

Preston, Douglas. 2017. The Lost City of the Monkey God, A True Story. New York & Boston: Grand Central Publishing. viii and 326 pp. ISBN 978-1-4555-4000-6.

--QUESTIONS and ANSWERS from a skeptic--

Mark Bonta, 2017

Sources:

In additions to works cited in full in my text below, please refer to links on the “Materials related to Honduran ‘lost cities’” section of my professional website (<http://sites.psu.edu/markbonta/>) for links to the Bibliography from my PhD dissertation, as well as the full text of the dissertation (Mapping Enredos). See additional publications—full-length or abstracts—at <https://altoona-psu.academia.edu/MarkBonta>.

What is this book about?

Preston narrates the treasure-hunter Steve Elkins’ two-decade search for Precolumbian ruins in eastern Honduras related to a “lost city” of legend. Considerable historical and archaeological background is provided; ruin sites are eventually located using LiDAR technology, and a group of scientists and support staff are flown to one of the sites in 2015. The site is known as T1 (recently renamed *Ciudad del Jaguar*) and is notable for an unlooted cache of carved stone items. Archaeologists returned in 2016 and excavated the cache. The site is currently guarded by the Honduran military. The book describes the significance of the site in the context of the wider region’s history and archaeology. The potential role of introduced Old World diseases in the site’s abandonment is discussed, and the modern-day scourge of leishmaniasis, which afflicts much of the team on the first trip, and some on the second, is described in depth.

Why is this book controversial, and why are you critiquing it at such length?

As Preston himself documents, the search for real and mythological archaeological sites in eastern Honduras has long been dominated by treasure hunters and looters whose stories have later turned out to be partially or wholly false. Some of these searches were funded by academic institutions, and thus it is important to put purported claims of discovery under the magnifying glass, as a service to the reading public and to the wide range of academic disciplines involved. In this case, major controversy involves the way language has been used in public discourse relating to the project; to what extent the region and its culture are “unknown” and the area “pristine”; what role the Honduran state has played and should play in the protection and promotion of the site; what rights Honduran indigenous people—and which people--have to claim the site as their heritage; to what extent T1 is a “city.” I do not comment on all these here—I prefer to do an annotated

response to issues about which I am qualified to respond, and some of the controversies do not have easy answers. However, I feel that it behooves me to provide at least my own reasoned interpretations, given that I am mentioned by Preston in the book, and in general, given that the book is about a scientific topic and describes a scientific project. The reader is free to skip around—I have provided broader context as well as “nitpicking” details that may be of interest to specialists. Much, but not all, of what I write about eastern Honduras has been published or realized in the past.

How are you qualified to critique this book?

I have become intimately familiar with eastern Honduras since I first came to know the region in 1991, as a United States Peace Corps Volunteer. During my two years in Peace Corps, my Honduran employer was COHDEFOR, which at the time contained the government department responsible for inventorying and safeguarding Honduras wildlife and protected areas. I was assigned to the Juticalpa office, the purview of which included the park visited in this book – the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve – and many other areas. In later years, I did my Master’s research in Geography at the University of Texas and focused on what local people across the region know about birds (ethno-ornithology); this later became my first book (Bonta, Mark, *Seven names for the bellbird: conservation geography in Honduras*, Texas A&M University Press, 2003). For my [PhD dissertation](#) research in Geography at LSU, I utilized complexity theory to describe and explain the regional geography (including what was known about archaeology and history) of Olancho, the large region directly to the west of T1. The theory I developed in *Mapping Enredos*, my 2001 dissertation, was incorporated into another book that has garnered almost 500 academic citations (Bonta, Mark, and John Protevi, *Deleuze and geophilosophy: A guide and glossary*, Edinburgh University Press, 2004). “Mapping Enredos” won LSU’s best dissertation prize, and includes lengthy sections on environmental and social conflict in the wake of Hurricane Mitch, as well as (*a propos* to my qualifications for this critique), a selectively detailed history of eastern Honduras based on numerous primary sources from Spanish colonial archives I visited. In addition, it included the results of ethnographic research I had undertaken with hundreds of Ladino (mestizo) and indigenous people across the region. My advisors included Miles Richardson (an anthropologist) and William V. Davidson, the world’s foremost expert on the historical geography of Honduran indigenous people. I have continued to research a wide variety of topics in the region, particularly birds and cycads, becoming particularly familiar with the cognate disciplines and fields of ornithology, conservation biology, ethnobotany, and philosophy. I have also been closely involved in biocultural heritage protection, working with individuals, professional societies, and local communities to help them identify and interpret critical archaeological, historical, and biological heritage so that they can better protect what is on their land and in their area—particularly in case outside interests (roadbuilders,

loggers, miners, dam-builders) are given concessions to develop and possibly destroy these resources before they are adequately understood and safeguarded.

As part of this overall effort, following in the footsteps of others such as Davidson, I was the first modern researcher to visit and identify an important and very large ruin site, Tayaco, documented as recently as the early 1800s by a Franciscan missionary, Padre Goycochea (see below), and belonging to the same culture as the one that built T1 and other sites mentioned by Preston. I have also tried to bring attention to other large ruins in the region, and have successfully attracted a few archaeologists and other scholars to help with the vast effort of identifying and protecting the region's cultural resources. On the natural side, I most recently received a National Geographic Committee for Research and Exploration Grant to do rapid biodiversity assessments on unexplored cloud forests in northeastern Honduras, which resulted in many important biological discoveries, including in the Dulce Nombre de Culmí region of the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve not far from T1. Another recent project (<http://www.zcog.org/three-wattled-bellbird>) that I helped design and gain government permits for involved the first-ever use of satellite harnesses to track the seasonal movements of the Three-wattled Bellbird from its nesting grounds in the Sierra de Agalta. One of the places that the birds migrated in 2014-2015, to find their preferred food, wild avocados, was (ironically enough) the Valle de la Fortaleza (the current term for T1's location), thus I instantly recognized the site from information received via the Bellbird project, and Preston's [2015 National Geographic article](#). I was unable to visit the site to ground-truth the bellbird data in 2015, but visited other parts of the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve (RPBR) where the birds had gone instead.

Is this really a true story?

Yes. I have no reason to believe that Preston is not being entirely truthful, to the extent of his knowledge, in his depiction of the events surrounding the T1 project. He reproduces others' words verbatim and does not reproduce conversations after the fact. Though he purposely as well as apparently unknowingly omits important facts, misinterprets other data, and does not have a scientific grasp of several subjects he writes about, it is not my judgment that he is anywhere passing off fiction as fact.

Is there an accompanying or related scientific study?

Yes. Please refer to Fisher, Christopher T., Juan Carlos Fernández-Díaz, Anna S. Cohen, Oscar Neil Cruz, Alicia M. Gonzáles, Stephen J. Leisz, Florencia Pezzutti, Ramesh Shrestha, and William Carter, "Identifying Ancient Settlement Patterns through LiDAR in the Mosquitia Region of Honduras," *PloS ONE* (11)8, 2016: e0159890 (<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0159890>). This article is publicly

available and is far more accurate in its discussion of the context of the T1 site than Preston's popular account. It is marred by sloppy proofreading (Valle de la Fortaleza is spelled three different ways; the inset map of the Valle locates it in the wrong part of Honduras; some scientific names of fauna are incorrect), but it does take into account the important literature related to the archaeological and ethnohistorical contexts of T1 in eastern Honduras; it does not make grandiose and specious claims regarding the "unknown" nature of the culture that constructed T1. I have sustained extensive conversations regarding my critique of the article with one of the authors and discussed my opinions with that person. My critique of 'Lost City' should in no way be interpreted as a critique of Fisher et al. (2016).

Does Preston claim that the project he describes found the White City, Ciudad Blanca, or Lost City of the Monkey God?

No. On page 104, Preston talks about sites located by Lidar during 2012 that were 'apparently built by an unknown civilization' : 'could one of these actually be *the* White City, *the* Lost City of the Monkey God? This, however, was the wrong question—it was clear to everyone by this point that the White City was a conflation of stories and probably did not exist in its described form.' In 2015, when they are at the T1 site, 'I asked Fisher whether the White City had finally been found. He laughed. "I don't think there is a single Ciudad Blanca," he said, "I think there are many." The myth, he said, is real in the sense that it holds intense meaning for Hondurans, but for archaeologists it's mostly a "distraction.'" (111). Preston does not contradict him. This may be lost on some readers and on the lay public and media in general, though, as Preston, like all writers about this myth, is somewhat coy: 'But Elkins also knew that there were many big ruins in Mosquitia, known and unknown, any of which might be the legendary White City, if it indeed existed in its described form, which was at the time an open question' (72) and 'every attempt to find the lost city in the past five hundred years had ended in fraud or failure' (76).

Does the author get his geography and regional background right?

Not really – only the very broad strokes. He fails to note or at least seriously downplays the fact that the cultural/archaeological region to which T1 belongs stretches from the Bay Islands to the Patuca River and encompasses numerous ecosystems, not just rainforest ("jungle"). It contains considerable expanses of tropical dry forest in the Aguan, Agalta, and Olancho valleys (which were tropical dry forests at the time the culture was at its height, some 800 to 1000 years ago), as well as broadleaf cloud forests, montane pine forests, and pine savannas across the region. Post-Classic ruins closely related to T1 occur throughout this region. Giving the lie to his repeated assertion that the area is unknown archaeologically, extensive and

systematic work has already been done, for example by Paul Healy: see, for example, Healy, Paul F., 'Excavations at Rio Claro, Northeast Honduras: Preliminary Report,' *Journal of Field Archaeology* (2013).

Furthermore, Preston's use of the term "Mosquitia" (Moskitia) is misleading and imprecise, as a 'land of rainforest, swamps, lagoons, rivers, and mountains' (1). To give him credit, the term, which originally was applied to the swamps and pine savannas of far eastern Honduras, dominated by the Miskito (Mosquito, earlier Zambo-Mosquito) people and now located wholly within Gracias a Dios dept, has been extended westward in very recent times to include the deep rainforests of Gracias a Dios, Olancho, and Colon depts—where T1 is ensconced-- that separate the true Moskitia from the tropical dry forests and cloud forests of the Honduran interior. No road connects the two areas. The deep rainforests and the Moskitia TOGETHER were referred to throughout the colonial period as 'la Taguzgalpa,' more or less a moniker for the wilderness outside of Spanish control. Neither the Moskitia nor la Taguzgalpa are adequate terms to encompass the totality of the geographic extent of the supposedly "unknown" "civilization" that stretched across the region (thus I prefer 'eastern Honduras', though ruins of many other cultures unrelated to the T1 culture have also been found there). Plenty of T1-like sites are located on the outskirts of major towns, on cattle ranches hundreds of years old, and so forth. T1 and related sites are important solely because they have not been looted (this is, of course, of considerable importance!). One name the Moskitia was *never* known by was this: 'Early maps labeled it the Portal del Infierno, or "Gates of Hell," because it was so forbidding.' (1). The Portal del Infierno is a narrow, rocky chute along the upper Patuca River, sometimes imagined as a deep and forbidding canyon by ill-informed outsiders (like E. G. Squier) who had not done the easy trip through it and believed the yarns spun by the local tellers of tall tales, who seem to have their laughs at the expense of many a travel writer and would-be treasure hunter in the region.

But aren't T1 and related sites the project documented much bigger than known sites, and that's what makes them so important?

