Frayer Bernardino de Sahagún is often hailed as the first great ethnographer. This characterization of Sahagún pays tribute to his exhaustive curiosity and deep interest in the cultures he recorded. At the same time, it obscures his motivations in compiling his vast compendium of culture, religion, and history. In overemphasizing Sahagún's supposed impartiality and objectivity, this approach discourages critical readings of his work. Sahagún's work should not be read as an unbiased source for knowledge about the Aztecs, ignoring the context in which it was compiled. In Book 1 of the Florentine Codex, The Gods, Sahagún provides a visual and written list of the Aztec deities. In this paper, I will argue that while the representation of the Aztec deities in The Gods draws upon both Aztec and Christian visual conventions, close association with either religious tradition was potentially dangerous. By giving the Aztec gods a Greco-Roman gloss, Sahagún distanced the deities from pre-Catholic religious practice and placed them into the ambiguous language of Renaissance approaches to the Greco-Roman deities. This portrayal has the effect of distancing the deities from religious practice and placing them into the equal parts glorifying and secularizing context of the Renaissance Greco-Roman pantheon.

The visual language employed by Sahagún's artists in The God's list of Aztec deities owes little to Aztec visual conventions. Sahagún's artists were students of the friars at the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlateloco, trained in European theories of proportion and draftsmanship. As a result, the figures of The Gods reflect the influence of Renaissance ideas about proportion and ideal human features. In Pre-Colombian style codices the artists often exaggerate the heads, hands, and feet of their figures, creating proportions that are stylized rather than naturalistic. In The Gods, figures approximate human proportions found in nature.
Additionally, while the Pre-Colombian codices are characterized by solid areas of flat color that do not attempt to convey a sense of dimension, Sahagún's artist has employed shading in order to represent three dimensional forms that exist in space (see Fig. 1 for comparison). In a manner common to European draftsmanship but not found in Pre-Colombian manuscripts, Sahagún's artist used shading and drapery lines to represent the natural folds of cloth. The faces of the gods show some influence of Aztec convention. Their profile presentation and open mouths are reminiscent of the codices. Simultaneously, their facial features are much smaller and more delicate than in the codices, reflecting a European rather than an Aztec idea of how the face should be represented. This is particularly clear in the open forms of the eyes, defined as much by the color of the skin as by line.

The depictions of the deities in The Gods are a more Europeanized interpretation of essentially the same images found in Sahagún's earlier work the Primeros Memoriales. With
the exceptions of Tlaculteutl and Tezcatzoncatl, all of the Florentine Codex's 26 deities have their counterparts in the Primeros Memoriales. The Primeros Memoriales represents an earlier stage in Sahagún's work and is closer to native pictorial traditions in that it maintains the primacy of the visual image over the text. The images were drawn before the text was copied and are more true to the Pre-Colombian canon. The Gods draws on the Primeros Memoriales to differing degrees from figure to figure. Some, like Chicomecoatl, are nearly exact in their reproduction (Fig. 2), while with others, in particular Quetzalcoatl, the differences between the two figures are pronounced. For the most part The Gods takes colors, attributes, and posture directly form the Primeros Memoriales deities and only modifies them in order to make them more Europeanized. It may be that the Florentine Codex artist was

1 Xiuhtecuhtli is not listed in Primeros Memoriales but Ixcozauhqui seems to have been the model for the Florentine Codex's representation for Xiuhtecuhtli. According to Thelma D. Sullivan, Ixcozauhqui is an alternate name for Xiuhtecuhtli. Sahagún, Fray Bernardino de. Primeros Memoriales: Paleography of Nahuatl Text and English Translation. Translated by Thelma D. Sullivan. Revised. University of Oklahoma Press, 1997, p67n42.

simply more accustomed to European styles of drawing. It seems probable however that even an artist trained in European techniques would be able to copy the *Primeros Memoriales* images more exactly if he wished to. As such, the Europeanized depiction of The Gods should be considered a conscious choice, made either independently by the artist or with the instigation of Sahagún.

