Catherine Addington

SPAN 7040: Translation (Pellón)

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Prologue

*Scholia to the Stories of the Origin of the Indians* (1701–1703)

Francisco Ximénez, O.P. (1666–c. 1729)

The manuscript copy and Spanish translation made by Dominican friar Francisco Ximénez between 1701 and 1703 remains the only written source for the *Popol Wuj*, the creation narrative of the K’iche’ Maya people. Contained in a textbook for missionaries in the Guatemalan highlands, Ximénez annotated the K’iche’ narrative to highlight similarities and differences between Maya religious beliefs and Christian ones. His annotations, and particularly the prologue he appended to them, make clear his editorial agenda, which sought to analyze Indigenous beliefs in order to uproot them. This framing complicates scholarship of the *Popol Wuj*, which has treated the work as a source for “pure” pre-contact Maya mythology. In translating this prologue, I aim to contribute toward the recontextualization of this artifact, acknowledging that Ximénez’s ethnographic work among the K’iche’ is inextricable from his interpretive lens as a friar participating in his order’s evangelization campaign.

My translation prioritizes a straightforward reflection of:

1. Ximénez’s colonial attitude (anachronism and regionalism have been avoided),
2. his theological vocabulary (hence many footnotes),
3. and his wildly variant, nonstandard Spanish syntax and meandering sentence structures.

While these features all compromise the text’s readability, they are characteristics of eighteenth-century Spanish writing, both the linguistic fluidity of the period and the informality that attends manuscripts with a limited audience. It is important to ensure Ximénez comes off as the colonial friar he is. Moreover, this choice somewhat constitutes an inverse of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s axiom regarding translation, that a translator “must not turn a good poem into a bad one.” She must not turn a rambling, essentializing prologue into a stylish manifesto either.