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## CHAPTER 4

### ETHNOHISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Over the years, it has become standard procedure to include a background discussion of ethnohistoric information in archaeological reports. The rationale for this is generally sound, since the recorded observations of Euroamericans can amplify and augment the inherently limited information on aboriginal cultures and lifeways recoverable solely through the use of archaeological methods. The ethnohistoric record has particular relevance for a site like Mitchell Ridge, which has produced evidence not only of the latest era of prehistory, but also of the same time periods that are treated in the known historical record. Indeed, some of the findings made at Mitchell Ridge are about as closely linked to certain Early Historic recorded events as is possible, short of direct correlations with a precisely documented place and/or known historical personages.

It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that, despite a fair amount of historical documentation for the relevant time periods, and despite a fortuitously remarkable set of archaeological data on the Early Historic occupation at the site, the ethnic identity of the native people(s) who occupied the site cannot be identified with certainty. This situation derives from two factors. First, as is generally the case with more or less mobile non-agriculturalists, people moved about within operational areas to the extent that fixed settlement locations of one or another named ethnic group generally cannot be identified in the historical record. Second, the Mitchell Ridge Site is located near that geographic point on the upper Texas coast which may have been a boundary zone between two major ethnic/linguistic groupings, namely the Atakapan-speaking Akokisa Indians around Galveston Bay and the Karankawans, who resided along the coast between the area of the Brazos River Delta and the Corpus Christi Bay area (Aten 1983a; Newcomb 1983). The historic documents are rather ambiguous on the point of precisely where this boundary (which seems, on the evidence, to have been quite real) was situated and, in any case, the mobile lifeway of aboriginal people in the area may have precluded the establishment of a hard and fast territorial boundary. As will be discussed at some length further on, the archaeological data are also unclear on this point, since some observable traits (e.g. most ceramic forms and decorations), clearly show greatest affinities with the Galveston Bay area, and others (e.g. certain mortuary patterns) may be more closely similar to those farther down the coast.

Given this situation, the most feasible approach to constructing an ethnohistoric framework for the findings at Mitchell Ridge is eclectic, insofar as relevant information on both the Akokisa and Karankawa is considered. Moreover, since the findings in Early Historic period burials at the site indicate admixtures of peoples of diverse and geographically far-flung origins, as well as acculturative processes which involved concomitantly diverse cultural elements, any meaningful treatment must also consider the broader context of historical processes and events that informed the world of the people who occupied the Mitchell Ridge Site. In short, the present discussion of ethnohistory incorporates, in addition to information on the Akokisa and Karankawa, some essential background material on native and Euroamerican groups further afield who were likely to have had relations with, or direct or indirect influence on, local peoples.

#### Periods of the Ethnohistorical Record

Three basic periods of Euroamerican-Indian contact/interaction are relevant to the findings at Mitchell Ridge. The first, corresponding largely to the Protohistoric of our archaeological chronology (ca. A.D. 1500-1700), saw exploration by Spaniards of the Southeast and the Gulf Coast, as well as early Spanish settlement and missionary activity along the coasts of Florida and in New Spain (Mexico). The second period began with the incursion of the French into the Mississippi valley and the Gulf coast near the end of the seventeenth century. During these years, the French began their exploration of the Mississippi Valley and established a small, ill-fated colony near Matagorda Bay on the Texas coast, ventures which were to open the way to concerted settlement and economic activity in the Mississippi valley and adjacent areas in the early eighteenth century. In response to the French incursions, Spanish authorities in New Spain, fearing permanent encroachment on their Gulf coastal plain territorial holdings, began to explore the western Gulf coast in earnest, and established a string of missions and presidios, first in

northeast Texas among the Caddoan tribes, and later at Bexar (San Antonio) and other locales on the Texas coastal plain.

