

Chapter 12 ■

Wendy Kramer, W. George Lovell, and
Christopher H. Lutz

Fire in the Mountains: Juan de Espinar and the Indians of Huehuetenango, 1525–1560

We focus here on the controversial career of Juan de Espinar, a humble Spanish tailor who, in 1525, received the encomienda of Huehuetenango, the largest award of Indian goods and services in the Cuchumatán Highlands of Guatemala (Figure 12–1). In an attempt to increase his quota of native tribute and labor, Espinar manipulated Indians into burning their homes and taking up residence within the boundaries of his encomienda. Early archival documentation, containing testimonies of both Indian and Spanish witnesses, offers a unique view of native life under European domination and reveals the cunning, malevolent behavior of an ambitious man committed to making himself master of the region.

The Issues

How, as an early privilege of conquest, the encomienda functioned in Guatemala has never been adequately determined (Kramer 1990; Rodríguez Becerra 1977). Hitherto, only sparse documentation on the subject has come to light.¹ Prior to the stabilizing presence of royal government, which in Guatemala did not materialize until 1544, conquerors themselves set the requirements for what goods

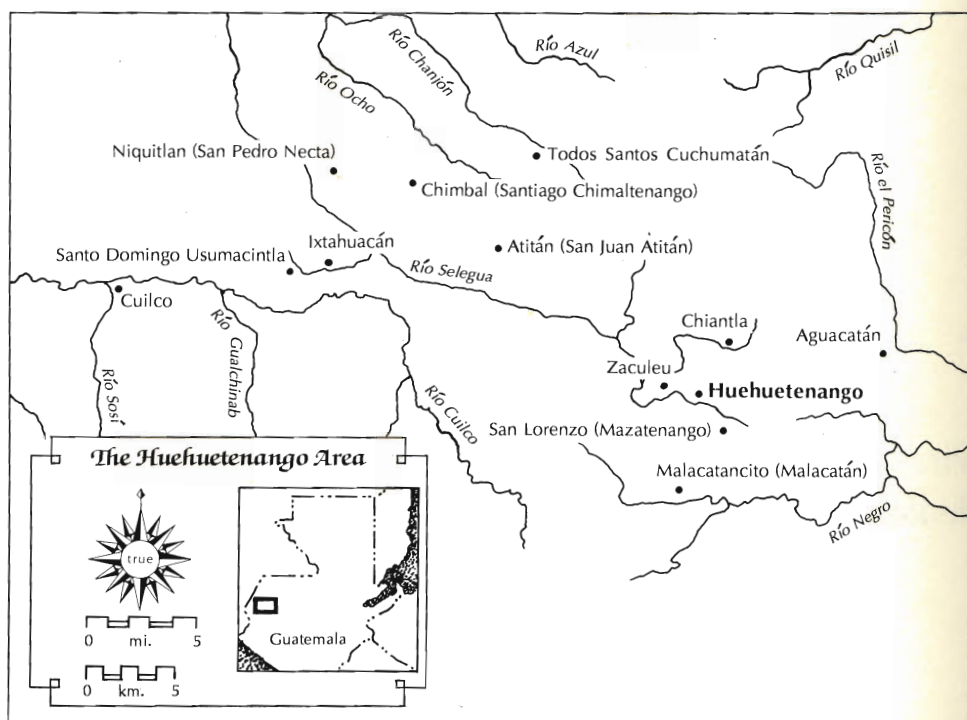


Figure 12-1. Settlements of the Cuchumatán Highlands of Guatemala.

and services were expected from the Indians they held in *encomienda*. It should not surprise us that Spaniards deliberately overlooked recording this kind of information, for the amount of tribute and the variety of services provided by Indians often exceeded the legal limits established by the Crown. We know, from passing references, of the existence of several documents that may contain such information, but these sources have not yet been found. It is for this reason that uncovering data relating to the early operation of *encomienda* in and around Huehuetenango, the largest town in the Cuchumatán highlands, is so exceptional. Our principal source is the correspondence of a complex *pleito*, or lawsuit, that took place from 1529 to 1537 between an obscure Spanish conquistador, Juan de Espinar, and the man who spearheaded the conquest of Guatemala, Pedro de Alvarado (AGI Justicia 1031). Litigation between conquerors was most frequent in the period immediately following subjugation. Bickering was exacerbated in the Guatemalan case by the constant reassignment of *encomiendas* on the part of those individuals charged between 1524 and 1548 with the day-to-day business of running the country (see Table 12-1). It was the reassignment of Huehuetenango, from Juan de Espinar to Francisco de Zurrilla, by Pedro de Alvarado in 1530, that triggered the lawsuit we examine here. Our examination, however, requires beforehand a brief outline of Preconquest and Conquest period history in order to contextualize certain events and circumstances discussed later on.

Table 12-1. Distribution of Encomiendas in Spanish Guatemala, 1524-1548

Governors, Lieutenant Governors, and Interim Governors	Tenure	Number of Towns Granted	Number of Encomenderos
Pedro de Alvarado	1524-1526	30	22
Jorge de Alvarado	1527-1529	94	72
Francisco Orduña	1529-1530	11	10
Pedro de Alvarado	1530-1533	90	50
Jorge de Alvarado	1534-1535	8	6
Pedro de Alvarado	1535-1536	19	10
Alonso de Maldonado	1536-1539	12	8
Pedro de Alvarado	1539-1540	7	3
Francisco de la Cueva	1540-1541	14	5
Beatriz de la Cueva	1541	—	—
Bishop Marroquín and Francisco de la Cueva	1541-1542	20	16
Alonso de Maldonado	1542-1548	—	—

Source: Kramer (1990).

Preconquest Huehuetenango

Archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence indicates that, by the middle of the fifteenth century, Huehuetenango had fallen under the political and tributary jurisdiction of the Quiché of Gumarcaah, later known as Umatlán (Carmack 1973). The precise extent of Quiché control, however, is still unclear. While strong all across the south, Quiché influence appears to have been less pronounced in the north and west, where small Mam chiefdoms may have held out against the expansionist aims of Gumarcaah. The secession of the Cakchiquel from the Quiché, which occurred around 1475, led to civil war between the two groups, a development that weakened considerably the rule of Gumarcaah over subjugated peoples. At least three Cuchumatán groups then seem to have thrown off the yoke of Gumarcaah, for the Indian chronicle known as the *Título de Santa Clara* exhorts the Quiché to be on guard against the Agaab people of Sacapulas, the Balamíha people of Aguacatán, and the Mam people of Zaculeu (Recinos 1957:197). Certainly by the time the Spaniards arrived in Guatemala, in 1524, the Mam of Zaculeu were treated by the Quiché more as allies than as vassals, for it was reported by none other than Pedro de Alvarado that the Mam ruler, Caibil Balam, was received with great ceremony and respect at Gumarcaah (Woodbury 1953:113).

