

**Nahua humanism and ethnohistory: Antonio Valeriano
and a letter from the rulers of Azcapotzalco to Philip II, 1561**

Humanismo nahua y ethnohistoria: Antonio Valeriano
y una carta de los regidores de Azcapotzalco a Felipe II, 1561

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RESUMEN La carta de 1561 de los gobernadores nahuas de Azcapotzalco a Felipe II es una fuente ya bien conocida de la historia del imperio tepaneca de Tezozómoc, el cual proporcionó un modelo para el dominio azteca posterior. El presente trabajo es un análisis detallado de ese importante texto —del estilo epistolar humanista, de los *exempla* clásicos y de las tradiciones y formas del saber nahua— que lleva a identificar a Antonio Valeriano como su autor. Por las propias palabras de Valeriano en la carta, es evidente que no pudo haber escrito el *Nican mopohua*, aunque se sugiere que sí pudo haber sido el traductor de las fábulas de Esopo en náhuatl.

PALABRAS CLAVE Azcapotzalco, época prehispánica y colonial, Esopo, latín, *Nican mopohua*, Sahagún, tepanecas, Tezozómoc, Torquemada, Valeriano

ABSTRACT The 1561 letter from the Nahua governors of Azcapotzalco to Philip II has long been recognised as a crucial source for the history of the Tepanec empire under Tezozomoc, which was a model for later Aztec domination. The present paper offers close analysis of the humanist conventions of epistolography, classical *exempla* and Nahua traditions and forms of knowledge combined in this important text, which leads to conclusive identification of the native scholar and political leader Antonio Valeriano as its author. Valeriano's own words in the letter show that he cannot have written the *Nican mopohua*, but it will be suggested that he may have produced the Nahuatl translations of Aesop's fables.

KEYWORDS Azcapotzalco, pre-hispanic and colonial period, Aesop, Latin, *Nican mopohua*, Sahagún, Tepanecs, Tezozomoc, Torquemada, Valeriano

Nahua humanism and ethnohistory: Antonio Valeriano and a letter from the rulers of Azcapotzalco to Philip II, 1561¹

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In February 1561 the native governors and rulers of Azcapotzalco wrote to the king of Spain to secure a number of privileges and exemptions for their town.² The document they produced has long been recognised as a unique source for the history of Azcapotzalco, the seat of the Tepanec empire which fell to the Mexica of Tenochtitlan, nearly a century before the Spaniards arrived in Anahuac.³ The letter also provides evidence of the humanist learning some members of the Nahuatl elite had acquired by the mid-1500s. The present discussion will begin by outlining the argument of the letter and its historical significance (I) and highlighting its combination of European and Mesoamerican influences (II), before identifying Antonio Valeriano, a nephew of Moctezuma II, as the author on the basis of both stylistic evidence and independent testimony (III). This examination further suggests that Valeriano cannot have written the *Nican mopohua*, the first Nahuatl account of the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which is sometimes still attributed to him (IV) —though a brief Postscript will propose that he may have been the anonymous translator of Aesop's fables from Latin into Nahuatl.

1 Versions of this paper were presented at the Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, UNAM in 2011, the London Institute of Classical Studies in 2012, and the Northeastern Group of Nahuatl Studies, Yale in 2015. Translations are my own unless indicated.

2 Seville: AGI-LM 1842. I am grateful to Pilar Lázaro de Escosura, Jefe del Departamento de Referencias at the AGI for supplying a facsimile. Editions of the document are in Zimmermann (1970) and Pérez Rocha and Tena (2000: 213-225) with translations, respectively into German and Spanish.

3 Carrasco (1984) drew attention to the letter's historical value. Carrasco (1999: 41-50), Santamarina Novillo (2007), Castañeda de la Paz (2013) treat pre-Hispanic Azcapotzalco; Gibson (1964), Lockhart (1992), González Gómez (2004) describe the town under Spanish rule.

CONTEXT AND ARGUMENT OF THE LETTER

Several Nahua political leaders petitioned the Holy Roman Emperor and the Spanish crown for titles, pensions or the restitution of lost lands, usually in Castilian and sometimes in Nahuatl.⁴ The appeal by the rulers of Azcapotzalco to Philip II, however, was written in Latin.⁵ After its opening salutation, the text was divided into eight parts, *Primum*, *Secundum*, *Tertium*, and so on (here indicated by [1], [2], [3] etc.):

Salutatio [Greeting]

(a) Deliberation: Should Indians dare to address a king?

(b) *Captatio benevolentiae* [seeking reader's good will]: The king is kind and ready to hear requests from his subjects.

[1] Account of the constriction of Azcapotzalco's boundaries, as Spanish settlers and the people of Tlacopan have intruded into the town's traditional territory.

[2] The king is asked to issue a seal for the protection and preservation of the town's original boundaries.

[3] Plea for exemption from public labour on building in Mexico City and from farm work for the Spaniards.

[4] The issue of the town's frontiers is raised again: from ancient times the Azcapotzalca were able to cut wood and quarry stone anywhere within three days journey from their town, but now they are prohibited from doing so.

[5] A short account of Azcapotzalco's history as a great *provincia* under the rule of Tezozomoc and of its tributaries and settlements

⁴ Zimmermann (1970), Pérez Rocha and Tena (2000), and Restall, Sousa and Terraciano (2005) are collections of such appeals.

⁵ Ricard (1966), Kobayashi (1974), and Osorio Romero (1990) are standard accounts of the Latin education given to youths of the Nahua nobility; SilverMoon (2007) and Laird (2015: 119-123, 134-135) challenge the long held view that this education was intended to train students for the priesthood.

including Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco, culminating in a plea for the town to claim the status of *civitas*, “city state”.

[6] More about Azcapotzalco’s heritage, with a request for *insignia* for the town.

[7] The writers ask for an academy to be established in Azcapotzalco for the teaching of Latin and Spanish.

[8] The final plea is for the town market, *tianquizco*, to be allowed on a second day in the week.

Valedictio beseeching a long life for the king.

As its text makes clear, the letter was originally presented with illustrations which are now lost: *descriptiones*, maps or drawings [1] and *picturae*, genealogical diagrams [2], showing Azcapotzalco’s original settlements and the ancestors who ruled over them.⁶ The writers’ complaint about the usurpation of their land leads them to point out that their *encomendero*, Francisco de Montejo, is away in Yucatan and no longer able to defend their interests [1]. As Montejo’s earlier campaigns in Yucatan had taken the lives of many conscripts from Azcapotzalco, a royal *cédula* of January 28 1550 reduced the tribute imposed on the town.⁷ The mere mention of Montejo’s name thus forges an implicit connection to the next request—for another ‘royal seal’ (*regia cedula*) to secure protection of the town’s borders [2].

The rulers of Azcapotzalco next ask for the labourers of their town to be exempted from public works, particularly the construction of the church of the Virgin of Guadalupe [3]. The growing adoration of the Virgin at Tepayac was promoted mostly by the episcopacy and secular clergy: while the Dominicans and Augustinians seem to have ignored the cult, the provincial of the Franciscans, Fray Francisco de Bustamante, denounced it in 1556 on the grounds that veneration of the Virgin’s image was encouraging the Indians to practice idolatry.⁸

⁶ Zimmermann (1970: *Tafel* 1-5) reproduces diagrams accompanying other suits of this kind.

⁷ Francisco de Montejo (1508-1565), son of the homonymous conquistador, conquered Yucatan: Landa (1973). Chuchiak (2007: 221 n. 58) mentions Azcapotzalco’s involvement.

⁸ Feliciano Velázquez (1931: 6-9, 41). Zumárraga’s successor as Bishop of Mexico, Alonso de Montúfar, oversaw the building of the first shrine of Guadalupe, served by secular

The letter gives a brief history of Azcapotzalco and its dominions [4], stating that the town had been founded 1 526 years before, in 35 AD—a date converging with a cautious estimate that would be made by the Franciscan chronicler Fray Juan de Torquemada.⁹ Tezozomoc or Tezozomocli is described as having ruled the town for 166 years, and it is affirmed that “there have been not more than one hundred and thirty three years since he departed from the living” [5]. The claim that Tezozomoc was thus born in 1262 AD and died in 1427 also seems to harmonise with Torquemada’s account, and the Annals of Tlatelolco give the same date for his death.¹⁰ Azcapotzalco’s former greatness as a *provincia* under Tezozomoc’s rule is then underlined. The fifth and largest part of the letter shows that the Tepanec empire under Tezozomoc in the early 1400s AD included satellite kingdoms ruled by his sons or sons-in-law, and that it benefited from more distant tributaries, as well as from alliances with other principalities. Pedro Carrasco made the important observation that very similar forms of domination and organization would be adopted by the Aztecs themselves, when their own triple alliance ran over the Tepanec dynasty in 1430, superimposing itself on virtually the same territories.¹¹

As well as holding a number of populations paying tribute, the letter reveals that Azcapotzalco had ordained or founded settlements of its own, including Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco:

Atque ut rem paucis aperiamus. Mexicani cum oppugnati fuere ab azcaputzalcanis iuxta montem nomine Chapoltepec in quem prius applicuere ex longa ac diutina peregrinatione, postea errabundi hinc inde pellebantur ignorantes omnino quem locum ad habitandum eligerent, eos

priests. Ricard (1966: 188-191) explains the Franciscans’ opposition to the Guadalupan cult. See n. 85 below.

⁹ Torquemada (1975: 347) [Book 3, chapter 6]: “Según la cuenta que tienen los de Azcapotzalco de la fundación y origen de su ciudad (que fue en otros tiempos de las mayores poblaciones que hubo en estos reinos) ha mil y quinientos y sesenta y uno años que se fundó.” Torquemada was writing in 1596: Carrasco (1984: 74).

¹⁰ Torquemada (1975: 348); Annals of Tlatelolco (1980: 55) [para. 258]. Congruities with the 1561 letter in Torquemada’s *Monarchia indiana* may be explained by Antonio Valeriano’s role as the friar’s informant (n. 64 below).

