

Received from John Pahl Aug 7, 1993

THE GREAT CITY SQUARE:
GOVERNMENT IN ANCIENT CHOLULA

by

Michael Lind

Centro de Estudios Regionales de Oaxaca

ABSTRACT

Historic documents present a confusing picture of the nature of government in ancient Cholula. Some sources state that two high priests of Quetzalcoatl ruled Cholula, while others relate that Cholula was governed by a council of nobles. The apparent contradictions between priestly rulers and councils of nobles may be resolved by recognizing that Cholula functioned both on a local level, as the capital of a kingdom, and on a wider regional level, as the religious center for surrounding kingdoms. Different organizational structures were necessary to manage these different levels and some sources refer to one—relating to the regional level—while others refer to another—relating to the local level. This study discusses each of these governmental levels and shows the articulation between them through an analysis of an illustration in the Historia Tolteca Chichimeca of the Great Square of the city.

Theory: Could it be possible that just as some aspect of the god Tezcatlipoca may be found in all of the other gods that this same principle was being applied to the many facets of the Quetzalcoatl and that most if not all of the temples within the temenon of Cholula were in honor of this one god, but in his many guises. This would surely make this whole square just what Bernal Diaz called it, the great ~~one~~ Cue of Quetzalcoatl. - Aug 7, 1993

January Meeting of the Mesoamerican Network

Riverside Municipal Museum

1990

INTRODUCTION

Historic documents present a confusing picture of the nature of government in ancient Cholula. Rojas (1927:160) states that two high priests of Quetzalcoatl, with the titles Agulach and Tlalchiach, ruled Cholula. On the other hand, Torquemada (1975: I, 386-87) reports that a council of six nobles headed by a captain-general governed Cholula, and Las Casa (1974:178) declares that Cholula was reigned by a council of four nobles. The apparent contradictions between priestly rulers and councils of nobles may be resolved by recognizing that Cholula functioned both on a local level, as the capital of a kingdom, and on a wider regional level, as the religious center for surrounding kingdoms. Different organizational structures were necessary to manage these different levels and Rojas referred to one--relating to the regional level--while Torquemada and Las Casas referred to another--relating to the local level. This paper discusses each of these governmental levels and shows the articulation between them through an analysis of an illustration in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca of the Great Square of the city.

CHOLULA AS A REGIONAL RELIGIOUS CENTER

At the time of the Spanish Conquest, the Indians of the Central Highlands of Mesoamerica regarded Cholula as their most sacred and holy city. Gabriel de Rojas, mayor of Cholula in A.D. 1581, wrote of the ancient holy city: "... this was a metropolis and as greatly venerated as Rome is in Christianity and Mecca among the Moors" (Rojas 1927:162). Cholula was known as the city of the god Quetzalcoatl, and the great Temple of Quetzalcoatl in Cholula's city square was even larger than the Templo Mayor of Aztec Tenochtitlan (Diaz del Castillo 1962: 162-64). As the religious center for surrounding kingdoms, Cholula hosted large numbers of pilgrims who came from as far away as 100-200 leagues to attend its great religious ceremonies (Torquemada 1975: I, 385). A hierarchical religious organization existed to direct the great religious ceremonies and it is this religious hierarchy which is described in detail by Rojas.

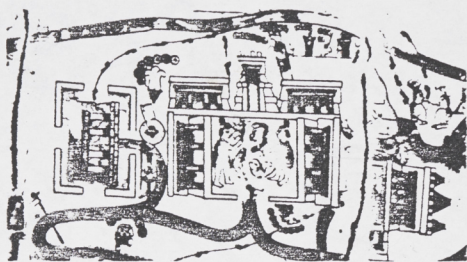
The two high priests of Quetzalcoatl, the Tlalchiach and the Agulach, headed this religious hierarchy. Only nobles from a particular calpulli ("barrio" or "neighborhood") within one of the city's six districts, Tianguisnahuac, could become priests of Quetzalcoatl. Upon entering the priesthood, a neophyte was required to give all or most of his worldly possessions to the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. The priests of Quetzalcoatl undertook three

periods of service, each lasting four years. During the first four years, the novitiates wore plain black capes. In the second four years, they received black capes with a red border and during the final four years black capes with red designs. Following this twelve year term, they dressed in black capes until they became old priests with the right to dress in all red capes. Upon the death of one or the other of the two high priests, the oldest red caped priest became the new Aquiach or Tlalchiach and donned the purple cape reserved for these two high priests (Rojas 1927: 160-62).

