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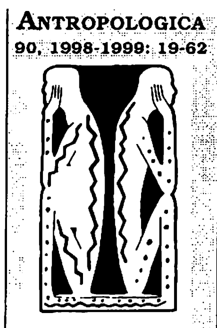


From Conflict to Cooperation: Spanish-Amerindian Relations on the Orinoco River, 1531-1760

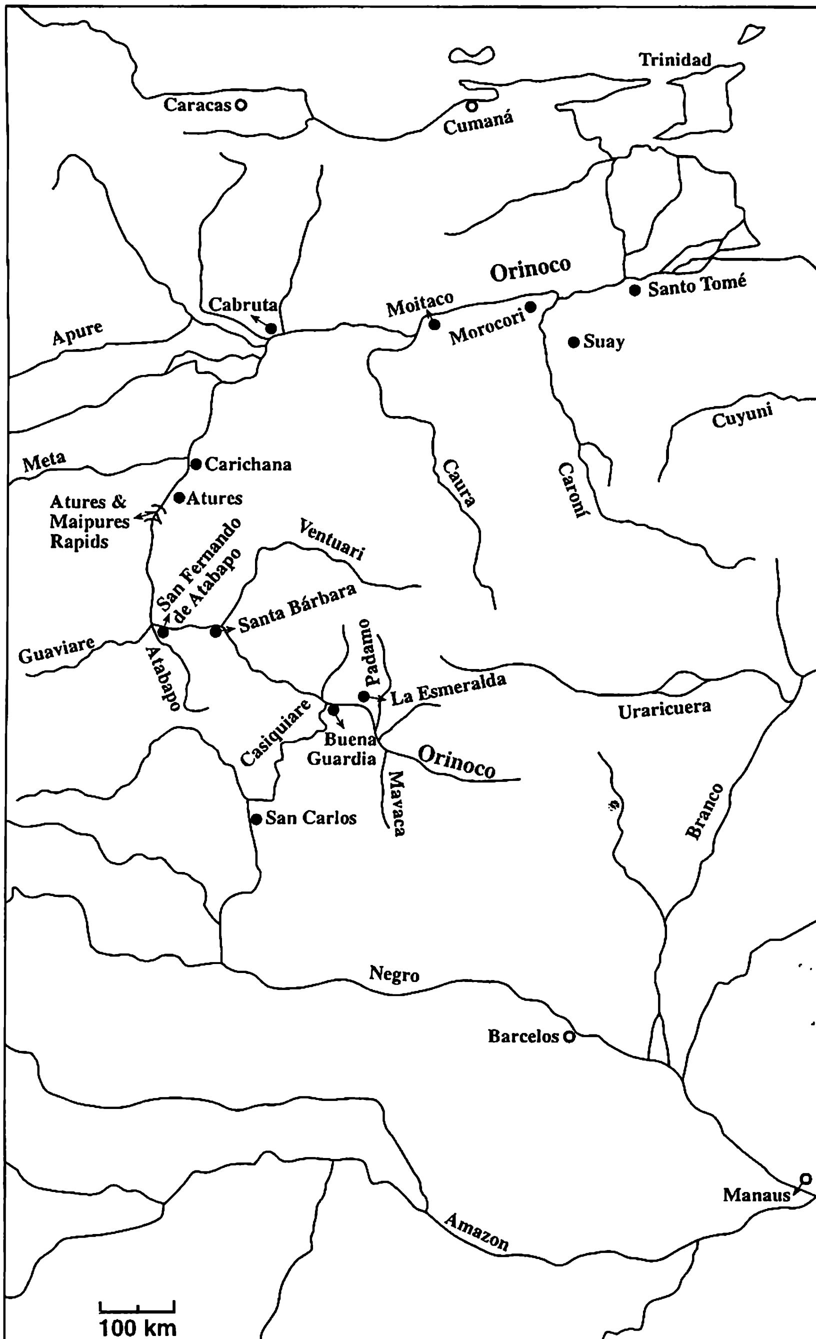
John Frechione

Introduction

When José Solano arrived at the Jesuit mission of Atures (at the base of the Atures Rapids on the Orinoco River) in February 1756, the region above the Atures-Maipures rapids was in a state of chaos: the Dutch and their Carib Amerindian associates were slave raiding from the east, other Caribs were raiding from the north, the Portuguese were infiltrating from the south, and Amerindian groups were relocating throughout the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro region—reconfiguring inter- and intragroup relations and engaging in escalating levels of violent conflict. As part of the Spanish Royal Border Commission, Solano and his force were charged with exploring and securing the Upper Orinoco River-Casiquiare Canal-Upper Río Negro River area (hereafter referred to as Upper Orinoco-Río Negro). Despite the volatile situation in the region (and, in fact, in large part because of the chaos), Solano was able to undertake his duties without resorting to violent conflict with the local Amerindians. When contrasted with the decidedly hostile confrontations that characterized Spanish-Amerindian relations in the Middle and Lower Orinoco regions, the activities of Solano's expedition were remarkable not only for the lack of hostile relations with the natives, but for the cooperation between the Spaniards and Amerindians that distinguished this colonial episode.

In order to appreciate fully the Commission's accomplishments in the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro, they must be placed within the context of the history of European-Amerindian relations in the Orinoco region and within the larger context of global geopolitics. This work considers the history of European-Amerindian contact on the Orinoco River prior to the arrival of the Commission (1531-1755), the Treaty of Madrid (1750) and the creation of the Royal Border Commission as a change in Spanish strategy toward the area, and the activities and interactions between Commission personnel and Amerindians (1756-1760).

Map: Orinoco-Casiquiare-Negro Zone



The Search for Wealth

Spanish interest in the Orinoco region was impelled by the same stimulus operating in other parts of the New World, with early explorations focusing on areas where adventurers felt they could likely "strike it rich" rather quickly. Relations with the indigenous populations were exploitative, with the Spaniards depending on the Amerindians for food and as sources of labor, but offering them nothing much in return. For instance, Spanish interest in the area of present-day Venezuela quickly came to focus on the existence of pearls (which Columbus had heard about in 1498) near the Caribbean islands off the north coast of the mainland (Whitehead 1988:73). By 1500, Spanish merchants were trading for pearls with the indigenous inhabitants of Cubagua and Margarita and, by 1501, a number of Spanish adventurers had received Royal licenses to take Amerindian ("Carib"[1]) slaves from the coast (Whitehead 1988:73). When the pearl beds themselves were discovered in 1512, the islands and nearby mainland were proclaimed "non-Carib" and, therefore, not to be raided for slaves. Because of the precarious situation of the small number of Spaniards relative to the large Amerindian population and the dependence of the Spaniards for their continued survival (food and water) on the Amerindians, the Europeans did not want to antagonize the indigenous inhabitants by raiding them for slaves. Thus, slaves to work the pearl beds were imported from more distant locations, such as the Bahamas (Whitehead 1988:74). Nonetheless, as Spanish presence and power in the area increased along with their need for slave labor, relations with the local Amerindians changed. In 1519, the Amerindians of the mainland were again declared "Carib" and subject to slaving. This led to a revolt by the indigenous inhabitants of the mainland, who killed over 80 Spaniards (Whitehead 1988:74 and endnote 4).

Initial European encroachment into the Orinoco River region was spurred by a desire to locate wealth (especially gold). Spanish attention turned to the Orinoco River in 1531, when it was decided that gold might "grow" very well in the Orinoco region.[2] This was the conclusion

[1] Spaniards adopted the use of the term "Carib" to designate Amerindian groups that they wished to portray as "...bloodthirsty, savage and cruel eaters of human flesh" (Whitehead 1988:1); that is, populations that needed to be "saved," but were too savage to be civilized through peaceful means. Thus, the Spaniards often assigned the designation in a political way to characterize groups that they wished to exploit, especially as slaves, without any cultural or linguistic basis. On the other hand, anthropologists have used the term to classify a large (Whitehead [1988:40] estimates that the mainland Carib population numbered around 100,000 persons at contact) Amerindian population that inhabited the northeastern South American mainland and neighboring Caribbean islands and shared a linguistic identity and some sense of cultural interrelatedness, but lacked any type of pan-village political organization (see Whitehead 1988:1-5). In the bulk of this paper, the term is used in the latter sense.

[2] The idea was that gold grew better near the equator, linking the color of gold and the glow of the sun (see Hemming 1978a:10).

drawn by Diego de Ordás, an important conquistador who had accompanied Cortés in the conquest of Mexico and who was granted the governorship of Marañón—which included the Orinoco (Tavera-Acosta 1954:36-37). Around June 1531, Ordás' expedition of some 280 men, 18 horses, and a mule (Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:216), entered the delta of the Orinoco River. They journeyed up river with great difficulty, passed the junction of the Meta, and were finally stopped by unsurpassable waterfalls (Aguado 1963 I:422; Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:219).[3] The expedition then retraced its route, arriving back at the peninsula of Paria by the end of 1531.

Ordás and those adventurers that followed in his wake were not interested in colonizing and settling the area, but only in thoroughly searching it in their quest for riches. Therefore, the Spanish strategy toward the Amerindians was to exploit them as guides, interpreters, and sources of provisions. Although chroniclers and historians vary on the precise details of this first voyage up the Orinoco (see Aguado 1963 I:409-431; Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:216-223; Hemming 1978a:11-16; Tavera-Acosta 1954:35-51), all recount a number of violent clashes between the Spaniards and Amerindians and the fact that the indigenous populations reported riches nearby. Ordás' large expedition depended to a significant degree on provisions that could be extracted from the Amerindians. For instance, in the second village (a Carao [Warao] community called Baratubaro [Hemming 1978a:12]) visited by Ordás, the Amerindians would not, or could not, provide food for the Spaniards. To punish them for this effrontery, Ordás lured about 100 of the Amerindians into a hut, had them put to the sword and, to make sure none escaped, had the hut set on fire (Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:217). As he voyaged further up the Orinoco, various Amerindians informed him of Lake Parime and the Province of Meta (Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:218), both interpreted by Ordás to be lands of great wealth. When shown gold and silver, the Amerindians consistently indicated that, although these did not exist in their territory, much gold (as well as food) was to be found in the region—in areas occupied by other indigenous peoples. It is likely, as Hemming (1978a:16, citing Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:218) implies, that the Amerindians were telling the Spaniards what the latter wanted to hear and, no doubt, to encourage the exploitative and violent Spaniards to leave their own territories as quickly as possible.

In 1532, Francisco Pizzaro captured the Inca Atahualpa and news of the great wealth found in Peru spread rapidly. This proof of the potential wealth still to be discovered in the New World further inspired the Spaniards (Whitehead 1988:78). Jerónimo Dortal, who had been

[3] Possibly the Atures-Maipures rapids (see Hemming 1978:13-15 and Tavera-Acosta 1954:43-44).

royal treasurer on Ordás' expedition and remembered the Amerindians' descriptions of the Province of Meta, acquired the governorship of Paria (the Orinoco) and, in 1534, left Spain to launch the second Spanish expedition up the Orinoco (Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:236). On the Paria peninsula, Dortal enlisted the services of Alonso de Herrera, who had also accompanied Ordás on the first expedition. Because of various difficulties, Dortal was not able to set off immediately and decided to send Herrera, with a force of 130 well-armed men (in nine brigs and one caravel for the horses) into the Orinoco (Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:236).[4] Herrera left Paria in May 1535 (Tavera-Acosta 1954:56) and journeyed to the multiethnic village of Aruacay (Heinen 1992:56) where he hoped to encounter provisions. Aruacay was the first village that Ordás had found after exiting the Orinoco Delta on his voyage. At that time, it was a very impressive, well-provisioned settlement with over 200 large huts, a chief priest, and nine subordinate chiefs (see Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:220-223 for a description of Aruacay and its inhabitants). Herrera found Aruacay abandoned (according to Aguado [1963 I:492] due to raiding by Caribs) and lacking food, so he crossed the Orinoco to the province of Carao (where Baratubaro had been located). Here he found another village, also abandoned,[5] but with a great quantity of manioc in its gardens and some corn (Aguado 1963 I:492-493). With this food at his disposal, Herrera resolved to await Dortal at this site and have his men build a new barge and prepare a store of processed manioc for their trip to the Meta. Some of the local Amerindians came to investigate the activities of the expedition, and friendly relations ensued for a time. However, possibly due to an act of sabotage by the Amerindians, Herrera became suspicious of the nearby indigenous population and took 300 of them prisoner (Aguado 1963 II:496-497). An effort by a large force of Guayana Amerindians to free the captives was defeated by Herrera's soldiers, but the attempt convinced Herrera to proceed up river without awaiting Dortal (Aguado 1963 II:499-502). During the voyage to the Meta River, the expedition engaged in a fierce battle with a group of Caribs—seemingly to punish these natives for their cannibalistic practices (Aguado 1963 II:503-506).

