

THE BLACK CHRISTS OF HONDURAS

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Fig. 5-1. Remembrance plaque of Honduras that pairs El Señor Cristo Negro de Esquipulas and the Honduran national patrona Virgen de Suyapa.

The Black Christ of Esquipulas and its related equivalent images are deep in the ethos of the Republic of Honduras. Honduran awareness of, and interest in, Esquipulas started long ago. One of the earliest contacts was in 1746, when by coincidence, the newly-appointed Bishop of Comayagua passed through Esquipulas at the beginning of the construction of the basilica. In 1759, when the basilica of Esquipulas was consecrated, another bishop from Comayagua was in attendance. And, for centuries, Hondurans have visited the site in Guatemala during the January 15 celebration and during Semana Santa. Esquipulas is a mere eleven km from the Honduran border. Honduran interest in Esquipulas has been kept alive by many writers over the years (Urritia 1904; Valle 1917; Anon 1937a).

Within Honduras, citizens have traditionally been attracted to the famous January celebrations for El Señor de Esquipulas that occur in several parts of the country. Large crowds are drawn by yearly notices in newspapers (Prats 1995; Molina 2005, 2006; Orellana 2007), especially for the festivals of Santa Lucía (just east of Tegucigalpa, the greatest concentration of population), Cedros, Gualala, Jesús de Otoro, Moroceli, Quesailica, Pespire, Sabanagrande, and Intibucá. The most famous of these places, while known as sites of black Christs, normally label the Christ with only the name of the place, such as "El Señor de Gualala," "El Señor de Quelala" or "El Señor de Intibucá." On occasion, the black Christ bares a name that relates to its origins, such as Moroceli's "El Cristo Negro de las Aguas." Others, such as at Quesailica and Cedros, are not black at all, but are white and are known as "El Señor de Buen Fin." "El Señor de Jano" and "El Señor de las Mercedes," in Santa Lucía, also are not black. Obviously, in Honduran, an image does not have to be black in color to be recognized as a "black Christ."

Dr. Jesús Aguilar Paz, renowned cartographer, geographer, multi-faceted scientist, and prolific writer, in 1930 discussed many aspects of this theme of Honduran culture history. He reported the legendary status of "Esquipulas" at that time (1972:88):

"Cristos como el de Esquipulas, son varios los que fama existen en Honduras, siendo el principal el de Santa Lucía, del cual se cuenta preciosa leyenda que escribió, por vez primera el ex-presidente don Marco Aurelio Soto. El Cristo de Cedros es gemelo del de Santa Lucía y de singulares perfecciones. El Cristo de Gualala, cuya fiesta es pomposa y concurrida, es otro de los santos trigueños famosos, cuya fiesta se celebra el 3 de mayo, Día de la Cruz."

Unlike the case in Nicaragua where over 30 places carry the "Esquipulas" toponym, in Honduras the term is rarely applied to places. On the series of maps produced by the Instituto Geográfico Nacional, 1972-93, at the scale of 1/50,000, *Esquipulas* can be found only three times and they are clustered near Esquipulas del Norte, a small town in northwestern Olancho. The 2001 census includes a few other places -- seven barrios -- in San Pedro Sula (2), La Ceiba, La Villa San Antonio, Pimienta, Choluteca, and Villanueva (INE 2001). See table 5-2 and map 5-1. The 2013 census adds three more places: El Triunfo de Esquipulas (municipio Tela, Atlántida), Hacienda Esquipulas (mun. Villanueva, Cortés), and Rancho Esquipulas (mun. Cedros, F. M.).

Since 2012, when the Spanish edition of this book appeared, new black Christ sites have been confirmed for Azacualpa (Valle de, Intibucá, 4), Balfate (Colón), Cerro Grande (Valle de Angeles), Fray Lázaro (Choluteca), Plaplaya (GAD), and Trojes (El Paraíso). They are indicated by a preceding asterick *.

Table 5-1. Black Christ Sites in Honduras, Classified According to Importance.

Geographical Scale (No.)	Possible Characteristics
1. Local (95)	site of a small black Christ, present or past, private or public
2. Municipal (47)	church with Sr. de Esquipulas as patron <i>or</i> holding January 15 celebration <i>or</i> a large Esquipulas Crucifix on main altar
3. Regional (12)	hosts <i>romería</i> beyond municipio, perhaps stairs to approach image, black Christ procession
4. Nacional (0)	designated as official national sanctuary none in Honduras
5. Internacional (0)	original site, major pilgrimage site only example, Esquipulas, Guatemala

Table 5-2. Black Christ sites in Honduras, by department and category.

<u>Dept. (total)</u>	<u>Cat. 1</u>	<u>Cat. 2</u>	<u>Cat. 3</u>	<u>Cat. 4</u>	<u>Cat. 5</u>
Atlántida (4)	2	2	0	0	0
Choluteca (12)	8	3	1	0	0
Colón (4)	3	1	0	0	0
Comayagua (15)	9	4	2	0	0
Copán (4)	3	0	1	0	0
Cortés (4)	2	2	0	0	0
El Paraiso (10)	6	2	2	0	0
Fran. Morazán (22)	14	6	2	0	0
Gracias a Dios (3)	2	1	0	0	0
Intibucá (14)	8	5	1	0	0
Islas de la Bahía (0)	0	0	0	0	0
La Paz (11)	8	3	0	0	0
Lempira (13)	7	5	1	0	0
Ocotepeque (3)	2	1	0	0	0
Olancho (10)	6	4	0	0	0
Santa Bárbara (9)	6	2	1	0	0
Valle (4)	2	2	0	0	0
Yoro (12)	7	4	1	0	0
Total (154)	95	47	12	0	0

In each of the seventeen departments of mainland Honduras at least one church possesses a black Christ and celebrates the darkened image in major ceremonies.

In the collective mentality of Hondurans, five black Christ sites are generally considered to be the most important. They are among the older of sites and display some of the largest crucifixes -- factors that might be related to their importance. For Santa Lucía, Gualala, Lepaera, Cedros, and Quesailica it is widely accepted in Honduras that these images were placed in mining centers by King Philip II in 1572. However, questions arise when this notion is subjected to analysis because (a) 1572 pre-dates the original Christ of Esquipulas, (b) Gualala, Lepaera, and Quesailica are not mining centers, and (c) the earliest record of mining in the vicinity of Santa Lucía is 1578 (West 1959: 770). Based on documents from the Archivo General de Indias in Sevilla (AGI 1580), Prof. West notes further:

"The entire Santa Lucía range contained many silver deposits, most of which were discovered and worked during the colonial period. By 1580 possibly 1,000 mining claims had been registered within a five mile [8 km] radius of the Santa Lucía vein, but only 30 mines were in actual operation. According to severance tax records, silver production with the Tegucigalpa district increased sharply after the Santa Lucía discovery, the peak of the entire colonial period being reached in 1584 with 12,500 marcos produced."

Therefore, we might expect that, if Felipe II donated black Christs to mining communities in Honduras in thanks for their production, the gifts would have occurred at least ten years after the supposed date of 1572.

Aside from these five sites, a few others are nodes of significant historical pilgrimages for local areas, such as Liure, Jano, Chalmeca, and Veracruz.

Another fascinating aspect of the Esquipulas phenomenon is the recent, purposeful construction of new sanctuaries for the promotion of pilgrimages within Honduras. Examples can be found in Arena Blanca (south of El Progreso), a barrio of Choluteca, and Villa de San Antonio (south of Comayagua). This, of course, speaks to the vibrancy of the modern cult of Esquipulas.

Often the origins of the Black Christs found in churches today are lost in the past. Many parishioners have somewhat mythical explanations for the appearance of the "Esquipulas", but others are known to have been distributed by priests or members of the churches, many of whom have made a pilgrimage to Esquipulas, Guatemala, and returned home with a small Black Christ as a prized possession.

Map. 5-1. Black Christ sites in Honduras



Map 5-1 legend.

- 1 Ajuterique, 2 Alianza, 3 Alubarén, 4 Arada, 5 Aramecina, 6 Arena Blanca, 7 Arenal (Yoro), 8 Belén Gualcho, 9 Cedros, 10 Cerro Grance (Comayagua), 11 Chalmeca, 12 Chiligatoro, 13 Choluteca (Cathedral), 14 Choluteca (Santuario Sr. de Esquipulas), 15 Cololaca, 16 Colomoncagua, 17 Comayagua (Cathedral), 18 Comayagua (Capilla de Obispo), 19 Comayagua (casa cural), 20 Comayagua (Ig. La Merced), 21 Comayagua (Barrio Suyapa), 22 Concepción, 23 Copán Ruinas, 24 Coraycito, 25 Corozal, 26 Culmí (Dulce Nombre de), 27 Danlí, 28 Dolores (Intibucá), 29 El Capulín (Soledad, E. P.), 30 El Carbón, 31 El Corpus, 32 El Pinar, 33 El Plomo, 34 El Portillo, 35 El Triunfo, 36 El Triunfo de Esquipulas (Champerico), 37 Erandique (Ig. San Antonio, barrio Erandique), 38 Erandique (Ig. La Merced, barrio Santa Bárbara), 39 Esquías, 40. Esquipulas del Norte, 41 Fraternidad, 42 Gracias, Ig. San Marcos, 43 Guajiquirito, 44 Guajiquiro, 45 Gualala, 46 Gualcince, 47 Gualjoco, 48 Guarita, 49 Guayape, 50 Jacaleapa, 51 Jano, 52 Jesús de Otoro, 53 Jocón, 54 Juticalpa (Ig. Santa Clara), 55 La Campa, 56 La Ceiba, 57 La Conce, 58 La Esperanza, 59 La Iguala, 60 Langué, 61 Las Anonás, 62 Las Casitas, 63 Lejamaní, 64 Lepaera, 65 Liure, 66 Los Laureles (Opatoro, La Paz), 67 Luquigue, 68 Macora, 69 Manto, 70 Maraita, 71 Marale, 72 Marcala, 73 Matazano, 74 Morocelí, 75 Morolica, 76 Nacaome (Ig. San José), 77 Naranjito, 78 Nuevo Celilac, 79 Ojojona, 80 Ojos de Agua, 81 Opatoro, 82 Orica, 83 Palacios, 84 Palenque, 85 Pespire, 86 Potrerillos, 87 Quesailica, 88 Quilito, 89 Quimistán, 90 Sabanagrande, 91 Salamá, 92 Salitre La Capa, 93 San Antonio del Norte, 94 San Antonio de Occidente, 95 San Antonio de Oriente, 96 San Antonio de Tepesco, 97 San Esquipulas, 98 San Francisco (Lempira), 99 San Francisco Cone, 100 San Jose, 101 San José de Colinas, 102 San José del Potrero, 103 San José Reitoca, 104 San Juan (Intibucá), 105 San Juan (La Paz), 106 San Juan de Duyusupo, 107 San Lorenzo (Yoro), 108 San Lucas, 109 San Manuel Colohete, 110 San Marcos de la Sierra, 111 San Pedro Sula, Ig. El Carmen, Colonia El Carmen, 112 San Pedro Sula, Ig. Guadalupe, 113 San Pedro Sula, Ig. Señor de Esquipulas, Barrio Buenos Aires, 114 San Pedro Sula, Ig. Señor de Esquipulas, Colonia Gracias a Dios, 115 San Sebastián Colosuca, 116 San Vicente Centenario, 117 Santa

Ana (Cacauterique), 118 Santa Ana Yusguare, 119 Santa Bárbara, 120 Santa Cruz, 121 Santa Fe (Colón), 122 Santa Lucía, 123 Santa Rosa de Copán, 124 Suyapa, 125 Támara, 126 Tatumbra, 127 Tegucigalpa, Catedral de San Miguel, 128 Tegucigalpa, Galería Nacional de Arte, 129 Tegucigalpa, Ig. La Merced, 130 Tegucigalpa, Ig. San Francisco de Asís, 131 Tela , 132 Texíguat, 133 Trujillo, 134 Veracruz, 135 Victoria, Ig. Vieja, 136 Victoria, Ig. Nueva, 137 Villa de San Antonio, Ermita del Señor de Esquipulas, 138 Villa de San Antonio, Ig. Las Mercedes, 139 Yamaranguila, Alcaldía Lenca, 140 Yamaranguila, la iglesia, 141 Yoculateca, 142 Yorito, 143 Yoro, 144 Yuscaran, 145 Zamarano.

Not show on map: Azacualpa (Valle de, Intibucá, 4), Balfate, Cerro Grande (Valle de Angeles), Fray Lázaro (Choluteca), Plaplaya (GAD), San Francisco de la Paz (Olancho), and Trojes (E. P.).

2-Ajuterique, Ajuterique, Comayagua

Informants of Ajuterique, all members of the Catholic parish of Jesus Nazareno, recall that in the past their church held the black Christ that now abides upslope in Veracruz. Many years ago, long before the present generation, during a visit to Veracruz, the black Christ of Ajuterique became too heavy to remove from the little chapel in Veracruz and remains there until today. Each year during mid-January the priest and some parishioners from Ajuterique return to Veracruz to pay their respects to "El Señor de Veracruz."

A black Christ is not normally displayed in the church in Ajuterique, but one is shown in their annual procession in June.

Figs. 5-2/3. Church (2020) and black Christ of Ajuterique during procession (2022).



1-Alianza, Alianza, Valle

In the church of San José, in Alianza, the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia photographed a black Christ in 2005 that had recently been repainted. The wooden image, 45 centimeters tall and in typical form, hangs on a free-standing cross. Normally, it is placed next to the larger white Christ high on the altar. The settlement of 760 (INE 2001) is the cabecera municipalidad.

Fig. 5-4. El Cristo Negro, Alianza, 2005 (IHAH).

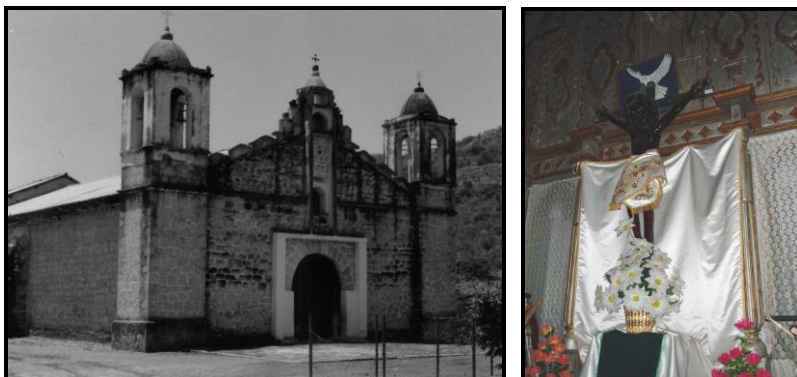


2-Alubarén, Alubarén, Francisco Morazán

San Lorenzo Alubarén (pob. 986, INE 2001) is one of the three old Lenca towns south of Tegucigalpa. It is the only one that has a black Christ. The 122 cm. tall Christ is the center-piece of the main altar. San Francisco de Reitoca formerly partnered with Alubarén in an exchange of saints. The third Lenca settlement nearby, Curaren, **some 12 kilometers** farther west and somewhat isolated because of a significant upslope, did not participate in the guancasco with Alubarén and Reitoca.

The small town nearest to Alubarén, San José de Reitoca, does have a small black Christ on the altar of the humble church. The mayordomo of the little chapel admitted they were influenced to buy their black Christ in Esquipulas by the presence of the Christ in Alubarén.

Figs. 5-5/6. Iglesia (1991) and Cristo Negro de Alubarén, 2007.



1-Arada, Arada, Santa Bárbara

Arada lies 11 kilometers southwest of Santa Bárbara, the departmental capital. Arada's population was 2,818 in 2001 (INE 2001). The *cristo negro* of Arada, cabecera of the municipio of the same name, has seen better days. The IHAH photograph from 2004 indicates that the wooden statuery, 100 cms. tall, has lost almost all of its fingers, from old age. In 2023, it was placed on the main altar.

Figs. 5-7/8/9. Church of Nuestra Señora del Tránsito (2020); the black Christ, Arada, 2004 (IHAH); black Christ on altar, 2023.

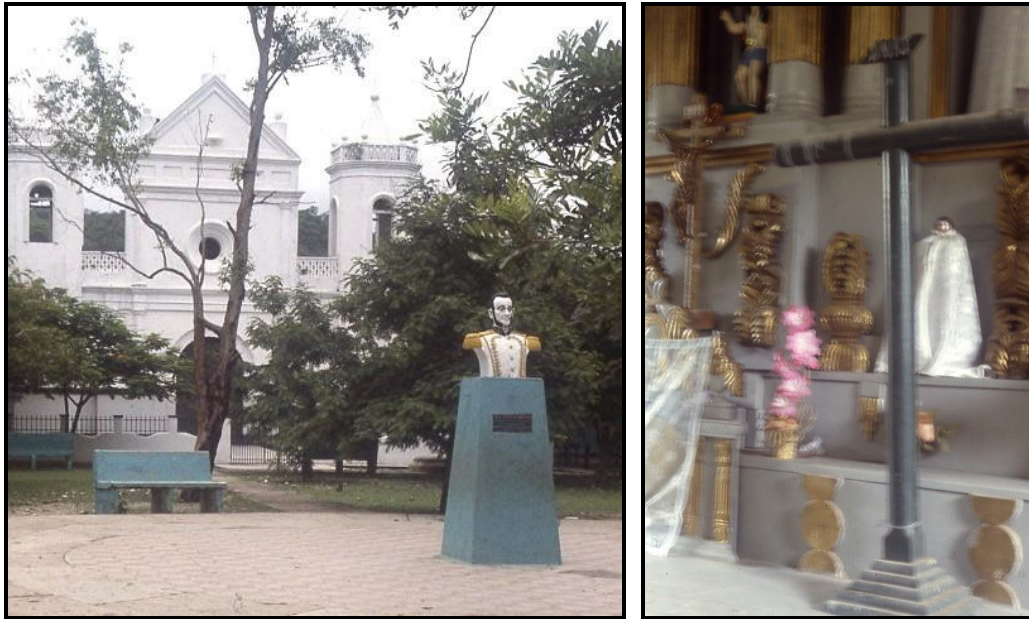


2-Aramecina, Aramecina, Valle

Although San Sebastian is the patron saint here, the church, which is properly centered on the east side of a formal plaza, for many years had a much-revered black Christ on its altar. Local informants cannot recall how long it had been in the church, but proclaim that during the invasion of Salvadoran soldiers in July, 1969, "El Cristo de Esquipulas" became missing. The empty black cross on the altar represents the missing black Christ.

Paz Solórzano (1949: 188) and Borhegyi (1954: 399) mention Aramesina as a black Christ shrine where edible tablets could be found. Indeed, modern residents admit that they consume "yeso," a type of pulverized clay, a gypsum, sulfate of lime, calcium carbonate often used in the manufacture of chalk. As evidence of its traditional nature, Aramesina is one of the few places in Honduras where, as late as 1994, the ancient Nahuatl term for market, *tianguí(s)*, was employed for its regular Sunday market. The settlement had a population of 1,033 according to the count of 2001(INE 2001).

Figs. 5-10/11. Iglesia de San Sebastián and vacant black cross, Aramecina, 1994.



3-Arena Blanca, El Progreso, Yoro

Some six kilometers south of El Progreso, the fastest growing Honduran city, on the eastern piedmont of the Uluá Valley, along the paved highway that heads south towards Santa Rita and Tegucigalpa, a sign announces "Sanctuario del Cristo Negro de Esquipulas." Turning eastward off the paved highway onto a gravel road, toward the mountains, one must pass next to two large ceibas that mark the entrance to a sacred landscape. The ceibas, perhaps 70-80 years old, obviously preceded the sanctuary, which was constructed in 1987-1988.

The small village of 546 people (INE 2001) swells in population in mid-January when thousands walk the Stations of the Cross along the dirt road and enter the grounds of the sanctuary. For the most part the visitors originate in the heavily inhabited Uluá Valley, coming from El Progreso, San Pedro Sula, Puerto Cortés, and Choloma. In 2004, over 5,000 pilgrims were counted by a reporter from San Pedro Sula on January 15th (Molina 2004: 26).

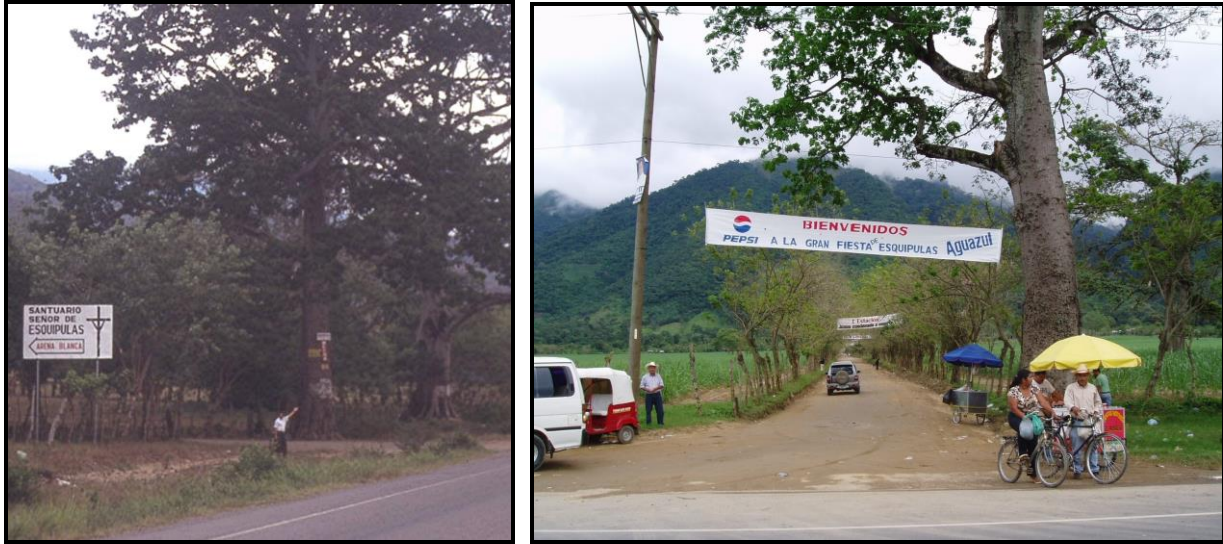
The impetus for the new site devoted to the black Christ seems to have been the notion of Padre Roberto Bandeira, from El Progreso. He found a major supporter of the project in the elderly head of the Basilio Fuschich (Hawit) family of El Progreso. A well-known and prosperous coffee grower, he knew of the famous pilgrimage site at Santiago Compostela, Spain, and to express his devotion and to eliminate the requirement of making the long trip to Esquipulas he offered land on which the sanctuary could be constructed.

The church and Esquipulas adornments are the most modern in Honduras. Pews are engraved with the cross of Santiago to signify the place's relationship to Compostela and the suspended Christ is quite colorful and modern.

Significant infrastructural developments have come because of the growing importance of the sacred site. In 2009 two large black Christs adorn the altar and a side chapel and the colorful air-borne Christ was gone. The national congress appropriated in 2007 funds to "empedrado"

the kilometer-long entranceway between the desvio on the highway and the sanctuary, but by the feria of 2009 none of the paving had commenced.

Figs. 5-12/13. Entrance from highway to Arena Blanca, with two large ceibas, Jan. 15, 1993; with one large ceiba, Jan. 15, 2009.



Figs. 5-14/15. Stations of the Cross; Pilgrims at Arena Blanca, 1995.



Figs. 5-16/17. Candles, wax, near the main altar; the suspended black Christ, 1995 (JK).

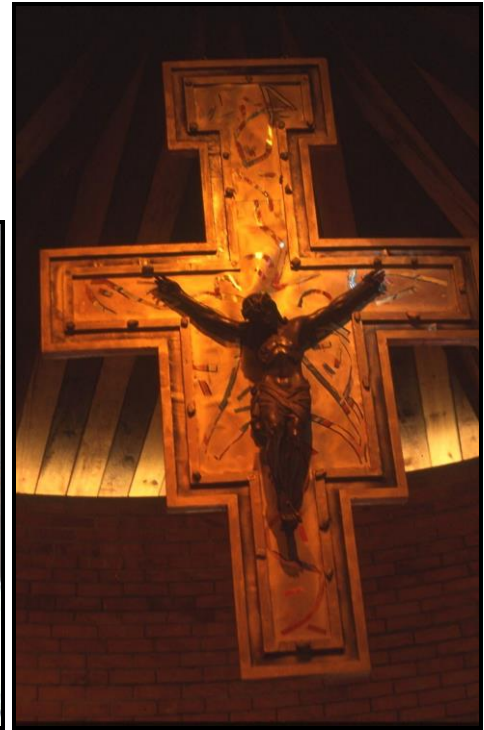


Fig. 5-18. Renovated interior, 2009.



