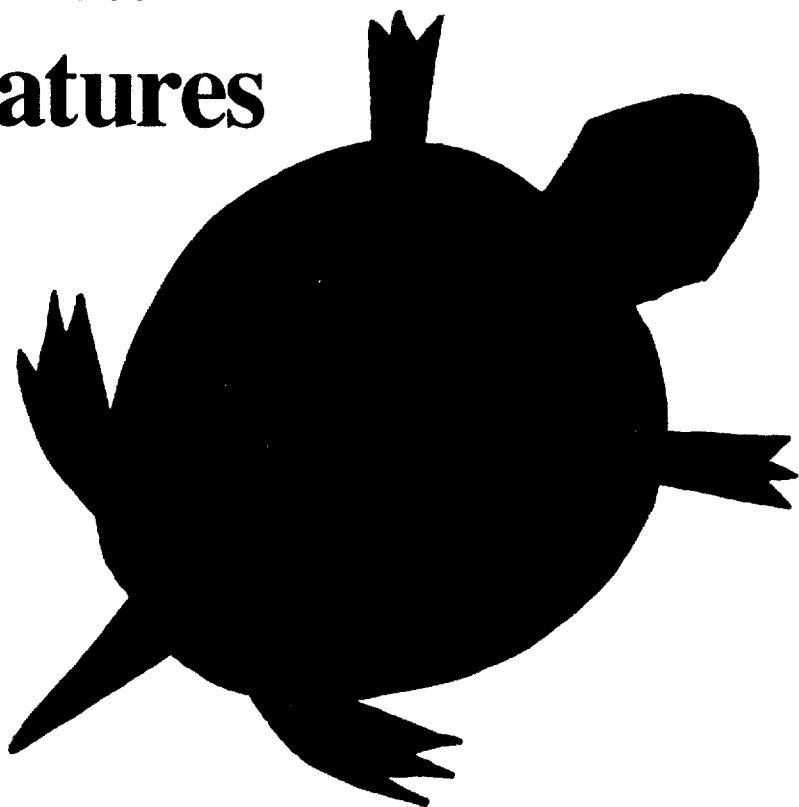


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**On the  
Translation  
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Native  
American  
Literatures**



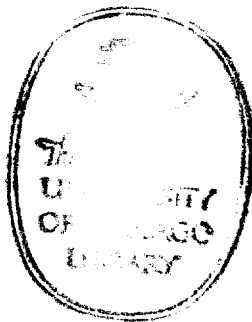
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The turtle figure accompanying the title page and part titles is adapted from a birchbark transparency made by a Woodlands tribe member in the Historic Period, perhaps as a pattern for beading designs. The bird figure accompanying the chapter titles is carrying a speech symbol; this image is from eastern Missouri. The cover image is the interior decoration on a Tusayan food bowl.

ANT

**The  
Amanuenses  
Have  
Appropriated  
the  
Text:  
Interpreting  
a  
Nahuatl  
Song  
of  
Santiago**

*Louise M. Burkhart*



Christian devotional texts written in the indigenous languages of the Americas have received very little attention as works of Native American literature. This neglect arises from an assumption that such texts are nothing more than colonial propaganda, an appropriation of indigenous language for the purpose of cultural destruction. Dennis Tedlock has pointed out that catechistic texts written by priests familiar with local languages and cultures are important documents of intercultural dialogue.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, due to the heavy involvement of indigenous writers in their production, these texts take on significance not simply as records of culture contact but also as literary products of the colonized people themselves. Their translation reveals aspects of indigenous interpretations of Christianity not recoverable from other sources.

In early colonial Mexico, sons of the Nahua (Aztec) nobility studied Spanish and Latin, the liberal arts, and Christian theology under the guidance of Franciscan friars. Some of these men went on to assist the friars in the ethnographic study of Nahua culture; some became teachers themselves; some became the grammarians, translators, and editors on whom the priests depended for the production of linguistically accurate and rhe-

torically effective preaching materials in the Nahuatl language. These men belonged to the intellectual and political elite of indigenous society; without them the friars would have had very little impact on indigenous culture.

Thus, behind the friars whose names are printed on the title pages of Nahuatl books stand these Nahua interpreters, these cultural brokers, seldom named or even acknowledged. To the friars they were simply amanuenses, assistants whose help, though vital, was a passive, uncreative act. The friars saw translation as a direct and divinely inspired transmission of Christian signs into the words of the Nahuatl language. Woodcuts of Saint Francis receiving the stigmata from Christ appear on the title pages of several Franciscan grammars, vocabularies, and catechisms in Nahuatl, bearing the Latin caption "you signed, oh Lord, your servant Francis with the signs of our redemption."<sup>2</sup> This scene may be interpreted as a metaphor for the process of translation occurring upon the pages of the books: the imprint of Christ's signs upon the Nahuatl language. Rafael, discussing the translation of Christian doctrine into Tagalog in the colonial Philippines, makes an observation equally applicable to the Franciscans in Mexico: "The preaching of the Gospel in a foreign tongue is construed as a way of participating in the ritual of recalling the promise of salvation. Translation commemorates the perfect Word of the Father."<sup>3</sup>

In reality, the Nahuatl language encoded a vastly different perception of the world and human nature than did Spanish or Latin; translation from one language and cultural system to the other was a hazardous process in which meanings were lost, gained, and altered, and Christian teachings were adapted to indigenous structures of thought and indigenous concerns. I have discussed this process elsewhere;<sup>4</sup> at present I wish only to make the point that the indigenous interpreters were not simply vehicles for the direct transmission of the friars' words into Nahuatl. There was no single correct way to translate a Christian text into Nahuatl. By controlling word choice and discourse strategy, the Nahua interpreters had considerable control over how the Nahua populace understood and responded to the friars' teachings.

Many texts remain European in spirit and intent; often they have been translated nearly word for word from Spanish or Latin texts. They are characterized by homiletic and narrative styles of discourse that, though grammatically correct and often terminologically complex, show little conformity to indigenous literary aesthetics. Metaphors borrowed from Nahuatl rhetoric are common, and the texts are salted with couplets, but these devices are subordinated to the purposes of indoctrination. The friar's voice prevails: the texts are directed at prescribing belief and inducing conformity.

