

“CENTLALIA” AND “NONOTZA” IN THE WRITINGS
OF SAHAGÚN: A NEW INTERPRETATION
OF HIS MISSIOLOGICAL VISION

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“When all yet was in darkness, when yet no sun
had shone and no dawn had broken, the gods
gathered themselves together and took counsel
among themselves there at Teotihuacan”.¹

These have become arguably some of the most famous lines from the *Florentine Codex*. They are also found at the entrance to the Teotihuacan Room of the Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia. From the time the Museum first opened, these lines have resonated in my mind. Several years ago, at a conference on Sahagún, Thomas Bremer presented a paper on some of the theological implications of the “Colloquios y doctrina christian [*sic*]”.² In the presentation he recited some of the opening lines of that text: “the twelve fathers of St. Francis, so they assembled, they convened all the lords, the rulers, that lived there in Mexico”.³ I was immediately struck by the similarity of the construction between these two passages. In consulting the original Nahuatl, I further discovered that Sahagún had used the same verbs, “centlalia” and “nonotza” in these two strikingly different passages. Based upon this revelation, I have sought to better understand the use of these two verbs in juxtaposition with one another in the works of Sahagún.

¹ Charles Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson, *The Florentine Codex* (Santa Fe and Salt Lake City: School of American Research and University of Utah Press, 1952-1982) in 13 parts, Book 7, p. 4-5.

² The Manuscript title of the work is “*Colloquios y doctrina christian.*” Henceforth, I will refer to it as the “*Coloquios y doctrina christiana.*”

³ Thomas Bremer, “Reading the Sahagún Dialogues,” in John F. Schwaller, ed., *Sahagún at 500: Essays in Commemoration of the Quincentenary of the Birth of Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún* (Berkeley, CA: Academy of American Franciscan History forthcoming).

The word “centlalia” comes from two Nahuatl stems. “Cem” means “one”, while “tlalli” means “it is earth”. The verb literally means to cause to be in one place. “Nonotza” is a reduplicated form of a simpler verb “notza”, which means “to call or to summon”. The reduplicated form indicates that the action of the verb was repeated either in time or in different locations. Consequently “nonotza” carries with it the notion of taking counsel, conversation, or telling a story. The juxtaposition of these two verbs is not common. Just as in the diphrase certain nouns are juxtaposed to create a third metaphorical meaning, so two verbs are frequently used together not necessarily creating a third metaphorical meaning but either to enhance or augment the meaning. Based upon the results of this study, I would posit that this combination of verbs is just such an instance.

Finding specific words within the totality of the Sahagún opus is a daunting matter. Fortunately R. Joe Campbell, of Indiana University, has consigned all of the *Florentine Codex*, *Psalmody christiana*, and the “Coloquios” to an electronic database which allows for searching for specific stems. Thanks to Campbell, I have been able to identify all the instances in which Sahagún used the verbs “centlalia” and “nonotza” in conjunction with one another. We have discovered sixteen instances. Further analysis of these instances allows one to divide them into certain categories. The most common examples are those in which both verbs are in the reflexive having an identified subject. The second group includes those instances in the nonspecific reflexive, using “ne-”. In the third group, the two verbs have the same subject and object but are not in the reflexive. The fourth group consists of those instances when the verbs merely appear in the same phrase, but are not linked by subject.

All of the instances of “centlalia” and “nonotza” appearing in the reflexive with an identified subject and juxtaposed with one another appear in the *Florentine Codex*.⁴ They are as follows:

⁴ All quotations come from the Dibble and Anderson translation of the *Florentine Codex*.

Book 3, p. 1

... ca in oncan teutioacan, quitoa in canin in iquin, in oc iouaian oncan *mocentllique* in ixquichtin teteu, yoan mononotzque in aquin tlatlquiz, in aquin tlamamaz, in aquin tonatiuh iez...

Book 6, pp. 127

Nican moteneoa, inic cioatlania in nican tlaca. In yehuatl in tenan in teta: in ye quitta intelpoch ye omacic in ye chichahuac: in niman *mocentlalia* in *mononotza*

Book 7, p. 5

Mitoea, in oc iooaian, in aiama tona, in aiama tlathui: quilmach, *mocentlaliq*, *mononotzque*, in teteuh: in umpa toutinacan...

Book 8, p.61

Mocentlaliaya, *mononotzaya*, in teuctlatoque, inic quixquetzaya, inic quipepenaya, in aquin tlatoani yez.

Book 10, p. 191

auh in ihcuac oyaque i, in tlamatinime: inman mononotzque, *mocentlaliq*, i, in nahuintin huehuetque quitoque. Tonaz tlathuiz.

Book 12, p. 27

Niman *mocentlaliq*, *mononotzque*, motecuionotzque, motlatocanonotzque, quimoottitique in tlatolli

... that there in Teotihuacan, they say, is the place; the time was when there was still darkness. There among all the gods assembled and consulted among themselves who would bear upon his back the burden or rule, who would be the sun...

Here is related how the natives sought wives. When one's mother, one's father already saw that their youth was already matured, already strong, then they assembled, they consulted among one another.

It is told that when yet [all] was in darkness, when yet no sun had shone and no dawn had broken - it is said- the gods gathered themselves together and took counsel among themselves there at Teotihuacan.

The lords assembled and deliberated as to whom they would set in office and choose to be ruler.

And when the wise men had gone, then these four old men assembled, they took counsel; they said: "the sun will shine, it will dawn".

Then they [the lords of Tlaxcala] gathered themselves together; they took counsel among themselves. The lords took counsel among themselves. The rulers took counsel among themselves. They considered the news among themselves.

