

Toward a New Interpretation of Prehispanic Discourses: Reconstructing the *Huehuetlatolli* in the Prehispanic Context

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Abstract:

Most current studies of Prehispanic Mexico have examined the indigenous discourse, *huehuetlatolli* (ancient words or words of the old men), not only as an indigenous oral tradition similar to European classical rhetorical speech but also as the symbolic representation of indigenous moral and religious philosophy. These studies, however, have overlooked possible colonial influence on the collection and evaluation process of *huehuetlatolli*, which the two Spanish priests, Andrés de Olmos and Bernardino de Sahagún, conducted in the sixteenth century. After the conquest, indigenous traditions were evaluated, modified, and even destroyed according to the colonizers' ideological purposes, and the current form of *huehuetlatolli* has survived after going through such colonial transformation. This essay tries to provide a new interpretation of *huehuetlatolli* through three steps: 1) by demonstrating how Olmos, Sahagún, and their fellow Spanish priests started to compare the *huehuetlatolli* to European classical and biblical rhetoric and moral philosophy; 2) by reconstructing how the indigenous old men and women as keepers of the Prehispanic discursive traditions practiced, transmitted, and preserved the *huehuetlatolli* at school and home; and 3) by proposing that the *huehuetlatolli* should be understood not only as a rhetorical oral discourse that promoted specific moral behaviors, but rather as the two main discourses, both oral and pictorial, with which the indigenous people used to record any cultural, historical, political, and religious aspect of indigenous society before the conquest.

Keywords: Huehuetlatolli, Prehispanic Discourse, Andrés de Olmos, Bernardino de Sahagún, Indigenous Rhetoric, Moral Philosophy, New Interpretation

The Nahua discourse, *huehuetlatolli*, known as ancient words or words of the old men, has been considered an essential source for the study of Prehispanic Mexico. Scholars of various disciplines such as anthropology, history, philosophy, and literature have paid special attention to the *huehuetlatolli* as it covered a wide range of cultural topics with a unique oral discursive mode. Most of them have viewed the *huehuetlatolli* not only as a European type of indigenous rhetorical orations focusing on its linguistic style and techniques, but also as the symbolic representation of indigenous moral and religious philosophy focusing on its primary themes. Miguel León-Portilla,

who could be considered one of the most influential scholars of Aztec studies of the twentieth century, presented the rhetorical works (“obras retóricas”) and the expressions of the moral philosophy and theology of the Nahuas (“la filosofía moral y la teología de los nahuas”) as two common denominators of the collections of huehuetlatolli (1992, 200). Likewise, Thelma D. Sullivan presents the huehuetlatolli as “the rhetorical orations in general—the prayers, discourses, salutations, and congratulatory speeches—in which the traditional religious, moral, and social concepts handed down from generation to generation were expressed in traditional language—that is rhetorical language” (1976, 82). Later scholars such as Josefina García Quintana (2000, 134), Carmen Espinosa Maldonado (1997, 18-19), and Don Paul Abbot (1987, 251) also see rhetorical and moral philosophy as the major characteristics of huehuetlatolli. I would, however, argue that this current widespread and predominant view of huehuetlatolli is indebted to Frays Andrés de Olmos and Bernardino de Sahagún, who first collected and evaluated indigenous discursive traditions with a European perspective as a part of their colonial project. By deconstructing how these Spanish priests collected and interpreted the huehuetlatolli, this essay proposes that the huehuetlatolli should not be limited to rhetorical oral traditions that primarily covered indigenous moral philosophy, but rather that it should be understood in a broader Prehispanic context as any type of indigenous discursive practice, either pictorial and oral, which dealt with any cultural, historical, political, and religious aspect of indigenous society.

Birth of Huehuetlatolli as Indigenous Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy

As the first collectors of huehuetlatolli, Frays Olmos and Sahagún gathered indigenous discourses as a part of their broader encyclopedic project in the first half of the sixteenth century. As Olmos started to collect and examine indigenous materials including the huehuetlatolli in 1533, which was earlier than Sahagún, his collection and translations could be an essential source for studying how the huehuetlatolli was initially understood and evaluated. Unfortunately, however, the original collection of the discourses in Nahuatl that Olmos completed and translated in Spanish have not survived except for only one that he included in his Nahuatl grammar book, *Arte para aprender la lengua mexicana* [Art for Learning the Mexica Language] (1972). This surviving speech is divided into two parts: the first part is titled “PLATICA QUE HAZE EL PADRE AL HIJO AVISANDOLE, O AMONESTANDOLE QUE SEA BVUENO” [SPEECH THE FATHER MAKES TO THE SON, WARNING OR ADVISING HIM TO BE GOOD], and the second part “RESPVUESTA QVE HAZE EL HIJO AL PADRE” [RESPONSE FROM THE SON TO THE FATHER]. As Olmos focused on Nahuatl grammar for the Spanish priests who wanted to learn Nahuatl, he did not provide detailed information about the surviving speech. However, he wrote a brief note about it twice in the book, which could show how he viewed the huehuetlatolli from the beginning stage of his collection. In the Introduction to the book, Olmos describes it as “una platica por los naturales compuesta, prouechosa y de buena doctrina, con otras maneras de hablar” [a speech composed by the natives, useful and of good doctrine, with other ways of speaking] (1972, 10).

According to this note, Olmos presents oral speech as the unique linguistic mode of huehuetlatolli and good instruction as its main theme. Olmos made his second note about this form of speech in the title of Chapter 8 as follows: “El octauo, de la manera de hablar que tenian los viejos en sus platicas. Y despues se pondra una platica de las que solia hazer antiguamente un padre a su hijo, en que se descubre mucho de la propiedad de la lengua” [The eighth, about the way of speaking that the old people had in their speeches. And afterwards, there will be a speech like those that fathers used to give their sons in ancient times, in which much is revealed about the property of speaking] (1972, 266). In this note, Olmos presents the old men as the keepers of speeches which they used to instruct younger generations in Prehispanic Nahua society. This instruction was most likely a moral and religious education, as demonstrated in the surviving speech in which the father admonishes his son to devote himself to God, respect others, behave well morally, etc. Through the notes and the surviving speech in his grammar book, Olmos provided general characteristics of huehuetlatolli: it was spoken and kept by old men, practiced as oral speech (“platica” or “manera de hablar”), and dealt with moral content or education (“buena doctrina”).

Even though Fray Olmos’s original collection of huehuetlatolli in Nahuatl is missing, several chroniclers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century included some of his translations in Spanish in their chronicles. Among them, Bartolomé de Las Casas (1967, 2:437-448), Juan de Torquemada (1975, 4:265-270), Gerónimo de Mendieta (1971, 113-120), and Alonso de Zorita (2003, 112-122) included Olmos’s Spanish translations of huehuetlatolli in their chronicles, commonly presenting them as *pláticas* (speeches), *exhortaciones* (exhortations), *avisos* (warnings), *amonestaciones* (cautions), and *consejos* (advice) in which parents educate their children how to conduct themselves well morally and ethically. In addition, the chroniclers tried to understand and evaluate these indigenous discursive practices through the eyes of European classical traditions.¹ Las Casas and Torquemada compared the indigenous speeches to European rhetoric, focusing on their eloquence and figurative structures. After presenting the huehuetlatolli collected by Olmos, Las Casas recorded that “[T]odas las gentes destas Indias tienen natural elocuencia, y así les es fácil orar y representar sus bienes y sus males como si todas las reglas y colores de la Retórica hobiesen aprendido [. . .]” [All the people of these Indies have a natural eloquence, and thus it is easy for them to speak publicly and represent their goodness and their evil as if they had learned all the rules and techniques of Rhetoric, (. . .)] (1967, 2:447).

