

Central Themes

Indigenous people, urban life, popular culture, religion

Suggested Reading

- Curcio, Linda Ann. *The Great Festivals of Colonial Mexico City: Performing Power and Identity*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004.
- Díaz Balsara, Viviana. *The Pyramid Under the Cross: Franciscan Discourses of Evangelization and the Nahua Christian Subject in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005.
- Nesvig, Martin Austin. *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006.

Related Sources

4. The Origin of the Nahuas and the Birth of the Fifth Sun (1596)
14. Poetic Attempts to Justify the Conquest of Acoma, New Mexico (1610)
16. The Spiritual Conquest: The Trial of Don Carlos Chichimecatecotl of Texcoco (1539)
20. Chimalpahin: Indigenous Chronicler of His Time (1611–1613)
24. The Persistence of Indigenous Idolatry (1656)
25. Afro-Mexicans, Mestizos, and Catholicism (1672)



16. The Spiritual Conquest: The Trial of Don Carlos Chichimecatecotl of Texcoco (1539)*

The Inquisition trial against Don Carlos Chichimecatecotl, the “Chichimeca Lord” of Texcoco, represents a pivotal moment in the early solidification of Spanish religious and political authority eighteen years after the fall of Tenochtitlan to Cortés. Inquisition procedures began at the church of Santiago Tlatelolco on June 2, 1539, when Francisco Maldonado from the *altepetl* (sovereign ethnic state) of Chiconautla secretly denounced Don Carlos in the Nahuatl language before Franciscan friars Juan de Zumárraga, first Bishop of Mexico, and two of the most capable Spanish translators of Nahuatl, Alonso de Molina and Bernardino de Sahagún. This selection contains Francisco’s elaboration of his first testimony, which decided the fate of Don Carlos because it seemed to offer evidence of the native lord’s outright rebellion against Spanish authority. Francisco was a zealous convert to the new faith of Christianity and brother of Don Alonso, the Lord of Chiconautla. The young catechist had trained at the College of Santa Cruz Tlatelolco and then returned to

*“Proceso inquisitorial de cacique de Tetzcoco,” in *Publicaciones del Archivo de Nación*, vol. 1 (Mexico: Eusebio Gómez de la Puente, 1910), pp. 22–25, 39–44. Excerpt translated by the editors.

his town to teach his people how to stage processions where they would pray to God, instead of Tlaloc, the rain god, to bring rain. Francisco provided the most damning testimony because he recounted how Don Carlos had made a long anti-Christian harangue at a meeting of indigenous nobles at Don Alonso's house. Don Carlos angrily denounced the Franciscan friars and their religion, directing his ire toward the young upstart Francisco. The Lord of Texcoco was personally offended by Francisco and his father's sympathies with the Spanish friars because Don Alonso was married to his half-sister—in the following testimony, he refers to Don Alonso as "brother."

Out of twenty-seven individuals prosecuted by Juan de Zumárraga, Don Carlos was the only one to be executed—burned at the stake for the crime of heretical dogmatism and for trying to convert people back to worshiping Tlaloc. Don Carlos defended himself by saying that he was innocent and had been denounced for political reasons because people, including some of his family members, questioned his legitimacy as Lord of Texcoco. Professor Patricia Lopes Don believes that, while other witnesses corroborated some of Don Carlos's comments, he was telling the truth when he said that the witnesses were politically motivated. Indeed, since before the Conquest, succession to the throne in Texcoco had been contentious. Kings and lords practiced polygamy and often had concubines. In Texcoco, kings always selected a son whose mother had the best social status—in this case, a mother who was a member of the Mexica royal family of Tenochtitlan. Since Nezahualcoyotl ascended the throne in 1427, the kings of Texcoco had always been sons of Mexica royal mothers. Nezahualcoyotl's son Nezahualpilli, who ruled from 1471 to 1515, had forty sons, several of whom were the children of some of Moteuczoma's sisters. But the Lord of Texcoco did not designate a successor before he died. During the Conquest, resentment over succession motivated some of Texcoco's nobility to ally with Hernán Cortés, and some with Moteuczoma—who had forced Texcoco to make his unpopular nephew Lord of Texcoco. After several rulers and dynastic struggles, Don Carlos was slated to become the next Lord of Texcoco. Don Carlos (born Ometochtli around 1505) was the son of a low-status concubine and King Nezahualpilli. Don Pedro, who was Lord of Texcoco in the 1530s, selected his half-brother, Don Carlos, to be his successor and broke with the tradition of appointing a male family member whose mother was Mexica. Therefore, most of the nobility of Texcoco viewed Don Carlos as an illegitimate heir, although Don Pedro worked hard to groom Don Carlos and make him more acceptable before he died. When Don Pedro died in the spring of 1539, Carlos took power. Almost immediately thereafter, people from Chiconautla, an altepetl subject to the jurisdiction of Texcoco, came forward to denounce Don Carlos before the Inquisition.

