Chapter 2: The Rio de Ulúa in the Sixteenth Century

This is a study of one town, inhabited when the first Spanish expeditions entered northern Honduras, and its history of persistence on the landscape, including episodes of relocation and renegotiation of its status in the Honduran colony. My approach explores how the indigenous people of this town used a variety of tactics to persist as a community and perpetuate their own views of the world under centuries of Spanish colonial authority. In this chapter, I situate Masca, later known as Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria, in the landscape and network of other inhabited places to which it was related.

The Ulúa Valley: Geography and Geomorphology

Honduras's north coast borders on the Caribbean Sea, stretching from the Gulf of Honduras on the west, to Cape Gracias a Dios on the east. This coast consists of a narrow coastal plain for most of its length backed by mountain ranges. These mountain ranges are interrupted every so often by river valleys, some narrow, some wide, where rivers flow from the interior of the country into the Caribbean. In the far west is the Ulúa river valley, the largest river valley in Honduras west of the Mosquitia (Figure 1). Only the Patuca and Cocos rivers have larger valleys, though mostly swamp. The lower Ulúa river valley is a long, fairly narrow valley of 2400 square kilometers of bottom lands, and ranges from 10 to 35 kilometers in width.

Today the valley is formed by two rivers that enter the Caribbean, the Ulúa and Chamelecon rivers. But it is important to remember that tropical rivers are dynamic. In the sixteenth century there was only one river flowing into the sea, the Ulúa River. All the other rivers that entered the valley were tributaries of the Ulúa. The tributaries that form the Ulúa River begin high in the intermountain valleys of central and southern Honduras and flow northwards to drain into the Caribbean Sea. All told, these rivers drain nearly a third of the country.

Kevin Pope (1985) studied the geomorphology of the remains of abandoned river courses in the valley, using geomorphology and the cultural remains of prehispanic settlements along them to date the abandonment of these river courses. He found that in the sixteenth century the Chamelecon river was a tributary of the Ulúa River, with a confluence in the northern part of the valley, somewhere near the modern town of Tibombo. The Choloma River flowed into the Chamelecon south of modern Choloma, before the Chamelecon joined with the Ulúa. According to Pope, sometime in the

Figure 1: Map of 16th century Spanish colonial settlements

sixteenth century the Chamelecon separated from the Ulúa and found its way into an old abandoned Choloma or Ulúa river course to enter the sea. Documentary evidence suggests that separation happened sometime between 1570 and 1590. Prior to 1590 I have not found any documents that mention the Chamelecon River. In 1590 it is described as flowing into the sea just to the east of Puerto Caballos, west of the mouth of the Ulúa River (1590 AGI Patronato 183 N. 1 R. 16). The Choloma River has also abandoned a number of river courses in the northwestern part of the valley, at times occupying an old Ulúa river course to flow into the sea. It abandoned the course that makes it a tributary of the Chamelecon sometime in the sixteenth century, but Pope is unable to date that abandonment. Pope also describes a major change in the course of the Ulúa in the seventeenth century in the southern part of the valley, with the river moving further west, abandoning a long segment of its course.

The valley today is divided into several different ecological zones. The northern part of the valley largely consists of the river delta, swampy land, and was largely uninhabited in prehispanic history. Along the broader bays to either side of the river delta, however, there were coastal settlements. The riverbanks themselves were the locus of prehispanic settlements. Along the flanks of the mountains on either side of the valley, quebradas drain into the rivers, with further prehispanic settlements along them. Finally the northwest and southwest parts of the valley have a series of hills, one to five hundred meters in height, with prehispanic settlements along their flanks and in one case, Cerro Palenque, on top of the 300 meter hill and along surrounding hilltops. The northwestern hill zone contains three lakes, Jucutuma, Carmen, and Ticamaya, with pre-Columbian settlement along the lakeshores.

The valley was characterized by tropical forests composed of tall trees, and zones of swamps, when the Spanish arrived. Juan Bautista Antonelli wrote a report to the Spanish Crown in 1590 describing the area from Puerto Caballos to San Pedro. About Puerto Caballos he wrote, "the town was surrounded by thick brush and swamps right up to the houses [toda la Villa cercada de arcabucos y çienegas hasta las casas](1590 AGI Patronato 183 N.1 R.16)." He noted that the entire valley north of the Rio Blanco was swampy. Only around San Pedro was the land suitable for cattle. Indigenous settlements in 1590 were on the riverbanks or adjacent to smaller water courses.

Indigenous Settlements of the Ulúa Valley in the Early Sixteenth Century

There has been limited systematic search by archaeologists for contact period indigenous communities in Honduras, except in one small area near the city of Santa Barbara (Black 1995, 1997; Weeks 1997; Weeks and Black 1991; Weeks, Black, and Speaker 1987). Gloria Lara Pinto (1980) included a general proposal of where indigenous communities might have been in her dissertation, based on her review of archival documents. Undertaken at the scale of the entire country, and with an emphasis on reconstructing economic relations, she restricted herself to identifying likely locations of colonial towns using modern maps. While this was a valuable and path breaking study, my own research revises many of her identifications, particularly for the Ulúa valley and adjacent areas.

Pedro de Alvarado provided the best document for this purpose, a *repartimiento* (assignment of labor obligations) to his Spanish supporters of the Indian towns (*pueblos de indios*) near a town he formally established in 1536, San Pedro de Puerto de Caballos (1536 AGI Patronato 20 N. 4 R. 6). Alvarado would continue as nominal Governor of Honduras until 1540, although he was recalled to Spain in 1537. There, he was confronted with the parallel claim of Francisco de Montejo to be the legitimate Governor of Honduras. In 1533 the King of Spain had granted another Royal patent to conquer and pacify Honduras to Montejo, who had recently tried and failed to conquer the Maya of Yucatan. In 1540, Alvarado lost his petition to remain governor of Honduras, and the King named Montejo as Governor, ushering in the beginning of formal Spanish colonial administration.

Pedro Alvarado's 1536 Repartimiento de San Pedro de Puerto de Caballos (1536 AGI Patronato 120 N.4 R.6) demonstrated Alvarado's personal knowledge of Honduran geography (Sheptak 1983). Yet this document, like others, needs to be critically examined before it can be used. In any text, the fact that certain information was recorded reflects a decision not to record other information (Voloshinov 1986: 91). This selection process points to underlying motivations for recording some things and not others.

The interpretation of the document is complicated by a sixteenth century controversy about the 1536 Repartimiento de San Pedro de Puerto de Caballos (1536 AGI Patronato 120 N.4 R.6) and a contemporary Repartimiento de Gracias a Dios also issued by Alvarado. They became a point of contention between Alvarado and Francisco de Montejo, the Governor of Yucatan who was appointed governor of Honduras in an

overlapping royal grant. Many scholars have accepted a claim made by Montejo that Alvarado knew nothing of the geography of Honduras, supposedly allocating the same community multiple times, or mistaking rivers and mountains for towns (Montejo 1864:225). It was actually the repartimiento of Gracias a Dios to which Montejo (1864: 205) was referring when he wrote in 1539 that

> because the Adelantado Pedro de Alvarado, because he had not seen nor pacified the land when he issued his repartimiento, and because those who received the repartimientos did not know, he left made in this town [Gracias a Dios] 110 repartimientos, done in this manner: he gave to one a province but all of its towns and ranches he gave to others; to another he gave a town by three or four names to three or four people; to still others he gave peaks, mountains, and rivers in repartimiento; and to others he gave the old sites of towns now depopulated… [como porque el Adelantado don Pedro dalvarado, como no habia visto ni pacificado la tierra cuado la repartio, no los que recibieron los repartimientos lo sabian, dejo hecho en esta cibdad (Gracias a Dios) ciento e diez repartimientos, que fueran desta manera: daba a uno una provincia y repartio todos los pueblos y estancias dellos a otros; y a otro daba un pueblo por tres o cuatro nombres a tres y a cuatro personas; e a otros daba penas y sierras y rios por repartimientos; y a otros asientos de pueblos viejos despoblados].

This may well have been true about the area covered by the Repartimiento of Gracias a Dios, whose conquest Alvarado had delegated to another; but Alvarado personally visited many of the areas assigned in the San Pedro document.

Alvarado entered Honduras in the southwest, near modern Ocotepeque, and marched immediately to the aid of Cereceda's colony of Santa Maria de Buena Esperanza (Figure 1), located west of the Naco valley (Montejo 1864:217,224). Buena Esperanza had been established near "el asiento de Zura" [the settlement of Sula] or "un pueblo de indios llamado Sula" [a pueblo de indios called Sula] (Pedraza 1898:423, 427). Montejo (1864:224) claimed that Alvarado marched taking slaves and destroying the country until "llego cerca del valle de Zura" [he arrived near the Sula valley]. This was the same area through which Bernal Diaz passed on Cortes' march to Honduras. Diaz (1980:483) stated that "fuimos luego a unos pueblos que se

decian Girimonga y a Zula, y a otros tres pueblos que estaban cerca de Naco" [we then went to some towns that are called Selimonga and to Sula, and to three other towns that are near Naco]. Scholars often incorrectly locate Buena Esperanza in the Ulúa valley, today called the Sula valley (e.g. Chamberlain 1953), but the association of name and place long postdates these sixteenth century documents. Buena Esperanza was clearly in the plains of the Rio Chamelecon near the modern town of Sula, west of Naco, and thus far to the west of the Ulúa valley (Figure 2).

