

The Zapotec City-State

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The Bènizàa Region

The region in which the Bènizàa live today is as diverse as the people themselves (Fig. 1). It consists of the rugged mountain ranges of the Sierra Zapoteca, the steaming hot flat lands of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and the fertile river beds of the Valley of Oaxaca. The people speak Didxazá, Diidxza, Dizaa, Titsa'sá or Tíchazàa. All are closely related language variants which nonetheless can be mutually unintelligible. All these people, however, have been called "Zapotec" as if it were a uniform group with fixed characteristics and easily recognisable cultural aspects. But the Bènizàa from the Isthmus dress more like the Huave or lowland Ayuuk than like the Bènizàa from the Sierra Zapoteca. The same goes for the food they eat and the houses they live in. However, a shared cultural and historical background explains the existence of a Bènizàa identity.¹

In both the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and the Sierra Zapoteca people claim to have their origins in the Valley of Oaxaca (AGIE 160b, Exp. 1:249r; Lorenzo [1984] 66-67) as I have shown recently using other historical records (Oudijk [2000]). As such they are all descendants of the people who produced the culture that we recognise as that of the Bèniǵolazàa or ancestors of the Zàa.² Thus the Bènizàa of today are carriers of a culture that began as early as 500 B.C., a cultural continuity of almost 2,500 years. Their history began at the time Monte Albán was founded on the hills in the heart of the Valley of Oaxaca. After a long period of flowering and expansion, the influence of the political powers situated in Monte Albán diminished until the main plaza was finally abandoned around A.D. 800. Smaller, yet locally powerful, polities, such as Zaachila, Lambityeco and Cuilapan, sprang up throughout the Valley of Oaxaca creating a new, apparently unstable situation in which political alliances and rivalries seem to have determined the historical process. Flannery and Marcus (1983) 217 called this period one of "Balkanization", that is "the division of a region into numerous small states that are hostile to each other". It is exactly this period which will be the focus of discussion here.

Research on Bènizàa City-States

The pre-hispanic history of the Valley of Oaxaca is dominated by the Classic period city of Monte Albán, which is built on the mountains rising up from the centre of the valley floor. The site has been an obvious point of interest ever since serious archaeological and historical research in the region began.³ Although many questions have still to be answered regarding this "capital", there is no doubt that Monte Albán represented the political power, and was the actual seat of the rulers of the Bèniǵolazàa state (e.g. Marcus and Flannery [1996]; Blanton et al. [1999]). Recently, Joyce Marcus (2000) discussed Monte Albán as a city, describing it according to the sector model of Homer Hoyt (1939) but making the important distinction between Western and non-Western concepts of the city. According to Marcus, the Mesoamerican city refers "not only to a nucleated settlement, but also to its ruler, its inhabitants, and the territory ruled, including outlying dependencies and landholdings" (Marcus [2000] 55-56). Thus the Mesoamerican concept of the city is what is known as the Nahuatl *Altepetl*, Ñuu Dzavui *Yuvui Tayu*, Maya *Ahawlel* and Bènizàa *Queche*, terms also used to refer to the Mesoamerican city-state (Smith [2000]; Lind [2000]; Grube [2000]). It should be noted, however, that we have to be careful about applying these post-Classic and colonial terms to Classic period phenomena. That is, it is not clear how far the post-Classic concept of *queche*, which will be used here to refer to the Bènizàa city-state, was also used to refer to the Classic Bènizàa state. If so – which is impossible to verify with present knowledge – it would be a clear example of disjunction since the same term would have been used at two distinct moments to refer to two distinct phenomena. As the evidence stands, it is premature to apply the concept of "queche" to the Classic period Monte Albán state.

Research on the fall of this political and religious centre was the reason for excavations in the Valley of Oaxaca. When the grandfather of Oaxacan archaeology and history, Alfonso Caso, was working in Monte Albán to establish a ceramic typology and

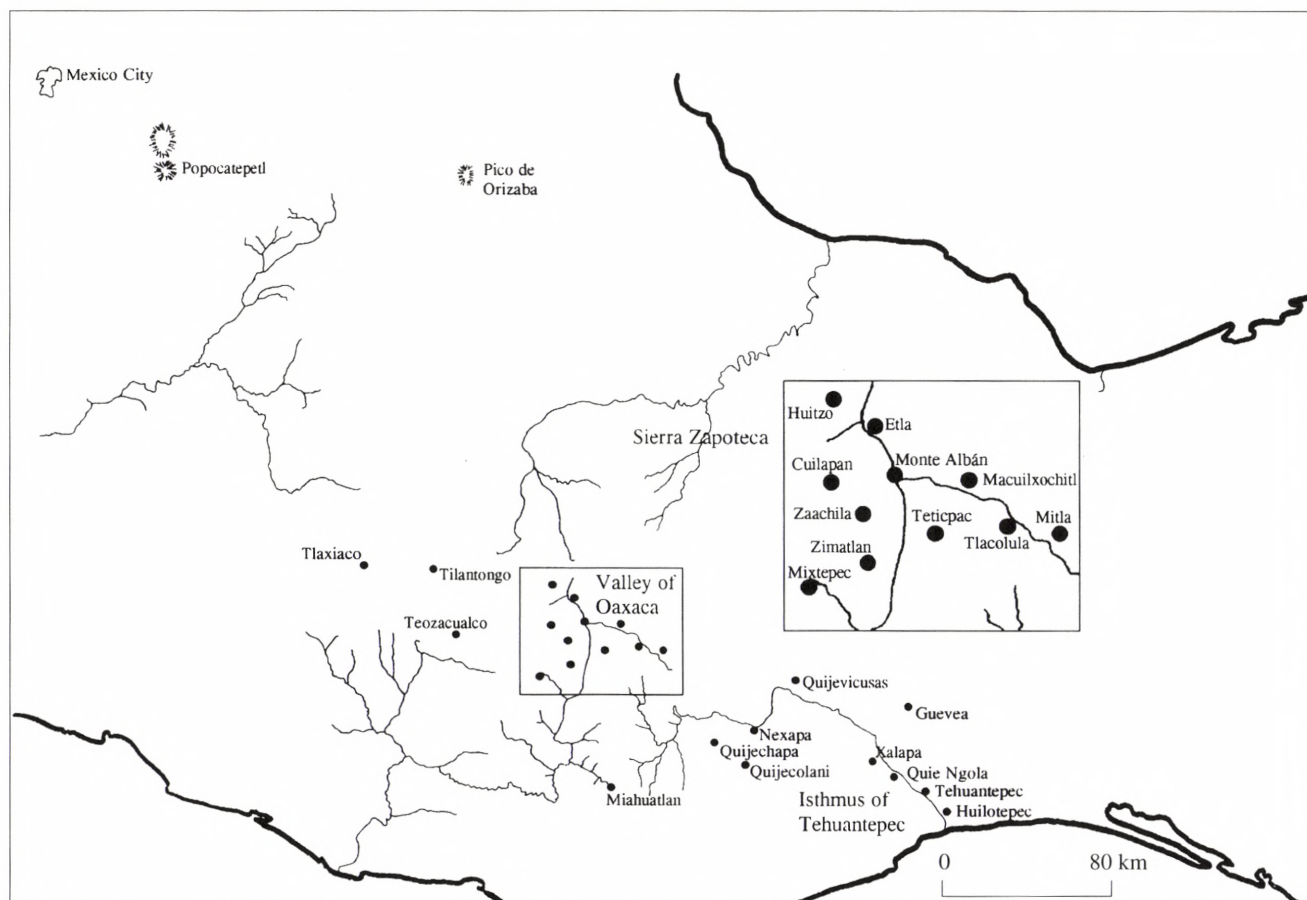


Fig. 1. Map of the Bènzàa region.

chronology, he and his colleagues found that the same ceramic complex was in use before and after the fall of Monte Albán. It was decided nonetheless to divide the complex into two “phases” and call the first Monte Albán (MA) IIIb and the second MA IV (Caso, Bernal and Acosta [1967]).⁴ However, to define MA IV better, Caso’s colleagues went out to excavate at the new political centres in the Valley which had sprung up during this particular phase. Although several of these sites were excavated (Paddock [1955]; [1957]; [1960]; [1983]; Bernal [1958]; [1964]; Bernal and Gamio [1974]; Bernal and Oliveros [1988]), the ceramic differences between the two phases continued to be one of “percentages or proportions of one type to another, [and] not simple presence or absence” (Marcus and Flannery [1990] 195).