Not really—or at least, we now know that we don't know and can't say. Beyond the quibbling over what constitutes a 'city' (109), Preston says that T1 is four times bigger than Las Crucitas de Aner, the hitherto largest known site in the region, whilst T3 is several times larger than T1 (110). "But that, he [head archaeologist Chris Fisher] explained, wasn't saying much, since no site in Mosquitia had ever been mapped in its entirety" (110-111); [t]he lidar maps of T1 and T3 hinted that many Mosquitia sites, almost all of which had been poorly mapped if they had been mapped at all, could be far larger than previously thought" (111). Fisher et al. (2016) point out that Lidar alone is not sufficient to determine the extent of an urban area or its population, because the remains of houses themselves (*sans* earthen mounds, which is what Lidar can

detect), if any exist, are not detected in this type of work. And neither Crucitas nor other sites in the region have been mapped with Lidar—if they were, more features would probably be revealed than have appeared on the ground surveys that have done! Thus there is really no way to tell which site is larger without Lidar mapping of all known large sites, and further archaeological research that could perhaps give a more accurate idea of total habitation areas (which, of course, would have fluctuated over time, until complete abandonment). Preston doesn't really say, but the height of the main pyramid he writes about at T1 I have been told is about 12 meters. Its dimensions make it no larger than constructions of its type that I have seen at Tayaco or at other sites in the region (in the municipalities of Guata, Gualaco, and San Esteban), several of which are completely undocumented, though known to local landowners and municipal authorities who attempt to protect them (the central Honduran government's authority, IHAH, has little influence in these areas; most sites, even if locally known, have not been mapped, let alone officially protected in any way).

What is the evidence for and/or against the author's claim (apparently following most or all project members' opinions) that T1 and the Valle de la Fortaleza (latter is name given by Fisher et al. 2016) are "pristine", "undiscovered", and otherwise unvisited by human beings in several centuries, and why is this important?

My documented response is lengthy, because the question bears on a range of misconceptions and misperceptions about who lived in the region at what time. This is important for various reasons, not least because of potential claims to the area as heritage (see below).

Let's read what Preston has to say about all this. First, in reference to the region, he calls it a 'pristine wilderness that had not seen human beings in living memory' (3). During the 1990s satellite recon work Elkins participated in, that pinpointed the location of T1's valley, he says that the aerial images revealed 'no sign of human entry, occupation, or indigenous Indian use; it appeared to be pristine, untouched rainforest. Absolutely uninhabited areas of tropical rainforest are very rare in the world today; even the remotest reaches of the Amazon...or the highlands of New Guinea, are used seasonally by indigenous people and have at least been minimally explored by scientists' (50-51). (Aerial images are not adequate for determining more than widespread human influence such as clearings for roads, pastures, or agriculture.) Elkins followed up this aerial survey with interviews of archaeologists, gold panners, smugglers, looters, and adventurers (no mention of hunters, gatherers, farmers, ranchers, or others, nor or whether or not Elkins visited Dulce Nombre de Culmí and the frontier communities closest to T1 at that time; I would suspect he did not have time, given that Hurricane Mitch struck soon thereafter). In any case, Elkins performed 'much research' that led him to conclude that T1 was 'truly unexplored'; he had a 'gut feeling' that the area was completely

inaccessible (51). In 2012, Preston got to ride on the Lidar plane, and states that '[w]e were flying above a primeval Eden, looking for a lost city...a jungle that no human beings had entered for perhaps five hundred years' (97).

In documenting his 2015 visit to the site—the first that any project personnel had been there since the area had been pinpointed 18 years previously—he mentions that 'no one had been in there on the ground in perhaps hundreds of years' (120)' and describes how one of the expedition members, and ex-British military officer, perceived the area (he was previously unfamiliar with the entire region): a 'wild pig' (peccary) ran right through the area, which was 'so apparently untouched; that 'a quail came right up to him' (133). This is followed by the oft-repeated revelation of the presence of spider monkeys, which Preston insists, based on his sources (including a biologist hired by Conservation International) are somehow evidence that the site had not been visited by humans in modern times. Finally, when the cache of stone implements is discovered, in an undisturbed state, he writes that '[t]his was proof, if we needed it, that this valley had not been explored in modern times' (154). Mark Plotkin, the ethnobotanist, visited the valley and looked for 'evidence of recent habitation' such as chile pepper bushes (174); he found nothing, and also did not find mahogany trees, which appears to have suggested to him or to Preston why the valley might not have been of interest to this extractive industry. On a later trip, a five-mile transect in the valley was explored by Trond Larsen, working for Conservation International, who judged that it was 'a pristine, undisturbed forest' with 'very old trees' that 'has not seen a human presence in a very long time,' 'perhaps for as long as five hundred years.' (183-184). The trees were '10-15 feet in diameter' (130).

What should we make of all this? Now that the Fisher et al. (2016) article shows us the location of T1 and the Valle de la Fortaleza in the headwaters of the Rio Pao, we can measure the distance to the nearest recent clearcuts, 8.6 km southwest of the entrance to the valley, which is marked by where the river cuts through the encircling hills, as accurately described by Preston. These clearcuts are visible on Google Earth and mark either cattle pastures or subsistence plots for corn or beans; they are outliers of the community of Pao (Pau). This is the border region spanning the corners of the departments of Gracias a Dios, where T1 and the valley are located, Colon, and Olancho; the latter department is where any local visitors to the valley and its outskirts live – in particular, part of the Dulce Nombre de Culmí municipality, whence the moving settlement frontier originates. But have these ranchers and farmers ever been to T1? Does the impression the book gives that they had not, at least prior to 2015, hold water? I would say, based on the following, that given the data I have examined, it is still impossible to tell.

What we DO know is that modern humans have at least been in the valley, if not T1 itself: ‘As we[Preston and others] reached the gap [in the hills downstream of T1], we saw the first evidence of historic human occupation in the valley—a tattered cluster of wild banana trees... This was the only sign we ever saw of post-conquest habitation of the valley’ (178). Given my quarter-century of experience in eastern Honduras, I would be extremely surprised if local hunters and gatherers, and possibly gold panners, if not mahogany timber cruisers as well, knew about the valley, beyond someone’s having planted bananas there – I have many reasons for saying this, though of course no actual proof positive, having not examined the location on the ground myself. First and foremost, it is an error on Preston’s part to assume that any and all local people would be interested in looting a cache of buried stone carved implements, thus because the cache hadn’t been looted, people hadn’t known about the site. These implements are easily found throughout the region, but are extremely heavy, and only a dedicated trafficking expedition in its own right would care; local people might be too busy surviving off their subsistence activities (or engaging in much more lucrative narcotrafficking, as Preston points out). Beyond this, the frequent floods in the bottomlands, such as the one in 2015 (‘A massive flood had scoured the valley after the 2015 expedition, washing away the old landing zone’, 277) would have obliterated evidence of seasonal use, potentially by nearby inhabitants of Pao (it is not reported whether any of these have been interviewed regarding the valley – there is some thought that the toponym ‘Valle de las Margaritas’ refers to the area, but I cannot confirm this), or by itinerant groups of gold panners (evidence of whose activities would also be obliterated by floods), subsistence hunters and endangered species traffickers, or plant gatherers. Fly-in mahogany camps that transported the logs out by plane to Culmí, common in the middle parts of the 20th century before mahogany cutting was banned, would presumably have left more obvious traces, at least of cut logs and stumps, though again, floods would have eliminated evidence of landing pads (see Archie Carr, *High Jungles and Low*, 1953). In terms of human habitations, these are invariably located on terraces above flood zones and are made of sticks and palm thatch or sometimes more durable materials such as wattle-and-daub. Assuming the project’s searches were exhaustive, habitation by people in wattle-and-daub houses in very recent times (last few decades—before that, the humid climate and leaf litter would destroy and cover even evidence of that) can perhaps be excluded, but not one-time, occasional, or seasonal occupation using less durable materials.

What of the huge trees? This is neither here nor there – no dating method was apparently used, and I have seen rapidly growing trees this size, that I know began to grow in the 1800s, on ranches and in towns in the drier central valleys of Olancho. Girth is a largely meaningless or at least misleading measure of tree age.

In essence, what Elkins and Preston are essentially saying is that no evidence has been found (yet) of a community permanently inhabiting the valley, that farmed (or ranched) in recent times. Obviously, strictly

speaking, and following quotes above, the valley wouldn't be 'pristine' if there were even occasional or seasonal visits, which there were, of course, if only for the purpose of planting, tending, and harvesting bananas. But how far back can we assume the area has been uninhabited? The question is addressed below as a response to perhaps the most significant lacuna in the book.

Otherwise, does Preston get the biological data about the area correct?

In most cases, his extremely evocative if sometimes sensational descriptions are spot on – what he describes is exactly the way these forests look and feel. Few species are identified to name (e.g. scarlet macaw, tapir, snowy egret, spider monkey, red brocket deer), and only a few are misidentified. “Wild pig” (133) is a reference to *Tayassu pecari*, the White-lipped Peccary (see Fisher et al. 2016), no relative of the pig. “Capybara” (252) is in error (it is a South American species), and may refer to a related smaller rodent such as the agouti or paca. In terms of descriptions of the ecosystem, ‘the thickest jungle in the world’ (1) is an unproveable assertion, and is belied by his own description of the towering forest in T1 with relatively open understory. Most likely, the thick vegetation encountered was in part a result of the tangled growth that results after the destruction of the forest, which in this area and across eastern Honduras is a product of frequent hurricanes and other storms causing massive flood events, such as the one that occurred in the T1 valley in 2015. (These floods cause enormous destruction on floodplains, leaving ‘lush meadows’ (97) and the type of landscape shown for T1 and also described for the other sites. The larger meadows may even have been a result of Hurricane Mitch or one of the more recent hurricanes to pummel the area. As for the technical designation of the ecosystem, the site of T1 is only a couple hundred meters above sea level, thus difficult to classify as ‘subtropical jungle’ (140), even if it was ‘surprisingly chilly’ (210).

How is it known that the site of T1 was abandoned as late as the early 1500s?

I confess that I am mystified by this claim, based on the fact that: ‘almost certainly, epidemics of European disease swept T1, T3, and the rest of Mosquitia sometime between 1520 and 1550.’ (230). ‘And then, around 1500, this culture collapsed...the Mosquitia civilization vanished everywhere all at once—in a sudden, civilization-wide catastrophe. “We have only a glimpse of this great culture,” said Oscar Neil, “before it vanished in the forest.”’ (210) As Fisher et al. (2016) and others point out, including the archaeologist Christopher Begley, who is the foremost expert on this culture, even Paul Healy’s research at Selin Farm has not definitively connected the post-Classic ruins of the region with Contact-era (1500s) chiefdoms (Healy suggests that the site he excavated was the Contact-era Papayeca). T1’s stone implements and earthen constructions date from around the 1200s AD. Nowhere does Preston back up this claim that T1 was abandoned as a result of disease introduced to the wider region by Europeans, though he is not incorrect in parts of his general description of the apocalypse of Old World diseases that wiped out over 90% of the

indigenous population at that time. I think it is important to be clear, here—yes, the sites of eastern Honduras continued to thrive after the great cities of the Classic Maya collapsed (such as Copán), but the archaeological record is still, quite unfortunately, silent on whether the abandoned eastern Honduran sites were the same ones encountered by Europeans in the 1500s.

In the broader context, does Preston get his pre-Columbian archaeology of Honduras right?