However, the Nahua interpreters did not always have priests dictating precisely what they should say, for some devotional texts are clearly of indigenous composition. The choice of subjects, the sophisticated literary style, the metaphorical language, and the extent to which Christian teachings are reformulated indicate that, within the bounds of what the priests who sponsored and preserved their work would tolerate, Nahua scholars are exercising their own creative genius. The amanuenses have become authors and have appropriated the discourses of Christian devotion to articulate their own view of the Christian order and their place within it. These texts are important records of colonial Nahua

religion; they are also testaments of cultural survival and masterworks of Native American literature.

Because Nahuatl devotional literature treats subjects familiar to Western readers, it is all too easy to lose the Native voice in the Christian content. The presence of priestly censors meant that the writers sometimes had to veil their intent in understatement and double meaning, making their voices even less outspoken. Therefore, even more than with other genres of literature, the translator must be extremely attentive to nuances of meaning, metaphorical allusions, ambiguities and double meanings, references to self and audience, the use of different styles and stylistic devices, the treatment of loanwords, and, where possible, the text's relationship to Spanish or Latin sources. A literal translation of a Nahuatl word or phrase, even if clumsy, may be preferable to the use of its familiar—and emotionally loaded—Christian counterpart. One must make the text readable in English while conveying the features that make it the product not of some culturally universal Christian devotion but of a specifically Nahua Christianity.

A presentation of one text will do more to convey the character and interpretive potential of this literature than many pages of generalizations. I have selected a song about an imported saint, the apostle Saint James—a saint so closely associated with Spain and with conquest that his appropriation presented the Nahua interpreters with a considerable challenge.

The song is found in the *Psalmodia christiana*, a Nahuatl songbook written by four Nahua scholars under the direction of fray Bernardino de Sahagún, the great Franciscan ethnographer.<sup>5</sup> First composed in 1558–60, it circulated widely in manuscript form before it was finally published in 1583. It is the only Nahuatl songbook published in colonial Mexico. Intended to replace the songs from oral tradition that were being used in Church festivals (songs which friars found difficult to understand), the *Psalmodia* was an attempt to create a new Nahua-Christian song genre that would be acceptable to the indigenous communities.

The Nahua writers were graduates of the Franciscan college in Tlaltelolco, what was then the northern section of Mexico City. In his prologue to the *Psalmodia* Sahagún does not name the four men, but they may be the same four whom he names elsewhere as his ethnographic assistants at that time: Martín Jacobita, Antonio Valeriano, Alonso Vegetano, and Pedro de San Buenaventura.<sup>6</sup> Sahagún states that he “dictated” the songs and they “wrote” them; from the text it is obvious that the Nahua scholars may have followed the friar's outlines and suggestions but that they were largely responsible for the actual content. Though Sahagún would later become pessimistic about the success of the Franciscan mission and suspicious of Nahua Christianity, at the time of the *Psalmodia*'s composition he was still an enthusiastic supporter of the Nahua Church. Had the *Psalmodia* been composed twenty years later, Sahagún might have been more critical of his students' work and supervised it more closely.<sup>7</sup>

In compiling their songbook, the collaborators made use of Latin breviaries, the Latin Bible, one or more books of saints' lives, drafts of the sahguntine ethnographic corpus, and their own literary talents. They excerpted, recombined, condensed, and

elaborated upon this material, mixing traditional styles of oral discourse with new styles originating from the translation of European texts. The result is a fascinating hybrid literary form and an outstanding work of Nahuatl literature.

Saint James the Apostle was the patron saint of Spain. As Santiago Matamoros (“Saint James Moor-slayer”), he was a warrior saint who led the reconquest of Spain from the Moors as well as the Spanish invasion of America. *Santiago y a ellos*, “Saint James and at them,” was the Spanish soldier’s battle cry at home and abroad. There were many stories of Santiago’s apparitions, armed and resplendent on his white horse, alongside Spaniards in their battles with the Moors. It was part of the folklore of the conquest of Mexico that Santiago had been seen fighting on the side of Cortés’s army; these stories followed Spanish armies throughout the Americas. Santiago was also the patron saint of Tlaltelolco, site of the Franciscan college and Martín Jacobita’s hometown.

The *Psalmodia*’s chants are divided into “psalms” or cantos, each of which is subdivided into short stanzas arranged in the printed text as paragraphs. Throughout the Saint James song, these stanzas are quite brief and each has a period marked at the end. They can be considered discrete phrasal units of the text; because of their brevity they may be considered lines rather than stanzas. My subdivision of some of these lines into more than one sentence is arbitrary: they could all be translated as one or as several English sentences.<sup>8</sup> Each canto represents a grouping of five or six of these lines into a larger phrasal unit that in turn constitutes a discrete segment of the entire song.

In the following transcription I preserve the organization and orthography of the original text, though I have placed word divisions according to grammatical units.<sup>9</sup>

#### PRIMERO Psalmo.

- (1) Ma onquiza, ma oncaoani, ma ueca actimoteca in itenio in imauizio, in itlaço in Dios, in Sanctiagio Apostol.
- (2) Ma iximacho, ma mocaqui, ma onmauico in itlachiual, in inechicau in vei tiacauh in toCapitan.
- (3) Ma onmotta, ma teispán tlalilo, inic cuecucuiuca in itlatqui iztac cauallo tlaçotlatquio, cenca mauicoauhqui.
- (4) Ma iecteneoalo in itlaçoEspada, in cenca pepetlacatiuh, inic tlauiectiuh, in quixaxamatziuh in toiaoa.
- (5) Vel mauiztli moteca in impan Morosme, in Turcosme motlapolollianime, inic ispampa eoa, pepectli moteca.
- (6) Cēca tlanestitiuh, tzizilicatiuh in iteucitlaeoauh, itepuzeoauh, maquiziotiuh, chalchiuhiotiuh.

#### SEGUNDO Psalmo.

- (1) YN iehoatzi in toveitlatocauh in Iesus, oquimonochili, oquimopepenili inic yiauquizcauh in Sanctiagio.
- (2) In iquac ie quimopeoaltiliz in iauiotl, inic oiauchioaloc in vei tlateculutl, yoan in isquichti in itlateculupoa, niman quimonochili in vei tiacauh in Sanctiagio, yoan in iteccauh in sant Ioan.
- (3) In iehoatzi in Sanctiagio, yCapitan omuchiuh in toveitlatocatzi in Iesus, ca no yoan quimotecutlatocatizino.
- (4) Matlactli vmume in iautequioaque, oquimopepenili in Iesus, auh in itecutlatocaoa, çan einti.