After establishing control of the area around Buena Esperanza and Naco, Alvarado established a temporary base at Tencoa on the Ulúa River in the Department of Santa Barbara, south of the Sula-Naco area. Consequently, we know that Pedro de Alvarado was personally familiar with the territory of northwestern Honduras up to the Naco valley. At Buena Esperanza, he could draw on the knowledge of the existing Spanish colonists who were familiar with the territory from there into the western Ulúa valley, and along the north coast as far as Trujillo, where they were originally settled and from which they had marched to the Naco valley in 1533 (Figure 1).

Speaking specifically of the Repartimiento de San Pedro, Montejo (1864:218-219) states that it includes an area extending to Olancho in eastern Honduras, and adds that the *Repartimiento de Gracias a Dios* also extends this far. This does not imply that the two grants included the *same* places to the east. It is rather a criticism of Alvarado for spreading out too thinly from the only established Spanish centers, a lesson Montejo had learned the hard way in Yucatan. It is perhaps not coincidental that Montejo is urging, in this letter, a project to settle the gold-rich valley of Olancho, a project which would not only bring him wealth but also consolidate his holdings on the eastern edge of his growing personal empire. Invalidating grants made in Olancho in Alvarado's two repartimientos would have the effect of freeing up this gold rich area for re-assignment to himself and his own partisans.

It is the Repartimiento of San Pedro, based on Alvarado's personal knowledge and that he could gain from the existing colonists at Buena Esperanza, that covers precisely the area central to this study. This document refers to three rivers (the Ulúa river, the Balaliama, and the Laula) and four valleys (Yoro, Naco, Sula, and Caguantamagas) as geographic signposts used to locate the towns being allocated in repartimiento (Figure

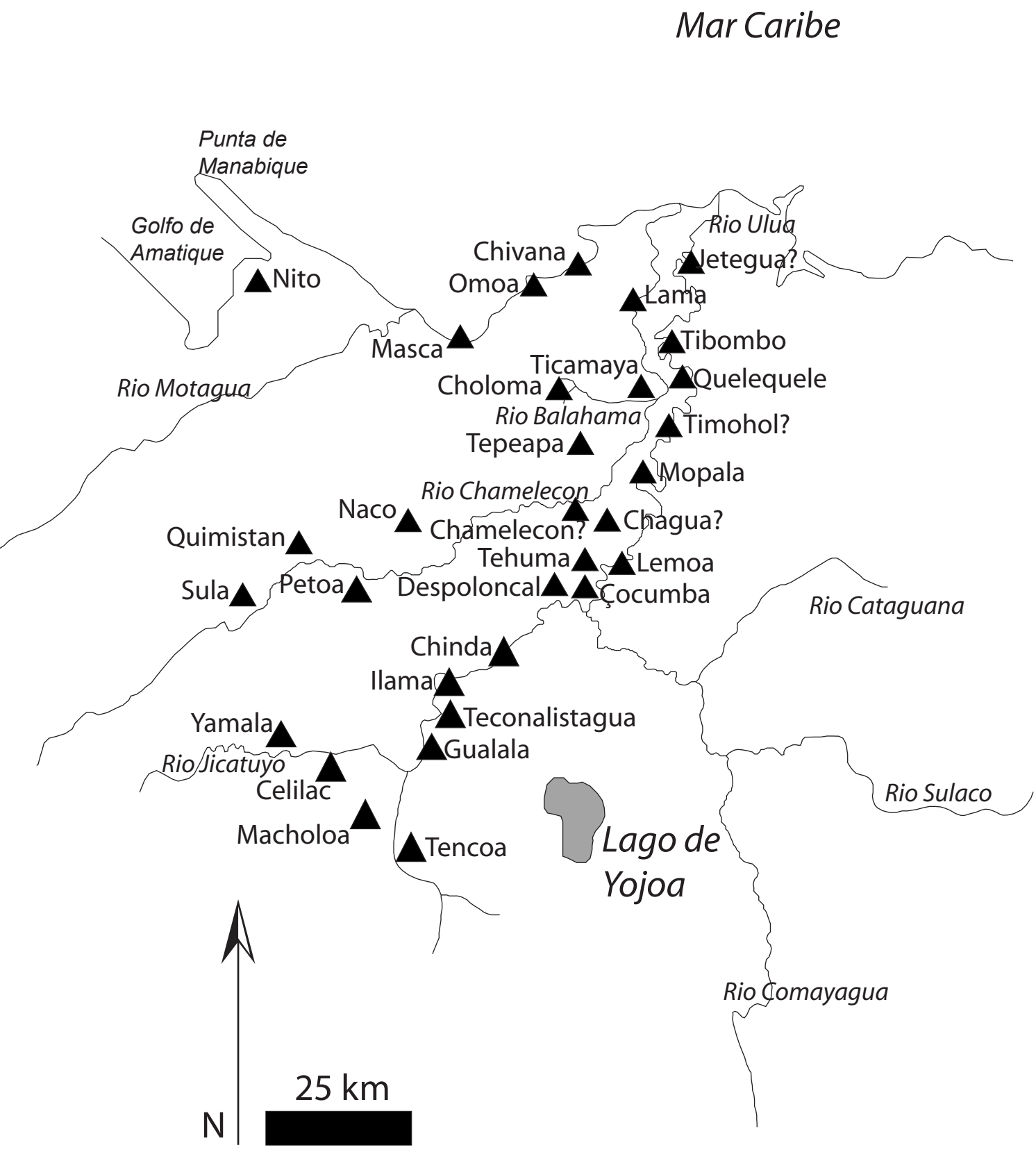

Figure 2: Map of indigenous 16th century settlements

2). The document uses a formula "name of grantee, town name(s), geographic region" to describe each of the 110 indigenous towns allocated:

> To Francisco Martin, I give and signal his lordship in repartimiento, the towns of Temterique and Nantrao, which are of the other part of the Ulúa river, with all the nobility and Indians of those towns, for which he has a written document [A Franciso Martin, dio y senalo, su senoria, de repartimiento, los pueblos de Temterique y Nantrao, que son de la otra parte del rio de Olua, con todos los senores e indios de los dichos pueblos, de que llevo cedula.] (Alvarado 1871b:30).

Here "Francisco Martin" is the individual being granted a town in repartimiento, "Temterique y Nantrao" are the names of the towns being given, and "the other part of the Ulúa river" is the geographic region.

The notion that Alvarado is expressing personal knowledge of town locations is even clearer when varying degrees of specificity are used:

> To Miguel Garcia de Linan, citizen and town official of said city, I give and signal, by repartimiento, the town of Tepetapa, with the town of Chichiagual, subject to it, three leagues from this city, and the towns of Chorochi, Chicoy, Cecatan, and Temaxacel which are, two of them towards Manianai, and two towards the road to Guatemala; and in addition the town of Peuta, which is towards the Yoro valley, with all the nobility and Indians of said towns
> [A Miguel Garcia de Linan, vecino e regidor de la dicha villa, dio y senalo, de repartimiento, el pueblo de Tepeteapa, con el pueblo de Chichiagual, a el sujeto, ques, tres leguas desta villa; y los pueblos de Chorochi, y Chicoy, y Cecatan, y Temaxacel, que son, los dos hacia la parte de Maniani; y los dos, hacia el camino de Guatemala; y mas el pueblo de Peuta, ques, hacia el valle de Yoro; con todos los senores e indios de los dichos pueblos] (1871b:23-24).

The distinction between the precise "three leagues from this city" and the imprecise "towards Maniani" in the above entry is indicative of the varying degrees of geographic knowledge being expressed in the document.

Given that the document reflects real geography, the locations of towns should be internally consistent, and towns listed as in the same region should cluster together on the real landscape as well. Identifications that violate these expectations should be avoided unless continuity from the sixteenth century can be demonstrated. Some early town names were applied

in subsequent centuries to other places in Honduras, which would confuse identification that did not use historical documents as a guide.

In order to control for such erroneous attributions, I used later sources which include town names in Honduras grouped into regions, such as a listing, grouped by district, of the towns in Honduras in 1582 (Contreras Guevara 1946), a 1632 list of towns in the region of Tencoa (Gonzalez 1957), an ecclesiastical survey of 1791 (Cadiñanos 1946), and a civil census from 1804 (Anguiano 1946). Often these documents allow names to be traced within a known region, even when no positive identification of the precise location of the town could be made.

The Ulúa river valley and surroundings is a large and complex area, and Alvarado uses a variety of descriptions to refer to the same areas. In Table 1 these descriptions are grouped so that descriptions that refer to the same region appear in the same table cell.

