

## Res 21 Spring 1992

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### *Anthropology and aesthetics*

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Figure 1. Detail of the garden murals of the Augustinian monastery, Malinalco, Mexico.  
Photo: Louise M. Burkhart.



## Flowery heaven

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### *The aesthetic of paradise in Nahuatl devotional literature*

LOUISE M. BURKHART

The Christianization of the Nahua (or Aztec) peoples of central Mexico in the sixteenth century was a process of compromise and accommodation, overseen by friars of the mendicant orders and the literate Nahuas who served as their translators and interpreters. Friars learned to preach in Nahuatl, depending on these bi- and trilingual (with Spanish and Latin) assistants to ascertain for them the best ways to relate Christian concepts to Nahua understandings. This transformation of late-medieval Christianity into an indigenous American mode is inscribed in a large corpus of surviving catechistic and devotional literature in Nahuatl.

The Nahuas encharged with translating Christianity had not only to find or invent Nahuatl equivalents for alien terms, but also to persuade, to present these translated ideas in such a way that they would be irresistible as well as comprehensible. To achieve this, they relied on the aesthetic and emotional responses attached to certain rhetorical modes, manipulating sets of metaphors that evoked the desired states of revulsion or attraction. Elsewhere I have analyzed how the use of Nahua moral metaphors to express such Christian concepts as sin and evil had the effect of "Nahuatlizing" the alien concepts and facilitating cultural continuity (Burkhart 1986a, 1989). In this paper I will examine another rhetorical mode by which Christianity was rendered meaningful: the application of flower and bird terms to the Christian sacred.

Christianity portrayed heaven, as well as humanity's primordial origin-place, as a paradisiacal garden, with the terrestrial Eden of Genesis serving as a prefiguration, or type, of the eternal, heavenly paradise. An easy correspondence developed between these places and various indigenous afterworlds and places of origin that were also described as lush tropical paradises.<sup>1</sup> This was exactly the sort of correspondence

that the friars loved to exploit, seeing in the indigenous beliefs a seed of Christian truth that they could nurture into conformity with their own precepts. They failed to realize that this garden imagery, this aesthetic of paradise, was not simply a mode of describing a place where one would want one's soul to spend eternity. The sacred garden was also a transformational aspect of the here and now, a sacred aspect of reality that one called into being by manipulating this garden imagery in ritual contexts, particularly through song.

In this symbolic garden, one came into direct contact with the creative, life-giving forces of the universe and with the timeless world of deities and ancestors. The garden is a shimmering place filled with divine fire; the light of the sun reflects from the petals of flowers and the iridescent feathers of birds; human beings—the souls of the dead or the ritually transformed living—are themselves flowers, birds, and shimmering gems. One's individual identity dissolves as one becomes part of the sacred ecosystem. This garden is not a place of reward for the righteous, existing on some transcendent plane of reality separate from the material world. It is a metaphor for life on earth, a metaphor that ritual transforms into reality by asserting that, in fact, this is the way the world is.

Hill (1987) has traced this "flowery world" complex throughout the Uto-Aztecan language family to which Nahuatl belongs: in culture after culture, to sing of flowers calls into being this sacred, iridescent, paradisiacal place infused with creative, animating power. The terminology of blossoming and flaming is closely related to concepts of the soul and the heart, and of coming to life. Hill terms this complex of symbols a "cult of brilliance," for not only flowers but also colorful birds, stones, and shells may serve to invoke it.

The close link in Nahuatl poetics between flower

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1. These include the home of the sun, the rain gods' Tlalocan, the home of the dual creator deity, and the mythical origin place Tamoanchan (also Xochitlicacan, Aztlan, Cincalco). Unweaned children who died went to a special heaven where they nursed from a milk-bearing tree. Correspondences between indigenous and

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Christian otherworlds were quickly noted by Nahuas and missionaries alike, and influenced the ethnographic records. For a discussion of Nahua paradise beliefs, see Heyden 1983: 73–87; López Austin 1988: I, 335–336; Peterson 1985: 259–264.

and song, *xochitl* and *cuicatl*, is an expression of this underlying "flowery world" complex; the couplet, in Hill's words, "evokes the world-creating immanence of each element" (Hill 1987: 5). The flowery world is a place filled with song; song calls this world into being. As Knab (1986) notes, for the Nahuas, flowers are the ultimate aesthetic achievement of the plant world, while songs are that of the human domain, which exists in a metaphorical relationship to the plant world. Thus flowers and songs are equivalent; together they embody the Nahuas' aesthetic of the sacred, the symbolic transformation of the human world into a garden full of flowers and singing birds.<sup>2</sup>

The brilliance of the flowery world lent it another superficial resemblance to Christian conceptions of the sacred. In Christian symbolism, light was an aspect of the sacred, both in the metaphorical sense of spiritual "enlightenment" and in a physical sense: the resurrected bodies of the saved would give off light, as does Christ's during his transfiguration. In Nahua-Christian thought, Christ became linked with the sun (Burkhart 1988). The sun was the source of the warmth and light that animated the sacred garden; it easily became a metaphor, or even an equivalent, for the life-giving deity. Christ as the "light of the world" translated into the brilliance of the sacred garden. Similarly, the radiance of the saved, which was a reward for individual moral merit, translated into the radiance of the transformed, which was an inalienable feature of the otherworld and bore no relationship to individual identity or morality. The glorified bodies of the Christian saved would transcend created nature, which was finite and transitory; the transformed Nahua self dissolves into a oneness with nature, which is eternal, self-creating, ever-transforming, and ever-renewing.<sup>3</sup>

2. Bierhorst (1985a) suggests that, in poetic usage, flowers and songs represented "revenants," or the souls of the dead returning to earth in a sort of nativistic uprising. This interpretation has been challenged by León-Portilla (1986) and others, but there is some truth in Bierhorst's reading: in the metaphorical world of song, flowers can stand for people, dead as well as living, whom the singer/conjurer marshals for one purpose or another. The analysis of these texts as "poetry" has tended to obscure this incantatory aspect. But the flowers are not dead souls returning to life; the souls exist, metaphorically, as flowers in their afterworld, which the singer envisions. This flower symbolism is an ancient complex with which sixteenth-century usage was continuous: it is native, not nativistic.

3. I am grateful to John Keber (personal communication) for his description of Christian beliefs about the bodies of the saved, and for pointing out to me the importance of the radical difference between these and corresponding Nahua beliefs.

By applying the flowery-world aesthetic to Christian referents, converted Nahuas were able to relate Christianity to the things they held most sacred, thereby turning the paradises of Christianity into further manifestations of their own sacred garden. The traditional practice of enflowering sacred space continued under Christianity: missionary chroniclers such as Motolinia (1970), Mendieta (1980), and Durán (1967) refer often to the use of flowers in offerings, pageants, and church decoration. Translated into more permanent media, flowers painted and sculpted by indigenous artisans adorn many sixteenth-century churches. And in the Christian hymns and prayers that took the place of traditional genres of ritual speech, Nahua authors and interpreters planted seeds from their own sacred landscape.

The friars' acceptance of this garden symbolism stemmed not only from the existence of Christian parallels, but also from their perception of the New World and their mission there. Peterson, analyzing mural paintings of gardens in the Augustinian monastery at Malinalco, relates this imagery to the mendicants' desire to create a utopic, paradisiacal Christian state, a New Jerusalem, among their indigenous charges. The mission Church was seen as a kind of garden, a vineyard of the Lord. The Malinalco murals represent an idealization of the Indo-Christian community and the Augustinian mission (Peterson 1985) (fig. 1). Paradise itself was thought by many Europeans to lie in the Western Hemisphere: this could only enhance the friars' Edenic view of their mission and reinforce the Nahuas' sense of their primordial origins.

Nahuatl devotional literature is an ambivalent genre in which "native" and "European" voices often cannot be easily distinguished. Certain texts, however, reveal a high degree of indigenous control over the selection and presentation of Christian material. Exquisite poetry and oratory, conforming to Nahua literary canons and displaying a skill with Nahuatl beyond that of any friar, indicate native authorship. Some texts bear errors that no priest would make, or adapt Latin spellings to Nahuatl phonetics to such a degree that priestly participation can only be indirect. It is in these texts that the flowery world tends to be most visible. When Nahua authors were free to select and manipulate Christian symbolism as they desired, they chose to emphasize the evocative realm of the garden.

### The garden songs of the *Psalmodia Christiana*

Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, the Franciscan ethnographer and educator best known for his twelve-book treatise on Nahua culture (Sahagún 1950–1982), produced the only Nahuatl songbook published in the sixteenth century. Titled *Psalmodia christiana y sermonario de los sanctos del año*, it is the only sahaguntine text published during the friar's lifetime (Sahagún 1583). It is noteworthy also because it was directed explicitly toward Indian rather than priestly use, and because its fifty-four woodcuts render it the most lavishly illustrated Nahuatl book printed in New Spain.

The *Psalmodia* is a collection of songs or chants composed for fifty-four Church festivals. Although not published until 1583, the songs were first written between 1558 and 1560, while Sahagún was stationed at Tepeapulco. Four Nahua scholars, who had been students of Sahagún at the Franciscan college in Tlatelolco, collaborated with him on the project, and can be considered the authors of the actual Nahuatl text. These were very likely the same four whom he acknowledges as having assisted him throughout his ethnographic project: Martín Jacobita of Tlatelolco, Antonio Valeriano from Azcapotzalco, and Alonso Vegerano and Pedro de San Buenaventura, both from Cuauhtitlan (Sahagún 1583: prologue; Sahagún 1950–1982: introductory volume, 54–55; Nicolau D'Oliver 1987: 35, 84).

Most of the *Psalmodia's* content derives from Latin sources available to its composers: the Bible, the missal and breviary, and one or more books of saints' lives. This material is carefully selected, reorganized, and translated into Nahuatl to create a highly unorthodox text adapted to Nahua use. Even less orthodox are a number of passages that invoke the flowery world, calling it into being through the incantatory power of song. These passages range from a single phrase to three pages (fifty-eight lines) of text. They occur in contexts relating to God's presence on earth (as Christ or the Holy Spirit), and in Franciscan festivals. Because the flowery world represented the transformation of present reality into a sacred space and time, it was logical that the coming of the deity should evoke such treatment.

Franciscan saints merited special attention not only because of Sahagún's devotion to his order. Franciscan nature mysticism saw the workings of God's mind reflected in the beauties of the natural world; the contemplation of nature was the starting point for the

mystic's ascent toward union with God (Armstrong 1973; Bonaventure 1549). The *Psalmodia's* authors used this tradition as a basis for placing their most honored Franciscans—Saints Bernardine, Clare, and Francis himself—into the flowery world. But here the garden is not a starting point on a route toward a transcendent sacred to be found in the depths of one's soul. The garden itself is the consummate manifestation of holiness; to incorporate these imported saints into it is the highest attestation of their worth and relevance that a Nahua sensibility can grant them.

