NOTE E DISCUSSIONI

RENAISSANCE EDUCATION AND INDIGENOUS HISTORY IN MEXICO. SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE BOOK *AZTEC LATIN*

Andrew LAIRD, A*ztec Latin. Renaissance Learning and Nahuatl Traditions in Early Colonial Mexico*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2024, pp. 488.

In 1524, a group of twelve Franciscans led by Fray Martín de Valencia, known as the 'Twelve Franciscan Apostles of Mexico', arrived in Mexico from Spain. The 'Twelve' played a vital role in the evangelisation of New Spain, seamlessly merging their religious fervour with a rich educational tradition shaped by the humanistic ideals of the European Renaissance. Their mission extended beyond mere conversion, placing a strong emphasis on teaching the indigenous population the liberal arts, sciences, and classical languages, with a particular focus on Latin. This encounter, however, was not a unidirectional process: the rich linguistic and intellectual traditions of the native populations also influenced the educational methods and content introduced by the missionaries[1].

[1] In 1521, Flemish Franciscans arrived in Mexico, paving the way for a second group in 1524—the 'Twelve' Castilian friars were sent by the Pope Adrian and personally welcomed by Hernán Cortés, who knelt before their leader, Father Martin de Valencia. Steeped in the Franciscan belief in the goodness of creation and humanity's receptivity to divine grace, the 'Twelve' embodied the simplicity and freshness of St. Francis of Assisi's teachings. Their mission was deeply shaped by Erasmus' humanist ideals, particularly his call to return to the purity of Scripture and early Christian writings. Driven by a desire to restore the purity of the early Church, they sought to bring this ideal to the New World, free from the corruption and excess that had tainted Europe. Their mission was imbued with a deep hope for spiritual renewal, aiming to rekindle the timeless ideals of faith in a land newly illuminated by the Gospel. See F. CERVANTES, *Conquistadores. A New History*, London 2021, pp. 250-254. See A. LAIRD, *Aztec Latin. Renaissance Learning and Nahuatl Traditions in Early Colonial Mexico*, New York 2024, pp. 14-15.

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Aztec Latin comes out exactly 500 years after the arrival of the twelve Franciscans and serves as a reminder of the importance of these early intercultural encounters and their lasting impact on the history of education and literary production in Mexico. Andrew Laird's book explores this dynamic exchange, highlighting how the combination of Renaissance learning and Nahuatl traditions gave rise to a unique phenomenon in the history of education. The fusion of these two traditions created prolific ground for the development of a new cultural and intellectual identity in colonial Mexico. This anniversary marks a significant historical turning point as well as a chance to reconsider how the combination of indigenous customs and Renaissance education shaped the interaction between the Old and New Worlds.

Aztec Latin is an insightful historical and philological study that focuses on the sixteenth-century Mexico, emphasising the educational and intellectual contributions of indigenous scholars in the decades following the Spanish conquest. The most important contribution of native Mexican writers to the development of early modern intellectual history is recognized in this book, which also examines the influence of Renaissance humanism on their writing. In order to show how these two different cultural frameworks overlapped and affected each other, the book analyses the researchers' use of both Latin and Nahuatl to demonstrate the dynamic connection between Renaissance educational practices and indigenous traditions.

In the introduction, Laird explains the evocative title, which captures the core of his study: *Aztec Latin* signifies not only the adoption of Latin by indigenous Mexicans but also symbolically underscores Nahuatl's role as a refined means of expression, comparable in the Americas to Latin's status in early modern Europe. Spanish colonisation had a profound impact on Nahuatl language, affecting its transcription into the Roman alphabet, its adaptation to Latin grammatical structures, and its integration into translations from Spanish and Latin. Latin coexisted with vernacular languages despite its limited accessibility, and its continual use in poetry and prose attests to its significance. Latin was a cultural force that moulded the Western world's ideas and beliefs. It maintained its authority in spite of the widespread use of vernacular translations, particularly in the Republic of Letters and the Church, where it symbolized a shared intellectual heritage. Its ongoing application in educational and religious settings demonstrated its ideological significance. Understanding Latin's historical relevance helps one better understand the intellectual and cultural climate of the West, where Latin continued to have an impact well into the 20th century[2].

[2] By introducing Latin to Indigenous peoples and emphasizing its significance, missionaries

Nations are narratives, to say with Homi Bhabha's words[3]. Stories have a crucial power through which colonised peoples have reestablished their identities and asserted the legitimacy of their histories. The ability to shape narratives and suppress alternative ones has been a fundamental aspect of both imperialism and the experiences of colonised nations. The continuous conflict between resistance and subjugation is revealed by the junction of these stories. It illustrates how debates over post-colonial identity, legacy, and the politics of memory are still influenced by the fight for narrative authority, which is not just a historical event. The dynamics of imperialism have never consisted of a one-sided encounter where a dominant Western power subjugates a passive non-Western population; rather, some form of active resistance has always been present, and in most cases, this resistance has ultimately prevailed[4]. It is precisely on this crucial point that Andrew Laird's book title, *Aztec Latin*, establishes a parallel between the ancient civilizations of Mexico and Rome[5]. The Spanish Empire sought to emulate the grandeur

reinforced a social divide based on linguistic knowledge. At the Council of Trent, Latin was seen as enhancing religious authority because it was inaccessible to the general public. Many Latin texts were produced for elite audiences, often remaining in manuscript form or published in limited editions for royalty, the church, or private collectors. Françoise Waquet demonstrates how this linguistic divide allowed Latin speakers to gain intellectual and social dominance, reinforcing hierarchies in religious, academic, and political spheres (see F. WAQUET, *Latin: Or the Empire of a Sign,* translated by John Howe, London 2001). Laird connects Waquet's insights to Pierre Bourdieu's theories of linguistic exchange, exploring how Latin created unequal power relations between those who understood the language and those who did not. See A. LAIRD, *Aztec Latin*, cit., pp. 318-319. Moreover, the first monograph by Laird (ID., *Powers of Expression, Expressions of Power: Speech Presentation and Latin Literature,* Oxford 1999) is a valuable example of the application of Pierre Bourdieu's theories on the relations among language, power, and politics to classical literature. See in particular P. BOURDIEU, *The Economics of Linguistic Exchange*, «Social Science Information» 16/6 (1977), pp. 645-668; ID., *Language and Symbolic Power*, tr. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, edited, introduced by John B. Thompson, Cambridge 1991.

[3] H.K. BHABHA, *Nation and Narration*, London 1990.

[4] See E.W. SAID, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York 1993. A critical historical perspective on colonialism and Western interference in the world was well articulated in Arnold J. TOYNBEE's *The World and the West* (Oxford 1953). In this influential work, Toynbee explored the dynamics between Western and non-Western civilizations following the age of exploration, colonialism, and industrialization. Rather than a linear historical narrative, he took a philosophical and comparative approach to analyse how non-Western societies responded to Western influence. Toynbee highlighted the profound effects of Western technology, ideologies, and economic power, showing responses ranging from adaptation and synthesis to resistance.

