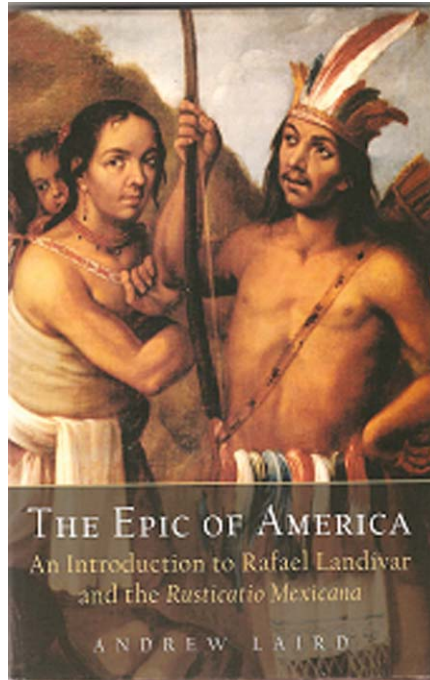


Latin and Roman Ideals in the Hispanic New World



by Rose Williams

“With regard to promoting the legacy of classical antiquity, neo-Latin writing frequently highlights the centrality of classical learning for a number of disciplines. Once the multivalent connections between the Roman tradition and the ethnically complex Hispanic American heritage are better understood, classical studies may have a new part to play in today’s curricula.” Andrew Laird, Prologue to *The Epic of America: An Introduction to Rafael Landívar and the Rusticatio Mexicana*.

“Ethnically complex” is an understatement — but it certainly fits the Western Hemisphere, or, as the European explorers called it, the New World. Its culture is a rich tapestry made up of many threads. Today we will explore one of those threads.

Latin America, Spain, and Rome

We generally acknowledge a debt to Rome and its language Latin. But we often don’t realize how much that language and its culture still surround us. An understanding of the Romans, and their history, language, and culture, helps us to understand the Western Hemisphere. The language is especially important. Latin literature has been written for 2,500 years; 1500 of these years were after the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

The strength of the Roman Empire crumbled away, and the Western world went into chaos and denial. Nobody could envision a world without the Empire. Rome’s central authority had bound most of Europe, Asia Minor, and North Africa together for many centuries. Its shining moment had been the Pax Romana (27 BCE—180 CE), (which was during the time of Christ and about two centuries after). At this time there was no major war in the civilized world. But even after that, century after century, Rome’s military and political stability had continued to provide **visible** benefits of roads, aqueducts, and well-built cities. Then there were its **invisible** benefits of organization and efficient administration.

But the Western Roman Empire fell, or rather collapsed in a series of ruinous raids and wars. Order and stability in its vast lands largely collapsed along with it, leaving, to put it mildly, a mess. We have long called this period the Dark Ages. That is no longer politically correct, but prospects were definitely gloomy. Imagine for a moment a world overseen by a stable, if somewhat tyrannical, power. When after many centuries that power disappeared, people would be totally at the mercy of the strong and the wicked. They didn’t want to face this, so they went right on calling themselves Romans, and clinging to the fragments of the shattered empire as best they could. A patchwork of small kingdoms and tribal states evolved from the shambles. Among the small centers of civilization that still existed and slowly expanded their influence, Latin remained the shared language. It was the language of law, education, religion, and exploration. It was also used for

