



FROM PICTURE TO PRINT

# MEXICO

A small display from the Bodleian Library's collections of rare books and manuscripts that illustrate the beginnings of printing in the colony of New Spain

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**Bodleian Library Proscholium**

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# MEXICO: FROM PICTURE TO PRINT

## Introduction

This exhibition provides ten extremely rare examples of Mexican books drawn from the Bodleian Library's collections. The celebrated Codex Mendoza is accompanied by nine printed books which illustrate the beginnings of printing in the New World.

The exhibition illustrates four themes:

### 1. Spain's colonisation of New Spain.

The Spanish *conquistador* Hernán Cortés landed on the American mainland from Cuba in 1519, conquering the Aztec capital two years later. Central and southern Mexico became the colony known as New Spain, which was elevated to a viceroyalty in 1535. This territory was gradually conquered and colonised by the Spaniards with the help of indigenous allies.

The Codex Mendoza was commissioned by Viceroy Mendoza, and is one of the treasures of the Bodleian. This fascinating codex depicts life from birth to death in traditional Aztec pictograms, with annotations in Spanish made by a Nahuatl-speaking Spanish priest. The printed books exhibited beside it reflect both the disappearance of that world during the process of colonisation of New Spain and the expansion of the Spanish empire from that colony. In 1564 a fleet under Miguel López de Legazpi set off from the port of Navidad, on the Pacific coast of Mexico, to conquer the Philippine islands, which became Spain's most distant colony.

### 2. The transfer of the technology of printing and of typographical material from Europe to the Americas.

The first printer to operate in the New World, the Italian Juan Pablos (Giovanni Paoli), was sent across the Atlantic in 1539 to set up a press with equipment and typographical material supplied by his master Juan Cromberger. Pablos had worked for many years in Cromberger's press at Seville. Cromberger, the son of a German immigrant printer, ran what was probably the most important printing firm of his day in the whole of the Iberian Peninsula.

As New Spain began to be colonised, Juan Cromberger had been commissioned to print books in Amerindian languages in his Seville press. However, it was impractical to set up works in those languages so far from where they were spoken, and it was decided to send a press to Mexico. Cromberger was induced by the Franciscan Juan de Zumárraga, Bishop of Mexico, and the Viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza (after whom the Codex Mendoza is named; *see exhibit 1*), to found a Mexican branch-office of his Seville press. Among his rewards were to be monopolies on the printing of books in New Spain and on the export of printed material to the colony, land for cattle ranching there, and an interest in Mexico's rich silver mines.

In about 1540 Juan Pablos began to print books in the old Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, later to become Mexico City. This was a century before books were first printed in the English colonies in the Americas. Pablos worked in a three-man team: he served as compositor; Gil Barbero, who had been recruited in Seville and whose nationality is unknown, was the puller; the third man, a skilled black slave of sub-Saharan origin called Pedro, was the property of Juan Cromberger and doubtless worked as the beater in the new press.

Over the course of the sixteenth century several other printers began to work in the colony, their products being represented by exhibits displayed here. Printing remained to a large extent a family affair, the presses and their expensive material passing from husband to widow, and from father to son or daughter.

The typographical material used at first in Mexico had come from Cromberger's Seville press, much of it being old and worn. Exhibits 5 and 6 illustrate how an obsolete woodblock, once used to depict Muslims in the Old World, was pressed into service in Mexico to portray the Zapotec people of New Spain.

### 3. The imposition of European thought.

The printing press was an essential tool in the imposition of European ideas in the new colony. A major preoccupation of the Spanish authorities was the conversion of indigenous peoples to Christianity through the technology of the printed word and image. Once missionaries had learned Amerindian languages (several of the exhibits are grammars and word-lists), they wrote religious books in them. Examples are provided of editions printed partly in the Nahuatl and Zapotec languages. The Codex Mendoza provides an example of the importance of the image in the pre-conquest culture of Mesoamerica. Some of the earliest books printed in New Spain make use of woodcuts to print images intended to aid the process of indoctrinating the indigenous peoples.

At the same time that they were using printing to convert indigenous peoples, the Spanish authorities, and especially the Inquisition, were wary of printing's potential to spread subversion. Two of the printers represented in this exhibition were imprisoned by the Inquisition in Mexico on suspicion of harbouring Protestant sympathies.