Figs. 5-19/20. The new black Christs of Arena Blanca, 2009 (CR). Christ on south interior wall; on outside west wall.



1-Arenal, Arenal, Yoro

Local residents confirm that their church has a small black Christ on the main altar in Arenal.

Fig. 5-21. Catholic church in Arenal, 2022.



***Azacualpa (Llano de), Azacualpa, Intibucá (4)**

Eight km north of the Intibucá/La Esperanza urban complex is a cluster of rural churches that worship the black Christ. Three churches surround the large upland flat (ca. 6,400') generally known as "Azacualpa de Yamaranguilla," It is an area of some four sq. kms, with

significant, tho dispersed settlement throughout. Two other churches, nearby, but east of the valley, are at Chiligatoro (previously visited, see below) and on highway V-622 (Cruz Alta?).

The most impressive structure is the newly-constructed Santuario de San Miguel Arcángel, near the intersection of V-610 and V-617. It is a destination for pilgrims who have visited from as far away as Potrerillos, Pimenta, Cortés to see their black Christ.

Other valley churches are at El Tabor (V-16 x V-610 intersection) and San Juan Obrero (on V-616).

Figs. 5-22/23. Santuario de San Miguel Arcángel; main altar with black Christ (2023).



Figs. 5-24. Main altar of black Christ, San Juan Obrero, 2022.



Figs. 5-25/26. Newly-erected black Christ churches at El Tabor; Cruz Alta, 2021.



***2-Balfate, Balfate, Colón**

Beginning January 15th each year, Parroquia San Esteban in Balfate places a large black Christ on its main altar for a couple of months.

Figs. 5-27/28. Iglesia San Esteban and black Christ, Balfate, 2023.



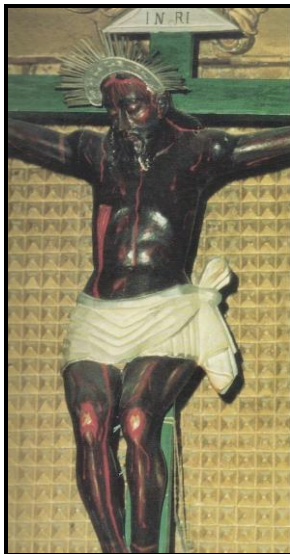
2-Belén Gualcho, Belén Gualcho, Ocotepeque

At 1,610 meters above sea level, Gualcho is one of the highest settlements in Honduras. It is isolated in the eastern sector of Ocotepeque and in 2001 the settlement had 2,182 people, 97% of whom declared themselves to be "Lenca." (INE 2001). The municipio has the highest proportion of Lenca population of any in the country.

Two black Christs are within the elaborate church. The larger one, approximately 100 cm tall is on the primary altar. The smaller image, of some 33 cm, is on a moveable free-standing cross.

Gualcho is a site that Borhegyi (1954: 399) claimed had clay tablets from Esquipulas. Also, GFEAH 2000: 47.

Figs. 5-29/30/31. Iglesia de Gualcho, 2006 (JB), main Black Christ, Gualcho, 2000 (IHAH), smaller black Christ, Gualcho, 2000 (IHAH).



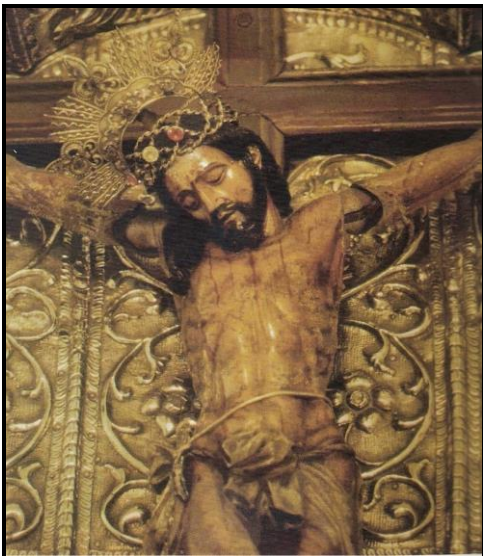
3-Cedros, Cedros, Francisco Morazán

It is often said that the black Christ of Cedros, El Cristo Negro or El Señor de Buen Fin, was a gift to the mining community of Cedros from King Felipe II, in the sixteenth century. This seems unlikely because documentary evidence suggests the mining community developed only in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1752 it was known as "Mineral del Señor San Joseph de los Zedros."

"La feria patronal dedicada al Señor del Buen Fin o Cristo Negro, se conmemora entre el 7 y 15 de enero de cada año, tiempo durante el cual a la sombra de la festividad religiosa, se organizan bailes, juegos pirotécnicos y presentaciones escolares. Por supuesto, también se disfruta de los platos típicos de la región y sus alrededores." (Palacios y Aguilar 1991: 40)

Within the well preserved church the "black Christ" is framed in neon light on the altar. Closer inspection reveals El Cristo Negro is far from black (Anon. 1909; GFEAH 2000: 166).

Figs. 5-32/33/34. Church in Cedros, 1994; altar of church, Cedros, 1994; detail of El Señor de Buen Fin, 2000 (GFEAH).



1-Cerro Grande, San Jerónimo, Comayagua

The presence of a black Christ was reported here in 1994 (Horst 1994).

*1-Cerro Grande, Valle de Angeles, F. M.

Aldea Cerro Grande is 3.5 km south of the Santa Lucía-Valle de Angeles road on highway V-828. The tiny chapel has a small black Christ within. The large double-trunk ceiba in front of the church hosts a sign depicting the iconic Esquipulas picture with the words “Cuida Nuestro Templo.”

Figs. 5-35/36. Chapel and Esquipulas sign on ceiba trunk (2019 Luis Sánchez).



2-Chalmeca, Yoro, Yoro

Chalmeca is a small caserío just off the main road between Olanchito and Yoro, about nine kilometers northeast of Ciudad Yoro. During the eighteenth century it was probably on the Trujillo-Comayagua camino real. Only 191 people were reported there in the 2001 censo (INEC 2001). In spite of its small size, the settlement has an important black Christ history. Local folks will proudly direct visitors to ruins of the early church of their black Christ and show you their new church as well.

An account of El Señor de las Esquipulas de Chalmeca was given by Antúñez C. in his *Monografía de Yoro* (1937):

"Chalmeca es un caserío de la aldea de la Guata en el municipio de Yoro. Dista de la ciudad cabecera como tres leguas. En la margen derecha del río Jalegua, se expande una pequeña *planada* que dista como dos kilómetros al Sur Oeste del caserío.

Un día -- de aquellos años ya lejanos, de la era del coloniaje -- unos cazadores vagaban por las praderas próximas, y al pie de una encina que se ergía en la pequeña *planada*, encontraron llenos de gran

júbilo al Señor de las Esquipulas que estaba envuelto en una roída *capita de paño*.

Dispusieron los que tuvieron la suerte del hallazgo, construirle un templo en aquel mismo lugar cuyas ruinas son objeto de gratas remembranzas. Varias familias allí construyeron sus casas y llegó a ser un pequeño pueblo; pero algún tiempo después lo abandonaron; ignorándose el motivo; y el santo fué donado a una señora María Solórzano, quien vivió en el actual caserío, muriendo a la avanzada edad de ciento diez años.

Es el Señor de las Esquipulas un santo muy milagroso; y se le ha Construido una pequeña ermita. Como las caravanas de romeros que agradecidos van a visitar la Virgen de Suyapa, así las personas que fueron oídas en sus ruegos se encaminan al caserío de Chalmeca a tributarle homenaje al milagroso Señor de las Esquipulas. Es maravilloso el conjunto de milagros que ostenta.

Una anciana que lleva en sus venas la sangre purísima de los siervos del Señor relata, que sus abuelitos decían que el pueblo fué abandonado, porque los españoles trajeron a estas regiones como cien familias negras vicentinas, lo que les disgustó profundamente, pues ellos eran de la raza autóctona y odiaban a la gente de color; encaminándose al pueblo de Jocón. También asegúrase que por allí cerca se explotó en aquellos tiempos una rica mina de oro."

In modern times Chalmeca celebrates their black Christ during the first two weeks of January. They also share an exchange of saints with Salitre la Capa and host a modest local pilgrimage.

Figs. 5-37/38. Chalmeca: modern church and ruins of old church of black Christ, geographer Scott Brady, sitting atop, 1993.





1-Chiligatoro (La Laguna de), Intibucá, Intibucá

Residents of Yamaranguila and Intibucá have a special affection for the black Christ that occupies the new church in La Laguna de Chiligatoro, a settlement of some 648 people (INE 2001), ten kilometers north of La Esperanza. The cement church, 20 x 40 varas in size, seems rather large for the rural environment of dispersed settlement. Informants say, however, that up to 1,000 people have access to the church and visit its black Christ when a priest comes every two weeks. The church, Las Mercedes, was constructed in 2005; its large black Christ de Esquipulas was bought in Guatemala City by church officials in La Esperanza. Construction on its main altar was still underway in January 2008.

Figs. 5-39/40. Church in the mist, Chiligatoro, January, 2008; altar of El Señor de Esquipulas, Chiligatoro, 2008 (CR).



Choluteca, Choluteca, Choluteca

1-Catedral

The smaller image of the black Christ now used in the Santuario del Señor de Esquipulas in Choluteca as the procession image was once displayed in the cathedral of Choluteca.

Fig. 5-41. The cathedral, Choluteca, 2007.



3-Santuario del Señor de Esquipulas (2)

In the barrio of Santa Lucía, adjacent to the boundary of barrio El Porvenir, in the northwestern sector of Choluteca, is a relatively new complex of buildings constructed to honor the black Christ of Esquipulas. After entering the colorful portal, the modern church is on the immediate left. Several other buildings and gardens are included in the beautifully arranged setting. This sanctuary is the most elaborate recent example of places erected specifically to celebrate the Christ of Esquipulas.

Two black Christs are within the church. The larger one, centered on the altar, is the **largest black Christ in the Americas** (1.86 m. tall). It was ordered especially for the new santuario after its construction. The image was carved in Spain by the famous sculptor Jesús Méndez Lastrucci, who has produced well-known likenesses of Picasso and Elvis Presley (2007).

The smaller image, formerly in the cathedral of Choluteca, was the inspiration for the new santuario. Its history is told by the designer and initiator of the Esquipulas complex in Choluteca, Padre Alejandro López Tuero in Appendix E of the Spanish edition. Padre Alejandro is a dynamic and personable Cuban-born priest, vicar of the Iglesia de San José Obrero in Choluteca, host parish of the sanctuary, and president of the Asociación San José Obrero foto.

Signs throughout southern Honduras direct visitors to the shrine.
Also, see Navarrete C. 2007.

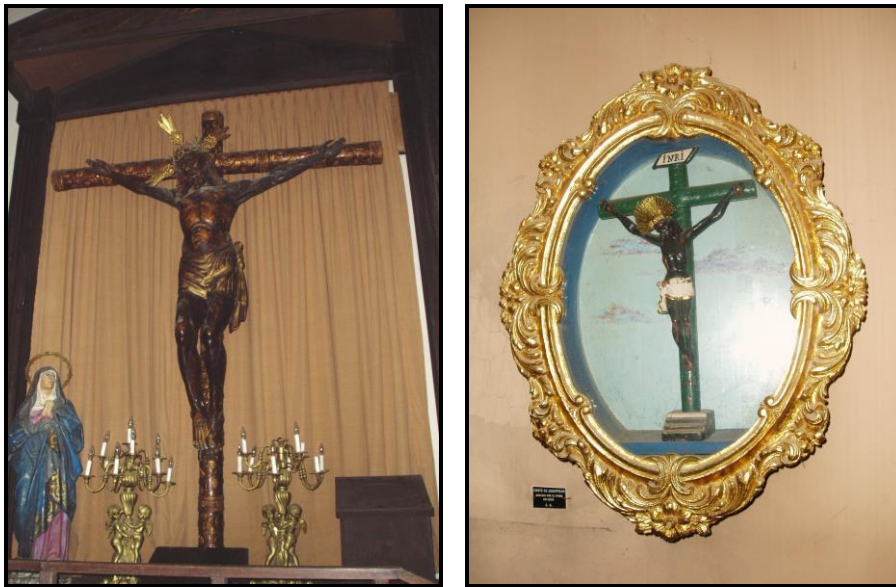
Fig. 5-42. Portal, Santuario del Santo Cristo de Esquipulas, Choluteca, 2007.



Fig.5-43. Iglesia, Santuario del Santo Cristo de Esquipulas, Choluteca, 2007.



Figs. 5-44/45. Altar de la Iglesia, 2007; Imagencita on side wall of the Señor de Esquipulas, 2007.



Figs. 5- 46/47/48. Padre Alejandro, 2007; highway sign east of Choluteca, 2007; announcement of excursión to Esquipulas sanctuary in Choluteca, Orocuina, 2008.

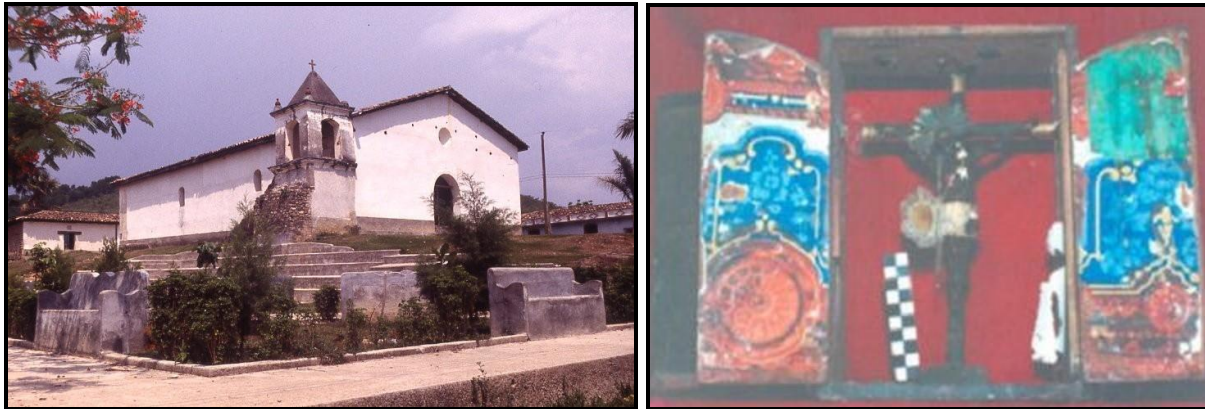


Colohete, San Manuel de (also, Coloete), see San Manuel Colohete, Lempira

1-Cololaca, Cololaca, Lempira

Within la Iglesia de la Virgen de la Candelaria, the small black Christ, carved of a single piece of wood, is enclosed in a wooden nicho. Apparently, on occasion, "Esquipulas" goes in procession. February 2 is the day of major celebration in the village.

Figs. 5-49/50. Cololaca church, 1993; Cristo Negro en nicho, Cololaca, 2004 (IHAH).



1-Colomoncagua, Colomoncagua, Intibucá (2)

Colomoncagua is an elongated, ridgeline settlement of 758 residents (INE 2001). It is surrounded by mountainous terrain at 940 m near the border with El Salvador. In unusual fashion the town has two Catholic churches and each has a black Christ. A very small (17x17cms.) black Christ adorns the main altar in Iglesia de San Sebastian residing in a colorful niche. Iglesia de San Pedro de Colomoncagua, the namesake of the town, hosts the second *cristo negro*, which is 17 cm tall on a free-standing cross. San Pedro also features a black Christ (Jesus de Rescate) on one of its front towers.

Figs. 5-51/52. Iglesia San Pablo, Colomoncagua, 2020.



Figs. 5-53/54. Esquipulas in nicho, Iglesia San Sebastián, Colomoncagua, 2004 (IHAH; Cristo negro, Iglesia San Pedro, Colomoncagua, 2004 (IHAH).



Comayagua, Comayagua, Comayagua

Comayagua, the colonial capital and center of the Honduran church for most of the country's history, is home to at least six black Christs.

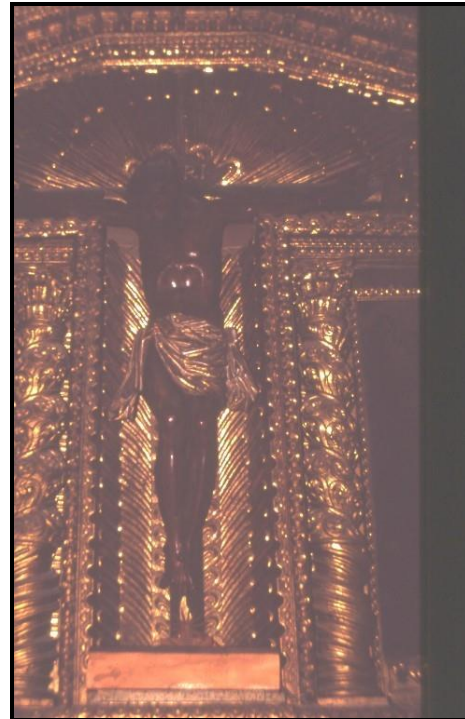
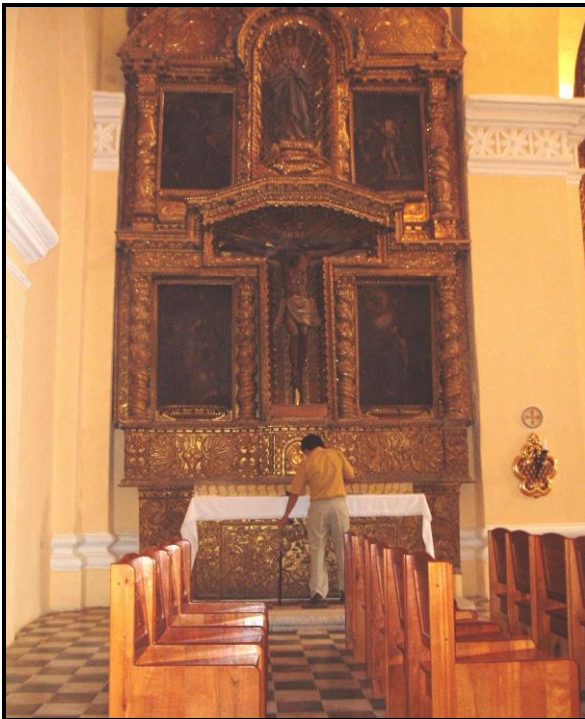
1-Cathedral

The most important structure is formally known as "La Catedral de la Inmaculata Concepción," Many consider "El Señor de Salomé," a large dark Christ that occupies a prominent position in the retablo to the left of the main altar in the cathedral, to be a black Christ. Most often, he is referred to as "de policromía morena" (Martínez C. 1992: 44; Palacios y Aguilar 2001). In spite of being honored with a mass on January 15th, it said that Salomé is not related to the black Christ of Esquipulas. The Salomé of Comayagua was sculptured in Spain -- a copy of the original in the Cathedral of Barcelona and hence, related to the Spanish Admiral's Christ in the Battle of Lepanto, which according to legend was black.

Fig. 5-55. The cathedral, Comayagua, 2007.



Figs. 5-56/57. Señor de Salomé, Catedral, Comayagua (2007).



2-Capilla del Obispo

The only life-sized black Christ in Comayagua that is personally owned is that of the long-time Bishop of Comayagua, Geraldo Scarponi, O. F. M. of Boston. About 1993, the mayordomo of the church in Lamaní, a small town 30 kilometers south of Comayagua in the upper Humuya Valley, found a weathered "Cristo Crucificado" outside the church, at the foot of the bell tower. Being devoted to the Christ of Esquipulas, the man brought the decaying statue to Comayagua and hired a local man, Antonio Bulnes, to restore it. The original figure, without a full face, feet, and hands, was re-carved and painted dark black to cover the imperfections. Until 2002, the Bishop displayed it in his personal chapel in his residence across from the cathedral and never thought of it as an Esquipulas Christ. On his retirement and move to Nicaragua, the Bishop placed the black Christ in the chapel of the Convent of the Claritan Sisters in Comayagua. Bishop Scarpone distributed small black Christs during his visitas to nearby communities and holds a special affinity for the Christ of Esquipulas because he was confirmed by Pope Paul VI on January 15, 1978. The Emeritus Bishop resided in the Seminario Redemptoris Mater in Managua until his death.

Figs. 5-58/59. The Bishop's black Christ in Comayagua; Bishop of Comayagua's crest, 1994.



1-Casa Cural

In 2003, the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia took a photograph of a large black Christ in the casa cural. The wooden image was described as "cristo negro crucificado, cristo muerto en color ocre y manto de castidad dorado sobre cruz de bolilloverde, repintado."

Fig. 5-60. Casa obispal, Comayagua, 2003.



2-La Merced (3)

Three features in what many claim is the oldest church in the early capital -- the Church of the Merced -- are black Christs. The most obvious is the very large rectangular painting hanging mid-way along the south wall. The central figure is a very black Christ in the setting with three other people as portrayed in Esquipulas, Guatemala. The second black Christ, a dark life-sized wooden statuery, dominates the altar of the southern vestibule. Judging from the number of devotees, this Christ appears to be the most revered object in the church. As of December 2006, the Christ in the southern vestibule, known as "El Cristo de la Vera Cruz," was undergoing restoration. Mario Martínez (1992: 55) reported that, on occasion, a small black Christ is placed on the retabló mayor. GFEAH 2000: 103

Fig. 5-61. Iglesia Merced, Comayagua, 2008.



Figs. 5-62/63. Detail, cristo of the southern vestibule, La Merced, Comayagua (2000 IHAH); Painting of El Señor de Esquipulas, La Merced, Comayagua, 2007.



1-Suyapa

In the barrio of Suyapa, northeast across the Río Chiquito from the center of the Comayagua, high on a hill, is a little chapel that, in 1994, was home to an 18-inch manufactured plastic black Christ. The figure, although centered on the main altar, is not the patron saint of the church.

Parishioners report that the little black Christ was placed in the church by a local woman returning from Esquipulas, Guatemala, in 1984. It is special for the local folks, but according to on-site informants, Suyapa, the *patrona* of the country, is more important. On a return trip in 2008, the altar was found without the cristo negro.

Figs. 5-64/65. Chapel and altar of Suyapa, 2008.



The other prominent churches in Comayagua (San Francisco, La Caridad, San Sebastián, and Santa Lucía), while often reported to have black Christs, on inspection do not.

1-Concepción (Guarajambala), Concepción, Intibucá

Concepción, a Lenca town some 30 kilometers south of Intibucá, was known earlier as "Guarajambala." The river of that name lies some four kilometers away. The church in Concepción is the site of a black Christ that shows the impact of time. As of January 2004, because of the great need of restoration, the Christ was removed from the church altar and stored in a room behind the altar. An earlier attempt to repair the feet and left of the Christ resulted in exaggerated sizes of the body parts. The newly restored pieces have been painted in a glossy black color that accentuates its inconsistencies.

Fig. 5-66. Church in Concepción, 2004.



Figs. 5-67/68. Details of restored image, Concepción, 2004.



1-Copán Ruinas, Copán Ruinas, Copán

The local church, Calvario, displayed in 1994 a framed painting of the black Christ of Esquipulas (Horst 1994). A search in 1991 found no black Christ in Copán Ruinas.

Fig. 5-69. Church on plaza, Copán Ruinas, 2022.



1-Coraycito, San José, Choluteca

Coraycito, a caserío of 266 residents (INE 2001), is the northernmost extension of the Departamento de Choluteca and under the diocese of Pespire. In 2004 a fire that destroyed a nearby pulperia spread to the church. Before being completely engrossed in flames, the church was entered and parishioners rescued their Christ from the main altar, but only after it had been charred. A new church was constructed by 2007 and today, their so-called "Cristo Quemado" is located on the wall in a room adjacent to the altar, used as the sacristía.

This the only verifiable case, to my knowledge, of a Christ actually being darkened because of a fire.

Fig. 5-70. The new church at Coraycito, 2007.



Figs. 5-71/72/73. The "Cristo Quemado" de Coraycito; detail of feet, 2007.



2-Corozal, Corozal, Atlántida (3)

Ten kilometers east of La Ceiba, along the Caribbean shore, lies Corozal, a Garífuna settlement of 2,116 (INE 2001). In the plain little Catholic church, a close inspection of the altar in 1996 revealed that three small black Christs are present, aligned one above the other -- largest at the top. Known as "Esquipulas," the black Christ serves as the patron saint of the village and is celebrated primarily on January 14 and 15, yearly. By 2009 the altar had been completely reorganized and displayed only two black Christs, one for procession.

Fig. 5-74. Catholic church in Corozal, 2009.



Figs. 5-75/76. Altar with three black Christs, Corozal, 1996; altar in 2009.



Fig. 5-77. The main altar, Corozal, 2009.



Figs. 5-78/79. Banner and black Christ for processions, Corozal, 2009.



