

## The “San Bernardino” of Sahagún’s *Psalmodia*

Sahagún escribió su “*Psalmodia Christiana*” después de 1558. Era la única obra publicada aún durante su vida, en 1583. Para su redacción procedió como de costumbre: ayudantes indígenas, formados por él mismo y por sus colegas en el Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, realizaron la escritura y le ayudaron a mantener el texto náhuatl libre de idolatrías y de herejías. Con la “*Psalmodia*” intentó Sahagún crear un sustituto aceptable para las pasadas tradiciones indígenas. De esta colección se publica aquí el salmo “*In die Sancti Bernardini*” en su versión náhuatl con la correspondiente traducción inglesa.

Sahagún’s Prologue to Book II of his “*Historia general de las cosas de Nueve España*” tells us that when, on the Provincial Toral’s order in 1558, he began the first drafts of the “*Historia*”, he also began the “*Postilla*” and the “*cánticos*” (cantares) which eventually became the “*Psalmodia Christiana, y sermonario de los Sanctos del Años en lengua Mexicana, ... Ordenada en cantares ò Psalmos, para que canten los Indios en los arcytos, que hazen en las iglesias*” (Sahagún 1956, 1: 105; Nicolau D’Olwer 1952: 52, 54). The purpose of the “*cantares*” was to provide a substitute for the songs of preconquest origin still sung in surviving indigenous ceremonies (“*areytos*”), which perpetuated much of the old pagan religion. Sahagún’s was not the first or only such attempt, though it



appears to have been the most successful, since its wide circulation in manuscript had been authorized by Viceroy Velasco sometime before 1564, it was approved by the Third Ecclesiastical Council in Mexico in 1585, and it was published in 1583 – the only one of Sahagún's works to be printed in his lifetime (Nicolau D'Olwer 1952: 109 – 111; Nicolau D'Olwer and Cline 1973: 205).

Copies of it are almost as rare as of Sahagún's sixteenth-century manuscripts; the largest number of extant copies I have seen cited is seven (Garibay K. 1953 – 1954, II: 100). In the eighteenth century, it was denounced and referred to the Inquisition as containing Biblical material translated into the local vernacular (Nahuatl), contrary to the rules established by the Council of Trent, and consequently systematically destroyed (Nicolau D'Olwer 1952: 111; Garibay K. 1953 – 1954, II: 100). In those times and in Spain's empire, however, if any work contained Biblical passages translated into a vulgar tongue, there was indeed nothing that the censoring authorities could do except ban it (Jiménez Moreno 1938: 18 f.; Ballesteros Gaibrois 1973: 78). In view of its survival into the eighteenth century, the "Psalmodia" would seem to have been a marginal case. One could not expect objection to such "psalmos" as were to be sung "In die sancti Bernardini"; those for "Dominica in Septuagesima", however – to take one example – might well be condemned, because in them are paraphrases of parts of Gen. ii, iii, vi, vii, viii, ix, and xi which follow the Biblical text closely (Sahagún 1583: fols. 89r – 92r, 32r – 41r). In it and some others, reference to scriptural passages can, in fact, materially assist one in the translation of the Nahuatl. Besides, as Baudot points out (Baudot 1976: 493, 499 ff.), book censorship or rigid control, which began in 1527, were maintained with varying strictness until 1820 for various reasons – fear of uprisings by Indians or Spaniards, the strength of the Mendicant Orders, among others; and the use of Nahuatl and the recollection of the ancient civilizations were, as a matter of imperial policy, discouraged after the third quarter of the sixteenth century.

As replacements for the surviving pagan "cantares", those which Sahagún provided do not attempt to approximate the ancient literary style; by that standard, they have been judged inferior to the "Cantares mexicanos" and others of their kind, or the best poetic or almost poetic parts of the Nahuatl texts of his "Historia general" (Jiménez Moreno 1938: 19 f., 52 ff; Garibay K. 1953 – 1954, II: 99 f.), though there are passages which use some of the old modes of expression. The literary style of the "Psalmodia" is in the main like that described by Dibble, regarding the "Postilla", which "yielded less to Nahuatl literary style than did Olmos in the Christian sermons of the 'Huehuetlatolli'" (Dibble 1974: 230).