[5] Laird opens his introduction with the story of the Mexican coat of arms, which features an eagle perched on a nopal cactus while holding a rattlesnake. This emblem stems from the Aztec legend of Tenochtitlan, in which the god Huitzilopochtli directs the Aztecs to settle by Lake Texcoco after they see an eagle on a nopal. Early depictions, such as the Codex Mendoza from around 1542, show only the eagle, while the rattlesnake first appears in the late sixteenth-century

of ancient Rome, with Charles V and Philip II adopting the title of 'Caesars' and linking their heritage to Roman and Trojan ancestors, but this comparison, in turn, extended to Amerindian civilisations, which were often likened to pagan Rome, and indigenous writers used Roman history to embellish their accounts of the pre-Columbian world.

1. Before *Aztec Latin*

Based on letters sent by Hernán Cortés following the fall of the city in August 1521, German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller published the first map of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztecs, in Nuremberg concurrently with the arrival of the twelve Franciscans in Mexico in 1524 – it is no coincidence that the map is used as the cover for *Aztec Latin*[6]. This map, an early European depiction of the heart of the Aztec civilisation, offered a detailed view of the city's impressive architecture and layout, reflecting European fascination with the New World[7]. Meanwhile, in April 1524, representatives from Spain and Portugal convened at Badajoz and Elvas (also known as 'la Junta de Badajoz y Elvas') to settle a conflict over who should rule the Spice Islands (also known as the Moluccas), which both countries claimed. The Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, which split the world between Spain and Portugal but did not specify where the anti-meridian was located, was the cause of this battle. A lack of geographic knowledge prevented astronomers and cartographers, especially Portuguese cartographer Diego Ribeiro, from reaching a consensus on the anti-meridian's location. By assigning the Moluccas to Portugal and providing Spain with financial compensation, the Treaty of Zaragoza ultimately resolved the conflict in 1529. These treaties were key in defining the modern concept of the 'West', splitting the world into Spanish and Portuguese spheres of influence and positioning Europe as the centre of geopolitical and cultural power. This division reshaped global boundaries and promoted a Eurocentric worldview that would dominate maps and power structures.

The encounter-clash between the Old and the New World set the stage for

Codex Aubin. The earliest written reference to the eagle consuming a snake comes from Hernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc in 1598. This imagery was familiar in Renaissance Europe, often seen on Roman coins and medals, and mentioned in Cicero's *De divinatione* 1.47. The adoption of this motif in the Mexican emblem may have aimed to align it with classical European traditions. See A. Laird, *Aztec Latin*, cit., pp. 1–2.

[6] See B.E. Mundy, *Mapping the Aztec Capital: The 1524 Nuremberg Map of Tenochtitlan: Its Sources and Meanings*, «Imago Mundi» 50 (1998), pp. 11-33.

[7] See Peter Martyr d'Anghiera's description of Tenochtitlan in his *De Orbe Novo Decades* (*Dec.* 5, 3, 133-134; 139-140).

profound shifts in the way knowledge was produced, shared, and understood. The 1994 book *New Worlds, Ancient Texts* by Anthony Grafton *et al.* attempts to expand modern interpretations of what the New World signified to Europe[8]. The central argument is that the intellectual revolution of early modern Europe was not solely sparked by the discovery of the Americas but also by tensions within European texts themselves. As Europeans attempted to comprehend new regions and peoples, ancient texts—which had long served as the basis for European knowledge—became both resources and challenges. Into the seventeenth century, these writings still influenced how Europeans perceived the New World. Instead of providing a single, cohesive story, Anthony Grafton's narrative centres on European philosophers and explorers, highlighting the anxiety they experienced while facing the unknown from a European perspective. The study prompts reflection on how these encounters shaped not only the European perception of the New World but also the European culture itself. In this context, Edmundo O'Gorman's impactful argument in *La Invención de América* (Mexico City 1958) is particularly relevant. By producing reports, maps, and narratives based on Greco-Roman, Biblical, and Christian traditions, he asserted that Europeans 'invented' rather than 'discovered' the American continent. This allowed them to categorize and manage the various cultures they came across[9]. John Hale, in *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance* (London 1993), explored the notion of the 'discovery' of Europe in a modern sense, highlighting how this concept is intertwined with European identity[10]. It was only in 1623 that Francis Bacon used the phrase 'we Europeans', implying a shared European identity recognized by his readers. This notion suggests that European identity was, in part, constructed through encounters with the 'Other,' a theme extensively examined by Tzvetan Todorov in *La conquête de l'Amérique: La question de l'autre* (Paris 1982). Todorov contends that the 'Conquest of America' played a crucial role in defining and founding European identity[11].

[8] A.T. Grafton, A. Shelford, and N. Siraisi, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery*, Cambridge (MA) 1992.

[9] E. O'Gorman, *La invención de América: Investigación acerca de la estructura histórica del Nuevo Mundo y del sentido de su devenir*, Mexico City 1958. See also W.D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, Malden, MA, 2005, who argues that "Latin America" is not a geographic or cultural given but a colonial and political invention rooted in Eurocentric discourses. Mignolo critiques the racialized and homogenizing narratives that underpin the term, framing it as a Creole–mestizo political project that emerged after independence but continued to operate within the structures of coloniality. Therefore, he calls for an epistemic decolonization grounded in indigenous and Afro-Caribbean thought as a challenge to Western hegemonic representations.

[10] J. Hale, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance*, London 1993.

[11] T. Todorov, *La Conquête de l'Amérique. La question de l'autre*, Paris 1982.

This reflection connects to contemporary debates on Western education, where some call for a return to a core canon of texts, while others criticize these canons as tools of elite dominance. Ancient classical texts were central for Europeans in understanding foreign societies, yet they were often misinterpreted or misapplied. Therefore, examining the influence and role of these texts is crucial for historians studying Europe's intellectual legacy in its encounters with the New World.

From a similarly Eurocentric perspective, Wolfgang Haase and Meyer Reinhold, in their edited volume *The Classical Tradition and the Americas. Vol. 1, Part 1: European Images of the Americas and the Classical Tradition* (Berlin, 1994), gather a series of scholarly contributions that focus on the relationship between classical antiquity and European perceptions of the Americas.[12] Although intended as the first part of a larger multi-volume project, this work provides a detailed analysis of how classical texts and intellectual traditions shaped European views of the New World during the Age of Exploration. The contributors explore themes such as the influence of classical mythologies and historical narratives on European perceptions of the Americas. They examine how explorers, writers, and artists used classical references to interpret and represent the unfamiliar landscapes, peoples, and cultures they encountered. The enduring influence of antiquity on European ideas and its consequences for the New World's cultural identity are demonstrated by this exchange. This volume provides a useful analysis of the cultural exchange between the classical world and the Americas, despite the project's regrettable discontinuation. It also illuminates the ways in which historical narratives continue to shape contemporary conceptions of identity, culture, and intellectual history.

