

Land Tenure among the Ancient Mexicans*

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IF WE examine closely the information given by the early Spanish and Indian chroniclers and the authors who gave particular attention to the subject of land tenure among the ancient Mexicans, it astonishes us that such false conclusions could have been arrived at as those of Morgan (1878) and Bandelier (1880b) which were in vogue during the first quarter of this century.

In spite of what is generally believed, the data furnished by the sources concur in the majority of cases, especially in their fundamental aspects although, understandably, information transmitted to the early writers by native informants was insufficient or misunderstood. However, when an error is repeated, it ceases to be purely individual, and inherent reasons must explain the unanimity of the false estimation.

Since 1930, when we first considered the material dealt with here, and in a later study, we have thought that these causes are clear and lend themselves to enumeration (Caso 1954).

The first cause of error is to speak of *Mexicans*, meaning by this all of the natives that at the beginning of the sixteenth century inhabited what is now the Mexican Republic.

In actual fact, the residents of Tenochtitlán, Tezcoco, Tacuba and the other cities of the Valley of Mexico told the Spaniards of some Indians called Chichimecs who followed a way of life very different from their own. Consequently, it is a fundamental error to confuse information about the sedentary nations of central and southern Mexico and other parts of Mesoamerica with what we know concerning the social and economic organization of the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes that dwelt on the Plateau outside the limits of Mesoamerica and in the north of the country.

The second basic error consists in applying what we know about some Indian nation to all, taking for granted that an identical type of organization characterized all parts of Mexico, without realizing that the political, social and economic situation varied greatly among the different peoples. Certainly we cannot apply what is known about a small town in which social differentiation hardly existed and in which the division of labor was primarily sexual, to a city like Tenochtitlán, capital of a true state and hub of an empire.

The third error is to equate source-data which apply to the time of the Aztec wanderings before the founding of Tenochtitlán with what took place

* Although it is not the policy of the AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST to publish translations, the importance of Dr. Caso's material in connection with a long-standing issue in Mesoamerican studies seems to call for its dissemination in English as well as Spanish (EDITOR'S NOTE).

later, especially after the overthrow of the Tepanecs of Atzacapotzalco. This is like trying to explain the social and political organization of Periclean Athens by using the Iliad and Odyssey as sources.

The fourth error is lack of historical depth. It is naively thought that the Aztecs actually *invented* the sort of social and political organization that they had at the moment of the Spanish Conquest. In this sphere, as in many others, the Aztecs followed the traditions of their forefathers. They received cultural influences from more advanced peoples who had disappeared by the sixteenth century, but not without leaving a deep imprint on their heirs in the dominion of Anáhuac.

Before the Aztecs, there existed in the Valley of Mexico a culture related to the Mixtec-Puebla culture, and a city—Tula—whose influence extended to places as far away as Sinaloa and Yucatán, the Guatemala highlands, and Guerrero. At the beginning of the present century, the Toltecs were not seriously considered; Seler (1912) and Brinton (1890) thought of them as mythical ancestors of the Aztecs rather than as a people who could have actually existed. At that time the remains of Tula, Hidalgo were adjudged as too paltry to bear witness in favor of the existence of a once great metropolis. Truly inconceivable is that the manifest existence of the Teotihuacán pyramids did not foster the belief that, in the Valley of Mexico before the Aztecs, a people existed with a social and political organization complex enough for undertaking such works as the construction of these monuments.

To credit the Aztecs with the invention of their social and political organization at the moment of the Conquest is to ignore all Mesoamerican history before the Aztecs.

Lastly, Morgan's great authority at the end of the last century, and the tremendous erudition of his friend and disciple, Bandelier, ascribed to the Aztec organization the same principles as those of the Iroquois Confederation. Few wished to undertake the re-study of a point that seemed well taken or to discuss a theory based on impressive citations which exhausted practically everything known on the subject.

Nevertheless, the facts were there, and they spoke for themselves. Social equality could not have existed if the Mexican *tlacatecuhtlis* derived their power from the god Quetzalcoatl, if the society was divided into nobles and plebeians, or if the *calpulli* lands were communal and the lands of the *pilli* were private property.

