

Chapter 9 ■

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Geographical Perspectives on Spanish–Pech (Paya) Indian Relationships, Northeast Honduras, Sixteenth Century

For inhabitants of North America, the consequences of Columbus's encounters began along the coast of Central America, in August 1502. This was during Columbus's fourth voyage to America, 10 years since the first. The four Spanish ships had been at sea for three months—a nice, quick trip. The fleet had passed through the Lesser Antilles and had touched Hispaniola, Jamaica, and the south coast of Cuba before sailing past the Cayman Islands and eventually stopping in the Bay Islands, in sight of the mainland of Honduras. The islands and adjacent mainland were then occupied primarily by ancestors of the modern Pech Indians, or as they have been called by outsiders for over 300 years, the Paya.

The Pech did not live within the bounds of Mesoamerica, the realm of high culture dominated by the Aztecs and the Mayas, and perhaps for this reason northeast Honduras has remained historically vague. However, the story of Spanish—Indian relationships in one of the more peripheral areas is intriguing and invites investigation. What follows, therefore, in abbreviated form, is a chronicle of the century-long interplay between conquerors and the vanquished.

The particular perspective employed here is that of historical geography. To

historical geographers, in their attempt to reconstruct the past, *places* and *physical environments* are of unusual importance. Exactly where did the past action take place is one of the first questions asked by historical geographers. Historical events may also be emphasized, but human activities must be located and placed within a specific geographical setting, thereby providing an enriching base for the action. A reconstruction of past landscapes and regional interactions based on archival research *and* fieldwork is the goal (Sauer 1941).

The approach of historical geography has special value in areas such as northeast Honduras where documentary evidence of the Spanish—Indian contact is so slight. Being alongside the zone of more active, successful Spanish colonization and possessing very few early Spanish towns, northeast Honduras left relatively little in the historical record to reconstruct past activities. In those marginal areas where the Spaniards did not immediately overwhelm the natives, the natural world becomes a more valuable avenue to understanding the period of culture contact and conflict. In such areas, one must wonder how the natives were able to resist European domination as long as they did. Perhaps at least part of the answer involves the nature of the physical environment—one aspect of the region that has changed little over the five centuries since the contact.

In this chapter, the primary themes are (1) the extent and geographical nature of the Pech culture region, (2) the erection of major Spanish centers therein, (3) the development of mining, (4) the Indian reaction to European presence, and (5) the eventual depopulation and territorial reduction of the Pech. All of these topics touch on the relationships between man and the natural environment, as well as the spatial and locational aspects of the early Spanish—Indian interaction.

The Fourth Voyage of Columbus in the Bay of Honduras

Most scholars who have written on the fourth, and final, voyage of Columbus to America have misinterpreted much information that is available from the primary accounts. The trip is, of course, a major event, but is yet to be understood satisfactorily. While it has not been given the attention that it deserves, the voyage (and its primary documents) remains the place to begin any serious discussion of native responses to Spanish incursions and of Spanish—Pech history specifically.

Confusion about the voyage stems primarily from the early determinations of Samuel Lothrop (1927), Frans Blom (1932), and Eric Thompson (1951) that the trading canoe found in the Bay Islands was operated by Mayas. Also some blame might be placed on those historians who followed Samuel Morison (1963) in his account of Columbus's route in the Bay of Honduras. A much better look at the trip and its implications can be found in Edwards's study of 1978.

This is not the place to discuss in detail the reformist notions of the trip; however, note that the Crown's historian, Peter Mártir, who, it is believed, had access to Columbus's now lost account of the trip, clearly wrote in the first edition that the merchant in the trading canoe was the ruler of the island, returning

home (Mártyr 1966:116). While most writers on the subject have concluded that the trading canoe was the first instance of Spanish contact with the high cultures of Mesoamerica, Mártyr's comment might indicate that the merchant was not necessarily a Mayan carrying Mesamerican trade goods to other Mayas. He could have been a local island merchant, a Pech, trading for his island and the adjacent mainland. Mártyr also wrote that Columbus sailed west from the Bay Islands, not south or east, as say the historians. From close inspection of all of the primary evidence, one could also conclude that Roatán Island, and not Guanaja, was the island visited by Columbus.

As will be seen below, documents of the voyage also provide insights into the nature of the sixteenth-century Pech of the mainland.

Extent and Nature of the Pech Region, Early Sixteenth Century

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, all lands in Honduras were obviously under the control of Indians. But it is also clear that there was great variation among the native populations there. One church chronicler of the late seventeenth century suggested that humans had lived in Honduras for 5,600 years and that over 30 different peoples could be then be identified (Vásquez 1944:4:77-79). That these groups often seem to be separated by features in the natural landscape indicates the close relationship between early man and his habitat. Therefore, a first step toward understanding the regionalizations among Honduran Indians, and specifically the Pech, might be to review the natural geography. Pech response to European contact was limited to their homeland alone.

Although the boundaries of the Pech culture region for the early sixteenth century cannot be determined with certainty, a general delimitation can be suggested from a perusal of the archeological, ethnohistorical, linguistic, toponymic, and geographical evidence.

Natural Environment

The physical geography of northeastern Honduras, at the greatest scale, is dominated by five mountain ranges that generally trend southwest-northeast and by the four hydrologic systems (Aguán, Sico, Paulaya, Plátano) enclosed by the mountains. In height, the mountains are not overpowering—they reach over 1,500 meters in only a few places and the maximum elevation is 2,333 meters—but they are quite difficult to traverse on foot because of their irregular topography. The few large intermountain flatlands—such as the Agalta Valley and the Olancho Valley—are 400–600 meters above sea level.