Don Carlos lost his life and a major piece of his family's hereditary estate, including a palace, which the Inquisition confiscated and sold to a Spaniard (Source 17). After Don Carlos's execution, Zumárraga was himself condemned. The Royal Council of the Indies in Spain stripped him of his position as an Inquisition official because of his harsh handling of this and other Inquisition cases against indigenous

people. Zumárraga and other Franciscans' aggressive retribution against alleged idolaters contributed to the crown's decision to remove all indigenous people from the jurisdiction of the Regular Inquisition in 1571.

Francisco's testimony was surely political, and he and all the other witnesses made their statements in the charged and dangerous environment of the Inquisition. Suspiciously, Francisco does not testify that Don Carlos talked about Tlaloc, and the first half of the Inquisition file goes into great detail about evidence of Tlaloc worship. Whether or not Don Carlos actually said all the things that the indigenous nobles claimed he did, the words would still be subversive to the Spaniards. Why? What do Francisco's allegations and the seizure of Don Carlos's property tell us about the political choices that Post-Conquest indigenous nobility in the new Spanish order were forced to make? If Francisco was putting words in Don Carlos's mouth, he understood enough about the Spaniards to know what would alarm them. Is this a document best suited to inform us about the experience of an indigenous Christian convert who has accepted Spanish culture and authority as legitimate? Or is this best used to explain why some rebellious indigenous leaders refused to accept Spanish authority as legitimate?

Inquisition Proceedings Against a Cacique of Texcoco

10. That Which Was Declared with Regard to the Cult of the God Tlaloc

. . . *Gobernador* [indigenous governor] Don Lorenzo, Don Francisco, Don Hernando, and Don Lorenzo, *principales* [nobles] of the aforementioned *pueblo* [town] of Texcoco, said that, just as they have said in the past, when it was not raining and when there was a lack of water, they heard tell of how on a mountain called Tlalocatepetl, they made sacrifices that were offered to the god of water, known as Tlaloc; and they had heard news that in ancient times Tlaloc had been customarily on this mountain where everyone was accustomed to coming for water and to making offerings to this idol, which was one of the most ancient in all the land; in the time of the ancient wars among Guaxocingo, Mexico, Tlaxcala, and Texcoco, those from Guaxocingo would smash the Tlaloc idol on the mountain in order to anger the Mexicans; and an uncle of Montezuma who was called Auizoca, being Lord of Mexico, had ordered that the Tlaloc idol, which Guaxocingo smashed, be placed in the sierra and be fixed; and after that, they once again held it in high esteem and reverence because it was very ancient and from time immemorial it had been part of this sierra and they believed that this idol should always have been there. And with this information they put out a search and went all over the sierra looking for it until they found it buried and they pulled it out and it was fixed and returned to form with gold and copper wires and the pieces were pulled together

where it appeared to be broken. And later before the most holy gentlemen they displayed a big piece of wood with wire around it that they said had been attached to the idol. And they also sent seven little round bars of gold, more or less the size of one's palm in length, which they claimed had been the gold wire with which the idol was assembled. And they said that they had melted down and made these seven little bars of gold; and then they showed three little bars of copper that they said were melted down from the same [idol]. They also presented a green jade stone with a figure in one part that they said was the sixth day-count, which they said the idol had on its forehead; and when, later, they took possession of the idol they stationed guards to see if they would come to him and make offerings and to find out who came and where they were from. And two or three times they found papers with fresh blood, copal incense, veils, small beads and other things for sacrifices. And they could not figure out who was doing it because the guards felt that they were not making the offerings where the idol usually was but instead down below at the foot of the sierra towards Guaxocingo. And there in a place towards Guaxocingo they found much fresh blood and it appeared, from the blood and the face [of the body], that some little boy had recently been sacrificed. The blood, the face, the papers, and the sacrifices that they found and took from the said sierra, are the same types of things found in Guaxocingo because, as everyone knows, each province had its own way of making sacrifices and offerings and had their distinct signs. Because of this they know that people from Guaxocingo are responsible. Thus they informed Your Lordship and surrendered the jade stone, the wire, the 3 bars of copper, and the 7 bars of gold, which are fat and are more or less one *vara* [yard] high, round and one span in length. . . .