Of all these examples, several key things stand out. The individuals who gathered and took counsel are all highly prestigious. In two of the cases they are the gods creating the world at Teotihuacan. In two instances they are lords and nobles of the people making strategic decisions. In Book 10 the four tribal elders of the Mexica carry on deliberation during their peregrination from Aztlan. In book 12 the rulers and leaders of Tlaxcala reacted to news of the Spanish defeat of native forces at Tecoac. The remaining instance deals with parents who are making decisions as to whether their child has attained sufficient maturity to wed. Clearly all of these instances for the Nahuatl carried immense social and historical weight. In every instance the verbs “centlaltia” and “nonotza” follow one another. Only in the selection from Book 10, the peregrination account, does “nonotza” precede “centlaltia.” Nevertheless, Dibble and Anderson translate it as “these four old men assembled, they took counsel,” rather than “these four old men took counsel, they assembled”.

In the second set of examples, the two verbs are both in the non-specific reflexive. These constructions function as almost like admonitions or as general counsel, speaking in general terms about unspecified individuals. All of those examples come from Book 2 of the *Florentine Codex* that deals with the ceremonies of the Mexica.

<p>Chapter 27, p. 96 zan oncan onocac, neoolololo, <i>neccentlalilo</i>, <i>nenonotzalo</i></p>	<p>Just there was lying down; there was coming together on the part of each; there was gathering together on the part of each; there was conversing on the part of each.</p>
<p>Chapter 27, p 102 ica <i>neccentlalilo</i>, ica <i>nenonotzalo</i>, in oncan cuicalli</p>	<p>For all this there was assembling, for this there was consulting there in the song house</p>
<p>Chapter 34, p. 148 auh intla aca quinnexxotlaz, intla machililozque, in ca otlahuanque: in ca <i>neccentlaliloya</i>, in ca <i>nenonotzaloya</i>: quinhuihuitequi, ocoauhtica huel quinnacatepozhuia, ihuan quincuatexoloxima, quincuatetequi</p>	<p>And if anyone discovered them, if they made it known that indeed they drank pulque, that indeed there had been gathering together, that indeed there had been arranging among themselves, they beat them repeatedly with pine staves; they bruised their bodies sorely, and they shaved their heads like servants - they cut [the hair from] the heads of each one.</p>

As in the previous examples, in each of these “centlalia” comes before “nonotza”. In the first example from Chapter 27, the “centlalia” has reduplication of the first syllable, implying that many came together in one place, or that it was repeated in space or time. There is no additional reduplication of the “nonotza” since it is already the reduplicated form of “notza”. The second: instance in Chapter 27 the two verbs appear without additional duplication. The context of these two passages is also important. Chapter 27 of Book 2 of the *Florentine Codex* deals with the celebrations in the month of Huey Tecuillhuil, known as the great feast of the Lords. Given the clear association in the other passages of these two verbs with high level meetings and consultations, it is not surprising that it would be used in this context either. Yet at the same time the actual participants in this celebration seem not to have been nobles and leaders but commoners: “Everyone came together —the poor of Mexico and those who tilled the fields”.⁵

The selection from Chapter 34, tells of the celebrations in the fifteenth month, Panquetzaliztli, the raising of flags. The specific action described tells of the ritual consumption of pulque by “rulers of the youths” (“telpochtlatoque”). Consequently the use of “centlalia” and “nonotza” again corresponds to the actions of high status individuals.

Third category of occurrences of “centlalia” and “nonotza” corresponds to those instances in which the subject and object are in their third person. Both of the examples of this come from the “Coloquios y doctrina christiana”.

<p>p. 100, lines 13-16 yn maclactin omomen S. Francisco Padreme: inic quincentlaliq, quinonotzque in ixquichtin tetcuti tlatoque yn oncan mexico monemitiaia.</p>	<p>The twelve fathers of St. Francis, so they assembled, they convened all the lords, the rulers, that lived there in Mexico</p>
<p>p. 142, lines 818 niman yaque in ixquichtin tlatoque, <i>quinmotzque, quincentlaliq,</i> quincenquixtique in ixquichtin tlamacazque, in tlenamacaque, in quequetzalcoa.</p>	<p>This having been said, at once all the lords left. They called them, they assembled them, they arranged them all together, those who offer things, those who offer incense, the feathered serpents.</p>

⁵ “Ixquixh tlacatl cenquizaia, in motolinia in mexica, yoan in millacatzitinti”.

As has been seen in the other examples, the citations above deal with meetings of individuals of the highest social rank. In these instances those being assembled are the lords and nobles, in the first instance, and the specialized priests, in the second. In the second instance the first verb is the simple form, “notza” which signifies to call or summon, as opposed to “nonotza” which means to call together or to call on several occasions or to take counsel. As well in the second example the verb order differs from the norm with “notza” preceding “centlalia”. Consequently of these two example, only the first can be considered as conforming with the norm.

The final category of instances of the juxtaposition of the words “centlalia” and “nonotza” includes all those cases in which the two verbs have different subjects, objects, or merely occur in the same sentence. The bulk of these come from the *Florentine Codex* although two come from the *Psalmodia christiana*.