Nine years after these important studies, David A. Lupher's *Romans in a New World*: *Classical Models in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America* (Ann Arbor 2003) explores how the legacy of ancient Rome influenced—and was often vehemently rejected during—the Spanish conquest of the New World[13]. In order to defend their acts and shape their perception of the New World, many conquistadors viewed themselves as representatives of civilization and frequently used analogies to ancient Rome. Lupher draws attention to the conflicts in this Roman model. Some Spaniards accepted it, while others doubted its applicability, especially in view of Christian morals. A revaluation of Spain's historical identity resulted from ethical discussions concerning the treatment of indigenous inhabitants as the

[12] W. HAASE – M. REINHOLD (Eds.), *The Classical Tradition and the Americas*. Volume 1, Part 1, Berlin 1993.

[13] D.A. LUPHER, *Romans in a New World: Classical Models in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America*, Ann Arbor 2003.

Spanish empire expanded. The harsh realities faced by native peoples were likened to Rome's subjugation of Iberian tribes, leading to a reconsideration of Rome's moral authority as a model for Spanish imperialism. This engagement with the New World forced Spaniards to confront their past, including the legacies of conquest and cultural domination. Lupher's analysis explores the connection between classical traditions and modern imperialism, illustrating how encounters with indigenous societies led to critical reflections on identity and ethical responsibility.

In the opening chapter of the co-edited volume *Brill's Companion to Classics in the Early Americas* (2021), Maya Feile Tomes argues that deeply ingrained intellectual traditions, ideological biases, and excessive specialization have led to a fragmented scholarly background[14]. By examining the transformative interactions between European classical traditions and the cultures of Ibero-America, the Caribbean, and Canada, this edited volume makes a significant contribution to classical reception studies[15]. More significantly, Feile Tomes, in the introduction of her co-edited volume, emphasizes a concern already raised by Andrew Laird around twenty years ago[16].

Laird's first pioneering works marked a transformative moment in classical scholarship, drawing critical attention to the overlooked classical traditions of Latin America. At the time, his approach represented a necessary corrective to the entrenched Eurocentric and Anglocentric paradigms that dominated the field. This perspective has become almost self-evident, to the point where its novelty might seem now anachronistic. In his foundational work *The Epic of America: An Introduction to Rafael Landívar and the Rusticatio Mexicana* (2006), Laird called attention to this oversight, advocating for renewed recognition of the diverse classical legacies in Latin America[17]. His groundbreaking studies over the past two decades have significantly advanced our understanding of how early European

[14] M. Feile Tomes – A. J. Goldwyn – M. Duquès, *Brill's Companion to Classics in the Early Americas*, «Brill's Companions to Classical Reception», volume 21, Leiden 2021.

[15] Before the *Brill's Companion*, in the broader context of classical reception studies, diverse works have made vital contributions toward a more comprehensive understanding of classical influences in the Americas, see A. Laird – N. Miller (Eds.), *Antiquities and Classical Traditions in Latin America*, Malden (MA), Chichester, and Oxford 2018; R. Andújar – K.P. Nikoloutsos, *Greeks and Romans on the Latin American Stage*, London 2020; G. Campos Muñoz, *The Classics in South America: Five Case Studies*, London 2021; S.M. McManus, *Empire of Eloquence: The Classical Rhetorical Tradition in Colonial Latin America and the Iberian World*, Cambridge 2021.

[16] M. Feile Tomes, *Synecdoche in Reverse: America's Transhemispheric Classics*, in M. Feile Tomes *et al.* (Eds.) *Brill's Companion to Classics in the Early Americas*, Leiden 2021, pp. 2-3.

[17] A. Laird, *The Epic of America: An Introduction to Rafael Landívar and the Rusticatio Mexicana.* London 2006. See also A. Laird, *American Philological Associations: Latin and Amerindian Languages*, «TAPA» 149/2 (2019), pp. 117-140.

encounters with indigenous societies compelled a reinterpretation and adaptation of classical and Christian legacies. This call for inclusion and revaluation is no longer controversial but forms an essential and widely accepted foundation for scholarship in classical reception. The challenge now lies not in establishing the importance of this perspective but in continuing to deepen and expand the inquiry into these complex interactions.

Last year, Sergius Gruzinski's book, *Quand les Indiens parlaient latin. Colonisation alphabétique et métissage dans l'Amérique du XVIe siècle* (2023), in a different way, but equally effectively, paves the way for the perspective adopted by Andrew Laird in *Aztec Latin*[18]. Gruzinski examines 16th-century Mexico as the first colonial society in history, where European writing became a tool for domination and integration. It facilitated communication with the metropolis, documented wealth, and assisted in the Christianization of local elites. He introduces the concept of 'alphabetical colonisation', where writing and Latin were taught to indigenous children in boarding schools, leading to the rise of a literate indigenous aristocracy that engaged with the Spanish crown and contributed to early publishing in the Americas. According to Gruzinski, colonisation was not one-sided; Franciscans, for instance, used aspects of pre-Hispanic songs and dances in their evangelistic activities. The native aristocracy's access to European humanist principles was also altered by this interchange.

2. The Impact of *Aztec Latin* for Classical Scholarship

Scholars such as Anthony Grafton, Tzvetan Todorov, David Lupher, and Stephen Greenblatt[19], have explored how early modern Europeans often situated the 'American' within a European classical framework. This perspective, however, is challenged by *Aztec Latin*, which presents an intriguing reversal[20].

The question of the classical canon takes on new complexity when traditions, too easily categorised as 'classical' during the Renaissance, were received and reinterpreted, especially in non-European contexts. In *Aztec Latin*, Laird explores how Mexican authors embedded classical and European references within indigenous intellectual schemas, creating hybrid texts that redefined the cultural and epistemological boundaries of the classical canon. This reversal not only emphasises the

[18] S. Gruzinski, *Quand les Indiens parlaient latin: Colonisation alphabétique et métissage dans l'Amérique du XVIe siècle*, Paris 2023.

[19] S. Greenblatt (Ed.), *New World Encounters*, Berkeley 1993.

