

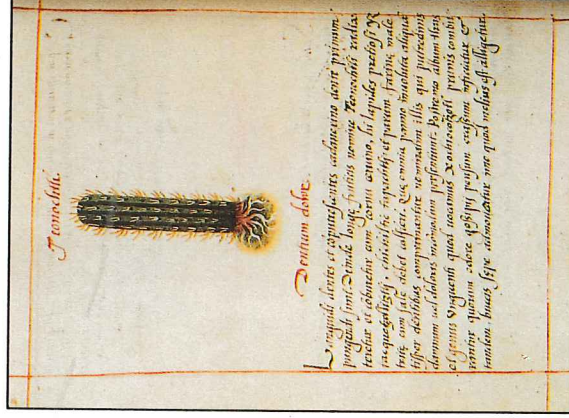
Codex Cruz-Badiano: the magic of the ancient Mexican herbal¹

¹ Introduction of the recently published *Libellus de medicinalibus indorum herbis*.

*Carlos Salinas de Gortari**

After much wandering, the ancient Mexican herbal written in Náhuatl by Martín de la Cruz and translated into Latin by Juan Badiano almost half a millennium ago, *Libellus de medicinalibus indorum herbis*, returned to Mexico in 1990 thanks to the generosity of Pope John Paul II. Full of medical wisdom and splendid illustrations, it is part of the historic legacy bequeathed to us by the peoples who gave us our roots and our temperament.

Since its discovery in the Vatican Library in 1929, the medical community, historians, botanists, Latinists and



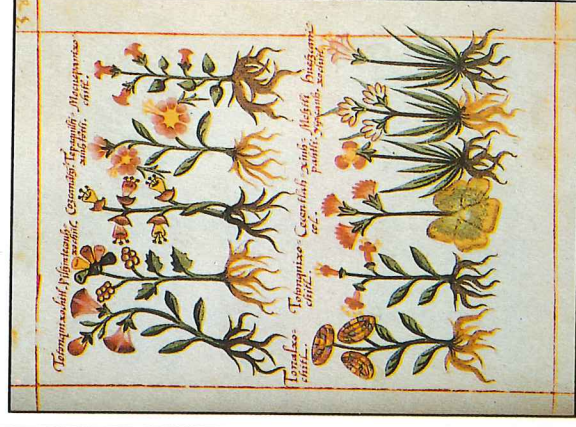
The purpose of the present edition is to disseminate both an invaluable record of pre-Hispanic medicine and an example of the sensitivity and the art of those who were here before us. Herbal medicine did not disappear from Mexico with the Conquest and the introduction of European medicine; on the contrary it continued to thrive not only among the indigenous population but among *mestizos* and Creoles as well, and still flourishes to this day. In the mid-17th century, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz wrote, "with what magical infusions have the indigenous herbalists of my fatherland poured their wizardry into my words?"

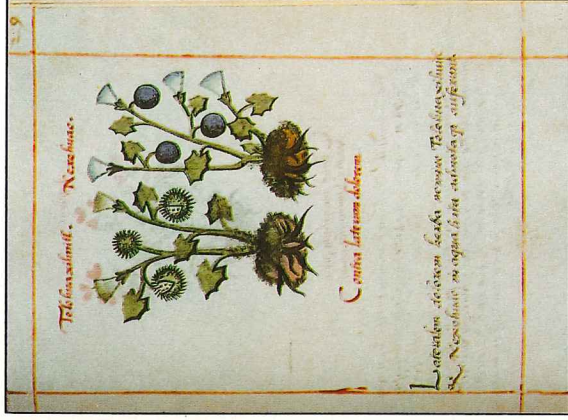


Mexican art historians have lamented its absence from Mexico's national library resources.

As a veritable treasure of our cultural heritage, a new edition of the Codex was indispensable. Since the Badiano Committee fifty years ago, the careful editorial efforts of Efrén del Pozo and Angel María Garibay's erudite translation into Spanish, the talent and the will have been there to make the Codex part of the nation's patrimony and above all of its consciousness.

* President of Mexico, honorary professor in the National University of Mexico.



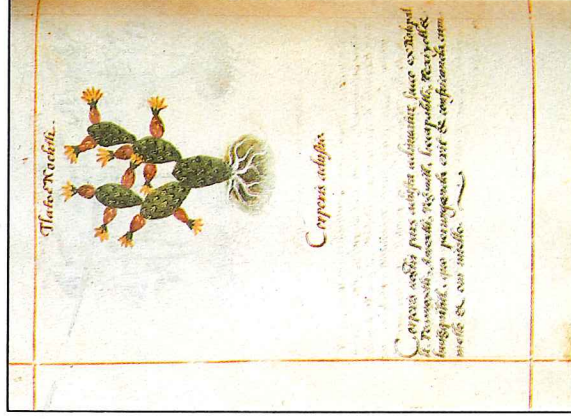


The *Codex de la Cruz-Badiano* is an ancient herbal, composed within living memory of the fall of Tenochtitlan, and written in ink made from the soil of Mexico. It is also the first of its kind in the Americas, testimony to the powers of observation and the experience, the mythic imagination and the artistic sensitivity that Xochimilco and Tenochtitlan bequeathed to Mexico and the continent.

