

NAHUA HUMANISM AND POLITICAL IDENTITY IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO:



**A Latin letter from Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin,
native ruler of Tlacopan, to Emperor Charles V (1552)¹**

by Andrew Laird

Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin made several requests for alleviation of the tribute due from Tlacopan to the town's encomenderos Isabel de Montezuma and the conquistador Juan Cano. In a Latin letter, transcribed and translated below, Don Antonio explained Tlacopan's importance in pre-Hispanic Mexico and described how his father had welcomed Hernán Cortés, allying his people with the Spaniards against the Aztecs – a version of events which diverges from other accounts, including Hernán Cortés' own. The following discussion examines the letter's rhetorical strategies in relation to its historical context, shows how the writer's humanist learning accommodated European and Mexican traditions, and considers why petitions like this were sometimes made in Latin.

1. Introduction

The Valley of Mexico, an area of more than six thousand square miles, had a large multiethnic and multilingual population when the Spaniards first arrived in 1519. There were five major peoples in the area with their own languages: the Mazahua, the Otomí, the Matlatzincas, Tlahuicas, and the Nahuas who named the region Anáhuac. Races from other parts of the Mesoamerican isthmus, belonging to different language groups, had also settled or traded in the area or were brought there as captives. These

¹ Thea De Armond and Mark Pyzyk offered invaluable observations on the letter for a seminar on “Aztecs, Romans and Spaniards” which the Stanford Department of Classics enabled me to organise in 2012. I would also like to thank Pablo Aparicio Durán, Ed Carter, Byron Hamann, Erika Valdivieso and especially Marianne Pade for their comments and corrections to this paper – which owes much to discussion at the 2014 *Texts and Contexts* meeting in Rome. Keith Sidwell's pioneering approaches to early modern Latin continue to inspire my own endeavours, and the present piece is fondly dedicated to him.

included Mixtecs from the west, Zapotecs from Oaxaca, Totonacs from the eastern coastal territories and Mayans from Yucatan.²

The dominant city-states had been Nahuatl-speaking. Each polity or *altepetl* had its own ruler known as a *tlatoani* (chief speaker; plural *tlatoque*). Tenochtitlan and its sister city of Tlatelolco, whose inhabitants were together known as the Mexica, or Aztecs, became the most powerful. The Mexica are generally believed to have forged and led a “Triple Alliance” with the states of Texcoco and Tlacopan in 1428.³ In whatever way the alliance in fact operated, the Aztec empire might best be seen as a mutable, symbolic confederation led by the Mexica, who had more complete control over regions beyond the Valley of Mexico than they did within it. After the Spanish conquest, tensions remained between the different Nahua principalities, some of which retained their continued identity as *cabeceras* under Spanish rule, governed by Christianized descendants of their original pre-Hispanic *tlatoque*.⁴

From the 1530s onwards, a few youths selected from the Nahua nobilities were taught Latin by missionary friars and the Imperial College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco was inaugurated in 1536 to offer more advanced instruction in grammar, rhetoric and dialectic. The Franciscan college was not established to train Mexicans for the priesthood, as has often been supposed: its purpose was rather to create an indigenous gubernatorial class imbued with a Christian humanist education.⁵ Thus by the mid-1500s, a few privileged natives of central Mexico were able to send appeals to the Spanish crown in Latin as well as in Castilian and Nahuatl.⁶ The first known example of such a petition in Latin is the letter edited and translated here,

² Prior to the conquest, Mexico’s population may have been greater than twenty-seven million: Prem 1997, 124–125. See further Knight 2002, 132–192 and Kline 2008.

³ The pre-eminence of the three powers is affirmed in Don Antonio’s Latin letter, section 13 below. Carrasco 1999 is a full history of the Tenochca Empire and the alliance. Herrera Meza, López Austin and Martínez Baracs 2013 consider the force of the Nahuatl term *excan tlatoyan* (parliament in three places), but Gillespie 1998, 233 has argued “the Triple Alliance, as it appears in the postconquest historic traditions, did not exist” because remembrance of it varied along ethnic lines. The Jesuit historian Francisco Javier Clavigero 1780, 1: 221 first used the expression *triplice alleanza* of an earlier confederation between Mexico, Acolhuacan and Tlacopan.

⁴ Gibson 1964a, Lockhart 1992.

⁵ Laird 2015, 121–122, 134–135. Ramírez de Fuenleal 1533, a letter to the Empress by the institution’s founder, president of the First Audience, Sebastián Ramírez de Fuenleal had envisaged the students being trained in “good Latinity and oratory” and in religious doctrine. A 1536 royal decree (cited in Ricard 1966, 221) credited the idea to the first bishop of Mexico Fray Juan de Zumárraga.

⁶ Laird 2014a is a descriptive inventory of the known documents in Latin by sixteenth-century Nahua writers. Natives in other parts of New Spain wrote in Spanish, Mayan and other indigenous languages: Restall, Sousa & Terraciano 2006.

addressed to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V by Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin (or Totoquihuaztli), who was the indigenous governor of Tlacopan from 1550 until his death in 1574.⁷ A brief account of his life in the next section will precede an account of the argument of the letter.

2. Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin

Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin's own writings make clear that he was the son of Totoquihuatzin who was *tlatoani* of Tlacopan at the time the Spaniards first reached Mexico.⁸ The *altepetl* was situated on the western shore of Lake Texcoco and had been a city in the Tepanec empire of Azcapotzalco before coming to prominence as a partner of Mexico and Texcoco, receiving approximately one fifth of the total tribute that had been due to the alliance.⁹ Totoquihuatzin belonged to the royal line instituted in the city by the Mexica in the 1430s, after their overthrow of the Tepanec empire.¹⁰ Writing in the 1530s, the Franciscan chronicler Fray Toribio de Benavente remarked that the rulers of both Texcoco and Tlacopan "might well be called kings because they lack nothing to be such."¹¹ Totoquihuatzin died in 1520 and was succeeded by Antonio Cortés' brother, Tetlepanquetzatzin, who met a violent end at the hands of the conquistador Hernán Cortés in 1525.¹²

Various individuals, with or without links to the pre-Hispanic ruling family, were then appointed as successive *caciques*, until Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin was made *gobernador* by the viceroy of New Spain, Antonio de Mendoza, on 21 April 1550, formally re-establishing the authority of Tlacopan's royal lineage.¹³ On his appointment, Don Antonio was charged with "securing the good governance of the town, seeing to everything with a bearing on the service of God, ensuring that the Indians learned Christian teaching and attended church services, taking care that

⁷ The letter, in the Seville General Archive of the Indies [AGI, Patronato 184, 45], was first transcribed in Zimmermann 1970, 2–4 (with German translation and a facsimile in *Tafel* 1–5) and later presented in Pérez-Rocha & Tena 2000, 167–178 with a Spanish translation.

⁸ Section [15] of the Latin letter below. The *Chronica Mexicayotl* incorrectly stated Don Antonio was son of Juan Cortés – Juan was Antonio's own son: Pérez-Rocha & Tena 2000, 48; Alvarado Tezozomoc 1598, section 349 [1998: 169]. The *Chronica* long attributed to Tezozomoc is now ascribed to Chimalpahin: Schroeder 2011.

⁹ Wagner 1944, 117 (adducing testimonies from Alonso de Zorita and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl); Carrasco 1999, 176–204.

¹⁰ Alva Ixtlilxochitl, 1625 [1:543]; Carrasco 1984, 89–90.

¹¹ Benavente 1536–1541, Treatise 3, chapter 7 [1951, 267].

¹² Cortés 1526, [1986: 366–367]: see further Don Antonio's letter, [17], and discussion below.

¹³ Gibson 1964a, 171.

they would not practice drunkenness, sacrifice or idolatry, and to see that tribute would be collected.”¹⁴ The question of tribute was the subject of three letters he wrote to Charles V in 1552.¹⁵ The first two in Spanish were both dated 6 January, “the day of the kings” (the choice of that feast of Epiphany was doubtless significant). Both letters asked for the return of estates which had been seized and handed over to Spanish settlers – along with the concession of two villages: Chiquipilco for the governor himself, and Tlallachco for the *república* of Tlacopan.

In the third letter of 1 December 1552, which was in Latin, Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin made a more detailed complaint about the servitude and excessive tribute imposed on his people by their *encomenderos* Juan Cano and his late wife Isabel, daughter of Montezuma [II] Xocoyotzin. The writer also called attention to Tlacopan’s former greatness in pre-Hispanic Mexico and maintained that his father had sought an alliance with Cortés against the Mexica at the time of the conquest. Don Antonio would express the same preoccupations more succinctly in a fourth letter, in Spanish, penned nearly a decade later, on 20 February 1561 and addressed to Philip II.¹⁶ In 1566, Antonio Cortés and other leading citizens lodged an appeal to the Audiencia in Mexico City for Tlacopan to be placed directly under the control of the Spanish crown, commuting payment of tributes to any other party.¹⁷

The letters written in Spanish asked, in addition, for a coat of arms. In the first letter of 1552 this request was expressed as follows:

suplico por quanto yo soy señor natural y lo fue mi padre Totoquivaçi y mis agüelos y a mi me llaman gobernador, que de aquí a tres o quatro años quitandome la gobernación me quedaré sin nada me mandes confirmar mi señorío para mejor servir a V.M. y demando en pago de lo que yo y mi padre sirvió en la conquista de México y después acá que siempre hemos servido lealmente un escudo de armas y que dentro entren estas que nosotros antiguamente teníamos y a este pueblo de Tlacopan lo mande V.M. hazer ciudad.¹⁸

(Since I am an indigenous lord, as my father Totoquihuatzin and my forebears were as well, and they call me governor, and given that in three or four years from now I will be left without anything once I am relieved of the governorship, and you order me to consolidate my control to better serve your majesty, in payment for the service I and

¹⁴ AGN, ramo Mercedes, vol 3, exp, 48, f. 22 cited in Pérez-Rocha & Tena 2000, 50 (my translation); Pérez-Rocha 1982, 82–83.

¹⁵ Cortés Totoquihuatzin 1552a, 1552b, and the Latin letter below.

¹⁶ Cortés Totoquihuatzin 1561.

¹⁷ Cortés Totoquihuatzin 1566.

¹⁸ Cortés Totoquihuatzin 1552a.

my father provided in the conquest of Mexico, and for the loyal service we have provided after that, I ask for a coat of arms which contains within it those arms we had of old, and for your majesty to decree that this town of Tlacopan be made a city.)

The arms, which were conceded in 1564, did incorporate the pre-Hispanic emblem which the people of Tlacopan had “of old”: there were two flowers (*tlacōmeh*, evoking *Tlacōpan*) in the upper section of the shield.¹⁹ A palace with three *xihuitzolli*, the traditional turquoise diadem of a *tlatoani*, symbolised the place of the former *altepetl* in the Mexican triple alliance. The use of the masculine *pequeño* in the accompanying motto “águila blanca pequeño” (small white eagle) shows that those Spanish words were a gloss of the Nahuatl meaning of the proper name *Totoquihuatzin* (Hurrying Bird).²⁰ Further images – of a crowned *tlatoani* before a Christian cross and of the same figure attaching a cross to the orb of the world – indicated the religious responsibilities with which the governor had been charged on his election some years before.

Don Antonio’s enthusiastic provision of workers to build the first ever church for the Company of Jesus in Mexico demonstrated his readiness to promote the Christian faith. The workforce must have been donated very shortly after the first delegation of Jesuits had arrived in New Spain in 1572, under the direction of their Provincial Father, Pedro Sánchez Baquero. Sánchez himself described how he was approached by the native governor:

La iglesia faltaba en que se pudiesen ejercitar nuestros ministerios; y la divina Bondad, que quería servirse de ellos, se mostró, como en todo, liberal en esta parte; porque un indio cacique y cabeza del pueblo de Tacuba, llamado don Antonio, con la gente de su pueblo, que era mucha, se vino a ofrecer diciendo que sus antepasados habían hecho la iglesia de México, y que no querían ellos ser vencidos de sus mayores, y así querían hacer la iglesia de compañía, con toda brevedad, sin ningún interés mas que del cielo: y luego comenzaron a juntar materiales...²¹

¹⁹ The royal *cédula* (ed. Paz y Meliá 1892, 253–255 and Villar Villamil 1933, *cédula* number 140) granting the arms in March 1564 states that there were “two green branches with some coloured flowers, like pink carnations”. Three such flowers [*tlacōtl*, plural *tlacōmeh*] symbolise Tlacopan in the *Codex Osuna* (1565). Domínguez Torres 2011 examines Cortés Totoquihuatzin’s coat of arms in detail; Castañeda de la Paz 2009, 135–138 and Rubial García 2011, 32–33 discuss the similar city-arms [*altepetlauiztli*] conferred on Tlacopan itself in 1564.

