

Treatise of Ruiz de Alarcón

The *Treatise* of Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón is one of the most important surviving documents of early colonial Mexico. It was written in 1629 as an aid to Roman Catholic churchmen in their efforts to root out the vestiges of pre-Columbian Aztec religious beliefs and practices. For the student of Aztec religion and culture it is a valuable source of information.

Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón was born in Taxco, Guerrero, Mexico, in the latter part of the sixteenth century. He attended the University of Mexico and later took holy orders. Sometime after he was assigned to the parish of Atenango, he began writing the *Treatise* for his fellow priests and church superiors to use as a guide in suppressing native "heresy."

With great care and attention to detail Ruiz de Alarcón collected and recorded Aztec religious practices and incantations that had survived a century of Spanish domination (sometimes in his zeal extracting information from his informants through force and guile). He wrote down the incantations in Nahuatl and translated them into Spanish for his readers. He recorded rites for such everyday activities as woodcutting, traveling, hunting, fishing, farming, harvesting, fortune-telling, lovemaking, and the curing of many diseases, from toothache to scorpion stings. Although Ruiz de Alarcón was scornful of native medical practices, we know now that in many aspects of medicine the Aztec curers were far ahead of their European counterparts.

"J. Richard Andrews and Ross Hassig have produced what will undoubtedly be the definitive translation for some time. . . . The editors provide a valuable and comprehensive explanation of the ecclesiastical context of the conquest, native religion and medicine, and religious syncretism. Helpful appendices include explanations of ritual and supernatural names, medical practitioners and practices, place names, and incantations used in the *Treatise*; another appendix reprints the 'Brief Relation of the Gods and Rites of Heathenism' of beneficiado Pedro Ponce, written about the same time."

—*The Americas*.

"The treatise carefully documents not only the religion of the Aztecs, but also the rites for such everyday activities as woodcutting, curing, and lovemaking. The translators of this work have supplied an historical introduction to put the treatise in context; notes to clarify obscure points in the text; lists of gods, curers, medicines, and place names; and corrections of the author's sometimes flawed Nahuatl."—*Masterkey*.

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