Chapter 2

City-States in the Valley of Mexico: An Overview

The Environmental Setting

The Aztec empire was centered in the Valley of Mexico (Figs. 2-1, 2-2), an area approximately 120 km north-south by 70 km east-west, located on the central mesa of Mexico between two mountain ranges, the Sierra Madre Occidental and the Sierra Madre Oriental. While much of Mexico's environment is mountainous, the valley provides approximately 8000 km^2 of relatively flat land (Sanders 1976:59).

Although surrounded by mountains as high as 5000 m, the valley itself is low enough in altitude (2240 m) to permit one agricultural season per year in which maize, beans, squash, amaranth, and other crops can be grown. In prehistoric times, the slopes were covered with forests, and the valley was partially filled with shallow lakes in which lived fish, waterfowl, crustaceans, insects, and other fauna consumed by the Aztec. In addition, the lakes contained economically important plants such as reeds and edible algae. Saline Lake Texcoco deposited salt that was extracted from soil by the lakeshore residents. The lake system, which consisted of lakes Xaltocan and Zumpango in the north, Lake Texcoco in the center, and lakes Chalco and Xochimilco in the south, provided food, water, and a means of speedy movement across the valley via canoes. The shallow water of the lakes permitted the development of chinampas, intensively cultivated raised fields. In southern lakes Chalco and Xochimilco, large numbers of chinampas constructed on the same grid apparently were created as a single state-planned project, in Late Aztec times (A.D. 1350-1520; Parsons 1976). This intensive agricultural system, which facilitated cultivation of maize and vegetables without dependence on rainfall, is one of the technological hallmarks of Aztec civilization (West and Armillas 1950; Coe 1964; Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979).

Occupational History of the Valley of Mexico

The Valley of Mexico has been occupied from Paleo-Indian times, and sites of all periods have been located by archaeological survey (Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979; see Fig. 2-3). Throughout the Early, Middle, and Late Formative periods (1500 B.C.–300 B.C.), residents of the valley occupied villages scattered around the lake. In the Terminal Formative period (300 B.C.–A.D. 150), the focus of occupation shifted to the sites now called Cuicuilco and Teotihuacan, polarizing population in the southwest and northeast sections of the valley.

After the demise of Cuicuilco following a volcanic eruption, Teotihuacan expanded in the Classic period (A.D. 150-750) into a center of ca. 125,000 inhabitants, with monumental architecture, foreign contacts as far south as Kaminaljuyú in Guatemala, a professional ruling class, and occupational specialists (Millon 1973, 1976). Meanwhile, the population living in the Valley of Mexico was sparse, with the bulk of the population living in the Teotihuacan Valley (Parsons 1976; Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979).

Following the general abandonment of Teotihuacan, the city of Tula, north of the Valley of Mexico in what is now the state of Hidalgo, probably dominated the area, although it may have been competing during this time (approximately A.D. 900–1150) with the city of Cholula to the southeast. This period is characterized as one of "Balkanization," during which the valley was a buffer zone between two large, competing centers outside the valley (Blanton 1975; Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979).

Oral history begins at this time, and the fall of Tula following a religious and political conflict is recounted in several versions (*Anales de Cuauhtitlan* 1938, 1945; Sahagún 1950-69; Durán

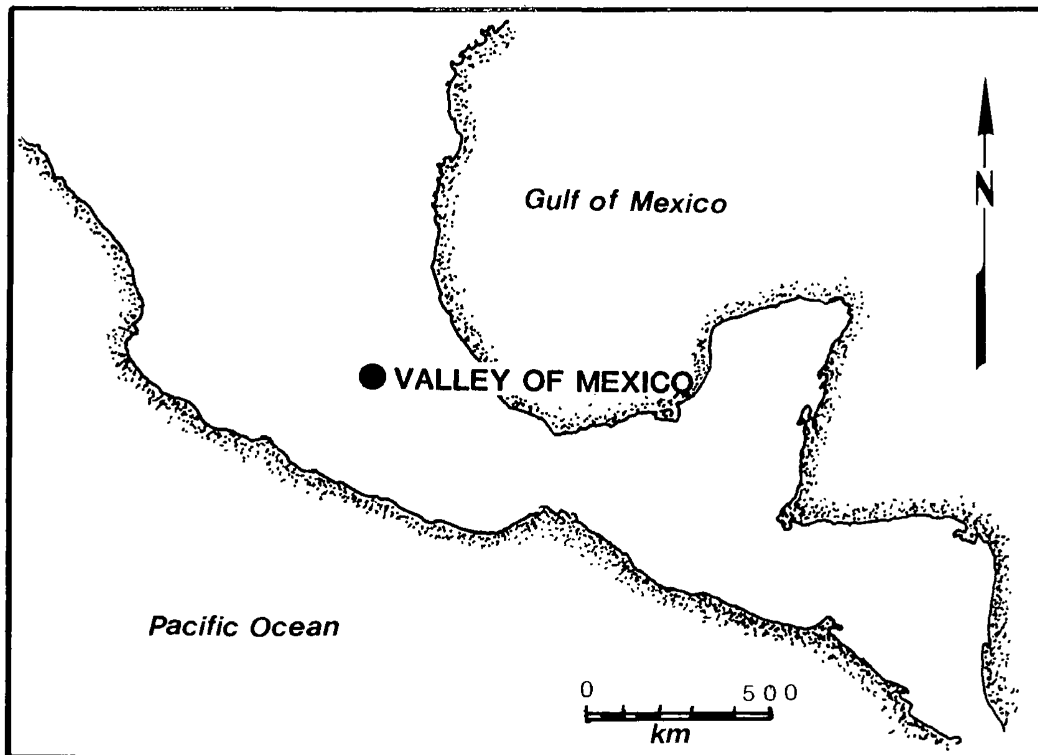

Fig. 2-1. Location of the Valley of Mexico in Mesoamerica. Since it has no outflow, it is technically a basin; however, in the text I refer to it as a valley, following the precedent in the literature.

1967; Chimalpahin 1958). After Tula's collapse, the historic narratives say that numerous groups, both from Tula and from farther north, entered the Valley of Mexico, establishing many small polities. These groups became important in the Postclassic socio-political environment and are the focus of this study. Although these polities were at first separated by buffer zones of unsettled land, their narratives record political interactions, coalitions, and confrontations which created the complicated political situation out of which the Aztec empire developed.

In the Early Aztec period (ca. 1150–1350), the largest and most influential sites were Azcapotzalco on the western side of the valley, and Huexotla and Coatlinchan on the eastern side. These centers became less influential in the Late Aztec period (ca. 1350–1520), when Tenochtitlan on the west and Texcoco on the east were the valley's most important political powers (Parsons 1974; Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979).

The Valley of Mexico survey project classified the total range of Late Horizon (Late Aztec) period sites. Based on site size and monumental architecture, the settlement categories included supraregional centers, primary regional centers, secondary regional centers, large nucleated villages, dispersed villages, small nucleated villages, hamlets, camps, isolated households, and isolated ceremonial centers. The supraregional centers, Tenochtitlan and Texcoco, had populations of 150–200,000 and 25–30,000 respectively. They were the centers of large polities, had monumental architecture, stratified societies, and were inhabited predominantly by elites and occupational specialists rather than by primary food producers. The primary regional centers were large, nucleated communities of 10–15,000 people, with distinct ceremonial architecture, indicating the presence of individuals who carried out roles in a socio-political hierarchy, and craft specialists. Secondary regional (local) centers contained well-defined public architecture and populations of 1,500–10,000. Large nucleated villages had populations of 500–1,000 people and little or no remains of civic-elite architecture. Small nucleated villages also had no public