11. The Seizure of the Goods of Don Carlos

And following the aforementioned, on this same day, His Most Reverent Lordship said that the goods of the said Don Carlos have been seized, including the houses of residence where until now he has been living, the country estate that is nearby adjoining it, and the other houses where they found the idols, all of which Don Lorenzo, *Gobernador*, has turned over for seizure.

24. The Elaboration of the Denunciation That Francisco Maldonado Made

And following the aforementioned, on the 11th of July in the year 1539, before me, the Secretary, Your Most Reverend Lordship, being in the pueblo of Chiconautla, Francisco, Indian, native to this pueblo, was made to appear, and he told all he knows and gave his testimony in the language of the Indians regarding what he knew of the matter of Don Carlos Chichimecatecotl of Texcoco. And because this is in their local language, he requested that Father Juan González, the cleric who was present, speak and translate what he knew about the case, and that he read what

was written in his language, which was contained in this legal document.* Therefore, the said Francisco, having legally sworn to his testimony in this document, translated by Juan González, said the following: as he has said in other statements in Mexico before Your Lordship, Don Carlos came to the pueblo of Chiconautla at the beginning of this past June. It was the Holy Day of the Trinity during which the required fasting and spiritual exercises must be made in this pueblo the Monday prior [to the Holy Day of Trinity]. Don Carlos was annoyed and was visibly angry about this, saying that this was not a universal requirement. The following Tuesday morning, the town of Chiconautla staged a procession, and Don Carlos, being in town, did not go to the church or the procession but stayed in the inn, sulking and being angry, being dissatisfied with those who participated in the procession. And all the prominent Indians and the *macehuales* [Indian commoners] of the pueblo went to the procession singing their praises to God, begging that he would have mercy on their souls, and later that same day in the evening after the sun had set, Don Carlos said to the witness: "Francisco, come here and listen up, brother. Would you by chance, be asking, 'What is Don Carlos doing?' Tomorrow I will leave for Texcoco. Look, when my grandfather Nezahualcoyotl and my father Nezahualpilli died they did not command us, nor exhort anyone that they must attend. Understand, brother, that my grandfather and my father examined everything, front to back; as is said, they knew the past and what was to come, and they knew what must be done a long time ago; one did what parents say and prophets exhorted. Truly, I tell you that my grandfather and father were prophets and they knew what one was supposed to do, and so one did it. And so, brother, understand me, that no one should take to heart this law of God and Divinity." It was like he was saying that no one should love God or his Law. He said: "What is this Divinity, what is it like, and where did it come from? What is it that you teach and what have you exhorted?" He addressed the witness, saying that it was a sin to make old men and women and some of the noble Indians believe in God: "Brother, what have you been going around teaching and saying? There is nothing else to be said." And this is how he finished: "You all should get past this Law of God and that is that." And then he concluded: "So listen, brother, this I truly tell you. What is taught in the school is all a joke." It was as if he were saying this [teaching] would not prevail nor is it something that should be paid attention to. He then continued, saying: "Neither should you nor the others believe what is alleged to be the law. And regarding what you say and teach from your little papers and doctrine books. By chance is it true or already uncovered? There is nothing else like this. Satisfied, I believe with reason that you all accept and understand what parents say. Understand me, brother, that I have lived and traveled everywhere and have held dear the words of my parents and grandfather. So listen, brother, to what our parents and grandparents said when they died, that truly, their beloved gods were made in heaven and in the earth, as such, brother, we should only follow what our grandparents and our parents held true and said when they died. Listen, brother, Francisco, what do the parents say? What do they say to us? What do you all understand? Look how the friars and the parish priests all have their own ways of doing

*The document does not exist in the original.