<p>Book 4, p. 47 inic oncan in <i>necentlaliaya</i> maahua, <i>mononotza</i>, moquequelo, mopahpatla, mopapatzahua.</p>	<p>So there at the place of congregation there was a dispute, discussion, abuse, faultfinding, and belittling.</p>
<p>Book 8, p. 61 ixquichtin <i>mocentlaliaya</i> in oncan huei tecpan tlatocan, inic <i>mononotzaya</i>, inic quipepenaya in ac yehuatl tlatocatiz</p>	<p>All were gathered there at the great palace, the residence of the ruler, in order to consult and choose him who was to be ruler.</p>
<p>Book 12, p.75 oncan <i>mononotzque</i> oncan quicemitoque, oncan <i>quicentlaliique</i> in intlatol</p>	<p>There they consulted among themselves, there they agreed, there they determined in their discourses</p>
<p><i>Psalmodia</i>, p. 214 In veueinti tlatoque Emperadoresme, in iquac itla vei muchiuaz, in vei tlatolli, inic <i>nenonotzaloz</i>: ceccan <i>quincentlalia</i> in nouian tlatoque, in itech pouhque</p>	<p>Great kings [and] emperors, when something grand is to be done, when [in] a great discourse it is to be announced, assemble in a certain place the great grandes from everywhere, those who pertain to them.</p>
<p><i>Psalmodia</i>, p. 222-23 Auh in iquac oquittac in tlazo in dios in sancto Domingo, in ie miequinti mozcalia, tlachia, in ipampa in temachtitl: <i>omoiohnonotz</i> in queni <i>quicentlaliz</i> in ipillhoa, inic muchipa temachtitinemizque in nouian cemaaoac.</p>	<p>And when God’s beloved Saint Dominic saw that many had regained their lives, [and] had seen, because of his instruction, he searched his heart how so to lead his children that they always would live preaching over all the world.</p>

One can fairly easily see that in these examples the stem “notz-” and the stem “centlal-” merely appear in the same sentence. In some instances one or the other appears in a nominalized form. When acting as verbs their structures are not parallel or they do not refer to a single linked action. What is interesting is that the two words appear in contexts which are associated with the very highest levels of society, consultations and gatherings of lords and nobles, as has been seen in the other examples.

In his works, Sahagún clearly used the words “centlalia” and “nonotza” to refer to moments of great importance, meetings and debates of transcendent importance. To further understand the implications of this, it is important to gain a slightly deeper understanding of the works of Sahagún and specifically analyze the least well-know of his works, the “*Coloquios y doctrina christiana*”.

Sahagún wished to more fully equip and arm the missionaries with works outlining the pre-Columbian belief systems to assist the parish priest in identifying vestiges of the old ways, the better to eliminate them. As part of this Sahagún produced several works of immediate use to his fellow missionaries. These include collections of sermons, the *Psalmodia christiana*, the translation of the Epistle and Gospel readings for the Sunday mass into Nahuatl, and the commentary on those readings. Those works, taken as a whole, has been characterized as a “doctrinal encyclopedia”.⁶ One other piece in this collection was the “*Coloquios y doctrina christiana*: In fact scholars have gained much insight into Sahagún’s overall plan through investigation of the prologue to the ‘Coloquios’ and the editorial history of the one work which was printed during his lifetime, the *Psalmodia christiana*.⁷

The “Coloquios” and the *Psalmodia* both pertain to a very prolific period in Sahagún’s life, sometime around 1564, he saw several other pieces of the doctrinal encyclopedia, and some of the major work on the *Florentine Codex*, while he was working in the Colegio de Santacruz Tlatelolco. The ‘Coloquios’ were based on old papers and testimonies of the activities of the first twelve Franciscan missionaries to Mexico. These undoubtedly had been saved and collected by the Franciscans for future historical reflection.

Sahagún, however, perceived in these notes the potential for a far different type of work. He was not so much interested, it would seem,

⁶ Luis Nicolau d’Olwer, *Fray Bernardino de Sahagún* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), translated by Mauricio Mixco, 41.

⁷ Arthur J. O. Anderson, “Sahagún’s ‘Doctrinal Encyclopaedia’”, *Estudios de Cultura Nahuatl*, 16 (1983), 109-122.

in writing a narrative history of the early conversion, as creating a more humanistic work. Rather than relying on essentially Spanish devices translated into Nahuatl to convert the Indians (such as catechisms, confessional guides, and other medieval devotional pieces many of which had already been completed), Sahagún began to create a new type of work. These works would be based in the native tradition, composed in Nahuatl, destined to bring about a new type of conversion among the natives. The classic example of this is the *Psalmodia Christiana*.

The *Psalmodia Christiana* was the only work of Sahagún to be published in his lifetime (1583). The work consists of songs written in Nahuatl to celebrate the feasts of the Church calendar, including those of many important saints, such as St. Francis, St. Dominic, the Evangelists, and many others. In his introduction to the modern edition of the *Psalmodia*, Arthur J. O. Anderson, notes that the songs were probably first composed in 1558-1561 during Sahagún's residence in Tepepulco.⁸ They were later edited and polished in 1564 when he had returned to Tlatelolco, using his four native assistants. For nearly 20 years the songs circulated in manuscript until they were finally published in 1583. The function of these compositions is of the highest importance. Among the religious orders involved in the evangelization the Franciscans tended to be the most indulgent regarding the use of pre-Columbian traditions and their adaptation to Christian ends, providing that they had been suitably cleansed of pagan influence. Many of the early chronicles tell of the natives' pleasure in singing and dancing in both their own native religious celebrations and later in a Christian context. What Sahagún did was to take this tradition in general, and perhaps some of the songs in particular, and adapt them to Christian worship.