### 4. The New World as the modern world.

The earliest editions printed in New Spain were largely for the use of missionaries, the Catholic church, or administrators. Once the colony was settled and the first university in the Americas – founded in Mexico City – began to function in 1553, more sophisticated editions of works written by academics and required by their students began to be printed in New Spain. The vast majority of books read and used in the Spanish colonies were printed in Europe, many being products of the major presses of the southern Netherlands but exported to Mexico from Seville. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, books for a more general readership were being printed in the colony in editions of good quality.

## Individual exhibits

### 1. Codex Mendoza. (Mexico, c. 1541)

*MS. Arch. Selden. A. 1, fols. 63v–64r*

The Codex Mendoza was named after and commissioned by the first Viceroy of New Spain (1535–50), Antonio de Mendoza. It was intended as a present for Charles V, but never reached Spain as the ship carrying it was captured by the French. It came into the hands of André Thevet, Geographer to Henry II of France (c. 1587), and after his death in 1590 it was purchased by Richard Hakluyt, an English geographer with a particular interest in the colonisation of the American continent. Hakluyt died in 1616, and the Codex was left in his will to Samuel Purchas, an English compiler of travel and discovery writings who continued the encyclopaedic collections begun by Hakluyt. Purchas considered it a jewel of his collections, and reproduced many of the pictograms in his own works. After Purchas' death, the Codex became the property of John Selden and came to the Bodleian with Selden's manuscripts in 1659.

Although the pictographic style of the Codex is consistent throughout, it contains three separate works. The first is a pictorial history of the Aztec empire (1325–1521), also known as the lost chronicle of the lords of Tenochtitlan. The ruins of Tenochtitlan are in the centre of modern-day Mexico City. The second part of the Codex is a copy of the annual tributes paid to the last emperor, Montezuma II, by some 400 towns within the Aztec empire. The final section gives a pictorial account of Aztec social life and customs, from birth to death. From the bringing up and educating of children, to relationships, marriage, daily chores, religious rituals and military training, the details of Aztec life are carefully set out in coloured pictograms. The figures in such works are floating on a blank ground and are not shaded, reflecting indigenous painting traditions.

However, it would be difficult to class this as a purely indigenous work. It was commissioned by a Spaniard, and annotated in Spanish by a priest who was able to speak Nahuatl so that it could be read by its intended recipient, King Charles V. Although the Codex never reached Charles, these annotations are invaluable for our interpretation of the pictograms. Before the Spanish conquest, indigenous painters created ritual manuscripts by which they calculated auspicious days on the

basis of the deities in ascendance. That function was not approved by the new Catholic church authorities, who made efforts to destroy those manuscripts they could find. However, in the case of the Codex Mendoza, the Spaniards were keen to use the skills of the manuscript painters to create a document which would record minute details of Aztec social life and customs.

The opening exhibited here first shows a novice priest in his canoe, transporting stone to repair the temple. We then see a novice priest attending a more senior priest on his way to war, to inspire the troops and perform ceremonies on the battlefield. The military theme continues, as we are presented with images of warriors and their associated costume, in an ascending line of rank and prestige. We see that warriors were ranked according to their bravery and by how many captives they had taken in battle. The final image is the warrior known as Tlacatecatl, with a headdress of fine feathers and rich clothing, showing that he has performed all the brave deeds of the above warriors, and has a higher rank.

## **2. Denis the Carthusian, *Éste es un compendio breve que trata de la manera de cómo se han de hacer las procesiones* [On religious processions] (Tenochtitlan [now Mexico City]: ‘Juan Cromberger’, 1544).**

*Arch.B e.2, sig. a1r*

The earliest printed Mexican book on display was produced only some four years after the first press to operate anywhere in the New World was established in what would become Mexico City. Although its colophon states that it was printed in ‘Juan Cromberger’s house’, it was a product of Juan Pablos, the first printer in Mexico. Pablos was a native of Brescia in Lombardy.

At some time between 1545 and 1548 Pablos acquired the Mexican office from the Cromberger family in Seville. He subsequently recruited Antonio de Espinosa (*see exhibit 10*) to work in it, and continued to print editions until his death in 1560. His press passed to his son-in-law Pedro Ocharte (*see exhibit 5*).

The book displayed here comes from one of the two editions of the same compilation printed by Juan Pablos in 1544 and c.1544 (the fifth and sixth editions now known to have come from the earliest Mexican press). It consists of two works: the first is a translation into Spanish of a treatise by the fifteenth-century Flemish theologian and mystic Denis the Carthusian (*aka* Denis of Ryckel). The second is by Zumárraga himself, who was so closely associated with the beginning of printing in Mexico and whose writings were profoundly marked by the thought of Erasmus.

