esis in the intact animal, fundamental differences do exist and these two processes cannot be equated.)

Todaro poses again the question why endogenous viruses have been able to persist throughout the evolution of their hosts (mice in this case). He gives as one possible explanation that the endogenous virus may provide a selective immunological advantage in protecting the host from similar but more virulent virus strains. An even more intriguing proposal, however, is that viral components might perform a necessary function during normal embryonic development. Could the viral agents stimulate normal multiplying cells in a manner related to neoplastic growth, and then cease to affect them after a certain state of development? This question is as yet unanswered, but the solution certainly rests in the domain of the developmental biologist. Again, the potentials shared by normal differentiation and carcinogenesis demand the attention of developmental biologists. The overlap is pointed up clearly by Coggins and Anderson, whose experiments show that under certain circumstances fetal antigens will protect hamsters against infection from doses of SV40. This and other suggestive findings cited in the book make the cancer problem almost irresistible to developmental biologists.

Each of the 14 thought-provoking reports carries a sizable bibliography, and there is a substantial subject index at the end of the book. Therefore this volume will also serve as a useful initial source and reference for all biologists interested in "cancer as a problem in biology."

MERLE MIZELL
Chapman H. Hymans III Laboratory of Tumor Cell Biology, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana

Aztec Ethnohistory

Sixteenth-Century Mexico. The Work of Sahagún. MUNRO S. EDMONSON, Ed. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1974. xvi, 292 pp. + plates. $15.

This book, which derives from a seminar held in 1972, consists of 11 papers by recognized authorities in the field of Nahuatl studies. The purpose of the seminar was to take stock of what is known about the 16th-century missionary and ethnographer Bernardino de Sahagún and his works, rather than to attempt a survey of Aztec culture. The papers take as their starting points a random selection of topics, from native medical texts (López Austin), rhetorical orations (Sullivan), and architecture (Robertson) to the doctrines and

A scene of gold working from Book 9 of the Florentine Codex, Laurentian Library, Florence. [Reproduced from *Sixteenth-Century Mexico: The Work of Sahagún*]

controversies of the 16th-century church in Spain and Mexico (Baudot). Specialists will appreciate that many of these essays contain new information or new insights, but what makes the volume interesting and valuable for anthropologists in general is a theoretical issue that crops up in almost every paper: To what extent can any outsider ever understand, let alone convey to others, the essential nature of an alien culture? This problem is faced by every ethnographer, from the novice embarking on his first field project to a man like Sahagún, with more than 60 years' residence in Mexico, fluent in Nahuatl, with access to the best informants, and with a genuine sympathy for Aztec culture.

With all his advantages, Sahagún nevertheless emerges as a product of his times. Baudot uses hitherto unpublished documents to show that Sahagún was deeply committed to the Franciscan view of missionary ethnology, with its dream of "an autonomous native Mexico under a strong and substantially independent viceroy, structured and ruled by friars desirous of founding a New Church based on the pre-Constantine model—all of this probably with millennarian and apocalyptic ambitions." The ideology of the Indians was to be changed "by using the Indian's own cultural and subjective reality and originality" (Baudot's phrase). But what was this subjective reality, and how could a Spanish friar ever hope to grasp it?

Sahagún belonged to a well-defined "school" of anthropology, which had its own party line, just as have the functionalists, structuralists, or Marxist anthropologists of more recent years. If one accepts the suggestion, put forward in Wilkerson's paper, that Andrés de Olmos was the author of both the Codex Tudela and the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas*, Sahagún's questionnaire-informant methodology, and its underlying assumptions, may have been almost standard among Franciscan missionary scholars. Starting from Sahagún's particular philosophy and his fixed ideas about what ethnology was for, we move on to another set of problems. Working backward from the answers incorporated into Sahagún's *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* through the Codex Florentino and other manuscript versions, López Austin attempts to reconstruct the original questionnaire, and—like any other questionnaire—it is seen to have its shortcomings and biases. Calnek's paper discusses informant bias, noting that Sahagún relied very heavily on nobles and merchants who had an aristocratic view of native society and a poor (if not misleading) idea of lower-class life and attitudes. The articles by Dibble and León-Portilla raise the problems of translation from Nahuatl to Spanish, though the underlying, and more serious, problem is one of cognition rather than of mere linguistics.

To give just one example, it can be argued that any attempt to explain the Aztec universe in terms of 16th-century European astronomy is doomed to fail, and that Sahagún's custom of writing down verbatim, and in the original language, the words of an informant is not the complete solution. The transcription may be accurate and authentic, but the problem is merely removed from the mind of the ethnographer to that of the reader, who still has to interpret the text. And, since much of Aztec culture withered under European dominion, we can no longer check in the field or repeat the experiment.

These theoretical issues are still alive, and at a recent academic party I heard the work of Lévi-Strauss discussed in much the same terms. Sahagún survives this scrutiny very well. Now that his philosophical position is more clearly understood, and his aims and methods reasonably well appreciated, he becomes a more useful source of information than ever before. The present book will revive the Sahagún industry, which had seemed to be running out of intellectual steam since the 1950–1969 publication of the Dibble and Anderson version of the Codex Florentino. Two participants in the seminar, with the apparent approval of their colleagues, have drawn up a list of problems requiring urgent solution. Several of their proposals require the collaboration of librarians, archivists, and scholars from many disciplines and countries. It is to be hoped that this initiative will not be stifled by sectarian interest or bureaucratic ineptitude.

WARWICK BRAY
Institute of Archaeology, University of London, London, England