There are abundant Spanish terms (not all of them religious); parallelisms in the classic Nahuatl style are at times fairly frequent; the "difrasismo", two related concrete terms indicating a third, often abstract meaning, is rare. On the other hand, we find series of "psalmos" given such classical Aztec labels as *tlacolcuicatl* (song of lamentation) for Septuagesima Sunday and *xochicuicatl* (flower song) for Easter Sunday; but Garibay, severe critic of literary style, finds them of little interest, for they represent Sahagún speaking, not the Indians, even if his collaborators actually may have written them (Garibay K. 1953 – 1954, II: 100 f.). Perhaps, therefore, it would be just to assess them on the basis of sixteenth-century Spanish as well as pre-Hispanic Nahuatl literary criteria.

The series of "psalmos" celebrating St. Bernardinus's Day are nevertheless attractive even as pseudo-Aztec documents. For one thing, more than most others of the 161 collections making up the "Psalmodia", they show real poetic as well as religious zeal. As Sahagún's patron saint, St. Bernardinus must have been of special significance to him, the more so as both were Franciscans, and Sahagún was the author of a more extended work on his saint, the "Vida de San Bernardino", now unfortunately lost (Jiménez Moreno 1938: 9, 24, 57 f.; Nicolau D'Olwer 1962: 87). If it was written before 1551, as Jiménez Moreno (1938: 9, 24) thought possible, the data he prepared at the instance of the Indians of Xochimilco, whose church was dedicated to St. Bernardinus, would have been fresh in his mind and, likely, would have colored the "cantares" in the "Psalmodia". Most sources, however, favor 1574 at the date of the "Vida".

As to the literary style of the "psalmos" in honor of St. Bernardinus, Spanish personal and place names abound, but there are not many others -- *sancta Iglesia, Dios, Ave Maria gratia plena, anima, Spiritu sancto*. A number of appropriately native figures of speech are to be noted: the series of "psalmos" starts off, for instance, with a metaphor comparing St. Francis with the cypress and the silk cotton tree of precious feathers, an idea touched upon again in the fourth and fifth "psalmos". The device of rich, repetitious enumeration of kinds of precious flowers, of precious stones, and of precious capes is typical of the old days. So are half a dozen or so parallel sequences -- *inmalacayo, imecauhyo* and others equally good. But if it and the rest of the 161 series of "cantares" were to have been sung in a pentatonic scale to the accompaniment of the beat of the two-toned drum and the sound of other musical instruments, they are unpunctuated by any of the particles typical of many songs traceable to pre-conquest days -- *a, ah, ohue, ohuaya*, and so forth at great length -- meaningless, Garibay thinks, except as they indicate vocal sounds needed to complete the dance measure or to maintain the poem's meter; or others -- *tico tico toto toto tiquiti*, etc. -- which apparently represent drum

rhythms and tones signaling a repetition or the ending of the song (Gari-bay K. 1964 – 1968, II: xxxii f., xxxix).

The text of the psalmos to be sung “In die sanctis Bernardini” (Saha-gún 1583: fols. 89r – 92r) follows, with a translation:

MAYO. In die sancti Bernardini.

PRIMERO Psalmo.

Ma ticmauiçoca in quetzalaeuētl, in tzin-  
itzcanpuchotl, in quimoxoaltilia in tote-  
cuio Dios, in iehoatzi in sant Francisco.

Nouian cemañoac motecealhuilia inma-  
lacaio, imecauhio in isquichti ipilhoa  
sancta Iglesia.

Auh in tehoanti in nicā nueva España  
titlaca, iceoallotitla, yiecauhiotitla  
tipactoque, touciltonotoque.

In isquich in ilhuicac nepapa suchitl,  
itech monlontoc in isquich in ilhuicac  
nepapā tlaçotetl isuchiquallo mochiuhtoc.

