Mission Villages and Agrarian Patterns in a Nueva Vizcayan Heartland, 1600-1750

Author(s): Susan M. Deeds


Published by: Journal of the Southwest

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40170027

Accessed: 05-08-2015 15:36 UTC
Mission Villages and Agrarian Patterns in a Nueva Vizcayan Heartland, 1600–1750

Susan M. Deeds

At the turn of the seventeenth century, a Nueva Galician bishop undertook an extended inspection of the newly settled province of Nueva Vizcaya. In reports to the king, Alonso de la Mota y Escobar wrote enthusiastically about the agricultural potential of the well-watered valleys and rolling hills of the Sierra Madre’s central plateau between Durango and Chihuahua.1 Despite the limitations of aridity, the alluvial flood plains and basin floors were suitable for wheat and maize cultivation with irrigation. Even grapes and citrus were being produced in the sandy soils. The semi-arid grasslands, dotted with springs, already supported cattle ranches. Numerous smaller holdings mixed crop farming and cattle raising. The most productive area was the Valle de San Bartolomé (today the Valle de Allende, in southeastern Chihuahua) where Mota y Escobar noted the cultivation of wheat, maize, and many varieties of fruits and vegetables along the Río Florido as well as the use of pasturelands for cattle.2 Livestock ranches could also be found along the Conchos, San Pedro, and Nazas rivers. These areas constituted the main source of foodstuffs for the mines of northern Durango and southern Chihuahua (see map). To the east of these rolling upland areas, the hot desert climate of the Bolsón de Mapimí dictated that land use be limited


Susan M. Deeds is assistant professor of history at Northern Arizona University and author of several articles on the ethnohistory of colonial northern Mexico. The author thanks Robert Jackson, Michael Meyer, Michael Riley and Cynthia Talbot for commenting on earlier versions of this article. She also acknowledges the support of a Northern Arizona University Organized Research Grant for research in the land records of the Guadalajara archives.
to ranching. To the west rose the western escarpment of the Sierra Madre Occidental with its 2,000–3,000-foot canyons. The productive land in that early mining region of Topia was confined to a few river valleys and isolated canyon bottoms where corn, sugarcane, coffee, and fruits were cultivated.3

It was not agricultural potential, of course, but silver deposits that first attracted Spanish settlers to this region, inhabited by Acalee, Xixime, Tepehuan, Tarahumara, and Concho Indians in the last half of the sixteenth century. They were followed by Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries whose task of congregating predominantly ranchería Indians, agriculturalists with no tradition of village life,4 was not only formidable but also crucial to the development of this Nueva Vizcayan heartland. Intentional or not, the missionary enterprise facilitated the most efficient organization of manpower in a labor-scarce region. Although this shortage meant that a partially free labor force of Indians, mestizos, and mulattos would evolve in the mines of the north,5 mission pueblos became a crucial source of seasonal agricultural labor, organized in repartimiento, a rotation system in which Indians were forced to work for Spaniards for nominal wages.

It has been demonstrated elsewhere that these forced-labor demands, exacted from a population suffering periodic losses ranging from catastrophic to moderate over time, played primary deculturat-

5. See West, The Mining Community in New Spain, and Ignacio del Río, “Sobre la aparición y desarrollo del trabajo libre asalariado en el norte de Nueva España (siglos XVI y XVII),” in Elsa C. Frost et al., eds., El trabajo y los trabajadores en la historia de México (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), pp. 92–111. Other sources paint a "not-so-free" picture; see, for example, the report from cabildo officials in Parral to the Audiencia de Guadalajara, May 15, 1681, Biblioteca Pública de Jalisco, Archivo Judicial de la Audiencia de Nueva Galicia (hereafter cited as AJANG), caja 3, exp. 9, and Cheryl English Martin, "Labor Relations and Social Control in Chihuahua, 1700–1750," paper read at the American Historical Association Meeting, Chicago, December 29, 1986.
ing roles. Here I look at another type of dislocation experienced by these Indian communities at the hands of Spanish landowners. Specifically, how did patterns of land use, land ownership, and land and water disputes limit the ability of these particular indigenous groups to survive? The historical relationship between the mission pueblos and Spanish landowners included conflicts over land, and these must be examined in conjunction with changes in the region's demography and organization of production.

Franciscans and then Jesuits began to establish missions in the area in the late sixteenth century. In the eastern portion, Franciscan missions congregated Tepehuanes and Conchos in the Santa Bárbara and San Bartolomé Valley region, while the Jesuits initiated their labors on the western edge. First they set up missions among the Acaxee and Xixime Indians who inhabited the mining district of Topia, straddling the present-day boundary between Sinaloa and Durango, and then moved into the Tepehuan and Tarahumara areas north of Durango by the 1630s. Congregation almost invariably followed the establishment of Spanish towns and the first landed estates. Missions were founded along rivers or arroyos with adequate water supply (close to Spanish landholdings when possible), and among the first tasks was the breaking of ground for fields (milpas) and the construction of irrigation ditches (acequias). Sometimes the right to divert water from rivers (saca de agua) was specified in land titles; occasionally diversion channels were registered later by the missionary. In their early years, most of the missions had adequate fields of corn, both irrigated and dependent on rainfall (de temporal). The missions of the central plateau also raised wheat and some


boasted vineyards and orchards. Several of the lower Tarahumara missions even marketed corn and wheat to the surrounding Spanish communities. In Topia, sugarcane and fruits supplemented corn production on mission lands. All of the missions maintained livestock. Although mission lands were communal, family units enjoyed the fruits of the individual plots they worked. Other lands, either part of the original mission grant or lands acquired later by purchase or donation, were worked by Indians assigned to this task without recompense in specie to support the mission (the padre and the church). Surpluses from these lands were sold to Spaniards; perhaps individual Indians sold surpluses as well. At least some of the missions had cofradías, confraternities dedicated to the cult of a patron saint, which owned livestock or land.