[20] For earlier and more tentative approaches to related questions, see Sabine MacCormack's work on the presence and uses of classical learning in Spanish America.

fluidity of classical traditions but also highlights the agency of indigenous authors in shaping a distinctly New World reception of antiquity. Education in early colonial Mexico often began with the *Auctores octo morales*, followed by the study of the *trivium*. This collection of preceptive texts, which included the proverbial sayings of Cato and medieval Latin versions of Aesop's *Fables*, dominated educational programs from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, with Erasmus' edited version published in 1539[21]. When classical literature was first presented, it was largely evaluated for its rhetorical or moral value, which influenced how it was received. For missionaries in early colonial Mexico, the European literary tradition—comprising works by Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, and St. Augustine—took on new meanings as it intersected with indigenous languages and cultures. Indigenous and Mestizo scholars' and chroniclers' contributions were revolutionary in this regard. These authors, who wrote in Nahuatl, Latin, and Spanish, consciously recrafted classical sources into stories that represented their own intellectual and cultural environments rather than merely adopting them. By encouraging creative reading and interpretation of classical literature, this method demonstrated how classical traditions may interact dynamically with regional histories and identities. As Laird has noted, native authors often used classical learning as a means to assert their identities, crafting narratives in which European and indigenous traditions converged and merged in new and generative ways.

Laird attributes a crucial role to Latin as a tool of power in colonial Mexico, where it served as the language of religious, political, and intellectual authority, much as it did in Europe. Latin was central to the cultural background introduced by the missionaries, functioning not only as a means of spreading Christianity but also as a symbol of European authority. In addition to bringing European hierarchy to a new setting, Latin gave missionaries and native intellectuals a forum to create and mould new identities, expressions, and ways of thinking. Gaining proficiency in Latin allowed one to access European knowledge, establishing Latin as a global language that upheld intellectual hierarchy and gave colonialism legitimacy. Latin was used to write official papers, laws, and religious doctrines, establishing a linguistic barrier that gave the colonial elite more control.

Yet, Latin *appeared* to be ideologically neutral, as Benedict Anderson insightfully remarks in *Imagined Communities* (1983), the universality of Latin never found correspondence in a universal political system: «The universality of Latin never corresponded to a universal political system. No sovereign could monopolize Latin and make it his—and only his—language-of-state, and thus Latin's au-

[21] D. Erasmus, *Autores cum suis commentis scilicet Catonis Romani sententiae morales Distichis descriptae* [...], Lyon 1539.

thority never had a true political analogue»[22]. This observation reveals that while Latin reinforced the intellectual dominance of European colonisers, its role did not align with the political consolidation of power typical of modern national languages.

Therefore, Latin was not merely a language of imposition; it also functioned as a tool of cultural mediation. Missionaries, in translating religious and educational texts into indigenous languages such as Nahuatl. This process made Latin a key to understanding and preserving aspects of local cultures, as in the case of Bernardino de Sahagún's *Codex Florentinus*, which documented Aztec knowledge. Indigenous intellectuals, educated in colonial schools, used Latin to participate in global humanistic discourse, showing that Latin could serve as a tool of resistance and adaptation as well as domination.

Aztec Latin truly represents an extraordinary challenge and opportunity for classicists. This book takes us beyond the boundaries of the Greco-Roman tradition as traditionally understood, exploring the impact of Latin and European humanistic ideas in the intercultural context of colonial Mexico. It is not at all a work on the reception of the classics but rather a study of one of the transformations of classical literature, myths, and imagery — and the humanistic thought linked to them — in a world profoundly different from the one in which these traditions originated. Indeed, it challenges 'Classical Reception Studies' by offering a vision that goes beyond the mere adaptation of classical traditions, exploring how they were reworked in ways that profoundly transform them and make them part of an innovative intercultural dialogue. The thought-provoking page 321 of the book is worth considering:

> The obvious fact that Renaissance humanism acquired its global reach as a consequence of imperial expansion, though, calls for careful reflection about how these avenues of enquiry should be explored. Europeans used their systems of learning and education as instruments of control in the process of colonization, and they inscribed their own interests and agenda into their representations of the peoples they had subjected. Although the ideological dimensions of ethnography, as a product of empire, have long been acknowledged, historians of scholarship still tend to regard their field as a domain largely remote from social praxis. Study of Greco-Roman legacies in the form of 'classical reception' is even more problematic, not least in colonial contexts, because it presupposes the centrality of classics, which it also seeks to affirm. Even if

[22] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London-New York 1983, pp. 40-41.

> interdisciplinary or inclusive approaches are accommodated, such a centripetal methodology serves the ends of classicists above all, and regularly leads to a distortion of historical realities. In that respect, practitioners of classical reception are all too comparable to those early missionaries in the Americas who subordinated whatever knowledge they acquired of indigenous cultures and languages to their own end of promulgating the Christian message.

Laird examines the connection between Renaissance humanism and imperial expansion, highlighting how the global reach of humanism was a direct result of European colonisation. This provoking reflection encourages a revaluation of the role of the classical tradition and its reception in the colonial context, revealing how European systems of learning were used not only as instruments of cultural dissemination but also as tools of control. While humanism has traditionally been celebrated as an intellectual movement of liberation, Laird suggests that it cannot be divorced from the mechanisms of domination that accompanied it. In particular, the study of Greco-Roman legacies, especially in colonial contexts, has often perpetuated a Eurocentric worldview that marginalises indigenous cultures. European educational systems were integral to the colonial project, serving as mechanisms for inscribing European cultural dominance into the colonies. Humanism, with its revival of classical Greek and Roman thought, became a vehicle for the colonial agenda, establishing European intellectual traditions as universal and superior while relegating indigenous knowledge and intellectual traditions to a subordinate position. European education, focused on the study of classical texts and rhetoric, presented these paradigms as the ultimate standard, sidelining the rich intellectual contributions of colonised societies.

The reception of classical texts in colonial contexts is particularly problematic, according to Laird, as it presupposes the centrality of Greco-Roman culture, reinforcing a Eurocentric view of history. This approach distorts historical realities by prioritising the values and perspectives of the colonisers while marginalising indigenous cultures and their ways of knowing. Even when inclusive or interdisciplinary approaches are employed, they often remain tethered to a centripetal methodology that serves the interests of classicists, ignoring the perspectives of colonised peoples and the epistemologies of indigenous cultures. The comparison Laird draws between 'practitioners of classical reception' and early missionaries in the Americas is particularly striking. Just as missionaries subordinated indigenous knowledge to the Christian agenda, classicists often subordinate non-Western traditions to a Eurocentric interpretation of culture. In the case of missionaries, the goal was to spread Christianity, while the study of classical texts aimed to affirm European cultural dominance. This parallel highlights how, in both cases, knowledge was selectively appropriated to serve a larger ideological

purpose. Thus, Laird calls for a methodological shift that that moves away from the centrality of classical texts and embraces a more inclusive approach that recognises the value of indigenous traditions. By decentring the classics and engaging with other cultural traditions on equal terms, it becomes possible to better understand how colonised cultures interacted with, resisted, and reinterpreted humanism and Greco-Roman legacies. This critique emphasises the importance of deconstructing the epistemological foundations of disciplines such as ethnography and, more broadly, the humanities.

