

## On the *Tegucigalpa/Taguzgalpa* Toponym, and its Regionalization

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### Introduction

One of the popular mysteries of Honduran geography and history is the location of the colonial territory known as *Taguzgalpa* or a similar term. Perhaps the name has captured so much attention in Honduras because the word is so like that of the capital city, *Tegucigalpa*. While one place name refers to a known aboriginal and modern settlement and the other to an imprecisely delimited and little known territory in eastern Honduras, it remains undetermined whether the two terms are related or not. The fact is, according to 16th century rules of transcription, orthography, and perhaps etymology, the words are essentially the same. The sound difference is no more than between **Z** and **S** and **CI** and **ÇI** and these letters, like **O** and **U**, **B** and **V**, **X** and **J**, **LL** and **Y**, **Y** and **I**, and **L** and **R** were interchangeable in Spanish in early colonial Honduras (Nieto Segovia 1995: 18, 26, 30, 33, 44, 45, 49). Of course, there is the monumental problem that Ta-guz-gal-pa has four syllables and Te-gu-ci-gal-pa has five. On the other hand, we do not know how the words were pronounced in Honduras during the 16th century when they were first heard by the Spanish ear as relayed from indigenous translators.

As in the case of *Sula*, presented in essay 6, the term has wandered cartographically over the country of Honduras. In part because of this restlessness, one might conclude that the numerous historical renderings of the terms that begin *Teguz*, *Tigus*, or *Taguz*, etc. and that end with *galpa* or *calpa*, perhaps refer to the same place, or at least are derived from the same parent words.

### Tegucigalpa: Transcriptions and Translations

Previous, and diverse, attempts to translate the term Tegucigalpa, with all of its variations, are evidence of the uncertainty of its provenience. Most attempts at translation, primarily by clergymen, modern historians, and several Mexican linguists, point to Náhuatl as the mother language and find that meanings normally relate to mineral extraction (silver or gold) or houses of important people. For example, Rómulo Durón, in the third edition of *Bosquejo Histórico de Honduras* (1982: 47), notes that Spaniards settled "al lado del pueblo indio de aquel nombre (*Taguzgalpa*), que, según se sabe por tradición antigua, significa **Cerro de Plata**." While Durón declares the generally accepted definition of Tegucigalpa, he presents at the same time a case of possible confusion between Taguzgalpa, the eastern region, and Tegucigalpa, the settlement.

Apparently, the toponym, as applied to a settlement, first appears in Spanish documents in the list of *repartimientos* of Pedro Alvarado (1536a). While in San Pedro in June 1536 *el tunatiuh* (Recinos 1986) allocated *Teguycigalpa* (in the AGI manuscript; *Teguycegalpa* in first printed version, CDI 16) to conquistador Alvaro Gil. Aside from the notation that the settlement was to be under the jurisdiction of Gracias a Dios and not San Pedro, we know nothing of its location.

Other 16th century transcriptions include: *Teguiagalpa* [also *Teguiagala*], "una encomienda de Alonso Cáceres, con 150 tributarios" (Cerrato 1549); *Tigusigalpa*, minas de (AGI 1580), *Teguçigalpa*, "una encomienda de Lope de Cáceres, con 50 tributarios" (Contreras Guebara 1582); *Tegucicalpa*, "con 80 indios casados" (Valverde 1590b); *Tegucigalpa*, "con 88 tributarios, jurisdicción de Comayagua" (AGI 1592); and for 1598: "Minas de *Taguzcalpa*" and *Tegua galpa*, "un beneficio"(AGI 1598).

By 1611, Guerra de Ayala, who perhaps understood a little Náhuatl from his government position, places "Teu", the "dios" prefix onto the toponym, but normally during the 17th century most writers employ *Tegusigalpa*. Examples are from Vásquez de Espinosa (1629) and AGI 1685, when *Tegusigalpa*, had an estimated population of about 120.

The first appropriate cartographical location of *Tegucigalpa* is shown on the 1723 Onofre Núñez (Davidson 2006: plate XXXIII). However, subsequent maps (1758 Díez Navarro; 1774 Speer, when *Tiguzgalpa* is placed in Nicaragua; and the 1780 Lamb [*Tiutzixalpa*] and 1780 Ratzel [*Tiuzeyalpa*] which badly misplace the town to east of Comayagua and Talanga) are woefully incorrect (Davidson 2006: plates XLVII, LXI, LXX, LXXI). During the mid-1700s, an "H" (although silent) was often added, as in *Theguisgalpa* (1758 map of Díez Navarro) and San Miguel de *Thegucipala* (1765 map of Aviles) [Davidson 2006: plates XLVII and LII]. After 1787, *Tegucigalpa* becomes the preferred spelling.