The species named in these passages are selected from the native flora and fauna, with the single exception of the rose, but even this is given a Nahuatl name, *Castillan cempohualxochitl*, "Castilian marigold."<sup>4</sup> Although the grape became important only with the introduction of Old World domesticated species, wild grapes existed in Mexico, and it is under the native name, *xocomecatl*, that the plant appears in the *Psalmodia*.<sup>5</sup>

The flowers named in the songs include ritually and medicinally important species, such as the *yolloxochitl*, "heart flower" (*Talauma mexicana*);<sup>6</sup> *cacaloxochitl*,

4. I have not seen this name used elsewhere. Molina (1970: 105v) glosses *rosa* as *castillan tlapalpopoço*, "Castilian red foamy (or bubbly) thing," from *tlapalli*, "dye," generally implying red color, and *pozoni*, "for something to boil, for the sea to be turbulent and covered with foam" (Karttunen 1983: 205). No standard translation for *rosa*, other than simply *xochitl*, "flower," or *Castillan xochitl*, "Castilian flower," seems to have developed, however. A late-sixteenth-century text comparing the Virgin Mary to a rose does not use any botanical term but instead resorts to such constructions as *xochitlapalnepaniuhqui*, "flower-red-joined-together-thing"; *tlapalxexeliuhqui*, "red-divided-thing"; and *tlapaltlatlamanqui*, "red-multiple-thing" (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: 45r). Elsewhere in the same text appears the phrase *yectlaçocastillan xochitl Rosas*, "good precious Castilian flowers, roses" (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: 249v). The marigold was used in a whole range of preconquest rituals, including festivals of Huitzilopochtli and Toci (Heyden 1983; Heyden 1987: 114–126). In treating the rose as a type of marigold, the *Psalmodia's* authors may have meant to allude to the marigold's rich symbolic heritage, while appearing to refer to a Christian symbol.

5. Peterson (1985: 186) discusses the native wild grape (*Vitis silvestris* or *V. labrusca*), which was documented by Hernández (1959–1985: II, 319; see VII, 159–160, for identification).

6. The identification of this magnolia is agreed on by Dibble and Anderson (in Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 201, following Santamaría 1959: 1135), Emmart (1940: 264), and Garibay (in Sahagún 1969: IV, 372). Various medicinal uses are mentioned in the Cruz-Badiano herbal (Emmart 1940), Hernández (1959–1985: II, 5) and the *Florentine Codex* (Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 201). Its buds are heart shaped. It also has digitalislike effects; this explains its usefulness for heart ailments (Ortiz de Montellano 1975: 220).



Figure 2. The *cacahuaxochitl*, "cacao flower," as depicted by Sahagún artists (from Sahagún 1979: XII, 188v).

"crow flower" (*Plumeria*);<sup>7</sup> *huacalxochitl*, "basket flower" (*philodendron*);<sup>8</sup> *izquixochitl*, "popcorn flower" (*Bourreria*);<sup>9</sup> and *cacahuaxochitl*, "cacao flower" (*Lexarza funebris*).<sup>10</sup> These are well known from the

7. This flowering tree includes *Plumeria rubra* L., *P. bicolor* R. and *P.*, and *P. acutifolia* Poir (Dibble and Anderson, in Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 200, following Santamaría 1959: 170; Emmart 1940: 308; Heyden 1983: 16). Garibay also lists *Tigridia pavonia* (in Sahagún 1969: IV, 325). Hernández (1959–1985: II, 268) describes its frequent use among Indians to make floral ornaments.

8. *Phyllodendrum affine* or *Ph. pseudoradiatum matuda* (Dibble and Anderson, in Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 209, following Santamaría 1959: 88; Peterson 1985: 171).

9. Another flowering tree, the *izquixochitl*, is identified by Dibble and Anderson (in Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 202, following Santamaría 1959: 508) as *Bourreria formosa*, *B. huanita*, and *B. littoralis*, and by Garibay (in Sahagún 1969: IV, 339) as *B. huanita*. It is described in Hernández (1959–1985: II, 434). Ximenez compared it to the rose in form and fragrance, and felt that it "could be used for ornaments in the garden of Our Lord" (1888: 38, quoted in Emmart 1940: 275–276). On the symbolism of this flower, see Heyden (1983: 39–43).

10. Garibay, in Sahagún (1969: IV, 325). This tree is described in Sahagún (1950–1982: XI, 202) and Hernández (1959–1985: II, 307–308).

depictions and descriptions of rituals in such ethnographic sources as Durán (1967) and Sahagún (1950–1982). In preconquest times, these flowers were important components of the rulers' pleasure gardens as well as of ritual accoutrements; Durán's list of flowers planted in Motecuhzoma Ilhuicamina's gardens at Huaxtepec includes all of the above species (Durán 1967: II, 247–248; Heyden 1983: 16–20, 48). Figure 2 depicts the *cacahuaxochitl*, "cacao flower"; men collect its blossoms while a hummingbird and a butterfly sip its nectar. The bird species named in the songs are notable either for colorful and iridescent plumage, such as the hummingbirds shown in figure 3, or for their singing.

There is some overlap with the species selected by the artists at Malinalco for their garden murals, as identified by Peterson (1985). The *yolloxochitl*, and *huacalxochitl*, rose, butterfly, parrot, hummingbird, and chachalaca appear in both. But the Malinalco painters drew on a much broader spectrum of their environment, including food plants, cacti, various mammals, and birds of prey. The *Psalmodia* authors selected only those bird and flower species that suggest a hot-country pleasure garden filled with music and color.

The selection coincides much more closely with the species invoked in the *Cantares mexicanos*, mid- to late-sixteenth-century Nahuatl songs composed in the full "flower and song" tradition of Nahuatl poetics (Bierhorst 1985a). About two-thirds of the plant and bird species in the *Psalmodia* garden songs are mentioned also in the *Cantares*.<sup>11</sup> However, the *Psalmodia* passages tend to list species names one after another in a sort of incantatory recitative; although the *Cantares* texts often mention two or three species, such long lists are not typical. It is possible that the *Psalmodia*'s authors were drawing on a catalog of appropriate species, perhaps sections of the drafts for Sahagún's volume on natural history, Book Twelve of his encyclopedia.<sup>12</sup> Nearly all of the species named in the garden songs would appear in the final redaction of this book.

To Sahagún, the *Psalmodia*'s garden songs probably suggested nothing more than a view of Christian paradise appropriate to Nahua parishioners, filled with

11. I arrived at this figure by using Bierhorst's concordance to the *Cantares* (1985b).

12. The *Florentine Codex*, as the surviving copy of the finished encyclopedia is known, was not written until 1575–1576, but the research project was well under way when the *Psalmodia* was composed (1558–1560) and revised for publication (1569).





Figure 3. Hummingbirds (from Sahagún 1979: XII, 24r).

the beautiful flora and fauna of their own continent. His assistants, however, were surely aware that their Nahuatl words invoked the transformational flowery world in a fully conceived and very traditional sense.

The first occurrences of garden references within the *Psalmodia* festival songs are brief and tentative. The text for the first festival, the Circumcision (January 1), borrows part of its content from a Latin missal reading on Christ's name.<sup>13</sup> This source describes Christ as *pious*, *pulcher*, *floridus*. The authors expand this last term, "flowery," into the phrase *ilhuicac suchitl cueponticac*,<sup>14</sup> "in heaven flowers stand blossoming"

13. The reading is for the January 2 festival, *De nomine Jesu Christi*. My identification is based on marginal notes in the *Psalmodia*, compared with a missal of 1557 in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid (*Missale . . . Gerunden 1557*: 283r).

14. Throughout this paper I reproduce the orthography of the text being quoted, but place word divisions according to modern grammatical categories. When not quoting directly from a text, I use a standardized spelling of Nahuatl, but without marking glottal stops and vowel length because these cannot always be definitely ascertained for sixteenth-century usage.

(Sahagún 1583: 18v). Since Nahuatl does not mark number in inanimates, *suchitl* (*xochitl*) may be read as either singular or plural; if singular, it could refer to Christ himself, blossoming in heaven. As stated, the line is ambiguous and reads most easily as a description of heaven as a flowery place.

The next festival included is Epiphany. The line *Reges arabum dona adducent* (Psalm 71:10), from the offertory for this festival, is translated into Nahuatl as "the great kings, the Arabian kings, will bring offerings, things to be offered." These offerings are described as a bursting forth of flowers, an appropriate setting for the infant Christ (Sahagún 1583: 19v):

*ma uel cenquiza, ma nechicau, in isquich qualli iectli, in mauztic, in tlaçotli, teuiutica nepapan tlaçosuchitl, in tetlapaloliztli: in teuiutica iollosuchitl, in elosuchitl, in izquisuchitl, in cacaoasuchitl: ma isquich oalolini in tzopelic, auiac suchitl, ma manaloqui, ma ic tlatlapalololiqui.*

May they come out together, may they assemble, all the good, the fine, the wondrous, the precious things, what in a sacred way are various precious flowers, the greetings,

what in a sacred way are heart flowers,<sup>15</sup> green-corn flowers,<sup>16</sup> popcorn flowers, cacao flowers! May they all come quaking, the sweet, fragrant flowers! May they come to be offered, thus may there come to be greetings!

The term *teoyotica*, "in a sacred way," was a formula used in Christian texts to indicate that a metaphor was being drawn between an earthly and a heavenly referent. Intended to uphold the distinction between those two realms in accordance with Christianity's transcendental dualism, it probably served rather to unite them, simply casting an aura of holiness around its referents. Applied to flowers, it here reinforces the Nahuas' sense of the flowery world as an alternate, sacred reality where things are, indeed, transformed into flowers.

It is for the festival of Saint Gabriel (March 24) that the *Psalmodia*'s authors first equate angels with birds. Both Nahua thought and Christian and pre-Christian thought in the Old World used bird symbolism for the soul. In Christian legend, angels as well were sometimes associated with birds (Armstrong 1973: 65–66). Thus there were precedents for the Nahua-Christian innovation of identifying angels with the most treasured birds of the American tropics, an identification that appears in other texts as well as the *Psalmodia*. Its aptness is obvious: angels are winged, move between the heavens and the earth, and are responsible for the beautiful music to be heard in heaven. The Nahua worldview lacked any intermediate category between humans and deities other than the souls of the dead. The glorious dead were thought to take the form of colorful birds and butterflies delighting in the paradise of the sun, flying back and forth to earth to suck the nectar of flowers (López Austin 1988: I, 336; Sahagún 1950–1982: III, 47). The friars introduced the word "angel" into Nahuatl to refer to beings that, in their view, had no indigenous parallel; however, the Nahuas seem to have fitted the new creatures, also often called the "nobles" (*pipiltin*) of heaven, into the slot once occupied by these avianized ancestors.

