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Fabricating History: *The Codex Mendoza* and Manuscript Production
during the Founding of New Spain

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Art History

by

Carlos Anílber Rivas

2013

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2013

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Fabricating History: *The Codex Mendoza* and Manuscript Production
during the Founding of New Spain

by

Carlos Anílber Rivas

Master of Arts in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Charlene Villaseñor Black, Chair

This thesis examines the historiography of the *Codex Mendoza*, one of the earliest surviving and most important manuscripts produced in Mexico after the conquest. In particular, I examine its provenance and evaluate its known documented history. How did this manuscript, produced in 1540 in Mexico by native artists and scribes, reach Europe and when? This reexamination highlights the absence of documentation supporting the widely-held belief that the *Codex Mendoza* reached France and not Spain, its intended destination, after the ship carrying it to Europe was plundered by pirates. After closely examining what is known of the manuscript's provenance and suggesting a complete rethinking of what we know about the *Codex Mendoza*,

this thesis demonstrates the interpretive side-effects of current assumptions about the manuscript's provenance and dependence on out of date historiography. The *Codex Mendoza's* assumed patronage and believed-intended audience has conditioned art historians to interpret the artistic style of the manuscript as containing European influence. However, a close re-examination of the codex in relation to other manuscripts produced in New Spain at the same time demonstrates that the *Codex Mendoza's* content and visual style is effectively all from the pre-conquest period and therefore radically different from most manuscripts produced at the time. Significantly, almost no comparisons exist in the literature on the topic making this comparison one of the first such contextual stylistic analyses of the *Codex Mendoza*. In addition, the methodologies employed by art historians in their study of the style of sixteenth-century manuscripts from New Spain have proved problematic, and in the case of the *Codex Mendoza* specifically, its believed European patronage has preconditioned interpretations of its artistic style. To address this problem I compare the *Codex Mendoza* with a contemporaneous manuscript of similar provenance. The comparison reveals that the existence and circulation of multiple visual styles and narrative strategies in manuscripts during the 1540s in New Spain was directly related to the intended purpose of the manuscript itself. This comparison also allows for the *Codex Mendoza's* proper placement within its art historical context and the broader context of manuscript production in New Spain.

The thesis begins with a close examination of the manuscript and the currently accepted history associated with it. I then trace the documentation concerning the origin of this believed history and challenge early historians' assertions about the *Codex Mendoza*, which I will argue are fabrications intended to please seventeenth-century audiences. Having determined that we

know nothing about the manuscript's patronage, I end with a reexamination of the manuscript's artistic style by contextualizing it with the *Relación de Michoacán*, a manuscript also from New Spain produced virtually at the same time.

The thesis of Carlos Anílber Rivas is approved

Robert Brown

Stella Nair

Charlene Villaseñor Black, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

Para mis padres, a quienes les debo el sincero amor y pasión que tengo por América.

No pasa un día donde no pienso sobre algún aspecto de nuestra tierra...

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Introduction

This thesis examines the historiography of the *Codex Mendoza*, one of the earliest surviving and most important codices produced in Mexico after the conquest. In particular, I examine its provenance and evaluate its known documented history. How did this manuscript, produced in 1540 in Mexico by native artists and scribes, reach Europe and when? This reexamination highlights the absence of documentation supporting the widely-held belief that the *Codex Mendoza* reached France and not Spain, its intended destination, after the ship carrying it to Europe was plundered by pirates. After closely examining what is known of the manuscript's provenance and suggesting a complete rethinking of what we know about the *Codex Mendoza*, this thesis demonstrates the interpretive side-effects of current assumptions about the manuscript's provenance. The *Codex Mendoza's* believed patronage and believed-intended audience have conditioned art historians to interpret the artistic style of the manuscript as containing European influence. However, a close re-examination of the codex in relation to other manuscripts produced in New Spain at the same time demonstrates that the *Codex Mendoza's* content and visual style is effectively all from the pre-conquest period. Significantly, almost no comparisons exist in the literature on the topic making this comparison one of the first such contextual stylistic analyses of the *Codex Mendoza*. In addition, the methodologies employed by art historians in their study of the style of sixteenth-century manuscripts from New Spain have proved problematic, and in the case of the *Codex Mendoza* specifically, its assumed European patronage has preconditioned interpretations of its artistic style. To address this problem I compare the *Codex Mendoza* with a contemporaneous manuscript of similar provenance. The comparison reveals the existence and circulation of multiple visual styles and narrative strategies

during the 1540s in New Spain in manuscript production, allowing for the *Codex Mendoza's* proper placement within its art historical context and the broader context of manuscript production in New Spain.

The history of *Codex Mendoza* begins with the invasion of the Mexica Empire¹ itself. In 1520, the Extremadura-born Hernán Cortés led an army of Spaniards and Tlaxcalans across what is now the Valley of Mexico into the island city of Tenochtitlán, the center of the Mexica Empire and one of the largest cities in the world outside of Asia (Figure 1). In a battle of epic proportions, the Spanish and Tlaxcalan army slowly succeeded in defeating the Mexica and capturing their emperor, Moctecuzoma II, bringing an end to a powerful empire that had begun about a century earlier. This invasion, unfortunately, led to a near complete destruction of the island city, whose architectural marvels became forgotten ruins buried underneath the construction of Mexico City which became the capital of this now colonized region (Figure 2).

In 1535, a decade and half after the invasion, the Spanish King and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V² appointed Antonio de Mendoza as the first Viceroy of this new colony, now called the Viceroyalty of New Spain, to govern it under the Spanish crown and to pacify uprisings, control rivalry amongst the conquerors (“conquistadores”), as well as to increase revenues for the royal treasury (Figure 3). It is in the midst of this bloody and unstable context that Viceroy Mendoza arrived; he never saw the beautiful city of Tenochtitlán that Cortés had seen and

¹ In this paper I will refer to the Tenochtitlán- Texcoco-Tlacopan “Triple Alliance,” popularly known as the “Aztec Empire,” as the Mexica Empire in keeping with contemporaneous terminology. The word Aztec was invented in the nineteenth century to collectively refer to the various distinct ethnic groups that formed the Mexica Empire, but for the purposes of this thesis the word “Aztec” is not specific enough.

² He was Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire and King Charles I of Spain.

described a decade earlier as most of it had already been destroyed when he arrived.³ Born in 1495, Viceroy Mendoza came from a wealthy and influential Castilian family that had close ties with the Spanish crown and had for centuries been interested in intellectual and humanistic pursuits. Indeed, the Mendozas are often credited with bringing the Italian Renaissance to Spain.⁴

Among Mendoza's undertakings during his tenure as Viceroy of New Spain was the commissioning of a document that described the Mexica people's history and customs, believed to have been done under the request of Charles V to inform the Spanish court about the newly conquered people now under Spanish dominion. This document has become known as the *Codex Mendoza*.

The *Codex Mendoza* is perhaps the most important of the several manuscripts produced in New Spain during the early aftermath of the Spanish conquest of the Mexica Empire. Made in the city of Tenochtitlán, it is a stunning pictorial and textual account of the Mexica people prior to the Spanish conquest, with illustrations produced by Mexica scribes and a textual commentary, in Spanish, written by a still unidentified Catholic friar. The *Codex* has become an invaluable resource for information not only about the history of the Mexica, but also for knowledge about Mexica daily life and customs. It is comprised of three sections: the first section tells the chronological history of the Mexica people beginning with the founding of Tenochtitlán and subsequent Mexica imperial conquests; the second section documents (in detail found virtually nowhere else) the tribute paid by the peoples conquered by the Mexica, shedding

³ For English translations of Cortes's letters to Charles V, see Hernán Cortés, *Cartas de relación de la Conquista de Méjico*, 2 ed., 2 vols. (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1932).

⁴ Gustavo Ávalos Guzmán, *Don Antonio de Mendoza, Comendador de Socuellamos y Caballero de la Orden De Santiago, Primer Virrey de la Nueva España* (Morelia: Publicaciones de la Universidad Michoacana 1942), 19.

light on the economy of Tenochtitlán and that of its empire; the third and final section details Mexica daily life and customs, from childhood to old age.⁵

The first section of the *Codex Mendoza* contains what is arguably one of the most famous and iconic images of Mexica culture, an eagle perched atop a cactus plant (Figures 3 and 4). This image lies at the center of a composition that conceptually depicts, in pre-conquest Mexica style, the island-city of Tenochtitlán with two diagonal canals that form an “X” shape. This particular depiction of the eagle is one of the oldest extant prototypes of this composition, which symbolically depicts the Mexica legend that the wandering nomadic Mexica found the location of their permanent settlement, Tenochtitlán, when they saw an eagle with a snake in its claws perched atop a cactus plant growing out of a rock.⁶ At the end of their journey the Mexica found such an eagle on the island where they were to build Tenochtitlán. The story — and the image — eventually became one of the defining symbols of what later became the nation of Mexico and now is iconically on the flag of Mexico itself (Figure 6). Its presence in the *Codex Mendoza* makes the document of the utmost interest for learners not only of Mexica culture and history, but for all those interested in the formation of national identity and the construction of a national cultural heritage in the modern nation of Mexico.

Surprisingly, the *Codex Mendoza* has yet to receive a comprehensive technical examination. Now housed in the Bodleian Library of Oxford University, to date only the *Codex*’s paper has been studied in any detail; watermarks throughout the *Codex* reveal that the paper on

⁵ For a color facsimile of the *Codex Mendoza*, see the second volume of Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *The Codex Mendoza*, 4 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). This remains the most recent (and definitive) color reproduction of the manuscript. The third volume provides a transcription of the manuscript accompanied with an English translation.