The black Christs in Corozal cannot be of great age because the settlement is relatively young. According to informants in 1974, the site was established in 1884 by a few families from Santa Fe who had been working in the banana farms east of La Ceiba. The long trips between their home village (Santa Fe), which is just west of Trujillo, and the new work site prompted a group, led by the David family, to move closer to the farms permanently. When visited by the author in June 1974, Juan David was recognized as the headman and actually called *cacique* of the place. The Davids, who descended from one of the Garífuna captains on St. Vincent Island and Roatán Island, were joined by members of the Quitano family, who previously lived in Cristales, the western Garífuna barrio of Trujillo. Interestingly, the only other Garífuna settlement with a black Christ is Santa Fe, from which the Corozal founders supposedly originated.

An alternate account of the founding of Corozal, *Guruzalu* in Garífuna, credits the role of Manuel Cayetano, from San Antonio, in 1864 (Centeno García 2001: 113). It might be noted that, according to documents associated with the Garífuna land titles, one "Manuel Calletano" still resided in San Antonio in 1882 (ANH TT Colón 80).

Annually, newspaper accounts of the feria patronal in Corozal appear in newspapers from San Pedro Sula. The following is one such account:

"La comunidad garífuna de Corozal, La Ceiba, Atlántida, celebra su tradicional feria patronal del 6 al 21 de enero, tiempo en el que desarrollarán un amplio programa social y cultural. Los festejos

están dedicados al Señor de Esquipulas y para celebrarlo se coronará a Nanci David y Marleni Guití como reinas juvenil e infantil, respectivamente. Entre las actuaciones artísticas programadas están las presentaciones de las danzas coropatía, guanaragua, gunchei, hunguy, moros y cristianos, y maipol. Además habrán encuentros deportivos, radioteatro, y concurso de oratorio. El punto principal del programa cultural será la exposición ecológica "Amor a la naturaleza . . . Escrito ecológico para la vida desde Corozal hasta el infinito", de Pablo Antonio Cháve."
(*La Prensa* [San Pedro Sula] 9 enero 1996: 8B)

1-Culmí, Dulce Nombre de Culmí, Olancho

Many informants in Olancho have reported a black Christ from Culmí, but visits over the years have failed to reveal one.

Fig. 5-80. The church at Culmí, 1995 (JRS).



1-Danlí, Danlí, El Paraíso

Informants report una lamina colorado en una custodia of the church in Danlí (Flores Andino 2007).

Fig. 5-81. The church in Danlí, 2007.



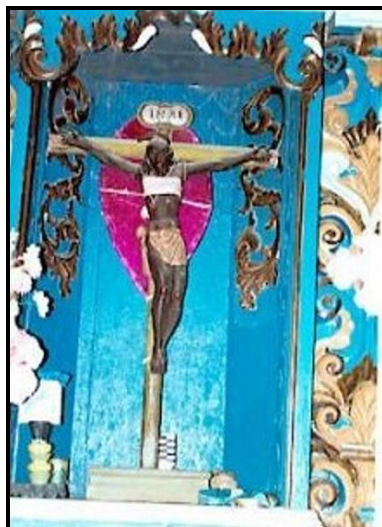
1-Dolores, Dolores, Intibucá

This settlement is relatively isolated at the end of a road running south from San Miguel Guancapla. One wooden black Christ, about 100 cm tall, is centered on the main altar. Another is “en nicho” for processions.

Figs. 5-82/83. Church and main altar, Dolores, Intibucá, 2022.



Fig. 5-84. The "en nicho" black Christ of Dolores, 2000 (IHAH).



1-El Capulín, Soledad, El Paraíso

Informants participating in the romeria in Liure in 2008 mentioned El Capulín as the nearest black Christ site, some ten kilometers to the west-north-west of Liure and just north of Soledad. Residents of El Capulín visit Liure regularly for the January 15 event.

2-El Carbón, San Estebán, Olancho (also, Santa María del Carbón)

The Pech, an indigenous people in eastern Olancho, have occupied the region around El Carbón for centuries (Samson 1997). Title to the lands around their settlement was procured with the aid of the famous Spanish missionary, padre Manuel Subirana, in Honduras known as "el Padre Santo." Today, El Carbón is a growing aldea on the improved main road between Olancho and Trujillo. By 2001 the population had increased to 686 (INE 2001).

Residents proclaim "El Señor de Esquipulas" as their patron and celebrate his day on January 15, the day when Subirana concluded the survey of their lands in 1862 (Davidson 1984: 453). This date seems too much of a coincidence, and begs the questions: "Did padre Subirana know of Esquipulas? Did he visit the Guatemalan site?"

The small black Christ is almost hidden within the nicho on the altar of the church.

Figs. 5-85/86. Church and black Christ, El Carbón, 1993 (JRS).



1-El Corpus, El Corpus, Choluteca

Informants born and reared in El Corpus, but now living in central Honduras, remember that a black Christ is in the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Purificación in the colonial period mining community. Given the propensity for mining centers in Honduras to house black Christs (*ie.*, Cedros, Santa Lucía, Yuscarán, etc.), it would not be surprising to find one there. Local informants say their black Christ is small. We never saw it while looking throughout the church.

Fig. 5-87. Church in El Corpus, 2008.



1-El Pinar, Guajiquiro, La Paz

When the Bishop of Comayagua, the Reverend Geraldo Scarponi, passed through the small town of El Pinar on March 18, 1993, he left behind as a gift to the town a small Black Christ.

1-El Plomo, Juticalpa, Olancho

A resident of Juticalpa has reported the presence of a small black Christ in the church at El Plomo, just south of Juticalpa in the Guayape Valley (Bonta 2007).

2-El Portillo, Concordia, Olancho

East of Concordia, Olancho, seven km north of the main highway to Juticalpa lies the small caserío of El Portillo, population 275 (INE 2001). The tiny west-facing hermita (foto A), is normally closed -- there is no resident priest -- and the mayordomo who keeps the key to the front door, is often away from the village. However, when present, he is an enthusiastic and devoted follower of his little black Christ. His family, the Murrillos, have always cared for the sacred image. When asked if the black Christ in the chapel ever ventured from his home, to go on processions for example, the mayordomo exclaimed with much gusto: "El cristo no sale, el cristo no sale, nunca, nunca."

The small black Christ was said to have been found in the quebrada near the chapel along the road to Concordia. A ceiba, aligned with the front of the chapel was planted nearby at the time its construction in 1972. The stream enters the Río Guayape less than two km to the northeast where placer mining has occurred for years.

Fig. 5-88. The hermita at El Portillo, 1994.



2-El Triunfo, El Triunfo, Choluteca

During the 1930s, when El Triunfo was in the municipio of El Corpus, the town was considered so close to Nicaragua that the people on each side of the border shared customs (Galindo y Galindo 1933: 65). Two festivals were held each year: August 30 was the day of Santa Rosa and January 14 was the day for El Señor de Esquipulas. After 75 years, much seems the same. The residents of El Triunfo visit Somotillo and other nearby towns in Nicaragua for market days and they enjoy annual trips to El Sauce, Nicaragua, to adore the black Christ there. But over the years the date of the festival of the black Christ has changed in El Triunfo.

Today a small black Christ has been placed into an inset into the right wall of the church. Origins of the image can be traced, according to local informants, to an elderly woman who lived in the caserío of Los Calpules (pob. 204, INE 2001), some six kilometers from El Triunfo. She was a devoted Guatemalan who had brought a small example of the black Christ of Esquipulas with her, "generations ago." As her health declined she decided to place the image in the church in El Triunfo, today a much larger place (pob. 6,577, INE 2001). Because she placed the statue in the church on February 12, that day is now celebrated as "el Día del Señor de Esquipulas." In recognition of the original site of the black Christ, he is carried each year to Los Calpules on that day.

Another informant suggested that the normal date of Esquipulas, in mid-January, was abandoned so residents from El Triunfo could attend the larger festival in El Sauce, Nicaragua, some 60 kilometers to the southeast. A few say they walked the route via Guasaule, Somotillo, and Villa Nueva before reaching trails in the countryside that go directly to El Sauce. The trip of several days includes a stop-over to see the black Christ in Villa Nueva.

Another version of the origin of the black Christ was printed in *El Periódico* (Tegucigalpa) (Anon 1995). "El Triunfo celebra su feria patronal en honor al Señor de Esquipulas. When El Triunfo became a municipalidad on 14 February, 1885, it was named "El Triunfo de Esquipulas." According to history, the image that personifies "al Santo fue traída por una promesa desde Guatemala por el Señor Estanislao Juarez a la comunidad de Los Calpules y fue entregada 13 de febrero a la comunidad de El Triunfo. El color negro que presenta la imagen de cristo negro es debido a ceno idea que le recuerda cuando queda oscuro en el momento de la muerte de El Salvador." Yearly there are processions between El Triunfo and aldea Los Calpules – some three kms.

Today, the parish is officially named "El Cristo de Esquipulas." A crucified Christ is also on the official escudo of the municipio, but it is white.

Figs. 5-89/90/91. The church, black Christ, and escudo of El Triunfo, 2007.



1-El Triunfo de Esquipulas (Champerío), Tela, Atlántida

This aldea lies in the far western sector of the municipio of Tela. It is one of the communities (Ramal del Tigre area) just east of the lower Uluá that is subject to occasional flooding. According to the 1988 national census, the village had 35 houses, inhabited by 179 residents; in 2001 the census recorded a population of 162 (INE 2001). During the 1990s when the village acquired a black Christ from Esquipulas, Guatemala, it requested a name change to the settlement.

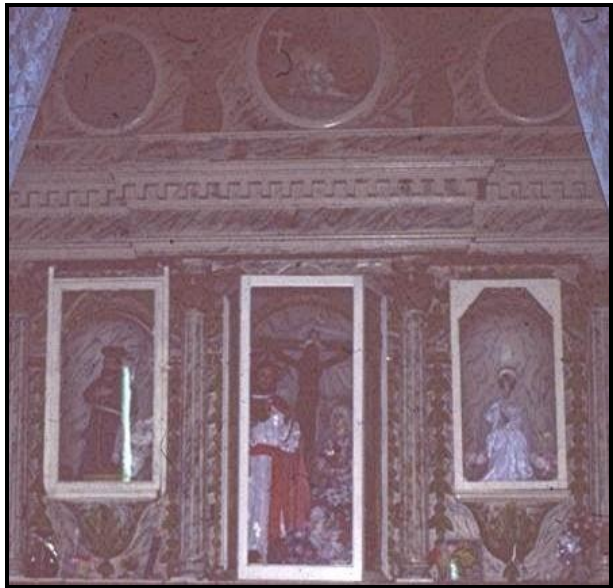
Erandique, Erandique, Lempira (2)

Judging from the relatively small size of the modern settlement (pob. 1,740, INE 2001) and the large number of colonial churches, Erandique apparently was a much more important place during earlier days. Because of the pattern of the churches and topography, it seems that the Spanish/Ladino population lived upslope in the center sector now known as Santa Bárbara in *El Centro*, while indigenous barrios were located down slope to the north (Gualmoaca, Gualmuaca) and to the south (Erandique). All of the churches are aligned, approximately, along the eastern edge of the town -- church doors open to the west, with altars to the east within the churches. The down slope barrios have, as part of their religious landscapes, large, old ceibas prominently located exactly in front of each church. San Sebastián, according to local legend, determined the location of the church in Gualmuaca -- at the foot of the large ceiba (Mitchell 1997: 213).

2-Erandique (Iglesia de San Antonio)

According to Shawn Mitchell, a geographer who worked in the region during the mid 1990s, El Cristo de Esquipulas in Erandique hangs in a glass case on the south, or right, wall of the old, interesting church. The ceiba directly in front of the church is suffering from a very old age and losing branches yearly.

Figs. 5-92/93. Iglesia San Antonio, Erandique, 1993; black Christ in Erandique, 1995 (SM).



2-Santa Bárbara (Iglesia de La Merced)

The church of Barrio Santa Bárbara, in el Centro, has La Virgen de La Merced as its patron saint. Within, however, is a Cristo Negro de Esquipulas. In addition to the Esquipulian celebrations of mid-January, Gualmoaca celebrates San Sebastián on January 20.

Figs. 5-94/95/96. Church of La Merced, Barrio Santa Bárbara, Erandique, 2023; with its black Christs of Esquipulas, 1991 (JRS).



2-Esquias, Esquias, Comayagua

The feria patronal of Esquias, a former mining center in northern Departamento de Comayagua, is January 15, in honor of El Señor de Esquipulas. Paz Solórzano (1949: 188) and Borhegyi (1954: 399) noted that Esquias has a shrine to black Christ. On the departmental maps of Salvat (1913) and Mendioroz (1912: 38-90) the settlement is shown as "Esquipulas."

Fiallos (1989: 62) explained that the name of the settlement comes from the great number of trees called *esquia* found in the nearby area. She probably is referring to the esquisuche (*Ehretia tinifolia*) or esquinsuche or jazmín (*Bourreria huanita*) (Nelson S. 1986: II, 462).

The small image of the *cristo negro*, with natural hair, was centered on the altar in 1994, but was located differently in later photos by IHAH and in 2000.

J. M. Escoto M. (Valle 1957: 184-85) provides the best explanation of the image's presence.

"... Una de el las [leyendas] es la de un Cristo que todavía, con menos fervor que antes, se venera en su templo. Allá por los primeros años de su fundación, érase que se era una viejecita de vieja. En un rastrojo, en busca de leña, encontróse un crucifijo ennegrecido, el cual llevo a su casa y en medio de flores guardó con llave bajo un baúl. La novedad fué grande entre los vecinos. Un día la viejecita quiso mostrarlo a los admiradores que querían verle, y, !oh sorpresa! había desaparecido. Las lágrimas se agolparon en los ojos de la pobre, y desalentada los condujo al lugar donde había dado con el hallazgo. !Oh asombro! Estaba allí. Sí, estaba allí, en el mismo sitio, con el mismo color negro, el mismo crucifijo.

Lo llevaron en procesión entre el jubilo, las lágrimas de emoción y los sollozos de la viejecita regocijada. Se cambiaron flores y lo embaularon. Eso fué lo malo. Cuando lo buscaron no estaba allí. Y para ello tenía razón: visto estaba que no quería estar en un baúl.

Hubo alguien que hizo alguna objeción y entonces le construyeron una casucha cubierta de paja, en la que también os diré que no quiso estar, puesto que, según la tradición, salió y se volvió a donde tenía por abrigo el azul de los cielos.

Se regó la noticia del hallazgo; más aún, la de los milagros, porque habéis de saberlo, goza de tal reputación. Las gentes acudieron; las limosnas crecieron lo suficiente para llamarse caudal, y he aquí que le levantaron un templo. Un hermoso templo, como no lo tiene cualquier pueblo de Honduras. Casi su edad es la de un siglo. Y lo construyeron en el mismo sitio donde el Cristo solía estar.

Detrás de esta iglesia como antes un pequeño arroyo, que dicen salía de los pies del negro señor de Esquipulas, cuya agua era tibia y medicinal. Ha cambiado de curso, ¿sabéis por qué? Porque hoy no se le venera como antes, con la fe y devoción de entonces. Eso no es lo que digo yo, me lo asegura y quiere convencerme de ello un octogenario de aquella época. Tal es una de tantas leyendas como las hay en este lugar, que aun le dan el nombre de pueblo, aunque realmente no lo merece ya. Hoy es un lugar solitario, aislado, que cual un abuelo, os puede contar sus añoranzas, sus alegrías, sus emociones pasadas."

(GFEAH (2000: 183, 185)

Fig. 5-97. The church in Esquipulas, 2000.



Figs. 5-98/99/100. Altar of church in Esquias, 1994; Cristo negro de Esquipulas, Esquias, 2000 (IHAH); Cristo Negro de Esquias, 2000 (GFEAH).



Figs. 5-101/102. Cristo Negro, Esquias, 2000 (IHAH; GFEAH).



2-Esquipulas del Norte, Esquipulas del Norte, Olancho (3)

Before the place gained the status of *municipio* in 1896, it was named Azacualpa and politically attached to the *cabecera* at Jano, Olancho. In 1887 its population was 225 (Vallejo 1888); today 549 people live there (INE 2001). Perhaps Azacualpa took the name Esquipulas, because it was under the jurisdiction of Jano, a place long-famous for its "black Christ." Esquipulas del Norte holds its feria for "El Señor de Esquipulas" on January 14.

The church is very small, as is the altar, which often supports three black Christs -- one is a small image hidden in a floral arrangement in the center of the altar. Also, on the right and left are small replicas of the Esquipulas scene. On the right is a page-sized print covered by glass; to the left is the scene in three-dimension in a nicho. Borhegyi (1954: 399) noted this to be a place of a "shrine and tablets," but given the size of the settlement and its remote location, this seems unlikely. Informants in 1991 knew nothing of the clay tablets produced in Esquipulas, Guatemala. About 30 years ago, a ceiba was planted at the entrance into the town.

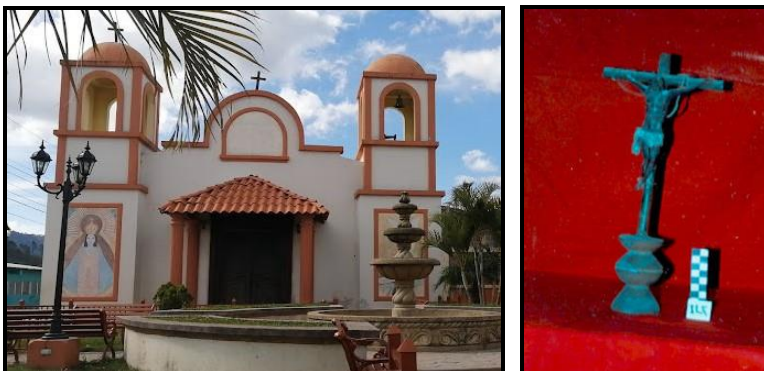
Figs. 5-103/104. Church and altar in Esquipulas del Norte, 1991.



1-Fraternidad, Fraternidad, Ocotepeque

The black Christ in the church at Fraternidad is a carving 13 cm tall, on a free-standing cross. Wooden portions of its upper body and head are in a state of deterioration.

Figs. 5-105/106. The church (2021) and black Christ in Fraternidad, 2004 (IHAH).



***2-Fray Lázaro, Choluteca**

In this aldea, some five miles northwest of Choluteca city, along highway V-287, is a rural church known as la Iglesia Cristo de Esquipulas.

Gracias, Gracias, Lempira

Gracias, the modern capital of the department of Lempira, has been one of the most important places since the earliest days of Spanish colonization. It was founded by in 1536 (Lunardi 1946: 47; **Aguilar y Palacios 1991**) and by 1544 it had become the capital of Central America, that is, the Audiencia de los Confines. Like the other early administrative centers (Antigua, Comayagua, León, Granada, Cartago) Gracias a Dios was occupied by several religious orders and the modern landscape reflects this in numerous churches and convents (Woodward 19876 36).

Today, four barrios are represented by four significant churches. The former indigenous sector (Las Mercedes, now rarely opened) is the only church that faces to the south. Santa Lucía, to the south of town at Mejicapa, formerly served the barrio of Mexican soldiers. San Sebastián, which opens to the east, unfortunately, has recently fallen into disuse.

1-San Marcos (2)

Among the churches of Gracias only the main Catedral de San Marcos has a small black Christ. The image, known as "El Señor de Esquipulas," was brought "some years ago" from Guatemala by a priest, and is imbedded into the right wall as one faces the altar. Apparently, the church owns another black Christ that is placed in the church on occasion (Mitchell 1997: 213). Perhaps this is the one Flores Andino (2007) learned was there in a document from 1867.

Figs. 5-107/108. San Marcos catedral and black Christ, Gracias, 1994.



1-Guajiquirito, Guajiquiro, La Paz

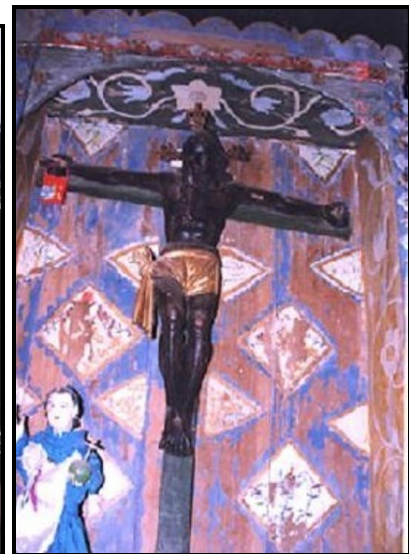
Guajiquirito is a small village of some 287 residents (INE 2001) about six kilometers down slope (a 1.5 hours walk in the mountains) from Guajiquiro. From the site, one can see volcano San Miguel, some 70 kilometers away in El Salvador. In 1997, the settlement had no formal Catholic church building, but parishioners meet regularly in the same home, wherein is located a small Black Christ statuery. The Christ is known locally as "Jesús de las Misericordias" and was brought to Quajiquirito by Monseñor Geraldo Scarponi from Comayagua in 1987. There is no other statuery in the house. They celebrate the "feast of Esquipulas" on the 15th of January and some residents have taken the trip to Esquipulas, Guatemala.

2-Guajiquiro, Guajiquiro, La Paz

Located at 1,890 meters above sea level, this settlement is one of the highest in Honduras. Its rich history includes a visit by E. G. Squier in 1858. Geographer Scott A. Brady (2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2009) has worked here on occasion.

Although San Sebastián is patron saint of the parish, he is often joined on January 20 by "El Señor de Esquipulas," a three-fourths life sized image on the main altar. The black Christ here is said to be "very old," but is without a remembered history. During the last census (INE 2001) one-half of the 379 residents still declared they are "Lencas." Their Sunday markets are well attended and display participants in the most colorful dress in Honduras.

Figs. 5-109/110. Iglesia de San Sebastian and black Christ, Guajiquiro, 1993.



Figs. 5-111/112. Details, Cristo Negro, Guajiquiro (GFEAH 2000: 55); Sunday market scene, Guajiquiro, 1991 (JRS).



3-Gualala, Gualala, Santa Bárbara (2)

Deep in the heart of the middle Uluá Valley, twelve kilometers north and downstream of Santa Bárbara, is Gualala, one of the most important of Esquipulas sites in Honduras. Here "El Señor de Gualala" reigns in a setting that mirrors something of the originating model in Esquipulas, Guatemala. The large black Christ is accompanied by the Virgin Mary on his left. Stairs allow pilgrims to approach the image. A second image, in front of the altar, is always prepared for procession in a cross-shaped wooden box.

The origin and antiquity of the famous Christ are unknown, but as early as 1796, the small "pueblo de indios" was recognized as the site of an important "santo," "El Señor Crucificado de Gualala" (AEC 1796). Later, when the titulo de tierra for the settlement was being prepared in 1834, the surveyor began his measurement near the sacred image ("del camarín de la Yglesia del Señor de Gualala se puso el primer mojón sobre el cual puesta la Aguja del N Este" (ANH TT Santa Bárbara 150). A large concentration of ceibas along the nearby Uluá River adds to the sacred nature of the area.

During the fiestas of mid-January and the feria patronal, which is Day of the Santa Cruz on the third of May, the church is surrounded by booths erected for selling food and drink to several thousand visitors. The town had only 560 residents in 2001 (INE 2001).

Fig. 5-113. Iglesia del cristo negro, Gualala, 1994.



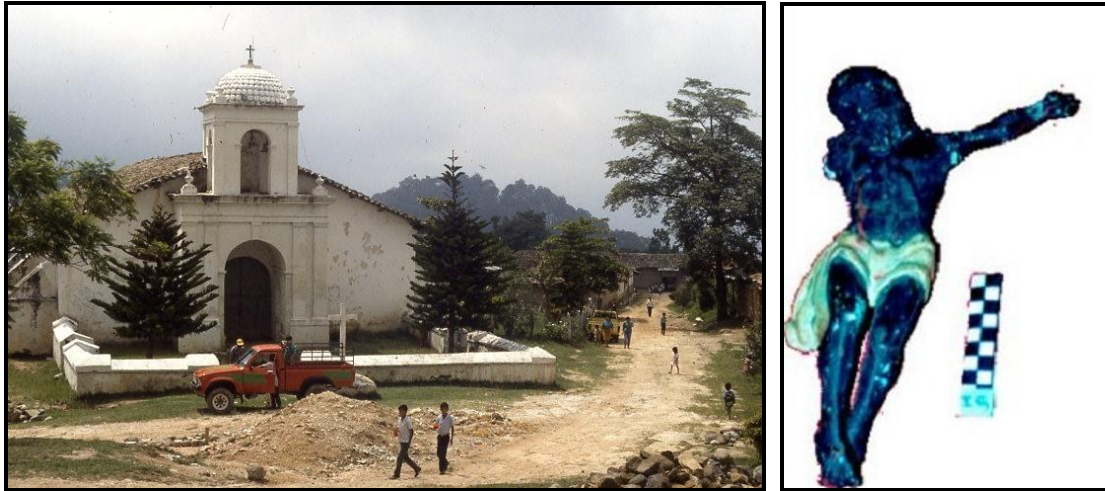
Figs. 5-114/115. Altar of the black Christ, with stairs; black Christ for processional, 1994 (JRS).



