The Florentine Codex and Indigenous Multimodal Rhetoric in Colonial Mexico

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Introduction

During Mexico's colonial period, Indigenous peoples used a variety of genres to communicate their history and try to improve their conditions. In addition to alphabetic genres like letters and petitions, they also created a variety of multimodal texts. One such text is known as the Florentine Codex, a project that began in the 1550s and was completed in 1577. The full Florentine Codex consists of twelve books written in both Nahuatl and Spanish that detail the knowledge, religion, culture, and history of the Mexica people before the Spanish-Aztec War of 1519-1521. Although it is often solely credited to Bernardino de Sahagún, a Spanish Franciscan friar, the Florentine Codex was co-written by a larger team of Indigenous scholars, scribes, and artists from the Colegio Imperial de la Santa Cruz of Tlatelolco. The books are extraordinary for many reasons including that they are collaboratively written, bilingual, multimodal, and provide readers with a fascinating look at an Indigenous pre-conquest worldview. Book 12, which details the arrival of the Spaniards and their eventual conquering of the Mexica people, is especially interesting because it displays a tension between indigenous knowledge and colonial reality that gives the book a rhetorical richness worthy of study.

Although Book 12 is primarily authored by indigenous people it is still a colonial product and should be studied as such. It presents an Indigenous point of view, but it does so under the constraints of both internal and external Spanish surveillance. Internal because the indigenous writers were born into in a new social and cultural paradigm they were expected to follow closely, or else they risked serious consequences (including bodily harm and death). External because they were under the supervision of a Spanish friar who was also actively supervised by greater political powers. For this reason, Matthew Restall refers to the Florentine Codex as a quasi-indigenous text.[1] The Florentine Codex closely approximates a pre-conquest indigenous worldview since the project attempted to be encyclopedic and covered much more information than a Spanish audience would have been interested in. However, traces of a Christian and colonial perspective impinge on that indigenous worldview: pre-conquest gods are sometimes referred to as

[1] Matthew Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés: The True Story of the Meeting That Changed History* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2019), 41.

"diablos" or devils, Spanish loan words like "diablo" and "retorica" are used in the Nahuatl text to convey concepts that didn't exist in pre-conquest times, and commentary about events that happened during the writing process can be found throughout the codex (in one section Sahagun writes about the pandemic nearly wiping out the Indigenous population). Book 12 takes the brunt of this colonial perspective because it is the only book that includes Spanish actors and because it borders on presenting an implicit argument about the injustice of the conquest and its aftermath.

The Florentine Codex contains three separate but interconnected narratives (see Figure 1):

- The first narrative is the Nahuatl alphabetic text. It was the first narrative to be written down and was composed by Nahua scholars who interviewed surviving elders several decades after the conquest.

- The second narrative is Sahagún's Spanish interpretation which is usually an accurate translation of the Nahuatl narrative but "often tones down Nahuatl passages that present the Spaniards as treacherous, evil, or greedy and tends to omit entire sections of the narrative that might have offended a Spanish audience."[2]

- The third narrative is made up of the images created by Nahua artist. There are 161 images in Book 12 and 1,844 throughout the full codex. The images are not simply decorative. They "offer evidence that can complement, amplify, contradict, or transcend the alphabetic text."[3] Most of the books in the Florentine Codex have images in full color but Book 12 is primarily in black and white because "the artists ran out of colors midway through Book 11."[4] Thus, the few images that contain color are probably of higher significance to the artists and to the narrative. It is also worth noting that there are various sections of white space in Book 12 that indicate the artists had planned to add images but ran out of time. This is an indicator that the third narrative was created last.

[2] Kevin Terraciano, "Reading between the Lines of Book 12," in *The Florentine Codex: An Encyclopedia of the Nahua World in Sixteenth-Century Mexico,* ed. Jeanette Favrot Peterson and Kevin Terraciano (University of Texas Press, 2019), 48.
[3] Terraciano, "Reading between the Lines," 45.
[4] Terraciano, "Reading between the Lines," 49.

