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Author(s): Steven W. Hackel

Source: *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Apr., 1997), pp. 347-376

Published by: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2953277>

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# The Staff of Leadership: Indian Authority in the Missions of Alta California

Steven W. Hackel

IN 1769, Spain set out to defend the Pacific Coast against settlement by other European powers by developing a series of colonial outposts that eventually stretched from San Diego to San Francisco. In this region, known to Europeans as Alta California, Spain depended on religious missions more than military fortifications or civilian towns to solidify its control. During the second half of the eighteenth century, missions had declined in importance in the rest of northern New Spain. In 1767, the crown expelled the Jesuits from Spain and its colonies and gradually converted most surviving missions in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas to parishes overseen by secular priests.<sup>1</sup> But in Alta California, Franciscan missions steadily increased in number and power as the most important centers of interaction between Indians and Spaniards. By 1821, when Spanish rule gave way to Mexican independence, roughly 70,000 Indians had been baptized in the region's twenty missions. Even after more than five decades of demographic disaster brought on by the ravages of disease, mission Indians still outnumbered Spanish settlers and soldiers 21,750 to 3,400; missions outnumbered military garrisons by a ratio of five to one and civilian settlements by six to one.<sup>2</sup>

The Franciscans' strategies to convert and control Indians in Alta California have sparked an intense debate that has recently involved the general public as well as scholars. Public interest has focused on the canonization of Fray Junípero Serra, founding father of the California missions, and more generally on Indian-Spanish relations in those missions.<sup>3</sup> Promoters of the Spanish colonial past portray the Franciscans as saving childlike Indians

Steven W. Hackel is an assistant professor of history at Oregon State University. He thanks Amy Turner Bushnell, Ramón A. Gutiérrez, Ronald Hoffman, Albert L. Hurtado, Karen Ordahl Kupperman, David G. LaFrance, Neal Salisbury, James A. Sandos, Fredrika J. Teute, and David J. Weber for their encouragement and comments. He is grateful to the participants at an Institute Colloquium where an earlier version of this article was discussed and to the National Endowment for the Humanities and The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation for financial support. Tina Chovanec of Chovanec Designs prepared the maps.

<sup>1</sup> David J. Weber, "The Spanish-Mexican Rim," in *The Oxford History of the American West*, ed. Clyde A. Milner II, Carol A. O'Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss (New York, 1994), 65; Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque, 1982), 43-60.

<sup>2</sup> Population estimates are for 1820. Peter Gerhard, *The North Frontier of New Spain* (Princeton, 1993; orig. pub. 1982), 309.

<sup>3</sup> The debate over the canonization of Father Serra has been summarized cogently by James A. Sandos, "Junípero Serra's Canonization and the Historical Record," *American Historical Review*, 93 (1988), 1253-69.

from savagism; detractors depict the missions as brutal labor camps, committed to cultural genocide.<sup>4</sup> Although participants in this dispute have generated a considerable number of articles and books, the involvement of Indian leaders in the running of the California missions remains largely unexplored.<sup>5</sup> Neither side has sufficiently examined the extent to which the missions depended on the persistence of Indian leadership, nor has either explored how Indian authority was created and legitimated within the missions.

Most Alta California missions counted between 500 and 1,000 Indian residents, two missionaries, and a military guard of four or five soldiers. Because their numbers were few and their resources limited, Spaniards looked to Indian leaders to help organize and regulate the missions' life and work. To this end, they instituted and directed annual elections in which the mission community chose its own officials, thereby enabling Spanish religious and military authorities to rule Indians through Indians. This system, though hierarchical in form, was flexible in operation. Indian officials not only served the needs of Spanish overlords, but they also protected the interests of the Indian community and, in some cases, ultimately rebelled against the Spanish order.

Recent studies of Indian communities in colonial America have noted the importance of Indian leaders and the challenges of their position. Colonists frequently tried to advance their objectives by co-opting Indian leaders, on whom they attempted to impose European forms of leadership. This practice involved a risk, for Indian leaders could subvert as well as implement colonial objectives. They, too, had much to gain though even more to lose in these encounters, for by participating in European systems

<sup>4</sup> Notable examples of the pro-Franciscan interpretation are Zephyrin Engelhardt, *The Missions and Missionaries of California*, 4 vols. (San Francisco, 1908–1916); Maynard J. Geiger, *The Life and Times of Fray Junipero Serra, O.F.M.*, 2 vols. (Washington, D. C., 1959); Francis F. Guest, "An Inquiry into the Role of the Discipline in California Mission Life," *Southern California Quarterly*, 71 (1989), 1–68; and Guest, "Cultural Perspectives on California Mission Life," *ibid.*, 65 (1983), 1–65. Critics include Rupert Costo and Jeannette Henry Costo, eds., *The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide* ([San Francisco], 1987); Sherburne F. Cook, *The Conflict between the California Indian and White Civilization* (Berkeley, 1976); Robert F. Heizer, "Impact of Colonization on the Native California Societies," *Journal of San Diego History*, 24 (Winter 1978), 121–39; Edward D. Castillo, "The Impact of Euro-American Exploration and Settlement," in Heizer, ed., *California*, vol. 8 of William C. Sturtevant, gen. ed., *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington, D. C., 1978), 99–127; Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687–1840* (Albuquerque, 1994); and Jackson and Castillo, *Indians, Franciscans, and Spanish Colonization: The Impact of the Mission System on California Indians* (Albuquerque, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Scholars have maintained that the Indians who served as officials derived their authority solely from the Spaniards, not from their own people, and acted as overseers, not community representatives. George Harwood Phillips, "The Alcaldes: Indian Leadership in the Spanish Missions of California," in *The Struggle for Political Autonomy: Papers and Comments from the Second Newberry Library Conference on Themes in American History*, Occasional Papers in Curriculum Series, No. 11 (Chicago, 1989), 83–89; Castillo, "The Other Side of the 'Christian Curtain': California Indians and the Missionaries," *The Californian: The Magazine of California History*, 10 (Sept.–Oct. 1992), 8–17; Robert L. Hoover, "Spanish-Native Interaction and Acculturation in the Alta California Missions," in David Hurst Thomas, ed., *Columbian Consequences*, vol. 1: *Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on the Spanish Borderlands West* (Washington, D. C., 1989), 397.

of governance, they could foster or hinder their own autonomy as well as that of their communities. Indians, therefore, responded in a variety of ways to imposed forms of governance, and Europeans accommodated those forms to the communities they sought to control. These responses and accommodations are crucial to the ethnohistory of all of colonial America from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth, from New France to New England to New Spain.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> An extensive literature discusses the intersection of Indian and Spanish structures of authority in Mesoamerican communities. An important early work is Pedro Carrasco, "The Civil-Religious Hierarchy in Mesoamerican Communities: Pre-Spanish Background and Colonial Development," *American Anthropologist*, 63 (1961), 483-97. Charles Gibson argued that the institutionalization of the Spanish municipal system in Indian towns led to a displacement of Indian leadership lineages, and by the late colonial period Indian town councils "functioned principally to collect tribute and to dispense minor punishments," in *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (Stanford, 1964), quotation on 191, and see esp. 166-93; Gibson, "Rotation of Alcaldes in the Indian Cabildo of Mexico City," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 33 (1953), 212-23.

Recent literature emphasizes the persistence of Indian sociopolitical structures in Indian towns throughout the colonial period; Robert Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers: An Ethnohistory of Town Government in Colonial Cuernavaca* (Albuquerque, 1991), "Indian Town Government in Colonial Cuernavaca: Persistence, Adaptation, and Change," *HAHR*, 67 (1987), 203-31, and "Living in Two Worlds: Cultural Continuity and Change among Cuernavaca's Colonial Indigenous Ruling Elite," *Ethnohistory*, 35 (1988), 34-59; James Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, 1992), 28-58; William B. Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford, 1972), 35-66; John K. Chance, *Conquest of the Sierra: Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Oaxaca* (Norman, Okla., 1989), 123-50; Ronald Spores, *The Mixtecs in Ancient and Colonial Times* (Norman, Okla., 1984), 165-86. On indirect rule in the Yucatan see Nancy Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton, 1984), esp. 86-114, 231-37.

Some of the most interesting discussions of indirect rule in the Spanish empire focus on Peru: Steve J. Stern, "The Rise and Fall of Indian-White Alliances: A Regional View of 'Conquest' History," *HAHR*, 61 (1981), 461-91, and *Peru's Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640* (Madison, 1982); and Karen Spalding, "Social Climbers: Changing Patterns of Mobility among the Indians of Colonial Peru," *HAHR*, 50 (1970), 645-64, "Kurakas and Commerce: A Chapter in the Evolution of Andean Society," *ibid.*, 53 (1973), 581-99, and *Huarochiri: An Andean Society under Inca and Spanish Rule* (Stanford, 1984). For Florida see Amy Turner Bushnell, "Ruling 'the Republic of Indians' in Seventeenth-Century Florida," in *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast*, ed. Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley (Lincoln, 1989), 134-50, and John H. Hann, *Apalachee: The Land between the Rivers* (Gainesville, 1988), 102.

For the persistence of native leaders in mission communities of the northeast see Jean O'Brien, "Community Dynamics in the Indian-English Town of Natick, Massachusetts, 1650-1790" (Ph. D. diss., University of Chicago, 1990), 12-13, 40-41, 62-63; Susan L. MacCulloch, "A Tripartite Political System among Christian Indians of Early Massachusetts," *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers*, No. 34 (1966), 63-73; Elise M. Brenner, "To Pray or to Be Prey, That Is the Question: Strategies for Cultural Autonomy of Massachusetts Praying Town Indians," *Ethnohistory*, 27 (1980), 135-52, esp. 143-44. For assertions that the Puritan missions constituted an attack on Indian leadership see Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill, 1975), 228-53. On Indian leaders and Jesuit missions consult Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 112, 118, and "Iroquois versus Iroquois: Missions and Christianity in Village Politics, 1642-1686," *Ethnohistory*, 32 (1985), 1-16.

After giving an overview of the Indians of Alta California and the colonial strategies of the Spaniards who settled among them, this article analyzes the system of elections and the responsibilities of Indian officials in the missions and identifies patterns of Indian leadership among the men who served as officials. These patterns, which are most visible at Mission San Carlos Borromeo on the Monterey peninsula, reveal a complex interplay of Indian and Spanish priorities. At first, the Spanish system of indirect rule relied on Indians who held power in their own communities before the missions were founded. Later, annual elections promoted new Indian leaders, from whose ranks came men who instigated rebellions against the Franciscans in the 1820s and reorganized Indian communities after the missions collapsed in the 1830s. Thus the Spaniards' use of and dependence on Indian officials reveal a noteworthy paradox of the colonial history of the Americas: indirect rule not only reshaped Indian lives, but it also provided Indians with the means and the personnel to retain control over some aspects of their communities, in some areas long after the collapse of colonial rule.

In California, Spaniards encountered the most linguistically diverse and densely settled native population in all North America. Estimating that 310,000 Indians lived within the boundaries of the present state on the eve of Spanish colonization, scholars have classified these Indians into six culture areas and at least ninety distinct languages.<sup>7</sup> Spanish settlement was concentrated in the coastal region between San Diego and San Francisco, where Indians probably numbered around 60,000 in 1769.<sup>8</sup> As settlement spread north from San Diego, it most directly and immediately affected the Tipai and Ipai around San Diego, the Luiseño to their immediate north, the Gabriolino of Los Angeles, the Chumash of the Santa Barbara region, the Yokuts of the Central Valley, the Salinan, Esselen, and Costanoan of the central coast, and the Miwok, Wappo, and Pomo of the San Francisco Bay area. These classifications simplify a complex mosaic, for Indians encompassed by them lived in semisedentary settlements of 100 to 1,000 people, and language and culture often varied from village to village. Trade, marriage, and ritual connected these communities, but most villages steadfastly maintained autonomy and protected their areas against encroachment.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cook, *The Population of the California Indians, 1769-1970* (Berkeley, 1976), 43. The speculative methodologies that Cook and others have used to estimate precontact native populations are the subject of John D. Daniels, "The Indian Population of North America in 1492," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., 49 (1992), 298-320. On Indian languages in California see Michael J. Moratto, *California Archaeology* (New York, 1984), 530-74, and William F. Shipley, "Native Languages of California," in Heizer, ed., *California*, 80-90.

