

CHAPTER I:  
A RICH REALM OF NATURE DISTURBED

The middle section of the Amazon river, called the Rio Marañón in Peru and the Rio Solimões in Brazil, flows eastward from the foothills of the Andes past the modern city of Iquitos, to the mouth of the Rio Negro by today's Manaus.<sup>1</sup> This is a vast, stately, slow-moving body of water which often appears, as it must have five hundred years ago, more like a great lake than like a river. It is more than a kilometer across in any season at most points, and drops only about thirty meters in altitude over the course of some 2000 kilometers. Great quantities of sediment are carried into this "river-sea" by the upper Amazon, and by long tributaries which descend to it from the Andes: the Huallaga, the Ucayali, the Javará, the Juruá and the Purús on the south; and the Napo, the Putumayo/Içá and the Caquetá/Japurá on the north (see map 1). The voluminous waters of the Solimões are therefore always turbid; and the annual flood, rising slowly from February to June, deposits millions of tons of life-giving silt upon the river's several hundred constantly shifting islands and its narrow *várzea* or floodplain, before surging eastward another fifteen hundred kilometers to the sea.

Eight or ten kilometers back from the middle Amazon on either bank (as much as a hundred near the swampy mouth of the Japurá) begins the slightly elevated, never-flooded *terra firme*, with its gloomy gallery rain-forest of towering

trees and sparse underbrush. More than ninety per cent of the Amazon valley is terra firme. There the most exuberant life is in the treetops. Below that vibrant and verdant canopy, a soggy soil is leached relentlessly by incessant rains during much of each year. If the trees are slashed and burned or clear-cut over a large expanse, the ground will degenerate within a few years' time into a red lateritic hardpan which can support only tough savanna grasses. The many shorter rivers which rise in this thickly forested but comparatively sterile landscape are for the most part devoid of silt; their clear waters are poor in the nutrients required by aquatic plants and animals, and they are dark in color when seen from a distance. Some of the longer tributaries, most notably the mighty Rio Negro which flows more than a thousand kilometers southeast from the Brazil/Colombia/Venezuela border region before joining the Amazon, are fed primarily by such lifeless streams. The native peoples who once lived along and between these "black" or "starvation" rivers of the terra firme could survive only in isolated and semi-nomadic communities of a few dozens or hundreds of individuals, taking a bare subsistence from hunting, gathering and the practice of a small-scale slash-and-burn horticulture.<sup>2</sup>

The várzea, in startling contrast, teems with life. It throws up a tangled wall of foliage at ground level which makes the rainforest seem impenetrable when seen from a passing canoe, and vibrant with a colorful cacophony of wild birds and monkeys. There is a much greater variety and abundance of both plant and animal species within any given square kilometer of land in the várzea than can be found on the nearby terra firme, or perhaps anywhere else on earth. This Amazonian floodplain was therefore once able to support very large and almost contiguous, permanently settled human communities. The várzea peoples subsisted on the

abundant fish, turtle and manatee of the river system, in addition to the game and wild fruits of the forest and the rich production of their gardens. When the annual flood receded, they farmed alluvial mudflats that did not have to be cleared of trees, in addition to the swiddens they had carved laboriously from the nearby forest.

The equatorial lowland climate of the Amazon Valley is warm and wet throughout the year, with temperatures varying between twenty-one and thirty-two degrees Centigrade both day and night, and a relative humidity of more than eighty per cent. There is little variation in the length of days, and the change of seasons is marked mainly by an increase or decrease in the amount of precipitation. More than two hundred and fifty centimeters of rain fall during most years, much of it in torrential cloudbursts; but both the amount and the timing of rainfall are less than fully predictable.

The rainiest season comes between November and April as a rule, just before the flood; so the land is already wet and lakes are filling before the gradual influx of water from far away. The river then normally rises about ten meters within a few weeks' time, the result of a balance between rains from April to August in the drainage area north of the equator, and from October to April in the south. But if the northern rains start early, or the southern rains run late, or if the rains on the Solimões itself are excessive, the flood may rise a few weeks sooner and three or four meters higher than expected, and drown out or drive away much of the life of the várzea.

Fortunately, the river is usually gentler than that with its neighbors. It rises slowly, allowing plants and animals plenty of time to adjust to the changing natural environment. People have time to get in their harvests and make a variety of other

preparations for the hard times to come, before the flood finally and inevitably engulfs them. Then, a few months later, the all-encompassing river recedes very quickly. Its banks drain, the naked fertile mudflats are revealed, the land comes fully back to life, and people begin planting their new crops and rebuilding what has been lost.

This Amazonian floodplain is not an undifferentiated flatland; rather, it is an intricate labyrinth of islands, lakes and channels whose form is constantly being altered by the rise and fall and the changing course of the great river. Its fertility varies considerably from place to place, because the silt-bearing waters distribute themselves unevenly across the land. Along the banks of the main stream itself there is a wide natural levee, parts of which are flooded only in the high-water years and for shorter periods of time. At certain points on both banks, this levee is interrupted by higher bluffs rising as much as thirty meters above the river's lowest level.<sup>3</sup> The bluffs are forested like the terra firme behind them, and can be farmed only by slash-and-burn methods and with long fallowing cycles if at all -- because, never fully renewed by the flood, any permanent garden plots opened atop them would be leached free of nutrients under the sun and rain, and rendered unrecoverable within a few years' time. Bluff-top sites were, on the other hand, often preferred for the more permanent native Amazonian settlements -- because they were well-drained, comparatively insect-free, benefited from the river breezes and offered a strategic vantage-point from which to keep watch against possible enemy attack.

Behind the levee and bluffs, however, there is a wide stretch of low-lying alluvial land criss-crossed by often navigable waterways known as paranás (roughly, bayous) some of them permanent and others apt to dry up when the flood waters

recede. The forest there is sparser and lower than in the terra firme, interspersed with stretches of grassland -- some (perhaps most) of which remains water-logged and swampy the year round. Huge expanses of flooded forest or igapó are a feature of this landscape during most of the year. But given even a slight elevation to allow for drainage, the lower várzea can be farmed indefinitely without losing either fertility or friability. The lakes and channels there are formed by a combination of rainwater which has run off locally, with water from the flood; they are slower-moving and less turbid than the main stream of the river, and therefore even richer in the aquatic plants which support an enormous variety and density of fish and animal life. Their banks are usually grassy, and advance and recede with the water level; their surfaces are often covered with floating masses of grass or with enormous water-lilies.

This middle portion of the Amazon valley was indeed a rich realm of nature, unusually well-endowed for the support of human populations, before its incorporation into the colonial system which was imposed upon the world by the Western Europeans beginning in the late 15th century. This book will explore aspects of the social and ecological transformations that were wrought by colonialism along the Solimões and along the adjacent but less favorably endowed Rio Negro, between the moments of first contact between native Amazonians and European intruders in the mid-16th century, and the establishment of a formal structure for the colonial governance of that region in the mid-18th century.

#### Human habitation.

People have lived in the várzea of the Solimões valley, as in the rest of Amazonia, for many centuries. It is more difficult to find traces of ancient

settlement there than in most other parts of the world -- because the materials available for construction in early times were not durable, because there was no stone for tool-making (even pebbles are a rarity between the base of the Andes and the mouth of the Negro), because most ancient habitation sites have been destroyed by the constantly shifting channel of the river, and because dense vegetation generally covers such remains as still do exist. But other kinds of evidence, especially the modern patchwork distribution of Indian languages and ancient pottery styles throughout the Amazonian region, indicate that peoples of Arawak, Carib and Tupí linguistic stock must have begun following the navigable rivers back and forth across it well before the time of Christ.

The várzeas of the Solimões valley represented perhaps the most benign and easily exploited habitat in all of Amazonia; and though only a very limited amount of archeological work has so far been done along the middle Amazon itself, what has been done suggests occupation over a long period of time. By the 16th century, native Amazonians had probably been hard at work raising maize on the never-depleted alluvial croplands of the várzea, harvesting manioc on its levees, manufacturing pottery from its fine clays and perfecting an elaborate lore and techniques for the utilization of its myriad plants and animals for some two thousand years.<sup>4</sup> They lived there with extraordinary abundance.

The great wealth of this watery realm of nature was not, however, a wealth of easily exploitable resources, cheap labor or accumulable capital. Its fortune was not for export. The prosperity of the várzea lay in the healthy and delicately balanced relationship between human beings and nature which had been forged there through centuries of trial-and-error experimentation. The Indians of both várzea and terra

firmes in Amazonia thought of themselves, not as the masters of nature, but as grateful and respectful participants in nature. Like the other Native Americans of pre-Columbian times, they lived virtually free from the ravages of epidemic disease, poverty, substance addiction or poor nutrition. As a result, they would seem to the first Europeans who visited them to be peoples enjoying remarkably good health, physical fitness and longevity.

The varzea peoples fished and hunted, gathered wild fruits and cultivated the earth for the exclusive purpose of obtaining a living for their families. They had no notion of acquiring or accumulating wealth. They moved freely and knowledgeably through their swampy forest world, on foot or in well-wrought and skillfully handled canoes. They worked diligently with patiently home-made tools to provide themselves with food, shelter, utensils, things of beauty and moments of festivity. They laughed a great deal and gave full expression to their sexuality. Their lives were full of adventure, with a greatly varied daily routine for people of all ages and both genders, and diverse challenges to the mind. They studied nature and observed human behavior closely; and they filled their evenings and their rainy-day afternoons with stories that helped explain the abundant life around them, while passing their collective experience and their knowledge of that life along to children. Among these busy and productive, free-spirited peoples there were, when the Europeans first saw them, neither masters nor slaves; no person was less than a full participant in the life of the community to which he or she belonged.

The prehistoric way of life in the Amazonian várzea was of course not idyllic, though as in Eden humanity seems to have walked there in familiar companionship with God. There were often enough signs of pride, greed,

perversity, jealousy and violence in interpersonal relationships. People might be poisoned or assassinated by unfriendly neighbors. Communities were frequently at war; and once launched upon such an enterprise, they might see their leaders and their able-bodied young men shot and killed with poisoned darts and arrows, or bludgeoned to death by their enemies. Women, children and the elderly might also be killed in war, or be carried off to engross the numbers of their antagonists. In the normal pursuit of subsistence, moreover, people were often enough drowned or badly wounded, or killed by jaguars, alligators, bloodthirsty piranhas or poisonous snakes. In times of excessive flood they might even come close to starving. Life was often hard, and subsistence required great exertion as well as alertness and ingenuity from men and women both young and old.