These Europeanized deities of The Gods are structured within a grid that likewise owes little to Aztec conventions and much to European ones. Grids are not alien to Aztec systems; it is the manner in which it is employed here that is alien. In divinatory almanacs, grids are used to define units of time (Fig. 3). The gods are depicted within these gridded spaces, but always for a purpose. They are active figures whose presence can be read as a good or bad augury, conveying information about a specific day or time period. They are typically depicted either seated or in a pinwheel posture. Often they gesture meaningfully or feature speech scrolls. They are also typically surrounded by other elements that provide further context for their presence—place markers, ritual implements, human or animal
figures. In the *Florentine Codex* it is the gods themselves rather than time who are being defined and categorized. In this way they are more reminiscent of medieval and Renaissance era encyclopedias, in which figures were similarly categorized, and placed on white empty backgrounds. Each figure is assigned an empty rectangular space defined by black lines and Spanish writing. They are shown as free standing figures devoid of context and robbed of agency.

One reason Sahagún's *The Gods* appear so different from Pre-Colombian modes of representation stems from their distinct intended purposes. Sahagún's images were meant to serve as tools for missionaries, not to accurately record indigenous understandings of divinity. The Gods was intended for a European audience, to assist future generations of friars in identifying survivals of indigenous practice. By depicting the gods as human figures wearing costumes, Sahagún assisted missionaries in recognizing when a member of their flock was merely wearing festive attire, and when they were dressed as a deity impersonator. According to Diego Durán, this was a legitimate concern. Often, Catholic feasts would fall close to or on the same day as native feasts. Durán describes native individuals dressing in the attire of a god as part of the festivities associated with Catholic feasts and warns priests not to take this lightly.³ In order to prevent deity impersonators from participating in Catholic feasts, priests needed the education in order to recognize them. Sahagún's *The Gods* serves this didactic purpose. It does not convey indigenous concepts of sacrality as much as it does European concepts of inaccurate spiritual practice.

In Sahagún's images, the gods look like humans dressed up in costumes. Their attributes look like illustrations rather than elements of power. Another factor contributing to the contrast between Sahagún's *The Gods* and the pre-Colombian representations of Aztec

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deities may be linked to a misunderstanding of Aztec concepts of divinity. As Elizabeth Boone has elaborated, *teotl*, the Nahuatl word often translated as god and used as such by early missionaries, is more accurately defined as an impersonal, sacred force or concentration of power.⁴ Teotl is complemented by the concept of *teixiptla*, the physical representation or incarnation of teotl. This consists of the attire and attributes of the god, features that, as Boone has written, define and even create teotl.⁵ When Sahagún's *The Gods* are compared with images of the Aztec deities from other codices, even from the *Primeros Memoriales*, *The Gods* can be seen to emphasize the human figure over the attributes, while the other codices emphasize attributes over human figure. For Sahagún this presentation of *The Gods* would have been acceptable because he would have interpreted the Aztec gods in the light of

![Domenico Beccafumi, *St. Lucy*, oil on panel, 1521. Photograph from www.wikipedia.com](image)

Fig. 4 Domenico Beccafumi, *St. Lucy*, oil on panel, 1521. Photograph from www.wikipedia.com

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⁵ Ibid, 4.
his only paradigm for understanding divinity: Catholic doctrine. Catholic saints, like Aztec gods, are often recognizable by attributes or attire. St. Catherine is identified by the wheel on which she was martyred, St. Lucy (fig. 4), whose eyes were torn out, holds her eyes on a plate. While these saints are identifiable by attributes, they are not defined by them. Saints were pious Catholics in life who now in death are close to God in heaven and as such can intervene with him on behalf of individuals still living on Earth. Their power comes from their pious lives and close proximity to God, not from their attributes. Sahagún would have had no basis for understanding the idea of God as an impersonal sacred force defined by sacred clothing.

Catholic saints and Aztec gods, as interpreted by Sahagún, share additional qualities in common. Beyond being recognizable by identifying attributes, both are also essentially human in form, and are associated with power over different areas or occupations. The similarities between Christian and Aztec belief were recognized by the Spaniards to varying degrees. Durán found numerous correlations between the two systems. He saw the Aztec rites as imitations of the Eucharist or ceremonies in Leviticus, he found precursors to the Trinity in Tota, Topiltzin, and Yolometl, and he equated Aztec religious practitioners with Catholic monks, nuns, and altar boys. Durán used these perceived similarities to argue that “From these things two observations can be made: either our Holy Christian Religion was known in this land or the devil, our cursed adversary, forced the Indians to imitate the ceremonies of the Christian Catholic Religion.”7 Sahagún's work is not as dominated by associations between Christianity and the Aztec religion as is Durán's, but he also conceded the possibility that the Aztecs might have been evangelized to prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, implying