penance. Look how the Franciscan friars have a type of doctrine, a way of living, styles of dress, and prayer. As everyone can see, the Augustinians, the Dominicans, and the priests each have different ways of doing things. It was the same for those who observed our gods. People from Mexico had a style of dress, prayer, and making offerings that was different from what people did in other pueblos. In each pueblo they had a way of making sacrifices and their own manner of prayer and making offerings. Just like the friars and priests, no one did the same thing as the other. We should follow this just as our ancestors followed this. In the manner that they lived, we should live. Parents teach and preach this to us so that we will understand; each one decides to follow the law, customs, and ceremonies that he wants to. Brother, all I am saying is that maybe you will all understand this but perhaps you will not accept what I say. Know that if, by chance, the words of my father, grandfather, and ancestors conformed to the word of God, then I would have also done as you do! However, it does not conform with what we understand the religious fathers preach to us. Those who carry out their duty would insist that they do not have women and scorn the things of the world and women. It is about time that those religious fathers did as they say. It is their duty, but not ours. What have you been going around saying and teaching? Relax. Calm down now that our nephews are born. The sons of Don Alonso, Tomás and Diego, will, as boys, teach this to others. What is it that you teach, brother, and what is it you go around preaching? If the Viceroy, Bishop, or Provincial orders something, then it is not a problem if you promote it very much. Listen, my nephew Lorenzo de Luna does not understand what I know is said. In another time, no one made accusations against my grandfather, my father, Moctezuma, or the Lord of Tacuba and no one scolded him"— [Don Carlos] made [Francisco] understand that he was burdening him with these things and making him feel sorry for himself for knowing them, so that no one might have been accused of stepping out of line or forcing his hand—this is how [Francisco] understood what [Don Carlos] declared. [Don Carlos] said the same things to them: "And you, what do you want to do and what do you say about this? Is it true that you say this or not? Look at what you are prohibited, what you are reprimanded for, what you are forbidden, and what you are scolded for, brother. Because you are my nephew, you do not have to do what the Viceroy, the Bishop, or the Provincial says, nor the curates who they appoint. I, also, was raised in the church and in the house of God as you were, but I do not live like you, nor should I. What more do you want? Don't the people of Chiconautla fear and obey you completely? Don't you have to eat and to drink? What more do you want? What are you going around saying these things for? Because it is not our duty to do what you do. According to what our ancestors taught and said it is not good to know the lives of others or to be like the others who are accustomed to seriousness and seclusion without authority over people of low social standing. Brother, what harm do women and wine do to men? Maybe the Christians do not have many women and so get drunk if the religious fathers do not intervene. Thus, what these fathers make us do is not our duty and this law should not impede anyone from doing what he wants to do. We should abandon and throw

from our shoulders what they tell us: Oh, brother, now that you have understood me, before my brother Don Alonso, I prohibit and forbid you! Obey, I say to them, and control what you say: nephew Don Alonso, let there be no dissent among us. We should flee from the religious fathers and we should do as our ancestors did and not as those who impede us would want us to do. In the times of the ancestors, the macehuales did not sit on the mats of lords or on fancy chairs, but nowadays one does and says whatever he wants. It was not like anyone could stop us or force our hand when we would want to do something. But instead, we should eat, drink, take pleasure, and get drunk as we used to do. Take a look at yourself and your nephew Francisco, Señor. Understand and comply with my words, which are also those of the Lord of Mexico, Yoanizi and my nephew the Lord of Tacuba, Tezapilli. He should tremble before them and know that if he did something else that it would cost him dearly and it could cost him his life." This is what the witness understood him to say. And after he had made this speech, Don Carlos said with a great sigh: "Who are these people that would destroy us, they who disturb and live among us, who burden us and subjugate us? Listen there! This is what I believe here. The Lord of Mexico, Yoanizi, maintains this and so does my nephew Tezapilli, Lord of Tacuba, and there is also TI[a]cahepantli, Lord of Tula. We are all considered equals and in agreement. We have no other equals and this is our land, our hacienda, our treasure, and our possession. This is our ancestral domain and our holding. And if anyone wants to do or say otherwise, we will laugh in his face. Oh brothers, I am very angry and emotional! Sometimes my nephews, the lords, and I talk about this, [saying,] who dares come here to seize, command, and judge us? He is not a relative or of our blood. This one who claims to be an equal thinks that this sentiment is hollow and that he could know it. This much is true: no one should mock us because our nephews and brothers are lords. Oh brothers! No one is on the same level as those liars, nor should they be. Nor should they join those who obey and follow our enemies." According to the witness, Don Carlos said all of this in his speech in the presence of the witness, Don Alonso, Lord of Chiconautla, Cristóbal, Indian commoner, resident of Chiconautla, two prominent Indians of Texcoco, called Zacanpatl and Coaunochitl, and another Indian commoner named Poyoma from Texcoco and Acanauacatl, and a prominent Indian of Chiconautla. All of the above named were scandalized by what Don Carlos said in his speech and attest that this is true. Asked if he had hatred or rancor against Don Carlos or if he is being coerced to testify, he [the witness] said that he does not testify out of bad intentions, but only because it is the truth and he wants to unburden his conscience for the love of Our Lord God. And the witness believes that his testimony about Don Carlos will be corroborated in other testimonies and that it was God's will that he come forward to say these things so that they would be revealed. In Mexico, he states, before Our Most Reverend Lordship, that all that his testimony contains in this proceeding is true and discharged in secret according to procedure before his Lordship, the said Francisco, and abovementioned interpreter.

