

The Florentine Codex

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

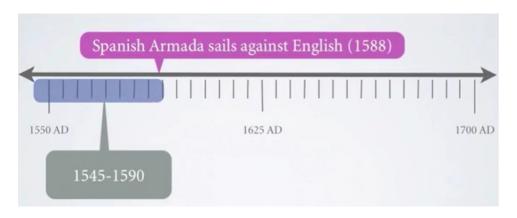
This tutorial covers the "Florentine Codex." By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, identify pages from the "Florentine Codex," and explain how it is one of the first examples of ethnography. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:



The "Florentine Codex" is one of the very first examples of ethnography.

1. Location and Time Period: The "Florentine Codex"

The "Florentine Codex" was written over the course of Fray Bernardino de Sahagun's lifetime, primarily from 1545 to 1590. This lesson's geographic focus is Mexico.



2. The "Florentine Codex"

The idea of a **codex**, or codices, which is the plural form, wasn't new to this region, as the Mesoamerican people had well-established codex-making traditions at the time of the Spanish conquest. In their desire to conquer and convert the native people of this region, the Spanish destroyed many of these works.

Franciscan monk Bernardino de Sahagun felt that if knowledge of the indigenous people's customs and traditions could be preserved, it would make it easier to convert them to Catholicism. This belief led to the first ethnographic efforts in the New World and the creation of the "Florentine Codex."



The Florentine Codex (also known as A General History of the Things of New Spain) by Fray Bernardino de Sahagun 1545-1590

Ink on paper

The "Florentine Codex" was written in 13 volumes with the working title of "A General History of the Things of New Spain." Each volume addressed a certain aspect of life for the Aztecs, such as their gods and local plants and animals:



Volume of Florentine Codex

Other volumes addressed their medicine and healing techniques, and their customs and festivals, such as this page referencing the Aztec calendar:



Volume of Florentine Codex

It was an important collection of the accumulated knowledge, history, and culture of the people of Mesoamerica. Because of this, Sahagun was careful in his attempts to preserve this knowledge in their own language. Therefore, it was originally written in **Nahautl**, the Aztec language, before later being translated into Spanish.

Sahagun also obtained information from a variety of sources, including both men and women, people from different social classes, and people of different professions. This notion of variety carries over into the drawings as well, which incorporate both indigenous and Western pictorial traditions, and were completed by many different artists. The "Florentine Codex" serves as one of the most important examples of early **ethnography** and cultural preservation in history.



Codex

A book made of hand-written pages.

Nahautl

Language of the Aztecs, spoken in Central Mexico and indigenous to Mesoamerica.

Ethnography

A branch of anthropology that deals with the scientific study of human cultures.

SUMMARY

Today you learned about **the "Florentine Codex,"** which is one of the first examples of ethnography. In addition to learning how to identify and define today's key terms, you examined and learned how to identify pages from the "Florentine Codex."

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.



TERMS TO KNOW

Codex

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Ethnography

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