15. I am giving literal translations for the names of flowers, because most do not have common names in English and the Nahuatl names are quite evocative.

16. The *eloxochitl* is identified by Santamaría (1959: 1135, followed by Dibble and Anderson in Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 202) and by Garibay (in Sahagún 1969: IV, 335) as *Magnolia dealbata* Succ. Hernández describes the plant (1959–1985: II, 368); it is depicted in the Cruz-Badiano herbal (Emmart 1940: pl. 69). Its elongated yellow blossoms probably suggested fresh ears of maize; hence its name.

In the *Psalmodia*, the archangel Gabriel becomes a resplendent quetzal bird in order to announce to Mary the incarnation of Christ (Sahagún 1583: 49v):

*Ilhuicac quetzaltotl oalmotitla in iuictzinco Dios inantzi, quimolhuilico: Aue Maria, gratia plena.*

*Inic valpepetlacatia in ixaiac, iuhquin tonatiuh ic oallanestitia.*

*In iatlapal, amo çan iuhqui inic patlaoc quetzalli, in vel iaque, in vel xopaleoac, cēca valpepetlacatia, vel oalpepetzcatia.*

From heaven a quetzal was sent to God's mother. It came to say to her: "Hail Mary, full of grace."

The way its face came shimmering, it was like the sun, the way it came shining.

Its wings, quetzal feathers are not so wide! They were quite pointed, quite green. It came shimmering greatly, it came truly glimmering.

This event was typically depicted, as in the woodcut in the *Psalmodia* (fig. 4), with both the winged angel and a dove, representing the Holy Spirit by which Christ was conceived; thus bird associations were particularly strong. The lily, also a standard component of the scene, adds flowers to birds to comprise a concise evocation of the flowery world.

By Easter, the authors have found their voice as conjurers of the sacred garden. The Resurrection turns the world, represented here in the microcosm of the churchyard, into a blossoming, music-filled garden (Sahagún 1583: 59r–60r):

*Yn telosuchitl, in tijollosuchitl, in ticacaoasuchitl, in titlapaltecomasuchitl: iecauhioctica ximalacaiotica, xitzcalloatica, otacico ī vncā mutzmolinia.*

*In tipuchotl, in taueuetl, in titlatzca, in toiametl, in aiauhquauitl tleica in oc titlaucuxtlicac, ie vncā, ie imma, in ticiācuiliz in musuchio in matlapal, in tizcaloaz, in ticeliaz.*

*In tisuchitotl, in telototl, in ticētzontlatole, in tuitziltziltzi, in campa oāmouicaca, in campa oancalacca: auh in tisquich in tinepapanquechol, in tinepapaçauca, xioalmouicaca, ma oalquixoa, ma papatlanioa, ma neçoçoalo, ma tlapoui, ma caquitzitl in amotlatoltzi: ma chachalacoa, ma tlacocoioimilini in amouicatzitl.*

You green-corn flower, you heart flower, you cacao flower, you red jar flower:<sup>17</sup> put forth a shady ring of fronds, send

17. Peterson (1985: 182) identifies the *tecmaxochitl* as *Solandra mexicana*, called *copa de oro* in Spanish. The plant is cataloged by Hernández (1959–1985: II, 141–142) and Sahagún (1950–1982: XI, 146, 206), but Dibble and Anderson give several possible identifications, as do Valdés and Flores in Hernández (1959–1985: VII, 83).



Figure 4. Woodcut of the Annunciation, in Sahagún's *Psalmody Christiana* (1543), f. 54v. Photo: Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

forth boughs! You have come to arrive in your place of sprouting.

You ceiba, you bald cypress, you cypress, you fir, [you] pine:<sup>18</sup> why do you still stand sadly? It is the time, it is the moment for you to renew your flowers, your leaves, for you to send forth boughs, for you to bloom!

You oriole,<sup>19</sup> you blue grosbeak,<sup>20</sup> you mockingbird,<sup>21</sup> you hummingbird:<sup>22</sup> where had you gone? Where had you entered? And all you various spoonbills,<sup>23</sup> you various

18. *Ayauhcuahuitl*, "mist tree," is, according to Emmart (1940: 279), *Pinus ayacahuite* K. Ehrenb.

19. Literally, "flower-bird" (see Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 45; Hernández 1959–1985: III, 346).

20. Literally, "green-corn bird" (see Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 22; Hernández 1959–1985: III, 366).

21. Literally, "possessor of four hundred words (or languages)" (see Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 52; Hernández 1959–1985: III, 326).

22. See Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 24.

23. The *tlauhquechol*, "red quechol (or quechollí)," is the roseate spoonbill, but what the generic *quechollí* included is not clear. Bierhorst (1985a; 1985b: 275) glosses it rather imprecisely as "swan," based on a proposed derivation from *quechtli*, "neck," and *olli*, "rubber," which would suggest long-necked birds. Molina (1970: 88v)

troupials,<sup>24</sup> come! Let there be flying, let there be unfolding, let there be unfurling! May your speech resound! May there be chattering, may your songs resonate like bells!

A later passage identifies the flowers, trees, and birds as representing, "in a sacred way," women, men, and angels, respectively. The trees and flowers surround the churchyard swaying and blossoming, the birds circle above them. The friendship between people and angels, between earth and heaven, reinstated by Christ's coming, is conceptualized as this harmonious coexistence within the sacred garden.

The song for Pentecost announces the coming of the Holy Spirit with a call to dancing and the music of drums, flutes, and bells (Sahagún 1583: 92v–93v). This is accompanied by another bursting forth of flowers, here *teoizquixochitl*, "sacred popcorn flowers" (a variety of *izquixochitl*); *cacaloxochitl*, "crow flowers"; and *tlapalomixochitl*, "red bone flowers."<sup>25</sup> The text then mentions the tongues of flame from heaven that came to stand upon the Apostles. The *cacaloxochitl* and the *tlapalomixochitl* are red in color; their selection may have been suggested by the tongues of flame. The *izquixochitl* has white blossoms (although these are red and white in one variety, the *tlapalizquixochitl*, "red popcorn flower"), but the plant was associated with flame: its seeds explode in fire, like popcorn (Hernández 1959–1985: II, 434). Bursting into bloom and into flame are equivalent in the cult of brilliance. The Holy Spirit's arrival catalyzes a flowery-world transformation, causing the Apostles to "flower" and bringing forth an abundance of flowers to adorn the Nahua celebrants.

Saint John the Baptist was sometimes referred to as the morning star that announces the coming of the sun-Christ (see Burkhart 1988). John was thus linked to Christ in the latter's role as the flowery world's energy source. The *Psalmody* calls forth flowers to celebrate

glosses *quechollí* as "bird of rich plumage." Karttunen (1983: 206) gives "bird with red plumage; flamingo or roseate spoonbill." I have chosen "spoonbill" because the roseate spoonbill is the type of *quechollí* most often mentioned, but this is, admittedly, imprecise. On the *tlauhquechol*, see Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 20; Hernández 1959–1985: III, 360.

24. See Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 20; Hernández 1959–1985: III, 364.

25. Garibay (in Sahagún 1969: IV, 347) identifies the *omixochitl*, "bone flower" as *Polianthes tuberosa* or *P. mexicana*. Bierhorst (1985b: 346) suggests that the *tlapalli*, "red," variety may be the purplish-orange stage of the (normally white) tuberose, or may refer to some other plant that resembles the tuberose.

this saint (Sahagún 1583: 107r–v):

*Ma tiquinmauiçoca in suchitetepe, ma tiquittaca in suchixtlaoatl, in cuecuepuntimani, in auiastimani.*

*In cacalosuchiquauitl, in izquisuchiquauitl, in iollosuchiquauitl, susuchiotimani, totonatimani, auiastimani, in axca ilhuitzin ipan.*

*In quincenmijaoaiotia Prophetasme, tlauizalpan pealo, ma netotilo, ma tiquinecuica in auiastiuitz, in velistiuitz in ehecatl.*

*In teuiutica auiaializtli, iquac quiçaco: in iquac motlacatili in teutitlantli in sant loan.*

*Ma ie cuele tocnioane, ca oquiçaco in vei citlali, ma ie cuele ma pealo, ma netotilo, ca oquiçaco in teuiutica vei citlali, in sant loan.*

*Ma tictocuzcatlica, ma titosuchicuzcatlica tocnioane, otechmomaquili in tosuchiuh: anca iehoatl in ipiltzi in Zacharias, in sant loan.*

Let us marvel at the flowery mountains, let us behold the flowery plains! They lie bursting into bloom, they lie giving off fragrance.

The cacao flower trees, the popcorn flower trees, the heart flower trees spread about flowering, spread about giving off warmth, spread about giving off fragrance, today on his festival!

He surpasses the Prophets! At dawn it is begun. Let there be dancing! Let us sniff the wind that comes giving off fragrance, that comes giving off scent.

What in a sacred way is fragrance came to emerge when the sacred messenger, Saint John, was born.

Go ahead, oh our friends! For Venus has come to emerge! Go ahead! May it be begun! Let there be dancing! For he who in a sacred way is Venus has come to emerge, Saint John!

Let us bejewel ourselves, let us bejewel ourselves with flowers, oh our friends! The one who gave us our flowers, it seems it is the child of Zacharias, Saint John!

That this blossoming is accompanied by wind (*ehecatl*) may be no accident: the authors were surely aware that *Ehecatl*, their ancestors' wind deity, was an aspect of *Quetzalcoatl*, who was also the morning star.

The *Psalmodia*'s longest garden song is found at the end of the book, in the text for Christmas. The authors give their source, quoting two Latin antiphons in the margins of the book. But here they diverge from their source to a greater degree than anywhere else in the book where Latin sources are given. The first antiphon reads: "There was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will, alleluia.'"<sup>26</sup> The *Psalmodia* adapts this as follows (Sahagún 1583: 235r–v):

*In ilhuicac tlaçonepapançaquã, tzinitzcan, teuquechol,*

*tlaçocoioalcahoantiuitz, anqui ieeoano in angelome.*

*Vnquetzalchalchiuhtlapitzalicaoacatiaque, vntlaçoiulcaoantiaque in nepapan tototl, tlaçotototl, in xupätototl Angeloti, alleluia.*

*Suchiçaquametl, chachalacatototl, suchitenacal, sioapalquechol iectli, iectli ie incuic coneoia in Angeloti: ma iecteneoalo in teutl Dios ilhuicac, alleluia.*

*In ie muchinti, in ilhuicac nepapan tlaçotototzinti, oalquetzalpatlätiaque, concuicaitoque: ma tlamatcaieliztli vnje in nican talticpac, alleluia.*

*Quetzaltlaçocoioilmilintiuitz in incuicatzli, oallaauistiaque ilhuicac cuicatica, quioalitotiaque: ma tlamatcaieliztli intech ie in tlaca, alleluia.*

*Omuchiuh in vmpa Bethlem, in iquac omotlacatiliztino totlaçotemaquisticatzli Iesu Christo, alleluia, alleluia.*

From heaven came various precious troupials, trogons,<sup>27</sup> sacred spoonbills,<sup>28</sup> resonating like precious bells. It seems that they<sup>29</sup> were angels!

