

8. The Return of the *Leres*: Jesuit Triumph and Defeat, 1745-1751

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During the years following the signing of the peace treaty, the men whom the Spanish recognized as the Tules' indigenous leaders worked to consolidate their position within the new system of local government. At the same time they attempted to manage the Jesuit missionary activity within their lands. After 1738 only those leaders who could prove they were trustworthy Christian vassals of the crown could hope to gain access to the emoluments and rewards that flowed from Spanish government coffers. An examination of the ways in which indigenous leaders such as Juan de Dios understood their power and loyalties after 1745 illuminates the Spanish crown's attempt to fashion a colonial space in the Darién.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Jesuits were famed for their missionary activity throughout the world. Bound by the injunction in the order's *Constitutions* that a "very special help will be found in the exchange of letters between the subjects and the superiors through which they learn about one another frequently and hear the news and reports which come from the various regions," the Jesuits set out to collect, collate, and file the voluminous correspondence they received from around the globe. Beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, the order oversaw the publication of selections of these letters in edited collections, and these Jesuit relations entered the print world, taking their place beside travel narratives as an established genre of the book trade. ¹ Printed collections of Jesuit letters had appeared as early as 1552, and the order's leaders recognized them as a useful means to bind laypeople to the faith and to recruit men of the cloth to the recently constituted order. ² Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries enormous collections of relations were compiled and published in Europe, cementing the Jesuits' reputation as the most persistent, widely dispersed, and successful missionary order in the world.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, European Jesuits showed a renewed interest in the provinces of the New World, an interest toward which the Spanish members of the order were ambivalent. Non-Spanish Jesuits looked to Spanish America as the greatest reservoir of pagan souls accessible to them, and they also gained encouragement from the fact that the South American Jesuit provinces already possessed a missionary infrastructure. However, this renewal of interest occurred at a time when the porosity of the imperial frontiers acutely displeased the Spanish crown, which viewed the increasing number of foreign priests requesting permission to travel to the New World with equal measures of unease and suspicion. Some Spanish Jesuits shared this point of view.

The years following 1739, during which England and Spain were at war in the Caribbean, saw the creation of important texts by two Spanish Jesuits concerned about the crown's overreliance on missionaries to shoulder the burden of imperial pacification and defense. Josef Gumilla's *El Orinoco*

ilustrado 3 and Antonio Julián's *La perla de America*, 4 ostensibly works of scholarly natural history, also aimed to catch the attention of the king's councilors responsible for the Indies. The two Jesuits offered up their natural history mixed liberally with anti-British polemic, and their works were meant to prod influential readers to recognize the need to defend these valuable portions of the American realm. Government bureaucrats, Gumilla and Julián argued, had to recognize that Spain's religious and strategic needs in the vast and largely unexplored frontier regions of the empire were intertwined. During the 1730s the British, Portuguese, French, and Dutch had all made incursions into the margins of the South American kingdoms, and the Jesuit authors stressed that unarmed missionaries alone could not be expected to conquer, christianize, and administer the enormous indigenous populations inhabiting the remote, inhospitable regions at the outer margins of the empire. With French and British power consolidated and expanded in the Caribbean, the strategic situation had grown in complexity, and the Spanish realms could only be secured with a considerable commitment from the Spanish state.

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The forceful case made by Gumilla and Julián was not ignored. Dionisio de Alsedo, who was in Madrid while the text was being circulated before its publication, positively received Gumilla's manuscript. The veteran American official was in the midst of preparing his own similar views for the printer and was so pleased by Gumilla's arguments that he provided the *dictamen* (a short introduction) to *El Orinoco ilustrado* when it was published in 1741. As I have shown, Alsedo was soon in a position to do much more for the Jesuit cause in America. His appointment as *presidente* of the Audiencia of Panamá was imminent, and from that position he would allocate a portion of the Audiencia's resources to the Jesuits operating in the Darién, just as Gumilla and Julián had so eloquently requested.

During the war of Jenkins's Ear (1739-1744) the councilors of the royal Consejo de Indias admonished officials on the isthmus regarding the rebellious Tule Indians. Because neither the funds nor the resources to mount a military expedition of sufficient strength to crush the Tule were available, special care was necessary in dealing with them. By unduly antagonizing the Indians while the crown lacked the power to stamp out resistance, Spanish officials were simply opening wide the doors through which the enemies of the kingdom who entered eastern Panamá might make themselves at home. 5

From the moment of his arrival on the isthmus in the summer of 1743, presidente Alsedo intended to capitalize on the momentum afforded him by the British war to pacify the Darién's Indians. The outlook was rather positive, for he had the peace negotiated by his predecessor as a starting point. During his first encounter with Juan Sanni at the Isle of Pines in the summer of 1743, Alsedo had made his position forcefully clear, informing the Indian leader that he considered any form of Tule interaction with the British to be an act of treason against the king of Spain. Alsedo made it known that while he governed Panamá as the presidente of the Audiencia,

all such treasonous acts would be severely punished.

Alsedo knew that he needed to do more than simply voice the familiar, and previously toothless, threats in order to gain Indian compliance with his exclusionary policy. In addition to his stern admonitions that the Indians needed to behave according to the terms of the treaties, the governor offered the cacique tangible benefits. Alsedo controlled regional salaried offices and positions; moreover, he possessed the power to confirm the leaders of the isthmus in their positions as heads of communities and commanders of the regional militia. They might owe the crown allegiance and service, but as indigenous vassals of the king they were also entitled to the numerous benefits attending their status. Alsedo could bestow these benefits, however, only after the indigenous leadership had made good-faith acts of religious conversion. Alsedo wanted to smake clear to the Tules' leaders that although the king accepted the homage of many vassals from around the globe, His Majesty recognized none who were pagans or apostates to the faith.

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

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In March 1741 the Father General of the Jesuit order, Father Francisco Retz, wrote a letter to the provincial of Quito, Baltazar de Moncada. The royal *cédula* of March 27, 1740, he insisted, required Moncada to dispatch missionaries from his province into the forests of the Darién. ⁶ However, Moncada had a full plate of issues before him at the time he received Retz's letter, the most important being the stabilization of Quito's Jesuit establishment after the recent turmoil it had suffered during the visitation of Padre Andrés de Zárate. ⁷ Moncada was unable to act on the urgings of his superior, and the matter fell to his successor, Carlos Brentan. ⁸ Brentan, having served in the missions along the Amazon River for more than fourteen years, placed a high premium on Jesuit missionary activity in the province. Upon assuming office he made a personal visita of the province, traveling the length and breadth of the enormous region in 1743. ⁹ After this arduous undertaking, the new provincial selected two men to missionize the Darién and escorted them northward to the isthmus. His coffers in Quito being empty, Brentan knew that he would have to ask the Audiencia of Panamá to allocate the funds necessary to support the missionaries. Accompanied by Fathers Joaquín Álvarez and Claudio Escobar, ¹⁰ Brentan made the trip though the forests of Barbacoas, the Chocó, and the Darién.

The Jesuits completed their journey to Panamá City on February 12, 1743. ¹¹ Less than a week after their arrival, Brentan presented himself before the Audiencia. ¹²

Brentan made an earnest plea for the support of his companions who were to labor in the Darién, arguing that the two men would each require 300 pesos per annum, sums that the Jesuit *colegios* of Quito and Panamá could not provide. On March 23, 1744, presidente Alsedo convened the Audiencia to celebrate the *junta de hacienda*, at which expenditures would be discussed. The presidente's representation summarized Brentan's earlier petition and underscored the vital necessity of missionary activity in ensuring the security of the isthmus. To clinch his argument Alsedo provided *informes* describing the tenuous Spanish position in the Darién written by Captains Félix Muñoz de Guzmán and Manuel de Arago, governors of the Darién, and by the *protector* of the Indians, Joaquín Balcárcel de Miranda. ¹³

