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Honors 230C
Research Prospectus

In 1519, Cortes and his fellow conquistadors first laid eyes upon the metropolis of Tenochtitlan, seeming to rise from the waters of Lake Texcoco itself. They marveled at the architecture of the city and were greeted with the full grandeur of Montezuma. Yet, just a few centuries prior on this spot, there would have been nothing but a few mud huts adorning the land on which this magnificent city would rise. Along with the growth in population, resources, and cultural sophistication also came the rise of the Mexica state and a creation of complex political hierarchies. Tenochtitlan was but one of many different city-states to inhabit the Central Valley of Mexico and the surrounding regions. So, when Cortes first laid his eyes upon the city, how unique a state was Tenochtitlan? Was the crown jewel of the Aztec empire politically different than the smaller states it absorbed or those states it was still actively fighting? Was this city an empire, a capital, or more? Following the conquest of the peoples of the Central Valley of Mexico, many of these questions became of utmost importance to the Spanish. Without understanding the answers to these questions and others like them, the Spanish colonial regime would fail to create stability or control in the region. And so, this research prospectus will explore the following question: how did the Spanish colonial regime in the early post-conquest era change the structure of government for the peoples inhabiting the areas in and around the Central Valley of Mexico?

To provide some background on this topic, let's turn back the clock and observe how the city-state of Tenochtitlan came to be. During the thirteenth century, several dozen city-states

were founded in the Valley of Mexico (Collier et al. 44). These city-states were generally independent politically from one another with their own political and religious centers. This stands in contrast with previously large states found in the Valley of Mexico, most notably Teotihuacan that arose in a much more centralized pattern (Collier et al. 46). Over time, through military conquest and subjugation of neighboring city-state, power began to become centralized in the Valley of Mexico (Berdan, *Aztec Imperial Strategies* 1). The states of Azcapotzalco and Texcoco rivaled each other for power in the late fourteenth century, with eventually a triple alliance between the cities of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan rising to power and defeating their rival Azcapotzalco (Berdan, *Aztec Imperial Strategies* 2).

And so, during this process of continual centralization of power, defeat, and absorption of smaller states, a general political structure began to take shape. The political structure of a city-state during the post-classical period of Mesoamerica can roughly be summarized as follows: the city-state itself was known as an *Altepetl*, headed by a "hierarchy of elites, capped by a hereditary dynastic ruler (tlatoani, pl. tlatoque)" (Elson and Covey 157). Further administrative division was handled on the level of the *calpolli*, with this unit reaching all the way down to the level of an average citizen of the *Altepetl* (Clendinnen 55). The *tlatoani* themselves derived authority from being head of the highest ranking of these subdivisions (Connell 12). And so, this general structure persisted among many city-states, even after being subjugated by another state or rising itself to imperial power.

This general political structure is what the Spanish colonizers found themselves facing after their conquest of the peoples of the Central Valley of Mexico. The Spanish faced the tough assignment of trying to legitimize their rule over people with whom they had no previous contact. To do so, the Spanish enacted various political tactics such as "… used a Spanish name

to designate political space, the new municipal areas corresponded precisely to the native altepetl…" (Connell 8) and "… relied on the aid of native peoples who provided them with labor and tribute but whose institutions served as a legitimizing and stabilizing force" (Connell 4). Many of these tactics seem to revolve around preserving indigenous institutions and practices of government as opposed to imposing a Spanish one. And so, this brings us back to the central question for this research prospectus and to my hypothesis for what this research would show: in the early post-conquest period, the Spanish largely co-opted indigenous practices when it came to highly visible functions of government such as political leadership and the structure of the *Alteptl,* but the Spanish changed the tributary system to serve their economic interests better.

To answer the overarching question of how the Spanish colonial regime in the early post-conquest era changed the structure of government for the peoples inhabiting the Central Valley of Mexico, two historical realities need to be established: what did government look like in the late classical period in the Central Valley of Mexico, and what did government look like in the early days of Spanish colonization? Once these two questions have been answered, how the Spanish actually changed government in Mexico can be gauged. Furthermore, to narrow down the comparison of "government," this research prospectus proposes to define the following as capturing the essence of the state governments found in the region:

1. The structure of the *Altepetl*
2. How political leadership was gained/established
3. How *Altepetl* interacted with one another (tributary system)

Now, with these goals in mind, I will describe how the sources found within the annotated bibliography fit into this larger overall vision.