<sup>8</sup> Cook, *Population of the California Indians*, 20-43; Gerhard, *North Frontier of New Spain*, 309.

<sup>9</sup> Heizer and Albert B. Elsasser, *The Natural World of the California Indians* (Berkeley, 1980); Julia G. Costello and David Hornbeck, "Alta California: An Overview," in Thomas, ed., *Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on the Spanish Borderlands West*, 304-08; James T. Davis, "Trade Routes and Economic Exchange among the Indians of California," *Reports of the University of California Archaeological Survey*, No. 54 (Berkeley, 1961).

Despite this great linguistic and cultural diversity, Indians in Alta California pursued a common subsistence strategy. They were hunter-gatherers who used burning, irrigation, and pruning to maximize food sources.<sup>10</sup> Women collected and processed the acorns, seeds, roots, and berries that constituted the mainstay of the diet; men fished and hunted game, birds, and sea mammals. Crafts were also divided by sex: women wove baskets, clothes, and household articles; men made tools and weapons.<sup>11</sup>

Social organization in precontact California is poorly understood, but recent studies suggest that villages—the principal unit of organization—were stratified into a ruling elite, commoners, and an underclass. The elite was treated with respect, awe, and caution by commoners, who had no rank, and the underclass, who had no formal ties to an intact lineage. Social status was ascribed and authority was distributed hierarchically: elite males inherited political, religious, and economic power through their fathers' lines. Access to power and control of ritual knowledge distinguished the elite, who also wore the finest clothes, inhabited the largest houses, and avoided manual labor. The community owned the village land, but the elite determined its use. At the top of the village hierarchy stood a chief, who oversaw the production, allocation, and trade of the community's food and material goods.<sup>12</sup> This was the complex and stratified Indian world Spain sought to control after 1769.

In California, soldiers and friars drew on policies, developed during the Reconquest of the Iberian peninsula and refined through two and a half centuries of colonization in New Spain, that promoted the incorporation of frontier peoples and regions into the expanding Spanish realm. In the Reconquest, the *municipio* (township) emerged as the principal vehicle through which new territories were settled and secured, and in the New World it became the primary form of local political organization.<sup>13</sup> In areas

<sup>10</sup> For a collection of articles that discusses how California Indians modified their environment to increase food yields see Thomas C. Blackburn and Kat Anderson, eds., *Before the Wilderness: Environmental Management by Native Californians* (Menlo Park, Calif., 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Edith Wallace, "Sexual Status and Role Differences," in Heizer, ed., *California*, 683–84; Nora Christensen Willoughby, "Division of Labor among the Indians of California," *Reports of the University of California Archaeological Survey*, No. 60 (Berkeley, 1963), reprinted in *Ethnology of the Alta California Indians*, vol. 1: *Precontact*, ed. Lowell John Bean and Sylvia Brakke Vane (New York, 1991), 427–99.

<sup>12</sup> Bean, "Social Organization," in Heizer, ed., *California*, 673–82; Bean, "Power and Its Applications in Native California," in *Native Californians: A Theoretical Retrospective*, ed. Bean and Blackburn (Ramona, Calif., 1976), 407–20. Jeanne E. Arnold provides a theoretical discussion of the rise of cultural complexity in the precontact Chumash, in "Complex Hunter-Gatherer-Fishers of Prehistoric California: Chiefs, Specialists, and Maritime Adaptations of the Channel Islands," *American Antiquity*, 57 (1992), 60–84.

<sup>13</sup> Lyle N. McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World, 1492–1700* (Minneapolis, 1984), 133–52; Mario Góngora, *Studies in the Colonial History of Spanish America*, trans. Richard Southern (Cambridge, 1975), 98–107; John E. Kicza, "Patterns in Early Spanish Overseas Expansion," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., 49 (1992), 233. For an introduction to the literature on Spanish municipal planning in North America see Dora P. Crouch, Daniel J. Garr, and Axel I. Mundigo, *Spanish City Planning in North America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), and Garr, ed., *Hispanic Urban Planning in North America* (New York, 1991).

settled by Spain, formal attachment to a municipality was not an option but a legal requirement and one of the preconditions for a productive and civilized life. As early as 1501, Ferdinand and Isabella instructed Nicolás de Ovando, the first royal governor of Hispaniola, to ensure that none of that island's Christian inhabitants "lives outside the communities that are to be made on the said island."<sup>14</sup> Within a few years, the monarchs extended a similar requirement to Indians: in 1503, they ordered Ovando to gather the Indians into towns in order to facilitate their economic integration and religious instruction.<sup>15</sup> This policy of *congregación* became a basic strategy for community organization and social control in virtually all of New Spain, especially after Old World diseases had decimated native populations.<sup>16</sup>

To eighteenth-century Spaniards, the California Indians' small huts and scattered villages were a sure indication of a savage and undisciplined existence. Like their predecessors elsewhere in New Spain, the Franciscans took as their first goal the resettlement of Indians into compact villages. In Alta California, as in Baja California and Sonora, where Indian settlements were dispersed, missionaries combined coercion and incentives to create new, large, Indian communities.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, disease reduced the Indian population, undercut the native economy, and prompted Indians to relocate to the missions. As a result, Indians from different villages, who had had only occasional contact in trade or war, began to live, work, and pray together.

Officials in New Spain used the Castilian *cabildo* (town council) as a model for the political organization of these new Indian communities as well as of their own. In Spain, most towns were governed by a council composed of six to twelve *regidores* (councilmen). Regidores usually represented the economic interests of the most important families, and they served long tenures, sometimes for life. Two *alcaldes* (judges) served ex officio on the town council, but unlike regidores, who were their social superiors, they rotated off the cabildo after a single year in office.<sup>18</sup> A *corregidor*, a crown-

<sup>14</sup> "Royal Instructions to Ovando" (1501), in Gibson, ed., *The Spanish Tradition in America* (New York, 1968), 55–57, quotation on 56.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain: 1523–1572*, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley, 1966), 136.

<sup>16</sup> McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World*, 170–73; Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, trans. Simpson, 136–37. For Spanish attempts to relocate Indians in Florida into sedentary settlements see Bushnell, "The Sacramental Imperative: Catholic Ritual and Indian Sedentism in the Provinces of Florida," in *Columbian Consequences*, vol. 2: *Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on the Spanish Borderlands East* (Washington, D.C., 1990), ed. Thomas, 475–90. The English and French also wanted Indians to settle into compact towns, but their attempts were neither as far-reaching nor as effective. On French and English policies toward Indians see James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York, 1985), 43–70, 131–78.

<sup>17</sup> The congregation of Alta California Indians into missions is discussed in Jackson, *Indian Population Decline*, 37–41. In some areas of northern New Spain, like New Mexico, most Indians lived in compact communities before the Spaniards' arrival; Edward H. Spicer, *Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico, and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533–1960* (Tucson, 1962), 288.

<sup>18</sup> Lockhart, *Nahuas after the Conquest*, 36; J. H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469–1716* (New York, 1990; orig. pub. 1963), 93–97.

appointed outsider who represented both the town and the central government, presided over the *cabildo*. True to this model, most Spanish towns in the Americas were administered by a *cabildo* composed of four to eight *regidores*, two elected *alcaldes*, and various minor officials, all governing in concert with an *adelantado* or a governor.<sup>19</sup> These New World *cabildos*, whose members were usually *encomenderos* or Spaniards with aristocratic pretensions, had authority over the basics of urban life: they drafted ordinances, punished wrongdoing, and regulated the local economy.<sup>20</sup>

As conquered peoples, Indians rarely served on Spanish *cabildos*, but they retained a measure of control over their communities through annually elected *cabildos* of their own.<sup>21</sup> Known collectively as the "Republic of Indians," these councils by the late seventeenth century were regulated by the *Recopilación de leyes de los reynos de las Indias*, which prescribed the frequency of elections and the number of officials. Most Indian *cabildos* in New Spain were composed of a governor, several *regidores* and *alcaldes*, and various lesser officials, in numbers proportional to the population of the settlement.<sup>22</sup>

In establishing Indian *cabildos* in New Spain, Spaniards accommodated and to a certain extent institutionalized Indian forms of social and political organization.<sup>23</sup> In central Mexico, newly appointed Indian governors continued the roles of preconquest dynastic rulers: they had judicial and financial responsibilities and oversaw the use of land.<sup>24</sup> These governors, who were assigned to assist in the collection of tribute, marshal military support for the Spaniards, and promote the spread of Catholicism, retained or increased their sizable landholdings and the economic advantages they derived from them.<sup>25</sup> Although their participation in the collection of taxes and in the exploitative *encomienda* (royal grant of Indian tribute and labor) and *repartimiento* (forced labor draft) led to frequent disputes between them and their communities, Indian governors could limit the Spaniards' demands through litigation.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> An *adelantado* was a royal deputy. The title was granted by the Spanish crown to the conquerors and founders of new colonies.

<sup>20</sup> McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World*, 135; Góngora, *Studies in the Colonial History of Spanish America*, 100-02; C. H. Haring, *The Spanish Empire in America* (New York, 1963; orig. pub. 1947), 147-65. An *encomendero* held a royal grant of the tribute and, occasionally, the labor of a specified number of Indians. In return, he was to provide military service to the crown and spiritual guidance for his allotted Indians.

<sup>21</sup> Góngora, *Studies in the Colonial History of Spanish America*, 110, 116-19; McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World*, 395-96; Bushnell, "Ruling 'the Republic of Indians,'" 137-39.

<sup>22</sup> Book 6, title 3, law 15, *Recopilación de leyes de los reynos de las Indias*, 4 vols. (Madrid, 1681). For an English translation of this law see "The Indian Cause in the Spanish Laws of the Indies," *American West Center Occasional Paper*, No. 16 (Salt Lake City, 1980), 115. The Republic of Indians was, ideally, to be segregated from Spanish society, yet its religious and political institutions would be modeled after Spain's.

<sup>23</sup> See note 6.

<sup>24</sup> Among the responsibilities of the Indian governors were protecting the community from excessive demands, collecting rents, keeping the community treasury, confirming elections in subject cities, allocating land, hearing minor cases "concerning debts, petty theft, assault, and the local market," and apprehending criminals; Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers*, 99-102.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> Indian governors initiated or threatened court cases over "land usurpation, boundary conflicts, water-rights struggles, and rental disputes," according to Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers*,



The responsibilities of Indian *alcaldes* and *regidores* in central Mexico also blended Indian leadership responsibilities with Castilian political forms. These officials collected tribute and organized labor, handled local land deals, oversaw the apprehension of criminals, supported the local church, and, through litigation, tried to protect the interests of the community.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the governor, *alcaldes*, and *regidores*, most Indian *cabildos* had a religious official known as a *fiscal*. Because there were so few missionaries in New Spain, *fiscales* frequently held wide-ranging responsibilities. Elected or appointed annually, they managed local church finances, rang bells for mass, and gathered parishioners for religious celebrations. At a minimum, *fiscales* were "church constables" who punished villagers for violating Catholic teachings, but usually they were full members of the *cabildo*; most had previously served as *regidores* or *alcaldes*.<sup>28</sup> All together, the officials of the *cabildo* formed an elite that controlled many of the most important aspects of Indian community life in New Spain.<sup>29</sup>

As the seventeenth century drew to a close, Spanish settlement in northern New Spain took different forms than in central Mexico. *Presidios* (military garrisons) and missions became the primary means for extending Spanish control into the region and for protecting the silver mines and the roads linking them to central Mexico.<sup>30</sup> In Nueva Galicia, Nueva Vizcaya, Baja California, and Sonora, many factors limited the full elaboration of Indian *cabildos*: the loose organization of Indian settlements, the resistance of many Indians to Spanish intrusion, the waning of the *encomienda* and *repartimiento*, and the priorities of the Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries who oversaw the appointment and election of Indian officials.<sup>31</sup> In these northern areas, although Indian officials rarely sat on full-blown *cabildos*, they nevertheless held a wide range of offices. Most of the Indian communities in these regions were based on a mission, and many of these offices were tied to the mission church. Thus, as Spaniards advanced into the far reaches of northern New Spain during the eighteenth century, they adapted the *cabildo* as a model for the political organization of new communities.<sup>32</sup>

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101. For legal channels open to Indians in New Spain see Woodrow Borah, *Justice by Insurance: The General Indian Court of Colonial Mexico and the Legal Aides of the Half-Real* (Berkeley, 1983).