Table 1: Alvarado's descriptions of regions in the Repartimiento of San Pedro

Description	**Detailed Listing of Towns**
"en el rio de Olua"	See Table 2
"en el rio balaliama" "en el rio calaliama" "en el rio balalianca" "en el rio balachama" "en el rio balahama"	See Table 3
"en las sierras comarcanas a dicho rio" "hacia la parte de las sierras del rio de Olua"	See Table 4
"en la costa de la mar" "en las cordilleras de las sierras de la mar" "en las sierras comarcanas a la mar"	See Table 5
"en la ribera del rio de Olua, arriba"	See Table 6
"desotra parte de las sierras del rio de Olua" "de la otra parte del rio de Olua, en las sierras" "en las sierras de la otra parte del rio de Olua"	See Table 7
"de la otra parte del rio de Olua" "de la otra parte del rio de Olua"	See Table 8
"en el valle de Naco" "juntos al pueblo de Naco" "en las sierras comarcanas al valle de Naco" "sujeto a Naco"	See Table 9
"en el valle de Sula" "en las sierras comarcanas del valle de Sula" "las sierras confines al valle de Sula" "las sierras comarcanas a Sula"	See Table 10

"hacia Caguatexmagar" "en las sierras de Caguantamagas" "de que es señor Ciguatamagar"	See Table 11
"hacia el valle de Yoro"	See Table 12
"hacia el Maniani" "hacia la parte de Maniani"	See Table 13
"en el camino de la provincia de Guatemala, aguas vertientes al rio de Laula" "en el camino de la provincia de Guatemala" "hacia el camino de Guatemala" "hacia la parte del camino de Guatemala"	See Table 14

The region “on the Ulúa River” is perhaps the most easily identified of the geographic descriptions. This location is specified for 15 towns, four with double or alternate names. Many of these towns can be precisely located today. They range from Quelequele in the north, to Esboloncal in the south, where the Ulúa enters the valley. At first, the designation of Chamelecon as “on the Ulúa River” appears anomalous, because today the town of Chamelecon is on the Chamelecon River. However, as discussed above, in 1536 when the document was written, the Chamelecon was a tributary of the Ulúa River and was treated as part of the Ulúa by the Spanish.

Table 2: Towns located on the Ulúa River

Town Name	**Identification**	**Later Jurisdictions**
Quitola/Quitamay	Ticamaya, Cortés	1582 San Pedro 1791 San Pedro
Chamolocon/Toninlo	Chamelecon, Cortés	
Tichel y Lequele	Quele Quele, Cortés	
Tibombo y Caquera	Tibombo, Cortés	1582 San Pedro
Despolonal	Esboloncal, Cortés	1582 San Pedro
Mopalalia	Mopala, Cortés	1582 San Pedro
Teuma	San Manuel Tehuma, Cortés	1582 San Pedro 1791 Tehuma or Ulúa 1804 Chinda
Lemoa/Marcayo	Lemoa, Cortés	1582 San Pedro
Chagua	Jaguas, Cortés	1582 none given
Chetegua	Jetegua	1582 none given
Chupenma		
Istacapa		
Maliapa		
Penlope		
Timohol		1582 none given

A second region is described as "on the balaliama (or balahama) river" where some of the towns can be identified. These identifications rule out Stone's (1957) suggestion that the Balahama/Balaliama is the Ulúa River. The location of Choloma, south of the modern town in the sixteenth century, and of Lama, confirm this was the name for what today is called the Choloma river, running in a course that has since been abandoned. Andres de Cereceda described Conta y Cholula as being two leagues along the same river as Ticamaya in 1533. Pope (1984) identifies this course of the Choloma River as having been current in the sixteenth century, and has the Choloma joining the Chamelecon river right at the archaeological site that represents the remains of the pueblo of Ticamaya (Blaisdell-Sloan 2006).

Table 3: The Choloma River

Town Name	Identification	Later Jurisdictions
Choloma y Teocunitad	Choloma, Cortés	
Lama y Milon	Lama, Cortés	
Conta y Cholula		
Pocoy		

"In the mountains near said river" and "towards the mountains near said river" refers to a small hill zone located on the northeastern edge of the valley. There are only five towns in the region, of which four were said to be tributary to Ticamaya in the sixteenth century. While none of these towns can currently be identified, one of them was described as being in the jurisdiction of San Pedro in 1582, which locates this area in the northern Ulúa valley.

Table 4: Towns in the mountains of the Ulúa river

Town Name	Identification	Later Jurisdictions
Toloa	Toloa, Yoro	1582 San Pedro
Yux		1582 none given
Estupil		1582 none given
Pepel		1582 none given
Tonaltepeque		1582 none given
Mecuxa	Mezapa, Atlántida?	

The region described in the Repartimiento as "on the seacoast" or "in the mountains of the coast" is associated with the Caribbean coast between the Ulúa River and modern Guatemala. All of these towns are either on the coast itself, or in the Sierra de Omoa. Five of these towns can be associated with modern locations, while a sixth, Quelepa, is known to have been in the same region based on the testimony of Bernal Diaz, who visited it on a foraging mission from Nito on the Golfo Dulce in 1525 (1980:480). The original location of Masca, the focus of this work, is among these towns north and west along the coast. In the late seventeenth century the people of Masca moved inland away from this original location, reflected in their shift from the jurisdiction of Puerto Caballos to that of San Pedro.

Table 5: Towns on the coast

Town Name	**Identification**	**Later Jurisdictions**
Comoa y Chichiaguala	Omoa and Chachaguala, Cortés	
Tecucaste		
Techuacan	Tecuan, Atlantida?	
Maxcaba	Masca, Cortés	1582 Puerto de Caballos 1791 San Pedro 1804 Chinda
Quelepa		
Yama		
Xacala		
Chabana	Chivana, Cortés	
Tolian	Tulian, Cortés	
Petegua		

The region "on the banks of the Ulúa, above (or upriver)" most likely refers to the geography around the modern town of Chinda, upriver from Esboloncal. The identifiable towns in this region are outside of the Ulúa river valley.

Table 6: Towns upstream on the Ulúa River

Town Name	**Identification**	**Later Jurisdictions**
Chintaguapalapa	Chinda, Santa Barbara	1582 San Pedro 1791 Petoa 1804 Chinda
Coapa		
Quechaltepete	Quezaltepeque, Santa Barbara	1582 Gracias a Dios 1632 Tencoa
Quitapa		
Chapoapa		1582 San Pedro
Motochiapa		
Yscalapa		
Tetacalapa		
Comila		

A number of other towns are located “on the other part of the Ulúa River”. Identifications of towns described in this way make it clear that this refers to tributaries of the Ulúa River. Early maps of the region (Davidson 2006) describe the river systems from the point of view of someone entering the streams by boat. Tributaries are seen as branching from the original river, rather than, in modern terms, as discrete bodies of water flowing into the Ulúa. There are multiple tributaries to the Ulúa that are not otherwise described in the repartimiento: the Chamelecon river, which flows west; the Rio Blanco, which flows southwest; and the Comayagua river, which flows southeast, each with their own tributaries. All of these are candidates for the "other part" of the Ulúa River.

Multiple towns are said to be located in the region “in the mountains" of the "other part" of the Ulúa River. The three identifiable towns, Oloman, Cataguana, and San Jose Guayma, are in the department of Yoro along the Rio Cuyumapa, a branch of the Comayagua River. Oloman and Cataguana are mentioned in the description of a foraging mission led by Gonzalo de Alvarado during the 1530s (Alvarado y Chavez 1967). All three places are mentioned in documents reporting a campaign against "infidel" Jicaque Indians in 1623, described as in the "valle de Cataguana, del rio Olua" and "las montañas de Cartaguana, Oloman, i Guaymar" (Garavito 1925a, 1925b). Other towns with this designation may have been located near Agalteca, further east along the Sulaco River, another tributary of the Comayagua River.

Table 7: Towns on the "other part" of the Ulúa River, in the mountains

Town Name	**Identification**	**Later Jurisdictions**
Catoguama	Cataguana, Yoro	
Oloma	Oloman, Yoro	
Guyamacan	San Jose Guayma,Yoro	1582 Comayagua
Atauchia		
Axuragapa		
Celot		
Contela		
Coateco		
Suchistabaca		
Chapalia		
Chapoapa		
Chondaguz		

Table 7 (continued)

Chongola		
Xuay		
Istabaca		
Maula		1582 Trujillo
Oricapala	Oricapila, Comayagua	1582 Comayagua
Tepetuagua		
Tarate		
Timolo		
Tisucheco		
Toscale		
Tulapa		
Yoqui		

Three towns are identified simply as "on the other part of the Ulúa River". While at first, this seems similar to the previous designation, the omission of "sierras" in these cases distinguishes them. One of these places, Chapanapa, granted to Andres de Cereceda in 1536, was listed in 1539 in the posthumous account of his estate, in a list of mines near Quimistan, which is along the Chamelecon River west of the Ulúa valley.