The Aquiach and Tlalchiach played a very important role in regional "foreign affairs" as the high priests of Quetzalcoatl. Quetzalcoatl was the deity that granted kings the divine right to rule on Earth. Rojas (1927: 161-62) states that upon inheriting their kingdoms, kings from surrounding regions would travel to Cholula to make rich offerings at the Temple of Quetzalcoatl and seek confirmation of their divine right to rule. In a ceremony performed in a small chamber, the Aquiach and Tlalchiach perforated the nose, earlobes, or lips of the king--according to the custom of his kingdom--so that royal ornaments might be placed in them and his divine right to rule be confirmed.

In the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2, a ruler is shown making rich offerings at the Temple of Quetzalcoatl and then proceeding to a building directly north of the temple to have his nose pierced (Fig. 1). The building has a wall around it with entrances on each of its four sides. This building is illustrated in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca where the Tlalchiach is depicted using a jaguar bone awl (the jaguar was the symbol of the Tlalchiach) to perforate the lower lip of a ruler, and the Aquiach is shown using an eagle bone awl (the eagle was the symbol of the Aquiach) to perforate the nose of another ruler (Fig. 2). The Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca does not name the building, which herein will be called the "confirmatory chamber," but states that the rulers fasted for four days and four nights before the ceremony (Kirchhoff et. al. 1976: 171-72).

Upon returning to his kingdom, the newly confirmed ruler was accompanied by five priests sent as messengers by the Aquiach and Tlalchiach to verify their confirmation of his divine right to rule. Every 52 years--Rojas's (1927:162) statement of 53 years is almost certainly incorrect--people from the kingdoms whose rulers were confirmed in Cholula participated in a great pilgrimage to Cholula to make offerings of fine feather cloaks, gold, silver, and precious stones to the Temple of Quetzalcoatl.



← Note Part of a building here

Fig. 1. The "Confirmatory Chamber" in the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2
(After Kirchhoff et. al. 1976:181)



The priests, in block,
appear to be wearing
beards.

Fig. 2. The "Confirmatory Chamber" in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca
(After Kirchhoff et. al. 1976: Facsimile, F. 21 r, Ms. 46-50, p. 2)



Fig. 3. Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca: Cholula's High Priests Settle Land Boundaries.

(After Kirchhoff et. al. 1976: Facsimile, F. 35 v, Ms. 46-50, p. 28)



Fig. 4. Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca: Cholula's High Priests Greet Soldiers Returning from Battle.

(After Kirchhoff et. al. 1976: Facsimile, F. 29 v, Ms. 46-50, p. 22)

The role of the two high priests in regional "foreign affairs" was not limited to ceremonies. Kings from surrounding kingdoms would send messengers with disputes they wished settled by the Aculach and Tlalchiach (Rojas 1927:164). The Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca illustrates the Aculach and Tlalchiach discussing and arranging land boundaries for two rulers (Fig. 3).

When Cholula was at war, the two high priests, who were too old to serve on the field of battle, selected captains from among the ranks of the priests of Quetzalcoatl to lead a contingent into battle. The Aculach had the eagle as his insignia, while the Tlalchiach had the jaguar (Rojas 1927:161). These insignia recall the elite Aztec troops, the Eagle and the Jaguar Knights. It should also be noted that each of the six districts of Cholula sent troops to war under their leaders (Rojas 1927:163). The Codex of Cholula illustrates one probable battleground east of Cholula, near the Colonia Analco in the modern City of Puebla, where Cholula probably fought some of the battles of the Xochiyaotl, or "Flowery Wars," against Huejotzingo, Tlaxcala, and the Triple Alliance of Tenochtitlan, Tetzaco, and Tacuba (see Fig. 5).

Rojas (1927:162) also states that wherever the Aculach and Tlalchiach went, they were accompanied by a large number of trumpeters and drummers. The Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca illustrates such a procession where the Tlalchiach and Aculach have gone out to meet soldiers returning from a war. The meeting takes place east of the Rio Atoyac, or Quetzallac River as it was known to the ancient Cholultecas. Interestingly, the trumpeter for the Aculach blows a shell trumpet decorated with an eagle head, while the Tlalchiach's trumpet has one decorated with a jaguar head--corresponding to each of the high priests' appropriate insignia. Other musicians illustrated include a seated drummer and a man shaking rattles (Fig. 4).