In addition to their desire to locate the Province of Meta, the expedition was obsessed with finding food. Therefore, they stopped often along the way to seek indigenous settlements where provisions might be encountered. In general, they were not very successful in this pursuit and suffered greatly—both from hunger and in skirmishes with

[4] See Aguado (1963 II:491-526), Oviedo y Valdés (1852 II:237-242), Hemming (1978a:47-49), and Tavera-Acosta (1954:56-60) for descriptions of this expedition.

[5] According to Aguado (1963 I:493), the Amerindians had abandoned this village because of their fear of the Spaniards, resulting from Ordás' vicious treatment of their relatives in Baratubaro during the first expedition to the Orinoco.

Amerindians (Aguado 1963 II:507-509, and 513). The expedition finally arrived at the Meta and, after entering this river, were beset by even greater difficulties. After searching for a considerable time, they found a village of 12 huts, well provisioned with food, about 100 km from the banks of the Meta (Hemming 1978a:49). The expedition stayed in this village for about two months, after which some 100 Amerindians launched a surprise attack (Aguado 1963 II:521; Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:240). Herrera was wounded in this battle and died a few days later. Alvaro de Ordás, the nephew of Diego de Ordás, assumed leadership of the expedition, which decided to forgo further exploration and returned to the coast (Aguado 1963 II:523-524; Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:240-241).

The negative effects of Diego de Ordás' treatment of the Orinoco Amerindians during the first expedition were already apparent in the second expedition. Aguado (1963 II:492-493 and 507-508) mentions a number of times that the Amerindians abandoned their settlements (clearing the villages of any useable foodstuffs) as Herrera approached because of their fear of the Spaniards which had originated with Ordás' expedition; and Herrera's voyage did little to lay the basis for improved relations with the indigenous populations.

Jerónimo Dortal made two more attempts to find the Province of Meta, but by travelling south, over land, from the north coast. The first such expedition, in 1536, ended in mutiny (Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:248) and the second, in 1540, reached the mouth of the Meta River and then returned to the coast after having done some exploration of the area (Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:264). It is likely that the Province of Meta described by the Amerindians to Diego de Ordás in 1531 (and the Province of Tihaos reported to Dortal in 1536 [Oviedo y Valdés 1852 II:247]) referred to the chiefdom of the Muisca (Chibcha) which was conquered by Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada in 1537 (Hemming 1978a:100).

By 1541, the legend of El Dorado had developed (see Hemming 1978a:97-109 for details) and expeditions set off from northwestern South America (Quito, Córo, and Bogotá) in search of this supposed source of riches, while exploration via the Orinoco River experienced a long pause. By 1549, political, legal, and humanitarian conflicts between the conquistadors/colonists of the New World and the Spanish crown led the King to issue new rules for conducting expeditions[6] and, in April 1550, to issue a royal decree suspending all conquests, expeditions, and exploration (Hemming 1978a:139; Useche 1987:26-

[6] Interestingly, these new rules included an order that all food consumed on expeditions be paid for (Hemming 1978a:139), possibly acknowledging the negative effect of the expeditionaries' practice of exploiting the native populations for provisions—by whatever means necessary—on relations with the Amerindians.

28). The decree prohibiting expeditions was lifted in 1559 and the search for El Dorado was taken up again.

One of a number of possible locations for El Dorado was thought to be in the Guayana Highlands drained by the Orinoco River (Hemming 1978a:148) and, in 1569, two expeditions headed overland toward the Orinoco from the north coast of Venezuela. The first, led by Pedro Maraver de Silva, suffered from an attack by Cumanagotos and subsequent desertions and never made much headway (Whitehead 1988:80); the second, under Fernández de Serpa, was ambushed by Amerindians near a tributary of the Orinoco, with de Serpa and 76 of his men being killed and the rest hastily retreating to the coast (Hemming 1978a:149). Another pause in the exploration of the Orinoco ensued following these disasters. The next recorded reconnaissance of the Orinoco did not occur until 1583, when Jorge Griego journeyed from Margarita Island to the Orinoco (Whitehead 1988:13). Griego's trading expedition was "unofficial," and it is likely that other such trips might have been taking place during this period (Whitehead 1988:81). Griego encountered numerous Amerindians from the Orinoco mouth to the Caroní River and named their villages and leaders. Whitehead (1988:13), who mentions Griego's voyage (citing materials from the *Archivo General de Indias*, Sevilla), indicates that it was a peaceful trading expedition and that Spanish-Amerindian relations were not hostile, "...despite the excesses of Diego de Ordás and Jeronimo Dortal earlier in the century" (Whitehead 1988:81-82).

The development of a fairly sustained Spanish presence in the Orinoco River region began in 1584, when Antonio de Berrío commenced his search for El Dorado in the area—a quest that would continue until his death in 1597. Berrío was the first European to enter the Upper Orinoco region (above the Atures/Maipures Rapids)[7] and to found a Spanish settlement on the river.

In 1579, Antonio de Berrío inherited considerable wealth and the governorship of El Dorado from Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, the uncle of his wife and the conqueror of the Muisca (Hemming 1978a:151). Unlike earlier expeditions to the Orinoco, Berrío set off from the Andes in the west, from the town of Chita where his inherited encomiendas were located. In 1584, he left Chita with 80 men, 500 horses, and numerous pigs and cattle and reached the Meta River (a major western tributary of the Orinoco) by February (Hemming 1978a:151). He then moved south over land and camped near the Guaviare River (which enters the Orinoco above the Atures/Maipures Rapids) to pass the rainy season (Useche 1987:32). During his trip from the Meta to the

[7] Berrío's route to the region east of the Upper Orinoco River was by land from the west, rather than by river from the east and north. He crossed the Orinoco near its confluence with the Guaviare River (Useche 1987:32).

Guaviare, Berrío encountered settlements of Achagua Amerindians, who "...were generous in feeding the passing expedition" (Hemming 1978a:151). However, the Achagua apparently tired of hosting the Spaniards and about 4,000 warriors attacked Berrío's camp. The Spaniards were able to repel this attack, and prisoners taken by Berrío told him that on the other side of the Orinoco there were large populations with much gold and precious stones (Hemming 1978a:152) and Lake Manoa.[8] In August, Berrío crossed the Orinoco and, with only 13 of his men (the others having fallen ill), explored part of the area on foot before returning to the Orinoco and travelling to near the Atures/ Maipures Rapids (Hemming 1978a:153). With his resources depleted, Berrío decided to return to Chita (arriving there by April 1585) to organize another expedition in search of Lake Manoa (Useche 1987:32-33). In March 1587, Berrío set off again into the llanos, with 97 men, over 500 horses, cattle, food, and six canoes. The expedition crossed the Orinoco near the Atures Rapids, began exploring the area, and built a settlement of 30 huts as a base. All of the expedition's contacts with the local indigenous populations were hostile (Useche 1987:33). After months of exploring the rugged area, his troops mutinied and Berrío returned to Chita in March 1589 (Hemming 1978a:155). However, these failures did not discourage the untiring explorer, who remained convinced that the route to Lake Manoa (or El Dorado) was to be found somewhere along the right bank of the Orinoco (Hemming 1978a:155).

In March 1590, Berrío left Bogotá (with 70 men in 44 canoes and rafts and 42 horsemen herding cattle over land) on his third and final expedition to embark from the west (Hemming 1978a:155). Once again, the expedition suffered considerable hardship while exploring the right bank of the Orinoco between the Parguaza and Suapure rivers—soon exhausting its supplies and undertaking sorties "...merely to steal food, not to find roads to the fabulous kingdom" (Hemming 1978a:155). Berrío then decided to head down the Orinoco rather than turning back up the Meta. On this trip (by raft), he came into contact with a number of Carib flotillas and had amicable relations with at least some of them (Hemming 1978a:157). It is possible that, at this point, Berrío employed a strategy that would become common among Europeans for allying themselves with Amerindians; that is, lending an indigenous group military support in its battles with other Amerindians (see Civrieux 1976[9]:14; Useche 1987:43-44). Berrío also established friendly

[8] As Tavera-Acosta (1954:67) notes, the Amerindians may simply have been telling Berrío that by descending the Orinoco, he would arrive at the ocean. According to Tavera-Acosta, *manoa* in Achagua means a great extension of water, or a lake or lagoon.

[9] Civrieux's *Los Caribes y la conquista de la Guayana española (etnohistoria Kariña)* provides an excellent chronicle of the events surrounding Carib-European relations during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. However, the lack of textual citations for much of his

relations with Amerindians near the mouth of the Caroní River (the easternmost major tributary joining the Orinoco River from the south) and left a small garrison in the village of chief Carapana before continuing to the coast (Hemming 1978a:156-158; Whitehead 1988:81-82). From information supplied by Amerindians, Berrío came to believe that the Caroní River was the entrance to Lake Manoa/El Dorado (Ralegh 1997:150). The expedition reached Trinidad in September 1591, and Berrío decided to found a town on the island to serve as a base for his venture into the Caroní. By January 1593, the construction of the town of San José de Oruña on Trinidad was well underway and, a few months later, Berrío sent his most trusted lieutenant, Domingo de Vera e Ibargoyen, with 35 men and 5,000 ducats of trade goods to the Caroní (Hemming 1978a:158; Whitehead 1988:82). Vera's expedition, which ventured about 100 km up the Caroní (Civrieux 1976:15), appears to have been quite successful and peaceful. Vera found that the size of villages increased as he moved up the Caroní into the Guayana Highlands—thus confirming Berrío's belief that El Dorado lay in that direction (Hemming 1978a:160). It is highly likely that the success of Vera's expedition, in the sense of friendly relations with the Amerindians, owed much to the fact that the Amerindians now received European goods in exchange for "hosting" the Spaniards. As has been noted, the Spanish practice of simply expecting to be fed and housed, or merely taking what they wanted, did nothing to promote amicable relations.

However, intra-Spanish hostilities worked against Berrío as well as against amicable Spanish-Amerindian relations. Francisco de Vides, governor of Cumaná, contested Berrío's rights to Trinidad and El Dorado and, utilizing his friendship with Morequito[10] (an important chief in the area), sought to undermine Berrío's efforts to reach El Dorado (see Ralegh 1997:151). In revenge, Berrío raided into the territory of Morequito and took many Amerindians as slaves (Ralegh 1997:152). Ralegh (1997:152) notes that "...Berrío for executing of Morequito and other cruelties, spoiles, and slaughters done in Arromaia hath lost the love of the Orenoquiponi, and of all the borderers, and dare not send any of his soldiers any farther into the land than to Carapana." While Berrío and Vides engaged in their dispute, Walter Ralegh, having intercepted information about El

information makes the work much less useful than it might have been. Nonetheless, many of the details he presents are corroborated by other authors (see, for example, Hemming 1978a and Whitehead 1988).

[10] Morequito, who initially had friendly relations with Berrío's expeditionaries, was executed by one of Berrío's lieutenants because of his involvement in this intra-Spanish intrigue (Ralegh 1997:152).

Dorado, arrived at Trinidad in April 1595 (Hemming 1978a:163; Whitehead 1988:82). Ralegh seized and burned San José de Oruña and captured Berrío (Ralegh 1997:134). Ralegh then ventured to the Caroní and established friendly relations with the Amerindians. Ralegh's approach was to treat the indigenous populations with respect: "He would not let his men take so much as a pineapple without payment, or touch any woman" (Hemming 1978a:168). Ralegh returned to the coast in mid-June 1595 and to England by December, where he published *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtifiul Empyre of Guiana...* in 1596.