<sup>27</sup> Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers*, 104–07.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 114–16; Chance, *Conquest of the Sierra*, 154.

<sup>29</sup> Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers*, 95–123.

<sup>30</sup> J. H. Parry, *The Audiencia of New Galicia in the Sixteenth Century: A Study in Spanish Colonial Government* (Cambridge, 1948); Philip Wayne Powell, *Soldiers, Indians, and Silver: The Northward Advance of New Spain, 1550–1600* (Berkeley, 1952).

<sup>31</sup> On the persistence and decline of *encomienda* and *repartimiento* in northern New Spain see José Cuello, "The Persistence of Indian Slavery and *Encomienda* in the Northeast of Colonial Mexico, 1577–1723," *Journal of Social History*, 21 (1988), 683–700, and Susan M. Deeds, "Rural Work in Nueva Vizcaya: Forms of Labor Coercion on the Periphery," *HAHR*, 69 (1989), 425–49.

<sup>32</sup> Indian officials in these regions donned the following titles: *gobernador*, *veniente de gobernador*, *capitán*, *sargento*, *alférez*, *alcalde*, *regidor*, *fiscal*, *alguacil*, *ropil*, *sacristán*, and *cantor*. An overview of Spanish attempts to introduce a Spanish governmental system among the Indians of Sonora and New Mexico is provided by Spicer, *Cycles of Conquest*, 289–91, 303–04, 328, 388–95.

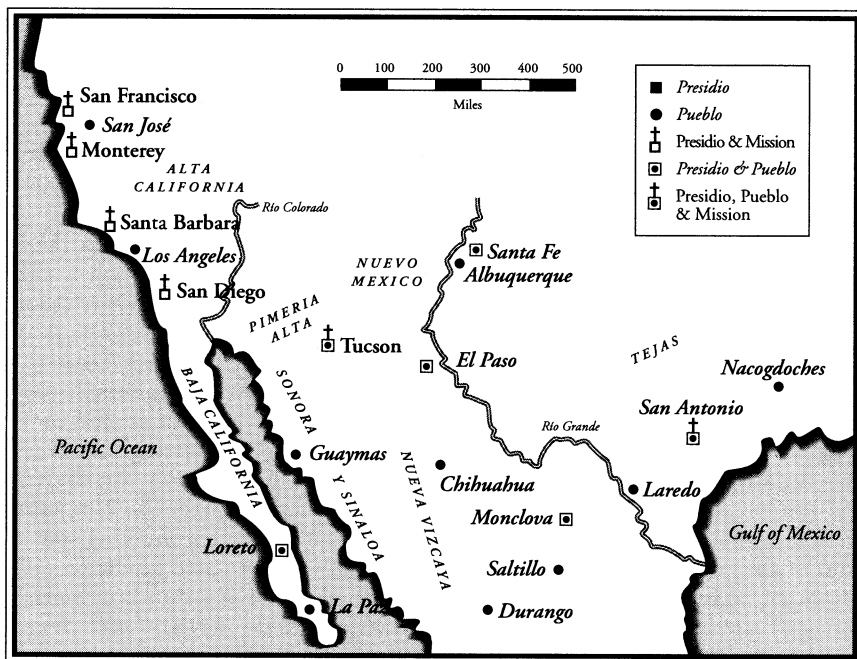


FIGURE I  
Selected Spanish Settlements in Northern New Spain, ca. 1785

In December 1778, after a decade of Franciscan activity in Alta California and the founding of eight missions, Felipe de Neve, military and civil governor of California, ordered the Franciscans to allow the Indians in the oldest missions to elect their own *alcaldes* and *regidores*. Neve based his order on historical precedent and his interpretation of the *Recopilación*. Missions San Diego (1769) and San Carlos Borromeo (1770) were to proceed

Indian officials in Nueva Vizcaya are discussed in Deeds, "Indigenous Responses to Mission Settlement in Nueva Vizcaya," in *The New Latin American Mission History*, ed. Erick Langer and Robert H. Jackson (Lincoln, 1995), 82–83, 88–89, and William B. Griffen, *Indian Assimilation in the Franciscan Area of Nueva Vizcaya* (Tucson, 1979), 45. On Sonora see John L. Kessell, *Friars, Soldiers, and Reformers: Hispanic Arizona and the Sonora Mission Frontier, 1767–1856* (Tucson, 1976), 71–72, Evelyn Hu-DeHart, *Missionaries, Miners, and Indians: Spanish Contact with the Yaqui Nation of Northwestern New Spain, 1533–1820* (Tucson, 1981), 32–36, and Cynthia Radding, "Ethnicity and the Emerging Peasant Class of Northwestern New Spain, 1760–1840" (Ph. D. diss., University of California at San Diego, 1990), 53, 80, 105–06, 139, 450–55. Ramón A. Gutiérrez discusses how Indians in New Mexico understood their town officials, in *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500–1846* (Stanford, 1991), 156–61. The role of Indian officials in the missions of Texas is discussed in Mardith Keithly Schuetz, "The Indians of the San Antonio Missions, 1718–1821" (Ph. D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1980), 254–67.

with the election of two *alcaldes* and two *regidores*; smaller, more recently founded missions, such as San Antonio (1771), San Gabriel (1771), and San Luis Obispo (1772), were to elect one *alcalde* and one *regidor*.<sup>33</sup> On election, each official was to report to the nearest military garrison, where the commander would install him in office in the name of the king. The presidial commander would then give the official the certificate he needed to exercise his powers; *alcaldes* also received a large wooden staff of leadership that symbolized their authority.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the acceptance of Indian officials in missions elsewhere in New Spain, the Franciscans in Alta California bitterly opposed the elections. The ensuing conflict between Neve and the friars emerged not from Franciscan objections to indirect rule but from suspicions between secular and religious officials in New Spain that deepened during the late eighteenth century. Although Roman Catholicism was the official religion of Spain, church and state officials held opposing views about the origin of civil authority, and each claimed ultimate jurisdiction over Indians. Royal jurists increasingly insisted that the king was the vicar of Christ and that the power to oversee the church and instruct Indians therefore resided, first and foremost, with the king and his representatives. Clerics and canon lawyers maintained that the king was a vicar of the pope and that the church was therefore the principal protector and instructor of Indians.<sup>35</sup> These disputes intensified under the Bourbon ascendancy. They became urgent after Spain's defeat in the Seven Years' War, when Charles III (1759–1788) and his ministers set out to bolster royal authority by curtailing the powers of the Catholic church and strengthening the economy of New Spain.<sup>36</sup>

True to the spirit of the Bourbon reforms, the first military and civil administrators of Alta California brought to their posts an official hostility to religious orders in general and missions in particular, which they saw as impediments to the transformation of Indians into useful subjects of the king. In 1767, just two years before the Franciscans founded the first mission in Alta California, Charles III expelled the Jesuits from New Spain because

<sup>33</sup> The only record of Neve's original order is Fray Fermín Francisco de Lasuén's response, Jan. 25, 1779, in *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, ed. and trans. Finbar Kenneally, 2 vols. (Washington, D. C., 1965), 1:75–77. Neve notified Teodoro de Croix, commander general of the interior provinces of his directive, Feb. 24, 1779 (copy certified in Monterey, Nov. 15, 1796), ramo Californias, tomo 65, expediente 7, fol. 303r, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Mexico City, Mexico. De Croix sent his approval, July 28, 1779, *ibid.*, fol. 304r. The most recently established missions at San Francisco (1776), San Juan Capistrano (1776), and Santa Clara (1777) were exempt from the governor's orders.

<sup>34</sup> This process is described in Lasuén to Neve, Jan. 25, 1779, in *Writings of Lasuén*, ed. Kenneally, 1:74. *Regidores* apparently did not carry a staff; Serra to Lasuén, [Mar. 29], 1779, *Writings of Juntpero Serra*, 4 vols., ed. Antonine Tibesar (Washington, D. C., 1955–66), 3:295. All quotations of Serra are my translations from the Spanish text in Tibesar. All other translations, with the exception of the letters by Lasuén, are mine.

<sup>35</sup> Gutiérrez, "Church and State: Spanish," in Jacob Ernest Cooke, ed., *Encyclopedia of the North American Colonies* (New York, 1993), 3:520–28.

<sup>36</sup> For Bourbon policies toward the church and the military see Farriss, *Crown and Clergy in Colonial Mexico, 1759–1821: The Crisis of Ecclesiastical Privilege* (London, 1968), and Christon I. Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico, 1760–1810* (Albuquerque, 1977).

he feared they would use their wealth and independence to obstruct his secular reforms. Gaspar de Portolá, who commanded the first overland expedition to Alta California, oversaw the Jesuits' removal from Baja California, and Neve himself directed their expulsion from the mining center of Zacatecas.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, it was the crown's need to conserve troops and limit expenditures, not an enthusiasm for missionary orders, that led royal emissary José de Gálvez to enlist the mendicant Franciscan order to pacify the Indians of Alta California.<sup>38</sup>

As governor of Alta California, Neve implemented the national policy of assimilating Indians into the conquerors' political system. In Neve's words: "With the elections and the appointment of a new Republic, the will of His Majesty will be fulfilled in this region, and under our direction, in the course of time, He will obtain in these Indians useful vassals for our religion and state."<sup>39</sup> Neve and his successors believed that extending to Indians the rudiments of Spanish municipal government would teach them a civics lesson that was at least equal in importance to the Franciscans' catechism.

The governor's inclusive political vision was challenged by the Franciscans' restrictive religious agenda. The friars wanted absolute control over the missions and the Indians who lived in them, and they believed that Indians so recently subjugated to the church and the crown could not possibly be ready for a measure of self-government, no matter how elementary its form. Moreover, they did not want the Indians to understand that the Spanish governor had civil and judicial authority over Indians, and the Franciscans feared that Indian officials would use their status to pursue their own goals. The Franciscans formally based their opposition to Indian elections on a legal technicality. The *Recopilación* specified that in each Indian town and *reducción* Indians were to elect officials and that *curas* (local priests) should supervise these elections.<sup>40</sup> The Franciscans argued that they themselves were apostolic missionaries, not parish priests; therefore, the *Recopilación* did not apply, and the governor's order had no foundation in law.<sup>41</sup>

At San Diego, where in 1775 the Tipai and Ipai had signaled their rejection of Spanish authority by destroying the mission and killing one Franciscan and two Spaniards, the governor's insistence in 1779 on elections in the rebuilt mission prompted the Franciscans to threaten resignation. Fray Junípero Serra called on the governor to suspend the elections in all the designated missions.<sup>42</sup> The conflict came to a climax just before mass on Palm

<sup>37</sup> Magnus Mörner, ed., *The Expulsion of the Jesuits from Latin America* (New York, 1965); Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven, 1992), 242; Edwin A. Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve, First Governor of California* (San Francisco, 1971), 9-13.

<sup>38</sup> Weber, *Spanish Frontier in North America*, 242.

<sup>39</sup> Neve to Serra, quoted in Serra to Neve, Jan. 7, 1780, *Writings of Serra*, ed. Tibesar, 3:410-II.

<sup>40</sup> Book 6, title 3, law 15, *Recopilación*. A *reducción* was a community in which Indians were taught the rudiments of Spanish religion and political organization. A useful discussion of the different terms used by Spaniards to describe mission settlements is found in Bushnell, *Situado and Sabana: Spain's Support System for the Presidio and Mission Provinces of Florida* (Athens, Ga., 1994), 20-23.

<sup>41</sup> Lasuén to Neve, Jan. 25, 1779, *Writings of Lasuén*, ed. Kenneally, 1:75-77.

<sup>42</sup> Serra to Lasuén, [Mar. 29], 1779, *Writings of Serra*, ed. Tibesar, 3:292-95.