Therefore, when Moreno (1931) published his study on Aztec political and social organization, he showed an alternate way of interpreting, without misconstruction, the information set forth by the Spanish and Indian sources. However, Moreno's thesis, published in a small edition and in Spanish, had little influence among European and U. S. investigators.

In dealing here with the particular point of land tenure, we must specify that, in order to avoid the aforementioned pitfalls, we will only be considering land tenure among the Tenochcas and the Tlatelolcas, even though making reference to other Indian states where these show the same organization. Cer-

tainly we need not take into account the tribal organization of the Chichimecs nor that of other nomads.

In the second place, we will not be concerned with the Aztecs when they left Aztlán and started their pilgrimage, nor when they settled in other parts of the Valley or founded Tenochtitlán. Nor will we describe other moments in their political life, as when they acquired their first king of the Toltec line, Acamapichtli, founder of the dynasty, or treat the span before the overthrow of Azcapotzalco.

The organization which we wish to describe here is that found by the Spanish conquerors as a consequence of the internal reforms carried out by Itzcoatl and elaborated on by the kings who followed, to arrive at the semi-divine rule of Motecuhzoma II.

In analyzing land tenure, we will see a complex society. Not only plebeians and nobles existed, but also a well-developed middle class, serfs who worked the nobles' lands, free workers who rented the lands of the elite or were wage-earners, and slaves employed in housework, farming, and industry. The Aztec society encountered by the Spanish differed markedly from a tribal society in which social stratification could not have existed.

Together with the error of considering the Aztecs a tribe—member of a tribal confederation, we have heard it affirmed that the *macehual* or plebeian was the poor person exploited by the nobles, and that the average person was a slave in the hands of the priestly and military "classes."

Actually priestly and military classes did not exist in the Aztec organization. Aztec classes were not determined by the *function* carried out by its members. Furthermore, belonging to a class did not perforce allow one to be a priest or a military man. Plebeians and nobles could be either or sometimes both, as in the case of priests who went to war and captured prisoners, as mentioned in the Mendoza Codex (1938).

Nor did the plebeian or macehual work the nobles' private lands. The plebeian, as we shall see, worked the land of his clan, and the usufruct of his plot belonged to him; the nobles' lands were worked by other persons who did not belong to the clan.

Before launching into the study of land tenure among the ancient Mexicans, it is necessary to speak, however cursorily, of the social classes we have referred to and to explain their makeup and origin.

At least from the time the city of Tula dominated central Mexico, though perhaps from the Teotihuacán epoch, the king (*ilatoani*, *ilacatecuhtli*) was not merely a tribal chief, nor a religious leader (*teomama*), nor a military chief (*cuauhilato*) as differentiated by Chimalpahin (1889:66-7), but a descendant of the god Quetzalcoatl, who, in turn, was the son of the creator gods. The Aztec chief Tenoch was only a military chief, while Acamapichtli, son of the Toltec princess Atotoztli, was a descendant of Quetzalcoatl. When the Mexicans reached the Valley, there was no overlord among them, only chiefs or captains who were not considered royalty (*Relación de Genealogía* 1891:272).

To be king necessitated a divine origin or confirmation in Tula. The *Po-pol*

Vuh mentions this for the Quichés (Recinos 1947:233 ff.) and the *Memorial de Sololá* for the Cakchiqueles (Recinos 1950:47). It meant nothing less than the divine ancestry to which no military chief could have aspired, however illustrious his exploits. The lords of Tochimilco descended from one Izcoualt who came from Tula (*Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas* 1891:262).

When a Mesoamerican tribe reached a certain importance, it would seek a prince of Toltec blood and would consider him as king since he had divine blood and would transmit to his descendants with this blood the right to rule.

Not only did the king have to be a descendant of the gods, but the nobles or *pipiltin* also had to have this ancestry which would distinguish them from the macehualtin. This is explained quite clearly by the early writers. Thus the *Relación de Genealogía* (1891:274-5) and the *Origen de los Mexicanos* (1891:297) say that Acamapichtli was held in reverence by the Mexicans because from him descended the earliest lineages and they considered him as the trunk and beginning of all of them. They add that he married 20 women, all daughters of the chiefs of the land, all of whom wanted to give him their daughters "because of being of nobility" and "from there descend almost all of the lords there are in this land."