²⁰ *Totōquiltiā* and *totōquitiā* are causative forms of the verb *totōca*, hurry; *huāctzīn* or *huāhtzīn*, a large bird: Karttunen 1992, 80, 248–249. Domínguez Torres 2011, 73 identifies the bird in this context as a Laughing Falcon.

²¹ Sánchez Baquero c. 1580, 54.

(We lacked a church to practise our ministry, but divine Goodness, seeking to serve our members showed itself to be liberal as in everything else in this region, because an Indian chieftain and head of the town of Tacuba called Don Antonio came with the people of his town, which had a large population, to offer help saying that his predecessors had built the cathedral church of Mexico City, and that they did not want to be outdone by their elders, and so wanted to build the church for the Company, in all speed, without any reward other than from heaven: and then they began to assemble materials...)

The Provincial Father went on to relate how the church was completed to perfection within just three months by more than three thousand Indian labourers, who showed evident joy and care in the work. Pedro Sánchez had already given a similar account of these events soon after they occurred, in a letter of March 1573 to Everard Mercurian, the Superior General of the Jesuits in Rome.²² In the same letter to Mercurian, Sánchez also recalled that he gave the *cacique* a portrait he had frequently asked him for: a good likeness of Ignatius of Loyola, the principal founder of the Company of Jesus, whom the Indian greatly revered.²³

Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin died in 1574. In his will and testament recorded in Nahuatl between 29 April and 1 May of that year he named his son Pedro Alvarado Tetzpanquetza as heir and as his successor as *cacique*.²⁴ Tlacopan, now Tacuba in Mexico City, continued to retain its economic importance and dependencies later in the colonial period.²⁵

3. Structure and argument of the Latin letter of 1552

Don Antonio's only Latin letter was dated the Kalends of December 1552. The text is just over 2,000 words in length and it is structured in this way:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| (i) Salutatio | Laudatio of the Holy Roman Emperor [1]
Captatio benevolentiae [2] |
| (ii) Exordium | Introduction to subject of letter: hardships imposed on people of Tlacopan [3] |

²² Sánchez Baquero 1573, 65. This an early Italian translation of the lost original letter. In the 1700s the Jesuit historian Francisco Javier Alegre elaborated upon Sánchez' account of the church's construction, noting it had a straw roof and for many years was called *xacalteopan*, "the shed-church": Alegre 1841, 1: 65.

²³ Sánchez Baquero 1573, 67.

²⁴ [Cortés Totoquihuatzin] 1574. Alvarado Tetzpanquetza was succeeded in 1585 by his brother Juan Cortés Chimalpopoca Moteuczoma Totoquihuatzin: see further Gibson 1964a, 171. Ruiz Medrano 2010, 43 discusses Don Antonio's will.

²⁵ Gibson 1964a, 1964b.

- (iii) Narratio 1 Oppression of people of Tlacopan and excessive tribute and labour imposed upon them by encomendero Juan Cano and Isabel de Montezuma [4]; Specification of tribute paid to Juan Cano and Isabel de Montezuma [5–8]; Details of land and locations appropriated by Juan Cano [9–11]; Atotoc [9]; Words of Juan Cano when he took Tetolinca [10]; Tepetlapan [11]
- (iv) Petitio Request for tribute to be paid to the Emperor instead of the encomendero and for Jacobo Ramírez to act as Visitor to moderate the amount due [12].
- (v) Narratio 2 Importance of Tlacopan before the Spanish conquest and its alliance with Mexico and Tlatelolco [13]; Juan Cano’s further appropriation of three towns belonging to Tlacopan [14]; Welcome given to Cortés by Totoquiuhatzin [15]; Totoquiuhatzin’s speech to Cortés [16]; Support Tlacopan gave to Spaniards against the Mexica; writer’s brothers killed by the Mexica [17].
- (vi) Conclusio Profession of loyalty to Emperor [18]; Summary of preceding petition [19]; Signatures [20].

This arrangement or *dispositio* is in line with Erasmus of Rotterdam’s recommendations for writing letters. His *De conscribendis epistolis* (1522) was very influential in the mid-1500s and appears to have circulated in New Spain.²⁶ Erasmus did not believe it necessary to adhere to the conventional sequence of *salutatio*, *captatio benevolentiae*, *narratio*, *petitio* and *conclusio* which had been advocated in earlier manuals on epistolography, and his associate Juan Luis Vives recommended that, after the opening, the structure of the main part of a letter could be devised *ad hoc* as the subject required.²⁷ In the text presented here, the first *narratio*, recounting the

²⁶ Burton 2007, Henderson 2007, and Mack 2011, 90–96, 228–256 highlight the success of Erasmus’ treatise on epistolography in sixteenth-century letters and education. Ricard 1966, Bataillon 1998, 540–550, 810–827; Egido 1998; Laird 2012, and Laird 2015, 125–130 show the importance of Erasmus’ thought for the missionaries’ practical theology, linguistics and pedagogy in post-conquest New Spain.

²⁷ Erasmus, *Conficiendarum epistolarum formula* 1498 [1985, 261–262] opposed the conventional five-part format proposed in the *artes dictaminis*; Vives 1534 [1989, 82].

circumstances prompting the letter, precedes the pivotal *petitio*. That central petition is then succeeded by a further section of *narratio*. As a whole, the epistle is fluent and engaging.

The first sentence of the lengthy *salutatio* to Charles V begins the letter with a flourish:

Tam alta est tua Celsitudo, atque cesarea majestas, Cesar invictissime, vt vbique gentium non tam imperium longe lateque patens, quam illa tui animi Christianitas per omnium ora sonet in finesque orbis terrae divulgetur... [1]

(So lofty is your eminence and Caesarean majesty, most invincible Caesar, that among peoples everywhere the Christian quality of your soul, as well as your empire stretching far and wide, sounds on the lips of all and is proclaimed to the ends of the earth...)

While the Holy Roman Emperor was naturally addressed as *Caesar*, the Hapsburg monarchy's strategic appropriation of myths of Troy and Rome might have a particular bearing on conjunctions of Christian and pagan Roman idiom throughout this letter.²⁸ In the sentence quoted above, for instance, classical usages – *longe lateque* (far and wide), and *omnium ora* (on the lips of all) – are juxtaposed with *in fines... orbis terrae* (to the ends of the earth), an expression from Psalm 18.²⁹

Praise for the Emperor's use of his authority to promote Christianity is amplified by a quotation from scripture:³⁰

Quo fit vt in te verissimum illa sancti Iob comprobemus, nimirum: Militiam hominis vitam esse super terram; quippe tuum studium eo semper tendere videtur quo gentes barbaras, ethnicos et demonum cultores, dei denique inimicos oppugnes ac e tenebris in lucem Christianorum pellucidam in ipsum scilicet iusticiae solem qui Christus omnium servator est educas, hosque victos pacifices, illustres, Christo tandem lucrifacias ...

(This has led us to commend in your case those words of the holy prophet Job as very true, namely, that “the life of man upon earth is

²⁸ Tanner 1993. The title of Caesar was also claimed by Philip II: Elliott 1989.

²⁹ “Longe late[que]” is found in Caesar and Cicero: Wölfflin 1933, 265 lists several instances; for “omnium ora” compare Virgil, *Georgics* 3.9: “victorque virum volitare per ora”; *Aeneid* 12.235: “succedet fama vivusque per ora feretur” (recalling Ennius Epigram 18, “Volito vivus per ora virum”); Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 6.8.1: “per omnium ora populorum discurrens”. Psalms 18:5: “In omnem terram exivit sonus eorum: et in fines orbis terrae verba eorum.”

³⁰ Carrera de la Red 1998, 142–144 examines a comparable *exordium* of a 1561 letter to Philip II by another Nahua noble, Pablo Nazareo, in the light of Erasmus' prescriptions in *De conscribendis epistolis*.

warfare”, since your exertions seem always to be directed toward fighting against barbarous peoples, pagans, and worshippers of devils, in short, against God’s enemies, then leading them from the darkness to the clear light possessed of Christians, indeed to that Sun of Justice which is Christ, saviour of all, and to pacifying them once conquered, enlightening them, and at last winning them for Christ...[1])

Aquinas’ interpretation of Job 7:1 had been influential: the condition of human life is like a military campaign because of the threats and dangers it presented. But here the verse was taken literally.³¹ The expression *Sol justitiae* (Sun of Justice), also originated in the Old Testament, but the title was given to Christ in the third century AD, and later used in the “Propers” or Offertory of the Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin.³² This Mass was said between Epiphany and the Feast of the Purification — the period in which this letter would have reached Spain. In Christian antiquity Saint John Chrysostom had connected the *Sol Justitiae* to the pagan *Sol Invictus* (Invincible Sun) because the date of Christmas had once been the celebration of the birthday of the solar deity.³³ Though *invictus* or *invictissimus* was a conventional epithet for the Holy Roman Emperor, its use here to hail Charles V may be pertinent in this very context: the Caesars of antiquity had long been associated with the *Sol Invictus*.³⁴ The rejection of any identification with Christ by Augustine and Tertullian would only have made it better known in the 1500s when Chrysostom’s works were being read in Latin.³⁵

³¹ Aquinas, *Expositio super Job*: 7: 1: “hoc est quod dicit militia est vita hominis super terram, ac si dicat: vita praesens qua super terram vivimus non est sicut status victoriae sed sicut status militiae” (He says, “Man’s life on earth is combat,” as if to say: The present life which we live on earth is not like a state of victory, but like the state of a military campaign).

³² “Felix namque es sacra Virgo Mariae et omni laude dignissima, quia ex te ortus est sol justitiae, Christus Deus noster” (For thou art happy, O sacred Virgin Mary, and most worthy of all praise, since out of thee hath arisen the sun of justice, Christ our Lord). Malachi 4:2: “et orietur vobis timentibus nomen meum sol iustitiae” (But unto you that fear my name, the sun of justice shall arise).

³³ Chrysostom 1588, *De Solstitiis et aequinoctiis* 2.118: “Sed et dominus noster nascitur mense decembris ... VIII Kal. Ian. ... Sed et Invicti Natalem appellant. Quis utique tam invictus nisi dominus noster? ... Vel quod dicant Solis esse natalem, ipse est Sol iustitiae” (But Our Lord too, is born in the month of December ... the eighth day before the calends of January [25 December] ..., But they also call it the “Birthday of the Unconquered.” Who indeed is so unconquered as Our Lord? Or, if they say that it is the birthday of the Sun, He is the Sun of Justice). Other editions of Chrysostom were probably available in New Spain before 1552: Yhmooff Cabrera 1996, 2: 200–217.

³⁴ Berrens 2004.

³⁵ Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 16 (cf. *Ad nationes* 1.13; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.67); Augustine, *In Evangelium Iohannis* 34.

