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# World of the Aztecs in the Florentine Codex

## The Library on Display

### Franca Arduini


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the world of the aztecs

IN THE FLORENTINE CODEX

Mandragora

**In this** book, the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana celebrates one of the most famous 16th-century manuscripts in its collections, the *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* ('General History of the Things of New Spain') by Bernardino de Sahagún, commonly referred to as the *Florentine Codex*.

A Spanish Franciscan friar who had arrived in Mexico as a missionary after the conquest of the region by Cortés (1519-21), Sahagún devoted his life to the study of indigenous cultures. Much like a modern-day anthropologist, he prepared questionnaires for prominent native elders, and from 1558, with the help of young Nahua students who had studied under him at Tlatelolco, compiled an unprecedented encyclopedia about the peoples and cultures of Central America. With its twelve books written in Nahuatl (the language most widely spoken in the region) and translated into Spanish, and over 2,000 colour illustrations, the *Florentine Codex* is an extraordinary source of information about the myths, religious beliefs and practices, everyday life, history, traditional crafts and even eating habits of the Aztecs, with large sections devoted to animals and plants and a moving account of the Spanish Conquest and its devastating consequences. It soon began to be suggested that the *Historia* might encourage idolatry, and in 1577 King Philip II of Spain ordered that all of Sahagún's writings should be sent to Spain so as to prevent the work's circulation. The friar wrote to the king himself in order to find out whether the precious codex had reached Europe, but never knew what had happened to it. At the age of almost eighty he set to work once again, spending his last years desperately trying to recover the material he believed had been lost.

**Also available in the Library on Display series:** *Imaginary Creatures* ISBN 9788874610983, $19.95

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