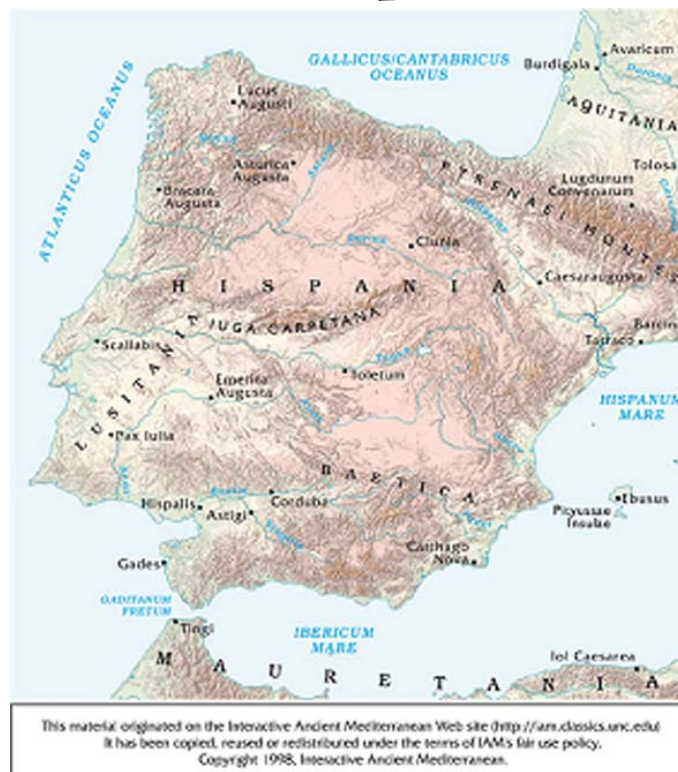
day to day communication throughout the so-called Medieval Period, or Middle Ages. Now a long period of history called the Middle Ages must be a link between two important eras. Those important eras were the Roman Empire and the Renaissance. This Renaissance was the rebirth, or the attempt at Rebirth, of the best parts of Greco-Roman culture. This effort produced the modern world.

As the Medieval period of European history drew to a close, two giant events were shaping up which would change everything. On one hand, the European exploration of the Western Hemisphere had begun. On the other, the Italian Renaissance (that Rebirth of the Roman world) was finding its feet. The two came of age together. The Europeans who came to the New World brought the Renaissance ideal with them, and set about building upon the Roman tradition. People were no longer content to be static — to cling to what they had left of ancient culture. They intended to recreate the lost glories and the lost stabilities of the ancient World in their new lands. And the language of this gigantic creative effort was Latin. Latin was not only the language of literature and science, but also was the language of legal and political authority. It still was in common use, and it carried a powerful identity as the language of ancient Rome. Rome as an ideal was still wielding power and influence over an even greater portion of the world than the city had once ruled.

Various Northern Europeans explored much of the North American continent and created great colonies in what would become the United States and Canada. They were deeply imbued with Renaissance ideas and classical heritage. Such Latin compositions as Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* were widely read. Also the Latin prose, poetry, and personal letters of great thinkers such as Erasmus and John Milton greatly influenced the colonists in the Northern New World. These colonists also often wrote in Latin, expressing new discoveries and experiences in Latin, the *lingua franca* of the Old World and the New. Examples of their output are books such as *Early American Latin Verse* and *Relatio Itineris in Marilandiam*. (Story of the Journey to Maryland.)

The Southern Europeans who explored and colonized the broad areas which became the Southwestern United States, Mexico, Central America, and South America were similarly imbued. The Latin language and classical ideas were central to the thinking and cultural framework of the peoples known as the Hispanics. This very word Hispanic is itself derived from the Latin word for the Spanish peninsula — *Hispania*. Today some people see this word as somehow belittling. On the contrary, it is a testimonial to one of the most ancient and admirable traditions in the world.

Roman Hispania



We can see from this map that Hispania included both Spain and Portugal.

The Roman way of life had continued in the European countries long after Rome itself had fallen. This was especially true on the Spanish peninsula, which had had a very long association with Rome. It first came under her sway in the third century before Christ. For seven hundred years Spain was Roman, and in many ways Roman she continues to be.