⁶ This same image appears in other early colonial manuscripts, such as the *Manuscrit Tovar*, *Codex Izhuatpec*, and *Códice Aubin*. See Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 6.

which the *Codex* was written is of European, specifically Spanish, origin,⁷ which ensures that the *Codex's* images were painted after the Spanish invasion. Each page of the *Codex* measures approximately 8.5 inches wide by 12.4 inches high.⁸ The current binding dates to the seventeenth century and is composed of plain vellum-covered boards.⁹ An examination and chemical analyses of the pigments and inks used in the *Codex*, which has yet to be undertaken, would shed light on questions regarding the precise composition of the *Codex* and the relative dates of the each of the three sections: were they all composed at the same time and by the same scribe? Technical analyses of other manuscripts' pigments have been able to reveal astonishing information that often drastically changes what scholars know about a particular work, and ideally such an examination will one day be conducted on *Codex Mendoza*.¹⁰

Despite these gaps in knowledge about the *Codex Mendoza*, it ranks along with the *Florentine Codex* as among the most famous of the early manuscripts produced in New Spain in the sixteenth century. It is the only Mesoamerican codex that pictorially combines the three aspects of Mexica life mentioned above, making it the most comprehensive of the Mesoamerican codices produced at this time.¹¹ And as Frances Berdan and Patricia Anawalt note, this

⁷ James Cooper Clark first identified some of these watermarks in 1938, but they were studied in greater detail by Wayne Ruwet in 1992. See Wayne Ruwet, "A Physical Description of the *Codex Mendoza*," in *The Codex Mendoza*, ed. Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 15.

⁸ Ruwet, 13.

⁹ Ibid, 14.

¹⁰ See, for example, the study of the *Getty Murúa* in Elena Phipps, Nancy Turner, and Karen Trentelman, "Colors, Textiles, and Artistic Production in Murúa's *Historia General del Piru*," in *The Getty Murúa: Essays on the Making of Martín de Murúa's "Historia General del Piru," J. Paul Getty Museum Ms. Ludwig XIII 16*, ed. Thomas B.F. Cummins and Barbara Anderson (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute 2008). Elena Phipps, Nancy Turner, and Karen Trentelman, "Colors, Textiles, and Artistic Production in Murúa's *Historia General Del Piru*," in *The Getty Murúa: Essays on the Making of Martín De Murúa's "Historia General Del Piru," J. Paul Getty Museum Ms. Ludwig Xiii 16*, ed. Thomas B. F. Cummins and Barbara Anderson (Los Angeles: Getty Research Instittue 2008).

¹¹ Frances Berdan and Patricia Anawalt, *The Codex Mendoza*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), xiii.

immensely rich primary document can be used to work backwards in time and study even more ancient pre-Hispanic peoples using ethnographic methods given that Mexica scribes played a major role in both the content and production of the *Codex Mendoza*.¹²

The *Codex* is a favorite among art historians and all scholars and learners of Mexica art, history, and culture, and has been since it was first examined in the sixteenth century in Europe. I believe this to be true for two reasons: it preserves an authentic pre-conquest Mexica visual style while conforming to a familiar western narrative form, that of a book. In other words, it is a foreign, exotic work and yet remains highly accessible to western audiences, much more so than other pre-conquest Mesoamerican codices.¹³ Its pictographic nature has always delighted Western audiences, who feel as if they are viewing the Mexica equivalent to Egyptian hieroglyphs. Contemporary scholars have called it the “rosetta stone” of Mexica culture, since it simultaneously depicts Mexica pictographs, Nahuatl and Spanish text side by side.¹⁴

The *Codex Mendoza* is what Elizabeth Boone would call a “historical book,”¹⁵ one of the three types of Mesoamerican manuscripts (the other two being “practical” and “religious”). Indeed, the information contained in the *Codex* is so valuable that scholars seem to often focus exclusively on its contents and overlook the actual history of the *Codex* and few have discussed it in its own right. Although the text and images contained in the *Codex* have been cited, analyzed, and reproduced quite frequently, and much of what we know about the Mexica prior to the invasion comes from the *Codex*, its actual history remains unknown. Scholars frequently

¹² Berdan and Anawalt, *The Codex Mendoza*, xiii.

¹³ In addition to the Spanish text that accompanies the pictographs, the pictographs themselves are labeled in the *Codex Mendoza* in alphabetized Nahuatl or in Spanish, making it possible for readers to understand what the pictographs mean.

¹⁴ *Essential Codex*, xii

¹⁵ Elizabeth Boone, “Pictorial Documents and Visual Thinking in Postconquest Mexico,” 150-151.

utilize the *Codex*, yet few have critically examined what we know about it. Several known facts about the *Codex*, for example, have gone unquestioned for centuries and became “fact” with little to no evidence. This is problematic given the *Codex Mendoza*’s immense value and its potential for use as an ethnographic object to look at older and less-documented Mesoamerican cultures.¹⁶ Thus, it is of the utmost importance to understand the precise history of the *Codex Mendoza* and situate it within its art historical context so that the information it contains can be utilized more accurately. In addition, by understanding the precise history of the *Codex* we will see that it reveals much about the survival of pre-conquest Mexica practices concerning self-representations (in this case, a pictorial history of themselves) after the conquest, opening new room for further inquiry and research.

The Commonly Accepted History of the *Codex Mendoza*

The *Codex Mendoza* is believed to have been written some time in the 1540s at the request of the Spanish King Charles V so that he could learn more about the Mexica people conquered in his newly acquired lands. Viceroy Mendoza, following the king’s wishes, commissioned the manuscript and sent it to Spain. It would have been painted by a Mexica scribe and annotated by a Catholic friar.¹⁷ The ship that carried the *Codex* left from Veracruz and stopped at Santo Domingo on the island of Hispaniola where it departed for Seville, but it was

¹⁶ See *The Essential Codex Mendoza*, xii.

¹⁷ Although the friar remains unknown, a handwritten letter at the end of the *Codex Mendoza* has been interpreted to be a “J,” possibly indicating that the name of the friar began with the letter J.

besieged by French pirates, most likely somewhere in the Caribbean close to Santo Domingo.¹⁸ Thus, the ship reached not Spain but rather France (Figure 7).¹⁹ Through an unknown sequence of events, the manuscript reached the French royal court, ending up in the hands of André Thevet, the geographer to King Henri II, in 1553. André Thevet sold the book in 1587 to Richard Hakluyt, chaplain to the English ambassador in France. The *Codex* then travelled to England, and Hakluyt bequeathed it to Samuel Purchas, an English historian and writer of global travel narratives. Purchas reproduced the *Codex Mendoza* via a woodblock replica in his 1625 five-volume opus *Purchas his Pilgrims* and provided an English translation of the Spanish text of the *Codex* which offered English viewers a profound — and rare — glimpse into Mexica culture.²⁰ After Purchas's death, he left the *Codex* to John Selden, a prolific collector of manuscripts in England. Selden then left the *Codex* (along with his collection of rare books) specifically to the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, where it has resided ever since.

The *Codex*, though treated with great enthusiasm in seventeenth-century texts such as Purchas's volumes mentioned above, was virtually forgotten until the nineteenth century when it was reproduced in color facsimile in a popular edition of Mexican manuscripts published in

¹⁸ For a history of piracy in the Caribbean, see Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas, 1500-1750* (Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 17. Piracy appears to have been a major problem for Spain from the onset of its colonization activities in the Americas, with France and England being the major threats to Spanish galleons traveling to the port of Seville, the entry point to Europe.

¹⁹ This history, including the pirate-episode, has been published even in recent survey-books on colonial Latin American art and is included in the introduction to the 1992 4-volume facsimile, transcription, and translation of the *Codex Mendoza* edited by Frances Berdan and Patricia Anawalt, among numerous other publications that discuss the *Codex*. See also, for example, Elizabeth Hil Boone, "Aztec Writing and History," in *The Aztec World*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brumfiel and Gary N. Feinman (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2008), 179. Elizabeth Hill Boone, "Aztec Writing and History," in *The Aztec World*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brumfiel and Gary M. Feinman (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2008), 179.

²⁰ Barbara Fuchs, *The Poetics of Piracy: Emulating Spain in English Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 45.

England by Lord Edward Kingsborough. Since this rediscovery it has informed virtually all modern scholarship on the Mexica, their empire in Mesoamerica, and their history.

The above history of the manuscript, though perfectly logical, presents numerous problems upon close examination. Although the ownership of the *Codex Mendoza* from André Thevet, to Hakluyt, to Purchas, to Selden, and to the Bodleian can be documented, questions arise about how the *Codex* ended up in France and how it was produced in the first place in New Spain. No textual sources present conclusive evidence that either King Charles V requested such a manuscript or that Viceroy Mendoza commissioned it. Nor can the pirate episode be documented; in fact, this story seems typical of many early histories of treasure brought over from the Americas to Europe. In other words, *no evidence exists for such an incident*. I therefore will examine the evidence that *does* exist in the next section of this essay in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the creation of myths surrounding the *Codex* and their subsequent acceptance as facts.²¹ Separating myth from fact is of the utmost importance because these myths of the manuscript's creation and transmission to Europe have conditioned how scholars approached interpretation of the *Codex Mendoza*.

Brief Historiography: Fabricating the *Codex Mendoza's* History

The earliest printed reference to the *Codex Mendoza* dates to late sixteenth-century France in a work titled *Vrais pourtraits et view de homes illustres* by André Thevet, the first documented owner of the *Codex Mendoza*. Written in 1584 and first examined by H. B. Nicholson, it contains the following passage

²¹ I should note that this is a project that could continue, as I am sure that there are more texts than those that I discuss. I have not included a few twentieth-century articles that touch on the history of the *Codex Mendoza* because they are interpretations of earlier texts that I discuss but do not reach any definite conclusions.