Under the weight of all the detailed testimony, the Audiencia shouldered the burden of financially supporting the two Jesuit missionaries. The junta unanimously voted to provide the priests with their salaries, and enjoined them "to teach the evangelical law to the inhabitants of that province and marchland, reducing them through the sweetness of those doctrines to the knowledge of the one true God and the mysteries of our holy, apostolic, and Roman Catholic faith, and awakening them from the blindness of their idolatry and giving them the clear light of the perfect religion." ¹⁴ The few Spaniards serving in government or military positions in eastern Panamá were gripped by doubt and confusion in October of 1744. ¹⁵ At the time the pair of Jesuits entered the region the principal settlement in the Darién was a small military fort at El Real de Santa María, at the junction of the Tuíra and Chucunaque rivers. ¹⁶ At El Real padres Joaquín Álvarez and Claudio Escobar found themselves enmeshed in a petty struggle that threatened to doom their endeavor to failure before they had actually begun the task. The cause of the trouble was a secular priest, Juan de Pomar y Burgos, who was being held against his will at the fort when the Jesuits got there. ¹⁷

Juan Pomar was the brother of the *teniente* of the town of Penonomé, a man named Idelfonso de Pomar y Burgos. The brothers had both been found culpable in the proceedings of a high-level investigation, or *pesquisa*, and a command had been dispatched from Madrid ordering the viceroy to suspend Idelfonso Pomar from his offices. ¹⁸ When he learned of this situation, Juan Pomar decided it was in his family's interest for him to leave his parish in Panamá City and rush to Cartagena to present a petition before the viceroy. The vicar general was not pleased when he learned of the priest's trip, and he promptly dispatched a *comisionario* with orders to track down the priest and bring him back to the city. This official had orders to seize the man's goods, read the general censures against the wayward priest (including the anathema), and use whatever force was required to ensure his return.

When presidente Alsedo learned of the broad authority that the vicar general had granted the comisionario, he angrily ordered him deposed, jailed, and brought back to Panamá City as soon as possible. By the time the two Jesuits arrived at El Real, therefore, both Padre Juan de Pomar y Burgos and the comisionario were in custody in the small fort. The Spanish militiamen and soldiers serving there had been disquieted by the grave censures that the comisionario had read. Most importantly, the Indians were in an even greater turmoil due to the harsh injunctions which they had heard the comisionario utter.

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Joaquín Álvarez immediately went to work to set the situation to rights. He calmed frayed Spanish tempers by proposing that both the comisionario and the priest leave the fort of El Real in his custody, and that they make their way together back to Panamá City. The priest assured the men that he would convince Alsedo not to delve any further into the matter, and that the presidente would ignore any questionable activities that the comisionario had carried out in the Darién. In order to assuage Indian fears, the priest traveled to Yavisa and began to work with the Indians he found there, bringing the son of the most important man of that small settlement to El Real for baptism. Having established this small, yet hopeful, foundation, Álvarez was forced to return to Panamá City on his mediating errand. 19

When he returned to the Darién, Álvarez became convinced that the two Jesuits who were slated to work near the Gulf of Urabá could expect trouble. He learned that the French ex-buccaneers living there had informed the Indians that the Spanish priests had come to the region to despoil the earth so that the Indians would be deprived of food, the better to enslave them and subject them to tyranny. The Frenchmen were to have warned the Darién Indians that "if they admit[ted] the Jesuits they will do in the Darién what they had done in Š Paraguay which was to make themselves the despotic masters of the entire province, holding the Indians as vassals." 20

The different inhabitants of the Darién were evaluating the meaning of the Jesuit entrada into their lands, a process that had begun before the actual arrival of the missionaries. The circumstance that the first public words some Tule would have heard spoken by a Jesuit priest were those of the comisionario intoning the anathema would seem to have confirmed the doubts put in place by the Frenchmen. The comisionario had with great ceremony damned the escaped priest, confiscated his worldly possessions, and confined him to the Spanish fort. Wary Indians could justifiably wonder what their treatment would be like, if Christians treated their ritual specialists so harshly.

The Jesuits made strategically located Yavisa their base of operations among the Tule, and Álvarez reported that upon his return there the young man whom he baptized two months earlier welcomed him to the town by kneeling, praising the Lord, "and acting as if he were the most ancient of Christians." The convert assisted in the indoctrination of the ten armed

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men and their women and children who resided at the river, and none of the villagers showed the slightest hostility, allowing him to preach, offer gifts, and say the mass. The Jesuit, after baptizing nine young boys, reported that their families repaid him with hospitality and kindness, and "the Indians offered [him] things, of the kind that they partook of in their own houses, which, although they were of the most rustic sort, such as bananas and monkey, [he] accepted with the highest appreciation." 22

After this success, Álvarez sent various kindly worded messages to Juan Sanni in the hope of gaining entry into the cacique's lands in the remote upper Chucunaque region. Sanni rebuffed all of these overtures, leading Álvarez to conclude that Sanni, "though a friend in name, had been painted an enemy by his actions." 23 Although the direct route to the man named in the treaty as the supreme Tule leader had been obstructed by that Indian's stubborn rejection of the faith, Álvarez set off on a second path, opening friendly relations with the man known as Sanni's brother, capitán Juan de Dios. It is unclear whether Juan de Dios and Juan Sanni were actually biological brothers or whether their relationship was a political or an adoptive one. Álvarez clearly spoke of them as if they were the sons of the same mother.

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After several meetings, the Jesuit had already taught capitán Juan de Dios the benefits of the Catholic faith and a Christian life and had convinced the Indian to leave behind his pagan ways. 24 By forging such a close relationship with Álvarez, Juan de Dios had stepped from out of the shadows, and from now on he would become a major force in colonial politics. Though he had been present at most of the meetings that formalized the Hispano-Tule peace, Juan de Dios was not recorded as having said anything at those momentous occasions. He was recognized as one among the many lieutenants of Juan Sanni and was duly rewarded with the honorific *capitán* after the signing of the treaty, but during protector Balcárcel's travels to the upper Chucunaque in 1739 Juan de Dios had served solely as his guide. Again, he stood as a silent partner to those proceedings, appearing to all observers to be of far less importance than the paramount leader of the Tule, Juan Sanni. 25

The treaties gave the Jesuit missionaries the power to create new *reducciones*, which were to be locally governed and intimately tied to Spanish lines of patronage, funding, taxation, and defense. The institution of the novel municipal and provincial power structure provided opportunities for self-styled village leaders like Juan de Dios to enhance their power. The potential for instability was increased by the fact that Spanish officials such as Alsedo were not particularly concerned that the benefits of office flow directly to those men who had led Tule villages in the past. Not surprisingly, the Tule men to whom they would hand provincial power needed to be, most especially, Christians willing to further Spanish aims.

If Sanni were willing to serve in this position, the honors of a Spanish American provincial cacique would be bestowed upon him. If he hesitated, or, in the worst case, followed a path of resistance, the mantle of Tule leadership would be stripped from him and placed on the shoulders of another man. Juan de Dios was positioning himself to be that man, hoping to amass a large measure of the colonial spoils the Spanish were offering to the Indian leaders of the Darién. Just how high he had set his sights would not become clear, however, until the Jesuits set out to convert the man the Spanish had named as the first Tule cacique, his "brother" Juan Sanni.

Before hearing from Sanni, and possibly to force his compliance, Álvarez had begun to groom Juan de Dios to occupy a central position in a new, Christian province of the Darién. Exactly what that position would be depended entirely on the actions of Juan Sanni. In his letters to Alsedo, the Jesuit cunningly upgraded capitán de Dios's status and began to name him as Sanni's primary lieutenant. Álvarez also commented glowingly on the many sacrifices that Juan de Dios had already made for the faith. For example, the Indian had expressed the wish to marry within the church and turn his back upon his other wives, an act that Álvarez described as nothing short of heroic. In addition, the capitán promised to provide the materials and labor necessary for the building of the church at Yavisa. In stark contrast, Álvarez associated Juan Sanni with stubborn opposition to his aims and resistance to the Catholic faith. Though he had been a prominent leader of the region's Indians who had been dealing with outsiders for nearly twenty years when the Jesuit missionaries arrived, Juan Sanni's time at the center of the Darién's affairs was being brought to an end. [26](#)

