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Land and Living

IN THE MAINLY Nahuatl sources of this book, documents in annual series with precise specifications of prices and other quantities are rarely found, nor is there much detail on techniques of production and distribution, so that without using altogether different materials it would be difficult to undertake economic history in the usual sense, and such is not my intention. Yet some aspects of economic life, often related to the kinds of social and political organization discussed in the previous chapters, emerge clearly enough and will be treated here at some length. Since the documents are much more expansive on land tenure than on all other aspects of the indigenous economy, the pages that follow are necessarily heavily weighted toward that subject.

Land Tenure at Contact

It was ultimately a rich, intensive, permanent-site agriculture that gave central Mexico at the time of the conquest preeminence in population size and many other respects over areas of southern Mesoamerica better provided with prestige goods, from jaguar skins and the plumes of tropical birds to the crucial quasi-staples cotton and cacao. Although the plant varieties and growing techniques that had developed over centuries, not to speak of the climate, were at least as important as the land itself in the flourishing of central Mexican agriculture, they were constants, equally available to all, so that land became the principal determinant and attribute of wealth as well as the primary basis of taxation. Elaborate vocabulary and procedures evolved (presumably all or nearly all with long-standing Mesoamerican precedents) to classify, measure, and allocate land and to record tenancy. Preconquest practices related to land were as relevant to postconquest land tenure as the altepetl was to postconquest political life, so it will be necessary to give the preconquest situation ample discussion.

Corporate Land Management

It is important to note at the outset that in preconquest times, the keeping of land records was in the hands of altepetl and calpolli authorities, and so to a large extent was allocation. This strong corporate role, together with a predisposition on the part of early scholars to identify the Mesoamericans with Indians of northeastern North America, led to the persistent notion that central Mexican landholding was communal. Recent scholars have now repeatedly shown that as far as arable land is concerned, in actual practice individuals and households worked it, held it on a long-term basis, and inherited it.¹ This side of land tenure deserves and will receive emphasis here, for it brings indigenous patterns far closer to those of Europe than once thought. Yet there is no doubt that the corporate entities retained residual rights to all lands (as in Europe) and, with fertile land at least, took a more active role in allocation and reallocation than their contemporary European counterparts.

Two of the most basic Nahua land categories were *altepetlalli*, “altepetl land,” and *calpollalli*, “calpolli land” (*tlaxilacallalli*, “tlaxilacalli land,” does occur with approximately the same meaning as calpollalli, but much less frequently).² The two were in fact different ways of referring to the same thing; presumably there was no altepetl land that was not at the same time calpolli land. In some sense, the entire jurisdiction of an altepetl must have fallen into these categories, but in practice they were used as the opposite of land held by nobles, and indeed a frequent implication was that the land was not held at all and hence was open to reallocation. All these points are illustrated by a case of 1575 in Coyoacan, in which an individual petitioned to be given an empty piece of altepetlalli described also as “calpollalli that no longer belongs to anyone and lies idle.”³ Of the two terms, calpollalli was much more common, reflecting the importance of the calpolli/tlaxilacalli as the primary land-distributing unit for the general population.

Nahuatl documents of the early to middle colonial period deliver considerable evidence pointing toward an earlier corporate division of at least the most fertile lands into relatively uniform plots, allocated to the population at a single time in the past. Plots held by individuals are described as measuring twenty units, or some multiple thereof, far too frequently for such a result to have arisen from chance. In places at least, whole tracts must have been divided into plots of twenty units of measure (sometimes square, sometimes with a lesser width), arranged in long strips side by side; some people got only one plot, some several, and calpolli leaders or important nobles might receive many times an ordinary commoner’s allotment. The best extant example is provided by the early census and tax records of the Cuernavaca region,⁴ where, in some districts at least, a plot twenty units long was the

normal allotment for a nuclear or small extended family, wealthier families might have forty, sixty, or even eighty, and leaders often had a hundred, two hundred, or more. In different parts of the region, the width of the twenty-unit plots varied from five to twenty (making them square), but in a single calpolli or large tract, plot width was often uniform, so much so that in the majority of cases the officials making the survey took it as a constant and left it unrecorded.

On the other hand, many plots described in Nahuatl testaments of the sixteenth century, probably the absolute majority, do not have even dimensions. Records made in Tepetlaoztoc (Tetzcoco region) around the 1540's, the only known painstaking and comprehensive land surveys of portions of a given region in preconquest style, also show predominantly plots of irregular shape and uneven dimensions.⁵ The registers, however, contain two separate sets of measurements for each plot, one giving the shape and lineal dimensions, the other the area in square units. A special sign is attached to any field of less than 400 square units, or in other words, less than the equivalent of twenty by twenty. A possible implication is that twenty by twenty was the normal plot size, and the irregularities arose in the process of adapting a uniform scheme to the features of a sloping and varied terrain.⁶

The corporate management of fields extended beyond the original subdivision and allocation to ongoing reallocation and the maintenance of up-to-date records. The Cuernavaca-region censuses contain numerous instances of outsiders who are given fields at some point after their arrival on the local scene, or of young newlyweds given their first allotment, or just as significantly, of people in these two categories who are still awaiting their allotments and meanwhile are performing less than full duties for the group. The lands are assigned by the calpolli officials (calpoleque) or by "the nobles" (pipiltin), presumably meaning higher authorities of the altepetl.⁷ A crucial feature of the preconquest system was the keeping of glyptic-pictorial registers of all arable, taxable lands in each district, together with the names of the current holders. The posterior Spanish chronicles assert that such was the preconquest practice,⁸ and the Tepetlaoztoc records represent a concrete example, exhaustive land registration still being carried out about a generation after the conquest. The Cuernavaca records, apparently for the most part done a little earlier, do not contain such a register, but they imply its existence and currency. To judge by the Tepetlaoztoc example, the notational conventions used by central Mexicans in registering land continued to be indigenous after the conquest, with the gradual addition of some (essentially superfluous) alphabetic glosses in Nahuatl. Further full examples are not available, but fragmentary records from Xochimilco in the late 1560's show that the details of the traditional manner of registration were still known: altepetl officials

TABLE 5.1
Terms for Fractions of the Primary Unit in the Indigenous Measuring System

Term	Literal translation	Equivalent
matl	arm, hand	four-fifths of a unit? (distance between outstretched hands?) ^a
mitl	arrow	half or three-fifths of a unit? (distance from one outstretched elbow to the far hand)
yollotli	heart	two-fifths of a unit? ca. 2.5–3 ft.? (distance between heart and outstretched hand)
acolli	shoulder	arm's length, from the shoulder to the fingertips
ciyacatl	armpit	arm's length
matzotzopatzli	flat part of the arm from elbow to wrist	cubit, from elbow to fingertips
molicpitl	elbow	cubit
omitl	bone	cubit
tlacxitl	foot	10–12 inches?
iztetyl, iztitl	nail (of fingers or toes)	ca. 6 inches (a Spanish <i>jeme</i> , distance from tip of thumb to outstretched forefinger)

EXAMPLES: *matl*, BC, p. 154; Williams 1984; *mitl*, AGN, HJ 298: 4 (translated as half a braza); *yollotli*, BC, p. 90 (construed by translator as a Spanish yard), TC, p. 20; *acolli*, AGN, Tierras 30, exp. 1, f. 37 (Mexico City, 1570); *ciyacatl*, NAC, ms. 1481 (Tlatelolco, 1581); *matzotzopatzli*, AGN, HJ 298: 4 (translated as almost half a braza); *molicpitl*, AGN, Tierras 56, exp. 8, f. 3 (Tlatelolco, 1579); *omitl*, AGN, HJ 298: 4 (translated as cubit); *tlacxitl*, BC, pp. 88, 165; *iztetyl, iztitl*, NAC, ms. 1481 (Tlatelolco, 1589; uses *omiztitl*).

^aMore often, in most places, a full unit.

called *tlalhuehuetque* (“land-elders”) existed, and the fragments appear to be extracts from complete registers still kept current.⁹

Registration involved exact measurement, something that indigenous central Mexicans were fully capable of. We know little of the techniques used, how angles and areas were calculated, but the results show that the means were adequate. And although it may not be possible to establish absolutely precise equivalents for the units of measure, it is clear that each subregion or altepetl had its own version of a refined system of standard units capable of handling both large and small dimensions. The primary unit was a largish one, most often of perhaps eight to ten feet. In some places it was called the *quahuitl*, “stick,” after the measuring stick used. (In the Tetzcoco and Tepaneca regions, and perhaps elsewhere, the term was often expanded to *tlalqua-huitl*, “land-stick”.)¹⁰ In other places, it was the *matl* or *maitl*, literally “arm, hand,” referring to any of various ways one can indicate distance by arm extension. “Quahuitl” and “matl” often seem synonymous, but in Tetzcoco and Coyoacan at least, the matl could be a fraction of the quahuitl.¹¹ A considerable vocabulary, based on the length of body parts, was available to designate various fractional units (see Table 5.1).

As to the size of the primary unit, Spaniards often translated "quahuitl" and "matl" as *braza*, "fathom" (about six feet), but it appears that the principal indigenous measure, though varying from place to place or occasion to occasion, was generally larger than that, and Spanish translators sometimes recognized as much by writing *braza de indios*, "the braza of the Indians."¹² The relative uniformity of the measure at any one time and place led many writers in Nahuatl to omit the name of the unit, but some Nahuas and Spaniards, aware of the overall variation, were at pains to describe the measure used. A Nahuatl document of 1554 from Coyoacan mentions the use of a quahuitl containing ten (Spanish?) feet as the customary one there, though a contemporaneous document from that region specifies a twelve-foot quahuitl.¹³ The quahuitl used in Xochimilco in 1568 had the special name *ne-huitzan* (for which I have found no analysis); the Spanish translator called it an "old-style measure" ("vara de las antiguas") and more usefully, a braza "measured from the foot to the hand," that is, apparently the distance from the ground to the hand of a standing man held as far as it would reach over his head, perhaps seven to eight feet or more depending on the person's height.¹⁴ A Nahuatl document from Amaquemecan in 1661 specifies that the quahuitl used in the case at issue contained three Spanish yards (varas).¹⁵ Another from Azcapotzalco in 1738 mentions that the tlalquahuitl employed on that occasion was called *cennequetzalpan*, derived from a word for standing erect; said to contain two and a half varas, seven and a half Spanish feet, it too was probably based on a standing person raising his hand over his head.¹⁶ Scholars working on the Tepetlaotzoc land records have arrived at an equivalence of 2.5 meters for the tlalquahuitl there; to aim at such exactitude may be somewhat illusory, but the estimate falls well within the general range of variation.¹⁷

A measuring stick of a locally customary size, then, was used for determining relatively small linear dimensions. For larger dimensions, ropes came into play, or so one can conclude from the fact that *mecatl*, "rope, cord," had the extended meaning of a plot of land of a certain size. In Culhuacan, the term is found once possibly referring to a piece 200 by 20 units, or 4,000 square units, and in the Cuernavaca region another equivalence occurs.¹⁸ In general, however, the *mecatl* seems to have been the basic standard plot twenty units square, called by Molina "an allotment of land" ("una suerte de tierra"). The most usual measuring rope must have been twenty units long. In fact, it does not seem to strain speculation too far to imagine that at some distant time, possibly before the Nahuas had arrived on the Mesoamerican scene and adopted intensive agriculture, the twenty-unit measure was the primary one, delineating one side of a square plot thought to be sufficient to maintain a small family, and the quahuitl or matl was derived by

dividing the larger unit by the even number (in the vigesimal system) of twenty. If the quahuitl was eight feet, the basic plot was 160 feet square; if it was ten feet, the plot was 200 feet square. Under optimal conditions of water and fertility, such an area (25,000 to 40,000 square feet) might have been enough to provide the primary support for a group of four to six people.

The systems of land measurement, allocation, and registration, then, show that the altepetl and calpolli were deeply involved with landholding. But to what extent is use of the word "communal" justified? Modern governments dedicated to the notion of private property also maintain exhaustive cadastral records and peg taxes to land held; in new areas especially (as on the North American frontier), they may lay out plots of uniform size and shape and distribute them to the populace. They may even from time to time redistribute some land. They do not, however, make allocation a primary means of land redistribution, and to the extent that indigenous altepetl did so, their system of land tenure could reasonably be called communal even though the bulk of the arable land was held and worked by individuals and households.

Yet it does not follow that the indigenous governmental units could reallocate at will or that corporate reallocation was the predominant means by which land changed hands. Consistent ongoing reallotment according to need would seem to be incompatible with what has been discovered for the best-documented areas for the early postconquest years, the Tetzcoco and Cuernavaca regions, where we find not only great variance in the amount of land households held, but no particular correspondence between household size and holding.¹⁹ The situation in Tepetlaoztoc, where some households held six or seven plots, others one, giving some far more arable land per person than others, appears to be primarily the result of the vagaries of inheritance over the generations. The implication is that the authorities could not or did not interfere with inheritance as long as there were living heirs and the land continued to be worked, and indeed, statements to this effect can be found in the postconquest chronicles.²⁰ As to more direct evidence, the tlatoani of Coyoacan is seen at mid-sixteenth century confirming the rights of individual spouses and offspring of commoners to inherit the latter's lands, or dividing the inheritance between disputing relatives.²¹ From the late 1540's onward, Nahuatl testaments show nobles freely leaving their lands to their heirs, and as the testaments of commoners mount in numbers later in the century, the same pattern obtains.

The editors of the Cuernavaca censuses, however, take the position that (there at least) inheritance could not be used to accumulate land, since for the great majority a single amount is given, for irrigated land, with at most, in a certain number of cases, a separate amount for additional unirrigated land.²² The question of how the land was acquired is usually not broached; in only

a small minority of the instances is the allotment said to have come from the altepetl or calpolli officials. What is most frequently seen is that the head of the household allots a portion of his (i.e., the household's) land to some other member without breaking up the household's unity. In my opinion, the Cuernavaca records are not inconsistent with widespread inheritance and accumulation. The editors attribute the differential to the varying size of the plots originally allotted,²³ and I by no means discount this possibility, especially in the case of nobles and leaders. But I take it that most of the heads of household must have acquired their land through inheritance. The suballocations seen within households look very much like the inheritance division described in the chronicles and often may well have been preliminary to definitive inheritance on the death of the household head. The fact that the Cuernavaca records, which are primarily tax documents, list sixty or eighty units of land together in a single sum does not mean that they necessarily made up a single plot. I imagine that as in all other known situations, many if not most holdings above twenty units (other than those of nobles, whose plots often took the form of large tracts) were in separate and probably noncontiguous fields, and there is no reason why they could not have been accumulated through inheritance.

Overall, the picture suggesting itself is that on relatively rare occasions such as altepetl foundation, large-scale migration, and major defeat or victory in war, corporate authorities laid out the best lands in plots and divided them among the members of the group according to their rank and need, but that subsequently inheritance and spontaneous sharing or division among the people holding and using the land was the principal mechanism of continuity and redistribution, much as in Europe. Corporate reallocation, although a constant factor and an important part of the rationale of land tenure, would have played a supplemental or secondary role, taking over essentially only when a household died out or land was left abandoned for some other reason.

A further large question is what part individuals and corporate authorities respectively played when new allocations did occur. Who took the initiative? The larger land and census records have virtually nothing to say on this issue. When the authorities gave plots to newlyweds or new arrivals from other districts, surely the recipients first requested an allotment, and in a few passages in the Cuernavaca records such requests are explicit.²⁴ But could it happen that individual initiative went even further? Our only glimpse into this question is a unique document from the Coyoacan region, dated 1554, describing an inquiry into landholding and a partial redistribution that took place at Atenantitlan in the southeastern part of the region after it was reassigned from the district of Palpan (San Agustín) to the district of Hueipolco.²⁵ Although thirty years had passed since the conquest, the document belongs

to the earliest land records preserved and is the only one known in which the fate of several plots over a period of years is detailed.

Most suggestive of all of the stories is that of a certain plot measuring thirteen by eleven units, newly assigned in about 1544 to one Martín Quauhtli, who after working it for three years left the Coyoacan area for Xochimilco. Later, an altepetl constable came to assign it to a new holder, Francisco Cihuahuinti, who though he must have requested it, left it lying idle for years, despite continuing to live in Atenantitlan. Finally, not long before February 1554, a Francisco Xico took it upon himself to cultivate the plot. As he testified, "Just recently I broke the ground for myself; no one gave it to me." His rights were apparently confirmed. Other plots as well were assigned upon the previous holder's death or departure to new recipients who either went elsewhere after a time or never used the holdings at all. The chain of action seems to begin with a particular individual seeing land left vacant for whatever reason and moving to occupy it, probably with the informal assent of neighboring landholders aware of the overall local situation. The calpolli authorities are then prevailed upon to give the applicant the land he wants and may have already started working, and finally an official from the altepetl, a constable, alcalde, or regidor, comes to give final approval and see to measurement and proper recording. The dynamism in the system comes from spontaneous developments at the level of individual and family—migration, death, the filling of vacuums, the capacity or lack of capacity to work certain lands—leaving the corporate authorities primarily the function of legitimizing the existing situation. The entire Atenantitlan investigation was carried out at the request of the local people to liquidate Palpan interests in the area and legitimate the subdivision among several local residents of a large plot left vacant by a nobleman presumably now deceased. Pedro de Paz, the Coyoacan regidor who represented the altepetl (though possibly affiliated with the locality too),²⁶ reported: "I distributed their land to those Atenantitlan householders just as they wished it. . . . I merely followed their statements about how they had distributed it among themselves." The regidor may in fact have exercised some discretion, but the very nature of the proceedings suggests that he used local information and preliminary allocations as the basis of what he did.

