Polities, territory and historical change in Postclassic Matlatzinco (Toluca Valley, central Mexico)

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Abstract

Historical interpretation of political dynamics in pre-conquest central Mexico from indigenous records is fraught with difficulties. Beyond the basic challenges involved in interpreting fragmentary evidence is the fact that the majority of evidence comes from the dominant imperial polity (Tenochtitlan) and paints a biased and overly generalized view of political and social dynamics in provincial areas. We present a reconstruction of the political geography of the Toluca Valley of central Mexico in Aztec times that avoids these biases by focusing not on the events described in native histories, but on the individual towns and their spatial locations. We find that a theoretical perspective that defines political entities by networks and relations among people more adequately captures the historical situation than traditional models that define polities based on territory and boundaries.
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Keywords: Political process; Polities; Ancient States; Borders; Toluca Valley; Mexico

Reconstructing the pre-European political situation in central Mexico presents a challenge for research in historical geography. Beyond obvious practical problems of fragmentary written evidence are three inter-related conceptual challenges. The first is to overcome the intentional bias of written historical records that results from their production and purposeful manipulation by the dominant, ruling elite class. The second is to give a 'voice' to places and regions ignored or suppressed by bias so that broader political, social, and economic process can be examined from a more balanced perspective. The third challenge is to conceptualize and represent places and regions that do not fit the standard western conception of 'territory' as a well-defined geographic or political space.

We address these conceptual challenges through an analysis of political process and change in the pre-conquest Toluca Valley of central Mexico between ca. A.D. 1300 and 1550. Through detailed mapping of town locations within the Toluca Valley (derived from a variety of sources), we can see through the biases in the historical record to show that political control of the Toluca Valley was never consolidated into an integrated politico-territorial unit. Rather, control of geographical space was continually contested between the native Matlatzinca people of the Toluca Valley and a series of outside imperial polities, including the Tepanecs, the Aztec Triple Alliance, and the Spanish Empire.

These conflicts served to fulfill and reinforce spatially overlapping, multi-scale social, economic or military agendas of multiple political entities both within and outside of the Toluca Valley. The very notion of well-defined territorial boundaries is not applicable to the pre-conquest Toluca Valley or surrounding regions, and this is reflected in our conceptual understanding of polities and cartographic representations of historic political situations. Thus, the work presented here contributes to on going discussions at the intersection of Anthropology and Geography on re-examining the effects and conceptual utility of 'borders' and the relation between borders, territory and the fluid nature of how people utilized geographic space and conceptualized political space[1].

In the following section, we describe the cultural and linguistic history our study area to demonstrate both its historical complexity and how that complexity is exacerbated by broader regional political processes.

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[1] M.L. Smith, Networks, territories, and the cartography of ancient states, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95 (2005) 832–849; M. Berman, Boundaries or networks in historical GIS: concepts of measuring space and administrative geography in Chinese history, *Historical Geography* 33 (2005) 118–133; J. Bintliff, Settlement and territory, in: G. Barker (Ed), *Companion Encyclopedia of Archaeology*, Vol. 1, London, 1999, 505–545.
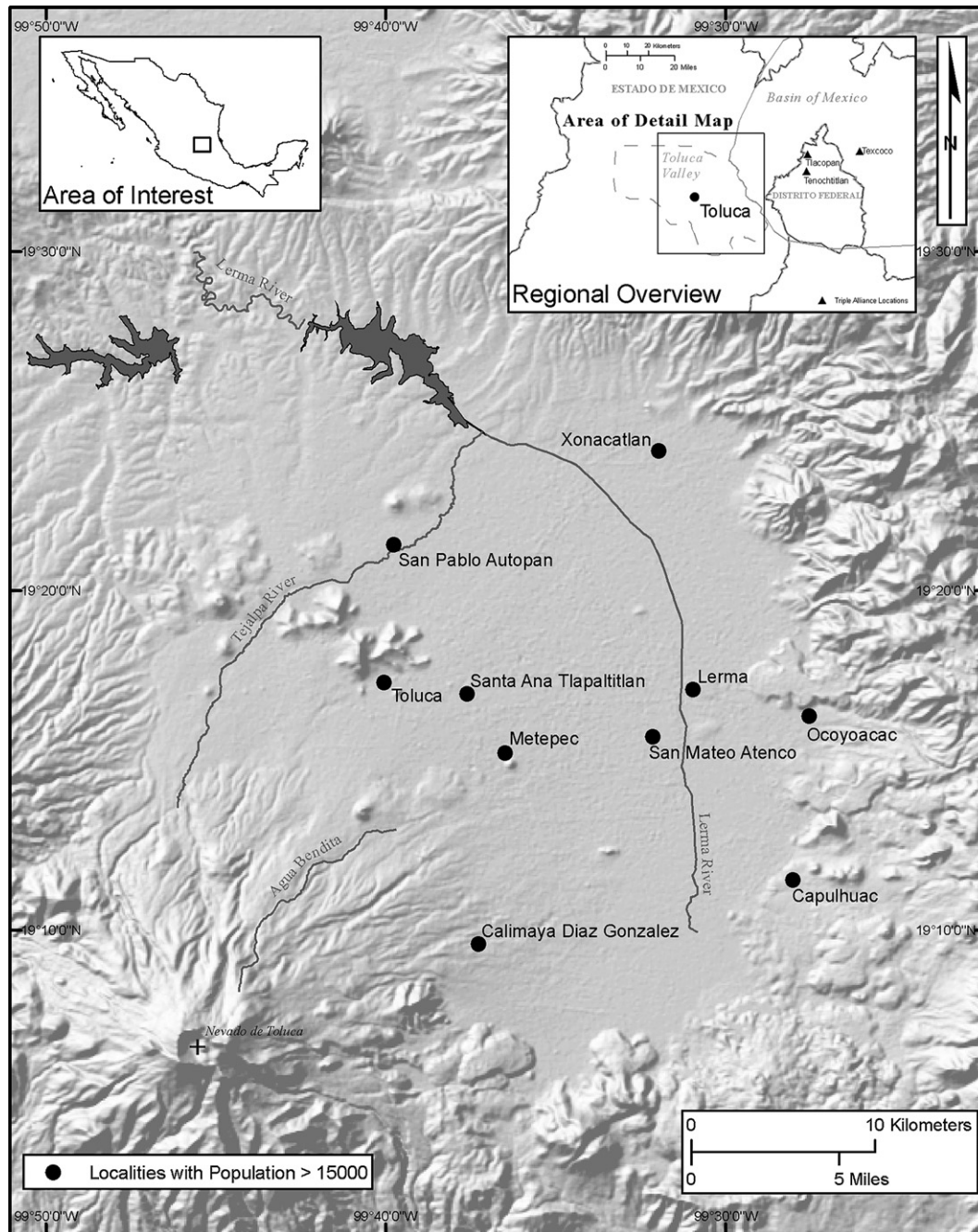
Fig. 1. Location of the Toluca Valley in Mexico.

The Toluca Valley, Matlatzinco, and the Matlatzincas

Situated in the south-eastern portion of the constituent state of Mexico, the Toluca Valley is a broad highland valley located immediately west of the Basin of Mexico (Fig. 1).

The valley is situated on an elevated plateau and because of this, generally experiences cooler temperatures than surrounding areas. The annual rainfall ranges from 800 to 1200 mm.[2] Fertile soils and the waters of the Lerma River have made the Toluca Valley a productive agricultural area.

Before the arrival of the Spanish in 1519, the Toluca Valley was known as Matlatzinco, a Nahuatl term that means either 'Place of nets' or else 'On the small place of nets.'[3] This usage is found in both types of documents used in the present study: native historical accounts from the Basin of Mexico and early colonial Spanish administrative documents from the Toluca Valley (see discussion of

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[2] http://www.worldweather.org/179/c01300f.htm#climate (last viewed 13 July 2009).

[3] The term 'matlatl' means 'net' in Nahuatl F. Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl*, Norman, 1983, and 'tzinco' is a locative that has been translated 'on the small place of' F.F. Berdan, Appendix E: the place-name, personal name, and title glyphs of the codex mendoza: translations and comments, in: F.F. Berdan, P.R. Anawalt (Eds), *The Codex Mendoza*, Vol. 1, Berkeley, 1992, 163–239.
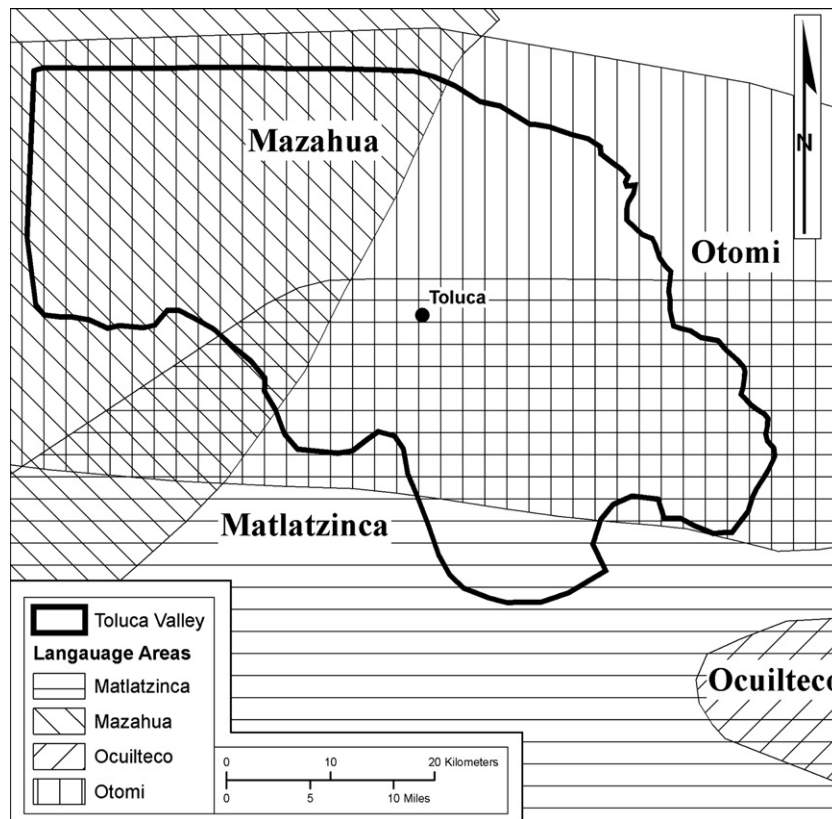
Fig. 2. Linguistic areas at the time of Spanish conquest, based on García Castro. García Castro leaves out Nahuatl, whose distribution is unclear. Source: R. García Castro, *Indios, territorio y poder en la provincia matlatzinca: la negociación del espacio político de los pueblos otomianos, siglos XV-XII*, Mexico City and Toluca, 1999, cited page: 48.

sources below). The term Matlatzinco was also used in two other ways: as the name of a large and powerful state that ruled the Toluca Valley before the area was conquered by the Aztec Triple Alliance empire, and as the name of the city that served as the capital of the Matlatzinco polity.[4]

The ethnonym 'Matlatzincas' ('Matlatzinca' in Spanish and Nahuatl) is even more complex. Following Nahuatl practice in central Mexico, Matlatzinca means the people of Matlatzinco. Thus it can refer to the inhabitants of the city of Matlatzinco, the members of the polity of Matlatzinco who lived in other towns, or anyone who lived in the valley of Matlatzinco (the Toluca Valley). The relationships among places, peoples, and indigenous labels for both were quite complex in Aztec central Mexico,[5] a fact that is not always understood by modern scholars.

To further confuse the issue, linguists have given the name 'Matlatzinca' to a language of the Otopamean language group spoken in ancient and modern times by some inhabitants of the Toluca Valley.[6] In Postclassic times (ca. 900–ca. 1519), the Toluca Valley was a complex linguistic mosaic, home to significant numbers of speakers of at least four languages: Matlatzinca, Mazahua, Otomi, and Nahuatl.[7] Fig. 2 shows René García Castro's map of the locations of three of these languages.

This map is at best a rough approximation; at least three limitations can be identified. First, reliable linguistic data are scanty for the pre-Spanish period. Second, there was much movement of peoples within the Valley (and between the Valley and areas to the east and west) both before and after Spanish conquest. Third, García Castro's map leaves out Nahuatl, perhaps under the assumption that Nahuatl was not native to the Toluca Valley. But there were significant numbers of Nahuatl speakers at the time of Spanish conquest, and it is likely that these populations had been present for several centuries (i.e., during the time covered by this article).