Torquemada also stated that the indigenous people were natural rhetoricians without learning any of the rhetorical techniques practiced in Europe: “[C]onfieso que en decir su razón estas gentes, así en contar sus bienes como referir sus males, son aventajadísimos retóricos, no porque ellos hayan oído ningún precepto retórico de los que enseña Quintiliano, ni de los que da Cicerón en sus particiones, sino por serlo ellos naturalmente y tan elocuentes que les es muy fácil decir cualquier cosa que quieren [. . .]” [I confess that in stating their reason, both in recounting their goodness and their evil, they are very excellent rhetoricians, not because they have heard any of the rhetorical precepts taught by Quintilian, nor of those given by Cicero in his partitions, but because they are naturally so eloquent that it is very easy for them to say anything they want (. . .)] (1975, 4:270). It

looks like Las Casas and Torquemada were not the first chroniclers who presented the huehuetlatolli through the lens of European rhetoric. Rather, as the original collector of huehuetlatolli, Fray Olmos must have noticed the similarities between the indigenous discourses and European rhetorical orations because he could understand the discourses in the original indigenous language, Nahuatl, better than any other of his Spanish contemporaries, including the Dominicans and Franciscans and, needless to mention, Las Casas and Torquemada.²

In addition to presenting the huehuetlatolli as a European type of rhetoric, Las Casas, Mendieta, and Torquemada also compared its themes and content to European classical philosophical and biblical traditions. In Volume 2 of his book *Apologética historia sumaria*, Las Casas examined several indigenous systems such as religion, laws, government, customs, education, etc. and compared them to those of European gentiles, mostly Greeks and Romans. By doing so, he tried to demonstrate that indigenous people in New Spain had a society that was as advanced and civilized as that of the classical Europeans (Lee 2021, 40-43). Las Casas paid special attention to how the Nahuas, especially old men and women, educated their children to be honest, modest, obedient, chaste, prudent, diligent, etc. through speeches at school and home. He frequently associated such indigenous education with the works of famous Greek philosophers such as Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* (1967, 2:427-436). According to him, all of the philosophers' guidance in their books could be found in the huehuetlatolli, which Olmos collected and translated: "Todo lo que habemos en esta parte de la crianza de los hijos destas nuestras indianas, en los que precedentes capítulos dicho, se confirma por unas exhortaciones [huehuetlatolli] que otro religioso de la orden de San Francisco [Fray Olmos] me envió de la Nueva España, estando yo en España la Vieja, [. . .]" [Everything that we have said here regarding the rearing of the children of these our Indians, in the previous chapters, is confirmed by some exhortations [huehuetlatolli] that another religious man of the order of Saint Francis sent me from New Spain, while I was in Old Spain (. . .)] (1967, 2:437).

Like Las Casas, Mendieta also linked the huehuetlatolli with European classical philosophical traditions. In his chronicle, Mendieta included three parental speeches and the responses of the children and provided a brief introduction before presenting them. In Chapter XX of Book II, titled "De cómo estos indios general y naturalmente criaban á sus hijos en la niñez, siguiendo las doctrinas de los filósofos, sin haber leído sus libros" [Of how these Indians generally and naturally reared their children in childhood, following the doctrines of the philosophers, without having read their books] (1971, 111), he cited several of Aristotle's ideas about child education to demonstrate that the Indians raised their children in the same ways the philosopher proposed in his book. One of these ideas was to prohibit children from seeing indecent pictures or activities, or from hearing or speaking slanderous words, which, according to Mendieta, the Indians promoted in their speeches: "Y de aquí proceden todos los filósofos à enseñar que à los mozuelos dende su tierna edad, sus padres y ayos los ejerciten en honestos ejercicios y trabajos. Y como esto lo uno y lo otro los indios lo cumplían para con sus hijos, parece bien claro en las pláticas y amonestaciones y trabajos en que los ejercitaban à ellos y à ellas dende su niñez, [. . .] y primeramente en estas pláticas que fueron traducidas de lengua

mexicana en nuestro castellano” [And from here all philosophers teach that, from a tender age, the parents and tutors should train young men in honest exercise and work. And as the Indians did this with their children in one way or the other, it seems very clear in the speeches, admonitions and works in which they trained their sons and daughters from their childhood, (. . .) and firstly in these speeches that were translated from the Mexica language into our Spanish] (1971, 112).

Torquemada more explicitly associated the huehuetlatolli with European biblical and philosophical childhood education. Like Las Casas and Mendieta, he first introduced the ideas of Greek philosophers (Plato and Aristotle) and biblical traditions about teaching moral behaviors to children. In his presentation of indigenous speeches, Torquemada frequently juxtaposed indigenous pedagogical ideas with the biblical and European approaches to child education (Lee 1971, 43). The following paragraph, for instance, exemplifies how Torquemada interrupted the flow of huehuetlatolli to demonstrate the similarities between indigenous and European traditions (Torquemada’s interruptions are italicized by the author): “[H]onra a todos, en especial a tus padres, a los cuales debes obediencia, temor y servicio. *Esto dijo Dios por estas palabras: Honra a tu padre y madres, para que vivas vida larga y buena.* Y proseguía el indio, diciendo: [. . .]; se bien criado y donde no fueres llamado no seas entremetido; *así lo dijo el otro Filósofo antiguo, no llegues a consejo antes que seas llamado, porque en lo contrario, demás de parecer mal criado y atrevido, darás pena con tu soltura*” [Honor everyone, especially your parents, to whom you owe obedience, fear, and service. *God said this by these words: Honor your father and mothers, so that you may live a long and good life.* And the Indian went on, saying: (. . .) be raised well, and where you are not called, do not meddle; *so said the other ancient Philosopher, do not come to counsel before you are called, because otherwise, in addition to appearing ill-bred and insolent, you will be embarrassed by your shamelessness*] (1975, 4:262). Torquemada furthermore argued that the practice of huehuetlatolli was as essential to the Indians as teaching children prayers and moral laws was to European Christians: “Estas exhortaciones, con otras, que por excusar prolijidad deo, son las que usaban hacer estos indios occidentales a sus hijos y con estas amonestaciones los criaban, [. . .], como entre nosotros los cristianos las oraciones y lo más forzoso de la ley divina; porque sabidas de memoria las supiesen poner en ejecución y así corrían de padres a hijos y de hijos a nietos y jamás se olvidaban” [These exhortations, with others, which I leave aside for the sake of brevity, are those which these western Indians used to make to their children, and with these admonitions they raised them, (. . .), as among us Christians the prayers and the most obligatory of the divine law; because they knew them by memory, they knew how to carry them out, and in this way they passed from parents to children and from children to grandchildren, and they were never forgotten] (1971, 4:269)

The indigenous speeches that Olmos originally collected and translated, and which Las Casas, Torquemada, and Mendieta partially included in their chronicles, were finally published in a collection by Juan Bautista in 1601. Bautista titled the collection *Huehuetlatolli que contiene las pláticas que los padres y madres hicieron a sus hijos y a sus hijas, y los señores a sus vasallos, todas llenas de doctrina moral y política* [*Huehuetlatolli, which contains the speeches that fathers and mothers made for their sons and daughters, and the lords for their vassals, all speeches full of moral and*

political doctrine], which included twenty-nine discourses in Nahuatl and in Spanish translation. Contrary to what the title indicates, however, this book does not include only indigenous speeches but also some Christian sermons. It is not clear which speeches in the collection were originally collected by Olmos, but as Leon-Portilla (1991, 26) argues, Bautista seems to have later added some Christian sermons. In any case, as a collection of speeches, this book provides a comprehensive understanding of the thematic and linguistic scopes of *huehuetlatolli* that was probably initiated by the original collector, Olmos. It contains the speeches that Olmos included in his Nahuatl grammar book, *Arte para aprender la lengua Mexicana*, and which Las Casas, Mendieta, Torquemada, and Zorita included in their chronicles. Thus, most of oral discourses collected in the *Huehuetlatolli* were those indigenous parents used to teach their children adequate moral behaviors before the conquest. In addition, it also included several speeches about political and civil moral behaviors that the king and vassals should follow, which Las Casas, Torquemada, and Mendieta did not mention in their chronicles. Yet Bautista appears to have extended the traditional comparison of *huehuetlatolli* to rhetoric and classical philosophy, as he quoted in his collection Las Casas's comparison of the speeches ("pláticas") to European rhetoric and classical philosophy in verbatim (1601, 91r-93).