First, on establishing what government looked like before the Spanish arrived, I think that it is important to not create an overly Tenochtitlan-centric view. Therefore, many of the sources chosen explicitly focus on other city-states and alternative political structures to Tenochtitlan. First off, Mary Hodge's book, *Aztec City-States,* contains an excellent overview of political systems across five different polities: Amecameca, Cuauhtitlan, Xochimilco, Coyoacan, and Teotihuacan. In her book, she covers how these *Altepetl* were politically structured as well as how leadership was established before and after Aztec conquest. Continuing off this diversity of analyzing non-Tenochtitlan city-states, the works of Headrick, *The Teotihuacan Trinity: the Sociopolitical Structure of an Ancient Mesoamerican City* and Collier et al., *The Inca and Aztec States* give insight into how *Altepetls* were organized before the dominance of Tenochtitlan. Headrick focuses exclusively on one ancient powerhouse, Teotihuacan, while *The Inca and Aztec States* gives context on the evolution of political structures in city-states during the postclassic era. Additionally, *The Codex Chimalpopoca* provides further insight into how political leadership was chosen, as well as connecting back to a history before Tenochtitlan. Finally, Offner's work, *Law and Politics in Aztec Texcoco* gives insight into the legal system of an alternative state, additionally showing how these laws interacted with land and the tributary system.

However, it would be a mistake to leave out the political structure of Tenochtitlan. Although arguably atypical among Mesoamerican city-states, its dominance at the time of Spanish arrival merits its additional emphasis. For a general overview of the political structure in the *Altepetl,* one can turn to Inga Clendinnen's work, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*. Additionally, for further insight into the structure of the *Altepetl* of Tenochtitlan, Monzon and Diebold's work *The Calpulli in the Social Organization of the Tenochca* focuses almost exclusively on political organization in Tenochtitlan. Furthermore, *The Florentine Codex* Volume 8 focuses on the

political elite and structure of Tenochtitlan, as well as how members of Aztec society rose to power. In terms of power under imperial rule, both Berdan's *Aztec Imperial Strategies* as well as Elson and Covey's work in *Intermediate Elites in Pre-Columbian States and Empires* give insight into how political leadership was gained, maintained, and/or lost by rulers of city-states subjugated by the Triple Alliance. Finally, the primary source of the Codex Mendoza provides a firsthand indigenous account of the tributary system running to Tenochtitlan. And so, from all these sources described in the preceding two paragraphs, I can establish what government looked like pre-conquest.

In terms of useful sources for describing government after the Spanish arrival, Connell's work, *After Moctezuma: Indigenous Politics and Self-Government in Mexico City, 1524-1730,* provides a great overview on how the Spanish attempted to change the *Altepetl* structure as well as how people came to power. It gives a special emphasis on how several of the native political practices already in place persisted in this early Spanish colonial period, and thus serves as a perfect overview of trying to contrast pre and post conquest political structures. Furthermore, the primary source of *The Codex Osuna* gives testimonial as to early leadership within Tenochtitlan under Spanish rule, as its purpose as a document was to argue against the alleged misrule of the viceroy at the time, Don Luis de Velasco. Another fascinating primary source that gives insight into political rule during the early Spanish conquest period is *Beyond the Codices: the Nahua View of Colonial Mexico*. This work is a compilation of various legal documents including wills, land documentation, municipal documentation, petitions, and other types of documents, translated from the original Nahuatl. These administrative documents give insight into how the Spanish and natives interacted via government administration, as well as providing further glimpses into how land and the tributary system were portioned. Finally, Prem's work in

“Spanish Colonization and Indian Property in Central Mexico, 1521 – 1620” provides further insight into the tributary system and how it evolved to become more land based under Spanish colonial rule. And so, using all of these sources, a historical reality of what the government system under early Spanish colonial rule can be established.

In the end, this research prospectus establishes the ability to answer the question: how did the Spanish colonial regime in the early post-conquest era change the structure of government for the peoples inhabiting the areas in and around the Central Valley of Mexico? By using the various sources provided in the annotated bibliography, historical realities for three essential areas of government can be established pre and post conquest: the structure of the *Altepetl,* how political leadership was gained/established, and how the tributary system functioned. Through a comparison of these three areas, the ways in which the Spanish imposed new political practices in government versus simply co-opting existing indigenous systems can be determined.

Bibliography

Anderson, Arthur J. O., et al. Beyond the Codices: the Nahua View of Colonial Mexico. University of California Press, 1976.