In its day-to-day, year-to-year functioning, then, the system seems to have shared a great many common traits with European modes of land tenure, although surely there was less tolerance of individual land rights in the absence of active cultivation, and community consensus on landholding matters counted for more. In a land transfer of almost any kind, consulting local community opinion was an essential part of the procedure. Even with new allocations of empty land, inquiries were made to be certain no one had prior

rights to it.* Those asked are usually called "tlaxilacaleque," which can mean either the calpolli elders or calpolli citizens in general, so that it is hard to be sure which is intended, but in any case, opinion is practically always unanimous, representing a local consensus on the status of the land and the legitimacy of the transfer. If at times the three or four persons interrogated are clearly district officials, at times there are ten or more people with humble names who appear to be simply neighboring homeowners.²⁷ Sometimes the group is referred to specifically as householders or even "all the householders," their individual names not being mentioned.²⁸ A report of the kind of thing actually said on such occasions comes from Tlatelolco in 1596. The governor and alcaldes, about to give possession of a house and lot after a sale, went to the site:

When they arrived, the householders there, the tlaxilacaleque, were summoned, and these people next to the house were told: "Come, what do you think about this house? Whose property is it?" They answered and said: "Oh rulers, María Salomé was truly the owner [*axcahua*]; now her grandmother María Juárez and Miguel Juárez, whose wife it was that died, are the true owners, and no one is claiming it from them."

Thereupon the governor gave formal possession to the new purchaser.²⁹ Anonymous groups of district citizens continued to participate in legitimizing indigenous land grants and sales into the eighteenth century.³⁰

General public assent was not the only rite associated with taking possession of land. The new possessor sponsored a feast, or at least gave something to eat and above all something to drink to the officiating authorities. The feast is best documented for confirmations and transfers affecting one or more entire altepetl, but sufficient hints exist to indicate that it was standard practice among individuals as well.³¹

The Structure of Individual Holdings

At the individual level we encounter perhaps the most characteristic aspects of Nahua landholding. Although specific individuals held specific plots, they did so, from the point of view of the corporation at least, in the capacity of *cale*, "householder, head of a household." Thus in some sense it was the household that held land, rather than its constituents, even though the person designated household head was in charge of all the lands, and other members might be assigned specific rights to specific plots.

*To be sure, before granting land or giving final possession, Spanish investigators often canvassed all the neighbors brought together as a group to ensure that the action was without prejudice to third parties, approximating the same procedure. But there was an important difference. Spanish officials were trying to determine if any individual or individuals felt the action violated their particular rights; Nahua officials were trying to determine whether the consensus was for or against the action.

Lands held by the household fell into two great categories, one well defined, the other defined mainly as not being the first. As seen in preliminary fashion in Chapter 3, the core of the holdings was the *callalli*, “house-land,” apparently meant to provide the family’s primary sustenance and constituting the most permanent element, more closely associated with the household as a cross-generational entity than other lands. I say “apparently” because everything must be deduced from the practical use of the relevant terms in texts produced by the Nahuas; no straightforward discussion of these matters is found in either Nahuatl documents or Spanish chronicles. In the most systematic of the early cadastral records, still mainly glyptic in nature, the first listed of a household’s plots bears the glyph for *calli*, “house,” signifying “callalli.”³² Some of the signs are accompanied by the Nahuatl word written with alphabetic characters, leaving no doubt at all of the intention.³³ The callalli went far beyond being merely a site for a house; intended for agricultural use, it was if not the largest of the family holdings then at least a plot approximating standard size,³⁴ and it was possibly the best situated, best watered, and most fertile. In Culhuacan, the callalli most often consisted of a set of chinampas.³⁵ Ordinarily the house complex would be found physically located on the callalli, but this was not an absolute requirement; land at some distance could be understood to be attached as house-land to a certain household.³⁶

For lands other than house-land, no single term emerges. Such plots are most often described simply as separate or in another place. In the 1554 Atenantitlan investigation, land not awarded as callalli is called *inic occan itlal*, “his land in another (or a second) place.”³⁷ In Tulancingo some fifteen years later, we find the term *-huecamil*, “one’s distant field,” juxtaposed with the primary plot.³⁸ It is natural to speculate that the secondary fields were often relatively marginal land, or at least less fertile than the callalli, but specific statements about relative value have no occasion to appear in testaments, the main potential source of such information. Although in the Cuernavaca census records irrigated land is listed before unirrigated, this is not entirely conclusive, since the figures appear to be totals rather than the dimensions of individual plots.

Holdings organized by the distinction between the central callalli and scattered non-callalli can be said to have been universal in Nahua society. In Nahuatl wills, people who have more than an absolute minimum of land practically always have multiple holdings located away from the central plot. This is as true for lords and even for tlatoque as for commoners. Around 1550, don Juan de Guzmán, tlatoani of Coyoacan, had scores of fields scattered all across his kingdom, but at the center was some callalli, attached to his palace.³⁹ Indeed, if one equates the teuctli or lord with the householder,

TABLE 5.2
Land Scattering: The Estate of Félix de Santiago, Calimaya (Toluca Valley), 1738

Description	Size	
	Almudes	Acres ^a
-a house on a lot (solar) in town, near the jail	—	—
-a field at the border of the San Marcos jurisdiction	—	—
-a little field on the Metepec road, near a small hill	1	0.7
-a field on the Metepec road where there is a crossing to San Lorenzo	4	2.8
-a field on the Metepec road, lower down	3	2.1
-a field on the Analco road	4	2.8

SOURCE: NAC, ms. 1477 B [1].

^aThe acre equivalents are uncertain.

the teccalli or lordly house with the household, and the tecpancalli or palace with the house, organization is fully parallel for nobles and commoners. The manner of describing plots rarely allows us to tell just how far apart holdings were unless, like those of the tlatoani just cited, they were located in different calpolli districts. With lesser figures this was not often the case, and secondary plots are identified only as being either in a separate place (*cejni*) or at some named place that does not appear among the known calpolli.⁴⁰ Most often such names seem to refer to the kind of sizable tract of land (probably defined by natural features) that the Spaniards called a *pago* or a *paraje*.⁴¹ Holding lands in different parajes would constitute significant scattering, and it was very common, to judge by the frequency in Nahuatl testaments of plots in differently named locations. On the other hand, a household's plots could be located in a single paraje and even at times be mainly contiguous, as shown in a recent reconstruction of a tract in Tepetlaoztoc.⁴² Furthermore, there is no doubt that many households, in some places the majority, held but a single plot. Yet just as the existence of many single-structure dwellings did not negate the general structure of the household complex, so single-plot households, perhaps often inhabited by young couples or new arrivals, fit the land-holding pattern in that any expansion with time would bring them into line with it, and their single holdings had the status of callalli. The pattern was as pervasive across time as across region and rank. As late as 1763, the holdings of a Josef de la Cruz in Tlapitzahuayan, near Chalco Atenco, consisted of the callalli plus four other apparently noncontiguous pieces of land.⁴³ Table 5.2 gives another eighteenth-century example.

What are the implications and rationale of the system of callalli plus scattered additional holdings? It can be seen as another form of cellular organization, treating a whole estate as a set of discrete independent parts related to each other not directly but in their common connection with the holder, who would attend to them sequentially and separately (as, for example, in

the relationship of tlatoani and calpolli). On a larger scale, the same mentality manifests itself in the general notion of dividing up the fertile land of the altepetl into many distinct, relatively small and uniform plots that retained their identity no matter who held them. Estate structure apparently had no room for numerical symmetries (other than the even dimensions of some plots), and it violated the principles of cellular organization by putting one plot, the callalli, on an entirely different plane from the rest. Yet it was surely comparable to the organization of the house complex into separate parallel buildings and even directly congruent with it, in the sense that just as each adult relative was likely to have a separate residential unit within the compound, he or she might have separate rights to one of the household's plots, or in the case of a male, actually work a plot separately.⁴⁴ Among the more concrete motivations of the system, a primary concern, at least at times of large-scale distribution, must have been to avoid giving an undue proportion of the best land to a few; the system of scattered multiple plots allowed a larger number to have at least some part of the most fertile areas, supplemented by less desirable land elsewhere. Multiple separate plots also facilitated the usual division of the inheritance among all heirs. For landholders who were lords or tlatoque, their lands could be close to dependents located in different entities and subentities.⁴⁵ Diversification would also have been possible, each larger household growing the various types of crops best suited to various soil types and other conditions. However, although the Nahuas classified lands by soil type, availability of water, and slope, and integrated these categories into their landholding records,⁴⁶ no overt evidence has been found for a conscious effort to obtain complementary kinds of lands.

Certainly there is nothing to make one think of the large-scale, systematic attempts seen in the Andes for each household or small unit to use all ecological niches, often leading to holdings many miles removed from each other and a quasi-migratory way of life.⁴⁷ The central Mexican system was compatible with either a diffuse residence pattern of households scattered here and there across the land or a quite high degree of urban nucleation (especially when the house-land was physically separated from the house complex), but its natural affinity, probably associated with the original rise of the system, was for an intermediary settlement type in which people would live quite close to each other on the most fertile parajes, working their primary plots there, and go out frequently to work supplemental plots in surrounding parajes, perhaps less favored by nature. The addition or loss of supplementary plots would hardly affect the location of settlements and households. Life would be fully sedentary, but there would be a great deal of short-term motion back and forth across the locality.

Land Sale

Among the considerations speaking against a thoroughly communal interpretation of indigenous central Mexican landholding is evidence that individual holders sold land to each other in preconquest times. The chronicler Ixtlilxochitl claims that one of twenty ordinances issued by Neçahualcoyotl, king of Tetzcoco in the fifteenth century, specified that if a person sold the same piece of land twice, the first buyer should keep it and the seller should be punished (for the duplicity, apparently, rather than for the sale proper, which here appears to be recognized by the highest authority as a legitimate possibility). The term *tlalcohualli*, defined as land that is sold and bought, is included in the encyclopedic volumes compiled under the direction of Sahagún.⁴⁸ Although these are not conclusive proofs, since Ixtlilxochitl is far from reliable on preconquest matters, and Sahagún's work sometimes includes phenomena of the postconquest period, mundane Nahuatl texts point in the same direction.

In the Cuernavaca-region census records, done surely no later than 1544, with local society showing minimal change, a calpolli head of Tepoztlan is listed as possessing purchased fields amounting to forty units, in addition to eighty units of other land, and this is not the only such listing.⁴⁹ Above all, an entire calpolli of Tepoztlan was named *Tlalcouhcan*, "where land is purchased," strongly implying the antiquity and generality of the practice.⁵⁰ The lands of don Juan de Guzmán in Coyoacan (ca. 1550) included many scattered pieces of *tlalcohualli*, distinct from and often smaller than his numerous patrimonial or lordly holdings.⁵¹ In Tlaxcala as early as 1547, indigenous people were coming from outside the area and buying land locally; the cabildo was concerned, but primarily, it appears, because it wanted the new purchasers to perform tribute duties, not because it saw anything untoward about the buying itself.⁵²

From the earliest postconquest documents one finds land referred to as someone's property (*-axca*) or the landholder called a property owner (*ax-cahua*).⁵³ That "-axca" labels an item as special to a given person or persons rather than others is clear, but that the concept had all the connotations of "property" in European languages is hard to demonstrate; indeed, it is unlikely. Likewise, *-patiuh*, often translated as "price" or "payment," equally meant "value," and it is probably derived from a root implying replacement and exchange in a very general sense.⁵⁴ Though words taken by early lexicographers to be equivalent to European "buy" and "sell" existed in Nahuatl, the same question arises. *Namaca*, "to sell," by origin meant "to give in return," and although *cohua*, "to buy," is more obscure etymologically, it too seems to have to do with reciprocity.⁵⁵ These words were used in the earliest

recorded postconquest money transactions, but what was their content in preconquest times?

A sixteenth-century Tlatelolco land case gives an answer to this question and throws additional light on the context and meaning of preconquest land sales, for not only does it tell far more than usual about the circumstances, but the reported sale is the earliest one documented.⁵⁶ In November 1558, relatives and witnesses affirmed that thirty-seven years before, by one reckoning, or three years after the arrival of Cortés by another, Magdalena Teyacapan, then doubtless still unbaptized, bought a piece of land at Tolpetlac (a northern dependency of Tlatelolco) from a man named Acxotecatl for twenty lengths of tribute cloth, or *quachtli*.⁵⁷ Since *quachtli* cloth was an important form of currency in preconquest Mesoamerica,⁵⁸ the transfer from Acxotecatl to Magdalena approximated a sale in the European sense, not merely some sort of trade. Immediately after the transaction, Magdalena went to the elders (*huehueteque*), also called *tetahuan*, "the fathers," who were altepetl officials in Tlatelolco proper rather than calpolli officials in Tolpetlac, and said to them: "Here is a bit of pulque that came from Tolpetlac, where I bought some land; it is so you will be informed that I am keeping the land for you, lest the person I bought it from, Acxotecatl, resident of Tolpetlac, should ever change his mind."

A land sale, then, was openly brought before the authorities, and a feast-like ritual accompanied the transfer like any other. Indeed, one way of looking at a transaction of this type is that the seller for a consideration relinquished his allocation from the altepetl/calpolli and permitted the authorities to reallocate it in the usual way to the buyer.⁵⁹ Sale in those circumstances would not contravene residual altepetl rights; nor would it by itself constitute sufficient legitimization of the transfer, or create an entirely separate category of land. Yet since individuals played the primary role, and going to the authorities was a second step that many may have omitted when the buyer felt sufficient confidence,⁶⁰ sale rather than reallocation was the effect, and throughout the colonial period indigenous people were to emphasize the distinction between tlalcohualli and other altepetl land.

The existence of land sale in return for currency did not preclude the exchange of one piece of land for another, and though we have little or no evidence for the preconquest period, trading is documented in Coyoacan in the time before 1575. One Juan Alvaro had accumulated six separate pieces of land, three by money purchase and three in exchange for land he already held. Although the term tlalcohualli does not appear as such, all six pieces are treated the same and apparently had the same status.⁶¹

In terms of the overall preconquest land tenure system, sale would seem

to have ranked third behind inheritance and corporate allocation as a mechanism for redistribution, but it was a normal, recognized feature. Data are not sufficient to say more with certainty. It would have been natural if sellers were primarily those who had inherited more land than they could work and if the land affected was usually other than callalli. The role of the corporation would thus have been stronger with the most fertile and densely settled lands, weaker with those that were more remote and less productive, at least in terms of maize. In postconquest times, however, as we will see, all sorts of holdings were sold, and there is little to tell us whether the pattern was new or old. Some scholars have proposed that selling was more common among the high-ranking; many early examples tend to confirm this proposition, but the mere absence of specific instances involving the humble, especially in the first decades, when they had only begun to appear in documents, is not entirely conclusive.⁶² At any rate, we can say that the Nahuas had traditions close enough to European practices of buying and selling land that they could immediately begin to act within the framework of the Spanish conventions.

Further Aspects of Land Categorization

The above discussion of some of the most basic features of the indigenous land regime has already defined several key concepts, but it has hardly touched the welter of categories, found in a variety of sources, that either show every sign of belonging to the preconquest system or openly purport to do so. A thorough treatment of the matter would assume frightening proportions without perhaps leading to a corresponding number of definitive conclusions. My intention here is merely to make one or two general points about land categories and then proceed to discuss a few of the ones with the most implications for postconquest times, trying above all to relate them to each other.

One of the largest, most intractable problems is the gap between, on the one hand, those sources—mainly synthesizing, mainly in Spanish—that devote space to a self-conscious description of preconquest land categories, and, on the other hand, sources—mundane, concerning individual postconquest cases, often in Nahuatl—that show comparable categories in actual use. A scholarly tradition has formed that approaches these two sets of materials by rationalizing the categories in the chronicles, comparing them with the mundane sources, and concluding from the difference a quick, sharp, and general loss of categories.⁶³ The list of classes considered basic does not always agree in detail from one version to another, but the impression arises that the categories are fixed and mutually exclusive, even though some of the objections to such an interpretation have been recognized and well stated: that the

chronicles are vague, arbitrary, and self-contradictory; that practice and the use of terms varied strongly from region to region; and that the descriptions given are normative and partisan.

Let us assemble the terms included in three such listings, disregarding which of them different scholars subsume under the same grouping. They are *teopantlalli* or *teotlalli*, land of the temples and gods; *tlatocatlalli*, ruler's land; *tecplantlalli*, palace land; *pillalli*, noble's land; *teuctlalli*, lord's land; *milchimalli*, "army" land; and *calpollalli*. I propose that these categories were not mutually exclusive, that they were controversial, that terminology varied with time, region, and even speaker, and that hence without contemporary case material from the preconquest period, which it appears we will never have, we cannot take the chronicles at face value on preconquest land categories. Certainly we cannot simply compare the chronicles with the postconquest mundane records and interpret the difference as change. It is at least as likely that those records give us a truer view of the situation in preconquest times than the chronicles do.

In my view, *tlatocatlalli*, *tecplantlalli*, *pillalli*, and *teuctlalli* all refer to some particular way of looking at the lands of the *teccalli* or *tecpán*, the lordly establishment discussed in Chapter 4. We have already seen that *tlatocayotl* or rulership was *teucyotl* or lordship writ large. "*Tecplantlalli*" emphasizes the corporate institution of the lordly house, and "*pillalli*" the individual holder of land, while "*tlatocatlalli*" and "*teuctlalli*" can be taken as emphasizing either the individual or the office. The status of "*tecplantlalli*" must have been as variable and controversial as the status of the lordly house itself, some maintaining that such land was separate from the *altepetl/calpolli* and at the discretion of the lord, others that it was held as a function of *altepetl/calpolli* office. No doubt the concept of a distinction between lands given by the corporation for a corporate purpose and lands inherited or acquired as an individual existed,⁶⁴ but there is no reason to assume that the distinction resulted in well-defined sets of entirely discrete holdings. Much land must have come under several categories simultaneously and uncontroversially; just as a *tlatoani* was at the same time a *teuctli* and a *pilli*, so presumably *tlatocatlalli* could at the same time be *teuctlalli* and *pillalli*. For an early postconquest example (ca. 1550), some of the same lands on a list of the *tecpillalli*, "lordly noble's land," of don Juan de Guzmán, *tlatoani* and governor of Coyoacan, appear in another list giving palace and patrimonial lands clearly pertaining to the rulership.⁶⁵

As for *teopantlalli* and *milchimalli*, the most probable interpretation is that these words name portions of the *calpollalli* set aside, possibly on an ad hoc, shifting basis, to help meet the needs of worship and warfare. With *teopantlalli* (far the more frequently mentioned of the two categories) there is no

lack of indication that this may have been the case. One scholar has found calpollalli actually meaning land dedicated to purposes of worship.⁶⁶ With relatively few examples of usage, it may be impossible to distinguish between passages, if any, in which calpollalli truly carries the meaning "religious land," and those in which calpolli land is simply being used for such purposes. Nevertheless, the more specifically religious meaning would not be at all far-fetched. Every calpolli possessed some sort of divinity associated with its origin legend, and there are indications that in postconquest times, the Nahuas viewed the saints, the successors to the gods, as the residual owners of the land (see Chapter 6). Calpollalli could hence have been primarily and originally the land of the gods, and only by extension the land of the corporation. Another possibility is that lands held by temple functionaries on much the same basis as tlatocatlalli or teuctlalli could have been called teopantlalli (again, partial postconquest analogues exist). In any case, a student of preconquest religious festivities has emphasized the intertwining of priests with other nobles and of temple life with government, opining that most support for religious display came from altepetl officials.⁶⁷ It is unlikely that large surfaces were ever temple land to the exclusion of belonging to individuals or other entities, and even less probable that the constant wars of preconquest times were supported by the product of large plots permanently dedicated to that purpose alone. Of the categories commonly considered basic, then, only two emerge as sharply distinct from each other, namely, calpollalli and the land held under any of several appellations by rulers, lords, and nobles. Even between these two the line is sometimes hard to draw.