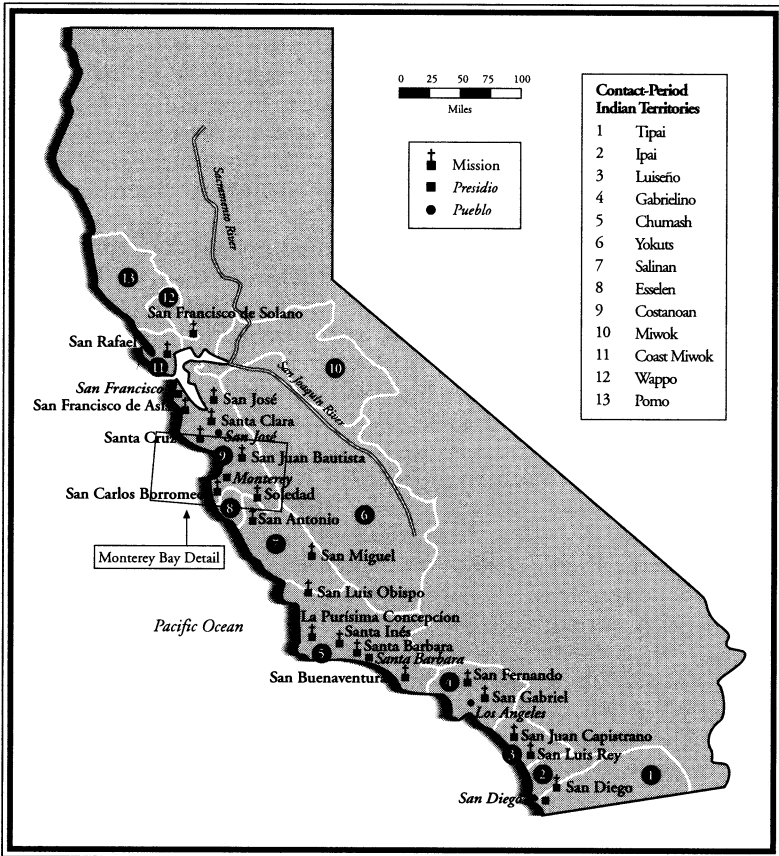


FIGURE II

Contact-Period Indian Territories with Spanish Settlements in Alta California.

Sunday in 1779 when Governor Neve and Father Serra exchanged bitter words. Later that evening, overcome with agitation and unable to rest, Serra cried out: “¿Qué es esto Señor?” (“What is the meaning of it, Lord?”) Serra was calmed by a voice from within that repeated one of Christ’s admonitions to the Apostles: “Be prudent as serpents and simple as doves.”<sup>43</sup> Reassured, Serra decided to go along with the governor’s orders but only in ways that would not “cause the least change among the Indians or in the mode of governing” that the Franciscans had established.<sup>44</sup> Serra believed that, with God’s help, he could join the simplicity of the dove with the cunning of

<sup>43</sup> Matt. 10:16. Serra to Lasuén, [Mar. 29], 1779, *Writings of Serra*, ed. Tibesar, 3:294–95.

<sup>44</sup> Serra to Lasuén, [Mar. 29], 1779, *Writings of Serra*, ed. Tibesar, 3:294–95.

the serpent and thus outmaneuver the governor and prevent the elections from decreasing Franciscan authority.<sup>45</sup> After the early 1780s, elections of Indian officials usually occurred annually in the largest and oldest missions.<sup>46</sup>

As Serra intended, the Franciscans quickly gained a large degree of control over the elections. Even though Neve sought to extend the crown's power into the missions, the Franciscans convinced him that only with their guidance would Indians and Spaniards profit from the elections. At several of the missions, according to Serra, Indian officials had committed crimes or behaved arrogantly, as if they were "gentlemen."<sup>47</sup> By January 1780, when the second annual elections were to take place, several of the officials had abandoned their missions, while others were too ill to vote. Consistent with Spanish law, Neve specified that only former Indian officials could vote, but he increased the missionaries' role in the elections, telling them to supply "direction" when necessary.<sup>48</sup> The Franciscans usually supplied direction by controlling the nomination of candidates, as Pedro Fages, Neve's successor as governor, described:

It has been established that each mission at the completion of [its first] five years must elect one or two *alcaldes* and the same number of *regidores* according to the number of individuals in the mission who have been reduced. They are to make these appointments successively, at the beginning of the year, with the assistance and intervention of the respective missionaries, who propose three of the least unqualified. A plurality of votes decides the elected, [whose names] are submitted to the governor, who approves or disapproves them according to his criteria, in the name of His Majesty.<sup>49</sup>

By narrowing the field of candidates, the Franciscans guaranteed the election of men whom they expected to facilitate their control of the mission.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Genesis 2:4; Serra to Lasuén, [Mar. 29], 1779, *Writings of Serra*, ed. Tibesar, 3:296-97.

<sup>46</sup> Mission San Diego was an exception; local village captains were recognized outright as *alcaldes*. By Jan. 1783, Gov. Pedro Fages had ordered the Franciscans at Missions San Francisco, San Juan Capistrano, and Santa Clara to oversee Indian elections. The Franciscans' grumbling continued until 1797, when Viceroy Miguel de la Grúa Talamanca y Branciforte upheld the governor's position; Nov. 15, 1797, AGN Californias 65:7, fols. 323v-330v.

<sup>47</sup> Serra to Lasuén, Aug. 16, 1779, *Writings of Serra*, ed. Tibesar, 3:364-67.

<sup>48</sup> Serra to Neve, Jan. 7, 1780, *ibid.*, 408-09. The restriction of the franchise to a select few was consistent with practices in Spain and its colonies; Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers*, 29-30.

<sup>49</sup> Fages, General Report on the Missions, [1787], paragraph 32, Archives of California, C-A 52:144, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, Calif.

<sup>50</sup> A limitation on the number of candidates eligible for election was not unique to California missions, nor did it apply only to Indians. In San José (Alta California's first Spanish *pueblo*) during the early 1780s, the settlers' elections were restricted after the settlers had elected men who proved unwilling or unable to control the community. The governor appointed a *comisionado* (military deputy) and an *alcalde* to supervise the town. Later, the outgoing *alcalde* submitted three names to the *comisionado*; if he approved, the three cast lots. The winner was named *alcalde* and the other two *regidores*. As in the missions, these appointments had to be approved by the governor, who occasionally rejected them and appointed new officials; Guest, "Municipal Government in Spanish California," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 46

In addition to securing for the missionaries a large measure of control over the elections, Serra tried to prevent Indian officials from learning that the military constituted a powerful secular counterpart to Franciscan authority. Serra instructed his trusted subordinate at San Diego, Fray Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, to speak to the presidio officer whose responsibility it was to confirm the Indians in office: "Ask him to carry out this function so that, without failing in the slightest degree in his duty toward his superior officer, the Indians may not be given a less exalted opinion of the fathers than they have had until now." Furthermore, Serra preferred that the Indian officials remain ignorant of the responsibilities with which the military charged them. "The document that is used in conferring these offices on them," Serra advised Lasuén, "may be as powerful as they wish, provided Your Reverences are the only ones to receive it and read it."<sup>51</sup> Even after these precautions, the Franciscans resisted sending newly elected Indians to the presidios for installation. An inquiry in the mid-1790s by Governor Diego de Borica revealed that none of the current presidio commanders had ever been called on to give Indians their oaths of office.<sup>52</sup>

The Indian cabildos elected in the California missions—like those in the missions of Sonora, Texas, and New Mexico—had fewer officials, smaller responsibilities, and less autonomy than those in the Indian *pueblos* and parishes of central Mexico at the same time. Rarely did a California mission have more than two *alcaldes* and two *regidores*.<sup>53</sup> Nor was an Indian governor appointed. Throughout the missions of northern New Spain, the duties of ecclesiastical and civil Indian officials overlapped, but in Alta California, perhaps to a greater extent than elsewhere in the Spanish borderlands, Indian *alcaldes* and *regidores* served as assistants to the missionaries, much like the *fiscales* of central Mexico.<sup>54</sup>

The subordination of Indian officials to the Franciscans was noted in 1787 by Governor Fages: "Although these authorities are granted some powers, they are necessarily dependent on the missionaries, without whose direction they would not be able to exercise them."<sup>55</sup> Franciscans treated Indian officials with the same heavy-handed paternalism that characterized all their interactions

(1967), 307–35, esp. 312–13, and "Municipal Institutions in Spanish California, 1769–1821" (Ph. D. diss., University of Southern California, 1961), 202, 227–29.

<sup>51</sup> Serra to Lasuén, [Mar. 29], 1779, *Writings of Serra*, ed. Tibesar, 3:296–97.

<sup>52</sup> Correspondence between Borica and commanders of presidios of San Francisco, Monterey, Santa Barbara, and San Diego, Mar. 2–30, 1796, AGN Californias 65:7, fols. 307r–314v.

<sup>53</sup> Mission San Luis Rey may have had 7 *alcaldes*. See the narrative of Pablo Tac, in *Native American Perspectives on the Hispanic Colonization of Alta California*, ed. Castillo (New York, 1991), 35–58, esp. 51. This volume includes other native accounts of life in colonial California. For politics in Mission San Luis Rey see Florence Connolly Shipek, "A Strategy for Change: The Luisiño of Southern California" (Ph. D. diss., University of Hawaii, 1977), 145–54.

<sup>54</sup> Conversely, in New Mexico at roughly the same time, Indian officials came under the authority of the civilian government, not the clerics. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*, 158–59. For Indian officials in 18th-century central Mexico see William B. Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford, 1996), esp. 345–69.

<sup>55</sup> Fages, General Report on the Missions, [1787], paragraph 33.

with Indians. Officials were subject to corporal punishment at Franciscan hands,<sup>56</sup> and they were not permitted to bring charges against the missionaries.<sup>57</sup> This disability set them apart from their counterparts in central Mexico, who frequently used legal channels to claim that their curates manipulated elections, misappropriated communal funds, and imposed excessive labor demands. In New Spain, to be left without the right to seek protection or redress through the law rendered one virtually defenseless.<sup>58</sup>

Under Franciscan supervision, Indian officials in California nevertheless had wide-ranging authority over other mission Indians. According to the *Recopilación*, they were charged with ensuring that Indians attended mass and remained sober.<sup>59</sup> They were to "keep guard" around the mission village at night and to "lead the people to prayer and to work."<sup>60</sup> Pablo Tac, a Luiseño who in 1832 at age ten was taken from California to Europe by a Franciscan, was one of a handful of California Indians who provided a description of the responsibilities of the Indian officials. According to the narrative Tac wrote while studying Latin in Rome, one of the *alcaldes'* main functions was to speak for the Franciscans: "In the afternoon, the *alcaldes* gather at the house of the missionary. They bring the news of that day, and if the missionary tells them something that all the people of the country ought to know, they return to the villages . . . [and] each one of the *alcaldes* wherever he goes cries out what the missionary has told them, in his language, and all the country hears it." Given the *alcaldes'* roles in conveying Franciscan directives to the missions' Indians, Tac's statement that Indian officials "knew how to speak Spanish more than the others" comes as no surprise.<sup>61</sup>

The Franciscans, emphasizing religious indoctrination, used catechisms to ready Indians for baptism and confessional manuals to prepare them for penance and communion.<sup>62</sup> Whether Indian officials helped translate these handbooks into local languages is not clear, but the records show that they were among the few Indians who participated in the sacraments of baptism and marriage as godparents and witnesses. On these occasions, the Franciscans

<sup>56</sup> For Serra's argument that the Franciscans had flogged and would flog Indian officials see Serra to Neve, Jan. 7, 1780, *Writings of Serra*, ed. Tibesar, 3:407-17, and Serra to Lasuén, Apr. 25, 26, 1780, *ibid.*, 4:3-11.

<sup>57</sup> Fages, General Report on the Missions, [1787], paragraph 33.

<sup>58</sup> In California, like most of the frontier of northern New Spain, in the absence of standing courts, the provincial governor assumed most judicial responsibilities. The legal system of New Mexico and Texas is clearly delineated in Charles R. Cutter, *The Legal Culture of Northern New Spain, 1700-1810* (Albuquerque, 1995). In New Mexico, the *protector de Indios* played a crucial role in assisting Indians with judicial matters; Cutter, *The Protector de Indios in Colonial New Mexico, 1659-1821* (Albuquerque, 1986).

<sup>59</sup> Book 6, title 3, law 16, *Recopilación*.

<sup>60</sup> Serra to Neve, Jan. 7, 1780, *Writings of Serra*, ed. Tibesar, 3:406-07.

<sup>61</sup> Tac, in *Native American Perspectives on . . . Alta California*, ed. Castillo, 51.