During the first half of the seventeenth century, Spanish landowners were much more interested in appropriating mission Indian labor than land. By the 1640s and 1650s, successive epidemics of smallpox and measles had contributed to heightened conflict among landowners over access to agricultural labor. Reacting to the initial...
disruptions brought by congregation in mission villages, and after a particularly severe epidemic in 1645, the Tarahumara Indians staged their first revolt in 1648. Other rebellions ensued in 1650 and 1652 after five years of drought, and they were followed by new epidemics.

Labor drafts and disease provided the catalyst for revolt in the Nazas River missions of Tizonazo and Santa Cruz in 1644. The short-lived revolt hardly alleviated the situation of the Tepehuan, Xixime, and Salinero inhabitants as their problems with Spanish society escalated to include conflicts over land and water as well. The non-Indian population was growing rapidly in this area around the mining town of Indé, with settlers acquiring whatever land was available. Among them, Felipe de la Cueva Montano purchased land adjacent to the mission of Santa Cruz. By the late 1640s, his overseer was planting wheat on lands claimed by the mission, and cattle from his hacienda were destroying village milpas. Even worse, water was being diverted from the Indians' ditch to hacienda lands with no designated water rights. Although de la Cueva, a priest, eventually was forced to stop using this water source, he had enjoyed the use of these lands for several years while the Indians were forced to forage for food.

He was aided by the bishop of Durango, Francisco Diego de Evía

decree of Gov. Luis de Valdés, Parral, May 20, 1645, AHP, r. 1648, fr. 14–16; Sebastián González de Valdés to Gov. Valdés, Parral, July 30, 1646, AHP, r. 1648, fr. 38; petition of Alonso de Medina to governor, Parral, Mar. 13, 1641, AHP, r. 1648, fr. 12–14; visita of Alonso del Castillo to Minas de San Diego and Santa Bárbara, June 27, 1646, AHP, r. 1646a, fr. 13–22.


16. Documents concerning the acquisition of land and land disputes in this area are found in AHP, r. 1648, fr. 20–21, 751ff; r. 1649b, fr. 816–19, 824–28; r. 1654d, fr. 1088–1213.
17. Pueblo de Santa Cruz del río de Nazas contra . . . Dn. Phelipe de la Cueba Montaño, Parral, July 12, 1649, AHP, r. 1653b.
y Valdés, who believed that the penury of the new diocese created in 1620 could be attributed largely to the fact that the Jesuits paid no tithe on agricultural produce grown either in the missions or on Jesuit haciendas. In his protracted campaign to force the Jesuits to pay the tithe, the bishop sided with the powerful Urdiñola family in Parras in its attempts to monopolize scarce water resources claimed by the Jesuit Lagunero missions in that Coahuilan valley. Unable to get civil authorities to act on the tithe question, the bishop secularized the Lagunero missions, as well as two Jesuit Tepchuan and Tarahumara missions where the padres had become more outspoken in their complaints against Spanish property owners. One was San Miguel de las Bocas, where Padre Nicolás de Zepeda had tried to resist increasing numbers of specific labor drafts, and the other, not surprisingly, was Tizonazo, the head mission of the pueblo of Santa Cruz. Although the Lagunero missions remained secularized, the Jesuits succeeded in having the Audiencia de Guadalajara restore the other two to their control.18

Before 1650, then, litigation between missions and Spaniards over land and water was infrequent. The situation began to change in the last half of the seventeenth century. From the 1660s to the 1680s, mining in the region was sporadically reinforced by new discoveries, giving impetus to population growth and new land acquisitions. Along the Conchos and San Pedro rivers, for example, in the 1650s and '60s, Sargento Mayor Valerio Cortés del Rey obtained, through grants and purchase, over sixty thousand acres of land. These cattle haciendas produced beef for mining towns and later became part of the larger entailed estate of Cortés del Rey established in 1689. In 1663, the mission of Satevó went before Governor Francisco Gorraez y Beaumont, charging that cattle and horses from Cortés del Rey's Hacienda de Conchos had occupied mission lands, destroying their planted fields and stores of seeds. Repeated complaints over the next four years failed to elicit official action because of Cortés del Rey's considerable political influence. In 1667, the Indians again appealed to the new governor, Antonio de Oca y Sarmiento, who called for an investigation. Subsequently, he ordered the offender to remove his livestock from mission lands, but much of the damage was irrepara-

18. For details of this case, see AGN, Historia, vol. 20, exp. 9; AHH, Temp. leg. 2009, exps. 26, 30; leg. 324, exps. 13–14; leg. 325, exp. 64.
ble as two of the pueblos, San Xavier and San Antonio, had already been abandoned.\textsuperscript{19}

