

The Transformation of the Southeastern Indians, 1540–1760

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Spanish Missions and the Persistence of Chiefly Power

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CONTRASTS

In the fall of 1728, fully a quarter century after the last Guale mission had been withdrawn to St. Augustine, an elderly Guale chief named Francisco Ospogue petitioned the king of Spain for an official military post from which he might draw a salary on which he and his descendants could live. Then approaching seventy years of age, the cacique Francisco based his petition on two primary facts: his more than forty years of active service in the Spanish militia (including a 1717 attack in which his wife and four children were captured and enslaved by English-allied Indians), and his noble birthright as the legitimate heir of the chiefly matrilineage of the Guale town of Ospogue, the remnants of which were at that time situated in the refugee mission called Nombre de Dios Chiquito.¹ As specifically noted in his petition, Francisco was “the legitimate son of Francisco Joseph and Augustina María, noble Indians,” and was confirmed as cacique during the term of then-governor Laureano de Torres y Ayala, as is separately documented to have occurred on February 9, 1695, during the visitation of Guale by Captain Juan de Pueyo.² As was reported subsequently, Francisco “was of the age of thirty six when he made him cacique, his ancestors having also been [caciques], as was certified by all the caciques of this time.” Given that Francisco’s predecessor during the visitations of 1685 and 1695 is separately documented to have been named Antonio,³ his succession to the office of cacique of Ospogue was probably matrilineal, following Guale custom.

What is perhaps most notable about this curious eighteenth-century petition is the fact that Chief Francisco Ospogue was probably the direct heir of a chiefly matrilineage that had been directly involved with the Spanish for more than a century and a half. The Guale town of Ospogue, also known simply as Ospo, was originally located on the southern side of Sapelo Island. In 1576 it was the site of the murder of Spanish royal officials during the widespread Guale-Orista rebellion that year, and follow-

ing its destruction by Governor Pedro Menéndez Márquez in 1579, the town's chief sued for peace in March of 1580.⁴ It was formally missionized by Franciscan friars in 1595, but was a center of unrest during the 1597 Guale rebellion (Fray Francisco de Avila was captured here), and was burned again in October of that year, followed by yet another suit for peace in 1600.⁵ The town and its lineage appeared briefly in visitation records over the next decade, and only reappeared during the late seventeenth century as a subordinate lineage within the relocated mission of San Phelipe, at that time situated on Amelia Island following more than a decade on Cumberland Island through 1684.⁶ After their violent destruction in 1702, the remnants of these and other Guale towns regrouped far to the south near St. Augustine, where they were subjected to yet another disastrous raid in 1717.⁷ By 1728, the refugee mission at Nombre de Dios Chiquito, still called Santa Catharina de Gualecita, held only seventy-one men, women, and children, including some thirteen immigrant Yamasee Indians and the remnants of most of the rest of Guale.⁸

Despite this 150 years of trauma, including at least four episodes of destruction by fire and at least four separate relocations, all during a period of at least 90 percent population decline among the Guale,⁹ Francisco Ospogüe's chiefly matrilineage survived to form a major component in his social and political standing among the remaining inhabitants of mission Nombre de Dios Chiquito. When he finally received a yearly pension, or alms, of two silver *reales* after 1734, one of the justifications used was that "the other caciques, by his example and in view of Royal mercifulness, will be more secure in their vassalage, and will be encouraged to distinguish themselves in Royal service, with the experience of seeing this cacique rewarded."¹⁰ Even two centuries after first Spanish contact, the hereditary leaders of southeastern chiefdoms still exercised real political power, and they and their subordinate populations were viewed as noble vassals of the Spanish crown.