The native Amazonian system for living on this earth, and for producing and distributing the goods and services that might be needed, nevertheless worked remarkably well for those who had devised it. Certainly it worked much better than any system that was to follow, as the modern history of the middle Amazonian várzea was forged under the impact first of European colonialism, and then of world capitalism. The system was an indefinitely sustainable one, capable of gradual technological evolution and fine-tuning from within; and it provided ample sustenance to surprisingly large communities of people, scattered quite densely upon the land. The demands that it made upon nature were those of human subsistence only; and they therefore remained both finite and intrinsically reasonable. Rarely if ever, for example, did they lead to the depletion of any natural resource.

Such balanced and viable ecological relationships, conscientiously

maintained by human beings within an acknowledgedly fragile nature, were to prove incomprehensible to European adventurers of the colonial and developmental age. Indeed, they would be seen by the representatives of colonialism as a barbarous and therefore intolerable set of arrangements -- ignorant, undisciplined and economically backward. Blinded by greed and ethnocentrism, grievously lacking in both intellectual curiosity and the instinct of solidarity with other human beings, most of the early visitors from abroad were ill-disposed even to learn what was practical and useful from the cultural ecology of the native Amazonians. They would adopt, begrudgingly, only that which was minimally necessary to survive in what they generally saw as a benighted and God-forsaken country; and they would refuse to cooperate in any way with the natives in maintaining their viable relationship with nature. On the contrary, they would prove wanton and relentless in wresting from this rich realm of nature every thing and person from which or whom they could see a way to extract a modest profit. To the native Amazonians, we may assume, such feckless conquerors and entrepreneurs must have seemed like a race of curious but dangerous madmen.

During the sixteenth century, two Spanish expeditions from the recently-conquered Andean territory of Peru (under Francisco de Orellana in 1542 and under Pedro de Ursúa and Lope de Aguirre in 1561) travelled the entire length of the Solimões valley in search of gold and discovery. They observed and had dealings (some cordial but most violent) with a number of the peoples of the várzea; and they must therefore have made some impact on the collective memory there. But these adventurers neither conquered nor established continuing trade relations with any peoples of the middle Amazon region; and not so much as one European individual

is reported to have remained behind after they passed through. The communications initiated at that time were not to be renewed for the better part of a century; and it therefore seems unlikely that these first Spanish visitors made any substantial lasting impact on the circumstances of central Amazonian life.

The chronicles of the Orellana and Ursúa-Aguirre expeditions do not, therefore, record the beginnings of colonial history in central Amazonia; but they are nevertheless documents of great interest and potential use to historians. As classics of the "conquest" literature, they have of course been widely read and thoroughly studied by students of Spanish imperial expansion.<sup>5</sup> In the twentieth century they have also captured imaginations easily swept away by the conquerors' feats of derring-do, or by their epic depravity, as in Ramón Sender's gripping and well-researched historical novel on Lope de Aguirre<sup>6</sup> or Werner Herzog's much-touted film Aguirre: The Wrath of God (which conflates and distorts images taken from the chronicles of both expeditions). These documents have, however, been little used for the purpose of reconstructing native American history.

The 16th-century accounts are invaluable those who would attempt to reconstruct the histories of the middle Amazonian várzea peoples themselves. Idiosyncratic and self-serving as all of them are, they include a great many bits and pieces of concrete information about the material and even the spiritual cultures of a few of these peoples, derived from first-hand observation. The information is exceedingly fragmentary and difficult to interpret; and for this reason it has been found to be of only limited use to scholars in search primarily of ethnographic data.<sup>7</sup> The 16th-century Spanish chroniclers wrote in a confusing, pre-scientific way -- sometimes interweaving what they had seen, or thought they had seen, or been

told that others had seen, with sheer fantasy. But as will be demonstrated in the remainder of this chapter, the fragments they provide can nevertheless be used to construct a detailed mosaic picture, if still a very incomplete one, of the way of life that was followed by a few aboriginal societies in tropical America, several decades before they came under the permanent influence of European colonial institutions.

The chroniclers can also assist us in imagining what these peoples' harrowing first experiences of the Europeans themselves must have been like, providing as they unwittingly do some eloquent testimonies to the first stages of the implementation in Amazonia of the bizarre and unnatural European practice of demanding goods and services from the native peoples of the countries they visited, violating the universal rules of courtesy in all of their dealings with them, and then wreaking catastrophic violence on any who had the temerity to resist.

#### The First Visit of the Madmen, 1542

Francisco de Orellana's fifty-seven Spaniards, the first Europeans ever seen in the middle Amazon valley, arrived by way of the Napo River at the start of the flood season in mid-February, 1542.<sup>8</sup> Having travelled for some time previously through what appeared to them to be uninhabited country along the middle Napo, and being virtually incapable of providing for themselves in so unfamiliar and waterlogged an environment, these strange men were hungry and anything but bellicose when they approached the first villages on the lower Napo or Solimões in search of food.

The Indians who met them were not greatly alarmed. They received the Spaniards' modest offerings of exotic but intriguing European trade goods, showed them to an abandoned village where they might make camp, and provided them with

great quantities of "food, turtles and parrots." Next day, the visitors moved on down the Solimões to a larger village where they were equally well-received, and were put up and fed for three days before continuing on their way through country in which they were seldom out of sight of a settlement. A Spanish veteran later recalled that they had "sought to treat these Indians kindly and ply them with gifts, as persons of whom they had need."<sup>9</sup> As a result their only disagreeable experience there, and for many leagues further down the river, was a plague of mosquitos which kept them from sleeping comfortably, and obliged them to spend the days shooing bugs from one another.

Further on, perhaps somewhere near the mouth of the Rio Javari (today's Brazil-Peruvian border), the strangers were met by a party of men in four or five small canoes who went out from their village to trade food for the Europeans' curious goods (the reputation of which had perhaps spread ahead of them downriver). These men were representatives of a chief called Aparia (Aparian, or Parian); and they soon conducted the travellers to a very large village at which, although a numerous party of armed men had assembled, the Spaniards were able to parley in a friendly fashion with Aparia himself.<sup>10</sup> The great chief very kindly provided them with housing and a generous supply of "turtles, manatee, wild birds, fish and roasted monkey-cats [sic]". Thereupon Orellana delivered himself of an oration upon the superiority of the Christian faith to the Indians' worship of "stones and hexed objects," explaining to the bemused chief that their King Charles V was Emperor of all the Indies including the great river on whose banks they stood. (The chronicler Carvajal maintains that his Captain had no difficulty in making himself understood to these Indians, and that they listened very attentively to his

expositions).<sup>11</sup>

Aparia then offered the hospitality of his villages if the Spaniards would agree to settle there among them. He warned them, moreover, that if they insisted on continuing down the river, they would soon find themselves in the territory of a tribe of ferocious fighting women (the "Amazons" of Carvajal's tale, whence the river acquired its European name), who were sure to kill them all. Orellana acknowledged this warning and gave the chief a few small gifts in return for the bountiful provisioning of his party; and he and his men settled into some houses the Indians had vacated for them. Next day, Aparia returned for a parley with twenty-six other "chiefs," men who must have been startled indeed when at a sign from their commander the Spaniards ceremoniously erected a huge wooden cross in the center of the village, and then proclaimed it to be the symbol of their far-away King's sovereignty over their hosts.<sup>12</sup>

Aparia's people were numerous and hard-working, and they dressed themselves most elegantly in a "cloak and long shirt, painted in different colors." It was revealed that they harvested large amounts of a local tree-cotton, which they wove into cloth and dyed for use in making this clothing. They also fashioned a delicately colored pottery. The forests and rivers provided them with large quantities of wild bees' honey, and with abundant fish which they smoked and dried. They raised abundant crops of maize and both bitter and sweet manioc, sweet potatoes, yams, beans and peanuts as well as peppers and squash and a great quantity and variety of tropical fruits. It seemed to the Spaniards that they must never have suffered any shortage of food. The surpluses of their orchards, gardens and fisheries were in any event great enough to allow them to provide ample food for the

several dozen visitors travelling with Orellana, and to do so during an extended period of time.<sup>13</sup>

Orellana's men stayed for two months in Aparia's village, fed and housed with apparent good cheer by the efforts of its inhabitants. This was long enough for them to build the large sailing vessel in which they hoped to be able to continue on their way down the river, defend themselves against the attacks of any unfriendly Indians, and eventually make their way by sea back to the Spanish Indies. The people of the village helped them by dragging timbers in from the forest, and providing the materials for caulking. As it turned out, the natives were themselves quite skillful at waterproofing vessels, having invented a pitch mixed with fish oil which they would spread on cotton fiber for this purpose, as they built and repaired their own dugout canoes. But they had no experience in the construction of Spanish-style planked sailing vessels, and were mightily impressed with the brigantine as they saw it erected before them. The vessel that these new acquaintances had worked together to build indeed turned out to be a phenomenal one by Amazonian standards; and it was the chronicler's impression that the people they met on the rest of their journey down the great river "desired nothing more than to take it away from us."

While they were still the guests of chief Aparia, Captain Orellana was visited by four mysterious emissaries -- men who impressed the Spaniards from the start with their great height, the hair they wore to their waists, and especially with their rich accoutrements of gold. These men brought gifts of food from another renowned chief, one whose name and country were not registered by the chronicler. They inquired who the Spanish visitors were and where they were going,

accepted Orellana's gifts, and then disappeared to be heard of no more. Experiences such as this encouraged these and subsequent travellers in thinking that beyond the riverbank realms they were reconnoitring in Amazonia, there were others (perhaps including even the famed El Dorado) where riches of the sort most sought after by Europeans might yet be found.<sup>14</sup>

Below Aparia's village, or "Cariries" as they understood it to be called, the travellers sailed in their new vessel for a distance of more than eighty leagues (perhaps four hundred and eighty kilometers)<sup>15</sup> in which:

they encountered many Indian villages, on the banks as well as on the many islands of the river; as well as finding many gardens and fruit trees from which they would take whatever they needed...though they did not dare to cross paths or enter into combat with the Indians, since the Spaniards were few for the great numbers of Indians there were.<sup>16</sup>

Along this stretch the sojourners encountered no warlike people, although they did see some burned-out villages which they understood to have been destroyed by Aparia's most feared enemies the "Machifaro" (Machaparo) people from further down the river. It was their impression that this entire "province" was subject to Aparia, who seems to have accompanied them at least part of the way; and Orellana was at pains to maintain cordial relations with so important a chief and his people, against the day when he hoped that they might be incorporated peaceably into the Spanish Empire. So long as they remained in Aparia's realm, the Spaniards were always both well-behaved and well-provided with food.<sup>17</sup>

The people of "Aparia" can be quite firmly identified with the Omagua (Cambaba) of later times, who had perhaps occupied the same territory during half a millenium before the arrival of the first Europeans,<sup>18</sup> and of whom we will have considerable to say further on. The word "Omagua" was never applied to this tribe in the 16th century Spanish sources, however, and was used on the contrary to refer to a mythical people of fabulous wealth located somewhere further down the river from the Andes. Pedro de Ursúa would set out in search of the country of these fabled "Omagua" in 1560, having learned of their riches from the reports of some Tupí-speaking Indians from Brazil who had visited Peru in 1549 (see below). But the historic Omagua of the 17th and 18th centuries made use of all of the distinctive cultural items mentioned for Aparia, most exceptionally of the beautifully colored cotton clothing. (Most inhabitants of the middle Amazon várzeas did not weave tree-cotton, and used no clothing at all). The Omagua, like the followers of Chief Aparia, were highly regarded by European observers in later years for their unusually "political" custom of submission to principal chiefs who exercised authority in many other villages than their own, and for their generally friendly and cooperative attitude toward foreign visitors. Another bit of evidence is the word "coniapuyara" which the chronicler Carvajal says Aparia's people used to refer to the mysterious tribe of warlike "Amazons" down-river; cunhã is the Tupían word for "woman," and the Omagua of the historical period were apparently the only Tupían-speaking people of the Solimões valley.

