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Book Reviews

Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain. By Fray Bernardino de Sahagún. Translated from the Aztec into English, with notes by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble. Santa Fe: The School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1955.

The primary sources of history are, through prolixity or physical inaccessibility or linguistic problems, kept from the eyes of all but professional historians in a sadly overwhelming majority of cases. It is an event, therefore, when in the form of truly gripping reading the primary documentation from both sides of one of history's greatest dramas becomes available to the unspecialized public.

With the publication of Book 12 of the Florentine Codex, we now have at hand in English the Aztec version of the conquest of Mexico, which was already ours in the conquerors' version from two sources — Cortés himself (the Five Letters) and one of his captains (Bernal Díaz del Castillo). There is much in all these accounts which does not deal directly with the struggle for control of Mexico from 1519 to 1521; but in all three, the reader is swept onward in the rush of great events described at first hand, and the sections dealing with other matters are likely to be found intriguing for their exoticism if for nothing else.

Since the twelve books of the Florentine Codex are not being published in numerical order, the issuance of Book 12 brings us only to the half-way point in the series. Anderson and Dibble, the translators and annotators, will publish a thirteenth volume at the end of the series, summing up their contribution and including an introduction to the work. Since research is still going forward and has now been under way for some years, one may expect the last volume to be a major contribution to American studies.

As has been noted in reviews of the volumes previously issued (Books 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 11), the Florentine Codex as presented by Anderson and Dibble is an English version of the original Náhuatl text by Sahagún (and, as is clear in

Book 12, his Indian collaborators). Sahagún, after many years of missionary work in 16th century Mexico, prepared a Náhuatl version of a *General History of the Things of New Spain.* He added a parallel but not always identical Spanish version, and the latter has been through the years the greatest source of information on ancient Mexican life, especially among the Aztecs. Only Seler's German version had been available to those who could not read the Náhuatl.

Again and again in the Book 12 account of the conquest we are confronted not only with the Aztec point of view on that great tragedy, but also with Aztec (that is, Indian) ways of stating that viewpoint. For instance, when the Spanish discovered that an Indian who had presented himself to them as Moctezuma was not the Aztec emperor, they are quoted as saying: "Thou canst not fool us; thou canst not mock us. Thou canst not make us stupid, nor flatter us, nor become our eyes, nor trick us, nor misdirect our gaze, nor turn us back, nor destroy us, nor dazzle us, nor cast mud into our eyes, nor place a muddy hand over our faces."

In his many years of living with the Indians (he became very fluent in Náhuatl), Sahagún may indeed have acquired deep understanding of the native mind; but it seems unlikely that he should have adopted this typically ceremonious, repetitious, and flowery form of Indian speech. It is still less likely that Cortés, fresh from Spain, should have learned it. What we have here, then, is an Indian paraphrase of a Spanish speech. Again and again we see the rhythm familiar to us from Indian legends, North American as well as Mesoamerican.

There is another interesting example on the same page (page 31). Moctezuma sent some noblemen with gifts for Cortés, and the Indians report what happened: "Like monkeys they seized upon the gold. It was as if they were satisfied, sated, and gladdened. For in truth they thirsted mightily for gold; they stuffed themselves with it, and starved and lusted for it like pigs." The Spanish lust for gold is clear enough in the accounts of Cortés and Bernal Díaz, but not stated in terms of monkey and pig analogies!

We get a fascinating insight into the Aztec mentality (one of many, of course) when the Aztecs learned how powerful the Spanish were, and when their priests foretold the conquest by the newcomers. In the ninth chapter, we read that "Moctezuma became very fearful; he felt foreboding, and was frightened and terrified, and foresaw evil for the city. And everyone was sore afraid. There were fear, terror, dread, and apprehension." It seems clear that the Aztecs, from the emperor on down, were suffering severely from a case of bad conscience. Probably they were imagining what all the nations they had been oppressing would do to them when liberated.

One of the omens which had terrified the Aztecs was the apparently spontaneous fire which broke out in the temple of their patron, Huitzilopochtli the war god. Architectural details, especially of the more perishable parts of ancient constructions, are difficult to come by in archaeology, but in the account of the temple fire, we read that ". . . the squared, wooden pillars were flaring; from within them emerged the flames, the tongues of fire, the blaze which speedily ate all the house beams." It behooves the archaeologist, then, to give much attention (nearly all already do) to Sahagún. The passage just cited (page 2) continues: "Thereupon there was an outcry; the priests said: 'O Mexicans, hasten here to put out the fire! Bring your earthen water jars!'" Where else could we get information on a detail such as the procedure in case of fire?