By virtue of their residence in the Toluca Valley, all residents (whatever language they spoke) could be called 'Matlatzincas.' In most cases, native historical documents from the Basin of Mexico seem to use Matlatzincas to refer to either the entire group of residents of the Toluca Valley or else to the people of the Matlatzinco polity. There is an unfortunate tendency among some modern scholars to conflate Matlatzinca as a language with Matlatzinca as a designation for peoples (speaking a variety of languages) of the Toluca Valley.[8]

[4] The use of a single term to designate both a polity and its capital was widespread in Aztec central Mexico, M.E. Smith, *Aztec City-State Capitals*, Gainesville, 2008, and in fact this usage was quite common in city-state systems throughout the ancient world M.H. Hansen, Introduction: the concepts of city-state and city-state culture, in: M.H. Hansen (Ed), *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures*, Copenhagen, 2000, 11–34.

[5] E. Umberger, Ethnicity and other identities in the sculptures of Tenochtitlan, in: Frances F. Berdan, John K. Chance, Alan R. Sandstrom, Barbara L. Stark, James M. Taggart, Emily Umberger (Eds), *Ethnic Identity in Nahua Mesoamerica: the View from Archaeology, Art History, Ethnohistory, and Contemporary Ethnography*, Salt Lake City, 2008, 64–104.

[6] F.D. Basalenque, *Arte y vocabulario de la lengua matlaltzingo vuelto a la castellana (orig. 1642)*, Toluca, 1975.

[7] R. García Castro, *Indios, territorio y poder en la provincia matlatzinca: la negociación del espacio político de los pueblos otomianos, siglos XV–XII*, Mexico City and Toluca, 1999.

[8] M.N. Quezada Ramírez, *Las matlatzincas: época prehispánica y época colonial hasta 1650*, Mexico City, 1972.

Calixtlahuaca is a Postclassic period archaeological site located in the village of San Francisco Calixtlahuaca, several km. north of the city of Toluca.[9] A number of archival documents from the Toluca Valley make it clear that the Calixtlahuaca archaeological site is the ruins of the ancient city of Matlatzinco.[10] A recently analyzed early colonial lawsuit from San Mateo Atenco[11] has some of the most explicit information. For example, when witnesses were asked about the political structure of the Toluca Valley before it was conquered by the Aztec empire, nearly all of them indicated that Matlatzinco had been the capital, and several explicitly identify the village of San Francisco Calixtlahuaca the location of that capital. For example, 'la poblazón grande y cabecera de los Matlatzincos, y el dicho sitio e lugar se nombra al presente es Calixtlahuaca, y por otro nombre San Francisco' ('the population center and capital of the Matlatzincas, and this location is currently called Calixtlahuaca, and its other name is San Francisco;').[12]

Regional historical context

Understanding the political situation of the ancient Toluca Valley within broader regional political processes is critical to understanding how bias in historical sources was produced, and subsequently how those biases can be addressed in modern-day spatially-oriented analysis.

The several centuries prior to the Spanish conquest in central Mexico, known as the Postclassic period, was a time of dynamic historical and political change. Starting in the twelfth century AD, small polities known as altepetl formed and began warring and trading with one another. The fortunes of individual polities rose and fell over the centuries, but sometime shortly after 1428, the Triple Alliance Empire[13] became the dominant political actor. By the time Fernando Cortés arrived in 1519 the Triple Alliance had conquered several hundred city-states and included several million tribute-paying subjects.

The historical record for Postclassic central Mexico is scanty and difficult to interpret. The Aztecs, like other Mesoamerican peoples, had a tradition of dynastic and ethnic history that combined oral and written accounts. Much of this history was written down after 1519 by Spanish friars and other chroniclers, and some of the histories that were painted onto various mediums such as bark survive today. Nevertheless, nearly all of the surviving texts come from the dominant Triple Alliance capital Tenochtitlan, and they present a heavily biased view of the past. When Tenochtitlan came to be the ruling city-state after 1428, its rulers deliberately burned earlier histories in order for their writing of the 'correct' history to triumph. Their version of history glorified the achievements of the kings of Tenochtitlan and left little room for the historical accounts of other polities. Perhaps the most glaring type of revisionism was the attempt of historians to erase the historical memory of the Tepanec Empire, an earlier polity that ruled central Mexican polity before the Triple Alliance was established in 1428.

Few native historical sources survive from the Toluca area, and today we must rely on the native historical record from the neighboring Basin of Mexico for information about this area. This is a clear source of bias. Much of the Toluca Valley was probably part of the Tepanec Empire, so the destruction of Tepanec histories and memories strongly affected the survival of information on this area.
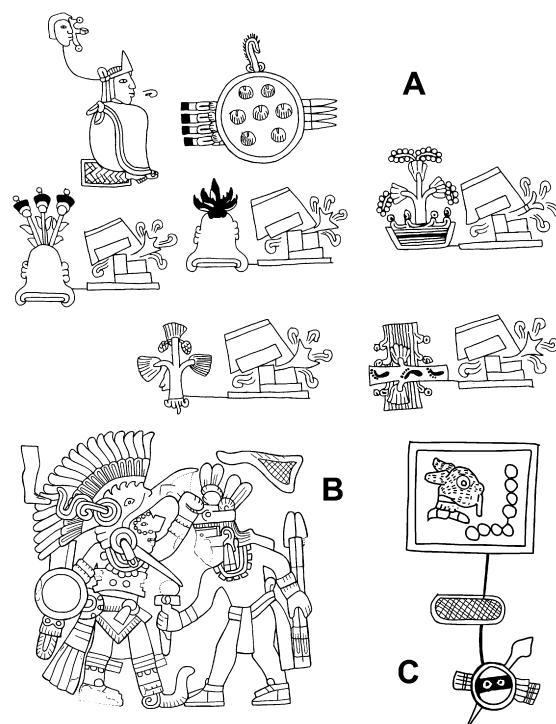
Fig. 3. The conquest of Matlatzinco as shown in pictorial sources from the Basin of Mexico. A: conquest of five towns from the *Codex Mendoza*. The Mexica emperor Axayacatl is shown at upper right. The burning temples signify conquest; the five towns, all located in the Toluca Valley, are Tlacotepec, Metepec, Capulhuac, Ocoyacac and Quauhpanoayan (additional Toluca Valley towns conquered by Axayacatl are shown in other parts of the codex). Reproduction courtesy of Frances F. Berdan. B: The conquest of Matlatzinco from the stone sculpture known as the Tizoc Stone. The warrior at left is the Mexica emperor Tizoc, and the defeated figure at right represents Matlatzinco, as indicated by the net glyph above his head; drawing by Emily Umberger. C: The conquest of Matlatzinco in the year 8-Rabbit from E. Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: Ritual, Divination, and History in a Pictorial Aztec Manuscript*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1995: f. 36v.; drawing by Bridgette Gilliland.

Furthermore, Tenochtitlan largely ignored this area until the rival Tarascan Empire made inroads in the mid-fifteenth century, after which the political involvement—and historical documentation—by Tenochtitlan increased dramatically. Tellingly, Toluca Valley towns are most often mentioned in imperial records when they were conquered. Fig. 3 shows three such examples from imperial sources. The *Codex Mendoza* (Fig. 3A) shows a number of conquered Toluca area towns (the burning temple means conquest) along with the emperor Axayacatl. An imperial relief carving known as the 'Tizoc Stone' (Fig. 3B) depicts the emperor Tizoc defeating a warrior from Matlatzinco, and the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (Fig. 3C) shows the conquest of Matlatzinco (indicated by the net) in the year 8-Rabbit.

Beyond the intentional bias created by Tenochtitlan chroniclers is a more fundamental question of the particular theoretical lens historical geographers use to interpret the form and function of Aztec geo-political spaces. In the following section, we outline the theoretical framework used to address this question in our analysis.

[9] M.E. Smith, J. Novic, P. Kroefges, and A. Huster, A new map of the Aztec-period city of Calixtlahuaca in Central Mexico, *Antiquity* 81 (2007); M.E. Smith, J. Novic, A. Huster, P.C. Kroefges, Reconocimiento Superficial y Mapeo en Calixtlahuaca, *Expresión Antropológica (Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura)* 36 (2009) 39–55.

[10] R. Hernández Rodríguez, Documentos relacionados con San Bartolomé Tlatelolco, *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropológicos* 9 (1950) 233–251.

[11] R. García Castro, M.T. Jarquín Ortega (Eds), *La proeza histórica de un pueblo, San Mateo Atenco en el valle de Toluca, siglos VIII–XIX*, Toluca, 2006.

[12] Litígio entre Atenco y Toluca, 1540–1635. Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Escribanía de Cámara, Leg. 161-A. Unpublished transcription by René García Castro, f. 339.

[13] The Triple Alliance, in this context, refers to the three city-states of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan that formed into an alliance. All were located in the Basin of Mexico.

Territorial and non-territorial polities

The basic polity in Aztec-period central Mexico was the *altepetl*, typically translated as 'city-state.' [14] One of the most influential definitions of the altepetl is that offered in James Lockhart's book, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*.[15] He defines the altepetl as 'an organization of people holding sway over a given territory' (p. 14). This definition falls into a trap that has caught many scholars of the Aztecs and other ancient states: the assumption that ancient peoples had concepts of political territoriality similar to modern nation-states. In the modern world, polities are defined in terms of their land or territory. Nation-states have clearly marked borders that are defended against incursions by other nation-states. The members or citizens of a nation-state consist in large part of those people who live within the state's borders; some citizens may live outside of the borders, and non-citizens may live within the borders. But regardless of the complexities involved, there are clear borders that are physically marked, officially recognized, and actively defended.[16]

This territory-based definition of state polities is quite widespread in the social sciences,[17] but it is a limited and even misleading perspective. Although some authors claim that modern notions of territoriality are universal in human societies,[18] this is clearly not the case. Anthropologists have shown that territoriality (the extent to which a group marks and defends a territory) varies widely among human societies, often in response to two environmental factors: the density and predictability of resources used by the group.[19] Thus most societies that live by hunting and gathering are non-territorial, while many non-state ('tribal') agricultural societies exhibit some form of territoriality. Most agrarian state societies, including the Aztecs, have territorial institutions with respect to land at the local level, but the extent of territoriality as a defining trait of polities is more variable. We employ an alternative conception of polity that emphasizes people, not territory. Following this perspective, an altepetl consisted of all of the people subject to its king, wherever they happened to live. In many cases, the members of an altepetl lived in a single continuous territory. In some cases, however, the subjects of neighboring kings lived interspersed with one another to such a degree that it is impossible to draw discrete territorial boundaries between the polities. The best known example concerns the altepetl of Tepechpan, Acolman, and Teotihuacan in the Teotihuacan Valley (this is the Aztec altepetl of Teotihuacan, not the Classic period metropolis of the same name). This situation was first pointed out by Charles Gibson, and it

has been discussed by in the Anthropology literature by Hodge, and Smith.[20] Hoekstra shows how the people-focused perspective of Prehispanic polities in central Mexico was transformed under Spanish rule into the European territory-based viewpoint of the organization of native communities.[21]

The alternative model fits well with the definition of polity given by Ferguson and Mansbach: 'A polity has a distinct identity; a capacity of mobilize persons and their resources for political purposes…; and a degree of institutionalization and hierarchy.'[22] This definition does not include territory and boundaries as inherent components of polities; indeed these authors point out that in some cases distinct polities shared the same space: 'Each polity had a territory in the sense of a space occupied by persons who identified with it, but that space was neither contiguous nor often exclusive' (p. 393). Other authors who have described preindustrial polities based on personal relations rather than territory include the ethnologist Hilda Kuper, archaeologist Monica Smith, and historical geographer Merrick Berman.[23]

Berman calls the people-focused approach the 'network model.' He shows how the non-territorial perspective requires visualization procedures distinct from those traditionally used for territorial polities. Previous work on visually representing Aztec political geography through maps has used lines to suggest the territorial boundaries of polities.[24] As shown in Fig. 4, the authors of *Aztec Imperial Strategies* combined this technique with lines connecting altepetl capitals to their subjects (largely based upon the *Relaciones Geográficas*).[25]

Although this approach more closely approximated the native conception of polity (a concept not analyzed in that work), we think it best to avoid imaginary territory lines altogether.

As a prelude to discussing our methods for visually representing Aztec political geographies, we outline the specific sources of historical information used to create our visual representations in order to further elucidate specific biases contained in the historical record for the Toluca Valley.

Sources of historical information

We use two main types of historical evidence to reconstruct the political history of the Toluca Valley in Postclassic times: native historical sources from the Basin of Mexico and Spanish colonial administrative records from the Toluca Valley. Place references found in the historical evidence were geo-referenced using Mexican government topographical maps at a scale of 1:50,000[26]

[14] Smith, Aztec city-states (note 4).

