



**Treatise on the Heathen Superstitions: That Today
Live Among the Indians Native to This New Spain,
1629 (Civilization of the American Indian Series)
(The Civilization of the American Indian Series)**

Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón

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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 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.

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