Contrast this with the contemporary statement of Spanish Friar Joseph Ramos Escudero, who had lived among the Florida mission Indians, and made the following statement regarding the leadership of the Lower Creeks in 1734. At the time, Fray Ramos was in London disguised as a Dutchman secretly observing the visit of Tomochichi, a Creek chief, and was able to have a conversation with Tomochichi's interpreter over a beer. Ramos explained in his subsequent communique that "[t]he present King is cacique of a large town called Apalachicol[a], which is the first after

Caveta, and the aforementioned interpreter gave me to understand that the stated present King is today the first in esteem on account of his great wisdom and counsel, and that of Caveta is very crazy [*alocado*] and desperate (and we know him to be thus in those parts), all of which should be believed to be so, because the Indians are not as subject to their Kings as the Europeans, at times good, at times bad, and although they do not recognize others as their caciques, but rather those who are such by birth, but in cases of wars and grave matters, they only give their attention to the cacique of greatest wisdom and age, and from the extremes that are seen here, it seems that this one is such, notwithstanding his being the second cacique of that province."¹¹

This and many subsequent accounts suggest that while the early-eighteenth-century Creeks retained the notion of hereditary leadership titles and traditional ranking, in actual practice the power of their chiefs derived from a combination of achieved and ascribed status. Specifically, Creek political organization seems to have been somewhat less rigidly hereditary than that of their mission counterparts at the same time, and this fluidity manifested itself in the increased importance of individual achievement and perceived wisdom within the context of the new European colonial world.

Admittedly, the distinction is a subtle one, but there can be no doubt that the political structure of the eighteenth-century Creeks, including the ancestral chiefdoms of Apalachicola, Tallapoosa, and Abihka, was evolving in a direction different from that of the missionized Timucua, Guale, and Apalachee.¹² Not only had chiefly succession lost its strictly hereditary character—female chieftains had been common, and teenagers and even children from the chiefly matrilineage could govern with the assistance of their noble relatives—but even the office of chief had lost its elevated and privileged character. In stark contrast to mission chiefs, who chose rebellion in 1656 to avoid being seen carrying sacks of corn on their backs, who as late as 1678 and 1695 had to be persuaded by Spanish officials to even participate in planting their fields and grinding corn because of localized population decline, and who were still preferentially given expensive Spanish cloth as late as 1687,¹³ Creek chiefs were described as early as 1708 as being little removed from their ordinary neighbors. As noted by experienced trader Thomas Nairne, "[T]hese honest men don't pretend that their subjects should contribute too much, to maintain a needless grandure. They are content to share with their people in assisting and set-

ting them a good example the better and more patiently to endure the necessary toils of life."¹⁴ In stark contrast to mission caciques, Creek chiefs were not exempt from manual labor, and according to William Bartram, by the late eighteenth century they differed little in both appearance and behavior from their common counterparts. In his words, the chief "associates, eats, drinks, and dances with them in common as another man; his dress is the same, and a stranger could not distinguish the king's habitation from that of any other citizen, by any sort of splendour or magnificence."¹⁵ Compare this description to those of the ancestral chieftains of the late prehistoric Southeast, known from archaeological and ethnohistorical data to have lived on platform mounds, to have been carried on litters, and to have worn and possessed ornate clothing and ornaments of copper, shell, and stone with elaborate iconographic symbols and mythical creatures.¹⁶ Clearly, substantial social transformations were in operation during the colonial era, and were most pronounced among nonmission groups.

Admittedly, there are methodological difficulties involved in forming a direct comparison between the ethnohistorical record for mission groups such as the Timucua, Mocama, Apalachee, and Guale and that for unassimilated frontier groups such as those involved in the emergent Creek Confederacy. Not only is there a substantial chronological difference between these two sets of documentary data, but they also derive from differing types of colonial interaction with completely different European cultures. Specifically, the vast bulk of ethnohistorical data relating to the mission Indians dates to the seventeenth century, and derives from Spanish documentation surrounding these assimilated components of the broader Florida colonial system, while in contrast the majority of the ethnohistorical data relating to unassimilated frontier groups dates to the eighteenth century, and derives in large part from English and French documentation surrounding long-distance interaction focusing on the slave and deerskin trade. These difficulties are not insurmountable, however, and a direct comparison between relevant sources of data, including not just historical but also archaeological data, makes it possible to assert that there were indeed some very fundamental and substantive differences between the colonial experiences of these two broad groups of southeastern Indians. In sum, Indian groups who were assimilated into the Spanish mission system seem to have exhibited a greater degree of cultural stability with regard to traditional sociopolitical systems than

those who remained in the deep colonial frontier. Simply put, from an anthropological perspective, chiefdoms evidently changed less and lasted longer within the context of the mission system. But in the same connection, this cultural persistence in the face of steep demographic collapse ultimately left mission chiefs governing dysfunctional societies, while ongoing social transformations in the deep frontier resulted in cultural adaptations that were uniquely suited for the European colonial era. In the end, prolonged cultural stability among mission Indians was illusory and ultimately fatal. The survival of frontier groups such as the Creeks to the present day serves as a tragic contrast to the effective extinction of all mission groups attached to Spanish Florida. Nevertheless, an examination and comparison of the details of these processes provides many important clues as to the nature of social transformation in the context of colonization, and even regarding culture change in general.