Climate is seasonal, with fairly sharp contrasts between the wet period (June—December) and the dry (January—May). Tropical temperatures are moderated as elevation increases. Natural vegetation is primarily a mix of hardwoods and pine in the sloping lands, with significant amounts of old savanna in the largest valleys (Johannessen 1959). Large waterways, particularly those that are navigable for the slight drafted *pipantes*, or dugout watercraft, are of importance to the

Indians. At the same time, obstacles to dugout travel, rapids and waterfalls that limit or make such travel difficult, are culturally prominent features. The head of dugout navigation on these eastern streams, or "canoe line," will later be examined as a possible cultural divide using the Wampú River as an example.

Limits of the Pech Culture Region

Archeological Record. At least 77 sites have been reported in the numerous archeological reports from northern and eastern Honduras, including the islands offshore (Craig 1965; Epstein 1957, 1978; Epstein and Véliz 1977; Feachem 1938, 1947-1948; Hasemann 1977; Healy 1974, 1978, 1987; Helbig 1956, 1964; Mejía C. 1954; Pownall 1779; Sapper 1899; Spinden 1925; Stone 1941, 1942; Strong 1934a, 1934b, 1935; Véliz 1972; Véliz et al. 1977). Many of the earlier surveyors, such as Spinden (1925), Strong (1934a, 1934b), and Stone (1941, 1942), after recognizing similar artifacts, particularly pottery and stylized metates, declared the zone to be "Paya" (see Figure 9-1). More recent archeologists (Epstein, Véliz, Healy), while continuing to recognize the similarity in remains, have cautiously avoided mentioning the possible ethnic relationship.

Given the site records, two distributional generalizations are apparent: (1) the Bay Island offertory sites are normally on the hilltops, and (2) the mainland sites are clustered along the major streams, particularly along the upper piedmont

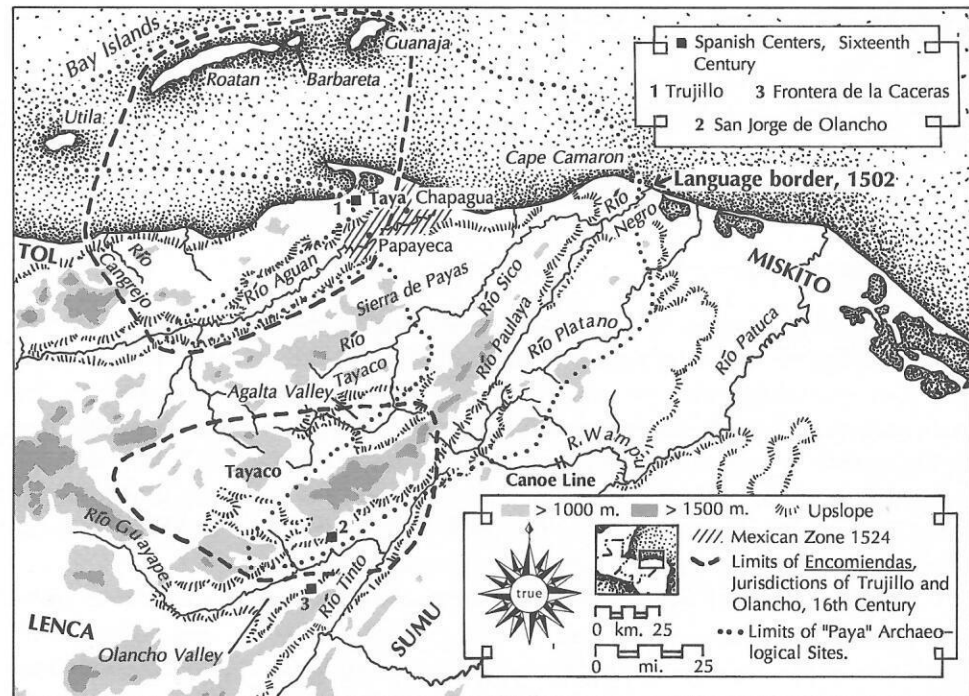


Figure 9-1. Paya archaeological sites and sixteenth-century Spanish centers, Northeast Honduras.

of the river valleys and away from stream banks (which might be subject to flooding or have been eroded away). Of course, the archeological survey can never be complete and does not encompass all Pech territory.

Ethnohistory, Language, and Toponyms. The ruler/merchant that Columbus first made contact with in the Bay Islands was taken as a translator along the coast as far as he could understand the language. He was released probably at the mouth of the Río Negro, some 100 kilometers east of Trujillo, where, as the eye-witnesses proclaimed, he was no longer useful. Obviously, he had come to the limit of his culture region. This is only one piece of evidence that incorporates the Bay Islands and the adjacent mainland into one linguistic and cultural region.

Other evidence is that in 1526, newly appointed Governor Diego López de Salcedo reported that a site in the Bay Islands and two mainland sites, one 4 or 5 leagues to the interior and the other 30 leagues inland, shared a common religious region. The three shrines, which sheltered green marblelike idols in the form of females, were cared for by a celibate Indian leader called "papa." A century later, islanders served as translators for Franciscan missionaries who worked on the mainland in Pech lands (Vásquez 1944:4:156).