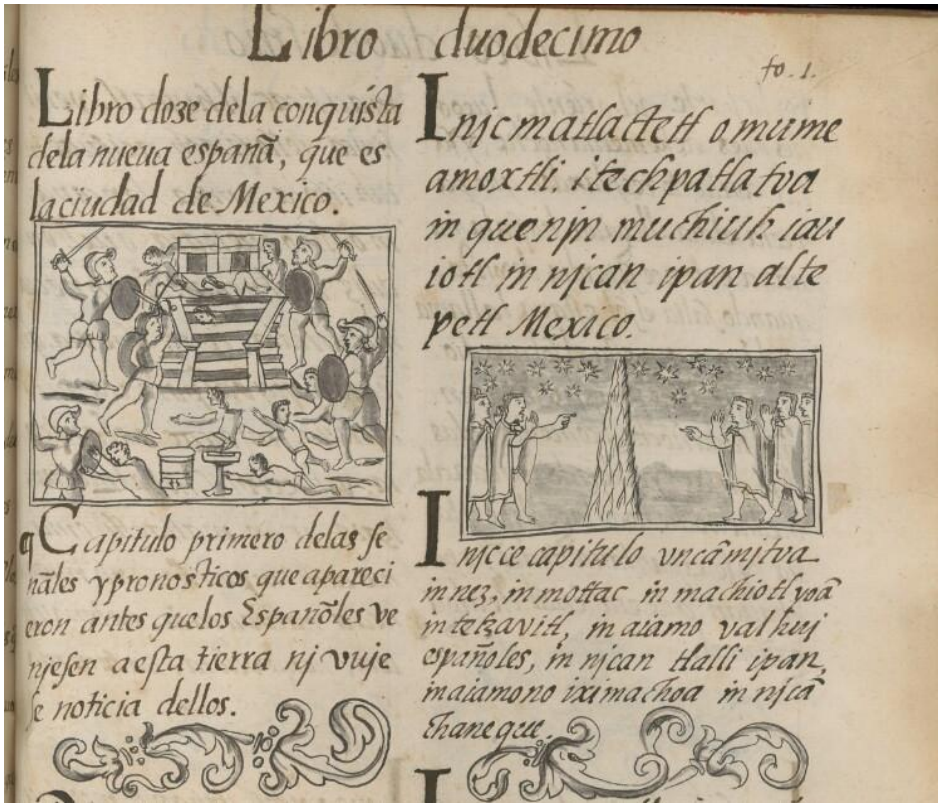

Figure 1: Image of the first page of the narrative section of Book 12. The left column is in Spanish, and the right column is in Nahuatl. Pictures depict aspects of the narrative. Florentine Codex Book 12, Folio 1r. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, and by permission of MiBACT

Course Applicability

Undergraduate Courses

Language, Power, and Knowledge
Rhetorical History
Rhetoric Special Topics
Multimodal Rhetorics
Feminist Rhetorics

Graduate Courses

Classical Rhetoric
Rhetorical Theory
Decolonial Rhetorics
Multimodal Rhetorics

Key Pedagogical Themes

Authorial Intent: The three narratives in Book 12 are authored by different people/groups which allow students to see tensions within the collaborative text. For example, the Nahuatl text and the Spanish text have differing views of the Spaniards and their moral integrity. Meanwhile, the pictographic text adds to the Nahuatl text and in some instances provides a counter-reading to what is explicitly stated. The Nahuatl text was written by a handful of elite indigenous scholars who originated from the altepetl (city-state) of Tlatelolco and thus the narrative displays a clear Tlatelolcan perspective and pride. Meanwhile, the pictographic text was created by a larger number of artists who were likely of a younger generation.