The primacy of Zaculeu in the preconquest scheme of things is unequivocal, even if the nature of its political hold over surrounding communities is as difficult to establish as the spatial range of its domination. We know that warriors from Cuilco and Ixtahuacán fought alongside the Mam of Zaculeu against the Spaniards in 1525, so its sphere of influence extended at least 50 kilometers to

the west. Northward, also, it commanded allegiance and affiliation, perhaps as far as the valley of Todos Santos, for it was from these parts that a relief force descended to assist Caibil Balam during the Spanish siege of Zaculeu (Woodbury 1953:16–19).

Spanish Conquest of the Mam

Spanish penetration of Huehuetenango began in 1525, when Gonzalo de Alvarado led an expedition against the Mam. Alvarado had been informed, so Fuentes y Guzmán (1932–1933:3:110) tells us, that Mam country was “great and rich” and that “abundant treasures” would be among the spoils of victory. He set off early in July 1525 with a party of 40 cavalry, 80 infantry, and 2,000 Mexican and Quichean warriors. Assisted by another contingent of several hundred Indians who served as pack bearers, the party proceeded first to Totonicapán, which functioned as military and supply headquarters for the duration of the campaign. After a brief encampment at Totonicapán, the party then journeyed north, entering Mam country proper. In the days that followed, Alvarado’s men defeated two sizable Mam armies, one from Mazatenango (San Lorenzo) and the other from Malacatán (Malacatancito), before marching on toward Huehuetenango, which they found abandoned. Having heard of the Spaniards’ approach, Caibil Balam had ordered the evacuation of Huehuetenango and had retreated with his forces to the nearby stronghold of Zaculeu, where Mam forces waited in hostile confrontation.

The task confronting the Spaniards was indeed formidable, for Zaculeu exhibited a distinct air of impregnability. Although located on an open plain, the site was surrounded on all sides but one by ravines, and further protected by a man-made system of walls and ditches. A reconstruction of the fortress as Fuentes y Guzmán imagined it to be (Figure 12-2) appears in the *Recordación Florida*. While the chronicler’s drawing is certainly fanciful, it nonetheless imparts a sense of Zaculeu as a safe and secure stronghold. Inside its defenses Caibil Balam had gathered 6,000 warriors, which meant that the Spaniards and their Indian allies were outnumbered some two to one.

By early September, however, Alvarado had steered his men successfully through two separate armed engagements. During the second clash, 8,000 warriors are reported to have come down from the mountains to the north in an attempt to break the siege laid to Zaculeu following the first exchange of fire. On both occasions, victory on the part of the invaders can in large part be attributed to the murderous impact of Spanish cavalry on Indian foot soldiers. Following their double defeat on the field of battle, the Mam never again ventured outside their stronghold, where they were effectively besieged until Caibil Balam finally surrendered a month or so later. Satisfied that the subjugation of the Mam had been accomplished, Gonzalo de Alvarado left for Spanish headquarters, at that time located in Iximché, with news of his triumph.

The fall of Zaculeu, in October 1525, meant that Spanish rule was considered to prevail throughout Huehuetenango. In his account of the conquest, Fuentes y Guzmán talks in exalted tones about the valor of Gonzalo de Alvarado, whose

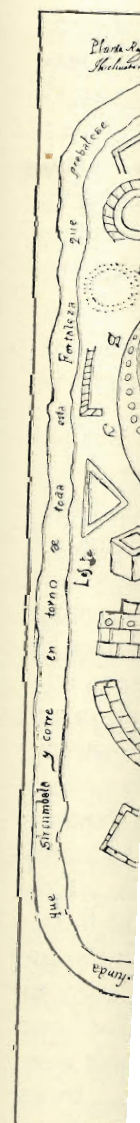


Figure 12-

own acc
heavily.
(Sáenz d
that he v
Alvarado
own per
sion is th
y Guzmá
Salazar

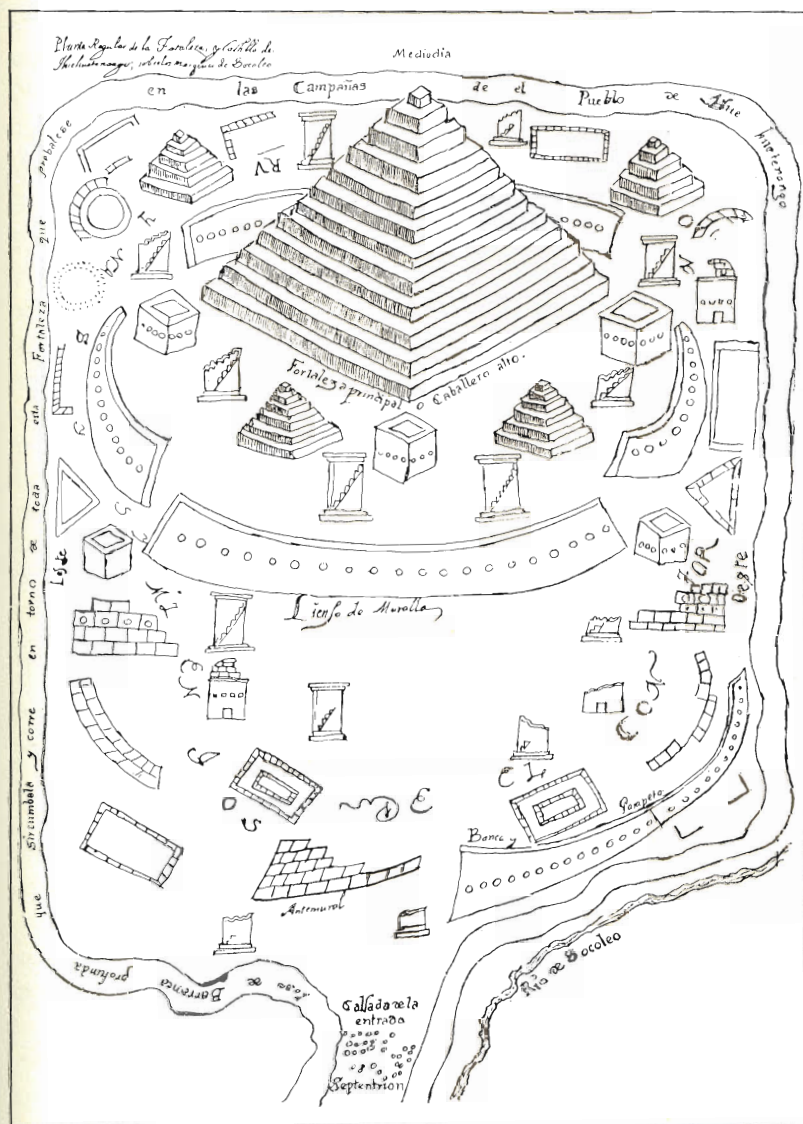


Figure 12-2. The fortress of Zaculeu, as depicted by Fuentes y Guzmán (1933).