Along with Olmos's collection, Sahagún's Book 6 of the *Florentine Codex* in Nahuatl and its Spanish version, Book 6 of *La historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, have been also indispensable sources for the study of *huehuetlatolli*. As several scholars already examined, Olmo's and Sahagún's collections share core similarities: parental moral admonitions and advice to children and political exhortations between the ruler and vassals as main themes appeared in oral speeches.³ Sahagún, however, added one more theme, theology, to the thematic scope of *huehuetlatolli* by including several prayers in his Book 6. Thus, Sahagún titled Book 6 of the *Florentine Codex* as "Libro sexto, de la Rethorica, y philosophia moral, y theologia: de la gente mexicana: donde hay cosas muy curiosas tocantes a los primores de su lengua: y cosas muy delicadas tocantes, a las virtudes morales" [Sixth book, of the Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy and Theology of the Mexica people, where there are very curious things regarding the beauty of their language, and very delicate things regarding the moral virtues]. This title demonstrates that Sahagún shared almost the same view of the two main aspects of *huehuetlatolli* that Olmos and his followers such as Las Casas, Torquemada, Mendieta, and Bautista maintained: Sahagún used the same term they did, rhetoric, to refer to the collection of *huehuetlatolli*, Book 6, and compared this book to classical European moral philosophy. Olmos and Sahagún's similar themes and evaluations of *huehuetlatolli* demonstrate that they might have communicated with one another about indigenous oral discourses. In fact, both collectors got to know each other in person and each other's works as well. Sahagún and Olmos worked together at the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco in the 1530s, and thus they could have even exchanged their ideas about the indigenous traditions, and more specifically, the indigenous discourses, *huehuetlatolli*. For this reason, they started to commonly present and evaluate them as "retórica" (rhetoric) and "doctrina o filosofía moral" (moral philosophy or education), which has been widely accepted by colonial chroniclers and modern scholars up to today.⁴

Reconstructing the Huehuetlatolli before the Conquest

It has been well-known that Prehispanic traditions in Mexico were evaluated and classified after the conquest by European cultural, historical, religious, and social criteria. In this process, most indigenous traditions were transformed, trimmed, and even destroyed according to the colonizers' needs. The huehuetlatolli went through the exact same process. As collectors of indigenous oral speeches, Spanish priests converted them into indigenous versions of European rhetoric and moral philosophy and recorded them as such in the European alphabetic writing system after the conquest. Focusing on the case of Sahagún, Walter D. Mignolo and Colleen Ebacher presented the surviving huehuetlatolli as an outcome of the indigenous discursive practice that lost its original form and was redefined by European discursive system:

Sin embargo, al ser transcritos y fijados en escritura alfabética, los *huehuetlatolli* fueron sacados de su contexto original e insertado en otro. Sus nuevos receptores no eran ya participantes en un juego de vida, sino observadores de participantes en juegos de lenguaje. En este nuevo contexto los *huehuetlatolli* pasaron a ser textos aptos para el estudio, lingüístico y cultural y también para la cristianización. Las categorías que apoyaron este *traslatio* fueron derivadas de la escritura alfabética y es así que Sahagún describe los discursos del Libro VI como "retórica y filosofía moral y teología de la gente mexicana" que son géneros discursivos derivados de la tradición alfabética occidental y no de las tradiciones orales mesoamericanas. (1994, 24)

[However, by being transcribed and fixed in alphabetic writing, the *huehuetlatolli* were taken out of their original context and inserted into another. Their new recipients were no longer participants in a game of life, but observers of participants in language games. In this new context, the *huehuetlatolli* became texts suitable for linguistic and cultural study, as well as for Christianization. The categories that supported this *translatio* were derived from alphabetic writing, and thus Sahagún describes the discourses in Book VI as "rhetoric and moral philosophy and theology of the Mexica people," which are discursive genres derived from the Western alphabetic tradition and not from Mesoamerican oral traditions.]

Mignolo and Ebacher argue that the current form of huehuetlatolli was separated from its original indigenous discursive system and was forcefully inserted into a new alphabetic system, and then Sahagún classified this transformed huehuetlatolli as rhetoric, moral philosophy, and theology following European discursive categories. In this context, reconstructing how the original indigenous discursive system such as huehuetlatolli was created, practiced, and preserved before the conquest would be essential to deconstruct how Olmos and Sahagún defined, selected, and evaluated the huehuetlatolli.

While Olmos's major works about indigenous traditions in which his original collection of huehuetlatolli was included has gone missing, Sahagún's major works have survived and served as essential sources for the study of huehuetlatolli. His Book 6 of the *Florentine Codex* and its Spanish version, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, in particular, could provide important

information as to how the oral discourses of Prehispanic period were understood and practiced. Throughout the entirety of Book 6, Sahagún uses the term *huehuetlatolli* twice. In Chapter XXI of Book 6, “The father, ruler or nobleman, exhorted his son in order to provoke him to chastity (1950-1982, 6:113),” Sahagún used it to refer to the discourses of the old men (*buehuetque*) and old women (*ilamatque*), as shown in the following paragraph:

Thou who art my son, thou who art my youth, hear the words; place, inscribe in the chambers of thy heart the word or two which our forefathers departed leaving: the old men [*in buehuetque* (vevetque)], the old women [*in ilamatque* (jlamatque)], the regarded ones, the admired ones, and the advised ones on earth. Here is that which they gave us, entrusted to us as they left, the words of the old men [*buehuetlatolli* (vevetlatolli)], that which is bound, the well-guarded [words]. They went saying that the pure life is considered as a well-smoked, precious turquoise; as a round, reed-like, well-formed, precious green stone. There is no blotch, no blemish. Those perfect in their hearts, in their manner of life, those of pure life-like these are the precious green stone, the precious turquoise, which are glistening, shining before the lord of near, of the nigh. Like them are the precious feathers, the dark green ones, broad, well-formed, which arch over the earth. They are those of pure life, those called good-hearted. (1950-1980, 6:113)⁵

In this paragraph, the father presents the old men (*buehuetque*) and women (*ilamatque*) as the creators of *huehuetlatolli* and uses their words and lives to educate his son. The father advises his son to emulate them, explaining how exemplary and pure was the life they lived, and thus they were glowing in front of the god, *tloque nabuaque* (the lord of near, of the nigh). In addition, the father presents the old men and women’s words as *huehuetlatolli*, asking his son to keep them in his heart. These words are translated here as “the words of the old men,” but in context it should be translated more properly as “the words of the ancestors or ancient words” because the old men (*buehuetque*) and women (*ilamatque*) already departed the earth, in other words, they were already dead. Sahagún also confirmed this translation in the *Historia general* by presenting the *buehuetque* and *ilamatque* as “nuestros antepasados” [our ancestors] and the *buehuetlatolli* as “lo que nos dijeron y lo que nos avisaron” [what they said and what they advised] (1997, 355-56).⁶