¹¹ Carrasco (1984: 88-89).

miseratus dictus Teçoçomoctli ea in parte loci ubi nunc est Tenuchtitla collocandos mandavit. Qui quidem mexicani octoginta annis serviere oppido nostro ei pro tributo persolvendo quae ex lacu capere poterant: pisces, ranas, anseres aliaque id genus aquatilia. Inter quos tandem orta nescio qua dissensione qui a communi consortio descivere vocati sunt tlatilolcani a quodam terre aggere in medio lacus posito. [5]

So that we might reveal the matter in a few words: when the Mexica had been fought by the Azcapotzalca near the mountain called Chapultepec, on which the former had earlier settled after a long period of wandering, and were now again driven to wander about from place to another, having no idea where they should choose to live, the said Tezozomoc, taking pity on them, decreed that they could be settled in a part of the region where Tenochtitlan is now. And so the Mexicans served our town for eighty years, by paying as tribute the things they were able to gather from the lake: fish, frogs, ducks and other kinds of aquatic animals. In the end after some kind of conflict arose among them, those who fell away from the community were called *Tlatilolcani* after a certain mound of earth positioned in the middle of the lake.

This account diverges from the one given in Fray Diego Durán's *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España*, an early history of the Mexica, compiled later in the 1560s. Comparison of both sources highlights the tendency of each people to glorify their own past.¹² According to Durán, the Mexica had left Chapultepec and established themselves in Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco by the time that Tezozomoc, concerned about their growing independence, doubled their tribute of fish, frogs and vegetables. The Mexica maintained they paid the tribute for *fifty* years, not eighty, “pretending to be content and feigning obedience”. Durán’s providential narrative relates that the Mexica met the demand of the tribute by cultivating produce on floating rafts —prompting Tezozomoc himself to declare that they were “chosen people of their god [Huitzilopochtli] and that some day they will rule over all the nations of the

12 Megged (2010: 184-248) explores the ways different groups in New Spain told stories to compete with “canonic narratives”.

earth”!¹³ Unsurprisingly, the Azcapotzalca do not record anything like this in their version of events: instead they refer to the Mexica settlers who turned on their people as *proditores*, “traitors” [5].

The rulers and governors of Azcapotzalco next ask for the king’s recognition of their coat of arms:

6.m Penes nos sunt iam a multis annis quaedam nostri oppidi insignia, quae quominus ab aliquo irrita credantur confirmanda tua Caesarea autoritate maxime volumus, quippe optime nostrae Reipublicae statum declarant. In primis depingitur formica, nec abs re, quia a formica suum sortitur nomen nostrum oppidum: Paries vero qui turris pinnas videtur habere muros quorundam mercatorum signat, fortissimos sane, quos tamen ob suam egregiam fortitudinem maiores nostri solo equavere. [6]

6th. For many years now we have had a coat of arms for our town, which, so that they may not be thought worthless by anyone, we very much want to be endorsed by your Caesarean authority, since they very clearly signal the status of our republic. Foremost in them an ant is depicted, and not without significance, because our town happens to take its name from the ant; then a wall with battlements represents the walls of a market: naturally they are shown as very strong because our ancestors compared their exceptional strength to that of the ground itself.

Azcapotzalco means “Place of the ant hill” in Nahuatl.¹⁴ The name glyph for the town of Azcapotzalco (Fig. 1) in the Codex Xolotl (c. 1542) and on the Stone of Tizoc (1481-1486) was a four-legged ant [*azcatl*].¹⁵ Other components of the desired coat of arms —the market walls, the heart and the indigenous head-dress “similar to the bishops’ mitre”— would later appear

13 Durán (1995: 98-104) [*Tratado primero*, chapter 6].

14 Molina (2004: 10): “Azcaputzalli. hormiguero [ant hill]. Azcatl. hormiga [ant].” For *-co* as a locative suffix in Nahuatl, see n. 42 below.

15 Codex Xolotl (1980: 2, plancha 6 E3); compare Lockhart (1992: 578, n. 15). Umberger (1998: 251 n. 9) notes a glyph on the Stone of Tizoc resembling an ant hill, with a four-legged ant recalling the Azcapotzalco glyph in the Codex Xolotl.



Figura 1. Name glyph for Azcapotzalco, Codex Xolotl

in a heraldic emblem for Azcapotzalco in the seventeenth-century Codex García Granados (Fig. 2).¹⁶ Philip II ceded a coat of arms in 1565, probably in response to this very request. The corpus of the *Cantares mexicanos* preserves a song in Nahuatl to honour this event which was composed by the drummer-poet Don Francisco Plácido, indigenous governor of Xiquipilco, who was one of the signatories of the 1561 letter.¹⁷

Philip's authority is also sought for the foundation of an educational institution in Azcapotzalco:

16 Glass (1964: 94-95, plate 50). The Codex García Granados has the glyph for rock (*tetl*) which denoted the Tepanecs in the Azcatitlan, Boturini and Xolotl codices, either as an ideogram, "the people of rock", or to represent the first syllable of "Tepanec" (Santamarina Novillo 2007: 74).

17 *Cantares mexicanos* (1985: 41r, 268-273). The song moves through the Creation, Flood, Incarnation and Resurrection to end with Azcapotzalco: such a broad narrative culminating in praise of the poet's patron or locality was common in European panegyric poetry. A preface naming Valeriano as the town's governor in 1565 could suggest he transcribed Plácido's song (Bierhorst 1985: 12). Plácido's Christmas song (*Cantares mexicanos* 1985: 37v) performed in the house of Azcapotzalco's previous governor confirms Plácido's association with the town.



Figura 2. Glyph for Azcapotzalco, Codex García Granados

nostro oppido convenientissimum iudicamus nos etiam musarumque domo donari debere, quam ut in hoc nostro oppido fundare valeamus, copiam a tua caesarea Maiestate expetimus, ubi etsi scientiarum omnium genera edoceri non debeat, at certe grammatica cum lingua hispana quae commodius praelegi possunt a quibusdam nostris qui sermonem latinum perinde ac hispani saepe sunt professi. [7]

we consider it very advantageous for our town to be endowed with a home for the Muses, and we seek from your Caesarean Majesty the resources to enable us to found it in our own town. Although there may be no need for all the sciences to be taught there, instruction in Latin and the Spanish language can certainly be provided by some of us who have frequently taught it as well as the Spaniards have.

The idea for such an academy could well have been inspired by the College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco which was established to give Indians an advanced instruction in Latin. That institution had been inaugurated as an “Imperial College” (*Colegio imperial*) in 1536, six years after Charles I’s

coronation as the Holy Roman Emperor Germanicus Caesar, by Pope Clement VII in Bologna in 1530. The rulers of Azcapotzalco were writing in 1561, six years after Philip II had succeeded Charles to the Spanish throne in 1555. Thus both the timing of their request for a college and the evocation of Philip's imperial "*Caesarean* Majesty" in this context may not be coincidental.

Finally, after seeking permission for the town's market to be open on a second day in the week [8], the letter ends with a reprise of the *captatio benevolentiae* at its opening, trusting the granting of the petition to Philip's clemency, liberality and Christian faith.

RENAISSANCE LEARNING AND NAHUA TRADITIONS IN THE TEXT

It is not only the important historical information yielded by this petition which distinguishes it from other such appeals. The text is an accomplished example of Renaissance epistolography. It cannot be ascertained for certain to which particular treatises on letter-writing Nahua Latinists had access, but many of Erasmus' recommendations in his celebrated *De conscribendis epistolis* of 1522 were reproduced verbatim in Fray Maturino Gilberti's *Grammatica Maturini* printed in Mexico City in 1559.¹⁸ The seventh and final section of that work, the first Latin grammar to be produced in the Americas, was a style guide entitled:

Quaedam pro pueris linguae Latinæ salutandi, valedicendi, percontandi exercitamenta ac formulae ex Erasmo Roterodamo aliisque doctissimis.

Some exercises and formulae of greeting, saying farewell and asking questions from Erasmus of Rotterdam and other learned authors.

18 Gilberti (2003). Burton (2007), Henderson (2007), and Mack (2011: 90-96, 228-256) note the success of the treatise (Erasmus 1971) which first appeared in 1522. Green and Murphy (2006: 183-184) list scores of European printed versions during 1522-1587, most before 1550. Osorio Romero (1980: 24-540) examines grammars and rhetorical manuals imported to New Spain.

The works of the Flemish grammarian and stylist Jan De Spauter or Despauterius were available to the students in the Imperial College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, along with texts by Cicero, Quintilian and Seneca, which provided stylistic models as well as precepts on compositional practice.¹⁹ Sixteenth-century humanists recommended clear and succinct expression, an arrangement (*dispositio*) suited to the contents, refinement in Latin diction, and the adroit use of commonplaces and *exempla* to win over the reader.²⁰

The writers of the 1561 letter draw attention to their own recognition of the importance of clarity and brevity:

Quare tua pietate freti modeste magis quam audacter tuae Caesareae Maiestati, quae animus ad scribendum impellere brevitate quam maxima fieri potuerit proponemus, quae omnia in ordinem redigentur quo clarius distinctiusque cognosci queant quae a tua clementia consequi conamur. [1]

So then, relying on that piety of yours, more modestly than boldly, we shall set out for your Caesarean Majesty, in the greatest brevity possible, what incited our desire to write, all of which will be assembled in order so that the things we are trying to obtain from your clemency can be clearly and distinctly discerned.

Again, in the final *Valedictio* it is remarked that “the epistle should not leap past the appropriate measure or go beyond the pale” (*Ne vero modum seu septa ut dicitur epistola transiliat iam hic finem capiet*). At just over two thousand words, the length is in line with Erasmus’s precept that the greatest amount of material be conveyed in the fewest words possible. While earlier manuals on letter-writing had recommended a classical structure (*salutatio, captatio benevolentiae, narratio, petitio, conclusio*), Erasmus and his associate Juan Luis Vives proposed that, after the opening *salutatio* or greeting, the

19 Mathes (1982); George (2009) discusses specific holdings of the library in Tlatelolco, including a copy of Quintilian annotated by a collegian.

20 Mack (2011: 228-256).

main argument could be devised as the subject required.²¹ The Azcapotzalca adopt the latter strategy: the *salutatio* to Philip II moves to a deliberation about whether the writers should even be addressing the king and culminates in a persuasive anticipation of his kindness and mercy, making an effective transition to the eight concerns which shape the rest of the letter.