Table 8: Towns on the other part of the Ulúa River

Town Name	**Modern Identification**
Chapanapa	
Nantrao	
Temterique	

Naco, where Spanish officers sent south by Cortes established themselves in 1525, is one of the regions already well known to Alvarado in 1536. Places are described as in the Naco valley, near the town of Naco, subject to Naco, or in the mountains surrounding the Naco valley. Some of these can be identified with towns in the Naco area today. Others were mentioned in letters written by Andres de Cereceda in 1534. Along with these, the report on the 1525 campaign by Bernal Diaz allows us to place Selimonga and Soluta close to Naco, Quimistan, and Sula. First hand knowledge is emphasized by the estimate of a combined strength for Naco and Ilamatepeque of up to 300 men.

Table 9: The Naco Valley

Town Name	**Identification**	**Later Jurisdictions**
Naco	Naco, Santa Barbara	
Quimistem	Quimistan, Santa Barbara	1791 Petoa 1804 Chinda
Tapalampa y Tetecapa	Tapalapa, Santa Barbara	1582 none given
Acapustepec y Sonalagua		1582 none given
Soluta y Tenestepet		
Selimonga		1582 San Pedro
Copanique		1582 Gracias a Dios
Motochiapa y Chapoapa		1582 San Pedro
Chumbaguapalapa	Chumbagua, Cortés	1582 San Pedro
Maciguata		
Petoa y Acachiauyt	Petoa, Santa Barbara	1582 San Pedro 1791 Petoa
Ilamatepet	Ilama, Santa Barbara	1582 San Pedro 1791 Tencoa 1804 Tencoa
Teconalistagua	Teconalistagua, Cortés	1582 San Pedro

A second location referred to in a similar way was the "valle de Sula". Great confusion has been caused by Doris Stone's (1941) identification of this location with the modern city of San Pedro Sula. However, historic documents show that this is the area around the present-day town of Sula, west of Quimistan, along the middle Chamelecon. Because it was an area with gold mines whose output was sent to San Pedro for processing, the city came to be called "San Pedro de las Minas de Sula", later shortened to San Pedro Sula. Two towns, Chiquila and Pozuma, can be identified, and are close to the modern town of Sula, west of the Naco valley.

Sula had been among the earliest named towns known from Honduras, and all the early references reinforce identification with modern Sula, Santa Barbara, west of Quimistan. The route followed by the expedition Cortes sent from Nito to Naco passed up the Motagua valley, entering the Sula valley, proceeding via Quimistan to Naco (Diaz 1980:480-483). In the early 1530s, when Spanish colonists abandoned Trujillo for the Naco area, they established Santa Maria de Buena Esperanza, their new capital, near Sula.

In 1536, Sula itself was not assigned in repartimiento. Andres de Cereceda reportedly destroyed the town when he abandoned it for Naco. The modern town of Sula derives its name from Cereceda's *encomienda* (grant of labor rights) in the same area, and the mines of Sula which were remembered and revived in the late eighteenth century, simultaneous with a growth of ranching population there to provision the fortress at Omoa (1786 AGCA A3 Legajo 507 Expediente 5264). In 1791, Sula was identified as a valley in the curate of Tencoa. Otherwise, none of the towns named in 1536 as located in or near Sula are mentioned in 1582, 1632, 1791, or 1804.

Table 10: The valley of Sula

Town Name	**Identification**	**Later Jurisdictions**
Chiquilar	Chiquila, Santa Barbara	
Aplaca		
Sicapez y Jalmatepet		
Chumbazina		
Tascoava		
Acapa		
Secaloce		
Chilapa		
Tepoltepet		
Prosuma	Pozuma, Santa Barbara	

A third valley identifiable with an area of the modern Department of Santa Barbara was described as "towards" or "in the mountains of" a specific person, Caguantamagas. He is specifically named as the *señor* of a town called Tranan. While none of these town names survive, in 1632 Yamalera was described as in the area of Tencoa, Santa Barbara, as was a Tamagasapa in 1791 and 1804. Today, the area around San Jose Colinas, Santa Barbara, in the Tencoa area, is called the valle de Tamagasapa.

Table 11: Near Caguantamagas

Town Name	**Identification**
Yamalera	
Guatecay y Cuena-aguapelo	
Tranan	

A final valley used as a term of reference is Yoro, east of the Ulúa valley. The Spanish colonists of Honduras would have known Yoro in 1536 because it was in the hinterland of Trujillo, from which they had moved to the Naco-Quimistan area only a few years earlier. Two towns named in this location are identifiable today.

Table 12: The Yoro valley

Town Name	**Identification**	**Later Jurisdictions**
Yoro	Yoro, Yoro	1582 San Pedro 1791 Yoro
Mapagua	Maragua, Yoro	1582 none given
Guatepegua		1582 none given
Peuta		1582 none given

Also east, but towards the south, was a cluster of towns described as "towards Maniani" or "towards the area of Maniani". Maniani was a town known to the relocated colonists living in Santa Maria de Buena Esperanza, according to letters from interim governor Andres de Cereceda to the king of Spain. Maniani itself was just north of the Comayagua valley and all the identified towns mentioned were part of the Comayagua jurisdiction in 1582.

Table 13: Towards Maniani

Town Name	**Identification**	**Later Jurisdictions**
Maniani	Maniani	1582 Comayagua 1791 Comayagua 1804 Comayagua
Agalteca	Agalteca	1582 Comayagua 1804 Cedros
Comayagua	Comayagua	1582 Comayagua 1791 Comayagua 1804 Comayagua
Sulaco	Sulaco	1582 Comayagua 1804 Yoro
Aramani		1582 Comayagua
Chicoy		
Chorochi		
Intiquilagua		
Lenga		
Macolay		
Maleo		

A relatively large number of towns were described with reference to a "Rio Laula". The same river was combined as part of a description referring to the "road to Guatemala". Located to the west, at a greater distance from the Ulúa valley, these towns were well known to the Spanish colonists because they were along the established route from the Naco and Quimistan valleys to the capital city of Guatemala. One town, Naoponchota, is actually described in both ways. Culúacan is probably the town Cuyuacan, 7 leagues inland along the Rio Motagua valley, mentioned by Bernal Diaz writing about the campaign of 1525 (1980:482). Chapulco today is a town south of the ruins of Quirigua, Guatemala, in the mountains which separate Honduras from the Motagua plain. These identifications, along with the inference that the Rio Laula was not a tributary of the Ulúa, based on it having a distinct name, suggest that Rio Laula is best identified with the Rio Motagua.

Table 14: The Rio Laula and road to Guatemala

Town Name	**Identification**	**Later Jurisdictions**
Achiete	Achote, Cuyamel	
Lalaco		
Culúacan		
Naoponchota		
Cecatan y Temaxacel		
Caxete y Laguela	Laguala, Gracias	1582 Gracias a Dios 1791 Gracias a Dios
Chapulco	Chapulco, Guatemala	1582 Gracias a Dios
Abalpoton		

A single town, Toquegua, has a related but distinct geographic location. It was described as "de la otra parte del rio de Olua, hacia el mar". Toquegua is the name of a prominent early colonial indigenous family in the Ulúa valley and the zone west to the Gulf of Amatique (Sheptak 2007). A town with this name was reported in other Spanish colonial documents, located east of Laguna Izabal. From the perspective of San Pedro, this location was towards the sea from one of the upstream branches of the Ulúa, the Rio Chamelecon.

Eight towns given in the San Pedro repartimiento have no geographic location indicated. Four are easily identified (Table 15). They include Meambar, a town described in the correspondence of Andres de Cereceda, where, as in a few other instances, the repartimiento gives an estimate of population size, in this case, 400 houses. The inclusion of San Gil de Buena

Vista, only one league from Nito on the Golfo Dulce in Guatemala, marks the western boundary of the *Repartimiento de San Pedro,* while one half of the island of Utila marks the boundary with an early repartimiento made when the colonists were in Trujillo to the east.

Table 15: Towns not assigned a geographic location

Town Name	**Identification**	**Later Jurisdictions**
Chinamin	Chinamit	1582 none given
La Isla de Utila	Utila, Bay Islands	1582 San Pedro
San Gil de Buena Vista	Golfo Dulce, Guatemala	
Gualala	Gualala, Santa Barbara	1582 Gracias a Dios 1632 Tencoa 1791 Tencoa 1804 Tencoa
Miambar	Meambar, Comayagua	1582 Comayagua 1791 Siguatepeque 1804 Comayagua
Taomatepet		
Patuca		
Oquipilco		
Chuyoa		
Ayaxal		

Finally, the Repartimiento describes two other towns simply as being three leagues from San Pedro, Tepeapa and Chichiacal, the latter described as "with" Tepeapa in a double naming pattern common in the Ulúa valley. San Pedro was founded just south of modern Choloma. The 1536 foundation document for San Pedro was actually written at Choloma:

> being in a large building that is at the seat of the *pueblo de indios* that is called Choloma, where there is a tree that they call *madre cacao* [estando en una cabaña grande que esta junto al asiento del pueblo de indios que se dicen Choloma, donde esta un arbol que se llama madre de cacao]

The town of Tepeteapa is the place where Anton de la Torre (1874:244) says Cristobal de Olid and Gil Gonzalez Davila met on the way to Naco in 1524. This was a point described as about three leagues from Choloma. Tepeaca, currently an eastern barrio within the modern city of

San Pedro, meets these requirements. Montejo moved San Pedro near here when he became governor of the province of Honduras (Montejo 1864:221).