CHOLULA AS THE CAPITAL OF A KINGDOM

Apart from being a regional religious center, Cholula was also the capital of an autonomous kingdom which was independent from the Aztec state (Duran 1951: I, 239). The Kingdom of Cholula was bordered by the Kingdoms of Tlaxcala, in the north; Tepeaca, in the east; Huaquechula, in the south; and Huejotzingo, in the west (Fig. 5). The Kingdom of Cholula covered some 800 square kilometers and included over 50 subject communities (Fig. 5).

The capital city of Cholula was divided into six principal districts: Tianguisnahuac, Mizquitla, Texpolco,

Xixitla, Tecama, and Colomochco. Each district controlled a particular area of the Kingdom and the subject communities within it (Carrasco 1971: 44-49). These areas were probably comparable to the Tlaxcalan tequitl (Anguliano and Chapa 1976: 122-23). They consisted of groups of towns that provided tribute (taxes in the form of goods) and tequio (labor services by communal work groups) for each district within the city.

Every district within the city was divided into calpulli or "barrios" and the district was named after its most important calpulli (Carrasco 1971:35). The calpulli was a social, religious, political, and economic unit bound together by kinship and residence. Each calpulli had its own temple and patron deity (Rojas 1927:163). Carrasco (1971: 35-44) has identified about 40 calpulli distributed among the six districts, and 29 of these are seen on the obverse of the Codex of Cholula which shows their location within Cholula and illustrates the temples or civic buildings of 25 of them (Fig. 6).

The City of Cholula had a population of about 40,000 inhabitants at the time of the Conquest (Rojas 1927:158) and another 40,000 persons may have been distributed among the more than 50 towns of the kingdom. A hierarchical political organization existed to govern the Kingdom and it is this political hierarchy which is mentioned by Torquemada and Las Casas as being headed by a council of nobles.

Torquemada (1975: I, 386) states that Cholula "... was governed by a captain-general, elected by the republic with a council of six nobles." According to Torquemada (1975: I, 386-87), the council meetings were also attended by priests since nothing was ever decided without first considering its religious implications. The council of six nobles fits neatly with the six districts--a noble representative from each district. Unfortunately, Torquemada does not specify that each noble on the council came from a different district within the city.

Las Casas (1974:178) relates that Cholula was divided into four districts each of which was governed by a prince or lord whose tenure was permanent and hereditary. According to Las Casas (1974: 53-54), these four rulers traced their descent back to four disciples of Quetzalcoatl who, having come from Coatzacoalcos, spent twenty years in Cholula establishing his religion. After twenty years, Quetzalcoatl returned to Coatzacoalcos with his four disciples but sent them back to Cholula to rule.

The documentary evidence regarding local level political organization within the Kingdom of Cholula is at best incomplete and contradictory. Unfortunately, Rojas has little to say about it. He does report, however, that the 26 highest ranking nobles in all Cholula ordinarily resided near the Temple of Quetzalcoatl in the Great Square of the city (Rojas 1927:162). The fact that he does not identify them as priests implies that they formed a secular elite with an important voice in the political affairs of the Kingdom. Fortunately, the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca has a remarkable illustration of the Great Square of Cholula, referred to by Rojas (1927:162), which resolves the documentary contradictions.

The Great Square

Referring to the illustration of the Great Square of Cholula, the accompanying text in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca reads:

And here again the town of the Cholultecas ... is shown. Here a painting of the town appears: this is what it is like, our great grandfathers, our grandfathers saw it like this: the town actually looks like this today too (Kirchhoff et. al 1976: 180-181).

Writing a generation after the Conquest, the authors of the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca depicted Cholula as they remembered it on the eve of the Spanish Conquest. Their intent was to portray the arrival in Cholula of their Chichimec ancestors who were allies of the Toltec conquerors of Cholula in the late 12th century A.D. Therefore, they illustrated the Great Square as they knew it in the early 16th century and peopled it with late 12th century Toltecs and Chichimecs (Fig. 7).

