

CHAPTER 4: RICH REALM RECONNOITRED

Early in the year 1637, there was a great stir in the down-at-the-heels pioneer village of Belém do Pará. Two Spanish Franciscan friars arrived there with six soldiers in a large canoe from the faraway headwaters of the Amazon -- country which had not yet been visited by the sertanistas of Maranhão and Grão Pará.¹ The friars' story was that they had been working to establish a mission alongside a placer gold mine among the Icahuate (Encabellado) people of the upper Rio Napo valley (see Map 1), working out of the Franciscan Province of Quito with the financial support of the encomendero of Cofanes. Things had gone well until the Icahuates had grown angry at the heavy-handed behavior of the captain of their military escort, and had killed him and driven the rest of the white men out of their country. Most of the missionaries and soldiers of their party had retreated up the Napo to try and make their way back to Quito; but Friars Domingo Brieva and Andrés de Toledo and companions had chosen instead to try their luck by travelling downstream.

The friars had been persuaded to attempt this feat by the stories of Francisco Hernández, a soldier of their party who claimed once to have visited Pará as a seaman on a Portuguese ship. He had recounted the fabulous tales current there about an El Dorado located somewhere up the great river; and realizing that the Napo must be a tributary of the Amazon, had argued that by travelling downstream all the way to Pará they might pass by the fabled city of gold, with its great mass of pagan humanity waiting to be evangelized. So Brieva and Toledo along with six other Spaniards (not including Hernandez!) had embarked hastily upon their adventure in mid-October of 1636 -- in a dugout without sufficient provisions, or any of the customary Indian crewmen or interpreters. Surprisingly, they had managed to reach the Portuguese outpost of Gurupá above Belém at the beginning

¹Gov. Jacome de Noronha, "Auto sobre a viagem de Toledo e Brieva (São Luiz, 28 mar 1637)" in Ibot, pp. 369-72, asserts that at this time the Portuguese canoes were trading or raiding only as far westward as the mouth of the Rio Tapajós (first visited by Pedro Teixeira in 1626).

of February, 1637, without having experienced any serious difficulty along the way.² Nor did the passage into Portuguese territory itself represent a problem, since at that time the Spaniards and Portuguese were vassals of the same Spanish king.

The Report of Friars Brieva and Toledo, and the Paraense Response

This journey was a prodigious feat, even travelling downstream and on the main course of the Amazon in the dry season, for a group of men without any prior experience of navigation on the great river. The friars themselves, who seem to have been the only spokesmen for the group,³ attributed their survival to God's care. At one point, unsure of what bank to follow, "they had cast lots with the names of several saints written on paper; and twice had drawn St. Joseph to the right, or south bank of the river." Once a large crack had appeared in their canoe, which Brieva repaired by simply passing his hand over the crack; and it was said as well that he had performed miraculous cures of illness in Indians by invoking over them the "sweet name of Jesus."³ Not the least remarkable achievement, thought the citizens of Pará, was that the travellers had passed through the territories of "innumerable savages, many of them cannibals" without suffering any harm.

Unlike the Spanish Amazon explorers of the previous century, Brieva and Toledo (neither of whom seems to have left an extended written account of his adventures) had only

²Fr. Laureano de la Cruz, O.F.M. "Nuevo descubrimiento del Marañón, año 1651" in Compte, Varones ilustres de la Orden Seráfica en el Ecuador I, pp. 155-64. Cf. Marcos Jiménez de la Espada, "Viaje del Capitán Pedro Teixeira," BSGM 9 (1880), pp. 209-31, summarizing and excerpting the classic Franciscan accounts; and Fr. Martín de Ochoa-King (Quito, 20 apr 1638), in P. Francisco Figueroa, S.J., Relación de la misión de Maynas (Madrid, 1904), pp. vii-xix.

³The closest thing to an official report on this journey appears to be the brief "Declaración" drawn up at Gurupá on 7 feb 1637 and signed by Fr. Domingo García de Brieva (all other sources refer to him simply as "Brieva"), Fr. Andres de Toledo and the six soldiers: Miguel Delgado, Francisco García, Francisco Sánchez, Mauricio de Nogoza, Francisco Ortiz and Luis Alvarez, pub. in Ibot, "Descubrimiento," pp. 636-37. Cristóbal de Acuña, who knew and later travelled the Amazon with Brieva, describes this first journey as "like that of persons who are each day in the hands of death." Acuña (English ed.) cap. 8, p. 53.

³This last prodigy was claimed not by Brieva himself, but by the soldiers. Alonso de Rojas, "Relación," paragraph 10, in Jiménez, "Viaje" (cont'd.) BSGM 13(1882), pp. 429-30. The practical Laureano de la Cruz, a fellow-Franciscan and Amazon missionary (of whom more below), thought that when Brieva repaired the canoe he must have had mud in his hand!

the vaguest things to say about the people they had encountered on their journey.⁴ They did report, however, that for the first 200 leagues of the trip (presumably an exaggerated estimate for the stretch on the Rio Napo) they had seen no one "because the people of that region have their villages at some distance from the river." Then they had arrived at the populous riverine settlements of the Omaguas, who proved to be friendly and provided them with badly-needed supplies. According to one story, they had come across a group of Omagua women in a canoe and given them some bead necklaces as a sign that they were peaceful men who would do the Indians no harm; and they had asked that they bring them some food. The women had gone away and come back with a group of several hundred people bearing corn, manioc and turtles. Unlike many other missionaries of the age, Brieva and Toledo were free to acknowledge that they had been unable to talk to these people or any others, or do any preaching of the Gospel along the way, because they were ignorant of the Amazonian languages. They had therefore been obliged to conduct all of their dealings (mostly asking for food) by means of signs.⁵

From the Omaguas on down, the friars had found numerous villages, at none of which did the people seem hostile or cause them any difficulty until they reached the mouth of the Tapajós. There, however, the natives' hackles had long since been raised by the deprivations of Portuguese slaving expeditions. The "Estrapajosos" had at first seemed friendly enough, and taken the Spaniards up their river a short distance to a very substantial

⁴Southey attributes the paucity of data to his impression that Brieva and Toledo were "stupefied with fear" during their voyage. *History of Brazil* III, pp. 581-82. An alternative interpretation is that in addition to being men of limited education (the friars were not priests, but lay brothers), they were probably travelling without paper and pen!

⁵Noronha, "Auto," in Ibot, "Descubrimiento," p. 370. Rojas, who provides the story of this first encounter with the Omagua ("Relación," in Jiménez, "Viaje" *BSMG* 13 (1882), p. 437) maintains that one of the soldiers in the friars' party could speak the Omagua language, and that he had reassured the women and been told by them that they had heard from others that "los hombres barbados no les hacían mal." Rojas raises doubts about his credibility, however, by going on to report an "Amazon story" that the Omagua had told to the soldier -- according to which there was a tribe of women on the north bank of the river whom the Omagua men visited for a few months each year. These women were very tall and had only one breast, and they had asked the Omagua to bring the Spaniards to them. Their custom was to give their boy children to the Omagua to raise, and keep the girl children for themselves.

village. There they had installed them in a large house "made of carved timbers, and hung with cotton cloths woven in various colors," in which they had slept in multi-colored hammocks of fine palm fiber and eaten plenty of fish and manioc. Around this village, however, the friars were horrified to find the skeletons, weapons and clothing of some Dutch soldiers who had been killed there a few years before; and it was not long before the hospitable Tapajós people had turned unfriendly to the Spaniards as well. They had robbed them of their few possessions, and had seemed on the point of killing them when they were dissuaded by the timely intervention of a Portuguese Franciscan whom the Indians knew and trusted, and who had managed to get them free and on their way to Gurupá.⁶

Despite their lack of curiosity with regard to ethnographic details, the contributions of Brieva and Toledo to the developing Paraense folk-knowledge of the Amazon basin were quite considerable. They reported that there was nothing to obstruct navigation on the river for a distance of perhaps five thousand kilometers; that for a long stretch in the middle of that vast watery world, there were very numerous indigenous peoples who lived in large villages (the friars estimated a hundred to a hundred and fifty of these above the Tapajós) and raised abundant food crops. Such peoples might be expected to be more easily "reduced" to the status of Christians and forced laborers than were tribes like the Icahuates of the Napo -- evasive, anarchic hunters and gatherers living deep in the forests of the terra firme. The várzea folk were also in a position to trade food supplies to expeditions travelling up the river. None of them had, moreover, appeared to be hostile or suspicious in their dealings with a small party of peaceable white men; Toledo and Brieva even entertained doubts that the people of the Solimões valley even made war among themselves!⁷

All of these revelations about the sertão set imaginations working in Pará. Within a month of the friars' arrival the Captain at Fort Gurupá, who had been the first Portuguese

⁶Jiménez, "Viaje", in BSGM 9 (1880), pp. 226-31; Toledo, "Declaración" in Ibot, "Descubrimiento," pp. 368-69; Rojas, "Relación," paragraph 20, in Jiménez, "Viaje," BSGM 13 (1882), p. 438.

⁷Noronha, "Auto," in Ibot "Descubrimiento," pp. 369-71.

official to receive them, was writing to the King with an offer to lead an expedition upriver in search of "the great number of Indians they found."⁸ But before that offer could even be discussed in Lisbon, the opportunity for adventure and glory was grasped by Pedro Teixeira, the Captain-Major of Pará. Teixeira, one of the founders of the colony in 1616 and its de facto governor from 1618 to 1622, had been a leading figure there for two decades. After years of fighting the Dutch and English, and leading slaving expeditions to the interior, he was perhaps the most experienced sertanista of Pará. The interim Governor at the time was Jacome Raymundo de Noronha, who had obtained the post by lobbying the Municipal Councils of Belém and São Luis after the death of the previous governor in 1636. Noronha saw the project for a trip up the Amazon as an opportunity to enhance his prospects for regularization by doing a signal service for the King. By making allies of the Indians along the Amazon, he hoped to prevent the fearsome Dutch (at that time still established in Pernambuco, and the principal threat to Spanish and Portuguese imperial interests all over the world), from launching an attack up the river against the Spanish silver mines of Potosí. The King had asked governors Bento Maciel Parente (in 1626) and Francisco Coelho (in 1634) to undertake an expedition with this purpose in mind; but neither of them had been in a position to carry it out. Noronha therefore placed high priority on this undertaking, and gave Pedro Teixeira a free hand in making the arrangements.⁹

⁸João Pereira-King (Gurupá, 2 mar 1637) in Ibot, "Descubrimiento," pp. 367-68. Pereira also anticipated other writers in recognizing the potential of the Amazon as a route for introducing African slaves to Peru, where they might be exchanged for silver.

⁹Acuña, chaps. 5 and 6 (English ed.), pp. 50-51; Southey, History III, pp. 580-82. The following account of the Teixeira expedition is based principally on Acuña chaps. 10-11, Berredo, Laureano de la Cruz, Southey and Jiménez de la Espada. Other sources are cited as appropriate. Jacome de Noronha's support of this undertaking did him no good personally. By the time Teixeira returned, the erstwhile governor had been deposed by his enemies and shipped to Portugal to be punished as an usurper, and for having dispatched so costly and ambitious an expedition to the sertão without royal permission. Consulta (Madrid, 23 jan 1640) in Cortesão, "Significado," p. 203. Cortesão nevertheless attributes great political significance to Noronha's decision, seeing it as an expansionist move on behalf of the Portuguese as opposed to the Spanish interest within the Habsburg dual monarchy in its last days, and as an early effort to promote trade as a means of enriching Pará with Peruvian silver.

Many settlers of Pará were opposed to this expedition, thinking that it would deprive them of fighting men who might still be needed to defend the colony against the Dutch; and they made use of this issue in their politicking against the interim governor. But the energetic Teixeira persisted in his preparations. He put up resources of his own to supplement those provided by the government; and in a very short time he managed to pull together and outfit the largest expedition ever launched by Europeans on the Amazon before the 1750's. The armada included seventy armed Europeans with at least twelve hundred Indian bowmen and crewmen recruited on the Rio Tocantins, for a total of over two thousand people (including the wives and children of many of the crew), travelling in forty-seven canoes with twenty oarsmen apiece. Brieva and four of the Spanish soldiers agreed to return to Quito with this expedition, and give it the benefit of their experience. The gathering-point was at Cametá by the mouth of the Tocantins, whence the great flotilla set out toward the Andes in late October, 1637.¹⁰

The Teixeira Expedition of 1637-39

¹⁰Acuña cap. 10 (English ed.), p. 55. The leaders of the expedition included, in addition to Teixeira himself, the pilot Bento da Costa; Franciscan chaplain Fr. Agostinho das Chagas; mestre de campo Col. Bento Rodrigues de Oliveira; sergeant-major Felipe Baião de Abreu and Domingos Pires da Costa; alferes Fernão Mendes Gago and António Gomes de Oliveira; ajudante Mauricio de Aliarte; Sgts. Diogo Rodrigues and Domingos Gonçalves; almozarife Manoel de Matos de Oliveira; and escrivão João Gomes de Andrade (signers of the controversial Auto da Posse, on which see below). An Ignacio de Rego Barreto gave a first-hand account of the trip to the King in 1644. Ms. now in AHU, cited as "ms. BNL Arquivo do Conselho Ultramarinao, lembrete 579" in George Edmundson, "The voyage of Pedro Teixeira," Transactions Royal Historical Society 4th ser. 3 (1920), pp. 62-63. Of the Spanish Franciscans, only Brieva made the return trip; Fr. Andrés de Toledo went on to Madrid to report on their adventure to the King. Laureano de la Cruz noted years later that Manoel dos Santos, cabo of a tropa de resgates on the Solimões in 1650, was a veteran of the Teixeira expedition. Victoriano Pimentel, writing in 1705, claimed to have known the abovementioned Fernão Mendes Gago, as well as two other veterans named Manoel Cordeiro Jardim and Luis Mendes -- of whom the latter was still alive in Pará in 1703. "Relação," in Wermers, "Estabelecimento," p. 551. Finally, there is the intriguing possibility that a number of the expeditionaries were not Portuguese but Dutch! George Edmundson cites a "History and Description of the River Amazons" (1669) by the English geographer John Scott for the story that Mattijs Matteson and "forty other Flemings" were among the seventy soldiers. There is no hint of this in any of the Portuguese or Spanish sources I have seen. Matteson, who must have been one of the more interesting personalities of the era, was a sailor out of Flushing who had been captured by the Portuguese at the mouth of the Amazon in 1623, and apparently remained in Pará. Edmundson says that he was the "piloto matamátego" who is mentioned in Alonso de Rojas' account of Teixeira's journey, and that he later served for several years with the Spaniards on the Orinoco before returning to Dutch service at Essequibo. Captured again when the English took Essequibo in 1665, he ended his days in English service a few months later. "Voyage," p. 64. No information has survived about the Indian participants in this great colonialist exploit -- though it is clear that it was they who did most of the work that made it possible.

The voyage up the Amazon was much more difficult than the friars' trip down had been --although October, when the river was low and the winds favorable, was perhaps the best time of year in which to make it. Considerable time had to be spent fishing and foraging as they went, in order simply to feed so large a company. More time was lost in exploring to find the best route and most suitable campsites. After a few weeks of sailing before the wind, moreover, the crews were forced to row all the rest of the way.¹¹ Rowing was both easier and safer on the sluggish channels through the várzea than it was along the main course of the river, with its surging currents; and often these paranás provided shortcuts as well. There were more fish to be caught in them, and the game-filled forests and savannas lined their banks. But was going to take a lot of practical experience to know which of these lateral routes were the best to take. Fr. Domingo and the Spanish soldiers could be of very little help as guides; and no one knew any more than they did about the more than two thousand kilometers of river beyond the mouth of the Tapajós. Teixeira's chief pilot, Bento de Acosta, made note of the names and general characteristics of tributaries, the distances between them, the locations of Indian settlements and other basic geographical features along the way, which were the basis for a map (the first ever drawn of the Amazon River valley) which was drafted later by his companion, Alonso de Rojas (see Map 4).¹² This was the birth of both the official and the folk traditions of navigation along the central stretches of the Amazon, within which generations of Paraenses would live their lives -- and to which over the long run can be attributed the eventual incorporation of most of the Amazon valley into Brazil.