Oscar Acosta, in his *Antología, Elogio de Tegucigalpa* (1978: 33-39), reviews the problem of provenience in a section entitled "Etimología de la palabra Tegucigalpa" and focuses on the ideas of non-Hondurans Dávila Garibi, Barra y Valenzuela, Flavio Rodas, y Antonio Peñafiel.

Perhaps the most elaborate construction is that by the Mexican Pedro Barra y Valenzuela in 1949. Using three Náhuatl terms: *tecohtli*, *calli*, and *pan*, he eventually determines that "Tegucigalpa" means "en la casa de los señores," or more simply "la casa de los señores" (Acosta 1978: 33). On the other hand, the Guatemalan Flavio Rodas N., perhaps out of his attachment to his homeland and a bit of "academic nationalism," believes the Tegucigalpa toponym derives from Quiché (Kiché), a Mayan language in Guatemala. He proposed that *kate* + *guitz* + *kakai* + *pa* in Quiché equals "*teguitz-kalpa* o *teguipkalpan*" and means "la región de los cerros de los venerables ancianos." Rafael Heliodoro Valle observed that Rodas "será muy poético, pero no tiene basas suficientes para la verdad . . . el valle de Tegucigalpa nunca fue ocupada por los mayas . . ." Antonio Peñafiel, in his *Nomenclatura Geográfica* (1897: 250) found that "*tecutli-calpan*" signifies "en los palacios reales." R. H. Valle believed that if the word is of Aztec origin, Peñafiel's sugestión is one of the best (Acosta 1978: 34). J. Ignacio Dávila Garibi,

catedrático de Náhuatl at UNAM, wrote: "Yo me inclino a creer que varios toponímicos centroamericanos, aunque tienen apariencia de nahuas, reconocen otra precedencia lingüística."

Aside from Acosta's compilation, a few others have made observations about the Tegucigalpa issue. Alberto Membreño (1901), one of the early toponymic experts of Honduras, believed Tegucigalpa is derived from four Náhuatl terms: *tetl* + *huistli* + *calli* + *pan*, which together means "en las casas de las piedras puntiagudas." The notion of "piedras pintadas" was supported by Oyuela (1989: 23) who sought evidence in the geological reality. Mario Felipe Martínez (1982: 13) pushed past the normally accepted "cerro de plata" and favors "lugar donde se reúnen los señores." He reasoned, properly it seems, that before the arrival of the Spaniards the indigenous population of Honduras did not mine for silver and therefore would not have used that term.

Totally different words are mentioned by Medardo Mejía (1983: 134) who wrote that "la aldea de indios *Tisingal*, dedicada a extraer oro y plata, fue transformada en población de mineros castellanos, and Hernández Chévez (1988: 94) who strangely claimed that when the departamento de Francisco Morazán was established in 1825 the capital was first named "*Tusgalpa* que significa cerro de plata."

### **Taguzgalpa: Early Colonial Notices of the Eastern Region**

For those attempting to reconstruct the geographical past of Central America, the formal bounding of Taguzgalpa has always proved allusive. For much of the later colonial period, especially after 1700, it seems clear that "Taguzgalpa" was transformed toponymically into "La Mosquitia." Throughout much of the early period, because of the rumors (or truth) of eastern Honduras as a place rich in gold, the region was of importance and mystery, and of intense interest to early explorers.

The first Spaniard to offer a translation of the toponym is Cristóbal de Pedraza (1544). Having been named "Protector of the Indians and Bishop of the Province of Honduras" by the King of Spain, Pedraza arrived in Puerto Caballos on the 13th of September, 1538 (Durón 1927: 32). His immediate concern was to settle the disputes between Montejo and Alvarado in Gracias a Dios (Chamberlain 1953: 159), after which it seems he returned to Spain, at least by January, 1541 (Durón 1927: 39). During this stay in Europe, Pedraza wrote the famous "*Relación de la Provincia de Honduras e Higueras*." The document contains information that the bishop obtained during the two-year stay in Honduras, 1538-40.