Signed [in rubrics], Fray Juan, Bishop of Mexico,
Juan González, Miguel López, Francisco Maldonado

Central Themes

Indigenous people, state formation, religion

Suggested Reading

- Greenleaf, Richard. "The Inquisition and the Indians of New Spain: A Study in Jurisdictional Confusion." *Americas: A Quarterly Review of Latin American Cultural History* 22, no. 2 (July 1966): 181–196.
- Gruzinski, Serge. *Man-Gods in the Mexican Highlands: Indian Power and Colonial Society, 1520–1800*, trans. Eileen Corrigan. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989.
- Lopes Don, Patricia. "The 1539 Inquisition Trial of Don Carlos of Texcoco in Early Mexico." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 88, no. 4 (November 2008): 573–606.
- Ricard, Robert. *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelization Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523–1572*, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

Related Sources

1. Copán and Teotihuacan: Shared Culture Across a Great Distance (200–900 CE)
4. The Origin of the Nahuas and the Birth of the Fifth Sun (1596)
17. The Inquisition Seizes Don Carlos's Estate: The Oztoticpac Map (1540)
20. Chimalpahin: Indigenous Chronicler of His Time (1611–1613)
21. The Creation of Religious Conformity (the Early Eighteenth Century)
24. The Persistence of Indigenous Idolatry (1656)



17. The Inquisition Seizes Don Carlos's Estate: The Oztoticpac Map (1540)

During the Inquisition's proceedings against Don Carlos Chichimecatecotl, Lord of Texcoco, in 1539, the court seized the accused idolater's property, including his estate of Oztoticpac. This fascinating indigenous map of the estate is believed to have been presented as legal evidence in the land dispute cases that resulted from Don Carlos's execution and were probably initiated by Don Carlos's family. Registering a total of seventy-five parcels of land, it is a rare historical source that documents Nahua property ownership during the Conquest period. It shows evidence of four different types of Nahua land tenure that were in existence during Pre-Conquest times, and it also documents changes in property ownership and the influence of new European foods and business. How were disputes over land related to the indigenous elite's loss of political power over their populations with the Spanish Conquest?

The map is organized into four quadrants. The top left is an illustration of the *tecpan*, the "lord's palace"—the seat of indigenous government and the residence of the *tlatoani*, the governor of the *altepetl* (sovereign ethnic state) of Texcoco. Don

Pedro Tetlahuehuetzquitzin had given his unpopular nephew Don Carlos the estate in order to raise Don Carlos's social status while he groomed him for power. But Don Carlos was tlatoani of Texcoco for only a few months when the Inquisition tried and convicted him. When Inquisition officials confiscated Don Carlos's estate, they sold the tecpan to a Spaniard, Alonso de Contreras. Don Carlos's family disputed the sale in court. They argued that, as was customary, ruling lords had the use of the palace and palace lands, but that they were considered patrimony to be handed down to the next lord upon assuming rule and could not be bought and sold. We see a disruption here of one of the two traditional Pre-Conquest kinds of public landownership: lands that the commoners were required to work to support the government in the palace. A second type of communal land worked by commoners, temple-land, had disappeared when the Spaniards destroyed the temples.

On the lower left are apple, peach, pear, quince, and pomegranate trees and grape vines, none of which were native to the Americas. Don Carlos had entered into a joint business venture with a Spaniard named Pedro Vásquez de Vergara to grow fruit trees and grapevines, some of which were grafted onto Carlos's preexisting native trees. These trees are pictured in the lower left-hand quadrant. Many of these trees and vines were planted on the land owned by the lord and some on the farmers' plots pictured in the right half of the map. In 1540, Pedro Vásquez de Vergara filed a lawsuit to recover his trees from the Inquisition, which was about to sell them to Alonso de Contreras.