In total, there are some 42 Indian towns given by Alvarado in repartimiento that were located in the Ulúa river valley, or along the coast between the Ulúa River and Guatemala. Another 27 towns were located with reference to the Ulúa River and its tributaries. After Spanish colonization, the town became the basic governmental and administrative structure of indigenous life. Spanish colonial structure actually reinforced and perpetuated what was already the basic focus of social relations in the Ulúa valley, the internally stratified, largely autonomous, indigenous town.

Social Identity in Indigenous Honduras in the Sixteenth Century

Honduras at the beginning of the sixteenth century had a complex social geography. Settlements ranged from small towns to cities with hundreds of houses and public buildings. Indigenous communities spoke many languages. Some of these, like the Chorti and Lenca, are well known, while others, such as the Pech and Tol, are less well known (Chapman 1978a, 1978b, 1985, 1986; Davidson 1985, 1991, 2006; Gomez 2002, 2003; Henderson 1977; Lara Pinto 1980, 1991, 1996).

Traditional studies of indigenous language distributions rely on Spanish colonial documents that never were meant as a comprehensive resource on language. As Van Broekhoven (2002:129) notes there is no necessary tie between ethnic identity and a community, nor do language and culture necessarily lead to a single identity. Campbell has shown that people of one culture can speak several different languages, and one language might be shared by people of several distinct cultures (Campbell 1998).

Previous reconstructions of language distributions in Honduras (Campbell 1976, 1979; Davidson 1985; Davidson and Cruz 1991; Stone 1941) have viewed the Ulúa valley as a meeting place of Maya, Lenca, and Tol/Jicaque. Studies of the distribution of Lenca in the sixteenth century have raised questions about the existence of Caré, Colo, Popoluca, and other recorded terms, whether as distinct dialects or independent languages (Chapman 1978b; Davidson 1985; Fowler 1989; Lara Pinto 1991). Are these labels for distinct languages? Lineages? Tribes? Campbell (1978) identifies only two Lenca languages, Honduran Lenca and Salvadoran Lenca. Sachse (2010) notes that for another of the troubling languages of Southeast Mesoamerica, Xinca, colonial documents record different distinct dialects being spoken in different barrios of the same town.

Interpretations of the Ulúa valley being a Maya speaking part of western Honduras in the sixteenth century have generally followed arguments made in the sixteenth century by Francisco Montejo, that there was all one language from Campeche to the Ulúa river, as part of his claim to govern from Yucatan to Honduras. Modern scholars who follow this model use Montejo's statement to craft models of language distribution that fit the culture area concept that predicted that the Ulúa valley was the frontier of the Maya languages, because of the existence of Mesoamerican area traits like polychrome pottery and ball courts that were considered typically Mesoamerican, and on the eastern edge of Mesoamerica, typically Mayan (Thompson 1938).

Arguments have also been made for the distribution of Tol/Jicaque in the lower Ulúa valley. These resulted from a flawed identification of towns inhabited in the early twentieth century by Tol speakers, actually in the Department of Yoro east of the Ulúa valley, with colonial towns of the same name in the valley itself. This is a problem I return to in my final chapter, as one of these misplaced towns was confused with Candelaria, the focus of this study.

The distribution of Nahuatl place names in Honduras has been treated as evidence of a prehispanic distribution of people speaking Nahua-related languages (Fowler 1986), but mainly reflects colonial period resettlement of Spanish auxiliaries, and the use of Nahautl as a prestige language. The practice of using Nahuatl calendric day names as personal names, and the use of Nahuatl toponyms in Mesoamerican regions not known to have had Nahua populations, is amply documented in Southeastern Mesoamerica. These two patterns are known from Honduras as well.

In general, those working in Honduras have sidestepped the question of prehispanic multilingualism, preferring to view multilingualism as a product of colonialism. Archaeologists have generally ignored Fox's call for recognition of prehispanic multilingualism (Fox 1981). The Ulúa valley situation is somewhat similar to the Xinca case studied by Sachse (2010), and the Chontales case in Nicaragua studied by Van Broekhoven (2002). Sachse (2010) attributed the multi-lingualism of single communities to colonial processes. Van Broekhoven (2002:130) uses Campbell's methodology of seeing where the preponderance of evidence leads to determine language distributions.

In studying the Ulúa valley, I reached the conclusion that the evidence suggests the communities were multilingual and that language was not the same as personal identity, as Van Broekhoven (2002) also suggests. I argue that many of the subdivisions of Lenca in particular might be better viewed

as naming localized identities with towns and their dominant families, not languages or dialects.

The Spanish colonizers were neither linguists nor anthropologists. At times they gave offensive names to indigenous groups, such as using the word "Jicaque" to refer to the Tol of Yoro. "Jicaque" in the Nahua languages means a savage, an uncivilized person, and was applied not only to the Tol in Honduras, but also to rebellious Indians in other parts of the Spanish colonies. Honduran colonial documents thus contain phrases like "indios jicaques de Campeche" or "indios jicaques Miskitos", in addition to using the unmodified term Jicaque for the Tol, for example, in documents reporting a campaign against "infidel" Jicaque indians in the Cuyumapa Valley in 1623 (Garavito 1925a, 1925b).

While today it is common to equate a nation with its language, this is a modern idea. The intellectual roots of this association are in the seventeenth century, but it was first codified as a concept in 1772 by Johann Gottfried Herder who proposed the unity of language, national character, and territory (Gal 2006:164). This idea developed in Europe with the establishment of dictionaries, grammars, and language academies. Even though the first non-Latin language grammar, the *Gramatica de la lengua castellana* of Antonio Nebrija, was published in 1492, it was not until 1713 that the Royal Spanish Academy was founded to elaborate the norms and rules of the Spanish language. In the sixteenth century, Spain was a multilingual country, and its colonies were multilingual as well. Because of this, we must be careful when we use colonial documents, or the words they use for the language of an indigenous community, as definitive evidence of their ethnic identity, maternal language, or community identity.

The colonial documents in fact so far are mute on what language the indigenous people of northern Honduras spoke. There are no explicit statements of the form, "they spoke XXX" where XXX is some known indigenous language. Nor when interpreters are used in colonial documents is there any indication of what language the interpreter speaks, as this example from Masca in 1662 illustrates:

> in the name and with the power of attorney of said
> encomendera I made appear before me the Mayor of said
> town Miguel Cuculi and the town official Roque Chi, and
> their being present along with the rest of the town,
> through Simon Lopez who performed the role of
> interpreter and understands the language of said Indians,
> made them understand said title (of encomienda)

> [en nombre y com poder de dha encomendera hize
> parezer ante mi a el Alcalde de dho pueblo Miguel
> Cuculí y regidor del Roque Chi y estando presenttes con
> los demas de dho pueblo por Simon Lopez que hizo
> ofiçio de yntterprette y enttiende la lengua de dhos
> yndios les dia enttender el dho ttitulo].
> (1679 AGI Guatemala 104 N.9)

This differs from the situation in Nicaragua where Patrick Werner reports (personal communication) that it was common for colonial documents to mention the language used by the interpreter. In Honduras, in contrast, the documents only refer to the language spoken, if they refer to it at all, as the "lengua materna" (mother tongue) of the Indians.

Many investigators (Feldman 1975, 1998; Hellmuth 1971; Henderson 1977; Milla 1879; Roys 1943:114; Sapper 1985; see also the maps in Chapman 1978:25 and Newson 1986:19) have followed Thompson (1938) in identifying a language and ethnic identity "Toquegua" in northern Honduras, including the lower Ulúa valley. Toquegua is further identified by these authors as a Maya language and ethnicity. This is largely based on the writing of Spanish priests who in 1605, after visiting a series of Chol speaking towns in the Verapaz region, visited a *reducción* (Spanish resettlement, which could concentrate people of different origins) of "Toquegua" in Amatique, located near the mouth of the Motagua River. They describe speaking to the people in the Amatique settlement in Chol, and say the people answered back in badly spoken Chol (Ximenez 1932).

Rather than interpret Toquegua as the name of a language and a people named for that language, it is more consistent with other information to interpret the word "Toquegua" as a reference to a group of people (Sheptak 2007). The people described in Amatique could speak a Cholan language, but in a way notably distinct from the native Cholan speakers with whom the expectations of the friars were formed. The individuals involved had been resettled, and it is possible they came from a town originally named Toquegua, as Toquegua occurs in historical documents as the name of a town in the Motagua Valley area. Interestingly, it also appears in historical documents as the name of a prominent family.

Social Relations: Town, Family, and Personal Names

Instead of projecting a modern equation of language, nation, and identity into the past, we can infer identity from the way people name

themselves. In most cases, in Honduran colonial documents the Indians use Spanish surnames, but there are also indigenous surnames used in this region in the colonial period. Pastor Gomez (2002, 2003) has shown that "Çocamba", the personal name of a cacique in the valley in 1536, is used in 1576 as both the family surname of the cacique of the town Santiago Çocamba, and as part of the town name. This example shows that "Çocamba", which prior to the conquest was the identifier of a specific person, and possibly already a town name, was transformed into a Spanish surname (*apellido*) in the colonial period.