A category running parallel to calpollalli, used apparently for the same lands and contrasted in the same way with classes such as tlalcohualli and pillalli, is that of tribute land. The exact shape of the term varies considerably. *Tequitlalli* and *tequimilli* ("tribute land, tribute field") incorporate the noun *tequitl*, "tribute, duty," whereas *tequitcatlalli* and *tequitcamilli* are derived ultimately from the verb *tequiti*, "to perform tribute duty, pay tribute."⁶⁸ The two sets apparently mean the same thing. Another formulation is created by adding the modifier *tequio*, "that which owes tribute," to the main word denoting the piece of land, whatever that should be.⁶⁹ Most common of all is a statement made about a given holding that *ipan tequiti*, "he pays tribute on it," or *ipan tequitihua*, "tribute is paid on it."⁷⁰ Since such expressions occur in Nahuatl documents from the earliest known to the eighteenth century, the category may be presumed to have existed in preconquest times. Not only do references to tribute land occur in the same situations where one might expect mention of calpollalli, but in a document of 1596 from Tetzcoco, a plot is actually called by both terms at once ("tequitcamilli calpollalli");⁷¹ such a pair is frequently used in Nahuatl to form a complex appellation by specify-

ing two slightly different aspects of the same thing. In Culhuacan in the 1580's, some people at death returned certain lands to the tlaxilacalli authorities for redistribution because the holdings were subject to tribute.⁷² The phrase thus conveyed that the land was under the direct administration of the tlaxilacalli, to be allocated to other members at need, which was precisely the thrust of the term calpollalli. An eighteenth-century Spanish translator rendered "tequitlalli" as "land of the barrio," and in another document of that period, some land called tequitlalli in Nahuatl is called *tierras de repartimiento* ("lands to be distributed") in Spanish.⁷³ The Spaniards used one or the other of these terms to denote the bulk of the calpollalli.

Matters would be considerably simplified if we could ascertain that there were two separate sets of categories, one referring to the status of land relative to the altepetl/calpolli, the other to status within the household. To an extent, such groupings exist. Callalli or house-land, non-callalli or additional land, and tlalcohualli or bought land refer in the first instance to household-internal status, pillalli and calpollalli to altepetl status. All three types in the first set could occur in a single nobleman's holdings and thus in some sense be pillalli. To be fully accounted for, any plot would need to be placed in two categories. In fact, however, whatever the primary thrust, most categories seem to have implications for both spheres.

Let us take the example of the common category *huehuetlalli*, literally "old land." The element *huehue-*, "old," can be attached to such words as "field," "house," and "property" with the same effect, which according to Molina amounts to "patrimonial." As one scholar has observed, huehuetlalli in practice comes close to meaning inherited land pure and simple.⁷⁴ But the corporation could give someone land so designated from the first moment, as when in 1567 the altepetl of Xochimilco awarded Martín Iuctli some chinampas "that become his huehuetlalli that he will leave to his relatives so that they will always eat and drink from it."⁷⁵ Huehuetlalli thus tends to fall together with callalli as the more central and permanent part of a family's holdings. For commoners, callalli was definitely simultaneously calpollalli at its origin and had the characteristic associated with calpollalli of not being lightly alienated.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the longer callalli stayed in a household, the more distinct it must have seemed from the empty or quickly reallocated portions of the calpollalli. The term huehuetlalli appears to have been used above all to denote holdings of the callalli type, with emphasis on the holders' discretion to dispose of them and the difference between such lands and ordinary calpollalli. Thus when a Pablo Huitznahuatl began to work some temporarily unused land in the Tlatelolco jurisdiction around 1550, "he did not say it was his huehuetlalli, but only made it his tequimilli."⁷⁷ Landholders used huehuetlalli status as justification for any action they saw fit to take,

either bequeathing the land to relatives or selling it.⁷⁸ With such connotations, “huehuetlalli,” although more than anything else a household-internal category, came to imply a restriction of altepetl/calpolli claims on the land, while “tequimilli,” primarily an altepetl-related category, came to imply secondary holdings in the household (i.e., non-callalli).

Further complications arise with huehuetlalli, however, for the term was used not only by individuals and households but by larger groups and corporations. According to Chimalpahin, in the early seventeenth century the citizens of the tlaxilacalli of Xollocó (Mexico City) claimed that the land on which a cross had long stood was their *huehuetlatquitl*, “patrimonial property.”⁷⁹ Here what is meant is a holding of the corporation as such, and no contrast with calpollalli obtains. Indeed, in such cases calpollalli was precisely what was being referred to, as a passage from Tulancingo (ca. 1570) makes clear. A party from one of the constituent parts of the altepetl complained to the Spanish alcalde mayor that a certain nobleman had sold off “the fields that are our calpollalli . . . truly the fields of our fathers and grandfathers, our *huehuemilli* [patrimonial fields].”⁸⁰ The sense remains the same—long-term possession with an aura of full discretion and close association between holder and holding—but the type of possession varies, and the holder can be an individual, a small group (household, family), or an entire corporation. So huehuetlalli is no more a fixed land category, susceptible to the same interpretation in every use, than any of the other Nahua land categories, meaningful though they are.

Even less fixed, probably not deserving the name of a land category at all, is *-tlalnemac*, literally, “land that is given to one, land-portion,” hence usually “one’s inherited land,” but also a plot awarded to one in judicial proceedings.⁸¹ The term apparently always refers to an individual or individuals, never to a whole household or corporation, and means essentially no more than one’s share within any of various frameworks. For this reason it is always, in my experience, in the possessed form, whereas huehuetlalli, though also possessed more often than not, does occur in the absolute. It places emphasis on the possessor’s particular rights, not the source of the rights or category of land per se. Thus we find in a text the phrase “huehuetlalli no-nemac,” “the huehuetlalli that is my share (inheritance, portion).”⁸² Other types of land could also be one’s *-tlalnemac*.⁸³

Seen occasionally in sixteenth-century Nahuatl texts, once with specific reference to the preconquest period, is the word *cihuatlalli*, “woman-land, woman’s land.” Although such land is most often possessed by a woman, the term seems to be a true land category meaning more than simply land that happens to be held by a woman at the moment. A preconquest king of Tetzcoco apparently presented his daughter with land called *cihuatlalli* on the

occasion of her marriage, giving the appearance that the term refers in effect to dowry land.⁸⁴ Other instances are compatible with such an interpretation but could as well refer to land a woman had inherited in her own right, regardless of marriage, or even acquired in other ways.⁸⁵ The thrust of the term seems to be that the land came into a household through a woman, and that she or her successors retained special claims on it in that context, not to place any restriction on what could be done with the property. Status as ci-huatlalli was somewhat independent of the woman who first brought the land into the family; the word could be used in the unpossessed form, and the category could remain viable even when the land passed into the hands of a man, as when a male citizen of Coyoacan referred to "his" ci-huatlalli.⁸⁶ Comparing the category with the last two treated, ci-huatlalli could and usually would be someone's -tlalnemac, but differed in principle from huehuetlalli in being less closely identified with the household as a whole, carrying instead the presumption of recent acquisition from the outside. It remains entirely possible, however, that huehuetlalli in one household could go to a woman as her inheritance and become ci-huatlalli in another.

There are other, less well-understood and -attested land categories that I have ignored, but those discussed above (and summarized in Table 5.3) are central to the system as I understand it.⁸⁷ In general, though the evidence on indigenous land categorization is relatively copious, it does not suffice to allow a complete reconstruction of the principles of the system and far less to understand the details of a subtle and varying practice. The existence of an extremely well-developed set of concepts and principles governing land tenure—in effect, a large body of land law, understood and enforced by both governmental officials and the community at large—cannot be doubted. Inheritance, individual and family rights to land, and sale gave Nahua land tenure many points of contact with the European tradition, as did the role of government in recording and legitimating. But for all the similarities, differences were profound. Not only did any single Nahua category fail to overlap entirely with any European category, differing substantially in the ensemble of its implications, but the relationship between public and private was not at all the same. One scholar has ventured the opinion that the most general division in the indigenous system was between public and private domains.⁸⁸ In fact, perhaps one of the most persistent sources of friction over land in preconquest times, and certainly in postconquest times, was the question of the rights of individuals or families relative to larger entities. Yet no terms that could be comfortably called "public" and "private" have yet appeared in Nahuatl land documentation (or in older Nahuatl in general, for that matter). We can identify entities of a clearly public nature that had land rights (the altepetl, the calpolli, the local community or subsection) and entities of

TABLE 5.3
Overview of Indigenous Land Tenure Categories

Category	Translation	Remarks
→1. altepetlalli	land of the altepetl	Can encompass any land over which the altepetl had residual control, but usually in effect means empty or loosely claimed land; generally falls together with the much more frequent calpollalli (2)
→2. calpollalli	land of the calpolli	Primary term for land on which the corporate claim was strong, subject to reallocation; often contrasted with pillalli (4), huehuatlalli (7), tlalcohualli (8), and other categories emphasizing the holder's discretion over the land
→3. tequitcatlalli, tequitlalli	land with tribute obligations	Essentially the same land as calpollalli (2), with emphasis on the direct obligations of the holder to the corporation
4. pillalli	land of nobles	Most frequent of several often overlapping terms referring to the holdings of high corporate officials, lordly and rulerly establishments, and nobles as individuals; often contrasted with calpollalli (2)
5. callalli	house-land	The plot or plots most closely and permanently associated with a given household; existed among both nobles and commoners; with commoners often assigned as calpollalli (2), but with time could be contrasted with it, falling together with huehuatlalli (7)
→6. hueca tlalli, inic occan tlalli	distant land, land in another place	Plots held by a household over and above the callalli (5); usually but not necessarily noncontiguous with the callalli and each other; with commoners often falls together with calpollalli (2) and tequitcatlalli (3)
7. huehuatlalli	old land, patrimonial land	Land that has been or is expected to be inherited within a household indefinitely and hence is at the holder's discretion; existed among both nobles and commoners; often falls together with callalli (5) and is contrasted with calpollalli (2) and tequitcatlalli (3)
→8. tlalcohualli	purchased land	Often contrasted with calpollalli (2) and tequitcatlalli (3); existed among nobles; existence among commoners in preconquest times not yet definitely established but probable

NOTE: Categories connected by lines and arrows have a tendency to refer to the same land.

what we would consider a private nature (the individual, the household), with some seeming to partake of both characteristics or to lie on the borderline (lordly houses and palatial establishments of various kinds). We cannot, however, point to lands that belong entirely in one domain or the other. Everything seems to belong to the two at once; even empty calpollalli was merely

awaiting assignment to some individual, and a single individual holding land did so as a calpolli member and potential household head.

It is true that one could say much the same, in principle, of European land tenure, where all private holdings entail public responsibilities and under certain conditions can be repossessed by public agencies. Nevertheless, the dominant relationship between public and private in the European tradition is that land is either one or the other, while the dominant relationship in the Nahua tradition was that it was both at the same time. Words like “-axca” (property) and “huehuetlalli” (patrimonial land) could be used in relation to larger as well as smaller entities. The system followed the usual principles of cellular organization, with large units consisting of compartmentalized constituent units that were themselves compartmentalized: altepetl land was thus divided into calpolli land, calpolli land into household land, and household land into plots that individual family members worked and expected to inherit, with no one place for division into “public” and “private.” The relationship of calpolli to household land was precisely that of household land to individual holdings. As in Nahua politics, constituent entities were forever working toward greater independence, trying to establish their own autonomous land rights, but within any successfully established domain, the process of subdivision and new thrusts toward autonomy repeated itself. The controversial status of teccalli land and the special rights families claimed to both callalli/huehuetlalli and tlalcohualli were entirely expectable under such circumstances. Statements that the lines between institutional and private ownership were blurred in specific cases or in general are true in their way but hardly do the situation justice.⁸⁹ Closer to the mark is one scholar’s recognition that lands that had stayed in the same hands for generations were viewed differently from those more recently assigned by larger entities.⁹⁰ I would raise this to a general principle of Nahua landholding: that the longer any entity held land and the more removed the land was from the original allocation, the more unrestricted power that entity had over it, and the less power resided with the original allocating agency.

After all, collective entities, including both the household (with its noble variant) and the calpolli, were a more integral and active part of landholding in indigenous central Mexico than their counterparts in Europe, yet their role was not incompatible with intensely individual land rights, personal initiative, or inheritance and voluntary transfer between individuals. The multiplicity of potentially overlapping categories and the sliding scale of more rights with greater distance from allocation, without creating a strictly intellectual confusion, allowed for an infinitely varying interpretation of cases, giving us every reason to believe that the struggles over the status of land seen from the early postconquest period went back into the precontact period as

an endemic feature of the system. They would have been held in check, however, by the pressure of a well-informed community consensus and extraordinarily detailed recordkeeping by local officials.

Land in Postconquest Times

Many aspects of the indigenous land system survived past the conquest into the following centuries. In fact, as we have seen, the middle and later sixteenth century has left us an essential part of the evidence with which the preconquest period can be studied. Indigenous municipalities remained in charge of their own land tenure management until independence and beyond. The pattern of estates consisting of many separate relatively small pieces, usually scattered in location, also continued to be dominant in all areas for the whole time. Several of the important categories dealt with above continued in use in their traditional meanings well into the second half of the colonial period. "Calpollalli" is attested as late as 1722 (Cuernavaca region), "tlaxilacallalli" 1738 (Azcapotzalco), "tequitlalli" 1723 (Chalco region), "callalli" 1763 (Chalco region), "huehuetlalli" 1659 (Tulancingo region), "tlalcohualli" 1738 (Azcapotzalco).⁹¹ Given the spottiness of the record and the fact that fewer Nahuatl documents are preserved from the time after about 1770, partly because they were becoming less acceptable to Spanish authorities, it is likely that these terms and the concepts they bore remained viable among many Nahua groups through the entire eighteenth century. Not everything, of course, remained the same. Vast substantive changes aside, some categories seem to have faded quite early. "Cihuatlalli" is not attested after the late sixteenth century. "Pillalli" and other terms referring to the lands of lords, rulers, and lordly establishments carry on into the early seventeenth century, but in the second half of the colonial period, they appear only, so far as is now known, in the Cuernavaca region.⁹²

With presently available sources, it does not seem possible to trace and date continuity or change in postconquest indigenous landholding practices with great precision. One large reason for the difficulty is the deterioration in the quality of the indigenous community's land records as the postconquest period proceeded. But this trend in itself, if interpreted, can tell us much. If we look at the overall situation in the sixteenth century after the Spaniards had established themselves, the fact that the newcomers began to appropriate some land seems to have affected Nahua landholding less than the drastic long-term indigenous population loss. Land values were low for both Spaniards and Indians; as late as the early seventeenth century, there was little indigenous reluctance to alienate lands and equally little interest in consolidating corporate rights to them when the opportunity presented itself.⁹³ To

all appearances, there was plenty of land available for the survivors, the more so as the effects of the series of epidemics of the sixteenth century mounted. Measuring lands practically to the inch (far more exactly than Spaniards in the Indies customarily did) and keeping meticulous, complete, unified, up-to-date records of all holders and holdings (something else the Spaniards did not do) were now far less necessary than when the population pressed heavily on resources. For some time, until perhaps 1550 or 1560 generally and until 1600 in some places (perhaps especially in the intensely cultivated chinampa areas), the full system was maintained. But by the seventeenth century, and surely by the third or fourth decade of that century, it was gone. Often the measurements for a given plot were specified inexactly or not at all, and above all, unified registers ceased to be kept. This change can be correlated partly with the general decay of preconquest pictorial/glyphic writing, the medium of indigenous land records; with Spanish influence (since the Spanish tradition emphasized titles kept in individual hands rather than unified cadastral); and even perhaps with the long-term process of the weakening of the indigenous corporation and its loss of various functions. Yet the strongest factor seems to have been simple lack of need, much as in the case of the fading of indigenous military lore after the conquest.

Under the circumstances, with empty land available for people to take when needed, things probably worked well enough. Litigation over individual plots is hardly preserved from the early colonial period except for chinampas and urban properties. Appeal to the knowledgeable consensus of the local community was presumably as effective as ever, and it continued as late as the eighteenth century.⁹⁴ By the middle of the seventeenth century, however, things were changing: the Hispanic population and economy had expanded greatly and taken vast amounts of land, indigenous population loss had nearly halted, and land values were on the rise. Suits involving pieces of land of all sizes were now commonplace, between Spaniards and Indians as well as inside the community. It would have been well, for many, if the old registers had still existed, but it was too late to revive them (it apparently did not even occur to anyone to try). For some, the new situation had its advantages. Claims to special rights to land could be pressed more successfully when there was no exact record to contradict them. Factionalism always played a large part in indigenous life. If the community climate was unfavorable to the claims of a person, family, or group, it was possible to appeal to Spanish authorities, who would view the matter with little contextual knowledge, not much respect for informal consensus, and great reliance on written documents.