The final historical period relevant to our findings at Mitchell Ridge began in the early eighteenth century. During this period, the French initiated systematic settlement of the Mississippi valley and adjacent areas, establishing towns at Biloxi, Mobile and New Orleans, as well as trading settlements and posts in strategic locations such as Natchitoches in present-day western Louisiana. These towns and posts quickly became entrepôts for the far-reaching economic activities of entrepreneurial traders who traveled among native peoples, exchanging European manufactured goods for Indian commodities, most notably deer hides. By the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the deerskin trade had emerged as a southern counterpart to the long-established northern trade in beaver pelts, and many native groups rapidly became dependent upon the wide array of manufactured goods they acquired from the traders.

#### The Protohistoric Period: Spanish Exploration and Initial Settlement in the Southeast

The Spanish incursion into the Southeast came from two directions, from the Caribbean as well as from New Spain. Settlements were established in the Caribbean beginning with Columbus's founding of La Navidad on the coast of Haiti in 1492, which was soon followed by his establishment of La Isabela on the north coast of the Dominican Republic. Puerto Rico was initially settled in 1508, and settlement of Jamaica and Cuba began, respectively, in 1509 and 1511 (Deagan 1985; 1990). Settlement of New Spain began in central Mexico in the 1520s, and by the 1580s the northern frontier of New Spain had reached as far north as Saltillo and Monterrey, where silver mining operations were established (Gerhard 1978).

The northern frontier of New Spain remained more or less fixed for over 100 years. Spanish expansion into what is today Texas began only at the end of the seventeenth century in response to French intrusions-- actual or anticipated-- into the northwestern Gulf region (Bolton 1915; Thomas 1971). On the other hand, Spanish exploration and settlement pushed early into Florida, a movement which was an extension of the colonization of the Greater Antilles islands. Ponce de Leon claimed the Florida mainland for the Spanish Crown in 1513, though the first lasting settlement was St. Augustine on Florida's Atlantic coast, established in 1565. The founding of St. Augustine was preceded by several other attempts at permanent settlement, all of which failed (Deagan 1990:237-238).

A number of Spanish expeditions in what is today the southern United States were undertaken during the sixteenth century. Two of the most intensively researched are that of de Soto/Moscoco in 1542 and the travels of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, a survivor of the ill-fated Narvaez expedition of 1528.

The de Soto expedition began in Florida and traversed much of the upland south, crossed the Mississippi River and ultimately entered the northeastern part of present Texas (Bruseh 1992; Perttula 1992:19-28). Although this expedition did not reach the Texas coast, and would, presumably, have had no direct effect on native populations there, it may have had serious repercussions in the interior Southeast through possible introduction of Old World pathogens (e.g., M. Smith 1987). The possibility of sixteenth century epidemics as been suggested by various researchers to have played a major role in the Protohistoric collapse of the populous and complex Mississippian societies of the region (e.g. Dobyns 1983; Ramenofsky 1987; M. Smith 1987; Perttula 1992).

#### *The Observations of Cabeza de Vaca*

In contrast to the situation with the De Soto/Moscoco expedition, Cabeza de Vaca and his fellow shipwreck survivors of the Narvaez expedition did directly interact with native people on the upper Texas coast, beginning in 1528. Cabeza de Vaca in fact lived among a group that frequented a coastal barrier island during part of its seasonal round, and this island may well have been Galveston Island (e.g., Newcomb 1983). Whether or not Cabeza de Vaca's "Isla del Malhado" was in fact Galveston Island, the locale was almost certainly on the upper Texas coast, and Cabeza de Vaca's observations are highly significant as an early ethnohistoric account documenting the native people of the area and selected aspects of their lifeway prior to the effects of European colonization of the larger surrounding region.

Several observations made by Cabeza de Vaca shed light on basic patterns of native subsistence and settlement. The first contact which he and his party had with native people was an encounter with three Indians armed with bows and arrows. Within a half hour, the Spaniards found themselves facing about 100 men, all similarly armed (Bandelier 1905:55). Since the ratio of able-bodied adult males to total

population was probably at least 1:4 among Texas coastal hunter-gatherers (see Aten 1979; Ricklis 1990:503-504), a resident island population of several hundred people is implied, a point noted previously by Newcomb (1983). This must be regarded as a relatively large population aggregate for mobile hunter-gatherers, who often dispersed into smaller socioeconomic groupings, or bands, comprised of about 20-50 people (Lee and De Vore 1968). Inferably, the island's resource base was sufficiently reliable and abundant that a relatively large population aggregate could be sustained.