In translating, Anderson and Dibble have suffered occasional perceptible difficulties. At the risk of seeming ungrateful for the essential and beautiful job they are doing, an attempt was made to suggest something in one or two such instances. The conclusion was arrived at after considerable struggle with the same difficulties that they had done the best that could be done, and therefore the places thus worked over will not be cited. The truth is that because of some important structural similarities, Náhuatl translates into English rather well, on the whole, and the version offered us here takes full advantage of the fact.

Bernal Díaz del Castillo. *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico, 1517-1521.* (translated and with an introduction and notes by A. P. Maudslay). México: The Mexico Press, 1928. Also London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1928.

Cortés, Hernán. *Five Letters, 1519-1526* (translated and with an introduction by J. Bayard Morris). London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1928.

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The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World: A Study of the Writings of Gerónimo de Mendieta (1525-1604). By John Leddy Phelan. University of California Press, 1956. Pp. 159, bibliography, index.

As both title and subtitle point out, this is not primarily a resurrection of Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta, pioneer Franciscan historian of the New World, as a person and a historian, but an exposition of his writings which Phelan frames neatly within the Joachimite apocalyptic theories of the Middle Ages. The author succeeds, but too well, in what seems to me a more than clever *tour de force.* His thorough command of Joachimite lore and sources, as well as of the early history of Spanish missionary activities in the Indies, produces a convincing picture of Mendieta and his contemporary mystic-minded Franciscans (in contrast with other more "realistic" ecclesiastics) as dyed-in-the-wool Joachimites. As such, these early sons of St. Francis in America appear as anti-clerical heretics, which most certainly they were not. The fallacy of this extremely logical composition rests on a false premise, namely, that the Franciscans of New Spain (the Observants) were identical with the 13th-century *Spiritual* friars who, by their stubborn adherence to Joachimite doctrine, spelled themselves out of the Order and the Church.

Joachim of Flora, Cistercian abbot and mystic (c. 1132-1202), wrote a prophetic-millennial work that was highly susceptible to anti-papal and other unorthodox interpreta-

tions. His theories were developed by sundry medieval groups, known in general as Joachimites, who produced other writings falsely attributed to Abbot Joachim. Among these was a considerable number of charter Franciscans who, shortly after the death of St. Francis in 1226, vigorously opposed the "Conventual" body of Franciscans under Brother Elias, the latter having ceded to the necessary expedient of dwelling in "convents." The dissidents called themselves "Spirituals," claiming themselves to be the only faithful adherents to the spirit of Francis' rule of Holy Poverty; their strict views on an apotheosized poverty, also a feature of Joachimite theory, led them to embrace other Joachimite heresies. In short, many Spirituals were expelled, and some executed, as formal heretics; while the rest, through obedience to the Roman Pontiff which St. Francis had so much emphasized, renounced Joaquimism, but still insisted upon a stricter *observance* of the Franciscan Rule. The heretical Spirituals ended around the year 1318; the faithful orthodox ones, deliberately rejecting the Spiritual designation, developed into the "Observants," soon the preponderant and most famous section of the Order, and who are commonly known as the Franciscans. (The Conventuals, accepting further Papal dispensations from Franciscan poverty, quickly dwindled down to the little-known branch still designated as Conventuals.)

To the Observants belonged all the famous Franciscans of the New World, not to mention those of the Orient and Near East, as well as the teachers and scholars of Western Europe. They certainly were not the centuries-defunct Joachimite Spirituals, much less were they Joachimite in doctrinal persuasion. True, a Joachimite mythical flavor hovered over Spanish and Franciscan ways of thinking — let us say a medieval myth stripped of definite Joachimite heresy. It was something like the classical literary fad in English and other European literature when Grecian gods and their antics crowded almost every line. To say that Mendieta and his confreres actually believed in the imminent extinction of the Papacy and the millennial reign of a purely human monarchi-

cal Messiah other than Christ Himself, is like attributing the worship of Zeus and Apollo to Milton and Shakespeare.

Had the author been fully cognizant of these facts, he would not have mesmerized himself into forcing all his facts into his specious synthetic framework, and his vast historical material and its exposition would have proved of great value. Aside from this major objection, it still does. It clearly shows how the Franciscan missionary approach, with regard to the natives of the New World, was radically different from other views and methods. This was sparked, however, not by Joachimite myth, but by the true Catholic mystique of St. Francis of Assisi.

Jemez, New Mexico FRAY ANGELICO CHAVEZ