Downriver from the Omagua (Aparia) country, there was a long stretch through which for a week the Spaniards found almost no settlements on either the islands or the banks of the swollen river, and suffered once more from the lack of

supplies. This may have been because the river banks were actually unpopulated;<sup>19</sup> more likely it was because by then at the height of the flood season (early May), with the river beaches and low-lying banks under water, no settlements or even camping-places were visible from mid-stream, and it was difficult even for natives of the region to forage for food:

from that point on we had a more difficult and a hungrier time, passing by more abandoned settlements than before, because the river extended from forest to forest and we could find nowhere to sleep, nor could we catch any fish, so we had nothing to eat but wild plants and, from time to time, a bit of toasted corn.<sup>20</sup>

At the end of the week, the invaders came within sight of the first village of the feared Machifaro -- a beautiful town with what appeared to them from a distance to be neat whitewashed buildings, situated atop a high bluff on the south bank. Aparia's people had prepared them for this, telling them that so small a group of men as Orellana's would have no chance of defending themselves against these terrible warlike people, whose chief was able to mobilize from the villages under his control some "fifty thousand" (read "a large force of") fighting men between the ages of thirty and seventy (the young men, it was said, being forbidden to go to war.)<sup>21</sup>

Before the Spaniards could even draw abreast of this village, a great company of armed men went out from it in canoes to attack them. The Machifaro made a fearsome noise with drums and trumpets, and threatened by signs (or so the chronicler imagined) to make a meal of these unwelcome visitors. There ensued a terrible battle in which the Indians showed themselves to be a formidable military

force on the water, able to fight in disciplined fashion against even so unfamiliar an enemy by coordinating the successive attacks of canoe-squadrons<sup>22</sup> and reinforcing themselves steadily as the need arose. Orellana's men were handicapped by wet powder which rendered useless their harquebusses; so they pulled their two brigantines together and fought desperately with crossbows, which at length proved sufficiently devastating to win the day -- despite the fact that the Machifaro carried shields made from the hides of alligator, manatee and tapir, which were as tall as a man and tough enough to fend off even the crossbow's deadly projectile. With difficulty, the Spaniards managed to fight their way onto the shore and into the town, and to drive its defenders (presumably the older and younger men and the women and children) into retreat. The Machifaro had fought bravely and stubbornly, the attackers would recall, "like men who hated to leave their homes." They seemed to have less military discipline on land than on the river; but even after the village was lost, they continued harrying the Spaniards for a long time from their canoes.<sup>23</sup>

This village turned out to be of enormous size, stretching out for at least half a league (perhaps three kilometers) along the bluff. The people there, both men and women it seemed, went about without any sort of clothing at all. Behind the town was a stretch of grassy country and open forest, excellent ground for hunting wild pigs and tapir.<sup>24</sup> The Machifaro had constructed a great number of pens with ponds in them on higher ground, in which during that season of hunger they kept hundreds of huge river turtles (the Amazonian tartarugas, measuring up to a meter in length and weighing as much as thirty-five kilos) which they fattened on corn until they needed to slaughter them for meat. In addition, the conquerors found an abundant supply of freshly-killed game and of "biscuit" (presumably beijú or casabe, a flat

bread made of the bitter manioc) and wild bees' honey, as well as:

a great store of corn and sweet manioc, and fresh fish preserved after their fashion, without salt of any kind, by roasting and drying it over the fire so that it may be kept for many days.<sup>25</sup>

In all, there was "enough food to feed a thousand men for a year."

When the Spaniards went about the abandoned village to try and gather some of these abundant provisions for their stores, they found parties of Indians working desperately to carry their food stocks away into hiding, so that they might hope to continue feeding their families during the several months of the flood and growing season which remained before their next harvest. The invaders did manage to collect about a thousand turtles and other supplies; but they were obliged to defend themselves every day against the attacks that were made on them by great numbers of naked Machifaro harriers armed with clubs ("macanas," perhaps wooden broadswords), bows and dart-launchers. Finally, after another pitched battle, they were driven out of the town and forced to take refuge in their boats and head downstream once more.<sup>26</sup>

Carvajal provides an extended account of this second long battle with the Machifaro (the one in which he himself lost an eye); but he is unfortunately concerned almost entirely with vaunting the military virtues of the Spaniards, tells us little about the department of the Indian defenders. What he does say is that they were brave and very numerous (at one point, he estimates some 10,000 warriors; at another, 8,000 in a hundred and thirty war-canoes), and that their tactic was to attack in successive waves until the Spaniards were exhausted. Like other early

chroniclers' accounts, this one is frequently guilty of hyperbole. At one juncture, however, the doughty friar noticed among the attacking canoes:

four or five witch-doctors, all of them with faces and bodies painted white and their mouths full of ashes which they would blow into the air, and with swabs in their hands which they used to sprinkle water on the river as if casting spells. Once they had taken a turn around our vessels in this fashion, they called up their warriors and began to blow on wooden flutes and beat their drums as the Indians attacked us amidst great shouting.<sup>27</sup>

Urged on by these shaman-chaplains, the Machifaro people pursued their enemies down the river for several days, giving them no rest at all -- despite the fact that this time the Spaniards were able to defend themselves with their booming and presumably terrifying (if generally inaccurate) harquebusses. During this headlong retreat, they continued to pass by a great number of villages set close together (never more than half a league apart), until to their relief they had left the Machifaro province far behind.<sup>28</sup>

There is as yet no basis for a firm identification of these "Machifaro" people with any of the várzea tribes mentioned by European observers during better-documented 17th century. A hundred and fifty years after Orellana's visit, the same approximate territory between the mouths of the Juruá and the Japurá was occupied by the tribes known as Yurimagua and Aisuares to the Spaniards. These peoples were also river-side dwellers whose villages were set on high bluffs along the south bank. Like other Amazonian peoples, they wore no clothing and made use of the

same foodstuffs as the Machifaro of Carvajal. The Yurimagua, at least were also to a remarkable degree under the influence of shamans. It therefore seems probable that these people were the same as those who had offered such vigorous resistance to the first Spanish visitors in 1541; but none of the characteristics mentioned is so unique as to provide the basis for a conclusive identification.

From the Machifaro territory downriver to the mouth of the Rio Negro (the only unequivocally identifiable location on the entire route described by Carvajal), the European visitors were permanently on the defensive, travelled fast and spent very little time in any one place. The men would land only when they had to, preferably at a smaller settlement, to drive away its inhabitants and steal their food. Accordingly, the chronicler has very little to tell us about specific cultural details for the peoples of the lower Solimões. He does distinguish three successive "provinces" along this leg: the first was of the people whom he calls "Omagua," a tribe whose territory was as extensive as that of the Machifaro and began at a sort of garrison village on their upriver frontier, located like so many others atop a high bluff on the south bank. This village the Spaniards captured and occupied for three days, eating their fill and resting, though they were obliged to fight off occasional attacks by its rightful inhabitants. There were ample stocks of food there; and the unwelcome guests noticed a number of "roads" or trails leading inland from the settlement. Just below this outpost village was the mouth of a great river [Lake Tefe?] entering from the south, around which there were "many large settlements, a beautiful and very fruitful country" This they took to be the center of this "province." The Spaniards were kept from entering that river or landing there at all, however, by the armed canoe squadrons which came out to attack them.

Later on the travellers did stop at a small village of what they took to be the same tribe; where they found a

pleasure house [sic] within which there was a great store of pottery of many shapes and sizes -- great urns, jars holding over twenty-nine arrobas [four hundred kilos?], smaller vessels and plates, shallow bowls and lamps. This is the finest pottery ever seen, better than that of Málaga, all glazed and painted in startlingly bright colors and with remarkable drawings and paintings on it which are so graceful as to bring to mind the Romans' ware.

In the same place, there were

two frightening idols woven of palm leaves, as big as giants and with wooden discs inserted into the fat parts of their arms like button-holes, and others in their calves close to the knee. They had great ornaments in their ear lobes as well, like the Indians of Cuzco and their chiefs.

29

In addition, the Spaniards found gold and silver ornaments in this village; and they were told that there was a people living further inland who had much more of that kind of wealth, to whom the inhabitants of the town would be glad to guide them. Roads ran inland from this settlement, as they had from the first village of this "Omagua" tribe, whose territory seemed to Carvajal to have continued by this time for a hundred leagues or more, all of it very densely populated.<sup>30</sup>

Next down the river and without any "no man's land" to separate it from the "Omagua" was the country of a chief named Paguana, who ruled over a numerous and "domestic" (that is, politically disciplined) population who were the first since the province of Aparia to receive the Spaniards hospitably. Here too there were trails running inland; and it appeared that the chief himself lived inland rather than at a village on the main course of the river. There were also plantations of pineapples, avocados, guavas, "plums" and other fruits -- as well, says the chronicler in a pirouette of fancy, as llamas like those of Peru! One of Paguana's towns further downstream was composed of several "barrios" strung out for a distance of two and a half leagues (some fifteen kilometers?) along the river, with a separate canoe-landing for each; but the people there were once more unfriendly and came out in force to attack the Spaniards. Before leaving this "province," the adventurers were obliged to capture and loot yet another town in order to obtain a bit of food to eat.<sup>31</sup>

The last province on the Solimões appeared to Orellana's men to be the most warlike of all, and even more populous than the others. The Spaniards never learned its name; but they reported that the people there carried wooden shields into battle and "defended themselves like men." At the one village they did occupy briefly in that country, the invaders found a few European-style chickens (something which they had not seen elsewhere along the middle Amazon).<sup>32</sup> Near the mouth of the great Rio Negro, and perhaps still within the territory of the same tribe, the Spaniards found several smaller villages as well as a large one which was located on high land and surrounded by a log stockade with a single door, behind which the inhabitants defended themselves quite successfully against their attackers. Not far from there was a camp at which the Indians had laid in a great stock of fish, which

the travellers managed to appropriate. Nearby was another site at which the visitors got the impression that the Indians were catching and preparing fish to trade with the other peoples living inland.<sup>33</sup> A few days later, Orellana's men passed the wide mouth of the Rio Madeira and continued on into the lower Amazon valley, beyond the area of our present concern.<sup>34</sup>

#### The Second Visit of the Madmen, 1560-61

Nearly twenty years after their harrowing but perhaps also intriguing experience with Orellana and his men, the villagers of the banks of the Solimões were visited by a larger and more fearsome gang of adventurers. These were the more than nine hundred Spanish soldiers and some Spanish women under Pedro de Ursúa -- a well-armed and confident horde, avid for conquest -- who had made their way down the Huallaga and Marañón rivers from Peru with a large but unspecified number of Andean Indian retainers and some African slaves, in search of the mythical rich "Province of Omagua." These invaders, among whom there was at least one veteran of the Orellana expedition, reached "civilization" on the Solimões in a decidedly restless mood. They had been travelling downstream for a long and uneventful time, and the densely-settled island of "Cararíes" (Caricuri, Cararo), just below the mouth of the Napo, was the first inhabited place they had seen in perhaps a hundred and fifty kilometers.<sup>35</sup> The river was low when they arrived (in October of 1560), and the people they encountered were gathering and storing food in preparation for the flood.