They went chirping like flutes of quetzal-green jade. They went resonating like precious bells, the various birds, the precious birds, the birds of spring, the angels. Alleluia!

The flowery troupial, the chachalaca,<sup>30</sup> the emerald toucanet,<sup>31</sup> the turquoise-browed motmot.<sup>32</sup> Fine, fine was their song, that the angels were intoning: "May the deity God in heaven be praised! Alleluia!"

All the rest of the various precious little birds of heaven came flying like quetzal feathers, went saying in song: "May there be peace here on earth! Alleluia!"

Their songs came ringing like precious quetzal feather bells. They came rejoicing with heavenly songs. They came saying: "May peace be with people! Alleluia!"

It happened there in Bethlehem, when our precious savior Jesus Christ was born. Alleluia! Alleluia!

The second antiphon reads: "While all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, Your Almighty Word, O Lord, leapt down from heaven's royal throne, alleluia."<sup>33</sup> In the *Psalmodia*, this

26. *Facta est cum Angelo multitudo caelestis exercitus laudantium Deum, et dicentium: Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis, alleluia* (*Hours of the Divine Office* 1963: I, 1177).

27. See Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 20.

28. Sahagún (1950–1982: XI, 20) lists *teoquechol*, "sacred quechol," as an alternate name for *tlahquechol*, the roseate spoonbill. Applied to angels, the designation as "sacred" is especially appropriate.

29. I follow Bierhorst's reading (1985b: 411) of *anqui ieeoano as anqui yehuan on*.

30. See Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 53; Peterson 1985: 216; Hernández 1959–1985: III, 328.

31. See Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 22; Hernández 1959–1985: III, 355, 360.

32. See Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 21.

33. *Dum medium silentium tenerent omnia, et nox in suo cursu medium iter perageret, omnipotens Sermo tuus, Domine, a regalibus sedibus venit, alleluia* (*Hours of the Divine Office* 1963: I, 1188).

becomes (Sahagún 1583: 235v–236r):

*Onauistoc in nepapan suchitl, cētlalmotecatoc in tlapalomisuchitl, oncuecuepuncotoc, teucuitlaquetzalaoachpixauhtoc, ma xexeliuhtimani, tzetzeliuhtimani ī teucuitlasuchitl, alleluia, alleluia.*

*In cacaoasuchitl, in izquisuchitl, in tlapaloacalsuchitl vnquetzalaoachuiuitoliuhtoc, vnteucuitlapepeiociotoc vnchalchiuhtonatimani: vncā cenquiztoc nepapan tlaçotetl in vmpa Bethlem, alleluia. Aviasticac in iollosuchitl, quetzalcoiolsuchitl, tlapaltecomasuchitl tlauizcalleoatoc: vnteucuitlatotonatimani: alleluia, alleluia.*

*In Castillan suchitl, cacalosuchitl, tlauizcalleoatoc: alleluia, alleluia.*

*In chalchiuhsuchitl tlatlatzcatimani, tlapalomisuchitl centlalmotecatoc: alleluia, alleluia.*

*In sucomecatl oitzmolín, ocuepun in ompa Engadi: alleluia, alleluia.*

*Yn quetzalitztl, epiollotli, tlatlapalteuilotl, xoxotla, pepetlacatimani, in ompa ontlaneci: alleluia, alleluia.*

*Inin ma ticmauicoça apuçonallo, quetzalapuçonalli, in chalchiuitl onchaiauh, vntepeuh in vmpa bethlem, tlaplan aci: alleluia, alleluia.*

*In teuxiuitl, in tlapalteuxiuitl, quetzalchalchiuitl oncuioac, onpepenaloc ī vmpa Bethlem.*

*A in iquac omotlacatili in piltzintli, in cunetzintli, in iehoatzi in Iesus: alleluia, alleluia.*

Various flowers lie giving off fragrance. The red bone flowers lie extended over all the land. They lie blossoming, they lie dripping with golden quetzal feather dew. Let the gold flowers<sup>34</sup> spread about scattering, spread about sprinkling! Alleluia!

The cacao flowers, the popcorn flowers, the red basket flowers lie waving with quetzal feather dew, lie glistening like gold, spread about giving off jade warmth. Various precious stones lie collected there, there in Bethlehem. Alleluia!

The heart flowers, the quetzal feather bell flowers,<sup>35</sup> the red jar flowers stand giving off fragrance, lie dawning. They spread giving off golden warmth. Alleluia!

The Castilian flowers,<sup>36</sup> the crow flowers lie dawning. Alleluia! Alleluia!

The jade flowers<sup>37</sup> spread about sparking, the red bone

flowers lie extended over all the land. Alleluia! Alleluia!

The grapevine has sprouted, has blossomed there in Engadi. Alleluia! Alleluia!

The emeralds, the pearls, the amethysts glow, they spread about shimmering. It is becoming light there! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Let us marvel at this ambery one! Quetzal ambers, jades, have sprinkled, have scattered there in Bethlehem. He arrives on earth! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Turquoises, rubies, quetzal jades have been taken, have been chosen, there in Bethlehem.

Ah, it was when the little child, the babe, Jesus was born! Alleluia! Alleluia!

This is no humble stable. The authors have transformed Bethlehem into a setting appropriate for the birth of a Nahua deity, or the rising of the solar Christ. The emphasis on precious stones may have been suggested by the term “Word” in the original antiphon: the wise words of sages and ancestors were often referred to metaphorically as jades and turquoises; Christ as “the Word” descending from heaven could easily suggest such a shower of gems. A song in the *Cantares mexicanos* dated 1553 uses very similar gem imagery, as well as bird and flower imagery, for the birth of Christ (Bierhorst 1985a: 254–257).

The grapevine of Engadi is a Christian motif that happened to fit perfectly with the garden theme. Engadi, an oasis southeast of Jerusalem, was famous in ancient times for its grapevines and balsam (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 1962: II, 101–102). The *Golden Legend*, a thirteenth-century compendium of religious lore, tells how, at Christ's birth, “the Rod of Engadi, which is by Jerusalem, flowered this night and bare fruit, and gave liquor of balm” (Voragine 1900: I, 27).

The legend of Saint Francis's receiving the stigmata, or five wounds of Christ, lent itself very readily to garden imagery. Not only did Francis commune with flocks of birds, but Christ himself appeared to the saint in the form of a six-winged seraph. Francis's followers came to refer to him as their “seraphic” father; the mystics of his order, beginning with Saint Bonaventure, interpreted the angel of the Apocalypse who ascends from the east with the seal of the living God (Revelation 7:2) to be Francis, bearing the stigmata (Armstrong 1973: 63).

The text for this festival (September 17) sets the scene as follows (Sahagún 1583: 172v–173r):

flower,” it is attested in both Sahagún (1950–1982: XI, 208) and Hernández (1959–1985: II, 279), but not identified. Sahagún includes a drawing of it.

34. The yellow-blossomed *teocuitlaxochitl*, “gold flower,” is listed and depicted in Sahagún but not identified by his translators (1950–1982: XI, 203). It is also in Hernández's catalog (1959–1985: II, 240). Valdés and Flores (in Hernández 1959–1985: VII, 126) cite a possible identification as *Rumfordia floribunda*.

35. This plant is not listed in Sahagún or Hernández, but Hernández does list a *coyalxochitl*, “bell flower” (1959–1985: II, 166–167); Valdés and Flores (in Hernández 1959–1985: VII, 93) give possible identifications.

36. By “Castilian flowers” the authors probably mean roses. See note 4 above.

37. The same flower as the *chalchiuhyexochitl*, “jade tobacco

*Vel ontlauastoc in nepapan suchitl, centlalmotecatoc in elosuchitl, in cacaoasuchitl, in mecasuchitl, Alleluia.*

*In cacaoasuchitl, in tlalpalizquisuchitl òtlatlatzcatimani, oncucuepuncotoc: Alleluia, alleluia.*

*Vnquetzalaoachuitoliuhticac in vncā tepeticpac, itocaioca Mōte Aluerne.*

*Ma amoiollo pachui in antepilhoa: ma tlalaloacalsuchitica, ma elosuchitica, celia in toiollo.*

*Tlalatcomasuchitl, castilla cempoalsuchitica ontlauizcaleoatoc in vncan tepeticpac. In vncan vei tlamauicollī in ipan omuchiuh in itlaço Dios in totatzi sant Francisco. Yn quetzaltototl, in tlahquechol, in xiuhtototl, in toznene, in elotototl, tlaçocoiolmilintimani, in incuicatzi, in intlatoltzi.*

*Xiquincaquica in coioltototl chachalaca: in xioapaltototl, vmpapatlantini in tlatlicpac.*

*Vel onpapakque, onahausque, in iquac tepeticpac moçauhtzinoto.*

Various flowers lie giving off much fragrance. The green-corn flowers, the cacao flowers, the red popcorn flowers, the rope flowers<sup>38</sup> lie extended over all the land! Alleluia!

The cacao flowers, the red popcorn flowers spread about sparking, lie blossoming. Alleluia! Alleluia!

They stand bending with quetzal feather dew, there on the mountaintop, in the place called Mount La Verna!<sup>39</sup>

May your hearts be filled, you children! May our hearts bloom with red basket flowers, with green-corn flowers!

Red jar flowers lie dawning with roses there on the mountaintop. A great marvel happened there to God's precious one, our father Saint Francis! The quetzal, the roseate spoonbill, the cotinga,<sup>40</sup> the parrot,<sup>41</sup> the blue grosbeak: their song, their speech spreads about resonating like precious bells!

Listen to the bellbird<sup>42</sup> chatter! The turquoise-browed motmot! They go flying about on earth.

They were quite delighted, they were joyful, when he went to fast on the mountaintop!

The text goes on to tell the traditional story. I will only point out that it places the occurrence of Christ's apparition at dawn, and stresses the brilliance of the

deity's appearance: "he came shining brightly, he came shimmering"; and later, "he stood shimmering, he stood shining" (Sahagún 1583: 174r–v).