According to the *Relación*, Pedraza, accompanied by two Spaniards and 60 peaceful Indians from the Trujillo vicinity, walked south from the coast for three days into the mountains behind the port. From the top of the range, probably the modern Sierra de la Esperanza, "they viewed towns, many rivers, and flat lands that they thought reached as far as Veragua [Panamá]." After hearing the local Indians use the term *Tagusgualpa*, Pedraza asked his Mexican translators (*nahuatlato*s) the meaning of the word. The answer: "Tagusgualpa que quiere decir en su lengua 'casa donde se funde el oro' por respeto que en el pueblo más principal della esta una casa de fundación

adonde vienen de muchas partes de la tierra a fundir oro." **Clearly, in this first encounter with the term *Taguzgalpa* it referred to a single locale, a building or a settlement, and not to a large territory.** The confusion is furthered in later incorrect transcriptions of the document, which write *Tagiusgalpa* (Pedraza 1908; Nieto Segovia 1995: 171).

Perhaps as a result of information Pedraza brought back to Spain, conquistadors began to seek rights to explore and conquer the little-known lands interior of the Caribbean coast.

The arc of coastal land stretching from Trujillo east and south to perhaps the Chiriqui Lagoon, Panamá, has always been to the Europeans a rather inhospitable place. The east coast remained so imperfectly known that much geographical information that appeared in the documentation is contradictory, confusing, and often fiction. Only where the interior land meets the sea at three major river mouths -- río Negro (near Cabo Camarón), río Coco (Segovia, Wanks, etc.) near Cabo Gracias a Dios, and the mouth of the Río Desaguadero [río San Juan] -- was there consistent and clear reference (Lehmann 1920: II, 632).

Cabo Camarón, supposedly named for a local Indian chief, "Camarona, casique de la provincia de Ebuya" (CDIU 1892: 7,269), has been known as a place name since 1502. The most prominent cape, Cabo Gracias a Dios, of course, derives its name also from the fourth voyage of Columbus. The mouth of the río Desaguadero [San Juan] was the main Caribbean entrance way into the isthmus and was easily identified by the large muddy discharge that flows into the clear Caribbean.

Through the middle of the 16th century, the same land of eastern Central America, including the eastern portion of Honduras, was identified by three different names. **Veragua**, often called a provincia, was the coastal area beginning on the north at Cabo Gracias a Dios (F. Gutierrez 1534, en Oviedo 1977: 4, 450), or at Cabo Camarón (D. Gutierrez 1540, en Honduras 1912: 151), and continuing until Carabaró [Gulf of Chiriqui, Panamá] (Fernández 1886: V, 85-86). Veragua was specifically excluded from the provinces of Honduras and Nicaragua which were already being settled by Spaniards in their western regions. Diego Gutierrez, began his term as governor of Veragua, but by 1541, he found himself as governor of the same lands but then named **Cartago** (Fernández 1886: V,105). By 1556, the east coast had another name, the provincia de **Nueva Cartago y Costa Rica** (Fernández 1886: V,164). Of course, **Taguzgalpa** was also in the general area --somewhere. Was this simply a matter of political personalities being interested in settling the same territory and were they using three different regional names in their efforts to secure rights of exploration, conquest, and settlement?

After several attempts to persuade the King to allow his trip into eastern Central America, Lic. Ortiz Delgueta received in 1564 a commission "to conquer and to pacify the lands of the provincia de la Taguzgalpa and Cabo Camarón, which are in darkness and without faith" (Durón 1927: 41). With his pilot Andrés Martín and twenty men, Ortiz sailed along the coast between Cabo Camarón and the Río Desaguadero [Río

San Juan, Nicaragua], and founded a settlement, "la ciudad de Elgueta [also, del gueta], on Laguna Cartago [Caratasca] (AGI 1567). About one year later the settlement was moved some 30 leagues to the south, where it was soon abandoned (Durón 1927: 42). At least according to Ortiz, "Taguzgalpa" at the time was not a part of Honduras, but a territory apart, deserving status of a province. Of course, his view was perhaps prejudiced for he wished to be the governor of that new land. The northern border seemed to have been at Cabo Camarón. The southern edge might have extended until the mouth of the Desaguadero, at the modern boundary between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The interior boundary would have been defined by the frontier occupied by Spanish settlers in Olancho and the lands actively worked by Christian missionaries. That the south and east trending coast defined the Caribbean border can be seen in the final commission granted to "Ortiz delgueta" to populate and to pacify the provinces of "Cavo del Camarón y Taguzgalpa," and any of the other nearby lands where the natives are warlike and without "light" (AGI 1572).