Yes and no. I am not qualified to discuss much of this, but I do take issue with his over-simplified portrayal of the country, which leaves out, most notably, the extremely important and powerful chiefdoms of the Lenca, who stretched from western Honduras all the way across the Olancho, and at least in post-Contact times, were also found through eastern Honduras (known as ‘Lenca’ and by other names). For example, Honduras’s ‘pre-Columbian history (beyond Copán) is still an enigma’ (288); T1 had ‘Maya neighbors to the west and north’ (151); ‘Copán is as far south as the Maya appear to have reached’ (200). First, the Maya region is oriented on a west-east axis from Chiapas to Honduras, not north-south. The Maya certainly reached well east of Copán—as far as Lake Yojoa, around 125 km farther east. T1 itself never had Maya neighbors—it had Lenca neighbors and possibly Tolupan neighbors, but Preston only vaguely mentions the Nahua, who derived from Mexico and were present in some form or another (dates and influence are not agreed upon by scholars—see notes in my dissertation excerpts, below). It is essentially impossible to talk about relationships between eastern Honduras and Mesoamerica, including the Maya, without talking about the Lenca.

Is the account of Columbus’s 4th voyage correct?

It is imprecise. Christopher Columbus himself did not ‘disembark’ (223) at Trujillo in 1502 before continuing ‘southward’ (actually fighting the current eastward, then southward)—his brother did (CC was sick at the time). More critically, a strong case can be made for the identity of Yumbe, the trader on the large log vessel Columbus captured plying the Gulf of Honduras near the Bay Islands, who famously told Columbus that the mainland consisted of two lands, Maya (Maia) and Taia. W. V. Davidson (1991), I, and others have discussed this in detail, and Yumbe’s identity is most likely to have been Pech. ‘Maya’ may simply have meant ‘theirs’ or [land to the] ‘west’, but one way or the other, it stuck and was later applied to peoples with related languages who did not call themselves by that name. Similarly, ‘Taya’ may have been corrupted to ‘Paya’ (the historical and now racist term for the Pech, though it is still acceptable in ethnohistorical parlance when referring to the documentary record); the Nahuas and Spanish used it for much of eastern Honduras, as in ‘Tayaco’ (land of Taya) and ‘Taycones.’ (see below). Preston hedges his bets and refers to the trader Yumbe (whom he doesn’t name) as probably ‘Chibcha’ (230), meaning Pech, since the

Pech are the sole documented Chibcha speakers in the region. The importance of all this will become apparent below.

Given that what Hernán de Cortés wrote to the King of Spain is what modern adventurers aver is the beginning of the White City legend, is the book accurate in its account of what the conqueror of the empire of the Mexica ('Aztec Empire' is not regarded as politically correct now) had to say?

Two accounts are used by modern treasure hunters to claim great age for the White City myth. Preston discusses this in Chapter 3 (11-12), and is broadly correct that Cortés wrote vaguely about important settlements somewhere in the hinterland of the Spanish coastal base of Trujillo, but he could not personally follow this up because his conquests in Mexico had fallen into disarray in his absence (mid-1520s). It is not true at all that 'jagged mountains clearly visible from the bay may have convinced him that such a journey would be daunting' (12), nor are Cortés claims about rich regions at all 'remarkable' (11) – conquistadors commonly lavished praise to their backers regarding what they had been told about areas they were interested in conquering. The 'jagged mountains' were not his problem, either (these were the relatively low peaks of Capiro and Calentura, on the other side of which numerous chiefdoms existed that Cortés was well familiar with)—indeed, Cortés had already had the route prepared for him and his substantial entourage all the way to the deep interior ("Huilaicho", e.g., the central tropical dry valleys of modern-day Olancho), precisely because he had learned that rival conquistadors sent by Pedrarias Davila, a hated enemy based in Leon, Nicaragua, near the 'South Sea' (Pacific), had reached eastern interior Honduras before him and were wreaking havoc (apparently, he had been beseeched by inhabitants of Olancho to come and save them—that, anyway, is what he and his chroniclers would have us believe).

The several accounts that talk about the Cortés episode (during which, as addressed below, various roving parties of Spaniards already ranged all across eastern Honduras, contradicting Preston's claims that they never did so) state clearly that Cortés had already had the way south across the various mountain ranges prepared for him; in his stead, he had his lieutenant Saavedra go and conquer the region, expel the other conquistadors, and set up a local administrative capital halfway between the two oceans, which they did in 1526. It was called Villa de la Frontera de Caceres, and its founding document is extant. Caceres was located in central Olancho not far from the modern town of San Francisco de la Paz, and supposedly successfully allied itself with local chiefdoms, extracting tribute from them and formally extending the 'Mexican' Spanish presence. However, Pedrarias's conquistadors soon returned and destroyed Caceres, setting up their own capital close by (Villa Hermosa). These conquistadors were incredibly brutal toward the local people, enslaving them in huge numbers; they banded together in a conspiracy, rose up, and destroyed Villa Hermosa in late January, 1527. The main route used by the conquistadors back and forth between the two

oceans went directly through an important part of the White City culture area, the Tayaco zone, now known as the Botaderos mountains; the city or large town of Peizacura is mentioned in this context and is very likely one and the same with the Tayaco ruins (much more on this below). Even after the destruction of these two interior Spanish settlements, in the 1530s the Tayaco region was worked for its placer gold, but the Indians there (later known as the Taycones, the direct ancestors of the modern-day Pech, and they apparently called themselves by that name even then) were quite rebellious and eventually drove the Spaniards in Trujillo out of the mountains. As a result of all this mayhem, an extremely cruel governor who succeeded Cortes and others in Trujillo, by the name of Salcedo, decided to travel overland to León, curry favor with Pedrarias, and along the way, punish the communities responsible for the destruction of Villa Hermosa. His late 1520s expedition was genocidal—able-bodied men were branded on the face and put in chains to be sold in León or elsewhere; everyone else who didn't escape was raped and/or murdered, and communities were burned to the ground (given the names of later communities on tribute lists, some were reinhabited and rebuilt). After this ghastly episode, combined with disease, indigenous groups in the area – Tolupan, Lenca, Nahua, and Pech, and perhaps others that have gone extinct—adopted various tactics, including hiding in remote regions as well as actively resisting the Spanish, who didn't wait long before returning (though Salcedo's gambit deservedly failed, and he was thrown in prison by Pedrarias for his pains).

All this is interesting background – but what did Cortés have to say SPECIFICALLY to start the White City myth?

It is necessary to compare Cortés' own account with those of others who documented the same episode – Díaz del Castillo, López de Gómara, and Alva Ixtlilxochitl (see notes below); place-names and motives differ, and this can be ascribed to the differing agendas of the writers, their own sometimes faulty memories, from whom they heard the stories, and so forth. Cortés was specifically interested in 'Xucutaco' and 'Hueitapalan' (Preston's 'Old Land of Red Earth'), based on religious origin stories he had supposedly been told back in Mexico as well as what he had heard locally. The key point here is that the actual focus of his stay in eastern Honduras became Olancho—which fulfilled requisites of his earlier descriptions, while the toponyms he and others use, which were later interpreted as referring to the 'White City,' do not appear again. GOLD is what Cortés was most interested in, and of course that was found through the region, as were sizeable communities, some with thousands of houses, and not far away from Trujillo. It is simply impossible to know whether Cortés was talking about anywhere other than Olancho and its vast gold resources.

What did Pedraza have to say about the White City?

The second of the two ‘foundation myths’ for the whole White City legend is an often sloppily interpreted (by academics as well as by popular writers) trip by ‘Protector de Indios’ Cristobal Pedraza in the early 1540s. Preston’s account of this is somewhat garbled. Preston says that Pedraza went ‘deep into the jungles of Mosquitia’ where he ‘found himself looking down on a large and prosperous city’; ‘[h]is Indian guide’ told him that the inhabitants ate off of ‘plates and goblets of gold’; Pedraza ‘continued on and never entered the valley’ (12). This is in a way the most important precedent used to suggest that the White City was talked about as early as the 1500s (even though supposedly no mention was made again until the 20th century). Here we confront a nest of problems, including what we now know is Pedraza’s own role in either making the story up or, more likely, selectively editing the truth, based on his later trips, when as Bishop of Honduras he walked a circuit of the country and passed close to or right through the area he earlier gazed at from above, without mentioning the earlier visit, though by that time it was almost completely depopulated (see below).

Pedraza wrote, in 1544, that ‘grandes sierras’ (high mountains) were found to the east of Trujillo, and he went to explore them. Spaniards before him had told him that on the far side of these mountains was nothing but sea, but he doubted it (obviously, given that ships from Spain via Jamaica followed the coast along the entire area), so his 60 accompanying Indians took three days to cut a swath to a high point (somewhere on the range’s divide), where they gazed down and on the far side saw ‘muy grandes poblaciones’ (great populations) and flat land; far in the distance, they saw more mountains and flat lands, and ‘aquel cabo’ (Cabo Gracias a Dios, the easternmost point of Honduras). Quoting from my dissertation (Bonta 2001, 111-112):

He sent down Indians to the nearest settlement, and they brought back three men and two women:

y ciertos de nuestros indios los entendian porque habla la lengua media maxqueda como portugueses y castellanos y preguntandoles...que tierra era aquella respondieron que tagiusgualpa | que quiere dezir en su lengua casa donde se funde el oro. (407) [and some of our Indians understand them because they spoke a similar language, like Portuguese and Castilians, and asking them...what land that was they responded tagiusgualpa, which means in their language ‘gold foundry’]

“La haga,” a woman to whom they talked, was the daughter of a “señor principal” (chief) in the town where the rulers ate from plates of gold, and the gold foundry was located. Though placer gold is abundant in eastern Honduras (not just in the Guayape), gold plates seem unlikely, since no indigenous gold ornaments have ever been discovered in the region (see Begley 1999). The reference was probably to copper, which was used and seems to have confused the Spanish on several occasions. Later, the Spaniards and more

residents of “Tagiusgualpa” had a meeting at the watershed of the unnamed range, and though Pedraza assured them that his intentions were peaceful, the Indians already knew enough about the Spaniards to fear and mistrust their intentions. Pedraza decided not to continue to Tagiusgualpa. [Footnote 41: ‘Curiously, in his 1547 bishop’s letter...Pedraza does not mention the region, though he had to have gone through it or near it on his way from Salamanca to Trujillo.’] Pedraza (409) ends the account with “era por el mes de setiembre y en la sierra auya aire fresco.” [‘it was September and the sierra air was cool’]

Where was Tagiusgualpa? Forty leguas or more east (“mano izquierda”) of Trujillo the only mountains high enough to fit Pedraza’s description (e.g. noticeably cool in September) are the part of the Cordillera de Agalta known today as the Montañas del Carbón, which reach 1900 meters above sea level. [Footnote 42 ‘My location for Pedraza’s gaze is at variance with Davidson (1991) and Lara Pinto (1991). Closer mountains to Trujillo are much lower (what are known today as “Sierra de Poyas” not reaching 1000 meters) and their far side, the valley of the Río Sico, would already have been known to people in Trujillo familiar with Cortés’ and Saavedra’s effort to expel the Nicaraguans in the 1520s. Furthermore, it took Pedraza four [sic] days with hundreds of Indians chopping to get to the top, a feat only necessary if one is scaling high peaks.] Below Pedraza, to his east, the Río Paulaya wound seaward through a fertile valle, joining with the Río Sico and forming the coastal plain just east of Cabo Camarón. This area had dense Precolumbian populations, as Begley (1999) describes, but their ruins were sacked during banana company occupation in the early 1900s, and what is left has barely been excavated.

