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"MUCHAS HIPAS, NO MINAS"

THE MUISCAS, A MERCHANT SOCIETY: SPANISH MISCONCEPTIONS AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE.

BY

J. MICHAEL FRANCIS

A THESIS

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THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THEY HAVE READ, AND RECOMMEND TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH FOR ACCEPTANCE, A THESIS ENTITLED **MUCHAS HIPAS, NO MINAS. THE MUISCAS, A MERCHAN SOCIETY: SPANISH MISCONCEPTIONS AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE** SUBMITTED BY J. MICHAEL FRANCIS IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY.

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ABSTRACT

Despite a growing scholarly interest in Amerindian peoples and their significant role in the historical development of the New World, the Muisca Indians of central New Granada (modern-day Colombia) have largely been ignored by historians. Based on evidence from the archaeological record and material from sixteenth-century visitas, Spanish chronicles, early colonial petitions and correspondence between Spanish settlers and the Crown, this study offers an important and much-needed re-evaluation of the Muisca. A closer examination of the pre-conquest political and economic organization, settlement patterns and population density, reveals that Muisca society was far more complex and diverse than scholars traditionally have assumed. Before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Muisca had created a sophisticated commercial network characterized by regional specialization, long-distance trade and the distribution of goods from vastly distinct ecological zones. The successful adaptation to the diverse climatic conditions of central Colombia facilitated the growth of a pre-contact population that was perhaps two or three times higher than hitherto has been argued.

This greater emphasis on the pre-conquest period fundamentally alters the way we view the Muisca how we understand the evolution of colonial society in New Granada. In contrast to the general assumptions that the Muisca left no "historic impress" on the region and quickly assimilated into a dominant Spanish culture, what emerges from this investigation is that the Muisca not only survived, but they played an important role in determining the essence of Colombia's colonial past. Much of the wealth acquired by early Spanish settlers, for example, was based on the exploitation of the pre-existing

economic system. Furthermore, the failure of the spiritual conquest and the inability of royal officials to relocate Muisca settlements suggests that the conquest of Muisca territory was by no means synonymous with the Hispanization of its indigenous inhabitants.

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Early colonial New Granada was arguably, after Peru and Mexico, the richest and most densely populated area of the New World. In the sixteenth century, New Granada attracted more European settlers than any region of Central America and, with the exception of Peru, more than any part of mainland South America. Yet we know very little about the first century of colonial rule, and we understand even less about the pre-columbian indigenous peoples who inhabited the region. Most of our knowledge of the conquest and settlement of the Americas comes to us from the experiences of the Aztec and Inca Empires. George Lovell observed that our understanding of colonial Latin America has been based largely on these studies of Mexico and Peru. He lamented that this has had a negative impact on our perceptions of peripheral areas.[1] Perhaps what occurred in the periphery better reflected the more common experiences of natives and Europeans in the sixteenth century.

In the last fifteen years, we have seen a number of excellent studies on sixteenth century Peru, Mexico and Central America. This increased body of literature has greatly enhanced our understanding of indigenous societies, how they adapted, resisted and responded to changing conditions under Spanish rule. More importantly, these recent investigations have emphasized the

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[1] George W. Lovell, Conquista y cambio cultural: la sierra de los cuchumatanes de guatemala, 1500-1821, (Antigua: Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica, 1990) xv.

signifi .ce of native peoples and institutions in the development and evolution of post-conquest society. Yet despite the growing scholarly interest in the nature of interaction between peoples of the Old World and the New, there has been not one attempt to analyze Muisca society in the post-conquest period. The assumption that one finds in the secondary literature is that the Muiscas were quickly absorbed by a dominant Spanish culture.

The rationale for choosing to focus on New Granada, and more specifically the Muisca Indians (Maps 1 and 2 show the territory occupied by the Muisca),[2] extends beyond the argument that it has been neglected by historians. An understanding of the Muiscas allows scholars to appreciate and better comprehend the indigenous peoples and institutions that helped shape colonial society in New Granada. Without such an awareness, any discussion of Colombia's colonial past becomes extremely conjectural, one-sided and Eurocentric. A closer examination of pre-conquest Muisca society and early colonial New Granada also gives us a valuable opportunity to focus on a region of Spanish America that was not simply part of the periphery. It was an important possession within the Spanish Empire, and it would thus be a gross error to assume that its colonial history simply mirrored, though on a smaller scale, that of Mexico or Peru.

The evolution of colonial society in New Granada was unique. Muisca territory was densely inhabited, with a native population significantly larger than what scholars traditionally have assumed. And while the land was extremely fertile, it lacked the one item that sixteenth-century Spaniards

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[2] In Map 1 Jorge Melo refers to Muisca territory as "Chibcha." There has been some confusion in the secondary literature over the terms "Muisca" and "Chibcha." While Chibcha has generally been accepted by most scholars to describe the pre-columbian indigenous peoples of the Cordillera Oriental, it does not appear in any of the early records. The Spanish chroniclers, for example, always referred to the natives of the region as Muisca or some variation thereof. For the purpose of clarity in this thesis, Muisca will refer to the people themselves, while the term Chibcha will be used only in reference to the language they spoke.

coveted most, gold. There were no gold or silver mines anywhere within Muisca territory. Instead, when the conquerors of New Granada reached the highland basins of the Cordillera Oriental, they found large quantities of cotton, salt, a remarkable variety of fruits and vegetables, and of course, labour. However, the absence of gold mines did not deter Spaniards from colonizing the region. Most found central Colombia an attractive place to settle and many became incredibly wealthy. Europeans benefited through the exploitation, not the creation, of a complex, yet poorly understood indigenous economic system that had developed long before the Spanish arrived in the New World. Through community production and regional specialization, Muisca settlements were able to acquire and circulate goods from vastly distinct ecological zones over long distances. The diverse soil conditions, altitudes and micro-environments that characterize Muisca territory facilitated the growth of a complex trade network. Muisca commercial organization thus gave Spaniards access to a tremendous variety of agricultural products, as well as salt, emeralds and other precious metals, including gold.

In part, the sophistication of the Muisca's economic system led to the decision to settle in New Granada. Spaniards were also attracted by the large indigenous population from whom they received little military resistance. They found the climate of the highlands much more agreeable than the heat and humidity of the coast and the lower elevations. Furthermore, the climatic and soil conditions of the highland basins were ideal for European crops such as wheat, which were rapidly and successfully introduced. It was less than a year after conquest when wheat was first harvested in New Granada.[3] And within two decades, most Muisca communities had begun to cultivate either

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[3] Kathleen Romoli, Colombia: Gateway to South America, (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc., 1942) 56.

wheat, barley or sugar. Spaniards also brought with them a variety of livestock including cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. Much of the fertile land once dedicated to indigenous crops was thus set aside for grazing.

As elsewhere in the New World, European contact with the native peoples resulted in a number of dramatic changes for the Indians of central Colombia. Shortly after the conquest, the powerful political confederations of Bogotá, Tunja, Cocuy, Sogamoso and Duitama appear to have lost most of their pre-colonial authority. However, a closer examination of pre-columbian political organization reveals that the relationships that governed Muisca society were far more complex than scholars have assumed. It is important to recognize that the break-down of five 'confederations' did not necessarily correspond with the collapse of political organization at the local level.

The most significant change for the Muisca in the sixteenth century was demographic. The introduction of Old World diseases irrevocably altered Muisca society. A 1492 population perhaps more than three million was reduced to just over five hundred thousand by the end of the sixteenth century. Not until the middle of the twentieth century would the population figures for the region reach the estimated pre-columbian numbers. The declining Indian population made it easier for European settlers to gain access to the most fertile land for crops and livestock. It also encouraged royal officials in New Granada to attempt to relocate Muisca settlements into larger congregaciones, making it easier to gather tribute and at the same time, they believed, would facilitate the process of religious conversion. Yet despite the dramatic demographic decline and the efforts of Spanish officials, missionaries and settlers to Hispanize the indigenous population, the native peoples of New Granada remained uniquely Muisca.

In 1560, a Spanish official by the name of Tomás López began an

investigation of several Indian communities in the northern part of the Kingdom of New Granada in the Province of Tunja.[4] Lopez' visita was not only one of the earliest visitas through Muisca territory, but it is also one of the earliest written sources for the entire region, despite more than two decades of Spanish presence. Appointed by the Spanish Crown, López was assigned to assess the spiritual well-being of the Indian population, as well as the treatment that native communities received from their encomenderos and any other Spaniards with whom they had had contact. The focus of this visita was, unfortunately, rather narrow. Perhaps that is why few scholars have examined it closely. It provided almost no precise demographic data nor did it include detailed accounts of Muisca economic or political organization and unfortunately, there were no descriptions of the daily lives of the native inhabitants. Furthermore, it was restricted to only a small number of native settlements in the Province of Tunja.

However, the information collected in the visita, when combined with other primary sources, such as sixteenth and seventeenth-century chronicles, petitions to Spain and political correspondence, as well as secondary works in anthropology, archaeology, history and geography, allows scholars to better comprehend the world of the Muisca, and it offers a unique insight into early colonial society in New Granada. Despite the limitations of its narrow scope, the information recorded in the visita challenges some of the generalizations that dominate the historiography of sixteenth-century New Granada and Latin America as a whole. It forces scholars to re-evaluate the role of the Church in the spiritual conquest of the New World. It also provides indirect evidence of

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4 Born in Tendilla, Spain in 1509 López later studied canon law at the universities of Paris and Bologna. He served as oidor to the audiencia of Guatemala from 1549 until about 1552. It was then that López was named oidor of Santa Fé, although he did not arrive in New Granada until 1557. See Juan Manuel Pacheco, "La evangelización del Nuevo Reino, siglo XVI," Historia extensa de Colombia, Vol. XIII, Tomo I, (Bogotá: Ediciones Lerner, 1971)

the demographic collapse of the native population in the early colonial period. Native testimonies from López' visita remind scholars that the conquest and colonization of Muisca territory did not mean the Hispanization of the Muisca people. And thus, the real value of the visita is not so much in the revealing detail of its contents, but rather the visita serves as a testimony to the survival and influence of native institutions in the post-conquest period. It confirms the importance of indigenous peoples in the evolution and development of colonial society, both politically and economically.

The primary objective of López' investigation was to determine the extent to which Spanish encomenderos provided religious instruction for their tributary Indians. López wanted to ensure that each community had established its own church, received full-time supervision from a priest, and that the Indians indeed were beginning to convert to Christianity. His discoveries shed light on questions of early Spanish attempts to convert natives as well as native responses to those efforts. The findings from the visita fundamentally contradict the assumptions that dominate the secondary literature. There was no sustained effort on the part of Europeans to proselytize the Indians of New Granada and despite the traditional arguments put forth by Colombian scholars, the Muiscas did not convert to Christianity soon after conquest. The religious encounter in the sixteenth century turned out to be a far more complex and protracted affair than has been hitherto assumed.

Chapter II. Approaching an Understanding

Almost one year after their departure from Santa Marta, General Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada and his men arrived in territory inhabited by the Muisca Indians. With the assistance of their interpreters, the Spanish conquistadors of New Granada asked a group of Amerindians they had encountered if a large native population lived in the area. The Indians responded "muexca bien agen." "Indeed there are many of us." When questioned as to the meaning of the word "muexca," the Indians explained that in their language muexca meant man or person. It soon became apparent to the Spaniards that the region was densely populated, so much so that they compared the image of the Indians in the countryside to that of a swarm of bees on honey.[5] According to the Spanish chronicler Pedro Simón, from that moment on the Indians of that territory were referred to as the moscas, or Muiscas.[6]

Social scientists typically have characterized the Muisca Indians as a

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5 The Spanish word for fly is "mosca." According to Simón, to the Spanish conquistadores, the native word muexca sounded almost identical to the Spanish mosca. Because the Spaniards had difficulty pronouncing many native words, they often substituted them with words familiar to them. Pedro Simón, Noticias historiales de las conquistas de tierra firme en las Indias Occidentales, Vol. III, (Bogotá: Biblioteca Banco Popular, 1981) 159.

6 Simón, Vol. III, 159. Pedro Simón was a Franciscan Friar born in 1574 in the Spanish town of San Lorenzo de la Parilla. At the age of twenty-three he left Spain for the New World and was thirty years old when he first arrived in Santa Fé in 1604. In 1607, Simón was commissioned to write a history of New Granada which he completed sometime between 1623 and 1625.

highly evolved and 'civilized' group that, at the time of conquest, had not yet reached the levels of development of the ancient Maya, Aztec or Inca Empires.[7] The Muisca were a sedentary agricultural people who inhabited the rich highland basins of the Cordillera Oriental in central Colombia. As with most aspects of Muisca society, the origin of Muisca settlement in the region has not yet been determined with much precision. Carbon 14 dating of archaeological sites has traced the origins of Muisca civilization to as early as 545 B.C.[8] However, more recent studies reject that hypothesis, and instead suggest that the Muisca did not arrive in central Colombia until sometime between the seventh and tenth century A.D.[9] Most scholars have accepted that the different communities that made up Muisca society shared a common language, and similar social, political, and economic organization. At the time of conquest, the Muiscas were said to have been undergoing a process of territorial expansion and political consolidation, but they had not yet achieved the status of 'empire.' This process was of course ended by the arrival of the Spanish conquistadores in 1537. It is also generally argued that Muisca technological development reached the same level throughout their territory and that the natives shared identical myths and religious beliefs.[10] We know that the

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7 Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, Colombia, (New York: Praeger, 1965) 17. Also see Hermes Továr Pinzón, La formación social chibcha, (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1980) 9 and Martin Glassner, "The Chibchas: A History and Re-evaluation," The Americas, Vol. XXVI, No. 3, (January, 1970) 302-304.

8 Lucía Rojas de Perdomo, Manuel de arqueología colombiana, (Bogotá: Carlos Valencia Editores, 1985) 115.

9 See Alvaro Botiva Conteras, "La Altiplanicie Cundiboyacense," Colombia prehispánica: regiones arqueológicas, eds. Leonor Herrera, Ana María Groot, Santiago Mora, and María Clemencia Ramírez de Jara, (Bogotá: Colcultura-Instituto Colombiano de Antropología, 1989) 80. Also see Carl Henrik Langabaek, Mercados, poblamiento e integración étnica entre los muiscas: siglo XVI, (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1987) 25 and Roberto Lleras Pérez, Arqueología del Alto Valle de Tenza, (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1989) 51. Lleras believed that the Muisca migrated to the Cordillera Oriental from either the northern coast of Colombia or Venezuela.

10 María Clemencia Ramírez de Jara and María Lucía Sotomayor, "Subregionalización del altiplano cundiboyacense: reflexiones metodológicas," Revista colombiana de antropología,

Muisca lived in thatch huts on dispersed homesteads and that they enjoyed access to a vast number of resources through well organized and extensive trade networks.

These are the generalizations that characterize the discussions and descriptions of the Muisca that are found in the secondary literature. However, to accept such general assumptions about Muisca society not only distorts many of the indigenous realities, but it also limits our understanding of the interaction between natives and Europeans. Without an awareness of the Muisca world, its geography, population, settlement patterns, and political and economic organization, any effort to comprehend New Granada in the early colonial period becomes highly conjectural and one-sided. In order to view conquest and colonization as a process of change through which Indians and Spaniards interacted, we must have an appreciation of both societies. At present, the Muisca are conspicuously absent from most of the historical literature. The difficulty, unfortunately, is the lack of source material for the Muisca. As with many other regions of North, Central and South America, historical evidence for the native peoples is either not present, or has not been discovered.

In the early 1960s, Juan Friede wrote that archaeology had not yet succeeded in explaining much about the social, political and economic realities of the pre-conquest indigenous peoples of New Granada.[11] At the time, the study of Colombian prehistory was still in its initial stages. As a discipline, archaeology was a relatively new field of study. It was not until the 1940s and 1950s that Colombians began formal training in archaeology.[12] More recent studies of the last two decades have resulted in a much richer understanding of

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Vol. XXVI, (Bogotá: 1986-1988) 176.

11 Juan Friede, "Los quimbayas," Revista colombiana de antropología, Vol. XI, (1962) 303.

12 Ibid., 303.

different pre-columbian societies.[13] Unfortunately, the archaeological record has not yet explained enough about the Muisca Indians to allow scholars to reconstruct fully Muisca history. There are several reasons for this. The most obvious is that a large number of Muisca sites were buried under modern buildings and roads. Urban centers like Bogotá and Tunja now cover extensive territory once inhabited by the Muiscas. Furthermore, much of the archaeological evidence that did exist in Muisca territory has not survived. Muisca houses were thatch constructions and thus left no permanent record. Many tombs and sanctuaries were looted during the colonial period. Today, guaqueros (tomb robbers) and farmers continue to uncover numerous artefacts from the Muisca period.[14] However, once the stratigraphic context of the site has been disturbed, either through farming or from grave robbers, scientifically controlled archaeological work becomes impossible.

Muisca archaeological sites in the highlands of Boyacá and Cundinamarca have so far been difficult to find.[15] There were no stone monuments like those discovered in the Peruvian and Bolivian highlands, which guide scholars to ancient Muisca sites, nor does there exist much physical evidence such as terraced agriculture. Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff noted that archaeologists know of only a few pre-columbian settlements.[16] Yet even the Muisca settlements known to archaeologists have yielded little

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13 See for example, Marianne Cardale de Schrimpff, Las salinas de Zipaquirá: su explotación indígena, (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1981), Germán Alberto Peña León, Exploraciones arqueológicas en la cuenca media del Río Bogotá, (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1991), Neila Castillo, Arqueología de Tunja, (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1984), Jorge Morales G. and Gilberto Cadavid, Investigaciones etnohistóricas y arqueológicas en el área guane, (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1984), Carl Henrik Langabaek, Mercados..., and Roberto Lleras Pérez, Arqueología...

14 Reichel-Dolmatoff, "Colombia indígena," Manual de historia de Colombia, Tomo I, (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1984) 102.

15 Cardale de Schrimpff, 241.

16 Reichel-Dolmatoff, "Colombia indígena," 102.

information. The archaeologist Marianne Cardale de Schrimpff, for example, explained that archaeological excavations in the area around Zipaquirá resulted in only fragmentary evidence from the Muisca period. Cardale found that extensive agriculture and soil erosion around Zipaquirá had disturbed the stratigraphic context of the upper layers which contained evidence from the Muisca era.[17] This is an important point to recognize because it indicates that the preservation of archaeological evidence in Muisca territory was disrupted by the extensive agricultural activities of its inhabitants. Furthermore, the acidic soils of the area did not provide adequate conditions for the preservation of bones, textiles or wood, making it impossible to determine exact population figures or the nature of material culture.

Archaeologists have blamed the poor preservation conditions in much of Muisca territory for the lack of material evidence that they have hitherto uncovered. Muisca textiles, which early Spanish chroniclers praised for their beauty, have been found only in extremely dry areas such as the caves around La Belleza and Vélez, as well as sites near Los Santos, Chiscas and Jericó.[18] Bone artifacts, for example, such as needles and awls, have been found only at sites in Sogamoso and Bogotá.[19]

The paucity of the archaeological record in New Granada has thus limited our understanding of Muisca society. However, there are alternative sources that, when examined together, create powerful combinations that offer a unique insight into the indigenous world. Spanish chronicles, visitation records, correspondence from Spanish settlers, as well as an examination of the geographic conditions to which indigenous society adapted, all provide

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17 Cardale, 11.

18 Sylvia Broadbent, Investigaciones arqueológicas en el territorio chibcha, Antropología 1, (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 1965) 35-36.

19 Ibid., 36.

valuable clues to anthropologists and historians of the early colonial period. Scholars should also be encouraged to consider material from Church archives in Spain and Rome which may well contain valuable information about the native inhabitants of Colombia.