Additional information on the distribution of Pech during the first century of contact with Europeans can be gleaned from local words of the period. If I am correct about the ethnicity of the aboriginal Bay Islanders, the first words recorded by the Europeans in the islands were Pech, although probably heard imperfectly by the untrained Spanish ear and transcribed incorrectly by the scribes of the day. Even with the great potential for misunderstanding, terms from the earliest documents can provide insights into the nature of the region. Table 9-1 lists the names of the people and places appearing in the four primary accounts of the Columbian voyage, the statements of eye-witnesses during the Columbian trials a decade later, reports of the Spanish entradas until 1527, and the missionary effort of 1622 that used island translators on the mainland.

Perhaps of most interest are the first place names attached to the mainland, *Taia* and *Maia* (Mártir 1966:116). I believe these are simply Pech terms for "mine" and "theirs," referring to parts of the north coast of Honduras. *Taya*, *Tayaco*, and *Tayacon*, can still be located in a few places, all of which are associated with the past and modern Pech. The latter two toponyms are probably derived by fusing the Pech word (*Taia*) with the Nahuatl locative *co*. *Maia*, or "their land," probably referred to non-Pech territory in western Honduras, perhaps then occupied by the so-called Jicaque, or modern Tol-speakers. This group certainly occupied those lands during the seventeenth century (Davidson 1985). *Oaque cacao*, which refers to Barbareta Island and is taken from Bartholomew Columbus's map of about 1506, could possibly mean "five houses" in Pech. *Ebuya*, which was known to Yáñez Pinzón, one of the captains on the voyage as a mainland province associated with chief Camarona (CDIU 1892:7:269), was probably near modern Cape Camaron, at the mouth of Río Negro. Contact with natives there could have been made when Columbus stopped to let the Bay Island translator off ship. *Uya* is the Pech term for "large." *Eb* is a prefix for "snake." As a final example, the topo-

Table 9-1. Early Words from the Pech Region, 1502–1527, 1622

<i>Dates of Event/Publication</i>	<i>Word</i>	<i>Refers to</i>	<i>Source</i>
<i>Places known from Columbian voyage</i>			
1502–1506	oalaua	Utila Island	B. Columbus map
1502–1506	manaua	Roatán Island	B. Columbus map
1502–1506	oaque cacao	Barbareta Island	B. Columbus map
1502–1506	banassa	Guanaja Island	B. Columbus map
1502–1511	Guanassa	Guanaja Island	Mártyr 1966:116
1502–1511	Guanasa		Mártyr map
1502–1513	Guanaxa		Anonymous 1513:269
1502–1513	Guanasa		Anonymous 1513:255,274
1502–1515	Guanaca		CDIU 1892:7:96
1502–1515	Guacuaza		CDIU 1893:39:415
1502–1515	Guanasa		CDIU 1895:9:165
1502–1515	Guana		CDIU 1892:7:348
1502–1515	Guanaja		Anonymous 1515:76
1502–1515	Guanasa		Anonymous 1515:80
1502–1511	Quiriquetánam Quiriquetana	Honduras mainland	Mártyr 1966:116
1502–1511	Taia	Mainland province	Mártyr 1966:116
1502–1506	Maiam		B. Columbus ca. 1506
1502–1511	Maia	Mainland province	Mártyr 1966:116
1502–1515	Maya	The mainland	CDIU 1892:7:348
1502–1515	Maya		CDIU 1892:7:92
1502–1515	Maya		CDIU 1894:8:76
1502–1515	Uiuya	The mainland	CDIU 1892:7:264
1502–1515	Ebuya	Mainland province, of the chief Camarona	CDIU 1892:7:269
<i>Places known from early Spanish entradas</i>			
1525–1526	Chapagua	Major town 7 leagues from Trujillo	Cortés 1971:265
1525–1526	Coabata town	Subject to Papayeca	Cortés 1971:266
1525–1526	Huitila	Utila Island	Cortés 1971:273
1525–1526	Huilacho	Olancho	Cortés 1971:271
1525–1526	Papayeca [Papaeca]	Province 7 leagues from Trujillo, with 18 subject towns	Cortés 1971:265 [271]
1525–1526	Telica	Town subject to Chapagua	Cortés 1971:266
1526–1526	Telicachequita	Town near savanna in Olancho	Ceparo 1526:61
1525–1563	Guaimura	Indian name for Trujillo or vicinity	Díaz 1982:674
ca. 1526	Gueymura	Port at Cabo de Honduras	Mendez ca. 1526
1525–1563	Olancho	Peaceful interior area	Díaz 1982:541
1525–1563	Olancho	Towns so-called, 55 leagues from Trujillo	Díaz 1982:559
1525–1563	Olancho	Town at peace	Díaz 1982:570

Table 9-1. (continued)