Pedraza does not mention a ‘city’ per se, and as explained above, the golden goblet story is unclear. (The landscape sounds very much like the description Fisher gives to Preston: “In its heyday T1 probably looked like an unkempt English garden” (209), and “even in this remote jungle” ... “where people wouldn’t expect it, there were dense populations living in cities.” The “remote jungle” comment is beside the point—ANY location in the temperate or tropical zones largely devoid of people can be transformed into a domestic landscape with enough human activity; the location only became ‘remote’ in later centuries, when low populations meant that the ‘natural’ vegetation returned in profusion. And, as commented previously, pine forests were much more widespread across the region (even Trujillo was originally called ‘Trujillo del Pinar,’ Trujillo of the pines), so it appears that thousands of years of human use had not only created a domestic landscape, it had fostered non-rainforest vegetation. Various commentators, as well as I, have founded long-lasting pine logs submerged under rainforest vegetation in the heart of Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve as evidence of this earlier forest type—local people rely on these ‘ocote’ sources for fire-starting. Preston does not mention whether any of these were found in the T1 area.

In any case, the local chiefdom 'Tagiusgualpa' became 'Taguzgalpa', a Nahuatl word identical to Tegucigalpa (in a different part of the country)—its etymology combines words for 'hill' and 'metal' and may refer to copper, gold, or silver (the latter in the case of Honduras's capital). The toponym was little used but apparently known in Trujillo, returning to widespread usage to refer to a much vaster region, stretching from northern Honduras across to the Coco River and signifying all land outside Spanish control, from the 1660s onward.

After Pedraza got a brief glimpse of perhaps an area similar in culture to T1, prior to its collapse from disease, is it true that the Spanish never again entered the Mosquitia?

Absolutely not! Preston writes 'Yet the Spanish never conquered the region; they never explored or even penetrated these remote jungles' (218). He ascribes the entry of the diseases that wiped out T1 and the entire culture to indigenous traders plying the rivers as well as refugees fleeing Spanish enslavement, and in this he is likely correct (231). But the Spanish not only entered the Mosquitia, they also did so repeatedly from the 1540s until the 1800s, even though they only established political control over it in its entirety—and then, only very tenuously—during a brief span between the early 1540s and the 1560s. Also, because the Spanish brought thousands of African slaves to work the mines in Olancho after 1540, and these frequently rose up and escaped, these also would also have been potential vectors for disease.

The Spanish could not stay away from interior eastern Honduras for long, even after the destruction of their first settlements by Indian revolts by 1527. The lure of gold was too great. Thanks to establishment of political control over the greater Honduras region exerted by Guatemalan conqueror Alvarado, the administrative locus shifted from Trujillo in the north to Gracias a Dios in the west by the 1530s, and it was not long before the new political leader, Montejo, sent out a conquering expedition from there (modern town of Gracias, Lempira) to recapture Olancho, done in spectacular form in the early 1540s with the establishment of San Jorge de Olancho, the ruins of which continue to lure treasure hunters to the present day. Most rivers in eastern Honduras contain gold, but the Guayape Region contained some of the best gold known in the Americas, thus the Spanish and their African slaves worked the region extensively, while the small Villa has been exaggerated in size and importance by centuries of local tradition, as has just about everything else about Olancho and eastern Honduras in general. The site of San Jorge was indefensible due to attacks by Tawahkas, and the Spanish receded northward to other, more defensible sites, while lapsing into careers as cattle ranchers when the most accessible gold was played out. The story continues in my dissertation (Bonta, 2001: 113-114):

Presumably, rumor of Pedraza's gaze over a golden landscape quickly reached the ears of Montejo and Cáceres, and they made the decision to establish Spanish control eastward from Olancho after that area was subjugated, around 1542. In 1544, a Capitán Alonso de Rreynoso (AGCA A1.29 4670 40107 1550 Probanza de Aguilar) took a force eastward from the Valle de Olancho to establish Spanish control over what is today Honduras north of the Río Coco and east of Olancho and Trujillo:

un Capitan [Rreynoso], proveido por el Adelantado Montexo, andava entendiendo en la conquista e pacificacion de una tierra que es entre Ulancho y Truxillo, y corre hasta el desaguedero de la laguna de León [Río San Juan, border of present-day Costa Rica and Nicaragua], que va a la Mar del Norte. A poblado una Villa que se dize la Nueva Salamanca; tienese noticia que es tierra rrica. (Maldonado 1875[1545a]:438) [A Captain, provided by Montejo, was conquering and pacifying of a land between Olancho and Trujillo, which drains from the Leon lake to the Northern Sea. He has populated a Villa called the Nueva Salamanca; word is that it is a rich land] [Footnote 44: The land referred to was the east coast and tropical wet interior of eastern Honduras and eastern Nicaragua. Though this entire area was later referred to at times as the Taguzgalpa, in more detailed accounts Taguzgalpa applies to what is today Honduras' domain, north of the Río Coco; "Tologalpa" to the south was modern-day eastern Nicaragua (see Vázquez 1944[1714]).]

... Olancho's neighbor to the east... "Villa de la Nueva Salamanca," ... lasted until at least 1561 (AGCA A1.29.1 4672 40137 Probanza de Jerónimo de Corella 1561). Its exact location is unknown [further documentation has revealed that it was almost certainly located along the Rio Paulaya], but it appears to have been within proto-Pech domain, perhaps somewhere near modern-day Dulce Nombre de Culmí, or along the Patuca or Coco rivers. Rreynoso awarded the villages of the Tagiusgualpa/Yara area, and others in far eastern Honduras, as encomiendas (AGCA Probanza de Jimenez 1555). Nueva Salamanca was plunged in the sort of landscape of which Spaniards were little fond, as an account by Pedraza demonstrates. In August 1545, Cristobal Pedraza, now Bishop of Honduras, set out from his seat in Trujillo heading west (counterclockwise) to visit his obispado; he did not return until mid-December 1547 (1991[1547]). His glowing phrases on Honduran geography (the Olancho part of which he hadn't personally glimpsed), written but three years before (Pedraza 1898[1544]), gave way to an apocalyptic vision of a destroyed and deserted land. Twenty years of plagues, slavery, and flight had done the job.

...En el camino de la Villa del valle de Vlancho a la Nueva Salamanca, abrá otras XXX leguas y más que no ay pueblo en el camino ninguno, sino muy grandes mosquiteros. (Pedraza 1991[1547]:14) (30 leagues are more from Olancho to Nueva Salamanca, no town in between, huge amounts of mosquitoes)

The final legs of his round trip, from San Jorge de Olancho through Nueva Salamanca and back to Trujillo, 70 infernal leguas, were much worse than the rest of Honduras because of the mosquitos and the waste-deep mud. Pedraza likened this part of his journey to a visit to purgatory and hell. He shows us several reasons why tropical wet eastern Honduras, east of the tropical dry Valle de Olancho, was physically hard to conquer and virtually impossible to hold: swollen, crocodile-infested rivers, swamps, and impassable trails. Geographically, lands east of Olancho and Trujillo were difficult for anyone who did not use canoes as their main mode of transport.

In the 1540s, then, ... the future Taguzgalpa [included]: its northwest [which] belonged to Trujillo (Cabo Camaron and briefly the Valle de Yara/Tagiusgalpa) and Olancho (Tayaco/Taycones, see below), and the rest to Nueva Salamanca. Successful resistance to the State [occurred] in all three areas by the end of the century...'

Yes, the above may be true, but how does this have anything to do with knowing whether or not the Spanish ever entered the T1 area? T1 is well to the east of the Rio Paulaya, and also distant from the Rio Patuca.

The story of the attempted Spanish subjugation of eastern Honduras is very lengthy and very complicated—Nueva Salamanca is just the beginning. The short answer to the above is that after failed attempts to set up Spanish administrative centers east of Olancho in the mid-1500s (see notes below on yet other attempts), the Spanish turned to Franciscan missionaries, who continued with spectacular failures of their in the early 1600s—five missionaries in two expeditions spent several years living and working throughout the region, conversing with somewhat more hospitable Pech, Lenca, and Mexican subjects, only to be killed and (supposedly) eaten by Tawahka and by the presumed ancestors of the Miskitos, the Albaguinas. These missionaries' surviving chroniclers gave elaborate recounting of the place names visited, and the rivers travelled upon, though of course without knowing whether or not the valley of T1 was still inhabited, or served as a place of refuge, or what its name might have been then in any of the various languages spoken, it is impossible to know whether missionaries visited it. They were certainly on the neighboring Wampu, Patuca, and Platano rivers and their tributaries, however, as well as on overland paths known to Spanish living in Olancho.

After 1660, the Taguzgalpa, as the whole region was now called, came to the attention of the Catholic Church because of the growing effects of the 'Zambos Mosquitos,' who were stealing cattle and otherwise harassing ranches and towns in the tropical dry valleys along the frontier. A long episode of Franciscan missionization followed, up until the early 1800s, focused almost entirely on sending in military expeditions to round up indigenous people, primarily Pech, in communities in the forests and along the rivers of the

region, relocating them by force in the dry, Hispanicized valleys of Olancho and elsewhere, to ‘civilize’ them (and not coincidentally, provide cheap or free labor to local ranchers and on church lands). This colonization episode was quite brutal, more so because the Pech, who inhabited homesteads and villages stretching across most of the region, regularly fled back to the Taguzgalpa; but they were also victimized there by the Zambos Mosquitoes from the other side, who, in the pay of the English (who had a settlement on the lower Rio Sico, Black River, in the 1700s), were merciless in their attacks on the Olancho Indians, Spanish, and mestizos. The Pech are discussed at greater length below, but suffice it to say that the voluminous Spanish reports refer clearly to numerous expeditions into the deepest reaches of the Taguzgalpa, particularly between 1680 and 1720. Given that the rivers were largely controlled by dangerous Zambos Mosquitoes armed to the teeth with English weapons, the Spanish went on horseback or on foot specifically into areas far away from these rivers, typically places where the Pech tried to hide—valleys like the Valle de la Fortaleza and numerous others. No maps or precise place descriptions have come down to us, but the point is that no area was off-limits to these Spanish conquistadors. T1’s valley was thus at no point ‘too deep in the jungle to be of interest’ to conquistadors, slavers (or missionaries) (230). This was neither *terra incognita* nor *terra nullius*, as impenetrable as its forests were becoming.

What, then, did happen to the descendants of the inhabitants of T1 and of sites across the entire region?

This is a complicated and contentious issue, one that Preston largely though not entirely skirts. Here is some of what he has to say on the subject: ‘Like most legends, however, it was anchored in truth: The lidar discoveries had confirmed that Mosquitia had indeed been the territory of a great and mysterious civilization that built many large settlements before it disappeared. It was exactly as Cortés had written five centuries ago: This land had been home to “very extensive and rich provinces.” But what had caused it to vanish so suddenly and completely?’ (104). When asked what had been achieved, Elkins replied ‘what we proved is that there was a large population in Mosquitia with a sophisticated culture that compares to anything in Central America.’ (183) (they did not prove this – it had been known by archaeologists for a very long time, and was known to many throughout the centuries) ‘Archaeologists believe the people of the Mosquitia spoke a dialect of Chibchan’ (199). ‘This culture is so little known that it hasn’t even been given a formal name.’ (205). ‘Five hundred years ago, the survivors of the catastrophe at T1 who walked out the city [sic] did not just disappear. Most of them lived on, and their descendants are part of the vibrant mestizo culture of Honduras today.’ (288). All this would tend to suggest, despite a nod to the Chibcha-related Pech, that the author (and/or Elkins) wishes to obscure the reality that indigenous people in the area have a clear claim of cultural heritage and ownership, just as the modern-day French have over Chartres cathedral, the Egyptians over the pyramids of Giza, the Greeks over the Acropolis, the Australian Aborigines over the entire continent

of Australia after Mabo, etc. Yet Preston hedges his bets--in discussing the Honduran government's non-response to a protest letter over the project from Miskito leaders: 'The letter included a map of Miskito territory that seemed to swallow the traditional lands of other indigenous Indian communities, such as the Pech and Tawahka, who are believed to be the actual descendants of the ancient people of the Mosquitia.' (274-275). This important quote demonstrates that, though he chooses not to stress the fact, Preston is aware that the Pech and the Tawahka could be claimants.

