EGALITARIAN IDEOLOGY AND POLITICAL POWER IN PREHISPANIC CENTRAL MEXICO: THE CASE OF TLAXCALLAN

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Source: *Latin American Antiquity*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (September 2010), pp. 227-251
Published by: Society for American Archaeology
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25766992

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EGALITARIAN IDEOLOGY AND POLITICAL POWER IN PREHISPANIC CENTRAL MEXICO: THE CASE OF TLAXCALLAN

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During the central Mexican late Postclassic period, the Aztec Triple Alliance became the largest and most powerful empire in Mesoamerica. Yet ancient Tlaxcallan (now Tlaxcala, Mexico) resisted incorporation into the empire despite being entirely surrounded by it and despite numerous Aztec military campaigns aimed at the defeat of the Tlaxcaltecas. How did it happen that a relatively small (1,400 km^2) polity was able to resist a more powerful foe while its neighbors succumbed? We propose a resolution to this historical enigma that, we suggest, has implications for the broader study of social and cultural change, particularly in relation to theories of state formation and collective action. We find it particularly interesting that the Tlaxcaltecas abandoned a key tenet of traditional Nahua political structure in which kingship was vested in members of the nobility, substituting for it government by a council whose members could be recruited from the ranks of commoners. To achieve such a significant deviation from typical Nahua authority structure, the Tlaxcaltecas drew selectively from those aspects of Nahua mythic history and religion that were consistent with a comparatively egalitarian and collective political regime.

Durante el Posclásico Tardío en el Altiplano Central de México la Triple Alianza Azteca llegó a ser el imperio más grande y poderoso de Mesoamérica. Sin embargo, el antiguo Tlaxcallan (el actual Tlaxcala, México) resistío la incorporación al imperio aunque estaba completamente rodeado por el mismo y a pesar de las muchas campañas militares aztecas para conquistarlos. ¿Cómo fue posible que este pequeño Estado (1,400 km^2) pudiera resistir a su enemigo más poderoso mientras que sus vecinos sucumbieron? Proponemos una solución a este enigma histórico y sugerimos que ésta tiene implicaciones generales para el estudio de cambios sociales y culturales, específicamente en las teorías sobre la formación del Estado y la acción colectiva. Es de particular interés que los tlaxcaltecas abandonaron un elemento fundamental de la estructura política nahua, en el cual la monarquía se daba entre los miembros de la nobleza, y lo sustituyeron por un gobierno a través de un consejo cuyos miembros podían ser reclutados de entre la gente común (macehualtin). Para llevar a cabo este cambio significativo con respecto a la estructura de autoridad nahua, los tlaxcaltecas seleccionaron aquellos aspectos de la historia mítica nahua y de su religión que eran consistentes con el régimen de igualdad y colectividad política.

During the late Postclassic period (the twelfth through the early sixteenth centuries C.E.), central Mexican societies were returning to a phase of imperial-scale political consolidation following the decline of a brief phase of imperialism centered at Tula (Sanders et al. 1979:137–181). Consolidation was more than the reestablishment of empire in the manner of Tula, because the social context for state formation and political competition had been altered with the growth of a nearly Mesoamerica-wide world system in which the scale and complexity of interregional economic exchange surpassed that of prior periods (Blanton et al. 2005; Smith and Berdan 2003). Political change took place in the context of endemic interpolity warfare (e.g., as summarized in Brumfiel 1983; cf. Sanders et al. 1979:150), as various polities competed among themselves to control not only subject populations but also the wealth of the burgeoning world system, eventuating in imperial expansion in and beyond the Basin of Mexico, first by the Tepanecs of Azcapotzalco

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Latin American Antiquity 21(3), 2010, pp. 227–251

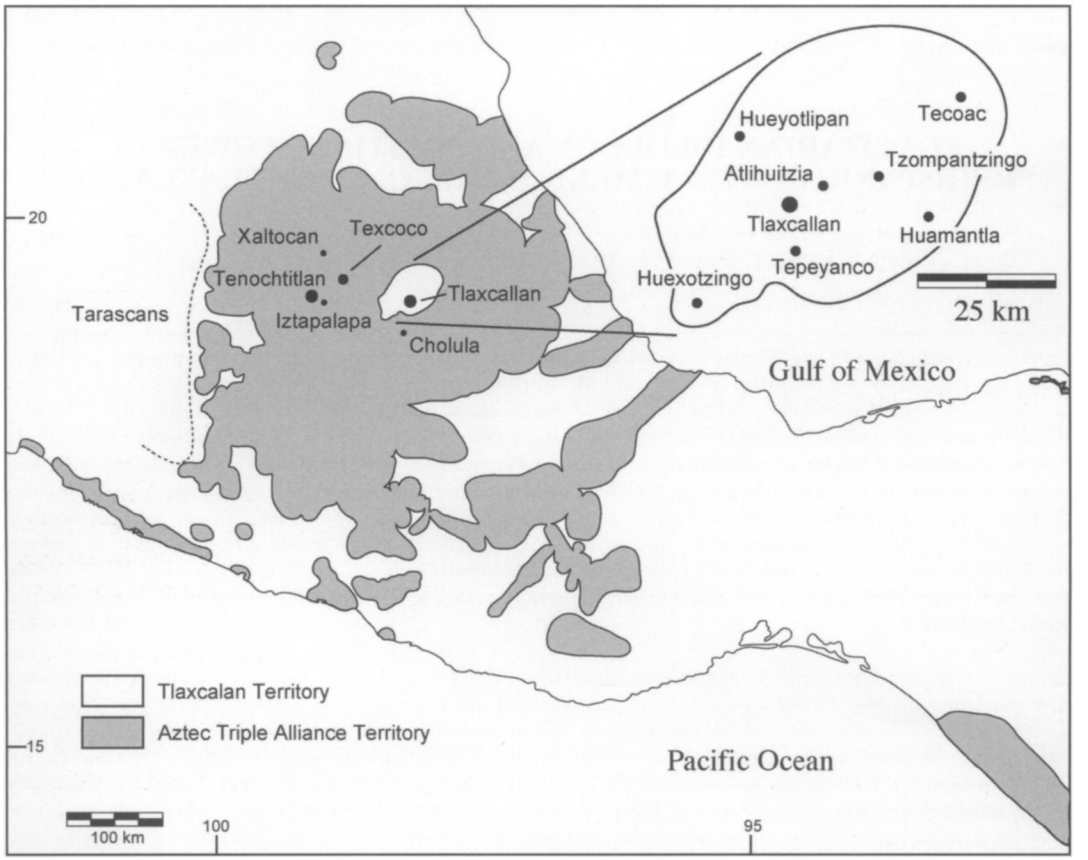

Figure 1. Location and size of Tlaxcallan in A.D. 1519 (Modified from Smith and Berdan 1996:Fig. II-1, Gibson 1952:6-10)

and later by the Triple Alliance partners, Tenochtitlán, Texcoco, and Tlacopan (the Aztec Empire [Berdan et al. 1996]). One of the polities involved in commercial growth, warfare, and political maneuvering of the period was the small (1,400 km^2) polity of Tlaxcallan (now called Tlaxcala), located in the northern portion of the Puebla-Tlaxcala region (and east of the Basin of Mexico), during what García Cook (1981:273–275) terms the Tlaxcala cultural phase (1100 to 1519 C.E.; Figure 1).[1] Of the battles fought by Triple Alliance armies, those against fellow Nahuatl speakers of the Puebla-Tlaxcala region were among the bloodiest and most costly to themselves and their antagonists, especially Huexotzinco but also Tlaxcallan (summarized in Isaac 1983), including battles that raged for 20 days continuously. Muñoz Camargo (1999:180–190) and Torquemada (1975:200–203, 219–220) provide an extensive chronicle of damaging Aztec defeats at the hands of the Tlaxcaltecas (Otomí and Nahua) that pushed Motecuhzoma to tears (Durán 2006a:459–462). Even Durán's (2006a:462) pro-Aztec account is hard pressed to provide convincing evidence of a victory over the Tlaxcaltecas and sounds more like an exit strategy necessitated by severe war fatigue, failure, and disillusionment.

Although ethnically diverse, the Tlaxcaltecas shared many of the technologies, social forms, and cultural elements of the other Nahua groups of central Mexico (summarized in Lockhart 1992), including mythical accounts of their origins as crude Chichimecs who migrated into central Mexico and gradually adopted farming and the cultural characteristics of the prior and more civilized Toltecs (e.g., Muñoz Camargo 1986:Chapters 5–6). In spite of their Nahua heritage, the Tlaxcaltecas resisted the growing imperial apparatus emanating from other Nahua polities in the Basin of Mexico. In fact, they came to identify the empire as a dan-

gerous enemy against which they engaged in numerous wars to resist incorporation (Davies 1980:126–129, 173–176, 240–247, 302–316), even as conquered provinces of the Aztec Triple Alliance gradually surrounded them (Muñoz Camargo 1998:134). Generations of scholars have accepted an explanation for their continued independence based on the idea that Tlaxcallan was purposefully left unconquered to provide military training for Aztec soldiers and fresh sacrificial bodies for imperial rituals (the "Flowery Wars" [e.g., Durán 1971:93–94; Soustelle 1970:101]), based on what were probably propagandistic rationalizations made by Aztec rulers after their defeat, in which the Spanish were aided by Tlaxcaltecan forces. But it is clear that the real reason for the failure to conquer is to be found in large part in the military capacity of the Tlaxcaltecas themselves (Davies 1973:229–232; Isaac 1983). As Isaac (1983) points out, it is also true that the empire was under pressure on several fronts and was stretched rather thin; yet this revisionist view of Tlaxcaltecan independence still begs the question: How were the Tlaxcaltecas, who shared the same technology and culture as the imperial Nahuas, able to withstand the forces of an empire much larger and more populous than themselves, while their neighbors failed?

Tlaxcaltecan Exceptionalism

> Y que ya habían probado todas las fuerzas, así de día como de noche, para se excusar a ser súbdito ni sujetos a nadie, porque en ningún tiempo esta provincia lo había sido ni tenían ni habían tenido cierto señor; antes habían venido extentos, y por sí, de immemorial tiempo acá [Cortés 1963:44].
>
> They had tried with all their forces both by day and by night to avoid being subject to anyone, for this province never had been, nor had they ever had an over-all ruler. For they had lived in freedom and independence from time immemorial [Cortés 1986:66; translated by Anthony Pagden].