In late January, protector Balcárcel had called for the major Indian leaders to come to meet with him at El Real. He had sent invitations to Felipe Uriñaquichu, the leader of the Tule of the northern tribe; the cacique Juan Sanni; and the capitán of the reduced Frenchmen, Santos Bullico. Balcárcel reported to Alsedo that on January 25, 1745, Santos Bullico and Francisco Fotoqua arrived at El Real "with various Indians § except for the cacique [Juan Sanni], who is gravely ill." [27](#) The men who arrived to take counsel with Balcárcel at El Real were from the Urabá region, and while they told him what he wanted to hear, they also sounded a note of caution. Although they were in accord with the provisions of the treaties, and most willing and eager to accept the entry of the Jesuits, their people, however, might need a little more time to get used to the new situation. The Frenchmen were the most blunt in the group, stating that missionization of the Darién would not be easy going. [28](#)

At the close of their interview, the men conveyed a message from Juan Sanni to the protector in which the cacique minimized his ailment, stating simply that he had been felled by a temporary, though bothersome, illness. [29](#) Sanni promised to relocate to the village of Tiligantí and bring enough of his people there to form a town that could serve as a nucleus for the missionary operations of the Jesuit priests. He ended his message by

apologizing for having previously destroyed the village that had formerly stood at the site, and he offered to provide the Indians to be missionized by the Jesuits as well as the African labor necessary to build the places in which the priests would live and worship. In short, Sanni was informing the Spanish secular authorities that he had changed face, and, in doing so, outmaneuvered Juan de Dios. That Indian leader had conveyed the news of the benefits of a Christian life to his presumed brother Juan Sanni, and the cacique, perhaps pressured by the actions of the convert, relented, issuing the invitation to the Jesuits to come and teach him about the faith. [30](#)

After receiving Sanni's message, the two Jesuits decided that Álvarez should travel to Chucunaque alone, while Escobar would remain in the Tuíra River region. Álvarez, who informed of the religious entrada in late 1744, had clearly taken charge of the mission. [31](#) Álvarez entered Sanni's lands with Juan de Dios and an interpreter, Juan de Urive. Though "carried by providence" to Sanni's remote home at a place called Arquiatí, Álvarez lost the sight in one eye on the arduous trip. [32](#) Having reached the end of their journey, the three men were surprised to find Juan Sanni extremely ill. He was, in fact, at death's door. [33](#) According to Padre Álvarez, when they entered his home Sanni informed the priest of his desire to use what little time remained to him in taking care of his soul. The Jesuit quickly explained the central tenets of the faith to him, and after listening intently, Sanni himself requested baptism. [34](#)

All of the observers who reported on Sanni's deathbed conversion depicted it as one of the transcendent moments in the history of the Spanish American empire. The baptism was a confirmation of the Christian faith, a vindication of Spanish aims and ideals, a feather in the cap for the Jesuit missionary, and a strategic victory for the presidente in Panamá City. Previously regarded as a rebellious pagan chieftain with a penchant for trafficking with the enemy, Sanni was immediately accorded a new status, akin to that bestowed on the converted lords who ruled the European states that had succeeded the Roman empire. The Spanish in Panamá believed that the sacrament had set in motion a series of irresistible processes, all of which would benefit the Spanish crown. The Tule of the southern tribe would follow Sanni into the Christian faith; the men would repudiate all but one of their multiple wives; and the population would settle down in reduced towns as the priest desired. Álvarez's labors had brought to the faith a recalcitrant pagan whose dramatic conversion would usher in the pacification of this troublesome region. [35](#)

According to Álvarez's account, Sanni even bestowed a blessing in his final wish, informing Álvarez that it was his desire that all of his offices and titles should devolve on his brother, Juan de Dios. Having performed this final bequest the cacique Juan Sanni gave up the ghost, a mere six or seven minutes after having been offered the sacrament of holy baptism. He was a Christian in the end. [36](#) Sanni's successor would be the man to provide the

Spanish civil and ecclesiastical officials with tangible proof that the Darién Indians had submitted to both the Christian faith and Spanish laws. Juan de Dios, the secondary figure who had stood in the shadows during the negotiation of the peace in 1738, was now King Philip V's highest-ranking Indian vassal in the province of the Darién.

Juan de Dios took advantage of the presence of the missionaries in order to enhance his own position at Juan Sanni's expense. Although Juan de Dios's play for power was a risky one, in the end he was perhaps most aided in his quest by epidemic disease, the result of the increased Spanish activity in the Darién. At the time of the Jesuit's entrada the Darién was in the punishing grip of viruelas, or smallpox, and when Juan Sanni became one of the epidemic's victims, his illness left a vacuum in the Tule political structure. This vacuum occurred just at the time when relationships between Spanish officials and Indian leaders were being increasingly formalized. The Christian Juan de Dios, already consolidating a position with the new Jesuit power in the region, took full advantage of his supposed brother's illness to monopolize the power the Spanish would confer on the indigenous leaders of a hispanicized Darién. [37](#)

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Presidente Alsedo soon celebrated the proof that the religious conquest was proceeding favorably, announcing in a decree of February 8 that "just recently there has appeared at the dock here, in the royal piragua which serves to transport food and supplies to the men quartered at the forts in the Darién, the very Reverend Father Joaquín Álvarez, the interpreter Juan de Urive, with Juan de Dios, brother of the *cacique*, his woman Doña Thomasa, a son of the Captain named Juan Joseph, Don Andrés Moreti, *Lere* and chief of the river of his name, and eight other Indians of the said *cacique's* jurisdiction, all baptized as Christians by Father Álvarez." [38](#)

Juan de Dios came to Panamá City with several objectives in mind. He voiced them to Alsedo as soon as the two met: he wished to present himself to the governor as a Christian; to have the succession of his brother's *cacigazgo* conferred upon him; to be named coronel of the militia troop of the Darién; and, lastly, he wished to have the *lere* of Moreti named as capitán, in the position he himself would vacate upon being named the cacique. Alsedo graciously received the Indian leaders who had come to Panamá City, made them aware that he considered them to be Christian vassals of the king of Spain, and announced publicly that he deemed them all "worthy of distinction and respect." [39](#) The governor welcomed Father Álvarez, Juan de Dios, and the cacique's wife to eat at his table, and extended the invitation to any others whom the Amerindians saw fit to join them. [40](#)

In addition, Alsedo covered the expenses the visitors might incur in the city, granting each of the Indians two reales for each day that they were to be his guests. The cacique and his wife were each granted an additional peso per

day, "and the corresponding *paniquiris* and *moras*." ⁴¹ The codification of the exchange of the paniquiri and mora signaled the development of a more complex relationship between the Spanish and the tribal Indian leaders of the Darién. Following the peace process of 1738, the paniquiri and mora evolved into a method through which the Indians hispanicized the kind of gift exchange that would originally have resolved a dispute between indigenous leaders. Although Alsedo may have been ignorant of the fact, the Carrisolis had earlier taken part in a cycle of exchange that had created certain expectations on the part of the Indian leaders. If the Tule-Spanish relationship were to exist on a firm footing, the process would need to be extended, and Alsedo's unblinking order that the payments be continued is evidence that he felt that Indian-Spanish relationships had achieved a new level of stability and integration.

These indigenous leaders showed themselves to be extremely flexible in this new situation. Juan de Dios accepted the cash that the governor offered him as the payment of the paniquiri and mora, although he surely knew that in the past these exchange items had always taken the form of linen goods. Though the original meaning of the exchange of the paniquiri and mora was far removed from the simple use of cash to discharge a debt in the manner in which Alsedo described, the cacique accepted the money graciously.