1-Gualcince, Gualcince, Lempira

In the church of the Inmaculada Concepción a small black Christ is located in the room behind the altar. The image is in a terrible state, having lost its right arm and being dislodged from its cross. Of course, December 8 is the most important celebration for inhabitants of Gualcince.

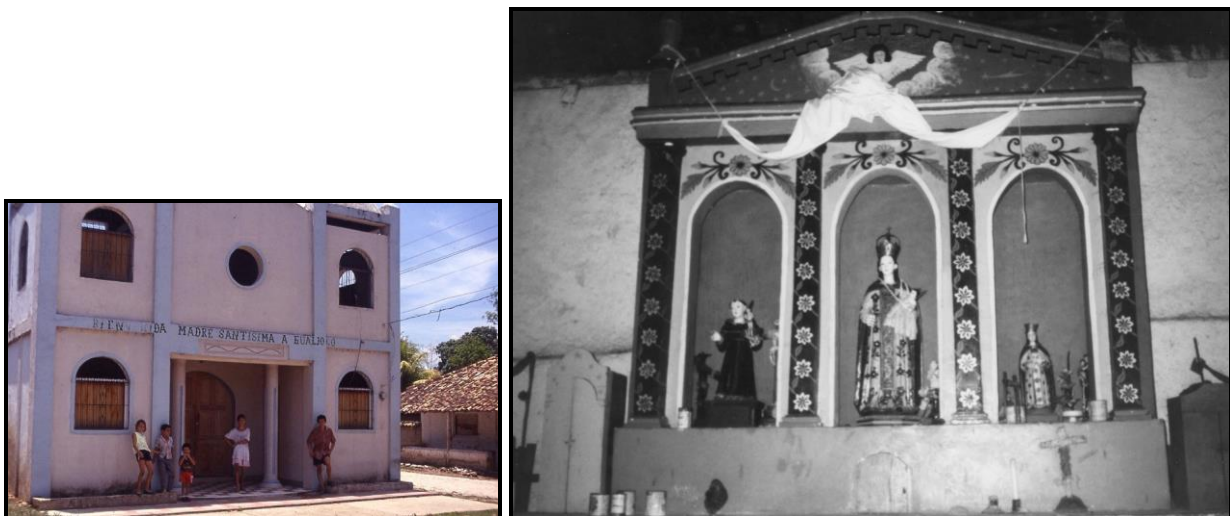
Figs. 5-116/117. The church (1993) and black Christ in Gualcince, 2004 (IHAH).



1-Gualjoco, Santa Bárbara, Santa Bárbara

The Spanish priest from the main church in Santa Bárbara, just down the road, placed the black Christ in Gualjoco when visiting in 1982. At that time the new church was erected on the site of a school. The small black Christ in Gualjoco has been placed to the far left of the altar. A larger stand alone black Christ was found in a back room 1993 (MR).

Figs. 5-118/119/120/121. Church and the altar, with small Cristo negro on left, Gualjoco, 1993.

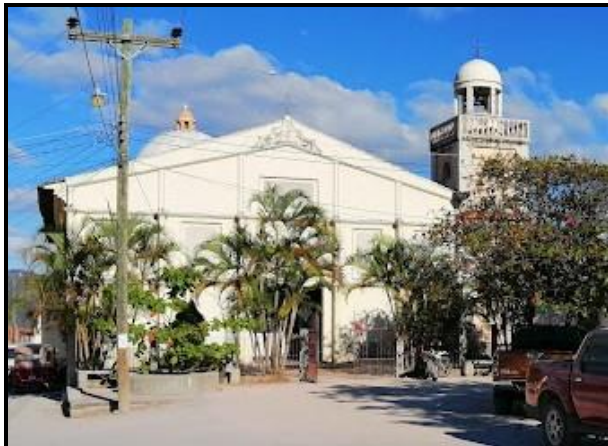




2-Guarita, Guarita, Lempira

In this settlement, only four km from El Salvador, residents honor between January 12 and 15 a black Christ of 85 cm tall known as "El Señor de Esquipulas" or, more frequently, "El Cristo Redentor" (Rivera 1988). According to the census of 2001, the town had only 565 residents (INE 2001). The church is remarkable for its large dome.

Figs. 5-122/123. Church and black Christ altar, Guarita, 2024.



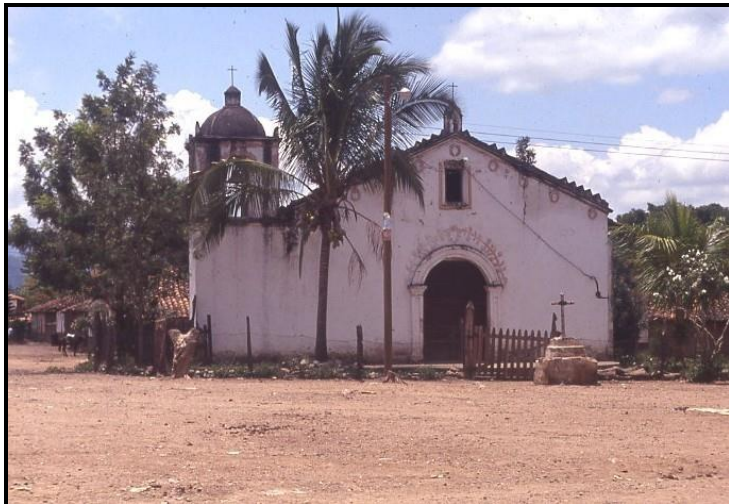
1-Guayape, Guayape, Olancho

The town, now cabecera municipal, lies far up the Guayape River towards its headwaters. For over a century, it has served as a gold mining center. During our visit in 1991, a few older

locals recalled that “long ago” the large black Christ in the church was stolen from the main altar. The church is somewhat unusual in being off-centered in relation to the plaza.

The black Christ now honored during the annual celebration on January 14-15 is a smaller one, de nicho, housed by Sra. Natalie Sanchez. She brought that one from Esquipulas, Guatemala, several years ago.

Figs. 5-123/124. The church and private nicho of the black Christ of Guayape, 1994.



Intibucá, Intibucá, Intibucá (see La Esperanza, Intibucá)

1-Jacaleapa, Jacaleapa, El Paraíso

A manuscript account, reported by Flores Andino (2007), indicates that the church had a wooden image of the black Christ of Esquipulas in 1867. No such statuary was found during our visit in 1994.

2-Jano, Jano, Olancho

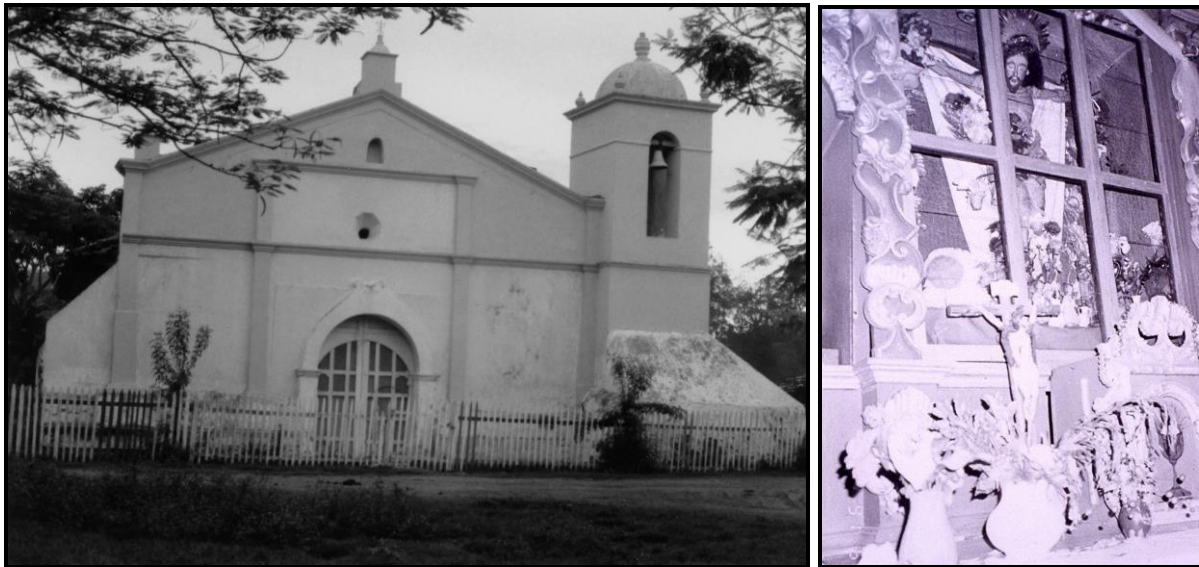
"El Señor de Jano" is the most beloved possession of the faithful in Jano, a small isolated aldea of some 786 residents (INE 2001) in western Olancho. It is also one of the most distinctive "black" Christs in its story of origin. In June, 1994, the mayordomo who lived just south of the church and kept the key to the front door of the church, related the story of the origins of the mid-sized **white** figure on the altar. Long ago the Christ, "el Señor de Jano," appeared in a field at Jano Viejo, a site nine kilometers to the northeast near the headwaters of the Río Jano. The area was previously occupied by the ancestors of the folks in modern Jano.

When asked by anthropologist Miles Richardson about the color of the "black Christ" in Jano, the mayordomo responded quickly, "El cristo es negro." Dr. Richardson continued his conversation by explaining that the color of the figure appeared, to him, to be white, but the mayordomo never waived in his insistence that the Christ was black, not "blanco." Although it might appear to some as "white," explained the mayordomo, the Christ is, in fact, "black." Once, he explained, many years ago, the village did have a black Christ on the altar, but one day, an evil person tried to steal the Christ. However, as the thief crossed the doorway leaving from the church, the Christ miraculously changed its color, becoming white. When seeing the color change, and that he now had only a mere white Christ, the evil man lost interest in the figure and dropped it in the doorway. Dogs in the village began to bark loudly and the thief, who was from a nearby town in Olancho, ran away.

The statue, which in fact is covered with a muted white paint, is celebrated especially in mid-January, but without any notion of a connection to Esquipulas.

The age of the image is unknown, but archival records from 1776, 1779, and 1787 (ANH-TT Olancho 124, 125 Mucupina) report a "cofradia del Señor Crucificado de Jano." Paz Solórzano (1949: 188) and Borhegyi (1954: 399) report the presence of the black Christ shrine in Jano.

Figs. 5-125/126. The church and El Señor de Jano, 1991 (MR).



2-Jesús de Otoro, Jesús de Otoro, Intibucá

Jesús de Otoro is the major town in the largest valley in the upper Ulúa watershed. During earlier times, before 1879, the site was known as Jurla (Fiallos 1989:195; Inestroza 2007). An ancient place, adjacent to the southeast, called San Juan de Quelala was a precedent settlement because the black Christ in the modern church in Jesús de Otoro is known as "El Señor de Quelala." Historian J. E. Inestroza (2007:173-205), in his excellent history of his native town, explains in detail the relationship between the places and the evolution of the black Christ and the previous symbol: "La Santa Veracruz" o "La Veracruz."

La Hermita (la Iglesia de Santa Cruz), located on the outskirts of the southern barrio of Santo Domingo, is a secondary site where the black Christ of Jesús de Otoro is often housed. While the main church in Jesús de Otoro was being restored in May 1993, "El Señor de Quelala" was housed in the Hermitage. The four-foot tall, very black statuary is revered especially during mid-January feria.

The subject of the origins of the black Christ has been undertaken by the historian of Jesús de Otoro, Inestroza (2007:200-201), who recorded the following legend more than thirty years ago.

"Cuentan los otoreños viejos que cuando se produjo el traslado del Cristo que se encontraba en la iglesia de Quelala a la iglesia de Juria en el siglo XVII tuvieron lugar hechos sobrenaturales que llenaron de sobresalto a los humildes habitantes del valle de Otoro. Sucedió que los quelalas decidieron abandonar su pueblo y entregar el Señor de la Santa Vera Cruz y todos sus santos que se encontraban en el retablo y nichos de la iglesia al pueblo de Jurla. En una procesión silenciosa los fieles compungidos llevaron sus imágenes sagradas al pueblo vecino, pero cuando se aproximaban a la puerta frontal de la iglesia los cargadores sintieron que el Cristo pesaba mucho, lo que les impedía ingresar al templo. Con gran trabajo lograron traspasar la puerta y apresuradamente colocaron el Cristo Negro en el centro del retablo, luego salieron silenciosos con sus corazones inundados de tristeza pues su santo patrono ya no pertenecía al pueblo de Quelala donde habían vivido desde tiempos antiguos.

El siguiente día de los hechos relatados un grupo de fieles de Jurla llegaron a su iglesia para rezar frente a la imagen del Cristo Negro y no lo encontraron. La venerada imagen apareció en el sitio que siempre había ocupado en la iglesia de Quelala. El acontecimiento llenó de miedo a los pocos vecinos que habían quedado en aquel pueblo, y nuevamente lo condujeron a Jurla y mientras caminaban con su cargo sagrada le pedían que aceptara su nueva casa, explicándole con palabras entrecortadas que el traslado obedecía a motivos de fuerza mayor, pues Quelala ya había desaparecido como pueblo y tenían la confianza de que los jurles lo adorarían y lo cuidarían por todos los siglos. Nuevamente sucedieron los hechos sobrenaturales del día anterior cuando trataron de introducir la imagen y el desaparecimiento misterioso por dos ocasiones más. Fue llamado el cura de Chinacla para que consagrara la imagen en el templo y la situación se normalizó".

Inestroza continues with variations on the origins of the famous black Christ of the Otoro Valley that is known as "El Cristo de Quelala."

"Una vieja leyenda que escuchamos cuando niños y que también fue recogida por Jesús Aguilar Paz, refiere que el Cristo del pueblo de Quelala desaparecía misteriosamente varias veces de su sitio en el retablo de la iglesia y siempre lo encontraban en una poza de la quebrada de Juria. Debido a este hecho sobrenatural los pobladores tomaron la decisión de trasladarse a Jurla.

Existe por lo menos una versión creíble de la causa del traslado del actual Santo Patrón de los otoreños que ha sido obtenida de la tradición oral. Se dice que el Cristo negro era sacado furtivamente por el sacristán con instrucciones secretas del sacerdote y llevado a la orilla de la Quebrada de Jurla, aguas arriba. Cuando era "encontrado" lo llevaban con muestras de alegría y

en nutrida procesión a la iglesia. El desaparecimiento y el encuentro se repitieron varias veces, hasta que se tomó la decisión de dejar la imagen en la iglesia de Jurla. En la actualidad el sitio del encuentro se llama "Poza del Señor". Debemos advertir que los quelalas no fundaron el pueblo que hoy se llama Jesús de Otoro como se ha dicho erróneamente pues este ya existía y con toda seguridad la causa de su extinción no tuvo que ver con hechos milagrosos.

Al margen de las leyendas, el traslado del Cristo Negro a Jurla sigue siendo un misterio. Se sabe que cuando se extinguieron los pueblos del valle los habitantes llevaron sus imágenes a la iglesia de Jurla. Quelala desapareció probablemente en 1790 cuando midieron y vendieron 45 caballerías de sus tierras. Es probable que el traslado de la venerada imagen se haya producido desde 1666 pues las inscripciones de la cruz de las que ya hemos hablado dan cuenta de un suceso ocurrido un 15 de enero, que por cierto, no corresponde al santoral de la Santa Veracruz. Quelala debió haber quedado jurisdiccionada a la iglesia de Jurla y los pocos habitantes que quedaban asistían a los oficios religiosos de la iglesia del pueblo vecino que estaba a dos kilómetros de distancia."

Figs. 5-127/128/129. Iglesia d Jesús de Otoro, 2004; Hermita Santo Domingo, 1993.



Figs. 5-130/131. Altars in 1994 and 2004.



Figs. 5-132/133. El Señor de Quelala and mayordomo of Hermita de Santo Domingo, 1993.



1-Jocón, Jocón, Yoro

This settlement has been a prominent site along the camino real between Trujillo and Yoro for centuries. Antuñez C. (1937: 146) and Fiallos (1989: 337) note that they celebrate "El Día del Sr. de Esquipulas" on January 15th, but four visits since 1991 have failed to reveal an image. Horst (1994) also reported its presence. In December 2006, women cleaning the church said the church had a small black Christ in their inventory, but their inspection at that moment did not produce it. A final visit in June 2010 did find on a left side altar a black Christ paired with the Virgen de Suyapa, the Honduran national patrona. After the recent restoration of the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles in Jocón by the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia, the major Christ (not black) is suspended before the altar.

Figs. 5-134/135. La Iglesia de Jocón, 1991, 2006.



Figs. 5-136/137. Suyapa and Esquipulas, 2010; restored church, 2018.



Juticalpa, Juticalpa, Olancho
1-Iglesia Santa Clara

In the northern barrio of the capital of Olancho, in a south-facing church, a small black Christ resides on the altar, cared for by doña Melita (Bonta 2007).

Fig 137a. The Santa Clara black Christ (LMB)



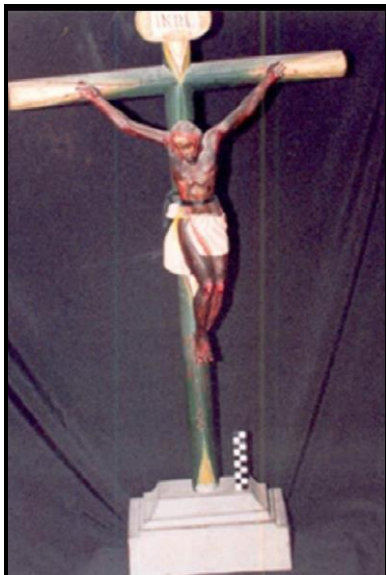
1-La Campa, La Campa, Lempira

The church at La Campa is best known for its startling situation at the west end of a large canyon. The church hosts as its patron saint San Matias. Also present, in a room behind the altar, is a small crucified black Christ called "Esquipulas" which hangs on a moveable base. Few of the town's 253 residents (INE 2001) knew of its presence.

Fig. 5-138. The church at La Campa, 1991.



Fig. 5-139. The Cristo Negro de Esquipulas, La Campa, 2003 (IHAH).



1-La Ceiba, La Ceiba, Atlántida

Iglesia Corazón de Jesús often hosts a celebration for El Cristo de Esquipulas during mid-January, but the major recognition of the black Christ is held in Colonia Miramar at Iglesia del Cristo Negro de Esquipulas. The church was organized about thirty years ago, housed in a former grocery store. The black Christ on the altar is large. **Surprisingly, the black Christ church is not in “Colonia Esquipulas” which is adjacent to the west and south (IGN 1991).**

Fig. 5-140/141. Iglesia del Cristo Negro de Esquipulas, La Ceiba, with its large Cristo Negro, 2009.



1-La Conce [La Concepción], Tocoa, Colón

During October, 1930, Manuel Herrera and Basilio Peralta walked throughout the settlements of the lower Aguán Valley, carrying an image of "el Santo Señor de Esquipulas" in hopes of gathering donations among the faithful to construct a church in La Conce. Permits were issued by the parish priest in Trujillo, Mariano Pérez, of the San Juan Bautista church, Francisco N. Zuniga, Director of the Police in Trujillo, and Maximiliano Vásques, Governor of the Department of Colón. Similar officials in places along the route, such as Tocoa, also gave **permission (AMT 1930; APT 1930).**

For a while a black Christ resided in the church, but an inspection in 1999 found no current Esquipulas at home.

2-La Esperanza, La Esperanza, Intibucá (2)

Intibucá and La Esperanza, at 1,720 meters above sea level, are the highest large towns in Honduras. The older indigenous town of Intibucá and the more recent Spanish/Ladino settlement of La Esperanza have fused over the years into a continuous urban landscape. While only a few residents and town officials know the location of the boundary between the two

towns and the two municipios (of the same names), the two Catholic churches representing the two places are both in La Esperanza (Mitchell 1997: map 226).

Fig. 5-142. La Esperanza - Intibucá, view to east, from the grotto, 1991. Tower in center is Iglesia de Intibucá; tower on right is Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza.



The churches are aligned roughly with the prominent grotto honoring La Virgen de la Inmaculate Concepción in a west-east direction, somewhat reminiscent of the Esquipulas basilica-town chapel relationship. The church of La Esperanza, located closer to the grotto, but one block to the south, celebrates the Virgin for a week in late November and early December. El Día del Señor de Esquipulas, January 15, is the date of the feria patronal of the parish of Intibucá.

Fig. 5-143. La Gruta de la Inmaculada Concepción, 2004, with geographers J. Bass, S. Brady, C. Revels.

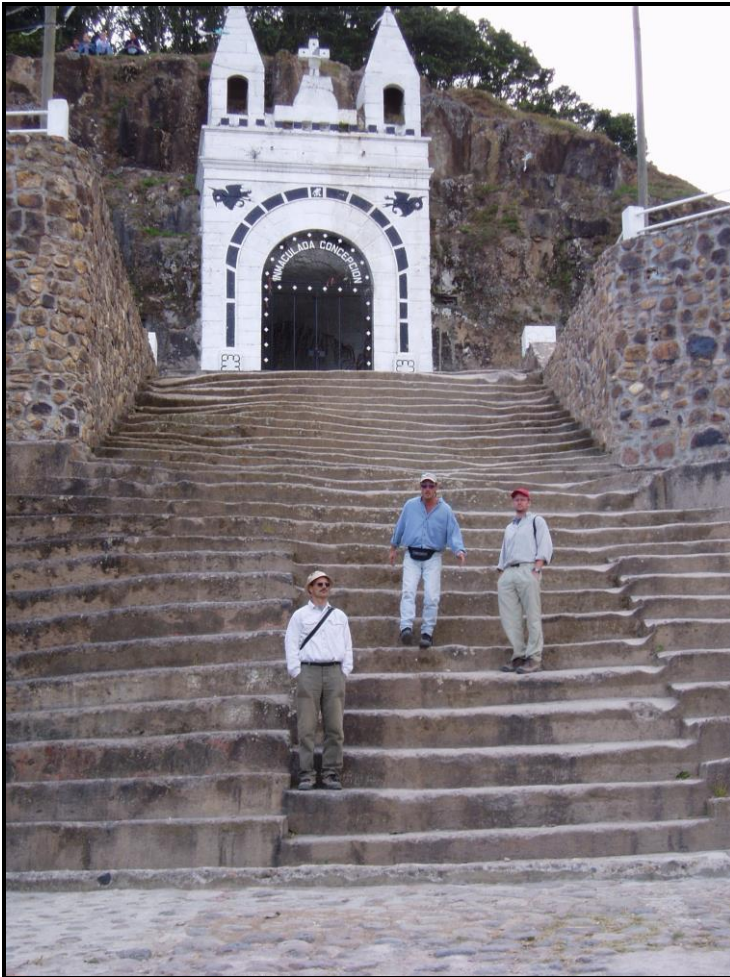


Fig. 5-144. Iglesia de Intibucá, La Esperanza, 1991.



The church of Intibucá houses two black Christs. They are both called "El Señor de Intibucá." The black Christ that hangs on the right (southern) wall of the church is only slightly smaller than the one centered on the main altar.

Figs. 5-145/146. El Señor de Intibucá, south wall, 1991, 2008.



Figs. 5-147/148. Main altar variations, 2004, 2008.



Shawn Mitchell's (1997: 213) observation on El Señor de Intibucá places it in a larger context:

"Folklore demonstrates the importance of Catholicism in interpreting and shaping the physical and cultural surroundings. El Señor [de Intibucá] is credited with selecting the site for the town of La Esperanza."

Mitchell then noted the research of Anna Chapman, the well-known anthropologist who lived among the Lenca near La Esperanza for years, and who gathered stories about the patron saint of Intibucá (Chapman 1985-86: II, 30-31).

"El Señor de Intibucá (la imagen que está actualmente en la iglesia), apareció al pie de un árbol (cedro, roble o cacao), a cuyo lado había una colmena. Las abejas lo cubrieron de cera, "como se pone vidrio sobre una estampa," después alguien quiso sacar miel de la colmena, pero la iglesia retumbó y el hombre quedó ciego. Ahora la colmena está en la pared de la iglesia. Luego que apareció, alguien con una campanita la llevó a un gran llano cercano, llamado Azacualpa, a unos diez kilómetros de Intibucá. Si la campanita sonaba, sería signo de que el patrón quería quedarse en este lugar (fundar el pueblo allí). Pero no sonó en Azacualpa y el santo regresó solo a su primer puesto. Luego lo llevaran a otro sitio, a las montañas arriba de Azacualpa, que ahora se llama Pueblo Viejo. Allí hicieron una iglesia cuyos basamentos están visibles todavía. Pero aunque hicieron una iglesia, el santo patrón no quiso permanecer allí, la campanita no sonó y él reparó en su primer puesto. No obstante, lo llevaron de nuevo, siempre con la campanita, esta vez más cerca de Intibucá, Santa Catarina, que ahora es un barrio del pueblo. Pues allí la campanita sonó un poquito, sin embargo él regresó de nuevo a su lugar de origen. Otra vez lo llevaron, ahora al Calvario, más cerca de donde había aparecido, entonces la campanita sonó más fuerte, pero el Señor de Intibucá siempre regresó a su primer sitio.