Since the Mexica lived in a hierarchy made up of many altepemeh (city-states) they had many internal conflicts and rivalries throughout their history. The writers of the Florentine Codex consisted of "'as many as eight or ten' educated Nahuas from Tlatelolco."[5] Because of the regional identities of the writers, Book 12 depicts and highlights the past political rivalry between Tenochtitlan (the capital city of the Mexica) and Tlatelolco, a smaller altepetl. Matthew Restall calls the Florentine Codex a "Tlatelolca-Franciscan account,"[6] while Lockhart calls it the "Tlatelolcan flavor of Book Twelve."[7] Evidence of the Tlatelolcan perspective is found in the Nahuatl text when "Itzquauhtzin, the Tlatelolcan ruler, is placed as much as possible on the same level as Moteucçoma (though he is popular where Moteucçoma is hated), and the Tenochca are seen as cowards who desert their part of the island and leave the real fighting to the Tlatelolca…[and when] the final Tlatelolcan phase is told [it is done] in greater detail than events in Tenochtitlan."[8] The Tlatelolcan perspective suggest that the writers had pride in their regional indigenous identity even after the fall of the Mexica empire.

The Spanish narrative frequently attempts to downplay or soften the violence that the Nahuatl narrative describes. For example, "Sahagún inserted a paragraph in the Spanish column that is not based on the Nahuatl…[where he] commented that Captain don Hernando Cortés could have destroyed the Mexica many times over, but always showed mercy and gave them as many chances to make peace as possible, so that they would not be completely destroyed."[9] Terraciano takes this to mean that Sahagún was invested in protecting Cortés's image "despite the violent tenor of the

[5] Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés,* 41.
[6] Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés,* 41.
[7] James Lockhart, *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (University of California Press, 1993), 30.
[8] Lockhart, *We People Here,* 30.
[9] Terraciano, "Reading between the Lines," 48.

narrative."[10] Time and again, the Spanish narrative reveals tensions between the content of Book 12 and the desire to protect, or at least not question, the Spanish presence in colonial Mexico.

The pictographic narrative was added much later than the original Nahuatl text and was created by a new generation of Nahua artists (due in part because the pandemic wiped out many Nahua people). Students can consider some of the choices the artists made to provide a third narrative (see Appendix). One good example is found in left hand drawing in Figure 1 which depicts a violent attack by the Spaniards against the Mexica. This is an interesting artifact because it is one of two images that is out of chronological order. The image is placed directly underneath the Spanish text "Book Twelve, of the conquest of New Spain, that is, of the City of Mexico" and above "First Chapter, of the signs and omens that appeared before the Spaniards came to this land or had been heard of." Its placement underneath the text "the conquest of New Spain" could be seen as an implicit argument about the unjust nature of the war since it was started without provocation during a religious festivity. It could also be read as casting doubt on the "signs and omens" if the artists viewed this section as being a form of pandering to a Spanish audience.

Historiography: Book 12 of the Florentine Codex offers only one perspective of the conquest of Mexico. A variety of other contemporaneous texts exist that allow students to see how the narrating of past events was affected by the writers' political needs, relationships with power, and the dominant ideology in the time of their writing. Students can learn a lot by comparing different accounts of the same story. I particularly like pairing the Florentine Codex with a 1520 text known as Hernan Cortés's "second letter" and an 1892 reproduction of a lost 1552 text known as the "Lienzo de Tlaxcala." I recommend students compare the following passages and images that depict the same events from different perspectives:

1. *The initial meeting between the Tlaxcalteca and Cortés and his army.* Found in Pagden 58-66; Lienzo Cells 1-8; and Book 12, Chapter 10 and 11.
2. *The massacre of Cholula*. Found in Pagden 70-74; Lienzo Cell 9; and Book 12 Chapter 11.
3. *The meeting between Moctezuma and Cortés*. Found in Pagden 84-87; Lienzo Cell 11; and Book 12, Chapter 16.
4. *The capture of Moctezuma*. Found in Pagden 88-92; Book 12, Chapter 17.

[10] Terraciano, "Reading between the Lines," 48.