The food resources which supported the island occupation are clearly indicated by Cabeza de Vaca when he notes that

the Indians stay on this island from October till the end of February, feeding on the roots I have mentioned, taken from under the water in November and December. They have channels made of reeds and get fish only during that time; afterwards they subsist on roots. At the end of February they remove to other parts in search of food, because the roots begin to sprout and are not good any more (Bandelier 1905:65).

This short passage indicates several fundamental aspects of aboriginal adaptation to the barrier island environment. Clearly, fish were a major staple. Moreover, the "channels made of reeds" apparently to refer to artificial fish traps, indicating a specialized technology for intensive fish procurement. The mentioned roots, "which they eat that taste like nuts...most of which are taken out of the water with much trouble" (Bandelier 1905:56), were also obviously very important in the diet, and probably provided a high-starch complement to an otherwise protein-rich diet of fish.

While it is apparent that a rather large group lived together, or at least in close proximity, on the island, it is also clear that this was a seasonally temporary situation which constituted only one part of a mobile settlement/subsistence strategy. The Indians spent the fall and winter on the island, but went to the mainland at the end of February to gather shellfish, berries, and, though not specifically mentioned, doubtless to hunt as well. Hunting would have been carried out with bows and arrows, since Cabeza de Vaca explicitly states that the Indians had "no other weapons than bows and arrows with which they are most dexterous" (Bandelier 1905:65).

Little is said about the kinds of domiciles inhabited by the Indians; they seemingly were simple huts, since Cabeza de Vaca noted that the lodges afforded little shelter against the cold weather, and were covered with mats. The fact that the Indians were able to quickly build a hut to house the shipwrecked Spaniards indicates that houses were easily constructed (Bandelier 1905:61-68) and thus, presumably, well-suited to a mobile way of life.

Cabeza de Vaca left a number of nuggets of information concerning the social organization of the island people. Speaking of the natives of the area in general, he mentioned that "all who are of the same descent cluster together", which presumably means that the basic socioeconomic unit was a kin group, the common pattern among hunter-gatherers (e.g., Lee and De Vore 1968). Cabeza de Vaca had the following to say about the social relations attending marriage:

When one [an adult male] takes a woman for his wife, from the day he marries her, whatever he may hunt or fish, she has to fetch it to the home of her father, without daring to touch or eat of it, and from the home of the father-in-law they bring the food to the husband. All the while neither the wife's father nor her mother enter his abode, nor is he allowed to go to theirs, or the homes of his brothers-in-law, and should they happen to meet they go out of each other's way a crossbow's shot or so, with bowed heads and eyes cast to the ground, holding it to be an evil thing to look at each other or speak. The women are free to communicate with their parents-in-law or relatives and speak to them. This custom prevails from that island as far as about fifty leagues inland (Bandelier 1905:66)

While caution should be taken not to draw overly confident inferences from these limited observations, certain patterns of social organization do seem to be suggested. The statement that the husband was required to send procured food to his wife's father appears to represent a form of bride price or bride service. The apparent fact that this wealth went to the father-in-law rather than the mother-in-law suggests a primary familial authority for elder adult males, which may have correlated with a pattern of patrilineal descent. Finally, the observation that the husband was expected to avoid his in-laws but that the wife could mingle freely with hers suggests that the newly married couple were socially linked to the

husband's family rather than the wife's kin, which can be interpreted as reinforcing a virilocal residence pattern wherein the new family lived with, or near, the husband's relatives.

Also concerning marriage rules, Cabeza de Vaca noted that, in general, marriages were monogamous. Exceptions were made for "medicine men" or male shamans, who were permitted two or three wives (Bandelier 1905:66-67).