The basic difference between missionized and frontier groups is one of trajectory. I would argue that by the first decades of the eighteenth century, mission groups such as the Timucua, the Guale, and the Apalachee comprised the surviving remnants of more or less traditional southeastern chiefdoms which were at that time experiencing the final death throes of long-term demographic collapse and flight in the face of recent armed aggression. In contrast, unmissionized frontier groups such as the Apalachicola, the Tallapoosa, and the Abihka comprised the remnants of similar chiefdoms that were at that very time experiencing the birth of a new social order that would ultimately lead to more egalitarian and fluid tribal confederacies without direct precedent among the chiefdoms of the late prehistoric Southeast. Mission chiefdoms were on their way out, and frontier chiefdoms were on the verge of transformation into new, and ultimately successful, social formations.

I do not believe that this difference in evolutionary trajectory can be attributed solely to the fact that mission groups were literally outcompeted by these very same frontier groups by the beginning of the eighteenth century. To be certain, many of the frontier groups noted above had by this time become musket-toting slave raiders with English support, and many of their primary victims were poorly armed mission towns with only limited Spanish protection. And indeed, by the end of 1706 all mission groups were physically reduced to a handful of refugee towns clustered around St. Augustine, while frontier groups ravaged the abandoned hinterlands in search of fresh sources of slaves. Moreover, by 1711

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the entire Spanish mission population had been reduced to fewer than three hundred men, women, and children, while English records dating to 1715 reveal that the constituent groups of the later Creek Confederacy alone amounted to almost nine thousand individuals, or nearly thirty times the mission population.¹⁷ What is notable here is not simply the fact that mission populations had dwindled from just over seventy-three hundred to fewer than three hundred in perhaps only a single generation, amounting to a 96 percent decline between 1681 and 1711 alone.¹⁸ The extraordinary element of this equation for my purposes here is the fact that even in the face of unprecedented demographic collapse, Spanish documents reveal that the essential elements of chiefly political structure survived much longer in the context of the mission system than they did among isolated frontier chiefdoms that eventually became involved in English trade.¹⁹ This contrast is even more impressive when one considers the fact that missionization preceded the expansion of the English slave and deerskin trade by as much as a century in some cases, and in all cases by at least fifty to a hundred years. Despite this lengthy saturation within the colonial system of Spanish Florida, fourth- and fifth-generation mission chiefs retained more hereditary power and privilege than did Creek chiefs whose parents had witnessed the arrival of Carolina traders in the 1680s.

While my primary focus in this paper is to elaborate on the specific characteristics of the mission experience that tended to promote sociopolitical stability and the persistence of chiefly power, I have also found it necessary to step back and take a broader view of the overall colonial experience for southeastern Indians both within and outside the mission system, focusing on the easternmost region dominated by Spanish and English colonial interests. This larger perspective makes it possible to identify specific differences among what I identify as the three primary categories of colonial interaction following first contact. The first category is *isolation*, referring to chiefdoms that remained in the deep colonial frontier after the period of first contact, and which were characterized by only sporadic and typically indirect long-distance interaction with European colonists, including limited exchange. The second category is *missionization*, referring to chiefdoms that were assimilated into the expanding mission system of Spanish Florida, and which were characterized by intensive and direct interaction with Spanish colonists. The third category is *commerce*, referring to chiefdoms that accepted resident English trad-

ers who supplied them with firearms and munitions for use in the slave and deerskin trade.