The right side of the map features land allotments in various rectangular shapes and sizes. Boundary lines connecting four tree glyphs designate the Oztotipac lands. The largest single section of land pictured on the top right of the quadrant is Don Carlos's privately owned estate; it appears that leaders in the Pre-Conquest times owned private property. Within the Oztotipac boundary, however, are two other types of landholding: land allotted to independent peasant farmers (*calpollali*) and land rented to tenant farmers. Adjoining Don Carlos's large block of land are ten long, thin rectangles that designate rental properties. To the right of these strips, you can see two lines of indigenous heads running vertically to indicate the ten renters.

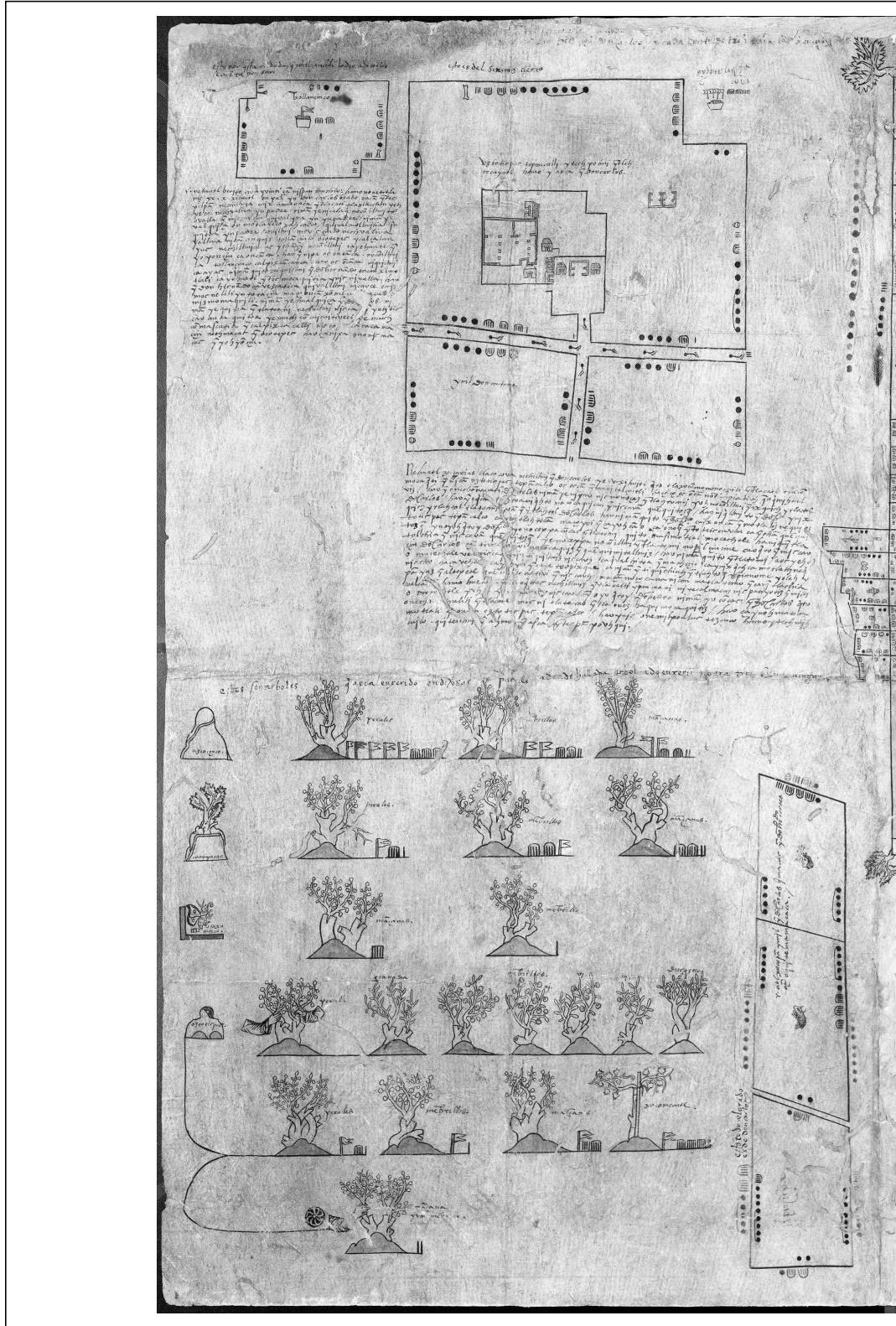
Further below, another line of indigenous head glyphs registers forty-five Nahuas (each little flag above a head equals twenty). These forty-five commoners (*macehuales*) are holders of calpollali (*calpolli* land). Every Nahua altepetl was divided into administrative districts called *calpolli*. In principle, the calpollali belonged to the calpolli, the corporate entity, but the land was not worked in common. Indigenous officials allotted calpollali within their territories to individuals and their families in varying sizes according to status, but individuals retained land allotments throughout their lifetimes and left them to their heirs. For all intents and purposes, the Nahuas practiced private landholding. However, such a landholder retained the right to hold the land only if he or she worked it. If left uncultivated, the lord or calpolli leader allotted the land to a landless resident or a newly married couple who would put it to good use. This practice of landownership is sometimes called