In this passage, Hernán Cortés, in his second letter to Charles V, reports on what the leaders of Tlaxcallan related to him about their struggle to maintain independence from the Aztec Empire and its leader, Motecuhzoma. This text captures an important component of a sense of Tlaxcaltecan exceptionalism, or what Gibson (1952:145–146, 194) variously refers to as their patriotism, provincial loyalty, or local chauvinism, resulting from the fact that they alone, of all the Nahua societies of central Mexico (except Huexotzingo, Tlaxcallan's ally at the time of conquest), remained independent from imperial domination and managed to do so without the ruler-centered form of government found in other Nahua societies. The purpose of this article is to investigate why this comparatively egalitarian and novel social formation was developed and how its social and cultural construction allowed for the levels of military mobilization needed to remain independent of the Aztec Triple Alliance. But our goal extends beyond a consideration of this one interesting example, since we think that by studying Tlaxcallan we will be able to contribute to the growing literature addressing the question of alternate pathways to social complexity in premodern states (e.g., Blanton 1998; Feinman 1995; McIntosh 1999) that has proved to be a productive research direction for prehispanic Mesoamerica (e.g., Beekman 2008; Blanton et al. 1996; Cowgill 1997; Millon 1992; Pasztory 1997).

Theoretical Perspective

According to a number of conquistadors and chroniclers, during the late Postclassic period, the population of Tlaxcallan faced severe pressure from the growing Aztec Triple Alliance involving costly military encounters but also forced isolation from trade routes that were important to their commercial activities (e.g., Cortés 2007:62; Díaz del Castillo 1956:277; López de Gómara 1943:I:179; cf. Cortés's [2007:63–64] description of the market). However vexed their situation was, one important advantage did accrue to the Tlaxcaltecas in the form of a substantial influx of political dissidents and uprooted families fleeing imperial control and warfare, a population that served to augment their military force (Aguilera 1991a; Gibson 1952:2).[2] Migrants from Nahua centers in the Basin of Mexico and other regions also fled the Aztec Triple Alliance to Tlaxcallan after 1428 C.E. (Aguilera 1991a:474; Chapa 1987). Among the immigrants there were also Pinome and Otomí speakers, the latter, e.g., who migrated following the destruction of

Xaltocan (in the Basin of Mexico) by the expansionist Tepanecs in 1400 C.E., but they also came to Tlaxcallan from other locations (*Códice Chimalpopoca* 1975:50; Muñoz Camargo 1998:134, 1999:181; see also Aguilera 1991a:473–474). Otomí immigrants, in particular, played a key military role in Tlaxcallan, situated as "buffer guards" between the Basin of Mexico (the empire's core zone) and Tlaxcallan's core to the east (Aguilera 1991a:474, 478–479; Gibson 1952:2; Motolinía 1950:260; Muñoz Camargo 1998:134–135, 1999:181, 185). Descriptions from the chroniclers indicate that these Otomí were fiercely loyal to Tlaxcallan, refusing to accept bribes to betray their Tlaxcaltecan confederates and driving back Aztec advances (Durán 1984:453–458; Muñoz Camargo 1998:136–137, 1999:182). Muñoz Camargo (1998:137) says that the Otomí were defenders of Tlaxcallan and would go when called to fight and die for their *patria y república* (homeland and republic). Firsthand accounts of the conquest (Cortés 2007:56–58; Díaz del Castillo 1988:229–238) and the *Códice de Huamantla* (Aguilera 1984) suggest that the Otomí also protected the eastern border of Tlaxcallan (see also Motolinía 1950:260; Muñoz Camargo 1998:134–135).

Given the scale and importance of immigration, we conclude that the strong sense of patriotism among Tlaxcaltecas was not built solely around Nahua ethnic identity, although the predominant culture of the polity was Nahua. Instead, we argue that this polity exhibited features of a culturally diverse coalescent society as described by Kowalewski (2006). In what follows, we first develop a theoretical framework that we propose is suited to the explanation of late Postclassic state formation in Tlaxcallan, drawing from ideas found in the literature on coalescence and collective action theory. Then we describe extant models of Tlaxcallan and lay out an alternate model of political organization in which we show how Tlaxcallan's state builders were innovative while, at the same time, they borrowed, selectively, from elements of the Nahua cultural heritage they shared with other polities of the central Highlands region.

Coalescent Societies

In his theoretical and comparative discussion of coalescent societies of the colonial Southeast and elsewhere, Kowalewski (2006:95–96) notes that in situations of severe pressure and threat, disparate groups may join together for mutual benefit and in the process develop new social formations. Often, Kowalewski points out, this involved a change in which centralized authority gave way to "more inclusive councils" while, at the same time, mythmaking that justified hierarchical control by chiefs was replaced by new myths that "put into words the ideology of integration of previously separate groups, the ceremonial ordering of clans, and individual achieved status" (2006:95). The situation in Tlaxcallan, as a predominantly Nahua society that accepted large numbers of immigrants, was not exactly comparable to the colonial Southeast. Nonetheless, we propose that the incorporation of diverse populations into society was an important element of the process of state formation and was achieved in ways broadly similar to the coalescent strategies described by Kowalewski, e.g., rule by council, patriotism, and an ideology of achieved status. Importantly, the Tlaxcaltecan strategy involved an egalitarianizing impetus in regime building that deviated in important ways from the predominant mode of state building and mythmaking found among other Nahua peoples of central Mexico.[3] For example, while in other Nahua polities rulers typically were recruited from noble lineages (Lockhart 1992:15), in Tlaxcallan a more egalitarian system of governance and ideology was developed that, like the societies of the colonial Southeast, stressed merit over hereditary status in the selection of political officials (more below). To better understand why coalescence would have taken an egalitarianizing turn, we place it within the framework of collective action theory.

Collective Action Theory

Collective action theory is a new approach that is not well represented in the writings of anthropological archaeologists or other anthropologists because, since the mid–twentieth century, research on the evolution of archaic or premodern states has been influenced primarily by Marxist and neoevolutionist theories (e.g., Cohen and Service 1978; Flannery 1972; Fried 1967; Sanders et al. 1976; cf. Blanton and Fargher 2008:5–11). These theories reflect an underlying assumption of separate evolutionary tracks leading to the more democratic and commercial "West" vs. an autocratic "Other" similar to Marx's Asiatic Mode of Production. In

the latter, an aristocratic governing elite used coercion and the manipulation of water control, warfare, ideology, redistribution, and managerial systems to gain and maintain power and to appropriate the surplus production of a subaltern class (Carneiro 1970; Flannery 1972; Fried 1967; Haas 1982; Sanders et al. 1976; Service 1975; Wittfogel 1957; Wolf 1999). The subaltern class is perceived, by contrast, as passive, mired in irrationality, and mystified by false consciousness (see Vitkin 1981) or *doxa* (Bourdieu 1977:164).

Despite the persistence of an elite focus in theories of premodern state formation, a few scholars have begun to challenge the long-held assumption of a distinction between a more democratic and market-based "West" and a despotic and archaic "Other" (Blanton and Fargher 2008; Fargher and Blanton 2007). Yet theories regarding the role of the subaltern or commoner in constructing political systems and participating in them remain underdeveloped. For example, Joyce et al.'s (2001) important contribution, while incorporating commoner political strategies, limits them to some degree in proposing three options: engagement ("opting in"), avoidance ("opting out"), and outright resistance (rebellion). We think that collective action theory offers a more robust approach to the strategic actions of actors in the political process, both commoner and elite, because it provides precise and testable propositions about the specific strategies employed by different segments of society in the political process.

The basic premise of a collective action theory for states can be articulated as follows: "A collective polity is built on cooperation between individuals and groups making up a political community" (Blanton and Fargher 2008:12). Because the demands and goals of individuals and groups are variable and divergent, state builders (principals; see below) are forced to negotiate with members of the political community in order to construct and maintain a viable system of government. This follows from the argument of collective action theorists that polity-wide coercion, as a state-building policy, is too costly, both economically and socially (Levi 1988; Lichbach 1996:217; North 1981:42; Olson 1965). The bargaining power of any group is dependent on the degree to which the state depends on that group for resources, including military and other labor (Levi 1988). In the more collective states, rulers or principals are dependent on the population at large (citizens) for most of the needed resources and thus make appropriate concessions to gain compliance with taxation. These include gaining credibility and the trust of citizens by providing public goods and by restricting the agency of governing officials (Blanton and Fargher 2008: e.g., 20–21).

We suggest that collective action theory can make a valuable contribution to understanding situations such as state formation in Tlaxcallan because the theory goes to the question of what motivates people to contribute their efforts (or even their lives) to build and maintain a polity. In this case, Tlaxcaltecas were required to maintain a nearly constant state of military readiness and a high degree of compliance with military corvée demands in order to remain independent of empires emanating from the Basin of Mexico. How was this accomplished? We propose that the central element of cooperation in this polity consisted of a reciprocity between a governing council, which provided effective military leadership (and other public goods, such as market management and judicial services), and taxpayers, who produced surpluses and provided military service. Further, we hypothesize that taxpayer trust in the collectivity could be maintained by assuring that governing officials would follow the mandates of moral codes to demonstrate their commitment to the collective enterprise. Last, we propose that a comparatively egalitarian council-based system of governance would have had particular resonance with powerful groups among immigrants, in particular among the most important warriors who migrated into Tlaxcallan, the numerous Otomí (Aguilera 1991a). These "Otonchichimecs," as they are sometimes called (Davies 1980:80–81), are recognized as an ethnic group that shared some of the fierceness as well as the egalitarian sensibilities of the Chichimecs (Umberger 2008:77), hunters and gatherers who represented early populations whose descendants, according to mythic accounts, eventually built the socially and technologically advanced Nahua societies.

Evidence indicates that the Otomís were well integrated into the Tlaxcaltecan state and rewarded appropriately. Cortés (2007:57, 128), Díaz del Castillo (1988:231–238, 508), Motolinía (1950:260), and Muñoz Camargo (1986) indicate

in their descriptions that a number of Otomí centers and their rulers formed part of Tlaxcallan, especially the important frontier settlements of Tecoac and Hueyotlipan. Moreover, in at least one case the Tlaxcaltecas promoted an Otomí hero and highly successful warrior, Tlahuicole, to the level of chief military leader or general of all Tlaxcaltecan forces (Durán 2006a:455; Muñoz Camargo 1999:189–190; Torquemada 1975:219–220), a position later held by titled political officials (*teteuctin*) according to contact-period historical descriptions (de Aguilar 2002:187; Díaz del Castillo 1988). Tlahuicole was also the most important hero in Tlaxcaltecan history at the conquest, indicating a degree of reverence for an Otomí that was not achieved by any Nahua. Finally, Muñoz Camargo (1998:140, 1999:185) indicates that high-ranking Nahua women and Otomí warriors intermarried following a major Aztec defeat achieved by the Otomí. These Otomí warriors who had defeated the Aztec also became members of the Tlaxcaltecan "nobility" (probably indicating that they were promoted to *teuctli* status)

Previous Approaches to State Formation in Tlaxcallan (*Cuatro Señoríos*)

Many earlier ethnohistoric accounts of Tlaxcallan have taken the colonial-period *cabildo* (Spanish municipal government) of 1550–1600 C.E., described in such sources as *The Tlaxcalan Actas* (Lockhart et al. 1986) and by the historian Muñoz Camargo (1947, 1986), and projected its organization into the late prehispanic period, even though this governing system cannot be confirmed to have existed prior to the 1540s (Gibson 1952:11). The early colonial system consisted of four fiefdoms (*señoríos*), each dominated by a single hereditary king (*tlatoani*) who was a permanent member of the ruling cabildo (Gibson 1952:89–109). The head of this cabildo, the governor, rotated among the *cuatro* (four) señoríos and served a two-year term. Accordingly, the prehispanic Tlaxcaltecan state was thought to be divided into four sections, each ruled by a tlatoani, and together these four kings formed the ruling council. Within this body, one tlatoani was considered the general ruler, and this position rotated among the four *tlatoque* (pl. of *tlatoani*), a new ruler succeeding the previous one at his death in a set order (Gibson 1952:105; Lockhart 1992:21–23; Pohl 2003a:243). All titles and statuses, including tlatoani and *pilli* (noble), were inherited in particular families.