Centered at the bottom of the illustration, which corresponds to the west side of the Great Square, is a long rectangular building called the Xiuhcalli or "Turquoise House" (Kirchhoff et. al 1976:180). The Xiuhcalli faces east and has a rectangular black altar or table just inside its doorway with three thrones to the north (left) and three thrones to the south (right) of it. The six thrones strongly support Torquemada's contention that Cholula was ruled by a council of six nobles. The Xiuhcalli was the council hall where these six nobles presided.

Tecotl quilli

However, even stronger support for Torquemada comes from an analysis of a series of residences, identified by their doorways and walls, located along the east side of the

Great Square at the top of the illustration. The large residence in the northeast corner (upper left) faces south and is occupied by the Tlalchiach. The equally large residence across the Great Square in the southeast corner (upper right) faces north and is occupied by Torquemada's "captain-general," the ruler of the Kingdom of Cholula. His head is adorned with the quetzal feather headdress reserved for great kings. In the Codex of Cholula, the ruler is referred to as the "Chichimecatl Teuhtli" (Simons 1962:77). The six smaller residences along the east side of the Great Square all face west. The northernmost one (far left) corners with the large residence of the Tlalchiach and is occupied by the Aquilach. The remaining five residences along the east side are the residences of the other five members of the council of nobles--the teuhtli or lords. The Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca, then, resolves the contradictory statements in the documents in favor of Torquemada.

To the north (left) and south (right) of the Great Square and on either side of the Xihucalli are a series of rectangles enclosing temples. Most of the temples have glyphs associated with them and depict named personages on either side of the temple. These illustrations were meant to portray the 12th century Toltec calpulli of Cholula and their leaders. The names of several of these calpulli became the names of later districts of Cholula. Two of the three later districts to the north and west of the Great Square are among the names of the calpulli along the left side of the illustration--Texpolco and Mizquitla. Only one of the three later districts to the south of the Great Square is among the names of the calpulli on the right side of the illustration--Tecama.

The illustration also shows a number of buildings within the Great Square. The largest of these is the Temple of Quetzalcoatl which faces west on an enclosed rectangular plaza. The Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca refers to the temple as the Xihucalco, "Turquoise Temple," and the Temamatlac, "Stone Stairs" (Kirchhoff et. al. 1976: 179-81; Carrasco 1971:15). The latter name corresponds to the Mixtec name for Cholula (Peterson 1987:96).

The "Confirmatory Chamber" north (left) of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl is not shown in the illustration (see Fig. 1). Directly south (right) of the temple, however, are two buildings facing each other. These two buildings represent the offices (but not residences) of the two high priests of Quetzalcoatl--the Tlalchiach and the Aquilach. The Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca refers to the upper (easternmost) building as the Quetzaltototl, "Quetzal Bird" Building, and