In lollosuchitl, in teuzquisuchitl, in  
cacaoasuchitl, in elosuchitl, in tecoma-  
suchitl, in tlapalomisuchitl:<sup>1</sup> vncan viuito-  
liuhtoc, auiahtoc, maxeliuhtimani, teu-  
cuitlaauachpeuiciuhtoc.

In quetzalitztl, in quetzalchalchiuhtl  
in tlapalteuxiuhtl, in epiollotl, in tlapal-  
teuilotl,<sup>2</sup> in ie muchi nepapā tlaçotetl,  
vncan cemonoc, cenquiztoc, pepetlacatoc  
vncan totonatoc.

SEGUNDO Psalmo.

Yn iehoatzi in itlaç in Dios ī S. Bernar-  
dino, ca ilhuicac suchitl, teuiutica tla-  
çotetl itzmolinca, icuepōca in taueueuh.

MAY. St. Bernardinus's Day.

FIRST psalm

Let us honor the cypress tree of quetzal  
feathers, the silk cotton tree of trogon  
feathers, which our lord God caused to  
bud – St. Francis.

Everywhere in the world their cover-  
ing, their protection, shades all the  
children of the Holy Church.

And in its shade, in its protection, we,  
the people of New Spain, are here happy,  
rejoicing greatly.

All the various heavenly flowers spread  
[perfume] on it; all the various heavenly  
precious stones grow as its fruit.

The heart flower, the godly popcorn  
flower, the cacao flower, the Indian corn  
flower, the cup flower, the red bone flow-  
er there are all arched, fragrant; scattered  
widely. They shine like the golden dew.

The emerald-green jade, the fine green  
jade, the ruby, the pearl, the amethyst,  
all the various precious stones lie massed  
there, gathered together, gleaming there  
– shining.

SECOND psalm

God's Beloved St. Bernardinus is the  
heavenly flower, the spiritual jewel, the  
bud, the flower of our cypress tree.

1 Identifications of flowers may be found in Sahagún (1950 – 1969, XI): *yollo-  
xochitl*, *Talauma mexicana* Don (201); *eloxochitl*, *Magnolia dealbata* Succ. (201);  
*cacauaxochitl*, *Lexarza funebris* (202); *izquixochitl*, *Bourreria formosa*, *B. huanita*,  
*B. littoralis* (202); *tecomaxochitl*, *Maximiliana vitifolia* (?), *Datura* sp. (?), *Amphi-  
tecna macrophylea* (?), *Bignonea* (?), *Solandra grandiflora* (?), or *Swartia guttata*  
(?) (146); *omixochitl*, *Polianthes tuberosa*, *P. mexicana* (198).

2 Identifications of precious stones follow those in Sahagún (1950 – 1969, XI):

Niman iuh pilpeuh in iecnemilice, in teicnoittaliztli ipan omozcalti in oc piltzītli, in tlamatzozalitzintli mocoia in quiquaz, ic quintlaoculiaia in motolinia.

Cenca yiollocopa in quicaquia in teutlatolli in oc tepito; çatepa quincenlaliaia, quinmachitiaia in ipilpoa.

Inic mauiztililoni in sancto piltzintli, cenca quimacacia in ipilpoa, amo motlapaloaia in ispa mauiltizq̄: auh itla quēma icāpa mauiltitinēca, in iquac oalmouicaia ī oc uel piltzītli, motlacaoaltiaia q̄toaia, ma titocaoaca: ie uitz ī Bernardinotzi.

In oc telpuchtli, cēca q̄motlaçotiliaia in inātzi Dios: muchipa moçaoaia in ipā sabado, ipampatzinoco in inantzi Dios.

In oc piltzintl, çan oc cali in ispantzinco motlanquaquetzaia in ixiptlatzi in Sancta Maria: yiollocopa quitoaia, Aue Maria, gratia plena.