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7 Ibid, 95.
he too saw the connections between Aztec and Christian religion.\footnote{Olivier, Guilhem. “El panteón mexica a la luz del politeísmo grecolatino: el ejemplo de la obra de Fray Bernardino de Sahagún.” In Nuove prospettive sul politeismo in Mesoamerica, edited by Culture Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza. Dipartimento di Storia. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2010, p 400.}

Sahagún’s understanding of the saints may have colored the way he interpreted the Aztec gods as acting in the world. The saints could be appealed to by anyone, but had their specific areas in which they were believed to be most effective. Likewise Sahagún associated the Aztec gods with specific areas of power. In the text portion of the Codex, Sahagún ascribes an area of power to each god, or a profession over which he or she is patron. Chalchuihtlicue is a water goddess, Tlaculteutil is goddess of vice, Chicomecoatl is goddess of food and drink, Yiacatecutli is patron of merchants, etc.

The format in which Sahagún has placed the Aztec Gods also suggests connections to Catholic saints. The rectangular grid that organizes The Gods into neat even spaces is reminiscent not only of medieval encyclopedias but also of Catholic saints calendars. In these calendars (fig. 5), time is divided into a grid with each rectangular space representing a day. The days contain printed images depicting the saint or event to which the day is dedicated on the Catholic calendar. With their ample negative space and frequent focus on individual figures, the calendars are visually remarkably similar to the grid framework that defines The Gods. It is difficult to know for sure if such calendars would have been present in the Colegio de Santa Cruz as visual sources for the artists, but it seems plausible. Such calendars were produced during this time period, would have been easy enough to import, and are the type of item one would expect to find in a religious institution.

While Sahagún seems to have drawn on his understanding of Catholic doctrine and imagery in order to interpret Aztec religion, this is not a correlation he would have wanted his readers to make. For Sahagún, too close an association between Aztec gods and Catholic saints could be dangerous. While other missionaries believed that the Aztecs could be
converted by substituting the cult of a Catholic saint in the place of currently existing Aztec devotions, Sahagún was strongly against this practice.⁹ He believed that the native people would continue to worship their gods under the guise of the Catholic figure. He wrote of the devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe at Tepeyac, saying she is called Tonantzin, which means “Our Mother.” This would be an acceptable title for the Virgin were it not the title of the Aztec goddess who had been venerated at Tepeyac before the arrival of the Spaniards.

As a missionary, Sahagún's goals were to prevent the survival of Aztec religion and to

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encourage correct missionary practice. The Spanish glosses connecting the Aztec deities to corresponding Greco-Roman deities provided an interpretative framework for European viewers of that would hopefully avoid too close an association between Catholic saints and Aztec deities. Not all of Sahagún's The Gods are qualified in this way, in fact only 10 of 24 have glosses, but this would seem enough to place them all within the same interpretative structure. The following table shows The Gods in one column with their corresponding gloss in the other. I have used grey and white fill to indicate gods who are on the same page open, so that the viewer would have seen them together. They are placed in the order in which they were meant to be read, corresponding to the order of their textual chapters in the book.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Huitzilopochtli</th>
<th>Hercules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paynal</td>
<td>Vicar of Huitzilopochtli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tezcatlipoca</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tlaloc</td>
<td>God of the rains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quetzalcoatl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicomecoatl</td>
<td>Ceres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tetequinna</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tzaptlatena</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ciocapiplti</td>
<td>Nymphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalchiuhlticue</td>
<td>Juno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tlaculteul</td>
<td>Venus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiuhtecuhlti</td>
<td>Vulcan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macuilsuchti</td>
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<tr>
<td>Omacat</td>
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<td>Yxtlilto</td>
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<td>Opuchtl</td>
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<td>Xipe Totec</td>
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<td>Yiacatecuhtli</td>
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<td>Nappa tecutli</td>
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<td>Chalchiuhlticue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pupuca tepetl/Quetzaltepetl</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iztactepetl/Mataltuec</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tezcatzoncatl</td>
<td>Bacchus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table demonstrates a certain internal logic employed in the structuring of the Aztec Pantheon created by The Gods. Although Aztec ways of grouping their gods have been little studied, the notion of a hierarchical Pantheon does not come from Aztec representations of the gods.\textsuperscript{10} In the Almanacs, the gods are linked in a number of ways that are ignored by The Gods' hierarchy. There are the Night Lords, the Lords of the Days, and the Lords of the Tricenas. There are also associations conveying notions of duality, such as the image of Mictlantecuhtli and Tezcatlipoca back to back in Plate 56 of the Borgia Codex. Gods were frequently conceived of as taking on dual, quadruple, or quintuple form.\textsuperscript{11} From the Aztec perspective, the relationships created by the role the gods play in the Almanacs may have been more important than the superficial groupings created by Sahagún and later researchers of the Aztec Gods, like Henry B. Nicholson and Salvador Mateos Higuera.\textsuperscript{12}