Since Anderson has published the *Psalmodia's* songs for the festival of Saint Bernardine, the great Franciscan preacher whose name Sahagún bore, I will not reproduce the text here (see Anderson 1984). The opening passages equate Francis with a cypress and ceiba tree, borrowing a Nahuatl rhetorical device used to emphasize the strength and protectiveness of rulers, elders, and ancestors. The trees are "gardenized" by describing them as feathered like quetzals and trogons. Under this arboreal Francis "we people of New Spain" are sheltered; the flowers and precious stones that burst forth in the following line may represent these people. Saint Bernardine is a flower and a gem that sprouts from the tree of Francis (Sahagún 1583: 89v–90r, 92r).

This Franciscan utopia is also the setting for part of the *Psalmodia's* text on Saint Clare. Here Clare is a flower, and Francis is a gardener. The imagery is partly derived from the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation (chap. 21). According to Franciscan legend, Clare called herself Francis's "little plant" (Thurston and Attwater 1956: III, 312); the activities of Francis and his early followers were known to many through a popular book entitled *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*. In the *Psalmodia*, Clare becomes the most precious flower in the heavenly garden (Sahagún 1583: 144v–145v):

*Ma onmauicolo, ma oniecteneoalo in ichpuchtepitzi in totecuio Iesu Christo: in vncan cemonoc, cenquitzoc in nepapan suchitl.*

*In icpac mauizmolontimani, mestimani in cenca auiaic, in mauiztic suchimatlatlatl, in nouiampa iaiaiticac, ic mauilia in isuchitepantzi in totecuio.*

*Vncan quimisquechili in totecuio, in itlaço in sant Francisco, isuchipiscatzi, isuchimancatzi muchiuhtica.*

*Inic tepanio in isuchitepantzi in totecuio, muchi tlaçotetl, auh cuztic teucuitlatica in tlaçalolli.*

*çan vel ceccan in quiaoao in isuchitepancaltzi, in itlaczacuillo epiollotli, in tlapisque in vncan tlapia, moiauchichiuhticate.*

*In suchitl, in vncan muchiuhtoc, itonaltzi in totecuio Iesu Christo, cēca quimotlaçotilia, cenca quimomalhuilia: oc cenca iehoatl in ilhuicac suchitl, in itlaço in sancta Clara.*

*Vncan neztoc, totonatoc, tlauzcalleoatoc in isuchitepetzi in totecuio, veca acitoc, centlalli mantoc in iaiuica, in imolonca, in iuelica.*

*Tlalatcomasuchitl, chalchiuiesuchitl, Castilla tlalalcomasuchitl, tlalalcomasuchitl, ontlauizcaleoatoc, viuitoliuhtoc, teucuitlaaoachpixauhtoc.*

38. *Mecaxochitl*, "rope flower," is identified by Garibay (in Sahagún 1969: IV, 342) as *Vanilla planifolia* or *V. fragrans*. See Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 192, 210; Hernández 1959–1985: II, 245–246.

39. The Italian La Verna is called Alverno in Spanish.

40. See Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 21; Hernández 1959–1985: III, 345.

41. See Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 22; Hernández 1959–1985: III, 344–345.

42. This is a literal translation of the name. Garibay (in Sahagún 1969: IV, 329) suggests *Agaleius gubernator* or *Icterus*; Alvarez del Toro lists *Habia rubica* (in Hernández 1959–1985: VII, 239). See Sahagún 1950–1982: XI, 50; Hernández 1959–1985: III, 353.

*Castilla cempoalsuchitl, tlatlapalpuiaoaoc, tlatlaztaleoaltic, tlapaliuisuchitl, teucuitlasuchitl: vncañ tlaçomauizuiuitoliuhtoc, quetzallaoachuitoliuhtoc, totonatimani: centlalmotecatoc, in velic, in auiaç.*

*Vel tlapac in monemitia, ameialpa in tlaçoilhuicasuchitl, cenquizca qualli ichpuchtli in sancta Clara, vel imijaoaio, vel izcallo muchiuhticac in itepetzi dios.*

May she be marveled at, may she be praised, the maidenly elder sister of our lord Jesus Christ! Various flowers lie together, lie gathered there!

The very fragrant and wonderful flowery green water spreads about flowing wondrously over them, spreads about gushing. It stands going about in all directions. Our lord's walled garden is watered with it.

There our lord appointed his precious Saint Francis. He is his gardener, his florist!

Our lord's walled garden is walled all with precious stones. And it is encrusted with gold!

His enclosed garden has an entrance in only one place. Its door is of pearl. The stewards who are on guard there are arrayed for war.

The flowers that lie growing there are the sunshine<sup>43</sup> of our lord Jesus Christ. He loves them dearly, he tends them carefully, especially the heavenly flower, his precious Saint Clare!

There our lord's flowery mountain lies visible, lies giving off warmth, lies dawning. Its fragrance, its emanation, its scent lies reaching far, lies spreading over all the land.

The red bone flowers, the jade tobacco flowers,<sup>44</sup> the red roses, the red jar flowers lie blossoming precious, lie flaming, lie waving, lie dripping with golden dew.

The roses, dark red ones, pale ones, the red feather flowers,<sup>45</sup> the gold flowers lie there waving like precious bracelets, lie bending with quetzal feather dew. They spread about giving off warmth. They lie extended over all the land, scented and fragrant.

Quite high she dwells, above the spring, the precious heavenly flower, the completely good maiden, Saint Clare. She stands as the very tassel, the very cusp of God's mountain.

The New Jerusalem described in Revelation features wondrous fruit-bearing trees, but no mention is made of flowers. A Nahua heaven without flowers, however, was hardly conceivable. And what higher compliment could be paid to a female saint than to let her preside over all the other flowers in heaven? An indigenous mural painting of Saint Clare in the cloister at Tlalmanalco, an important Franciscan center, seems to reflect the same considerations (fig. 5). The saint's torso emerges from a flower; she is surrounded by blossoming vegetation.<sup>46</sup> The scene was probably suggested by the title page woodcut used in sixteenth-century Spanish editions of Pedro de Vega's *Flos sanctorum*, which shows various saints emerging from the blossoms of a rosebush (Kubler 1948: II, 375–376).

Other texts in the *Psalmody*, although lacking the iteration of indigenous flora and fauna that marks the songs presented above, nevertheless betray the authors' abiding interest in this symbolic complex. The story of the Garden of Eden is told in the *Tlauculcuicatl*, "Lament," written for Septuagesima Sunday (Burkhart 1986b). A lengthy text entitled *Suchicuicatl*, "Flower Song," for use on the Sundays between Easter and Pentecost, follows Saint John on his angel-escorted tour of the heavenly city in Revelation. Both of these songs are based on standard biblical readings for these occasions, but their inclusion in what is otherwise a book for festivals suggests a keen interest in the subject matter. The text for Corpus Christi begins with a description of heaven as a flowery, bird-filled Mount Sion (Sahagún 1583: 99r). Mary Magdalene's festival develops an elaborate garden metaphor, based on Christ's appearance to her in the guise of a gardener after his resurrection (John 20:15); Mary Magdalene's soul, hoed and seeded by Christ, becomes a garden full of flowers (Sahagún 1583: 117v–118v). The birth of Mary is a metaphorical dawn, complete with singing bird-angels (Sahagún 1583: 171v). The text for her conception borrows from liturgical sources the references, from the Old Testament Song of Solomon,

43. *Tonalli* is a complex concept. The term derives from the verb *tona*, "to be warm, for the sun to shine" (Karttunen 1983: 245). It refers to warmth and sunlight, and also to one of several indigenous soul concepts. The *tonalli* lodged in the crown of one's head and was the source of body heat, regulating growth and well-being. It was linked to the sun and to the creator deity Tonacatecuhtli, whose name means "Lord of Sustenance": food crops were called *tonacayotl*, an abstract substantive form of the verb *tona*. To refer to the flowers as Christ's *tonalli* implies that he is the source of their warmth and brightness, and suggests an underlying Christ-as-sun metaphor.

44. See note 37 above.

45. The *tlapalihuihochitl*, "red feather flower," is cataloged in Sahagún (1950–1982: XI, 211) and Hernández (1959–1985: III, 153). It is not identified by Dibble and Anderson (in Sahagún 1950–1982), by Garibay (in Sahagún 1969), or by Valdés and Flores (in Hernández 1959–1985: VII). There is an illustration in Sahagún.

46. A companion painting portrays the much-revered fray Martín de Valencia, charismatic leader of the first official Franciscan mission to New Spain, who worked at Tlalmanalco and was buried there. The convent at Tlalmanalco was still incomplete in 1585; the murals must postdate that year (Kubler 1948: II, 480).





Figure 5. Mural painting of Saint Clare, late sixteenth century, in the Franciscan cloister at Tlalmanalco, Mexico. Photo: Louise M. Burkhart.

to the “enclosed garden,” “sealed fountain,” and “lily among thorns” typically used as figures for the immaculately conceived Virgin (Sahagún 1583: 224v–225r). The martyred saints Peter, Paul, and James shed “roseate spoonbill” blood (Sahagún 1583: 112v, 122r). There are also many contexts in which verbs for shining, shimmering, and glistening are reiterated for various Christian sacra, thereby attaching to these referents the associations of the cult of brilliance.