Sahagún explained his motives in his Prologue to the work. He noted that the natives had customarily sung songs of various types in the worship of their ancient gods. With the arrival of the Spanish many attempts had been made to force the natives to abandon these songs and sing only songs of the Christian faith. Yet in most instances the natives returned to singing their old songs and canticles. In order to facilitate the abandonment of the old songs, Sahagún offered up these songs as replacements for the old.⁹

There are indications that the songs written by Sahagún were in fact a hybrid. On the one hand they retained some of the literary devices of the ancient poetry and song. Some of the most notable poetic figures of

⁸ Bernardino de Sahagún, *Psalmodia Christiana (Christian Psalmody)* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), XV-XVI.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-9.

pre-Columbian times, the diphrase (difrasismo), the use of ‘connector words’, and rhythmic notations are either absent or exceedingly rare.

Nevertheless, there are some elements which have a striking similarity to pre-Columbian forms. For example the canticle to St. Thomas Aquinas has a striking similarity to Sahagún’s version of the creation of the moon. In the song to St. Thomas, Sahagún writes:

In oc iouia, in aiama tintli cemanoc, iuh tlatilli, iuhca dios itlatoltzi...	When all was yet darkness, before the word began, such was the commandment, such was the Word of God... ¹⁰
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Compare this to the description of the creation of the current world by the gods assembled at Teotihuacan from the *Florentine Codex* (Book 7, Chapter 2, p. 4-5):

Mitoa, in oc iooaian, in aiama tona, in aiama tlathui	It is told that when yet it was darkness, when yet no sun had shone, and no dawn had broken... ¹¹
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Clearly the two passages are strikingly similar, although not exactly parallel. It was, however, this type of elevated discourse in Nahuatl which would resonate with the natives as proper for holy songs of praise. One of the other common figures of pre-Columbian poetry was the use of metaphors of flowers, birds, and precious stones to indicate divinity and preciousness. While the total repertoire of these in the ‘Psalmody’ is limited, and certainly less than in the song cycles documents in the *Cantares* or the *Romances*, they are notable. Some clear examples can be found in the use of flowers. The first selection is a part of the Psalms for the celebration of Easter:

In teuiutica in tijollosuchitl, in ticacalosuchitl, in telosuchitl, in titlapaltecomasuchitl, in tipiltzi sancta Iglesia, in ticiuatl xipapaqui, ximotlamachti	You divine talauma, popcorn flower, magnolia, red solandra flower; you daughter of the holy Church, you woman: be happy, be joyous.
In teuiutica tisuchitototl, in telotototl, in ticentsontlatole, in tiuitzitzilti, in ie amuchinti in amipilhoa in dios, in amangeloti xioalmouicaca, xiciaoalotimaniqui in toteuitoal	You divine orioles, you grosbeaks, you mockingbirds, you humming birds, all you sons of God, you angels; come, circle around the courtyard of our church. ¹²

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

¹¹ *Florentine Codex*, Book 7, Chapter 2, p. 4-5.

¹² Sahagún, *Psalmody christiana*, 112-113. Translation by Anderson.

This compares rather closely to songs from the Pre-Columbian tradition. By way of comparison, the following is a stanza from a song performed before the great prince Nezahualcoyotl of Texcoco:

<p>Ma xicyahuelintzotzona moxochihuehueuh tucuicanitl ma izquixochitli man cacahuaxochitli ma ma onmoyahua ontzetzelihui ye nica huechuetitlano man tahuiyacani</p> <p>ya çan ca xiuhquechool tzinitzcan tlahuquechol oncan oncuican tlatohuaya y xochitl ai paqui</p>	<p>Beat your flower drum beautifully, singer: Let there be popcorn flowers, cacao flowers. Let them scatter let them sprinkle down beside the drummer. Let us have joy</p> <p>There! The turquoise swan, the trogon, the roseate swan is singing, warbling, happy with these flowers.¹³</p>
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Taken as a whole, however, Sahagún's purpose is clear: he wished to use traditional song forms with heavily revised and Christianized vocabulary, and thus modify them to further the work of evangelization.

At the same time that Sahagún was working on the *Psalmodia* with his students at the Colegio de Santacruz, he was also composing the 'Coloquios'. The full title of the work, "Coloquios y Doctrina christian conque los doze frayles de San Francisco... convertieron a los indios de la Nueva España," describes the contents. It is a colloquy through which the first twelve Franciscans purportedly converted the Indians of New Spain to Christianity. The work itself was little known before it was first published by Fr. José Pou y Martí in 1924.¹⁴ Since then the work has been described and analyzed by several authors. Miguel León-Portilla included it in his landmark work, *La filosofía náhuatl*, and then later translated and edited a complete version of the work.¹⁵ Even earlier the work was translated into English and has been studied on various occasions by Jorge Klor de Alva, Louise Burkhart, Ana de Zaballa Beascochea, Thomas Bremer, and Walden Browne.¹⁶

¹³ John Bierhorst, *Cantares Mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University press, 1985), 190-191. Translation is by Bierhorst.

¹⁴ José Pou y Martí, "El libro perdido de las pláticas o Coloquios de los doce primeros misioneros de México", *Estratto della Miscelanea Fr. Ehyle III* (Rome: Tipografia del Senato del Dottore G. Bardi, 1924).

¹⁵ Miguel León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl* (México: Instituto Indigenista, 1956), e.g. chapt. 3; *Los diálogos de 1524 según el texto de Fray Bernardino de Sahagún* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1986).