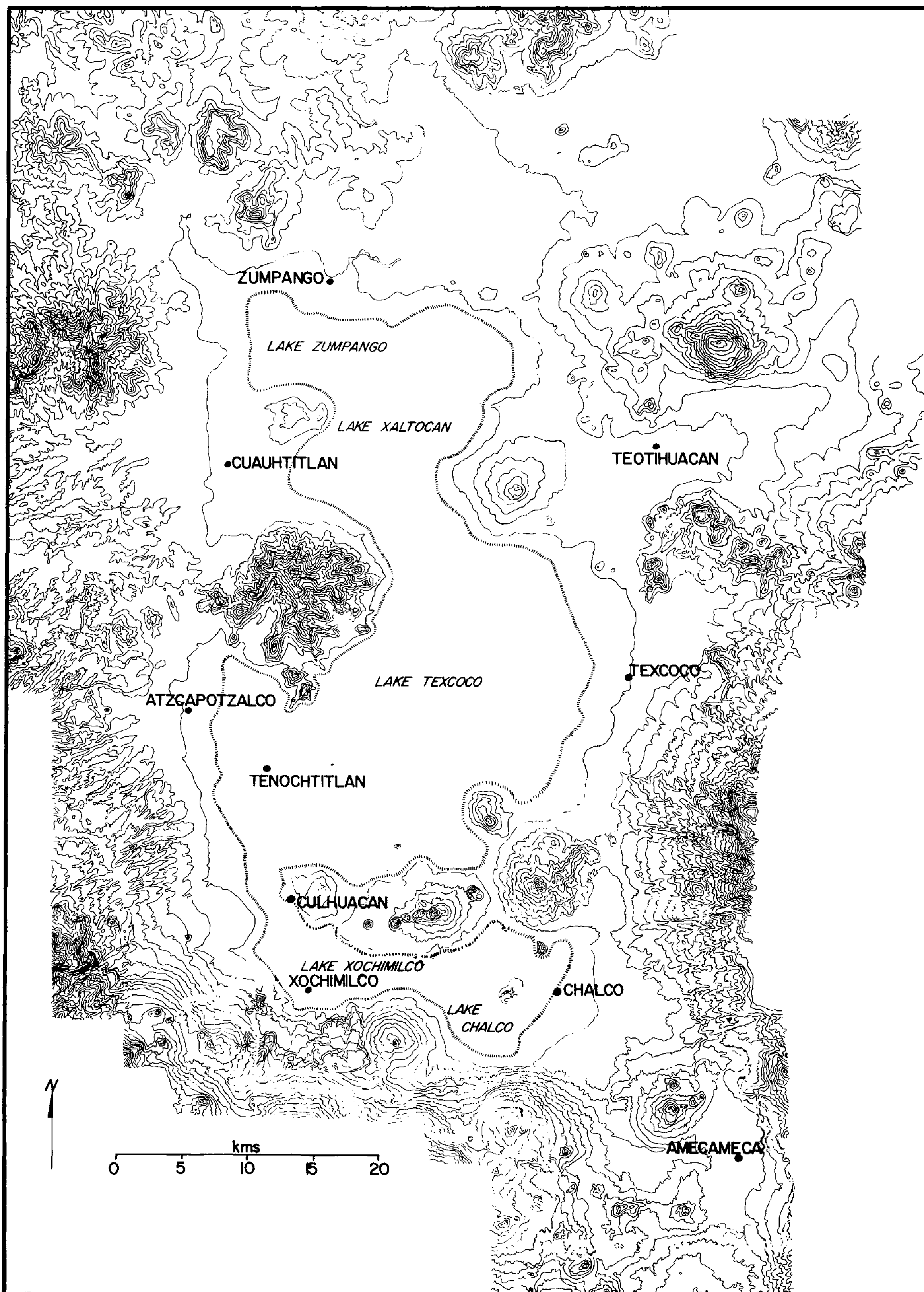

Fig. 2-2. The Valley of Mexico, showing the location of mountains in relation to the lake and major towns (after Parsons et al. 1982).

Absolute Chronology	Major Archaeological Periods and Phase Names				
	New System		Old System		
					1520
1500 1400	Late Horizon		Late Aztec	Tenochtitlan	1350
1300 1200	Second Intermediate	Phase Three	Early Aztec	Culhuacan/Tenayuca	1150
1100 1000		Phase Two	Late Toltec	Mazapan	950
900 800		Phase One	Early Toltec	Coyotlatelco	750
700 600 500	Middle Horizon	Phase Two	Late Classic	Metepec Xolalpan	500
400 300		Phase One	Early Classic	Tlamimilolpa	250
200	First Intermediate	Phase Five		Miccaotli	150
100 A.D. 0 B.C.		Phase Four	Terminal Formative	Tzacualli	A.D. B.C. 100
100 200		Phase Three		Patlachique	300
300 400 500 600		Phase Two	Late Formative	Ticoman	650
700 800		Phase One-B	Middle Formative	Cuautepec La Pastora	900
900 1000 1100		Phase One-A		El Arbolillo Bomba	1050 1150
1200 1300 1400 1500	Early Horizon	Phase Two Phase One	Early Formative	Manantial Ayotla Coapexco	1300 1400 1500

Fig. 2-3. Chronological sequences for the Valley of Mexico (after Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979:93).

buildings and had only 100–500 people living in them (Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979:55-57, 160–71; Parsons et al. 1982:71).

Based on population, Sanders (1970:409) classified the Valley of Mexico's Late Horizon settlements as follows. Level 1 included only Tenochtitlan/Tlatelolco, with a population of 150–200,000; Level 2 was comprised of Texcoco, with 25–30,000; Level 3 included Xochimilco, Amecameca, Tlalmanalco, Tacuba/Tlacopan, and Ixtapalapa, each with ca. 15,000 residents. Level 4 consisted of 40 other towns with 4–5,000 inhabitants, and Level 5 included villages and hamlets of less than 1000 residents.

The total population of the valley in 1519 is estimated to have been 1–1.2 million (ibid). The survey detected a considerable population increase during the Late Aztec period, evident from the appearance of more and larger sites. The settlement pattern survey data suggest that although population expanded most markedly in Tenochtitlan, throughout the valley it was higher in the Late Horizon period than in any other previous period (Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979).

Political Units in the Valley of Mexico

City-States

In Nahuatl, the basic unit in political organization was altepetl, a word whose roots are atl, or "water" and tepetl, or "hill" (Andrews 1975:419). Molina (1970:4) defines altepetl as "pueblo, or rey," and Siméon (1885:21) defines the term as "poblado, ciudad, estado, rey, soberano"—settlement, city, state, king, sovereign. The term altepetl is associated with the idea of rulership as much as with territory, for under "rey" or king, Molina lists "vey tlatoani, altepetl" (Molina 1970:103). Thus, a city with attendant lands, governed by a tlatoani or ruler was the basic Nahua political unit, which the Spaniards called a señorío, or lordship, and which has been called a city-state in recent anthropological literature (Bray 1972; Calnek 1978).

Fundamentally, "in political terms, a Mexican city state can be defined as a sovereign territory with its own government and with one or more rulers chosen from a royal lineage" (Bray 1972:164). The territory contained a capital or central place, plus rural dependencies. The town was the center of government; it contained the major temples and was a center of redistribution and exchange via markets held at 1-, 5-, or 20-day intervals. The town was the cultural, political, artistic, religious, and economic focus of its surrounding region (ibid.).

Each city-state was governed by a hereditary ruler who lived in the urban center. Other elites, as well as occupational groups such as craft specialists, artisans, warriors, priests, and bureaucrats also lived in the urban center. Within the urban center of a city-state were residential wards, which were the smallest unit of political organization

TABLE 2-1
VALLEY OF MEXICO COMMUNITIES WITH A TLATOANI IN 1519[1]

Confederation	Town	Name of Tlatoani
Mexica	Tenochtitlan	Moctezuma
	Tlatelolco	(Cuauhtlatoani)
	Ecatepec	Panitzin
	Azcapotzalco	Teuhtlehuacatzin
Culhua	Culhuacan	Tezozomoc
	Huitzilopochco	Huitzilatzin II
	Mexicaltzingo	Tochihuitzin
	Ixtapalapa	Cuitlahuatzin
Mixquica	Mixquic	Chalcayaotzin
Xochimilca	Xochimilco	
	Tepetenchi	Tlatocatzin
	Olac	Macuilmalinaltzin
	Tecpan	Tlilcoyohualtzin
Cuitlahuaca	Cuitlahuac	
	Tizic	Atlpopocatzin
	Teopancalcan	Ixtotomahuatzin
	Atenchicalcan	Mayehuatzin
	Tecpan	Acxochitzin
Chalca	Amecameca	
	Itztlacozauhcan	Cihuaillacatzin
	Tlayllotlacan	Cacamatzin
	Tzacualtitlan Tenango	Yotzintli
	Tecuanipan	Miccacalcatl Tlaltetecuintzin
	Panohuayan	Cuauhcecequitzin
	Tlalmanalco	
	Opochhuacan	Necuametl
	Itzcahuacan	Itzcahuatl
	Acxotlan Cihuateopan	Huitznecahual
	Tenango Tepopula	Tlacayaotl
	Chimalhuacan	?
Tepaneca	Azcapotzalco[2]	Tlaltecatlçin
	Cuauhtitlan	Aztatzontzin
Tepaneca	Citlaltepec	Aztatzontzin
	Huehuetoca	"
	Zumpango	"
	Coyoacan	Cuappopocatzin
	Tacubaya	Yzquas(?)[3]
	Huepoxtla	?
	Tacuba/Tlacopan	Totoquihuatzin
	Tenayuca	Moteucçomatzin
	Tepotzotlan	Quinatzin
	Tequixquiac	?
	Tultitlan	Citlalcohuatl
	Xilotcingo	?
Acolhua	Acolman	Coyoctzin
	Chiauhtla	?
	Chiconauhtla	Tlatecatl
	Chimalhuacan Atenco	Acxoyatlatoatzin
	Coatlinchan	Xaquinteuctli
	Huexotla	Tzontemoctzin
	Ixtapaluca	?
	Otumba	Cuechimaltzin
	Teotihuacan	Mamallitzin
	Tepetlaoztoc	Tlilpotonqui
	Tepexpan	Teyaoyaualouatzin
	Texcoco	Cacamatzin
	Tequizistlan	?
	Tezoyuca	?
	Tezontepec	?

[1]Based on *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* (1945) and Gibson (1964b).
[2]Azcapotzalco is listed twice because it had two tlatoque in 1519: one was Mexica and the other was Tepaneca and represented the indigenous ruling lineage.
[3]Carrasco and Monjarás-Ruiz 1976:66.
? = name unknown

(Bray 1972). Documents call a residential ward by a number of terms: barrio (Spanish), tlaxillacalli, and calpulli (Nahuatl: pl. tlaxillacaltin; calpultin), and there is still some ambiguity about the usage of the terms barrio, calpulli, and tlaxillacalli.

The hereditary ruler of a city-state was generally called tlatoani, or "speaker." In all city-states, society was stratified into two levels: pipiltin (elites) who were often descendants and relatives of the tlatoani, and commoners, or macehualtin (sing. macehualli). The nobles were supported by tribute which the commoners paid to them. These characteristics define what Aztec city-states had in common in 1519; in the case studies that follow, differences among them will be emphasized.

Confederations

The unit of political organization larger than the individual city-state in the Valley of Mexico in the late pre-Hispanic period was the league, or confederation, of city-states. Because a single polity would have less power in valley politics than a coalition, it was a long-established practice for polities to join together for mutual defense and to go to war together. Leagues were territorial blocs of city-states with shared interests. Since confederation members often shared a mythology about common origins, they have sometimes been described as "ethnic" groups or "tribes" (Gibson 1964b; Bray 1978). There were eight leagues in the Valley of Mexico in the Late Postclassic period: the Tenochca (Mexica), Tepaneca, Acolhuaque (Texcocan), Chalca, Xochimilca, Culhuaque, Cuitlahuaca, and Mixquica (see Fig. 2-4). The Aztec imperial system was formed originally from three of these confederations. The following section briefly describes the political organizations of the three cities and confederations that led the empire.