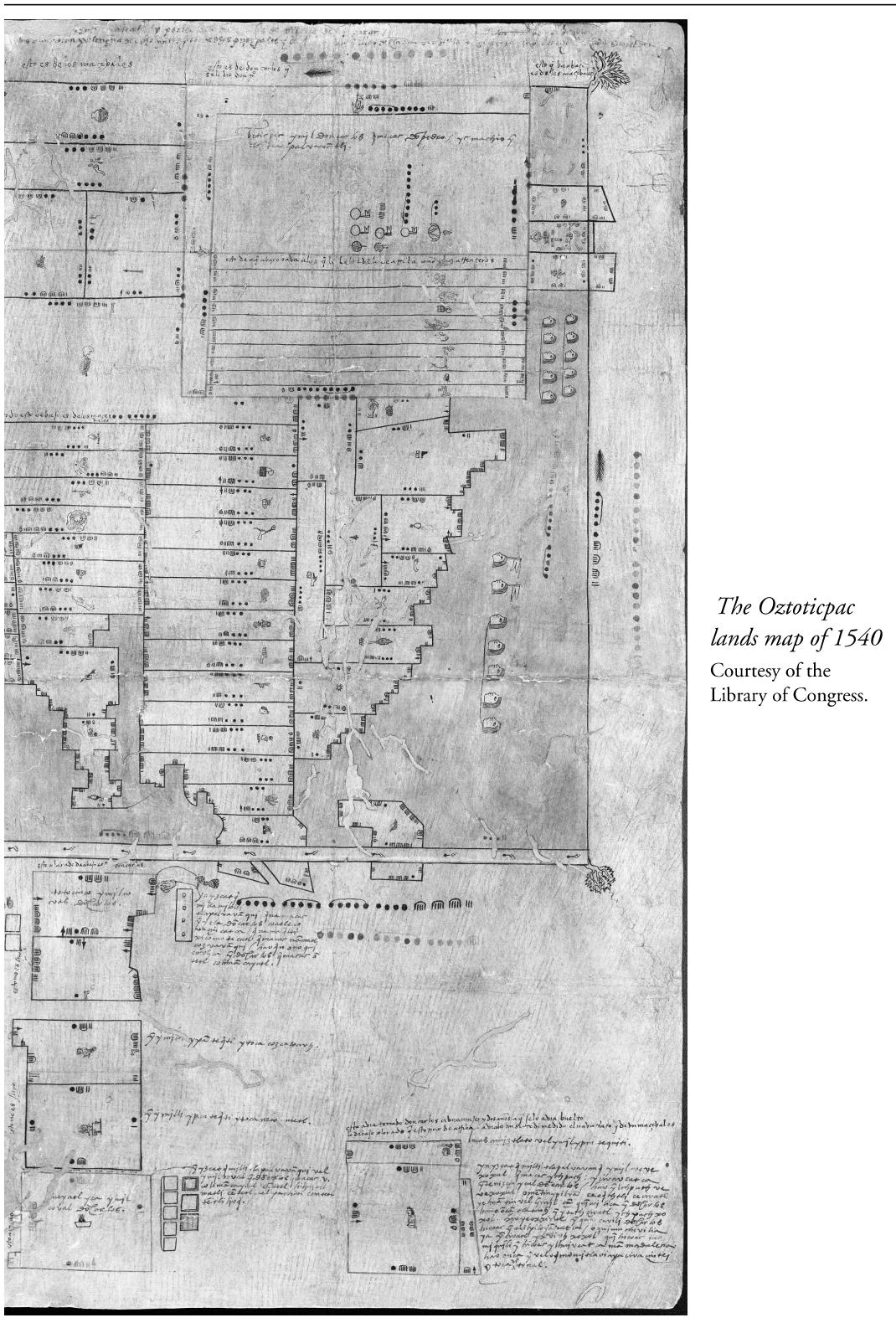
"usufruct" rights to hold the land; according to the sixteenth-century Bishop of the Yucatán, Diego de Landa, this form of landownership existed among the Mayas (Source 8). The leaders distributed property to the landless not only out of a sense of communal duty to all members of the district but also because they wanted to collect a tax in agricultural produce or cotton cloth from the landholders.