1527-1527	Nuylancho	A valley	Salcedo 1527a:250
1525-1563	Guayape	Later name for Olancho	Díaz 1982:570
1525-1563	Quemara	Coastal town 4 days' walk east of Tela	Díaz 1982:545
1526-1526	Agalta	Indian town	Ceparo 1526:60
1526-1526	Escamilpa	Indian town in province of Huylancho	Ceparo 1526:57
1526-1526	Escamilpachecita	Town near savanna in Olancho, slightly more than 1 league from Escamilpa Grande, which is up-valley	Ceparo 1526:61
1526-1526	Escamilpa Grande	Town a little more than 1 league from Escamilpa	Ceparo 1526:61
1527-1527	Chequila	Town 17 leagues from Trujillo	Salcedo 1527a:247
<i>Places known from 1622 mission trip</i>			
1622-1714	Azocequa	<i>Aso-se-wa</i> (Pech)= <i>agua</i> <i>amarillo</i> (Spanish)	
	Barcaquer Borbortabahca Murahqui Río Guampún Río Xaruá	Later name for Guampún Río Wampü (Unidentified Pech word or mistranscription?)	
	Yaxamahá Zuyy		Vázquez 1944:4:164
<i>People known from Columbian voyage</i>			
1502-1515	Ynube	Island ruler	CDIU 1892:7:264
1502-1515	Yunbera		CDIU 1892:7:397
1502-1515	Junbe		CDIU 1894:8:37-38
1502-1515	Junhera		CDIU 1894:8:76
1502-1539	Yumbé	Island merchant-chief	F. Columbus 1959:231
1502-1515	Camarona	Chief of Ebuya Province	CDIU 1892:7:269
<i>People known from early entradas</i>			
1525-1526	Cecoatl	Chief of Coabata, a town subjected to Papayeca	Cortés 1971:266
1525-1526	Chicohuytl	Chief of Chapagua Province	Cortés 1971:270
1525-1526	Mazatl	Chief of Papayeca Province	Cortés 1971:270
1525-1526	Mendoreto	Chief of Chapagua Province	Cortés 1971:270
1525-1526	Montamal	Chief of Telica, of the province of Chapagua	Cortés 1971:266
1525-1526	Pizacura	Chief of Papayeca Province	Cortés 1971:270
1525-1526	Poto	Chief of Chapagua Province	Cortés 1971:270
1525-1563	Papayeca	Chief of large town near Trujillo	Díaz 1981:541
1525-1563	Acaltecas	Unpacified Indians of interior	Díaz 1982:541

nym *Asocecgua*, reported in 1622 by Franciscan missionaries in "Paya" lands (Vásquez 1944:4:14), is still used by the modern Pech to mean a muddy stream (in Spanish, *agua amarillo*, or "yellow waters").

Apparently, Nahuatl toponyms, such as *Chapagua* and *Papayeca* (Cortés 1971:265), seem to have referred to the relatively large Mexican-led settlements in the lower Aguán valley. The names of their chiefs, also given to us in Mexican, support that notion.

A Modern Analogy. To test the possibility of a modern analogy relating toponyms to physical geography and cultural boundaries, in January, 1990, four geographers from Louisiana State University ventured down the Río Wampú in search of the boundary that separates the modern realms of the Pech and the Sumu.¹ After a day-and-a-half walk through mountains, we reached the upper Wampú, which is too shallow to float canoes, so balsa rafts were constructed. A day later, after passing through more than 50 minor rapids, we could not, with safety, pass the largest of the rapids (*Salto Grande*; in Sumu, *Kitan-non*). We reached the Sumu villages on the middle Río Patuca on the fifth day.

The Wampú trip confirmed our hypothesis that a "canoe line" might separate the upstream Pech from the downstream Sumu. It actually worked. As it turns out, upstream from the large waterfall the tributaries bear the Pech prefix *aso*, which means "water"; downstream the tributaries carry the Sumu suffix for "water," *was*.

A Final Demarcation. If the limits of the "Pech" archeological region, the distribution of the sixteenth-century Indian settlements in the hinterlands of Trujillo and Olancho, the sites of modern Pech place names, and the eastern limits of Bay Island speech on the shore at 1502 are drawn on the same map, the composite that emerges probably comes close to defining the cultural region of the Pech in the 1500s. This territory included the Bay Islands and the north coast of Honduras between the Río Cangrejo (near La Ceiba) and Río Negro. To the interior, Pech occupied the valleys of the Aguán, Sico, Paulaya, and Plátano, as well as the Agalta Valley and the Olancho Valley at least until the confluence of the Río Tinto. The headwaters of the Wampú were probably utilized as well.

Determining the limits of the region is perhaps easier than attempting to explain such a configuration. I am becoming convinced that certain aspects of physical geography play some role. The canoe line on the Wampú seems to correspond to a cultural border today and perhaps did so 400 years ago. The rapids on the upper Patuca might have played a similar role in separating the Pech and aggressive ancestors of the Sumu; the higher mountains of the coastal range west of Trujillo seem to separate the Tol and Pech; high mountains also separate the Lenca and Pech. The proto-Miskito and Pech, as mentioned first by the Columbian sailors, are still separated by upland and lowland habitats (see Figure 9-1).

This Pech area probably contained alien enclaves. Apparently, two Mexican-dominated settlements with their subjugated Pech towns occupied the lower Aguán Valley south and east of Trujillo.

The Early Spanish Centers at Trujillo and Olancho: Two Spatial-Environmental Settlement Models

After the Spaniards became established in México under Cortés and in Panamá under Pedrarias, the lands between became a battleground for Spaniards fighting among themselves for New World property. Pedro Alvarado eventually took Guatemala for Cortés and Hernando Córdova overwhelmed Costa Rica and organized Nicaragua for Pedrarias, but Honduras remained, and here the fraternal battles raged (see Chamberlain 1966 for the most exhaustive historical account). Eventually the Cortesians won Honduras, but in their rush to claim the land by right of settlement, the earliest attempts to build towns failed. Two early centers that had the most success and affected most directly the Pech population were Trujillo and San Jorge de Olancho.