Political authority seems to have been weakly developed, since Cabeza de Vaca noted that the Indians had "no ruler among them" (Bandelier 1905:71), though the absence of a ruler, in the perception of a sixteenth century Spaniard, probably should not be taken to mean that there were no individuals in positions of decision-making authority. In fact, there are indications that the society of the islanders was not without social statuses or specialized roles for certain individuals. Children were apparently afforded special treatment, since Cabeza de Vaca believed that "of all the people in the world, they are those who most love their children and treat them best..."(Bandelier 1905:63-64). Observations concerning mortuary practices, to be mentioned shortly, also indicate special treatment for children. Shamans apparently were accorded special status, as suggested by the observation, already noted, that they could have more than one wife. Also, in Cabeza de Vaca's perception, only the bodies of shamans were cremated (Bandelier 1905:66), suggesting a special set of beliefs associated with the body and/or spirit of the shaman.

Cabeza de Vaca's observations on mortuary practices have special interest for the findings at Mitchell Ridge, which include burials of the Late Prehistoric and Protohistoric Periods. His observations indicated that mortuary practices were not uniform, but varied according to social roles and age/sex status, a pattern which, as we shall see later on, is evidenced in the archaeological record at Mitchell Ridge. Cabeza de Vaca had the following to say regarding burial practices:

...should a child of one of them happen to die, parents and relatives bewail it, and [so does] the whole settlement, the lament lasting a full year, day after day. Before sunrise the parents begin to weep, after them the tribe, and the same they do at noon and at dawn. At the end of the year of mourning they celebrate the anniversary and wash and cleanse themselves of all their paint. They mourn all their dead in this manner, old people excepted, to whom they do not pay any attention, saying that these have had their time and are no longer of any use, but only take space, and food from the children. Their custom is to bury the dead, except those who are medicine men among them, whom they burn, and while the fire is burning, all dance and make a big festival, grinding the bones to powder. At the end of the year, when they celebrate the anniversary, they scarify themselves and give to the relatives the pulverized bones to drink in water. ...There is another custom, that when a son or brother dies no food is gathered by those of his household for three months, preferring rather to starve, but the relatives and neighbors provide them with victuals (Bandelier 1905:66-67).

There are certain points of interest in these passages which augment the archaeological mortuary data from Mitchell Ridge. First, it is apparent that a one-year period of mourning commonly followed the death of a member of the group. This may correlate with the presence of curated human remains which constituted secondary burials at the site. The mention of cremation of shamans or "medicine men" is also possibly relevant to the fact that a minority of the burials at Mitchell Ridge are secondary cremations. Finally, Cabeza de Vaca implies special mourning practices for males (brothers and sons), which may be in keeping with greater status, as suggested by relatively more burial goods in male graves than in graves containing female individuals.

### *The Protohistoric Situation on the Eastern Gulf Coast*

Although a long way from the Mitchell Ridge Site, developments in Florida during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century are worth briefly noting here, since certain findings of Protohistoric glass trade beads at the Mitchell Ridge Site suggest that already local Indians were at least indirectly affected by European presence on the eastern Gulf coast. As already mentioned, exploration of Florida had begun during the early sixteenth century, and the permanent settlement of St. Augustine was founded on the Atlantic coast in 1565. Spanish colonization in Florida was limited, and did not involve intensive production of market commodities as was the case in the Caribbean (Deagan 1985). For this

reason, relations with native peoples were not based upon the congregation of forced labor, as they were elsewhere in the Spanish New World. Rather, Spanish-Indian interaction involved establishment of political alliances through intermarriages of Spaniards and Indian caciques, limited tribute labor on the part of Indian males to the colony at St. Augustine, and establishment of Christian missions in Indian towns (Deagan 1985; 1990).

