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The Spanish Attempt To Tribalize the Darién, 1739-1750*
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Creating a “Darién Tribe” From the Tule People¹

This paper examines Spanish-indigenous interactions in eastern Panamá after 1735, when imperial administrators struggled to re-establish control there following a destructive Indian rebellion in 1727-8. Reacting to heightened international tensions, the Spanish crown ordered officials in Panamá City to pacify the Darién frontier in order to head off foreign incursions into a region that had traditionally served as a haven for its enemies. A tenuous administrative system had put down fragile roots in the Darién, although the rebellion exposed its weaknesses and ushered in a seven-year period of colonial neglect. Spanish actions to incorporate the Tule into a workable colonial structure began in 1635 and were intertwined with, and reliant on, the members of a family named Carrisoli. In the early seventeenth century the activities of Julián Carrisoli de Alfaraz were central to the missionizing activities of a band of Dominican friars, and at the end of the century Julián’s son Luis provided the local Spanish defense against the incursions of the buccaneers and the short-lived colony of the Scots.² Following Luis Carrisoli’s death in 1701 the Spanish position in the Darién eroded, and the rebellion of 1727 exposed the grave problem the region posed to the Spanish imperial system. This paper analyses the activities of a new generation of officials, men such as Dionisio Martínez de la Vega and Dionisio de Alsedo, as they struggled to “re-conquer” the eastern portion of the isthmus after 1735.

The Panamanian isthmus, a place so vital to Spanish endeavors at the start of the conquest of the Americas, had become a troubled frontier zone by the close of the sixteenth century. The Spanish conquistadors, having arrived in the Darién at the end of 1502, quickly established the isthmus as a strategic springboard for their various expeditions of conquest and exploration. In 1513 Vasco Núñez de Balboa, with the assistance of indigenous allies, discovered the trans-isthmian route connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Balboa derived fame, but little profit from his discovery, and in 1519 he fell victim to a judicial murder at the hands of his rival, Pedrarias Davila, governor of Castilla de Oro.³ Pedrarias presided over the plundering of the isthmus, during which the indigenous population of central

Panamá declined precipitously.⁴ After the conquest of the Inka state in Peru in 1532 the Spanish population of Panamá diminished, as that richer realm siphoned off unattached adventurers. Furthermore, economic and social development in New Spain to the north and Peru to the south relegated early Panamá to the position of a tertiary economy reliant upon shipping and the transportation of goods from other realms across the isthmus.⁵ By the latter part of the sixteenth century English and French pirates, recognizing the value of attacking the Spanish empire at its vulnerable isthmian chokepoint, stepped up their disruptive attacks, establishing a durable model for future intruders by coordinating their activities with the region's indigenous people and African rebels.⁶

By the start of the seventeenth century, Spanish officials had established colonial rule over the central isthmus; decimated, converted, and subdued that region's Indians; and secured a negotiated peace with the rebel African communities. While the isthmus was more or less secure at its center, its eastern border proved impossible to seal off from foreign attack and intrusion. Spanish efforts were directed at controlling and converting the region's indigenous population, and throughout the seventeenth century Julian and Luis Carrisoli, as maestres de campo of the province of the Darién, pursued a gradualist policy of indigenous pacification through the selective co-optation of local indigenous leaders. Spanish officials came to measure colonial success in eastern Panamá through assessing the number of client Tule leaders who were willing to pledge allegiance, and provide services to, the Spanish crown.

The Carrisolis' modest goal was to have at their disposal a reliable party of men who could muster indigenous militia troops to defend the colony whenever the isthmus was threatened. However, in their communications with their superiors the Carrisolis described the indigenous polity with which they interacted in a way that made it conform to Spanish preconceptions, and placed on their own shoulders the mantle of Euro-native warlords. The officials depicted themselves as the controllers of a "tribal" entity that the Spanish termed the "reduced Darién Indians." This group, presumably, was comprised of peoples who had voluntarily removed themselves from their native realms and had placed themselves under Spanish administration at reducciones, or "reduced towns." Following Neil L. Whitehead, I term this process tribalization, and see it as one in which European actors and indigenous leaders exercised an equal agency as they re-imagined, and worked to create, a new Indian polity.⁷

Prior to 1728, Spanish officials assumed that the Carrisolis' colonial policy was bringing ever greater numbers of the Tule Indians to the Christian faith and placing them in hispanicized towns under the administration of Christian Tule officials whom the Spanish termed capitanes. The Spanish believed that these "reduced" Indians comprised a distinct social, cultural, and political entity called the "Darién Indians." However, the "tribe" that the Spanish thought of as the "reduced Darién Indians" existed, at best, in the minds of the imperial administrators. Even so, through their rhetorical creation of a colonial Tule polity in their official correspondences, the Carrisolis succeeded in establishing themselves as the most important chieftains of the imaginary tribal entity nonetheless. The capitanes whom they had endorsed, on the other hand, were in no senses imaginary, and, as the Spanish would soon learn to their peril, these men were agents capable of independent action.

The imperial competition that characterized the later seventeenth century actually served as an incubator for new "tribal" leaders, since the Carrisolis' heightened need for indigenous allies led them to elevate growing numbers of self-proclaimed Tule leaders to the position of capitan in order to ensure the defense of the isthmus. The "reduced Darién Indians" developed throughout the century as a unit characterized by the presence of a multitude of "tribal" chiefs who ruled over few actual Indian constituents. Although the Carrisolis had achieved some success in crafting a hierarchy amongst the new indigenous leaders whom Spanish officials were incorporating into the nascent colonial administrative system, there was nothing about that tenuous system that required that a Carrisoli be present for it to hold together. A Tule village leader simply needed a modicum of local support and the ear of a Spanish official or a foreign intruder in order to lay claim to a position of regional leadership within the province.

The Spanish expected that by attaining a secure administrative understanding with one, or at most a small group of Tule sub-chiefs, the Darién could be administered, Christianized, and subdued. This expectation, which Spanish officials believed was supported by the information they had gained from the activities of the first generation of explorers and exploiters, was the bedrock upon which their seventeenth-century efforts in the region were grounded. As Mary W. Helms has shown, the Indian polities of pre-contact Panamá were in fact dominated by regional chieftains who expressed their cultural power through the control of long-distance trade networks and the production of items for exchange.⁸

However, the ferocity of the conquest, the profundity of the native demographic collapse, and the stringency of Spanish economic exploitation destroyed the social system that had supported chiefly indigenous power. Eighteenth-century Spanish officials planned their strategies as if nothing had changed since the time of Balboa, but, in reality, very little was the same. The mistaken belief that the peoples of the Darién continued to be dominated by all-powerful regional chieftains was not unique to the Spanish. It was shared by the various English, Scottish and French intruders who actively sought diplomatic alliances with the indigenous leaders whom they believed to be the region's indigenous lords.

Euro-Tule interactions between 1640 and 1740 were carried out under this particular misapprehension, and the result was the creation of a group of self-conscious regional chieftains who, in conjunction with Spanish administrators, worked to create a unified “tribe” of Indians, in accordance with the Europeans’ understanding, with themselves as its leaders. These newly-emerging indigenous leaders labored to make their political arrangements recognizable to the Spanish, in order to integrate themselves, when such a strategy was prudent, into the Spanish colonial administration. Recognizing that power could be gained through the use of the leverage that a close relationship with the Spanish colonial administration would bring, these Tule leaders brandished their staves of office, medals, awards, and royal commissions like talismans.⁹

Several Tule village leaders attempted to consolidate regional power-bases that were predicated upon their monopolization of Indian interactions with Spanish officials.¹⁰ In addition, these and other indigenous leaders made diplomatic overtures to the non-Spanish intruders to the Darién. The French and English buccaneers who operated in the region between 1670 and 1690, and the Scottish intruders who arrived between 1698 and 1700, all found willing Tule allies. In the 1730s, the period under scrutiny in this paper, it was the Spanish who attempted to exert a modicum of colonial control over a region that they had recently ignored. Spanish officials from Panamá City worked to construct a rejuvenated colonial system by negotiating a devolution of power upon a generation of Tule leaders, men who had acquired considerable skills through their adept management of diplomatic relationships with the various competing outsiders.

This paper examines the manner in which the Spanish attempt to “re-conquer” the Darién through a policy of peace encouraged the emergence of several new “tribal” Tule leaders. These men judiciously apprised the strategic reality presented to them by the Spanish maneuvers to re-establish an imperial administration in the region. Through the manipulation of rhetoric and colonial politics, they strove to consolidate some Tule villagers into what the Spanish would recognize as an Indian “tribe.” Their actions would meet with compliance, resistance, and, at times, indifference by the inhabitants of the communities of the Darién. Taken together however, the emerging chiefs, the Tule villagers, and the European intruders took part in a recoverable historical process that has not yet been described accurately, or in detail.

The Structure of Peace in the Darién

A royal order of 26 February 1735 called for officials in the Americas to oversee the conquest of the Darién. It prompted the viceroy to confer with the new presidente of the audiencia of Panamá, Dionisio Martínez de la Vega, on 20 June 1735. Martínez informed his superior that he would need 500 trained Spanish soldiers to put an end to warfare in the Darién.¹¹ Such an extravagant complement of men, arms, and materiel was not forthcoming from the viceroy, however, and the situation festered until April 1737, when Martínez offered the hostile Indians a general pardon in return for the cessation of the attacks against the Spanish.¹²

A group of Tule caciques responded favorably to Martínez’s offer of amnesty in the fall of 1738, the result, the presidente triumphantly opined, of two years of constant pressure, which included the destruction of the rebels’ means of subsistence and retributive attacks by tribal Chocó warriors allied to Spain.¹³ On the other hand, the spokesman for the caciques themselves later reported that they had chosen peace over continued hostilities because several epidemics and natural disasters had emiserated their people, making further resistance difficult, if not impossible.¹⁴

Individual Tule leaders made positive initial responses to the amnesty, but Martínez informed them that he sought a grander settlement, one that would encompass all of the “Darién Indians.” A cacique named Felipe Merina informed Martínez that this goal, however worthy, would not be easily

achieved. The Indian stated that as far as he was concerned, “the peace could only be for the Río Chucunaque, of which he was head. He simply did not possess the power to make peace for the entire province.”¹⁵ Martínez responded by giving the caciques with whom he had had contact an ultimatum: they had six weeks to decide whether to be represented by a single cacique who would come forward and sign a comprehensive peace treaty with him, or else Martínez would re-commence hostilities against them.¹⁶ The six-week interval would be ample, he assumed, to allow the leaders to order their affairs and agree to the peace.

The presidente's desire to deal with a single, powerful cacique no doubt led to competition amongst autonomous Tule leaders to stand as the single man who would be recognized by Martínez as the paramount leader of a substantial portion of the Darién's Indians.¹⁷ Throughout the seventeenth century, long-term Spanish-Tule contact had resulted in the opening up of leadership opportunities for Tule men who wished to put themselves forward as self-styled chieftains, and Spanish strategic needs had now forced upon the polity the selection of a paramount chief to act as spokesman and guarantor of a comprehensive peace treaty.¹⁸ The Tule man who emerged as the supreme tribal cacique was a chieftain named Juan Chani or Sanni. This man, also known as Tunchile, had played a central, destructive role in the Indian uprising of 1727-8. However, it now appeared that he had decided to take up a part on the new tribal stage that Spanish colonialism offered him.¹⁹

On 31 October 1738 Sanni journeyed to Panamá City to iron out the peace with the presidente, making clear that although he was escorted solely by Marzelo del Castillo of Molineca and his interpreter, Pedro Santiago Cabrejo, he was, in fact, the ruler of an Indian nation numbering some five hundred men, women, and children.²⁰ The cacique made an important point immediately, stating that the term ‘rebel’ was not the proper one to be used in relation to his people, since they had merely provided assistance to certain individuals in distress. Adopting a more conciliatory note, Sanni then conveyed to the presidente his desire for peace, which he promised was the general wish of his people.²¹

The treaty that Sanni negotiated aimed to do nothing less than effect a total re-organization of Tule administrative life under a rejuvenated Spanish administration. The provisions of the treaty revealed that Juan Sanni and other now-lesser Tule leaders had wielded considerable power during its negotiation.

