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THE MATERIAL WORD: *Indigenous Knowledge and Christian Texts in the Braidense Lectionary*

ABSTRACT: This article examines a rare sixteenth-century manuscript lectionary (Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9) containing Nahuatl translations of Biblical texts, long associated with Bernardino de Sahagún and the Franciscan evangelization project in New Spain. Through interdisciplinary analysis combining ethnohistory, art history, and conservation, the authors illuminate Indigenous roles in colonial knowledge production. The lectionary, in effect, offers a core sample of the intellectual labor of Indigenous peoples involved in its creation: They served as scribes and Biblical translators, as papermakers, and possibly as bookbinders. Unique among the corpus of Nahuatl lectionaries, this manuscript was created from two types of native paper, one for the main text and another for binding reinforcement. Considering the paper as the outcome of pre-Hispanic technologies allows us to expand the field of Indigenous knowledge manifested in the Christian book to include material knowledge, as well as theological and linguistic knowledge. This trinity of knowledge allows us to link the lectionary to Sahagún's Nahuatl sermonary (Newberry Library Ayer MS 1485) produced at the Colegio de Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco. The lectionary's preservation of neophytes' alphabet practice offers singular evidence of the pedagogical practices at the Colegio.

KEYWORDS: Franciscan order, book history, Indigenous studies, material culture, Nahuatl language, ethnohistory, missionary texts

Among the many manuscripts that were produced in mendicant scriptoria in sixteenth-century New Spain, those that have received the most attention by far are the so-called ethnographic works of friars such as Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún. While of obvious and inestimable value to historians, Sahagún's *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* (also known as the *Florentine Codex*) has shone so brightly in the historiography that it has left in the shadows much of the vast repertoire of Nahuatl-Christian writing composed or translated by Sahagún, his confreres, and their Indigenous collaborators. The textual output of these Franciscan and Nahua scholars spans many genres and includes linguistic resources such as grammars and dictionaries, but also catechisms, sermons, manuals for confession, lives of saints, devotional works, and religious dramas, all of which were intended to facilitate the indoctrination of the newly converted native peoples of New Spain. Collectively,

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these Nahuatl-Christian texts represent a critical resource for scholars across many disciplines.[1]

One of these Nahuatl texts, a lectionary, is in the collection of the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense in Milan and is referred to as the Braidense Lectionary hereafter.[2] While the manuscript first came to the attention of European scholars in the early nineteenth century, its location was unknown until 1988, and confirmed in 2022.[3] Mundy was able to examine the manuscript first hand in 2024, and the acquired images and videos of the work have been shared with and discussed by Leeming and Haude. Unlike other lectionaries, particularly those in Mexico, this manuscript has barely been studied, yet it presents three crucial features that have sparked this article. First, its production has long been associated with Bernardino de Sahagún, and it remains one of the least studied of all the projects associated with this eminent friar. Second, elements of its manufacture (binding and paper) further strengthen the connection to a Franciscan school, possibly Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco, where the *Florentine Codex* was produced. Third, it is the only known lectionary to have been made on native paper, unlike the European paper used for others. To set this lectionary in its historic context, the first section of this paper offers an ethnohistorical perspective on the Nahuatl lectionary, framing it as an artifact of Nahua–mendicant

1. Pioneering scholarship employing Nahuatl-Christian texts was conducted by Louise M. Burkhart in the 1980s and resulted in the publication of her seminal work *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1989). This work was followed by numerous articles, chapters, and additional books that deepened our understanding of what she referred to as the "Nahua-Christian moral dialogue"; see especially *Holy Wednesday: A Nahua Drama from Early Colonial Mexico* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), *Before Guadalupe: The Virgin Mary in Early Colonial Nahuatl Literature* (Albany: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, University at Albany, 2001), the *Nahuatl Theater* series (co-edited with Barry D. Sell; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004–9), and most recently, *Staging Christ's Passion in Eighteenth-Century Nahua Mexico* (Denver: University Press of Colorado, 2023). Others who have followed her lead include William F. Hanks, *Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), David Tavárez, *The Invisible War: Indigenous Devotions, Discipline, and Dissent in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), Mark Z. Christensen, *Nahua and Maya Catholicisms: Texts and Religion in Colonial Central Mexico and Yucatan* (Stanford: University of California Press; Berkeley: The Academy of American Franciscan History, 2013), Berenice Alcántara-Rojas, "La mala nueva: La llegada del cristianismo en sermones en lengua náhuatl de la primera mitad del siglo XVI" (*Iberoamericana*, XIX, 71, 2019, 77–98), and Ben Leeming, *Aztec Antichrist: Performing the Apocalypse in Early Colonial Mexico* (University Press of Colorado: Louisville, CO; Albany: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, 2022).

2. Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9.

3. The existence of the manuscript was confirmed by Heréndira Téllez Nieto in "Un desconocido manuscrito mexicano en la Biblioteca Nacional Braidense, Milán: el original Evangeliarium de fray Bernardino de Sahagún," *La Bibliofilia*, Anno CXXIV (2022), 455–65. Mario Alberto Sánchez Aguilera discussed it briefly in *Siguense unos sermones de dominicas y de sanctos en lengua mexicana: Ms. 1485, Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library*. Cultura Náhuatl. Fuentes 16 (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Coordinación de Humanidades, UNAM Chicago, 2022), 129. In 1988, Eloise Quiñones Keber listed the Milan lectionary BNB AH._X.9 under the heading "Evangelical Works" in her appendix to the volume she edited with J. Jorge Klor de Alva and H. B. Nicholson, *The Work of Bernardino de Sahagún: Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Mexico*, Studies on Culture and Society, Vol. 2 (Albany, NY: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, 1988), 344. The manuscript was also discussed in Heréndira Téllez Nieto and José Miguel Baños Baños, "Traducciones bíblicas en lenguas indoamericanas: El evangeliario náhuatl de la Biblioteca Capitular de Toledo (MSS 35-22)," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 113, no. 3–4 (2018): 656–89.

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collaboration in the production of Christian missionary texts, and questioning the manuscript's long association with Sahagún. The second section offers a codicological survey of the manuscript to reconstruct how such a manuscript came to exist. It includes a comparison of the Braidense Lectionary to Sahagún's Nahuatl sermonary (Newberry Library Ayer MS 1485; hereafter, the Newberry Sermonary), a collection of sermons composed around 1540 by Sahagún and his Nahua students, recently revealed to have been created of exceptionally rare maguey paper, to argue that it is the same material.[4] A third section discusses the pedagogical practices revealed by sheets of native paper included in the Braidense Lectionary's binding.

While Sahagún was a goad to our inquiry, when we brought together the perspectives of ethnohistory, art history, and conservation, what emerged over the course of our study of the book was the preeminence of the contributions of the (still largely unnamed) Indigenous contributors to the lectionary project. The lectionary, in effect, offers a core sample of the intellectual labor of Indigenous peoples involved in its production. As the sections below demonstrate, they served as scribes, having mastered new alphabetic forms; they worked as biblical translators, forging new theological concepts alongside the Franciscans; and they created its paper. This last contribution to the Christian book grew out of technological foundations of the pre-Hispanic period. This multidisciplinary study of the Braidense Lectionary allows us to document concrete contributions of Indigenous participants to what is often seen as a Franciscan-driven evangelization project and, in doing so, capture a fuller spectrum of Indigenous colonial knowledge production in the sixteenth century.

THE ETHNOHISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE NAHUATL LECTIONARY

Of all the categories of sixteenth-century Nahuatl-Christian writing, perhaps the least studied today are the lectionaries.[5] A lectionary is a type of liturgical book that contains all of the scriptural readings to be proclaimed during various rites, mainly the mass. In Europe, these scriptural excerpts (called "pericopes," from

4. Bernardino de Sahagún and others, Ayer MS 1485, Newberry Library, Chicago (hereafter "Newberry Sermonary"). See the Newberry blog post dated December 2, 2024, "Manuscript is Most Extensive Example of Maguey Paper in Existence" https://www.newberry.org/news/analysis-reveals-that-manuscript-is-most-extensive-example-of-pre-columbian-maguey-paper-in-existence.

5. Another understudied genre of Nahuatl-Christian writing with a large corpus of texts is sermons. However, recently these have begun to attract deserved attention. See, for instance, the project headed by Berenice Alcántara Rojas, "*Sermones en mexicano*. Catalogación, estudio y traducción de sermones en lengua náhuatl del siglo XVI de la Biblioteca Nacional de México" https://sermonesenmexicano.unam.mx/index.html, accessed Feb. 25, 2025. See also Mario Alberto Sánchez Aguilera's edition of the Newberry Sermonary, *Siguense unos sermones*, and Ben Leeming's English language edition of the same, *The Americas' First Sermons: The Nahuatl Sermonary of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún* (University of Utah Press, Forthcoming).

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the Greek for "extract")[6] were most commonly written and recited in Latin; however, in the mission field of New Spain, the friars deemed it necessary to have on hand a lectionary that rendered the scriptures in Nahuatl, the lingua franca of the early-colonial evangelization project.[7] Scriptural pericopes may have been read or chanted in Nahuatl in certain ritual contexts, but they were even more commonly used by the friars for the composition of sermons. Having a single authoritative version of these essential passages from scripture ensured that accurate and agreed-upon translations were used to explain Catholic doctrine to Nahuas in plain, orthodox language. Due to the polemical nature of biblical translation into vernacular languages in the early Modern world, Nahuatl lectionaries were enveloped in controversy in the latter half of the sixteenth century, and numerous manuscripts were confiscated and destroyed. The fact that as many as 30 copies survive today hints at the number that once existed, and gives testimony to the critical role they played in the life of the "Indian church" of New Spain.[8]

As with its medieval cousins, the Braidense Lectionary is organized according to the Catholic Church's annual liturgical cycle, providing for each mass one reading from the New Testament epistles and a second reading from the Gospels (Figure 1).[9] Readings are introduced by an incipit (from the Latin meaning "it begins"), which consists of the first few words of the pericope in Latin. Lectionaries contained the same pericopes also recorded in missals (used by priests to officiate the mass) and breviaries (used in reciting the Liturgy of the Hours). Together, these three books were the most important liturgical texts of the Catholic Church and would have been deemed essential in any Catholic ritual setting anywhere in the world at the beginning of the sixteenth century. However, instead of Latin, the text of the Braidense Lectionary renders the entire pericope in sixteenth-century "church Nahuatl."[10] Together with the decision to record these translations on sheets of native paper, these characteristics

6. "Pericope." *Oxford Reference*. Accessed Jan. 2, 2025. https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100317437.

7. There were vernacular-language lectionaries. One of the most popular in Spain—and therefore most relevant to the Nahuatl lectionary—was that of Franciscan friar Ambrosio de Montesino (or Montesinos), *Epístolas y Evangelios por todo el año con sus doctrinas y sermones*, published in 1512, 1527, and 1549. Leeming has conducted a brief preliminary study of this publication to see whether it may have been used as a source for the Nahuatl lectionary. Results have been inconclusive; further study is ongoing.

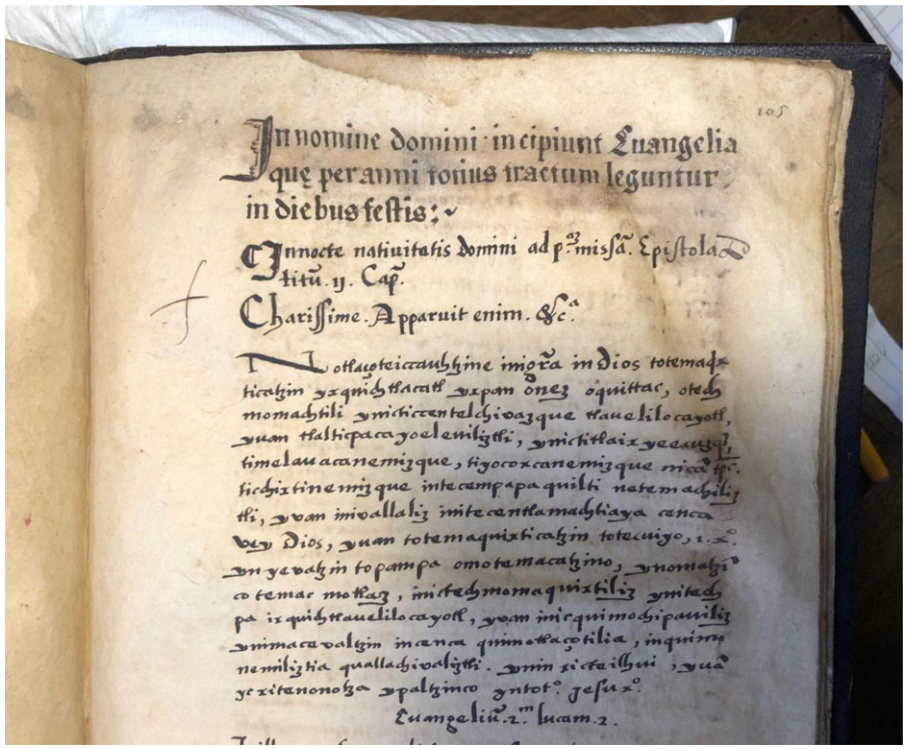
8. Téllez Nieto, "Un desconocido manuscrito," 456. There was at least one lectionary that, remarkably, made it through the licensing and printing process. It is the voluminous work of Franciscan friar Maturino Gilberti, *Diálogo de doctrina christiana, en la lengua d[e] Mechuaca[n]* (1559). The first section of this large, folio-sized book (f. 3v to f. 244v) is a lengthy catechism in Purépecha. The second part (f. 245r–295v) is a lectionary providing Epistle and Gospel readings for Sundays in the entire church calendar with short sermons for each reading.

9. There are readings from the Old Testament, but almost never on Sundays. Instead, these were reserved for weekday, or ferial, masses and the feasts of saints.

10. The term "Church Nahuatl" is used by Barry David Sell in "Friars, Nahuas, and Books: Language and Expression in Colonial Nahuatl Publications." PhD diss. (University of California Los Angeles, 1993), 83. Adapting the term developed by William Hanks for Yucatec Mayan, we might also refer to this register of colonial Nahuatl as "Nahuatl *reducido*." See Hanks, *Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

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FIGURE 1
Detail of page (f. 105r of the Braidense Lectionary)



Source: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, f. 105r. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

foreground the Indigenous nature of this early artifact of the Catholic mission in the Americas.