Thus, unlike the French later on, Spanish colonists were not engaged in a systematic economic interaction with native groups along the Gulf coast or the interior Southeast. Nonetheless, limited quantities of European trade goods were reaching Indian communities, to ultimately find their way into the archaeological record of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The precise mechanisms by which this took place are difficult to confidently identify for any given archaeological context, but could have involved (a) presentation of gifts to Indians by Spanish military or mission personnel (b) occasional exchange of European goods for Indian commodities, (c) Indians salvaging materials from shipwrecks, and/or (d) indirect or "down-the-line" exchange or gift-giving between native groups or individuals who obtained European goods in one of these ways. As Marvin Smith (1987:25) has pointed out, none of these factors alone would have put great amounts of European material into the hands of Southeastern Indians; European goods must have been relatively scarce until the beginning of the Southeastern deerskin trade in the late seventeenth century. Nonetheless, there does appear to be a trend toward increasing abundance of trade goods in archaeological contexts after ca. 1600 (Smith 1987:27), so the combination of factors must have effectively disseminated material as Spanish settlement grew, as shipping increased, and as the number of missions in Florida and adjacent areas increased during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Smith (1987) has also suggested that the earliest (sixteenth century) European goods acquired by Southeastern Indians were largely consumed by sociopolitically elite groups and individuals, often finding their way into high-status burials. Later, during the seventeenth century, as European goods became more abundant (and as political hierarchies collapsed under the impact of disease-driven depopulation), European tools and ornamental artifacts became increasingly available to the general population and lost much of their prestige as "sociotechnic" artifacts (Smith 1987:26-27).

Despite the limited economic relations between Indians and Spaniards during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the limited extent of Spanish settlement and missionary activity, it is apparent that early Spanish exploration and colonization had profound effects upon native societies in the Southeast. The introduction of Old World diseases, for which native Americans had never developed immunities, dramatically reduced aboriginal population levels, perhaps as early as the middle of the sixteenth century (e.g. Milner 1980; Dobyns 1983; Ramenofsky 1987; Smith 1987; Perttula 1992). With major population loss, the agricultural societies of the Southeast, represented archaeologically by material remains of the various Mississippian cultures, could not sustain their sociopolitical structures, and the complex hierarchical chiefdoms of the region experienced, to varying degrees, catastrophic simplification.

As a result, the cultural map of native societies was, by the late seventeenth century, considerably changed from what it must have been earlier. The collapse of native cultural systems was not, however, total, nor did it occur evenly across geographical space. When the French arrived in the Mississippi Valley in the 1680s, they found a mosaic of native groups, some of which retained sizeable populations and considerable political power. As European states competed for land, resources and influence, various southeastern Indian societies played major roles in the three-way power struggle between the Spanish, French and English colonies. The eighteenth century was an era of intense competition between the colonial powers, and so it was between the Indian tribes who formed alliances with one or another of the European states. Such alliances led to conflicts between native groups, a situation that was exacerbated by competition for European trade goods. The disruptions and displacements of native peoples and communities which attended these processes had wide-ranging effects which, as we shall see, reached as far as the Mitchell Ridge Site on Galveston Island.

#### The Early Historic Period: Initial Contacts and Interaction

Between the 1680s and the 1720s, Euroamericans became increasingly active in the area of the western Gulf coastal plain. The primary political reality influencing these activities was the geographical confrontation between the French, who pushed southward down the Mississippi valley, and the Spanish, who regarded the region as the northern frontier of their colonization of New Spain.

The first settled colony on the Texas coast was established by Rene Robert Cavalier de la Salle in 1685. La Salle's goal was to locate the mouth of the Mississippi, establish a settlement there, and thus effectively lock in place French control of the entire valley (the French already controlled the upper Great Lakes area through political and trading alliances with various Indian tribes of the region). Unfortunately for La Salle's plans, he entirely missed the Mississippi and sailed on to the Texas coast to mistake Matagorda Bay for the mouth of the river (see Weddle 1987). Nonetheless, La Salle, accompanied by French men, women and children sent to establish the colony, decided to proceed with settlement. The location of the establishment, which La Salle named Fort Saint Louis, has been identified as the Keeran Site on Garcitas Creek, a small stream which empties into Matagorda Bay (Gilmore 1984).