The first protocol of the pact, for example, included one of many Spanish concessions to the Tule, granting that “the people of the northern band, who have always lived dispersed, are granted the liberty to remain that way for the next ten years.”²² Therefore, while on one level representing a Spanish attempt to impose a form of colonial dominion over a newly-tribalized Tule people, in reality the pact, rather than reflecting an imposition of Spanish power, instead signaled an acceptance by the Spanish of messy current realities, something especially evident in Martínez’s dispensing with the consistently failed policy of expanding the reducciones.

The third protocol was even more remarkable. It stated that no Indian would be “pressured or forced by violence to accept the Christian faith.”²³ The Spanish here accepted a weakened policy of voluntary missionization in which Indians who had already been converted would continue to live under religious discipline at the existing reducciones, while those who chose not to reduce themselves would be left in peace, so long as they did not commit acts of violence or rebellion against the Spanish administration.²⁴

In addition, the treaty formalized the gift-exchange that the Tule leaders called the paniquiris and moras, which, the text stated, “had been given to the Indians for the longest time.”²⁵ Although a high-level investigation of the crown’s ledgers had failed to find the official accounts for the previous presents,²⁶ the gifts were proclaimed to be valid, extra-judicial grants.²⁷ In an act that displayed a deft rhetorical sleight-of-hand, the paniquiris and moras were re-defined as a type of clothing, and the pact ordered the presidentes to continue providing these traditional items of exchange, since the King and Consejo both greatly approved of clothes being given to the Indians “to enhance their decency.”²⁸

The treaty-making Tule leaders clearly extracted every concession they could, even dictating that only Jesuit priests would be allowed to enter the Darién and tend to the reducciones.²⁹ In addition, the pact stipulated that no persons of African descent would be allowed to enter the Darién without the expressed permission of the principal cacique.³⁰ The fifth protocol dealt with the province’s leadership structure, and as such was perhaps the treaty’s most vital provision. It stated in simple language, that “due to problems with the teniente generales in the past, the Indians will be ruled only by their own caciques, and all caciques are subordinate to Juan Sanni. All of these native leaders, including Sanni, are,

in turn, subordinate to the governor of the province.”³¹ Martínez’s treaty, therefore, legalized a new tribal structure of rulership for the province, covering leaders from the highest cacique to the smallest riverine chief. The provisions covering the tribe’s system of overlordship were detailed, and supplemented by the remarkable statement that “every river shall have a captain, whom the governor must approve in order for him to hold that office.”³²

Strategic constraints during a time of heightened British-Spanish pressures had forced officials to negotiate the tribalization of the Tule, a process that they had previously assumed would occur as the result of a long-term interactions and confrontations that would comprise a sequence of contact, conquest, and missionization. The treaty of 1738 changed the pace of this development, and it was negotiated and signed principally because all of the players needed the peace that it promised. Martínez got peace from the pact; Sanni got the leadership of a tribe; and the royal Consejo de Indias believed that the treaty would provide regional security as the crown prepared for a war in the Caribbean. With so many factors acting in its favor, the pact received royal approval on 27 October 1739.³³

Once the tribalization process in the Darién had gathered some momentum, it suddenly took on a contagious quality. When Felipe Uriñaquichu, the leader of the Tule living at the Gulf of Urabá, learned in late 1741 of the presidente’s audacious pact, he approached Martínez and signed an almost identical agreement.³⁴ The tribalization fever had yet to fully run its course, for a party of Frenchmen, ex-buccaneers who also lived at the Gulf of Urabá, chose this opportunity to seek the crown’s pardon and themselves become signatories to the comprehensive treaty. These long-outlawed men, ruled by a European cacique of their own choosing named Santos Bullico, became vassals of the Spanish crown and acquired legal standing as a chartered buffer community within a tribal Darién.³⁵

With the taming of the French levantados, Dionisio Martínez de la Vega’s attempt to bring order to the chaotic Indian country appeared to have achieved tangible results. As Spain prepared for a possible war against the British, the Darién could be removed from the crown’s list of the most problematic trouble spots. The presidente clearly had engineered an acceptable short-term solution, but only time would tell whether Martínez’s attempt to tribalize the Darién by treaty would prove a long-term success. Although Martínez brimmed with optimism, the future would almost certainly be fraught with perils for

him. For Juan Sanni and, to a lesser extent, Felipe Uriñaquichu, had been granted remarkable administrative powers within the suddenly colonial Darién.

The novelty of this arrangement in the Darién upset the fragile political equilibrium that Spanish officials had established at other isthmian frontier zones. The Spanish effort to extend the frontier eastward to the Darién was not welcomed by those indigenous leaders who had made their careers as representatives of colonial authority on the Chepo frontier. In April 1739, soon after the treaty had been negotiated with Juan Sanni, the cacique of the Indians of Chepo paid Martínez a visit, and the presidente reported to the crown in a letter of 27 May 1739 that

the cacique Don Ventura showed himself on this occasion to be most displeased. Having stayed with me here for several days he was treated with the greatest respect as he is one of the chieftains who controls a major force of the Indians. At the frontier, by the fort of Chepo, he took his leave of me understanding that he had been very well treated by me.³⁶

Tribal leaders from what previously had been the sole frontier region near Chepo clearly preferred that the Darién remain a marginalized Indian country. Since any changes in its status and, most importantly, in the status of its leaders, could have a direct effect on their lives and livelihoods, these men preferred the status quo.

The Jesuit Entrada

The Spanish-Tule peace treaty of 1738 had stipulated, in accordance with Indian wishes, that only Jesuit missionaries would be given leave to enter the Darién. Since the eastern Panamá frontier straddled separate imperial jurisdictions, the royal cédula which placed the King's imprimatur on the treaty ordered that the provinces of Quito and Santa Fe were each to contribute men to the effort. Jesuits from Quito would missionize the northern tribe of the Tule people, whose territory stretched from the central mountains to the South Sea, while the missionaries from Santa Fe would minister to the Indians of the southern tribe, who lived on either side of the Gulf of Urabá.

In March 1741 the Father General of the Jesuit order, Father Francisco Retz, wrote a letter to the provincial of Quito, Baltazar de Moncada. The royal cédula of 27 March 1740, he insisted, required Moncada to dispatch missionaries from his province into the Darién.³⁷ However, Moncada had a full

plate of issues before him at the time he received Retz's letter, the most important being the stabilization of Quito's Jesuit establishment after the recent turmoil it had suffered during the visitation of Padre Andrés de Zárate.³⁸ Moncada was unable to act on the urgings of his superior, and the matter fell to his successor, Carlos Brentan.³⁹ Brentan, having served in the missions along the Amazon River for over fourteen years, placed a high premium on Jesuit missionary activity in the province. Upon assuming the office, he made a personal visita of the province, traveling the length and breadth of the enormous region in 1743.⁴⁰ After this undertaking the new provincial selected two men to missionize the Darién, and escorted them northward to the isthmus. His coffers in Quito being empty, Brentan knew that he would have to ask the audiencia of Panamá to allocate the funds necessary to support the missionaries. Accompanied by Fathers Joaquín Álvarez and Claudio Escobar,⁴¹ Brentan made the difficult trip through the forests of Barbaças, the Chocó, and the Darién. The Jesuits completed their journey to Panamá City on 12 February 1743.⁴² Less than a week after their arrival, Brentan presented himself before the audiencia and the new presidente, Dionisio de Alsedo.⁴³

Brentan made an earnest plea for the support of his companions who were to labor in the Darién, arguing that the two men would each require 300 pesos per annum, sums which the Jesuit colegios of Quito and Panamá could not provide. On 23 March 1744 presidente Alsedo convened the junta de hacienda, at which expenditures would be discussed. The presidente's representation summarized Brentan's earlier petition, and underscored the vital necessity of missionary activity in ensuring the security of the isthmus. To clinch his argument Alsedo provided informes written by Captains Félix Muñoz de Guzmán and Manuel de Arago, governors of the Darién, and by the protector of the Indians, Joaquín Balcárcel de Miranda that described the tenuous Spanish position in the Darién.⁴⁴ Under the weight of all the detailed testimony, the audiencia shouldered the burden of financially supporting the two Jesuit missionaries. The junta unanimously voted to provide the priests with their salaries, and enjoined them

to teach the evangelical law to the inhabitants of that province and marchland, reducing them through the sweetness of those doctrines to the knowledge of the one true God and the mysteries of our holy, apostolic, and Roman Catholic faith, and awakening them from the blindness of their idolatry and giving them the clear light of the perfect religion.⁴⁵

The few Spaniards serving in government or military positions in eastern Panamá, however, were gripped by doubt and confusion in October of 1744.⁴⁶ At the time the pair of Jesuits entered the region the principal settlement in the Darién was a small military fort at El Real de Santa María, located at the junction of the Tuíra and Chucunaque rivers.⁴⁷ Upon reaching El Real padres Joaquín Álvarez and Claudio Escobar found themselves drawn into a petty struggle which threatened to doom their endeavor before they had actually begun the task. The cause of the trouble was a secular priest named Juan de Pomar y Burgos, who was being held against his will at the fort when the Jesuits got there.⁴⁸ Joaquín Álvarez immediately went to work to set the situation to rights. He calmed frayed Spanish tempers by proposing that the jailed priest, and the troublesome comisionario who had been dispatched high-handedly to retrieve and punish him, leave the fort of El Real in his custody, and that they make their way together back to Panamá City. The priest assured the men that he would convince Alsedo not to delve any further into the matter, and that any questionable activities which the comisionario had carried out in the Darién would be ignored.

Having calmed the Spaniards, Álvarez then worked to alleviate Indian fears. He traveled to Yavisa and preached the gospel to the Indians he found there, bringing the son of the most important man of that small settlement to El Real for baptism. Having established this small, yet hopeful, foundation, Álvarez journeyed to Panamá City on his mediatory errand.⁴⁹ When he returned to the Darién, Álvarez became convinced that the two Jesuits who were slated to work near the Gulf of Urabá could expect trouble. He learned that the Frenchmen living there had informed the Indians that the Spanish priests had come to the region to despoil the earth so that the Indians would be deprived of food, the better to enslave them and subject them to tyranny. The Frenchmen were to have warned the Darién Indians that “if they admit[ted] the Jesuits they will do in the Darién what they had done in ... Paraguay which was to make themselves the despotic masters of the entire province, holding the Indians as vassals.”⁵⁰ These comments illustrate that the different inhabitants of the Darién were evaluating the meaning of the Jesuit entrada into their lands, a process that had begun prior to the actual arrival of the missionaries.⁵¹

The Jesuits made strategically-located Yavisa their base of operations among the Tule, and Álvarez reported that upon his return there the young man whom he baptized two months earlier welcomed him to the town by kneeling, praising the Lord, “and acting as if he were the most ancient of Christians.”⁵² The convert assisted in the indoctrination of the ten armed men and their women and children who resided at the river, and none of the villagers showed the slightest hostility, allowing him to preach, offer gifts, and to say the mass. The Jesuit, after baptizing nine young boys, reported that their families repaid him with hospitality and kindness, and “[t]he Indians offered [him] things, of the kind that they partook of in their own houses, which, although they were of the most rustic sort, such as bananas and monkey, [he] accepted with the highest appreciation.”⁵³

After this success, Álvarez sent various kindly-worded messages to Juan Sanni in the hope of gaining entry into the cacique's lands in the remote upper-Chucunaque region. Sanni rebuffed all of these overtures, leading Álvarez to conclude that Sanni, “though a friend in name, had been painted an enemy by his actions.”⁵⁴ Although the direct route to the man named in the treaty as the supreme Tule leader had been obstructed by that Indian's stubborn rejection of the faith, Álvarez set off on a second path, opening friendly relations with the man known as Sanni's brother, capitán Juan de Dios. It is unclear whether Juan de Dios and Juan Sanni were actually biological brothers, or whether their relationship was a political or an adoptive one. To Álvarez, however, they clearly seemed to be the sons of the same mother.