Much of the problem of the 16th century delimitations of the lands of the east coast of Central America must have come from the extreme lack of knowledge of the area in the Spanish homeland. Documents from this era show clearly the confusion over the area know as Taguzgalpa, as well as the delimitations of other east coast areas. It simply was not a well-known place. For example, on the first of December, 1573, the Spanish crown agreed to allow Capitán Diego de Artieda, who paid for the right, to "discover and populate" the coast of Costa Rica from the mouth of the Desaguadero de San Juan to the border of Veragua along the Mar del Norte [Caribbean](AGI 1577). However, there is some evidence that he was incorrectly in conflict with other Spaniards who made encomienda at Cabo Camarón (AGI 1576).

The crown was uncertain about a conflict, because for this period, Taguzgalpa (also *Tauzgalpa*) was defined "as lying between Cabo Camarón and the Río San Juan" and, as was normal for the period, no interior boundary could be placed (Gámez 1939: 33). Another region, also inhabited by uncivilized Indians, was labeled *Tologalpa* (or *Taxnalpa*). This region, according to Gámez, was placed between Cabo Camarón and the Río Grande [Aguán]. However, Tologalpa was normally considered to be south of Taguzgalpa and in Nicaragua.

The next royal grant of this period "to conquer and populate" the east coast was that to Diego Lopez de Cezino, a Spanish vecino of Trujillo. In a real cédula of Feb. 10, 1576 (CDI 14[1870]: 528-37), the lands opened to Lopez de Cezino, *La Taguzgalpa*, were also called "Nueva Cartago," and ranged along the coast northward from "Dezaguadero" (San Juan) a Punta de Camarón, where begins the provincia de Honduras, with all lands [to the interior] until the borders of Nicaragua and Nueva Segovia." Such a territory essentially included all of the lands in Honduras and Nicaragua beyond the settled eastern frontier.

Lopez de Cezino apparently planned to enter the territory by way of Caratasca Lagoon and the abandoned site of "Sueta" [Gueta], as had his predecessor, Ortiz Delgueta. According to Lopez's agreement with the Crown, if after four years he had established commerce with Spanish colonies, he and his offspring were to oversee the

land with salary forever. Such wording makes certain that by this date, the Spanish politicians and map makers thought Taguzgalpa comprised a separate "provincia" in Central America. Shortly after Lopez received permit to enter Taguzgalpa, Diego de Herrera was refused permission to explore in the same area (Durón 1927: 45) because the area was "taken." The "Carta-Relación" of García de Palacio (1576: 47, 69) leaves no doubt that the eastern region was apart. In the list of the 13 provinces of the Real Audiencia de Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, **and** "Taguzgalpa" are each shown as separate entities. (That the editors of the 1983 UNAM translation erred in equating Taguzgalpa and Tegucigalpa can be corrected by viewing the manuscript.)

In response to a series of royal questions on what kind of a land is Taguzgalpa, what qualities does it have, what is the importance of its population, and is it possible that Diego de Herrera might be able to discover the land and to colonize it, Honduran governor Contreras Guebara stated in 1578 that "the land that they call Taguzgalpa is bordered by the province of Honduras and falls in the demarcation of her some fifty leagues from Trujillo along the coast until reaching the desaguadero of Nicaragua. It is a land of good and mild climate and good for settlement. They have seen gold there. The inhabitants there are few but the people are clean and clothed and domesticated" (AGI 1578). Until this time, he noted that six Spanish captains had made entradas into the land, but the soldiers entering here have been murdered by Indians who appear to be without order.

By 1584, the rash of attention being paid to the eastern zone must have excited the governor of Honduras, Rodrigo Ponze de Leon, for he "offered" the King his own services "to discover in the provincia called *La Taguzgalpa*, which land was nearby next to his region" (AGCA 1584; BAGG V (2) 1940: 149). Ponze de León, according to Durón (1927: 53), was in Trujillo in May 1584 from where he expressed an interest in the exploration. The King's response and permission was granted in April 1585, but by October 1585, Ponze was still in Puerto Caballos asking that the king give him the chance to enter the east (Durón 1927: 54). There is no evidence that the governor actually attempted an exploration of the area, but the King did ask to be kept informed on the nature of the place, whose riches and peoples have received so much notice.