¹⁶ Jorge Klor de Alva, "The Aztec-Spanish Dialogues of 1524," *Alcheringa /Ethnopoetics*, vol. 4, Num. 2 (1980), 52-193; "Sahagún's Misguided Introduction to Ethnography and the Failure of the Coloquios Project," in Klor de Alva, H. B. Nicholson, and Eloise Quiñones Keber, *The Work of Bernardino de Sahagún: Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Albany, NY: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, the State University of New York, 1988, 92-93. Louise Burkhart, "Doctrinal Aspects of Sahagún's Coloquios," in Klor de Alva, Nicholson,

These authors agree on the general contours of the work. It was inspired, if not directly lifted, from notes and other papers left in the possession of the Mexico City Franciscans. It is a stylized dialogue between the first twelve Franciscans and the lords and nobles of Tenochtitlan. Taken as a whole the work pretends to narrate the events related to the arrival of the first twelve Franciscans, their initial dialogue on theological topics with the lords and rulers of Tenochtitlan and the subsequent elaboration of Christian doctrine.¹⁷

The version of the 'Coloquios' which has reached the present day is incomplete. In the Spanish version of the work, which accompanied the Nahuatl, he outlined what the final structure was to be. The original work was conceived as having two distinct parts. The first part, as noted, was the colloquy between the first twelve Franciscans and the Nahua nobles, in thirty chapters. The second section was the elaboration of the Christian doctrine, in twenty-one chapters. Unfortunately all that exists at present are the first fourteen chapters of the first part. Consequently we have only about one quarter of the whole work, and slightly less than half of the first part. Yet the material which is extant provides sufficient indication of both Sahagún's artistry with the Nahuatl language and solid indications of how he envisioned the work as functioning. Fortunately much of the background and intent of the work was described by Sahagún in his Spanish prologue.

The prologue to the 'Coloquios' is much longer and more detailed than the Prologue to the 'Psalmodia'. The 'Coloquios' prologue begins with a quick observation on the degree of change which had occurred in the world between 1520 and 1564, the year the account was written. He felt that he would be remiss if he did not set down in writing his testimony of some of the great wonders which God had wrought during his own lifetime. He noted that sages had predicted that the "torrid zones" of the earth were inhabitable, due to their proximity to the sun. Nevertheless, practical experience had proven them wrong. Moreover the changes which had occurred in the previous century were also unimaginable. Columbus had discovered the islands of the Antilles, and Cortés and conquered New Spain. With this latter act the Pope empowered the King of Spain to send missionaries to that newly con-

and Quiñones Keber, *The Work of Bernardino de Sahagún*, 65-82; Ana de Zaballa Beascochea, *Transcultivación y misión en Nueva España: Estudio Histórico-doctrinal del libro de los 'Coloquios' de Bernardino de Sahagún* (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra' 1990); Thomas Bremer, "Reading the Sahagún Dialogues," in Schwaller, ed., *Sahagún at 500*; Walden Browne, *Sahagún and the Transition to Modernity* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 81-90.

¹⁷ Jorge Klor de Alva, "La historicidad de los Coloquios de Sahagún", *Estudios de Cultura Nahuatl*, 15 (1982), 147-180.

quered land. Sahagún then gave a rather detailed account of the arrival of the first twelve Franciscans to Mexico. Upon their arrival, and after having rested and regained their strength, Cortés arranged for them to meet the lords and rulers of Mexico to initiate the preaching of the Gospel. This occurred over many days. The record of this encounter is the document which Sahagún offered as the ‘Coloquios’. For Sahagún the friars wished to teach four basic fundamental issues:

1. They had been sent to convert the natives to the Christian God.
2. The monarch who had sent them had no temporal desires from them but only their spiritual benefit.
3. That the doctrine that they taught was not human in origin but divine, having been imparted by God the All-Powerful, through his Holy Spirit.
4. That in the world there is another kingdom, called the Kingdom of Heaven, which is ruled by the omnipotent Lord in heaven, and that on earth the monarch is his vicar who lives in the city of Rome and is the Holy Catholic Church.¹⁸

Sahagún described his work as having been written in a “plain and clear style, well measured and proportioned to the capacity of the listeners...”¹⁹

In fact the Nahuatl is rather elegant, but in a fairly simple style. As with the Psalmodia, there is a relative absence of many of the conventional Nahuatl poetic devices. There is a near total absence of diphrases. The rhythmic and ejaculatory words are completely missing. There are even relatively few mentions of birds, flowers, and precious stones, as is found in the highly refined Nahuatl poetic tradition. Yet the overall tone is elevated.

There is a proper use of the honorific, denoting the scrutiny which the native listeners would have made of the descriptions of the Spanish ruler, the Spanish God, and even references to themselves. For example in referring to the message that they bring, the friars call it: “yhiiotzin, ytlatoltzin,” “his honorable breath, his honorable word.”(41 [42])²⁰ This is an example both of the proper use of the honorific and

¹⁸ León-Portilla, *Los diálogos de 1524*, 73-74.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ In citing from the ‘Coloquios’ I will give the León-Portilla line numbers first, followed by the Klor de Alva line numbers in brackets. The two scholars divided the original text into slightly different lines, resulting in a less than perfect correspondence between the two versions. The translations are my own, obviously drawing on both León-Portilla’s and Klor de Alva’s interpretations.

of the diphrase. The dialogue opens with an invocation to the Nahuatl nobles: "Tla xiqualmocaquilitican totlaçouane, yn nican ammoneltique, yn nican oammocenquixtico, yn ammexica, yn anenochca..." "Listen hither our beloved ones, here you have verified for yourselves, here you all come to one place together, you Mexica, you Tenochca..." (17 [18]) The direct form of invocation is cast in the honorific, evidenced by the reflexive particle -mo- and the use of the applicative or causative suffix: xiqualmocaquilitican. Another early use of the diphrase and the honorific occurs a few lines later when the friars state that they have come to the home and the city of the Nahuatl: "yn nican amochantzinco, in amauh, in amotepeuh ipan;" "here at your honorable house, your water, your hill [i.e. your city]." (38-39 [39-40]) The word for home is simply "chantli." In this instance Sahagún has placed the honorific noun suffix "tzin" on the word. The one of the classic diphrases is "in atl, in tepetl," "water, hill," or simply "altepetl," which signifies a city. Recently scholarship has demonstrated that in fact that the "altepetl" was not just a simple city, but rather closer to a city-state.²¹ In this instance the diphrase occurs as a possessed pair of nouns, "your water, your hill" rather than the possessed form of the single word term, "amaltepeuh." This is a small indication of the more elevated tone of the work, since this type of poetic device was highly prized.