In a decree of the next day Alsedo named Juan de Dios coronel of the militia of the southern part of the Darién and head of the cacigazgo covering the same territory, with the same salary in that office as had been granted to his recently dead brother. Juan de Dios followed this by ratifying the peace with the Spanish. The Indian leader then respectfully made four requests. After first thanking Father Álvarez for bringing the Christian faith to him, Juan de Dios asked that only Jesuits be allowed to enter his lands because the Indians had grown accustomed to their care and would be mistrustful of any other religious order. His second request was that Don Félix Muñoz, who had been involved in the negotiations with Sanni, be named commander general of the Darién, which was Sanni's dying wish. Third, Juan de Dios asked that the protector of the Indians keep a ledger, which the capitanes could inspect at their request, in which the Indians would sign and date the receipt of their respective salaries. This would prevent the awkward situations which had arisen in the past in which capitanes had accepted what they thought to have been gifts only to be rudely informed, when they had appeared to collect their salaries later on, that such payment had already been disbursed. Finally, Juan de Dios requested that he be allowed to receive his salary of thirty pesos for the month of February immediately, so that he could buy stores and supplies while he was in Panamá City. ⁴²

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These requests were relatively simple for Alsedo to handle; he demurred only on the second point, which was a matter entirely in the hands of the viceroy. The crown had already agreed to the first request in the royal *cédula* of March 1740; and the third was an arrangement of administrative efficiency whose value was evident to all. Regarding the final request, Alsedo not only disbursed Juan de Dios's salary, but he also ordered

that the other capitanes in his company be given a month's salary while they were in Panamá City. [43](#)

On February 11 the bishop of the city, don Juan de Casañada Velásquez y Salazar, confirmed the Indians who had come in the company of Father Álvarez. [44](#) After the bishop gave public certification to the religious conversions of the leaders of Darién's Indians, Panamá's military establishment proceeded to pay public homage to the new military officers of the Darién. The next day the capitán of the second battalion of grenadiers of the city of Panamá formed the battalion at the city's plaza, and the coronel of the Darién's militia was presented to the troops. The capitán read the cacique's commission before the assembled men and dignitaries, and at the close of the ceremony Juan de Dios was received by the troops with great acclaim. [45](#)

Alsedo assented to Juan de Dios's wishes regarding Andrés, the *lere* of Moreti, who was duly named to the position of capitán, which Juan himself had vacated to become the region's cacique and coronel. The copy of the *decreto* that named Andrés Ruiz a capitán of the militia provided graphic evidence of the transitional nature of the arrangements being worked out for the Darién. The text stated that Alsedo did "approve of the election and proposition made by the supplicant of the *Lere* de Moreti." [46](#) A line is scored through the words "Lere de Moreti" in the document, apparently because the writer realized that the *lere* was the Tule word for a ritual specialist of the pagan religion. Immediately following the scored passage, the *lere* is renamed Andrés Ruiz, which may illustrate Alsedo's prevention of the scribe from using the honorific by which the applicant had previously been known.

On February 13 the secretary of the Audiencia recorded several oaths administered by Alsedo and sworn to by Juan de Dios. [47](#) Alsedo began by asking if Juan de Dios was a Christian and faithful vassal of King Philip V, to which Juan de Dios replied, "Yes." Following this admission, Juan de Dios was brought to the governor's private chapel, where a light was directed upon the crucifix at the center of the room. The cacique was asked to swear three times to uphold the peace that had been signed by his brother, to affirm that the Indians within his cacigazgo would reduce themselves to live in Christian towns, to swear that he would obey all of the king's commands, to defend the jurisdiction he was being given, and, finally, to prevent the entry of foreign enemies into the region under his command. To all of these requests he answered, solemnly, "Yes," offering to comply with its provisions to the very loss of his life.

In his trek to Panamá City with the Indian leaders, Father Álvarez provided the kind of pageant that Dionisio de Alsedo y Herrera had expected. In less than one year the Jesuit could claim to have brought the greater part of the Indian population of eastern Panamá under Spanish Christian administration by himself. The new cacique of the Darién had been a guest at his table and

had, in Alsedo's private prayer room, sworn to defend the Christian faith, the Spanish crown, and the lands that had been entrusted to him. Álvarez could convince himself that he had set in motion a drama akin to the great conversions of the early church, in which pagan kings declared themselves and their people followers and defenders of the church. For the time being, Alsedo could bask in the glory of believing that he had converted the Darién, one of the empire's most notorious costas bravas, into a pacified region of the Spanish empire. It was not a belief that could be savored for very long.

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In June 1746 the viceroy of the New Kingdom of Granada, Sebastián Eslava, requested from Alsedo an account of the missionary activity that had taken place to date before he disbursed the considerable sum of 600 pesos to the Jesuits working in the Darién. Governor Alsedo asked Pablo Maroni, the rector of the Jesuit colegio of Panamá, to prepare an informe to send to the viceroy. Maroni had been a companion of Brentan's, serving with him in the missions along the Amazon in the kingdom of Quito, and Alsedo relied on him as a knowledgeable and experienced source regarding missionary affairs in his jurisdiction. Maroni's report, dated July 1, 1746, was a frank and reasoned assessment of missionary activity in the Darién. [48](#)

Maroni reported that rather than confine himself to the region of the Chucunaque, Claudio Escobar had been assigned to work with the Indians of the Gulf of Urabá, where he attempted to persuade the Tule leader Felipe Uriñaquichu to allow missionaries to enter the territory. There were immediate problems. The French residing in the area were furious with the chief for having admitted the Jesuits in the first place, and they soon put both the chief and the missionary to flight. The two eventually settled in the town of Paya, where Escobar attempted to form a reducción with little success. [49](#)

Maroni reported that large populations of Indians could not be concentrated in the two reducciones of Yavisa and Paya due to smallpox plague ravaging the province. In fact, the fury of the pestilence led to the recall, in only the second year of their activity, of the two original missionaries who had entered the Darién. The Jesuit missionary endeavor, which had begun so triumphantly a year earlier, now teetered in the face of a devastating outbreak of disease. [50](#)

Ignacio María Franciscis and Jacobo Walburger replaced Álvarez and Escobar in November 1745. [51](#) They were to have their faith and preconceptions tested. [52](#) Their first stop in the Darién was at the lands controlled directly by coronel Juan de Dios and Andrés, the lere and capitán of Moreti. These villages were four days distant from the Spanish town of El Real de Santa María, and subsequently almost never visited by Europeans. Juan de Dios and capitán Andrés clearly wanted to keep things that way, and after several minutes of consultation, Walburger decided that distant Yavisa was the better site for his new reducción.

The Jesuits sifted through the Indians of the region, selected those willing to relocate under their tutelage, ultimately gathering a group of *indios reducidos* numbering 197 souls. Upon reaching the Tuíra valley the two Jesuits split up, with Walburger hoarding the entirety of their human cargo at Yavisa. Francis was left to settle at the village of Paya, where the Sicilian Jesuit devoted himself to learning the Tule language and working to produce a vocabulary and grammar of the language. [53](#)

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Father Walburger produced a *breve noticia* that provided the details of his experiences in the Darién and a striking record of the clash of European intellectual expectations with Tule realities. Walburger's *breve noticia* is notable in many ways, not least for its confrontation with Tule religious beliefs and practices in the eighteenth century. His first paragraph provided an extensive description of the geographical confines and borders of the province of Darién, while the next begins by informing the reader that "the [Indians'] religion is filled with superstitions and blasphemies." [54](#)

Walburger went on to report that the Indians described their divinity as residing in the heavens, sitting on a small bench of gold, dressed in silver and gold, his neck, hands, and feet adorned with corals and glass beads. The divinity resided in a house constructed of silver and gold and adorned with mirrors inside, and even his hammock was of woven gold. The god had in his service Indians of the Darién who provided him, from time to time, food and chicha in gold vessels. The divinity was unaware of what occurred on the earth, and learned of terrestrial occurrences only when a Tule Indian died and informed him of recent terrestrial events. [55](#)

This account, in spite of a condescending and mocking tone, conforms remarkably to conceptions of the Tule creator deity that modern anthropologists have conveyed. [56](#) Modern Kuna believe that divine beings in the spirit realm have entirely different physical and corporeal characteristics to go with their distinct status, and practitioners of the healing tradition are required to learn a different language with which to communicate with these beings. [57](#) Walburger's assertion that the Indian god needed to be told what had occurred on earth, therefore, appears less ridiculous when interpreted in this light.

Walburger's relation also described an Indian conception of the Spanish god as a separate entity from the Indian god. The Spanish divinity, he had reportedly been told, understandably loved the Spanish more than he did the Indians, and at times in heaven the two deities engaged in battle. The Indians believed that most of the time the Indian god got the better of the Spanish one, but that he retaliated for any celestial defeats by inflicting pestilence upon the lands and animals of the Indians. At the time Walburger was writing his *noticia*, the Darién's Indians were experiencing waves of disease and increased interaction with the Spanish and other outsiders; thus the story of contesting deities fit the social and political realities that attended the Spanish attempts to subjugate the Indians.