For most indigenous people, however, especially commoners, land rights rested on informal consensus or equally informal action (at least in the sense

of leaving no written record) by altepetl/calpolli authorities. Very few reallocations of land were ever written down as land grants in the Spanish manner. More frequent were bills of sale, but even sales apparently most often went undocumented unless the purchaser was a Spaniard.⁹⁵ If there was any document at all, it was likely to be the testament of a family member mentioning the piece of land in contention. From the Spanish point of view, the use of a will to establish title begged the question of whether the land belonged to the testator in the first place, but this aspect of the matter did not cause many problems because from the Nahua point of view, a testament issued before the proper local authorities and some witnesses representing the community guaranteed that the testator had authentic rights to what he bequeathed. A greater difficulty was that the document often lay more than a generation back in time and did not mention the person currently raising the claim.⁹⁶ Another hazard was the repetitiousness of naming patterns, leading to any number of people named Juan de Santiago or Ana Francisca in a single district over a stretch of years.

But by far the thorniest problem was the identification of land. Nahuatl documents of the second half of the colonial period, whether wills, sales, or records of municipal action, usually fail to provide adequate information to differentiate the plot involved from others in the same district (this is true of many documents of the first half of the period as well). Even when some sort of measurement is given, it is often a standard one, and though a paraje name or other geographical indication ("on the road to Toluca") is sometimes present, the same wording would cover many other plots; the intention of such descriptions as there are is primarily to distinguish among a testator's various properties. The names of parajes and subdistricts in any case merge with ad hoc descriptions ("at the road crossing," "at the edge of the ravine") and repeat as constantly as personal names. In Coatlichan (Tetzcoco region) in the years 1762–64, a suit revolved about the question, never firmly settled, of whether the piece of land concerned was the whole paraje of Cihuateopancaltitlan, or the whole paraje of Yancuiccalco, or just one part of Cihuateopancaltitlan.⁹⁷ In a long suit in Tenayuca (north of Mexico City) from 1697 to 1709, a major recurring problem was to try to identify a rancho one Miguel Francisco was administering for the municipality; Spanish and indigenous authorities seemed unable to establish whether certain land he had leased or sold was the rancho or not.⁹⁸ The same thing could happen even in the indigenous community of Mexico City, where in 1697 a Juan Pascual presented papers dated 1600 giving title to a house and chinampas; these documents were recognized by all as valid, but the opposing party affirmed that they related to Juan Pascual's residence, not the property in litigation.⁹⁹ Nahuatl documents, then, from the beginning to some extent, and increas-

ingly as time went on, gave specific people clear rights to specific lands but were not in themselves sufficient basis for successful claims because in the matter of identification of the property they simply referred to common knowledge and community consensus. If a document happened to have been prepared a generation or more before coming into dispute, it might prove impossible to relate to community consensus at all.

Adoption of Spanish Procedures

In the above it has already been seen that indigenous landholding remained a matter primarily regulated inside the community, following norms largely derived from, if not literally identical with, those of the preconquest period, and that specifically Spanish procedures were not uniformly introduced. But here as in other spheres, Spanish terminology and ideas, originally often little more than a cover for some partial indigenous equivalent, in the long run had a considerable effect.

The old ways of measuring persisted to some extent through the entire colonial period. A document from the Toluca Valley at the very end of the eighteenth century, for all its late colonial idiom, still relies entirely on the classic style of measurement. The term *quahuitl* is employed to describe the unit, only the length is specified (on the presumption that the width is uniform and understood), and the quantities are round in vigesimal terms (80, 20, 10).¹⁰⁰ Even when Spanish terms occur, the content can still be indigenous. Measurements of a piece of land in Azcapotzalco in 1738 are given in the Spanish *brazada*, yet not only are the dimensions an utterly traditional 40 by 20 units, but the measuring stick used ("tlalquahuitl") contained two and a half varas, within the range of the indigenous *quahuitl/matl*.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the vara or Spanish yard did make headway. It is found in 1630 as a fraction of a *matl*, and repeatedly from 1620 through the eighteenth century as the principal measurement.¹⁰² But increasingly in the late period, both the *quahuitl* and the *vara* were used only to measure small strips, urban house lots, and the like. For larger holdings, the Nahuas began to adopt the highly imprecise Spanish system of stating the extension of land by the amount of seed that could be planted on it (in the indigenous context, the seed was generally understood to be maize, as was sometimes in fact made explicit, although the concept was occasionally applied to wheat as well). A *fanega de sembradura* is thought by some to have equaled about 8.8 acres, a *media fanega* (half) consequently 4.4, a *cuartilla* (fourth) 2.2, and an *almud* (twelfth) 0.73, but the values undoubtedly varied with time, place, and purpose, often being mere estimates.¹⁰³ Nahuatl documents show that "fanega" and "almud" were borrowed directly from Spanish in this meaning, whereas an indigenous equivalent, *tlacoton* (literally "little half"), took the place of "cuartilla."¹⁰⁴

An even vaguer Spanish way of describing extension also found its way into Nahuatl vocabulary: talking in terms of yokes (of oxen), that is, giving the number of yokes it would take to work the land.¹⁰⁵ By now, the reader of these pages will not be surprised to learn that the middle of the seventeenth century was a watershed in the manner of expressing the dimensions of landholdings, with the new modes making their appearance in the 1640's and 1650's.

Spanish legal procedures involving land tenure began to be introduced much earlier, in the mid-sixteenth century, as part of the Hispanic reorganization of altepetl mechanisms more generally. Documents of that time from Coyoacan already include all the most important items: grant, possession, and bill of sale.¹⁰⁶ To what extent, however, did these genres match the Spanish originals? For one thing, European-style written records about land dealings were most likely to be drawn up, and to approach Spanish models most closely, when a Spaniard was involved in the transaction.¹⁰⁷ Even so, a punctilious observation of written and other formalities sometimes characterized purely indigenous land dealings as well.¹⁰⁸ In general, over time the documents tend to come ever closer to Spanish counterparts.

Some were quite close from the beginning. In Coyoacan in 1575, one Joaquín Flores, of the district of Atepotzco, came before the governor and alcaldes and presented a petition asking that he be granted some empty town land in his home territory. District authorities appeared on his behalf, verifying the facts and supporting Flores's request, whereupon the governor and alcaldes granted him the land for himself and his children after him, and sent the chief constable out to give him full possession. The notions of petition and possession are both conveyed through Spanish loanwords.¹⁰⁹ Almost two centuries later, in the Toluca Valley town of Calimaya in 1750, a Marcelino Antonio and his wife came before the governor, alcaldes, and other officials with a petition requesting a specific piece of land, and the story repeated itself, this time the governor himself proceeding to the spot to give possession (which is reported in some detail).¹¹⁰ The second document especially has many local peculiarities, but both reproduce the main elements of a Spanish land grant.

Looking beneath the surface, we can say, first of all, that the Spanish mode differed little from already established indigenous practice. We have already seen that as well as can be reconstructed, in preconquest times a person would ask the authorities for land, often a specific piece he had already identified and perhaps begun to work, and after verification they would give it to him, carrying out formalities of measurement and making a record. There was surely no written petition, and no sources tell us just what the applicant said on this occasion, but the Nahuas were such masters of formulaic speeches that it would have been most uncharacteristic if there were no set

speech for the purpose, and likewise for the finalization of rights. Procedures diverged, then, primarily in the type of written record kept and in the detail of formula and rite. It was perhaps because of the variance of the Spanish forms that the Nahuas frequently used Spanish terminology for the acts of petitioning and taking possession, but just as likely it was because of the emphasis Spaniards placed on them as necessary steps in the process of establishing title.

Yet the gestures in the direction of Spanish ritual did not mean that indigenous ritual was abandoned, even if it was not ordinarily reflected in the written record. A certain amount of subtle, even profoundly significant evidence of continuing indigenous thought and practice can be found buried in records ostensibly following a Spanish model, but writers definitely tended to emphasize what would have legal value within the Spanish framework and to omit what would not, so that the more purely indigenous side of practice is hard to detect. It is seen in Spanish complaints that indigenous officials were always eating and drinking and receiving gifts for their cooperation, and sometimes in statements made by parties to litigation about how things really worked.¹¹¹ Rarely was a Nahuatl notary naïve enough to put everything that happened on paper, but in San Miguel Tocuillan (Tetzcoco region) in 1583 one writer did just that. A precious source for various purposes, the document (no. 1, Appendix A) has already been used in previous chapters.

Since Tocuillan, despite its location in the central part of the Valley of Mexico, was no major settlement, and indeed possibly merely a subconstituent of Tetzcoco, the writer may not have mastered the Hispanic formulas, causing him to resort instead to a full dialogued account. Even so, his version is artful and condensed, representing formula of a different kind. Perhaps it is a descendant of the memorized oral recitals that must have accompanied reference to written cadastral records in preconquest times. At any rate, to set the scene again, a woman known only as Ana, having fallen on bad times, moves in, together with her husband and young son, to live with her older brother Juan Miguel, a regidor, until, the arrangement becoming burdensome, she suggests that they request some land for a site where she can build a house. Juan Miguel then sets out to collect a set of four notables from as many subdistricts, first telling Ana to prepare some tortillas and get out the pulque, of which there is a plentiful supply. Whether these men are heads of calpolli or sub-calpolli, with Juan Miguel a regidor in a larger municipal entity, or whether they all together constitute a cabildo or full set of officers for Tocuillan is not clear. In any event, when they arrive at Juan Miguel's house, they partake of the tortillas and pulque, and after polite small talk, Ana requests "a bit of the land of San Miguel" (the town saint) on which to build a house. They assent, go out with Ana to the general area, ask her to

designate a site, and after one of their number (the one who usually performs the task) has measured out the land, award it to her, saying "that's how much land we're giving you." Ana and her husband weep on receiving the plot, and she promises to keep candles and incense burning at the altar of San Miguel in gratitude. She makes the gesture of asking everyone back to the house for some more pulque, which is politely declined. All five officials speak, everyone embraces, and the occasion is over.

Since the account, although longer than a terse Spanish grant document, is still highly compressed and selective, it appears to be not merely a story told in colloquial idiom about the events of a day, but a reporting of the proper performance of legitimating ritual. Before Juan Miguel even left the house, it had probably been decided that the site would be awarded, and where. The document tells of the carrying out of a feast and other requisite niceties in the same spirit as Spanish title papers specifying the proper sequence of legal acts and bearing the necessary signatures. Although close parallels to the Tocuillan document have not been found (and with most writers having been better trained in Spanish documentary genres, few must ever have been written), I believe that grants and other transfers within Indian communities across the entire period under consideration were accompanied by food, drink, and various ritualistic negotiations and transactions (including outright payments to those officiating), all phenomena with roots in the preconquest period.

At the same time, Spanish land ritual, especially the concept of "taking possession" and the acts accompanying it, became meaningful to the Nahuas. The Spanish manner of having the principal officer present take the new possessor by the hand and lead him over the property, while the latter carried out symbolic destructive acts showing his full rights (pulling off twigs and throwing stones), seems to have become deeply embedded in Nahua practice, though the Spanish rite may have been affected by indigenous elements (entirely aside from a separate substratum of indigenous rites). Thus some extant examples contain hints of the traditional Mesoamerican emphasis on the cardinal directions and four-part gestures. In acts of possession in Tlatelolco and Mexico City in 1620 and 1630, the new possessors indeed threw stones, but specifically in the four directions (*nauhcampa*).¹¹² The governor of Calimaya, in giving possession to Marcelino Antonio in 1750 (see above, at n. 110), was careful to stroll him about all four corners of the property.¹¹³ Even so, the "possession" functioned very much as in Spanish land law, as something to which the new holder could appeal in the first instance to ward off any other claim, and something without which (in theory) any claim, however valid, that he himself might have to the land could not be made operative. At times, the possession even carried the Spanish implication that the holder was now

the primary repository of the materials for the future defense of his rights, as when in Mexico City in 1630 the buyer of a house, as part of an act of possession, was given the original testaments of previous owners, as well as the bill of sale and record of the current proceedings, to keep always.¹¹⁴ In the majority of unwritten transfers involving humble people, eating, drinking, and other indigenous ritual may have outweighed the Spanish trappings, but a mixture of both sorts of legitimation was probably the norm, and surely both became part of standard Nahua procedural lore.

Postconquest Forms of Non-calpolli Land

As we have seen, in preconquest times a tension existed between calpolalli, quite directly under the control of the general corporation, and lands that under various headings were under more autonomous control by subgroups of individual members of the corporation. Although several of the non-calpollalli categories fell into disuse, others did not, and the often disputed distinction continued to be a marked characteristic of indigenous landholding in the postconquest centuries. The nature of the sources for both periods precludes any definite statement that the tension increased in absolute terms, nor can it readily be shown, though it may be suspected, that the non-calpollalli sector grew in relative size. Spanish cultural influence and actual pressure from Spaniards in and out of government certainly played a role in the process, but often Spanish factors prove to coincide with indigenous counterparts. The subject is thus full of ambiguities and for now must remain so. Still, something can be said about the forms and rationale of attempts to remove land from the calpolli domain.

As noted above, the indigenous category tlalcohualli (purchased land) remained current in central Mexico through the whole colonial period, and it was common for one person or married couple to sell land to another. In many such sales, probably the majority of those of which record is preserved (since records were needed for subsequent title validation proceedings in Spanish courts), the buyer was Spanish, and the piece of land was lost to the Indian community forever. But in some documents only Nahuas are involved, and many others (above all testaments) report such sales indirectly, leading to the conclusion that between indigenous people land sales without written record were, if not the rule, at least a frequent phenomenon. Nevertheless, the Spanish bill of sale (*carta de venta*) became part of the repertory of Nahua notaries from an early time.¹¹⁵ As with the petition and the possession, apparently the primary motivation was to cement certain rights within the Spanish framework, so that the simple use of the term as a catchword seems for some to have been the crucial factor, the actual content of the procedure being relatively unimportant. Yet the wording does often approximate the Spanish

model, implying that the transaction occurs between two absolutely free economic agents acting as individuals and in no other capacity, and transferring the property sold to the absolute control of the buyer for all time to come. If taken literally (whether it was or not is virtually impossible to judge), the language would mean the introduction of a quite pure form of the European conception of private property into Nahua thinking. In my opinion, although the Nahuas translated and understood the Spanish formulas, the two traditions had so many points of contact that there was nothing to keep indigenous people from interpreting the statements within their own framework.

Spanish authorities were aware of land sale by and among Indians, and perhaps moved in part by the apprehensions of indigenous authorities about the possible results of unrestricted sale under postconquest conditions,¹¹⁶ were always passing ordinances demanding full justification of any sale, especially evidence that the seller was not being coerced and was fully aware of what he was doing, that he was not being impoverished by the sale, and that he had good reason for it. The response was the appearance of additional formula in Nahuatl bills of sale. An affirmation of voluntary action was within the Spanish tradition, but the rest was neither purely Spanish nor purely indigenous, reflecting rather specifically postconquest circumstances. The seller would likely affirm that he had other land to support himself, that the land being sold was in disuse or useless (flooded, next to a highway and exposed to damage by livestock, etc.), and that he needed the money to pay his tribute, cover other debts, or have masses said for relatives. He might add that for a specified reason the land sold was not calpollalli or tequitcatlalli.¹¹⁷ Although in an individual case these assertions were not necessarily untrue, they were not necessarily true either. They were above all legal language designed to ensure the validity of the transaction in Spanish and indigenous courts, and they owe their plausibility primarily to the fact that Spanish ordinances in these matters spoke to widespread conditions.

Sale documents are thus only the façade for processes that become visible all too rarely—usually only when a disagreement caused someone to dispute the legality of a sale. Consider the case of José Lázaro in Amecameca in the late eighteenth century. In May 1767, a document was drawn up confirming the sale of a piece of land by José de Santiago and his wife Catarina María to José Lázaro and his wife Luisa Juana, for fifteen pesos. The land was in the tlaxilacalli of Huehuecalco, next to another piece José already held, and Catarina and her first husband had themselves bought it many years previously. The listed witnesses, three people entitled “don,” of whom one was fiscal of the church, are referred to by José as “notlaxilacaltlahuan,” “my tlaxilacalli uncles,” so that they seem to have been figures of authority in the district. Nevertheless, irregularities abounded. When the document was drawn up,

only nine of the fifteen pesos had been paid; the rest was to follow at an unspecified rate, and in fact José Lázaro gave Catarina María only small bits whenever he could, taking over ten years to pay the full amount (which he claimed was sixteen pesos, not fifteen). Because of the drawn-out nature of the transaction, some neighbors took the position that the land was in hock rather than being sold. The notary who drew up the document, though he had frequently been Amecameca's municipal clerk, was not in office at the moment, and above all, the governor and alcaldes were not called upon as was the custom. José Lázaro claimed that if he had brought in the full set of municipal officials, all the money he had paid to Catarina María over the years would have had to go instead for snacks and pulque for them, and he would have been liable besides for a money payment of three pesos, called the *tlatlaqualoni* (literally "something to eat with"), which they were customarily given on the occasion of a sale. The out-of-office notary said he had agreed to take care of the sale by himself because the amount involved was small. In June 1781, after appeal to Mexico City, although no one denied that the money had changed hands, the Audiencia declared the sale false and ordered the land returned to Catarina María (not quite the same as her actually receiving possession, of which there is no record).¹¹⁸

Halfway between formal and informal procedures, José Lázaro's story contains many elements in common with cases less well recorded. Payments made bit by bit on an undetermined schedule (or not made at all), each side having a divergent interpretation of the total amount and of who now really owned the land, are mentioned in other sources as well.¹¹⁹ The lack of ready cash among humble people amply explains the practice. When, as often, the value of the land was even less than in José Lázaro's case, the motivation to avoid written and other formalities was even greater. Transactions often reached the level where sale was only one aspect of the transfer, and one could legitimately doubt whether "sale" is a proper description. Purchase terminology is sometimes used in the sources for dealings of this type, sometimes not.