Así fue como, después de tantas andanzas, tuvieron que construir la iglesia en el mismo lugar donde apareció primero, y adonde tantas veces había regresado. "Allí sí, la campanita sonaba lindo. Se oía de muy lejos. Al Señor de Intibucá le gusto aquí porque es valle."

Los que llevaban la imagen tenían la campanita, porque el dictamen fue que donde repiqueteara, allí mismo deberían fundar el pueblo. La llevaban de noche, cuando la demás gente dormía y algunos creyeron que la habían robado; pero luego la hallaron, en Azacualpa, en Pueblo Viejo, como ya hemos contado. Esta campanita ya no está in la iglesia, pues hace muchos años un padre la llevó, no se sabe adonde."

Another woman, from the nearby town of Yamaranguila, told the anthropologist:

"El Señor de Intibucá es patrón de todo del Departamento de Intibucá, no sólo del pueblo de Intibucá, sino de todos nosotros. El es el mismo Cristo, y es de nosotros, del pueblo indígena. El quien nos cuida. El nos da todo. Le decimos el Santísimo Nombre de Jesús de Intibucá. El Señor de Intibucá nos da fuerza y sabiduría."

Another informant told Chapman that:

"El Señor de Intibucá no quiere salir de la iglesia, no se deja; sólo una vez se dejó, hará tres o cuatro años (por 1978). Era el 20 de mayo y no había llovido todavía, el maicito se estaba secando, entonces, cuando el padre quiso hacer una procesión, el santo sí se dejó, y al rato que lo sacaron ¡cayo un aguacero! El patrón de Yamaranguila (pueblo cercano) sí se deja sacar y por eso pueden hacer el guancasco con nosotros.

Cuando la agresión de El Salvador (1969), también lo sacaron, comentó un campesino, y cuando llegó a la esquina se dio vuelta hacia la frontera de El Salvador (hacia al sur), y por eso no hubo guerra por acá, aunque sí la hubo en muchas partes de la frontera, pero por acá no. Es que el Señor de Intibucá nos protege."

One writer (Bueso 1975: 7) has suggested that the year of the first appearance of El Señor de Intibucá was 1757, probably because that corresponds to the date of the construction of the church in Intibucá. El Señor is celebrated on January 1 and 15, "Día de Cristo Negro" (AVAI 2007: 6, 19; GFEAH 2000: 51).

2-La Iguala, La Iguala, Lempira

The black Christ on the ornate altar here is called "El Santo Cristo de Esquipulas." The patron saint of the small town of 267 residents (INE 2001) is Santiago.

Figs. 5-149/150. Church (2020), Altar with black Christ, La Iguala, 2000 (GFEAH 2000: 31).

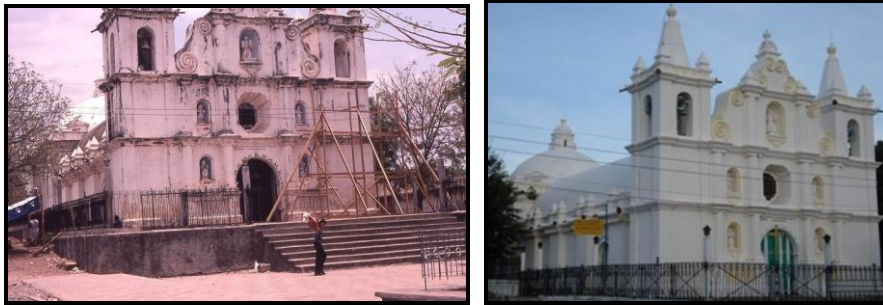


2-Langue, Langue, Valle (2)

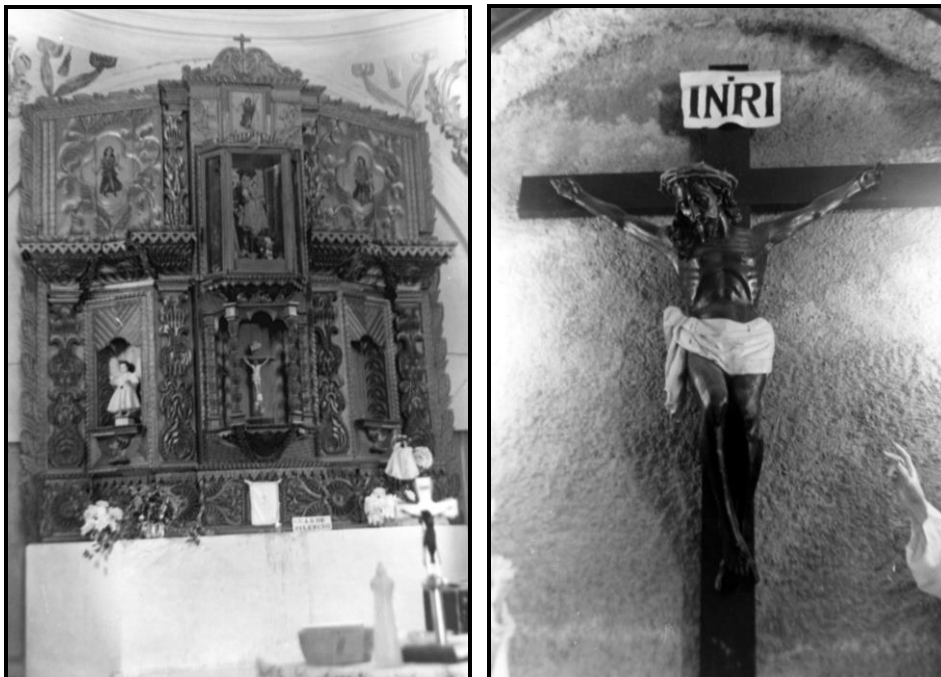
Writing over the portal of the church proclaims that "En el año de 1804 construyó esta obra el maestro Ubaldo Ramirez." If this is indeed the case, the Langue church is one of the oldest in the country. Many of the so-called "colonial" churches were built after 1821. The church is headquarters of "La Parroquia y Santuario de San Antonio de Padua." San Antonio is honored on June 13, yearly. Still, Langue is one of the prominent places in Honduras that celebrates the Señor de Esquipulas as the patron of the settlement. January 15 is the special day.

Inside the church the old, ornate retablo has a small white Christ in the most prominent position, lower center, but a small 23 cm. black Christ is in, perhaps, an even more important position, that is, on a table in front of the main altar. The large black Christ photographed in a visit in 1991 was on the right (south) wall. Paz Solórzano (1949: 188) and Borhegyi (1954: 399) noted a shrine to the Christ of Esquipulas in Langue.

Figs. 5-151/152. Iglesia de San Antonio, Langue, 1991, restored 2007.



Figs 5-153/154. Main altar with small black Christ on front table; Cristo Negro de Esquipulas, south wall, 1991.



1-Las Anonás, Distrito Central, Francisco Morazán

In the northeastern sector of modern Tegucigalpa, near the confluence of Quebrada Las Anonás and Río Chiquito, in the colonia now called "21 de Octubre," during the 1940s and 1950s, a family by the name of "Flores" kept a small black Christ in their home. It was originally acquired in Esquipulas, Guatemala. According to informant Francisco Flores Andino (2007) of Tegucigalpa, "El Cristo de Bienvenidos," as it was called, served as a focal point in the neighborhood "Las Anonás." The image was visited regularly by many people who believed in its power to heal, but especially during mid-January and Semana Santa. The informant does not recall seeing the statue after 1960.

1-Las Casitas, Distrito Central, Francisco Morazán

A few kilometers due west of the airport in Tegucigalpa, just off the road that leaves southwest Tegucigalpa and heads for Mateo and Lepaterique is the aldea of Las Casitas. On the altar of the small church is a large black Christ. An elderly resident claimed that she knew it has been there since at least 1913; others claimed it was placed in the church when first constructed in 1850. It seems to have no special history, but a large ceiba tree planted some 80 years ago directly in front of the church adds an aura of sacredness to the site. Between visits in 1993 and 2008 changes in the altar scene and park in front are evidence of the dynamic nature of religious settings. In 2008 the celebration of January 15th, beginning at 6 p.m., consisted of a procession with the black Christ around the village, accompanied with fireworks, marimbas, and concluded with a mass.

Figs. 5-155/156. Las Casitas church and ceiba, 1993, 2008. (with geographer S. Brady and anthropologist F. Cruz)



Figs. 5-157/158. Main Altar, Las Casitas, 1993, 2008.



1-Lejamaní, Lejamaní, Comayagua

Informants in 1993 related that the church in Lejamaní once had a painting of El Cristo Negro de Esquipulas on the south wall (also, Flores A. 2007).

Fig. 5-159. La Iglesia de Lejamaní, 1993.



3-Lepaera, Lepaera, Lempira

In Lepaera, a settlement of 2,885 inhabitants (INE 2001), El Señor de Esquipulas hangs in a glass camarín, much like the original in Esquipulas, Guatemala.

Figs. 5-160/161/162. Lepaera: church (JRS), camarín (WVD), detail of Cristo (JRS), 1991.



3-Liure, Liure, El Paraíso

El Señor de Esquipulas is celebrated January 25th as the patron saint of Liure, a town of 960 residents (INE 2001). According to information contained in the land titles of San Antonio de Liure (ANH-TT El Paraiso 60, 61, 62), a **Spaniard recently arrived from Guatemala City in 1717 expressed his devotion to "un cristo crucificado," but it is unknown if the Christ was black.**

The village attracts considerable crowds for its pilgrimage, especially from northern Choluteca. Several packed buses visit the site daily during mid-January to honor the black Christ.

Two cristos negros are displayed in the church. The smaller one, 26 cm high, is confined in a nicho to the left of the altar. It is called "El Niño de Esquipulas," and appears to be older than the other. The second black Christ, prepared for procession, is 38 cm tall and has been placed well before the altar. During the pilgrimage season, it receives almost all of the attention. Another unusual feature in the church is the giant limestone baptismal pila is located in the northwest corner and engraved with: "Lyvre Enero 29 de 1848 Jvan Molina."

Figs. 5-163/164. Church and altar, Liure, 2008.



Figs. 5-165/166. Professor "Sacristan" Sanchez with el Cristo Negro for procession; "El Niño de Esquipulas" in nicho, Liure, 2008.



Figs. 5-167/168. Author at bautismal pila in the church, Liure, 2008.



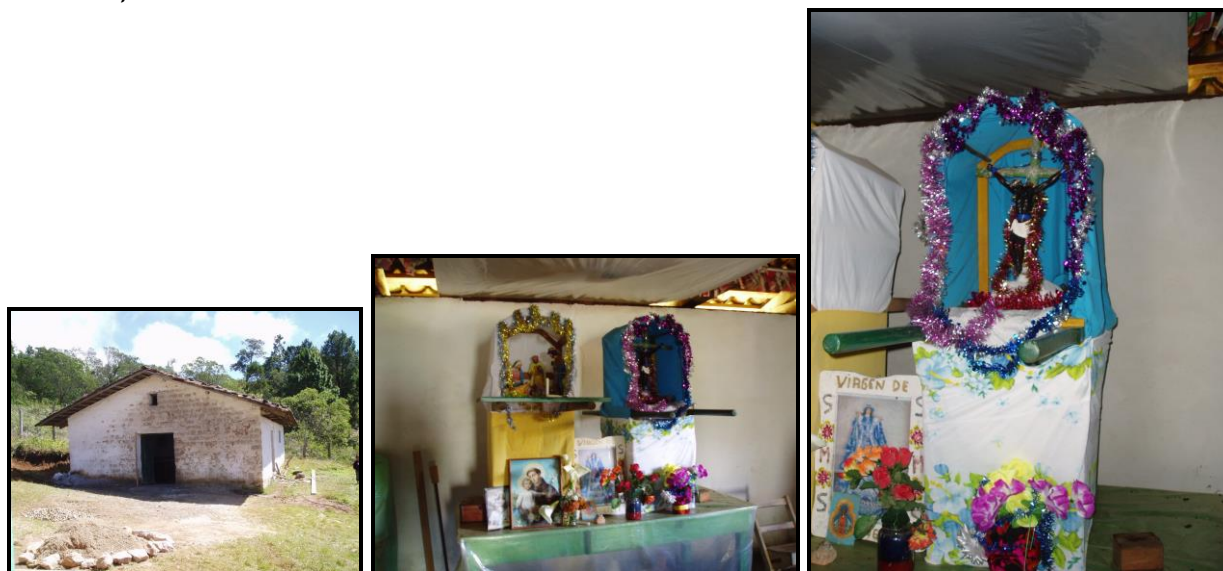
Until recently, when residents and priests conflicted over the commercial role of the event, Liure and Texíguat participated in an exchange of santos. Along the route ceibas mark the way, as they do at the vado in Liure. Folklore associated with the Liure-Texiguat guancasco is recalled in oral traditions (Ramos y Valenzuela 1997: 45-7). Fiestas for Esquipulas are in Liure on January 14 or 15; in Texiguat for San Francisco on October 3.

UNAH historian Luis Sanchez, who comes from Liure, as a child had the nickname "sacistran" because he was fascinated with the local religious activities and the Liure pilgrimage. Luis died of COVID on August 4, 2020.

1-Los Laureles, San José, Opatoro, La Paz

Not far from the desvio to Opatoro is the tiny caserío of Los Laureles. In 1992, the residents dedicate themselves to El Señor de Esquipulas. Recently a new hermita, also named after the Christ of Esquipulas, was constructed. The small (61 cm) black Christ that is honored resides atop a table-top altar, always ready for procession. José Santos Rodriquez oversees the regional procession on January 15 each year.

Figs. 5-169/170/171. Ermita del Señor de Esquipulas, altar, and procession Cristo Negro, Los Laureles, 2008.



1-Luquigue, Yorito, Yoro (3)

Among the older, colonial religious structures in Honduras, the church at Luquigue is the most respected. The settlement is the remnant of a **reducción** of 1751, into which the indigenous Torupan (formerly Jicaques) were concentrated (Florez [2006]; Davidson 1985: 65, 68, 84-7). Two paintings of El Señor de Esquipulas, rescued from Luquigue, have been measured by the restoration department of the IHAH to be 64x46 cms. and 51x41 cms. One of these was restored in 2005 and is inscribed in yellow at the base of the cross: "El Yllmo y Rmo Señor de Don F de Cadinaños concede cien dias de yndulgencia a todos los fieles y es . . . un credo desta imag del Señor de Esquipulas Año 1788."

Figs. 5-172/173. Church at Luquigue, 1993; painting from Luquigue in IHAH bodega, 2007.



1-Macora, Jocón, Yoro

The village of Macora, some five kilometers northwest of Jocón, was until 1987 a predominately Catholic place. In that year, however, Protestants became so numerous that they took control of the modest church building for their services. One family, that of Andrés Hernández, because of its devotion took the small black "Crucificado de Macora" from the church into their home. As of 1994, a few families still gather out of respect for the image on January 14, the date the town used to recognize as its saint's day.

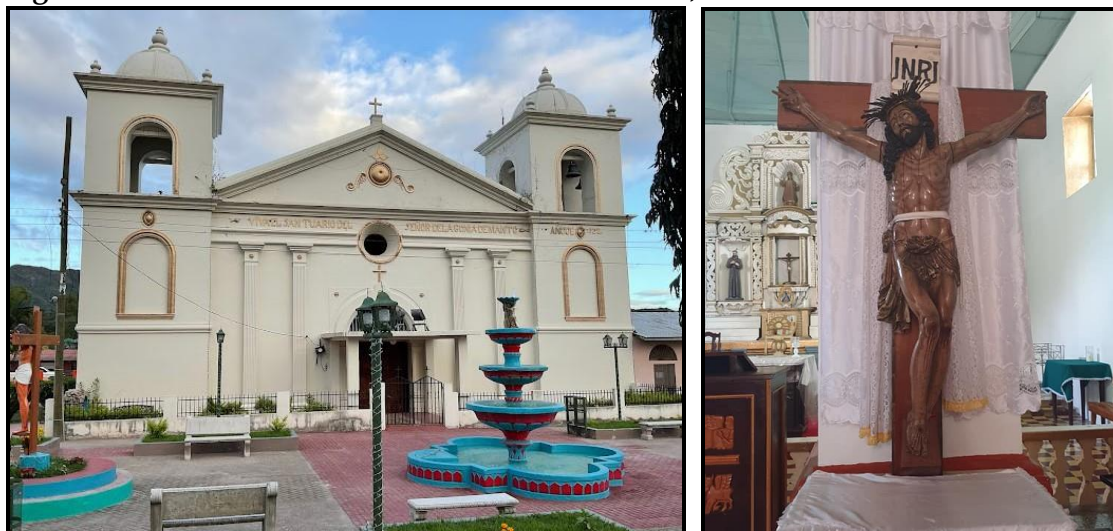
Figs. 5-174/175. Church at Macora; "El Crucificado de Macora," 1993.



1-Manto, Manto, Olancho

Reports of Manto as a site of a black Christ are frequent (Paz Solórzano 1949: 188; Borhegyi 1954: 399), but these have not been confirmed in several personal visits by the author. In El Santuario del Señor de la Agonia can be seen a large free-standing dark Christ in front of the altar. The church has some fame for its old painting, “The Christ of the Souls in Purgatory,” that depicts racial components of colonial Honduras (Lara 2022).

Figs. 5-176/177. Santuario and dark Christ in Manto, 2022.



1-Maraita, Maraita, Francisco Morazán

The small village of Maraita (351 residents, INE 2001) is represented in the world of the Cristo Negro de Esquipulas by a painting (oleo sobre lienzo, 64x46 cm) that hangs on the right wall of the San Pedro church.

Figs. 5-178/179. Night view of restored church (2021) and painting in iglesia de Maraita, 2005 (IHAH).



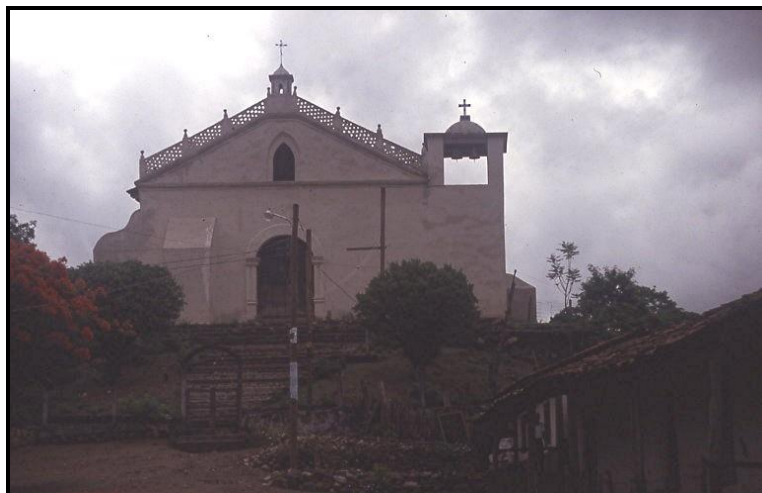
2-Marale, Marale, Francisco Morazán

Historical records present evidence of a "Cristo de Esquipulas" in Marale for at least 150 years. The "Padron del Pueblo de Marale del mes de febrero del año de ochocientos cecenta" (ANH C&P 1860) notes on folio 2: "Tiburcio Aguilar, viudo, 70 a., Labrador, [y] Mallordomo del Cristo de Esquipulas." Later in the document, "Josefa Mexia, viuda, 43 a., mujeril, Tenance del mismo Cristo."

The modern church sits high on a hill and displays one small black Christ (28 cm high). Flores Andino (2007) learned of three black Christs in the church, and in 1993 two adorned the altar.

While the feria patronal of Marale is held on January 20 in honor of San Sebastián, "El Cristo de Esquipulas" is equally important. Perhaps, because the dates of celebrations are so close, they have been fused. Also, Victoria, close nearby, has a larger pilgrimage on January 15 that is attended by residents of Marale. (GFEAH 2000: 169)

Figs. 5-180/181. Iglesia de Marale, 1993; cristo negro, Marale, 2000 (GFEAH).



1-Marcala, Marcala, La Paz

A black Christ has recently been installed on the right wall, near the main altar, in the main church in Marcala, iglesia de San Miguel. In 2002, a comerciante, not resident in Marcala, bought the 115-cm. tall image in Guatemala City and presented it to the church. "Pan de señor," the sacred earth tablets made in Esquipulas, Guatemala, are found in the market here.

Figs. 5-182/183. Iglesia de San Miguel; El Sr. de Esquipulas, Marcala, 2008.



1-Matazano, San Rafael, Lempira

On the road between San Rafael and Gracias, in the Department of Lempira, a major desvío is at Matazano, where the road heads south toward La Iguala. The small church in the community of 142 (INE 2001), about one-half declared as "Lenca," is also small, but houses a small black Christ too (2004).

3-Morocelí, Morocelí, El Paraíso

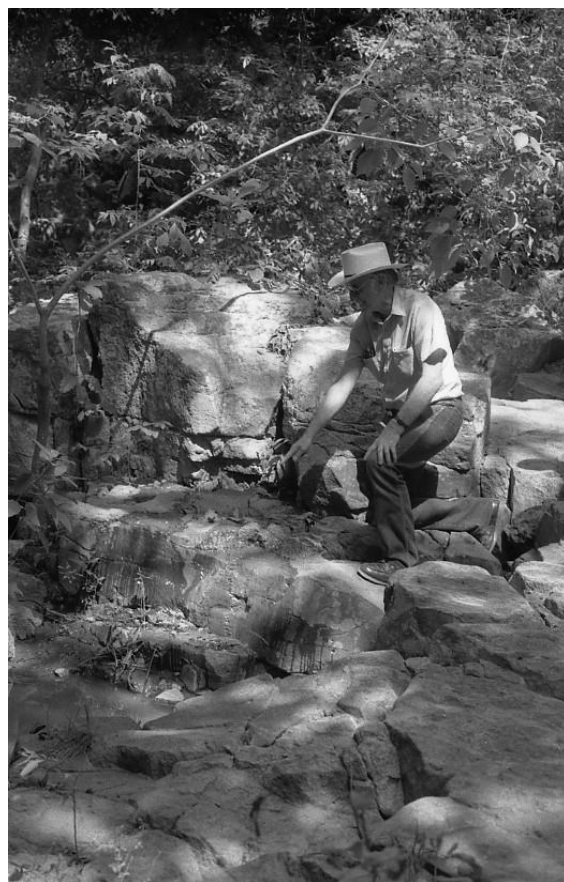
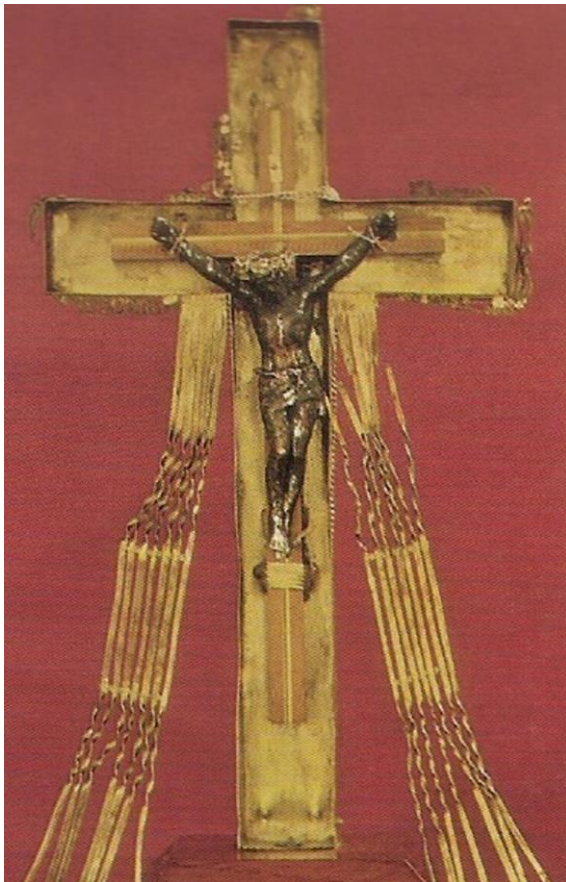
In the recently restored church in Morocelí, the larger Christ on the main altar is white; a smaller, 30 cm. tall, black Christ is displayed on a stand to the left of the altar. It is known today as "El Cristo Negro de las Aguas." However, in an archival note from 1860 the image is called simply "El Señor de la Aguas."