At least four of the towns that were part of the *provincia del rio Ulúa* (province of the Ulúa river), the colonial administrative territory centered on the Ulúa river, included historically documented individuals who had indigenous surnames (Figure 3). These included Masca, where the indigenous-surnamed Cuculí family produced members who functioned as *alcaldes* (mayors) and *regidores* (councilmen), and individuals who petitioned the Audiencia in Guatemala. In 1672, Miguel Cuculi, alcalde of Masca, participated in the ceremonial transfer to its new *encomendero* (holder of labor rights) of the encomienda of Masca (1679 AGI Guatemala 104 N.9). In 1675, Blás Cuculi, who identified himself as a *vecino* (resident with legal rights) of San Pedro Masca, presented a petition on the part of the indigenous community to the Audiencia of Guatemala in Santiago Guatemala (1675 AGCA A3.12 Legajo 527 Expediente 5525). In 1704, Simon Cuculi, acting as alcalde, assumed the debt of a Spanish resident of San Pedro in order to secure land near San Pedro for the relocated town, by then known as Nuestra Senora de Candelaria de Masca (1714 AGCA A1.45.6 Legajo 368 Expediente 3413).

Another notable indigenous family present in Masca was the Chi family. Roque Chi was a regidor participating in the ceremony transferring the encomienda of Masca from one holder to another in 1662. In 1711 both Diego Chi and Guillermo Chi were regidores. Another family member, Juana Chi, appears in a 1781 list of town residents (1781 AGCA A3.1 Legajo 1305 Expediente 22217 folio 15).

Chavacan is a third indigenous family name that appears in Masca, as well as in neighboring Ticamaya. Again, at Masca the use of this surname is a marked practice of a family with members in political offices. Martin Chabacan appears in a 1610 list of coastal watchmen at the point of Manabique on the coast near the original location of Masca (1610 AGCA A3.13 Legajo 527 Expediente 5505). In 1711, Marcos Chavacan was regidor and Agusto Chavacan was alcalde of Masca. In 1712 Marcos Chavacan was located in Puerto Caballos as part of the coastal watch. In

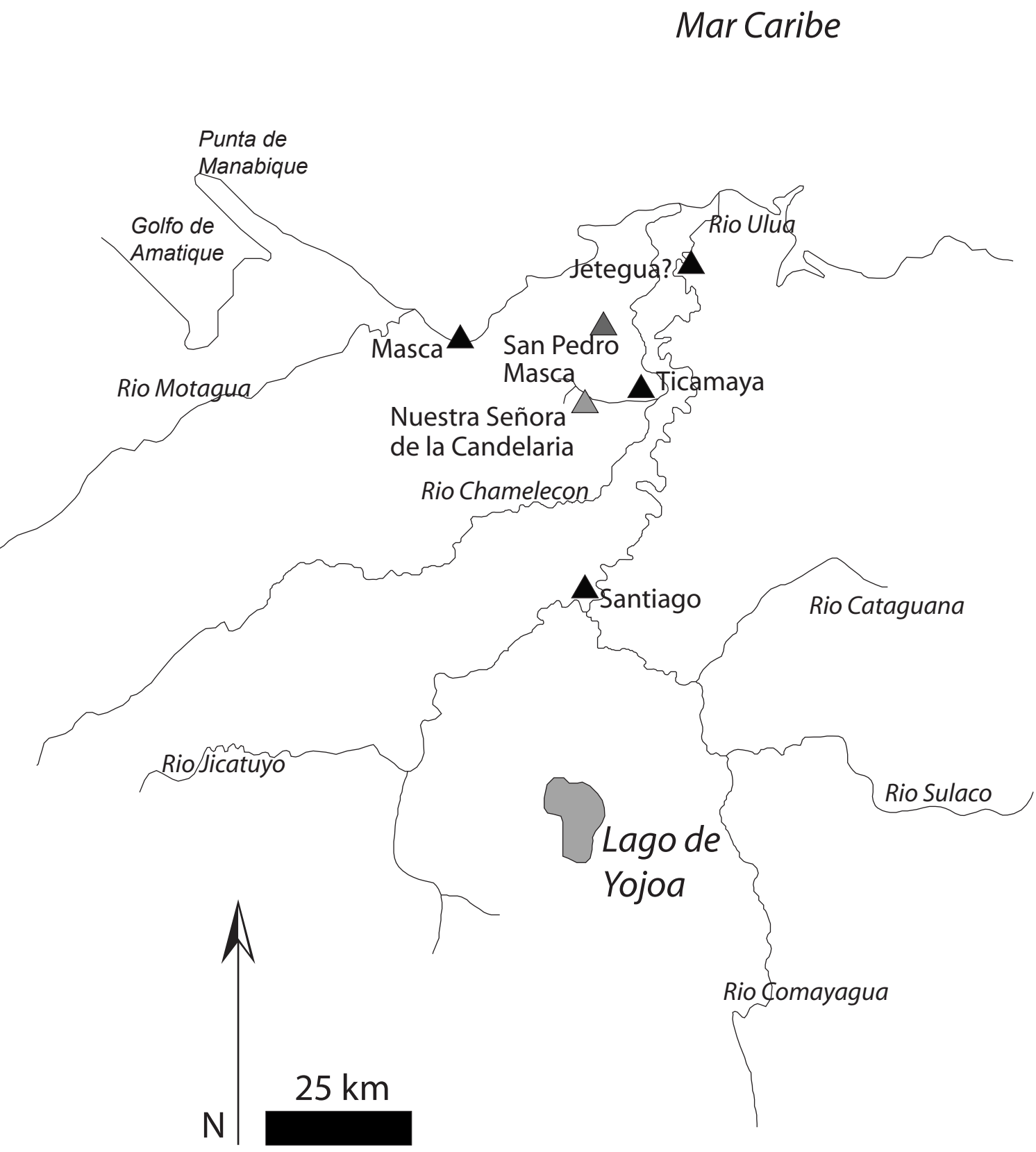

Figure 3: Towns in the Ulua province with individuals with indigenous surnames

1781, Masca's residents included Pascual Chavacan and Angela Maria Chavacan. At that time, an Ana Maria Chavacan lived in Ticamaya, whose residents were ultimately counted together with those of Candelaria in 1809 (1781 AGCA A3.1 Legajo 1305 Expediente 22217 folio 14).

Jetegua, another pueblo de indios in the Ulúa valley, also had a number of families with indigenous surnames, again acting in governance roles. In 1679 Gaspar Sima was alcalde, with Sebastian Calao as *mayordomo* (town official) and Luis Toquegua as regidor (1679 AGCA A1.60 Legajo 5364 Expediente 45339). In 1710, Fabrian Calao, also described as mayordomo, and Marcelo Alao, Luis Toquegua, Jacinto Sima, and Bartolome Calao are listed among the *indios principales* of Jetegua (1710 AGCA A1.12 Legajo 50 Expediente 493). Literally meaning "principal Indians", *indios principales* are understood to comprise a separate social stratum, an indigenous upper class present before the Spanish colony that continued to be recognized by others in the town even when not formally part of colonial structures.

In the colonial towns where indigenous surnames were preserved, individuals with these names are prominent in government and are denoted indios principales. They are even occasionally described with a distinctive Nahuatl-derived term *tlatoque*. Immediately after listing Fabrian Calao, Marcelo Alao, Luis Toquegua, Jacinto Sima, and Bartolome Calao, along with Pablo Perez and Pedro Garcia, as officers of Jetegua, the 1710 document invokes “los demas tlatoques chicos y grandes del pueblo", "the rest of the small and great tlatoques of the town". “Tlatoque” is the plural of the Nahuatl word “tlatoani”, which literally means “speaker” and was the word used by the Mexica for their rulers. Even more than the term indio principal, tlatoque implies the existence of a recognized group distinguished in social rank, an indigenous nobility still acknowledged in the early eighteenth century.

Toquegua itself was clearly a surname for such a high-ranking family in colonial Honduras. At the same time, it was a town name. Again, this is not unique. There are other indigenous towns whose names appear as surnames of prominent indigenous families in the colonial period. Cuculi, in addition to being the name of a prominent family in Masca, named an indigenous town located west of the mouth of the Golfo Dulce, on the coast. Alao was a family name in Jetegua, along with variants like Calao, but it was also the name of an indigenous town in the mountains between the Ulúa and Motagua rivers. Gualala, the name of an indigenous town on the Ulúa River in Santa Barbara south of Naco, appears as the surname of one of the

last indios principales in Naco in 1588 (1588 AGCA A3.16 Legajo 511 Expediente 5347).

The group of resettled residents at Amatique in 1605 identified as "Toquegua" included people with surnames Achavan, Ixchavan, and Chavan (Feldman 1998), the first two likely Maya-style male and female names using the prefixes ah- and ix- along with Chavan, recognizably related to the family name Chavacan recorded in colonial towns of the Ulúa valley. Chivana, an indigenous town today located between Puerto Caballos and Omoa on the coast, was also spelled Chavana, and may be related.