A major problem for the Teixeira expedition was sickness and desertion among its

¹¹Teixeira later reported that expeditions leaving Pará in June, when the winds were strong and steady out of the east, might hope to sail against the current as far as about the mouth of the Japurá on the middle Solimões (over two thousand kilometers from the sea). "Relación" (Quito, 2 jan 1639), in Cortesão, "Significado," p. 193. Cf. Charles Boxer's note that "from July to December, wind and current are opposed to each other, so that in days of sail a vessel could make her way up or down the river by utilizing either the one or the other." Golden Age of Brazil, p. 271.

¹²Alonso de Rojas, "Relación" paragraph 15, in Jiménez, "Viaje" BSGM 13 (1882) p. 435, who says that Acosta explored each major tributary up to three or four days' journey from its mouth.

crewmen. Those who fell ill could not row and often begged to be left behind to die; others stole away in a canoe from their campsites at night, and tried to make their way back to Pará. The Indians were no less fearful than were the inexperienced Portuguese of what might lie ahead. There was moreover little to be gained by it for them, even if the expedition were successful -- and meanwhile it was they who were obliged to do the back-breaking work of moving heavy canoes against the current from dawn until dark. Somewhere on the Solimões in February, Teixeira devised an ingenious method for keeping these desertions to a minimum. He started the rumor that Quito was not far away, and then he sent the mestre de campo Bento Rodrigues de Oliveira, a Brazilian-born fluent speaker of the lingua geral who was experienced at working with Indian canoemen and much respected by them, ahead with Friar Brieva and two of the Spanish soldiers, in eight canoes manned by the worst grumblers of the lot. Their job was to discover the best route and leave signs at their resting-places. The remaining crews could then make a game of looking for these signs, and when they found one they could be reassured that the party was for the time being safe, and closer to its destination. The further they got from Pará, moreover, the less likely it was that the crewmen would desert -- fearful as they were of being lost or killed on their way back through unfamiliar and possibly hostile territory.¹³

In July of 1638, the main party reached the spot on the Napo in Icahuates country, above the mouth of the Aguarico, from which Brieva and Toledo had launched themselves on their downstream journey two years before. There Teixeira left the bulk of the men who remained with him, forty soldiers and most of the surviving Indian levies under Captain Pedro da Costa Favela, with instructions to set up a fortified camp and commence preparations for the voyage back to Pará. Teixeira and a smaller group, including most of the officers, then made their way up the river to join Oliveira's men in the frontier province of Quijos, and with them they travelled the eighty leagues overland to Quito. Brieva had

¹³Berredo, Annaes, paragraph 769 (1905 ed. I, p. 271).

previously gone ahead to prepare the way, and have supplies collected to feed them. Along the road and in the capital, the wild-looking sertanistas and their Amazonian Indian companions were received with great festivities in an atmosphere of mixed awe, jubilation and apprehension.¹⁴

On the one hand, these unexpected visitors were men in the hallowed conquistador tradition, subjects still of the Spanish King; and they had engaged in what might reasonably be seen as a consolidation of the King's imperial holdings in the New World. But on the other hand, both the Audiencia in Quito and the Viceroy in Lima were aware that the Portuguese both at home and abroad were restless under Spanish rule. They were disturbed at the considerable number of Portuguese who had already taken up residence in Peru, and concerned lest Teixeira's feat provide the basis for future claims to Amazon territory on the part of an independent Portugal. While the expeditionaries were being wined, dined and celebrated, therefore, anxious political maneuvers were taking place around them. Some Spanish officials thought that they should simply be clapped in prison, or at least sent to Spain on the galleons out of Cartagena, rather than being allowed to return to Pará. Alonso de Rojas was sent down Lima to show his remarkable map to the Viceroy; and he travelled with representatives of both the Jesuits and Franciscans of Quito, men anxious to discredit the Portuguese interlopers and reestablish their claims to the mission field which was opening in Amazonia.

The greatest cause for official alarm was that Teixeira had brought with him a sealed document in his packet of instructions from Governor Noronha, one which was to be opened only on his way back to Pará, after the party had passed through the province of the Omaguas. The President of the Audiencia of Quito correctly surmised that such orders could only involve the establishment of some sort of settlement, or a legal claim to the terri-

¹⁴Berredo speaks of a bull-fight in which Teixeira's Indian companions from Pará were allowed to kill the bulls with their bows and arrows, a Te Deum at which Teixeira was seated on a red velvet throne, a reception by the assembled nobility of Quito, another by the Audiencia, and several days of public celebrations in the capital with music and fireworks.

tory they had reconnoitred. Teixeira had also been instructed, as he was free to acknowledge in Quito, to locate some sites suitable for the construction of fortresses along the river, against the day when these might be necessary to protect the region from invasion -- whether by the Dutch from the Atlantic or by the Spaniards from Peru was not specified.

After extensive consultations, the President and the Viceroy decided to provide Teixeira's men with a small subsidy and send them back the way they had come. To accompany the party, they would send two Spanish Jesuits with instructions to make careful notes on the country they traversed, and on any suspicious behavior by the expedition itself -- and then to continue on directly from Pará to Madrid and give a detailed report the King. The reasons given for sending the Paraenses back to their homes were that they might indeed be needed there for the defense of Belém in the event of a Dutch attack, and that it seemed impolitic to punish them for having obeyed their Governor's orders and escorted a Spanish friar and soldiers back to Quito! There was concern too that the Portuguese might resent any harsh treatment they received from the Spaniards, and use that later as an excuse to come back and invade Quito by way of Quijos -- an outpost which was so poorly garrisoned and so tenuously held by the Spaniards, that it was feared that it might be conquered from the Amazon at any time by "twenty soldiers in five or six canoes with a hundred and fifty Indians." The best policy, then, was to let the Portuguese adventurers go, and then do everything possible to prevent the establishment of any further trade or communication between Peru and Pará by way of the Amazon.¹⁵

¹⁵Pérez de Salazar, "Informe" (Quito, 19 may 1639), in Cortesão, "Significado," pp. 194-201. Teixeira assured Pérez that even if the orders were to establish a settlement he would be unable to do so, because he had lost too many men on the journey upriver. Pérez later proposed that the Spaniards of Peru should do their best to get down into the valley and build forts there before the Portuguese had a chance to do so. In Madrid, the Consejo de Indias discussed the report and came to the conclusion that communication between Pará and Peru by way of the Amazon was a serious threat to both the defense and the fiscal administration of their empire in the Andes, as well as to the freedom of the Indians of the Amazon, since the Portuguese were inveterate slavers. The solution proposed was that the Portuguese be driven out of Pará and a Spanish fort be placed at the mouth of the Amazon. Consulta (28 jan 1640) in Cortesão, "Significado," pp. 202-04. This decision was made while Teixeira and his men were still on the river; but before the Court at Madrid had the opportunity to do anything about it, Portugal regained its independence from Spain and the possession of Pará and Maranhão was confirmed to its founders.

The refreshed expeditionaries set out at last on the return trip from Quito in March of 1639, accompanied by the Spanish Jesuits Cristóbal de Acuña and Andrés de Artieda. Along with them went four Spanish Mercedarian friars, who were planning to set up a convent for their order in Pará.¹⁶ Fr. Domingo Brieva (whom the Jesuits had done their best to keep from being allowed to make this journey), was sent along to travel the length of the great river once more -- this time as emissary from the Franciscans of Quito to the Court in Madrid, charged with pressing their claim by right of "discovery" to an extensive mission territory in the Amazon valley.¹⁷ Embarking this time at Archidona on the Napo, the Paraenses rejoined Pedro da Costa Favela within a few days, and learned that in their absence he had failed to keep peace with the fearsome Icahuates. The Indians had "rebelled" (presumably against Favela's exactions of food to feed his large party of men, women and children during the nine-month stay) and had attacked the Portuguese camp, killing three Indian levies. The Paraenses, "far from long-suffering, and still less accustomed to such liberties from Indians," had responded by destroying several of the Icahuates' villages and capturing over seven hundred of them as slaves.

After this, Favela's party had been obliged to keep up the hostilities while at the same time foraging for the food they had previously obtained by trading; and they had very nearly been brought to its knees by the constant harrying. The Icahuates would capture and behead any Indians from Pará whom they caught out hunting or fishing in small parties; and at one point they had managed to sneak in to the camp itself and destroy most of the

¹⁶The sources do not supply the date of the Paraenses' departure, but Pérez de Salazar wrote in May that they had left two months earlier. Acuña was rector of the Jesuit colegio at Cuenca and a brother of the corregidor of that town. The corregidor had offered to make the journey to Pará at his own expense, but was denied permission to leave his post; so he arranged to have his brother sent instead. Acuña chap. 15 (English ed., pp. 58-59). The Mercedarian Superior and one other friar died on the way to Pará, leaving Fr. Pedro de Santa Maria de la Rua Cerne and his surviving companion to establish the Mercedarian convent in Belém, an institution which was to survive until the end of the colonial period. Berredo, Annaes, paragraph 695 (1905 ed. I, p. 271). On the missionary activities of this order in Pará, see Chap. 5 below.

¹⁷In the Spanish capital in 1640, both Brieva and Acuña presented cases to the King alleging prior rights to the Amazon mission field. The result was a pair of royal orders (18 and 21 dec 1641) assigning both the Spanish Jesuits and Franciscans to work in the region "sin embarazarse los unos a los otros." Jiménez, "Viaje" in BSGM 9 (1880), pp. 274-75.

Portuguese canoes. Teixeira was therefore obliged to remain on the Napo for several weeks, while his built new canoes and continued to fight the Icahuates, "taking three times the number of their own lives for one of ours -- a slight chastisement compared to those which the Portuguese are accustomed to inflict in similar cases," as one of the Spaniards put it, before they could embark anew for the return journey. Then to the expeditionaries' great disappointment, all of their Icahuate captives either died within the few days it took them to reach the mouth of the Napo, or managed to make their escape.¹⁸

Omagua and "Machifaro" Revisited

Some sixty leagues below the mouth of the Napo, the expedition reached the country of the Omagua, of whom Teixeira had written after observing them on the way up:

they flatten their heads; they occupy about 100 leagues of the river where they have some 400 towns. They are great butchers; and though all of the peoples of this river are blood-thirsty cannibals, these really overdo it. They eat no other meat than human flesh, and they keep the skulls of those whom they have devoured as trophies in their houses. They eat so much that the fat of their victims makes them hairless . . . most of their villages are large and produce abundant supplies of everything they need.¹⁹

Padre Cristóbal de Acuña, an observer of more inquisitive mind and one who was unconcerned with finding a justification for enslaving the Omagua, took a longer look at this tribe and provided us with a great deal more information.

The province seemed to him to be the finest on the Amazon, "two hundred leagues long, with settlements so close together that one is scarcely lost sight of when another comes in view." The Indians now appeared to be living exclusively on the numerous islands of the river, all of which were inhabited -- or if too small for settlement, at least cultivated by

¹⁸Acuña cap. 50 (English ed., pp. 93-94); Berredo, paragraphs 706-07 (1905 ed. I, pp. 281-82).

¹⁹Relación (Quito, 2 jan 1639), in Cortesnao, "Significado," pp. 192-93.

people from the larger islands nearby.²⁰ The Omagua seemed the "most intelligent and best-governed" people on the river, and were so obedient to their principal chiefs that a single word sufficed to make them do whatever they were told. They cultivated cotton; and from it they spun and wove fine cloth, not only to clothe themselves but as an article of commerce.

On the question of cannibalism, the Jesuit interviewed two Indians from Pará (presumably deserters from the upriver trip) who had been taken prisoner by the Omagua and had lived with them for eight months -- accompanying them on military expeditions against their enemies the Ticuna on the north bank and the Curina on the south. According to them, the Omagua were not cannibals at all; on the contrary, they were exceptionally kind to their prisoners of war -- living and eating with them and treating them like members of their families. When the Portuguese tried to buy some of these "slaves," the Omagua refused to trade them. Generous to a fault in the delivery of food and clothing, even of laboriously constructed canoes to their visitors,²¹ these exemplary native Amazonians were greatly disturbed by the notion of a trade in people; and they had soon learned to hide their captives when they learned that the Portuguese were coming. One custom shocking to European sensibilities that they did observe, was to put aside the chiefs and the most valiant warriors from among their prisoners of war, and

²⁰Acuña, cap. 51 (English ed., pp. 95-96). Cf. Alonso de Rojas' hyperbolic notes on population density, based on the mistaken impression that settlement patterns must be the same inland as on the islands and banks. "Relación" paragraphs 16 and 26, in Jiménez, "Viaje," pp. 435 and 444-45. Rojas reported that all the banks of the Solimões were populated with extensive villages, and that they were so densely populated that "no pudiendo caber en la tierra, los arrojan a las islas." Acuña seems a more reliable source on this point.

²¹On this point, cf. Rojas' note that often great numbers of Indians would overcome fear and come out to meet the travellers in their canoes, to parley a bit and receive "algunos dijes como cuchillos, anzuelos y muchas veces pedazos de paño roto, que colgaban como reliquia al cuello; les traian después refresco de maiz, yuca, camotes, plátanos, canas dulces y mucho pescado, todo esto en abundancia y liberalmente, sin pedir paga." The riverbank people never attacked the Spaniards, and willingly provided them with escorts for expeditions inland. When the Indian guides went ahead of the party during such expeditions, they were apt to be attacked by their enemies from the terra firma; but even the most ferocious of these would take flight as soon as the Spanish soldiers appeared, and return later in peace with liberal gifts of "sustento," "Relación" paragraph 22, in Jiménez, "Viaje" p. 439.

kill them in their festivals and general meetings, dreading that they might do them great injury if they preserved their lives: and, having thrown the bodies into the river, they preserved their heads as trophies in their houses, which were those that we often met with throughout the voyage.²²

The most immediately striking thing about the Omagua (something which had not, surprisingly enough, been pointed out by the 16th-century explorers), was their curious custom of flattening the foreheads of both male and female infants until their skulls looked "more like an ill-shaped Bishop's mitre, than the head of a human being." This beautification of the body was accomplished by placing their babies in a kind of press:

a small board being secured on the forehead, and another one at the back of the head, so large as to serve as a cradle, and to receive the whole of the body of the infant. The child is placed on its back upon the larger board, and secured so tightly to the other one, that the back and front of the head become as flat as the palm of the hand.²³

However great their cultural incompatibilities with the white men, which by now must have been overwhelmingly apparent to the Omagua, they were as friendly to Pedro Teixeira's party as they had been to their predecessors a century before. Acuña reported that everywhere they went, people would first spend some time "making provision for our lodging," and they would then set off to go hunting -- some into the forest with dogs, and

²²Acuña cap. 52 (English ed., pp. 96-98). He goes on to say that although there may well be tribes on the Amazon "who, on occasion, do not feel disgust at eating human flesh," cannibalism was nowhere as prevalent as the Portuguese claimed it was everywhere, in the interest of justifying their slave-raids. Berredo, who never visited the country of the Omagua, has them pulling the teeth out of the skulls of their victims in order to make necklaces. *Annaes* paragraph 719 (1905 ed. I, p 287).

²³Acuña cap. 52 (English ed., pp. 96-97). Cf. the observation of Fr. Laureano de la Cruz a decade later: "Toman la criatura de pocos dias nacida, y cinenle la cabeza por la parte del cerebro con una faja de algodón ancha, y por la frente con una planchuela que hacen de canas bravas, les coje desde los ojos hast el cabello bien apretada, y de esta manera lo que la cabeza habia de crecer en redonda, crece para arriba, y queda larga, chata, y muy desproporcionada." "Nuevo descubrimiento," p. 192. P. Samuel Fritz, noted late in the 17th-century that the Omagua "apply to the forehead a small board or wattle of reeds tied with a little cotton so as not to hurt them, and fastening them by the shoulders to a little canoe, which serves them for a cradle." *Journal*, pp. 47-48.

others to the river with their bows and arrows --returning in a few hours with enough meat to supply the entire party. The impression they gave was that of a "meek and gentle" folk with a "clear understanding, and rare abilities for any manual dexterity." As a general rule, they

conversed with us confidently, and ate and drank with us, without ever suspecting anything. They gave us their houses to live in, while they all lived together in one or two of the largest houses in the villages; and though they suffered much mischief from our friendly Indians [that is, from the Rio Tocantins crewmen, now nearing the end of two years away from their homes and families!] without the possibility of avoiding it, they never returned it by evil acts.