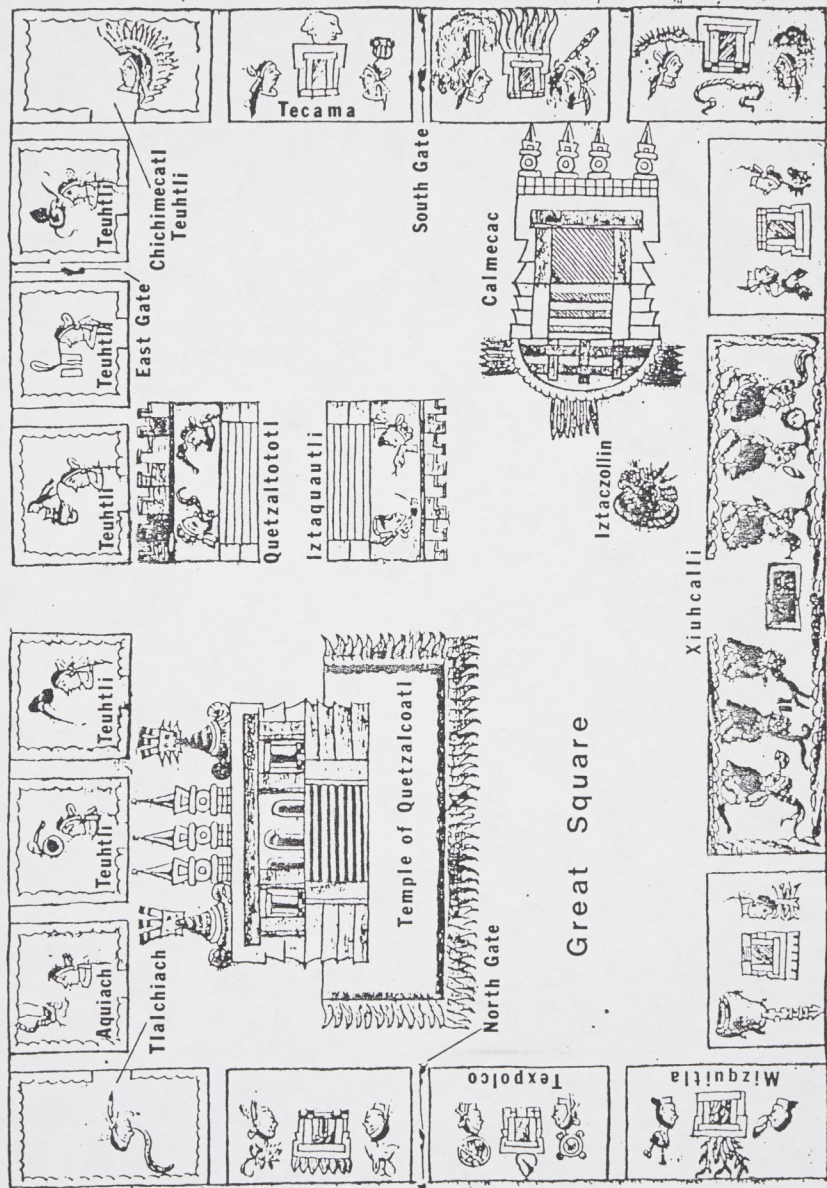


Fig. 7. The Great City Square of Ancient Cholula

(Adapted from Kirchhoff et. al. 1976: Facsimile, F. 26v - 27r, Ms. 46-50, pp. 12-13)



Fig. 8. The Place Glyph of Cholula [Above]
and the Quetzalcotl - Iztacuatli Building [Below]

(After Kirchhoff et. al. 1976: Facsimile, F. 14 r, Ms. 54-58, p. 40)

names the lower (westernmost) one the Iztaquautli, "White Eagle" Building (Kirchhoff *et. al.* 1976: 179-81; Carrasco 1971:15). The Quetzaltototl faces west and represents the offices of the Tlalchiach, while the Iztaquautli faces east and represents the offices of the Aquiach. A face on illustration of one of these buildings, identifiable by the distinctive merlon roof decor, appears elsewhere in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca and shows the Quetzaltototl and Iztaquautli to be two storey buildings (Fig. 8).

In the southwest (lower right) part of the Great Square is a large building identified in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca as the Calmecac, "School for nobles and priests" (Kirchhoff *et. al.* 1976:179-81). The Calmecac faces north on an enclosed semicircular plaza whose floor has an interwoven checker design. North (left) of the Calmecac, just outside the door of the Xiuhcalli, is a circular altar called the Iztaczollin--Altar of the "White Quail."

The Political Elite

Although available data are sparse regarding the recruitment of the political elite, it would appear probable that each of the six members of the council (including the ruler) came from a different district within the city. According to the Codex of Cholula, the successive Chichimecatl Teuhtli who ruled Cholula throughout much of the 16th century came from the Tenanquihuac calpulli of the Tianguisnahuac district. These rulers were all from the same family or lineage for all bear the family name Marcelino-Acapixohuatzin. This does not mean, however, that the Chichimecatl Teuhtli was not elected. The Aztec kings were elected from among the members of the royal lineage so that a deceased king's brother, and not his son, might be elected king (Duran 1951: I, 124). The same may have obtained in Cholula. The Chichimecatl Teuhtli may have been elected from a royal lineage within the Tenanquihuac calpulli of the Tianguisnahuac district of the city. Other council members--the Teuhtli--may have been elected from specific noble lineages within particular calpulli in each of the different districts of the city.