Walburger remarked that the ritual specialists whom the Tule called *leres* were the big men of the settlement, adding for his most likely readers that the people "give these men much respect and credit, as Christians do prelates." ⁵⁸ The Austrian Jesuit recognized that if the Indians believed their creator god was ignorant of events taking place in the physical world, then the men possessing the ability to communicate with the beings living in the spiritual realm had to be esteemed as very important men. "If something goes amiss, or someone gets sick, or if something goes awry in the loyalty of the Indians of the band, this requires the consultation of the *lere*, the principal voice in the town." But communication with a spiritual realm brought forth a familiar enemy. Walburger angrily reported that the major function of these pillars of the community was their frequent consultation with the devil, "whom they conceived to be very practical, and knowledgeable of everything." ⁵⁹

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The Jesuit stated that the Indians freely admitted and revealed in their intimate association with the prince of darkness, whom they found to be quite helpful to them. For example, if an Indian lost an animal or a valuable item he said that a *nia* had taken it, and it was as clear as day to Walburger that the Tule *nia* was nothing more than the Catholic devil. The present-day San Blas Kuna believe a *nia* to be a particularly malevolent spirit being that delights in inflicting harm upon a person's *purpa*, or vital spirit. A *nia* can be seen, communicated with, and convinced to depart only by an Indian ritual specialist, or *lere*. ⁶⁰ English-speaking visitors also made note of unsolicited avowals by Indian ritualists that they conjured the devil in order to heal the sick or to see the future. ⁶¹ Instead of serving as linguistic evidence that the Tule had internalized or incorporated crucial elements from Spanish belief system, as has been argued more appropriately for mid-colonial Mexico, ⁶² I believe that the Indians' use of the Spanish term *demonio* to stand in for the Tule *nia* was the result of a simple maneuver of translation. ⁶³ When missionaries began to indoctrinate the Indians in the early seventeenth century, they had obviously substituted the Spanish term *demonio* for the Tule words *nia* and *purpa*, and Tule speakers of Spanish throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries soon felt free to use the terms interchangeably. The easy substitution of the term *demonio* for *nia* and vice versa on the part of bilingual *leres* was proof that the Catholic priests had not been able to convince the Indians of the malign and base nature of the devil. More sustained religious instruction might have driven out such a free usage of the term *nia*. Its continued usage, coupled with the very existence of the *leres* as religious specialists, provided substantial proof, if more was needed, that missionary preaching and indoctrination had not progressed far in the Darién.

Walburger's *breve noticia* provided ample evidence of the cultural power and influence of the *leres* in eighteenth-century Tule society. The Jesuit, explaining the strong hold that "superstition" had on the Indians, attributed this fact to the "*leres*, to whom they give so much respect and credit." In

local Tule society, the *leres* were clearly the men who mattered most. ⁶⁴ The men the Spanish termed *capitanes* and *caciques* were important and served the vital function of mediating the villagers' relationships with the rapidly changing outside world, but it was the *leres* who ensured the community's metaphysical equilibrium and preserved Tule oral traditions. In a clear delineation of the direction in which Tule power flowed, Walburger reported that the *leres* instructed the chiefs, "teaching them the things of the times since the Spanish arrived." ⁶⁵

In the colonial world of the Jesuit *reducción* of Yavisa, where Indians from several disparate villages had been collected, Walburger described his misfortune at having no less than four *leres* in residence in the town. These men, he wrote ruefully, "incited hatred and abhorrence for the things of the church," and, subsequently, "very few ever came there." ⁶⁶ Although Walburger had begun indoctrinating the Indians by teaching the children of Yavisa how to pray, his "pleasure was short-lived, for the *leres* undid all the work I had done." ⁶⁷ According to the Jesuit, the ritualists informed Walburger's charges that hell was not to be feared, for it was a place for the Spaniards, not the Indians; the *leres* argued that the priest's admonitions were specific to the Jesuit alone, and did not apply to his Indian students. ⁶⁸

Walburger claimed that the four *leres* concentrated their efforts and conjured for eight days in an attempt to call down a fatal fever upon him, and when this failed, they conspired to lure him away from the town and into the distant mountains where he could easily be killed. The *leres* planned to inform Walburger that a sick child requiring his attention there could not be moved, but luckily for the priest a sympathetic Tule woman informed him of the plot. ⁶⁹ From this point forward, Walburger noted, the *leres* hated him irreconcilably and obstructed all that he attempted to do, going so far as to rebaptize the children to whom the priest had administered that sacrament. The *leres*, no doubt weary of the Jesuit's incessant talk of demons and Satan, began publicly mocking the Jesuit priest, calling him *chui mor chichi*, "devil in black dress."

Walburger failed to combat the power of the *leres* or to make inroads into the Tule way of thinking, and he soon came to recognize the truth of the oft-mentioned comment that those Indians who sought baptism in the Darién did so solely to receive Christian names. ⁷⁰ Although some of the Indians who had heard his teachings did call for him moments before their deaths, they did so, he reported, only to be assured that they would see their relatives after they died. Walburger noted despondently that these seekers of the sacrament had no understanding whatever of the doctrine and perceived the rite in purely mechanistic terms. Whatever the reasons, in two years and eight months of religious work Walburger had performed just sixty-three baptisms. Of these, fifty-two had been performed on children, who were by definition unable to make up their own minds about whether to accept or reject the rite.

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In the penultimate numbered section of the *breve noticia*, Walburger's honest description illustrated the utter defeat of his mission. He reported that he was no longer able to convince even those Tule Indians nearest to death to convert, with the dying Indians informing him to his face that they would never believe in the efficacy of the doctrines he preached to them. The *leres* had transformed Walburger into so marginal a figure that the townspeople not only made open fun of him, but they also held the rites he practiced up to public ridicule. 72

The *leres* devastatingly deployed popular contempt and mockery as weapons against the priest, entertaining the Indians by acting out rueful pantomimes of the sacraments. On one occasion Walburger discovered the *leres* performing the mock baptism of a live lizard and several recently killed animals, and he looked on in horror as they intoned the phrases of the Latin rite in colloquial Tule. 73 The priest suffered the ultimate humiliation one afternoon when he returned to the church after having been lured away from the altar in the midst of the mass to find the *leres* at the altar brazenly carrying out a mockery of the mass, adding ridiculous barbs and jests to the order of the Church's most sacred ritual. 74

The Jesuits operating contemporaneously in New France used their knowledge of astronomy and medicine to discredit and ridicule indigenous ritual specialists. 75 By casting into doubt the claims of these men to have direct contact with the sacred, the Jesuits deployed their scientific knowledge in order to strengthen their own claims to divine power. In the North American case, the Jesuits often successfully turned laughter against the North American shaman, whom they believed they had unmasked as nothing more than a rattle-waving charlatan. In the Darién the situation was reversed, and the *leres* mocked the doctrines of the Catholic faith and used ridicule as a weapon in a wide-ranging, tenacious, and effective program to discredit the Jesuit priest living among them.

Walburger's handling of a lunar eclipse in February 1747, which could have been used as proof of the priest's command of sacred knowledge, became mired in the dynamic that had already fixed his status within the village community. The Jesuit reported that he had heard a great uproar the night the moon disappeared. The townspeople, rather than seek his counsel, turned instead to the *leres*, who retired together and concluded after some consultation that the eclipse was not a message from the Spanish god, but was instead a sign that had been sent for them. The *leres*, not Walburger, provided the villagers with an explanation of the event's meaning, informing them that the Indian god was angry, had displayed his anger by smashing the moon, and would make the Indians pay for their transgressions by taking the life of one of the principal *leres*. 76

As if on cue, one of the ritual specialists, capitán Andrés, became ill soon thereafter. Several months earlier presidente Alsedo had hoped to transform Andrés from a Tule lere to an indigenous capitán. Andrés's interaction with Walburger proved that the process of hispanicization would require a more concerted effort. Walburger consulted with the stricken man, and the Jesuit claimed that although Andrés had renounced his ritual practices he still would not accept baptism. When asked by Walburger to repudiate his many wives in order to die a member of the church, Andrés responded firmly that he could never renounce the women, for he fully expected to enjoy their company in heaven after he died. The capitán-lere abruptly ended their discussion of the Catholic faith by informing Walburger that he did not fear death, because he was assured that "only the Spanish went to hell, while the Indians went straight to heaven." 77

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Considering this utterance, it is unclear whether Walburger had in fact convinced the capitán-lere to renounce his practices at all, for, as he reported, "he still consults the other *leres*, and errors are spread." 78 This comment refers to the fact that Andrés had passed along several of the Christian concepts with which Walburger had been trying to convert Andrés to the other Indians in significantly changed forms. Andrés's case was the closest thing Walburger presented to a conversion narrative in the breve noticia, but the events ran counter to the traditional tropes that his readers would have expected. Andrés, facing death and certain damnation, did not repent and acknowledge the truth of the faith. Quite the opposite had occurred, in fact. Andrés's refusal was a clear signal that Walburger's failure was utterly complete: he could not educate the young, adults were indifferent to his teachings, and the old and the dying ignored him as well.