Since the Omagua also appeared to be very little attached to the worship of their own gods, Acuña concluded that all of these traits were signs of a ready disposition for conversion to Christianity.²⁴

Not surprisingly, some of the Jesuit Acuña's most detailed and convincing observations were in the area of religious life and practice. The rites of the peoples of the Solimões seemed to him to differ little from tribe to tribe:

They worship idols which they make with their own hands; attributing power over the waters to some, and therefore, place a fish in their hands for distinction; others they choose as lords of the harvest; others as gods of their battles. They say that these gods come down from Heaven to be their companions, and to do them good. They do not use any ceremony in worshipping them, and often leave them forgotten in a corner until the time when they become necessary; thus when they are going to war, they carry

²⁴Acuña caps. 28 and 43 (English ed., pp. 72 and 86-87). This writer makes a number of observations like the above which refer to no specific tribe, but to the peoples of the Solimões in general. Since he saw more of the Omagua than of any other people, and was so favorably impressed by them, I have assumed that by and large his general observations may be applied to the discussion of the Omagua.

an idol in the bows of their canoes, in which they place their hopes of victory; and when they go out fishing, they take the idol which is charged with dominion over the waters; but they do not trust in the one or the other so much as not to recognize another mightier God.

At one point further down the river, a "Curuzirari" chief came out with a few relatives to meet the Portuguese and put himself at their service. It seemed that he had been impressed by the fact that they had travelled up the Amazon and then returned through hostile territories without being harmed. The chief explained that if the Paraenses were as powerful as they appeared to be, and intended to continue navigating his river, "he did not want always to be attacking them under the shade of night, but to know them, and recognize them from that time on as friends; while others would be forced to receive them." Then he asked them to leave him one of their gods for their protection, and to help his people maintain a steady supply of food. The soldiers wanted to leave a large wooden cross behind, in hopes that the Indians would fail to take care of it and thus provide a pretext for enslaving them the next time they came; but Acuña protested, arguing that to encourage cross-worship was to reduce Christianity itself to the level of mere idolatry.²⁵

The role of the shaman in central Amazonian society was another matter of great interest to the Jesuit traveller. At one point, he learned of a witch-doctor living further downriver who had declared himself to be a god. Acuña sent ahead to say that he was about to visit this competitor with a God more powerful than he. But when Acuña arrived with his talk of a God who was invisible but nevertheless all-powerful, the shaman refused to be convinced. He was, he explained to the skeptical Jesuit, a child of the sun; and he returned to his home in the sun each evening, "the better to arrange for the government of the following day." People on the Solimões appeared to hold such men in very great esteem -- more out of fear of the harm they could do, thought Acuña, than out of love for the ideas

²⁵Acuña caps. 40-41 (English ed., pp. 83-85).

they represented.

These sorcerers usually have a house, where they practice their superstitious rites, and speak to the demon; and where, with a certain kind of veneration, the Indians keep all the bones of dead sorcerers, as if they were the relics of saints. They suspend these bones in the same hammocks in which the sorcerers had slept when alive. These men are their teachers, their preachers, their councilors and their guides. They assist them in their doubts, and the Indians resort to them in their wars, that they may receive the poisonous herbs with which to take vengeance on their enemies.²⁶

Customs for the burial of the dead other than shamans appeared to vary from place to place: some put their loved ones to rest (presumably in clay pots) within their own houses; others burned the bodies in great bonfires together with all their possessions; but "both one and the other celebrate the obsequies of the dead for many days, with constant mourning interrupted by great drinking bouts."²⁷

The Omagua lived in villages strung out along the shores of the larger wooded islands. By this time it appeared that they were shunning the river's banks, because they thought themselves more vulnerable there to attacks from their enemies. They continued nevertheless to raise bumper crops of manioc on the levees; and they produced abundant maize without having to do any arduous slashing and burning in the forests, by making use of the fertile mud-flat beaches and the smaller islands which were left high and dry after

²⁶Cf. Fritz's observation forty years later that the Omagua recognized a supreme Author of Nature called Zumi-Topana, but did not worship him as the other Amazon tribes worshipped "the devil." "No doubt some of them had familiar intercourse with the Devil, and learnt from him various modes of injury and wicked spells for their objects of vengeance; today [1690's] the majority hold in high honor certain great witch-doctors and are wont to threaten the Indians of other tribes, saying that they shall be obliged to bewitch them unless they concede what they ask, but these have generally appeared to be boastful words without intention of acting upon them." Journal, pp. 50-51.

²⁷Acuña caps. 40-42 (English ed., pp. 83-86). Cf. Alonso de Rojas: "Todos son idólatras que adoran dioses falsos; no tienen ritos ni ceremonias para venerarlos, ni templos de sus ídolos, ni sacerdotes. A los hechiceros temen, a quienes consultan, y estos al Demonio, de quien reciben oráculos, y con embustes engañan a los miserable indios." "Relación," paragraph 18 in Jiménez, "Viaje," p. 437.

each receding flood. Other crops included bananas, pineapples, guavas and various semi-domesticated palms and nut-trees, as well as potatoes and sweet manioc (macaxeira, the non-poisonous variety which could be eaten without an elaborate processing to remove the toxic sap). Bitter manioc was the staple food, prepared in the universal Tupían way as farinha de mandioca.²⁸ The Omagua had an ingenious method for storing their unprocessed mandioca: after the harvest at the end of the low-water season, they would bury great quantities in deep holes carefully covered. Under the flood waters, the manioc would be more or less preserved (and though rotting a bit, did not lose its food value) until it could be dug up after the flood to feed the people while a new crop matured.²⁹ The other standard means of preserving manioc was to bake it into large thick cakes like those mentioned in the 16th-century chronicles, which were then hung in the high parts of the houses where they were preserved from dampness and lasted for many months. These cakes could be eaten as they were, or dissolved in water, cooked and left to ferment to make the favorite wine of Omagua festivals and drinking-bouts. Other wines were made of wild fruits and stored in earthen jars, or in pipes made of hollowed trunks, or in large, closely-woven baskets made waterproof with plant resins.³⁰

The river-bank peoples had uniform technologies for exploiting the manatee, turtle and fish with which they were so richly endowed. Manatee lived in the vegetation which covered the lakes and sluggish streams of the várzea. Hunters would patrol such areas in small canoes with shell-tipped harpoons at the ready, and kill the great ungainly "sea cows" when they came up to breathe. Then right away they would cut up their carcasses and smoke them on a grill made of green sticks, which made it possible to keep the meat for a month despite the heat. In the absence of salt, they used wood ash both to season their meat

²⁸Curiously farinha de mandioca had not been mentioned by the 16th-century travellers, although it was presumably in use then as well -- perhaps because to the Europeans at first glance it did not appear to be a foodstuff!

²⁹This use of "silos" to store manioc was also noted by Rojas, "Relación" paragraph 5, pp. 425-26.

³⁰Acuña, caps. 22-24 (English ed., pp. 65-68).

and to preserve it for longer periods. During flood season, when both fish and game were scarce, the people still supplied themselves with fresh meat from turtle-pens like those described for the 16th-century Machifaro. Turtles were gathered at a specific time during the summer, when great numbers of females came ashore at certain preferred beaches to dig holes and lay their eggs. While the turtles were engaged in that labor, the Indians would descend on them, turn the unfortunate beasts on their backs to keep them from escaping, and having strung them together on long lines passed through holes pierced in their shells, tow them back to their villages. Taken from the pen as needed, one turtle would supply enough meat to feed the largest family.

From the same turtling beaches the Indians gathered, moreover, a great quantity of eggs each season. These were trampled in canoes set aside for the purpose, into a malodorous mash from which, as it fermented in the sun, a thick oil rose to the top. The oil, put aside in clay pots, was used year round by the Indians for every cooking purpose.

Fish were taken in the summer-time, when lakes were low and cut off from the main stream, by agitating the stagnant water with broken branches of the timbó vine. The sap of this vine poisoned great numbers of them, and caused them to float up to the top. During the rest of the year, the larger varieties of fish were hunted from canoes in the same way as the manatee, with a long arrow attached to a dart-launcher which also served as a buoy, with the help of which to follow the wounded fish until they were exhausted. The dart-launcher or estolica, also a weapon of war, was a flattened pole a yard long and three fingers broad:

in the upper end a bone is fixed, to which an arrow some five feet [9 palmos] long is fastened, with the point also of bone or very strong palm wood, which, worked into the shape of a harpoon, remains like a javelin hanging from the person it wounds. They hold this in the right hand, with the estolica clutched by the lower part, and fixing the weapon in the upper bone, they hurl it with such tremendous force and so good an aim, that at fifty paces they never miss.

The same weapon was used for hunting the giant river turtle in open water, a task at which the Omagua were so skillful that they could transfix the turtle's slender neck from a considerable distance, if ever it showed its head.³¹

Warfare was by this time a major preoccupation of the Omagua and all their neighbors (if indeed it had not been forever). There were many tribes on the river (Acuña thought perhaps a hundred and fifty in all of Amazonia) -- peoples whose cultures were similar although they spoke quite different languages, and who lived very near to one another.

But this proximity does not lead to peace; on the contrary, they are engaged in constant wars, in which they kill and take prisoner great numbers of souls every day. This is the drain provided for so great a multitude, without which the whole land would not be large enough to hold them.

No tribe they encountered was, however, sufficiently warlike to want to do battle with the Teixeira expedition with its many hundreds of men in great numbers of canoes, and its terrifying firearms. Some of them, had a tremendous advantage in mobility over the dugout canoemen. When threatened with battle, these natives could easily take flight because

they navigate in vessels so light that, landing, they carry them on their shoulders and, conveying them to one of the numerous lakes near the river, laugh at any enemy who, with heavier vessels, is unable to follow the same example.

The principal weapons of all of them were the dart-launcher described above, and the bow and arrow. Arrow-tips were sometimes dipped in a "poison so fatal that an arrow, stained with it, destroys life the moment it draws blood."³²

³¹Acuña, caps. 25-27 and 37 (English ed., pp. 68-71 and 81).

³²Acuña, caps. 36-37 (English ed., pp. 80-81). Poisoned arrows are mentioned in the 16th-century sources only for the Arawaks and others living below the mouth of the Madeira, but in the 18th-century a very fine grade of curare was produced and traded by the people living near Omagua territory on the Tonantins, a tributary of the Solimões not far below the mouth of the Içá.

Acuña's view of inter-tribal relations differs so strikingly from the picture derived from the 16th-century travellers that it cannot be passed over. A century earlier, the Omagua had been described as living on the banks as well as on the islands of the Solimões, and as enjoying the benefits of an active trade with all their neighbors except the Machifaro. The only state of apparently permanent warfare described was that existing between Omagua and Machifaro. By the mid-17th century, however, the Omagua seemed to be living only on the islands, and to be engaged in perpetual warfare. Warfare was described, moreover, as the principal activity of several other peoples living along the river -- some of whom had seemed remarkably peaceable to visitors just a few decades before. There is no basis in the sources consulted for a firm conclusion regarding the nature and extent of this process of change; but one possible explanation is hinted at by Acuña's startling reference to the demographic effect of war as a "drain" preventing overpopulation. Another is that by 1639 the changes due to the introduction of European trade goods, and to the European demand for Indian slaves (discussed at length below) were already beginning to manifest themselves on the Solimões. The voyages of Teixeira's men on the central Amazon in 1638 and 1639 must themselves have represented both an unprecedented demand on the region's goods and services, and an unprecedented injection of European trade goods into the economy of the Solimões. Some of the changes evident in Acuña's observations made in 1639 may therefore be attributable to that experience alone.

The last Omagua settlement going downstream was located some fourteen leagues below the mouth of the Rio Putumayo-Içá, and twenty-four above the mouth of the Rio Juruá (that is, somewhere near the mouth of the Rio Jutáí, see map 5). This was "a very populous village with warlike inhabitants, being the first force which, in this direction, is prepared to resist the onslaught of their enemies." Beyond it for fifty-four leagues was country in which no Indians appeared to live on either the islands or the banks of the river. The settlements there were "some distance inland, in dense thickets, whence they came forth to seek for anything they require;" and it was possible to travel down the river without

seeing any sign of them. In the middle of this stretch was the mouth of the Juruá, whose lower reaches Acuña was told were populated by people of the same tribes as inhabited the lower Jutái.

Beyond this "no-man's land" was the first of many villages of the "Curuziraris" (Aisuares? "Machifaro?"). These stretched out for a distance of eighty leagues, "with settlements so close together, that one was scarcely passed before, within four hours, we came upon others; while sometimes, for the space of half a day at a time, we did not lose sight of their villages." The Curuziraris themselves had for the most part withdrawn to the forest by the time Acuña arrived in their country, having heard perhaps that the returning Portuguese were "destroying, killing and making prisoners" as they went. But an examination of their houses and possessions gave the impression of an orderly and ingenious people, with a system of subsistence very similar to that of the Omagua. From the deep ravines near their houses, they dug clay of a very a good quality, which they used to make great quantities of "earthen jars, pots, ovens in which they used to make their flour [that is, farinha de mandioca], pans, pipkins, and even well-formed frying-pans" for their own use and to trade with other tribes. The people here wore no clothing, but made use of small nose ornaments and earplugs for which they prepared the ear by keeping large perforations of the lobe stuffed with sticks and bundles of leaves.³³

The Village of Gold, and Tribes of the Lower Solimões

At the last "Curuzirari" village on the high south bank of the river across from one of the mouths of the Japurá, not far above the modern town of Tefé, Pedro Teixeira called his officers and soldiers together on August 16, 1639, to reveal the contents of his secret orders. He had been instructed by the Governor of Pará to stake out the site for a settlement on this river, at the place he deemed most appropriate. He explained that he had selected

³³Acuña, caps. 55-56 and 58 (English ed., pp. 100-104). Rojas refers to the Curuziraris as "Solimões" -- a confusing appellation which appears to have been applied indiscriminately by the Paraenses to várzea dwellers living between the Omaguas and the mouth of the Negro during the 17th and early 18th-centuries. "Relación," in Jiménez, "Viaje" BSGM 13 (1882), p. 443.

this spot "because of the reports of gold to be acquired there, and because the air was good and there were wide fields for planting, grazing cattle and raising other animals."