Trujillo

The coastal site first explored by the Columbian sailors was settled under the orders of Cortés by his captain, Francisco de las Casas, in May 1525 (Saldaña 1525). The locale selected was an obvious choice—again emphasizing the importance of the physical world in historical activities. For the same reason that Columbus had first stepped ashore in the place, the Spanish colonizers were guided to the site—because it lies inside the largest protected bay on the Caribbean shore of Central America. For people using sailing vessels, such a site is of overwhelming importance. The enormous enclosure, some 13 kilometers wide across its mouth, was formed as a giant sand spit built westward. Sediments from the Río Aguán, whose mouth is just upwind, are pushed westward with the longshore drift by the constant Trade Winds. Inside the harbor, winds and waves are relatively calm, except in the rare cases of winter *nortes* that infrequently blow in from the northwest. Without this set of geographical features to attract the earliest explorers and colonists, Spanish contact with the Pech would have been much delayed. Without a doubt, the presence of a large, protected bay was the single most important physical factor that influenced Spanish settlements on the north coast of Honduras. Puerto Caballos and Tela, both to the west of Trujillo, are other examples.

Cortés himself visited the new villa in 1526 and assisted in cutting the forest from the site and in erecting the first houses. After dividing the pacified local Indians among the conquerors (Salcedo 1526:f.322,328), he returned to Mexico in the same year. The initial site of Trujillo was a swampy area beneath the foot of the mountain, but under Governor Salcedo the town was moved upslope, “where the setting sun could be seen” (Salcedo 1526:f.324).

Olancho

The large flat valley to the interior of Trujillo, over two difficult mountain ranges to the south, was known first as *Uilancho*, and then as *Huilancho*, before being

finally corrupted into Olancho. The valley, one of the largest in all of Honduras, approximately 20 by 130 kilometers, quickly attracted the attention of rival Spaniards, who had a liking for the upland flatlands that reminded them of their Castille homeland. It was into this land that the Spaniards from Nicaragua traveled and thereby provoked a response by the allies of Cortés in Trujillo.

By late April 1526, Francisco Saavedra, left in Trujillo as Cortés's representative, had determined that a Spanish settlement should be established far to the interior near the heart of Indian populations—in the Olancho Valley. He therefore ordered Bartolomé de Celada to proceed inland in search of the best site for the proposed Spanish villa (Cepero 1526:57–59). The new settlement, named Villa de la Frontera de Cáceres, was erected “in a savanna near some Indian towns called Telica chequita and Escamilpa chequita” (Cepero 1526:61).

The town seems to have been located and constructed according to requirements of Spanish town planners of the time, because the site possessed the following characteristics: (1) it was in the territory of Indian settlements, where labor can be obtained without much effort and where Indians can serve the Spaniards without much work, (2) the place should be beautiful, airy, dry, and settlers must be able to see the setting sun, (3) waters nearby should be clear and flowing, (4) the site should be away from the marshes and mudholes, (5) there should be grass, pasture, and land for *ejido*, and all types of livestock, and (6) there should be forested land nearby for timber to use in framing building and to lay foundations for stone houses (see Cepero 1526:59; Salcedo 1527b:385–386).

At another scale of design, the internal layout of the villa followed another widely known model of new settlement by Spaniards in the New World. Celada and his men, with the help of the local Indians, laid out the first plots in the following order: (1) the church, (2) the plaza, (3) hospital, (4) the governor's house, (5) jail, (6) cabildo, and (7) other houses.

The Settlement Model

Within only two years of Spanish colonization, the two dominant models of colonial settlement had been placed on the landscape of eastern Honduras. One model focused on the coast and had a port as a node of transshipment. It was connected to the interior by a *camino real* (main highway), which had in turn a few tributary roads that reached into a hinterland. In those lands behind the port, products were gathered for use in the port or sent on to the mother country.

The second pattern of settlement was oriented to the interior and focused on a Spanish town built along the upper piedmont of an upland valley. Frontera de Cáceres was designed as this type, but San Jorge de Olancho was the permanent example for the Olancho Valley.

For at least half a century, the Spanish settlers in Honduras did not deviate from this pattern of settlement site selection. All of the Spanish centers (Lunardi 1946: 67–90) fit one of the two models: the ports were Puerto de Caballos (near modern Puerto Cortés), Triunfo de la Cruz (near modern Tela), and Trujillo; the interior piedmont sites were Villa de la Frontera de Cáceres, Choluteca, San

Pedro, Gracias a Dios, and Comayagua. Not until the attraction of mining in irregular upslope areas, such as at the silver mines near Tegucigalpa in the 1580s (West 1959), did the colonists abandon their propensity for coastal ports and upland interior piedmonts.

Early Mining

The acquisition of precious minerals, which attracted so much Spanish interest throughout the New World during the colonial period, twice dominated the economy of Honduras. Between 1530 and 1560, gold placering occurred along the streams entering the Caribbean Sea and in the adjacent valleys. The second period began in 1570 and centered on several gold and silver veins in the mountainous interior of western Honduras (West 1959:767). In eastern Honduras, the swiftly flowing streams on their way to the sea cut deeply into the old, highly mineralized crystalline rock and eroded flakes and nuggets of gold downstream into alluvial deposits probably known to the natives before the arrival of the Europeans.

Gold brought the Spaniards, less than two years after they established Trujillo, into the gravels of the Aguán Valley just over the mountains from the port (West 1959:768, citing AGI Guat 44/20 marzo 1530). By 1534, the placers were in full production (West 1959:768, citing AGI Guat 48/25 febrero 1534). Five years later, the richest of all Honduran placers was discovered near Guayape in the upper Olancho Valley (Chamberlain 1966:218, 233; Montejo 1539b). Pedraza (1544:402), shortly afterward, claimed Olancho to be the richest area in all of Central America, if one included its potential for agriculture and ranching.