According to local legend, the figure first appeared in a rocky stream a short distance north of town. Because of the miraculous nature of the image and its origins, it is said that the waters of the stream never stop flowing. A parque was constructed in 2004 at the sitio de El Pozo Milagroso, which added another cultural feature to the previously constructed Santuario del Cristo Negro de las Aguas. On January 18, each year, El Señor de las Aguas is celebrated. While Esquipulas is never mentioned, the date suggests a connection with the Guatemalan icon. (GFEAH 2000: 181).

Figs. 5-184/185. Iglesia de Morocelí, 1991; Shrine of El Cristo Negro de las Aguas, Morocelí, 1991;



Figs. 5-186/187. Detail, El Cristo Negro de las Aguas, Morocelí, 2000 (GFEAH); anthropologist Miles Richardson at El Pozo Milagroso, 1991.



1-Morolica, Morolica, Choluteca

The presence of a black Christ was reported here in 1994 (Horst 1994). In October 1998 flooding by the Río Choluteca caused by hurricane Mitch destroyed the town. A new settlement, Nueva Morolica, was constructed five km away in 2003.

Fig. 5-188. The destroyed church 1998.



1-Nacaome, Nacaome, Valle

Nacaome is the departamental capital of Valle. La Iglesia de San José has one small black Christ that appears in the photographic inventory of the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia in Tegucigalpa.

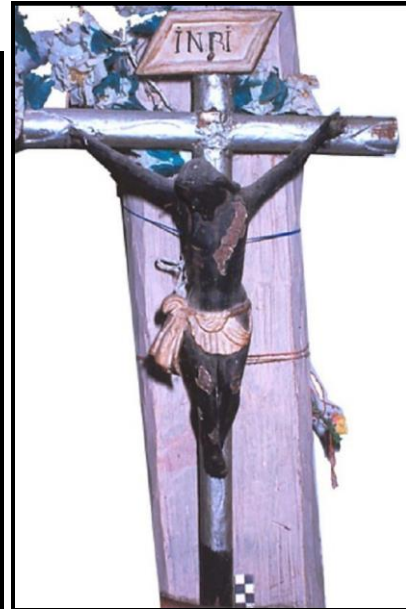
Figs. 5-189/190. Iglesia de San José, Nacaome, 2007; cristo negro, Nacaome, 2006 (IHAH).



1-Naranjito, Naranjito, Santa Bárbara

In the Iglesia de la Asunción in Naranjito, hidden behind the retablo major, the IHAH located in 2004 an old black Christ. Its fingers had been burned.

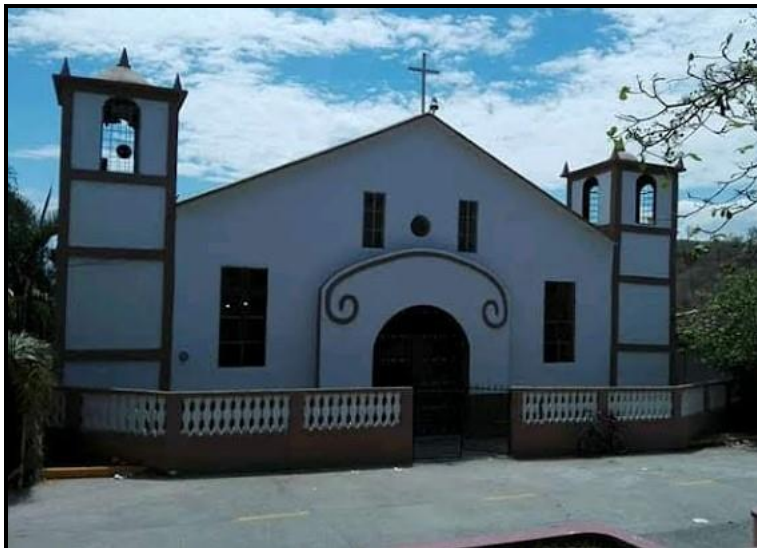
Figs. 5-191/192. Iglesia de Naranjito, 2006; cristo negro, Naranjito, 2004 (IHAH).



1-Nuevo Celilac, Nuevo Celilac, Santa Bárbara

The black Christ here is placed in a niche in the form of a cross. Its left arm is broken from the body, and hanging from the cross. Perhaps it was damaged when it was moved during a procession.

Figs. 5-193/194. Church (2019); Cristo Negro, Nuevo Celilac, 2004 (IHAH).



1-Ojojona, Ojojona, Francisco Morazán

The age of the modern church in Ojojona can be determined by the words that appear over the portal: "Se colocó esta Yglesiaño D 1823 siendo cura D Mariano Castejón." Within the church, on the wall to the right as one faces the altar, is a large painting, much like the one in La Merced in Comayagua, which depicts the crucified black Christ with his three companions as in Esquipulas, Guatemala. The period of the painting is thought to be 1714-1741 (Martínez C. 1992: 104).

From elderly informants, Rodríguez (2018) reconstructed the trip by foot from Ojojona to Esquipulas until the 1970s, when pilgrims began riding in baronesas and then buses. Often with their neighbors from Santa Ana and San Buenaventura, those of Ojojona began in early December for their month-long trek. A few rode donkeys. The route was first to El Aguacatal, Lepaterique, then to Lamaní, in the southern Comayagua valley. The way after Lamaní was not told, but probably passed Guajiquiro, Marcala, San Juan, La Esperanza, La Campa, and Belén Gualcho on to Ocotepeque. Christmas was celebrated along the roadside.

Walkers tried to cover 40 km in a twelve-hour day. Most carried a petate for ground cloth and a blanket for the times when a house was not available. Dried meat, tamales pisque, tortillas, totopostes, lácteos and rosquillas, were carried, as were pans for cooking. The route passed well-known springs and streams of fresh water. On occasion, a pulpería could be found.

When the romeriantes first saw the Esquipulas temple from the eastern ridgeline, they said they thought they were in a dream, "una lindura." They cried with happiness, although they were in pain from the trip.

Ojojona shares with Lepaterique one of the most vibrant *guancascos* in the country. In January, the people of Lepaterique walk, with their patron Santiago, to Ojojona; in May, the folks from Ojojona take San Sebastian to visit in Lepaterique, meeting between the villages at Surcos de Cañas. GFEAH 2000: 156

Figs. 5-195/196. Church in Ojojona, 1994; Painting of Señor de Esquipulas, in church of Ojojona, 2000 (GFEAH);

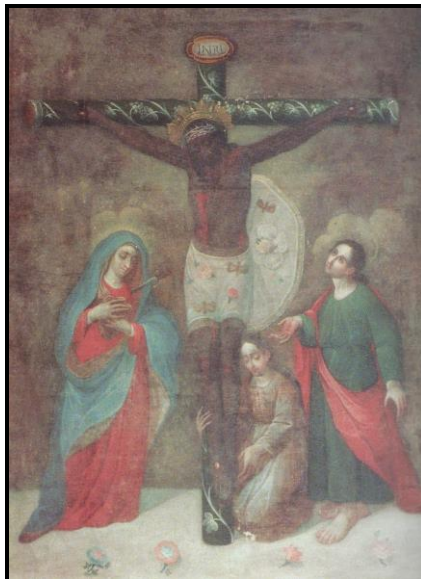


Fig. 5-197. The Lepaterique-Ojojona guancasco, encuentro de Surcos de Cañas, 2004.



1-Ojos de Agua, Ojos de Agua, Comayagua

During a visit in 1994, several residents mentioned that a black Christ moved between the church and a private home and was celebrated, especially on January 15.

Fig. 5-198. Iglesia de Ojos de Agua, 1994.



2-Opatoro, Opatoro, La Paz (3)

Until 1971 or so, many devoted residents of Opatoro made an annual pilgrimage to Esquipulas, Guatemala, in mid-January. The 150-kilometer trip, "*por bestia*," took approximately fifteen days, they say. At home as well, in their church, they also honor El Señor de Esquipulas. Three figures, which are considered to be black Christs, are displayed in the church. At the feet of the large white crucified Christ on the main altar, a tiny *cristo negro* is almost hidden in its red niche. Just in front is a 20 cm high image that rides on a processional cross. Finally, the classic photograph of the Esquipulas triad is framed within a blue niche on a small altar to the left.

In 1870, according to a two page manuscript in the National Archives of Honduras (ANH 1870 Anón.), Opatoro celebrated as patron saint "Apóstal San Yuan." The procession of the saint, accompanied with music played on "un pito y un tamborcito y dos malos volines," went to Guajiquiro. In neither place was a black Christ mentioned.

Probably under the influence of visiting priests from Comayagua, La Virgen de Los Angeles has replaced San Juan as patron of the village and a black Christ, known as "El Señor de Esquipulas," pronounced locally as "E.ki.pula," was added. Therefore, Opatoro has two ferias patronales. January 15 is the special day of Esquipulas and during Semana Santa the black Christ is taken procession.

Figs. 5-199/200. Iglesia de Opatoro, 1993; commercial picture of the scene in Esquipulas, nicho, Opatoro, 2008.



Figs. 5-201/202. Main altar, Opatoro, with smaller black Christs, 2008.



2-Orica, Orica, Francisco Morazán

During our visit in June of 1993, while the church was being remodeled, the Christ was removed from its cross and placed in the casa cural. Its antiquity is unknown.

Figs. 5-203/204/205. Church of San Francisco (2022); Black Christ of Orica, at casa cural, and without head piece (1993).



1-Palacios, Juan Francisco Bulnes, Gracias a Dios

On the table altar in the recently-constructed small Catholic church situated just south of the grass airstrip at Palacios stands a small black Christ. Ladino immigrants from western Honduras arrived at the mouth of the Río Negro in 1991 and initiated a "dia de Esquipulas." At the time no statuary was in the church, but when a priest arrived shortly afterwards, he obtained the image and placed the small Esquipulas crucifix in the church. The settlement, often thought of as the "jumping-off point" to northern Mosquitia, still has a relatively sparse population of 217 (INE 2001). See Plaplaya below.

Figs. 5-206/207. The Catholic church and altar with black Christ, Palacios, 1994.



1-Palenque, Choluteca, Choluteca

According to informants in the Santuario del Señor de Esquipulas in Ciudad de Choluteca, a small black Christ is located in the church in Palenque. This settlement of 252 (INE 2001) people is located on the east side of the Río Choluteca seven kilometers south of Marcovia.

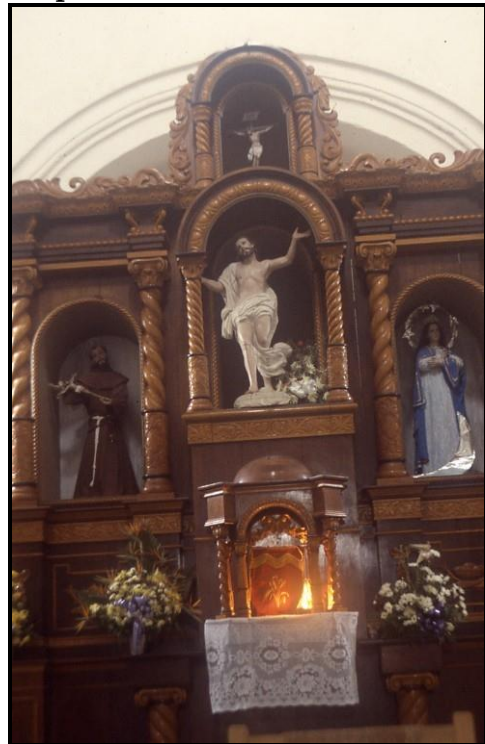
***1-Plaplaya, Juan Francisco Bulnes, Gracias a Dios**

In the westernmost house and Garífuna sector of the town of 300 a family altar hosts a "Cristo Ek. ee. pulas" that was acquired in Guatemala. On the 15th of January each year it is installed in the village church for a "little feria." Otherwise, the santo is San Vicente (WVD field notes, January 5, 1995).

2-Pespire, Pespire, Choluteca

"El Señor de Esquipulas," which possesses the most prominent position, high on the main altar of the church in Pespire, is clearly not black in color. The church, another in the Franciscan mode, is Iglesia de San Francisco de Asis. Paz Solórzano (1949: 188) and Borhegyi (1954: 399) note the presence of a shrine to "Esquipulas" in Pespire, but do not mention a black Christ.

Figs. 5-208/209. Church (2004) and main altar (1991) in Pespire.



1-Potreriillos, Potreriillos, El Paraíso

Flores Andino (2007) reports a cristo negro in this unusually small cabecera municipal -- only 202 people (INE 2001).

Fig. 5-210. Church of Portrerillo, El Paraíso, 2020.



3-Quesailica, Santa Rosa de Copán, Copán

Quesailica, also Quezailica, was an important aboriginal settlement reported by the Spaniards first in 1535. By 1680 it was known as "San Miquel Quezailica" (AGCA 1680; Martínez 1993: 3). The modern settlement has 1,055 residents and is located 14 km northeast of Santa Rosa de Copán (INE 2001).

The church of Quesailica is notable for its colorful flower-clock over the portal. The "black Christ", normally known as "El Señor de Buen Fin" or "El Cristo Negro del Buen Fin" is not black in color. Martínez C. (1993:14) believed "El Señor del Buen Fin" dates from the 19th century. According to church records, at least by late 1877 "el cristo crucificado de Esquipulas" was to be celebrated on "el 15 de enero." Cura Calletano Corea, from the parish in Trinidad, so instructed the alcalde of Quezailica (Martínez C. 1993:19). Bueso (1996: vi) dedicated his book on Santa Rosa de Copán to "el Santo Cristo Negro del Señor del Buen Fin de San Miguel de Quesailica."

A few years ago, residents of Quesailica walked in procession with the black Christ until a site called "Los Encuentros del Cristo de Esquipulas" where they met devotees from Lucerna, Ocotepeque.

For many more details of the history of the settlement and the celebration of the black Christ in Quesailica see Navarrete C., E. Barillas, y O. Haeussler, "Quesailica, Honduras: una fiesta al Cristo de Esquipulas en la imagen del Señor del Buen Fin," *Anales, AGHG* (Guatemala) 2004.

Figs. 5-211/212. La iglesia de Quesailica; Señor de Buen Fin, Quesailica, 1991.



1-Quilito, Guajiquiro, La Paz

This tiny caserío of 122 residents in 2001 (INE 2001) lies northwest of Guajiquiro on the washed-out road to Guajiquirito. In 1963, Francisco Fernández, after a trip to Esquipulas, returned with a small black Christ and deposited it in the house of a relative in Quilito. Frequently, residents of the settlement gather to honor "Esquipulas." In 1993, the village was without a church building.

1-Quimistán, Quimistán, Santa Bárbara

In la iglesia de San Juan Bautista in Quimistán a black Christ in the typical form of that in Esquipulas hangs on a free-standing cross. The image is approximately 50 cm in height. It is somewhat damaged, having lost fingers on both hands.

Figs. 5-213/214. The church (2023) and black Christ of Quimistán, 2004 (IHAH).

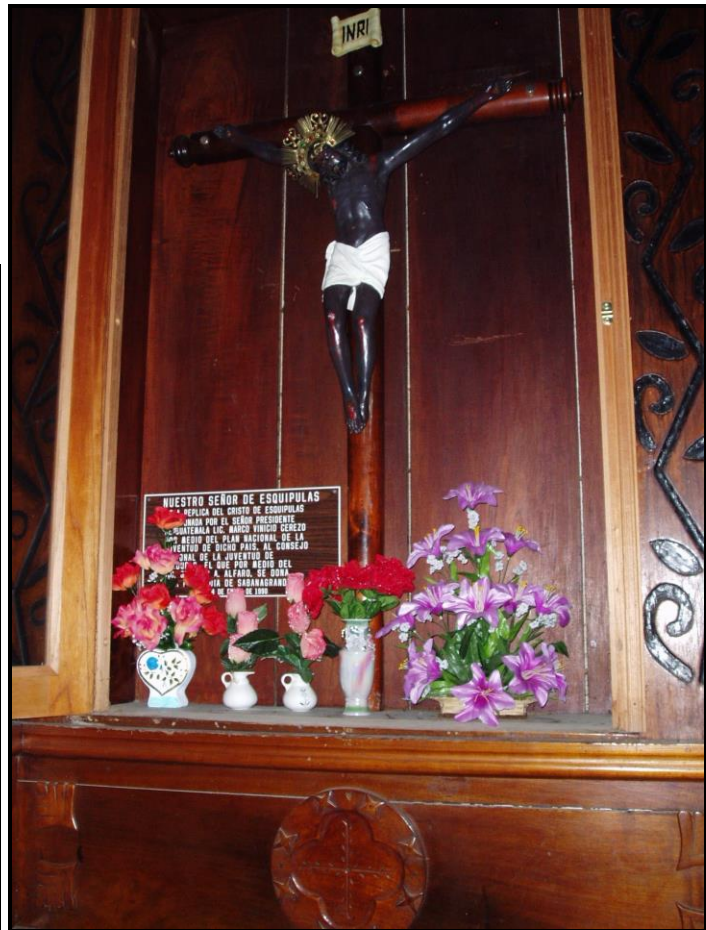


2-Sabanagrande, Sabanagrande, Francisco Morazán

In Sabanagrande (known earlier as Apasunca), the church was constructed in 1809 and restored in 1877. The large Cristo Negro de Esquipulas that adorns the right wall of the church was brought from Guatemala in December, 1989, a gift from the Guatemalan President Marco Vinicio Cerezo. During the meeting of Central American youth in May of that year the Guatemalan president presented each delegation with a life-size black Christ as a symbol of Central American unity.

Honduran Congressman Gustavo Alfaro, who served as executive secretary of the Honduran National Youth Council (Consejo Nacional de la Juventud -- CONJUVE), donated the statue to the parish in Sabanagrande.

Figs. 5-215/216. The church in Sabanagrande; "Nuestro Señor de Esquipulas," 2007.



1-Salamá, Salamá, Olancho (2)

According to Flores Andino (2007), who has gathered information on black Christ for years, in a document from 1862, Salamá had two black Christs. Two visits during the 1990s found no black Christs.

Fig. 5-217. Iglesia de Salamá, 2018.



1-Salitre La Capa, Yoro, Yoro

In 1993, the small black Christ in the chapel here was the object of a *romería* by people of Chalmecca, with whom they exchanged saints. Pilgrims come from as far as San Pedro Sula to Salitre La Capa (pob: 250, INE 2001), which lies four kilometers southeast of Chalmecca.

San Antonio de Esquipulas, see San Antonio del Norte

2-San Antonio del Norte, San Antonio del Norte, La Paz

In 1812 at the time the local government was being reorganized San Antonio del Norte was officially called San Antonio de Esquipulas (ANH 1812).

Fig. 5-218. The church in San Antonio del Norte, 1993.



1-San Antonio de Occidente, San Antonio de Oriente, Francisco Morazán

The lesser, sister mining settlement of San Antonio de Oriente lies a few hundred meters away. In its humble church is another, much smaller, black Christ, the so-called "Señor de los Milagros." Previously the little village, now of only 51 inhabitants (INE 2001), was the "el Mico" mine (Díaz Zelaya 1983).

2-San Antonio de Oriente, San Antonio de Oriente, Francisco Morazán

Once known as "Mineral de San Antonio," the town was headquarters of a thriving silver mine and became famous because the church was the central focus of the most famous painting of Honduran landscapes, by Velásquez. In 1885, the governor of the mine, Pablo Padilla, asked permission from church officials in Comayagua "a destruir La Iglesia del Señor de Esquipulas" and to build a school on its site (AEC 1885). The population then was 447 (Vallejo 1888). Only 187 residents lived there in 2001 (INE 2001).

The black Christ of San Antonio de Oriente is called locally "El Cristo Olvidado" because for years it was stored in the sacristan behind the altar of the church and essentially forgotten by the parishioners. When the national tourism commission began to develop a campaign to market the old mining center as a tourist destination, in a search for religious artifacts of the church, the black Christ was discovered (Díaz Zelaya 1983). A painting of the Esquipulas Christ,

once in the church, has been restored and now hangs in the Museo Popenoe of the Pan American School of Agriculture at Zamarano, just down slope (Flores Andino 2007). (GFEAH 2000: 161)

Figs. 5-219/220/221. The church of San Antonio de Oriente, 2008; "El Cristo Olvidado," 2004 (IHAH); detail of ""El Cristo Olvidado," 2000 (GFEAH).



1-San Antonio de Tapesco [Tapexco], Copán Ruinas, Copán

This settlement, which has a reputation as a place of Chortí traditions and continued contacts with their kin in nearby Guatemala, celebrates their black Christ on January 14 with the drinking of the local *chilateyo* beverage. The border is less than two kilometers away, and Esquipulas, Guatemala is easily accessible by road via Jocotán and Camotán. The village of 192 (INE 2001) also maintains contact with its municipal cabecera some six kilometers to the northeast (Martínez P. 1997: 60).

Chortí communities frequently celebrate January 15th in their agricultural calendar. In his *Memoria Chortí*, Lázaro Flores (2004: 27, 91) wrote of this: "Hay una ceremonia de bendición del maíz, de unas mazorcas que serán sembradas el 15 de enero, el día del Señor de Esquipulas."

2-San Esquipulas, Puerto Lempira, Gracias a Dios

According to the 2001 national census (INE 2001), a new caserío of 22 Miskito Indians has been established on the Río Coco near Awasbila, in the southwestern corner of the municipio of Puerto Lempira. Apparently, during the civil disruptions along the Río Coco during the mid-1980s, a few families from San Esquipulas, Nicaragua, relocated across the river.

2-San Francisco, San Francisco, Lempira

The Iglesia de San Francisco here displays a medium size black Christ on its altar. The town of 490 residents (INE 2001) is quite isolated in the southeastern corner of Lempira, about 20 km from Erandique.

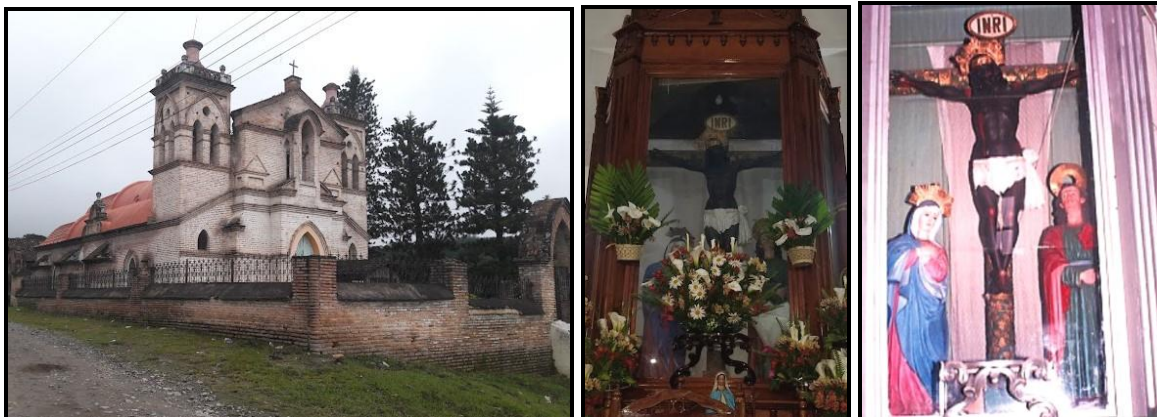
Figs. 5-222/223. The church (2022) and cristo negro de San Francisco (2006, IHAH).



1-San Francisco Cone, Sensenti, Ocotepeque

Another of those off-the-beaten track places, San Francisco Cone, lies seven kilometers northeast of Sensenti at about 1,200 meters above sea level. Its 986 residents (INE 2001) first placed a 140 cm tall black Christ within its own shrine on the right wall. However, by 2015 it had been placed atop the main altar.

Figs. 5-224/225/226. The church of San Francisco Cone (2017); black Christ on altar (2022), cristo negro, San Francisco Cone (2006 IHAH).



1- *San Francisco de la Paz, San Francisco de la Paz, Olancho

Ancient San Francisco Zapote, celebrates El Señor de Esquipulas for its feria patronal on January 15 each year.

Fig. 5-227. The cristo negro of San Francisco de la Paz.