Even before the Spaniards arrived in this densely settled region, they had observed and been impressed by an example of the technology which had been developed by the middle Amazon peoples for exploiting the unique food resources

of their environment. A few days above Cararíes, they had run across a small group of Indian men on a beach by the river, just after these men had turned a hundred or so nesting female turtles on their backs, to be transported later on at leisure to their pens. The turtlers had also been at work gathering large quantities of turtle-eggs for their families; but they had fled when they saw the strangers coming, leaving the Spaniards with enough meat and eggs for many days' consumption. Later at Cararíes, Ursúa's men found an advance party of their own expedition who had been subsisting there on turtles almost exclusively for some weeks, while they waited for the main company to arrive.<sup>36</sup>

The attitude of the Omaguas towards the Europeans appeared to these visitors to have changed quite drastically since Orellana's visit to the same place (Carvajal's "Great Aparia") only twenty years before. The advance party of Spaniards had been so coolly received, in fact, that the soldiers had felt themselves obliged to build a stockade for their protection near the entrance to one village. When Ursúa arrived, they were having to defend themselves there with their arquebusses against almost daily attacks. These men had perhaps been unduly jittery when they first reached at the settlement; and they had certainly gotten their relations with the Omagua off to a bad start. One day a group of Indians had gone to visit them in peace, and the Spaniards had seen their approach as a threat of attack. Fearing the worst, they had lured their unsuspecting guests into a thatched hut, and then surrounded them and stabbed some forty people to death. The Omaguas' active hostility, then, was no more than a response in kind. Despite the atrocity and the inauspicious beginning, however, the statesman-like Ursúa managed to establish a kind of uneasy armistice by making generous gifts to the chiefs of the

place. It was clear to the Spaniards from the start that by this time, perhaps recalling their encounters with Orellana, the Omaguas though angry at their visitors' brutality, were also "very greedy for the goods which the Governor and soldiers could give them."<sup>37</sup>

Communications with the Omagua were facilitated on this occasion by a group of six Tupí-speaking "indios Brasiles" who accompanied the group as interpreters. These men were survivors of the horde of some ten to fifteen thousand migrating Tupinambá led by Viarazú, fugitives from the Portuguese slave-raiders on the Brazilian coast, who had made their way across the continent to Peru in 1549. Much of their journey had been made by way of the Amazon, some of whose peoples had resisted their passage by force and had cost them many lives. Thousands of these migrants had been forced at some point to remain behind at the Island of Tupinambaranas below the mouth of the Madeira, while others had fought their way on to Peru. Once there they had told the Spaniards stories of a fabulously rich "Omagua" on the Amazon, in hopes of luring them back there as allies so as to take vengeance on their enemies.<sup>38</sup>

On the uppermost island of this first inhabited territory (that of the historic Omaguas or Cariríes, not the fabled enemies of the Tupían migrants) there were two large villages in 1560. Each of these contained some thirty imposing, rectangular multi-family dwellings, housing between fifty and two hundred people -- which suggests that there may have been as many as three or four thousand people in each village.<sup>39</sup> There were in any case enough evacuable houses there to provide lodging for the entire Spanish party of well over nine hundred! Numerous other towns were scattered on the island and both banks of the river near Cararíes; and

there was a continuous trade and traffic in canoes between these populous settlements. Someone in the Spanish party estimated (on what basis was not made clear) that the "province" might contain some sixty thousand people in all.<sup>40</sup>

Ursua's men, like Orellana's and all subsequent early visitors to the Omagua people, were impressed by the multi-colored cotton clothing worn by both men and women. They noted that the principal weapon used by the natives was a long and deadly dart with a hard, sharp point of black palm wood, which was thrown with a dart-launcher (estolica) similar to that which the soldiers had seen used with deadly effect by the Inca soldiers of Peru. But the most remarkable thing to these visitors was that by European standards of that day, the Omagua seemed to produce every sort of foodstuff in astonishing quantity. Altamirano reported that upon arriving at "Cararo" they had been presented with over fifty canoe-loads of fish, corn, yams and peanuts -- and that along the bank near that town (on land which as far as he could tell was never flooded) there appeared to be some four leagues of continuous corn and manioc fields, as well as plantations of avocado, zapote, mamey, "zamora figs[?]" lugma [lúcuma?], "plums", peanuts and potatoes. From the bitter manioc the Omagua made great stores of both casabe, a flat bread capable of storage for long periods, as well as a delicious and intoxicating wine. In both cases the travellers noted that manioc was prepared for use by being transformed into masato, shredded and the stored underground until it rotted, as a means of neutralizing its poisonous sap.<sup>41</sup>

With the help of Ursúa's trade goods, the Omaguas were persuaded to provide victuals for the entire expedition during a week's time, although

the treatment the Spaniards gave them was so

disrespectful and unreasonable that their ill fame ran  
 ahead of them down the shores and islands of the river ...  
 on which they would be travelling in their armed vessels,  
 with the result that the Indians would abandon their  
 villages and hide from them.<sup>42</sup>

This steadily deteriorating relationship made it difficult for the Spaniards to obtain food or information, and impossible even to attempt the permanent settlement on the Amazon which the more responsible and far-seeing among them thought was both desirable and necessary to the colonialist enterprise. Ursúa had brought forty horses along with him, astonishingly enough; and these were disembarked on the island of Cariríes to exercise. These great, unfamiliar beasts must have caused no small sensation, as they grazed among the Omaguas' corn and manioc plants.

Finally, having thoroughly worn out their welcome, the would-be conquerors were obliged to cut short their exploration of the nearby banks of the Solimões and continue on their journey down the river. Along the way, they passed "many depopulated villages with their food supplies hidden away." At one settlement they were startled to find a white hat and an iron tool, apparent relics of Orellana's visit; at another, once again, there were some white chickens "like those in Spain." From time to time, the people of the riverbank villages would go out in their canoes to have a look at these strange travellers from a safe distance; but the wary natives sought neither combat nor commerce. During this leg of the journey, the Spaniards appear to have passed the mouth of the river Putumayo or Içá.<sup>43</sup>

At one village an adventurous chief came out with his followers bearing green branches as a sign of peace, and bringing with him copious quantities of food. To this Ursúa responded with gifts of knives, hatchets, machetes, combs, beads and

tops. The chroniclers, here as elsewhere in early America, were inclined to view transactions such as these as an indication of the Indians' childlike fascination with gimcracks and baubles. In fact, as we shall see, they were exchanges which would over the long run have a decisive impact on the material culture of native Amazonia, and give rise to a process of profound social and technological transformation. Vázquez and Almesto seem to have guessed this important truth when they note that "the Governor gave all who came knives to keep them happy."<sup>44</sup>

These bold barterers spread the word among their neighbors that the Spanish visitors appeared to be friendly folk after all; and Ursúa wisely forbade anyone in his party but himself from trading with the Indians, in order to avoid unfortunate incidents. From there on down the river for some days, people began once more to carry food out to barter with the Spaniards from their canoes on the river. This friendly exchange continued until the rambunctious expeditionaries got out of hand once more, and began to take "as much as they were able to get without paying for it" behind their Captain's back. Soon after that, the travellers found themselves once again sailing past abandoned settlements without any apparently available provisions. There were extensive plantations of corn, manioc, sweet potatoes, squash, peppers and peanuts along the way; but none of these were ripe enough yet to harvest. To make matters worse the mosquitos and the sand-fleas, which had begun to attack the party in earnest as soon as they passed the mouth of the Napo, seemed to them by now an insufferable plague.<sup>45</sup>

At one point, a party sent to explore a long paraná extending through the várzea found a well-worn footpath that appeared to run inland. Curious, they followed the path for some distance through the sparse forest -- until at length they

came upon a group of people who were carrying loads of manioc bread, cotton, fish and other goods which they seemed to have obtained by trading with the Omagua (Cararíes) along the river. Most of these bearers dropped their bundles and escaped; but the soldiers managed to capture one woman, whom they brought back to the brigantines for interrogation. Her dress and speech were different from those of the Cararíes, and proved unfamiliar to the Tupinambá guides as well.<sup>46</sup>

Not far beyond that spot was the village of "Maricuri" (Manicuri), which they thought at first might be the beginning of a new province but later judged, by the similarity of clothing, houses and weapons, to be a "Cararí" settlement still. The "Carari" territory now appeared to the Spaniards to be about 150 leagues in length (or some 900 miles, undoubtedly an exaggeration); and there was a settlement every four or five leagues along its islands and banks. These settlements appeared to be large or small according to the quality and disposition of the land. The consensus among Ursúa's men by this time, after many days of being scrupulously avoided by the Indians, was that the population of this province was rather sparser than it had at first seemed to them to be:

There did not appear to be altogether more than 10,000 or 12,000 Indians, which was very few for so extensive a province, and compared to the usual population in other parts.<sup>47</sup>

This low estimate must be interpreted, however, in the light of the party's recent experience, the fact that they were navigating along the south bank of a river too wide to see across and must therefore have missed seeing whatever settlements there were on the northern bank or on the opposite sides of islands, and the fact that they

were travelling fast and not stopping to make careful reconnaissance. Their note on the distribution of communities is perhaps more revealing: if there was indeed a settlement every five leagues for a hundred and fifty, there were some thirty in all; and if these settlements had an average population of one to two thousand, there may indeed have been something like thirty to sixty thousand "Carirí" or Omagua at the time of this second European visitation.