Although a small, plain book, the *Compendio breve* is emblematic not only of the first press in the New World but of those who promoted its establishment. As a book printed for the ecclesiastical authorities, it is characteristic of the first Mexican editions. It was printed on Bishop Zumárraga’s orders and at his own expense.

## **3. Mateo Alemán, *Ortografía castellana* [Spanish spelling] (Mexico City: Jerónimo Balli, 1609).**

*4° F 42 Med. sig., \*4v-A1r*

The Seville writer Mateo Alemán was the author of *Guzmán de Alfarache* (two parts: 1599, 1604), one of the most popular works of fiction in the Spanish Golden Age and the model for the picaresque novel. In 1622/3 it was translated into English as *The Rogue* by James Mabbe, Fellow and Chaplain of Magdalen College, Oxford. Alemán had been imprisoned twice in Spain for debt; he emigrated to New Spain in 1608 where he completed his proposals for spelling reforms in Spanish, the *Ortografía castellana*. The page of text exhibited here is an example of those proposals put into practice.

The woodcut portrait displayed was closely modelled on the engraving of Mateo Alemán by the Flemish artist Pedro Perret which had been included in the Madrid *editio princeps* of the first part of *Guzmán de Alfarache*. It is an example of the notable influence exerted by Flemish engravings

upon the arts of colonial Spanish America.

This book was printed in the press of Jerónimo Balli, son of Pedro Balli (*see exhibit 9*), by the Fleming Cornelio Adrián César who had been freed in 1602 from his imprisonment by the Inquisition (*see exhibit 7*). Jerónimo Balli's production was intermittent. He died in 1610.

By the 1550s the Mexican presses had begun to produce academic texts required by the first university on the American continent, which opened its doors in Mexico City in 1553. They were, then, printing some editions which were intended neither for missionary work nor for administrative purposes, although they were still commissioned and financed by institutions. Books like Alemán's of 1609 or Morga's history of the Philippines of the same year (*see exhibit 4*), are examples of a further development: by the early seventeenth century the Mexican presses were sufficiently established to print titles of general interest to the reading public in the colony and to do so in editions of high quality.

**4. Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* [*History of the Philippines*]  
(Mexico City: Jerónimo Balli, 1609).  
*Vet. KK2 e.1, sig. O3v-O4r***

Antonio de Morga was a colonial administrator in Spanish America and the Philippines. In 1600 he led the Spanish in a naval battle against Dutch corsairs in those islands. His *Sucesos* is a classic early account of Spanish colonialism in the Philippines. It is based not only on extensive research, but also on Morga's personal involvement in some of the events he recounts.

The pages displayed here contain a letter to Morga from the soldier, priest, diplomat, explorer, naval pilot, scientist and bibliophile Hernando de los Ríos Coronel who played a vital role in establishing the Philippines, which had been colonised from Mexico, as a thriving Spanish possession.

This book was printed in the press of Jerónimo Balli by the Fleming Cornelio Adrián César (*see exhibit 3*).

**5. Pedro González de Feria, *Doctrina cristiana en lengua castellana y zapoteca*  
[*Catechism in Spanish and Zapotec*] (Mexico City: Pedro Ocharte, 1567).  
*4<sup>o</sup>F 3 Th. Seld., sig. H2v-H3r***

This book is partly in Zapotec, the language of the Oaxaca region of southern Mexico. It illustrates the range of indigenous languages in which books were printed in Mexico City for missionaries during the early years of the new colony. Pedro González de Feria was a Spanish Dominican and a missionary to the Zapotecs, later becoming Prior of his order's house in Mexico City, taking part in a disastrous expedition to Florida, and being consecrated Bishop of Chiapas.

The printer of the *Doctrina cristiana* was the Norman merchant Pedro Ocharte (Pierre Ochart), the third printer to work in Mexico and son-in-law of the first, Juan Pablos (*see exhibit 2*). In 1563 Ocharte's widowed mother-in-law leased him Pablos's equipment which included two printing-presses. He later bought Pablos's house and press. In 1572 – a time of considerable fear in Spanish territories of French Protestantism – he was imprisoned by the Mexican Inquisition on suspicion of heresy. He was put to the torture but eventually absolved in 1574. After his imprisonment Ocharte's press seems to have remained inactive for many years, although he continued to commission others, including Antonio de Espinosa (*see exhibit 10*), to print for him. From 1580, however, Ocharte's press produced its own editions until its owner's death in 1592 (*see exhibit 8*).