Other land disputes between mission pueblos and landowners did not involve haciendas of such magnitude. These cases are actually more representative of the wide variety of Spanish landholdings in the area, which ranged in size from small ranchos to moderately large haciendas of 2,000–10,000 acres.\textsuperscript{20} Although concentration of land into larger holdings did become more common in the later eighteenth century, landholdings in the seventeenth century were comparatively smaller and dispersed; nonetheless they came to be controlled by an oligarchy. Smaller landholdings were classified as ranchos and estancias rather than haciendas. The need to acquire land where both water and labor were plentiful resulted in a pattern of noncontiguous holdings by single landowners.\textsuperscript{21}

In a number of instances, Spanish owners registered parcels which they claimed had not been used by the Indians for long periods of time, probably a reflection of the still declining Indian population in the missions.\textsuperscript{22} During the first century after contact, Nueva Vizcaya suffered rates of demographic decline ranging from 60 to 95 percent.\textsuperscript{23} Despite the villagers' claims that the lands in question had been theirs "for all recorded time" (de tiempo immemorial) and that they contained sources of water needed by milpas then under cultivation, Nueva Vizcayan governors granted lands formerly held by the Tarahumara missions of Huejotitlán and San Felipe to Spaniards in 1670 and '75.\textsuperscript{24} In each case the Spanish claimant received a sitio de

\textsuperscript{19} This case is found in AHP, r. 1667, fr. 738–43. See also West, The Mining Community, pp. 120–21.


\textsuperscript{21} Cramassuel, "Evolución en las formas de dominio del espacio colonial: Las haciendas de la región de Parral," Encuentro 20 (Jun. 1990). The author attributes the increase in hacienda size to demographic growth in the eighteenth century, which assured the supply of agricultural labor.

\textsuperscript{22} See Gerhard, The North Frontier, p. 24; and Reff, "Old World Diseases," p. 89. I have compared estimates and counts made by the Jesuits in the 1590s and 1678; among them are Andrés Pérez de Ribas, Triunfos de Nuestra Santa Fe (Madrid: A. de Paredes, 1645), III, lib. 8, cap. 2; and the Ortiz Zapata visita report, 1678, DHM, 4–III, pp. 301–419.

\textsuperscript{23} Registro de un sitio que llaman Valsequillo en términos de Huejotitlán, Nov. 3, 1670, AHP, r. 1669a, fr. 282–99; petition of Capt. Diego de Quirós, June 1674–Jan. 1675, AHP, r. 1671a, fr. 379–95.
ganado mayor (4,388 acres) of grazing land and in the case of San Felipe an additional two caballerías of cropland (210 acres). In neither instance do the records specify the amount of land being contested by the Indians, but the point of contention was the loss of irrigable lands. In the poorer Topia missions of Remedios and Otatitlán, vecinos succeeded in acquiring smaller parcels of land (usually scattered caballerías) in the 1670s. In each of these cases, the Spanish recipients had provided military services in quashing Indian rebellions.

What seems clear is that after 1650 Spaniards became more interested in acquiring land. Before midcentury, the primary pressure on Indian communities was the demand for their labor, but in the decade of the 1650s the contest for labor began to be compounded by modest, piecemeal encroachments on Indian lands.

By 1680, the number of Spanish ranchos, estancias, and haciendas surrounding the missions had nearly doubled, but for the most part mission lands were still sufficient to support the resident populations, at least when enough adults remained after repartimiento drafts to plant and harvest the fields. In the 1690s, a series of factors combined to precipitate a crisis in the general economic state of the region that did not begin to be overcome until the second decade of the eighteenth century. In searching for solutions to the economic problems, the Nueva Vizcayan elites increased pressures on the Indian communities not only by maximizing efficient use of repartimiento labor but also by more frequent appropriation of Indian lands and water sources. The process which had been set in motion after 1650 intensified.

By 1690, pressures on mission Indians both from repartimiento and internal obligations had precipitated greater flight to zones of refuge in the mountain canyons or to mining towns in search of work. The Tarahumara had been particularly hard hit by the influx of Spaniards to new mines at Cusihuiriachic, and disease continued to take tolls in the lower Tarahumara and Tepehuan missions. These

25. P. Manuel Gutiérrez to padre provincial, Píaba, April 10, 1681, AGN, AHH, Temp., leg. 278, exp. 39; títulos de tierras de Pedro Beltrán (1675–1766), AIPG, Tierras y Aguas, libro 30, exp. 15.
26. The Ortiz Zapata visita report of 1678 furnishes numbers of landholdings. These have been compared with earlier mission reports (e.g., report of Nicolás de Zepeda, ca. 1650, AGN, Jesuitas, I-16:19).
developments were followed by famine and epidemic. A drought in the first three years of the decade resulted in shortages of wheat and corn. Deaths from a measles epidemic in 1693 were reportedly very high throughout the province, and other epidemics ensued in the next three years. During the decade, the Tarahumara revolted twice; the final rebellion was suppressed only at great cost in 1698.28

In the midst of subsistence crisis, labor shortage, rebellions, and mining reversals in Parral, elites also suffered adversity. Although the founding mining/landholding elite apparently remained a part of the oligarchy throughout the colonial period, some sources indicate marked fluctuation in land ownership during the period between 1696 and 1707. The Cortés del Rey mayorazgo survived only with large loans from a Parral merchant, Cristóbal de Orrantia.29 The crisis of the 1690s demonstrated the fragility of the region's economy and particularly the problems of labor shortage. Landowners began to forge new alignments with local authorities against the missions, primarily in an effort to ensure a more reliable workforce.30

The turn of the century marks a watershed in the history of the region’s land tenure. Encroachments on mission lands escalated in the first third of the eighteenth century. This is explained in part by growing numbers of non-Indians, whose population increased nearly fivefold between 1700 and 1750, after only doubling in the previous fifty-year period.31 The population growth was due to the natural increase of the racially mixed population and in lesser measure to the influx of Spaniards and other non-Indians who were attracted by perceived economic opportunities to migrate from central Mexico.