The Jesuit claimed that several meetings were all that were required for him to teach capitán Juan de Dios the benefits of the Catholic faith and a Christian life. Following these encounters, Álvarez convinced the Indian leader to leave behind his pagan ways.⁵⁵ By forging such a close relationship with Álvarez, Juan de Dios had stepped from out of the shadows, and from now forward would become a major force in the new, colonial politics of the Darién province. Though he had been present at most of the meetings that formalized the Hispano-Tule peace, Juan de Dios was not recorded as having said anything at those momentous occasions. He was recognized as one among the many lieutenants of Juan Sanni, and was duly rewarded with the honorific capitán after the signing of the treaty, but during protector Balcárcel's travels to the upper-Chucunaque in 1739 Juan de Dios had served solely as his

guide. Again, he stood as a silent partner to those proceedings, appearing to all observers to be of far less importance than the paramount leader of the Tule, Juan Sanni.⁵⁶

The treaties gave the Jesuit missionaries the power to create new reducciones, settlements whose leaders would be tethered to Spanish lines of patronage, funding, taxation, and defense. The novel municipal and provincial power structure provided opportunities for self-styled village leaders like Juan de Dios to enhance their power. The potential for instability was increased by the fact that Spanish officials such as Alsedo were not particularly concerned that the benefits of office flow directly to those men who had led Tule villages in the past. Not surprisingly, the Tule men to whom they would hand provincial power needed to be, most especially, Christians willing to further Spanish aims. If Sanni were willing to serve in this position, the honors of a Spanish American provincial cacique would be bestowed upon him. If he hesitated, or, in the worst case, followed a path of resistance, the mantle of Tule leadership would be stripped from him and placed on the shoulders of another man. Juan de Dios was positioning himself to be that man, and was hoping to amass a large measure of the colonial spoils the Spanish were offering to the Indian leaders of the Darién. Just how high he had set his sights would not become clear, however, until the Jesuits set out to convert the man the Spanish had named as the first Tule cacique, his “brother” Juan Sanni.

Prior to hearing from Sanni, and possibly to force his compliance, Álvarez had begun to groom Juan de Dios to occupy a central position in a newly Christian hispanic Darién. Exactly what that position would be depended entirely on the actions of Juan Sanni. In his letters to Alsedo, the Jesuit upgraded capitán de Dios’s status, and began to name him as Sanni’s primary lieutenant. Álvarez also commented glowingly upon the many sacrifices that Juan de Dios had already made for the faith. For example, the Indian had expressed the wish to marry within the church and turn his back upon his other wives, an act that Álvarez described as heroic. In addition, the capitán promised to provide the materials and labor necessary for the building of the church at Yavisa. In stark contrast to his dealings with Juan de Dios, Álvarez associated Juan Sanni with stubborn opposition to his aims, and resistance to the Catholic faith. Though he had been a prominent leader of the region’s Indians who had been dealing with

outsiders for nearly twenty years when the Jesuit missionaries arrived, Juan Sanni's place at the center of the Darién's affairs was in peril.⁵⁷

In late January protector Balcárcel called for the major Indian leaders to come to meet with him at El Real. He had sent invitations to Felipe Uriñaquichu, the leader of the Tule of the northern tribe; the cacique Juan Sanni; and the capitán of the recently-pardoned Frenchmen, Santos Bullico. Balcárcel reported to Alsedo that on 25 January 1745 Santos Bullico and Francisco Fotoqua arrived at El Real "with various Indians ... except for the cacique [Juan Sanni], who is gravely ill."⁵⁸ The men who arrived to take counsel with Balcárcel at El Real were from the Urabá region, and while they told him what he wanted to hear, they also sounded a note of caution. Although they were in accord with the provisions of the treaties, and most willing and eager to accept the entry of the Jesuits, their people, however, might need a little more time to get used to the new situation. The Frenchmen were the most blunt in the group, stating that missionization of the Darién would not be easy going.⁵⁹

At the close of their interview, the men conveyed a message from Juan Sanni to the protector in which the cacique minimized his ailment, stating simply that he had been felled by a temporary, though bothersome, illness.⁶⁰ Sanni promised to relocate to the village of Tiligantí and bring enough of his people there to form a town that could serve as a nucleus for the missionary operations of the Jesuit priests. He ended his message by apologizing for having previously destroyed the village which had formerly stood at the site, and offered to provide the Indians to be missionized by the Jesuits, as well as the African labor necessary to build the places in which the priests would live and worship. In short, Sanni was informing the Spanish secular authorities that he had changed face, and, in doing so, he outmaneuvered Juan de Dios. That Indian leader had conveyed the news of the benefits of a Christian life to his presumed brother Juan Sanni, and the cacique, perhaps pressured by the actions of the convert, relented, finally issuing an invitation to the Jesuits to come and teach him about the faith.⁶¹

After receiving Sanni's message, the two Jesuits decided that Álvarez should travel to Chucunaque alone, while Escobar would remain in the Tuira River region. Álvarez had clearly taken charge of the mission.⁶² Álvarez entered Sanni's lands with Juan de Dios and an interpreter, Juan de Urive. Though "carried by providence" to Sanni's remote home at a place called Arquiatí, Álvarez lost

the vision of one eye on the trip.⁶³ Having reached the end of their journey, the three men were surprised to find Juan Sanni extremely ill. He was, in fact, at death's door.⁶⁴ According to Álvarez, when they entered his home Sanni informed the priest of his desire to use what little time remained to him in taking care of his soul. The Jesuit quickly explained the central tenets of the faith to him, and after listening intently, Sanni himself requested baptism.⁶⁵

All of the observers who reported on Sanni's deathbed conversion depicted it as one of the transcendent moments in the history of the Spanish American empire. The baptism was a confirmation of the Christian faith, a vindication of Spanish aims and ideals, a feather in the cap for the Jesuit missionary, and a strategic victory for the presidente in Panamá City. Previously regarded by the Spanish as a rebellious pagan chieftain with a penchant for trafficking with the enemy, Sanni was immediately accorded a new status, akin to that bestowed upon the converted lords who ruled the European states that had succeeded the Roman empire. The Spanish in Panamá believed that the sacrament had set in motion a series of irresistible processes, all of which would benefit the Spanish crown. The Tule of the southern tribe would follow Sanni into the Christian faith; the men would repudiate all but one of their multiple wives; and the population would settle down in reduced towns as the priest desired. Álvarez's labors had brought to the faith a recalcitrant pagan whose dramatic conversion would usher in the pacification of this troublesome region.

Sanni, of course, appeared in Álvarez's and Alsedo's accounts by means of messages that he supposedly conveyed to Álvarez and the Protector of Indians and interim governor of the province, Joaquín Balcárcel y Miranda. By the time Álvarez traveled from Yavisa to Arquati to meet Sanni, the cacique had become a powerless, prostrate figure on a cot, near death. According to Álvarez's account, Sanni even bestowed a blessing in his final wish, informing Álvarez that it was his desire that all of his offices and titles should devolve upon his brother, Juan de Dios.

The cacique Juan Sanni then gave up the ghost, a mere six or seven minutes after having been offered the sacrament of baptism. He was a Christian in the end.⁶⁶ Because Sanni had died in the faith, his named, Christian successor would be the man to provide the Spanish civil and ecclesiastical officials with tangible proof that the Darién Indians had submitted to both the Christian faith and Spanish laws.

Sanni's successor was, of course, none other than Juan de Dios. The secondary figure that had stood in the shadows during the negotiation of the peace in 1738 was now King Philip V's highest ranking Indian vassal in the province of the Darién.

Juan de Dios took advantage of the presence of the missionaries in order to enhance his own position at Juan Sanni's expense. Although Juan de Dios's play for power was a risky one, in the end he was perhaps most aided in his quest by epidemic disease, the result of the increased Spanish activity in the Darién. At the time of the Jesuit's entrada the Darién was in the punishing grip of viruelas, or smallpox, and when Juan Sanni became one of the epidemic's victims, his illness left a vacuum in the Tule political structure. This vacuum occurred just at the time when relationships between Spanish officials and Indian leaders were being increasingly formalized. The Christian Juan de Dios, already consolidating a position with the new Jesuit power in the region, took full advantage of his "brother's" illness to monopolize the power the Spanish would confer on the indigenous leaders of a hispanicized Darién.⁶⁷

Celebrating the Fruits of Success

Presidente Alsedo soon celebrated the proof that the religious conquest was proceeding favorably, announcing in a decree of 8 February that

just recently there has appeared at the dock here, in the royal piragua which serves to transport food and supplies to the men quartered at the forts in the Darién, the very Reverend Father Joaquín Álvarez, the interpreter Juan de Urive, with Juan de Dios, brother of the cacique, his woman Doña Thomasa, a son of the Captain named Juan Joseph, Don Andrés Moreti, Lere and chief of the river of his name, and eight other Indians of the said cacique's jurisdiction, all baptized as Christians by Father Álvarez.⁶⁸

Juan de Dios came to Panamá City with several objectives in mind. He voiced them to Alsedo as soon as the two met: he wished to present himself to the governor as a Christian; to have the succession of his brother's cacigazgo conferred upon him; to be named coronel of the militia troop of the Darién; and, lastly, he wished to have the lere of Moreti named as capitán, in the position he himself would vacate upon being named the cacique. Alsedo graciously received the Indian leaders who had come to Panamá

City, made them aware that he considered them to be Christian vassals of the king of Spain, and announced publicly that he deemed them all “worthy of distinction and respect.”⁶⁹ The governor welcomed Father Álvarez, Juan de Dios, and the cacique’s wife to eat at his table, and extended the invitation to any others whom the Amerindians saw fit to join them.⁷⁰

In addition, Alsedo covered the expenses the visitors might incur in the City, granting each of the Indians two reales for each day that they were to be his guests. The cacique and his wife were each granted an additional peso per day, “and the corresponding paniquiris and moras.”⁷¹ The codification of the exchange of the paniquiri and mora signaled the development of a more complex relationship between the Spanish administration and the tribal Indian leaders of the Darién. Following the peace process of 1738, the paniquiri and mora evolved into a method through which the Indians hispanicized the kind of gift exchange that would originally have resolved a dispute between indigenous leaders. Although Alsedo may have been ignorant of the fact, his predecessors had countenanced a cycle of exchange that had created certain expectations on the part of the Indian leaders. If the Tule-Spanish relationship were to exist on a firm footing, the process would need to be extended, and Alsedo’s unblinking order that the payments be continued is evidence that he felt that Indian-Spanish relationships had achieved a new level of stability and integration.