The somewhat inappropriate illustration shown here was impressed from an old woodblock sent from Seville across the Atlantic by the Cromberger press (*see exhibit 6*).

This book was once in the collection of the English politician, lawyer, book-collector and polymath

John Selden (1584-1654), who had a strong interest in what were considered exotic languages (see exhibits 1 and 10).

**6. Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, *Improbatio Alcorani [Refutation of the Koran]* (Seville: Estanislao Polono, 1500).  
*Inc.e.S4.1500.1, sig. a1r***

The Italian Dominican theologian, missionary and Arabist Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (c.1243-1320), lived for many years in the Middle East. This is the first edition to be printed anywhere of his famous attack on Islam which was frequently drawn upon by later Christian writers.

This book is exhibited here because it illustrates how obsolete printing material from Europe reappeared many years later in Mexico. The Polish printer Estanislao Polono worked in Seville in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. His press and typographical material were inherited by his colleague, the German immigrant printer Jacobo Cromberger, who in his turn bequeathed them to his son Juan. Surplus to requirements in the Crombergers' Seville office, the woodblock from which this illustration was impressed was taken – probably by Juan Pablos in 1539 – to the Mexican branch-office where it was reused by Ocharte who inherited it from Pablos. It appears in Pedro González de Feria's *Doctrina cristiana en lengua castellana y zapoteca* of 1567 (see exhibit 5) doubtless because both Riccoldo da Monte di Croce's and Pedro González de Feria's works are concerned with the conversion to Christianity, by Dominican preachers and missionaries, of peoples whom sixteenth-century Spaniards considered heathens. Although a woodcut of turbaned Muslims being used to represent Zapotecs in the Mexican book might seem odd, compositors of the period often had to choose what were the least inappropriate woodblocks at their disposal to illustrate the editions they were setting up.

**7. Juan Bautista, *Confesionario en lengua mexicana y castellana [Preparation of penitents for confession, in Nahuatl and Spanish]* (Santiago Tlatelolco: Melchor Ocharte, 1599).  
*8° B 22 Art. BS. sig. A1v-A2r***

Juan Bautista was a prolific Franciscan writer and 'guardián' of the monastery of Santiago Tlatelolco (see exhibit 8).

The verso of the title-page, exhibited here, contains a woodcut of a penitent whom the Devil attempts to drag away from making his confession to a friar. On the facing page is part of the ten-year privilege covering the printing both of the text and woodcut illustrations of this work. This privilege was awarded to the author by the Count of Monterrey, then Viceroy of New Spain. In his preface Juan Bautista outlined how a confessor should visit villages during Lent to prepare their indigenous inhabitants collectively for confession. He recommended that the missionary explain a sin and then show a woodcut depiction of it to them – clear evidence of the part played by printed illustrations in the missionary effort. Juan Bautista even suggested that such pictures should be provided to indigenous peoples to keep so that they could be reminded of the missionary's teaching. Woodcuts were, indeed, printed in or exported to the New World in large numbers during the colonial period. This suggests that missionaries adapted their practice to the visual culture of New Spain seen in the pictograms of the Codex Mendoza (see exhibit 1).

This book was printed by Melchor Ocharte, son of Pedro Ocharte (see exhibits 5 and 8). In 1597 Pedro's widow had transferred her late husband's press to Tlatelolco, where Melchor printed Juan Bautista's *Confesionario* two years later. The Flemish printer Cornelio Adrián César (see exhibits 3 and 4), whose press had been impounded by the Inquisition, was imprisoned for suspected Protestant heresy in the Franciscan monastery at Tlatelolco when the Ocharte press was transferred there. The friars may have hoped to use his skill to print Franciscan publications on the Ocharte press. Melchor Ocharte printed in Mexico from 1597 to 1605, for some of that time in the monastery of Santiago Tlatelolco. One of the skills learned by the indigenous pupils at the Tlatelolco college was bookbinding.