Tovar (1878:34) says that the great chiefs gave him their daughters and that their sons became kings, captains and dignitaries. Durán (1867:I-48, II-162, I-410, I-348) confirms this and says that the most illustrious and the founding fathers gave him their daughters "so that there might be a successor to the reign" and "so that from there would come forth lineages of the lords of the earth," and he says that they were sons, brothers or nephews of the great, and that the Mexican nobility "were the rich feathers fallen from the wings of kings gone by" and that all the lords were related, those of México, Tlaxcala and Michoacán. Itzcoatl, addressing the nobles, tells them: "Here art thou, the lords and leaders, my uncles, brothers and nephews" (Durán 1867:I-71).

Motecuhzoma II says that the noble sons of kings must have precedence over the macehuales even though these have achieved the title of valiant (Tezozomoc 1878:578). These are the nobles that Zorita (1909:98) calls "Cuartos señores" and he says that rather than signiory they had lineage. Called "pilli" (pl. "pipiltzin"), they were children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the supreme lords, and because of this they were called also "tlacopiltzin" and "pipiltzintli." They formed the upper echelons of the army and the bureaucracy and were used as ambassadors. Sahagún says that "the illustrious and noble and of good extraction, . . . sons and descendants of lords and kings and senators, and sons and servants of our lord and son Quetzalcoatl, those who in times past ruled and governed the empire and territories and because of this were born designated and elected by our lord and son Quetzalcoatl" (Sahagún 1938:II-114).

The pilli, son or grandson of a king, differs essentially from the macehual, even though the latter be a *calpulec* or chief of his ward (*calpulli*). The former has divine blood, being descended from the gods, but need not have employment or authority. The calpulec, without noble blood, (although in many

cases he might have royal blood as we will see later) holds authority for life and is the representative of the interests of his calpulli or ward and is supported by the power vested in him by his neighbors. Zorita (1909) calls him "Elder relative" and says that the calpulli resembles certain mountain Biscayan organizations in Spain.

The macehual, however, was set apart from the noble from the time his ancestors were born. The macehualtin were created in the year 8 House; the nobles earlier in the year 1 Rabbit, and they helped the gods in lifting the sky which had fallen during the flood (*Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas* 1891:228, 234, 263).

We know that Acamapichtli married 20 maidens and that these most likely came from the different wards of Tenochtitlán. Thus their offspring were descendants of the ancient settlers of each ward on the maternal side and of the Toltec kings on the paternal. Probably from among Acamapichtli's grandchildren and great-grandchildren the Calpulec were elected to govern the wards or calpullis. The *Código Cozcatzin* (1881), *Código de Ixhuatepec* (1901) and *Código de Sta. Isabel Tola* (1897) seem to indicate as much.

Naturally the king of Mexico had, like all kings, the power to ennoble or to "knight" the plebeians who distinguished themselves: these were the famous *caballeros pardos* of whom the chroniclers speak (Torquemada 1723:II-545; Tovar 1878:76; Tezozomoc 1878:363; Durán 1867:II-160, 164; Acosta 1940:II-219).

Having considered the profound difference between plebeian or macehual and noble or pilli, we can now study the question of land tenure among the ancient Mexicans.

It is known that Itzcoatl, the fourth king of Mexico, made a pact with the plebeians or macehualtin, inhabitants of the calpullis. It held that if the war with Atzcapotzalco were won, the macehualtin would serve the pipiltin who, as we have seen, were uncles, brothers or nephews of Itzcoatl (Tovar 1878:50; Tezozomoc 1878:243; Durán 1867:I-75). Just after the Atzcapotzalco war, the difference between the social classes of nobles and plebeians is strengthened by Itzcoatl's dispositions.

The first of these is to grant the highest religious, military, judicial and administrative titles to his noble relatives, creating in this way a bureaucracy or courtly nobility which excluded the plebeians from its highest ranks.

The second, and most important, is to create private ownership of land for the nobles and to establish, thereby, an economic difference which reenforced the differences in blood. Abundant data and hieroglyphic pictures attest that conquered lands were presented to the Mexican nobility. Although, from Itzcoatl's time, lands were granted to the clans or calpullis, especially for their temples, and also to plebeians who distinguished themselves in the war (*Código Cozcatzin* 1881; *Código de Ixhuatepec* 1901; *Código de Sta. Isabel Tola* 1897; Tovar 1878:52; Tezozomoc 1878:248-9, 253; Acosta 1940:II-283).