Lockhart (1992:21–23) extends a variant of the cuatro señoríos system into the prehispanic period, suggesting that Tlaxcallan was a complex *altepetl*, a type of polity (native state) found in the Western Nahua area (e.g., Basin of Mexico). The altepetl is defined by two basic features: a dynastic ruler (tlatoani) and corporate landholding groups (*calpulli*) that formed subdivisions of the altepetl (Lockhart 1992:Chapters 2, 4; see also Offner 1983; van Zantwijk 1985). The tlatoani acted as the central figure in the altepetl; he symbolized the unity of the polity, took responsibility for external relations, maintained integration and cohesion among the constituent calpulli, and, in imperial contexts, controlled conquered tlatoque. In larger and more complex polities, the tlatoani sometimes appointed high-level political officials, often referred to as *teuctli* or *teteuctin*, from the hereditary nobility (*pipiltin*) to assist him in his duties. In most cases, a hereditary leader called a *teuctlatoani*, who was a pilli, controlled each calpulli. However, the tlatoani exercised some power over the selection of individual teuctlatoani. The teuctlatoani and other pilli formed the corps of administrative officials that handled the daily political business of their respective calpulli. Together the teteuctin and the *teuctlatoque* (pl. of *teuctlatoani*) formed a subservient advisory committee that assisted the tlatoani in decision making or selected a new tlatoani when an heir apparent was absent or a succession dispute arose. Most altepetl of central Mexico conformed to this pattern before conquest by the Aztec (e.g., Culhuacan, Huexotla, Huitzilopochco, Mexicalzingo, Ixtapalapa, Tacuba or Tlacopan, Coyoacan, Cuauhtitlan, Tenayuca, Chimalhuacan Atenco, Coatlichan, Huexotla, Otumba, Teotihuacan, and Acolman, to name just a few). The major deviations were the imperial capitals, Tenochtitlán and Texcoco, after the formation of the empire; Chalco (a confederation of 25 tlatoque and one of the most difficult conquests within the basin); Cholula (with two hereditary rulers? [Díaz del Castillo 1988:317, 324; Rojas 1979a, 1979b]); and Tlaxcallan. Lockhart's model for Tlaxcallan presents its deviation as a composite of four altepetl (later four *cabeceras*), each ruled by a tlatoani and each autonomous within its territory.

Pohl (1998, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d) suggests a slight variation on the altepetl theme, suggesting that Tlaxcallan was organized in a more segmentary fashion (cf. Fox et al. 1996; Southall 1988) in which the four ruling houses formed the core of a loosely integrated state composed of competitive factions forged among the nobility through reciprocal feasting and the gifting of prestige goods, as opposed to tightly integrated calpulli. As the wealthiest and most powerful faction heads, the tlatoque would have constructed sumptuous palaces and sponsored the construction and painting of murals, books, and polychrome pottery that emphasized and commemorated their personal histories, elite lineages, and strategic marriage alliances.

We propose that these models of late Postclassic Tlaxcallan are not tenable because they are based principally on a system of governance that was developed during the early colonial period that reflected the influence of Spanish imperial policies (we return to this issue later).[4] Furthermore, there is no evidence from the conquest era or early colonial descriptions of either kings or calpulli, two basic features of a typical altepetl. Neither the conquerors (Anonymous Conqueror 1961; Cortés 2007; de Aguilar 2002; Díaz del Castillo 1988; de Tápia 2002) nor Motolinía (1950) identify any major Tlaxcaltecan leaders (teteuctin) as ruling major territorial divisions that could be identified as constituent altepetl, whereas altepetl rulers were easily identified from Cholula to Tenochtitlán by the conquistadors. In fact, the only statement associating any individuals with any places comes from Motolinía (1950:258–260), who stated only that the notable leader Maxixcatzin lived in Ocotelulco and that another, Xicotencatl, lived in Tizatlan at the time of conquest. They are not identified as rulers of these places at the time of conquest, only as the most powerful and important members of Tlaxcaltecan society, nor are they identified as descendants of the founding teteuctin in these places. Only later, in the colonial period, were dynasties created, associated with territorial units, and also artificially extended into the prehispanic era (e.g., *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* 1979; Muñoz Camargo 1986; Torquemada 1975), but this process took 200 years to reach consensus and uniformity after the Spanish conquest (Gibson 1952:13–14). Furthermore, *The Tlaxcalan Actas* (Lockhart et al. 1986), the *Padrones de Tlaxcala*, and the *Padrón de Nobles de Ocotelolco* (Rojas et al. 1987) make no mention of calpulli.

In the following sections of the article we develop an alternative model for the organization of the Tlaxcallan polity on the eve of the conquest and then follow this with a discussion of the ideological basis of state formation, which we propose was based on an egalitarian ethic and a relatively high degree of commoner participation in government, rather than competition among noble families.

The Social and Cultural Foundations of State Formation in Late Postclassic Tlaxcallan

Here we present a model for Tlaxcaltecan society on the eve of the Spanish conquest that we think accounts for how they were able to maintain independence from imperial forces. The approach we take has been developed around what we see as two related dimensions of social and cultural change in the late Postclassic that gave rise to a social organization in some respects unique among Nahuatl speakers. First, we identify a flexible and adaptive governing system in which governing elites were recruited based on achievement and principal control was vested in a governing council made up of these elites, unlike a typical altepetl in which principal control was vested primarily in an individual hereditary ruler. Later, we point to how religious belief was mobilized to provide the ideological justification for this mode of governance.

Our scheme for late Postclassic Tlaxcallan, although benefiting from the work of many scholars, is provisional owing to the fact that information for the time period in question is spotty and incomplete. For example, the earliest Spanish accounts, while valuable, must be viewed critically because Tlaxcaltecan organization was so far outside the experience of the conquistadors and other early Spanish imperial authorities. Cortés (1986:66, cf. 68), upon encountering Tlaxcallan, did make the useful and important observation that it did not have an "over-all ruler," and he (1986:68) took note of a governing system that reminded him of an Italian republic such as Venice. However, right from the beginning, Cortés attempted to bend Tlaxcallan into the kind of centralized government that he would be more comfortable with, e.g., he focused

primarily on one leader, Maxixcatzin, for counsel (Cortés 1986:66, 68; Gibson 1952:12; Lockhart 1992:31; Nava Rodríguez 1966:53). This tendency to allocate power primarily to one or a few leading families continued as a main theme of Spanish imperial policy during the sixteenth-century reorganization (e.g., Gibson 1952:103–106; Lockhart et al. 1986:108–109 [f. 141v]; Muñoz Camargo 1986; Nava Rodríguez 1966:53) but was a distortion of what had been a more decentralized aboriginal political regime. To describe the political system of late prehispanic Tlaxcallan, we look at four features that we think were key to this polity's functioning: promotion to elite or principal (*teuctli*, pl. *teteuctin*) status based on achievement, including service to the state; a system of funding of principals (*teccalli*); a governing council consisting of principals; and an induction ceremony that tested the mettle of new recruits to the governing council and made them aware of their moral obligations to the people of the polity.

Teccalli, Teuctli, and Council: Introduction

Abundant evidence supports the idea that in prehispanic Tlaxcallan principal authority was vested in a governing council made up of persons who were obligated to provide military as well as administrative services to the polity. The resources needed to meet these obligations were provided through the local variant of the teccalli system (an estate or "noble house") that was an important element of the social landscape of the prehispanic Eastern Nahua area (Chance 2000; Lockhart 1992:102–104). In most areas where the teccalli system was employed, control of resources was awarded to a governing elite (teuctli) who typically inherited wealth and status based on patrilineal (Carrasco 1976:21–22) or cognatic descent (Chance 2000). In Tlaxcallan, however, inheritance of teccalli estates and teuctli status was less often based on kinship. Instead, the governing council certified teuctli status based on demonstrated achievement, as we detail below. The result was an unusual situation (in terms of both Spanish and Nahua norms of the period) in which there was constant cycling of elites in and out of official statuses.

Teccalli and council in Tlaxcallan have been difficult to understand in part because they were not well understood by early Spanish observers. Spanish culture of the fourteenth–sixteenth centuries was an example of late European feudalism and accordingly was strongly ruler-centric and was becoming more so as royal power was extended to gain control over local municipal governments (Morse 1984:74). However, in spite of royal intervention, local elites (*hidalgo* and *señor*) maintained their preferential access to many positions of municipal authority (McAlister 1984:28, 31). At both the scale of the polity and in local governance, although there was a growing cadre of appointed officials in the service of the kings, it remained the case that lineal descent stood as the major source of legitimation of status (ascription), both in the sense of hereditary dynastic succession of kings and among the hidalgo/señor class (McAlister 1984:27, 33).

Given the saliency of ascription in Spanish culture, it makes sense that the strongly Hispanicized Tlaxcaltecan historian Diego Muñoz Camargo (1986), writing in the late sixteenth century, reflected his hidalgo class interests by placing considerable emphasis on descent reckoning in his reconstruction of Tlaxcaltecan history. This is obvious in his repetitious (but inconsistent [Gibson 1952:4–5, Appendix I]) historical accounts of the ruler lists of the main sixteenth-century head towns (Tepeticpac, Ocotelulco, Tizatlan, and Quiahuixtlan) and in his repeated propagandistic assertions that descendants of the aboriginal "nobility" should be allowed to retain their privileges in the colonial society owing to the fact that they were early converters to Christianity and because they had been providers of valuable services to the Spanish Empire (e.g., Muñoz Camargo 1986:132). However, according to Gibson (1952:103), there is little evidence for four principal rulers or dynastic histories prior to the 1540s; as he puts it, "Contemporary documentation bearing the signatures of the four individuals themselves or reliable references to them, survives only for the 1540's and later times" (1952:103).[5] The rising emphasis on ascribed status with Hispanization in the early colonial period, which created confusion and uncertainty, is also demonstrated by the outpouring of (fraudulent) Tlaxcallan lineage registers painted in European style (Cosentino 2007).