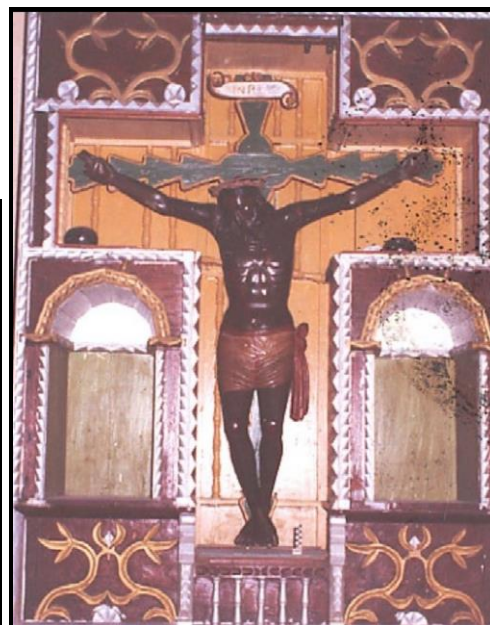
1-San José, San José, Choluteca

This settlement is the northernmost municipio in Choluteca. A small black Christ is worshipped in the small church there.

2-San José de Colinas, San José de Colinas, Santa Bárbara (2)

The church in San José de Colinas (formerly Tamagazapa) hosts two black Christ figures. The smaller one (50 cm in height) rests at the top-center of the retablo. The larger one (136 cm tall) dominates the altar.

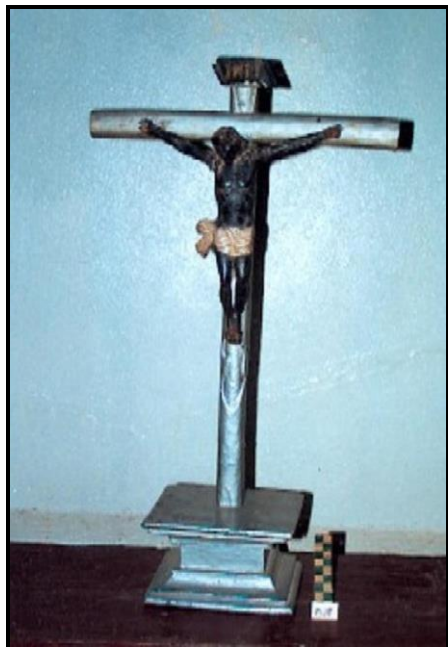
Figs. 5-228/229. Cristo negro on retablo, San José de Colinas, 2005 (IHAH); Cristo negro on main altar, 2005 (IHAH).



1-San José del Potrero, San José del Potrero, Comayagua

The small (26 cm) black Christ in the church at San José del Potrero was photographed by the IHAH in 2006.

Fig. 5-230. The black Christ, Iglesia de San José del Potrero, 2006 (IHAH).



1-San José, Reitoca, Francisco Morazán

The town nearest to Alubarén, San José de Reitoca, has only 122 residents (INE 2001). A small black Christ hangs on a free-standing cross on the altar of the humble church. The mayordomo of the little chapel, admitted they were influenced to buy their black Christ in Esquipulas by the presence of the Christ in Alubarén.

Fig. 5-231. The hermita de San José de Reitoca, 1991.



2-San Juan, San Juan, Intibucá (3)

Along the main highway between La Esperanza and Gracias lies San Juan, cabecera of the municipio of the same name. According to early documents, the settlement previously carried the names of San Juan Caite, San Juan Malutena, and San Juan de Buenavista. In 2001 the population was 1,163 (INE 2001).

This settlement has an unusual church-settlement relationship that is shared with very few other sites in Honduras. The church does open to the west, as is the typical pattern, however, the plaza lies behind the church, or to the east. The church does not open onto the plaza. Therefore, as one walks out the front door of the church the view is of wooded land over a cliff. Behind the church in the middle of the plaza a ceiba, now quite large, has been planted.

Figs. 5-232/233. The church and ceiba behind, San Juan, 1993; main altar, 1991.



The black Christ of San Juan, "El Señor de Esquipulas," is the patron saint and is honored on January 15 annually. There is no significant pilgrimage to San Juan in mid-January or Semana Santa. The largest image (116 cm) hangs on the altar and has been restored recently. He is missing fingers on both hands. Two smaller figures are attached to free-standing crosses: one is 33 cm tall and the other is 28 cm high.

Figs. 5-234/235/236. Restored Cristo Negro; smaller stand-alones, San Juan, 2006 (IHAH).



1-San Juan, San Juan, La Paz

Of course, as the name of the town implies, worshippers honor San Juan Bautista on their patron saint's day, June 24. However, a black Christ, known as "Esquipulas," hangs in the church and is also regarded highly. The black Christ once was high on the main altar, but fell and was broken, and was not replaced. It has been discarded. On January 14-15, "El Señor de Esquipulas" is celebrated in a second major feria.

Fig. 5-237. Iglesia de San Juan, La Paz, 1993. (Prof. Flores Andino in foreground)



1-San Juan de Duyusupo, Choluteca

This small town of 127 (INE 2001) reportedly has a black Christ, according to informants in Choluteca (2007).

1-San Lorenzo, San Lorenzo, Yoro

Inhabitants of this settlement in the upper Aguán Valley report that they have a small black Christ in their church.

2-San Lucas, San Lucas, El Paraíso (2)

El Señor de Esquipulas is celebrated with his feria during mid-January. San Lucas has his festival during late March. Two crucifixes, both free-standing for easy placement, are in the church. The older and larger one, which has lost fingers on both hands, is 45 cm tall and remains on the altar. For the exchange of saints and procession with neighboring San Antonio de Flores the devoted of San Lucas use a smaller black Christ, only 20 cm tall. The town has 1,228 residents (INE 2001).

Figs. 5-238, 239, 240. The church (1991) and black Christs at San Lucas, 2004 (IHAH). Anthropologist Miles Richardson contemplates the unique penguin fountain.



2-San Manuel Colohete, San Manuel Colohete, Lempira (3)

This settlement is a special place in Honduras, primarily because of the old, elaborate facade on the church. On close inspection, a tiny black Christ can be seen embedded in the facade high over the portal of the church.

The large black Christ on the altar is "El Cristo Negro de Esquipulas" and is the patron of the village. Some have suggested that the black Christ of Colohete is the oldest in Central America (Navarrete C. *et al* 2004: 132). Except for its relatively isolated situation, the exceptionally dark and beautiful image, housed in its ornate old church would probably be a much more significant draw for tourists than it is currently.

The residents of the town of 677, who claim to be 47% Lenca (INE 2001), have been connected to Esquipulas, Guatemala, for many years. According to informants in 1983, they made annual trips to Esquipulas in January. Today, if they go, it is by car. However, several of the older heads recall making the trip in a three-day walk. Quite a quick pace for the distance of over 50 miles.

The small pots on the altar were made in Colosuca, modern San Sebastián, the sister settlement that is ten kilometers to the southwest. Before 1976 the exchange of saints, the *guancasco*, among Colohete (San Manuel), Colosuca (San Sebastián), and La Campa had stopped. However, a smaller santo de Esquipulas is available for processions. (GFEAH 2000: 11, 13)

Figs. 5-241/242. Church in San Manuel Colohete, 1991; Black Christ inset in church façade, Colohete, 1991 (JRS).



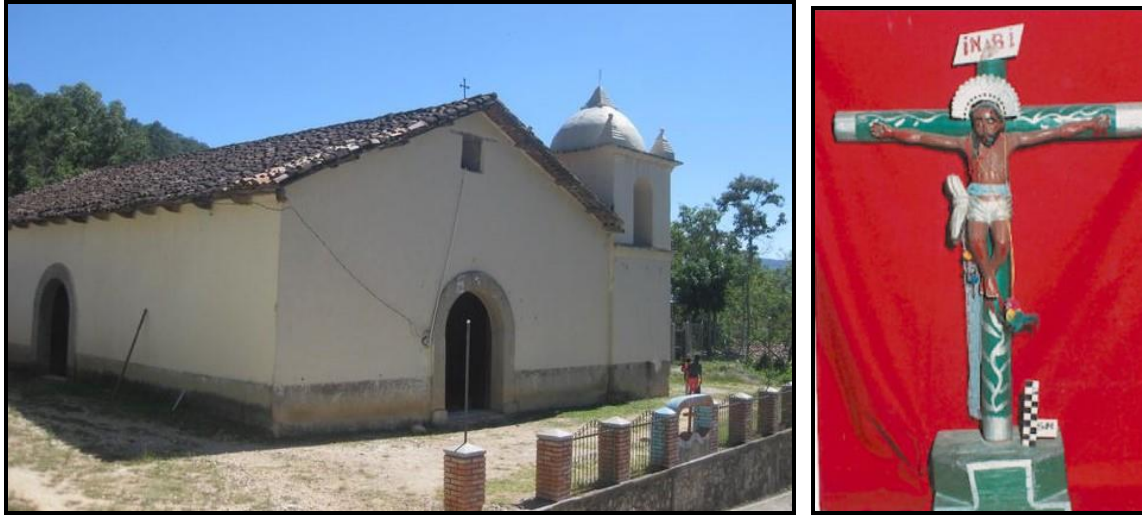
Figs. 5-243/244/245. Black Christ on main altar, with Mario Ardon and mayordomo, 1983; detail (IHAH 2004); smaller Black Christ, for processions (IHAH 2003).



1-San Marcos de la Sierra, San Marcos de la Sierra, Intibucá

The patron saint of the small settlement of 283 inhabitants (INE 2001) is San Marcos, but the small image of "El Señor de Esquipulas" (35 cms. tall) is much revered, according to informants. Unfortunately, the municipio has been declared as the poorest in the country (Martínez 2008).

Figs. 5-246/247. Church (2022) and El Señor de Esquipulas, San Marcos de la Sierra, 2006 (IHAH).



San Pedro Sula, San Pedro Sula, Cortés

As early as 1855 “Esquipulas” was used as a place name in the land title for San Pedro’s ejidos. “El Platanar de Esquipulas,” next to the “Rio de las Piedras,” formed one of the boundaries (Rodriquez A. 2019: 18). At least four churches in San Pedro Sula have a black Christ displayed.

1-Iglesia El Carmen, Colonia El Carmen (2)

Colonia El Carmen lies a few km northeast of San Pedro Sula centro. In January 2008 the church that houses a black Christ was being restored. In 1995 parishioners had placed a small black Christ high near the roof, behind the altar. Another, less dark, was positioned on the end of the altar.

Figs. 5-248/249. Cristo negros, Ig. El Carmen, San Pedro Sula, 1995 (JK).



1-Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Virgen de Guadalupe (2)

In barrio Guadalupe, north of the central business district in San Pedro Sula, the modern church hosts an artful presentation of a black Christ that hangs high above the altar. Another, smaller, dark Christ is placed near the table-altar in conjunction with the Virgen of Guadalupe, patroness of the parish. A final black Christ is on the west wall.

Figs. 5-250/251/252. Iglesia de Guadalupe; Cristo Negro above altar, dark Christ-Virgen of Guadalupe pairing, Ig. Guadalupe, San Pedro Sula, 2008.



2-Iglesia Cristo de Esquipulas, Barrio Buenos Aires

The templo "Cristo de Esquipulas" in Barrio Buenas Aires is one of four churches established in San Pedro Sula by Padre Cruz Ripa, a Spanish missionary de la Congregación de los Hijos del Corazón de María y member de la parroquia de Guadalupe de San Pedro Sula. The church was dedicated to El Señor de Esquipulas in April, 1976.

Figs. 5-253/254. Iglesia "Cristo de Esquipulas," San Pedro Sula, with black Christ, 2008.



2-Iglesia Señor de Esquipulas, Colonia Gracias A Dios

In the far northwestern outskirts of San Pedro Sula is the relatively new church dedicated to El Señor de Esquipulas, in 1971. The crucified Christ that hangs behind the modest table altar is 45 cm tall, a gift of Doña Mérida Orellana de Aguilar. The present pastor of the parish, Rev. Fernando Ibañez is from Burgos, Spain, which also has a tradition of a black Christ.

Figs. 5-255/256. Iglesia y altar, Señor de Esquipulas, Col. Gracias a Dios, San Pedro Sula, 2008.



1-San Sebastian (de Colosuca), San Sebastian, Lempira (2)

The church in San Sebastian has two black Christs. The large one, "El Santo Cristo Negro," occupies the central position on the main altar encased in glass. This is undoubtedly the one that Flores Andino (2007) recalled seeing "years ago" on the altar, along with Santiago. The smaller cristo negro (43 cm tall) is confined to a small nicho.

Fig. 5-257. Iglesia de Colosuca 2019.



Figs. 5-258/259. Main altar, with cristo negro; Cristo negro in nicho, San Sebastian de Colosuco, 2007 (IHAH).



1-San Vicente Centenario, San Vicente Centenario, Santa Bárbara

The cristo negro of San Vicente Centenario is approximately 28 cm tall and hangs on a free-standing cross that moves about the church in various locations.

Figs. 5-260/261. Church (2022) and Cristo Negro of San Vicente Centenario, 2004 (IHAH).

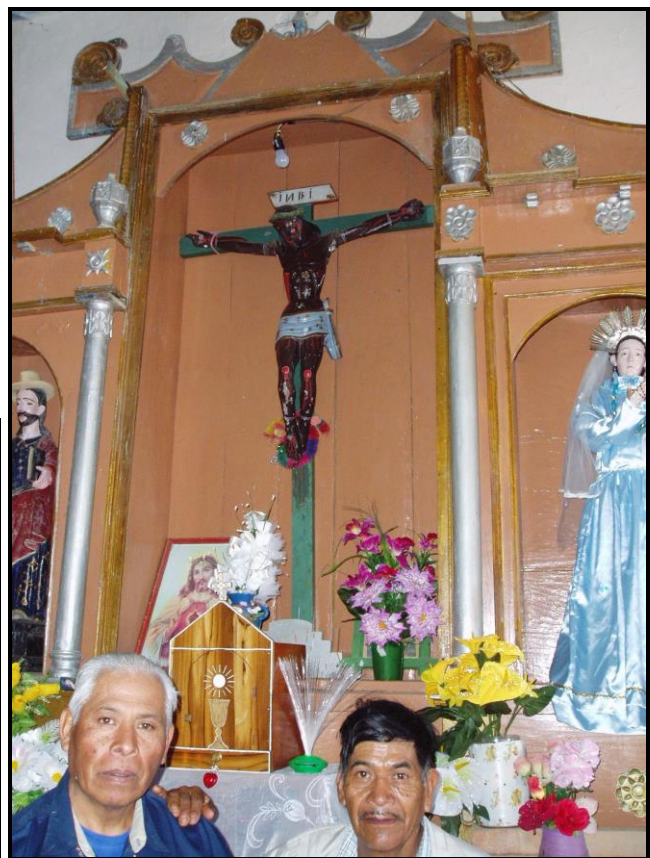


1-Santa Ana, Santa Ana, La Paz

Formerly known as Cacauterique, Santa Ana is one of the four old mountainous Lenca towns southwest of Guajiquiro. In the census of 2001 it held only 310 residents (INE 2001). The church sits at the far west of town, much like Opatoro, and opens onto a large unused field. According to Andrés Martínez, delegado de la iglesia, the church was constructed in 1899 and the Cristo negro that hangs on the main altar was present before that date. Residents of Santa Ana still take pilgrimages to Esquipulas in trucks. The trip normally takes eight days.

Francisco Flores A. (2007) reports two images in the church from 1865.

Figs. 5-262/263. The church and altar (with mayordomos) at Santa Ana, 2008.



1-Santa Ana Yusguare, Santa Ana Yusguare, Choluteca

The church in Yusguare is beautifully situated on the main plaza. The interior is simply adorned and without a black Christ visible. However, in the sacrista behind the altar, a black Christ 33 cm tall on a free-standing cross is stored, paired with Virgin de Guadalupe. Since the photograph taken by the IHAH in 2005, the image suffered a dislocation of his right arm. Flores A. (2007) knew of a black Christ in Yusguare that measures about 70 cm tall.

Figs. 5-264/265. Church and black Christ of Yusguare, 2008 (LS).



2-Santa Bárbara, Santa Bárbara, Santa Bárbara

Santa Bárbara, capital of the department of the same name is not an ancient place. Its origins can be traced to the late 18th century. During the spring of 1797, the prospect of moving the historical *cabecera* of the *curato* from Tencoa three leagues northward to a new site, known then as Santa Bárbara Cataquiles [also Cachaquiles, Cathaquiles, Cathequiles], provoked twelve *vecinos* of Tencoa to protest. Their document explained the locational advantages of the Tencoa settlement area and the faults of the proposed site of Santa Bárbara. To support their claim, the proponents championed the central location of Tencoa and downplayed the extreme northern peripheral position of Santa Bárbara in relation to the other settlements within the region of the Tencoa curato. However, the appeal by the residents of Tencoa was unsuccessful. On July 18, 1797 Santa Barbara was proclaimed the new *cabecera* and the national government in Comayagua confirmed the decision on July 29, 1797 (Davidson 2006: mapa 80; AGCA 1797).

Patron saint of the city is la Virgen de Concepción, celebrated during the first week in December. However, the *cristo negro* housed in the main church in Santa Bárbara occupies the lower central position on the main altar, immediately below Guadalupe. Residents claim no special history for the image, but do not believe it is of great age. No information can be found in the church records that go back to approximately 1870. GFEAH 2000: 62.

Figs. 5-266/267/268. Church (1993), main altar (1998), and Cristo Negro, Santa Bárbara, 2007 (IHAH).

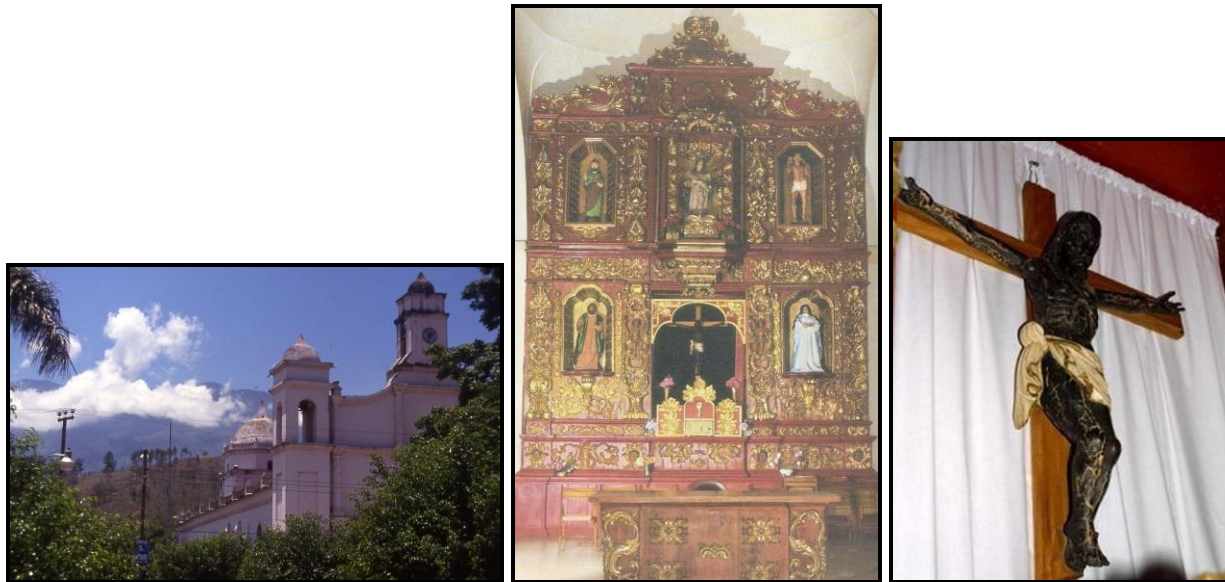
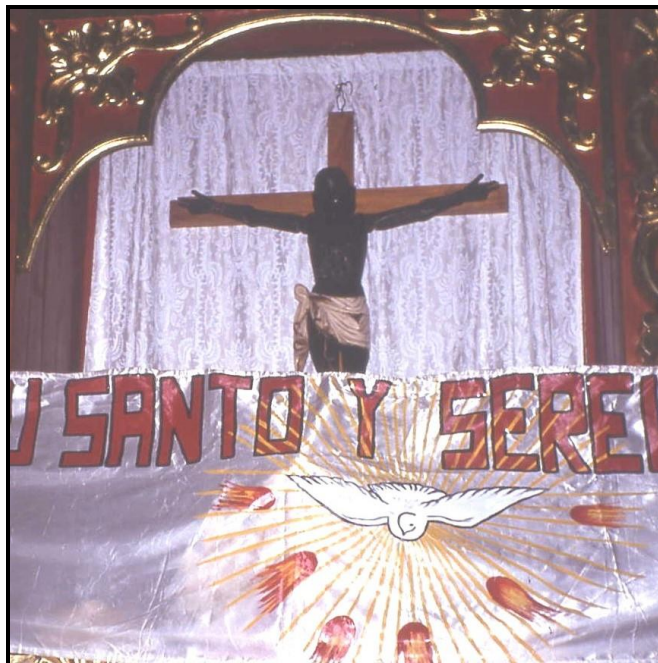


Fig 5-269. The altar in 1993 (MR).



1-Santa Cruz, Marcala, La Paz

This aldea of 346 people, exactly half classified as Lenca (INE 2001), is located four kilometers from Marcala along the secondary road that runs southwest from barrio San Juan. Formerly, the steep, upslope road connected Marcala with Yarula and Santa Elena. The small modern church in Santa Cruz received a black Christ in 1997 as a gift from a businessman in Marcala. He bought the image in Guatemala City. It is paired with Guadalupe.

Figs. 5-270/271. Church in the mist of January, 2008; altar of El Sr. de Esquipulas, paired with Guadalupe, Santa Cruz, 2008.



1-Santa Fe, Santa Fe, Colón (3)

There have been at least three black Christs in Santa Fe, a Garífuna settlement known during the early nineteenth century as Punta Hicaco. As of 2006, one was attached to a free-standing cross along the east wall of the church, opposite a white Christ on the west wall. In 1997, small altar contained a tiny free-standing *cristo negro* and another in a *nicho*.

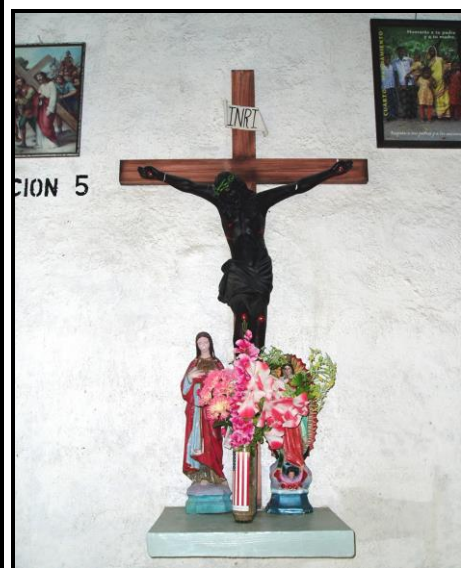
The church is located midway on the south side of the main road that runs east-west through the coastal village. Informants give contradictory answers about their Christ's relationship with Esquipulas. Some older residents stated that the black statue is the same as "Esquipulas," others, younger, said that it has no relationship to the black Christ of Esquipulas.

An anthropologist who lived in Santa Fe during 1983, wrote extensively about religion and artifacts in the village, but did not mention a black Christ. She noted that Santa Fe has the Virgin del Carmen as its patron saint. According to historians of the village, a manifestation of the virgin appeared on Cayo Blanco, a small unoccupied islet a few kilometers offshore. Each year on July 16 several villagers, accompanied by their image of the virgin, visit the island (Bianchi 1988: 206). If a black Christ was in Santa Fe during her stay, it was not an important element in their Catholicism.

Fig. 5-272. Cristo Negros on altar, Santa Fe, 1997 (TEM).



Figs. 5-273/274. Altar and Black Christ on side wall, 2006.



3-Santa Lucía, Santa Lucía, Francisco Morazán

Perhaps because of its proximity to Tegucigalpa, the largest Honduran city and capital of the country, El Cristo de las Mercedes, or El Cristo Señor de las Mercedes de Santa Lucía, attracts much attention as a "black Christ." However, on closer examination observers recognize immediately that the statuary is certainly not dark, but that does not impede the large number of pilgrims that visit Santa Lucía during celebrations of mid-January and Semana Santa -- to see their "Cristo negro."

Many Hondurans claim that the Christ in Santa Lucía was presented by the Spanish king, Philip, The Second, to the mining community on January 15, 1572. Historians have claimed that Felipe II sent it first to a convent, La Señora de las Mercedes in Santa Lucía, in 1594 (Martínez C. 1992: 103).

Another, legendary, account originated with President Marco Aurelio Soto and has been passed on by Jesús Aguilar Paz (1972:90):

" . . . la parte legendaria del Santo Cristo de Santa Lucía y que movió al presidente Soto a escribir sobre dicho tópico, se refiere a que el Cristo prefirió quedarse en el florido jardín de Santa Lucía, pues cada vez que los Tegucigalpas pretendían traerla a la Capital, la imagen se hacía terriblemente pesada, de modo que hacía imposible su conducción. Esta pesadez se hacía imposible al no más llegar al portillo de la Mina Grande, punto correspondiente al camino viejo, que del mineral conducía a la ciudad."