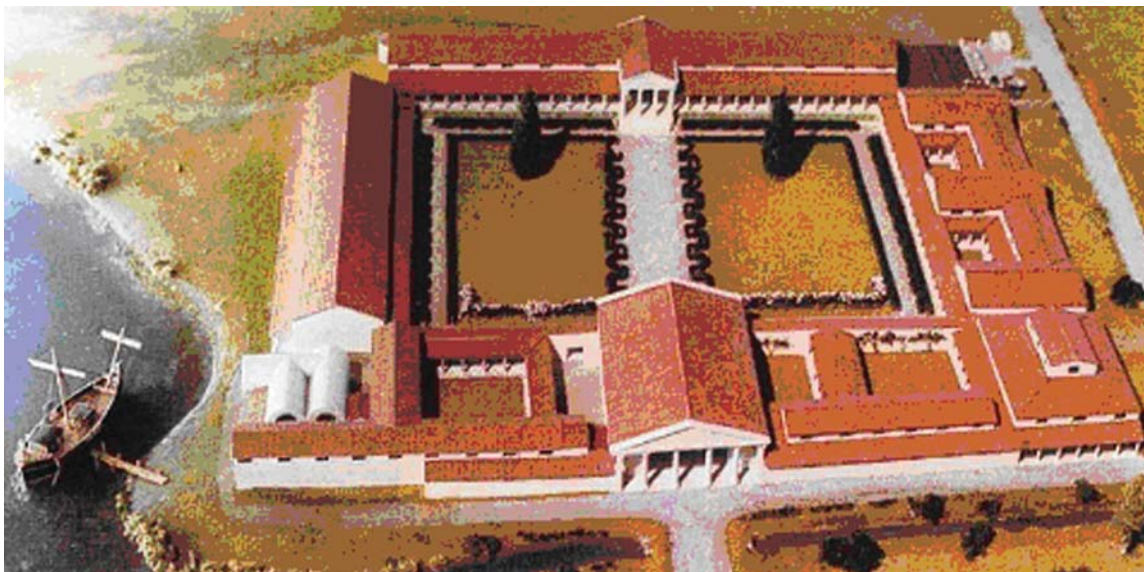
The Hispanic settlers who created so much of the culture of the Western hemisphere brought Rome to this hemisphere with them—in language and in way of life. We will look at a few examples of Latin America's Roman heritage, which can add so much to our understanding both of Hispanic heritage and modern life in this hemisphere.

I. Cultural Heritage

A. Agricultural and Economic Heritage

Central to Roman life were the great *latifundia*, or large estates. These were the closest thing to industrialized agriculture in the ancient world. They specialized in products for export: often grain, olive oil, or wine. They were found in southern Italy, Sicily, Egypt, and especially in Hispania Baetica, the Roman province which roughly corresponds to modern day Andalucía.

The great *latifundia* of Baetica shipped products, especially olive oil, far and wide. Amphoras from Baetica have been found in all parts of the Roman Empire.



This is a typical plan of a villa rustica

The hub of the *latifundia* was the *villa rustica*. It served as the residence of the landowner and his *familia* (including both relatives and followers). The villa was also a farm management centre. It often had buildings to accommodate farm laborers, sheds for animals, and barns for crops.

Many of the Spanish explorers came from Andalusia, which had once been Hispania Baetica, and nearby Extremadura, which includes parts of ancient Lusitania. The explorers carried their “Roman ideas,” including the *latifundia* concept, with them as they sailed to the New World.

As Spanish exploration of the New World moved forward apace, Spanish royalty made numerous land grants to explorers. One of these was made in 1529 to Hernan Cortes. Cortes was named Marquess of the Valley of Oaxaca and granted a tract of land including all the present state of Morelos. He also had control of all the people living in his domains. Thus were born the great *haciendas**, or estates, following the pattern of the *latifundia*. These spread through the Spanish New World.

Some *haciendas* remained plantations, sometimes raising specific crops; as we might have guessed, Brazil soon began to specialize in coffee. As had happened in the spreading Roman world, other *haciendas* ran mines or even factories. Some combined various productive activities. The owner of the *hacienda*, sometimes called the *hacendado* or *patrón*, was usually in practice an absolute ruler; there was no court of appeals for the dwellers of the *hacienda*. Besides the small group at the top of *hacienda* society, there were *peones* who worked the land and *campesinos* who worked small holdings and owed a portion of the profits to the *patron*. Also present on the ranches were the cowhands, known in different countries as *gauchos*, *vaqueros*, or *charros*. These various terms are still used today.

As the colonial system collapsed in the twentieth century, many *haciendas* fell on bad times. In 1917 during the Mexican revolution they were abolished by law in Mexico. Their land was generally restored to the Indians, with the landowners being allowed only 200 acres.

In Peru in the early 1970s Juan Velasco Alvarado made dissolution of the *haciendas* part of his agrarian reform. Yet remnants of the system and its lifestyle still affect Latin America and its people today.

* Some readers have asked for the derivation of *hacienda*. *Diccionario de uso del español*. Madrid 2007: Gredos “del lat. *faciēda*, pl. neutro del ger. *de facere*, lo que ha de hacerse” In English, *hacienda* is from the Latin *faciēda*, the neuter plural of the gerund of *facere*. The dictionary goes on to say that *hacendar* comes from *hacienda*.