While Ralegh explored the area around the Caroní, Berrío (whom Ralegh had set free) returned to San José de Oruña and, by December 1595, had ventured into the Orinoco again and founded Santo Tomé de Morequito on an island near the western end of the Orinoco delta (Civrieux 1976:16). During the Berrío-Ralegh episode, Vera e Ibargoyen had been in Spain recruiting for the next attack on El Dorado planned by Berrío. He reached Trinidad in April 1596 with a large number of recruits. However, many of these colonists were killed by Amerindians as they tried to journey from Trinidad to Santo Tomé (Whitehead 1988:83). Nonetheless, Berrío made one last attempt to discover Manoa/El Dorado. In 1596, he sent Alvaro Jorge and an improperly equipped expedition of 400 men to the Caroní valley (Hemming 1978a:176). All went well for the first four months, with the Amerindians feeding the expedition as it travelled about 120 km up the river valley. But then Jorge died, the expedition split under various leaders, and the Spaniards began abusing the natives. The Amerindians attacked and killed over 350 of their "guests," with the survivors escaping back to the coast (Hemming 1978a:176; Whitehead 1988:83). Antonio de Berrío died in 1597 in Santo Tomé, shortly after his son, Fernando, arrived from New Granada with supplies and reinforcements (Hemming 1978a:177).

When Antonio de Berrío died, Spanish-Amerindian relations along the Lower Orinoco and on Trinidad were, in general, hostile as evidenced by the attacks on Vera e Ibargoyen's recruits and the massacre of Alvaro Jorge's expedition. Ralegh (1997:133) notes that Amerindians from Trinidad who visited him "...came some with most lamentable complaints of his [Berrío's] cruelty, how he had devided the Iland & given to every soldier a part, that he made the ancient Casiqui which were Lordes of the country to be their slaves, that he kept them in chains, & dropped their naked bodies with burning bacon, & such other torments, which I found afterwards to be true." The Spaniards were also involved in the Amerindian slave trade along the coast south of the Orinoco Delta (Ralegh 1997:153). Nonetheless, Berrío had tested two strategies for creating mutually beneficial alliances with the

Amerindians: (1) providing certain groups identified as potentially important allies with military support in their conflicts with other indigenous groups; and (2) establishing trading relationships. These strategies would, however, be basically abandoned by the Spaniards and adopted by their European rivals as they contested power over the region.

European Rivalry on the Orinoco

Following his father's death, Fernando de Berrío continued the search for wealth—launching no less than 18 expeditions to the Caroní, Caura, and Cuchivero tributaries of the Orinoco—between 1598 and 1609 (Hemming 1978a:180-182). However, the intrusion by Ralegh had initiated a period of rivalry among European powers for control of the Guayana-Orinoco region. Throughout the 1600s, Spain's tenuous hold on the area would be attacked as the small and isolated settlement of Santo Tomé served as the only foothold of the Empire there. It is, in fact, remarkable that the Spaniards were able to rebuff the numerous attempts by the other European maritime powers in this endeavor. However, it should not be surprising that they faced such a difficult struggle. If one thing characterized Spanish policy in this and other areas of the New World, it was the lack of an effective, organized effort to explore and colonize. The Spanish conquest was very much the undertaking of private, wealthy individuals (viewed favorably, but not financially supported by the crown) (Useche 1987:25) who often fought amongst themselves—both in the legal arena and on the battlefield (for example, Ordás/Herrera/Dortal vs. Sedeño [see Aguado 1963] and Berrío vs. Vides [see Hemming 1978a:161; Ralegh 1997:151-152; Whitehead 1988:82]).

Santo Tomé, an "obscure outpost of Empire..." (Whitehead 1988:87) was founded as a base for the exploration of Guayana in search of El Dorado, not as a colonizing effort on the part of the Spanish crown (Useche 1987:42), and it was rarely visited by Spanish supply ships—leading to a very precarious existence for its inhabitants (Whitehead 1988:87). The Spaniards of Santo Tomé did not plant subsistence crops to support themselves, since they spent their time searching for El Dorado. They had planned to secure food from the neighboring indigenous groups through trade. However, because of its isolation and neglect by Spain, European goods to be used as trade items were rarely available (Useche 1987:42). Thus, in order to survive, the residents of Santo Tomé would often raid Amerindian villages to harvest the gardens and to take prisoners as slaves for themselves or for sale on the coast (Useche 1987:44)—perpetuating in this way their antagonistic relations with the Amerindians.

The Dutch would prove to constitute the most serious long-term threat to the Spaniards, and their strategy for relations with the Amerindians built upon the approach of Ralegh and typified the constructive and practical strategies employed by the non-Spanish Europeans in the area. Whitehead (1988:93) notes that the date of the first establishment of the Dutch in Guayana is unclear, but that it is likely that one of the earliest Dutch settlements was made in the Essequibo River in 1616. He also states (Whitehead 1988:92) that the Dutch were trading along the coast of Brazil by 1587 and that, in 1604, they reconnoitred the Orinoco while, at the same time, a large Spanish force under the governor of the fort at Santo Tomé raided Dutch plantations on the Corentyn River (Whitehead 1988:84; Civrieux 1976:18). Thus, the Dutch were apparently quite involved in the Guayanas before 1616. The Dutch came to the Guayanas not in search of El Dorado, but to procure trade goods (particularly fruits, sugar, spices, dyes, tobacco, and salt [Whitehead 1988:92]). The Dutch established trading posts, both in the interior and on the coast (along the Pomeroon, Essequibo, Berbice, and Corentyn Rivers), where the Amerindians could deliver foodstuffs, pottery, woods, dyes, and other forest products and receive European goods (especially metal tools and cloth) in exchange (Whitehead 1988:151). Unlike the Spaniards, the Dutch did not try to convert the indigenous groups to Christianity (Useche 1987:44), but rather promoted amicable relations through fair trade. In sum, the Dutch needed the cooperation of the Amerindians for their profitable commercial activities and had no desire to subjugate them. Because of their extensive trading networks, large population, and dispersed territory—and their ever-increasing antagonism toward the Spaniards—the Caribs became the primary associates of the Dutch in Guayana (see Whitehead 1988:151-171 for details). It is important to note that the Dutch in no way controlled the numerous loosely linked Carib populations. The European trade goods (including firearms) provided by the Dutch to the Caribs in their "special" relationship undoubtedly helped to enhance the superiority of the Caribs throughout their widespread trading network, but the Caribs acted in their own interests (which happened to most frequently coincide with those of the Dutch). The various coalitions of Caribs from different areas of their territory that were formed to attack Spanish settlements were initiated by the Caribs themselves (see, for example, Whitehead 1988:115-119). Dutch influence was greatest on the Carib groups inhabiting the Imataca-Essequibo area where the Dutch forts, trading posts, and plantations were located (see Civrieux 1976:10-11).

The Dutch relationship with the Spaniards at Santo Tomé, during most of the 1600s, was rather curious. They encouraged, supported, and sometimes participated in Carib attacks in a mostly covert war

against the Spaniards; while, simultaneously, carrying on trade with the Spaniards and, in this way, providing the residents of Santo Tomé with one of their few connections with the outside world (Whitehead 1988:87). The Dutch, as consummate merchants, appeared always more than willing to promote this trade, and it was the changing policies of the Spaniards at Santo Tomé that determined the level of this interaction.

By the early 1700s, the Dutch strategy had changed toward the Spaniards on the Orinoco. The emphasis of Dutch commercial activities was shifting from trade in forest products to plantation agriculture—a much more profitable enterprise—and Spanish power in the area was increasing as the Crown devoted greater resources to the Orinoco region (Whitehead 1988:105-107). In order to protect their plantations, the Dutch no longer wanted to antagonize the Spaniards and, at least in part because of this concern, by the mid-1700s, the Dutch were attempting to stem the flow of firearms to the Caribs (Whitehead 1988:165). In fact, rather than serving as trading partners to the Dutch and as the main force in the battle against the Spaniards, the Caribs' primary role in the Dutch region became that of black slave hunters and rebellion quellers, as the black slave populations that worked the sugar plantations escaped into the forest or openly rebelled against the Dutch (Whitehead 1988:163-165).

While the Dutch and their Carib allies agitated the Spaniards from the southeast, the French entered the Guarapiche River area north of the Orinoco (beginning in 1651) and allied themselves with the Carib populations there, while the English continued to try to establish a foothold in the region. Both the French and English also utilized strategies of amicable relations, based upon fair trade, with the Amerindians. Table 1, which chronologically summarizes the major European conflicts in the region from 1595 to 1717, illustrates the chaotic situation that existed in the area during this period.

During these years, the Spaniards of Santo Tomé were also continuously battling the local Caribs. Interestingly, there was one period during the 1600s when the Spanish strategy toward these Amerindians led to a relatively stable situation for Santo Tomé. This interval in Spanish-Carib hostilities began in 1639—following the destruction of Santo Tomé in both 1637 and 1639 by the Dutch and their Carib allies—when then-governor Diego López de Escobar, facing a desperate situation that threatened the very existence of the Spanish colony, proposed peace with the neighboring Caribs. To attract the Caribs to this relationship, Escobar utilized the proven approach of joining them in raiding a neighboring Amerindian group (Civrieux 1976:25; Useche 1987:51; Whitehead 1988:90). In 1642, Martín de Mendoza La Hoz y Berrío (nephew of Fernando de Berrío) became

governor of Trinidad, Guayana, and El Dorado and maintained the detente with the local Caribs, established by Escobar, until his death (in 1656 or 1658 [Useche 1987:52; Whitehead 1988:91]). This peace between Spaniards and Caribs was limited to those Caribs near Santo Tomé—those of the Lower Orinoco/Imataca-Essequibo region remained firm in their alliance with the Dutch (Useche 1987:51). However, with the Peace of Westphalia[11] in 1648, the Dutch/Carib threat from the southeast was likewise greatly diminished. La Hoz y Berrío also encouraged free trade between the Spaniards and Dutch. When this trade was barred and the peace with the Caribs broken by the new governor in 1658, Santo Tomé entered another period of deterioration (Useche 1987:52-53; Whitehead 1988:97-99) that would endure until the 1720s.

The Spanish Missions

Toward the end of the 1600s, the Spanish "conquest" of the Orinoco was being spearheaded by various missionary groups. During the 1660s, Aragon Capuchin missionaries aided by Spanish militia founded three missions in the northern llanos (Guarapiche area), but these were all destroyed during a Carib-led rebellion of Amerindians (with French support) between 1669 and 1673 (Whitehead 1988:99). Between 1665 and 1681, Jesuit missionaries, entering via the Meta River, founded eleven missions on the west bank of the Orinoco (from the Capanaparo River in the north to the Vichada River in the south [see map in Useche 1987:80]). However, in 1684, a large Carib force (assisted by the French and Dutch [Civrieux 1976:38-39]) destroyed these missions and continued to harass the Jesuits in their missionizing attempts until the end of the century (Useche 1987:54-81).

By 1700, the Caribs (supported by their European allies) were lords of the Orinoco River (Whitehead 1988:103). At the same time, Santo Tomé (more than 100 years after its foundation) was for all purposes in a state of ruin (Whitehead 1988:107), with the few soldiers stationed there lacking food and clothing and with its artillery inoperable (Civrieux 1976:42). This situation—characterized by relatively little activity on the part of the Spaniards in Guayana—would continue for the first two decades of the 1700s (Useche 1987:88; Whitehead 1988:106).

However, geopolitical changes in Europe and the ascent of Philip V to power in 1713 launched Spain into a new epoch characterized by relatively more efficient and competent government. Specifically for the

[11] Under the Peace of Westphalia, Spain and Holland agreed to respect each others' colonies in the Guayana area (Civrieux 1976:28; Whitehead 1988:91).

Table 1
Chronology of Conflict Among European Rivals in Orinoco Region: 1595-1717

Year	Incident(s)	Source(s)
1595	English (under Walter Ralegh) capture and burn San José de Oruña on Trinidad and take Antonio de Berrió prisoner.	Hemming 1978a: 163-166
1604	Dutch reconnoiter Orinoco to locate site for a colony. Spaniards from Santo Tomé raid Dutch plantation and fort on Corentyn River.	Civrieux 1976:18 Whitehead 1988:84
1613-1615	Spaniards from Santo Tomé attack Dutch settlements on Corentyn and Essequibo (the latter having been established in 1613) as well as English forts on the Arature, Barima, and Mazaruni rivers.	Civrieux 1976:19 Whitehead 1988:85
1616	Dutch, under Captain Groenewagen, establish new settlement on Essequibo River.	Whitehead 1988:93
1617-1618	Ralegh returns to Trinidad and sends Keymis with 500 troops to Santo Tomé. Keymis takes Santo Tomé on 1 January 1618. A small group of Spaniards survive attack and escape to Caroní and take part in the rebuilding of Santo Tomé later in 1618.	Civrieux 1976:20-21 Whitehead 1988:86-87
1619	Fernando de Berrio (son of Antonio), Governor of Trinidad, Guayana, and El Dorado, sends troops to the Barima River to punish Caribs who attacked Santo Tomé in August. Most of these troops are captured by English pirates near the mouth of the Orinoco River.	Whitehead 1988:87
1623	Dutch (Groenewagen) build fort of Kijkoveral on an island in the Essequibo River.	Civrieux 1976:22
1629	Dutch, English, and Caribs attack Santo Tomé. The town is abandoned by the Spaniards and burned—either by the invaders or by the Spaniards themselves.	Civrieux 1976:22-23 Whitehead 1988:88

Table 1 (Cont.)