Here it should be noted that different geographers, anthropologists, and others have made maps neatly delineating indigenous territorialities at the present, around the time of Conquest, and at points in between. However, not only are boundaries of ethnic groups not fixed over time, but also the definitions of these groups is quite complex and may not adequately be defined on the basis of language (which language, if more than one was commonly spoken in a household?). The concept of multiethnicity, as demonstrated in various ways below, fits the region better as the Spanish encountered it at Conquest, even if the Pech have the best geographical-historical claim to T1, as they do to the rest of the region. The basic logic is as follows, and is expanded upon in dissertation excerpts below that talk about the wider region:

- the T1 site and surrounding valley contain ruins very similar to ruins across eastern Honduras the geographical extent of which most closely fits the area inhabited by Pech since the 1500s, even though it is not reliably recorded that they themselves currently feel that their direct ancestors built the ruins, and even though they have not recently inhabited sites within 20km of T1;

- the Tawahka, first documented in the 1540s, though they live not far away on the Patuca River, have always been a river-going culture, as have the Miskitos (derived in part from the Tawahka and allied groups), whereas the Pech have always been associated with the interior mountains and forests that separate central-eastern Honduras from the true Moskitia;

- Some Nahua and Lenca presence in T1 and elsewhere across the region would not be surprising, given a wide range of commonalities between all these groups, such as the interchangeable terms 'miangul' and 'papa' for the priests/shamans of the entire region, as documented at Conquest (see below);

- Like the many Mayan ethnic groups who continue to inhabit the lands of their ancestors, the descendants of the builders of T1 and other communities did not abruptly vanish; they continued to inhabit the area, in some cases continuing to practice religious ceremonies in ways similar to their ancestors—this is most clearly the case at Tayaco, likely the 'city' of Peizacura that the Spanish encountered (see below).

Following are excerpts from my dissertation (Bonta, 2001, 113-124) that delve into this issue in much greater depth, for those who are interested (translations not provided):

...the definitive construction of a “greater” Taguzgalpa, was tied to the persistence of a priestly class called the “miangules,” or “papas” as they were also known. These characteristically southern Central American religious figures were key in keeping the Spaniards at bay. Details in documents from 1526, 1555, and 1561 are crucially important for constructing the profile of a people that in many ways were probably characteristic of southern Central American cultures across Olancho and the Taguzgalpa in 1500. In the heart of the rugged Montaña de Botaderos directly south of Trujillo across the Valle de Aguán, along the deeply incised Tayaco and Naranjal rivers (today at a northeastern extremity of Olancho), were the first of Honduras’ Spanish gold mines, worked fast and furious in the early 1530s under the governorship of Andrés de Cereceda (Cereceda 1954[1530]). In 1531:

Descubriéronse en esa sazón buenas minas de oro....en la provincia de un cacique el más principal de la tierra en cuanto servían, que se llamaba Peicacura, mataron tres españoles....se alzaron la mayor parte de los indios que servían en toda la tierra. (Fernández de Oviedo 1959[1535-57]:371)
Siguióse que junto a las minas que llaman de Tayaco, donde se sacaba oro, se habían alzado dos caciques, viendo que los otros que se habían alzado se quedaban sin castigo, y estos últimos alzados sacaban oro...e para castigar otros caciques alzados días había en un valle que se dice Agalta, que fueron en la muerte de los cristianos de Huilanchó. (374)

According to López de Salcedo (1954[1526]), “papas” (from Nahuatl “papatli”; see also Molina and Spinosa 1966[1571]) were long-haired indigenous priests in the Trujillo and Aguán region who stirred up trouble, and are presumably synonymous with or closely linked to the “caciques” mentioned above. Pedraza (1898[1544];1991[1547]) mentions in several places how the Indians around Trujillo and in the Valle de Aguán in the 1520s and 1530s sought refuge from initial Spanish persecution in the high mountains. It appears that the proto-Pech groups in the more easily conquerable lowlands fled south to join others in the Montaña de Botaderos, which was easier for them to defend. Spaniards overseeing goldmining operations suffered losses in Tayaco at the hands of an adamantly anti-Spanish and anti-Christian culture. The above quote from Oviedo also links Tayaco, “Peicacura,” the Valle de Agalta, and the Valle de Huilanchó together through his implication of a concentrated effort by Indians in these areas to expel the Spaniards from Villa Hermosa. [footnote 45: Lara Pinto (1991) asserts that Mexicans ruled the Valle de

Agúan and Valle de Agalta at the time of conquest, and that the “Taycones” of the AGCA 1561 Corella probanza were also Mexicans. However, most of the information about the indigenous residents of northeastern Honduras in sixteenth-century documents describes polities well within the cultural parameters of (non-Mesoamerican) southern Central American groups as described in Steward (1948). López de Salcedo’s (1954[1526]) use of “papa” for the indigenous priests in northeastern Honduras is a Mexican borrowing (see Molina and Spinosa 1966[1571]), and the synonymous use of “papa” and “miangul” (not a Nahuatl word) in 1555 and 1561 (AGCA Probanza de Jimenez; AGCA Probanza de Corella) indicate that “miangul” was their “true” name in a local language. The idea that Hernando Cortés encountered Mexican-dominated polities near Trujillo has been inspired predominantly by a few intriguing references in his Quinta Carta-Relación (1992) where he makes clear that local people had already heard about his Mexican exploits through traders who had contacts with Mexico. He then states that local people were brought to him who spoke a language closely related to the Mexican with which he was familiar; he does not say at any point that Mexican speakers numerically dominated the local chiefdoms, however. While it is possible to infer that the leaders and places he later mentions, most of whom he gives Nahuatl/Pipil names (though see Alva Ixtlilxochitl’s [1969] different spellings), were indeed Mexican, it is equally plausible to assume that local non-Mexican-dominated polities would have sent him exactly and only the people who could communicate with him. One of the two rebellious chiefdoms, “Papayeca” (López de Gomára 1966[1552] writes “Papaica”) might mean simply “place of Papas”; one of its leaders was called “Pizacura,” etymologically almost identical to the “Pezacura”/“Peicacura” mentioned by later sources. Cortés’ account suggests to me that Pipiles or other “Mexican” traders lived within or alongside the local chiefdoms, and played a mediating role between the conqueror of Mexico and non-Mexican (proto-Pech) chiefdoms.]

The rebellious papas resurface in the documentary record linked to Nueva Salamanca and Olancho in the 1550s. The 1555 Probanza de Juan Jimenez (AGCA A1.29.-1 4671 40116) is a detailed account of the problems Nueva Salamanca and its eight or nine remaining Spanish vecinos were having with the miangules, whom they said were also called “papas.” Witnesses testified that the miangules were sodomos and did not have sexual relations with women. They were found in all the towns of the land, and were particularly entangled with “un pueblo que se dize xicaque”; “mataron a sus encomenderos”; and “salen en sus canoas y piraguas de armada la buelta de truxillo” “para saquear a truxillo.” The “xicaques,” ruled by miangules, inhabited the coast “desde el Río de Pezacura [Sico] donde estan poblados hasta la punta de Camaron y truxillo.” The town of “xicaque” was 16 leguas from Truxillo and 12 leguas from Salamanca. Between the two Spanish towns was a “cordillera do ellos estan rica en oro.” Even though the miangules had incited several uprisings and were homosexual, the Spanish authorities had done nothing to suppress them and thus to reopen Salamanca’s connection with Trujillo.

The rebel towns, at one time having rendered tribute to Salamanca, included Paya, Gualaguyrri, Guyriguyri, Guyro, Auca, Xab, Tajao, Guava, “los pueblos de Xicaque,” Cumay, Yahu, and Taguaca. One 1555 witness says that the Indians of Yahu, Auca, and Guiro came to kill the tribute Indians in towns nearer to Nueva Salamanca. The document mentions the miangules/papas both in the context of all these towns, indicating that they were present across most of eastern Honduras (except perhaps Taguaca and the possibly proto-Miskito Auca), and specifically in the context of Xicaque, a group of rebel towns along the coast east of Trujillo, concentrated at the confluence of the rivers Paulaya and Sico (Río Pezacura) just east of Cabo Camarón. [footnote 46: This is the first use of “xicaque,” a Mexican term applied to unsubjugated “barbarians” (see Newson 1986). This coastal group appears to have been different from inland, upriver groups such as those in Tayaco, but presumably “Xicaque” and “Tagiusgualpa” were synonymous. “Paya” and “Taguaca” represent the first mentions of these groups, as far as I am aware. Several of the toponyms appear to be Chibcha-related.]

Fifteen fifty-five seems to be a watershed date for much of eastern Honduras. Nueva Salamanca disappeared mysteriously (probably abandoned and/or sacked) within the following five to ten years, and much of the Taguzgalpa escaped Spain’s grasp for good. [footnote 47: In any case, the tribute villages under Salamanca in the 1540s, according to another Salamanca probanza (AGCA A1.29 4670 40100 Provanza de méritos y servicios de Miguel de Casanos 1548) had only 20 tribute payers (“Xicaque”) up to 40 tribute payers (an unreadable name) (This document also lists a “Buga”). Another document from Salamanca (AGCA A1.29 4670 40107 Probanza de méritos del Capitán Luis de Aguilar 1550) lists two towns, Paraqueri (Paragri) and Xaguiya (“jagüilla” means the white-lipped peccary in Olancho) with four or five men in each town. This is few even for Honduras (Chindona, Olancho, in 1582 [Contreras Guevara 1991], was tied for the highest tribute population in the province: 80).] Only the Tayaco region remained striated [Spanish-conquered/controlled] space until the end of the century.

The 1561 Corella probanza (AGCA A1.29.1 4672 40137) focused on what should be done with the residents of the Tayaco area, who were still under the Spanish yoke. It is one of the more intriguing documents in Honduran cultural history, giving more details on the miangules who ruled over the “Taycones” [footnote 48: “Tayaco” and “Taycones” were synonymous. Davidson (1991) links “Tayaco,” first mentioned by the Spanish in the 1520s, to Martyr d’Anghiera’s (1964[1524]) Columbian “Taia” with “co” as a Nahuatl locative. He equates “Taia” and “Maia” to Pech words for “mine” and “theirs” from the point of view of proto-Pech cacique Yumbé, whom Columbus captured in the Bay Islands and employed as guide as far east as Cabo Camarón. “Taia” becomes “Tayaco” and the “Taycones,” and is picked up today in the Río Tayaco of northeastern Olancho as well as a “Montaña de Tayaco” in the Cordillera de Agalta southwest of Gualaco. Were “Taia” and “Paya” the same word? Newson (1986:39) says “‘Taia’...is likely to have been a corruption of Paia or Paya.” Paya, first mentioned as a Salamanca tribute town in 1555, had become the

standard term for the Pech at least by the 1660s, and is today considered by the Pech themselves to be a racial slur. “Pezacura/Peicacura/Pizacura,” I submit, is related to “peischa” (Conzemius 1928:111), which means “gente” (“the people”) in Pech. This has simply remained their own term for themselves. “Pezacura” and its variants also likely meant “leader of the people” or something similar, though the Spanish applied it both to places and caciques. “Kuk-ká” (Conzemius 1928:149) means “tierra” (“land”); “-cura” and “-cora” (and –ura/-ora) are common toponymic suffixes in northeastern Honduras, but nowhere else in the country. As for “paya,” it could come from the 1555 tribute town’s name, or indeed be a corruption of “taia.” However, “Pai-há” (Conzemius 1928:86) means “plant,” “tree,” or “wood” in Pech; “paiyá” means “bijao” (90), a member of the Musaceae family with leaves used to thatch dwellings; “paiá” is “cuñada (cuando la cuñada habla)” (101): “los rritos y cerimonia que los yndios de la Provincia de los Taycones y Çavano hazen” (part of title). In “la villa de Sanct Jorge del valle de Olancho,” at the behest of the Bishop of Honduras, witnesses were queried on various issues, including:

los papas, casas y lugares secretos que para el dicho efecto tienen y de el pecado nefando contra natura de sodomia que husan y tienen y como en los dichos sacrificios husan matar y sacrificar mucho nyños y muchachos y todos en el sacrificio se sacan mucha sangre...en la dicha provincia de Çabanaco. [Footnote 49: W. V. Davidson (pers. comm.) comments that this toponym could be a combination of “savana” and the “-co” locative. A land of savannas near the Tayaco region would mean either the Valle de Agalta or the Valle de Aguán. Though the former is a more likely possibility, “Savá” is a town in the Aguán.]