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

Alsedo's assessment of the Spanish strategic situation had forced the issue of Indian religious conversion to fuse with that of the tribal leaders' loyalty to the crown, and the Tule capitanes, who had been dealing with outsiders for decades, accepted the challenge laid down by the new colonial regime. In accepting the faith, Juan Sanni and Juan de Dios also accepted the benefits and responsibilities attending provincial rulers in the Spanish empire. Presidente Alsedo expected the Indian leaders to lead their pagan subjects to the Catholic faith, never understanding that the caciques had known when they swore fealty to the crown that their ability to force the Tule

villagers to convert was extremely limited.

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

The Tule made clear to the Austrian Jesuit that none of the answers he provided to the questions confronting the community could supplant those offered by their own system of belief, presided over by the leres. Walburger's time among the Tule occurred while the Indians were ravaged by disease, a situation that could have led to a loss of faith in the native healers if they failed to provide relief or protection against illness. Instead the Tule blamed the priest by correlating the missionary's arrival directly with the onset of the devastating sickness. [79](#)

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The leres retained their place in the cultural hierarchy, dealt effectively with indigenous concerns regarding illness, and discredited the isolated Jesuit priest living in their midst. They explained that the malevolent Spanish god had caused the catastrophic illness because of his implacable hostility toward the Tule and their god. This theory provided the explanation for the destructive and visible effects of disease on the community and tarred the Jesuit as a pestilential outcast, making the leres even more vital and central to the community. Paradoxically, Walburger was recognized as a sacred specialist by the leres who learned about him and his creed. But they believed him to wield a malevolent form of power that he derived from a divinity of minor importance.

Walburger ended his *breve noticia* with a grim warning to the Spanish authorities. Greater resources and different tactics would be necessary to defeat the demonic forces that had taken root in the Darién. To make matters worse, the British, who made no attempt to correct the abominable errors of the Tule, sold them guns and other materials and had consequently become highly esteemed by tribal leaders such as Miguel of Calidonia. These dangerous men had gone so far as to send their children to Jamaica to receive their education, and in the Darién, Walburger noted ruefully, it was not allowed "for a bad word to be spoken against [the British]." [80](#) Like Gumilla in the Orinoco ilustrado, experience on the ground had forced Walburger to the conclusion that missionization needed to be coordinated

with a larger imperial project aimed at gathering untamed regions into the core areas of the Spanish empire.

Walburger diagnosed a problem with profound roots that entailed more than the tenacity of the demonic leres who presided over the Tule rituals. Although it was certain, he argued, that the dealings of the leres with the devil had dragged the Indians inexorably toward eternal damnation, the Jesuit concluded that the tribal leadership, rather than Satan, was the core of the problem. For the men who had so recently given solemn professions of their faith had in short order renounced their oaths. Juan de Dios was a great disappointment, and Walburger concluded that he had come to the Spaniards "only for the silver they offered him." ⁸¹ Any policy based on treating the cacique as a representative of Christian authority seemed doomed to fail, especially because the apparently promising Juan de Dios had seen fit to murder Spaniards before the signing of the treaties. It would be a very long time, the embittered Jesuit advised his superiors, before the Darién would resemble the other settled provinces of the Spanish empire.

In this assessment Walburger's thinking fell wide of the mark, as it had in several other respects. For in the end it would not matter whether Juan de Dios, or others like him, had truly accepted the Catholic faith into his very heart, inasmuch as the roots of the failure of Alsedo's policy lay not within the unfathomable soul of a Juan de Dios but rather within the complicated indigenous polity. The presidente had in fact succeeded in establishing a nominally Christian provincial ruling structure for the Darién, an achievement that was no small feat. But Alsedo was unaware that the ruling structure on which he had placed his imprimatur lacked the coercive capacity, and perhaps the inclination, to challenge or transform the power that the leres wielded in the village communities. The Tule *caciques* and *capitanes*, even if they had desired to do so, lacked the ideological and physical resources that they needed to transform the religious life of the Tule people.

Padre Jacobo Walburger died among the Tule in 1751, no doubt contemplating until the end of his days the profound failure of his ministry. ⁸² By the mid-1750s Juan de Dios, who had so recently raised himself from a local village leader to the office of the Darién's cacique, would also become a casualty of the Spanish failure in the Darién. Having used his cunning and ambition to climb to the apex of the nascent system of Spanish regional rule, he had left himself nothing to hold onto when that system crumbled beneath him. In a sign of their inability to grasp the workings of indigenous power, Spanish officials in Panamá City held Juan de Dios responsible for the system's collapse, rather than list him, with Walburger and the Jesuits, as one of its victims. ⁸³

Notes:

Note 1: Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesús*, trans. by George E. Ganss, S.J., (Rome: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), part VIII, paragraph 673, p. 292. For a discussion of the introduction of the epistolary travel narrative as a defined genre, see Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 171-216, esp. pp. 171-186. [Back.](#)

Note 2: Vicente D. Sierra, "Las Cartas de Indias," and "Las 'Cartas de Indias' y las vocaciones en Alemania," discusses the publication and wide distribution of Jesuit letters. These discussions are parts of chapter 3 of his *Los jesuitas germanos en la conquista espiritual de Hispano-América, siglos XVII-XVIII* (Buenos Aires: Instituto Cultural Argentino-Germana, 1944), pp. 59-67. [Back.](#)

Note 3: *El Orinoco ilustrado: Historia natural, civil, y geográfica de este gran río y de sus caudalosas vertientes: gobierno, usos, y costumbres de los Indios* (Madrid: n.p., 1741). [Back.](#)

Note 42: *La perla de América, provincia de Santa Marta, reconocida, observada, y expuesta en discursos históricos* (Madrid: n.p., 1787). Though published at the close of the century, Julián's text is the product of his experiences in the 1740s and 1750s. [Back.](#)

Note 5: See the remarks of the Viceroy, the Marqués of Villahermosa, to the crown, 1 September 1735; Archivo General de Indias (AGI) Panamá 305, f. 111v. [Back.](#)

Note 6: This letter is mentioned and paraphrased in José Jouanen, *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en la antigua Provincia de Quito 1570-1774* (Quito: n.p., 1941), vol. 2, p. 244. Jouanen's text is especially useful because the author abstracted, paraphrased, and reproduced documents that he consulted in the Jesuit Archive in Rome. Equally useful in this regard is Juan Manuel Pacheco, S.J., *Los jesuitas en Colombia* (Bogotá: n.d. [preface dated 1989]), vol. III, chapter XI, "La Misión del Darién," pp. 289-307, which provides extracts of documents in the Archivo Nacional de Colombia at Bogotá, as well as the Jesuit Archive in Rome. [Back.](#)

Note 7: The visitador's activities in Quito during the presidency of Dionisio Alsedo y Herrera are discussed in Luis J. Ramos Gómez, "Tensiones en Quito: La visita del padre Andrés de Zárate, S.J., y sus secuelas," section II-5 of his *Época, genesis y texto de las "Noticias secretas de América," de Jorge Juan y Antonio de Ulloa, vol. I, El viaje a América (1735-1745) de los tenientes de navío Jorge Juan y Antonio de Ulloa, y sus consecuencias literarias* (Madrid: Instituto "Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo," 1985), pp. 50-53; Jouanen, *Historia de la Compañía*, vol. 2, pp. 138-164; and F. González Suárez, *Historia general de la república del Ecuador* (Quito: Edit. Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1970 [1892]), pp. 993-1003. [Back.](#)

Note 8: The following biographical information on Brentan was provided by Sierra, *Los jesuitas germanos*, p. 377: "Born in Hungary 24 August 1694, he

entered the Order on 3 October 1714. He arrived in Quito in 1722.Š He wrote an extensive history of the missions which was lost in Europe upon his deathŠ. After his provincialate (1744-1747) he was designated, in 1751, Procurator of the missions in Rome." [Back](#).