The colony was to prove a short-lived and ill-fated venture, fraught with problems from even before its inception. One of the two French ships ran aground upon entering Matagorda Bay and broke up on shoals, spilling out valuable cargo and supplies (the local Indians, the Clamcoets [Karankawa] carried off many of the goods that washed ashore). Although the Indians were initially friendly, La Salle quickly managed to antagonize them by confiscating several of their dugout canoes. The Indians retaliated, killing and wounding several Frenchmen (Joutel 1713; Cox 1905). When interrogated several years later by Spanish authorities, Jean Baptiste Talon, a boy among the French colonists, summarized La Salle's relations with the local natives in these terms:

M. de la Salle would never have had war with the Clamcoets if on arrival he had not high-handedly taken their canoes and refused them some little article that they asked him in return for them and for other services that they were ready to render to him. Nothing is easier than to win their friendship [than by giving them presents]. But also, as they give voluntarily of what they have, they do not like to be refused. And, while they are never aggressors, neither do they forget the pride of honor in their vengeance (Weddle 1987:251).

Not long after these events, La Salle was murdered by some of his own men while traveling in east Texas (Cox 1905). Meanwhile, relations between the Indians and the settlers at Fort Saint Louis were strained, and late in 1688, the Karankawa attacked the settlement, capturing or killing the colonists. Just how many of the settlers were still living at this time is open to question, since the settlement had recently experienced a smallpox epidemic. Indeed, as suggested elsewhere (Ricklis 1990:539) the Indians may have attacked the settlement in a retaliatory response to the outbreak of smallpox, if the illness had spread to the local native population.

In any event, the establishment of Fort Saint Louis served as a direct catalyst for increased Spanish fear of French encroachments on the northeastern periphery of Spanish territory. Up to this time, the northern frontier of New Spain had been more or less stable in Nuevo Leon and southern Tamaulipas. The La Salle episode prompted the Spanish authorities first, to commission expeditions through the interior and along the coast to determine the extent of French incursions, and, second, to establish the first mission-presidio complexes in east Texas in order to create an impediment to westward French expansion (Bolton 1915).

In early 1687 an expedition under the command of Martín de Rivas and Pedro Iriarte sailed north from Vera Cruz in search of the La Salle colony. The diary of the chief pilot, Enriquez Barroto (1987) chronicled the progress of the expedition, and described encounters with coastal Indians at the mouth of the Rio Grande, at Aransas Pass near Corpus Christi Bay, and on the shores of Matagorda Bay. The shoreline of the bay was explored, and wreckage from one of La Salle's ships, *La Belle*, was seen, but no contact was made with the French settlement.

The expedition sailed on to Galveston Bay but, finding the bay waters too shallow for safe entry, proceeded to the Louisiana coast where Indians of Atakapan linguistic stock were encountered. Among these people were two castaways from a Spanish galley. The Indians claimed to know of a wrecked ship at the mouth of a river westward along the coast, and further said that they had seen white men hunting on horseback in the vicinity of the shipwreck (Barroto 1987; Weddle 1992:103). The expedition returned to Galveston Bay, since it was thought that the Indians might have been describing the wreckage of one of La Salle's ships and members of the colony. However, no signs of the ship or white men were found, and the only indication of people of any sort were a group of abandoned Indian huts.

In the spring of 1689, an overland expedition under the command of Alonso de León set out from Coahuila with orders to find and report on the French colony (West 1905). The expedition came upon the

settlement on April 22, finding it sacked and in ruins, and noting several decomposing bodies of colonists. Because French books and other goods had been seen in the possession of the occupants of nearby Indian camps, the obvious conclusion was that the local Indians had massacred the settlers.

Several significant aspects of native life and culture on the central Texas coast can be gleaned from the accounts of De León, Enriquez Barroto, and from the diary of Minet (1987), a member of La Salle's party. Since these do not pertain directly to native peoples of the upper Texas coast, their relevance for elucidating aboriginal life at the Mitchell Ridge Site is questionable. Nonetheless, certain basic patterns may have been shared by coastal Indians in both areas, and these can be very briefly overviewed here.

Observations of native camps on the shoreline for this period are limited to the Enriquez Barroto and the Minet diaries. Barroto's expedition anchored for several days during the latter part of March at the latitude of Aransas Pass, the main tidal inlet to Corpus Christi Bay, where they traded beads to the Indians for fish (Barroto 1987). The size of the Indian camp was not stated, but subsistence was apparently based at least in part on fishing. La Salle's party encountered a large encampment, comprised of about 400 Indians living in 50 *cabanes* at the entrance to Matagorda Bay in February of 1685 (Joutel 1713:77; Minet 1987:109). Minet made a map showing the location of the camp, and it is clear that it was situated at the northern end of Matagorda Island on the shore of Paso Caballo, the tidal inlet connecting the Gulf with Matagorda Bay. Subsistence patterns were not described, but the location strongly suggests that fishing was an important economic activity here.