Witnesses, many of whom had been conquistadors or other settlers in Olancho since the 1540s, and several of whom had been among the Taycones, reply:

a bisto en algunos pueblos de Taicones viendo por ellos sacrificios hechos de los dichos yndios de hombres e muchachos muertos...que husan hazer en cada un año por su salud y sementeras y lo hazen por mandado de un myangul que es entre ellos como sacerdote y lo tienen para su hechizos e ydolatrías y en el adoran y les dize que el es el que les da salud y buenos temporales....le an dado thener casa apartada fuera de el pueblo con servicio de muchachos...es huso y costumbre entre ellos y que no se abía de servir de mugeres syno de hombres y muchachos....Y más a oido decir que al tiempo que el tal papa muere entierran de más de los que consygo tiene de muchachos otros muchachos que los pueblos más cercanos...y a esta causa dizen que ay más yndias que yndios porque no sacrifican yndias.

The miangules not only could not have sexual relations with women, but were not allowed to even look at them. The Church was equally preoccupied by the increasingly skewed sex ratio and the sacrifices of

children, with the threat of the Taycones' (yet un-Christianized) extinction looming. Another witness had seen:

en la mayor parte de los...pueblos de Taicones hazer grandes borracheras y en muchas partes hallar y hallado escondidamente grandes sacrificios de sangre y plumas e papagayos sacrificados....algunos de los dichos yndios nonbrados entre ellos miangules y papas...les da a entender que el sólo sube al cielo y que habla con el demonyo....el pueblo de Zaqir que es en los Taicones y estaba en una casa grande y de ella salían grandes calzadas de losa por do salía alavanse...muchos papagayos y animales sacrificados...dicho yndio tenya los cabellos tan largos que le llegaban a la rodilla. [footnote 50: The witness Pedro Rodriguez de Escobar who tells the above-excerpted story of a sacrifice at Zaqir in 1561 is listed as the encomendero of "Zaquire" (his only encomienda) in Contreras Guevara's 1582 list (1991), when it still has 12 tribute Indians.]

The Taycones inhabited towns with stone causeways and large houses for sacrifices. The miangules guaranteed productivity of crops, and were able, shaman-like, to climb to the sky and negotiate with "el demonyo." Another witness in 1561 said that the Taycones did sacrifices of blood "cortándose y sacandose sangre de las orejas y lenguas y narizes y ofrescellas al pie de un árbol de una higuera [Ficus sp.?] en la qual thenyan un ydolo de piedra con muchas navajas..." He mentioned the town of Çacaram, very likely the Pech word for "river beach." [footnote 51: Conzemius 1928:136, "sakará."] The knowledgeable Miguel de Molero said that the houses of sacrifice he had seen held offerings of cacao, ocote (pine) sticks, feathers, and blood. He claimed that the Indians in Çabanaco pierced their noses and genitals with "agujas de raya" after sufficient intoxication, while also flailing their backs with "una pala do tienen puestos muchas puya de ceyva [ceiba]." In Cotunga, recounted Juan de Rojas of Nueva Salamanca, he was told that a Spanish priest had actually baptized several boys, but that the Taycones killed them all. [Footnote 52: Juan de Rojas, the only witness from Nueva Salamanca, made the sole mention of a town of "Cotunga"; he also said "provincia de los dichos yndios Taicones térmynos de la dicha villa," meaning in the jurisdiction of (near-extinct) Nueva Salamanca.]

From all this we can infer that though the Taycones rendered tribute to the Spanish, the grip of Church and State was tenuous. Olancho clearly desired to make the Taycones, which may have previously belonged to Salamanca, an integral part of their own domain: the Olanchanos had obviously already spent a fair amount of time in the region. The Taycones and their more hostile downriver neighbors the Xicaques were what Olancho el Viejo was up against, at least in official accounts: organized southern Central American polities desperately trying to maintain their Precolumbian identities under the onslaught of a State more determined than any enemy they had known previously. The 1561 probanza witnesses describe a people

very similar to others in southern Central American, northern South American, and Antillean areas (“Circum-Caribbean Tribes”) that the Spanish encountered and inevitably destroyed. Steward (1948:2) wrote:

A comparison of data from the modern tribes [e.g. Pech] with those from the earlier chroniclers and from archaeology shows that all but the very backward and isolated tribes have suffered drastic changes. Gone are the intensive horticulture, the dense population, the large villages, the class-structure society, the mounds, temples, idols, and priests, the warfare, cannibalism and human trophies, the elaborate death rites, and even the technological and esthetic refinements evidenced in the early metallurgy, weaving, ceramics, and stone sculpture. The modern tribes who retain a predominantly aboriginal culture have come to resemble the Tropical Forest tribes...rather than their own ancestors. They carry on small-scale slash-and-burn farming...live in small villages, weave simple cloth, and make only plain pots. Their society is unstratified, their religious cults are scarcely remembered, and the principal survival of former days is the shaman.

In other words, the Spanish destroyed what they could not understand—not gatherer-hunters whose threat would have been minimal, but organized and internally stratified village societies whose main sin was the rejection of overcoding from the outside.

What ultimately became of the Taycones? The witnesses in 1561 unanimously echoed Bishop Corella in stating that yes, indeed, a priest was necessary for the Taycones Sodomites. One was provided at an unknown later date: a list of towns under San Jorge’s jurisdiction in 1590 included “Taycones” “que están todos en una congregación debajo de un cura” (Valverde informe, in Bonilla 1955). There were only three “Taycones” tribute towns (no other names given) as well as “Zaquire,” in 1582 (Contreras Guevara 1991). No reference to “Taycones” after 1590 have come to light. By the 1660s, the Valle de Agalta was the eastern edge of Olancho, so in the interim the Taycones to its northeast had faded back into the sheltering montaña of Taguzgalpa. The miangules were enshrined in toponyms along the ancient camino real from Tayaco to Trujillo. In the heart of the Montaña de Botaderos on the Colón side of the range is a Río Miangul, a Cerro Miangul, and a village of Miangul, bearing witness to a people who resisted the State for centuries. [footnote 53: “Mangulile,” (a municipio in northwestern Olancho), may stem from the same root. The word “miangul,” or anything similar, is surprisingly enough identifiable neither in the Pech dictionary of Conzemius (1928) nor in various sources I have examined on Misumalpan languages. There is a “Cerro Meangul” in El Paraíso department, and other similar sounding toponyms in southern and eastern Honduras, leading me to wonder whether areas inhabited by “Lenca” and “Matagalpa” were also somehow connected to this phenomenon. Given the sketchy nature of sixteenth-century ethnohistoric data across

Honduras, it is altogether possible that such connections existed even though they have been little suspected: the divisions between ethnic groups may be more apparent than real; “miangul” could have been a pan-Honduran term.] Faint echoes of the Taycones can be heard even today in Los Encuentros (Río Dulce de Tayaco), the modern Ladino village on top of perhaps the largest ruins in northeastern Olancho, replete with plazas and stone causeways like most ruins in the area. An elderly man regarded as the local authority on the “antigües” (ancient inhabitants) remembers that “se decía que aquí se sacrificaba un niño.”

In 1578, Governor of Honduras Alonso de Contreras Guevara replied to the King, who had asked for information about the “Taguzgalpa” (Contreras Guevara 1992[1578]). [Footnote 54: Separate colonization efforts of the East launched by sea from Trujillo in the 1500s seem to be tied to the ineffectiveness of Nueva Salamanca, San Jorge, and Trujillo among the Taycones and Xicaques, but are rarely mentioned in the same context. In 1547, King Carlos V ordered the Audiencia de los Confines in Gracias a Dios to prohibit the conquest of “Teguzgalpa” by a Captain from Nueva Segovia (Nicaragua) (see Conzemius 1928:24, note 1) because the Captain might be harming the Indians who were protected under the New Laws. He issued this decree apparently in ignorance of the role of Nueva Salamanca (leading me to wonder whether the King was being kept in the dark for some reason). But King Felipe II, in a Real Cédula of 1562 (reproduced in Parainfo 1[1]:135-6, misprinted as “1572”), ordered that settlers, under Governor of Honduras Hortiz Delgueta, should go to the “Provincias del Cabo de Camarón y Tagusgalpa” to people and pacify the lands. Intriguing is his separation of western (Camarón) and eastern (Tagusgalpa) areas. As Conzemius (1928:24) details, Ortiz de Elgueta in 1564 founded a settlement near the huge brackish Laguna de Cartago (Caratasca), then moved it 30 leguas south to an area abundant in gold, naming it “Ciudad Elgueta.” This town lasted two years. The effort to launch a conquest of Taguzgalpa from Trujillo was renewed in the 1570s. A certain López in Trujillo is cited by Newson (1986:36) in a letter of 1579 where he complains of the attacks on Trujillo and its nearby Indian tribute towns by the “Xicaques.” Newson mistakenly calls this the earliest use of “Xicaque” and, I believe in error, interprets these “Xicaques” as the Tolupan in the headwaters of the Río Aguán (the term was used much later, in the late 1700s, to refer to this group). As I suspect following the 1555 Jimenez probanza, López’ Xicaques were the same Xicaques of the region around Camarón and Yara. The same Diego López of Trujillo (see Conzemius 1928:24, note 2) had received orders in 1576 to “conquistar y poblar de españoles la provincia de Taguzgalpa que se llama el Nuevo Cartago.”] He said that though the land was good, six captains had already been lost there, referring to previous colonization efforts launched by sea from Trujillo to get around the menacing Xicaques. The theme of planning to conquer Taguzgalpa through the placing of Spanish ciudades there continues through the 1580s (Conzemius 1928:24, note 2). Nothing became of this until in the early 1600s the King finally turned to the Franciscans to get the job done (which they were never able to do effectively, either...). Since at least 1550 and perhaps earlier, the Xicaques had continually blocked Spanish landward expansion east from Trujillo

into the Taguzgalpa. The Xicaques, who had in the 1550s attacked Spanish ships, taken Spanish women, and even invaded Trujillo (Probanza de Jimenez 1555), were subjugated by Alonso de Oseguera. [Footnote 55: His grandson of the same name writes of the elder's exploits in 1662 (AGCA A3.16 2072 31508).] He was responsible for the "conquista y pasificación de los Yndios Xicaques y que saco de las montañas quinientas personas los mas ynfielos y los pobló en Olancho el Viejo." A more detailed account given by Alonso Criado de Castilla, President of the Audiencia de Guatemala, refers to this event which occurred in the 1590s:

reducción de yndios...asta cantidad de quinientos, en la Provincia de Honduras junto al pueblo Olancho El Viejo, y llámanse Xicoaques, yndios de guerra que por aquellas partes hacían muchos daños. (Criado de Castilla 1991[1598]:106)

Criado de Castilla relates how Oseguera and a company of soldiers and Indian archers went into the middle of the Xicaque zone and took them without a fight. The President ordered they be settled somewhere else, apparently within Olancho el Viejo (see also Sherman 1979:427, note 63). He records a culture that mummified their dead "como lo hazen la gente maumetana" and buried them in underground vaults with their food. Criado de Castilla says that the land of the Xicaques borders the "Teguzgalpa," so that their subjugation (and forced removal) could be a great aid for conquering that difficult land to the east. It is hard to know why the Xicaques gave up so easily, (if we are to believe Criado de Castilla). Rhizomatic and as difficult to eliminate as the Taycones, they did not disappear altogether. Thanks largely to England's support of pirates and the Zambos Mosquitos in the 1600s and 1700s (see Newson 1986), the Taguzgalpa, which by 1700 came to include everything east of the Río de Aguán (Cabo Camarón was no longer safe for the Spanish), was never conquered decisively, and the remnants of the Xicaque and Taycones were able to subsist between two empires.