A few of the people Ursúa's men did see along this stretch of the river, both men and women, wore ornaments of gold in their ears and noses. This was a matter of great interest to some of the Spaniards in particular, and led them to speculate that the expedition might be drawing close to some more prosperous realm -- though according to the Tupí interpreters, the "Great Omagua" of their lurid accounts was still a great distance further down the river.<sup>48</sup>

Beyond the last village of the "province of Cararíes and Manicuríes" there was a long stretch of country without any visible settlements on either the islands or the banks, perhaps a sort of "no-man's land" separating the Omagua from their deadly enemies, the Machifaro.<sup>49</sup> Within this distance were the mouths of two large rivers entering from the south (presumably the Rios Jutaí and Juruá); but for an entire week the soldiers were hard put to supply themselves with any sort of food, and lived on wild grasses and the few fish they could take with a hook and line.<sup>50</sup>

Machifaro was still a very large settlement situated on a high bluff on the south bank, the most impressive they had seen up to this point. Altamirano, who named the place "Arimocoa," spoke of its having been so populous as to be able to assemble 6,000 warriors in two hundred canoes, with another 2,000 left to guard their homes.<sup>51</sup> The town was composed of large round multi-family houses, with

palm-thatched roofs reaching down to the ground and doors both front and back. The people were entirely naked, and used the same arms and means of subsistence as when Orellana had encountered them. Their turtle corrals were still in evidence, one or more for each house and richly stocked with six or seven thousand turtles at the time of Ursúa's visit in late November. There were great supplies of maize in the houses, and behind the town were extensive plantations of bitter manioc and other food crops, as well as a wide savanna well-populated with deer and other game for hunting.

The reception provided by the Machifaro people to the Spaniards was on this occasion, as in 1541, anything but cordial. The women and children of the town were embarked with hastily-gathered food and household goods, and fled downriver while the fighting men prepared for the worst. Thousands of warriors gathered along the edge of the bluff and around the long stairway cut into it which led up to the town, armed and vigilant. The Spaniards approached in their canoes with arquebusses loaded and crossbows at the ready, keeping guard while Ursúa landed at the head of a small party armed with swords and shields. The captain held his own arquebuss conspicuously in one hand, while waving a white lace handkerchief in the other. As soon as they were within earshot, he had his interpreters request of the Machifaro that they provide his men with some food and a place to stay. Then the landing party walked up the long flight of stairs to the top,

where there was a great host of Indians with their chief who, seeing that the Governor was beckoning to him with the handkerchief, came to take it and stood by his side. Some Indians came with the chief to stand among the Spaniards, while others remained armed and in battle

formation along one side of a great square.<sup>52</sup>

Weighing his options, the chief agreed and instructed his people to vacate the houses at one edge of the town (as had been done for Orellana), and to stock them with plenty of maize, manioc and turtles. Ursúa gave strict orders that his men were to do no damage, take nothing by force, eat only what they needed and put food aside for the days ahead. But the hungry and mutinous troops could not be contained, and they rushed to gorge themselves on anything they could find to eat,

making many cakes, fritters and stews with the turtles and their turtle eggs and fat, and the bee's honey they found there, and they did nothing but disport and enjoy themselves without looking toward the future . . . the Blacks and the Indian servants of the Spaniards used up the corn making wine to drink.<sup>53</sup>

Whatever they couldn't eat, they packed off to the brigantines. The result was that after a month in the village, they were pressing hard on what had been an extraordinarily abundant supply of food -- and the scarcer the food, the more brutal became the Spaniards' exactions on the unfortunate Machifaros.<sup>54</sup>

At this point some 200 Omaguas in a fleet of seventeen war canoes came down from Cararí and Manicurí, believing it seemed to Ursúa and his men that since that the Spaniards would by this time have dispersed and weakened their old enemies, they would find them an easy prey. The war party startled the town early one morning with a reveille of flutes and horns. The Machifaro naturally sprang into action; but they took the precaution of stopping to explain to Ursúa that since

they were being attacked they were going to have to defend themselves. The Spaniards should not be alarmed by their coming forth with weapons. The chief added that he would need no help in fighting the despised Omaguas, but that the Spaniards were welcome to come and watch the battle if they liked.<sup>55</sup> Ursúa sent sixty harquebussmen as observers, and these men were unable to resist joining the affray and helping to kill or capture a great number of the attackers. The Omagua, seeing that the Spaniards were still there and had chosen to fight against them, took flight. The Machifaros and Spaniards then pursued them for a time up a paraná which offered no escape, until the Omaguas were obliged to abandon their canoes and escape into the forest. When this battle was over the Machifaros, to the Spanish soldiers' great disgust, proved unwilling to share the spoils; so in the interest of maintaining the peace Pedro de Ursúa ordered his men to return to them that part of the booty "for which they had no use."<sup>56</sup>

From Machifaro, Ursúa sent a party to explore a nearby lake, presumably Lake Tefé, upon which according to the Tupí interpreters there lived one of the great nations which had attacked and nearly destroyed their people a few years before, during their journey from Brazil to Peru. This lake turned out to be of enormous size, so large reported the soldiers that a canoe could be lost in it and out of sight of any shore. The party found no settlements on its banks, however, and were soon discouraged from pursuing this exploration any further.

Soon after Christmas, 1560, the Spaniards were obliged by scarcity to travel two days' downriver, past a number of abandoned settlements, to the last village of the Machifaros. This turned out to be another enormous place; Altamirano

estimated its population (no doubt with some exaggeration) at 10,000.<sup>57</sup> From there they sent an exploring party inland along another "great road," while Ursúa attempted to establish friendly relations with the few Indians who remained in the town by making them small gifts from his stock of trade goods. Others visited an outlying place where they found groves of fruit trees, apparently planted or at least systematically exploited by the Machifaro, and a number of additional houses. The returning exploration party reported that the road they had pursued seemed to be an important trade route, with Inca-style tambos or inns placed along it at the end of each day's march -- each with its manioc garden and some women to prepare food for any travellers. Over this route, they had been told, the Machifaros traded pottery and fish for the gold ornaments and other goods which were produced by a populous tribe of warriors situated at some great distance from the river.<sup>58</sup>

This was the place and date (New Year's day, 1561) when the respected Pedro de Ursúa was murdered by a party of his erstwhile followers inspired by the traitorous Lope de Aguirre. The story of the intrigues leading up to that event (which is the key point in this narrative as it was constructed by the chroniclers on whom we are relying, and by most of the many historians who have read them), is a gripping one -- one of the more fascinating and revealing in the entire literature of the conquest of America. The assassination and usurpation were not moments of great significance for the early history of the Solimões peoples, however; and for that reason they are not explored here in any detail. Their immediate consequence was the desertion of three of the expedition's Tupinambá guides and interpreters, disgusted with the internal politics of the Spaniards and with their failure to help them take revenge on their enemies.<sup>59</sup> The interpreters disappeared in a canoe

downstream, whereupon in desperation the new Spanish captains felt obliged to send men out to the nearby Indian villages in an effort to round up food supplies and capture all the people they could find. When these people were brought into camp, the Spaniards offered them gifts of trade goods and colored clothing, in an effort to persuade them to continue to keep the party supplied with food. Such a desperate move could be only temporarily successful.

The great Machifaro village in which the Spaniards were encamped was dubbed by them Muchos Barcos (Many Boats), because of the great number of cedar trunks they found there -- giant logs torn from the river's banks which had floated downstream and been rescued from the river during the previous year's flood. These were used by the Indians to manufacture great dugout canoes, some for their own use and others to trade with their neighbors. The soldiers set to work to try and build a few such vessels for themselves, since the large "brigantines" in which they had been travelling were by now gradually rotting and falling apart. They obliged some of the captive Indians to help them; but after a short time these native boatbuilders grew impatient with the Spaniards' abusive treatment and took flight into the forests.

Lope de Aguirre, the brutal new captain of the Spanish expedition, conceived an "exemplary punishment" to put a stop to such desertion: he invited a friendly chief and his people to a celebration in his quarters; and when he had them drunk and dancing, he ordered his men to surround the party and attack. They stabbed some of the visitors to death and clapped neck-irons on others. Not surprisingly, this measure proved counter-productive; within a short time the village had been abandoned by its inhabitants, and there seemed to be no Indians anywhere who

would have any truck with the intruders. The aggrieved natives set up ambushes around the town; and soon any small group of Spaniards who went out to hunt or forage for food was in danger of being attacked and massacred. The Spaniards were soon afraid to leave their camp; and they were quickly reduced to having to eat their horses, dogs and poultry with whatever edible plants they could find in the nearby forest. To the famine and terror that spread among them were added the inconvenience and discomfort of having to prepare food and even row the giant dugout canoes with their own hands, since by this time most of the serving-people they had brought with them from Peru were long since dead. Despite everything, however, they stayed at "Muchos Barcos" for three months as the flood rose and food grew even scarcer, building the small vessels in which at last they managed to continue on their way. Behind them they left a ruined village, with no stores of provisions to tide its legitimate inhabitants over the hungry months of the flood.<sup>60</sup>

Below the Machifaro country, the Spaniards encountered a very large island and divided their forces to travel for three days down both sides of it. The south bank of the river opposite this island they found to be densely populated; whereas on the north shore there seemed to be no settlements at all. At the eastern end of the island, they came upon a low-lying, swampy village where there were "few houses and many mosquitos," and which the people abandoned in haste as soon as they saw them coming. The multi-family houses there were large and rectangular as elsewhere, but covered with straw from the savannas rather than with the palm-leaves that were usually employed (though the Spaniards saw no stretches of savanna near at hand). In this village they did find extensive stores of corn and manioc, and of fish which had been roasted and dried to keep it from rotting quickly, on grills made

with green sticks. They managed to capture a few Indians near this village, and gave these people gifts before setting them free as part of a new effort to encourage trade. Presently a few people did begin to come in with various kinds of food for barter. These Indians were naked, carried arms like those of the Machifaro, and moved about among the Spaniards without any apparent fear or shyness -- offering once more great quantities of food in exchange for trade goods which had relatively little value in European eyes.<sup>61</sup>

After sojourning for a week in this town, the invaders travelled on for a day to encounter yet another -- this one perhaps the largest they had seen since the first village of the "Machifaro" province. Its location was presumably not far above the mouth of the Rio Negro. This settlement was two leagues (twelve kilometers?) long, consisting in a row of small rectangular houses thatched with reeds which were set along a single "street," each house surrounded by its own garden and fruit trees. It was set atop a low bluff on the south bank which was virtually an island at this season (mid-May) because of the flooded land which stretched behind it. Altamirano says that the villagers there had tree-houses into which they were prepared to move at the height of the flood; and that by the time the Spaniards left, the rising waters were threatening to inundate the village itself.<sup>62</sup> The mosquitos were especially dense there. Beyond the lake or swamp on higher ground were extensive open fields planted in manioc, sweet potatoes, yams, squash, cotton, peppers and various kinds of fruit trees. The savanna in the distance was filled with wild birds, pigs and tapirs for hunting. The inhabitants of this village withdrew to one end of it when they saw the Spaniards coming, leaving abundant provisions in the rest. Among their comestibles was a clear reddish wine,

made from a mash of corn, sweet manioc and other things, which is set to ferment like Spanish wine, in huge jars where once it reaches the proper consistency they add to it some of the water in which it was cooked and then remove and strain the wine into other containers where it ferments some more and settles. The result is a beverage so powerful that if not watered down it makes you drunk like wine.