After the initial period of first contact during the mid-sixteenth century, all southeastern chiefdoms diverged into either missionization or isolation, which lasted for more than a century until the first two decades after the establishment of Carolina in 1670, after which the period of intensive trade began for many groups. Some groups, such as the Timucua and Guale, experienced only missionization, while most other groups, such as the constituent chiefdoms of the later Creek Confederacy, experienced more than a century of isolation followed by well over a century of commerce. For this reason, I have found it necessary to compare and contrast all three categories in order to assess the mechanisms for social transformation that might have been involved in each case.

I should add a word of caution here: the following discussion represents an initial and thus very preliminary exploration of some of the issues involved in social transformation during the European colonial era. Since this paper is based on conclusions that I have only recently reached regarding the nature and function of the broader colonial system of Spanish Florida and how aboriginal chiefdoms were assimilated into that system,²⁰ the following discussion should be viewed as a beginning rather than an end. Furthermore, many of the comparisons and contrasts made in this paper are intentionally broad and unidimensional, and in this sense will ultimately require considerable refinement as the ideas and concepts proposed here are subjected to more detailed scrutiny. Nevertheless, I would hope that these preliminary interpretations might serve as a useful framework for future research.

My point of departure for the discussion that follows is the observation that chiefly social organization lasted longer and changed less within the context of the Florida mission system than it did in the deep frontier.²¹ Specifically, assimilation into the mission system of Spanish Florida seems to have actually fostered stability in that chiefly system, countering the inherently destabilizing effects of early demographic collapse and later English trade. My primary thesis in this regard is that the broader colonial system of Spanish Florida reinforced internal chiefly power by providing a tributary exchange system in which aboriginal land and labor were harnessed through hereditary chiefs to produce surplus foodstuffs such as corn which were then exchanged for Spanish luxury goods and military support. In this way, by providing a new and substantial external market for

aboriginal corn, the Spanish colonial system not only reinforced the primary economic sources of chiefly power, namely land and labor, but also satisfied the additional preexisting need for ostentatious public display and for external military backing. In effect, Spanish Florida thus became a sort of modified paramount chiefdom through which the chiefly matrilineages of destabilized chiefdoms bolstered their own internal power by subordinating themselves to the Spanish crown.

CONTACT AND DIVERGENCE

For my purposes here, I will not attempt to frame my discussion of aboriginal social organization within the broader context of the rise and spread of agricultural chiefdoms during the late prehistoric period, nor will I attempt to provide an overview of the initial stages of European exploration in the Southeast.²² It is sufficient to note that following initial contacts along coastal regions by expeditions under Juan Ponce de León, Lúcas Vázquez de Ayllón, and Pánfilo de Narváez between 1513 and 1528, and after the monumental expedition of Hernando de Soto between 1539 and 1543, during which prehistoric chiefdoms across much of the interior Southeast experienced first contact with the European world and its pathogens, the decade of the 1560s marked several important benchmark events for the already-collapsing chiefdoms of the Southeast. First, there were no fewer than three Spanish exploratory expeditions launched into the deep interior regions of northern Alabama, northern Georgia, eastern Tennessee, and western North Carolina. These expeditions, including a large detachment of soldiers under Tristán de Luna in 1560 and two successive expeditions by Juan Pardo between 1566 and 1568, marked the last direct European presence in most of these regions until more than a century later, after the beginning of direct English trade after 1685.²³ As a consequence, the Luna and Pardo expeditions prefaced more than a century of physical isolation from the European colonial world, during which time epidemic population collapse apparently functioned independently to spur transformations in both social geography and organization.

The second watershed event of the 1560s was the establishment of several European colonial settlements along the Atlantic seaboard, including French Charlesfort and Fort Caroline and Spanish St. Augustine and Santa Elena, all established between 1562 and 1566.²⁴ While only St. Augustine survived past the 1580s, these early colonial endeavors resulted

in the establishment of a permanent European colonial hub on the eastern seaboard, and thus the beginning of incrementally more direct and intense interaction between European colonists and the chiefdoms of the Florida and Georgia coastal plain. All surviving societies within a two-hundred-mile radius west and north of St. Augustine were eventually assimilated into the expanding mission system of Spanish Florida between roughly 1587 and 1633, where they remained through the retreat of the missions between 1702 and 1706 and the final removal to Cuba and Mexico in 1763.