The reputation of the Guayape finds immediately attracted other Spaniards. Initial exploitation by Alonso de Cáceres in 1540 was halted after less than two years because of jurisdictional disputes among the Spanish officials (Chamberlain 1966:217–219; see especially n. 7, p. 219), but he did found a new Spanish town—San Jorge de Olancho—across the Río Guayape from the abandoned Frontera de Cáceres. During the earliest mining of the Olancho Valley, Indians often resisted the new Spanish community through various means mentioned below, but gold was a powerful incentive and eventually Spanish success there led to further exploration into eastern lands and the establishment of Nueva Salamanca. While San Jorge can be located with some precision along the upper piedmont near the Río Olancho and the modern site of Boquerón, Nueva Salamanca, which existed from 1544 until at least 1550, was near the previously unknown Indian towns of Xoanya, Paragri, Xagua, and Tanguara (Chamberlain 1966:222–224), and until now remains unlocated. We know only that the *villa* was some “20 leagues” (80–100 kilometers?) beyond (east of?) San Jorge de Olancho (Chamberlain 1966:222–223).

By the mid-sixteenth century, gold production in Honduras had begun to decline. Deposits in some areas were depleted, but the main reason for decline was the disappearance of cheap labor. The decimation of Indian population had been such

that the New Laws of 1542 forbidding aboriginal slavery did not have to be strongly enforced [West 1959:769].

Pech Reaction and Resistance

Native reactions to the conquest, with its numerous aspects—warfare and slaving, settlement construction, mining, agricultural development—were varied and in the Pech lands of sixteenth-century Honduras seem to have followed a rhythmic progression of resistance-retreat-resistance-retreat until the number of natives was so slight that they were overwhelmed and placed in several *encomiendas*, where they quietly declined.

When Cortés left Trujillo for the return to México, explicit instructions were left describing the proper good treatment of the local Indians (Cortés 1525). At the time, Indians were at peace with the Spaniards, but shortly after his departure for México, the officials who replaced him became known for their cruelty (Pedraza 1544:416–417). Governor Salcedo (1526:f. 322) complained that the Indians near Trujillo had to be ordered to work and after one year at his job, this governor conducted a successful slaving trip to León, Nicaragua (Salcedo 1529).

But the Indians on occasion had their reprisal. The earliest account of an Indian victory came under the leadership of the Lenca cacique Unito, the “Señor de Comayagua,” whose own political headquarters was 170 kilometers to the west. Upon hearing of the fledgling Spanish presence in the Olancho Valley, Unito gathered local Indians and in the middle of the night attacked and destroyed Frontera de Cáceres, killing 15 “Christians” and 20 horses (Salcedo 1527a:250). No other attempts to build Spanish towns in Olancho took place until the discovery of the rich Guayape gold mines in 1539 led the bold conqueror Cáceres to erect San Jorge de Olancho in 1540 on the northern valley piedmont across the Guayape from the original villa.

While the building of Spanish towns in their midst provoked the Indians, nothing seemed to incite them more than the abuses accompanying mining. Throughout the 1540s, about every two years (1542, 1544, 1546) Olancho Indians fought the Christians (Chamberlain 1966:224–225). Some Indians refused to furnish supplies to the concentrated populations of the mines, some fled the valley, and others fought (Chamberlain 1966: 218). Late in 1542, negro slaves joined the rebellious Indians of the Olancho district and drove the Spaniards from their headquarters at San Jorge and from throughout the valley. The revolt was put down in early 1543 by Rodrigo de Anaya, who rebuilt San Jorge and restored some *encomiendas* in the valley, finally securing the valley for the Spaniards (Chamberlain 1966:221–222).

Perhaps one of the last notable instances of Indian reprisal was that reported by Alonso de Río (1546). In 1544, a widespread Indian revolt apparently took place and included the Guayape mines of Olancho, near Comayagua, at San Pedro, and in Nicaragua at Nueva Segovia. In these places, native warriors killed several Spaniards and their negro slaves who were working the mines; as a result, the mines became depopulated.

Some 80 years later, and 160 kilometers away, one report from Trujillo reminds

us that Indian resistance probably continued throughout the sixteenth century (Tovilla 1635). Martín Tovilla, named *alcalde mayor* of Gulf Dulce and Verapaz by the king in 1629, left Spain with the famous Honduras flotilla in early 1630, and by way of Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, and Jamaica, reached Trujillo in October 1630. He arrived in the small port of 150 *vecinos* with some apprehension because he had learned that the local "Jicaques," who are also called "Caribdis," had a reputation for eating human flesh. During his stay of 50 days, Tovilla learned that Trujillo's governor, Capitan Francisco de Via Montan y Santander, had prepared the town (of *manaca* palm-roofed dwellings) in defense with an enclosure and a fortified *morro* of 16 pieces of artillery. The defenses were primarily designed against the "Indios de Guerra," whose lands began in the mountains some 6 leagues south of the port and extended 300 leagues along the coast to Cartagena (Colombia). Between the Indian lands and Trujillo was a great plain where one Mateo Ochoa was the principal land and cattle owner. On occasion, the Indians raided the pastures and threatened the residents of the port nearby.

Seaward of the port, the Indians were no threat. In fact, the offshore Paya, from islands then named La Guanaja and La Guayaba (Roatán), served the Spanish settlement as provisioners and were paid four reales per person for each week's work. Produce from the Trujillo area most prominently included indigo, hides, zarzaparilla, pita grass, and cochineal.

The other mechanism that seemed to stir intense native anger was the intrusion of religious missions into their lands. Perhaps because of the associated martyrdom, the most famous colonial mission episodes of eastern Honduras are those of the Franciscans Esteban Verdelete (1604–1612) and Cristóbal Martínez de la Puerta (1616–1623). Both were killed on the eastern margins of Pech lands, in the untamed territory of "Taguzgalpa" (Vásquez 1944:4:99–122; 127–186) and probably by ancestors of the Sumu, not by the Pech.