Tenanquihuac, the calpulli from which the Chichimecatl Teuhtli came, means "place of the gate or entrance of the wall" (Simons 1962:95). In the Codex of Cholula and in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca, the Great Square is shown as a walled compound with three gates opening out onto broad avenues within the city which lead to the north, east, and south (Figs. 6 and 7). Tenanquihuac's location, as shown in the Codex of Cholula, was directly outside the north wall

of the Great Square and on the west side of the broad avenue which led northward from the Great Square. On the east side of this avenue, also directly outside the north wall of the Great Square, was the neighboring calpulli of Tianguisnahuac--the calpulli from which the priests of Quetzalcoatl came (Fig. 6). Cholula's most powerful rulers, the two high priests of Cholula and the Chichimecatl Teuhtli, came from these two neighboring calpulli within the Tianguisnahuac district of the city.

Interestingly, just as the Temple of Quetzalcoatl is on the east side of the Great Square, so too is the Tianguisnahuac calpulli on the east side of the avenue directly north of the temple. Likewise, just as the Xiuhcalli council hall is on the west side of the Great Square, so too is the Tenanquiahua calpulli of the Chichimecatl Teuhtli on the west side of the avenue directly north of the council hall. The locations of these two neighboring calpulli relative to the Great Square's principal temple and principal government building were certainly significant.

CONCLUSIONS

The system of government in ancient Cholula was admirably adapted to the city's unique status as both a regional religious center and the political capital of a local kingdom. The kingdom's foreign policy decision making powers were in the hands of those with the greatest vested interests in maintaining Cholula's role as a regional religious center--the high priests of Quetzalcoatl. The high priests' capabilities for engaging in an active foreign policy were considerable. They could grant or withhold confirmation of a foreign king's divine right to rule and were respected judges who settled disputes between foreign potentates. They also controlled the kingdom's only elite professional fighting force--the priestly "Jaguar and Eagle Knights." The entire priestly organization was financed in large measure by foreign funds in the form of "offerings" to the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, and the pilgrims and foreign traders that attended the great religious ceremonies were undoubtedly a boon to the local economy of the kingdom.

The kingdom's domestic policy decision making powers were in the hands of the Chichimecatl Teuhtli and the council of nobles. The ruler and council of nobles functioned as the kingdom's legislative, judicial, and executive administrators. They probably established laws and dispensed justice, levied taxes and dispersed public funds, determined public works projects and conscripted labor services, and regulated commerce in the city's market.

They also had the power to draft and lead a citizen army. The political system was financed by the taxes collected within the kingdom.

Torquemada (1975: I, 386-87) alluded to the articulation between foreign and domestic policy makers by reporting that the priests (foreign policy makers) always attended the meetings of the council of nobles (domestic policy makers). Clearly, domestic policy decisions could have an important impact on foreign policy and *vice versa*. The articulation of domestic and foreign policy makers is revealed in the structure of the Great Square of Cholula.

The Xiuhcalli--the Turquoise House--symbol of Cholula's local political power as the capital of a kingdom, was centered along the west side of the Great Square facing the Temple of Quetzalcoatl--the Xiuhcalco or Turquoise Temple--symbol of Cholula's regional religious power in foreign affairs. The offices of the two high priests, the Quetzaltototl of the Tlalchiach and the Iztaquautli of the Aquiach, were situated near the palace of the Chichimecatl Teuhtli in the southeastern part of the Great Square which facilitated communication with him concerning foreign policy discussions in progress. The high priests of Quetzalcoatl and the council of nobles (including the ruler) resided next to one another along the east side of the Great Square which facilitated immediate and direct communication amongst them any time of the day or night. The two large palatial residences of the Tlalchiach and the Chichimecatl Teuhtli faced one another across the Great Square and identify them as the chief foreign policy maker and chief domestic policy maker, respectively, within Cholula.

The government of ancient Cholula stands in marked contrast to the governments of surrounding kingdoms in the Central Highlands of Mesoamerica on the eve of the Spanish Conquest. The Aztec to the northwest and the Mixtecs to the southeast are well-documented groups in which foreign policy decision making powers and elite military forces were in the hands of the political elite. These governments were headed by kings determined to extend their kingdoms through military conquests, forcing subjugated communities to provide them with tribute and labor services. Unique among its neighbors in the Central Highlands because of its status as a sacred city, Cholula developed a form of government in which foreign policy decision making and elite military forces were in the hands of spiritual conquerors--the high priests of Quetzalcoatl--and not the king or political elite. Tribute flowed into Cholula from foreign sources as "positively motivated religious offerings" not as "negatively connotated taxes" extracted from peasants by

force of arms. Divested of foreign policy decision making powers and lacking control of the professional military--which might have tempted them to embark on foreign conquests with potentially disastrous political and economic consequences for the Kingdom, in general, and Cholula's lucrative status as a regional religious center, in particular--Cholula's political elite tended almost exclusively to the Kingdom's domestic affairs; and, in the process, Cholula became one of Mesoamerica's greatest centers of commerce. Cholula's fame as a great commercial center was second only to its renown as a sacred city.