Most important for this study, both Masca and Mascaban are indigenous personal names recorded in the Amatique area. Mascaba or Masca was an indigenous town originally located on the coast east of Amatique, near Manabique. Even when the residents of this town relocated inland, they preserved the name Masca as part of their town name, into the eighteenth century.

All the indigenous town names that appear as surnames in the colonial period in this area should be considered as naming an individual or a group of residents in an indigenous town, each town perhaps headed by one family in particular that shared the town name as a personal name. Considerable evidence suggests that the families who shared the names of towns were higher ranking than other families in those towns. These families of indios principales were cosmopolitan: possibly multilingual, and certainly critical participants in long distance connections with other Mesoamerican peoples.

Multilingualism and Cosmopolitanism

Colonial documents suggest that the indigenous towns of the Ulúa region incorporated two classes of people, one of which retained indigenous names and monopolized community governance. The use of a Nahuatl term to refer to some of these individuals brings us back to the question of the language spoken in the region, and the contribution that identifying the dominant language of this region might make to understanding indigenous identity here.

Names for prominent indigenous families in the colonial period often were also names of specific towns, across an area extending from the Golfo Dulce (today in Guatemala) to the Ulúa river valley (Figure 4). This is the same area identified by others as the zone of a "Toquegua" language or ethnic group. Toquegua is a town name in the 1536 Repartimiento of San Pedro by Pedro Alvarado, and a family name in Jetegua in the 1600s. The argument for Toquegua being a language (and by extension, a language-

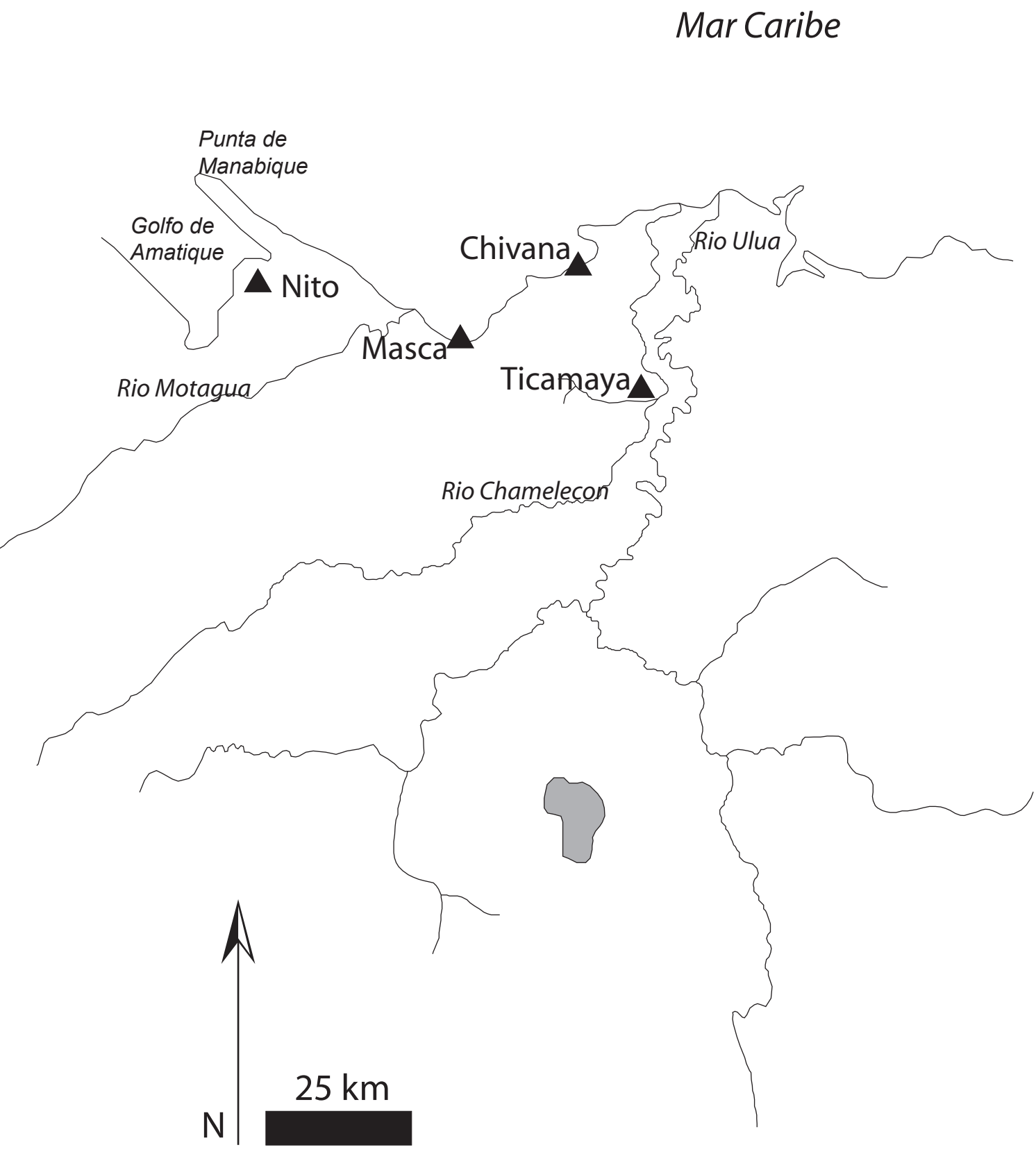

Figure 4: Map of the Toquegua area

based ethnicity) comes from analyses of colonial era documents concerning the area around the mouth of the Motagua River from 1605 through the 1620s. With the discussion of the pattern of prominent families in the colonial pueblos de indios using indigenous names of towns as surnames, we can revisit the evidence for the early seventeenth century Motagua Valley, and demonstrate that here, too, it is better to interpret Toquegua as a genealogical or town identity, not a language or a language-based ethnicity. Further, this evidence points to the presence of individuals or families with cosmopolitan connections, including linguistic practices.

A list of 190 names from Amatique of people identified as "Toquegua" includes names that appear to be derived from Nahuatl, others that may be Yucatec, and still others that may be Chol (Feldman 1975, 1998). Some of these are day names in the Mesoamerican calendric system, in different languages. Using calendric day names as alternative personal names was a Mesoamerican practice, employing a 260 day calendar shared across linguistic and ethnic boundaries. Different groups used words in their own languages for the numbers and day signs that made up the 260 day cycle. The use of day names in "prestige" languages (for example, Nahuatl day names used by Yucatec speakers) is well attested historically. For this reason, none of the three languages used for calendric day names by some of the people resettled in Amatique should be assumed to be the single language of birth of the community. Instead, these probably should be considered prestige naming patterns among a socially restricted group with connections to Cholan, Yucatecan, and Nahuatl speaking or Nahuatl identified peoples elsewhere.

Only a small percentage of the population living at Amatique in the early 1600s uses such exotic names. Nor are the majority of the recorded names that are not calendric identifiable as Yucatec or Chol. Instead, many are similar to names of towns on the Ulúa River, and to the names of the prominent indigenous families recorded there in the colonial period. We can take the distribution of these place- and family- names as an indication that a network of related families and interlocked towns was present in the region from the Golfo Dulce to the Ulúa river, extending inland up the Motagua river to near Quirigua. In Honduras, this distribution coincides with the territory called the "Provincia del Rio de Ulúa" in Spanish colonial documents. This "province" extended upriver to at least the area around modern Santiago, Cortés (in the late sixteenth century, Santiago Çocamba).

The ancestors of the people in this zone, including those called Toqueguas in seventeenth century Spanish documents, had been peers, trading partners, of Maya in Belize and Yucatan before colonization. When

the Ulúa river people needed help defending against Pedro de Alvarado in 1536, the lord of Chetumal in eastern Yucatan sent 50 canoes with warriors to aid Çocamba (Gomez 2003; Sheptak 2004; see also Chamberlain 1953; Roys 1943, 1957:162). Roys (1943:116-117, 1957:162) indicates that Nachan Can, the cacique of Chetumal, probably had representatives in the Ulúa river area himself.

The Maya of Yucatan and of Acalan-Tixchel, far west on the Gulf of Mexico, considered this zone, from the Golfo Dulce to the Ulúa river, one of the major areas for the production of cacao. Early Spanish archival sources from the colonization of Honduras highlight the importance of the province of the Rio de Ulúa in the regional cacao trade. Diego Garcia de Celis wrote in 1534 that Çocamba was "the most principal cacique in all this region and the Indians called him the great merchant of cacao" ("el mas principal cacique que ay en toda esta governacion y los yndios llaman el gran mercader de cacao") because of his cacao trade with Yucatan (1534 Guatemala 49 N. 9).

Landa (1973) tells us that the Yucatec Maya had premises at Nito, near Amatique, and on the Ulúa river, where they came to live and to trade in cacao. Ralph Roys (1957) narrates an incident where a Cocom family member escaped being killed in Yucatan, because he was away trading for cacao on the Ulúa river. Landa tells us specifically that the Yucatecan Maya Chi family had agents living in the Ulúa region to trade for cacao in the early sixteenth century. Masca is the only Honduran colonial town with a record of a family named Chi. This makes it likely that it was Masca, originally located on the coast, that Yucatecan Chi family members visited while trading for cacao in the sixteenth century, some possibly remaining as residents or even spouses of high status local families. At least three distinct Maya noble families have been identified with discrete relations in the Ulúa region: the Chi, Cocom, and the Chan of Chetumal.