The contents of the Braidense Lectionary were surveyed by Jesús Bustamante García in his important 1990 study.[11] However, his analysis was not based on a first-hand appraisal of the manuscript, but rather on Bernardino Biondelli's 1858 publication titled *Evangelarium, Epistolarium, et Lectionarium Aztecum*, in which Biondelli provided a transcription of the Braidense Lectionary.[12] At the time Bustamante conducted his investigation, most scholars, including Bustamante,

11. Jesús Bustamante García, *Fray Bernardino de Sahagún: una revisión crítica de los manuscritos y de su proceso de composición* (México: UNAM, 1990), 118–21.

12. Bernardino Biondelli, *Evangeliarium, epistolarium et lectionarium Aztecum sive Mexicanum ex antiquo codice Mexicano nuper reperto depromptum* (Typis Jos. Bernardoni Qm. Johannis, 1858).

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assumed it had been lost. Nevertheless, his description is very thorough, and so the manuscript's contents will only briefly be treated here.

The Braidense Lectionary's pericopes are divided into four sections, each one beginning with a title in Latin. They are as follows:

> Part I: *Sequuntur co[m]munes epistole de apostolis*, "Here follow the common Epistles of the Apostles" (1r–18v). These are texts from the New Testament Epistles that could be read on any occasion in the church year.
>
> Part II: *Incipiu[n]t eva[n]gelia ferialia cu[m] epistolis*, "Here begin the ferial Gospels with Epistles" (18v–73v). These are Gospel and Epistle readings that were intended for weekday masses (ferias).
>
> Part III: Incipiunt ep[isto]l[a]e et euangelia d[omi]nicalib[us] officiis congrue[n]tia q[ue] per an[n]i toti[us] discursu[m] legu[n]tur traducta in li[n]gua[m] mexicana[m] "Here begin the Epistles and Gospels appropriate for Sunday services which are read throughout the course of the whole year, translated into the Mexican language [Nahuatl]" (74r–104v). These are Epistle and Gospel readings for Sunday ("dominical") masses.
>
> Part IV: *In nomine domini incipiunt Evangelia qu[a]e per anni totius tractum leguntur in diebus festis*, "In the name of the Lord, here begin the Gospels which are read throughout the course of the whole year on feast days" (105r–125v). These are Gospel readings for special celebrations in the church calendar.

Intriguingly, there is a two-page handwritten table of contents at the beginning of the manuscript that reorders the four sections as follows: Part III (Sunday readings), Part II (ferial readings), and Part IV (readings for feast days). Part I (the commons of the Apostles) is not listed. This reordering brings the four parts of the Braidense Lectionary into conformity with the standard arrangement of lectionaries, which, as with sermonaries, tend to start at the beginning of the church year with Advent. Presumably, someone created this table of contents for the manuscript as a way of making its contents more accessible to the friars consulting it. As the physical evidence presented later in this essay reveals, the quire structure confirms that the lectionary's parts still adhere to their original order, which means the groups of readings were intentionally laid out in the order described above. This is an odd arrangement. Most of the Nahuatl lectionary manuscripts examined by Leeming begin with the First Sunday of Advent, as do European lectionaries and missals, in conformity with long-standing medieval tradition.[13] Why the Braidense Lectionary was not arranged

13. Newberry Library Ayer MSS 1467, 1466, and 1487 (MSS 1466 and 1487 are Gates reproductions of lectionaries whose whereabouts are currently unknown), Biblioteca Capitular de Toledo MS 35–22, British Foreign Bible Society (Cambridge) MS 375, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection JGI.981, and Biblioteca Nacional de

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in the expected order, beginning with the readings for the first Sunday of Advent, remains a mystery.

The origins of the Nahuatl lectionary trace back to the very earliest years of the Roman Catholic mission in the lands of the dethroned Aztec, or Mexicah, *tlahtohqueh* (speakers, i.e., rulers). Mendicant friars, especially the eschatologically minded Franciscans, felt a great urgency to communicate the Word of God to Indigenous Americans before the arrival of the End Times, which many of the friars believed to be imminent.[14] To effectively do so, they deemed accurate translations of scripture in Indigenous languages to be of the utmost necessity. It is unlikely that any of the friars ever considered tackling the mammoth task of translating the entire Bible into an Indigenous language since this was expressly forbidden in Catholic territories; it would be over 100 years later in Protestant New England that John Eliot and native Massachusett linguists would first accomplish that feat in the Americas.[15] Instead, what New Spain's Catholic missionaries required was a lectionary consisting of translations of the scriptural texts that were read or sung at mass and which were employed in the composition of sermons.

Catholic liturgy was then (as it is today) infused with and ordered by scripture. Catholic tradition stretching back to the times of the early Church assigned scriptural passages to be read at important feasts such as Christmas, Lent, and Easter, and eventually at every Sunday and weekday mass of the year. Since the time of Charlemagne, these readings had been gathered into liturgical books such as the lectionary but also the breviary and the missal.[16] In Europe, these books recorded scripture in the standard Latin of the Vulgate Bible and, less commonly, vernacular languages. Readings were proclaimed in Latin by a lector from the pulpit during mass. Scriptural passages were also chanted in Latin during mass since many of the hymns and prayers took their texts from the Bible. Because the vast majority of the laity did not comprehend Latin, it fell to the preachers of sermons to explain the readings in vernacular languages for the edification of the faithful. In the medieval tradition, the sermon typically followed the reading of the Gospel, as it does to this day.

In New Spain, worshippers of European descent would have continued to hear scripture declared in Latin during mass just as their forebears had in Old Spain.

México MS 1492 all begin with Advent. The other manuscripts are missing their beginning folios, making it difficult to ascertain whether they began with Advent sermons. However, most of them appear to be Sunday readings, which would suggest they did begin with Advent.

14. Ben Leeming, *Aztec Antichrist: Performing the Apocalypse in Early Colonial Mexico* (Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado and Albany, NY: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, 2022), Chapter 2 "American Apocalypse"; Mark Z. Christensen, *Aztec and Maya Apocalypses* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2022).

15. For an important study of Eliot's translation practices, see Richard W. Cogley, *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians Before King Philip's War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

16. Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources* (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1986), 350.

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However, the crowds of native peoples who were assembled on Sundays would have heard the words of scripture, or *teotlahtolli* (sacred words or Word of God), proclaimed in their own language by a friar in the context of sermons, which were delivered in Nahuatl before the celebration of mass.[17] Roman Catholic sermons at the time drew heavily on the authority of scripture in the delivery of its message. Therefore, having an approved Nahuatl translation of the mass readings was an indispensable resource for composers of Nahuatl sermons, such as Sahagún.

The close relationship between sermons and lectionaries is readily apparent in the earliest surviving collection of Nahuatl sermons, the Newberry Sermonary (Chicago, Newberry Library, Ayer MS 1485), composed by Sahagún and his students at the Colegio de Santa Cruz Tlatelolco between the years *ca*. 1538 and 1540.[18] As with most lectionaries, sermonaries such as Sahagún's are ordered according to the church calendar, with one sermon written for each Sunday of the liturgical year beginning with Advent, as well as numerous sermons for the feast days of important saints. Each sermon is composed around a thema (from the Latin for "theme"), which Sahagún selected from one of the two New Testament readings—typically the Gospel—that were to be read at mass that particular day. For example, Sahagún's sermon for the Second Sunday of Lent, "*D[omi]nica 2ª in quadrages[s]ima*," begins by citing the incipit: "*Domine, bonum est nos hic esse*, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here'" (Figure 2).[19] This is followed by a citation indicating that the pericope is taken from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 17, a text which contains the story of Jesus' transfiguration. Turning to the Braidense Lectionary, we find under the heading for the Second Sunday of Lent the same reference to Matthew 17, as expected (Figure 3). This is followed by the incipit in Latin: "*In illo t[em]p[or]e assumpsit iesus petru[m] et jacobu[m]*, 'At that time, Jesus took Peter and James,'"[20] which in turn is followed by the Nahuatl translation of verses 1–9 of Matthew 17. From this example, we can see that lectionaries provided preachers such as Sahagún translations of the church-mandated passage for the Second Sunday of Lent (Matthew 17:1–9), and that he

17. Regarding whether these translations were read aloud during mass, either in place of Latin or in addition to it, the evidence is inconclusive. Lara states, without citing sources, "As far as we can tell from similar practice elsewhere, the priest would go to the pulpit, the place for vernacular preaching, and would read either the Nahuatl Epistle or Gospel for the day or just the Gospel, with no ceremonies. This allowed the preacher to comment on what was just heard." *Christian Texts for Aztecs: Art and Liturgy in Colonial Mexico* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 300, n. 85. However, the sermons of Ayer MS 1485 contain language that suggests the pericopes were read in Latin during the mass. This will be explained in the paragraphs that follow.

18. Chicago, Newberry Library Ayer MS 1485. Although the sermons were first composed no later than 1540, the manuscript held by the Newberry was redacted *ca*. 1548. The sermons were edited in two periods by Sahagún himself, one around the time of the manuscript's manufacture (*ca*. 1548) and the second in 1563. See Bernardino de Sahagún and Sánchez Aguilera, *Siguense unos sermons*, 79–81, and Leeming, *The Americas' First Sermons*.

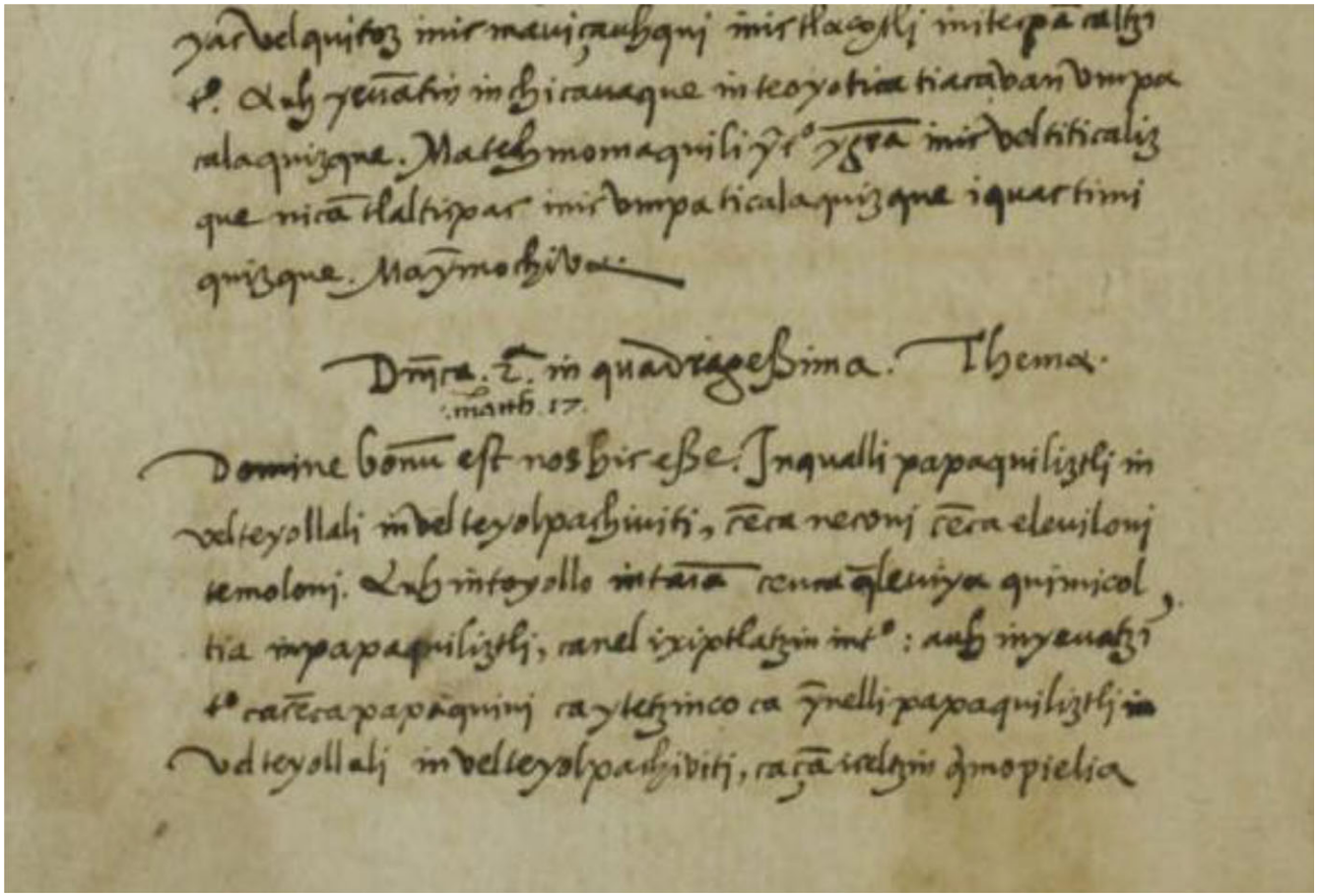
19. Matthew 17:4. Chicago, Newberry Library Ayer MS 1485, f. 70.

20. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, MS AH._X.9, f. 81v.

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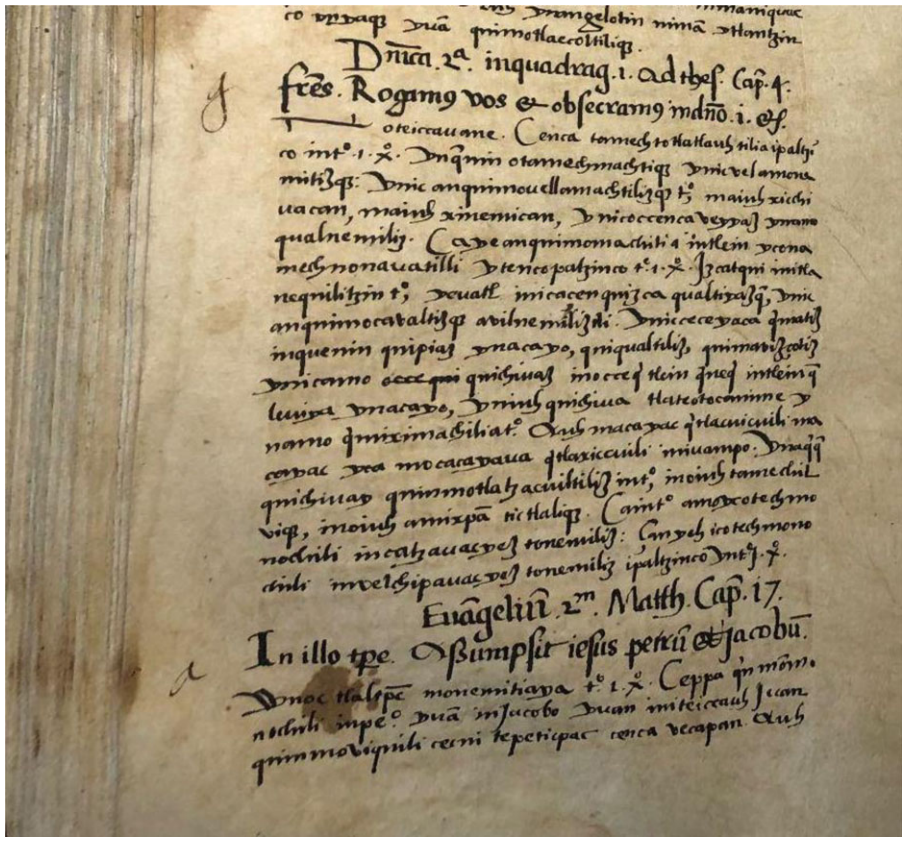
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Figure 2
Detail of the page (f. 70 of Ayer Sermonary)



Source: Bernardino de Sahagún and collaborators, Sermon for the Second Sunday of Lent, Ayer Sermonary, *ca*. 1540–63, f. 70, detail. Newberry Library, Chicago, Ayer MS 1485.