Inheritance of offices, with descent typically traced through males, played an important role in royal succession in the Nahua polities of the late prehispanic period, especially in the Aztec Empire's

core zone in the Basin of Mexico (Western Nahua [e.g., Boone 2000:163]). Scholars such as Lockhart (1992:37, 103) who interpret Tlaxcallan primarily through the lens of typical Western Nahua political structure have followed Muñoz Camargo in assuming a predominance of patrilineal descent in prehispanic Tlaxcallan as well (cf. Carrasco 1976:21–22). In some powerful families, lineal descent did, at times, influence status, e.g., when a son of the teuctli Xicotencatl the elder was chosen to lead Tlaxcaltecan forces against the Spanish (Cervantes de Salazar 1991; Díaz del Castillo 1988:235; Herrera y Tordesillas 1934; Torquemada 1975), although, even in this instance, de Aguilar (2002:187) suggests that Xicotencatl the younger was likely promoted based on merit. In Tlaxcallan, while ascription retained some salience, inheritance of governing status was not automatic because succession had to be certified by the governing council (Anguiano and Chapa 1976:134–135, 140, 147, 152; Gibson 1952:11–12; Lockhart et al. 1986:108–109 [f. 141v]; Motolinía 1971:339–343; Muñoz Camargo 1947:56–57).[6] In many cases, potential lineal heirs (pipiltin) did not provide service and thus did not inherit governing status and were cast out of the nobility (Anguiano and Chapa 1976:134–135).[7]

Service and Social Mobility

Sources based on early colonial-period documents clearly indicate that teuctli status was bestowed, not inherited (for Tlaxcallan, see especially Anguiano and Chapa 1976:134–135, 140–141, 147, 152; Motolinía 1971:340; Muñoz Camargo 1999:185, 190; but for more general information on status mobility in central Mexico, see also Durán 1971:137–138; Zorita 1963:104; cf. Lockhart 1992:103).[8] In the typical altepetl, a council of tlatoque or high-ranking officials confirmed hereditary succession, and this could be based in part on ability, but the selection was made within the confines of potential candidates from a particular ruling family or descent group (e.g., Davies 1973:87). There is compelling evidence that in Tlaxcallan achievement was especially important and broadly conceived so as to make possible recruitment to positions of authority from across social sectors. A passage in Muñoz Camargo's *Historia de Tlaxcala* (1986:98; cf. Anguiano and Chapa 1976:140–141) is particularly interesting in this regard because it is counter to his more typical prose that portrays Tlaxcallan through the lens of Spanish feudalism. In this passage, Muñoz Camargo relates how succession to teuctli status could be based on success in war, giving valuable advice or counsel "en la República" (evidently, in council), and commercial endeavors (other sources indicate that service to the priesthood was also considered [cf. Aguilera 1991b:104; Anguiano and Chapa 1976:140–141; Durán 1971:137–138; Zorita 1963:104]).[9] Motolinía (1971:340; see note 9) also indicates that the title of teuctli was earned and not ascribed or inherited and that commoners (*macehualli*, especially *yaotequihua*) could be promoted.[10]

Postclassic social mobility in Tlaxcallan was marked by a number of Nahuatl terms reflecting the rise or fall of an individual based on personal achievement (or lack thereof). For example, *macehualtin* (commoners) who had risen through the social ranks and had been designated as pipiltin (nobility) were called yaotequihua (warriors inscribed as nobles; and possibly *mopilaque*, but this term may mean "false nobles"), while the pipiltin who had fallen to macehualli status despite noble birth were called *pillaquistiltin* (a Tlaxcaltecan term [Anguiano and Chapa 1976:134, 152]). There also developed an intermediate class of individuals between the pilli and macehualli called *teixhuiuh* (a term unique to Tlaxcallan [Lockhart 1992:102]) that contained both rising and falling individuals. *Pilli* was a general term for elite status, but among the pipiltin there was a graded hierarchy of statuses ranging from lowly ranked teixhuiuh and *pilli* (or pipiltin) to highly ranked teccalli holders (teuctli [Anguiano and Chapa 1976:134–135]). Interestingly, *The Tlaxcalan Actas* indicate that pipiltin were not considered to be "genuine nobles," saying only that nobles whose fathers had been teteuctin were "genuine nobles" (Lockhart et al. 1986:61), emphasizing, we think, the role of service to the state, at least by the father of the nobleman, in native social classification even in the colonial period. For example, teteuctin could award subdivisions of their teccalli as sub-benefices (in *usufructo* in Anguiano and Chapa 1976:147) to secondary elites, the pilli and teixhuiuh (Muñoz Camargo 1986:134), in anticipation that they provide military service under the direction of an estate's teuctli. Muñoz Camargo indicates that pipiltin and teixhuiuh would consist of a teuctli's

descendants, but others could be recruited as well, given that as many as 40 pipiltin were recorded in one teccalli (Lockhart 1992:102; Rojas et al. 1987:309–325).

The apical teteuctin or tlatoque of the prehispanic period were influential figures who had achieved great wealth (possibly including very large *teccaltin*) and wisdom/age and had provided extensive services to the state (e.g., Maxixcatzin and Xicotencatl the elder). However, they did not have the status of kings, as was implied by the term *tlatoani* in other Nahua societies (Lockhart 1992:15, 109). Instead, *tlatoani* appears to be a rare term of respect similar to the Spanish term *Don* in colonial Tlaxcala, which individuals acquired (earned) based on extensive service to the cabildo, according to Lockhart et al.'s (1986:21–22) analysis of the cabildo minutes from the middle–late sixteenth century, and was not ascribed at birth. Like all other teteuctin, they participated in and were responsible to the ruling council. In council, it is obvious that the leading tlatoque could exercise strong leadership, but only in the capacity of persuasive and influential orators. For example, Cervantes de Salazar (1991:31–36) reports extensively on the council's deliberations pertaining to the decision whether or not to ally with the Spanish.[11] In these meetings, a contentious debate took place in which many voices were heard (e.g., Maxixcatzin, Xicotencatl the elder, Xicotencatl the younger, and Temilotecutli), but several important leaders (e.g., Maxixcatzin and Temilotecutli) eventually led the council to the decision to ally with the Spanish. It is not clear why some tlatoque were more important than others. By definition, none was under the overlordship of other teteuctin, nor did they maintain overlordship over other members of the council, but some of these important officials appear to have been exceptionally influential. Díaz del Castillo (1956:271) hints that age may have been a factor, when he mentions that five "old caciques" came as a group to confer with Cortés. Wealth also figured into influence, and the two most significant of the tlatoque, Xicotencatl the elder and Maxixcatzin, were comparatively better off "from an economic point of view" because they had more vassals (Anguiano and Chapa 1976:138–139 n. 17), and it should be noted that Maxixcatzin also maintained control over the most important regional market (Cortés 2007:63–64; Motolinía 1971:247; Muñoz Camargo 1947:38).

It is not clear how many leading tlatoque there were at the time of the conquest. By the mid–sixteenth century, the governing system instituted by the Spanish consisted of four ruling houses that shared the central position of authority in a rotation among what, by that time, again following Spanish practice, had been designated as head towns or *cabeceras*, Tepeticpac, Ocotelulco, Tizatlan, and Quiahuixtlan, with the dependent territories of each center extending out from the four so as to divide Tlaxcala into four pie-wedge-shaped subdivisions (Gibson 1952:131–134, Map E; Motolinía 1950:258–260; Saldaña Oropesa 1950:39–55). Lockhart (1992:21, Figure 2.2) suggests that this quadripartite system had been carried forward from prehispanic practice, but no evidence supports this proposition, and in fact, there is no evidence that prehispanic Tlaxcaltecas recognized a center-plus-dependency type of regional organization (Gibson 1952:12–13). Furthermore, we know that the Spanish introduced a head-town-plus-subject-communities pattern during the colonial period in Tlaxcala (Gerhard 1993:326; cf. Chance 1996). Even Lockhart (1992:33) admits that the quadripartite scheme and the four-part rotation cannot be confirmed prior to the 1540s (cf. García Cook and Merino Carrión 1991:349–350; Gibson 1952:12–13, 131–134). In fact, Gómez de Santillán, a Spanish official (*corregidor*), implemented the territorial division and rotation of governor in 1545 as part of the political reorganization of the cabildo of Tlaxcala (Saldaña Oropesa 1950:39–55).[12] Rather than four, the conquistadors describe a variable number of major authority figures in Tlaxcallan at the time of first contact (e.g., Anonymous Conqueror 1961; Cortés 2007; de Aguilar 2002; Díaz del Castillo 1988; de Tápia 2002). For example, in their first major encounter with the Spanish, Díaz del Castillo (1988:240–241) describes a Tlaxcaltecan army led by four major figures (who each brought 10,000 soldiers) but in the same section also mentions a fifth significant leader ("Guaxoban"). In the initial encounters of the Spanish and Tlaxcaltecas, the number of Tlaxcaltecan diplomats who counseled with the Spanish at various times ranged from two (often Xicotencatl and Maxixcatzin), to seven (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1991:58), to 50 (Cortés 1986:61; Díaz

del Castillo 1988:275). And not all tlatoque were from the main centers of Tepeticpac, Ocotelulco, Tizatlan, and Qiahuixtlan; early sources also mention tlatoque from Tepeyanco and possibly also Tecohuatzingo or Tecoac (a largely Otomí settlement), Tzompantzingo, Atlihuitzia, and Hueyotlipan (also Otomí [García Cook and Merino Carrión 1991:350–351; cf. Gerhard 1993:324; Muñoz Camargo 1998:104, 187–188]).[13] As late as 1541, the official document regarding the division and marking of land within the colonial city of Tlaxcala makes no mention of the four tlatoque or the four head towns and, instead, refers to the governors and principals of Tlaxcala (Archivo General del Estado de Tlaxcala [Sempat Assadourian and Martínez Baracs 1991:206–208]). A 1548 census mentions two tlatoque from Atlihuetzia (Anguiano and Chapa 1976:139). In this same census, a total of six individuals are listed as having had tlatoani status (Anguiano and Chapa 1976:134–135).