### TERCERO Psalmo

Yn axca in nican tlatlicpac mopoanime: in nechichiualtimatli ica ī quappatlacio, iuitemalacaio, tenchilnaoio, tentecomaio, tlapaltimatli, in isquich in tonaltimatli, in mauicauhqui in intech quitlalia.

In itlaço in Dios in sant Bernardino, in iquac ie telpuchtli, tlamatiliztica, nepapan iecnemiliztica omocencauh.

In this manner the saintly one as a child began benevolence. When he was growing up, when he was yet a child, the folded tortilla was given him who would eat. Thus he showed compassion for the poor.

Quite of his own accord he listened to the word of God while he was yet small. Later he gathered together the children who were his companions. He taught them.

So praiseworthy was the sainted little boy that his companion children highly respected him. They did not dare to amuse themselves in his presence. And if sometimes they went amusing themselves in his absence, when he returned, even when he was yet a child, they stopped. They would say: "We must stop; Bernardinus is already coming."

When he was still a youth, much did he love the Mother of God. He always fasted on Saturday on account of the Mother of God.

When he was yet a small boy, still only [at] home, he would kneel before the image of St. Mary. Of his own accord he would say: "Hail, Mary, full of grace."

### THIRD psalm

Now it is those who take pride in mundane things here who place on themselves the ornamented capes with the flattened heads, with the feathered stone discs, with the red eye border, with the stone disc border; the colored capes; all the special privilege capes; the marvelous ones.

God's beloved St. Bernardinus, when he was still a youth, arrayed himself in knowlege, in a variety of saintly life.

... *quetzalitzli* (222); *quetzalchalchiuitl* (223); *tlapalteoxiuitl* (224); *epiollotili* (224); *tlapalteuilotl* (225).

Grammatica, yoan in isquich nepapan tlamatiliztli, ic oquichichih, ic oquijec-quetz in ianima.

In quetzalli, in cuzcatl, in tilsuchitl, in mecaxuchitl<sup>3</sup> quitemua, quitlaçotla in tlalticpc tetecuti, i pipilti, i mocēmati.

In icnotlacaiutl, in tetlacamatiliztli, in nepializtli, in tlapaccaihiuiliztli, yoā tetlaçotlaliztli oquimistestili in teuiutica tecpilli sant Bernardino.

In teucuitlatl, in laçotetl, i cacaoatl, in milli, in tlalli, in cenca vei, in cēca no qualli, in quitemoa in iectli calli, innecuiltonol muchiuhitica, in nican tlalticpac motlacamati, in mocuiltonoa.

#### QUARTO Psalmo.

Ynic oquimaxcati in ilhuicac necuiltonoliztli in sant Bernardino: in tlalticpac inecuiltonol, muchi icnotlaca oquimacac, çan niman amo tle ipan oquittac.

In iehoatzi i teuiutica aueuetl in sant Francisco, itlan moceoaluito, quinemiliztocac in sant Bernardino, teuiutica ipiltzi omuchih in totlaçotatzli sant Frāncisco.

In mauiziotl, in nepantlaçaliztli, in tēiutl, in nemauiçoliztli queleuia, quitemua in tlalticpac tlaca.

Auh in itlaço i Dios in sant Bernardino teuiutica omotlauizti,<sup>4</sup> omotepitono, omotelchih in nican tlalticpac.

IC oquimopantlaxili in totecuio dios tlamauçoltica ipan oaltemuc in Spiritu sancto, inic vei temachtiani omuchih.

Nouian oquiz in itenio, nouian ocaoan, miequinti oquimotoquilitinca, inic

With [Latin] grammar, with all the varied knowledge he ornamented, he adorned his soul.

The earthly lords, noblemen, the proud ones seek quetzal feathers, jewels, vanilla, aromatic pepper; they value them.

Spiritually a lord, St. Bernardinus gathered a treasure of indigence, submission, chastity, resignation, and love of others.

Gold, precious stones, chocolate, cultivated fields, the broadest and best lands, seemly houses are what the rich, the fortunate here on earth seek as their wealth.