As will be seen below, until the 1560s the colonial experience of all these groups had been largely similar, marked by occasional though certainly notable visits by European explorers and would-be colonists and by the apparently rapid spread of European plagues in their aftermath.²⁵ After that point, however, these colonial experiences diverged radically. Chiefdoms neighboring St. Augustine in the coastal plain became increasingly integrated into the expanding Spanish colonial system through the mechanism of missionaries, including scattered Jesuit and early Franciscan efforts between 1568 and 1575 and substantial renewed Franciscan activity after 1587. During this same time, chiefdoms of the deep interior Southeast remained in virtually complete isolation from direct European contact for nearly a century before the Virginia firearms revolution after 1659, only accepting a resident English presence after 1685.²⁶ While it is of course possible that the early seventeenth-century Iroquois wars and other colonial conflicts in the Northeast may have had an indirect impact on the southeastern interior during this interval, my strong impression is that neither firearms nor direct English commerce penetrated this region until 1659, despite the possibility of one or more long-distance population relocations prompted by such activity.²⁷

Despite this radical divergence in the colonial experiences of mission and frontier groups after the 1560s, however, one factor might be argued to have remained a more or less constant effect of the European colonial presence: disease. In this regard, the end result of colonial depopulation is relatively well documented: by the mid-eighteenth century, global southeastern Indian population levels had almost certainly dropped to well below 10 percent of their original levels in the early sixteenth century.²⁸ In some of the more well-documented cases, population losses were even steeper, clearly exceeding 95 percent in less than a century.²⁹ While a variety of probable and possible causes for this radical depopulation rate

may be identified during this broader period, including factors relating to intergroup warfare and early English slaving, fugitivism and out-migration, and reduced fertility and birthrate caused by increased levels of stress and decreased community health, in my judgement the single most important factor in the overall demographic collapse of the southeastern Indians was epidemic disease.³⁰ Whether such plagues were episodic or continuous, and whether they were localized or multiregional, their ultimate effect was to act as an independent and ongoing drain on the human resources of each aboriginal chiefdom.

CHIEFDOMS AND DEMOGRAPHY

In order to judge the potential and actual effect of such demographic collapse on aboriginal sociopolitical structure, it is first necessary to explore the relationship between chiefdoms and their demographic base. Specifically, what was the connection between the political power of hereditary southeastern chiefs and the substantial subordinate populations they claimed as traditional subjects or vassals? Or, to rephrase the question, what was the real source of chiefly power in an agricultural chiefdom? Basing my case on a combination of archaeological data from the late prehistoric and early historic period, as well as ethnohistoric documentation relating primarily to mission groups, I would argue that chiefly power in the Southeast was constituted in the ability to appropriate and amass agricultural surpluses for the exclusive use of the chiefly matrilineage and other designated public officials, including warriors, artisans, and laborers involved in public works.³¹ The key here is the word "surplus"; chiefs presumably were not in a position to regularly cut into the minimum subsistence base of their subordinate populations. Chiefly tribute, including both direct tribute of foodstuffs and indirect tribute of labor to produce foodstuffs, was constituted in the surplus production "above the line" of minimum survival. Such surpluses were largely made possible with the dawn of intensive agriculture based on highly productive crops such as corn, beans, and squash. In this sense, surplus agricultural production provided the tool with which chiefs and their families and heirs financed their power.³²

Agricultural production also tied subordinate populations to the land, and thus traditional notions of chiefly ownership of land formed an essential component in the equation. Tribute was owed by subordinate lineages

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precisely because they lived and worked on lands owned by the chiefly lineage.³³ Furthermore, agricultural land was only valuable as a source of surplus and thus tribute if it were worked, and thus subordinate families and lineages held an obligation to farm their respective parcels of the chiefly domain. Spanish documentary evidence reveals, for example, that widows unable to work their husbands' fields could be dispossessed of their land, unless the chief made arrangements for public labor to be temporarily diverted for this purpose.³⁴ In sum, land without labor served no function, making both land and labor a fundamental source of real chiefly power.