During the 1970s and 1980s the Oaxacan Settlement Pattern Project (OSPP), a full surface survey of the Valley floor, produced a lot of new information on Bènzàa history (Blanton et al. [1982]; Kowalewski et al. [1989]; Marcus and Flannery [1996]). Although it has exercised a formidable influence over the last two

decades, this project has made the MA IIIb-IV problem even clearer and at the same time has deepened the controversy about it among scholars. Whereas the members of the OSPP should have corrected Caso’s methodological blunder of having an event determine the division of two ceramic complexes which cannot really be distinguished, they simply continued using his categories. The consequences are obvious when looking at the maps of settlement patterns related to the two phases: phase MA IIIb is present in the western part of the valley but absent in the eastern part, while in phase MA IV the opposite is the case (Kowalewski et al. [1989] 266, 291). In the following MA V phase the whole Valley is occupied evenly again (*ibid.* 316). Instead of concluding that we clearly have a functional rather than a chronological difference, the OSPP recognised the problem but chose to ignore it completely in their further analysis (*ibid.* 251-54). Consequently, they suggested an apparently massive population movement from the eastern to the western Valley in about A.D. 500, leaving the east virtually depopulated. Then in about

A.D. 750 the population moved from the western part of the Valley to the eastern part, this time leaving the west virtually depopulated. Finally, for reasons unknown, in approximately A.D. 1000 the population spread out evenly over the whole Valley floor.

A second problem continued by the OSPP concerns the chronology of the different phases. Although the fall of Monte Albán, i.e. the beginning of MA IV, had not been dated satisfactorily by Caso, it was now firmly dated as A.D. 750 and the end put at about A.D. 1000. This left a period of over five hundred years (A.D. 1000-1521) for the so-called MA V. The map of the settlement patterns (*ibid.*) and the proposed theories on related social and political matters of this last period reveal a considerable stability. This is, however, contrary to information from the historical sources produced after the Spanish conquest of 1521, which present a situation of continuous fighting, factionalism, and even large-scale migrations, especially after about A.D. 1350 (Whitecotton [1977]; Zeitlin [1994]; Oudijk [2000]). So in this particular case the academic conclusions based on the archaeological record do not concur with the historical record due to its coarse periodisation. OSPP's results do not distinguish between sites of A.D. 1100 and 1500, or rather, suggest they were contemporary. The historical record, however, shows that communities may very well have disappeared, or at least declined significantly, during this tumultuous period. Thus the MA V phase settlement pattern, as identified by the OSPP, does not represent a contemporaneous existence but rather a cumulative record of possible non-contemporaneous occupation and is, as such, of limited use for a discussion of socio-political developments during short periods within MA V.⁵

Beginning shortly after Kowalewski et al.'s key publication (1989) and continuing through the 1990s, a new chronology and categorisation has been proposed (Winter [1989]; [1990]; Lind [1991-92]; [1994a-b]; Martínez López et al. [2000]). First the names and chronology of the phases were changed to Xoo (A.D. 500-800), Liobaa (A.D. 800-1250), and Chila (A.D. 1250-1521). The fall of Monte Albán is situated at the end of the Xoo phase, which at the same time incorporates the ceramics of both former phases MA IIIb and MA IV. Although this seemingly solved the problem that was created by Caso and continued by the OSPP, it has created a major new problem. The MA V phase is now divided into the Liobaa and Chila phases; as regards ceramics, the latter is well defined and basically consists of the original MA V ceramic phase (Martínez López et al.

[2000] 7-8). The Liobaa phase, however, is left largely undefined with regard to ceramics, i.e. it represents a hiatus and therefore does not exist archaeologically. This has left us with the unacceptable situation of not being able to use the information about MA V/Liobaa/Chila phases or phases from earlier publications because it is not clear how these relate to the new chronology.

The present situation of the archaeology of the Valley of Oaxaca is particularly unfortunate for the purposes of this contribution. After the fall of the Monte Albán state it is unclear what happened in the Valley.⁶ However, since the historical record clearly shows the existence of Bènizàa city-states during the period A.D. 1250-1521 (the Chila phase), we have to assume that these had their origin in the Liobaa phase, which is not defined. It is thus impossible to give an account of the origin of the city-state in the Valley of Oaxaca. Furthermore, it has become increasingly clear that, due to the short-term character of colonial historical information (later than 1521) it is difficult to relate it to archaeological data which cover a much longer span of time. This is particularly the case in the Bènizàa political landscape since it had been in turmoil for some 100 years when in 1519 the Spanish troops of Hernán Cortés landed on the shores of what they were to call "New Spain".

Having explained the problems concerning the particular period under discussion here, the question should be how to produce a relevant account of city-state culture in the Valley of Oaxaca. Since there is no solid information on the period A.D. 1450-1521 for reasons which will be discussed below, I have decided to discuss principally the situation around 1440 and make several suggestions about that of 1540. The information for these descriptions is based, on the one hand, on the data related to the MA V phase as produced by the OSPP but treating it as if it represents the Chila phase, and on the other hand on the information as presented in colonial documents. In order to give a full account, I will transpose information backwards and forwards from one period to the other if necessary. Of course, this approach suffers from various methodological problems, of which I am well aware, but at this stage it is the only reasonable manner in which to discuss Bènizàa city-state culture.

I will first give a brief historical overview of the last 250 years before the Spanish conquest. This is necessary in order to put the descriptions of the Bènizàa city-state culture into context. Then will follow a discussion of the different elements that make up the city-state as put forward by Hansen (2000) 17-

19. If possible, these will be described within the context of each of three Bènizàa subregions: the Valley of Oaxaca, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and the Sierra Zapoteca.

The Chila Phase (A.D. 1250-1521)⁷

The few historical accounts at our disposal seem to indicate that around A.D. 1250 a new dynasty was founded in Zaachila, the main Bènizàa polity of the Valley of Oaxaca at the time. Its founder immediately began to build political ties with other polities and consequently had his son marry a noble woman from Teozacualco, an important city-state in the Mixteca (see Lind's article (2000) on the Ñuu Dzavui city-state). Through this alliance his grandson became the founder of the fourth dynasty of Teozacualco, thus securing a network of contacts and influences reaching far beyond Zaachila's direct political control. During the second half of the 14th century Zaachila was ruled by Lord Cosijoeza 11 Water. He and his son and successor, Lord Quixicayo 6 Water, followed the policies of expansion through various marital and military alliances. They continued to have close ties with the Ñuu Dzavui city-states of Teozacualco and Tlaxiaco. During these years new Bènizàa communities were founded in the Sierra Zapoteca. Simultaneously, it was Cosijoeza who made the first incursion into the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Uniting his own army with that of his allies, he conquered various towns in order to establish strongholds that were to guard the commercial route to the southern lands of Xoconusco and Guatemala. It seems that during this campaign a number of villages were founded in the Isthmus, among which are Guevea, Xalapa, and possibly the beginnings of the fortress of Quiengola. Although very little archaeological research has taken place, it seems likely that the region which connects the Valley of Oaxaca with that of the Isthmus was also conquered during this period. According to an early 17th century chronicler it was the ruler of Zaachila who took the region from the Ayuuk and established four fortified garrisons to secure it (Burgoa [1989] II: 235-36). Quijevicusas in the north was to hold off the Ayuuk, Quijchapá and Quijcolani in the south were to guard the Chontales, while Nexapa in the centre closed off the corridor. We can place the establishments of Guevea, Xalapa and Tehuantepec in the Isthmus in the same context. The first lies to the north of the route, the second to the south, and the third controls the whole lowland area to which this corridor gives access. Furthermore, only some 7 km north-east

of Tehuantepec the spectacular fortress of Quiengola was built probably to control the region very much as Nexapa did further north.

When, after a long reign, Cosijoeza's son and successor Lord Quixicayo died without a son to follow him on the throne, a halfbrother of Cosijoeza, Lord 1 Grass, was installed as ruler of Zaachila. This was, however, not without considerable problems with other factions of the Zaachila royal family. These problems crystallised in the mid-15th century when Lord 1 Grass died. A dynastic struggle broke out that was to divide the whole of the Valley of Oaxaca into rival factions until the arrival of the Spaniards in 1521. Cuilapan seems to have profited most as it took over the prominent political and economic position of Zaachila. This factionalism and the related social insecurity also led to large-scale migrations to the Sierra Zapoteca and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec during the second half of the 15th century. The reason for all these problems seems to have been that Lord 1 Grass did not have a (legitimate) son, or that his son was not accepted as ruler by other factions. Pictographic documents present a son called Cosijopii who moved to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec after he had lost the power struggle in Zaachila. Using Cosijoeza's settlements as bases he began a conquest of the Isthmus, where he founded many new towns and firmly established his court in Tehuantepec, which soon became a large city. Because the royal house of Zaachila had a legitimising effect on the lesser houses all through the Valley of Oaxaca, the dynastic crisis and consequent move of Cosijopii to the Isthmus had a devastating effect on these related houses. It seems that factionalism was widespread during this period, causing many people to opt for migration to other places. This development led to a large-scale colonisation of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and to a lesser degree that of the Sierra Zapoteca. In the case of the Isthmus, Cosijopii received these people with open arms and gave them land to found new communities displacing the Huaves, Mixes and Zoques who used to live in the region.