Most of the information presently available about the Muisca Indians comes to us through the descriptions left by early Spanish settlers and chroniclers. Unlike the Incas with their quipus,[20] or the pictographs and hieroglyphs of the Aztecs, the Muiscas lacked any recognizable devices for recording their history. Seventeenth-century Spanish chronicler Pedro Simón wrote that the Muisca had no figures or characters with which to record the successes of their past. Instead, historical knowledge was always entrusted to memory. However, Simón remarked that history was passed from generation to generation with incredible accuracy, "never losing anything as a result of carelessness or poor memory."[21] Unfortunately, most of what survived in the memories of the Indians was never systematically recorded on paper. Thus, the information in the chronicles has its shortcomings, and historians and anthropologists have been extremely critical of the value of the chronicles as a source for understanding Muisca society.

Spanish chroniclers were not, for example, very interested in Muisca economic activity or the nature of indigenous political organization. Nor were they specific about Muisca settlement patterns, population or history. In fact, the cronistas were interested primarily in what they considered "curious" aspects of Muisca society. Native hygienic practices and polygamous relationships, for example, were both aspects of indigenous society that Spanish

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20 A quipu is a series of knotted coloured strings that were used by royal statisticians to record data such as births, deaths, food production and tribute. Recently Sabine MacCormack has argued that the quipu was also used as a form of writing.

21 Simón, Vol. III, 363.

observers found interesting. In his Noticias historiales, Pedro Simón expressed both surprise and disdain for the native's obsession for bathing. He compared the Indians to ducks. According to Simón, the natives were constantly splashing about in the water, despite the cold temperatures of the highlands and the páramo.[22] Spanish chroniclers also took great interest in native customs such as polygamy. Chroniclers noted that Muisca men were permitted to marry as many women as they were capable of maintaining. There were suggestions that some caciques possessed as many as twenty, fifty and even one hundred wives.[23] Pedro Simón was left unimpressed by rumours that the Indian chief Bogotá had three hundred wives. Of course three hundred wives was nothing to admire, according to Simón, when one considered what the Third Book of Kings, chapter 11, said of King Solomon. Any admiration for the cacique Bogotá paled in comparison to the seven hundred queens and three hundred concubines of King Solomon.[24]

Cannibalism was often a quality ascribed to those indigenous groups about whom Spaniards knew little, or from whom they received strong military resistance. While there is no convincing evidence whatsoever that cannibalism was practiced anywhere in New Granada, Simón was certain that the Panche Indians, who inhabited lands west of Muisca territory, found their greatest pleasure in the consumption of human flesh. Simón claimed that the Panches were so fierce and blood-thirsty that if they were not successful in capturing enemy Indians for sacrifice, they would eat weak or sick members of their own tribes. Furthermore, Simón added that if the Panches did not have a

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22 Ibid., Vol. III, 271.

23 José Pérez de Barradas, Los muiscas antes de la conquista, 2 Vols. (Madrid: Instituto Bernardino de Sahagún, 1950) 195. Also see Rojas de Perdomo, 129.

24 Simón, Vol. III, 203.

fire prepared to roast their victims, they would eat their meals raw.[25]

The chronicles also contained descriptions of Muisca weaponry, fighting tactics, and, to a certain degree, religious beliefs,[26] which the cronistas argued were inspired by the devil.[27] Kathleen Romoli de Avery complained that the information gathered by the cronistas of New Granada told much more about the customs and lives of Spaniards than it did about the native inhabitants.[28] The sociologist Orlando Fals Borda believed that the chronicles were unreliable and faulty. He explained that the lack of useful material in the chronicles made any discussion of pre-conquest man-land arrangements "little short of conjectural."[29] J. H. Elliot observed that the Spanish chroniclers were "prisoners of their ecological lexicons."[30] Their mindsets were pre-conditioned to see what they expected to see, and to ignore or reject the elements of indigenous society that they did not comprehend. A classic example can be found in Pedro Simón's attempt to describe the political structure of the natives in the sabana de Bogotá.

Simón recognized that not all native chiefs in the region were of equal nobility or descent. He claimed that those caciques whose towns bordered

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25 Ibid., Vol. III, 209.

26 In 1577, Philip II issued a decree which abolished any further descriptions of native society, especially religious beliefs. All of the material on those subjects was supposed to have been confiscated and sent to Madrid. See David Brading, The First America, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 120. It is unclear to what extent this decree affected the Pedro Simón's account, but it is said that much of Pedro Agnado's chronicle was censored by the Crown.

27 Friede, "Los quimbayas," 303. This view is consistent with what Kenneth Mills found in Peru. In his study of mid-colonial Peru, Mills explained that Europeans were unable to recognize the complexity of non-Christian belief systems. Indigenous religious systems were thus classified as idolatrous, "something wild, dark and uncivilised..." Kenneth Mills, "The Religious Encounter in Mid-Colonial Peru," D. Phil. Dissertation, (Oxford: 1991) 209.

28 Kathleen Romoli de Avery, "El suroeste del cauca y sus indios al tiempo de la conquista española," Revista colombiana de antropología, Vol. XVI, (1967) 243.

29 Orlando Fals Borda, Campesinos de los Andes, (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional, 1961) 83.

30 J. H. Elliot. The Old World and the New, 1492-1650. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 16-17.

hostile territory were held in high esteem. They were referred to as usaques. What functions these usaques fulfilled in Muisca society was left unexplained in Simón's descriptions.[31] Like many of the European chroniclers of the New World, Simón was unable to comprehend the nature of native institutions. Instead of granting the Muisca the complexity of their own political systems, Simón simply substituted European terms that he believed most closely resembled indigenous political roles. Thus, according to Simón, the Muisca usaques were the same as Spanish dukes. The cacique from Suba performed the role of viceroy and the cacique of Bogotá was king.[32] To Simón, indigenous political organization was nothing but a rude and simplistic version of a European model.

The nature of Muisca society, its political organization, economy, and settlement patterns, were all difficult for Spaniards to comprehend. When the Spaniards arrived in 1537, Muisca territory was not politically consolidated and thus there was no dominant elite from whom Spanish chroniclers could gather information for the entire territory. Native elites were important to chroniclers in other regions of the New World.[33] Language was also a barrier for the cronistas of New Granada. It does not appear that either Simón or Aguado spoke Chibcha, and their chronicles suggest that they did not rely extensively on native testimonies for information concerning Muisca society.[34]

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31 According to the Colombian ethno-historian Carl Henrik Langabaek, the term usaque is found exclusively in references to territory controlled by the cacique of Bogotá. Only nine caciques in the region were given the title of usaque. They were the caciques from Guasca, Fómeque, Tibacuy, Ubaté, Chía, Teusacá, Fosca, Pacho, Simajaca, Cáqueza, Subachoque and Pasca. In his archival research, Langabaek found no evidence of usaques for the northern half of Muisca territory, the region presently known as the Department of Boyacá.

32 Simón, Vol. III, 391.

33 Early chroniclers in Peru, for example, relied heavily on the Inca elite for information regarding Indian society.

34 The first grammar of the Quechua language, for example, was published in 1560 by Fray Domingo de Santo Tomás. See Elliot, 34. There were also numerous dictionaries and grammars compiled of Nahuatl. The first study of the Muisca language was a work written by Friar

Furthermore, when the earliest chronicles of New Granada were written, the native population had already declined dramatically. As we will see, the highest rate of native mortality occurred within the first one hundred years after contact and thus influenced the kinds of descriptions that exist from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The anthropologist Sylvia Broadbent noted that there exists very little written evidence from the first four decades after conquest.[35] The chronicler Pedro de Aguado, for example, did not write his Recopilación historial until ca. 1575. Material for Pedro Simón's Noticias historiales, was not compiled until the first quarter of the seventeenth century, more than one century after the first Europeans arrived in Colombia, and by which time the native population had dropped by as much as 90%. Lucas Fernández de Piedrahita's chronicle, Noticia historial de las conquistas del Nuevo Reino de Granada, and Juan Freyle's El Carnero were both from the seventeenth century. Therefore, scholars must examine these sources critically, with an appreciation of the magnitude of demographic change in the early colonial period. What is clear, however, is that a remarkable chronicle for the Muisca Indians would have required a remarkable chronicler. Such a chronicler for New Granada did not exist.

It is rather curious that there are a number of excellent chronicles for Peru, central Mexico and the Yucatán, all of which provide detailed descriptions of native societies; yet very little information about the Muiscas is found in the chronicles for New Granada.[36] Was it because the cronistas in New Granada were less capable? Perhaps because there were fewer Spaniards in New Granada compared to Mexico and Peru, there was less potential for a

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Bernardo de Lugo entitled Gramática, catecismo y confesionario de la lengua chibcha. It was not written until 1617.

35 Broadbent, Los chibchas..., 13.

36 There are the writings of Bernabé Cobo and Pedro Cieza de León for Peru, Diego de Landa for the Maya of the Yucatán, and of course Bernardino de Sahagún for Mexico.

brilliant cronista to emerge. However, how then does one explain someone like Diego de Landa who wrote a remarkable account of the Maya of the Yucatán, a region with far fewer Spanish settlers than New Granada? Was it simply a matter of chance? Or can it be said that scholars have placed too much emphasis on the abilities of the cronistas themselves. It therefore might be argued that Diego de Landa's chronicle of the Maya is best understood as a reflection of the brilliance of the local culture, and not necessarily the brilliance of the chronicler. Had he gone to New Granada instead of the Yucatán, would Diego de Landa, for example, have written such an insightful account of the Muisca Indians? While Colombian scholars traditionally have argued that much of the material concerning the Muiscas was censored, the very nature of Muisca society offers an alternative, and perhaps more valid explanation, for the kind of information found in the chronicles.

Historian Juan Friede suggested that Spanish censorship was to blame for the sketchy descriptions of the Muisca Indians. Friede claimed that all of the information from the fifth book of Pedro de Aguado's Recopilación historial was suppressed by Spanish officials. The book contained twenty-eight chapters which included discussions of Muisca economic organization, religious rites, food, clothing, the Muisca justice system and marriage rituals.[37] Friede believed that Book Five was censored for political reasons. He claimed that the material from the fifth book would have led to legal complications for the Spanish settlers in New Granada because Muisca hereditary laws and customs would have challenged Spanish institutions.[38] Friede's argument is a

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37 Friede, "Descubrimiento y conquista del nuevo reino de granada," Historia extensa de Colombia, Vol. II, (Bogotá: Ediciones Lerner, 1965) 327. Friede based this claim on an index for Aguado's book that he discovered in Seville. However, there is no reference that indicates its precise location.

38 Ibid., 329. Such legal difficulties, according to Friede, included Mestizos who attempted to reclaim cacicazgos based on Muisca hereditary laws. Another legal problem that occurred with some frequency was when a male Indian from a particular encomienda died, his wife and

surprising one, especially when one considers that Friede collected and transcribed vast quantities of primary documents from the early colonial period, some of which included evidence that the Crown encouraged officials to find out as much as possible about native government, succession laws and jurisdiction.[39] His hypothesis is further challenged by evidence from 1593 and 1601 visitas through Boyacá. Material from these visitas suggests that the Spanish wanted to gather information about native hereditary laws. In both visitas, Indians were asked how succession to the cacicazgo was determined in pre-colonial times.[40] In Friede's defense, it might be argued that the visita, which contained information for the private use of royal officials in Spain, sometimes included material that would have been deemed unacceptable for a chronicle, to which the public had access. However, even if Muisca hereditary laws concerned Spanish officials, why was it necessary to confiscate Aguado's descriptions of Muisca commerce, religion, burial practices, wedding ceremonies, food, and clothing? How did they threaten Spanish authority? It is worth noting that Muisca hereditary laws were discussed in Pedro Simón's chronicle.[41] Friede's claim that most of the references to Muisca social and economic organization were censored is a rather dubious one. Detailed descriptions of other native societies in Spanish America make it difficult to accept that in New Granada the chroniclers were subject to harsher censorship.

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the rest of her family would return to her original village. This of course was harmful to the encomendero who would lose large numbers of tributary Indians. Curiously, Muisca hereditary laws are discussed by Fray Pedro Simón. What is clear from Spanish observations of Muisca hereditary laws is that the Spaniards had tremendous difficulty understanding the nature of a matrilineal society. Anthropologist Sylvia Broadbent found that discussions of Muisca hereditary laws are filled with contradictions because chroniclers could not comprehend the system. Sylvia Broadbent, Los chibchas: organización socio-política, (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1964) 18-19.

39 Juan Friede, Fuentes documentales para la historia del Nuevo Reino de Granada, Vol. II, (Bogotá: Biblioteca Banco Popular, 1975) 110.

40 Hermes Tovar Pinzón, Documentos sobre tributación y dominación en la sociedad chibcha, (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1970) 8-9.

41 Simón, Vol. III, 389.

While it generally has been accepted that the Spanish Crown prevented the publication of some material from Aguado's Recopilación historial, there are other possible explanations for the paucity of information concerning the natives of New Granada.

The subject matter in the chronicles and the discussions of native societies perhaps better reflects the complexities of the encounter between indigenous peoples and Europeans, and their attempts to understand each other, than it does the insight or intellectual capacity of individual cronistas. This of course does not imply that cronistas like Sahagún or Cieza de León were not impressive chroniclers. Indeed, of all the Spaniards who wrote chronicles in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Sahagún and Cieza de León were among only a handful of cronistas whose abilities and insight allowed them to recognize elements of indigenous societies that most Europeans could not, or did not wish to. Perhaps the cronistas in New Granada found nothing particularly fascinating about Muisca culture. Anthony Pagden argued that Sahagún, for example, could not possibly have written such a detailed and lengthy account of native culture had he not possessed a "real" interest in Aztec society.[42] One might then question whether or not it is a coincidence that the chroniclers that demonstrated the greatest understanding and appreciation for native societies wrote about the indigenous groups with the most advanced material cultures. Spaniards were impressed by the large temples and stone monuments, the great cities and the extensive road and irrigation systems that in their view equalled and sometimes even surpassed the achievements of Europeans. Quipus, pictographs and hieroglyphs were all indications that the Indians were progressing towards 'civilization.' They were

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42 Anthony Pagden, The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 4.

also physical manifestations of native culture. Material culture represented something that Spaniards could identify. They could thus pose questions about the origin, meaning, purpose and significance of what they saw. Of course this did not necessarily translate into a direct understanding of native society, but material culture was at least something that Europeans could recognize and about which they could write.

The absence of rich material remains in Muisca territory has led some anthropologists to advance the thesis that the Muisca should not be considered as one of the most 'civilized' native cultures in America.[43] According to Luís Gómez, the archaeologists Emil Haury and Julio César Cubillos were the first to adopt this theory, which was based on the limited materials that they uncovered during excavations in the Parque Arqueológico de Facatativá. The paucity of stone monuments and sculptures, the scarce evidence of Muisca architecture, and the absence of large urban centers led Haury and Cubillos to conclude that the cultural achievements of the Muiscas have been overemphasized and that a re-evaluation of Muisca cultural achievements was necessary.[44] In the section on the Muisca Indians in the Handbook of South American Indians, A.L. Kroeber attributed the success of Muisca civilization to their large population and propitious environment. Kroeber argued that the Muiscas were not as "advanced" as other native groups because they had no calendar, no knowledge of astronomy, no great stone monuments and no elaborate arts or crafts.[45]

Geraldo Reichel-Dolmatoff reached a similar conclusion. According to Reichel-Dolmatoff, the assumption that the Muisca were a more complex

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43 Luís Duque Gómez, "Tribus indígenas y sitios arqueológicos," Historia extensa de Colombia, Vol. I, Tomo II, (Bogotá: Ediciones Lerner, 1967) 566.

44 Ibid., 566.

45 Glassner, 302. From A.L. Kroeber, "The Chibcha," Handbook of South American Indians, Vol. II, ed. Julian H. Steward, (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1944) 887.

society than any other native group in New Granada was a direct result of the Spanish decision to settle in Muisca territory. He argued that the Spaniards were impressed by the large native population, and by the climate and fertile soils, which provided excellent conditions for the introduction of European crops and livestock. Furthermore, the Muisca offered little military resistance to conquest and quickly submitted to Spanish rule.[46] These were the factors that led to what Reichel-Dolmatoff referred to as the "myth of Chibcha civilization," a myth that has continued to persist and one that "still lacks evidence in archaeological fact."[47]

If one were to accept the argument that material culture is in itself a gauge with which one can measure the sophistication or complexity of a society, the Muisca never achieved the same standards as the Aztecs, Incas or the Ancient Maya. Muisca material culture is not even considered the most advanced of the indigenous groups that inhabited New Granada. The anthropologist Carl Henrik Langabaek wrote that Muisca material culture was no more complex than that of several indigenous groups of the Magdalena Valley or the eastern plains.[48] In terms of architecture, pottery, metallurgy and burial practices, lowland communities from the Cauca Valley, the Central Cordillera and the Caribbean coast had reached a similar, or perhaps even higher level of material culture.[49] However, to base one's understanding of Muisca society strictly on material evidence is an oversimplification and a

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46 Reichel-Dolmatoff, Colombia, 167.

47 Ibid., 167.

48 Carl Henrik Langabaek, "Las ofrendas en los andes septentrionales de influencia chibcha," Museo del Oro, No. 16, (mayo-julio, 1986) 41. Textiles recovered from the Muisca period suggest that they were quite able weavers. They also worked with gold but the technique used by the Muisca involved a high proportion of copper. Stone work was not uncommon, but it was limited to only a few regions (near Tunja) and there were no magnificent stone monuments. Muisca pottery was well made, but it lacked the elaborate decorations that impressed Europeans. See Rojas de Perdomo, 143-158.

49 Reichel-Dolmatoff, Colombia, 159.

distortion of a society whose complexities were either perishables and thus have not been preserved, or else they were reflected through non-material evidence. The magnificent wooden temple at Sogamoso, for example, mysteriously burned to the ground shortly after conquest.[50] Spaniards were also impressed by Muisca fences which "surrounded their beautiful villages like enormous wooden castles."[51]

The archaeologist Sylvia Broadbent agreed with Reichel-Dolmatoff that interest in the Muiscas and the region they inhabited was largely influenced by the Spanish decision to settle there.[52] It was also influenced by the initial discovery of large quantities of gold and emeralds.[53] However, Broadbent explained that the interest in the Muisca Indians did not result in the creation of the "myth" of Muisca civilization. It is not that the achievements of the Muiscas have been exaggerated, she argued; but rather because other native cultures in the Americas have been largely ignored.[54] Broadbent added that it was indeed possible for a complex society to exist without having to dedicate its efforts to the construction of permanent stone monuments to impress future archaeologists.[55] Elements of Muisca culture that most impressed early Spanish settlers and chroniclers will never be found on the archaeological record. While textiles and wooden constructions have not survived over time, the complexity of Muisca socio-political and economic organization, as well as

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50 Nicolás del Castillo Mathieu, Descubrimiento y conquista de Colombia, (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1988) 103.

51 Ibid., 102.

52 Broadbent, Investigaciones..., 32-33.

53 Initially, the conquerors of New Granada found tremendous quantities of gold and emeralds, especially in Tunja, Sogamoso and the sabana of Bogotá. It was not until many years after their arrival in the altiplano that the Spaniards realized that there were no gold mines in Muisca territory and that the only way to acquire it was through trade with other natives. See Langabaek, Mercados..., 88 and David Bushnell, The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 9-10.

54 Broadbent, Investigaciones..., 32.

55 Ibid., 31-32.

their religious beliefs, can not be fully appreciated by focusing solely on archaeological evidence.[56] An understanding of Muisca society requires a multi-disciplinary approach.

Without the advantage of extensive archaeological records to complement written sources, and because the information from the chronicles is limited, reconstructing the pre-colonial world of the Muisca is extremely difficult. While one can easily criticize the cronistas of New Granada for not providing information that is of interest to modern scholars, their value as a source perhaps has been underestimated. The information provided in the chronicles becomes significantly more revealing when it is examined with other primary evidence from the early colonial period, as well as materials that hitherto have traditionally been reserved for anthropologists, demographers, and historical geographers. The introduction of such material helps to provide the depth that is required for any reconstruction of the Muisca past. Greater breadth and an imaginative treatment of available sources is essential in order to better comprehend Muisca political, social and economic organization. Only then is it possible to assess the nature of change after conquest.

The discovery and conquest of Muisca territory began in 1536 when Don Pedro Fernández de Lugo, the governor of Santa Marta, authorized an expedition into the interior of Colombia. It was believed that the large quantities of gold and emeralds that had been found among the coastal Indian population came from somewhere in the interior.[57] More than a year earlier, in January of 1535, the inhabitants of Santa Marta had received word of Francisco Pizarro's successes in Peru and the rumours of the marvelous

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56 Ibid., 32.

57 Melo, Historia de Colombia, Tomo I, (Bogotá: Editorial La Carreta, 1978) 145.

treasures of the Inca Empire.[58] The news sparked an exodus from Santa Marta, as disgruntled settlers set out for Peru. Sixteenth-century chronicler Pedro de Aguado wrote that Governor Lugo planned and funded the expedition in order to keep Spaniards from completely abandoning Santa Marta in favour of the newly conquered Inca territories.[59] A twenty-seven year old lawyer named Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada was appointed to lead the exploration. The conquest of the Inca Empire and the stories of its fabulous riches had served to create new hopes and expectations for the many Spaniards who joined Quesada's expedition. They believed that not only were they going to discover an unknown route to Peru or the South Sea, but more importantly, they were convinced that they were going to conquer a wealthier kingdom along the way.[60] It was with those aspirations that they encountered the Muiscas.

In April of 1537, Jiménez de Quesada and his men left the coastal city of Santa Marta. Descriptions of Santa Marta in the sixteenth century suggest that the expedition was motivated by more than just a quest for riches. Pedro Simón described Santa Marta as one of the most wretched cities in all the Indies. Native uprisings occurred with great frequency. Pirates sailed off its shores, robbing supply ships and stealing treasures, and residents suffered from severe food shortages that were often accompanied by illnesses and plagues.[61] Aguado claimed that the main sustenance of the Spanish settlers in Santa Marta was corn, but that it was in short supply because the rebellious Indians were no longer providing them with it. Without the assistance of the natives, Spaniards had difficulty procuring their own food supplies.[62] It is not

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58 Castillo Mathieu, 88-89.

59 Aguado, 49.

60 Jorge Orlando Melo, Historia de colombia, Tomo I, (Bogotá: Editorial La Carreta, 1978) 145.

61 Simón, Vol. III, 79-80.

62 Aguado, 76.

surprising then, that more than one thousand men applied to join Quesada on his expedition into the interior.[63]

Almost five hundred miles separates the sabana of Bogotá from the city of Santa Marta (See Map 3). It took the Spaniards nearly one year to complete the arduous journey, much of which was through harsh lowland jungles. Of the more than one thousand men that joined the expedition, six hundred travelled by land with General Quesada. The remainder sailed up the Magdalena River on Spanish brigs. Quesada and his men followed the Magdalena River southward, and then ascended 2,700 meters up the western flank of the Cordillera Oriental. According to Pedro Simón, this first expedition cost the lives of almost eight hundred Spaniards and an infinite number of native men and women servants:

> All of those [men] who are missing, which amounts to more than eight hundred, [not including] the many native men and women servants who were taken from Santa Marta, were consumed by the sea, the rivers, the land, illnesses, tigers, bears, caymans, snakes, heavy downpours, harsh terrains, worms, distension, hunger, sunstroke, intolerable heat, bats, mosquitos, and another thousand [hardships] that one could not possibly count. And these were the risks involved in the discovery of this New Kingdom, not the wars against the Indians, though there were no lack of those...[64]

Only one hundred sixty-six men remained when the Spaniards first made contact with the Muisca Indians.[65]

Unfortunately, there exists no known written account of the conquest of New Granada from any member of the original journey. Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada's memoirs of the expedition have never been found. And unlike

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63 Simón, Vol. III, 82-83.

64 Ibid., Vol. III, 149.

65 Ibid., Vol. III, 149.

other regions of the New World where indigenous peoples recorded their own versions of conquest, there were no accounts written from a native perspective in New Granada. In fact, for the first forty years after the arrival of the Spaniards in New Granada, there exists very little written documentation.[66] We therefore rely mainly on the information provided by the cronistas. The Spanish chronicler Pedro de Aguado wrote that initially, Jiménez de Quesada and his captains were unimpressed by what they had discovered. Aguado claimed that while the Spaniards recognized that the land was productive and fertile and that there was a large indigenous population, they were disappointed with their discovery because they failed to uncover valuable gold deposits. He explained that the General, his captains, and the soldiers that accompanied them, were all of the opinion that they should abandon the area and continue their quest for fantastic riches elsewhere. Quesada sent Captain Juan de Sanmartín and twenty soldiers on an expedition to the west and he ordered Captain Juan de Céspedes and another group to the south.[67]

Céspedes and his men found nothing but a cold climate and harsh terrain. They encountered few natives and therefore decided to join Captain Sanmartín. It was to the west that both groups met the Panche Indians. Céspedes commented that Panche territory extended great distances and supported a large population. He believed that they possessed much more gold than the Muiscas and that there were a large number of gold mines in the region. Pedro Simón wrote that in Panche territory, gold was found in great abundance. Simón claimed that the Indians "collected [gold] by the handfuls from between the roots of the trees and grasses...[and] the earth which was shaken off...consisted more of gold than of soil."[68] However, instead of

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66 Broadbent, Los chibchas..., 13.

67 Aguado, 139.

68 Sam Enslow, The Art of Prehispanic Colombia, (Jeeferson: McFarland & Company, Inc.,

attempting to conquer the Panches, Spanish forces retreated back to Muisca territory and founded their capital in the sabana of Bogotá. Captain Céspedes believed that the Panches would have been too difficult to subjugate without the assistance of a much larger military force.

Pedro Simón also wrote that members of the original expedition felt disappointed and cheated when they first reached New Granada:

> [Spanish soldiers] were reluctant to settle in [Muisca territory], as it appeared to them that the only value of these provinces was the healthy and fertile land, and the abundancy of food to support human life; it [the land] was well suited for every type of farm animal brought over from Spain..., however, [Muisca land] lacked both gold and silver, the nerves and soul that sustains all of this as well as every republic. And thus the land was considered like a body without soul, like veins without blood, and the gold that was discovered...which was no small amount..., had been brought from other regions through trade with these [Muiscas] for the salt and cloths found here.[69]

However, their frustration was not so much a result of what they found, but rather, what they had hoped to discover. It must be remembered that the soldiers who joined Quesada's expedition risked their lives in a quest for gold, not land. Rumours in Santa Marta of the fabulous gold and silver treasures that had been found in Peru had created false and often outrageous expectations. Simón wrote that the men from Santa Marta somehow believed that they were going to discover a kingdom of Midas, where everything they touched turned to gold.[70]

Curiously though, the conquerors of Muisca territory did manage to accumulate large quantities of gold. Almost every native settlement yielded a

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1990) 114.

69 Simón, Vol. III, 203-204.

70 Ibid., Vol. III, 204.

rich booty, especially Tunja, Sogamoso and Bogotá.[71] In Tunja, for example, when Spanish soldiers caught their first glimpse of the fine gold chagualas (nose rings), diademas (crowns), and breast plates, they began to run around shouting, "Peru, Peru, Peru..., here we have discovered another Cajamarca!"[72] They also delighted in the "delicious tinkling" of the gold sheets that hung from the eaves of the principal buildings in Tunja.[73] In Sogamoso, the conquistadors collected a booty of more than thirty thousand pesos in oro fino, twelve thousand pesos of oro bajo and more than one hundred emeralds.[74] Many of these early settlers in New Granada, including Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, believed that the vast amount of gold that they found was in itself a clear indication that there were rich gold mines in Muisca territory. According to Quesada, the Muiscas could not have possibly accumulated so much gold simply through trade.[75] In the 1560s, Juan de los Barrios wrote that while gold mines had not yet been discovered in the region, large sums were still acquired through the salt trade.[76] When Licentiate Angulo de Castejón conducted his 1562 visita to regulate native tribute requirements, it was determined that almost every community in Muisca territory was capable of providing at least a small quantity of gold. Some native settlements, like Turmequé, were expected to pay as much as 1,200 pesos of medio oro.[77] Simón himself admitted to having devoted much thought in trying to determine where the Muisca could have obtained the "infinite sums" of gold that were collected by the first group of conquistadors. Simón claimed that since the conquest, Spanish settlers had

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71 Langabaek, Mercados..., 88.

72 Simón, Vol. III, 255-256.

73 Bushnell, 9. From Juan de Castellanos, Elegías de varones ilustres de Indias, 4 Vols, (Bogotá, 1955) 4: 231.

74 Castillo Mathieu, 103 and Friede, "La conquista del territorio...," 145.

75 Simón, Vol.III, 257.

76 Germán Romero, 52.

77 Eugenio Martínez, 555-563.

turned the entire territory "upside down," but found no mines that could have possibly produced such an abundance of gold.[78] What was even more frustrating for Simón was that the native practice of offering gold objects to their deities persisted, yet it was unclear how so much gold was acquired. Despite their persistent efforts, Spanish officials were unable to convince the natives to volunteer information about the origin of the large quantities of gold that had been found. They tried friendship with the Indians, kind requests, offerings, intimidation and threats, all of which were unsuccessful.[79]

Germán Colmenares argued that the colonial economy of New Granada was, for three centuries, an economy based on gold and silver. Practically all cities were therefore founded in regions that either contained gold or silver mines, or in territory where gold could be acquired through tribute.[80] This is an interesting observation especially when one considers that no mines were found in either the sabana de Bogotá or in the province of Tunja. Nevertheless, both Captain Sanmartín and Captain Céspedes agreed that the best location for the establishment of a permanent Spanish settlement was the area that the Indians called Teusacá, or what later became Santa Fé. As we will see, the nature of the indigenous economy ensured access to a remarkable variety of goods, including gold. The region had an excellent supply of wood, food and water to support Spanish settlers. There was a large native population that offered little military resistance to the Spaniards and the sabana was good for Spanish agriculture. The sabana de Bogotá also served as a natural fortress. The mountains to the east provided an excellent natural

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78 Simón, Vol. III, 257. Quesada's observation was not unique. Early Spanish settlers had much difficulty understanding the nature of the indigenous economy. This is examined below in further detail.

79 Ibid., Vol. III, 257.

80 Colmenares, "La economía y la sociedad colonial, 1550-1800," Manual de historia de colombia, Tomo I, (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1984) 243.

barrier. Not only were they difficult to cross, but the Spaniards in the sabana would be warned well in advance of any attack. It was considered the best place from which a small number of Spaniards could successfully defend themselves against an Indian assault.[81] This is an important point to recognize because when Santa Fé was founded in 1538, there were less than two hundred Spaniards in the sabana.

Shortly after the foundation of the Spanish capital, General Quesada decided that it was necessary for him to travel back to Spain in order to inform the king about what he had discovered. He also wanted to ensure that he and his followers received the full benefits of the discovery.[82] He took sixty men with him to help secure a safe passage from Santa Fé to the coast. Aguado reported that this left only a handful of men in the sabana.[83] The decision to settle in Santa Fé was thus strongly influenced by its location. The importance of Santa Fé as a natural fortress remained significant because throughout the early colonial period the Spanish population in central Colombia was never very numerous.

Peter Boyd-Bowman has conducted several studies on Spanish emigration to the New World. Based on passenger lists from the Catálogo de pasajeros a Indias, Boyd-Bowman discovered that after Peru and Mexico, New

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81 Aguado, 181.

82 Shortly after the foundation of Santa Fé de Bogotá, two other expeditionary forces arrived in the region. One group had come from Venezuela under the command of Nicolás Federmann while the second force moved in from Quito and was led by Sebastián de Belalcázar, a lieutenant to Francisco Pizarro. The nature of the dispute and its outcome is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is worth mentioning that all three leaders wanted control of the region and all submitted individual claims to the Spanish Crown. Unlike what occurred in Peru, the dispute did not cause a civil war in New Granada. This is an interesting question and does merit further inquiry. Part of the explanation for the peaceful process might be because the nature of Muisca society did not fulfill the expectations or the desires of Quesada, Belalcázar, or Federmann. New Granada was not the golden kingdom that they had hoped to discover. All three leaders continued in their quest for El Dorado. After several more expeditions of discovery, Jiménez de Quesada died, still convinced of El Dorado's existence.

83 Aguado, 181.

Granada attracted the highest numbers of Spanish settlers. However, the number of Spanish emigrants to New Granada was still minimal. Between 1520 and 1539, only 696 Spaniards registered to emigrate to New Granada.[84] From 1540 to 1559, another 892 arrived.[85] Boyd-Bowman concluded that less than three thousand Spaniards arrived in New Granada from between 1520 and 1579. However, these figures can be misleading. First of all, in his calculations, Boyd-Bowman considered only the passengers who were officially registered from Seville. He did not include estimates for those people who moved to New Granada from other parts of America. Nor did he address the question of the movement of colonists out of New Granada. A large number of Spaniards abandoned New Granada after the discovery and conquest of the Inca Empire.[86] By the same token, many disgruntled conquistadors from Peru made their way north to New Granada with hopes of being granted an encomienda , or perhaps taking part in an expedition to find El Dorado.[87] Thus, until more regional studies are done and we develop an understanding of the movements of the European population, it is impossible to determine the exact number of Spaniards in New Granada in the sixteenth century, but it is important to recognize that the European population in Muisca territory was probably never more than a few thousand.

The original group of Spanish settlers in New Granada was attracted by the productivity of the soil, the wide variety of resources and the large labour supply. Although the conquistadors managed to collect an impressive booty of

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84 Peter Boyd-Bowman, Patterns of Spanish Emigration to the New World, 1493-1580, Council on International Studies, (Buffalo: 1973) 41.

85 Ibid., 53.

86 Melo, 145.

87 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. III, 218. In a 1558 letter to the Crown, Licentiate Grajeda complained of the burgeoning number of Spaniards who were arriving in New Granada from Peru. Grajeda appealed to the king to send an order to the Peruvian viceroy prohibiting further emigration from Peru to New Granada.

emeralds and gold artifacts in almost every native community, they were disappointed to discover that there were no gold or silver mines. However, the decision to colonize the region was based on what was already there. It was not determined by what they had hoped to discover. The fertility and diversity of Muisca land with its rich resources, Muisca settlement patterns, population density, and economic and political organization, were all important elements of indigenous society which encouraged Spaniards to settle in the region. They also helped determine the nature and evolution of colonial society in New Granada.

Chapter III: The Muisca and the Land

Before the arrival of the Spaniards in the mid-1530s, the Muisca Indians occupied the fertile highland basins of Bogotá and Tunja (See Map 4). Muisca territory included roughly the entire departments of modern-day Cundinamarca and Boyacá. It ranged from Pasca in the south to Soatá in the north, a distance of about three hundred kilometers. In total, the Muiscas were said to inhabit an area as extensive as 2,600 square kilometers.[88] The region itself is characterized by a wide variety of distinct micro-environments, with diverse climates, terrain and vegetation. It is also known for its valuable natural resources and the rich soils that dominate the highland basins of the Cordillera Oriental. In the early seventeenth century, the Spaniard Antonio de Herrera observed that the quality of the land in this region was remarkable. According to Herrera, the multitude of inhabitants and well constructed buildings, the abundance of corn and deer, and the diversity of fruits and vegetables all indicated that the land was productive.[89] Today, as in the colonial period, this area is among the most densely populated in Colombia.[90]

Highland basins, or altiplanos, are common in the Andes of South

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88 Robert C. Eidt, "Aboriginal Chibcha Settlement in Colombia," Annals of the American Association of Geographers, Vol. XLIX, (December, 1959) 378.

89 Antonio de Herrera, Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las islas y tierrafirme del mar oceano, Vol. 12, (Madrid: Oficina Real de Nicolás Rodriguez Franco (1730) 1934) 19.

90 Preston E. James, Latin America, Third Edition, (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1959) 110.

America. The geographer Robert Eidt explained that the altiplanos of the Cordillera Oriental are the beds of former Pleistocene lakes.[91] According to Eidt, such basins were formed in regions where mountains divided into "sub-parallel ranges," which then converged at both ends.[92] Within some of these enclosed valleys, large lakes developed. Over time, topsoils from the surrounding mountains washed into the lakes. Water levels slowly decreased and when the lakes dried, they often left a fertile and level basin floor.[93] These highland basins were found throughout Muisca territory. Manuel Ancízar, for example, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, explained that the smooth, fertile land around Ubaté was made up of layers of sediment that over time had been deposited in the ancient lake that surrounded the region. Ancízar lamented that present cultivation in the area had been reduced to wheat, corn, barley and potatoes, when in pre-columbian times, the region supported a variety of crops that today would be impossible to imagine.[94]

The importance of the Andean lakes and highland basins of central Colombia is reflected in much of Muisca mythology. Archaeologists have discovered offerings of gold, pottery and wooden figures around the sacred lakes of Siecha, Guatavita[95], Tota Fúquena and Iguaque.[96] Muisca myths offered their own explanations for the origins of the altiplanos. One such myth that has been passed down told of the creation of the altiplano in the

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91 Eidt, "Aboriginal Chibcha...," 377-378. Map 4 shows the highland basins found in Muisca territory.

92 Ibid., 375.

93 Ibid., 375.

94 Manuel Ancízar, Peregrinación de alpha, Vol. 1, (Bogotá: Biblioteca Banco Popular, 1984) 33.

95 It was believed that several thousand years ago, a gigantic meteorite fell at Guatavita. A golden god was said to have chosen to settle deep under Lake Guatavita. This powerful spirit gave power to the caciques of Guatavita to lead their people. See Reichel-Dolmatoff, Colombia, 168.

96 Reichel-Dolmatoff, "Colombia indígena," 100.

southern part of Muisca territory. Bochica, one of the Muisca's principal deities, was said to have drained the great lake that covered the ten leagues (or about fifty kilometers) between Bogotá and Zipaquirá.[97] What remained was a rich, level and productive basin on which the Muisca grew their crops.[98]

About three thousand square kilometers, or twelve percent of Muisca territory, consisted of altiplano land.[99] Robert Eidt pointed out that the regions of highest population density at conquest coincided precisely with the location of the highland basins.[100] The resources that were available to the Muisca, as well as the variations in terrain, vegetation, soil types, irrigation and climate, played an important role in the economic development of the region in both pre-columbian and post-conquest society. Rich mineral deposits found in the altiplanos included the salt mines of Nemocón, Zipaquirá, and Tausa. Emeralds were mined in Muzo, Somondoco, Coscuez and Ubalá, and coal was found throughout Muisca territory.[101] This variety of valuable resources available to the Muisca allowed for the development of several specialized industries.

The production of food, however, was still the most important economic activity to the Muisca Indians. As Eidt mentioned, the highest concentration of population was centered in the prime agricultural zones of the highland basins. Spanish chroniclers consistently spoke of the extensive farmlands on which

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97 See Beltran Peña, Miguel Triana, La civilización chibcha, Quinta Edición, (Bogotá: Biblioteca Banco Popular, 1984) and Pérez de Barrados for more detailed accounts of Muisca thought and religious beliefs.

98 Ancizar, 26.

99 Eidt., 378.

100 Ibid., 377.

101 Rojas de Perdomo, 111. It is still unclear to what extent coal and other resources were exploited. It also should be noted that in addition to salt, emeralds and coal, Muisca land contained lime, sulpher, zinc, petroleum, gypsum, clay, sandstone, marble and copper. However, while there have been suggstions that coal was exploited by the Indians of Sogamosos, Broadbent, Investigaciones..., 36, I have not found any references that prove any of these other resources were exploited by the Muisca.

the natives grew their crops. The Muisca had domesticated a tremendous variety of crops, including corn, beans, an assortment of different fruits, yuca, potatoes, and coca.[102] Even without the assistance of beasts of burden or sophisticated farming tools, agricultural productivity was still impressive.[103] There were sufficient resources to support a large indigenous population within Muisca territory and the surplus meant that trade could be extended beyond their boundaries. Climatic variations, fertile soils, adequate irrigation, and Muisca settlement patterns, are all important factors to consider in any discussion of the indigenous economic system.

The lacustrine soils of the sabana de Bogotá, for example, were extremely fertile and there were three major rivers and a series of smaller tributaries in the region.[104] Juan and Judith Villamarín argued that because of these conditions, and because of adequate rainfall and very few seasonal changes, a variety of micro-ecological zones developed.[105] They included mountain slope forests, low lying areas that became marshes during the rainy season, páramo at altitudes above three thousand meters, and arable lands. Within relatively short distances, there were distinct variations in sunlight exposure, hours of sunlight, and rainfall.[106] The Muisca adopted a system of exploiting these micro-ecological zones in order to secure ample food supplies for trade and to

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102 Simón, Vol. III, 401.

103 Potatoes matured in about four months on the Colombian altiplanos. Corn matured from between eight and ten months. See Eidt, 383.

104 Juan A. Villamarín and Judith E. Villamarín, "Chibcha Settlement Under Spanish Rule: 1537-1810," Social Fabric and Spatial Structure in Colonial Latin America, ed. David J. Robinson, (Syracuse: University Microfilms International, 1979) 27-29.

105 In modern times, precipitation in the sabana ranges from 925mm to 2000mm per year. In Muisca territory, the year can be divided into four seasons of alternating wet and dry periods. December, January and February are the driest months of the year and the highest temperatures. March, April and May are wet months with an average temperature of 12° C. Dry season returns in June, July and August, but the evening temperatures can fall below zero, with frost threatening the crops. Most of the precipitation falls between September and November.

106 James, 109.

protect themselves against the hazards of the sabana environment. Drought, flooding and frosts often were a threat to Muisca crops.[107]

Spanish perceptions of Muisca territory, absurd as they sometimes were, offered further testimony to the region's climatic diversity. Spaniards claimed that such drastic climatic variations throughout Muisca territory were to blame for the deaths of many Indians. According to Simón, constant movement between warm and cold climates presented a terrible risk to everyone's health. Simón believed that even those Spaniards who enjoyed the luxury of travelling on horseback became ill, some, Simón claimed, died on journeys through the harsh micro-environments of Muisca territory.[108] While Simón's observation demonstrated a clear lack of understanding of what actually caused disease, it did illustrate that within relatively short distances, the temperature and the topography varied dramatically.

A similar kind of diversity was enjoyed by the provinces of Tunja and Vélez. Owing to the topography of the region, the Indians were able to cultivate almost any crop in at least one area of the province.[109] Darío Fajardo wrote of Vélez that climatic differences within the province, assisted by irrigation from the rivers Suárez, Opón, Carare, Horta, Oiba, Chicamocha, Río del Oro and all of their tributaries, allowed for the cultivation of corn, yuca, potato, cotton, and later, sugar cane.[110] Muisca communities, and later, Spanish settlers, took advantage of these different zones to create a sophisticated and diverse economic system.

The Muisca Indians lived on small, dispersed settlements. There is little

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107 Villamarín and Villamarín, "Chibcha Settlement Under...," 30.

108 Simón, Vol. IV, 344.

109 Orlando Fals Borda, El hombre y la tierra en Boyacá, Segunda Edición, (Bogotá: Punta de Lanza, 1973) 39

110 Darío Fajardo, El regimen de la encomienda en la provincia de Vélez, (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 1969) 12.

archaeological or written evidence to suggest that there existed large urban centers, or even incipient cities.[111] Instead, the Muisca established what Juan and Judith Villamarín referred to as "dispersed homesteads."[112] Like the Maya of the Yucatán, the Muisca found that living in dispersed settlements was the most convenient for farming.[113] Furthermore, all of the resources from the micro-ecological zones could thus be exploited by the different homesteads throughout the region. According to Villamarín, neighbouring settlements were typically several leagues (a league being about five kilometers) apart.[114] Each community had its own territory for hunting, fishing, planting and wood collection.[115] Extensive trading networks were established and goods from different regions within Muisca territory and outside were exchanged at local markets. A magnificent pre-colonial market was said to have existed in the town of Turmequé, about twenty kilometers south-west of Tunja (See Map 5). Merchants sold gold, emeralds, pottery, salt and cotton cloth.[116] This practice continued throughout the early colonial period. Every four days, for example, a market was held in the main square in Tunja. Cotton cloth, dye tints, tobacco, palm wine and chicha, barbasco for fish poison, cabuya for ropes and cord,

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111 Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada wrote that native settlements of ten, twenty, thirty, and even one hundred houses, were scattered throughout Muisca territory. Archaeological evidence from Guatavita and Pueblo Viejo de Cogua suggests that there were indeed several sites where material remains indicate the existence of large towns. Unfortunately, until more archaeological work is done in other regions of Muisca territory, it is impossible to determine the exact nature of Muisca settlement patterns.

112 Villamarín and Villamarín, "Chibcha Settlement Under...," 25. A royal cedula issued in 1549 asked for the Audiencia of New Granada to consider the logistics of resettling the natives into nucleated towns. The cedula was issued as a result of reports to the Crown that Indian communities were too dispersed. Ibid., 39.

113 Lovell, Conquest and Survival in Colonial Guatemala, (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1985) 87.

114 Villamarín and Villamarín, "Chibcha Settlement Under...," 37. Juan and Judith Villamarín based their conclusions mainly on material from the end of the sixteenth century. Given the size of the pre-conquest native population, it is likely that Muisca settlements were much closer together than the Villamarins' concluded.

115 Ibid., 27-29.

116 Ramírez de Jara and Sotomayor, 183.

calabashes and gourds, fruits, salt, emeralds, coca, vegetables, spices, oils and maize, were all exchanged.[117] Captain Francisco Salguero testified that he often saw natives from the town of Chibatá at the markets in Tunja. They were said to have carried enormous quantities of cloth, corn, potatoes, wood and herbs, which were then traded to other Muisca Indians, as well as natives from outside Muisca territory, in exchange for gold.[118]

Lucía Rojas de Perdomo described the Muisca economy as one dominated by community production and regional specialization. Gold, for example, was worked principally by the Indians of Guatavita (Map 6). The communities of Tinjacá, Sutamarchán, Ráquira, Guasca and Suesca specialized in pottery making (Map 7).[119] Cotton was grown primarily in the regions around Vélez, in Somondoco and Surubá, and in the llanos of Támara (See Map 8). However, while these products circulated throughout Muisca territory and beyond, production and control of distribution was limited to very specific zones. It appears that much of the northern cotton trade, for example, was controlled by natives from the communities of Sogamoso and Duitama.[120] In the south, the cotton trade was concentrated around Teusacá, Suesca and Chocontá. However, there were several other communities, like Pasca and Fusagasugá, that traded cotton and cloth with native groups outside of Muisca territory. Coca production was centered in the northern part of the province of

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117 Romoli, Colombia..., 92, and Pedro Aguado, Recopilación historial, (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1906) 206.

118 AHNC, Visitas de Boyacá, Folio 13, 1560, 277-278.

119 Rojas de Perdomo, 137.

120 Germán Colmenares, La provincia de Tunja en el Nuevo Reino de Granada, (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 1970), 15. Pablo Fernándo Pérez wrote that the Indians of Chitagoto travelled specifically to the markets of Sogamoso and Duitama in order to trade for cotton. "El comercio e intercambio de la coca: una aproximación a la etno-historia de Chicamocha," Museo del oro, No. 27, (abril-junio, 1990) 17. The arrows on map 8 do not refer to precise pre-colonial trade patterns but instead reflect the evidence that hitherto has been uncovered. Further archaeological evidence might be able to clarify exact routes.

Tunja in the communities of Chitagoto and Ocavitá (See Map 8).[121] Salt was mined mainly in the three communities of Nemocón, Zipaquirá and Tausa (Refer to Map 9). If natives from other communities wished to purchase salt directly from one of those three towns, they had to negotiate with the governing cacique, who ultimately determined the quantity and the price.[122] Through this system, goods were circulated and sold in markets all over Muisca territory.

Exactly how the economy functioned within Muisca territory is not clear. Spanish attempts to describe native commercial activities indicate that not only did they have difficulty understanding the indigenous economy, but also that they perceived it as inferior to their own. Licentiate Grajeda, for example, believed that without base metal coinage, the native economy functioned to the detriment of both Spaniards and Indians. He explained that the Indians used gold to negotiate the sale and purchase of wood, herbs, game, cloth and other goods. According to Grajeda, the natives had no concept of the value of gold and they exchanged it without any awareness of what they were giving or receiving. Grajeda added that the Indians did not trade silver and that they refused to accept it as a payment for other goods.[123] For Grajeda, this was a clear indication that the indigenous peoples of New Granada had no concept or appreciation of value and that trade somehow occurred despite native ignorance. Grajeda's erroneous observation indicates that it was not only the cronistas who had difficulty understanding native institutions.

Nevertheless, many of the early Spanish encomenderos were able to take advantage of Muisca economic organization in order to gain profit, and at the same time, avoid having to pay the obligatory quinto real, or royal fifth tax.

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121 Colmenares, La provincia..., 16-17.

122 Juan Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. II, 247.

123 Ibid., Vol. III, 223.

Encomenderos benefited through the exploitation of the pre-existing economic system. Through well established long-distance trade networks, Muisca communities were able to trade a variety of goods in exchange for gold. Thus, instead of demanding gold as tribute, encomenderos accepted cloth, wood, corn, salt or coca leaves. In Tómas López' visita for example, only the communities of Socotá and Chibatá were required to pay some of their tribute in gold.[124] In Suta, the cacique testified that they used to give their encomendero gold, but now they gave him cloth instead.[125] Indians in Turmequé, Cocuy, Cucunubá, Tunquirá and Moniquirá were all required to provide most of their tribute in cloth.[126] The cloth and the other products that were collected would then be sold at the gold mines in Pamplona or Mariquita, or at local markets within Muisca territory. Some goods were traded as far away as Peru.[127] In return, the encomendero received payments in gold, from which he would not have to pay the Crown tax.

Complaints lodged against encomenderos from Santa Fé suggest that throughout the early colonial period, natives frequently were sent to the gold mines of Mariquita, Neiva and Pamplona, where they sold corn, potatoes, salt and other goods in exchange for gold.[128] Most of the witnesses who testified in Tomás López' visita claimed that members of their communities often had been sent to either distant gold-mining regions or to the desembarcadero (unloading dock) of Vélez (See Map 3). Natives from Chibatá, for example, were sent by their encomendero to sell corn at the mines in Pamplona.[129]

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124 AHNC, Visitas de Boyacá, Folio 13, 317 and 266.

125 Ibid., 200.

126 Ibid., 235, 300, 289, 213 and 312. The locations of most of the sixteenth and early seventeenth-century encomiendas in Muisca territory are found on Map 11.

127 Colmenares, La provincia..., 123.

128 Martínez Garnica, 153.

129 AHNC, Visitas de Boyacá, Folio 13, 265.

Indians from Cucunubá, Suta, Turmequé, and Tunquirá told López that inhabitants of their pueblos sometimes carried corn, cloth and wheat-flour to the desembarcadero of Vélez.[130] In some cases, encomenderos ordered native carriers to the desembarcadero to collect personal goods that had been sent from Spain.[131] Only the two communities of Cocuy and Tunquirá testified that Indians had been sent to actually work in the gold mines. However, in both pueblos witnesses claimed that this had occurred many years earlier and that they had not worked in the mines since.[132] Unfortunately, many of the testimonies from Lopez' visita were ambiguous and thus it is impossible to determine either the frequency or the exact number of Indians who were sent to the mining districts. However, it appears that most of the natives who did go to Vélez, Pamplona and/or Mariquita, served as carriers. Few Indians were ever ordered to work directly in the gold mines. Instead, they acquired the gold through trade.

A 1558 letter to Spain revealed that the change in tribute payments from gold to other goods had already cost the royal treasury more than eleven thousand pesos per year.[133] The royal contador, Pedro Nuñez de Aguilar, explained that over a three year period in Tunja, Santa Fé and Vélez, more than six thousand pesos of buen oro that should have been given as tax payments to the royal treasury were never paid.[134] Nuñez did not estimate what was missing from the rest of Muisca territory, but judging from the tribute demands in the province of Tunja in 1560, many encomenderos avoided having to pay the Crown tax. The organization and diversity of the

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130 Ibid., 289, 199-200, 236-237 and 213.
131 Ibid., 236-237, 199-200 and 213.
132 Ibid., 295-296 and 213.
133 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. III, 251.
134 Ibid., Vol. III, 276-277.

indigenous economy gave encomenderos access to vast resources, including gold.

The Muisca economy was complex and highly developed. Markets were held in different communities on specific days and they attracted both merchants and consumers from great distances (Map 5 shows the major pre-colonial markets in Muisca territory). Spaniards discovered well established trade routes between the highlands and the Magdalena River.[135] Transportation from the zones of production to regional markets occurred through what Pablo Fernando Pérez called, "intermediary towns."[136] While scholars have not yet been successful in determining the exact nature of pre-colonial trade routes, both Pérez and Carl Langabaek discovered archival evidence that suggested that intermediary towns played an important role in the circulation of products throughout Muisca territory. Indians from Paipa, for example, travelled about eighty kilometers to the north to Soatá in order to acquire coca, which they then carried more than one hundred kilometers south to sell in the market at Tunja.[137] Material from visitas conducted in Bobotá, Cerinza, Suta, Cucaita, Simijaca and Cucunubá all included testimonies that indicated that those communities acted as intermediaries in the salt trade. Native inhabitants from Cerinza, for example, obtained their salt directly from Nemocón and then transported it to market in Pamplona.[138] What is not clear from the visita is whether the salt was carried directly to Pamplona, or whether it was traded at other markets along the way.[139] Witnesses from the different

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135 Cardale, 10.

136 Pérez, 27.

137 Langaback, Mercados..., 80-82.

138 Ibid., 53.

139 The arrows on the maps do not indicate exact trade routes and are probably incomplete. Evidence from the archeological record and written documents has not yet allowed scholars to accurately reconstruct pre-colonial trade routes.

communities testified that they also carried salt to the markets in Tunja, Saboyá, Vélez and Muzo.[140] In a visita from 1594, Indians from Ubaté explained that they travelled directly to Tausa and Zipaquirá to acquire salt, which they later traded for cloth and gold at markets in Santa Fé (Teusacá) and Tunja.[141] Natives from Pasca specialized in the south-western salt trade with the Pijaos and the Panches.[142]

According to Pablo Fernando Pérez, the extensive distribution of such diverse goods could not have occurred without the existence of a native "guild" that specialized in such a process.[143] While there is little evidence at present to support Pérez' claim, Carl Langabaek found only one example from archival evidence where natives who resided in the production centers transported their own goods to distant markets.[144] Once at market, products were either exchanged through a system of barter or they were purchased with gold coins.[145] Merchants also sold goods on credit and profited by the high interest rates they charged. To determine prices, merchants used a system of weights and measurements.[146]

Trade goods were not, however, confined specifically to markets within Muisca territory. Salt, for example, was carried to markets located long distances outside of Muisca lands.[147] Marianne Cardale de Schrimpff discovered that salt from Zipaquirá was sold at markets located in La Tora,

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140 Langabaek, Mercados..., 78. See salt trade map.

141 Ibid., 78.

142 Cardale de Schrimpff, 16.

143 Pérez, 27.

144 In 1572, natives from Susacón transported coca to markets in Tunja and Sogamoso. Langabaek, Mercados..., 80-82.

145 Rojas de Perdomo, 110. The gold coins used were said to be circular and about three or four centimeters in diameter. They did not have any kind of stamp or marking to them. See Miguel Triana, La civilización chibcha, Quinta Edición, (Bogotá: Biblioteca Banco Popular, 1984) 122.

146 Rojas de Perdomo, 110.

147 Cardale, 15.

more than two hundred kilometers to the north, near the modern Colombian city of Barrancabermeja.[148] Muisca salt was also transported to markets within Panche and Pijao territory in the south-west. The nature of salt production was believed to have facilitated long-distance trade. Cardale discovered that the Muisca did not actually mine the salt. Instead, they collected the brine from nearby springs and stored it in large containers. The brine was then boiled over a fire until the water evaporated. When the water evaporated what was left was a solid block of salt that was not only easy to transport, but it also meant that the salt would not revert to brine in humid climates, which is a characteristic of granular salt.[149]

Archaeological excavations in the Valle de Samacá have also uncovered evidence that trade was not limited to adjoining communities and that the Muiscas exchanged goods with indigenous groups from as far away as the Atlantic Coast (See Map 10).[150] Indians from Chuymyte testified that before the arrival of the Spaniards, they obtained yellow beads (cuentas) through trade with native groups from Santa Marta.[151] The Muisca also traded for sea shells. Pedro Simón claimed that the Muiscas went to considerable effort to obtain coastal sea shells, for which they paid very high prices. The shells were either used to make ornaments or, according to Simón, were sounded during battle,

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148 Ibid., 15. It was in La Tora that Jiménez de Quesada decided to abandon his original plans of following the Magdalena River until he reached Peru and instead he turned his attentions toward the east. The discovery of Muisca cloth and large quantities of salt at the markets in La Tora, as well as rumours that they originated from a land with a great salt lake and a large and rich native population, influenced Quesada and his men to travel eastward to the Cordillera Oriental. See Castillo Mathieu, 100. Map 9 gives some indication of the nature of the pre-colonial salt trade. It must be remembered though, that the arrows on the map do not reflect precise trade routes and are only a partial reconstruction of the Muisca salt trade.

149 Cardale, 241.

150 Ana María Boada Rivas, Asentamientos indígenas en el Valle de la Laguna (Samacá-Boyacá), (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1987) 121. Muisca cloth was traded to the Indians from Santa Marta in exchange for gold and sea shells. See Triana, 121.

151 Tovar, Documentos..., 54-55.

"in the place of trumpets."[152] Commercial links were also established between the Muisca and the Guayupe and Sae peoples of the Eastern Cordillera. It has also been suggested that Muisca goods were traded as far as the Meta River in the Colombian llanos.[153] Corn, fish, cotton, honey, yopo (snuff) and exotic birds were among the many products that reached Muisca territory from the llanos.[154] The Muiscas also maintained amicable trade relations with most of the indigenous groups that bordered their frontiers. They traded with the Laches[155] and the Guanes [156] to the north, the Tubebos, Narcotes and Teguas to the east, and the Buchipas and Sutagaos in the south. To the west they exchanged goods with the Yarequíes, Agatáes, Muzos, Calimas, and the Panches. Groups of Bogotaes, Tunjas, Sogamosos, Guanes, Chipataes, Agataes, Saboyaes, as well as Indians from other provinces, gathered every eight days at the famous market at Sorocotá, about forty kilometers north-west of Tunja.[157]

Muisca commercial ties did not always translate into friendly alliances with other indigenous groups. Violent encounters did sometimes occur with neighbouring tribes. The Muisca were required to maintain a permanent military force on their western border for fear of attack from the Panches.[158] Their neighbours to the east, the Muzos, were also perceived as a military threat.

One of the difficulties, however, in determining the nature of indigenous relations in the early colonial period is that most of the

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152 Simón, Vol. III, 254.

153 Jane M. Rausch, A Tropical Plains Frontier: The Llanos of Colombia, 1531-1831, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984) 11.

154 Langabaek, Mercados..., 143.

155 The Laches sold salt to many indigenous communities in the province of Tunja. Colmenares, La provincia..., 17.

156 The Guanes were said to have traded for Muisca salt. Colmenares, Encomienda y población en la provincia de Pamplona, 1549-1650, (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 1969) 10.

157 Simón, Vol. III, 404.

158 Rojas de Perdomo, 113.

information that exists comes from Spanish sources. One must therefore be cautious about the validity of Spanish claims that neighbouring tribes were belligerent. Such assertions may well have been employed by Spaniards to justify their own actions. In an appeal to the Crown to grant them permission to establish a Spanish town in Muzo territory, a group of Spanish settlers complained that if their request was not granted, complete destruction would befall the 'hapless' Muiscas. The settlers claimed that the Muzos were the most odious and inhuman group of cannibals that they had ever seen or heard of, and that without a permanent Spanish settlement in Muzo territory, little by little, the entire Muisca population would be eaten.[159] This absurd petition reflects a genuine desire of Spanish settlers to establish control over the Muzos. However, it is likely that their aim did not derive from concern for the welfare and protection of the Muisca Indians. Muzos were not cannibals. Access to the rich emerald mines, and more native labour, was a more likely incentive for the foundation of a Spanish town in Muzo lands.

While it is apparent that some violent clashes did occur, it is not likely that the Muiscas, Panches and Muzos were in a constant state of warfare. Peaceful relations were essential to an economy based on trade. Armando Martínez Gárnica wrote that before the arrival of Europeans, colonies of Muisca Indians had settled in Muzo, Guane, and Panche territory. There, they grew corn, peppers, cotton, and other crops suited for cultivation in warmer climates.[160] Carl Langabaek discovered that the Muiscas controlled large parcels of land in the warmer climes of the Colombian lowlands.[161] It is thus likely that any conflicts that did arise resulted from struggles to control

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159 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. III, 231.

160 Armando Martínez Garnica, Legitimidad y proyectos políticos en los orígenes del gobierno del Nuevo Reino de Granada, (Santa Fé de Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1992) 153-154.

161 Langabaek, Mercados..., 68.

productive lands. Rojas de Perdomo believed that the Muzos wanted access to the fertile lands in the sabana de Bogotá.[162] Perhaps then, the same can be said for the disputes between Muiscas and Panches. The Muiscas may have sought to guarantee access to resources from the warmer lowlands of Panche territory.

Sixteenth-century descriptions of the Muisca Indians all emphasized Muisca excellence in matters of trade. According to the 1582 Relación de Trinidad de los Muzos, the Muisca Indians were referred to in Muzo territory as "hipas," which in the Muzo language meant "merchants."[163] Juan de Quincoces, the procurador of Tunja, wrote that Muisca communities were the wealthiest in all the Indies. He explained that the Muisca traded gold, emeralds, salt, cloth and coca with native groups from other provinces both within and outside New Granada.[164] Several Spanish priests from Tunja observed that the Muiscas reminded them more of merchants than warriors, for "their utmost happiness [was] found in markets and making transactions."[165] Archbishop Juan de los Barrios wrote that the Muiscas were men of trade and were extremely able in such matters.[166] "[The Muisca] were so sharp in their dealings, that no other Indian could equal [them] in matters of such dazzling ingenuity.[167]

These observations are wonderful testimonies to the organization and diversity of the Muisca economy. But what exactly do they tell us about the Muiscas themselves? Besides being skillful merchants, what was it that made them Muisca? Recent investigations have questioned the "homogeneous"

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162 Rojas de Perdomo, 113.

163 Langabaek, Mercados..., 139-141.

164 Colmenares, La provincia..., 129.

165 Fals Borda, Campesinos de los andes, (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional, 1961) 9.

166 Mario Germán Romero, Fray Juan de los Barrios y la evangelización del Nuevo Reino de Granada, (Bogotá: Academia Colombiana de Historia, 1960) 52.

167 Pérez de Barradas, Vol II, 146. (From Pedro Simón, Vol. II, 307)

nature of Muisca society.[168] Community autonomy, economic specialization, regional political sovereignty and linguistic variations were all factors that indicated that Muisca society was far more diverse and complex than what scholars traditionally have assumed.

According to the Spanish chronicler Pedro de Aguado, if a Muisca Indian from either Bogotá, Tunja or Vélez were to travel to a Spanish town, he would be immediately recognized as Muisca owing to the peculiar manner in which he presented himself.[169] Aguado claimed that language and religious practices varied little within Muisca territory.[170] Another sixteenth-century chronicler, Fernández de Oviedo, wrote that there were no differences between the Indians from Tunja and those from Bogotá. Oviedo's conclusion was simply based on his observation that the natives from both Tunja and Bogotá "were people who engaged in much trade." Each town had their own market to which many people would come to sell and purchase goods.[171]

Pedro Simón, on the other hand, was struck by the differences between natives within Muisca territory. According to Simón, there was no one name that the Muisca Indians used to identify themselves. Instead, he argued that each community member identified him or herself with either their present cacique or a famous ancestor.[172] Their loyalty to their local communities did not change, even if they were conquered and required to pay tribute to a more powerful cacique.[173] Simón's account is an interesting one, especially when one considers that his chronicle was written about fifty years after Aguado's

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168 Ramírez de Jara and Sotomayor, 175-201.

169 Aguado, 129-130.

170 Ibid., 128.

171 Pérez de Barradas, Vol. II, 151, [From Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias, (Madrid, 1877) II, 398.]

172 Simón, Vol. III, 156.

173 Ibid., Vol. III, 156.

and thus might very well have reflected the political changes that followed conquest. In his study of contemporary rural communities in Boyacá, Orlando Fals Borda found that loyalties to the community outweighed national identity. Locals referred to themselves as "from Saucío," for example, or "from Chocontá."[174]

Simón added that there was no common language spoken in Muisca territory. According to Simón, the reason for the linguistic diversity was because, unlike the Incas of Peru, the Muiscas lacked a powerful "king" to force his subjects to learn the same language. He claimed that outside of the sabana de Bogotá, natives from each community spoke their own idiom. Simón wrote that only in the sabana de Bogotá did all the Indians understand and speak the same language.[175] There is little evidence to either support or reject this assertion. In a 1550 letter to Spain, a Dominican friar by the name of Jerónimo de San Miguel complained that the linguistic diversity of the region made attempts to convert the natives to Christianity extremely difficult. He claimed that:

> The language of these [natives] is not one, [but rather] there is a great difference between them, so much so, that [over a distance] of fifty leagues there are six or seven languages. All of us find great difficulty in the pronunciation and thus there is not one Spaniard who is able to speak any of [the native languages].[176]

What is not clear from this statement is whether or not Jerónimo de San Miguel was referring specifically to the natives within Muisca territory. He may have included languages spoken by the Panches, Pijaos, Laches or Guanes. However, if one considers the importance of regional trade and the movement

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174 Fals Borda, Campesino..., 43-44.

175 Simón, Vol. III, 158.

176 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. 1, 33.

of goods over long distances, it is quite possible that there was a common language adopted by Muiscas. There is also evidence that Chibcha was spoken by indigenous peoples outside of Muisca territory. Both the Guayupe and the Sae Indians from the Eastern llanos, for example, traded cotton to the Muiscas and it has been suggested that some members of those communities could speak Chibcha.[177] Perhaps then, there were regional dialects, but it is doubtful that each community spoke a separate language. In his 1560 visitation through the province of Tunja, for example, Tomás López employed the same translator to document the native responses to his inquiries.[178] One might question whether or not the translations were accurate, but judging by the unique answers given by witnesses from the different communities, it is unlikely that the translator invented testimony that he could not understand.

The most problematic and least understood aspect of Muisca society is its political organization. Despite the extensive commercial ties between local communities, Muisca society was never administered through a centralized government. Scholars traditionally have described Muisca political organization as a "state in formation."[179] According to Pedro Aguado, political power among the Muisca, since antiquity, had been in the control of regional caciques.[180] Each cacique governed a particular town or valley and received tribute payments from his subjects.[181] Local political hierarchies encouraged the production of goods for tribute and redistribution.[182] Shortly before the

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177 Rausch, 16.

178 AHNC, Tomo 18, Folio 13, Visitas de Boyacá, 1560. The translator was an Indian by the name of Andrés. More biographical information about this figure might prove valuable as it is not clear if he spoke only Chibcha or if he could speak a variety of indigenous languages.

179 Rojas de Perdomo, 132.

180 Aguado, 125-126.

181 There is very little information available about the nature of tribute in Muisca territory. It is unclear exactly how much tribute was paid to individual caciques, what that tribute was, and what roles the caciques had to fulfill in order to maintain power.

182 Villamarín and Villamarín, "Chibcha Settlement Under...," 25.

arrival of the conquistadors, a process of expansion and political consolidation had begun. The Zipa of Bogotá was said to have controlled the entire region from Chocontá in the north to Pasca in the south. The area from Turmequé to Sabogá and Chipatá was ruled by the Zaque of Tunja. [183] At the time of conquest, the Zipa was moving to extend his territories into Tunja. He was also attempting to expand into the warmer lands of the Panches.[184] During the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the Zaque, together with his allies from Cucaita, Sora, Samacá and Boyacá, moved to extend his territories into the region around the Cordillera de Sora.[185] This entire process of expansion had begun only years before the arrival of Quesada and his men. This is an important point to recognize when one considers the break-down of native political organization that followed the conquest.

It is unclear exactly how much power the Zipa and the Zaque possessed. However, as the number of regional studies increases, it has become more evident that within the territories defined by Aguado as under the control of the Zipa or the Zaque, local community leaders enjoyed a significant amount of political and economic autonomy. Hermes Tovar Pinzón described the region as being made up of a series of politically and economically "autonomous islands."[186] He argued that there were five dominant political units in Muisca territory. In addition to Bogotá and Tunja, Tovar included the 'confederations' of Cocuy, Sogamoso and Duitama. However, there were also communities outside of these particular units that appear to have enjoyed complete political and economic autonomy.[187] The Spanish encomendero of Tópaga, Antonio

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183 Aguado, 126.
184 Villamarín and Villamarín, "Chibcha Settlement Under..., 31.
185 Boada Rivas, 23.
186 Tovar, La formación..., 11.
187 Ibid., 11.

Bravo Maldonado, claimed that even though the most powerful ruler in the region around Tópaga was the cacique from Sogamoso, the Indians from Tópaga and many other surrounding communities paid tribute and provided services to their own caciques and not to the cacique of Sogamoso.[188] Thus, the assumption that at the time of conquest the Muisca were a homogeneous society with two opposing political forces is not simply a generalization. It is fundamentally incorrect. When the Spaniards first arrived in Muisca territory, political power was dispersed throughout the region.

Pedro Aguado observed that local rivalries between village chiefs often led to alliances and military conflicts in which one chieftain would attempt to subdue another's tributary Indians.[189] However, it recently has been suggested that what early Spanish officials and chroniclers interpreted as tribute payments was not tribute at all.[190] Instead, Spaniards might have erroneously classified native trade, collective ritual offerings, and the redistribution of excess goods, as forms of tribute. Again, any discussion of native tribute is limited by the lack of source material presently available. The earliest and most reliable information about Muisca political organization and pre-colonial tribute system comes from the visitas of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. While periodic visitas began in New Granada around 1550, there is almost no material concerning native tribute from before 1560.[191] Thus, most of the earliest data was not gathered until almost four decades after conquest, by which time much change already had occurred. In 1553, for example, fifteen years after conquest, the Crown sent a letter to the president and the oidores of the Royal Audiencia of New Granada in which it was

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188 Colmenares, La provincia..., 8-9.

189 Aguado, 159.

190 See Lleras Pérez, 60 and Langabaek, Mercados..., 150.

191 Colmenares, "La formación...," 18-19.

requested that local officials determine both the amount and the kind of tribute that Indians used to provide their caciques before conquest. The Crown also wanted information concerning the value of the tribute and how often it was given.[192] The 1555 reply from the Audiencia stated:

> In respect to Your Majesty's orders that a report be prepared and an inquiry be made into what the natives used to provide as tribute payments back during their period of infidelity..., until now we have not been able to do [it]...[but] it will be done as Your Majesty orders.[193]

Nevertheless, material that is available from the later visitas does yield important clues that shed some light on the question of native tribute. Every native community included in Hermes Tovar Pinzón's Documentos sobre tributación y dominación en la sociedad chibcha admitted to having had to provide some form of tribute to their caciques before conquest. Most testimonies, however, were vague and only a few witnesses were able to recall, or were willing to admit, the exact quantity of tribute they gave. What is evident from the documents is that the tribute that was given reflected the remarkable diversity of products available to native communities both from within Muisca territory and through long-distance trade. Products offered as tribute included cloth, cotton, deer, parrots, macaws, gourds, hides, yuca, batatas, beans, yopo, corn, coca, emeralds, shells and salt. Almost every community gave gold, and many assisted with the cultivation of their cacique's crops and the construction of community houses and fences.[194] Can these payments and services not be defined as tribute?

In order to provide a satisfactory answer to this question, one must first

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192 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. II, 108-109.

193 Ibid., Vol. II, 247.

194 The pueblos of Ramiriquí, Mona, Ocavita, Guacha, Paipa, Onzaga, Socotá, Topia, Ysa, Guaquirá, Coytivá, Comezá, Cosquetibá, Chipatá, Chusbitá, Sagará, Bombaza, Busbanza, Ura, Cheva, Ogamora, Suta and Chuymyte all claimed to have given gold as part of their tribute during the pre-colonial period.

understand the nature of the relationship between Muisca caciques and their subjects. Was tribute given, for example, as a payment for some special function or functions that caciques performed for their communities? If so, what were they? Secondly, what was done with the tribute after it was given? Researchers must also consider what natives in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries understood as 'tribute'. According to another seventeenth-century chronicler, Lucas Fernández de Piedrahita, the Muisca translation for "tributo" was tamsa, the meaning of which is still unclear. In Chibcha, the word for regalar (to present or to give) was zebquisca, and the Chibcha translation for dar (to give) was either zequasa, zemnisca or zequitisuca.[195] Carl Langabaek argued that the Spanish falsely interpreted native offerings as tribute.

There is evidence to suggest that some of the goods offered as tribute were either redistributed or offered to Muisca deities during religious festivals. In 1572, for example, the cacique from Tobasía claimed that when he gave one piece of cloth to his señor, the cacique from Duitama, he was given two in return.[196] A witness from Suta testified that when members of that community helped cultivate the cacique's land, the cacique was obligated to provide them all with food and drink.[197] Natives from Chita testified that before the arrival of the Spaniards, they were "subjects" of the cacique from Cocuy, whom they provided with cloth, meat and salt.[198] What might be easily interpreted as tribute becomes more complex when one considers the testimonies from the Indian pueblo of La Sal. Witnesses from La Sal stated that before the Christians came, they were "subjects" of the cacique from Chita, with

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195 Langaback, Mercados..., 47. [From Lucas Fernández de Piedrahita, Noticia historial de las conquistas del Nuevo Reino de Granada, II Vols. (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, /1666/ 1973) I: 73.]

196 Ibid., 49.

197 Tovar, Documentos..., 46.

198 Ibid., 13.

whom they "exchanged" coca leaves and corn for salt.[199] If the cacique from Cocuy was indeed the most powerful ruler in the region, why did he not receive tribute from the natives of La Sal? Afterall, La Sal was probably an important center because it was the only community in the entire region that produced salt. Such a relationship reflects a much more complex arrangement between Muisca communities, based on something other than military superiority.

In a letter to the Spanish Crown, Pedro Aguado explained that all the gold and cloth that was given to the caciques during native celebrations was subsequently tossed into a deep lake as offerings to their "demons."[200] It was not a payment to the caciques themselves. Juan de los Barrios also wrote that whatever goods the Indians managed to acquire were given to their gods.[201] Unfortunately, Spanish officials were often more concerned with what natives gave as tribute, and they were not necessarily interested in what the tribute was for or how it was used. This is reflected in the nature of the sources as discussions of native tribute rarely went beyond an inventory of the goods that were given. Thus, scholars presently know very little about tribute and the role of the cacique in pre-conquest Muisca society.

Carl Langabaek interpreted Muisca pre-conquest 'tribute' as a complex pattern of trade, ritual offering and redistribution of goods. Products that were offered as 'tribute' were stored and later distributed throughout the territory. Langabaek believed that caciques in Muisca territory acted collectively as a group of "specialists" in the storage and distribution of goods.[202] Through this system, Langabaek argued, the Muisca were able to acquire and circulate large

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199 Ibid., 15.

200 Langabaek, Mercados..., 50.

201 Germán Romero, 52.

202 Langabaek, Mercados..., 52.

quantities of products from vastly diverse ecological zones. Langabaek cited two examples to support this theory. The cacicazgo of Duitama, located in tierra fría at an altitude of more than 2,500 meters above sea level, received coca as tribute from the cacicazgos that had access to the dry land around the Chicamocha Canyon. Several small communities of Tegua Indians from the llanos were "subjects" of the cacique from Tota, whom they provided with yopo, parrots, macaws and gourds.[203] This system of 'tribute,' according to Langabaek, gave communities from the highlands access to both exotic goods and products that they could not grow locally. Unfortunately, given the vagueness of the available sources, such a hypothesis is still highly conjectural. Many questions still remain to be answered. Did communities from the lowlands, for example, receive any goods in return for their 'tribute' payments? If so, what kinds of goods? Secondly, what was the nature of the relationship between caciques and their subjects? Why was it that some "subject" communities assisted with agricultural work, while others did not?[204] To what extent was their power based on military superiority? It is rather curious that there is only one example of a community providing military service for their cacique, and it was not even in Muisca territory.[205]

Any attempts to reconstruct pre-conquest Muisca tribute and political organization are made more difficult because of their rapid break-down after the arrival of the Spaniards. By the end of the sixteenth century, such native institutions had changed dramatically. There were no more Zipas or Zaques, and even the powerful pre-colonial confederations of Cocuy, Sogamoso and

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203 Ibid., 52.

204 The community of Chipa were "subjects" of the cacique from Sogamoso to whom they brought parrots, macaws and gourds. They did not provide any services nor did they give any other goods. Tovar, La formación..., 16-17.

205 Tovar, Documentos..., 16. In addition to offering birds and deer and assisting in crop cultivation, the natives from Panqueba testified that they used to provide military service to the cacique from Cocuy to ensure that other communities met their tribute requirements.

Duitama appear to have lost much of their authority. The Muisca communities of Ramiriquí, Mona, Chipa, Busbanza, Bombaza, Chipatá, Comeza y Cosquetiba, Coytivá, Guaquirá, Ysa, Topía and Onzaga all testified that they no longer gave any tribute to their ex-caciques. A witness from Chipatá stated that "the Indians pay no attention to the caciques."[206] Of the small number of pueblos that still provided tribute at the end of the century, none of them did more than assist with the cultivation of some crops.[207] There was no exchange of goods. The cacique from Suta lamented that the custom of providing caciques with pieces of cloth and helping them build community houses and fences recently had been lost.[208]

What does this say about Langabaek's theory that in the pre-colonial period, caciques performed the role of storage and redistribution specialists? How did goods circulate, or did they? How did that affect the organization of the native economy? It is worth noting that almost every community included in Hermes Tovar's monograph on native tribute claimed that before the arrival of the Europeans they used to give gold to their caciques.[209] With the possible exception of the town of Ocavita, not one community continued this practice after 1600.[210] Could this mean that native communities perceived the conquest as an opportunity to avoid having to pay tribute to distant caciques? Did the arrival of the Spaniards allow local caciques to regain control of their own pueblos? After all, the cronistas did note that the process of political

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206 Ibid., 53.

207 These communities that still provided some tribute were Suta, Ocavita, Socotá, Guacha, Paipa, Chusbita y Sagará, Ura, Cheva y Ogamora and Panqueba.

208 Ibid., 46.

209 Ocavita, Paipa, Guacha, Onzaga, Socotá, Topía, Ysa, Guaquirá, Coytivá, Comeza y Cosquetiba, Chipatá, Chusbitá y Sagará, Bombaza, Busbanza, Ura, Cheva, Ogamora, Suta, Chuymyte, Ramiriquí and Mona all gave gold to their caciques. See Tovar, Documentos..., 42-85.

210 Ibid., 42-85.

expansion in Muisca territory had begun only shortly before the first Spaniards reached the Cordillera Oriental. Pedro Simón wrote that the Zipa and the Zaque were cruel tyrants, despised by all the Indians.[211] Or were Spanish settlers and encomenderos successfully able to gain control over native resources and the movement of goods? Unfortunately, given the nature of the available sources, it is impossible to provide any satisfactory explanations for the apparent changes in native political organization. There are still too many questions that are left unanswered. We know almost nothing for example about political organization at the local level. To what extent were local caciques able to maintain sovereignty over their own community members? How did their roles change after conquest? Furthermore, how did the collapse of the larger political units affect the organization of the indigenous economy?

It generally has been accepted that the arrival of European settlers in New Granada led to a number of dramatic changes for Muisca society. European colonization began a process of change which, it has been argued, radically altered the political, social and economic structures of indigenous society.[212] Natives were expected to provide Spaniards with food and clothing and they were required to build houses, pay tribute, maintain cemeteries and provide other services.[213] The subsistence of the first generation of Spanish conquistadors and the settlers who later joined them thus depended entirely on the exploitation of the Indians. However, as we have seen, the European population was never very large during the early colonial period.

Spanish settlers also successfully introduced European crops such as wheat, barley and sugar cane. In fact, it is quite remarkable how quickly Spaniards introduced European crops and farm animals. Within ten years after

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211 Simón, Vol. III, 425.

212 Colmenares, "La formación...," 22.

213 Ibid., La provincia..., 119.

conquest, Old World crops were being cultivated in several native communities.[214] In the early 1560s Friar Juan de los Barrios wrote of the province of Bogotá that:

> ...the climate is cool, except in the valleys, some of which are very warm; this region is well supplied with wheat, barley, corn, [and] all types of fruits, including Spanish figs, grapes, melons, and pomegranates; there is also an abundance of cattle, horses, sheep, goats, hogs, and plenty of deer, hens, quail, turtledoves and ducks...[215]

In 1555, natives from Toca were already growing wheat and barley on their land.[216] Tribute assessments from Licentiate Angulo's 1562 visita indicate that, of the one hundred ten repartimientos included in the visita, there were only fourteen communities whose members were not expected to provide either wheat, barley or cane to their encomenderos.[217] Thus, by mid-century, large portions of native land were dedicated to the cultivation of European crops.[218]

In addition to Old World crops, Spaniards introduced cattle, horses, pigs, goats and other farm animals. Only twelve years after the foundation of Bogotá, settlers in the region reported that they were well supplied with food because an abundance of cattle recently had been imported from the province of Coro.[219] According to Germán Colmenares, the most common complaint lodged by native communities in the sixteenth century was that Spanish livestock had destroyed their crops.[220] In 1560, for example, the native communities of Moniquirá and Tunquirá complained of Spanish hogs and

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214 Ibid., Encomienda y población ..., 93.

215 Germán Romero, 52.

216 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. II, 248. There is also mention that Spanish livestock had caused much damage to native crops in Toca.

217 Eugenio Martínez, 555-563. See also Colmenares, La provincia..., 133.

218 Colmenares, "La economía...," 258.

219 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. I, 209.

220 Colmenares, "La formación...," 21-22.

cattle that had damaged their crops.[221] Natives in Chivatá reported that their encomendero had hogs on their land but that they did not do any damage to the land.[222]

In his examination of the impact of 1492, Alfred Crosby concluded that the arrival of Europeans and the introduction of Old World crops and livestock quickly and radically transformed indigenous societies, so much so that it is almost impossible to imagine what pre-columbian civilizations were like.[223] While no scholar has ever addressed this question in the context of Muisca history, it appears that the effects were equally devastating. Unlike many other regions in the New World where Spanish settlers could not grow European crops successfully, the rich soil conditions and the climatic variations in Muisca territory were ideal for such purposes.[224] Large tracts of fertile land once dedicated to Muisca crops were set aside for European plants or were used by animals for grazing. Angulo de Castejón reported in his 1562 visita that encomenderos in New Granada had usurped the most productive lands for their own crops and livestock.[225] In August of 1587, the Indians from Suta complained that both the Audiencia and the Cabildo of Tunja had taken all their best land, making it impossible for them to grow their own crops.[226] By the end of the sixteenth century, Muiscas from the sabana region had access to only about five percent of the arable land, some of which was in areas of low

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221 AHNC, Visitas de Boyacá, Folio 13, 213, 313 and 314.

222 Ibid, 266.

223 Alfred W. Crosby, The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1972) 64.

224 In the West Indies, for example, and in the wet lowlands of mainland South America, early Spanish settlers either had to import wheat or make bread from less agreeable manioc flour. See Crosby, 65.

225 Germán Colmenares and Darío Fajardo, Lecturas de historia colonial, III: El problema indígena en el período colonial, (1540-1614, (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 1969) 19.

226 Colmenares, La provincia..., 182.

productivity.[227] However, nothing had a greater impact on the indigenous world than the spread of Old World diseases.

As elsewhere in the Americas, the most dramatic change for the natives in New Granada was demographic. The introduction of European diseases such as smallpox, measles and typhus, irrevocably altered Muisca society. By the end of the sixteenth century, the native population in New Granada had declined perhaps by as much as 90%. An awareness of demographic trends is essential to any understanding of change during the early colonial period. It is difficult to overestimate the ramifications of such a cataclysmic population collapse on a labour intensive merchant society such as the Muisca. However, it must also be recognized that the rapid decline in population and the subsequent break-down of some indigenous institutions in New Granada were not synonymous with the Hispanization of New Granada. The Muisca population declined; it did not become Spanish.

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227 Villamarín and Villamarín, "Chibcha Settlement Under...," 81-82.

Chapter IV: Conquest and the Tragedy of Contact

Population estimates for the Muisca vary. Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff wrote that at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards, the native population was approximately half a million.[228] However, Reichel-Dolmatoff's calculations were based on findings from the first general surveys of the late sixteenth century, by which time there had already been a dramatic population decline.[229] Throughout the sixteenth century, the native inhabitants of New Granada were ravaged by waves of Old World diseases. In 1558, for example, an outbreak of smallpox in the province of Tunja was responsible for the deaths of more than 15,000 Indians.[230] Other major epidemics followed in 1568-69, 1587, and again in 1633.[231]

Material from visitas conducted during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries offer some clues of widespread demographic decline. In 1571 and 1572, native inhabitants from Pisba, Chipa, Motavita, Ramiriquí, and Mona all claimed that large numbers of Indians had died since the arrival of

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228 Reichel-Dolmatoff, "Colombia indígena," 97.

229 Colmenares, "La formación de la economía colonial, 1500-1740," Manuel de historia de Colombia, Tomo I, ed. José Antonio Ocampo, (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1984) 19. Colmenares suggested that a population figure of half a million likely represented about one-third of what the pre-conquest population would have been.

230 Rausch, 41.

231 Ibid., 41.

the cristianos.[232] A witness from the pueblo of Pisba testified that the population had declined drastically since the first visita was conducted twenty years earlier.[233] One might question the validity of such claims. It is quite possible that community members lied to Spanish officials so as to have their tribute requirements lowered. Indeed, most of the communities that spoke of high death rates also complained that as a result they could not meet tribute demands. However, just as one can not assume that all native testimony was true, one can not simply conclude without more convincing documentation that these testimonies were all lies. An examination of evidence from other sources suggests that Indian claims of high population losses were probably true.

Native testimonies from Tomás López' 1560 visita through the Province of Tunja provide further evidence of demographic collapse. Indians from the communities of Tunquirá, Boyacá, Suta and Turmequé, all referred in their testimonies to the "period of the plagues" which occurred after the arrival of the Spaniards.[234] Witnesses from communities such as Socotá and Chibatá testified to the "many" Indians (muchos) who died without having been baptized.[235] There are also references to the deaths of natives who were struck by "illnesses," "fevers," and "colds."[236] Again, it is possible that such claims were fabricated. Natives from Suta and Tunquirá complained that the population loss made tribute payments extremely difficult.[237] The cacique from Chibatá testified that "now more than ever," tribute demands were a real

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232 See Tovar Pinzón, Documentos..., 52, 54-55, 58-59, 63 and 64.
233 Ibid., 58-59.
234 AHNC, Visitas de Boyacá, Folio 13, 1560, 212, 306, 200, 236-237.
235 Ibid., 315, 269.
236 Ibid., 259, 213.
237 Ibid., 200, 213.

burden "because many Indians have died."[238] According to Indian witnesses from Chicamocha, the epidemic of 1558 left their town paralyzed and unable to pay the entire tribute demanded by their encomendero.[239] Skeptics who question the rate of demographic decline might include these testimonies to support the theory that Indians lied about the number of deaths in order to pay less tribute. This however, is not a satisfactory explanation. Natives from Boyacá and Socotá, while reporting large population losses, also explained that they could easily meet the tribute demands of their encomenderos.[240] The conclusions that one might draw from this are of course conjectural, and by no means provide precise demographic data. However, the language from these testimonies are a valuable source and an additional indication of the impact of Old World diseases on the indigenous populations of the Americas. References to plagues, sickness and death appear repeatedly throughout the visita.

It is important to recognize that permanent Spanish settlements were not necessarily a prerequisite for the transmission of European diseases. The first smallpox epidemic in Peru, for example, has been traced back to 1524. Noble David Cook argued that the epidemic lasted three years and wiped out half the population.[241] This occurred almost eight years before Francisco Pizarro and his men arrived in Inca territories and direct contact was made between Europeans and Indians. Contact with coastal Indian tribes in Colombia occurred as early as 1500. Permanent Spanish settlements were established in the 1520s and the early 1530s.[242] It is therefore likely that the

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238 Ibid., 266.

239 Colmenares, La provincia..., 126.

240 AHNC, Visitas de Boyacá, Folio 13, 1560, 306, 315.

241 Noble David Cook, Demographic Collapse: Indian Peru, 1520-1620, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1981) 60.

242 The coastal city of Santa Marta was founded by Rodrigo de Bastidas in 1526. Pedro de

Muisca experienced some demographic decline before Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada's expedition arrived in 1537, especially when one considers the nature of pre-columbian trade. Trade links between coastal Indians and natives from the interior meant that the Muiscas could easily have been exposed to European diseases almost forty years before the first Spanish expedition arrived.[243] Unfortunately, reliable counts of the indigenous population in Muisca territory did not take place until more than fifty years after conquest.[244] However, while demographic figures have not been documented with much precision, it appears that the Muisca population was far greater during the early colonial period than scholars traditionally have assumed.

Early Spanish accounts consistently stated that Muisca settlements were numerous. On February 13, 1547, the Licenciate Miguel Díez de Armendáriz wrote a letter to the king of Spain that outlined his initial impressions of central Colombia.[245] Armendáriz believed that Muisca territory had been densely populated before the arrival of the Spaniards. He explained that between Vélez and Santa Fé, a distance of thirty two leagues, there were no more than two leagues that did not show signs of having had cultivated maize,

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Heredia founded the port city of Cartagena in 1533.

243 In their studies of the impact of disease at different altitudes and on climates, Sherburne Cook and Woodrow Borah found that communities living at higher altitudes in colder climates suffered less from lethal diseases than did Indians who lived in warm low-level climates. Thus, the proportion of survival at the higher altitudes was greater. This perhaps explains why the early expeditions into the interior found relatively small indigenous populations along the Magdalena River compared to those they encountered higher in the Andes.

244 Juan and Judith Villamarín, "Colonial Censuses and Tributary Lists of the Sabana de Bogotá Chibcha: Sources and Issues," Studies in Spanish American Population History, edited by David J. Robinson, Dellplain Latin American Studies, No. 8, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981) 47.

245 Miguel Díez de Armendáriz was an important figure in New Granada in the early colonial period. Armendáriz was a judge and was the first official to conduct visitas in Cartagena, Santa Marta, Santa Fé de Bogotá and Cali. He also authorized many of the early expeditions of discovery and colonization. See Robert H. Davis, Historical Dictionary of Colombia, (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1977) 103.

potatoes, frijoles, cotton or coca.[246] Armendariz' observation is an interesting one because not only does it imply that the region supported a large population, but it also suggests that there was a significant demographic decline. When Armendáriz made his way through Muisca territory in 1547, he saw only "signs" of extensive cultivation.[247] Similar observations can be found in other primary sources.

One of the earliest descriptions of Santa Fé de Bogotá comes to us from the first Archbishop of New Granada, Juan de los Barrios, who estimated that there were more than fifty thousand tributary Indians in the sabana de Bogotá alone.[248] In other words, Juan de los Barrios believed that there were more than fifty thousand males between the ages of 17 and 55 in just the sabana region. Pedro Simón chose the imagery of a swarm of bees on honey to describe the initial impression of the conquistadors when they reached the sabana de Bogotá.[249] Simón also wrote that when the original group of Spanish explorers passed through Sorocotá, they encountered many large villages, "even though [the region] is now deserted."[250] Pedro de Aguado, who first arrived in central Colombia in 1562, related his impression of the crowded markets in the Muisca territory. He spoke of the "infinite" number of Indians, including caciques and señores principales who gathered at the market in Tunja every four days. There, they bought, sold and traded a remarkable variety of goods.[251] While none of the accounts of Diego de Armendáriz, Jerónimo de San Miguel, Pedro Simón or Pedro de Aguado provided exact

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246 Colmenares, La provincia..., 55.
247 Ibid., 55.
248 Germán Romero, 52-53. A tributary Indian was defined as any male between the age of 17 and 55. See Colmenares, "La formación...," 18-19.
249 Simón, Vol. III, 159.
250 Ibid., Vol. III, 163-164.
251 Aguado, 206.

population figures, they all suggested that the native population was extremely large. This kind of information can be included in what historical demographers Sherburne Cook and Woodrow Borah referred to as "counts of indirect demographic content."[252] While impressions do not provide exact figures, they do give the historian the impression that one is not dealing with sparsely settled regions and that a dense population was a real possibility.

Juan and Judith Villamarín argued that in the 1530s there were between 120,000 and 160,000 natives who occupied the region known as the sabana de Bogotá.[253] These estimates were, however, calculated on the basis of census reports from 1592-1595, and, unfortunately, the Villamaríns' study did not include population estimates for the rest of the Muisca territories. Germán Colmenares did, though, conduct a regional study for Tunja, and Darío Fajardo published a colonial study of Vélez, which included population figures for the small province. Both studies were based on tributary accounts from the second half of the sixteenth century. Fajardo calculated that the pre-conquest population of Vélez was about 15,000.[254] Colmenares suggested that the indigenous population in Tunja exceeded 200,000 in 1562. Thòse figures, according to Colmenares, were very rough estimates. He did not offer any figures for the early sixteenth century. Based on the research of Colombian historian Juan Friede, Woodrow Borah and Sherburne Cook estimated that in 1537, the indigenous population in Tunja was 257,500.[255] A similar figure was given by Spanish chronicler Pedro Simón who stated that at the arrival of the

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252 Cook and Borah, Essays in Population History, Vol. 1, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) 8.

253 Villamarín and Villamarín, 31. See Map 4 for reference. The territory outside of the altiplano was not included in the population estimates.

254 Fajardo, 33.

255 Borah and Cook, Essays in Population..., Vol. I, 417.

Spaniards, there were almost 200,000 natives in Tunja.[256]

Colmenares explained that any accurate reconstruction of the indigenous population of New Granada must, for the moment, be confined to the seventeenth century.[257] He argued that it was not possible to do the same kind of work for Colombia that Sherburne Cook and Woodrow Borah did for Mexico.[258] The sources simply were not there, or had not yet been discovered. Enumeration of entire communities or villages was extremely rare until the latter half of the eighteenth century.[259] The exact figures for the sixteenth century will thus never be known with any degree of certainty, but historians and anthropologists must have at least a general notion of the size of the aboriginal population in order to determine the impact of demographic decline and how that influenced the region.

If we combine the population estimates of Cook and Borah, Fajardo and the Villamaríns for the provinces of Tunja, Vélez and the sabana de Bogotá, we are left with a total population of somewhere between 392,500 and 432,500. Such estimates are only slightly less than those suggested by Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff's calculation of 500,000 for the entire Muisca population. However, it must be recognized that Juan and Judith Villamaríns' study of the sabana de Bogotá did not include all of the Muisca territory outside of the provinces of Tunja and Vélez. Furthermore, none of these estimates took into account the very real possibility that European diseases reached central Colombia before 1537.

Jorge Orlando Melo offered one of the few population estimates for the entire Muisca territory. Melo calculated that the number of indigenous

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256 Simón, Vol IV, 53.
257 Colmenares, La provincia..., 59.
258 Ibid., Encomienda..., 7.
259 Borah and Cook, 73.

communities at the time of conquest approached one hundred fifty. Population estimates for each town varied from five inhabitants to ten thousand. According to Melo, the entire population for the Muisca territory fell somewhere between eight hundred thousand and one million two hundred thousand. This meant that the population density varied from between forty and sixty inhabitants per square kilometer. Melo believed that the productivity of the land and the existing agricultural technology made it possible to support such a large population.[260] He calculated that each hectare of Muisca land was capable of producing enough potatoes to support a family of six people for one year. It would have thus required only about one tenth of Muisca territory to maintain a population of one million two hundred thousand.[261] While it appears that Muisca farming technology was limited to the wooden hoe and stone axes, Melo argued that the volume of calories provided in relation to work required was extremely high.[262] The fertile highland basins, adequate irrigation, and numerous micro-environments were all characteristics of Muisca territory that made agricultural production highly successful.

One of the problems with Melo's calculations, however, is that it is unclear exactly how they were reached. His figures appear to be somewhat arbitrary. How, for example, did he know the breakdown of community populations in each of the more than one hundred fifty Muisca settlements?

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260 Melo, Historia..., 59.

261 Ibid., 57.

262 Carl Langabaek wrote that the agricultural technology among the Muisca was consisted of the wooden hoe and stone axes, Mercados..., 53. Melo added that the amount of food that the Muisca produced and their caloric intake was, despite their limited technology, even higher than that of Europe during the same period. Melo based his conclusion on the nature of the food that was grown by the Muisca (corn, beans, potato and yuca) and the fact that the Muisca did not have to devote large portions of land and labour to maintain large farm animals. See Melo, Predecir el pasado: ensayos de historia de Colombia, Colección Historia No. 4, (Santa Fé de Bogotá: Fundación Simon and Lola Guberek, 1992) 23.

