

THE AZTEC "FLOWERY WAR": A GEOPOLITICAL EXPLANATION

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This article examines the sixteenth-century Hispanic writings on the so-called Flowery War between the Aztec Empire and the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley kingdoms (ca. 1455-1519). It argues that modern writers have grossly exaggerated the ritual component and intent of this protracted war, largely through a misunderstanding of the geopolitics of both the Valley of Mexico and the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley. The thesis presented here is that the Aztec Empire was simply unable to conquer the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley, despite high incentive and heroic attempts to do so.

FROM 1519 TO THE PRESENT, Europeans and Euro-Americans have been fascinated with the protracted "Flowery War" (*xochiyaóyotl*), or "War of Flowers" (*yaoxóchitl*), between the "Aztec" Triple Alliance and the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley kingdoms of Tlaxcala, Huexotzinco, and Cholula.¹ This war raged intermittently from the mid-1450s to the arrival of the Spaniards in 1519 (see Table 1). Contemporary anthropologists (e.g., Harner 1977a, 1977b; Price 1978; Hicks 1979) are still grappling with the basic question raised by Hernando Cortés in 1519: Why did the Aztec Empire not conquer the relatively small Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley kingdoms?²

The main purpose of this article is to examine the sixteenth-century Hispanic writings on the Flowery War, especially with respect to its origin and persistence, ceremonial exchanges between the elites of the warring powers, reports of battle-field behavior and results, and Triple Alliance incentive and ability to conquer the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley kingdoms. This article will not enter into the long-running debate about the specific validity of the early Hispanic documents (see Keen 1971; Moriarty 1969; Price 1980; Santley 1981). Rather, my aim is to treat them cautiously but respectfully as ethnohistorical data and to show that the major twentieth-century writings on the Flowery War all contain important elements that cannot be reconciled with these materials. In fact, some contemporary writers have taken to employing these ethnohistorical documents piecemeal and selectively, without regard for overall context.³

EARLY EXPLANATIONS OF THE FLOWERY WAR

Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who accompanied Cortés into the central Mexican highlands in 1519, reports (1928:227-28) the following conversation between Cortés and two Tlaxcalan nobles, Xicotécatl the Elder and Maxixcatzin:

He [Xicotécatl] said that Montezuma . . . could place a hundred and fifty thousand men in the field. . . .

Cortés asked them how it was that with so many warriors as they said came down on them they had never been entirely conquered. They answered that although the Mexicans [Triple Alliance] sometimes defeated them and killed them, and carried off many . . . for sacrifice, many of the enemy were also left dead . . . and others made prisoners, and that they [Triple Alliance] never could come so secretly that they [the Tlaxcalans] did not get some warning, and that . . . they mustered all their forces and with the help of . . . Huexotzinco they defended themselves and made counter attacks. That as all the provinces . . . raided by Montezuma and placed under his rule were ill disposed towards the Mexicans . . . they did not fight with good will; indeed, it was from these very men that they [the Tlaxcalans] received warnings, and for this reason they had defended their country. . . .

Some six weeks later, in Tenochtitlán, Andrés de Tapia (1866:752)⁴

asked Mutezcuma and others his captains, why, having those enemies surrounded, they did not finish them off once and for all, and they replied: "We could easily do so; but then there would remain nowhere for the young men to train [militarily], except far from here; and, also, we wanted there to always be [nearby] people to sacrifice to our gods."

This official Tenochca explanation for the protracted intervalley war and for the continued independence of Tlaxcala was echoed by most postconquest chroniclers who wrote on the subject (Motolinía 1858:46; Durán 1964:140-41, 238, ch. 28, 59; Durán 1971:93-94, ch. 3; Codex Ramírez 1878:64; Ixtlilxóchitl 1965:206-7, ch. 41; Pomar 1891:44-47). They ignored the Tlaxcalan viewpoint, as have most later writers.

TABLE 1
Chronology of Major Events in the Flowery War

ca. 1450-55	"Flowery War" begins between Triple Alliance (Tenochtitlán, Tetzcoco, Tlacopán) and Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley allied kingdoms (Tlaxcala, Huexotzinco, Cholula). Famine of 1 Rabbit (1454).
ca. 1484	King Nezahualpilli of Tetzcoco "put his hand upon Huexotzinco."
ca. 1490	Nezahualpilli of Tetzcoco again "put his hand upon Huexotzinco."
ca. 1499	Tlaxcala attacks Huexotzinco, which appeals to Tenochtitlán for aid but is refused.
ca. 1503	Huexotzinco defeats Triple Alliance in Battle of Atlixco, in "a great slaughter" and rout.
ca. 1506	Major but indecisive battle between Triple Alliance and forces of Huexotzinco, Tlaxcala, Cholula, and Tliluhquitepec.
ca. 1507-12	Tlaxcala attacks Huexotzinco, burning crops, seizing lands, and causing famine.
ca. 1512	Huexotzinco joins Triple Alliance; together, they fight a major but indecisive battle against Tlaxcala.
ca. 1516	Huexotzinco quits Triple Alliance, rejoining Tlaxcala and Cholula.
ca. 1517	Major defeat of Triple Alliance by Tlaxcala-Huexotzinco.
ca. 1518	Definitive subjugation of Huexotzinco by Tlaxcala. Cholula tilts towards Triple Alliance but remains independent.
1519	Spaniards arrive in Tlaxcala.
1521	Tlaxcala provides some twenty thousand soldiers for the siege of Tenochtitlán, which eventually surrenders to the Spanish.

The fullest early statement concerning the origin as well as the initial rationale of the Flowery War is provided by the Tetzcoacan nobleman Ixtlilxóchitl, who explains it as a response to the terrible famine of 1 Rabbit, or 1454, which followed four years of crop failure owing to late frosts and severe drought. The famine affected all of the *tierra fría* (above 2,000 meters altitude) of the central Mexican highlands, including all of the Valley of Mexico and much of the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley. Many people died and many others pawned themselves or their children for food to non-Aztec peoples (especially the Totonac) living on the semitropical eastern slopes of the gulf (see Hassig 1981). According to Ixtlilxóchitl (1965:206-7, ch. 41):

the priests . . . of Mexico [Tenochtitlán] said that the gods were angry at the empire, and that to placate them it was necessary to sacrifice many men, and that this had to be done regularly. . . . Nexahualcoyotzin [Nexahualcōyotl, king of Tetzcoco] . . . said that it sufficed

to sacrifice war captives. . . . the priests replied that the wars . . . were very remote and not regular, that the captives came from a great distance and [thus were] debilitated, that they [the sacrifices] should be very regular and the people [sacrificial victims] fresh and fit for sacrifice to the gods. . . . Xicoténcatl, one of the lords of Tlaxcalan, was of the opinion that from that time forward they should begin to have wars between the señoría [kingdom] of Tlaxcala and that of Tetzcuco and their allies, and that they should designate a battlefield on which to have frequent battles, and that those who were made . . . captives in them be sacrificed to the gods, which would be very acceptable to them [the gods] as their food, being hot and fresh . . . ; besides, there would be a place [thusly] where the sons of the lords could train, [so] that famous captains would come from there, and that it be understood not to exceed the boundaries of the battlefield designated for that purpose and to try to take lands and señoríos . . . and that their battle be held the first days of their months [i.e., every twenty days], beginning with Tlaxcalan the first time, and . . . the second on the battlefield chosen by Huexotzinco, and the third on the battlefield of Cholulan . . . ; and then begin again . . . [with] Tlaxcalan.