The son of Cosijopii was called Cosijoeza II and he seems to have continued his father's conquests until his death in 1502. Cosijoeza II fought against the Mexica or Aztec armies of Ahuitzotl and Moctezuma Xocoyotzin and eventually married the sister of the latter. Don Juan Cortés Cosijopii II was born from this marriage and ruled in Tehuantepec at the time of the Spanish conquest until he died in 1562.⁸

City-State Organisation

All scholars agree that the city-state was the prevailing type of state during the Post-Classic period (Blanton et al. [1981]; Kowalewski et al. [1989]; Marcus [1989]; Winter [1990]). It is thus important to explore the way in which the Bènizàa city-states were organised because it has considerable consequences for our understanding of the size and population of these units. I use the word “explore” because very little has been done in the study of pre-hispanic or early colonial Bènizàa social relationships and its closely related land tenure. This is in stark contrast to some other important Mesoamerican peoples like the Mayas, Nahuas and Ñuu Dzavui (Farriss [1984]; Lockhart [1992]; Terraciano [1994]). Whereas these modern studies of social organisation are based on indigenous documents, it is only today that studies of the Bènizàa are using these sources but the results are not yet known.⁹

Based on my own studies of Bènizàa manuscripts and some early colonial Spanish documents, the following situation can be sketched for the Valley of Oaxaca and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The main political unit was the *queche*, which was normally a nucleated settlement where the hereditary ruler had his palace, surrounded by a number of communities subject to this ruler. However, very often the hinterland was dotted with numerous mere farmsteads, but these were integrated in some way and, as such, formed constituent parts of the *queche*. It is the *queche* that we shall regard as the Bènizàa city-state.

The different parts of the city-state were simply called *tòbilàoqueche* or *chacuèqueche*, which means “one thing [of the] *queche*”. Each of these parts was governed by the *Xoana*, who was the head of his *yoho* or house. The main legitimating aspect of this *yoho* was the possession of a sacred bundle or *quiña*, i.e. an actual bundle of paper, cloth or vegetable material which contained a sacred object symbolising the deified founder of the *yoho*. Because the *Xoana* was an imaginary or real descendant in direct line of this founder, he was accepted as lord of his house. As such, the *quiña* represented the “root or trunk of descent” of the *yoho* (AGIM 882:156r). This becomes clear in another term that was used in reference to the parts of the city-state, namely *tobiquiñaqueche* or “one box [of the] *queche*”.

Judith Zeitlin (1994) excavated part of the political-religious centre of Tagolaba, a *tòbilàoqueche*, *barrio* or *estancia* in colonial terminology, of Tehuantepec. She describes it as a corporate community of about 200 households which were physically separated from

the other *yohos*, an identity reinforced by its own administrative and religious centre. Within the region there seems to have been a settlement pattern of dispersed hamlets and households very similar to what seems to have existed in the Valley of Oaxaca (Zeitlin and Zeitlin [1990] 429-31).

The most important *yoho* was called *quihui*¹⁰ or palace. This is the place of origin of the *Coqui* or hereditary ruler of the *queche*. Of course, it also had a sacred bundle, and normally the *quiña* of the other *yohos* were subject to that of the *quihui*, i.e. the founders of the *yohos* all shared descent with the *quihui*, but only in a secondary line. Consequently, the *Xoanas* had to provide the *Coqui* with tribute and personal services, as well as with soldiers and arms in time of war. However, besides these obligations, the *Xoana* governed as an autonomous ruler of what can be regarded as a sub-polity of the *queche*. The *Coqui*, and in powerful city-states the *Xoanas* too, resided in the palace, which consisted of one or more connected patios closed off on all four sides by raised mounds on which rooms were built. This emphasis on closure and privacy of the elite is a particular characteristic of the Post-Classic period (Kowalewski et al. [1989] 329) and it was reinforced by privileges like the consumption of certain foods and drinks and the exclusive right to wear certain clothes (Acuña [1984] II: 96-97).

Another important title used in Bènizàa society was *Pichana*. It seems that it refers to the ruler of a dependent city-state – dependent on a *quihui* or *Coqui*. Within his own polity the *Pichana* had his *Xoanas*, who had the same relationship to their lord as that described for the *Coqui* and his *Xoanas*. It seems that the relationship between a *Coqui* and a *Pichana* consisted in an unequal alliance in which the latter had to provide the former with soldiers and arms at times of war, but these obligations probably differed from case to case. The alliance was affirmed and reaffirmed by the exchange of nobility through marriage. Within their respective communities the *Coqui* and *Pichana* justified their position by claiming direct descent from the founding couple of the house. In large public displays, which included dance and theatre-like plays, the rulers showed pictorial documents that proved their descent as well as other regalia inherited from their ancestors (Oudijk [2000] 62). Within their *queche* these rulers had absolute power, their word was law (Acuña [1984] I: 215, 330-31; II: 79, 94, 172, 257).

These lords, the *Coquis* and *Pichanas*, had intermediaries who collected tribute, organised the workforce, controlled the fields, and were in charge of mili-

tary divisions. We have evidence for two distinct titles: the *collaba* and the *copa*. The first seems to have been more of an overseer (*tillàbaya* = to order; CV 256v) while the second was a guardian (*tàpaya* = to guard; CV 209v).

This brings us to the relation of these rulers with their people, a subject in Bènizàa history yet to be studied.¹¹ It seems that there were at least three different kinds of *pèniquèche* or commoners: 1) those who “belonged” to the *quihui*, 2) those who belonged to the *yoho*, and 3) so-called slaves. The first category was made up of people who worked on the fields of the *quihui* and paid tribute to the Coqui in the form of corn, clothes, precious materials, etc. They also had to provide their lord with food, drink and servants. Furthermore, they had to perform personal services like restoring and cleaning the palace, bringing wood and water, and taking care of the Coqui’s personal fields. In the literature the commoners in general are often called *terrasgueros*, but this term masks the indigenous distinctions. For example, it seems that there was some difference between those who were conquered and those who were not. The first were called *copàci*, which comes from *tònixicopàcia* = “to conquer” (CV 203v, 87v), while the second were called *huènichijna* from *tòniachijna* = “to work” (CV 286r, 407r).

The commoners of the *yoho* basically did the same as those of the *quihui*, i.e. they paid tribute and provided personal services to their lord, the Xoana. However, an important difference was that the Xoana had to pay part of the tribute he received to the Coqui. He had to pay this tribute because he had received land from the Coqui at the time of the conquest or at a later moment when he (or one of his ancestors) and his people had arrived in the region to settle. Thus, the *quihui* and *yoho* are similar entities but at different levels in the hierarchy. During the colonial period this difference became evident. As the Coqui was exempted from paying tribute to the Spanish Crown, the people of the *quihui* consequently only had to pay tribute and services to their Coqui. However, those of the *yoho* paid tribute to their Xoana or Pichana, and also to the King of Spain.¹²

The last group of commoners are the *chóco*, *pinijni*, and *xillàni* or slaves.¹³ Very little is known about these people so that the difference between them is not clear. However, they are attested in Bènizàa society and the few extant references indicate that they were prisoners of war who could be bought and sold (Acuña [1984] II: 77). Apparently the status was inherited (AGIE 160b: 218r), which suggests that the

slave, like the other commoners, belonged to the palace or house. In pre-hispanic times some of these people were used for human sacrifice. As such this information fits fairly well with that from the *relaciones geográficas* (Acuña [1984]).

The internal organisation of the city-states in the Sierra Zapoteca is still unknown at the moment. As explained above, it seems that the conquest of the region took place only shortly before the Spanish conquest. Unlike the Isthmus, where the colonisation was organised under the leadership of a powerful Coqui who personally took control of the land and then divided it among his warlords and groups that arrived later, the Sierra was conquered by so-called *parentelas* or groups of relatives. Each of these “brothers” founded his own town with his own people and became Coqui immediately after. Although political and probably marital relationships continued to exist after the initial conquest, these towns functioned as autonomous polities. From the colonial records it seems that one of the Coquis was more important, or at least had greater prestige, than the others, but it is not at all clear if this also had political consequences, nor whether this was a hereditary characteristic or not (Chance [1989] 13-14). As the conquest took place shortly before the Spanish conquest there does not seem to have been time for the development of a clear settlement pattern. That is to say, very few of the towns in the Sierra have subject communities.

