

## Featured Artifact: Codex Telleriano-Remensis

*Era 1 : Three Worlds Meet (Beginnings to 1620)*

<http://historyexplorer.americanhistory.si.edu/resource/?key=2359>



**Look at the artifact presented to you. In a few sentences, respond to the following questions:**

**Describe:** Objectively describe the artifact. What do you think it is made of? What does it look like? Does it look old or new? Is it intact, or is it damaged in some way?

**Analyze:** When, where or how do you think this item was used? What kind of person may have created or used this item? What significance do you think the object held, either for the creator or the user? Do you see words or images on the artifact that connect it to others (besides the creator and user)?

**Share your conclusions with a partner, then discuss the following:**

**Evaluate :** Justify why you came to those conclusions about the artifact. What further questions do you have about the object? Of those questions, which could you solve by observing the object in person and which would you need to solve with research?

## Background Information

The civilizations of pre-Hispanic Mexico recorded their histories, religious beliefs, and scientific knowledge in books called codices. Codices are folded pieces of hide or bark that depict both mundane and spiritual scenes with images, symbols, and numbers. Scribes and painters busily recorded daily affairs, filling libraries and temples with books throughout Mexico and Central America. The majority of these illustrated books did not survive the Spanish conquest, but indigenous scribes trained by Spanish missionaries continued writing.

While these colonial-era texts were still filled with pictures, over time they referenced the visual language of older Mexican and Maya books less and less. These new books about community histories (including land titles) and secret religious traditions were sometimes bilingual, combining Spanish with either Náhuatl (the common language of central Mexico) or a Mayan language, both of which were now written with the Latin alphabet.

This image is from an Italian reproduction of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, a manuscript co-written by Spanish friar Pedro de los Ríos about 1550. It documents the religious beliefs, calendar system, traditions, and history of the Tolteca-Chichimeca culture of Central Mexico. Joseph Florimond, Duc de Loubat, (1837-1921) was an American philanthropist who published a series of reproductions of pre-Hispanic and colonial-era Mexican manuscripts, including the Codex Telleriano-Remensis. The Graphic Arts Collection of the National Museum of American History houses several reproductions of Mesoamerican codices published for study by French, German, and Italian scholars at the turn of the 20th century.

**After reading and considering the background information, compose a response to the following:**

**Analyze:** Address the following object-specific questions:

- Do you think that words or images tell a story more effectively? What benefits or drawbacks might one approach have over the other?
- How, specifically, did European influence change Mexican culture?

**Synthesize:** What does this object tell us about the era in which it was created, or the American experience as a whole? How would you describe the social, economic, or political climate of America during this time? What connections can you make between this object and other things that you have seen, read, or experienced?

**Analyze:** Address the following era-specific essential questions:

- How did the values and institutions of European economic life take root in the colonies, and how did slavery reshape European and African life in the Americas?
- How did societies in the Americas compare to others around the world?
- How did early European exploration and colonization result in cultural and ecological interactions among previously unconnected peoples?