The main features of Ixtlilxóchitl's account also appear in the writings of another Tetzcoacan, Juan Pomar (1891:44-45, 46-47, 49). A problematical feature of both accounts is the supposed twenty-day periodicity of engagements and the rotation of Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley participants. Neither of these details appears in the other ethnohistorical sources, nor do the accounts of specific engagements in the protracted Flowery War provide supporting evidence for these practices.

The Tenochca sources do not mention a treaty origin for the intervalley Flowery War, nor do they explain this military activity as a consequence of the famine of 1454. Durán (1964:140-41, ch. 28) has the Flowery War originating in the Tenochca search for plentiful sacrificial victims for the new Temple of Huitzilopochtli constructed by Moteuczoma I (1440-69).⁵ On the other hand, Tezozómoc (1878: 362-63, ch. 39) reports a conversation between Moteuczoma I and his renowned advisor Tlacaelel, in which the latter presents a mainly secular and imperialistic proposal for launching a war with the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley kingdoms.⁶ Specifically, he is said to have proposed to make⁷

cruel war with them to render vassalage from them and to have something to sacrifice to our gods; . . . with these vassals we will have a great fortune of offerings and tribute, riches and property. . . . and for us the Mexicans [goods] for our trade and gain, that will not be so far away; suffice that we get them in Huexotzinco, Cholula, Atlixco, Itzucan [Izucar] . . . , whither they will be redeemed and we will buy slaves, gold, very rich precious stones, and feathers. . . . With such markets the Tlaxcalans will come to them, and will be bought there, and they will be sold as slaves, and with this maneuver we will have very nearby wars for achieving victory and gaining slaves for our glory and the adornment of our persons, with gold and feather bracelets, gold lip-plugs, gold ear-plugs, precious stones, plaited ribbons set with stones of great . . . value.

Diego Muñoz Camargo, the major sixteenth-century source on Tlaxcala, vigorously rejected the majority opinions expressed by his literary contemporaries about the Flowery War (1892:123-24, ch. 15):⁸

There being . . . continual wars between Tlaxcalans and Mexicans, the encounters and skirmishes between them were also continuous, in order to exercise the army and just in case one day Mocheuzoma [*sic*] could conquer them and make them his tributaries, although some thinkers are of the opinion that, if Motecuhzoma had wanted to destroy the Tlaxcalans he would have done so, but rather that he kept them like quail in a cage in order not to lack training for war, and because he had to occupy the sons of the lords, and also to have . . . people with whom to sacrifice and serve their idols . . . , which I am not able to bring myself to believe for many reasons; because if it were so, the lords of this province [Tlaxcala] would

not have accepted so earnestly the [Spanish] request to go against the Mexicans . . . ; [an] other is the enmity, which was mortal and terrible, that they [Mexica and Tlaxcalteca] had, for never did they form kinship at all between them, neither through marriage nor by any other means . . . rather the word Mexicans was odious and detestable to them, as was the word Tlaxcalans to [the Mexica]; because it is . . . well-known that in all other provinces they married one another.

Muñoz Camargo (1892:109-10) blames the Triple Alliance, especially Tenochtitlán, for beginning the intervalley hostilities and portrays his native Tlaxcala as the innocent victim. He has Tlaxcala sending ambassadors to Tenochtitlán to ask "what had been the cause for their bringing war, there being no reason for it." In response, the (unnamed) Tenochca king supposedly proclaimed himself "Universal Lord of the whole World" and offered the Tlaxcalans the opportunity to submit peacefully as tributaries—lest he "come upon them." The Tlaxcalans reportedly replied that "they would die before such a thing happened," whereupon the Triple Alliance "came to corral them within a few years within their own lands" and "kept them shut in more than sixty years" before the Spaniards arrived.⁹

In summary, Harner's (1977a:131) and Soustelle's (1970:101) *prima facie* case for the hypothesis that the intervalley Flowery War was a direct, treaty-based, sheerly ritual response to the famine of 1 Rabbit (1454) is difficult to sustain when we examine all of the major ethnohistorical sources, rather than a few carefully selected ones (cf. "References Cited" in Harner 1977a:133-35). Only Tetzocan sources (Pomar 1891; Ixtlilxóchitl 1965) support that hypothesis, and only if they are taken as literal records of historical fact. The Tenochca sources are not uniform in this regard; Durán (1964) and the Codex Ramírez (1878) damage the hypothesis by omission, while Tezozómoc (1878) not only fails to tie the onset of the intervalley war directly and causally to the famine of 1454, but also stresses secular and imperialistic motives. Muñoz Camargo (1892), the major source on Tlaxcala, argues explicitly against the ritual explanation of the intervalley war and posits, instead, Tenochca imperialistic expansion. Although the time frame employed by Muñoz Camargo—"more than sixty years"—would make the onset of this war roughly coeval with the great famine, he makes no causal connection between these events (cf. Hassig 1981).

INTERVALLEY GIFT EXCHANGES AND CEREMONIAL VISITS

One aspect of the intervalley Flowery War that, at first blush, seems odd is the supposedly secret exchange of gifts and ceremonial visitations between the rulers of the belligerent powers. Pomar (1891:45) states that both King Nezahualcōyotl (ruled ca. 1431-72) and King Nezahualpilli (ruled ca. 1472-1515) of Tetzococo carried out gift exchanges with Huexotzinco and Tlaxcala. "I was able to get to know one of the ambassadors," he claims (Pomar 1891:45). In explanation, Pomar recalls that the Tlaxcalans and Huexotzincans had sheltered the young Prince Nezahualcōyotl in ca. 1418-28, when King Tezozómoc of the Tepaneca Empire was offering a reward for his capture or death (see Ixtlilxóchitl 1965:99-152, ch. 20-31; Gillmor 1968), and that these two Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley kingdoms had later helped Nezahualcōyotl reclaim his throne in the aftermath of the 1428-30 Aztec-Tepaneca War (see Isaac 1983). Ixtlilxóchitl (1965:195, ch. 39), the major Tetzocan source, provides a similar statement and rationale.

Muñoz Camargo (1892:112), writing from the standpoint of Tlaxcala, reports: and notwithstanding this [the wars], the Mexican [Tenochca] and Tetzcocan Lords, *during times when they imposed truces for a while*, sent to the Lords of Tlaxcala huge presents and gifts [presentes y dadas] of gold, cloth, cacao, salt and all the things that they [the Tlaxcalans] lacked, without the plebian people knowing about it, and they met one another secretly, maintaining the proper discretion. [emphasis added]

I believe Muñoz Camargo provides a major clue for an understanding of these exchanges in the phrase "during times when they imposed truces for a while." Durán (1964:192, ch. 43) also has the famous Tenochca counselor Tlacaoel saying of these visits and gift exchanges: "It is reasonable that there be truces and greetings among the rulers." Periodic lulls in the war would have served several purposes. First, they would have given the Triple Alliance time to replenish its losses with fresh recruits from outlying provinces, to put down insurrections from within, and to pursue territorial expansion in other directions (see Isaac 1983). Second, the lulls would have provided the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley kingdoms an opportunity to rest their troops and to assess their long-range chances of remaining independent, that is, to mull over the costs of continued resistance versus capitulation.