#### FOURTH psalm

Thus did St. Bernardinus appropriate to himself heavenly wealth; his earthly wealth he gave all to the poor. He esteemed it not at all.

He went to place himself in the shade of the spiritual cypress tree, St. Francis. St. Bernardinus followed his way of life. He became the spiritual son of our beloved St. Francis.

Mundane people covet honor, pride, glory, vanity; they seek them.

But God's beloved St. Bernardinus in a saintly manner rejected, belittled, despised the world here.

So did our lord God exalt him that miraculously the Holy Ghost descended upon him. Thus he became a great preacher.

His renown spread everywhere; he became famous everywhere. Many spent

3 *Tlixochitl* is identified as *Vanilla planifolia* in Sahagún (1950 – 1969, XI: 198); *mecaxochitl* is identified as *Vanilla planifolia* or *V. flagrans*, or *Piper* sp. in Sahagún (1950 – 1969, XI: 192). Reference to the description in Hernández (1942 – 1946, III: 749 – 751), however, suggests that *Piper* sp. is likely correct.

4 Read *omotlauitzo*.

quicaquiznequia in itemachtiltzi, in tlattolli.

QVINTO Psalmo.

In tlatoque, in motlacamati, quintlatlatilia in impilhoa, in teucuitlatl, tlaçotetl, in quetzalli, cacaoatl, tilmatl, quicauilitiui in ipilhoa.

Auh in itlaço in Dios in sant Bernardino, miec tlamantli temachtiliztlatolli, in vel icococatzl, vel itlatequipanolitzi quimocauilitia in ipilhoa in sancta Iglesia.

In chicaoac, in tiacauh, in oquichtli ic moteniotia, ic panuetzi in tlamalizli, ic mitoa tequioa.

Miec tlamantli tlamauicollli, ic oquimoteniotili in Dios, in itlaço in sant Bernardino: cequi in oc nemi, cequi in iquac ie omomiquili, in oquimuchiui.

Ilhuicac suchitl, tlaçoiollosuchitl, mauiztlaçotetl, tlaçoquetzalitztl in itech cuepuncoc, in itech cuecucueiocatoc in tolhuicaaeueuh, ic muchiuhtica in itlaço in Dios in sant Bernardino.

Ma vntlatlauhtilo, ma vnuauiziotilo, ma vnuicapano in itlaçomauiztocatzl in totecuiio Iesu Christo, ca itlauiz muchiuhtica in itlaço Dios in sant Bernardino: i iehoatl itocatzi Iesus; ca imactzinco mani, ichimal, itlauiz muchiuhtica.

their lives following him, so much did they wish to hear his sermons, the discourses.

FIFTH psalm

The rulers, the rich amass treasures of gold, jewels, quetzal feathers, cacao, for their sons. They go leaving them to their sons.

But God's beloved St. Bernardinus left the sons of the Holy Church many instructing discourses which were his true possessions, his productions.

The strong, brave, manly one becomes famous, elevates himself by capturing [men]. Hence he is called a courageous warrior.

By many miracles which St. Bernardinus performed, some when he yet lived, some when he had already died, God made his beloved glorious.

A heavenly, precious heart flower is he; a marvelous precious stone, a precious emerald-green jewel lying flowering, shining in our heavenly cypress tree: such did God's beloved St. Bernardinus become.

May the precious, glorious name of our lord Jesus Christ be supplicated, honored, exalted. For the armament of God's beloved St. Bernardinus was the name of Jesus, in Whose hand lay his shield, his weapons.

The "Psalmodia" was undoubtedly produced in Sahagún's usual way: with the help of the native collaborators trained by him and his colleagues in the Royal College of Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco, who wrote what his trembling hand could not and helped to keep the Nahuatl free of error, idolatry, and heresy. Whereas the conquest and its aftermath had silenced Quauhtemoc and his war-cry and Neçualcoyotl and his song, to paraphrase Baudot (1976: 510), and sought to destroy their language and the memory of their civilization, the Franciscans in exchange had tried to substitute a compatible tradition and future. Of this attempt the "Psalmodia" is an example.

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