- (5) Sant Pedro, Sanctiago, yoan sant Ioã, oquinmotecutlatocatzino in iehoatzi in Iesus: çan no im eisti imispan oquimonestili in itlatocaiotzi in vmpa Thabor.
- (6) çan no iehoanti imispã quimotlatlauhtili in itatzi Dios, yoan eztica omitonitzino, in vmpa suchitla Gethsemani.

### TERCERO Psalmo.

- (1) YN iquac oquinmoxexelhui in Iesus in iiautequioacaa, inic nouian cemanaoac teuiutica iaiuotl quichiuazque.
- (2) Auh in iehoatl in toveiCapitan in Sãctiago, oitequih muchiuh in vmpa España, in quiniauchiuh in tlatlacateculu.
- (3) Vmpa oquimopeoaltili in itemachtli, itocaioca Galizia, miectlamantli tlamauçolli oquimuchiuli.
- (4) Cenca ic omauçoiloc in itemachtli, in ic otlaneltocac in vei ciuapilli Doña Loba.
- (5) In vmpa Galicia, vmpa icac in iveiteupancaltzi, in cenca mauiztililo in nouian cemanaoac.
- (6) Vmpa tlamauçoto in vei teupisqui in sancto Padre: vmpa oquinoalisquetzteoac in Cardenales.

### QVARTO Psalmo.

- (1) YN tehoanti in nueua España titlaca, ma cenca ticmauçooca in iveicaltzi in toCapitan, in vncan tlaçopialo in inacaiotzi, in itocaioca Galizia Sanctiago.
- (2) çan no iehoatzi in quinmoiauchiuilico in nica nueua España in toiaoua tlatlacateculu, in iehoatzi in toveiCapitã in Sanctiago.
- (3) IlhuicacacCorona in iteucuitlaicpacsuchitl oquimocuili in ilhuicac, quimomaqli î Iesus totlaçoternaquisticatzi.
- (4) Iecnemiliztica quimoteputztoquili, in toveitlatocatzì Iesus, in iehoatzi in toveiCapitan Sanctiago.
- (5) çan no yoan imiquiztica oquimoteputztoquili, in ipampa tlaneltoquiliztli, oquimonoquili in itlapalteu:lotlahuecheleççotzi.<sup>10</sup>

### First Psalm

- (1) May it issue forth, may it resound forth, may it reach far and wide, the fame, the honor of God's precious one, Saint James the Apostle!
- (2) May they be recognized, may they be heard, may they be marveled at, the deeds, the valor of the great warrior, our Captain!
- (3) May it be seen, may it be placed before people, how they shimmer, the vestments of the white horse! It is covered with precious vestments, it is very wondrous!
- (4) May his precious Sword be praised! It goes glimmering greatly! With it he goes thrashing things, he goes smashing our enemies!
- (5) Truly, fear is cast down upon the Moors, the Turks, the confused ones! As they flee from his presence, saddles are cast down!
- (6) Greatly it goes shining, it goes jingling, his skin of gold,<sup>11</sup> his skin of metal! It goes covered with bracelets, it goes covered with jades!

### Second Psalm

- (1) He, our great speaker, Jesus, he called him. He chose Saint James as his soldier!
- (2) It was when he was about to begin the war, by which war was made on the great were-owl and all his fellow were-owls. Then he called him—the great warrior Saint James, and his younger brother Saint John!

- (3) He, Saint James, he became our great speaker Jesus's Captain. And he also made him a magistrate!
- (4) Twelve are the war commanders whom Jesus chose, but his magistrates are only three!
- (5) Saint Peter, Saint James and Saint John—Jesus made them magistrates. Likewise, it was the three of them, it was in their presence that he revealed his realm, there at Tabor.
- (6) Likewise, it was in their presence that he prayed to his father, God, and he sweated with blood, there at the garden, Gethsemane.

### Third Psalm

- (1) When Jesus divided up his war commanders, it was so that everywhere in the world in a sacred way they would make war.
- (2) And our great Captain Saint James, it became his task to make war on the were-owls there in Spain.
- (3) Where he began his teaching, it was in a place called Galicia. He did many wondrous things!<sup>12</sup>
- (4) Thus his teaching was greatly marveled at. Thus the great noblewoman Doña Loba considered the things to be true.<sup>13</sup>
- (5) There in Galicia, there stands his great temple. It is greatly marveled at everywhere in the world.
- (6) There the great priest, the Holy Father, went to marvel. There he left cardinals appointed.

### Fourth Psalm

- (1) We, we people of New Spain, let us marvel greatly at our Captain's great house, where his body is guarded as something precious, in the place called Galicia Saint James!
- (2) Likewise he came to make war here in New Spain upon our enemies, the were-owls, he, our great Captain, Saint James!
- (3) His heavenly Crown, his flowery chaplet of gold, he took it in heaven. He who gave him it was Jesus, our precious rescuer!<sup>14</sup>
- (4) With his good life<sup>15</sup> he followed behind our great speaker Jesus, he, our great Captain, Saint James!
- (5) Likewise with his death he followed behind him. Because of belief he spilled the amethysts, the roseate spoonbills, of his blood!

I will proceed through the text according to its "psalms" or cantos, discussing some of the Nahuatl stylistic strategies the authors employ and the indigenous meanings they express or imply.<sup>16</sup>

The opening canto is written in an incantatory or invocatory style of discourse, as if to conjure forth the saint's presence for the celebration of his festival.<sup>17</sup> It begins by invoking the saint's fame, then his deeds and valor. The first two lines have the same structure: three optative clauses followed by a couplet of possessed nouns and then a couplet of titles for the saint. In the third line, what has merely been heard and known, perceived from a distance, begins to become visible and present. One does not yet see the saint, but his horse has materialized. Now there are only two optative clauses, followed by a series of visual images. In the fourth line the sword appears. The pace of the action increases even more: there is only one optative clause, followed by a visual image of the shining sword, then two verbs describing the saint's actions. The verbs for the sword's glimmering and for the saint's actions share the compounding verb *-tiuh*, which denotes that the subject is performing the action while "going." This creates a triplet; it also strengthens the sense of action: no sooner does the saint's sword materialize than he rides off to do battle with it.



In the fifth line optative clauses cease to be necessary, for the saint has now taken matters into his own hands. To create the desired effect one need merely report it: the enemies flee so rapidly that their saddles (*pepechli*, “platform(s)”) fall off. The verb *moteca*, “it lies down” or “it is cast down,” describes both the fear that descends upon the triplet of enemies and the casting down of their saddles. The saint is associated with forward and outward movement; the enemies with movement downward, suggestive of defeat.