In addition to using traditional forms and literary devices, Sahagún also draws upon what had become an extensive repertoire of neologisms, developed by the friars to allow for the application of certain European-Christian concepts to Nahuatl. Similarly he uses certain Spanish borrow words which taken on a Nahuatl grammatical structure. The opening lines of the 'Coloquios' make ample use of both of these devices. In the first line, Sahagún refers to all that will follow as "temachtiztlatolli," or "the teaching word." (1 [1]) While the exact term no doubt was used before the arrival of the Spaniards, it is frequently used in expositions of Christian doctrine and closely associated with them. This association is strengthened in the second line: "in itoca Doctrina xpiana [cristiana]," "it is called Christian Doctrine." (2 [2]) This also indicates the borrowing of Spanish terms directly in Nahuatl for certain concepts which were not easily translated. Sometimes when Spanish words were adopted into Nahuatl, they then took on a Nahuatl grammatical structure. This is seen a few lines later in referring to the twelve Franciscan fathers: "S. Francisco Padreme," "Fathers of St. Francis." (13 [14]) Here the Spanish word

²¹ James Lockhart, *The Nahuatl After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 14-58.

“padre” has been borrowed into Nahuatl. The word used here is the singular form of the Spanish word, “padre,” which then was given the Nahuatl plural marker “-me.” This alone makes it clear that Sahagún composed the work using contemporary Nahuatl (i.e., Nahuatl of the period in which he was writing) rather than the Nahuatl of the time of the events he was depicting. James Lockhart and Frances Karttunen have studied the transformations of Nahuatl throughout the colonial period. The use of Spanish borrow-words is a clear indicator of the second stage of language change, which Lockhart places between the 1540s and the mid-seventeenth century.²² Additionally, the work had to have been composed by someone who was basically familiar with Spanish. The Spanish word “padre” is nearly unpronounceable by the Nahuatl speaker, containing as it does two sounds, -d- and -r-, which are not present in Nahuatl. When borrowed into Nahuatl “padre” frequently was written “pale”.

One of the most striking borrow words to appear in the ‘Coloquios’ is the Spanish word “indio”.²³ In purely native texts this word is extremely rare. Yet it is used it not as a Spanish term, but as a borrow-word. The exact phrasing is as follows: “quen axcan iancuican oquimitique, oquinnextique, intoca indiosme”, “which now for the first time they recently saw, they discovered them, whose name is Indians”. (70-71 [71-72]) The text relates how the Spanish monarch had sent out expeditions to discover new lands in the wake of the Columbus expedition, and that these discoverers had found the natives and called them Indians. Given the context the potential Nahua listeners might have no idea that they were included among this group called Indians. Yet the word functions as a borrow word, having the Nahuatl plural marker “-me” added to the already plural Spanish word “indios”. The term “indio” hardly ever appeared in works produced by natives, and was extremely infrequent even in texts produced by Spaniards. Much preferred in both instances was “nican tlaca,” “here men/people”. Indeed just a few lines earlier the text refers to the natives of the region as “yancuic españa tlaca, “New Spain people” (3 [3]) or “Nueva España tlaca”, “New Spain people”. (49 [50]) By comparison, certain other Spanish words in the Nahuatl text were treated as Spanish words: “Españoles”, “cardenales”, and “Indias Occidentales.’ (57, 67, and 87 [58, 69, and 86]).

Other parts of the introductory section read very much as if they came from Pre-Columbian times. There are several very striking pas-

²² Lockhart, *The Nahua*, 261, 295-96, *et passim*. See also Frances Karttunen and James Lockhart, *Nahuatl in the Middle Years: Language Contact Phenomena in Texts of the Colonial Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976). Volume 85 of the University of California Publications in Linguistics.

²³ Lockhart, *The Nahua*, 115.

sages which resonate from an earlier tradition. One of these is the listing of the peoples. In the ‘Coloquios’ Pope Adrian VI sends a message to the newly conquered peoples in these words:

<p>Ma quicaquican ma quimatica, ma iitlopachiui in iehoantin nopilhoan, in iancuica tlalli ipan in Nueva España tlaca in mexica, in tenochca, in aculhoaque, in tepaneca, in tlaxcalteca, in michoaque, in cuesteca, auh in ie nouian aoaque tepeuaque, in nepanan tlaca, in iancuic tlalli ipanonoque (in motocaiotia Indias occidentales) ca iamo uecauh, ca quinizcui onicac, onicma in inteio, in imitoloca.</p>	<p>Hear it, know it, that the hearts of my children may be satisfied those in the new land, the New Spain people, the Mexica, the Tenochca, the Acolhuaque, the Tepaneca, the Tlaxcalteca, the Michoaque, the Huasteca, and all those who have cities²⁴ various [other] men who are spread out on the new land (which are called the West Indies) indeed not a long time ago just now as such I heard it, I knew it, their renown, their reputation. (47-60 [48-61])</p>
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The listing of the peoples or nations is not uncommon in pre-Columbian Nahuatl literature. A brief example comes from the cycles of songs known as the ‘Cantares Mexicanos’. There are several poems which demonstrate this poetic devices. They come from the general type called the ‘yaocuicatli’, “song of war. The first is entitled “Tlaxcaltecyotl”, “The Tlaxcallan one.” The Tlaxcallans were traditional rivals of the Tenochca-Mexica.