In colonial times the social organisation in the Bènizàa regions changed dramatically because the Spanish introduced a new system. During the 16th century, the Spanish authorities established the so-called *cabildos* or town councils. Initially, most of them were firmly controlled by the Coquis, who were called *cacique* or *señor natural* by this time, but little by little the power of the *caciques* eroded and the Xoanas now called *principales*, gained the upper hand. They began to control the *cabildo* and with it the political power in the community. This process was reinforced by the Spanish authorities, who wanted to break the (feudal) power of the *caciques* and thus favoured the *principales*. At the same time another process was undermining the power of the *cacique*: the tribute that the commoners of the *yoho* had to pay to the Coqui before the Spanish conquest now went to the King of Spain.

Closely related to social organisation is the possession of land. Theoretically the founder of the *quihui* had taken possession of the land when he conquered the region. He then distributed it among his warlords, who in their turn distributed it to their people. Of

course, although quite different in nature, in the Isthmus and Sierra Zapoteca this process is fairly clear because these regions were conquered relatively late (since the mid-15th century). However, in the Valley of Oaxaca this is not the case at all because it was occupied by Bènizàa since 500 B.C. and more recent foundations occurred during the 10th and 11th centuries after a confusing period that followed the fall of Monte Albán. Studies in other parts of Mexico have shown that land tenure was extremely complex (Lockhart [1992] 141-76; Prem [1978] 50-116), as it probably was in the Bènizàa region, but the position is uncertain without any detailed studies based on indigenous documentation.¹⁴ Certainly in the early colonial period there does not seem to have been any private ownership by commoners, a situation probably due to a continuation of pre-hispanic customs.

So in pre-hispanic times the *queche* was a loosely distributed system of related, but relatively autonomous communities of varying size. As such, the *queche* was divided into different *yohos*, each of which was devoted to a cult of its particular Sacred Bundle and was controlled by a Xoana. These *yohos* together were subject to a Coqui, lord of the main *yoho*, which was called *quihui*. In colonial times this changed to a system based on the *pueblo*, consisting of various geographical units called *barrios*, each with its own cult related to a Catholic saint maintained by a *cofradía*. The political power of the *pueblo* was in the hands of the *cabildo*, whose seats were occupied by the *principales*. Some *caciques* continued to wield considerable political and economic power through their ownership of large tracts of land, but most disappeared under pressure from the *cabildo* and the Spanish authorities. The Bènizàa city-state had ceased to exist.

Identity

The ethnic and political identity of the city-states in the region under discussion here is considered to be Bènizàa, which is based on a common language called Tíchazàa, a common history from the Pre-Classic period onward (500 B.C.), and a common cultural background (Marcus and Flannery [1996]). During the Late Post-Classic period intensive contacts existed with other groups, particularly the Ñuu Dzavui and Nahuas. Although this made possible the intrusions and foundations of ethnically distinct communities in the Valley of Oaxaca and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec which apparently existed together with the Bènizàa villages, scholars have continued to identify the dif-

ferent city-states as ethnically distinct polities. My own studies have called these conclusions into question. It has become clear that members of the supposedly Bènizàa elite were actively intermarrying with the elite from other ethnic groups in order to create a network of political allies. Obviously, their choices were guided not by ethnicity but rather by political and legitimating power. Of course, as a consequence of this policy ethnic identity became less important, especially if we take into account that descendants of inter-ethnic marriages were used in either place of origin as candidates for rulership. Focus on ethnic identity would thus have been counterproductive. On the other hand, this policy fits perfectly with one of the characteristics of the city-state: it shares its ethnic identity with a number of other city-states, whereas its sense of political identity is primarily centred on the city-state itself rather than on smaller or larger entities (Hansen [2000] 18).¹⁵ Independently I came to the same conclusions in relation to the Bènizàa polities (Oudijk [2000] 111-12).

In order to discuss the identity of the city-states we first have to identify what we include in the term. Generally, archaeologists and ethnohistorians use the so-called *relaciones geográficas* for this purpose. These are long questionnaires which were sent to the different towns in the Americas (and Spain) by Philip II at the end of the 1570s in order to compile an inventory of his possessions in the empire. Although the answers were written down some 60 years after the Spanish conquest, the political organisation of these colonial municipalities and their subject towns is considered to be a good reflection of the pre-hispanic political organisation (Gerhard [1986]; Taylor [1972]; Carrasco [1999]). According to the *relaciones* the Valley was divided into 14 political entities,¹⁶ while the Isthmus of Tehuantepec was one large city-state. Each consisted of a main town and various subject communities (Table 1), which concurs very well with the description of the *queche* given above. However, the *relaciones* were written from the point of view of the main town and are consequently not very useful for determining the political identity of the subject communities. The names of the subjects are not related to the name of the main community either, but that does not necessarily mean that they did not centre on the city-state.

The archaeological record of the Valley of Oaxaca also gives an indication of city-state culture in the region. Kowalewski et al. ([1989] I: 344-48) give a division of the Valley into 10-20 "petty kingdoms" largely matching the information of the *relaciones*

geográficas. It could be assumed that if the subject communities centred on the city-state, this would be visible in their material culture. However, because no detailed study has been made of these individual political units to determine whether they can actually be distinguished archaeologically, the archaeological record cannot be used to identify the political identities of subject towns.

The indigenous sources give better indications of the political identity of the subject communities. Of particular interest are pictorial manuscripts like the Lienzo de Huilotepec from the Isthmus and the Genealogy of Quialoo from the Valley (Oudijk [2000] 79-96, 159-81). The first depicts the lands of the town of Huilotepec and a scene in which the elite are paying tribute to the Coqui of Tehuantepec. This can be read in various ways: it shows the subject-patron relationship but it also shows that the Xoanas of Huilotepec received their legitimacy from the Coqui since he recognised them as lords of their town. The Xoanas then obviously identified themselves with the city-state of Tehuantepec because it gave them the right to rule. Since it seems that all subject communities in the Isthmus have had at some point in their history a similar document, we can say that the political identity of the region was centred on Tehuantepec, even though some of the towns had a distinct ethnic background. The Genealogy of Quialoo is different since it depicts the lands and a genealogy of Xoanas of the subject town of San Matheo Mixtepec, and a genealogy of Coquis of the main town, Santa Cruz Quialoo (Mixtepec). San Matheo was founded by the second son of the founder of Santa Cruz, i.e. a secondary line, and probably received noble women from the *quihui* as marriage partners at later times too, although women are not depicted in the pictorial. But the fact that the Xoanas of San Matheo depicted the lineage of Santa Cruz in its document shows clearly that its legitimacy came from these Coquis and therefore from being centred on the city-state.

Finally, there is some etic information from Ñuu Dzavui pictorials. In these documents Zaachila's territory is pictographically represented as the Valley of the Cacaxtli, a carrying device. When Cuilapan is given away as a dowry by the Coqui of Zaachila it is depicted as "Cuilapan in the lands of the Cacaxtli", i.e. it was subject to Zaachila. Another representation makes this even more clear when a "Valley of Flowering Maguey" is shown in relationship with a temple from which a hand extends holding a cacaxtli. Here the hand should be read as "servant of" or literally "being the hand of".¹⁷ Although the Valley of Flow-

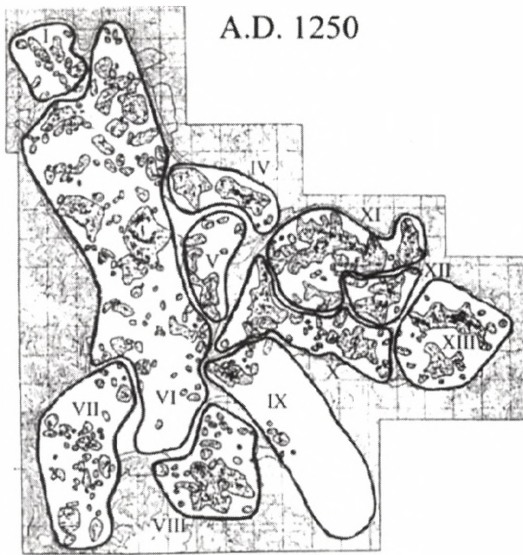
ering Maguey has not yet been identified, it is likely that it was a servant or subject of the Zaachila city-state. These references make clear that these communities were seen as part of the city-state and actually received the name of that city-state as part of their own name.

So there are good reasons to believe that in the Bènzàa region the city-state was named after its main political centre and that the subject towns had their political identity focused on the city-state. From the Isthmus of Tehuantepec it is clear that the political identity can be distinct from the ethnic identity. I have gone so far as to avoid referring to the rulers of these city-states as being Bènzàa, but instead denominating them in reference to their city-state only (Oudijk [2000] 111-12).

Population and Territory

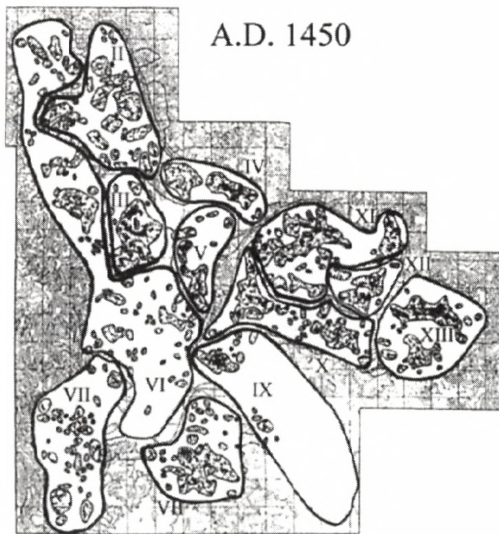
The Valley of Oaxaca was divided into between 11 and 13 polities which are called here city-states (Figs. 2-4).¹⁸ Due to continuous warfare and the formation of shifting alliances, the actual size of their population and territory changed considerably over time. This seems particularly to be the case in the central and eastern parts of the Valley, but this impression of a different character of the western part may be the result of our limited knowledge of the historical process in this region (Tables 1-2).

The only evidence-based population estimates we have for the Post-Classic period were produced by Kowalewski et al. (1989) I: 320-22. It has to be said, however, that they are low estimates since much of the population lived dispersed across the hinterland and is consequently not included in Kowalewski et al.'s Table 10.2, which concerns the central places. Furthermore, their estimates are based on mound volume, size of site area, and sherd density (Blanton et al. [1982] 10-12). We can assume, however, that certain factors influenced the population estimates. For example, the territory controlled by Zaachila consisted of large tracts of land occupied by scattered farmsteads inhabited by commoners working for the Coqui of Zaachila. As these are not included in Kowalewski et al.'s estimates there seems to be a mismatch between the size of the city-state and its population. For example, in the 13th century Zaachila had a large territory but a relatively low estimated population (42.25 persons per km²), while Tlalixtac had a much smaller territory with a relatively high estimated population (133.91 persons per km²). It must be added that the estimates are heavily influenced by historical



I	Huitzo	VIII	Ocotlan
II	Etlá	IX	Chichicapan
III	Cuilapan	X	Tetipac
IV	Tlaxiáctac	XI	Macuixochitl
V	Coyotepec	XII	Tlacolula
VI	Zaachila	XIII	Mitla
VII	Tepezimatlan/Ixtepec		

events. In A.D. 1250 Zaachila’s territory stretched from the Zaachila Valley through the Central Valley, into the Etlá Valley. Both Cuilapan and Etlá were part of this territory.²⁰ In A.D. 1450 Cuilapan had become an independent city-state following the dynastic problems in Zaachila and the migration of its main faction. So Zaachila’s population dwindled between 1250 and 1521, while that of Cuilapan shows a contrary trend during the same period.



Still, it is clear that Zaachila was the largest and economically most important city-state in 1250. Its 736 km² was almost three times the size of the second largest polity, Chichicapan, which had most of its territory in the mountains south of the valley. It therefore did not have such a large population and probably not as large an agricultural output as Zaachila. These were followed by a group of five medium-sized city-states (128-216 km²), mostly in the eastern part of the Valley, and finally a group of four small polities (48-64 km²). Almost 300 years later, however, the situation looked quite different when Cuilapan had taken over large tracts of land from Zaachila, but more importantly, it had become the most populous city-state in the Valley.



On the basis of her excavations in Tagolaba and a study of historical sources, Judith Zeitlin ([1994] 284-87) gives the “extremely conservative” estimate of 25,000 but clearly favours a number like 50,000 for population of the city-state of Tehuantepec. Those are the only estimates for the Isthmus of Tehuantepec during the pre-hispanic period. As to the colonial period, there is a little more evidence. We have the *Suma de Visitas* from 1550, which gives a population of 11,845, and the 1580 *relación geográfica* gives 1,200 for the town of Tehuantepec and another 2,000 for its subject towns. It continues by informing us that in 1550 this number was more like 20,000, but that many people died in epidemics. The problem of estimating the indigenous population for both the pre-hispanic and colonial period is notoriously complex and difficult, so I will not pursue this subject. The figures are offered simply to give an idea of the size of the city-state of Tehuantepec. However, what is clear is that the Bènizàa population of the Isthmus came from the Valley of Oaxaca during the period 1450-

Figs. 2-4. The city-states in the Valley of Oaxaca.

City State	Suma de visita	Oudijk	Territory	Subject towns
I Huitzo (Huajilotitlan)	5,917	3,127	64	9
II ETLA	4,696	9,296	176	–
III Cuilapan	34,800	24,737	304	17
IV Tlalixtac	3,369	7,433	48	4
V Coyotepec	2,333	2,707	48	–
VI Zaachila Estancias	2,253 3,486	1,142	256	9
VII Tepezimatlan Estancias Zimatlan Ixtepec Estancias	640 1,961 2,637 937 2,579	5,159	216	4
VIII Ocotlan Estancias	1,499 3,208	12,248	144	–
IX Chichicapa	4,802	8,794	272	7
X Tetipac (Titicapa)	6,864	11,163	128	8
XI Macuilxochitl (Teotitlan del Valle, Tlacoahuaya)	2,822	21,804	176	5
XII Tlacolula (Yagul)	1,643	9,729	56	1
XIII Mitla (Miquitla)	2,369	16,179	160	11
Total	88,814	133,518	2,03	

Table 1. Population estimates for the city-states in the Valley of Oaxaca.¹⁹

1521, which must have had its effect on that region, as was also made clear by Judith Zeitlin ([1994] 287-91). Our archaeological and historical information is not detailed enough to describe this process satisfactorily.

The Sierra Zapoteca is again a problem because the

information about this region is so scarce. No population estimates exist for the pre-hispanic period; however, the colonial period has been exhaustively investigated by Chance (1989). Of course, he could not overcome the lack of documentation either, but

	P. 1250	P. 1450	P. 1521	T. 1250	T. 1450	T. 1521
Huitzo	3,127	–	3,127	64	–	64
Cuilapan	–	15,700	24,737	–	64	304
Tlalixtac	10,713	10,713	7,433	80	80	48
Coyotepec	3,507	3,507	2,707	76	76	48
Zaachila	31,095	18,522	1,142	736	672	256

Table 2. Development of population and territorial estimates for the city-states in the ETLA and Zaachila Valleys.

according to his figures in 1548 the three distinct groups of Sierra Bènizàa consisted of 7,382, 19,586 and 18,137 people, respectively (*ibid.* 48-63). The first estimate is very low because figures are known for only nine communities, which is about 30% of the total number of communities. Considering the enormous drop of 68% of the population between 1548 and 1568, probably caused by European diseases, the pre-hispanic population in the region was considerably higher than the 45,000 at the mid-15th century. However, it has to be said that few settlements had more than 1,000 inhabitants and many villages had a population of only between 500 and 1000.

Self-sufficiency

Although our idea of this period in the Valley of Oaxaca still needs much research as it suffers from large gaps, certain assumptions can be made. It seems that this region was typically divided into functionally distinct entities, i.e. the main political centre was the town of Zaachila (Acuña [1984]), which had the status and prestige that allowed its main house to provide lesser houses with legitimate power, and to found new houses (Oudijk [2000]; Zeitlin [1994] 287-88).

On the other hand, there were at least two religious centres in the Valley: the towns of Mitla and Teticpac (Burgoa [1989]). The latter seems to have been founded at some point by the rulers of Zaachila and functioned as the burial place for the nobility. Mitla was the town in which the great priest or Huijatoo resided and where the "Great Lords" or Coquis were buried (Acuña [1984] II: 258-64). The Huijatoo was probably the medium of the oracle of Mitla, which is actually a *quiña* or bundle (Romero Frizzi [1994] 237). We may tentatively identify this oracle as the bundle called the "Heart of the Village", which in colonial times was guarded in a cave with some 300 other ancestor bundles. Before the arrival of the Spaniards, these were almost certainly kept in the sanctuaries of Mitla. Considering the importance of these oracles in pre-hispanic Oaxaca (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez [in press]; Pohl [1999]), it seems quite possible that this was the origin of Mitla's fame.

At an economic level the Bènizàa regions are quite diverse. Again our ideas about this are shaped by the scarce and particular information.²¹ Most energy went into subsistence agriculture, which did not vary much between the Isthmus, the Valley, and the Sierra. The most important crops were corn, beans, chilli and squash, and in some regions other foods were added

like fish, chicozapote, aguacate, etc. In general we can consider the tribute to the rulers an important factor in the movement of goods, particularly elite goods. Among these were precious stones and feathers, gold, jewellery and jaguar skins, apart from the more regular foodstuffs. The rituals of the cult were another factor: the bundles and images were honoured with incense, tobacco, feathers, and the blood and hearts of many animals.

The Isthmus seems to have been dominated by the town of Tehuantepec and its Coqui, which entailed a predominant flow of goods towards the centre. However, the influence of this Coqui also reached the Valley of Oaxaca, where in 1580 no less than six of the major *queche* are said to have paid tribute in pre-hispanic times (Acuña [1984]). While the far-away subject towns had to pay in luxury goods like jewellery, gold and cloths, the ones closer to Tehuantepec paid with personal services and bulky foods. Long-distance trading was certainly going on between the Isthmus and other regions (Acuña [1984] II: 107-25), but it is not clear how far this was controlled by the Coqui. In any case, it brought in many items from all over Mesoamerica and these were probably distributed through the market in Tehuantepec. The scarce information at the *barrio* level shows polychrome pottery and obsidian in a Xoana(?) context (Zeitlin [1994] 283).

When the rulers of Zaachila moved to Tehuantepec they took the Huijatoo with them, which suggests that from about A.D. 1450 onwards this Isthmus settlement became an administrative, economic and religious centre.

The Late Post-Classic period in the Valley of Oaxaca is characterised by specialised craft production, and a distribution network in or close to the main political centres (Kowalewski et al. [1989] 348-64). This can be seen, for example, from widespread ceramic traces, relatively high frequency of obsidian at all levels of society, and a relatively large presence of elaborate polychrome pottery at different social levels. This system of exchange and economic relations meant that the different city-states existed in a network of dependency. At a local level we can see this in the Valley of Oaxaca, where wares have a broad distribution but the decoration and shapes mark the sub-regions (Kowalewski et al. [1989] 353). As the potters were situated in between the different city-states rather than within their centres, the production and distribution was limited only by the means of transportation rather than by political borders.

Along the Río Salado of the Tlacolula branch of the

Valley, salt was extracted and distributed throughout the region (Acuña [1984] I: 80; Kowalewski et al. [1989] 361-62). Although in the *relaciones geográficas* of various communities it is noted that salt came from the Isthmus, where rich saltbeds were situated under the control of the *cacique* family of Cortés of Tehuantepec (AGIE 160b: Exp. 1), the *relación* of Miahuatlan clearly states that these saltbeds were not exploited until after the arrival of the Spaniards (Acuña [1984] I: 80). The new economic possibilities offered by the introduction of pack-animals like mules and horses were seized eagerly by the indigenous elite and commoners (Taylor [1972] 35-66), which must have caused considerable changes in the trading system and consequently its production system. As bulky foodstuffs could now be transported over large distances, supported by a regional marketing system of agricultural staples, this may have encouraged specialisation in agricultural products and crafts in particular regions. This would mean that in pre-hispanic times the distribution of luxury elite products, like feathers, cacao, luxury ceramics, etc., took place at a regional level, while that of foodstuffs was of much more local importance (Zeitlin [1994] 290-91).

As far as the economy of the Sierra Zapoteca is concerned, we are largely groping in the dark (Chance [1989] 111-21). Obviously, the area relied mainly on subsistence agriculture, which in times of surplus production may have generated some local trading, but this can be considered of minor importance. If we transpose some of the colonial information to the pre-hispanic period (*ibid.*), the Sierra would have been a producer of cloth and mantles. These, probably together with other products, were carried to places of distribution inside and outside the region. Such a model seems to be confirmed by the existence of a corridor passing through the Cajonos river valley connecting the Valley of Oaxaca with the coastal region of the Gulf of Mexico (Gutiérrez Mendoza et al. [2000]). A comparison of the clay composition of ceramics from archaeological sites along this corridor show convincing similarities, confirming the existence of such a corridor (Ortiz Díaz et al. [2000]).

Urbanisation

Its urban character is yet another tricky aspect of the Post-Classic Bènzàa city-state. As discussed above, the city-state consisted of a political cum religious cum administrative centre where the Coqui had his palace surrounded by scattered communities and farmsteads. But what the centre actually looked like is

not very clear. Various factors make a solution to this problem particularly elusive. First of all, the present-day cities and towns are mostly built on top of the pre-hispanic city-states, which makes archaeological surveying and excavation virtually impossible. Furthermore, today, as well as throughout their colonial history, most Bènzàa communities testify to a nucleated settlement pattern but this was often caused by the Spanish policy of “congregation”: it was the policy of the Spanish Crown and church to bring together indigenous people in nucleated towns in order to make it easier to convert them to Catholicism. That was especially the case after European diseases began to wipe out entire communities. Finally, pre-hispanic and early colonial pictorial documents that show communities represent only the main building(s), that is, the pre-hispanic temple and/or palace, or the Catholic church. The painters of these manuscripts were not interested in representing the houses of the towns, and these sources are therefore of limited use for the issue under discussion here.

For the Valley of Oaxaca, Kowalewski et al. ([1989] Chapter 10) suggest that the Post-Classic period was characterised by a scattered rural settlement pattern of small extent (310); but at the same time there were also large towns and cities. Yet, by European standards, these towns had an open, almost dispersed internal settlement pattern.²² As the evidence stands, the Post-Classic city-state was focused on the palace of the Coqui or Pichana not only politically and “ethnically”, but also urbanistically. From Kowalewski et al.’s maps (*ibid.* Appendix IX) we may deduce that the palace was built around a patio. Close to the palace we often find a more open structure which may have been the civic buildings and a temple platform; they would constitute the centre of the settlement. The use of adobe or sun-dried bricks seems to have been restricted and used mostly in combination with mounds (= palace/civic building). Due to the fact that the commoners’ houses were built of perishable materials, it is impossible without archaeological excavation to say whether the centre consisted of a conglomeration of houses that became more dispersed as towards the periphery, or whether the whole settlement was rather dispersed. However, the formation of terraces around the central buildings seems to suggest that at least in some cases houses were densely built around the palace. These terraces “often represent individual household architectural units” (*ibid.* 931).

The existence of such “terraces” is also attested in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, or rather, in the city of

Tehuantepec itself. Although it is impossible to ascertain the character of this city today due to the fact that present-day Tehuantepec is built on top of the pre-hispanic site, excavations in one of its *barrios* has given some ideas about the nature of the outer parts. Judith Zeitlin's excavations in the *barrio* of Santa Cruz Tagolaba (1994) show that this particular part of the city was occupied by approximately 200 houses in an area of about 400 x 1500 m. The focus of the *barrio* was on the palace of the Xoana, a building measuring 24 x 5 m with adobe walls and painted stucco, and a two-room temple, which seems to be facing a square. It is not clear whether the density of the housing in the immediate surroundings of this palace was greater than further away, but if we assume an even distribution, this would give an area of 50 x 60 m per household, which is very close to what Zeitlin reports (*ibid.* 284). Such spacing would suggest one or two houses facing a patio with fields or gardens beside them. Considering that Tehuantepec had 49 of these *barrios* and all of them were in some way tributaries to the Coqui, it seems very likely that the main palace, temple(s), central square, and possibly market, gave Tehuantepec the status of a city.

Information about the pre-hispanic Sierra Zapoteca is lacking, and a discussion of the settlement characteristics must therefore be considered tentative. John Chance ([1989] 12) claimed that the Sierra villages were "simple peasant settlements" which could not be "classified as urban". The internal settlement pattern of Sierra Bènizàa communities has received somewhat greater attention but no consensus has been reached (Schmieder [1930]; Gerhard [1977]; Fuente [1965]; Chance [1989]). It is not clear whether these settlements were dispersed or nucleated in pre-hispanic times; and we will probably not know the answer until archaeological surveys and excavations can be conducted in the region. However, a particularly interesting characteristic is the ease with which Sierra Bènizàa vacated and moved their communities. Both Chance (1989) 69 and Nader (1964) 205 observed that few present-day towns were situated in the same place as in the 16th century.

War and Defence

Of the seven dependent city-states which in their *relaciones geográficas* mention that the Coqui of Zaachila was their supreme lord to whom they had to pay tribute, four say that the nature of this tribute was providing Zaachila with soldiers in times of war. Such an agreement suggests that an important function of

the *quihui* of Zaachila was to organise military expeditions and protect the Valley city-states against outside intruders (Blanton et al. [1981] 103). Although an unequal alliance, it was particularly profitable for all parties. The investment of resources in a military confederation of relatively autonomous members is quite small in comparison with what each member would have to put in if they were not in such an alliance. That is to say, a neighbouring political unit will think twice before attacking a member of a confederation because it knows it will have to fight all members rather than just the one. Furthermore, to raise a considerable army among the members of a confederation is much easier than if one political unit has to do it. On the other hand, in the case of a military campaign a large army of a confederation has a much better chance of being victorious than the small one of a single polity. Since war and conquest was an important source of prestige and economic wealth in pre-hispanic Mexico (Acuña [1984] II: 95; Hassig [1988] 17-47), a confederation was an attractive option.

During the second half of the 14th century the *quihui* of Zaachila was forming a major confederation of different city-states. Ethnic identity played no significant role in this confederation, which was based instead on the marital relationships between the members of the different city-states. In this way at least two city-states from the Mixteca, Tlaxiaco and Teozacualco, were incorporated as members. All members continued to be politically and administratively autonomous, although the *relaciones* suggest that each had to make a separate contribution. This large army succeeded in conquering the corridor that connects the Valley of Oaxaca with the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, as well as making a first incursion into the Isthmus itself. As described above, the objective was to secure control of the important commercial route to the south and the rich lands and saltbeds of the Isthmus. A firm hold of the region was established through the foundation of fortresses and villages, probably by the various members of the confederation.²³

Another example of such alliance building that we find in the *relaciones geográficas* is that between Zaachila and Macuilxochitl (Oudijk [2000] 113-35). Around 1370, Coqui Cosijoeza 11 Water gave a noble woman from Cuilapan, still a subject town of Zaachila at this time, to be married to the Pichana of Macuilxochitl. This Pichana then helped Cosijoeza's son, Coqui Quixicayo, in the conquest of Huitzo and Mazaltepec in the Etla Valley and consequently received a noble woman from Zaachila as wife. This policy of the two succeeding Coquis was probably part of the formation

of a confederation by the Zaachila city-state. The *relación geográfica* of Macuilxochitl refers to the obligation to fight against villages when ordered to do so by the lord of Zaachila (Acuña [1984] I: 331).

The tradition of recognising a supreme lord and providing him with soldiers in times of war was also continued when the Spaniards arrived in New Spain. It is well known that various indigenous groups, among which were Tlaxcaltecs, Quauhquecholans, Mixtecs and Zapotecs from Tehuantepec, fought on the Spanish side against other indigenous groups. One particular document from 1570 (AGIJ 291) explains in great detail that each of these city-states provided a number of captains who would bring their own people and during the whole conquest would continue to fight as a unit (*capitanías* and *cuadrillas*). It seems likely that these captains represented particular *yohos* from which the soldiers were combined to form a squadron. As such, each individual city-state could raise an army from its constituent parts, but, as in the case of the Valley of Oaxaca, the different city-states could form a larger confederation in which each army was regarded as a group with its own identity and military leader while fighting under the leadership of the supreme ruler. Normally, that is in pre-hispanic times, these leaders would receive lands to found new communities and (conquered) people to serve as tributaries, which did not happen with the Spaniards.²⁴

Defensive sites in the Valley of Oaxaca during the Late Post-Classic period are mainly small citadels outside the centre which may have been for the sole use of the elite (Elam [1989] 407). The fact that they are oriented towards the Valley rather than towards the mountains suggests furthermore that they were built to control internal tension instead of external threats. This would point to a fairly unstable political situation during this period, which confirms what we know from the historical sources. The fortresses built in the Nexapa corridor have received very little attention. Eduard Seler visited them at the beginning of the 20th century and there are brief references in Gerhard [1986] 200-5), but no archaeological surveys or excavations have been done. It seems, however, that they were constructed to control both the passage between the Valley of Oaxaca and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and at the same time prevent the hostile Chontales and Mixes from attacking this trade route. The largest fortress of this type is Quie Ngola in the lowlands of the Isthmus. Situated on a steep high hill just north of Tehuantepec, it is a large site with two high temple platforms flanking a patio and a ball court, a 11,000 m² palace with 14 patios and a terrace overlooking the

Isthmus lowlands, and massive walls 1.5 m thick and at times 3 m high (Peterson and MacDougall [1974]; Peterson [1990]). The site is dated to the Late Post-Classic period, which is not precise enough for our purposes here. Since it has merely been mapped and no excavations have taken place, there is little we can conclude from the relatively scarce information. Various pits left by looters show that Quie Ngola seems to have been constructed as one project. I have suggested that it was first built in order to control the Isthmus trade route (Oudijk [2000]), and the historical record informs us that it was the site of a major battle between Mexica and Bènizàa armies at the end of the 15th century. On this occasion the latter sat out a siege of the former and emerged victoriously. The well-planned and well-executed large living quarters, temple platforms, a ball court, and palace make this site quite unlike the small citadels of the Valley of Oaxaca. Quie Ngola was clearly built to hold a relatively large number of people and resist an attacking army for a long period of time. In the end it was part of a strategy based on external threat and a stable internal political situation.

City-State Culture

The city-states situated in the region dominated by the Bènizàa seem to have existed in a dynamic system of interdependency in which, at the same time, they continued to possess a political, administrative, military and “ethnic” autonomy. As such, this system can be considered a city-state culture (Hansen [2000b]).

On a broader scale, the Bènizàa city-state culture was part of a large interregional network of economic and political ties between the different Mesoamerican city-states and city-state cultures (Blanton et al. [1981] 101-6; Kowalewski et al. [1989] 307-65; Nicholson and Quiñones Keber [1994]). This network really comprised what we know today as Mesoamerica, the region from northern Mexico to Honduras. Due to the continuous social, political, economic and military contacts between the different city-states and city-state cultures, a general elite society emerged which saw its cultural expressions in a style that is known as Mixteca-Puebla (Nicholson [1960]; Nicholson and Quiñones Keber [1994]), International Style (Robertson [1970]), or Post-Classic International Style (Smith [in press]). The sub-styles, i.e. expressions of distinct city-state cultures, have not been defined very well in Oaxaca (cf. Lind [1994]).

Although the elite in Bènizàa city-states spoke predominantly Tíchazàa, it was by no means the only

language they used. Due to the continuous intermarriages and other social contacts it seems to have been more the rule to have been bi- or trilingual rather than monolingual. It is not clear what the situation at the commoners' level was like.

The nature of the city-states in the three Bènzàa regions is distinct. In the Valley of Oaxaca, the development of the city-state is clearly related to the downfall of the Monte Albán macro-state: several polities emerged to fill the power vacuum left by Monte Albán, creating the different city-states discussed above. In the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and the Sierra Zapoteca a different process gave rise to their city-states. After a period of expansion by Zaachila, the most important city-state in the Valley of Oaxaca, its collapse caused conquests and related large-scale migrations to these two regions. In the Isthmus one large city-state was founded by a paramount leader of the Zaachila ruling house who chose Tehuantepec as his centre. The smaller dependent city-states had some autonomy but were clearly centred on Tehuantepec. In the Sierra, however, small city-states were founded by groups of related warlords who continued to rule independently until the Spanish conquest.