How Cholula developed its unique form of government in contrast to its neighbors is an important question. An approach well-suited to the archeological investigation of the cultural dynamics of evolving polities has been developed recently by Becker (1984). Becker suggests that virtually all polities in Mesoamerica evolved from social moieties with dual leadership vested in an external affairs leader and an internal affairs leader. He demonstrates how archeological data derived from spatial patterning in architectural clusterings can be used to analyze the cultural dynamics of evolving polities. Cholula is an ideal site to initiate archeological research into the cultural dynamics involved in the evolution of its unique system of government, and Becker's approach is an important starting point for any such research.

The question of how Cholula developed its unique form of government, however, is intimately related to the question of how Cholula became a sacred city. Anthropologists, in general, and archeologists, in particular, have paid little more than lip service to the existence of sacred cities. Few comparative studies of the governmental or other organizational aspects of sacred cities have been done. Nevertheless, recent studies of the Templo Mayor as an axis mundi of Tenochtitlan have offered exciting new insights into the evolution of sacred centers (Broda, Carrasco, and Matos Moctezuma 1987). Cholula, again, is an ideal site to initiate research into the cultural dynamics involved in the evolution of a sacred city and the studies of Broda, Carrasco, and Matos Moctezuma provide an important starting point for any such research.

Sacred cities perservere where other cities fall. Today, almost 500 years after the Conquest and after having suffered the Conquistadors' most infamous and brutal massacre (Peterson and Green 1987), Cholula persists as a sacred city. The city's inhabitants are continually involved in religious ceremonials (Bonfil Batalla 1973). The city still functions as a political and religious center

for the communities that once occupied its Kingdom. Cholula's main plaza, the zocalo, occupies much of what was once the Great Square. The Convento, one of Cholula's principal churches, rests atop the ruins of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl on the east side of the zocalo; and the "City Hall" or Presidencia is on the west side of the zocalo in approximately the area where the Xiuhcalli once stood.

More important, however, over 300,000 pilgrims converge on Cholula in September of each year (Oliviera 1970:231). Most are poor indigenous people who come from villages scattered throughout the State of Puebla and the neighboring States of Mexico, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, Morelos, and Oaxaca (Oliviera 1970: 238-39). What attracts them, however, is not the Convento built upon the ruins of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. Instead, they come to visit the church dedicated to the Virgen de los Remedios built atop a more ancient temple. The ancient temple--called Tlalchiualtepetl or "Man-Made Mountain, and known today as the Great Pyramid--is the largest building ever constructed by humans in any place or any time including the present. Already in ruins when the Temple of Quetzalcoatl was built by the Toltecs in the 12th century A.D., the Great Pyramid demonstrates that Cholula's roots as a sacred city extend far beyond the 12th century A.D. and deep into the past. It is incumbent upon archeologists to develop research strategies designed to probe Cholula's past to reveal the cultural dynamics involved in the evolution of a sacred city.

Note on the Place Glyph for Cholula

The place glyph for Cholula in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca shows the Tlalchiualtepetl or ruins of the Great Pyramid with a frog or toad atop it, a ring of flowers on its side, a group of reeds to its left, and a tree to its right (Fig. 8). Motolinia (1951:138), who climbed to the top of the ruins of the Great Pyramid in A.D. 1535, recounts a legend about the frog which was told to him by the Cholultecas. In ancient times, the people who inhabited Cholula had planned to build the Great Pyramid higher than the tallest mountain. However, a great storm erupted and an enormous stone in the form of a frog or toad fell from the sky and landed atop the Great Pyramid. Following this event, the ancient Cholulans abandoned their project fearing further supernatural displeasure. Although no frog-shaped meteorite has been discovered at the Great Pyramid of Cholula, the possibilities of such an event having occurred at Cholula in the distant past are intriguing in the light of Mecca.