FIGURE 3
A Gospel reading from Matthew 17 at the bottom of the page



Source: Unknown creators, Readings for the Second Sunday of Lent, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, f. 81v. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, MS AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

in turn chose one particular verse (verse 4) as the thema around which he would construct his sermon for that particular Sunday.

Many of the sermons composed under Sahagún's supervision reveal a close intertextual relationship between the sermonary and the lectionary. The fact that sixteenth-century Nahuas would have heard the Sunday sermon *before* they heard the Epistle and Gospel readings in mass explains why Sahagún frequently employed expressions such as the following in his sermons:

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Auh in ipa[n] eva[n]g[eli]o in axca[n] mitoa ipa[n] missa,

("In the Gospel that today is said in mass . . . ")

Auh ini[n] ca itech mana in eva[n]g[eli]o yn axca[n] mitoa ipa[n] missa,

("This is taken from the Gospel which today is said at mass . . . ")[21]

Additionally, to ensure Nahuas would understand the Gospel when it was read during the mass (most likely in Latin), every sermon makes sure to translate the Latin thema for the audience. This typically happens after the sermon's *introductio* (introduction), in the *Prima Pars* (First Part). Referring again to the sermon for the Second Sunday of Lent, Nahuas would have heard the thema repeated in Latin, "*Domine, bonum est nos hic esse*." Then, the preacher would continue, declaring, "*Ini[n] teotlatolli nopilhuane ca ipa[n] icuiliuhtoc in Santo Eva[n]g[eli]o, in axca[n] mitoa ipa[n] missa*" ("These sacred words, O my children, lie written in the Holy Gospel which today is said at mass").[22] This would have been followed by the formulaic expression, "*auh inic monavaitoa q[uihtoz]n[equi]*" ("In the Nahuatl language they mean"), which in turn would be followed by the Nahuatl translation of the text.[23] While in some sermons only the thema is translated, in other sermons Sahagún and his Nahua students went on to translate more or less literally the entire pericope of the Gospel reading. This practice surely stretched the boundaries of what was deemed acceptable for the translation of scripture at a time in New Spain when leadership of the church was shifting from Franciscan to Dominican leadership and missionary writings in native languages were falling under greater scrutiny.[24] These brief examples illustrate the intertextuality of sermonaries and lectionaries. Much fertile territory remains exploring this intertextual relationship more deeply by carefully comparing the translations of scripture in lectionaries such as the Braidense's with translations that were incorporated into sermons, such as Sahagún's.[25]

21. Chicago, Newberry Library, Ayer MS 66, f. 70.

22. Chicago, Newberry Library, Ayer MS 1485, f. 71.

23. These formulaic expressions, repeated throughout the entirety of the Newberry Sermonary, suggest that priests declaimed the Epistle and Gospel readings in Latin during masses attended by Nahuas. Whether the Nahuatl translations of the readings were recited aloud in other contexts remains unknown.

24. For a thorough discussion of this climate and the impact on missionary writing, see Martin Austin Nesvig, *Ideology and Inquisition: The World of the Censors in Early Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

25. This has begun to be explored by Sánchez Aguilera in the Introductory Study to his 2022 publication of the Newberry Sermonary, and in Pilar Máynez, Mercedes Montes de Oca, and Julio Alfonso Pérez Luna, "'The Beginning of Times' in Two Texts of Preachment from New Spain (Sixteenth Century)" in *Missionary Linguistic Studies from Mesoamerica to Patagonia* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 3–33. At the time of this article's publication, Leeming is engaged in similar work.

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Surviving sources, mostly Franciscan in affiliation, make it clear that the Nahuatl lectionary was deemed to be of the utmost necessity for the friars' work. This monumental task of creating one was likely begun as early as the 1530s, perhaps by the Frenchman Arnaud de Bassac or by Arnaldo de Bassacio, who Mendieta tells us "translated the Epistles and Gospels that are sung in the church throughout the whole year."[26] Sources tell us that fray Alonso de Molina, perhaps the greatest *nahuatlahto* of all, also translated the Epistles and Gospels, as did fray Bernardino himself according to virtually all Sahagún scholars. Other sources underscore the importance of this particular translation project. In the 1560s, the anonymous author of the *Códice franciscano* included the Nahuatl lectionary among several books "very necessary for the education of any Christian nation."[27] He states that, in the absence of an authoritative print edition, handwritten copies of the lectionary were circulating among the friars, a concerning reality "since not all copyists are good scribes or understand what they write . . . [and] those who preach from them can make many mistakes."[28] Other documents give similar testimony. In the 1570s, the Holy Office sought to suppress the circulation of translations of scripture in the vernacular Indigenous languages but expressed concern that this might impact the friars' work. In a questionnaire circulated around the year 1577, the Holy Office sought the opinion of a number of respected friars about the impact of suppressing the Nahuatl lectionary, which by that time was well known to all.[29] Fray Juan de la Cruz, a member of the Dominicans, an order known to be especially conservative about the translation of scripture and a harsh critic of the Franciscans' translation projects, nevertheless responded unequivocally:

> From the prohibition of the Epistles and Gospels will result great diminishment in the doctrine of the Indians and in the sermons because some things will be said for others and poorly said because not all know the language perfectly, and thus I say precisely that the Epistles and Gospels are very necessary.[30]

Finally, the number of handwritten copies of the Nahuatl lectionary that survive to this day is further evidence of the central importance that this particular kind

26. "*Tradujo las epístolas y evangelios que se cantan en la Iglesia por todo el año*" (translation by Leeming); Jeronimo de Mendieta, *Historia eclesiástica indiana* (Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 2 Vols. Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1973), Vol. 2, 118.

27. "Muy necesarios para la erudición de cualquiera nación cristiana" (translation by Leeming). Francisco Fernández del Castillo, *Libros y libreros en el siglo XVI* (México: Tip, 1914), 60.

28. Fernández del Castillo, *Libros y libreros*, 61.

29. The questionnaire is reproduced in Fernández del Castillo, *Libros y libreros*, 81–5.

30. "*De la prohibición de las epístolas y evangelios resultará grande diminución en la doctrina de los indios y en los sermones porque se dirán unas cosas por otras y mal dichas porque no todos saben perfectamente la lengua y así digo precisamente que las epístolas y evangelios son muy necesarios*" (translation by Leeming). Fernández del Castillo, *Libros y libreros*, 85. Apparently, Franciscan translations of the lectionary readings were being used in Dominican convents. See Bustamante, *Fray Bernardino de Sahagún*, 138–40.

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of auxiliary preaching aid had to the friars. Leeming's personal list of Nahuatl-language lectionaries holds 18 items; Heréndira Téllez-Nieto's "Philología bíblica plurilingüe" project reportedly has more than 30 items in its database, in addition to lectionaries in the Otomí and Purépecha languages.[31] In terms of "production value," these range from very rough, hastily copied texts to superb manuscripts such as the Biblioteca Capitular de Toledo's MS 35–22, whose ornate initial capitals, red-letter headings, and pristine lettering make it one of the most beautiful manuscripts to have been produced in sixteenth-century New Spain's mendicant scriptoria.

It has been the near-universal assessment of scholars since the nineteenth century that it was Sahagún himself who oversaw the project of creating a Nahuatl lectionary. This connection began as early as the 1820s, when the Braidense Lectionary was acquired by Giacomo Costantino Beltrami from an unnamed convent library in Mexico. In his 1830 publication *Le Mexique*, Beltrami breathlessly declared, "Behold my discovery . . . the very elegant *POSTIL ON THE SUNDAY EPISTLES AND GOSPELS* . . . of the renowned monk, Bernardino de Sahagún."[32] Soon thereafter, when Biondelli issued his publication of Beltrami's manuscript in 1858, he accepted Sahagún's authorship unquestioningly. In the late twentieth century, this association was further strengthened by Bustamante in his authoritative study of Sahagún's manuscripts. Finally and most recently, Téllez-Nieto channeled the spirit of Beltrami in a 2022 article that announced the discovery of "An Unknown Manuscript in the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Milan: The Original *Evangeliarium* of friar Bernardino de Sahagún."[33]

But *did* Sahagún and his team compose a Nahuatl lectionary? And if so, was it *this* lectionary? Sahagún's association with the Nahuatl lectionary derives from a number of statements the friar himself made in the 1560s and 1570s that were repeated later by Franciscan chroniclers. However, none of these testimonies clearly declare Sahagún wrote a lectionary per se; rather, they indicate he composed a "*postilla*" "on" or "about the Epistles and Gospels." For example, in 1564, in a summary of his doctrinal writings, Sahagún stated "the fourth book of this volume was meant to be a declaration or *postilla* of all the Epistles and

31. Téllez Nieto, "Un desconocido manuscrito," 456. In addition to lectionaries in Nahuatl, Otomí, and Purépecha, there was apparently another in the Mixtec language. See Joaquín García Icazbalceta, *Bibliografía mexicana del siglo XVI: catálogo razonado de libros impresos en México de 1539 á 1600, con biografías de autores y otras ilustraciones* (Mexico: Lib. de Andrade y Morales, 1886), 152.

32. "*C'est précisément la una muy élégante Postila de las Epistolas y evangeles dominicales : et voilà ma trouvaille*" Giacomo Costantino Beltrami, *Le Mexique* (Paris: Delaunay Libraire, 1830), II: 79.179; cited in Bustamante 1990:92. Translation assistance from DeepL https://www.deepl.com/en/translator.

33. Téllez Nieto, "Un desconocido manuscrito," 455–65.

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Gospels of the Sundays throughout the year."[34] Later, in 1576, when writing the prologue to Book 10 of the *Historia general*, Sahagún referenced "the *postilla* on the Epistles and Gospels of the Sundays throughout the year that I made."[35] Gerónimo Mendieta, Juan de Torquemada, and Agustín Vetancurt each make statements similar to Sahagún's own.[36] While it seems clear that Sahagún composed a "*postilla*," there remains confusion about what precisely this text was and the nature of its relationship to the lectionary. Some have suggested that it refers to a text, now lost, that was a commentary or exegesis on the lectionary readings[37]; however, most have concluded that Sahagún's *postilla* refers to the Nahuatl translations of the Epistle and Gospel readings, in other words, the lectionary.[38] However, until the precise nature of this *postilla* is worked out, Sahagún's connection with the Nahuatl lectionary remains tentative.

As for his connection to the Braidense Lectionary in particular, there is simply not enough evidence to unequivocally link the manuscript to Sahagún, despite the declarations made by investigators. Just as the historical evidence referenced above fails to clarify the picture, our careful examination of the manuscript itself also fails to yield a clear connection to Sahagún. Most notably, the manuscript is completely lacking the handwritten glosses that are the hallmark of texts he edited, such as the Newberry Sermonary (Ayer 1485) and the *Primeros Memoriales*.[39] However, one cannot fail to recognize the physical similarities between the Braidense Lectionary and the Newberry Sermonary, a text that is unquestionably the product of Sahagún's circle. These similarities will be explored in more detail in what follows. For now, the best we can say is that the connection between Sahagún and the Braidense Lectionary remains tentative, an interpretive stance that we believe makes room for a much-needed

34. "*El quarto libro deste volumen avía de ser una declaración o postilla de todas las epístolas y evangelios de las dominicas de todo el año.*" (Bernardino de Sahagún, *Coloquios y doctrina christiana*, edited and translated by Miguel León-Portilla (México: UNAM, 1986), 75). Translation by Leeming.

35. "*La postilla sobre las epistolas y euangelios de los domingos de todo el año que hize*." (Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introductions and Indices*, edited and translated by Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson, Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1982), 73. Translation by Leeming.

36. Geronimo de Mendieta, *Historia eclesiástica indiana* (Biblioteca de Autores Españoles. 9 vols. Ediciones Atlas, 1973), Vol. 2, 119, 186; Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquía Indiana*, cited in Sahagún 1986:34; Agustín de Vetancurt, *Teatro Mexicano*, also cited in Sahagún 1986:34.

37. For example, Miguel León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún: First Anthropologist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 145.

38. This is the conclusion of Jesús Bustamante García in *Fray Bernardino de Sahagún*, 115. Bustamante also suggests that the "*postilla*" may have collectively referred to the sermonary and the lectionary (113). This conclusion is also followed by Sánchez Aguilera, *Siguense unos sermones*, 64–5.

39. Compare the relatively clean pages of the Braidense Lectionary with those of the Newberry Sermonary (Ayer MS 1485), the margins of which are filled with additions made by Sahagún around 1548 and again in 1563. See Leeming, *The Americas' First Sermons*. Sahagún's handwritten glosses in the Newberry Sermonary can be viewed online at the World Digital Library website, https://www.loc.gov/item/2021668112/. Additional important examples of texts edited by Sahagún's are the so-called *Codices Matritenses*, available online at the Biblioteca Digital Mexicana, http://bdmx.mx/documento/galeria/bernardino-sahagun-codices-matritenses.

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reconsideration of the role of Nahua scribes, bookmakers, and translators in early colonial Mexican textual production.

There *is*, however, one Franciscan friar who can be associated with the manuscript, whose name appears in a note that brings us to the question of dating the manuscript. Written on the back of the folio facing the first page of the lectionary's text, this note reads, "*Esta al uso de f[ray] Di[ego] de Canizares [sic] de los Menores*." Completing this statement, a second hand wrote "*desde el año de 15XX*," with the last two letters too blurred to confidently interpret[40] (Figure 4). Beltrami declared Fray Diego de Cañizares (d. 1597) "one of the companions and the great friend of Sahagún," and insisted on reading the note's date as "1532."[41] Of course, such an early date is inconceivable since Sahagún only arrived in New Spain in 1529, and in 1532 his confrere Cañizares would have only been 7 years old.[42] However, it makes sense that the manuscript was used by Cañizares since, according to Mendieta, he was "a confessor and preacher to Spaniards and Indians in the Mexican language [Nahuatl] and has a gift for all of it."[43] It has already been discussed how essential the Nahuatl lectionary was to friars preaching in Nahuatl; in fact, Cañizares may have had to regularly fend off other friars who would likely have also wanted to have access to the text. Recently, Andrew Laird has suggested reading the date as "1552," which we consider to be much more likely.[44] This aligns with Bustamante's carefully reasoned assertion of a *terminus post-quem* of 1561 for the Braidense Lectionary.[45] We see no reason to question the hypothesis that the Braidense Lectionary was composed in the decades of the 1540s or 1550s.