The text is written in elegant Latin: classical terms are used to designate the categories and institutions in New Spain: *senatus* [4] and *senatores* [1] denote the *Audiencia* and its *oidores*; and *vectigales* [5] are *terrazgueros* or payers of tribute. The Azcapotzalca ask for their *oppidum*, *i. e. pueblo*, to be elevated to the status of a *civitas*, “city state” [5] and Tezozomoc’s domain at its apogee is tactfully referred to not as an *imperium*, but as a *provincia*, the Roman term for a part of an empire. On the other hand, *com[m]endatarius* [1], which thrice serves as a translation for the Spanish *encomendero*, is barely attested in classical Latin. As a word in Christian canon law for someone who held an ecclesiastical benefice *in commendam* or “in trust”, *commendatarius* is a reasonable approximation for *encomendero* and it was employed in an earlier petition by the native governor of Tlacopan.²² The word *chirographum* in the request to the king for a royal seal (*chyrographo [sic] munita* “fortified in handwriting” [3]) is not an ornamental grecism but an expression common in classical Latin for a hand-written pledge or authentication.²³

There is recurrent emphasis throughout this petition on the value of *litterae*, “letters”: a term which connotes at once alphabetic letters, literacy and writing, as well as literature and literary learning, sacred and secular. For Renaissance grammarians and their ancient precursors, the *littera*, the letter, was also the fundamental, atomic element of *grammatica* —and grammar

21 Erasmus’ *Conficiendarum epistolarum formula* of 1498 (Erasmus 1985: 261-262) opposed the conventional five-part format advocated in the earlier guides to letter-writing known as *artes dictaminis*; compare Vives (1989: 82).

22 Seville: AGI-P 184, 45: Laird (2016: 152, 155).

23 *Chirographum*, Latin equivalent of the Greek χειρόγραφον, had that general sense in Cicero (*Ad Atticum* 2.20.5; *Philippics* 2.4.8) but later acquired the specific meaning of “bond” or “record of a debt” in Roman law (*Digest* 20.7.57) as it did in patristic Greek: Lampe (1961: 1522). Greek terms, mediated by Pliny and other authors, were in the 1552 *Libellus de medicinalibus indorum herbis* translated into Latin in Tlatelolco by the Nahua Juan Badiano: Cruz (1964).

was tantamount to Latin, or language itself.²⁴ At the very opening of their appeal, the rulers of Azcapotzalco introduce themselves as “vassals... who have not hailed letters, whether divine or human even from the portal” (*nos mancipia [...] et litteras sive divinas sive humanas necdum a limine salutaverimus*). They maintain that illiteracy was to blame for the primitive condition of their ancestors:

praedecessores suae tempore gentilitatis fuere admodum rustici, abiecti, nudi et corporis et animae dotibus, inter quas primas habent virtutes ac litterae, quas profecto ne per somnium quidem novere. [*Salutatio*]

Our forebears in the time of their paganism were altogether rustics, abject, bare of endowments for body and soul, amongst which the virtues and letters hold first place: things they did not even know in their dreams.

This characterisation of *litterae* recalls Antonio de Nebrija’s affirmation that letters were necessary to adorn human life—an expression which had been recalled in a similar context by Fray Julián Garcés, the Dominican bishop of Tlaxcala, in a Latin treatise he sent to Pope Paul III affirming the capacity of the Indians in Mexico to adopt the Christian faith.²⁵

The writers of the letter also regard knowledge of *litterae* as a means by which “the hearts of Christians are greatly strengthened in the faith” (*litterarum cognitione Xp[ist]ianorum corda in fide maxime corroborari* [7])

24 The four parts of grammar—*litera*, *syllaba*, *dictio* (“word”), and *oratio*—given in Gilberti (2003: 88) followed Perotti’s 1473 *Rudimenta grammatices*. The partition ultimately derived from Priscian’s *Institutiones*, Book 2.

25 Nebrija (1492: Book 1, chapter 2): “Entre todas las cosas que por experiencia los ombres hallaron: o por reuelacion divina nos fueron demostradas para polir e adornar la vida umana: ninguna otra fue tan necessaria... que la invencion delas letras”; Garcés, *De habilitate et capacitate gentium* (1537) in Laird (2014: 208, 220): *nulla exterorum hominum notitia, nullo cultu, aut victu, aut vestitu, aliisque humanae vitae ornamentis praediti, nullo litterarum commertio*, “They had no word of other human beings, no education or any means of sustaining themselves or clothing, or other adornments of human existence, no dealings with letters?”. Compare Nebrija (1488: 1r): “Si los otros subditos & vassallos de Vuestra Real Magestad que han dado obra al estudio delas letras asi miraran por el bien publico & ornamento de nuestra España, como yo que soy el meno de ellas.”

in their request for an academy where Latin could be taught in Azcapotzalco. The rapid introduction of alphabetic literacy after the conquest would have revealed an astonishing range of new linguistic, intellectual and spiritual domains to those natives of New Spain who received a Christian humanist education. For that select few, the single term, *litterae*, which united such a variety of ideas and practices, may well have been a source of genuine fascination.

Commonplaces, mainly from ancient Roman authors, are strategically employed in the 1561 letter. The opening deliberation about whether it is appropriate for the Indian subjects to address their king echoes a verse from Virgil:

Nunquam ne indis audendum cum principe, regeve aut imperatore?
Imo vero, audendum quam maxime, ne extremae pusillanimitatis esse credamur, et si qua est animis insita timiditas est procul abigenda, audaces enim fortuna iuvat timidosque repellit. [*Salutatio*]

Should Indians never dare to speak with a prince, king or emperor? On the contrary, we must so dare to the utmost, in order not to be believed cowardly in the extreme —and if there is any timidity ingrained in our mind we should drive it far away, since “Fortune helps the bold and drives back the fearful.”

The phrase *Audentes fortuna iuvat* “fortune helps the bold”, from Virgil’s *Aeneid* was popular in Spain: it had been employed by Hernán Cortés in his *Carta de relación* to the Emperor of October 1520.²⁶ The last two words of the hexameter given here, *timidosque repellit*, “and drives back the fearful”, were not authentic because Virgil’s original line was unfinished. But they were in the verse as it was reportedly quoted in 1560, the year before the

26 Virgil, *Aeneid* 10.284; Cortés (1986: 145). “La fortuna ayuda a los osados” was proverbial in Castilian after De Rojas’ *La Celestina* (1499). The Jesuit commentator Juan Luis de la Cerda remarked on this verse: *Quot huic germanae & cognatae sententiae?*, “How many *sententiae* are germane or related to this one?” listing several parallels to the expression (La Cerda 1617).

Azcapotzalca penned their letter, by the mutineer Pedro Alonso Casco on Aguirre's Amazon expedition.²⁷

In the sentence following this quotation, *litterae* are invoked yet again, this time in the sense of "classical literature", which supplies the writers with a sustained *exemplum* to illustrate their own boldness, and to guide the king's response to their suit:

Ad haec ausum non minimum prestat id quod litteris est proditum, nimirum principes non christianos solum, verum et ethnicos in suos subditos fuisse mites, benignos, clementes, eosdemque in suis querellis aut quibusvis petitionibus lubentissime audisse. Cuius rei argumento est Adrianus imperator, et is pro multis unus sufficiet, qui transiens in itinere a muliere quadam rogatus ut eam audiret, cum respondisset sibi ocium non esse, audivit ab ipsa muliere: Noli ergo imperare; tum conversus aequissimo animo eam audivit.

Daring things like this is very well supported by what is shown in literature: there is no doubt that not only Christian princes but pagan ones too have been lenient, kind and merciful to their own subjects and they have been very willing to hear their complaints or suits of every kind. The emperor Hadrian is proof of this principle and this one figure will serve for many. On a journey he was making he was asked by a certain woman to hear her: when he replied that he did not have time, he heard that very woman say "In that case, do not be an emperor." At that he was moved to hear her very readily.

The recollection of this episode is remarkable because the story was not in *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, containing the standard Roman biography of Hadrian which had circulated since the late middle ages.²⁸ But the anecdote was included in life of Hadrian by the Greek historian Cassius Dio,

27 Simón (1942: 68). The words would also be quoted by the Venezuelan liberator Francisco Miranda (Miranda 1982: 224).

28 Marshall (1982). In medieval and Renaissance Europe this story was far more often (if incorrectly) told about the emperor Trajan: Paris (1879), Boni (1906).

epitomised (also in Greek) nearly a thousand years after Dio wrote, by Joannes Xiphilinus, a monk from Constantinople. That epitome had been translated into Latin and published with the *Scriptores* in the early 1500s by the Italian humanist Giorgio Merula, and Robert Estienne or Stephanus printed an *editio princeps* of Xiphilinus in 1551.²⁹ Thus the anecdote found in the 1561 letter may have been gleaned from one or these printed editions, if not from a vernacular source: the popular Franciscan author Fray Antonio de Guevara included a life of Hadrian in his *Década de Cesares* published in Valladolid in 1539. Whatever led the rulers of Azcapotzalco to the story, they deploy it to good effect. An *exemplum* like this does not constitute unalloyed flattery: the woman's reprimand to the Emperor could potentially be levied at the king should he not respond to his petitioners.

The invocation of Hadrian as a model for Philip II is appropriate, because he was one of the Roman emperors who was born in Spain.³⁰ A preoccupation with Iberia's classical past might also explain why the Azcapotzalca refer to the academy of Latin they want to establish as a *Musarum domus* "home for the Muses" [7] —a phrase which had been coined by the Roman poet Silius Italicus.³¹ The widespread belief that Silius had been of Spanish origin caused him to be cited on other occasions:³² Fray Julián Garcés, for instance, had quoted a remark the poet made about the savagery of the pagan Spaniards of antiquity to convince the Pope that they had been far more barbarous than the Mexican Indians.³³

29 Merula (1519) and (1521) was printed from editions of 1516, with the addition of Erasmus' annotations from a similar title printed in Basel in 1518: Merula's translation of Dio's lives of Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian had already appeared in Censorinus (1503). Stephanus (1551).

30 González Rodríguez (1981) and Lupher (2003) treat the complex associations between Spain, Rome and the New World; compare MacCormack (2006).

31 *Musarum aedes*, "temple of the Muses", is the more conventional expression in classical Latin, but *aedes*, temple or sanctuary carries stronger connotations of pagan belief. The Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius (1584: 2.3) used *musarum mihi domus*, "my Muses' home", of his study.