Remarkably, he appears not to have influenced in this choice by the potential of the site for strategic fortification, or by the density of its population by the native Amazonians. The homesick expeditionaries, ignorant as they were of the limited agricultural potential of a stretch tropical forest savanna, agreed that there was probably no more suitable place for a settlement on the entire length of the river. The captain then asked that anyone who objected to their laying legal claim to this location on behalf of the King of Portugal (who was at that time still Philip IV of Spain) step forward; and when not even the two Spanish Jesuits did so, he proceeded to celebrate a formal "act of possession." His scribe then gathered a bit of earth from the place and put it into Teixeira's cupped hands; the captain then named locale "Franciscana" in honor of its discoverers, Friars Brieva and Toledo; and a formal document was drawn up to be signed by all of the officers present.³⁵

³⁵The text of this auto de posse, which became the principal basis for Portugal's legal claim to territory in the central Amazon valley, may be seen in Berredo paragraph 710 (1905 ed. I, pp. 283-85); in Andrés de Zárate's "Informe" on the Maynas Jesuit missions pub. in Figueroa, Relación, p. 356; in RIHGB 67, 1 (1903), pp. 331-332; in the published catalog to As gavetas do Torre do Tombo I (Lisbon, 1960); and in English translation in Fritz, Journal, pp. 34-45. The subsequent endless debate over its contents had mostly to do with what it had to say about the location of "Franciscana." Berredo appears to have suppressed the key phrase, "en frente de los Evajaris" from his version, leaving only the note that the village was near the "bocainas de ouro," as part of his elaborate effort to demonstrate that the village was located on the Rio Napo near the mouth of the Aguarico, sometimes called "river of gold" because of the placer mines at its headwaters. The problem of locating the village is greatly complicated by the fact that the sources leave the dates of departure of the expedition from the upper Napo, or its arrival at any particular spot, very unclear. The departure from Quito seems to have occurred in mid-March ("about two months" before Perez de Salazar's "Informe" of May 19, 1639); the auto was done on August 16, which would suggest that the expedition was well on its way down the river by then; but the debate over whether to collect slaves up the Rio Negro (which could be reached from the Japurá travelling rapidly in a couple of weeks) did not take place until October. The suppressed word "Evajaris" might refer to the river Javari, which forms the modern border between Brazil and Peru and is about half-way between the mouth of the Japurá and the mouth of the Aguarico. But the general impression one gets from the sources (despite the fact that Berredo states quite explicitly the contrary) is that the expedition's "village of gold" was the place below Omagua territory where they had traded for gold ornaments -- and that place was assuredly near the mouth of the Japurá. Even granting that the village was on the middle Solimões rather than the Napo, there is confusion about its location. Acuña says that it was the first Curuzirari town going upriver, and places it across from the mouth of the Japurá just above Tefé; then at another point he says that the "Curuzirari" occupied the riverbanks down to about Lake Coari. Cap. 60 (English ed., p. 105). Condamine was probably right in placing "Franciscana" somewhere in the neighborhood of the 18th-century mission of Paraguarí (mod. Alvares), a few miles above Tefé on the south bank across from the principal mouth of the Japurá. Relación abreviada (Madrid, 1921), p. 67. These imprecisions were at the bottom of a long and bitter debate which occupies a prominent place in the literature of Amazonian history, but is of very little interest for the present socio-historical purposes. Wherever the auto was done, it was of dubious validity given the

The village in question was one which Teixeira's men had dubbed the aldeia do ouro or "village of gold" on their way up the river, because to their delight and astonishment they had found there some people wearing "circlets and bracelets of gold and other objects of gold after their custom." Here and at a few places further upstream, a few of these Indians had been willing to trade the golden ornaments they were wearing for iron tools.³⁶ The objects thus obtained had been assayed in Quito at twenty-one (or twenty-three) karats, and everyone was now anxious to see how many more of them could be found.³⁷ But the Indians who had supplied some "fifty ducats worth" of these goods to the expeditionaries as they made their way up the river, were now able to provide only one small earring, which Acuña himself "obtained by barter."³⁸ Nevertheless the "village of gold" and the formal act of taking possession which had been carried out there were to loom large in all Spanish and Portuguese negotiations regarding the central Amazon valley, for a century and more to come.

The most complete account of what Teixeira's men actually encountered in this village (and where on the river it was to be found) appears to be that of Felipe de Matos

subsequent separation of Portugal from Spain, and the general disapproval of the expedition on the part of the Spanish government in whose name Teixeira had in principle acted. The "legal" case for Portuguese sovereignty on the Solimões was in any event only an adjunct to, or a cover for, the more interesting unofficial penetration and transformation of the region which was carried out over the period of a century by the settlers of Pará and their followers -- men for whom legal documents and government policies were matters barely comprehensible, and of no serious consequence.

³⁶Acuña, cap. 59 (English ed., p. 104). Rojas observes ("Relación" p. 443) that some of the ornaments were obviously the products of a skilled goldsmith. It will be remembered that according to Altamirano the Ursúa expedition had found gold ornaments among the "Carro" (Omagua) in 1562, and "que aquel oro era de la tierra adentro, donde habia grandes poblaciones de gente vestida, de mucha razón y muy rica." Vázquez de Espinosa, p. 384.

³⁷Teixeira, "Relación" in Cortesão "Significado" p. 192. Teixeira intimates that the village was at the western end of the populated stretch of the Solimões, and that the people wore ornaments of copper as well as gold. Ignacio de Rego Barreto, ms. report cited in Edmundson, "Voyage," pp. 62-63. According to Barreto, the people there had told them that the gold came from washings only two days distant up a nearby tributary, and was available there in large quantities. Everyone had wanted to go there directly, but had been denied permission to do so by Pedro Teixeira; then on the way back it had been impossible to make the side trip, because they were so shorthanded (the "greater part of our natives" having died in the Kingdom of Quito). Cf. Acuña cap. 58 (English ed., p. 103).

³⁸Acuña, cap. 56 (English ed., p. 102); Rojas, "Relación" paragraph 24, p. 443.

Cotrim, the Sergeant-Major of Pará who had accompanied Teixeira all the way to Quito and back, and who was asked to give depositions in the matter back home in Portugal a few years later. Cotrim remembered that about half-way from Pará to the headwaters (that is, to the spot on the Napo near the Aguarico where Pedro da Costa Favela had made his camp), some Indians from nearby towns came out to trade food for the goods we carried in our canoe; and we saw that some of them wore rings and semi-circular platelets of gold -- some of which they gave us in exchange for trade goods. Asked whence these ornaments came, they said that they came to them down a river [the Japurá] which flowed into the Amazon some four days' journey from there.

These people had informed them, moreover, that the gold-trading Indians possessed so much of the precious metal that they simply kept it in pots to be exchanged for other merchandise. They had nothing to offer in trade, in fact, except gold. The informants also passed along the story that the washings were so rich at this source, that the miners themselves did not bother to collect any but the larger grains. The Paraenses asked who these miners were, and were told that all of them were "dark-skinned Indians" (presumably a reference to African slaves); and that in each mining settlement there was a crowned governor who wore great ornaments of gold leaf which hung from his ears and nose. Cotrim was at pains to report all of this to the King in the hopes that he would outfit an expedition, with a hundred and fifty soldiers in fifty canoes and two thousand Indian crewmen (who should be paid their wages at the end of the voyage, he believed, so as to give them an incentive not to desert as so many had done from Teixeira's party). The expedition would need a good stock of "axes, sickles, knives, scissors, mirrors, fishhooks, combs, bells and beads" with which to buy supplies and make gifts to the chiefs along the way. With adequate support, he believed that they would be successful in finding and occupying the

territory of the miners themselves.³⁹

Acuña, for his part, had been told that by travelling up the Rio Japurá and over a short portage, one might reach this fabled "river of gold," where

at the foot of a hill, the natives get a great quantity; and this gold is all in grains and lumps of a good size; so that by beating it, they make plates, which ... they hang to their ears and noses. The natives who communicate with those who extract the gold are called Managus [that is, the Manao. See Chapter 7], and those who live on the river and work at the mines are called Yumaguaris, which means "extractors of metal" . . . they give every kind of metal this name of yuma, and thus they called all the tools, hatchets, mattocks and knives we had by this same word.

He pointed out that this information (consistent with that of Altamirano, Rojas, Teixeira and Cotrim --and referring quite clearly to a trade of long standing between the peoples of the Solimões and those of the gold-bearing Amazon tributaries which rose in the eastern slopes of the Andes) was more reliable than that which the Portuguese had acquired on their way up to Quito. At that time, they had had no one with them who spoke the languages of the middle and lower Solimões; and they had been forced to rely on signs "which were so uncertain that each one might apply any meaning to them that happened to enter his mind." On the return trip, Teixeira's men had the help of interpreters --presumably Omagua captives who knew the languages of their neighbors, and could translate them into their own dialect of Tupi-Guarani, which was more or less comprehensible to speakers of the Paraense lingua geral.⁴⁰

³⁹Cotrim-King (Moura, 9 aug 1645), ms. in AHU Para Cx 1; and Cotrim-King (Lx, 24 oct 1645), ms. in Casa de Cadaval (Evora), Papeis Politicos Cod. 987 (K-VII-31), ff. 506-506v. (Of this second document, I have seen only the abstract in Virginia Rau, Os Ms. da Casa da Cadaval I, pp. 40-41).

⁴⁰Acuña, cap. 57 (English ed., pp. 102-103); Rojas, "Relación," paragraph 24, p. 443. Elsewhere in his treatise, Acuña puts serious strains on his credibility by going on about how he believes that the Amazon mines must be richer even than those of Peru. Cap. 34 (English ed., pp. 78-79). Some observers have concluded from such passages that Acuña is nothing but a fabric of such fantasies (for example, his contemporary and fellow-Jesuit Montoya, cited in Jiménez, "Viaje," cont. in BSGM 13, pp. 216-18), but a close examination of his text in comparison with the other available documents and geographical details

Below "Franciscana," the weary expeditionaries grew impatient to get home; and from there on they had less detailed observations to make about the peoples they were encountering along the way. The same had unfortunately been true of both groups of 16th-century travellers -- with the result that the information we have about the aboriginal peoples of the lower Solimões valley is fragmentary and confusing in the extreme. About the river Japurá, which Acuña correctly indentified with the Caquetá of New Granada, they learned that it had several mouths flowing into the Solimões, and that between these outlets there was a broad area of low-lying islands, lakes and channels which was inhabited by a multitude of people. The Jesuit chronicler was also made aware that by following some of these channels through the interfluvium, it was possible to come out in another river-basin (that of the Rio Negro), lying far to the north of the Amazon.⁴¹ Across from the principal mouth of the Japurá, and four leagues below it, was a large river or lake (Tefé or Tafi) which was densely inhabited by a people whom he called the "Paguana"⁴²(see map 5). Then between Tefé and Lake Coarí, sections of both banks of the Solimões were also thickly peopled, by tribes about whom Acuña had nothing to say beyond the fact that they existed.⁴³

Below Lake Coarí lived the exceptionally numerous and powerful "Yoriman" people, who made a stronger impression on the expeditionaries than their neighbors had done.⁴⁴

reveals that on the contrary, he was at his best a thoughtful observer and a remarkably meticulous collector of "hard data."

⁴¹Cap. 45 (English ed., p. 88). This is the earliest documented reference to the important Japurá-Urubaxi trade route between the Solimões and Negro, on which see Chapter 7, below.

⁴²Cf. Carvajal's "Chief Paguana," who lived at approximately the same place in 1542. Acuña cap. 59 (English ed., p. 104)

⁴³See note 76 below, comparing Acuña's observations on this region with those of Fr. Laureano de la Cruz a decade later. In cap. 60 (English ed., p. 104), Acuña suggests confusingly that all of this territory above Lake Coarí is part of the territory of the Curuzirari.

⁴⁴The "Yoriman" were probably the "Solimões" of most later 17th-century Portuguese accounts, and perhaps also the "Ibanoma" and the "Yurimagua" reported half a century later by Samuel Fritz (see Chapters 6 and 7 below). Between 1640 and the 1690's, when the next European accounts of this region were written, the once-numerous inhabitants of the lower Solimões were so greatly diminished and dispersed as a result of European epidemic disease and the incursions of slave-hunters from Pará, that their old territory was left all but uninhabited -- as it continued to be until the last half of the 19th century. The Yurimagua of the 1690's (not mentioned in the 16th and early 17th-century sources) were living above the Japurá in the old Machifaro and Curuzirari territory; the Ibanoma were somewhere between Tefé and Coarí. There is basis

This was the "most warlike and renowned tribe on the river of the Amazons," a people who had seemed willing to do battle with the entire Teixeira expedition on its way upstream the year before. Both men and women went about without any sort of clothing there; and they were so brave and self-confident that when they came to trade with the Portuguese they would wander about among them with no sign of fear. Their territory stretched for some sixty leagues along the river below Lake Coarí, in the neighborhood of modern Codajás. Acuña observed that throughout this distance "the islands and mainland [that is, the south bank] are used to such advantage, and are so covered with people," that the territory must be considered the most densely-settled in the entire middle Amazon valley. In view of the great size and hunger of the Teixeira expedition, which despite its hardships and losses still consisted of several hundred people, the Yoriman saw an excellent opportunity for peaceful trade: "every day more than 200 canoes came, full of women and children, with fruit, fish, flour and other things, which they exchanged for glass beads, needles and knives."

Mid-way through the Yoriman territory, the Europeans came to the largest settlement they had encountered anywhere along the Amazon.⁴⁵ The houses there were stretched out along the bank for a distance of perhaps a league and a half:

A single family does not live in one house, as is usually the case in Spain, but the smallest numbers that are contained under one roof are four or five, and very often more, from which circumstance the great number of people in this village may be imagined.

This statement regarding the size of the village need not be disregarded as an exaggeration, if we keep in mind that such multi-family dwellings (common in much of Amazonia) were more likely to be scattered in small clumps, or strung out at intervals, than arranged side-by-

for a supposition that by the 1690's both peoples had moved upriver in an effort to escape the depredations of the Paraenses; but there is not so far enough evidence for a conclusive identification of these riverine tribes with the once-populous "Yoriman."

⁴⁵Cf. the account in Chap. 1 of the Ursúa-Aguirre expedition of 1561, which also found an exceptionally large settlement in this region.

side for such a great distance. The population must, moreover, have been remarkably great and its agricultural production very substantial, since this village alone was able to provide the Portuguese with 500 fanegas (about 850 bushels) of farinha de mandioca in trade -- enough to supply its needs during the entire remaining several weeks of their journey to Pará.⁴⁶ After leaving this large village, the expedition stopped at several others of the same tribe, and Acuña notes that the greatest density of Yorimán settlement was to be found near the mouth of the river Cuchiguara (Port. Coxiguara, the modern Rio Purús).

Around the mouth of the Cuchiguara there lived another numerous tribe by that name, in a country which abounded with fish, turtle, plantations of maize and manioc, "all the things requisite for facilitating the entrance of an expedition." The Cuchiguaras appeared to have extensive trade relations up the Purús, for they were able to list the several tribes who lived along it in order, to the distance of a two-month journey.⁴⁷ These were apparently the easternmost people on the Solimões; and they were settled in permanent riverine villages at this time, taking advantage of the subsistence potential of the várzea -- fishing and cultivating the summer mudflats.⁴⁸

Not far below the Cuchiguara on the north bank was the wide opening of the river Basururú (modern Manacapurú)

which divides the land into great lakes, where there are many islands, which

⁴⁶Acuña, cap. 62 (English ed., p. 106). Cf. Pedro Teixeira's observation during the trip upriver that for a week beyond the mouth of the Rio Negro the Solimões had appeared entirely uninhabited except that they passed a number of travelling canoes along the way. After that time, "entré en el principio de la maquina de gentio, que esta poblado, sobre el rio y tan vecino uno de otro que en trezentas leguas de camino [that is, from around Codajás to somewhere above the Japurá] se puede decir, es solamente un pueblo." On the inhabitants of the country, he had remarked that they were "lindo gentio . . . bien acondicionadas sus mujeres, bien agestadas, y confiadas, traendo de comer a nuestros vogueros, y a los soldados." "Relación," in Cortesão, "Significado," p. 191.

⁴⁷Working up from the Cuchiguaras, these were the Cumayari, Guaquiari, Cuyariyayana, Curucuru [possibly the Purupurús of later Portuguese and Brazilian documents], Quatausi, Mutuani and finally the "giant Curigueres," who were said to wear gold plates in their ears and noses and were reputed to be 16 palms or more than 11 feet tall! Acuña cap. 63 (English ed., pp. 107-108).

⁴⁸Cf. Anon., "Relação das aldeias" (s.d. 1692?), ms. AHU Pará Cx 2 and Itamaraty 340-1-2, doc. 36, which is the earliest ms. document I have found referring to this tribe, and which makes clear that as of the late 17th century the Coxiguaras still existed and were in regular contact with the Portuguese.

are peopled by numerous tribes. The land is high, and never inundated by the many floods which take place; very productive both in maize, manioc and fruit as well as in flesh and fish; so the natives are well off for food, and multiply rapidly.

The people of this region just west of the mouth of the Rio Negro were known collectively as Carabuyanas; of their culture, Acuña says nothing except that they fought with bows and arrows.⁴⁹ Finally, across from the mouth of the Negro and west of the Madeira, there were the wandering Zurina and Caripuna tribes, who did marvellous wood carvings of "small idols so like nature, that many of our sculptors would do well to take a lesson from them," as well as

seats formed in the shape of animals, with such skill, and so well arranged for placing the body in a comfortable position, that nothing could be imagined more ingenious or commodious.

This work was done with tools they made by sharpening stones and pieces of the breastplates of turtles, and fixing them into wooden handles. With the same equipment, the Caripuna manufactured their principal weapons, the gracefully shaped dart-launchers which were much sought after by the other tribes of the region. The Zurina and Caripuna, like all the other peoples of the upper Amazon, produced these things not only for their own use but to trade with their neighbors.⁵⁰

Frustrated Conquest

⁴⁹Nevertheless, he lists the following specific tribes (or settlements) for the Manacapurú region: Caraguana, Pocoana, Urayari, Masucaruana, Quereru, Cotocariana, Moacarana, Ororupiana, Quinarupiana, Tuinamayna, Araguanayna, Mariguyana, Yaribaru, Yarucaguaca, Cumaruyana, and Curuanari. Cap. 64 (English ed., pp. 109-110).

⁵⁰Acuña, cap. 63 (English ed., pp. 107-108). The scientific travellers Spix and Martius, who visited this region in 1818 and had Acuña's notes on it in mind, reported that there was by that time no vestige of any of these peoples, or of the Cuchiguara. What they did find were numerous taperas, or abandoned village-sites at which there were no remnants of any cultivated crops except an occasional urucú tree and thickets of taquaruçú, which they thought had been planted years before to set off the limits of family garden-plots. Viagem III, p. 241. "Caripuna" was the word used for "Carib" by the peoples of the Rio Negro (see below); and Fr. Laureano de la Cruz says that the Omagua used it to refer to the Spaniards. All three usages suggest that it may have been a Tupian term for dangerous barbarian.

When the Teixeira expedition reached the mouth of the Rio Negro,⁵¹ there was widespread grumbling among the soldiers and Indian crewmen. After two years of considerable hardship, they were coming close to home "now consumed and dying of hunger, and . . . unable to look forward to anyone who was able to reward them." The men demanded to be allowed to travel up the Negro for a few days, so as to trade or raid there for some slaves, and have at least something to show for their efforts when they returned to Pará. Teixeira was inclined to agree; but at this critical juncture the Spanish Jesuits intervened, and succeeded in persuading the captain to press on towards Pará where he might hope to gather fresh resources so as to return to the Negro within a few months' time. Their arguments were that the company had already lost several months' time on its return journey from Quito, that they were urgently needed for the defense of Pará against the Dutch, that it in any event it was an injustice to capture slaves on a first incursion into any new territory, and that if the peoples of the Negro were as numerous and warlike as it was believed they might be, they might well make an end to the exhausted expeditionaries -- who

⁵¹Acuña has interesting things to say about this river, the scene of much of the later portion of our story. In his day, it had apparently not yet been navigated by any Europeans other than Pedro Teixeira, who had travelled up it for two days on his way to Quito. Nevertheless, Acuña reports a remarkable knowledge of the river which must have been obtained primarily from the Indians of the expedition. He observed the presence of great quantities of building-stone around its mouth (a very unusual feature in the general geography of the Amazon Valley), and the celebrated blackening of the course of the Amazon for several miles after the Negro emptied into it. He attributed the clearness (blackness) of its water to its great depth and to the presence of innumerable lakes (presumably flooded forest, or *igapó*) along its banks. (Cf. the note on the geography of the Negro valley at the beginning of Chapter 7). The Tupinambá guides from Pará had given it the name of *Vruna*, or black water, in the *lingua geral*. Acuña was correctly informed that much of the course of the river ran west to east (though the course is more north to south for some two hundred kilometers above its mouth!) and that it was very thickly peopled by tribes known as the *Canizuaris*, *Aguayaras*, *Yacucaraes*, *Cahuyapitis*, *Manacurus* (*Manao?*), *Yanmas* (*Yanoama?*), *Guanamas*, *Carapanaris* (*Carib?*), *Guaranacaguas*, *Azerabaris* (*Bare?*), *Curupatabas* and *Guaranaquazanas* (these last, apparently a people of the Rio Branco basin) -- all of them accustomed to fighting with bows and poison-tipped arrows. The banks of the river were for the most part elevated, he wrote; and there were extensive stands of timber good for both construction and boat-building. Fish were much less plentiful than on the *Solimões*; and somewhere up the river (on the upper Rio Branco, as would later be revealed) there were very extensive pasture-lands suitable for grazing cattle. All of this was essentially accurate information; but perhaps most surprising of all, Acuña reported the existence of a navigable channel connecting the Rio Negro and a "Rio Grande" (presumably the *Essequibo*, reached by way of the Rio Branco and the Rio *Rupunini* over the short *Parime* portage) at whose mouth it was said that the Dutch had established a settlement. Alarmed at this revelation, he even proposed building a fort at that point -- against the day when "the covetous" would undoubtedly make an effort to conquer the entire Amazon valley from that quarter. Cap. 65 (English ed., pp. 109-111). Cf. Pedro Teixeira's brief account of his own observations on the river, which covers a few of these points as well. *Relação* (Quito, 2 jan 1639) in Cortesão, "Significado," p.191-92.

were by this time too weak and too tired to keep guard over a significant number of captives even if they could acquire them.⁵²

So it was that Teixeira's men returned decimated and penniless to Pará, from a extraordinary transcontinental journey of reconnaissance. They were received there with little enthusiasm. To come back empty-handed was not at all what was expected of a Paraense entrada to the sertão; and to make things worse, the political situation in the colony had changed dramatically since they left. Jacome de Noronha had been dismissed from his post; and a new Governor had arrived who disapproved of the expedition's having been sent up the river in the first place. All available men and weapons were needed for the defense of Belém and São Luis against the Dutch attack from Pernambuco, which was expected momentarily. The colonial economy, as always, was languishing for the lack of Indian manpower.

A few months later, it was learned in Maranhão and Grão Pará that Portugal had actually regained its independence from Spain. This news was encouraging to the settlers; but at first no one could be sure just how long their autonomy would last, or what its implications might be for the future of the colony and the policies governing its expansion into the interior. Both the will and the resources for a return voyage to the Negro and Solimões were therefore definitely lacking in Pará, as they would be for several years to come. During this time, the Dutch indeed captured São Luis do Maranhão for a period of months; and much energy went into dislodging them. The labor force was further reduced by desertion and epidemics; and the dire shortage of missionaries made it unlikely for the time being that anyone would set out up the Amazon to "save" the numerous souls who had

⁵²*Ibid.* caps. 66-68 (English ed., pp. 112-17). It had never been the intention of the old slaving-captain, Teixeira, to return to Pará empty-handed. The President of the Audiencia of Quito, with whom Teixeira had talked at length while he was there, was left with the impression that the Portuguese captain intended to travel homeward at a leisurely pace "por ir reconociendo bien la tierra, y bocas de las rios por algunas entradas que harán, a sacar indios y llevarlas para hacerlos esclavos que es grangería que tienen, no solamente para el servicio de las mismas provincias, sino con los de fuera que vienen a ellas, y los llevan comprados, y los mismos de la tierra los envían a la Provincia de Caracas y otras partes." Pérez de Salazar, Informe (Quito, 19 may 1639), in Cortesão, "Significado," pp. 196-97.

been found there.

The story of Amazon gold had nevertheless made a big impression on people's minds in Pará and elsewhere; and when things returned to "normal" there, it would caused a short-lived outburst of something like the El Dorado madness, which had for many decades affected the judgment of Spaniards in their conquests of the South American interior.⁵³ A series of still-born projects were hatched, among which one of the wilder had a group of British investors in London outfitting eight ships and two thousand men so that they might journey up the Amazon and build a fort, in the vicinity of which they would direct the mining of gold by Indian slaves, while training an Indian army for an eventual assault on Quito!⁵⁴

The possibility that there might in fact be some gold mines within their reach was naturally a source of some agitation among the moradores of Pará themselves, and it appears to have intrigued their new King. The royal governors of the 1640's, still housed for the most part at São Luis, were too busy with other problems to attempt any adventures far to the west. But at one point Captain-Major Aires de Souza Chichorro of Pará received instructions that some sort of an official expedition should at least be sent up to try and locate the mines about which people were talking. This assignment was given to settler Bartolomeu Barreiros de Ataíde, with an appointment as Captain-Major of the Discovery of

⁵³In general, the Portuguese seem to have been less affected by this gold-hunter's disease than were the Spaniards of New Granada and Peru. The late 18th-century chronicler Sampaio, who took some pride in that fact, thought that the most appropriate treatment of the "golden lake" myth was that of Voltaire in *Candide*. Francisco Xavier Ribeiro de Sampaio, Diário da viagem que, em visita e correição das povoações da Capitania de São José do Rio Negro fez o ouvidor...1774 e 1775 (2nd ed., hereafter cited as "1903 ed.") in Nabuco, Limites I Mem Bres Ann II, CCCXXXVIII, p. 74.

⁵⁴Ambassador António de Souza de Macedo-King (London, 2 oct 1642), ms. Ajuda 51-V-17, pp. 121-26; Macedo-King (Lisboa, 23 jun 1646), in Nabuco, Limites I Mem Bres Ann I, pp. 3-6. The scheme had been hatched by a British merchant and retired pirate, James Dupay, who claimed to have sent a ship to the Amazon in the late 1630's that sailed all the way up and explored the Spanish mines near Quito, and to have made a map of the route. I have seen no further references to such a journey, although if Edmundson was right in claiming that many of Teixeira's men were not Luso-Brazilians (see note 13 above) it may be that the expedition in question was Teixeira's. The great scheme foundered, in any event, in financial and political intrigues which were to some extent fabricated by the Ambassador himself in an effort to keep the British out of Portugal's Amazonian territory.

the River (or Lake) of Gold. Ataide got a large expedition together rather hastily, persuaded the Carmelite friar José de Santa Thereza Lima to serve as his chaplain, and set out in search of El Dorado in August of 1649. The governor of the colony, believing that "Indian manpower was a more reliable kind of treasure," added to Captain Ataide's instructions that while he was at it, he was to round up as many slaves as he possibly could, and bring them safely back to Pará.⁵⁵

No documents resulting directly from this expedition have come to light, but what is known is that it failed altogether to find any gold, that it lost a great many Indian crewmen (whether from warfare, disease or starvation is not clear), and that it returned to the capital with too few slaves even to pay for itself. Ataide was disgraced, and subjected to an official investigation -- as a result of which he was said to have died of shame. As a result there was a major scandal in the government of the infant colony, leading to the destitution of both the Governor and the Captain-Major of Pará (for having authorized Ataide to conduct illegal slaving); and this itself appears to have put a damper on official enterprises up the Amazon for some years to come. What is certain, however, is that Ataide's men had wandered for some weeks on the densely populated middle Solimões (in the neighborhood of Teixeira's "village of gold"). They had probably taken some slaves there, and had met with some armed resistance. It is possible too that in their search for slaves they became the first Portuguese expedition to travel any great distance up the Rio Negro. But so costly and resounding was the failure of this first effort to follow up on the discoveries of Pedro Teixeira and his followers, that Pará was temporarily discouraged from the intent; and the peoples of the Negro and Solimões were left largely to their own devices for the better part of a generation.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Berredo, *Annaes* paragraphs 950-51 (1905 ed. II, pp. 79-80); Baena, *Compêndio*, p. 63; Prat, *Notas I*, pp. 221-22.

⁵⁶Laureano de la Cruz, "Nuevo descubrimiento," in *Compte Varones I*, pp. 195 and 200. Nabuco maintains that Ataide's men did visit the Negro, but cites no source for this affirmation. *Limites I Mem Bres*, pp. 58-59. Kiemen refers to another El Dorado expedition sent up the Amazon in 1670 or 71 on orders from the

Spanish Missions to the Omagua in 1644-1650

The decade of the 1630's had seen the Solimões valley "discovered" anew by Spaniards, and reconnoitred quite thoroughly by Brieva, Toledo, Acuña and Artieda as representatives of the Franciscan and Jesuit provinces of Quito. During the 1640's, both of these groups established new mission fields east of the Andes (the Franciscans in "Sucumbíos" around the headwaters of the river Putumayo; the Jesuits in "Maynas" on the upper Marañón), and both laid plans to extend their work into the populous Solimões country as soon as their personnel and material resources would allow. The first genuine missionary visitor to the Omaguas appears to have been Padre Gaspar Cujía, one of the Jesuit pioneers of Maynas, who set out down the Marañón with a canoe-squadron of friendly Indians and a military contingent from the new Spanish outpost town of Borja (see map 6) in 1644. First they visited the Cocama people (Tupí speakers culturally very similar to the Omagua) on the river Ucayale for some months; and having been warmly received there, they carried on down to the Omagua with the intention of establishing at least a legal claim to that territory, in the name of the King of Spain (since by this time Portugal and its colonies were a separate realm). The Omagua proved friendly, as was their custom; and they seemed not unwilling to have a missionary settle among them. But Cujía himself was unable to stay. He thought at that time that there were about thirty thousand Omaguas --half of them settled on the islands of the river, and half on its banks and the lower reaches of several tributaries, especially the river "Yurun" (?? presumably not the Juruá, which was below the limits of Omagua territory). Cujía's "Omagua" of the banks and tributaries of the upper Solimões may well have included the members of other tribes as well; nevertheless, they were the "greatest nation" yet found in Amazonia; and the Jesuit visitor determined to send them a resident missionary as soon as one could be spared for the job.⁵⁷

King, organized at the request and under the direction of the Franciscan custos of Pará, Fr. Manoel do Espírito Santo; but I have seen no other references to this journey. Indian Policy, p. 124.

⁵⁷P. Juan de Velasco, S. J. Historia del reino de Quito en la América meridional III, lib. 5 (1960 ed.), pp. 730-31, who says that Cujía was accompanied by P. Bartolomé Pérez. Samuel Fritz, who was missionary to the Omagua half a century later, believed this first expedition to have been led by the mission Superior,

As things turned out, the Franciscans won the race and later gave up the prize, leaving the Solimões mission field to the Jesuits. Before doing so, they would lay the way for further friendly contacts between the Spaniards and the Omagua; and what is more important for our purposes, they would gather invaluable information about the situation of that tribe during the first years of its sustained contact with Europeans determined to bring them under colonial domination. The first Franciscan visitor was a lay brother, Fray Pedro Pecedor, who was sent to work with the "Seno" of Sucumbios in about 1641, with instructions to continue on downstream from there after a time, until he encountered the Omagua. When the Seno grew impatient with mission life and withdrew, he therefore set out down the Rio Putumayo (Port. Içá) with a young retainer from Quito named Pascual. They came out on the Rio Solimões near the lower Omagua settlements; but rather than remain in them, they continued on down to the country of the "Aysuaces" (Aisuares, Achouares), below the mouth of the Juruá. There they stayed for several years, during which Pascual set up housekeeping with an "Aisuar" woman and Friar Pedro devoted himself to missionary work. Then at some point the missionary decided to leave, and was escorted downriver in search of the Portuguese of Pará. Pascual, who seems to have been the first secular "transfrontiersman" to settle on the Solimões (see Chapter 9), was later killed in a drunken quarrel with an Omagua over the barter of some European goods for Omagua cotton cloth.⁵⁸

Fray Laureano de la Cruz set out for the Omaguas mission from Quito in May of 1647, in the company of another Franciscan priest, Fray Juan de Ibarra Quincuoces, the lay

P. Lucas de la Cueva, in the company of Acuña's old companion from the 1639 trip, P. Andrés de Artieda. Fritz, *Journal*, p. 51. Padre Cueva later lamented that the far-away Omagua were the greatest unmet challenge and opportunity in Maynas, and that "a tener con quien, ya estuvieran poblados. Hízoseles una visita; nunca mas por alla se ha ido." Cueva-P. Gabriel de Melgar (Jéveros, 9 sep 1651), copy in Melgar's *Carta Anua 1642-52* for the Jesuit Province of New Granada and Quito, ms. in APTSJ Col. Astrain 33.

⁵⁸Cruz, pp. 177, 190 and 195, who remarks that Pecedor left his assistant behind on the Solimões "hecho indio y peor." Fr. Pedro appears to have left no written account of his remarkable experience; no Portuguese documents concerning his arrival in Pará have emerged; and it is therefore not clear what became of him after leaving the Aisuares.

brothers Fray Diego Ordóñez and Fray Domingo Brieva (by now the greatest Amazon traveller of the day, setting out on his fourth journey along the river!) and a couple of young donados or servant boys from their convent.⁵⁹ These men went in response to an urgent royal cédula sent out from Madrid the year before, which instructed the Audiencia of Quito to get some missionaries into the central Amazon valley quickly at all costs -- in anticipation of any expansionist moves by the newly-independent Portuguese.

Unlike the Jesuits, who welcomed any opportunities to establish theocratic mission "empires" in remote places, these zealous Franciscan pioneers were full of misgivings from the start about their assignment. This was because "they knew that such a pacification and reduction would not be accomplished without violence, and the sending of people there to conquer and settle." On the other hand, if the Omagua were as numerous and as "civilized" as they were reported by Brieva and others to be, Cruz and his companions thought that they might perhaps manage to learn their language, become familiar with the country, and then only at some later time persuade the government to send settlers there. If all went well, they hoped to convert these Omaguas and get them establish them as full-fledged Christian vassals of the King of Spain before any settlers arrived among them -- so that they might be recognized as free citizens, and allowed to serve rather as allies in the conquest of other tribes, than as subjects living under the authority of encomenderos like the Indians of Peru. These missionaries set out with ample supplies of trade goods, and of ornaments for the churches they hoped to build -- all of these provided by pious private donors in Quito.

At Archidona in Quijos on the upper Rio Napo, Fray Laureano and his companions contracted as interpreters an Omagua couple from the branch of the tribe who had long been settled in that region, people who had had the misfortune of being rounded up and given in encomienda to a Spaniard settled there. After a few weeks, this small party set off down the

⁵⁹In 1642, having returned to Spain with Acuña to report to the King on the "discovery" of the Amazon, Brieva had asked for royal assistance so that he might go back to America with another lay brother "para ofrecerse de nuevo a la conversión de aquellas almas hasta acabar la vida." Petición (Madrid?, 19 oct? 1642), ms. AGI Quito 7.

Napo with a military escort under encomendero Diego de Paz of Archidona, who had offered to see them safely installed in their mission. At the mouth of the Napo in mid-October, they ran into a war party of some fifty Omagua in five small canoes, who said that they were on their way up to raid the long-suffering Icahuates and to "kill and steal, as we learned was their custom." The Omaguas seemed at first to be alarmed at the sight of these new visitors; but when they learned that they were Spaniards, they stopped and waited for them on a beach where "we greeted and embraced each other." Fray Laureano then persuaded them to give up their "evil plans" and conduct the new missionaries back to their villages.⁶⁰

The uppermost Omagua settlement at that time (late in 1647) was at "Piramota," a densely forested island perhaps ten miles long and two miles wide, located some "seventy leagues" below the mouth of the Napo.⁶¹ There these visitors were surprised to find a much sparser population than they had been led to expect. There were only about two hundred and fifty people living in twenty-eight houses built of tree trunks with palm-thatched roofs, which were stretched out close beside one another on the river bank "like so many ships with their prows toward the water, each with a door on the river and a door on the forest behind." The Omaguas nevertheless received them kindly, vacating two of these houses for the Franciscans and their companions, and providing them with plenty of food. After four days during which the missionaries set up a wooden cross in the village and said Mass for its curious inhabitants, the soldiers set out on their return trip up the river. Captain Díaz promised to return each year during the low-water season, to bring them supplies and if necessary to escort them home, if they found for any reason that they were not

⁶⁰Cruz had been led to believe that the Omagua occupied a territory two hundred leagues in length, with villages within sight of each other all that way, and that they were "gente apacible, política y la de más razón y gobierno de todo nuestro gran río, que tenían caciques principales a quienes estaban muy obedientes, y tenían comercio y comunicación con las naciones vecinas, y otras cosas, que nos obligaron a hacer de esta nación y provincia un muy elevado concepto." Cruz, pp. 181-86.

⁶¹Acuña says 60 leagues. If these accounts are compared with those of Carvajal and Ortiguera (chap. 1), it appears that by the 1640's the Omagua had withdrawn a considerable distance from the upriver outposts they had occupied in the mid-16th century.

accomplishing their purposes.

Next day the Napo river Omagua interpreters fled as well, leaving the friars to their own linguistic devices with the bare rudiments of Tupían which they had managed to acquire on the journey down. Undaunted, they somehow persuaded the people to begin cutting and dragging in timbers for the construction of a chapel which they intended to dedicate to the patron San Pedro de Alcántara (on whose day in the Christian calendar they had arrived), and commended themselves to the Lord. The missionaries could not conceal their disappointment at the small population of this place, at what they considered to be its cultural poverty, and at the stark contrast between what they were seeing and the glowing picture of this society which had been drawn by earlier visitors.⁶²

Fr. Laureano adds a few new details to our sketch of the culture of the Omagua, based on his observation throughout the many months of his stay with them. The oft-mentioned painted cotton clothing consisted in a sleeveless shirt worn by the men which hung to their knees -- but which as it turned out they wore only part of the time, often feeling more comfortable without it. Women wore bits of cotton cloth so short and narrow "que les honestan muy poco (as do very little to cover their private parts)." On festive occasions they carried fans made of feathers, with which to shoo away the ever-present mosquitos. The great variety of fish, turtle, manatee and wild game with which they sustained themselves were taken with bow and arrow, harpoon, blowgun and ingenious snares. A favorite meat was that of the wild pig "with its navel in the middle of its back, which has to be cut out immediately on killing or it causes the meat to smell rank;" the tapir (danta) was also favored, and its tough hide was still used to construct the shields they carried into battle. Such large game was found not on the islands, but on dry land along the river's banks.

Fray Laureano's Omagua were also surpassingly skillful canoemen. In building

⁶²Cruz, p. 186.

their canoes, they made use of the huge tree trunks which came floating down the river during flood season. Men kept an eagle eye out for such trunks as they moved about on the river; and when they saw one they would lasso it and tow it laboriously in to their village. There during the dry season, they labored patiently over these great logs, hewing out graceful and well-balanced embarkations with "stone axes, and other tools made of the shells of turtles and the bones of animals."⁶³

Life for the Omagua was also quite dangerous. Hunters might meet death in the claws of a wild cat, the jaws of an alligator, the coils of a giant snake.⁶⁴ People slept under a mosquito netting patched together from their old clothing, which also protected them against the vampire bat which might suck the blood of the unwary while they slept. But worst of all from the friars' point of view, were the hazards that arose from their own festivities:

the bouts of disgraceful drunkenness which they frequently hold, inviting people to do nothing but drink the wines they make of those roots they eat, or of corn and potatoes, in such great quantities that they last for two, three or four days -- with every man and women among them drinking their fill. And once one of them is over a neighbor invites them to another, so that most of the year (except during the flood) is spent on these festivities. These drinking bouts are the origin of all the suffering of these unhappy folk -- because at them they meet to decide upon all community affairs and decide upon the killing and enslavements of people, and the other evil deeds that they will perform.

⁶³Cruz, pp. 191, 193 and 197. These great trunks, from which the Rio Madeira got its name when Pedro Teixeira passed by its mouth on his way back to Pará in 1639, are called cedros in the Spanish and Portuguese sources, and are often mentioned both as valuable construction material and as a hazard to navigation. Most of them seemed to have been growing on sections of the bank which were washed away by the flood; and their great number is a testimony to the ever-shifting course of the river.

⁶⁴Cf. Samuel Fritz, S.J. "Notas sobre el río Marañón o Amazonas" in Constantino Bayle, "Descubridores jesuitas del Amazonas" pp. 138-41, on huge lagartos which sometimes attacked and ate people in their very houses during flood season, or terrified them with their growling. The huge sucurí snake also killed people, and might even grab a hand trailing in the water from a canoe (in which case the only salvation was to cut off its head with a knife).

At those times, the missionaries lived in fear and trembling, because although the Omagua appeared to be peaceful folk when sober, once drunk "they get into such a state that they recognize no one, and not even parents, children and relatives are safe."

It was Fray Laureano's uninformed opinion that the main problems of the Omagua of his day came from living on the uninhabitable islands of the river, rather than moving to its more promising banks. The land on the islands appeared to him to be sterile because it was so often flooded. It seems today that the well-intentioned friar did not understand the difference in fertility between the rich alluvial soils of low-lying plots on the islands and banks, and the leached soils of the terra firme. He observed that the floods rose so high as to cover any garden plots on the islands nearly every year, and that they reached the higher várzea (or levees) only occasionally; so he concluded that the land was more productive where it was high enough to avoid being flooded. Sustenance appeared to him to be scarce among the Omaguas, and of dubious quality. As a European unacclimated to the Amazon valley, he seems to have viewed its rich and varied diet of fish, game and edible wild plants combined with root crops and corn as a primitive and hopefully temporary substitute for real food. Moreover, Fray Laureano found the plague of mosquitos to be intolerable. This tribe's only hope, as he saw it, lay in being resettled under missionary supervision in larger settlements on higher and drier land, where there might be some possibility of farming in a proper European fashion and establishing the basic conditions for civilized life.⁶⁵

After four months of intensive language learning and what seemed at the outset like rather successful missionary work at Piramota, Fr. Laureano left his companions there and set out with thirty Omagua rowers to visit the communities downstream. He estimated that it was eight leagues to the next inhabited island; nine to the next; four to the next; eight to the next; and ten leagues to the one after that.⁶⁶ On each island as large or larger than the

⁶⁵Cruz, pp. 191-93.

⁶⁶The names of the first three settlements below Piramota were Sacayey, Mayti and Caraute. See Appendix E below. The length of a "league" (not to mention the difficulty the travellers must have had in estimating how many they had travelled on the river in a given period of time) is a problem in interpreting all of these

first one, he found a village similar to but smaller than Piramota. Early in the year 1648, then, he found a total population of less than seven hundred people in six settlements along more than two hundred and thirty kilometers of this once densely-populated stretch of the river!

The people he visited were friendly enough, providing the travellers with "the food they had, such as sweet manioc, corn and the other ordinary fruits of the land with a great quantity of fish." Cruz corresponded with gifts of beads, bells, fishhooks and the "other little things of which they are fond." He baptized a child whom he found on the point of death. Baptizing children appears to have been the preferred sacramental activity of this particular group of Franciscans, "other than the daily religious observances, which are what comes first." At one village he was asked to put up a cross as he had done at Piramota, which the people then dutifully "worshipped and kissed" according to the friar's instructions. But the numbers of people were so small everywhere, that Cruz eventually began to wonder whether the effort was worthwhile.

At the sixth inhabited island, in March or April of 1648, the missionary found at least a partial explanation for what appeared to be the greatly diminished population of the Omagua country. He came to a village that appeared once to have had perhaps eighty inhabitants, but which had recently been all but wiped out by an epidemic of smallpox which was travelling up the river. Every single member of this community had fallen sick, and although some had fled to die or perhaps to find some way of surviving alone in the forests, it appeared that only sixteen people were convalescing in the town. Cruz was told there that the entire Omagua nation from that point down the river had suffered from this terrible disease, and that great numbers of people had died everywhere. The plague had not yet spread to the upper-most villages of the Omagua; but it was sure to do so; so he missionary returned to one of the healthy settlements to await it. The flood was rising, and the weather

sources. I have used the standard six kilometers throughout, which gives the distances here to be forty-eight, fifty-four, twenty-four, forty-eight and sixty kilometers respectively.

was not propitious; there was a notable cold spell with brisk winds, and a heavy fog blowing up from the east under a constant drizzle; and this blocked out the sun for several days. Fr. Laureano was told that that was something that happened two or three times a year in that region.⁶⁷

One stormy night, the smallpox indeed caught up with them. Next morning a small boy and an old women in different houses came down with it; and from them it spread to the rest until in little more than a month there was no one, adult or child, in the town who did not fall miserably victim to the disease. Even the young lay brother who accompanied me fell ill. Only I was spared by God, though I lived and worked among those unhappy victims of a disease so contagious and disgusting that just to see the miserable state of the sick and to smell the stench of them was enough to kill a man.

Inside their thatched houses, the people were living on wooden platforms constructed to raise them above the level of the swirling flood; they kept their canoes tied under these platforms at night, and in the daytime they went out in them into the flooded forest to look for edible fruits and catch what little fish they could, since the river had wiped out most of their crops. Under these reduced circumstances,

those miserable folk brought down by the epidemic and covered with lesions, lying on those naked plank floors with no kind of comfort or attention unless it be a little fire, and many had not even that, were so unfortunate that they all died. The howling of the sick and the weeping of the survivors made me think of the sufferings of the souls of these people waiting in purgatory for the others to follow. They had no medicine with

⁶⁷There are references to this occasional cold spell in several of the early sources. Cruz says that people shivered in their thin clothing, and had to warm up the water before drinking. Cf. Acuña cap. 53 (English ed., p. 98). The origin of the epidemic is not clear. At this time the gold-seeking Portuguese expedition under Bartolomé Barros de Ataide was not yet on the Solimões; the epidemic may have derived from some other visitors of the 1640's, or have worked its way up through intertribal contacts from Para.

which to cure themselves beyond the bark of some trees and the leaves of others which they cooked and then washed themselves in the water -- but these were to very little avail. They would lasso the bodies of the dead and tow them out to the middle of the river. And those who escaped death were left in so weakened a condition that for a long time they were no good for anything.⁶⁸

The Omagua attributed this calamity to the great powers of an evil shaman. After five months in the village, with a third of its people dead and the rest convalescent, the flood began to recede and Fr. Laureano felt free to return to Piramota -- which as it turned out was the only village of the Omagua which managed to escape that epidemic. There he found that friars Brieva and Ordóñez had fallen sick from some other ailment; and he was obliged to tend to them for some months until he could send them back with Captain Díaz and his men to Archidona. Díaz brought with him a new lay brother who had been sent to join Cruz and Quincuoces; and in March of 1649, the three friars set out to inspect their ravaged province anew.⁶⁹

This experience was disheartening in the extreme. They travelled some eight hundred kilometers down to the mouth of the Putumayo-Içá, changing Omagua crews at the half-way point when they learned that the men from Piramota were afraid that they might be killed by their own fellow-tribesmen further down. Along the way, they visited or learned of the existence of some thirty-four Omagua settlements (including those located below the Putumayo-Içá) -- all of them more or less "like the rest," which would suggest a population of not more than five thousand people in all. At the Içá, where there was a village containing about a hundred survivors of the epidemic, they were told by "one Mayrcatizi, a great witch-doctor" that they could travel no further because of the danger of attack by the Omagua

⁶⁸Cruz, p. 189.

⁶⁹Cruz, pp. 190 and 192.

living below that point.⁷⁰ The great Omagua province, Fray Laureano concluded, was not at all what it had been cracked up to be:

so few people, living so far apart from one another, without order, reason or government, without principal chiefs nor obedience to anyone -- people whose commerce with their neighbors was to kill or capture one another, as we had had ample occasion to observe. The islands where they lived were frequently flooded, miserably hot and mosquito-ridden and for other reasons uninhabitable, at least by Spaniards.⁷¹

The Franciscans returned sadly to Piramota, having decided to return to Quito and abandon the mission just as soon as encomendero Díaz came again to bring them succour.

Cruz' dyspeptic account of Omagua society provides us in passing with some remarkable demographic data, the first worthy of the name for any people on the Solimões. By his count there were thirty-four villages in all, of which the biggest was the uppermost at Piramota, containing twenty-eight houses with two to four "indos de lanza" or men of fighting age in each (some eighty men in all, an average of three per multifamily house). Including the women and children, the population of this town was about two hundred and fifty (or nine people per house). If we assume an equal number of women and men and a small number of old people, there was an astonishingly small number of children in Piramota: barely one child per couple. Figures for six other Omagua communities (two of which had been visited by the smallpox before Cruz saw them) suggest an average of perhaps 2.5 men of fighting age per multifamily house, which may perhaps be adjusted upward to Piramota's three to account for losses in the epidemic. The six communities had fourteen, eight, sixteen, twenty-two, nine and fifteen houses respectively; and if we apply the

⁷⁰Mayrcatizi himself was not afraid to travel downriver; Cruz met him on his way back from the lowermost Omagua settlement, where he had a son, late in 1650. p. 195.

⁷¹Cruz, 189-91. He goes on to state hyperbolically that in the entire length of Omaguas down to the Içá "no hallamos diez indios cabaes [that is, healthy adult males] fuera de sus mujeres y muchachos, que no son muchos."

same ratios of population to houses as at Piramota, we get populations for these settlements (rounded to the nearest multiple of five) of about a hundred and twenty-five, seventy, a hundred and forty-five, two hundred, eighty and a hundred and thirty-five -- a total with Piramota of about one thousand people, or an average of about a hundred and forty-five per village. In thirty-four villages, that would give a total Omagua population in ca. 1648 of not more than five thousand. If the loss in the single smallpox epidemic of that year was about one third, as was suggested by Fray Laureano's experience in the village of Carauté, then the total population must have declined to about three thousand five hundred once that epidemic had passed.⁷²

Yet Padre Cujía had guessed that there were some thirty thousand people on the islands and banks of the Omagua territory just five years before; and Acuña and the 16th-century observers had also left the impression of much larger populations in the region. Laureano de la Cruz was of course in a better position than any of these to provide actual figures for our discussion, after three years of life and work with the Omaguas which included visits to nearly all of their (island) settlements. He had found only half as many people in all as Cujía had thought lived on the islands alone just four years earlier; and he makes no mention at all of any Omagua settlements on the banks of the Solimões (which would presumably have interested him greatly and been worthy of comment, in view of his strong feeling that the whole tribe was in need of being resettled there). One is forced by Fray Laureano's bleak description of the Omagua to the conclusion that -- no matter how greatly Cujía may have overestimated their numbers, or Acuña their cultural attainments -- something drastic had befallen this once prosperous people in the years since Acuña's and Cujía's visits.

The most likely guess to explain this transformation is an earlier epidemic,

⁷²Cruz, pp. 186-88 and 190. In a more ebullient mood during the first days of his mission at Piramota, Fr. Laureano had written that there were 400 people in the twenty-eight houses there, and 200 in the fourteen houses of the island nearest by. That would have given an average of fourteen people per house or 190 per village, which would raise the total to 6,500 before the smallpox hit. Cruz-Fr. Juan de Durana (San Pedro de Alcantara de Omaguas, 24 oct 1647), in *Compte Varones Ilustres* I, pp. 145-46.

introduced perhaps by the companions of Cujía or Pecador. It is possible that internal conflicts or an exceptionally severe flood drove portions of the tribe to relocate in areas removed from the main stream of the Solimões (something which is perhaps suggested by Cujía's reference to settlement along the "Yurun"). The passage of Teixeira's expedition itself, like a plague of locusts with enormous and probably forced requisitions of food, accompanied by the ravaging of women and stealing of canoes, may have driven the people into remote places of refuge. Finally, it is possible that the Mayoruna of the south bank and the Ticuna on the north (bitter enemies of the Omagua a generation later) had launched devastating attacks during that period which killed a great many Omagua and drove the remainder onto the islands for protection. No information has so far emerged which helps to unravel this knotty problem any further.

While waiting for deliverance at Piramota, carrying on their religious observations and tending to the sick, Cruz and his friends had a hair-raising introduction to the Omagua practice of infanticide. One day a baby was born in a nearby house. The friars heard him crying, and went to investigate. When they arrived, they found that his parents had already buried the boy with along with the placenta in a hole near their house. The Franciscans dug him up immediately, baptized him, and had him nursed by another Omagua woman for the few days before he died. Having seen this behavior with their own eyes,

we believed what the Omagua themselves had sometimes told us -- that they buried their babies alive as soon as they were born, because they'd wanted a boy and got a girl, or because the baby was born while another was still being breast-fed. We learned that the mother in this case had already buried two babies and others one, two or three. We scolded them for this evil deed; and they responded that they'd always done it, that it was an old custom among them.⁷³

⁷³Cruz, p. 192.

It seemed to Fray Laureano that it was this barbarous custom which above all others gave the lie to what he had been told about the "policía, razón y buen gobierno" of the Omagua. Frequent infanticide compounded by the continuous slaughter of inter-tribal warfare must, he concluded, be the root cause of their startlingly low population density. Epidemic disease served only to accelerate a process of self-extirmination which was embedded in their very culture. Today, we would be more likely to say that these customs had evolved in the process of the Omaguas' ecological adaptation, perhaps to help keep their population from outrunning the available food resources. When the tribe came up against the unprecedented catastrophe of European epidemic disease in the 17th century, however, the practices of war and infanticide proved dysfunctional and served to inhibit their demographic recovery.

After three years with the declining Omagua, the Spanish Franciscans were more than ready to leave. They waited several months for their benefactor Díaz during the summer of 1650; but the encomendero of Archidona failed to appear. Relations with the people of Piramota appear to have been deteriorating. It must be remembered that they had fed, housed and transported the missionaries since the day they arrived, receiving very little in return. The friars had never experienced open hostility from the Omagua; but now they began to fear that the Indians ("who respect the Spaniards mostly out of the fear of our harquebusses") were plotting against them. So they persuaded some of the Omagua men to help them build a large canoe, without letting anyone know what it was for; and they began quietly to hoard their provisions. Then one day in October, leaving most of their possessions behind in order to avoid arousing suspicion, they embarked upon the river with the pretext of going after turtles: three friars, their two young retainers from Quito, and five Indian boys from the interfluvial tribes whom they had bought ("rescatado") from the Omaguas' pool of captives, and hoped to take back to Quito for training. Lacking the strength to paddle up the river, the group set off downstream towards Pará -- travelling as inconspicuously as possible, in daily (and perhaps justified) fear for their lives. On the way

through Omagua territory, they stopped as little as possible and then only to beg for food, until they had passed the last Omagua village some twenty-four leagues (a hundred and fifty kilometers) above the mouth of the Rio Juruá.⁷⁴

Twenty-eight leagues (a hundred and seventy-five kilometers) below the Juruá was the first village of the Aisuares, a tribe living in small villages strung out for a distance of some eighty leagues (four hundred and eighty miles), sometimes only a couple of miles apart, on the sparsely forested high south bank of the Amazon. The two settlements the friars visited each consisted in two straw-thatched houses, built with a single low door which was covered for protection against the mosquitos. These people appeared to wear no clothing at all, and farmed gardens on the river islands to which they travelled back and forth from their home places in canoes. They produced fine clay pots and decorated drinking-gourds for trade with their neighbors. But when the friars asked them for food, they learned that the Aisuares' supplies had recently been depleted by the depredations of the Portuguese gold-hunting expedition under Bartolomeu de Ataide -- one which may well have spread epidemic disease in the region as well, but which was by that time on its way back down the river to Pará.⁷⁵

Beyond the Aisuares, Cruz and his companions continued down the south bank to Lake Tefé, and then crossed to the north bank without even noticing the mouths of the Japurá. They stopped at a village of the "Yaguanais" ("Paguanas?") on the Rio Araganatuba there, where there were forty houses and the people no longer understood them as they spoke in Omagua.⁷⁶ A few leagues beyond that point, they passed by the territory of the

⁷⁴Cruz, pp. 194-195. He points out that the mainland above the mouth of the Ica was inhabited by the "Jaunus" (probably a misreading of "Ticunas") on the north and by the "Mayuzunas" (Mayorunas) and "Guarayeos" (Guareicus?) on the south. Cruz makes no other reference to these tribes, but we know from other sources that four decades later they were the "traditional enemies" of the Omagua who kept them confined to the islands of the river for protection. Presumably they were the enemies in the intertribal wars of which Fr. Laureano complains.

⁷⁵Cruz, pp. 185-196.

⁷⁶Cf. Acuna cap. 60 (English ed., pp. 104-105), who noted that the north bank between Tefe and Coari (specifically the river "Araganatuba," probably the modern Parana Copean, six leagues below the mouth of the Igarape Catua) was populated by a great number of tribes speaking different languages, including the

ferocious "Yorimanes" (Solimões, Ibanoma). These people seemed to the Franciscans to be the largest tribe on the river at that time -- with numerous villages extending sixty leagues along both banks of the river, each consisting in twenty or twenty-four houses. They were also the least friendly: the parties who came out on the river to have a look at them, naked and armed with dart-launchers, seemed so ominous that the travellers did not attempt even to land and ask for food in that country. Passing the Yorimanes, they travelled for seventy leagues past the mouths of the Rio Purús and Lake Manacapurú to the Rio Negro, without seeing any other signs of human habitation.⁷⁷

The Dutch and Carib Trade as an Economic Determinant

One of the more startling revelations to the men of both Peru and Pará from their mid-17th century reconnaissance of the Solimões and its peoples was that by the late 1630's, a variety of Dutch trade goods were in wide circulation there. This they found all the more remarkable, since they knew it to be likely that no Dutchman had ever visited that region. In 1639, Cristóbal de Acuña noted that such goods were very much in evidence among the Indians living around Lake Manacapurú on the Solimões, just west of the mouth of the Rio Negro:

The Carabuyanas who inhabit this extensive territory use bows and arrows, and some of them have iron tools such as hatchets, cutlasses, mattocks and knives. When asked by the interpreters where these came from, they reply that they are obtained from Indians living nearer to the sea, who get them from some white men like ourselves who use the same weapons, swords and arquebusses, and who dwell upon the seacoast. These men were different

Yaguanais, Macuna, Mapiaru, Aguaynau, Huiruna, Marirua, Yamorua, Terarus, Siguiyas, Guanapuris, Piras, Mipitirus, Yguanaris, Aturiaris, Masipias, Guayacaris, Anduras, Cacuaras, Maraymumas and Guanabis. Acuña speaks of two mouths of this river Araganatuba, both connecting with the Japura; and a look at the modern map makes it clear that Amazonas (Diccionario p. 61) and other writers have been mistaken in interpreting this passage as a reference to modern Codajaz, further down the north bank beyond Coari. The area around the mouth of the Catua, half-way between Tefe and Coari on the south bank, was also "thickly peopled with barbarians."

⁷⁷Cruz, p. 196.

from us [the Spanish and the Portuguese] only in the color of their hair,
which was yellow.⁷⁸

The question the Iberian explorers had to ask themselves with regard to this alarming bit of information, was how the hated heretics had managed to extend the tentacles of their economic influence into the very heartland of Spanish and Portuguese South America, without undertaking any of the risks or expenditures of conquest?

The Indian traders "living nearer to the sea" belonged to several tribes, all of them situated on the northern edge of the Rio Negro basin, which put them directly or indirectly in communication with the wide-ranging Carib traders from the northern coast of South America, who dealt in turn directly with the Dutch. In the 17th century these Caribs were comparatively recent immigrants to the South American mainland, refugees from the colonized West Indies to the Guayana territory between the Orinoco and Essequibo valleys (see Map 5). Their last-ditch mode of adjusting to European expansion had been to roam the hinterland in search of forest products and Indian slaves, and take these to exchange for trade goods at a Dutch fort on the coast.⁷⁹ This association is well established in the history of Spanish occupation on the river Orinoco, for which it is a central theme; but it has been little studied as it affects the history of Amazonia.⁸⁰ One of the centers of Carib

⁷⁸Acuna, Chap. 64 (English ed., pp. 108-09; the above translation is my own). This cryptic note might be interpreted to mean that the suppliers were the Dutch established around the mouth of the Amazon, who had in 1639 only recently been dislodged by the Portuguese. Acuna quite explicitly and plausibly believes, however, that they were those of Guiana, settled at the mouth of either the "Rio Dulce" or the "Rio Felipe."

⁷⁹The ethnohistory of the Caribs of mainland South America is brilliantly explored in Neil L. Whitehead, Lords of the Tiger Spirit: A History of the Caribs in Colonial Venezuela and Guyana, 1498-1820 (Dordrecht/Providence, 1988). See also his "Carib ethnic soldiering in Venezuela, the Guianas, and the Antilles, 1492-1820," Ethnohistory 37,4 (fall 1990)357-85. George Edmundson, employed nearly a century ago by the British government to do historical research on the Brazil-British Guiana frontier region to help build its case in a border arbitration, said that no Dutch records survived which revealed any more than the barest administrative details about this trade before 1657. "The Dutch on the Amazon and Negro in the 17th Century, Part II" English Historical Review 19 (1904), p. 8.

⁸⁰The principal source on the Carib trade seems to be Joseph Gumilla, S.J. El Orinoco Ilustrado (Madrid, 1741). See also his "Informe a S.M. sobre impedir a los indios caribes y a los olandezes las hostilidades que experimentan las colonias del Gran Rio Orinoco" (printed pamphlet, n.d.) in the Real Academia de la Historia (Madrid), Jesuitas 157,5.

control was situated in the upper Essequibo river valley, from which there is easy access to the Rio Negro and Amazon by way of the Rupunini and Tacutú-Rio Branco savannas in flood season (see map 5). The Caribs living in the hills near the Rupunini and Tacutú, known as Caripuna in the Portuguese documents, were allies and trading partners of the Dutch. They referred to the yellow-haired foreigners as paraná-guiri, or "men from the sea," which term for the Dutch and British white men was still in use as late as 1900 among the Indians of the Rio Branco headwaters in Brazil.⁸¹

Early evidence for the use of the Essequibo as an Indian trade route to the interior was provided by Captain Lawrence Keymis, assistant to Sir Walter Raleigh in the exploration of the Guiana hinterland during the 1590's, who described it as the route for reaching the great golden lake of Manoa:

[The Essequibo] lieth southerly in the land, and from the mouth of it unto the head they pass in twenty days; then taking their provisions, they carry it on their shoulders one day's journey to the side of a lake, which the Jaos call the Roponowini, the Charibes Paribe.

Keymis, who did not make the trip himself but had it described to him by Indian informants, went on to presume that the lake in question was a huge inland sea (thus providing the basis for one of the most curious distortions of 17th-century maps of South America), when the phenomenon referred to seems to have been the annual flooding of the savannas around the

⁸¹Edmundson, "Dutch on Negro II," pp. 2-3 and 11-14. On the Portuguese view of the Caripuna of the upper Essequibo, who were not contacted by them until the second half of the 18th century, see letters of João Pereira Caldas to the commander of the fortress of São Joaquim do Rio Branco (Barcelos, 9 aug and 31 dec 1784), in RIHGB 4 (1842), pp. 503-04. By that late date, the Portuguese were convinced that the only commercial contacts of the Dutch with the Rio Negro valley were through these Caripuna, who still sold slaves to them for iron tools and firearms. Caldas-Castro (Barcelos, 21 jul1781), AHU Rio Negro Cx 2, doc. 28. But when the naturalist Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira visited the upper Branco valley in 1786, he was taken to see a crystal mine from which the Indians told him the Dutch had taken samples a few years back. Now they were buying crystals on a regular basis from the Uapixana Indians, making them into bracelets and necklaces, and trading these goods back to the Indians! Ferreira-Castro (Barcelos, 10 aug 1786) in Americo Pires de Lima, Dr. Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira (Lisboa, 1953), p. 183. Other direct trade relations were maintained with the Ackoways of the Essequibo and Cuyuni valleys, who maintained a certain rivalry with the Caribs. Commander Essequibo--W.I.Co. (Essequibo, 27 feb 1683), in Nabuco, Limites II Mem Bres Ann III, p. 106.

Rupunini and Rio Branco headwaters -- which makes possible the passage of canoes from one watershed to the other by way of a portage of no more than a few hundred yards. So accurate were Keymis' informants, however, that even the figure of twenty days for the journey from the Essequibo estuary to the Parime land bridge appears to have been substantiated by later travellers.⁸²

Beginning in 1616, the Dutch operated a small trading-post on Kijkoveral, or Fort Island, thirty leagues up the Essequibo at its juncture with the Cuyani and Nazaruni rivers. The first administrator of the fort, and governor of the Essequibo territory for nearly half a century, was one Groenewegen who had served before this time with the Spaniards on the Orinoco and achieved there "the good liking of the natives whose humours he perfectly understood," in addition to taking a Carib wife.⁸³ Among his twenty to forty employees were "outrunners" who travelled the hinterland to trade by routes which can only be guessed at today, and company factors who established themselves in remote trading posts to receive merchandise brought to them by the Indians. Both kinds of agent exchanged Dutch manufactured goods for such forest products as tobacco, balsam and the red dyestuff urucu (achiote, onoto) which was in great demand among the textile manufacturers of Europe. Additional operations were carried out by private Dutch transfrontiersmen who in time grew especially interested in trading for slaves.⁸⁴

The sugar plantation economy of the lower Essequibo valley had its beginning with the first Dutch colonization efforts in 1657; and though set back briefly by the British seizure of the colony in 1665-66, it grew steadily after the reorganization of the Dutch West

⁸²The passage from Keymis, as well as the interpretation and verification of it based on the 19th-century travel accounts of Schomburgk and Im Thurn, are taken from Edmundson, "Dutch on Negro II," pp. 9-10.

⁸³Edmundson, "Dutch on Negro II," pp. 6, 9-11 and 14, who notes that the Essequibo post was set up by Jan de Moor and Company of Zeeland, and passed under the administration of the Zeeland chamber of the West India Company in 1624.

⁸⁴Joaquim Nabuco, miscellaneous notes on the historical background of the Brazil-British Guiana border question. Nabuco Family Archive, Rio de Janeiro. That urucu was a key item in the trade was suggested by Karl Schwerin, personal communication, 1969.

India Company in 1674. This system of production determined what was to become the essential character of the Dutch inland trade. The expanding canefields provided an almost inexhaustible demand for Indian slaves (cheaper than those imported from Africa)--at least until about 1740, when the center of settlement shifted from around Fort Island down toward the Guiana coast.⁸⁵ By that time the increasing rationalization of Caribbean sugar production had led to a large-scale plantation which called for the more durable, disciplined and productive labor force that only African slaves could provide, and which produced sufficient profits to enable planters to buy them. By the last quarter of the 17th century and during the first half of the 18th however, the Dutch trade with the hinterland of Guyana (like Portuguese expeditions from Para) was concerned primarily with the recruitment of Indian slave labor.

There is evidence that a Huguenot refugee trader working out of Fort Island visited the site of a crystal mine on the upper Essequibo as early as 1625. He may have been the first European to trade along the Essequibo-Rio Branco route for goods from the Amazon basin. Forty years later, the English captain who occupied the fort obtained a fragment of information about the already established inland trade from a Swiss by the name of Hendrickson whom he held prisoner there. Hendrickson, who had apparently received his apprenticeship in tropical forest trading in the Dutch fort on the island of Gurupa near the mouth of the Amazon in the 1620's, and would therefore have had some notion of the potential for trade in the Amazon valley, had served for 27 years (since about 1640) as a trading factor in Guiana. His contacts had been with the "Occowye, Shawhaun and Semicoral" Indians of the far interior--presumably the Ackoways of the upper Essequibo, and now-extinct tribes of the Rio Branco valley.⁸⁶ These bits of information suggest an early and steadily maintained Dutch commercial presence up the Essequibo to the fringes of

⁸⁵Nabuco notes.

⁸⁶Edmundson, "Dutch on Negro II," pp. 5-8.

the Rio Negro valley during the mid-17th century. Most of the available data on how the Dutch and Indian trade actually worked, however, comes not from the Portuguese frontier but from the Spaniards in the Orinoco basin, reporting on it half a century later.

The Spanish Jesuit Jose Gumilla, who served on the Orinoco during the 1730's, described the latter-day slaving operations of the Caribs in some considerable detail. Indian warfare as he understood it had always involved the capture of women and children "to satisfy the boundless lust of the savages, and provide them with servants"--which in modern language might read "in order to increase their numbers." But the arrival of the Dutch introduced an element of steady demand, which had stabilized and accelerated the Carib slave-trading in particular as the essential feature of the regional economy. The Dutch would buy as many Indian slaves as the Caribs could deliver, and even instigated their raids by paying them for slaves in advance.

By the early 18th century fleets of Carib canoes were travelling up the Orinoco each year to visit the tribes friendly (or subject) to them; and for the price of at most "two axes, two cutlasses, a few knives and some beads or other trifles per head" would buy such captives as the tribesmen had been able to gather by means of their "barbarous wars" since the previous trading season. When the Caribs had obtained as many slaves as were available through peaceful exchange with their allies, they would descend upon enemy tribes with skillfully executed night attacks in which they burned villages, terrified the inhabitants by shooting off their Dutch firearms, and then captured entire communities as the people tried to escape. The men who offered resistance and the "useless" old people were slaughtered on the spot, and the rest were carried off into slavery. When enough people to fill a canoe or two were gathered in either of these ways, the Caribs would send them back to the Essequibo under guard, while the main party continued on its way.

This Dutch and Carib system, as Gumilla saw it, was based upon the management of terror. To "friendly" tribes, the Caribs would explain that the attacks on others were made necessary by their refusal to receive the travelling Caribs in a hospitable way, and either

provide them with supplies or trade slaves to them. Those who received them peaceably would be safe from the Caribs' terrible retribution; but those who attempted to resist them would be persecuted without mercy. The method appears to have worked with all the tribes of the region, except for the very few (Gumilla cites the Caberres of the middle Orinoco valley) who were sufficiently numerous, well-organized and warlike themselves to fend the Caribs off.⁸⁷

In 1728, a Jesuit missionary accompanied an expedition of Spaniards who travelled up the Orinoco and Guaviare rivers embijados, or naked and painted like Caribs to inspire fear and avoid the hostile attacks of the other tribes. Several days up from the mouth of the Guaviare, they ran into

a flotilla of Caribs who were trading with those tribes, people so destitute of iron tools and so devoid of the natural love of parents for their children, that they would barter a son or daughter for an ax, a cutlass or four strings of beads. Their desire for such goods made them insensible to the tears of the innocent victims of their greed. (author's trans.)⁸⁸

This passage may help to explain a curious fact about the Amazonian Indian slave trade in general--that so much of it was carried out in peaceful transactions between tribes friendly to one another. The fact that these Indians of the Guaviare were willing to exchange their children for manufactured goods suggests that on the one hand they had great need for iron tools; and on the other than among forest-dwelling people who had never experienced the inhuman condition of slave labor on a European plantation, the European notion of "slavery" itself was difficult to grasp. It is easier to imagine that an Indian father might have allowed his child to be "adopted" by another forest tribe, a tribe with which he or she could be expected to live the kind of life to which all were accustomed, than that he

⁸⁷Orinoco Ilustrado II, cap. 8, p. 279. Elsewhere he says that the Caribs gave some tribes special assignments--such as the "Quiriquiripas" who were left at peace in their hills in return for supplying the marauders with the fine hammocks and cloth which they manufactured of tree-cotton. I, cap. 21, p. 188.

⁸⁸Orinoco Ilustrado II, p. 281.

would willingly condemn the child to a life of violent exploitation and an almost certain early death. The more so when the adopters were a powerful, adventurous and presumably charismatic group such as the Caribs; and when the parent understood that he had no choice in the matter.

At the end of such a buying and raiding expedition, perhaps 1000 or more miles from the coast, the Caribs would leave the trade goods they had left over--along with two or three resident Carib "factors"--in the care of the chief of some friendly tribe so that they might continue gathering slaves by purchase from other tribes further inland, to be collected by the fleet a year later. The threat of Carib retribution sufficed to guarantee the safety of such trading representatives. Thereupon, the rovers would return down the Orinoco to their villages along the Guayana coast, and after resting for a time, return to the Dutch factory--"some to pay debts and receive new advances in trade goods, and others to sell the slaves they had gathered." (Gumilla seems to indicate here that Carib trading was an individual rather than a collective enterprise). "Most of the dealings are on an advance basis, and as a result most of the Caribs are permanently indebted to their suppliers, despite the fact that the Dutch pay them much more for a slave than the Caribs need to buy him in the hinterland." The Jesuit continues:

the price which the Dutch pay to the Carib for a slave, which they call itoto, is a box with a lock and key containing ten machetes, ten hatchets, ten knives, ten bundles of strung beads, a shiny metal ornament to be worn on a mirror for painting their faces according to their custom, and some scissors for cutting their hair; all of this goes in the chest, and in addition he is given a musket with powder and balls, a flask of firewater and little items such as needles, pins and fishhooks. This is the payment for a slave when they sell him; but when they buy him they pay to the tribes far inland no more than a hatchet, a machete and a little something else.⁸⁹

⁸⁹Ibid.

Gumilla had, one may presume, a greatly exaggerated notion of the price of an Indian slave in Kijkoveral or anywhere else, which makes it difficult to guess what the real difference was between cost to the Caribs and selling price at the fort. This was nevertheless undoubtedly great. Gumilla sees in the disparity an evidence of Carib greed and impovidence; what seems more likely is that they "spent" the evident surplus in buying from friendly tribes the food, canoes, weapons and other utensiles which their busy schedule of specialized trading activities must have kept them from producing for themselves. In addition, many of the slaves for whom they gave merchandise to the inland tribes must have died or escaped before they could be delivered to the Dutch fort. The most useful thing about this passage, aside from the list of goods which entered the trade, is its clear suggestion that the price of slaves was lowest in the deep interior, and got higher as the Caribs neared the coast.

The material basis for this trade, and indeed of all exchange relations between Indians and Europeans in the American tropical forest, has been eloquently described by Alfred Metraux in his essay "The Revolution of the Ax."⁹⁰ This was that the Indians of the Orinoco valley (like those of the Negro and Solimoes valleys and the rest of lowland South America) subsisted to a greater or lesser degree by means of a slash-and-burn horticulture, in which the slashing was done laboriously with stone, bone or shell axes which hacked away at the fibers in tree-trunks rather than severing them. The Europeans introduced tools of iron and steel which transformed this labor so thoroughly that a man who had once cut down a tree or hollowed a dugout canoe with an iron ax, could thereafter scarcely imagine how it had been possible to do such work with a stone ax. Since neither the raw materials nor the technology for producing iron and steel existed in the tropical forest, the result was a strangely complex and quickly-established dependence upon the purveyors of these tools. A similar dependence might develop with the experience of such

⁹⁰Diogenes 25 (Spring, 1959):28-40.

novelties as metal knives, fishhooks, machetes and spearpoints; or firearms to replace bows and blowguns (although here the process was a slower and more complex one because of the need for practice in using them, the necessity of a steady supply of powder, shot and flints and the difficulty of maintenance of the weapons); of distilled spirits in contrast to indigenous fruit and root-crop fermented wines and beers; of sugar in place of wild honey; of sea salt in place of wood ash for seasoning; or even of mirrors, transparent glass beads and broad-brimmed hats. The Dutch provided a steadier supply of these "trinkets" at a lower cost than either the Spanish or the Portuguese were able to do; the Caribs and others distributed them; and the Indians of tropical America provided whatever had to be provided in order to obtain them on a regular basis.

As if the predation of the Caribs alone were not enough, Gumilla reported that after 1731 the Dutch themselves had taken to travelling decked out in Carib paint and dressed only in the loincloths embellished with silver-allowy bars which distinguished Carib leaders from their naked followers. These "outrunners" or self-employed transfrontiersmen would accompany the Carib raiders on their forays, instructing them in military tactics and the use of firearms, and in so doing might stay away from the fort for years at a time--sending down slaves with the Carib fleet and receiving shipments of trade goods when it returned.

The result of this collaboration had been to increase the Caribs' boldness in resisting the inroads of the hated Spaniards on their river. They would fire on the Jesuit canoes they passed, and kept up a constant military pressure on the missions, sometimes attacking them openly but more commonly making night raids to destroy their crops. They had killed Jesuit missionaries as far back as 1686 and 1693;⁹¹ but the climax of confrontation came in the mid-1730's, when the Caribs destroyed four Jesuit and two Franciscan missions, killing

⁹¹These early killings, noted by Gumilla, were reported to the Spanish Jesuit Samuel Fritz on the Solimoes in 1696 by the Yurimagua, who had presumably learned about them by way of their trade connection with the Manao and other tribes of the upper Rio Negro over the Japura-Urabaxi route (see chap. 7). What Fritz was told was that the Jesuits on the Orinoco had been killed by "some heathen Indians of the headwaters of the Rio Negro, called Caripunás with others that are called Guaranaguas." Fritz-P. Altamirano (Jeberos, 20 ago 1696) in Fritz, Journal, pp. 97-98.

a missionary and several Spanish soldiers, in one three-year period.⁹²

There is documentary evidence from the Dutch side for at least one such mixed Carib and European expedition at a much earlier date. The colorful Captain Mattijs Matteson, a soldier of fortune who had served first the Dutch, then the Portuguese and then the Spaniards in their efforts to gain control of the northern rim of South America, had in 1655 led a Spanish party from the mouth of the Orinoco southward, mostly overland, in search of El Dorado. They had come out on the savanna of Parime at the headwaters of the Branco, where they traded with the Indians for gold and emeralds. Six years later, he left the Spaniards and came to work once again for the Dutch on the Essequibo. There, he persuaded the aging Governor Groenewegen to accompany him with fourteen Dutch soldiers and 400 Caribs on a journey to the same region by way of the Essequibo--with the object not merely of trading but of exploiting the fabled mineral resources of that country. This expedition failed when, some 100 leagues from Kijkoveral Fort and beyond the Parime passage, they ran into hostile Indians and were forced to turn back.⁹³

The secret of Dutch success in exploiting the Indians while maintaining friendly relations with them was that the Dutch could provide their friends cheaply with ample quantities of the manufactured goods they came to need, and could turn a tidy profit by disposing of (or putting to work in their fields) what the Indians gave them in return. They saw no need for territorial expansion, or for the exercise of sovereignty over their Indian allies. There was also among the Dutch very little urge to "civilize: them or to save their souls. Dutch and Indian relations in those primeval times were based on mutual respect, or at least on a mutual recognition of usefulness. When a lone outrunner went among the "savages", he was obliged to live as they did, and work and fight as they did, in order to

⁹²For more detail on the Spanish colonial government's "Carib problem," and efforts to solve it in the 1750's, see Demetrio Ramos, "El problema caribe y la exploracion de las tierras entre el Cuchivero y el Caura," *Revista de Indias* 5,17 (1944):473-522.

⁹³"Dutch on Negro II," p. 16. The same writer maintains that Matteson had made the journey from Para to Quito with Pedro Teixeira in 1638. Edmundson, "Voyage," p. 64.

survive. Two of the key elements in this remarkable and long-enduring alliance between the Dutch and the Caribs were noticed as early as 1614 by the author of the report on a Spanish expedition from Trinidad which destroyed a Dutch factory on the Guiana coast, and found among its ashes:

a very large quantity of booty--axes, knives, cutlasses and other things with which they kept the Carib race at their disposal, whose daughters they used to marry.⁹⁴

Society on the Solimoes in the mid-17th Century

[insert here final section, making the changes explicit]

For several years (at least a decade) after the departure of the Spanish Franciscans, the peoples of the Solimões may have been free of any direct European incursions from either the Spanish or the Portuguese end of their disturbed realm of nature. But they were far from being isolated from European influences, which would be continuous in their histories from that time forward. The smallpox epidemic of 1648 (not, in all probability, the first) was followed by that of 1662, one which cut its deadly path from all the way from Maynas to Pará via the Solimões. The structure and texture of tribal life underwent during this time what we are safe in characterizing as drastic changes as the result of the severe and only slowly recuperable demographic decline caused by devastating, demoralizing, incurable and unexplainable epidemic diseases. Intertribal relations were certainly affected by the declining numbers of the island and várzea peoples --which shifted the balance of favor of their forest-dwelling neighbors, and drove the Omagua and others to defensive positions on the islands. But above all, the peoples of the Solimões had long since been made aware of the existence of the rare and invaluable trade goods introduced to the South American continent by European traders; and they were now obliged to reorient their economic

⁹⁴Cited in Edmundson, "Dutch on Negro II," p. 13.

activities toward obtaining them.