own account of the conquest (alas, no longer extant) the chronicler relied upon heavily. Using Fuentes y Guzmán as a historical source is always problematical (Sáenz de Santa María 1969), but the chronicler does make it clear in this case that he was working directly from Gonzalo de Alvarado's firsthand descriptions. Alvarado's account may likewise have been imperfect, weighted perhaps in his own personal favor, but the fact remains that Fuentes y Guzmán's filtered version is the only surviving source we have for the conquest of the Mam. Fuentes y Guzmán also singles out the key role played in the campaign by Antonio de Salazar and Gonzalo de Solís. Salazar was credited with maintaining the siege

of Zaculeu when Alvarado led other Spaniards into battle against the relief force that attacked from the north. After Alvarado's departure for Iximché, Solís was left in command of Spanish and allied troops stationed in Huehuetenango and was charged with conducting a reconnaissance of all Mam communities either subject to, or aligned with, Zaculeu. None of these three conquerors, however, received the encomienda of Huehuetenango for the part they played in bringing the natives to heel. That prize, the right to exact unspecified goods and services from Indian communities in the newly conquered land, fell to Juan de Espinar, a Spaniard whose name passes without mention in the story so far.

Juan de Espinar, Encomendero of Huehuetenango

The documents are silent about both Juan de Espinar's place of origin and his family background. This is hardly surprising, given that Espinar himself would have had no wish to dwell on his humble lineage, and in view of the fact that it is difficult generally to identify the place of origin and family background of many of Guatemala's early conquerors. Perhaps a good number of them, like Espinar, were of low social standing and so had little reason to dwell on where they were born or who their families were—standard refrains that surface in the depositions prepared by conquerors and their offspring when they sought recompense from the Crown for services rendered. Men who did include information of this kind in legal solicitations were ones who usually had something to boast about (Kramer 1990:390). Unfortunately, nothing exists for Guatemala that is remotely comparable to the census of the first encomenderos of Panama used by Mario Góngora (1962:68–90), or the roll of Cajamarca analyzed by James Lockhart (1972:90–102), or the survey carried out in 1514 in Hispaniola, which Frank Moya Pons (1987:99–118) gleaned so effectively. In her study of the *hidalgos*, or noblemen, of Guatemala, Pilar Sanchíz Ochoa (1976) notes that the intense interest among Spanish residents to become *hidalgos* spread even to nonconquerors, tradesmen, and laborers. Sanchíz, however, was able to add but little to our knowledge of either the regional or social origins of Spanish residents, observing only that, in spite of vociferous claims to "*hidalguía*," there were probably very few "*hidalgos peninsulares*" in the area.

Espinar was awarded Huehuetenango by Pedro de Alvarado in 1525. He held the encomienda until 1530, when Don Pedro had it temporarily removed. Although no mention is made of him, we assume that Espinar must have served under Gonzalo de Alvarado, for he gained control of Huehuetenango around the time the Mam surrendered at Zaculeu.² Huehuetenango was then a prize catch, but there were other encomiendas of comparable size or even larger, encomiendas held by such men as Pedro and Jorge de Alvarado, Pedro Puertocarrero, Pedro de Cueto, Sancho de Barahona, Diego de Rojas, and Bartolomé Becerra (Kramer 1990:357–358). In spite of the fact that, after Huehuetenango was returned to him in 1531, Espinar no longer had the usufruct of some neighboring towns, his encomienda continued to be substantial (AGI Justicia 295).

Unlike most of his peers, Espinar was quite content with his lot. He an-

nounced with obvious pride that, since the time of the conquest, he had never traveled outside of Mexico or Guatemala, a thinly veiled slight about the high mobility of the first conquerors, many of whom left the area disappointed with their gains, seeking greater enrichment elsewhere (AGCA, A1.29 legajo 4678, expediente 40244).

Two important chroniclers make mention of Espinar, but they are unable to furnish specific information either about his services in the conquest or his place of birth. The main reason why Espinar attracted their attention is because of the money he made in America. Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1962:284) claimed that he remembered when, at the time of the conquest of Mexico, Juan de Espinar disembarked in Villa Rica from Spain and the Canary Islands, noting that Espinar went on to become a "very rich" resident of Santiago de Guatemala. Fuentes y Guzmán (1932–1933:3:99–101) also noted that Espinar became a wealthy man, but depicted Espinar's circumstances prior to his alleged discovery of silver mines at Chiantla as one of consummate poverty. Espinar is described, before fortune smiled on him, as a "miserable subject, with a wife and many children but with no means to feed so many mouths." The chronicler, once again, may have confused fact with fancy, for our archival sources say nothing about Espinar having been impoverished, nor ever having married and fathered children, even out of wedlock. We do have evidence that Espinar benefited considerably from gold placer mining in the Río Malacatán to the south of Huehuetenango, an enterprise he became involved in soon after the conquest. Espinar may indeed have played a role in the discovery, later on, of silver mines within the boundaries of his encomienda, but by then he was already a man of some means. A fellow conqueror, one Francisco López, made the unsolicited remark as early as 1539 that Espinar (AGCA A.1.29, legajo 4678, expediente 40244) "has very fine *haciendas* and good profits from them." Years later, President Alonso López de Cerrato (AGI Justicia 301) also observed that Espinar had "good Indians," probably meaning an ample or sufficient number at his command. Espinar himself reveals little, concerned in one deposition (AGCA, A1.29, legajo 4678, expediente 40244) with telling the Crown that he was a conqueror of Mexico and a first conqueror of Guatemala. It meant a lot to him to establish that he had a rather good horse (AGI Justicia 1031), a point others also did not fail to make.³

Besides his soldierly deeds and his owning a horse, nothing about Espinar's stature prepares us for the award of such a prime encomienda as Huehuetenango. We must bear in mind that Espinar was neither a member of the Alvarado clan nor one of its favored cronies. Don Pedro, the original grantor, was himself hard-pressed to explain why Huehuetenango landed in the hands of such an unworthy recipient. In 1530, the only explanation he could offer (AGI Justicia 1031) ran as follows:

As a result of continuous warfare in the region, the distribution of encomiendas had been irregular. Consequently, there were men like Espinar to whom the captains, to placate the appetites [of their soldiers], had given disproportionately large encomiendas, while others who deserved good encomiendas ended up with very little.

It is to Alvarado's investigations into Espinar's background that we owe some specific evidence as to whom the encomendero of Huehuetenango might have been.

There was certainly no love lost between Pedro de Alvarado and Juan de Espinar. The enmity between them dated from the time of Francisco de Orduña's governmental inquiry of 1529–1530, when Espinar presented damaging testimony against Alvarado. Upon Don Pedro's return to Guatemala in 1530, he set his sight on Huehuetenango as an appropriate reward either for himself or for one of his new followers. Alvarado, accustomed to getting his way, was unprepared for Espinar's bold refusal to relinquish his encomienda. Even though Don Pedro had originally granted Huehuetenango to Espinar, changed conditions in the former's own fortunes and the influx of worthy new colonists made it necessary to usurp or divide large encomiendas held either by members of the first conquering expedition or distributed by Jorge de Alvarado in 1528. Besides, reports that Espinar mistreated Indians and had burned several of their towns in order to get them to reside within the boundaries of his encomienda, provided Alvarado with ample justification for the removal of Huehuetenango.