It is clear, then, the reason why Classicists are uniquely positioned to read and comprehend the significance of this work. *Aztec Latin* is much more than a narrative about the role of Latin in colonial Mexico. It is an invitation to reconsider the meaning of our field of study, to explore the intercultural interactions that have shaped the modern world, and to see the classical tradition as part of a global, open, and continually evolving dialogue. *Aztec Latin* invites every classicist to look beyond the conventional boundaries of the discipline, recognizing the power of Latin not just as a legacy of antiquity or even as a tool of a social and intellectual transformation, but as a fundamental organising system – a kind of epistemology – in a global intellectual history.

3. Inside *Aztec Latin*

Aztec Latin is divided into two major sections: Chapters 1–4 and Chapters 5–10. In the early chapters, Laird surveys how Franciscan and Dominican missionaries employed humanist educational methods to convert and educate indigenous peoples, whereas the later chapters celebrate the significant achievements of native Mexican scholars, offering vital context and a critical reassessment of their contributions.

The first three chapters offer a compelling exploration of how Renaissance Humanism was adapted to the realities of the New World. Focusing on rhetoric, grammar, and broader humanist ideals, Laird inspects how these intellectual traditions were transformed in response to the social, linguistic, and political contexts of colonial Mexico. Renaissance Humanism, rooted in classical traditions and enriched by Christian thought, provided missionaries with a dual framework: rhetoric for persuasion and grammar for understanding and documenting indigenous languages. These elements were interconnected, addressing the intellectual and practical demands of evangelisation. Influenced by classical and medieval Christianity, rhetoric evolved into a means of communication and persuasion. While Diego Valadés presented the conquest as a mission of civilisation, occasionally justifying coercion, figures such as Bartolomé de las Casas promoted peaceful persuasion. European developments in linguistics led to the development

of grammar as a fundamental component of intercultural communication. Beyond Latin, language study was transformed by scholars like Antonio de Nebrija and Erasmus. Missionaries in New Spain used these ideas to develop grammars for native languages like Nahuatl, fusing humanist theory with practical need. The introductory chapters situate this analysis within broader debates about Renaissance Humanism, exploring its evolution and contested definitions, and integrating classical traditions, missionary practices, and linguistic innovations into a cohesive narrative.

The book opens with a chapter titled *Faith, Politics, and the Pursuit of Humanity: The First Scholars in New Spain*, which offers a compelling historical analysis of the interplay between Humanism, colonial politics, and indigenous advocacy in the wake of the fall of Tenochtitlan. By contextualising the rise of Humanism in New Spain within the broader historical framework of Spanish colonisation, Laird effectively highlights how classical learning influenced early missionary efforts and shaped the treatment of indigenous populations. Following the fall of the Aztec Empire in 1521 and the establishment of colonial rule in New Spain, the Spaniards imposed exploitative practices on the indigenous populations, including heavy taxation, forced labour, and enslavement.[23] Though, some missionaries, such as Fray Julián Garcés and Fray Juan de Zumárraga, emerged as advocates for indigenous rights: they used their classical education to appeal to universal values of justice and humanity, citing classical authors like Virgil and Horace to strengthen their arguments. In Spain, in the meantime, Humanism combined classical and religious studies, as exemplified by Antonio de Nebrija, a prominent scholar who championed the importance of Latin in comprehending Christianity, law, and medicine.[24] Laird details how this intellectual tradition found new applications in New Spain, inspiring early missionaries like Bartolomé de las Casas, who was influenced by Erasmus' ideals to advocate for the rights of indigenous people. Las Casas transitioned from a businessman to a radical reformer, famously opposing Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda's assertion that the Indians were natural slaves during the Valladolid controversy (1550–1551).

The arrival of the first Franciscan missionaries from Flanders in Mexico in

[23] See also S. Rinke, *Conquistadors and Aztecs. A History of the Fall of Tenochtitlan*, New York 2023, pp. 220-242.

[24] On Humanism in Spain, see R. Kagan, *Students and Society in Early Modern Spain*, Baltimore 1974; A. Coroleu, *Humanismo en España*, in J. Kraye (Ed.) *Introducción al Humanismo renacentista*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 295-330. On Antonio de Nebrija, see A. Fontán Pérez, *El humanismo español de Antonio de Nebrija*, in *Homenaje a Pedro Sáinz Rodríguez*, Vol. 2: *Estudios de lengua y literature*, Madrid 1986, pp. 209-228; C. Codoñer – J.A. González Iglesias (Eds.), *Antonio de Nebrija: Edad Media y Renacimiento*, Salamanca 1994.

1523, including Johann Dekkers, Johann van der Auwera, and Pieter de Muer, was a fundamental moment in the learning of Nahuatl and engaging with indigenous elites, setting the stage for future missionary work despite tensions with Spanish Franciscans. Fray Juan de Zumárraga, appointed the first bishop of Mexico City in 1527, played a crucial role in defending indigenous communities and establishing educational institutions like the College of Santa Cruz. His support for the printing press to spread Christian teachings and collaboration with scholars like Fray Andrés de Olmos, who sought to understand pre-Hispanic cultures, highlighted the scholarly aims of early missionaries. Another central figure, Vasco de Quiroga, arrived in 1531 and approached indigenous rights through a humanist perspective inspired by Thomas More's *Utopia*. Quiroga's advocacy for humane treatment of indigenous peoples, alongside Fray Julián Garcés's efforts to secure the papal bull *Sublimis Deus* (which condemned the enslavement of indigenous people), reflected the broader commitment of early missionaries to protect and uplift native populations within the context of Renaissance humanism. Together, these scholars worked to defend indigenous rights, promote education, and facilitate Christian conversion, leaving a lasting impact on the cultural and social horizon of New Spain and laying the foundation for future missionary efforts.

In the following chapter, *Persuasion for a Pagan Audience. Rhetoric, Memory, and Action in Missionary Writing*, Laird examines the various rhetorical techniques used by missionaries in Mexico during the sixteenth century, showing the stark differences in their approaches to indigenous cultures. This chapter can be seen as a history of rhetoric, particularly in how missionaries in the New World utilised it. By tracing the development of rhetorical tactics and their ethical implications, it not only underscores the importance of rhetoric in the context of conversion but also provides insights into the broader cultural exchanges that influenced the colonial experience. The chapter begins with Cicero's *De Inventione* to explore various perspectives on rhetoric, focusing on figures like Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, who advocated for peaceful conversion, in contrast to Fray Juan Focher and Fray Diego Valadés, who supported more forceful approaches. By presenting the Renaissance as a combination of classical eloquence and medieval Christian ideals, rather than merely a resurgence of classical ideas, Laird reveals the close ties between Renaissance humanism and Christian traditions. He describes how early Christian authors, like Augustine, modified rhetorical devices for missionary and spiritual goals; this practice persisted throughout the Renaissance. Humanists of the period aimed to make rhetoric both practical and transformative for education and evangelism, blending classical and Christian ideals. As a pivotal character in this tradition, Laird shows how Las Casas opposed the coercive tactics of his time by promoting a discourse of peaceful persuasion by drawing on classical

sources[25]. Another missionary, extensively studied by Laird, is Fray Cristóbal Cabrera, who presents a distinctive approach by prioritising persuasive preaching and exemplary conduct over coercion[26]. Through the contrasting strategies of figures like Las Casas, Focher, Valadés, and Cabrera, Laird illustrates a spectrum of methods ranging from peaceful persuasion to forceful measures, highlighting the critical role of rhetoric in shaping education and religious practices in early New Spain.