With respect to this last point, the Tenochca kings appear to have lost no opportunity to provide their eastern enemies with food for thought. Both Sahagún and Durán state that "enemy" leaders were secretly invited to view certain Triple Alliance festivals in Tenochtitlán, especially those involving substantial numbers of human sacrifices. Sahagún (1969[1]:147) states that this was done so that these enemy rulers "would tell in their lands what happened with regard to the captives." According to Durán (1964:187-88, ch. 42), King Ahuítzotl of Tenochtitlán secretly invited the rulers of Tlaxcala, Huexotzinco, Cholula, Michoacán, and Metztitlán to his coronation in 1486,

with the intention of showing the enemy . . . the greatness of Mexico. It was designed to bewilder them, fill them with fear, and make them see the grandeur and abundance of jewels and gifts that were exchanged on such an occasion. . . . in order to show that the Aztecs were the masters of all the riches of the earth.

The next year, 1487, these same so-called enemy leaders are reported as secretly in attendance at the rededication of the Great Temple in Tenochtitlán (Durán 1964: 192-99, ch. 43-44), in order for King Ahuítzotl to display "his grandeur to all the nations, the magnificence of his empire and the courage of his people" (1964:194). Reportedly, "the enemies, guests, and strangers were bewildered, amazed. They saw that the Aztecs were masters of the entire world and they realized that the Aztec people had conquered all the nations" (1964:195). The foreign dignitaries "departed from Mexico bewildered by the majesty of the city and the amazing number of [sacrificial] victims who had died. They were also astonished at the wealth that had been given away during those days" (1964:199). Ambassadors from the so-called enemy states of Tlaxcala, Huexotzinco, Cholula, Tliluhquitepec, Michoacán, Metztitlán, "and the land of the Huastecs" were also reportedly present for the coronation of Moteuczoma II, in 1502 (Durán 1964:224-26, ch. 54).¹⁰ "From this day on . . . Moteuczoma invited the enemy rulers three times a year to great feasts" (1964:226). Of course both sides can engage in bluff and implied threat. Durán says that "the Tlaxcalans"—perhaps a shorthand for the three kingdoms of that area, as we will see later—also invited Moteuczoma II "to their solemnities and when he attended or sent representatives it was without knowledge of his own people, nor did the masses of

Tlaxcalans know anything about it. However . . . he seldom attended these feasts in person" (1964:226).

Why were the gift exchanges and visitations supposedly kept secret? Durán (1964:193-94, ch. 63) says that the rulers "did not wish the common people . . . to suspect that kings and rulers made alliances, came to agreements and formed friendships at the cost of the life of the common man, and the shedding of his blood." But the Tenochca kings also issued their invitations and entertained visiting dignitaries "without the knowledge of the kings of Tacuba [Tlacopán] and Texcoco" (Durán 1964:225, ch. 54). This aspect of the secrecy may reflect the intense rivalry between Tenochtitlán and Tetzcoco for tributary provinces (see Gibson 1971). Personal encounters arranged and lavish gifts given by either of these cities might influence enemy nobles to negotiate capitulation, and thus tribute, with it rather than with the other.

In summary, the gift exchanges and ceremonial visitations between the rulers of enemy powers do not seem odd once we examine them in the full context of the ethnohistorical sources. Certainly these features of the intervalley Flowery War do not demonstrate that the conflict had no geopolitical basis, that it was "nothing but the suitable instrument for fulfilling the obligation contracted with the gods," as Canseco Vincourt (1966:122-23) argues in this regard. To the contrary, the proffering and accepting of invitations and gifts apparently signaled or prolonged strategic pauses in the long war; these acts also provided negotiation opportunities that might end it.

REPORTS OF THE MAJOR BATTLES

Huexotzinco was for long the strongest political power in the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley (see Davies 1968:88-91), and it was the main focus of Triple Alliance military operations in that area, early in the sixteenth century. For the period before the turn of the century, there is a paucity of specific information on intervalley battles (see Isaac 1983). We are told, however, that Huexotzinco and Tlaxcala were encouraging revolt and resistance against Triple Alliance expansion in the present states of Veracruz (Durán 1964:114, 125-27, ch. 21, 24; Tezozómoc 1878:343-46, ch. 34) and Oaxaca (Torquemada 1943[1]:159-62) in the mid-fifteenth century. In fact, Torquemada (1943) dates this interference in Oaxaca to the year after the famine of 1 Rabbit, i.e., 1455. Also, Chimalpahín (1965:107, 113, 217, 223) of Chalco states that Tetzcoco's King Nezahualpilli "put his hand upon Huexotzinco" in 1484 and again in 1490—apparently meaning that he temporarily subjugated that kingdom in those years (cf. Ixtlilxóchitl 1965:275-77, ch. 61). Furthermore, both Durán (1964:194, ch. 43) and Ixtlilxóchitl (1965:273, ch. 60) report that substantial numbers of prisoners of war from the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley kingdoms were sacrificed in Tenochtitlán in 1487, for the rededication of the Great Temple.

Despite its apparent battlefield reverses during the 1480s, Huexotzinco delivered the Triple Alliance a humiliating defeat in the Battle of Atlixco, ca. 1503 (Durán 1964:231-36, ch. 57; Muñoz Camargo 1892:ch. 13).¹¹ According to Durán (1964:231-32, ch. 57), the Triple Alliance took the offensive with an army of one hundred thousand, which suffered "a great slaughter" and rout, although many Huexotzincan soldiers were killed as well. Moteuczoma II "began to weep bitterly" when he heard

the field reports, and "everyone sobbed in sadness and despair" (Durán 1964:235). Tezozómoc (1878:611-13, ch. 91-92) also reports this engagement as a Triple Alliance defeat, noting that "the bodies of the dead impeded the living" (1878:611) on the battlefield; the headnote to his ch. 92 (1878:612) says that "more than forty thousand died on both sides," apparently referring to their combined casualties.¹²

The next major Triple Alliance battle with Huexotzinco probably occurred in 1506 (see Chimalpahín 1965:229), reportedly at the instigation of an allied force from Huexotzinco, Tlaxcala, Cholula, and Tliluhquitepec (Durán 1964:238-39, ch. 59). Once again "a great slaughter" took place, in which the Triple Alliance "lost eight thousand two hundred soldiers" but "performed a similar feat against the Cholulans and the fields were covered with dead bodies and many prisoners had been taken" (1964:238). Tezozómoc (1878:624, ch. 94) also reports massive slaughter by the Triple Alliance army, as well as the battlefield deaths of ten thousand of its own soldiers. Although he seems to want to portray this battle as a Triple Alliance victory, Tezozómoc reports that Moteuczoma II listened to the battle reports "with great sighs and tears." Durán (1964:238) says that the Tenochca king "wept bitterly and complained about the gods." Incredibly enough, Durán (1964:238) implies that the Tenochca king was mistaken in his grief, because "Tlaxcala and Mexico fought in order to practice war and not because of enmity"!