5. *The massacre in Tenochtitlan often referred to as "la Noche Triste."* Found in Pagden 128-129; Lienzo Cell 14; and Book 12, Chapter 20.
6. *The death of Moctezuma*. Found in Pagden 132; Book 12, Chapter 23.
7. *The escape of the Spaniards and the Tlaxcalteca from Tenochtitlan.* Found in Pagden 137/139-144; the Lienzo's last three cells of Row 3 and all of Row 4; and Book 12, Chapter 26-28.

Mythohistorical Writing: The beginning of Book 12 is very different in tone and content from the rest of the narrative. In this beginning section, the aftermath of the war is presented as inevitable with many signs and omens appearing to the Mexica "Ten years before the arrival of the Spaniards."[11] In this opening chapter they also refer to the god Huitzilopochtli with the Spanish word "diablo" or "devil."[12] They assert that when the Mexica came upon the Spaniards, they "thought that it was [the god] Quetzalcoatl Topiltzin who had arrived."[13] They also reassert the myth that Moctezuma surrendered upon his first meeting with Cortés due to the belief that he was the god Quetzalcoatl. These details reveal a mythological quality to the understanding of the conquest. Yet it is unclear whether this belief originated from the native community or if it was a Spanish myth based on their prejudicial opinions of the Mexica/Nahua.

There are two competing theories on why this section appears and why it seems so different from the rest of the narrative. The first is that either the Nahua writers or their informants believed that the conquest was to some degree predestined. Miguel Leon Portilla[14] and Walter Mignolo[15] base this on the Nahua concept of tlatollotl which they define as the idea that Mexica history and legacy was so important that history was molded to preserve a collective truth of Mexica greatness. In other words, the greatness of the Mexica and the subjugation of the Nahua could only coexist if a greater power, a Christian God perhaps, had decided it would be so.

The second theory is that the Nahua writers wanted to incorporate a Christian-mythic aspect to the history specifically for their Spanish audience.[16] Camilla Townsend writes that the Florentine Codex team were the first to ever suggest that the Mexica believed the Spaniards to be gods. She observes that "the stories they told bore a distinct resemblance to the narrations in certain Greek and Latin texts that were in the Franciscan school

[11] Lockhart, *We People Here,* 50.
[12] Lockhart, *We People Here,* 52.
[13] Lockhart, *We People Here,* 60.
[14] Miguel León-Portilla, *Toltecáyotl: Aspectos de la cultura náhuatl* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980), 58.
[15] Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Duke University Press, 2011), 142.
[16] Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés,* 42.

library. They waxed eloquent in their tales of pillars of fire and a trembling king."[17] Whether the mythic aspects of Book 12 originated to appease a Spanish audience or were internalized from a Spanish perspective is a debate for students and teachers to engage with as they read through the book. Either way, there are rhetorical reasons to incorporate mythic aspects into conquest history.

Women in the Conquest: As students look through Book 12, it is likely they will notice the Indigenous woman who makes select appearances in the images of the book. The Nahuatl narrative describes her as "a woman, one of us people here, [who] came accompanying them [the Spaniards] as interpreter. Her name was Marina and her homeland Tepeticpac, on the coast, where they first took her."[18] The Spaniards named her Marina but due to the lack of the "r" sound in Nahuatl, Indigenous people pronounced her name "Malina" and when they added the honorific suffix "tzin" she became known as "Malintzin." We can see this spelling in the Nahuatl text although it appears as Marina in both the English and Spanish translations.

Malintzin is a polarizing figure. Arguably because she is a woman, which adds an element of sex to discussions about her. We know that she was a slave that was "gifted" to the Spaniards and after that Cortés "gave" her to Alonso Puertocarrero, one of the highest-ranking men around. Around the time her usefulness as an interpreter became apparent, Puertocarrero was sent back to Spain to present the king with the gold the Spaniards had collected and to help persuade him to give Cortés the permits he needed.