Indian Depopulation and Territorial Reduction

Perhaps the most commonly expressed disappointment—an almost constant gripe—of the Spanish officials in the New World when writing home was the disastrous decline or lack of Indians in their neighborhoods. Native labor was vital to Spanish development in the colonies and without the local manpower European life was a hard one. Of course, the other side of the situation was the occasional attempt, notably by religious personnel, to protect native life and institutions.

Coasts and islands just offshore, easily accessible to foreigners who approached by watercraft, were the best places to raid for slaves. The Bay Islands had been looted for Indians to replenish the Cuban mines in 1516 and 1517, and even while Cortés proposed peace with the Indians on the adjacent mainland, other countrymen were slaving offshore (Davidson 1974:32–33). By 1526, one or two of the Bay Islands had been depopulated by slavers from Cuba (Salcedo 1526:f. 324).

When the Protector of the Indians,² Bishop Cristóbal de Pedraza, arrived on

his second trip to Trujillo in 1544, he realized, perhaps in his own bias favoring the Indians, that the mainland as well had lost considerable native population. Only a few Indians, less than 400, remained in the vicinity of the port (Pedraza 1544:417). He blamed the reduction on the governors who followed Cortés and Saavedra. Pedraza claimed that Salcedo and Cereceda had captured the Indians and sold them as slaves in the Greater Antilles, where most natives had perished over a decade earlier (Sauer 1966:66; Denevan 1976:57). Near Trujillo the natives who had escaped the slaving raids ran into the *monte* behind Trujillo some 14 to 15 leagues away—in an area now known as the “Sierra de Payas.” The bishop further remarked that since the days of Cortés, when population density near Trujillo was greater than that of México, now no towns of 1,000 and 1,500 houses were left.

The local story was perhaps best reported by a priest who wished the Crown to learn of the maltreatment of natives in Honduras (Irugillen 1547). He, echoing the words of his bishop three years before, wrote of the poor treatment of Indians near Trujillo at the hands of past governors Salcedo and Cereceda. The padre claimed that Indians were captured, placed on ships, and sold in all of the Greater Antillean Islands. Others were linked together by chains and transported overland to Nicaragua. This last episode is verified by the account of Governor Salcedo himself (Salcedo 1529). For the Indians who escaped slavery, they vanished into the rugged mountains across the Río Aguán behind Trujillo, where “many died of hunger and sickness.” At the time of Irugillen’s report, in all of the jurisdiction of Trujillo, including the Bay Islands, he believed only 150 to 180 Indians (probably meaning *tributarios*, or tribute-paying Indians) remained. These few had been divided (*repartidos*) among the Spanish citizens and conquerors of the port.

Although there are indirect indications of early encomiendas near Trujillo and Olancho (Salcedo 1526), the thorough Cerrato census of encomiendas (1549–1551) organized from Guatemala to cover the entire province of Guatemala, reports nothing for eastern Honduras. The implication, therefore, is that indeed few natives were organized and remained under the control of Spaniards.

So few Indians were left in the Trujillo vicinity to man the port (Robledo 1556) that with the decline in gold to the interior the prominence of Trujillo was reduced and Comayagua became the seat of the church in 1558 (Reina V. 1983:153).

Although the early documents portray a clear sense of the depopulation that took place in eastern Honduras, for no period is there better standardized documentation on the reduction of the Pech Indians than for the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Researchers must be aware, however, of the one great flaw to any analysis of population change for the period—most Pech territory was still outside the control of the conquerors.

Statistics were gathered only from the encomiendas within the hinterlands of Trujillo and San Jorge de Olancho. Still, some indication of population decline in the controlled areas is presented in the five sets of figures compiled between 1575 and 1592 (see Tables 9–2 and 9–3).

The most general document is that of Velasco (1575:469). Clearly, the reporter

Table 9-2. Indian Settlements/Population in the Trujillo Jurisdiction, Late Sixteenth Century, by Census Year

	1575	1582a	1582b	1590	1592
Number Indian towns	24	19	22	20	15
Number tributarios	600	440	413	496	301
<i>Settlements</i>					
Agalteca		50		60	
Agalteca		58			
Coyra		40		40	
Curubare, Curubarique			(counted with Tople and Mingupepa)		14
Çapota					6
Elen, Elena (Isla)				15	18
Goacura, Guacura (counted with Moaca)	30			40	22
Guanaja, La (Isla)	40			60	56
Helen (Isla)		14			
Maloa		8		14	
Mingupepa			(counted with Tople and Curubare)		
Moaca (counted with Guacura)			Moaca		
Monguiche		20	Monguiche	30	13
Monterjuca/Montiejuca/ Monte Xucar		35	Montejucar	30	44
Ninguepa		13			
Ochoa		10	Ochoa	20	14
Papaloteca		10		12	9
Papeyeca		10		8	
Roatan (Isla)		15		20	20
Tepusseca, Tepusteca		6		15	11
Tocoa		45		50	28
Tomala, Tomalamaugua, Tomalamazagual		10		20	16
Topol/Tople		4	22, counted with Mingupepa and Curubare		
Utila					
Xagua		5	Xagua		5
Xuyxa/Xuyza/Juyja		30	Xuyxa	40	25

Source: 1575=Velasco (1575); 1582a=Contreras (1582); 1582b=Anonymous (1582); 1590=Valverde (1590); 1592=Anonymous (1592).

was acting from incomplete information as he wrote that the Trujillo area had 220 to 230 Indian towns with 8,000 to 9,000 tributarios. For the district around San Jorge de Olancho, the figures are as outlandish: 10,000 tributarios in an untold number of towns. Actually, Velasco might have been correct on the estimates of Indians living in the unexplored eastern parts of Honduras adjoining the districts of Trujillo and Olancho, but these areas were without even the most rudimentary exploratory surveys at the time, and any population estimates must therefore be mere guesses.