Juan de Dios showed himself to be extremely flexible in this new situation. accepting the cash that the governor offered him as the payment of the paniquiri and mora, while he surely knew that in the past these exchange items had always taken the form of linen goods. Though the original meaning of the exchange of the paniquiri and mora was far removed from the simple use of cash to discharge a debt in the manner in which Alsedo described, the cacique accepted the money graciously and without demur.

In a decree of the next day Alsedo named Juan de Dios coronel of the militia of the southern part of the Darién, and head of the cacigazgo covering the same territory, with the same salary in that office as had been granted to his recently dead brother. Juan de Dios followed this by ratifying the peace with the Spanish. Then the Indian leader respectfully made four requests. After first thanking Father Álvarez for bringing the Christian faith to him, Juan de Dios asked that only Jesuits be allowed to enter his lands, since the Indians had grown accustomed to their care, and would be mistrustful of members of another

religious order. His second request was that Don Félix Muñoz, who had been involved in the negotiations with Sanni, be named commander general of the Darién, which was Sanni's dying wish. Thirdly, Juan de Dios asked that the protector of the Indians keep a ledger, which the capitanes could inspect at their request, in which the Indians would sign and date the receipt of their respective salaries. This would prevent the awkward situations which had arisen in the past in which capitanes had accepted what they thought to have been gifts only to be rudely informed, when they had appeared to collect their salaries later on, that such payment had already been disbursed. Finally, Juan de Dios requested that he be allowed to receive his salary of thirty pesos for the month of February immediately, so that he could buy stores and supplies while he was in Panamá City.⁷²

These requests were relatively simple for Alsedo to handle; he demurred only on the second point, which was a matter entirely in the hands of the Viceroy. The first request had already been agreed to by the Crown in the royal cédula of March, 1740; and the third was an arrangement of administrative efficiency whose value was evident to all. Regarding the final request, Alsedo not only disbursed Juan de Dios's salary, he also ordered that the other capitanes in his company be given a month's salary while they were in Panamá City.⁷³

On 11 February the Bishop of the city, Don Juan de Casañada Velásquez y Salazar, confirmed the Indians who had come in the company of Father Álvarez.⁷⁴ After the bishop gave public certification to the religious conversions of the leaders of Darién's Indians, Panamá's military establishment proceeded to pay public homage to the new military officers of the Darién. The next day the capitán of the second battalion of Grenadiers of the city of Panamá formed the battalion at the city's plaza and the coronel of the Darién's militia was presented to the troops. The capitán read the cacique's commission before the assembled men and dignitaries, and at the close of the ceremony Juan de Dios was received by the troops with great acclaim.⁷⁵

Alsedo assented to Juan de Dios's wishes regarding Andrés, the lere of Moreti, who was duly named to the position of capitán which Juan himself had vacated to become the region's cacique and coronel. The copy of the decreto that named Andrés Ruiz a capitán of the militia provided graphic evidence of the transitional nature of the arrangements being worked out for the Darién. The text stated

that Alsedo did “approve of the election and proposition made by the supplicant of the Lere de Moreti.”⁷⁶

A line has scored through the words “Lere de Moreti,” in the document, apparently because the writer or reciter realized that the Tule “lere” was the word for the ritual specialist of the pagan religion.

Immediately following the scored passage, the lere is re-named Andrés Ruiz, which may illustrate Alsedo’s prevention of the scribe from utilizing the honorific by which the applicant had previously been known.

On 13 February the secretary of the audiencia recorded several oaths administered by Governor Alsedo and sworn to by Juan de Dios.⁷⁷ Alsedo began by asking if Juan de Dios was a Christian and faithful vassal of King Philip V, to which Juan de Dios replied, “Yes.” Following this admission, Juan de Dios was brought to the governor’s private chapel, where a light was directed upon the crucifix at the center of the room. The cacique was asked to swear three times to uphold the peace which had been signed by his brother, to affirm that the Indians within his cacigazgo would reduce themselves to live in Christian towns, to swear that he would obey all of the King’s commands, to defend the jurisdiction he was being given, and, finally, to prevent the entry of foreign enemies into the region under his command. To all of these requests he answered, solemnly, “Yes,” and swore the oath three times, in the end offering to comply with its provisions to the very loss of his life.

In his trek to Panamá City with the Indian leaders, Father Álvarez provided the kind of pageant which Dionisio de Alsedo y Herrera had expected. In less than one year the Jesuit could claim to have single-handedly brought the greater part of the Indian population of eastern Panamá under Spanish Christian administration. The new cacique of the Darién had been a guest at his table, and had, in Alsedo’s private prayer room, sworn to defend the Christian faith, the Spanish crown, and the lands which had been entrusted to him. Álvarez could convince himself that he had set in motion a drama akin to the great conversions of the early church, in which pagan kings declared themselves and their people followers and defenders of the church. For the time being, Alsedo could bask in the glory of believing that he had converted the Darién, one of the empire’s most notorious costas bravas, into a pacified region of the Spanish empire. It was a belief that would not be savored for very long.

A Stark Change of Fortune

In June 1746 the Viceroy of the New Kingdom of Granada, Sebastián Eslava, requested from Alsedo an account of the missionary activity which had taken place to date before he disbursed the considerable sum of 600 pesos to the Jesuits working in the Darién. Governor Alsedo asked Pablo Maroni, the rector of the Jesuit colegio of Panamá, to prepare an informe to send to the Viceroy. Maroni had been a companion of Brentan's, serving with him in the missions along the Amazon in the kingdom of Quito, and Alsedo relied upon him as a knowledgeable and experienced source regarding missionary affairs in his jurisdiction. Maroni's report, dated 1 July 1746, was a frank and reasoned assessment of missionary activity in the Darién.⁷⁸

Maroni reported that rather than confine himself to the region of the Chucunaque, Claudio Escobar had been assigned to work with the Indians of the Gulf of Urabá, where he attempted to persuade the Tule leader Felipe Uriñaquichu to allow missionaries to enter the territory. There were immediate problems. The Frenchmen residing in the area were furious with the chief for having admitted the Jesuits in the first place, and soon put both the chief and the missionary to flight. The two eventually settled in the town of Paya, where Escobar attempted to form a reducción with little success.⁷⁹ Maroni reported that large populations of Indians could not be concentrated in the two reducciones of Yavisa and Paya due to the peste of viruelas, which was ravaging the entire province at the time.

In fact the fury of the pestilence led to the recall, in only the second year of their activity, of the two original missionaries who had entered the Darién. The Jesuit missionary endeavor, which had begun so triumphantly a year earlier, now faltered in the face of a devastating outbreak of disease.⁸⁰ Fathers Ignacio María Franciscis and Jacobo Walburger replaced Álvarez and Escobar.⁸¹ These two recent arrivals to the New World replaced their brethren in November 1745. Their attempt to effect religious conversions within the new reduced towns would severely test their faith and preconceptions.⁸²

Their first stop in the Darién was at the lands controlled directly by coronel Juan de Dios and Andrés, the lere and capitán of Moreti. These villages were four days distant from the Spanish town of El Real de Santa María, and subsequently almost never visited by Europeans. Juan de Dios and capitán Andrés clearly wanted to keep things that way, and after several minutes of consultation, Walburger

decided that far-off Yavisa was the better site for his new reducción. The Jesuits sifted through the Indians of the region, selected those willing to relocate under their tutelage, ultimately gathering a group of indios reducidos numbering 197 souls. Upon reaching the Tuíra valley the two Jesuits split up, with Walburger hoarding the entirety of their human cargo at Yavisa. Francis was left to settle at the village of Paya, where the Sicilian Jesuit devoted himself to learning the Tule language and working to produce a vocabulary and grammar of the language.⁸³

Father Walburger produced a breve noticia that provided the details of his experiences in the Darién and a striking record of the clash of European intellectual expectations with Tule realities. Walburger's breve noticia is notable in many ways, not least for its confrontation with Tule religious beliefs and practices in the eighteenth century. His first paragraph provided an extensive description of the geographical confines and borders of the province of Darién, while the next begins by informing the reader that "the [Indians'] religion is filled with superstitions and blasphemies."⁸⁴

Walburger went on to report that the Indians described their divinity as residing in the heavens, sitting on a small bench of gold, dressed in silver and gold, his neck, hands, and feet adorned with corals and glass beads. The divinity resided in a house constructed of silver and gold and adorned with mirrors inside, and even his hammock was of woven gold. The god had in his service Indians of the Darién who provided him, from time to time, food and chicha in gold vessels. The divinity was unaware of what occurred on the earth, and learned of terrestrial occurrences only when a Tule Indian died and informed him of recent terrestrial events.⁸⁵

This account, in spite of a condescending and mocking tone, conforms remarkably to conceptions of the Kuna creator deity which modern anthropologists have conveyed.⁸⁶ Modern Kuna believe that divine beings in the spirit realm have entirely different physical and corporeal characteristics to go with their distinct status, and practitioners of the healing tradition are required to learn a different language with which to communicate with these beings.⁸⁷ Walburger's assertion that the Indian god needed to be told what had occurred on earth, therefore, appears less ridiculous when interpreted in this light.

Walburger's relation also described an Indian conception of the Spanish god as a separate entity from the Indian god. The Spanish divinity, he had reportedly been told, understandably loved the Spanish

more than he did the Indians, and at times in heaven the two deities engaged in battle. The Indians believed that most of the time the Indian god got the better of the Spanish one, but that he retaliated for any celestial defeats by inflicting pestilence upon the lands and animals of the Indians. At the time Walburger was writing his noticia, the Darién's Indians were experiencing waves of disease and increased interaction with the Spanish and other outsiders, thus the story of contesting deities fit the social and political realities which attended the Spanish attempts to subjugate the Indians.

Walburger remarked that the ritual specialists whom the Tule called leres were the big men of the settlement, adding for his most likely readers that the people “give these men much respect and credit, as Christians do prelates.”⁸⁸ The Austrian Jesuit recognized that if the Indians believed their creator-god was ignorant of events taking place in the physical world, then the men possessing the ability to communicate with the beings living in the spiritual realm had to be esteemed as very important men. “If something goes amiss, or someone gets sick, or if something goes awry in the loyalty of the Indians of the band, this requires the consultation of the lere, the principal voice in the town.” But communication with a spiritual realm brought forth a familiar enemy. Walburger angrily reported that the major function of these pillars of the community was their frequent consultation with the devil, “whom they conceived to be very practical, and knowledgeable of everything.”⁸⁹

The Jesuit stated that the Indians freely admitted and revealed in their intimate association with the prince of darkness, whom they found to be quite helpful to them. For example, if an Indian lost an animal or a valuable item he said that a nia had taken it, and it was as clear as day to Walburger that the Tule nia was nothing more than the Catholic devil. The present-day San Blas Kuna believe a nia to be a particularly malevolent spirit being which delights in inflicting harm upon a person's purpa, or vital spirit. A nia can only be seen, communicated with, and convinced to depart by an Indian ritual specialist, or lere.⁹⁰ English-speaking visitors also made note of unsolicited avowals by Indian ritualists that they conjured the devil in order to heal the sick or to see the future.⁹¹ Rather than linguistic evidence that the Tule had internalized or incorporated crucial elements from Spanish belief system, as has been argued more appropriately for mid-colonial Mexico,⁹² I believe that the Indians' use of the Spanish term demonio to stand in for the Tule nia was the result of a simple maneuver of translation.⁹³

When missionaries began to indoctrinate the Indians in the early seventeenth century, they had obviously substituted the Spanish term demonio for the Tule words nia and purpa, and Tule speakers of Spanish throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries soon felt free to use the terms interchangeably. The easy substitution of the term demonio for nia and vice versa on the part of bilingual leres was proof that the Catholic priests had not been able to convince the Indians of the malign and base nature of the devil. More sustained religious instruction might have driven out such a free usage of the term nia. Its continued usage, coupled with the very existence of the leres as religious specialists, provided substantial proof, if more was needed, that missionary preaching and indoctrination had not progressed far in the Darién.