29. Documents on debts incurred by the Cortés del Rey heirs are in AGI, Guadalajara, 120. A strong case for the persistent domination of the early settlers is made by Cramoysan in La provincia de Santa Bárbara, and in her “Evolución en las formas.” The case for a 50 percent turnover in hacienda ownership is made in Keith W. Algier, “Feudalism in New Spain’s Northern Frontier: Valle de San Bartolomé, A Case Study” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1966), p. 95.


The increase brought great pressures on land with reliable water sources. The devastating drought at the end of the seventeenth century had made control of water resources an even greater preoccupation. In 1691, for example, the mission of Santiago Papasquiaro was forced to purchase new cultivable lands (tierras de siembra) with a water source.

The loss of parcels of mission land seems to have occurred earliest in those pueblos where the absolute numbers of Indian residents were very low and where the surrounding non-Indian population had older roots. This was the case of Santa Catalina in Tepehuana, located adjacent to one of Nueva Vizcaya's oldest presidios; the disputed land here was located at the mouth of the Santa Catalina River. This pattern also characterized many of the Topia missions where the non-Indian population had been forced to take up farming and stock-raising on smallholdings when the mines played out in the second half of the seventeenth century. In both Topia and northern Durango, mestizaje (racial mixing) proceeded rapidly.

During the second decade of the eighteenth century, disputes between missions and vecinos over land and water escalated in the lower Tarahumara region. In one case, San Miguel de las Bocas had received an additional sitio of land and an outlet from the Río Florido for an acequia in 1699 when a new group of Indians was congregated in the mission. The land was donated by General Martín Pacheco, but title was not registered to the mission. Since the mission population of Bocas was actually increasing due to the infusion of new residents, both the land and the water were important to its economic well-being. After Pacheco's death, his sons began to cultivate these lands and then sold them as part of their hacienda in 1711. The governor, who heard the Indians' complaints, did not restore the lands to the village but did allow the Indians to continue using water

34. Inventario de temporalidades, Santa Catalina, 1704, AGN, AHH, Temp., leg. 1955, f. 55; report of P. Pedro Retes, Santa Catalina de Tepehuanes, June 29, 1745, Mateu Collection; padrón de Santa Catalina, 1707, AHP, r. 1707, fr. 74–81; land titles and confirmations in AIPG, Tierras y Aguas, lib. 16, exp. 59; lib. 17, exps. 16, 19, 22; lib. 19, exp. 35; lib. 20, exps. 10, 13; lib. 39, exp. 14.
at appointed times from the irrigation ditch leading from those lands. In cases where water was shared, the party with secondary rights usually could use the water at night and on fiesta days. In a dispute between the Franciscan mission of San Francisco de los Conchos and an adjacent wheat farm, the village was awarded only a small piece of the land in contention and had to allow the landowner access to the water at night and on holidays. In another case, the village of Huejotitlán lost some of its farmland after protesting its use by vecinos in 1710 and again in 1720, even though former padres in the mission had taken care to register water rights. It is interesting to note that conflicts over land tended to occur more frequently in those missions which were supplying the largest number of repartimiento workers. One explanation is that the Indians were less able to keep their lands under cultivation, thus providing Spaniards with the excuse to claim lands not being used. But it is also possible that landowners made deliberate attempts to deprive Indians of a subsistence base in order to assure their dependence on outside work.

Cultural differences over attitudes to land were also at work in these disputes. Spaniards nearly always professed to be claiming tierras baldías, or empty lands. Often these were in fact complementary monte lands that, although not farmed by Indians, did constitute an integral part of their agricultural system because they supplied additional food sources (game and wild plants), firewood and charcoal, pasture, thatch, and clay. Spaniards usually saw these lands as untamed and unproductive and were often able to convince the local judge to award the land in question to the non-Indian claimant who would make “productive” use of it through such improvements as tilling the soil, building fences, or grazing livestock.

In the 1720s, a flood of complaints issued forth from the missions directed to Jesuit and Franciscan superiors, local officials (alcaldes

36. Documents concerning this dispute are found in AHP, r. 1700a, fr. 38-38, and r. 1711a, fr. 170-76. Details on remanente rights can be found in an earlier case, AHP, r. 1654d, fr. 1088-1213. These are also discussed in Meyer, Water in the Hispanic Southwest, pp. 157-40.

37. Título de merced . . . Pueblo de Sn. Francisco de los Conchos, Nov. 25, 1719, AIPG, Tierras y Aguas, lib. 12, exp. 78.

