Aztec Palaces and Other Elite Residential Architecture

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One hallmark of complex society is the elite residence, or palace. By this standard, Aztec society of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Central Mexico is found to be extraordinarily hierarchical and richly nuanced, with administrative palaces, pleasure palaces, and mansions, all designed to cosset their noble denizens and advertise themselves to the world as seats of authority and wealth. From detailed descriptions in documentary sources quite a lot is known about Aztec palaces and other fine houses: what went on in them, how space was used, and how Aztecs thought about palaces. In contrast, material evidence is paltry, as there are few archaeologically known examples. This essay reviews Aztec period elite residential architecture of the Basin of Mexico and adjacent regions, with an emphasis upon those palaces that served as seats of government. Synthesizing documentary and material sources reveals how the forms of these buildings reflect their function as the arena for the distinctive pattern of Aztec government-by-elite-consensus. Aztec palaces also reveal the universal human fondness for luxury and comfort.[1]

Aztec Palaces: Types and Examples

The evidence is indisputable that elite residential architecture in the Central Highlands of Mexico in the Postclassic period (i.e., A.D. 1150–1520) encompassed a wide range of forms, from rustic hunting lodges to the imperial palace of Tenochtitlan. The most common Aztec word for *palace* was *tecpan-calli*, meaning *lord/place-house*[2]

[1] This essay takes up in greater detail themes introduced in "Architecture and Authority in an Aztec Village: Form and Function of the *Tecpan*" (Evans 1991); more detailed interpretations of Aztec palace behavior are presented in "Aztec Noble Courts" (Evans 2001) and "Sexual Politics of the Aztec Palace" (Evans 1998a), while description and analysis of pleasure palaces and gardens can be found in "Aztec Royal Pleasure Parks" (Evans 2000).

[2] In the *Florentine Codex* (Sahagún 1963 [1569], bk. 11: 270), the Spanish gloss for *tecpan-calli* reads: "Palaces where the lords lived . . . city buildings where audiences were held and the lords and judges met to determine public lawsuits." The original text translated from Nahuatl continues: "[T]he house of the ruler, or the government house, where the ruler . . . lives, or where the rulers or the townsmen, the householders, assemble."

Tlatocacalli, on the other hand, indicates a house "where the lord usually lived"; a *tecpilcalli* was the palace of an important person; and *tlacocalli* refers to a "sumptuous [house] with many buildings" (for Spanish glosses on these terms, see p. 271).

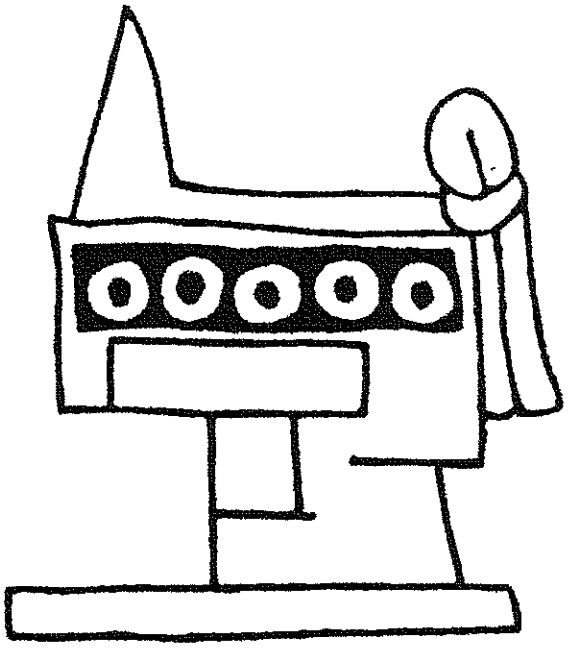

Fig. 1 Aztec glyph for *tecpan-calli (lord/place-house)* shows the house glyph surmounted by the *copil* headdress of office. Across its lintel is its signature disk frieze, an ancient Mesoamerican symbol for preciousness in general and jade in particular, as well as for the day as a measure of time.

(Fig. 1).[3] Early Colonial period documentary sources in the native tradition used the word *tecpan* as shorthand for many kinds of palaces of ruling lords, regardless of special functions. Where the ruler was living, that was his (or, very occasionally, her) *tecpan*. Spanish sources sometimes used the word *tecpan* but more frequently called them *casas reales, palacios,* or, distinguishing the pleasure palaces, *casas de recreo*. The word *tecpan* is still in use in Mexico today, used interchangeably with *casas de comunidad* or simply *comunidad*, referring to an administrative palace or community building (Ponce de Léon and Siller 1985: 25). This meaning has survived the Colonial period because the native tradition of local political administration was maintained, whereas pleasure palace and mansion sites were appropriated by Spanish lords and rebuilt to Spanish taste.

It is appropriate to use the English term *palace* in regard to the Aztec *tecpan*, and also to use associated conceptual analogs such as *pleasure palace* because the Aztecs used *tecpan* in many of the same general senses attributed to *palace*. Most commonly, the term meant the home of a hereditary lord, and it also took on associated meanings, such as seat of government, place of riches and art, and idyllic retreat amidst scenery and diversions.

Aztec palaces in general comprised three main functional types: (a) *administrative palaces* were local places of government and residences of local rulers; this plan was dominated by a large entry courtyard, which served as a meeting space, surrounded by suites of special

[3] The disk motif in association with rulership occurs as early as the Middle Formative, for example, appearing on Monument 1 (The King) at Chalcatzingo, and in Guerrero wall paintings depicting richly garbed figures who were no doubt nobles. That the meanings of jade/preciousness and the day as a unit of time would overlap is understandable, given the deep tradition of lords as monopolizing knowledge of calendrics.

purpose rooms; (b) *mansions* of wealthy nobles and commoners were luxurious residences built in conformance to sumptuary laws; (c) *pleasure palaces* and *retreats* had diverse functions expressed through forms ranging from hay-bale barracks at religious shrines to luxurious aeries carved out of cliff faces, as at Nezahualcoyotl's baths at Texcotzingo.

With its emphasis on administrative *tecpans*, this essay only briefly considers mansions and pleasure palaces, but Aztec palaces in general comprise a polythetically distributed set of features. They all share some features with each other, but there seem to have been no strict rules governing local variations on form and function. Functional types form sloppy clusters of features. For example, pleasure palaces were famed for gardens, but administrative palaces also had gardens, and garden development was as avidly pursued by Aztec nobles as it was by English lords several centuries later (Evans 2000). Administrative *tecpans* were defined by the signature large entry courtyard, but entry courtyards characterized many Postclassic period residences in the Central Highlands (and in other times and places), and presumably this feature was present in Aztec palaces of all functional types, even if hypertrophied in such imperial administrative *tecpans* as Motecuzoma II's palace in Tenochtitlan or the palaces of Texcoco.

Of the hundreds of Aztec palaces that once stood in the Basin of Mexico and adjacent regions, we have solid, substantial evidence—ethnohistorical and/or archaeological—remains—from only a few dozen, most of them administrative *tecpans* (Fig. 2; Table 1). Of imperial palaces, there are extensive descriptions by people who lived in them or who knew people who lived in them, but not one of the imperial palaces has been excavated systematically, nor is this likely to occur because their remains lie deeply buried beneath modern cities. However, in the last few years several smaller *tecpans* have been archaeologically investigated. The combination of sources permits a broad reconstruction of different types of palaces.

Administrative *Tecpans*

The system of administrative *tecpans* in the Basin of Mexico, the Aztec core area, linked all communities having governmental functions, from the most powerful imperial capital, Tenochtitlan, administering a far more extensive tribute empire than that of any of Mesoamerica's antecedent or contemporaneous societies, down to large villages where tributes from adjacent smaller villages were gathered.

The Basin of Mexico encompassed ca. 7,000 sq km. In this area a large, dense population (1.6 million inhabitants in 1519 [Sanders 1992: 179]) lived in all habitable zones, from drained swamps to arid hills terraced with agave (maguey). The largest community, urban Tenochtitlan, had a population of ca. 100,000.[4] The basin's several thousand farming villages had populations ranging from dozens to hundreds (Sanders, Parsons, and Santley

[4] Motolinía (1951:266) wrote: "In all of our Europe there are . . . few cities of parallel size and dimension that have so many surrounding and well-ordered towns . . . I doubt if there is any town so excellent and opulent as Tenochtitlan and so thickly populated."

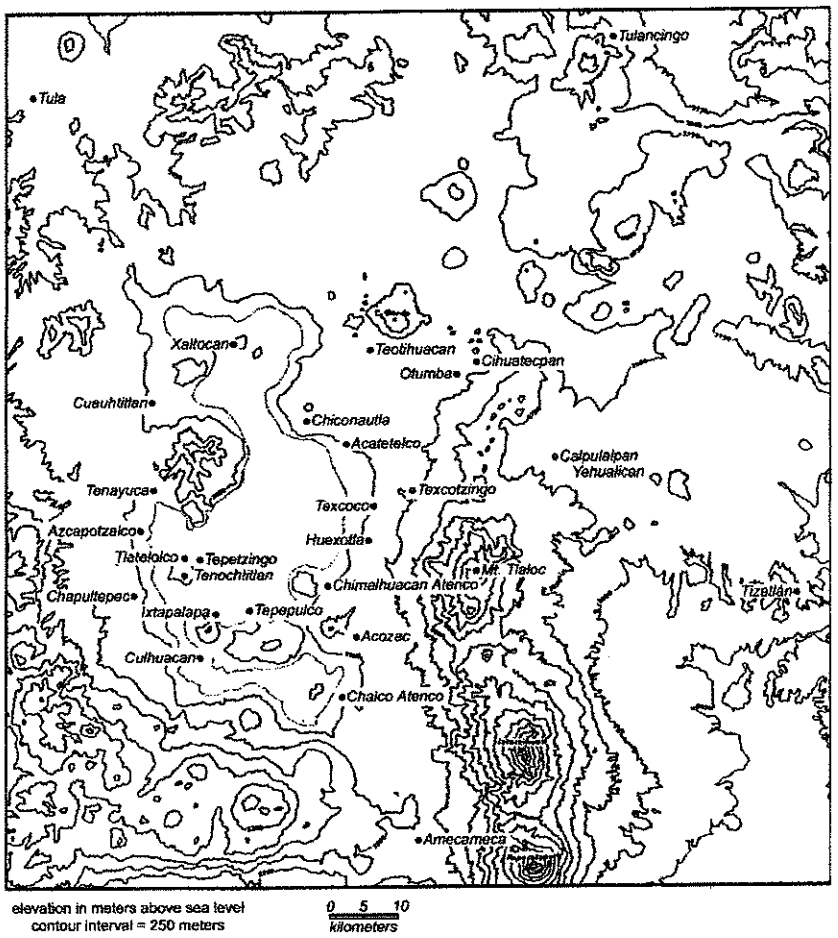

Fig. 2 Central Highlands, Mexico, with locations of Late Postclassic period palaces discussed in the text.

1979). The Aztec political and settlement hierarchy operated dendritically from the highest authority level, that of the rulers of Tenochtitlan and Texcoco, down through the ramifying tribute system of city-states (Charlton and Nichols 1997; Hodge 1997; Smith 2000), each ruled by a *tlatoani* (pl. *tlatoque*), who was a member of one of a set of related noble dynasties. At the lowest level, low-ranking members of such dynasties served as lords of the larger villages (Evans 1993). Communities at all levels were administered from *tecpans*, which were simultaneously seats of government and the primary residences for ruling lords.

How many administrative *tecpans* were there in the Basin of Mexico at the time of European contact? Probably well over five hundred: at least two imperial *huetecpans* (Tenochtitlan and Texcoco),[5] more than fifty city-state *tecpans* (administrative residences of

[5] While Tacuba (Tlacopan) figured importantly in the Triple Alliance of the Aztecs, little is known of its *tecpans*, and the most important Tepanec *tecpan* may have been at Azcapotzalco.

Table 1. Palaces of the Late Postclassic Central Highlands of Mexico by Site Name

Site name	Name and type	Lord's title and name	Domain; province	Date[a]	Data type	Plan
Acatetelco[b]	horticultural garden	*huetlatoani* of Texcoco	Acolhua	1400s	s. arch.? s. ethno.	abstract
Acozac	*tecpan*, city-state	*calpixqui*	Acolhua	≤ 1520	sig. arch.	partial
Acxotlan	*tecpan*	*tlatoani*	Chalco	—	frag. ethno.	none
Amecameca	*tecpan*, city-state	*tlatoani*	Chalco	≤ 1520	frag. ethno.	none
Azcapotzalco	*tecpan*. city-state	*tlatoani*; Maxtla	Tepaneca	1430s	frag. ethno.	none
Calpulalpan	horticultural garden	*huetlatoani* of Texcoco	Acolhua	1430 ≥	frag. ethno.	none
Chalco	mansion?	*tlatoani*	Chalco	—	frag. ethno.	none
Chalco Atenco	*tecpan*, city-state	*tlatoani*	Chalco	1470s	frag. ethno.	none
Chapultepec	imperial retreat	*huetlatoani* of Tenochtitlan	Mexica	1420s ≥	s. arch. sig. ethno.	none
Chiconautla	*tecpan*. city-state	*tlatoani*	Acolhua	≤ 1520	sig. arch.	partial
Chimalhuacan Atenco	*tecpan*, city-state	*tlatoani*	Acolhua	≤ 1520	sig. arch. s. ethno.	partial
Cihuatecpan	*tecpan*, village	headman	Acolhua	≤ 1520	sig. arch.	complete
Cuauhtitlan	*tecpan*. city-state	*tlatoani*	Tepanec	1300 ≥	s. ethno.	none
Cuexcomate	*tecpan*, village	headman	Huaxtepec[c]	≤ 1520	arch.	complete
Culhuacan	*tecpan*. city-state	*tlatoani*	Mexica	1550s?	ethno.	none
Huexotla	pleasure palace	*tlatoani*	Acolhua	≤ 1520	frag. ethno.	none
Ixtapalapa	*tecpan*; city-state	*tlatoani*; Cuauhtemoc	Mexica	1519	sig. ethno.	none
Otumba	mansion	noble lord; FC Ixtlilxóchitl	Acolhua	1515 ≥	frag. arch.	none
	tecpan or other elite residence	*tlatoani*?	Acolhua	≤ 1520	frag. arch. frag.ethno.	none