Don Pedro had this to say (AGI Justicia 1031) about the man he regarded as an artisan upstart:

Espinar is a lowly person and of little disposition, someone who has lived by his trade as a tailor. His Majesty orders that tradesmen of the mechanical arts should not be given Indians but, rather, that they use their trades so that they ennoble newly settled lands and kingdoms and that the Indians should be given to the nobility and to those of a disposition other than that of tradesmen similar to the aforementioned Espinar.

For most men, Alvarado's wrath would have been good cause to back down, but Espinar stood firm. While careful always to downplay his knowledge of a manual skill, Espinar was not ashamed of the fact, prevailing prejudices aside, that he had once worked as a tailor (AGI Justicia 295). Don Pedro and his supporters also tried to denigrate Espinar by accusing him of gambling huge sums of money. Gambling, however, was so widespread among early Spanish settlers that this accusation likely did little to erode Espinar's reputation. Ironically, the former tailor lost especially large sums to Alvarado himself. Gambling debts evidently forced Espinar to make onerous demands on his Indians for gold and jewels (AGI Justicia 1031). His imperious character and his staunch belief that encomienda rewards should rest on military service and seniority in the region alone help explain how Espinar was able to frustrate Alvarado's attempts to appropriate or reassign Huehuetenango for any great length of time. Thus, regardless of his past and his growing infamy as a Spaniard who abused Indians, Espinar argued tenaciously that Huehuetenango was his from the time of the first assignment and should continue to be so.

Encomienda: The Spanish Reward

Juan de Espinar held the encomienda of Huehuetenango from 1525 until his death in the early 1560s, with one 10- to 12-month hiatus. For more than 35 years, many of them turbulent and fraught with uncertainty, a combination of tenacity, cleverness, and political savvy, together with a toughness that drifted, at times, into cruelty, made Espinar the master of Huehuetenango. He also had keen business instincts, controlling the sale of Indian tribute and developing an elaborate infrastructure of mining and agricultural activities in and around Huehuetenango. Land titles that cover Espinar's tenure as encomendero have yet to be located. It seems safe to assume, however, that by virtue of the power he wielded, Espinar could use the land much as he pleased, even though encomienda theoretically had nothing to do with seigneurial rights.⁴ Espinar, for example, owned a pig farm next to the town of Huehuetenango, and laid claim to enough land to raise large quantities of corn and beans, which he stored for consumption throughout the year.

About 10 kilometers to the south of Huehuetenango, along the course of the Río Malacatán, Espinar was fortunate enough to be one of the first Spaniards to exploit local deposits of gold. Good fortune for Espinar proved to be an onerous burden for the Indians he controlled. There is no evidence to show that Espinar owned the gold deposits. Rather, he staked claim to a part of them, as did other Spaniards in the same area. Since Espinar held the largest encomienda close to the placer mines, he wisely took advantage of his position to sell food supplies to other Spaniards who had gangs of Indian slaves (*cuadrillas*) working the gold deposits. While his encomienda gave him a foothold in the region and supplied him with foodstuffs, cloth goods, and labor services, it was panning for gold that made Espinar a wealthy man (AGI Justicia 1031).

Espinar claimed in his litigation with Alvarado that he earned approximately 9,000 pesos a year from his mining operations and another 3,000 pesos from his agricultural enterprises. From these earnings it would be logical to deduce that the rewards from the encomienda itself were insignificant because Espinar was an entrepreneur, not a feudal lord. That conclusion, however, would be misleading. In the case of Espinar, and many other encomenderos as well, the two roles were intertwined. Without his encomienda, and all that a rapacious encomendero could extract, Espinar's mining and agricultural enterprises may never have been more than modest or insignificant operations.

It is difficult to chart the course of Espinar's fortunes throughout his lifetime. We are on reasonably firm ground, however, in assuming that the most profitable years occurred prior to midcentury. Indian numbers were at their highest levels in the first decades after conquest. Population decline (Table 12-2) set in quickly and precipitously, the result of warfare, disease, and culture shock (Lovell and Swezey, 1982; Lovell et al. 1984). Espinar lived long enough to see the native population of Huehuetenango plummet to a small percentage of what it had been when he first arrived in 1525. One factor that affected the population size of his encomienda was that during the first five years of his tenure (until 1530) he claimed not only the cabecera (head town) of Huehuetenango but a handful

of other settlements he lost the right to later on, when they were granted to other Spaniards.

Added to the woes of an *encomienda* shrinking both in population numbers and territorial extent, with the enforcement of the New Laws (1542) under President Cerrato (1549–1555) came restrictions on the amounts of tribute collected, the numbers of Indians given in personal service, and the outright abolition of most Indian slavery (Sherman 1979:129–152). Also, gold deposits in the Río Malacatán probably did not continue to provide as rich a payoff in the 1540s and 1550s as in earlier decades. In short, native numbers and riverine gold declined at the same time (MacLeod 1973:60–61, 110–111). These developments must have made Espinar's later years somewhat less prosperous than his first quarter-century as *encomendero* of Huehuetenango. Even though his fortune declined, it was his varied and creative use of Indian labor and resources that helped him sustain a position of high economic status until the time of his death. Measured only in terms of population size, Espinar's *encomienda* in the mid-sixteenth century was the eleventh largest in a list of over 90 holdings, not including those of the Crown (AGI Guatemala 128).

Juan de Espinar did not run this complex operation, especially the panning of gold, all by himself. He had Indian servants (*naborías*) work exclusively in the mines, a Spaniard who served as a mining expert, a foreman (*mayordomo* or *calpixque*), and several pig herders (*pastores*) in Huehuetenango. To the south, whether Santiago's capital site was Almolonga (1527–1541) or Panchoy (1541–1773), Espinar built a house that must have been maintained by servants. By 1530, possibly even earlier, he was a council member (*regidor*) on the body (*cabildo*) that governed the most important city in Central America. As well as

Table 12–2. The Population of Huehuetenango and Subject Towns, 1530–31 and 1549

<i>Head/Subject Town</i>	<i>1530–1531</i>	<i>1549</i>
Huehuetenango (includes Chiantla)	3,000–3,500 ^a tributaries	500 ^b
Santiago Chimaltenango (Chimbal, Chinbal)	500 casas ^c	35 ^d
San Juan Atitán (Atitán)		
San Pedro Necta (Niquitlán, Niquetla)	200 casas ^e	20

a. Estimate based on calculations by Kramer 1990.

b. All 1549 figures are from AGI Guatemala 128.

c. 200 houses in the town center, or *cabecera*, and 300 in outlying settlements, or *estancias*. AGI, Justicia 1031.

d. Santiago Chimaltenango and San Juan Atitán, together, had 35 tributaries in 1549.

e. AGI Justicia 1031.

an urban household in the capital, Espinar also owned agricultural lands nearby. On this estate, Espinar likely settled Indian slaves, who would be joined by groups of *encomienda* Indians to produce wheat and other foodstuffs, for both domestic consumption and sale at market (AGI Justicia 1031; *Libro viejo* 1934:34; Lutz 1982).

