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## SPANISH CONTACTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE ON THE UCAYALI RIVER, PERU<sup>1</sup>

by

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### ABSTRACT

Archaeological evidence from the Ucayali River suggests that large communities, probably with a complex social organization, were characteristic throughout the prehistoric period. In contrast, Steward and Métraux suggest that large communities were the unstable product of the missionary period. Re-examination of the ethnohistoric sources indicates that large, stable communities were in fact characteristic of the mainstream Ucayali tribes at the beginning of the historic period but that they collapsed with the precipitous population declines caused by Spanish diseases. Tribes on the major tributaries probably had smaller communities; but only the tribes most remote from the mainstream were characterized by the kind of one house communities which Steward and Métraux believed to be characteristic of the Peruvian *montaña* as a whole.

Archaeological research carried out by Donald W. Lathrap and his associates on the Ucayali River and its tributaries has made it possible to trace the cultural record some 4000 years into the past. Within the later parts of prehistory we believe that it is possible to recognize the arrival and development of the cultural groups which occupied the area during the Historic Period: the Cocama and the Shipibo/Conibo, or more generally speaking, the Panoan tribes (Lathrap 1962, 1970; Myers 1970; Roe 1973).

Our evidence indicates that Panoan speakers arrived on the Ucayali about A.D. 300 when ceramics of the Pacacocha Tradition first make their appearance in the archaeological record. Through a series of changes in the rules of ceramic manufacture, by A.D. 800 the pottery of the Pacacocha Tradition came to be characterized by a complex series of vessel forms and polychrome painted decoration which was outlined by incised lines. At least in part, these changes can be attributed to influences from the Polychrome Tradition which was spreading up the Amazon and its major tributaries (Lathrap 1970; Myers 1970; Roe 1973).

The Polychrome Tradition appears on the Ucayali by A.D. 1320, marking the arrival of the Cocama on the Ucayali south of the Pachitea River (Lathrap 1970). However, by the early historic period Cocama territory had contracted to the lower third of the Ucayali (Myers 1968), a sharp reversal of the expansionary tendencies which had characterized the Miracanguera sub-tradition of the Polychrome Tradition since before A.D. 1000 (Lathrap 1970).

Our evidence indicates that large sites, apparently occupied for a considerable period of time, were characteristic throughout the archaeological record (Myers 1973), a settlement pattern which did not fit the composite picture presented by Julian Steward and Alfred Métraux in the *Handbook of South American Indians* (1948). As a result of this lack of fit between archaeological evidence and Steward and Métraux's summary, a reexamination of the ethnohistoric record is in order.

#### *The Traditional View of Ucayali Ethnohistory*

Almost all of the information on the ethnohistory of the riverine tribes was also available to Steward and Métraux when they prepared the relevant chapters for the *Handbook of South American Indians* (Métraux 1948; Steward and Métraux 1948). Nevertheless, their discussions appear to be affected by two unstated biases which color almost everything they say. These biases are reflected most clearly in their general discussions about *montaña* ethnography. First, they treat *montaña* ethnography as an historical composite. That is, they lump all of the available information as if it came from a single time frame. When there is a conflict between two sources of different date, they select the later one (usually written by a nineteenth century European traveler) as the more reliable, rather than searching for mechanisms which would account for the differences between accounts of different date. This is not to say that Steward and Métraux were not thoroughly familiar with the historical sources. Their discussion of Conibo history, for example, is still impressive although some improvements can be made. Second, they assume the cultural unity of a language family. Thus, they speak of the "Panoan village" and the "Panoan sociopolitical unit" as if there were not significant differences among the various tribes of Panoan speech. In both regards they do a serious injustice to the facts of *montaña* ethnohistory. Nevertheless, their descriptions have greatly influenced a generation of anthropological thinking about the Peruvian *montaña*. Therefore, it seems useful to summarize those aspects of their discussions which deal with Indian groups resident on the central Ucayali and its western tributaries.

Steward and Métraux state that "a large house sheltering one to several families constitutes the Panoan village or community" (1948:570). "The aboriginal Panoan sociopolitical unit was the household, which evidently

consisted of related families. . . . It was also the political unit, despite the proximity of many houses to one another, and was to a large degree the economic unit" (1948:581). They go on to claim that "the household community has persisted since earliest times. Even mission life, when scores of people were concentrated in large villages failed to destroy it, for families returned to their aboriginal separatism after leaving the missions" (1948:581). "The aboriginal community headman was doubtless the family elder" (1948:583).

The Cocama socio-political organization appears to be quite different from that of the Panoan tribes. "Cocama villages consisted of thirty to forty huts, each sheltering several extended families" (Métraux 1948:693). "The authority of the Cocama chief appears to have been slight" but it may have extended beyond the household to the village (Métraux 1948:698).

Based upon these descriptions, we would expect Cocama villages, on the lower Ucayali, to be significantly larger than those of groups living upstream. The larger Cocama villages might contain as many as 600 persons, slightly more than the number which Forge suggests as the upper limit for a neolithic egalitarian society (1972:375). This fits well with Métraux's observation that the authority of the Cocama chief may have extended beyond the household to the village. Panoan villages should have been composed of one to a small number of houses, certainly less than 100 persons. Consequently, we would expect egalitarian societies with no real authority vested in the headman. In terms of Service's (1962) levels of social organization, the Panoans would be at the tribal level while the Cocama would barely have reached the chiefdom level.

### The Historical Record

My reading of the historical record does not meet the expectations that might be derived from the *Handbook of South American Indians*. Still less does it fit the caricature later presented by Steward and Faron (1959). Put briefly, there appears to be a marked difference in the complexity of social organization between groups which lived on the mainstream Ucayali (the Cocama, Conibo and Piro); those who lived on the principal tributaries (the Setebo and Shipibo); and those who lived on the upper tributaries and in the interfluvial areas (Campa, Cashinahua, Remo, and so forth). The distinction is not along linguistic lines, as conceived by Steward and Métraux, but along ecological lines. According to the population dynamics model presented by Donald W. Lathrap (1968:28-29; 1970:75), the alluvial lands of the Amazon Basin are the best agricultural lands for tropical forest agriculture, able to support the largest and most powerful tribes. As these groups expanded, smaller and less powerful tribes were forced onto the tributaries and into the interfluvial areas.

My view of Ucayali ethnohistory is at odds with that of Steward and Métraux on almost every significant point. There can be no question but that they were familiar with the same ethnohistoric sources that I employ: they did not believe them. I do. There are at least two considerations which would lead Steward and Métraux to disbelieve the historical evidence. First, we must recognize that the earliest historical sources were written either by adventurers in search of gold and kingdoms to conquer; or by missionaries whose vast expenditures could only be justified by a proportionate number of conversions to the Catholic faith. When disinterested parties finally did reach the Amazon, they found no evidence of the large populations which were reported to have lived there.