Tenayuca residences?	elite	nobles?	Tepaneca	≤ 1520	frag. arch.	none
Tenochtitlan	new imperial *huetecpan*	*huetlatoani*, Motecuzoma II	Mexica	1502–20	frag. arch frag. ethno.	abstract
	old imperial *huetecpan*	*huetlatoani*, Axayacatl, Itzcoatl, Motecuzoma I	Mexica	1430s?–1521	sig. ethno.	abstract
	pleasure garden, zoo: "Place of Whiteness"	*huetlatoani*	Mexica	≤ 1520	ethno.	none
	pleasure garden?. zoo: fierce beasts	*huetlatoani*	Mexica	≤ 1520	ethno.	none
	pleasure garden, Ahuehuetitlan	*huetlatoani* of Tenochtitlan	Mexica	≤ 1520	frag. ethno.	none
	mansion	noble lord; Cuauhtemoc	Mexica	≤ 1520	frag. ethno.	none
	administrative (residential?) palace	Cihuacoatl	Mexica	≤ 1520	frag. ethno.	none
Teotihuacan	mansion	noble lord; FC Ixtlilxóchitl	Acolhua	1515 ≥	frag. ethno.	none
Tepepulco	game reserve	*huetlatoani* of Tenochtitlan	Mexica	≤ 1520	ext. ethno. some arch.	none
Tepetzingo	game reserve	*huetlatoani* of Tenochtitlan	Acolhua	1470s–1520	ext. ethno.	none
Texcoco	*tecpan*, or mansion *Cillan* or *Zilan*	*huetlatoani* of Texcoco or other noble	Acolhua	1300s, 1400s	frag. ethno.	none
	imperial *huetecpan*	*huetlatoani*; Nezahualcoyotl	Acolhua	1430s ≥	sig. ethno.	abstract
	imperial *huetecpan*	*huetlatoani*; Nezahualpilli	Acolhua	1470s ≥	sig. ethno.	none
	Axoquentzin's mansion	noble lord; Axoquentzin	Acolhua	1470s?	frag. ethno.	none
	mansion; Tecpilpan	noble lord; FC Ixtlilxóchitl	Acolhua	1515–20	frag. ethno.	none
	mansion	noble lord, Iztacquautzin	Acolhua	Nezpil's reign	frag. ethno.	none
	mansion or *tecpan*	noble lord, later *huetlatoani*, Cacama	Acolhua	1515–20	frag. ethno.	none

	mansions	400+ noble lords	Acolhua	1521	frag. ethno.	none
	tecpan or *huetecpan*	*tlatoani* or *huetlatoani*, Quinatzin	Acolhua	1300s	sig. ethno.	abstract
Texcotzingo	imperial retreat	*huetlatoani* of Texcoco	Acolhua	1450s ≥	s. arch. sig. ethno.	none
Tlatelolco	*tecpan*, city-state	*tlatoani*	Mexica	≤ 1473; restored 1521	s. arch. ext. ethno.	none
Tulancingo	*tecpan*	*tlatoani*	Acolhua	≤ 1520	frag. ethno.	none
Xaltocan	*tecpan*	*tlatoani* or *calpixqui*	Acolhua	≤ 1520	frag. ethno.	none
Yautepec, Morelos	*tecpan*, city-state	*tlatoani*	Huaxtepec[c]	≤ 1520	sig. arch.	partial
Yehualican	horticultural garden	*huetlatoani* of Texcoco	Acolhua	≤ 1520	sig. arch. sig. ethno.	partial

Notes: arch. = archaeology; ethno. = ethnohistory; ext. = extensive; frag. = fragmentary; s. = some; sig. = significant.
[a] ≥ appended to a year indicates the start date for a timespan; ≤ appended to a year indicates an end date for a timespan.
[b] Also known as Atenco and El Contador Park. [c] Tributary to the Triple Alliance of Aztecs.

tlatoque, and, in a few cases, of the *calpixque* stewards, who replaced some *tlatoque*), and perhaps three to five hundred *tecpans* in small towns and villages.[6] The highest lords, the *huetlatoque* of Tenochtitlan and Texcoco, lived in the largest and most elaborate administrative *tecpans*—the *huetecpans*—*hue* in these words conveying the sense of *revered, respected, great, elder*, as in Huehueteotl, the old god of the hearth. In the main courtyards of these *huetecpans*, imperial policies were discussed and decided, and the decisions were sent on to be discussed in the courtyards of *tecpans* of city-state capitals, and from there, directives were distributed at the local level by the *tlatoani*'s vassal and junior kin, the local village headman (or occasionally headwoman), a noble who lived in a *lord-place*, a *tecpan*, and there consulted with household heads as to political policy and local civic administration (Evans 1989, 1993).

Tecpan Form and Function

The form of the *tecpan* is dominated by a large courtyard, opening onto the community plaza, which is best seen as a kind of mega-courtyard for the community. Hernán Cortés became so accustomed to this layout that he judged the limits of Mexica influence by it. Traveling south to the Gulf of Honduras after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, he arrived at Çinacantençintle (Chacujul, Guatemala, just upstream from Lake Izabal) and found:

> [A] great square where they had their temples and shrines . . . roundabout in the same manner as those of Culua [Mexica] . . . since leaving Acalan we had seen nothing of this kind . . . I collected my people together in one of those great rooms . . . the whole town . . . was very well laid out and the houses were very good and built close together. (Cortés [1519–26] 1986: 397–398)

Moreover, modern observers have noted that this characteristic plaza-centered civic architecture sets up its own internal contrasts between the solid pyramid and open plaza (Robertson 1963: 24–25), and the whole civic layout contrasted sharply with contemporaneous European cities. Regarding Francisco Cervántes de Salazar's (1953 [1554]) description of Mexico City's *plaza mayor*, the Zócalo, George Kubler (1948) noted:

> Public plazas of this character do not occur in the medieval towns of Europe . . . the monumental concept of the plaza is anti-medieval [because European squares grew out of markets at juncture of traffic arteries, thus] the great plaza of Salamanca was an irregular, unplanned void within the urban solid. The Mexican plazas, on the other hand, are unprecedented in general European practice, but for a very few exceptions. Their form is suggested, not in coeval European towns, but in Italian theory of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, where the relation be-

[6] A city-state *tlatoani* administered an average of about forty tributary farming villages, and some of these were more nucleated nodes of local administration. In the Teotihuacan Valley a settlement pattern of one larger village with modest civic-ceremonial focus in each set of four to six farming villages was typical (Evans n.d.b).

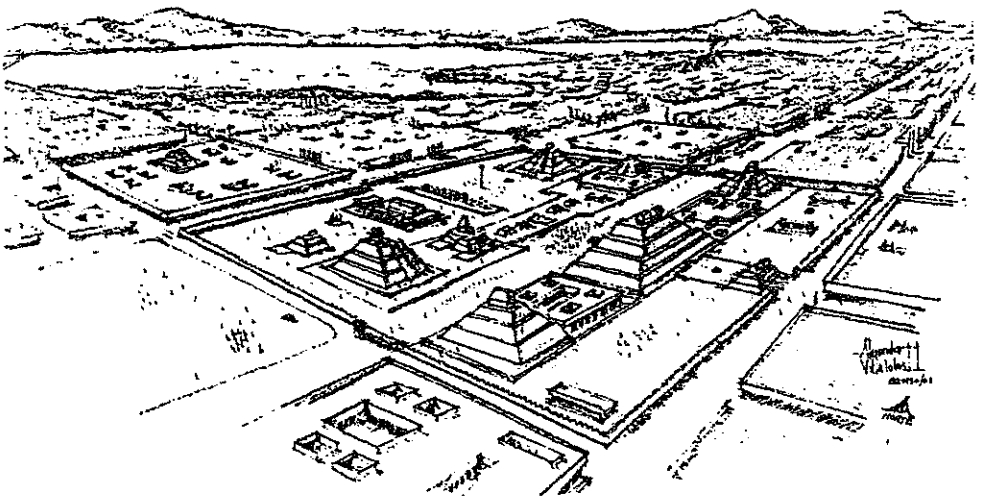

Fig. 3 Ceremonial center, Tenochtitlan-México, 1519, looking toward the northwest. Motecuzoma II's palace (*bottom, center*) opening upon the plaza. To its north (*center*) is the Great Temple precinct; to its west is Axayacatl's palace. Reconstruction drawing by Alejandro Villalobos Pérez (1985: 62). Used with permission.

> tween open spaces and house blocks was an object of constant study in the ideal urban layout, by . . . Alberti . . . Filarete. (98)

The community's main plaza, adjacent to the entry courtyard, sometimes functioned as a kind of palace anteroom. In Figure 3, Tenochtitlan's Templo Mayor, Axayacatl's *tecpan* where Cortés and company were lodged, Motecuzoma II's *tecpan*, and the plaza that linked them are depicted. This was a common pattern: The *tecpan* shared the civic-ceremonial focus of the community with the plaza and, where present, the ritual precinct, especially the main pyramid.

In larger towns, in addition to the palace and plaza, the civic-ceremonial focus included other elite residential and special purpose buildings, such as dance and music halls, schools and ball courts. In rural areas of the Aztec period Basin of Mexico, the pyramids and mountaintop shrines that were major ritual places were often spatially distinct from the villages. Within many rural villages, the administrative palace and plaza may have served as the main focus for ceremonial events, with rituals and festivals being carried out there as well as at isolated shrines and pyramids. It has long been observed that the plaza was the forerunner of the open-air chapel of the Colonial period (McAndrew 1965). The palace courtyard, a slightly more privileged plaza, was another locus of ritual, and thus another logical ancestor of the open-air chapel. The palace courtyards of Tizatlán, Tlax., for example, were the settings for ritually contextualized feasts in which spiritual transcendence was achieved through drunken violence (Pohl 1998).

Consider the Aztec plaza-palace courtyard relationship as part of a series of nested spatial-political relationships pertaining to the palace, an arrangement wherein the most

interior palace space was the most privileged, and the most private. This was made explicit by several of the sumptuary laws promulgated by Motecuzoma Ilhuicamina:[7]

> 1. The king must never appear in public except when the occasion is extremely important and unavoidable ... 3. Only the king and the prime minister Tlacaelel may wear sandals within the palace. No great chieftains may enter the palace shod, under pain of death ... 11. In the royal palace there are to be diverse rooms where different classes of people are to be received, and under pain of death no one is to enter that of the great lords or to mix with those men [unless of that class himself]. Each one is to go to the chambers of his peers. (Durán 1994 [1581]: 208, 210)

These laws laid out a code of withholding royal and noble presence that was based on the spatial layout of the palace and the accessibility of the persons of the ruler and lords: the king's presence should be strictly limited, just as access to various parts of the palace was strictly limited. This provides a nice example of the body politic as political capitol, along the lines discussed by Stephen Houston and Tom Cummins (this volume).

Within the palace, the entry courtyard was the largest and most public space. Its physical and sociological centrality reflected the importance of rhetoric in achieving political and ethical consensus in Aztec society. The Aztec ruler's title, *tlatoani*, means *chief speaker*, and skill at poetry and argument was regarded as the hallmark of the truly masterful noble, one worthy of having a *tecpan*. One son of Texcocan ruler Nezahualpilli was put to death for building a palace without his father's permission and before having achieved significant mastery of either warfare or rhetoric (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl 1975–77 [1600–40]: II: 169; also I: 549). The courtyards were forums for debate and showing off. A gifted speaker could persuade others and mark himself as a coming leader in front of other nobles, who had gathered to listen, discuss, and judge.

Administrative Palaces of the Imperial Capitals: The *Huetecpans*

Almost no archaeological evidence remains of the several great *huetecpans* of the major capitals, but there is considerable written documentation of palace layout and courtly practices from chroniclers. These descriptions emphasize the large size and sumptuousness of the *huetecpans* at the time of European intrusion, as would befit the administrative residences of two of the most powerful rulers on earth.

Their empire and wealth had been gained within the century before Cortés's arrival, and so the tradition of great palaces at Aztec capitals had little time depth. Documentary sources and evidence from other *tecpans* indicate that the earliest rulers' houses were probably modest, of perishable materials, and near or perhaps at the earliest central temple (see Cuauhtitlan, p. 35–36).

[7] Motecuzoma Ilhuicamina, the first Motecuzoma, ruled 1440–1469. Laws similar to the ones he promulgated governed behavior in Postclassic period palaces of the Mixteca Alta (see Gonzalez Licon, this volume).

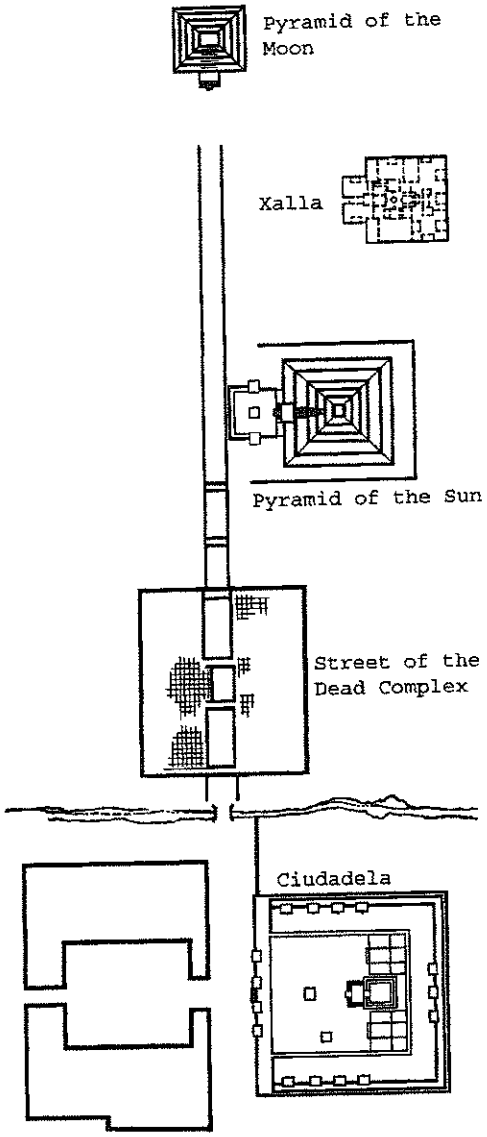

Fig. 4 Simplified plan, Teotihuacan's monumental core along the Street of the Dead. Three complexes possibly served, in turn, as the city's administrative palaces: Xalla, the Ciudadela compounds, and the Street of the Dead complex.