Taken alone, these two observations concerning shoreline camps do not present a meaningful pattern of seasonal settlement and subsistence scheduling. However, when considered along with other observations recorded during the eighteenth century, and in conjunction with archaeological data on subsistence and seasonality at shoreline sites, it is apparent that there was a major emphasis on fall-winter fishing on the central Texas coast, a pattern which appears to have involved relatively large, seasonally aggregated groups (see discussions in Ricklis 1990, 1992a, 1992b). This may be similar to the kind of occupation, noted above, which Cabeza de Vaca described for his Isla del Malhado on the upper Texas coast.

#### *The Account of Simars de Bellisle*

In the winter of 1719, the Frenchman Simars de Bellisle, and four of his compatriots, were marooned on the upper Texas coast; general consensus is that these men found themselves on the shores of Galveston Bay (Folmer 1940; Gilmore 1974:9). Four of the five died of hunger and exposure, leaving De Bellisle as the sole survivor. De Bellisle too would almost certainly have perished, had he not encountered a group of coastal Indians with whom he lived for over a year. The account left by De Bellisle of his life with these Indians, most probably Akokisas (Folmer 1940; Gilmore 1974), is a remarkable record which provides useful first hand observations of native life on the upper Texas coast in the early eighteenth century.

After burying the last of his companions, De Bellisle first encountered Indians on an island in the early spring, where they were busy gathering birds' eggs on the beach. The Indians took De Bellisle's clothes, forcing him to spend the night neck-high in water as protection from mosquitoes. Though not seeming particularly sympathetic to his plight, the Indians nevertheless fed De Bellisle and allowed him to remain with the group.

It is clear from the account that during the summer the group was quite mobile, moving from place to place to hunt and gather plant foods. De Bellisle describes this pattern as follows:

I passed the entire summer with them in this country with them going everywhere in search of food because they possess no cabins or fields. That is why they travel in this manner the entire summer. The men kill a few deer and a few buffaloes and the women search for wild potatoes (Folmer 1940:216).

Another observation seemingly relevant to summer subsistence patterns is that deer in riverine areas "were very frightened by the Indians who come here in summer" (Folmer 1940:211).

With the onset of winter, the highly mobile foraging pattern of the summer months appears to have given way to a different sort of residence pattern involving larger groups:

When the beginning of winter came we all left [the area of summer activities] to join a band of their people who were waiting for us at the end of the bay. We arrived there at the end of seven or eight days (Folmer 1940:217).

Unfortunately, De Bellisle does not indicate the kind of subsistence commonly carried out during the winter. The fact that his Indians appear to have merged with another group of related people on the bayshore, however, at least suggests a shift from the summer reliance on mobile hunting to a winter emphasis on procurement of estuarine resources.

It is clear that hunting was practiced during the winter as well as the summer season. However, the winter hunting described by De Bellisle was not within the context of the entire socioeconomic band, as seems to be implied for the summer. Rather, it was an activity carried out by male hunting parties which set out with the specific goal of procuring meat and then transporting it back to the larger group:

After a few days had passed, they told me that all the men were going to hunt buffaloes and were going to war against their enemies, and that I should keep myself ready to go with them the next day and that I should carry part of their baggage on my back. Indeed, the next morning they took their horses and their arrows, and after putting a few deerskins on their horses' backs, instead of saddles, they told me to go ahead and that they would catch up with me soon because they were on horseback. I asked them to loan me one. They told me that it was not decent for a man of different color to possess a horse and that I should go on foot.... I walked for two days under these conditions, and the third day we arrived at a prairie which seemed endless in every direction and where numerous buffaloes were grazing. We halted there to hunt.... That morning they killed fifteen or sixteen buffaloes.... They decided the next morning to return to the place where they had left their wives. We left accordingly at daybreak. They went very fast. All I could do was follow them, running as fast as I could. In addition, they had given me my portion of the buffalo meat to carry (Folmer 1940:218-220).