Francisco de Valverde, one of the most knowledgeable writers of the time, writing from Trujillo in 1590, was the first to attempt to recognize an interior boundary of Taguzgalpa. Although very general, his delimitation was "downstream on the Guayape, where people not yet conquered still lived" (1590a). The Guayape of Valverde's day is the river now called the Patuca.

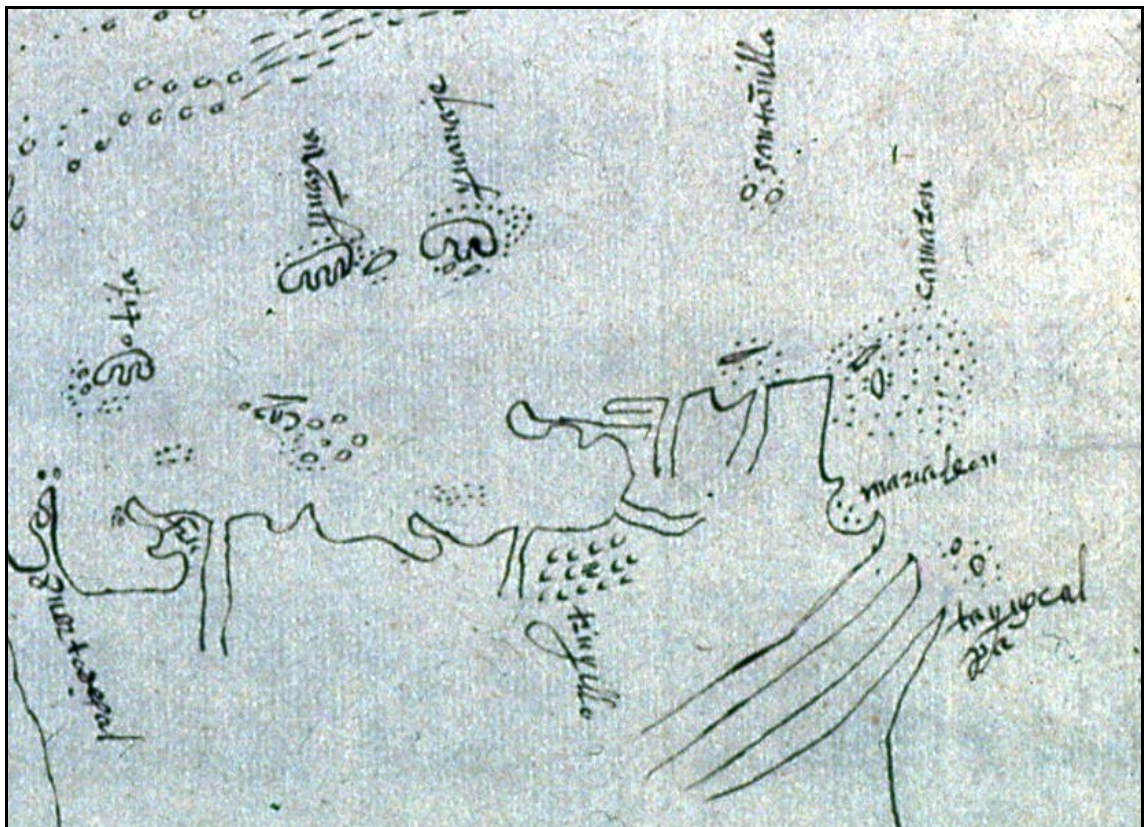
Four years later, an apparently frustrated Spanish King reminded his officials in Guatemala that several people had offered "to discover, pacify, and populate the province of *Tacuzgalpa*, which lies between Honduras and Nicaragua and which is very rich and full of native population," but that he still has "an unclear notion of the land and how one would proceed to enter and to pacify it". The King requested a "specific and detailed report" of the area. He concluded by wondering who might be available to conquer the land (see Lehmann 1920: II, 632).

At the beginning of the 17th century, Dr. Criado del Castilla, who gained fame by opening the port at Amatique (Santo Tomas del Castilla), was also responsible for sending Fr. Francisco Sande (Salcedo) to *Teguzgalpa* entering by way of Sebaco, Nicaragua, and Nueva Segovia. Durón (1927: 59) reported that a reducción was made in the confines of Taguzgalpa at a site called "río de las piedras". That site was said to be in the valley of Olancho and to be of Jicaque Indians. If all of this is so, then at 1602, Taguzgalpa included lands quite near civilized lands.