32 Silius Italicus, *Punica* 8.595 is the only place *musarum domus* is found in Roman literature. Nebrija championed Silius Italicus as a Spaniard, but had he been a native of Italica in Andalusia, his name would have been *Italicensis*: Campbell (1936).

33 Laird (2014: 208): *Feritas Hispanorum quondam tanta erat, ut Silius Italicus ex Italica Bethicae ciuitate oriundus, dicat de maioribus suis eulogium inclytum*. "The ferocity

The request for the establishment of an academy was introduced by an adage of unclear origin:

Haud nobis est obscurum divinum illud oraculum: Sapientia cor stabilis, ventis pondus ponit, ex quo clarissimum omnibus redditur litterarum cognitione Xpistianorum corda in fide maxime corroborari, atque hos qui aliquando gentilitatis ventis agitati fuere, pondus in sua Xpistianitate habere. [7]

The following divine oracle is not at all obscure to us: “Wisdom steadies the heart, giving it weight against the winds.” From this it is rendered very clear to all, that the hearts of Christians are greatly strengthened in the faith through knowledge of letters, and that those who were at one time buffeted by the winds of paganism now have anchorage in their Christianity.

Although the phrase *qui fecit ventis pondus*, “[God] who made a weight for the winds”, is in the Vulgate (Job 28: 25), this “divine oracle” could come from a pre-Hispanic tradition of oratory or song. For example, a traditional admonitory oration from a ruler to his sons in the Nahuatl text of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún in Book 6 of the *Historia general* contains an expression of disappointment, “wherever my heart goeth, it sinketh, it riseth” [*in canin nemi noiollo, in temo in tloco*], and a prescription, “do not rise up, do not blow as a violent wind against one” [*ma tevic teoa, ma titehecavitivetz*].³⁴

In their closing *Valedictio*, the rulers of Azcapotzalco use a couple of classical commonplaces to emphasise their lowly standing:

licet Iro pauperiores atque alga viliores simus: sumus tamen S[acrae]
C[atholicae] C[aesareae] Maiestatis servi fideles.

of the Spaniards was at one time so great that Silius Italicus who came from the city of Italica in Betica pronounces a hardly glorious eulogy of his own ancestors.”

³⁴ Sahagún (1969: 91-92, 89). Compare the orations to Tezcatlipoca (1969: 7-10, 41-45) where priests pray for a calm temperament in adverse conditions.

for though we are poorer than Irus and cheaper than seaweed we are nonetheless loyal servants of your holy Catholic Caesarean Majesty.

The poverty of Irus, a character in Homer's *Odyssey* had become proverbial in Roman and Renaissance literature.³⁵ A shepherd in Virgil's *Eclogues* claimed he would be "pricklier than the butcher's broom plant and cheaper than seaweed [*viliior alga*]" if he were not telling the truth; a satire by Horace has the hero Ulysses remark that "breeding or virtue without wealth is cheaper than seaweed".³⁶ Both tags were later adopted in playful contexts by authors who normally used them to disparage others. In this letter to Philip II, however, these expressions serve as a vehicle of extravagant self-depreciation.

Yet Erasmus and other humanists criticised and parodied the obsequious salutations and valedictions that had been advocated for letter-writing in the medieval *artes dictaminis*.³⁷ Therefore, given the evident influence of Erasmus' prescriptions on their composition, the self-abasing manner in which the Azcapotzalca present themselves in the *salutatio* to Philip II may seem surprising:

At cum nos mancipia et quidem humillima simus... annon temerarium omnino fuerit nos scribere non ad principem quemquam sed ad te talem ac tantum regem? Ut etiam si tuos servos ultro nos offeramus vix digni iudicemur; qui enim aut quales sumus? Nempe pauperes, miseri, barbari, tales denique quorum praedecessores suae tempore gentilitatis fuere admodum rustici, abiecti, nudi et corporis et animae dotibus...

But as we are vassals and indeed of the lowest sort... is it not altogether rash for us to write to any prince, let alone to a king such as yourself, so great, that even if we offer ourselves as your slaves of our own accord

35 Homer, *Odyssey* 18.9f.; Ovid, *Tristia* 3.7.42: *Irus et est subito, qui modo Croesus erat*, "And one who was rich as Croesus is suddenly Irus"; Erasmus, *Adagia* 1.6.76 *Iro pauperior*, "poorer than Irus". Gilberti (2003: 666) followed Erasmus in using the Irus *exemplum* adversarially: *Opes? At vel Iro ipso pauperiores*, "Wealth? You are even poorer than Irus!".

36 Virgil, *Eclogues* 7.42; Horace, *Satires* 2.5.8.

37 Henderson (2007).

we may scarcely be judged worthy? Who, then, or what are we? Nothing but paupers, wretches, barbarians, such as whose forebears in the time of their paganism were altogether rustics, abject, bare of endowments for body and soul...

The servile tone could be explained by the courtly style in which Nahua nobles may have expressed themselves, in formal contexts, in their own language. The passage quoted above is strikingly similar to the opening of a speech redacted in Nahuatl in 1564 under the direction of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún. The speech was supposed to have been made in 1524 by a delegation of high-ranking Aztec priests to the first Christian missionaries in Mexico:

mach titlatin? ca çan timacevaltonti, titlalloque, tiçoquiyoque, tivaço[n] que titoxonque, ticocoque, titeuhpouhque, ca can otech tlaneuj, in tla-catl totecujō inic ipetlanacazco, ycpalnacazco otech motlalili?

Are we perchance something? Since we are only the poor class of the people, we are full of earth, we are of mud, we are ragged, we are wretched, we are afflicted, we are sorrowful; indeed the man, our lord only lent us the corner of his reed mat and the corner of his seat [where] he placed us.³⁸

The prime position and the sense of the words *mach titlatin*, “Are we perchance something?,” parallel those of the Latin rhetorical question *qui enim aut quales sumus?* “Who, then, or what are we?” with which the authors of the Azcapotzalco letter introduce themselves. The sequence of idioms in Nahuatl —“we are only the poor class of the people, we are of earth, we are of mud”— also matched the Latin writers’ claim to be *pauperes*, *miseri*, *barbari*. Again, like the rulers of Azcapotzalco who signed themselves with their Spanish titles of “governor”, “mayor”, or “ruler”, the Aztec

38 Sahagún 1986, 148. The Latin from the Azcapotzalco letter quoted above actually resembles Sahagún’s Nahuatl version more closely than the wording of his original Spanish: *Nosotros que somos como nada, personas soezes y de muy baja condicio[n], y que por hieiro nos [h]a[pu]esto n[uestro] señor en las esquiñas de su estrado y silla.*

priests' characterization of themselves as "the poor class of the people" and as "ragged" stood in contrast to their exalted social position and fine attire: in Sahagún's account of their exchanges with the missionaries they were called *sátrapas*, "satraps", in Spanish (or *quequetzalcoa*, "feathered serpents", in Nahuatl).

There are other instances of Nahua Latinists introducing themselves in a similar way: a decade earlier in 1552 the native governor of Tlacopan, Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin, had stated in a letter to Emperor Charles III "we may be judged to be humans of the lowest condition and may seem to be of no worth in the eyes of Spaniards" [*abjectissimae conditionis homines censeamur, nulliusque precii apud hispanos videamur*].³⁹ That same year Juan Badiano translated the dedication of Martín de la Cruz' Mexican herbal to the viceroy's son as follows:

nos misellos pauperculos Indos omnibus mortalibus inferiores esse, et ideo veniam nostra a natura nobis insita parvitas et tenuitas meretur.

we poor little wretched little Indians are inferior to all mortals, and the smallness and insignificance ingrained in us by nature therefore merits pardon.⁴⁰

These expressions of self-depreciation may not be evidence of submissiveness on the part of craven subalterns, but something more like the reverse: they were replicating in Latin a style which had been a convention of courtly speech in classical Nahuatl.⁴¹

Other traces of Nahuatl vocabulary and usage are discernible in the 1561 letter. As well as the word *tianquizco* [8] and references to places by their indigeonous names rather than Spanish forms (e. g. *Quauhnauac* [5]

39 Seville: AGI-P 184,45, 1; Laird (2016: 151).

40 Cruz (1964: f. 1r-2v).

41 Karttunen and Lockhart (1987: 22). The *auto-humiliación* in the Nahuatl passage above may have been a formulaic device (Johansson 2002: 226-227); Maxwell and Hanson (1992: 20-21) note that "constant potential for antonymic interpretation gives the Nahuatl author the power to say one thing but to mean another". Compare the self-characterisation of the Mexican priests in the impetrative orations in Sahagún (1969).

for “Cuernavaca”), attention is drawn to the etymologies quoted above for the names of Azcapotzalco [5] and for Tlatelolco [6].⁴² In addition, Nahuatl idioms or categories could account for some of the Latin expressions or concepts. First, the phrase *Atque ut rem paucis aperiamus*, “So then in order that we might reveal the matter in a few words”, [5] is deployed at a crucial juncture, prior to the important account of how the Azcapotzalca brought about the settlement of Tenochtitlan by the Mexica. Comparable usages are found in classical and Renaissance texts: Petrarch for example used the expression *rem aperio*, “I will reveal the matter.”⁴³ But there is a similar solemnising formula in Nahuatl to signal the importance of the argument to follow: *in axcan achitzin ic tictlapoa in itop iniipetlalc*, “now we will open the coffer a little”.⁴⁴ Even the image of the heart as the *vitae fons et origo*, “the fount and origin of life”, on the coat of arms proposed for Azcapotzalco could also derive from pre-Hispanic tradition, as well as from classical Galenic medicine.⁴⁵ The organ symbolises the town’s role as “the origin of all the nobility which was scattered among the peoples of New Spain” (*origo totius nobilitatis quae in populis huius Novae Hispaniae est dispersa* [6]).

In addition, the dating formula at the end of the letter may have a multicultural significance:

Datae Azcaputzalci, quarto idus februarii, anno vero a Christo nato quingentesimo sexagesimo primo supra millesimum.