The political and architectural antecedents of the Aztec palace have been addressed in detail elsewhere (Evans n.d.a; Sanders and Evans n.d.). Here, it is relevant to point out that the Aztecs used their cultural predecessors in Central Mexico to bolster their authority, associating themselves with the cultures of Teotihuacan and Tula. They used the ancient monumental heart of Teotihuacan for their own rituals, but its Terminal Formative and

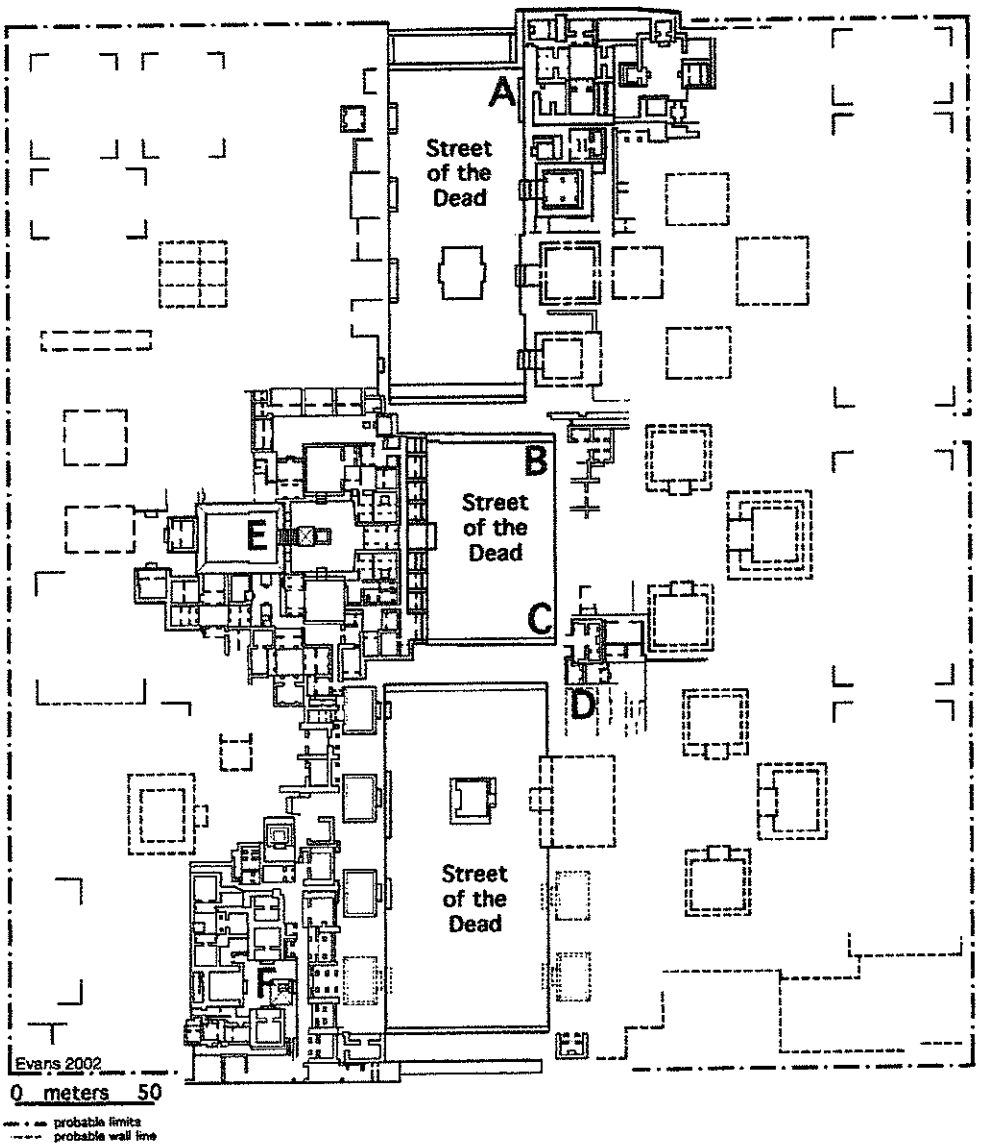

Fig. 5 Street of the Dead Complex, Teotihuacan. This vast system of formal spaces and informal "backstage" domestic rooms would have been well-suited to the administration of Teotihuacan's government and trading network. The Street of the Dead itself is embraced by the complex and may have served as its main courtyard. From Rubén Cabrera Castro (1982); Rubén Cabrera Castro, Ignacio Rodriguez G., and Noel Morelos G. (1982, 1991); René Millon, Bruce Drewitt, and George Cowgill (1973); and Noel Morelos García (1993); see also Cowgill (1983, 1997), Manzanilla and López Luján (2001), and Wallrath (1967). *Key*: A = Viking Group; B = Plaza East habitations; C = *escaleras superpuestos*; D = 1917 excavations; E = west plaza (*plaza oeste*) compound; F = *edificios superpuestos*.

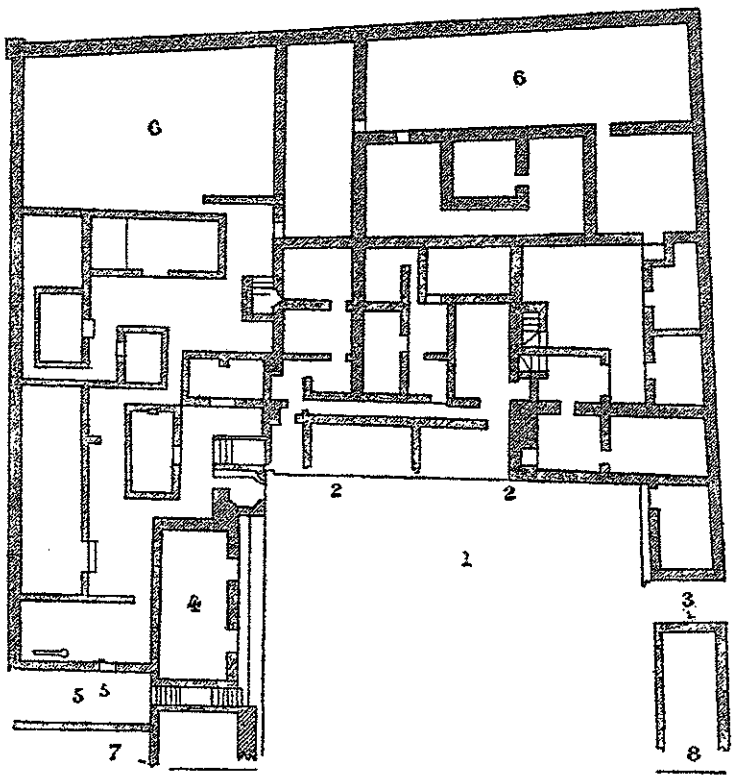

Fig. 6 Plan, Palacio Tolteca, Tula. Possibly this city's royal residential and administrative palace during its apogee in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, this palace was excavated by Désiré Charnay (1888). Unfortunately, no scale is associated with this plan, but if the size of most rooms conforms to the dimensions of other residential buildings, then the main courtyard (Charnay's 1) would have been substantial, opening onto the southern part of Tula's main plaza and surmounted by a dais room. (Charnay's 4 was the dais room, which he called the reception apartment.) From Charnay (1888: 107).

Classic period administrative palaces (Figs. 4, 5) had long lain in ruins, probably buried by the time of the Late Postclassic period. The Aztecs actively helped along Tula's process of decline, looting its sculptures and installing them in their own ceremonial precincts. Tula's royal palace may have been the Palacio Tolteca excavated by Désiré Charnay (1888) in the 1880s (Fig. 6). In contrast to Teotihuacan's Street of the Dead complex, the Palacio Tolteca had a layout similar to that of the typical Aztec palace, with a large main courtyard serving as an intermediary space between the dais room and the plaza.

Tenochtitlan and Texcoco claimed cultural descent from Tula, but neither was yet a thriving city during Tula's Early Postclassic period of hegemony. Texcoco, an older city than Tenochtitlan, had the older documented palace (see Palace of Quinatzin, Texcoco, p. 25) and had far fewer rulers than did Tenochtitlan during the important period from 1430 to

1521. Numbers of rulers brings up the question of whether the Aztecs followed a tradition of building a new palace for each new ruler. The answer seems to be yes and no. In Texcoco, Nezahualcoyotl's palace was the dominant administrative palace—the *tecpan*—for about a century, beginning with its establishment in the decades after 1430. Nezahualcoyotl's successor, Nezahualpilli, built his own palace, but it seems to have served as a *tlatocacalli* and his house while he was a *tlatoani*, while the *tecpan*, the seat of government, remained at Nezahualcoyotl's palace (Umberger n.d.). Between 1430 and 1521, Tenochtitlan had many more rulers than did Texcoco, and at least several of them established *tecpans*, but there does not seem to have been a tradition of a new *tecpan* for each new ruler. For example, the *conquistadores* consistently cite two Tenochtitlan palaces that were the center of governmental activity: Motecuzoma's and Axayacatl's. They also mentioned many other rich houses, for example, that of Cuauhtemoc, who became Tenochtitlan's last ruler in 1520, but never discussed these as places of government activity. Yet some sources indicate that Cuauhtemoc's establishment was the palace of his father, Ahuitzotl (ruled 1486–1502; Umberger [n.d.] cites Alcocer 1973 [1935]). However, Ahuitzotl may have lived in this palace and governed from Axayacatl's palace, which was just to the south.

Rulers probably rebuilt and expanded existing palaces (see Axayacatl's Palace, Tenochtitlan, p. 22). If the first palace in early Tenochtitlan was at the temple, then, by the 1420s and 1430s, the city's ambitious dynasts would have required more substantial quarters for their administrative residences (Morales Schechinger 1993: 46). It may have been by this time that the rulers' *tecpan* was established west of the Great Temple precinct, at the location of Axayacatl's palace, which was named after the Tenochca ruler Axayacatl (ruled 1469–80), who enlarged it. It was also known as Montezuma's Old Palaces or Montezuma I's palace after the Tenochca ruler Motecuzoma Ilhuicamina (ruled 1440–69), who built or rebuilt it.

Administrative Palaces of Tenochtitlan

Axayacatl's palace, Tenochtitlan. Arriving in Tenochtitlan on November 8, 1519, Cortés (1986 [1519–26]) was greeted by Motecuzoma Xocoyotzin on the causeway leading to the central plaza.

> [H]e . . . continued up the street . . . until we reached a very large and beautiful house which had been very well prepared to accommodate us. There he . . . led me to a great room facing the courtyard through which we had entered. And he bade me sit on a very rich throne. (85)

In thus describing Axayacatl's palace, Cortés focused on the key elements of the Aztec palace: the courtyard and dais room. Motecuzoma's actions installed Cortés as lord in this palace.

Axayacatl's palace in Tenochtitlan covered a large block west of the Templo Mayor precinct.[8] It was ca. 180 x 190 m, somewhat smaller in area than that of Motecuzoma's new

[8] The area is bounded by Calle de Tacuba (N), Calle Francisco Madero (S), Avenida Brasil (E), and Avenida Chile (W). Most sources agree on this location; see Ignacio Alcocer (1927); Pedro Alvarez y Gasca

palaces. Construction of the royal palace at this location may have begun in the time of Itzcoatl (ruled 1428–40). Further rebuilding took place in the early 1450s; a flood in 1449 heavily damaged the city, so that in the early 1450s, when Central Mexico was suffering from crop failures, Motecuzoma Ilhuicamina requisitioned work crews from other polities for construction at the Great Temple and at the *casas reales* (Chimalpahin 1965 [ca. early 1600s]: 99) as a means of getting work in exchange for grain distributions to the needy. In 1475, during Axayacatl's reign, an earthquake necessitated rebuilding (Lombardo de Ruiz 1973: 83), and Chalcans were required to send work crews and material for palace construction.

Sometime after 1502, Motecuzoma Xocoyotzin built his New Palaces and Axayacatl's palace was kept as lodging for important visitors and as a repository of family wealth, two features that intersected when the important visitors were Spaniards searching for gold. Andrés de Tapia (1963 [ca. 1534]: 38), one of Cortés's company, recalled that Cortés "saw a doorway that seemed recently closed off with stone and mortar. He . . . found a large number of rooms with gold in jewels and idols and featherwork."

Another eyewitness, Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1956 [1560s]), recounted the same events:

> They took us to lodge in some large houses, where there were apartments for all of us, for they had belonged to the father of the Great Montezuma, who was named Axayaca, and at that time Montezuma kept there the great oratories for his idols, and a secret chamber where he kept bars and jewels of gold, which was the treasure that he had inherited from his father Axayaca, and he never disturbed it. (194)

Although this should not be taken as evidence of ancestral cult practices on the order of those of the Inca, it does indicate how Aztec palaces functioned as dynastic monuments and shrines.

The Spaniards immediately coerced Motecuzoma into living at Axayacatl's palace with them, and the focus of Tenochtitlan's courtly life thus shifted back there. For many months, the Spaniards and the Aztec lords lived together amicably, together enjoying the pleasure-seeking and conniving life of the noble court, a life dominated by gambling, sex, feasting, hunting, and political turmoil coming to a fast boil.

The lid blew off the Azteco-Hispanic hybrid noble court with the first Spanish offensive in Tenochtitlan, the massacre of Aztec nobles dancing in the Templo Mayor precinct, next door to Axayacatl's palace. The Spaniards retreated into the palace as it was attacked by the Tenochca, as depicted in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (1979 [ca. 1550]; Fig. 7), in which Axayacatl's palace is distilled into a huge courtyard surrounded by rooms, with the court-

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(1971); Sonia Lombardo de Ruiz (1973); Marquina (1960) cited by Lombardo de Ruiz (*lám.* 27); Carlos Romero Giodano (1969); Manuel Toussaint, Federico Gomez de Orozco, and Justino Fernandez (1990 [1938]). A location east of the Templo Mayor has also been suggested; see José Benítez (1929) and Roque Cevallos Novelo (1979 [1977]): 171, 176).

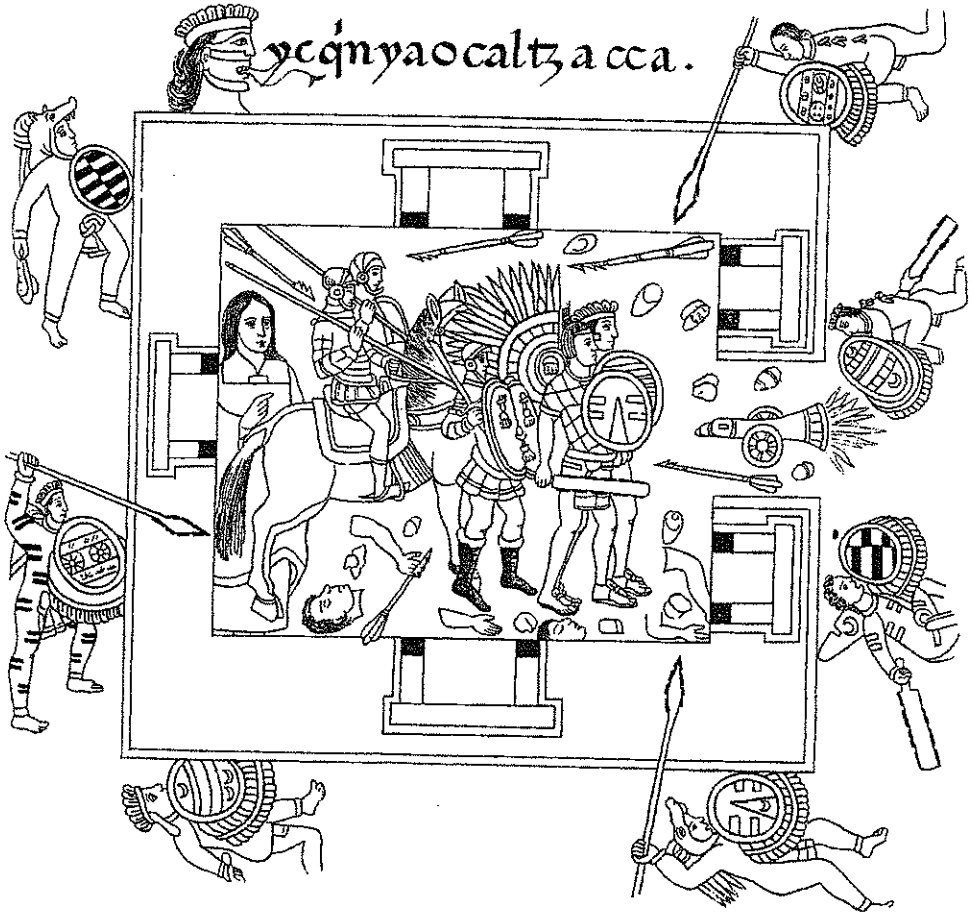


Fig. 7 The Spaniards defend themselves against Aztec attack. Plan, Axayacatl's palace, Tenochtitlan. From the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (1979 [ca. 1550]: ill. 14).

yard serving as an arena for political argument of the most violent sort. Here the Spaniards learned firsthand the defensive advantages of a pattern of suites of rooms around an entry courtyard: It created a blank exterior wall and also provided roofs from which to attack the attackers. The experience of defending an Aztec administrative palace lent the Spaniards insight, as they formulated their strategies of attacking Aztec palaces themselves more than a year later.