Chapter 3 (*Between Babel and Utopia: Renaissance Grammar and Amerindian Languages*) is a significant contribution to both the history of classical scholarship and intellectual history, as it discerns how Renaissance linguistic advancements, rooted in classical traditions, were adapted by missionaries in New Spain to engage with indigenous languages and cultures. The chapter analyses how the study of grammar during the Renaissance influenced the methodologies used by missionaries to learn and document indigenous languages, reflecting a blend of humanist ideals and practical needs. The chapter is divided into several sections. Laird starts with a summary of Latin and vernacular grammar in Renaissance Europe, where he talks about how humanists like Erasmus and Antonio de Nebrija changed the field of linguistics and produced grammars for languages other than Latin[27]. This shift laid the groundwork for missionaries like Fray Andrés de Olmos, who created

[25] In contrast to de las Casas, Laird discusses figures like Focher and Valadés, who supported more aggressive methods. Valadés, in particular, viewed the Spanish conquest as a civilizing mission akin to Roman expansion, adopting a Eurocentric perspective. His work, *Rhetorica Christiana*, represents a significant contribution to missionary rhetoric, serving as a comprehensive manual for preachers and including practical examples drawn from the New World. However, Laird points out that while Valadés showed interest in mnemonic techniques blending European and indigenous elements, he often assumed a condescending tone toward indigenous populations.

[26] Cabrera has already been the subject of studies published by Andrew Laird, including the following: A. LAIRD, *Franciscan Humanism in Post-Conquest Mexico: Fray Cristóbal Cabrera's Epigrams on Classical and Renaissance Authors,* «SUP» 33 (2013), pp. 195-215; ID., *Classical Letters and Millenarian Madness in Post-Conquest Mexico: The Ecstasis of Fray Cristóbal Cabrera (1548)*, «IJCT» 24/1 (2017), pp. 78-108: ID., *'Hispani hic peccant': Fray Cristóbal Cabrera's Verse Epistles from New Spain (Vat. Lat. 1165)*, «SUP» 37 (2017), pp. 81-110; ID., *Humanism and Experience in the Poetry of Fray Cristóbal Cabrera (1513-1598),* in R. CACHO CASAL – I. CHOI (Eds.), *The Rise of Spanish American Poetry 1500–1700: Literary and Cultural Transmission in the New World*, Cambridge 2019, pp. 81-100.

[27] On the influence of Erasmus and Nebrija in Mexico, see M. BATAILLON, *Érasme au Mexique*, Algiers 1932; ID., *Erasme et l'Espagne: Recherches sur l'histoire spirituelle du XVIe siècle*, Paris 1937; M. BEUCHOT, *Presencia de Nebrija en la Nueva España: Julián Garcés y Bartolomé de las Casas*, in I. GUZMÁN BETANCOURT – E. NANSEN DÍAZ (Eds.), *Memoria del coloquio La Obra de Antonio y su Recepción en la Nueva España*, Mexico City 1997, pp. 145-151; B. CUMMINGS, *Erasmus and the End of Grammar: Humanism, Scholasticism, and Literary Language,* «New Medieval Literatures» 11 (2009), pp. 249-270.

the *Arte de la lengua mexicana*, which diverged from Nebrija's Latin grammar to accommodate the unique characteristics of Nahuatl. Laird notes that Olmos recognised the limitations of applying Latin grammar to Amerindian languages, highlighting their unique structures. Missionaries in the early 16th century struggled to maintain proficiency in their native languages while engaging with the indigenous ones. Figures like Fray Pedro de Gante and Fray Cristóbal Cabrera, for example, lamented their fading command of Flemish and Spanish but retained fluency in Latin, essential for translation. Missionaries created practical language handbooks, or *artes*, for languages like Nahuatl and Otomí, influenced by Renaissance humanism and Nebrija's work. They believed that being able to communicate effectively in native languages was essential for evangelisation, so they placed more emphasis on practice than theory. This strategy was informed by Erasmus' interpretation of the Babel narrative, which placed a strong emphasis on linguistic unity. Fray Alonso de Molina and Fray Maturino Gilberti adopted this view, with Gilberti even integrating Erasmus' methods despite Inquisition scrutiny. Ultimately, the missionaries' pragmatic approach to language reflected a broader humanist tradition, bridging classical learning with the indigenous cultures they encountered.

The Imperial College of Santa Cruz at Santiago Tlatelolco, a pioneering educational institution in New Spain, founded in 1536 and designed to offer higher education to indigenous elites, is the topic of the fourth chapter (*Education of the Indigenous Nobility: The Imperial College of Santa Cruz at Santiago*). Founded in 1536 in Tlatelolco, near Mexico City, the college aimed to provide higher education to indigenous elites, facilitating their preparation for leadership roles within the Spanish colonial system[28]. The College of Santa Cruz was founded with religious and political aims, creating a class of indigenous leaders to support Spanish influence and promote Christianity. Key figures in its establishment included Antonio de Mendoza, Sebastián Ramírez de Fuenleal, Bishop Zumárraga, and Fray García de Cisneros. Tlatelolco was chosen as the site for its historical significance and to integrate indigenous students into colonial society. Despite challenges such as fears of heresy, racial prejudice, and concerns about cultural erosion, students excelled academically, particularly in Latin, dispelling doubts about their abilities.

[28] On the College of Tlatelolco, see J. Estarellas, *The College of Tlatelolco and the Problem of Higher Education for Indians in 16th Century Mexico*, «History of Education Quarterly» 2/4 (1962), pp. 234-243; E.V. George, *Humanist Traces in Early Colonial Mexico: Texts from the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco*, in F. Grau Codina – J.M. Maestre Maestre – J. Pérez Durá (Eds.), *Litterae Humaniores: Del Renacimiento a la Ilustración*. Valencia 2009, pp. 279-291; E. Hernández – P. Máynez (Eds.), *El Colegio de Tlatelolco: Síntesis de historias, lenguas y culturas,* Mexico City 2016.

The curriculum, modelled on European universities, focused on the *trivium*—grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic—and was supported by a growing library. This approach not only developed language skills but also fostered critical thinking. Graduates gained the ability to translate religious texts and took on leadership roles in their communities. The college played a key role in bridging Spanish and indigenous worlds, contributing to the development of Nahuatl literature and empowering indigenous elites to participate in colonial affairs. The chapter deserves to be read in conjunction with the Appendix 1.3, which provides a comprehensive list of books held at the Imperial College of Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco from 1572 to 1584—a remarkable archive of the first libraries of the Aztec scholars. Additionally, a list of named College of Santa Cruz alumni is provided in Appendix 1.4, illustrating careful research with significant historical significance.