Sahagún creates an Aztec Pantheon by organizing the deities into roughly interrelated groups and in a roughly hierarchical order. The most important male deities are grouped together on the first page. The Nahuatl text that begins this section reads “First Chapter, which telleth of the highest gods.”\textsuperscript{13} Although the Spanish is slightly different, speaking of the “main god” and seemingly referring directly to Huitzilopochtli, Sahagún nonetheless places the deities he defines as most important at the beginning of the book.\textsuperscript{14} Two of these most important deities are associated with key Greco-Roman gods, the others seem to be to cast as helper figures to these deities. Huitzilopochtli, Hercules, is placed spatially above

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 1n1.
Paynal, who is glossed as his vicar. Tezcatlipoca, Jupiter, is placed above Tlaloc, suggesting that Tlaloc is similarly meant to be read as a subordinate figure. Tlaloc is glossed as god of the rains, and this may explain the connection. Jupiter was the leader of the Olympian deities, but he was also a rain God, typically depicted wielding a lightning bolt as a weapon. To a mind schooled in classical mythology, the connection between these two figures may have seemed self-explanatory.

The next page begins with Quetzalcoatl (fig. 6). He lacks a gloss, but his textual description is part of the “most important gods” section. In the Códice Matritense del Real
Palacio, a Sahaguntine Manuscript in Madrid, part of which forms the Primeros Memoriales, Sahagún likewise makes associations between the Greco-Roman deities and the Aztec gods. A number of these associations vary between the Florentine Codex and the Códice Matritense del Real Palacio. In the latter, Quetzalcoatl is linked to Hercules, while Huitzilopochtli is connected to Mars.\textsuperscript{15} The association of either god with Hercules has a certain logic: both, like Hercules, were conceived of as deified human beings. It is unclear why Sahagún would have changed his glosses between the two texts. Guilhem Olivier has argued that missionary writers like Sahagún were inspired by the theories of Euhemerus.\textsuperscript{16} Euhemerus posited that the gods of Antiquity had formerly been great men and women, who were deified and worshiped. This theory was then employed by the Christian Church Fathers in order to debunk pagan religion, claiming that pagan gods were in actuality only men worshiped as gods.\textsuperscript{17} According to Olivier, this strategy was also employed against the Aztec Gods as well.\textsuperscript{18} Perhaps, as principal deity of the Aztecs, Sahagún viewed Huitzilopochtli as the greater threat than Quetzalcoatl. He may have ultimately chosen to gloss Huitzilopochtli as Hercules as a reminder of his human origin, and as a suggested tool to aid missionaries in their rhetoric against Aztec religion.

The rest of the figures on the two page spread that begins with Quetzalcoatl are all female deities, half of which are glossed. In the text, the chapter addressing the first of the goddesses, Cioacoatl, begins “here are noted the greatest goddesses who were worshiped as idols.”\textsuperscript{19} Aside from the mountain deities included at the end of The Gods, this two page spread lists all the female deities included in Sahagún’s Pantheon. The Gods defines

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ibid, 396.
  \item Ibid, 396.
  \item Ibid, 396.
\end{itemize}
goddesses as a certain interrelated “class” of divinity. The *Códice Matritense del Real Palacio* also connects female divinities to Greco-Roman goddesses, but there is significant variance in the attributions. In both Pantheons, Chicomecoatl is Ceres, seemingly a logical association given the two goddesses shared connections to grain and food production. In the *Códice Matritense del Real Palacio*, however, Cioacoatl and Tlazolteol are both described as Venus at different points (Cioacoatl is also linked to Eve), Chalchiuhtlicue is called Neptune, and Teteuinna is Artemides (presumably Artemis).

