



0. BOOKS BURN IN THE NEW WORLD - Story Preface

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This image depicts a page from "Dresden Codex," a pre-Columbian Mayan book from the 11th or 12th century. It is one of the few works which was not burned by Spanish missionaries and clergy members during their 16th-century efforts to Christianize the indigenous people of today's Latin America. The process of deciphering the Mayan glyphs—so people today could understand the words in the Codex—took a very, very long time. Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

As missionaries began to travel to the New World, the practice of ecclesiastical book censors and book burning went with them.

Anxious to convert the Mayans, missionaries destroyed nearly all of their books. Only three or four Mayan books remain in the world today. One of them, the *Dresden Codex*, is currently owned by the Staatsarchiv in Dresden, Germany. (This link will help you to interpret the *Dresden Codex*.)

Other illuminated books helped the Conquerors understand the endemic culture of the Conquered.

The *Codex Mendoza*, for example, is a record of Mexican culture prepared for Emperor Charles V between 1535-50. Apparently it was acceptable for others to write about Aztec culture, even though books written by the people who lived in that civilization were destroyed.

The *Codex Mendoza* is now owned by the Bodleian Library at Oxford University (whose website has digitized the work for online review). It's an excellent example on how history gets distorted when secondary, slanted information is used instead of primary sources.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/BOOKS-BURN-IN-THE-NEW-WORLD-Book-Burning-and-Censorship)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/BOOKS-BURN-IN-THE-NEW-WORLD-Book-Burning-and-Censorship)

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Dresden Codex

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Codex Mendoza

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