The sun was also crucial to the calendrical epistemology of pre-Hispanic Mexico – and in some of the Nahuas’ supposed interpretations of the catastrophe of the Spanish conquest. Several sixteenth-century testimonies maintain that the Mexicans initially connected the Spaniards with the sun and even venerated them as “sons of the sun”: the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado was called *Tonatiuh*, (Sun).³⁶ Some of the omens held to have presaged the Spanish conquest also involved the sun—although the traditions about them may really have been based on European classical sources.³⁷ Such reports (which probably reflected *post*-conquest ideologies) could underlie the connection Antonio Cortés Totoquiuhatzin made between the Emperor Charles’ capacities both to “enlighten” (*illustres*) and to “pacify the conquered” (*victos pacifices*) – a principle inherited from the pagan Roman empire by the early church.³⁸

The idea of a link between the Christian *Sol Justitiae*, the pagan Roman *Sol Invictus* and the Aztec *Tonatiuh* may seem tendentious, but a similar association had been made by the Franciscan Fray Toribio de Benavente or “Motolinía” who was appointed guardian of Tlacopan.³⁹ Fray Toribio’s *Memoriales*, an ethnological work drafted more than a decade before and finalised only in 1549, contained a chapter entitled:

De muchas y diversas fiestas que en esta tierra tenían, en las cuales se declara muchas idolatrías, y como para los destruir estuvo en nuestro favor el sol y la luna, esto es, Christo, Sol de Justicia, y su muy preciosa Madre y Señora nuestra.⁴⁰

(The many and varied festivals the natives held in this land in which many idolatries are revealed, and how in order to destroy them, the

³⁶ *Codex Ramírez* (1580s) [1975] trans. León-Portilla 1962, 59: “The Indians knelt... and adored the Spaniards as sons of the Sun, their god”; the *Anales de Tlatelolco Manuscripts* (c.1550) [1991, 256, 264]: refers to Pedro de Alvarado as *Tonatiuh*, “the Sun.” In the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, c. 1563, fol. 46r., an image of the sun with a human face depicts Alvarado, captioned “al cual llamavan los yndios tonatihu que quiere dezer el sol” (the Indians called him *Tonatiuh* which means Sun). Hamann 2013, 529–530 discusses the significance of the sun’s central position on the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (1552) at a turning point in this pictorial history of the conquest.

³⁷ Fernández-Armesto 1992; Lockhart 1993, 5, 18; Townsend 2003.

³⁸ Orosius, *Historiae adversum paganos* 6.1.7–8, 6.22.5.

³⁹ Cervantes de Salazar 1560, quoted below. Cervantes’ statement that Motolinía was guardian of the people of Tacuba after their conversion implies this had been a long time ago. In any case the signature of *Thoribius* below that of Antonio Cortés in the Latin letter does *not* belong to Fray Toribio de Benavente (as he customarily signed himself “Motolinía”: Mendieta, Book 3, chapter 12, 211), but to Don Toribio Feliciano, who signed Don Antonio’s 1561 letter in full. It is conceivable that the native noble had taken the friar’s name when he was baptised.

⁴⁰ Benavente 1549, cap. 14 [1996, 151].

Sun and the Moon were on our side, that is Christ, Sun of Justice, and his most precious Mother and Our Lady.)

The friar's use of syncretism as a strategy for conversion does more than reinforce the connection between the Christian and pagan suns hinted at by Don Antonio: it suggests that missionaries were the ones who were first responsible for it.

The topos of pacification through conquest effected a transition to the *captatio benevolentiae*:

Quam Rem in nobis es foelicissime operatus, qui vbi per tuos hispanos, demonum agmen horrendum profligasti, et Xpianismum introduxisti, nostram hanc prouinciam, pace, ac quiete summa collocasti, quae etsi majorum nostrorum stragem, bonorum temporalium jacturam non minimam doleat, tamen tuum immortale beneficium agnoscit quam humillime. [2]

(To this end you have laboured very happily among us: by the agency of your own Spaniards you have overthrown the dreadful army of devils, introduced Christianity, and with the utmost peace and tranquility given order to our province which has the humblest recognition of your immortal kindness, even though it grieved at the slaughter of our elders and at the very great loss of our worldly wealth.)

The courteous tone could be double-edged: the writer did not have to highlight the human cost of Charles V's victory for religion. The flattery of an earlier remark quoted above was not unalloyed either – the people of Tlacopan regarded Job's dictum that "the life of man upon earth is warfare" as being especially true of the Emperor.

The Emperor Charles is asked to look on the letter sympathetically – even though the petitioners "may be judged to be humans of the lowest condition and may seem to be of no worth in the eyes of the Spaniards" (*etsi abjectissimae conditionis homines censeamur, nulliusque precii apud hispanos videamur*) [2]. Erasmus, whose prescriptions on epistolography are generally followed in this letter, derided such obsequious formulae in salutations.⁴¹ But in courtly Nahuatl speech such an abject tone seems to have been conventional – and there are comparable examples of passages in which writers of Latin from the educated Nahua elite introduced themselves in a similar way.⁴² Despite appearances, Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin's

⁴¹ Erasmus, *De conscribendis epistolis* 1522 [1971, 276–285].

⁴² Johansson K. 2002, 226–227, discusses *auto-humiliación* as a formulaic device in the Nahuatl language. Compare the description of "Inversion" in Maxwell & Hanson 1992, 20–21: "constant potential for antonymic interpretation gives the Nahuatl author the power to

wording may not betoken the submissiveness of a craven subaltern, but almost the opposite.

As noted above, the principal subject of this letter was the servitude and excessive tribute imposed on Tlacopan by Juan Cano and his late wife Isabel de Montezuma, whom Cano had married in 1532 after he became an associate of Hernán Cortés.⁴³ The aggravation Isabel caused the native governors of Tlacopan is conveyed in forthright terms at the beginning of the first *narratio*:

que etsi nostri sanguinis nostraeque patriae fuit, tamen adeo ab humanitate aliena fuit vt pietatis loco et naturalis amoris quo sese vnus terrae et gentis homines amant, tyrannidem exercuerit: et nos qui a preclaris et nobilibus patribus sumus orti, loco seruorum tenuerit. [4]

(Even though she was of our own blood and from our own country, she was herself so remote from humanity that instead of the duty and natural love which men of the same race and country usually show to each other, she exercised tyranny and kept us in the position of slaves, when we were born from renowned and noble parents.)

Montezuma's daughter had been of the same *sanguis* and *patria*, and – by way of rhetorical emphasis – of one *terra* and *gens* as the inhabitants of

say one thing but to mean another.” Juan Badiano (1552, f. 1r), thus characterised his own “Indian” race in his Latin translation of the dedication of a Nahuatl herbal to the viceroy's son: “we poor little wretched little Indians are inferior to all mortals, and the smallness and insignificance ingrained in us by nature therefore merits pardon” (nos misellos pauperculos Indos omnibus mortalibus inferiores esse, et ideo veniam nostra a natura nobis insita parvitas et tenuitas meretur); and in 1561 the rulers of Azcapotzalco would present themselves in a letter to Philip II (ed. Laird 2011) as “poor people, wretches, barbarians, such then whose predecessors in the time of their paganism were altogether rustics, abject, bare of adornments for body and soul” (pauperes, miseri, barbari tales denique quorum praedecessores suae tempore gentilitatis fuere admodum rustici, abiecti, nudi et corporis et animae dotibus). See further Laird 2014a, 163–165.

⁴³ Juan Cano de Saavedra (1502–1572) was rewarded for fighting for Cortés, although he had originally arrived in Mexico in 1520 as a participant in Pánfilo de Narváez's expedition against him. Cano's appeal for full restitution of Isabel's patrimony in 1548, before her death is examined in Kalyuta 2008; another attempt was made in 1553: Pérez-Rocha 1998, 16, 23; Sagaón Infante 1998; Megged 2010, 201. Juan Cano had some unnamed Franciscans compile an account of genealogies and inheritances from pre-Hispanic Mexico (Toribio de Benavente may have been involved) to be sent to Charles V, of which some pages survive: Benavente (undated); García Icazbalceta 240–280. Fernández de Oviedo's *Historia general y natural de las Indias* (1557) Book 33, chapter 54, staged a dialogue between Fernández and Juan Cano who gives his own commentary on the conquest of Mexico: Martínez 1986; Myers 2010, 166–173. See notes 64 and 65 below for an attempt to reconstruct a lost *Relación* of the conquest written by Cano himself.

Tlacopan: she and they alike were Nahuas or “Indians.”⁴⁴ At the same time, the *tlacopanenses* were a distinct group, as the previous sentence had indicated: “no other people is so fiercely oppressed by such a multitude of tributes *as our people of Tlacopan* [nostrum populum tlacopanensem]” [4], reiterating the complaint made a few lines above [3]: “all we Indians are worn down by tribute and much servitude, but *especially we Tlacopanecs* [maxime nos tlacopanenses].”

The substantial dues to both Juan Cano and Isabel are then described in detail [5–8]: as well as money, they received grain, fruit, tortillas, wood, charcoal, wild fowl and poultry. Further products are listed with explanations of their names:

viginti vestes, quas nauas, totidem vestes quas vipiles nostri vocant hispani, et sindones viriles totidem, ac etiam totidem indica femoralia que hic apud nos vulgo mastiles appellantur... Necnon et ducentas placentulas nomine apud nos tortillas, onera lignorum etiam sex damus, et pabulorum decem, carbonum duo grandja onera, vnum fasciculum tedarum quas ocote vocant, candelas tres nigras seu huius terrae... Infine autem cuiuslibet anni, mille frumentorum mensuras que hanegas vocantur... quorum vniciuique vnoquoque die vnam gallinam damus precio duorum argenteorum, vnum lignorum onus, pipera multa que axi dicuntur, dimidiam partem vnus orbis salis, et ducentas placentas [5]–[6]

(twenty garments which the Spaniards call *nauas*, the same number of what our people call *huipiles*, the same number of finely woven male garments, and the same number again of Indian loincloths, which among us here are commonly named *mastiles* ... We also give two hundred of the little pancakes we name *tortillas*, six loads of wood, ten of fodder, two large loads of charcoal, a bundle of the pitchpine torches which are called *ocote*, three black candles which are of this land. ... And at the end of every year we give a thousand measures of grain which are called *hanegas* ... To each of [Juan Cano’s guards] on each day we give one hen worth two silver pesos, one weight of wood, many peppers which are called *axi*, half a wheel of salt, and two hundred *tortillas*...)

This catalogue not only provides glosses for terms derived from the Nahuatl words *huipilli*, *maxtli*, and *ocote*.⁴⁵ It also throws light on examples of

⁴⁴ Chipman 2005, 27–74, examines the Spaniards’ accommodation of Isabel de Montezuma and her subsequent status. The complex process of the assignation of the *encomienda* of Tacuba [Tlacopan] to Isabel is summarised in Gibson 1964a, 423–426.

⁴⁵ The *huipil* was the traditional upper garment worn by women. *Tomastli*, a possessed form of *maxtli* is discussed in Fray Julián Garcés *De habilitate et capacitate gentium* (1537)

Spanish usage which had become common in New Spain, but were not widely known in the Iberian peninsular: *nagua* and *axi* were loan-words from Taíno, the Arawakan Caribbean language; *tortilla* in Spain has always designated an omelette, not the unleavened flat bread of Mesoamerica; and *hanega* was a variant (more widely used in the New World at this time) of the usual Castilian *fanega*.⁴⁶ By showing his awareness of all the words which might not be familiar to a reader in peninsular Spain, Don Antonio signals the extent of his acculturation – and he also conveys the authoritative status of Latin as a stable and effective vehicle of meaning. By writing in Latin he can make a conclusive statement of what the items given various names in Nahuatl, Spanish or Taíno actually are.

The letter also enumerates land, territories or towns belonging to Tlacopan which had been ceded to Juan Cano [9–11, 14], appropriated by him, or to which he laid claim following his wife’s death a year earlier in 1550 or 1551. These allocations are confirmed and detailed elsewhere: several documents attesting the dowry Hernán Cortés had given to Isabel Montezuma in 1527; the pictorial Codex Osuna; and the *Memorial de los pueblos* – a Spanish text from the mid-1500s which enumerated Tlacopan’s towns and estates and to whom they were subject.⁴⁷ The latter source lists Capolhuac, Ocoyacac and Tepehuexoyocan among the five *pueblos* under Juan Cano’s control: “they serve him and they do not know of Tlacopan as an authority.”⁴⁸ The Latin letter states that Juan Cano had taken the same three *oppida* which properly belonged to Tlacopan [14]. The *Memorial* was probably compiled at the same time as the letter, or afterwards, since it makes no mention of Doña Isabel.

In the context of this discussion of the appropriations of land from Tlacopan, Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin makes clear that his town had once been a principal power, possessing dominions of its own:

primo quidem certiozem facimus tuam excel[le]ntissimam maiestatem
has indias antiquis in temporibus fuisse diuisas in tres partes nimirum
mexicum, tlacubam, et tetzcocum atque ex consequenti tres dominos

and examined in Laird 2014b, 200–201, 206; *ocote* was wood from the *Pinus montezumae*. The Nahuatl forms are given in Karttunen 1992, 90, 141, 176.

⁴⁶ Helmer 2009 is an account of the semantics and diffusion of *aji* [*axi*] in colonial Spanish America. The predominance of *hanega* in the Spanish colonies (as opposed to *fanega* favoured in the peninsular) is confirmed by attestations for the 1500s in the *Diccionario de la Real Española* [DRAE].

⁴⁷ *Codex Osuna* (1565); Anon., *Memorial de los pueblos sugetos al señorío de Tlacupan* (1550s); AGI Patronato 245, Ramo 9 attesting Isabel’s dowry is cited in Carrasco, 1999 177 n. 8.

⁴⁸ *Memorial de los pueblos*, item 3 [1971, 5]: “Estos cinco que agora se siguen traxo Juan Cano, y le siruen y a Tlacupan no la conoçen por señorío ninguno...”

seu rectores habuisse qui dominabantur aliorum populorum circumiacentium. [13]

(In the first place then we inform your most excellent majesty that in old times these Indies were divided into three parts, namely Mexico, Tlacopan, and Texcoco, and as a consequence had three masters or rulers who ruled the other surrounding peoples.)

The customary sequence of Mexico, Texcoco and Tlacopan, found in all other accounts has been transposed: Tlacopan is here put *second* after Mexico City.⁴⁹ The usual sequence signalled in descending order, the polities by the size the number of their dominions – Tlacopan had the smallest. The sentence quoted above also echoes the beginning of the *Gallic Wars*: the Indies of New Spain had been divided into three parts like Gaul.⁵⁰ The opening of the Roman historian Sallust’s *Bellum Catilinae* was recalled in this letter too, but the evocation of Julius Caesar here could appeal to the latter-day Caesar to whom this letter was addressed.⁵¹ While recognising that the conquistadors and missionary friars in New Spain had been aware of Tlacopan’s importance, Don Antonio emphasises that his own people were never in servitude in order to lend weight to his plea for Tlacopan to be relieved from tribute as far as possible, and to be allocated one of its former subject peoples [13] and for the *oppida* appropriated by Juan Cano to be returned [14].

Further narratives are then provided in support of the petition [15–17]. Opportunely calling attention to his own Christian name *Antonius Cortés*, the writer explains how his father Totoquihuatzin had rejoiced at the first arrival of the Spaniards: he sent gifts to them and received them in Tlacopan “with open arms” [*obuiis manibus*].⁵² The *tlatoani* had even invited Hernán

⁴⁹ Even the *Memorial de los pueblos*, compiled in Tlacopan, uses the sequence “Mexico, y Tezcuco, y Tlacupan” on all six occasions the three *altepetl* are named.

⁵⁰ Caesar, *Bellum gallicum* 1.1: “Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres...” (All of Gaul was divided into three parts...). The Paris 1543 Vascosanus edition of Caesar, *C. Iulii Caesaris rerum ab se gestarum commentarii de bello Gallico* was in the library of the convent of Santiago de Tlatelolco: Mathes 1982, 51.

⁵¹ See note 28 above. The echo of Sallust’s exhortation that men should not to go through life like cattle, comes earlier [7]: the men of Tlacopan worked so hard for Juan Cano that they had become “unmindful of the salvation of their souls, like cattle” (*immemores suae anime salutis veluti pecora*).

⁵² Erasmus *Adagia* 2.9.54 [1992, 111] noted the proverbial quality of “*obuiis manibus*” in Jerome, *Epistles* 53.11. The phrase in this letter “*et accedentes ad hoc nostrum oppidum obuiis manibus, vt dicitur, recepit*”, is mistranslated in Pérez-Rocha & Tena 2000, 175: “y cuando se acercaban a nuestro pueblo amenazados por los Manes, como a veces se dice, los acogió.” Domínguez Torres 2011 quotes the *Spanish* as the primary source and thus renders in English the fatal substitution of *Manes* (ancient Roman spirits of the dead) for *manus*

Cortés to destroy the temple of his gods, and to take from it anything he liked; he offered him his daughters as wives for the Spaniards; and he also asked for an alliance, in order to make war on the nations in Mexico which were hostile to him [16]. The welcome recalls that eventually given to Hernán Cortés by Xicontecatl, ruler of the Tlaxcaltecs, if not the confused reception provided by Montezuma.⁵³ None of the genealogies for Totoquihuatzin and his descendants supplied by chroniclers like Alvarado Tezozomoc or Chimalpahin indicate that he ever had any daughters.⁵⁴ Montezuma's daughters, on the other hand – the most prominent of whom was Isabel – did end up being married to Spaniards.⁵⁵ The claim that the *tlatoani* of Tlacopan was prepared to give up his own daughters to the Spaniards is a strategic fabrication, but it is an understandable choice of fabrication in the context of a letter complaining about the abuses inflicted upon the town by Isabel and her husband.

Don Antonio avers that he is quoting “the very words” [haec sunt quidem verba] which his father spoke to Cortés, although he was an infant when Totoquihuatzin first encountered the Spaniards and his account of that meeting cannot be based on any genuine recollection. The formulae used at the beginning and end of Totoquihuatzin's welcoming speech to the Captain strongly suggest that the whole episode was instead crafted as a fiction to win over the Emperor Charles:

Prosperissime veneris cum tuo exercitu sciasque nos tibi et ei cuius nomine venis esse paratos ad serviendum: et quem adoras deum eundem colam cum toto meo populo... Ceterum scias me nolle gerere bellum contra te et tuum exercitum, ne meus populus male pereat. [16]

(May your arrival with your army be most auspicious, and may you know that we are prepared to serve you, and the one in whose name you come. Along with my people I will worship the same god you praise... In any case, you should know that I have no wish to wage war against you and your army, lest my people come to a bad end.)

This is far more than a promise of co-operation with the invaders: the language attributed to the *tlatoani* is oddly consonant with the terms in

(hands): “every time they approached our town, threatened by the Manes [Mexicas] as sometimes they are called, he welcomed them.”

⁵³ Compare e.g. Cortés 1522, 66; and Xicontecatl's speech in Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Historia de la nación chichimeca* (1648), chapter 90 [1975: II, 236]. Restall, 2003, 77–99 surveys sources for the encounter between Cortés and Montezuma.

⁵⁴ Alvarado Tezozomoc 1598, sections 345–354 (1998, 168–170) – a text now attributed to Chimalpahin in Schroeder 2011 – names Totoquihuatzin's male successors.

⁵⁵ Chipman 2005, 53–95 provides a detailed account of the strategic marriages of Montezuma's daughters Isabel and Mariana, and of other descendants.

which the Spaniards were accustomed to express their demands to native groups when they first came upon them. Soldiers were obliged to recite a declaration known as the *Requerimiento* to the peoples they encountered in the New World, in order to assert Spain's sovereignty over their territories.⁵⁶ The natives were addressed "in the name of" the Pope and the Catholic monarchs; they were informed that they were "subjects or vassals of their Highnesses"; and they were enjoined to accept the Christian faith. Furthermore they were told that, should they fail to comply, they would be killed or enslaved and deprived of their property – and that they would be to blame for these losses. The missionaries also introduced themselves as representatives of the Pope and Holy Roman Emperor, albeit without the threats of violence or coercion.⁵⁷ Thus the script of Totoquihuatzin's oration, in which the ruler pledged to serve the Captain and "the one in whose name [he] came" and promised not to wage war against the Spaniards, indicates that its author was familiar with their protocols.

Don Antonio also explains how Totoquihuatzin and his people subsequently lent their support to the Spaniards:

his addo dictum meum patrem sepe prohibuisse Muntecuħomam mexici rectorem quo minus bellum gereret contra hispanos, tamen ipse mei patris admonitionem contemnens paravit bellum. Porro hispani fugientes mexicum transiuerunt per hunc populum meum quibus quoniam cum illis inerat amicitiam rursum res necessarias victui largitus est et eos liberauit fame ingenti qua consumebantur... [17]

(To that I add that my father was often said to have prevented Montezuma the ruler of Mexico from campaigning against the Spaniards, but in defiance of my father's warning he nonetheless prepared for war. What is more, the Spaniards fleeing Mexico passed through this community of mine, which, as it had already entered into an alliance with them, again supplied them with all the things they needed to survive, and freed them from the severe hunger which was devastating them...)

There are several narratives of how the Spaniards suffered heavy losses in the summer of 1520 as they escaped Tenochtitlan by night after the death of Montezuma, crossing the lake of Mexico on rope bridges whilst under heavy attack from the Aztecs – an event which became known as the *Noche Triste*.⁵⁸ In his letter of April 1522 Hernán Cortés related that he found his

⁵⁶ Hanke 1949; Williams 1992, 88–93; Restall 2003, 87–99.

⁵⁷ Compare the speech of the first Franciscan missionaries to the Mexica "priests of the idols" in Sahagún, *Coloquios* 1564, chapters 1–5 [1993: 63–69].

⁵⁸ The date and fatalities vary in different accounts: Cortés 1522, 139 gives 30th June 1520 and states 150 Spaniards and more than 2,000 indigenous allies were killed. Díaz del

men in Tlacopan after they reached dry land and was keen to lead them out to the countryside before they were attacked by the enemy pursuing them. The chronicles of López de Gómara and Bernal Díaz told the same story, adding that the Mexica were inciting the men of the town to fight the Spaniards. According to Díaz, they were being attacked by soldiers from Tlacopan as well as Azcapotzalco and Teniyocan from under the cover of high maize plants in fields nearby so that they wanted “to leave that town as soon as possible.”⁵⁹

Francisco Cervantes de Salazar drew from the accounts by Hernán Cortés and López de Gómara, but as he compiled his *Crónica de la Nueva España* in Mexico City, probably around 1560, he was also able to collect further reports and testimonies. Cervantes’ account of the Spaniards’ arrival in Tlacopan on the *Noche Triste* at least shows that there had been some debate about what happened there:

llegaron a Tacuba; los de la retroguarda, creyendo que Cortés, que iba en el avanguardia, reposara en los aposentos y casa del señor de aquella ciudad, se entraron en el aposento de la casa. En esto hay dos opiniones: la una es que llegando allí los nuestros, los mexicanos que venían en su seguimiento se volvieron, o porque estaban ya cansados de pelear, o porque no osaron entrar en términos ajenos, temiendo que los tacubenses les salieran al encuentro, porque rescibieron bien a los cristianos, de lo cual se quexaron mucho después los mexicanos dellos y los riñeron, porque en su pueblo no habían acabado de matar a los españoles. Esto dicen Motolinea y los tacubenses, cuyo guardián, después de convertidos, fue el dicho Motolinea, fraile franciscano y conquistador.

La verdad es, según las Memorias de muchos conquistadores, que los mexicanos los siguieron hasta allí, y mas de una legua adelante, que como era de noche, los tacubenses ni ayudaron ni dañaron. Los de la retroguarda, como vieron que Cortés no reposaba en los aposentos, sino que iba adelante, a toda furia salieron, por no perderle...⁶⁰

(They reached Tacuba: the Spaniards in the rearguard, believing that Cortés (who was in the vanguard) would rest in the lodgings and the house of the lord [Totoquiuhatzin] of that city, entered the guest

Castillo 1568–1575, chapter 128, followed López de Gómara 1552, chapter 110, in dating the *Noche Triste* to 10th July 1520: according to López, 450 Spaniards and 4,000 native allies perished. Compare Fernández de Oviedo (1557), Book 33, chapter 14, “Como huyó Cortés de México” (How Cortés fled Mexico”) and the dialogue staged with Juan Cano in chapter 54; Sahagún (1545–1590) Book 12, chapter 24 [1975: 67–9]. The chroniclers’ varying estimates of the losses are tabulated in Wagner 1944, 300.

⁵⁹ Díaz del Castillo 1568–1575, chapter 128.

⁶⁰ Cervantes de Salazar 1560, Book 4, chapter 125 [2:60].

accommodation of that house. About that there are two opinions: [1] One is that once our men arrived there the Mexica who were in pursuit of them turn around, either because they were tired of fighting by then or because they dared not enter foreign boundaries, fearing the Tacubans would come out to confront them because they gave a good welcome to Christians – something the Mexica among them afterwards complained about greatly and reproached them for not finishing off the slaughter of the Spaniards in their town. This is what Motolinía and the people of Tacuba say: their guardian, after they were converted, was that same Motolinía, a Franciscan friar and conqueror of souls.

[2] The truth is, on the testimony of many conquistadors that the Mexica followed the Spaniards as far as Tacuba, and more than a league beyond, and as it was night the Tacubans gave neither help nor hindrance. The Spaniards in the rearguard, once they realised Cortés was not resting in the accommodation but going on ahead, left in a frenzy not to lose him...)

The first opinion reported is consistent with what Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin had maintained and repeated in three of his letters in Spanish. Cervantes, however, contrasts that with the second opinion which he believed to be the truth: the people of Tacuba (Tlacopan) did nothing for the Spaniards on this occasion.

Alonso de Zorita, whose manuscript *Relación de la Nueva España* was completed in 1585, provided another description of the Spaniards' reception in Tlacopan after their flight from Tenochtitlan:

Y ordenó de parar en Tlacuba, que es la tierra firme fuera de todos los puentes, en el aposento de aquel pueblo, y así los dixo a todos... Mucha gente fue hasta llegar a Tacuba, y se metieron algunos en el aposento que Cortés había dicho y a todos los mataron allí. Y Cortés se había pasado sin parar en él. Y todo era maizales muy altos y muy llenos de gente y de allí salían los indios y mataban los españoles como iban huyendo y desbaratados.⁶¹

(And [Cortés] gave the order to stop in Tlacopan, the dry land at the end of all the causeways, in the lodgings in the town, and he said this to everyone... Many went on until they reached Tlacopan and some went into the lodging Cortés has spoken of, and there they killed them all. But Cortés went a long way ahead without stopping in the place. The place was full of high maize plantations full of men, who leapt out and killed the Spaniards as they were fleeing and in confusion.)

⁶¹ Zorita 1585, Part 3, chapter 28 [2:582–583]

This presentation of the Tlacopanecs as aggressive opponents of the Spaniards, apparently without any incitement, runs counter to Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin's presentation of his people as their firm allies who prevented Cortés' men from dying of starvation.⁶²

But one of Zorita's sources was none other than Juan Cano. The chronicler prefaced his *Relación* with a unique "Catalogue of Authors who have written Histories of the Indies or offered treatments of them." There the *encomendero* of Tlacopan was described as follows:

Juan Cano, natural de Cáceres, que fue casado con una hija de Moctençuma, escribió una Relación de aquella tierra y de su conquista, y se halló en ella, y así por esto, como por respecto de su muger, le encomendó Hernando Cortés muy buenos repartimientos de pueblos de indios...⁶³

(Juan Cano, born in Cáceres, who was married to a daughter of Montezuma, wrote a *Relación* about that land [New Spain] and its conquest, and he took part in it, and so because of that and out of respect for his wife, Hernan Cortés entrusted him with very generous allocations of the Indians' towns...)

No other author mentions Juan Cano's own memoir of the conquest, but Zorita refers to it on several occasions in his work and states he had access to the manuscript.⁶⁴ Rodrigo Martínez Baracs has argued that the tenor of Cano's lost *Relación* could be reconstructed from Zorita's own *Relación de la Nueva España*, particularly when elements of his narrative are not apparent in the other sources he used.⁶⁵ This could bear on Zorita's characterisation of Tlacopan's role in the *Noche Triste*. So too might the fact that he never cites Cervantes de Salazar's *Crónica de la Nueva España* (even though Cervantes is named in the prefatory Catalogue). Irrespective of when Juan Cano produced his *Relación* and of whether its existence was ever known in New Spain, it is likely that those governing Tlacopan in the mid-1500s had cause to be concerned about how Cano and others were presenting the town's role in the conquest more generally. The historical claims made in the latter part of Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin's letter,

⁶² An indigenous view of events contemporary with Cortés Totoquihuatzin's letter is in line with Zorita's opposing account: the pictorial narrative of the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (note 36 above) usually dated to 1552 shows, at cell 19, the Spaniards being attacked at Tlacopan. Kranz 2001 is a detailed survey of the versions of the *Lienzo*.

⁶³ Zorita 1585, "Catálogo de los autores" [1:112].

⁶⁴ The manuscript is mentioned in Zorita 1585, Part III, *Proemio* [2:413]. The entry for Juan Cano from the *Catálogo* quoted above goes on to reveal Zorita met Cano's grandson when he was on business in Granada for his father, Gonzalo Cano who succeeded Juan Cano as *encomendero* of Tlacopan.

⁶⁵ Martínez Baracs 2007.

fanciful as they may be, would have been an expedience to counteract detrimental testimonies from Juan Cano and others.⁶⁶

On the other hand Don Antonio's report of Totoquihuatzin's death the following year – "meus pater fuit mortuus non quidem bello sed infirmitate quadam" (my father had died, by no means in battle but of an illness) [17] – would be endorsed: Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl recorded that the ruler perished in a smallpox epidemic.⁶⁷ But the next event related, towards the very end of the letter, is not corroborated anywhere:

Transeunte vno anno hispani redierunt mexicum contra quos ne bellum inirent mexicani eos obnixe alij filij patris mei qui mihi erant fratres, monuerunt, qui pro bono malum recipientes occissi sunt a mexicanis, quorum vnus vocabatur tepanecatintli, alter tlacatecalzintli. [17]

(One year went by and the Spaniards returned to Mexico, and the Mexicans were strenuously warned not to enter into a war against them by my father's other sons who were my brothers. Receiving an evil return for their good deed they were killed by the Mexicans: one was called Tepanecatintli, and the other Tlacatecalzintli.)

There are no other testimonies that Totoquihuatzin had sons with those names. The heir of Totoquihuatzin as king of Tlacopan was widely identified as Tetelepantquetzatzin (or Tetepanquetzal): Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl would describe how Tetelepantquetzatzin had formed an alliance against the Spaniards with Cuauhtemoc, Montezuma's successor as leader of the Mexica, and with Cohuanacoch, *tlatoani* of Texcoco.⁶⁸ After the fall of Tenochtitlan, the three *tlatoque* were captured by Hernán Cortés. In a letter of 3 September 1526 to Charles V, the Captain explained that he had taken these leaders "who appeared prone to cause instability or revolt in those regions" with him on his 1524 expedition to Honduras. After receiving intelligence from a native informer that Cuauhtemoc, Cohuanacoch, Tetelepantquetzatzin and "a certain Tacatelz" were plotting to kill him and the other Spaniards on the journey, Cortés had Cuauhtemoc and Tetelepantquetzatzin hanged as the instigators.⁶⁹ Cortés' letter of 1526 was

⁶⁶ The exploration of the ways different groups in New Spain told stories which competed with the "canonic narratives" in Megged 2010, 184–248 could bear on Cortés Totoquihuatzin's construction of parallel realities, but his fabrications had an evident strategic purpose.

⁶⁷ Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1648, ch. 90 [2:236]. Gibson 1964a, 171 on the other hand implies the *tlatoani* met a violent end ("Totoquihuatzin was killed in the conquest") but does not give a source.

⁶⁸ Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1648, chapter 91 [1975, 2: 242–243].

⁶⁹ Cortes 1526 [1866: 420]: "aquel Guateumucin, é Guanacaxín, señor que fué de Tezcuco, y Tetepanqueçal, señor que fué de Tacuba, y un Tacatelz, que á la sazón era en

not printed until the nineteenth century but several early sources tell a similar story, and confirm that Tetelepantquetzatzin was executed with Cuauhtemoc and Cohuanacoch.⁷⁰

The names Don Antonio gives for his brothers, *Tepanecatzintli* and *Tlacatecalzintli*, have some resemblance to those of the conspirators identified by Hernán Cortés as *Tetepanqueçal*, lord of Tacuba, and *Tacatelz*.⁷¹ Don Antonio's use of different but similar sounding names in the Latin letter enables his revisionist narrative to compete with different accounts without flatly contradicting them. His intention may even have been to bamboozle his reader – the very emperor to whom the conquistador had recounted his version of events twenty five years before. Alternatively, *Tepanecatzintli* and *Tlacatecalzintli* could have existed and there is no other record of them: in that case the phrase “*alij filij patris mei qui mihi erant fratres*”, (my father's other sons who were my brothers), would signal that Totoquihuatzin had had two further sons in addition to Tetelepantquetzatzin. Whatever the truth of the matter may be, it remains the case that Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin had at least one brother who was put to death by the very conquistador from whom he took his own Spanish name.

4. Conclusions

In seeking relief from the abuses of the *encomendero* Juan Cano, the letter surveyed above was not simply promoting the interests of Nahuas or “Indians” *vis à vis* the Spaniards. It was asserting the distinctive prestige and patrimony of the town of Tlacopan. The letter's closing narration laid emphasis on the stature of the *altepetl* before the conquest and, more questionably, on its support of the Spaniards against the Mexica, offering a contrast to details presented in other primary sources for the conquest of Mexico and its aftermath.

esta ciudad de Méjico en la parte de Tatlulco, habían hablado muchas veces y dado cuenta dello á este Mexicalcingo, que... les habia parecido que era buen remedio tener manera como me matasen á mí y á los que conmigo iban...” (This Cuauhtemoc, and Cohuanacoch, who was ruler of Texcoco, and Tetelepantquetzatzin, ruler of Tlacopan, and a certain Tacatelz, who was at the time in the city of Mexico in the Tlatelolco area, had spoken many times recounting to Mexicalcingo that... it had seemed to them the best solution was to arrange to kill me and those travelling with me...). My translation here standardises Cortés' versions of the Nahuatl names.

⁷⁰ Restall 2003, 147–53 is an overview of some of the different accounts

⁷¹ “Tacatelz” looks more an approximation of *tlācatēuctli* (patron) a Nahuatl title for a noble: see further Piho 1972. Cortés' Nahuatl nomenclature was far from precise as is evident from the quotation in note 69 above.

Independent testimonies of Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin's religious zeal, his receipt of a coat of arms and his election as *gobernador* and Rector of his polity all reflect the Nahua ruler's orientation and standing as a Christian and as a loyal Spanish subject. At the same time, the *copilli* or crown and the floral emblem for Tlacopan and other pre-Hispanic signs incorporated into that coat of arms, signalled the distinctive identity of its bearer. The intrusion of aristocratic Nahuatl speaking style into the Latin letter (in conjunction with the potential ironization of Charles V's zeal for war in the name of religion) delicately hinted at this too. The letter itself offered a further revelation of the extensive humanist training its writer had received. Given that Castilian had long been the prevalent language for official documents and communications to the Spanish crown, it remains to explain why this one letter by Don Antonio and a handful of others by other educated Nahuas, were composed in Latin.

Such accomplishment provided powerful proof of an author's humanity in the fullest sense: Latinity, like literacy, had been invoked as evidence of the Indians' capacity to be civilised or to profess the Christian faith.⁷² That ideological consideration best explains why some texts by native Mexicans were composed in or even translated into Latin.⁷³ Latin or *gramática* also had a special status because it was regarded, not as the source of the "natural" and therefore corruptible vernaculars, but as an artificial medium refined from them, which provided the basis for systematising and explaining other languages, including those of the New World.⁷⁴ This happens to be illustrated by Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin's use of Latin to explain some Nahuatl, Taíno and even Spanish words not known in peninsular Spain. In addition, the writer was able to take advantage of knowledge of rhetorical techniques which could be acquired only through a humanist education or the reading of manuals of rhetoric or epistolography produced in Latin. It is true that the *dispositio* of the letter, the style of the *salutatio* and the elegant oration ascribed to Totoquihuatzin could all have been deployed in the vernacular, but such features are not found in the Spanish letters written by Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin – and the same

⁷² Garcés, *De habilitate et capacitate gentium* (1537) maintained that pre-Hispanic Mexicans were literate and highlighted the native youths' competence in Latin to argue the Indians were not barbarians and could adopt the Christian faith: Laird 2014b, 194–201.

⁷³ A 1541 suit to Charles V by Pedro de Moteuczoma [Montezuma] and Badiano 1552 (see note 42 above), appears to be a translation from Nahuatl into Latin: Laird 2014a, 152–155.

⁷⁴ Caruso and Laird 2009, 14–15 on Latin as an artificial medium; Percival 2004 and Laird 2012 consider the role of Latin grammar in *artes* (manuals) of Amerindian languages.

divergence in practice between Latin and Castilian letters is found in the correspondence of Franciscans in the same period.⁷⁵

Another consideration applies to this case at least. The letter surveyed here recalled a number of pagan and Christian writings, but only the Book of Job was cited by name. The echoes and evocations of other Latin sources were far easier to recognise in a letter which was itself in Latin than they would have been if they had been given in Spanish.⁷⁶ Phrases in Latin could have been incorporated into a Spanish text, but the incongruity would have impaired the fluency of the composition. On the other hand, a Nahua writer with a Christian humanist education had little knowledge of *vernacular* literature with which to embellish such an appeal in Spanish. Writing in Latin was the best way for Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin to imbue his words with a deeper significance: he could seamlessly accommodate classical or biblical references, some of which even hinted at parallels between European and Mexican traditions. The purpose was, after all, to reassure, impress, and to win over the emperor to whom his letter was addressed.

5. Transcription

The inconsistent orthography of the original has been retained. In particular it is worth noting that *tlacubam* [13] and *tlacubae* [15] are used for Tlacopan, in addition to the uninflected *tlacoban* in [1] and [20]; likewise *tlacubanenses* [12] is employed as well as *tlacopanenses* [3] and *tlacopanensem* [4]: Nahuatl pronunciation made no distinction between the vowels *o* and *u* or between the unvoiced *p* and the voiced *b* (which did not exist in classical Nahuatl).⁷⁷ The text below also reproduces the paragraphing and punctuation of the 1552 manuscript and Roman numerals indicate where the each of the five unnumbered pages of the manuscript begins. When conjectures or corrections have been made, the original letters or *lacunae* in the 1552 manuscript are in footnotes along with the readings of Zimmermann and Pérez-Rocha & Tena. For ease of reference the text is presented in twenty numbered sections.

⁷⁵ There is such a contrast between the numerous Spanish letters and the few written in Latin by Fray Juan de Zumárraga, Bishop of Mexico from 1528 until 1548: García Icazbalceta 1947 vols. 2–4.

⁷⁶ Erasmus 1522 [1971, 317] remarks (on the *exordium* of a letter): “Quin Maronis ingenium potius imitemur in alienis asciscendis, vt non aliunde corrogata, sed domi nostrae nata videantur” (In borrowing from others we should imitate Virgil’s talent, so that things appear to be home-grown rather than gathered from somewhere else.)

⁷⁷ Launey, 2011, 3–8.

[I]

1. S[acre] C[atholice], C[esaree] Majestati Antonius cortes Rector
populi de tlacoban omnesq[ue] alij conciuēs humile ser-
uitium impendunt.

Tam alta est tua Celsitudo, atque cesarea majestas, Cesar invictissime, vt vbique gentium non tam imperium longe lateque patens, quam illa tui animi *Xpianitas* per omnium ora sonet in finesque orbis terrę divulgetur; ac non supremi imperij fidissimum custodem solum, sed & *Xpianae* fidei, defensorem optimum esse, atque acerrimum propugnatorem contra vel gentilium vel hereticorum incursus omnes affirmant.⁷⁸ Quo fit, vt in te verissimum illa sancti Job comprobemus: Nimirum Militiam hominis vitam esse super terram:⁷⁹ quippe tuum studium eo semper tendere videtur, quo gentes barbaras, ethnicos et demonum cultores, dei denique inimicos oppugnes, ac e tenebris in lucem *Xpianorum* pellucidam in ipsum scilicet iusticiae solem,⁸⁰ qui *Xpus* omnium seruator est, educas, hosque victos pacifices, illustres, *Xpo* tandem lucrifacias.

2. Quam Rem in nobis es foelicissime operatus, qui vbi per tuos hispanos, demonum agmen horrendum profligasti, et *Xpianismum* introduxisti, nostram hanc prouinciam, pace, ac quiete summa collocasti, quae etsi majorum nostrorum stragem, bonorum temporalium jacturam non minimam doleat, tamen tuum immortale beneficium agnoscit quam humillime. Magna que ex parte sum[m]um et illud sane ineffabile gaudium nobis prouenit quod tibi vt pote imperatori inuictissimo, humanissimo, ac denique *Xpianissimo* subjectos esse sciamus. Id quod consolationi maximae nobis est, nosque bono esse animo iubet, nec certe est, cur timeamus, literis cum tua cesarea majestate agere. Nam etsi abjectissimae conditionis homines censeamur, nulliusque precii apud hispanos videamur, tua tamen illa saepe experta lenitas, et animi candor, amorque vnicus, quem erga indigenas hactenus gessisti et geris, et te gesturum speramus, quo nostras causas atque nostri afflictiones, literis, jam postquam non datur veras audire et reddere voces declaremus cogere videtur. 3. Age ergo, pientissime imperator, nobis tuas patientissimas aures accommodare digneris, cum in dies nos gemamus ob ingentia grauamina quae nobis ex immoderatis tributis, et seruitiis multis prouenire constat, quibus nos jndi atterimur omnes, sed maxime nos tlacopanenses, quibuscum agitur pejus, miserius iniquisque, quam vt excogitari possit. Quam Rem numquam nobis est

⁷⁸ *ōēs affirmēt*: addendum in left margin of ms.

⁷⁹ Job 7:1: militia est vita hominis super terram et sicut dies mercennarii dies eius.

⁸⁰ *Missa votiva BVM Vultum* tuum: sol iustitiae, Christus Deus noster; Malachi 4:2 et orietur vobis timentibus nomen meum sol iustitiae.

datum declarare tuo sacro isti senatui, tum ob loci intercapedinem tum ob nullam nunciorum potestatem. Porro nacti temporis opportunitatem, fidissimumque quorundam Religiosorum auxilium non omissimus quo minus literis istis explicarem nostrarum miseriarum congeriem quam hic plorantes describimus, ea potissimum est de afflictione que e tributis, evenit quam, obsecramus, parumper equo animo accipere ne grauare:

4. ¶Ante omnia asserimus nullum alium populum tributorum multitudine premi vehementer quam nostrum populum tlacopanensem, qui a nostro commendatorio nomine Joanne Cano hactenus est grauatus tributis superfluis quae quotannis tribuimus, ab eo non solum sed etiam a filia moteçoma quam in vxorem habuit, que etsi nostri sanguinis nostrae que patriae fuit, tamen adeo ab humanitate aliena fuit vt pietatis loco et naturalis amoris quo sese vnus terrae et gentis homines amant, tyrannidem exercuerit: et nos qui a preclaris et nobilibus patribus sumus orti, loco seruorum tenuerit. 5. Vtrique [III] horum octogesimo quoque die tribuimus sexcenta argenteorum pondo, viginti vestes, quas nauas, totidem vestes quas vipiles nostri vocant hispani, et sindones viriles totidem, ac etiam totidem indica femoralia que hic apud nos vulgo mastiles appellantur. Preterea, quolibet die damus quinque gallinas indicas, quarum unaqueque stat duobus argenteis, et octo frumentorum onera, quorum vnum quodque duobus valet argenteis, etiam atque etiam nonnulla fructuum genera que a nobis summo sudore queruntur⁸¹, comparanturque⁸² sex argenteis. His addimus quatuor coturnices quas etiam duobus argenteis emimus, Necnon et ducentas placentulas nomine apud nos tortillas, onera lignorum etiam sex damus, et pabulorum decem, carbonum duo grandja onera, vnum fasciculum tedarum quas ocote vocant, candelas tres nigras seu huius terrae. Haec quidem omnia singulis diebus tribuimus. Infine autem cuiuslibet anni, mille frumentorum mensuras que hanegas vocantur, et semper quolibet anno, colimus duos agros pregrandes quibus colendis maxima fit populo afflictio.

6. ¶Dictus Ioannes Cano minime Contentus his duos hispanos locavit sibi custodes, vnum in suis hortis, alterum in suis prediis que sunt estanciae, quorum vnicuique vnoquoque die vnam gallinam damus precio duorum argenteorum, vnum lignorum onus, pipera multa que axi dicuntur, dimidiam partem vnus orbis salis, et ducentas placentas, denique his cum Joanne Cano quasi tribus comendarijs seruimus:

⁸¹ 1552: querutur [sc. quaeruntur]

⁸² 1552: comparatur

7. ¶Nec his rebus fit satis illi, verum etiam viginti homines in sua domo seruiunt, qui sunt presto ad ejus jussa capescenda, quindecim etiam seruiunt in suis hortis, totidem occupandis in custodiendis ouibus et capris. Qui quidem homines in tantum labori seu potius seruituti addicuntur vt diebus festis et dominicis nec sacrum nec concionem, nec doctrinam XPianam quam discendam a nobis obnixissime iubet, audire sinantur minime; itaque immemores suae anime salutis veluti pecora in montibus semper agunt atque in hortis.⁸³ Etsi negotium quod illis est iniunctum non diligenter agunt, suis vestibis spoliantur, et quam pessime tractantur.

8. ¶Preterea, illis que taxata sunt in moderatione tributorum nobis concessa non est contentus, verum alia multa sua propria autoritate exegit atque eflagitauit a nostro populo. De qua re nos fuimus conquesti apud hunc senatum quem habent Illustrissimus Prorex dns. Iodouicus de velasco ac ceteri tui consiliarii, quibus nostris afflictionem audientibus et volentibus nos tributorum aliqua parte relevare, Dictus Joannes⁸⁴ Cano minime acquiescit, neque iusticiam quam nobis faciunt admittit, sed negotium totum et causam ad tuam cesaream maiestatem deferre vult, vt isthic terminetur et finiatur per istum senatum. Quod quidem si facit, erit nobis maximo incommodo atque grauamine. Nam non poterimus isthuc adesse ob penuriam rerum maximam & loci intercapedinem quam maxime longam. Quamobrem supplicibus verbis petimus, vt, si isthic es finienda Causa nostra, fiat nobis tributorum noua moderatio que conformis sit nostrae pauperie et numero nostri populi qui non attingere potest tria millia hominum etiam pueros numerando, ceterum oramus vt que preter moderationem tribus accepit Joannes tuo iussu restituat.

9. ¶Insuper non tantum excessit tributorum moderationem, sed etiam in tribus locis a nobis accepit, idque contra nostram voluntatem tres agros pregrandes latitudine sed maxima longitudine, vbi hortos fecit. In vno quidem atotoc nomine, parietes altos et domus multas easdem quas superbas construximus multo sumptu pecuniarum nostrarum: pro quibus faciendis ne vnum quidem numisma soluit, et genera arborum que in eo plantauimus, nos ipsi quesiuimus, et plantauimus et nutriuimus maximo labore. Hunc quidem hortum possederat prior maritus dominae ysabel filiae moteçoma supra dictae: quo mortuo successit Joannes Cano et factus ejus maritus mordicus tenuit et tenet, et nobis eum petentibus respondet hunc agrum seu hortum

⁸³ Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 1.1: Omnis homines, qui sese student praestare ceteris animalibus, summa ope niti decet, ne vitam silentio transeant veluti pecora, quae natura prona atque ventri oboedientia finxit. Sed nostra omnis vis in animo et corpore sita est.

⁸⁴ 1552: Joanes

sue mulierj deberi a suo patre moteçoma jure hereditario. Quod quidem quam falsum [III] sit plurimi testantur. Atque eam ob rem amore quem ad Deum +patrem nostrum⁸⁵+ geris iubeas nobis concedi cum omnibus domibus factis a nobis.⁸⁶

10. ¶ In altero vt pote in agro nomine tetlolinca, quem abhinc octodecim annis accepit Joannes Cano, plantauit vites multas: quem quando accepit vtens dolo haec verba nobis proposuit seu potius dedit. Scitis hispanos esse cupidissimos terrarum, atque ideo ne hunc hunc agrum, vbi genera florum multa habetis, a vobis accipiant in eo plantabo vites causa conservandi eum: et quicquid fructus terra produxerit mihi vobiscum commune erit; et ager ipse semper vestri iuris sicut hactenus erit. haec quidem dixit, tamen iam permultos annos dictum agrum possidet et non modo non ipsum agrum restituit, sed nec fructus terrae. Petimus ergo summopere vt hic ager malicia quada[m] acceptus nobis reddatur, cum is iuste nostro dominio debeatur.

11. ¶ In vltimo loco nomine tepetlapan manet quidam ager minime sterilis, vbi multas arbores plantauimus et parietes altos circumduximus. Hunc quidem agrum iniustissime acceptum Joannes Cano abhinc iam quatuordecim annis volens ire in hispaniam vendidit cuidam hispano nomine Joanni de Burgos, pro quo millia et ducenta pondo auri recepit. Petimus hunc etiam iussu tuae sacrae maiestatis nobis reddi cum iure ad nos pertineat quam ad Joannem Canum.

12. ¶ Audisti clementissime rex, nos tlacubanenses non modo multitudine tributorum grauari, sed et priuari nostris agris et alijs multis possessionibus. Nec locus esse videtur dicendi impresentiarum quot quantosque agros a nostro populo hispani acceperint et accipiant modo vbi vel hortos vel praedia faciant. Beneficium ergo nobis immortale fuerit idque quam maxime contendimus vt que tributa hactenus dedimus dicto Joanni Cano et suae vxori filiae mutecuçome, posthac sacrae maiestati demus et nos nostraque omnia in numero tuorum seruorum, qui tibi seu officialibus tuis tributa soluunt, habere digneris, et quod a tua pietate obtinere malumus est vt moderata sint omnia tributa et seruitia, que impendimus et vt id rectius fieri possit, oramus tuam clementiam, vt vix certe xrianus et probus nec non et Indorum amans Jacobus Ramirez Visitator tuus mandato tuo ad nos veniat et proprijs oculis et tributa et seuitia videat, vt ipse iuxta nostrum modum post tandem tributa moderetur et populum nostrum seruitijs superfluis releuet,

⁸⁵ 1552: ad deum p[]um ge[]is iubeas. Zimmermann: ad deum patrem nostrum generis iubeas. Perez-Rocha & Tena 2000: ad deum purum geris iubeas

⁸⁶ 1552: domibus deo factis a nobis

qui et videat an praedia omnia, dico estantia et horti omnes in nostro oppido manentes recte possideantur ab hispanis et a nostro Commendatorio Joanne Cano. Demum vt ipse iusticiam rectissimam nobis faciat. Qua in re vnicum nobis beneficium futurum est.

13. ¶ Hic nonnulla adijcere licet quibus nostrum statum pristinum intelligas quibusque suasus facile nobis concedas que efflagitamus. primo quidem certiore facimus tuam excelentissimam maiestatem has indias antiquis in temporibus fuisse diuisas in tres partes nimirum mexicum, tlacubam, et tetzococum atque ex consequenti tres dominos seu rectores habuisse qui dominabantur aliorum populorum circumiacentium. Id quidem cum notum sit hispanis impugnatoribus harum Indiarum et potissimum religiosis, qui nobis sanctum Catholicam fidem declarauerunt, non est quod pluribus exponamus. Quoniam igitur noster populus nunquam seruiuit quin potius illi seruitus magna impensa est ab alijs: maximo nobis grauamini est quod tam immoderata soluamus quotannis et (quod peius est) priuemur nostris terris et alijs possessionibus. Eam ob causam genibus flexis oramus vt nos tributis maxime releues et si fieri potest, vnum ex populis qui seruiebant nobis, nostro dominio ascribas, vt vel nos iuuet in dandis tributis, vel nostrae pauperiei succurrat.

14. Hic silentio praetereundum non est dictum Joannem Canum a nobis segregasse⁸⁷ tria oppida seu estancias vnam capoloac, aliam ocoyacac, tertiam tepeuexoyocam, que antiquis in temporibus ad nos pertinebant. Eas inquit Joannes Cano a tua inuictissima maiestate obtinuisse vt seorsum [IV] seruirent et nobiscum vna minime soluerent tributa tamen cum hinc versus hispaniam est profectus dixit se illas petiturum a tuo senatu vt simul daremus tributa. Digneris mandare Joanni Cano vt illas seorsum non habeat, sed simul annua tributa soluamus, quo mutuo nos releuemus tributis.

15. ¶ Reliquum significo omni subiectione⁸⁸ et reuerentia ego tuus cliens humilis Anthonius Cortes meum patrem nomine totoquiuhatzin fuisse presentem et rectorem huius tlacubae tempore belli hispanorum qui sciens hispanos tuos cum domino Marchione Del valle iam venisse gauissus est impendio et illis non nulla munera misit et accedentes ad hoc nostrum oppidum obuiss⁸⁹ manibus, vt dicitur,⁹⁰ recepit et res necessarias eis affatim ministravit. Et sequentia verba Marchioni proposuit.

⁸⁷ 1552: segregase

⁸⁸ 1 Tim. 2, 11: in omni subiectione

⁸⁹ 1552: obiis

⁹⁰ Jerome, *Epistles* 53.11: obuiss manibus

16. Prosperrime veneris cum tuo exercitu sciasque nos tibi et ei cuius nomine venis esse paratos ad serviendum: et quem adoras deum eundem colam cum toto meo populo: Ecce tibi fanum deorum meorum destrue et ingredi illud et quicquid in eo inuentum tibi placuerit accipe et vtere. Praeterea hic sunt filiae meae quas in vxores ducere possunt tui qui tecum veniunt vt e vobis nepotes et neptes nostras habeamus. Caeterum scias me nolle⁹¹ gerere bellum contra te et tuum exercitum, ne meus populus male pereat, sed quod magis volo est quoniam sunt multae gentes mihi inimicae nunquam a me expugnatae maximum mihi iuuamen fuerit si omnes nos debellemus. Haec sunt quidem verba, inuictissime imperator que meus pater proposuit Marchioni, nec credas hec omnia a veritate abhorre cum hec cum⁹² hispani tum Jndi testentur.

17. his addo dictum meum patrem sepe prohibuisse Muntecuçomam mexici rectorem quo minus bellum gereret contra hispanos, tamen ipse mei patris admonitionem contemnens parauit bellum. Porro hispani fugientes mexicum transiuerunt per hunc populum meum quibus quoniam cum illis inierat amicitiam rursus res necessarias victui largitus est et eos liberavit fame ingenti qua consumebantur vltiusque progressi sunt post quorum recessum meus pater fuit mortuus non quidem bello sed infirmitate quadam. Transeunte vno anno hispani redierunt mexicum contra quos ne bellum inirent mexicani eos obnixae alij filij patris mei qui mihi erant fratres, monuerunt, qui pro bono malum recipientes occisi sunt a mexicanis, quorum vnus vocabatur tepanecatztintli, alter tlacatecalztintli. **18.** Ex quibus omnibus colliges meos fratres mortem obijisse propter tuos hispanos et meum p[at]rem te recepisse vt pote dominum nec tibi in aliquo contra dixisse, quin potius tuis semper seruasse ac perinde tibi. His omnibus fretus audeo implorare tuum auxilium ne ergo patere nos grauari tributis sed iube vt ad tuum imperium pertineat hic noster populus et minime ad Joannem Cano et filiam Muntehuçcome et horum filios a quibus sit satis nos perpeccos fuisse ea que mala nobis intulerunt. Quo mentio facta de hispanis habeatur vera hic subijcio testium nomina que sunt Melchior Vasquez, Joannes Çacancatl, Gaspar tlacateuhtli, Balthasar, Benedictus, Thoribius, et alij multi homines hi omnes sunt Jndi, hispani vero sunt qui sequuntur Bernardinus De tapia.

19. Et vt quae petimus in summa sint dicta, paucis Repitimus. primum et precipuum est, vt que tributa damus Joanni Cano, demus, tuae sacrae maiestati. 2^m. vt Visitator Jacobus Ramirez nostrum visitet populum, et taxet

⁹¹ 1552: nolle

⁹² tum

omnia tributa 3^m. vt Agros a Joanne et alijs hispanis acceptos jubeas nobis reddi: & qui in nostro oppido manent praedia quae nobis relinquunt. Vltimum vt quae extra tributorum moderationem accepit Joannes nobis restituat et premium laboris nostri quem habuimus in edificandis domibus quas non tenebamur construere, soluat nobis. Dat. Mexici & tlacoban, Kalendis decembris 1552 asj⁹³

20.	antonius cortes	
	melchior vasquez	geronymo de suero
[V]	joannes çacancatl	benedictus thoribius
	Petrus de santamaria	Jacobus Gaspar tla- cateuctli
	martinus	balthasar xolotecatl michael

6. English Translation

[I] To your Holy, Catholic and Caesarean Majesty, Antonio Cortés, Ruler of the people of Tlacoban and all other fellow citizens render humble service.

1. So lofty is your eminence and Caesarean majesty, most invincible Caesar, that among peoples everywhere the Christian quality of your soul, as well as your empire stretching far and wide, sounds on the lips of all and is proclaimed to the ends of the earth; and all men affirm that you are not only the most faithful guardian of the highest empire, but also the best defender of the Christian religion and the most vigorous champion against the incursions of pagans and heretics; this has led us to commend those words of the holy prophet Job as very true in your case, without any doubt: “The

⁹³ “así” (thus): hispanism.

life of man upon earth is warfare,⁹⁴ since your exertions seem always to be directed to fighting against barbarous peoples, pagans and worshippers of devils, in the end against God's enemies, then leading them from the darkness to the clear light possessed of Christians, indeed to that very Sun of Righteousness which is Christ, saviour of all, and to pacifying them once conquered, enlightening them, and at last winning them for Christ.⁹⁵ **2.** To this end you have laboured very happily among us: by the agency of your own Spaniards you have overthrown the dreadful army of devils, introduced Christianity, and with the utmost peace and tranquility given order to our province which has the humblest recognition of your immortal kindness, even though it grieved at the slaughter of our elders and at the very great loss of our worldly wealth. To a large degree our knowledge that we are subject to the most invincible, the most humane and in fact most Christian of emperors, is the source of a great and clearly inexpressible joy to us. This is a thing which is of very great reassurance to us, it bids us be in good spirits as we certainly have no reason to be afraid of engaging in correspondence with your Caesarean majesty. For though we may be judged to be humans of the lowest condition and may seem to be of no worth in the eyes of Spaniards, your oft-proven gentleness, open-mindedness and the singular affection which you have so far shown and still show to native people, and which we hope you will show again, seems to compel us to declare our pleas and afflictions in writing, now we are no longer granted the opportunity to hear and respond to your actual words in person.

3. So then, most pious of Emperors, deign to lend us your most patient ears, since from one day to another we are groaning because of the huge and weighty burdens which, it is recognised, come upon us from excessive tribute and much servitude by which all we Indians are worn down, but especially we Tlacopanecs, for whom conditions are worse, more wretched and unfair than could be imagined. This was a matter which it was not granted to us to declare to your sacred Council, because of the remoteness of its location and because we had no power to send delegates.⁹⁶ Wherefore benefiting from the opportunity of the moment and from the very loyal support of certain friars, we have not failed to set out in this letter the mass of misfortunes which we lament as we describe them here, the most pressing of which is the hardship which has resulted from the tribute. We beg you to hear us briefly on this subject and not be aggrieved:

⁹⁴ See note 31 above.