42 *Quauhnhuac*, “[place] beside the trees” (Lockhart 2001: 23); *Tianquisco* “(at the) market place” (Karttunen 1992: 240); *Tlatelolco* “place of the earth mound” (Molina 2004: 135v). Compare Karttunen (1992: 35) and n. 14 above on “Azcapotzalco”.

43 *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (1996: 146): *aperio*, “To make known or clear by words etc., reveal, disclose, explain.” Petrarch, *Epistolae Familiares* 4.1.

44 Sahagún (1986: 148-149): *in itop iniipetlalc*, “the chest and the basket”=“coffer”. Karttunen (1992: 293) translates *tlapōhuiliztli* as “recitation” but also cites Molina (2004): “*tlapouiliztli*, opening, the act of unfastening”.

45 The heart was seen as the source of vitality after Plato: Singer (1997: xi-xii); Wear (1995) on Galenic theories of the circulation of blood. Sahagún (1961: 130) [*Historia general* Book 10, chapter 27, Nahuatl text] *Toiollo teiolotia, tenemitia... tecuini* “Our heart... animates us, sustains us, pulsates.” The Nahuatl for heart, *yōllotl* is related to *yōli*, “live”, “come to life”: the diphesis *in ixtli in yollotl*, “face and heart”, conveys both the distinguishing characteristics and living essence of an individual (Karttunen and Lockhart 1987: 54-55; León-Portilla 2006: 190-192).

Written in Azcapotzalco on the fourth day before the Ides of February in the true year, the one thousand five hundred and sixty first, from Christ's birth.

The *Anno Domini* system of numbering the year, for all that it is combined with the ancient Roman style of identifying the day of the month, signals unequivocal allegiance to the Christian faith. But the introduction of the word *vero*, “true”, into this conventional formula hints at systems of reckoning the years which are *not* true.⁴⁶ That implicit disavowal of pre-Hispanic chronology serves as a subtle reminder that such chronology existed.

Finally, the first-person plural used throughout is common in Nahua petitions, chronicles and other kinds of discourse, but it is less regular in classical or Renaissance Latin epistolography: thus the choral “we” form here could be regarded as a marker of cultural hybridity.⁴⁷ The *valedictio* at the end, however, contains an exceptional use of the first-person singular before a prompt reversion to the first-person plural:

Ne vero modum seu septa ut dicitur epistola transiliat, iam hic finem capiet, si tamen **subiecero** fuisse in votis ad Hispaniam duos ex **nobis** mittere qui negotia declarare possent, sed per proregem non licuit nec super ea re plus molesti esse **voluimus**, quod **sciremus** te etiam idem nolle.

And so that this letter may not go beyond the appropriate measure or “go beyond the pale”, as the expression goes, may it come to an end here, once **I have added** that it had been one of **our** wishes to send two of **us** to Spain so that they might represent these concerns, but this was not permitted by the Viceroy and **we did not wish** to cause any further trouble with this matter, because **we knew** you were equally unwilling too.

46 Neither Erasmus' formulae for dating a letter (Erasmus 1971: 298-300) nor the summary in Gilberti (2003: 608) introduce *vero* “true”.

47 Examples include letters from the Nahua Cabildo of Tenochtitlan in 1554 and the nobles of Xochimilco in 1563 to Philip II (Restall, Sousa and Terraciano 2005: 64-71); orations in Sahagún (1986); poems in the *Cantares mexicanos* (1985); and the Annals of Tlatelolco in Lockhart (1993). Lockhart's title is apt: *We People Here*. Erasmus (1971: 266-276) opposed the use of the first-person plural in place of the singular in normal letters, but this was not recalled in the brief epitome by Gilberti (2003: 652).

As well as being the only first-person singular form in the entire text, the future perfect *subiecero* “I will have added” has a performative role. It helps to engineer a speech-act, because the proposition to be added is made in the very same sentence.⁴⁸ That meta-textual comment, a remark in the letter about the letter, has allowed a single writer to step out of the frame of the “we” discourse, in order to indicate momentarily not only his existence as one individual, but also his control of that discourse (“may it come to an end here”) —before he rejoins the plurality of *azcaputzalcami* whose collective sentiments are generally conveyed throughout. The way in which the writer calls attention to his presence is unobtrusive and easy to miss, but this is hardly the production of a scribe or amanuensis merely transcribing or translating someone else’s words. It suggests the intervention of a canny author who signals that he is responsible for formulating all of the words himself.

ANTONIO VALERIANO AS AUTHOR OF THE 1561 LETTER, AND HIS SCHOLARLY CAREER

It remains to establish the identity of that individual author. The names of the signatories with their titles (in Spanish) are on the final folio. After the two *gobernadores*, Don Hernando de Molina and Don Baltasar Hernandez, and the two *alcaldes*, Pedro Zacharias and Pedro Dionisio, Antonio Valeriano’s name appears next to that of the poet Francisco Plácido (Fig. 3), in the third of five lines of signatures and is placed above several other native rulers of rank, including four *regidores*, although at the time the letter was written, Valeriano held no formal title.⁴⁹ His talent for Latin though, which was already renowned, strongly suggests that he was the writer. That suggestion is supported by two external data which will be considered below: another

48 Austin (1971) distinguished “constative utterances” which *describe* a state of affairs from “performative utterances” which *bring about* a state of affairs: the classical version of the same distinction made by Quintilian, in the *Institutio oratoria* (12.10.43). The text was in the library of the College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco: George (2009).

49 In a later letter to Philip II, written in Spanish in 1576 Valeriano would sign himself “Don Ant[oni]o Valeriano, g[obernad]or” (of Tenochtitlan): a facsimile and transcription is in León-Portilla (2015).

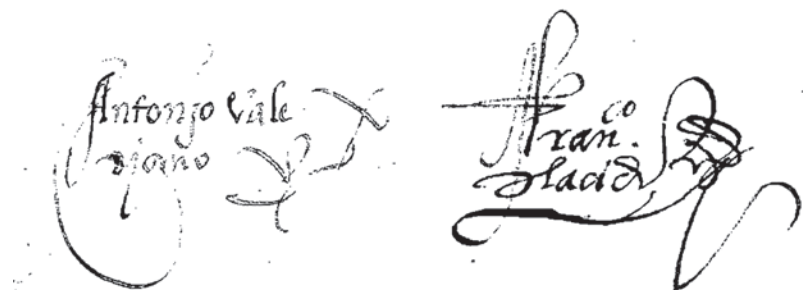


Figura 3. Signatures of Valeriano and Plácido, AGI 1842, f. 6

Latin missive authored and signed by Valeriano with a couple of markedly similar stylistic and thematic features; and a testimony from Fray Juan de Torquemada that Philip II, to whom the 1561 letter was addressed, in his turn wrote to Valeriano.

The earliest testimony of Valeriano's calibre as a Latinist comes from a textbook published in 1554 by Franciso Cervantes de Salazar, a professor at the newly inaugurated Royal University of Mexico:

Franciscanorum positum est monasterium, et in ipso Indorum collegium qui latine loqui et scribere docentur. Magistrum habent ejusdem nationis Antonium Valerianum nostris grammaticis nequaquam inferiorem, in legis christianae observatione satis doctum et ad eloquentiam avidissimum.⁵⁰

In the Franciscan monastery a college has been founded for the Indians who are taught to speak and write Latin. They have a teacher from their own people, Antonio Valeriano, in no way inferior to our own Latin instructors, learned in the observance of the Christian faith, and very devoted to cultivating eloquence.

The Nahuatl *Chronica Mexicayotl* also recorded Valeriano's capacity for Latin, implying that it was this, rather than his ancestry, which accounted for his marriage to Doña Isabel, daughter of Don Diego Huanitzin, king of Azcapotzalco, by Montezuma II's daughter Doña Francisca. The writer of

⁵⁰ Cervantes de Salazar (2001: 267r).

the *Chronica* commented that Valeriano was “not noble [*a[h]mopilli*], only a Collegial student of Latin speech [*zan hueymomachtiani Collegial Latin tlatolli*]”.⁵¹ In fact Valeriano was himself descended from an eminent line of *huei tlatoque* or pre-Hispanic rulers: his father was Don Francisco Alvarado de Matlacohuatl of Azcapotzalco, son of Tezozomoc Acolnahuacatl and brother of Montezuma II.⁵²

Valeriano had trained at the college of Tlatelolco, where he became an instructor himself: Fray Bernardino de Sahagún credited him with being the “principal and most learned” of his Latinate collaborators on the production of his *Historia general*, compiled in Nahuatl in the 1560s, and later translated into Spanish.⁵³ Sahagún again acknowledged his help in rendering the *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana* from Spanish into Nahuatl in 1564 “in a polished and reasoned manner”.⁵⁴ The friar listed “Antonio Valeriano, resident of Azcapotzalco” as the first of four students who “were the most capable and knowledgeable in the Mexican language and in the Latin language who up to now have been raised in this College”.

The most effusive testimony of the native scholar’s capacity for composition in Latin was provided by another Franciscan, Juan Bautista, who described Valeriano as “one of the greatest Latinists and rhetoricians to come out of [Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco]... he spoke [Latin] *ex tempore* with such precision and elegance that he seemed like a Cicero or Quintilian”.⁵⁵ Such hyperbolic

51 *Chronica Mexicayotl* (1998: 171, 176). The text, long attributed to Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, is now ascribed to Chimalpahin: Schroeder (2011).

52 Castañeda de la Paz (2011) is an indispensable discussion, drawing attention to the *Séptima Relación* of Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin (1998: 183) and to an affirmation by Antonio Valeriano’s grandson (of the same name) that Valeriano’s father was Francisco Alvarado de Matlacohuatl: AGN-V 110, exp. 2, f. 338v-339r. Castañeda de la Paz (2012: 54) presents a diagram of the genealogy.

53 Sahagún (1982: 55): “In all of [the siftings of my book] my collaborators were collegians expert in grammar. *The principal and most learned of them was Antonio Valeriano, of Azcapotzalco*, and Alonso Vegerano of Cuauhtitlan; another was Martín Jacobita. I should add Pedro de San Buenaventura. All three were expert in three languages: Latin, Spanish, and Indian.”

54 Sahagún (1986: 75): Vegerano, Jacobita (future rector of Tlatelolco) are again named, after Valeriano, along with Andrés Leonardo. Valeriano’s hand in the *Coloquios* may account for the uncanny resemblance noted above between the excerpt from the Nahuatl text and the *salutatio* of the Latin letter.