The eastern Honduran frontier shrank during the 1500s as ciudades failed and tribute towns, which defined Spanish jurisdictions, disappeared into the ever-growing rhizome of Taguzgalpa. By the Franciscan missionary period, beginning with Fray Esteban slightly before 1610, Olancho el Viejo extended only as far east as the Valle de Agalta and Valle de Olancho—the eastern limit of tropical dry forest and of good land for cattle.

Proto-Pech groups seem to be the villains of sixteenth-century accounts out of Trujillo, Olancho, and Salamanca, but by the 1600s they are (re)constructed as the "docile" Paya (and probably Yara). Though they were flighty, they preferred to be safe in the missions within State space instead of helpless within smooth space, terrorized by both the anarchistic Tawahka and the fearless and heavily armed Zambos Mosquitos. The Tawahkas, before the rise of the Zambos, became the villains of seventeenth-century Olancho El Viejo, ravaging the settlements of the Valles and eventually killing a substantial force of Spanish

and Ladino soldiers and two Franciscan missionaries on the Río Guayape/Patuca in 1612 (Vázquez' 1944[1714]). [Footnote 56: For the background of the Verdelete and Monteagudo missionary effort, see also BAGG 1939[1607] and 1939a[1610].

A decade later, Tawahkas murdered three more Franciscan friars who had gone into the Taguzgalpa by sea from Trujillo and had ministered among "Payas," "Mexicanos," "Xicaques" and other groups for over a year. In those years, the coastal peoples were deathly afraid of the Tawahka "Albaguinas" (AGCA A1.11 4056 31441 1624) who came down the rivers from the interior to ravage the coasts. [Footnote 57: Vázquez (1944[1714]), the main source for this missionization effort, had access to documents concerning the lives and deaths of Cristobal de Martínez and company, but at some point an error occurred and published versions of his Crónica refer to the Albaguinas as "Albatuinas," while also calling them "Tawahkas." This misled researchers who sought a connection to "Albaguina," a proto-Miskito word for the Tawahka (W. V. Davidson, pers. comm.). AGCA A1.11 4056 31441 contains, in its first folios, fragments of an original set of testimonios from witnesses regarding the Martínez episode, paralleling Vázquez' account except for the clear, repeated writing of "albaguina."]

As mentioned above, the Franciscan mission that began in the 1660s featured the travails of the Pech; I quote below from my dissertation (Bonta, 2001, 157-160) in reference to Tayaco, where the Pech continued to hold ceremonial rites on their ancient ruin site into the 1800s:

The last gasp of Franciscan missionary effort [footnote 93: The missions had lost importance as the 1700s advanced: see, for example, Relación de los religiosos franciscanos... 1991[1748]. The San Buenaventura cluster in the Valle de Gualaco was an exception in that San Buenaventura eventually became a town in its own right, though by 1820 only a few Pech were left (ANTO 66 Los Encuentros 1820). San Buenaventura received ejidos through the help of a missionary in the time around 1734 (ANTO Santa María de Payas 1735). Another long-lasting mission, San Sebastián along the Río Aguaquire (present-day Río Tonjagua) in the Valle de Agalta, was occupied from the 1670s (Ovalle and Guevara 1681[1991]) until at least the 1720s. The Río Tinto area northeast of Catacamas, site of relatively long-lasting Paya missions, ended up as a sitio owned by mulato ganaderos of Catacamas by the late 1800s, and even became a municipio in 1874 (ANTO 89 Icoteas 1875; ANTO 163 Río Tinto 1789-1837; it is an aldea of Catacamas today). Several other mission sites disappeared without a trace.] was the visit of the erudite Guatemala-based Costa Rican friar Antonio de Liendo y Goicoechea, who penned a detailed description of his failed effort to convert the "Indios Agaltas," the Pech east and north of the Valle de Agalta, around 1806. Goicoechea established two missions called San Esteban Tonjagua and Nombre de Jesús Pacura, the latter

near a preexisting mulato or mestizo settlement. Both were on or near the serranía [pine ridge] edges of the Valle de Agalta, following a long-established pattern.

Goicoechea's contribution to the history of Olancho, an 1806 letter and 1807 Relación, are best known for the latter's description of a secret Paya celebration in a longhouse (on the ruins of a Taycones center) at Los Encuentros, the confluence of the Tayaco and Naranjal rivers, [footnote 94: Goicoechea does not witness the event, but is told of it by an acolyte whom he sent along with the Pech. Contrary to Goicoechea's painting of the Tayaco region as a remote montaña known only to the Pech, the Governor of Honduras' 1770 report, summarized above, shows that not only was Pacura a preexisting Ladino settlement, but also that Tayaco was crossed by a camino real to Sonaguera and the coast. This was a heavily used contraband route according to the governor, so it is likely that not only the Pech but the Olanchanos as well were keeping the Padre in the dark about "pre-Christianity" in the region. How much of a "secret" from local estancieros could such ceremonies have been, considering that the camino real went right by the site?] but they also provide valuable insights on the geography of Olancho:

Me encuentro el las honduras de Agalta, y jusgo que por ello, se han llamado así estos países...Es un valle grande, hermoso, y ameno; pero cercado por todas partes de montes altísimos, cruzados de río profundos, y barrancos peligrosos. El primero que los penetró, estaba ciertamente aburrido de su existencia. (Goicoechea 1935[1806]:247)

[The mission Pech] En lo general no son tan perversos como la gente comun de ese pueblo. Ofrecen con franqueza lo que tienen: no se burlan de persona alguna: no beven sino por sus fiestas. (249)

Goicoechea insinuated that the common people of Olancho drank a lot, did not offer with frankness everything they had, and were mocking of him and/or each other. The northeastern olanchanos were depraved inhabitants of a cruel landscape. The "uncivilized" Pech of the Taguzgalpa, on the other hand, were unsullied (if conflictive) inhabitants in a virtual Garden of Eden:

Cada parcialidad [i.e. Pech family] procura de intento colocarse en los parajes mas ocultos, fragosos e inaccesibles. El empeño de encubrirse los hace ingeniosos, para encontrar guaridas seguras. Unos de otros se recelan y se temen en tanto extremo, que cuando alguna de las poblacioncillas se hace conocida la trasladan a otra parte....Jamás salen de sus chozas por un solo punto, temiendo abrir huellas por donde pueda algun curioso rastrear sus habitaciones...para que sus gallos con el canto no los descubran en el silencio de la noche los encierran de suerte que no pueden pararse, ni batir las alas, por

que saben que no cantan sin estos dos requisitos....Es pues, la montaña de Agalta mas benigna y sana que los países conocidos....Es indecible el amor con que los indios miran su adorada montaña. La desnudez, hambres y trabajos les son preferibles a la comodidad mayor que les ofrezcan por otra parte....Su país mantiene el temperamento mas dulce y suave, libre de mosquitos, zancudos, niguas, y otras sabandijas. Las aguas que reciben de muchas cristalinas fuentes son saludabilísimas: el terreno fecundo y que sabe rendir ciento por uno a sus cultivadores. Allí se encuentran libres de las epidemias, y males que en todas partes aflijen a los míseros mortales, no se conoce la lue, venera, viruelas, sarampión, catarros, ni calenturas periódicas. (Goicoechea 1937[1807]; italics mine)

He saw the Pech as inseparable from their native landscape: a poignant statement of becoming-forest as the felicitous alternative to the plagues of Civilization. But parallel to his Utopic forest is a narrative of Pech duplicity—taking the proffered gifts at the missions and patting the old friar’s ego, but ultimately treacherous in their faked (or highly syncretic) Christianity. The rites that they practiced at Los Encuentros resemble those recorded among the Pech in 1698 (Betancur 1991[1698]) and the Taycones even earlier (AGCA Probanza de Corella 1561). Turning pragmatic in response to these barriers to civilization, Goicoechea laid plans for the better organization of northeastern Olancho, in which the Pech would become peons to the ranches:

Son incalculables los bienes que resultan a los hacendados y ganaderos de aquel distrito y aún a todo Olancho, con tener por amigos y compadres a los que hasta allí habian experimentado por sus enemigos mortales [meaning the Pech]....La asistencia de este Pueblo [Pacura], y la de San Esteban Tonjagua es de increíble consuelo a unas 20 haciendas de ganado establecidas en el Valle. En todas partes carecen de hombres y brazos para las siembras, las correrías de Ganado, las quezerías, y para conductores de los productos....Desde el pueblo de Gualaco (que es una ayuda pequeña de Parroquia) hasta Pacura, y hasta Tonjagua, hay un terreno como de treinta leguas, y en que apenas hay seiscientas almas...En suma a tanta necesidad, que en día ignoro como puede pasarse sin ayuda de los indios....Gualaco...es tan miserable que no puede mantener un coadjutor....Si toda la provincia de Comayagua se queja por la falta de misioneros, es preciso que la penuria llegue al extremo en los Valles de Gualaco y de Agalta, que son los términos mas distantes y miserables del infortunado país de Honduras. (Goicoechea 1937[1807]; italics mine). [footnote 95: Perhaps a different geography of northeastern Olancho would have resulted if Church and State had heeded 90-year-old Sargento Pedro de Tejada, vecino of Olancho, who had seen it all by 1737. He had gone to the montañas to extract Payas in the late 1600s, and believed there were still thousands more Indians out there. “Siéndole preguntado qué medio se puede dar para que esta gente se redusgan a vivir en nuestra santa fee, dijo: que para el descargo de su consciencia no hallava otro medio que hera darles todo el Valle de Agalta” (Testimonio de Autos...

1991[1739]). Tejada claimed to be echoing the territorial pretensions of the Pech themselves, who would be satisfied only when they got back the Valle de Agalta: the Pech, it appears, still thought of the Spanish as usurpers of their ancestral domain.]