Primary sources from the early colonial period indicate that Spanish administrators were quite unaware of the size of the indigenous population. The cabildo of Tunja, for example, criticized the Licentiate Jiménez de Quesada for having distributed encomiendas to his followers without ever having visited the different regions. The result was that some Spaniards were awarded encomiendas with many Indians while others were left with almost nothing.[263] The first general visita in the Province of Tunja was not conducted until 1550, more than twelve years after conquest. The validity of the demographic data gathered during this first visita is questionable. Some native settlements were never visited.[264] Indians from Chipa, Pisba, Guáquira, Soatá and Onzaga all testified that instead of visiting their communities personally, Licentiate Angulo de Castejón ordered native caciques to Tunja where he had them count kernals of corn to represent the number of Indians in their towns.[265] Knowing that the population figures gathered by Angulo ultimately determined the amount of tribute each community was required to pay, it is unlikely that the caciques volunteered precise demographic data.

In a 1556 letter to the Crown, the Royal factor, or agent, Bartolomé González de la Peña complained that the 1550 visitation was poorly conducted and that the information in it was completely unreliable because, according to González, it was entrusted to Spaniards who themselves possessed Indians. Those encomenderos with large numbers of tributary Indians gave false testimonies because they feared that some of their Indians would be taken away. Encomenderos with few Indians lied as well, hoping that their apparent

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263 Martínez Garnica, 99.

264 Natives from the pueblos of Chuymyte and Mona testified in 1572 that although the visitador Angulo visited their communities, he did not record population figures. See Tovar Pinzón, Documentos sobre tributación y dominación en la sociedad chibcha, (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1970) 54-55.

265 Ibid., 43, 52, 56-59.

misfortune would influence royal officials to grant them more. There were also suggestions that large numbers of Indians had fled their native communities after conquest to avoid the brutal treatment and the excessive tributary demands of their encomenderos.[266] The cacique from Turmequé, for example, testified that many of his Indians had moved to other regions and for that reason the land was becoming sparsely populated.[267] Similar testimonies were recorded in other visitas from the sixteenth century. Andrés López de Galarza, the encomendero of Cocuy, claimed that the natives from Cocuy were not able to meet his tribute demands because a great many had moved to other towns.[268] Germán Colmenares expressed considerable doubt as to the validity of the demographic data gathered during this first visita and he suggested that it accounted for less than one-third of the indigenous population.[269]

Melo's demographic estimates also imply that the Muisca Indians suffered less from the introduction of Old World diseases than did the Aztecs, Mayas or the Incas. A pre-conquest population of eight hundred thousand suggests that within Muisca territory there was only a 37.5% decline by 1600. Melo's higher estimate of one million two hundred thousand would have meant that the overall population fell by 58.3%, a staggering decline, but still significantly lower than the figures recorded elsewhere in the Indies. Judging from aerial photographs and field excursions, Robert Eidt concluded that the expression and extent of artificial field forms in Muisca territory was evidence that the land supported more people in prehispanic times than is presently

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266 Martínez Garnica, 70.

267 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. III, 106.

268 AHNC, Folio 13, Visitas de Boyacá, 300-301. There was no mention however, of the more than six thousand natives from Cocuy who were believed to have been forced to join an expedition to find El Dorado. See Martínez Garnica, 71.

269 Colmenares, La provincia..., 50.

believed.[270] If one considers the catastrophic impact that the "microbe shock"[271] had in other regions of the New World, Eidt's observation becomes more plausible.

The highest rate of mortality among the native peoples of America occurred within the first one hundred years of contact.[272] In his study of demographic decline in Peru in the sixteenth century, Noble David Cook concluded that between 1520 and 1570, the native population decreased by 61%.[273] It has been suggested, however, that Cook's estimates were far too conservative and that the pre-conquest population of Peru was much higher than the 3.3 million postulated by Cook.[274] George Lovell calculated that between 1520 and 1680, the Cuchumatán population of Guatemala declined by more than 90%, from 260,000 to 16,000.[275] A similar decline occurred among the Aztec Indians in central Mexico. Sherburne Cook and Woodrow Borah estimated that the pre-conquest population of just over twenty-five million had, by 1600, fallen by almost 90% to 2.6 million.[276] The great plague of 1575-77 alone was believed to have been responsible for the deaths of two million Indians in New Spain. At the time, Spanish chronicler Bernardino de Sahagún expressed concern that the entire native population of Mexico was about to

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270 Eidt, Advances in Abandoned Settlement Analysis: Application to Prehistoric Anthrosols in Colombia, South America, (Milwaukee: Center for Latin America, University of Wisconsin, 1984) 112.

271 Tzvetan Todorov, The Conquest of America, Translated by Richard Howard, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1982) 133.

272 Crosby, 37.

273 Cook, 94.

274 Magnus Mörner estimated that in 1532 there were about nine million natives in Peru, considerably higher than the figures given by Cook. See Mörner, The Andean Past, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 44.

275 George Lovell, Conquista y cambio cultural: la sierra de los cuchumatanes de Guatemala, 1500-1821, (Antigua: Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica, 1990) 166.

276 Wright, Ronald, Stolen Continents: The "New World" Through Indian Eyes, (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1992) 154.

disappear.[277] A German missionary observed in the seventeenth century that "the Indians die so easily that the bare look and smell of a Spaniard causes them to give up the ghost."[278] It is difficult to conceive of such a cataclysmic population collapse and how it must have affected the indigenous peoples of the Americas. But, as Tzvetan Todorov pointed out: "no serious argument has yet been raised against these figures, and those who, even today, continue to reject them do so simply because, if the thing is true, it is profoundly shocking."[279]

In a recent article published in the Latin American Population Bulletin, Thomas Whitmore attacked those critics who have questioned the extent of depopulation among the native peoples of the New World. Whitmore rejected the hypothesis that the rate of demographic decline in the Americas could not possibly have exceeded the 25%-40% decline that occurred in Europe during the Black Plague. More than a sixth of London's population, for example, was believed to have succumbed to the plague in 1603 alone; and another sixth perished in 1636.[280] However, such a comparison does not, according to Whitmore, reflect the realities of two very distinct "epidemiological events." While in Europe there was a single pathogen that was responsible for the Black Death, the native peoples of the Americas were struck by a series of "virgin-soil epidemics," which involved not one, but rather a variety of different pathogens.[281]

Alfred Crosby added that many of the Old World's benign diseases became effective killers in the New World and what were fatal diseases in

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277 Brading, 122.
278 Crosby, 37.
279 Todorov, 132.
280 Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971) 9.
281 Thomas M. Whitmore, "Sixteenth-Century Population Decline in the Basin of Mexico: A Systems Simulation," Latin American Population History Bulletin, (No. 20 Fall, 1991) 11.

Europe became even deadlier in America.[282] According to Crosby, when migration occurs, those individuals who have lived longest in isolation generally suffer more because their "genetic material has been least tempered" by world diseases. Few of the world's most deadly diseases originated in the New World and thus the native peoples of the Americas had the "dangerous privilege" of having lived so long in isolation.[283]

If there was a similar demographic catastrophe in New Granada as has been documented for other Amerindian populations, it is possible that the Muisca population could have been as high as ten million in 1492. The spread of disease in Muisca territory, however, might have been tempered slightly by the altitude and colder climate of the Andean highlands and therefore a population decline of over 90% is perhaps an exaggeration.[284] However, there is evidence from the archaeological record that such a dramatic demographic drop did occur among the indigenous populations that lived at higher elevations. In his study of nine repartimientos in the Alto Valle de Tenza, the archaeologist Roberto Lleras Pérez found that in the seventy-four year period between 1562 and 1636, the native population in the Valle de Tenza declined by an average of 82.8%. In a couple of the sites that were excavated, Lleras claimed that the indigenous population fell by as much as 95.3%, despite the high elevations and cooler temperatures.[285] Each of the nine repartimientos

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282 Crosby, 37.

283 Ibid., 37.

284 Noble David Cook found that in the southern sierra of the Peruvian Andes, the native population declined by about 47% between 1520 and 1570. Cook explained that the impact from disease was less severe in that region because of the cool climate and because few Spaniards permanently settled in the area. Most of the Peruvian conquistadors lived on the coast. Such was not the case in New Granada where the majority of European settlers lived in the highland regions of Cundinamarca and Boyacá. The capital city of Bogotá, for example, sits at 2,700 meters above sea level.

285 Roberto Lleras Pérez, Arqueología del Alto Valle de Tenza, (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1989) 102. The nine repartimientos studied by Lleras were Baganique, Boyacá, Ciénaga, Gacha, Icabuco, Ramiriquí-Tunja, Tibaná, Turmequé, and Viracachá. Unfortunately,

included in Lleras' study was situated at an altitude somewhere between 1,900m and 3,200m above sea level with average temperatures ranging from between 14°C and 17°C.[286] Unfortunately, without more evidence from other Muisca sites, it would be premature to conclude that the percentage of demographic decline reported by Lleras for the Alto Valle de Tenza occurred uniformly throughout Muisca territory. A pre-conquest population of about three million would therefore not be an unreasonable suggestion, and is probably a far too conservative estimate. Such a figure, however, would correspond much more closely with the demographic trends that have been documented for other regions in the New World.[287]

It is unlikely that scholars will ever know the exact extent of population decline for any region of the New World. Despite the sophistictated and often "ingenious calculations" on which scholars have based their demographic estimates, population figures from the sixteenth century are still only "informed guesses."[288] However, it is essential that we have at least a general awareness of demographic trends. The value of demography to the historian is not necessarily in the numbers themselves, but rather, demography should be used as a tool to help us understand how population change influenced the development of colonial society. The rapid population decline in New Granada might help to explain the break-down of Muisca political organization. It must also be considered in any examination of the early colonial economy. How did population loss, for example, affect the production

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in his 1989 study, Lleras did not provide a systematic break-down of demographic data for each repartimiento.

286 Lleras, 17-27.

287 It should also be recognized that some of the Muisca population lived at lower altitudes and also that after conquest, many natives from the highlands fled to the lowlands to escape the Spaniards.

288 Nancy Farriss, Maya Society Under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 57.

and distribution of goods? Manuel Ancízar was probably correct when he remarked that it was virtually impossible to imagine the quantity or the diversity of crops that Muisca land supported before the arrival of the Europeans.[289] After all, it probably was not until the 1940s or 1950s that the population density of central Colombia reached levels similar to that of the Muiscas in the late fifteenth century. At the turn of the twentieth century, for example, the combined population of Boyacá and Cundinamarca was about 1.5 million, less than half that of the estimated pre-columbian indigenous population.[290] Unfortunately, we know almost nothing about what happened to Muisca society after the Spaniards arrived. At present, there is almost no mention of the Muiscas in the secondary literature for the early colonial period. They are simply relegated to the role of tribute-paying Indians. There has been no attempt to understand how or why Muisca society changed under Spanish rule.

There are however, some clues that suggest that there was more continuity to native life after conquest than scholars traditionally have assumed. Despite the rapid population decline and the apparent break-down of indigenous political and economic organization, natives did not necessarily accept Spanish culture. A closer examination of early Spanish efforts to congregate native settlements and convert the natives to Christiantiy demonstrates that Spaniards were both unsuccessful and ineffective. It does not appear that the Catholic Church was a powerful influence in the lives of the Muisca in the sixteenth century.

Having just arrived in the sabana de Bogotá, Gonzalo Jiménez de

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289 Ancízar, 33.

290 Henrique Arboleda C., Estadística general de la República de Colombia, (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1905) 11.

Quesada and his men celebrated Holy Week in the native community of Chía. While in Chía, the General was approached by a cacique from the nearby Indian town of Suba. The cacique had travelled to Chía to offer his peace to the Spaniards. Apparently, an alliance was established, but soon thereafter the cacique was struck by some mortal illness. Before his death, however, the cacique was warned that if he truly wanted to "rejoice in eternal happiness," he would have to be baptized and made a Christian. The cacique agreed, was baptized, and died shortly thereafter. According to Pedro Aguado, the cacique from Suba thus became the first Indian in the Kingdom of New Granada to convert to Christianity.[291] His 'conversion,' however superficial it might be, characterized the nature of the spiritual conquest of New Granada in the early colonial period.

In her study, Maya Society Under Colonial Rule, Nancy Farriss wrote that one of the most intriguing problems for Latin American historians was to determine whether or not the Amerindian peoples of the New World "truly" became Christians. In other words, Farriss wanted to understand whether the Indians came to genuinely believe in "One God, Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth...?"[292] Such inquiries into indigenous religious thought are complex and often frustrating endeavours because, as Farriss pointed out, natives so seldom speak for themselves in the written documents from the early colonial period.[293]

Little attempt has been made by Colombian scholars to examine the nature of religious change in the early colonial period. Most of what does appear in the secondary literature supports the theory that conversion to Christianity occurred swiftly and without resistance. The Colombian

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291 Aguado, 136.
292 Farriss, 301.
293 Ibid., 301.

anthropologist Lucía Rojas de Perdomo claimed that no aspect of Muisca society, including religion, was exempt from the "civilizing hand" of the Spanish invaders. She suggested that soon after conquest, the pantheon of Muisca deities was abandoned in favour of Christianity and Muisca temples and centers of worship were replaced by Spanish churches.[294] Yet in 1559, Bishop Juan del Valle presented a petition to Licentiate Grajeda in which the Bishop expressed his disappointment and concern that so few churches had been built in New Granada.[295] In fact, by the end of the sixteenth century, Spanish churches had been built in only a handful of native communities.[296]

In a recent general survey of Colombian history, David Bushnell stated that the Muisca Indians converted to Christianity "soon after conquest."[297] Bushnell added that the Spanish clergy in New Granada were not only numerous, but they also played an important role in the early life of the colony.[298] Friar Gregorio Arcila Robledo praised the achievements of the first Franciscans, who he claimed had baptized and converted more than "eighty thousand souls" in the sabana of Bogotá alone by the end of the sixteenth century.[299]

However, despite such claims that the Muiscas became Christians, evidence from Pedro Simón's Noticias Historiales..., letters written to the Spanish Crown, and testimonies from Tomás López' 1560 visita through the Province of Tunja, all indicate that early attempts by Spanish priests and encomenderos to convert the natives to Christianity were unsuccessful. Such

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294 Rojas de Perdomo, 162.
295 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. III, 245.
296 Melo, Predecir..., 45.
297 Bushnell, 20.
298 Ibid., 20.
299 Fray Gregorio Arcila Robledo, Las misiones franciscanas en Colombia, (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1951) 467.

attempts at conversion can be described at best as sporadic. The "apostolic fervour of Christianity," which John Leddy Phelan claimed thrived anew after the discovery of America, in no way characterized the 'spiritual conquest' of the Muisca Indians.[300] There was no euphoric quality to any of the early missionary campaigns in New Granada. Unenthusiastic clergy of dubious intellectual merit, recalcitrant Indians, dispersed native settlements, and the difficulty Spaniards found in learning Chibcha, all contributed to the failure of large-scale conversions.

One of the main objectives of Tomás López' 1560 visita through the province of Boyacá was to determine and assess the nature of religious instruction that Spanish encomenderos provided for their Indians. During the course of his visita, López discovered that not one of the communities he inspected received the benefits of full-time religious supervision. In fact, when the visita was conducted, there was not a single priest, friar or missionary present in any of the indigenous communities. Some native witnesses claimed that they had never even seen a priest. No Spanish priests for example, had ever appeared in the Muisca communities of Ysa or Cucunubá.[301] In Chibatá, natives claimed that they had received some instruction from a priest who had stayed in the town for four or five months, but then departed. According to the Spanish encomendero of Chibatá, the rest of the time natives were given religious instruction from the encomendero himself, his son and another Spaniard.[302] However, native responses suggest that there was little, if any, actual instruction. One of the native capitanes from Chibatá, for example, testified that when some of the Indians became sick, the encomendero, Pedro

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300 John Leddy Phelan, The Millenial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956) 47-48.
301 AHNC, Visitas de Boyacá, Folio 13, 205 and 288.
302 Ibid., 270.

de Ribera, "made them Christians."[303] The cacique from Chibatá added that "when the plagues came, many Indians were made into Christians."[304] There is no mention of any instruction.

Similar accounts were given in most of the other pueblos inspected by López. Indians from the pueblo Socotá testified that four or five years earlier, some Spanish priests had come from Sogamoso, but had not been back since.[305] They added that some of the community members who had died were also "made Christian by their encomendero."[306] For two or three months there was a priest in Suta.[307] In Turmequé there were two priests, both of whom stayed for one year. However, before them there had been no religious supervision, and at the time of Lopez' visita, neither of the two priests was still present in Turmequé.[308] In Tunquirá, witnesses testified that there had been one priest who had stayed for a couple of months during the "plague," and in Cocuy, natives told López that a priest had come once and he remained in Cocuy for only one "luna," or moon.[309] Martín Sánchez Ropero, the encomendero of Socotá, testified that he had a ladino Indian provide religious instruction to the natives from his encomienda.[310] Curiously, the pueblo of

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303 Ibid., 269.

304 Ibid., 236-237. This was not simply a matter of lip service being paid to the visitador. To the true believer, baptism was essential to guarantee that a soul would go to heaven and not to hell. See Todorov, 169.

305 Ibid., 315-316.

306 Ibid., 316.

307 Ibid., 200.

308 Ibid., 235.

309 Ibid., 212-214 and 300.

310 Ibid., 317. Ladino was a term given to natives who were capable of speaking and writing Spanish "as well as any Spaniard." See Farriss, 97. The fact that some encomenderos used ladinos to provide religious services is not completely surprising, especially when one considers what occurred elsewhere in the New World. According to Sabine MacCormack, some of the early missionaries in the Americas perceived the "religious errors" that the natives committed as "part and parcel of human nature untutored by revelation..." MacCormack noted that Hernán Cortés himself appointed pagan priests to perform Christian ceremonies. There was never any doubt among the Spaniards that, as Christians, they possessed an absolute "religious truth." They believed that the natives eventually would become Christians. See MacCormack, 205

Moniquirá was the only community from the visita where there is any mention of a Christian church, which native witnesses claimed they were in the process of building.[311]

Only in the community of Boyacá does there appear to have been consistent religious supervision. The cacique of Boyacá, who went by the Christian name of Don Pedro, testified that for three years a Dominican friar provided instruction to the native inhabitants. However, the friar had departed after an epidemic ravaged the community and since then there had been no further instruction.[312] Don Pedro claimed that despite the friar's departure, all the Indians who survived the epidemic were Christians. Of course Don Pedro's testimony could be interpreted a number of different ways. Did he simply mean that all of the natives had been baptized? Was Don Pedro even telling the truth? By claiming that all the Indians were already Christian, Don Pedro might have believed that no other priest would be sent to Boyacá. Perhaps Don Pedro considered himself a Christian. It is worth mentioning though, that before his testimony, Don Pedro was not permitted to take the oath because "although he said he was Christian, it did not appear that he understood what that meant."[313]

While López' visita included only a small number of native communities in Muisca territory, many of them were important indigenous settlements. Not only did they have large populations, but most were within relatively short distances from Tunja. Furthermore, by 1560, the majority of the pueblos had been administered by more than one Spanish encomendero.

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and Stephen Greenblatt, Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991) 9.

311 AHNC, Visitas de Boyacá, Folio 13, 312.

312 Ibid., 306.

313 Ibid., 306.

Turmequé, for example, had had five different encomenderos by 1560.[314] Boyacá was the largest native settlement with a population of 650 tributary Indians and it was also only 19 kilometers from Tunja.[315] There were more than 500 tributary Indians in Turmequé, and Turmequé was no more than 45 kilometers from Tunja. 400 tributaries lived in the village of Chibatá, just six kilometers outside of Tunja. Cocuy on the other hand, was much further from Tunja, but it reportedly had over 565 tributary Indians. Socotá had 450 and Suta had 300.[316] Even the smaller communities of Ysa and Moniquirá still had more than 120 and 160 tributaries respectively.[317] There are many examples from other sources like early correspondence and the chronicles, that indicate that what López discovered during his 1560 visita was indicative of what occurred elsewhere in New Granada.