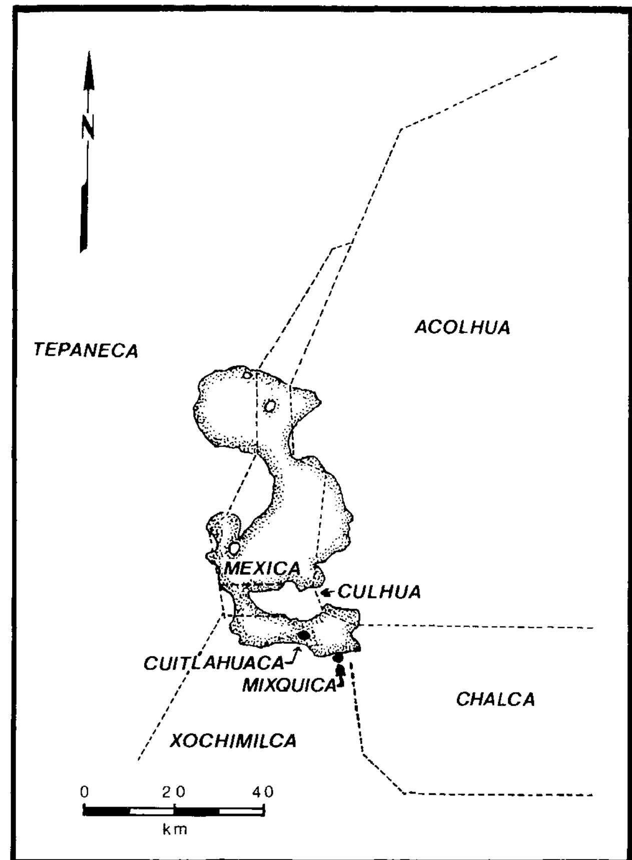

Fig. 2-4. Political confederations of the Valley of Mexico in Aztec times (after Gibson 1964b).

Aztec Capitals

Since most generalizations about Aztec polities are based on the capitals, I will briefly outline the political organizations of Tenochtitlon, Texcoco, and Tlacopan. Tenochtitlan and Texcoco are the best-known Aztec city-states, and the following overview of these paramount cities is intended to place non-capitals in perspective. Two important differences between the capitals and other city-states were their regional span of control and the large numbers of people and quantities of resources at their command.

Tenochtitlan

Most generalizations about Aztec culture are drawn from Tenochtitlan. Tenochtitlan was located in the "highest part of New Spain and in the highest mountains. . . . Mexico is entirely surrounded by mountains and has a very beautiful crown of ranges around her, and the city itself is situated in the middle. This gives it great beauty and adornment and great security and strength" (Motolinía 1950:203).

Cortés described the capital as follows:

> This great city of Temixtitlan is built on the salt lake, and no matter by what road you travel there are two leagues from the main body of the city to the mainland. There are four artificial causeways leading to it, and each is as wide as two cavalry lances. The city itself is as big as Seville or Córdoba.

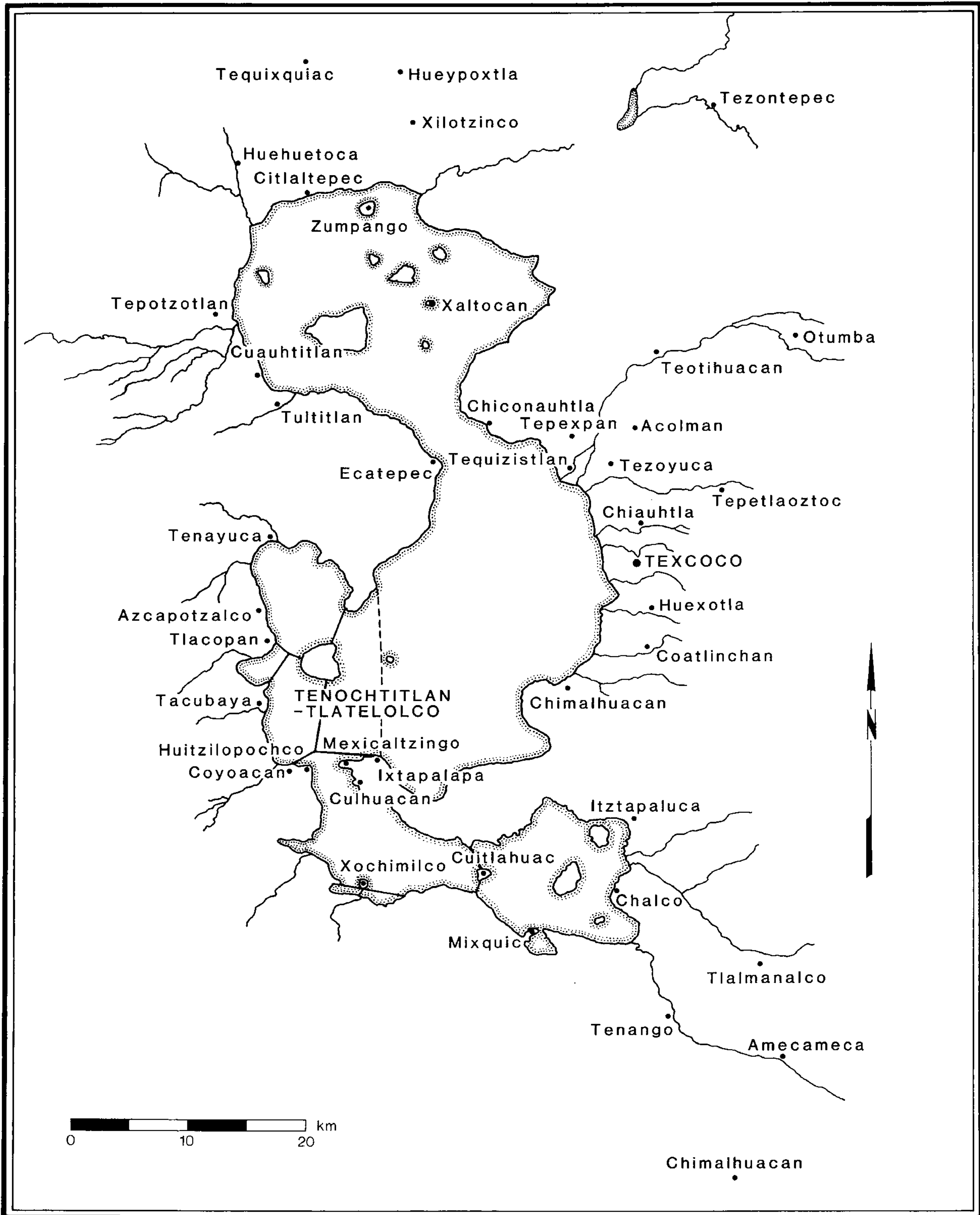

Fig. 2-5. Cities in the Valley of Mexico, ca. A.D. 1519, that were the residence of a tlatoani.

> The main streets are very wide and very straight; some of these are on the land, but the rest and all the smaller ones are half on land, half canals where they paddle their canoes. . . . there are bridges made of long and wide beams joined together very firmly and so well made that on some of them ten horsemen may ride abreast. [Cortés 1971:102-03]

He adds that "The city has many squares where trading is done and markets are held continuously" (ibid.:103).

> There are, in all districts of this great city, many temples or houses for their idols. They are all very beautiful buildings, and in the important ones there are priests of their sect who live there permanently. . . . [Cortés 1971:105]
>
> Amongst these temples there is one, the principal one, whose great size and magnificence no human tongue could describe, for it is so large that within the precincts, which are surrounded by a very high wall, a town of some five hundred inhabitants could easily be built. All round inside this wall there are very elegant quarters with very large rooms and corridors where the priests live. There are as many as forty towers, all of which are so high that in the case of the largest there are fifty steps leading up to the main part of it; and the most important of these towers is higher than that of the cathedral of Seville. They are so well constructed in both their stone and woodwork that there can be none better in any place, for all the stonework inside the chapels where they keep their idols is in high relief, with figures and little houses, and the woodwork is likewise of relief and painted with monsters and other figures and designs. [Cortés 1971:105-06]

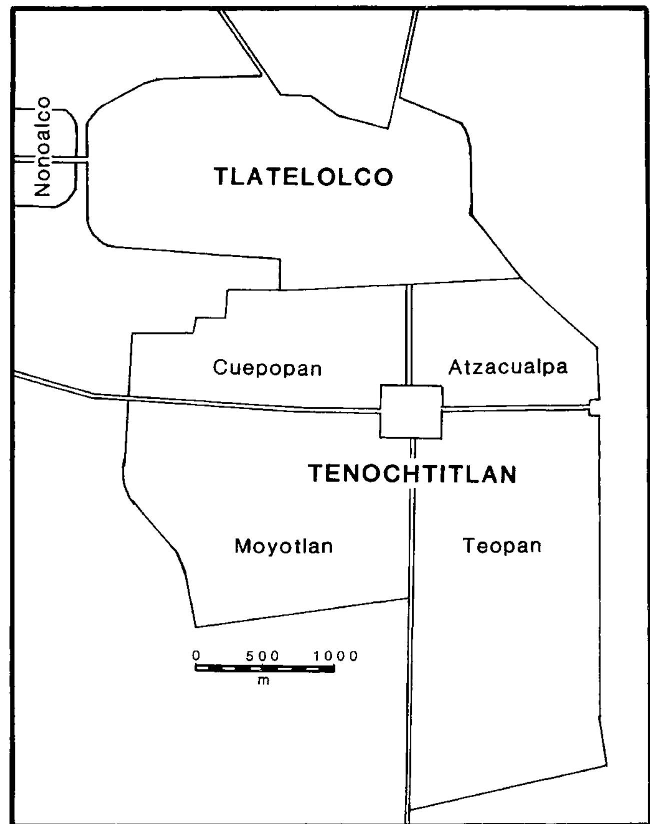

Fig. 2-6. Plan of Tenochtitlan, showing its causeways and four divisions (redrawn from Calnek 1976: Map 20).