Encomienda: the Indian Burden

Litigation between Pedro de Alvarado and Juan de Espinar provides the earliest details on the tribute and labor obligations of a Guatemalan *encomienda*. We compare in Table 12-3 native obligations for 1530-1531, when Zurrilla held Huehuetenango, and 18 years later, in 1549, when Espinar had long since regained control. Circumstances clearly altered over time. First, the *encomienda* of Huehuetenango in the early 1530s consisted of the population of the *cabecera* itself plus the inhabitants of at least four smaller, outlying towns. In 1549, the *encomienda* contained only the head town and one subject town, Chiantla. Second, the total number of Indian tributaries dropped from an estimated 3,000-3,500 to only 500 during these two decades (Table 12-2). Third, the more stringent enforcement of Crown laws, especially the reforms regarding Indian tribute and labor and the abolition of Indian slavery, must have greatly reduced the burden on the remaining population. Since an information void exists between the early 1530s and the late 1540s, we are forced to reconstruct how Huehuetenango's Indians fared during the interim. Espinar's loss of some subject towns, and their tributaries, in the 1530s, together with depopulation and *encomendero* freedom to exploit as the master saw fit, meant increasingly hard times for the Indians. While his *encomienda* holdings were rapidly spiraling downward, Espinar was undoubtedly desirous of maintaining his mining operation, his income, and his status in Santiago society. In short, if the year under Zurrilla presented in Table 12-3 looks bad for the Indians, most likely there were even more difficult years later on.

On the other hand, the year that Zurrilla held Huehuetenango might well have been an unusually demanding one for the Indians. Zurrilla took advantage of this opportunity to direct considerable native resources toward supporting the mining operations run by himself and Pedro de Alvarado. During his tenure, Zurrilla had the gang of 120 Indian slaves taken from the *encomienda*. He also owned outright, from his days in Mexico, a second *cuadrilla* of 100 Mixtec slaves. To the feeding and clothing of these slaves we must add an unknown quantity of goods and services given to Pedro de Alvarado for the Indian slaves belonging to him, for they worked the same gold deposits as the slaves of Zurrilla. Forty laborers known as *indios de servicio*, along with honey, fowl, and some clothing, went to Zurrilla's house in Santiago and the estate he owned nearby. Most other goods and services—cotton cloth, reed mats, foodstuffs, and the labor of men and women—were deployed in the support of the Indian slaves and the Spanish miner. We lack information on precise tribute schedules, but if payment followed the pattern used in subsequent periods, then half was furnished on the *tercio*

de San Juan (June 24) and half at Christmas on the *tercio de navidad*. Juan, an Indian leader of Huehuetenango, stated that each time tribute was paid to Zurrilla he counted the items and turned them over to the foreman (a Spaniard) who distributed the items between the mines and Santiago (AGI Justicia 1031). Most of the crops harvested to feed the local population and meet their obligation to feed the *indios de servicio* and Indian slave miners would probably have been furnished in the December payment. In his litigation with Alvarado, Espinar claimed that he had 3,000 fanegas (4,500 bushels) of corn and 300 fanegas of beans and chile stored at Huehuetenango, which he lost when Zurrilla held

Table 12-3. Tribute Paid in Huehuetenango in 1530-1531 and 1549

	1530-1531	1549
Clothing:	800 mantas ^a 400 masteles ^b 400 xicoles ^c 400 guipiles ^d 400 naguas ^e 400 cutaras ^f	300 mantas
Foodstuffs:	Unspecified amounts of maize, beans, chile, and salt ^g 108-126 large jugs	1 sementera of 15 fanegas (maíz) ^h 1 sementera of 5 of honey ⁱ /fanegas (frijoles) 100 cargas/loads of ag ^k 100 panes/loaves of salt 12 dozen gallinas de Castilla ^m
Fowl:	2,268 gallinas ^l	
Other Items:	400 petates ⁿ	1 sementera of 4 fanegas of cotton ^o
Labor Obligations:	40 indios de servicio: Indian men to the city every 20 days all year ^p 120-200 indios de servicio: Indian men to the gold mines every 20 days all year ^q 30 indias de servicio: Indian women to the gold mines in order to make tortillas and prepare food for the Indian laborers and the Indian slaves. ^r	6 indios de servicio

the enco
any resp
It seen
Alvarado
Juan de

Table 12

Slaves

a. A sta
ments. TH
b. From
c. A do
d. Huip
e. Wom
f. A typ
g. See
h. The
ing.
i. Hone
to the cit
j. Most
k. Chil
l. At th
for the e
an annua
m. Eu
monplac
n. Wor
o. A p
would re
p. The
the enco
labor in
in the va
own sup
q. The
went to
necessar
Indians
r. Ove
days of
s. Nev
Indians
their tov
Source
Simeón

the encomienda. Espinar's 600 pigs, likewise, were lost, although Zurrilla denied any responsibility.

It seems, on the testimony of several witnesses, that Zurrilla and his partner Alvarado were more rapacious in their exploitation of Huehuetenango than was Juan de Espinar. While, with hindsight, we know that Zurrilla only held the

Table 12-3. (continued)

Slaves	80 male and 40 female slaves, siezed from other towns, delivered to Zurrilla in Santiago. Used in the mines. ^s
<p>a. A standard length of cotton cloth. Half of this amount paid during each of two tributary payments. The same was true in the cases of the masteles, xicoles, guipiles, naguas, cutaras, and petates.</p> <p>b. From the Nahuatl, <i>maxtlatl</i>, a type of loincloth.</p> <p>c. A doublet or jacket.</p> <p>d. Huipil, or type of woven blouse worn by women.</p> <p>e. Womens' skirts.</p> <p>f. A type of sandal, with deerhide soles, probably worn by men.</p> <p>g. See below in the labor part of this table and text.</p> <p>h. The harvest from a planting (sementera) of approximately 22.5 bushels of maize. A large planting.</p> <p>i. Honey (miel) delivered to the encomendero in the city by the 40 personal service Indians sent to the city on 20 day shifts. They carried six or seven large jugs (jarros) each trip.</p> <p>j. Most likely a type of black bean.</p> <p>k. Chile.</p> <p>l. At this early date, probably turkey hens or native fowl. Each group of 40 Indians sent to work for the encomendero in the city of Santiago (see below) carried 126 every 20 days of the year for an annual total of approximately 2,268.</p> <p>m. European chickens introduced by the Spaniards from the Iberian peninsula were more commonplace than 20 years earlier.</p> <p>n. Woven reed mats used for sleeping.</p> <p>o. A planting of four fanegas, equal to approximately six bushels, of which the encomendero would receive the entire crop.</p> <p>p. These Indians carried the gallinas (turkey hens) and honey listed above on a regular basis to the encomendero's house in Santiago. The total of 720 Indians gave approximately 14,400 days of labor in house construction, domestic service, and agricultural work in the encomendero's estate in the valley of the city. Each time a group of 40 traveled to the city they provided and carried their own supply of corn.</p> <p>q. These laborers hauled firewood and dug out dirt to aid the mining of the gold. Every time they went to the mines they brought five gallinas for the miner, and all the chile, beans, salt, and corn necessary to feed themselves and the 200 slaves Zurrilla had mining for gold. These 2,160 to 3,600 Indians provided approximately 43,200 to 72,000 days of work in a year.</p> <p>r. Over an entire year, approximately 540 women served in this capacity producing about 10,800 days of labor for the encomendero.</p> <p>s. Newly enslaved Indians from towns included in the encomienda of Huehuetenango. About 70 Indians were branded. All were taken to work the gold mining operations but most returned to their towns, according to Zurrilla, when he lost the encomienda.</p>	