### The lady of the flowers

The Christian symbolism surrounding the Virgin Mary so abounded with flower and garden imagery that she was easily integrated into the flowery world. Nahuatl devotional literature applies more garden-related references to her than to any other single figure, and on the whole these references fall securely within the bounds of Old World models. Various Old Testament texts used in the Marian liturgy could easily be read by Nahuas as “garden songs.” One prayed the Rosary, which represented a necklace of roses, to Mary; in Nahuatl this was called *ixochicozcatzin*, “her flower necklace.” The lily and the rose were especially associated with her; these imported flowers and New World look-alikes turn up in Nahuatl texts on Mary. She was the Queen of the Angels; for the Nahuas, this

brought her into association with birds as well as flowers.<sup>47</sup>

Two unpublished texts that share a Marian focus will serve to document Mary’s relationship with the sacred garden. The first of these, an eighty-six-page cycle of orations to Mary, is a masterpiece of Nahuatl oratory. The complex style indicates Nahua authorship, but the author (or his priestly supervisor) was well informed of Christian teachings and makes accurate use of many loanwords and biblical allusions. These orations lie at the beginning of a manuscript in the Biblioteca Nacional of Mexico (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d., MS 1476), the second half of which is in the Bancroft Library (MS M-M 464). The manuscript is related to that which contains the *Cantares mexicanos*: two of the hands, including that in which the orations are

47. The cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe, although firmly established in the middle of the sixteenth century, did not come to dominate Mexican religion until much later. The legend of the apparitions to Juan Diego, in which flowers bloom in the Virgin’s presence and later are transformed into her image, cannot be securely documented until the middle of the seventeenth century. The image known today existed by 1556, and its shrine was popular among Indians and Spaniards; however, the legend does not necessarily reflect sixteenth-century Nahua beliefs and will not be dealt with here. See Lafaye (1976) for a discussion of the cult’s seventeenth century, largely creole development.



transcribed, are strikingly similar; both contain nearly identical Nahuatl redactions of Aesop's fables. Both documents originated in a Jesuit setting, probably in the late 1580s or 1590s, while drawing much of their content from earlier works prepared under the direction of mendicant friars.<sup>48</sup>

In front of the oration cycle proper is bound a four-page text entitled *De la Aue Fenix*. By applying the Old World motif of the phoenix bird to the Assumption of Mary, the author manages to transform her into a bird without introducing any overtly indigenous ideas that might raise priestly eyebrows. The text describes the phoenix's death and resurrection, then recounts Mary's fate in similar terms, addressing her as "oh fine precious bird, oh fine phoenix bird." The text ends with the following invocation, switching from the preterite to the present tense in order to relate the mythological event to the lives of the Nahua supplicants (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: iv):

*cemicacanezcalilizyhuil, ic omitzmihuichichihuili  
cemicacayolilizaztlacapalli ic omitzmaztlacapaltili ynic  
omitzmopatlanaltili, omitzmohuiquili yn ompa  
ytlàtòcachantzincó: Ye timohuica ye titechmotlalcahuilia  
Auefenixzine tlàtòcaCihuapille Santa Mariae, ma yhuan  
xitechmohuiquilili in toyolia tanima, ynic ompa  
timitzontotoquilizque ynic ygraciatzin tot<sup>o</sup> Ma  
qualnemilizyecnemilizyhuitica titihuiyotican  
titaztlacapaltican ynic huel tipatlanizque mohuictzinco  
titziazque motlantzinco tipapatlantinemitihui.*

With feathers of eternal reviving [Christ] befeathered you, with wings of eternal life he bewinged you. Thus you flew, you went there to his royal house. Now you are going, now you are departing from us, oh phoenix bird, oh royal noblewoman, oh Saint Mary. Take our *yolia*, our *anima*,<sup>49</sup>

so that we may follow you there, through the grace of our lord. With the feathers of good living, proper living, may we befeather ourselves, may we bewing ourselves so that we will be able to fly, we will go looking toward you, we will go flying about beside you.

The ancient belief in the avian transformation of the soul transfers its aesthetic and emotional appeal to Christian ideas of morality and heavenly reward. It is now good Christians who will be privileged with this transformation. Yet the flowery world continues to exert its power, determining the images used to attract people to these new ideas.

The lily and the rose connote, in Christian usage, Mary's virginity, purity, and beauty. In Nahuatl only the latter term is necessarily implied: the language of flowers spoke much more persuasively of fertility and sensuality than of maidenly innocence. Although Nahuas were made well aware of Mary's sexually abstinent lifestyle, flower terminology tied her to the flowery world rather than to any cult of virginity.

The author of the orations makes frequent appeals to Mary's flowerlike greenness and freshness, using derivations of the term *celic*, "something fresh, green," from the verb *celiya*, "to catch fire; for plants to sprout, to blossom" (Karttunen 1983: 29). The equation here of flowering and fire, together suggesting a sudden quickening of brilliant life, is typical of the flowery-world complex as defined by Hill (1987). The Spanish term for lily, *azucena*, is often employed, sometimes with the Nahuatl *xochitl*, "flower," appended.<sup>50</sup> The author flaunts his verbal prowess with such constructions as *celticachipahuacateoyotica-xochitzintle*, "oh fresh/green-pure-in-a-sacred-way-a-flower" (1r) and *celticaqualnezcaAçucenaichpochxochitzintle*, "oh fresh/green-beautiful-lily-girl-flower" (2r). Other invocations include *tlapaltic celticarosaxochitzintle*, "oh red fresh/green-rose-flower" (3r); *yamancaahuiaAçucenai-chpochcelticaXochitzintle*, "oh soft-fragrant-lily-girl-fresh/green-flower" (7v); *tzopelicaahuiaxochitzintle Açucenaichpochahahuiaacatzintle*, "oh sweet-fragrant-lower, oh lily-girl-fragrant one" (11v); *auiaaichpoch-xochitzintle*, "oh fragrant-girl-flower" (17v); *tlaxochicelticatzintle*, "oh precious-flower-fresh/green

48. Both manuscripts make some attempt to mark glottal stops, an orthographic convention that became systematically employed only under Jesuit supervision. Also, they both contain some Jesuit content, such as tales of Saint Ignatius. The date 1585 given in the *Arte adivinatoria*, one of two sahuaguntine documents included in the *Cantares* manuscript, provides a *terminus post quem*. Bierhorst (1985a: xii, 8) identifies the *Cantares* manuscript as a Jesuit copy of a Franciscan original, dating most probably to the early or mid-1590s. The manuscript I am citing here also contains sahuaguntine material, copied from the *Psalmodia christiana*. The inclusion of miracles of the Rosary and a lengthy tale involving Saint Dominic suggests that at least part of the original documentation was produced in a Dominican context, or translated from Dominican sources. The context in which the Marian orations were originally composed remains uncertain.

49. This joint use of a Nahuatl and Spanish/Latin term for "soul" is typical of many Nahuatl devotional texts. The (te) *yolia*, housed in the heart and surviving after death (see López Austin 1988: I, 229–232),

was the indigenous soul concept that most resembled that of Christianity. However, the frequent use of *anima* either alone or paired with it indicates that priests did not entirely trust the native concept.

50. Another text included in the same manuscript pairs the term *azucena* with *omixochitl*, the indigenous tuberose, a lily look-alike (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: 335v–338v).

one" (18v); and other combinations of the same elements.

Garden symbolism also enters the orations in connection with specific topics and allusions. Isaiah's text "And there shall go out a stalk from the root of Jesse, and a flower shall arise from his root" (11:1) was interpreted as a Marian prophecy: the stalk is Mary; the root is her mother, Saint Ann, a descendant of Jesse (David's father); the flower is Christ. This text, the source of the popular medieval "Jesse tree" genealogies of Mary and Christ, is the model for this passage in the oration on Mary's conception (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: 1v):

*tehuatzin Cihuapille, in tiyyecyolloxochiquahuitz-molinaltzin, in huel tipiazticatzintli  
tiymelauhcaaçucenaxochitzin in lesse*

You, oh noblewoman, you are the sprout of the good heart flower tree, you are the very slender one, you are the straight lily-flower of Jesse.

The passage has omitted the generational sequence of Jesse-(Ann)-Mary-Christ, in which the tree simply provides a genealogical model, to become an assertion of Mary's flowery nature. The *yolloxochitl*, "heart flower," a hot-country flowering tree of great medicinal and ritual importance, is equated, probably on the basis of its white blossoms, with the lily, a symbol of Mary.

The oration on Mary's birth describes this event as a dawn, a figure used also in the *Psalmodia* and by the Augustinian fray Juan de la Anunciación (Sahagún 1583: 170r–171v; Anunciación 1577: 188r–v). Mary is addressed as *titeotlahuizcaltzintli*, "you are the sacred dawn," and *tiytlahuizcaltzin in yoliliztonatihu*, "you are the dawn of the sun of life" (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: 2v). This association with the coming of light links Mary to the cult of brilliance and the solar aspect of Christ.

Since it was through Mary, as mother of Christ, that access to heaven was regained, she was often invoked as the doorway or entrance to heaven. In the orations, she is told: *Ca mocatzinco, mopampatzinco in calacoa, yn ixochitecuiltonoliztlalpantzinco tot<sup>o</sup> Dios*, "Through you, because of you, one enters the flowery land of riches of our lord God"; later she is addressed as the entrance to *icemihcacatetlamachcuiltonoayan-xochitlalpantzinco*, "[God's] flowery land of eternal contentment and riches" (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: 7v; 22v–23r).

When the author composed his oration for the Expectation, a Spanish festival celebrated December 18,

perhaps it was the image of the pregnant Mary that suggested his abundant allusions to coming-to-life, brilliance, and flowering (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: 12r–13r). Mary is invoked as being "in a sacred way" the vessel or water jar of the spring or fount of life (*yolilizameyalacaxtintle*); her childbirth will cause honey-sweet precious rain to fall (*neuctzopelicaltaço-quiahuitz*). Her womb is alluded to as a coffer that holds the jade, the quetzal plume, the turquoise with which her devotees will adorn themselves; this is the sun of life, who will shed light for the people of the world. Mary is a vessel of jade-green water from which will flow the heavenly jade-green water of life; this will cause the germination of that which was frozen with the ice of sin. Her retention of virginity during childbirth is described as her becoming even more flowerlike: her pure maidenly lily-flower freshness (*mochipahualizichpochAçucenaxochicelticayotzin*) will simply sprout and blossom all the more. The *hortus conclusus*, "enclosed garden," and *fons signatus*, "sealed fountain," of the Song of Solomon (4:12) appear in the statement: *tehuatzin in tiyecxochitlatza-qualtzintli; tehuatzin in tiyecchalchihuahmatlalaAcax-machiotiltzintli*, "you are the good flower enclosure, you are the good sealed jade-green water vessel." The oration for the Assumption also alludes to the *hortus conclusus*, invoking Mary as *cenquizcaqualtilizxochimiltzintle*, "oh flower field of complete goodness," walled with stones of goodness (29v).

For his text on Mary's childbirth (13r–15r), the author calls forth a rain of sweet honey dew from heaven (*hualtzopelicaneucàhuachquiahuia ilhuicac*). The newly born Christ is Mary's precious jade, and he shimmers and shines even more than the sun. He is greeted by *yn ilhuicac tlaçopipilti in tlahquecholme, in teoangeloquecholme*, "the precious nobles of heaven, the roseate spoonbills, the sacred angel spoonbills." Mary's heart shines and shimmers with light and fire of love; she is invoked as *iztacyecyoloxochitzintle*, "oh white good heart-flower."

Mary's Purification, undergone forty days after childbirth in accordance with Mosaic law, brought forth in many texts attestations of her purity: she did not really require this rite but was simply obeying the law. The oration for this occasion expresses purity in terms of radiance, linking Mary's moral condition to her membership in the cult of brilliance (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: 15v):

*Ca in mochipahualizpepetlaquilitzin, oc achi chipahuac, quixmihmictia in tonatiuh oc achi qualnezca metztional-pepetlaquillo, mocauh in mochpoch Açucenaxochi-celticayotzin.*

Your pure shimmering is a bit purer, it dazzles the sun, it is a bit more beautiful than the shimmering of the moon. Your maidenly lily-flower greenness remained.