Tenochtitlan occupied an island and was connected by causeways to the mainland (Fig. 2-6). In addition to the wide roads, canals allowed canoe transport of people and goods in and out of the city.

The city had between 150,000 and 200,000 occupants in 1519, and it covered an area of 12 to 15 km^2 (Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979; Calnek 1976). The causeways ran into avenues which divided the city into four quarters; since the founding of the city, these quarters had been administrative divisions. Each of the divisions had a large temple or ceremonial center within it, and these quarters were subdivided into wards which some documents call a calpulli and others a tlaxillacalli (Calnek 1976:296).

Each ward contained a temple for the patron deity, a telpochcalli, or young men's house, and a plaza. All were on a smaller scale than the main temple and plaza, perhaps on the scale of the excavated pyramid which is visible today in Mexico City's Pino Suárez metro stop. These ward temples were typically low platforms, each with a house-like structure on top of it. "In addition to providing the locus for public and private rituals dedicated to local deities, the temple was also the meeting place for barrio elders and the focal point for large ceremonials organized by occupationally specialized groups" (Calnek 1976:297).

Residences in Tenochtitlan ranged from sumptuous palaces to less elaborate dwellings. Residential units were walled compounds enclosing a number of separate dwellings. They faced inward on an open patio. Most compounds were occupied by a "bilateral joint family" (ibid.:298). The houses of commoners were located in various wards, whereas the rulers lived at the center of the city in the palace-temple complex. Residential architecture was a sign of social status, for persons of elevated status had finer and larger houses than those of the lower classes (Trautmann 1968; Calnek 1976:300).

Tenochtitlan, as well as the Classic-period city of Teotihuacan, had a cruciform layout (Marcus 1983a). Each quarter may correspond to or be associated with one of the four world directions. The

four quadrant layout may represent the Nahua world divided into four quarters, each associated with a world direction, and each with its own color symbolism, deity, and aspect (Nicholson 1971). Motolinía, in 1541, said, "It was a sight worth seeing, to look from the top of the principal temple and see how, from all the lesser towns and districts, the roads came in very straight and ended in the courtyard of the temples" (Motolinía 1950:86).

Social Organization of Tenochtitlan

> The people of this city are dressed with more elegance and are more courtly in their bearing than those of other cities and provinces, and because Mutezuma and all those chieftains, his vassals, are always coming to this city, the people have more manners and politeness in all matters. [Cortés 1971:108]

The populace of Tenochtitlan in 1519 formed two ascribed social strata, elites and commoners. Among the elite were (1) rulers, (2) chiefs, or teteuctin, who held administrative titles and offices, and (3) noblemen by birth, or pipiltin (literally meaning "noble children"). The nobles were free from tribute payment. (In some cases, freedom from tribute payment was earned by outstanding non-elite warriors. Those who achieved the status were called quauhpipiltin, "eagles' sons") (Carrasco 1971:354).

Commoners were called macehualtin. The commoner class included commoners who lived in land-holding wards, and others who were tenant farmers working on patrimonial lands of the elites. At the bottom of the social scale were the tlacotin, or slaves. People became slaves to pay debts, as punishment for crimes, or by being captured in war (Carrasco 1971:351-57; Torquemada 1975, II:563-67; Ramírez de Fuenleal 1870 [1532]:256).

Tenochtitlan's Administrators

The political system was headed by one ruler whose title in Nahuatl was tlatoani, or "he who speaks." Between ca. 1376 and 1521 nine tlatoque, all of whom were related, ruled Tenochtitlan (Fig. 2-7). The rules of succession stated that the office of the tlatoani went first to the eldest son of the principal wife of the ruler; if this individual was not acceptable, then the second or another qualified son would be chosen. After that, the choices were the grandson of the ruler, then his brothers in order of age, and last of all, other kinsmen of the ruler. If a ruler did not designate a successor, one was chosen by the council of lords—elite advisors to the tlatoani (Zorita 1963:91).

The tlatoani of Tenochtitlan, alternatively called hueytlatoani ("great tlatoani") or tlacateuctli ("lord of men") was chief priest, commander-in-chief of the army, highest judge, and controller of the main market at Tlatelolco as well as overseeing the activities of the pochteca, or long-distance traders in sumptuary goods. The ruler lived in a palace adjacent to the main temple, where he appeared for ceremonies. In these ceremonies the ruler sometimes appeared as ixiptla or spokesman-representative of the chief deity. The ruler's council lived near him, and the high level courts were held in the palace (Sahagún 1954, Book 8:41-45). Recent excavations in Mexico City have begun to corroborate the arrangement of the ceremonial center as described by eyewitnesses at the time of the Spanish Conquest and as depicted in codices (Matos 1978).

In Tenochtitlan, the most important official after the tlatoani was the cihuacoatl, or "snake woman," an official whose responsibilities encompassed those of chief judge, viceroy, captain general, and second king (Sahagún 1954, Book 8:55; Torquemada 1975, II:352). The cihuacoatl led the council in selecting a new ruler when needed (Durán 1964:220-21). Cortés described Tlacotzin, the cihuacoatl of Moctezuma II, as ". . .captain and governor of them all and directed matters concerning the war" (Cortés 1971:263). The cihuacoatl was Tenochtitlan's chief administrative officer. In matters dealing with religion, the ruler actively led important state rituals, but the cihuacoatl was charged with supervising the priesthood, the temples, and the performance of rites (Vaillant 1941:95). Although the qualifications for being appointed to the office of cihuacoatl were the same as that of ruler, the office of cihuacoatl was held consecutively by members of one branch of Tenochtitlan's ruling lineage (Durán 1967:369; Carrasco 1971; see Fig. 2-7).

The next level in the administrative hierarchy was the Council of the Four, or the war chiefs. Incumbents of these offices were potential rulers. "After the election of a king, four brothers or nearest relatives of the king are elected who take orders from the king. One of these may be elected king and no others" (Durán 1964:103). Itzcoatl's council was composed of four of his brothers (ibid.). Two of these four officials are almost always called tlacatec-

catl and tlacochcalcatl. The others are sometimes referred to as tlillancalqui and ezuauacatl (Durán 1967:103), uitznauatlailotlac, pochtecatlailotlac, or ticociauacatl (Sahagún 1954, Book 8:61). In the chronicles, a number of diverse titles appear because many honorific titles were granted to individuals, and since eligibility for these offices apparently was based largely on lineage, qualified persons with any of a number of titles were appointed to the four offices.

The exact duties of these four advisors are not clearly defined. The tlacateccatl always is described as commander of the army, and this title probably appears frequently because there was a high mortality rate among them. The tlacochcalcatl and the ezuauacatl are reported to have served as judges in the palace, along with the cihuacoatl (Sahagún 1954, Book 8:55).

The members of the Council of the Four, then, were related to the tlatoani, were proven warriors, and had been awarded titles for this. The upper level of the political hierarchy of Tenochtitlan, consisting of the six highest offices, was monopolized by a single dynasty (Rounds 1979; Brumfiel 1983).

Other advisors—"old men, seasoned warriors, leaders of youth, lords, keepers of gods, and fire priests" (Sahagún 1954, Book 8:61)—comprised an additional group of officials who advised the ruler. These middle-level hierarchies dealt with military, religious, economic, judicial, and tributary matters. Members of these hierarchies were appointed from the elite class.

Military Officials. Since the Aztec state had no standing army—despite its emphasis on war—every adult male was called upon to fight. Those who took captives received the titles "quaquachite, otomí, tlacatecatl" (Sahagún 1958, Book 9:47). Orders of soldiers were distinguished by different insignia, and the nobility had their own warrior societies, distinct from the commoners (Durán 1971:187, 194-202). Particularly by taking captives, a warrior could earn titles, exemptions from taxes, sumptuary items and the status to wear them, or the post of governor of conquered towns. "From there they came to rule, to govern cities; and at that time they seated them with [the nobility] and they might eat with Moctezuma" (Sahagún 1954, Book 8:73). They received special clothing, shields, and jewelry, "and he gave them stewardships ['calpixcantli'] possibly in two places or in three he gave them [such offices] for truly they had taken [captives]" (ibid.:74).

Religious Officials. The cihuacoatl was the overseer of the priesthood, and the next two highest religious officials were the priests of the two most important Tenochca deities, Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc. The assistant to them, called Mexicateohuatzin, was overseer of religion in the provinces and in Tenochtitlan. The hierarchy of priests in Tenochtitlan had many levels (see Acosta Saignes 1946). According to Durán, priests were given titles such as "tlacatecuhtli, mexicaltecuhtli, tlacochcalcatl-teuchtli, tepannecatl, mistoncatltecuhtli, amiztlato" (Durán 1971:138). However, some of these titles are also mentioned in Sahagún's list of highest judges (1954, Book 8:55; 1959, Book 9:47), and much remains to be learned about the religious or priestly duties of nobles, particularly the highest-level officeholders who participated in religious activities along with priests who had purely sacerdotal functions. The religious hierarchy directly affected the political hierarchy by (1) advising the rulers through oracles, and by interpreting the tonalpohualli, or sacred almanac, to select propitious days for coronations and other state events (Sahagún 1957, Books 4 and 5; Díaz 1956:183; Carrasco 1966), and (2) by educating the sons of rulers and nobles, who were educated by the fire priests from the age of ten or twelve (Sahagún 1954, Book 8:71-72).

Judicial Officials. The tlatoani, who was the supreme judge, appointed judicial officials. He held court every 10-12 days to judge important cases which came from the tlacxitlan, the court where cases involving nobles were tried, as well as difficult cases from lower courts. This court had 13 judges, among whom were the cihuacoatl, the tlacochcalcatl, and the ezuauacatl. If an individual was tried and condemned to die, he was executed by officials called achcacauhtli, quauhnochtli, and atempanecatl (Sahagún 1954, Book 8:55). Highest in the hierarchy was the court for cases involving nobles, followed by the regional courts. Then came courts for judging commoners. Each level in the judicial hierarchy had executioners and enforcement officials (ibid.:54).