In Soto's own words, from 1953 (Valle 1957: 108-09):

"Uno de los objetos regalados por Felipe II a Santa Lucía era como hemos dicho, un Cristo que a la verdad es una regular obra de escultura. Tal imagen, como venida de rey, cobró desde su llegada gran celebridad y de por fuerza tenía que ser milagrosa. Los prodigios que el Cristo hacia esparcieron la fama por todos los ámbitos de la provincia, y aún más allá, pues se cuenta que hasta de México han venido en romería. Los enfermos que curó, los náufragos que salvó, etc., venían ellos o sus deudos a visitar al Señor, trayéndole pingues ofrendas. El Cristo de Santa Lucía era dueño de haciendas y de cuantiosos bienes de fortuna: tal vez en sus buenos tiempos no lo habrían ahorcado por 100.000 duros. En la Iglesia del pueblo se conservan muchas estampas y amuletos que forman los trofeos del Señor. Hay un atril de plata donde hemos visto esta inscripción: "Devoción de Nicolás Navas, Año de 1799."

El tal Navas, según se cuento, regaló al Señor tan valioso mueble porque debido a ser devoto del Cristo, se encontró una mina riquísima, cuya fama y nombre conserva todavía.

Imagen de tanto valor y de tanto poder para hacer milagros era natural que despertase vehementes deseos de poseerla. Inspirados en este interés, dícese

que los vecinos de Tegucigalpa (ellos habían de ser) dieron la treta de traerse la ciudad al Cristo de Santa Lucía. Pusieron mano a la obra y comenzaron trayendo prestada la imagen con la buena intención de quedarse con ella la vez menos pensada.

Fueron al fin a poner en práctica su premeditado plan, y alegres venían ya y como en triunfo, sin saber la mala jugado que les preparaba el Cristo. Una legua próximamente habían andado cuando tuvieron que pararse: el Cristo se había vuelto tan inmensamente pesado, que no podían moverlo: sólo tomaba su natural peso cuando retrocedían con él. En la imposibilidad de llenar sus deseos, los conductores mohinos tuvieron que volver el Cristo a su lugar. Los de Santa Lucía contentos con el amor que les demostraba el santo y del chasco que habían sufrido los tegucigalpenses hacinaron en el sitio de la milagrosa hazaña, un montón de piedras, y en su cima pusieron la Cruz que, de tiempo en tiempo renovada, se encuentra hasta hoy en el lugar que ya hemos dicho.

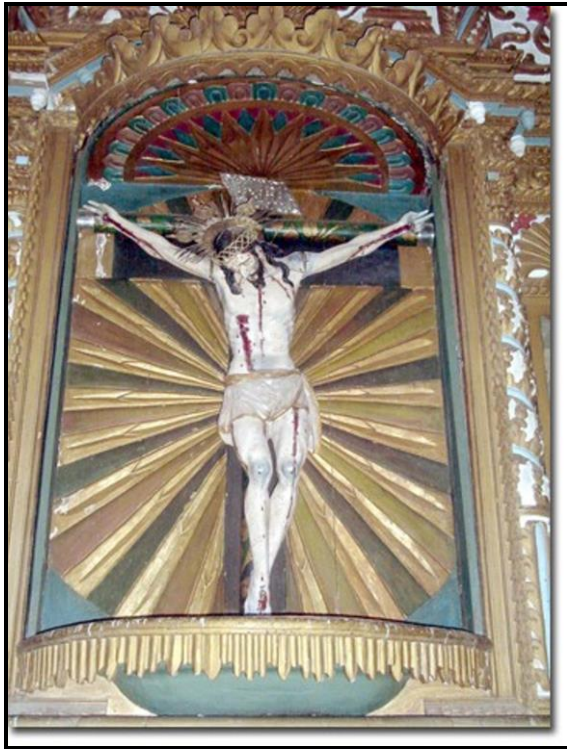
Tal es la tradición y no tenemos más que añadir, sino que la fe en el Cristo de Santa Lucía se conserva viva en nuestros pueblos y que sus milagros pasan de boca en boca como verdades inconcusas que no necesitan demostración."

On the Saturday and Sunday nearest January 15 the church in Santa Lucía holds its most important annual festival. The highway to Santa Lucía is crowded with buses and private automobiles carrying thousands of pilgrims who participate in all aspects of celebration. Paz Solórzano (1949: 188) and Borhegyi (1954: 399) note that Santa Lucía has a shrine and tablets associated with the black Christ of Esquipulas. (Prats 1995; GFEAH 2000: 168)

Figs. 5-275/276. Iglesia de Santa Lucía (1994); Altar scene, Santa Lucía, January 15, 1991.



Fig. 5-277. Detail, El Cristo de las Mercedes, Santa Lucía, 2000 (GFEAH).



1-Santa Rosa de Copán, Santa Rosa de Copán, Copán

This settlement, the capital and largest place of the Department of Copán, is not a major center for the devotion of the black Christ. Residents are more interested in visiting Quesailica or Esquipulas, Guatemala. The domed church hosts two black Christs: a tiny color print of the Esquipulas scene and a sculpted crucified Christ, about 100 cm. tall, on a moveable platform. The image, in the classic form of Esquipulas, has recently been repainted -- a brown color over the darker original.

Figs. 5-278/279/280. Catedral de Nuestra Señora Virgen de Santa Rosa, Santa Rosa de Copán, with el Cristo negro, 2004 (IHAH) and on altar, 2023.



1-Suyapa, Distrito Central, Francisco Morazán

Within the church at Suyapa, which is just east of the national university in Tegucigalpa and behind the national Basilica of the Virgen de Suyapa, no image of the Christ of Esquipulas can be seen today. However, according to the "Inventario de la Parroquia de Tegucigalpa. Año de 1876", the church did then display a small painting of "Esquipulas" (Valladares R. 1946: 74). The same document comments that "Suyapa is to Honduras, as Esquipulas is to Guatemala."

Fig. 5-281. La Iglesia Virgen de Suyapa, 1989.



1-Támara, Distrito Central, Francisco Morazán

In a document of June 12, 1816 (ANH 119/3845), the church in Támara was referred to as the repository of "El Señor Crucificado de Támara." The color of the Christ was not mentioned. Residents of Tegucigalpa, however, speak of a black Christ in Támara "in the past." Visits of 1983, 1993, and September 2007 to the church and interviews with parishioners uncovered no indications of a black Christ within the last forty years.

Fig. 5-282. The church at Tamará, 2007.



1-Tatumbla, Tatumbla, Francisco Morazán

In the church of San Francisco, named for the patron saint of the settlement, has been seen an unusual oil painting of El Señor de Esquipulas, on laton (sheet brass). The IHAH measured it to be 44x31 cms. Flores Andino (2007) knew of it also. Two trips in 2008 did not reveal the painting.

Fig. 5-283. The church at San Francisco, Tatumbla, 2008.



Tegucigalpa, Distrito Central, Francisco Morazán

1-Cathedral

In the main church, on Plaza Morazán, in the center of downtown Tegucigalpa, there is no black Christ. The only dark image is a black virgin, de Monserrat, the original of which is near Barcelona. It has been said that once "El Cristo Quemada" of the Galería Nacional de Arte was in the Cathedral.

Fig. 5-284. Cathedral de San Miguel, Tegucigalpa, 2001.



1-Galería Nacional de Arte

Adjacent to the church of the Merced, the National Art Gallery displays a splendid piece of artwork (100 cm high) entitled "El Cristo Quemado." It is said to have originally been in the cathedral of Tegucigalpa. While it is a "black Christ" it has no relationship to Esquipulas.

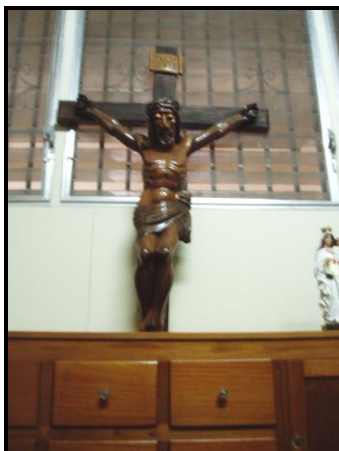
Figs. 5-285/286. Galeria Nacional de Arte, Tegucigalpa; "El Cristo Quemado," 2007.



1-Iglesia de La Merced

Towards the river, one block south of the cathedral, is La Iglesia de la Merced. Upon viewing the interior of the church no black Christ can be seen. However, the visita of bishop Diego Rodríguez in 1760 noted a "Cristo de Esquipulas" (ANH 1760) in La Merced, and perhaps that is the dark brown one that is hanging within the sacistran on the left side of the church. Informants recall that "until a few years ago" the cristo adorned the retablo mayor of the main altar. A painting of the Cristo de Esquipulas has been reported (Martínez C. 1992: 124), but not revealed during a recent inspection.

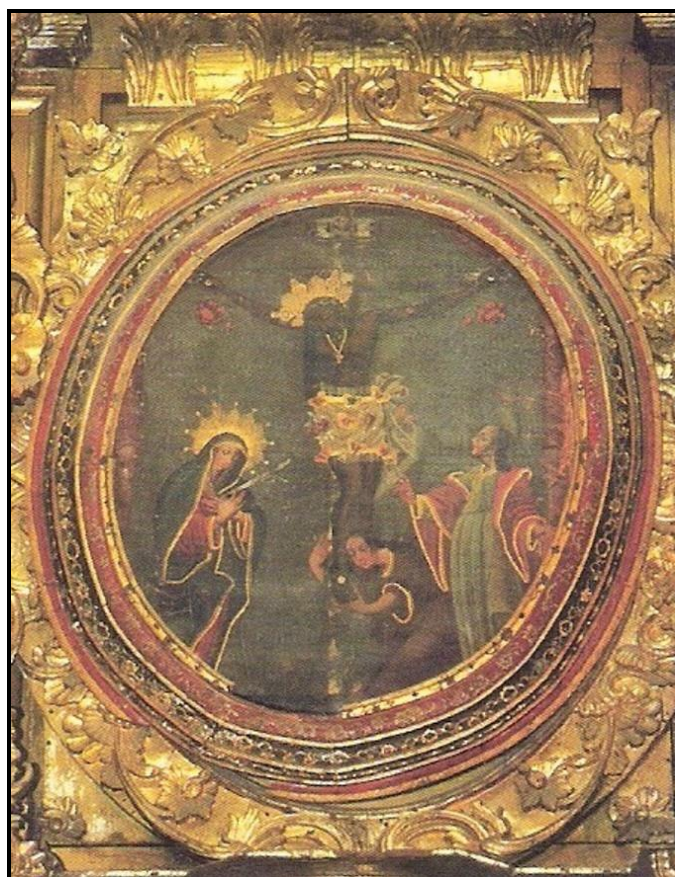
Fig. 5-287. "Black Christ" of Iglesia de la Merced, Tegucigalpa, 2007.



1-Iglesia de San Francisco de Asís

The church, a part of the former Franciscan convent that faces Parque Valle, is home for one of the rare paintings of the Esquipulas Christ. High on the retablo behind the altar is an oval rendering of the crucifixion scene. Francisco Flores Andino (2007) has dated the painting from May 13, 1771. The northern wall of San Francisco has two other dark images, San Benito and San Martín. (GFEAH 2000: 128, 130, 131)

Fig. 5-288. Painting of Esquipulas scene, Ig. San Francisco de Asís, Tegucigalpa (GFEAH 2000).



1-Tela, Tela, Atlántida

In la Iglesia San Martín de Porres, since 1964, during mid-January "El Cristo Negro de Esquipulas" has been celebrated. Many of the residents of Colonia Las Brisas gather for a special saying of the rosary, youth choir, and a mass. There is no permanent statue of a black Christ in the church.

1-Textíguat, Textíguat, El Paraíso

In the church of San Francisco, the IHAH inventory photograph of a black Christ 29 cm tall shows a figure that has lost its right foot and all of its fingers. On inspection of January 2008, the

image could not be located. However, a tiny black Christ was being held in the right hand of Saint Francis on the left of the main altar.

Figs. 5-289/290. Iglesia de San Francisco; main altar, Texíguat, 2008.



Figs. 5-291/292/293. Black Christs of Texíguat (IHAH 2004); Saint Francis holding a small black Christ, 2008.



***2-Trojes, Trojes, El Paraíso**

Trojes, which developed as a settlement during the Contra War, is the most recent church in Honduras to proclaim El Señor de Esquipulas as patron.

1-Trujillo, Trujillo, Colón

An interesting occurrence of a black Christ in Trujillo is revealed in documents discussing the settlement of an estate in 1815 (**AGCA 1815, 1816**). After the death of Capitan Pedro Suasi, leader of the *morenos franceses* fighting in Tehuantepec, Mexico, an inventory of his possessions in Trujillo was taken. Suasi was obviously one of the wealthiest residents, owning houses, canoes, land of milpas y plantanales, ganado mayor of all classes, etc. Among his "inventario de vienes" was "una pintura mas pequeña (en lienso) del Señor de Esquipulas con su bobillo" (**1816, folio 7**). There is no indication of how Suasi came to possess the painting, but that he owned it is evidence that those in his community knew of Esquipulas 200 years ago. Of course, for many years Trujillo was a major port with contacts throughout northern Central America (Mack 1997).

Fig. 5-294. Cathedral de Trujillo, 2022.



3-Veracruz, Comayagua, Comayagua (5)

The little caserío of Veracruz is a special place for its devotion to the black Christ of Esquipulas. The tiny chapel there holds five representations of the Esquipulas Christ. Also known, incorrectly, to some residents of the Comayagua Valley as Cantoral (which lies a bit to the west), the caserío is of unusual importance given the size of the settlement and its relatively isolated location. Veracruz sits atop the eastern edge of a ridgeline at an elevation of approximately 1360 meters in the northwestern corner of the Comayagua Valley, some 15 kilometers due west of Comayagua and 11 km northwest from Ajuterique. In 2001, its population was 51 (**INE 2001**).

Informants at the Ajuterique church in 1995 remarked that the statuary in Veracruz was originally located in their church, but today remains "*de los indios de las montañas*." Long ago, when the black Christ of Ajuterique was visiting the small village upslope, they said, the *cristo* became unusually heavy and was unable to be returned down slope. The people in both settlements agreed that "*la figura*" wished to remain in Veracruz. For many years, Veracruz and

Ajuterique have shared the *guancasco* tradition. Today, when Santiago is honored in May in Ajuterique, the *cristo negro* of Veracruz makes the journey to Ajuterique to pay his respect.

The festival in Veracruz normally occurs on January 14 and 15. Pilgrims from down slope, especially from the piedmont region of the northwestern corner of the Comayagua Valley, begin their walks early on the morning of the 14th. Two routes are followed. One, which follows the older, more direct, way, from Ajuterique, heads northwest along a trail where one must walk. The other route follows the modern road, a well maintained gravel road as of January, 2004, that passes through to San Antonio Cañas, another *portillo* village. Because Veracruz has no resident priest, the one from Ajuterique presides over the event.

Public transport for the trip to Veracruz is available in Comayagua on the north side of the main market. A large truck, with standing room only, leaves at 11 A. M. for Portillo de la Mora. The ride is just less than two hours. The road passes through the lush rice fields, irrigated via concrete canals with water from the Río Selguapa. Past the piedmont, through Lo de Reina, an oak hardwood forest dominates, with an occasional liquidambar. Halfway up the slope, pines begin near La Laguna, followed by another band of hardwoods and then finally at about 1,200 m a few more pines. From Portillo, where the truck stops, pilgrims must walk for 90 minutes on a well-maintained gravel road to reach Veracruz. All of the settlements in this geographical zone are *portillos*, settlements that are established in the saddles along the ridgelines of the mountain ranges.

The primary reason for the pilgrimage is to pay respect to "El Señor de Veracruz." This image is about 50 cm tall and hangs on the altar encased in glass. A close look reveals two other black *Cristos de Esquipulas* on his right arm. A slightly smaller image has been placed on a table to the left of the main altar and, with the Virgen, is prepared for procession.

The market held in conjunction with the pilgrimage of mid-January attracts a variety of vendor/traders. In fact, the range of the merchants -- from Siguatepeque, Comayagua, Marcala, Jesús de Otoro, La Villa San Antonio -- exceeds the distances traversed by the pilgrims.

Fig. 5-295. Chapel of Cristo Negro de Esquipulas, Veracruz, 2004.



Figs. 5-296/297. Pilgrims walk the camino to Veracruz; the last of the merchants, late evening, Veracruz, January 15, 2004.



Fig. 5-298. Mayordomo and friends, Chapel in Veracruz, 2004.



Figs. 5-299/300/301. Black Christs in Chapel of Veracruz, for procession and El Señor de Veracruz on the altar, 2004.



2-Victoria, Victoria, Yoro

Victoria is the *cabecera* of a *municipio* of the same name. The elongated settlement of approximately 2,000 inhabitants (INE 2001) is oriented east-west along an elevated platform on the north side of the Río Sulaco.

Two churches host black Christs in Victoria. The older church, known as *la iglesia de abajo* (it is downstream and slightly downslope) is unusual in orientation (Tillman 2009), being located just west of the old plaza and with its door opening to the east, altar to west.

Figs. 5-302/303. The churches of Victoria: old (iglesia abajo) and new (arriba), 2006.



Figs. 5-304/305. Altar and mayordomo (with author), upper church, Victoria 2006 (CR).



Figs. 5-306/307. Black Christs, upper and lower churches, Victoria, 2006 (CR).



La iglesia arriba, is newer, built in 1996. It is situated, in normal fashion for Honduran churches, to the east of a *parque*, with door opening to west, altar to east. The black Christ in the new church is life-size and carved by an *ebanista* of Sulaco, a village just upstream from Victoria. The

priest in Victoria commissioned the carving for dedication on the opening of the new church. Residents claim that a few hundred pilgrims enter Victoria yearly to participate in the celebration of El Cristo Crucificado on January 15th. A sister church in Germany placed a small metallic sculpture of a black Christ on the south wall in 1992. The inscription: "En hermandad. Parroquia Heilig Kreuz, Recklinghausen/Alemania 1992." **Recklinghausen** is a city in the Ruhr Valley.

Villa San Antonio, Villa San Antonio, Comayagua (2)

3-Ermita del Señor de Esquipulas

The newest chapel devoted to El Señor de Esquipulas in Honduras is in the northeastern barrio of the same name in Villa San Antonio in the southern Comayagua Valley. Informants say that Germán Cáliz, president of the local Claritians organized the religious community about 2003. The *feria* that is held during mid-January attracts visitors and merchants from San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalpa, La Paz, Siguatepeque, and throughout the Comayagua Valley.

Figs. 5-308/309. Ermita and grounds during festival; black Christ altar, Ermita del Señor de Esquipulas, La Villa, 2008.



1-Iglesia de Las Mercedes

The largest church in Villa San Antonio is located on the main plaza. Only upon close inspection can one see a very small *cristo negro* hanging from the rosary on the left side of the Saint Francis to the left of the altar.

Figs. 5-310/311/312. Iglesia de Las Mercedes; Tiny Cristo Negro, on rosary of St. Francis, Las Mercedes, Villa San Antonio, 2008.



Yamaranguila, Yamaranguila, Intibucá (3)

1-Alcaldía

Adjacent to the church on the south is a building belonging to the "Alcaldía auxiliara municipal indígena Lenca de la Vara Alta de Yamaranguila." Within a large closeable vitrina, a small black Christ can be found on an altar. In June 2001, José Gavino Manueles, alcalde auxiliara, was gracious in allowing us to view their image.

Figs. 5-313/314. Small Cristo Negro hidden on cross, shrine of Alcaldía Lenca, 2001.



2-La Iglesia

Within the church on the east of the plaza in Yamaranguila are two black Christs. One hangs on the altar and another is displayed along the southern wall.

Figs. 5-315/316. Church 1994; altar 2004.



Although the town, one of the most traditional in Honduras, has as its ferias patronales on the days of Santa Lucía (December 13) and San Francisco (October 4), the importance of El Señor de Esquipulas cannot be overstated. Of the Cristo Negro of Yamaranguila, anthropologist Anna Chapman (1985-6: II: 46) related the following:

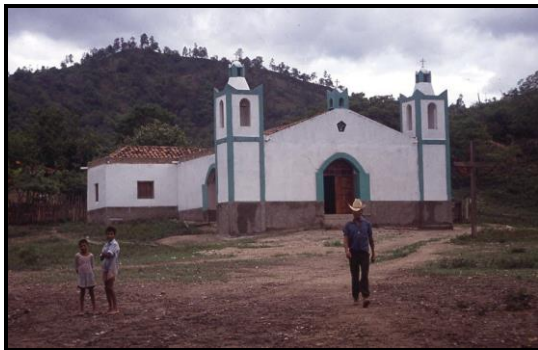
Un hombre venía por el camino de El Obispo, del pueblo de San Miguelito. Venía solo, con una mula cargada con dulce (azúcar no refinada) y otras cosas para venderlas aquí. Ya de noche se puso a descansar debajo de un pino. Estaba por dormir, cuando oyó voces; no supo qué eran, quizás rezos, pensó. Se puso a averiguar de dónde salían, pero no vio nada. Atizó el fuego y miraba por todas partes. Las voces no lo dejaron dormir en toda la noche. Por la mañana vio el Esquipulas en un nicho del tronco del mismo pino, pero bien arriba. Las puertitas del nicho estaban abiertas. No quiso tocarlo y se vino aquí al pueblo para dar cuenta. En aquel entonces sólo había un alguacil aquí. Volvió acompañado de cuatro hombres, armados con garrotes, pues creían que era el susto y fueron a capturarlo. Más

bien hallaron el Cristo. Lo bajaron y lo trajeron aquí. El pino donde estaba se transformó en rocas y allí están. Esto fue para que no se quemara, para que no desaparezca. Y el Señor de Esquipulas quedó en la iglesia y ya nunca salió. (also see Carias, *et al* 1988)

1-Yoculateca, San Ignacio, Francisco Morazán

The small village of Yoculateca (480 residents; INE 2001) has a classic settlement plan: the town is in a flat valley, with an entrance ceiba, and the little church is to the east of the plaza. The main altar displays two small crucifixes: a black Christ on the right and a white Christ to the left. The mayordomo, a man born in the early 1930s, could recall no special history to explain the presence of the black Christ, but knew it had been in the church as long as he could remember.

Figs. 5-317/318. Church and altar at Yoculateca, 1993.



1-Yorito, Yorito, Yoro

One of the most important old towns along the camino between Trujillo and Comayagua, Yorito lies within a zone of *cristo negro* concentration. Within 50 kilometers of Yoro black Christs can be found at Yoro, Yorito, Chalmecca, Macora, Jocón, San Lorenzo, Luquigue, Victoria, Marale, Yoculateca, and Esquias. This is a region of Tolupan people and early Fransiscan influence. In the Yorito church the image of El Señor de Esquipulas, photographed by IHAH, is approximately 40 cm tall and in an advanced state of ruin.

Figs. 5-319/320. Church in Yorito, 1993; Cristo Negro, Yorito, 2006 (IHAH).



2-Yoro, Yoro, Yoro

Yoro is an ancient settlement, probably appearing on the list of places in the *repartimiento* de San Pedro by Pedro Alvarado (1536). The city remains important as the capital of the department of Yoro. The parish, which is organized by a group of Jesuits, celebrates Santiago (July 25th) and the Immaculate Conception (December 8th), but also has a black Christ hanging on the altar. However, the church is best known as the grave site of the famous "santo missionary" of Honduras, Jesús Manuel Subirana.

Figs. 5-321/322. Iglesia de Yoro, altar, 2006 (CR).



Figs. 5-323/324/325. Tomb of Subirana, Iglesia de Yoro, 2006 (CR).



1-Yuscarán, Yuscarán, El Paraíso (2)

San José de Yuscarán was established as a mining settlement during the 1730s (Flores Andino 2000: 101). Although the settlement today has much less population and a peripheral position relative to Danlí, Yuscarán remains capital of the Departamento de El Paraíso. The church, located on the plaza central, celebrates its ferias patronales with San Juan Bautista (June 24) and La Inmaculata Concepción (December 12).

The black Christ of Esquipulas is represented by a small example that hangs high on the left side of the altar. The IHAH image collection includes a 79x57 centimeters oil painting of the Esquipulas triad that originated in Yuscarán. Flores Andino (2000: 116-117) reported that the church has two "Cristos de Esquipulas." An image was on the altar and a colonial painting was in the sacristía.

Figs. 5-326/327/328/329. Iglesia and altar Black Christ in San Juan church, Yuscarán, 2002; Oil painting of Esquipulas scene, from Yuscarán, 2004 (IHAH).



1-Zamarano, Escuela PanAmericano, Francisco Morazán

The Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia reports that a painting of a black Christ previously in the church at San Antonio de Oriente is now housed in the Museo Popenoe on the Zamorano campus.

*** **

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