The second factor which seems to have affected the conclusions reached by Steward and Métraux is an expectation that peoples with similar languages should have similar cultures. The Cocama might have a relatively large and complex socio-political organization because their relatives on the Amazon, the Omagua, were even larger. The Omagua, in turn, were believable because their social complexity fit with that of the Tupinamba whose habits were well described before their culture was destroyed. The Conibo, on the other hand, are related to the Remo and Cashinahua who did not have particularly complex organizations when they were first described. However, they fit into a general pattern of the Campa whose early culture is fairly well known (Varese 1968).

My point of view, that the historical sources are at least relatively believable, is based upon different considerations. First, the historic sources are consistent among themselves. While later observations are not identical with those of an earlier date, when several observations are available there is a clear trend — generally toward a reduction in numbers and societal complexity. Moreover, within the sources themselves are suggested mechanisms which would account for the apparent incongruities: slave raiding and disease. Second, the reported existence of very large riverine communities in the early historic period is consistent with the archaeological evidence which suggests that communities of similar size existed in the prehistoric period as well (Myers\*1973). Third, the assumption of demographic similarity between groups of the same language family is highly suspect. Although there is no evidence from the period of initial contact which bears upon the question, evidence from the mid-eighteenth century suggests that while the riverine Conibo lived in villages of 500 to 600 persons, the Shipibo and Setebo of the lower tributaries lived in much smaller communities.

Unfortunately, the historic record usually tells us little about community organization. Still, we do learn enough of tribal sizes, locations and habits to sketch the destruction of indigenous life on the Ucayali.

### The Ethnohistory of the Ucayali

The ethnohistory of the Ucayali can be divided into five major periods prior to the observations of anthropologists. The first period dates to the mid-sixteenth century when Juan Salinas de Loyola first contacted the tribes of the Ucayali. Because his accounts contain the only observations made prior to the establishment of missions in the Amazon Basin, his reports are particularly important for establishing an ethnohistoric baseline. Not surprisingly, the records are somewhat difficult to interpret, partly because he presents little geographic information by which the locations of the tribes can be positively identified. Nevertheless, there is sufficient information to get a pretty good idea of what the Ucayali was like more than 400 years ago.

The second period dates to the mid-seventeenth century, almost 100 years after the epic voyage of Juan Salinas de Loyola. During this period, missionaries entered the Ucayali from three directions: the Jesuits from the north; and the Franciscans from the south and east. It ended when the Jesuits withdrew to the Huallaga under threats from the Shipibo. Ethnohistoric information from the Franciscans is sparse, but the writings of the Jesuits confirm the general outlines of the facts recorded in the previous century.

The third period begins in 1682 and ends in 1698 when the priests were massacred. Again, both Jesuits and Franciscans were involved, but this time the Franciscans entered only from the south. By this time the lower Ucayali was virtually uninhabited, so the Jesuits extended their activity well to the south. For the first time, the missions of the two orders overlapped.

In the mid-eighteenth century both missionary orders attempted to re-establish themselves on the Ucayali, but the Jesuits were soon forced out, leaving the field to the Franciscans who later withdrew under renewed Indian attacks.

Finally, in 1791 the Franciscans managed to establish themselves on the Ucayali for good. During the succeeding years they were regularly visited by European travelers such as Raimondi (1876, 1942), Herndon (Herndon and Gibbon 1854), and Macroy (1875). It was the observations of these men which were believed by Steward and Métraux. While the nineteenth century observers offer many useful observations on the state of the *montaña* Indians, their observations on social organization and societal complexity can be only a pale reflection of the aboriginal condition. Nearly 300 years of slave raiding, missionization and disease had taken their toll.

#### *The Expedition of Juan Salinas de Loyola in 1557*

Juan Salinas de Loyola entered the Ucayali on September 29, 1557. He went upstream for a distance of 100 leagues before reaching the Province of Benorina whose inhabitants met him with threats of war. They were quickly

converted to peace and Salinas passed on to the Province of the Cocama which was very much larger, extending for a distance of more than sixty leagues. There were many well formed villages on the high banks of the river and on the lakes. Each village had a chief who was very much respected by the people. The Cocama wore cotton clothing decorated with many beautifully painted designs. They adorned themselves with features and ornaments made of gold and silver. They made splendid pottery. Although their language was unknown to Salinas, he had little difficulty understanding it with the help of interpreters (Salinas de Loyola 1897a:LXXIII-LXXIV).

Leaving the Province of the Cocama, Salinas continued upstream through about fifty leagues of uninhabited territory until he reached the Province of the Pariaches which was well populated and extended for many leagues. The land was mountainous (*muntuosa*)<sup>2</sup> and since the river was so abundant, the wetness of it was sufficient to create forests (*montaña*), especially in the winter when the river left its course and flooded a great part of the land. The Pariaches had many large villages located upon the banks of the river. In each village there were chiefs who were much respected and obeyed. Clothing was made of cotton, decorated with painted designs. The Pariaches spoke a different language which was very difficult to understand (Salinas de Loyola 1897a:LXXIV).

Past the Province of the Pariaches he entered another province of war-like people, very different in language and dress. He asked them for Ycatara, according to the notices that he had carried with him since the beginning, and they assured him that Ycatara was Cuzco of Peru. They brought him Indians who had been there, and according to details and signs that they gave him, he realized that they were telling of Cuzco which he had known for many years. Having found out what he came to learn, he returned to Santiago de las Montañas where he had left the rest of his men and equipment (Salinas de Loyola 1897a:LXXV).

In another manuscript, probably later but incomplete and undated, Salinas de Loyola speaks again of his discoveries on the Ucayali River:

I discovered many provinces of people with great reason and good breeding, of cotton clothing well painted with a brush; jewels of gold and silver with which they adorned their persons, with large medals on their breasts and on their wrists, and beads of gold and silver hung from their noses and ears and headdresses of silver on their heads in the manner of hoops (*aros de cedazos*); great plumagry. They are a magnificent (*lucido*) people, well disposed and well featured; they have their settlements on the high banks of the river in the manner of villages of 200 and 300 and 400 houses. The chiefs are obeyed and respected much more than those before [on the Marañon and Pastaza Rivers] and it is thus that in the ornament of their persons they represent themselves to be lords. The language is different than those of before and only by great luck and the aid of interpreters that I understood them. In the distance of the 350 leagues I discovered many provinces,

as I have said, and settlements, and although in dress and manners, sustenance, hunting and fishing and fruits they are all one, in the language there was great difference that they were not able to understand without interpreters (Salinas de Loyola 1897b:LXXXII).

One of the most interesting observations in Salinas' narrative is the fact that the Ucayali was not continuously occupied but rather there were large segments of uninhabited land between the provinces. Such an unoccupied territory between two large and powerful groups on the major rivers is a recurring feature in the early history of Amazonia. Salinas observed this pattern not only on the Ucayali, but also on the Marañón. Orellana made similar observations on the Napo River and on the Amazon itself (Medina 1934). These stretches of uninhabited territory can be interpreted as buffer zones between each of the major groups. The absence of unoccupied territory between the Benorina and the Cocama suggests that the two groups were allied. On the other hand, the fact that the Cocama and the Pariache were separated by a no man's land almost as large as the territory occupied by either group suggests that there was considerable hostility between them. In support of this position, we can note that each time the Spaniards entered a new province they were subject to attack, whereas in moving from the Benorina to the Cocama there were not renewed hostilities. Further, the fact that each of the three principal groups on the Ucayali spoke a different language supports the probability of hostility among them.