Palace of Motecuzoma II or Motecuzoma Xocoyotzin, Tenochtitlan

> The palace inside the city in which he lived was so marvelous that it seems to me impossible to describe its excellence and grandeur. Therefore, I shall not attempt to describe it at all, save to say that in Spain there is nothing to compare with it. (Cortés 1986 [1519–26]: 109)

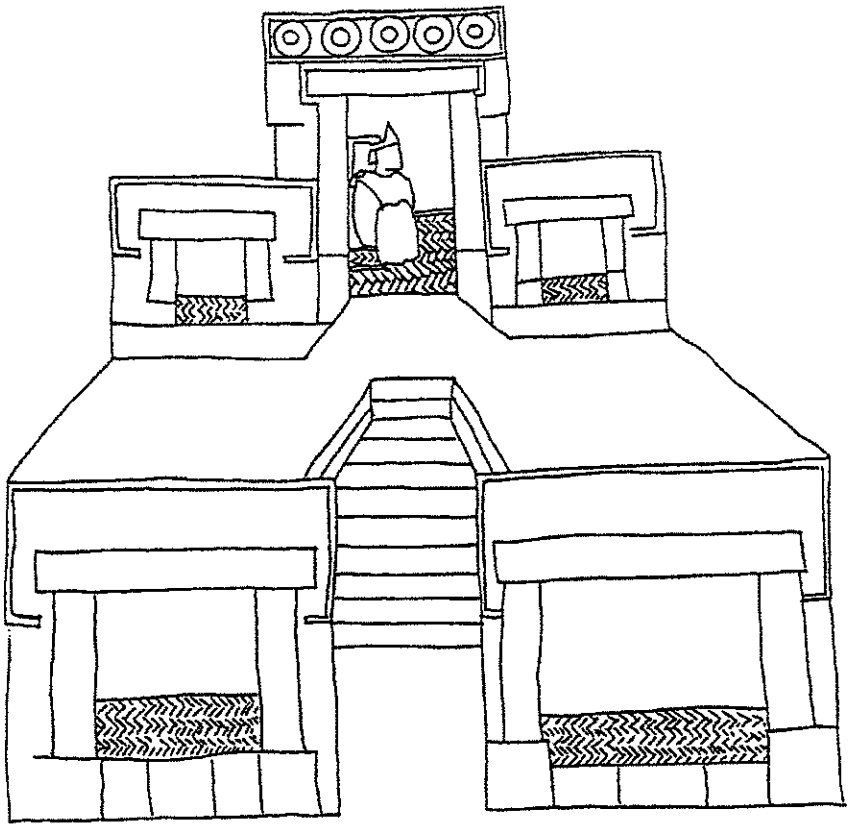


Fig. 8 Motecuzoma II's palace, Tenochtitlan. From the *Codex Mendoza* (1992).

Cortés's speechlessness on this topic is as frustrating as the only extant portrait of the palace, from the *Codex Mendoza* (1992; Fig. 8). Tapia (1963 [ca. 1534]) says a little more, describing how Cortés visited Motecuzoma to convince him to reside with the Spaniards at Axayacatl's palace:

> He went to Moctezuma's palace, where there were many things worthy of notice . . . Moctezuma met him and took him into a hall where he had his dais. About thirty of us Spaniards went in with him, while the rest stayed at the door of the building. (38)[9]

Motecuzoma's palace in Tenochtitlan covered a huge square block, ca. 200 x 200 m, somewhat larger than today's National Palace, which now overlies it, because it encom-

[9] The Anonymous Conqueror (1969 [1917]: 73) relates: "I entered more than four times the house of the chief Lord without any other purpose than to see things, and I walked until I was tired, and never saw the whole of it." However, this writing, while genuinely contemporaneous with the time of the Spanish Conquest, may have been that of an individual recounting the experiences of others.

passed land south of the Royal Canal (Guadalupe Victoria 1991).[10] Motecuzoma's palace featured a large entry courtyard, which opened onto the city plaza (see Fig. 3). In the courtyard, hundreds of courtiers spent their days, gossiping, feasting, and waiting for royal business to be conducted. Around the entry courtyard, suites of rooms surrounded gardens and smaller courtyards.

Little is known of this *tecpan* from archaeological evidence, but features of its layout can be reconstructed from descriptions and from the space it occupied.[11] From the perspective of design, Motecuzoma's palace followed earlier Aztec palaces in terms of features (though it no doubt expressed them with surpassing sumptuousness), but would have differed from many older palaces in the formality of its design, because it was built as a single unit to fill a limited urban space, rather than growing by accretion from a smaller core building into the surrounding open space (see Cuexcomate, Valley of Morelos, p. 41, and Cihuatecpan, Teotihuacan Valley, Basin of Mexico, p. 42). Motecuzoma II clearly had his palace designed for a generous block of Tenochtitlan's prime real estate, and its layout was likely to have been more engineered and more formal than the sprawling, organically grown palaces of less densely occupied cities.

Administrative Palaces of Texcoco

In Texcoco, a less nucleated city than Tenochtitlan, the imperial *tecpan* palaces ranged over larger areas. Three major palaces are well-documented, and in spite of the ambiguity noted above as to whether Nezahualpilli's establishment was a *tecpancalli* or *tlatocacalli*, it is described here, with the other two major palaces.

Palace of Quinatzin, Texcoco. Old administrative palaces stayed in use: We have seen how Axayacatl's palace became quarters for honored guests. In Texcoco, the palace of King Quinatzin was still a valuable building and grounds in the mid-sixteenth century, when its plan was drawn for a legal battle for ownership (Cline 1966, 1968).[12]

> Built in the fourteenth century by Quinantzin, the [p]alace ... was for many years the principal feature of Texcoco, housing the ruler and his court. Although over-

[10] Estimates vary. According to Alejandro Villalobos Pérez (1985: 62), Motecuzoma's palace would have measured ca. 150 x 175 m, but the National Palace measures 180 x 200 m (Galindo y Villa 1890: 123). "The Royal Mansion, or Royal Palace, was originally the residence of Moteczoma II. The land occupied by this complex of buildings, situated in the heart of Mexico City, was granted to Hernán Cortés by the king of Spain in 1529. The heirs of the conqueror sold the property to the Spanish government in 1562, and it was there that the Viceregal Palace was constructed. Today this enormous building is the Palacio Nacional of the Federal Government of Mexico." (Horcasitas and Heyden, in Durán 1971 [1579]: 180, note 1)

[11] Excavations in the interior of the present National Palace revealed some Aztec period sherds but no architectural evidence (Besso-Oberto G. 1975; Valverde L. 1982). Excavations in the *Zócalo*'s southeast corner, which would have been adjacent to the southwest corner of the palace, revealed cell-like rooms, which possibly functioned as sweatbaths (*temascales*; Lombardo de Ruiz 1973: 157).

[12] Quinatzin's dates of rule may have been 1298 to 1357, according to the Mappe Tlotzin (in Cline 1966: 82–83). Other sources use 1261 as a starting point and 1331 as his date of death.

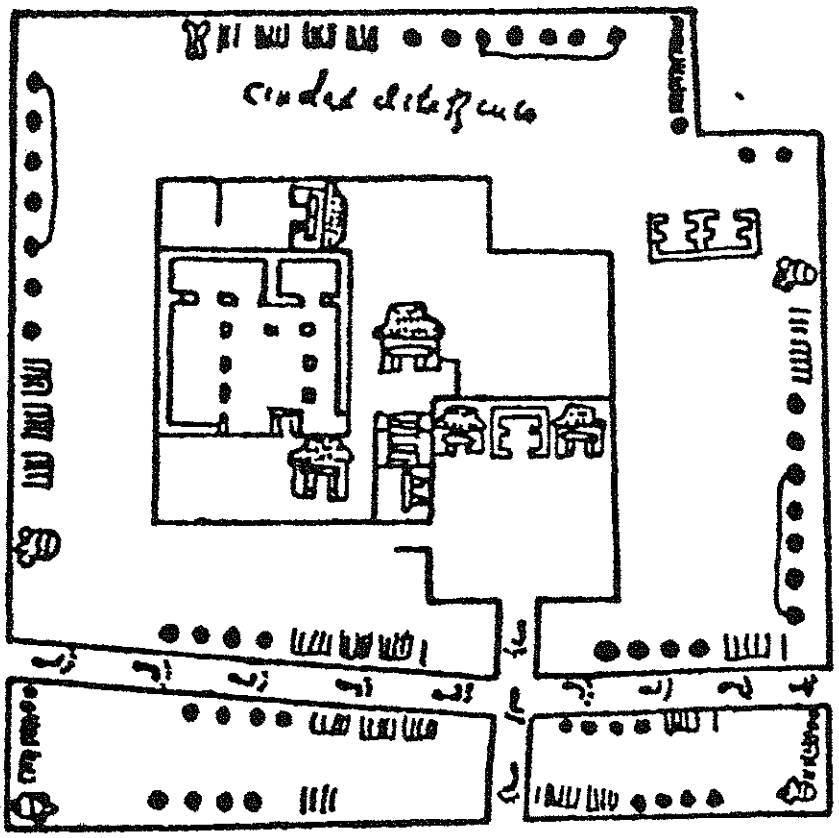


Fig. 9 Quinatzin's palace, Texcoco. From the Oztoticpac lands maps, ca. 1540 (Cline 1966: 89).

> shadowed by the buildings erected by Nezahualcoyotl and Nezahualpilli, it served as council hall for the lords of Texcoco up to the time of the Spanish [C]onquest. (Cline 1966: 92–93)

This plan (Fig. 9), from the Oztoticpac lands maps (ca. 1540), shows an entry courtyard providing the point of access between public space and the more private, presumably residential quarters beyond it. It is tempting to see Quinatzin's palace as a kind of archetype for the *tecpan* of the Early Postclassic, but this is a highly abstract plan probably reflecting changes in layout since its original building.

Between Quinatzin and his great-grandson Nezahualcoyotl, the most illustrious palace builder in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, Texcoco's palace history is vague. The palaces known as Cillan or Zilan (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl 1985 [1600–40]: II: 114) may have been built and occupied during this interval, or these names may have a more general meaning, referring to Quinatzin's establishment, and, at times, to Nezahualcoyotl's.

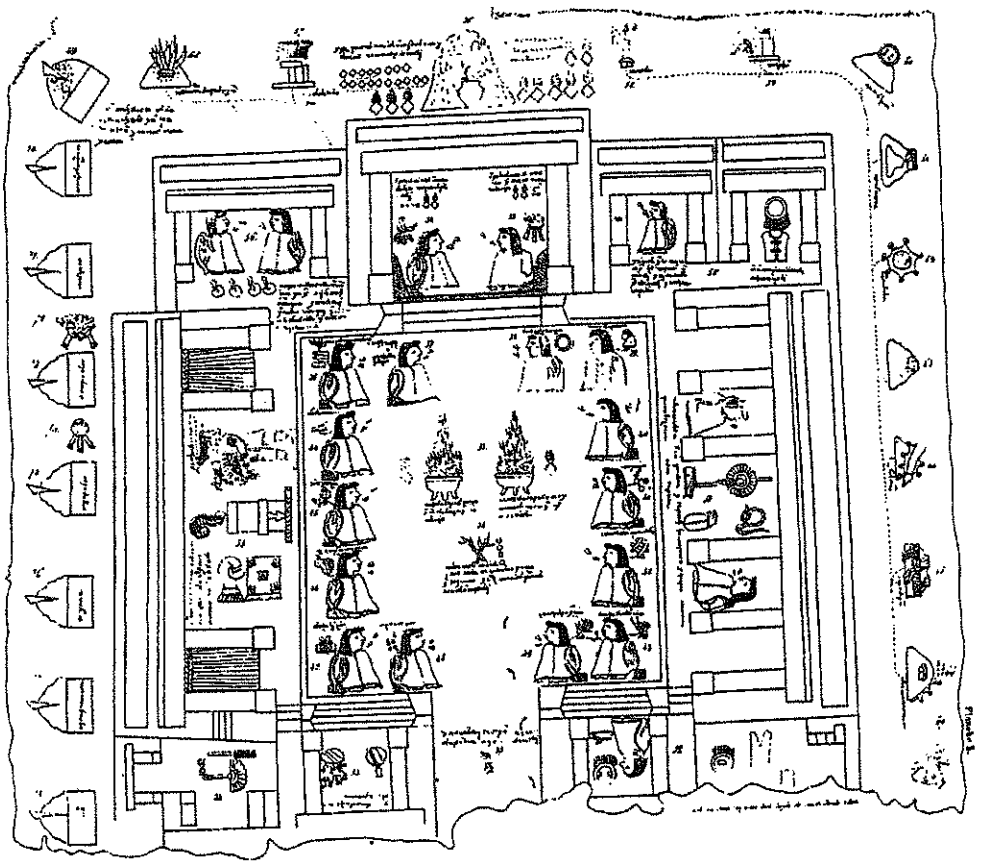


Fig. 10 Plan, Nezahualcoyotl's palace, Texcoco: "Room 1, the court, shows judges. Room 2 has Nezahualcoyotl and Nezahualpilli . . . seated on their straw thrones. Rooms 3 and 4 are the armory and the keeper of the arms; rooms 20–22 the council of finance, i.e. collection of tribute; rooms 15 and 18 are the council of war; room 14 the hall of the kings of Mexico and Tlacopan; rooms 8 and 12, the hall of science and music" (Robertson [1977: 15, citing Boban 1891: I: 228–242]); a passage-way (*center, lower area*) leads to the plaza and its market (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl 1985 [1600–40]: II: 94, n. 2). From the Mapa de Quinatzin (see Robertson 1963: fig. 3). The original is in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

Nezahualcoyotl's palace, Texcoco. The famous Mapa Quinatzin plan of Nezahualcoyotl's palace (Fig. 10) has guided thinking for many years about the form and function of the Aztec palace, and the components of this plan are familiar: central courtyard, dais room, and platforms with various purposes. The plan dates from 1541 and shows Nezahualcoyotl facing his son Nezahualpilli, who was a lad of eight when his father died in 1472. In the main courtyard are the *tlatoque* of the principal city-states in the Texcocan domain at the time of European intrusion. Thus the scene depicted on the map is a historical composite, possibly showing a ritualized convocation of the *huetlatoani*, his heir, and their liege lords.

Documentary sources indicate that Nezahualcoyotl built his palace after taking the throne of Texcoco in the early 1430s and before the completion of his imperial retreat, Texcotzingo, which seems to have occurred in the 1460s. No doubt construction of his palace complex was an ongoing project, as was the development of the extensive gardens it included. The complex may have encompassed an area measuring nearly 1 sq km (i.e., 821.5 x 1,037 m), as claimed by Texcocan noble chronicler Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, but he tended to exaggerate his family's history.[13] However, in contrast to Motecuzoma's palace-on-a-city-lot, Nezahualcoyotl's establishment had room to grow, and adjacent special purpose buildings such as ball courts and schools may have been incorporated into this property. Alva Ixtlilxóchitl wrote ca. 1600 that Nezahualcoyotl's palace had two *patios principales*—one that was a *plaza y mercado* and became the central plaza of Colonial-era Texcoco and the other that was the interior patio depicted in the Mapa Quinatzin. It was here that fires constantly blazed in the braziers and Nezahualcoyotl's council of lords met (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl 1985 [1600–40]: II: 93), according to the Mapa Quinatzin.

The palace was still in use in the early 1520s, when for more than three years it was the home of Pedro de Gante, one of the earliest Christian proselytizers. Archaeological evidence is spotty. The site known as Los Melones may represent some part of Nezahualcoyotl's palace (Gillmor 1954–55), and its remains include a tower and walls finished with a coating of *tezontle* gravel (pumice) mixed with lime plaster (Noguera 1972).

Nezahualpilli's palace, Texcoco. Nezahualcoyotl's son Nezahualpilli (ruled 1472–1515) built his own separate palace in 1481, while those of Nezahualcoyotl and Quinatzin remained in use. Nezahualpilli's palaces were located in the center of Texcoco, but their exact location is, at present, not known. Alva Ixtlilxóchitl described them as smaller than Nezahualcoyotl's but more sumptuous, and having more features like gardens and baths and observatories (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl 1985 [1600–40]: II: 150). Highly regarded as a seer and wizard, Nezahualpilli saw the importance of monumental building projects as statements of public power.

Torquemada (1975–83 [1615]), writing in the early 1600s, recalled:

> I have seen all the palaces of Nezahualpilli [including touring the ruins with members of Nezahualpilli's family, who were able to describe to him the functions of certain architectural features (4: 186)] . . . They said that he was a great astrologer and valued much understanding the movements of the celestial bodies . . . and at night he would go up to the flat roofs of his palace and from there watched the stars . . . At least I know to have seen a place in his houses, on top of the flat roofs for four walls no higher or wider than a *vara*, with enough room for one man lying down and in each corner there was hole where one put a pole from which was draped a canopy. And asking '[W]hat was this for?' one of his

[13] Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl (1985 [1600–40]) wrote: "[D]e oriente a poniente . . . mil doscientos treinta y cuatro varas y media, y . . . de norte a sur . . . novecientas y setenta y ocho varas" (II: 93), assuming that the *vara* = 0.84 m (Heyden 1994: 593).

> grandchildren (who was showing me through the house) told me that it was from the king Nezahualpilli for when at night he was with his astrologers and watched the heaven and the stars, from where I inferred to be true that which people said of him; and I think that raising the walls a *vara* off the surface and adding a ceiling of cotton or silk [awnings] . . . offered a better way of observing the sky (1: 260).

Nezahualpilli used such vantage points for humanitarian purposes as well:

> [H]e had made an observatory in his palace, covered with lattices so that one could see and not be seen, and from there he used to watch the people who came to the markets and on seeing some poorly dressed woman with children he would confer with his servants to learn about her and her needs and would clothe her and her children and feed them from the granaries for a year; this was very common for him. (Torquemada 1: 261)

Torquemada further noted that the palace also provided hospital space for orphans and the ill.

Alva Ixtlilxóchitl (1975–77 [1600–40]: II: 151) wrote:

> For the part that falls to the north of those houses and near the kitchens, were granaries of admirable size, in which the king had an considerable quantity of maize and other grains in order to use in famine years [such as 1505 and 1506, when Nezahualpilli opened the granaries for his subjects. Each granary] held four or five thousand *fanegas*, and all was in such good order and well-ventilated that the grain lasted many years. On the south side were the gardens and mazes, that with the height and size of the palace were guarded from cold winds from the north, and on the east side there was a pond with an aviary. (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl II: 151)

The women's quarters of Nezahualpilli's palace were the focus of several lurid stories designed to emphasize the perils of sexual encounters outside strict behavioral boundaries (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl II: 164–165; Evans 1998a: 171–172, 177–178; Evans 2001: 262–264; Zorita 1994 [1566–70]: 130–131).

Torquemada wrote:

> I have seen . . . within his gardens still remain buildings of some of the palaces built for the king's women, who went to the royal palace by a road and footpath made by hand of cut stone and stucco . . . high off the ground and . . . so narrow that one had to walk single file. (4: 186)

In the early 1500s the palaces were the loci of some of the earliest omens signaling the end of the Aztec empire. Nezahualpilli found celestial portents while using his rooftop observatory, and deep inside the palace he received from a gate-crashing hare the news of "the arrival of other people who have come through our doors without resistance" (Torquemada 1: 294).

Nezahualpilli's palaces were occupied in 1521 by the Spaniards (Torquemada 2: 143). Motolinía (1951: 267) described Nezahualpilli's palace as "large enough to accommodate an army. It had many gardens and a very large pond which they used to enter in boats through a canal below the ground."

> [Quartered there, Cortés commanded his men] under pain of death, not to leave the house without [his] permission. The house was so large that had we Spaniards been twice as many we could still have put up there very comfortably . . . Toward sunset, certain Spaniards climbed onto some high roofs from where they could survey the whole city (Cortés 1986 [1519–26]: 171–172).

Later, Cortés's Tlaxcalan allies vandalized the palace, including the "large apartment that was the general archive of his papers, on which were painted many ancient things" (Pomar 1941 [1582]: 3–4).

> [Nezahualpilli's son] Ixtlilxochitl . . . went to the [c]ity of Texcoco, where he . . . found the city sacked and ruined by the Tlaxcalans. He ordered everything repaired and cleaned, especially the palaces of his father and grandfather and those of other lords (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl 1969 [1600–40]: 54).

City-State *Tecpans*

Probably because city-state capitals often retained native governors, their *tecpans* tended to continue in use into the Colonial period, and there is significant information, both archaeological and/or ethnohistorical, pertaining to the layout and rooms function of eight such *tecpans* in the Basin of Mexico and one in the adjacent Valley of Morelos.[14] They are discussed below in alphabetical order by site name.

Acozac: El Palacio. El Palacio is one of the most complete *tecpan*-palace type residences known from the Aztec period Basin of Mexico. It was occupied throughout the Postclassic period and into the Colonial era. Prior to 1418, the ruler was a *tlatoani* (*señor*; Alva Ixtlilxóchitl 1975–77 [1600–40]: I: 327), and Acozac provided service to the Texcoco royal palace (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl II: 89–90; Offner 1983). After Nezahualcoyotl regained control of Texcoco in the 1430s, Acozac's status was changed: It remained an administrative center for the Acolhua domain but was ruled by a *calpixqui*, a steward of the Texcoco *huetlatoani* (Gibson 1964: 40).[15] However, the palace remained in use and would have retained its same functions because the *calpixqui* was still a lord, although one without dynastic pretensions.

Over half the mound encompassing the building was recently destroyed by a road cut, but fortunately, archaeological recovery operations revealed a surviving intact side (south-

[14] Less is known about the form of Aztec period elite residential architecture at Culhuacan. Colonial period wills mention *tecpans* (Cline and Léon-Portilla 1984: 228, 233, 246, 248, 249). At Tenayuca, recent excavations have revealed a "palacio o conjunto residencial de alta jerarquía [palace or adjoining residence of high status]" (Limón Boyce 1997: 10–11]).

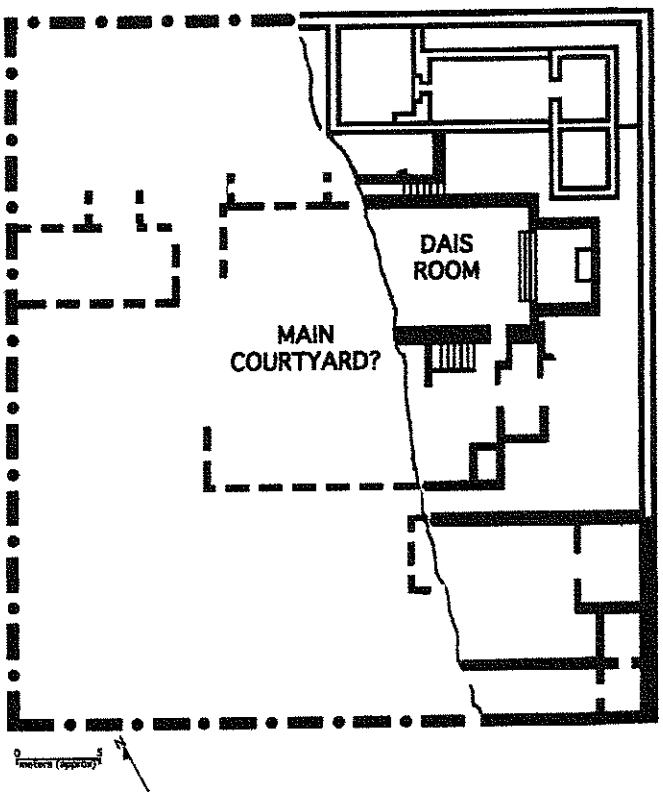


Fig. 11 Dais room (*upper right*) and possible main courtyard area (*center*), plan, El Palacio, Acozac. Redrawn from Richard Blanton (1972; *broken lines*), Jurgen Brüggemann (1983; *solid lines*), and Eduardo Contreras Sanchez (1976; *broken lines alternating with filled circles*).

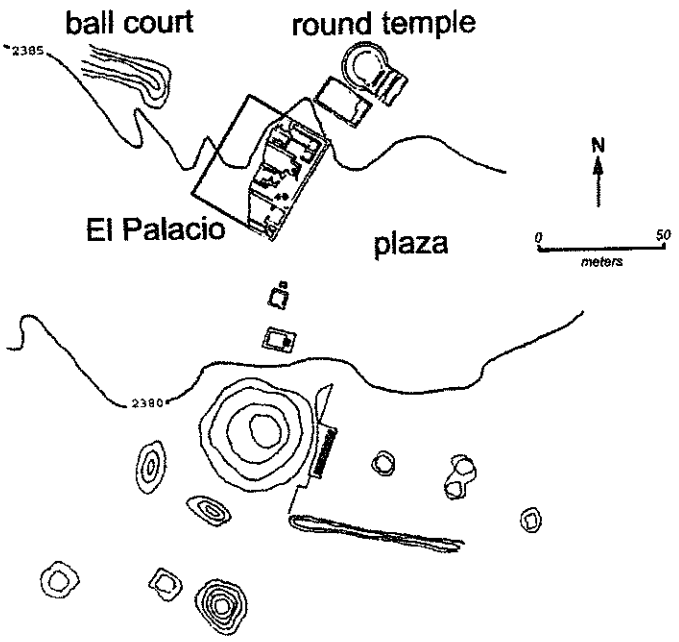


Fig. 12 Plan, civic-ceremonial architecture, Ixtapaluca Viejo, Ix-A-26, Acozac. Note the palace's proximity to the ball court, temples, and plaza. Redrawn from Richard Blanton (1972), Jurgen Brüggemann (1983), and Eduardo Contreras Sanchez (1976).

east wall) ca. 45 m long. The building was probably ca. 45 sq m, given Eduardo Contreras Sanchez's estimate of original extent and the square plan of known Aztec *tecpan*-palaces (Fig. 11). This would have provided ca. 2,000 sq m of interior space. The palace featured a largish courtyard presumably connected to the building entrance on the now-destroyed northwest side (Contreras Sanchez 1976). With its red-painted walls, its imposing frontage on the town's main plaza, and proximity to the ball court and large temples, El Palacio provides an excellent example of the *tecpan*'s place in the civic-ceremonial center (Fig. 12) because it is the only known archaeological evidence in the Basin of Mexico of a palace associated with a ball court, a pattern known from the ethnohistorical record and from countless archaeological examples elsewhere in Mesoamerica.

The hillside site of Acozac sloped down toward the southeast and was dominated by a view of magnificent Mt. Iztaccihuatl, which was appropriated as an important feature in orienting the civic-ceremonial buildings: The façade of the palace was framed by the mountain, a view visible down the length of the site's ball court.[16] The propinquity of palace and ball court and the orientation of the palace to the ball court and other features demonstrate broader, pan-Mesoamerican patterns and also show that there was considerable flexibility in how the component architectural parts were arrayed.

Amecameca. Entering the Basin of Mexico on their approach to Tenochtitlan, Cortés (1986 [1519–26]: 80) and company stopped at Amecameca and "were quartered in some very good houses belonging to the lord of the place." The palace continued in use after the Conquest, and is mentioned by Chimalpahin (1965 [ca. early 1600s]): 245) in the context of the Early Colonial period problem of native noble polygyny and also as the residence of Fray de Valencia in 1533 (253), suggesting that other friars followed the lead of Pedro de Gante, finding *tecpans* an ideal place to live and preach.

Azcapotzalco. Azcapotzalco was a capital of the Tepanecs, overlords of the Mexica of Tenochtitlan and the Acolhua of Texcoco prior to the Tepanec War of the early 1430s, which resulted in the takeover of the Tepanec domain by the Mexica and Acolhua. The Tepanec had a curious division of functions with regard to their capitals, with Tlacopan/Tacuba serving as the main center (Durán 1994 [1581]: 14), whereas Azcapotzalco was the place of "the court and the kings of the Tepanecs" (61).

Archaeological explorations in the area included excavation of the Early Postclassic

[15] Nezahualcoyotl transformed several *tlatoani* towns into *calpixque* outposts, and all were located at the boundaries of his domain. This was possibly a deliberate effort to stabilize these regions against the ever-present threat of pretensions of independence on the part of dynastic lords (Evans and Gould 1982: 295–297).

[16] The most prominent civic-ceremonial building at Acozac (Ixtapaluca Viejo, Ix-A-26) is the Templo Mayor, which is 10 to 12 m high. The first civic-ceremonial building in this area to be systematically studied was a ball court, the first ever found in the Basin of Mexico, which was investigated by H. B. Nicholson, Frederick Hicks, and David Grove (Grove and Nicholson 1967). Richard Blanton (1972) mapped the site and drew plans of several residences, including *Tlatel* 116, which was apparently the same as El Palacio later excavated by archaeologists from the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (Contreras Sanchez 1976), and Gebäude 49, as described by Jürgen Brüggemann (1983).

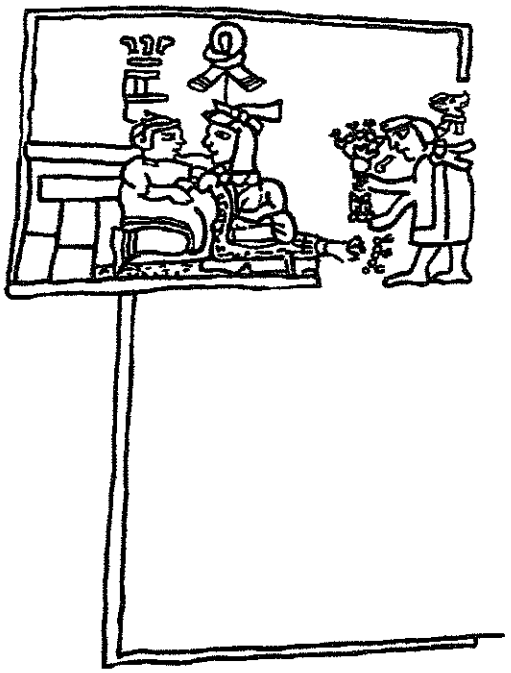


Fig. 13 Azcapotzalco palace. From plancha 8, *Códice Xolotl*. Nezahualcoyotl, with coyote-head name glyph above his head (*right*), enters the palace, carrying an offering of flowers for Maxtla (*center*), who has a knotted loincloth above his head. The flowers at Maxtla's feet represent his feigned indifference to Nezahualcoyotl, whom he ignores as he sits "on a dais with the ladies and concubines of his [murdered] uncle, the King Chimalpopoca [of Tenochtitlan]." From Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, *Historia Chichimeca* (118), quoted in the *Códice Xolotl* (1980) [1553–69]: 107); "Adjoining the palace is indicated the plaza" (107). Detail redrawn from the original.

period Coyotlatelco mound at Santiago Ahuizotla (Tozzer 1921) and other excavations by Manuel Gamio and others (described in Umberger 1996a: 260–261). The palace of Tezozomoc may have been different from that of his heir, Maxtla. Both rulers excelled at intrigue and staging dramatic political scenes. Three important elements of the Aztec palace are indicated in an illustration from the *Códice Xolotl* (1980 [1553–69]; Fig. 13): the plaza (*lower section*), the main courtyard (*upper section*), and the dais (*upper section, lower left*).

Chiconautla. Perhaps the best-known Aztec city-state palace is the Chiconautla building excavated by George Vaillant (n.d.) in the 1930s, argued to be the administrative *tecpan* of the *tlatoani* of that lakeshore town. The plan has been published extensively (Vaillant 1966), often juxtaposed with the Mapa Quinatzin plan, and is a familiar feature of books on the Aztecs. The plan presented here (Fig. 14) is more complex, redrawn from Vaillant's field drawings and notes, which have been recently edited and published (Vaillant and Sanders 2000: 786). However, given the courtyard-and-dais focus of the Aztec palace, it is clear that

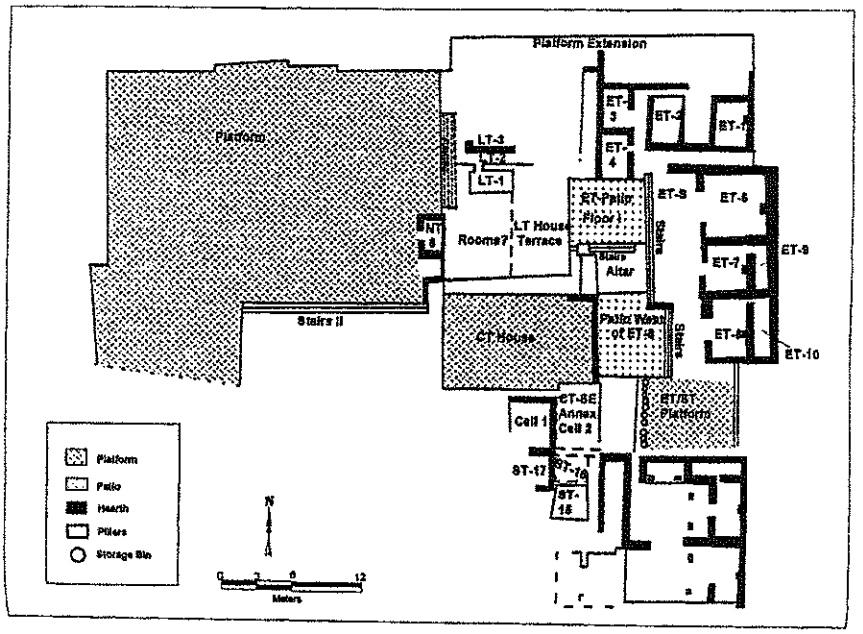


Fig. 14 Palace plan, Chiconautla. Redrawn from George Vaillant's original notes. It is far more detailed than that usually presented for this building (e.g., Vaillant 1966), but it still reveals only the building's domestic section (Vaillant and Sanders 2000: 786).

the Chiconautla plan presents only part of a compound of buildings, and its functions, beyond being residential and of the Aztec period (Elson 1999), are unclear. This section of the building, with its relatively small rooms, many featuring *tlequil*-style hearths, may have been the private quarters of a much larger *tecpan* building, which would have included a main courtyard and dais room.

Chimalhuacan Atenco. One of Texcoco's city-states (Gibson 1964: 43), Chimalhuacan Atenco had a *tecpan* that is documented by descriptive and physical evidence. It is shown at the top of the map from the 1579 *Relación geográfica* (Fig. 15) as a glyphlike, simple front-view Aztec house with a disk frieze set on a platform (Paso y Troncoso 1979 [1890]). The gloss on the platform says "El Tianguiz" (The Market). West of the platform is a much larger building, El Monasterio.

Recent excavations on the town's principal platform have uncovered the remains of an extensive Aztec period building thought to be the *tecpan* (Fig. 16). The plan of the archaeological zone shows the *tecpan* on the east. On the west is the Templo Viejo de San Andrés, the ruins of a very early Colonial period chapel, possibly overlying a Pre-Columbian ceremonial building.

The *tecpan*'s southeast corner has been excavated (García, Ramírez, Gámez, and Córdoba 1998). The excavated portion of the building measures ca. 20 x 30 m, and the east side is

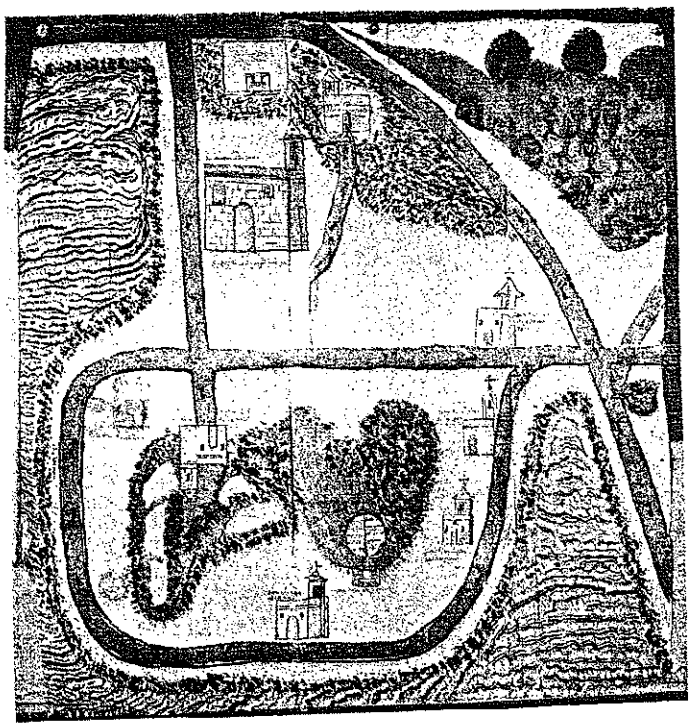


Fig. 15 Chimalhuacan Atenco. Note the *tecpan* (*top, center*), viewed upside down, and El Monasterio (*center*). From Francisco del Paso y Troncoso (1579 [1890]:VI: 69).

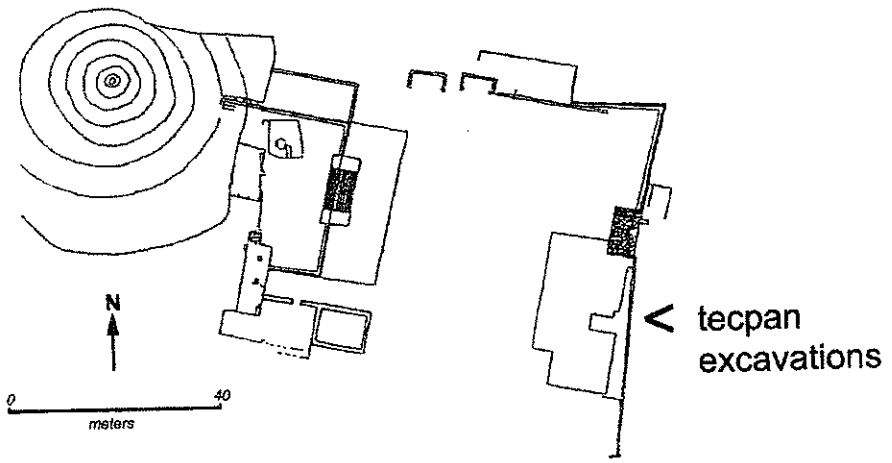


Fig. 16 Civic-ceremonial architecture, plan, Chimalhuacan Atenco. Note *tecpan* excavations on the mound's east side. Redrawn from Raúl García et al. (1998: pl. 1).

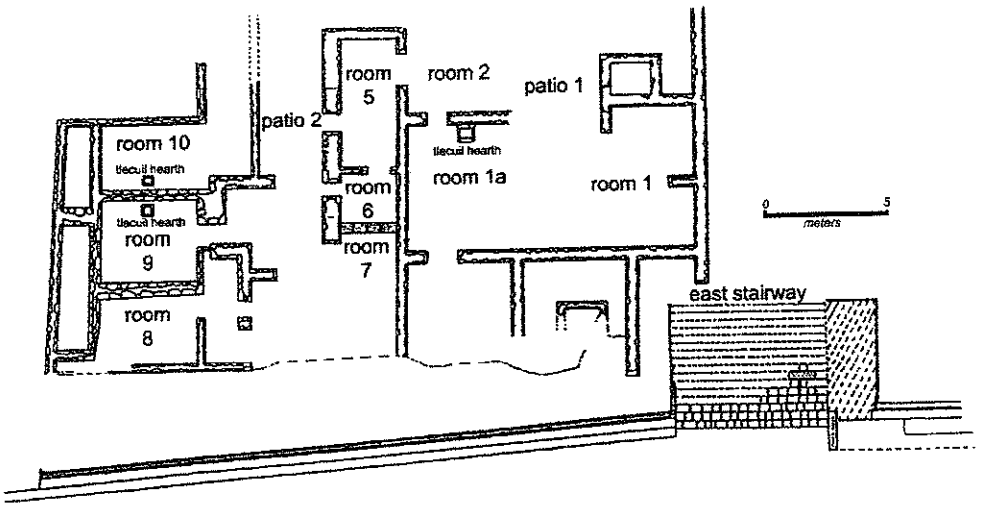


Fig. 17 Palace plan, Chimalhuacan Atenco. Excavation revealed wall bases in the building's southeast quadrant. Note *tlecuil*-hearths in rooms 1a, 9, and 10 and the east stairway (*lower right*). Redrawn from Raúl García et al. (1998: fig. 1).

dominated by a wide staircase (Fig. 17). The dimensions of the building were probably ca. 55 m north-south and perhaps 30 to 40 m east-west. There are about a dozen rooms and hallways in this section, and thus the whole building may have contained thirty to forty separate rooms. Its layout is difficult to reconstruct in terms of the typical *tecpan* rooms-around-the-courtyard pattern because the hallway that provided access from the east stairway would have bisected such a courtyard. This brings up the problem of the orientation of this building. The *Codex Mendoza* illustration of Motecuzoma's *tecpan* (see Fig. 8) has been used as a prototype for a hypothetical reconstruction (Fig. 18) centered on the stairway and positing a kind of dais room west of the excavated portion of the structure.

Patio 1 was slightly sunken relative to the platform of rooms (1, 1a, 2) around it. Several suites of rooms are found beyond the patio and the platform: rooms 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 are accessed from patio 2 and may have been habitation rooms. Cut-stone hearths (*tlecuiles*) were installed into the floors of several rooms (for contexts of *tlecuiles* at Monte Negro, see González Licón, this volume). Some of the smaller, unheated rooms may have been storage areas for household goods, tribute payments coming into the city-state or being transshipped to Texcoco or market goods. The right to hold a market was held by the dynasty ruling a particular town, and sellers at the market "paid the *tlatoque* for market privileges" (Gibson 1964: 356). The *tlatoani*'s role in administering the market may have been reflected architecturally in the orientation of the courtyard and dais room toward the marketplace.

Cuauhtitlan. The Annals of Cuauhtitlan (1992) document *tecpan* evolution rather than format, but the information is pertinent to other *tecpans*, such as those in Tenochtitlan. Early in the town's history, the ruler lived in a "straw-house."

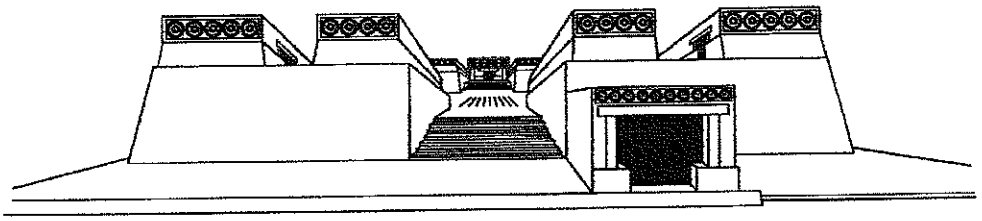


Fig. 18 Palace reconstruction, Chimalhuacan Atenco. The staircase at center is in the middle of the building's east side in the plan of the excavation. Redrawn from Raúl García et al. (1998: pl. 2).

> [For example, in 1024] a Cuauhtitlan lady named Itztacxilotzin was inaugurated to govern the nation. Her mound and her straw-house were in Izquitlan Atlan . . . [Then, in 1035, a new ruler built] a new straw-house, or palace house. That is where he started it, and so that is where the rulers' residence was, etc. [In 1368, rulership was inherited by Lady Ehuat.] And she, too, lived at the temple of Mixcoatl, which had been the royal residence. (39, 72)

These passages and others indicate the custom of establishing the residence of the ruler at the town's main temple, a custom that may have been practiced when Tenochtitlan was founded.[17] However, in 1418 a ruler from Tlatelolco "came and founded a dynasty . . . came there to build his palace house" (81). The Early Colonial period *tecpan* is illustrated in the *Codex San Andrés* (Galarza 1963) as a *tecpan* glyph (i.e., house glyph with the superposed disk frieze along the top of the building).

Ixtapalapa. The city-state of Ixtapalapa was ruled by Cuitlahuac, "[l]ord of the town" and Motecuzoma II's brother (Tapia 1963 [ca. 1534]: 38). In 1519 the *tecpan*-palace was under construction and probably was one of the most luxurious in the Aztec empire, since it was being built by one of the empire's most powerful men, with access to labor and resources on a grand scale. On November 7, 1519, the night before they first arrived in Tenochtitlan, the Spaniards stayed there. Descriptions by Cortés and Díaz del Castillo are worth quoting at length, being among the most complete in the Mesoamerican ethnohistoric literature, providing key facts about quality of finishing and use of cotton cloth, as well as conveying a sense of the importance of landscape design in these palaces. Apparently, the Spaniards found extraordinary the Aztec use of the lakeshore setting in the layout of the house—how the lake as an ecological zone was appropriated into water features in landscaping and how the lake was an important transport avenue, which was integrated into the traffic flow pattern of the *tecpan* through "driveway" canals.

[17] *The Annals of Cuauhtitlan* (1992: 72, 74) continue: "[In 1373, a new ruler, who also] resided . . . at the temple of the devil Mixcoatl . . . [In 1379, another new ruler, whose] straw-house was in the same place where the temple of Mixcoatl was. There he lived as ruler." The ruler installed in 1390 continued this tradition.

Cortés (1986 [1519–26]) wrote:

> [In] Iztapalapan . . . the chief . . . has some new houses, which, although as yet unfinished, are as good as the best in Spain; that is, in respect of size and workmanship both in their masonry and woodwork and their floors, and furnishings for every sort of household task; but they have no reliefs or other rich things which are used in Spain but not found here. They have many upper and lower rooms and cool gardens, with many trees and sweet-smelling flowers; likewise there are pools of fresh water, very well made and with steps leading down to the bottom. There is a very large kitchen garden next to his house and overlooking it a gallery with very beautiful corridors and rooms, and, in the garden a large reservoir of fresh water, well built with fine stonework, around which runs a well-tiled pavement so wide that four people can walk there abreast. It is four hundred paces square, which is sixteen hundred paces around the edge. Beyond the pavement, toward the wall of the garden, there is a latticework of canes, behind which are all manner of shrubs and scented herbs. Within the pool there are many fish and birds. (82–83)

Díaz del Castillo (1956 [1560s]) was similarly impressed.