<sup>62</sup> On Franciscan religious instruction of Indians see Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, trans. Simmons, 101-02; Lino Gómez Canedo, *Evangelización y conquista: Experiencia franciscana en hispanoamérica*, 2d ed. (Mexico City, 1988), 148-62, 169-72; Charles W. Polzer, "Roman Catholicism: The Spanish Borderlands," in *Encyclopedia of the North American Colonies*, ed. Cooke, 3:532-40; Weber, *Spanish Frontier in North America*, 106-11; and Bushnell, *Situado and Sabana*, 95-103.



relied on Indian officials to translate Catholic rites into terms that were comprehensible to their people. We do not know the content of these unrecorded translations, but in trying to explain Catholic rituals, officials may well have invoked concepts that gave the rituals an Indian meaning.

Never content simply to instruct Indians, the Franciscans tried to control their lives, especially their sexual behavior. To that end, most missions had single-sex dormitories for the unmarried, and Indian officials were charged with keeping unmarried men and women from having illicit contact. In 1797, Mission Santa Cruz even had one *alcalde* for men and another for women.<sup>63</sup> In this area of responsibility, many *alcaldes* showed more regard for the desires of other Indians than for the demands of the Franciscans. In 1821, Modesto, an *alcalde* at Mission San Juan Bautista, took advantage of the illness of one of the friars and "delivered" the single women to the men. He was quickly suspended from office and replaced by Francisco Sevilla, a former *alcalde* who had "taken good care of the single women."<sup>64</sup>

Franciscans also attempted to remake the Indians' daily routines, primarily through a rigid labor regime; here, too, Indian officials often played a crucial role. Tac recounted how *alcaldes* circulated through the villages telling people when and where to report for work: "Tomorrow the sowing begins and so the laborers go to the chicken yard and assemble there."<sup>65</sup> When their calls went unheeded, officials punished those who they or the Franciscans believed were shirking. In 1797, Claudio, an Indian baptized at Mission San Francisco who later absconded, declared that one of the reasons he had run away was that the *alcalde* Valeriano "made him go to work" when he was sick.<sup>66</sup> Homobono, who also fled, declared that Valeriano "hit him with a heavy cane for having gone to look for mussels at the beach," an outing that most likely took him away from his work at the mission.<sup>67</sup> Not all Indian officials could be counted on to enforce the Franciscans' labor regime. In 1814, the *padres* at Mission San Francisco lamented that, when they asked the *alcaldes* to supervise work in and around the mission, "not infrequently the *alcaldes* and the men spend their time in play and remain away [from the mission] for another day despite the fact that their task is an urgent one."<sup>68</sup>

Franciscans also looked to Indian officials to administer a share of the corporal punishment they considered necessary for the Indians' souls. Foreign visitors and Anglo-American immigrants emphasized that Indians

<sup>63</sup> Fray Manuel Fernández to Borica, Dec. 12, 1797, Alexander S. Taylor Collection, No. 120, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.; see also Juan Bautista Alvarado, "Historia de California (1876)," 5 vols., vol. 1, C-D 1:85-86, Bancroft Library.

<sup>64</sup> Fray Estevan Tapis to Gov. Pablo Vicente de Solá, Feb. 24, 1821, Taylor Coll., No. 1200.

<sup>65</sup> Tac, in *Native American Perspectives on . . . Alta California*, ed. Castillo, 51.

<sup>66</sup> Claudio, quoted from "Testimony of Runaway Christian Indians Taken by Lieutenant José Argüello, San Francisco, August 12, 1797," in Randall Milliken, *A Time of Little Choice: The Disintegration of Tribal Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1769-1810* (Menlo Park, Calif., 1995), 300.

<sup>67</sup> Homobono, quoted *ibid.*, 301.

<sup>68</sup> Ramón Abella and Juan Sainz de Lucio, Nov. 11, 1814, quoted in Geiger, ed. and trans., *As the Padres Saw Them: California Indian Life and Customs as Reported by the Franciscan Missionaries, 1813-1815* (Santa Barbara, 1976), 128.

“did a great deal of chastisement, both by and without [Franciscan] orders.”<sup>69</sup> Frederick Beechey, an English sea captain who visited Mission San Francisco in 1826, claimed that officials used goads to keep fellow Indians kneeling during mass, for “goads were better adapted to this purpose than the whips, as they would reach a long way, and inflict a sharp puncture without making a noise.”<sup>70</sup> Hugo Reid, a Scot who married an Indian from Mission San Gabriel, later wrote that alcaldes carried “a wand to denote their authority, and what was more terrible, an immense scourge of raw hide, about ten feet in length, plaited to the thickness of an ordinary man’s wrist!”<sup>71</sup> Although these may well be exaggerations motivated by religious and national differences, Indian complaints substantiate the basic claim of alcalde violence in the mission. However severe, corporal punishments by Indian officials did not take the place of beatings dealt directly by the Franciscans.<sup>72</sup> Viewing themselves as the spiritual fathers of the Indians, Franciscans maintained that it was their responsibility to chastise them; they flogged Indians for repeatedly running away, for practicing native religious beliefs, and for performing a host of other acts considered disrespectful or sinful.<sup>73</sup> When Indians remained incorrigible after several floggings, the friars sent them to the presidio for more beatings and hard labor.

In addition to being the intelligible voice and strong arm of the Franciscans, Indian officials were meant to be the military’s eyes and ears at the missions.<sup>74</sup> Military officials expected Indian alcaldes to investigate and

<sup>69</sup> Hugo Reid, [Letter No. 19], “New Era in Mission Affairs,” in Susanna Bryant Dakin, *A Scotch Paisano in Old Los Angeles: Hugo Reid’s Life in California, 1832–1852, Derived from His Correspondence* (Berkeley, 1978; orig. pub. 1939), 273. For a discussion of Anglo-American and foreign views of the Indians and Franciscans in early California see James J. Rawls, *Indians of California: The Changing Image* (Norman, Okla., 1984).

<sup>70</sup> Castillo, “Other Side of the ‘Christian Curtain,’” 13.

<sup>71</sup> Reid, quoted in Dakin, *Scotch Paisano in Old Los Angeles*, 272–73. Reid, who died in 1852, married Bartolomea in 1837.

<sup>72</sup> An extensive literature debates the Franciscans’ use of physical punishment in the missions of California. The classic condemnation is Cook, “The Indian versus the Spanish Mission,” *Ibero-Americana*, 21 (1943), 1–194, republished in his *Conflict between the California Indian and White Civilization*. For an opposing view see Guest, “An Examination of the Thesis of S. F. Cook on the Forced Conversion of Indians in the California Missions,” *SCQ*, 61 (1979), 1–77; Guest, “Cultural Perspectives on California Mission Life”; Guest, “Inquiry into the Role of the Discipline in California Mission Life”; and Guest, “The California Missions Were Far from Faultless,” *SCQ*, 76 (1994), 255–307. Guest does not deny that the Franciscans beat the Indians; rather, he argues that the corporal punishment was rarely worse than a parental spanking.

<sup>73</sup> As Serra declared in 1780, “that spiritual fathers should punish their Indian children with whippings appears to be as old as the conquest of these kingdoms; so general, in fact, that the saints do not seem to be any exception to the rule.” Serra to Neve, Jan. 7, 1780, *Writings of Serra*, ed. Tibesar, 3:412–13. Serra took inspiration from Saint Francis Solano, who worked for two decades among the Indians of Peru and Paraguay. Solano, according to Serra, did not hesitate to have Indians whipped when they did not follow his commands. Thirty-five years later, Fray José Francisco de Paula Señán, the fourth president of the California missions, echoed this belief: “The missionary father attends to the correction and suitable chastisement and he applies the punishment like a natural father on his sons.” Señán, Aug. 11, 1815, quoted in Geiger, ed. and trans., *As the Padres Saw Them*, 114.

<sup>74</sup> For a description of some of the constabulary duties of the Indian officials, as outlined by a former governor of California, see Alvarado, “Historia de California,” C-D 1:85–86.

report crimes that occurred at the missions. When a man at Mission San Juan Capistrano killed his wife, it was Bruno, the mission alcalde, who heard the murderer's first admission of guilt and carried the news to Spanish officials.<sup>75</sup> Indian officials, however, rarely cooperated as readily as Bruno; in fact, alcaldes exposed very few of the crimes committed at the missions. In 1808, after several Indians at Mission San José brawled and fled the mission, an alcalde failed to notify the Spanish authorities, a dereliction of duty that led the governor to brand him a criminal accomplice.<sup>76</sup> More often than not, when Indian officials were called on to explain murders or robberies at their missions, their testimony proved unremarkable, merely echoing accounts offered by others.

Some actions of Indian officials, such as administering punishment, may have had no precedent in pre-mission village leadership, but many of their duties and responsibilities resembled those of earlier native leaders. Village leaders oversaw the production of the community's food while remaining exempt from basic manual labor; similarly, alcaldes participated in the productive life of the mission as coordinators, not laborers. Village captains made crucial decisions concerning the distribution of food;<sup>77</sup> alcaldes, too, decided how to allocate the mission's food resources. In 1786, for example, Franciscans at Mission Santa Clara discussed the distribution of the mission's harvest with the Indian leaders:

We called together the principal [Indian] leaders at the mission and we said to them: . . . The soldiers are suffering much from hunger. They have no corn, no wheat, no beans. They are asking us to sell them some of these things. . . . If we do sell, there will not be enough on hand to support you until the time of the wheat harvest. If you wish to go away for some weeks to gather nuts, it will be possible to sell them some corn, and there will be that much extra to spend on clothes. You may consult with your own people if you wish.

In less than an hour they returned to say that they would choose life in the open, for the pinole was already getting ripe.<sup>78</sup>

Indian village captains reportedly led their people in battle, a responsibility subsequently held by alcaldes when the Franciscans and presidio commanders experimented with using armed parties of Indian auxiliaries to defend the missions from foreign attack.<sup>79</sup>

The alcaldes' perquisites of office resembled the advantages that had distinguished village captains from the rest of the Indian community. The elite

<sup>75</sup> Pedro Poyorena to Antonio Grajera, Mar. 5, 1797, Mission San Juan Capistrano, AGN Californias 65:8, fol. 336r-v.

<sup>76</sup> Gov. José Joaquín de Arrillaga to the commander of the San Francisco presidio, May 12, 1808, Archives of California, C-A 26:503.

<sup>77</sup> Bean, "Social Organization," 678.

<sup>78</sup> Tomás de la Peña, quoted in Lasuén to Fages, Apr. 7, 1786, *Writings of Lasuén*, ed. Kenneally, 1:105.

<sup>79</sup> Mariano Payeras, 1821, Taylor Coll., No. 1257.

had constituted a self-perpetuating oligarchy; similarly, in the early years of the elections, only Indian officials cast votes for their successors. Village captains, like Indian officials, were supported by the labor of the community.<sup>80</sup> Both sets of leaders wore distinctive clothing and lived in special houses.<sup>81</sup> And according to Julio César, an Indian baptized at Mission San Luis Rey, *alcaldes* were among the few Indians allowed to ride horseback, a privileged act in Spanish California.<sup>82</sup> Despite these advantages, Indian officials—like village captains—enjoyed only a slight material advantage over their people, and that advantage was never secure, dependent as all Indians were on a fragile mission economy.<sup>83</sup>

As intermediaries between cultures, Indian officials were often caught between the conflicting demands of the Indian community and the Franciscans. Indians such as Homobono and Claudio at San Francisco—and surely others who do not appear in the historical record—resisted the labor regime the *alcaldes* reinforced and so resented the *alcaldes*' use of their authority that they left the missions. Conversely, officials' conformity to Indian expectations often invited Franciscan condemnation. Baltazar, one of the first *alcaldes* at San Carlos Borromeo, ran afoul of Serra when he fathered a child by his wife's sister. Serra's god demanded that his people be monogamous, whereas Indians expected their leaders to be polygamous.<sup>84</sup> The Indian community probably saw Baltazar's sororal polygyny as an emblem of his status; the Franciscans considered it proof of his depravity. They hounded him out of the mission, branded him a deserter, and tried to sever his connection to his people. Serra then accused Baltazar of "sending messages to the people here, meeting personally with those who leave here with permission, and thereby trying to swell the numbers of his band from the mountains by new desertions of the natives of this mission."<sup>85</sup>

Resistance by some *alcaldes*, such as Modesto and Baltazar, to Franciscan notions of marriage and sexuality and acquiescence by others, such as Francisco Sevilla and Valeriano, to their directives suggest the ambiguities of the *alcalde*'s role and rule. Even though their behavior at times appeared unpredictable—even unacceptable—to Indians or Spaniards, Indian officials occupied a privileged space in the Spanish system as interpreters, mediators, and enforcers of the new colonial order. The influence of Indian officials

<sup>80</sup> Bean, "Social Organization," 678.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*; Serra to Lasuén, [Mar. 29], 1779, *Writings of Serra*, ed. Tibesar, 3:295.