A purchase such as José Lázaro's is straightforwardly economic, since it took place between nonrelatives and had the purpose of increasing José's productivity by adding land located nearby and easy to work. We have no reason to doubt that many other transactions were of that nature, and at times evidence appears of systematic speculative activity.¹²⁰ A great many sales, however, were motivated by the need to pay funeral and other emergency expenses. A glance through collections of Nahuatl testaments will show how frequent it was to order property sold for masses for the testator's soul. Most often such sales were carried out by relatives, officials, or others assigned the role of estate executor. But there could also be mixed, anticipatory arrange-

ments. During his lifetime, Constantino Esteban of Tlatelolco made an agreement with Miguel Hernández of the neighboring district of Santa María in Mexico City to sell him his house and lot for seventy pesos. Constantino received only thirty pesos at the time; then when he fell ill in 1620, he had a testament drawn up ordering Miguel to give thirty pesos to his wife and children and pay ten pesos for requiem masses for his father and himself. Miguel did so, and then received the property with all formalities.¹²¹

Many sales were the result of family contingencies only on the seller's side, with the buyer acting impersonally, on market principles. But often family was involved on both sides, so that sale and inheritance came close to merging. In Tezontla (Tetzco region) in 1689, a Juan Miguel, struck with an illness, made a will stating that he had already transferred a small piece of land at Calinatoxtitlan (Granadostitlan, "next to the pomegranates") to his nephew Diego Gabriel, who had given him half a peso for it. Juan Miguel then survived his illness to make a second will over twenty years later, in 1710; this time he merely stated that he was leaving the land to his nephew (who had doubtless possessed and worked it the whole of the time). In 1713, Juan Miguel's widow in her will, presumably to avoid all possibility of counterclaims, once again left the same piece of land to Diego Gabriel, saying nothing of the background.¹²² It is entirely possible that Diego Gabriel would have inherited the land anyway, and the transaction could be seen less as a sale than as payment for the right to enjoy one's inheritance early. It is also likely, though as usual in these cases not demonstrable, that Diego Gabriel paid less than the going rate.

Other cases have even less of an aura of sale. A testator might make what looks like a normal bequest to a relative, then follow it with a request or order that the relative make a payment, at times specifically destined for masses or other funeral expenses (and probably so intended even when no specific purpose is given). The money might or might not be overtly labeled as a quid pro quo. Money might not be mentioned at all. María Teyacapan, who left two buildings and fifteen chinampas to her nephew in Culhuacan in 1580, simply added "and he is to favor me with a mass"; no amount was named, but the effect was the same.¹²³ Aside from functioning as the vehicle for a kind of inheritance fee, intrafamilial sale could facilitate redistribution within the family beyond the scope of normal inheritance. In a family of the Tetzco region in the seventeenth century, the holdings were divided among the children in the normal way, but in the event, one brother flourished and the others did not. As his siblings one after another fell into straits or suffered illness, he would give them money, take care of their children, and see to their burials in return for their land, thus reintegrating family properties that might otherwise have gone their separate ways.¹²⁴ On the other hand, just such fa-

miliar cooperation might have taken place equally well in preconquest times under the rubric of the special responsibility of uncles, with no connotation of sale.

One effect, with possibly major implications, was that those who acquired land from relatives for a consideration, even though it had been calpollalli and they might have inherited it in any case, did not hesitate to call it tlalcohualli (purchased land). How well they succeeded in obtaining more general acceptance of such a view seems impossible to establish from the available sources, but if a significant percentage of the lands changing hands in this manner escaped the duties imposed on calpollalli/tequitcatlalli, the domain of taxable, reassignable land must have been constantly diminishing. In view of the general situation with postconquest land tenure, the status of such land was probably precarious and controversial. The potentially mushrooming amount of tlalcohualli among indigenous holdings may not have gone unchallenged, but it did provide a much-used pretext for reselling land alleged to have been sold before.

Presumably the popularity of the appeal to the special standing of tlalcohualli, though growing out of the indigenous heritage, was reinforced by the introduction of the bill of sale genre, by Spanish notions of unlimited rights to sell private property, and by common practice in the local Spanish economy (though there is no evidence of any overt Spanish campaign to Europeanize the indigenous land regime). Another and even more basic land category, huehuetlalli (old land), also coincided with Spanish concepts closely enough to merge with and perhaps be influenced by them. As inherited or inheritable land tied to a family's fortunes, huehuetlalli was generally translated into Spanish as "patrimony, patrimonial land." Spanish *patrimonio*, while referring to an inherited family estate in toto, also had, when applied to a single individual, the connotation that his patrimony was his special share, all other claims having been previously resolved, so that while the holder of the patrimony had a serious responsibility for its preservation, he was completely free to do whatever he wanted with it. By the late sixteenth century, the Spanish term had been introduced into Nahuatl, and by the seventeenth, it was being used standardly along with or even instead of huehuetlalli to justify the right to sell land and differentiate it from tribute-paying calpollalli.¹²⁵

Pillalli (nobles' land), together with its related categories referring to office or lordly establishments, had been the main opposite pole of calpollalli in preconquest times. After the conquest, however, these terms gradually fell into disuse, unlike others that were often distinguished from calpollalli (tlalcohualli, huehuetlalli, callalli). First to go were all those relating to office and palace lands (tlatocatlalli, tecpantlalli, and equivalents), which do not appear in known documents after the early seventeenth century. Such lands are seen

spoken of in the later colonial period mainly in Spanish, as cacicazgo lands. "Pillalli" (also in the variant "tecpillalli") held on more strongly, perhaps because it emphasized the rights of the individual holder rather than those of a larger entity, but it too faded in the second half of the seventeenth century and was generally speaking a rarity in the eighteenth.¹²⁶ Does this mean that nobles' lands became indistinguishable from calpollalli, or at least from the various gradations of the holdings of ordinary commoners? Although it seems to be true that the lines became more blurred, I believe the answer to this question should ultimately be in the negative. The evolution is closely parallel to developments with the indigenous nobility in general, as dealt with in Chapter 4. There it was seen that indigenous terminology for noble rank decayed after the early seventeenth century, but new types of distinctions were made, and a recognizable, self-perpetuating upper group continued to exist. Just so, that same upper group (despite the sale of much of its land to Spaniards before 1650) continued to maintain landholdings larger than and in some ways distinct from the rest, in spite of the loss of the old terminological distinctions. For one thing, it was mainly nobles who sometimes went beyond Hispanic-style procedures and records within the indigenous community to confirm their rights in the Spanish context, having sales, grants, and acts of possession carried out directly under the auspices of Spanish officials, much as any Spaniard would do, with consequently firmer title anchored outside the local altepetl.¹²⁷ In the late colonial period, the holdings of the class of people who functioned as governor, alcalde, and fiscal, at least in some of the larger towns, sometimes approximated Spanish haciendas or ranchos, or more often took the traditional shape of numerous scattered plots, but in either case were differentiated by their scale, staff, and equipment from most estates of ordinary plebeians even when described in the same terms. As in times past, altepetl officials often used their position to assure the allocation of lands to themselves.¹²⁸

All the forms of non-calpollalli landholding in the later colonial period, both those overtly resting on indigenous categorization and those involving its replacement, showed signs of Spanish influence, and it is a fair statement of the general trend to assert that there was movement in the direction of a more individualized conception of landholding in the European style, in which the landholder stood in contrast to larger entities rather than forming part of them. On the other hand, the new concepts were reinterpreted, receiving indigenous content, and all of them represented variants on a traditional distinction between calpollalli (as land held by individuals but under the close supervision of the community) and other lands, a distinction that had no near counterpart in the European tradition. Ultimately it was still the indigenous concept of calpollalli/tequitcatlalli that defined, albeit negatively, all other civil categories of landholding.

In a flux between two traditions, indigenous landholding was in a potentially precarious state by the eighteenth century. Despite great losses into Spanish hands, in most areas indigenous towns still had considerable amounts of land and administered it for the most part autonomously, following a regime in which indigenous elements still predominated. Yet with the double tradition, two sets of authorities to whom to appeal, the loss of exhaustive indigenous record keeping and surveying, and the fragmentation of the altepetl into entities often unable to exert any wider influence, a fragile neighborhood consensus was left as the only stabilizing force. People must often have done as they pleased, interpreting evolving community norms to suit themselves, and there was no easy or fully satisfactory way to settle serious disputes.

Economic Life and Material Culture

Having understood something of how the Nahuas held land, we may now turn to the question of what they did with it, or more broadly, of how they lived and made a living. On these important matters, the internal sources of the indigenous world prove far less generous than on political and social organization, inheritance, or land tenure. Since the routine of daily life consists of an almost infinite number of discrete small actions and strategies, its elements must have seemed individually too insignificant (as well as too obvious or presupposed) to deserve space on the written page. Though Nahuatl documents are rich, enlightening, and not infrequently graphic, they fall into well-defined, highly selective types that by no means blanket the field of potentially interesting information. Nahuatl writing is never merely discursive but always for a specific purpose; in mundane Nahuatl documentation, that purpose is generally to claim or protect rights or possessions that might be legally challenged. In the sphere of marketplace activity, the crafts, and the production, sale, and consumption of agricultural commodities, challenges apparently did not reach the level of legal action within the altepetl framework.

Indeed, this whole domain seems to have gone substantially without altepetl regulation of any consistent kind, at least after the third quarter of the sixteenth century. One reason may have been the small money value of dealings in such areas. It is also possible that a great deal of Nahua economic activity spilled over into the general Spanish economy, escaping the purview of the altepetl and falling directly under the jurisdiction of Spanish authorities. Whatever the reason, Nahuatl litigation and sale documents tend to deal with land, not products, and the Nahuatl wills that specify all the testator's lands and their destination say little about what was grown on them or how, much less about any other routine activity. To attempt to treat somewhat

systematically the productive and nonproductive aspects of daily life among indigenous people, it would be necessary to resort to Spanish sources, many of a synthetic nature, and as in other parts of this book, that I am reluctant to do without adequate indigenous sources as a check. Moreover, such a treatment is already available.¹²⁹ Here I intend only to devote some pages to those aspects of economic endeavor and material culture that find expression in Nahuatl sources, as a supplement to what may be seen from other perspectives. (See Chapter 3 for some relevant discussions of household life and appurtenances.)

Money and Money Dealings

Although preconquest Mesoamerica lacked coinage or an exclusive reliance on precious metals as a medium of exchange, currencies existed. One reads in chronicles of copper artifacts, beads, and quills filled with gold dust serving in this capacity, as no doubt they did,¹³⁰ but the items most commonly mentioned, and the only ones still found operating in early postconquest mundane records, are lengths of cotton cloth called *quachtli* (often used for tribute) and cacao beans. Both were commodities of ordinary consumption, especially for people of means, but in temperate central Mexico they had the aura of luxury goods because cotton and cacao grew only in warmer lands, mainly located to the south. Quachtli, arranged in standard bundles of twenty, were used to buy the indigenous slaves who were still owned in the Cuernavaca region around 1540.* (They also, as indicated at nn. 56–57 above, appear as payment in the earliest recorded postconquest land sale, in the Tlatelolco jurisdiction.) Cacao as a medium of exchange appears again and again, in both Spanish and Nahuatl documents, throughout the sixteenth century and on through the colonial period. Cacao could be amassed to represent substantial values, but ordinarily it came into play for small transactions worth less than a quachtli; at any particular time, with adjustments in a given case for the relative quality of the two products, a standard rate of cacao beans per quachtli prevailed.¹³¹

Spanish money entered the Nahua world very quickly; it figures prominently in one of the earliest extant Nahuatl documents, a Tlaxcalan market price list of 1545,¹³² and it continues to appear as a standard item in documents of all kinds through the postconquest centuries. The Tlaxcalan cabildo records of the 1550's and 1560's repeatedly show a conceptual mastery of the Spanish monetary system; furthermore, by the nature of the taxes imposed and by general descriptions of the local economy, they imply that most indigenous people including commoners actually had some money in their pos-

* AZ, 2: 1, 3. *Quauhnahuacayotl*, cloaks of a specific type ("Cuernavaca-style"), were given in tribute like quachtli and on occasion were used to pay for slaves as well. The same presumably applies to other types of cloth and cloaks in different regions.

session in the course of a year.¹³³ Documents from Coyoacan show money circulating in the altepetl market by the middle of the sixteenth century, with the various specialties all able to pay money assessments.¹³⁴ Similarly, the Culhuacan testaments (ca. 1580) show money in the hands of almost everyone, including women and very humble people; not only land, houses, and transport animals, but things such as household gear and ordinary foods bore a money value and were exchanged locally on that basis.¹³⁵ The word *tomín*, signifying a coin, gold weight, and standard of value equal to the *real* or eighth of a peso, is one of the first attested Spanish loanwords in Nahuatl, and “peso” itself was not far behind (1548).¹³⁶ Both, as well as *medio*, half a *tomín* or *real*, were an indispensable part of the Nahuatl vocabulary from the mid-sixteenth century forward.

How much change did the introduction of the Spanish monetary system represent, and was the adjustment a difficult one? The transition to money occurred with great speed in all known parts of the area, and there is no evidence that the Nahuas had any difficulty in comprehending money's significance; prices seem rational, and money was prized and sought after by all. No strong indigenous reinterpretation, such as that affecting borrowed land categories or introduced governmental offices, seems to obtain. On one occasion, the Tlaxcalan cabildo took an apparently antimonetary position, condemning the commoners who neglected their duties and sustenance crops in growing cochineal for money, which they pointedly noted could not be eaten in time of famine. This is a statement, however, with few parallels in indigenous records (though some can be found in the annals of various other civilizations), and it covers up the fact that the nobles on the cabildo were themselves growing and selling cochineal for the money it brought them.

The transition from one system to the other was only partial in any case, for the two became integrated. The *tomín/real* and its multiple the peso quickly replaced the quachtli for larger transactions, but for items worth under a *tomín* or half a *tomín*, cacao beans continued in use. It was not a question of competing currencies, but of cacao beans functioning as change for the Spanish coins. This ability to build one system into the other implies that the conceptual distance between the two was not insurmountable. Meso-American trade is often considered to have contained a very large element of barter because by many descriptions currency appears to have been at most supplemental to the direct exchange of goods. In the early Tlaxcalan market price list just referred to, however, each item has a price in cacao beans. What looked superficially like barter was actually an exchange of something worth a given amount by an abstract standard for something of equal value by the same standard. Such an interpretation is reinforced by hints of the use of cacao beans as change to even out market transactions.¹³⁷ This business strategy had the advantage of making sparing use of the rare currency. The

use of a mainly fictional currency had much in common with Spanish practice in the Indies, in which pesos often represented an instrument of evaluation, a means of reckoning shares of investment, or an almost totally abstract credit amount likely to be traded from one person to another for months and years, all in the name of getting along without rare cash. In both systems, standards of value existed and were normally applied in all kinds of business transactions even though the amount of currency in circulation was far from sufficient to proceed on a cash basis.

Despite their currencies, it is not clear that the preconquest Nahuas had any well-defined term in the semantic range “money, currency, cash.” Molina’s dictionary entry *tlacocohualoni*, “that with which various things are bought,” might be suspected of being no more than an attempt to account for Spanish *dinero* were it not for the fact that the term appears quite regularly in the early Cuernavaca census records, in specific application to quachtlí given as tribute.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, it did not become part of the standard postconquest vocabulary; I have yet to find it in any other text. Even if “tlacocohualoni” really was a general term meaning “medium of exchange,” indigenous people still felt that Spanish-style money was sufficiently different to require a new word. They did not, however, borrow Spanish “dinero,” possibly because the Spaniards themselves used it relatively little. Instead they extended the meaning of the tomín, the coin most used in all sorts of transactions, employing it first, especially in the plural, in the sense “coins,” and then in the more general meaning “cash, money.” The entire evolution took place very early, as can be seen in the phrases *cempohualli ommatlactli pesos tomines*, “thirty pesos in money (cash, coin),” and *itomin atl tepetl*, “the money of the altepetl,” both written in 1548. “Tomín” must have come into Nahuatl by about 1540, and since the extended meaning surfaces in the first dated Nahuatl documents of the late 1540’s, it too must go back to earlier in that decade. “Medio” (half a tomín; in Nahuatl usually “melio”) also took on the broader meaning, at least for some speakers. Both words have retained that sense to this day, so that even in the twentieth century, “dinero” is not among Nahuatl’s by now vast repertory of Spanish loanwords.¹³⁹ The early freezing of usage can also be seen in the fact that though Spaniards soon nearly dropped the tomín, speaking instead of reales, Nahuatl did not follow suit. “Tomín” continued to be the ordinary Nahuatl term for one-eighth of a peso as well as meaning money or cash, and though used abstractly, it was apparently limited to money in the specifically Spanish style; there is no indication that cacao beans could be included under that rubric.

Using the name of a coin for the general concept of money does not necessarily imply either naïveté or the predominance of tiny transactions in the indigenous world. Among the Spaniards themselves, the main way of saying “in cash” was *en reales*, and when money changed hands even in very large

amounts, it was usually in silver reales rather than larger denominations. Transactions among the Nahuas were indeed rarely very large by Spanish standards, but dealings in the range of five to fifty pesos abounded in all time periods and were spoken of in terms of peso amounts just as would have been done in Spanish documents. Technical Spanish terminology for different kinds of pesos (*pesos de minas*, *pesos de buen oro*, etc.) was also employed as appropriate.¹⁴⁰

The alacrity with which the Nahuas took to money casts doubt on the often-expressed opinion that tribute obligations to the Spanish government gave the principal impetus to indigenous acceptance of the new system.¹⁴¹ The relevant vocabulary took shape at a time when money tribute was not yet fully incorporated into the postconquest framework and surely did not impinge on the ordinary person. I am convinced, in fact, that the causal flow is in the other direction, that is, that to the extent that indigenous people acquired money and it circulated among them, money tribute became possible. No doubt a dialectic was eventually set up in which each factor promoted the other, but consider that the money tribute remained differential by region, being higher in areas more economically active and connected to the Spanish economy.¹⁴² As a people already commercially oriented and in possession of currencies, the Nahuas needed no special pressures to understand and adopt a monetary system, but would do so as a simple function of their degree of access to Spaniards and the Spanish economy.