After Puertocarrero's departure, she became a full-time interpreter and was almost always by Cortés side. Months after the fall of Tenochtitlan, she gave birth to a son by Cortés who he took back to Spain when the boy was around five or six years old. She was also married to another conquistador around the time her son was two or three and had a daughter by her husband. Unfortunately, debates about her relationships with these Spaniards and whether she was forced, coerced, or a willing participant have taken the focus away from her ingenuity as a speaker and interpreter. Yet we know that she made important contributions to the communication between Spaniards and Indigenous leaders. Whether those contributions were for the better or the worse is another debate that adds to her polarization.

A keyword search of the Digital Florentine Codex, we can see that she is mentioned by name in about twelve folios and that she appears in eight images. Considering the length of Book 12 and the 161 images, she is not a very prominent figure, but her images are quite powerful. [See Figure 2 and

[17] Camilla Townsend, *Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 96.
[18] Lockhart, *We People Here,* 86.

3]. Students might analyze what differences they notice in her textual vs pictographic portrayal.

Figure 2: Book 12; Folio 26r. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, and by permission of MiBACT

Figure 3: Book 12, Folio 29r. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, and by permission of MiBACT

Essential Terminology

Altepetl or Altepemeh: Students should be aware that the "Aztecs" is a misnomer for the people who were known as the "Mexica" (pronounced meh-shee-ca). The Mexica were made up of an alliance of altepemeh (city-states) but had a main ruler, or tlatoani, located in Tenochtitlan. Although people within the alliance would see themselves as part of the Mexica, they had stronger regional identities based on their originating altepetl (city-state). The Mexica also had a powerful rival known as the Tlaxcalteca from the main altepetl in Tlaxcala. When the Spaniards arrived, they allied themselves with Tlaxcala and were able to destroy Tenochtitlan with the help of their Tlaxcalteca allies. The altepetl identity of indigenous people in Mexica was thus highly important and plays a role in the perspectives depicted by various conquest texts.

Pictographic Event-Oriented Histories: Pictographic event-oriented histories "in which time and place are arranged around the intersection of

event and participant."[19] These can also be referred to as "res gestae." They are "genealogical-historical screen-folds, painted generally on long panels of animal hide to record the dynastic histories of the Mixtec ruling families… [and where] the deeds or events of specific individuals or groups outline the story, and time and place are often given, but they are subsumed."[20] I classify the pictorial narrative in Book 12 as a form of the res-gestae or event-oriented pictographic histories. The pictographic narrative is primarily focused on big events like the arrival of the Spaniards, the attack on the Mexica, the deaths of Mexica rulers, etc. The images in Book 12 generally follow a chronological order except for one image in the beginning that depicts violence (see Figure 1) before it is introduced in the text.

Myth-history; Mythistory; or Mythohistorical: The spelling can differ, but the term refers to the blending of mythic aspects in historical narrative. Lee Bebout writes that "myth and history constitute a foundational element to identity-based social movements. These narratives often provide the basis through which community can be imagined and citizenship articulated."[21] Similarly, Joseph Mali explains that we tend to separate myth and history as opposites and dismiss myths as "self-deception" or "collective error."[22] Instead, Mali explains that mythistory is "inevitable, and ultimately valuable, [it is] histories of personal and communal identity" and communicate the "myths of common ancestry and territory that define and defend the national community or, more fundamentally, the primordial myths of birth and death, fertility and purity, damnation and salvation, and so on, that make up the moral and cultural inhibitions of humanity."[23] The Mexica had many mythohistorical components in their ancient stories. Mexica gods were embedded in their long group migration to Mexico and their eventual rise to power. Book 12 also contains mythohistorical aspects, but these are new ones not found in previous sources. It is difficult to say whether these mythohistorical elements originated organically among the Nahua people or if they were purposely included to reify Spanish beliefs that the Mexica believed the arriving Spaniards to be gods. Although the mythohistorical narrative in Book 12 does not appear in any previous sources, it is retold in various European sources after it, solidifying the belief whether it was true or not.