[15] J. Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: a Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries*, Stanford, 1992. This section is based upon part of chapter 3 of Smith, *Aztec City-State* (note 4).

[16] M. Kuus and J. Agnew, Theorizing the state geographically: sovereignty, subjectivity, territoriality, in: K.R. Cox, M.L. Low, J. Robinson (Eds), *Sage Handbook of Political Geography*, New York, 2007, 117–132.

[17] M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Volume 1: a History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*, New York, 1986.

[18] S. Grosby, Territoriality: the transcendal, primordial feature of modern societies, *Nations and Nationalism* 1 (1995) 143–162.

[19] R. Dyson-Hudson and E.A. Smith, Human territoriality: an ecological reassessment, *American Anthropologist* 80 (1978) 21–41; A.T. Smith, *The Political Landscape: Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities*, Berkeley, 2003.

[20] C. Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519–1810*, Stanford, 1964, cited pages: 44-47; Smith, *Aztec City-State* (note 4); M.G. Hodge, *Aztec City-States*, Ann Arbor, 1984.

[21] R. Hoekstra, A different way of thinking: contrasting Spanish and Indian social and economic views in central Mexico (1550–1600), in: A. Ouweneel, S. Miller (Eds), *The Indian Community of Colonial Mexico: Fifteen Essays on Land Tenure, Corporate Organizations, Ideology, and Village Politics*, Amsterdam, 1990, 60–86; see also J.K. Chance, The Barrios of colonial Tecali: patronage, kinship, and territorial relations in a central Mexican community, *Ethnology* 35 (1996) 107–139.

[22] Y.H. Ferguson and R.W. Mansbach, *Polities: Authority, Identities, and Change*, Columbia, 1996, cited page: 34.

[23] H. Kuper, The language of sites in the politics of space, *American Anthropologist* 74 (1972) 41–-425; Smith, Networks, territories (note 1); M. Berman, Boundaries or networks (note 1).

[24] R.H. Barlow, *The Extent of the Empire of the Culua Mexica*, Berkeley, 1949; P. Gerhard, A method of reconstructing pre-Columbian political boundaries in central Mexico, *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris* 59 (1970) 27–41.

[25] F.F. Berdan, R.E. Blanton, E.H. Boone, M.G. Hodge, M.E. Smith, and E. Umberger, *Aztec Imperial Strategies*, Washington, DC, 1996.

[26] INEGI, Toluca de Lerdo (E14A38), *1:50000 Topographic Maps*, 1988 (a), INEGI, Tenango De Arista (E14A48), *1:50000 Topographic Maps*, 1988 (b), INEGI, Volcan Nevado de Toluca (E14A47), *1:50000 Topographic Maps*, 1988 (c), INEGI, San Miguel Zinacantepec (E14A37), *1:50000 Topographic Maps*, 1988 (d).
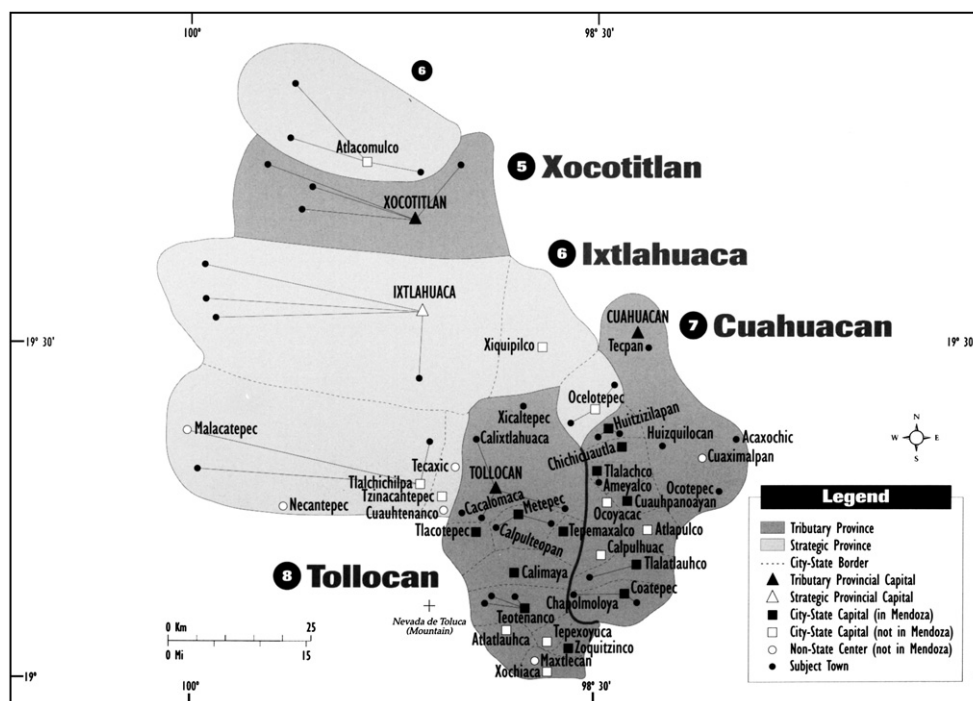
Fig. 4. Map of the imperial provinces in the Toluca Valley from F. Berdan, Richard E. Blanton, Elizabeth H. Boone, Mary G. Hodge, Michael E. Smith, Emily Umberger (Ed), Aztec Imperial Strategies, Washington, DC, 1996, page 326.

and National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) place-name files for Mexico[27] using a spatial algorithm written by Tomaszewski.[28]

The central Mexican native historical record

The Aztecs of central Mexico maintained a tradition of indigenous political and ethnic history. Historical events were recorded in documents painted onto various mediums such as bark and were known as codices that used a year-count calendar to keep track of time. Most historical knowledge was retained in the memories of historians or scribes, who consulted the codices as mnemonic devices when recounting historical narratives orally.[29] Although some pre-Spanish codices with religious and economic content have survived, all codices known to modern researches that deal with historical events were painted after the Spanish conquest, employing ancient styles and conventions. Many Aztec histories are preserved in the writings of early Spanish chroniclers such as Diego Durán,[30] who consulted native historians and now-lost codices in constructing accounts of Aztec dynastic history. This body of historical knowledge, as contained in codices, Spanish colonial writers, and other sources, is known as Aztec native history.

Aztec native history is almost entirely focused on the exploits of the kings and dynasties of individual altepetl. Each polity kept its own historical records, but for a variety of reasons most local histories have been lost and the vast majority of surviving histories

come from Tenochtitlan. The reason for recording and telling native history was to glorify dynasties and ethnic groups, not to preserve an accurate record of past events. These sources thus contain a strong component of bias in the form of propaganda and ideological discourse. There is a clear tendency for historical accuracy and reliability to decline as one moves back in time. Smith argues elsewhere that most events purported to happen more than two centuries before the arrival of the Spaniards in 1519 are most usefully viewed as mythical accounts with dubious historical validity.[31]

For the most part the native historical record for the Toluca Valley consists of accounts written in Tenochtitlan and other cities in the Basin of Mexico. Events in the Toluca Valley are only preserved as they relate to the history and politics of the polities in the Basin. Our approach for the earliest periods is to largely ignore the events depicted (generally migrations, conquests, and ceremonies) and focus instead on the specific places mentioned. We assume that those places were most likely important towns during the general period covering the events included in the histories.

Administrative documents from the Toluca Valley

In contrast to the Basin of Mexico, very few native historical sources from the Valley of Toluca have survived. Local administrative documents from the Spanish legal system, however, do preserve some useful historical information. The documents that have been

[27] NGIA, National Geospatial-Intellegence Agency GEOnet Names Server (GNS): Names Files of Selected Countries (Mexico), 2005.

[28] B. Tomaszewski, The reconstruction of Aztec political geography in the Toluca Valley of Mexico, MA Thesis, Department of Geography, State University of New York at Buffalo, 2005; B. Tomaszewski, Reconstructing Aztec political geographies, *ArcUser* 9 (2006) 24–26.

[29] E.E. Calnek, The analysis of prehispanic central Mexican historical texts, *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 13 (1978) 239–266; E.H. Boone, *Stories in Red and Black: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs*, Austin, 2000.

[30] F.D. Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, Norman, 1994.

[31] M.E. Smith, Comments on the historicity of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, Tollan, and the Toltecs, *Nahua Newsletter* 36 (2003) 31–36; M.E. Smith, Tula and Chichén Itzá: are we asking the right questions? in: C. Kristan-Graham, J.K. Kowalski (Eds), *Twin Tollans: Chichén Itzá, Tula, and the Epiclassic-Early Postclassic Mesoamerican World*, Washington, DC, 2006, 559–597.

most extensively used to reconstruct central Mexican polities and territories on the eve of Spanish conquest are the *Relaciones Geográficas* of the late 1570s.[32] Because the territorial organization of colonial New Spain was deliberately modeled on the pre-Spanish situation, lists of towns and villages subject to colonial *cabeceras* (or 'head towns') can typically be interpreted as evidence for the approximate spatial extent of conquest-period city-states.[33] Unfortunately, *Relaciones Geográficas* survive for only two towns in the Toluca region, Teotenanco and Atlatlauhcan (both located in the southern end of the valley).

These and other documents on the pre-Spanish history of the Toluca Valley were discussed in several works in the mid-twentieth century.[34] There continues to be an active program of historical research on the colonial period in the Toluca area.[35] Although several historians have published and analyzed local administrative documents that bear on pre-Spanish events,[36] only René García Castro[37] and Emily Umberger[38] have addressed issues of territorial organization explicitly. A distinctive genre of maps painted for colonial land petitions, known as the Techialoyan codices,[39] also contain limited information on conquest-period patterns.

We also make use of two informative text documents from the region. The first is a lengthy early colonial lawsuit between the town of San Mateo Atenco and the Marquesado del Valle (Hernando Cortés' personal estate, which included the city of Toluca). René García Castro kindly provided a searchable copy of his unpublished transcription of this document.[40] The second document is a discussion of the distribution of lands following Axayacatl's conquest of the valley in 1475. This document is discussed below in our section on the land distribution.

Methods

Geographic database development

The complexities of the pre-conquest situation in the Toluca valley motivated the development of a computational system that could properly capture, store, and visually represent historic information. We developed a historical geographic database to support two core tasks. First, it served as a repository for historic information and provided query and analysis tools for spatial and non-spatial information retrieval. Second, database contents were the basis of information that was geographically visualized, this forming the core evidence of our analysis.

The underlying conceptual premise of the historical database is an object-based view. Each location, or 'place' in the database is conceptualized as an identity-persistent object, a perspective based on the ideas of identity persistence outlined in Hornsby.[41] Hornsby approaches identity as distinct from an object's properties, values, or structure, and treats is as a unique characteristic that distinguishes one object from another. This is analogous to the idea of a primary key in database design. Identity is enduring, and the state of identity may change (from existence to non-existence). Hornsby's model identifies two types of change in which an object can been altered by some action or process. These are continuous change (e.g., weather patterns, vegetation growth), and discrete change (e.g., a land parcel ownership change). The latter was used for this research as this conceptual view was more aligned with the transactional nature of political change in the study area.

For ease of research, each place was abstracted spatially and represented as a point feature. For pre-historic times this is not a major issue, as many settlements are quite small when compared to modern urban centers.

Using an object-based perspective of identity persistence is beneficial as it allows a location to be established as early as a historic reference is made to it. As social, political or other process occur through time, some locations may be abandoned, and others may change or be combined with other locations, yet still retain their identity for reconstruction purpose.

Critical GIS data sources

National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) place-name points were an essential data source used to match ancient place-names to modern place-names.[42] NGA place-name points for current locations in Mexico were derived from the NGA GEONet Names Server. We used the NGA place-name gazetteer as opposed other gazetteers as its spatial coverage was deemed sufficient for project needs. We supplemented NGA data with 1:50,000 maps produced by Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática (INEGI)[43] as they provide the largest scale view of the Toluca Valley available. The NGA name point files generally show name place of populations as low as 2500 people. The INEGI maps therefore are important for showing place-name values for smaller populated areas. Each INEGI map used in this study was obtained in a digital GIS-ready format from the INEGI offices in Mexico.

Matlatzinco before Axayacatl's conquest of 1475

In this section, our analysis brings to light polities in the Toluca Valley that may have been silenced by a combination of bias,

[32] R. Acuña, *Relaciones geográficas del siglo XVI*, Mexico City, 1984–1988.

[33] P. Gerhard, *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain*, Norman, 1993; P. Gerhard, A method of reconstructing (note 24); Berdan, Blanton, Boone, Hodge, Smith, and Umberger, *Aztec Imperial* (note 25).