Luís López, a sixteenth century Dominican friar, wrote that 'Christianity' among the natives of New Granada existed only in name, and that religious instruction consisted only of a few prayers in Spanish.[318] In 1580, the Spanish oidor of Santa Fé wrote a letter to the king in which he stated:

> ...the natives are as ignorant now as they were before the conquest; missionaries neglected their religious duties and very few [of them] bothered to learn the native language, and for that reason they have been forced to teach the

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314 Eugenio Martínez, 604. There had been three separate encomenderos in Boyacá (589), two in Chibatá(592), two in both Ysa (594) and Cocuy (590), four in Suta (602) and one in Moniquirá (595) and Socotá (601). This is a reflection of the political instability in New Granada during the first several decades. Encomiendas were often awarded and then redistributed when the balance of power shifted. But it is important to recognize that these communities had not remained completely isolated until López' visita.

315 Ibid., 589. The population figures given here are found in Eugenio Martínez' monograph on native tribute. They are based on the 1562 visita by Licentiate Angulo and are thus not extremely accurate. The actual figures from 1560 were probably much higher. Diccionario Geográfico de Colombia, Instituto Geográfico "Agustín Codazzi," Tomo I, (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1971) 179.

316 Eugenio Martínez, 590, 604, 592, 600 and 601-602.

317 Ibid., 594 and 595.

318 Pacheco, 482.

> catechism in Latin and Spanish, which the Indians repeat like parrots.[319]

Concern over the spiritual well-being of the natives was expressed in much of the early correspondence from New Granada to Spain. Missionaries blamed the Muiscas, their settlement patterns, and each other, for the dismal accomplishments of the Church over the first few decades. Friar Jerónimo de San Miguel criticized a group of Dominicans for wanting to abandon their positions in New Granada and instead move to Peru.[320] In a 1554 petition to the Crown, Juan de los Barrios wrote that the clergy in New Granada was made up of the "dregs" of Spanish society.[321] Friar Juan de Soto sent a letter to the Crown in which he begged the king to forbid "such idiots" from coming to New Granada. De Soto complained that the vast majority of priests did not know how to read or even how to pray. Instead, their skills were limited to "buying and selling, and setting a thousand bad examples."[322]

Bartolomé González de la Peña and Juan de Penagos both wrote that it was absolutely essential that priests be posted in every native settlement. González cited an example of a priest who was responsible for two pueblos. For a period of two months, the priest would teach the natives from one village and then move to the other for two months, and so on. Unfortunately, by the time he had returned to the first community, the natives had forgotten everything he had taught them and returned to their ancient idolatrous practices.[323]

Preaching the gospel to the native inhabitants of the Americas required

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319 Ibid., 483.

320 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. I, 36.

321 Antonio de Egaña, Historia de la iglesia en la América española, (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1966) 21.

322 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. II, 28.

323 Ibid., Vol. III, 252 and 357.

both a good knowledge of the native languages as well as an understanding of native religious beliefs.[324] Therefore, in order to do their duties effectively, missionaries in the New World found that they needed to know something of native languages, customs and traditions. The Spanish clergy in Peru, for example, had acquired a basic understanding of the native language and religious beliefs by the mid-sixteenth century.[325] The same can not be said for the clergy in New Granada. The first compendium of the Muisca language, Friar Bernardo de Lugo's Gramática, catecismo y confesionario de la lengua chibcha, was not written until 1617, almost six decades after Fray Domingo de Santo Tomás' Quechua dictionary and book of grammar were printed.[326] Furthermore, early Spanish settlers and clergy knew very little about the religious beliefs and practices of the Muiscas. The cronistas, for example, all emphasized the native's devotion to the sun and the moon. Simón claimed that the Muiscas worshipped the sun above all their other gods.[327] Royal officials in Spain also emphasized the importance of the sun to the Muiscas. In their correspondence they expressed their desire that officials in New Granada determine how much tribute the Muiscas offered to their sun temples.[328] However, these observations were probably more a reflection of Inca beliefs. Neither the sun nor the moon seem to have played important roles in Muisca mythology.[329] Instead, highland lakes such as Guatavita, Siecha, Tota, Fúquene

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324 Brading, 106.

325 MacCormack, 205.

326 Gómez, 442.

327 Simón, Vol. III, 377.

328 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. II, 112.

329 Pérez de Barradas, Vol. II, 442. The Muisca myth of creation, for example, told of a woman named Bachué who one day emerged from a very deep lake. A young boy of three years appeared with her and they lived together until he was old enough to marry her. The woman gave birth to four or six children at a time until the entire land was populated. There is no mention of the sun or the moon in this Muisca myth of creation. See Francisco Beltrán Peña, 68-69. According to Francisco Beltrán, the myth of Bachué originated in the south among the

and Iguaque appear to have been more significant in Muisca religious thought.[330]

Part of the explanation for the paucity of information concerning Muisca religious beliefs might be because Spanish officials, cronistas and members of the clergy could not always detect evidence of pagan activity. Spaniards complained constantly that Muisca sanctuaries were extremely difficult to find. Archbishop Juan de los Barrios wrote that Muisca sanctuaries were remarkably well hidden.[331] There were few of the "lavish objects," temples, or magnificent stone monuments that characterized many of the Inca state cults.[332] According to Simón, the Muiscas made many of their religious offerings in between high cliffs and crags, and sometimes even in streams or below waterfalls.[333] Simón added that the Indians sometimes conducted their "abominable rituals" at night, when their devilish activities could be hidden by darkness. However, even by day they would go undetected because they practiced their ceremonies within the protection of deep forests or thick bramble.[334]

Muisca settlement patterns caused considerable problems for the Spanish clergy. Members of the clergy insisted that an essential prerequisite to the successful conversion of the native population involved the reshaping of Muisca settlement patterns.[335] Plans to combine native communities into

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Muiscas from the sabana de Bogotá. An even more interesting myth of creation come from the region around Tunja. In this version, the first inhabitants of the earth were the caciques from Ramiriquí and Sogamoso. They created all people and it was they who gave light to the sun and the moon. It was thus man who created the sun and the moon and gave them their splendour, not vice-versa. Beltrán, 70.

330 Reichel-Dolmatoff, Colombia, 100.

331 Germán Romero, 52.

332 Mills, 1.

333 Simón, Vol. III, 387.

334 Ibid., Vol. IV, 344.

335 Colmenares, La provincia..., 13.

larger congregaciones began as early as the 1550s. Several attempts were made, but they were largely unsuccessful. In a 1558 letter to the Crown, Licentiate Grajeda explained that efforts to relocate the natives were frustrated because the Indians refused to move: "I am told that we have been unable to comply [with your request] because these people become very annoyed [when we try to move them]..."[336] However, by the end of the sixteenth century the native population had declined dramatically and with it the economic vitality of the encomienda system. Spanish administrators thus renewed their efforts to congregate settlements. In the 1590s and early 1600s, officials made repeated attempts to relocate and unite communities into larger congregaciones.[337] Most Indians resisted and usually had to be moved by force. Their houses often were burned to keep them from returning.[338] Yet despite Spanish efforts, attempts to relocate the Muisca were largely unsuccessful. Once Spanish officials left the congregaciones, Indians usually returned to their original settlements.[339] In 1600, for example, a Spanish visitador named Henríquez ordered the Indians from Ocusa, Chímiza, Chinantá and Gámeza to live together in the town of Zotaquirá. Years later it was discovered that they had all returned to their native communities.[340] Visitador Henríquez reported in 1600 that the natives of Oicatá had moved to their new village and dutifully had built their huts around the church. However, thirty-six years later, another visitador named Juan de Valcárcel discovered that, although there were still some huts and fences, the new village had been abandoned and was covered by

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336 Friede, Fuentes documentales..., Vol. III, 217. Spanish encomenderos might well have objected to any attempts to take away their tribute paying Indians.

337 Villamarín and Villamarín, "Chibcha Settlement Under...," 47.

338 Ibid., 47.

339 Ibid., 47.

340 Colmenares, La provincia..., 74.

grass. The natives had returned to Oicatá.[341]

The purpose of this examination into the spiritual conquest of the Muisca is not so much to criticize the achievements of early missionaries in New Granada, but rather it is an assessment of the role of the Church in the Hispanization of the indigenous peoples. There was undoubtedly a genuine concern on the part of many early missionaries and Spanish settlers for the spiritual well-being of the native population. However, such concerns did not mean that the Muiscas became Christian. When Simón wrote his chronicle during the first quarter of the sixteenth century, he commented that daily experiences in New Granada had taught him that even the most ladino Indians continued to worship their ancient idols.[342] Simón's observation implies that perhaps there was some continuity to Muisca religious life. In his study of Muisca civilization, Miguel Triana believed that after conquest the Muiscas held on tenaciously to their religious beliefs.[343] Unfortunately, because we know so little about Muisca religious beliefs, it is virtually impossible to understand how, or if, they changed after conquest. There are, however, a couple of examples that suggest that the religious encounter in New Granada was much more complex than the secondary literature indicates.

In a letter written to the Consejo de Indias on 1, January, 1568, a Spanish precentor named don Gonzalo Mejía described the appalling conditions of the churches in New Granada:

> All of the churches in the entire archbishopric are built of thatch; they are very old and about to fall, and when it rains they become filled with water, so much so that there is scarcely a place to kneel [for prayer.][344]

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341 Fals Borda, El hombre..., 57.
342 Simón, Vol. III, 387.
343 Triana, 79.
344 Germán Romero, 57-58.

Eight days before the letter was dratted, a Christian cacique named don Alonso had gone to Santa Fé to inform Spanish officials that the church in Fusagasugá was about to collapse. Don Alonso and the Indians from his community took it upon themselves to repair the damaged church and the reconstruction was undertaken without any clerical supervision. According to don Mejía, the cacique reprimanded the Spanish authorities in Santa Fé for their neglect and said that the Indians would never allow such things to happen to their sanctuaries.[345] The cacique claimed that when he first noticed that the church was about to collapse, he ordered a group of Indians to erect a large "post" next to the church to keep the church from falling. The "post" was said to have been extremely large, thick and very beautiful. What is not clear from the testimony is whether the "post" was made from stone or from wood. Stone monoliths (and perhaps wooden monoliths as well) were important symbols in Muisca cosmology, and it is thus possible that the 'repairs' ordered by the 'Christian' cacique were simply misunderstood by Spanish officials.

The second example occurred in the town of Cogua, located about eight to ten leagues from the city of Santa Fé. One of the Indians in the town had contracted smallpox and was near death. The Indian, according to Simón, had long since converted to Christianity and had lived the life of a good Christian. When the priest arrived at the home of the dying man, he was surprised to find the Indian's nephew holding a cross and praying over his uncle's body. The priest took the cross from the young man and began to administer the final sacraments. However, the initial satisfaction with the nephew's actions soon gave way to suspicion. The cross, which was made from palm leaf, weighed more than what the priest thought it should. He therefore unravelled the cross, and inside discovered a small gold idol that represented the Muisca deity

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345 Ibid., 57-58.

Bochica. The nephew was subsequently punished by the priest for allowing his uncle to die in such a state.[346]

Whether or not these examples can be described as some form of religious syncretism is not yet clear. Until we understand more about Muisca spiritual beliefs as well as their perceptions of Christianity, it is impossible to fully comprehend religious change in the sixteenth century. However, syncretism does imply that the natives knew something about Christian thought and it appears that there was very little religious instruction in New Granada in the early colonial period. Unlike in New Spain where more than four thousand Indian children of noble descent were sent to Franciscan missionaries to receive their education, Muisca children were never required to do the same.[347] A friar named Juan de Soto petitioned the Crown in 1553, asking that native caciques and principales be ordered to send their children to be educated by Spanish friars, but there is no evidence to suggest that that ever occurred. When the Jesuits first arrived in the Province of Tunja in the late sixteenth century, they found that large numbers of the elderly Indians had already been baptized. However, it was soon discovered that none of the natives understood what baptism meant, nor why they had been baptized. Thus, the Jesuits felt it necessary to baptize the Indians and teach them the catechism "sub conditione."[348]

To what extent Muisca religious beliefs changed after conquest has not been yet determined, but considering what we know about the religious experience in other parts of the New World, it is likely that native religion had to adjust and adapt to the changing conditions of colonial society in order to

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346 Simón, Vol. III, 387.
347 Brading, 103.
348 Pacheco, 497.

survive.[349] Indigenous religious systems remained significant because they changed.[350] It would thus be an oversimplification, and probably an incorrect one at that, to suggest that Muisca beliefs persisted intact under a Christian veneer. What we can conclude from the examination of the spiritual conquest in New Granada is that while religious beliefs may have been altered, the Muisca did not become Christians. The assumption that the natives quickly converted to Christianity is simply false.

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349 Of the many studies that address this question of religious adaptation and change, there are two in particular that stand out, both in their understanding of the topic and in their penetrating analysis of native religion after conquest. Nancy Fariss' Maya Society Under Colonial Rule and Kenneth Mills' more recent study, "The Religious Encounter in Mid-Colonial Peru," are essential to anyone interested in questions of religious change in the post-conquest period.

350 See Mills, 268.

Chapter V: Conclusion

> The Chibcha left no historic impress, no persisting influence on the modern life in their former area. They have also left surprisingly few physical monuments; their archaeology is meager. Even their speech died out long ago. It is clear that they achieved much less of a cultural construct in their day than the Mexicans or Peruvians.[351]

A.L. Kroeber's assessment of the Muisca published in the monumental Handbook of South American Indians epitomizes most of the assumptions found in the secondary literature. Muisca civilization has generally been ignored in discussions of the historical development of post-conquest society. The lack of rich material remains such as stone monuments, elaborate sculptures or temples, and the absence of large urban centers have led many scholars to conclude that Muisca culture was not particularly advanced or complex and that their achievements have been overemphasized. It generally has been accepted that after 1537 and the arrival of the Spaniards, the Muisca were rapidly absorbed into a dominant Spanish culture. The natives quickly assimilated and, within a short period of time, all remnants of Muisca civilization simply disappeared. As a result, discussions of the Muisca Indians are conspicuously absent from the historiography of New Granada.

The failure of historians to consider the importance of the Muisca

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351 A.L. Kroeber, "The Chibcha," Handbook of South American Indians, ed. Julian H. Steward, Vol. 2, (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1963) 887.

Indians in Colombian history is, however, more a reflection of the ethnocentricity that has dominated Colombian historical literature and more specifically, the Academy of Colombian history, than it is an indication of the realities of pre-columbian or post-conquest society. Far from being absorbed by Spanish culture, native peoples and institutions not only survived, but they also helped determine the evolution and development of society in colonial New Granada. Understanding the Muisca is thus essential to any reconstruction of Colombia's colonial past.

Indeed, the Muisca have been excluded from much of the historiography of New Granada, in part because of the paucity of traditional historical evidence. It is likely that the limited sources, both written and archaeological, have discouraged some scholars from ever addressing the topic. The nature of the secondary literature suggests that there have been few, if any, real attempts by Colombian historians to utilize materials and methodologies adopted by other disciplines. Historians must move beyond the rigid confinements of traditional methods and source material. More importantly, scholars need to approach and examine both the new and the old sources with more imagination, creativity and thoroughness. A multi-disciplinary approach, combining evidence from the archaeological record, Spanish chronicles, ecclesiastical records, political correspondence, sixteenth and seventeenth-century visitas, as well as materials and methods utilized by demographers and historical geographers, has helped provide the breadth essential to understanding Muisca society. While many questions remain unanswered, this initial use of interdisciplinary evidence has revealed much about the Muiscas that hitherto had been absent from the historical literature, the implications from which fundamentally alter traditional perceptions of Muisca society.

What is most evident from this inquiry into Muisca history is that the Muisca world was far more complex than historians or anthropologists traditionally have assumed. Muisca economic and political organization, while not yet fully understood, reflected a remarkable degree of regional diversity and adaptation to local environments. The nature of trade, 'tribute,' and the accumulation and distribution of goods, both within Muisca territory and beyond, implied a level of political and economic sophistication that scholars either have neglected or have oversimplified. The success of the indigenous economic system was not based simply on the propitious environment characteristic of Muisca territory, with its climatic variations, fertile soils and adequate water supply. Muisca communities successfully exploited the resources available in the different micro-environments and created an extensive and complex trade network through which products from vastly diverse ecological zones were acquired and circulated.

Scholars need to re-evaluate our traditional interpretations of political divisions within Muisca society as well as the roles of local political authorities. We know almost nothing, for example, about the functions performed by Muisca caciques, or their association with the communities over which they governed. The essence of pre-conquest 'tribute' payments reflected certain political or perhaps religious arrangements between caciques and their subjects that early European observers did not comprehend. Carl Langabaek's hypothesis that what Spaniards classified as native tribute was instead a complex system of trade, ritual offering and redistribution demands more scholarly attention. Such economic arrangements and political relationships however, can not be fully appreciated by limiting our discussions and analysis of Muisca political organization to the Zipa, Zaque and the three other pre-colonial confederations. Furthermore, the post-conquest break-down of the

five dominant political units did not necessarily result in the collapse of authority at the local level. A closer examination of sixteenth and seventeenth-century visitas, with an emphasis on regional variations, will shed light on these questions. Scholars should also be encouraged to investigate written and archaeological evidence from neighbouring indigenous groups such as the Guanes, Laches, Muzos and Panches.

The pre-conquest population density in Muisca territory was at least two or three times higher than has been estimated. Nevertheless, a pre-columbian population of three million is probably still a conservative figure and further archaeological evidence might suggest that the number of indigenous inhabitants in central Colombia was even higher. Of course, the precise demographic figures are not as important to the historian as what the general patterns of demographic change imply. While most scholars have accepted that the Muisca population was relatively high on the eve of conquest, estimates rarely have exceeded one million for the entire region. These modest estimates have helped shape the perceptions of Muisca society, its institutions and its cultural achievements. What this new demographic data suggests is that Muisca economic and political organization was indeed capable of supporting a much larger internal population than has been assumed.

Historians must have an awareness of population trends both in their assessments of the pre-colonial Muiscas, and in their interpretations of change in post-conquest society. That the indigenous population declined by almost 90% within the first one hundred years after the initial contact with Europeans is crucial to understanding how native society was altered by the arrival of the Spaniards. It is not enough simply to explain that the indigenous population declined after conquest. One must attempt to understand the impact of population loss on native political and economic institutions, settlement

patterns, and although much more difficult to comprehend, belief systems. Demographic data thus becomes a powerful explanatory tool that helps scholars better comprehend the process of change in early colonial New Granada.

To what extent Muisca society was altered after conquest is a question that demands further inquiry. However, the common assumptions that the indigenous peoples of central Colombia disappeared and left no "historic impress" on society are quite simply incorrect. The failure of the spiritual conquest raises considerable doubts as to the effectiveness of Spanish institutions in New Granada. The Church did not play an important role in the Hispanization of the Muiscas. Spanish officials also failed in their persistent efforts to congregate Muisca villages. Throughout the early colonial period, Muisca communities successfully resisted Spanish attempts to relocate their native settlements into larger congregaciones.

Historians need to examine the nature of colonial society in greater detail, with an appreciation of what we know about the pre-columbian world of the Muisca. The evolution of colonial society must be viewed as a process in which Spaniards and natives interacted. Without a better understanding of Muisca society, its institutions, organization, customs and traditions, it becomes impossible to comprehend the nature of the historical development of New Granada. What scholars likely will discover is that despite a burgeoning Spanish population, the rapid introduction of European crops and livestock, and the spread of Old World diseases (the combined pressures from which might have been greater in New Granada than any other part of the New World), the region remained characteristically Muisca through most of the early colonial period.

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