To the king and nobles these lands were given "for themselves, their sons

and heirs" (Tezozomoc 1878:268) constituting something very similar to what in feudal law were called "entailed estates." Thus Tezozomoc mentions 11 towns from which lands were given to Tlacaclael after the defeat of Coyoacán (Tezozomoc 1878:271, 276) and after that of Xochimilco the lord of the place offered to each of Tlacaclael's sons and nephews a tract of 400 square fathoms (approximately 111 acres).

Durán (1867:I-78) makes an important distinction in telling us that the lands of Atzacapotzalco, which after the defeat were set aside for the crown, were seigniorial and patrimonial.

The tract of 400 square fathoms seems to have been a unit, since, after the fall of Xochimilco, Itzcoatl orders that two such tracts be given to each noble and one such to each plebeian soldier who had distinguished himself (Durán 1867:I-113; Ixtlilxochitl 1892:II-169). Lands were even given to three soldiers of fortune, who came from Culhuacán and helped the Mexicans in the struggle against Coyoacán (Acosta 1940:II-286).

Torquemada (1723:I-164) says that in his time, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, many Mexicans and Tlatelolcas still farmed lands in the province of Chalco because of grants to their fathers from Motecuhzoma Ilhuicamina. So we see that conquest and royal disposition instituted private property for the kings and for the nobles or pipiltin.

Zorita (1909), Pedro de Ahumada (1560), Vasco de Puga (Puga 1940:35) and Ixtlilxochitl (1892:II-169) have given us a well-known classification of the different classes of land that existed under Aztec law and we can divide them into two large categories: lands under public domain and those under private domain.

LAND UNDER PUBLIC DOMAIN

These lands belonged to the king, not as an individual, but as a functionary and were state lands set aside for specific purposes: maintenance of certain palace personnel, *tecpanpouhque* or *tecpanilaca* (Torquemada 1723:II-546) or of the judges (Mendieta 1870). They were therefore called *tecpanitlalli* or "palace lands." The *tecpanpouhque*, who were certainly nobles or else people of distinguished achievement, were greatly esteemed and received for their services the production from these lands which they left to their sons, but could not sell. It does not seem to us that inheritance could have taken place except in the case of son succeeding father in office. Such lands seemingly formed part of the ward lands and were worked by the *tecalec* in the service of those whom Zurita calls "second-class lords," those with an official commission. A king might rent, but not sell, other lands called *ilatocamilli* or *ilatocallalli* or *itonal in tlacall*: "seigniorial lands" or "his day lands," which took care of the general expenditures of the administration or of those which the king budgeted for the maintenance of a particular official (Zorita 1909:157-8, 167; Anonymous 1940:145; Ixtlilxochitl 1892:II-170; Ahumada 1560).

We must keep in mind that the Aztecs used money (*patolcuachtli*, blankets, cacao, gold dust) only for exchange; *salaries* to functionaries consisted of the

produce from certain cultivated land plus the services of those who worked it. The kings rewarded extraordinary service with jewelry of gold and jade, with feather ornaments or luxurious armour and with richly woven or embroidered blankets; but only in exceptional cases, for wartime services, did the king raise a plebeian to noble status or give him land.

The second type of public lands belonged to temples and schools. These were called *teotlalli* (Cortes 1563:444), which may be translated as "lands of the gods" or "sacred lands" (Puga 1940:35). Special tenants worked them, which is why Román (1879:I-120) said that the temples had their own vassals and Torquemada (1723:II-154) remarked that in addition to the offerings which they received, the temples held lands which all of the kings gave them and that they were worked by *lessees* who contributed maize, pulque, fowl, firewood, charcoal, etc. Ahumada (1560) also mentions these temple lands. In addition, special towns rendered tribute to the temples or were under obligation to keep them in repair or furnish wood for the sacred fires (Zorita 1909:217). Also certain lands were farmed by the devotees of a particular god. The youth of the *calmecac* and those of the *telpochcalli*, the priestly and military schools respectively, cultivated their school lands (Zorita 1909:121; Motolinia 1903:253; Sahagún 1938:I-292).