In its last line the canto finally provides a glimpse of the saint’s person, but he is covered with shining armor. The saint himself is veiled by his attributes and is, in effect, identified with them, just as indigenous deity images and impersonators (*ixiptla*) took on a god’s identity by wearing the appropriate regalia. The line consists of a couplet of *-tiuh* verbs, followed by a couplet of possessed nouns ending in the morpheme *-ehuauh* “skin,” followed by another couplet in which the *-tiuh* verbal suffix is attached to nouns describing the saint’s armor. The tight structure of this line reasserts order and stability after the violent action of the preceding lines. The enemies have been routed but the saint is still present, still moving outward, emanating light and sound, and covered with precious objects.

Rather than the fisherman’s son of the Gospels or the pilgrim saint of medieval legend, the authors chose to invoke Santiago Matamoros. However, the saint of the *Reconquista* has been transformed into a numen of the Nahuatl sacred world. The saint’s sword and the trappings of his horse shimmer with radiance. His armor is no longer a defensive weapon but a glistening treasure trove, which also creates music: the jingling bells represented by the onomatopoeic verb *tzitzilica*.

These reiterated references to radiance and preciousness are invocatory formulas for calling forth the sacred aspect of reality, perceived in terms of shimmering light, precious stones, brightly colored birds and flowers, fragrant scents, and pleasing music. This is the world of Nahuatl song, a paradisiacal otherworld which is also this world, ritually transformed to reveal the sacredness and preciousness immanent in created nature. Life itself is a bursting and blossoming of shimmering, radiant color. It is through the flower-filled poetry of song and the rhythm of dance that one achieves direct contact with this sacred world, which was, for Nahuas, the ultimate reality, the “really real.”<sup>18</sup> The relationship between the immediately perceived world and this sacred transformation of it is metaphorical, in that elements from the flowery world can “stand for” things of the ordinary world, and yet it is more than metaphorical, for, in a sense, ordinary things “really are” their transformational selves, however fleeting and incomplete one’s perception of those real selves may be.

Christian symbolism of paradise and beauty was oriented not toward the material, created world but toward the beyond: God and his favored ones, eternal life in glory of the resurrected and transfigured dead. The ultimate reality was spiritual and transcendent, bearing no direct tie to the earth and life upon it. Christian transcendentalism was meaningless to the Nahuas and was lost in translation. However, the existence within Christian symbolism of metaphors for holiness involving light, gardens, flowers, jewels, and the like provided a gateway through which the “flowery world” complex of Nahuatl

belief slipped into colonial religion. Allusions to this symbolic complex abound in Nahuatl-Christian literature, particularly in texts directed at invoking and praising sacred beings.<sup>19</sup>

The first canto begins to develop double levels of meaning that will run through the rest of the song. The Spanish term *capitan*, “captain,” is paired with the indigenous *huey tiacauh*, “great warrior.” This creates ambiguity: is the man under the golden armor a Spanish soldier or a Nahuatl soldier? The possessive prefix *to-*, “our,” attached to *capitan*, and not to *huey tiacauh*, suggests the direction in which this ambiguity is to be resolved: the text asserts indigenous possession. Santiago may be a *capitan*, but he is on our side. The golden armor, suggestive of Spanish soldiers and their greed, is, after all, overlain with bracelets and jades, which were more precious than gold in indigenous valuation.

In the fourth line Santiago routs “our enemies”; in the fifth his foes are Moors, Turks, and heretics (“confused ones”), foes of the Spanish Church who had little relevance to the indigenous community. This juxtaposition repeats the ambiguity between indigenous and Spanish referents. By equating these enemies with their own, the authors have again implied that Santiago is on their side, and theirs is the Christian community—on a par with any other—that he defends.

The saint’s horse and sword are European imports,<sup>20</sup> but as ethnic markers they are ambiguous: high-ranking indigenous nobles were permitted to possess these items. The saint described may be a Spanish captain intent on conquest; he may also be an indigenous lord defending his community from dangerous outsiders. The text permits no unambiguous viewing of his face.

In the second canto, the scene shifts from the present to the past, and from incantatory to narrative discourse. This second canto is linked to the first through the continued use of military imagery, now combined with information from the Gospels. Christ, James, and the other apostles are categorized according to indigenous social rankings. Christ is the *huey tlatoani*, “great speaker,” a title applied to the ruler of a city-state with many tributaries, like Tenochtitlan before the Spanish conquest. Christ selected James to be his *yaoquizqui*, “one who goes out as an enemy”; this is a general term for soldiers, denoting no particular rank or distinction. James also receives the titles *capitan* and *huey tiacauh* given him in the first canto. The loanword *capitan*, possessed by “us” in the first canto, is now possessed by Christ (line 3). “Our” *capitan* is also Christ’s *capitan*; “we” and Christ are on the same side. The term has been removed from its ethnic Spanish context and used to link indigenous and Christian identity.

The twelve apostles are *yaotequihuaque*, “they whose work is the enemy”; this term denotes the commander of a rank of soldiers. Christ’s closest companions saints Peter, James, and John are here designated his judges or magistrates. The office of *tecutlato*, “one who speaks as a lord,” was, in preconquest times, granted to certain very successful warriors; they administered justice in the rulers’ courts.<sup>21</sup>

The metaphor of spiritual warfare against the Devil and his minions is a common Christian figure; to describe the apostles as warriors required no particular inventiveness. But by describing these warriors in terms of the preconquest military hierarchy, referring to different rankings rather than simply using generic references to soldiers, the authors

have associated the apostles with the social structure of preconquest Mexico. This narrative about the past describes a society similar to, or even identifiable with, that of the Mexican past. Events of the Christian scriptures are made meaningful through this association with preconquest society.

Since “devil” meant something somewhat different for Nahuas and European Christians, I have here translated *tlacatecolotl*, the Nahuatl term used for devils and demons, with the more literal but still malevolent-sounding “were-owl.” *Tlacatecolotl* (plural *tlatlacatecolo*) literally means “human horned owl.” This was the title given to a type of malevolent shaman who had the horned owl as his alter ego (*nahualli*); the friars appropriated this term, for lack of anything better, to refer to devils. Lucifer was then the “great *tlacatecolotl*.” The term *tlacatecolotl* occurs in nearly all Nahuatl doctrinal texts, turning up also in indigenous chronicles. From its very specific original referent, it quickly expanded its meaning to encompass the hordes of malevolent non-human beings that populated the friars’ world.