<sup>82</sup> César, "Recollections of My Youth at the San Luis Rey Mission," trans. Nellie Van de Grift Sánchez. First published in *Touring Topics*, 22 (1930), 42–43, reprinted in *Native American Perspectives on . . . Alta California*, ed. Castillo, 13–15.

<sup>83</sup> Lasuén worried that the missions would not have enough food to support officials who would be entitled to special portions of grain but whose manual labor would be lost to the mission; Lasuén to Neve, Jan. 25, 1779, *Writings of Lasuén*, ed. Kenneally, 1:76–77. The most thorough discussion of the mission economy is Robert Archibald, *The Economic Aspects of the California Missions* (Washington, D. C., 1978). See also Steven W. Hackel, "Land, Labor, and Production: The Colonial Economy of Spanish and Mexican California," *California History* (forthcoming).

<sup>84</sup> Bean, "Social Organization," 677.

<sup>85</sup> Serra to Neve, Jan. 7, 1780, *Writings of Serra*, ed. Tibesar, 3:408–09.

within the Indian community, however, depended not only on the authority Spaniards invested in them but also on the legitimacy these men brought to their leadership positions. Based on kinship and lineage networks, this legitimacy, in turn, helps explain the ability of Spanish officials to orchestrate social, religious, economic, and political change within native communities and the ability of native officials on occasion to keep such initiatives at bay.

The historical record speaks far more directly about what Indian officials did than about who they were—an imbalance that is mirrored in the scholarship.<sup>86</sup> Fortunately, records created by colonial administrators allow investigation of the place of Indian leaders in the complex web of kinship and lineage that defined the Indian community. Franciscans notified presidio commanders of election results and occasionally mentioned Indian officials in baptismal, marriage, and burial records. By combining these reports—fragmentary as they are—with information on family relations, village affiliations, and vital statistics contained in sacramental registers, we can sketch a composite portrait of the mission staff of leadership.<sup>87</sup>

Mission San Carlos Borromeo presents the most complete materials for a case study. Its sacramental registers are intact and thorough, and more reports of its annual elections have survived than for any other California mission.<sup>88</sup> Established in June 1770 as the second mission in Alta California and the first on the central coast, San Carlos Borromeo served as the early residence of the father president, who set policy for the region. Located about three miles from the Monterey presidio, the headquarters of the region's governor, Mission San Carlos was overseen by Franciscans until its secularization

<sup>86</sup> Scholars have portrayed the Indian officials as little more than blind enforcers of the Franciscans' commands. They have interpreted the role of Indian officials with little knowledge of who the officials were or how they fit into their native communities. In such work, the identities of individual Indian officials become insignificant because the mission is described as a polarized "plural institution" composed of two antagonistic groups: Indians and Spaniards. See, for example, Phillips, "Indians and the Breakdown of the Spanish Mission System in California," *Ethnohistory*, 21 (1974), 291–302, and Heizer, "Impact of Colonization on the Native California Societies," 130. These issues are explored in Hackel, "Indian-Spanish Relations in Alta California: Mission San Carlos Borromeo, 1770–1833" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1994).

<sup>87</sup> Sacramental registers contain information relevant to the life histories of individual Indians not elsewhere available, but cross-cultural misunderstandings, clerical errors, illegible handwriting, and inconsistent record keeping present challenges for the historian. These difficulties are discussed in John R. Johnson, "Mission Registers as Anthropological Questionnaires: Understanding Limitations of the Data," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 12 (1988), 9–30, and Cook and Borah, "Mission Registers as Sources of Vital Statistics: Eight Missions of Northern California," in *Essays in Population History: Mexico and California*, vol. 3, ed. Cook and Borah (Berkeley, 1979), 177–311.

<sup>88</sup> On the destruction of a significant portion of the historical documents relating to Spanish California see Henry Putney Beers, *Spanish and Mexican Records of the American Southwest* (Tucson, 1979), 224. The sacramental registers of Mission San Carlos are available on microfilm from the Family History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints. See Mission San Carlos Borromeo Baptisms, 1770–1855, Film 0913159; Mission San Carlos Borromeo Burials, 1770–1915, Film 0913162; Mission San Carlos Borromeo Marriages, 1772–1908, Film 0913161.

by the Mexican government in 1834. The record keeping of the Franciscans and the efficiency of the microcomputer enable one to identify and situate within the native community forty-six *alcaldes* and *regidores* who served at San Carlos Borromeo from 1779 to 1831, probably about half the officials during those five decades.<sup>89</sup> References by Franciscans at San Carlos Borromeo to *fiscales* cease at roughly the same time that elections for *alcaldes* and *regidores* begin. The Franciscans may have continued to appoint *fiscales*, but in all likelihood they relied on *alcaldes* and *regidores* instead.

Typically diverse, the Indian community at the mission comprised Indians from the Costanoan and Esselen linguistic families who came from at least ten different villages.<sup>90</sup> At the time the mission was founded, the population of the Monterey region seems to have numbered around 2,800.<sup>91</sup> In almost every year, because disease was endemic, the Franciscans recorded more burials than births; only the baptisms of Indians from the surrounding area allowed the mission's population to reach a peak of around 875 in the mid-1790s. The mission population subsequently declined, and after 1808, when the friars recorded the baptisms of the last Indians they recruited from the surrounding area, went into free fall. Disease continued to take a heavy toll, and by 1825, the mission had only about 300 Indians.<sup>92</sup>

At San Carlos Borromeo, Indian officials were always baptized men who were married or widowed.<sup>93</sup> They were usually older and had been baptized earlier than other men from their villages. Thirteen out of fourteen, for example, who served during the period 1779-1798 fit this pattern. Of those

<sup>89</sup> I uncovered the names of more than 46 officials but identified only 46 in the sacramental registers. During the period 1779-1831, there were a total of 212 leadership spots (53 years × 4 = 212). Of these 212 spots, the identified 46 officials filled at least 99.

<sup>90</sup> The number of villages represented at Mission San Carlos is a matter of debate as are the exact boundaries of the Costanoan- and Esselen-speaking groups. For discussions of the settlement areas of the Indians baptized at the mission see Milliken, "Ethnohistory of the Rumsen," in *Papers in Northern California Anthropology*, No. 2, ed. Stephen A. Dietz, Northern California Anthropological Group (April 1987); Milliken, "Ethnographic Context," in "Archaeological Investigations at Elkhorn Slough: CA-MNT-229, A Middle Period Site on the Central California Coast," ed. Dietz, William Hildebrandt, and Terry Jones, *ibid.*, No. 3, Northern California Anthropological Group (March 1988), 57-94; Richard Levy, "Costanoan," in Heizer, ed., *California*, 485-86; Milliken, "Ethnogeography and Ethnohistory of the Big Sur District, California State Park System during the 1770-1810 Time Period," Anthropology Dept., Univ. of California, Berkeley (March 1990); Gary Breschini and Trudy Haversat, "An Overview of the Esselen Indians of Central Monterey County," June 20, 1993, Archaeological Consulting, Salinas, Calif.; Cook, "The Esselen: Territory, Villages, and Population," *Monterey County Archaeological Society Quarterly*, 3 (January 1974), 6-7; and Thomas Roy Hester, "Esselen," in Heizer, ed., *California*, 496-97.

<sup>91</sup> All population figures for precontact California are speculative. This tabulation relies on estimated population totals from Milliken, "Ethnohistory of the Rumsen," 47-52, "Ethnogeography and Ethnohistory of the Big Sur District," 74-76, and "Ethnographic Context," 64-66.

<sup>92</sup> "Appendix B, Spiritual Results, Indians," Engelhardt, *Mission San Carlos Borromeo (Carmelo): The Father of the Missions*, ed. Felix Pudlowski (Ramona, Calif., 1973; orig. pub. 1934), 243; Jackson, *Indian Population Decline*, 89-90.

<sup>93</sup> The Franciscans did not recognize women as political leaders. General studies suggest that political leadership in California before the conquest was nearly the exclusive domain of males: Levy, "Costanoan," 487; Bean, "Social Organization," 678; Wallace, "Sexual Status and Role Differences," 687; Joseph G. Jorgensen, *Western Indians: Comparative Environments, Languages, and Cultures of 172 Western American Indian Tribes* (San Francisco, 1980), 223-24.

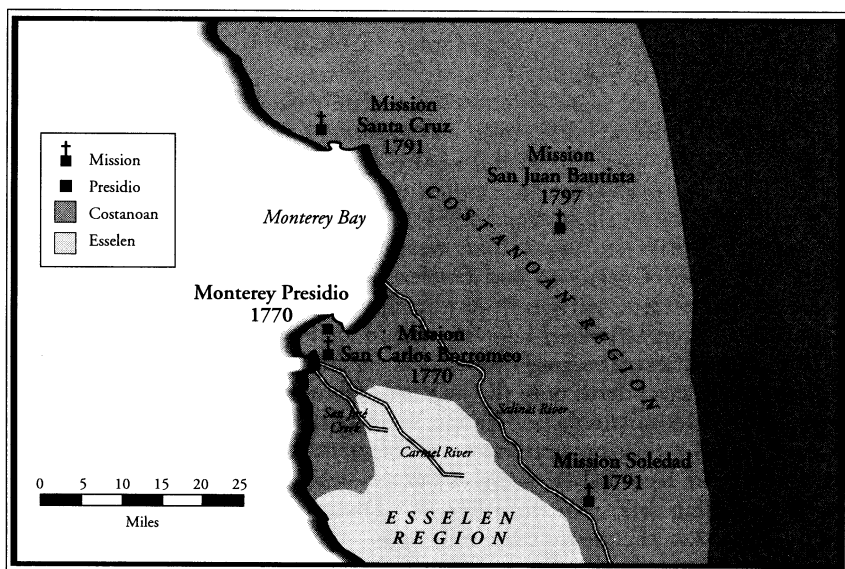


FIGURE III

Monterey Bay Area. Contact-Period Indian Territories with Spanish Settlements.

who served in 1792, Hilario José was one of the first adult Esselen men baptized, Atanasio José was older and had been in the mission longer than most Costanoan men, and Sancio Francisco and Nicomedes were older than most of the men from their communities.

During the mission's early recruiting years, Indian officials were likely to have been village captains or their close associates. For example, the sacramental registers identify Sancio Francisco and Abrahan—officials in the 1790s—as former village leaders. The baptismal record of Nicomedes, also an official in the 1790s, describes him as the “principal confidant” of the village captain Aristeo José.<sup>94</sup> Later, the mission community tended to produce its own leadership. After the early 1790s, fewer captains came to the mission; those who did were not elected to leadership positions.<sup>95</sup> As the mission pop-

<sup>94</sup> Mission San Carlos Baptism 1074, Mar. 19, 1785, entered by Fray Matías de Santa Catalina Noriega.

<sup>95</sup> Three latecomers, Joaquín Chato Torres, Agustín Pasay, and Cornelio, lived for a long time at the mission but are not identified as officials. Possibly, they served as officials during one of the years for which the election results are lost or incomplete (20–25% of the total years of the alcalde system). But their absences as witnesses from the register suggest that they were never part of the mission leadership hierarchy. Nearly all Indian officials at Mission San Carlos seem to have served as marriage witnesses sometime before their election as officials, but not all marriage witnesses went on to serve as officials. To the extent that there was a ladder of leadership at the mission, serving as a marriage witness seems to have been an important rung. While these village captains may not have had the necessary qualifications for election, they may have

ulation matured, it developed a cadre of men who spoke Spanish and were familiar with the Franciscan regime—qualifications that supplanted previous experience as village captains.