**8. Juan de Gaona, *Coloquios de la paz y tranquilidad cristiana, en lengua mexicana* [Dialogues on peace and Christian tranquillity, in Nahuatl],** edited by Miguel de Zárate (Mexico City: Pedro Ocharte, 1582).  
*Arch. B f.8, sig. b8v-A1r*

The Spaniard Juan de Gaona was an eminent Franciscan theologian and humanist scholar who, like his fellow-Franciscan Juan de Zumárraga (*see exhibit 2*), was influenced by Erasmus's thought. He was posted to New Spain in 1538 where he spent long years studying the Nahuatl language. He taught at the Franciscan College of Tlatelolco which shortly before had been founded outside Mexico City. This college, to which Zumárraga himself had donated a collection of books, boasted one of the first academic libraries in the Americas. The pupils were the sons of the indigenous elite who, it was hoped, would go on to become New Spain's native clergy (*see exhibit 7*). For their part, the friars learned indigenous languages from their pupils. In 1551 Gaona was appointed Provincial of his order in New Spain. The *Coloquios* were edited by another Franciscan, Miguel de Zárate, long after their author's death.

This book came from Pedro Ocharte's press several years after his imprisonment and torture by the Inquisition (*see exhibit 5*). It is printed in Spanish, Latin and Nahuatl.

**9. Antonio del Rincón, *Arte mexicana* [Nahuatl grammar] (Mexico City: Pedro Balli, 1595).**  
*Vet. KK1 f.1, sig. M7v-M8r*

This book is one of the earliest grammars of Nahuatl and was an influential primary source for the language as it was spoken in post-conquest New Spain. It was much used by missionaries converting the indigenous peoples of Mexico. It also contains a short bilingual dictionary. The pages exhibited here list the Nahuatl word 'ocelotl' which gives the English 'ocelot'; the Spanish translation provided is 'tigre', a word still used in some parts of Spanish America for 'jaguar'.

Antonio del Rincón was a *mestizo* (a person of mixed indigenous and European blood). His forebears had been lords of the major city of Texcoco, one of them the famous intellectual and ruler Nezahualcóyotl. Rincón was among the first native-born Mexicans to join the Jesuit order.

Pedro Balli, who ran the fourth press in the history of the colony, began printing in Mexico City in 1574. Two years later, on Antonio de Espinosa's death, he leased Espinosa's shop and equipment becoming an important printer in his own right. He died in 1601.

**10. Alonso de Molina, *Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana* [Spanish/Nahuatl dictionary] (Mexico City: Antonio de Espinosa, 1571).**  
*S. Seld. d.46, sig. ✕1r*

The printing of this book was financed by the fourth Viceroy of New Spain, Martín Enríquez de Almanza, whose coat of arms appears on the title-page.

Alonso de Molina was a Franciscan friar and prolific author of religious works intended for Nahuatl-speaking peoples. In 1555 Juan Pablos had printed an earlier version of Molina's *Vocabulario* in Mexico City. The author wrote in the dedicatory letter of the much enlarged second edition of 1571, displayed here, that the purpose of his dictionary was to help in the task of converting the indigenous peoples to Christianity. Nahuatl was the language of the inhabitants of central Mexico whom we associate with the Aztecs, and it was the principal imperial tongue of pre-Conquest

Mexico. In 1570 King Philip II of Spain had decreed that it was to be the official language of the colony of New Spain to facilitate Spaniards' communication with its indigenous inhabitants. Under Spanish rule this tongue spread to northern Mexico and to the present-day countries of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador as Nahuatl-speaking allies of the Spaniards helped them to conquer those areas, and as Spanish missionaries taught Nahuatl to various indigenous peoples in order to convert them more easily to Christianity. Alonso de Molina was a fluent speaker of Nahuatl and had been teaching it to Franciscan missionaries since he was a child. This edition would have been used for such instruction rather than in the field, its large format suggesting that it was not intended for a missionary's pocket. The second edition of the *Vocabulario* remained the most important guide to the Nahuatl language until the late nineteenth century.

The Spaniard Antonio de Espinosa was one of the finest of the early printers in New Spain; he was also a skilled punch-cutter and type-founder. He left Seville in 1551 to work for Juan Pablos in Mexico, modernising Pablos's typographical material and substantially improving the appearance of his products. Espinosa subsequently went back to Spain where he successfully challenged the Cromberger/Pablos monopoly of printing in New Spain and gained a royal licence to print under his own name in the colony. This indicates that printing there was becoming a commercially attractive proposition. Returning to Mexico in 1559 with a team of experienced workers, he established the second press to operate there. He printed some books for Pedro Ocharte (*see exhibits 5 and 8*), his press functioning until his death in 1576 when his shop and equipment were leased to Pedro Balli (*see exhibit 9*).

The copy displayed here belonged to John Selden (*see exhibits 1 and 5*) whose motto in Greek can be seen at the top right of the title-page.

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