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B. Architectural Heritage

In many Latin American countries, although the land has usually been confiscated and redistributed, the descendants of the earlier *haciendados* sometimes own the great house, also called the *hacienda*. In recent years preservationists and investors have been rescuing great *haciendas* which are in need of repair. They sometimes restore these as second homes or hotels As the pictures below indicate, the *hacienda* is a descendant of the Roman *villa*.



J. Paul Getty exact copy of Roman Villa, California



Modern Hacienda in California

Central to the life of the *latifundia* or the *hacienda* was the central court known to the Romans as *peristyle* and to Hispanics as the *patio*.



Peristyle — Roman Villa at Piazza Amerina, Sicily



Peristyle – House of the Vettii Pompeii



Patio of Hacienda San Angel, Puerto Vallarta used by permission of hotel owner

Cities in the New World- Heritage of Names

Merida, Capital of Yucatan

Not only the rural estates and dwellings, but many cities in Latin America today show the Hispanic explorers' use of their Hispano-Roman roots. Some carry the names of ancient Roman cities; many have architecture and landscaping reminiscent of Roman Spain.



Downtown Merida

*Photo of Downtown Merida by James and Ellen Fields
www.yucatanliving.com*

Chroniclers say that Merida was originally called T'ho or Ichcansihó by the Mayan inhabitants. When the first Spaniards saw this Mayan commercial center with ornate stone structures, it reminded them of the Roman ruins in Spain's city of Merida.

Merida began life around 25 BCE as Emerita Augusta. Augustus Caesar, like many conquering Romans, had a fondness for founding cities and naming them for himself. Emerita Augusta had gradually shortened its Roman name to Merida. Merida in Spain became the capital of the Roman Province of Lusitania, which included most of the modern Spanish Extremadura.

Merida in Yucatan is known as the white city, because its houses are white and the clothing of its people is white. The above scene in Merida in Yucatan is very similar to those in ancient Roman towns.

Medellín capital of the Federal State of Antioquia in Columbia.

This city takes its name from Medellin, a city near Merida in Extremadura in Spain. Medellin was founded in 75 BCE by the Roman general Quintus Metellus Pius, who of course called the place Metellinum. Medellin was the birthplace of Hernan Cortez. Other conquistadors, such as Francisco Pizarro, Pedro de Alvarado, Pedro de Valdivia, Ines Suarez, and Vasco Nunez de Balboa were all born in Extremadura. Gaspar de Rodas, the first governor of Antioquia, came from Badajoz, which is near Merida and Medellin in Extremadura.

C. Historical Heritage



Pax Augusta and Pax Porfiriana — Pax at a Price

There are many movements and eras in the history of Latin American countries which show the lasting influence of Latin America's Hispano-Roman heritage. This brief comparison will highlight Augustus Caesar's pacification and rule of the Roman Empire (27 BCE to 14 CE) and Porfirio Diaz's pacification and rule of Mexico (1876-1911).

It is significant that the rule of Diaz is called in English and Spanish histories the *pax porfiriana* in comparison to Augustus' *pax Augusta*. Diaz' story has been compared in political and historical thought to that of Augustus.

Porfirio Diaz, like Augustus Caesar, was hero to some and villain to some. Augustus, in spite of numerous plots against him, kept his power to the end of his life. Diaz did not; he was forced from office and fled to France in 1911.

Like that of Augustus, Diaz' rule was a long period of peace which he brought to a country that had endured a long history of war. As in the case of Augustus, one key to Diaz's *pax* was a well-regulated army. Such an army tends to control fragmentation in any society and to promote, shall we say, collective advancement with little dissension.

Another key was the patron-client system of Rome. We cannot overstress the importance of this deeply rooted institution. It had been one of the major foundations of Roman society. Patrons, usually Roman patricians or aristocrats, had long taken other Romans as clients and provided them with help of various kinds, ranging from money to business opportunities to representation in court. In turn, the clients provided services, such as working on a patron's political campaigns, becoming part of a group of followers, or using their skills or training on their patron's behalf. The system was so strong that one's honor was bound up in it. *Fides* or loyalty was due to the patron and his family from the client, and to the client and his family by the patron. If a client was endangered in any way, his patron would protect him. When in chaotic times a Roman patron was attacked by a powerful and dangerous enemy, clients would often hide the patron at risk of their own lives. Patron and client are familiar terms even today, implying a very special co-dependent relationship. Augustus had made great use of this system in which relationships between individual citizens formed an important political and social link.