Teccalli

Once raised to teuctli status, the political official was awarded a named teccalli. We think the evidence indicates that it was as an institution much like a "benefice" as described by Max Weber (1978:1073–1074; *appanage* in French terminology). In European feudalism, a benefice constituted a grant given by the ruler that was not always heritable and which was granted to an individual not for personal benefit but, rather, to support the costs of an office or similar official position where there was an absence of salaried officials. The latter implies that the estate in question was in some sense owned by the state as an awardable asset that could substitute for a salary paid to a government official. A teccalli as a benefice was a named entity that encompassed a specific geographical location (e.g., Anguiano and Chapa 1976:144; see note 8). Typically, resident commoner households (macehualtin) provided a teccalli's resources and produced surpluses for their teuctli overlord by working some combination of arable lands and perhaps other resources (such as forested uplands [Muñoz Camargo 1986:134]). They also provided military corvée under the command of the teuctli for Tlaxcallan's many wars. A teccalli might include other revenue-producing resources such as marketplaces (e.g., Cortés 2007:63–64; Motolinía 1950:259). During the sixteenth century, teteuctin in some cases were also owners of what appear to have been private estates (*pilcalli*) that fell into a separate category of ownership from teccalli, but it is not known to what degree this has prehispanic precedent or, if so, how much land was private vs. teccalli (e.g., Anguiano and Chapa 1976:147). Interestingly, in one documentary case reported by Hicks, the surpluses from private estates were described as being "land from which the lords ate" (2009:581). This seems to imply that teccalli were a more public resource meant to defray service expenses rather than being personal properties that could be a source of personal household wealth (see also Castillo Farreras 1972:78).[14] Therefore, they would have been analogous to *tlatocatlalli* (ruler's office's land) or *teuctlalli* (teuctli's [office's] land) and *tecpantlalli* (palace land) described in early colonial documents and histories of other Nahua polities, which were bound to political offices and not individuals. Both Zorita (1963) and Sahagún (2005) specifically mention land attached to offices and not individuals in central Mexico (Castillo Farreras 1972:78–82, 85; Offner 1983:136–137; cf. Lockhart 1992:156).[15] Having been awarded an estate, the teccalli holder assumed a titled (in what follows, "elite") status, teuctli, and accepted the obligation to provide military and governing services (e.g., Anguiano and Chapa 1976:139).

Council Governance

The council, although difficult to piece together, seems to have had the power to declare war and peace, send ambassadors, propose alliances, and appoint and remove political and military officials to/from their posts up to and including the succession or execution of all teteuctin (including tlatoque [Aguilera 1991b:103; Gibson 1952:18–19; for primary sources, see also Cervantes de Salazar 1991; Díaz del Castillo 1988:249–279; Muñoz Camargo 1947:56–57]),[16] and as such it was a monitorial body that ensured a teuctli fulfilled his duties and punished or executed individuals who deviated from the moral code or council wishes. Decision making was achieved through speechmaking and debate until a consensus was reached (e.g., Cervantes de Salazar 1991:31–36).

It is apparent that even important tlatoque and their families were not independent political actors and, instead, were accountable to the council. Xicotencatl the younger, e.g., who at one time served as

leader of the combined Tlaxcaltecan force that initially attacked the Spanish, later was ordered by the council to be put to death (or turned over to Cortés for execution) for his treasonous opposition to the council regarding the Spanish and regarding invasion of Tenochtitlán (Cervantes de Salazar 1991:110–112; Díaz del Castillo 1988:511–513; Durán 2006a:559; Muñoz Camargo 1998:115–116). In a passage pointing out that in prehispanic central Mexican cultures even elites were obligated to a moral code, Zorita (1994:130) describes how a brother of the important tlatoani Maxixcatzin was put to death for adultery (see also Motolinía 1971:321). Importantly, we think that Maxixcatzin lacked the authority to act unilaterally because he took the case to the council, which tried his brother, found him guilty, and sentenced him to death. This account can be contrasted in the same passage, where Nezahualcoyotl, as ruler of Alcolhuacan, had supreme judicial power and could act unilaterally in a similar situation.

Size of the Council

The size of the governing council is unknown. By the mid–sixteenth century, the Spanish-designed cabildo government of Tlaxcala included a council of 220 elite-electors, each one a teuctli (Gibson 1952:107–108, citing the *Actas de cabildo del ayuntamiento de Tlaxcala*; Lockhart et al. 1986:36, 40, 44, 50 [ff. 4, 18, 40–41, 79–80]). The council of the conquest period is not described in detail, but it is of interest that a group of 50 "men of rank" arrived at the Spaniards' camp (Cortés 1986:61), evidently on a fact-finding mission in anticipation of a council debate about how to treat the Spanish. Was this the full constitution of the council? Or was it only a group selected by the full council to gather information? If we follow the argument of García Cook and Merino Carrión (1991:352–380; cf. Anguiano and Chapa 1976:151), there might have been as many as 10 (or even more) tlatoque and four times that many lesser teteuctin, approximately the same size estimated by Cortés for the group of "men of rank." However, the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (ca. 1550) identifies 143 teteuctin, and the *Padrón de Nobles de Ocotelolco*, the *Padrones de Tlaxcala*, and the *Lienzo de Tepeticpac* together identify 122 teteuctin (excluding Quiahuixtlan), suggesting that the ruling council may have been larger during the prehispanic era than the group met by Cortés (Aguilera 1986; Anguiano and Chapa 1976: 142–147).

Induction Ceremonies

Following their selection and council approval, candidates for teuctli status were required to pass through elaborate induction rites during which they were socialized into their new role, invested with the symbols of office, and required to complete temple service and, as a finale, to provide gifts to the sitting teteuctin and many macehualtin (Anguiano and Chapa 1976:141; Motolinía 1971:339–343; Muñoz Camargo 1986:98–100; Zorita 1963:94–96; cf. Carrasco 1966).[17] As part of the initiation rite, the candidate's septum was pierced, and he was awarded an eagle's claw and a jaguar's bone signifying that he had acted in the manner of Tezcatlipoca-Camaxtli, the polity's major deity (described below) and demonstrated his true value and merit in military service to the state (Motolinía 1971:339; for Chichimec ideology associated with Tezcatlipoca-Camaxtli, perforation of the septum, and association with eagle and jaguar, see Odena Güemes 1990:454–456). Then, the people tore the clothes from his body, "hurled insults at the ruler-elect and even pushed him about to try his patience" (Motolinía 1971:339; for a generalized description that was partially based on Tlaxcallan, see also Zorita 1994:94; and see note 13). Assuming that he remained calm and tolerant in the face of abuse, the candidate was brought to a temple and remained there between one and two years (Motolinía 1971:340; Zorita 1994:95; cf. Muñoz Camargo 1986:49). During this period of penance (which involved sleep deprivation, fasting, and beatings with ropes lined with maguey spines), autosacrifice, and reflection, the candidate was trained in a strict moral behavioral code that stressed his responsibility to the people and service to the state and to Tezcatlipoca-Camaxtli, and not his personal rights or privileges (Motolinía 1971:340, 342; Zorita 1994:93–96).

At the end of the ceremony of investiture, the candidate was dressed in rich clothes, and a bow was placed in his left hand (signifying his role as warrior and leader) and a scepter in his right (signifying his role as administrator and judge [Motolinía 1971:342]). He was instructed once again in his responsibilities to his subjects, to behave well, and to guard and treat his subjects well.

Finally, he was given his title and with it the right to govern and vote in the council. At that point, he emerged from the temple and descended to an adjacent plaza where all the teteuctin and many macehualtin (commoners) had gathered to participate in the investiture feast funded by the new teuctli. According to Motolinía (1971:341–343), during a typical feast between 1,200 and 1,700 turkeys were consumed along with large volumes of other foods, *pulque* (a fermented drink made from maguey sap), and cacao. Thus we estimate that these festivals involved thousands of Tlaxcaltecas and provided an important mechanism for social integration and the development of a sense of Tlaxcaltecan identity.

Although induction rituals and associated festivals occurred in other Nahua polities (Gibson 1952:11–12; Zorita 1994:93–96), the Tlaxcaltecan induction cycle was set apart by its length and severity of temple service and the scale of the festival that included thousands of macehualtin. For example, at first glance this induction ritual may appear highly similar to induction rituals described by Sahagún (2005:II:322–324; see also Zorita 1963:93–94) for the Basin of Mexico in that both involved bringing the ruler-elect to the temple, dressing him in elaborate clothing, requiring a penitence period, and finishing with an induction feast. However, upon closer inspection the differences in the rituals become highly apparent. In the basin version, officials brought the ruler-elect to the temple, and the common people did not test him; he then spent only four days in penitence, and this penitence required only fasting and autosacrifice (bloodletting). This contrasts with the Tlaxcaltecan ritual that required one to two years of penitence, sleep deprivation, rigorous beatings, and training in a strict moral code along with autosacrifice and fasting. Finally, at the end of ritual, the basin ruler-elect hosted a feast to which he invited only his friends (entourage) and high-ranking officials from neighboring states. The type of public feast for the community at large hosted by the new Tlaxcaltecan teuctli did not occur. In fact, the only role described by Sahagún for commoners was the chance to see the ruler-elect offer incense to the idol of Huitzilopochtli atop the massive central pyramid from far below in the plaza. Durán's (2006a:126–127, 302, 401) descriptions of Mexica ruler selection include instruction in a moral code at the time of election by the ruler of Texcoco or the ruler of Tlacopan in the form a brief lecture, a level of instruction that does not rival the intense moral training experienced by Tlaxcaltecan leaders. Durán (2006a:302, 306–308) also indicates that in the Basin of Mexico, the investiture speech spoke of Quetzalcoatl's inheritance and that conquered polities paid for the feast and only their lords and the ruler-elect's entourage attended. Zorita (1963:94) tells us that the lords presented the ruler-elect with many gifts of mantles and jewels.

The Ideological Basis of Council Governance

In the late prehispanic Nahua polities, mythic histories and religious practices provided ideological justification for the allocation of political authority in society. In the northern fringe of Mesoamerica, where Nahua culture predominated, a key issue that was played out in myth and ritual surrounded the alternate claims to the right to govern society made by nobles and commoners. In what follows we describe the nature of this political discourse and how it figured into the ideological framework of state formation in prehispanic Tlaxcallan. Interestingly, while Tlaxcaltecan myth and religion were grounded in Nahua religion, here the adoration of the deity Tezcatlipoca (also known as Mixcoatl-Camaxtli) was strongly emphasized. To understand why this particular deity was selected for special attention, in the next section we place Tezcatlipoca within the context of the broader Nahua religious system, particularly as it was developed in the imperial heartland of the Basin of Mexico.

Tezcatlipoca in Nahua Myth and Religion

Nahua mythic history, which describes the journeys of the various Nahua ethnic groups from Aztlan and Chicomoztoc (Boone 1991), was reenacted during the annual calendar festivals in cities such as the imperial capital of Tenochtitlán. In the sense of Rappaport (1979:194–199), these rituals served to promote the acceptance and sanctification of those social conventions concerning the nature of power and authority that are inscribed in the histories. Mythic history and its accompanying rituals did this by linking political philosophy to a cosmovision that united nature and history to humanity (e.g., Bernal-García 2007:69; Broda 1991; cf. Gillespie

1989:xxv; Wolf 1999:278). While mythic history varied in details among Nahua ethnic groups, all (including the Tlaxcaltecas) embraced the proposition that the current world is a product of a dramatic and conflictive cosmic history consisting of a sequence of ages (Nicholson 1971:397–403). The first ages (usually four in number) featured a complex and variable cast of deities, but the culminating struggle to create the fifth, or current, age required the efforts of two of the principal Nahua gods, Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl (Nicholson 1971:399–400). That the current age resulted from the combined efforts of two deities provides a key insight into how ideas about the nature of rulership and power were embedded in Nahua cosmovision. Although the two deities cooperated to actualize the fifth age, they also symbolized a logic of duality and opposition at play in the constitution of nature, humanity, and society.