Of all the codices that existed before and came after the merging of two magnificent civilizations, this one is the amalgam of two spirits, two

languages, two ways of seeing and understanding that have become our own. What is striking in this singular synthesis is the strength of the new ethnic mixture, for it reminds us that cultures coexist and are distinguishable, without a rift, in the present, like superimposed sediments of the same spirit.

"In the *Codex de la Cruz-Badiano*," says Angel María Garibay, "a native Mexican assembled the therapeutic wisdom of his ancestors in his soft and winged tongue." Thanks to this edition, many of us can now approach its wisdom and preserve its spirit, not only because of its aesthetic and



historical value, but because of its important place in our already rich medical tradition. Its drawings demonstrate the artistic expressiveness of the Nahuas, full of light, grace and color, transmitting to us the richness of the soil, the flora and the fauna of New Spain, and foretelling from afar, the rigor of the new science.

The Mexican people welcome this new, carefully crafted edition with great delight. Persistent in their essential curiosity about their roots, proud of the values and traditions inherited from their history, they can now enjoy a worthy reproduction of this herbal,



the original of which has been deposited in the library of the National Museum of Anthropology and History for safe keeping. It now becomes one of the many signs by which we decipher our identity, because they speak to us of other times and other experience. Today we consider it an irreplaceable part of the spirit shared by all the Mexicans who lived then and those who are today determined that Mexico shall prevail.

We must now begin to absorb the many valuable levels of the



A brief history of the Codex de la Cruz-Badiano

The *Codex de la Cruz-Badiano* was written in Náhuatl by Martín de la Cruz, an empirically trained native Mexican doctor and professor at the College of the Holy Cross of Tlaltelolco, at the express request of Francisco de Mendoza, son of the First Viceroy of New Spain, in the hope that it would reach the hands of his sovereign Charles V of Spain. It was first translated into Latin by another professor at the college, a Xochimilca by the name of Juan Badiano, who completed the work on July 22, 1552. It is illustrated by a profusion of colored drawings of plants mentioned in the text, made by unknown hands, undoubtedly also native Mexican though already exposed to European influence.

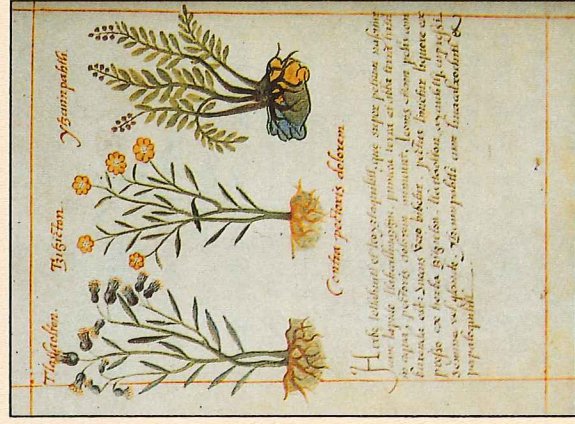
The book is a genuine collection of medical prescriptions for curing a variety of ailments principally by means of plants readily available in Mexico. But it is more than a simple herbal, for it includes numerous instructions of an unquestionably medical nature. It is a work which, although entirely indigenously Mexican in terms of the ethnic and cultural origin of its authors, is *mestizo* in its purpose and conception.

The *Codex de la Cruz-Badiano* is perhaps the oldest medical text written in the Americas. By the middle of the 17th century, the manuscript had come into the hands of the Madrid pharmacist Diego Cortavila y Sanabria. A copy made soon afterward was taken to England where it became part of King George III's library. This copy is now in the Royal Library at Windsor. Meanwhile, the original manuscript was acquired by Cardinal Francesco Barberini (1597-1679), a nephew of Pope Urban VIII, who was highly interested in Mexican herbal matters. It remained forgotten for many years even after the Barberini collection was incorporated into the Vatican Library in 1902. The English copy was discovered in 1923 by G. Gabrielli who referred to it in his *Iconographia botanica*. Six years later in 1929, Charles Upson Clark and Lynn Thorndike almost simultaneously announced its discovery in Rome.

The *Libellus* was first printed in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1939, edited by William Gates for the Maya Society, in whose journal number 22 it was reproduced. The English translation appeared in number 23 with the editor's notes, all under the title of *The De la Cruz-Badiano Aztec Herbal of 1552*. It was printed again in the same city the next year, with a translation and notes by Emily Walcott Emmart, under the title *The Badianus Manuscript (Codex Barberini, Latin 241)*. *Vatican Library. An Aztec Herbal of 1552*.