When he became *princeps*, or first citizen, Augustus took the role of *pater patriae*, or father of the country, and became the symbolic patron of all Roman citizens. Roman Emperors, good and bad, never totally lost this identification. The system had taken deep root in Hispania, and it was embraced enthusiastically by Europeans who were granted power in the New World. Provincial governors in Latin America had always employed it. It was a fairly simple step for Diaz to establish a civil service system in which every local official ultimately owed allegiance to himself, the great *patron*.

Diaz' presidency, like Augustus' principate, expanded the economy greatly through construction of factories, roads, dams, industries, and improved farming. But also as in the case of the people who suffered confiscation of their property under Augustus, the reforms of Diaz brought suffering to many.

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II. Linguistic and Educational Heritage

Spanish and Portuguese, the languages of the explorers of the New World, both had sprung from Latin and retained strong Latin elements. But Latin itself was the language of legal and political authority. It still brought to mind ancient Rome, whose status had only grown greater as time passed. The Roman Republic and the Roman Empire influenced thinking across the world, as they still do today.

The classical tradition did much to shape the explorers' perceptions of the New World. Achievements of highly developed peoples found in the New World were compared to ancient Mediterranean societies. Most famous of these comparisons is that of the pyramids of Central America and Mexico with Egyptian pyramids.

Sometimes for better and sometimes for worse, Roman imperialism provided a model for the Iberian explorers. Some saw themselves as Julius Caesar, subjugating peoples and bringing them European culture.

Now we come to the amazing influence of Sir Thomas More's book *Utopia*. In this Latin work More created a wonderful fictional society which he said flourished on an island in the New World. The Spanish humanist Vasco de Quiroga was deeply impressed by *Utopia* and founded *hospital-pueblos* on its pattern. Quiroga created the first "hospitality center and town" in 1532. At Santa Fe, near Mexico City, he built an Indian town around a common central square or forum, the

pattern descended from ancient Roman towns which was found throughout Europe. The Romans, being extremely fond of rectangles, carried that structure, which was similar to their *villas*, wherever they went.



Plaza in Quiroga, Michoacan



Celtic Village

Typical villages of preRoman peoples, such as the Celtic village seen here, are not built around an open square in the middle.



Plaza Vasco de Quiroga, Patzcuaro, Michoacan

Here is a plaza built on the Roman plan, i.e. the center of a rectangular city. Around the forum in Santa Fe, Quiroga's Utopia, were ten houses, cells for the friars, and a Church-*hospital*. This *hospital* institution welcomed the sick, the poor, the hungry, and travelers in need of a place to stay. Like the meeting houses of New England, it served as both church and town meeting place. This tradition harks back to the Roman basilica, a public building located in the Forum which held a large number of people and served a variety of functions both civic and religious. Santa Fe rapidly expanded to seventy houses, several orchards, fields of maize, wheat, barley, and flax, pens for animals and poultry. Years later Quiroga extended his experiment to the lake towns in the old Tarascan region of Michoacan. There he founded Santa Fe de la Laguna, where his utopia pattern put down strong roots and began to multiply across what is now Michoacan. Within the *hospital-pueblos*, or hospitality-towns, the main features of life were the practice of religion, work in the fields, and the learning of skills such as bricklaying, tanning, carpentry, metalworking, ceramics, or textile production. Three kinds of authority were recognized: natural authority (the Indian patriarchs), the *principales* elected by vote of the heads of each household, and the rector (community priest). The use of domestic servants was not allowed, and collective cooperation was encouraged in the

fields and in public projects. Quiroga's *hospital-pueblos* survived throughout the colonial period (despite various attempts to seize their lands). In 1776 they were functioning under the same rules laid down by Quiroga in 1563. The town of Santa Fe de la Laguna still exists today as an Indian community, with the same *hospital-church* built by Quiroga and a dedication to the crafts he promoted, ceramics and textile production. In the Tarascan area many communities still practice the same crafts assigned to them by the bishop, who gave different villages different crafts to decrease bickering. In other towns the *hospitals* still stand, enduring emblems of a man venerated by the descendants of those Indians who called him "Tata Vasco."