Many of the earliest indigenous sources within the accessible literature on Aztec history revolve around the study of codices. However, this ignores the fact that beyond the codices, life in early, post-conquest Mexico can also be analyzed through the lens of administrative documents. Anderson's work, *Beyond the Codices*, strives to do just that. The book provides a collection of various legal documents including wills, land documentation, municipal documentation, petitions, and other types of documents, translated from the original Nahuatl. Most of the documents are from the mid-sixteenth to early seventeenth century and give a glimpse into the evolving administrative and governmental practices in New Spain.

Berdan, Frances F., and Patricia Rieff Anawalt. The Codex Mendoza. University of California Press, 1992.

The Codex Mendoza is an Aztec Codex created around 1541. The Codex was created with the purpose of recording information on the Aztec tributary and political system. The Codex Mendoza is comprised of three parts. The first part records a history of Aztec rulers and their military victories. The second part provides a list of tribute to the Triple Alliance from different regions. The final part describes general Aztec daily life.

Berdan, Frances F. Aztec Imperial Strategies. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996.

Berdan's work focuses on the strategies the Aztecs used to expand and maintain their state. In this book, Berdan identifies four distinct strategies used by the Aztecs: political, economic, frontier, and elite. In the political sphere, Berdan argues that the Aztecs used a combination of creating new administrative hierarchies and marriage connections to bring in new city-states. On the economic front, Berdan states that the Aztecs used the tributary and collection system to force potentially rebellious states to specialize and thus lose economic control. The frontier strategy refers to the different treatment of client states on the borders of the Aztec empire, and the elite strategy refers to the Aztec's creation of an elite class that transcended a particular city-state.

Bernardino, et al. General History of the Things of New Spain: Florentine Codex. Translated by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, vol. 8 School of American Research, 1950.

Volume eight of the Florentine Codex concerns itself with the subject matter of kings and lords. It covers more fact-like information on rulers such as lineages and historical narratives. In a similar vein, it describes how rulers were brought to power. Additionally, it describes the lifestyle of lords and kings. Finally, it gives information on how different governmental duties ought to be performed and who would be granted those posts.

Bierhorst, John. *The Codex Chimalpopoca: History and Mythology of the Aztecs*. University of Arizona Press, 1998.

Summary not applicable as this is material from class.

Clendinnen, Inga. *Aztecs: An Interpretation (Canto Classics)*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Summary not applicable as this is material from class.

Collier, George A., et al. The Inca and Aztec States, 1400-1800 : Anthropology and History. Academic Press, 1982, pp. 43 – 89.

This book covers the evolution of the Incan and Aztec states from 1400-1800. However, for the purposes of this research prospectus, two sections will be focused upon: "Patterns of Empire Formation in the Valley of Mexico, Late Postclassic Period, 1200-1521" and "Dynastic Succession and the Centralization of Power in Tenochtitlan." The former of these sections argues that the rise of Tenochtitlan was simply an extension of a process going back hundreds of years of smaller city-states slowly consolidating power among each other. The latter of these sections argues that the unique dynastic succession of the Aztecs arose out of necessity to facilitate a larger pool of candidates for political and military leadership, as well as the creation of the office of *cihuacoatl* to provide further stability.

Connell, William F. After Moctezuma: Indigenous Politics and Self-Government in Mexico City, 1524-1730. University of Oklahoma Press, 2011.

Connell's work focuses on the contact and evolution between the imperial Spanish political system and the existing native institutions in Tenochtitlan. His work covers the evolution of the governmental structure in Tenochtitlan from the mid-16$^{th}$ century through to the early 18$^{th}$ century. Connell makes arguments about how natives used the cabildo to challenge Spanish authority and further indigenous interest. Furthermore, Connell, describes the slow process of Spanish legitimization of power and integration of imperial titles with native conceptions of authority. However, the larger overarching narrative of the book is the slow, multi-generational efforts of indigenous people to try and regain a semblance of self-governance under Spanish colonial rule.

Elson, Christina M., and R. Alan Covey. Intermediate Elites in Pre-Columbian States and Empires. University of Arizona Press, 2006, pp. 154 – 165.

For this research prospectus, only a portion of Elson and Covey's work will be used, specifically the chapter titled "The Role of Provincial Elites in the Aztec Empire." This chapter focuses on those rulers who ruled altepetl but were still subjugated under Aztec imperial rule. The major conclusion that the authors come to is that these intermediate, provincial elites ruled in a constant state of precariousness. This often made them willing to take risks or form allegiances to try and further strengthen their position within – or sometimes against – the Triple Alliance. The authors

go on to conclude that this lack of stability is ultimately what made many of these "middle managers" liable to switch to the side of the Spaniards so quickly.

Headrick, Annabeth. The Teotihuacan Trinity : the Sociopolitical Structure of an Ancient Mesoamerican City. 1st ed., University of Texas Press, 2007, pp. 90 – 102.

Headrick's work in *The Teotihuacan Trinity: the Sociopolitical Structure of an Ancient Mesoamerican City,* gives the reader an overview of what life may have been like in the city of Teotihuacan. However, for the purposes of this research prospectus, only the chapter on "A marriage of convenience the king and the military" will be used. Headrick's main point for this work was that within Teotihuacan society, the military and the dynastic rulership balanced each other out. The military both provided a sense of a common goal for different lineages, as well as a way for ambitious members of society to rise through the social ranks. Thus, the military and political branches of society in Teotihuacan acted as a quasi-system of checks and balances.

Hodge, Mary G. Aztec City-States. Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, 1984.

Hodge provides a comparative analysis of five different city-states to gain more insight into the political structure of city-states in the Central Valley of Mexico in the late pre-hispanic period. Through this comparative analysis of Amecameca, Cuauhtitlan, Xochimilco, Coyoacan, and Teotihuacan, Hodge gives insight into the diversity of political systems established before the Spanish arrived. She also goes on to make a point of how many of these systems differed from that found in Tenochtitlan, which she denotes as atypical among city-states of the time. In terms of diversity of comparison, Hodge also focuses on the distinction between local and regional governments between city-states. One last point of focus in this book is how these city-states political systems changed when incorporated within the Aztec empire. Thus, Hodge gives an overview of different political systems found within the Central Valley of Mexico, and how imperial influence changed them.

Jeronimo de Valderrama. *Codex Osuna.* National Library of Spain, 1565. Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_07324/?st=gallery. Accessed 13 December 2022.

The Codex Osuna is a sixteenth century, pictographic manuscript. It was created between 1563-1566 by Don Jeronimo de Valderrama at the request of the King of Spain. It served as an indigenous testimonial against the alleged misrule of the Viceroy Don Luis de Velasco. The text contains information in Castillian Spanish as well as Nahuatl. Most notably for this work, it contains information regarding public, government works and descriptions of buildings for state institutions. The document itself is administrative in nature, and likely a subsection of a larger work.

Monzon, Arthur, and A. Richard Diebold Jr. "The Calpulli in the Social Organization of the Tenochca." *Publicaciones Del Instituto de Historia*, no. 14, [s.n.], 1949, p. HRAF ms: 1-95 [original: 112 ], https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nu07-009.

Monzon and Diebold's work focuses on social organization in Tenochtitlan when the Spanish first arrived in 1519, specifically that of the Calpulli. The central question driving this work was whether Calpullis did indeed carry heavy social weight within Tenochtitlan. The alternative to this would be that at this time, Tenochtitlan was already such a hierarchically defined society that any relation outside of one's class was moot. Monzon and Diebold argue that, since most citizens of the city were part of a Calpulli and that these Calpullis often determined important life events such as inheritance of land, endogamy, etc., this unit – the Calpulli – existed and had merit.

Offner, Jerome A. Law and Politics in Aztec Texcoco. Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Offner's work is part of a larger movement in Aztec scholarship of trying to provide a less Tenochtitlan-centric view of Aztec society. In this book, Offner chose to focus on a study of Texcoco due to the availability of data and the difference in political structure between it and Tenochtitlan. Furthermore, the book focuses on laws, with an emphasis on how those laws influenced other aspects of society. The book provides a general backdrop to the legal history of Texcoco, with a run-down of particularly important rulers such as Nezahualcoyotl. Additionally, the works provides a special focus on how laws interacted with various levels of the political system in Texcoco, and how that legal system matured.

Prem, Hanns J. "Spanish Colonization and Indian Property in Central Mexico, 1521-1620." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 82, no. 3, 1992, pp. 444–59. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2563355. Accessed 14 Dec. 2022.

Prem's work focuses on how the Spanish exercised their control of power on Indian property. This article especially focuses on the Spanish acquisition of land in the early post-conquest period. Prem first describes the Encomienda and tributary system. Prem then goes on to argue how and why this system broke down, and eventually ends with Spanish ownership of native lands. Prem also describes how this evolution was not entirely coerced by the Spanish, but that the natives had some agency within the process as well.