38. Denuncia de tierras, Sn. Jerónimo de Huexotitlán, Nov. 1, 1720, AHP, r. 1720b, fr. 1373-1376; Informe de la situación y estado de Huexotitlán, misión de Tepchuana, P. Juan Antonio Núñez, Oct. 25, 1745, Mateu Collection.

mayores), governors, and the Audiencia de Guadalajara. Labor drafts intensified to the point of totally depopulating villages at harvest time.\textsuperscript{40} Non-Indians had increasingly moved into the environs of mission pueblos, settling on the margins and attracting Indians to gambling and drinking. Governor Manuel San Juan de Santa Cruz had become concerned also over the frequency with which Indians were bartering or practically giving away their stores of seed to non-Indian traders.\textsuperscript{41} Although it is clear that Indian and non-Indian communities were not neatly separated, the sources do not facilitate accurate categorization of the mission population as to ethnicity and numbers. In absolute numbers some missions continued to decline in population in the eighteenth century, some stabilized, and others experienced growth. These patterns, moreover, did not take the form of continuous lines but consisted of fluctuations. Although disease and famine worked on a cyclical basis to reduce population in certain locales, migration also served as a continuous process that contributed to changing population distributions. Especially common in missions, repopulation by in-migration can give the appearance of relative fluctuations in numbers even when other evidence clearly indicates an actual decline. Furthermore, the geographic mobility of Indians also tends to distort the picture as does the growing incidence of racial mixing.\textsuperscript{42}

Jesuit reports commented more and more frequently on the loss of lands, especially in those missions which still had sizeable and sometimes recovering Indian populations. Population growth characterized just under half of the missions, but it is not clear whether this was due to a natural increase in the birthrate, a decline in the death rate, or to repopulation by in-migration.\textsuperscript{43} In some instances, missions had sold some of their holdings to pay off debts, but many of the cases involved usurpations of land not being cultivated, per-

\textsuperscript{40} See Deeds, "Rendering unto Caesar," pp. 114–204, for population counts. Michael M. Swann provides detailed information on individual mobility, especially in the late colonial period in \textit{Migrants in the Mexican North: Mobility, Economy and Society in a Colonial World} (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989).

\textsuperscript{41} See Deeds, "Rural Work," pp. 440–42.

\textsuperscript{42} Visitación que hizo el Gob. López de Carbajal a Santiago Papasquiao y disposiciones que dictó, April 1724, AHP, r. 1722b, fr. 659–87; "Que los españoles no se introduzcan a los pueblos de indios," Jan. 18, 1718, AHP, r. 1718a, fr. 12–17.


\textsuperscript{44} Demographic rates were calculated by comparing ecclesiastical and civil counts which are not very reliable before the late eighteenth century. They include the Ortiz Zapata report and other counts found in AGN, AHH, Temp., leg. 279, exps. 66–67, 69–71, 112–19 (1690s); AHP, r. 1707, fr. 74–81 (1707); AGN, AHH, Temp., leg. 2009,
haps explaining a relative lack of litigation. Still others reflected a
desperate need for water, for both agriculture and livestock. The
Jesuit mission of Cinco Señores on the Río Nazas was located in a
semidesert region at the edge of the Bolsón de Mapimí. In this area
where large amounts of land were needed to sustain cattle, increasing
numbers of Spaniards registered ranches (sitios de ganado mayor)
around the mission and the presidio of Cuencame. Accordingly, the
number of pretenders to the river water mushroomed. They began
to divert more and more water from the pueblo, and their cattle
increasingly laid waste to Indian milpas. The Indians appealed to the
alcaldé mayor in Cuencame, asking that their lands be measured and
their water rights confirmed. They also wanted damages paid for the
destruction of their crops. After several years of wrangling, in 1727
the Indians simply abandoned the village and fled to the hills. Only
after the governor had the lands surveyed and markers placed did the
Indians return several months later. Water was divided so that the
village and neighboring Spaniards used it in turns (tantas).

In 1728, Nueva Vizcaya was struck by a pandemic, this time of
measles, and Governor Ignacio Francisco de Barrutia reported that
much of the harvest would be lost because of the lack of laborers.
Death tolls were especially high in the lower Tarahumara area. Then
in late 1730s, another subsistence crisis gripped the region, creating
more hardship than its predecessor of the 1690s. A protracted drought
began in 1737 and was followed in 1738–39 by an epidemic of mat-
lacahuati (probably typhus). Death tolls in Indian villages from this
epidemic seem to have run about three times higher than those in the
measles epidemic of the previous decade. Governor Juan Bautista

exp. 99 (1725); Gerardo Decorme, La obra de los jesuitas mexicanos durante la época colonial,
1572–1767 (México: Antigua Librería Robredo, 1941), pp. 78–82 (1731); AGN, AHH,
Temp., leg. 1126, exp. 4 (ca. 1740); AGN, AHH, Temp. leg. 2009, exps. 20, 42 (1743–
1745); and Archivo de la Catedral de Durango (hereafter cited as ACD), Varios, año 1749.
44. See, for examples, AIPG, Tierras y Aguas, lib. 18, exp. 8; lib. 19, exp. 17; lib. 20,
exps. 4, lib. 28, exps. 180, 206; and AIPG, Libros de Gobierno, vol. 43, f. 28.
45. Information on this case is found in AIPG, Tierras y Aguas, exp. 5; AHP, r.1727a, fr. 323–57; and Visita report of P. Juan Antonio Balthasar, 1745, AGN, AHH, Temp.,
leg. 2009, exp. 20.
46. Governor to the king, Parral, June 4, 1728, AGI, Guadalajara, 110; census of
Tarahumara missions, 1728, in AHP, r. 1728a, fr. 157–70.
47. Archivo de la Parroquia de Santiago Papasquiaro, burial records, 1659–1750; and
Archivo de la Parroquia de Santa Catalina de Tepehuanes, 1728–1758 (filmed by the
Genealogical Society of Utah). Audiencia de Guadalajara to king, July 16, 1739, AGI,
Guadalajara, leg. 104.
Mission Villages  