But this is entirely contrary to the truth, for the Mexicans have never used printing. However, I will confess that the Mexicans, in order to express their ideas, use characters resembling diverse terrestrial and aquatic animals and the head, feet, arms, and other limbs of a man, just as the Egyptians and Ethiopians did formerly in their hieroglyphic letters — a subject which I have treated amply in my *Cosmography*. Two such books I have by me, written by hand in the city of Themistitan²², and filled with their characters and figures and the interpretations of them.²³

Although I have not been able to determine the identity of either of the Mexican manuscripts Thevet refers to above, I believe that one of the two must be the *Codex Mendoza*, which seems likely since Thevet was one of the early owners of the *Codex*; Thevet's signature, in fact, appears in numerous places throughout the *Codex* in both Latin and in French, along with the date of 1553 signifying the year Thevet likely came into possession of the book (Figure 3). However, there is no mention of the specific contents of either of the codices in this passage other than the fact that they contain hieroglyphic letters resembling animals with human limbs. This seemingly minor detail may point to the identity of at least one of the codices, as the *Codex Mendoza's* content is precisely composed of pictographs that an early modern intellectual would have readily compared to hieroglyphs.²⁴ We are not given any other information about the Mexican codices in his possession. The other interesting fact revealed by the passage is that although Thevet owned the *Codex*, he seemed unaware of what it was about. In other words, he had it in his collection of books as a curiosity, prized because it was from the Americas. Thevet's lack of awareness of the *Codex's* significance could presumably support the claim that pirates besieged the ship carrying the *Codex* to Spain and the booty ended up in the French court. Those in the

²² "Themistitan" is a sixteenth-century mispronunciation of "Tenochtitlán."

²³ Taken from H. B. Nicholson, "The History of the *Codex Mendoza*." In *The Codex Mendoza*, ed. Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 5. See Nicholson's note for the original French.

²⁴ For more on how these pictographs function, how places and place names are constructed, see Boone, "Aztec Writing and History," 180-90.

French court would have been unaware of the intended use of the *Codex* and would have had little means of interpreting it. Moreover, it does not seem likely that Thevet could even read Spanish and thus he would probably never be able to understand the actual meaning of the text, and surely he would have been unable to read the Mexica pictographs. Thus it seems to fit the theory that the *Codex* ended up haphazardly in France via pirates.

An examination of another work by Thevet, however, puts this theory into doubt. In *Grand insulaire*, which Thevet wrote between 1586-1588 and which contains descriptions and maps of the major islands of the world, Thevet explained that he had in his

possession two books about the idols writ by hand containing the genealogy and history of the kings and great lords of that country, and the pictures of the idols they adored, painted and pictured in two books, written by hand by a monk who lived there around thirty-four years, exercising the charge of a bishop in that country. [These] books came into my hands after having been presented to the late Queen of Spain, daughter of King Henry II of France.²⁵

We see here that Thevet did not acquire the manuscripts via pirates, but rather that these works were presented to the Queen of Spain (who I will assume is Isabel de Valois, who reigned from 1559-1568, given that she is the only daughter of Henry II that became a Queen of Spain) and that it was after this that Thevet acquired the codices. This suggests that the codices were indeed in Spain prior to Thevet's acquisition of them if they were presented to Isabel de Valois.

Moreover, given Isabel's tenure as Queen, this would lead us to believe that the *Codex* had been in Spain at least twenty-five years prior to Thevet's acquisition of it. Although H. B. Nicholson has discussed this fact, he reaches the conclusion that because Thevet obtained the book in 1553, Isabel de Valois would have been too young to be presented with such a book, given that she would have been only eight years old. In other words he believes that it is not likely that the

²⁵ Cited in Nicholson, "The History of the *Codex Mendoza*," 5-7.

Codex could have been presented to Isabel, and we therefore have no evidence to prove that the *Codex* was ever been in Spain prior to Thevet's ownership of it.

As well-articulated as Nicholson's argument may be, I disagree with his conclusions. Any examination of early modern European court life reveals that children of royal lineage were educated at young ages, and so it is possible that the eight-year old Isabel de Valois would have been presented with the manuscript at some point during her education. Some would argue, however, that Isabel in 1553 would probably not have yet been residing in Spain but would still have been in France. I will then contest the assumption, held by Nicholson and others, that Isabel de Valois was the specific queen that Thevet refers to in the passage above.

If we look at Thevet more closely, we will find that he wrote *Grand insulaire* at least thirty-five years after he obtained the *Codex* (probably in 1553), and it is possible that Thevet had a poor memory or had forgotten details of his acquisition of the *Codex* three and a half decades after the fact. If Thevet did indeed acquire the *Codex* in 1553 and visited Spain that year, then he might have been referring to the prior Queen of Spain (Mary I), not Isabel de Valois, and might have confused the fact that she was the daughter of Henry II of France. Whatever the exact sequence of events, it does not seem likely that the *Codex* was not in Spain given that Thevet specifically states that he obtained it after a presentation of it to the Queen of Spain. The only inconsistency is the date of his acquisition. Although this is the case, the scholarship about the *Codex* that emerged after Thevet's writings would ignore or be unaware of this fact (until Nicholson), as we will see in the next paragraphs.

The earliest printed work that refers specifically to the *Codex* by name is to be found in England in Samuel Purchas's widely read early seventeenth-century travel-history of the world,

whose title is popularly shortened to *Purchas his Pilgrimes*. *Purchas his Pilgrimes* attempts to list and describe the major European global expeditions while providing a description and history of all the peoples encountered (and subsequently conquered). This work appeared in London in two editions, a one-volume edition in 1614 and a massively expanded (and more well-known) five-volume edition in 1625 (Figures 3 and 4). Scholars of the *Codex* have seemingly overlooked the fact that there are two editions of this work, published a decade apart. I will thus provide the first examination of the discrepancies between both editions. In the 1614 edition, Purchas devotes a paragraph to the Spanish conquest of Mexico and it is here where the first mention of the *Codex Mendoza* is found:

The Mexican historie described in Pictures and sent to *Charles* the fift, (a copie whereof I haue seene with Master *Hakluit*) in the first part sheweth their first expedition and plantation in this place; then all drowned with water, with great bogs and some drie bushie places: their Kalendar : and the names, yeares, and conquests of their Kings. In the second part their tributes are described; the particulars whereof are, reparations of certaine Churches; so many baskets of Mais ground holding halfe a busihell) and Almonds of Cacao, baskets of Chianpinoli, mantles, paide euey fourth day: and once a yeare Armours and Targets of Feathers; all this was paid to the Citie Tlatilulco. And in like proportion euey Towne and Nation subiect, was to pay the Naturall or Artificiall commodities thereof: as Aroures garnished with feathers, rich mantles, white or of other colours, Eagles aliue, beames of timber, bords, salt made in long moulds for the LL. Of Mexico onlypots, of Honie, Naguas and Huipiles (which were attire for women) Copale for perfume, Cotton, Wooll, Red-Sea-shels Xicharas in which they drinke Cacao, othersful of Gold in powder, each containing two handfuls, plates of Gold, three quarters of a yard long, and foure fingers broad, as thicke as parchment; Yellow Varnish to paint themselves, Bels and Hatchets of Copper, Turkeflestones; Chalke, Lime Deere-skins, Cochnile, Feathers, Frizolcs, Targets of Golde, Diadems, Borders, Beades of Gold, Beades of gemmes, Tigres-skins, Amber, Axi or West-Indian Pepper, &c.²⁶

There are some important things to note in Purchas's description of what this document contained. In 1614, there was not yet any name for the untitled *Codex* and Purchas refers to it simply as "The Mexican history described in Pictures and sent to *Charles* the fifth." Just as

²⁶ Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (London: W. Stansby for H. Fetherstone, 1614), 794.

important is the fact that Purchas makes no mention of Mendoza. In fact, Purchas mentions Mendoza only once in the entire volume and at no point does Purchas lead us to believe the *Codex* is at all connected to Mendoza.²⁷ Purchas titles it based on content (“pictures”) and according to who he believes to have been the original owner of the *Codex*, Charles V. Moreover, Purchas does not indicate that the *Codex* never reached Charles V. In fact, the opposite seems to be true; he tells the reader that this picture-history was sent to Charles V and that what he has seen is a “copy.” Thus, given that Purchas indicates that the *Codex* was sent to Charles V and that he has seen but a copy of the work, we must assume that Purchas believed that the *Codex* reached Spain. I will also note that Purchas seems aware of the structure and contents of the *Codex* given that he manages to explain what each section is about, and so no question exists as to the identity of the document that Purchas refers to in this 1614 edition.

Purchas goes on to elaborate more on the *Codex* in the second, much longer 1625 edition of *Purchas his Pilgrimes*. In this revised edition he gives readers a history of the *Codex* in a chapter devoted to the Spanish conquest of Mexico. He writes:

For the Spanish Governour having with some difficultie (as the Spanish Preface imports) obtained the Booke of the Indians, with Mexican interpretations of the Pictures (but then daies before the departure of the Ships) committed the same to one skilfull in the Mexican language to be interpreted; who in a very plaine stile and verbatim performed he same, using also some Morisco words, as Alfaqui and Mezquitas (for Priest and Temples) import. This Historie thus written, sent to Charles the fifth Emperour, was together with the Shippe that carried it taken by French-men of war, from whom Andrew Thevet the French Kings Geographer, obtained the same: after whose death Master Hakluyt (then Chaplaine to the English Embassadour in France) bought the same for 20. French crownes, and procured Master Michael Locke in Sir Walter Raleighs name to translate it. It seems that none were willing to be at the cost of cutting the Pictures, and so it remained amongst his papers till his death, whereby (according to his last will in that kinde) I

²⁷ The exact sentence, found on page 777, reads: “When as Cortez had conquered Mexico, as after followeth to be related, he was made Admirall of the South Seas, but the gouernment of Mexico and New Spain was, with the title of Viceroy, giuen to *Don Antonio de Mendoza*. These two, partly in emulation of each others glorie, partly in hope of enriching themselues, fought to disouer vnknown lands; the one by Sea; the later, both by sea and land.”

became possessor thereof, and have obtained with much earnestnesse the cutting thereof for the Presse.²⁸

Here we see that Purchas has now greatly expanded upon his knowledge of the *Codex* and communicates this to his readers. Eleven years after the first edition, we are now told that the *Codex* never reached Charles V. En route to Spain, the ship that carried it was captured by “French-men of war.” We are not given any details about this incident, such as the exact location, but we are told that once in France the *Codex* passed to the hands of Thevet, whom Purchas explains was the Geographer to the King of France. In this second telling, the *Codex* is not a “copy” but in fact the original. Purchas does not explain how he came across this new information in the eleven years since he last wrote about the *Codex*; no sources are given.

We might begin to understand Purchas’s new knowledge about the *Codex* by observing that he states that he now owns the *Codex* whereas in the first edition of *Purchas his Pilgrimes* he states that he has only seen a copy. Purchas provides a history of the ownership of the *Codex* (which many later scholars will assume to be true), stating that from Thevet the *Codex* went to Master Hakluyt, then a Chaplain to the English Ambassador in France, after he purchased it for twenty French Crowns from Thevet. Hakluyt commissioned a translation of the text from the Spanish to English from Michael Locke. After Hakluyt’s death (which apparently occurred between 1614-1625) the *Codex* was willed to Purchas who then was the owner of the work at the time of the 1625 publication of *Purchas his Pilgrimes*. And he states that he “cut” the images in woodblock at great cost to reproduce it in the volume. We must imagine, then, that unless Purchas invented this history of the *Codex*, he was thoroughly unaware of it when he first wrote about it in 1614. There are two possible ways Purchas became aware of this information, then.

²⁸ Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, vol. 3 (London: W. Stansby for H. Fetherstone, 1625), 1064.

Either he had more conversations about the *Codex* with Hakluyt prior to Hakluyt's death or the *Codex* included information with it when it came into the hands of Purchas after Hakluyt's death. In both cases we must assume that Hakluyt's received this information about the *Codex* from Thevet, the original owner of the *Codex* in France. This is mere speculation but these possibilities must be examined if we are ever to reach conclusive information about the journey of the *Codex* from New Spain to Europe. However, because it contradicts what Thevet stated in his writing, we must conclude that when Hakluyt purchased the *Codex* from Thevet, Thevet offered very little of what he knew about the *Codex*, including how he obtained it, to Hakluyt, leaving Purchas with very little to go by. What is likely is that Hakluyt told Purchas the 1614 version when he first showed Purchas the manuscript.

What this indicates, then, is that Purchas most likely fabricated the incident of the pirates, or "French-men of war," as a way of explaining how the *Codex* ended up in France (and subsequently England) in a work where he tried to be as specific and elaborate as possible about the various subjects he covered. This would have fit popular ideas about how objects were transported to Europe from America, especially in England where pirates were often national heroes.²⁹ In other words, there is no reason to privilege his story of the pirates in 1625 over his 1614 story that Mendoza received the *Codex*. At the same time, the purpose of Purchas's work was to offer a history of the world, and given that he decided to include a reproduction of *Codex Mendoza*, it is not unfathomable that he wished to provide his readers a complete story of what they were about to see. Pirates would have made viewing the *Codex* all the more more

²⁹ Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas, 1500-1750*, 11-12.

fascinating for a seventeenth-century audience in England.³⁰ The fact that he was able to trace such a history would have legitimized Purchas as a historian and a collector, and no doubt would have increased the value and importance of the *Codex Mendoza* for seventeenth-century readers which again, would have made Purchas's woodblock reproduction all the more exciting.

Perhaps the first serious attempt to work on the *Codex Mendoza* after Purchas is Lord Edward Kingsborough's landmark publication *Antiquities of Mexico*, a massive deluxe seven volume set published in London between 1831-1848. Each volume, weighing in at nearly thirty pounds, contains either a facsimile of the known codices produced in New Spain during the early conquest period, or a transcription of the texts (along with a translation and commentary). Kingsborough's contribution, however, lies primarily in the color facsimiles. Kingborough calls the manuscript *The Collection of Mendoza* based on the fact that Purchas states that it is the "Spanish Governour" who had it sent to Spain, and repeats the same history that Purchas provides to us in the second edition of *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, crediting Purchas with this information.³¹ Thus, I believe it is here where the *Codex* was first attributed to Mendoza and thus where the myth begins, so much so that from then on the name *Mendoza* was attached to the *Codex*. Yet we must recall that Purchas did not offer us any evidence as to why he believed the

³⁰ Lane explains the omnipresence of piracy in the early modern world, and the persistence of it in people's collective consciousness, no doubt because of its persistent use in literature, present even in works such as *Don Quijote*, meaning that problems of piracy were most likely well known throughout European society.

³¹ Lord Edward King Kingsborough, *Antiquities of Mexico: Comprising Fac-Similes of Ancient Mexican Paintings and Hieroglyphics, Preserved in the Royal Libraries of Paris, Berlin, and Dresden; in the Imperial Library of Vienna; in the Vatican Library; in the Borgian Museum at Rome; in the Library of the Institute at Bologna; and in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Together With "The Monuments of New Spain" By M. Dupaix: With Their Respective Scales of Measurement and Accompanying Descriptions* Vol 5 (London: Robert Havell, 1831-1848), 39.

manuscript to have been commissioned by Mendoza in the first place.³² Kingsborough uncritically utilized the writings by Purchas and inserted them into his own thoughts on the *Codex Mendoza*.

After Kingsborough's facsimile, a century would pass before the next examination of the Codex's history in James Cooper Clark's 1938 *Codex Mendoza: The Mexican Manuscript known as The Collection of Mendoza*. Here we see what Clark claims is the *first* attempt at interpreting the *Codex* after its nearly four-hundred years of existence. When explaining the history of the *Codex*, Clark carefully examines the *Codex* for evidence of the prior owners. In other words, Clark does not merely repeat Purchas's history as did Kingsborough. Clark provides us with the exact page numbers where the various owners have left their marks and signatures, thus confirming the European owners of the *Codex*. With regard to its production and intended use, Clark notes that the *Codex* was

Drawn by a Mexican artist, annotated by a Spanish writer to enlighten the Council of the Indies at Seville, incorporating not only copies of a record of Mexican history and a list of tributes paid to Montezuma, also contains an original document depicting Mexican manners and customs.³³

Here, Clark states that the *Codex* was not to be sent to Charles V, as Kingsborough and Purchas before him had argued, but rather that it was meant to go to the Council of the Indies at Seville. This is a much more sophisticated statement; naturally it would make sense that an ethnographic

³² The commentary offered by Kingsborough in *Antiquities of Mexico* is not worthwhile. He devotes his study of the *Codex* to gather evidence for his argument that the Mexica are one of the twelve lost tribes of Israel, and he connects their rituals of human sacrifice to early Judaic rituals of sacrifice. No direct discussion of any specific content of the *Codex* is offered to us and no interpretation of the work is presented to us. As impressive as Kingsborough's seven-volume set may appear, there is relatively little to take away from it other than the aforementioned facsimile. The facsimile itself is absolutely impressive, though not reliable in its rendition of color; it seems as if Kingsborough was not interested in depicting color accurately, and in general the colors in his facsimile are unusually saturated and bright.

³³ James Cooper Clark, ed. *Codex Mendoza: The Mexican Manuscript known as The Collection of Mendoza* Vol 1 (London: Waterlow & Sons, 1938), xi.

document such as the *Codex* could have gone to the Council of the Indies, in Seville where the American colonies were administered. However, Clark does not provide any context for this information or any sources that mention where he obtained this information, and I am still trying to figure out how Clark came to know this, though most likely this is Clark's own theory based on what he thought have likely happened.

With regard to the episode with the French pirates, when Clark paraphrased Purchas's history he was careful to say that it was Purchas who believed that the pirates took the *Codex* and that it is *not* fact. Nevertheless, virtually all other subsequent discussions of the origins of the *Codex* mention the French pirates, ignoring Clark's careful assertion.³⁴ Anawalt and Berdan, in their 1992 4-volume edition of *The Codex Mendoza*, did not question this incident and state the incident as *fact* in their introduction. Likewise, no mention is made to some of the other possibilities that I am arguing for above. Luckily for us, the essay by H. B. Nicholson, "The History of the *Codex Mendoza*," is included in the first volume of this set that takes up many of the problems associated with the *Codex*. Although my conclusions are different than his, Nicholson's essay is perhaps the first (and only) comprehensive critical assessment of the history of the *Codex*.

Stylistic Analysis: its Problems and its Fruits in the Study of Indigenous Visual Production in the Colonial Period

As I have demonstrated in the previous section of this essay, there are numerous problems associated with the received history of the *Codex*, among them the fact that so few

³⁴ Perhaps the reason for this is the fact that Clark's work, though published in the 1940s, is very inaccessible now as most of the edition was destroyed by World War II bombings in London. Only a few copies of it are scattered in special collections throughout the world.

scholars have examined its actual history. I argue that the *Codex Mendoza* probably reached Spain, but that there is no record (that I have yet to come across) that indicates this was a royal commission by Charles V or Viceroy Mendoza. While it may have been intended for a European audience, I believe insufficient attention has been paid to the manuscript in the context of Mexica traditions of writing histories and other forms of manuscript production. In other words, I am proposing that by shifting attention away from the idea that this work was produced to inform the Spanish monarchy about its newly conquered people, we can refocus our lens on how the *Codex* is very similar to what the Mexica were already producing prior to the Spanish conquest — making it an extraordinarily valuable and rare type of document. The *Codex Mendoza* not only tells us about Mexica history and culture, but *is* a product of Mexica history and culture itself. I believe that the *content* was originally a self-representation intended for Mexica audiences, not for Spanish and European ones. There is evidence (which I have not examined in this thesis) that the first two sections of this manuscript were in fact copies of already existing (but now lost) texts and pictorial histories, and now even the third section is believed to have been part of an earlier tradition.³⁵ Further contemplation of the *Codex* could provide a richer understanding of Mexica culture and its status of Mexica culture in the aftermath of the Spanish invasion. Although I am not yet proposing an alternative, detaching the name “Mendoza” from the manuscript could prove useful in reconceptualizing how we understand it. As I showed, the name “Mendoza” was given to it by English historians with little knowledge about life and society in New Spain and the history and customs of the Mexica people, and is a result of European naming

³⁵ A recent dissertation (2002) from the University of Essex by Joanne Harwood, of which I have yet to obtain a copy, discusses the third section of the *Codex* and considers that it might be a copy of a previous text, in much the same way that the first two sections are. For a brief discussion about the belief that the first and second sections might be copies, see Berdan and Anawalt, 2.

conventions that do not allow for the Mexica character of the manuscript to come to light, only its alleged patronage.

The *Codex Mendoza* is valuable and has been of such great scholarly and public interest precisely because it *looks* like a pre-conquest document; it *appears* to be from before the Spanish invasion — but it is not. Yet despite this, little to no work has been done to explore exactly why and how, twenty years after the invasion, did a document supposedly commissioned by Viceroy Mendoza look like a pre-conquest Mexica artifact. During the conquest, after all, virtually all pre-conquest Mexica manuscripts were destroyed with only a handful of manuscripts from other nearby Nahua groups surviving today. Why then create something that looked like the manuscripts that the colonizers were so eager to destroy? An obvious response to this question would be to attribute its appearance to the fact that it was drawn by a Mexica scribe (not yet) trained in European artistic conventions (perspective, modeling, foreshortening, etc.) and still familiar with pre-invasion pictorial strategies.³⁶ To complicate the matter further, I do not believe that we fully understand what the *Codex Mendoza* actually is in the first place. Is, for example, the *Codex Mendoza* one of the last vestiges of a pre-conquest Mexica style in manuscripts? A discussion of the style of the *Codex*'s style in relation to the style of similar manuscripts

³⁶ Among the first undertakings by the Catholic Church upon its arrival to New Spain was the conversion — and education in European conventions — of the local population. Under the oversight of Catholic friars, scribes were trained in European artistic conventions and were taught to read and write in Latin and Spanish. Twenty years after the conquest, it is likely that there were still scribes in Tenochtitlán familiar with the pre-conquest conventions, those that had been scribes prior to the conquest.

produced at the same time would prove fruitful in attempting to resolve some of these problems and understanding what the *Codex Mendoza* — and its style — actually is.³⁷

The issue of style however, especially when discussing non-Western art, raises another set of problems. One of the most influential and earliest writers on style, Henrich Wölfflin, associated artistic style to the race and ethnicity of the maker.³⁸ Ideas such as this that came out of the Social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century privileged the art of Europe over all others and created a Eurocentric hierarchy within the academic discipline of art history, one that persists to this day.³⁹ Furthermore, even within the study of European art a hierarchy exists. Svetlana Alpers has noted the problems and difficulty, for example, of studying northern European art given that the tools and assumptions about art developed in the service of one — the art of the

³⁷ Traditional scholarship on colonial Latin American art has tended to emphasize the notion that once the Americas were colonized by the Spanish, non-Spanish indigenous art died. In 1964, for example, George Kubler wrote that the “survivals of native motifs into the colonial Period...are so few and scattered that their assembling requires an enormous expenditure for a minimum yield, like a search for the fragments of a deep-lying shipwreck. Therefore, I renamed the study....so that its readers would not expect any large remnants of the wreck of pre-Columbian civilization.” See George Kubler, “On the Colonial Extinction of the Motifs of Pre-Columbian Art,” in *Essays in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology*, ed. Samuel K. Lothrop *et al.* (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1964), 14. However, Kubler’s studies and his influential school of thought were informed by so few examples of colonial art in the first place, one that privileged the art of cities (and city centers to be exact) and ignored cultural productions, be they art or architecture, of rural areas that were not hit as hard by Spain’s colonizing efforts. It is based on a erroneous notion that indigenous culture (and consequently its art and visual culture) became Hispanic with the arrival of the Spanish.

More progress has been made recently as the field has moved towards the recognition of colonial art in the Americas as “hybrid”—a mixture of pre-Hispanic and European conventions. See for example, Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn, “Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 12, no. 1 (2003). Though the issue has not yet been fully resolved, as we can be imposing the concept on objects that were never intended to be viewed as such, “hybridity” still remains a useful theoretical apparatus to use when discussing works such as the *Codex Mendoza*.

³⁸ Henrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*, trans. M. D. Hottinger (New York: Dover, 1950 [1932]), 6.

³⁹ In the case of art of colonial Latin America, often the art has been labeled as simply derivative from (and inferior to) the work produced in Europe that New World artists often drew inspiration from, and often the most valued and sought after art from the colonial period in Latin America is that which looks the most authentically European. See, for example, the evaluation of a painting by an indigenous artist in Alfred Neumeyer, “The Indian Contribution to Architectural Decoration in Spanish Colonial America,” *Art Bulletin* 30, no. 2 (1948): 105-06.

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries produced in the region that is now Italy.⁴⁰ Other scholars were hopeful that the increase in study of the art outside of Europe would naturally lead to a dissolution of Italian-centric terminology, as such terms and concepts would be invalid in the study of regions where these terms never existed.⁴¹ Yet others have noted that this situation unfortunately persists in the discipline of art history.⁴²

With regard to “Aztec” painting, a couple of scholars who defined its style fell into this problem of using Eurocentric tools to discuss visual approaches that the Mexica and other Nahuatl groups employed. Donald Robertson, one of the earliest examiners of Mesoamerican art and whose mode of thought still resonates throughout the field, defined “Aztec” painting style (as found in manuscripts) as such:

the painted figures exist in a world of undefined space. There was no attempt on the part of the artists to show depth, and generally the forms are evenly distributed over the surface of the pages. Lines are neither fluid nor expressive and show no meaningful variation in width or intensity, for they function instead to frame and qualify areas of color. The colors themselves are flat, brilliant, and unobscured by modeling or shading. Human figures are depicted in a strict profile or in the mixed frontal and profile view in which the most characteristic features of each anatomical part are shown clearly, with the human forms being created by adding separable and interchangeable components to a torso. Images are represented in a conventionalized rather than perceptually accurate manner.⁴³

⁴⁰ Svetlana Alpers, “Style is What You Make It: the Visual Arts Once Again,” in *The Concept of Style*, ed. Beryl Lang (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 106. Svetlana Alpers, “Style Is What You Make It: The Visual Arts Once Again,” in *The Concept of Style*, ed. Beryl Lang (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 106.

⁴¹ H. W. Janson, “Criteria of Periodization in the History of Art,” *New Literary History* 1 (1970): 121-2.

⁴² For a brief but relevant discussion of the terminology still used in the study of African art, see Gridley McKim-Smith, “Spanish Polychrome Sculpture and its Critical Misfortunes,” in *Spanish Polychrome Sculpture 1500-1800 in United States Collections*, ed. Suzanne L. Stratton (Dallas, Texas: Meadows Museum, 1993), 14-15.

⁴³ Discussed in Elizabeth Hill Boone, “Towards a More Precise Definition of the Aztec Painting Style,” in *Pre-Columbian Art History: Selected Readings*, ed. Alana Cordy-Collins (Palo Alto, California: Peek Publication, 1982), 155. Elizabeth Hill Boone, “Towards a More Precise Definition of the Aztec Painting Style,” in *Pre-Columbian Art History: Selected Readings*, ed. Alana Cordy-Collins (Palo Alto, California: Peek Publications, 1982), 155.

The problems should be clearly evident: the very language and concepts we use to describe and think about Mexica painting, such as the absence and presence of depth, modeling, anatomical naturalism, etc., are all concepts derived primarily from the study of fifteenth and sixteenth century Italian art — concepts that are clearly inappropriate, anachronistic, and irrelevant in the discussion of Nahua visual production. In this case in particular, Aztec painting style is being defined by a *lack* of these visual techniques, which I believe creates a Eurocentric bias.

How, then, does one go about discussing style in a work such as the *Codex Mendoza*? What are we to look for? The *Codex Mendoza*'s supposed patronage has preconditioned interpretations of its visuals, especially questions concerning the extent of European influence on its artistic style and how “pure” the pre-conquest style of the manuscript's images actually is. Because I have problematized the supposed patronage of the *Codex Mendoza*, I believe a reevaluation of the manuscript's style is necessary. In addition, a reexamination of style might reveal more about the intended purpose of the *Codex Mendoza*. To accomplish this reexamination, in this section of the paper I wish to compare the *Codex Mendoza* to another manuscript of similar provenance, the *Relación de Michoacán*. This comparison will allow for a better understanding of the *Codex*'s context and its relation to manuscript production during the early history of New Spain, a time when manuscript-making was the norm for books given that the printing press did not arrive in New Spain until 1539 and was limited to Tenochtitlán/Mexico City.⁴⁴ Instead of focusing on the degree of European influence in the hand of the scribe as traditionally has been the case, I will focus instead on the way manuscripts differ in their construction of narratives, that is, the way narrative is presented. I will still point to the

⁴⁴ Ruwet, 43.

differences, however, in the visual style for the sake of pointing to the simultaneous existence of two different styles at the same time.

Although temporally and historically so similar, no focused comparative discussion of the two manuscripts has been done thus far. A side-by-side comparison will reveal a much more complicated situation concerning the production of manuscripts and their visual styles during the early colonial period in New Spain than is currently understood. I will argue that during the period immediately following the conquest, the style of the visuals of a particular manuscript was *chosen* based on its intended function rather than it being the result of the scribes' training and/or background. In other words I wish to argue that a European-style manuscript or a pre-contact Mexica style manuscript could be *produced at the same time* during the early colonial period depending on the particular circumstances surrounding their production as shown by the existence of the *Codex Mendoza* and the *Relación de Michoacán* produced virtually at the same time. By examining the differences in these two manuscripts produced it will be clear that at least during the aftermath of the conquest *function* played as much of a role in the way the images looked stylistically just as much as did the scribes' training.

The *Relación de Michoacán* is another extant manuscript produced in New Spain during the late 1530s or early 1540s, and was commissioned by Viceroy Mendoza (proper confirmation exists for this patronage in the *Relación* itself⁴⁵), and thus it was produced around the same time as the *Codex Mendoza*, though possibly a few years before. Now housed in Madrid, the *Relación* is a record of the customs of the P'urhépecha-speaking inhabitants (pre-conquest enemies of the

⁴⁵ The full name of the manuscript is *Relación de las ceremonias y ritos y población y gobernación de los Indios de la provincia de Michoacán hecha al ilustrísimo señor Don Antonio de Mendoza, Virrey y Gobernador de esta Nueva España por su majestad, etc.*

Mexica) of the region to the west of the Mexica Empire known as Michoacán.⁴⁶ The *Relación* is the result of a trip that Viceroy Mendoza made in 1539 to Tzintzuntzan, 193 miles west of Tenochtitlán/Mexico City (four years after his arrival in New Spain) to settle the most notorious labor and land dispute in the history of New Spain between Spaniards and original inhabitants.⁴⁷ According to the prologue of the *Relación*, it was produced to help Viceroy Mendoza learn about the P'urhépecha and thus govern the region more effectively.⁴⁸

To begin the comparison, it should be remarked that the *Relación* looks remarkably different from the *Codex Mendoza*. It measures only 5.7 inches by 8.1 inches,⁴⁹ making it significantly smaller than the *Codex* and a small work in general.⁵⁰ Although the style of each work has been studied, they have not been looked at comparatively.⁵¹ The question is of course, not only how they are different, but *why*. To begin with, the *Codex Mendoza* uses Mexica pictography (part of a larger universal Mesoamerican system of writing employed by various distinct ethnic and cultural groups; Figure 12). The *Relación*, in contrast, employs a European system of text accompanied by images that serve as illustrations for the text. In the *Codex*

⁴⁶ Numerous ethnic groups resided in Michoacán, and English-language literature has tended to refer to them collectively as “Tarascans” but I believe this term, like the term “Aztec,” is not specific enough to refer to the multitude of people that lived in this area and so I agree with Angélica Afanador Pujol’s dismissal of this term. For a brief discussion of the historical pejorative connotations of this term, see Angélica Jimena Afanador Pujol, “The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigenous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century *Relación de Michoacán* (1539-1541)” (Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2009), 21. Angélica Jimena Afanador Pujol, “The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigenous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century *Relación De Michoacán* (1539-1541)” (Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2009), 21.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁰ Although mere speculation, European paper might have been scarce in New Spain in first part of the sixteenth century. Paper mills would not be established until the 1560s. Preconquest “paper” was different, as it was made using completely different materials than European paper. See Ruwet, 45.

⁵¹ It should be noted that far less scholarship in general concerning the *Relación de Michoacán* exists than that of the *Codex Mendoza*.

Mendoza the pictographs — images — are the primary means of communication. The text in the *Codex Mendoza*, I would argue, serves to illustrate the images for Europeans unable to read the Mexica pictographs. It exists simply to enhance understanding of the images in much the same way that the images in the latter two works serve to enhance understanding of the text. Thus, the very way these works operate is fundamentally different.

In addition to their operative techniques, the very style of the visuals in the two works differ from one another. Stylistic analyses of early colonial codices such as the *Codex Mendoza* have tended to focus on comparisons between pre-conquest style and European styles and conventions.⁵² This type of examination has been invaluable in tracing the spread and development of European artistic conventions in the Americas in the sixteenth century. At the same time, however, these studies tend to focus primarily on identifying what has been imported from Europe. The only in-depth stylistic examination of the *Codex Mendoza*, Kathleen Stewart Howe's 1992 essay on the subject, falls into this category. In the essay Stewart Howe argues for the existence of European pictorial stylistic conventions in the *Mendoza*. She carefully examines contour lines throughout the *Codex* and detects an unusual amount of cursive lines, or lines with curvature. She begins her study by pointing out the differences in line in pre- and post-conquest Mesoamerican manuscripts, stating that pre-conquest linear techniques did not use the swell and taper of line to indicate contour and modeling.⁵³ Although pre-conquest Mexica drawing and painting featured the use of cursive line more than in the art of other Nahua groups, such as the Mixtec,⁵⁴ according to Stewart Howe the *Codex Mendoza* contains more cursive lines than any

⁵² For a recent example see Todd Olson, "Clouds and Rain," *Representations* 104, no. 1 (2008): 102-15.

⁵³ Howe, 27.

⁵⁴ Howe, 26.

other Mexica visual artifact, leading her to believe that the influence of European conventions made their way to the hand of the Mexica scribe who drew the pictographs.⁵⁵ Stewart Howe's conclusions, however, in general rely heavily on the assumptions that the *Codex* was intended specifically for a European audience and that the third part was an original creation requested by a European patron, assumptions that precondition her analysis of the pictographs in the *Codex*. Further examination of the manuscript's materials, especially its pigments, would shed further light on the extent of European influence including the way the *Codex Mendoza* was produced and the extent to which the scribe had been trained by the friars by this time.⁵⁶

Stewart Howe's examination is fruitful, but again I believe her initial questions precondition her outcomes. She looks in the *Codex Mendoza* for traces of European practices because she assumes European patronage. If we take a random page from the *Codex Mendoza*, say the first page of the third section (Figure 12), what we see is a pre-conquest visual style *and* a method of history telling — pictographs. All of the images on the page are pictographs that, when examined by a viewer who understands how to read them, can decipher the narrative contained on the page. Even if the hand of the scribe may have been influenced by the training of Spanish friars — of which there is no evidence to begin with — the composition and style of the entire work is still Mexica. Only a scribe fluent in Mexica pictography and visual language, for example, could produce a work like this. If we examine this image, we find that a person reading the images would rely on the pictographs and visual signs present on the page, however a

⁵⁵ Howe, 26.

⁵⁶ A technical analysis of the *Getty Murua*, a manuscript from the Andes, was able to resolve many unanswered questions about the manuscript and reveal sections of the manuscript that were added after its initial creation. See Phipps, Turner, and Trentelman, "Colors, Textiles, and Artistic Production in Murúa's *Historia General del Piru*."

European reader would have needed the Spanish glosses — added later by a Spanish friar — to understand what was going on.

I wish to now briefly examine one of the most famous images in the *Relación de Michoacán*, the only image that simultaneously depicts those involved in the production of the *Relación* (Figure 14). The image depicts a friar handing a manuscript (the *Relación* itself) to the seated Viceroy Mendoza, the person for whom the *Relación* was made. This image can be used as a case-study to discuss the differences in style between the *Codex Mendoza*; I will focus on the depiction and construction of space in both works.⁵⁷ To begin with, like most images throughout the *Relación* we find that this scene is an illustration and lies within a single square bounding box marked by two lines that frame the image. The bounding box is an obvious European convention that would have been known to the artist through prints and illustrated books shipped to New Spain during the early conquest period. Mendoza himself brought two hundred books with him when he arrived to New Spain when he began his appointment as viceroy.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the human figures are rendered in three-dimensional space, some of them in profile view while others in three-quarter view. However, *all* human figures in the *Codex Mendoza* are rendered in side-profile view as was customary in the pre-conquest tradition. This indicates that the scribe of the *Relación* had been exposed to European image-making techniques. In other images in the *Relación*, however, the presence of pre-conquest visual strategies in the midst of largely European-styled imagery confirms that the artists of the *Relación* were certainly an indigenous scribe who had received training in European style.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ For further discussion of this image see Afanador Pujol, 29.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 33.

Modeling and shadow further heighten the sense that this is supposed to be real space. If we turn back to images from the *Codex Mendoza*, real space is almost never depicted, figures are orderly and scattered throughout the page with no attempt at perspective or situating the figures in a real space. The style of the two works is so different that comparison between them is almost inappropriate.⁶⁰ Traditional explanations to account for this difference would suggest that the hand of the scribe who drew the *Relación* images had received European training (or *more* training, as Stewart Howe's work suggests that the scribe of the *Codex Mendoza* had received European training). However, I believe it is insufficient to account for the difference in style by merely attributing it to the various scribes' levels of European training.

Why then, are the *Codex Mendoza* and the *Relación de Michoacán* so different, if presumably they are of the same time period and of similar patronage? What accounts for the vast differences in the way these two works operate and look? I believe one way to answer this question will be to examine the intended audiences of the *Codex Mendoza* and the *Relación*. Although no direct evidence exists that the *Codex Mendoza* was meant for Charles V, we know that it did in fact circulate in European courts and that its first documented owner most likely received it from the Spanish court, as I argued earlier in the paper. Furthermore, the last few pages of the *Codex Mendoza* confirm that it was made to be sent to Europe, as the Catholic friar who wrote the annotations in Spanish writes that he must hastily complete his annotations because the ship to Europe is leaving soon.⁶¹ If we are to believe that the *Codex Mendoza* was

⁶⁰ Discussions on style have often pointed out the problems of using terminology meant for European art history on the art of non-Western cultures. To even speak of perspective or modeling/shadowing in the *Codex Mendoza*, for example, may be pointless as these were not the goals of the Mexica scribes. However, for the purposes of this paper I found it useful to point out the stylistic differences between both the *Relación* and the *Codex Mendoza* to formulate my argument that two separate styles were circulating at the same time.

⁶¹ Berdan and Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza*, 8.

intended for Europe, we might then understand why it preserves such a Mexica style. For despite the extra curves present in the lines identified by Stewart Howe, there is no doubt that the overall intended effect is to preserve an authentic Mexica style. Thus, I believe that the *Codex Mendoza* was designed not only to inform the Spanish monarchy but to *present* Mexica pictorial history and Mexica artistic style as an artifact in and of itself. If the purpose was simply to inform the Spanish court about the history and customs of the Mexica people, I believe something more legible and practical to the European viewer — something such as the *Relación* — could have been made instead. Clearly this was not the case. The nature of the *Codex Mendoza* reveals to me that what Charles V wished to see — or what its makers wanted to present — was not merely a history and account of the Mexica people but rather an actual Mexica document. What the scribe and friar prepared, then, was a user-friendly version of a Mexica document, one that Charles V — and any European — could understand. By drawing Mexica pictographs to tell the history of the Mexica people and their lifestyle and customs, and leaving space for the friar to explain what it all means in Spanish, what was created was essentially the equivalent of a translation in the form of subtitles. It should be clear, then, that except for the Spanish text, the work itself *is* a Mexica document, fabricated to make Mexica pictographic tradition and artistic style accessible. A place for further research would be to conjecture what the Mexica scribe(s) of the *Codex Mendoza* left out in the history and daily life portions of the document — is this an abridged fabrication of their culture, or did we get a faithful *copy* of an already existing document? And perhaps even more importantly, if the Spanish were so eager to destroy Mexica manuscripts — virtually all of them destroyed at the time of conquest — what accounts for the desire to reproduce and replicate such a document twenty years after the invasion?

Conclusion: A New Way of Understanding the *Codex Mendoza* and Manuscript Production in the Sixteenth Century

The examination of the *Codex Mendoza* revealed that much of what we knew about it was the result of the fabrication of early historians, and that current scholarship relied on these fabrications that went unquestioned for centuries. This has large implications not only for the study of manuscripts produced during the colonial period in Latin America, but also for the entire field and for any study of objects with historiographies that begin in an era where the truth was not necessarily the goal — what else has gone unquestioned? What else needs to be reexamined? How do the biased and incorrect methodologies of seventeenth-century (or earlier) historians shape our understanding of what we know about colonial Latin America?

A correct understanding of the *Codex Mendoza*'s precise provenance — and an acknowledgement that we in fact know little about it — allows us to form a more precise interpretation of the work itself. Understanding that the *content* was pre-conquest will then allow us to get a better sense of how the Mexica depicted themselves in their histories. This leaves room for further inquiry, as we can now look at the *Codex Mendoza* and ask more interesting questions about it. What did the Mexica include in their histories, and what was left out? What is emphasized, what is ignored? Asking these questions will better allow us to understand Mexica culture overall.

FIGURES

Figure 1. Artist's rendition of Tenochtitlán as it might have looked prior to its destruction in 1521. (National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City)

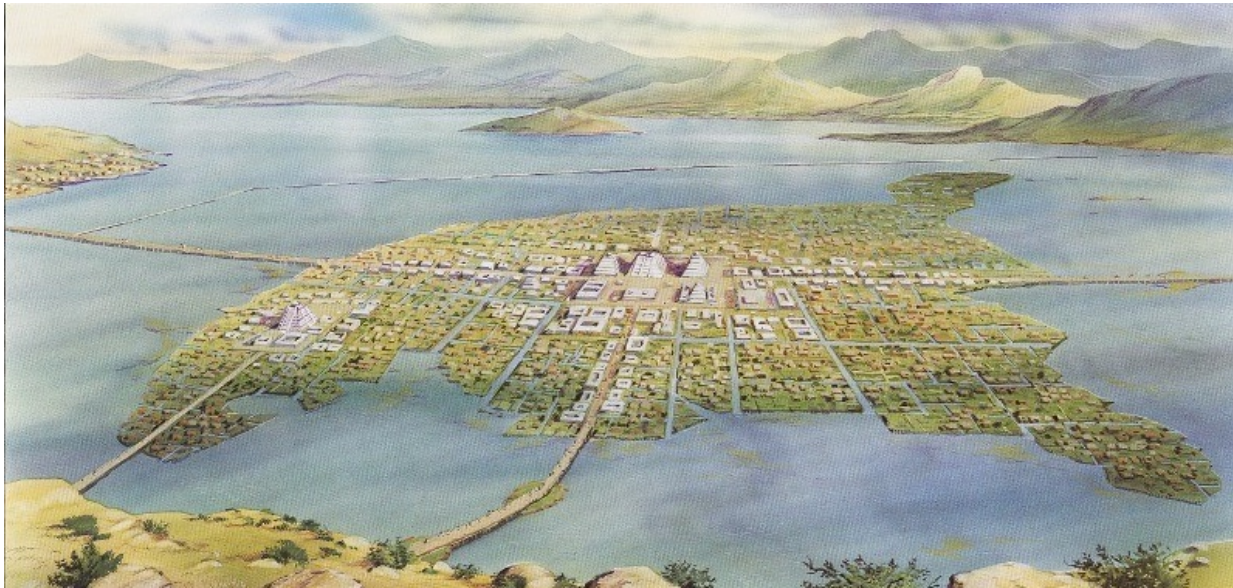


Figure 2. Juan Gómez de Trasmonte, *Mexico City*, 1628. (Crónicas Cartográficas: Historia Urbana y Geografía, <<http://cronicascartograficas.wordpress.com/2008/10/08/exposicion-virtual-mapas-tempranos-de-la-coleccion-latinoamericana-benson/>>)



Figure 3. Ramón Torres, *Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza*. Oil on canvas, 41cm x 32.5cm. (Museo de América, Madrid)



Figure 4. Artist unknown, *The Codex Mendoza*, folio 2r. Unknown pigments and ink on European paper, 8.5" x 12.4". (Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford)



Figure 5. Artist unknown, *The Codex Mendoza*, folio 2r. detail. Unknown pigments and ink on European paper, 8.5" x 12.4". (Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford)



Figure 6. The current flag of Mexico.



Figure 7. Map Showing the Journey of the *Codex Mendoza* to Europe (Rivas 2011).

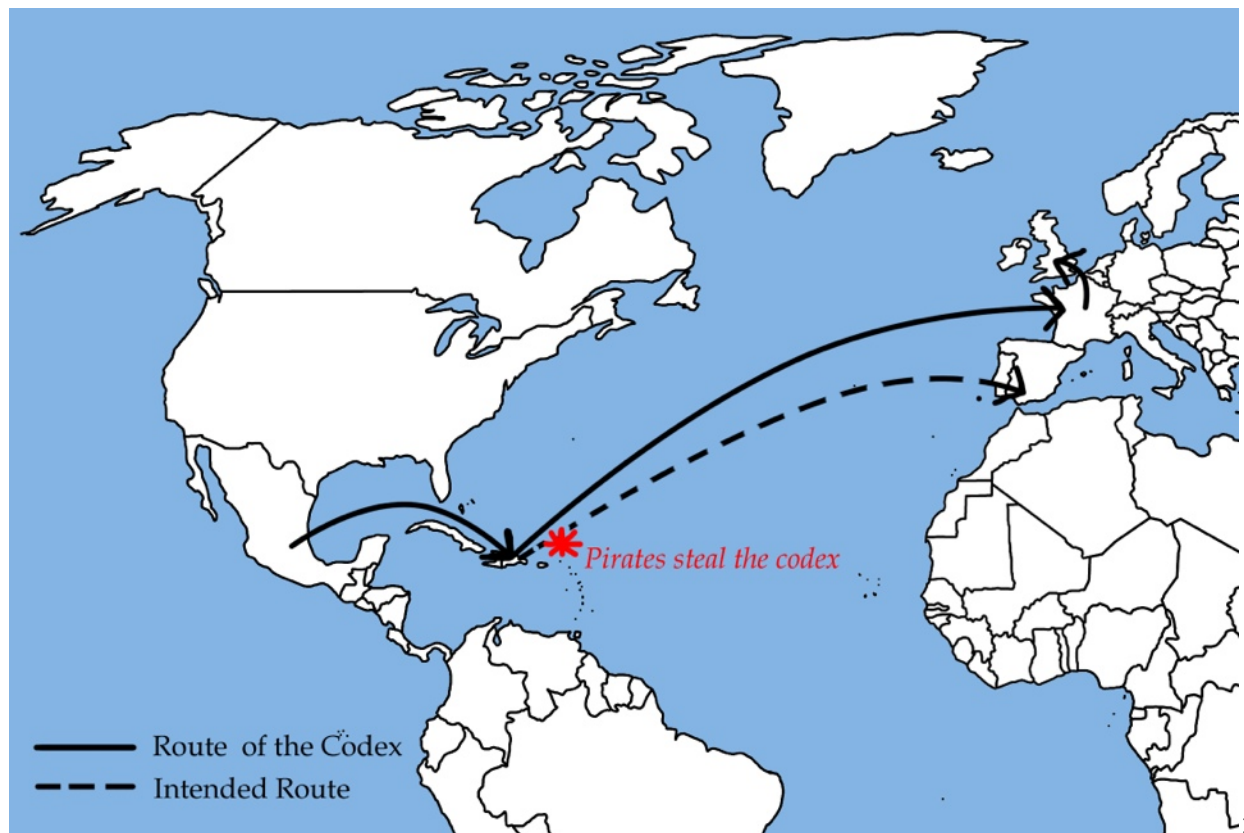


Figure 8. Title Page of *Purchas His Pilgrimages*, 1614. (Early English Books Online)

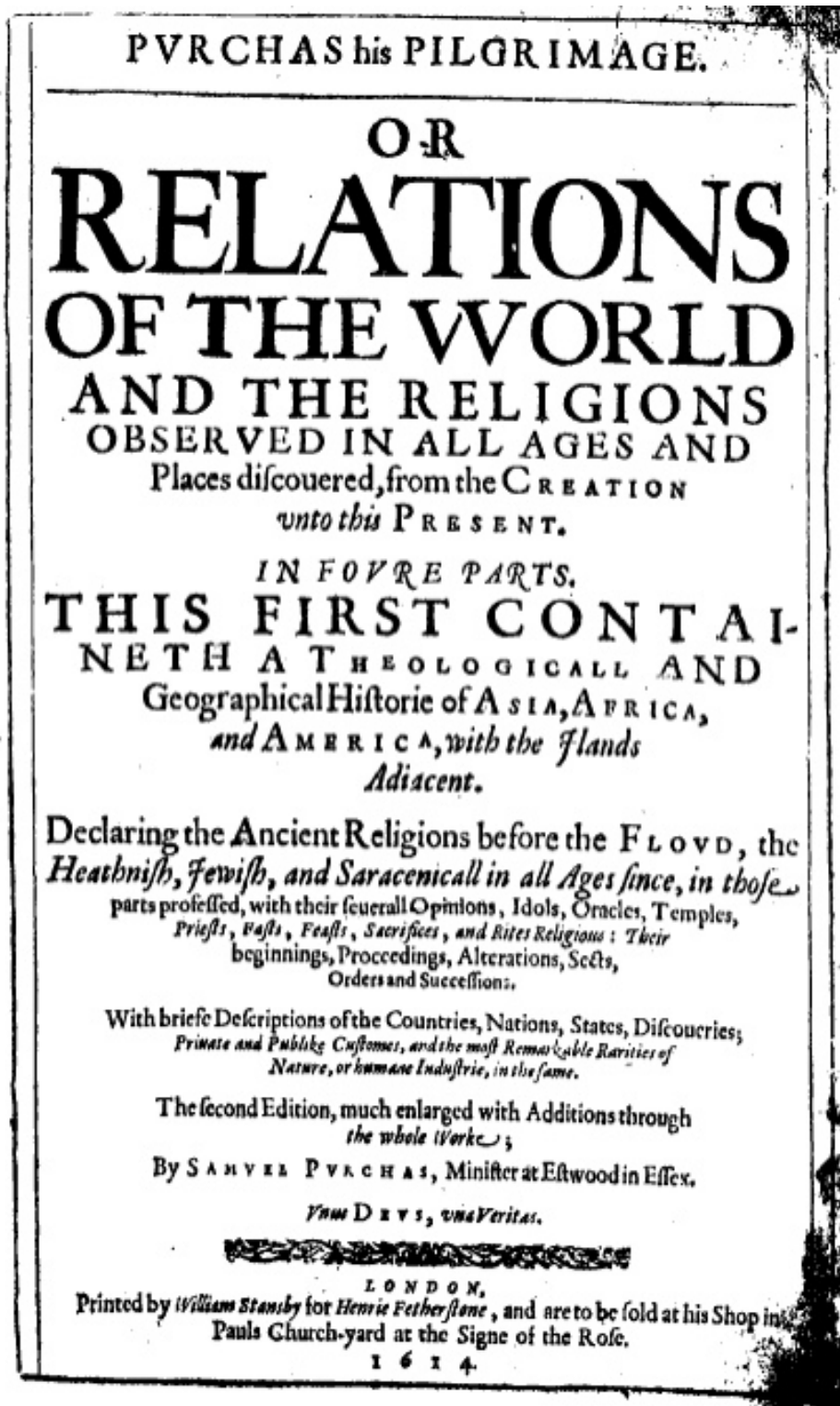


Figure 9. Title Page of *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 1625. (Early English Books Online)

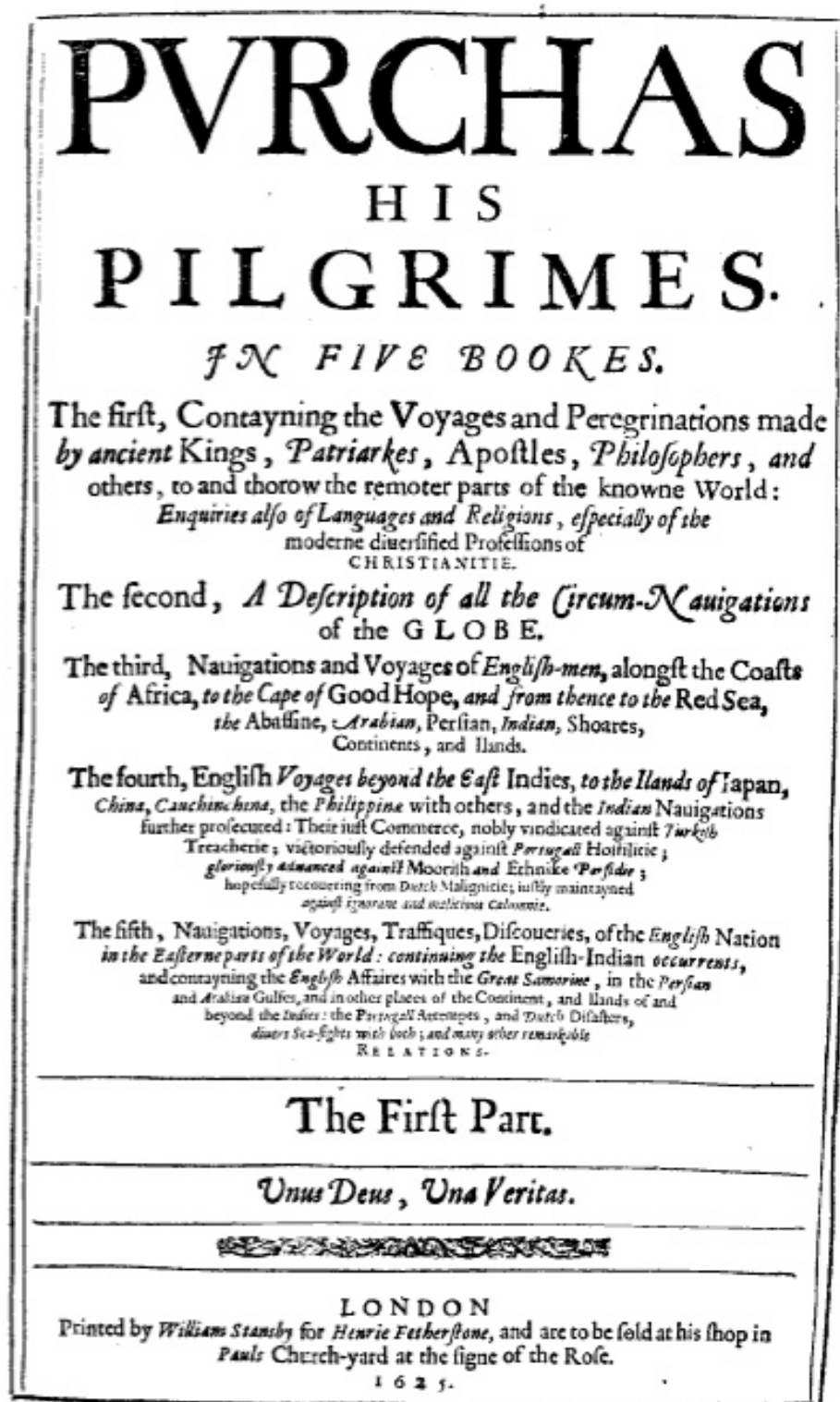


Figure 10. 17th century woodblock reproduction of the first illustration in the *Codex Mendoza*, found in *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 1625. (Early English Books Online)



Figure 11. Ownership of the *Codex Mendoza*. (Rivas 2013)

Court of Spain	154? - 1553
André Thevet	1553 - 1587
Richard Hakluit	1587 - 1620
Samuel Purchas	1620 - 1626
John Selden	1626 - 1654
Bodleian Library, Oxford University	1654 - present

Figure 12. Artist unknown, *The Codex Mendoza*, folio 10r. Pigments and ink on paper, 8.5" x 12.4". (Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford)



Figure 13. Artist unknown, *The Codex Mendoza*, folio 57r. Unknown pigments and ink on paper, 8.5" x 12.4". (Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford)

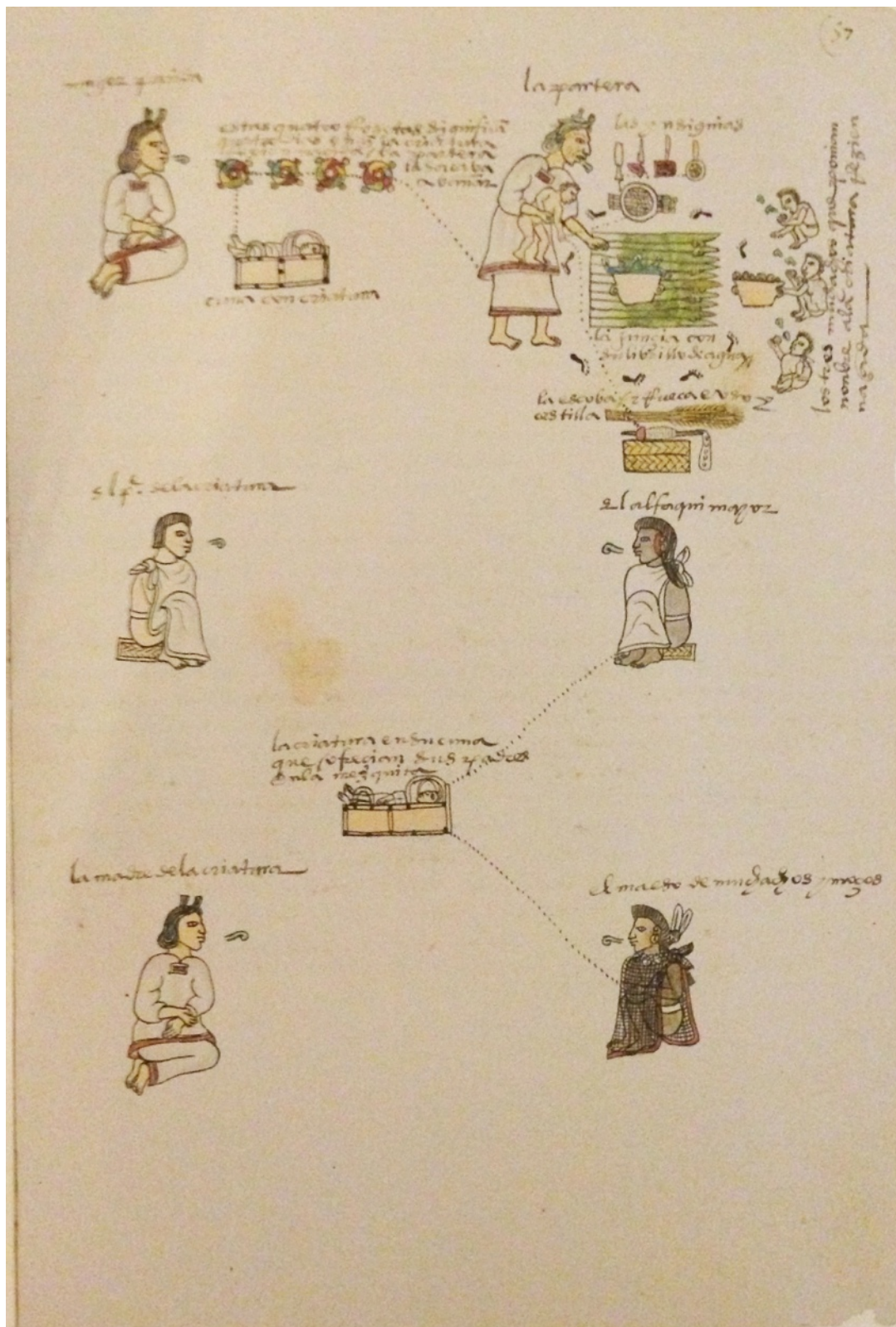


Figure 14. Artist unknown, *Relación de Michoacán*, folio 1r., ca. 1539-1541. Unknown pigments and ink on European paper, 5.7" x 8.1" (Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Spain)



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