The sun/moon comparison may ultimately derive from the Song of Solomon text *pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol*, "beautiful as the moon, elect as the sun" (6:9), a line frequently applied to Mary. That this attestation of brilliance is immediately followed by a flower metaphor suggests that shining and blossoming were closely linked in the author's mind.

One of the most frequently depicted scenes in sixteenth-century Mexican woodcuts is the crucified Christ, with Mary and Saint John standing to either side. The orations include a text addressed to Mary as she stood at the foot of the cross. The cross as a tree, through which the tree-related sin of Adam and Eve was reversed, was a typical medieval figure. The oration develops this image. Mary is a fruit tree (literally, "flower-food-tree") that God sprouted in his orchard ("flower-food-field") of life. Christ is her fruit, which was hung from the tree of life, the cross, by its stalk, the three nails. Mary is placed at the foot of this other fruit tree, to create a botanical image of trees in an orchard (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: 24v–25v). In the following oration, for the Resurrection, Mary is called the "paradise fruit-field of life" (*tiyolilizParaiso-Xochiqualmiltzintli*) and the "fruit tree of life" (*tiyolilizxochiqualkauhtzintli*) (27v).

Imagery of brilliance also recurs in the oration for the Resurrection. Mary is invoked as *huel nelli tlahuizcalcitlaltzintle, nalquizcapêpêtaquiliccatlanex-illocatzintle, tlatlalchipahualiccateyollalicatzintle*, "oh true star of dawn, oh luminous possessor of clear shimmering, oh consoling possessor of daybreak," in whom Christ entered in order to become *toyoliliz-tonatiuhztzin totetlahuilicatzin*, "our sun of life, our illuminator" (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: 26v). The risen Christ's visit to his mother is recounted in these terms (28r–28v):

*in oncan mocochiantzinco mopantzinco, mocalaquico mitzmottitizino, ahmo iuh hualqualnezcaquiça in tonatiuh yn iuh hualmoqualnezcapepetlaquiltihtia ynic mixpantzinco moquetzinoco: auh yn oticmottili oncan ticmocuitihuechilihtihuetz, aocmo ticmocahuiliaya Ca iuhquin motlaçoeloxochiahuiayaltihuitza, moteocuitlaxochipepetlaquiltihuitza.*

There in your sleeping-place he came to enter upon you, he showed himself to you. Not so beautifully does the sun come forth, as he came forth shimmering beautifully, the way he came to stand before you. And when you saw him there, you fell upon him, no longer were you separated from him. It was as if he came giving off fragrance as a precious green-corn flower, he came shimmering as a golden flower.

Again, resplendence and flower imagery go hand in hand.

Mary shines when Christ brings her back to life, in the oration for the Assumption. The angels marvel at how shimmery she is; she dazzles all the saints with her brilliance (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: 31v).

An oration to Saint Joseph alludes to the tale of his flowering staff: *in momactzinco itzmolin xotlac in huacatlacotopili*, "in your hand sprouted, burst into bloom the dry-stalk staff" (*Santoral en mexicano* n.d.: 35r). When it was time for Mary to marry, according to this legend, the high priest was instructed by the Holy Spirit to assemble all the bachelors of the lineage of David; the one whose staff burst into flower was to be Mary's husband. This vivid image of the enflowering of the sacred was sure to appeal to Nahuatl audiences.

The oration cycle is more firmly grounded in Christian sources than the *Psalmodia's* garden songs. It lacks the exuberant blossoming forth of multiple indigenous flora, and asserts Christian morality in a more consistent manner. Nevertheless, the influence of the flowery world is evident.

The second text is an anonymous sixteenth-century manuscript in the possession of the John Carter Brown Library (*Doctrina* n.d.). Misattributed to Sahagún by Nicolás León, its previous owner, the text is a devotional manual containing prayers to Christ and Mary, biblical readings, miracles of the Virgin, hagiographic material on Mary's life, a guide to communion, and various other entries. Its fractured Latin passages and seemingly unpatterned order of contents suggest that, although its compilers must have worked with priests who gave them access to an assortment of religious writings, they were here following their own agenda. One entry is a transcription of an otherwise unknown publication from the press of Pedro Ocharte, dated 1572. It is a Nahuatl translation, by the famous Franciscan linguist Alonso de Molina, of a declaration of the indulgences granted the religious confraternity of the Rosary. The inclusion of this document, together with the many other entries related to the Marian cult, suggests that the entire text

may have been prepared by and for members of this confraternity. Sponsored by the Dominican order, the Rosary confraternity was very popular in indigenous communities (Dávila Padilla 1596: 99, 442–448). The date of this document also provides a *terminus post quem* for the manuscript.

Of interest here are the careful translations of Old Testament readings for the Marian festivals of the Visitation and the Assumption. These are among many Old Testament texts referring to plants, flowering, spring, fertility, and the like, which were read as prophecies of Mary and included in the liturgy for Marian festivals. The selection of these texts for these festivals is not in itself unusual; what is striking is the inclusion of these passages as isolated entries with no exegesis to explain their relevance to the festivals. Instead they read as biblical garden songs, providing the invocations of flora and fauna appropriate to religious celebrations.

Where these passages occur in the manuscript, they are interspersed with Marian miracle legends taken from the fourteenth-century *Scala celi* by the Dominican Johannes Gobius,<sup>51</sup> and with a reading for the festival of Saint Mark taken from the prophet Ezekiel (1:10–14). This latter text recounts the prophet's vision of four winged beings—a person, a lion (puma in the Nahuatl version), an ox, and an eagle—flying about in heaven with flame and lightning flashing from their eyes. These were interpreted as the four Evangelists; hence the passage relates to Mark, whose symbol was the lion, but this connection is not explained in the manuscript. This vision of resplendent, winged beings spoke very clearly to the Nahua view of the sacred. The miracle legends indicate an interest in concrete manifestations of sacred beings, here Mary, in the everyday world; this also was an important feature of human-deity relations in the Nahua world.

The text for the Visitation is the Song of Solomon 2:8–14. The description in Luke (1:39) of Mary running into the hills to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth provided the link with this Old Testament love song of spring. Since the biblical source can easily be consulted, I will reproduce only the most relevant part of the Nahuatl passage (*Doctrina* n.d.: 63r–v):

*Izcatqui. yn notlaço. nechmolhuilliya. ximoqtza. xiçihui yn tinotlaço. yn tinohuillouh. yn tichipahuac. xihualmohuica Ca yn itztic cehuallatl. ye hoquiz yn quiyahuitl oyan hoquiz. In xochitl. honez omochiuh yn totlalpan. le oncâ ye î mâ yn tlamatetecoz. Yn itzatzilliz. cocotl ocacoc yn totlalpan. Omochiuh yn ixochiquallo ynguera. yn huinomilli. ye moxochiotia. cenca haahuiyastimomâ.*

Behold, my precious one says to me, arise! Hurry, you my precious one, you my dove, you pure one. Come! For the cold shadowy water has left, the rain has gone, has left. The flowers have appeared, have grown on our land. Now it is the time, it is the moment, for things to be pruned. The cry of the turtle dove has been heard on our land. The fruits have grown, the figs, the vineyards are now flowering, they have spread about giving off great fragrance.

For the Assumption, the text is Ecclesiasticus 24:11–20. The speaker, to be interpreted as Mary, describes herself in terms of various precious and fragrant plants associated with Old Testament paradises: she is exalted like a cedar of Lebanon, a cypress growing on Mount Sion, a palm in Cades, a rose in Jericho, an olive on the plain, a plane tree growing by the water. She is fragrant like cinnamon, balsam, and myrrh (*Doctrina* n.d.: 70r). This biblical text is also the source for a woodcut of Mary published in the Franciscan Juan Bautista's book of Nahuatl sermons, 1606, where it introduces his treatise on the immaculate conception of Mary (fig. 6). The trees and flowers place the saint in an evocative garden setting.

This passage is immediately preceded by verses 22–28 of the same chapter of Ecclesiasticus. This entry is entitled “another reading on the same festival” but seems to refer to the upcoming Assumption rather than preceding material. As in the passage cited above, the speaker, to be read as Mary, speaks of herself as a plant. A torn page interrupts the text, but the extant lines contain such phrases as “I am like a tree, which is called terebinthus, I have put forth leaves . . . I am like the grapevine, I have borne fruit . . . which is very fragrant. . . . For my heart is very fragrant, it surpasses honey” (*Doctrina* n.d.: 69r–v).

These passages, despite the Middle Eastern geographic and botanical names that made them difficult to translate into Nahuatl, must have fascinated the literate Nahuas who had access to biblical and liturgical writings. Their appeal lay in their conformity to the Nahua aesthetic of the sacred: they allowed Mary's worshipers to surround her with images of burgeoning, blossoming plants.

51. This text is cited in the manuscript. I have verified the presence of these legends in the Beinecke Library's edition of this medieval encyclopedia, in the entry entitled *Virgo dei genitrix* (Gobius 1480).



Figure 6. Woodcut of the Virgin Mary, from fray Juan Bautista's sermon on the Immaculate Conception (1606), 503. Photo: Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

One of the most interesting entries in the John Carter Brown Library manuscript is a saint's legend found also in another text compiled by Nahuatl worshippers (*Sermones en mexicano* n.d.). The latter version is the more complete; variations in wording between the two suggest that they are independent variants of one original Nahuatl rendering of the legend. It is the tale of Saint Amaro, here Nahuatlized to Amalo, and his voyage to paradise.