San Ignacio Mini, Argentina

This is a *Reduccio*, built by the Jesuits. Notice the typical Roman structure like that of the early *hospital-pueblos*. Portuguese and Spanish missionaries in South America followed the ideals of the Renaissance in their own way. The Jesuits established *Reducciones* (missions) where slavery was outlawed and local people, under the combined leadership of Jesuits and the native leaders, were protected from the excesses of colonial rule, which could be excessive indeed. The *reducciones* resisted slave raids and had a high degree of self-rule and economic success. These facts have been cited as contributing factors to the attack on the Jesuits by European governments and the Jesuits' expulsion from the Americas and from many European countries in 1767. Like the Knights Templar of the 1300s, the Jesuits of the 1700s were victims of their own success and of the jealousy of national rulers.



Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco

Latin was also the language of the Catholic Church, which was central to the interaction of the Hispanics with native cultures. Christianizing the Indians was a major concern for many Spaniards and Portuguese in the New World. Pope Alexander VI had granted the lands found in the New World to the Spanish crown on the condition that it evangelize the people there. While Quiroga the lay bishop was teaching general skills, others were founding colleges and universities. Two colleges which were founded very early in the New World were San Jose de los Naturales in 1527 and Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco in 1536. These universities taught Latin, literature, science, and even created Indian symphony orchestras. Caraman's *The Lost Paradise*, and the film "The Mission" made from it, deal with the amazing success the universities achieved before the Jesuits, who were largely responsible for them, were expelled in the 1700s from the colonies and from most European countries.

Soon Latin was not the exclusive property of the Europeans. Our students should be impressed to know that within two or three years many native students had learned to read and write Latin.

The language opened to New World scholars the wealth of the Italian Renaissance. Books, ideas and some scholars followed the *conquistadores* west. A neo-Latin literature that had native

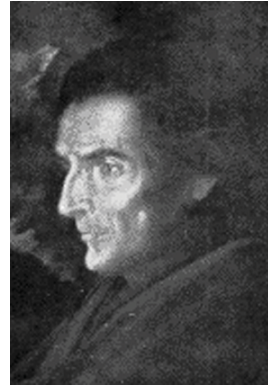
New World elements began to flower, and does so to this day.

III. Latin Literature Yesterday and Today

Two New World writers of Latin whom I am studying at the moment are Rafael Landivar, author of *Rusticatio Mexicana*, and Jose de Acosta, author of *De Natura Orbis Novi*. Let us examine some of their Latin writing.



Rafael Landivar



Jose de Acosta

Landivar's *Rusticatio Mexicana* is a Latin epic which stands up very well to comparison with Vergil's great *Aeneid*. Here is a passage from the *Aeneid*

Aeneid I 189-193

ductoresque ipsos primum, capita alta ferentis
cornibus arboreis, sternit, tum volgus, et omnem
miscet agens telis nemora inter frondea turbam;
nec prius absistit, quam septem ingentia victor
corpora fundat humi, et numerum cum navibus aequet.

The leaders first, with their high heads and branching antlers
he slew, then the lesser, and driving the whole herd
with arrows among the leafy groves,
the victor did not stop until seven huge bodies lay on
the ground; he equaled the number with his ships.

Now here is a passage from *Rusticatio Mexicana*.

Rusticatio Mexicana XIV 272-287

Sed iam laeta vocat rursum me cervus ad arva
Cervus ab umbrosis veniens ad flumina silvis
Cornigeram secum ducens per devia turbam.
En tibi septenos praestanti corpore cervos,
Ingentem superant qui vasta mole juvencum

But now the stag calls me to the happy fields
The stag coming to the stream from the forest
Leading his antlered band by devious paths,
Behold the seven stags of outstanding beauty
Larger than a young bull.

Both of these passages relate to stag hunts — notice that it is difficult to tell in Latinity and poetic sophistication which is written by Vergil and which by Landivar. Both find seven stags, and the stags that both mention seem larger than we would expect, as Aeneas expects one stag to feed a whole ship and Landivar says they are larger than young bulls. Landivar is probably seeing an elk, such as the one in the picture below. Since Aeneas is in North Africa, Heaven only knows what he sees.



