Preface and Acknowledgments

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The Florentine Codex has inspired and catalyzed interdisciplinary scholarship over many decades. It has been scrutinized from multiple perspectives—as an incipient ethnography, a literary work, a dictionary, a historical record, and a theological reflection—and found to be all of these and more. Created by the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún and his indigenous collaborators, the document records two languages, features over two thousand images, and engages a broad range of fundamental questions, including those of authorship, literacy (both verbal and visual), intercultural dialogue, and historical memory. The Florentine Codex occupies a prominent nexus between the pre-Hispanic past and the New Spanish colonial present and, as such, opens up a fertile space to investigate the various epistemic systems that met, intermingled, and clashed in sixteenth-century Mexico. Until recently, studies of the manuscript focused on the very important task of translating and comprehending the bilingual texts. We acknowledge our collective debt to the illustrious scholars who have gone before us and share our appreciation for this magnificent illuminated manuscript. Breaking new ground, the authors in this collection of essays direct their critical analyses to the images of the Florentine Codex: their pictorial sources, their material components, and their correspondence with the accompanying narratives. In resituating the paintings within their textual matrix and a Nahuatl-Christian context, this volume as a whole complicates a Eurocentric understanding of the images and foregrounds the roles and agency of their indigenous makers.

The impetus for this volume began with a two-day conference, “Visual and Textual Dialogues in Colonial Mexico and Europe: The Florentine Codex,” held in 2015 at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the Getty Center. The meeting convened a group of scholars from Mexico, Europe, and the United States to examine the interrelation of the manuscript’s three “texts”: the Nahuatl and Spanish alphabetic texts and the hand-painted images. Taken together, both words and pictures offer a rich body of evidence for interdisciplinary investigation, as well as a springboard for larger questions. The conference was followed six months later by an informal workshop held at the Getty Research Institute. The dialogue generated by this workshop highlighted the need for a publication dedicated to our new interpretative perspective on the Florentine Codex. We are grateful for the participation of the invited scholars, whose thought-provoking papers were subsequently expanded and refined into the essays found in this volume. Additionally, we acknowledge the contributions of the discussants at the 2015 conference, Kim Richter, Cecelia F. Klein, and Daniela Bleichmar.

For so generously hosting and facilitating these meetings, the editors would like to express their special thanks to Barbara Fuchs, then director of the Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies and the UCLA William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, and to Thomas W. Gaehtgens and Kim Richter, then director and associate director of the Getty Research Institute at the Getty Center. We also acknowledge the assistance of Sue Kang, Nathaniel Deines, Sally McKay, Lisa Cam-

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We owe a great debt to the warm reception and cooperation of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, where the Florentine Codex is housed. Ida Giovanna Rao, the director of the library until December of 2017, made the original three-volume Florentine Codex accessible for research and waived the costs of publishing its images. Our thanks also to Anna Rita Fantoni, the Laurenziana's current director, for supporting this generous arrangement, and to the Getty Research Institute for allowing us to incorporate into this volume both images and related text from their superb digital copy of the Florentine Codex.

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Note to readers: The editors acknowledge that the alphabetic spelling of some Nahuatl words can vary from one scholar and one chapter to the next. As one example, the name of the Aztec ruler at the time of the conquest can be spelled Moctezuma, Moteuczoma, or Motecuhzoma. Recognizing the complexity of the cultural terms "Aztec" and "Nahua," in this volume the name Aztec is generally applied to precontact peoples who flourished in central Mexico and, by conquest or negotiation, received tribute from many communities of Mesoamerica. Specifically, those who lived in the island cities on Lake Texcoco, Mexico-Tenochtitlan, and Tlatelolco, were also referred to as the Mexica. More current is our use of the term Nahuas for those peoples who spoke, and continue to speak, the language of Nahuatl. On the pagination of the Florentine Codex, we have followed throughout the folio numbers internally sequential within each book, found in the upper right-hand corner (recto and verso). The exception to this practice is in the pagination of the first twelve folios of Book 1, in which the only page numbers are those for volume 1 found in the lower right-hand corner of each folio (recto and verso).

THE
FLORENTINE
CODEX

FIGURE 1.1. Victims of the first smallpox outbreak in 1520. Florentine Codex, Bk. 12, fol. 53v. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Med. Palat. 218–220. Courtesy of MIBACT.