The next appearance of *huehuetlatolli* in Book VI does not occur in one of the main chapters that include speeches but in one of the three additional chapters that deal with adages, riddles, and metaphors. In Chapter 43, “Here are told some of the figures of speech called metaphors, which are subtle expressions; and their interpretations, their explanations,” the word *huehuetlatolli* appears as follows: “ANOTHER’S SONG, ANOTHER’S WORDS: It means the one who spoke words not his own – perhaps the words of the old men [*buehuetlatolli*], the words of the noblemen [*pillatolli*]; but a mere commoner, if he took it upon himself to talk, was told: ‘Are these perchance thy words, thy song, which thou utterest? What thou utterest is not necessary’” (1950-1982, 6:250).⁷ The *huehuetlatolli* here could be ostensibly understood as the words or discourse of the old men, and there is no other possibility of different translation in the context. Yet this paragraph provides some

important clues for understanding the roles of the old men (*buehuetque*) and their words. The huehuetlatolli in this paragraph refers to the words of the old men who are not dead but still alive, and they seem to have had a certain authority like the noble men because their words, huehuetlatolli and *pillatolli*, respectively, were clearly distinguished from the words of the commoners, *macehuallatolli*. It looks like the old men as the speakers or utterers of huehuetlatolli before the conquest had their own discursive styles and content which distinguished them from other social groups, and they also seem to have enjoyed certain political power due to their age and experience in the Prehispanic society.⁸

Sahagún seems to provide contradictory information in Book 6 because he presents the living as well as the dead old men and women as creators or speakers of huehuetlatolli. However, it should be noted that Sahagún does not contradict himself because what they said, whether they were living or dead, referred to the same words. To put it another way, the living *buehuetque* and *ilamatque* were the knowers and transmitters of the ancient words that the dead *buehuetque* and *ilamatque* left behind. Thus, what the former said was essentially based on the ancient words of the latter, as Ruiz Bañuls argues: “[M]e inclino a afirmar que al pensar en ‘antigua palabra’ se está evocando el concepto de tradición, tan antigua como se quisiera, y al traducirla como “discurso de los ancianos” se hace referencia al hecho de que los viejos eran depositarios y transmisores de la misma” [I am inclined to assert that, by thinking of the ‘ancient word’ one is evoking the concept of tradition, as old as one would like, and by translating it as the ‘discourse of the elders,’ one is referring to the fact that the elders were the repositories and transmitters of it] (2009, 66).

Sahagún provided further information in Book 6 of the *Florentine Codex* about how the huehuetlatolli as the ancient words or words of the old men and women were transmitted from generation to generation. He stated that indigenous people learned them from childhood in school. According to him, when the children were ready to go to school at a certain age, their entire family got together and prepared a ceremony in which the old men (*buehuetque*) and women (*ilamatque*) of the family advised the children how to live and behave and informed them of what they would learn at the school. The following advice is one of the speeches that they gave to the children:

O my child, O my youth, thou art no longer much of a little bird; for already thou art understanding; already thou hast discretion. Here is a word or two to the satisfaction of us who are old men, who are old women. Go taking it as thy charge; do not reject it. If thou art to laugh at it, accursed art thou. But there thou wilt be told, thou wilt be given some more, for thou wilt goest to a school. There thou wilt examine, thou wilt compare the words of the old men. And if thou hearest something which seemeth not correct, thou art not to laugh. O my precious son, O my youngest son, it is time to go. Be diligent in the seeping, in the offering of incense. (1950-1982, 6:215-216)⁹

As a representative of the old men (*buehuetque*) and old women (*ilamatque*) of the family, the speaker asked the child to keep and remember well his advice. It appears that he himself called this advice “one or two words of the old men and women,” which could be clearly understood as

huehuetlatolli. The speaker further informed the child that he or she would learn various other types of the “words of the old men” (*jntlatol vevetque [huehuetque]*) at school, asking him to compare these words to those that he was given at home. The child who was addressed here would probably attend one of the Aztec schools, Calmecac, because, as Sahagún recorded, the children attending this school learned *qualli tlatolli* (good discourse): “Very carefully were they taught good discourse. If one spoke not well, if one greeted others not well, they drew blood from him [with *maguey* spines]” (1950-1982, 3:64-65).¹⁰

Sahagún did not specify how and what kinds of good words or speeches of old men and women the children would learn at the school, but several Spanish priests, as well as native and mestizo chroniclers, described how and with what materials they were instructed at Calmecac before the conquest. For example, Fray Juan de Tovar explained well how indigenous discourses, including oral traditions such as huehuetlatolli, were taught at the indigenous school. In his chronicle, *Historia y creencias de los indios de México*, Tovar included numerous speeches or oral discourses similar to the huehuetlatolli. After he finished his chronicle, Tovar sent a copy of it to his Jesuit religious brother, Fray José de Acosta, who was preparing his own chronicle, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*. After reading Tovar’s chronicle, Acosta questioned how the Indians could conserve the memory of so many and diverse things (“la memoria de tantas y tan varias cosas”) without letters and how much credibility the long and elegant orations included in the *Historia y creencias* had because, according to him, the Indians did not have letters like the Europeans, and thus it would not be possible for them to preserve such long and elegant orations (Tovar 2001, 56).¹¹ In his response to Acosta’s question, Tovar stated that the Indians had their own pictorial writing and calendar systems to record their past, and taught their children the orations or speeches based on their reading of the pictorial books:

Pero es de advertir que aunque tenían diversas figuras y caracteres con que escribían las cosas, no era tan suficientemente como nuestra escritura, que sin discrepar por las mismas palabras refiriese cada uno lo que estaba escrito; sólo concordaban en los conceptos. Pero para tener memoria entera de las palabras y traza de los parlamentos que hacían los oradores y de muchos cantares que tenían, que todos sabían sin discrepar palabra, los cuales componían los mismos oradores, aunque los figuraban con sus caracteres, pero para conservarlos por las mismas palabras que los dijeron sus oradores y poetas, había cada día ejercicio de ello en los colegios de los mozos principales que habían de ser sucesores de éstos, y con la continua repetición se les quedaba en la memoria sin discrepar palabra, tomando las oraciones más famosas que en cada tiempo se hacían por método, para imponer a los mozos que habían de ser retóricos; y de esta suerte se conservaron muchos parlamentos sin discrepar palabra, de gente en gente, hasta que vinieron los españoles que en nuestra letra escribieron muchas oraciones y cantares que yo vi y así se han conservado. (2001, 59)

[But it should be noted that, although they had diverse figures and characters with which they wrote things, it was not as sufficient as our writing system, which without differentiating through the same words, each referred to what was written; they only agreed on concepts. But in order to have a complete

memory of the words and a trace of the speeches that the orators made, and of many songs that they had, which they all knew without disagreeing on a word, which were composed by the same orators, although they represented them with their characters, but in order to preserve them through the same words with which their orators and poets spoke them, there was daily practice of them in the schools of the young noblemen who were to be their successors; and with continuous repetition it remained in their memory without any word differences, taking the most famous orations that were made at each time by method, in order to impose on the young men who were to be rhetoricians; and in this way many speeches were preserved without word differences, from people to people, until the Spaniards came and wrote in our writing many prayers and songs that I saw, and hence they have been preserved.]

Tovar explains here how the oral discourses (“parlamentos” or “oraciones”) included in his chronicle were created and practiced by the Indians. According to him, they used diverse pictorial figures to record things and thus there could be discrepancy among those who would interpret pictorial books because the indigenous pictorial writing system was not perfect like the European alphabetic system. To avoid such discrepancies and maintain the uniformity of how those books were read, the Indians had orators and singers who composed orations and songs based on the pictorial books. At school, the young noblemen learned and memorized the orations and songs through diligent repetition to preserve them through the generations with the same words without any difference or change. In this way, according to Tovar, the Indians were able to preserve Prehispanic orations and songs, which were then written in a European alphabetic system after the arrival of the Spaniards.

Tovar’s response to Acosta’s question about the lengthy orations provides important information as to how the huehuetlatolli was created and practiced before the conquest. More than anything, Tovar demonstrated that indigenous speeches such as the huehuetlatolli were not practiced alone but were always accompanied by pictorial books, as the former was a result of accurate readings of the latter. Some colonial chroniclers also verified the close relationship between the oral and pictorial discourses. Alonso de Zorita, who included in his chronicle several huehuetlatolli originally collected by Olmos, also confirmed this close relationship between the huehuetlatolli and its pictorial counterparts by recording that the indigenous nobles maintained their “good advice,” meaning the huehuetlatolli, as memory in their pictorial books: “Demas de criar los hijos con la disciplina e cuidado que se ha dicho, los padres asimismo lo tenían en les dar muchos y muy buenos consejos, y los tienen hoy en día los indios principales por memoria en sus pinturas [. . .].” [In addition to bringing up children with the discipline and care that has been mentioned, the parents also had to give them much and very good advice, and today the principal Indians possess it as a memory in their paintings (. . .)] (2003, 112).

Another chronicler, Fray Diego Durán, also presented the importance of pictorial books as the main sources for oral traditions. In his chronicle, Durán argued that the Indians must have been evangelized by one of the Christian apostles before the conquest because the indigenous people performed several religious practices very similar to those of the Christians, such as fasting, offering incense at the altars, playing musical instruments in the temples, etc. Based on this idea, Durán

identified one of the indigenous gods, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, with the Christian apostle, Saint Thomas, who taught the Indians those religious rites and practices. To verify Topiltzin as Saint Thomas, Durán asked an old Indian man to explain to him the life of Topiltzin, which he recounts as follows:

I was desirous of finding out whether these things [the teachings of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl] were true. Therefore, I questioned an Indian advanced in years, from Coatepec, who was considered a wise man in his town. This man dies of the great plague. I begged him to tell me whether what was written and painted there was true, but the Indians find it difficult to give explanations unless they can consult the book of their village. So he went to home and brought back a painted manuscript, but the characters impressed me more as representations of magical things than history. Within this document was to be found in almost unintelligible signs the entire life of Papa and his disciples. This native narrated the life of Topiltzin to me as I had known it but in a better manner than I had heard before. (2010, 64-65)

In response to Durán's question, the old indigenous man tried to explain the life of Topiltzin based on his memory at the beginning, and although he was known as a wise man, he had a hard time orally recalling it. Thus, he needed to consult pictorial books to accurately narrate the life of Topiltzin as a Christian apostle. Durán's report confirms again the close relationship between oral traditions such as huehuetlatolli and their pictorial counterparts. While Tovar informs us that the pictorial books were complemented by the indigenous orations, Durán states that these orations were also complemented by the pictorial books. All these examples demonstrate that the Nahua people before the conquest equally depended on the system of oral traditions and pictorial writing to maintain and preserve their cultural, political, and religious practices because these two indigenous discursive systems could not function well without assisting each other.

Deconstructing the Huehuetlatolli as Indigenous Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy

Frays Olmos and Sahagún, who first collected indigenous oral traditions, presented the huehuetlatolli not only as an indigenous version of European rhetorical orations but also as the symbolic representation of indigenous moral and religious philosophy, which later chroniclers and scholars simply recycled until recently. To initiate and continue such typical characterization of huehuetlatolli, however, they deliberately overlooked or simply ignored the inseparable and interdependent relationship of the two Prehispanic discursive practices, oral traditions and pictorial books. To make the huehuetlatolli conform to their expectations of indigenous rhetorical orations, Las Casas, Torquemada, and Mendieta, who included in their chronicles several speeches collected by Olmos, did not mention any pictorial images. Unlike them, Sahagún included fifty-two pictorial images in Book 6 of the *Florentine Codex*, but he did not mention that they were the original pictorial sources of the orations he collected. In addition, they do not seem to depict the main theme of each chapter properly as they were too simplified. Furthermore, these images mostly reflected a European painting style rather than the Prehispanic indigenous pictorial writing system (Favrot Peterson 2019, 174-180). Not only by separating oral traditions from their pictorial counterparts but also by

stressing the eloquence of the former, the Spanish colonizers were able to identify the huehuetlatolli with European types of rhetorical orations before the conquest.

The mutual dependency between oral traditions and pictorial books also seriously challenges the presentation of huehuetlatolli as the only orations that primarily dealt with moral and religious philosophy. Because the indigenous people used pictorial writing system to record almost all sectors of their society such as economy, history, politics, religion, etc., the orations or oral traditions that were based on the reading of these pictorial books must have been as diverse as the themes of their pictorial counterparts. According to Fray Toribio de Benavente, also known as Motolinia, who came to Mexico City in 1524 as one of the famous twelve Franciscans, the indigenous people in central Mexico maintained various types of pictorial books before the conquest:

Había entre estos naturales cinco libros, como dije de figuras y caracteres: el primero hablaba de los años y tiempos: el segundo de los días y fiestas que tenían en todo el año: el tercero que hablaba de los sueños y de los agüeros, embaimientos y vanidades en que creían: el cuarto era del bautismo y nombres que daban a los niños: el quinto es de los ritos, ceremonias y agüeros que tenían en los matrimonios. Los cuatro de estos libros no los ha de creer vuestra ilustrísima señoría como los Evangelios, porque ni los escribieron Juanes, ni Lucas, ni Marcos, ni Mateos, mas fueron inventados por los demonios. El uno, que es de los años y tiempos, de éste se puede tomar crédito, que es el primero, porque en la verdad aunque bárbaros y sin escrituras de letras, mucha orden y manera tenían de contar los mismos tiempos y años, fiestas y días, como algo de esto parece en la primera parte del tratado y sexto [*sic*] capítulo. Asimismo escribían y figuraban las hazañas e historias de guerra [y también] del subceso de los principales señores, de los temporales y pestilencias, y en qué tiempo y de qué señor acontecían, y todos los que sujetaron principalmente esta tierra e se enseñorearon hasta que los españoles entraron. Todo esto tienen escrito por caracteres e figuras. (1971, 5)

[There were among these natives five types of books, as I said, of figures and characters: the first spoke of the years and times; the second of the days and feasts that the natives had throughout the year; the third spoke of the dreams and the omens, trickery and vanities in which they believed; the fourth was of the baptism and names that they gave to the children; the fifth is of the rites, ceremonies, and omens that they had in their marriages. Your Illustrious Lordship must not believe that the last four of these books are like Gospels, because they were written neither by John, nor Luke, nor Mark, nor Matthew, but were invented by demons. The first one, which is of the years and times, can be given credit because, although the natives were barbarian and without alphabetic writings, they truly had much order and a way of counting the same times and years, feasts and days, as something similar to this appears in the first part of the treaty and sixth [*sic*] chapter. Likewise, they wrote and figured the exploits and histories of war [and also] of the succession of the principal lords, of storms and pestilences, and in what time and under which lord they occurred, and all those who principally subjugated this land and ruled until the Spaniards entered. All this is written in characters and figures.]

The pictorial books that Motolinia classified seem to cover almost all social sectors and private as well as public events in indigenous society. From the official political history and religious festivals

and rites to the domestic ceremonies such as marriage, baptism, and naming a new-born baby were recorded in the pictorial books. He emphasized the importance of the first book that dealt with the Aztec calendar system. With this calendar, the Indians were able to record their historical and religious events by counting the exact date and time of festivals, conquests, seasonal pestilence, royal genealogical successions, etc. As Tovar stated in his chronicle, the orations or speeches based on all these types of books were produced and taught at schools. However, the first collectors of huehuetlatolli, Frays Olmos and Sahagún, included certain orations in their chronicles through selections and exclusions. In Book 6 of the *Florentine Codex*, for instance, Sahagún excluded religious practices such as how to conduct human sacrifice and prepare monthly festivals, which probably formed the most important aspect of indigenous religious ceremonies, while he included the practices of confession and coronation in front of god, which were very similar or acceptable practices to the Europeans. It is obvious that he did not want or was not allowed to include those purely indigenous practices in his collection as they would remind the Indians of Prehispanic idolatry.

As the two main Prehispanic discursive practices, oral tradition and pictorial books, were inherently interdependent and thus inseparable, the huehuetlatolli as an example of such practices could be understood as a hybrid discursive product, in other words, not only as an oral but also as a pictorial discourse. Sahagún seems to confirm this hybrid concept of huehuetlatolli by recording that the old men were in charge of the pictorial books and oral traditions before the conquest: “Según que afirman los viejos, en cuyo poder estaban las pinturas y memorias de las cosas antiguas [. . .].” [According to what the old people confirm, in whose possession were the paintings and memories of ancient things (. . .)] (1997, 447). As the old men (*huehuetque*) oversaw the entirety of the pictorial books and memories or oral traditions, it would be logical to consider any oral and/or pictorial discourse as huehuetlatolli. In fact, some Nahua chronicles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries understood the huehuetlatolli exactly as both pictorial and oral discourses that dealt with various social traditions such as tribute records and merchant activities (economy), the state’s major conquests (history), royal elections and successions (politics), sacred festivals and ceremonies (religion), etc.

In his *Crónica mexicayotl* written in Nahuatl, for example, Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc recorded how México-Tenochtitlan developed and became the most powerful city in Prehispanic Mexico by using the discourses of the old men and women, or ancestors. According to him, the *huehuetque* and *ilamatque* documented the history of the foundation and growth of Tenochtitlan in the oral and pictorial discourses:

Hela aquí, que aquí comienza, se verá, está asentada por escrito la bonísima, voracísima relación de su renombre; el relato e historia de origen y fundamento de cómo empezó y principió la gran ciudad de México Tenochtitlan, que esta adentro del agua, en el tular, en el carrizal, y se la llama el tular, el carrizal del ventarrón, la que se construyera en cabecera de todos y cada uno de los poblados de todas partes de esta reciente Nueva España; según lo dijieran y asentaran en su relato [*ynin tlaltol*], y nos lo dibujaran

en sus "pergaminos" [*texamapan*] los que eran viejos [*ynbuehuetque*] y viejas [*yllumatque*], nuestros abuelos y abuelas, bisabuelos y bisabuelas, nuestros tatarabuelos, nuestros antepasados; aconteció que nos dejaron dicha relación admonitiva, nos la legaron a quienes ahora vivimos, a quienes de ellos procedemos, y nunca se perderá ni olvidará lo que hicieran, lo que asentaran en sus escritos y pinturas, su fama, y el renombre y recuerdo que de ellos hay, [. . .]. (1992, 4-5)¹²

[Here it begins, it will be seen, the most beautiful, most truthful account of its (Tenochtitlan) fame recorded in writing begins here, will be seen; the account and history of the origin and foundation of how the great city of Mexico Tenochtitlan began and originated, which is inside the water, in the tular, in the reedbeds, and is called the tular, the reedbed of the strong wind, which was made to be the head of each and every one of the settlements in all parts of this recent New Spain; according to what those who were old men (*ynbuehuetque*) and old women (*yllumatque*), our grandfathers and grandmothers, great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers, our great-great-grandparents, our ancestors said and recorded in their story (*ynin tlatol*), and drew for us in their "parchments" (*texamapan*); it came to pass that they bequeathed to us this admonitory account, they bequeathed it to those of us who now live, to those of us who come from them, and what they did, what they recorded in their writings and painted books, their fame, and their glory and memory will never be lost or forgotten, (. . .).]

Tezozomoc states that his chronicle is the most excellent and truthful account about the foundation and development of Tenochtitlan because it is based on the account (*tlahotli*) of his ancestors, the Tenochca old men (*buehuetque*) and old women (*ilamatque*), which could be clearly understood as huehuetlatolli. According to him, the Tenochca ancestors left their account to their descendants in two ways: they spoke in oral discourse or words (*quitotiaque tlatolli*) and painted in pictorial books (*otehmachiyyotiliaque texamapan*). Like the previous chroniclers, such as Frays Olmos and Sahagún, Tezozomoc presents the old men and women as the composers of huehuetlatolli. Unlike those chroniclers who mainly presented the huehuetlatolli as oral speeches, however, Tezozomoc demonstrates a substantially different point of view by presenting as the huehuetlatolli any discursive form, either pictorial books or speeches/words.

In his chronicle, Tezozomoc also demonstrates that the main topic of huehuetlatolli should not necessarily be theological and moral philosophy, as Olmos and Sahagún initially presented. Rather, he seems to argue that any discourse that dealt with any aspect of Prehispanic indigenous society should be considered huehuetlatolli as long as the old men and women created and transmitted it. Thus, he claimed his *Crónica mexicayotl*, which primarily focused on a political and geological history of Tenochtitlan, was a certified and confirmed ancient account (*buehuetlatolli*) because it was based on the pictorial books as well as oral traditions that the Tenochca old men and women or his ancestors left: "He aquí que con todo esto os convencemos de que ya certificamos y confirmamos su antigua narración (*buehue tlahotli*). Oídla y comprendedla bien, vosotros, los hijos y nietos, los mexicanos, los tenochcas, y todos quienesquiera que de vosotros provengan, quienes nazcan, vivan y sean de vuestro linaje" [Behold, with all this we convince you that we have already certified and confirmed their (the elders) ancient discourse (huehue tlahotli). Hear it and understand

it well, you, the children and grandchildren, the Mexicas, the Tenochcas, and all whoever comes from you, who are born, live and are of your lineage] (1992, 9-10).¹³

Tezozomoc's broad and extensive understanding of huehuetlatolli could be confirmed by another Nahua chronicler of the seventeenth century, Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin. When Chimalpahin introduces the content and topic of his chronicle at the beginning of "Octava Relación," he presents the *huehuetlatolli* as an account of ancient life (*huehuenemiliztenonotzaliztli*) that included all historical aspects of his hometown, Tzacualtitlan Tenanco Chiconcóhuac in Chalco, such as its origin, history, and traditions (1998, 2:271-272). Then, Chimalpahin explained who created the huehuetlatolli and how it was transmitted¹⁴:

Aquí se dirá y se expondrá la antigua relación que se pintó sobre esta vida señorial de los antiguos, porque este ordenamiento no es simple fábula, cuento o invención, sino que todo es verdad y tal como sucedió; así nos dejaron dicho y pintado su huehuetlatolli los ancianos y ancianas (*huehuetque yllamatque*), los tlatoque y principales tzacualtitlantenancas, nuestros abuelos y abuelas, bisabuelos y bisabuelas, nuestros antepasados que acá vinieron a vivir, así es la relación que nos dejaron. Esta relación de la ciudad y de los linajes señoriales, que se pintado y escrito en papeles con tinta negra y roja, nunca se perderá ni se olvidará, se guardará por siempre. (1998, 2:295)¹⁵

[Here will be told and explained the ancient account that was painted about this lordly life of the ancients, because this arrangement is not a mere fable, tale, or invention, but everything is true and just as it happened; This is how the old men and women (*huehuetque* and *ilamatque*), the Tzacualtitlantenanca rulers and nobles, our grandfathers and grandmothers, great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers, our ancestors who came here to live, left us their huehuetlatolli spoken and painted. This is the account they left us. This account of the city and the lordly lineages, which was painted and written on paper in black and red ink, will never be lost or forgotten, it will be kept forever.]

Like the previous colonial chroniclers, such as Olmos and Sahagún, Chimalpahin presents the old men (*huehuetque*) and old women (*ilamatque*) as the composers and/or transmitters of huehuetlatolli. Like Tezozomoc, however, he clearly understood the huehuetlatolli as both oral traditions and painted books by stating that the old men and women, his ancestors in his hometown left their huehuetlatolli in words and painted books ("nos dejaron dicho y pintado su huehuetlatolli los ancianos y ancianas").¹⁶

Chimalpahin also undermines the typical and colonial perception of huehuetlatolli by demonstrating that the huehuetlatolli did not primarily deal with Prehispanic religious and moral philosophy. As he wrote his chronicle to defend his family's cacicazgo (governorship) in his hometown, Tzacualtitlan Tenanco Chiconcóhuac in Chalco, against a lawsuit (1998, 2:309), he focused on its historical and genealogical development along with its neighboring cities in Chalco. In this context, Chimalpahin collected oral traditions and ancient pictorial books among which he focused on *huehualtepetlahbtolli* (huehuetlatolli of the city) and *huehuetlatocatlacamecayotlahbtolli* (huehuetlatolli of the lordly genealogy) (1998, 2:346-347) for his legal purposes. Thus, the main

topic of his chronicle was “La genealogía y declaración de la descendencia y linaje y generación y origen de sus antepasados del señor don Domingo Hernández Ayopochtzin” [The genealogy and declaration of the descent and lineage and generation and origin of the ancestors of Mr. Domingo Hernandez Ayopochtzin] who was the grandfather of Chimalpahin (1998, 2:270-271). However, he argues that his chronicles should be considered *huehuetlatolli* because he consulted the surviving *huehuetlatolli* of his time, verified them, and wrote his chronicles based on them: “ellos tenían todas las pinturas antiguas que he mencionado y el libro antiguo cuyas fuentes son los llamados originales, y de allí yo extracté el contenido, renovándolo, porque [la relación con] las antiguas genealogías señoriales era su propiedad y de ella saqué yo este huehuetlatolli, que aquí podrá verse” [They had all the ancient paintings that I have mentioned and the old book whose sources are the so-called originals, and from there I extracted the content, renewing it, because (the account about) the ancient lordly genealogies was their property and from it I extracted this huehuetlatolli, which can be seen here] (1998, 2:304-307).¹⁷ For Chimalpahin, the huehuetlatolli could be any oral or pictorial discourse that dealt with any aspect of ancient life and history.

Concluding Remarks:

The indigenous people in central Mexico used two main discursive systems to record their social and cultural systems before the conquest: a pictorial writing system and oral traditions. In the process of converting indigenous pictorial and oral discourses into alphabetic text after the conquest, the Spanish priests had absolute power to determine what generic form those discourses should be recorded or written in. In other words, whether a Prehispanic discourse, either pictorial or oral, would be written in alphabetic text in narrative style, poetic form, or direct oral speech like huehuetlatolli was totally up to the collector of the discourse. Most colonial chroniclers in sixteenth-century New Spain recorded Prehispanic culture and history in a narrative form, principally following European historical writing traditions. Yet many of them included oral traditions in their chronicles in the form of short speeches or dialogues. It is extremely rare, however, to find a chronicle filled solely with oral discourses like Olmos and Sahagún did in their collections of huehuetlatolli. These priests, as the first collectors of huehuetlatolli, commonly selected specific oral discourses that the indigenous people used to advise, suggest, and exhort their younger generations and/or each other, and presented them as not only linguistically similar to European rhetorical orations but also thematically similar to European moral and religious philosophy. The way they presented those selected discourses as huehuetlatolli, however, seriously transformed the Prehispanic discursive practices because the indigenous people before the conquest did not use the huehuetlatolli to refer to a limited number and specific purpose of oral speeches but rather to the entire oral and pictorial discourses of any topic of indigenous society.

Despite the fact that the original forms and practices of huehuetlatolli was transformed by the Spanish priests, it should be noted that this essay does not discredit the entire historical and cultural value of huehuetlatolli. It is needless to say that the speeches currently accepted and presented as

huehuetlatolli surely included important information for the study of Prehispanic Mexico. The numerous speeches in the collection of huehuetlatolli demonstrate how much indigenous people cared about child education at home and the official school system like the Calmecac. In addition, the religious prayers collected in Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* also sheds light on the significance of sacrifice and death in the Nahuatl cosmological worldview. Furthermore, the speeches used in the ceremonies of death and inauguration of a king demonstrate the theocratic political and religious system before the conquest. Most current studies of huehuetlatolli tend to focus on these Prehispanic traditions following the interpretation of Spanish priests as a standard perspective and analytical framework while not paying much attention to European influences. Under these circumstances, this essay suggests that the European influence that Spanish chroniclers of the sixteenth century projected into the huehuetlatolli should be taken into consideration as an essential factor in the study of Prehispanic Mexico.

Endnotes:

1. See the studies of Lee (2021, 33-47), and Pollnitz (2017, 126-132) who have examined in detail the European influence on the process of collecting and translating huehuetlatolli. According to Lee, Spanish priests such as Olmos, Sahagún, Las Casas, Mendieta, and Torquemada modified the moral themes and discursive style of huehuetlatolli to make them more similar to those of European moral and rhetorical orations. In doing so, they were able to argue that the Indians were intellectually and morally capable human beings like the Europeans and thus could convert to Christianity. Alternatively, Pollnitz focuses on the roles of indigenous informants. She argues that the similarities between huehuetlatolli and European classical and biblical speeches were primarily created by the indigenous informants who helped the Spanish priest collect the huehuetlatolli in Nahuatl. As they were educated by the Renaissance curriculum at the Colegio de Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco, they were familiar with European classical philosophy and rhetorical orations. In the process of collecting indigenous speeches in Nahuatl, the indigenous informants assimilated these speeches, even before translating them into Spanish, to European rhetorical orations. These two studies are acknowledged as primary sources for the first section of this essay.
2. Fray Olmos's language ability seems to have been extraordinary. He was ordered to examine Prehispanic indigenous traditions in 1533 because he had a better command of Nahuatl than anyone else: "por ser la mejor lengua mexicana que entonces habia en esta tierra" [for being the best speaker of Mexica language in this land at the time] (Mendieta 1971, 75). Along with Nahuatl, he also learned Huastec and Totonac and wrote a grammar book about each of these three languages (Pilling 1895, 50).
3. Regarding the similarities and differences between Olmos's and Sahagún's collections, Garibay hypothesized that Olmos originally prepared two repertoires for the collection of huehuetlatolli. Olmos used one of them for his own collection and later Sahagún took the other for Book 6 of the *Florentine Codex*, imitating and following Olmos's advice (1992, 426-427).
4. Some modern scholars have identified more huehuetlatolli following the ways Olmos and Sahagún selected in the sixteenth century. Including the discourses in Book 6 of the *Florentine Codex*, Sullivan identified a total of eighty-nine huehuetlatolli in Sahagún's corpus (1976, 79-80). Like Sullivan, another scholar, García Quintana also found more huehuetlatolli in Sahagún's two works, *Florentine Codex* and *Historia general*, but she found a total of 100 huehuetlatolli, which included eleven more orations than Sullivan (2000, 136-146). Sullivan and García Quintana's uncritical use of Olmos and Sahagún's collections as their models, however, might overlook possible colonial influence on the indigenous practice of huehuetlatolli before the conquest.

5. “In tinopiltzin, in tinotelpuch: tla xiccaquj intlatolli, tla moiollocaltitlan xictlali, xiqujcujo, in cententli, in cencamatl in concauhteoque in totechihcaaoan in vevetque, in jlamatque in otlachixque, in otlamavcoque: auh in otlaztlacoque tlalticpac. Ca izcatqui in techonmacativi, in techonpialtitivi in vevetlatolli in nelpilli, in toptli, in petlacalli: ca conjtotivi ca teuxivtl vel popoca: ca chalchivtl ololivic, acatic, vel icucic momati in chipaoacanemjiltzli: can ceio, can hecauhio, vel qujzquj in jniollo, in jnnemjiliz in chipaoacanemjiliceque: iuh in jniollo, in chalchivtl, in teuxivtl cuecueiomatica, tonatica, in jxpan tloque, naoaque: iuhquj o, in xopaleoac quetzalli, in patlaoac, in vel iaque, in vitoliuhtoque tlalticpac, in chiapaoacanemjiliceque: in mjtoa qualli iniollo” (*Florentine Codex* 1950-1980, 6:113).
6. Here is Sahagún’s translation in Spanish in the *Historia general* that corresponds to the quoted paragraph in Nahuatl; “Hijo mío muy amado: Nota bien las palabras que quiero decir, y ponlas en tu corazón, porque las dejaron nuestros antepasados viejos y viejas, sabios y avisados, que vivieron en este mundo; es lo que nos dijeron, y lo que nos avisaron y encomendaron que lo guardásemos como en cofre y como oro en paño, porque son piedras preciosas muy resplandecientes y muy pulidas, que son los consejos para bien vivir, en que no hay raza ni mancha, dijéronlas los que perfectamente vivieron en este mundo; son como piedras preciosas que se llaman *chalchibuites* y *zafiros*, muy resplandescentes delante de nuestro señor, y son como plumas ricas muy finas, y muy anchas y muy esteras que están arqueadas; tales son los que las tienen en costumbre (y) llámanse persona de buen corazón” [My beloved son: note well the words I want to say, and put them in your heart, because our ancestors, old men and old women, wise and enlightened, who lived in this world, left them; This is what they told us, and what they warned us and commanded us to keep it as in a chest and as gold in cloth, because they are precious stones very resplendent and very polished, which are the advice for living well, in which there is no class or blemish, those who perfectly lived in this world said them; They are like precious stones that are called precious green stones and sapphires, very splendid before our Lord, and they are like very fine rich feathers, and very wide and very matted that are arched; such are those who have them traditionally (and) are called good-hearted people] (1997, 355-56).
7. “Tecujc, Tetlatol: qujtoznequj: in aqujn amo itlatol qujtoaia, aço vevetlatolli, pillatolli: auh çan maceoalli in qujmotlatoltia, ilhviloia. Cujx motlatol, kujx mocujc in tiqujtoa: ca amo monequj in tiqujtoz” (*Florentine Codex* 1950-1980, 6:250).
8. The following is Sahagún’s translation in Spanish in the *Historia general*: “*Canto ajeno, palabra ajena*. Quiere decir el que no decía palabra suya, sino acaso las palabras de los viejos. Palabras de algún noble, o acaso sencillamente de un pobre, decía. Le dicen: “¿Es acaso tu palabra, acaso tu canto lo que prefieres? No deberías decirlo” [Someone else’s song, someone else’s word. That is to say, he who did not speak his own word, but perhaps the words of the elders. Words of some nobleman, or perhaps simply of a poor man, he said. They say to him, “Is it perhaps your word, perhaps your song that you prefer? You should not say it] (1997, 422).
9. “O nopilitze, notelpuchtze: ca aocmo cenca titototzintli, ca ie timotlachialtia, ca ie timotlacaqujtia: izcatqui in cententli, in cencamatl, in tonequijxtli in tivevetque, in tilamatque: ma xoconmotquijltiuh, maca can tocontlatlaçaz: intla xicvetzca, omotlaveliltic; â tel quexqujchtzan vmpa tilhvloz, vumpa timacoz, ca nezcalilizcali in tiauh; â vmpa ticnepanoz, â vmpa ticnamjctiz in jntlatol vevetque: auh intla avmpa itztiuh ticcaquj, maço tivalvetzczaz. O notlaçopiltze, noxocoiove: maiecuel, ma xonmovica: ma itlan xonmaqujti in ochpanoaztli, in tlenamactli” (*Florentine Codex* 1950-1980, 6:215-216).
10. There existed several types of schools before the conquest, but two schools, Telpochcalli and Calmecac, have been generally represented. The children at Telpochcalli learned religious practices and martial arts such as combat skills, and those at Calmecac learned religious, historical, astrological, and professional traditions by receiving education about gods, the calendar, pictorial writing system, and craftsmanship (Calnek 1988; Díaz Infante 2006, 62-88; Escalante Gonzalbo 2010, 15-19). Whether a child attended the Calmecac or the Telpochcalli, however, many different types of oral discourses/traditions must have been taught at both schools.

11. Acosta acknowledged Tovar's chronicle as one of his main sources for his own writing about the Prehispanic indigenous traditions: "The most diligent and learned men who have penetrated and attained their [Indians] secrets, their ancient style, and their government judge them in a very different way, amazed that there could have been so much order and reason among them. One of these authors is Polo Ondegardo, whom I chiefly follow in things pertaining to Peru, and in matters of Mexico Juan de Tovar, a former prebendary of the Church in Mexico and now a religious in our Society of Jesus; on the orders of the viceroy Don Martín Enríquez, he made a diligent and lengthy study of that nation's old histories" (2002, 330).
12. "Yzcatqui nican humpehua nican mottaz nican ycuillcehtoc yncenca qualli yn cenca nezcail tlahtolli ynitauhua ynipohualloca ynitlahtolli. yninelhuayo yni tepecho. yniuh peuhtica yniuh tzintitica yn motenehua huey altepetl Ciudad Mexico Tenochtitlan yatlihtic yntultzallan ynacatzallan. yhuan mitohua motenehua tolli ycoyocayan acatl yco yocayan ynan yta itzonteco mochiuhtica ynmochi yxquich yc nohuian altepetl. yn yncuic Nueva España. yniuh quitotiaque. yniuh quitlallitiaque. ynin tlaltol. yhuan otechmachiyotiliaque. texamapan ynhuehuetque yllamatque. catca yn tocihuan yntocolhuan yntachtōhuan yn tomintonhuan yn topiptonhuan yn tochichicahuan yniuhqui nenonotzal mochiuhtih. y noteccahui cahuiltiaque. yn axcan tonnemi yn in techtiquiça auhayc polihuiza yc ylcahuiz. ynoquichihuaco ynoquitlallico yn intlillo yn intlapallo yn intenyō yn imitolloca. yn imilnamicoca" (1992, 4-5)
13. "ocaye yxquich ynic tamechonpehualtilia ynticneltia yn ticchicahua huehue tlahtolli huel Xiccaquican Xicanacan yn antepilhuan yn anteyxhuihuan. ynan Mexica ynan Tenochca. yhuan ymochintin yn çāço ac yehuantin. yn amotech quiçatihui yn yollizque. in nemitihui yn amo tlacamecayo huan yezque" (1992, 9-10).
14. The translator of Chimalpahin's chronicles, Rafael Tena, did not translate the term huehuetlatolli in Spanish, but he used it in his translation just like in the Nahuatl text. He did so throughout his translation.
15. Auh ynin huehuetlahtocanemiliztli in huehuetlahtocatenonotzalizamoxtlahtolli nica ye mihtoz ye motenehuaz in ye mopohuaz, ca amo çan çaçanilli ca amo çan tlapipictli amo çan tlahtlaquetzalli ynic tlatecpantli, ca mochi neltiliztli ca mochi omochiuh; ca yuh oquitotehuaque cs yuh oquiteneutehuaque yuh otechtlalilitehuaque y inhuehuetlahtol in huehuetque yllamatque, in tlahtoque in pipiltin Tzacualtitlan tenanca, in tocolhuan in tachtonhuan in tomintonhuan in topiptonhuan nican onemico, y iuhqui yn innenonotzal mochiuhtih yn otechcauiltiaque. Ynin altepenenonotzaliztlahtolli yhuan tlahtocatlacamecayonenonotzaliztlahtolli in tliltica ycuiliuhtoc machiyotoc amapan ayc polihuiz ayc ylcahuiz, mochipa pieloz. (1998, 2:284-296)
16. To some extent, Chimalpahin seems to have placed more emphasis on the painted books as he associated the huehuetlatolli much more with painting ("pintado o se pinto"), writing ("escrito"), paper ("papeles"), and black and white colors ("tinta negra y roja") rather than with speaking. Whenever Chimalpahin consulted pictorial books in his chronicle, he presented what he acquired from these books as huehuetlatolli.
17. Ca oconmanilique yehuantzitzin mochi yn onicteneuh huehueamatlacuiloli yhuan huehuelibro yn inan motenehua originales, yn itech onitlacopin yn onicyancuilli ye quimopielia, ca nel ymaxcatzin in huehuetlahtocatlacamecayotl, yn itech oniquixti ynin huehuetlahtolli y ye onmottaz. (2:304-306)

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