However, Rojas (1927) mentions no such legend and reports that the Cholultecas maintained a shrine to a rain deity named Chiconauhquiahuitl or "Nine-Rain" atop the ruins of the Great Pyramid at the time of the Conquest. Frogs and toads are associated with rain deities and the frog or toad atop the Great Pyramid in the place glyph for Cholula in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca most likely symbolizes the shrine of the rain deity Chiconauhquiahuitl. Beneath the frog on the side of the ruins of the Great Pyramid, the six flowers arranged in a circle around a central seventh flower probably symbolize the six districts of the City of Cholula with the central seventh flower symbolizing the Great Square. The reeds to the left of the Great Pyramid with the banner above them reading "Iztac Torin" or "White Reeds" are a symbol of Tollan or "city"--Cholula was called Tollan Cholollan ["Torin" should read "Tollin" or "reeds;" Rojas notes the problems Nahuatl speakers have with "r" and "l"]. The tree to the right of the Great Pyramid has a banner above it reading "Iztac Huexotr" or "White Willow" [again, "Huexotr" should read "Huexotl" or "willow"]. Cholula was also referred to as the Place of the White Tules and the Place of the White Willow.

REFERENCES

ANGUIANO, MARINA AND MATILDE CHAPA

- 1976 "Estratificacion social en Tlaxcala durante el siglo xvi," in Estratificacion social en la Mesoamerica prehispanica, edited by Pedro Carrasco and Johanna Broda. Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia.

BECKER, MARSHALL JOSEPH

- 1984 "The development of polity in Mesoamerica as interpreted through the evolution of plaza plans," Revista Espanola de Antropologia Americana, Vol. XIV, 47-84. Madrid: Ed. Univ. Compl.

BONFIL BATALLA, GUILLERMO

- 1973 Cholula: La ciudad sagrada en la era industrial. Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico.

BRODA, JOHANNA; DAVID CARRASCO, AND EDUARDO MATOS MOCTEZUMA

- 1987 The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan. Los Angeles:
University of California Press.

CARRASCO, PEDRO

- 1971 "Los Barrios Antiguos de Cholula," Estudios y Documentos de la Region de Puebla-Tlaxcala, III, 9-88. Puebla: Instituto Poblano de Antropología e Historia.

DIAZ DEL CASTILLO, BERNAL

- 1962 Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva Espana. Mexico: Editorial Porrúa.

DURAN, FRAY DIEGO

- 1951 Historia de las Indias de Nueva-Espana y Islas de Tierra Firme. 2 Vols. Mexico: Editora Nacional.

KIRCHHOFF, PAUL; LINA ODENA GUEMES AND LUIS REYES GARCIA

- 1976 Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca. Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

LAS CASAS, FRAY BARTOLOME

- 1974 Los Indios de Mexico y Nueva Espana--Antologia. Mexico: Editorial Porrúa.

MOTOLINIA, FRAY TORIBIO DE BENAVENTE

- 1951 Motolinia's History of the Indians of New Spain. Translated and annotated by Francis Borgia Steck. Washington: Academy of American Franciscan History.

OLIVERA, MERCEDES

- 1970 "La Importancia Religiosa de Cholula," in Proyecto Cholula edited by Ignacio Marquina. Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

PETERSON, DAVID A.

- 1987 "The Real Cholula," Notas Mesoamericanas.
No. 10, 71-118. Cholula, Puebla: Universidad
de las Americas.

PETERSON, DAVID A. AND Z.D. GREEN

- 1987 "The Spanish Arrival and the Massacre at Cholula,"
Notas Mesoamericanas. No. 10, 203-223. Cholula,
Puebla: Universidad de las Americas.

ROJAS, GABRIEL

- 1927 "Descripcion de Cholula," Revista Mexicana de
Estudios Historicos, Tomo I, Num. 6, 158-170.

SIMONS, BENTE BITTMAN

- 1962 The Codex of Cholula: A Preliminary Study.
M.A. Thesis, Department of Anthropology,
University of the Americas (formerly Mexico
City College), Cholula, Puebla, Mexico.

TORQUEMADA, FRAY JUAN

- 1975 Monarquia Indiana. 6 vols. Mexico:
Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico.