The Cost of Conquest

Indian Decline in Honduras Under Spanish Rule

Linda Newson

ROUTLEDGE

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Dellplain Latin American Studies

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At the time of the Spanish conquest, Honduras was inhabited by two distinct social systems, which defined the boundary between the cultures of Mesoamerica and South America. Each system was administered in a different way, and subsequently the survival of each civilization varied markedly. This study examines the nature of each culture at the time of Spanish conquest, the size of the populations, and the method of colonization applied to each. Particular attention is focused on Spanish economic activities and the institutions that directly affected the Indian way of life. Dr. Newson bases her findings on extensive archival research conducted in Spain, Guatemala, and Honduras and on archaeological, ethnographic, and linguistic evidence found in secondary sources.

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Abbreviations

Unpublished Sources

AGCA Archivo General de Centro América, Guatemala City

AGI Archivo General de Indias

- AG Audiencia de Guatemala
- CO Contaduría
- EG Escribanía de Camara
- IG Indiferente General
- JU Justicia
- MP Mapas y Planos
- PAT Patronato

AHNM Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid

ANCR Archivo Nacional, Costa Rica

- CC Complementario Colonial

ANH Archivo Nacional de Historia, Honduras

BM British Museum, London

- Add. Additional Manuscripts

BNM Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid

BPR Biblioteca del Palacio Real, Madrid

- MA Miscelánea de Ayala

MNM Museo Naval, Madrid

PRO Public Record Office, London

- CO Colonial Office

RAHM Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid

CM Colección Muñoz

SHM Servicio Histórico Militar

Published Sources

AEA Anuario de Estudios Americanos

ASGH Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia, (Guatemala)

BAGG Boletin del Archivo General de Gobierno, Guatemala City

CDHCN Colección de Documentos Referentes a la Historia Colonial de Nicaragua

CDHCR Colección de Documentos para la Historia de Costa Rica

CDI Colección de Documentos Inéditos Relativos al Descubrimiento, Conquista y Organización de las Posesiones Españolas en América y Oceanía

CDIU Colección de Documentos Inéditos Relativos al Descubrimiento, Conquista y Organización de las Antiguas Posesiones Españolas de Ultramar

CS Colección Somoza

HAHR Hispanic American Historical Review

HMAI Handbook of Middle American Indians

HSAI Handbook of South American Indians

JLAS Journal of Latin American Studies

LARR Latin American Research Review

RABNH Revista del Archivo y Biblioteca Nacionales (Honduras)

Part I

Introduction

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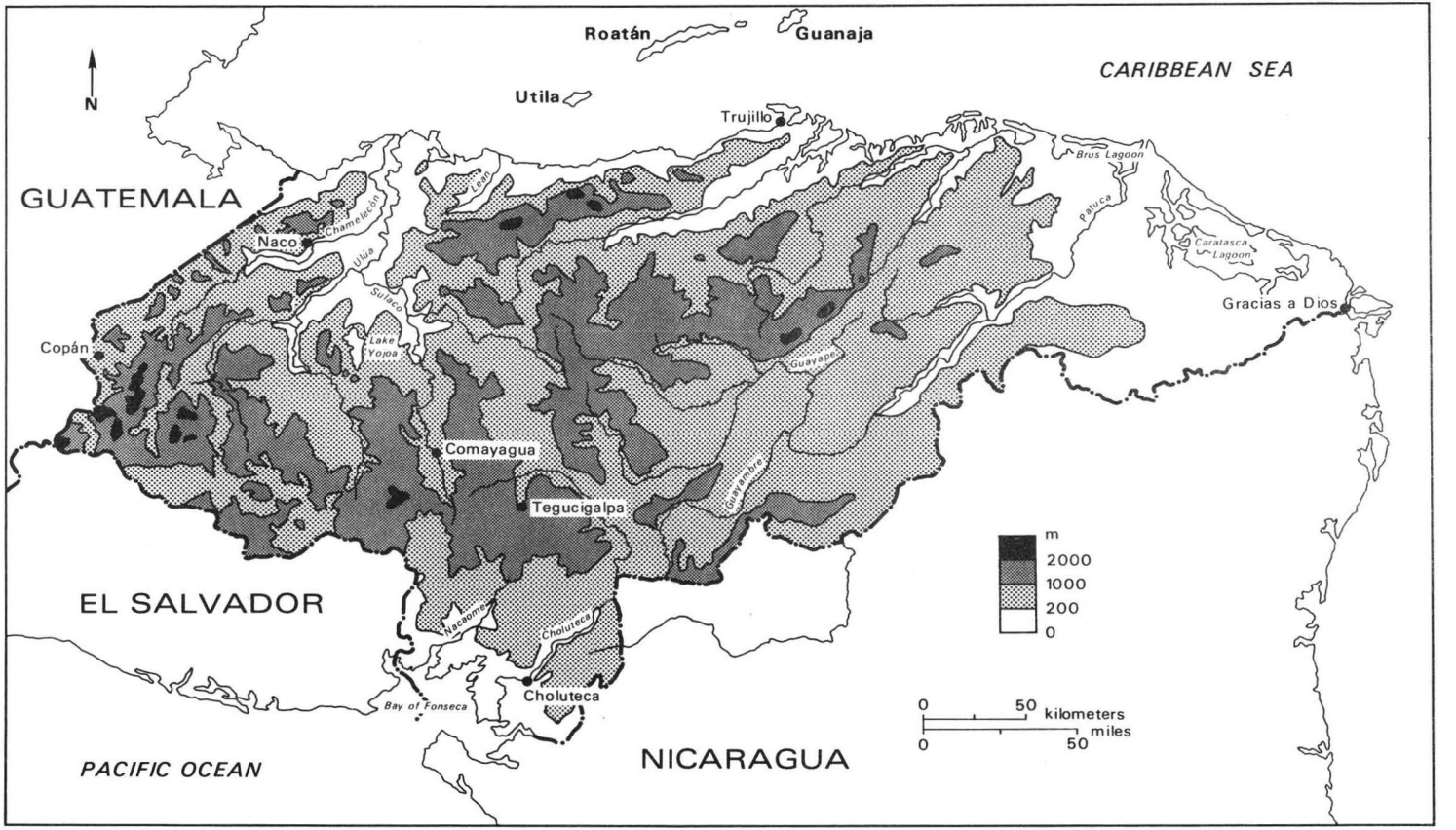
Roatán
Guanaja
CARIBBEAN SEA
N
Utila
Trujillo
GUATEMALA
Naco
Chamelecón
Ulúa
Leán
Sulaco
Lake Yojoa
Brus Lagoon
Patuca
Caratasca Lagoon
Gracias a Dios
Copán
Guayape
Comayagua
Guayambre
Tegucigalpa
m
2000
1000
200
0
EL SALVADOR
Nacaome
Choluteca
Choluteca
Bay of Fonseca
0 50 kilometers
0 50 miles
PACIFIC OCEAN
NICARAGUA

1
Patterns of Conquest and Indian Populations

The conquest and colonization of Honduras was disastrous for its Indian population. In common with Indians in other parts of the New World, those of Honduras suffered a dramatic decline from which they have never fully recovered. Although Dobyns has suggested that the Indian population of the subcontinent declined by about 95 percent between the time of Spanish conquest and its population nadir,[1] it is clear that there were considerable regional variations in the decline and recovery of different Indian groups. Some groups became extinct at an early date, whilst many suffered a sharp decline followed by a slow recovery, and others continued to decline into the nineteenth century.

DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Demographically Central America is a microcosm of colonial Spanish America. There are areas where the Indian population declined dramatically at an early date, with any remaining Indians being gradually absorbed into an expanding *ladino* population. In geographical terms these areas comprised the Pacific coast south from Soconusco to Nicoya, as well as the lowlands of the Gulf of Honduras. In Soconusco and Zapotitlán the Indian population was reduced to about one-twentieth of its preconquest size by the 1570s, when its continued decline was checked by immigration from the highlands.[2]

[1]H.F. Dobyns, "Estimating Aboriginal American Population: An Appraisal of Techniques with a New Hemispheric Estimate," *Current Anthropology* 7 (1966):415.

[2]M.J. MacLeod, *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1973), pp. 71, 77-78; idem, "An Outline of Central American Colonial Demographics: Sources, Yields and Possibilities," in *The Historical Demography of Highland Guatemala*, eds. R.M. Carmack, J. Early, and C. Lutz (Albany: SUNY, 1982), p. 7; P. Gerhard, *The Southeast Frontier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 169-70, suggests an aboriginal population of 80,000 for Soconusco, which fell to 1,800 tributaries in 1569 and 800 in 1684.

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Here intense economic activity, associated with cacao production, contributed to the rapid decline in the Indian population, whereas further south in El Salvador, Choluteca and Pacific Nicaragua similar activity focused on the cultivation of indigo, which largely supplanted that of cacao. The other major factor that contributed to the decline in the lowlands, particularly in the Caribbean lowlands of Honduras, the Bay of Fonseca, Pacific Nicaragua and Nicoya, was the Indian slave trade, which resulted in the latter two regions alone losing up to one-half million Indians.[3] By the end of the sixteenth century, Indian populations in Pacific Nicaragua and Nicoya had been reduced by over 97 percent, a depopulation ratio of nearly 40:1. Subsequent increases in the Indian population in the lowlands were retarded by miscegenation and later, particularly on the Caribbean coast, by tropical diseases, but some increases were registered in Soconusco and Pacific Nicaragua in the eighteenth century.[4]

In general the scale of depopulation in the highlands was lower than in the neighboring lowlands. In the highlands of Guatemala depopulation ratios calculated from population estimates for Totonicapán by Veblen and for the Cuchumatán highlands by Lovell for 1520 to 1570-80 are 8.1:1 and 5.5:1 respectively,[5] but if they are calculated to their respective nadirs in the late seventeenth century, the corresponding figures are 13.5:1 and 16.1:1. These figures are fairly comparable with those estimated for the central Mexican highlands. Cook and Borah have estimated that between 1532 and 1608 the depopulation ratio for the plateau of central Mexico was 13.2:1 and for the coast, 26:1.[6] Furthermore, in common with the central Mexico plateau and in contrast to the lowlands, Indian populations in the highlands of Central America generally experienced a sustained recovery. However, in most areas this increase did not begin until at least the middle of the seventeenth century and even then it was punctuated by epidemics.

A number of authors have drawn attention to the significant difference between the levels of decline in the highlands and lowlands, often attributing it to differences in the impact of disease, and in particular to the added impact of tropical fevers in the lowlands. Although the validity of this assertion can be questioned, other factors such as the Indian slave trade and the greater intensity of economic activity clearly contributed to the higher level of decline in the lowlands. In fact the simple division between highlands and lowlands masks regional variations with these broad areas. Clearly Indian populations in areas that attracted few outsiders, such as Totonicapán, the Chuchumatán highlands and Verapaz, declined at a slower rate and became less ladino in character than

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[3]L.A. Newson, "Demographic Catastrophe in Sixteenth-Century Honduras," in *Studies in Spanish American Population History*, ed. D.J. Robinson (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1981), pp. 227-28; and idem, "The Depopulation of Nicaragua in the Sixteenth Century," *JLAS* 14 (1982):270-75.

[4]J. Gasco, "Demographic Trends in the Soconusco, 1520-1970" (Paper presented at the 44th International Congress of Americanists, Manchester, 1982); L.A. Newson, *Indian Survival in Colonial Nicaragua* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press) (in press).

[5]T.T. Veblen, "Native Population Decline in Totonicapán, Guatemala," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 67 (1977):484-99; W.G. Lovell, "The Historical Demography of the Cuchumatán Highlands, Guatemala, 1500-1821," in *Spanish American Population*, ed. Robinson, pp. 195-216.

[6]S.F. Cook and W. Borah, *The Indian Population of Central Mexico, 1531-1610*, Ibero-Americana 44 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1960), p. 48.

other areas where commercial agricultural and mining enterprises were established.[7] This generalization does not hold true for areas of sparse Indian population, such as Costa Rica and the eastern Caribbean lowlands, where colonization, often initiated by missionaries, was delayed and the Indian population declined slowly through the colonial period. Meanwhile, at the subregional scale Indians located near major towns and ports also experienced a more rapid decline, which, although sometimes mitigated by Indian immigration from more remote areas, continued as the Indians were gradually absorbed into the growing population of mixed races.

FACTORS INFLUENCING DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

From the time of Spanish conquest to the present day, the changing size of Indian populations during the colonial period has been attributed to a variety of factors, the relative importance of which has varied over time with the availability of evidence and interpretation of observers and researchers. Early commentators stressed the ill treatment and overwork of the Indians in explaining the rapid decline of the Indian population, but more recently researchers have emphasized the importance of disease.

Sixteenth-century observers blamed the rapid decline of the Indian population on the overwork and ill treatment of the Indians by conquistadors and colonists. There is no doubt that the Black Legend was a reality in the Caribbean, where the Indians became virtually extinct within a generation. Particularly important in Central America was the Indian slave trade, which resulted in the coastal regions of Pacific Nicaragua and to a lesser extent Honduras, being rapidly depopulated. The rapid decline of the Indian population and the concerned representations to the Crown, particularly by the Dominicans, resulted in the New Laws being introduced in 1542. Although the New Laws were often infringed, by banning Indian slavery, moderating personal service and calling for the regulation of tribute payments, they did lead to a general improvement in the treatment of the Indians. Since Central America was effectively colonized before the introduction of the New Laws, its Indian population received little legal protection from exploitation, such that overwork and ill treatment probably contributed more significantly to the decline in the Indian population there than it did on the South American mainland where colonization largely followed their introduction. But, as has already been demonstrated, different regions within Central America experienced different levels of decline and these cannot be satisfactorily explained by differences in Crown policy or in the activities of its officials. It was the Crown's intention that laws and institutions formulated in Spain should apply uniformly to all parts of the empire. Whilst laws might be interpreted differently by different administrators, officials were constantly changing and it is doubtful if personnel in any one area interpreted the laws consistently in a manner that might account for a smaller or larger decline in the Indian population in some areas than in others. Any spatial variations in Spanish-Indian relations that emerge are

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[7]For similar ideas see M.J. MacLeod, "Ethnic Relations and Indian Society in the Province of Guatemala, ca.1620-ca.1800," in *Spaniards and Indians in Southeastern Mesoamerica: Essays on the History of Ethnic Relations*, ed. M.J. MacLeod and R. Wasserstrom (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska, 1983), pp. 203-205; and L. A. Newson, "Indian Population Patterns in Colonial Spanish America," *LARR* 20 (1985):62-65.

better interpreted as reactions to local conditions than as expressions of differences in government policy or its interpretation by its officers.

Most recent writers on the historical demography of Latin America agree that disease was a major factor in the decline of the Indian population.[8] The most notable killers were smallpox, measles, typhus, plague, yellow fever, and malaria. In the documentary record there are numerous accounts of the populations of villages and whole areas being reduced by one-third or one-half as a result of epidemics, particularly of smallpox and measles. The devastating impact of these diseases on previously noninfected populations has been corroborated by historically more recent epidemics.[9] It is often assumed that the greater decline in the Indian population of the tropical lowlands was due to the greater impact of disease, mainly yellow fever and malaria, which only occur in climates where the mean temperature is over 20°C, and possibly due to the greater virulence of diseases in warmer climates. There are a number of difficulties with these proposals. First, it seems likely that malaria and yellow fever were relatively late introductions to the New World. It is generally held that malaria was introduced into the New World about the middle of the seventeenth century and the first agreed upon epidemic of yellow fever occurred in Yucatán in 1648, although a few would argue for its

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[8]S.F. Cook, "The Demographic Consequences of European Contact with Primitive Peoples," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 237 (1945):108-109; J. Vellard, "Causas biológicas de la disaparición de los Indios Americanos," *Boletín del Instituto Riva-Aguero* 2 (1956):77-93; Cook and Borah, *Indian Population of Central Mexico*; H.F. Dobyns, "An Outline of Andean Epidemic History to 1720," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 37 (1963):493-515; W. Borah, "America as Model: The Demographic Impact of European Expansion upon the Non-European World," *35th International Congress of Americanists*, Mexico, Vol. 3 (1964), pp. 379-87; Dobyns, "Estimating Aboriginal American Population," pp. 410-11; A.W. Crosby, "Conquistador y Pestilencia: The First New World Pandemic and the Fall of the Great Indian Empires," *HAHR* 47 (1967):321-37; W.R. Jacobs, "The Tip of the Iceberg: Pre-Columbian Indian Demography and Some Implications for Revisionism," *William & Mary Quarterly* 31 (1975); A.W. Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Depopulation of America," *William & Mary Quarterly* 33 (1976):289-99; W.M. Denevan, ed., *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1976), pp. 4-6; H.F. Dobyns, *Native American Historical Demography: A Critical Bibliography* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1976), pp. 22-57.

[9]Dobyns, "Estimating Aboriginal American Population," pp. 410-11; Jacobs, "Tip of the Iceberg," pp. 130-32; Dobyns, *Native American Historical Demography*, pp. 25-34; W.H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), pp. 204-205.

presence at an earlier date.[10] Hence, the early decline in the Indian population cannot be attributed to these diseases. Second, although it is true that intestinal infections are more prevalent in the tropics and, although not contributing directly to the mortality rate, would have increased the susceptibility of Indians living there to more deadly diseases,[11] a number of other diseases introduced from the Old World were equally if not more virulent in the highlands. Smallpox and pneumonic plague thrive in cool, dry climates, where unhygienic conditions are created that also favor the spread of typhus.[12] Furthermore, the concentration of population in large nucleated settlements in the highlands would have enabled and facilitated the spread of disease, whereas in the tropical lowlands its spread was generally hindered by the dispersed character of the population and settlements.[13] Despite these comments, it is important to recognize that many tropical coasts earned early reputations for being unhealthy, and it may be that there were other tropical diseases, as yet unidentified, which may have contributed to the higher mortality rate there. At present, however, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the lower level of Indian survival in the tropical lowlands can be accounted for wholly in terms of the greater impact of disease. Whilst disease was clearly a major factor in the decline of Indian populations, the pattern of its impact is likely to have been much more complex than sometimes suggested, with the spread of diseases dependent not only on altitude and climate, but on a whole variety of other factors, including the presence of

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[10]P.M. Ashburn, *The Ranks of Death: A Medical History of the Conquest of America* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1947), pp. 130-34; J.A. Vivó Escoto, "Weather and Climate of Mexico and Central America," in *HMAI*, ed. R.C. West, Vol. 1 (Austin: University of Texas, 1964), pp. 213-14; F. L. Dunn, "On the Antiquity of Malaria in the New World," *Human Biology* 37 (1965):385-93; C.O. Sauer, *Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1966), p. 279; J.E.S. Thompson, *Maya History and Religion* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1970), pp. 54-55; J. Duffy, *Epidemics in Colonial America* (Port Washington and London: Kennikat Press, 1972), p. 140; C.S. Wood, "New Evidence for a Late Introduction of Malaria into the New World," *Current Anthropology* 16 (1975):93-104; McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, p. 213; Denevan, ed., *Native Population of the Americas*, p. 5; A.W.A. Brown, "Yellow Fever, Dengue and Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever," in *A World Geography of Human Diseases*, ed. G.M. Howe (London: Academic Press, 1977), p. 390.

[11]These may have included typhoid, paratyphoid, bacilliary and amoebic dysentery, hookworm, and other helminthic infections most of which were water-borne and more prevalent in the humid tropics (G. Sangster, "Diarrhoeal Diseases," in *Geography of Human Diseases*, ed. Howe, pp. 145-74).

[12]Smallpox: C.W. Dixon, *Smallpox* (London: Churchill, 1962), p. 313; Z. Deutschmann, "The Ecology of Smallpox," in *Studies in Disease Ecology*, ed. J. May (New York: Hafner, 1961), pp. 7-8; Crosby, "Conquistador y Pestilencia," p. 333. Plague: P.H. Manson-Bahr, *Manson's Tropical Diseases* (London: Cassell, 1948), p. 261; R. Pollitzer, *Plague*, WHO Monograph Series no. 22 (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1954), pp. 256-57, 418, 451; J.F. Shrewsbury, *A History of Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 1-6; MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, pp. 8-9. Typhus: Ashburn, *Ranks of Death*, pp. 81, 95-96.

[13]F.L. Black, "Infectious Diseases in Primitive Societies," *Science* 187 (1975):515-18; D.E. Shea, "A Defense of Small Population Estimates for the Central Andes," in *Native Population*, Denevan, ed., pp. 159-61.

vectors for transmitting the disease, population density, the degree of interpersonal contact, subsistence patterns, sanitation, and immunity.[14]

INDIAN SOCIETIES AND RESOURCES

Although disease and the ill treatment and overwork of the Indians both contributed significantly to the decline in the Indian population, alone they cannot adequately explain its differential decline. The level of decline (and subsequent recovery) of Indian populations in different regions appears to have been influenced by two factors. First, it was influenced by the nature of Indian societies at the time of Spanish conquest and, related to this, the size of the aboriginal population. This factor influenced the type of institutions and mechanisms used to control and exploit the Indians. The second factor was the existence and desirability of resources to be found in the area.

Indian Societies and Spanish Policies

The background of those who came from Spain to conquer and colonize America was essentially feudal, but one in which the Crown, supported by the Church, played a dominant role. The Spanish had two main aims with respect to the Indians of the New World: to effect their civilization and christianization and to exploit them as sources of profit and labor. From the beginning policies adopted towards the Indians attempted to reconcile these conflicting aims, which were perhaps most apparent in the *encomienda.* The encomienda was a grant of Indians to an individual who, in return for providing the Indians with protection and instruction in the Catholic faith, could levy tribute from them in the form of goods or money, and until 1549 could also demand labor services. However, the early years of conquest witnessed the dramatic decline of the Indian population in the Caribbean and demonstrated that not all Spaniards could be entrusted with the important tasks of civilizing and christianizing the Indians. Hence, from the mid-sixteenth century the custodial duties of *encomenderos* were gradually taken over by Crown administrators (*corregidores de indios*) and the secular clergy. Meanwhile, tribute revenue increasingly entered the royal coffers rather than the hands of encomenderos, and labor was organized under the *repartimiento.* The latter required each Indian village to make available a quota of its tributary population for approved work for specified periods and fixed wages. The encomienda and repartimiento were later superseded in many areas by free labor. Despite their shortcomings, the encomienda and repartimiento were initially considered appropriate for controlling and exploiting Indians in the highland states and chiefdoms of Middle America and the Andes for several reasons.[15] First, these Indians had paid tribute and had been subject to labor drafts in the pre-Columbian period,

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[14]Shea, "Defense of Small Population Estimates," pp. 160-61.

[15]S. Zavala, *New Viewpoints on the Spanish Colonization of America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1943), p. 68; E.R. Service, "Indian-European Relations in Colonial Latin America," *American Anthropologist* 57 (1955):413-14; M. Harris, *Patterns of Race in the Americas* (New York: Walker, 1964), pp. 3-13; J.A. Villamarin and J.E. Villamarin, *Indian Labor in Mainland Colonial Spanish America* (Newark: University of Delaware, 1975), pp. 24-30.

so that although the Spanish modified the systems by which they were exacted, such demands were not considered extraordinary. Second, the hierarchical structure of these societies permitted the Spanish to control and exploit large Indian populations through a relatively small number of native leaders; a closer means of control such as slavery was therefore unnecessary.[16]

The control and exploitation of essentially egalitarian tribes, who subsisted on the products of shifting cultivation supplemented by hunting, fishing, and gathering, could not be effected so easily by means of the same institutions. These Indians had not paid tribute or provided labor for extracommunal purposes in pre-Columbian times, so that no organizational structure existed for their exaction and the task was made even more difficult by the lack of effective native leadership.[17] Thus to impose the encomienda and repartimiento would have required considerable managerial input. Since these Indians produced only small surpluses, if any, and constituted only small sources of labor, the task was not generally considered to be worthwhile. Instead the initial conversion and civilization of tribal Indians were left to the missionary orders, who could supply the closer form of supervision required. Theoretically after ten years mission settlements were to be handed over to the secular authorities and the Indians were to pay tribute and provide labor in the same way as those Indians who had been granted in encomiendas. In practice, however, they persisted much longer.

The nomadic hunters, fishers, and gatherers provided even less in terms of surpluses and sources of labor, and they were more difficult to control than tribes, so that little effort was made to bring them under Spanish control. Where the Spanish exploited minerals and lands within the territories of these groups, they generally employed imported labor, and only when the Indians harassed their settlements did the Spanish attempt to control them by enslavement or extermination. In fact Indian slavery was forbidden in 1542, but it continued in remote parts of the empire, notably northern Mexico, southern Chile and Argentina, where the Indians proved exceptionally difficult to control.[18]

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[16]For example, C. Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), pp. 220-21; C. Furtado, *Economic Development of Latin America: A Survey from Colonial Times to the Cuban Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 10; M. Lucena Salmoral, "El Indofeudalismo Chibcha como explicación de la fácil conquista Quesadista," in *Estudios sobre política indigenista Española en América*, Vol. 1 (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1975), pp. 111-60; Villamarin and Villamarin, *Indian Labor*, p. 29; M. Godelier, "The Concept of 'Social and Economic Formation': the Inca Example," in *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology*, ed. M. Godelier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 68-69; I. Wallerstein, *Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750* (New York and London: Academic Press, 1980), p. 174; S.J. Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1982), pp. 27-50.

[17]H.E. Bolton, "The Mission as a Frontier Institution," *American Historical Review* 23 (1917):45; R. Benedict, "Two Patterns of Indian Acculturation," *American Anthropologist* 45 (1943):207-12.

[18]Service, "Indian-European Relations," p. 418; Harris, *Patterns of Race*, pp. 10-11. Slavery here means the right to dispose of an individual as a piece of property, not a condition of ill treatment or limited freedom of action.

Thus, although there were some exceptions, there was a fairly high degree of correlation between the nature of Indian societies and the institutions and mechanisms used to control and exploit them. These institutions disrupted the Indian way of life to varying degrees and thus had different demographic consequences. In general slavery was the most disruptive, followed by missionization and the encomienda-repartimiento.

Resources

The nature and degree of cultural and demographic change during the colonial period were also related to the intensity of contact between Indians and other races. This in turn was largely determined by the desirability of resources to be found in the area. Colonists settled in areas where there were mineral deposits, and where there were large sedentary Indian populations that could be employed in the development of commercial agriculture, and in particular in the raising of tropical crops. Indians employed in these activities were often overworked and ill-treated, whilst the demands the colonists made on Indian labor and lands undermined Indian communities, encouraged free labor, and fostered miscegenation. In the towns, mines and haciendas, miscegenation was rife, and the surrounding Indian communities experienced greater cultural and demographic changes.[19] Conversely, the lack of resources and the remoteness of Indian communities from centers of intense economic activity aided their survival.

THE STUDY AREA

Within the context outlined, the aim of this book is to study the demographic and cultural changes experienced by Indians in Honduras during the colonial period. The demographic history of Honduras is probably the least well known of all the Central American countries, and this study aims to identify trends in the Indian population, comparing them with those noted for other provinces of Central America, and focusing attention on regional variations within Honduras itself.

At the time of Spanish conquest Honduras was inhabited by Indian groups representative of two cultural types: chiefdoms and tribes (Figures 1 and 2). The nature of these societies at the time of Spanish conquest and the resources of the province directly influenced the pattern of conquest and colonization and thus the demographic and cultural changes experienced by the Indians.

The book is divided into three main sections by dates that are significant in terms of the process of demographic and cultural change: conquest and 1550. Reasons for choosing conquest are obvious and 1550 is considered appropriate since it marked the effective introduction of the New Laws, including the end of the Indian slave trade, and the loss of the seat of the *Audiencia*. A further division could have been made at 1720, which marked the beginning of the Bourbon administrative reforms, including the abolition of the encomienda, and the first signs of demographic recovery. However, since

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[19]For example, Gibson, *Aztecs*, p. 144; F. Cámara Barbachano, "El mestizaje en Mexico," *Revista de Indias* 24 (1964):34; W. Jiménez Moreno, "El mestizaje y la transculturación en Mexiamérica," in *El mestizaje en la historia de Ibero-América* (Mexico: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1961), p. 81; MacLeod, "Ethnic Relations," pp. 196-205.

these events did not significantly alter economic and social trends, a break at 1720 would not have illuminated the process of change, but rather would have broken its continuity. As such, although the book was originally divided into four major parts, it was later collapsed into three.

Within the two major sections of the book, the nature of Spanish conquest and colonization is outlined before the cultural and demographic changes consequent upon it are discussed. For the period up to 1550, the inadequacy of the evidence makes a precise comparison between the experiences of chiefdoms and tribes difficult, so that the nature of Spanish conquest and colonization and its impact on the Indian population is discussed for the country as a whole. Subsequently, Spanish activities within the regions occupied by chiefdom and tribal groups remained broadly distinct. In western and central Honduras the establishment of haciendas, towns and mines and associated activities directly affected Indian communities, as did the encomienda, repartimiento, and other exactions that made demands on Indian production and labor. In eastern Honduras, with the exception of the Olancho valley and Trujillo and its immediate hinterland, where Spanish activities were broadly similar though less intense than those in the central and western areas, the most important influences on Indian life were the missionaries and later the Zambos-Mosquitos who emerged on the Mosquito Shore. Following the discussion of the nature and distribution of outside influences, the cultural changes experienced by Indians in the distinct areas will be analyzed and finally the demographic trends in both regions described and compared. The fact that the activities of Spaniards and other non-Indian groups are described before the changes experienced by the Indians are considered, is not meant to suggest that the culture-contact process was unidirectional. Clearly the process was an interactive one in which innovative responses to the new economic, social, and political order accompanied Spanish demands for change. Nevertheless, many of the changes were precipitated by the arrival of the Spanish and it seems logical to describe the context within which the changes were occurring, before discussing the changes themselves.

The discussion of cultural changes experienced by the Indians in Honduras is uneven, reflecting the availability of documentary evidence, which in turn is related to the importance the Spanish attached to different regions. The larger Indian populations to be found in the chiefdom area attracted conquistadors and colonists from an early date and it was here that Spanish centers of administration and economic activity were located. Thus from the time of conquest there are accounts of these cultures by conquistadors, chroniclers, missionaries, and royal officials amongst others. For most of the tribal area, however, there is little evidence available until the end of the sixteenth century and even from that time onwards it is fragmentary, although it does improve during the colonial period as the area came into the sphere of European influence. As such, any reconstruction of Indian cultures in these areas at the time of conquest has to rely mainly on documentary evidence from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, prior to which they had undoubtedly experienced some degree of change as the result of intermittent and indirect contact with other races and cultures. Until more archaeological investigations have been conducted in this area, there is no alternative but to rely on the documentary evidence available. The analysis of the cultural changes experienced by Indians in eastern Honduras is made even more difficult by the variety of cultural influences to which they were exposed (Figure 1). Although the civilization and christianization of Indians in the tribal area were largely left to the missionary orders, on the western fringes of the area Indian communities were brought under Spanish administration and allocated in encomiendas. The picture is complicated even further by the settlement of the English on the Mosquito Shore and by the emergence of the Zambos-Mosquitos, who gradually extended their influence over the tribal groups from the east. Because of the variety of cultural influences to which Indians in the tribal area were exposed, the discussion of

cultural changes experienced by them after 1550 will be divided into four sections: tributary Indian villages; the missions; Indians outside Spanish control; and residents on the Mosquito Shore. The last category poses a problem in terms of examining trends in the Indian population, because there were changes in the racial character of the population that involved the Indians in contributing to the emergence of a mixed race known as the Zambos-Mosquitos. As a mixed racial group the Zambos-Mosquitos as a whole cannot be classified as Indians any more than mestizos, and this is particularly true for the Honduran sector of the Shore, where the negro influence was strongest. As such, the Zambos-Mosquitos are not regarded as Indians at the end of the colonial period.

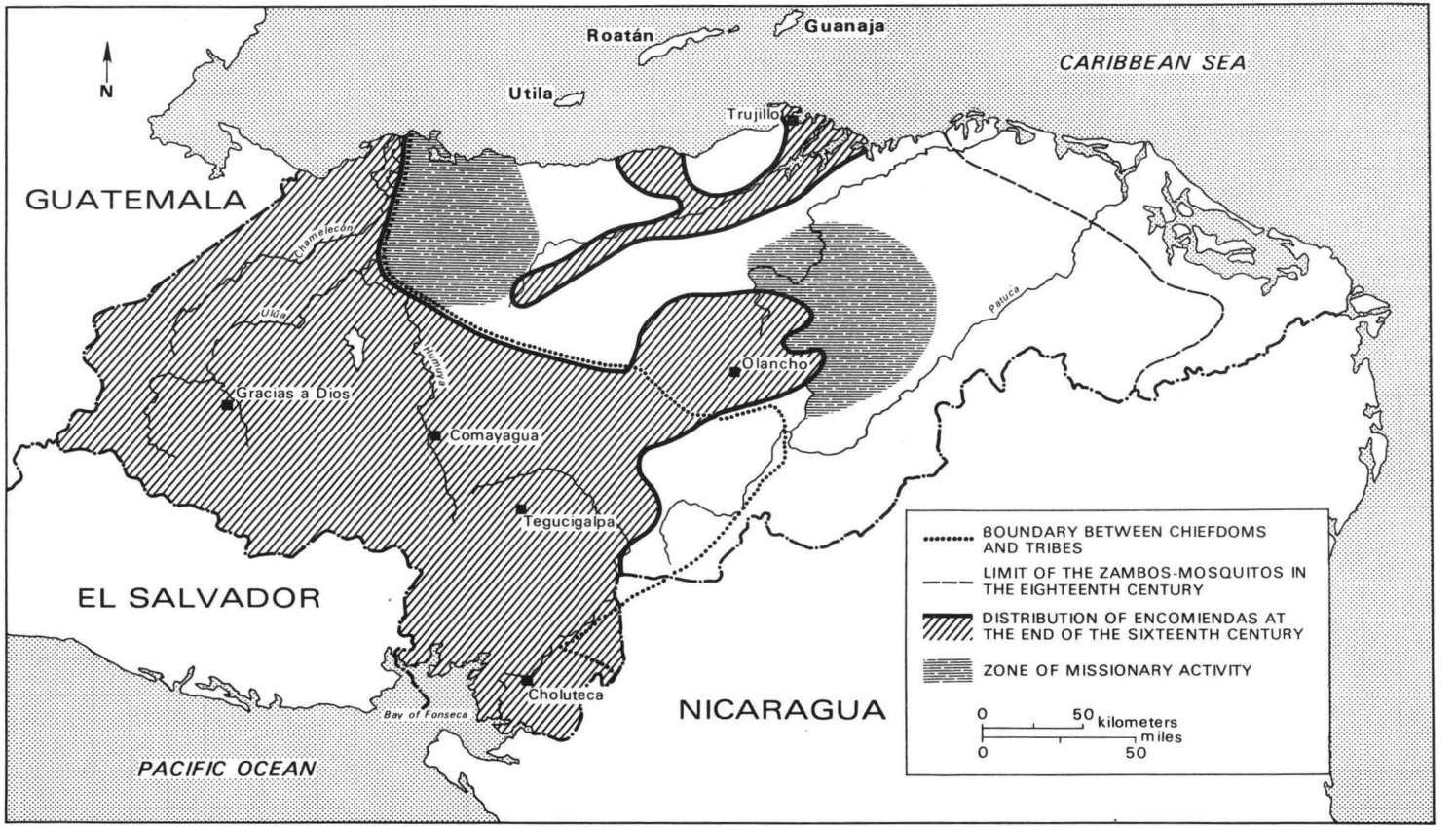

Figure 1. Zones of Cultural Influence During the Colonial Period

Part II

Honduras on the Eve of Spanish Conquest

2
Indian Cultures and Environments

Recent attempts to classify the Indians of Spanish America have not always recognized the variety of cultural-linguistic groups that inhabited Honduras. Steward, in his original typology of South American cultures, identified a fourfold developmental sequence of Marginal, Tropical Forest, Circum-Caribbean and Sub-Andean, and Andean cultures. In this typology the whole of Central America, including Honduras, was classified as Circum-Caribbean.[1] Steward considered that the Circum-Caribbean culture was the foundation on which the Andean civilizations had been built. It was characterized by the presence of large sedentary farming communities, which were socially stratified and possessed some form of political organization, and had a priest-temple-idol complex.[2] According to Steward the origin of this cultural type was in the Andean area, from whence it spread to Central America, Colombia, Venezuela, and the Antilles. As it spread into the tropical forested lowlands it introduced new technologies, but it lost many of its sociopolitical, religious, and material elaborations. Hence the Tropical Forest type was seen as derivative from the Circum-Caribbean type, and was characterized by smaller villages formed by unstratified groups, who subsisted more on wild food resources, and whose religion was based on shamanistic practices.[3] A more recent analysis of cultural traits by Chapman using historical evidence has suggested that the tribes of eastern Honduras and Nicaragua should be classified as Tropical Forest cultures, since much of the cultural elaboration to be found there is the result of

[1]J.H. Steward, ed., *Handbook of South American Indians: The Marginal Tribes*, vol. 1, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 143 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1946) pp. 4, 12.

[2]Ibid., pp. 6-9.

[3]J.H. Steward, ed., *Handbook of South American Indians: The Circum-Caribbean Tribes*, vol. 4, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 143 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1948), pp. 11-15; idem, *Handbook of South American Indians: The Comparative Ethnology of South American Indians*, vol. 5, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 143 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1949), pp. 769-71; J.H. Steward and L.C. Faron, *Native Peoples of South America* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1959), pp. 284, 453.

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postconquest acculturation. She also rejects the proposed origin of the Tropical Forest culture as derivative from Circum-Caribbean culture and suggests that the Tropical Forest culture in Central America originated from a 'sweet manioc culture' that developed in northwest South America prior to and independent of any Circum-Caribbean culture. She suggests that the former was introduced to the area by Chibchan peoples a few thousand years before the Christian era.[4] In 1959 Steward modified his typology of South American cultures and changed the names of the types to give an indication of their characteristics; thus the Tropical Forest type was renamed Tropical Forest Farmers and the Circum-Caribbean type was called Theocratic and Militaristic Chiefdoms. He also recognized the presence of Tropical Forest peoples in Central America by indicating that northern and eastern Honduras was inhabited by Tropical Forest Farmers.[5]

The distinction between Indian groups inhabiting western and eastern Honduras was also effectively drawn by Kirchhoff, who in defining Mesoamerica on a cultural-linguistic basis, included within it western Honduras.[6] Kirchhoff's eastern boundary of Mesoamerica was later defined more precisely by Stone using archaeological, historical, and ethnological evidence. However, she admitted that the boundary was difficult to establish because of the natural blending of cultures at the margins of culture areas and the presence of cultural inliers and outliers within the major culture areas.[7] Similarly, Baudez maintains that there was no sharp break between Mesoamerican and other Central American cultures and that, although the cultures of the Pacific area possessed many traits characteristic of Mesoamerica, they were essentially marginal to the Mesoamerican civilization. As such, he prefers to talk of a zone of Mesoamerican tradition and a zone of South American tradition.[8] More recent writers, notably Sharer, Fox, and Henderson, have also suggested that the frontier of Mesoamerica should not be conceived as a sharp boundary, but as a broad zone of interaction between Mesoamerican and non-Mesoamerican peoples.[9] Since much of Honduras fell within this broad zone of interaction, the boundaries of cultural groups at the time of Spanish conquest are not easy to define. The following account is based primarily on historical sources, together with published archaeological and linguistic evidence. Although an attempt will be made to draw a line between the Maya on the one hand and the Lenca and Jicaque on the other, for reasons given above, this line should not be regarded as a sharp boundary defining Mesoamerica. Indeed the major distinction of interest for this study is between chiefdom

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[4]A. Chapman, "An Historical Analysis of the Tropical Forest Tribes on the Southern Border of Mesoamerica" (Ph.D. diss., Department of Anthropology, Columbia University, 1958), pp. 158-67.

[5]Steward and Faron, *Native Peoples,* p. 13.

[6]P. Kirchhoff, "Mesoamérica," *Acta Americana* 1 (1943):92-107.

[7]D.Z. Stone, "The Eastern Frontier of Mesoamerica," *Mitteilungen aus dem Museum für Volkerkunde im Hamburg* 25 (1959):118-21.

[8]C.F. Baudez, *Central America* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970), p. 227 n.2.

[9]R.J. Sharer, "The Prehistory of the Southeastern Maya Periphery," *Current Anthropology* 15 (1974):174; J.S. Henderson et al., "Archaeological Investigations in the Valle de Naco, Northwestern Honduras," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 6 (1979):191; J.W. Fox, "The Late Postclassic Eastern Frontier of Mesoamerica: Cultural Innovations Along the Periphery," *Current Anthropology* 22 (1981):322.

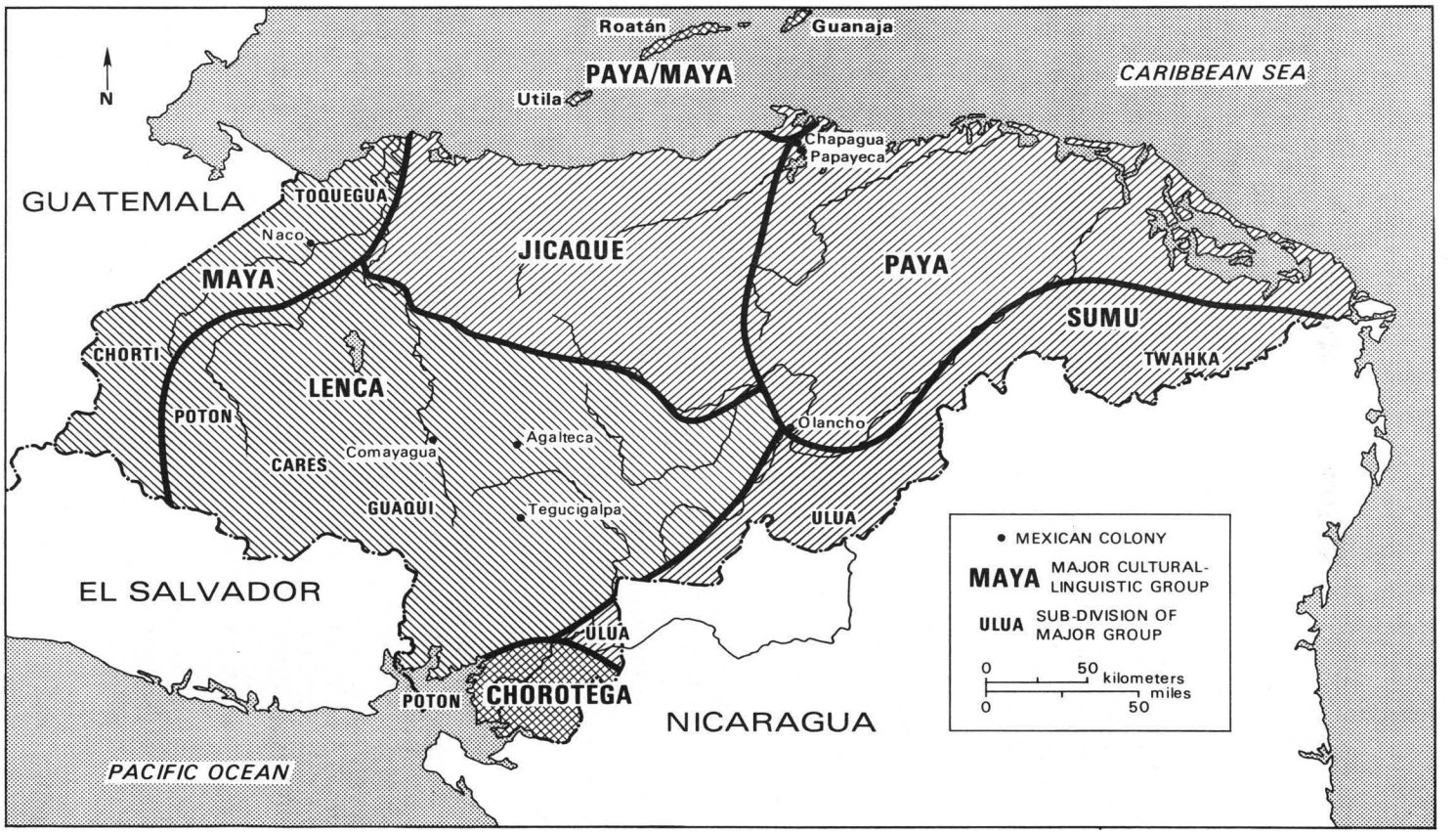

Figure 2. Distribution of Indian Cultures on the Eve of Spanish Conquest

and tribal groups, rather than between Mesoamerican and non-Mesoamerican peoples. Although there is a broad correspondence between the two classifications, they are not identical. Although the chiefdoms comprised a number of Mesoamerican groups--the Maya, Chorotega, Pipil, and Nahuatl--they also comprised the Lenca. Linguistically the Lenca are unaffiliated, although they show the least divergence from the Xinca in Guatemala and El Salvador;[10] culturally they appear to have been organizationally more complex than their neighbors to the east, and as such they are included amongst the chiefdom groups. The tribal groups comprised the Paya and Sumu (and later Mosquito), who belonged to the Macro-Chibchan linguistic stock, and the Jicaque. The latter are generally considered to belong to the Hokan stock found predominantly in North America, although the evidence for their affiliation is far from reliable.[11] The Jicaque are thought to have migrated to Central America at an early date--probably about 5,000 years ago--from whence they became acculturated to Chibchan culture.[12] Culturally they are most akin to the Paya and Sumu, and they are therefore regarded as a tribal group.

THE CHIEFDOMS

The Lenca

Although the Lenca inhabited the greater part of central Honduras at the time of Spanish conquest, there are few historical references to these Indians or their language. The earliest reference to the Lenca is contained in an account of an encomienda of the villages of Yngrigula, Renytala, and Alupare in 1543, which indicates that the latter two villages were Lenca.[13] Unfortunately the location of these villages is unknown. Stone suggests that the Lenca included a number of Indian groups known as the "Potón, Guaquí,

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[10]J.A. Mason, "The Native Languages of Middle America," in *The Maya and Their Neighbors*, ed. C.L. Hay et al. (New York: Appleton Century, 1940), pp. 74-75; D.Z. Stone, *The Archaeology of Central and Southern Honduras*, Papers of the Peabody Museum 49, no. 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957)p. 4 n.8; idem, "Synthesis of Lower Central American Ethnohistory," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 4, ed. R. Wauchope (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), p. 210; T. Kaufman, "Mesoamerican Indian Languages," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., vol. 11 (of 24) (Chicago: Benton, 1974) p. 960; L.R. Campbell, "Distant Genetic Relationship and Diffusion: A Mesoamerican Perspective," *42nd International Congress of Americanists* (Paris) (1978) 4:595-605.

[11]Kaufman, "Mesoamerican Indian Languages," p. 960; L.R. Campbell, "The Linguistic Prehistory of the Southern Mesoamerican Periphery," in *Las fronteras de Mesoamerica*, XIV Mesa Redonda de la Sociedad Mexicana de Antropología, vol. 2 (Mexico, 1976), pp. 157-64.

[12]Chapman, "Tropical Forest Tribes," p. 48.

[13]AGI AG 52 Montejo 24.9.1543.

Cares, Chatos, Dules, Paracas, Yaras, possibly the Colo, and naturally the Guajiquiro if they are not already included under the term Guaquí."[14]

In 1576 Lic. Palacios recorded that Potón was spoken by Indians in San Miguel (Chiquimula) and Nicaragua, but he did not include it amongst the languages spoken in Honduras, which were "la ulba, chontal y pipil."[15] However, Herrera, following a letter written by Jerónimo de San Martín in 1537, recorded that "Potones" lived near Cerquín in the vicinity of Gracias a Dios, and in 1586 Fr. Alonso Ponce observed that "Potones" lived on the islands of Teca and Meangola in the Bay of Fonseca, as well as on the mainland in El Salvador.[16] In arguing that Potón was a Lenca language,[17] Stone indicates that Fr. Alonso Ponce clearly distinguished Potón from four known Maya dialects.[18] Fr. Alonso Ponce observed that "Potones" inhabited some islands in the Bay of Fonseca, which in the late seventeenth century fell under the jurisdiction of the convent of Amapala, where it was said that the Indians spoke "the Mexican language in general, and Lenca in some."[19] Other authors believe Potón was a Maya dialect; Sapper, for example, suggests that the Chol Maya called their language "Putum."[20] In a testimony presented by the Mercedarians in 1688 in support of their claim that they instructed the Indians in their native languages, witnesses testified that the language spoken in the *partido* of Aguanqueterique was Lenca and that this was distinct from the language

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[14]Stone, *Central and Southern Honduras*, p. 4.

[15]CDI 6:5-40 ref. to p. 7 Palacios 8.3.1576.

[16]A. de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las islas i tierra firme del Mar Océano*, 17 vols. (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1934-57) 12 dec. 6 lib.3 cap.19:279; Fr. A. Ponce, *Relación breve y verdadera de algunas cosas que sucedieron al Padre Fray Alonso Ponce en las provincias de Nueva España* (Madrid: Viuda de Calero, 1873), pp. 381-82, 385-93.

[17]Stone, *Central and Southern Honduras*, pp. 84-85; idem, "Central American Ethnohistory," p. 213 n.21. Her conclusion is backed by Thompson (*Maya History and Religion*, p. 96).

[18]Ponce, *Relación breve*, pp. 383-84.

[19]Ibid., pp. 381-82; F. Vázquez, *Crónica de la provincia del Santísimo Nombre de Jesús de Guatemala*, vol. 4 (Guatemala: Sociedad de Geografía e Historia, 1937-44), pp. 62-63.

[20]W.E. Gates, "The Distribution of the Several Branches of the Mayance Stock," *Carnegie Institution of Washington Yearbook*, Publication no. 219 (Washington, DC, 1920), Appendix 12, p. 610; W. Lehmann, *Zentral-Amerika*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1920), pp. 625-26, 643, 645-47, 823; Stone, *Central and Southern Honduras*, p. 84. Mason is more cautious; he refers to the Potón as "unclassified, probably Mayan" (Mason, "Native Languages of Middle America," p. 84).

spoken in Gracias a Dios and Tencoa, which most witnesses said was "Puttum."[21] It seems likely that the term "Puttum" referred to the Putun (Chontal Maya), who are thought to have inhabited the area around the Chamelecón valley.[22] However, the Potones found in southern Honduras were probably Lenca rather than Maya. This is supported by the fact that Lic. Palacios recorded that "Potón" was spoken in Nicaragua, which was certainly not inhabited by Mayan groups.

There is probably less controversy over the identification of the Cares, Guaquí, and Colo as Lenca groups, although it is largely based on historical evidence for their presence in areas which are thought to have been inhabited by the Lenca. In 1539 Bishop Pedraza noted that "the provinces of the cares and guaquí" were located in the jurisdiction of Gracias a Dios,[23] and Herrera recorded that they were to be found in the vicinity of Cerquín, near Gracias a Dios.[24] Since the Lenca leader Lempira combined with the Cares to oppose the Spanish and, since according to Herrera (following López de Velasco) Indians in this area "who were never at peace were those of a different tongue," Stone argues that the Cares must have been a Lenca group.[25] However, the same source makes it equally clear that the cooperation was only achieved by Lempira through the use of force; in fact his forces had to conquer "the Cares their enemies."[26] If Herrera's statement that those who were never at peace were those who spoke different languages is correct, then it is clear that the Cares and Potones cannot both be considered as Lenca groups, since just before the Spanish conquest these two groups had fought a bitter war. The evidence of a Lenca affiliation is slightly stronger for the Cares. Nevertheless, the Cares were clearly distinguished from the Lenca throughout the colonial period; in 1591 the Mercedarians had charge of four Indian parishes: Tencoa, de los Cares, Cururu, and de los Lencas.[27] Seventeenth century sources indicate that the centers of the partidos of the Cares and Lencas were Intibucá and Aguanqueterique respectively, with Lenca also spoken in the villages of Locterique, Curarén, Alubarén, and Reitoca.[28] Although the languages of the Cares and Lencas could be distinguished, the culture and distribution of the Cares suggest that they were probably a Lenca group.

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[21]AGI AG 183 12.7.1683, AG 184 1688. The villages where it was spoken were: Telica, Yamala, Ylamatepeque, Teconalistagua, and Yguala. One witness suggested that the language spoken was "naguatle," which was used as a lingua franca throughout the area. Another said that in some villages in Tencoa "jucap" was spoken, the affiliation of which is unknown.

[22]Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, pp. 6, 91.

[23]AGI AG 9 Pedraza 18.5.1539. Elsewhere he distinguishes the "Cares" from those of "Çarquín" (CDIU 11:400 Pedraza 1544).

[24]Herrera, *Historia General* 12 dec.6 lib.3 cap.19:279.

[25]Stone, *Central and Southern Honduras*, p. 5; Herrera, *Historia General* 9 dec.5 lib.8 cap.3:108--"los que no tenían paz eran los diferentes en la lengua."

[26]Herrera, *Historia General* 12 dec.6 lib.3 cap.19:279.

[27]AGI AG 164 Fr. Andrada, Bishop of Honduras 20.4.1591.

[28]AGI AG 184 Testimonio 1688; BNM 2675 f.453 Misiones de Mercedarias 1696; ANH P5 L68 Alcalde Mayor of Tegucigalpa and Choluteca 3.5.1698.

The province of "Guaquí" was also located in the vicinity of Gracias a Dios,[29] and it seems likely that it included the villages of Guajiquiro, Marcala, Chinacla, Yarula, Cacaoterique, and Opatoro, where the Indians today speak a language classified as Lenca.[30] Fr. Alonso Ponce observed that in Comayagua and Agalteca Colo was spoken,[31] which was probably a Lenca language. In 1553 the Mercedarians were given charge of the "*partido* de los Rencas (sic)," which included the villages of "Xeto, Comayagua, Lajamaní, Tencoxquín, Curucu and Orica."[32]

Evidence for the inclusion of the Chatos, Dules (Sules), Yaras, and Paracas as Lenca groups is even more problematic. In the eighteenth century the Chatos, Dules, and Yaras were living in the vicinity of Olancho El Viejo and in the headwaters of the Río Tinto.[33] It would appear that the Chatos and Dules were probably Lenca or perhaps Matagalpa, but the Yaras were almost certainly a Jicaque group.[34] The historical evidence that Stone presents for including the Paracas as a Lenca group is that Frs. Espino and Ovalle on a missionary expedition to the Olancho valley met "a family of Paraca Indians of the Lenca nation."[35] It is clear that the Paracas were less extensive in Honduras than in north-central Nicaragua, where Franciscan missionaries were active in converting them in the late seventeenth century. Lehmann believes that they were Matagalpan, a proposition that is generally supported by historical evidence of their location in the seventeenth century.[36]

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[29]AGI AG 9 Pedraza 18.5.1539.

[30]F. Johnson, "Central American Cultures," in *Handbook of South American Indians*, vol. 4, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 143 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1948), pp. 61-62; Stone, *Central and Southern Honduras*, p. 111. Squier identified the following villages as Lenca-speaking: Guajiquiro, Opatoro, Intibucá, and Similatón (E.G. Squier, "The Xicaque Indians of Honduras," *The Athenaeum*, no. 1624 (1858):760). D.G. Brinton (*The American Race* (New York: N.D.C. Hodges, 1891), p. 160), and Lehmann (*Zentral-Amerika* 2:668-70), accept this identification, the latter adding Chilanga to the Lenca dialects. However, Swadesh has recently suggested that Chilanga is a distinct language (M. Swadesh, "Lexicostatistic Classification," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 5, ed. N.A. McQuown (Austin: Texas University Press, 1967), p. 98.

[31]Ponce, *Relación breve*, p. 347.

[32]P. Nolasco Pérez, *Historia de las mercedarias en América* (Madrid: Revista 'Estudios,' 1966), p. 99.

[33]AGI AG 297 Fr. Betancurt 9.8.1698; AGCA A1.3 219 2466 Indians of Olancho El Viejo 6.6.1724; AGI AG 343 Rivera 5.4.1737; BAGG 1:29-39 ref. p. 32 Letona 20.7.1743; AGI AG 449 Navarro 30.11.1758 (Report 1744).

[34]Lehmann, *Zentral-Amerika* 2:631, 635. See the discussion of the Jicaque.

[35]Vázquez, *Crónica* 4:189; Stone, *Central and Southern Honduras*, p. 4.

[36]Lehmann, *Zentral-Amerika* 1:481-82, 2:631; Newson, *Indian Survival.*