Saint Amaro is a pilgrim saint venerated in the Spanish city of Burgos, along the pilgrimage route to Saint James Compostella. His cult dates to the fifteenth century, if not earlier. By 1772, when Henrique Florez described the cult (1772: XXVII, chap. 4), the legend told in the Nahuatl manuscripts seems no longer to have been in circulation; it is not associated with the cult today. In the sixteenth century, however, the legend of Amaro's voyage was circulating in Spanish and Portuguese imprints. Contemporary explorations of lands to the east fostered a fascination with legends of fantastic voyages, which could be read as earlier travels

to the "Indies." Some edition of the Amaro story, perhaps the Burgos edition of 1552, found its way to New Spain and into the hands of a Nahuatl interpreter.<sup>52</sup>

In the story, Amaro is a Spaniard who teaches Christian doctrine but is unable to answer his students' questions about the nature of terrestrial paradise. Amaro prays that he might be allowed to see paradise, and in his sleep an angel tells him that he will be carried there in a boat. Amaro sets sail with a number of servants. They have several adventures en route, including a rescue, by a resplendent Mary, from an attack by sea monsters. After further adventures, Amaro arrives at the gates of paradise, and the porter, convinced of Amaro's virtue, allows him to look inside (*Doctrina* n.d.: 121v–122r):

*çan tlatlapolloyā omlachixticatca quittac yn xochitl omcā mochihua yhuan tlanepātla yn icac yn itech tlatlaqueo ī adā. Eua et<sup>a</sup> Niman oca hualmohuicac yn to<sup>o</sup>. yuā yn çiuapilli .s.ta ma<sup>a</sup> quihuicatzē yn ixquichtin çiuapipilti çeca motlamachtitihuitze yuhquin xochitla quitequillia yn xochitl yhixpan cuicaya quitohuaya porchra es et<sup>a</sup> nimā hualtemoque yn agellome yn ixquichtin yn itlaçohuā yn Dios. cuicaya tlapitzaya miyequintin huehuetl ātzotzonaya . . . yn quimittaya yn ixqçhtin çiuapipiltin ynic micpac xochiuh, yn quenin teyolquima yn incuic. . . . nimā ātac y xocoquahuil mochihuiqui yn il<sup>o</sup>. callacticac hehica cēca hueuecapā yn tepātli ynic tzacui Auh yn totome moch ōpa nemi yn ixquichtin.*

He was just looking in at the doorway. He saw the flowers that grow there and in the middle stood that [tree] by which Adam and Eve sinned. Then our lord and the noblewoman Saint Mary came there. All the noblewomen came. They came very joyously. As if in a garden, they were cutting flowers. They were singing before her, they

52. I am grateful to William Christian (personal communication) and John Keber (personal communication) for all of my information on Saint Amaro. Mr. Christian lent me a *novena*, printed in Burgos in 1966, in which Florez's biography of the saint is reprinted. Mr. Christian also alerted me to an inventory of a bookseller in Toledo, for 1556–1567, published by Blanco Sánchez (1987); the bookseller's stocks included several hundred pamphlets on Saint Amaro. Mr. Christian also referred me to an Inquisition case, described by Barreiro (1973: 105), in which a Galician curer investigated in 1602 invokes Saint Amaro in his cures and credits the saint as the source of his healing techniques. Mr. Keber brought to my attention a summary of a fifteenth-century Portuguese version of the Amaro story (in Lida de Malkiel's appendix to Patch 1956) and the existence of Spanish versions printed in Burgos in 1552 and in Santo Domingo in 1593.

53. That is, *tota pulchra es amica mea, et macula non est in te*, a line from the Song of Solomon (4:7) read as a reference to Mary's immaculate conception.

were saying "pulchra es, etc."<sup>53</sup> Then the angels came down, all God's precious ones. They were singing, they were playing [flutes], many of them were playing drums.<sup>54</sup> . . . He was watching all the noblewomen, how they had flower garlands, how delightful their song was. . . . Then he saw the hog-plum<sup>55</sup> tree, it was grown, it stood entering heaven, therefore the walls with which it is enclosed are very high. And the birds all live there.

Amaro begs the porter to allow him to enter, but he is sent away. He thinks he has been at the door only an hour, but by the time he returns to where he left his companions, 266 years have elapsed and he finds himself among their descendants.

Nahua interest in this legend can be explained in relation not to Spanish explorations but to the Nahuas' own sense of the sacred and their identification of the flowery paradise with their own earth. For them, Amaro could be read as a visitor to Mexico, who witnesses a transformation of their land into a sacred garden where resplendent divine beings walk and bird-angels sing. The visitor from Spain becomes the other, the outsider, who bears witness to a wondrous world that he is not privileged to enter. Like the friars, Amaro can penetrate only so far into the Nahuas' sacred world.

### Paradise and persuasion

The aesthetic of paradise was a potent tool for manipulating the religious affections of converted Nahuas. The attachment of garden imagery to Christian sacra rendered the new referents emotionally and aesthetically appealing, and provided a sense of continuity within change. The authors of these texts were experimenting with ways to create a workable Nahua-Christian synthesis within the range of doctrinal variation that their priestly teachers and supervisors would tolerate. In various genres (song, oratory, narrative) and in various doctrinal contexts, they found it expedient to employ the symbolism of the flowery world.

There were numerous contexts in which this

54. The other version of the legend (*Sermones en mexicano* n.d.) has *mecahuehuetl*, "cord-drum," a term coined for harps and other stringed instruments. The present writer heard *meca* as *miyec*, "many," and pluralized it to refer to the players rather than the instruments. He thereby created an angelic orchestra of indigenous Mexican instruments.

55. The *xocotl*, referring to hog plums and used also as a generic term for sour fruits, was often used in Nahuatl texts for the Tree of Knowledge.

symbolic complex could be expressed with the Church's approval. In the texts examined here, Nahua writers display interest in utopian and paradisiacal visions of the afterworld, Franciscan nature mysticism, winged and resplendent celestial beings, legends of seafaring saints, metaphors of the sun and the dawn, the floral symbolism of Mary, and Old Testament prophecies that speak in terms of plants. They had only to pick and choose among the Christian symbolism available to them in the Bible, the Roman liturgy, medieval exegesis and hagiography, and even millennial interpretations of their own conquest and conversion.

Sahlins, in his analysis of culture change in contact-period Hawaii, proposes that change occurs as people attempt to apply old cultural categories to changing conditions; new experiences challenge the validity of those categories and ultimately force their reevaluation (Sahlins 1985). People try to stay the same, but they end up changing as the world changes around them. Nahuas attempted to stay the same by finding in Christianity points of continuity with their preexisting cultural categories. By equating Christianity's paradisiacal tradition with their own flowery world, they retained their sacred aesthetic but ended up applying it to a very different sort of garden. It is saints and good Christians who have access to this sacred garden; it is the souls of the virtuous that become birds in heaven; it is the maidenly Mary who walks in the garden of her solar son. Stories are told not of the deities, kings, and heroes of the preconquest past but of the saints and biblical personages who have been substituted for them. The garden becomes less a transformational aspect of the natural world, or of Nahua society collectively, and more a place of reward tied to an at least nominal participation in Christian morality.

Even within this garden of the righteous were perpetuated, though, the basic elements of the cult of brilliance. The close linguistic and conceptual relationship among life, the heart or a soul concept located in the heart, flaming and radiance, and blossoming remained unchallenged; indeed, it was reinforced. A Christian sun dawned upon the flowers of an ancient landscape; dead warriors flashed their feathers and sang in the voices of angels. Things changed; things—for Nahuas perhaps the most important things—stayed the same.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research on which this paper is based has been supported by fellowships at the Newberry Library, the John Carter Brown Library, Dumbarton Oaks, and a travel grant for research in Spain from the American Philosophical Society. I wish to thank the above libraries, the Biblioteca Nacional de México, the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, and the Beinecke Library at Yale University for access to their collections. I also thank the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, for permission to publish photographs of items in the library's collection.

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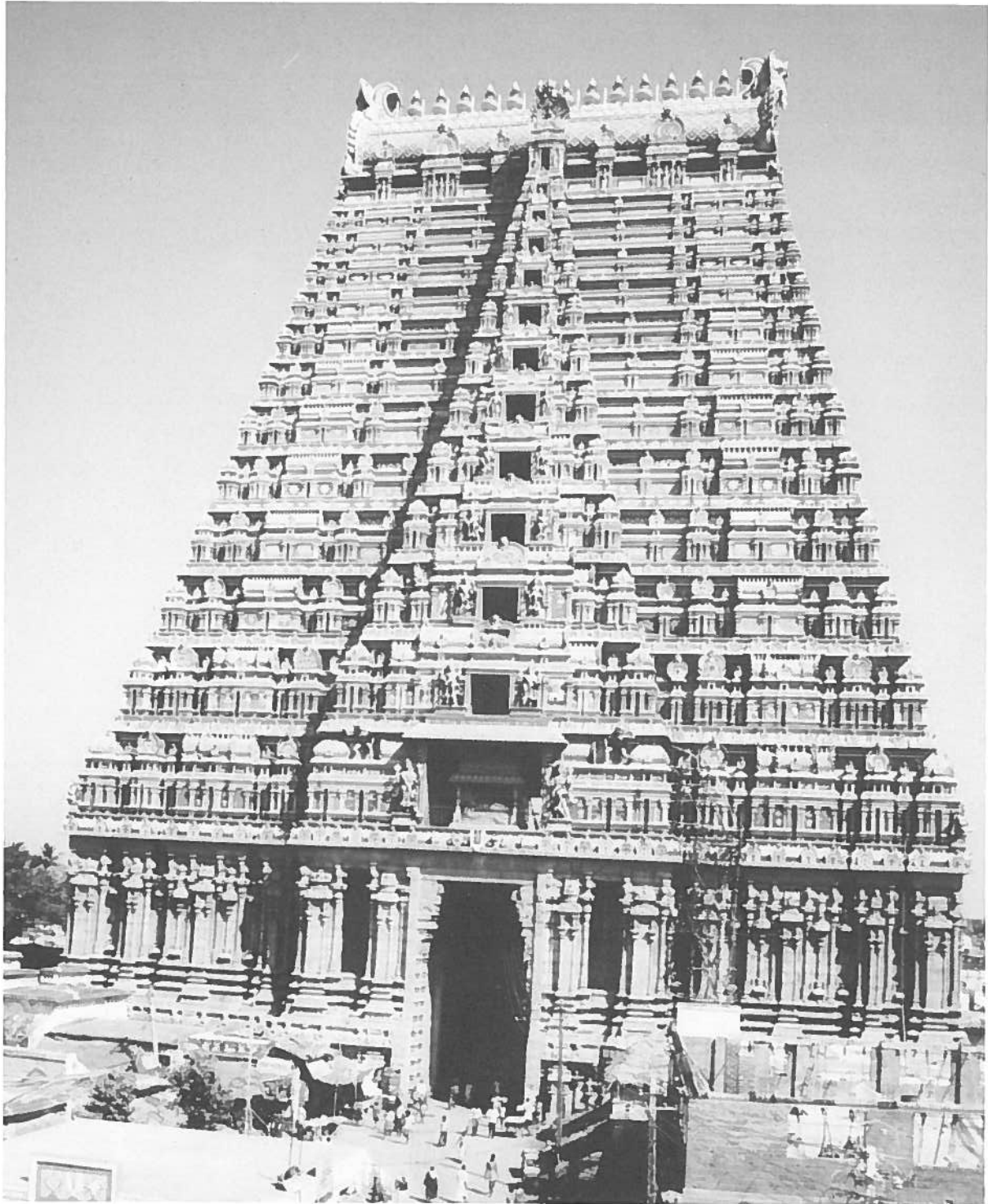


Figure 2. *Rajagopuram* at south entrance to Ranganatha temple complex at Srirangam, sixteenth to twentieth centuries. Photo: Samuel K. Parker.