Year	Incident(s)	Source(s)
1631	Spaniards begin to rebuild Santo Tomé in a different location—further up the Orinoco, closer to the mouth of the Caroní River, near the Usupamo.	Civrieux 1976:23 Whitehead 1988:88
1637	Santo Tomé (at its new site) is destroyed by a Carib/Dutch attack. The surviving Spaniards retreat to the Sierra Imataca area.	Civrieux 1976:24 Whitehead 1988:88-89
1638-1639	Spaniards rebuild Santo Tomé at still another site; this time, three leagues up the Caroní. In July 1639, a Dutch/Carib force destroys this settlement.	Civrieux 1976:24-25 Whitehead 1988:90
1642	Santo Tomé is rebuilt at Usupamo.	Civrieux 1976:26
1643	French begin colonization of Cayenne (in present-day French Guiana).	Civrieux 1976:27
1646	Dutch drive the French from Cayenne.	Civrieux 1976:27
1648	Spain and Holland sign the Peace of Westphalia, whereby they agree to respect each others' colonies in the Guayana area.	Civrieux 1976:28 Whitehead 1988:91
1651	French enter Guarapiche River region north of the Orinoco, ally themselves with the Caribs there, and found a mission.	Civrieux 1976:29 Whitehead 1988:96
1656	French found fort at Ovantique (on mainland in the Gulf of Paria) and raid Spanish settlements on the northern llanos with their Carib allies. At the end of the year, a Spanish force from Cumaná overruns the French fort.	Civrieux 1976:30-31 Whitehead 1988:97
1657	Portuguese settle near the confluence of the Negro and Amazon rivers. Dutch break the Peace of Westphalia by founding settlements on the Moruca and Pomeroon rivers.	Useche 1987:86 Pérez 1988:429 Civrieux 1976:31-32
1658	Dutch/Caribs raid Santo Tomé.	Whitehead 1988:91

Table 1 (Cont.)

Year	Incident(s)	Source(s)
1661	Portuguese abandon their settlement on the Negro River.	Pérez 1988:429
1664	English sack Santo Tomé.	Civrieux 1976:35 Whitehead 1988:99
1665	English attack the Dutch fort on the Pomeroon River.	Civrieux 1976:35
1666	Spaniards destroy the Dutch fort on the Pomeroon.	Civrieux 1976:36
1669	Portuguese found a fort on the Negro and begin acquiring slaves from the Upper Negro-Casiquiare-Upper Orinoco area through their trading partners, the Manaus.	Useche 1987:87
1670	French/Caribs attack the Dutch as they rebuild the fort on the Pomeroon.	Civrieux 1976:36
1673-1674	Caribs/French stage hit-and-run raids on Spanish settlements in northern llanos.	Civrieux 1976:36-37 Whitehead 1988:100
1679	Dutch/Caribs attack Santo Tomé.	Civrieux 1976:38
1682	French/Caribs overrun Santo Tomé, taking the governor prisoner.	Civrieux 1976:38 Whitehead 1988:101
1685	French/Caribs level Santo Tomé.	Civrieux 1976:39
1687	French return to Cayenne.	Civrieux 1976:39
1688	French fortify position on the Guanipa River and, with the Caribs, continue to raid Spaniards.	Whitehead 1988:102
1690	French attempt to install a base in the mouth of the Pomeroon, but Dutch harassment leads them to abandon this plan.	Civrieux 1976:40
1717	French attempt to reoccupy the fort at Ovantique, but a Spanish force from Cumaná quickly destroys it.	Civrieux 1976:42 Whitehead 1988:107

Guayana region, this would result in a concerted effort by the Spanish crown—finally injecting required resources—to secure control of the area (Whitehead 1988:104-106). Moreover, by the early 1720s, there were signs that the primary barrier to the Spaniards—the Caribs—were becoming vulnerable. First of all, a Carib-led rebellion in the Guarapiche area in 1719 provoked a severe Spanish response. Between 1719 and 1726, the governor of Cumaná made numerous raids against the Amerindians of the Guarapiche and Guanipa rivers in order to pacify the region. The Spaniards were quite successful and, at this time, surviving Caribs began retreating south to the north bank of the Orinoco (Civrieux 1976:8 and 43; Useche 1987:91; Whitehead 1988:106). In addition, the Orinoco Caribs located around the Caura River suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Caverre (Cabre) Amerindians (who were apparently acting as an "ethnic militia" on behalf of the Spaniards) between 1715 and the early 1720s (Civrieux 1976:43-44; Useche 1987:91; Whitehead 1988:109).

Against this background, the Franciscan Observant missionaries, supported by Spanish troops, civilian militia, and Amerindian allies (Whitehead 1988:109), began missionizing in earnest in the Guarapiche-Guanipa area, the north bank of the Lower Orinoco and, to a lesser extent, on the south bank. In 1724, the Catalan Capuchins founded Suay on the Caroní as a base for future missionizing (Civrieux 1976:47; Whitehead 1988:109), which would actually not begin until the early 1740s. In 1725, Santo Tomé received major reinforcements in the form of 15 soldiers, 12 new 6-pounder swivel guns, and 30 families of colonists (Whitehead 1988:110) and, by 1731, the Jesuits were reestablishing their Orinoco missions (Useche 1987:97-98).

The response of the Caribs and their European allies to these Spanish activities began in 1729 when the Papal Commissioner for Paria and the Orinoco, Nicolas Gervaise Labrid, arrived in Santo Tomé. Labrid was a French cleric who received his commission as the result of an innovative plot hatched by the French to gain a firmer foothold in the region (see Civrieux 1976:48-50 and Whitehead 1988:111-113 for details on this intrigue). Labrid had to flee Santo Tomé because of Spanish resistance and was murdered in 1730—ostensibly by Caribs, but possibly by Spanish agents (Whitehead 1988:111). In 1730-31, missionized Caribs rebelled in the northern llanos area (Civrieux 1976:50; Whitehead 1988:113) and, in 1732, Caribs from the Essequibo region aided a Swedish-Dutch force that was moving against the Spaniards in the Upper Cuyuni River. A Spanish contingent repelled this invasion (Civrieux 1976:51). Then, in 1733, a large war fleet of Caribs (apparently including some Dutch) moved up the Orinoco and attacked the Jesuit missions which were in the process of reestablishment (Civrieux 1976:52; Useche 1987:99; Whitehead

1988:115-117). Carib war fleets returned to attack the Spaniards, and especially the Jesuit missions, in 1734 and 1735, but they were unable to dislodge the Jesuits (as they had done in 1684) or the Spaniards in general (see Civrieux 1976:52-58; Useche 1987:99-105; and Whitehead 1988:115-119 for more detail). Although many factors converged to stimulate this Carib action, it is likely that the Jesuits were the main targets because "...the Jesuit reduction of the Achagua and Salivá was seriously upsetting Carib trading patterns, since the trading superiority of Carib groups would have been directly undermined by the presence of missionaries among their trading partners, offering similar goods, apparently for nothing" (Whitehead 1988:106). The inability of this significant Carib effort to retard the Spanish advance in the long term marked the beginning of the end for the Caribs and the other indigenous groups on the Middle and Lower Orinoco.

In 1733, Carlos de Sucre assumed the governorship of Nueva Andalucía and the Orinoco and, faced with a situation where the Amerindians (particularly the Caribs) and their European allies again controlled the Orinoco region, achieved a measure of detente with the Dutch and the French by 1735—thus attempting to undercut the power of the Caribs (Civrieux 1976:56-57). Sucre also attempted to make peace with the Orinoco Caribs. He travelled the Orinoco all the way to the Jesuit missions on the Guaviare River,[12] offering the Caribs European trade goods (knives, axes, flasks of rum) in order to wean them from Dutch influence (Whitehead 1988:113). Nonetheless, with the now-long history of Spanish repression, the Caribs were unwilling to comply with Sucre and Carib resistance continued. In 1741, the English and Caribs carried out raids along the Orinoco and Caroní rivers, "...destroying mission posts, and then burning Santo Tomé de Usupamo to the ground" (Whitehead 1988:123) while, at the same time, an English force landed on the Paria peninsula, but were repelled by Spanish troops. In the following year, the English-Carib raiders again attacked along the Caroni, destroying Spanish settlements and Capuchin missions (Whitehead 1988:124). Moreover, although the Dutch relationship with the Amerindians had, by this time, changed to a great degree (based upon the shift in Dutch economic emphasis from trade in forest products to plantation agriculture), their mere presence continued to aggravate the Spaniards, who fundamentally became the aggressors in the conflict.[13] In fact, even though Storm van 's Gravesande (who became Commander General of Essequibo in 1743)

[12] On this voyage, Sucre passed the Atures/Maipures Rapids. Thus, he was likely the first Spanish government official to traverse the rapids in water craft.

[13] For instance, by 1746, the Capuchins (with missionized Amerindians) felt confident enough to destroy a "secret" Dutch forward post on the Cuyuni River (Whitehead 1988:124)—in the territory of the Dutch-allied Imataca-Essequibo Caribs.

encouraged Dutch expansion and action against the encroaching Spaniards, he was consistently frustrated in his attempts by the directors of the Dutch West India Company (see, for example, Civrieux 1976:63 and 67). By the early 1740s, the Guarapiche-Guanipa region was essentially missionized and pacified (Whitehead 1988:121), and the Spanish missionaries pushed forward along both banks of the Orinoco and in the Imataca-Essequibo areas—though not without resistance.

By the late 1740s, the relative success of the Spanish missionaries among the Amerindians allowed the Spaniards to focus once again upon the Dutch threat in the region (Useche 1987:127-128). As the Capuchins moved southeastward in their missionizing, they met heavy Carib resistance (with Dutch backing) along the Yuruari (a tributary of the Cuyuni River) and, during this same period, the Dutch and Caribs even attacked Santo Tomé (Whitehead 1988:125). The overriding strategy of the Spaniards was to found missions and populate them by capturing Amerindians through armed raids. This often led to further difficulties as the nonmissionized native population would seek revenge by attacking the missions and the mission populations frequently deserted (see Whitehead 1988:119-122).

Against this background of expanding Spanish domination in northeastern Venezuela and the Middle and Lower Orinoco region, word of a new threat to the Spaniards in the area began to emanate from the Jesuit missions to the west and southwest. The Jesuit Gumilla (1963:251) indicates that, as early as 1737, the Portuguese were raiding into the Upper Orinoco from the Río Negro for Amerindian slaves. These raids, undertaken by the Portuguese themselves or by their Amerindian trading partners, were seriously disrupting the already precarious situation of the Jesuit missions on the Orinoco.[14] Thus, in 1744, Manuel Román (superior of the Jesuit Orinoco missions) decided to travel south of the Atures/Maipures rapids to investigate the situation. According to Gilij (1965 I: 54-57), Román travelled with only one soldier and a number of missionized Saliva Amerindians in order to avoid inciting a confrontation with the Guaypunavis (a group greatly feared by other indigenous populations throughout the region) with whom Román hoped to make peaceful contact. Near the mouth of the Atabapo River, the tiny expedition encountered a large boat containing Portuguese from the Río Negro. They offered to take Román back to their settlement which, they said, could be reached by travelling solely along the rivers. Román accompanied the Portuguese and, after a long journey, arrived on the Río Negro. There, he met the Portuguese Jesuit Aquiles Avvogadri whose task it was to establish the legal status of the

[14] The continuing difficulties of the Jesuits in missionizing this area are apparent from data provided by Useche (1987:118), who indicates that although 19 missions or settlements were established by the Jesuits between 1731 and 1749, in 1749 only six remained.

Amerindians taken or traded for as slaves by the Portuguese. Román spent a number of months in the Portuguese slave camp and then returned to the Jesuit missions below the Atures/Maipures rapids after a total absence of a bit more than eight months. Román is credited with discovering the Casiquiare Canal, a natural waterway linking the Upper Río Negro and the Upper Orinoco and, thus, the Amazon and Orinoco systems.[15] The Spaniards now had proof that not only were the Portuguese trading for slaves in Spanish territory through Amerindian intermediaries, they were also violating Spanish territory themselves—though possibly unbeknownest to them, since they likely did not realize that they were operating in the Orinoco.

The Portuguese actually began their northward move toward the Upper Orinoco in 1657, when they founded a settlement (Taruma) near the junction of the Negro and Amazon to serve as a base for slaving along the Río Negro (Useche 1987:86). The Río Negro was considered "...the most lucrative source of Indian labour" (Hemming 1978b:439). At the time, the Portuguese were surprised to find that the Amerindians of the area defended themselves with firearms—probably obtained from the Dutch in Guayana (Useche 1987:86) via indigenous trade routes. From that time until the mid-1700s, the Portuguese and their Amerindian trading partners harvested an astounding number of "souls" from the Río Negro-Upper Orinoco zone. Useche (1987:111) notes that (according to information supplied to Manuel Román by Avvogadri) over a six-year period, approximately 12,000 Amerindians had been "registered" in the area—and this did not count those not appearing in the registers, nor those captured or traded for by the Caribs entering from the east in service of the Dutch. A source consulted by Hemming (1978b:443) indicates that, from the mid-1600s to the mid-1700s, around "...three million Indians were descended from the Río Negro alone."

The Treaty of Madrid

Such Spanish-Portuguese border friction involving missionization by Spanish Jesuits was in no way limited to the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro zone. Throughout the "borderless" interior of South America—from the Upper Amazon to the Guaporé River (part of the present-day border between Bolivia and Brazil) to the Uruguay River—the Spanish

[15] Useche (1987:109) notes that the Spanish were fully aware of the existence of this natural canal by 1740, when two wandering Portuguese arrived at the Jesuit missions and informed the Jesuits that they had arrived there from Portuguese territory to the south by an exclusively water route.

Jesuits were coming into heightened conflict with Portuguese slaving expeditions and settlers (see, for example, Hemming 1978b:409-443 [for the Upper Amazon]; and 462-474 [for the Uruguay area]). Primarily in an attempt to rectify this situation, the Spanish and Portuguese crowns signed the Treaty of Madrid on 13 January 1750. The Treaty recognized that lands already occupied by either colonial power would be retained by said power and that the boundaries would be established along the most conspicuous landmarks (hills and major rivers) (Hemming 1978b:452). The exact boundaries were to be determined by two groups of commissioners, one working from south to north and the other from north to south along the whole region where Portuguese and Spanish territories coincided (Ramos Pérez 1946:22). The Spanish commission assigned to determine the northern boundaries would travel to the Río Negro (via the Orinoco) and, there, meet a Portuguese commission to officially set the boundaries (Ramos Pérez 1946:23). Although the "official" reunion never took place, the Spanish Commission would enter the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro region, explore this area, and found numerous small settlements. Under the guise of its broad duty to establish boundaries in the Río Negro zone, the Spanish Boundary Commission in the north was charged with a number of other duties—fundamentally under the general rubric of the exploration and pacification of the Orinoco—that would occupy the commissioners during their stay in the region.

These "secret" duties (Ramos Pérez 1946:65-66) were not included in the treaty, but appear to reflect concerns of Don José de Carvajal y Lancaster (Spanish Secretary of State) that developed during the time between the signing of the treaty and the departure of the Commission. The first was economic: the search for and potential exploitation of natural resources—specifically cinnamon and cacao (the latter being the source of chocolate) (see Ramos Pérez 1946:67-75). The other was geopolitical: the expulsion of the Dutch. By the 1750s, the Dutch had made considerable territorial gains along the Guayana coast, with colonies from Essequibo to Surinam, where they were involved in plantation agriculture (Ramos Pérez 1946:77; Useche 1987:127-128). Their trade in forest products with the Amerindians had greatly diminished, and they now depended on the Amerindians (particularly the Caribs) to hunt runaway black slaves and quell slave rebellions (Whitehead 1988:151-153). Apparently, Carvajal y Lancaster felt that years of covert and overt hostilities on the part of the Dutch heretics, and their continuing involvement in contraband commercial activities and the Amerindian slave trade on the Orinoco, necessitated a response.

Spanish and Portuguese interests coincided on this issue. The Dutch had been a thorn in the side of the Portuguese in Brazil from the 1620s until 1654, when the Dutch were forced to abandon their colony in Pernambuco by a rebellion[16] of Portuguese settlers, Amerindians, and "runaway" black slaves (see Hemming 1978b:283-311). Moreover, by the 1700s, the Dutch in Guayana were indirectly disturbing Portuguese activities in the Río Negro area. At this time, the Portuguese were operating from the Lower Río Negro, trading with the Amerindians of the region for turtle eggs (to produce oil) (Pérez 1988:429) and slaves. Their main partners in the slave trade were members of the Manau (or Manao) Confederation (Vidal 1997:30), great travellers and traders who voyaged far throughout the region (Hemming 1978b:440). However, in 1723, the Manaus closed off the main trade route via the Upper Río Negro and began armed opposition against the Portuguese. Apparently, Dutch influence on the Manaus played a role in this change in strategy on the part of the Amerindians. The Manaus were trading slaves from the Río Negro area to the Dutch in eastern Guayana through an intermediary indigenous group before 1714 and travelled to the Essequibo themselves in 1722 and 1723 (Hemming 1978b:640, endnote for page 442). The Portuguese Jesuits found the famous chief of the Manaus, Ajuricaba, flying a Dutch flag from his canoe when they attempted to make peace with him following the start of hostilities (Hemming 1978b:441). However, peace was not made, and the Portuguese sent troops against the Manaus, ultimately fragmenting the confederation and ending its control over the Lower Río Negro by 1730 (Hemming 1978b:442; Pérez 1988:429; Vidal 1997:30-31). Furthermore, the Dutch entered Portuguese territory in 1746, while searching for mineral deposits, and clashed with the Portuguese in the Parima (Uraricuera) River region (Civrieux 1976:66). Finally, around 1757-58, the Manaus made a hit-and-run attack on the Portuguese—destroying seven settlements on the Río Negro (Anonymous[17] 1909:285).

The Spanish plan, in conjunction with the Portuguese (Useche 1987:128), concerning the Dutch was to locate and recruit the large groups of black slaves who had escaped from the Dutch colonies and to employ them in a covert war against the Dutch—basically in the same

[16] Because of a truce between Portugal and the Netherlands, military support to the rebellion by the Portuguese Crown was not forthcoming and the Crown played almost no role in the final expulsion of the Dutch.

[17] The cited document appears in Altolaguirre y Duvale (1909:257-305). Altolaguirre (1909:257) indicates that he received a copy of the document from the Marqués del Socorro, a descendant of D. José Solano, and that he (Altolaguirre) has edited it slightly. It thus may be attributed to Solano himself or, more likely, to one of the persons who took part in the activities of the Border Commission in the Upper Orinoco.

way that the Dutch had utilized the Caribs against the Spaniards (Ramos Pérez 1946:80-81). Moreover, the Spanish Border Commission hoped to establish peace with the Caribs, further undercutting Dutch power (Ramos Pérez 1946:82).

The Royal Spanish Border Commission, commanded by José Iturriaga, arrived in Venezuela in 1754 (Whitehead 1988:125). In addition to Iturriaga, the main commissioners were Eugenio Alvarado, José Solano, and Antonio Urrutia (see Ramos Pérez 1946:36-41). The Commission was faced with numerous logistical and political difficulties (Lucena Giraldo 1993; Ramos Pérez 1946; Useche 1987:131) but, nevertheless, managed to begin exploration and mapping. In August 1754, Alvarado left Cumaná for the Orinoco with an advanced party of 100 men (Whitehead 1988:125). Alvarado was to explore the Caroní River area, examine the situation of the Capuchin missions in the zone (and, especially, the gold deposits they were said to be exploiting [Ramos Pérez 1946:129]), determine the current circumstances regarding Dutch and Carib activities in the area and, most importantly, attempt to establish friendly relations with the Caribs (Whitehead 1988:125). Alvarado's explorations yielded a significant amount of information (see Ramos Pérez 1946:133-170) but, on the matter of swaying the Caribs to the Spanish side, Alvarado was generally unsuccessful (Whitehead 1988:125). After so many years of Spanish-Carib hostility, it appears that most of the Caribs were unwilling to negotiate a peace, even though a few groups were settled in missions by the Border Commission without force of arms (Whitehead 1988:125-126). During 1754, Carib groups from eastern Guayana, armed with Dutch firearms, attacked the western-most Capuchin missions (Civrieux 1976:83).

Iturriaga and the rest of the Border Commission arrived at Santo Tomé in July 1755 (Civrieux 1976:86). Working with the Capuchins, from the mission at Morocori on the Caroní, the Commission was able to convince a number of Carib groups to resettle at Morocori (Civrieux 1976:86-87; Whitehead 1988:126). In 1756, due to hostile relations between Iturriaga and the Capuchins (Civrieux 1976:86-89; Ramos Pérez 1946:185-188), the Commission moved its headquarters to Moitaco, a Franciscan Observant mission (located near the confluence of the Orinoco and Aro rivers). By 1757, with a recent injection of major reinforcements, equipment, and artillery, Spanish power in the region had become too great for any effective Carib resistance. Along the Middle Orinoco, Carib strategy basically became one of retreat, with sporadic attacks on the missions to free their missionized kinsmen (see Civrieux 1976:88-93; Useche 1987:133-149; Whitehead 1988:126-127); while, in the Imataca region to the east, the Capuchins were meeting with continued success in their armed incursions to capture and missionize the Caribs (Civrieux 1976:91).

While Iturriaga concerned himself with this decisive drive to secure Spanish control over the Middle and Lower Orinoco, he entrusted the duty of penetrating the Upper Orinoco to his subordinates. In 1755, he sent Juan Galán to the Atures Rapids to reconnoiter their passage and to gather provisions in anticipation of the movement of the Commission to the Río Negro to meet their Portuguese counterparts. However, Galán died shortly after his arrival in Atures (Ramos Pérez 1946:179) and, in February 1756, Iturriaga sent Solano[18] (in 18 vessels with 126 Amerindians and 13 soldiers) to the great rapids (Ramos Pérez 1946:183).

Solano in the Upper Orinoco: 1756-1760

From 1531 to the early 1750s, Spanish relations with the Amerindians in the Orinoco region were characterized by exploitation and general hostility. The Spaniards were able, at times, to establish relatively amicable relations with some indigenous groups (principally with the Arawaks—and even with the Caribs of the Caura region from 1629 to 1658), but these were exceptions rather than the rule. For most of this period, the Spaniards and Amerindians were engaged in an ongoing war, punctuated by numerous bloody battles. This history of hostile relations in the Middle and Lower Orinoco region stands in sharp contrast to the nonviolent and relatively cooperative relations between the Solano expedition and the Amerindians in the Upper Orinoco region.

This difference was likely due to a complex of interrelated factors. First of all, one of the objectives of the Border Commission was to attempt to establish peaceful relations with the Amerindians in order to win them to the Spanish side in the Spaniards' battle with competing European powers for sovereignty over the region (Ramos Pérez 1946:82).[19] In addition, and due in large part to the activities of the competing European powers, the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro area was in a state of chaos, with the Spanish Jesuits pushing in from the north and west, the Portuguese from the south, and the Dutch from the east. This European competition was provoking considerable migration within the region by Amerindian populations as alliances with the different European powers and among the natives themselves shifted, thereby intensifying inter- and intraethnic group conflict (Vidal 1997:35). Clearly, the Amerindians also were open to the possibility of relatively peaceful regional stabilization. Finally, the character of José Solano as a diplomat seems to have been particularly well-suited to the

[18] At the time, Solano was nearing his 30th birthday (Ramos Pérez 1946:39).

[19] Although the orders from Carvajal y Lancaster referred specifically to the Caribs, it obviously reflected an underlying strategy that could be applied to other indigenous groups.

task. His ability to overcome obstacles in carrying out his duties and his facility in mediating between the Spaniards and Amerindians and between Amerindian polities are remarkable, given the context of the situation.

On his way to the Atures/Maipures rapids, Solano suffered the desertion of many of his Amerindians and soldiers as well as the loss of food supplies at the Carichana Rapids, but was able to recapture some of the deserters and continue his voyage (Ramos Pérez 1946:203-294). In Carichana (located near the confluence of the Meta and Orinoco), Solano was informed by the Superior of the Jesuit missions, Padre Lubian, and by the captain of the mission's troops, Juan Bonalde, that he could not surmount the rapids in the large boats in which he was travelling, and that the Amerindians controlling the rapids were very warlike and would resist him (Anonymous 1909:266). Upon arriving at the Mission of Atures a few days later, this warning was reiterated to Solano by the Jesuit missionary, Padre Olmo, and the head of the Spanish soldiers at the mission (Anonymous 1909:266-267).

Solano's first concern at Atures was lack of food. Therefore, on 18 March 1756, he sent two of his large boats to seek supplies in the Jesuit missions on the Meta River (Ramos Pérez 1946:204-205). Solano, however, wasted no time in investigating the passage of the rapids. Because the Ature Amerindians of the mission would not willingly attempt the traversal of the rapids (at least in the company of a European), Solano set out in one of his large boats and some canoes with 200 Amerindians under the pretext of going hunting on the other side of the river. He managed to convince the Ature to scale the first part of the rapids to avoid a time-consuming portage. Having accomplished this, Solano was able to maintain the impetus among the Amerindians and, by passing over one after another of the many cascades that comprised the rapids, after three and one half days (28 March 1756) arrived above the Atures Rapids (Anonymous 1909:267). Solano then decided that he would attempt to pass the Maipures Rapids. However, "...in this case [the Maipures Rapids] the most important obstacle was not the rocks of the river, but the attitude of the warlike Indians of chief Crucero [Cruzero]" (Ramos Pérez 1946:212).

Cruzero and the Guaypunavis

Cruzero was headman of a group of Guaypunavis who inhabited the village of Maracoa at the mouth of the Atabapo River (Ramos Pérez 1946:299). The Guaypunavis were the most feared and warlike of the indigenous groups in the Upper Orinoco (Useche 1987:152). They were recent arrivals to the mainstream of the Orinoco, having moved there from the Inírida River (Gilij 1965, I:55; Humboldt 1821:205) or the Río

Negro (Vidal 1997:35, footnote 8) during the early 1740s under the headman Macápu. In what appears to have been a bloody war of expansion (linked to slave raiding), by the mid-1750s, the Guaypunavis headed a confederation—partly based on firearms obtained from the Portuguese in exchange for Amerindian slaves (Ramos Pérez 1946:293)—over a great number of indigenous populations from the Atures Rapids in the north to the headwaters of the Ventuari River and its tributaries as well as the lower courses of the Atabapo, Guaviare, Inirida, and Vichada Rivers (Anonymous 1909:276). During the late 1740s, they attacked the Jesuit missions a number of times to acquire slaves for trading (Ramos Pérez 1946:293-294; Useche 1987:116). However, by the time Solano arrived at the Mission of Atures, the Guaypunavis under Cruzero appear to have adopted a less hostile attitude toward the Jesuits (Gilij 1965, III:104; Humboldt 1821:208), principally due to the pressure they were experiencing from the Manitivitana (or Maripisana) Amerindians from the Casiquiare Canal-Río Negro region (who presumably were slave raiding for the Portuguese [Humboldt 1821:208]).[20]

In the area between the Atures and Maipures rapids, Solano met with Cruzero who, at first, was not in favor of the Spaniards' plan to cross his territory to enter the Portuguese possessions on the Río Negro (Anonymous 1909:268; Ramos Pérez 1946:212). Cruzero told Solano of the mistreatment that the Guaypunavis had suffered at the hands of the Spaniards. But by making the curious argument that the Border Commission personnel were "Spaniards of the King" and different from the Spaniards settled on the Orinoco, Solano was able to obtain Cruzero's assistance (in the form of food and rowers) for the Commission, and he informed Iturriaga of this success (Anonymous 1909:268; Ramos Pérez 1946:212). Iturriaga, however, was not yet prepared to attempt the passage of the rapids[21] and ordered Solano to meet him in Moitaco to discuss their plans (Anonymous 1909:268).

Solano joined Iturriaga in Moitaco and, on 7 December 1756, the Commission moved up the Orinoco to Cabruta (a Jesuit mission), where Iturriaga immediately clashed with the Jesuits—accusing them of not providing the necessary support for the Royal Border Commission (Ramos Pérez 1946:218-219).[22] Iturriaga and Solano agreed that Solano

[20] A force of more than 200 Manitivitanas (Maripisanas), Amuizanas, and Guaypunavis (under the leadership of Inao) attacked the Mission of Atures in 1750 (Pérez 1988:432; Vidal 1997:35).

[21] While Solano was reconnoitering the Atures/Maipures rapids, Iturriaga was occupied with the campaign against the Caribs and encountering considerable difficulties because of the deterioration of his relations with the Capuchin and Franciscan Observant missionaries (see Civrieux 1976:86-92).

[22] During this period, Spanish and Portuguese resentment of the Jesuits—who were considered to be growing rich from their missions and suspected of obstructing the Treaty of

should proceed to Bogota to seek an order from the Viceroy instructing the captain of the Jesuit missions' troops to obey Iturriaga and to solicit provisions from the Viceroy (Ramos Pérez 1946:218). Before leaving for Bogotá, Solano returned to the Mission of Atures because it was feared that the Amerindians were planning a general attack against the Jesuit missions (Anonymous 1909:269-270). This proved to be a false alarm and, in February 1757, Solano left Atures for Bogotá via the Meta River. This trip was quite successful and Solano returned to Cabruta with provisions and funds in January 1758 (Ramos Pérez 1946:229-232). In Cabruta, Solano was informed by Iturriaga that the latter had not proceeded to the Atures/Maipures rapids during Solano's absence because Cruzero had broken the peace negotiated by Solano and, additionally, because the Portuguese commission[23] had already left Maríva [Barcelos] (the agreed-upon meeting point of the Spanish and Portuguese commissioners on the Río Negro) (Anonymous 1909:271).

Solano arrived again at the Mission of Atures on 24 February 1758, faced with the possibility that his earlier efforts to gain the cooperation of the Guaypunavis had been undermined. However, Cruzero's breaking of the peace appears to have been an exaggeration stimulated by the fears of the Spaniards. Rather than violating the "peace" through armed attacks, Cruzero had gathered a large force of warriors (Ramos Pérez 1946:296) which the Jesuits and Spaniards assumed augured a military campaign against them. Although this buildup might have been due, in part, to Cruzero's distrust of the Spaniards, it seems to have been more directly related to the threat represented by the migration of other indigenous groups into the area. At this time, some Irruminabis, who had occupied the Portuguese Carmelite missions on the Río Negro, deserted the missions and were moving north (Ramos Pérez 1946:296). In the process of their expansion, the Guaypunavis had never been able to dominate the indigenous groups of the Casiquiare-Río Negro (ostensibly because of the support provided to the latter by the Portuguese) (Anonymous 1909:283) and were in a constant state of warfare with these southern groups—especially the Manitivitanas (Humboldt 1821:207, 210).

At the beginning of March 1758, Solano (with only 21 Amerindian rowers and 11 soldiers) traversed the Atures-Maipures rapids and

Madrid—was reaching a peak (Ramos Pérez 1946:255-257). While Iturriaga's Commission was active on the Orinoco, the attempts of the Boundary Commission in the south had lead to violent conflict between the Spanish-Portuguese and the Amerindians of the Jesuit's Seven Peoples missions—located to the east of the Uruguay River (see Hemming 1978b:462-486 for details).

[23] The Portuguese Commission under the governor of Maranhão-Pará, Mendonça Furtado, set off in October 1754 for Mariva [Barcelos] (Hemming 1978b:459-460). They spent 1755 and 1756 there, but left in 1757 before returning again briefly in 1758 and then departing once again (Ramos Pérez 1946:373).

arrived at the port of Cruzero's village in his attempt to renew amicable relations with the Guaypunavis. Cruzero's reception was nonviolent, but quite unfriendly; he would not meet with Solano and demanded, through messengers, that Solano leave. Solano bided his time, asking for and receiving food for his troops. The Guaypunavis delivering the food informed him of Cruzero's intentions to kill, cook, and eat the Spaniards to avenge past grievances. Solano, by now familiar with the behavior of the Amerindians, called Cruzero's bluff and, after four days of standoff, Cruzero agreed to meet with him. Solano entered the heavily armed village, accompanied by only an Amerindian interpreter and two soldiers,[24] and told Cruzero that, above all, the Commission wanted peace and would not break this peace without provocation. He ended with a threat of his own, saying that, despite his desire for peace, if the Guaypunavis wanted war, he would unite his troops and oblige them. The Guaypunavis then recounted the "wrongs" done to their relatives by the Spaniards. As this long narration went on, Solano made a surprising move by taking a baby girl (possibly the daughter of Cruzero) from the arms of a nearby woman and cuddling and playing with the child, who contentedly accepted his attention. Seeing this, Cruzero quickly rose from his hammock and took the baby from Solano's arms and, now calm, said that the discussion would continue later. Solano, unopposed by Cruzero who held the infant, gently kissed the baby and then was led to the village's guest quarters by a number of Guaypunavi headmen. Shortly thereafter, the Guaypunavis began arriving at the guest hut with baggage and equipment from Solano's launch, thereby indicating that the presence of the Spaniards was, at least for the time being, accepted (this paragraph is based on Anonymous 1909:272-274).

Solano's performance with the baby may have represented a calculated risk on his part to prod Cruzero into dealing with the situation at hand, rather than dwelling interminably on a discussion of the past; or, having spent some time with the Guaypunavis and having observed their behavior in general and their relation to their children in specific, he might have used this knowledge in a way that would gain him more immediate acceptance—showing that he was much like them. Regardless of the underlying motive, the strategy appears to have quickly defused a tense situation. The next morning, Cruzero (accompanied by more than 100 warriors) went to Solano's hut, where he again began to detail the Guaypunavis' complaints against the

[24] After years of interacting with the Orinoco Amerindians, the Spanish had learned that the most effective way to make nonviolent contact with potentially hostile groups was to enter their territories without a show of force. Apparently, the arrival of small groups of Spaniards, rather than large troops, confused the indigenous populations and did not provoke an attack on their part (see, for example, Civrieux 1976:55; Whitehead 1988:113).

Spaniards. Solano, now accustomed to this opening ritual, repeated his pledge that the Commission wanted only peace, but would fight if necessary. Once these preliminary statements were made and the military power of the Guaypunavis acknowledged, Cruzero said, "yes, I have many valiant and well-armed warriors, but I want peace with you [Solano] because I see you are good" (Anonymous 1909:274). He ended by telling Solano that his group could stay in Maracoa as long as they wanted and that they would be provided with food.

With this success, Solano moved quickly; proclaiming the foundation of the new settlement of San Fernando de Atabapo and, in consultation with Cruzero, choosing a site nearby to build a fort—for which the cutting of wood began immediately. Continuing his astute approach in dealing with the Amerindians, Solano named Cruzero governor of San Fernando (Ramos Pérez 1946:299). When supplies arrived from Atures, Solano dispensed gifts to the Guaypunavi headmen and their wives and made sure to compensate fairly the Amerindians who had served as rowers (Anonymous 1909:283). Iturriaga, notified by Solano of all that had taken place, began making arrangements to supply San Fernando with cattle and, more importantly, with Spaniards to supplement the Guaypunavi population (Ramos Pérez 1946:307-309, 326).

It is important to emphasize that Cruzero's motivation for establishing peaceful relations with the Commission personnel seems to have been based more upon his concern about other Amerindian groups encroaching from the Casiquiare-Río Negro zone than with any perceived threat from the Spaniards. In fact, Solano appears to have arrived at a very opportune moment in the history of the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro region for the establishment of a "Pax Hispanica" (Ramos Pérez 1946:294).

The Manaus/Manitivitanas Threat

In mid-1758, a number of actions by other Amerindian groups in the region helped Solano to solidify his alliance with the Guaypunavis and to extend the Commission's influence over indigenous groups to the south and southeast. Around this time, seven Carinaca Amerindians from the Ventuari-Caura headwaters—the northeastern boundary of Cruzero's confederation—arrived in San Fernando and informed Cruzero that Caribs (aided by the Dutch) were planning not only to attack the Carinaca but, following this, to move down the Ventuari to engage the Guaypunavis (Anonymous 1909:284). However, at about the same time, Cruzero received notice, from an ally in the Casiquiare Canal area, that the Manaus (under the headman Inao) had attacked and burned seven Portuguese settlements on the Río Negro, killing many of the soldiers, and carrying off the artillery, arms, and

ammunition, before retreating to Manitivitana territory near the Casiquiare Canal (Anonymous 1909:285). The coalition of Manaus (with their captured European weapons) and Manitivitanas (long-time enemies of the Guaypunavis) posed a serious threat to Cruzero. Under these circumstances, Cruzero sought assurances from Solano that the Spaniards would assist him in any conflict with these groups, and the fort at San Fernando was quickly completed and reinforced with artillery and soldiers from the Mission of Atures (Anonymous 1909:285). Even with the fort and support of the Spaniards, Cruzero evidently remained uncomfortable about the Manaus and Manitivitanas. Therefore, unbeknownst to Solano, Cruzero sent messengers to discuss peace between the Guaypunavis and Manaus/ Manitivitanas. Inao and Immo (headman of the Manitivitanas) distrusted Cruzero and, consequently, Inao (who had been educated in Portugal and could speak and write Portuguese) sent a letter directly to Solano seeking permission to live in peace under the jurisdiction of the Spanish Crown[25] (Anonymous 1909:286).

Within the context of this indigenous rivalry for Spanish attention, Cruzero decided to be the first headman in the area to become a vassal of the Spanish King. Thus, in May 1758 with the pending arrival of Inao and Immo, an elaborate ceremony was held in San Fernando, where Solano presented Cruzero with a staff representing his status as "first chief of the King" (Anonymous 1909:287). A few days later, emissaries from Immo arrived in San Fernando and sought permission to meet with Solano. "Solano, always trying to reinforce the prestige and authority of Crucero...had them present themselves to the headman of the Guaypunavi, as a courtesy" (Ramos Pérez 1946:315). On the agreed-upon day, Immo, with over 2,000 Manitivitanas armed with bows and arrows (nonpoisonous) in 100 canoes, appeared in San Fernando de Atabapo. The Guaypunavis also adorned and armed themselves and, meeting the visitors at the rivers edge, engaged in a "sham battle" (Ramos Pérez 1946:315). This sham battle was real enough, however, to result in 14 dead and 78 wounded (Anonymous 1909:288). Over a four-day period of drinking and eating, the peace was sealed between the Guaypunavis and the Manitivitanas and, in early 1759, a similar episode took place between the Guaypunavis and Manaus (Ramos Pérez 1946:361). Inao and Immo[26] also submitted to the ritual of vassalage to the King of Spain (Anonymous 1909:290).

[25] Obviously, the actions and movements of these indigenous groups had much to do with the repressive activities of the Portuguese in the Río Negro zone (Anonymous 1909:285; Vidal 1997:37).

[26] An anonymous reviewer of this paper indicated that Immo did not submit to the act of allegiance and was, therefore, persecuted by the Spaniards thereafter. Although it is never clearly stated that Immo took the oath of vassalage, the cited text notes that "...Inao persuaded

With peace established among the Guaypunavis, Manitivitanas, and Manaus, Solano had assured a clear and relatively tranquil route through the Casiquiare Canal and Upper Río Negro to the Portuguese possessions on the Negro. As Useche (1987:155) notes, "...this reduction [pacification] of the Indians presents the difference of having been achieved without any more shots or bloodshed than those of the ritual [mock] battles, with which it was sealed."

The Manau/Manitivitana predicament had diverted Cruzero's attention from the Carib threat in the Upper Ventuari-Caura rivers area, and the Guaypunavis would take no action on the matter. Solano, however, informed Iturriaga of the situation and, in October 1758, a Spanish force left Cabruta to deal with the Caribs (Anonymous 1909:291). These Spaniards evidently dealt a considerable blow to the Caribs of the Upper Caura, taking around 800 prisoners (Useche 1987:147).

Settlement and Exploration: 1758-1760

News of the presence of Solano's expedition, the foundation of San Fernando de Atabapo, and the peace established among the major warring indigenous groups in the region spread rapidly among the populations of the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro and many sought assistance from the Commission in establishing settlements[27] under the jurisdiction of the Spanish Crown (Anonymous 1909:293; Ramos Pérez 1946:318-320). Although his main goal had been to ensure a stable passage through the area for the Commission, Solano (in accordance with the strategy of Iturriaga) moved to secure the region through such settlements in order to prevent Portuguese incursions (Ramos Pérez 1946:301). The local Portuguese, regardless of any official agreements between the Spanish and Portuguese crowns, were still quite active in their slave-raiding pursuits and probably represented the prime motivating factor on the part of the indigenous groups in seeking alliance with the Spaniards.

One group that would prove especially important in Spanish exploration of the Upper Orinoco (east of the Orinoco-Casiquiare divide) arrived in San Fernando in late 1758. These were the Makiritares (or Yekuanas), whose principal territory was on the Padamo River. They sought assistance in locating a site for a settlement, provided notice of cacao groves near their territory (Ramos Pérez 1946:320) and, possibly,

him [Immo] and finally, according to what D. Josef Solana later learned, convinced him..." (Anonymous 1909:290) to take the oath.

[27] For example, by early 1759, Immo (with a group of Manitivitanas and a number of Manaus) was founding the settlement of Santa Bárbara near the mouth of the Ventuari River (Ramos Pérez 1946:362).

informed the Spaniards of the supposed presence of runaway black slaves (from the Dutch colonies) in the remote reaches of the Upper Orinoco. Solano sent a contingent, under Francisco de Bobadilla, to investigate the existence of cacao and runaway blacks, as well as to reconnoiter the Orinoco-Casiquiare junction for building a fort (Ramos Pérez 1946:321-322). Bobadilla left San Fernando in 1758, probably in the company of the Makiritares, and travelled as far as the mouths of the Padamo and Ocamo rivers, returning with a positive report on the cacao (Ramos Pérez 1946:325) and information on the Casiquiare (Díez de la Fuente 1909:310)—but making no mention of encountering the runaway blacks.[28]

In 1759, with peaceful and cooperative relations established between the Spaniards and Amerindians in the zone, Solano moved to secure the southern boundaries of Spanish territory. In August, he sent Simón López and Bobadilla to the Río Negro (via the Atabapo-Temi-Pimichin route and not through the Casiquiare Canal) to found a fort at the mouth of the Casiquiare and to make contact with the Portuguese Border Commission in Mariva [Barcelos] (Ramos Pérez 1946:363-364). López, with the assistance of local Amerindians, founded the fort of San Carlos de Río Negro at the junction of the Casiquiare and Negro. This clear statement of sovereignty by the Spaniards was not looked upon favorably by the local Portuguese, who probably saw it as a strategy to claim rights to the region through physical occupation (possession)—a strategy frequently and effectively employed by the Portuguese themselves in numerous instances in South America (Ramos Pérez 1946:370-372). Bobadilla continued down the Negro to Mariva [Barcelos] where he learned that the principal Portuguese commissioner and his troops had left in 1758 (Ramos Pérez 1946:373).

In December, Solano sent an expedition, headed by Apolinar Díez de la Fuente, to identify a site for a fort at the source of the Casiquiare, to investigate the possible exploitation of the cacao groves (the existence of which Bobadilla had confirmed in 1758) and, in general, to explore the Upper Orinoco. According to Díez de la Fuente's (1909:306-317) account of the expedition, the Spaniards left San Fernando de Atabapo on 3 December 1759 (accompanied by Guaypunavi and Makiritare Amerindians), reached the new settlement of Santa Bárbara on 7 December, and arrived at the source of the Casiquiare on 31 December where they spent three days clearing a site for the construction of a fort. Continuing up the Orinoco, the expedition

[28] During his stay in the Capuchin mission zone (1755-56), Iturriaga had made plans to contact the black slaves and put into effect the strategy of utilizing this force against the Dutch (Ramos Pérez 1946:189-191). However, he never carried out this attempt and, although other plans to contact the runaway black slaves are mentioned from time to time, this goal of the Commission never was realized.

arrived at the first port of the Makiritares at the mouth of the Iguapo River on 7 January 1760. On 8 January, a group of Makiritares visited Díez de la Fuente, bringing gifts of food. Díez de la Fuente reciprocated with gifts of European goods. On 13 January, the Spaniards arrived at the Makiritares' port at the mouth of the Padamo River where a similar exchange of gifts took place, after which the expeditionaries were escorted to the village of Guazapa. On the Padamo, Díez de la Fuente held two meetings with the Makiritares: the first (14 January) in the village of Guazapa on the Lower Padamo, and the second (30 January) in the village of Guarena on the Upper Padamo. In these meetings, Díez de la Fuente told the Makiritares that the Spaniards were going to stop the attacks by the Dutch-allied Caribs from the east and by the Amerindians from the Río Negro. In return for this great service, the Spaniards requested that the Makiritares swear allegiance to the King and agree to live in settlements with Spaniards and receive the Christian faith. At both meetings, the Makiritare headmen responded that what Díez de la Fuente had said was good, but that they would have to consult with their other kinsmen before providing a definitive answer. On 1 February, Díez de la Fuente set out to reconnoiter the cacao groves of the Upper Padamo and collected some samples to take to Solano. He also made arrangements for the Makiritares to harvest about two tons of cacao beans when the fruit was in season. The expedition then backtracked to the Orinoco and travelled upriver for three days searching for ripe cacao (Ramos Pérez 1946:393-394) before returning to the Casiquiare on 12 February to continue work on the fort (with the workforce now supplemented by seven Makiritares). The next day, Bobadilla—who was returning from Maríva [Barcelos] to San Fernando de Atabapo via the Casiquiare—unexpectedly arrived at the construction site and, after resting there, departed on 15 February to carry his report and information about Díez de la Fuente's activities to Solano (Ramos Pérez 1946:394). Díez de la Fuente finished the Fort of Buena Guardia on 11 March 1760 and thus, in conjunction with the Fort at San Carlos de Río Negro, the Spaniards controlled both ends of the Casiquiare Canal and the traditional routes of entry into the Orinoco from the Negro.

While on his way to San Fernando de Atabapo to report to Solano, Díez de la Fuente met a contingent of soldiers and Amerindians, carrying supplies, on their way to reinforce the Fort of Buena Guardia and carrying instructions for Díez de la Fuente from Solano. Solano's orders directed Díez de la Fuente to return to the Padamo and encourage the Makiritares to begin founding a settlement, as soon as possible, near Buena Guardia and to further investigate the cacao groves while travelling to the source of the Orinoco (Ramos Pérez 1946:396). Díez de la Fuente left Buena Guardia on 16 March 1760 to

carry out these orders (Ramos Pérez 1946:397). In his account of this trip, Díez de la Fuente (1909:318-322) mentions an interesting incident that illustrates how the Spaniards had come to defer to the Amerindians. Around mid-March, a group of Darivazanis arrived at the Fort of Buena Guardia with a number of Amerindian slaves that they were transporting through the Casiquiare to the Río Negro as tribute for Cocubí. Cocubí, the son-in-law of Immo (Anonymous 1909:292) and headman of a large population of Manitivitanas, was assisting the Spaniards in their activities at San Carlos de Río Negro. Because the Spaniards did not want to antagonize Cocubí, and since they had not received instructions on how to handle such a situation, the Darivazanis were allowed to pass the fort with their cargo of slaves.

Díez de la Fuente arrived at the Padamo on 21 March and encountered the Makiritare headman Guazapa and a party of Irruminabis and Manaus who were visiting and trading with the Makiritares. From Yoni (or Une), a Manau headman, Díez de la Fuente obtained information about the headwater region of the Orinoco. Yoni told Díez de la Fuente that travel into the area was difficult because of the presence of a very bellicose indigenous population (the Guaharibos) and because the river became so small and shallow that it could not be navigated in canoes. Nonetheless, in compliance with his orders, Díez de la Fuente proceeded up the Orinoco (accompanied by some of the Irruminabis and Manaus) in early April. Three-days journey past the mouth of the Ocamo River (the farthest point reached on the Orinoco by Bobadilla in 1758), Díez de la Fuente discovered the existence of Brazil nut trees. The expedition passed the mouth of the Mavaca River and reached the Guaharibo Rapids (Ramos Pérez 1946:406), and possibly the Peñascal Rapids (Barandiarán 1979:26), on the Orinoco on 11 April. Finding they could not advance beyond this point in their canoes, they retraced their route to Buena Guardia, arriving at the fort on 17 April 1760 (Ramos Pérez 1946:407).

Díez de la Fuente returned to San Fernando on 24 April 1760 and received new orders from Solano to return to the Upper Orinoco to pacify[29] other indigenous groups and stimulate the foundation of new settlements. According to sources cited by Ramos Pérez (1946:410-418), he did not leave San Fernando until 3 August 1760 to undertake this work. During late August-early September, the expedition explored

[29] Although overall relations between the Spaniards and the Amerindians could be characterized as very good, there were some problems. Apparently, for reasons unknown, relations between Immo and Solano had deteriorated to the point that Immo was behaving less than cordially towards the Spanish (Ramos Pérez 1946:410-411). In addition, hostile relations still existed among many of the Amerindian groups, and word of attacks by the Maquiritares and Macapures in the Cunucunuma River area on villages friendly with the Spanish prompted Díez de la Fuente's visit to this little-known river basin (Díez de la Fuente 1759-60; Ramos Pérez 1946:412).

the lower reaches of the Cunucunuma River without contacting the sought-after Amerindians. On 10 September, Díez de la Fuente sent a contingent to the Padamo to oversee the long-awaited harvest of cacao and, on 11 September, he travelled to the mouth of the Pamoni River (a tributary of the Casiquiare) to seek food supplies and to convince a local headman (Dabillape) to settle his people near the Fort of Buena Guardia. Thereafter, he journeyed to the Fort of San Carlos de Río Negro to obtain a boat and other supplies and returned to Buena Guardia in mid-October. At the fort, he was greeted with the very disappointing news that the group sent to bring in the cacao had returned empty-handed. Seemingly, the Makiritares had harvested the cacao in June and, in the interim, many of the seeds had become too dry or had been eaten by animals. Díez de la Fuente did, however, receive some positive news when Yoni and Dabillape arrived at Buena Guardia to indicate that they were ready to found settlements there. Díez de la Fuente then decided to go personally to the Padamo to recruit Makiritares for a settlement at La Esmeralda (located to the west of the mouth of the Iguapo River on the Orinoco). He arrived at Guazapa's village on 28 October and, by 9 November, had returned to the site chosen for La Esmeralda with Guazapa, Guarena, and many of their followers. Construction of the settlement began immediately. The Makiritares were very enthusiastic about the new settlement and, by 14 November, had almost completed the large house of Guazapa. However, in mid-afternoon of the same day, Díez de la Fuente received orders from Solano to leave the area for his eventual return to Spain.[30] The orders instructed Díez de la Fuente to effect his departure in the best manner possible. This completely unexpected change of events greatly disappointed Díez de la Fuente. Nonetheless, he was compelled to follow the orders and, in order to appease the Amerindians and ensure that they continued their work on the settlement, he falsely told them that he would return in about two months. Díez de la Fuente returned to Buena Guardia the same day and arrived in Cabruta on 25 December 1760. The Commission personnel finally embarked for Spain on 1 July 1761, although Iturriaga remained in Guayana as Commander General of the new foundations on the Orinoco and Negro (Ramos Pérez 1946:424).

[30] The order to leave the area resulted from the death of Fernando VI (King of Spain) and the complications this event would mean for the Royal Commission on Boundaries. Iturriaga received the orders to not proceed further with the work of the commission on 19 June 1760 and, apparently because of his reluctance to abandon all that had been achieved, moved rather slowly in communicating the new orders to those involved (Ramos Pérez 1946:419-421).

Conclusion

Solano arrived in the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro region at an opportune moment for implementing a nonviolent strategy of rapprochement toward the indigenous populations—primarily because the Amerindians were, at the time, equally amenable to cooperative relations with the Spaniards. The Commission personnel were able to secure much of the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro zone in a period of less than three years (March 1758 to November 1760). This is in marked contrast to the situation in the Orinoco River area below the Atures/ Maipures rapids, where the implementation of essentially hostile and overtly exploitative strategies on the part of the Spaniards towards the Amerindians required approximately 250 years before a significant degree of Spanish sovereignty was achieved. As the Commission withdrew from the region, a state of sporadic Spanish-Amerindian conflict still existed in the Middle and Lower Orinoco zone (see Civrieux 1976:96; Whitehead 1988:127-128). Solano's expedition, with the cooperation of the indigenous populations, established at least eight settlements/forts[31] throughout the zone and carried out a remarkably extensive program of exploration. Regarding the primary goal of the Commission (the delineation of boundaries), although the Spanish and Portuguese commissions never met in Maríva [Barcelos] and the Treaty of Madrid was eventually nullified (see Ramos Pérez 1946:419-424), Solano's accomplishments fundamentally created the present-day borders between Venezuela and Brazil in the disputed Upper Orinoco-Río Negro zone.

In sum, this instance of relatively sustained contact without conflict in the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro zone is attributable to the fortunate convergence of the interests of the Spaniards and Amerindians in the region. Solano was thus able to gain the cooperation of the powerful Amerindian groups in the Upper Orinoco and to carry out his activities in collaboration with these and other groups.

Epilogue

Following the departure of the Border Commission, the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro zone entered a state of dormancy, with Iturriaga attempting to maintain at least a minimal Spanish presence in the region (Ramos Pérez 1946:421). In 1763, Solano returned to the New World as the Captain General of the Venezuelan Provinces contiguous

[31] It should also be remembered that from 1595 until the foundation of Suay on the Caroni River by the Capuchins in 1724, Santo Tomé was the only relatively stable Spanish settlement on the Lower Orinoco.

to Guayana (Civrieux 1976:98-99) and rejoined Iturriaga in consolidating Spanish power throughout Guayana. In 1764, the construction of the new capital (Angostura) of the region began (Whitehead 1988:128) and, in 1765, Manuel Centurión (a protege of Iturriaga and Solano) became Governor of Guayana. Centurión, with Solano's support,[32] completed the conquest of the Caribs and established "...an effective civil power centralised at Angostura" (Whitehead 1988:129).

In the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro region, a small military presence was maintained. By 1764, San Fernando de Atabapo had been abandoned, with the troops there moving to the Río Negro (Bobadilla 1909:323-324), and Bobadilla reconnoitered the zone to collect current information on and to investigate, again, the possibilities of exploiting cacao. He travelled to the Padamo and returned to Angostura in the company of a number of Amerindian headmen (Bobadilla 1867:170). In 1765, Capuchin missionaries founded a number of mission settlements in the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro region (Xerez 1909a:327-335). Díez de la Fuente finally returned to La Esmeralda in 1767 to reinitiate its construction (Xerez 1909b:341). These settlements were apparently to serve as part of Centurión's attempt to reestablish a real Spanish presence in the region and to link the Upper Orinoco-Río Negro area with Angostura. By 1773, Centurión's soldiers (with the assistance of local Amerindians) had opened an overland route from Angostura to La Esmeralda. The route went along the Caura to the Erebato, across the Sierra Maigualida to the Manapiare, up the Ventuari to the Cunucunuma and from there to La Esmeralda on the Orinoco. Along this trail, no less than 19 forts/outposts were constructed[33]—some of the larger ones being populated by Spaniards as well as Amerindians. Towards the end of 1775, the forts were destroyed in an uprising by the Amerinds, apparently resulting from the repressive treatment of the natives by the Spaniards (Barandiarán 1979:34-41). In 1776, Centurión was replaced as governor of Guayana and this Spanish attempt to secure and colonize the Upper Orinoco region basically came to an end. The only nonindigenous presence in the area from this date until the Venezuelan War of Independence was formed by a few Franciscan Observant missionaries (who had replaced the Capuchins in 1771-72) (Useche 1987:171).

As noted above, the Spaniards were still interested in the exploitation of cacao from the zone in 1764. However, as was the case with their proposed meeting with the Portuguese Border Commission, nothing ever came of these plans. The same can also be said about the

[32] Iturriaga died in 1766 (Civrieux 1976:101).

[33] Barandiarán (1979:34-35) lists 30 such "assistance centers."

scheme to locate and utilize black runaway slaves against the Dutch.[34] The Dutch were, in fact, first ousted from their colonies in Guayana, not by the Spaniards, but by the British in 1781. The British were then forced out of these colonies by the French in 1782, who returned them to the Dutch in 1783. The British again seized the area in 1796 and it was returned to the Dutch in 1803 under the Peace of Amiens. Finally, the British returned in 1804 and the colonies were officially ceded to them in 1814 (Whitehead 1988:170).

Between the late 1700s and mid-1800s, there was little significant contact between the Amerindians and Europeans in the Upper Orinoco region. The next major interaction period came with the rubber boom era (which began in Venezuela in 1860). As in other countries of Amazonia, the system of rubber exploitation and production[35] resulted in considerable acculturation, suffering, and population decimation for the indigenous inhabitants of the Upper Orinoco region,[36] but no long-term benefits for the development of the region. The boom ended in Venezuela in the 1920s and was followed by a mini-boom during the Second World War (see Iribertegui 1987 for a detailed analysis of the rubber era in southern Venezuela).

During and after the rubber boom period, the tropical forest zone of southern Venezuela was a true frontier area with little direct connection to, or control by, the capital. Although various laws were promulgated regarding the treatment of indigenous populations, these had hardly any effect, positive or negative, on the Amerindians of southern Venezuela (see Iribertegui 1987 for historical developments in the region). Even the paternalistic activities of the Catholic missionaries toward the Amerindians were lacking for most of this period. They were expelled in 1817 and did not return until 1933 (Iribertegui 1987:324-330).

By the mid-1900s, the largest number of individual Amerindian groups in Venezuela were to be found in the Upper Orinoco region. Although considerably reduced in number from the pre-Contact period, these groups were relatively removed from the decimations of slave raiding (after the late 1750s) and most were not incorporated into Western political or missionary spheres until recently.

[34] It should be noted that territorial threats to Spanish sovereignty in Guayana from the Portuguese, Dutch, and French continued to be of concern to the Spaniards after the withdrawal of the Border Commission (see Cal Martinez 1979 for information on the period from 1763 to the early 1780s).

[35] The exploitation of other forest products (such as balatá, chicle, and pendare) had similar effects on the Amerindians in the zone.

[36] See the fictional, but accurate, depiction of life during the latter part of the rubber boom era in Colombia and Venezuela in *La vorágine* by Eustasio Rivera (1924).

Abstract

In 1531, Spanish adventurers first entered the Orinoco River region in their quest for "El Dorado." In general, from then until the late 1700s, relations between the native Amerindians and the Spanish were decidedly hostile along the Lower and Middle Orinoco. In contrast, Spanish-Amerindian relations in the Upper Orinoco River area, beginning in 1756 with the arrival of the Spanish Royal Commission on Boundaries, were characterized by a lack of violent confrontation and were, in fact, distinguished by the cooperation between the Amerindians and the Spaniards in pursuing the objectives of the Commission. This paper examines the factors contributing to this change in relationships by considering the history of European-Amerindian contact on the Lower and Middle Orinoco, the creation of the Border Commission, and the activities and interactions between Commission personnel and Amerindians in the Upper Orinoco.

Resumen

En 1531, los españoles entraron a la región del Orinoco en la búsqueda de El Dorado. En general, desde entonces hasta fines del siglo XVIII, las relaciones entre los amerindios y los españoles fueron decididamente hostiles a lo largo del bajo y medio Orinoco. En contraste, las relaciones entre ambas partes en el alto Orinoco, comenzando con la llegada de la Comisión Real de Límites en 1756, se caracterizaron por la ausencia de confrontación violenta: por el contrario, la cooperación entre los españoles y los amerindios –en busca de los objetivos de la Comisión- fue la nota más resaltante. Este trabajo examina los factores que contribuyeron al cambio en estas relaciones interétnicas, como son la historia del contacto entre los europeos y los amerindios del bajo y medio Orinoco, la creación de la Comisión de Límites, y las actividades e interacciones entre el personal de esta Comisión y los amerindios del alto Orinoco.

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Center for Latin American Studies
4E04 Forbes Quadrangle
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
EE.UU.
<jfrech@ucis.pitt.edu>