Walburger's breve noticia provided ample evidence of the cultural power and influence of the leres in eighteenth-century Tule society. The Jesuit, explaining the strong hold which "superstition" had on the Indians, attributed this fact to the "leres, to whom they give so much respect and credit."⁹⁴ In local Tule society, the leres were clearly the men who mattered most. The men the Spanish termed capitanes and caciques were important, and served the vital function of mediating the villagers' relationships with the rapidly changing outside world, but it was the leres who ensured the community's metaphysical equilibrium and preserved Tule oral traditions. In a clear delineation of the direction in which Tule power flowed, Walburger reported that the leres instructed the chiefs, "teaching them the things of the times since the Spanish arrived."⁹⁵

In the colonial world of the Jesuit reducción of Yavisa, where Indians from several disparate villages had been collected, Walburger described his misfortune at having no less than four leres in residence in the town. These men, he wrote ruefully, "incited hatred and abhorrence for the things of the church," and, subsequently, "very few ever came there."⁹⁶ Although Walburger had begun indoctrinating the Indians by teaching the children of Yavisa how to pray, his "pleasure was short-lived, for the leres undid all the work I had done."⁹⁷ According to the Jesuit, the ritualists informed Walburger's charges that hell was not to be feared, for it was a place for the Spaniards, not the Indians; the leres argued that the priest's admonitions were specific to the Jesuit alone, and did not apply to his Indian students.⁹⁸

Walburger claimed that the four leres concentrated their efforts and conjured for eight days in an attempt to call down a fatal fever upon him, and when this failed, they conspired to lure him away from the town and into the distant mountains where he could easily be killed. The leres planned to inform Walburger that a sick child requiring his attention there could not be moved, but luckily for the priest a sympathetic Tule woman informed him of the plot.⁹⁹ From this point forward, Walburger noted, the leres hated him irreconcilably, and obstructed all that he attempted to do, going so far as to re-baptize the children to whom the priest had administered that sacrament. The leres, no doubt weary of the Jesuit's incessant talk of demons and Satan, began publicly mocking the Jesuit priest, calling him chui mor chichi or devil in black dress.

Walburger failed to combat the power of the leres, or to make inroads into the Tule way of thinking, and he soon came to recognize the truth of the oft-mentioned comment that those Indians who sought baptism in the Darién did so solely to receive Christian names.¹⁰⁰ While some of the Indians who had heard his teachings did call for him moments before their deaths, they did so, he reported, only to be assured that they would see their relatives after they died. Walburger noted despondently that these seekers of the sacrament had no understanding whatever of the doctrine and perceived the rite in purely mechanistic terms. Whatever the reasons, in two years and eight months of religious work, Walburger had performed just sixty-three baptisms. Of these, fifty-two had been performed on children, who were by definition unable to make up their own minds about whether to accept or reject the rite.¹⁰¹

In the penultimate section of the breve noticia, Walburger's honest description illustrated the utter defeat of his mission. He reported that he was no longer able to convince even those Tule Indians nearest to death to convert, with the dying Indians informing him to his face that they would never believe in the efficacy of the doctrines which he preached to them. The leres had transformed Walburger into so marginal a figure that the townspeople not only made open fun of him, they also held the rites he practiced up to public ridicule.¹⁰²

The leres deployed popular contempt and mockery as weapons against the priest, entertaining the Indians by acting out rueful pantomimes of the sacraments. On one occasion Walburger discovered the leres performing the mock-baptism of a live lizard and several recently-killed animals, and he looked on

in horror as they intoned the phrases of the Latin rite in colloquial Tule.¹⁰³ The priest suffered the ultimate humiliation one afternoon when he returned to the church after having been lured away from the altar in the midst of the mass to find the leres at the altar brazenly carrying out a mockery of the mass, adding ridiculous barbs and jests to the order of the Church's most sacred ritual.¹⁰⁴

The Jesuits operating contemporaneously in New France used their knowledge of astronomy and medicine to discredit and ridicule indigenous ritual specialists.¹⁰⁵ By casting into doubt the claims of these men to have direct contact with the sacred, the Jesuits deployed their scientific knowledge in order to strengthen their own claims to divine power. In the North American case, the Jesuits often successfully turned laughter against the North American shaman, whom they believed they had unmasked as nothing more than a rattle-waving charlatan. In the Darién the situation was reversed and the leres mocked the doctrines of the Catholic faith and used ridicule as a weapon in a wide-ranging, tenacious, and effective program to discredit the Jesuit priest living amongst them.

Walburger's handling of a lunar eclipse in February 1747, which could have been utilized as proof of the priest's command of sacred knowledge, became mired in the dynamic which had already fixed his status within the village community. The Jesuit reported that he had heard a great uproar the night the moon disappeared. The townspeople, rather than seek his counsel, turned instead to the leres, who retired together and concluded after some consultation that the eclipse was not a message from the Spanish god, but was instead a sign that had been sent for them. The leres, not Walburger, provided the villagers with an explanation of the event's meaning, informing them that the Indian god was angry, had displayed his anger by smashing the moon, and would make the Indians pay for their transgressions by taking the life of one of the principal leres.¹⁰⁶

As if on cue, one of the ritual specialists, capitán Andrés, became ill soon thereafter. Several months earlier presidente Alsedo had hoped to transform Andrés from a Tule lere to an indigenous capitán. Andrés's interaction with Walburger proved that the process of hispanicization would require a more concerted effort. Walburger consulted with the stricken man, and the Jesuit claimed that although Andrés had renounced his ritual practices he still would not accept baptism. When asked by Walburger to repudiate his many wives in order to die a member of the church, Andrés responded firmly that he could

never renounce the women since he fully expected to enjoy their company in heaven after he died. The capitán-lere abruptly ended their discussion of the Catholic faith by informing Walburger that, no, he did not fear death, since he was assured that “only the Spanish went to hell, while the Indians went straight to heaven.”¹⁰⁷

Taking this utterance into account, it is unclear whether Walburger had in fact convinced the capitán-lere to renounce his practices at all, for, as he reported, “he still consults the other leres, and errors are spread.”¹⁰⁸ This comment refers to the fact that several of the Christian concepts with which Walburger had been trying to convert Andrés had been passed by Andrés to the other Indians in significantly changed forms. Andrés’ case was the closest thing Walburger presented to a conversion narrative in the breve noticia, but the events ran counter to the traditional tropes that his readers would have expected. Andrés, facing death and certain damnation, did not repent and acknowledge the truth of the faith. Quite the opposite had occurred, in fact. Andrés’ refusal was a clear signal that Walburger’s failure was complete: he could not educate the young, adults were indifferent to his teachings, and the old and the dying ignored him as well.

The Perils of Tribalization

The starkly divergent experiences of Fathers Álvarez and Walburger illustrate the themes of this paper. Álvarez aimed primarily to convert and consolidate the indigenous leadership of the Darién; the leaders would then bring to the faith the people over whom they exercised authority. Álvarez was attempting to enact the tribalization of an indigenous people through the baptism and Christianization of the men whom he considered to be their leaders. Although such a strategy was problematic, the pageantry presided over by Alsedo in Panamá City was not just an empty display. By taking part in the ritualized activities, cacique Juan de Dios and capitán-lere Andrés became versed in the ritual, language, and forms required of Spanish indigenous leaders.

Alsedo’s assessment of the Spanish strategic situation had forced the issue of Indian religious conversion to fuse with that of the tribal leaders’ loyalty to the crown, and the Tule capitanes, who had been dealing with outsiders for decades, accepted the challenge laid down by the new colonial regime. In

accepting the faith, Juan Sanni and Juan de Dios also accepted the benefits and responsibilities attending provincial rulers in the Spanish empire. Presidente Alsedo expected the Indian leaders to lead their pagan subjects to the Catholic faith, never understanding that the caciques had known when they swore fealty to the crown that their ability to force the Tule villagers to convert was extremely limited.

The men and women who actually wielded social power within the isolated Tule communities of the Darién interior had been entirely absent from Alsedo's calculations. While the men Alsedo called caciques had been accruing political power on a colonial and provincial level, the leres, the ritual practitioners who transacted the sacred business of the people, continued to organize and preserve Tule villages at the local level. Hidden from the eyes of the Spanish or the other European intruders, the leres wielded power in the communities which comprised the indigenous isthmus, at the same time that tribal leaders such as Juan de Dios forged and managed the community's relationships with outsiders. The dual nature of Tule political power eluded observers such as the presidente, just as it had eluded the other European intruders, the buccaneers and the Scots. Ironically, Father Walburger's bitter first-hand experience made him one of the few European men who got close enough to discern the true nature of local Indian power.

The Tule had made clear to the Austrian Jesuit that none of the answers he provided to the questions confronting the community could supplant those offered by their own system of belief presided over by the leres. Walburger's time amongst the Tule occurred while the Indians were ravaged by disease, a situation which could have led to a loss of faith in the native healers if they failed to provide relief or protection against illness. Instead the Tule blamed the priest by correlating the missionary's arrival directly with the onset of the sickness.¹⁰⁹ The leres retained their place in the cultural hierarchy, dealt effectively with indigenous concerns regarding illness, and discredited the isolated Jesuit priest living in their midst. They explained that the malevolent Spanish god had caused the catastrophic illness because of his implacable hostility toward the Tule and their god. This theory provided the explanation for the destructive and visible effects of disease on the community and tarred the Jesuit as a pestilential outcast, making the leres even more vital and central to the community. Ironically, Walburger was

recognized as a sacred specialist by the leres who learned about him and his creed. But they believed him to wield a malevolent form of power that he derived from a divinity of minor importance.

Walburger ended his breve noticia with a warning to the Spanish authorities. Greater resources and different tactics would be necessary to defeat the demonic forces that had taken root in the Darién. To make matters worse, the British, who made no attempt to correct the abominable errors of the Tule, sold them guns and other materials and had consequently become highly esteemed by tribal leaders such as Miguel of Calidonia. These dangerous men had gone so far as to send their children to Jamaica to receive their education, and in the Darién, Walburger noted ruefully, it was not allowed “for a bad word to be spoken against [the British].”¹¹⁰ Experience on the ground had forced Walburger to the conclusion that missionization needed to be coordinated with a larger imperial project aimed at bringing untamed regions with the core areas of the Spanish empire.

Walburger described the sources of opposition to his mission as comprising more than the tenacious, demonic leres who presided over the Tule rituals. While it was certain, he argued, that the dealings of the leres with the devil had dragged the Indians inexorably towards eternal damnation, the Jesuit concluded that the tribal leadership, rather than Satan, was the core of the problem. The Indian men who had so recently given solemn professions of their faith had, in short order, renounced their oaths. Juan de Dios was a great disappointment. Walburger concluded that he had come to the Spaniards “only for the silver they offered him.”¹¹¹ Any policy based upon treating the cacique as a representative of Christian authority seemed doomed to fail, especially since the apparently promising Juan de Dios had, Walburger alleged, seen fit to murder Spaniards prior to the signing of the treaties. It would be a very long time, the embittered Jesuit advised his superiors, before the Darién would resemble the other settled provinces of the Spanish empire.