Now we shall compare the prose writers Caesar and Acosta

Caesar *De Bello Gallico* Liber VI, Cap XXVII

Sunt item, quae appellantur *alces*. Harum est consimilis capris figura et varietas pellium, sed magnitudine paulo antecedent/ mutilaeque sunt cornibus et crura sine nodis articulisque habent/ neque quietis causa procumbunt neque, si quo adflictae casu conciderunt, erigere sese aut sublevare possunt.

There are likewise those which are called *alces*. The figure and spotted skin of these is similar to a goat, but they are a little larger and have disfigured horns and legs without joints, neither can they lie down for the sake of rest; nor if they are afflicted by accident, are they able get up or to raise themselves.

Acosta *De Natura Orbis Novi* . Liber I Cap. XXI

Pecudes illas mirabiles habent, /quas Indi llama, nostri Indicas oves vocant,/ quae praeter lanam et carnes, quas vestiendo et alendo generi Indorum praebent, /sunt etiam iumenta vehendis oneribus commodissima. Nam dimidium oneris muli cuius-vis portant,/ sunt autem minimi sumptus, /quippe quibus neque ferro ad calces,/ neque clitelia ad dorsum/ neque vero ordeo ad pabulum opus sit.

They have those wonderful beasts that the Indi call llama, we call Indian sheep, which aside from wool and meat, that they furnish for wearing and eating to the Indian race, are also very suitable animals for carrying loads. For they carry half again the load of any mule; moreover expenses are small, since for them there is need neither for iron for shoes, nor harness for their backs nor barley for food.

Both prose authors, who again are almost interchangeable for Latinity, are describing for the folks back home strange animals they have encountered — Caesar's animals are just a bit too strange, and we wonder if he is pulling the Senate's collective leg. Contributors to Latinteach have recently drawn our attention to the "fainting goats" which when startled stiffen and fall over. They only remain that way a few minutes, however, and they certainly have joints in their legs, which they use to get up. Caesar's little *alces* which tip over and cannot rise are another matter.



The word llama is not Spanish, but comes originally from Quechua, a family of languages spoken by Indian peoples of Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, and Argentina.



Acosta was understandably impressed with this new beast. After he has eulogized its usefulness and economical maintenance, he says that nature provided this wonderful beast because the Indians were poor and needed a special boost.

Caesar's **alces** are not much stranger, however, than Landivar in his *Rusticatio Mexicana* considered the buffalo.

As he describes it, he seems to have difficulty believing that the animal, with its huge shoulders and tiny hindquarters and rather ridiculous little tail, is put together correctly. A cosmic mistake, perhaps? After all, one's first buffalo would be quite a shock.



For my last comparison with Vergil I want to turn to Don Francisco Cabrera, a native of the Mexican city of Puebla who writes beautiful poetry in Latin today.

Vergil, *Aeneid*, Aeneas Bk 1. 1.7
dealing with Rome's legendary founder

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris
Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit
litora, multum ille et terris iactatus et alto
vi superum saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram;
multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet urbem,
inferretque deos Latio, genus unde Latinum,
Albanique patres, atque altae moenia Romae.

I sing of arms and the man who first from Troy
came, driven, to Italy and the Lavinian shore,
having been much tossed about on land and sea
driven by savage Juno's deep held anger;
After many hardships and wars, bearing his gods
he came to Latium that he might build
a city, and the towering walls of Rome

Cabrera's *Monumenta Mexicana: Mexican Heritage*
dealing with the legendary hero/founder/god of pre-Columbian civilization Quetzalcóatl

Mexicae longaeva cano primordia gentis
Egregia quae stripe fluens Tolteca superbit,
Numinis afflatu divinos nacta triumphos
Rex dum jura dabat Quetzal cognomina Coatl,
Multa diu bello passus longoque labore
Pace super, divis notas dum conderet artes.

I sing the ancient rise of the Mexican race
flowing from the giant Toltec root
raised to holy triumph by the Divine Spirit's breath
when King Quetzalcoatl long ago gave laws
Having suffered much and long in war and peace
While he founded arts known only to the gods.

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I hope this presentation will give a general idea of the insights to be gained by connecting the threads. As Roger Bacon said “*Omnes scientiae sunt connexae, sicut partes eiusdem totius.*” “All branches of learning are connected like parts of the same whole.”