We have seen that, aside from the lands ceded by the kings and worked by tenants for the benefit of the temples of the city, there existed others dedicated to the service of the local temples of the wards or calpullis. The latter had been known from Itzcoatl's time and, most probably, were worked in shifts by the plebeians living in the calpulli.

The third type of public land was that set aside to cover war expenditures. Ahumada (1560) says tribute to the lords of Mexico for their garrisons was furnished by these lands: the most extensive and richest of each town. This indicates that the so-called *itonalli* or *itunales* were utilized to maintain Tenochca soldiers in garrison towns.

Lands dedicated to the support of the army in time of war were called *milchimalli* or *cacalomilli*. Milchimalli means "land of the shield" and, according to Torquemada (1723:II-546), these produced the maize which was roasted to make *pinole* from which a beverage was elaborated. The lands called Cacalomilli most probably produced the maize from which were prepared toasted *tortillas*, usually called *totopos*, still referred to as *cacalas* in some regions, and which stay fresh for several days.

The lands conquered from the enemy, which were divided among Tenochtitlán, Tezcoco and Tacuba, were called *yaotlalli* (Ixtlilxochitl 1892:II-169; Anonymous 1940:145). Motolinia (1903:296), nevertheless, reserves this term to mean the battlefield which he also calls *quiauhuilale*, "land of rain." (I believe the name should be *quauhilalli* or "land of eagles"—eagle being the name for warrior.) Herrera (1726:II-140) states that when the Matlatzincas were vanquished, tracts were awarded which measure 800 by 400 fathoms, or double the unit which we mentioned above, and that the produce of these lands was destined exclusively for war expenditures.

LAND UNDER PRIVATE DOMAIN

Lands under private domain were of three types. The patrimonial lands of the king came to him through inheritance or appropriation after conquest. Bearing on the latter point we have ample information formulated by an Indian noble, Don Pablo Nazareo (1940:113), in his own name and in that of his wife Doña María Axayacatzin. Although the allegations of the petition as to the amount of land owned may be exaggerated, important for us is what is said about land having been the private property of the ancestors of Doña María—a descendant of the kings of Mexico. Information about the property involved goes all the way back to Huitzilihuitl, of whom it is said that he had 20 towns in his service and 17 estates, all of which seems to us rather doubtful.

In the same document Motecuhzoma Ilhuicamina is said to have held for his private benefit some 32 towns and 26 estates, though they are unnamed. On the other hand, the 21 estates are named which were owned by Axayacatl in addition to tracts of land in 26 towns.

Another petitioner, Juan Cano (1940:137-9), who was married to the daughter of Motecuhzoma II, states that Motecuhzoma and his wife held *private property in addition to that of the seignior*y, which was theirs before Motecuhzoma became ruler. The *Origen de los Mexicanos* (1891:306) as well as the *Relación de Genealogía* (1891:280-1) affirm that Tecalco, Motecuhzoma's wife, owned private lands, which she had inherited or purchased, and the *Relación* insists that the patrimonial lands and estates of the king "he had from his patrimony, away and apart from the seigniory."

Durán (1867:I-365) says that the colonizers that went to Oztoman and Alahuiztan, in the present state of Guerrero, were under obligation to plant and harvest cacao orchards for the king of Mexico, and Ixtlilxochitl (1892:I-234) lists 10 towns which Nezahualcoyotl retained as private property.

Finally, this citation from Zorita is conclusive:

"All of these supreme and lesser lords and other individuals held their own patrimonial lands and with them their *mayerques* or *ilalmaites*. . . . The tribute which the latter gave to the lord, and from this and from what they rented their patrimonial lands, they could dispose of as they wished, as of something of their very own" (Zorita 1909:162, Ramírez 1838b:221).

Up to now we have not discovered whether the land belonging to the king had a special name.