There were such great quantities of this potion, that the whole party of "blacks and Indians as well as Spaniards" stayed drunk on it for several days.<sup>63</sup>

The people of this village were unusally willing to trade with the Spaniards, bringing in great quantities of fish, manatee, turtle, fruit, corn and wild pig -- and spreading the word to other communities so that their neighbors would do the same. They even hired themselves out to do domestic service for the soldiers, preparing their food and baking bread and doing "anything else that was needed." But as it turned out, they made the visitors pay a high price for these kindnesses:

they were most stealthy thieves, stealing the clothing and weapons of the Spaniards as they slept along with anything else they could find; and we could not keep them from doing this. For this reason, the soldiers treated them very cruelly and harshly -- killing many of them with their lances, knives and harquebusses, and clapping others in irons.

But despite such violent retribution, the Indians continued to come in to trade every

day. This, it seemed, was due to the very great value they placed on the Spaniards' "glass beads, tin horns, combs, knives, scissors and bells." Sometimes they would also bring food to trade for the freedom of those of their fellows who had been made prisoner by the soldiers. These Indians also had a collection of cedar trunks which were drawn up to be used in making canoes "for their trade and navigation". Some of these the Spaniards appropriated to use in making their own embarkations more seaworthy, a task which kept them in this village for more than a month.<sup>64</sup>

Upon leaving this settlement, the "Marañones" (as the Spaniards under Lope de Aguirre had taken to calling themselves) stayed away from the south bank in order to avoid encountering any more hostile Indians; and as a result their chroniclers virtually ceased to register information of the kind which is of ethnohistorical interest today. They travelled down-river on the south bank for another week, and then passed down the north side of an island (modern Tupinambaranas?) which appeared to be "sixty leagues" long. It is probable, though not certain from the texts, that during this journey they left the Rio Solimões, passed (without comment!) the mouths of the mighty Negro and Madeira rivers, and reached the area along main stream of the Amazon just above the narrows of Obidos. Along this stretch, they continued to see the signs of a dense population on both banks.<sup>65</sup>

#### Society on the Solimões in the mid-16th century

A close reading of the surviving Spanish accounts of these early voyages of exploration reveals that the islands and várzeas (particularly on the southern bank) of most of the length of the Rio Solimões between the mouth of the Napo and the mouth of the Negro, and the banks of the Amazon around the mouth of the Madeira,

were quite densely settled in the 16th century. These chronicles do not inform us at all about the demography and human ecology of the valleys of the Rio Negro and other tributaries. The pattern on the Solimões was one of large and permanent settlements, consisting in groups of generally multifamily dwellings of a lashed-pole construction (whether round or rectangular), thatched with a variety of palm leaves, reeds and grasses. Several of these towns extended along a kilometer or more of the riverbank, and housed as many as four or five thousand people. The villages were usually, but not always, located on high land above the annual floods; and their inhabitants farmed both alluvial mudflats and swidden plots carved from the rainforest. They made use of canoe landings on the river itself, or on the adjacent lakes and paranás. These villages were always located close to their gardens and orchards, as well as to the permanent sources of animal protein in the forests, the savannas and especially the waterways of the várzea.

The political organization of the Solimões valley peoples centered on these large villages, each with its principal chief. Some of these leaders may have enjoyed spheres of influence which encompassed several villages, or in modern parlance "chiefdoms." An educated guess would establish the Omagua and "Machifaro" as the largest tribes, with perhaps thirty to sixty thousand people each -- and suggest the possibility that the entire population of the Solimões várzea country, settled in some eighty to a hundred villages averaging between one and two thousand people, may have between 100,000 and 200,000 people in all -- a larger and more densely settled population that has lived in the valley of the Solimões at any time since.

The basic material culture was substantially the same along the entire Solimões --although there were sufficient local differences (such as the Omaguas'

Tupian language and colorful cotton clothing) to allow even the casual foreign observer to distinguish at least three and perhaps five "tribes," "nations," or "provinces" -- each with its own compact territory extending along a section of the river. Among these were the Omagua, whose territory ran from a point between the mouths of the Napo and Javará rivers to a point between the Içá and the Juruá; the "Machifaro" between the Juruá and the Japurá, the nameless people living around Lake Tefé and the mouth of the Japurá (as Ursúa's men saw it, this territory incorporated that of Carvajal's "Omagua" as well); the people of Carvajal's "Paguana" around the mouths of the Purús and Codajás; and the nameless warlike people of the lower Solimões near the mouth of the Rio Negro (see map 1).

The horticulture of the Solimões peoples produced bitter and sweet manioc, corn, squash, sweet potatoes, peppers, peanuts, pineapples and a variety of tree fruits (avocado, zapote, mamey, lúcuma?) which may have come from cultivated orchards. There were, by the time these Spanish observers arrived, at least a few chickens similar to those known in Europe; and among the wild animals used for food were the river turtle and manatee, a great variety of fish, parrots and other birds, monkeys, iguanas, tapir, wild pigs and deer. A considerable quantity of wild honey was collected each year in the forest, along with a great variety of edible and medicinal fruits and plants.

Among the more remarkable technologies for food-gathering practiced along the Solimões were the collection of great numbers of giant turtles which were kept in pens to provide meat during the flood-season, and the preservation of both fish and meat by smoking and drying in the absence of a regular supply of salt. Food of all kinds was produced in remarkable quantity everywhere, with surpluses

readily available for feeding visitors or for trade. There was a well-developed artsanry which produced large quantities of pottery (including pots of extraordinary size and beautiful decoration, and a great variety of other domestic utensiles), as well as spinning, weaving and dyeing a cloth made from domestically grown cotton. These products, as well as manioc bread, dried fish and colorful feathers, were traded apparently quite extensively and on a large scale with the peoples living inland from the the Solimões. At least some of the riverine peoples wore ornaments crafted in gold which were obtained by trade with peoples living to the north, and poisoned the tips of their arrows with curare obtained from the terra firme peoples. Alcoholic beverages were produced by fermentation, and on ritual occasions might be consumed to the point of drunkenness. The men were very skillful in manufacturing and handling dugout canoes of all sizes, most commonly made of the great trunks which could be captured as they floated past any village during the flood season.

The general impression of inter-tribal relations is that they were peaceable and based primarily on trade between the riverine peoples and those living inland -- with the notable exception of a permanent state of warfare between the Omagua and "Machifaro," carried out across the unsettled "no-man's land" which separated their territories. Most villages were located on exposed high land near the banks of the river, which suggests that their inhabitants had no great fear of the tribes living inland. On the other hand, most of the peoples of the Solimões appeared to be more or less experienced in warfare -- fighting better from canoes on the water than on land. They knew how to build log stockades when necessary (though these were not a permanent feature anywhere); and their weapons included the bow with

poisoned arrows, the club, the giant shield and the dart-thrower.<sup>66</sup> Drums, flutes and horns were used during battles, and (at least among the "Machifaro"), shamans seem to have had a large role in urging the troops on in combat. There is no report at all in these early accounts of the cannibalism which would be widely attributed to these same middle Amazonian peoples in the later colonialist sources, excepting only the single comment by Carvajal to the effect that at one point the Machifaro seemed to the chronicler to be threatening to eat their Spanish attackers, and an entirely unsubstantiated charge against the Arawak people who lived to the north and east of the mouth of the Rio Madeira, far from the Solimões valley itself. Nor is there any mention of the enslavement by any of these Indian peoples of the captives they might take in warfare, or of the existence of a class of "slaves" in any of the indigenous societies of the várzea.

The native Amazonians' initial experience of the Spanish visitors was one of unprecedented violence. The damage done by crossbow and harquebuss was like nothing that could be accomplished with the weapons traditionally available on the Solimões. It was an experience too of the unprecedented rapacity and wantonness of a caste of apparently demented and homicidal men -- men who were mysteriously incapable even of providing for themselves, or of doing any of the many other useful things that the men and women of Amazonia were trained to do, and who were therefore reduced to requiring that other men and women do their work for them. This was the unsavory experience of an encounter with hostile and destructive strangers who felt that they were free to violate all of the traditional canons of life in tropical forest society, and do so with impunity because of their superior military force -- men with whom it was impossible for an honored chief to negotiate or even

communicate in the normal human manner.

On the other hand, the peoples of the Solimões also experienced at this time the introduction of a few material goods of extraordinary rarity, beauty and usefulness, artifacts unlike any that human beings in the tropical forest had ever seen before. Some of these goods, in particular the sharp-edged knives, axes and machetes, would become invaluable to the performance of traditional Amazonian tasks. These trade goods must have been warmly remembered, and used and coveted and fought over, long after the rapacity and the violence of their hirsute and unwashed visitors had faded from the minds of the men and women of the middle Amazon valley.

At the time when the first Spanish explorers from Peru visited the várzeas of the Rio Solimões in the mid-16th century, the nearest permanent outposts of European colonialism were many hundreds of miles away on the coasts of Brazil and Venezuela and in the Andes. None of these settlements was much influenced by the reports that filtered back to Europe and the colonial capitals from the Orellana and the Ursúa-Aguirre expeditions, nor were the commanders of any of these outposts yet in position to cast the covetous eye upon the Solimões valley. A century later, when the next European visitors returned to the middle Amazon, the Omagua and "Machifaro" and their native Amazonian neighbors would find themselves surrounded by and enmeshed in the life-destroying world-wide web of colonial exploitation; another century later, most of these peoples would have ceased to exist. In order to understand the holocaust that was about to descend on the inhabitants of the rich realm of nature that lay in the valleys of the Rio Solimões and the Rio Negro, we must now make a lengthy detour into the establishment early in

the 17th century of a Portuguese colonial society and a unique Amazonian colonial labor system around the mouth of the great river in Pará.

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<sup>1</sup>For present purposes the main stream of the Amazon between the Rio Napo and the Rio Negro will be referred

to here as the Rio Solimões, although strictly speaking it is called the Marañón west of today's Brazil/Peruvian border. The events recounted in this book occurred primarily within the territory of present-day Brazil, and broadly speaking within the valleys of the Rios Solimões and Negro which constitute the modern Brazilian State of Amazonas.