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[19] Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter Mignolo, *Writing without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes* (Duke University Press, 1994), 54.
[20] Boone and Mignolo, *Writing without Words,* 55.
[21] Lee Bebout, *Mythohistorical Interventions: The Chicano Movement and its Legacies* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011) 2.
[22] Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), xii.
[23] Mali, *Mythistory,* xii.

Primary Sources

Cortés, Hernán, and Anthony Pagden. *Letters from Mexico*. Yale University Press, 1986.

Hernan Cortés, the captain at the forefront of the Spanish-Aztec war, wrote several long reports to the king of Spain detailing his actions in Mexico.

Federico Navarrete (coord.) *Reconstrucción Histórica Lienzo de Tlaxcala*. México, Dirección General de Asuntos de Personal Académico, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas-UNAM, 2019. https://lienzodetlaxcala.unam.mx/el-lienzo-de-tlaxcala/

The Lienzo de Tlaxcala was a large pictographic text created around 1552 that depicts the role of the Tlaxcalteca in the conquest. Although they initially fought against the Spaniards, they eventually made an alliance and fought with them against the Mexica. The rhetorical situation for the creation of the original Lienzo (which was lost and has never been found) was a planned delegation to Spain to meet Emperor Charles V (the same intended audience for Cortés's letter). The Lienzo should be understood as a pictographic argument of the importance of the Tlaxcalteca and their right to certain privileges, which they were granted in 1562. In 1862 a copy of the original was made in book form and that is the surviving copy we have today. This website presents a digital recreation of what the Lienzo would have looked like and also allows students to see how the cells in closer detail. The website cited here was developed by Mexican scholars and is fully in Spanish. Teachers can also access a digital recreation of the Lienzo through Wikipedia (https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lienzo_de_Tlaxcala) however this version does not have details on what is happening in each cell.

Lockhart, James, editor and translator. *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico*. University of California Press, 1993.

Lockhart's book has the Nahuatl version with an English translation on the left page, and the Spanish version with an English translation on the right page. It includes an introductory chapter that highlights various aspects of the text worth analyzing. Additionally, it contains excerpts of other indigenous sources that write about the conquest, offering students more primary sources to analyze. The Lockhart textbook includes all the images found in the original Book 12, but a small downside is that all images are in black and white.

Sahagún, Bernardino de, Antonio Valeriano, Alonso Vegerano, Martín Jacobita, Pedro de San Buenaventura, Diego de Grado, Bonifacio Maximiliano, Mateo Severino, et al. *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España (Florentine Codex).* Ms. Mediceo Palatino 218–20, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, MiBACT, 1577. Available at Digital Florentine Codex/Códice Florentino Digital, edited by Kim N. Richter, Alicia Maria Houtrouw, Kevin Terraciano, Jeanette Favrot Peterson, Diana Magaloni, and Lisa Sousa. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2023. https://florentinecodex.getty.edu

This is the free digital version of the Florentine Codex. It includes all twelve books with English translations for both the Spanish and Nahuatl.

Secondary Sources

Boone, Elizabeth Hill and Walter Mignolo. *Writing without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*. Duke University Press, 1994.

This edited collection is a great resource for understanding pictographic texts. Various chapters discuss the political contexts and purposes during the colonial period, the main genres used in pre-conquest times, and the way that power and ideology affects our perspective of what we count as "writing." I recommend this resource for teachers who want to incorporate fully pictographic texts or who want to compare the pictographic genre with Book 12's genre blending version.

Hamann, Byron Ellsworth. "Object, Image, Cleverness: The Lienzo de Tlaxcala." Art History 36.3 (2013): 518-545.Kerpel Magaloni, Diana. *The Colors of the New World: Artists, Materials, and the Creation of the Florentine Codex.* Getty Research Institute, 2014

This is a great resource for teachers who want to pair the Lienzo de Tlaxcala with Book 12. Hamann explains the ways to read the pictographic text, provides context for its original creation, and explains the main rhetorical moves found in the text.

Peterson, Jeanette Favrot and Kevin Terraciano. *The Florentine Codex: An Encyclopedia of the Nahua World in Sixteenth-Century Mexico.* University of Texas Press, 2019.