The implication of this seems to be that Taguzgalpa, at least for the 16th century, never had fixed boundaries, but instead was that land where the non-Christianized Indians lived -- outside the realm of Spanish authority in eastern Honduras and Nicaragua.

The first cartographical notice of "Taguscalpa" is on the 1604 map of Francisco Navarro (Davidson 2006: plate XVII). The crude map places "Taguscalpa" near three major Caribbean river mouths, southeast of [cabo] "Cameron" and "Maria Leon," probably near the modern border between Honduras and Nicaragua. It conveys only the slightest notion of where the area might be.

Map 1.





One of the earliest attempts to delimit the territory more specifically was that of Juan Diaz Guerra de Ayala who in 1607 (October 13) arrived in Trujillo en route to his exploration of the lands possessed by the indios de guerra who called their homelands "*la Tagur galpa*." According to Guerra de Ayala, the term meant "tierra rica" in the language of the Indians. He understood at the time that this region ran along the coast about 100 leagues from the "desaguadero de Nicaragua" to "Cabo de Camarón," which is about 10 leagues east of Trujillo (BAGG 1946). The Indians on this coast, at this time, usually called "Caribs" or "cannibals" were known for their cruelty and for killing Spanish priests. They wandered as nomads from home bases during the *invierno*, the rainy season from June to December. It was still rumored locally that from this territory, during pre-Hispanic times, gold was taken annually for the Emperor Montezuma in central México.

According to the real cédula of 16 december (AGCA 1607), the King noted the importance of conquering and converting the Jicaques of the "Provincia de Taguzgalpa," which borders the Province of Honduras. From this document, Fr. Estevan Verdelete, a Franciscan, obtained his commission to proceed with the conversions to the east of Honduras. Three years later, another real cédula wrote of the need for missionaries in the mountains that border *Theguzigalpa* (AGCA 1610). This toponym apparently refers to modern Tegucigalpa and not Taguzgalpa. In 1598, only shortly before the above documents were written, Tegucigalpa appears clearly written as *Tegua galpa* (AGI 1598) and *Teguzgalpa* (Reina Valenzuela 1981: 46) also referring to the settlement, one of the *beneficios* of the church in Honduras.

Before 1615, the date of the first edition of his *Indiana Monarchia*, the famous Fray Juan de Torquemada learned of a place known as *Tlacuzcalpan*, a province east of Honduras ["que llamaron la Nueva Extremadura"] (Torquemada 1723: 454). At the time Torquemada served as "Chronologist of the Franciscan Order in México" and would have known much of eastern Honduras from the missionaries who had returned from the region. That a Náhuatl term was used is understandable because Torquemada knew the language well and had lived in México for years.

In the often-copied map of Hessel Gerritsz, from 1625 (Davidson 2006: plate XVIII), "*Taguzcalpa, o Tiguzigalpa*" is also located near the Caribbean coast, but now just south of the Río Coco, in modern Nicaragua. By 1666, most maps of the period, including the well-known one by Nicolás Sanson (plate XXII, Davidson 2006), continue to copy this placement and terminology. **(Map 2)** Clearly, during the early-to-mid 17th century, the slightly different words referred to the same, but uncertainly located, place. Also at this time, the "i" sound seems to distinguish the terms from this period onward: the word with the "i" sound **always** related to the modern capital and its vicinity; when the word is without the "i" sound the term **almost always** refers to the lands to the east yet unconquered by the Spanish.



Map 2.