In this assessment Walburger’s thinking fell wide of the mark, as it had in several other respects. For in the end it would not matter whether Juan de Dios, or others like him, had truly accepted the Catholic faith into his very heart, since the roots of the failure of Alsedo’s policy lay not within the unfathomable soul of a Juan de Dios, but rather deeper within the complicated indigenous polity. The presidente had in fact succeeded in establishing a nominally Christian provincial ruling structure for the

Darién, an achievement that was no small feat. But Alsedo was unaware that the ruling structure upon which he had placed his imprimatur lacked the coercive capacity, and perhaps the inclination, to challenge or transform the power that the leres wielded in the village communities. The Tule caciques and capitanes, even if they had desired to do so, lacked the ideological and physical resources that they needed to transform the religious life of the Tule people.

Padre Jacobo Walburger died amongst the Tule in 1751, no doubt contemplating until the end of his days the profound failure of his ministry.¹¹² By the mid 1750s Juan de Dios, who had so recently raised himself from a local village leader to the office of the Darién's cacique, would also become a casualty of the Spanish failure in the Darién. Having used his cunning and ambition to climb to the apex of the nascent system of Spanish regional rule, he had left himself nothing to hold onto when that system crumbled beneath him. As late as 1754 Juan de Dios plaintively addressed a memorial to the presidente and the bishop of Panamá City, writing that the absence of missionary activity amongst his people was a matter of grief and concern to him. He did "consider [it to be a] great lack ... to have a town without a doctrinero," or missionary priest. Even after he had lost the confidence of the administrators, Juan de Dios still thought it worth his while to petition the presidente on these matters.¹¹³ In a sign of their inability to grasp the workings of indigenous power, Spanish officials in Panamá City held Juan de Dios responsible for the system's collapse, rather than listing him, with Walburger and the Jesuits, as one of its victims.

*I would like to thank John M. Murrin, Kenneth R. Mills, Peter G. Lake, David Armitage, and the anonymous reviewers for reading an earlier version of this essay and providing many thoughtful comments and insights.

¹The San Blas Kuna Indians, the descendants of the early modern indigenous peoples of Panamá, use the word "Tule" to describe themselves, and this is the term that I shall use for the early modern actors in this paper. ("Tule" is translated as "person" in the Kuna language.) The need to differentiate between the present-day San Blas Kuna and the agents in this paper is more than a semantic distinction. The early modern Indians of eastern Panamá and the present-day San Blas Kuna of Panamá occupy different physical, political, and temporal places. The Darién's peoples have experienced considerable change since 1600. Confronted by epidemic illness and pressures from the encroaching Chocó people to their east, the inhabitants of the Darién migrated from the interior to the San Blas Islands of Panamá's Atlantic coast during the second half of the nineteenth century. (A small number of Kuna still occupy the area around the Chucunaque River.) In addition to this profound geographical re-orientation, the San Blas Kuna experienced deep political change as well, attaining their autonomy from the Panamanian government in the early twentieth century following an armed struggle and the intervention of the United States. For the Kuna migration, and the group's ideological explanations for their present autonomy, see E. Nordenskiöld, An Historical and Ethnological Survey of the Cuna Indians, (Göteborgs: Comparative Ethnographical Studies, 10, Göteborgs Museum, 1938); and J. Howe, A People Who Would Not Kneel: Panamá, the United States, and the San Blas Kuna, (Smithsonian Institution, 1998). For a well illustrated collection of articles and photographs relating to San Blas Kuna life, art, and culture, see M.L. Salvador, (ed.), The Art of Being Kuna: Layers of Meaning Among

the Kuna of Panamá, (UCLA Fowler Museum of Art, 1997). For studies of the ethnohistory of the Kuna and their ancestors, see M.W. Helms, Ancient Panama: Chiefs in Search of Power, (University of Texas Press, 1979), and the work of Reina Torres de Araúz: “Aspectos etno-ecológicos de los grupos humanos del este de Panamá,” in Actas del II Simposio Nacional de Antropología, Arqueología, y Etnohistoria de Panamá, (Universidad de Panamá [Centro de Investigaciones Antropológicas], 1971), pp. 291-311; “Datos etnohistóricos Cunas, según documentos (1699-1799) [sic] de la colonia escocesa en Darién,” Ibid., pp. 93-111; “La historia de Caledonia o la colonia escocesa en Darién: Analysis de un opusculo documental,” Actas del IV Simposio Nacional de Antropología, Arqueología, y Etnohistoria de Panamá, (INAC, 1973), pp. 497-507; “Etnohistoria Cuna,” Revista Lotería (Panamá) no. 221 (1974): 53-79; and “Las culturas indígenas panameños en el momento de la conquista,” Hombre y Cultura 3 [2] (1977): 69-97.

²The activities of the group of buccaneers that set off from Jamaica in 1679 to operate in the Darién region are told in several first-hand accounts. See “W.D.,” “A Brief Account of Captain Sharp and other his companions; their voyage from Jamaica unto the province of Darién and South Sea...,” book 3, chapter 12, of Esquemeling, The Buccaneers of America (E.P. Dutton, n.d., [English trans. orig. pub 1684]), pp. 257-283; [this edition is hereafter cited as Dutton Esquemeling]; P. Ayres, (ed.), The Voyages and Adventures of Capt. Barth. Sharp and others, in the South Sea, (London: Printed by B.W. for R.H. and S.T., 1684); Basil Ringrose, The Buccaneers of America. The Second Volume Containing the Dangerous Voyage and Bold Attempts of Captain Bartholomew Sharp and Others ... From the Original Journal of the Said Voyage, (E.P. Dutton, n.d.; orig. pub. 1685), pp. 289-475; William Dampier, A New Voyage Around the World, (London: James Knapton, 1697); Lionel Wafer, A New Voyage and Description of the Isthmus of America, (London: James Knapton, 1699); William Hacke, A Collection of Original Voyages: II. Captain Sharps Journey over the Isthmus of Darién, and Expedition into the South Seas, written by Himself, (London: Printed for James Knapton, 1699); Anonymous, “An Account of our Intended Voyage from Jamaco ... to Poartavell,” and Anonymous, “The Journall of our Intended Voyage ... over land into the South seas,” in John F. Jameson, (ed.), Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period: Illustrative Documents, (MacMillan, 1923), pp. 84-137. Although the Indian leaders depicted in the accounts are vitally important to pirate activities, they are in fact often perfunctorily described. For accounts of the earlier exploits of Sir Henry Morgan, see Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1669-1674, (HMSO, 1889), docs. 483, [p. 190], and 504, [pp. 201-203]; and Peter Earle, The Sack of Panama: Sir Henry Morgan’s Adventures on the Spanish Main, (Viking, 1982). The following have also provided useful background information regarding buccaneers and piracy: Violet Barbour, “Privateers and Pirates of the West Indies,” American Historical Review 16 (1911): 529-566; A.P. Thornton, “Agents of Empire: The Buccaneers,” in Thornton, For the File on Empire: Essays and Reviews, (MacMillan, 1968), pp. 79-89; Robert C. Ritchie, Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates, (Harvard UP, 1986); Ritchie, Pirates: Myths and Realities, (James Ford Bell Lecture, [no. 23], 1986); Karen O. Kupperman, Providence Island 1630-1641: The Other Puritan Colony, (Cambridge UP, 1993); and J. L. Anderson, “Piracy and World History: An Economic Perspective in Maritime Predation,” Journal of World History 6 (1995): 175-199. For an important contribution to the study of the French naval bureaucracy’s interest in the South Sea, Central America and the Darién, see A. Lafuente, “Una ciencia para el estado: La expedición geodesica hispano-francesca al virreinato del Perú (1734-1743),” Revista de Indias 43 (1983): 549-629. Also still useful for their descriptions of French buccaneers activities are two works by E.W. Dahlgren: “Voyages Francais a destination de la Mer du Sud avant Bougainville (1695-1749),” Nouvelles-Archives des Missions Scientifiques et Littéraires 14 (1907): 423-568; and La France et les cotes de l’océan Pacifique: Le commerce de la Mer du Sud jusqu’a la paix d’Utrecht, (Paris, 1909), esp. pp. 76-146. The Scottish imperial adventure of the late seventeenth century is examined by G.P. Insh, The Company of Scotland Trading to Scotland and the Indies, (London, 1932), which provides the best modern treatment. Insh, however, was more interested in the Company as an institution than with the interactions between Scotsmen and Amerindians on the ground in the new world. Insh carefully titled his work to correct the popular misnaming of the Company as the “Darién Company”, and provided extensive information about the Company’s single trading venture to Africa. J. Prebble, The Darién Disaster, (London, 1969), is a readable popular history centering on the Company’s new world activities. Although Prebble’s narrative takes more of an interest in the details of what went on in Darién, his study unfortunately lacks footnotes. The work also has two even greater problems: Prebble in some cases stretches the documents further than they ought to go in order to make his points, and his study is filled with stereotyped images of drunken Amerindians. Two recent articles with a focus on Amerindians have proven thought-provoking and helpful: C.H. Langebaek, “Cuna Long Distance Journeys: The Result of Colonial Interaction,” Ethnology 30 (1991): 371-380; and B. McPhail, “Through a Glass Darkly: Scots and Indians Converge at Darién,” Eighteenth Century Life 18 (1994): 129-147. Langebaek’s interesting, though brief, piece is well-annotated and based on Spanish archival sources; McPhail’s, though centering on Scottish-Amerindian interaction, is based primarily on pamphlet literature produced after the failure of the Company’s efforts. McPhail’s study therefore is useful in that it affords a description of some Scottish ideas and images of

Amerindians, but it does not provide a documentary-based study of what took place when the Scots and Indians interacted in Darién. The establishment and operation of the Carrisolis' management of Indian affairs in eastern Panamá during a time of incessant foreign intrusion is discussed in chapters 2-5 of my "The Door of the Seas and Key to the Universe": Indian Politics and Imperial Rivalry in the Darién, 1640-1750," (Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

³Balboa's activities are examined by A. de Altolaguirre y Duvalé, Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, (Madrid, 1914); K. Romoli, Balboa of Darién: Discoverer of the Pacific, (Doubleday, 1953); and C.O. Sauer, The Early Spanish Main, (University of California Press, 1966), esp. pp. 218-237.

⁴For Pedrarias' activities, see P. Alvarez Rubiano, Pedrarias Davila, (Madrid, 1944); and Sauer, Early Spanish Main, pp. 247-265.

⁵For the evolution of the isthmian economy, see A. Castellero Calvo, Economía terciaria y sociedad: Panamá siglos XVI y XVII, (Panamá City: Impresa de la Nación/INAC, 1980), and La Ruta transistmica y las comunicaciones marítimas hispanas siglo XVI a XIX, (mpresa de la Nación/INAC, 1984); E.D.C. Ward, "Imperial Panama: Commerce and Conflict in Isthmian America, 1550-1750," (University of Florida Ph.D. Diss., 1988); and Ward, Imperial Panama: Commerce and Conflict in Isthmian America, 1500-1800, (University of New Mexico Press, 1994).