Notes

1. Based on a short reference by the 17th century friar Francisco de Burgoa ([1989] II: 119, Chapter 53) the name Bènzàa is generally translated as "People of the Clouds" from *beni-* or "person" (CV 312r) and *-zàa* or "cloud" (CV 285r), which is very similar to the name of the ethnically distinct neighbours of the Bènzàa, the Ñuu Dzavui, which translates as "People of the Rain". Oddly enough, the Ñuu Dzavui received the Nahuatl name "Mixteca" or "People of the Clouds", while the Bènzàa received the name "Zapoteca" or "People of the Sapote", a native fruit of Mexico (*Casimiroa*). How this Nahuatl name is related to the Tichazàa name has not been explained satisfactorily. In Tichazàa the zapote is called *quelaquè*, *pillàhui*, *quia*, *quèlachiña*, or *quelapèche* (CV 104r), which does not have any possible etymological link with Bènzàa. It is not known what the Mexica were actually doing when they gave the Bènzàa a name, but it is intriguing that Sahagún ([1992] I, Chapter 18:45) noted that the god Xipe Totec was honoured by those from Tzapotlan, Jalisco in the north-west of Mexico. As Xipe was the main god in the Bènzàa capital of Zaachila (Codex Nuttall [1992] 33), it seems that the Nahuatl name of the Zapotecs is in some way related to the worship of Xipe Totec and reflects a political or consanguineous relationship with Zaachila.
2. For Bèngólazàa archaeological material, see Caso (1928); (1969); Caso and Bernal (1952); Caso, Bernal and Acosta (1967); Scott (1978); Blanton (1978); Blanton et al. (1982); Urcid Serrano (1992); Flannery and Marcus (1994). For an overview of Bèngólazàa pre-hispanic history, see Flannery and Marcus (1983); (1996); Winter (ed.) (1990). For Bèngólazàa colonial history, see Taylor (1972); Whitecotton (1977); Chance (1989). For Bènzàa ethnography, see Parsons (1936) and Fuente (1949).
3. For an historical overview of archaeological research in Oaxaca, see Bernal (1980).
4. Monte Albán IIIb and its following phases MA IV and V are also called the Early and Late Post-Classic period respectively, referring to the period after the Classic period during which Monte Albán rose and fell (MA IIIa-IIIb).
5. See also Chase and Chase (1988) on archaeological models and interpretations based on surface surveys.
6. In a valuable contribution, Joyce Marcus (1989) discussed the origin of the city-state in the valley using the data as presented by the OPSS. It makes the problem we are dealing with very clear. Marcus argues that the origin of the city-state can be dated to MA IV (A.D. 600-1000) but the material she is working with should, according to Martínez López et al. (2000), be related to the Xoo (A.D. 500-800) and Liobaa (A.D. 800-1250) phases. It is, however, impossible for the reader to determine which of Marcus' assumptions are actually based on Xoo phase material and which on Liobaa phase material, making it largely impossible to use the article as a source.
7. See Oudijk (2000) for the most recent discussion of Bènzàa history and historiography. The following account is based on that work.
8. During the last years before the conquest two more Cosijoezas lived in the Valley of Oaxaca: one at Zaachila and another in Cuilapan. This confusing profusion of rulers with the same names has led to what is called "structuring" in the oral tradition, which is a process that simplifies history by attributing events from large periods of time to one particular person (Vansina [1985]). This takes place especially when different historical persons have the same name or have done more or less the same things, as is the case in Bènzàa history (Oudijk [2000]).
9. The references to social organisation in earlier studies are all based on entries in the 16th-century Spanish-Tichazàa dictionary of the Dominican Friar Juan de Córdoba without a thorough philological and linguistic analysis (Whitecotton [1977] 142-57; Spores and Flannery [1983]; Marcus and Flannery [1996] 13-14). A serious problem of this method is that because the dictionary follows European categories, typically indigenous ones can be and are easily missed (see Lockhart [1992] 5-9 for a fuller discussion). As a result of this pernicious method, Bènzàa society has been presented as relatively simple but, as was shown for the Mixteca in Terraciano's study of Ñuu Dzavui documents (1994), this may very well not have been the case.
10. Variants of this word exist: quihue, quehue, queve, gueve.
11. The following analysis is based on my own study of a particularly interesting set of documents relating to Don Juan Cortés Cosijopii of Tehuantepec, various other documents from the Bènzàa regions, as well some comparisons with work by Lockhart (1992) and Terraciano (1994). However, it has to be regarded as provisional, and may be tentative, in some aspects. Most of the information we have concerns the early colonial period and it is not yet clear how it relates to the pre-hispanic situation.
12. It seems that the tribute paid to the Crown was much higher than that which used to be paid to the Coqui in pre-hispanic times. Of course, this meant a considerable erosion for the wealth of the lower nobility. There are indications that several of these lords tried to raise the tribute in order still to receive the same amount as before. This obviously meant that if they

- succeeded their subjects suffered a considerable loss of income during the early colonial period, which caused many complaints by the commoners in the colonial courts.
13. The *pinijni* and *chóco* are clearly related to captivity in war (C75v) while *xilláni* does not have that connotation at all. It is even used in a respected form as in “servant” of God (C379v).
 14. The only studies seem to be Taylor (1972) and Romero Frizzi (1988), but they hardly discuss the early colonial period and are fairly general in their discussion of possession of land or deal particularly with the 17th and 18th centuries.
 15. Of course, this also converts the title of this contribution into a contradiction in terms, as well as many of the contributions in this book and the earlier one on city-states (Hansen [2000a]). I have, however, decided to keep it the way it is rather than changing it into a long title describing the region under discussion.
 16. Only nine *relaciones* from the Valley have survived, of which two are composite *relaciones*, that is, they contain the *relaciones* of two towns. Three are missing: Etlá, Coyotepec and Ocotlán. There are no *relaciones* from the Sierra Zapoteca.
 17. Maarten Jansen, personal communication. See also a similar scene in the Tira de la Peregrinación p. 21 in which the Mexica are represented in a temple with a hand on its roof. This temple is situated in front of the ruler of Culhuacán, Coxcox, to whom the Mexica were subject at the time. Here the hand is related to *māye* which means both “hand” and “servant” (Molina [1944] 51v; Lockhart [1992] 97).
 18. Figures 2-4 are based on Kowalewski et al.’s Figure 10.2 (1989) 316, which shows the Period V site clusters. The borders I have drawn are quite impressionistic and should be considered working hypotheses rather than conclusions. A comparison of my discussion here with Kowalewski et al.’s Figure 10.8 and their discussion of territorial organisation (1989) 344-48 gives a good idea of the problems and possibilities of the material concerning the Late Post-Classic period. One important determinant factor is the disciplinary focus of the scholar. Whereas Kowalewski et al. has an archaeological focus, mine is more ethnohistorical.
 19. This table needs some explanation as to how I arrived at these numbers. Based on the discussion of the territorial organisation in the Valley of Oaxaca by Kowalewski et al. (1989) 344-48 and my own studies of ethnohistorical documents, I drew borders on their Figure 10.2 (*ibid.* 316) creating maps for three different periods in the Late Post-Classic. To reach a population estimate I took the numbers given in Table 10.2 (*ibid.* 320-22) and plotted these on my maps. Similarly I could give an approximation of the territories of the city-states since all maps in Kowalewski et al. are given with grids of 4x4 km.
 20. Coqui Cosijoeza 11 Water of Zaachila gave Cuilapan as a dowry to the royal house of Tlaxiaco when his son married a noble woman from that city-state (Oudijk [2000] 118). This clearly shows that it was part of the Zaachila realm. As to Etlá, since the Classic period the Etlá Valley seems to have been the region used for cultivation to provide the Monte Albán state with the food it needed. As Zaachila seems to have been the successor of the Monte Albán state, it also seems to have taken over the Etlá Valley, which became the most important source of income and power for its royal house. After the members of the Zaachila *quihui* moved their court to Tehuantepec, Etlá became an independent city-state with a widely scattered population. This is consistent with the *Genealogías de Etlá*, which show the foundation of its royal house only five generations before the Spanish conquest of 1521, i.e. at some time during the first half of the 15th century. The city-state of Huitzo is another case in point. Between 1372 and 1450 it was part of the Zaachila realm because it was conquered by Lord Quixicayo 6 Water. This would mean that it was independent before its conquest, and it seems to have become independent again after the dynastic crisis in Zaachila in the mid-15th century. It is tempting to interpret the ceramic differences between MA IIIb and MA IV as proposed by Kowalewski et al. (1989) 251-306 as an early indication of the territorial separation of the Valley of Oaxaca. That is to say, MA IIIb would represent the precursor of what was to become the Zaachila city-state, and MA IV would represent the other independent city-states. Of course, I am of the opinion that these periods were contemporaneous.
 21. In the case of the Isthmus the information basically comes from the *Relación Geográfica* of Tehuantepec, which dates from 1580. By this time the economic relations and production had possibly changed considerably due to Spanish influences, as was the case in the Valley of Oaxaca (see *infra*). This may influence our ideas about the period. Besides the *relaciones*, the information about the Valley of Oaxaca is also based on the archaeological surveys (Blanton et al. [1982]; Kowalewski et al. [1989]), but they do not necessarily give a fuller view on the period. The Sierra Zapoteca is again a problematic region due to the general lack of information (Chance [1989] 111-21).
 22. Again, I have considerable reservations about Kowalewski et al.’s methods. Based on all sites they identified during their survey, the characteristics of a Typical Valley Site were defined. This TVS was then used in the discussion of site characteristics for each period in order to see in how far these agreed or disagreed with the TVS. The problem is, however, that almost 40% of the total number of sites encountered in the Valley of Oaxaca are identified as belonging to Monte Albán phase V. It is, therefore, obvious that the TVS is very similar to the Typical MA V Site. This overrepresentation of MA V sites is directly related to the chronological problems. Whereas all phases in the chronology of the valley are between 150 and 300 years long, MA V is 500 years long! It is thus not surprising that one finds more sites in MA V than, for example, in MA IV. However, it has to be said that if we compare similar time periods, MA V would still have more sites than any other. Yet it is clear that we need either a more detailed division of MA V into an early and late sub-phase, or to resolve the problem of the non-identified Chila phase. This should then be followed by a designation of the old literature to the subperiods or phases.
 23. One of the subject villages of Tehuantepec is called Mixtequilla or “Little Mixteca”. It is, however, not clear if this was a Ñuu Dzavui community. In 1595 it produced a document in Tíchazàa, which does not necessarily say anything about its ethnic identity either since it simply may have been one Tíchazàa-speaking person in a Ñuu Dzavui community.
 24. Consequently the frustrated indigenous leaders complained to the Spanish authorities, which produced the document that is our source of information now.

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 AGIJ – Archivo General de Indias, Ramo Justicia
 AGIM – Archivo General de Indias, Ramo México
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