In native California, political leadership customarily descended from father to son.<sup>96</sup> This practice carried over to San Carlos Borromeo, although it was disrupted by persistently high mortality.<sup>97</sup> Of the thirty-seven baptized sons of village captains identified in the mission's records, only eight lived to their mid-thirties. Four of these gained positions of responsibility, three as officials, one as an interpreter.<sup>98</sup> The high death rate among the young made it very hard for elite families to maintain a direct line of influence. Yet the son of a village leader who lived to adulthood had a far better chance of becoming a mission official than others his age.<sup>99</sup> Officials who did not have blood ties to former village captains were frequently related to other leading Indians: two were the sons of officials, three pairs were brothers, ten pairs were brothers-in-law, and eleven officials had close ties to mission interpreters. In addition, many *alcaldes* were related by marriage to soldiers. For example, Atanasio José, an *alcalde* for many years, had a daughter whose first and second husbands were soldiers at the Monterey presidio. Other officials were related to privileged Indians from Baja California who worked closely with the Franciscans during the first years of the mission. Extended leadership families such as these suggest that in the face of high death rates, marriage provided a means for surviving members of powerful Indian families to maintain leadership status in the mission.

Spanish laws regulating *cabildos* promoted turnover in officeholding, but at San Carlos Borromeo, as elsewhere in New Spain, these laws proved ineffective, because they conflicted with the native practice of long-term rule and the Spanish desire to support cooperative local leaders. A common strategy to assure continuity of leadership was to rotate *alcaldes* and *regidores* in office each year. At Mission San Carlos, Oresio Antonio was *regidor* in 1810,

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retained a measure of influence among their own village groups. It is these captains, perhaps, to whom Fray Juan Amorós referred in 1814 when he stated that Indians at the mission "show more respect and submission to their chiefs than to the *alcaldes* who have been placed over them for their advancement as citizens"; Amorós, Feb. 3, 1814, quoted in Geiger, ed. and trans., *As the Padres Saw Them*, 126–27.

<sup>96</sup> See studies cited in note 93 above.

<sup>97</sup> An extensive body of literature documents Indian mortality in the missions of Alta California. See Cook and Borah, "Mission Registers as Sources of Vital Statistics," 177–311, and Jackson, *Indian Population Decline*.

<sup>98</sup> Marcos Chaulis had two sons, Romano and Domicio, who were officials. Nestor, son of the captain Abraham (who also was an official), was a *regidor*. Misael José, son of village captain Felipe Jesús, was an interpreter at the mission.

<sup>99</sup> Indians selected as *alcaldes* were not the only individuals of leadership age in their respective ethnic-linguistic groups. The size of the pool of potential Indian officials differed from group to group. In most years, there were 10–30 additional men of leadership age (25–50) who could have served as Indian officials had age been the only qualification. For the year 1792, Hilario was among 21 Excelen villagers, Nicomedes was one of 5 Sargentaruc, Sancio Francisco was one of 11 Kalendaruc-Locuyusta, and Atanasio José was one of 12 Tucutnut villagers and one of 27 Indians from the 5 Rumsen villages who were the right age. If one considers the whole mission population, in 1792 there were 112 men ages 25–50.



1812, and 1814 and alcalde in 1811, 1813, and 1815. Other officials sat out a year or two and then returned to office. As the rotational system suggests, differences between the responsibilities of alcaldes and of regidores faded over time. Important and cooperative Indians, provided they could stay alive, were thus never far from office; some served continuously for up to six years, and others rotated in and out over more than fifteen years.

Indian officials reflected the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the mission community, as the mission's two language families and four largest village groups could each frequently claim one of the officials.<sup>100</sup> After 1776, when Esselen villagers first came to the mission, San Carlos was composed of both Costanoan- and Esselen-speakers, the former enjoying numerical superiority over the latter throughout the mission's life. The Franciscans carefully noted the village affiliation of all Indians at baptism and monitored the changing composition of the population.<sup>101</sup> If late eighteenth-century guidelines for the Franciscan missionaries at Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción in San Antonio, Texas, are typical of Franciscan electoral management in northern New Spain—and there is no reason to suppose otherwise—the Franciscans at San Carlos Borromeo worked hard to ensure that officials were drawn from the mission's largest groups. The San Antonio instructions, probably written in 1787 or 1788 by Fray José García, urged the missionaries to “remind” voters that the positions of governor and alcalde alternated annually between the most populous groups at the mission, the Pajalache and the Tacame.<sup>102</sup> This correlation between the ethnic and linguistic composition of officials and that of the mission population reflected the needs of Spaniards and Indians alike. Franciscans and governors would have found it difficult to incorporate and control the Indians without assistance from native leaders who could effectively communicate with the mission's most populous groups, and powerful Indian groups might have rebelled had they been excluded from positions of authority.

<sup>100</sup> In Texas, at Mission San Francisco Solano, a similar situation prevailed: each major group was represented by a fiscal. Until the mid-1740s at neighboring Missions San Antonio de Valero and Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción, each major ethnic group was probably represented by an alcalde; Schuetz, “Indians of the San Antonio Missions, 1718–1821,” 256–65. For examples of the ethnic distribution of Indian officials in the towns of colonial Mexico see Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers*, 22, and Chance, *Conquest of the Sierra*, 134–35.

<sup>101</sup> In 1789, “to facilitate and make more expedient the government of the mission,” the Franciscans considered Mission San Carlos to be composed of two “Nations,” each of which spoke a different language; Report by Fathers Pasqual Martínez de Arenaza and José Señán entitled “Informe de esta Misión de San Carlos según el estado en que se hallaba el día último de Diciembre, 1789,” quoted in Milliken, “Ethnohistory of the Rumsen,” 31. Original is in the AGN, Archivo Histórico de Hacienda (AHH), Colección de Documentos para la Historia de México (DPHM), Serie II, Tomo 2 (2), and available on microfilm at the Bancroft Library.

<sup>102</sup> Benedict Leutenegger, trans., *Guidelines for a Texas Mission: Instructions for the Missionary of Mission Concepción in San Antonio, ca. 1760* (San Antonio, 1990; orig. pub. 1976), paragraph 18, republished in *Archaeology of the Spanish Missions of Texas*, ed. Anne A. Fox (New York, 1991), 81. The Pajalache Indians are also known as the Pajalat; T. N. Campbell, “Coahuiltecas and Their Neighbors,” in Alfonso Ortiz, ed., *Southwest*, vol. 10 of Sturtevant, gen. ed., *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington, D. C., 1993), 343–58.

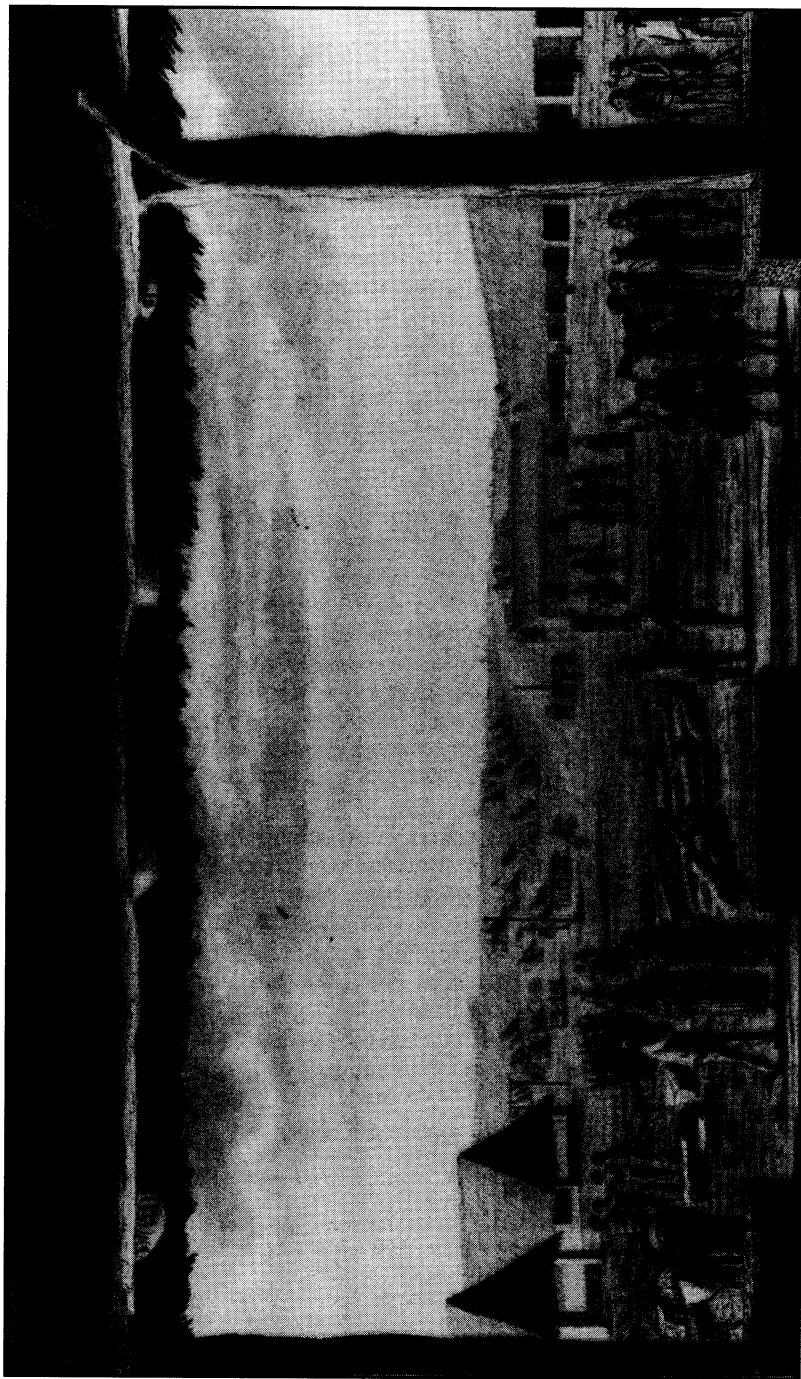


FIGURE IV

Mission San Carlos Borromeo, ca. 1791, by José Cardero. Reproduced with the permission of the Museo Naval, Madrid.

Not until 1810, when twenty-six-year-old Teopisto José became regidor did a mission-born Indian serve as an official at San Carlos Borromeo. The policy of drawing the officials from the mission's different village and linguistic groups helps to explain why so few—only seven—were born in the mission. Indian officials were usually in their late twenties or early thirties when first elected. Thus Indians born in the 1770s at the mission could not have served until the mid-1790s, and yet they did not dominate the leadership positions when they reached maturity. Rather, the representation of different village groups, some of which did not come to the mission until the mid-1780s, took precedence over the selection of the individuals who, having spent their entire lives in the mission, might have been the most acculturated to Spanish ways and loyal to Franciscan wishes.<sup>103</sup> Even after 1810, Indians born at the mission filled only one quarter of the leadership positions; those baptized before age ten took only slightly more than half.

Beginning in 1810, repercussions from the Mexican independence movement shook the hybrid system of indirect and representative rule in the missions of Alta California. Economic and political support for frontier missions evaporated during the Mexican struggle, and, after Mexico won independence in 1821, the new federal government attempted to expel Spanish missionaries, whose loyalty it doubted, and challenged the missions as anachronistic relics of Spanish rule and impediments to economic growth.<sup>104</sup> Municipal electoral reforms that were instituted elsewhere in Mexico after 1810 did not directly affect the missions.<sup>105</sup> While politicians at the national level debated the form that the new government would take, Indians contested political authority in the missions, as they, too, tried to clarify who had the right to rule.

During the 1820s, soldiers and settlers increasingly relied on the missions for food and Indian laborers. The missions themselves continued to be unhealthy, and labor demands on Indians increased, just as Franciscan authority was weakening. At several missions, these circumstances prompted Indian officials to reject the colonial order altogether and lead their people out of the missions. Had the officials been given the right to bring charges against the missionaries, they might have used that legal leverage to improve conditions in the disintegrating missions. Had they been in a better position to profit personally from the missions' economic system, they might have

<sup>103</sup> By 1805, the Franciscans at Mission San Carlos could count more than 18 mission-born men who were at least age 25. Mission San Carlos, especially during its first decade, had one of the highest birth rates of any mission in Alta California; Jackson, *Indian Population Decline*, 83–108.

<sup>104</sup> Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 43–68.