⁶For translated Spanish documents dealing with Sir Francis Drake's destructive operations against the isthmus in the sixteenth century, see Z. Nutall, (ed.), New Light on Drake, (Hakluyt Society, 1914); I. Wright (ed.), Spanish Documents Concerning English Voyages to the Caribbean, 1527-68, (Hakluyt Society, 1929), Documents Concerning English Voyages to the Spanish Main, 1569-80, (Hakluyt Society, 1932), and Further English Voyages to Spanish America, (Hakluyt Society, 1951). For a discussion of the place of Africans in the early modern history of Panamá, see A. Fortune, "Los negros cimarrones en Tierra Firme y su lucha por la libertad," 4 partes, Lotería (Panamá) numeros 171 (Feb. 1970): 17-43; 172 (Mar. 1970): 32-53; 173 (April 1970): 16-40; and 174 (May 1970): 46-65; and "Bayano, precursor de la libertad de los esclavos," Lotería (Panamá) numero 234 (Aug. 1975): 1-15. Fortune's essays have been recently collected in Obras Selectas, comp. y prologo G. Maloney, (Panamá City: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 1993). Also thought-provoking is E. Vila Vilar, "Cimarronaje en Panamá y Cartagena. El costo de una guerilla en el siglo XVII," Caravelle number 49 (1987): 77-92.

⁷For an analysis of the anthropological concept of the tribal zone, see Neil L. Whitehead and Brian Ferguson, "The Violent Edge of Empire," in their War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare, (School of American Research Press, 1992), pp. 1-31; Whitehead, "Tribes Make States and States Make Tribes: Warfare and the Creation of Colonial Tribes and States in Northeastern South America," War in the Tribal Zone, pp. 127-151; and Whitehead, "Ethnogenesis and Ethnocide in the European Occupation of Native Surinam, 1499-1681," in J.D. Hill, (ed.), History, Power, and Identity: Ethnogenesis in the Americas, 1492-1992, (University of Iowa Press, 1996), pp. 20-36.

⁸Helms, Ancient Panamá, passim.

⁹This process is described in chapters 1 through 6 of my "Door of the Seas."

¹⁰N.L. Whitehead, "Carib Ethnic Soldiering," Ethnohistory 37 (1990): 357-385 examines an analogous process which took place in northeastern South America in what is now the Suriname-Guyana border.

¹¹AGI Panamá 305, f. 253.

¹²AGI Panamá 305, f. 254r.

¹³AGI Panamá 305, f. 254r.

¹⁴AGI Panamá 305, f. 258v.

¹⁵AGI Panamá 305, f. 255r.

¹⁶AGI Panamá 305, f. 256r.

¹⁷The sources do not provide a description of such a process, so we are left to speculate on this question.

¹⁸For a discussion of these efforts see the first portion of my "Door of the Seas."

¹⁹AGI Panamá 305, f. 256v. For Sanni's activities in the upheaval of 1726, see chapter 6 of my "Door of the Seas."

²⁰AGI Panamá 305, f. 257v.

²¹AGI Panamá 305, ff. 258r-258v.

²²AGI Panamá 305, f. 318r.

²³AGI Panamá 305, ff. 322v-323r.

²⁴AGI Panamá 305, f. 323r.

²⁵AGI Panamá 305, f. 327v.

²⁶AGI Panamá 204, undated "informe de la contaduría," f. 34v.

²⁷AGI Panamá 204, f. 34v; and AGI Panamá 305, f. 327v.

²⁸AGI Panamá 305, f. 328r.

²⁹AGI Panamá 305, f. 321r.

³⁰AGI Panamá 305, f. 326r.

³¹AGI Panamá 305, f. 324r.

³²AGI Panamá 305, f. 325r.

³³AGI Panamá 305, ff. 330v-331r.

³⁴AGI Panamá 305, f. 340r-351v.

³⁵AGI Panamá 305, f. 344r; and AGI Panamá 204, f. 81v-82r. The Frenchmen were numbered at sixty men in the treaty, and if we estimate three dependents per man, we arrive at a mixed community of some two hundred and forty persons at the Gulf of Urabá.

³⁶AGI Panamá 305, f. 282v.

³⁷This letter is mentioned and paraphrased in José Jouanen, História de la Compañía de Jesús en la Antigua Provincia de Quito 1570-1774, (Quito, 1941), 2 volumes, vol. 2, p. 244. Jouanen's text is especially useful because the author abstracted, paraphrased, and reproduced documents that he consulted in the Jesuit Archive in Rome. Equally useful in this regard is Juan Manuel Pacheco, S.J., Los Jesuitas en Colombia, tomo III (1696-1767), (Bogotá, Colombia, n.d. [preface dated 1989]), chapter XI, "La Misión del Darién," pp. 289-307, which provides extracts of documents in the Archivo Nacional de Colombia at Bogotá, as well as the Jesuit Archive in Rome.

³⁸The visitador's activities in Quito during the Presidency of Dionisio Alsedo y Herrera are discussed in Luis J. Ramos Gómez, "Tensiones en Quito: La visita del padre Andrés de Zárate, S.J., y sus secuelas," section II-5 of his Época, genesis y texto de las "Noticias secretas de América," de Jorge Juan y Antonio de Ulloa, tomo I, El viaje a América (1735-1745) de los tenientes de navio Jorge Juan y Antonio de Ulloa, y sus consecuencias literarias, (Madrid, [Spain], Instituto "Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo," 1985), pp. 50-53; Jouanen, História de la Compañía, vol. 2, pp. 138-164; and Gonzáles Suárez, História del Ecuador, pp. 993-1003.

³⁹The following biographical information on Brentan was provided by Sierra, Los Jesuitas Germanos, p. 377: "Born in Hungary 24 August 1694, he entered the Order on 3 October 1714. He arrived in Quito in 1722. . . . He wrote an extensive history of the missions which was lost in Europe upon his death. . . . After his provincialate (1744-1747) he was designated, in 1751, Procurator of the missions in Rome."

⁴⁰Jouanen, História de la Compañía, vol. 2, p. 217.

⁴¹Álvarez was born in Andujar, Spain in 1713; became a Jesuit priest in 1731; and arrived in the Americas in 1743. In 1756 he was elected the procurador of the province of Quito by the provincial congress; after the expulsion of 1767 he was vice-provincial at Ravenna, where he died in 1791. The Creole Escobar was born in the reino of Quito in 1713 and joined the Jesuit order in 1732; the date of his death is unknown. See Pacheco, Jesuitas en Colombia, v. 3, note 38, pp. 298-299.

⁴²Letter of Alsedo to the Crown, 15 October 1744, AGI Panamá 204.

⁴³Jouanen, História de la Compañía, vol. 2, p. 217. The author here cites a letter in the Jesuit Archive in Rome written by Brentan on 21 February 1744.

⁴⁴Jouanen, História de la Compañía, vol. 2, p. 244

⁴⁵Jouanen, História de la Compañía, vol. 2, pp. 244-245. As a testament to the difficulties Spanish authorities confronted, it appeared that the Jesuit order had had a priest performing missionary labor in the Darién in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Father Bernardo Recio, a missionary operating in the Kingdom of Quito in the middle of the century, claimed that from the year 1700 onwards Father Esteban Ferriol had lived among the Indians of the Darién, making only occasional trips to his native Panamá City. On 31 July 1737 he is reported to have died in the Darién. Recio, Ferriol's contemporary, and a fellow missionary in the province of Quito, provided the earliest information available about the elusive Ferriol. See Bernardo Recio, S.J., Compendiosa relación de la Cristianidad de Quito, edición, prologo, notas, y apéndices por el Padre Carlos García Goldaraz, S.J., (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas [Instituto Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo], 1947), pp. 161-162. For the exact date of Ferriol's death, see Jouanen, História de la Compañía, p. 247. Jouanen provided no citation to the source of his information regarding Ferriol. Goldaraz provided dates of birth (2 August 1681), entry into the Company of Jesús (13 August 1697), and death (31 July 1737) for Ferriol in a footnote on p. 161, but he failed to add the source(s) of that information. This account is the only evidence available relating to a presumed rapport between the Tule Indians and the lone Jesuit priest; in turn, this rapport, and its long-lasting legacy of affection, has been cited as the explanation for the Tule preference for Jesuits which was expressed in the treaties of 1738-1741. (See Castellero Calvo, Conquista, evangelización, pp. 230-231.) The case for Ferriol's importance is especially hard to make when the testimony of a late eighteenth century Indian is taken into account. The Indian reported that the Tule preferred Jesuit missionaries because they had their own sources of funding while the mendicant friars made unwelcome monetary demands upon the villagers. See M.A. de Arosemena, (ed.), "Noticia de la Provincia del Darién: Copia que se sacó de unos papeles Antiguos que envío al Sr. Virrey en el año de 1789 el Conde de Real

Agrado,” part I, Hombre y Cultura 2 [5] (1974): 143-157, and part II, Hombre y Cultura 3 [2] (1977): 155-162; the relevant information is contained in part I, p. 146.

⁴⁶Alsedo, in his letter of 15 October 1744, AGI Panamá 204, mentioned that the missionaries had departed from Panamá City on 28 September, and had arrived in the Darién five days later. The documents which provide the sources for my account of this systematic stage in the spiritual conquest of the Darién carried out in late 1744 and early 1745 are contained in a packet of papers in AGI Panamá 204 titled Testimonio de los Autos de la Verdadera Pacificación y Reducción al Gremio de la Sagrada Fee Catholica y Dominio de Su Magestad, que Dios Guarde--La Principal Parte de la Provincia del Darién en el Partido del Casique Don Juan de Dios Alsedo subcessor de su Hermano, don Juan de Sanni (alias) Atunchile, a la Vanda del Sur desde la Cordillera hasta las Orillas del Mar. Por la Mision del MRP Joachin Álvarez de la Compañía de Jesús, Misionero de la Provincia de Quito, en el Darién. (The title page of the packet was clearly written some time after the documents were received in Madrid, as they refer to the Presidente as “Alsedo.”) Álvarez provides two of the documents in the collection: a Letter to Alsedo, dated 6 January 1745 (item 1 in the packet); and a more detailed Informe of 12 February 1745 (item 18). The Jesuit missionary also clearly served as the main informant for Alsedo’s Decreto of 8 February 1745 (item 4), which described Álvarez’s activities in the Darién. Fragmentary secondary accounts of Álvarez’s missionary activity are contained in Jouanen, História de la Compañía, pp. 244-247; and José Joaquín Borda, História de la Compañía de Jesús en la Nueva Granada, 2 volumes, (Poissy: Imprenta de S. Lejay et Co., 1872), vol. 2, pp. 20-23. The treatment of Álvarez’s activity is cursory in Severino de Santa Teresa, História documentada, vol. 4, p. 279; and lacking entirely from Castellero Calvo, Conquista, evangelización.

⁴⁷The town had but a small garrison of Spanish soldiers who were headquartered at a modest wooden fort with a thatched roof. The fort is described by Joaquín Balcárcel de Miranda in his letter of 1 February 1745 to Dionisio Alsedo y Herrera, AGI Panamá 204.