The next page spread is headed by Xiuhtecuhtli, glossed as Vulcan, and contains all male deities, none of whom are given a gloss. This section begins “which telleth of the little gods—the lesser [ones], who were considered the very old gods.” As Olivier notes, it seems odd that key deities like Xiuhtecuhtli and Xipe Totec would be grouped in the “lesser gods” category. Perhaps they were included because they were considered “very old gods.” Xiuhtecuhtli and Xipe Totec aside, the gods described in this section are largely Tlaloques (Opochtli, Nappa tecutli), or associated with specific professions or classes of people (Yiacatecutli, Macuilxochitl “god of the palace folk,” Nappa tecutli). The last “lesser god” may be Tezcatzoncatl, “Bacchus,” but he is oddly separated from the other “lesser gods” in that his chapter is meant to be read after the Tepictoton “Little Molded Ones” that follow him in the Pantheon. Visually he is associated with the “lesser gods” and I think he was meant to be read that way, as the “lesser gods” includes other deities associated with pulque and

21 Ibid, 393.
The Tepictoton are the visual end to the Pantheon, but they are also distinct in appearance from the rest of the pantheon. They are bodiless and largely colorless, and two pairs of the Tepictoton share rectangles in the grid instead of having their own spaces. The Tepictoton’s chapter begins “Those thus named Tepictoton were only imagined. They made them as representations of various mountains.” 

People who suffered from a number of bodily ailments such as paralysis, cramping, and palsy, or who were threatened with drowning, would mold small representations of these gods from amaranth seeds. They would hold a night long vigil and then ritually sacrifice the figures in the morning. The gods themselves were embodiments of certain mountains—Popocatepetl, Iztactepetl, etc., but they are represented here in their molded amaranth form. Their depiction is very similar to that found in Primeros Memoriales, but less colorful and with more Europeanized facial features.

In creating this visual juxtaposition between the different Aztec deities, The Gods constructs an Aztec pantheon that has more to do with European understandings of pagan belief than with actual Aztec belief. As mentioned above, The Gods’ hierarchical presentation of the Aztec deities does not reflect ways in which they are grouped and associated in Aztec documents. Instead, it reflects a Christian polemical interpretation of the Greco-Roman Pantheon that, as Olivier has written, “simplified and even caricatured” pagan religion. In ancient Greece, each city-state had its own patron god or goddess, but there were also Panhellenic deities who lived on Mount Olympus and were conceived of as superior to these patron deities. These twelve gods were Jupiter, Juno, Venus, Mars, Apollo, Diana, Neptune,

26 Ibid, 21-22.
27 Ibid, 22.
Vulcan, Mercury, Vesta (later replaced by Bacchus), Ceres, and Minerva.\textsuperscript{30} Sahagún transplanted the division between higher “Olympian” deities and lesser “local patron” deities onto the Aztec Gods. For the most part, those gods listed as more important in the \textit{Florentine Codex} are also glossed with Olympian deities, while the less important ones are for the most part local patron deities. This ignores the fact that Huitzilopochtli was himself a local patron deity, only elevated to the status of “Olympian” by the power of the Aztecs. It also applies one universal standard to the entire region. In the city where a specific deity was primary patron, that deity's importance may have risen far above that of some of Sahagún's Pantheon. The Gods negates local difference by conveying an imaginary universal Pre-Colombian religion.

Sahagún's glosses concretize the association between the Greco-Roman deities and Aztec deities, but the visual depiction of The Gods would have assisted the European viewer in making this connection. Similarities between the Catholic saints and Aztec gods have been discussed above, but Greco-Roman deities were also sometimes portrayed in this rectangular isolated format, and were recognizable by attributes. Jupiter held a lightening bold, Neptune a trident, Bacchus grapes, Hercules the lion skin, Ceres ears of wheat, Venus was naked with long hair, etc. One element in particular would have distinguished The Gods from Catholic saints and lent to their being identified with the Greco-Roman deities. Many of the figures in The Gods are depicted semi-nude by European standards—the so-called “lesser gods” in particular are often bare chested, and the skirt-like attire worn by some of them would have been reminiscent of Roman military skirts. Saints were portrayed semi-nude or even completely naked but this nakedness was always for a purpose. When Saints are naked it is usually in the context of their martyrdom, torture, or public disgrace, occasioned in response to their stalwart Catholic faith. Their nudity is not their natural condition, but rather a sign of