We know from colonial documents that the residents of the Ulúa river communities divided themselves into two ranks, the "indios principales" and "los demas", that is, the elite, and everyone else. The indios principales were a group that consisted of a few families who alternated in service as alcaldes and regidores for the town. Some of these families continued to use indigenous names. In some colonial documents the principales are referred to using the Nahuatl term "tlatoques", and in one settlement, calendrical day names were recorded in the early seventeenth century. In contrast, the majority of the residents of indigenous pueblos took on Spanish surnames beginning in the sixteenth century.

The people of this zone were active traders dealing across language barriers. Some must have spoken Yucatec to maintain active alliances with trading partners in Yucatan and Belize. Spanish priests spoke to some in Chol around Amatique, and received answers in that language, albeit spoken with a notable accent. Some of those living near Amatique used Nahuatl calendric day names. They were comfortable using some Nahuatl words in Spanish documents. All of this points to the people called Toquegua in Spanish colonial sources being multilingual rather than monolingual. At the same time, the majority of evidence supports identifying the principal language of the people of the area, their "lengua materna", as a form of Lenca.

Place names from the region, including Toquegua itself, suggest Lenca origin. Toponyms ending with the syllable “-gua”, like Motagua, Quirigua, Jetegua, Chapagua, Teconalistagua, Chasnigua, Chapulistagua, are common in the area. Fox (1981:399-400) cites John Weeks and Lyle Campbell as arguing that “-gua” ending names in the Motagua valley are probably not from a Maya language. While they proposed Xinca as the language originating these place names, the distribution of such names is broader than the known Xinca distribution, extending from Guatemala to Honduras and El Salvador. South of the coastal zone modern scholars have identified as occupied by speakers of a proposed "Toquegua" language, the distribution of the -gua place name ending corresponds with the location of populations known to speak Lenca languages in sixteenth century colonial Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

One town name in the Toquegua area is undeniably Lenca. Quelepa, located near the Motagua valley, shares its name with Quelepa, El Salvador, and Quelepa, Comayagua. In Lenca it means “place of the jaguar”. The root, -lepa, also forms part of the name of the cave Taulabe, on Lake Yojoa (not recorded in colonial sources to date), which as a word in a Lenca language can be glossed as "cave of the jaguar".

The personal name of Çocamba, the cacique who directed resistance to the Spanish in the Ulúa valley, contains sound clusters not recorded for Maya languages, notably "-mba". In contrast, this cluster is attested in Lenca, and the name is intelligible on the basis of the scant sources for Lenca. In Lenca languages “-camba” or “-yamba” is the gerund ending of a verb. In collecting Lenca vocabulary in El Salvador, Campbell (1976) noted that the word “sho” in Salvadoran Lenca means “rain”. “Sho” in Salvadoran Lenca is equivalent to “so” in Honduran Lenca. Based on the Salvadoran Lenca vocabulary, “socamba” would mean something like “raining” or “it's raining”.

Language does not equate with identity. Shared language does, however, facilitate communication. The evidence is strong for identifying the native tongue of the people of the "Toquegua" area as a Lenca language, potentially facilitating social relations with other speakers of Honduran Lenca languages living south of this area, in what today are the modern political departments of Santa Barbara and Comayagua. The leading families also valued and used multiple Maya languages and employed some Nahuatl terms. These are indirect traces of commercial and social ties, cosmopolitan connections of a multilingual network of independent towns along the Caribbean coast that preserved indigenous identity at the level of the town and the family even under the pressures of colonization.

Population of Indigenous Towns in the Sixteenth Century Río Ulúa

The sixteenth century saw a sharp population decline in the province of the río Ulúa. In total, some 42 Indian towns assigned by Pedro Alvarado in Repartimiento in 1536 were located in the Ulúa river valley, or along the coast between the Ulúa River and Guatemala. Of those 42 towns, only 29 still existed in 1582 (Figure 5). At that time, these 29 towns had 415 tributaries. Depending on what multiplier you care to use for the relationship of tributaries to household size, that means the indigenous valley population in 1582 would have been somewhere around 2324 (1:5.6) to 3320 (1:8) individuals. While the decline in number of pueblos de indios (from 42 to 29) already represents a 31% reduction in inhabited towns, it is likely that overall population fell more. In one case, Ticamaya, described in 1536 as having up to 80 men, in 1582 had only 8 tribute-payers, a loss of 90% of the population, based on the standard equation of tribute payers with adult males.

Masca, located on the coast west of Puerto Caballos in 1536, was among the 29 Indian towns that still survived in 1582. At that time, Masca had 20 tributaries, for an estimated population of around 112 to 160 individuals. This would be Masca's lowest colonial population, and the number of residents rose steadily until the nineteenth century, when it once again fell during the tumult of the Central American Republican period. Exploring how the residents of sixteenth century Masca managed their persistence throughout the colonial period is the goal of the chapters that follow. First, it will be useful to explore how I propose to re-read documents written by and for Spanish administrators, in order to see the traces of indigenous action.

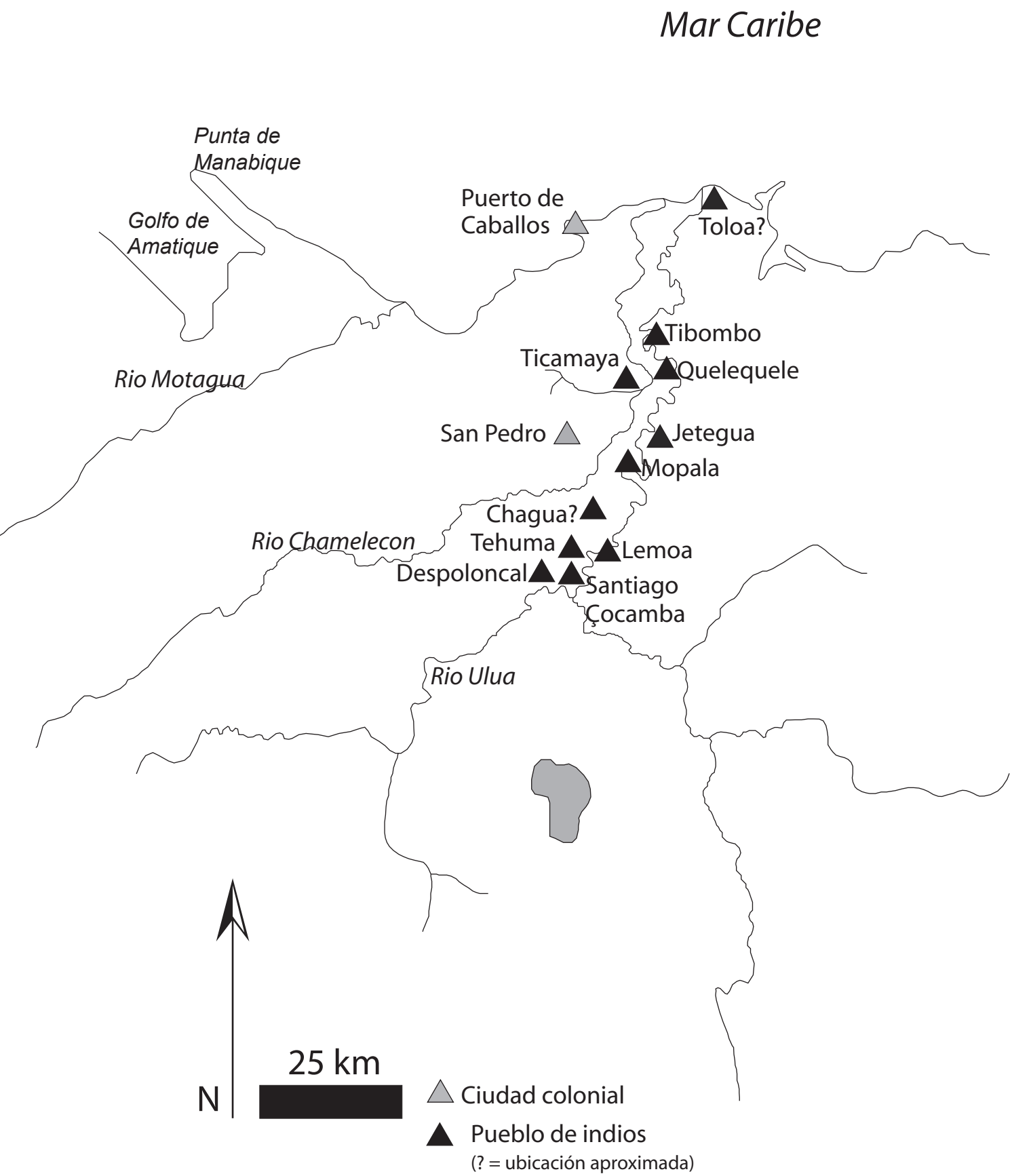

Figure 5: Indian towns in the Provincia de Ulúa in 1582