Nevertheless, in spite of the linguistic differences among the three groups, their modes of livelihood and dress were very similar. With respect to the socio-political organization of these groups, we note the existence of well-ordered towns with up to 400 houses. If we presume that there were multi-family houses containing some twenty persons, which seems likely from later evidence (Figueroa 1904:108), there were towns of 4000 to 8000 persons. Each town had its own chiefs who could be distinguished from the populace at large by means of their ornaments. These ornaments were often trade goods presumably brought in from Cuzco by the third major group on the river. However, from Salinas' accounts there is nothing to suggest a paramount chief in any of the provinces on the Ucayali.

It is most unfortunate that Salinas does not give us a more detailed account of the geography of the Ucayali. His estimates of distance are almost certainly inflated as were his estimates of distance on the Marañón (Jimenez de la Espada 1897:LXXIII). About the only thing that he does tell us is that the Pariaches lived in a mountainous locale. On the Ucayali, the area which best fits this description is the zone above the mouth of the Pachitea River (Figure 1), an area which was occupied by the Conibo a century later. Barring any major population shifts, for which there is no evidence, the sixteenth century Pariache are probably Conibo.

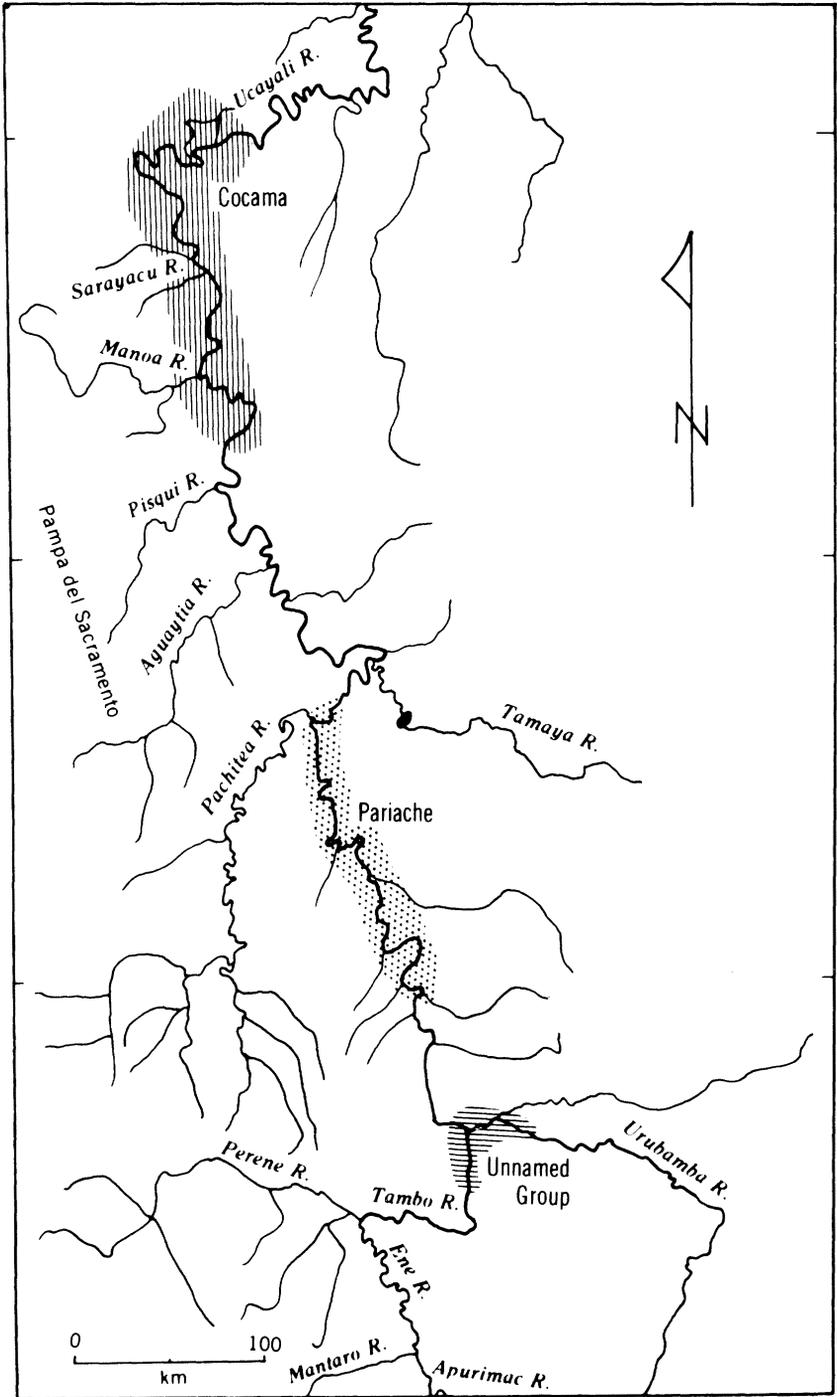


Fig. 1 Location of Ucayali tribes in 1577.

Salinas also tells us that the unnamed group upstream from the Pariache traded with Cuzco. Since this important activity was conducted by the Piro in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (Chantre y Herrera 1901:282; Herndon and Gibbon 1854:200), it is most likely that Salinas' unnamed group should be identified as Piro.

The fact that the languages of the Cocama, Conibo and Piro belong to different language families fits with Salinas' observation that the three tribes of the Ucayali spoke different languages. Thus, it is most interesting that the cultural characteristics of these groups were very similar. Such cultural similarity is at odds with the model employed by Steward and Métraux who expect that linguistically related groups will have similar cultural characteristics whereas those of unrelated languages will have a quite different set of cultural characteristics. The fact is that Cocama, Conibo and Piro cultural characteristics were very similar in a wide variety of traits which included their dress, pattern of cranial deformation and ceramic characteristics. These cannot be explained by postulating a common cultural base. Nor can the similarity be explained in straight-forward ecological terms. It is a case of cultural convergence for cultural advantage, a strategy which was mutually adopted by the principal tribes of the Ucayali. In most cases it is not clear which tribe originated a particular characteristic and which adopted it later. However, polychrome pottery appears to have been introduced to the Ucayali by Cocama (Lathrap 1970:151) and later imitated by the Conibo and Piro. The location of the principal tribes does follow an ecological model. Only the major rivers could support large tribes with a complex social organization. Tribes without large populations were not powerful enough to maintain themselves on the major rivers. When a tribe did succeed in reestablishing itself on the Ucayali, it adopted the visible signs of its newly-achieved power. Cultural convergence among tribes of different historical backgrounds was the result.

### *The Ucayali in the mid-seventeenth century*

During the last half of the seventeenth century there was a remarkable amount of missionary activity on the Ucayali. Franciscans entered from the south and east; and Jesuits entered from the north (Figure 2). Although the two orders were in contact with one another, and even helped each other on occasion, their operations were essentially independent. Even the names by which they called particular tribes were frequently different, a fact which presents certain problems in coordinating their accounts.