[34] Major mid-twentieth century works are: R. Hernández Rodríguez, *El Valle de Toluca: época prehispánica y siglo XVI*, Toluca, Mexico, 1988; P. Carrasco, *Los Otomíes: cultura e historia prehispánica de los pueblos mesoamericanos de habla otomiana*, Mexico City, 1950; J. García Payón, La zona arqueológica de Tecaxic-Calixtlahuaca y los matlatzincas: etnología y arqueología (primera parte), *Talleres Gráficas de la Nación*, Mexico City, 1936.

[35] S. Wood, The evolution of the Indian corporation of the Toluca region, 1550–1810, *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 22 (1992) 381–407; M.T. Jarquín Ortega, *Congregaciones de pueblos en el Estado de México*, Toluca, 1994; García Castro, Jarquín Ortega (Eds), *La proezo histórica* (note 11) .

[36] R. García Castro, De señoríos a pueblos de indios: la transición en al región otomiana de Toluca (1521–1550), in: F. González Hermosillo (Ed), *Gobierno y economía en los pueblos indios del México Central*, Mexico City, 2001, 193–211; Hernández Rodríguez, *El Valle de Toluca* (note 34); Quezada Ramírez, *Las matlatzincas* (note 8).

[37] See note 7.

[38] E. Umberger, Presence and material remains in the outer provinces, in: Berdan, Blanton, Boone, Hodge, Smith, Umberger (Eds) (note 25), 151–180.

[39] X. Noguez, R. Hernández Rodríguez (Eds), *Códice Techialoyan García Granados (edición facsimilar)*, Toluca, 1992; S. Wood, Don Diego García de Mendoza Moctezuma: A Techialoyan Mastermind?, *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 19 (1989) 245–268; N. Béligand, *Códice de San Antonio Techialoyan: A 701, manuscrito pictográfico de San Antonio de la Isla, Estado de México*, Toluca, 1993.

[40] García Castro, Jarquín Ortega (Eds), *La proezo histórica* (note 11).

[41] K. Hornsby, M. Egenhofer, Identity-based change: a foundation for spatio-temporal knowledge representation, *International Journal of Geographical Information Science* 14 (2000) 207–224.

[42] NGIA, National Geospatial-Intellegence Agency GEOnet Names Server (GNS): Names Files of Selected Countries (Mexico), 2005.

[43] INEGI, Toluca de Lerdo (E14A38), *1:50000 Topographic Maps*, 1988 (a), INEGI, Tenango De Arista (E14A48), *1:50000 Topographic Maps*, 1988 (b), INEGI, Volcan Nevado de Toluca (E14A47), *1:50000 Topographic Maps*, 1988 (c), INEGI, San Miguel Zinacantepec (E14A37), *1:50000 Topographic Maps*, 1988 (d).

propaganda, and differential preservation of the documentary sources. To accomplish this, we systematically examine the relationship between polities in the Toluca Valley and other regional political entities over time. In particular, the city of Matlatzinco is used as an identity-persistent entity for comparing political change and process. As discussed above, the city of Matlatzinco was the capital of a large polity in the Toluca Valley on the eve of its conquest by king Axayacatl in 1475. A fundamental question in our analysis is: how far back can we trace the dominance of Matlatzinco? Nearly all of our evidence for the earliest historical periods in the Toluca Valley is found in native historical sources from Tenochtitlan and other cities in the Valley of Mexico. In this section we summarize those data, focusing on the names of Toluca Valley towns mentioned in those accounts in order to understand the dominance of Matlatzinco. To structure our overall analysis chronologically, we divide the Postclassic epoch into five periods that are defined largely on the basis of political developments in the Valley of Mexico that affected the polities of Matlatzinco (Table 1).

The chronology shown in Table 1 is based on sources and data from the Valley of Mexico that are discussed in previous sections. Four of these periods fall before 1475 and Axayacatl's conquest and thus need to be discussed separately from the period after 1475. Fig. 5A–D is an overview map showing the important political towns for the first four periods.

References to these towns are seen in the historical record throughout the five periods we use to structure our analysis. In the following sections, we present the results of our systematic investigation of the political and social situation of each period.

Period A, legendary (pre-1300)

While acknowledging Smith's argument that it is unlikely that the Aztec native histories preserve reliable historical information about individuals and events prior to about two centuries before the Spanish conquest of 1519,[44] we suggest that the mention of specific Toluca Valley towns in sources describing potentially mythological events from this early period can be used to suggest the identities of the major polities of that era.[45] This suggestion is based upon the assumption that only the most important towns were mentioned in the historical sources. A number of native historical sources include information about the Toluca Valley in this period.[46]

Two major types of events dated by native histories from the Basin of Mexico to the thirteenth century and earlier involve peoples and places in the Toluca Valley. First, eight out of twelve sources that describe the migrations of the Aztec peoples from Aztlan to central Mexico include the Matlatzinca among the migrant groups.[47] These sources probably refer to speakers of Nahuatl who settled in the Toluca Valley, perhaps during the thirteenth century. Second, several sources that describe the lives of the semi-legendary Toltec and Early Aztec kings include events that

Table 1
Periodization of Postclassic history in the Toluca Valley

Code	Period	Approximate dates
A	Legendary	Pre-1300
B	Early Tepanec	ca. 1300–1370
C	Tezozomoc reign	ca. 1370–1428
D	Early Triple Alliance	1428–1475
E	Triple Alliance reign	1475–1519
F	Spanish colonial	After 1519

supposedly occurred at places in the Toluca Valley. Instead of interpreting the content or significance of these perhaps mythological events, we focus exclusively on the named places where they were purported to take place.

Five towns in the Toluca area are mentioned more than once in the Aztec native histories for Period A: Cuahuacan, Malinalco, Matlatzinco, Teotenanco, and Xilotepec; their locations are shown in Fig. 5, A. Although Alva Ixtlilxochitl lists Tollocan (Toluca) for this period,[48] we interpret this as a mistaken reference to Matlatzinco, for the following reasons. First, Alva Ixtlilxochitl never uses the term Matlatzinco; and second, no other author lists Tollocan in this period. In subsequent periods, a number of individual sources include both Tollocan and Matlatzinco, suggesting that these may have been two separate towns. Although some of the specific events reported to have taken place in the five towns in Period A may be more mythological than historical in nature (e.g., Toltec kings sent their families to Matlatzinco, King Xolotl carried out rituals at Malinalco), the fact that these five towns are included suggests that they may have been important places at this time.

Period B, early Tepanec period (ca. 1300–ca. 1370)

In the Basin of Mexico, the fourteenth century saw the rise to power and prominence of the Tepanec kingdom of Azcapotzalco, based in the western part of the Basin. Tepanec history is particularly difficult to reconstruct because the dominant Mexica of Tenochtitlan systematically destroyed historical documents and repressed information about this imperial power that preceded their own rise to glory. Careful historiographic analysis by Carlos Santamarina,[49] however, has brought to light the contours of the rise and demise of the kingdom of Azcapotzalco. In addition to the rise of Tepanec power, the fourteenth century prior to ca. 1370 also witnessed the founding of Tenochtitlan and the establishment of a situation of warfare and competition among numerous city-states.[50] The polities of the Toluca Valley were drawn into the political dynamics of this period, and thus their names turn up in the native historical accounts.

Towns in the Toluca Valley are mentioned less frequently in the native historical record during this period. The four towns included in these sources (Cuahuacan, Matlatzinco, Mazahuacan, and Tollocan) are shown in Fig. 5B. The location of Mazahuacan is

[44] See note 30.

[45] We cannot accept the attempt of some scholars to assign precise historical dates to events in the Toluca Valley extending more than two or three centuries before the Spanish conquest. E. Vargas Pacheco, La cerámica, in: R.P. Chán (Ed), *Teotenango: el antiguo lugar de la muralla*, Vol. 1, Mexico City, 1975, 189–264; B.A. Albores Zárate, Una travesía conceptual. Del Matlatzinco al Valle de Toluca, *Anales de Antropología* 40 (2007) 253–282.

[46] Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón, *Relaciones originales de Chalco Amequemecan*, Mexico City, 1965; Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón, *Codex Chimalpahin: Society and Politics in Mexico Tenochtitlan, Tlatelolco, Texcoco, Culhuacan, and Other Nahua Altepetl in Central Mexico: the Nahuatl and Spanish Annals and Accounts Collected and Recorded by don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin*, Norman, 1997; Anales de Cuauhtitlan, Anales de Cuauhtitlan, in: P. Feliciano Velázquez (Ed), *Códice Chimalpopoca*, Mexico City, 1975, 1–118; F.J.d. Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, Mexico City, 1975–1983, Anales de Tlatelolco, *Anales de Tlatelolco: unos anales históricos de la nación mexicana, y códice de Tlatelolco*, Mexico City, 1948; F. de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras históricas*, Mexico City, 1975–1977.

[47] M.E. Smith, The Aztlan migrations of the Nahuatl chronicles: myth or history?, *Ethnohistory* 31 (1984) 153-186.

[48] de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras históricas* (note 46).

[49] C. Santamarina, *El sistema de dominación azteca: el imperio tepaneca*, Madrid, 2006; C. Santamarina, Memoria y olvido, ostracismo y propaganda: El Imperio Tepaneca en fuentes e historiografía, *Revista Española de Antropología Americana* 35 (2005) 117–131.

[50] N. Davies, *The Aztecs: a History*, Norman, 1973.
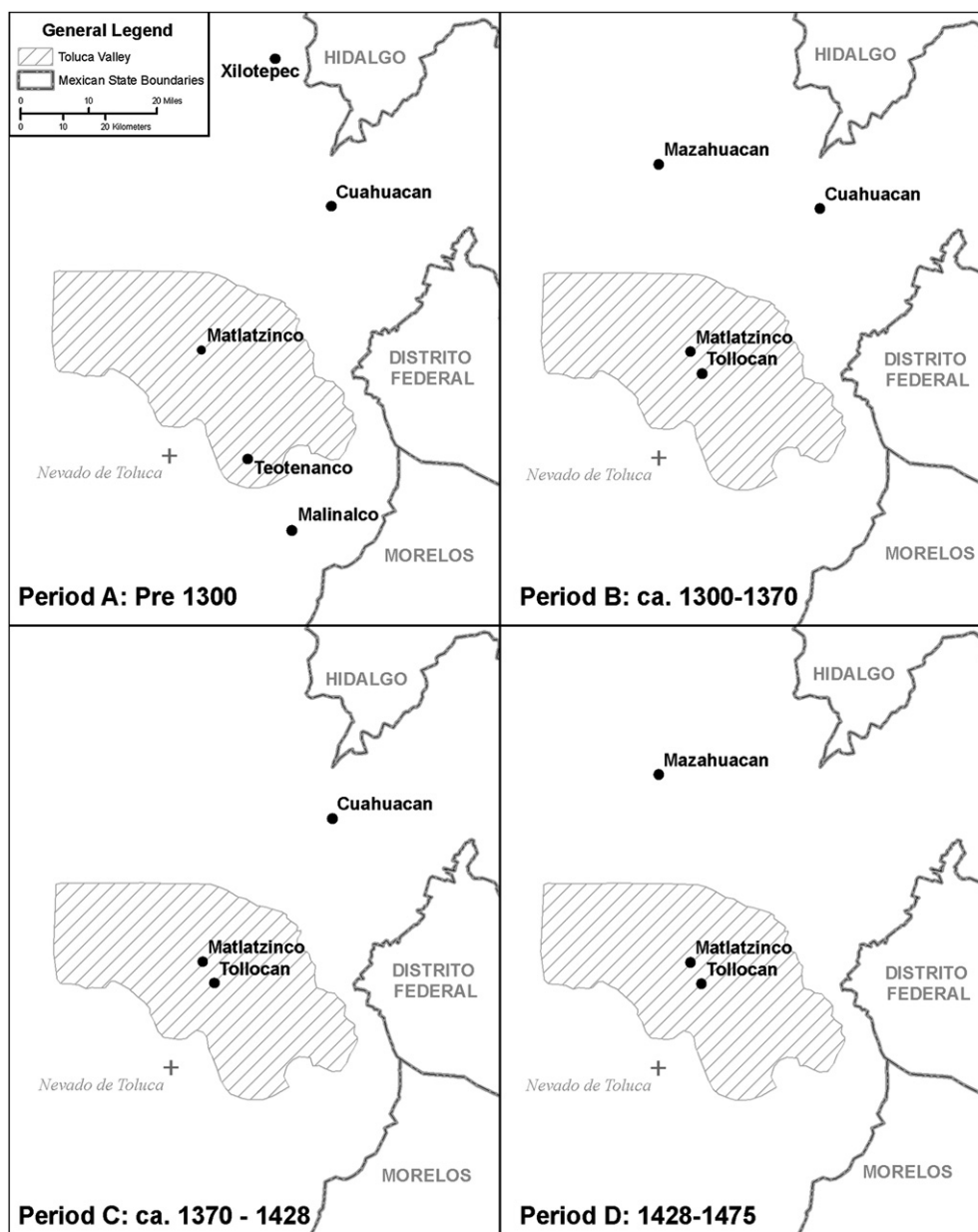
Fig. 5. Locations of major polities in four periods before 1475. These maps are based on our analysis of major native historical sources that discuss events prior to 1475. Source: R. Hernández Rodríguez, Los pueblos y las genealogías en el Códice Techialoyan García Granados, in: X. Noguez, R. Hernández Rodríguez (Eds), *Códice Techialoyan García Granados (edición facsimilar)*, Toluca, 1992, 49–59, A. Saurwein, Autenticidad de los glifos toponímicos del 'Círculo del Tepanecáotl' del *Códice Techialoyan García Granados*, in: X. Noguez, S. Wood (Eds), *De tlacuilos y escribanos: Estudios sobre documentos indígenas coloniales del centro de México*, Zamora and Toluca, 1998, 69–98; C. Santamarina, *El sistema de dominación azteca: el imperio tepaneca*, Madrid, 2006.

uncertain; sometimes this term is listed as a toponym, and other times Mazahuas are listed as an ethnic group. We have tentatively placed Mazahuacan at Xocotitlan, a town in the midst of the Mazahua language area (Fig. 2). Although we include Tollocan as a town for the first time in this period, its status remains uncertain, and it is possible that references to this town actually refer to Matlatzinco. The major reason for distinguishing Tollocan as a separate town and polity is a reference in Chimalpahin[51] to groups that attacked the Mexica near Ixtlahuaca; this list includes both Matlatzinco and Tollocan. Most of the examples of Toluca Valley towns mentioned in Period B concern wars and other interactions with the Mexica, who were serving as Tepanec vassals.

Period C, the reign of Tezozomoc (ca. 1370–ca. 1428)

This period covers the reign of king Tezozomoc of Azcapotzalco (capital of the Tepanec Empire), the most powerful Aztec king before the establishment of the Triple Alliance Empire in 1428. Tezozomoc conquered many city-states and engaged in a lengthy military struggle with the kings of Texcoco on the eastern side of the Basin of Mexico. As we discuss below, there is abundant evidence for Tepanec influence and control in the Toluca Valley, and it is likely that these relations included some kind of subjugation to Tezozomoc of Azcapotzalco during the heyday of the Tepanec Empire.

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[51] Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón, *Relaciones originales* (note 46), cited page: 54.

The native historical record from the Basin of Mexico includes little mention of Toluca Valley towns in this period (Fig. 5C). Matlatzinco is mentioned twice by Chimalpahin.[52] Additional information comes from the Codex García Granados, a colonial pictorial document from the Toluca Valley.[53] As analyzed by various scholars, this document includes depictions of towns and events in three periods: the Legendary period; the reign of Tezozomoc; and the final Prehispanic period.[54] For the middle epoch, numerous towns in the Toluca Valley are listed as subjects of Tezozomoc (Fig. 6).

Of these towns, two (Tollocan and Cuahuacan) are included in a central circular arrangement of toponyms that lists the kings subject to or allied with Tezozomoc.[55] The most probable interpretation of these data is that Tollocan and Cuahuacan were the major polities and that the other towns shown in Fig. 5 were either subject to these towns (and therefore subject ultimately to Tezozomoc), or else were independent towns under Tezozomoc.

As in the case of the previous period, the status of Tollocan is still uncertain for this period. All other sources point to Matlatzinco as the dominant polity in this period and the next, and it may be that the scribe who painted the Codex García Granados used Tollocan in place of Matlatzinco, projecting back the situation of Periods E and F into earlier epochs.

Period D, early Triple Alliance period (1428–1475)

The Tepanec Empire was defeated in 1428 (shortly after the death of Tezozomoc) by a coalition of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and several other polities. The victory signaled the formation of the Triple Alliance among Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan. These polities immediately initiated a program of imperial expansion by conquest, and by 1519 the empire ruled several hundred city-states and several million subjects throughout much of northern Mesoamerica. Our Period D starts with the formation of the Triple Alliance in 1428 and ends with the conquest of the Toluca Valley by king Axayacatl of Tenochtitlan in 1475.

Until Axayacatl's conquest in the 1470s, towns in the Toluca Valley are not prominent in the Aztec native histories in this period. Only Matlatzinco and Mazahuacan are mentioned in these sources as participating in various activities until the 1470s, when Tollocan is described as part Axayacatl's program of conquest of the valley (Fig. 4D). The early decades of the Triple Alliance were taken up with conquests to the south and east,[56] and the Toluca Valley did not get much attention from the Empire until the rival Tarascan Empire started to pose a threat. Based in Tzintzuntzan in present-day Michoacán (210 km to the west of the Toluca Valley), the Tarascans had started their own program of imperial expansion in parallel with the Triple Alliance. By the 1460s Tarascan expansion had reached the edges of the Toluca Valley,[57] and this set the scene for Axayacatl's conquest of the area in 1475.

Discussion: Matlatzinco and Tollocan before 1475

The historical data described above do not allow us to date the foundation of the city of Tollocan with precision. If one were to accept the native historical sources at face value (in this case, the chronicle of Alva Ixtlilxochitl), Tollocan would be as old as Matlatzinco. We think it most likely, however, that Alva Ixtlilxochitl used Tollocan to refer to the city of Matlatzinco. After Period A we include Tollocan as a likely place because Chimalpahin includes both Tollocan and Matlatzinco as separate participants (allies) in his discussion of a battle. By 1475, most sources agree that Tollocan existed as an independent city and polity. The number of references to Tollocan prior to 1475 is much smaller than the number of references to Matlatzinco, and we think it likely that some sources—compiled after the Spanish conquest—confused the two places for the earlier periods. After 1475 the city of Matlatzinco was renamed by the Triple Alliance conquerors as Calixtlahuaca and it is possible that the earlier toponym may have been unfamiliar to some writers in the Basin of Mexico after the Spanish conquest.

The resolution of this issue will require new documentary data or new archaeological fieldwork. Diverse native historical sources are in agreement that Matlatzinco was an important capital long before 1475, and there are many clear and explicit statements that the archaeological site of Calixtlahuaca was recognized in the sixteenth century as the ruins of Matlatzinco. No other archaeological site in the region matches the size of Calixtlahuaca or the monumentality of its temples and palace. Few Postclassic archaeological remains have been located within the city of Toluca, although a modest Postclassic site with a small temple is known from a hilltop just north of Toluca. If excavation of that site were to reveal remains consistent with a major political capital, dating prior to 1475, this might lend support to an earlier dating for Tollocan. Given the nature of the remains reported from the site, however,[58] we think it unlikely that this small site was a major political capital. For the present, however, we consider the pre-1475 status of Tollocan unclear and our reconstructions tentative.

Reign of the triple alliance − 1475–1519 (Period E)

The conquest of the Toluca Valley by Axayacatl was a significant event for the future of the region. After this, the valley was, broadly, under the control of the central Aztec authority, and paid taxes like other conquered areas. Although some later conquests were carried out by Ahuitzotl (successor to Axayacatl) to suppress rebellions, the region would not see any significant military activity until conquest by the Spanish in 1521. In the following sections, we outline important events and relationships during Period E that elucidate processes involved in transferring control of the Toluca Valley from local to regional powers.

Conquest by Axayacatl

Triple Alliance operations against the Tarascans began with an expedition of conquest to the Mazahua region north of the Toluca

[52] Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón, *Codex Chimalpahin* (note 46).

[53] Noguez, Hernández Rodríguez (Eds), *Códice Techialoyan* (note 39).
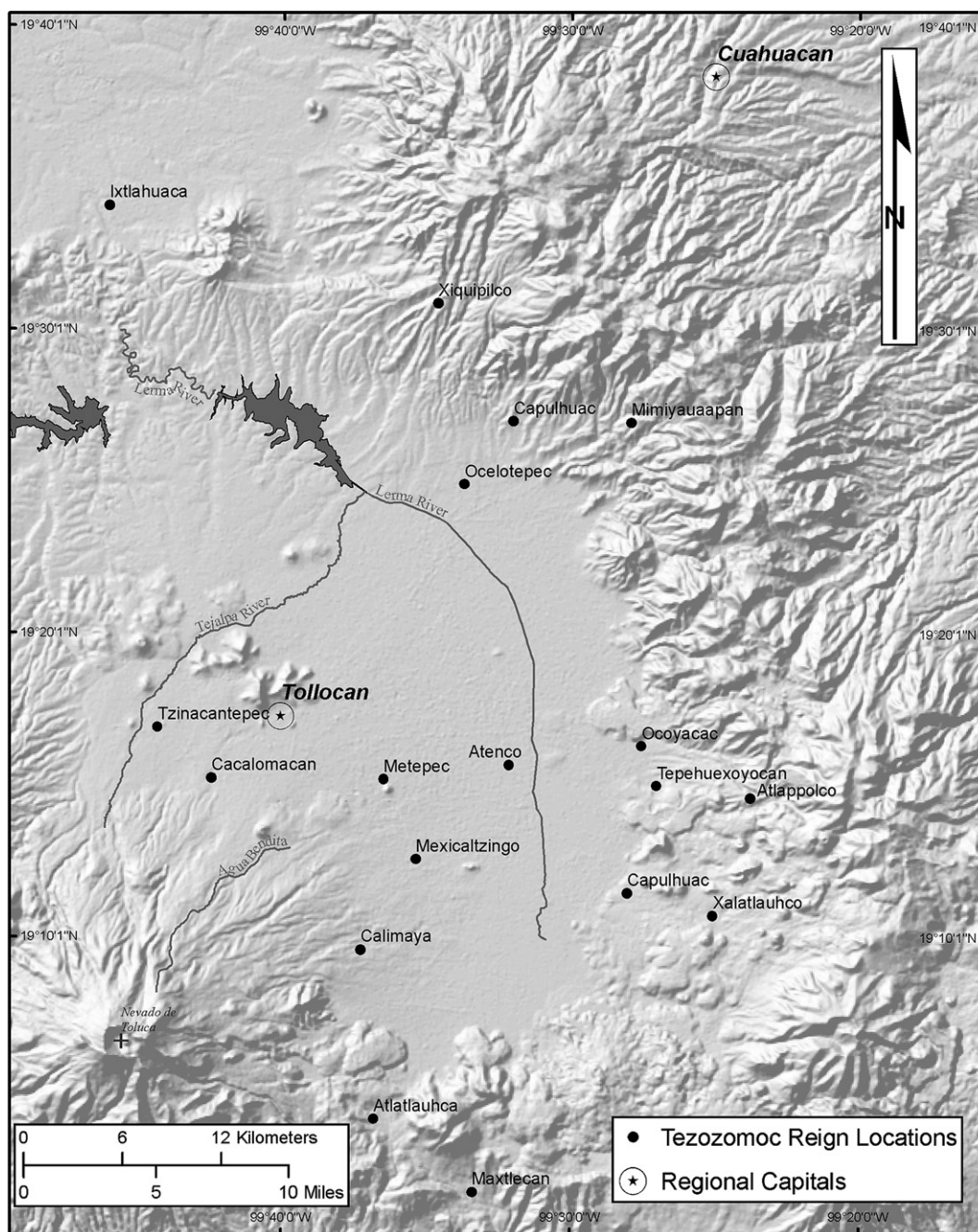
[54] R. Hernández Rodríguez, Los pueblos y las genealologías en el Códice Techialoyan García Granados (note 39), 49–59; A. Saurwein, Autenticidad de los glifos toponímicos del 'Círculo del Tepanecáotl' del *Códice Techialoyan García Granados*, in: X. Noguez, S. Wood (Eds), *De tlacuilos y escribanos: Estudios sobre documentos indígenas coloniales del centro de México*, Zamora and Toluca, 1998, 69–98; Santamarina, *El sistema* (note 49).

[55] C. Santamarina, *El sistema de dominación azteca* (note 49), cited page: 278.

[56] See note 25.

[57] C. Herrejón Peredo, La pugna entre mexicas y tarascos, *Cuadernos de Historia (Toluca)* 1 (1978) 11–47.

[58] R. Nieto Hernández, Toluca prehispánica: datos sobre su historia, *Expresión Antropológica (Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura)* 8/9 67–76.

Fig. 6. Locations of Toluca Valley towns subject to Tezozomoc of Azcapotzalco in Period C, based on the Códice García Granados. Source: X. Noguez, R. Hernández Rodríguez (Eds), *Códice Techialoyan García Granados (edición facsimilar)*, Toluca, 1992. We follow the following analysis of that document: M.T. Jarquín Ortega, *El Códice Techialoyan García Granados y las congregaciones en el altiplano central de México*, in: X. Noguez, S. Wood (Eds), *De tlacuilos y escribanos: Estudios sobre documentos indígenas coloniales del centro de México*, Zamora and Toluca, 1998, 49–58; A. Saurwein, *Autenticidad de los glifos toponímicos del 'Círculo del Tepanecáotl' del Códice Techialoyan García Granados*, in: X. Noguez, S. Wood (Eds), *De tlacuilos y escribanos: Estudios sobre documentos indígenas coloniales del centro de México*, Zamora and Toluca, 1998, 69–98; C. Santamarina, *El sistema de dominación azteca: el imperio tepaneca*, Madrid, 2006.

Valley in 1473.[59] Two years later, in 1475, the imperial armies conquered Matlatzinco and Tollocan. This was considered a major military victory and was celebrated in Tenochtitlan with festivities and poetry.[60] In 1476 or 1477, Axayacatl set out to confront the Tarascan armies directly, his most ambitious campaign by far. Fought at the edge of Tarascan territory to the west of the Toluca Valley, this battle ended as a humiliating defeat involving the losses of thousands of Triple Alliance soldiers.

Matlatzinco and other towns in the Toluca Valley evidently used the disarray that followed the Triple Alliance defeat to rebel, and in 1478 Axayacatl returned to the valley with his army to reconquer it. The Triple Alliance at some point had initiated a 'frontier strategy'

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[59] The best analysis of these events is that of Carlos Herrejón Peredo, whose chronology and interpretations we follow. Herrejón Peredo, La pugna (note 57).

[60] Á.M. Garibay K, *Axayácatl, poeta y señor de Tenochitlan*, *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 6 (1966) 29–45.
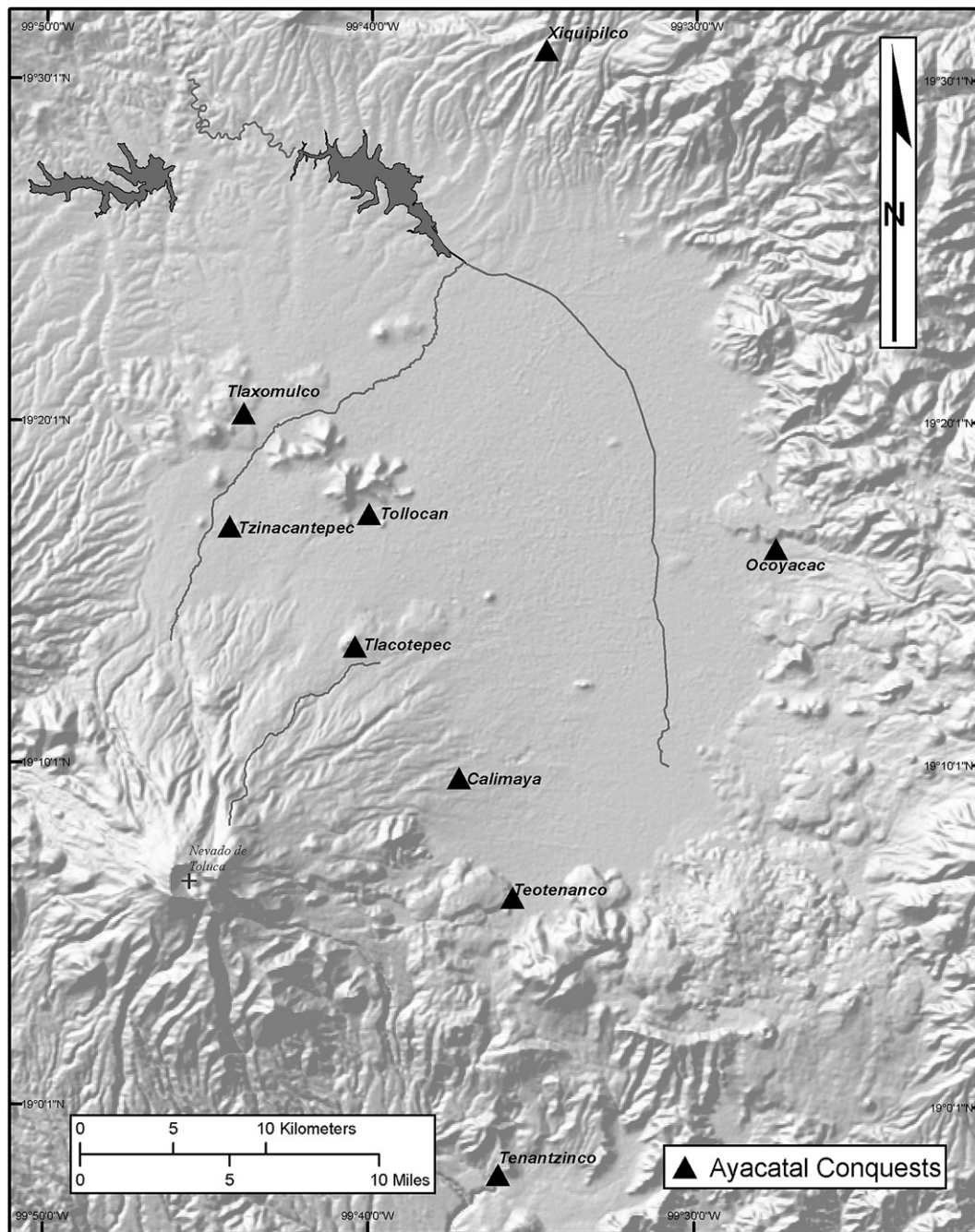
Fig. 7. Locations of Toluca Valley towns conquered by Axayacatl in the 1470s as shown in the Codex Mendoza.

that involved a variety of mechanisms for containing Tarascan aggression.[61] These included the establishment of client states along the Tarascan border (just west of the Toluca Valley) and the construction and maintenance of a series of fortified towns in the client states. Based upon its aftermath, the reconquest of Matlatzinco in 1478 can be seen as part of this frontier strategy. Unlike most imperial provinces—where imperial rule was indirect and political or economic interference was minimal—the new province of Tollocan was subject to severe control and manipulation. Axaycatl destroyed

Matlatzinco and established Tollocan as the provincial capital, and he confiscated many of the towns and subjects formerly controlled by Matlatzinco and distributed them among allies and relatives.

Before turning to this distribution of lands we consider the towns included in the imperial conquest lists as victories for Axayacatl. Fig. 7 shows Axayacatl's conquests as listed in the Codex Mendoza.[62]

These towns are distributed through much of the Toluca Valley, and they include some of the major conquest-period city-state capitals in this region. Two things are interesting about this map of towns.

[61] See note 25.
[62] Codex Mendoza (note 3) , cited page: f.10r–f.10v.
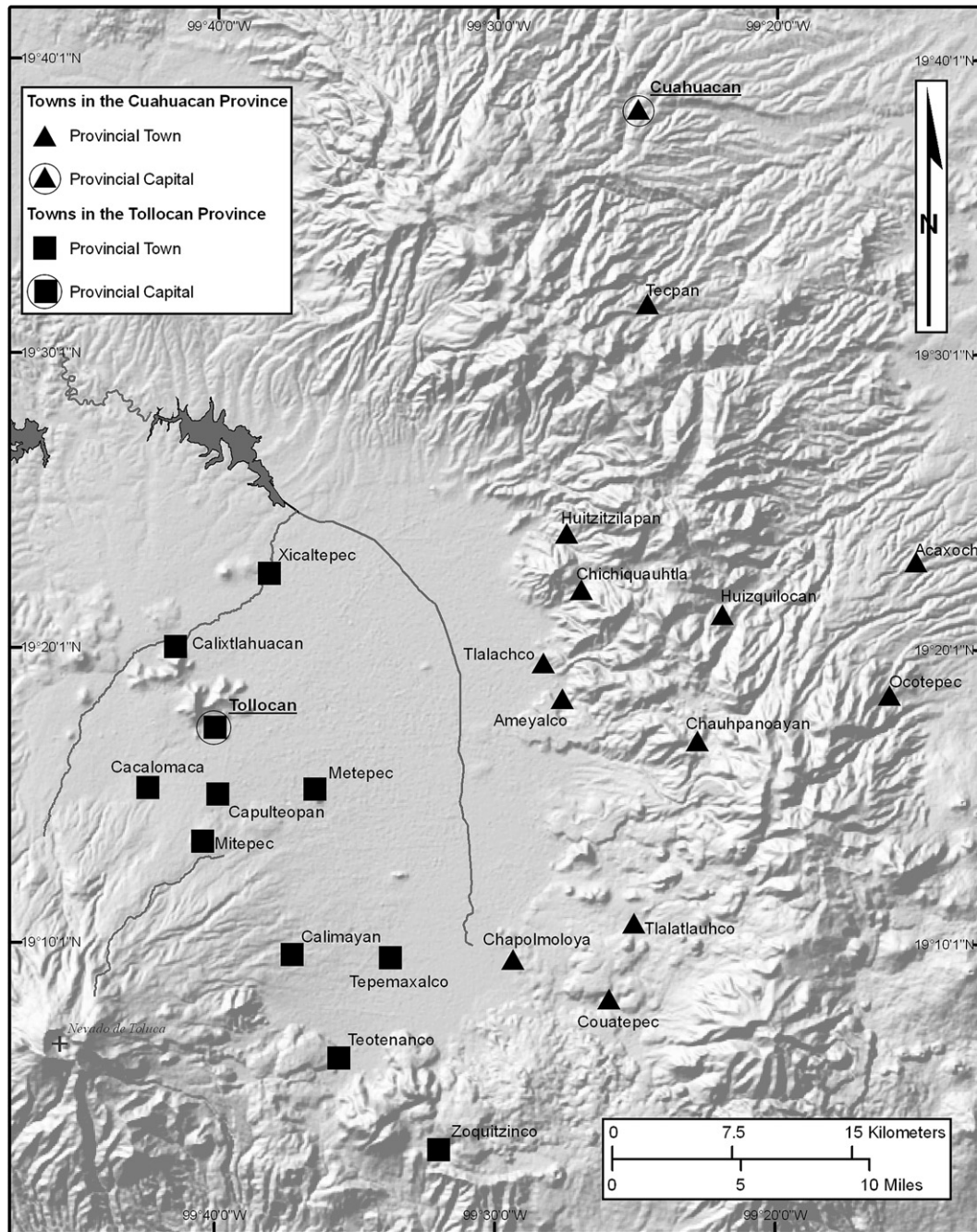
Fig. 8. Locations of Toluca Valley towns subject to the Triple Alliance Empire through the tributary provinces of Tollocan and Cuahuacan. Source: Codex Mendoza, *The Codex Mendoza*, Edited by Frances F. Berdan and Patricia R. Anawalt, Berkeley, 1992.

First, it does not include Matlatzinco (or Calixtlahuaca), despite the fact that all narrative descriptions of Axayacatl's campaign make it clear that Matlatzinco was the most important town conquered.[63] We offer two possible explanations for this omission. (1) Conquest lists were composed sometime after the actual events. By then, Matlatzinco had been long destroyed and had ceased to be an important town or polity, and it is possible that decades later scribes may have confused it with Tollocan, which had become the major town after 1475 and on into the colonial period. (2) Matlatzinco was omitted because its conquest was associated with the

disastrous Tarascan campaign that played a remarkably minor role in imperial native historical accounts (for obvious propaganda reasons).

The second interesting feature about the map of Axayacatl's conquests (Fig. 7) is that the distribution of the towns corresponds broadly to the region included in the Tepanec Empire under Tezozomoc (as seen in Fig. 6). Towns in this area had previously experienced some form of domination by an empire from the Basin of Mexico, and this may have contributed to the selection of this region for conquest by Axayacatl.

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[63] C. Herrejón Peredo, *La pugna entre mexicas* (note 57); Hernández Rodríguez, *El Valle de Toluca* (note 34).
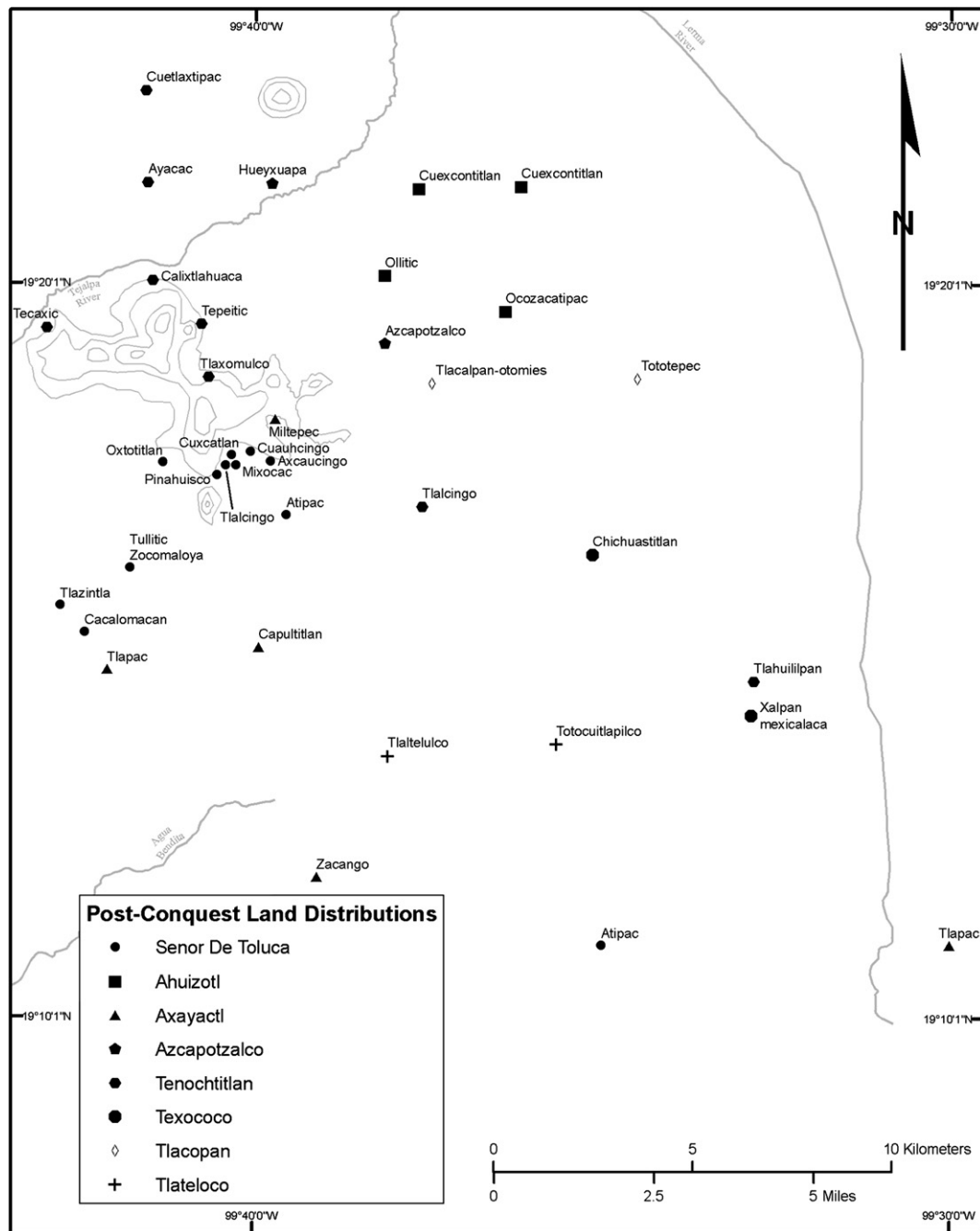
Fig. 9. Locations of towns and lands distributed by Axayacatl after 1478. Source: Hernández Rodríguez, *El Valle de Toluca: época prehispánica y siglo XVI*, Toluca, Mexico, 1988.

The imperial provinces of Tollocan and Cuahuacan

The Toluca Valley was incorporated into the Triple Alliance Empire through several cross-cutting arrangements. The clearest of these involved the establishment of the tributary provinces of Tollocan and Cuahuacan (Fig. 8).

Four of the towns included in the province description in the Codex Mendoza—Toluca/Tollocan, Mitepec (labeled as Tlacotepec in Fig. 6), Calimayan, Teotenanco—are towns specifically listed as being conquered by Axayacatl (Fig. 7). Whether or not the Tollocan

province was a cohesive political unit subject to one king is not known. A second form of imperial integration was a separate relationship of domination between a number of Toluca Valley towns and the city of Tlacopan (see below).

The distribution of land by Axayacatl

Axayacatl's distribution of Toluca Valley lands to his allies and relatives was a remarkable event, unusual in the records of Aztec imperialism.[64] The primary archival document describing this
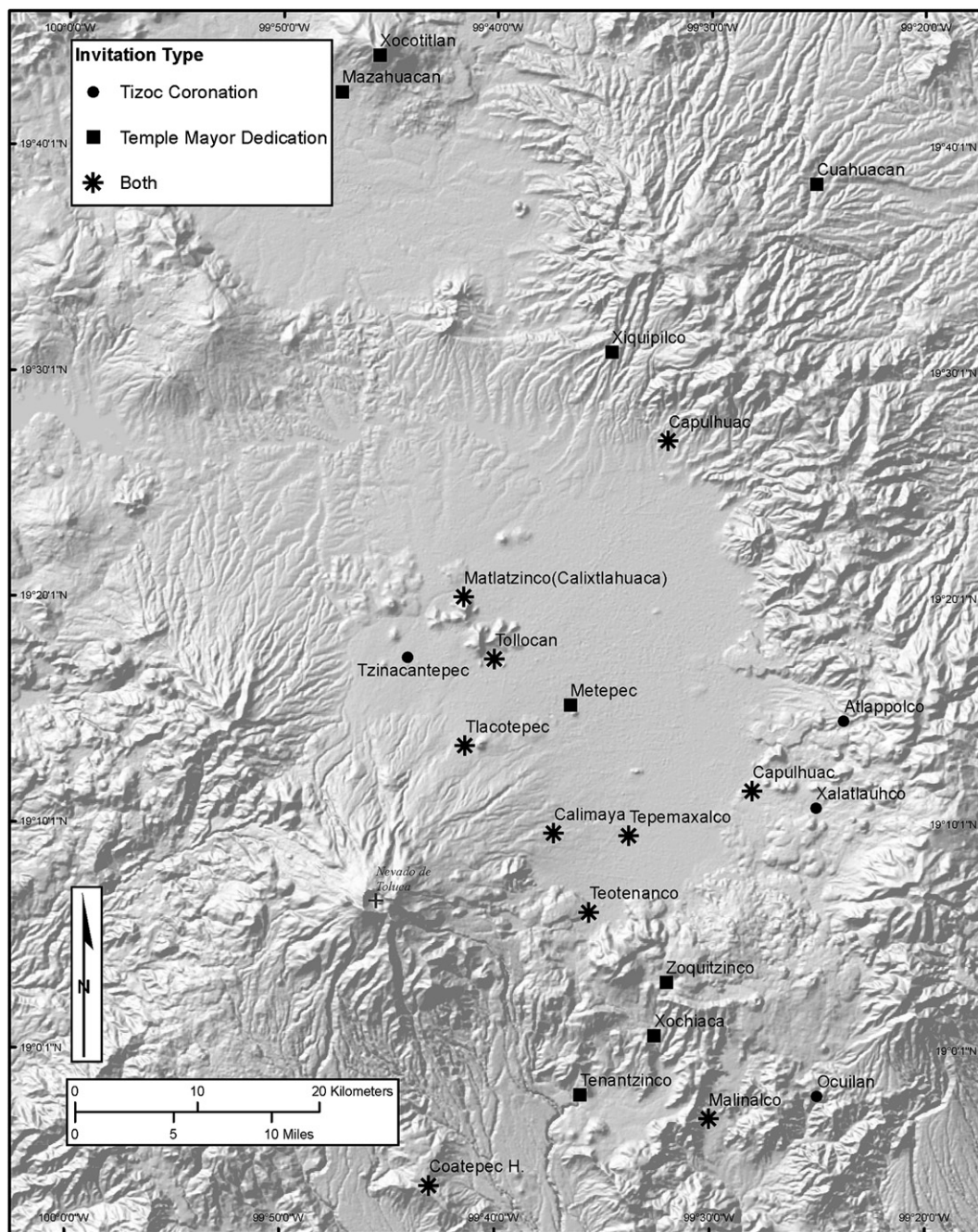
Fig. 10. Locations of Toluca Valley towns whose nobles attended imperial ceremonies in Tenochtitlan in 1481 and 1487. Source: F.D. Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, Norman, 1994, cited pages: 302 and 330.

process[65] was published by Hernández,[66] and analyzed most extensively by García Castro.[67] The document is a schematic map with Toluca at the center, surrounded by a series of boxes of varied sizes and shapes that list the towns distributed to each king or noble. This redistribution of lands was so distinctive that it was mentioned by the Texcocan chronicler Alva Ixtlilxochitl,[68] who normally had little to say about events in the Toluca Valley. Towns in the Toluca

Valley (Fig. 9) were awarded to the kings of Toluca, Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, Tlacopan, Tlatelolco and Azcapotzalco, as well as to Axayacatl himself and his brother (and future successor as king) Ahuitzotl.

As Fig. 9 shows, the towns given to some of the kings did not form discrete contiguous areas. Most towns given to a single lord were located near one another, but there was a considerable amount of intercalation of towns in different jurisdictions.

[65] Archivo del Hispotal de Jesús, Leg. 277, Exp. 2, Cuaderno 4, ff. 1126–1128.

[66] Hernández Rodríguez, *El Valle de Toluca* (note 34), 251; The map is also published in Umberger, Presence and material remains *Aztec Imperial* (note 38), 151–180, on page 157.

[67] García Castro, *Indios, territorio y poder en la provincia matlatzinca* (note 7), cited pages: 74–86.

[68] de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras históricas* (note 46), cited section: volume 2, page 145.
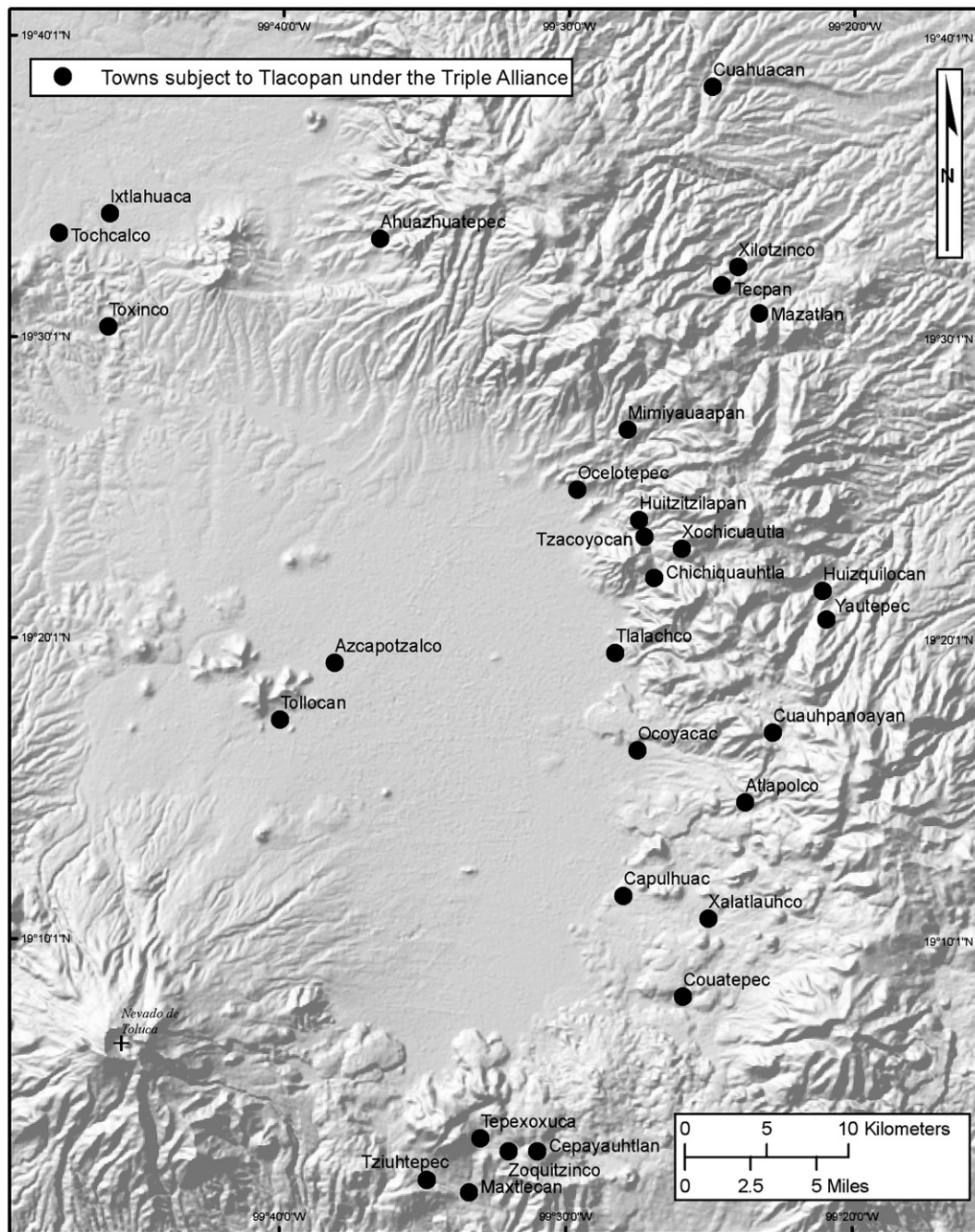
Fig. 11. Locations of Toluca Valley towns subject to Tlacopan in period E. Source: this is based on the 'Memorial de los Pueblos' list Memorial de los Pueblos, Memorial de los Pueblos, in: F.d. Paso y Troncoso (Ed), *Epistolario de Nueva España, 1505–1818*, Vol. 14, Mexico City, 1940, 118-122. As analyzed by Pedro Carrasco P. Carrasco, *The Tenochca Empire of Ancient Mexico: the Triple Alliance of Tenochtitlan, Tetzcoco, and Tlacopan*, Norman, 1999., and lists of 16th century Spanish labor drafts, discussed by Charles Gibson C. Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: a History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519–1810*, Stanford, 1964.