In the Nahua cosmic scheme, nature was sacralized by adding layers of symbolic meaning to the ecotonic transition from a northern arid zone to a more verdant agricultural domain to the south and east, where the Nahua and other Mesoamerican peoples resided (e.g., Davies 1980:73–74). The ecotone was symbolically meaningful in Nahua cultural design in three senses. First, it demarcated the contrast between foraging peoples, or those recently descended from foraging peoples, whose desert or arid-zone existence was considered closer to a state of nature by comparison with the more sedentary agricultural populations living in a state of culture. Second, the nature-to-culture gradient mapped onto an ethnic distinction that contrasted the socially and culturally crude Chichimecs and related groups, such as the Otomí, of the desert north (Davies 1980:76–77; see also Braniff and Hers 1998) with the Nahua, whose Toltec cultural heritage made them the equals of other "civilized" Mesoamerican peoples (Berdan 2008). Third, the dual structure of the natural world was reflected in the symbolic representations of the cooperating deities who constructed the fifth age. The desert north was most strongly associated with the deity Tezcatlipoca, a sorcerer-transformer associated with the stars of the night sky, the jaguar, hunting, warfare, and the Chichimec peoples (e.g., Heyden 1991:191; Olivier 2003:14; see also Braniff and Hers 1998:58; Odena Güemes 1990:454–456), while Quetzalcoatl was one of the principal deities of a group of related deities thematically associated with sun, rain, agriculture, and the more civilized Nahua, who were governed by rulers descended from royal lineages (Mónaco 1998:128; Nicholson 1971:414–416, 428–430).

"Desert Power" in Nahua Political Philosophy

Mythic history provides an extended discourse on the concept of authority, first by alluding to the rise and fall of Toltec civilization and then in accounts of migrations into central Mexico by bands of Chichimecs, following the Toltec collapse. This history documents how primitive desert peoples were transformed from nomadic bands to neo-Toltec societies governed by a hereditary nobility (Boone 1991:148; cf. Gillespie 1989:20; Wolf 1999:189). The Toltec portion of the histories attributes the great achievements of the resplendent Toltec civilization to the culture hero Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl (Carrasco 1982; *Códice Chimalpopoca* 1975; Nicholson 2001), who had endowed the people with the advantages of civilized living and great material wealth. This part of the history is important for understanding the origins of rulership in the post-Toltec Nahua polities because marriages to daughters of noble Toltec families ruling southern Basin of Mexico cities, such as Culhuacan, were highly valued as a source of political legitimation for Chichimec rulers (e.g., Davies 1973: e.g., 6; Dibble 1951:35; cf. Gillespie 1989:80–81). Political legitimation through marriages to Toltec nobility is an important factor to consider in understanding late Postclassic state formation and Nahua concepts of authority (e.g., as described for the Basin of Mexico by Gillespie [1989]). However, mythic history provides a far more complex moralizing discourse on power that is dualistic, in that it balances the authority of noble rule with the importance of achievement as an equally legitimate path to authority, even commoner achievement. For example, the establishment of the Acolhua polity is attributed to the famous Chichimec Xolotl (Dibble 1951), although some of Xolotl's descendants did marry into Toltec families.

The Nahua cultural logic that defines authority in a dualistic sense is apparent in the opposition of Quetzalcoatl and Toltec symbolism, on the one hand, and Tezcatlipoca and Chichimec symbolism, on the other (e.g., van Zantwijk 1985:96–97). How-

ever, the Nahua cultural scheme is more than a simple duality. While the distinction between Chichimec and neo-Toltec Nahua could be represented as a relationship of nature to culture, we perceive a more complex dual oppositional logic at play in which nature and culture are seen to operate simultaneously on two levels. One level goes to the degree to which a person enjoys a civilized way of life (sedentary, farming, with great wealth), but this gradient intersects with a more fundamental sense of self in which the culturally primitive are endowed with a greater sense of moral purpose and understanding.

This dual opposition of nature–culture is evident in the events and personnel recounted in mythic history. It begins in accounts of the glorious Toltec Empire and its culture hero Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl (Carrasco 1982; Nicholson 2001), but Tezcatlipoca also figures into the history of the Toltec era as an interloper whose trickery exposed the moral limitations of Toltec rulers, limitations that brought the demise of the civilization. In one interesting episode found in most accounts, Tezcatlipoca urged the ruler Quetzalcoatl to look at himself in a mirror, advising him, "Know yourself, see yourself"; and when he did, he was terrified at what he had become (Bierhorst 1992:32; see also Mónaco 1998:132). Tezcatlipoca then tricked the ruler into drinking *octli* (pulque) to a state of drunkenness to make him "lose his judgment, so that he no longer performs his sacraments" (Bierhorst 1992:31–32, 34). Inebriated, Quetzalcoatl appears to have compounded the problem by urging his sister to drink with him and then (possibly) fornicating with her (summarized in Nicholson 2001:47). Mortified by his unthinkable transgressions, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl abandoned Tula, hastening the end of the Toltec era. In another and equally important episode, Tezcatlipoca and his allies came to another Toltec ruler, Huemac, a warrior, and convinced him to engage in human sacrifice (Mónaco 1998:142–146, citing the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*), including the sacrifice of his legitimate sons or heirs. By sacrificing his sons, Huemac in essence sacrificed his lineage and the ability to inherit rulership and, thus, became Atecpanecatl, the enemy of Quetzalcoatl and dynastic succession and the destroyer of royal privilege (Mónaco 1998:144). Consequently, Tezcatlipoca, through his defeat of Quetzalcoatl and influence over Huemac, set in motion the transformation of central Mexican society that allowed achievement to become a legitimate path to authority alongside nobility.

The Toltec collapse story and the migration epics point to the potential dangers of accepting a civilized state of Toltec being since mythic history associated it with drunkenness, incest, and other barbaric acts. By contrast, Chichimecs are presented in some ways in a more favorable light than Toltecs, endowed with a kind of "desert power" (with apologies to Frank Herbert) lacking in the Toltec self. We note that it was the special ability of Tezcatlipoca that brought to light the true character of the Toltec ruler by urging him to look into the obsidian mirror to "know yourself, see yourself" and then tricking him into moral transgression. This aspect of Nahua political philosophy is neatly expressed in concepts surrounding what it means to have the ability to truly see. Tezcatlipoca, although symbolized in relation to night, dark, and the stars, was thought to possess an especially acute visual ability, represented by an obsidian mirror, through which "the whole character of a culture is clearly reflected" (Nicholson 1971:412; Olivier 2003:250–254). Bernal-García (2007:109) likens this feature to the Huichol idea that the desert is a source of acute vision, giving access to the wisdom of the ancestors. We relate this kind of visual wisdom to the ability to see the potential for virtue in persons regardless of social standing, including the idea that success can be the product of achievement, not just noble birth (Sahagún 1950–1982:II:5). For example, one name for Tezcatlipoca was Moyocoyotzin, "he who creates himself" (Heyden 1991:189). And in the *Codex Borgia*, Tezcatlipoca is depicted as Ixquimilli, a blindfolded judge, pointing to the importance of blind justice (Seler 1963:112–113).

Ideological and Ritual Basis of State Formation in Tlaxcallan

Various sources point to Tezcatlipoca (and his Chichimec form, Camaxtli) as the patron deity of Tlaxcallan and a corresponding de-emphasis on the idea of divine rulership, royal lineage, and Quetzalcoatl symbolism. For example, in Muñoz Camargo's *Historia de Tlaxcala* (1986) Quetzalcoatl is only briefly mentioned, and following Motolinía's (1950, 1971) extensive descriptions, participation in Cholula's Quetzalcoatl cult seems

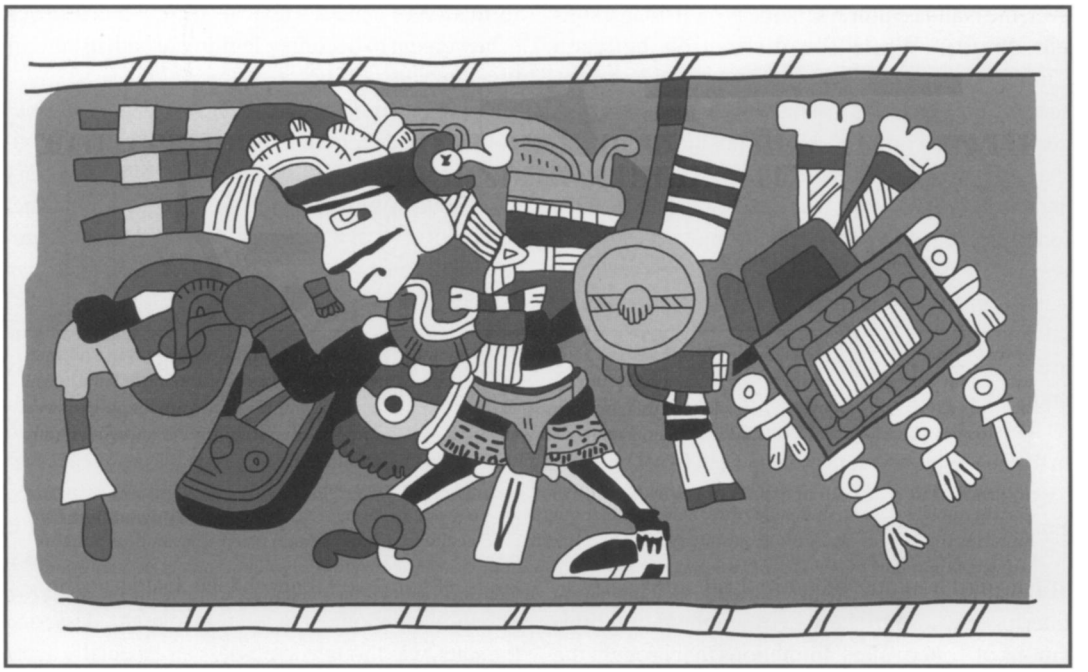

Figure 2. Tezcatlipoca, Tizatlan murals, Late Postclassic Tlaxcallan (Redrawn from Noguera 1929:pl.1)

to have been relatively unimportant in the Tlaxcaltecan region.