The book shifts its focus from Chapter 5. In this section of the book, Laird discusses how Renaissance Humanism was adapted in early colonial Mexico, highlighting the ways indigenous scholars and missionaries blended classical European traditions with local knowledge and culture. Through detailed analyses of key texts and figures, including the works of Franciscans at the College of Santa Cruz, native governors' petitions, Nahuatl translations of European fables, and the *Florentine Codex*, Laird explores the interaction between Latin, Nahuatl, and Spanish literatures.

Chapter 5, *From the Epistolae et Evangelia to the Huehuetlahtolli*, completely redirects attention to Nahuatl literature influenced by classical, especially Latin, traditions. The contact between Latin and Nahuatl writing during the early colonial era is highlighted by Laird's exploration of the rich literary output of Franciscans and Mexican intellectuals at the Imperial College of Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco. The chapter acknowledges the importance of indigenous scholars who wrote in Latin and produced a wide variety of works, such as Nahuatl original compositions and translations of Christian scriptures. The chapter begins with a descriptive analysis of the forms and contents of two important manuscripts: Juan Badiano's *Libellus de medicinalibus Indorum herbis* (1552), which blends indigenous herbal knowledge with Latin scholarship, and an intriguing trilingual vocabulary of Spanish, Latin, and Nahuatl from around 1545, reflecting the college's linguistic efforts. The trilingual Spanish-Latin-Nahuatl dictionary, created at the College of Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco in 1540, is a significant illustration of Nebrija's legacy. About 70% of the entries in this work, which was based on Nebrija's *Dictionarium ex Hispaniensi in Latinum sermonem*, have red-coloured translations in Nahuatl. These translations frequently included Latin words, highlighting the importance of Latin in missionary education while also presenting inventiveness in modifying European ideas for the Nahuatl language. As a means of promoting Christianity and fostering intercultural dialogue, the lexicon was probably created with missionaries and educated native partners in mind. Laird discusses the chal-

lenges faced by native translators, who needed to adapt Christian texts to the linguistic and cultural context of Nahuatl while maintaining accuracy. The chapter also examines lesser-studied manuscripts, including handwritten lectionaries featuring Epistles and Gospels in Nahuatl. As restrictions on scripture translations tightened, new forms of Christian literature in Nahuatl emerged, notably *Colloquios y Doctrina christiana* (1564) and *Huehuetlahtolli* (1601). These texts exemplify how indigenous scholars utilised their linguistic skills to merge Christian teachings with indigenous literary traditions.

In Chapter 6, *Humanism and Ethnohistory: Petitions in Latin from Tlacopan and Azcapotzalco*, Laird surveys the Latin petitions submitted by native governors in the mid-1500s, seeking restoration of territory, reduced tribute, and other privileges from the Spanish crown. The author scrutinises three key Latin documents from post-conquest indigenous leaders: Juan de Tlaxcala's report on a land dispute, a letter from Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin to Emperor Charles V, and a petition from Azcapotzalco's rulers to Philip II. These documents reveal how indigenous leaders, many of whom were Christianised descendants of pre-Hispanic nobility, utilized Latin to advocate for their communities. The first document, Juan de Tlaxcala's land dispute report, shows how indigenous judges navigated linguistic and cultural barriers. The second, a letter from Totoquihuatzin to Charles V, highlights efforts to address tribute abuses, using rhetorical strategies influenced by humanist traditions. The third letter from Azcapotzalco's rulers demonstrates their mastery of Latin and classical rhetoric to assert traditional rights and resist Spanish encroachment. Overall, Laird's analysis of these Latin texts provides vital insights into the politics and cultural dynamics of post-conquest indigenous society, highlighting the agency of native leaders and the negotiations within the colonial framework. The chapter adopts a post-colonialist historical approach to highlight the dynamic interplay between resistance and adaptation, illustrating how the indigenous nobility leveraged their humanist education to effectively advocate for their communities amid colonial pressures.

Chapter 7, *A Mirror for Mexican Princes. The Nahuatl Translation of Aesop's Fables*, explores the adaptation of Aesop's *Fables* into Nahuatl, shedding light on the intersection of European humanist traditions and indigenous culture at the College of Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco. Laird identifies the specific Latin source for the Nahuatl translation as Joachim Camerarius' *Fabellae Aesopicae* from 1538, which corrects misconceptions about earlier potential sources. The chapter highlights several Nahuatl manuscripts, notably those found in the Biblioteca Nacional de México and the Bancroft Library, as well as a later manuscript by Padre José Antonio Pichardo. These manuscripts exhibit the educational objectives of the College, emphasising moral and practical lessons rather than strictly religious themes. The fables serve to instruct indigenous elites, focusing on leadership and governance, consistent with the humanist tradition of 'mirrors for princes'. Laird dis-

cusses the purpose behind the translations, suggesting they were designed to impart essential skills for effective governance and to adapt Aesopian wisdom to the cultural and moral context of indigenous audiences. The selection of fables omits those with themes of revenge or paganism, further indicating a tailored approach to moral education. While the exact authorship remains uncertain, evidence points to a collaborative effort involving Franciscan missionaries and indigenous scholars, with figures such as Fray Bernardino de Sahagún and Antonio Valeriano likely playing key roles. In conclusion, Laird's analysis of the Nahuatl translations of Aesop's *Fables* reveals their significance in merging European literary traditions with indigenous practices.

Chapter 8, *Aztec Gods and Orators: Classical Learning and Indigenous Agency in the Florentine Codex*, emerges as a standout chapter in Laird's work. The in-depth analysis focuses on Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, commonly known as the *Florentine Codex*, a twelve-book compilation documenting Aztec culture and religion in both Nahuatl and Spanish[29]. Sahagún's twin purpose of documenting pre-Hispanic Mexican beliefs and customs and combating pagan activities is made clear by Laird. The *Codex*, which is organised similarly to medieval encyclopaedias, illustrates Sahagún's project to produce an all-inclusive resource for academic and missionary use. He demonstrated his dedication to knowing indigenous languages by using a novel technique by translating Nahuatl writings into Spanish. In order to facilitate conversion, Sahagún frames Aztec gods in a Greco-Roman repertoire, comparing them to Roman gods in order to undermine both belief systems[30]. This rhetorical strategy reflects Renaissance interest in classical mythology, but with a critical rather than celebratory approach. Sahagún's work blends indigenous myths with European narratives, reinterpreting them through a Christian perspective. Book 6, focusing on Nahuatl rhetoric, philosophy, and theology, emphasises the role of public speaking in Aztec culture while aligning Nahuatl traditions with European rhetorical standards. His use of Nahuatl adages, riddles, and metaphors highlights the linguistic richness of the language, blending indigenous and European influences. A detailed examination of Sahagún's work is provided in Chapter 8,

[29] On Sahagún, see C.E. DIBBLE, *Historia de la nación mexicana*, Madrid 1963; ID., *Sahagún's Historia*, in ID. – A.J.O. ANDERSON (Eds.), *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 13 vols., Santa Fe (NM), and Salt Lake City (UT) 1950-1982, vol. 1, pp. 9-23; A. LAIRD, *Aztec and Roman Gods in Sixteenth-Century Mexico: Strategic Uses of Classical Learning in Sahagún's* Historia general, in J.M.D. POHL – C.L. LYONS, Altera Roma*: Art and Empire from Merida to Mexico*, Leiden 2016, pp. 147-167.