Durán has this engagement ending with the one-day battle reported above, but Tezozómoc (1878:625-26, ch. 94) says the Triple Alliance army called up reinforcements and then made "a cruel slaughter" and captured 800 enemies besides. Tezozómoc (1878:630-35, ch. 95-96) further reports a slightly later battle with Huexotzinco and Cholula, in which 8,200 Triple Alliance troops were killed (1878:633). It is not clear whether Tezozómoc intends these fatality figures to include soldiers captured for later sacrifice as well as those killed on the battlefield. At the same time, 6,000 Huexotzinco-Cholula deaths are reported (1878:632) from this skirmish; even if this figure is intended to include sacrificial captives as well as battlefield dead, the latter would have numbered 5,600, because only 400 Huexotzinco-Cholula captives are reported (1878:635).

To summarize, Durán would have this particular episode of the intervalley Flowery War resulting in 8,200 Triple Alliance dead, apparently on the battlefield rather than on the sacrificial altar. Tezozómoc's mortality figures total 18,200, mostly, his account implies, in battlefield deaths. At the same time, Tezozómoc reports a total of 1,200 enemies captured by the Triple Alliance in two of the three skirmishes he describes. Tezozómoc alone provides specific mortality figures for the Tlaxcala-Pueblan forces—either 5,600 or 6,000 battlefield deaths—but from only one of the three skirmishes. The picture is further clouded by Ixtlilxóchitl's (1965:309-10, ch. 71) reporting only one battle (which he dates to 1508) in this episode, for which he numbers the Triple Alliance dead at only 2,800 (an inversion of Durán's and Tezozómoc's figure of 8,200 for the first and third battle, respectively). Thus we are limited to saying that the ethnohistorical sources report this episode of the intervalley Flowery War as being hard-fought and bloody, that they indicate battlefield deaths running into the thousands on both sides, and that the number of captives for eventual sacrifice probably also numbered in the thousands.

Around 1507 Tlaxcala attacked Huexotzinco, doubtless seizing the opportunity to fall upon this former ally while it was still weakened from its recent wars with

the Triple Alliance. Muñoz Camargo (1892:114) says that "within a short time" the Tlaxcalans "had cornered the Huexotzincans in the high Sierra Nevada and volcano [Popocatepetl]." They then burned Huexotzinco's maize fields for two years in a row, reducing the kingdom to famine (Tezozómoc 1878:638-39, ch. 97; Durán 1964: 239-40, ch. 60; Chimalpahín 1965:232-33). Around 1512 the Huexotzincans sent ambassadors to Tenochtitlán, proclaiming their great desire to become Triple Alliance subjects and "true brothers in arms" (Tezozómoc 1878:638).¹³ Chimalpahín (1965: 225-26, 232) states that this was the second time (the first being in 1499) that the Huexotzincans had appealed to Tenochtitlán in desperation from attacks by Tlaxcala, and that on the earlier occasion Tenochca King Ahuítzotl had rejected their plea and jailed the ambassadors and their accompanying refugees. This time the three kings of the Triple Alliance reportedly conferred and then accepted the Huexotzincans into their polity, opening Tenochtitlán to large numbers of their starving refugees.

Bolstered by the remnant forces of Huexotzinco, the Triple Alliance quickly attacked Tlaxcala. Both Durán and Tezozómoc treat this engagement as a Triple Alliance victory, doubtless because it ended with the capture of a famous Tlaxcalan general (Durán 1964:240, ch. 60; Tezozómoc 1878:644, ch. 98). Nevertheless, this hard-fought battle raged for twenty days (Durán 1964:240), and the Triple Alliance was fought to a complete standstill and exhaustion before an emergency levy of reinforcements "of all kinds of people in the shortest possible time" (Tezozómoc 1878:644) was sent to the front. Either during this war or shortly after it, "all the flower of the captains and soldiers" of Tetzococo died in an engagement with Tlaxcala, according to Ixtlilxóchitl (1965:321-24, ch. 74). He states (1965:324) that "there was so much blood . . . that it [the battlefield] looked like a flowing river [río caudaloso]."

The Huexotzincan refugees remained in Tenochtitlán and Chalco for about four years, i.e., until ca. 1516, before having a falling out with their Tenochca hosts and returning home (see Chimalpahín 1965:232; Tezozómoc 1878:645-46, ch. 98; Barlow 1948:159-60; Hist. Mex. Pin. 1965:63, para. 259-61). Shortly thereafter, the Tenochcas reportedly invited the Huexotzincans to the dedication ceremony for King Moteuczoma II's statue and were rebuffed. The Tenochca sent ambassadors to King Tecuanéhautl of Huexotzinco to inquire the reason. As Tezozómoc (1878: 648, ch. 99) tells the story, Tecuanéhautl said, "in a low voice so that his vassals would not hear: 'Tell King Moctezuma, our good and loyal nephew, that I kiss his hands, that I will send [some] nobles there [to discuss the matter]; because I am now terrified, I can give you no further response.'" At a later, private meeting in the mountains, the Huexotzincan emissaries explained that "Cholula had threatened them, that if they . . . made up to the Mexicans, they [the Cholulans] and the Tlaxcalans would quickly kill them all" (Tezozómoc 1878:649). Huexotzinco and the Triple Alliance soon resumed skirmishing (see Durán 1964:246, ch. 62; cf. Tezozómoc 1878:652, ch. 100).

Probably in 1517 the Triple Alliance launched a major offensive against the combined forces of Huexotzinco and Tlaxcala. It is not certain that Cholula took an active part in this engagement, although Durán (1964:241, ch. 61) still lists it as an enemy. Durán (1964:242) sums up this battle tersely: "a brave battle took place,

the Aztecs being completely vanquished, some killed, some captured. All of the [Aztec] commanders were taken prisoner by the enemy." Muñoz Camargo (1892: 116-17) says that the Triple Alliance army "fled, in disarray or wounded, with the loss of many men and riches," and that the Tlaxcalans ended up with "many prisoners taken at little cost." Tezozómoc (1878:650, ch. 99) reports that the Triple Alliance army had killed and captured many Tlaxcalans but also that "many people from both sides died." Indeed, "half of the men [from Tenochtitlán] had died and the other half had been captured" (Tezozómoc 1878:652, ch. 100). Durán (1964: 242) has King Moteuczoma railing furiously against his officers, stripping them of their insignia and revoking their sumptuary privileges. The next year, however, the officers redeemed themselves in a successful campaign against the combined forces of Huexotzinco and Tlaxcala, which were led by Xicoténcatl (the Younger?) of this latter kingdom (Durán 1964:245, ch. 61; Chimalpahín 1965:233). As we shall see later, it is not mere coincidence that Tlaxcala was commanding the military forces of the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley in 1518.