Tribute Collectors. The tribute collectors, having many ranks and titles, were nobles and warriors appointed to these offices. They operated outside Tenochtitlan and are described below in the section on the empire.

Market Officials. The great market in Tlatelolco required administrators, and market directors oversaw exchanging and pricing of merchandise. They

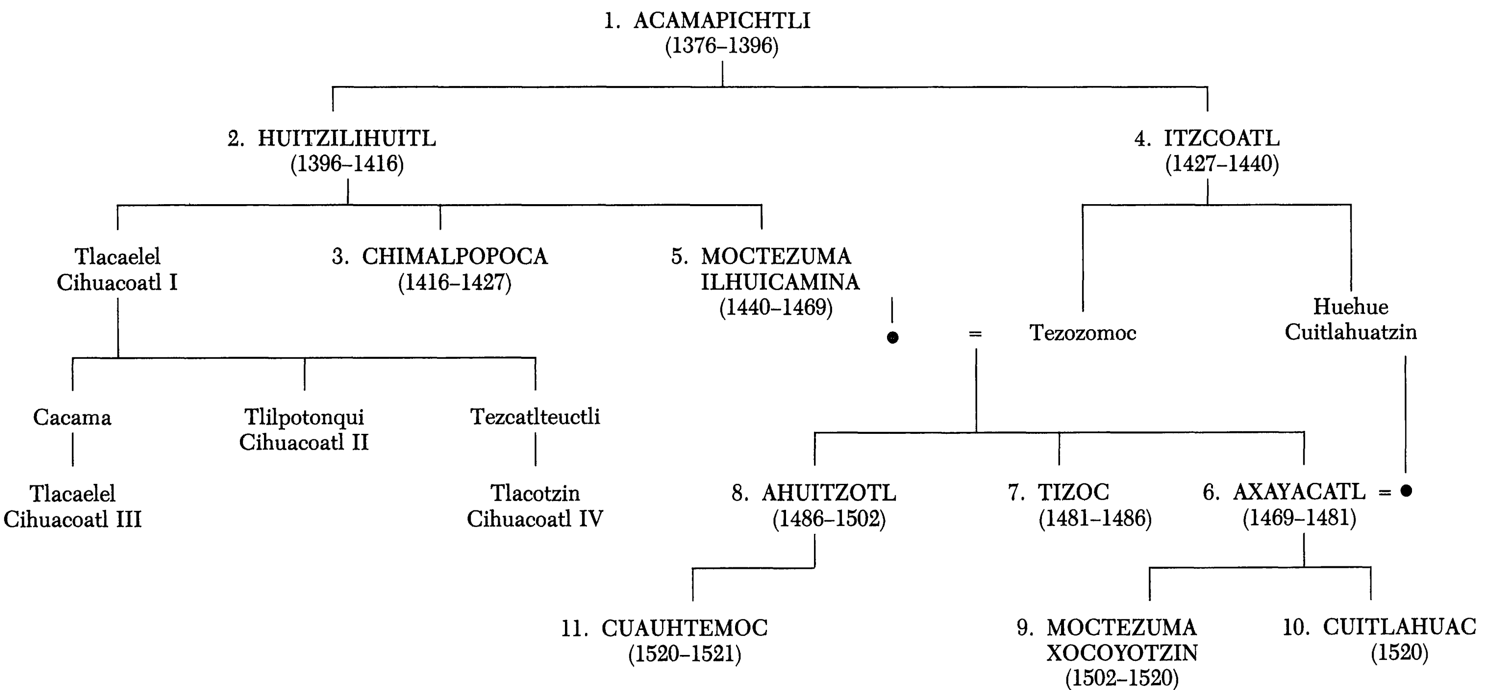

Fig. 2-7. Genealogy of the rulers of Tenochtitlan, including their relatives who held the office of cihuacoatl. Individuals who held the office of tlatoani are shown in capital letters; those holding the office of cihuacoatl are followed by roman numerals, indicating the order in which they served (after Carrasco 1971:350; Durán 1964:368).

also collected taxes from the sellers, and they enforced regulations concerning the market, including rules regarding theft and escapes of slaves (Sahagún 1954, Book 8:67-69).

According to Sahagún (1959, Book 9:24), the overseers of the Tenochtitlan marketplace (held in Tenochtitlan's sister-city, Tlatelolco) were the pochteca, or traders. The pochteca were long-distance traders who dealt primarily with sumptuary goods. During the expansion of the empire, they worked closely with the ruler of Tenochtitlan, carrying goods for him to places of exchange outside the boundaries of the empire, and exchanging them for feathers and other raw materials used in the crafting of sumptuary goods (ibid.:17). The head pochteca (puchtecatlatoque) had the titles Quappoyaualtzin (who led the disguised merchants, who also served as spies for the imperial ruler), nentlamatitzin, uetzcatocatzin, canatzin, and uei ocomatzin (Sahagún 1959, Book 9:24). Pochteca lived in their own residential wards and worshipped distinctive gods. There were pochteca barrios in 12 Valley of Mexico cities: Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, Huexotla, Tlatelolco, Coatlinchan, Chalco, Huitzilopochco, Mixcoac, Azcapotzalco, Cuauhtitlan, Xochimilco, and Otompan (Otumba) (ibid.:17, 24, 48-49; Durán 1967:185).

Lower-Level Officials—Ward Administrators. Within the state hierarchy, the ward or calpulli was the smallest unit of administration. For warfare and communal labor, workers were grouped first into units of 20 and then into larger units of 100. The ward was also the basic tribute-paying unit (Zorita 1963:110).

The principal administrator of a ward was responsible for justice and heard legal cases, assisted by a group of elders and other officials called teochcautin. The members of the ward met in the principal administrator's house to deliberate concerning the group's needs and the payment of tribute, and to plan their festivals. "This is very expensive for the elder, for to keep his guests happy and peaceful, he must support them with food and drink at these meetings, which are held frequently throughout the year" (Zorita 1963:110). Other ward officials oversaw the telpochcalli, or school for young men, and the barrio temple, for which lands were set aside and worked, in order to support festivals.

There was a difference between urban and rural wards. In Tenochtitlan, there were wards of specialized craftsmen such as the featherworkers' barrio which was established by Moctezuma I.

> And when finally the craft [of] feather design became important, it came to pass in the time of Moctezuma. For when he ruled, precisely when he was reigning, then quetzal feathers arrived, and all kinds of precious feathers. In just his time [this commerce flourished]. So he settled, he housed separately, those who were his feather workers, who pertained to him. He gave them a house of their own. The feather artisans of Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco mingled with one another. [Sahagún 1958, Book 9:91]

Featherworkers produced costumes for rulers, warriors, and deities. "And some were known as featherworkers of the treasury store house; their domain was everything which was in Moctezuma's treasure store house" (ibid.).

In summary, Tenochtitlan in 1519 was the largest urban center in the Valley of Mexico, with hierarchies of administrators for both internal and external affairs. It contained monumental architecture, befitting an imperial capital, and it has served as the model for understanding the organization of central Mexican cites. Now let us briefly examine the organization of another Triple Alliance capital, Texcoco.

Texcoco

The City of Texcoco

Texcoco, located in the eastern Valley of Mexico, was capital of the kingdom of Acolhuacan. Texcoco evidently was not a tightly nucleated city, like Tenochtitlan. Although its Aztec-period nucleus covered ca. 4.5 km^2 and contained about 25,000 people (Parsons 1971:120), Texcoco's total metropolitan area covered some 80 km^2, an area estimated to have been inhabited by about 100,000 people (Hicks 1982:231). Though the city had a nucleus of palaces, it consisted mostly of dispersed clusters of houses, organized into barrios or calpultin.

The city's ceremonial center contained temples, palaces, storehouses, and a daily market. The city contained as many as 400 temples, and its main temple, like that of Tenochtitlan, was a twin temple, where Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc were worshipped.

The city contained six major barrios or sections. Each section was governed by its own noble lineage and consisted of a palace, ceremonial center, and dependent commoners (Hicks 1982:236-37). Within these divisions were subdivisions of crafts-