55 Prologue of Bautista (1606), in García Icazbalceta (1954: 474-478).

comparisons were not unusual.⁵⁶ But to prove his point, Bautista copied out the last letter he received from Valeriano. This has long been believed to be the only surviving example of Latin writing by the Nahuatl scholar:

Hic litterarum gerulus ad vestram Paternitatem portat, id quod mihi traducendum jussisti. Nescio profecto an in traductione ejus sim felix. Multa quippe in eo sunt praegnantia; ut nesciam in quem sensum meliorem verti debeant. Si quid est erratum parcas obsecro: & tuam gravem censuram adhibeas: & his litteris tam male formatis simul & ignoscas: illiturae enim videntur potius quam litterae. Nec mirum vestrae Paternitati videatur: manus namque jam vacillant: oculi caligant, & aures oclusae. Iterum & iterum parcas. Deus Optimus Maximus longaeвам tuae Paternitati vitam concedat. De Mexico. Tui amantissimus, & si indignus. Antonius Valerianus

This bearer of letters is delivering to Your Paternity the thing which you bade me translate. I know not for sure whether I am fortunate in my translation of it. Indeed there are many things in it weighty with implication, so that I do not know what is the better sense into which they should be rendered. I beg you to pardon anything done in error, and to apply to it your grave censure; and at the same time to overlook these badly formed letters: for they appear to be litterings rather than letters. And that should seem no wonder to Your Paternity: as my hands now quiver, my eyes grow dim and my ears are blocked. Again and again pardon. May God Best and Greatest grant a long life to Your Paternity. From Mexico City. Most devoted to you, though unworthy. Antonio Valeriano

Valeriano probably wrote, or meant to write, *liturae*, “blots”, not *illiturae* which was the word transmitted by Bautista.⁵⁷ The original play on *liturae* and

⁵⁶ In a joint 1525 letter Bishops Garcés and Zumárraga wrote that their opponent Gonzalo de Salazar was more eloquent than Demosthenes or Cicero: AGI-J 1018, ed. Mariano Cuevas (1939: 455-456).

⁵⁷ *Illiturae* “about to soil”, future participle from *illino*, “besmire with mud”, does not construe in the Latin (translated above as “litterings”, to parallel its assonance with *litterae*). Successive copyists, including Eguíara y Eguren (1986) in 1755, Beristáin (1821)

litterae had a classical source in Ovid's image of an epistle blotted with tears: *littera suffusas quod habet maculosa lituras* (*Tristia* 3.1.15). *Tristia* 3.1 was among the examples of Ovid's exile poetry which were recommended as models for students composing Latin verse—in New Spain as well as in Europe—during the 1500s.⁵⁸ The verse had also prompted similar puns in Latin by Erasmus, and, in English, by his associate John Colet, the founder of St Paul's School in London, who disparaged writing that “ratheyr may be called *blotterature* thenne *litterature*”.⁵⁹ Thus reconstructed, the end of the sentence Valeriano intended to write—*his litteris tam malè formatis simul & ignoscas: liturae enim videntur potius quam litterae*, “overlook these badly formed letters: in fact they look more like blots than letters”—leads nicely into the next. The ink blots would be a consequence of the trembling and diminishing vision of which he goes on to complain. If Valeriano really had written the ungrammatical *illiturae* in the first place, it is tempting to imagine that those very physical disorders were the cause of his mistake.

However that may be, the symptoms of old age listed—shaking hands, dimming eyes and blocked ears—echo specific phrases from Innocent III's late twelfth-century treatise (c. 1196), *De miseria conditionis humanae*, “On the misery of the human condition”:

Si quis autem ad senectutem processerit, [...] caligant oculi et vacillant articuli..., et aures surdesunt.

If anyone has proceeded to old age, [...] his eyes grow dim and joints quiver..., and his ears go deaf.⁶⁰

and Osorio Romero (1990) retained Bautista's reading. I am grateful to Roland Mayer for alerting me to the textual problem and to its solution.

⁵⁸ *Tristia* 3.1 was included in the first anthology of classical verse printed in New Spain: (*Tam de Tristibus quam de Ponticis* 1577: f. 23v-25r). Osorio Romero (1984); on the poem's place in curricula planned by the Jesuits see n. 69 below.

⁵⁹ Valeriano may have known the *De conscribendis epistolis* of Erasmus (1971: 211) which had *illiterata literatorum turba*, “an illiterate horde of literates”. Erasmus (1993: 502) complained in *Epigrams* 44 about schoolmasters teaching *illiteras litteras* “unlettered letters”. The quotation from Colet's 1509 statutes for St Paul's is in Lupton (1909: 280).

⁶⁰ Innocentius (1855: col. 706). This must be the text recalled by Valeriano, and not the erotic motif of Catullus 51 or Lucretius 3.152-59, as maintained in Gil (1990, 122 n. 75).

The *De miseria* had been composed in the 1190s and manuscripts abounded in European monasteries; a text was part of the 1540 edition of Innocent's work owned by Bishop Juan de Zumárraga, which probably passed to the Imperial College library at Tlatelolco.⁶¹ The theme of longevity provides an associative link to the closing sentence wishing a long life for Fray Juan Bautista:

Deus Optimus Maximus longaevam tuae Paternitati vitam concedat

May God Best and Greatest grant a long life to Your Paternity

Valeriano here applies the pagan epithet of Jupiter, *Deus Optimus Maximus*, to the Christian God—exactly as he had for Philip II in the *valedictio* at the end of the 1561 letter to the king:

a Deo Optimo Maximo tuae Caesareae Maiestati precamur vitam longaevam

we beseech from God, the Best and Greatest, a long life for your Caesarean Majesty

That similarity, along with the recurrence of a self-referential preoccupation with *litterae*, helps confirm that both texts share the same author.

The letter to Bautista was written in Mexico City where Valeriano had served as a judge, and then as a governor for more than thirty years before his death in August 1605. The Codex Aubin compiled in the later 1570s, recorded the appointment of “Vareliano” [*sic*] as judge of Tenochtitlan, from 18 January 1573.⁶² The accompanying illustration (Fig. 4) shows him sitting on a throne in the manner of a *tlatoani* wearing a turquoise *xihuitzolli*, the head-dress compared to a mitre in his 1561 letter [6], but he is also holding

61 Moore (1981) treats the diffusion of the *De miseria* which came to be included in Innocent's *De sacro altaris mysterio* (Innocentius 1540; Yhmoff Cabrera 1996: 2:154), a title owned by Bishop Zumárraga, much of whose library passed to the College (Mathes 1982: 25, 94).

62 Compare Bautista (1606) quoted in García Icazbalceta (1954: 475). A facsimile and translation of the text of the Codex Aubin is in Dibble (1963). Lockhart (2001: 119) notes Nahuatl has no “r”, but some Spanish writers sometimes also confused “r” with “l”.

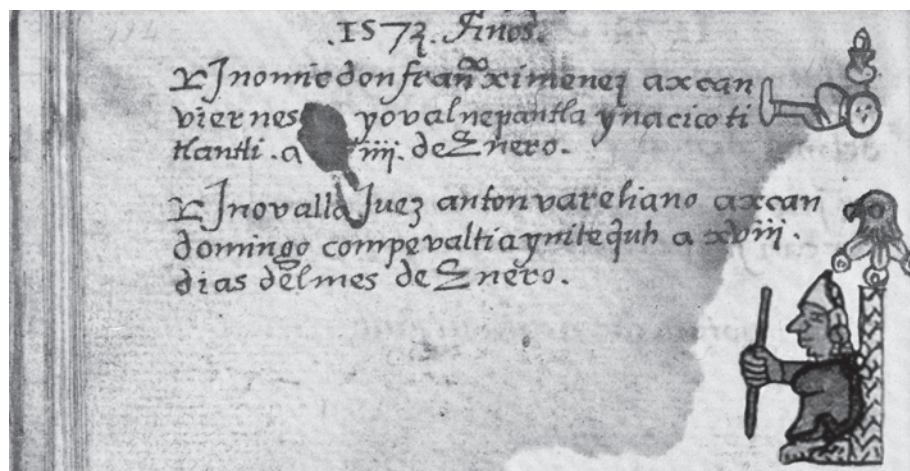


Figura 4. Antonio Valeriano depicted in the Codex Aubin
(British Museum) f. 59v

a Spanish staff of office. A glyph above the throne shows the three-pronged symbol for water, *atl*, below the image of a bird, *tototl*: the combined root forms of those words, respectively *a-* and *to-*, form an approximate phonography of “Anton”.⁶³

The fullest sixteenth-century source for the life of Antonio Valeriano was given by Fray Juan de Torquemada, in his account of the benefits of providing Mexicans with an advanced education:

On account of that very aptitude they have been chosen as judges and governors in the colony [*republica*], and they have done better than others, as they are men who read, know, and understand things. We have a good example of this in the case of Don Antonio Valeriano, an Indian, a native of the town of Azcaputzalco, one league from this city, governor of the district of San Juan, which they call Tenuchtitlan. Having proved a good Latinist, logician and philosopher, he succeeded the masters named above [Fray Arnaud de Bassac, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, Fray Andrés de Olmos] as Lecturer in Grammar at the College for some

63 Lacadena (2008: 14); Whittaker (2009: 69).

years, and after that he was elected Governor of Mexico, and he governed the Indians of this city for more than thirty five years, to the acclaim of the viceroys and the edification of the Spaniards. And since he was a man of very great talent the king took notice of him and wrote him a very favourable letter, offering many kindnesses. He died in the year 1605, and at his burial which was at the convent of San Francisco, in the chapel of Saint Joseph, there were many people, both Indians and Spaniards; and members of the College took part, because he had been a lecturer there (as already stated) and all the community of the religious went out to receive his body, and carried it on their shoulders from the entrance of the courtyard to the tomb, as one deserving of such. I myself know very many of the particular aspects of his talent, because for some years he had been my master, in teaching me the Mexican language. I was present when he died and among other things he gave me his works, worthy of his knowledge, translations in the Latin language and also into Mexican: there was one of Cato, something very worthy of esteem, which (if God pleases) will be printed in his name.⁶⁴

As well as revealing that Valeriano taught him Nahuatl, Torquemada provides three further items of information:

(i) The report that the king took notice of Valeriano and wrote to him suggests that Philip II's gift of a coat of arms to Azcapotzalco was in response to the 1561 letter addressed to the king.