By way of partial summation of this section, we have seen that a careful reading of the ethnohistorical reports of battlefield behavior and outcomes in the intervalley engagements for the period 1503-18 reveals a profusion of such phrases as "a great slaughter," "the bodies of the dead impeded the living," "the fields were covered with dead bodies," "a cruel slaughter," "so much blood that it looked like a flowing river," and other indications of hard-fought battles with high casualty rates. In short, the source materials offer strong testimony against Soustelle's (1970:101) assertion that "on the battlefield the warriors did their utmost to kill as few men as possible," an assertion that is one of the foundation stones of Michael Harner's recent ecological explanation of Aztec warfare (quoted in Harner 1977a:131). Similarly, Frederick Hicks's (1979:90) conclusion that the protracted intervalley Flowery War was fought for sport appears odd, to say the least, when we consider the staggering casualty rates indicated by the ethnohistorical sources.¹⁴

INTER- AND INTRAVALLEY GEOPOLITICS

Huexotzinco was the main military target of the Triple Alliance in the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley during the opening years of the sixteenth century. As a result, Huexotzinco suffered heavy manpower losses through battlefield deaths and capture for sacrifice. The locus of power in the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley temporarily shifted, ca. 1507, when Tlaxcala fell upon the weakened Huexotzinco and drove it to seek relief by joining the Triple Alliance, ca. 1512.¹⁵ If we follow Chimalpahín (1965: 107, 113, 217, 223, 225, 232), these events repeated a scenario from the previous century. After King Nezahualpilli of Tetzaco "put his hand upon Huexotzinco" in 1484 and 1490, according to Chimalpahín, Tlaxcala fell upon its weakened erstwhile ally and drove it to Tenochtitlán for relief, by 1499. On that occasion, King Ahuítzotl of Tenochtitlán is said to have treated the Huexotzinco ambassadors as enemies, jailing them and refusing aid.

Why did King Ahuítzotl reject this entreaty from Huexotzinco ca. 1499? An answer consistent with Michael Harner's (1977a, 1977b) recent ecological explanation of the Flowery War would be that King Ahuítzotl wished to retain Huexotzinco as an enemy polity in order to have a nearby source of captives—a veritable human

stockyard—for sacrificial offerings and cannibalism. But if that is so, why then did King Moteuczoma II so readily welcome Huexotzinco into the empire, ca. 1512, stopping the harvest of captives from that polity until ca. 1516? Certainly, there is no indication that the Aztec gods had lost their thirst for sacrificial blood in the meantime (see Cook 1946). Being unable to explain variation (in policy towards Huexotzinco) by appeal to a constant (the use of war captives for sacrifice), we must look to Central Mexican geopolitics itself. We are told that, ca. 1512, Huexotzinco asked to be incorporated into the Triple Alliance and was welcomed; in contrast, we are told nothing about what Huexotzinco tried to negotiate ca. 1499—a truce? an alliance? incorporation into the Triple Alliance? Not knowing what was offered, we have no way of knowing why King Ahuítzotl rejected the offer. What we can say is that the Triple Alliance's willing incorporation of Huexotzinco, ca. 1512, and its cessation of hostilities with Cholula, ca. 1518, cast serious doubt upon Harner's (1977a:131; 1977b:51) more general claim with respect to the intervalley Flowery War, namely, that the Triple Alliance "viewed it essential to have conveniently nearby 'enemy' populations on whom they could prey for captives."

By 1519 the geopolitics of the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley had changed dramatically. Cholula had tilted towards the Triple Alliance, and war-torn Huexotzinco had been conquered definitively by Tlaxcala (Chimalpahín 1965:233; Barlow 1948:159-60; Díaz del Castillo 1928:242-55; Cortés 1928:52-60, 2nd ltr.). Tlaxcala had become the major belligerent military power in its region. Thus the Spaniards dealt first with Tlaxcala and only secondarily with Huexotzinco and Cholula. For the same reason, Tlaxcala looms many times larger in conquest history than does any other power in its region. The Spaniards were doubtless unaware of the recency of Tlaxcala's dominance. Otherwise they would not have been so intent upon inquiring, as we saw earlier, just how it was that Tlaxcala, *specifically* (rather than the combination of Tlaxcala, Huexotzinco, and Cholula) had so long resisted Triple Alliance conquest. Their historical ignorance is excusable; that of twentieth-century scholars is not.

In this regard, the validity of historian Charles Gibson's (1952:26) statement that "the Tlaxcalans had been almost unique in central Mexico for the success of their resistance to the Aztecs" has to rest upon one's liberal interpretation of "almost unique" (see Davies 1968 on Metztlán, Tototepec del Sur, Teotitlán, and Yopitzinco, as well as Huexotzinco, Cholula, and Tlaxcala). A similar historical naiveté appears in anthropologist Michael Harner's recent assertion (1977b:51, 1977a:131) that "the Tlaxcalan state was preserved [by the Aztecs] as a stockyard" for sacrificial victims. No plausible case could be made that the Triple Alliance had made any special effort to preserve Tlaxcala, specifically, for any purpose whatsoever. Nor can we sustain anthropologist Alfonso Caso's (1958:14) characterization of the long Flowery War "as a kind of tournament in which the enemies 'of the house,' the Tlaxcalans, were the special challengers."

A reasonable interpretation of the ethnohistorical record is that the Triple Alliance consistently concentrated its main military effort in the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley upon that area's dominant belligerent power. Most often in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, that power was Huexotzinco, which was able to coerce Tlaxcala and Cholula into alliance with it. Accordingly, Triple Alliance attention

focused upon Huexotzinco. Tlaxcala became the dominant belligerent power ca. 1512-16 and again, definitively, in 1518-19; only in those moments (and perhaps ca. 1499) was Tlaxcala the "special challenger" of the Triple Alliance. Even at that, Tlaxcala could not mount the same order of challenge as Huexotzinco had done, because Tlaxcala was unable to coerce Cholula into alliance with it and Huexotzinco. Whereas the Triple Alliance had previously faced a league of three powerful enemies in the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley, it now faced a league of only two. Furthermore, the junior partner in the new league, Huexotzinco, was depleted from years of intensive warfare; otherwise, Tlaxcala probably would not have been able to subdue it, any more than it could now subdue Cholula.

CONCLUSION

Triple Alliance Military Capability

Although the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley appears to have been highly vulnerable to Triple Alliance conquest in 1518-19, a good case can be made that the Triple Alliance was simply incapable of conquering the area prior to that date. In this regard, we have already put to rest the common but mistaken idea that the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley was politically "disunited" (Hicks 1979:88) vis-à-vis the Triple Alliance. This latter typically faced the combined might of Huexotzinco, Tlaxcala, and Cholula. Even in 1521, after years of heavy losses of men in combat and in the wake of a smallpox epidemic, Tlaxcala alone was still able to offer Cortés thirty thousand soldiers and, apparently, to deliver at least twenty thousand for the Battle of Mexico (Cortés 1928:130, 149, 166-67; Díaz del Castillo 1928:432, 452, 468, 471, 516, 521; cf. Gibson 1952:22-23).