Source: AGI Justicia 1031; AGI 128; Kramer (1990); Fowler (1989:159,185); Díaz del Castillo (1962:5); Simeón (1981:765).

town for 10 months to a year, it makes no sense to think that he wished to consume its worth as quickly as possible, for he could not have known he would hold it so briefly. On the other hand, unlike Espinar, Zurrilla did not intend to stay in a backwater like Guatemala all of his life. So neither Zurrilla nor his mentor Alvarado, the latter ever anxious to amass large sums of cash for his foreign ventures, acted as if preserving the encomienda and its population were important.

Espinar claimed, and witnesses supported him, that the population of Huehuetenango declined by half during the brief time Zurrilla was encomendero. Apart from attrition due to disease, numbers fell because Indians fled to the mountains to escape the clutches of Zurrilla's hired administrators. In an unidentified subject town, Indians were said to be (AGI Justicia 1031) "very hostile and did not want to serve, running off always into the wilds. Sometimes Indians from the cabecera [together] with the Spaniard working as foreman went to look for them. They would bring them back forcibly as prisoners, and make them work. [Zurrilla] had them put in chains in order that they might work at the mines as did [the Indians] in the other towns." Indian resistance, perhaps more passive than in the subject town just mentioned, also occurred in the cabecera. When two high-ranking leaders of Huehuetenango did not cooperate with Zurrilla in mobilizing Indian labor, he ordered that they be sent before Pedro de Alvarado in Santiago. It was said by one witness (AGI Justicia 1031) that Zurrilla "had had a lord and a lord who was a translator punished."

Another witness, Luis de Bibar, testified that he had heard it said that Indians from Huehuetenango had been mistreated, perhaps even killed, when they refused to serve Zurrilla and Alvarado. Bibar stated that when Espinar arrived back in Guatemala in 1531, with the order from the Audiencia of Mexico returning Huehuetenango to him, that Indian leaders (principales) were in prison for having fled. Among those jailed was Coatle, the lord of Chiantla. Bibar also stated, however, that Coatle fled later on from Espinar, himself not above reproach for harsh treatment of Indians. In his defense, Espinar's attorney stated (AGI Justicia 1031) that when "his client had mistreated his Indians it was a long time ago, when the Indians were uncivilized and half at war and [because] they did not want to feed nor maintain some slaves that their encomendero had in the mines, on account of which some of them [slaves] died of hunger." Ignacio de Bobadilla, on the other hand, noted that on two occasions he had written letters on Espinar's behalf, instructing his foreman to give the Indians more supplies of corn, if they were in need, even though they had received their regular supplies (AGI Justicia 1031). This suggests that, while no saint, Espinar was understandably concerned for the welfare of his Indians, for their work in the mines kept him rich. Ironically, these two factors, Indian survival and maintaining the flow of gold, appear to have played a key role in the burning of several of Huehuetenango's subject towns in early 1530, perhaps the most startling revelation offered by the documents at hand.

The Burning of the Towns

Analysis of testimony concerning the burning, in January 1530, of four or five subject towns, the motivations for these actions, and the subsequent migration of Indians down from the mountains to the fertile plain close to Zaculeu leads us to conclude that it was Juan de Espinar who ordered this course of action, probably in collusion with the native lords of Huehuetenango and, perhaps also, with the Indian leaders of the outlying towns themselves. In order to understand this unusual course of action we must briefly invoke Preconquest antecedents.

From testimony we learn that many of the Mam settlements west and north of Huehuetenango, as well as the cabecera itself, began to pay tribute to Utatlán after Quiché expansion into the region in the early fifteenth century. Not only did Mam communities begin to pay tribute, but the conquering Quiché are said to have displaced local populations from traditional lands in the lower and more fertile plain around Zaculeu, forcing them to move to colder, less salubrious upland locations. Even with the decline of Quiché influence in the late fifteenth century, and with the increasing independence of Huehuetenango from Utatlán, the smaller Mam settlements (each with its own patio and temples, as the witnesses testify) continued to pay tribute to the Quiché lords. This would suggest that places such as Chimal, Atitán, Niquitlán, Chiantla, and others were under the indirect rule of Utatlán, and that the authority of Huehuetenango and Zaculeu was somehow bypassed. Contradicting this assumption, however, is the evidence that, after the Spanish conquest, the lords of Huehuetenango ordered these same places to pay tribute to the new master of Huehuetenango, Juan de Espinar, an order the rulers of the subject towns obeyed. Their apparent willingness to pay tribute to Espinar upon orders from Huehuetenango suggests that the latter held considerable sway over outlying communities. Justified or not, the lords of Huehuetenango referred to the nonelite inhabitants of the subject settlements as "their commoners." The close ties between these places and Huehuetenango is indicated by their involvement, outlined earlier, in Mam efforts to defeat the Spaniards at Zaculeu.

Taking these relations into account, it becomes more understandable why, in early 1530, under orders from Espinar and the lords of Huehuetenango, families in several mountain towns (see Table 12-4) would burn their houses (apparently having first removed their personal possessions and food supplies), abandon both home and community, and move a relatively short distance to the plain surrounding Zaculeu. Other motives, however, are less apparent, and involve a necessary departure, on our part, from historical fact to historical imagination.