⁴⁸Alsedo provides information on the priest Pomar and the problems he caused in his Letter to the King of 11 March 1745, AGI Panamá 204. The following paragraphs regarding the activities of Father Pomar are drawn from information contained in folio pages 107-110. Juan Pomar was the brother of the teniente of the town of Penonomé, a man named Idelfonso de Pomar y Burgos. The brothers had both been found culpable in the proceedings of a high level investigation, or pesquisa, and a command had been dispatched from Madrid ordering the Viceroy to suspend Idelfonso Pomar from his offices. A pesquisa investigation was a serious matter, and the investigator, armed with broad powers, was dispatched by royal order to make an on-site examination pertaining to a list of specific charges. This particular investigation was instigated by a list of charges brought to the attention of the crown by the oidor who was acting as fiscal of the audiencia, Licenciado Juan Pérez García. Pérez was no stranger to controversy and had been the primary target of Alsedo’s campaign to rid central Panamá of contraband traders and their allies. When he learned of this situation Juan Pomar decided it was in his family’s interest for him to leave his parish in Panamá City and rush to Cartagena to present a petition before the Viceroy. The Vicar General was not pleased when he learned of the priest’s trip, and he promptly dispatched a comisionario with orders to track down the priest and bring him back to the city. This vicarial official had orders to seize the man’s goods, read the general censures against the wayward priest, (including the anathema), and to use whatever force was required to ensure his return. When presidente Alsedo learned of the broad authority which the Vicar General had granted the comisionario, he angrily ordered him deposed, jailed, and brought back to Panamá City as soon as possible. By the time the two Jesuits arrived at El Real, therefore, both Padre Juan de Pomar y Burgos and the vicarial comisionario were in custody in the small fort. The Spanish militiamen and soldiers serving there had been disquieted by the grave censures that the comisionario had read. Most importantly, the Indians were in an even greater turmoil due to the harsh injunctions which they had heard the vicarial comisionario utter.

⁴⁹Letter of Alsedo, AGI Panamá 204. Alsedo noted that Álvarez, Pomar, and the comisionario arrived in the city on 18 October 1744, and that it was “one of the most disorderly days the city had ever seen.” The Pomar brothers had considerable support in the town, and, when placed on trial for leaving his parish without secular or ecclesiastical permission, Juan Pomar was absolved after a process which took two months, an outcome which Alsedo stated “amazed those who had observed or considered the case.” After being absolved he attained the proper permission, passed overland to Cartagena, and presented his family’s case before the Viceroy. Joaquín Balcárcel de Miranda, interim governor of the Darién, wrote in a letter of 1 February 1745 to Alsedo that Pomar had passed through El Real on 28 January on his way to Cartagena, and was allowed to continue his journey, “having shown to me his license to travel, which was issued by yourself.” Letter of Balcárcel de Miranda 1 February 1745, AGI Panamá 204, f. 130r.

⁵⁰Letter of Álvarez 6 January 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁵¹Álvarez had to counteract a bad first impression: the first public words some Tule would have heard spoken by a Jesuit priest were those of the vicarial comisionario intoning the anathema against Pomar. Such an action would have confirmed the doubts put in place by the Frenchmen. The comisionario had, with great

ceremony, damned the escaped priest, confiscated his worldly possessions, and confined him to the Spanish fort. Wary Indians could justifiably wonder what their treatment would be like, if Christians treated their own ritual specialists so harshly.

⁵²Relación of Joaquín Álvarez, February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁵³Letter of Joaquín Álvarez, January 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁵⁴Relación of Álvarez, February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁵⁵Relación of Álvarez, February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁵⁶Diario of Balcárcel 12 February 1739, AGI Panamá 305.

⁵⁷Relación of Álvarez, February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁵⁸Letter of Balcárcel de Miranda to Alsedo, 1 February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁵⁹Letter of Balcárcel de Miranda to Alsedo, 1 February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁶⁰According to Balcárcel, Sanni used the term “malespasadas lastrisas” to describe his infirmities. A “lastre” is a bothersome illness from which one can ultimately recover. Letter of Balcárcel de Miranda to Alsedo, 1 February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁶¹Relación of Álvarez, February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁶²This was a significant decision, and provides the clearest sign of the dynamic operating between the two Jesuits. All missionary activity in Sanni’s lands would be directed by Álvarez, a decision made without discussion, although the two men were of the same age, and had entered the order at nearly the same time.

⁶³Alsedo reported that the road to the lands of Juan de Dios and Sanni was not an easy one, and that upon it “[Álvarez] lost the vision of one eye.” Letter of Dionisio Alsedo 11 March 1745, AGI Panamá 204; a copy of the letter can be found in AGI Panamá 305. Álvarez mentions his loss of vision in his Relación of February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁶⁴Sanni’s illness, and his desire for baptism is reported in Alsedo’s letter, Álvarez’s Relación, and Alsedo’s Decreto of 8 February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁶⁵Relación of February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁶⁶Alsedo’s Decreto of 8 February stated that Sanni died a quarter of an hour after receiving the sacrament, whereas Álvarez’s Relación of February 1745 states that Sanni died six or seven minutes after receiving the sacrament.

⁶⁷For the outbreak of the disease in the mid-1740s, see Susan Austin Alchon’s informative monograph Native Society and Disease in Colonial Ecuador, (Cambridge UP, 1991), esp. p. 103. Although historians have thought otherwise, the Darién was not isolated from the disease trends sweeping through the kingdoms of Spanish America in the eighteenth century. When the administration of Alsedo worked to place the province under effective Spanish control, further avenues for the transmission of disease were opened. The Protector of the Indians Joaquín Balcárcel, for example, proudly mentioned in a letter to the Presidente that Antonio Masgana, a man under his tutelage, had opened the previously unused overland route between Panamá City and Cartagena. In addition to serving as a path along which state papers could travel more easily, the overland route also opened an avenue for the movement of carriers of disease. The Jesuit missionaries themselves had recently been based in one of the affected regions, the reino of Quito.

⁶⁸Decreto, 8 February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁶⁹Decreto, February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁷⁰Decreto, February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁷¹Decreto, February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁷²The requests are enumerated in Alsedo’s Decreto of February, 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁷³Decreto of February, 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁷⁴Certification of the Bishop, February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁷⁵Testimonio of the Sargento, February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁷⁶Decreto of Alsedo, February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁷⁷Testimonio, February 1745, AGI Panamá 204.

⁷⁸Maroni’s report is excerpted in Jouanen, História de la Compañía, pp. 245-246.

⁷⁹Jouanen, História de la Compañía, pp. 245-246.

⁸⁰A Dominican friar operating in the region, Fray Gregorio Díaz Pimienta, alleged that Escobar’s health was worn down by the insults and betrayals of the Protector of the Indians, Joaquín Balcárcel de Miranda; see Pacheco, Los Jesuitas en Colombia, vol. 3, p. 299, who cites a letter of Díaz Pimienta, O.P. to the Viceroy [Eslava] (the original text erroneously reads “Viceroy Panamá”), 28 September 1746, in the Archivo Histórico Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá (Milicia y Marina, tomo 122). Hereafter this archive is cited as the ANC.

⁸¹Franciscis was a Sicilian scholastic; Walburger was a priest from the province of Southern Germany, as Austria was then termed by the Order. Pacheco, Los Jesuitas en Colombia, p. 300, provides the following

biographical data for the two men. Franciscis was born in 1705 in Palermo, entered the Company 23 May 1719, and took orders in 1731. After teaching rhetoric in Palermo, philosophy at Tripani and Messina, and theology at Modica, he embarked for the Americas in 1741, headed for the Province of Quito. After serving in the Darién he served in the Amazonian missions of the Kingdom of Quito until the Jesuit expulsion in 1767. Walburger was born at Innsbruck on 18 June 1715, entered the Company 1 April 1731, and came to the Province of Quito in 1742.

⁸²For the date of the arrival of the missionaries, see Walburger's breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 12r.

⁸³Franciscis had previously taught rhetoric, philosophy and theology in Europe. Maroni provided this information in his informe to Viceroy Eslava, which is abstracted in Jouanen, História de la Compañía. Pacheco, Los Jesuitas en Colombia, p. 300 cites an informe written by Franciscis on 20 June 1746 to Presidente Alsedo which is in the ANC (Milicia y Marina, tomo 119). Severino de Santa Teresa, História documentada, vol. 4, p. 280, mentioned that Ignacio Franciscis broke his leg during one of his travels throughout the Darién, and was forced by this injury to leave sometime around 1750, though no exact date of his departure was provided.

⁸⁴Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, 1r.

⁸⁵The description of God and his home are in AGI Panamá 307, 1r, and continues through 1v.

⁸⁶For a discussion of the Kuna cosmological oral tradition and its relationship to the social structure, see chapter one of this dissertation.

⁸⁷Chapin, "Curing Among the Cuna," chapters 2-5, pp. 62-207.

⁸⁸Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 2r.

⁸⁹Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 2r.

⁹⁰For a discussion of the danger of the nia, and the rituals necessary to free a person from their power, see Chapin, "Curing Among the Cuna," chapter 7, pp. 309-369.

⁹¹Descriptions of Kuna diabolism are in A Short Account From, and Description of the Isthmus of Darién, Where the Scots Colony are Settled, (Edinburgh, 1699); Blackwell, Description of Darian, 9-10; A Letter Giving a Description of the Isthmus, pp. 13-14; and The History of Caledonia, p. 24-5.

⁹²For Mexican diabolism, see Fernando Cervantes, The Devil in the New World, (Yale UP, 1995), passim.

⁹³Louise M. Burkhart, The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth Century Mexico, (University of Arizona Press, 1989) provides evidence of similar problems of translation within the native community. The situations are not entirely analogous, however, because the peoples of sixteenth-century Mexico were experiencing religious instruction more intensely than the Tule of the Darién ever would. See also D. Tavárez, "Naming the Trinity: From Ideologies of Translation to Dialectics of Reception in Colonial Nahuatl Texts, 1547-1771," Colonial Latin American Review 9 (2000): 21-49.

⁹⁴Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 2v.

⁹⁵Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 11r-11v.

⁹⁶Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 13r.

⁹⁷Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 13v.

⁹⁸Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 13v.

⁹⁹Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 15r. Rather than provide information of who this Indian woman was, why she held sympathies for Christianity, and what the nature of her sympathies were, Walburger instead saw her revelation as simple proof of the truism that "Indians cannot keep secrets."

¹⁰⁰Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 15v.

¹⁰¹Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 16r.

¹⁰²Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 22r. Walburger's account must be treated with care, as the Jesuit relation was by this time a genre of literary reportage and spiritual conquest narrative with its own forms and conventions. Walburger's narrative depicted a cadre of highly-skilled and resourceful obstructionists who deftly nullified his missionary activity.

¹⁰³Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 22v.

¹⁰⁴Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 22v. For a discussion of ridicule and humor in colonial contexts see James Merrell, "'The Customs of the Country,'" in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, (eds.), Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire, (University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 117-157, esp. pp. 152-153.

¹⁰⁵For the Jesuit attack on the shaman in North American Indian communities, see James Axtell, The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), chapter 6, "Harvest of Souls," pp. 91-131.

¹⁰⁶Walburger described the eclipse and its aftermath in the Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 6v.

¹⁰⁷Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 7v.

¹⁰⁸Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 7v.

¹⁰⁹In a very real sense, the missionary could of course be a vector of the disease, since he would come into close and frequent contact with the ill and dying.

¹¹⁰Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 17v.

¹¹¹Walburger, Breve noticia, AGI Panamá 307, f. 23r.

¹¹²Castillero Calvo, in a chapter devoted to Walburger, erroneously gives 1750 as the year of the Jesuit's death. See Conquista, evangelización, esp. pp. 217-218. Prior to Castillero's flawed dating, others offered dates between 1759 and 1763 for Walburger's demise. Father Bernardo Recio, however, when he arrived in Quito in late 1751, knew the missionary to be dead. (Recio, História de la Cristianidad, p. 165 [paragraph 155].) A letter of the governor of Panamá, sent to the crown 8 March 1757, confirmed 1751 as the year of Walburger's death. (Letter of Manuel de Montiano, 8 March 1757, AGI Panamá 130.)

¹¹³See the Memorial del Cacique Coronel Juan de Dios de Herrera, AGI Panamá, 130, which is included in a packet of letters and reports compiled by the presidente of the audiencia of Panamá, Manuel de Montiano, on 8 March 1757.