Second, these kingdoms were fringed by rugged mountains in which it was much easier to mount a defense than to launch an offense; even when battles began on lower ground, the defending force could retreat to the mountains as a final tactic. More importantly, Muñoz Camargo (1892:111-12, 117) states that Tlaxcala, at least, packed its mountainous frontiers with refugees from the Triple Alliance's other wars. Besides "paying tribute and rent," these refugees "had to be continually at arms and on guard as defenders of their lands"; indeed, they seem to have absorbed the first onslaught of attack from any quarter.

Third, at least part of the region was fortified; again, our only detailed information is on Tlaxcala, but there is no reason to believe that it was unique in this regard (see Davies 1968:71-72). Cortés (1928:50) was favorably impressed with the fortifications of the city of Tlaxcala. Torquemada (1943[1]:202) states that the borders of Tlaxcala were "fortified with *presidios y tercios*" ("forts and troops"). Díaz del Castillo (1928:186) describes one of these forts as "strongly built of stone and lime and some other cement, so strong that with iron pickaxes it was difficult to demolish it and it was constructed in such a way for both offense and defense that it would be difficult to capture."

Fourth, the soldiers of the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley kingdoms were fighting for their continued independence on their home territory. In contrast, the Tlaxcalan lords told Cortés that many of the Triple Alliance's soldiers "did not fight with good will" and even relayed warnings of impending attacks (Díaz del Castillo 1928:227-28). We must remember that the Triple Alliance had expanded rapidly in the

late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries—burning, plundering, expropriating lands, slaughtering both combatants and civilians (see Isaac 1983)—and many of its subjects doubtless harbored deep hatred toward it.

Fifth, and related to the last point, the Triple Alliance was never free to concentrate its might upon the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley for any extended period. Internally, owing to the rapidity of its territorial expansion, the alliance was rife with rebellion; no sooner was unrest quashed in one quarter than it broke out in another, to be extinguished with massive force and horrifying brutality (Isaac 1983). Indeed, the “military exercise” explanation for the lack of Triple Alliance conquest of the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley—first asserted by Moteuczoma II in his conversations with the Spaniards and then faithfully repeated over the centuries—rings hollow in view of the near constancy of full-scale warfare within and on the far fringes of Triple Alliance territory.

Externally, the Triple Alliance was virtually surrounded by powerful, independent, bellicose polities that had inflicted humiliating defeats upon it. To the west was Michoacán, which had slaughtered a reported 20,900 (Durán 1964:167, ch. 37) or 31,800 (Tezozómoc 1878:424, ch. 52) Triple Alliance soldiers in a single encounter, ca. 1478 (cf. Pomar 1891:47). To the northeast was Metztitlán, which humiliated the Triple Alliance army so thoroughly, ca. 1481, that the unnerved Tenochca King Tizoc lost the confidence of the nobility and was “helped to die” five years later (Durán 1964:179-80, ch. 40; Tezozómoc 1878:440-44, ch. 57; Codex Ramírez 1878:67). To the south were the unconquered portions of present-day Oaxaca, where “the armies of the three capitals of the empire . . . were destroyed and lost much of their fame and reputation” ca. 1496 (Ixtilixóchitl 1965:283, ch. 63). Indeed, when King Ahuítzotl of Tenochtitlán died, in 1502, the choice of his successor (Moteuczoma II) reportedly was strongly influenced by the argument that a mature rather than a young man should be chosen, because “we are surrounded by our many enemies” (Tezozómoc 1878:571-72, ch. 82; cf. Durán 1964:220, ch. 52).

Triple Alliance Incentives for Conquest

Berdan has recently cast doubt upon Triple Alliance incentives to conquer the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley, by asserting (1982:109-11) that: “Certainly, the potential tribute that could be extracted from Tlaxcala would have paled against the luxurious tribute . . . received from many other provinces.” This statement is problematical, even misleading, in view of Berdan’s own anthropogeographical analysis of Triple Alliance tribute schedules. She demonstrates convincingly that most tribute of foodstuffs was collected from provinces relatively near to the Valley of Mexico, whereas the “luxurious tribute” was extracted mostly from the more distant provinces. She further argues persuasively that both Tenochtitlán and Tetzoco had long been dependent upon food tribute; that steadily increasing bureaucratization and occupational specialization, as well as general urban growth, resulted in steadily increasing tribute dependency in the Valley of Mexico; and that both the pace of conquest and the severity of the tribute schedules escalated commensurately in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Berdan 1975:112-26, 240-57; 1982:36-40).

Berdan’s tribute map (1975:110) shows that the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley was bordered on three sides (west, north, and south) by Triple Alliance provinces that

supplied mainly "maize complex" tribute to the empire's capitals. Cortés (1928: 50-51) was witness to Tlaxcala's bounty in this respect:

Its provisions are . . . very superior—including such things as bread [*tortillas*], fowl, game, fish, and other excellent vegetables and produce. . . . There is a market in this city in which more than thirty thousand people daily are occupied in buying and selling. . . . The province contains many wide-spreading fertile valleys all tilled and sown, no part of it being left wild.

We should note in this regard that the supposed "poverty" that Tlaxcala suffered as the result of being "shut in" by Triple Alliance aggression was, with the exception of salt, an elite poverty of sumptuary goods—cotton, gold, silver, tropical feathers, cacao (Muñoz Camargo 1892:110-11; Pomar 1891:45; Díaz del Castillo 1928:213; Cortés 1928:49). Even at that, we may be faced with an exaggeration (Gibson 1952: 15, n. 58), because Cortés (1928:51) mentions the presence of many of these elite items in the Tlaxcala marketplace in 1519.

Berdan (1976, 1978) has also made a strong case for the inextricable linkage of trade, tribute, and redistribution in the Triple Alliance polity. She points to internal trade as one of the means by which commoners often obtained tribute stuffs levied against them and a means by which the central government acquired goods for redistribution. Thus Tlaxcala's thriving market (Cortés 1928:50) is of more than passing interest. We should also note, of course, that Cholula was famous as one of the great marketing centers of central Mexico (see Berdan 1982:42).

In summary, no reasonable case can be sustained that the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley was lacking in economic attractiveness to the Triple Alliance. The supposed lack of economic incentive as an explanation for Triple Alliance imperialistic failure is a tautological smokescreen, thrown up to provide intellectual shelter should the "ritual" explanation of the intervalley Flowery War become untenable.¹⁶

The Triple Alliance would also have had a purely political motivation for incorporating the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley. The independent kingdoms there received large numbers of political refugees from the Triple Alliance, depriving it of many tributaries and providing a potential staging area for dissident forces. For example, a reported sixteen thousand Chalco subjects fled to Huexotzinco and other Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley communities when Chalco was conquered by the Triple Alliance in 1465 (Chimalpahín 1965:103).

Triple Alliance Ideology

Modern scholars should not be misled by the Triple Alliance's war propaganda and its self-serving historical rationalizations, whether recorded in codices compiled by the indigenous nobility and naively incorporated by postconquest chroniclers or contained in official statements made to the Spanish conquistadors. In the first place, it is entirely possible that the supposed treaty origin of the intervalley Flowery War, reported only by writers from Tetzco and their copiers, was a post hoc rationalization disseminated by the Tetzcoan elite late in the fifteenth or early in the sixteenth century, in order to justify their armed aggression against Tlaxcala and Huexotzinco—good allies before Tetzco joined into the imperialistic Triple Alliance with Tenochtitlán and Tlacopán. Let it be noted, in this regard, that the Tetzcoan treaty-origin story has Xicotécatl of Tlaxcala proposing that his polity be warred upon by the much stronger Triple Alliance (Ixtilixóchitl 1965:206-7)!