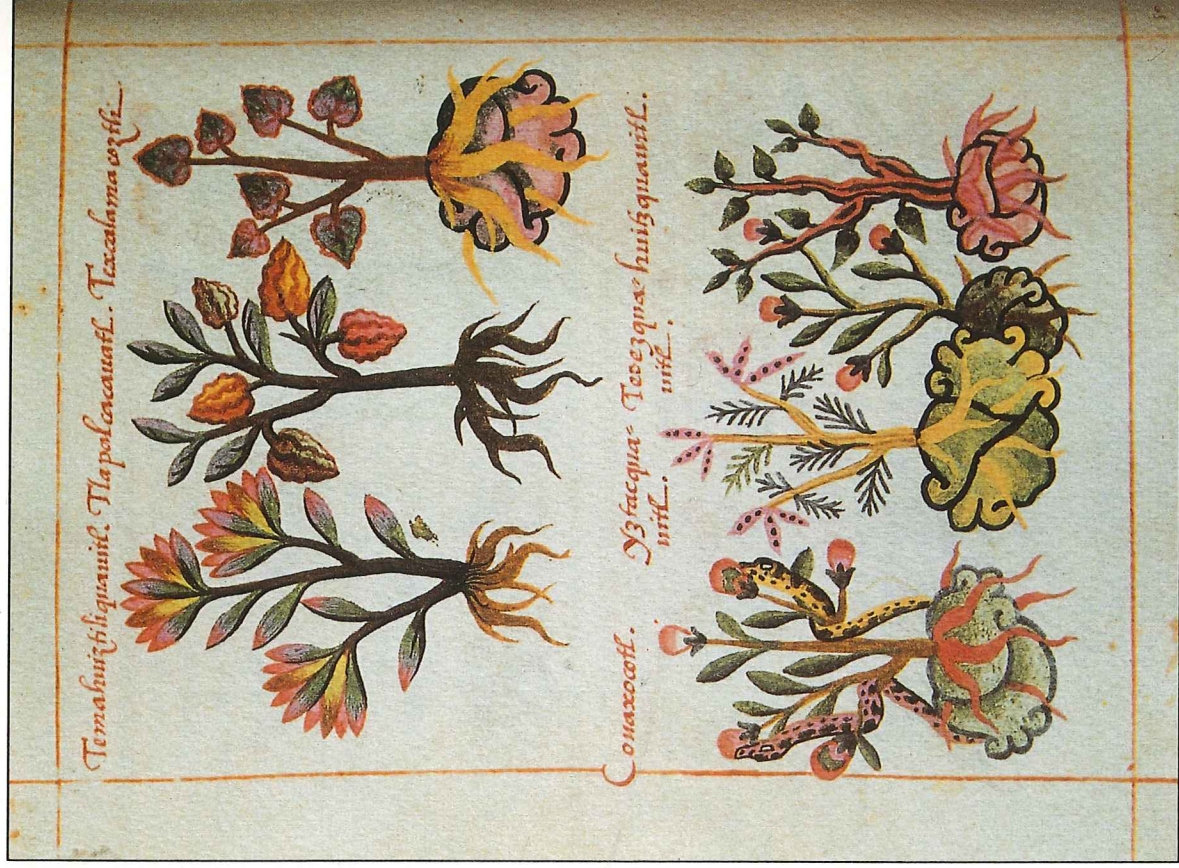
There was no Spanish edition until 1952, the manuscript's 400th anniversary, when Demetrio García and Francisco Guerra's translation was published in a limited edition in Mexico City by Luis Vargas Rea and *El Diario Español*, without the illustrations, entitled *Libellus de medicinalibus indorum herbis. El manuscrito mexicano-latino de Martín de la Cruz y Juan Badiano de 1552*. So it was not until the publication of the Mexican Social Security Institute's edition of 1964, that the general public had any direct contact with the manuscript.

Martín de la Cruz might be surprised by the interest in his work 440 years after its creation. The *Codex* appeared destined for destruction and oblivion, yet may now be the largest single source of immediate post-Conquest medicinal knowledge and also an invaluable source of pre-Hispanic scientific thought.





Cruz-Badiano herbal, the first link in a cultural tradition that has always been a source of pride to Mexico. The task falls to anthropologists, historians, literary critics, but most particularly to the medical profession to broaden interest in this gem of devotion to the health of body and mind. Let the historic validity bequeathed to us by native Mexican physicians resound in the humanistic education of tomorrow's doctors. Let the professional contribution made possible by that education be, as Diego Rivera remarked when he painted the mural of the Codex at the



La Raza Hospital, "with the intention of making the Mexican people aware of their ancient medical culture, so as to confirm their welfare in the present."

As a Mexican and President of Mexico, I hope the new edition of this incalculably valuable manuscript will encourage all Mexicans to take better and greater care of our traditions, and that it will stimulate the abilities we all share and that enable us to meet on equal terms with other nations at a time of tremendous world change.

All Mexicans without exception share the pride inspired by the majesty

and splendor of our culture which belongs intimately to each and every one of us. To know it is to make it a creative force in our lives and for our goals. No matter where it may be, we cannot give up our cultural heritage. May the experience of reading the *Codex de la Cruz-Badiano* be like one of its therapeutic potions which, as the Codex says, served "to banish weariness, shake off fear and stimulate the heart." Mexico needs all of us to be full of the vigor to overcome the challenges of this moment in history and offer our children a more promising future. M