For Nahuas, especially for historically and culturally self-conscious Nahuas like Sahagún’s students, the *tlatlacatecolo* were not simply creatures of the imported religion, for their ranks included the deities formerly worshipped in Mexico. From the very beginning the friars had argued for the rejection of these gods by identifying them as devils, an identification which the friars took quite literally. Nahuas learned to refer to their parents’ gods as *tlatlacatecolo*. The “great *tlacatecolotl*” was sometimes associated with the deity Tezcatlipoca.<sup>22</sup>

Scattered throughout the *Psalmody* there are stories of other apostles and martyrs of early Christianity who smashed idols, drove away *tlatlacatecolo* and brought people into Christianity. Nahuas of the first postconquest generation would have heard in such words the echoes of their own people’s recent past. The beings on whom Christ and his warriors are to do battle are the deities of unconverted, unbaptized peoples.

Of all the New Testament events in which James participated, the authors mention only three. Christ chooses James and his brother John; no mention is made of their occupation as fishermen (Matthew 4:21–22), a role inconsistent with that of a Nahua warrior. As one of Christ’s three “magistrates,” Saint James witnessed events that the other apostles were not privileged to attend: Christ’s transfiguration upon Mount Tabor and Christ’s praying in Gethsemane, during which, according to Luke 22:44, his sweat was as drops of blood (*sicut guttae sanguinis*). Little is revealed about these events—least of all that the three men, in a swoon at the transfiguration and asleep at Gethsemane, could hardly be considered attentive participants. What is important is their attendance upon the deity; the authors honor Saint James by recounting his close relationship with Christ.

Like the preceding canto, this one has six lines; however, it is composed in a narrative style lacking the tight structure of the opening invocation. The discourse style of European written narrative, in which a chronological sequence of events is reported, competes with indigenous interest in formulas of oral recitation. The canto reads as a narrative; however, the events are recounted with minimal detail and are reduced to a series of images and assertions fitted into the six-line form.

Repetitive devices occur throughout the canto. The first line recounts Christ’s

calling of James; the same event is more elaborately told in the second line. The phrase “the great were-owl and all his fellow were-owls” is echoed in structure by “the great warrior Saint James and his younger brother Saint John”; one can imagine the apostles lined up against the demons for face-to-face combat.

The verbs *oquimonochili*, “he called him,” and *oquimopepenili*, “he chose him,” in the first line are repeated one by one in the *quimonochili*, “he called him,” of line two and the *oquinmopepenili*, “he chose them,” of line four; in the latter pair one sound has been altered in each word through the dropping of the *o-* past prefix in the first and the change to a plural object marker in the second (*qui-* to *quim-*). Other words also recur with slight variations that create echoes without creating monotony: line one’s *tohueytlatocauh*, “our great speaker,” is given a reverential suffix in line three, *tohueytlatocatzin*, “our (rev.) great speaker.” The term *tecutlato* occurs in two verbalized and one possessed form: *quimotecutlatocatzino*, “he (rev.) made him a magistrate” (line three); *oquinmotecutlatocatzino*, “he (rev.) made them magistrates” (line five); *itecutlatocahuan*, “his magistrates” (line four).

The second part of line five forms a couplet with line six, *zan no imeixtin imixpan*, “just also they three before them,” being nearly repeated in *zan no yehuantin imixpan*, “just also they before them.” These introductory phrases are followed by descriptions of Christ’s actions; both lines then close with a reference to place, “there at Tabor” and “there at the garden, Gethsemane.”

The third canto recounts another phase of Christ’s war against the devils. The first line refers to Christ sending his apostles to preach throughout the world. With this seemingly straightforward statement the authors are treading upon politically sensitive ground. According to Mark 16: 15, the resurrected Christ told his followers: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Christian lore distributed the apostles around the known world in such a way that all lands were at least nominally covered.

When Europe became aware of the Western Hemisphere, questions arose as to whether Christ had actually sent his apostles to “all the world.” One popular solution was to follow Columbus’s confusion and include the “Indies” with India. Saint Thomas had preached in India, and hence perhaps in the Indies as well. If one wished to find evidence of the saint’s presence, one could do so; in Mexico the myth of Quetzalcoatl was so manipulated as to make him into Saint Thomas. The belief in previous evangelization became a feature of national consciousness among Mexicans of Spanish descent.<sup>23</sup>

Sahagún, like most Franciscans, chose not to believe in an earlier evangelization but to credit his own order with the original conversion of Mexico. In his Spanish prologue to the *Colloquios* he wrote: “we know for certain that our Lord God kept this land of diverse peoples and domains . . . concealed for his secret reasons until these our times.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, Mexico was by special dispensation excluded from Christ’s apostolate and reserved for the followers of Francis.

When Nahuatl writers refer to “everywhere in the world,” one would expect that they would consider their own land as part of this expanse. By referring in a Nahuatl text to Christ’s worldwide dispatch of his apostles, they imply that Christ did mean to include Mexico.

The rest of the third canto is a distillation into five lines of the medieval legend about Saint James's mission to Spain and the history of his shrine at Compostela in Galicia. Before beginning to discuss his activities in Spain, the authors reassert indigenous possession of the saint: he is *tohueycapitan*, "our great captain."

According to Spanish legend, Saint James, whose name means "fighter" (*luchador*), preaches in Spain but manages to convert only nine people. He then returns to Judea and is martyred. His disciples take his body and get into a boat, which an angel guides back to Galicia. The saint's body is swallowed up by a great rock. His disciples are persecuted by Queen Loba, the local ruler whom Saint James had been unable to convert. They enjoy a series of miraculous escapes, and Loba eventually converts. A church is built on the site of her palace to hold Saint James's remains. Many miracles occur there; it becomes a center for pilgrimages and is visited by many worthies. During the *Reconquista* the saint appears as a knight on horseback fighting on the Spanish side.<sup>25</sup>

The writers definitely had access to lengthy tellings of this legend, for in their songs about some of the other saints they include numerous hagiographic details that indicate the use of some edition of the *Flos sanctorum*. But they treat Saint James as a generic apostle. He enters Spain, his assigned territory; he fights non-Christian deities in the form of *tlatlacatecolo*; he performs miracles; he converts the local leader; an elaborate shrine is built for his remains. The last line, about an unnamed pope and his cardinals, hardly seems worthy of inclusion; it certainly does not bring the canto to a resounding close. The apostle most closely tied to Spanish national identity receives a summary treatment, while the tales of other apostles in other lands are recounted at length. This constitutes deliberate neglect of Spain.