This edited collection is solely focused on the Florentine Codex. The introduction and chapters 1 and 3 are the most useful for those

reading Book 12. Both the pictographic and textual narratives are analyzed.

Restall, Matthew. When Montezuma Met Cortés: The True Story of the Meeting That Changed History. HarperCollins Publishers, 2019.

Restall's book uses primary sources to contextualize the meeting between Moctezuma and Cortés. This book also looks at the historiography behind the meeting, the way the story grew into mythic proportions with each retelling, and breaks down how the Spaniards were able to defeat the Mexica. This is a good resource for understanding the historical context of Book 12.

Richter, Kim and Alicia Maria Houtrouw. "Introducing the Florentine Codex (1575-77) and It's Three Narratives," *Available at Digital Florentine Codex/Códice Florentino Digital, edited by Kim N. Richter, Alicia Maria Houtrouw, Kevin Terraciano, Jeanette Favrot Peterson, Diana Magaloni, and Lisa Sousa. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2025.*
https://florentinecodex.getty.edu

The digital Florentine Codex has a number of resource essays. This is a good essay for understanding more about the three narratives in the codex.

Townsend, Camilla. *Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

While Restall's book provides a good historical context using a great number of Spanish primary sources as well as indigenous sources, Camilla Townsend's book provides a history of the Mexica from Mexica sources. Restall's book focuses primarily on the moment of contact. Townsend's book focuses on the Mexica's preconquest history, the conquest, and the aftermath of the conquest decades later.

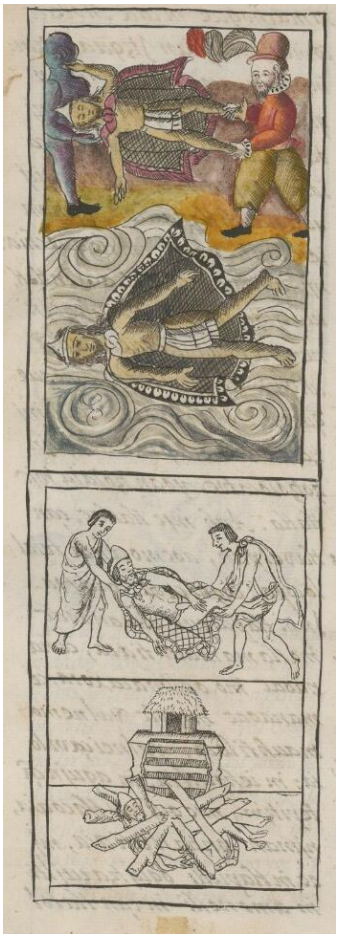
Discussion Questions

1. The death of Moctezuma remains a mysterious detail. In his second letter, Cortés claims that Moctezuma asked "to be taken out onto the roof of the fortress where he might speak to the captains of his people and tell them to end the fighting…[but just as] he was to speak to them, he received a blow on his head from a stone; and the injury was so serious that he died three days later. I told two of the Indians who were captive to carry him out on their shoulders to the people. What they did with him I do not know; only the war did not stop because of

it, but grew more fierce and pitiless each day."[24] However, Chapter 21 and Chapter 23 in Book 12 provides a different explanation of what happened. What differences do you notice between Book 12 and Cortés's explanation of how Moctezuma died? What constraints or restrictions might the writers of the Florentine Codex have faced when writing about this moment?

2. Compare the Spanish version of Moctezuma's treatment in Chapter 21 and his death in Chapter 23. How closely does the Spanish match the Nahuatl? What does this tell you about what Sahagún thought about the matter? What constraints or restrictions might Sahagún have faced when discussing this matter?

3. Observe the accompanying images to Chapter 23 (Figure 4 and 5). You'll notice that one of the images is very big, detailed, and in color. How do the images interact with the text? In other words, do the images depict the same thing as the text or do they add, contradict, omit, or expand on what we find in the accompanying alphabetic text?