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 14.
the humiliations acted upon them for their strong belief. In the case of the Aztec deities, their semi-nude state is portrayed as normal (fig. 7). Luba Freedman notes that in Antiquity the Olympian gods might be represented either nude or clothed, but the Olympian women were always represented clothed, with the exception of Venus.\textsuperscript{31} It was only in the Middle Ages that all the Olympian deities began to be portrayed as nude, a choice that was meant to
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 214.
convey the demonic qualities of these figures.\textsuperscript{32} Demons, like the pagan gods, were depicted as nude, a code for lasciviousness.\textsuperscript{33} Nudity came to be evocative of paganism, and the Greco-Roman gods were nearly always morally ambiguous figures, even if they were not portrayed in a specifically negative light.\textsuperscript{34} The semi-nudity of the Aztec deities would have united with Sahagún's glosses in creating a mental connection in the minds of European viewers between the gods of antiquity and the gods of the Aztecs.

In connecting the Greco-Roman gods to the Aztecs, Sahagún achieved two things. He provided a framework for the European mind to conceive of them in which they would both be less dangerous and easier to conceptualize, and he presented the Aztecs within the favorable light of Greco-Roman antiquity. Sahagún's first achievement was to give European viewers a way to contextualize the exotic figures he presented. The Greco-Roman deities had formerly been a threat to Christianity and this view of them as false deities persisted, but the danger that they would continue to steal worshipers away from the Christian God was no longer imminent.\textsuperscript{35} As such, Renaissance thinkers were able to accept these figures as the embodiments of the valued ideas of antiquity and use them as allegorical, decorative figures, without concern that they would be worshiped. In The Gods Sahagún's juxtaposition of the Aztec deities to the now harmless Greco-Roman deities diminishes their implicit danger. It encourages the viewer to read the Aztec gods in a similar manner as to how they would have read the Greco-Roman gods, as essentially harmless and non-threatening. This approach opens up the possibility that one day the Aztec gods, like the Greco-Roman ones, might be casually used as allegories, or employed in decorative marginalia. They might one day be used as representative of some broader secular concept rather than as gathering places for

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 214.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 214.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 215.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 6.
sacred power.

If the Aztec gods could become harmless, their followers could become Christians. The choice to present the Aztec gods in this way can be read as an optimistic message. It invites the viewer's participation in Sahagún's hope that one day the Aztecs would be as Christian as their European counterparts who were also formerly pagan. In a sense these images express the reality of Sahagún and of his helpers. For them this was what the Aztec gods were—as false and as harmless, intrinsically if not in practice, as the Greco-Roman gods. In addition to this optimistic message for conversion, the connection between the Aztec gods and the Greco-Roman gods also makes a powerful statement about the Aztecs themselves. The Romans were esteemed by contemporary Europeans for their skill in statesmanship, architecture, philosophy, and art. They were viewed as the great ancestors to whom modern day Europeans compared themselves. With the Renaissance, classicizing motifs became abundant in architecture and art as markers of prestige and culture. By equating the Aztecs with the Romans, the implication was made that Aztec civilization was equally worthy of admiration and respect, that they also had achieved impressive heights of knowledge. While the Aztec gods are as false as the Greco-Roman gods, the Aztecs themselves are as noble and worthy of respect and honor as were the Greeks and Romans.

In the Florentine Codex's The Gods, Sahagún provides a representation of 26 Aztec deities. The style in which they are represented draws upon both Christian and Aztec conventions. Glosses on the images link the Aztec gods to Greco-Roman deities, suggesting that the Aztec gods were meant to be read as part of a Greco-Roman style Pantheon. In connecting the Aztec gods to the Greco-Roman pantheon, Sahagún avoids associating them too closely with either Pre-Colombian belief or Catholic belief, instead connecting them to the less threatening realm of Greco-Roman religion. In addition to avoiding dangerous
religious associations, this connection also suggests the inherent nobility of the Aztecs. It implies that they, like the Europeans, would one day be capable of completely embracing Christianity, to such an extent that their former gods would be considered mere allegories, decorative, nonthreatening conceits.
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