<sup>105</sup> For municipal electoral reform during the revolutionary period see Roger L. Cunniff, "Mexican Municipal Electoral Reform, 1810–1822," in *Mexico and the Spanish Cortes, 1810–1822: Eight Essays*, ed. Nettie Lee Benson (Austin, 1966), 59–86. Most Indian communities during this period were subsumed into larger political units, and the Indian cabildo was displaced by a municipal government, which was usually dominated by non-Indians. In many areas, these changes spelled the end of Indian political autonomy; Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule*, 375–79; Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers*, 197; Cheryl English Martin, *Rural Society in Colonial Morelos* (Albuquerque, 1985), 196–97.

been more loyal. But in Alta California at this time, many Indian officials found little to gain by preserving the Franciscans' collapsing regime.

Lacking both an institutional means to reform the system from within and a significant personal stake in its survival, Indian officials at several missions turned their authority against the Spanish system. In 1824, Andrés, an alcalde at Mission Santa Barbara, joined forces with Indians at Missions Santa Inés and La Purísima to lead the largest of the Indian uprisings in Mexican California.<sup>106</sup> In 1827, Narciso and two other officials persuaded 400 Indians to flee San José;<sup>107</sup> another alcalde, Estanislao, joined the resistance the following year;<sup>108</sup> and a fifth San José official, Victor, was later implicated and punished.<sup>109</sup> These insurgencies dealt hard blows to the missions even though soldiers eventually put them down. Such rebellions did not merely demonstrate the dissatisfaction of Indians with the Franciscan regime. Taken collectively, they laid bare the dependence of the Spanish colonial system on Indian authority, for they showed how Indian officials frequently held the fate of the missions in their hands.

At San Carlos Borromeo during the 1820s, worsening economic conditions and declining Franciscan control did not lead to overt rebellion; instead, they prompted a scramble among Indians for authority in the crumbling mission. No longer a source of conflict solely between Franciscans and soldiers, political control of the mission was openly negotiated and disputed among the Indians, some of whom held power while others wanted it. As disease, disaffection, and flight greatly reduced the pool of Indians most likely by lineage to assume the staff of leadership, Indian elections began to create rather than merely reinforce Indian political authority, and the elections themselves became vulnerable to contestation. When the Franciscan-brokered electoral system failed, one group of Costanoan Indians came to control the vast majority of leadership positions.<sup>110</sup> Their political dominance in the decade 1822–1831 finally provoked open dispute and formal appeals for the intervention of Mexican secular authorities.

The time, day, and place of the contested election of 1831 show how far Indians at San Carlos Borromeo had transformed and made their own a practice that Spaniards had originally considered an emblem of Spanish civility. Held on Sunday after mass under the watchful eyes of the Franciscans, Indian elections in the 1780s and 1790s had been thoroughly infused with Catholic meaning and Franciscan authority.<sup>111</sup> As time passed,

<sup>106</sup> There is an extensive literature on the Chumash uprising. See, for example, Sandos, "Levantamiento! The 1824 Chumash Uprising Reconsidered," *SCQ*, 67 (1985), 109–33; Sandos, "Christianization among the Chumash: An Ethnohistoric Perspective," *American Indian Quarterly*, 15 (Winter 1991), 65–89; and Phillips, *Indians and Intruders in Central California, 1769–1849* (Norman, Okla., 1993), 65–69.

<sup>107</sup> Ignacio Martínez to Gov. José María Echeandía, May 21, 1827, Taylor Coll., No. 1936.

<sup>108</sup> Jack Holterman, "The Revolt of Estanislao," *Indian Historian*, 3 (Winter 1970), 43–54, 66.

<sup>109</sup> Echeandía, Feb. 7, 1829, Archives of California, C-A 18:442–43.

<sup>110</sup> During the period 1822–1831, 19 of 23 known leadership positions went to Costanoan Indians. In the mission, Costanoan-speaking Indians outnumbered Esselen-speaking Indians roughly 2 to 1 by 1821.

<sup>111</sup> José Joaquín de Arrillaga to Borica, Apr. 28, 1796, AGN Californias 65:8, fols. 307r–308v.

however, elections combined Indian culture and Spanish procedures. By 1831, the annual election was no longer fixed to the Catholic schedule of worship; rather, it occurred on Saturday evening, a time when Indians gathered for their own diversions and discussions. Furthermore, elections did not take place in or near the church but in the ritual space of an Indian *temescal* or sweatbath, a place sheltered from Franciscan oversight.<sup>112</sup> In addition to the return to an Indian ceremonial site, this election also reveals continuities in the way mission Indians recognized and achieved leadership early and late in the mission period, for, in conformity with an earlier pattern, two of the Indians elected, Domicio and Romano, were sons of a village captain.

Although this election of Indian officials linked to earlier authority systems demonstrates a continuity with pre-mission times, the dispute afterward signals that some Indians at the mission had grown accustomed to the representative system that the Franciscans had overseen. In January 1831, four Indians asked that the recent election be invalidated because it had not occurred at the proper time and place and because the winners did not represent the different village groups in the mission. The Indians' letter to Antonio Buena, magistrate at the Monterey presidio, stated their principal objections to the recently elected officials: "Domicio is the half-brother of Romano, and the first cousin of Francisco. Francisco is the brother-in-law of Agricio, and furthermore, Agricio is a distant relative of Domicio; they are one people." The protesters proposed a return to the system of drawing officials from the mission's different groups, arguing that "it be made a condition that each direction or tribe will elect only one [official]."<sup>113</sup> Their awareness of the winners' shared family ties and their assertion of diversity in the mission underscore the extent to which mission Indians continued to derive their identities from their places of origin decades after their ancestral villages were incorporated into the mission. Furthermore, the protestors implicitly accepted the annual elections as a means of generating and legitimating Indian authority: their letter denounced the procedures of one election, not the practice of electing officials annually.

During the 1830s, national and provincial political leaders transferred control of the missions to secular administrators and parceled out the bulk of mission lands and resources to local soldiers and settlers.<sup>114</sup> Some former

<sup>112</sup> Letters signed with the marks of Antonio, Landelino, Gaudin, and Martin to Buena, Jan. 18, 1831, Archives of Monterey, C-A 150, 1:266-68, Bancroft Library. The letter is in the hand of José Joaquín Gómez, customs officer for Monterey.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 60-68, takes a wide-ranging look at the secularization of the missions in California. A useful summary of the historical antecedents to the mission secularization in California is Gerald J. Geary, *Secularization of the California Missions (1810-1846)* (Washington, D. C., 1934). C. Alan Hutchinson provides a thorough analysis of the local proponents of secularization in *Frontier Settlement in Mexican California: The Hijar-Padrés Colony and Its Origins, 1769-1835* (New Haven, 1969). Hutchinson examines the Mexican government's role in secularization in "The Mexican Government and the Mission Indians of Upper California, 1821-1835," *The Americas*, 21 (1965), 335-62. Hubert Howe Bancroft summarized the main events of secularization in his monumental *History of California*, 7 vols. (San Francisco,

missions continued as secular communities; most fell in ruins after the exodus of Indians to their ancestral homelands or the emerging pueblos. In all of these places—former missions, Mexican towns, and regions beyond state control—vestiges of the Indian-Spanish political system survived: Indian officials continued to lead their communities in the face of growing economic, political, and demographic challenges.<sup>115</sup>

Two Indian officials, José Jesús of Mission San José, a recently baptized Miwok, and Romano of San Carlos Borromeo, baptized three decades earlier, took divergent paths after the missions were secularized; José Jesús cut his ties to Mexican California while Romano became more entrenched in its political system. Their experiences suggest that former mission officials were among the few Indians who had the skills to negotiate two cultures during this period of accelerating change. José Jesús returned to the Central Valley, where he led a group of Indians who stole livestock from Mexican ranchers. In 1845, he was briefly engaged by John Sutter—whose fame in the Gold Rush still awaited him—to catch horse thieves. Two years later, Sutter enlisted him again to form an Indian brigade for the California Battalion in action against Mexican resistance to the United States regime. In 1848, to prove his friendship to the new government, José Jesús offered the San José magistrate Indian laborers whom he and his men had captured in the surrounding hills. Never far removed from important events, during the Gold Rush José Jesús also supplied Indian laborers to Charles Weber, the founder of Stockton.<sup>116</sup>

Like José Jesús, Romano participated in many of the central transformations of California. Born the son of a village captain and baptized as an infant in 1799, he served as an official at San Carlos Borromeo in 1830 and 1831, the year of the disputed election. Romano lived through epidemics at the mission and made an effective adjustment to life in Mexican California. In 1835, a year after the secularization of Mission San Carlos, he served as *alcalde* for the Indian community living at the site of the former mission. And in 1844, the Monterey municipal government appointed him *Juez de Campo* for this community, called San Carlos by the 1840s.<sup>117</sup>

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1884–1890), 3:301–55. Castillo has examined one Indian's narrative of the years after secularization, in "An Indian Account of the Decline and Collapse of Mexico's Hegemony over the Missionized Indians of California," *Amer. Indian Q.*, 13 (1989), 391–408. See also Manuel P. Servín, "The Secularization of the California Missions: A Reappraisal," *SCQ*, 47 (1965), 133–49.

<sup>115</sup> For an examination of mission communities after secularization see Daniel J. Garr, "Planning, Politics, and Plunder: The Missions and Indian Pueblos of Hispanic California," *SCQ*, 54 (1972), 291–312. Phillips argues that the Indians left the missions en masse after secularization, in "Indians and the Breakdown of the Spanish Mission System in California," 291–302. Compare Clement W. Meighan, "Indians and California Missions," *SCQ*, 69 (1987), 187–201. See Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769–1936* (Berkeley, 1995), 39–41, and Phillips, *Chiefs and Challengers: Indian Resistance and Cooperation in Southern California* (Berkeley, 1975), for discussions of southern California Indian leaders during and after mission secularization.

<sup>116</sup> Albert L. Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven, 1988), 52, 81–82, 99, 112.

<sup>117</sup> Testimony of Romano, in "Criminal contra el Indio José," Apr. 1835, Archives of Monterey, C-A 150, 2:69–70; "Libro de Actas," Jan. 3, 1844–Mar. 9, 1844, Monterey Collection, box 3, file MR 255, Monterey Ayuntamiento, Huntington Library.

Romano's duties as *juez* (judge) are unknown, but his appointment demonstrates a continuity of leadership from pre-mission times. Few Indians in Alta California had the linguistic and cultural skills, much less the good fortune, to survive such remarkable changes. Fewer still have had their stories told. But the experiences of Indians like José Jesús and Romano testify to the ability and creativity of California Indians who did adjust to life in a rapidly changing world.

To most Indians in Alta California, Spaniards brought disease, cultural dislocation, and an early grave; to some, they also provided political opportunity. The prominence of individuals like Baltazar, Andrés, José Jesús, and Romano and the coherence of the groups they led suggest that the political system the Spaniards relied on to control the missions—and the Indians' ability to shape that system to their needs—fostered the preservation and creation of Indian authority. Indians who held legitimate authority among their people frequently served as officials, and the composition of the Indian *cabildos* reflected the divisions of village groups in the missions. When officials did not reflect the community, disgruntled or excluded Indians sought redress from Spanish authorities. For the most part, Indian officials cooperated with the Spanish, but a personal crisis or the declining welfare of their communities could incite them to reject the colonial system and replace Spanish authority with their own. When Indian officials contradicted or challenged Spanish authorities, they courted dismissal. Still, it was never in the interest of Spaniards to replace uncooperative officials with Indians whose legitimacy was not recognized by their own people. Nor was it in their interest to level the distinctions of rank among Indians. To have done so would have provoked opposition from the Indians who could most effectively assist in controlling the missions.<sup>118</sup>

Doubtless, there were Indian officials in the missions of Alta California whose malleability rather than their kinship or lineage recommended them to the Franciscans. But for the most part the *alcalde* system depended on the extent to which native villages, leadership, and traditions were incorporated into the missions. The authority of Indian officials in colonial California originated from more than brute force, Franciscan missionaries, or the Spanish state. It was carried over from native villages, legitimated and re-created in annual mission elections, and ultimately strengthened by the extent to which the staff of Indian leadership remained embedded in a network of shifting family relations that defined Indian communities throughout the colonial period.

<sup>118</sup> Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule*, 237.