In 1644 it became necessary for the Spanish of Mianas to establish peace with the Cocama of the Ucayali who were a continuing source of trouble for missions on the Huallaga and the Marañon. Padre Gaspar Cujia visited the Cocama with a troop of Spanish soldiers as well as some Xevero and Mainas Indians and an interpreter. Because of a lack of missionaries, no mission was established at this time but occasional visits were made until

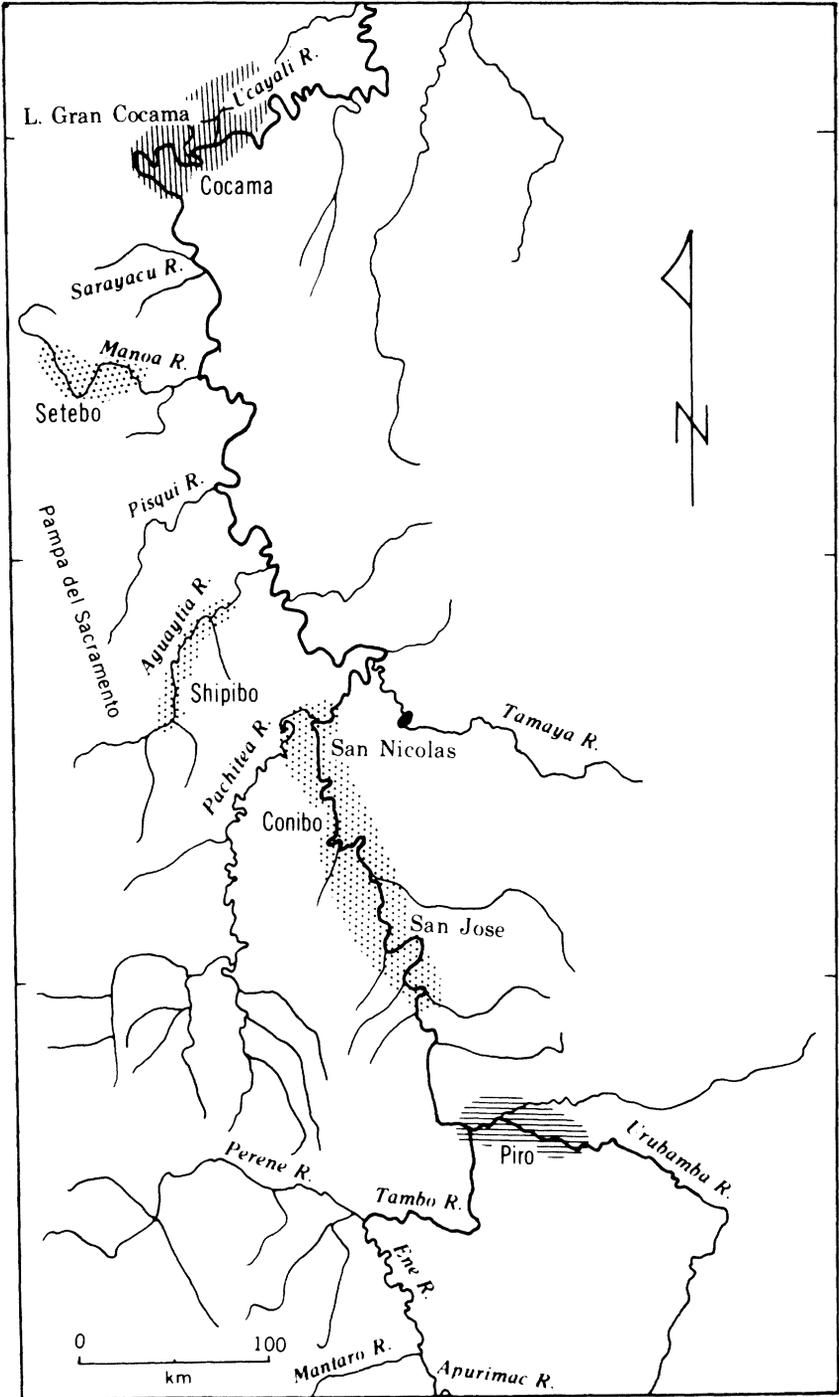


Fig. 2 Location of Ucayali tribes in the mid-seventeenth century.

1651 when a mission was finally established by Father Bartolome Pérez. After only three months, Father Pérez returned to Borja on missionary business and the Cocama were left without a mission until 1657. Father Tomas Mojano and Brother Domingo Fernandez lived among the Cocama from 1657 to 1659. They established four new villages from their base on the lake known as the Gran Cocama. By 1659, the danger of living among the Cocama had become too great so they were ordered to Sta. Maria del Huallaga, bringing with them about 100 Cocama warriors with their families (Chantre y Herrera 1901:140-141, 145-146, 211; Figueroa 1904:104-108).

During this period of thirteen years, the nature of Cocama society must have changed radically. When they were first visited by Father Cujia there were estimated to be some 10,000 to 12,000 persons, including about 2000 warriors. One large village had eighty houses, others had forty houses, and the average village included about thirty houses. Just seven years later, about 300 warriors were left; and six years after that, many less. Figueroa, who was in charge of the missions of Mainas until his death in 1666, attributes the decline of the Cocama not only to the ravages of the Chipeo (Shipibo) but more importantly to the effects of repeated pestilence. In 1644 Cocama chiefs appear to have been powerful men whose authority extended far beyond the confines of their own village. There may even have been paramount chiefs. When Father Cujia visited the Cocama, the chief of the south had recently died. While this need not mean patrilineal inheritance of the chieftainship, it does imply that the sons of the dead chief might have had some claim on his position. Moreover, it seems possible that the chief of the north might have hoped to expand his authority by keeping the two sons under his roof. But, only thirteen years later, not only did the Cocama live in small dispersed settlements, but Father Mojano was able to speak of their leaders as "chiefs in name only" (Figueroa 1904:108-109).

When they entered history the Cocama had a fearsome reputation on the Huallaga and Marañon Rivers where they made frequent raids. Their attacks on the Shipibo to the south must have been equally ferocious. But, with the ravages of disease brought on by Spanish contact, substantial changes took place. By 1657 peace was established with the Shipibo who regularly visited the Cocama mission and in fact it was the threats of the Shipibo which ultimately forced the withdrawal of Father Mojano (Figueroa 1904:109-110). Nevertheless, the Cocama played a leading role in the Indian uprisings on the Huallaga River from 1663 to 1666, aided by the Maparinas, who had been Cocama allies as early as 1644, and the Shipibo, who had earlier ravaged the Franciscan missions among the Payansos (Chantre y Herrera 1901:226, 229; Figueroa 1904:108).

In 1657 the Franciscans began a serious missionary effort toward the Ucayali from their missions among the Payanso Indians on the Tulumayo River. Two missions were established among the Setebo in 1657, and again in 1661. The second time, more than 2000 Indians were brought together while

many more remained dispersed in the forest. Both times, Setebo uprisings, said to have been induced by the Calliseca, forced the abandonment of the missions. Finally, in 1663 a mission which brought together many Indians was established among the Calliseca but it was abandoned five years later, apparently because of renewed hostilities (Amich 1854:26-29).

There is very little ethnographic information contained in Amich's discussions about the first Franciscan missions among the tribes of the Ucayali. We learn only that it was necessary to bring Indians together to make up the mission communities. Since there were two missions among the Setebo, the original village size must have been less than 1000 persons. The Calliseca were, if anything, somewhat more dispersed since no missions were founded among them until six years after the first attempt with the Setebo even though the Calliseca were closer to the Payanso missions.

It is not easy to identify the Calliseca of the seventeenth century with a modern tribe. Father Amich thinks that the Calliseca became known as Shipibo in the eighteenth century, but Herndon (Herndon and Gibbon 1854:I:209) and Tessman (1930:127) believe that they were Cashibo. The difficulty is that although three tribes occupied this general area in the eighteenth century, only two of them were known to the Franciscans of the seventeenth century. The eighteenth century tribes were the Setebo, who occupied the lower Manoa River; the Shipibo who occupied the lower Pisqui and Aguaytia Rivers; and the Cashibo who occupied the upper Aguaytia River and the middle Pachitea. For present purposes it makes little difference since we are concerned not so much with the accuracy of tribal identifications as we are with the demographic situation on the western tributaries of the Ucayali. Both the Calliseca and the Setebo of the seventeenth century seem to have lived in smaller communities than the tribes of the Ucayali and may even have lived in dispersed communities composed of one or two houses.

We have one more bit of evidence from this period. In 1641, Father Illescas went down the Pachitea River to the Ucayali on an exploratory mission. He passed safely through Conibo territory, but was killed by Shipibo at the mouth of the Aguaytia River. The facts of his death were learned from Conibo on the Ucayali in 1686 and from Shipibo at the Jesuit mission at Santiago de la Laguna in 1687 (Raimondi 1876:II:220). The Jesuits called tribes at this mission in 1682 the Chipeo and the Xitipo (Chantre y Herrera 1901:274). On the eighteenth century map of the Jesuit Javier Weigel (Chantre y Herrera 1901: following p. xvi) the Xitipo are shown in Franciscan territory on the lower Manoa River. On the contemporary map of the Franciscan Jose Amich the Setebo are shown in the same position (Izaguirre 1922-24:III: following p. 16). Hence there can be little doubt that the Xitipo was the Jesuit name for the Franciscan's Setebo. Therefore, the Chipeo must be the Shipibo.

The Jesuits were forced out of the Ucayali in 1659 and the Franciscans in 1668. The Indian societies that they left behind were very different from those which they had found. When the Jesuits first visited the Cocama in 1644 there were thousands of them. After 1644 there was a great pestilence which killed off seventy percent of their number in only seven years. With such an abrupt population decline, the essentials of their social organization must have vanished during this period. Disease spreads rapidly among people who do not have natural antibodies to ward it off. Since the Shipibo fought with the Cocama during the period of their decline, the Shipibo too must have contracted the disease, then from the Shipibo to the next group, to the next.

By the time the Franciscans reached the Calliseca and Setebo in 1657 these tribes may already have suffered their first great population decline. Since social and economic systems change radically during precipitous population decline, observations of native life made after 1644 must reflect a cultural adaptation to sharply reduced numbers of people rather than to conditions which existed prior to the Spanish Conquest. If large, complex societies did exist on the Ucayali during the prehistoric and early historic periods, they had vanished by the 1650's.

#### *The Ucayali in the late seventeenth century*

In the late 1600's both the Franciscans and the Jesuits tried again (Figure 3). Father Lucas de Lucero learned that at thirty days of navigation from Laguna, up the Ucayali, there were many nations to be Christianized. These included the Campa, Remo, Manamobobo, Conibo and Piro which, together, were said to number some 10,000 persons. The Piro traded with an adjacent nation at whose head was a ruler called *inga* who had some 200,000 vassals. Gold ornaments traded to the Piro proved that this was a very rich nation. To obtain so many souls for God, Father Lucero made friends with the Conibo who at that time numbered some 1500 persons. A mission village was established and though no missionary was sent, some Conibo boys were instructed in the Christian Doctrine with the hope that they would later serve as interpreters (Chantre y Herrera 1901:282).

In January, 1686, Father Enrique Rither left Laguna for the Ucayali with a group of Conibo who had come to ask for their own missionary. He took with him a lay brother, Francisco Herrera, and a number of Setebos who spoke the same language as the Conibo. They reached a village known as San Nicolás de Pachitea which had been founded by Father Lucero. In a period of twelve years, Father Rither founded nine new villages and made more than forty trips into the interior. He died in 1698 at the hands of the Conibo at about the same time that another missionary was killed by the Shipibo (Chantre y Herrera 1901:293-296).

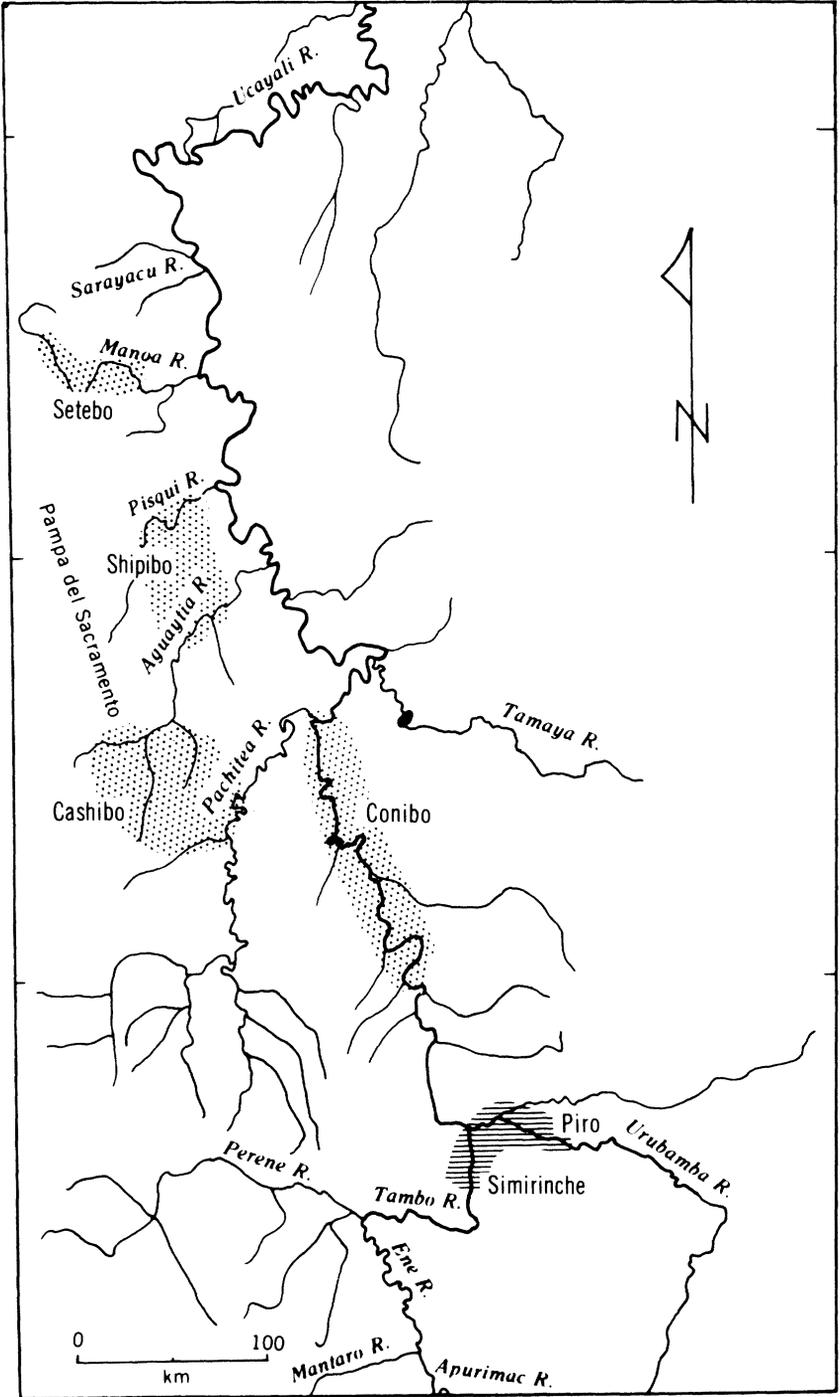


Fig. 3 Location of Ucayali tribes in the late seventeenth century.

Very little is known of the labors of Father Rither on the Ucayali. Although he is said to have written a memoir of his experiences, this document has not yet come to light.

In 1685 an advance party of Franciscans descended the Perené River to the Ucayali which they followed as far as the Jesuit village at San Nicolás which the Franciscans called San Miguel de los Conibos. In 1686, Father Manuel Biedma recorded that the Conibo lived in large houses, each of which contained some twenty to thirty persons. The 2000 Indians in San Miguel were governed by three chiefs: Cayampay, Sanaguami and Saman-pico (Amich 1854; Izaguirre 1922:I:252; Raimondi 1876:II:216). It is virtually certain that San Miguel had been brought together by the Jesuits, probably combining three previously existing groups each of which had its chief. This suggests that each of the original groups numbered about 600 to 700 individuals who lived in long houses which contained twenty to thirty persons each – perhaps twenty-five to thirty such houses in a community. These community characteristics are very similar to those described for the Cocama some forty years earlier.

Abandoning San Miguel to the Jesuits, the Franciscans founded San José de los Conibos about midway between the juncture of the Tambo and Urubamba Rivers and the mouth of the Pachitea into the Ucayali. Here they united two groups of Conibo led by chiefs named Izana and Quebruno (Raimondi 1876:II:222).

Father Biedma recorded in his diary (Raimondi 1876:II:220-227) that Indians of various other tribes lived on the tributaries between San Miguel and San José. He visited a Maspo village two leagues up a river known to him as the Taco River. There he found twenty-six houses occupied by some 500 persons. A group of Amahuaca lived one league up the Coniguati River. There Biedma found twelve houses occupied by 150 persons.

### *The Ucayali in the mid-eighteenth century*

In 1736 the Franciscans reentered the Ucayali from the Perené River which had been closed for nearly fifty years by the Machobos, Simirinches, and Piros. The Conibo has at least two villages on the Ucayali: Camarinahue and Cararosqui, and probably many more. Siabar, the chief of Cararosqui was the son of Cayampay who had assisted Father Biedma some fifty years before. However, other Conibo chiefs resented the special treatment of Siabar and demanded iron tools of their own. Unable to comply, the missionary retired (Izaguirre 1922:II:90-95).

A few years later, the Franciscans again moved overland toward the Ucayali, this time from the missions of Cajamarquilla, far to the north of any previous expeditions. They traveled across the northern parts of the Pampa de Sacramento to the Manoa River where they found the Setebo (Figure 4). Having established outposts with this tribe, they moved southward to

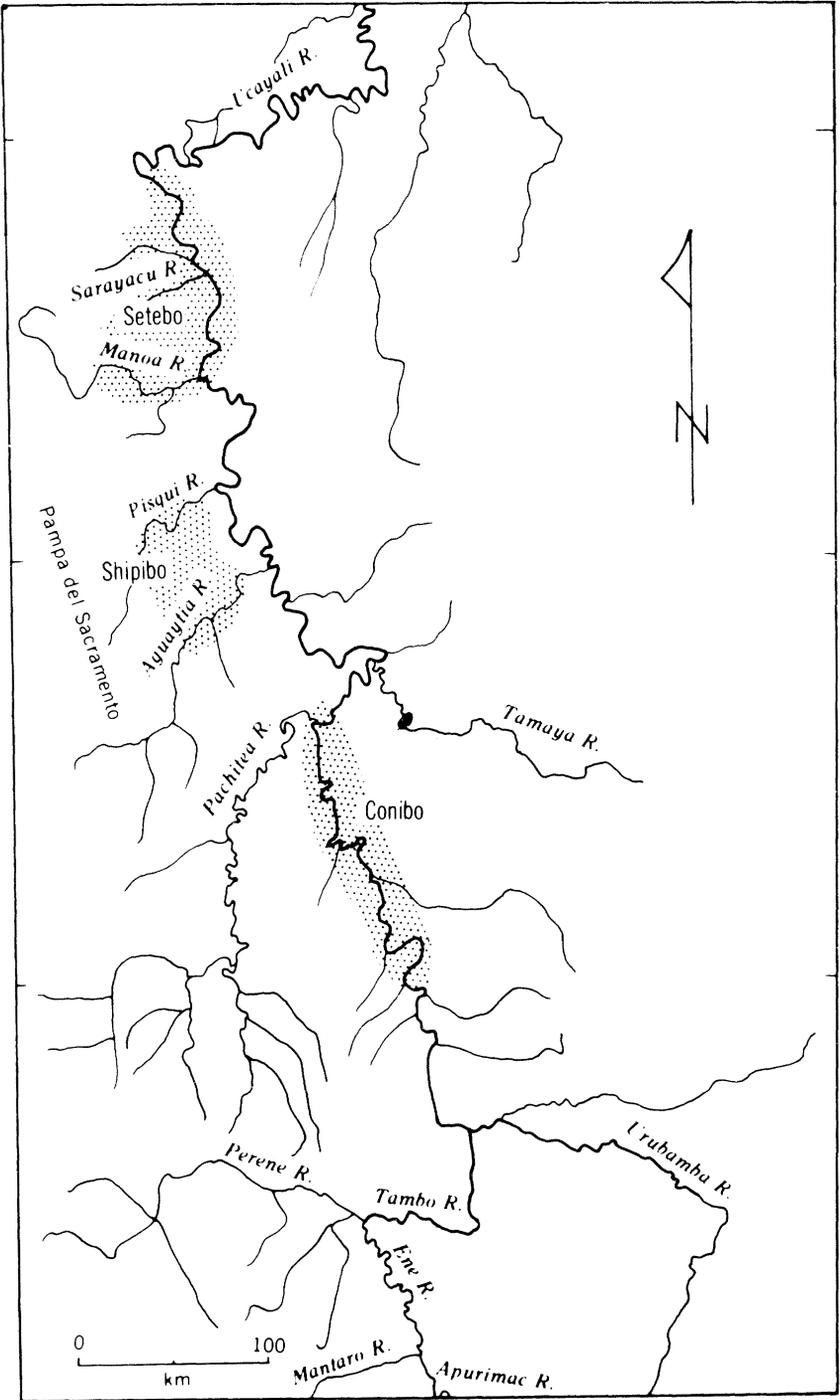


Fig. 4 Location of Ucayali tribes in the late eighteenth century.

missionize the Shipibo and finally reached the Conibo before they were again driven out. To provide support for the fledgling missions among the Setebo, an expedition set out down the Pachitea River. It aborted, but search parties sent to ascertain the fate of a missing missionary recorded information on the Cashibo of the middle Pachitea River. Another search party, from the Setebo, contacted the Shipibo who were missionized after this date (Amich 1854:26-29).

The Pampa de Sacramento was entered repeatedly during the 1750's by missionaries in search of the great numbers of Indians who were believed to inhabit the Ucayali. Only a few temporary campsites were found on the Pampa, one of which had been recently abandoned by the Indians, perhaps upon seeing the approach of the missionaries. The entire area, including the upper reaches of the Huallaga and Ucayali Rivers apparently had no permanent inhabitants although it was used as a hunting ground by groups which lived on the principal western tributaries of the Ucayali (Amich 1854:214-220).

The Cashibo of the upper Aguaytia River were contacted in 1757 by Father Alonso Abad who crossed the southern Pampa de Sacramento from the Tulumayo River. He saw banana and maize fields along the river before he was attacked and forced to retreat (Amich 1854:214). The Cashibo were also contacted in 1763 and 1765 on the middle Pachitea River where they lived in large houses (*galpones*) a quarter of a league from the river. Fields were kept near the house (Amich 1854:234-236; 242-243). This is precious little information, but it does suggest that Cashibo communities consisted of at least two large houses, each of which probably sheltered four or five families as did the Setebo and Conibo *galpones* of the next generation (Izaguirre 1922-1924:VIII:245). The settlement on the Pachitea evidently had some permanence since the Franciscans stopped there in both 1763 and 1765.

When the Setebo were contacted in 1760 they lived on the Manoa River some twenty leagues from the Ucayali. Only 220 of them remained after a disastrous defeat by the Shipibo in 1736. Like the Cashibo of the upper Aguaytia, the Setebo fields were placed near the river while the houses themselves were set back into the forest. Chiefs evidently maintained some authority since the missionaries were taken to the chief's house where they were given food and drink (Amich 1854:226-233). Although no information is given about the size or composition of the community, there appear to have been several houses, probably multifamily houses similar to the ones occupied in the next generation (Izaguirre 1922-24:VIII:245). Still the Setebo community prior to the formation of the mission probably contained less than 100 persons.

The Shipibo of this era lived on the Aguaytia and Pisqui Rivers, some twenty leagues from the Ucayali. They were certainly much more numerous and powerful than the Setebo whom they had beaten badly in a pitched battle. By 1764, 1000 Shipibo had been united in four mission villages while

many more remained dispersed in the forest. Of Shipibo villages and social organization there is no record. We know only that four missions had been founded because the Shipibo could not be persuaded to gather into larger settlements (Amich 1854:239; Izaguirre 1922-1924:II:326).

The Conibo were also contacted briefly in the 1760's. The Franciscans believed that they visited San Miguel de los Conibos (Amich 1854:246), quite likely Siabar's village, but the community may have been moved.

### *The Ucayali in the late eighteenth century*

The last great missionary effort toward the Ucayali began in 1790 (Figure 4). Starting from Laguna on the lower Huallaga River, Father Narciso Girbal y Barcelo journeyed down the Marañon to the Ucayali which he ascended for nineteen days to the first settlement. It was located on a lake to the west of the Ucayali and occupied by some fifty Setebo (Izaguirre 1922-1924:VIII:136-139). The second Setebo village, a day's travel to the south on the Sarayacu River, was inhabited by about 200 Indians (Izaguirre 1922-1924:VIII:140, 239). It was to become the center of Franciscan activity on the Ucayali for the next seventy years. Four more Setebo villages were located on the Manoa River. The one farthest upstream had been the site of the last Franciscan mission to the Setebo, destroyed in 1767. Following the revolt, the Setebo had scattered into a number of separate villages and moved toward the mainstream. During the interim, their numbers had increased to at least 600 persons and perhaps as many as a 1000, a growth of 300 to 500 percent in less than twenty-five years (Izaguirre 1922-1924:VIII:151-153).

The northernmost Conibo settlement was located on the Ucayali, about midway between the Sarayacu and Manoa Rivers, but the bulk of the tribe continued to live around the mouth of the Pachitea River (Izaguirre 1922-1924:VIII:130, 160). The Piro lived still farther upstream.

Perhaps 1000 Shipibo lived on the Pisqui and Aguaytia Rivers. The balance of power must have shifted since 1767 since they were now very much afraid of the Setebo and Conibo and steadfastly refused to move into the mission at Sarayacu although they repeatedly asked the missionaries for their own priest (Izaguirre 1922-1924:VIII:241).

Many other tribes lived in the hinterlands to the east and west of the Ucayali but except for the slaves held by the Setebo and Conibo, they had little direct contact with the Franciscans (Izaguirre 1922-1924:VIII:249).

The first ethnographic description of the Ucayali tribes was recorded by Father Juan Dueñas, based upon his observations in 1792 (Izaguirre 1922-1924:VIII:239-255). In addition to confirming and enlarging upon the many small bits of information gathered in earlier epochs, Father Dueñas added a good deal of new information. The description applies specifically to the Setebo and Conibo but he also felt that it would apply to the Shipibo,

although he did not know them well. The Indians lived in large houses (*galpones*) which sheltered four or five families, separated only by fireplaces and sleeping quarters. When a chief died, they intrigued to determine the next chief, but were happy to leave the choice up to the missionaries. Both the Setebo and Conibo kept slaves from a number of different tribes, including the Shipibo. These slaves regularly intermarried with their captors to increase the size of the tribe.

After the establishment of the mission at Sarayacu many Conibo moved downstream to the mouth of the Sarayacu River which became the site of a new mission called San Antonio de Padua de los Conibos (Izaguirre 1922-1924:VIII:240-241). Other nations also moved toward the new mission or requested missionaries of their own to gain access to the iron tools and other gifts which were freely distributed by the Franciscans. Thus began the mixing of tribes on the Ucayali that was observed by later travelers such as Marcoy, Herndon and Raimondi as well as by later missionaries. The rubber boom of the early twentieth century intensified the redistribution of tribes which were enslaved to work the plantations until the boom collapsed in 1920.