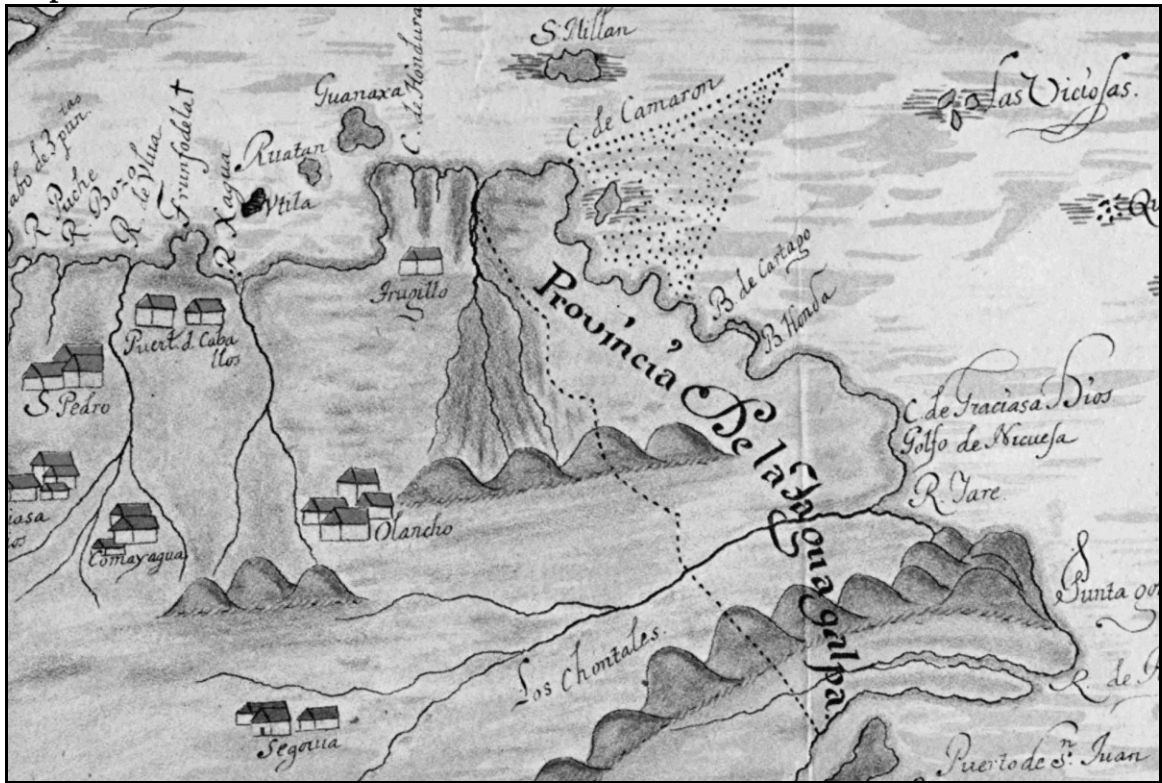
To the Spanish chroniclers who never were on the scene in Central America information on the eastern side was often incorrect and confused with other place names, ie. Taguzgalpa for Tagusigalpa. For example, Vásquez de Espinosa (1629: 246-247) delimited the provinces of heathen Indians from Trujillo and to near Puerto Bello in Panamá, along the coast and for 40 leagues inland, but he believed incorrectly that the Indians therein wore clothes, were governed, and were well behaved. He further believed that some Mexicans still lived there among the over 300,000 inhabitants. These notions were essentially fiction.

As a delimited region, la "Provincia de la *Taguagalpa*" appears first on the 1690 map of Fuentes y Guzmán (Davidson 2006: plate XXVII). (Map 3) The area encompassed within a dotted line is an elongated coastal strip that runs from the mouth of a large river, probably Río Aguán, west of *Cabo Camaron*, Honduras, until *El desaguadero* [Río San Juan, southern Nicaragua]. Because some of this region was (and is) occupied by the Tahwaka people (also Toakas, etc.), it is no great leap in logic to see the possibility of *Taguagalpa* meaning "land of the houses of the Taguaca," as understood, perhaps by a Mexican guide/translator who accompanied Spanish explorers.

The beginning of the 18th century marks a transition the use of places names in eastern Honduras. By 1700, it seems clear that the territory known by names similar to *Taguzgalpa* was the homeland of the ancestors of the Miskito Indians of the eastern Honduras, an area now known as La Mosquitia. The English map by Moll (1701) is the first to record the location of the *Moskitos* (Davidson 2006: plate XXVIII) and subsequent

maps followed the nomenclature. Taguzgalpa drops off of the maps and out of texts.

Map 3.



A final mention of the old toponym comes in 1747 when the Franciscans in Guatemala were asked to report the state of their missions. The authors took the opportunity to include a brief history of the compilation of Francisco Vásquez (1714-16) and for the period after his *Crónicas*, made a few original notations. One of these was a late description and exaggerated delimitation of the *Provincia de Teguzgalpa*, where the Franciscans had been working. To them, at the time, this province began at laguna Guaymoreto, at Truxillo, and proceeded through the Valle de Truxillo [Aguán] to the west, into the Valle de Agalta, Olancho, and Jamastrán. On the south the province was bounded by the ríos de *Gayamble* [Guayambre] and Guayape. The sea formed the border on the east.