(ii) Valeriano's place of burial in the chapel of Saint Joseph (San José) in the convent of San Francisco in Mexico City can be connected with some important information recorded by the Nahuatl chronicler Chimalpahin: the *Cofradía de la Soledad*, the Confraternity of Solitude, was instituted in that chapel on 12 April, Good Friday of 1591, and "gobernador don Antonio Valeriano" was inscribed as one of the nine founding members,

⁶⁴ Torquemada (1975-83: 5:176-177) [Book 15, chapter 43]; earlier notice of Valeriano was in 2:361 [Book 5, chapter 10].

amongst whom were Torquemada and Fray Francisco de Gamboa.⁶⁵ The *Cofradía* staged dramatic productions of an exemplary nature: Torquemada himself composed “*comedias o representaciones*” in Nahuatl, probably drawing from Valeriano’s linguistic knowledge.⁶⁶

(iii) The hint of Valeriano’s “Mexican” translation of Cato is tantalizing, as there is no other contemporary attestation of this. Torquemada cited fragments of lost works by Cato the Elder (234-159 BC) elsewhere in the *Monarchia indiana*, but in this context he must be referring to the *Disticha moralia*. Those “moral couplets” attributed to Cato really dated from the third or early fourth century AD.⁶⁷ The proverbial sayings, each couched in two lines of Latin hexameter verse, showed no evidence of Christian thought but they did presuppose monotheism, and formed part of the *Auctores octo morales*, a medieval canon of Christian and classical texts, which also included Alain of Lille’s *Proverbs* as well as Aesop’s Fables. The collection came to dominate school curricula from the early fourteenth century until the mid-1500s.⁶⁸ Thus the Distichs of Cato frequently accompanied Aesop’s Fables as a vehicle for rudimentary instruction in Latin: selections copied by hand must have circulated in New Spain, before editions by Nebrija and Erasmus became available.⁶⁹

65 Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin (1949-52: 3: f. 223).

66 Torquemada (1975-83: 6:395) [Book 20, chapter 79] also states Bautista wrote *comedias*: Bautista quoted in García Icazbalceta (1954: 476); Horcasitas (2004: 100-101).

67 León-Portilla (2000: 34) suggests Valeriano translated Cato the Elder’s *De agri cultura*, but such a technical study of farming in ancient Italy would have been of little interest, even if it had reached New Spain.

68 Ziolkowski (2006: 114); Pepin (2000). The *Auctores octo morales* included the *De contemptu mundi* attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux, of which there is an anonymous, undated Nahuatl translation (JCB Codex/Ind/23). For the Nahuatl translations of Aesop’s fables see Postscript below.

69 According to Osorio Romero (1980: 32), the Biblioteca Nacional de México holds two Erasmian editions of the *Disticha moralia* (Erasmus 1559, 1567). Cato (*i. e.* the Distichs) was second after Aesop in a list of classics (including Vives, Cicero, Virgil, Valla, Ovid’s *Tristia*) which the Jesuits sought to publish in Mexico. Viceroy Martín Enríquez reproduced the list in his license for the printing of Toledo (1577): García Icazbalceta (1954: 297). From the copy of *Tam de Tristibus* (1577: f. A4r) in New York Public Library it appears that the lost preceding folio contained the same list.

The edifying Distichs had prompted renderings in various European languages. A translation of the three examples beginning Book 1 gives an impression of their content:

If god is a spirit, as the songs tell us, he is to be worshipped above all with a pure mind.

Always be wakeful, be not given to sleep; for continuous idleness offers food for vice.

Deem the first virtue to be holding one's tongue; he is close to god who knows how to be duly silent.

Such maxims might have had a particular resonance or appeal for indigenous Mexican scholars: after all, the Proverbs of Solomon, which are very comparable, were translated into Nahuatl in the sixteenth century.⁷⁰ Moreover, Valeriano's own Latin writing has a sententious quality, and he would have assisted Fray Bernardino de Sahagún in his redaction of the Nahuatl wisdom literature of the orations now known as the *Huehuetlahtolli* for Book 6 of the *Historia general*, entitled *Rethorica, philosophía moral, theologia de la gente mexicana*.⁷¹

There is now growing recognition of the importance of Antonio Valeriano's contribution to civic life in sixteenth-century New Spain as governor of Mexico City, as well as his role in the production of the Florentine Codex, *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana*, and liturgical works under the direction of Sahagún and other friars.⁷² In relation to such monumental achievements, the surviving letters Valeriano penned in Latin are more modest. Nonetheless they reveal a depth of Latin culture which matches the writer's abilities

70 Mendieta 1997 mentioned Fray Luis Rodríguez's translation of the Proverbs; a manuscript has been located by David Tavárez (2013a).

71 Latin text: Roos (1984).

72 Karttunen (1995), SilverMoon (2007) and Tavárez (2013b) have considered Valeriano's role as a scholar-translator. Connell (2011) and Mundy (2015) emphasise his importance as a political leader; the latter putting Valeriano centre stage in the post-conquest history of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. See too the Spanish letter Valeriano wrote as governor of Tenochtitlan to Philip II in León-Portilla (2015), cited in n. 49 above.

as a Nahuatl translator.⁷³ The letters also exhibit a sensibility and tact appropriate for a statesman who was successful in mediating between Spanish and Nahua communities.

ANTONIO VALERIANO, THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE AND THE *NICAN MOPOHUA*

Frances Karttunen has tellingly remarked “Antonio Valeriano is not well known for the many accomplishments of his [...] career, but curiously enough he is credited with things he probably did not do.”⁷⁴ One of the things he did not do, but for which he is so frequently acclaimed, was to write the famous Nahuatl narrative of a series of apparitions of the Virgin Mary, the Lady of Guadalupe, to an indigenous Mexican named Juan Diego at Tepeyac in December 1531.

There is no firm evidence for the existence of this narrative (known by its opening as *Nican mopohua*, “Here it is related”), before it appeared in the *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*, “Great Miracle”, by the vicar of Guadalupe, Luis Laso de la Vega in 1649. That volume of Nahuatl texts came out a year after the Spanish account by Miguel Sánchez, the first printed source for the celebrated apparitions.⁷⁵ An initial connection between Valeriano and the Guadalupean tradition was made in 1675 by the priest and scholar Luis Becerra Tanco, who affirmed that a “Juan Valeriano” had recounted the miraculous events to his own uncle, Gaspar de Praves, who died in 1628.⁷⁶ Attribution of the *Nican mopohua* to Valeriano arose from Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora’s claim that Fernando de Alva Ixtilxóchitl possessed a manuscript of the miracles authored by Antonio Valeriano, which Ixtilxóchitl translated into Castilian, adding further related accounts in Nahuatl.⁷⁷ This observation prompted an Italian antiquarian, Lorenzo Botturini Benaduci, to suggest, without mentioning Valeriano’s name, that the manuscript Sigüenza had

73 Bautista (quoted in García Icazbalceta 1954: 475) consulted Valeriano about Nahuatl on “particular things, like etymologies and the meanings of words”.

74 Karttunen (1995: 117).

75 Sánchez (1982).

76 Brading (2001: 92).

77 Poole (1997: 165-170) traces the transmission of Sigüenza’s claim.

ascribed to the Indian scholar could itself have been the same text that was published by Laso de la Vega. Botturini's supposition was enthusiastically endorsed as fact by the Jesuit Juan José de Eguiara y Eguren in his bibliography of Valeriano, printed in 1755:⁷⁸

Let us wholeheartedly place a golden crown on the writings of our Valeriano, attributing to him alone the one published in the Mexican language in Mexico City in 1649... we attribute then this small but golden work to our Valeriano, *by following the tracks* [*vestigia legentes*] of our *own most learned Arbiter and Historian* [*Critici et Historiographi eruditissimi nostri*] Don Carlos de Sigüenza.⁷⁹

The attribution, which thus went through several stages, has proved highly influential, winning the acceptance of eminent historians such as Mariano Cuevas, E. J. Burrus and Edmundo O'Gorman, but there is no real evidence to support it.⁸⁰ Leaving aside the general problems of the historicity of the Guadalupan apparitions recounted in the canonical accounts of the 1600s, sixteenth-century sources for Valeriano make no mention of anything that could be easily identified with the *Nican Mopohua*.

Miguel León-Portilla, however, has found a way of reconciling Edmundo O'Gorman's hypothesis that Valeriano wrote the *Nican Mopohua* in 1556 with the complete lack of independent contemporaneous evidence for any of the events it relates. León-Portilla's suggestion is that Valeriano was sufficiently impressed by the *neixcuitilli*, the Franciscans' Nahuatl dramas, to develop a confabulation of his own: a *relación* which combined the traditional style and content of the *cuicatl* or indigenous songs with the conventions of European miracle narratives. The purpose of the *relación* was to celebrate and explain—in poetic rather than in historically veridical terms—the popular cult of Mary-Tonantzín at Tepeyac and the veneration of her image.⁸¹ This conjecture, which could have been built on Chimalpahin's tes-

78 Eguiara y Eguren (1986: 287-292).

79 Eguiara y Eguren (1986: 290-291).

80 Cuevas (1931); Burrus (1979); O'Gorman (1986).

81 León-Portilla (2000: 43-7).

timony that Valeriano belonged to the *Cofradía de la Soledad*, also accords with the view that had been expressed in the early 1800s by Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, the Dominican priest and hero of Mexican independence:

the history of Guadalupe is a comedy of the Indian Valeriano, forged on Aztec mythology concerning Tonantzin, to be represented in Santiago [church of the College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco], where he was a professor, by the young Indian college students, who in that time were accustomed to represent in their language the farces that they called sacramental *autos*, which were in vogue in the sixteenth century.⁸²

Teresa de Mier's idea was later to be elaborated by Joaquín García Icazbalceta, who noted that the *Nican mopohua* contained positive references to Tlatelolco and could be easily divided into acts for a dramatic performance.⁸³