It is also quite probable that the "military exercise" and "nearby source of captives" explanation of Triple Alliance failure to conquer the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley,

reportedly stated by Moteuczoma II to Andrés de Tapia in 1519 (1866), was a strategic rather than a factual answer to a potentially dangerous question. After all, we could hardly expect Moteuczoma II to have answered Andrés de Tapia's apparently pointed question in such a way as to admit military weakness.¹⁷

We need not naively accept as fact the indigenous nobility's religious explanations for warfare policy and conduct. What empire has not put forth, and fervently believed, religious rationalizations for such matters?

Finally, we must not forget that the Triple Alliance was a sharply stratified polity, in which nobles and commoners had different public roles and different private motivations for their participation in imperial enterprises. Elsewhere (Isaac 1983), I have argued that commoners' participation in warfare was indeed motivated by the hope of socioeconomic advancement through battlefield capture of human sacrificial victims, whereas elite warfare policy and direction were motivated by geopolitical, administrative, and sumptuary concerns. What elite and commoners shared was an officially sponsored religious ideology and praxis that rationalized and sustained their respective functions (cf. Price 1978:106). That earlier argument was made with respect to ordinary warfare; it can now be extended to the intervalley Flowery War as well.

NOTES

1. The "Aztec" Triple Alliance was formed by the city-states of Tenochtitlán (now Mexico City), Tetzco (Texcoco), and Tlacopán (now Tacuba) in 1428-30. The three cities jointly administered the "Aztec Empire" until its overthrow by the Spaniards and their Indian allies in 1521. Tlacopán was never more than a junior partner in the alliance, however, and after about 1440 Tenochtitlán increasingly gained ascendancy over Tetzco. The term Tenochca, as used in this article, refers to the government of Tenochtitlán.

2. Gibson (1971:393) estimates the population of the total territory controlled by the Triple Alliance in 1519 at nine million, although some present estimates are much higher. Gibson (1952:142) estimates the population of the Tlaxcalan region at "perhaps 500,000" in 1519; this figure is perhaps too high. Davies (1968:94-96) discusses various population estimates for the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley and arrives at the following figures for 1519: Tlaxcala, 150,000 in all and 55,000 in the towns; Cholula, 200,000 in all and 40,000 for the city; and perhaps as high as 35,000 for the city of Huexotzinco; he provides no estimate for the latter kingdom.

3. Anthropologists have long been both cavalier and selective in their use of Aztec ethnohistorical sources. In the nineteenth century, Adolph Bandelier, self-appointed research assistant to Lewis Henry Morgan,

assured the latter that he "need not fear" the sixteenth-century Spanish writings on Aztec Mexico because they "can be wielded and used to advantage" (quoted in Keen 1971:389) with respect to Morgan's evolutionary paradigm. Keen (1971), Moreno (1962), and Berdan (1975:33-34) have shown that the distortions wrought by Bandelier and Morgan with respect to Aztec political organization were reflected in the works of serious scholars well into the twentieth century. At present the sixteenth-century writings are being used selectively and "wielded to advantage" in service of the anthropological ecological and materialist paradigms (Harner 1977a, 1977b; Harris 1978).

4. All translations from the Spanish sources quoted herein and listed in the bibliography under their Spanish titles are my own.

5. Almost every major source on central Mexican history has a somewhat different set of dates for the reigns of the Tenochca kings. I shall follow the dating in Monjarás-Ruiz (1976).

6. Durán, Tezozómoc, and the anonymous author of the *Codex Ramírez* are often referred to collectively as "the *Crónica X* authors," because they apparently relied upon the same, now lost pre-Hispanic "*Chronicle X*" in compiling their own works. This comment applies to the entirety of Tezozómoc

(1878), Durán's book of secular history (Durán 1964), and the first half ("Relación del Origen de los Indios que Habitan esta Nueva España según sus Historias") of the Codex Ramírez (1878:17-92). Durán's (1971) book on ritual is a close plagiarism of the second half ("Tratado de los Ritos y Ceremonias y Dioses que en su Gentilidad Usaban los Indios desta Nueva España") of the Codex Ramírez (1878:93-149)—or both are independent plagiarisms of the same, now lost document (cf. Codez Ramírez 1878:11). Thus these three authors cannot be treated as independent sources and cannot be used as a check on one another. At the same time, we must not exaggerate the element of overlap; see below for substantial differences among these three sources. These differences reflect the fact that Durán spent virtually his whole life researching Aztec history, oral as well as written, and brought the fruits of this extensive research to bear upon his own historical treatise, even though he says he followed the general outline of the Chronicle X. Similarly, Tezozómoc interviewed knowledgeable elders and sought out historical documents in addition to the Chronicle X to inform his own writing.

Because many readers will not have access to the same editions of Durán and Tezozómoc that I am using, I have cited chapters as well as pages in these crucial works. I have done the same with citations from Ixtlilxóchitl (1965). The chapters in all three are so short that their enumeration provides an effective guide to other editions.

7. Tezozómoc often presents problems of interpretation as well as of translation. The difficult passage rendered here in English reads in the original: "guerra cruel con ellos, para tener vasallage de ellos y tener que sacrificar á nuestros dioses; . . . con estos vasallos harémos gran hacienda de sacrificios y rentas, riquezas y bienes, . . . y para nuestros tratos y grangerías [*sic*] nosotros los mexicanos, y que no sean tan lejos; bastará que los pongamos en Huexotzinco, Cholula, Atlixco, Itzacan, . . . adonde se resgaten [*sic*] y compremos esclavos, oro, piedras muy ricas de valor, y plumería. . . . Con estos tales mercados vendrán los tlaxcaltecas á ellos, y allí se comprarán y ellos se venderán por esclavos, y con este achaque tendrémos muy cerca guerras para conseguir victoria y alcanzar esclavos para nuestra pretension y adornami-

ento de nuestras personas, con brazaletes de oro y plumería, bezoleras de oro, orejeras de oro, piedras preciosas, trezaderas de colores engastadas en piedras de mucho . . . valor."

8. So firmly entrenched had the Valley of Mexico viewpoint become over the centuries that Muñoz Camargo's nineteenth-century compiler and supposed champion, Alfredo Chavero, took him severely to task for disputing them. Chavero (in Muñoz Camargo 1892:110-11, n. 3) asserted that Muñoz Camargo "fouls up completely the origin and nature of the continual wars. . . . They [the Aztecs] did not want to conquer them, which would have been easy for the powerful [Aztec] armies . . . [against] so small a kingdom as Tlaxcala."