Thus, at the historical end of the use of the term **Tagusgalpa** the region, which was still mostly unknown to colonial officials, had reached its most exaggerated areal extension.

### Concluding Remarks

Obviously, much has yet to be learned about the origins, meanings, locations, and evolutions of the twin toponyms, Tegucigalpa and Taguzgalpa. The two terms have distinctly different geographical beginnings. Pedro Alvarado was in San Pedro, in 1536, when he allocated, *en repartimiento*, *Tegucigalpa*, an indigenous settlement located

somewhere to the south and supposedly toward Gracias a Dios. Bishop Pedraza, from just south of Trujillo, probably in 1539, heard the other term *Tagusgualpa*, which also was located vaguely to the southern interior. Both references were to settlements and not to regions. Given the rudimentary understanding of Honduran geography at this early period in the exploration of the country, it seems absolutely plausible that the words -- heard slightly different by the Spanish ear and transcribers -- could refer to the same location. The fact is that the indigenous settlement that becomes known as Tegucigalpa is almost equidistance, 200 kms., from San Pedro (to the southeast) and from Trujillo (to the southwest). And, in both cases the sites were over several mountains ranges, in far lands probably unknown to the native informants.

Subsequently, while each place (and toponym) was occasionally mistaken for the other, by mid 16th century *Tegucigalpa* is the settlement that becomes the national capital; *Taguzgalpa* becomes defined as a large region, the virtually unknown wilderness of eastern Honduras. The toponyms had taken on divergent meanings.

As far as translations are concerned, on both occasions, the authors were Spaniards who heard the spoken words of Mexican translators. Given these origins, it is not surprising that most attempts to translate the toponyms looked to Náhuatl as the most probable mother language. However, translations and definitions of indigenous words are almost always more difficult than historians and other scholars imagine. Probably, the suffix portion (*galpa*, *calpa*) is of Mexican (Náhuatl) origin. The prefix part (*Teguci*, etc.) is much more problematic. Until today, we cannot say with certainty what the prefix refers to. Is it possible that the word comes from the fusion of a prefix from a local Honduran language and a Náhuatl suffix? Two languages being represented in one Honduran toponym is not without precedent, for examples: *Ajuterique* (Náhuatl + Lenca), *Olanchito* (indigenous + Spanish), *Belen Gualcho* (Spanish + Lenca), *Kayo Sirpe* (Arawak + Mískito), and many others.

Under any circumstance, it appears that "Tegucigalpa" originated from náhuatl. On occasion newly discovered place names in Mexico have a prefix much like early renderings of Tegucigalpa: *Tecuci-tlán*, an encomienda pueblo of Colima (Hemmerich y Valencia 1991: 136) and *Tecuci-apa*, Culiacán (Gerhard 1982: 257, 260), but just because the prefixes sound like *Teguci* does not mean they are related.

However, the final etymology of Tegucigalpa will undoubtedly come from a linguist and not from a historian or historical geographer. For example, a well-respected linguist at UNAM's Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas in Mexico (Dakin 2009), recently offered a new possibility based on the "glossing" or interpretation of a compound of *tekwisi* (crab in náhuatl) plus *calli* (house in náhuatl) (Campbell 1985). Dakin suggested that *tewisi-kal-pa*, which basically means "crab, hard-sided recipient," might be the origin of *Tegucigalpa*. She commented that many náhuatl translators have interpreted *cal-li* "somewhat poetically" as "house of", but in the case of a mollusk, a more reasonable translation is "shell."

The linguist concluded with the question of whether the Tegucigalpa area has a special and prominent environmental, historical or archeological connection with land crabs or riverine snails that might make such a meaning reasonable. That Tegucigalpa *is* located within an upland depression that might collect and concentrate jutes (snails, *Pachychilus*) during times of Choluteca river tributary flooding is unusually intriguing in this light. Across MesoAmerica where jutes concentrate and are utilized and often eaten (Healy *et al* 1990) they are also seen as place names.

\*\* Honduras has 63 species and subspecies of snails (Thompson 2011: 281).