> And then when we entered the city of Iztapalapa, the appearance of the palaces in which they lodged us! How spacious and well built they were, of beautiful stone work and cedar wood, and the wood of other sweet scented trees, with great rooms and courts, wonderful to behold, covered with awnings of cotton cloth. When we had looked well at all of this, we went to the orchard and garden, which was such a wonderful thing to see and walk in, that I was never tired of looking at the diversity of the trees, and noting the scent which each one had, and the paths full of roses and flowers, and the many fruit trees and native roses, and the pond of fresh water. There was another thing to observe, that great canoes were able to pass into the garden from the lake through an opening that had been made so that there was no need for their occupants to land. And all was cemented and very splendid with many kinds of stone [monuments] with pictures on them, which gave much to think about. Then the birds of many kinds and breeds which came into the pond. I say again that I stood looking at it and thought that never in the world would there be discovered other lands such as these. (191)

The exact dimensions of Cuitlahuac's palace are not known. Its layout seems to have centered on "great rooms" and courtyards, and it was well integrated into its lakeshore setting, with gardens and pools overlooked by "upper . . . rooms [and] a gallery" and surrounded by pavement walkways ca. 4 m wide. Quality of finishing was high, and at least some of the pools were apparently finished masonry (*de cal y canto*; Torquemada 1975–83 [1615]: bk. 3, chap. 21: 394), with steps leading toward the bottom. They must have been well-sealed because they contained freshwater in an area adjacent to the saline lake. Díaz

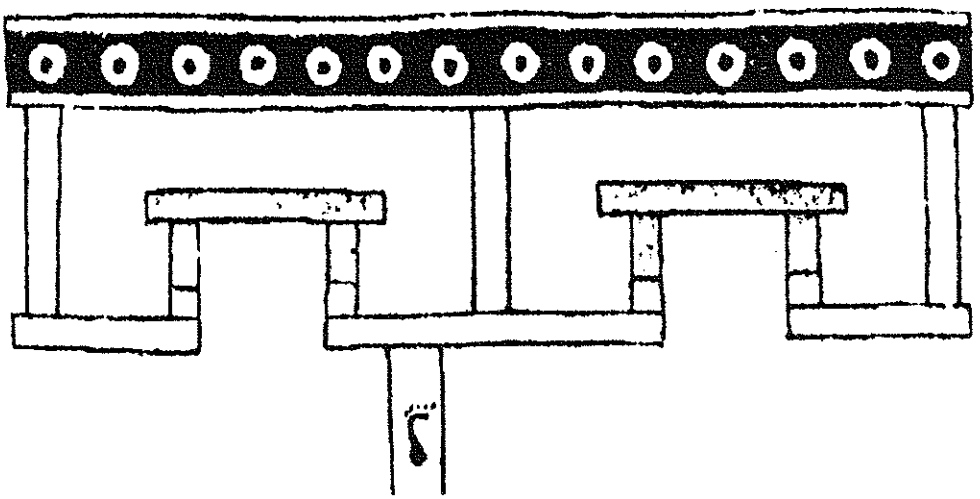


Fig. 19 *Tecpan*-palace, Ixtapalapa. From Relación de Iztapalapa (1580).

del Castillo's comments on the use of cotton awnings help us understand the amenities provided within the great open-courtyard spaces so important to Aztec palace life, and also give insight into noble use of cotton, a major tribute item.

The Spaniards burned Ixtapalapa in the War of Conquest, destroying Cuitlahuac's palace. Díaz del Castillo 1956 [1560s]: 191) remarks that the palace (and much else) was gone: "Of all these wonders that I then beheld to-day all is overthrown and lost, nothing left standing." After the Conquest, Cortés claimed many pieces of property, including some in Ixtapalapa, and these were listed as part of his estate in his legal papers (Archivo General 1940 [1570]: 57).

Sixteenth-century depictions of a *tecpan*-palace at Ixtapalapa, found in the *Mapa de México* (1986 [ca. 1550]) and the map from the *Relación de Iztapalapa* (1986 [1580]; Fig. 19), represent either a rebuilding of Cuitlahuac's palace or a separate *tecpan*. An archaeological survey of Ixtapalapa found the Aztec period remains of the town to underlie modern occupation (Blanton 1972: 152–156; Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979: 161, 163). The evocatively named Conjunto Palacio area identified in a survey of Aztec period *chinampas* is so called after a nearby street of the same name (Avila López 1991: 38 and fig. 8).

Tlatelolco. Tenochtitlán's sister city until 1473, Tlatelolco became its least important *barrio* after Tenochca ruler Axayacatl took advantage of Tlatelolcan royal marital discord and other circumstances to take over the city and its lucrative long-distance trade monopoly (Evans 1998a: 174–176). The temple and palace were ruined in the process.

> [T]he [P]re-Hispanic palace was probably on the east side of the market, at the site of the [c]olonial *tecpan* . . . and may have originally been built early in the reign of Tlacateotl, who succeeded to the throne in 8 House, 1409. (Umberger 1996a: 256, 257; see also Barlow 1987)

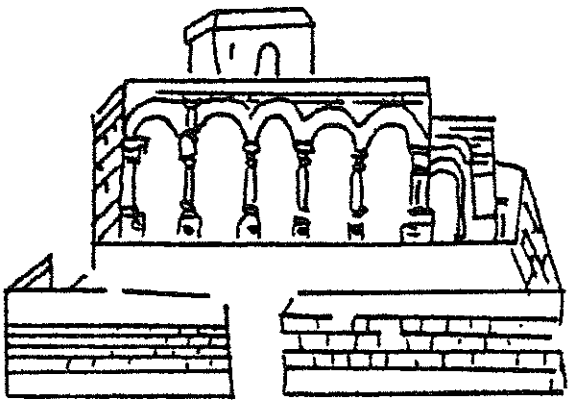


Fig. 20 *Tecpan-palace*, Santiago Tlatelolco. From *Códice del tecpan* (1939 [1576–81]).

It seems to have been rebuilt by the time of the Spanish Conquest, when Cuauhtemoc was military governor of Tlatelolco before his succession to the Tenochtitlan throne and when he lived in this location (Flores Marini 1968: 53). Although the *tecpans* of the Colonial period are beyond the scope of this essay, it is important to note that Tlatelolco's *tecpan* was rebuilt on the same location (Fig. 20) and is now part of the Three Cultures Archaeological Park in Mexico City, which is dominated by remains of the Tlatelolcan temple-pyramid. Of the Pre-Columbian *tecpan*, only its location remains.[18]

Yautepec. In the Valley of Morelos, just south of the Basin of Mexico, Yautepec was a city-state capital ruled by a *tlatoani* at the time of European contact. In the town's civic-ceremonial center, the *tlatoani*'s palace was built on a platform east of the pyramid-plaza (Fig. 21; Smith et al. 1994). The palace's platform measures ca. 95 m east-west x 75 m north-south (Vega Nova 1996: 162), surmounted by a 35 x 50 m palace mound, with deposits of successive rebuildings measuring ca. 1.5 m deep below the present height of the mound (Vega Nova 1996: 153). Excavation in the southwest corner has yielded rooms that are decidedly small and utilitarian (Fig. 22), with kitchen and other domestic detritus. In this early stage of research, generalizing about their layout of rooms is not possible, but the only known courtyard is both small and isolated. The palace mound is located just east of other civic-ceremonial buildings such as the town's pyramid, but in the palace's earliest stages of occupation, its western façade was closed to both the pyramid and the plaza. Over time, this side was opened to plaza activity, a point worth noting because it indicates flexibility in layout and orientation of various components of the civic-ceremonial center.

In the course of the excavations, seventeen burials were uncovered, mostly in flexed posture in simple graves (i.e., not in constructed tombs), with no particular pattern of

[18] The *Diccionario Porrúa* (1976: 2059) offers this definition: "tecpan (palacio). Edificio construido en el mismo sitio en que se halló la casa real de los señores de Tlatelolco. Tuvo varia fortuna. El nuevo edificio se terminó en 1776 y se destinó a una escuela de artes y oficios para niños pobres, en especial de raza indígena y de la parcialidad de Tlatelolco, en cuya plaza se halla, mirando al Poniente." Later versions seem to have been juvenile houses of correction.

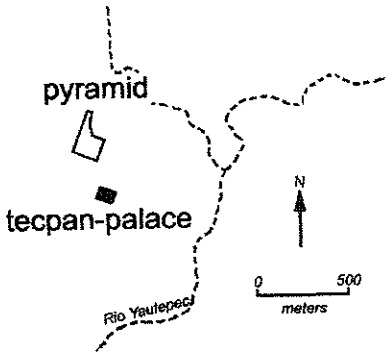


Fig. 21 *Tecpan*-palace platform mound (*blackened rectangle*) in relation to the pyramid (*above*), Yautepec, Morelos. Redrawn from Hortensia de Vega Nova (1996: fig. 5).

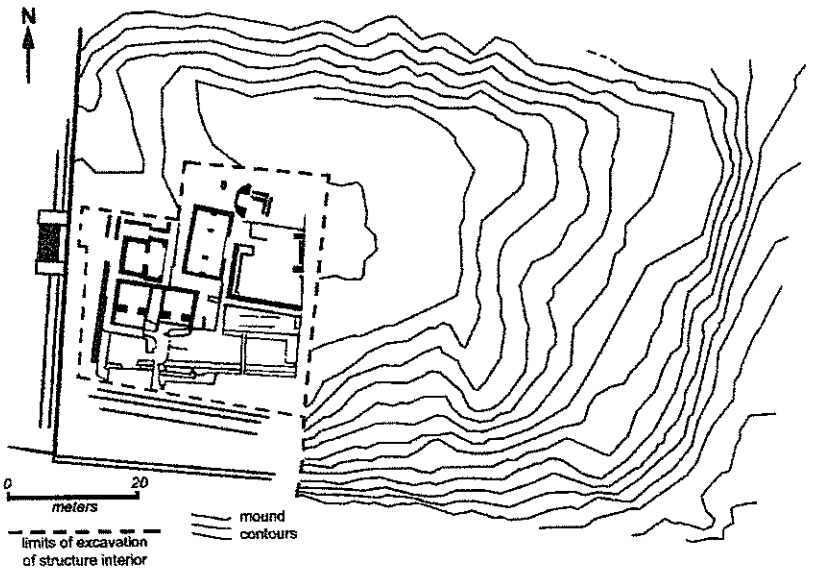


Fig. 22 *Tecpan*-palace, palace mound, plan, Yautepec. Note limits of excavation (*broken lines*) and mound contours (*wavy lines*). Redrawn from Hortensia de Vega Nova (1996: figs. 14–16).

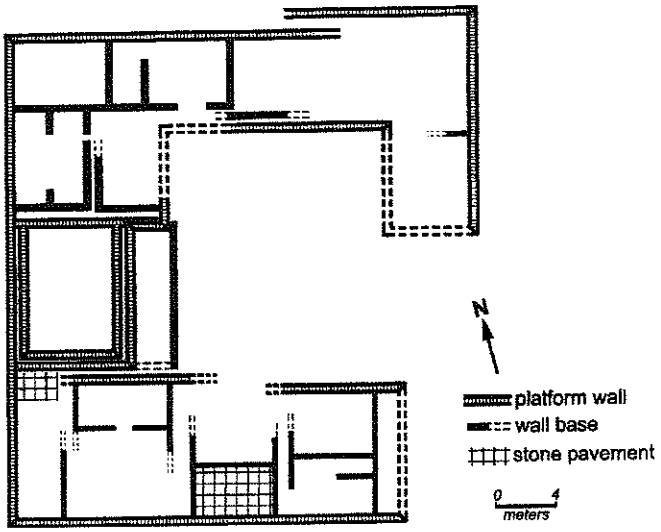


Fig. 23 *Tecpan*, patio group 6, plan, Cuexcomate, Morelos. Note wall bases (*solid and broken lines*), platform walls (*blackened rules with vertical lines*), and stone pavement (*crosshatching*). Redrawn from Michael E. Smith et al. (1989: 195, fig. 7).

orientation; only three had associated grave offerings. Two seem to have been sacrificial victims, both adult women, one decapitated and the other dismembered (Vega Nova 1996: 157). It was the practice in Aztec times for a deceased lord to be accompanied into the afterlife by attendants, including women (Pomar 1941 [1582]: 35–36), but the lack of context makes any interpretation completely hypothetical.

Village *Tecpans*

Surveys of the nearly continuous Aztec farming villages over the terraced piedmont of the Central Highlands have revealed that some villages had modest monumental architecture, which may have served as local foci for the tribute payments and dispute arbitration of several adjacent villages. That centralized government would ramify down to the village level during the Late Postclassic is understandable, given the high density of population and the propensity of polygynous nobles to have more offspring than could be supported in the city-state capitals. It would make perfect sense to establish local *tecpans*, staffed by members of cadet branches of city-state dynasties (Evans 1993, 1998b: 339–340).

Cuexcomate, Valley of Morelos. Excavations at the Aztec period village of Cuexcomate in the Valley of Morelos revealed a set of associated buildings on a platform encircling a patio, which has been interpreted as "the residence of a noble household" (Smith et al. 1989: 194). The complex is ca. 29 x 31 m (Fig. 23), with a central patio ca. 10 x 15 m. The *tecpan* grew over time, beginning with two separate houses, which were then leveled and a small platform built over their remains (Smith 1993: 44). This was later covered by a more extensive platform with six separate houses. The final extension of the platform created more space for the construction of larger buildings. The more dispersed building style—the *casas* approach to covering the range of necessary functions—is particularly characteristic

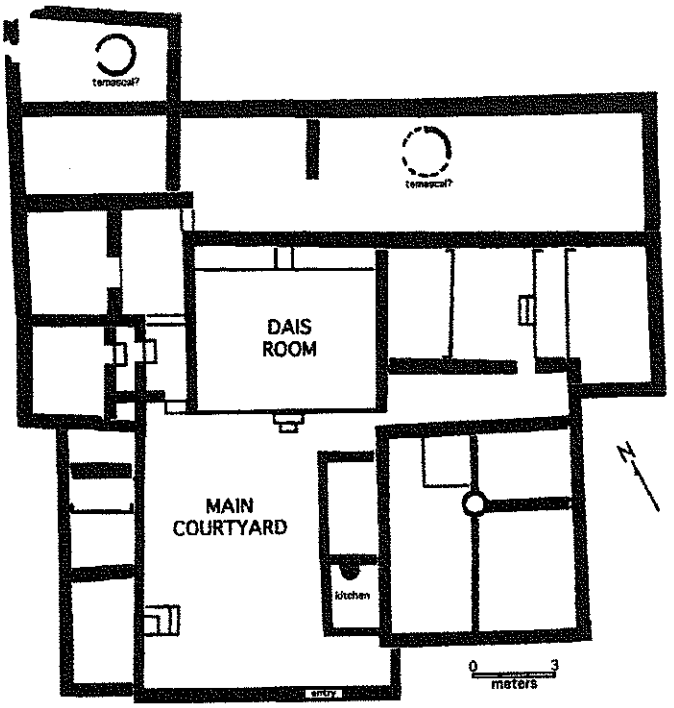


Fig. 24 Probable *tecpan*, plan, Structure 6, Cihuatecpan, México. Note the dais room (*center*) behind the main courtyard and a kitchen (*right*); the entry is in the main courtyard's front wall (below); possible sweatbaths (*temascales*) are to the rear (*top, left and center*).

of buildings in warmer climates of regions like Morelos, in comparison with the colder Basin of Mexico. The *tecpan* faces the downslope vista of the site, opening onto a plaza, across which is a pyramid.