⁹⁵ See notes 32, 33 and 36 above.

⁹⁶ *tuo sacro isti senatui* (To your sacred Council). The Council of the Indies established formally in 1524 had been conducted in Valladolid in 1550–1551.

4. Before all else, we affirm that no other people is so fiercely oppressed by such a multitude of tributes as our people of Tlacopan, which up to now has been burdened with excessive annual payments by our *encomendero*, Juan Cano by name – and not only by him but also by Montezuma’s daughter whom he took for a wife. Even though she was of our own blood and native land, she was herself so remote from humanity that instead of the duty and natural love which men of the same race and country usually show to each other, she exercised tyranny and kept us in the position of slaves, when we were born from renowned and noble parents. 5. To each of these two, [III] every eighty days, we pay six hundred silver pesos, twenty garments which the Spaniards call *naguas*, the same number of what our people call *huipiles*, the same number of finely woven male garments, and the same number again of Indian loincloths, which among us here are commonly named *mastiles*.⁹⁷ In addition, on any day, we give five Indian hens, each one of which costs two silver pesos, and eight weights of grain each worth two silver pesos, and over and above that, very many types of fruit which are sought with the greatest of effort and bought for six silver pesos. To those things we have to add four partridges which we actually buy for two silver pesos, and furthermore two hundred of the little pancakes we name *tortillas*; we also give six loads of wood, ten of fodder, two large loads of charcoal, a bundle of the pitchpine torches which are called *ocote*, three black candles which are of this land. So we pay all these things as tribute each day. And at the end of every year we give a thousand measures of grain which are called *hanegas*, and always in any given year we cultivate two huge fields, the cultivation of which is a very great hardship imposed on the people.

6. The aforementioned Juan Cano, not happy with this, positioned one of his two Spanish guards in his gardens, and the other on the farms which are his estates. To each of them on each day we give one hen worth two silver pesos, one weight of wood, many peppers which are called *axi*, half of a wheel of salt, and two hundred tortillas, so that we provide service to these men along with Juan Cano, as if we had three *encomenderos*.

7. Not even those provisions are enough for him, as twenty men serve in his house ready to take his orders, another fifteen provide service in his gardens, and the same number are employed in guarding his sheep and goats. Those men are bound to so much work – or rather servitude – that on holy days and Sundays they are hardly ever allowed to heed sacred rites, services or

⁹⁷ See notes 45–46 above on the terms introduced here.

the Christian doctrine which you very strenuously bid us learn, and so they are unmindful of the salvation of their souls, rather like the cattle they are always tending in the mountains and enclosures. And if they do not diligently go about this work which has nothing to do with them, they are robbed of their clothes and treated in the worst way possible.

8. What is more, he is not happy about what is calculated and granted to us in the rating of our tributes –he has actually used his own authority to exact and demand forcefully many other things from our people. We had complained about that matter before the council held by the most illustrious Viceroy Don Luis de Velasco and your other councillors who heard of our hardship and wanted to relieve us of our tribute to some degree. But the said Juan Cano does not at all assent, nor does he accept the judgments they are making, but wants to refer the whole business and the plea to your Caesarean majesty, to be concluded and settled by your Council.⁹⁸ It will cause us great hardship and trouble if he indeed does this, as we will be unable to attend, owing to the great scarcity of our resources and to the distance of the location, which is as far away as it could possibly be. For that reason with our humble words we ask, if our case is to be settled there, that the new rate of our tribute may be made in line with our poverty and the number of our community, which cannot come near three thousand men, even counting the boys. We also plead that Juan may, at your bidding, return what he has received that is above the rate for three thousand people.

9. What is more not only has he gone beyond the rate for our tributes, but he has also received from us in three locations – and this against our will – three fields colossal in breadth and also great in length, which he has made into gardens. In fact, in one of them named Atotoc we built high walls and many lofty houses, spending a lot of our own money: he did not spend a single coin for these things to be done, and the varieties of trees we planted on the site, we ourselves sought out, planted and nurtured with a great deal of work. He had actually taken possession of this garden before marrying Doña Isabel the daughter of Montezuma mentioned above, on whose death, Juan Cano, becoming her husband and his successor, held and holds fast to this property, and when we ask for it he replies that this field or “garden” was legally due to his wife as an inheritance from her father Montezuma. [III] Very many attest to how untrue this is. So on that account with the love you bear to God, first may you order the field with all the homes we made to be granted to us.

⁹⁸ “*istum senatum*”: note 96 above.

10. Another case is that of a field named Tetlolinca, which Juan Cano received eighteen years ago and planted with many vines.⁹⁹ When he took it using his trickery, he put to us, or rather left us with, these words: “You know the Spaniards are very covetous of land, and because of this, so that they do not take from you this field where you grow many kinds of flowers, I will plant vines in order to keep it. Whatever produce the land brings forth will be common to me and to all of you; and the field will always be yours by rights as it has been up to now.”

That is what he said, but for many years he has been in possession of the said field and not only has he not given back the field itself, but he has not given us any of the produce from the land either. We therefore earnestly beg that this field, taken by a cunning kind of malice, be returned to us, since it is rightly owed to our dominion.

11. In the last place called Tepetlapan there is still a very fertile field, where we planted many trees and we built high walls around it. Juan Cano took this field fourteen years ago now, and as he wanted to go to Spain, sold it to a certain Spaniard by the name of Juan of Burgos: he received one thousand two hundred gold pesos for it. We ask that this too be returned to us by the order of your sacred majesty, since by rights it belongs to us rather than to Juan Cano.

12. You have heard, most merciful king, that we Tlacopanecs are not only being weighed down with a multitude of tributes, but also being deprived of our fields and many other possessions. It does not seem to be the place to speak at the present time of how many and how large are the lands the Spaniards have taken, and still take, where they make either gardens or farms. It would therefore be an immortal kindness to us, and one which we are striving for to the utmost, from now on to give to your sacred majesty the tributes, which, up to now, we have given to the said Juan Cano and his wife the daughter of Montezuma, and that you may deem us and all our own worthy of being in the number of your servants, who make tribute available to you and your officials, and what we choose to obtain from your piety is that all our tributes and services which we measure out may be kept within due limits; and so that it may be possible for this to be done more rightly, we beg your mercy, that a man who is undoubtedly Christian and upright and very much a lover of the Indians, Jacobo Ramírez, may come to us by

⁹⁹ Tetlolinca, now San Lorenzo Totolinga, Naucalpan in Mexico City, was subject to the cabecera of Tlaicopan: Memorial de los pueblos, fol. 1 [1970, 5].

your decree as your Visitor, to see with his own eyes the tributes and services we provide; so that in accordance with our own measure, he may after a while moderate our tribute and relieve our people from excessive service; and so that he may see whether all the farms (I mean the estates and all the gardens left in our town) should be held by the Spaniards, and by our *encomendero* Juan Cano: that he might provide for us the justice which is most correct. In this matter the benefit to us is something that would be unparalleled.

13. Here we may add some things through which you may understand our former state and by which you may be easily persuaded to grant us what we ask. In the first place then, we inform your most excellent majesty that in former times these Indies were divided into three parts, namely Mexico, Tlacuba, and Texcoco, and as a consequence they had three lords or rulers who ruled the other surrounding peoples. Although that is known to the Spanish invaders of these Indies and especially to the religious men who declared the Catholic faith to us, what we are explaining is not known to very many. Our own people was never in servitude, but rather great service was due to it from others: it is the greatest burden to us that we should pay such excessive tribute every year and (what is worse) be deprived of our lands and other possessions. For that reason on bended knee we pray that you relieve us from our tribute to the greatest degree, and, if it can be arranged, that you allocate to our dominion one of the peoples that used to be in our service, either to help us in paying tributes or ease our poverty.

14. At this point the fact should not be passed over in silence that the aforementioned Juan Cano took three towns or estates away from us: one was Capoloac, another Ocoyacac and the third Tepeuexoyocan, which in former times used to belong to us. Juan Cano said that he had obtained these from your most invincible majesty for [IV] to separate service, and not to yield tribute jointly with ourselves. But when he went from here and set off for Spain, he said he would seek those estates from your Senate, so that we should pay our tribute jointly. May you deign to command Juan Cano not to possess those estates separately, but ensure that we provide our annual tribute all at once, so that we might accordingly have some relief from making payments.

15. One remaining thing which I, your humble subject Antonio Cortés, should point out in all submissiveness and reverence is that my father, Totoquihuatzin by name, had been chief and ruler of Tlacopan at the time of the war with the Spaniards. Knowing that your Spaniards had already come with their commander the Marquis del Valle, he greatly rejoiced, sent

several gifts to them and, as they approached this town of ours, he welcomed them, as the saying goes, “with open arms,” and provided all that they needed in abundance. He then proposed the following to the Marquis:

16. “May your arrival with your army be most auspicious, and may you know that we are prepared to serve you, and him in whose name you come. Along with my people I will worship the same god you praise. Here you have the shrine of my gods: destroy it, go in and take and make use of anything you find there that you like. Furthermore, here are my daughters – the men who have come with you can take them as wives, so that we may share grandsons and granddaughters. In any case, you should know that I have no wish to wage war against you and your army, lest my people come to a bad end. Rather what I want far more is – since there are many nations hostile to me which I have never managed to defeat – it would be a very great help if we could make war on them together.”

Those are the very words, invincible emperor, which my father put to the Marquis and you should not think that any of these things which both Spaniards and Indians attest are inconsistent with the truth.

17. To that I add that my father was said often to have prevented Montezuma the ruler of Mexico from campaigning against the Spaniards, but in defiance of my father’s warning he nonetheless prepared for war. What is more, the Spaniards fleeing Mexico passed through this community of mine, which, as it had already entered into an alliance with them, again supplied them with all the things they needed to survive, and freed them from the severe hunger which was devastating them, and they made further advances. After their departure, my father had died, by no means in battle but of an illness. One year went by and the Spaniards returned to Mexico, and the Mexicans were strenuously warned not to enter into a war against them by my father’s other sons who were my brothers. Receiving an evil return for their good deed they were killed by the Mexicans: one was called Tepanecatztintli, and the other Tlacatecalztintli.

18. From all this, you will gather that my brothers met their end for the sake of your own Spaniards and that my father welcomed you indeed as his lord, and did not contradict you in any respect, but rather always served your own people in the same way as he served you. Counting on all this, I presume to beg your help, so that you do not suffer us to be weighed down by tributes, but bid this district of ours to belong to your empire and not at all to Juan Cano and the daughter of Montezuma and their sons from whom we have suffered enough with the ills they have inflicted on us. In order that the mention made of the Spaniards be deemed true, I append here the names of witnesses: Melchor Vasquez, Juan Xacancatl, Gaspar Tlacateuhtli,

Balthasar, Benedicto, Toríbio, and many other men. These are all Indians, but there are Spaniards too, whose names follow: Bernardino de Tapia.

19. And so that what we ask for may be summed up, we ask for it again in a few words. First and foremost is that we may give to your sacred majesty the tributes we give to Juan Cano. Second, that the Visitor Jacobo Ramírez may come to our people and reckon the value of all our tributes. Third, that you order the lands taken by Juan and the other Spaniards to be given back to us and that those who reside in our town give up the estates which are ours. The last is that Juan restore to us whatever he has received in excess of his tributes, and release to us the pay which we have earned for building houses we were not obliged to construct. Signed in Mexico and Tlacoban, on the Kalends of December 1552, as follows:

Antonio Cortés

Melchior Vásquez

Gerónimo de Suero

[V]

Juan Xacancatl

Benedicto

Toríbio

Pedro de Santamaria

Jacobo

Gaspar Tlacateuctli

Martin

Balthasar Xolotecatl

Michael

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