de Belaunzarán reacted to the crisis in 1739 with emergency measures. Each jurisdiction was ordered to survey and impound all grain supplies. Because these proved insufficient, the governor solicited grain from areas to the south. Censuses were taken in Indian villages in order to assign all available Indians to agricultural repartimientos. 48

Meanwhile, during the 1720s and 1730s, landowners began to regularize their land titles through the procedure known as composición, and increasing numbers of composiciones and confirmations of land title appear in the records of the Audiencia of Guadalajara thereafter. Although this may reflect acquisition of lands depopulated by victims of epidemics, it is more probably explained by a resumption in the practice, which had been suspended for Nueva Vizcaya in 1696, of paying these fees to regularize ownership of lands. Payment of composiciones was resumed at least by 1724. 49 Whatever the reason, there seems to have been a greater preoccupation on the part of Spaniards to assure their title to land. In other words, land ownership appeared to offer greater potential for economic profit or social prestige, perhaps because the growing mixed population helped meet the demand for agricultural laborers 50 in addition to augmenting the number of consumers of foodstuffs.

As the middle of the eighteenth century approached, the control of land and water assumed much greater importance. In the missions, where repartimientos had increased in proportion to their total populations, the greater value attached to land ownership introduced new tensions. In 1738, the Juez Privativo de Tierras of the Audiencia de Guadalajara named a special land judge (subdelegado de tierras) for Chihuahua. 51 Within three years, his actions seriously challenged the ability of the missions to retain their lands and raised important questions concerning classifications of property within the mission communities.

48. Information on these measures is found in AGI, Guadalajara 104 and 186; AGN, Provincias Internas, vol. 69, exp. 1.
49. Composiciones are found in AIPG, Tierras y Aguas, and AGI, Guadalajara 120. Mention of the suspension is found in Bohumil Baďura, “Apuntes sobre las composiciones de tierras en Nueva España,” Historia (Academia Praha) 24 (1984):214. Frontier areas where Indians remained unsubdued were often given exemptions from taxes to compensate for the risks and losses incurred.
50. This is also the argument of Cramaussel, “Evolución en las formas.”
51. Oidor Martín de Blancas to Marqués de la Regalía, Guadalajara, August 12, 1744, AGI, Guadalajara, 113. This official’s title was juez privativo subdelegado superintendente general de ventas, medidas y composiciones de tierras de Nueva Vizcaya.
When missions were established, they were entitled to a measure of land called the fundo legal. Although the amount of the fundo legal for Indian communities in central and southern Mexico was much smaller, the practice in northern Mexico was to allot a square league, or the equivalent of a sitio de ganado mayor. The actual size of the fundos legales of these missions is difficult to ascertain because either the missions never received titles at the time of their founding or they subsequently lost them. The only title to a fundo legal in this area uncovered to date is that of San Gerónimo de Ajoya, a visita pueblo of San Ignacio de Piastla. It was issued only after the pueblo requested in 1744 that its lands be surveyed. The petitioners stated that they had never possessed papers showing title to their lands. The final survey declared that the village possessed one sitio de ganado mayor and four caballerías of land with irrigation rights (tierras de pan llevar).

The picture is further complicated because the Jesuits over time purchased or acquired land in excess of the original fundo. Until 1740, the Jesuits did not register these lands as a matter of course; they thus avoided paying taxes on them. The fundo legal itself was not subject to composición or taxation. The new water judge in Chihuahua challenged this status quo by recognizing only a half-league of land as the fundo legal and requiring that the mission communities register any properties in excess of that amount and pay for their composición. The Jesuits immediately sought redress from the Audiencia de Guadalajara. By the end of 1742, they were able to get a decision exempting the larger fundo legal from the land judge’s ruling, but they were forced to submit properties acquired in addition to the fundo legal for composición or forfeit them to be sold at auction. Even in those cases where the lands were unproductive, the Jesuits often decided to pay the fee in order to keep buffer lands between missions and haciendas.

52. Autos from the fiscal of the Audiencia de Guadalajara, AGI, Guadalajara, 106; Meyer, Water in the Hispanic Southwest, p. 80, says that the fundo legal in the south came to be standardized at 600 square varas, about 250 acres. The square league constitutes 4,338 acres.