But as Franciscans at the time were expressly opposed to the veneration of the Virgin of Guadalupe, such a scenario—at Santiago de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco of all places—can hardly have been less likely. After all, one of the friars there was bold enough to inform Bishop Montúfar, a promulgator of the veneration of the Virgin at Tepeyac, that it was “a cult which we all deplore”.⁸⁴ For Valeriano, as a close collaborator with Sahagún, who condemned the linking of the Mother of God to Tonantzin as a Satanic invention, it would have been both inconsistent and disloyal to promote a cult which had the potential to foster such grave misunderstanding.⁸⁵

Antonio Valeriano did make an oblique reference to the worship at Tepeyac in his letter of 1561:

nulla transeat hebdomada quin in ea multi ex nobis, cum tamen per pauci simus, ad haec servitia impendenda distribuantur, triginta quidem

82 Teresa de Mier, (1981: 212), cited in Brading (2001: 222).

83 García Icazbalceta (undated: 67-69), in Poole (1997: 222).

84 Ricard (1966: 190).

85 Sahagún (1982: 90) [*Historia general*, Book 11, chapter 12] explained that at Tepeyac there had once been a temple to the Aztec goddess Tonantzin, whose name means “Our mother”, and some preachers were encouraging the Indians to give that name to the Virgin; compare n. 8, above, and Karttunen (1995: 118).

ad structionem ecclesiae divi Dominici, viginti vero ad hispanorum praedia, decem autem ad aedem sacratissimae Virginis archiepiscopalem, quinque etiam ad templum (quod vulgo Guadalupe dicitur) virginis Mariae; inde fit ut ecclesiam quam iam a multis annis inceptam habemus ad finem usque protrahere minime valeamus, sed nec impresentiarum incipere monachorum monasterium, qui in quibusdam domibus satis humilibus commorantur apud nos. [3]

no week passes in which many of us, few though we are, are not allocated to imposed labours: thirty men for building the church of St Dominic, twenty for the farms of the Spaniards, ten for the archepiscopal palace of the most sacred Virgin, and five again for a temple of the Virgin Mary (which is commonly called “Guadalupe”). It has thus come about that we are in no way able to carry through to the end the church we have, which was begun several years ago, nor even at the present time to begin the monastery for the monks who are lodging among us in some very modest dwellings.

The purpose of this part of the paragraph is to seek exemption for the townsmen of Azcapotzalco from the labour required of them by the Spaniards.

A forthright expression of opinions about the cult would be neither relevant nor politic here, but this passage contains a couple of innuendos. The relative clause *quod vulgo Guadalupe dicitur*, “which is commonly called Guadalupe” is in parentheses in the manuscript, and its antecedent is *templum*, not *virginis Mariae*. The moniker *Guadalupe* is thus applied to the edifice, so that no mention is made of the Virgin of Guadalupe as such. The choice of the word *templum* for the site of Guadalupan devotion is telling in this context: the ancient Roman term carried connotations of pagan religion.⁸⁶ In contrast, the place of worship that still needs to be completed in Azcapotzalco is called an *ecclesia* —the Greek word adopted into Latin since late

86 Palmer (1954: 186): “Even where it would have been possible to find a Latin equivalent [for a Greek Christian technical term], undesirable pagan associations often ruled it out of court. *Vates* or *fatidicus* could not do service for *propheta* nor *templum* or *fanum* for *ecclesia*.”

antiquity as the customary word for “church”. Whilst *templum* could certainly be used for a site of Christian worship, the distinction between *templum* and *ecclesia* may have been pointed: after all Sahagún would remark that in Tepeyac, the site of the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe, “the Mexicans used to have a *temple* [*templo*] dedicated to the mother of the gods”.⁸⁷

Valeriano was not so much employing these very delicate rhetorical effects to signal his personal views about the Guadalupan cult (which are bound to have been unfavourable), but to put into relief the seriousness of a need which the rulers of Azcapotzalco considered pressing: completion of the church of San Felipe and the construction of the adjacent monastery for the Dominican friars. That objective was achieved: both were built by 1565.⁸⁸

CONCLUSIONS

The Azcapotzalco letter offers insight on the chronology, organization and spread of the pre-Hispanic Tepanec empire which was the model for later Aztec domination, and it reveals something of the preoccupations and privations of the town’s native elite in the early colony. The granting of a coat of arms to the town, the completion of its church and monastery, and personal acknowledgment of Valeriano by the king show that the petition met with a measure of success.

The 1561 letter displays the qualities of literacy and learning, which are affirmed at its opening as accompaniments to human virtue and as a means of consolidating Christian belief. The influence of humanists such as Erasmus and Nebrija is evident in the conception and design of the missive. While no direct quotations from Scripture or from Christian sources are to be found, there are verbal echoes of the Roman poets Virgil, Horace and Silius Italicus, and apparent allusions to the Greek historian Cassius Dio and to Homer. Indigenous legacies are also interwoven into the form and content of this communication, which offers a remarkable example of cultural hybridity: as well as the words and etymologies discussed directly, the language and rhetoric show the latent

⁸⁷ Sahagún (1982: 90).

⁸⁸ Ricard (1966: 70).

influence of Nahua forms of thought. Irrespective of the consideration of Valeriano's authorship, the letter can be fruitfully analysed on its own merits.

A text is never best elucidated on the basis of an author's reputation alone: scholars since the eighteenth century have been more prone to praise and extol Valeriano's long cherished note to Fray Juan Bautista than to examine or analyse it. But to any reader who might impugn the quality of his Latin, the challenge issued by José Mariano Beristáin has some justification: would Cicero or Dean Manuel Martí have written better Nahuatl, had they been conquered by Montezuma?⁸⁹ Valeriano's mastery of European humanist idiom is perhaps all the more salient if one reflects upon the image of the writer in traditional Mexican dress in the Codex Aubin. The samples of fluent, eloquent and occasionally playful expression in his Latin writings show why Antonio Valeriano's capacities were recognised by Vives's disciple, the humanist and rhetorician Francisco Cervantes de Salazar and by Philip II of Spain, as well as by the Franciscans Juan Bautista, Juan de Torquemada and Bernardino de Sahagún.

POSTSCRIPT: VALERIANO AND THE NAHUATL TRANSLATIONS OF AESOP'S FABLES

Valeriano did not write the *Nican mopohua* but he may have authored a text with a very similar title, *Nican ompehua*, "Here begin": the translations of forty seven of Aesop's fables from Latin into Nahuatl.⁹⁰ The Nahuatl fables survive in two anonymous, undated manuscripts, one in the National Library of Mexico (BNM Ms. 1628) and the other in the Bancroft Library (M-M 464). The manuscripts are copies of earlier versions and could have been produced in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.

89 Beristáin (1821: 84): "Estoy muy lejos de comparar esta carta con las de Cicerón, ni con las de Vives, Angel Policiano, Lipsio y Manuel Martí; pero ruego al que la leyeré que reflexione si habrían escrito mejor una carta en mexicano u otomí Marco Tulio y el deán de Alicante, si hubiesen sido conquistados por Moctezuma?" Poliziano, Lipsius and Vives were among the most eminent humanists of Renaissance Europe; Martí, Dean of Alicante, notorious for his anti-American polemic, was eighteenth-century Spain's most celebrated Latinist and antiquarian.

90 Nahuatl text and translation: Kutscher, Brotherston and Vollmer (1987).

The fables in the BNM manuscript are in the same volume and written in the same hand as the transcriptions of the Nahuatl songs known as the *Cantares mexicanos* and of the *Kalendario mexicano, latino y castellano*, an account of native religious festivals.⁹¹ The entire manuscript is likely to have originated in a Franciscan environment, and several scholars, discerning resemblances to Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's work, have conjectured that he himself was the translator.⁹² Convergences between the *Kalendario* and the friar's treatment of native festivals in Book 2 of the *Historia general* provides some basis for this speculation. The *Cantares mexicanos* have been attributed to Sahagún too—but that raises the question, given the collaborative manner in which the *Historia general* and *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana* were produced, of what it means to call Sahagún an "author".

Antonio Valeriano, who is mentioned by name in the *Cantares mexicanos* collection, has been credited with its compilation as well, perhaps in collaboration with other literate speakers of Nahuatl who had Franciscan connections.⁹³ But Valeriano's connection to the *Cantares* prompts consideration of his potential role in producing the version of Aesop with which the songs were transmitted. The likelihood that the translation would have been made from a Latin object text rather than a Spanish one narrows the field—very probably to the indigenous Latinists whom Sahagún names as his collaborators: Martín Jacobita, Alonso de Vergerano or Antonio Valeriano.⁹⁴ Moreover, the translator would have to be a Latinist with an extensive command of Nahuatl—as the task would require the capacity for innovation as well as correctness of speech in a language which was already becoming corrupted. In that respect, on Bautista's testimony at least, Valeriano was also superbly qualified,

91 Iguíniz (1918) is a text of the *Kalendario*; García Icazbalceta (1954: 376-387).

92 Peñafiel (1900: 6); Garibay (1953-4: 2:184); Kutscher, Brotherston and Vollmer (1987: 222-223).

93 Bierhorst (1985: 9). Compare n. 17 above.

94 Aesop was available in Spanish, but the Latin fables would have been known as a school text (notes 68 and 69 above). The Nahuatl translations include a version of *Aethiops*, Aphthonius' Aesopic fable about the Ethiopian, which only widely circulated after the Latin text printed in Basel (Aesop 1524: 171). That or a later Frobenius edition, or an anthology based on it, was the Mexican translator's most likely source, not Accursius' earlier compilations of Aesop, as Brotherston (1972: 37-8) and Kutscher, Brotherston and Vollmer (1987) have suggested.

whilst other native Latinists may well have found their command of Nahuatl diminished after being subjected as young children to the Franciscans' immersive teaching of *grammatica* in the Indian colleges.⁹⁵

Finally, if Fray Juan de Torquemada was correct in recording that Antonio Valeriano produced a translation of Cato, it is very possible that he did the same for Aesop. But Torquemada may have been confusing Cato's Distichs with Aesop's Fables in any case: the sententious maxims of the former resemble the morals of the latter, and the pseudo-Catonian *Disticha moralia* had been presented with the Latin Aesop so commonly and for so long as components of the *Auctores octo morales*. By the mid-1500s, the Fables and the Distichs would have been regarded as effectively the same work.

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