Other lands from the private domain were those of the nobles or pipiltin (singular, pilli) Torquemada 1723:II-545; Ahumada 1560). Such lands were called *pilalli*, as well as *tecuhllalli* or "lands of the lords" (*Anunciación* 1554:262) or *tecpillalli* (Ixtlilxochitl 1892:II-169). We do not believe that the distinction which Torquemada makes among these pilalli lands is important. He lists three kinds:

1st. Those of the descendants of kings, who held private lands with serfs and which they could sell to some other noble, *if they were not subject to entail*, since the latter type was presented as a gift by the ruling monarch and reverted to him in the case of no heir being left at the owner's death.

2nd. The lands inherited by a noble's son who received them together with the nobility.

3rd. The lands given by the ruler to those who distinguished themselves and were made nobles, such as the "caballeros pardos" (or knighted plebeians), who could not own serfs though they could sell the land to nobles provided that the king had not stipulated to the contrary. With no heir, the lands reverted to the king, and if sold to a macehual they were incorporated into the calpulli holdings.

It seems to us that Torquemada contradicts himself about the first type; if these lands belong to the king's descendants they are held through inheritance and not as gifts, unless gifts from later kings is meant. Nor is what Torquemada attests concerning lands subject to entail credible, and we have not found it mentioned by any other writer.

The land of the first type and that of the second seem to be the same. A distinction can be made, however, in regard to those awarded the ennobled macehuales or caballeros pardos. Even though it is written that their children could inherit them and that they could be sold to other nobles, their being incorporated in the calpulli is unintelligible. Which calpulli is meant; that of the ennobled plebeian or that of the buyer?

All the writers agree that the lands of the nobles or pilalli were worked by certain serfs, who were called mayeques or tlalmaites (Zorita 1909:162; Ahumada 1560; Anunciación 1554:261; Witte 1942:58). The mayeques were like the serfs of medieval fiefs. They could not leave the lands to which they pertained. They were obliged to render menial service; the men constructed their masters' houses, carried water and firewood, and planted and harvested the crops; the women ground maize dough and made tortillas. In case of sale or succession, they passed along with the land to the new owner, and they could not be thrown off these lands; nor did they pay taxes to the king, but they did go off to war as soldiers. Their *status* closely resembles that derived from a fee contract during the Middle Ages.

The mayeques or tlalmaites were quite different from the plebeians, who were owners of the clan or calpulli lands and could move to another ward. They differed also from the freemen or *renters*, who could leave the plot at the termination of their contract and who did not render personal service to the owner of the land, nor pass with the land to a new owner (Zorita 1909:94, 166). At the same time, the mayeques were not like the slaves that the owner employed to work in his fields. Slaves had no rights concerning the land inasmuch as they could be transferred to another job such as weaving blankets, for example, whenever their master so desired (Witte 1942:57).

The mayeques seem to have a multiple origin. Undoubtedly almost all were the ancient settlers who owned the lands which were conquered and then divided among the nobles to form their individual holdings or pilallis. We are told that this happened in Coyoacán and was the rule in Mexico (Durán 1867:I-101; Zorita 1909:221). It also seems that some mayeques came from other towns either because their lands were not sufficient for making a living or because they fled from justice (Zorita 1909:156).

Lastly, as provided for under Aztec law, an individual could lose the usufruct of his plot of calpulli land should he leave the city or not work the land for two years running (Zorita 1909:95). He could also forfeit his property rights as punishment for breaking the law. Such individuals, upon forfeiture of their holdings, would most certainly seek to make a living at agriculture, if they had no special training, rather than sink to the depths of becoming a *tameme* or porter (Cortés 1922:99). Even up to the first century of colonial times the mayeques, then called *terrazgueros*, continued to work the fields of the chiefs, and decrees were issued by the Spanish authorities ordering that they do so (Zavala 1939:II-428 ff.).

On the other hand, since the mayeques had not paid taxes to the king of Mexico (Zorita 1909:168), exemption was sought from taxes to the Spanish crown. To this end the chiefs litigated against the authorities, and many Indians tried to pass for mayeques in order not to render tribute. These debates have furnished us with ample information concerning the mayeques. We even have census records complete with their names and those of their lords. Thus in Yecapixtla, Morelos, the lords enumerated were 52, including three ladies, and the mayeques 592 (Ahumada 1560; Puga 1940:36; Cortés 1946:185-93).