53. These papers are in AIPG, Tierras y Aguas, lib. 37–1, exp. 5.

Meanwhile, from 1740 to 1742, vecinos took advantage of the situation, particularly in the Tarahumara Baja, to acquire mission land. The land judge, Manuel de Guemes, cooperated closely with a member of the Chihuahua town council (the *alcalde ordinario*) to facilitate this process. Two of the most productive missions, Satevó and Santa María de las Cuevas, lost considerable pasture and plow-lands. Huejotitlán and San Miguel de las Bocas, already suffering under excessive repartimientos, also saw their lands pared. Access to water was a factor in each case. These more aggressive attempts to acquire lands in the lower Tarahumara were also connected with these missions’ proximity to Chihuahua, where the expanding mining economy offered a market for agricultural produce. Although some of the Jesuits were very active in the process of defending properties, others cooperated with Spanish landowners, alleging that the missions no longer needed all of the original land. Dissension among the Jesuits on this matter could be quite acrimonious. Overall, the *matlazahuatl* epidemic, the drought, numerous repartimientos, and the assault on lands did not bode well for the future of the missions. This reality was about to be recognized by the Jesuits themselves.

In 1740, having come under increased criticism in Mexico from royal and ecclesiastical officials, the Jesuit order decided to secularize some of its missions, or to turn them over to the diocesan clergy. More than making a gesture of goodwill, the Jesuits hoped to directly link this action with royal support for the expansion of their mission field into Alta California. The question of which missions to secularize was not a difficult one given the recent troubles of the Topia and Tepehuana mission provinces. And these problems merely capped a long history of demographic transformation in many of

55. P. Lorenzo Reino to P. Prov. Escobar y Llamas, Chihuahua, Villa de Sn. Felipe, Jan. 19, 1745, AGN, Jesuitas, I-16, exp. 32; Juicio de residencia del gobernador Belanza- ran, AGI, Escritura de Cámara, 394; land title of Cristóbal Marqués, Feb. 8, 1742, AIPG, Tierras y Aguas, lib. 15, exp. 1. The Jesuits alluded to corruption here between the two officials, who were both Basques.


57. In 1751, the bishop of Durango described the dire consequences of drought in the region; AGI, Guadalajara, 208.

these villages which had resulted in an ethnic composite resembling that of the larger society. After the selection of those provinces was confirmed by the inspection of the Jesuit visitor, Juan Antonio Balthasar, in 1743, the order proposed the transfer to the king and the bishop of Durango. The secularization process occupied the next ten years and was formalized in 1753.\textsuperscript{59} During those ten years, mission Indian communities further deteriorated, struck again by a measles epidemic in the late 1740s. Their properties and manpower were eroded by the aggressive activity of landowners whose ranks had been reinforced by merchant families in Parral and Chihuahua, beneficiaries of mining successes in Chihuahua and growing regional trade.\textsuperscript{60} Land ownership as a reward for military service had declined. Only on the eastern edge of the region with its line of presidios did military officers continue to expand their holdings in very arid grasslands, establishing large cattle ranches.\textsuperscript{61} In Topia, where natural resources were even more scarce, a ranchero economy of smallholders developed; their acquisitions of a few caballerías of mission land had here and there proceeded slowly but steadily.\textsuperscript{62}

Although the Franciscans did not secularize their Nueva Vizcayan missions, in the 1740s they lost control of the communal lands of these villages to the \textit{corregidor} of Chihuahua, Antonio Gutiérrez de Noriega. This official used a viceregal order of 1746 calling for the planting of communal lands in Indian villages as justification for his takeover. In effect, these machinations served to enrich Gutiérrez

\textsuperscript{59} The secularization process is studied in detail in Deeds, "Rendering unto Caesar," passim.

\textsuperscript{60} Many lands were actually sold by the missions in this period to pay off debts incurred: P. Marcelo de León, circular letter to Topia missionaries, AHPM, no. 1410a. Descriptions of the missions and their impecunious state in 1749 are in the collection of letters from the missionaries to the bishop of Durango, ACD, Varios 1749. This picture is corroborated in the reports of Jesuit visitor P. Agustín Carta, 1753, in AGN, AHH, Temp., leg. 2009, exp. 41; and in a report of the governor of Durango to the king, Chihuahua, July 15, 1750, AGI, Guadalajara, 110. The increasing acquisition of land by merchants is documented in land titles found in AIPG, Tierras y Aguas, lib. 27, exp. 37, lib. 28, exps. 75, 76, 130–35, 146, 166, 172; and in the nómina of vecinos of the Valle de San Bartolomé, July 15, 1750, AGI, Guadalajara, 110. Information on the acquisitions of land in southern Chihuahua by the Jugo and Orrantia families is in AGI, Guadalajara, 120, and Phillip L. Hadley, \textit{Minería y sociedad en el centro minero de Santa Fulalia, Chihuahua, 1700–1750} (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1979), p. 211.

\textsuperscript{61} Land titles in AIPG, Tierras y Aguas, lib. 18, exps. 39, 40, 43; lib. 28, exps. 111, 185; lib. 33, exp. 1.

\textsuperscript{62} Land titles in AIPG, Tierras y Aguas, lib. 8, exp. 9; lib. 12, exp. 36; lib. 28, 104; lib. 30, exp. 4; lib. 36, exp. 2; lib. 38, exps. 5, 6, 8, 12; lib. 39, exp. 6; lib. 41, exp. 1; lib. 47–48, exp. 5.
and the overseers he appointed, as they appropriated much of the product. The intent of the viceroyal decree was to ensure a sustained system of communal plantings to build up stores of grain, thus protecting Indian communities from subsistence crises like the one that still gripped the region and would continue to do so until 1751. That this order so completely failed in Durango and Chihuahua is a measure of the strength of the elites whose decisions about the use of land and labor were more economically rational than those of royal policymakers who could not adjust to local structural realities.