Symbolism associated with Tezcatlipoca (or Mixcoatl-Camaxtli) is emphasized on the murals discovered on excavated temples in the modern communities of Ocotelulco and Tizatlan (Figure 2), which were located near the center of the Tlaxcallan polity during the late Postclassic period (Caso 1927:145–160; Contreras 1992), along with themes of penitence and autosacrifice through bloodletting (Caso 1927; for interpretation of symbols, see also Lind 1994:97).[18] Codex-style polychromes from Tlaxcallan reproduce the themes and iconographic elements seen on the murals. Caso (1927:Figure 10) illustrates an example with bloody skulls, bloody hands, shields, and atlatls along with flint knives. Our systematic ceramic collections within the ancient urban center of Tlaxcallan have much iconography associated with Tezcatlipoca (celestial or sacrificial eyes, precious stones, smoke swirls and red strips associated with flowing blood and Camaxtli) and little that can be tied to Quetzalcoatl (Hernández Sánchez 2005; Figure 3). Another ceramic example, recovered in the excavations at the Ocotelulco temple, shows Tezcatlipoca with a maguey spine and copal bag on the interior base of a bowl, reinforcing the theme of autosacrifice (Contreras 1992:Figure 8). In his analysis of stylistically identical Cholula (Catalina) polychromes, Lind (1994:97) concludes that the iconography of maguey spines, knives, skulls, balls of feathers, and incense bags reflects an impersonal focus on religion, ritual, autosacrifice, and human/animal sacrifice. He contrasts these themes with the very personal and idiosyncratic imagery on Mixteca Alta polychromes that emphasize elite rituals including feasting, weddings, and the genealogies of divine rulers (cf. Pohl 1998:196). The *Codex Cospi* and especially the *Codex Borgia* (both probably painted in Tlaxcala) strongly emphasize religious ritual and sacrifice as well as Tezcatlipoca (Boone 2007:172–173, 222–225; Peperstraete 2006). On the other hand, Quetzalcoatl has virtually no presence in ceramic or mural imagery at Tlaxcallan (e.g., Caso 1927; Contreras 1992).

These conclusions are supported by symbolic themes found in late Postclassic decorated pottery. In her analysis of the iconography represented on 365 whole and partial Mixteca-Puebla polychrome vessels ("codex style") from the Valley of Oaxaca, the Mixteca Alta, Veracruz, Puebla-Tlaxcala, and

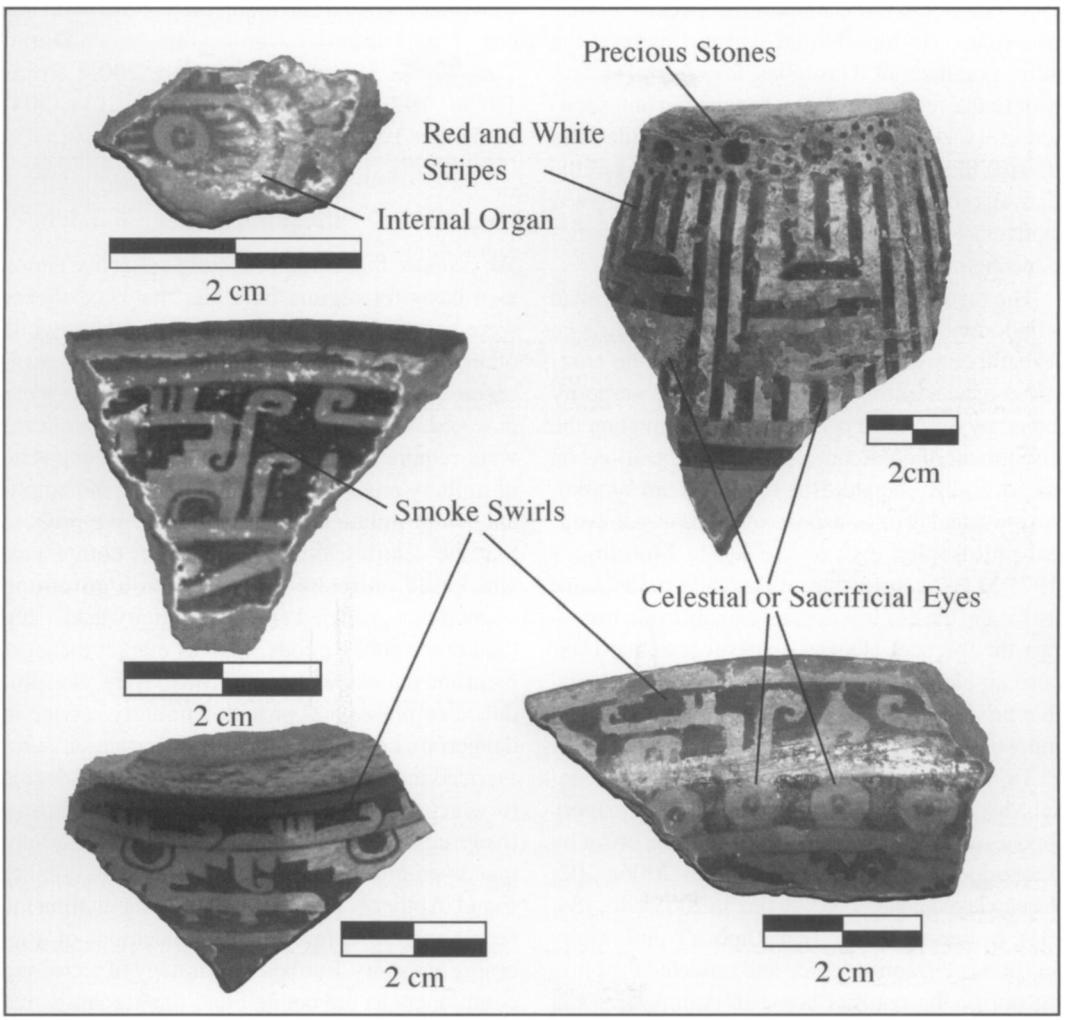

Figure 3. Iconography associated with the *Complejo de Humo y Oscuridad* of Tezcatlipoca on "Codex-Style" ceramics from Tlaxcallan (Tlaxcala Mapping project)

the Basin of Mexico (we exclude those vessels with no secure proveniences), Hernández Sánchez (2005) identifies design complexes that reflect key themes of cosmovision and ritual. When we tabulated her data, we found strong statistical associations between Tezcatlipoca-related representations ("complejos asociados a la oscuridad" [Hernández Sánchez 2005:159–173]) and vessels from Tlaxcallan (giving a chi-square of 4.25, $df = 1$, $p \leq .05$; Figure 3). Conversely, when we tabulated all themes associated with Quetzalcoatl (and associated themes of nobility, sun, and precious objects), we found fewer than expected examples in the materials from Tlaxcallan (giving a chi-square of 8.09, $df = 1$, $p \leq .01$) and a strong occurrence in other areas.[19]

Early colonial descriptions of preconquest politics and religion dovetail nicely with the themes of autosacrifice, human sacrifice, and Tezcatlipoca on murals and polychromes. Among our best sources are Motolinía (who lived in Tlaxcala during the 1530s), Durán (1994), and the mestizo Tlaxcalteca historian Muñoz Camargo (1986). From Motolinía (1971:70), Muñoz Camargo (1986), and Durán (1971:Chapter 7) we learn that Tezcatlipoca-Camaxtli was the most powerful and important deity in Tlaxcallan. Motolinía (1950:78–83) describes in detail the large-scale, integrative pan-

polity celebration of Camaxtli that occurred every four years. He reports that during this time the entire populace of Tlaxcallan fasted for 80 days prior to the festival and also engaged in autosacrifice every 20 days by piercing their tongues and offering their blood to Camaxtli. On the day of the festival, offerings and human sacrifices (using war captives) were made in temples in all the settlements before the deity's images.

The focus on Tezcatlipoca in ancient Tlaxcallan is important in a number of ways. An emphasis on Tezcatlipoca would have foregrounded the commoner aspect of the dualistic concept of authority shared by the Nahua peoples, thus legitimating the recruitment of commoners to serve in positions on the governing council. But Tezcatlipocan symbolism is evident in other aspects of Tlaxcaltecan political philosophy, e.g., as we see in Motolinía's (1971:321) statement that no Tlaxcalteca was above justice and the law was applied equally to all. In contrast, the absence of Quetzalcoatl suggests that Tlaxcaltecan ideology downplayed royal lineages and elite privilege, thus promoting a more egalitarian philosophy than seen in other Nahua polities.

This pattern can be contrasted with other central Mexican polities, where Tezcatlipoca imagery appears (e.g., Durán 2006b:47–59) but is offset by Quetzalcoatl imagery (e.g., Durán 2006a:302; Hernández Sánchez 2005; Sahagún 2005:I:46, 134, 304). In these polities, Tezcatlipoca's philosophy was present to some degree and reflected the playing out of the conflict between commoners and elites over the right to rule as part of the Chichimec inheritance. As a result, commoner power and councils were present to some degree (e.g., Davies 1987; Fargher and Blanton 2007; Lockhart 1992; Offner 1983; van Zantwijk 1985). However, these polities differed from Tlaxcallan because these councils were set off against and controlled by rulers from powerful royal lineages or dynasties. In these polities, the hereditary rulers (tlatoque) wielded extensive power, lived in sumptuous palaces, and enjoyed numerous privileges denied to others (e.g., Alva Ixtlilxochitl 2000:90–96, 107, 110, 145–154, 191–196; Chimalpahin 1965:185, 206; Cortés 2007:76, 100; Díaz del Castillo 1988:317, 324, 340, 342, 344; Durán 2006a:125, 306, 308; Sahagún 2005:I:134, 278–279, 303–305). We also see use of Quetzalcoatl imagery (and related themes mentioned above), individualized ruler imagery, and more reference to royal lineages and inherited rulership (e.g., Durán 2006a:302; Hernández Sánchez 2005; Rojas 1979a, 1979b; Sahagún 2005:I:46, 134, 304; Umberger 1996:85, 88–90, 97–101).

Conclusion

We propose that by emphasizing collective action as a basis for regime building, the Tlaxcaltecas were better able to repel imperial conquest while other, more traditional and less collectively organized Nahua polities in central Mexico were defeated. To achieve their goals, the Tlaxcaltecas were required to maintain a nearly constant state of military readiness and a high degree of compliance with military corvée demands. We propose that the central element of taxpayer compliance was based on reciprocity between a governing council that provided effective military leadership (and other public goods, such as market management and judicial services) and taxpayers, who produced surpluses and provided military service in dangerous circumstances. The information summarized in this article points to the marked degree to which the Tlaxcaltecas developed a comparatively egalitarian and collective political system that de-emphasized the rule by neo-Toltec nobility found in other Nahua polities while facilitating the recruitment of commoners into positions of governing authority. Further, the strategy of recruiting commoners to the council and the emphasis that was placed on council members' moral accountability would also have promoted credibility and trust in the governing institutions. Last, we propose that a comparatively egalitarian council-based system of governance was particularly effective in military mobilization given the importance of the Otomí ethnic minority, who provided important military services (Aguilera 1991a) and were known to embrace an ethic of egalitarianism (e.g., Umberger 2008:77).