Financial transactions in the indigenous world were not limited to the sales of real estate dealt with above (and of other items—livestock, household goods, foods, and the like—of which no written record was made). By the middle of the colonial period, Nahuas were entering into dealings as complex as mortgages (*censos*), but in these cases one of the parties was always Spanish, the indigenous party being a wealthy noble, and the transaction took place in Spanish before a Spanish notary, essentially outside the indigenous context.¹⁴³ The same tended to be true of leases (*arrendamientos*); in the most common type, the indigenous corporation or a community member acting in its name leased a large piece of corporate land, sometimes a rancho or estancia, to a Spaniard. The revenue was usually intended to pay for religious observances. Such dealings were often less well documented than mortgages and led to controversies over the true ownership of the land.

Leasing did occur on occasion within the indigenous community, however. In 1726, don Antonio and don Manuel de Galicia y Castilla, of Aya-pango in the Chalco region, leased four and a quarter fanegas de sembradura of land to doña Antonia de la Concepción of nearby Amecameca for nine years at a total rent of 459 pesos, which the lessors received then and there. The document was drawn up in Nahuatl, and notaries from both towns were present. Maize and wheat crops were grown alternately on the property, pos-

sibly under the direction of the Hispanic person who noted down in Spanish on the back of the document what was done with the land each year. The product was probably intended for markets in Mexico City, or at least for the growing urban concentration in the town of Amecameca, and the lease rate was close to that current among Spaniards in Chalco, so that the entire operation was barely within the indigenous sphere. Controversy arose because the document mentions that the land would be left fallow periodically without making clear whether or not fallow years would count as part of the term of the lease.¹⁴⁴ The parties would no doubt have done better to use a Spanish notary more accustomed to the technical language of leases, and other indigenous lessors and lessees may have done just that.

The names of the participants and the amount of money involved betray that the Ayapango lease took place in the upper circles of indigenous society. At lower levels, informal renting between individuals may have gone on, but if so it has left very little trace. A Miguel Huantli (Culhuacan, ca. 1580) grew some crops for himself on a few chinampas not belonging to him (as well as working his own chinampas), but fails to tell us just whose land it was, or whether or not he paid any rent.¹⁴⁵ Presumably such arrangements followed preconquest precedent, but treatment of the topic in Spanish chronicles tends to confuse renting with dependent status,¹⁴⁶ so that these writings do not contain much good evidence for the existence of simple payment in compensation for the temporary use of land, as opposed to rendering services and helping with the tribute in return for being allowed to live on someone's property as a dependent.

Another Spanish economic concept adopted by the Nahuas was that of putting goods in pawn or hock (*prenda*) in return for cash. The term appears as a loanword in Nahuatl texts starting in the late sixteenth century,¹⁴⁷ and the goods affected could be either valuables or real estate. Rarely were such dealings committed to paper (we find out about them mainly from after-the-fact assertions in wills), but an example is extant from Coyoacan in the mid-seventeenth century. In 1654, one Juan Francisco and his wife Juana Ursula placed an orchard, which they had bought in 1642 for twenty pesos, in hock with a Simón Gabriel and his wife Juana María for ten pesos, to be repaid in two years. In the event of nonpayment within the term, the products of the orchard were to be used to pay off the debt. Apparently it was already realized that the repayment process might be a long one, since the document carefully specifies that the land would eventually be passed on to the owners' son.¹⁴⁸

Such a provision must be deemed prudent, for in fact leases and pledges sometimes eventuated in a permanent transfer of possession. It is possible that in the minds of indigenous people of the postconquest period the line between selling, leasing, and pawning was less firm than among Spaniards. On the one hand, the Nahuatl verb *cobua*, "to buy," could be used when one was ac-

quiring services only temporarily,¹⁴⁹ and on the other, whenever a person paid out money or was in possession of something for a certain time, he seems to have been well on the way to establishing a claim to permanent ownership. Yet the Nahua principle that use makes for ownership was not the only factor at play. I believe that many Nahuas fully understood the distinctions between the types of transactions, but since most agreements were oral and there was a double framework for interpretation, each party was relatively free to interpret a transaction as best suited him, which tended to give an advantage to the possessor of the moment.

The Nahuas were not, it is true, alone in thinking that use makes for firmer rights, since the Spaniards too gave great weight to uncontested possession over a period of time in deciding questions of ownership, and this fact helped some long-term Spanish lessees of indigenous lands to become permanent owners. In the Spanish system, however, possession took second place to documentation, and a family could rent a piece of land for a hundred years without coming a whit closer to ownership if someone else held a valid title. By the middle colonial period, very few Nahua landowners had demonstrably valid title (by Spanish criteria) with which to quash other claims. Another factor blurring the line between temporary and permanent transfers was the perennial lack of cash. Since many indigenous people were unable to pay in cash even the relatively modest prices they usually charged each other for land, houses, or animals, there was no alternative to paying in installments. Until payment was complete, possession was not fully clear, and if the complete price was never paid, of course the seller would want his goods back.¹⁵⁰

What of European practices of owing, lending, and borrowing money? Nahuatl seems to have had little if any special vocabulary in this range. The common verb *tlanehua* and related forms could mean “borrow,” and the causative derivative *tlaneuhtia* meant “to lend,” but the object borrowed or lent could be anything whatever (including people); the emphasis in this set of terms, as usually seen, was in any case on the transitoriness of the holder’s possession, rather than on the necessity and means of returning the object.¹⁵¹ Another Nahuatl verb, however, proved more immediately applicable to the new situation. Molina (whose work, let it be remembered, took place in the time from the 1540’s to about 1570) makes distinctions between forms related to “*tlanehua*” and others related to *tlacuia*, also meaning “to borrow,” but with broader options on the form in which the item was to be returned.*

*Molina is contradictory and for once apparently confused on the difference between *tlanehua* and *tlacuia*. In the Spanish section, f. 98, his glosses imply that *tlanehua* forms were used when the very thing borrowed was to be returned (consonant with their occasional use for renting, as seen in glosses on f. 128v of the Nahuatl section and in n. 151, above), whereas *tlacuia* forms were used when the thing borrowed was to be returned in kind, as, presumably, when one lent someone supplies to be consumed (firewood, food, and the like), expecting to get back the

By the late sixteenth century (perhaps earlier), “tlacuia” had become the standard word used for borrowing money, so much so that it and derived forms were understood to refer to money even when no more specific mention of it was made; the nominal *netlacuilli*, “that which one has borrowed,” meant “(money) debt.”¹⁵² Yet as a word for the complementary notion of lending money, by the late colonial period “tlaneuhtia” became more common than the causative of “tlacuia.”¹⁵³

With the terms related to monetary borrowing, it is quite clear that a semantic evolution occurred in the course of the sixteenth century, leading to the formation of concepts without exact parallels in preconquest times (though not without precedent in a general fashion). With the concept of owing money, the lack of parallels and the subsequent conceptual reorganization become even clearer. Under “to owe,” Molina gives some phrases that may or may not be applicable to money, but that in any event are not found in mundane Nahuatl texts.¹⁵⁴ A related form, *-tech ca*, “to be attached to one,” is used at times in postconquest texts where “owe” would fit,¹⁵⁵ but the meaning is actually broader, “to be counted against someone,” and the phrase could be used with anything for which a person was accountable. The word that first gained currency as an equivalent for “owe” was *pialia*, derived from the verb *pia*, “to keep, guard, have custody of,” so that the literal meaning of the applicative “pialia” was “to keep something for someone.” Only the latter sense figures in Molina; the meaning “to owe” first appears, to my knowledge, around 1580, in one of the testaments of Culhuacan: “atle ma itla nicnotlacui anoço itla aca nicpialia,” “I have borrowed nothing at all, nor do I owe anything to anyone.”¹⁵⁶ In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, “pialia” apparently became the dominant term, although “pia” itself, since notions of guarding and custody inherently involve obligation to another person, at times bordered on “owe.”¹⁵⁷ The related form *pialtia*, the causative of “pia,” meaning “to make someone custodian of something,” in this time was sometimes used to mean “lend (money).”¹⁵⁸ After about the second decade of the seventeenth century, however, “pialia” and related words are found no more in connection with debts. The probable reason is that “pia” was evolving, becoming an equivalent of the Spanish verb *tener*, “to have,” and thus often connoted permanent possession (a point we will return to in Chapter 7).

Replacing “pialia” definitively was *huiquilia*, the applicative form of *huica*, a verb with traditional meanings including “to carry, take, accompany,

equivalent but not literally the same supplies. Such a distinction would readily explain the easy applicability of *tlacuia*; no change whatever would be required for money borrowing to fit the definition, and with use the association with money would become ever stronger. But in other places (Spanish, f. 51, Nahuatl, ff. 120, 128v), Molina says that *tlanehua* forms imply return in the same kind (“en la misma especie”), and *tlacuia* forms imply return in a different kind of thing (“no en la misma especie”).

be responsible for." The earliest presently known attestation in the sense of monetary obligation is in a text of 1611 from the Jalisco region, well outside central Mexico,¹⁵⁹ but I take the provenience of the expression to be central Mexican. By mid-seventeenth century, the grammarian Carochi considered "huiquia" the normal word for "owe"; it continued to appear in this meaning throughout the colonial period to the exclusion of other words, and it is still in the language today.¹⁶⁰ Surely it is no coincidence that as an equivalent to the European concept of having a monetary obligation, Nahuatl fastened successively on two words emphasizing custodianship. The European way of thinking of owing money was clearly unfamiliar to the Nahuas, and though in fact they seem by the second half of the sixteenth century to have been incurring and collecting debts in the same manner as Spaniards, they may have conceptualized the activity differently, at least during a long transitional period. For one thing, until late in the game, the "owe" equivalents appear to have been used primarily when an actual cash amount had changed hands and was in a sense being kept for someone. When it is a question of money owing for a purchase, money not yet really in existence, the sources usually say merely "not yet paid."¹⁶¹

As to the actual process of making loans, the vast majority of transactions were carried out informally and involved small amounts, almost always under ten pesos, usually under five, and frequently under a peso. A loan at the corporate level, 400 pesos lent by the altepetl of Calpan to the altepetl of Tlaxcala in 1562 with a formal acknowledgment of debt (*conocimiento*) and a fixed term (*plazo*) of ten months, is unique in all respects.¹⁶² Not only were loans left unrecorded unless they had not been collected at the time of the creditor's death, but nowhere does one find any indication of a fixed term or schedule of payment. Generally no purpose is specified, though in a few cases it emerges that people borrowed money in emergencies—to treat injuries or get out of jail.¹⁶³ Most loans were isolated transactions by people who show no sign of having lent money to anyone else. Indigenous merchants (*pochteca*) and petty traders, however, might make the lending of money a part of their business. In 1608, when she made her will, one Bárbara Agustina of Chiucnauhpan in the Coyoacan district, who sold pigs, turkeys, and doubtless other things (since she owned a mule to transport them), was owed no fewer than eight money debts, ranging from half a tomín to one peso. She had lent out 200 cacao beans as well.¹⁶⁴ The smallness of the amounts and the humble names of the debtors, most without a second appellation, are testimony to the depth of the penetration of monetary dealings into the indigenous world by the end of the sixteenth century. A Juan Fabián, also of the Coyoacan region, who in the time around 1615 owned an orchard and pack train and sold fruit, does not seem to have been an actual moneylender, but

he did frequently both lend and borrow up to five pesos, dealing with both Nahuas and Spaniards.¹⁶⁵

How moneylenders received profit from their loans is nowhere hinted at in any mundane Nahuatl documents that I have seen. I do presume, however, that except among relatives and close friends, the lender received some monetary consideration or other significant economic advantage. (Among Spaniards, the traditional procedure was to lend less than the nominal amount, then receive the full amount on repayment.) I hesitate to resort to literary evidence, but *faute de mieux* I will do so, presenting for whatever it is worth some material from a moralistic play in Nahuatl, possibly dating from around 1627, which has a pochtecatl or merchant as its protagonist and concentrates on the theme of usury.¹⁶⁶

Moneylending is the only activity of the pochtecatl that we are shown; the only hint of other dimensions is the fact that his house is at the edge of the marketplace. He takes high rates of interest for short time periods, varying with the situation. The conditions are described precisely, though no word for interest as such is evident. With a small, short-term loan, the pochtecatl demands four tomines per peso, amounting to 50 percent in two weeks. With 4,000 pesos over a somewhat longer time period, he demands 400 pesos, or 10 percent, a month. People also give him large amounts of money in safe-keeping, which he later denies ever having received. One of the means he uses in his manipulations is to have a notary write out a false bill of sale for land. Needless to say, the bad deeds of this particular pochtecatl have been exaggerated for effect (he curses beggars and tries to get sexual favors from a poor girl needing money), but I offer these tidbits in the hope that they have some of the same social accuracy found in the parallel playlet about the sharp practices of the executors of wills (see Chapter 6), where we have enough other evidence to be on firmer ground.

Markets, Traders, and Nonagricultural Occupations

Along with its tlatoani and its specific divinity, one of the principal integrating elements of a preconquest altepetl was its central market. All three phenomena had significant successors in postconquest times, and indeed, by external accounts, the market was of the three the one that underwent the least change, but it is by far the least well represented in surviving internal Nahua records. Nothing indicates that market operations had ever been as carefully recorded as land tenure; the very nature of such dealings would resist it. Yet the preconquest tlatoani and other altepetl officials had carried on market supervision as one of their primary duties, and the tlatoani in particular derived revenue and services from the market, which was thought in some sense to belong to him.¹⁶⁷ The first flush of Nahuatl documentation

in the mid-sixteenth century delivers a reasonable amount of information on market organization, after which the topic disappears from indigenous records except for some chance oblique reference.

Information comes from the three important centers of Coyoacan, Mexico City, and Tlaxcala, each having left some sort of internally generated listing of products sold or groups of vendors.¹⁶⁸ Since the lists were made for somewhat different purposes, they manifest different criteria and vary from each other to an extent, as can be seen in Table 5.4. Nevertheless, they agree on the general kind of thing available and on many specific staples. Given the restricted nature of the documents, it is my belief that all the things mentioned in all three listings, and many other items as well, were for sale at the market of any major central Mexican altepetl.* For Coyoacan and Mexico City, each entry represents not merely a single item sold, but an entire organized group making and selling it, which implies that each group would deal in additional related products, as they do in the descriptions in book 10 of the Florentine Codex. The variety of goods is impressive, the importance of the market to the everyday life of the people obvious. Luxuries are not emphasized, a possible change since preconquest times, although some ingredients for fancy garments (feathers, dyed rabbit hair, fringes for cloaks and skirts) are in evidence, as well as some jewelry and bells. In any event, most of the things sold could have been converted into luxuries if of sufficiently high quality or brought from afar, which may have been precisely the function, for example, of the organized groups of merchants (*oztomeca*) attested in the Coyoacan market. The market supplied firewood and kindling, much in the way of household paraphernalia and other items of daily use, and a considerable part of the daily diet. Yet of the greatest staples—maize, beans, and pulque—pulque does not appear at all, and maize and beans only on the Mexico City list (despite the fact that the Tlaxcalan list is primarily devoted to foods). It is my impression that the maize and beans in the Mexico City market reflect the urban nature of the population, and in any case were likely choice varieties from a selection of regions rather than the ordinary product in bulk. Although society as a whole could hardly have existed for long without the market (consider the standard items firewood and salt), nearly everything in it was in some sense a specialty, extra, or supplement. Finished clothing was for sale, but just as important were supplies of all kinds for textile manufac-

*The items of Table 5.4 agree well with Spanish lists of what could legally be sold in the markets of Ecatepec, Xochimilco, and Acolman in 1551 (Gibson 1964, p. 356). Generally speaking those lists are less varied, but they do contain some things not in the table (digging sticks, melon seeds, boats, needles, grinding stones). I am sure that these goods would have been found somewhere in the Coyoacan, Mexico City, and Tlaxcala markets as well (except possibly for boats in Tlaxcala). I do not believe that sporadic Spanish orders restricting what could be sold in Indian markets (see Gibson 1964, p. 355) had any appreciable effect whenever given items could be produced and there were customers to buy them.

TABLE 5.4
Items Sold in Some Central Mexican Markets, Mid-16th Century

Coyoacan, ca. 1550	Mexico City, 1540's-50's?	Tlaxcala, 1545-63
FOOD AND TOBACCO ^a		
cacao	cacao	cacao
chiles	chiles	chiles
chia	chia	tamales
tamales	shelled maize	fish
atole (maize gruel)	beans	venison
fish	pinolli (flour of maize and chia)	rabbit
meat	atole	axolotl (salamander)
lake scum (tecuatl)	chocolate drink	quail
salt	tortillas	turkeys, eggs
lime (for tortillas)	fish	avocados
tobacco	meat	tomatoes
smoking tubes	duck	guavas
cigars	greens	sapote fruit
	fruit	actus fruit
	honey? (neuctli) ^b	smoking tubes
	salt	
	lime	
	tobacco	
	smoking tubes	
CLOTHING-RELATED ITEMS ^c		
clay dye	colors	cochineal
bark-clay concoction (a dye)	rabbit hair	feather ornaments
colors	feathers	dyed leather
warping frames	borders of cloaks	sandals
spindles	borders of shirts	
canes (for hand looms)	hides	
rabbit hair	yarn	
feathers	cotton	
cloth borders	wool? down? (tomitl)	
hides	women's shirts (huipiles)	
sandals	skirts	
	cloaks (of wool? tomitilmatl)	
	sandals	
HOUSEHOLD AND WORK ITEMS		
pots	pots	pots
clay vessels	cups (xicalli)	bowls
sauce bowls	baskets	mats
griddles	mats	(fire)wood
baskets	pine torches	pine bark
brooms	metal items ^d	copper items
mats	clay bells	
(fire)wood	paper	
tumplines		
medicine		
obsidian blades		
metal items ^d		
worked wooden items		
clay bells		

(continued)

TABLE 5.4 (*continued*)

Coyoacan, ca. 1550	Mexico City, 1540's-50's?	Tlaxcala, 1545-63
SPANISH-STYLE ITEMS ^e		
collars (cabezones)	Spanish bread ("Castilla tlascalli")	chickens, eggs
upper garments (chamarros)	collars	
shirts (camisas)	hats	
candles	leather belts (talabartes)	
	blankets (frezadas)	
	capes (capas)	
	coarse cloth (sayal)	
	silk	
	soap (jabón)	
	guitars (mecahuehuetl)	

SOURCES: BC, docs. 25, 34, pp. 138-49, 208-13; TA, *passim*; Durand Forest 1971, pp. 121-24.