Northeastern Olancho was the most distant and despicable corner of unfortunate Honduras. A more arrogant statement could scarcely be imagined, and his attitude shows the bitterness and lack of control that Goicoechea felt in a land whose complex identities Church and State could barely comprehend. [footnote 96: A collection of documents in the Archivo de la Casa Cural de Gualaco show that Franciscan effort continued in northeastern Olancho but that most Pech eventually returned to the montaña. It was a Jesuit priest, Manuel de Jesús Subirana, who finally procured them land titles in 1862 (ANTO 64 El Carbón), doing the same for the Pech on the south side of the Cordillera de Agalta in Dulce Nombre de Culmí (see Sampson 1997 for a detailed account and many references). The wave of Ladino settlement crested over them in the later 1800s, and today their lands are imbedded in a mosaic of olanchano spaces. For a priest's geography of Gualaco/San Esteban in 1900, with echoes of Goicoechea, see the fascinating AEC Documentos... (1900). For a Ladino ethnography of the Pech, see Urbina Ordoñez (1971).]

The Franciscan missions from 1660 to 1807, in retrospect, achieved few to none of their stated objectives: neither the Pech nor the Tawahka nor any other inhabitants of the Taguzgalpa gave up their roving, anarchistic ways, and few who were extracted formed other than unfavorable views of civilization. The missionaries were derailed by numerous forces beyond their control, ranging from the polytheistic strength of native religions, through the shield of the forests and rivers, to the precipitous ascent of the Zambos Mosquitos and the territorial pretensions of the English.

This is all fine and good, but does any of it change Preston's narrative in any way, or cast doubt on the conclusions? Overall, the book is a confused and misleading account seriously hampered by Preston's lack of command of Spanish and resultant reliance of filters between his own understanding and the understandings of ordinary, everyday Hondurans. Additionally, after being criticized by academics, Preston both criticizes them and cites them after reaching out for clarifications, but he errs seriously in relying too closely on Elkins' team of researchers, who for reasons unknown to me were unaware of the complex history of Spanish involvement in eastern Honduras, or did not communicate it effectively to Preston. Ironically, the Spanish accounts would have strengthened and enriched his narrative, as it could even be posited that the T1 valley might have been a last refuge of sorts for remnants of the Pech (this is not so farfetched--I have come across something similar in reliable oral histories of an equally remote region in northwestern Olancho, of some sort of a 'lost tribe'—a group of families of either Pech or Tolupan speakers talked about by elderly local Nahoas as a 'tribu' that survived into the latest 1800s and possibly early 1900s). If we ignore the part

about how we aren't really sure that any of the sites were the exact same ones inhabited at Conquest—thus that they were abandoned at that time due to disease—we can agree at least that disease WAS the primary factor devastating the area in the 1500s. The great shame is that the Pech continue to get short shrift from outsiders (except for Subirana, who finally got them land title, which they still defend), even though the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve was originally set up and administered with the idea of its being a landscape that would preserve the heritage of indigenous groups who lived in and around it. The book relies on narratives from select and ill-informed outsiders that discussing nothing of the Reserve's long and complex management history, and does not mention at all the various (successful) approaches to community-based conservation that have worked elsewhere in Honduras. To some extent, the T1 area, particularly at the time of the project, has been beset by ultraviolence due to drug cartel activity, so Preston was kept isolated from the full local context of conservation that would have created a more acceptable narrative (more on that below). This is not unique to Preston – I have noticed through the years that despite all the pressures on the region coming from Olancho, outsiders almost invariably fail to adequately dialogue with local leaders and other local voices, relying instead on outsiders from elsewhere in Honduras and abroad who profess great and in-depth knowledge of the region, but in reality do not measure up to the types of informants I have been privileged to dialogue with and accompany into the forests. In the case of leishmaniasis, this became a very serious issue – had Preston talked to any of a number of local experts, he and the rest of the team would have been well aware of how common the disease is in the biosphere reserve (many colleagues of mine have contracted it there and take great precautions to avoid it when they make return trips). Overall, I most regret that the Pech, who have very little effective representation at the national or international level as it is, as Chris Begley has also pointed out in a recent Internet post on the Real Archaeology website, continue to be all but ignored despite the fact that they have BY FAR the most nuanced and detailed knowledge of the biocultural resources of the deep forests. Certainly a robust ethno-archaeology project could help them reengage with their own deep past, and gradually help them regain the respect of mestizo Hondurans who, as it is, are led to believe that a mysterious, vanished culture, rather than the Pech, are the builders of the ruins that Preston so accurately describes have helped restore pride in the Honduran identity as a whole.

So is there anything you DO like about the book?

Yes, three things. First, perhaps there is no such thing as bad publicity. On the heels of Stewart's omphaloskeptic but amusing *Jungleland* (Stewart, Christopher S, *Jungleland: A Mysterious Lost City and a True Story of Deadly Adventure*, Harper Collins, 2014), we have a book by a renowned writer that at least draws attention to the area, and at least to some degree engages the idea that academic debate about 'lost cities' is possible and perhaps even desirable. In the age of pseudo-science, truthiness, and reality shows, it is important not to cast aside skeptics, knowledgeable academics and local experts, but rather to

embrace them (us) with all our grumpy, nitpicking emphasis on truth and correctness. The money and influence (several million dollars) behind the project are also far more than any of us researchers have ever been able to access, and media coverage has been intense. At some point, perhaps, protection of the region will occur, and at very least, those of us who toil in obscurity to create factually accurate accounts have been challenged to make our findings and opinions more widely known. Second, I quite enjoy all the details about leishmaniasis, about which I knew very little—this was the highlight of the book for me. Third, Preston is a very talented and evocative writer who can spin a great yarn, and his descriptions of the valley of T1, at their best, are some of the finest characterization I have come across, despite the rather tiresome, lurid descriptions of creepy-crawlies that are more out of a B-grade movie or pulp adventure fiction (perhaps on purpose, given his precursors in the White City genre) than a politically-correct 2017 account.

Finally, in relationship to political correctness, what should we make of the way Honduras, Hondurans, and certain unsavory outsiders are portrayed in the book?

To address this issue, I have included a range of quotes that apparently portray Preston's point of view, which I have discussed with colleagues and which I feel seriously hamper the account, while being in several cases extremely insulting and even harmful. No doubt the most controversial character was Bruce Heinicke, a now-deceased criminal—antiquities looter, drug trafficker, and probably murderer—who was an official member of the 2012 Lidar expedition based in Roatan. You can judge for yourself—at very least, the way that Preston excoriates the University of Chicago-trained academic Christopher Begley in a lengthy diatribe (despite his as well as the scholars' reliance on Begley's magisterial 1999 dissertation on the archaeology of the region) is incredibly ironic and cynical (191) given the way that he paints the corrupt and brutal Heinicke, who was a 'fixer' for Elkins:

The 'pistol-waving' (43) Heinicke "not only knew his way around Honduras but also had a keen understanding of when and how to bribe people (a delicate art), how to manage Honduran bureaucracy, how to intimidate and threaten, and how to deal with dangerous criminals without getting killed.' (41). Elkins admitted that '[in] order to make this [2012 Lidar expedition] happen, I had to dance with the devil at times' (43). Later in the book (84-86), after Preston's promise that nothing would be written until after his death, Heinicke talks candidly about his past drug smuggling, artifact smuggling, and jaguar killing exploits, even claiming to have found a gold statue in the Moskitia that sold for \$240,000 on the US black market (astounding if true, given that such items are rare if not nonexistent in archaeological collections from the region). Preston buys him beers: 'Despite his foul language and alarming appearance, he had a certain rough charm and charisma, conveyed by a pair of deep blue eyes.' (86) 'It was undeniably true that Bruce's help was crucial to the success of the effort' – thus Preston is basically admitting that someone who apparently

murdered two guides, at least shooting them and leaving them for the ‘alligators’ in the Wampu/Patuca area (86-87), in addition to all his other crimes, was the main reason that the narrative in the book happened in the first place. This was quite true – he even admitted to bribing Customs officials in Roatan to get equipment into the country for the 2012 Lidar overflights. (And to imagine that this same group refused to work with Dr. Begley because they had been told that he did not file all his field reports with the IHAH.)

The spookishly CIA-like Heinicke represents all that is awful and pathetic about US involvement in Honduras—he was a bully who believed that only the law of the gun could keep ‘gringos’ safe and Hondurans in line. If this were true, I and many others like me should have been dead long ago, as we work in these admittedly extraordinarily dangerous areas, such as Olancho, but are not targeted *precisely because* we self-identify and are known to be non-violent; it is *absolutely true* that if we were known to be armed, because we work with local communities in environmental heritage and justice issues, we would be seen as viable targets by the bad guys. As the world’s foremost academic expert on the roots and dimensions of violence in this region, I believe I speak with some authority on the topic; Preston doesn’t not exaggerate the dangers, but he dangerously misrepresents the way that responsible outsiders should deal with Honduran culture (and, above, all, RESPECT the culture). This is also ironic because Preston describes the earlier history of US exploitation in some detail, correctly assessing the negative effects of its having been the archetypal ‘banana republic.’ (Oddly enough, though he portrays Samuel Zemurray of United Fruit in some detail, he footnotes his daughter, Doris Z. Stone (58), who was in reality one of the most important figures in the archaeology of the region that includes T1—something he fails to mention). Even more ironic because Preston, presumably because he is exposed solely to the Honduran governments that followed the 2009 coup, is very one-sided in his treatment of Honduran political reality, misrepresenting the reasons for the coup (66). In his most dastardly move, Preston relies on the incorrect statement of Honduran official Paredes, who tells him (192) that many of us criticized the project because we weren’t involved, and the reason for this is that we were Zelaya’s (the deposed president’s) followers. This is even more insulting than his intimations (189-190) that we were motivated by jealousy. The simple idea that we were academics interested in truth and accuracy (in my own case—extraordinary claims of the discovery of Atlantis need to be accompanied by extraordinary evidence, if in fact ‘Atlantis’; was ever more than a fantasy of Plato’s) do not appear to have factored into his calculation, I suspect because of the extreme political and academic factionalism in the country. Preston was clearly only directly exposed to the post-coup faction controlling the permits, protecting the site, and helping promote the project to the world (administrations of presidents Lobo and Hernandez). There are elements of truth in Preston’s account, but it is almost unbelievably naïve and unbalanced.

Perhaps predictably in a book that does not portray ordinary, everyday Honduran society—filled with decent, thoughtful, hardworking people—Preston’s descriptions of the Honduran landscape and its people are caricatures at best, peppered with a few neutral statements. In this, the book could easily be mistaken for something written in the early decades of the 20th century. Judge for yourself: Tegucigalpa is called a ‘dense city of crooked little neighborhoods and slums’ (113), and the spectacular trip from there to Olancho is described as ‘a long, dusty drive over mountain roads, through a succession of impoverished villages with dilapidated houses, heaps of trash, open sewers, and sad-faced, droopy-eared dogs slinking about.’ (118). Journalistic license, true, but a very selective description quite light on positive aspects of the trip, though he complements the appearance of one town, as well as Catacamas – which in reality are the only two places where travellers on the main highway see the well-kept downtowns; the Olancho Highway otherwise skirts the towns and follows the impoverished edges. Imagine, if you will, such a selective description of Philadelphia or another US city—such distressing sights can also be seen there. No mentions of the immaculate colonial churches, cobblestone streets, old adobe facades and red-tiled roofs that proliferate in the same towns he passes by (and in parts of Tegucigalpa) – the impression given of Honduras, except for the T1 site itself, and the 2012 junket at a luxury resort in Roatan, makes the entire country sound like a slum or a smoking ruin of a former forest, which is exactly the opposite of the stated intent of the project, to promote a positive image of the country to help it improve pride and identity both domestically and in international eyes. At least on his return trip on the Olancho Highway in 2016, he is more complementary of both real and imaginary (El Mago) towns (276-277), though inexplicably referring to the ‘inscrutability and “cognitive dissonance” of Honduras today.’