Although the six-line form of the preceding cantos is maintained, this canto shows less stylistic development. The reiteration of *ompa*, "there," creates a sense of distant wonders being enumerated. The fourth line balances *ic omahuizoloc*, "thus it was marveled at," against *ic otlaneltocac*, "thus she believed." There is a reiteration of wonderment, with different forms of the verb *mahuizoa*, "to marvel at," presented in lines three through six. The authors are writing with care, but they are not putting forth their best effort.

The fourth canto shifts the scene from Spain to New Spain. The first line links the here and now to that distant place by continuing the series of "marveling" statements: we here in New Spain also participate in the worldwide wonderment at Saint James's shrine. The optative "let us marvel" is a call to action, marking a shift from the narration of past events back to the ongoing festival celebration.

The phrase "we people of New Spain" should be read as referring to the indigenous community, or specifically those who are at this moment reading or performing the text. It does not include people of Spanish descent. When the *Psalmodia* (and other Nahuatl-Christian texts) speaks of the Spaniards in Mexico it calls them *Castillan tlaca*, "people of Castile," and clearly distinguishes them from the "people here" (*nican tlaca*) or the "people of New Spain." There is a hint here of an incipient pan-Nahuatl or even pan-indigenous ethnic identity, at least among these Nahuatl speakers from different communities who have been raised and educated together under the Franciscans. Ethnic group-

ings such as Mexica, Acolhua, or Tepaneca were not meaningful to the Nahua Church; the *Psalmodia* is intended for use in all communities that understood its language. “We people of New Spain” is an appropriately inclusive term for the indigenous citizens of the colony; these are the faces behind the text’s various first-person-plural statements.<sup>26</sup>

The second line of this canto is an understated utterance that speaks volumes. The opening “likewise” refers back to line two of the preceding canto, where Saint James was sent to make war on the demons in Spain. In the same way he came here to New Spain to make war on the “were-owls” who are “our” enemies. The authors have collapsed the conversion of Spain and the conversion of Mexico into a single continuous or repeating history. They have resolved the issue of Christ’s universal apostolate by making New Spain an extension of Spain rather than of Saint Thomas’s India. New Spain is included in that original apostolate without any intervening reversion to “paganism”: the fifteen centuries between the life of Saint James and the conversion of Mexico are simply ignored.

The basis for this statement is the widely held belief that Saint James appeared and fought alongside the Spaniards in the conquest of Mexico. In that sense he did come to New Spain to make war. However, the song makes no mention of warfare between Spanish and indigenous armies. There is no indication that the Spaniards brought Saint James, that Saint James was on the Spaniards’ side, or even that the Spaniards were involved. Instead, the people of New Spain are equated with the people of Spain as subjects of the saint’s work, and the non-Christian deities of ancient Spain are equated with those of Mexico—“our enemies the were-owls.” Saint James came to fight not the people of New Spain but only their former deities.

The radical nature of this statement is made even clearer by comparing it with a text that presents, in Nahuatl, a Spanish view of these events, and not that of a soldier or colonist but of a friar devoted to the Nahua Church. The Augustinian Fray Juan de la Anunciación wrote sermons for the festivals of the saints in a book published in 1577. His work, which was the *Psalmodia*’s only published rival in the field of hagiography, borrowed some of its material from a manuscript version of the *Psalmodia*; however, this friar tells a very different story about Saint James. He reminds his Nahua audience that only eight hundred to twelve hundred Spaniards were able to conquer them, even though they were “innumerable” and had many valiant rulers.

Auh macihui in amixachintin ancatca, vel oanpanahuiloq̄ ca çan quezquitoton in amechpehuaco, oquim-panahuiq̄ in amoculhuā, ca oquimmopaleuiliq̄ yxpātzinco in totecuiyo DIOS, in cihuapilli sancta Maria, yuā in Săctiago, ca miecpa oquimmonextilitzinoq̄ oquimmotititzinoq̄.

And even though you were a great many, you were quite overcome. Just a very few came and conquered you; they overcame your grandfathers. Indeed, before our lord God, the noblewoman Saint Mary and Saint James helped them. Indeed, many times they appeared to them, they made themselves visible to them.<sup>27</sup>

Here, the saints helped the Spaniards to vanquish the grandfathers of the Nahua congregation. The friar goes on to explain that this is why “you Christians” should celebrate Saint James’s festival.

In one line of a song, the *Psalmodia*’s authors have rewritten the history of the

conquest and redrawn the political structure of colonial society. Saint James no longer validates the Spanish invasion. The Spaniards and the Nahuas are not pitched against one another but occupy the same status in relation to the saint and the demons/deities. The song tells a story not of invasion, warfare, and defeat but simply of conversion. In this revisionist history there is no justification for Spanish domination.<sup>28</sup>

The *Psalmodia* works similar magic upon the festival of the Roman martyr Saint Hippolytus. His festival was celebrated in Mexico because it happens to fall on August 13, the day that, in 1521, the Aztec ruler Cuauhtemoc was taken prisoner by Cortés; this event marked the effective beginning of Spanish colonial dominion. The song for this festival also celebrates “our” liberation from the “were-owls.” The history of the conquest is left ambiguous and understated in the following lines:

Tintlacaoa ticatca in tlatlacateculu, auh in iehoantin in tetcuti, in tlatoque, quinpisticatca  
quintlaçotlaticatca in tlatlacateculu: auh in Dios quinoalmioali in iiaoziczoa, ic peoaloue in  
tlatlacateculu, yoan in intetlaçotlacaoa.

We were the slaves of the were-owls. And the lords and kings were keeping, were loving the were-owls.  
But God sent his soldiers. Thus the were-owls were conquered, and those who loved them.<sup>29</sup>

The speakers’ “we” is dissociated from those who kept the old deities. God’s soldiers are not ascribed any particular ethnic identity; they could even be saints, like James and his fellow “soldiers” of Christ. “Our grandfathers” are not directly implicated and the Spanish presence is not validated. Here again, the story of conquest is told as a story of conversion, and this story does not justify the continuing Spanish presence.