During the European colonial period, depopulation in general, and epidemic population decline in particular, resulted in a substantial net loss of human labor, reducing the available labor pool from which these chiefly surpluses were generated. What can be said about the hypothetical effects of such demographic collapse in the absence of mitigating circumstances? In essence, a reduction in agricultural labor meant a reduction in agricultural surpluses, and a reduction in these surpluses left hereditary chiefs with little real basis for traditional chiefly power. In particular, as the amount of surplus foodstuffs declined, so too did the possibility of supporting artisans or laborers for public projects, or warriors for military action. Moreover, with the disappearance of substantial chiefly corn reserves came increased vulnerability to drought and famine, removing the protective buffer represented by these storehouses.

The primary result of rapid depopulation for southeastern chiefdoms was instability at a societal level. The system of public finance represented by chiefly tribute was undermined or even eliminated as populations dwindled to unprecedented lows. Even minimal losses could have profound effects. As the local and regional labor pool shrank, so too did the agricultural surpluses that once supported chiefly craftsmen and mound builders. This is not to say that the basic annual subsistence of subordinate families and lineages was necessarily affected; even in cases of agricultural crop failure, individual families within affected chiefdoms possessed a wide range of options for subsistence, and thus probably retained a strong degree of self-sufficiency with regard to food production. Nevertheless, the political superstructure overarching domestic life within southeastern chiefdoms almost certainly suffered the earliest and most severe impact of demographic collapse.

Indeed, archaeological evidence confirms that some of the most visible

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markers of chiefly social organization vanished within only a few generations after first contact; sumptuary goods crafted from copper, shell, and stone had fallen into disuse by the beginning of the seventeenth century, and earthen platform mound construction ceased during the same period.³⁵ Presumably warriors and defensive works were maintained as long as possible, particularly given the broader regional context of localized political destabilization. But there seems little doubt that as populations declined, so too did the agricultural power base of chiefly matrilineages.

RESPONSES

With instability came increased vulnerability, both to natural and social forces. In broad perspective, agricultural surpluses constituted both the mechanisms and the means for surviving not only short-term fluctuations in yearly crop production, but also both internal and external social tensions. Chiefly food reserves could be harnessed for a variety of purposes, not all sumptuary, and thus any diminishment of these reserves represented not only a decrease in chiefly power, but also a weakening of the primary buffer against societal collapse and fragmentation. In essence, it might be argued that the internal system of public finance by chiefly tribute represented the economic "glue" of southeastern chiefdoms, and that any threat to this system also represented a threat to the chiefdom.

Using available archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence relative to the period 1540–1685, I would hypothesize several specific responses that appear to characterize southeastern chiefdoms experiencing demographic collapse. These may be grouped in the following five broad categories, which I will define below: contraction, relocation, aggregation, confederation, and assimilation. To greater or lesser extents, most chiefdoms ultimately experienced several of these responses at one time or another during the colonial era. It should be noted that these responses are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor are they intended to describe the entire range of possible responses to demographic collapse. Nevertheless, for purposes of clarification and contrast, it is useful to review these responses individually.

Contraction may be defined as the abandonment of subordinate satellite communities within a single local or regional chiefly domain and their relocation to larger and more centrally situated communities. Documen-

tary evidence from the Florida missions indicates that this phenomenon, called *congregación*, was typically a response to declining population levels in small outlying villages and hamlets, and represented an attempt to "draw in" surviving populations from communities that were no longer viable entities.³⁶ The end result of such contraction was an overall reduction in the number of occupied community sites, and at least a temporary boost in the declining populations of primary communities to which these survivors relocated. This phenomenon appears to be confirmed by archaeological evidence in many areas, as indicated by a decrease in the number of archaeological sites within specific localities, in some cases corresponding to occupational continuity or even expansion in central sites.³⁷

Relocation represented the physical movement of individual communities or chiefdoms from one previously occupied locality to another unoccupied area. Such relocations might be prompted by localized crop failure caused by drought or flooding, or by intergroup warfare or hostility, and were undoubtedly exacerbated by the destabilizing effects of demographic collapse. In particular, many recurrent episodes of natural or social trauma that would not normally have caused significant problems to chiefdoms during the prehistoric period were instead cause for regional abandonment and relocation during the colonial era, precisely because of the increased instability and vulnerability of chiefdoms experiencing epidemic depopulation. As early as 1584, for example, one of the survivors of the 1566–1568 Pardo expeditions noted the relocation of an unnamed chief and his vassals from the western side of the Appalachian summit across the mountains to the east as a result of increased intergroup warfare, which was said to have resulted in the abandonment of a lengthy section of an entire river valley.³⁸ The best archaeological evidence for relocations of this kind is in the sixteenth-century Coosa chiefdom of northwest Georgia, which has been traced through a series of short-distance migrations downriver to a single eighteenth-century location within the upper Creek region.³⁹