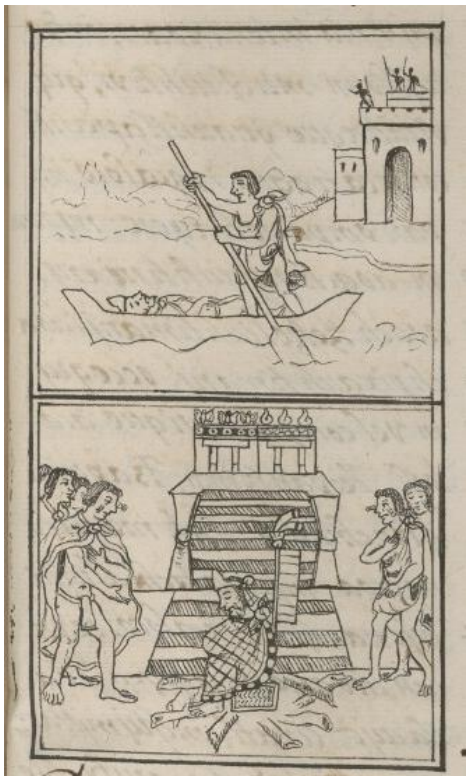


Figure 4: Left, the Spaniards throw Moctezuma's and Itzquahtzin's bodies in the water. Underneath, Mexica pick up Moctezuma's body and burn it in a pyre. Book 12, Folio 40v. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, and by permission of MiBACT.

Figure 5: Right, The Mexica take Itzquahtzin's body back to Tlatelolco. Book 12, Folio 41r. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, and by permission of MiBACT.

[24] Anthony Pagden, *Letters From Mexico* (Yale University, 1986), 132.

4. In Book 12 there is a description of the Tlaxcalteca giving their elite daughters away to the Spaniards: "The Tlaxcalans guided, accompanied, and led them until they brought them to their palaces and placed them there. They showed them great honors, they gave them what they needed and attended to them, and then they gave them their daughters."[25] The Spanish version writes: "They also gave them many of their maiden daughters, and they received them and used them as their women."[26] Scholars have noted that the women were not given as gifts. Instead, in both Tlaxcala and Tenochtitlan, the elite daughters of rulers and noblemen were presented as wives for the Spaniards to cement a new alliance. What role did cultural differences play in the conquest? How does Book 12 depict the role of women during the conquest? What constraints might writers have faced in discussing how Spaniards treated Mexica women?

5. In his second letter, Cortés writes "I left a careful watch on the crossroads and went to Mutezuma's houses, as I had done at other times, and after having joked and exchanged pleasantries with him and after he had given me some gold jewelry and one of his daughters and other chiefs' daughters to some of my company, I told him that I knew of what had happened in the city of Nautecal…and the Spaniards who had been killed there."[27] Curiously, Book 12 omits that Moctezuma gave his daughters as wives for the Spaniards. What reasons did the writers have for omitting this detail but keeping it for the Tlaxcalteca?

6. This discussion question is best for those teaching in a Hispanic Serving Institution and links together the Florentine Codex with the oral tradition of Llorona stories in Mexico and other Latin American countries. If students are unfamiliar with La Llorona, introduce them to the story before discussing. Read the quote and look at the accompanying image (see Figure 6): "The sixth omen was that many times a woman would be heard going along weeping and shouting. She cried out loudly at night, saying, 'O my children, we are about to go forever.' Sometimes she said, 'O my children, where am I to take

[25] Lockhart, *We People Here,* 92.
[26] Lockhart, *We People Here,* 93.
[27] Pagden, *Letters From Mexico,* 88-89.

you?’”[28] What similarities and differences do you see between la Llorona folktale, and the omen discussed in Book 12? What inferences can you make about how the story came to be and how it has changed over the centuries, and why?

Figure 11: A woman crying out at night. Book 12, Folio 2v. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, and by permission of MiBACT.

[28] Lockhart, *We People Here,* 54.