Having made their subtle political statement, the authors retreat to safer subject matter and close the canto with three lines about Saint James’s martyrdom. He is crowned by Christ in heaven with the martyr’s crown of flowers, the loanword *corona* being equated with the Nahuatl term for a chaplet made of flowers (literally, “on-his-head flowers”). This ornament suggests indigenous ritual accoutrements, to which flowers were as essential in colonial as in preconquest times, and which included wreaths worn on the head. Flowers were intrinsic to the Nahua view of the sacred, as described earlier. It is appropriate that saints in heaven should be adorned with flowers, but their wearing of them is an index of paradisiacal existence itself rather than a symbol of the moral rectitude for which, in Christian formulations, that existence is the reward.

The following line is the strongest moral statement in the entire text, and it is not a very strong moral statement. The *Psalmodia* as a whole is strikingly amoral, free of the intrusive, judgmental voice of the preaching friar. Like more traditional Nahuatl songs, it is concerned with the celebration and commemoration of the sacred rather than with human behavior. The line simply compares Saint James’s lifestyle with that of Christ: the apostle followed Christ’s good conduct. Priests told the lives of the saints to Nahua as to European audiences in order to inspire people to follow in the saints’ footsteps. Fray Juan de la Anunciación makes this explicit in his hagiographic work: the ministers should preach to the natives (*naturales*) about the lives of the saints, *amonestandoles y animandoles à que las imiten y sigan*, “admonishing them and encouraging them to imitate and follow them.”<sup>30</sup> Saint James imitated Christ; an endorsement of such behavior for ordi-

nary humans would, in a priest's discourse, logically follow. But the writers are not interested in Saint James as a moral model, only in establishing his close relationship to the sacred.

This last canto is somewhat more stylized than the preceding one. In line three "his heavenly crown" and "his flowery chaplet of gold" form a couplet, and the first portion of this line (which I have translated as a sentence) forms a couplet with the second half, the verb *quimomaquili*, "he gave it," nearly repeating the structure of *oquimocuili*, "he took it," with a change of subject. The *zan no*, "likewise," introducing line two is repeated in line five. Lines two and four both end with "he, our great captain, Saint James"; line one also ends with the saint's name. The reference in line four to his life is followed by a parallel reference to his death, which as a martyrdom for faith was also an imitation of Christ. Thus, line four's *iyecnemiliztica quimotepotztoquili*, "with his good life he followed behind him," is echoed in line five's *imiquiztica oquimotepotztoquili*, "with his death he followed behind him"; once again, exact repetition is avoided by the selective inclusion of the *o-* prefix, which does not affect meaning in this context.

The very last word of the song, *itlapalteuilotlahquecholzotzi*, "his amethyst roseate spoonbill blood (reverential suffix)," is also its longest and most complex compound term. The flowers referred to two lines above are here joined by an allusion to precious stones and brilliantly colored birds, two other vital components of the sacred world. Martyrdom for faith has become a manifestation of Nahua sacred reality, as the saint's blood issues forth in the form of amethysts (or other reddish crystalline stones) and roseate spoonbills. This is metaphor, and more than metaphor: ultimately, it is of such things that this holy blood "really" consists. Like blood, amethysts and roseate spoonbills are reddish in color, and their Nahuatl names incorporate terms for redness. Amethyst is *tlapaltehuilotl*, "red crystal," *tlapalli* referring to red paint or dye. The roseate spoonbill is *tlauhquecholli*, *tlauh-* coming from *tlahuatl*, "red ochre," an element found also in terms referring to the light of torches and of the dawn, and *quecholli* referring to long-necked birds (from *quechtili* "neck" and *olli* "rubber"<sup>31</sup>).

The invention of this long (twelve-syllable), complex, and highly evocative compound word brings the song to a resounding finale, while alluding to traditional Nahua concerns with penitence and the life-giving powers of sacrificial blood. The canto is one line shorter than the preceding four; this shortening also marks a decisive ending to the text.

By describing the saint's travels to New Spain before discussing his death, the authors leave ambiguous the chronological sequence of the saint's actions. Perhaps he came here, as well as to Spain, before he died. Though his body is kept there in Spain, he is associated with symbols of the Nahua sacred world: shimmering light, jade and amethyst, flowers and tropical birds. He is a warrior, a magistrate, "our" captain, who can be invoked to ward off external dangers.

The Nahua authors have appropriated the patron saint of conquest and used him to legitimize indigenous society, to protect the indigenous community, to negate the significance of Spanish political domination, and to embody a distinctly non-Christian (though characteristically Nahua-Christian) perception of the sacred. This Santiago is not



a precolumbian deity, but neither is he a Spanish captain or a fisherman of Galilee. He is a suitable patron for a colonial Nahuatl community.

The friars sought to silence indigenous voices and replace them with their own, with Christian word and text unaltered and eternal. Translation between two cultural worlds is never so straightforward a procedure. The friars' amanuenses saw translation as a transformative process through which they could construct texts with meanings appropriate to their own place and time and their own concerns as nobles and cultural brokers in a colonized society. By unmasking some features of the Nahuatl face behind Santiago's shining armor, I hope to have shown that texts of Christian devotion produced by indigenous writers, even under the direct supervision of priests, may record not the destruction of the authors' culture but their methods of coping and surviving, not the obliteration of native discourse styles but their creative adaptation to new outlets of expression. Translating their texts from a perspective of linguistic and cultural sensitivity not available to sixteenth-century priests, we may recover some lost aspects of colonial Native American experience.

## Notes

1. *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 333–34.

2. *Signasti domine servum tuum Franciscum signis redemptionis nostre*. Nahuatl works bearing this scene include Fray Alonso de Molina's vocabularies of 1555 and 1571, Molina's 1571 grammar, and the *Cartilla para enseñar a leer* of 1569. It also appears on Fray Maturino Gilberti's 1559 vocabulary of Tarascan.

3. Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 33.

4. See especially *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989).

5. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Psalmody christiana y sermonario de los sanctos del año en lengua mexicana* (Mexico: Pedro Ocharte, 1583), 120r–22r. I thank the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University for the reproduction of the *Psalmody* that I have used for this study.

6. Sahagún, *Psalmody*, prologue; Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles Dibble (Santa Fe: School of American Research and University of Utah Press, 1950–82) introductory volume, 54–55; Luis Nicolau D'Oliver, *Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1499–1590)*, trans. Mauricio Mixco (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987) 35, 84.