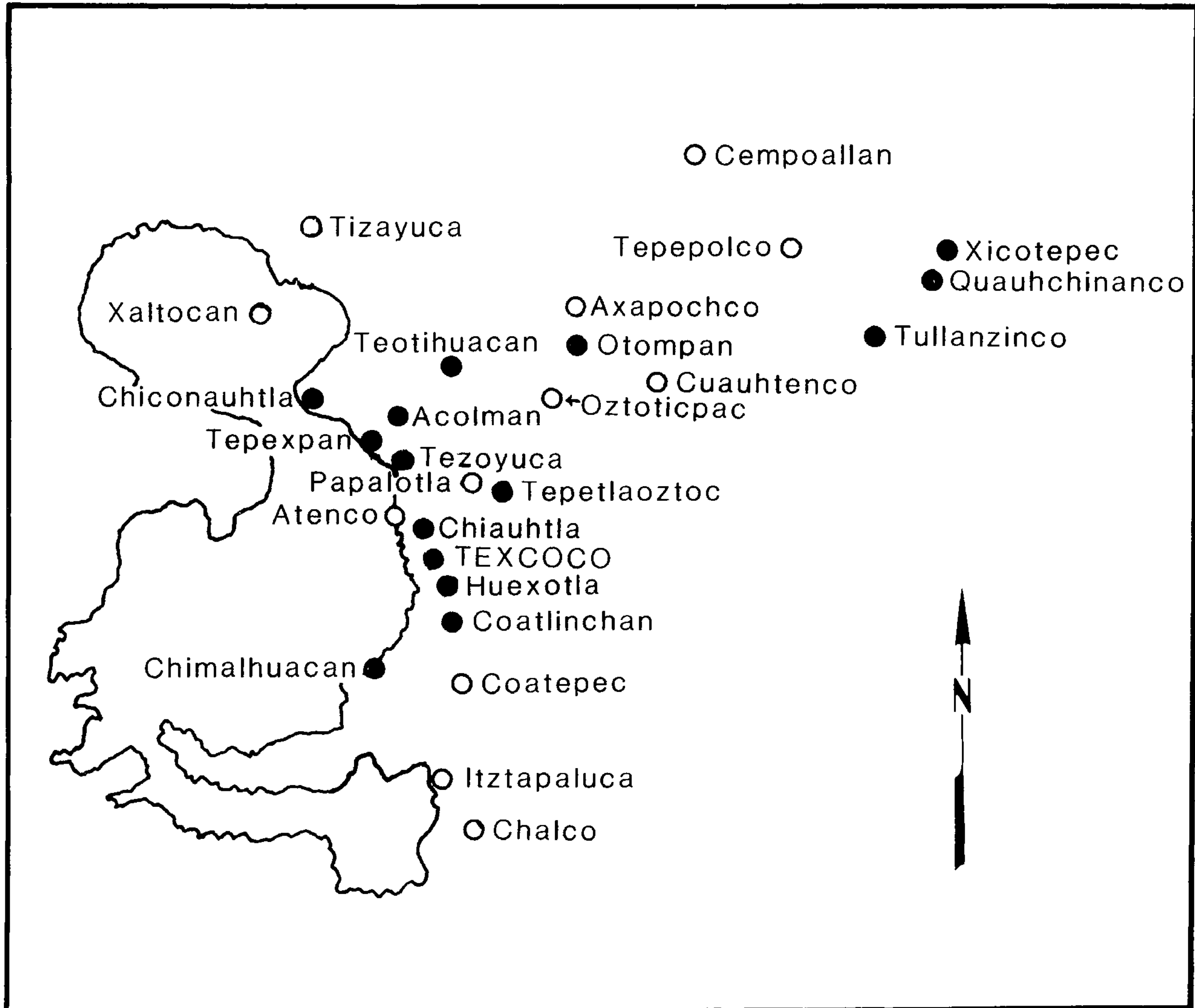

Fig. 2-8. Lordships of the Acolhua state. Those marked with solid dots are centers with a tlatoani, those with circles are centers that were governed by calpixque.

men and other specialists. This arrangement of discrete lineage-based units resembles the organization of the entire Acolhua (Texcocan) state, in which 14 provinces were administered by second-level lords subject to the Acolhua ruler.

Organization of the Acolhua State

Nezahualcoyotl became the ruler of Texcoco and the Acolhua state ca. 1430, having overthrown the Azcapotzalcan rulers, who had killed his father, Ixtlilxochitl, the previous Acolhua ruler. In 1430 or 1434, after Nezahualcoyotl and Itzcoatl of Tenochtitlan had defeated Azcapotzalco, Nezahualcoyotl reorganized the Texcocan state as follows.

Administration. Nezahualcoyotl appointed 14 hereditary rulers (tlatoque), some of whom had been deposed by the Azcapotzalcans, to rule 14 provinces, or second-level city-states. He also created 8 tributary provinces, each governed by administrators, or calpixque (see Table 2-1 and Fig. 2-8).

Twenty-nine towns served the Texcocan palace. These 29 were divided into two groups, each of which provided goods and labor for 6 months of each year (Table 2-2). The other dependencies provided tribute at different intervals, as assigned by the ruler. These two groups, along with the central section of Acolhuacan, made up three admin-

TABLE 2-2
REORGANIZATION OF THE ACOLHUA (TEXCOCAN) STATE, CA. 1430

Rulers appointed to govern 14 señoríos or provinces:	Huexotla
	Coatlinchan
	Tepetlaoztoc
	Acolman
	Tepexpan
	Tezoyuca
	Chiconauhtla
	Chiauhtla
	Chimalhuacan
	Otompan (Otumba)
	Teotihuacan
	Tullanzinco
	Quauhchinanco
	Xicotepec
Tribute-paying provinces, governed by administrators (calpixque):	Texcoco and its barrios
	Atenco
	Tepepolco
	Axapochco
	Quauhtlatzinco
	Ahuatepec
	Tetitlan
	Coatepec
	Ixtapalapa
	Tlapechhuacan
	Tecpilpan
Towns paying tribute to the ruler of Texcoco and his palace were:	Coatepec
	Iztapaluca
	Xaltocan
	Papalotla

(Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1975–77, II:89)

istrative divisions of the Acolhua state: the Sierra division, the Milpa division, and the Central division (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1975-77, II:89-90).

Judicial Officials. The three administrative groups (the Milpa, the Sierra, and Central divisions) of the Texcocan state were judicial units as well (Corona-Sánchez 1976:91). Two judges for each division were appointed, one for the nobles and one for the commoners.

Military Officials. The 14 great lords served as advisors to the Texcocan ruler and also as war chiefs (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1977, I:444-47; Torquemada 1975, II:355).

The Acolhua State's Provincial Rulers. The Acolhua administrative system employed city-states as administrative units for providing laborers and soldiers and for judicial matters, but the tlatoque were by no means isolated in their realms. Nezahualcoyotl reassigned lands so that the Texcocan city-state rulers were supported by produce from lands in each other's territories (as described in the chapter on Teotihuacan). Even the sizes of rulers' lands were dictated by Nezahualcoyotl: each portion measured 400 by 400 units (medidas) exactly (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1975-77, II:91; Paso y Troncoso 1912).

Descriptions of the Acolhua state suggest a well-organized political system based on an extensive territory ruled by an interrelated group of elites (Offner 1979; Carrasco 1984). Although the capital city, Texcoco, was less nucleated than Tenochtitlan, it did not lack monumental architecture (Parsons 1971) and even outside the capital the state invested considerable labor in public works and palaces, such as those at Tetzcotzinco (Parsons 1971). Our picture of the Texcocan state is influenced by the content of the histories, which emphasize the Acolhua rulers' administrative talents and philosophical and aesthetic contributions to Nahua culture (Nezahualcoyotl believed in an invisible deity; Alva Ixtlilxochitl emphasizes the quality of Texcocan rhetoric [Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1975-77; see also Piña Chan 1976; Offner 1979]). Recent research has investigated the local economic basis of the Acolhua state (Brumfiel 1980; Hicks 1978, 1982). Overall, the Acolhua state appears to have been a tightly organized political system administered by a combination of elite rulers and appointed administrators (Hicks 1978). The orderly, centralized hierarchy of provincial rulers and administrators was purported to have been created in a single decree; it contrasts with the Mexica system, which the histories report was forged more gradually and less neatly by Tenochtitlan, out of a number of city-states in the western and southern sections of the Valley of Mexico.

Tlacopan

The third city-state member of the Aztec Triple Alliance was Tlacopan (called Tacuba in the Colonial period). This city-state headed the Tepaneca division, or the city-states formerly ruled by Azcapotzalco. The rulers of Tenochtitlan and Texcoco defeated the Azcapotzalcans ca. A.D. 1428.

> . . . Tlacaelel was victorious over the Tepanecs. . .
>
> And together (with Itzcoatzin) he did the same with those of Tacuba, although their lord, who was called Acolnahuacatl Tzacualcatl, later surrendered and he himself came to Mexico to recognize and to give obeisance in the name of his people to King Itzcoatzin and to Tlacaeleltzin. The King of Tacuba and his successors thereafter remained as counsellors to Mexico. . . . [Chimalpahin 1978:33]

TABLE 2-3
DIVISIONS OF THE ACOLHUA STATE
WHICH PROVIDED LABOR FOR THE PALACE

Acolhuacan Center Zone: Provided Labor for The Ruler's Palace 6 Months per Year	"Milpa" Zone: Provided Labor for Texcocan Ruler's Palace During the Other 6 Months	"Sierra" Zone: Dependencies Provided Labor and Goods at Irregular Intervals
Huexotla	Teotihuacan	Tullanzinco
Coatlinchan	Tepepolco	Xicotepec
Chimalhuacan	Cempoallan	Cuauhchinanco
Tepetlaoztoc	Aztaquemecan	Pahuatlan
Acolman	Ahuatepec	Tlachilotepec
Chiauhtla	Axapochco	Papaloticpac
Coatepec	Oztoticpac	
Ixtapaluca	Tizayuca	
Tepexpan	Tlalanalpan	
Palalotla	Coyoacan	
Chiconauhtla	Cuauhtlapan	
Tezoyuca	Cuauhtlacca	
	Cuauhtatzinco	
	Oztotlauhcan	
	Achichilacayocan	
	Tetliztoc	

(Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1975–77, II: 89–90)

After the rulers of Tenochtitlan and Texcoco had defeated the Azcapotzalcans, they appointed Totoquihuatzin I (who ruled between 1431 and 1470) as the Tepaneca ruler and relocated the Tepaneca seat of government in neighboring Tlacopan. Azcapotzalco was reduced in rank to a dependency of Tlacopan.

While the city of Tlacopan had previously been ruled by a son of Tezozomoc, Acolnahuacatzin, or Aculnahuacatl Tzacualcatl (*Anales de Tlatelolco* 1948:22; *Crónica Mexicáyotl* 1949:101), under the Triple Alliance, it had four more rulers: Totoquihuatzin I (1431-1470), Chimalpopocatzin (1470-1490), Totoquihuatzin (1490-1519), and Tetlepanquetzanitzin (1519-1521) (Zantwijk 1969:131). It is likely that these four rulers were related to Tenochca rulers. Certainly they ruled with the approval of Tenochtitlan (Chimalpahin 1978:33; Motolinía 1950:284).

There is no history with great time-depth describing the development of Tlacopan. This is not surprising since this city-state was promoted to administer the Azcapotzalcan domain, and the lack of dynastic information suggests a disjunction in rulership following Tlacopan's promotion to head of the Tepaneca realm (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1975-77; Torquemada 1975, I:145, 175; Barlow 1947-48).