Consequently, the property of the nobles or pipiltin was individual. It included not only ownership of lands, but the service of those who lived on them. Furthermore, it was property that could be transferred through inheritance or sale, and the king could transfer it as a reward or as a gift. In the case of the owner leaving no heir, it reverted to the crown.

Moreover, we have information that such organization of communal lands for plebeians and private lands for nobles was not limited to Tenochtitlán and other cities of the Valley of Mexico. We have seen that it existed in Morelos, and Zorita says the same for Uatatlán, Guatemala and for the Tarascans of Michoacán—though he says there the plebeians as well as the nobles were allowed land as private property.

Witte says that in the Huasteca the distinction between nobles and plebeians existed. From the Mixteca abundant pre- and posthispanic documents speak clearly of the distinction between a noble (*yya*) and a plebeian (*tay ñuu*) and of mayeques who worked the nobles' fields. From these documents even the number of mayeques and how much they paid as rent to the lord can be ascertained (Zorita 1909:23, 81, 167; Witte 1942:58; Dahlgren 1954), as for example, in the titles of Tecomaztlahuaca (1578).

ALTEPETLALLI OR CALPULALLI

The communal lands of a town were called collectively *altepetlalli* "town lands" (Annunciación 1554:262; Clavijero 1917:I-355); but as Torquemada (1723:I-Lib. II Cap. 8) says, the towns were divided into fractions (*parcialidades*) or *campan*, the fractions into calpullis or wards (*barrios*) and the wards into streets or *ilaxilacallis* (Monzón 1949).

Each ward was the owner of calpulalli lands, which served to pay the tributes to the lord and to feed its inhabitants, the macehualtin. Thus the

owner was the calpulli, which would correspond to the ancient clan headed by the calpulec or chinancaltec, already mentioned as being translated by Zorita (1909:93-6) as "elder relative" (Sahagún 1938:I-207, 209, 253; Ahumada 1560; Ramírez 1838:218).

Each individual family held the usufruct of a plot and as long as they continued to work it, could not lose this right. Only if they went two years without planting would it revert to the community and the Calpulec assign it to someone else. The houses and lands *in usufruct* passed on to the children through inheritance.

Calpulli lands lying fallow could be rented to another calpulli in order to cover community expenses. Never could they be taken from calpulli patrimony by sale, inheritance, or donation. Invasion of the lands of one calpulli by another was grounds for serious strife.

The office of calpullec was lifetime and required that the one filling it be a competent and mature resident of the calpulli; but, in addition, he had to be a *principal* (noble?) and even though the charge was not hereditary, the calpulli inhabitants generally elected a son or relative of the former calpullec. Clan meetings were held at the calpullec's house, and he was in charge of large expenditures. The calpulec kept maps showing the calpulli lands.

Torquemada (1723:II-546) and Clavijero (1917:I-353) mention maps on which lands were indicated by color. Both agree that the calpulalli were indicated by yellow, but differ concerning the king's lands, which the former calls red and the latter purple. Those of the nobles were rose according to Torquemada and crimson according to Clavijero (See Kirchhoff 1954).

The house in which the clan elders or calpuleques held their councils was called the calpulco and served also as the chapel of the ward priest.

These calpulli lands, which originally came to the ward through the first partition of Tenochtitlán, Tlatelolco, and Nonoalco, kept increasing little by little because the Aztecs, even before settling in Tenochtitlán, were familiar with the construction of *chinampas*. According to tradition, they already practiced this in Aztlán and constructed several during their wanderings—in Tequixquiác, Xaltocan and Epcoac (Tovar 1878:33; Acosta 1940:II-252). Also, as we have seen, the calpulli lands were expanding because of the gifts by the king to the calpullis of conquered lands; especially for the benefit of the local temples dedicated to the capulteteo gods.

Both plebeians and nobles dwelt in the wards. For example, from the ward of Aticpac, situated in Tlatelolco, came the two princesses who were daughters of Tzotzocatzin and who married Nezahualpilli (Torquemada 1723:II-184, I-163; Durán 1867:I-228; Tezozomoc 1949:38) and Axayacatl's sister, who was married to Moquihuix, held lands in Aztacalco, in San Juan ward, to the west of the present-day Calle de Bucareli (Torquemada 1723:I-163; Caso 1956:12).