Note 9: Jouanen, *História de la Compañía*, vol. 2, p. 217. [Back](#).

Note 10: Álvarez was born in Andujar, Spain, in 1713. He became a Jesuit priest in 1731 and arrived in the Americas in 1743. In 1756 he was elected the procurador of the province of Quito by the provincial congress; after the expulsion of 1767 he was vice-provincial at Ravenna, where he died in 1791. The Creole Escobar was born in the reino of Quito in 1713 and joined the Jesuit order in 1732; the date of his death is unknown. See Pacheco, *Jesuitas en Colombia*, v. 3, note 38, pp. 298-299. [Back](#).

Note 11: Letter of Alsedo to the Crown, 15 October 1744, AGI Panamá 204. [Back](#).

Note 12: Jouanen, *História de la Compañía*, vol. 2, p. 217. The author here cites a letter in the Jesuit Archive in Rome written by Brentan on 21 February 1744. [Back](#).

Note 13: Jouanen, *História de la Compañía*, vol. 2, p. 244. [Back](#).

Note 14: Jouanen, *História de la Compañía*, vol. 2, pp. 244-245. As a testament to the difficulties Spanish authorities confronted, it appeared that the Jesuit order had had a priest performing missionary labor in the Darién in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Father Bernardo Recio, a missionary operating in the Kingdom of Quito in the middle of the century, claimed that from the year 1700 onward Father Esteban Ferriol had lived among the Indians of the Darién, making only occasional trips to his native Panamá City. On 31 July 1737 he is reported to have died in the Darién. Recio, Ferriol's contemporary, and a fellow missionary in the province of Quito, provided the earliest information available about the elusive Ferriol. See Bernardo Recio, S.J., *Compendiosa relación de la Cristianidad de Quito* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas [Instituto Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo], 1947), pp. 161-162. For the exact date of Ferriol's death, see Jouanen, *História de la Compañía*, p. 247. Jouanen provided no citation to the source of his information regarding Ferriol. Goldaraz provided dates of birth (2 August 1681), entry into the Company of Jesús (13 August 1697), and death (31 July 1737) for Ferriol in a footnote on p. 161, but he failed to add the source(s) of that information. This account is the only evidence available relating to a presumed rapport between the Tule Indians and the lone Jesuit priest; in turn, this rapport, and its long-lasting legacy of affection, has been cited as the explanation for the Tule preference for Jesuits, which was expressed in the treaties of 1738-1741. See A. Castellero Calvo, *Conquista, evangelización y resistencia: ¿Triunfo o fracaso de la política indigenista?* (Panamá: Instituto Nacional de Cultura [Editorial Mariano Arosemena], 1995), pp. 230-231. The case for Ferriol's importance is especially hard to make when the testimony of a late eighteenth-century Indian is taken into account. The Indian reported that the Tule preferred Jesuit missionaries because they had their own sources of

funding, whereas the mendicant friars made unwelcome monetary demands on the villagers. See M. A. de Arosemena, ed., "Noticia de la Provincia del Darién: Copia que se sacó de unos papeles Antiguos que envío al Sr. Virrey en el año de 1789 el Conde de Real Agrado," part I, *Hombre y Cultura* 2, no. 5 (1974): 143-157, and part II, *Hombre y Cultura* 3, no. 2 (1977): 155-162; the relevant information is contained in part I, p. 146. [Back.](#)

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

Note 16: The town had but a small garrison of Spanish soldiers who were headquartered at a modest wooden fort with a thatched roof. The fort is described by Joaquín Balcárcel de Miranda in his letter of 1 February 1745 to Dionisio Alsedo y Herrera; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 17: Alsedo provides information on the priest Pomar and the problems he caused in his Letter to the King of 11 March 1745; AGI Panamá 204. The following paragraphs regarding the activities of Father Pomar are drawn from information contained in folio pages 107-110. [Back.](#)

Note 18: A pesquisa investigation was a serious matter, and the investigator, armed with broad powers, was dispatched by royal order to make an on-site examination pertaining to a list of specific charges. This particular investigation was instigated by a list of charges brought to the attention of the crown by the oidor who was acting as fiscal of the audiencia, Licenciado Juan Pérez García. Pérez was no stranger to controversy and had been the primary target of Alsedo's campaign to rid central Panamá of contraband traders and their allies. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Letter of Alsedo; AGI Panamá 204. Alsedo noted that Álvarez, Pomar, and the comisionario arrived in the city on 18 October 1744, and that it was "one of the most disorderly days the city had ever seen." The Pomar brothers had considerable support in the town, and, when placed on trial for leaving his parish without secular or ecclesiastical permission, Juan Pomar was absolved after a process that took two months, an outcome that Alsedo stated "amazed those who had observed or considered the case." After being absolved he attained the proper permission, passed overland to Cartagena, and presented his family's case before the viceroy. Joaquín Balcárcel de Miranda, interim governor of the Darién, wrote in a letter of 1 February 1745 to Alsedo that Pomar had passed through El Real on 28 January on his way to Cartagena and was allowed to continue his journey, "having shown to me his license to travel, which was issued by yourself." Letter of Balcárcel de Miranda 1 February 1745; AGI Panamá 204, f. 130r. [Back.](#)

Note 20: Letter of Álvarez 6 January 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 21: Relación of Joaquín Álvarez, February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 22: Letter of Joaquín Álvarez, January 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 23: Relación of Álvarez, February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 24: Relación of Álvarez, February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 25: Diario of Balcárcel 12 February 1739; AGI Panamá 305. [Back.](#)

Note 26: Relación of Álvarez, February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 27: Letter of Balcárcel de Miranda to Alsedo, 1 February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 28: Letter of Balcárcel de Miranda to Alsedo, 1 February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 29: According to Balcárcel, Sanni used the term "*malespasadas lastrisas*" to describe his infirmities. A lastre is a bothersome illness from which one can ultimately recover. Letter of Balcárcel de Miranda to Alsedo, 1 February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 30: Relación of Álvarez, February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 31: This was a significant decision, and it provides the clearest sign of the dynamic operating between the two Jesuits. All missionary activity in Sanni's lands would be directed by Álvarez, a decision made without discussion, although the two men were of the same age and had entered the order at nearly the same time. [Back.](#)

Note 32: Alsedo reported that the road to the lands of Juan de Dios and Sanni was not an easy one, and that upon it "[Álvarez] lost the vision of one eye."

Letter of Dionisio Alsedo 11 March 1745; AGI Panamá 204; a copy of the letter can be found in AGI Panamá 305. Álvarez mentions his loss of vision in his relación of February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 33: Sanni's illness and his desire for baptism is reported in Alsedo's letter, Álvarez's relación, and Alsedo's decreto of 8 February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 34: Relación of February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 35: Sanni, of course, appeared in Álvarez's and Alsedo's accounts by means of messages that he supposedly conveyed to Álvarez and the Protector of Indians and interim governor of the province, Joaquín Balcárcel y Miranda. By the time Álvarez traveled from Yavisa to Arquiati to meet Sanni, the cacique had become a powerless, prostrate figure on a cot, near death. [Back.](#)

Note 36: Alsedo's decreto of 8 February stated that Sanni died a quarter of an hour after receiving the sacrament, whereas Álvarez's relación of February 1745 states that Sanni died six or seven minutes after receiving the sacrament. [Back.](#)