Despite the lack of information about the early periods in Tlacopan's development, Colonial documents have provided clues to how the Tepaneca territory was organized and administered under the Triple Alliance (*Memorial de los Pueblos*, in Paso y Troncoso 1940, XIV:118-22; *Códice Osuna* 1947; see also Gibson 1964a). The head town, Tlacopan, ruled a number of towns within its immediate territory (13 in the mid-sixteenth century; in pre-Hispanic times it had governed 16 additional towns that were held by a Spanish encomendero in the mid-1500s). Thirty-seven towns obeyed Tlacopan in warfare, paid tribute to Tlacopan, and supplied Tlacopan with stone, lime, wood, mats, shields, pottery, and other materials. A total of 32 estancias paid tribute to Tacuba's ruler, worked his lands and provided fuel for his palace for 80 days of each year. At the head of these towns and estancias were 8 administrative units (each called a tlatocayotl and governed by a tlatoani): Tlacopan, Coyoacan, Cuauhtitlan (including the lordships of Tultitlan, Tepotzotlan, and Tepexic), Tullan, and Apazco (Zantwijk 1969:131-33).

Thus, within Tlacopan's domain were towns directly in its jurisdiction, plus a number of provinces and their dependent towns, some of which were ruled by tlatoque. All of these dependencies paid tribute and labor to Tlacopan. Towns that paid tribute directly to Tlacopan's ruler were yet another category.

Superimposed on this organization was an impe-

rial tribute structure, including towns paying tribute to all three capitals (*Memorial de los Pueblos*, in Paso y Troncoso 1940, XIV:119-22; Barlow 1949:33-50). Tlacopan's ruler was supposed to have received ⅕ of the imperial tribute (Torquemada 1975, I:145, 175), or perhaps even less (*Anales de Cuauhtitlan* 1945:65). According to the *Codex Mendoza* (as interpreted by Barlow 1949:33-50), the imperial tribute provinces in Tlacopan's territory were Quahuacan, Xocotitlan, Atotonilco, Quauhtitlan, Xilotepec, Axocopan, Huepuchtla.

The lord of Tlacopan was one of the main administrators of the empire, led the Tepaneca division warriors in imperial battles, and called up labor from the Tepaneca zone for imperial projects (Durán 1967:227-28, 373, 381, 389; see Fig. 6-7). Unlike Tenochtitlan and Texcoco, there is no mention of palaces being built in Tlacopan for the ruler; although the ruler at Tlacopan shared in feasts and imperial ceremonies, he may not have received as many of the benefits of imperial leadership as the rulers of Tenochtitlan and Texcoco. As we will see in the chapters on Coyoacan and Cuauhtitlan, large parts of the Tepaneca city-states were directly administered by Mexica nobles, and the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* describes Tenochtitlan's continual meddling with city-state government, economics, and ritual in the Tepaneca area. Through its apparently rather firm control over Azcapotzalco and Tlacopan, Tenochtitlan was able to govern the old Tepaneca empire, which covered the area of the valley from southwest to north (see Fig. 2-9).

Led by Tenochtitlan, Tlacopan, and Texcoco the city-states of the Valley of Mexico together embarked on conquests of polities outside the valley, forming the Aztec empire. Triple Alliance policies for dealing with polities outside the Valley of Mexico are decribed in the following section.

The Empire

The Triple Alliance

The Triple Alliance, or confederation of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tacuba (Tlacopan) came into being after these and other subject polities rebelled against and defeated Azcapotzalco in 1428. The Triple Alliance was formed in 1430, and this new confederation replaced the Azcapotzalcan polity as dominant in the Valley of Mexico.

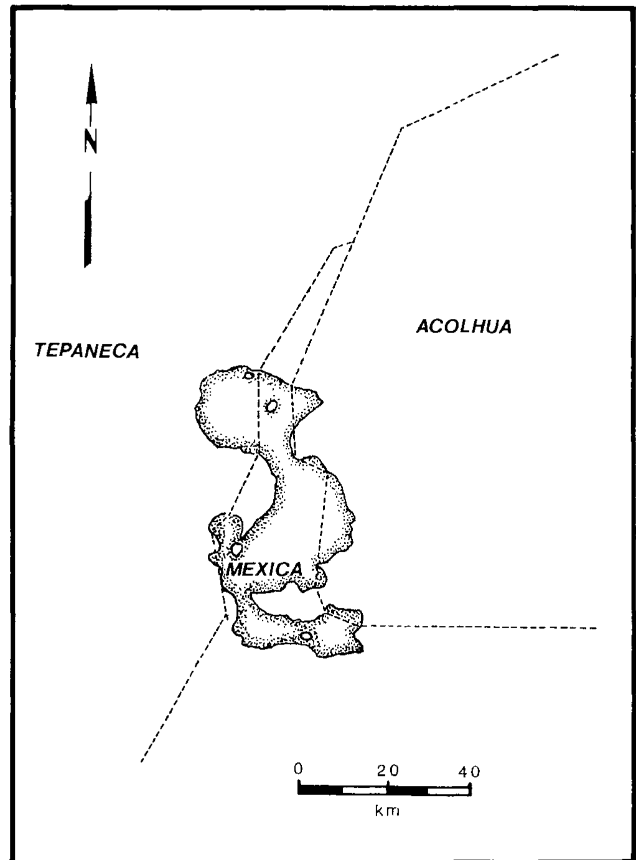

Fig. 2-9. Areas of the Valley of Mexico controlled by the Triple Alliance members in 1519 (after Gibson 1964b).

There are different versions of how this confederation came about. Tenochca (Mexica) sources recount that Nezahualcoyotl and other rulers allied themselves with Tenochtitlan voluntarily, rather than chancing a confrontation with the Mexica (Chimalpahin 1978:32-33; *Codex Ramírez* 1920:109). According to Chimalpahin, the ruler of Tlacopan,

> who was called Acolnahuacatl Tzacualcatl, later surrendered and he himself came to Mexico to recognize and to give obeisance in the name of his people to King Itzcoatzin and to Tlacaeleltzin. The King of Tacuba and his successors thereafter remained as counsellors of Mexico until the arrival of Captain Don Hernando Cortés. He did the same with those of Coyoacan. By wars Tlacaeleltzin defeated Xochimilco and Cuitlahuac. After this the four lords who governed the Republic of Four Capitals [Culhuacan, Ixtapalapa, Mexicaltzingo, and Huitzilopochco] . . . [and] the king. . .of Mizquic. . . came to Mexico to render obedience to the said lords. And thus Nezahualcoyotl, the king of Texcoco did the same; he did not want war but came himself to Mexico to render obedience in the name of his city to his kinsman

> Itzcoatzin and to his uncle Tlacaeleltzin, his mother's brother. The king of Texcoco and his successors thereafter then also remained as counsellors of Mexico until the arrival of Captain Don Hernando Cortés. [Chimalpahin 1978:32-33]

A Texcocan version disagrees with this reconstruction. The Texcocan historian Ixtlilxochitl relates that the empire of Azcapotzalco was initially divided between Texcoco and Tenochtitlan; however, Itzcoatl later reconsidered, demanded more territory, and had to be defeated by Nezahualcoyotl [Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1975-77, I:87-88, II:445-46]. Following this conflict, Texcoco received tribute from some areas within the Mexica half of the Valley of Mexico.

The foundation of the Triple Alliance is sketchy, but the formal agreement on which it was chartered was as follows:

> In Mexico City and its province there were three principal lords. They were the ruler of Mexico, the ruler of Texcoco, and the ruler of Tlacopan now called Tacuba. All the other inferior lords served and obeyed these three rulers. Since they were confederates, they divided all the land they conquered among themselves.
>
> The rulers of Texcoco and Tacuba obeyed the ruler of Mexico in matters of war. They were equals in all the rest, for none could meddle in the affairs of another. They held some towns in common, however, dividing among themselves the tribute paid by these towns. In some cases they divided the tribute into five parts: Two fell to the share of the ruler of Mexico, two to the ruler of Texcoco, and one to the ruler of Tacuba. [Zorita 1963:89]

Torquemada states that only tribute from joint conquests was divided and that each of the three participating cities was allowed to conquer and exact tribute independently. He adds that in addition, the world was divided into three territories. The land between the cardinal points east, south, and west was Tenochtitlan's. Tlacopan's territory stretched from the points west to north. The Texcocan area began slightly southwest of north and extended to east (Torquemada 1975, I:175), and while tribute was to be divided among the participants, only the ruler of each section was considered the political paramount of that area (see Fig. 2-9). Their titles were Culhua Tecuhtli (Tenochtitlan), Acolhua Tecuhtli (Texcoco), and Tepanecatl Tecuhtli (Tlacopan), or lord of the Culhua, lord of the Acolhua, and lord of the Tepaneca.

While the aforementioned agreement is the stated rule, in practice, by 1519, both Tenochtitlan and Texcoco received tribute from towns within each other's territory (Gibson 1971). Texcoco received tribute from chinampa lands in Coyoacan and Xochimilco and from lands in the territories of Tlacopan, Azcapotzalco, Tenayuca, Tepotzotlan, Cuauhtitlan, Tultitlan, Ecatepec, Huexachtitlan, Cuexomatitlan (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1975-77, I:446, II:86-88). Most of these lands are in areas formerly ruled by Azcapotzalco and may have been assimilated following the war of 1428. Others in the productive chinampa area were taken over by Texcoco later. In turn, Tenochtitlan received tribute from 36 towns in the Acolhua area (Barlow 1949:66-72). A study of the variation in tribute payment showed that

> the outer territories of Tlacopan and Texcoco, even though those towns were capitals and partners in the Triple Alliance, are listed as tributary [to Tenochtitlan]. Apparently only the capitals and part of the land in their immediate vicinities were exempted from the imperial tribute system. The exemption of other nearby towns, such as Azcapotzalco may be explained by their having been absorbed closely into the fabric of the capitals by distribution of land to the nobility of the Triple Alliance. [Borah and Cook 1963:75-76]

Apparently the tributary areas changed over time; the preserved tribute lists freeze only a few moments in the history of the empire (Gibson 1971). It is also believed that polities longest under the domination of the Triple Alliance paid heavier tribute quotas per family than newly-conquered regions. Rebellions increased the tribute assessment in regions of older subjugation to amounts approaching their capacity to pay (Borah and Cook 1963:62).