In the early sixteenth century, these calpolli land allotments could not be bought and sold, but depopulation from European smallpox and measles severely disrupted the re-allotment system. Lands remained vacant as many calpolli residents died off. Indigenous leaders resorted to selling or renting these lands to Spaniards so that they could make their tribute tax payments to their new imperial overlord, the Spanish crown.

Differences in wealth come clear in the map. The holders of calpollali had land allotments that were roughly twice the size of the renters' plots, and the private land of Don Carlos's family was thirty to forty times larger than the calpollali. The entire estate within the area marked by the four trees was surrounded by the lands that commoners owned. Some of the commoners' lands within Don Carlos's estate spill across the tree-designated boundary, which has led researchers to conclude that these were properties under dispute. Why might Don Carlos's execution have encouraged his neighbors to attempt to grab land? Or was it the other way around? Did the commoners have to defend their land against the encroachments of the nobility of Texcoco? If so, why? Could it have been a loss of authority over the commoners that brought about the execution of the Lord of Texcoco and made the commoners more aggressive in expropriating the land of the nobles?

Prior to recent research on land tenure in sixteenth-century Mexico, the popular notion was that indigenous people did not have private property and held land only in common. How does this document show a much more complex and complicated system? How did the administration and distribution of land to the common people give leaders power? Was the encroachment of the commoners on the estate of Don Carlos's family a sign that the calpolli farmers of Oztoticpac gained more power after the Spanish Conquest? How might depopulation have given the surviving calpolli farmers a new advantage in negotiating with their Nahua rulers over what the farmers gave them in tax and labor?





Central Themes

Indigenous people, state formation, land and labor

Suggested Reading

- Gibson, Charles. *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519–1810*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964.
- Harvey, H. R., ed. *Land and Politics in the Valley of Mexico: A Two-Thousand Year Perspective*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991.
- Lockhart, James. *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992.

Related Sources

7. The Mixtec Map of San Pedro Teozacoalco (1580)
8. The Urban Zoning of Maya Social Class in the Yucatán (1566)
16. The Spiritual Conquest: The Trial of Don Carlos Chichimecatecotl of Texcoco (1539)
40. The Mayas Make Their Caste War Demands (1850)



18. Father Fernández Attempts to Convert the Seris of Sonora Single-handedly (1679)*

Beyond the frontiers of the northern silver mining zone, the duty to spread Hispanic civilization and Christianity to the indigenous people fell mostly on the shoulders of the Franciscan and Jesuit religious orders, which ministered to the New Mexico and Río Grande region and to the northern Pacific Coast, respectively. Historians agree that the Society of Jesus, which started its conversion efforts in 1590, was completely unsuccessful in transforming the culture of the Seris (Comáac) of the deserts of Sonora. Slowly making their way north from Sinoloa along the Gulf of California, they managed to convert the Yaquis and created a handful of viable settlements in the interior by the 1640s. When Father Fernández established the first mission to convert the Seris in Pópolo in 1679, it had already been thirty-four years since the first European, Father Andrés Pérez de Ribas, reported on these people (Source 9). Unlike the Yaquis, who lived in small, dispersed agricultural settlements and with whom the Jesuits had more success, the Seris did not farm at all. The Seris had to be settled in a *pueblo* (town), which they were forced to construct, and then encouraged to farm before any conversion would take place. The Seris

*Thomas Sheridan, ed., *Empire of Sand: The Seri Indians and the Struggle for Spanish Sonora, 1645–1803* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), pp. 31–33. © 1999 The Arizona Board of Regents. Reprinted by permission of the University of Arizona Press.