Espinar tried to cover up his involvement in the plot by telling the then governor, Francisco de Orduña, that the Indians had burned their towns because they were in rebellion against the Spaniards. At the same time, Espinar, through his intermediaries, ordered Indian leaders to proceed with this destruction, and indeed flee to the mountains, in order that armed Spaniards whom he claimed would be passing through the region on missions of conquest and pacification might not see them. Afterward, those who fled were to come and live near

Table 12-4. Settlements Burned, Wholly or in Part, in Huehuetenango (1530)

<i>Identified Places</i>	<i>Unidentified Places</i>
Huehuetenango	Amala
Cozumaçutla, Xozumaçutla (Sto. Domingo Usumacinta)	Mocoga
Chiantla	Esquinel
Atitán ^a	
Chinbal, Chimbál (Santiago Chimaltenenago)	
Niquitlán, Niquetla, Necotla (San Pedro Necta)	

a. Acatepeque "en lengua de México y [en lengua de] la tierra Muachí y agora se llama Atitán."
Source: AGI Justicia 1031.

Zaculeu, also referred to as Zacualpa Huehuetenango. Cotoha, an Indian leader of Huehuetenango, testified that Espinar's native messenger told the lords (AGI Justicia 1031) that his master had said that "everyone should go down to the plain and gather themselves so that the Christians could not distribute them [in the encomienda]." The same witness said that Espinar had ordered that the towns be burned quickly, before informants of Orduña could see them, for if they did not proceed in haste then the Spaniards would kill them.

Espinar's initial reason behind razing thousands of houses was his anger over what he saw as intrusions into his encomienda jurisdiction by two other Spaniards, García de Salinas and Juan Niño. Preliminary evidence suggests that these men laid claim, based on official grants, to Chimbál, Atitán (claimed by Salinas) and Nequetla (claimed by Niño).⁵ In order to eliminate the case made by them—that he was usurping *their* towns—Espinar planned with his allies, the lords of the cabecera of Huehuetenango, the burning of subject towns and the resettlement of inhabitants in other locations. Because, under Spanish law, a grant of encomienda was for the use of the production and labor of a specified population, and not the lands or territory on which people lived, by this daring move Espinar wiped out the real resource base of his enemies while, simultaneously, consolidating his own holdings. As well as asserting and strengthening his own authority, Espinar's action also served to bolster the authority of the lords of Huehuetenango.

Investigations ordered by Orduña soon revealed that the Indians of the subject towns were not in rebellion but, rather, were simply following, as they had on previous occasions, the instructions of both Espinar and the lords of Huehuetenango. Espinar's motives were thus ones of unabashed greed, the desire for optimal enrichment. They also reflect a spitefulness and sense of territoriality against what he saw as the intrusion of García de Salinas and Juan Niño. To these must be added his wish to protect the rather elaborate infrastructure

he had developed in the environs of Huehuetenango within a scant five years of the Spanish conquest.

Indian motives are more complex and less obvious to discern. Throughout the lawsuit, there is evidence of a congruence of interests between Espinar and the Indian leaders of both the cabecera and the outlying towns. Even though the solution chosen—to burn entire towns—was a radical one, inhabitants of these places had legitimate complaints about where they lived. Indian witnesses complained that town sites in the sierra were unhealthy, excessively cold, and that soils there were inferior to those of the plain around Huehuetenango and Zaculeu. By contrast, the same witnesses noted that they, their families, and their children especially would live in a warmer, more hospitable environment.⁶

Equally important, the return to the plain, after the displacement caused by Quiché conquest, relocated these populations near the best land for growing corn, where they and their ancestors had raised far better crops than was possible at more lofty altitudes. Olín, the chief of Huehuetenango, testified that the lords and Indians of the other towns were living close to Zaculeu, where they guarded their corn fields.

Without exception, all witnesses speak favorably of moving from higher elevations to the lower altitude of the Zaculeu plain. Even the leaders of Huehuetenango mentioned this as a factor, which suggests that the town of Huehuetenango of the late 1520s must have been at a higher elevation and in a different location than the modern city of the same name.

Another reason that Indian witnesses gave for having burned their towns was that the Cuchumatán region was no longer at war, meaning that disruptions caused both by Quiché invasion and Spanish conquest were over. Testifying in 1530, Olín stated that the main justification for burning part of the old cabecera of Huehuetenango and moving closer to Zacualpa Huehuetenango (Zaculeu) was that there was no more war and so, by implication, the inhabitants could move to less defensible, open locations on the plain.

If, as the Indians declared, there was lower morbidity, warmer temperatures, and better harvests on the plain, all this was beneficial both for the former inhabitants of the subject towns and their leaders. On the negative side, the subject towns, and especially their leaders, must have lost some of their autonomy, for they were apparently now under the direct authority of the lords of Huehuetenango and, through them, Espinar. If there were benefits for the people of the subject towns, burning and resettlement appears to have been a boon for the encomendero and his native accomplices. In short order, the cabecera's leaders and their Spanish master concentrated most of the scattered population of some half dozen towns. Since, as they claimed, these people had their best, traditional milpas near Zaculeu, not only would a larger labor supply be mobilized for the use of the native elite and Espinar but, at the same time, there could be greater agricultural productivity for everyone. The concentration of the region's labor pool could have relieved some pressure on Huehuetenango's own local population while at the same time increasing the productivity of Espinar's varied enterprises in agriculture and mining.

While the burning of the towns and the gathering of their inhabitants near

Zaculeu had benefits for all parties involved, the main beneficiary was Juan de Espinar, not the Indians. Unfortunately for him, his trickery and scheming came to the attention of Francisco de Orduña, whose investigative findings were passed on to Pedro de Alvarado. Don Pedro, in turn, used the disclosures against Espinar. This resulted, about eight months after the incidents occurred, in Espinar losing his encomienda, and in the collapse of related agricultural and mining enterprises. It also resulted in Espinar being thrown in jail and then forced into exile, albeit temporarily, in Mexico. After Francisco de Zurrilla's one-year tenure as encomendero, Espinar regained control of Huehuetenango and of his agricultural and mining operations. The economic power and political authority he and his Indian allies asserted during that brief period in 1530, however, was gone forever. Because of excessive exploitation by Zurrilla, Huehuetenango's congregated population fell by about half during Espinar's year-long absence. Furthermore, when Espinar regained control of Huehuetenango, the encomienda known by that name no longer included Chimal, Atitán, or Niquetla, which were apparently ceded to Francisco de Zurrilla (AGI Justicia 295). The parts of Huehuetenango that remained under Espinar's entitlement incorporated only the cabecera itself and nearby Chiantla. As a consequence, Espinar's economic power and the political authority of local native elites suffered a sharp decline.

By 1537, when Espinar's litigation with Alvarado over losses suffered under Zurrilla's tenure in 1530–1531 came before the courts, the Indian rulers of Huehuetenango were at least nominal Christians with new baptismal names. Their conversion to Christianity may indicate a continued willingness to cooperate with Espinar in order to maintain their status even as the human resource base around them was shrinking. Huehuetenango was still an important encomienda at mid-century, but decidedly a lesser place than it had been in preconquest times and, briefly again, in the months immediately following the fire in the mountains of 1530.

Notes

1. William L. Sherman (1969) has written about the estate of Pedro de Alvarado but his study does not deal in any detail with early encomienda.