<p>Otacio ye nican tenochtitlan y ximochicahuacan antlaxcalteca ye huexotzinca</p>	<p>Already you have arrived here in Tenochtitlan. Make yourselves strong, you Tlaxcalteca, huexotzinca.²⁵</p>
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The second is very similar and deals with a Matlatzincan lord. The Matlatzinca region was west of modern-day Mexico City in the region of Toluca:

<p>Zan ye netlapalolo in tepilhuan in acolihuaque in an topaneca.</p>	<p>Already are the princes hailed, the Acolhuaque, the Tepaneca.²⁶</p>
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²⁴ As noted before, the diphrase “water, hill” refers to the native polity, the “altepetl”, or city-state. Here it reads literally: “those who have water, those who have hills”.

²⁵ John Bierhorst, ‘Cantares Mexicanos’. *Songs of the Aztecs* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985) 318.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 316.

The another example comes from the Chalco War, when the forces of Mexico-Tenochtitlan made war on their neighbors to the south, destroying them and incorporating them into their sphere of influence:²⁷

Moxeloan chalcatl moneloa ye oncan almoloya cequiyan quauhtlia ocelotl cequia mexicatl, acolhua, tepanecatl o mochihua in chalca	Chalco is scattered about, stirred up, already there where the water springs forth, some there [are] eagles, ocelots, some [are] Mexica, Acolhua, Tēpaneca, the Chalca are made [them]. ²⁸
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Although the poetry is an important source of comparison, the historic literature, chronicles and the like, are also useful in finding Pre-Columbian examples for some of Sahagún's constructions. The listing of the peoples can be found through the *Anales de Cuanhtitlan*:

Auh yc niman nenonotzalloc ynic huallazque yaoquizaquihui yn huexotzinca yn tlaxcalteca yn tliliuhquitepeca, ca yn yehuatl yn Nezahualcoyotzin huel quiximatia yn tliliuhquitepeca yn atlancatepec tlaca yn tlaxcalteca yn huexotzinca	And so an agreement was reached for the Huexotzinca, the Tlaxcalteca, and the Tliliuhquitepeca, to come to battle, for Nezahualcoyotzin was well acquainted with the people of Atlancatepec, the Tlaxcalteca, and the Huexotzinca. ²⁹
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Of all of the passages of the 'Coloquios' the opening verses are the most telling and the most evocative of an earlier poetic tradition. This stanza gives the over-all explanation of the purpose of the entire work:

²⁷ Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 139.

²⁸ Bierhorst, 'Cantares', 240.

²⁹ Nahuatl: John Bierhorst, ed., *Codex Chimalpopoca: The Text in Nahuatl with a Glossary and Grammatical Notes* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 56; English: John Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 97.

<p>Nican ompeua in temachtiliztlatolli in itoca Doctrina xpiana in omachtiloque nican yacuic españa tlaca</p> <p>in oquinmachtique in matlactin omome Sanct francisco Padreme in uel iancuican quinalminali in cemanauac teuyotica tlatoani in Sancto padre papa Adriano sesto</p> <p>Inic ce capitulo</p> <p>Uncan mitoa yn quenin tlanonotzque ynicuc yanuican maxitico yn oncan vey altopetl iiolloco in mexico tenochtitlan, yn maclactin omomen. S. Francisco Padreme: <u>inic quincentlalique.</u> <u>quinnononotzque</u> in ixquichtin tetcuti tlatoque in oncan Mexico monemitiaia (Emphasis mine)</p>	<p>Here begins the word that teaches. Its name: the Christian Doctrine, that which the new Spain people were recently taught</p> <p>They taught them, the twelve Fathers of St. Francis. Truly, recently he sent them hither the speaker of divine things to the world the Holy Father Pope Hadrian VI.</p> <p>The First Chapter</p> <p>There it is told how they recounted something when first they came near, there, in the heart of the great city, Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the twelve Fathers of St. Francis. Thus <u>they gathered them together,</u> <u>they took counsel with them,</u> all the lord and rulers who were residing there in Mexico: (1-16 [1-17])</p>
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Several of the important features of this text have already been noted. What is central to this passage is the use of the paired verbs “centlalia” and “nonotza”. In this text the Twelve gather the lords and nobles of Mexico-Tenochtitlan together; and then take counsel with them. As noted previously, the juxtaposition of these two verbs is not common. Just as in the diphase certain nouns are juxtaposed to create a third metaphorical meaning, so two verbs are frequently used together not necessarily creating a third metaphorical meaning but either to enhance or augment the meaning.