<sup>2</sup>For a fuller general description of the natural environment and cultural ecology of the Amazon Valley, see Betty Meggers, Amazonia: Man & Culture in a Counterfeit Paradise (Chicago, 1971). An exemplary study of one of the many interfluvial subsistence systems of the terra firme is William Smole, The Yanoama Indians: A Cultural Geography (Austin, 1976).

<sup>3</sup>These high bluffs (most noticeable on the southern bank between Lake Mamiá and the mouth of the Jutaf, and on the northern bank above Lake Manacapurú near Codajás) are not alluvial várzea but outcroppings of the sterile terra firme. On this and other key geographical features of the region, see S.F. Marbut & C.B. Manifold, "The Topography of the Amazon Valley," Geographical Review 15,4 (1925).

<sup>4</sup>For a lucid, critical review of recent literature on the prehistory of northwest Amazonia, see Anna Curtenius Roosevelt, Parmana: Prehistoric Maize and Manioc Subsistence along the Amazon and Orinoco (New York, 1980), esp. chap. 1. On the archeology and prehistory of the of the Peruvian várzeas, see Donald Lathrap, The Upper Amazon (New York, 1970), esp. pp. 84-112. Archaeological work in the Brazilian Amazon has been concentrated primarily on Marajó Island and the lower Tapajós valley in Pará; but see Peter Paul Hilbert's reports on excavations along the Solimões in Proceedings of the International Congress of Americanists [PICA] 34 (1960), pp. 465-476, his Archaeologische untersuchungen am mittleren Amazonas: Beitrage zu vorgeschichte des sudamerikanischen tieflandes (Berlin, 1968) and Mario F. Simões, "Contribuição à arqueologia dos arredores do baixo Rio Negro, Amazonas," in Publicações Avulsas do Museu Emilio Goeldi No. 26 (Belém, 1974), pp. 165-88.

<sup>5</sup>On the Orellana expedition, the classic and only first-hand account is that of its chaplain, Fr. Gaspar de Carvajal, Relación del nuevo descubrimiento del famoso rio grande de las Amazonas (Sevilla, 1894). This text, edited and annotated by Toribio de Medina, was translated into English and published with further commentary by H.C. Heaton as The Discovery of the Amazon according to the account of Friar Gaspar de Carvajal (New York, 1934; 2nd ed., 1988). References here, however, are to the modern Spanish edition of Carvajal's text alone (México, 1955), more accessible than that of Seville. Supplementary information gathered from veterans of the 1541-42 expedition was included in Chapter 15, pp. 243-48 of Toribio de Ortiguera's account (see below). Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo's celebrated letter to Cardinal Bembo in 1543, based on interviews with Orellana and published by Eugenio Asensio in Miscelánea americanista (Homenaje a Antonio Ballesteros) I (Madrid, 1951), is of little interest for the social history of Amazonia. The historio-

graphy of the Orellana expedition is reviewed in Emiliano Jos, "Centenario de Amazonas: la expedición de Orellana y sus problemas históricos," Revista de Indias 3 (1942):661-710 & 4 (1943):5-42, 255-304 & 479-526. See also Ladislao Gil

Munilla, Descubrimiento del Marañón (Pubs. de la Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos 84; Sevilla, 1984), Philip A.

Means, "Gonzalo Pizarro and Francisco de Orellana," Hispanic American Historical Review 14 (1934):275-95 & Sir Clements Markham's introduction to his Expeditions into the Valley of the Amazons, 1539, 1540, 1639 (Hakluyt Society 24; London, 1859).

The tragic tale of the Ursúa expedition was told by veterans Francisco Vázquez and Pedrarias de Alместo in their "Relación verdadera de todo lo que sucedió en la jornada de Omagua y Dorado . . ." (1562), in Nueva Biblioteca

Autores Españoles XV (Madrid, 1909), pp. 423-484; by veterans Pedro de Monguía and Gonzalo de Zúñiga in their separate "Relaciones," in Colección de documentos inéditos ... de América y Oceanía IV (Madrid, 1865), pp. 191-282;

and with additions gathered from other participants by Toribio de Ortiguera in his "Jornada del Marañón," Biblioteca

Autores Españoles CCXVI (Madrid, 1968), pp. 217-358. The Vázquez-Almosto account was the basis for that presented

in the sixth book of Fr. Pedro Simón, Noticias históricas de la conquista de Tierra Firme en las Indias Orientales (Biblioteca de Autores Colombianos 44-52; Bogotá, 1953), available in English translation as William Bollaert (ed.),

The Expedition of Pedro de Ursúa and Lope de Aguirre in Search of El Dorado and Omagua in 1560-1561 (London, Hakluyt Society Pubs. no. 28, 1861). The memoir of another participant, Captain Altamirano, is included in Antonio

Vázquez de Espinosa, Compendio y Descripción de las Indias Occidentales (Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections Vol.

108; Washington, 1948), Part 2, Book IV, Chaps. 9-16, pp. 381-396; and in the English edition of the same work (Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections Vol. 102; Washington, 1942), pp. 408-425. I have not seen the three anonymous accounts of this expedition which are listed in the Paz catalogue of the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid as mss.

3199, 3191 & 19525. Histories of this expedition include Robert Southey, The Expedition of Orsua (London, 1821),

Walter N. Breymann, "The Opening of the Amazon, 1540-1640" (unpub. PhD. Illinois, 1950)

and Emiliano Jos, La expedición de Ursúa al Dorado, la rebelión de Lope de Aguirre y el itinerario de los "marañones" (Huesca, 1927).

<sup>6</sup> Ramón Sender, La aventura equinoccial de Lope de Aguirre (Madrid, 1962). See also Miguel Albornoz, Orellana: el caballero de las Amazonas (2nd ed. Mexico, 1965); Leopoldo Benites Vinuesa, Argonautas de la selva (México, 1945);

George Reid Millar, A Crossbowman's Story of the First Exploration of the Amazon (New York, 1955); E. Rodríguez

Fabregat, Pasión y crónica del Amazonas (Buenos Aires, 1955); Edgardo Ubaldo Genta's play La Amazonia. Tragedia

en Cuatro Jornadas (Montevideo, 1942) and especially Raymond Marcus, "El mito literario de Lope de Aguirre en España

e Hispanoamerica," Actas del Tercer Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas (Mexico, 1970).

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<sup>7</sup>E.g., Alfred Metraux, "Tribes of the Middle and Upper Amazon," in Handbook of South American Indians III (Washington, 1947), pp. 687-712.

<sup>8</sup>Orellana had been an officer in the large expedition under Gonzalo Pizarro from recently-conquered Peru, which explored the montaña east of Quito and the headwaters of the Rio Napo in 1541. The circumstances of the separation of his party from that of Pizarro, and their subsequent descent of the Napo and Amazon, are the subject of a classic controversy in Spanish colonial historiography which bears little relation to the present inquiry and will not be outlined here. For a review of this subject see the works of Jos, Means, Gil Munilla and Markham cited in note 4 above.

<sup>9</sup>Carvajal (1955 ed.), pp. 56-57; Ortiguera chap. 15, p. 246. The location of these first two villages is uncertain, but by Toribio de Medina's plausible exegesis of Carvajal (intro. to 1934 ed., p. 97-101) they may have been on the lower Napo river near its mouth (see map 1). From here on, the expedition was certainly travelling down the Rio Solimões.

<sup>10</sup>This seems to have been the "isle of the Cariries" on the lower Marañón or Solimões, of Ortiguera's later account. Carvajal's "Aparia" is sometimes called "Aparia the Great" to distinguish him from a lesser chief of the same name whom Orellana's men had visited on the middle Coca river, tributary of the Napo. See the discussion of this journey in Donald Lathrap, "Alternative Models of Population Movements in the Tropical Lowlands of South America," in PICA 39, 4 (Lima, 1972), pp. 16-19.

<sup>11</sup>There is no ready explanation for this curious detail. Carvajal refers to Orellana's strange linguistic ability on several occasions, and claims that it saved their lives more than once. Lathrap, "Models," p. 18, suggests that Orellana must have learned the "basic Omagua" for talking with Aparia's people from the branch of that tribe whom they had found living on the Rio Coca. It is perhaps more likely that the Spaniards had brought an Omagua from the Napo along as interpreter, though there is no indication of this in any of the sources. For ethnohistorical material on the "Omagua-yeté" of the middle Napo basin, see Udo Oberem, "Un grupo indígena desaparecido del Oriente ecuatoriano," Revista de Antropologia (São Paulo) 15-16 (1967-68): 149-170.

<sup>12</sup>Carvajal, pp. 58-61. The "Amazons" intrigued the Dominican chronicler greatly, and were the subject of intense speculation among European visitors to the valley for a long time. The material basis for this myth would appear to lie somewhere between the facts that many Indians of the valley wore long hair; that most people of either sex generally went about with bared breast and painted body; that some tribes had a matrilineal social structure; and that in dire straits the women of any tribe might fight alongside the men to defend their villages. Ortiguera (see below) makes it clear that the (masculine) warriors in question were the "Machifaro" people who inhabited the adjacent territory downstream from Aparia's settlements.

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<sup>13</sup>Ortiguera, p. 246.

<sup>14</sup>Carvajal, pp. 61-65; Ortiguera, p. 246.

<sup>15</sup>Estimates of distance in the colonial sources are always difficult to translate into modern terms; and this is particularly the case in Amazonia where virtually all travel was by water, and where calculations of distance based on the time passed and the estimated speed of a vessel (whether propelled by paddle or by sail) were complicated by the wide variations in winds and currents, and by the sameness of much riverbank scenery. Values for the "league" (*legua*) appear also to have varied from period to period (if not from author to author!), between about four kilometers and six. Six kilometers per *legua* appears to be a reasonable approximation in most circumstances, and this value appears often enough to correspond to modern estimates based on map study, where the specific locations and distances can be determined.

<sup>16</sup>Ortiguera, p. 246 (author's trans.).

<sup>17</sup>Carvajal, p. 66; Ortiguera, p. 246.

<sup>18</sup>For a discussion of carbon-14 findings which suggest the presence of the Omagua in this territory during the 9th or 10th century, see Lathrap, "Model," pp. 18-19. On the identification of Aparia's people with the Omagua, cf. Antônio Porro, "Os Omagua do Alto Amazonas. Demografia e padrões de povoamento no século XVII," in Universidade de São Paulo, *Contribuições à Antropologia em homenagem ao Professor Egon Schaden* (Coleção Museu Paulista, Série Ensaio vol. 4; São Paulo, 1981), p. 209.