[30] At page 262, Laird provides a useful table of equivalences between Mexican and Roman gods in drafts of *Historia general*, Book 1.

which demonstrates how it handled the difficulties of colonialism and cross-cultural interaction. Our comprehension of the *Codex* as a tool for cultural preservation and a way to further missionary objectives is enhanced by Laird's insights into the interaction of classical allusions, rhetorical devices, and religious frameworks. This chapter is crucial to Laird's study because it not only strengthens the story of Aztec-European relations but also highlights Sahagún's writing as a significant contribution to early colonial literature.

The following chapter, *Universal Histories for Posterity: Native Chroniclers and Their European Sources*, explores the vital role that indigenous and mestizo chroniclers played in documenting and dignifying their histories during the colonial period in Mexico. Laird explores how chroniclers like Diego Muñoz Camargo, Hernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc, Chimalpahin, and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl used classical and European references to enrich their narratives and assert the importance of their cultures. Despite the decline of Latin education at the College of Santa Cruz, a new generation of chroniclers emerged in the 17th century, producing detailed historical accounts in Nahuatl and Spanish. They integrated classical analogies and European sources to validate their stories, demonstrating a sophisticated engagement with both indigenous traditions and European intellectual currents. For example, Muñoz Camargo used Roman literature to elevate Tlaxcala's history, while Tezozomoc compared Aztec practices to the Roman Senate. Chimalpahin, educated in both indigenous and European contexts, blended dual dating systems and cited classical authors to position Nahuatl as a scholarly language. Alva Ixtlilxochitl portrayed his ancestor Nezahualcoyotl as a philosopher-king, drawing on European literary traditions. In order to demonstrate how these chroniclers employed classical influences to proclaim the richness of Mexican history, the chapter focuses on the dynamic combining indigenous and European cultures. The tenacity and agency of indigenous peoples during the colonial era are demonstrated by their works, which engage with wider intellectual currents while preserving indigenous knowledge[31].

In the last chapter, (*General Conclusions and Envoi*), Laird synthesises the principal themes of humanism in early colonial Mexico, illustrating its unique development influenced by figures like Erasmus, the translation of Latin into indigenous languages, and the vital role of native scholars. These elements advanced a rich literary tradition in Nahuatl, establishing a distinctive intellectual legacy that resonates with classical antiquity. Laird draws attention to the ongoing

[31] On the topic see G. MARCOCCI, *The Globe on Paper: Writing Histories of the World in Renaissance Europe and the Americas*, translated by Richard Bates, Oxford 2020, pp. 17-31. See also G. BAUDOT, *Utopia and History in Mexico: The First Chronicles of Mexican Civilization 1520–1569*. Niwot 1995 [French orig. Toulouse 1976].

practice of contrasting Mexican traditions with classical ones and suggests a number of directions for further research. The function of Latin in New Spain and its relationship to Nahuatl, the impact of Christian and classical literature on historical chronicles, and the ways in which humanist ideas influenced European ethnography and reactions to native languages across the Americas are all significant subjects.

A notable illustration is the Nuremberg Map of Tenochtitlan, printed in 1524. The map, accompanying Pietro Savorgnano's Latin translation of Hernán Cortés' letters, illustrates a fusion of indigenous and classical influences. The Latin map labels notably 'TEMIX TITAN', a reference to the Roman sun god Titan, likely the result of a misinterpretation of the city's name, Tenochtitlan. This example underlines how early modern ethnography frequently relied on familiar classical frameworks to interpret and represent unfamiliar cultures. While Christian beliefs undeniably shaped early European depictions of pre-Hispanic societies, the profound impact of humanist learning on colonial Mexican texts—whether in Nahuatl, Latin, or Spanish—has often been overlooked. Acknowledging this humanist influence is crucial to fully appreciating the intellectual complexity of these sixteenth-century writings. Laird's clever choice to conclude his book with the narrative surrounding the 1524 map of Tenochtitlan—the cover of *Aztec Latin*—demonstrates a thoughtful synthesis of the central themes explored throughout the work.

4. Conclusions

Andrew Laird's *Aztec Latin* is a masterful work of scholarship that redefines the interaction between indigenous and European intellectual traditions in early colonial Mexico. This book offers a critical analysis of the network of intellectual and cultural exchanges that shaped the historical context of New Spain, delivered by the most authoritative voice in the field at a time when it is more important than ever to reevaluate, reinterpret, and decolonise our understanding of ancient texts and societies in light of contemporary complexities. Laird urges readers to focus on the conversations that arose from these early interactions and to reconsider the stories of domination, appropriation, adaptation, and resistance.

The capacity of the book to combine an authoritative and thought-provoking tone with mature and thoughtful prudence is one of its most compelling strengths. This is especially clear in the final chapter, which offers a fair assessment. The ambitious scope of the work results in varying levels of detail across chapters, each of which has the potential to become a standalone monograph, given the richness and complexity of the subject matter. The second part of *Aztec Latin*, spanning Chapters 5 to 10, is a true revelation, uncovering the extraordinary nov-

elty of an uncharted territory in scholarship. Laird's forward-looking perspective not only synthesises existing knowledge but also invites scholars to delve deeper into the rich resources of indigenous literature and its legacies. Enhancing the book's value, the appendices and bibliography provide critical context and resources for further study. The appendices offer essential documents and supplementary materials that enhance the reader's understanding, while the extensive and meticulously curated bibliography, particularly the wealth of primary sources, serves as a valuable guide for those wishing to delve deeper into the field.

To sum up, *Aztec Latin* is a remarkable and pioneering contribution to Classical Studies and Latin American Studies, reflecting Laird's sagacious insights and ambitious vision. It stands as a testament to his scholarly achievements and a vital resource for future research, opening pathways for continued exploration of the relationships between indigenous and European cultures. By inviting readers to engage with Mexico's past, Laird not only enriches our understanding of the long story he tells but also fosters a greater appreciation for the enduring significance of indigenous intellectual traditions. This work is poised to inspire scholars and readers alike for generations to come.

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