The utilization of these two verbs in the creation myth is extremely telling. Sahagún gives two slightly different accounts of the creation. In Nahua thought, the world has been created five times. Each of the previous four creations came to a cataclysmic end. The current epoch began when the gods gathered at Teotihuacan and made sacrifice. Sahagún first dealt with the topic in Book 3 of the *Florentine Codex* where he discusses the origin of the gods. He begins the book by telling of the first origin of the current epoch:

<p>In quenin tzintique in teteuh in canpa tzintique amo uel macho, ca ie iehoiatl in pani ca in oncan teutioacan, quitoa in canin in iquin, in oc iouaian oncan <i>mocentlalique</i>, in ixquichtin teteu, yoan <i>mononotzque</i>, in aquin tlatlquiz, in aquin tlamamaz, in aquin, tonatiuh iez...</p>	<p>How the gods had their beginning, where they had their beginning, cannot be known. This is plain: that there in Teotihuacan, they say, is the place; the time was when there was still darkness. <i>There all the gods assembled and consulted among themselves</i> who would bear upon his back the burden or rule, who would be the sun...³⁰</p>
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Note that the two verbs do not appear immediately one after the other. Rather the subject of both verbs, “in ixquichtin teteu,” “all the gods”, comes between them. Both verbs are cast in the reflexive, indicating the all the gods participated in the action upon one another. They gathered themselves together and consulted with one another. The second instance of the use of these two verbs in conjunction with each other is far more famous. It has been widely repeated and as noted above appears in the Mexican National Museum of Anthropology.

<p>Mittoa, in oc iouaian, in aiama tona, in aiama tlathui: quilmach <i>mocentlalique</i>, <i>mononotzque</i>. in teteuh: in umpa teutihuacan, quitoque, quimolhuique: Tla xioalhuiian, teteuie: aquin tlatquiz? Aquín tlamaz? In tonaz, in tlathuiz?</p>	<p>It is told that when yet it was darkness, when yet no sun had shone, and no dawn had broken --it is said— the gods <i>they gathered themselves together and took counsel among themselves</i> there at Teotihuacan. They spoke, they said among themselves: “Come hither O gods! Who will carry the burden? Who will take it upon himself to be the sun, to bring the dawn?”³¹</p>
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In this rendering the two verbs are immediately juxtaposed, both in the reflexive. The passage has a very formal organization. First of all it begins with the common Nahua equivalent of “once upon a time:” “mittoa,” “It is told”. Then the time of the event is described. This particular passage refers to a time before time, when all was in darkness

³⁰ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 3, 1. (Emphasis mine).

³¹ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 7, p. 4-5. (Emphasis mine).

and there was no day. Then the action is introduced. The players, the gods, gather themselves and take counsel among themselves. Lastly, comes the place: Teotihuacan. The passage then goes on to discuss the particulars of their debate and discussion.

When one looks at the opening of the 'Coloquios' the similarity is striking. The first chapter of the Coloquios' also begins with the ubiquitous "mitoa". It then sets the stage by describing the timing of the event, when these people had recently arrived. This would have been a common temporal point of reference for the natives of central Mexico, since certainly life was dramatically different before and after the arrival of the Spanish. Then the location of the event is described. It takes place in the very heart of the great city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, as well known a place as Teotihuacan, with only slightly less symbolism. Finally the passage comes to the action. In this instance it is the Twelve Franciscans who are the active agents. The two verbs are not in the reflexive. The Franciscans do not gather themselves together and take counsel among themselves, but rather they gather up the lords and nobles of Mexico and take counsel with them. Again the two verbs are immediately juxtaposed with no added material between them. The impact which this particular narrative might have had on a Nahuatl listener would have been dramatic. Sahagún had taken the myth of the creation of the world, and subtly changed it. In fact he was clearly demonstrating that the arrival of the Franciscans was nothing less than the re-creation of the world, just as it had been created long ago at Teotihuacan.

These examples demonstrate that the two verbs "centlalia" and "nonotza" are used to describe the convening and deliberation of the very highest personages. In all of the *Florentine Codex* examples those being convened and deliberating are either gods or great lords and nobles. Consequently, when the words are applied to the conversion, Sahagún is clearly indicating that the convening and taking of counsel by the Franciscans is on a par with these other high level groups. These are matters of the very origins of the world, matters of state of the very highest importance.

This analysis of the vocabulary used in the "Coloquios" indicates that Sahagún reasonably attempted to cast his description of the arrival of the Franciscans in the same language as the traditional accounts of the beginning of the world. This closely parallels his efforts in the *Psalmody* where he sought to recast traditional Nahuatl songs in a Christian mold. He utilized the very elemental aspects of the old religion as a vehicle in the evangelization. This contrasts clearly with Motolinia who was guided by notions of apostolic poverty, conversion through example, and the urgency of the coming of the millennium.

The strategy that Sahagún used was firmly rooted in Nahua thinking and cosmology. The Nahua perceive the universe as passing through a cyclical development. The legends of the suns clearly manifests this belief. This circularity applied to many other aspects of life. Certainly the celebrations of the solar calendar kept repeating the cycles of religious practice. Kay Almere Read has characterized this aspect of Nahua through as “time-space”. She notes:

Time-space worked like a spinning rope. Drawing fibers into its rotation, it constantly doubled back on itself in order to spiral forward. With each rotation, the days and years piled up, creating changing and unique power-filled moments.³²

In this manner events in Nahua cosmology spiral back on themselves, repeating, yet changing in an ever forward moving pattern. Some of the patterns repeat more fully than others, until a full time of completion occurs. At that point the cosmos fell back on to itself and would begin again. Recognizing these patterns, Sahagún cast the meeting of the Twelve Franciscans and the Mexica lords and nobles using a vocabulary as full and symbolic as possible. He cast this encounter as one of the significant events that transforms the cyclical nature of time and begins a new era. Sahagún recognized that the evangelization conducted by the early missionaries was incomplete. That while the stalks of paganism had been cut down by the first friars, the roots of the old religion remained, ready to sprout anew.³³ He characterized the Christianization of the Nahua as nothing less than a new creation of the world: coming out of darkness into light: “Mitoa, in oc iooaián, in aiámo tona, in aiámo tlathui”.

³² Kay Almere Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 190.

³³ D’Olwer, *Sahagún*, p. 6-7.