Although these groups of towns did not constitute polities, their spatial relationships mirrored those of Aztec city-states in their lack of territorial integrity. In other words, they illustrate the person-centered nature of political organization discussed above. García Castro's map of these towns[69] attempts to fit them into discrete territories, but as our Fig. 9 indicates, this is not possible without seriously distorting some spatial relationships.

Interaction with Tenochtitlan

One reason for Axayacatl's granting of towns to allies and relatives was to provide places in which immigrants from cities in the Basin of Mexico could settle.[70] These migrations out of the increasingly crowded Basin of Mexico constituted one form of social interaction between towns in the Basin of Mexico and the Toluca Valley. Another form of interaction operated within the elite class: Toluca
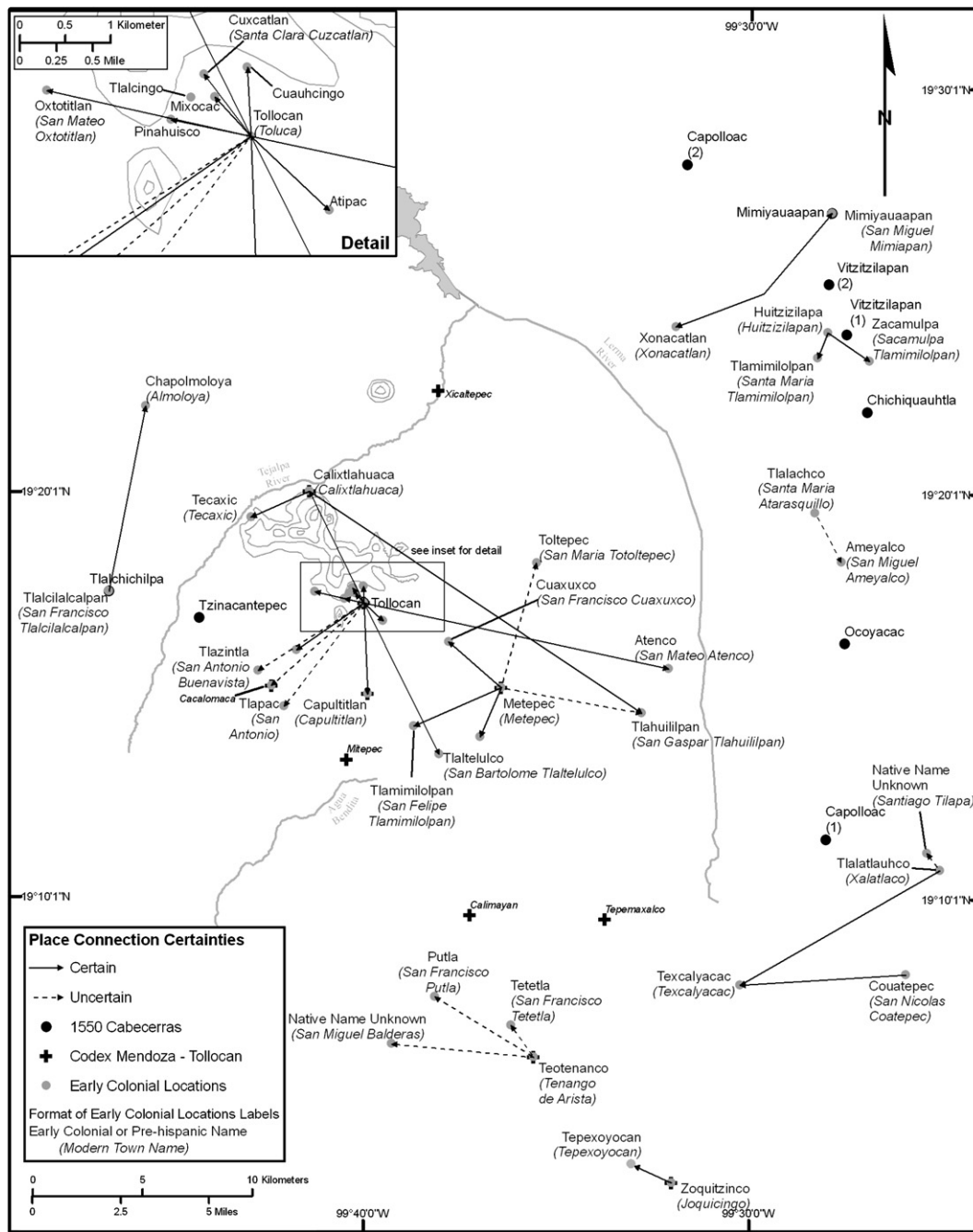
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[69] See note 7.
[70] See note 10.

Fig. 12. Relations of domination among Toluca Valley towns in the early Spanish colonial period. Source: R.H. Barlow, Documentos relacionados con San Bartolomé Tlatelolco, *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropológicos* 9 (1950) 233–251.

Valley nobles attended state ceremonies in Tenochtitlan. Coronations, royal funerals, and temple dedications provided settings where the nobles of the empire gathered for feasting, gift exchange, and ceremonial activities that promoted social and political solidarity among the imperial elite class.[71]

Fig. 10 shows the towns whose nobles were invited to two of the major imperial ceremonies in Tenochtitlan: the coronation of Tizoc (Axayacatl's immediate successor) in 1481, and the dedication of the Templo Mayor in 1487 by Ahuitzotl (who ruled 1486–1502).

In general, the majority of those invited to both ceremonies came from towns within the Toluca Valley, and these towns are also listed in the Codex Mendoza. Significantly more notables from towns in the north of the Valley were invited to the dedication of Templo Mayor than the coronation ceremony. These invitations show that kings and nobles from a large number of polities in the Toluca Valley were considered parts of the central Mexican elite class whose loyalties were sought (and coerced) by the kings of Tenochtitlan in the final decades before the arrival of Cortés.

[71] M.E. Smith, The role of social stratification in the Aztec empire: a view from the provinces, *American Anthropologist* 88 (1986) 70–91.

The Tepanec connection

The nature of subjugation and control by the Triple Alliance was more complex than we have suggested so far. Many provincial towns were subject to one or both of two types of ruling political entities. The first type was towns subject to the Triple Alliance itself and listed in tax documents such as the Codex Mendoza. Taxes from these towns were distributed in a formula of 40% each to Tenochtitlan and Texcoco and the remainder to Tlacopan.[72] The second type was towns subject to one of the three individual capitals, separately from their relationship to the combined empire. It appears that some provincial city-states capitals experienced both types of subjugation, and in some cases individual towns and villages within a given provincial polity were subject to different capitals in the Basin of Mexico. This complex situation is the subject of Pedro Carrasco's book, *The Tenochca Empire of Ancient Mexico*.[73]

Many towns in the Toluca Valley were considered subjects of the city of Tlacopan, the Tepanec successor to Azcapotzalco. Carrasco interprets several lists of towns from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as representing these towns; we plot them in Fig. 11.

These towns overlap with the towns listed in the Codex Mendoza as subject to the Triple Alliance (Fig. 8). If Carrasco's interpretations are valid,[74] this overlapping distribution provides another example of the non-territorial nature of central Mexican polities, as the provinces of the Triple Alliance Empire and the Tepanec Empire were not discrete bounded entities, but rather overlapping areas of villages and peoples subject to distinct overlords.

Early colonial period cabeceras and sujetos

Although we do not analyze territorial processes after the Spanish conquest of 1519, this period is important because it produced numerous documents that provide information about the pre-Spanish situation. Fig. 12 shows early colonial period cabeceras (head towns) and sujetos (subject communities) within the Toluca Valley. In this map we use a different convention—drawing lines between cabeceras and their sujetos—to better illustration the political landscape.

The political landscape of the early colonial period in the Toluca Valley appears to reflect the political situation before the arrival of the Spaniards. In most cases, the larger towns that were listed as tributaries in the Codex Mendoza appear in later colonial records as either cabeceras or sujetos.

The spatial relationships between centers and their subjects again conform to the non-territorial model described above. This is true even though the Spaniards at the time were in the process of instituting more European-style territorial forms of organization, control, and geographical dispossession in central Mexico through methods such as physical power, state support, and motivation for profit.[75]

Summary and conclusions

In this work, we try to give (a kind of) 'voice' to political entities in the pre-conquest Toluca Valley too long 'silenced' by intentional bias in the historical records and a paucity of historical evidence. Finding this voice depends upon an analysis of the inherent geographical dimensions of the political situation in the Toluca Valley. Particularly important is our focus on specific towns and polities mentioned in the native historical sources and their locations. Our examination of which towns were included in particular sources allows us to (a) identify and mitigate biases and (b) reconstruct the political landscape of the Postclassic Toluca Valley. This was a complex political landscape whose polities engaged in multi-scale relationships with one another and with imperial polities in the Basin of Mexico.

We have expanded on previous research on the pre-historical and historical geographies of the Toluca Valley in two important ways. First, we have presented detailed cartographic summaries of social, political, and temporal phenomena for the period between ca. A.D. 1300 to 1550 in the Toluca Valley. With this approach, we show how detailed mapping can assist in identifying where ancient places were located, how they interacted with one another over time, and the effects that ethnohistoric native bias and fragmentary evidence have on reproducing effective cartographic summaries of the past. Previous research on mapping pre-historic locations was hampered by limited and imprecise maps and spatial data. The geographical visualization and representation methodologies we used helped to illuminate these comparisons through the development of historical GIS databases and the use of GIS for qualitative analysis. Second, our approach to representing ancient polities is grounded in a theoretical perspective that challenges the euro-western notion of using well-defined political boundaries to define ancient states, because these types of representations are not applicable to the time and place considered in our study.

Future research on representation and interpretation of ancient states can build on the view of polity presented in this paper in at least two ways. First, geographers and others can continue to explore methods for the analysis of non-territorial political relations and institutions. Second, theoretical and comparative models of how place and political process were constructed by ancient people need to be further developed. Ideally, this will move away from the restrictive and often incorrect political models of discrete territorial entities and lead to improved understanding of ancient states and people.

[72] Although the term 'tribute' is typically used by Aztec scholars, these payments in fact correspond to the common definition of a tax (regular, institutionalized, and recorded payments), rather than tribute (a one-time lump-sum payment). D. Tarschys, Tributes, tariffs, taxes and trade: the changing sources of government revenue, *British Journal of Political Science* 19 (1988) 1–20.

[73] Carrasco, *The Tenochca Empire of Ancient Mexico* (note 64). Another recent study of Aztec imperialism focused almost exclusively on the Triple Alliance and its towns and processes Berdan, Blanton, Boone, Hodge, Smith, and Umberger, *Aztec Imperial* (note 25).

[74] For discussion, see: M.E. Smith, Review of the Tenochca empire of central Mexico, by Pedro Carrasco, *Ethnohistory* 49 (2002) 451–453.

[75] C. Harris, How did colonialism dispossess? Comments from an edge of empire, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94 (2004) 165–182. Beatriz Albores discusses the changing uses of the terms Matlatzinco and Toluca Valley during the colonial period. Albores Zárate, Una travesía conceptual (note 45).