7. It is somewhat startling that the *Psalmody* actually did get published. By 1583 Sahagún had become extremely critical of some of the earlier work by himself and his students. He (apparently) withdrew from the publication process the *Colloquios* of 1564, a text commemorating early Franciscan successes, which was going to be printed along with the *Psalmody* (see J. Jorge Klor de Alva, "Sahagún's Misguided Introduction to Ethnography and the Failure of the *Colloquios* Project," *The Work of Bernardino de Sahagún: Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Aztec*

Mexico, ed. J. Jorge Klor de Alva, H. B. Nicholson and Eloise Quiñones Keber (Albany: State University of New York, 1988).

8. All Nahuatl “nouns” and “verbs” are really “sentence-words” that can stand alone as sentences; nouns incorporate an understood copula and verbs incorporate a subject.

9. Elsewhere in this paper I employ a standardized orthography.

10. Sahagún, *Psalmody*, 120r–22r.

11. *Teocuitlatl*, “sacred excrement,” refers to both gold and silver, the two metals being distinguished by the modifiers *coztic*, “yellow,” and *iztac*, “white,” respectively. The term without modifiers appears to be more often associated with gold than with silver; hence my translation.

12. *Tlamahuizolli*, “something to be marveled at.” This is the standard Nahuatl gloss for “miracle.”

13. The verb form *tlaneltoaca*, “to consider things as true,” is used in Nahua-Christian writings in contexts where European texts speak of religious conversion or religious faith; both concepts were alien to indigenous culture.

14. *Temaquixtiani*, “one who takes (people) from the hands of others,” was the standard Nahuatl term for Christ as savior.

15. I am reading the ambiguous *Iecnemiliztica* as the possessed form *iyecnemiliztica*, “with his good life,” consistent with *imiquiztica*, “with his death.”

16. My attention to the various forms of repetition and parallelism the authors employed in constructing this text was suggested by William F. Hanks’s work with colonial Yucatec texts (e.g. “Elements of Maya Style,” in *Word and Image in Maya Culture*, ed. William F. Hanks and Don S. Rice [Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989]; “Grammar, Style, and Meaning in a Maya Manuscript,” rev. of *Heaven Born Mérida and its Destiny: The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, by Munro Edmonson, *International Journal of American Linguistics* 54 [1988]).

17. My use of exclamation points in this canto (as in the fourth canto) is obviously arbitrary. The invocatory tone set by the many optative constructions, as well as the gradual increase in activity from line to line, suggests an active, excited style of oral declamation.

18. For my knowledge of the characteristics and cultural distribution of this symbolic complex, I am indebted to Jane H. Hill and her paper entitled “The Flowery World of Old Uto-Aztecan,” presented at the 86th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Chicago, 1987. The relationship between the poetry of song and the Nahuas’ deepest philosophical concerns was established by Miguel León-Portilla (*Aztec Thought and Culture* [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963]). Willard Gingerich has recently reevaluated and elaborated upon León-Portilla’s ideas (“Heidegger and the Aztecs: The Poetics of Knowing in Pre-Hispanic Nahuatl Poetry,” *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*, ed. Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987]).

19. For a fuller description see Burkhart, “Flowery Heaven: The Aesthetic of Paradise in Nahuatl Devotional Literature,” *Res* 20 (1991).

20. Indigenous weaponry included a swordlike weapon made of wood inset with obsidian blades, the *macuahuitl*. The use of the Spanish term *espada*, however, suggests that the authors are thinking of the European version.

21. The preconquest military hierarchy is described by Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), Chapter 3. The *tecutlato*’s role as magistrate is discussed in Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, IX, Chapters 14 and 21. This title was also applied to rulers of subject city-states (Hassig 28). *Tecutlato* is not used for Christ as judge at the Last Judgment. In that context terms based on the verb *tzontequi*, “to judge, sentence” (literally, “cut [someone’s]

hair”) are always used. Thus there would be no ambiguity between these preconquest-type judges or magistrates and Christ’s role as judge.

22. For a fuller discussion of the term *tlacatecolotl* and its referents, see Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, 40–44. I owe to Michael D. Coe the term “were-owl” as a translation for *tlacatecolotl*.

23. For an excellent discussion of the issue of previous evangelization, see Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531–1813*, trans. Benjamin Keen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

24. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Coloquios y Doctrina Cristiana*, trans. Miguel León-Portilla (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1986), 72.

25. My discussion is based on two Spanish editions of the *Flos sanctorum*, one published in 1558 in Alcalá and the other in 1568 in Seville, in the collection of the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.

26. The term “Indians” (*indios*) very rarely appears in sixteenth-century Nahuatl texts.

27. Fray Juan de la Anunciación, *Sermonario en lengua mexicana* (México: Antonio Ricardo, 1577), 170r.

28. In this formulation there is a striking similarity to the Andean chronicler Guaman Poma de Ayala’s revisionist history. According to him the Inca troops were so stunned by apparitions of Saint James and the Virgin Mary that they did not resist the Spanish forces. Since the Andeans peacefully accepted the Spanish presence and the Christian religion, the abusive colonial regime had no justification (see Rolena Adorno, *Guaman Poma: Writing and Resistance in Colonial Peru* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986]).

29. Sahagún, *Psalmodia*, 149r–v.

30. Anunciación, 130r.

31. I am following J. Richard Andrews’s reading (*Introduction to Classical Nahuatl* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975], 465).

## Suggested Reading

Arthur J. O. Anderson and John Keber are currently preparing for publication a translation of the entire *Psalmodia christiana*. See also my translation of the *Psalmodia’s tlaocolcuicatl*, “sad song,” in *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 18: 181–218 (1986) and Anderson’s translation of the San Bernardino song in *Indiana* 9: 107–14 (1984).

On the life and work of Sahagún, see Luis Nicolau D’Oliver, *Fray Bernardino de Sahagún 1499–1590* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987); J. Jorge Klor de Alva, H. B. Nicholson, and Eloise Quiñones Keber, eds., *The Work of Bernardino de Sahagún: Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Aztec Mexico* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988); and Munro S. Edmonson, ed., *Sixteenth-Century Mexico: The Work of Sahagún* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974).

I discuss other aspects of the indigenization of Christianity in *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989); “Flowery Heaven: The Aesthetic of Paradise in Nahuatl Devotional Literature,” *Res* 20 (1991); and “The Solar Christ in Nahuatl Doctrinal Texts of Early Colonial Mexico,” *Ethnohistory* 35: 234–56 (1988).