In the following table, we summarize what is known from both native and Spanish sources about the names of the different types of lands, their owners, and those who cultivated them.

	<i>Name</i>	<i>Owner</i>	<i>Worked by</i>
Land under public domain.	Tecpantlalli Tlatocatlalli or Tlatocamilli	Tecpanpouhque Tlatoani (the king)	Tecalec Macehualtin Tribute payers
	Teopantlalli	Temples	Mayeques Macehualtin Tribute payers
	Itonales Milchimalli or Cacalomilli	Army	Tribute payers
Land under private domain.	Patrimonial lands (Private property)	Tlatoani (the king)	Mayeques
	Pillalli or Tecpilalli (Private property)	Pipiltin and "caballeros pardos"	Mayeques
	Calpulalli (Communal property)	Calpulli	Macehualtin

It is easy to understand the Aztec agrarian system as long as we do not try to do so in terms of Iroquois organization or Roman property. Furthermore, as we said at the beginning and have been able to show, the agreement among the sources is great in regard to the fundamental points.

How could Morgan and, even more surprizing, Bandelier have arrived at so different a reconstruction, based on almost the same sources as we have used?

A basis of truth lies in every misconception. It seems to us that in the future, a hypothesis worthy of investigation would be to prove whether the social and political organization of the Aztecs, and probably that of their Toltec and Teotihuacán predecessors, could be the result of two tendencies which were manifest in diverse aspects of Mesoamerican culture, in religion, architecture, sculpture, lapidary work, dress, arms and pottery, and which we might call: 1) the northern influence, which particularly comes down the Pacific coast and 2) the southern influence which appears to penetrate the Plateau through Guerrero, Oaxaca and the Veracruz coast.

The first seems to appear in the form of successive waves which, from very ancient times, penetrated into Mesoamerica bringing a tribal organization, that is, one based on kinship, of which the clans or *calpullis* and "barrios" would be a survival up to the present (Redfield:1928; Villa Rojas:1947).

The second, perhaps originally developing from a tribal organization, would have evolved from ancient times and would have succeeded in fusing great masses of population, in organizing the division of labor and in the training of specialists. It would also have the concepts of kings who were descendants of gods, the division of society into nobles and plebeians, a middle class of merchants (*pochteca*) and feather-workers (*amantecca*) and, perhaps, other artisans too, communal property for the plebeians and individual property for the nobles, and, lastly, the existence of cities, which could have changed, in virtue of their religious and military power, into imperial cities that dominated vast territories.²

The Aztecs, the last descendants of the ancient cultures in religion, in art and in science, would be an example of the fusion of both currents because of their cultural organization. On the one side we have the tribal current with communal ownership of land and social equality, while on the other the theocratic and imperial organization with social classes, nobles with private property, and the king or *tlatoani*, descendant of the god *Quetzalcoatl* and at each succession farther away from the *macehual*, the ancient owner of the territory of Anahuac in primitive times.

At the present time, however, I will limit myself only to offer these suggestions as a program for future investigation.

NOTES

¹ This translation is a slightly revised version of an article originally published under the title "La Tenencia de la Tierra entre los Antiguos Mexicanos" in the *Memoria de el Colegio Nacional*, tomo IV, No. 2, 1959:29-54, Mexico, D. F.

² Diverse governmental systems existed in Mesoamerica. The division of power between 2, 3, and 4 personages with equal rank, or else the subordination of two of them to a third, was known. We have information of dual government from Orizaba and Cotaxtla, for example (Tezozomoc 1878:348). We know of government by three among the Matlatzinca and in Uiatlán, Guatemala (Zorita 1909:79). The best-known example of government by four is Tlaxcala; but it also existed in Cholula and among the Quiches and Cakchiqueles, whom we have mentioned.

Nevertheless, a unitarian form of government was most frequent, for example, among the Totonac (Torquemada 1723:I-278), in Yucatán (Román 1879:I-314), among the Tarascans (*Relacion de Michoacán*) and in the Valley of Mexico. However, in ancient times, during the reign of Huitzilihuitl, according to Chimalpahin (1889:79), not only did the king govern, but also the *ilacatecatl*, who was Itzcoatl and the *ilacochcalcatl*, who was Cuatlecoatl, so that he says: "there were three to govern."

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