Administration of Warfare

> I have not yet been able to discover the extent of the domain of Mutezuma, but in the two hundred leagues which his messengers traveled to the north and to the south of this city, his orders were obeyed, although there were some provinces in the middle of these lands which were at war with him. . . . The greater part of the chiefs of these lands and provinces, especially those from close by resided, as I have said, for most of the year in the capital city, and all or most of their eldest sons were in the service of Mutezuma. In all these domains he had fortresses garrisoned with his own people, and governers and officials to collect the tributes which each province must pay; and they kept an account of whatever each one was obliged to give in characters and drawings on the paper which they make, which is their writing. Each of these provinces paid appropriate tributes in accordance with the nature of the land; thus Mutezuma received every sort of produce from those provinces, and was so feared by all, both present and absent, that there could be no ruler in all the world more so. [Cortés 1971:109]

The main goals and activities of the Triple Alliance were obtaining captives and collecting tribute. The chronology of expansion is recorded in the Mexica conquest lists, which give the towns and territories conquered by each ruler (see Kelly and Palerm 1952). The initial military campaign of a ruler was carried out to obtain prisoners for sacrifice and tribute for distribution as gifts and rewards, both of which would affirm and reinforce the capital's position. Other campaigns were carried out, in which the Mexica sought to obtain more prisoners, more tribute, or secure trade routes. Figure 2-10 illustrates the area from which the Triple Alliance was exacting tribute in 1519.

Triple Alliance wars were directed by the ruler of Tenochtitlan. To declare war, Mexica ambassadors, called teucnene, approached the enemy ruler to ask whether he wanted peace (and to do whatever the Mexica asked) or war. To symbolize a declaration of war, these ambassadors carried shields and spears to the opposing ruler (Durán 1964:99, 1967:109, 156).

When war was declared, the ruler of Mexico notified the rulers of Texcoco, Tlacopan, and the rest of the valley to proclaim war in their domains. He sent capes and insignia to the rulers. The commoners were ordered to go to war, and the keepers of the storehouses were instructed to give them arms (Sahagún 1954, Book 8:51-52).

The army was composed first of priests, who chanted and beat drums, and then of the rulers and armies of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan, followed by armies of Chalca, Xochimilca, Tepaneca, Chinampaneca, Malinalca, Tlahuica, etc. (Sahagún 1954, Book 8:51-52; Durán 1967:156-57). Cadres of warriors marched in order, arranged by political affiliation, and one writer estimated that Moctezuma could muster 100,000 soldiers from his subject provinces (Durán 1967:164).

In war, the object was to take prisoners alive and uninjured for sacrifice, and to capture the opposing city. A demonstration of victory was to burn the main temple of the enemy city. The conquered city's idols were taken from the city back to Tenochtitlan and kept in a temple reserved for captured gods (Sahagún 1951, Book 2:168).

Imperial Tribute Collection

When the outcome of a war was a Triple Alliance victory, the terms of surrender were set.

> And when the city which they had destroyed was attained, at once was set the tribute, the impost. [To the ruler who had conquered them] they gave that which was there made. And likewise, forthwith, a steward was placed in office, who would watch over and levy tribute. [Sahagún 1954, Book 8:53-54]

Tribute was delivered every 80 days, sometimes by an imperial official and in other cases by the conquered ruler. In addition to regularly scheduled tribute, conquered areas sometimes were ordered, as a peace settlement, to furnish labor and materials or to perform special tasks for Tenochtitlan. For instance, the conquered lords of Tepeaca (now in the state of Puebla) were ordered to furnish bearers to carry supplies, warriors, slaves for sacrifice, protection for Mexica merchants and travelers, a market area where exotic goods could be exchanged, and sustenance for the Mexica governor. In addition, they gave "gifts" to Moctezuma and his council, and the priests from Tepeaca went to Tenochtitlan to worship the Mexica deity, Huitzilopochtli (Durán 1967:159-60).

The empire imposed a "clearly defined system" of tribute collection on each conquered province (Berdan 1975:74). This chain went upwards from residential district or calpulli, to community, to regional center, to provincial capital, to Tenochtitlan. "Similar instances are found throughout the *Relaciones geográficas*, and this system probably existed with little variation throughout the empire" (ibid.). In Tenochtitlan, the principal tribute administrator was titled petlacalcatl. Provincial tribute collectors and their assistants were called calpixque (Gibson 1971:390; Berdan 1975:118; Carrasco 1976). The 38 provinces which paid tribute to Tenochtitlan are listed in the *Codex Mendoza* (1925; Barlow 1949; see also Fig. 2-10).

There is a lack of quantitative information about the distribution of tribute after it was delivered to Tenochtitlan. However, it is known that after wars, Mexica rulers gave sumptuary items to participating warriors and rulers. During the war with Tehuantepec, soldiers were stopped from sacking the city by Ahuitzotl and promised that they would get a part of the spoils (Durán 1967:388-89). Tribute was used for sustenance of state officials: the tlatoani and his court, judges, military officials, priests, provincial tlatoque, calpixque, artisans, singers, dancers, and laborers working on public projects. Tribute was also used to support state functions, such as festivals and rituals, constructing

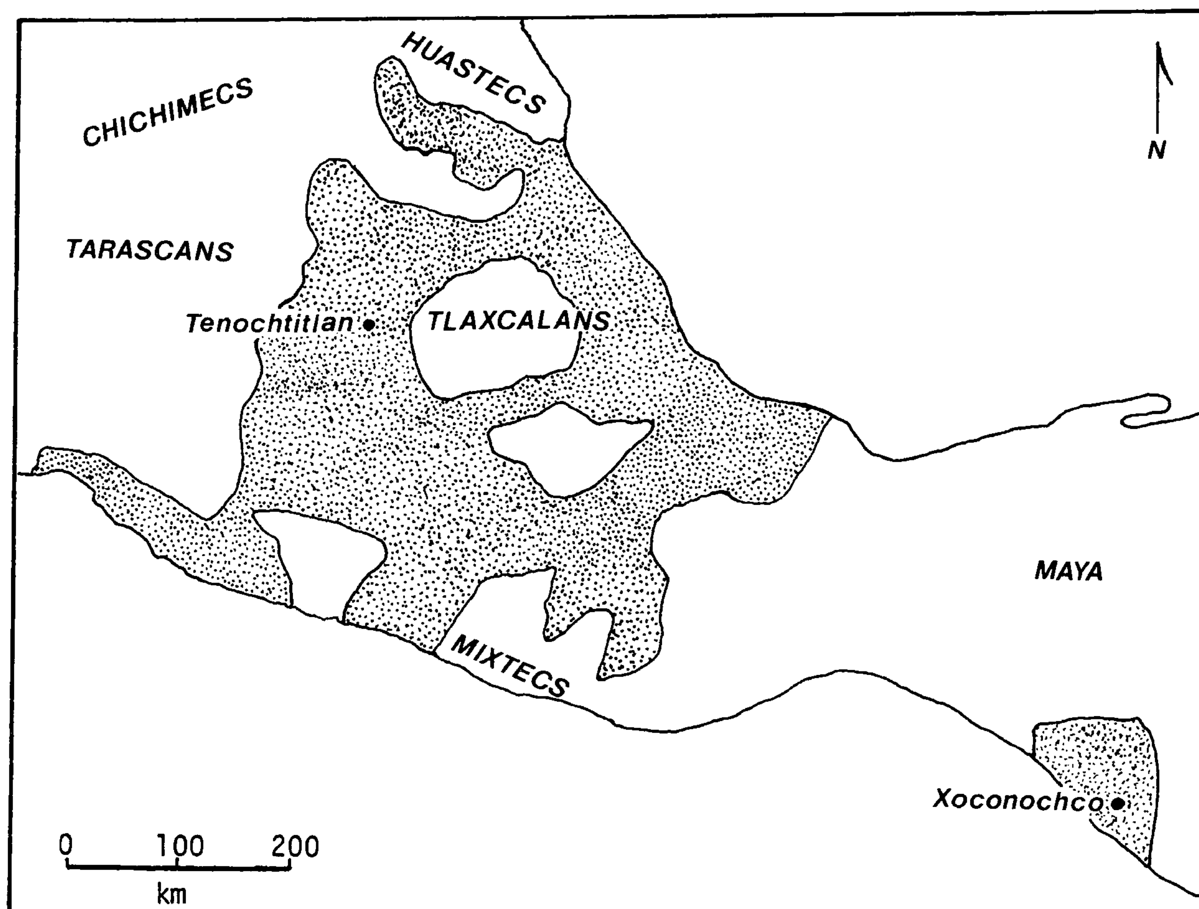

Fig. 2-10. The areas in Mesoamerica from which the Triple Alliance was exacting tribute in 1519 are indicated by shading (after Bray 1968).

public buildings, war expenses, social expenses such as food distributed during famine and to indigents, support of colonies, and political relations—for instance, gifts to foreign rulers (López Austin 1961:124-25).

I will now turn to a detailed processual analysis of five city-states—of their internal organizations, their development, their participation in regional confederations, and their interaction with the Aztec capital. Comparison of the development of individual city-states can suggest how the Aztec empire (best known from reports of its developed form, in 1519) evolved and how neighboring city-states and confederations were affected by, and in turn affected, its expansion. The city-states whose political systems were studied intensively and which are described in Chapters 3-7 are Amecameca, Cuauhtitlan, Xochimilco, Coyoacan, and Teotihuacan. The case studies are presented in the order of the last-conquered city-state to the first-conquered city-state; that is, we will look at the least acculturated or most recently assimilated polity first.