

Glossary

Most of these terms are originally from Nahuatl (N) or Spanish (S).

Acolhua (N). A Nahuatl-speaking ethnic group inhabiting the territory to the east of the great lake in Mexico's central basin in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The group contained several distinct altepetls, including such well-known ones as Texcoco and a town on the site of Teotihuacan.

Altepetl (N). Nahuatl term for any state, no matter how large, but most frequently used to refer to a local ethnic state. A close approximation would be our notion of "city-state."

Audiencia (S). The high court of New Spain, residing in Mexico City. In the absence of a sitting viceroy, the governing council of New Spain.

Cabildo (S). Any town council organized in the Spanish style. Used to refer to the local indigenous council governing their community's internal affairs.

Cacique. An Arawak or Caribbean indigenous word. A ruler, often used as the equivalent of tlatoani. Eventually, the word was used to describe any prominent indigenous person of a noble line.

Calli (N). Literally, a house or household. Often an important metaphor for larger political bodies. Also one of the four rotating names for years.

Calpolli (N). Literally, "great house." A key constituent part of an *altepetl*. We might think of a combined political ward and religious parish.

Chalchihuitl (N). A precious greenstone often translated into English as "jade." The Nahuas valued the gem exceedingly, and thus it served as a metaphor for that which was well loved.

Chichimec (N). Literally "dog people." Used in Nahuatl to refer to "wild" or nomadic, nonfarming peoples who lived primarily by hunting. The Mexica were proud of their Chichimec heritage.

Chinampa (N). Artificially raised plot for intensive agriculture built up in shallow water.

Cihua or cihuatl (N). Literally "woman" but with many embedded uses. A "cihuapilli" was a noblewoman or even queen. The "cihuacoatl" (literally Woman Snake) was the title of the Mexica king's highest-ranking aide.

Cofradía (S). A sodality, or lay religious brotherhood. Often established by indigenous and African people in colonial Latin America for mutual support in such things as paying for funerals.

Culhua (N). An ethnic group inhabiting the center of the central basin of Mexico in the fourteenth century.

Discalced friars. Mendicant orders whose members go entirely barefoot or wear only sandals, symbolic of their vow of poverty.

Doctrina (S). Spanish for Christian indoctrination but refers to an indigenous parish run by friars.

Don/doña (S). Spanish high title attached to a first name, like “Sir” or “Lady” in English. Applied by Nahuas in the early colonial period only to titled nobility from Spain and to their own highest-status local nobility.

Encomienda (S). Post-conquest grant of the right to receive labor and tribute from an indigenous altepetl through its existing mechanisms. In all but a handful of cases, these were given to Spaniards.

Flower Wars. A pre-conquest form of sport consisting of mock battles, which sometimes resulted in death.

Fray (S). The title given to a friar, or *fraile* in Spanish.

Gobernador (S). Governor and head of the indigenous cabildo. Early on, the position was filled by the tlatoani, but later, elections were held among all noblemen. Sometimes called a “judge” or “judge governor.”

Guardián (S). The prior of a monastic establishment.

Macehualli (pl. macehualtin) (N). Indigenous commoner. Sometimes used by indigenous people to refer to themselves as a group in opposition to Spaniards.

Marqués (S). Marquis, lord of a border region. Several viceroys bore the title, but when the Nahuas used it without a specific name, they meant either Hernando Cortés or his legitimate son.

Mestizo (S). Person of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent.

Mexica (N). The ethnic group that dominated central Mexico at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards. Now most often referred to as the “Aztecs.”

Nahua (N). One who speaks the Nahuatl language. The Mexica as well as dozens of other groups in Mexico were Nahuas.

Nahuatl (N). The politically dominant tongue that had become a lingua franca in central Mexico by the time of the arrival of the Spaniards.

New Spain. The large colonial jurisdiction centered on Mexico City and including much of present-day Mexico.

Otomí. An ethnic group whose people were scattered throughout various places in central Mexico. Perceived as “barbarians” by the Nahuas, they probably had a prior claim on the land.

Pilli (pl. pipiltin) (N). Indigenous nobleman.

Pinome. Speakers of the language Pinotl, or Popoluca, living east of the central valley. Perceived as “lesser” by the Nahuas, they had a prior claim on the land.

Pulque (S). An alcoholic beverage made from fermented sap of the maguey plant.

Quauhpilli (N). Literally an “eagle nobleman.” A nobleman by virtue of deeds or merit rather than by virtue of birth. These were sometimes commoners promoted after success on the battlefield, or sometimes noblemen brought in from other altepetls.

Tacuba. The term used in Spanish to refer to the Tepanec altepetl of Tlacopan.

Tecpan (N). Literally, “place where the lord is.” Originally, the palace of a local lord. After the conquest, used to refer to a community house where the indigenous cabildo met.

Tenochtitlan (N). Originally a small village established by the Mexica on an island in Lake Texcoco. Eventually the capital of a great state. After the conquest, the site of the founding of Mexico City. The people of the city were called the Tenochca.

Tepaneca (N). A Nahuatl-speaking ethnic group inhabiting the territory to the west of the great lake in Mexico's central basin. The group contained several distinct altepetls, including such well-known ones as Azcapotzalco and Tlacopan.

Teuctli (pl. teteuctin) (N). Lord, head of a dynastic household, with lands and followers.

Tlatoani (N). Literally, "one who speaks," and implicitly, one who speaks on behalf of a group. A dynastic ruler of an altepetl, in this book translated as "king." It was sometimes applied to a high Spanish authority, like the viceroy.

Tlaxcala (N). A large altepetl just outside the central valley that remained unconquered by the Mexica and their allies. The Tlaxcalans (or Tlaxcalteca) were among the very first to ally with the Spaniards.

Tochtli (N). Literally "rabbit." Often used as a metaphor to refer to ill fortune. Also one of the four rotating names of years.

Tollan (N). Literally "place of the reeds," often called "Tula" in English. A real town in central Mexico, but in ancient stories, often used to refer to a utopian community of the distant past.

Totonacs. An ethnic group living near today's Veracruz.

Triple Alliance. Used to refer to the fifteenth-century alliance between the ruling families of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan. There was in fact no formal alliance or political league, but the understanding was real.

-tzin (N). A Nahuatl suffix most often employed as an honorific, but sometimes merely conveying affection for a beloved person or object of humble status.

Viceroy or Virrey (S). The representative of the Spanish monarch in a region of the New World. At first, there were only two, that of New Spain and that of Peru.

Visitador (S). Inspector. These were sent regularly by the Spanish Crown to investigate local government in the Americas in a system of checks and balances.

Xiuhpohualli (N). Literally, "year count" or "yearly account." A traditional genre used by the Nahuas to recite their history verbally; often transcribed as written texts after the conquest.