Aggregation represents a response that is similar to relocation, but is here defined as a physical relocation from a previously occupied area to an area still occupied by a preexisting chiefdom. In this sense, immigrant communities or entire chiefdoms attached themselves to other chiefdoms, presumably negotiating a subordinate position within the existing social order as tributaries to the local chiefly matrilineage. Abundant documentation from the Spanish mission era describes this process in detail,

revealing that immigrants were normally incorporated into the chiefly organization of the matrilineage on whose lands the immigrants settled, and that tributary obligations were normally expected of the newcomers. This was certainly the case among Yamasee immigrants to the Mocama chiefdom in the 1670s, and Chisca immigrants to the Timucuan chiefdoms in the 1640s, and undoubtedly occurred in other areas as well.⁴⁰ Archaeological evidence for the long-term persistence, and even expansion, of aboriginal occupation in specific areas during the early colonial has been interpreted as an indirect measure of population influx from other regions, probably prompted by localized demographic collapse, warfare, or societal instability.⁴¹

Confederation may be defined as a process similar to aggregation, in which two or more relocated chiefdoms or groups of communities band together in a new social formation that does not derive primarily from a preexisting local chiefly order. In this sense, leaders of confederated societies did not necessarily have any preexisting claim to matrilineal ownership of land or other resources, and thus presumably established structural relationships that may have been somewhat more egalitarian, or at the very least less strictly hierarchical, than would have been the case under circumstances of aggregation. An early example of this in the study area is the Yamasee confederacy, which crystallized along the lower South Carolina coast in the early 1660s, and which evidently represented an amalgam of relocated communities and chiefdoms forced together along the northern mission frontier as a result of early English slaving.⁴²

A final, though pivotal, response to demographic collapse may be identified as *assimilation*, which I would define as the incorporation of preexisting chiefdoms as subordinate elements within the political and economic infrastructure of the expanding colonial system of Spanish Florida. This process of assimilation manifested itself as *missionization* in the Southeast, and thus forms the core discussion that follows in this chapter.⁴³ As a potential response to depopulation during the colonial era, assimilation differed from all other responses described above in that assimilated chiefdoms actually became functional components of a much broader sociopolitical system centered locally at St. Augustine, but which ultimately found its core in Europe. This distinction is extremely important, since all other responses to depopulation were strictly aboriginal in their character, while assimilation involved conscious and intentional subordination and linkage with a European-centered system.

In this sense, foreshadowing the final section of this paper, I would note that there were fundamental differences between the assimilation of chiefdoms into the Florida colonial system through missionization and the later involvement of frontier chiefdoms in the English slave and deerskin trade. As will be seen below, missionization directly subsumed participating chiefdoms within the political hierarchy of the Spanish colonial system, while the English trade system involved no such structural integration or explicit political subordination. Even though this commercial linkage undoubtedly led to a degree of mutual economic dependency, English colonists and traders for the most part interacted with independent and effectively autonomous aboriginal societies that had already experienced (or were undergoing at that time) the transformations resulting from some or all of the first four responses noted above, namely contraction, relocation, aggregation, and/or confederation. As a consequence, the trajectory of societal change in the absence of assimilation (i.e., missionization) was in most cases radically different.

MISSIONIZATION⁴⁴

As a mechanism for societal assimilation within the context of the early European colonial era, missionization had far more important consequences for the aboriginal chiefdoms neighboring Spanish St. Augustine than the simple construction of churches and convents and the placement of resident Franciscan friars for purposes of religious conversion and indoctrination. Indeed, the most significant consequences reached far beyond even the relatively dramatic introduction of European material culture and foodstuffs and their incorporation into the domestic economy of mission households, an important and commonly addressed topic of interest to mission archaeologists.⁴⁵ What missionization actually signified for the chiefs and chiefdoms that chose this route was functional assimilation into the political and economic structure of the colonial system of greater Spanish Florida. In this sense, missionized chiefdoms ultimately became peripheral components of a nearly global political and economic system centered in Europe.