<sup>19</sup>On this possibility, see Thomas P. Myers, "Defended territories and no-man's lands," *American Anthropologist* 78 (1976):354-55, referring to the functional separation between tribal territories observed by Juan Salinas de Loyola on the Rio Ucayali in the 1570's.

<sup>20</sup>Carvajal, p. 67 (author's trans.). Fishing was easiest in the várzea at low water, when the lakes and streams are shallow and enclosed; during the flood season, the same numbers of fish were scattered far and wide in the flooded forest.

<sup>21</sup>Carvajal, p. 68; Ortiguera, p. 247. The figure is incredible, but may perhaps be taken to mean "large numbers," or "thousands rather than hundreds."

<sup>22</sup>Ortiguera, p. 247, speaks of 400 "canoas y piraguas" in all.

<sup>23</sup>Carvajal, pp. 68-71. Ortiguera's account of this first encounter with the Machifaro differs from Carvajal's in two important respects. According to his informants, the Machifaro chief had received Orellana peaceably and had a section of the village vacated to make room for his men, in addition to providing food, though the Spaniards had arrived armed to

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the teeth. They had then attacked them only after the Spaniards had abused their hospitality by attempting to gather up a large amount of food and stow it in their ship. Chap. 15, pp. 246-47. Carvajal was an eyewitness, and he provides more convincing details of what he claims happened, and so must be given preference. But he may well also have whitewashed the story; and in any event, he makes use of it to exemplify the heroism of the Spaniards in doing battle with "aquella mala gente" and preventing them from carrying out their "mal propósito" of defending themselves against attack! The second difference is that Ortiguera maintains that the Spaniards fought with their arquebusses (which would have been more terrifying than crossbows to people who had never seen firearms), and that they could not have defeated the much larger Indian force without them.

<sup>24</sup>A large land mammal reaching a length of two meters, found in the grasslands near the lakes and streams of the low várzea. Peccaries travel in herds of up to one hundred in the same areas. Meggers, pp. 23-25

<sup>25</sup>Ortiguera, p. 247 (author's trans.). "Bitter" manioc (*Manihot utilissima*), a root crop grown on well-drained soils free of prolonged flooding, is the staple food of most Amazonian peoples (and those of the rest of Brazil and parts of Africa as well). Its flesh is scraped and shredded and must be squeezed free of a poisonous sap before being prepared in flat cakes (*beijú*) or beverages or, more commonly, as the universal grainy dry and toasted, durable farinha de mandioca. "Sweet" manioc is cooked and eaten like yams. Manioc of either variety requires about eight months to mature, whereas maize requires only about three in Amazonia. The result is that manioc must be grown on higher land which requires clearing, whereas maize can be planted on the lowest-lying mudflats, or sown twice in each season on higher ground. Meggers, p. 31.

<sup>26</sup>Ortiguera, p. 247, has the Spaniards driven out of the town on the first day, and pursued downstream by the Machifaro people for another two days and nights.

<sup>27</sup>Carvajal, p. 77 (author's trans.).

<sup>28</sup>Carvajal, pp. 71-78; Ortiguera, pp. 247-48.

<sup>29</sup>Carvajal, pp. 81-82 (author's trans.)

<sup>30</sup>Carvajal, pp. 78-83.

<sup>31</sup>Carvajal, pp. 83-84.

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<sup>32</sup>The mysterious appearance of Old World chickens in several 16th-century accounts of visits to the remote interior of South America has been attributed persuasively to intertribal trade from the coastal regions already under European influence. See Erland Nordenskjöld, Deductions Suggested by the Geographical Distribution of Some Post-Columbian Words Used by the Indians of South America (Comparative Ethnographical Studies No. 5; Göteborg, 1922), chaps. 1 & 2.

<sup>33</sup>The area around the mouth of the Negro is the scene of a large commercial fishery still today. See Nigel J.H. Smith, Man, Fishes & the Amazon (NY, 1981).

<sup>34</sup>Carvajal, pp. 84-88.

<sup>35</sup>Vázquez de Espinoza's informant Altamirano, a veteran of the expedition, had them passing by but not stopping at a village called "los Paltas," with about 2,500 unclothed inhabitants, somewhere above "Cararo" on the Rio Marañón. Part 2, Book IV, Chap. 20, p. 383. His is the only reference to such a place in these sources.

<sup>36</sup>Ortiguera, p. 235; Vazquez y Almesto, p. 429.

<sup>37</sup>Vázquez de Espinoza, p. 383; Vázquez y Almesto, p. 429; Ortiguera, p. 236, who thought that these Indians deserved better treatment by the Spaniards, for having befriended Orellana and "por ser gente de buena digestión."

<sup>38</sup>Ortiguera, pp. 220-22 and 263; cf. on the Tupian migration, Erland Nordenskiöld, "The Guaraní invasion of the Inca empire in the 16th century: an historical Indian migration," Geographical Review 4,2 (1917):103-21; Philip A. Means, "A note on the Guaraní invasions of the Inca Empire," Geographical Review 4,6 (1917):482-84; Alfred Métraux, "Les migrations historiques des Tupí-Guaraní," Journal de la Société des Americanistes de Paris [hereafter JSAP] n.s. 19 (1927):1-45; and Carlos Drumond, "A carta de Diogo Nunes e a migração dos Tupí-Guaraní para o Perú," Revista de História (São Paulo) 1 (1950):95-102. Altamirano recalled that Ursúa had also brought two Tupí-speaking Cocama interpreters from the Rio Ucayali to help with these communications. Vázquez de Espinosa, p. 382.

<sup>39</sup>Ortiguera, p. 236, says there were fifty to sixty people "con sus mujeres e hijos" in each house--which suggests (unless the "con" is taken to mean "including") that it may be appropriate to multiply by a conservative four to get an estimate of as many as 200 people to a house. Altamirano reported that some 3,000 people had come out to meet them when they first reached "Cararo" (300 canoes with ten to twelve people in each), and that the total population [of the island?] was over 8,000. Vázquez de Espinosa, p. 383.

<sup>40</sup>Vázquez y Almesto, p. 429; Ortiguera p. 237.

<sup>41</sup>Vázquez de Espinosa, pp. 383-84; Vázquez y Almesto, p. 429.

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<sup>42</sup>Ortiguera, p. 237 (author's trans.)

<sup>43</sup>Ortiguera, pp. 335-38; Simón, chaps. 6-7 (English ed., pp. 22-25). The presence of European-style chickens on the Amazon in aboriginal times is hard to account for; but cf. Carvajal's recollection of having found them on the lower Solimões.

<sup>44</sup>Vázquez y Almesto, p. 430.

<sup>45</sup>Ortiguera, p. 238; Vázquez y Almesto, p. 430.

<sup>46</sup>Vázquez y Almesto, 430.

<sup>47</sup>Simon, Chap. 7, p. 28; Vazquez y Almesto, pp. 430-31, say that all the pueblos they have seen (apparently since leaving the first populated island) have been located on the (south) bank, about ten to fifteen leagues apart and small in size: "la gente de esta provincia no es mucha, según buena conjetura, porque en las poblaciones que nosotros vimos [my emphasis] basta que haya siete u ocho mil indios habitantes, y a lo mas largo diez mil." But they point out as well that at this point the party was travelling rapidly and that "no hacíamos mas que allegar una noche y salir por la mañana."

<sup>48</sup>Ortiguera, pp. 237-40; Simon, Chap. 6, pp. 25-28; Altamirano says the group was visited at "Cararo" by a succession of chiefs dressed in "muy buenas y galanes camisetas pintadas de labores y colores de algodón al uso del Peru, y todos traían caracuras [spirals?] de oro muy fino, y subido en las narices, y patenas en los pechos, y aguilillas de oro y otras joyas de mucho valor." Vázquez de Espinosa, p. 383.

<sup>49</sup>cf. the practice noted by Juan de Salinas Loyola on the Ucayali river in the 1570's. Thomas Myers, "Defended Territories & No-Man's Lands," American Anthropologist 78 (1976):354-55.

<sup>50</sup>Vázquez y Almesto, p. 431.

<sup>51</sup>Vázquez de Espinosa, pp. 384-85.

<sup>52</sup>Ortiguera, p. 429 (author's trans.).

<sup>53</sup>Ortiguera, pp. 249-53.

<sup>54</sup>Vázquez y Almesto, pp. 431-32; Simon, Chap. 8, pp. 30-311; Vázquez de Espinosa, p. 385.

<sup>55</sup>Vázquez y Almesto say that he asked the Spaniards for assistance with the defense.

<sup>56</sup>Ortiguera, pp. 250-51; Simón, Chap. 8, p. 33; Vázquez y Almesto, p. 432.

<sup>57</sup>Vázquez y Espinosa, p. 385.

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<sup>58</sup>Ortiguera, pp. 253-54, who claims that the road led to a mountain honey-combed with silver mines. Altamirano, who was a member of this exploring party, seems a soberer source. Vázquez de Espinosa, pp. 385-86. This improbable story is rather more comprehensible if we assume that the road was located on the northern bank of the Solimões, and led to some point in the interfluvial trade route toward the gold-trading peoples of the upper Negro basin. See Chap. 4 below.

<sup>59</sup>Ortiguera, pp. 253-54. Ortiguera is the principal primary source for these events; they are perhaps made most accessible to modern readers in Ramón Sender's novel cited above.

<sup>60</sup>Ortiguera, pp. 264-57 & 274; Simón, Chap. 13, pp. 51-53 and Chap. 15, pp. 60-61; Vázquez y Almesto, pp. 438-440.

<sup>61</sup>Ortiguera, p. 276; Simon, Chap. 18, p. 76; Vazquez y Almesto, p. 442.

<sup>62</sup>Vázquez de Espinosa, pp. 387-89.

<sup>63</sup>Ortiguera, pp. 276-78. Simón says that the houses here were like those of the preceding village, and that the language and weapons and nakedness were the same, so that these people were presumed to be of the same tribe as the Machifaro.

<sup>64</sup>Ortiguera, p. 278; *Ibid.* Vázquez y Almesto, p. 443. It was during this month (May, 1561) that the plots were hatched and murders perpetrated by which Lope de Aguirre emerged as sole leader of the expedition. Aguirre declared the policy of having as little contact as possible with the Indians, and suspending the search for "Omagua". His goal was to get back to New Granada as soon as possible and from there launch a projected attack upon Peru. Ortiguera, pp. 278-93.

<sup>65</sup>Ortiguera, p. 294. The suggestion sometimes made that Lope de Aguirre and his "Marañones" may have made their way up the Rio Negro, and then down the Orinoco to the sea rather than continuing on the Amazon, seems to me to be baseless.

<sup>66</sup>Curiously, there is no mention in 16th-century sources of the blowgun (*cerbatana*) reported for this same region in later periods. This is perhaps because the blowgun was used rather for hunting than in warfare, and the visitors had no occasion to observe and be impressed by it.