^aThe "boat people" mentioned in the Coyoacan lists probably were traders in various aquatic foods, but they may have sold other goods, and it is conceivable that they actually sold boats.

^bPossibly maguey juice, not honey.

^cOn the Mexico City list, "chiquipon" must be *chiqui(uh)pan*, associated with colors.

^dThese may well have included objects of iron in the Spanish style.

^eThe item *cordón*, "rope, twine," on the Mexico City list has a Spanish name, but it is not clear what was Spanish about the product.

ture at home. In all the main departments, including food, clothing, and hardware, goods were overwhelmingly indigenous in type, as one would expect, but Spanish-style items had already made a significant impact in at least the two Valley of Mexico markets. Coyoacan had whole trade groups devoted to European collars and shirts, and another to candles. Chickens and their eggs were standard fare in the Tlaxcalan market. In Mexico City, a whole range of European clothing and cloth was available, as well as soap, guitars, and Spanish (wheat) bread. In the home of the largest and wealthiest Spanish population of all New Spain, some of these things, especially the wheat bread, may have been primarily for a Hispanic clientele, but they were being sold and surely in most cases produced by indigenous people.

In its manner of organization, too, the market retained predominantly preconquest characteristics. A separate spot reserved for each specialty, as shown in the Mexico City diagram, and the separate organization of each trade, as seen in the Coyoacan records, were both preconquest modes. So too was the correspondence seen there with altepetl organization. One of the lists is divided in two, one part for each of Coyoacan's great halves, and this may reflect an actual physical and organizational division in the marketplace. At any rate, the taxes of the two were at times collected and totaled separately. Several trade groups are described by the name of a constituent unit of the altepetl, and the most geographically explicit listing raises the likelihood that all the groups in the market were based in some specific subunit, consisting of people only from that unit. The subunit was not coterminous with the

trade group, however, since some altepetl units fielded as many as four or five groups; from Apçolco came chile sellers, pine-torch splitters, fish dealers, shirmakers, and candlemakers. Nor did any one unit necessarily have a monopoly on any one line. Groups of dealers in wood and chia, chile sellers, and merchants came from different units. Commonly enough, however, one sub-unit apparently had only one specialty and was the only group in the market purveying it. Except for a few from nearby places, including Mexico City and Iztapalapa, the groups were overwhelmingly from within the Coyoacan region itself, even the merchants. With the wood dealers coming from wooded regions and the fish dealers and reed makers from the lake shore, the market was a vehicle for the exchange of complementary goods from the entire district and thus an important force for altepetl integration. It must be remembered, though, that Coyoacan was a major complex altepetl with a large population and a diverse territory. The market of nearby Huitzilopochco, a much smaller and more uniform entity, could not have been so integrated and self-contained, nor could the markets of most towns.

About the nature of the trade groups very little emerges. The group names occurring in the Coyoacan market fall into four main categories: makers (*-chiuhque*), sellers (*-namacaque*), and dealers (*-necuiloque*) in respect to various wares, plus some oztomeca or merchants. The first two types constitute a large majority of the groups; see Table 5.5. (It remains entirely possible, however, that some trades or types of trades were more heavily populated

TABLE 5.5
Classes of Trade Groups in the Coyoacan Market, ca. 1550

Category	List				Total	Percent of Total
	1	2	3	4 ^a		
Makers (<i>-chiuhque</i>) ^b	16	15	14	21	66	40.5%
Sellers (<i>-namacaque</i>)	15	12	18	10	55	33.7
Dealers (<i>-necuiloque</i>)	5	4	3	5	17	10.4
Merchants (oztomeca)	5	4	2	3	14	8.6
Other ^c	3	3	3	2	11	6.7
TOTAL	44	38	40	41	163	99.9% ^d

SOURCE: BC, doc. 25, pp. 138-49.

NOTE: Each separately named group is counted, even when the same trade figures twice on a list. In each case, the criteria of the original list makers were somewhat different; omission and grouping together appears to have occurred each time. Using all four extant lists, it is hoped, counteracts this factor to some extent, but one must be aware that most of the groups appear on all four, and that the absolute totals are consequently much larger than the number of groups actually active at any one time.

^aA category not yet well understood (*tlayehualli*) is omitted from the count.

^bIncludes certain more specific terms for productive activity, such as pine-torch splitters, metal forgers (smiths), and wood shavers (carpenters). “-Chiuhque” is, however, by far the predominant form.

^cIncludes “boat people” and a group named only by its unit of origin.

^dColumn does not total 100 percent because of rounding.

than others and dominated the market far more than would appear in such a category count.) The sellers as well as the makers probably produced their own goods in many cases. The dealers were possibly involved in production too, though they must have collected goods in some fashion from colleagues to sell (as with the dealers in wood, fish, or chia).^{*} Dealers as well as makers and sellers specialized in a single commodity, unlike the merchants, for whom no one commodity is listed.¹⁶⁹

In Coyoacan, each trade paid its taxes as an entity; though members must have contributed individually, the round numbers show that a single assessment was first made for the whole group.¹⁷⁰ Figures called *tianquizhuaque*, "holders or possessors of the market," paid the tax to the tlatoani's representatives, first having collected it through unknown mechanisms inside the trade groups. Doubtless there was one such officer for each group, possibly the same as the *topileque* (minor officials, constables) seen for some trades in the late-sixteenth-century Culhuacan testaments.¹⁷¹

In mid-sixteenth-century Tlaxcala, market constables were appointed annually, one for each of the sub-altepetyl, and in addition members of the cabildo took turns functioning as *diputados* (delegates, deputies), judging market cases and supervising activity. The prices of cacao imported into the market, for example, were to be announced to the officials and then to the public. An effort, not too successful by all indications, was made to restrict the exchange of goods handled by the trade groups to the marketplace proper.¹⁷²

By the later part of the sixteenth century, systematic internal sources on indigenous markets dry up. We know that the mainly preconquest features we have just been discussing persisted to some extent, for the simple reason that some have been preserved to this day. Taxation and supervision by the altepetl also continued, if perhaps more sporadically.¹⁷³ But a Hispanic presence in the market was not long in making itself felt. Even the Tlaxcalan

* Molina defines *necuiloa* as "to deal, retail (petty items), or twist something" ("contratar, regatonear, o entortar alguna cosa"). The root seems to have to do originally with twisting and turning (although it appears superficially to contain within itself *ne*, reciprocal or reflexive prefix, and *cui*, "to take"). There are several interesting related items in Molina's dictionary. *Tlanecuilo* is defined either as "petty retailer, dealer," or "swindler, sharp dealer" (the latter connected with the sense of twisting). *Necuiloloni* (lit., "that which is dealable") is glossed as "something bought to be resold." -*Tech necuiloa* (lit., "to deal with someone") is glossed as "logrear," that is, to give something to someone else to sell on a speculative basis. *Necuilmnia*, the applicative of *necuiloa*, has the gloss "to deal with another's property." The conclusion arising from the linguistic evidence is that a dealer or "necuilo" had usually acquired the bulk of his goods from others, and that he might either have bought them outright or be selling them on commission. The "sellers" (-*namaque*) in the Coyoacan market may overlap with both dealers and makers. The chile sellers were most likely dealers, whereas the tamale sellers most likely produced their own wares. One group is called "candlemakers" part of the time, "candle sellers" at other times, and the same occurs with "fish sellers" and "fish dealers."

market price list of 1545 owed its existence to the related facts that Spaniards were making large-scale use of the Indian markets and Spanish officials wanted to regulate them. *Tianguiz* or *tiánguez*, from Nahuatl *tianquitztli*, "market, place of commerce," entered Mexican Spanish almost immediately after the conquest. As time went on, the Spanish population relied on the market more and more for its daily needs.¹⁷⁴ Pedro de Arenas, in his early-seventeenth-century manual of Nahuatl for Spanish speakers, takes it for granted that Spaniards will acquire most of their food in the market, either buying it themselves or sending an Indian employee. In Puebla, by the late seventeenth century Spaniards appear to have been relying primarily on Indian bakers and vendors in the marketplace for the great Spanish staple of wheat bread.¹⁷⁵ Already in the course of the sixteenth century, we hear Spanish reports that markets were becoming less orderly, meaning for the most part, apparently, the weakening of organization in terms of strong exclusive trade groups, each with its strictly defined site within the marketplace. One major element in such weakening was the entry of nonindigenous people as active participants in marketplace business, in direct response to the growth of a Hispanic clientele and greater potential profit. These intruders—most often blacks, mulattoes, or mestizos, but including low-ranking Spaniards as well—had no relation to altepetl-based organization; rather they became important in interregional and intersector market articulation, and they tended to draw Spanish supervision attempts in their wake.¹⁷⁶ It was where the most Spaniards congregated (in Spanish cities, corregimiento capitals, and towns on highways) that the changes and pressures were greatest, but in central Mexico they were ubiquitous. Thus despite escaping a sustained campaign of direct reorganization such as affected altepetl government and the religious cult, the market was a greater arena of cultural, social, and economic interaction between indigenous and nonindigenous people, and in due course documentary avenues must be discovered that will provide an adequate vision of things in this sphere.

Merchants, long-distance traders in goods of relatively high value, were prominent in the preconquest economy; they participated in marketplace activity, but transcended any single altepetl market and may have dealt outside the framework of organized markets for some purposes. The principal term applied to them was "pochtecatl," with "oztomecatl" an apparently exact equivalent sometimes paired with the other word, sometimes used in its stead (as in the Coyoacan market lists). Although we might reasonably assume that the two terms correspond to two types or aspects, one perhaps associated with longer distances or more luxurious goods than the other, documents seen to date fail to bear out such a distinction.¹⁷⁷ The main source on preconquest pochteca, book 9 of the Florentine Codex, tends to be more informative

on the group's ceremonial aspects and political connections than on its economic activity and internal organization. Produced apparently by descendants of Tlatelolco merchants, it portrays the pochteca idealistically and nostalgically as a tightly cohesive and highly prestigious hereditary group, indirectly emphasizing their uniqueness.

All the same, parallels can be observed between the pochteca/oztomeca and other trade groups. Both names by origin referred to ethnic-political units; pochtecatl means "inhabitant of Pochtlan," oztomecatl "inhabitant of Oztoman," and the names probably go back to groups then famous for trading activities. The ethnic connotations may have faded in certain contexts, allowing the terms to become pure trade designations, as had happened also with *amantecatl* (originally "inhabitant of Amantlan," which came to mean "featherworker, skilled craftsman in general") and *toltecatl* (originally "inhabitant of Tula," acquiring the additional meaning "craftsman, artisan"). Yet the words are symptomatic of the closeness of pochteca organization to the altepetl/calpolli, just as with the producer-vendors and local retailers of the marketplace. In late preconquest times, Pochtlan was a name still in use for an actual entity among the Tlatelolcan merchants, and they were grouped into six calpolli subdivisions, each with a leader.¹⁷⁸ Nor does the hereditary aspect distinguish merchants sharply from other tradesmen, for the crafts too are said to have stayed within the same family and locality.¹⁷⁹

After the conquest, pochteca/oztomeca were still functioning as groups concentrated in certain altepetl units in the 1550's and 1560's, as seen in the Coyoacan market lists and the Huexotzinco census materials.¹⁸⁰ A group of pochteca, not named as individuals, also appears in the Tlaxcalan cabildo minutes of 1551, where they are given forty pesos to invest on behalf of the altepetl government, an apparent continuation of their dealings as representatives of preconquest tlatoque.¹⁸¹ An anonymous annalist of Tenochtitlan in the 1560's tells of continuing corporate activity by the pochteca, noting that they decorated a Christian cult object with feathers and displayed a new saint's image in a procession.¹⁸² Spanish sources report that well into the second half of the sixteenth century, Indian merchants of the Valley of Mexico, Tlaxcala, and Cholula went on long expeditions, particularly to the south, to bring back tropical fruit, cacao, feathers, and other regional specialties, much in the manner of their predecessors.¹⁸³ In the bulk of Nahuatl documentation, however, pochteca are seen, when seen at all, as individuals, and rarely are they specifically called by the professional name. The nature of the documents may well magnify the extent of the change across periods. The fact that there were well-organized groups does not mean that within a given framework individual action, including competition, could not have been the norm, as it was in other aspects of Nahua life. At one time, when guild regulations were

the main thing studied about Spanish merchants, they were imagined to be a highly unified, monopolistic, even anticommercial group, but when trial and notarial records opened up, the most individualistic, cutthroat traders conceivable were revealed, united only when it came to combating other sectors of the economy. So it may well have been with the pochteca of preconquest times.

Actually, the postconquest pochteca have left very little documentary trace. The only persons who can be identified as such with certainty are an Antonio de Santa María and his son and successor, Luis Tlauhpotonqui, who lived in Culhuacan in the late sixteenth century.¹⁸⁴ The son followed his father's path according to the preconquest pattern, and the women of the family also married traders. Among the goods they stocked were the traditional *tecomates* (deep cups for beverages, made either of clay or of gourds brought from tropical areas), including elaborate painted ones and one in the form of a bird. As one would expect, they had dealings outside Culhuacan, though as far as emerges not outside the immediate Mexico City orbit. The father had given a colleague twelve pesos' worth of merchandise on credit, the amount to be paid back out of his profits on resale; this sort of cooperative speculation may well have had preconquest roots. Other activities of Antonio and Luis, however, were Spanish-influenced at least in the form they took. The father owned horses, which he not only used to transport goods but sold on credit to other indigenous people. He made substantial money loans, in amounts of up to twenty pesos; indeed, in the son's will these appear to have been a very large part of the business, probably because several debts proved hard to collect and were still outstanding when father and then son made their wills. In addition to its mercantile dealings, the family owned a quite impressive collection of scattered chinampa land.

Other likely pochteca include a Pablo Quechol, living in Culhuacan at the same time, who had in his possession smaller or larger amounts of tecomas, baskets, bowls (some stored in large pots), metal-tipped digging sticks, men and women's clothing, and 2,000 cacao beans to help toward his marriage (which he died before arranging), as well as some chinampas.¹⁸⁵ He lacked horses and mentioned no debts owed him, which seems to place him at a lower rank than our first example. Another probable merchant was Constantino de San Felipe of Xochimilco, who made his will in 1572.¹⁸⁶ In addition to several chinampas and a house, he had some wares on hand: twenty tecomas with some stirring sticks kept in a (Spanish-style) chest, and sixty cloaks or lengths of cloth (*tilmatli*), which is to say, three of the standard bundles of twenty each. No debts were owed him, but he did have a horse. Both these traders had received some or all of their goods from their parents and so were presumably pochteca of at least the second generation.

Among the testators of Culhuacan are several people who do not mention debts or salable goods in commercial quantities and whom we might not suspect of being traders, much less full-scale merchants, but for the fact that they share two characteristics of the known pochteca: owning one or more horses or mules and having out-of-town connections or actually being from out of town.¹⁸⁷ Some of these people then prove to have been in direct contact with those just mentioned, giving us some sense of the profile of the specifically commercial sector in the indigenous world by the late sixteenth century. Cross-altepelt connections or mobility; ownership of European transport animals; and the use of specifically Spanish economic arrangements—including moneylending, pawnbroking, and even sometimes entering into *conciertos* (stipulated agreements) and *compañías* (formal partnerships)—are key characteristics. None of the traders were literate enough to sign their own names, and as a group the names were not particularly prestigious. None of these people are known to have held altepetl office. A few were landless, though most had moderate amounts of productive land. No direct connections emerge between this group and the nobles who dominated altepetl government and churchly organizations.