2. Formal title to the encomienda of Huehuetenango is dated October 3, 1525. Even though it seems that Zaculeu did not actually capitulate until toward the middle of the month, the Spaniards must by early October have felt confident of victory.

3. The witness Hernando de San C[h]ristóbal states that Espinar "has served in the conquest . . . on foot and on horseback." This suggests a rise from more lowly to higher status. Ygnacio de Bobadilla notes that Espinar "is among the first conquerors of this province of Guatemala and that in this war he has seen him serve with his arms and horses and sometimes saw that he had a servant." Pedro de Paredes, a witness for Pedro de Alvarado, knew of Espinar serving "in the war of the conquest of this province and in that of Tututepeque." See AGI Justicia 1031.

4. See Lovell (1985:118–139) on Spanish and Indian landholding patterns in the region. On the often close link between encomienda and the birth of the hacienda, of which this appears to be a good example, see Lockhart (1969) and MacLeod (1973:129–130).

5. Espinar (AGI Justicia 1031) refers to García de Salinas and Juan Niño as "enemies

who
towns
than
when
volun
passin
cabec
journ
lated.
tants,
held
6
thorit
kill a
those
of acc

Refer

The
Cent
AGC
153
AGI
154
AGI
153
AGI
153
AGI
15
Carr
19
Díaz
19
Fow
19
Fue
19
Gór
19
Kra
19
Libr

who have endeavored to dispute with me [my rights] over some of the aforementioned towns." Our evidence that these three towns were in contention is more circumstantial than direct. Chimal, or Chimaltenango, and Atitán were considered one encomienda when President Cerrato assessed them for tribute in 1549 (AGI Guatemala 128). Juan Niño volunteered (AGI Justicia 1031) detailed testimony on Niquetla, suggesting more than just passing interest in the settlement. He notes that, during a visit there, he found the cabecera of Niquetla to be a burned-out shell, a place empty of people. Niño therefore journeyed one league (4 kilometers) to sleep "at some outlying parts, for they were populated." The people there, however, fled when they saw the Spaniard. Among the inhabitants, Niño says he did not see any men. It is also important to remember that Espinar held Huehuetenango and Chiantla until his death in the early 1560s.

6. Because of the conspiracy between Espinar and Indian leaders to tell Spanish authorities the same story, reinforced by the encomendero's apparent threats to harm or kill anyone who told of his involvement, it is difficult to discern Indian concerns from those suggested by Espinar himself. Added to this confusion of motives is the problem of accurate translation from Mam to Spanish at this early date.

References

The following abbreviations are used in these references: Archivo General de Centroamérica (AGCA), and Archivo General de India (AGI).

AGCA A.1.29, legajo 4678, expediente 40244

1539 Probanza de Juan de Espinar.

AGI Guatemala 128

1549-1551 Las tasaciones de los pueblos del termino y jurisdicción de Santiago de Guatemala.

AGI Justicia 295

1535 Residencia de Pedro de Alvarado.

AGI Justicia 301

1555 Residencia de Alonso López de Cerrato.

AGI Justicia 1031

1529-1537 Juan de Espinar con Pedro de Alvarado.

Carmack, Robert M.

1973 *Quichean Civilization: The Ethnohistoric, Ethnographic, and Archaeological Sources*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Díaz del Castillo, Bernal

1962 *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. Editorial Porrúa, México, D.F.

Fowler, William R., Jr.

1989 *The Evolution of Ancient Nahuatl Civilizations: The Pipil-Nicarao of Central America*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

Fuentes y Guzmán, Francisco Antonio de

1932-1933 *Recordación florida*. Biblioteca "Goathemala," vols. 6-8. Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Guatemala.

Góngora, Mario

1962 *Los grupos de conquistadores en Tierra Firme (1509-1530)*. Universidad de Chile, Centro de Historia Colonial, Santiago de Chile.

Kramer, Wendy

1990 *The Politics of Encomienda Distribution in Early Spanish Guatemala, 1524-1544*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Warwick, England.

Libro viejo de la fundación de Guatemala y papeles relativos a D. Pedro de Alvarado.

- 1934 Prólogo del Lic. Jorge García Granados. Biblioteca "Goathemala" vol. 12, Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Guatemala.
- Lockhart, James
 1969 Encomienda and Hacienda: The Evolution of the Great Estate in the Spanish Indies. *Hispanic American Historical Review* 49:411-429.
 1972 *The Men of Cajamarca: A Social and Biographical Study of the First Conquerors of Peru*. University of Texas Press, Austin.
- Lovell, W. George
 1985 *Conquest and Survival in Colonial Guatemala: A Historical Geography of the Cuchumatán Highlands, 1500-1821*. McGill-Queen's University Press, Kingston and Montreal.
- Lovell, W. George, Christopher H. Lutz, and William R. Swezey
 1984 The Indian Population of Southern Guatemala, 1549-1551: An Analysis of López de Cerrato's Tasaciones de Tributos. *The Americas* 40:459-477.
- Lovell, W. George, and William R. Swezey
 1982 The Population of Southern Guatemala at Spanish Contact. *Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 3(1):71-84.
- Lutz, Christopher H.
 1982 *Historia sociodemográfica de Santiago de Guatemala: 1541-1773*. Serie Monográfica 2. Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica, Antigua, Guatemala.
- MacLeod, Murdo M.
 1973 *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.
- Moya Pons, Frank
 1987 *Después de Colón: Trabajo, sociedad y política en la economía del oro*. Alianza Editorial, Madrid.
- Recinos, Adrian (editor and translator)
 1957 *Crónicas indígenas de Guatemala*. Editorial Universitaria, Guatemala.
- Rodríguez Becerra, Salvador
 1977 *La encomienda en Guatemala: Análisis de una sociedad en formación (1524-1554)*. Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla.
- Sáenz de Santa María, Carmelo
 1969 Estudio preliminar, in *Obras históricas de D. Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán*. Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, vol. 230:v-lxxxii. Editorial Atlas, Madrid.
 1969-1972 *Obras históricas de D. Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán*. Edited by Carmelo Sáenz de Santa María. Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, vols. 230, 251 and 259. Editorial Atlas, Madrid.
- Sanchíz Ochoa, Pilar
 1976 *Los hidalgos de Guatemala: Realidad y apariencia en un sistema de valores*. Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla.
- Sherman, William L.
 1979 *Forced Native Labor in Sixteenth-Century Central America*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London.
 1969 A Conqueror's Wealth: Notes on the Estate of don Pedro de Alvarado. *The Americas* 26:199-213.
- Simeón, Rémi
 1981 *Diccionario de la lengua Náhuatl o Mexicana*. Siglo Veintiuno, México, D.F.
- Woodbury, Nathalie F. S.
 1953 The History of Zaculeu. In *The Ruins of Zaculeu, Guatemala*, 2 vols., edited by Richard B. Woodbury and Aubrey S. Trik, 1:9-20. United Fruit Company (William Byrd Press), Richmond, Va.