The breakup of the Indian communities accelerated after secularization. When Bishop Pedro Tamarón y Romeral visited these areas in 1765, he found many of the former pueblos abandoned. Without the religious orders as buffers, however ineffective and exploitive themselves, Indians claimed even less control over their own land and labor. The communities that did survive had undergone inundations of non-Indians, hastening the process of mestizaje and cultural absorption. As Indians lost their lands or were unable to cultivate them in the face of hostile Indian raids, now from Apaches, and demands on their labor, some moved toward the relative security of haciendas as permanent agricultural laborers; others hired themselves out as temporary wage laborers. The transition to wage labor was facilitated by the intensification of commercial activity in the region in the late eighteenth century. By the end of the century, Durango, at the southern edge of the region, had become an important regional commercial center. Population growth, especially among non-Indians, had created new markets for agricultural produce. And increases in the amount of capital available for local investment had encouraged a modest revival in Chihuahua mining centers. That chapter of

64. Audiencia de Guadalajara to king, Sept. 3, 1743, AGI, Guadalajara, 105; report of Vis. José Rafael Rodríguez Gallardo on siembras de comunidad, Aug. 18, 1750, AGN, Provincias Internas, vol. 176, exp. 6.
65. Pedro Tamarón y Romeral, Demostración del vastismo obispo de la Nueva Vizcaya, 1765, ed. by Vito Alessio Robles (México: Antigua Librería Robredo, 1937), 62–133; Gov. Joseph Carlos de Agüero to viceroy, Durango, July 5, 1767, AGN, Provincias Internas, vol. 94, exp. 2; cura de Huejotitlán to governor, Nov. 26, 1767, AGN, Provincias Internas, vol. 94, exp. 1; land titles in AIPG, Tierras y Aguas, lib. 32, exp. 8; lib. 35, exps. 1 and 13, lib. 41, exp. 43, and in AGI, Guadalajara, 115.
Nueva Vizcayan history marks the virtual end of Indian enclaves in the region.

In the last ten years, anthropologists and ethnohistorians have provided new evidence regarding the persistence of cultural and ethnic enclaves among indigenous groups of northwestern Mexico. Their work on the Yaqui, Mayo, and Tarahumara Indians, among others, coincides with a trend in Mexican colonial history that emphasizes cultural survivals among indigenous groups, challenging the view that demographic catastrophe and the integration of Indians into regional and eventually global market economies produced such severe economic and sociocultural disruptions as to allow for very little survival of preconquest culture. Rather this work stresses how these groups were able collectively to adapt the institutions and belief systems of their conquerors to their cosmologies and retain much of their culture and ethnicity in the process.

This Durango–southern Chihuahua case runs counter to the thesis of the persistence of indigenous cultural identity and instead represents a pattern resulting from the interaction of peculiar demographic, cultural, social, and economic variables which severely limited the capacity of the Acajee, Xixime, Tepehuan, lower Tarahumara, and Concho Indians to maintain their cultural and ethnic identities. Although the acquisition of Indian lands accelerated in the first half of the eighteenth century, the loss of these resources seems to have had less importance as a variable in the destruction of their communities. Demographics appear to have exercised the greatest influence as the Indian communities declined precipitously in the first hundred years and then, despite stabilization and sometimes modest growth, could not avoid absorption by the growing non-Indian sector. Mestizaje was already well advanced by the early eighteenth century in all but the Tarahumara Baja missions. Even when mission communities remained ethnically Indian, their survival was doomed by the agricultural repartimiento which depopulated villages at crucial times in the agricultural cycle, taking away their means of subsistence.

Depopulations due to death by epidemics and to cyclical absences in the labor drafts encouraged land encroachments, which became

more frequent as the non-Indian population expanded. By the eighteenth century, land and water conflicts were on the rise. Two types of land acquisition can be discerned. Most commonly, usurpation of mission land by vecinos involved fields and pastures not used for several years. Most of these cases were not contested. The less frequent, more aggressive takeovers were motivated by the need for access to permanent reliable water sources and by the prospect of profiting from the supply of agricultural produce to the mines. The latter type became more pronounced in the 1730s and ’40s as the extended drought highlighted the importance of control of water sources and as the Chihuahua mines experienced greater yields, fueling a minor boom in their environs. Even in these cases, the Jesuits were not very effective in defending Indian lands, particularly after the 1743 decision to secularize the missions.

Southern Nueva Vizcaya in the last half of the eighteenth century exhibited astonishing transformations from the previous century. Except for the Tarahumara Baja, the non-Indian population outnumbered the Indians three to one. Demographic changes were crucial to solidifying Spanish control, not only because they eliminated the potential for Indian resistance but also because they added a substantial number of mestizos and mulattos to the labor pool. With the regional economy fueled by population growth and reinvigorated mining, land became a potentially greater source of economic power and profit. The wealthiest landowners, with increased access to laborers, moved to consolidate their holdings, increasingly at the expense of mission village lands. In the ongoing struggle for indigenous cultural survival, loss of lands represented a final assault. That blow, although not the decisive factor in the breakup of economically viable and culturally cohesive indigenous communities, further stacked the odds in a struggle which was already nearly lost.