### Discussion

The preceding discussion demonstrates the necessity of revising the prevailing evaluation of the ethnohistoric tribes of the Ucayali River. These tribes were important in their own right, not merely simple tribes which lived on the margins of Andean civilization. Evidence from the earliest period suggests that the riverine tribes, at least, had complex social organizations which involved many thousands of people. But early observations are scarce. By the time the independent observers of the nineteenth century did arrive, a massive population decline had already taken place. Once powerful tribes were brought into mission villages, Portuguese slave raiders were a constant threat (Chantre y Herrera 1901:495; Edmundson 1922:118) and there were at least two major epidemics before 1700.

Within the seven years between 1644 and 1651 the population of the Cocama nation had declined by seventy percent and the tribe had ceased to be a significant force on the Ucayali. The effect of this decline on other tribes is not clear. We do know that the Shipibo were in contact with the Cocama during this period but there is no evidence by which we can gauge the effect that Cocama diseases had on the Shipibo. In view of Lathrap's model of population dynamics (1970:75) it is somewhat surprising that groups living on the tributaries did not invade the Ucayali to occupy the territory vacated by the Cocama. However, the tributary tribes also suffered a significant population decline as a result of Spanish diseases (Chantre y Herrera 1901).

This, coupled with the threat of Portuguese slave raids (which would fit Lathrap's model as a powerful group expanding along the alluvial lands of the Amazon Basin), was sufficient to keep the tributary tribes in their place. Further, the length of time involved may not have been enough to permit the establishment of a new equilibrium. By the 1790's, both the Setebo and the Conibo were moving into the lands which formerly had been occupied by the Cocama. Certainly the lower Ucayali was well known to the Conibo who regularly traversed it on their way to trade with Jesuit missions to obtain iron tools; yet, the bulk of the Conibo remained around the mouth of the Pachitea River which remains the heart of their territory even today.

Likewise, the territory occupied by the Shipibo and Setebo has changed little since the seventeenth century. The Shipibo occupied the Aguaytia and Pisqui Rivers the first time that these rivers are mentioned in history. In 1791 they also occupied the Tamaya River. The location of the Shipibo is hardly different today. The Setebo traditionally occupied the lower Manoa River. By 1791 they had expanded to the Sarayacu and even had a small village on an oxbow lake of the Ucayali to the north of Sarayacu. At this time they were allied with the Conibo who also were expanding to the north. The territorial expansion of these two tribes may have been one of the benefits of their alliance.

The Cashibo occupied the headwaters of the Aguaytia River and the middle Pachitea River in the seventeenth century. Only very recently have they moved toward the mainstream (Trujillo Ferrari 1960). Other tribes such as the Mayoruna, Remo, and Amahuaca are seldom mentioned in the early documents. These tribes to the east of the Ucayali remained largely out of the missionary influence until the early nineteenth century. As a result they have preserved their aboriginal patterns to a much greater degree than have the tribes on the mainstream and to the west.

It is much more difficult to talk about tribal populations and social complexity than it is to speak of tribal locations. The early population estimates are probably fairly reliable when they pertain to a particular village or to a tribe with whom the missionaries had extensive contact.

The fact that the estimates are fairly consistent from generation to generation also suggest that they may be reasonably accurate. In fact, there is only one population estimate that seems really out of line: the estimate of only 220 Setebo in 1760. Perhaps so much of the tribe had scattered into the forest that the missionaries had never even heard of them.

It is still more difficult to judge social complexity. In reality, the historic sources shed little light on the problem. There are only three kinds of statements about political leaders in the sources: 1) chiefs were much respected and obeyed; 2) chiefs or their houses, were decorated in an extra-ordinary manner; and 3) the tribe was led by a chief. We learn virtually nothing about how a chief was chosen, about his duties, or about his

prerogatives. The fact that one Conibo chief was the son of a former chief may mean nothing more than that a chief's son was just a little more likely to become the next chief than the son of a common man. Only for the Cocama in 1644 is there really some indication that the chief was a special kind of person. Although the tribe had some 10,000 to 12,000 members there appear to have been just two principal chiefs. One of them had died recently and the other had taken the sons of the dead chief to live with him. This might have been just familial duty, but it might also have been a political play to consolidate the tribe under a single leader.

For the most part, an estimate of social complexity must be derived from the number of occupants in the largest community. Such a procedure is possible only on the assumption that social complexity is a function of the number of individuals in the face-to-face social unit. Anthony Forge has suggested that the upper size limit of neolithic egalitarian communities is about 350 to 400 persons. Beyond this number, more complex forms of social organization become necessary (1972:375). Translated into the terms of Service's levels of social organization (1962), the neolithic egalitarian society would be a tribe; and the next most complex form of social organization would be a chiefdom. In these terms, Cocama and Conibo societies would have been chiefdoms at the time of Contact; and the Shipibo and Setebo societies might have been tribes. But, as Service points out, a tribe which is consistently in competition with a chiefdom may itself become a chiefdom because the higher level of social complexity is better adapted to handling the problems of war (Service 1962:152). Thus, while the Shipibo and Setebo communities might not have been large enough to give rise to pristine chiefdoms, their competition with chiefdoms might have caused them to develop into secondary chiefdoms.

The pattern that emerges from the reexamination of the ethnohistoric record is that the tribes of the Ucayali and its tributaries varied in both language and social organization. The most powerful tribes were the Cocama, Conibo and Piro who lived on the Ucayali River. At least the Cocama and Conibo must have been chiefdoms at the time of Spanish contact. The Shipibo and Setebo were less powerful groups that lived on the major tributaries: the Aguaytia, Pisqui and Manoa Rivers. They may also have been organized into chiefdoms not so much because it was necessary in terms of numbers of face-to-face social relationships as because it was a more effective organization for holding off the chiefdoms of the Ucayali. On the headwaters and minor tributaries were a large number of minor tribes such as the Cashibo, Amahuaca, Remo, Mayoruna and a host of others. Little is known about these groups in the early period beyond the fact that their members were frequently the slaves of the Ucayali chiefdoms. In all likelihood, the groups on the margins of the Ucayali should be classified as tribes.

## NOTES

1. It was Donald C. Lathrap who started my interest in the ethnohistory of the Ucayali by encouraging me to read Izaguirre. I am indebted to Nancy C. Morey for her detailed comments on an earlier version of this paper.
2. The translation of "*muntuosa*" presents something of a problem. Generally, when "*muntuosa*" is used in the early sources it means "forested" rather than "mountainous" as I have translated it here. But since Salinas' entire journey up to this point had been through the tropical forest it seems unlikely that he would have made a special point of mentioning it for the first time when he was 300 leagues up the Ucayali, except in connection with some other natural phenomenon, flooding, as he does in the same sentence. Further, his travels up the Ucayali would have brought him into the vicinity of the Pachitea River where altitudes of more than 500 m. are quite close to the river. Certainly it seems that Salinas was attempting to draw some sort of contrast. The other possibility is that the lands through which he had been traveling were not forested. While this might have been possible in the Province of the Cocama, the fifty leagues of uninhabited land between the Province of the Cocama and the Province of the Pariaches must have been heavily forested as it is today. Therefore, the translation of "*muntuosa*" as "mountainous" seems most likely to be the proper translation.

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