After the late sixteenth century, the term pochtecatl appears in known mundane texts no more, nor do people in possession of the typical wares, neither the exotic luxuries nor the tecomates and bundles of cloth.¹⁸⁸ On the other hand, a few people owning horses or mules and engaged in some sort of local trade do continue to show up here and there. Examples from the early seventeenth century still display much the same social profile; the two fullest ones were already mentioned above in connection with borrowing and lending money. One was the previously mentioned Juan Fabián of the Coyoacan region, who owned several pieces of land including an orchard, the apparently indigenous fruit of which he sold not only in Coyoacan but in neighboring Indian towns. At times, he hired local workmen (carpenters) in relation to his orchard and lands. Thus he was a producer and entrepreneur as much as a trader. But he did have a packtrain of horses and mules (some of them hired from Spaniards) to carry his fruit, along with other things perhaps, to be sold outside the immediate area, and he had outside connections. His son-in-law Diego Francisco, from neighboring Huitzilopochco, often took a horseload of fruit to sell on behalf of the family enterprise, probably in Diego's hometown. In all probability, Juan's financial activity (seven transactions outstanding, several of them with Spaniards, when Juan made his will), was merely a by-product of his central business. He hoped to initiate his namesake son into the trade, putting him in charge of the packtrain and relations with subordinates; in the event, both son and son-in-law failed him, losing animals and withholding money. Juan Fabián's humble name speaks

for itself; he was illiterate, held no office, and gives no sign of having had connections with anyone who did. Thus he manifests nearly all the diagnostic characteristics of a pochtecatl of the late sixteenth century. At the same time, he is close in type to the Hispanic muleteers, petty dealers, and small growers (activities often combined) who were to be found at the lowest rungs of Spanish regional trade, and indeed the Spaniards from whom he hired animals and with whom he maintained debts and credits seem to have been of just that type.¹⁸⁹

The other example, at a lower level, is Bárbara Agustina, who lived in the Coyoacan district at near the same time; her petty lending of money and cacao to humble local Nahuas was detailed above. A series of very small outstanding debts dominate her will, but she also had pigs and turkeys on hand and had sold the same items to others, so that raising and selling small livestock must have been an important part of her activity. A widow, she had no real estate beyond the house she left to her daughter. The place may have belonged originally to her husband's family, for on several occasions she mentions her late mother-in-law, to whom she still owed money, and whose successor in trade she may well have been. Bárbara Agustina can be taken as an illustration of a type present in the local market, but she also owned a mule worth the very considerable amount of thirty-five pesos, which she must have used to transport goods to other markets.¹⁹⁰

The general question of the role of women in trade both before and after the conquest is as elusive as many other important matters pertaining to the indigenous economy. Because of Nahuatl's reluctance to specify gender, indigenous lists of tradespeople and descriptions of market and merchant activity tell us hardly anything about the relative functions of men and women. Pictures accompanying the Florentine Codex show many women vendors in the market, especially in everything related to food and clothing.¹⁹¹

The annalist Chimalpahin, in the course of telling about other things, reveals some tidbits about the market women of his day. In 1612, María López, a chocolate drink seller, was living in the San Juan section of Mexico City. She had originally come from Tetzcoco but had made San Juan her home, become a district citizen, and married a local man, Juan Pérez. Chimalpahin mentions her because she complained all the way to the Royal Audiencia about the way a Franciscan friar had her husband stripped and given lashes even though he was already very ill. We also hear from Chimalpahin of a female vendor of bitter atole, named only María, who in 1613 was living in a house she apparently owned behind the church of San Antonio Abad in the southern part of Mexico City. A widow (her husband had been the tailor Francisco), she seems to have headed a household that included her son-in-law. She comes into Chimalpahin's story by virtue of claiming that the road

in front of her house was her property and demanding payment if district boosters erected a cross there as they planned. María was publicly vociferous in her cause, so much so that Chimalpahin says he could not repeat her filthy language. The cross, however, was erected, and María died of illness shortly after, which both Chimalpahin and the neighborhood took to be a judgment of God (we will hear more of her in Chapter 6). Both of Chimalpahin's vendors are seen to be specialized in one kind of product, permanently rooted in the community, and assertive members of it. But perhaps the most suggestive of Chimalpahin's tidbits is in his report that when Spanish officials were trying to move and reform Mexico City's markets in 1592, it was the women ("Mexica cihua") who brought suit, as though he were taking for granted that the market was primarily a woman's affair.¹⁹²

But what of women as pochteca? Nothing in the sources for the preconquest period hints that they ever assumed that role directly, and they do not appear among the identifiable pochteca of the late sixteenth century. A woman named María Tiacapan, wife of one Culhuacan pochtecatl and cousin of another (the aforementioned Luis Tlauhpotonqui), does assert that of the two horses she and her husband had, she was jointly responsible for the acquisition of one of them and hence joint owner, but she mentions no other mercantile dealings or assets.¹⁹³ At the same time and place, Ana Tlaco, whose home was in Yecapixtla (just south of the Chalco region) but who died in Culhuacan, owned a horse or mule and gives some indication of having been a petty producer and trader of clothing.¹⁹⁴ By present indications, it seems unlikely that women in trade went much beyond figures like Bárbara Agustina, essentially market women owning a transport animal that permitted them to engage in regional trade in a very small way. In both Spanish and Nahuatl sources, the owners and conductors of packtrains always turn out to be men.

By the eighteenth century or before, even the rough equivalents of pochteca (people of middle rank with pack animals and trade involvement beyond a single local market) have largely disappeared from Nahuatl sources, though Spanish sources point in the direction of a continuing or even increasing role of Indians in the lower levels of interregional trade. In the later period, most of the known larger entrepreneurs and owners of transport animals are noble members of the officeholding group.¹⁹⁵ The entire subject is drastically under-documented. I do not believe that traders at the middle and lower ranks of indigenous society actually ceased to exist; I think rather that mules and especially horses—the two primary diagnostic signs—so decreased in value over the decades and centuries that they received less mention in testaments.

Surmising developments from what is known of the overall structure of the situation, it can be said that indigenous society's pochteca sector was

under severe challenge in the postconquest period. The pochteca's role as primary purveyors of high-value goods acquired through long-distance trade soon faded as Spanish merchants, traders, and entrepreneurs invaded and with time practically preempted any aspect of interregional trade that showed a strong profit potential. For a time, the pochteca had a special niche in the supply of goods from warmer climates that were desired only by Indians. But the staples of this trade, cacao and cotton, were so in demand in the indigenous sector that before long, with indigenous people increasingly able to pay in money, Spaniards entered and eventually dominated the field, stimulated further by the development of direct Spanish demand for the products. Spaniards had no interest, either as traders or as consumers, in feathers, jade, and other Mesoamerican exotica, which were hence left to the pochteca, but cultural change was rendering these items, once so important to war, religion, and social differentiation, obsolete in indigenous society itself.

With the scope of indigenous trade thus restricted and its content altered, there was little left to distinguish a pochtecatl from a producer-vendor who could afford some pack animals. The overall commercial structure was transformed, the Spanish economy taking over most of the function of large-scale interregional articulation. At the same time, transport and the handling of certain marginal goods were relegated to members of the lowest ranks of Hispanic society. These traders and muleteers were in constant contact with indigenous people, buying from them, employing them, and sometimes dealing with them as equals. Once the Nahuas had learned some basic skills and acquired some capital goods, they could compete successfully at this level. By the late colonial period, in fact, transport and petty commerce in regional specialties, though low on the Spanish scale, were among the prime economic opportunities available to indigenous people, and it is not surprising that the upper group, the heirs of the preconquest nobility, moved into this kind of enterprise. By the second half of the period, no one indigenous group seems to have dominated activity in interregional trade; rather people across the whole spectrum took part in it to the extent of their ability. Aspects of the pochteca heritage must have remained alive in the indigenous world and affected behavior, but the new situation no longer called for just that kind of specialist.

As to the other kinds of nonagricultural occupations the Nahuas practiced across the entire period, known Nahuatl sources add little to what the Spanish record tells us,¹⁹⁶ other than the glimpses of marketplace trades already presented. Organized craft groups are seen a few times in sixteenth-century texts attempting to avoid their apparently traditional duties of performing certain work for the tlatoani or the altepetl.¹⁹⁷ In Tlaxcala in 1550, a group from the district of Acxotlan wanted the work they were doing on an altar-

piece in the monastery church considered a fulfillment of their own vows, not tribute duty, to which notion the cabildo and the Franciscan friars objected.¹⁹⁸ In Tulancingo in 1570, a group of eleven painters complained to the Spanish alcalde mayor that they had worked for three months painting buildings and cloths at the church, and that their pay had been withheld by altepetl officials, not for the first time.¹⁹⁹ The officials would no doubt have responded that the painters did not deserve pay for doing their normal duty to the corporation. In time, the issue seems to have been resolved mainly in favor of pay for craftsmen working for public purposes, though examples can be found of individuals donating their services to a church as late as the eighteenth century, a continuation of the tradition even if now viewed as voluntary behavior.²⁰⁰

One occupational specialty about which Nahuatl sources have a certain amount to say is weaving. The early Cuernavaca-region censuses show weaving as a virtually universal activity of women, both noble and commoner.²⁰¹ The wives and other women associated with household heads produced the cloth that dominated tribute in kind. By the late sixteenth century, cloth tribute was a thing of the past in central Mexico, but the Culhuacan testaments make clear that essentially all women did spinning and weaving, using indigenous hand equipment, which, together with yarn and half-finished clothing items, appears frequently in their wills. Often they were making things for themselves or for the family, but in some cases they intended the product for the market from the beginning.²⁰² Mention of this kind of home weaving by women continues into the seventeenth century,²⁰³ and then, like so many other things, fades out. Surely Nahua women continued to weave; perhaps what they produced was of less value relatively, or perhaps the phenomenon is to be attributed exclusively to the less generous nature of the later documentation. It is possible, however, that Spanish textile works (*obrajes*) had a considerable impact, and also that Spanish-style looms partially displaced indigenous techniques in the home; a couple of examples of mechanical looms and associated equipment appear in Nahuatl wills, apparently both owned and operated by men.²⁰⁴ In these cases, weaving can be presumed to have been the man's primary occupation, along with work on the family fields.

Indigenous Dress After the Conquest

The production and exchange of clothing constituted a large part of the indigenous economy even after the conquest, so it behooves us to attend carefully to documentary hints about the kinds of garments Nahuas wore. The last well-attested example of full preconquest garb is that of don Julián de la Rosa of Tlaxcala, who in 1566 owned not only several elaborate and valuable cloaks of traditional design, including one covered with feathers

(though the feathers were those of the European domestic duck), but also—doubtless as heirlooms and for special occasions—full war regalia, including a monkey uniform of feathers with a pheasant head device, a coyote headdress, and a shield with 200 quetzal feathers.²⁰⁵

But change came quickly. We have seen that already by 1550 the European fitted and buttoned shirt had become so popular that whole trade groups were devoted to making shirts and collars. *Camisa* was one of the earliest and most widespread Spanish loanwords entering Nahuatl; coming when it did, it was one of only a handful of borrowed nouns incorporating the indigenous absolute ending *-tli*, which it retains in Nahuatl speech to this day.²⁰⁶ Given the frequency of reference to shirts, it is hard to agree with the remark of the late-sixteenth-century official and writer Gonzalo Gómez de Cervantes that Indian men except for noblemen went naked save for “a bandage to cover their private parts” and a cloak so light it appeared made of netting.²⁰⁷ In 1584, even Cristóbal, the unemployed turkey thief and lowlife of Tulancingo we met in previous chapters, wore a *camixatli* in addition to his indigenous loincloth and cloak, though all three were old and easily tore off in a fight with the turkey’s owner, leaving Cristóbal naked.²⁰⁸

As Cristóbal’s example shows, trousers were slower than shirts in becoming normal wear for males; conceivably, Gómez de Cervantes was right that in his time only people of substance wore them. Nevertheless, they were coming into use in the second half of the sixteenth century. The type first mentioned were *zaragüelles*, usually thought to have been very wide, loosely fitting long trousers.²⁰⁹ The zaragüelles that Juan Velásquez of Culhuacan had in 1581 were green, and they were bought (not long before) rather than made at home.²¹⁰ As time proceeded, *calzones*, the word for the usual Spanish trousers, began to displace “zaragüelles,” presumably corresponding to a change in the items themselves. In 1639, Baltasar Bautista, a baker of Mexico City, had two pairs of calzones, one of Rouen (a printed cotton cloth) and the other of *lampote* (a cloth made in the Philippines).²¹¹ Jackets (*jaquetas*), doublets (*jubones*), hats (*sombreros*), and shoes (*zapatos*) are also attested after the middle of the sixteenth century.²¹² But apparently even the most Hispanized in dress did not soon abandon the indigenous man’s cloak, or *tilmatli*. Both Juan Velásquez and Baltasar Bautista had *tilmatli* with embroidery on them (*tlamachyo*) to go with their European pants. European influence is not lacking, however, even with the *tilmatli*. In addition to Baltasar’s three red cloaks (apparently his normal wear) and his embroidered one, he had one of Rouen. Some men speak of a *frezada* (in Spanish usually a blanket used to cover a bed or a horse) where one would expect “*tilmatli*,” and the two words are even found equated.²¹³ The clothing that the well-off Lucía María of Atocpan (near Milpa Alta in the southern part of the Xochimilco district) was keeping

for her sons around the year 1635 represents the most complete known listing of a Spanish-style outfit. There was a shirt, a doublet, pants (calzones, one pair of them woolen), shoes, and a hat, as well as several tilmatli, one of Rouen with Spanish-style lacework (*randas*).²¹⁴ The mother had made some of the trousers and cloaks herself, the others then apparently having been bought.

Women's clothing, as often in such situations in world history, was more conservative than men's, but then, it had resembled the European manner more from the beginning, consisting primarily of a long full skirt and an upper garment. Since the skirts are never found described in any detail, we learn nothing about whether or not indigenous skirts were influenced by Spanish counterparts. But it is clear that women retained the indigenous upper garment, a kind of shift called a *huipil* (Nahuatl *huipilli*), sleeveless, unfitted, and reaching well below the waist. Even Lucía María, whose sons were so up-to-date, wore a huipil, albeit a new and probably fancy one. Among her accessories, a bracelet of feathers (*machoncotl*), including quetzal plumes, was definitely of indigenous type, and so apparently was her carrying apparatus (*mamalhuaztli*). Her headgear may have been Spanish influenced; her *-tlapachiuhca*, literally "covering," had a Nahuatl name, but it probably was a type of shawl introduced from Spain.²¹⁵ A hundred years later (1734), doña Felipa de Jesús, wealthy widow of a member of the officeholding group of Soyatzingo (Chalco region), had shawls called in Spanish *rebozos*, but she too still wore huipiles, some of them from Pachuca and Oaxaca.²¹⁶

Aspects of Land Use

What Nahuatl documents (and other sources too, apparently) have to say about plant and animal varieties and techniques of propagating them falls so far short of the copious material on land tenure that I mention a stray fact or two here only to make clear how unbalanced our knowledge is. As to tools, which at times are mentioned in wills, by the later sixteenth century the Nahuas were using a combination of indigenous and Spanish implements. The evidence is rather skewed, since only a tool of metal, hence probably European or European influenced, would be likely to be worth bequeathing. Most frequently mentioned is the *tlaltepoztlí*, literally "land iron," which can be safely considered to be a Spanish hoe or mattock (*azadón*).²¹⁷ Also found, however, is the *huictli*, or indigenous digging stick with a flat blade, usually in the form *tepozhuictli*, with the addition of the word for "metal, iron," apparently signifying that the blade was now made of that material. Several of these are found among the stock of a Culhuacan pochtecatl in 1581, and at the same time and place another possessor of a *tepozhuictli* had paid six tomines (three-fourths of a peso) for it, so the item was of more than negli-

gible value and must have ordinarily been purchased rather than manufactured by the user.²¹⁸ The latest presently known attestation of the word *tepozhuictli* is from 1689,²¹⁹ but since the tool has survived in some places to the present century, it must still have been in use in the eighteenth. The *huitzoctli*, a pointed oaken pole for levering sod loose or planting seed, is not mentioned in known testaments, but a document of the mid-seventeenth century asserts that in breaking the ground of a field dedicated to religious ends, the ordinary people brought "only" *huitzoctli*, whereas the more illustrious brought a yoke of oxen, if not several.²²⁰ By the seventeenth century, some of the wealthier Nahuas had surprising numbers of oxen,²²¹ and the general impression arising from both Nahuatl and Spanish sources is that oxen were ever more prevalent among the general population as well, but at present there is no way to gauge the exact rate and extent of the development. The hand tools of agriculture were in the male domain, and they can be found given to a son on the explicit ground that the recipient is male.²²²

As for crops, one surprise in the documentation is that the chinampas of sixteenth-century Culhuacan seem to have been used more for the staple maize and beans than for the multitudinous specialties with which the chinampas of the southern lake region are often associated.²²³ In general, however, the staples are little mentioned, ceding in interest to the land that produced them. More often felt worth bequeathing were the magueys that bordered many fields and to which some lands were entirely devoted.²²⁴ Quite often seen, because of their revenue-producing potential, are orchards in the Spanish manner or individual European fruit trees. The word *huerta* was borrowed into Nahuatl before 1550, and orchard owners, most often but not always nobles, are no rarity from that time forward. Peach and pear trees are perhaps most frequently mentioned, but apple, pomegranate, walnut, fig, apricot, and quince also occur. Such orchards could also include native trees like the avocado and sapota.²²⁵

Horses and mules appear in Nahuatl sources, as seen above, mainly in packtrains or as individual animals for transport or riding, and mainly in the hands of nobles or entrepreneurs; only occasionally is it specified that a noble owned a whole herd of larger livestock.²²⁶ The European chicken receives frequent mention under various names, especially in the sixteenth century when it was still something of a novelty.²²⁷

At one time it was thought that the Spaniards destroyed and revolutionized Nahua political and religious life while leaving the fabric of ordinary economic life at the local level nearly untouched. Though only scattered morsels related to economic activity as such are to be found in Nahuatl documents, they imply that no such differential obtained. In the economic realm

as in the others, a strong indigenous base continued to provide the framework while Spanish items and modes quickly entered everywhere, not so much displacing as infiltrating, interpenetrating, and being assigned to niches already existing in the indigenous cultural scheme. Indeed, it may be that the economic sphere, as the least formal of all the major sectors and the one of greatest concern to the bulk of the Hispanic population, was the arena of the most direct and pervasive interpenetration. Several economic phenomena of the indigenous world appear to have persisted unchanged in the essentials, but we can be sure that nothing was left literally untouched.

Religious Life

THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY of postconquest Mexico has often been seen in terms of successful or unsuccessful resistance to a Christian conversion campaign. In fact, conscious, overt indigenous resistance was not utterly lacking from the picture, and it is not entirely inappropriate to speak of some effort on the part of the Spaniards to convince or "convert" the Indians in the manner of evangelists of our own times. But neither category, conversion or resistance, truly hits the mark. As in politics, existing Nahua patterns were what made the quick apparent success of Spanish modes possible; the altepetl was as important in religious as in political organization. One can hardly speak of an indigenous inclination to disbelief in Christianity. For the people of preconquest Mesoamerica, victory was *prima facie* evidence of the strength of the victor's god. One expected a conqueror to impose his god in some fashion, without fully displacing one's own; the new god in any case always proved to be an agglomeration of attributes familiar from the local pantheon and hence easy to assimilate. Thus the Nahuas after the Spanish conquest needed less to be converted than to be instructed. Spanish ecclesiastics seem to have taken much the same view of the matter, since they spoke mainly in terms of instruction or indoctrination rather than conversion, and never referred to themselves as missionaries, the word so many modern scholars have anachronistically preferred.

Mesoamerican religion, including that of the Nahuas, was highly developed. A complex pantheon of deities possessed specific iconographic and other attributes and was embodied in images inhabiting sumptuous temples; there a hierarchy of religious specialists held forth, overseeing the observance of a full calendar of festivities, replete with processions and rich costumes, throughout the year. Sacrificial and penitential practices affected all levels of the population, while divination and shamanistic rites played some part in every aspect of daily life. Religion was an integral part of sociopolitical organization. A special ethnic god (like the Mexica's Huitzilopochtli, often at once a deified ancestor and a variant of one of the general Mesoamerican