Two documents from 1582, one collected in April by secular officials in Valladolid (Comayagua) (Contreras 1582) and another in May by the church from Tru-

Table 9-3. Indian Settlements/Population in the Olancho Jurisdiction, Late Sixteenth Century, by Census Year

	1575	1582a	1582b	1590	1592
Number Indian Towns	s.n.	36	34-39	14	29
Number Tributarios	10,000	470	726	469	590
<i>Settlements</i>					
Agalteca			Present		69
Cacao Suchil/Cacaoçuchil		15	Present		11
Catacamas/Cataçamas		30			12
Chindona		80		60	45
Cilca Comayagua/Circacomayagua		30		20	21
Cilimongapa		8			
Coay					4
Comayaguela		8			
Comayaguilla		5			
Coroora		15			
Cotaciali/Cosacial/Cotaçialia		10	Present	20	14
Cuchiapa		8			
Çagua/Zaquay		20			19
Çanoara					6
Çapota/Capote				20	6
El Real, Santa María					
Goapinchiapa		4			
Gualaco		50			23
Gualpay		15	Present		6
Guanapo		25			
Gueycanola					37
Jano/Xano/Zano		30		30	41
Juticalpa/Xuticalpa		20		20	8
La Guata		25		40	54
Laguína/Yalaguína		18		15	
Maguina		7+7			5
Malcao		6			
Maloa					4
Mantocanola		20		40	32
Matapique		30			
Metapa				30	24
Monte Xuca		40			
Punuara/Ponvara		12+12			10
Taloa			Talhua		16
Talsina		10			
Taporoora					9
Taycones, Los/Taycon		8+7+15		80 (in six barrios)	
Tepaneca					8
Texilque/Tijilque		25	Present	40	17
Tunpan/Taunpan		14	Taunpan		4
Xalapa		4			
Yaguale		3			
Yaroca					15
Yupiricano				40	
Yupite Yoron/Yupiteyocon		60			59
Yupitilenca/Yutipelenca/Lupite		10	Lupite	14	11
Zaquire		12			

jillo (Anonymous 1582), portray a much better and similar picture of the number of Indian towns and the tribute-paying adults in the hinterlands of Trujillo and Olancho. The governor's figures for the eastern Honduran zone totaled 1,139 tributarios in 56 villages; the church counted 1,060 "indios casados y tributarios" in 55 towns.

By the spring of 1584, Honduran officials had written to the king much concerned about the decrease in Indians throughout the country, especially around Trujillo and Olancho, where much sickness was reported because of the forced collection of zarzaparilla during the invierno (in Honduras, this is the rainy, cooler season, between June and December). To make their point to the Spanish officials, the oidores from Guatemala claimed that whole villages were full of widows (Anonymous 1584). Zarzaparilla was a leading item of tribute during this period.

There is some confusion between the summary of Valverde (1590) and the figures presented in the longer document, but in either instance the number of *indios casados* (tribute-paying natives) dropped to 965 for the hinterlands of Trujillo and Olancho, down by 9 to 15 percent from the previous census in 1582. According to Valverde's 1590 *relación*, of the 27,000 native miners along the Guayape River in 1542, when they were freed, none now remain. A further reduction to 899 *indios tributarios* is shown in the 1592 count of the "Naturales de los pueblos de esta Provincia de Honduras q consta en las 194 partidos de esta cargo" (Anonymous 1592).

Therefore, for the Spanish-controlled areas, among the encomienda populations for the decade after 1582, one could conclude that native population dropped about 20 percent.³

Conclusion

And finally, to answer the Pech the question posed by the editor of the *Columbian Consequences* volumes (Thomas 1989:11), "Why did some Native American groups survive while others disappeared?" Two factors, eminently geographical in nature, recommend themselves for the Pech region.

1. The Pech occupied, and still occupy, a location peripheral to Spanish permanent settlement. Aside from the Spanish centers at Trujillo and in the Olancho valley, which only during this decade have been joined by an all-weather road, no significant Spanish settlement was established in eastern Honduras. The Pech lived on the eastern edge of colonial success and even until today, Hispanic ways have not penetrated the Bay Islands or eastern Honduras.

2. The local physical geography, dominated by rugged topography and streams inaccessible by nonnative watercraft, provided innumerable sites of refuge for Indians retreating from the conquest. Although the valleys were virtually eradicated of natives by the close of the sixteenth century, the upland enclaves did allow isolated continuations of Pech life. Virtually all of the 1,200 remaining Pech live in the highest watersheds.⁴

Notes

1. Participants were Scott Brady, Peter Herlihy, and James Samson.
2. The position of Protector of the Indians was established in 1528 (Chamberlain 1966:224–225, see n. 1; Montejo 1539a).
3. For Honduras, the best account of population reduction is that of Newson (1986).
4. The bibliography of works on the modern Pech includes Anonymous (1977), Castillo V. (1967), Conzemius (1927–1928, 1928, 1930, 1932), Cruz S. (s. f.), Díaz E. (1922), Holt and Bright (1976), Honduras (1977), Lanza, et al. (1986), Lunardi (1943), and Massajoli (1970).

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