While Sahagún's role in composing the Braidense Lectionary is unclear, it is certain that a central role was played by a Nahua scholar or scholars. In this

40. Together these statements read, "It is of the use of f[ray] Di[ego] de Cañizares of the [Order of the Friars] Minor" "since the year 15XX," f. 0v. Andrew Laird, *Aztec Latin: Renaissance Learning and Nahuatl Traditions in Early Colonial Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 164.

41. "*Un des compagnons et le grand ami de Sahagún*" (translation assisted by DeepL). Beltrami, *Le mexique*, 173. I have not found any evidence corroborating the statement that Sahagún and Cañizares were "great friends." However, it is certain that the two knew each other since they were both alive and active at the same time in and around the environs of Tlatelolco and Mexico City.

42. In his *Memoriales*, Mendieta states that Cañizares was 45 years old in 1570 when Mendieta composed his report of New Spain's Franciscan friars. See Carlos Sempat Assadourian, "Memoriales de Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta," *Historia Mexicana* 37, no. 3 (January–March 1988): 397.

43. "*Confesor y predicador de espanoles y de yndios en la lengua mexicana y en todo ello tiene gracia*" (Leeming translation). Sempat Assadourian, "Memoriales," 397.

44. Andrew Laird, *Aztec Latin*, 164.

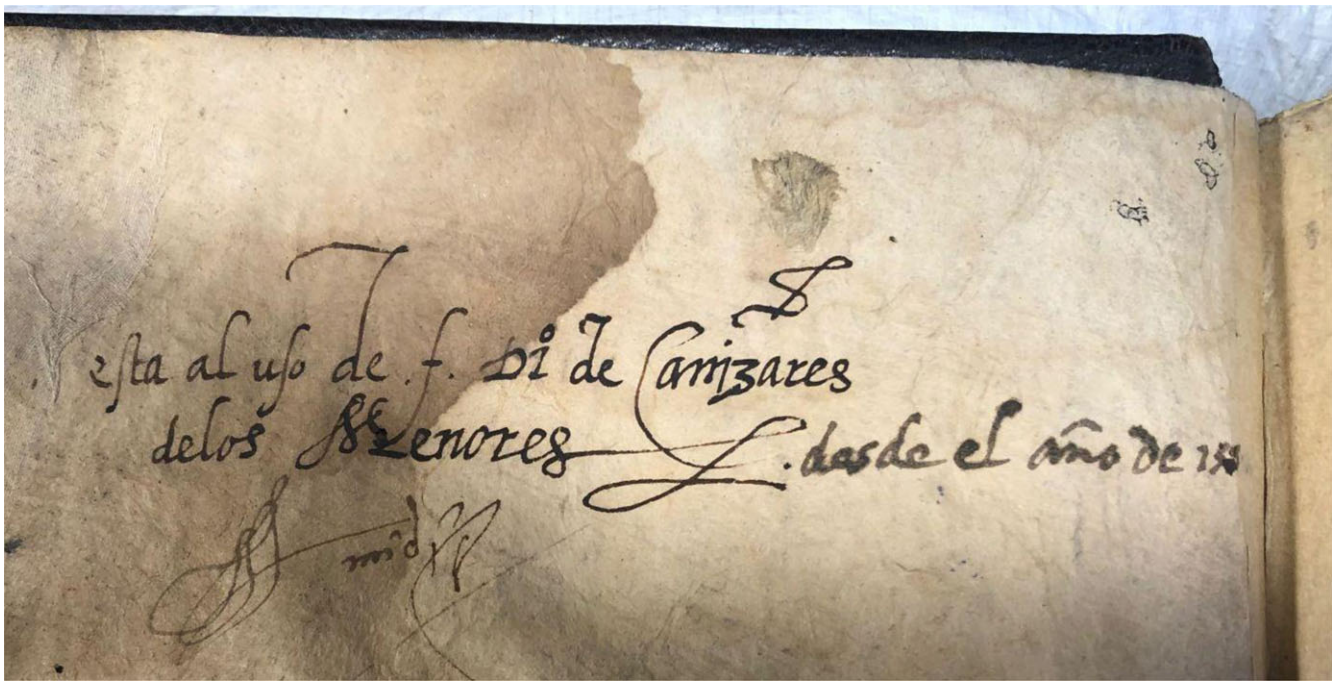
45. The date of 1561 is associated with two important copies of the Nahuatl lectionary, one of which is Biblioteca Nacional de México MS 1492. The second is Biblioteca Capitular de Toledo MS 35–22, which was brought to Spain in 1561 and also contains a copy of the Nahuatl lectionary. The relationship between the Braidense Lectionary and these two copies has not been thoroughly explored, so it is possible that the Braidense Lectionary text dates to after 1561. Further support for this date is discussed by Bustamante and has to do with the supposed pre-Tridentine nature of the Braidense Lectionary's pericopes, another as-of-yet unverified assertion. See Bustamante *op. cit*.

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FIGURE 4

Annotation showing the name of the Friar Diego de Cañizares, and the likely date 1552



Source: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, f. 0v. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

regard, we are fortunate to have the remarkable statement of Nahua Latinist don Pablo Nazareo of Xaltocan on the matter. Nazareo was a member of the Nahua nobility and the son-in-law of Moteuczoma's brother, don Juan Axayaca.[46] Nazareo was educated at the Colegio de Santa Cruz and went on to become the college's rector. Following the conquest, Nazareo's family, as so many other Nahua lineages did, struggled to maintain ancient privileges and territories. Therefore, in 1556 Nazareo took up the pen and, drawing on his classical education at the Franciscan institution, composed an elegant letter to the Spanish monarch, Philip II, petitioning him for the alleviation of his family's suffering. Impressing upon the king the extent of his devotion to the mission of the friars, Nazareo wrote that he "took the trouble" to translate "a very large number" of texts into Nahuatl to assist the friars in their duties. One of these was a lectionary, about which Nazareo left this remarkable statement of authorship, "I toiled to the utmost night and day, to translate the Gospels and Epistles into my mother tongue to be read in church over the course of the whole year."[47] Claims of authorship of religious texts by native people are exceedingly rare in the sources since ecclesiastical authorities did not deem native people mature enough Christians to undertake such tasks; this is why most religious texts bear the name of friars such as Sahagún, Molina, Bautista, etc. However, as ethnohistorians have increasingly argued, it is no longer tenable to refer to the likes of Sahagún as the sole author of such works, which is why scholars now take pains to acknowledge native participation, even if specific native writers cannot be cited. Although it is currently not possible to link Nazareo directly to the Braidense Lectionary, perhaps future scholars will be able to reconstruct his role in the rendering of its pericopes in elegant Church Nahuatl.

With this ethnohistorical survey complete, we now turn to evidence drawn from the physical artifact itself, offering the perspective of an art historian and a conservator to further fill out our understanding of this manuscript.

MANUSCRIPTS AS BUNDLED TECHNOLOGIES

In recent years, most historians and anthropologists have focused on the new world of intercultural ideas produced by evangelization in New Spain, drawing largely on written texts or the iconography of images. But manuscripts are complex objects in and of themselves, never dependent on one maker creating them ex novo. Instead, the successful creation of a manuscript such as the

46. Andrew Laird, "Nahuas and Caesars: Classical Learning and Bilingualism in Post-Conquest Mexico; An Inventory of Latin Writings by Authors of the Native Nobility," *Classical Philology*, 109, no. 2 (April 2014), 160.

47. "*Sic noctes, diesque summopere laboraui vt que per anni totius discursum in ecclesia leguntur euangelia et epistolas in linguam maternam traducerem.*" Quoted in Laird, *Aztec Latin*, 162. Translation by Laird.

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Braidense Lectionary is the outcome of a triad of technologies (papermaking, alphabetic writing, and bookbinding) that have been developed over time, and in some cases, millennia. Two of these bundles of technological knowledge were imported from Europe, and one was native to the Americas. To harness all of them into a single book required a high degree of social coordination between men and women who possessed the needed knowledge of the technologies that were eventually integrated, like fibers into a braid, into the manuscript. While information about these processes is scarce in the historical archive, books and manuscripts such as the Braidense Lectionary are their own "archive of origin" and preserve, through the graphic marks on their pages, the choices of paper, and the structure of binding, the tale of their creation. In this section, we plumb the physical evidence that the creators of the Braidense Lectionary left behind to reconstruct that tale of creation. While this analysis focuses on just one manuscript, our working hypothesis is that the physical features of the larger corpus of lectionaries and other works, such as sermonaries, will show patterns and relationships among members of the corpus in addition to, and perhaps beyond, the textual evidence itself.

While the content of the book was indebted to an intercultural practice of evangelization, the material of the book is indebted to a native tradition. Indeed, the first technology was its paper, and in this case, the native paper to make the Braidense Lectionary was locally made in New Spain. In the pre- and post-contact eras, two types of native Mesoamerican paper were manufactured, *amatl* and *metl* (maguey). Amatl can be documented to the beginning of the first millennium, and it is the most common of the two types of paper in surviving manuscripts.[48] Amatl was made from the inner fibers of a tree, any one of the subspecies of the *Moraceae* family.[49] These trees grew in cooler and wetter climates than did agave, which was used in the manufacture of maguey paper. To make amatl paper, the inner fibers of the tree were cleaned, soaked, and then pounded into sheets with specially made stones often carved with vertical striations.[50] Maguey paper, or metl, derives from the inner fibers of agave leaves, and the plants used for this paper grew in arid regions where trees used to make amatl did not. The technologies were somewhat distinct, as the inner fibers of the agave leaves were prepared by cooking, rotting, or mashing before pounding

48. Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1977); Bruce F. Benz, Lorenza López Mestas C., and Jorge Ramos de la Vega, "Organic Offerings, Paper, and Fibers from the Huitzilapa Shaft Tomb, Jalisco, Mexico," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 17, no. 2 (2006): 283–96.

49. Victor Wolfgang Von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers* (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1944), 37–8.

50. Francisco Hernández, *Historia de las plantas de Nueva España*, ed. Isaac Ochoterena and José Rojo, 3 vols. (Mexico City: Instituto de Biología/Universidad Nacional Autonóma de México, 1942): vol. 1, 249–50; Marie Vander Meeren, "El papel amate, origen y superviviencia," *Arqueología Mexicana* 4, no. 23 (February 1997): 70–3, from 72.

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into a sheet with stone beaters.[51] As pounded paper from either material resulted in amorphous and irregular edges, the edges were folded inward to provide reinforcement and definition. Theoretically, the paper fibers of either material could be pounded to make any size sheet. In practice, most amatl sheets are a roughly standard size of about 30 cm × 40 cm. They often appear to be limp rather than stiff, unless two sheets have been laminated to make a thicker, stiff sheet. Maguey sheets appear to have more variation in size compared with amatl and are thought to have been determined by the size of the *penca* (agave leaf) from which they derive.[52]

While many native manuscripts were labeled as "maguey" in the nineteenth century, Rudolph Schwede's examination revealed that most were, in fact, amatl.[53] Maguey paper, in contrast, is extremely rare, as only eight manuscripts made of it have been identified. In the 1980s, Sylvia Albro identified that maguey paper was used for four of the paintings of the 1531 *Huexotzinco Codex* (Harkness Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress).[54] In 2013, Carolusa González Tirado and Gabriela Cruz Chagoyán identified the paper of another sixteenth-century codex (named Volume 757-CA-AH) as being maguey. They also listed six other known maguey manuscripts from the sixteenth century, including two that are now lost.[55] Maguey paper likely originated in the Huexotzinco/Puebla/Tlaxcala region, given that all of the identified manuscripts come from there.

The preponderance of amatl paper in the native corpus would point to the Braidense Lectionary being made of amatl. In fact, the Braidense Lectionary uses two native paper types within this one manuscript, reminiscent of the 1531 *Huexotzinco Codex*, which contains four sheets of amatl paper and four sheets of maguey paper. Mary Elizabeth Haude analyzed the *Huexotzinco Codex*, in which she identified distinct characteristics of both papers.[56] In light of this study, it is likely that the paper of the Braidense Lectionary is maguey since its material characteristics (color, texture, sheen, and rigidity) closely match those of the maguey papers in the *Huexotzinco Codex* (Figure 5). The paper in both works has

51. Carolusa Tirado González and Gabriela Cruz Chagoyán, "El papel de maguey como soporte documental: estudio de un códice Huexotzinca del período colonial," *Conserva: Revista de Conservacion, Restauracion y Patromonio* 18 (2013): 5–19, from 11.

52. González Tirado and Cruz Chagoyán, "El papel de maguey," 15.

53. Rudolf Schwede, *Über Das Papier Der Maya-Codices u. Einiger Altmexikanischer Bilderhandschriften* (Dresden: R. Bertling, 1912); Von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers*, 102. *See also Hans Lenz, Mexican Indian Paper: Its History and Survival* (Mexico City: Editorial Libros de Mexico, 1961).

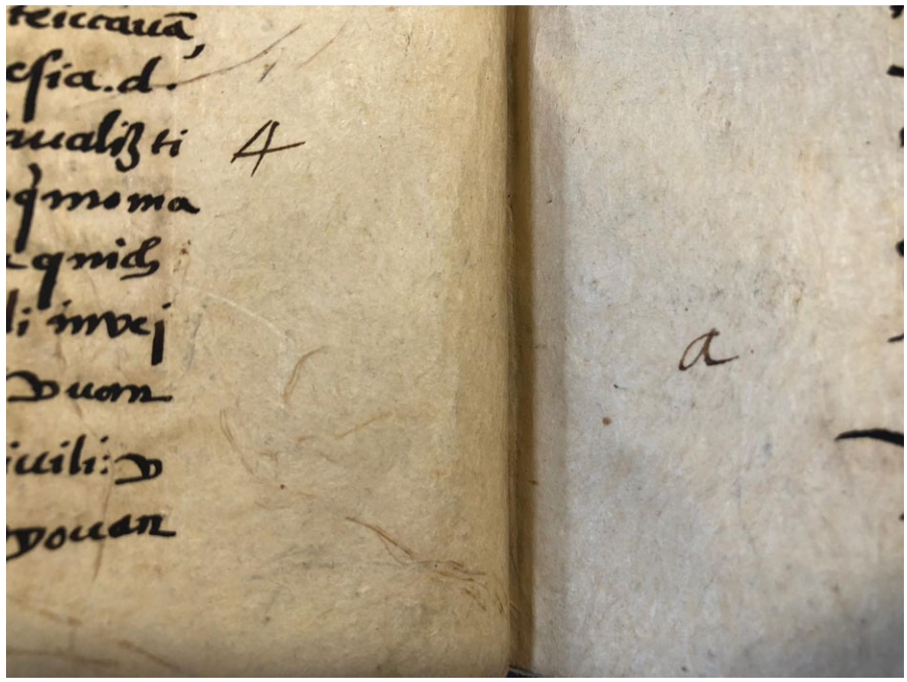
54. Sylvia Rodgers Albro and Thomas C. Albro, "The Examination and Conservation Treatment of the 1531 *Huexotzinco Codex*" in *Codice de Huexotzinco*, 63–77 (in Spanish), 137–49 (in English). (Mexico City and Washington, DC: Coca Cola/Library of Congress, 1995), 105.

55. González Tirado and Cruz Chagoyán, "El papel de maguey," 10.

56. Mary Elizabeth Haude and Tana Villafana, "A Technical Study of the 1531 *Huexotzinco Codex* using Macroscopic Examination and Multimodal Imaging." *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl,* 66 (2023): 109–28.

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Figure 5
Details showing surface sheen and variations of paper color on facing pages.



Source: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, f. 10v (left) and f. 11r (right). Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

a smooth side and a side that is slightly textured from the marks of the pounding stones (Figure 6). These features of maguey contrast with those of amatl papers, which in the *Huexotzinco Codex* are characterized as being of a tan color, fibrous, thin, and limp when handled. Amatl papers also show the striations from the pounding stones on both sides. The characteristics of the papers used in the binding of the Braidense Lectionary closely resemble those of the *Huexotzinco Codex* amatl papers, as they are tan and fibrous with marks from the stone beaters visible on both sides.

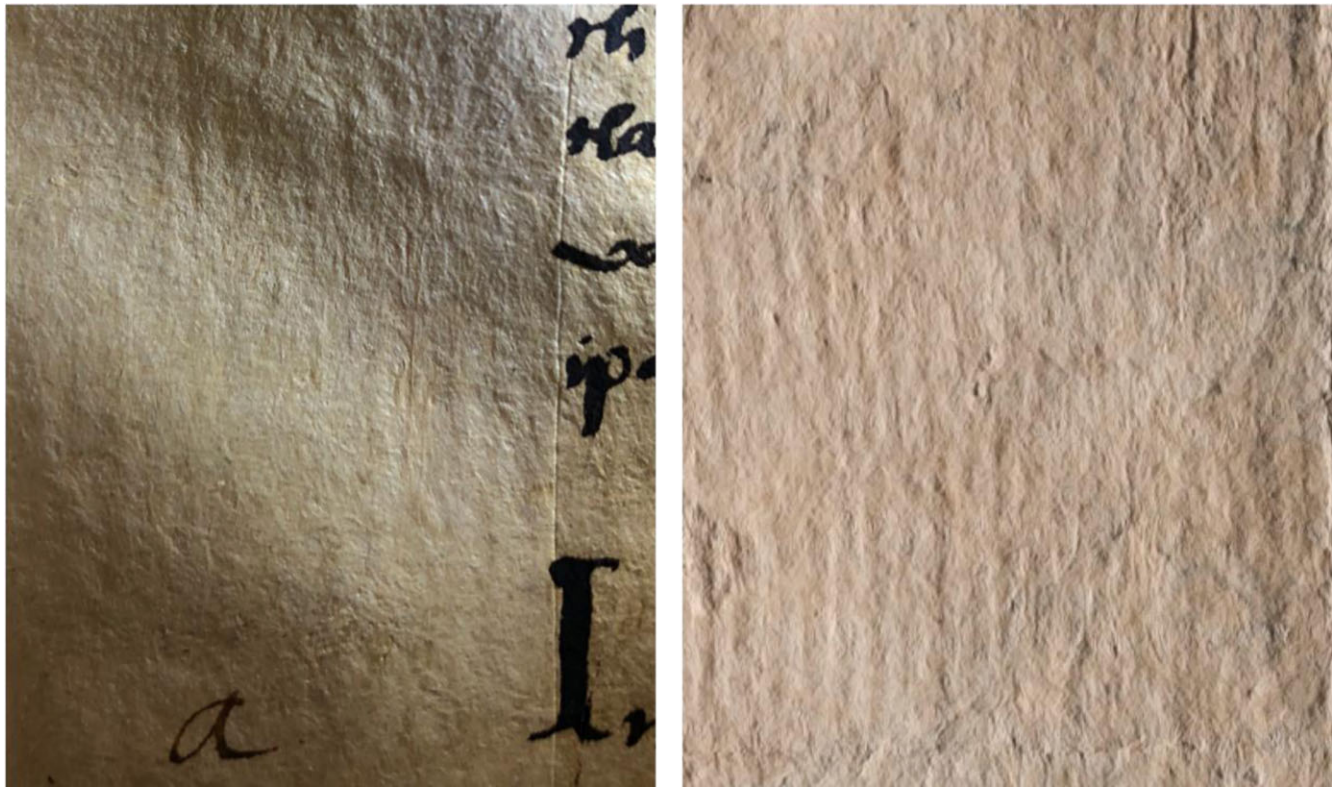
The papers of the Braidense Lectionary closely resemble that of the Newberry Sermonary. Similar to many of the leaves of the Braidense Lectionary, the paper of the Newberry Sermonary is a warm off-white color that is dense with a lustrous, slightly glossy surface sheen. The Newberry Sermonary's paper also has a smooth side and a textured side with visible pounding marks. Interestingly, both the Braidense Lectionary and the Newberry Sermonary have many leaves

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FIGURE 6

Comparison of paper from the Braidense Lectionary and the Huexotzinco Codex. (left) The Braidense Lectionary. (right) Paper from the Huexotzinco Codex showing the marks from the pounding stones in raking light. Fiber analysis revealed Codex Painting 8v to be maguey



Source: Left: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, f. 11r. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission. Right: Unknown creators, Huexotzinco Codex, Painting 8v, *ca*. 1531 Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Harkness Collection.

that contain stray dark fibers (Figure 7). And as with Braidense Lectionary, the leaves of the Newberry Sermonary retain their rigidity as they are turned.

In 2024, Library of Congress paper conservators Haude and Sylvia Albro analyzed the fibers from four areas of the Newberry Sermonary, including fibers adhered to the front cover, using polarized light microscopy. All four fiber samples were identified as maguey. Although the fibers of the Braidense Lectionary have not yet been analyzed, the paper comprising its text is identical in appearance and handling characteristics to the paper of the Newberry Sermonary. Therefore, the text paper of the Braidense Lectionary is most likely maguey, given its strikingly visual and tactile similarities to the maguey papers of the 1531 *Huexotzinco Codex* and the Newberry Sermonary.

All of the edges of the sheets that comprise the book block appear to be trimmed, with the exception of folio 4, which has a remnant of a folded edge typical of native papers. By trimming the edges of the manuscript text, which was a conventional European bookbinding practice, all of the leaves were made the same size. There are 125 numbered folios, and two initial unnumbered pages, meaning the manuscript has 127 folios of native paper. These pages measure on average 34.5 cm high and 20.3 cm wide, and with the exception of folio 4 and its folded edge remnant, most of the edges of the paper appear to have been trimmed, probably in the binding process.

To acquire such paper would have meant that the book's makers had to have contact with native papermakers or traders in paper, given that the making native paper was a specialized skill, dependent on access to amatl or metl. Such a choice was not a neutral one, one option among many. It meant that the makers of this manuscript opted not to use imported European paper, which was the choice for most of the writers of the manuscripts associated with evangelization, including the *Florentine Codex*; this is the only known lectionary to be made native paper. Choosing native paper also meant that the manuscript's creators were choosing a material with a long history, and not one that would have been entirely positive in the eyes of the mendicant friars. This valence is revealed in descriptions in two books created under Sahagún's auspices. One of them, the *Primeros Memoriales*, underscores how native paper was used to absorb blood offerings in pre-Hispanic rituals.[57] In this manuscript, native paper makes a frequent appearance in the costumes and attributes of pre-Hispanic deities. In Figure 8, the artist presents the human impersonator of the deity Nappatecuhtli, and at left is a written list of the accouterments that he wears. Among them are the *amacalli*

57. Bernardino de Sahagún and Others, *Primeros Memoriales*, trans. Thelma D Sullivan (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 74.

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FIGURE 7

Similar stray dark fibers in the Braidense Lectionary f. 10v (left) and the Newberry Sermonary f. 143r (right)

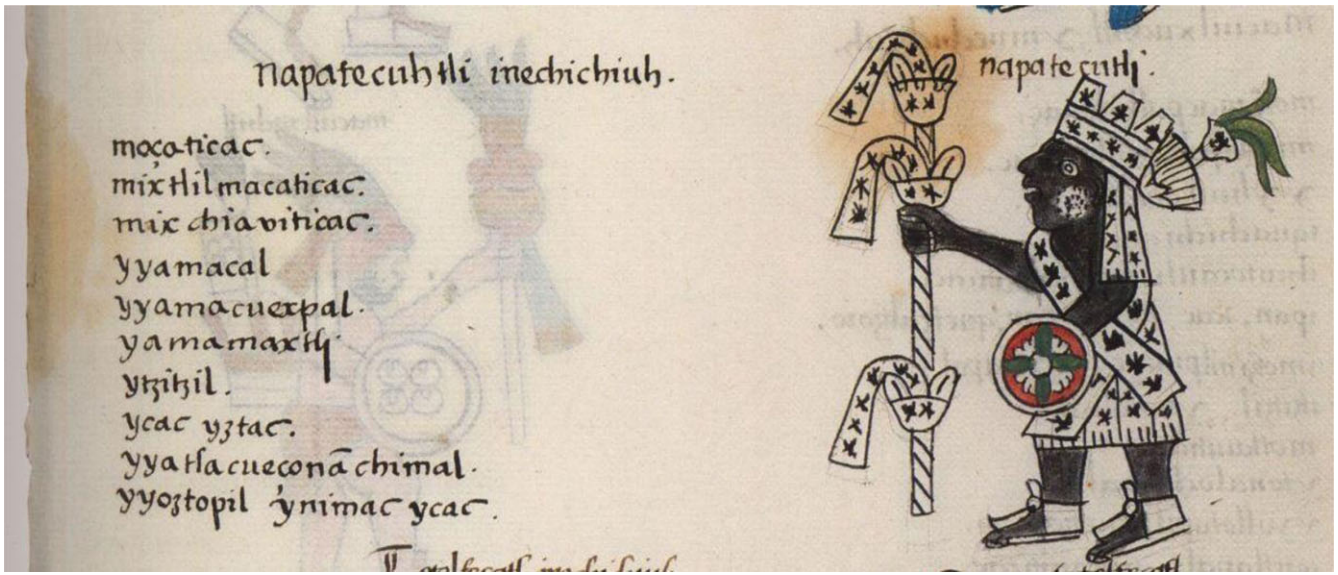


Source: Left: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, f. 10v. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission. Right: Newberry Sermonary f. 143r Chicago, Newberry Library, Ayer MS 1485.

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FIGURE 8

Detail showing the ritual impersonator of the deity Nappatecuhtli wearing paper garments and costume elements



Source: Bernardino de Sahagún and collaborators, Primeros Memoriales, *ca*. 1559–62, f. 265r,. Real Biblioteca de Palacio, Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional, II/3280, f. 265r.

(paper house) or the *amacuexpalli*, (paper locks of hair) and the *amamaxtli* (paper loincloth). These white garments are shown with black stars, the representation of *chapopohtli*, a kind of tar, which in turn represented spattering raindrops. The later *Florentine Codex* describes how sacrificial captives were clad with paper banners and adornments, which were taken from them and burned before they were killed.[58] Such paper-based costumes and rituals were part of the idolatry that the mendicant friars were on a mission to destroy. In light of this background, we must ask why the makers of Braidense Lectionary deployed native paper, and what it tells us about them and the missionary project. But first, let us look at the way that the book itself was created from these 127 folios of native paper.

CREATING THE TEXT BLOCK

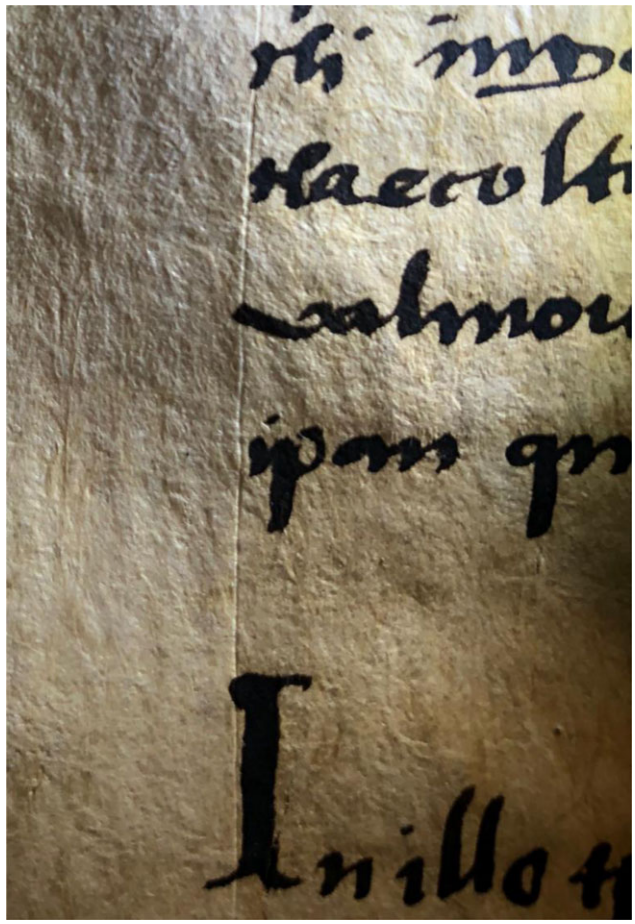
After the book's makers had acquired enough suitable paper, they then drew on European practices: They stacked the paper into groups of four sheets and then folded them in half vertically to create booklets of eight folios, called quires. Such an eight-folio quire arrangement was found frequently in coeval Europe. At this point, the writers could begin filling the 16 blank pages of the quire with alphabetic text, another technology introduced from Europe, but adopted by native scribes as early as the 1530s. As we will see, among the creators of the book were skilled scribes, and their familiarity with European manuscript conventions reveals that this was not the first time they had made a manuscript. One of the many features shared with other bound manuscripts is a common method of demarcating the text area, referred to as blind ruling or scoring, where an instrument, such as a stylus, was pressed against a straight edge onto the paper or parchment so that the lines were discernible without markings from pencil or ink. In the Braidense Lectionary, the makers lightly scored two lines on the left and right of each page to guide the writers in creating even text blocks (Figure 9). As a result, each page has an even text block of 31 cm high and 13 cm wide, creating wide margins on each manuscript page. The margins would allow for emendations, but it seems that the manuscript was intended to be a finished copy, not a working draft. There are no blank pages, except for an endpaper, and very few emendations to the text. Significantly, the manuscript shows some signs of use, but they are not excessive: There are no ripped or partial pages, and with the

58. Bernardino de Sahagún and Others, *Florentine Codex*, *ca*. 1576, Book 2, f. 63v. Available at *Digital Florentine Codex/Códice Florentino Digital*, edited by Kim N. Richter and Alicia Maria Houtrouw, "Book 2: The Ceremonies," fol. 63v, Sahagún, Bernardino de. *Florentine Codex*: General History of the Things of New Spain. Transcribed and translated with notes by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble. 2nd rev. ed. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research/University of Utah Press, 1950–82. Getty Research Institute, 2023. https://florentinecodex.getty.edu/en/book/2/folio/63v?spTexts=&nhTexts= Accessed 24 February 2025.

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FIGURE 9

Raking light image of f. 11r showing the blind ruling line demarcating the left margin and the text block



Source: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, f. 11r. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

exception of a missing end folio (it would have been folio 126), the text seems to be quite complete.

The text of the Braidense Lectionary lacks any signatures or names that would allow us to identify its creators, except for that of Diego de Cañizares, who is specifically named as a user, not a creator. The physical evidence shows that it was the product of a skilled collaboration among three scribes (A–C) who worked

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sequentially on the main body of the manuscript. At some point after the manuscript was finished, and likely bound, two other scribes (D–E) added an index to the volume on the first, unnumbered pages of the manuscript, as a guide to the reader to its contents. At least two other hands intervened in the manuscript, one to set down the name of Diego de Cañizares, the other to offer the largely illegible date discussed above.

The main three scribes were highly skilled, and each exhibits a distinctive trained hand; they wrote in brown iron-gall ink, a choice shared with Spanish-language notaries and scribes. Scribe A begins on folio 1r with the textual section beginning: "*Sequuntur Co[m]munes epistole de apostolis*" (Figure 10). This scribe continues to work through the second textual section, which begins on folio 18v and runs to folio 73v. Its title, appearing on folio 18v, reads "*Incipiu[n]t eva[n]gelia ferialia cu[m] epistolis*" ("Here Begin Ferial Gospels with Epistles"). Scribe A continues to work through folio 104v. The scribal hand is somewhat variable across these pages, which suggests that this scribe got tired across sections, leading us to think that the manuscript was penned over a number of days, if not weeks. Scribe A has a cramped hand with a strong horizontal compression of the letters. This scribe includes about 47 lines per page in the early part of the manuscript, but in later sections, only has about 43. As seen in Figure 10, from left to right, this scribe has a characteristic capital *I*, written as if it is ")(," with an outward flaring capital. The *y* is also distinct. Initial letter *N*'s are written with a very long diagonal bar. And the scribe has a characteristic way of writing "*t. i. x^{o}*," a common abbreviation for "*t[otecuiy]o J[esu] X[rist]o*" ("our Lord, Jesus Christ").

Included in the work of Scribe A is the large section break that occurs with folio 74r, "*Incipiunt ep[isto]l[a]e et euangelia d[omi]nicalib[us] officiis . . .*" discussed above, where the Gospel readings for Sundays masses begin, and most known lectionaries would begin (Figure 11). Here, to acknowledge the importance of this section, the scribe has added a large decorative initial cap, which is the only one in the manuscript. So here, as the scribe worked on a traditionally arranged lectionary, he seems to have been responding to the new norm of the arrangement within New Spain, presenting to the reader with this clear sign of the new order. This scribe may contribute the title on folio 105r, which reads "*In nomine domini incipiunt Evangelia qu[a]e per anni totius tractum leguntur in diebus festis*."

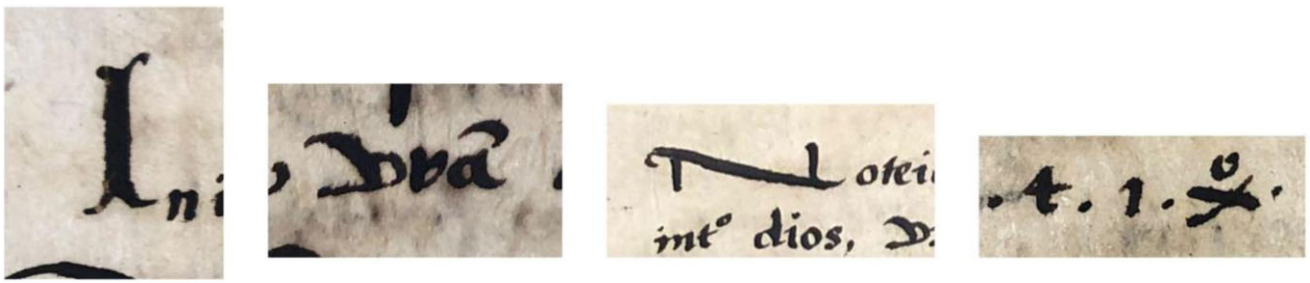
Scribe B's work begins on folio 105r with the subtitle "*In nocte natiuitatis . . .*," a page that falls in the middle of quire 14; this confirms that the scribes were working sequentially, rather than working concurrently on different quires. Scribe B has a way of writing *A* that is distinct from Scribe A. Figure 12 shows

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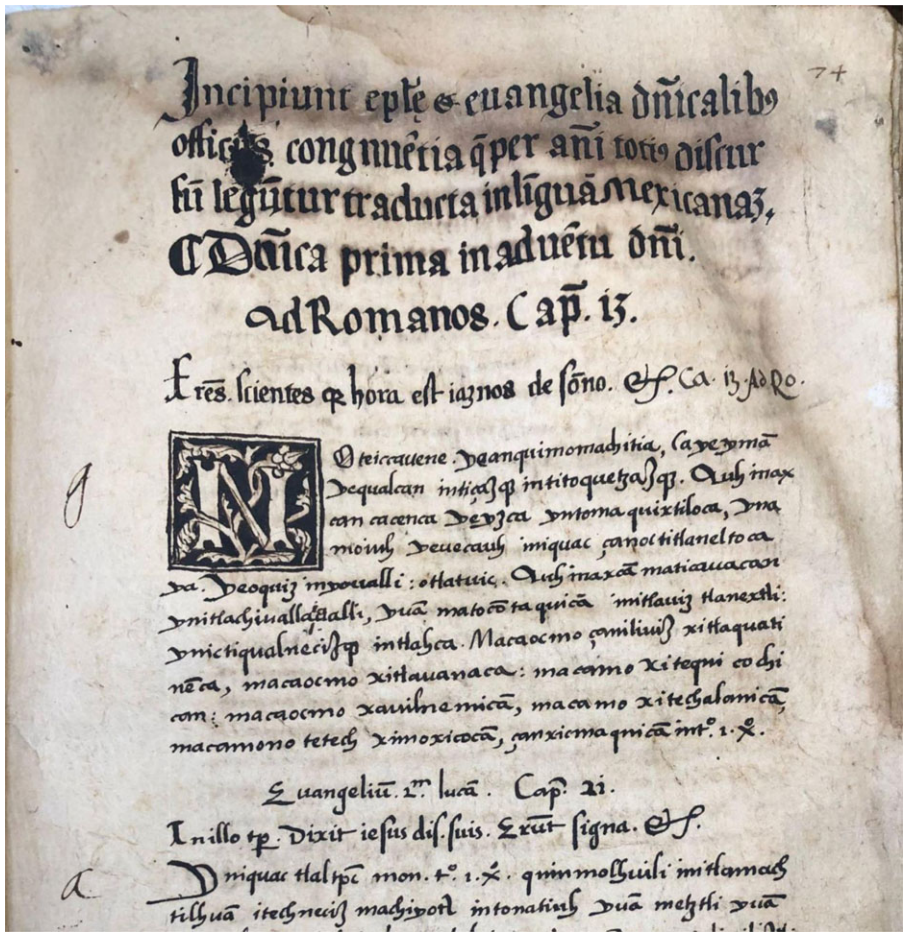
FIGURE 10

Characteristic letterforms of Scribe A, with image a, b, and d from f. 11r, and image c from f. 1r.



Source: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, f. 11r and f. 1r. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

FIGURE 11
Detail showing the work of Scribe A and the only initial capital in the manuscript



Source: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca.* 1540–61, f. 74r. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

the differences between the A's on folio 104v (theorized to belong to Scribe A) and on folio 105r. Scribe B also has a distinct way of forming the capital *I* and the capital *S* (Figure 13).

The writing of Scribe B continues until mid-page of folio 119r, when the work of Scribe C begins. This scribe has a very distinctive way of writing *A*'s, as well as the space and air in the style of writing, looking almost italic. Scribe C makes greater

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FIGURE 12

Details showing Scribe A (two on left from f. 104v) and Scribe B (two on right from f. 105r)

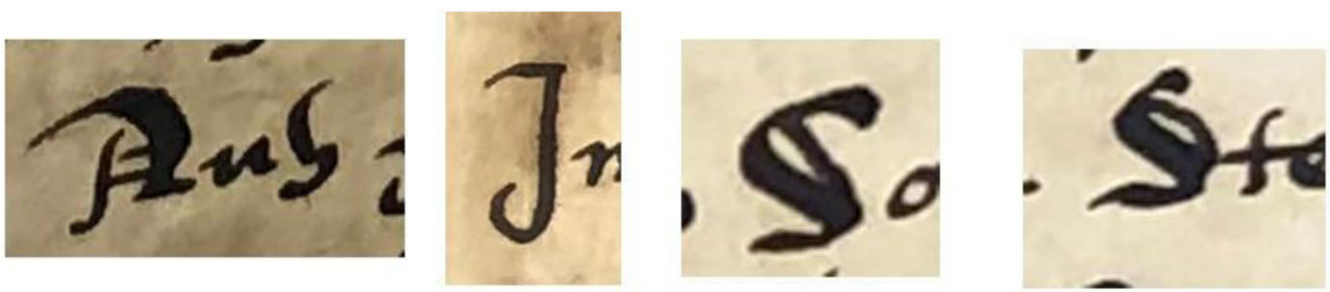


Source: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, f. 104v and f.105r. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

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FIGURE 13

Details showing examples of letterforms of Scribe B, from f. 106v (two on left) and f. 107r (two on right)



Source: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, f. 106v and f. 107r. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

use of dramatic overlines on *q*, and two different distinctive ways of writing a capital *A*, and a distinctive capital *M* and *ch*, with a loopy join (Figure 14). He begins writing in the middle of the page, and the change of scribal hands does not mark a section break. This scribe tends to include only about 32 lines per page. Folio 119 is set at the beginning of quire 16.

Because Scribes B and C begin their work mid-page, immediately following the work of Scribes A and B, it suggests that this manuscript was designed and executed in one setting, rather than being a collation of manuscripts from different times and places. If this were the case, one would expect that section breaks, and different scribal hands, would follow the quire division, but they do not.

In addition to these principal scribes, another hand, and what appears to be a different ink, added letters *a* through *g* in the margin, corresponding to dominical days. Different authors (none of them Scribes A, B, or C) contributed to the index page, which, as mentioned above, sets the contents into a different order. Because this index page has been tipped into the binding (and cannot be accounted for in the original quire structure), it was almost certainly a later addition to the manuscript. The added index thus provides a clue that may help with the dating of the work. When the manuscript was composed, its creators adopted an arrangement of the contents that was later judged to be nonstandard. The added index was an attempt to bring the manuscript into some conforming with the standard.

Because they are built out of individual quires, manuscript books are marvelously flexible vehicles for text. Upon filling one quire, the writers would move to another, and so on. Having loose quires allowed them to swap out pages if they made a mistake, and in some places with a large number of scribes who were copying known texts, they could work concurrently on different quires. As they neared the end of the text, they could vary the size of the quire, which might offer as few as 4 pages, or as many as 20 pages. When the text was complete, the manuscript could be bound, which would set it into a final form.

The creators of the Braidense Lectionary were clearly skilled in creating manuscript books, as is revealed by the regularity of the arrangement of the pages. Scholars of books have a shorthand notation to describe the way books are put together (the "collation"), and in that shorthand, this manuscript looks like this: i, 1^4, ii–iii, $2–15^8$, iv, 16^6, v–vi (where Roman numerals represent single folios tipped in to binding). What is pertinent here is that most of the book—104 folios of it—is quite regular, speaking to the know-how of its makers. At some point, one writer created an even foliation, writing numbers on the upper

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FIGURE 14

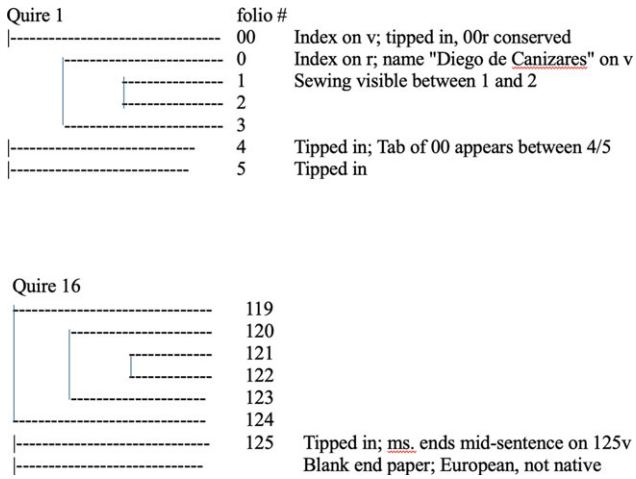
Details showing examples of letterforms of Scribe C from f. 121r (two on left) and f. 120v (three on right)



Source: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, f. 121r and f. 120v. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

FIGURE 15

Diagram showing the quire structure of the Braidense Lectionary[Insert Figure 15 here]



Source: Authors' diagram.

righthand corner of the recto sides of pages. This paginator left the first folio unpaginated and began numbering on the second folio. Only the front and the back of the book are irregular. We reproduce diagrams of the irregular quires, 1 and 16, in Figure 15.

At some point, probably in the twentieth century, the manuscript was rebound, and it may be that the person in charge of rebinding consolidated single sheets, but the pagination and the continuity of the text suggest that this manuscript has the same arrangement now as it did through most of its history. It may have been that the single sheet that appears before quire 16 (folio 118) was once the cognate of folio 125 and that that use resulted in their separation. Because the text ends mid-sentence, it is clear that there were more pages to this manuscript, probably contained within another quire that has since been lost. But overall, the consistent quire structure, as well as the evidence of the hands, speaks to a carefully planned and skillfully executed manuscript whose present book block is largely unchanged since its completion.

SECRETS OF THE BOOK'S BINDING AND PRACTICES OF PEDAGOGY

Before describing the material aspects of the Braidense Lectionary, a brief overview of bindings used in sixteenth-century New Spain is warranted.

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European-style limp bindings of either leather or parchment were commonly used for printed books and bound manuscripts in New Spain. In European bindings, the book block (the collection of leaves that comprise the text) was sewn along the left edge, also known as the spine. The edges of the cover (top, bottom, and fore edge, or the edge opposite the spine) were reinforced and defined by folding the leather or parchment inward, and are referred to as turn-ins. Limp bindings lacked boards to stiffen the covers, but they could be made stiffer by tucking endpapers inside the turn-ins or by adhering a conjugate of an endpaper to the inside of the cover directly on top of the turn-ins. Manuscript texts were generally written in iron-gall ink inside an area that delimited the text and defined the margins.

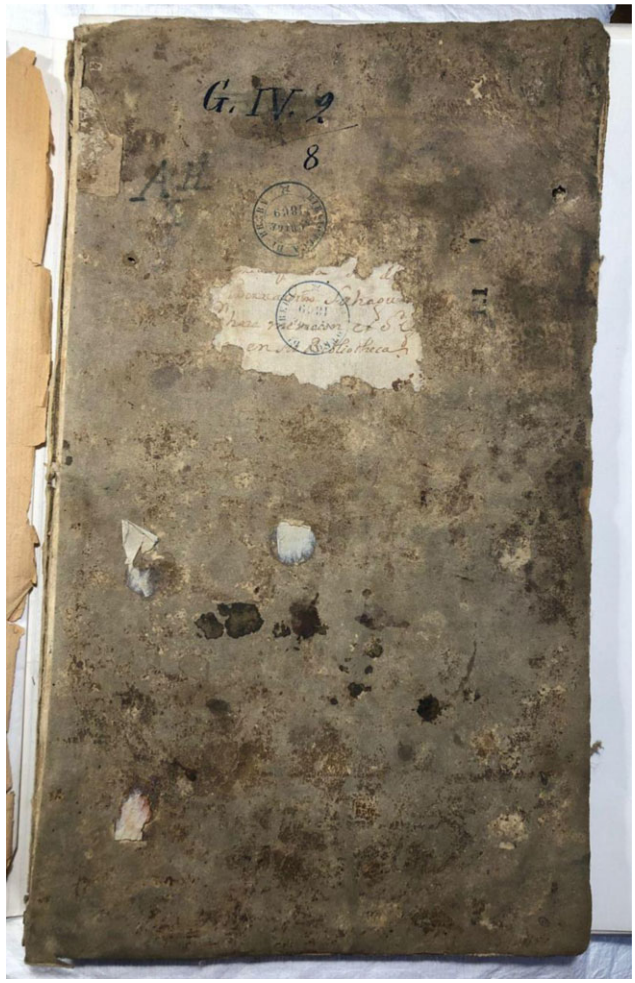
When the manuscript was rebound in the twentieth century, the book block was separated from the original cover, revealing one of the most startling secrets of the Braidense Lectionary. While the book block was rebound, the library kept the original cover without any major intervention and cataloged it separately (Figure 16).[59] It is falling apart, a fortuitous state that has allowed us to discern the original elements that were integrated into its original limp binding of brown leather. Contained within the original covers are 14 leaves of native paper: The front cover envelops 5 leaves of paper and may have originally had more, while the back cover contains 8. These papers were likely used to reinforce, stiffen, and give bulk to the covers of the manuscript. The turn-ins that once contained these reinforcing paper sheets inside of the front cover are no longer extant except for a partial turn-in on the fore edge. These reinforcing sheets, which measure approximately 34.5 cm high and 20.3 cm wide, are approximately the same as those of the leather cover, which measures 35 cm high and 21 cm wide. That they were part of the original binding is revealed by the holes that pierce through the front and back leather covers as well as the reinforcing papers near the fore-edge corners at the top and bottom. Here, leather ties were once used to keep the binding closed. Remnants of these ties are still attached near the bottom fore-edge corner of the inside front cover and near the top and bottom fore-edge corners of the inside back cover. The book has a pastedown of European paper that was adhered to the inside of the back cover. It was pasted on top of the turn-ins at the top, bottom and fore edge. But the wastepaper sheets were not covered by the European paper pastedown. However, they are all pierced and seem to have been tied into the binding with cords that passed through the pierced hole. Thus, a sheet of wastepaper would have been visible on the inside of both the front and back covers. While the other sheets of wastepaper would have been palpable, they were not, it seems, meant to be seen or read.

59. Currently, the Braidense Lectionary is bound in a modern (likely twentieth-century) stiff board binding of blind-tooled dark brown leather. The library has no specific information about this rebinding.

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FIGURE 16

The outer front original cover of the Lectionary now detached from the original book block. The paper label, in a later, possibly nineteenth-century script, contains the name of Sahagún. The superimposed date stamp of 1869 is that of the Library



Source: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, outer front original cover. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

The pages of reinforcing paper are fascinating because they were recycled, possessing another life before being used as reinforcement. In contrast to the book block's paper, the wastepaper has the characteristics of amatl. They are a

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yellow-tan color and have a rough, textured matte surface. The marks from the pounding stones are readily visible on both sides. And every sheet contains writing on either the front or back, and often both sides, in black ink, likely vegetal carbon black typically used by Mesoamerican scribes.

The patterns and contents of these pages reveal them to have been part of programs of writing exercises, meant to teach neophytes how to render the alphabet, and more advanced writers to set down texts in Latin and Nahuatl. Of the 24 visible pages, 15 of them contain renderings of the alphabet exclusively, written in one line, and repeated multiple times on the page. Three of the pages have no text at all (although all of the folios do, meaning that text appears on at least one side of each sheet). Six of the pages have repeated short texts, two of which are in Latin and two in Nahuatl. The longer of the Latin texts is from Psalm 33 and reads "*Benedicam Dominum in omni tempore, semper laus eius in ore meo. In Domino laudabitur anima mea. Audiant mansueti, et laetentur. Magnificate Dominum mecum, et exaltemus nomen ejus in idipsum*."[60] The shorter one is the admonition "*Domine, exaudi orationem*."[61] Unfortunately, neither of the Nahuatl texts are legible enough to reconstruct adequately, but both appear to be religious in nature.

Figure 17 offers evidence about the use of these reinforcing sheets. It shows a set of two folios that were once attached to the front cover, which we have numbered folios 1–6 for the front cover and folios 1–8 for the back, specifying their origin. On the left, the once folded sheet has been bound into the binding along the original top of the page; on the right, a sheet has been bound into the binding along its side edge. These pages show evidence of being folded into fours (as on the left) or in half (as on the right) and being reoriented by different writers. In the case of the sheet on the right, the top five lines are upright, and the lines that follow are upside down.

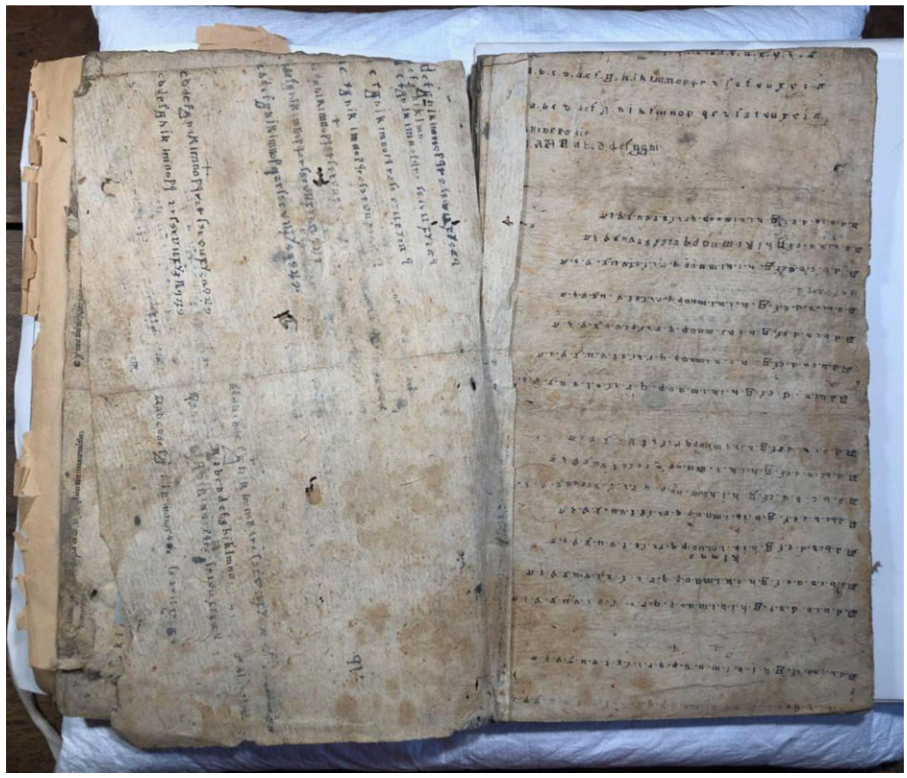
The repetition of the alphabet dominates these sheets of amatl paper and reveals the writers began at the top of a sheet. For those working on a sheet that had already been used, they established the top by reorienting the sheet, or by folding the sheet horizontally. Some of the alphabets were written by polished hands and others with irregular letters having clumsy forms (Figure 16). The writing is like what would be found in a school copybook and leads us to believe that these pages are evidence of the systematic training that novice writers would undertake. The pages are not in any order, but it does not seem as if these pages

60. "I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall be always in my mouth. In the Lord shall my soul be praised: let the meek hear and rejoice. O magnify the Lord with me; and let us extol his name together" (Psalm 33:2–4).

61. "O Lord, Hear my prayer." This phrase appears both in the Bible (Ps. 101:2, 142:1) and in the liturgy of the mass.

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FIGURE 17
Recycled paper used in the interior of the front cover



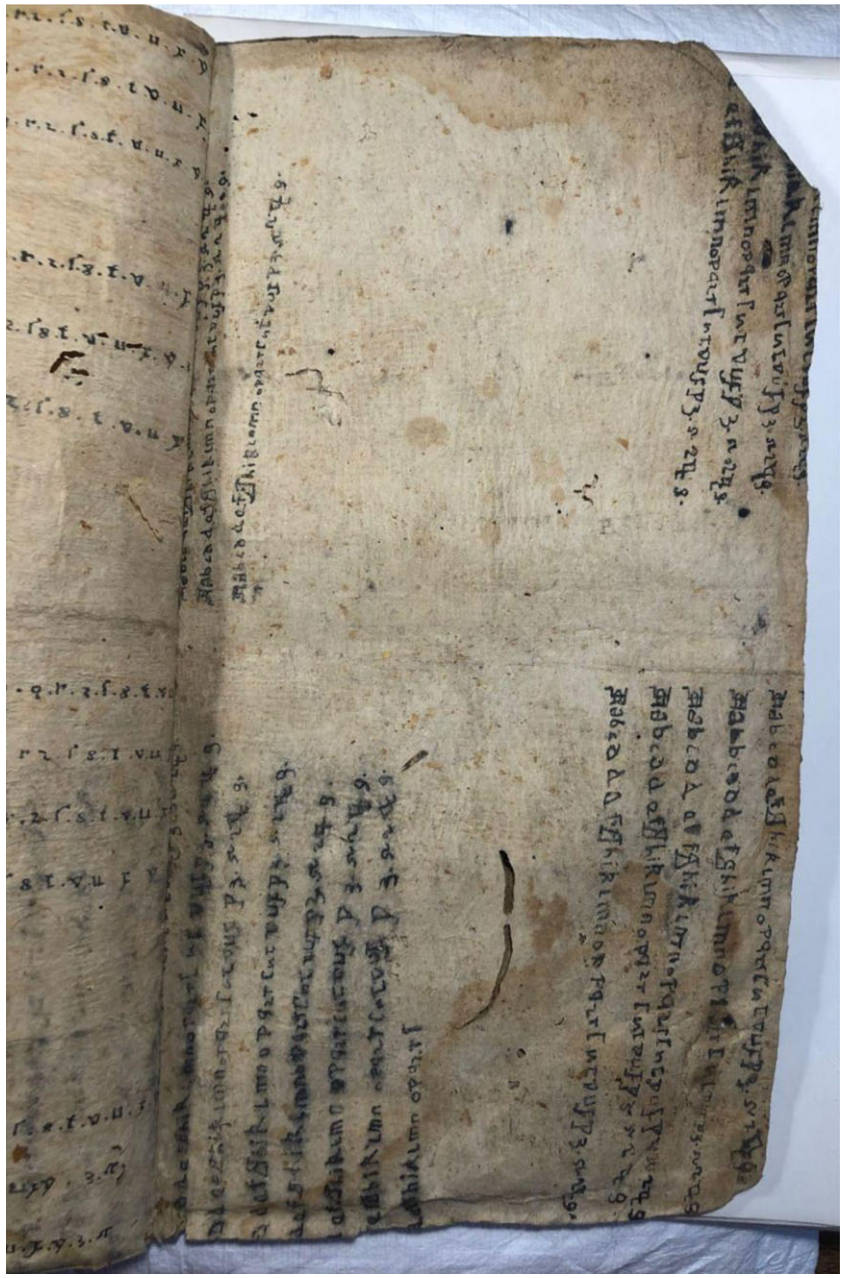
Source: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, interior of the front cover. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

were the work of one student, who progressed from novice to skilled writer, but rather multiple students, who used unbound pieces of paper to practice scripts, carefully reorienting them for each new exercise. The most typical pattern is that one writer repeated the alphabet three to five times and then stopped, as seen in Figure 18. Sometimes another writer reoriented the sheet and took up the same task.

The manuscript also provides evidence of how more advanced writers mastered more complicated texts. At the top and the middle of the page in Figure 19, the short catch phrase "*Benedica[m] dom[in]i* [sic]"—the first words of Psalm 33—is written in a practiced hand. Below the top short phrase, the entire first half of

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FIGURE 18
Four groups of alphabets written by neophyte writer(s)

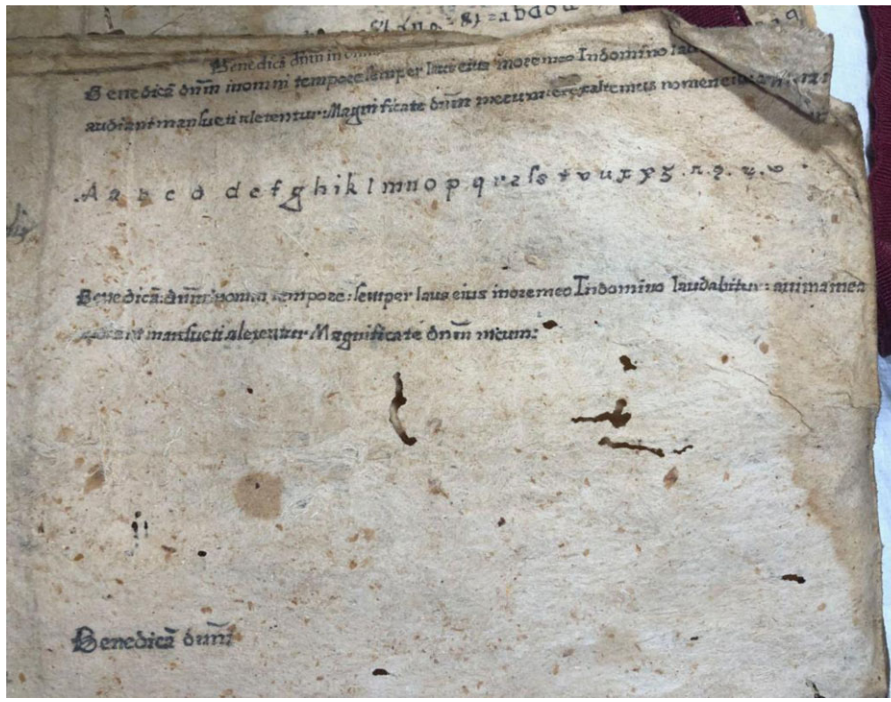


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FIGURE 19

Detail of a sheet of recycled paper included in the back cover of the lectionary



Source: Unknown creators, Braidense Lectionary, *ca*. 1540–61, back cover. Milan, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AH._X.9. By permission of the Ministero della Cultura—Pinacoteca di Brera—Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further publication is prohibited without permission.

Psalm 33 is written out in a different hand, and then the alphabet is written, and then another rendering of the first half of Psalm 33. Another short prompt appears at the bottom of the page but is not followed by any texts. This suggests that prepared amatl paper sheets with catch phrases were supplied to advanced writers, and then the student would either recall the text from memory or, perhaps, be prompted by a reading of the full text. That novice and advanced writing appear on the same folio also points to a classroom where mixed levels of students would share practice paper, and perhaps also class time.

Because no other such practice sheets have been documented to date, these ones provide rare evidence for how Nahuatl speaking students gained alphabetic literacy, filling in the historical accounts of instruction in native schools.[62] That

62. Some of the basic studies on native education are Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru, *Historia de la educación en la época colonial. El mundo indígena* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1990), and José María Kobayashi, *La educación como*

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the language of the longer texts was Nahuatl and Latin (and not Spanish), as well as the content of the texts, argues strongly that these reinforcing papers were also produced in a Franciscan convent. By offering real-world data, these 14 sheets complement the lofty accounts of the mendicants written in the sixteenth century that discuss their educational mission. For instance, two engraved images published with the friar Diego Valadés's *Rhetorica christiana* show the friars offering oral discourses to native peoples.[63] One of them, offering a schema of a Franciscan convent, shows a friar pointing to images as part of the instructive techniques (Figure 20). And we know that such techniques were successful, given the sophisticated texts, such as the sermonaries discussed above, that native writers were producing by mid-century.

The pages offer missing evidence connecting point A, the Franciscan school, to point B, the Nahuatl language text. They reveal the pedagogical methods used by the friars, or perhaps their Indigenous collaborators, to teach writing, which as an embodied and physical practice, calls for a different approach than oral instruction. The frequent repetitions of the alphabet, whose letterforms are at the basis of writing, suggests that, initially, students carried out rote repetition of letterforms, similar to the way that European writing manuals taught writing. After physical mastery, the arts of memory, so valued by Valadés, came to the fore. Used by neophytes to practice alphabetic writing of Nahuatl and Latin, these amatl paper pages show us the beginning of the process that would culminate in the production of a text such as the lectionary. There were many Franciscan schools that taught writing across New Spain, so the writing exercises on amatl paper could have been made in many locales. But the possibilities narrow when we consider that the book proper includes elegant Nahuatl translations, as most of this activity took place in the Basin of Mexico. To account for the use of scrap paper, the likely site of creation narrows even further, as only one place in the Basin also is documented as having a book bindery: Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco.[64] Thus, the evidence points strongly to the creation of the text, and the creation of the book, within the walls of this Franciscan colegio.

conquista. Empresa Franciscana en México (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1985). For a recent historiographic critique of the Colegio de Santa Cruz, see Carlos Tapia Segura, "El Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco. Representación Histórica de Un Proyecto Fallido," *Contribuciones Desde Coatepec* 34 (2021): n.p.

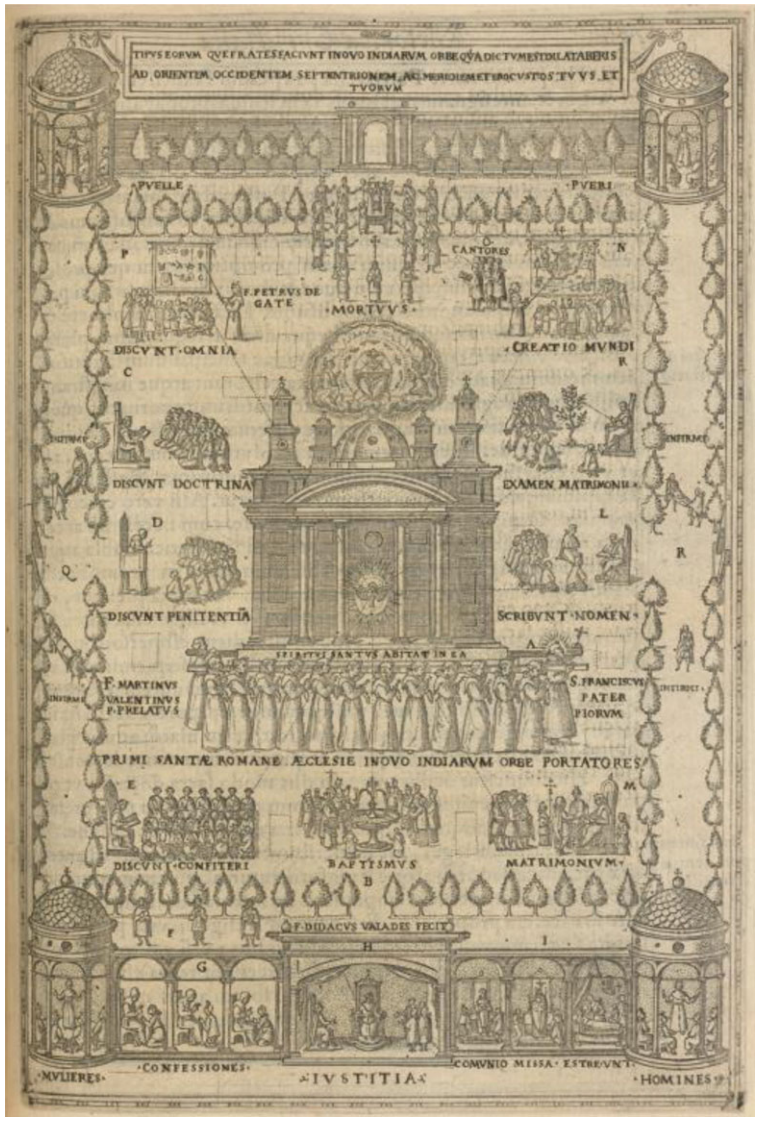
63. See the recent critical edition: Diego Valadés, *Rhetorica christiana ad concionandi, et orandi usum accommodata*, ed. and trad. Julio Pimentel Álvarez (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas-Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas [Ediciones Especiales, 95], 2019).

64. Bookbinding material is found in the inventories of Tlatelolco published in Joaquín García Icazbalceta and Edmundo Aviña Levy, eds., "Códice Tlatelolco," in *Códice Mendieta*, Facsimile ed., vol. 2, Biblioteca de Facsimiles Mexicanos 4–5 (Guadalajara, Jalisco, México: n.p., 1971), 241–71; Martha Elena Romero Ramírez, "Limp, Laced-Case Binding in Parchment on Sixteenth-Century Mexican Printed Books" (Ph.D. dissertation, London, University of the Arts, London, 2013), 22–3.

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FIGURE 20

Diego Valadés, "The Franciscan convent." At both the upper right and upper left, a friar pointing to images as part of the instructive techniques, but writing instruction is not included



Source: Diego Valadés, Rhetorica christiana ad concionandi, et orandi usum accommodata vtrivsq[ue] facvltatis exemplis svo loco insertis : qvae qvidem ex Indorvm maximè deprompta svnt historiis : vnde praeter doctrinam, svma qvoqve delectatio comparabitvr. Perugia: Pietro Giacopo Petrucci, 1579, plate following f. 106. Providence, John Carter Brown Library, BA579 V136r.

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CONCLUSIONS

The drive to evangelize the Indigenous peoples of New Spain led Franciscans, as well as other mendicant orders, to spearhead novel projects. Their need to have orthodox translations of biblical texts into Nahuatl led to the creation of the Braidense Lectionary. In this article, a careful focus on the volume itself reveals the many roles that Indigenous peoples played in bringing a conceit (a book of Nahuatl texts) to reality. As casting these yet-unnamed people as protagonists in the creation of this book, we have attempted to counter an entrenched historiographic focus on named friars. Instead, each of the sections of this paper has shown the crucial roles of Indigenous writers and translators, scribes, and papermakers and even possibly bookbinders played in the book's creation, one part of the creation of a world known as "New Spain."

The words that friars said when they read a text such as the lectionary were *teotlahtolli* (roughly meaning "sacred words/speech"), and the book that contained them could well have been called a *teoamoxtli* (sacred book). While the former term is ideational, the second is material, in that the root of *amoxtli* is amatl, the Nahuatl term for paper. The pair of words remind us that the creation of an evangelized New Spain was as much about material practices as it was about ideas. Indeed, in the 14 rare amatl pages that the Braidense Lectionary preserves along with its 127 bound folios, we see, from alpha to omega, the stages that native students passed through as they became autonomous writers. In schools where writing was taught, the Braidense Lectionary shows us that amatl paper was at hand, and plentiful enough to be used by neophytes for writing practice. And native papers were designed for use with native inks, so their use allowed for a set of familiar interlocking technologies to come into play. Indeed, amatl paper may have been particularly valued in teaching pen skills, as the rougher surface of the amatl sheets demanded a necessary development of the fine motor skills of the arm and hand to control of the writing quill and the ink. These were the foundations needed to represent phrases in Nahuatl and Latin—likely first encountered as spoken ones—using the Roman alphabet. And on the pages of the manuscript proper, we can see the end result in the conversion of the Word—excerpts from the most sacred text in Christianity—into the words of the Nahuatl language set onto the page.

Just as meanings in the Nahuatl language shape what the Bible says, so too meanings of the paper inflect what the book means. Thus, the question remains: why was native paper, with its long history of use in pre-Hispanic ritual, used for a Catholic text? It is not that European paper was just unavailable, because coeval Franciscan projects, such as Sahagún's *Codices Matritenses* evidence ready access. One explanation is aided by what James Lockhart calls "double mistaken

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identity": Native intellectuals and mendicant friars maintained their own ideas about the material, and (mistakenly) assumed their counterparts believed the same.[65] But the uncritical application of Lockhart's thesis tends to set those elements of "mistaken identities" into opposing camps and to freeze them in time. The value of the Braidense Lectionary is that it shows us how "identities" (or ontological concepts) could change over time, dilating and contracting as communities of peoples came together to make new things. While amatl and maguey papers had important ritual uses before the Spanish invasion, their uses expanded as they became imbricated in native alphabetic literacy. Mastery of paper, ink, and quill allowed Indigenous intellectuals to participate in the project of evangelization. Literate natives could read catechisms and other sanctioned religious texts, and they could help in the creation of new texts, such as sermons, to further that goal. And as other scholars have established, alphabetic literacy and the skill of writing allowed Indigenous peoples to maintain or assume new political powers.[66]

In the eyes of the friars, native paper may have looked enough like European paper to allow them to assume a neutrality of the material, a convenient assumption. The amatl sheets in the bindings of the Braidense Lectionary also show us that the first alphabetic words that neophyte writers would have encountered on amatl paper, after the alphabet, were religious ones. In the eyes of the friars, it may have been the *meaning* of these words that, like a cap of whitewash, transformed the once-rich semantic field of native paper to a blank sheet. What the paper meant to the native creators of the book is still a question that needs to be answered.

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65. James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 234.

66. Yanna Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Alcira Dueñas, *Indians and Mestizos in the "Lettered City" Reshaping Justice, Social Hierarchy, and Political Culture in Colonial Peru* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2010); Icíar Alonso Araguás, "Nobles y mestizo como intérpretes de las autoridades en el México colonial (ss. xvi–xvii)," in *Identidad en palabras: nobleza indígena novohispana*, ed. Patrick Lesbre and Katarzyna Mikulska Dąbrowska (México; Warsaw; Tolouse: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas; Universidad de Varsovia, Facultad de Neofilología, Instituto de Estudios Ibéricos e Iberoamericanos; Universidad Toulouse II—Le Mirail, 2015), 303–22.

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Kim Nichols, and Leith Calcote. Eric Slauter and Angela Wachowich, representing the Kim-Park Program for the Study of the Book at the University of Chicago, invited the three authors to speak at an event hosted at the Newberry Library in early May of 2025. This evening prompted a fruitful exchange between the authors and a highly engaged audience and, thanks to the generosity of Will Hansen and his staff, culminated in a viewing of some of the Newberry's treasures. We are grateful to all who facilitated that evening and attended the event. Finally, to the Editorial Board of *The Americas*, and John F. Schwaller in particular, and to the two anonymous readers who reviewed our submission, we express our gratitude for your insightful feedback and helpful suggestions. This paper is much stronger thanks to your careful consideration; any errors that remain are the authors' own.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2025.10079.

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