9. Díaz del Castillo's (1928:202, 227) paraphrase of Xicotécatl the Elder's statement to Cortés to the effect that the "Mexicans" had warred upon Tlaxcala "for more than a hundred years" cannot be correct if "Mexicans" is taken to mean the Mexica-Tenochca as a component of the Aztec Triple Alliance, which dates to less than one hundred years prior to Xicotécatl's 1519 statement. It is possible, of course, that the Mexica-Tenochca fought against Tlaxcala as agents or mercenaries for the Tepaneca Empire, early in the fifteenth century. If so, the eagerness of Tlaxcala and Huexotzinco to assist Tetzcoco and Tenochtitlán in their 1428-30 war of independence against the Tepaneca Empire becomes more understandable; we should note, however, that only Ixtlilxóchitl (1965) reports this alliance or, for that matter, any active role for Tetzcoco in the 1428-30 war against the Tepaneca. At any rate, I am inclined to agree with Davies (1968:108-11, 141) that it was the eastward expansion of the Triple Alliance under Moteuczoma I (reigned 1440-69) that initiated the great hostility between the Valleys of Mexico and Tlaxcala-Puebla, because the kingdoms of this latter area increasingly found their coastal trade cut off.

10. As Davies (1968:73-74) points out, the exact location and political status of Tliluhquitepec in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is unknown today, because that polity disappeared in the aftermath of the Spanish conquest. He suggests that Tliluhquitepec was "a kingdom very closely linked with Tlaxcallan, but enjoying a semi-independent situation." Michoacán was a large state to the

west of the Triple Alliance, in the present state of Michoacán, while Metztlán was located to the northeast, in the present state of Hidalgo.

11. I am following Davies (1968:76-77) in treating Atlixco as a satellite of Huexotzinco, rather than as an independent kingdom. Davies notes that the Plain of Atlixco is the logical strategic point at which to attack Huexotzinco; thus the battle accounts often specify an encounter with Atlixco when Huexotzinco was the actual target. In summarizing this and subsequent military engagements against and within the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley, I shall follow the sequence of events as related by Durán (1964), partly because it is the most detailed and partly because its sequence is, in the main, independently confirmed by Chimalpahín (1965). I agree with Davies (1968:119-20, 136) that Muñoz Camargo (1892) compressed the events in his account, confusing or confounding the times and places of certain battles, and is almost certainly in error in stressing the continuity rather than the periodicity of military engagements within the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley and against the Triple Alliance. There is general agreement among all three sources (Durán, Muñoz Camargo, Chimalpahín), however, on the eventual outcomes of these many skirmishes.

12. The relevant passage reads: "De cómo los dos campos mexicanos, y Huexotzinco murieron en ambas partes, mas de cuarenta mil." Tezozómoc (1878:613) also says that the Triple Alliance army was outnumbered twenty to one, which, if true, would mean that Durán's figure of one hundred thousand for the size of this army was grossly inflated.

13. The chronology of events presented here differs from Barlow's (1948) in his vivid account of Huexotzinco's demise. Barlow correctly notes that both Tezozómoc (1878:638, ch. 97) and Durán (1964:239-40, ch. 60) date the beginning of this Tlaxcala-Huexotzinco war at ca. 1507, when the Aztecs were preparing to celebrate the ending of a fifty-two-year calendrical cycle. Contrary to both Tezozómoc (1878:ch. 97) and Chimalpahín (1965:232-33), however, Barlow has the Huexotzincans seeking refuge and assistance in Tenochtitlán almost immediately, and these two powers attacking Tlaxcala together in 1508. Actually Tezozómoc (1878:ch. 97) says that the Tlaxcalan siege of Huexotzinco and the destruction of its crops "went on for a space of several years in this manner" before the Huexotzincans sent ambas-

sadors to appeal for aid in Tenochtitlán. Thus Chimalpahín's (1965:232-33) date of 1512 for this last event is consistent with Tezozómoc's account. Durán (1964:ch. 60) has compressed this whole sequence into two sentences, giving the impression that everything mentioned happened in rapid-fire order, although he gives no precise dates.

14. Incredibly enough, the English translators of Durán's *Historia* gratuitously annotate the intervalley war as "a remarkable form of institutionalized warfare whose . . . only object was that of capturing brave warriors Due to the nature of the war, soldiers did their best not to kill the opponent but rather to take him alive" (Doris Heyden and Fernando Horcasitas in Durán 1964:348, n. 76). Just as astonishing are Vaillant's (1950) statements that the Aztecs viewed war "as an opportunity to vibrate to the deep rhythms of nature," that the intervalley Flowery War "was undertaken to satisfy this yearning when no active campaign was in progress" (1950:214), and that central Mexican warfare generally lacked "the realistic calculation of European strife" (1950:230). Vaillant (1950) and Soustelle (1970) have had great influence upon two generations of U.S. anthropologists and historians, because their very readable works have been widely used as textbooks in ethnography and history courses.

15. Cortés (1928:52) stated that Huexotzinco was smaller than Tlaxcala in 1519, and that may very well have been the case, owing to the latter's seizing communities and lands that formerly had belonged to the kingdom of Huexotzinco. Indeed, Barlow (1948) states that one of the reasons for Huexotzinco's sudden withdrawal from the Triple Alliance, ca. 1516, was bitter disappointment that the alliance had not exerted itself over the preceding four years to help Huexotzinco recover the lands it had lost to Tlaxcala in warfare, ca. 1507-12.

16. Davies (1968) goes so far as to argue for lack of economic incentive not only with respect to Tlaxcala (1968:143, 146) and Huexotzinco (1968:149), but also with regard to Metztlán (1968:54). He does so despite clear evidence of "the agricultural richness" (1968:44) of this latter kingdom, which would have fallen within Berdan's (1975:110) "maize complex" tribute area; and despite the testimony of the Tenochca chronicles concerning the Triple Alliance's humiliating military encounter with Metztlán, ca. 1481 (Durán 1964:179-80, ch. 40; Tezozómoc 1878:440-44, ch. 57; Codex

Ramírez 1878:67; cf. Davies 1968:52-53).

17. I think it quite likely that this one conversation was the sole source of all statements to this effect in the major postconquest writings, beginning with Motolinía's 1541 *Historia*. By the time Pomar (1891:46) wrote his memoir in 1582, Moteuczoma II's answer to Andrés de Tapia's question had attained the status of proof for statements about the nature of the intervalley Flowery War: "which is confirmed by what Motecuhsuma replied to the Marqués del Valle [Cortés], who asked him the reason for not having conquered them." The fact that Pomar was able to find nobles of either valley who would "confirm" the military-exercise-and-sacrificial-captives version of the Flowery War's origin and persistence does not

necessarily demonstrate that this was part of the pre-Hispanic ideology. To the contrary, this explanation may simply have spread widely and rapidly in both valleys in the postconquest era, becoming an element in a new image of a glorious past that the descendants of the indigenous nobility (such as Pomar and Ixtlilxóchitl) would have wanted to perpetuate. Other sixteenth-century writers (e.g., Durán and Sahagún), who interviewed living elders, likewise consulted indigenous nobles or their descendants. Finally, we know that there was considerable copying of one writer by another (e.g., of Pomar by Ixtlilxóchitl, of Muñoz Camargo and a host of others by Torquemada, and of parts of the Codex Ramírez by Durán).

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