At the heart of this collective system was the egalitarian ideology of Tezcatlipoca that emphasized egalitarian and collective tenets highlighting the moral capacity of the commoner, blind justice, and achieved status and social mobility. Tezcatlipoca symbolism was also expressed through mythic history and ritual in other Nahua polities, including in the imperial center of Tenochtitlán

(van Zantwijk 1985:96–97), and the dualistic sense of authority that we see reflected in the Nahua cosmovision did have some egalitarianizing outcomes in state building in the imperial capitals in spite of the predominance of noble rule. For example, succession to the throne based on achievement was found to some degree in Western Nahua polities (e.g., Boone 2000:163); commoner participation in governing councils was common (e.g., Davies 1987:114–115; van Zantwijk 1985:96–97; cf. Fargher and Blanton 2007); and the Acolhua polity, a Triple Alliance partner but also a site where Tezcatlipoca was a prominent deity, featured a highly regarded judicial system that emphasized blind justice and the moral accountability of judges (Offner 1983:77, 242, 251).

The extreme emphasis on Tezcatlipoca and near absence of Quetzalcoatl in Tlaxcallan implied a rejection of the dualistic theory of authority implied in the more typical expressions of Nahua cosmovision and ritual. As a result, the Tlaxcaltecas abandoned centralized rulership or kingship, a basic tenet of Nahua political philosophy, thereby impeding the development of royal lineages, a divine-ruler cult, and kingly privileges. In the absence of kingship, the resulting distribution of power among a large group of ruling elites (drawn from across social sectors) severely curtailed the ability of a principal official or the most powerful tlatoani to monopolize ideological or material resources.

Finally, the egalitarian ideology ensured that all officials, even the most powerful tlatoque, were held accountable to the same moral code as all members of Tlaxcaltecan society and were not accorded special treatment or privileges when they violated it. For Tlaxcaltecan ruler-officials (teteuctin), egalitarian ideology provided a strong moral code that underscored service and sacrifice to the state in warfare and to the people in administrative duties. This code was enforced by the ruling council's selection of officials based on achievement and certification of titles, by requiring recruits to undergo a lengthy period of intense socialization upon selection to office, and by the ruling council's monitoring of official conduct. Moreover, the use of reclaimable estates (teccalli) under the control of the ruling council greatly facilitated the state's ability to monitor official behavior, enforce moral codes, and remove corrupt officials from office.

Adherence to the moral code by the ruling elite would have also provided the added benefit of cultivating trust among nonelite taxpayers and promoted the image that rulers were committed to the collective goals of the state. Furthermore, the egalitarian ideology's stress on a person's true value and meritorious behavior (especially in warfare) regardless of social status and its de-emphasis of ascription made possible the elevation of commoners into political offices and, thus, the ruling elite. Together these factors would have been key elements in promoting Gibson's (1952) Tlaxcaltecan patriotism and integrating immigrants into a Tlaxcaltecan identity.

Stated another way, the Tlaxcaltecas created a collective system that gave taxpayers (commoners) a stake in the welfare of the state and integrated them in such a way that they benefited from Tlaxcallan's independence and success. Specifically, they were rewarded with the potential to gain wealth and political office, including rising to the ruling council through military or other achievements. They also enjoyed public security, voice in the government, protection from Aztec conquest, and access to a wide range of bulk luxury goods (e.g., highly decorated polychrome pottery, cotton, and a range of high-status foods, among other things) through markets and teuctli feasts funded by the principals. We think that these features would have cultivated trust and compliance on the part of taxpayers and at the same time made Tlaxcallan an attractive migration destination for dissident elements fleeing imperial control.

Acknowledgments. This article reports on our research project in Tlaxcala, Mexico, which includes an archaeological study of the late Postclassic capital of Tlaxcallan, and a systematic evaluation of published aboriginal and colonial-period documents in light of the archaeological data. We thank the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., the National Geographic Society, and the National Science Foundation (Grant 0809643-BCS) for providing funding for this project. We thank the Consejo de Arqueología, the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, the Presidencia de Totoloc, and the communities of Tepeticpac, Quiahuixtlan, and Ocotelulco for providing necessary permissions and support for our research. We also thank our field crews, especially Lisa Overholtzer, John Millhauser, and Nezahualcoyotl Xiuhtecutli, for their valuable contributions to our work. Finally, we thank three anonymous reviewers for their useful critiques of an earlier version of this article. However, all errors or omissions are our sole responsibility.

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Notes

1. *Tlaxcallan* refers to both the territory and the largest city in this late prehispanic state. Our recently completed archaeological survey of the city of Tlaxcallan has documented one of the largest cities in Postclassic Mesoamerica,

with a nearly continuous settlement covering an area of about 450–500 ha. Much of this area is covered by densely packed residential terraces, possibly indicating a population density exceeding that described for Tenochtitlán. Yet our survey also documented that this massive settlement did not function as or house the capital (government buildings) of the Tlaxcallan state, which was located in a rural zone about 1 km outside the city.

2. Based on their synthetic analyses of a number of chroniclers, both Gibson (1952) and Aguilera (1991a) conclude that there was a large influx of immigrants into Tlaxcallan during the late prehispanic period, especially Otomís. Their sources include Antonio de Herrera (Crown historian with access to court documents), Torquemada, and Muñoz Camargo. Aguilera (1991a:474) also consulted the *Códice de Huamantla*, which among other things depicts the arrival of Otomí from outside Tlaxcallan.

3. *Egalitarian* is used here to refer to a political philosophy that asserts that people have equal worth and moral value regardless of birth status. However, in practice egalitarianism is not always achieved, yet the philosophy may exist side by side with economic and social inequality (e.g., the contemporary United States). We do not imply that central Mexico or Tlaxcaltecan society was equal in the sense of egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies in which all statuses are achieved and provide little power over others.

4. They are also not supported by our recently completed settlement pattern study, which indicates that the city of Tlaxcallan was not organized around an altepetl form, with a single or even four central plazas with palaces and temples, as Lockhart's model would predict.

5. Examination of the firsthand descriptions provided by the conquistadors supports Gibson's conclusions (e.g., Anonymous Conqueror 1961; Cortés 1986; Díaz del Castillo 1988).

6. Here we utilize both synthetic analyses and primary sources. Anguiano and Chapa rely primarily on documents in the Archivo General de Indias, Archivo General de la Nación: Ramo de Tierras, Archivo Histórico, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia: Colección Antigua, the *Padrón de Nobles do Ocotelolco*, the *Padrones de Tlaxcala del Siglo XVI*, and *El Lienzo de Tlaxcala* and to a secondary degree on Motolinía, Muñoz Camargo, Torquemada, and Zorita. We feel that inclusion of Anguiano and Chapa is important because they reach a conclusion similar to ours that individuals were promoted to teuctli status based on merit and not solely on noble birth. Gibson relies on Las Casas, Mendieta, Torquemada, and Zorita and appears to generalize for Huexotzingo, Cholula, and Tlaxcala on assignment (achievement) of teuctli status involving induction ceremonies, as opposed to ascription. Lockhart et al. provide a translation of a Nahuatl document from the minutes of the Tlaxcaltecan cabildo dated September 2, 1560, that involves the selection of an unrelated and relatively low-status noble as the successor to the dead ruler of Quiahuixtlan. Motolinía speaks in general of the Eastern Nahuas (Huexotzingo, Cholula, and Tlaxcala), but given his extended residence in Tlaxcallan, detailed observations made there, and wide acceptance as one of the best sources on Tlaxcallan, we conclude that these descriptions are based primarily on Tlaxcallan and only secondarily on these other places. Muñoz Camargo is a recognized primary source on Tlaxcallan, and given that the cited passage contradicts Hispanic culture and his Hispanic leanings, we conclude that it reflects a local Tlaxcaltecan pattern and not a pattern introduced by the Spanish.

7. Based on information provided in the *Padrón de Nobles de Ocotelolco* and the *Padrones de Tlaxcala*.

8. Aguilera relies primarily on Muñoz Camargo's description of achievement in teuctli status in his *Relaciones Geográficas de Tlaxcala*. Again, Anguiano and Chapa are working from primary documentary sources, especially the *padrones*. Dúran in the cited passage is speaking of the egalitarian ethic shared, to varying degrees, among all central Mexican Nahuas. Again, we think that Motolinía generalizes based on his observations and interviews made during his residence in Tlaxcala. Zorita is generalizing based on observation of Eastern Nahuas. Finally, Lockhart's conclusion is based on speculation and secondary sources.

9. Based on data from the early colonial *Padrón de nobles de Ocotelolco*, at least 15 percent and possibly as much as 26 percent of noble or elite houses belonged to commoners (*macehualli*) that had risen to elite status through merit (Anguiano and Chapa 1976:134–135, 151–152).

10. In at least one recorded colonial case a low-status noble was promoted to the rulership (tlatoani) of Quiahuixtlan based on merit over objections from the Spanish *corregidor*. The Spaniard pushed, unsuccessfully, for the title to be passed to the previous ruler's underage son and for selection of a regent for the boy until he reached maturity (Lockhart et al. 1986:22, 108–109).

11. Cervantes de Salazar was an early director of the University of Mexico and chronicler of the early colonial period who wrote specifically on Tlaxcala and its ruling council during the conquest.

12. The cited passage is a transcription of an official document dated to March 3, 1545, from the minutes of the viceroy of Mexico.

13. García Cook and Merino Carrión based the identification of additional centers and teuctli on Muñoz Camargo (1986) and Díaz del Castillo (1988).

14. Castillo Farreras's synthetic work involves a generalized study of types of land described by the chroniclers.

15. Offner's work is an excellent synthetic analysis of law and politics in central Mexico, especially Alcolhuacan, based on both individual early colonial documents and the chroniclers.

16. Aguilera's sources are unclear regarding government by council. Gibson relies on the chroniclers Cervantes de Salazar, Herrera, Vetancurt, and Torquemada along with Díaz del Castillo in describing the debate over peace and an alliance with the Spaniards against the Aztec.

17. Motolinía and Muñoz Camargo are the original sources on the investiture ceremony (Anguiano and Chapa 1976:141). Overall, their descriptions show much correspondence confirming the interpretation that Motolinía's description is based on information collected during his residence in Tlaxcala. Zorita's (1963:94–96) also appears to be based on Tlaxcala given its similarity to Motolinía and Muñoz Camargo. These descriptions can be compared with a very different early colonial account purportedly based on Cholula (Carrasco 1966).

18. Regarding the identification of Quetzalcoatl on the Tizatlan altar B, Caso says, "Es para mí casi imposible, llegar a precisar las deidades de que se trata en esta representación" [It is for me almost impossible to arrive at a precise identification of the deities that are depicted in this representation (our translation)] (1927:156). He (1927:156) goes on to tell us that the central figure may be wearing a ring of Tezcatlipoca and a jaguar skin (another symbol of Tezcatlipoca), before saying that maybe two small blue circles on this eroded image might be tears, a symbol of Quetzalcoatl-Xolotl (1927:158). At best this is a highly unreliable and confused (why would Quetzalcoatl be wearing symbols that identify him as Tezcatlipoca?) identification that Caso himself invalidates before making.

19. The complexes in question include "Banda Solar," "Complejo de Nobleza y Lujo," "Complejo de Señores y Animales Poderosos," and the "Complejo de Oscuridad."

Submitted: May 29, 2009; Accepted: July 13, 2009; Revised: September 10, 2009