The process of missionization has been the subject of considerable research not only in the southeastern United States, but also across the European colonial world of the modern era. Particularly along the frontiers of the vast Spanish colonial empire of the sixteenth to eighteenth

centuries, aboriginal societies were gradually assimilated into the broader colonial system by a process initiated and fostered by Christian missionaries, whose efforts to convert and catechize these groups served as an important step in the structural linkage between what was known at the time as the "Republic of Indians" and the "Republic of Spaniards." While its name tends to emphasize the religious and spiritual dimension, missionization was actually a much more intricate and complex process, with implications far beyond the simple conversion of the members of aboriginal societies to Catholicism. Indeed, the establishment of mission provinces along the frontier of established Spanish colonial zones was primarily a secular political process, in which localized aboriginal societies became integrated into the globally oriented Spanish colonial system. The construction of small mission compounds within principal aboriginal towns was actually only a small part of a much more complicated and far-reaching process that was supervised by political leaders of both republics.

The key to understanding the process by which southeastern chiefdoms were assimilated through missionization into Spanish Florida, as well as the ultimate impact on the societies involved, lies in the structure and function of the broader colonial system of Spanish Florida. Viewed within the context of the vast colonial empire ruled by Spain during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, Spanish Florida actually served as a strategic military outpost on the northern periphery of a complex web of productive colonies centered on the Caribbean basin and mainland Central and South America. Because Florida lacked the direct economic benefits afforded by richly populated New World provinces that routinely produced gold, silver, and other valuable commodities, its primary function was strategic—to guard the sea routes of the Bahama channel, through which all the treasures of the Americas passed on their way to Spain. As a consequence, direct royal support for the Florida garrison-town of St. Augustine was only scarcely sufficient for the majority of the garrison, and occasionally lacking altogether, for which reason St. Augustine ultimately developed a reputation as a wretched frontier town to which few colonists would relocate willingly. During the seventeenth century, external support became even less reliable, and delays in the shipment of wheat, corn, and other products from New Spain and Havana and in the delivery of cash from the situado—the royal dole from the coffers of Mexico—left the

inhabitants of St. Augustine in the precarious position of having too many poor military families and not enough colonial farmers.

The survival of this garrison-town, therefore, was ultimately based on an extensive support system, including not only periodic infusions of cash, armaments, provisions and other supplies from Spanish colonies external to Florida, but also the vast pool of human and natural resources making up greater Spanish Florida. This reservoir was, of course, the mission system. Without readily available internal sources of wealth with which to supplement purchasing power based on royal support, St. Augustine's population was in many ways almost wholly dependent upon Indian labor, both directly and indirectly, to make up for substantial shortfalls in vital foodstuffs (principally corn) and other supplies. As a consequence, the colonial system of seventeenth-century Spanish Florida was fundamentally based on the structural assimilation of largely self-sufficient centers of Indian population distributed across an unevenly productive landscape. In this sense, Florida's mission provinces served a truly pivotal function for the residents of St. Augustine: (the maintenance of a vast Indian labor pool comprising an interconnected web of population centers subordinated beneath the Spanish crown and church.) In effect, then, Florida was not so much an independent Spanish outpost interacting with neighboring and autonomous Indian societies, as was the case with later English colonies to the north, but was instead a broader community of interdependent Spanish and Indian populations woven into a functioning, though inherently flawed, colonial system.

At its core, the internal economic structure of the colonial system in seventeenth-century Florida revolved around the production and distribution of staple food crops, particularly corn. While this is of course a gross simplification of a far more complex economic system, local corn production does seem to have played a determining role in the overall structure of Florida's economic system, particularly as regards the role of the missionized chiefdoms in that system. It was the production and distribution of Florida's yearly corn crop that constituted the primary economic relationship between St. Augustine and its mission provinces. Together, the missions provided both surplus corn and surplus labor for producing more corn, all of which was subsidized at least in part by funds derived from Florida's yearly royal subsidy, the situado. While local officials normally skimmed personal profits from all such transactions, the end result of this system was the yearly production of substantial supple-