Note 37: For the outbreak of the disease in the mid-1740s, see S. A. Alchon's informative monograph *Native Society and Disease in Colonial Ecuador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), esp. p. 103. Although historians have thought otherwise, the Darién was not isolated from the disease trends sweeping through the kingdoms of Spanish America in the eighteenth century. When the administration of Alsedo worked to place the province under effective Spanish control, further avenues for the transmission of disease were opened. The Protector of the Indians Joaquín Balcárcel, for example, proudly mentioned in a letter to the presidente that Antonio Masgana, a man under his tutelage, had opened the previously unused overland route between Panamá City and Cartagena. In addition to serving as a path along which state papers could travel more easily, the overland route also opened an avenue for the movement of carriers of disease. The Jesuit missionaries themselves had recently been based in one of the affected regions, the reino of Quito. [Back.](#)

Note 38: Decreto, 8 February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 39: Decreto, February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 40: Decreto, February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 41: Decreto, February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 42: The requests are enumerated in Alsedo's Decreto of February, 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 43: Decreto of February, 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 44: Certification of the Bishop, February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 45: Testimonio of the Sargento, February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 46: Decreto of Alsedo, February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 47: Testimonio, February 1745; AGI Panamá 204. [Back.](#)

Note 48: Maroni's report is excerpted in Jouanen, *História de la Compañía*, pp. 245-246. [Back.](#)

Note 49: Jouanen, *História de la Compañía*, pp. 245-246. [Back.](#)

Note 50: A Dominican friar operating in the region, Fray Gregorio Díaz Pimienta, alleged that Escobar's health was worn down by the insults and betrayals of the Protector of the Indians, Joaquín Balcárcel de Miranda; see Pacheco, *Los Jesuitas en Colombia*, vol. 3, p. 299, who cites a letter of Díaz Pimienta, O.P., to viceroy Eslava (the original text erroneously reads "Viceroy Panamá"), 28 September 1746, in the Archivo Histórico Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá (Milicia y Marina, tomo 122). Hereafter this archive is cited as the ANC. [Back.](#)

Note 51: Franciscis was a Sicilian scholastic; Walburger was a priest from the province of Southern Germany, as Austria was then termed by the Order. Pacheco, *Los Jesuitas en Colombia*, p. 300, provides the following biographical data for the two men. Franciscis was born in 1705 in Palermo, entered the Company on 23 May 1719, and took orders in 1731. After teaching rhetoric in Palermo, philosophy at Tripani and Messina, and theology at Modica, he embarked for the Americas in 1741, headed for the Province of Quito. After serving in the Darién he served in the Amazonian missions of the Kingdom of Quito until the Jesuit expulsion in 1767. Walburger was born at Innsbruck on 18 June 1715, entered the Company on 1 April 1731, and came to the Province of Quito in 1742. [Back.](#)

Note 52: For the date of the arrival of the missionaries, see Walburger's breve noticia; AGI Panamá 307, f. 12r. [Back.](#)

Note 53: Franciscis had previously taught rhetoric, philosophy, and theology in Europe. Maroni provided this information in his *informe* to viceroy Eslava, which is abstracted in Jouanen, *História de la Compañía*. Pacheco, *Los Jesuitas en Colombia*, p. 300, cites an informe written by Franciscis on 20 June 1746 to Presidente Alsedo, which is in the ANC (Milicia y Marina, tomo 119). Severino de Santa Teresa, *História documentada*, vol. 4, p. 280, mentioned that Ignacio Franciscis broke his leg during one of his travels throughout the Darién and was forced by this injury to leave sometime around 1750, though no exact date of his departure was provided. [Back.](#)

Note 54: *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, 1r. [Back.](#)

Note 55: The description of God and his home are in AGI Panamá 307, f. 1r-1v. [Back.](#)

Note 56: For a discussion of the Tule cosmological oral tradition and its relationship to the social structure, see chapter 1. [Back.](#)

Note 57: N. M. Chapin, "Curing Among the San Blas Kuna of Panamá" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 1983), chaps. 2-5. [Back.](#)

Note 58: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 2r. [Back.](#)

Note 59: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 2r. [Back.](#)

Note 60: For a discussion of the danger of the nia and the rituals necessary to free a person from their power, see Chapin, "Curing Among the Cuna," chap. 7. [Back.](#)

Note 61: Descriptions of Tule diabolism are in Anon., *A Short Account From, and Description of the Isthmus of Darién, Where the Scots Colony are Settled* (Edinburgh: n.p., 1699); I. Blackwell, *A Description of the Province and Bay of Darian: Giving a Full Account of all it's Situation, Inhabitants, Way and Manner of Living and Religion, Solemnities, and Product; Being Vastly Rich in Gold and Silver....* (Edinburgh: n.p., 1699), pp. 13-14; and Anon., *The History of Caledonia: or, The Scots Colony in Darién in the West Indies. With an account of the manners of the inhabitants and the riches of the country. By a Gentleman lately arrived* (London: John Nutt, 1699), pp. 24-25. [Back.](#)

Note 62: For Mexican diabolism, see F. Cervantes, *The Devil in New Spain: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). [Back.](#)

Note 63: Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), provides evidence of similar problems of translation within the native community. The situations are not entirely analogous, however, because the peoples of sixteenth-century Mexico were experiencing religious instruction more intensely than the Tule of the Darién ever would. [Back.](#)

Note 64: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 2v. [Back.](#)

Note 65: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 11r-11v. [Back.](#)

Note 66: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 13r. [Back.](#)

Note 67: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 13v. [Back.](#)

Note 68: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 13v. [Back.](#)

Note 69: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 15r. Rather than provide information of who this Indian woman was, why she held sympathies for Christianity, and what the nature of her sympathies were, Walburger instead saw her revelation as simple proof of the truism that "Indians cannot keep secrets." [Back.](#)

Note 70: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 15v. [Back.](#)

Note 71: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 16r. [Back.](#)

Note 72: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 22r. Walburger's account must be treated in the same fashion as were the buccaneer narratives discussed in earlier chapters. As mentioned above, the Jesuit relation was a type of literary reportage and spiritual conquest narrative with its own forms and conventions. Walburger's narrative depicted a cadre of highly skilled and resourceful obstructionists who deftly nullified his missionary activity. [Back.](#)

Note 73: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 22v. [Back.](#)

Note 74: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 22v. For a discussion of ridicule and humor in colonial contexts, see James Merrell, "The Customs of the Country," in B. Bailyn and P. D. Morgan, eds., *Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 117-157, esp. pp. 152-153. [Back.](#)

Note 75: For the Jesuit attack on the shaman in North American Indian communities, see James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), chap. 6. [Back.](#)

Note 76: Walburger described the eclipse and its aftermath in the *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 6v. [Back.](#)

Note 77: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 7v. [Back.](#)

Note 78: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 7v. [Back.](#)

Note 79: The missionary could of course be a vector of the disease, because he would come into close and frequent contact with the ill and dying. [Back.](#)

Note 80: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 17v. [Back.](#)

Note 81: Walburger, *Breve noticia*; AGI Panamá 307, f. 23r. [Back.](#)

Note 82: Castellero Calvo, in a chapter devoted to Walburger, erroneously gives 1750 as the year of the Jesuit's death. See *Conquista, evangelización y resistencia*, esp. pp. 217-218. Before Castellero's flawed dating, others offered dates between 1759 and 1763 for Walburger's demise. Father Bernardo Recio, however, when he arrived in Quito in late 1751, knew the missionary to be dead. (Recio, *História de la Cristianidad*, p. 165, para. 155.) A letter of the governor of Panamá, sent to the crown 8 March 1757, confirmed 1751 as the year of Walburger's death. (Letter of Manuel de Montiano, 8 March 1757; AGI Panamá 130.) [Back.](#)

Note 83: In 1754 Juan de Dios plaintively addressed a *memorial* to the presidente and the bishop of Panamá City. He wrote that the absence of missionary activity among his people was a matter of grief and concern to him. Juan de Dios closed his remarks with a heartfelt plea for spiritual attention, stating that he did "consider [it to be a] great lack ſ to have a town without a

doctrinero," or missionary priest. It is interesting that even after he had lost the confidence of the administrators, Juan de Dios still thought it worthwhile to petition the presidente on these matters. See the Memorial del Cacique Coronel Juan de Dios de Herrera (AGI Panamá 130), which is included in a packet of letters and reports compiled by the presidente of the Audiencia of Panamá, Manuel de Montiano, on 8 March 1757. [Back](#).

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