Cihuatecpan, Teotihuacan Valley, Basin of Mexico. The only complete physical remains in the Basin of Mexico of a building conforming to the Aztec *tecpan* plan were found at the village site, Cihuatecpan (Evans and Abrams 1988: 118–181).[19] Structure 6 measures 25 x 25 m (Fig. 24), the smallest of probable *tecpans* known from archaeological evidence, small enough to fit into a corner of the main courtyard of Motecuzoma's *tecpan* at Tenochtitlan or Nezahualcoyotl's at Texcoco. Yet it was three times larger than the biggest of the other two

[19] The name of the site means *woman-lord-place*. In tracing the etymology of the word *tecpan* and its associated forms, I encountered *cihuatecpan* as a town name, most notably as a *barrio* of Tenochtitlan. Hence this term can be interpreted in various ways: as the *palace of the wife or wives of the ruler* and as the palace of Cihuacoatl, the minister of internal affairs. A recent spate of ethnohistoric documents dealing with rulership has provided clear instances of women ruling as *tlatoque* (see Cuauhtitlan, p. 35); were the record fine-grained enough, it would probably reveal that the village heads were sometimes female. Thus the community name *Cihuatecpan* could have been derived from a local incident of female rulership.

hundred buildings at the site, almost all of them houses of commoners, and it conforms well to the *tecpan* pattern of disproportionately large entry courtyard, dais room, and suites of rooms around the courtyard.

Aztec farmhouses commonly featured an entry courtyard flanked by residential and work rooms, and this pattern is to some degree the seminal version of the Aztec palace. Structure 6 had a more formal pattern. The entry courtyard was disproportionately large, 8.3 x 9.7 m, with a packed-earth floor and stuccoed walls decorated with a wide band of deep red paint. The dais room opposite the entryway was reached by a staircase from the courtyard. Along the back wall of the dais room, an embedded pavement of adobe bricks extended from either side of a centrally placed *tlequil*-style, cut-stone hearth. Other rooms around the central courtyard include raised platforms that may have served to accommodate special guests at meetings and feasts or to store goods for tribute.

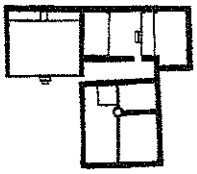
Concerning the Mapa de Quinatzin depiction of Nezahualcoyotl's palace, Donald Robertson (1977: 15) wrote: "The interesting thing about this reconstruction is that the building is both monumental and symmetrical and that it has a series of smaller buildings. . . in the open corners," and Cihuatecpan Structure 6 provides archaeological evidence confirming this pattern. Behind Structure 6's central courtyard were four suites of residential rooms, presumably for the lord and his several wives and their children, plus other relatives and hangers-on. Quarters for palace workers may have been separate from the palace—the shabbiest house we excavated was next to the palace, and it may have housed the *tecpan pouhque* (palace people). In the back of Structure 6 were two service yards with circular stone wall bases, possibly *temascales* (sweatbaths), judging from their shape, location, and associated artifacts, which consisted of fragments of figurines, mostly of Xochiquetzal, the goddess of healthy fertility and textile arts, reflecting two of the main concerns of Aztec women.

Structure 6's construction history was established from features of wall bonding and abutting, room levels, and ceramic typology and hydration dates from sherds and obsidian blades from floor contexts and room fill (Evans and Freter 1996). The construction chronology (Fig. 25) showed that the northeast corner of the building was built first, then the courtyard and some habitation suites, and finally the service yards and platforms. The resulting building (Fig. 26) remained in use until 1603 when the colonial government ordered its abandonment.

Mansions and Pleasure Palaces

The administrative *tecpan* announced the Aztec political process through its layout, whereas Aztec mansions and pleasure palaces, while also elite residences, expressed political organization in indirect ways. They are worth summarizing for what they reveal about the use of wealth gained from political position.

STAGE 1



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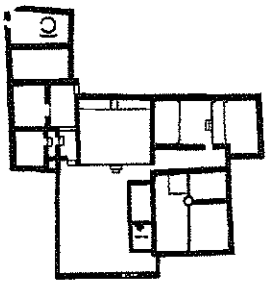

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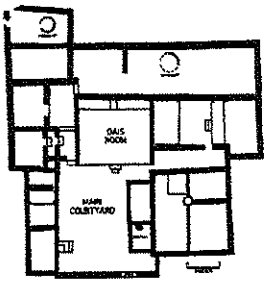

Fig. 25 Structure 6's three-stage construction history, Cihuatecpan, México.

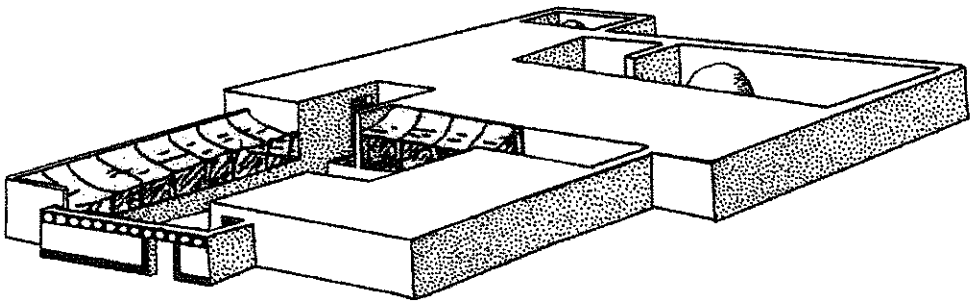

Fig. 26 Reconstruction, Cihuatecpan, México.

Mansions.

> [A]ll the lords who were subject to Mexico had houses in the city. These lords resided there much of the time because Moteuczom, great lord that he was, took delight in holding court. (Motolinía 1951: 272)

Mansions included the homes of nobles and nonnobles—luxurious houses of wealthy entrepreneurs like *pochteca* long-distance merchants, of nobles who gained an income from farm plots but lived in cities, of mature and accomplished offspring of powerful rulers, of diplomats, and of foreign allies maintaining residences in the imperial capitals. In Tenochtitlan there would have been dozens of these houses; the Spaniards wrote about laying siege to several neighborhoods of fine houses, especially those along canals. Most notable was Cuauhtemoc's house, inherited from Ahuizotl (Alvarez y Gasca 1971). In Tlatelolco there were also noble houses: Axayacatl had a palace built there after conquering the city in 1473, and wealthy merchants maintained large residences, although these homes may have had modest exteriors; chroniclers report that merchants were careful to conceal the extent of their wealth so as not to inspire jealousy among the nobles.

Outside Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco, there would have been mansions in other capitals, especially Texcoco and the twelve *pochteca* merchant headquarters towns. During the Spanish Conquest, to ransom his brother, Ixtlilxóchitl sent to Texcoco "for the gold which had remained in the palaces of his father and grandfather . . . together with the gold and silver taken from the houses of four hundred other lords in the city." (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl 1969 [1600–40]: 55) This suggests that there were probably hundreds of mansions in the basin and adjacent regions, mostly in the largest cities.

No recognizable archaeological evidence of such residences remains, but they are known from descriptions of feasts and other functions that took place within them and also from citations of the architectural features that could only be used with the permission of the ruler: part of the sumptuary laws that demonstrated the conflict between the status-seeking individual's urge to display wealth and taste and the ruler's wish to limit such displays to himself and his clients.[20] These features were the architectural parlance of the palace world; to use them announced to the world the right to own a palace, a right only a king could grant.

The mansion that Nezahualpilli built for his older brother, Axoquentzin, rewarded a military victory against Chalco, and the mansion was a copy of the Chalcan king's palace (Umberger 1996b: 92–93). Nezahualpilli sent an architect, mason, and artist to study the building's plan and features. This incident shows how palaces functioned as status symbols—win a great victory, get a great palace—and also how individual innovations of design in architecture and landscaping were closely noted and became fashionable.

[20] Diego Durán (1994 [1581]: 209): "Only the great noblemen and valiant warriors are given license to build a house with a second story; for disobeying this law a person receives the death penalty. No one is to put peaked or flat or round additions upon his house. This privilege has been granted by the gods only to the great."

Nezahualpilli had one of his own sons executed for building a palace without his permission. Descriptions of this incident emphasize the severe justice kings had to deploy, even unto their own law-breaking offspring, but the subtext provides information as to who deserved a palace. Alva Ixtlilxóchitl 1975–77 [1600–40] describes how the son, Iztacquauhtzin, came to be executed.

> [W]ithout [Nezahualpilli's] permission he built some palaces to be his dwelling, without having achievements to merit it; because the laws stipulated that although he was a hereditary prince he could not build rich houses nor decorate them with bunches of feathers, until he had been through four battles, and had captured at least four officers, experienced military men, that had [achieved] in knowledge all the [grades] that were necessary for a wise man, philosopher, orator and poet, and at least had achieved skill in some of the mechanical arts, and being approved in one of these things, with the permission of the king could have achieved this . . . because the other way had the death penalty, so they carried out this law on Iztacquautzin. (II: 169; also I: 549)

Retreats, Pleasure Palaces, and Gardens

Nezahualpilli may have consoled himself by retreating to one of his numerous country palaces. Aztec nobles developed many properties for their recreational and contemplative potential, and they built pleasure palace residences at such sites, as well as creating gardens within their *tecpan* palaces. Gardens were treasured by nobles, who embowered the many courtyards of their palaces with trees, vines, and flowering plants. The right to cultivate certain plants was covered by sumptuary laws, and for a noble family to lose the privilege of developing impressive gardens was somewhat like banishment from paradise. Such matters call forth unanswered—probably unanswerable—questions of the floral gradations of noble privilege: Like symbols in a heraldic crest or ribbons on veteran's chest perhaps the flowers in the gardens spoke a well-understood language of earned and inherited privilege.

In the Basin of Mexico, there were perhaps several dozen permanent pleasure palaces and a handful of ephemeral palaces. The development of pleasure parks in the fifteenth century by the related dynasties of Tenochtitlan and Texcoco became a fascinating contest of elite-status rivalry (Evans 2000). Beginning in 1420, four different types of pleasure parks were established and/or refined: imperial retreats, horticultural gardens, urban zoological and memorial parks, and game reserves (see Table 1). I should note that spiritual and ritual functions were ever-present at these pleasure palaces, which were often located at or near existing shrines, especially hot springs and mountaintops with commanding views.

> [T]he gardens of flowers and sweet-scented trees, and the many kinds that there were of them, and the arrangement of them and the walks, and the ponds and tanks of fresh water . . . and the baths which he had there, and the variety of small

> birds . . . and the medicinal and useful herbs that were in the gardens. It was a wonder to see, and to take care of it there were many gardeners. Everything was made in masonry and well cemented, baths and walks and closets, and apartments like summer houses where they danced and sang . . . as a consequence of so many crafts being practi[c]ed among them, a large number of skilled Indians were employed. (Díaz del Castillo 1956 [1560s]: 214)

Lords also had temporary palaces, encampments at spiritual retreats and military outposts. The Spaniards describe comfortable quarters being made up for them quickly, using bales of straw or thatch. This must have been similar to the quarters constructed for kings when they traveled, for example, on the yearly pilgrimage of the lords to the shrine atop Mt. Tlaloc.

Palace as Power, Palace as Offering, Palace as Art

Having reviewed the main types of Aztec palaces and some notable examples, we can ask what do Aztec palaces signify in broader cultural terms. When we consider the Mesoamerican sequence of cultural development, the final century was unsurpassed in terms of the territory made to serve as a catchment zone for a few related royal families. The Aztecs managed to control far more land and collect much more wealth than any competing polity or predecessor. This remarkable concentration of resources gave rise to elite conspicuous consumption patterns similar to those of Old World's flashier archaic agrarian states, Rome and Babylon, for example, wherein the rulers' facilities were a means of announcing high status and investing wealth.

Many complex societies have administrative palaces, but far fewer also have horticultural gardens and imperial retreats carved into cliffs. The range of variation in palace types and sizes, the sumptuary laws—these are all indications that concentration of wealth is extreme and that high value was placed on expressions of wealth that stressed social position and taste.

It is fortunate that so much is known about Aztec palaces. Spanish soldiers and clerics stayed in them for months before hostilities broke out, fortified themselves within the palaces during the conflict, and as soon as the Conquest was over staked claims to palatial property. Spaniards admired and later imitated palace settings and layouts, responding to two major aspects of the Aztec palace: (a) The beauty and certain comforts of these places were appreciated by Cortés and his men, and (b) The effectiveness of the central courtyard as a forum for political action and rhetorical expression impressed Catholic proselytizers, who used this design as a natural place of instruction and consensus for the young nobles they needed to convert in their spiritual conquest.

Early on, the Spaniards recognized the Aztec palace form as crucial to shaping Aztec attitudes because of the role of the courtyard. In this strongly hierarchical social structure, ideas and policies affecting multitudes were first argued before a group of powerful elites, in the courtyards of the palaces. Pedro de Gante, a strong proponent of conversion by co-opting pagan religious forms and sacred places, had spent his first three years in Mexico

living in Nezahualcoyotl's palace in Texcoco. There he gained such respect for the courtyard as element of rhetorical process that he had the influential schools for elite Aztec youth built in that form. Advocating the use of native customs as a context for conversion, Fray de Gante saw how the *tecpan* courtyard served as an arena for discourse, particularly for the sermons that Aztec elders regularly preached to those assembled.[21] Fray de Gante sensed the customary power inherent in the courtyard-and-dais architectural layout, and he copied the design for the influential native chapel and school, San José de Los Naturales, which was erected in the patio of the convent of San Francisco in Mexico City (Maza 1972: 33).[22]

Thus the *tecpan* courtyard became the prototype for the open-air chapel, a forecourt in front of churches. Services were held for Spaniards in the enclosed church, and for natives in the open-air chapel (McAndrew 1965). The position of the dais room, the traditional seat of power, was spatially held by the enclosed church, where Spaniards attended services. In terms of preaching to the natives, the dais function was assumed by the preaching stations, the pulpits at the corners of the open courtyard. This was a spatial expression of the assumption of the power of the Aztec lords by the Spaniards, and priests in particular, with regard to direct contact with the people. The Aztec aristocracy was as a whole sector of society demoted to a position inferior to that of Spaniards (Gibson 1960).

This Spanish colonial appropriation of the functional dichotomy of Aztec palace form, with dais and courtyard representing ruler and ruled, is enormously revealing about Aztec palaces and the close relation they have demonstrated between architectural forms, functions, and societal and political meanings. In contrast to Spanish elite houses, and the conventions of Iberian noble architecture, the Aztec administrative-residential palace represented its distinctive societal meaning, its courtyard and dais room shaping social and civic identity and linking the lords and their people.

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[21] See, e.g., the *huehuetlatolli* speeches recorded in Frances Karttunen and James Lockhart (1986, 1987).

[22] The *tecpan* courtyard is the formal category missing from James Lockhart (1992: 428, table 10.1) under the table subheading "Stage 1 (1519 to ca. 1545–50)" provided for his "Arts and Architecture" data.

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