This passage shows clearly that by 1720 native groups on the upper Texas coast had access to horses, though it is less apparent how the animals were obtained. It is possible that the Indians' statement that "it is not decent for a man of different color to possess a horse" indicates that they had not seen European using horses, and that the animals were obtained as wild strays or from other Indians. Alternatively, the Indians may have simply been mocking De Bellisle, which they did often and which he laments at some length in his account. In any event, there were certainly no Euroamerican settlements on or near the upper coast in 1720, so the animals would have been obtained through exchange with other Indians (such as southern plains tribes who traded widely in horses; see Swaggerty 1988) or from feral descendants of strays from the early east Texas mission-presidio complex or animals left behind by the de León expedition to the coast in 1689.

De Bellisle spent most of his time with the Akokisa as a virtual slave, forced to work and frequently beaten. The means of his eventual escape conveys something of inter-group relations among the Indians, and the relative geographical locations of the various groups tend to confirm that his time was spent among people inhabiting the Galveston Bay area. De Bellisle convinced two of the Indians to carry with them a letter describing his plight, which they were to give to the first white man they encountered. These Indians did not do so, but rather took it "for the purpose of showing it to all their tribes" (Folmer 1940:218). Eventually, the letter was shown around in a village of the Biday (Bidai) tribe, suggesting that the Akokisa of the Galveston Bay area and the Bidai, who resided inland and to the north, were allied to one another (in keeping with the belief that the two groups were closely related culturally and spoke Atakapan dialects [e.g. Aten 1983a]). At this time, a number of Assinai (Hasinai Caddoans) were visiting the Bidai village, and saw the letter. They took it and conveyed it to M. St. Denis at the recently established French post at Natchitoches. St. Denis thereupon sent a contingent of Hasinai to the coast to rescue de Bellisle. De Bellisle noted that the Indians with whom he was staying were quite fearful of the Hasinai, stating that

When the day finally came [for me to leave with the Hasinai], when I saw two Indians, with whom I was living..come to take me away. The first ones, when they came to me,



took me by my throat and told me that if I should leave they would kill me with their arrows because they feared I would avenge myself of all the bad treatment they had inflicted on me. At that moment the two Assinai joined us and when they saw that these unlucky creatures were ready to kill me, they told them that if they dared to do me the least harm, they should count that within a short time they would be all destroyed by the Assinai. This made them tremble from fear and immediately they let me go, not understanding why these Indians chose my side (Folmer 1940:222-223).

Clearly, the four decades between the 1680s and the 1720s saw an increasing European presence along the Texas coast, as exploratory expeditions commissioned by Spanish and French authorities crisscrossed the region and surrounding areas. Native peoples of the region surely must have increasingly felt, directly or indirectly, the effects of the growing colonial presences along the Gulf coastal plain. Goods of European manufacture must have become occasionally available, perhaps from shipwrecks or even through indirect, down-the-line exchange. Though De Bellisle does not mention such items among his Galveston Bay Indians, he does note finding a rowboat washed ashore, and other items surely must have been occasionally cast up and collected by local natives. Though pertaining to a group further down the coast near Corpus Christi Bay, it is interesting to note that in 1720 the French navigator Jean Beranger observed metal knives in use by Indians in that area (Wagner 1983:22). It is certainly possible that such items were also reaching Galveston Bay area people by this time. De Bellisle's account shows that the upper coast Indians were using horses by 1719, and this must have modified, or at least greatly facilitated, traditional hunting and mobility patterns. Finally, as we shall see further on, the native people of the upper coast may have begun to experience the dire effects of the epidemic diseases introduced by Europeans.

Still, the people of the upper coast remained geographically removed from the more direct impacts of European contact during this period. The Spanish settlement in the form of mission-presidio complexes was yet to come to the Galveston Bay area, and direct participation in the French-Indian trading sphere probably emerged only during the second quarter of the eighteenth century.

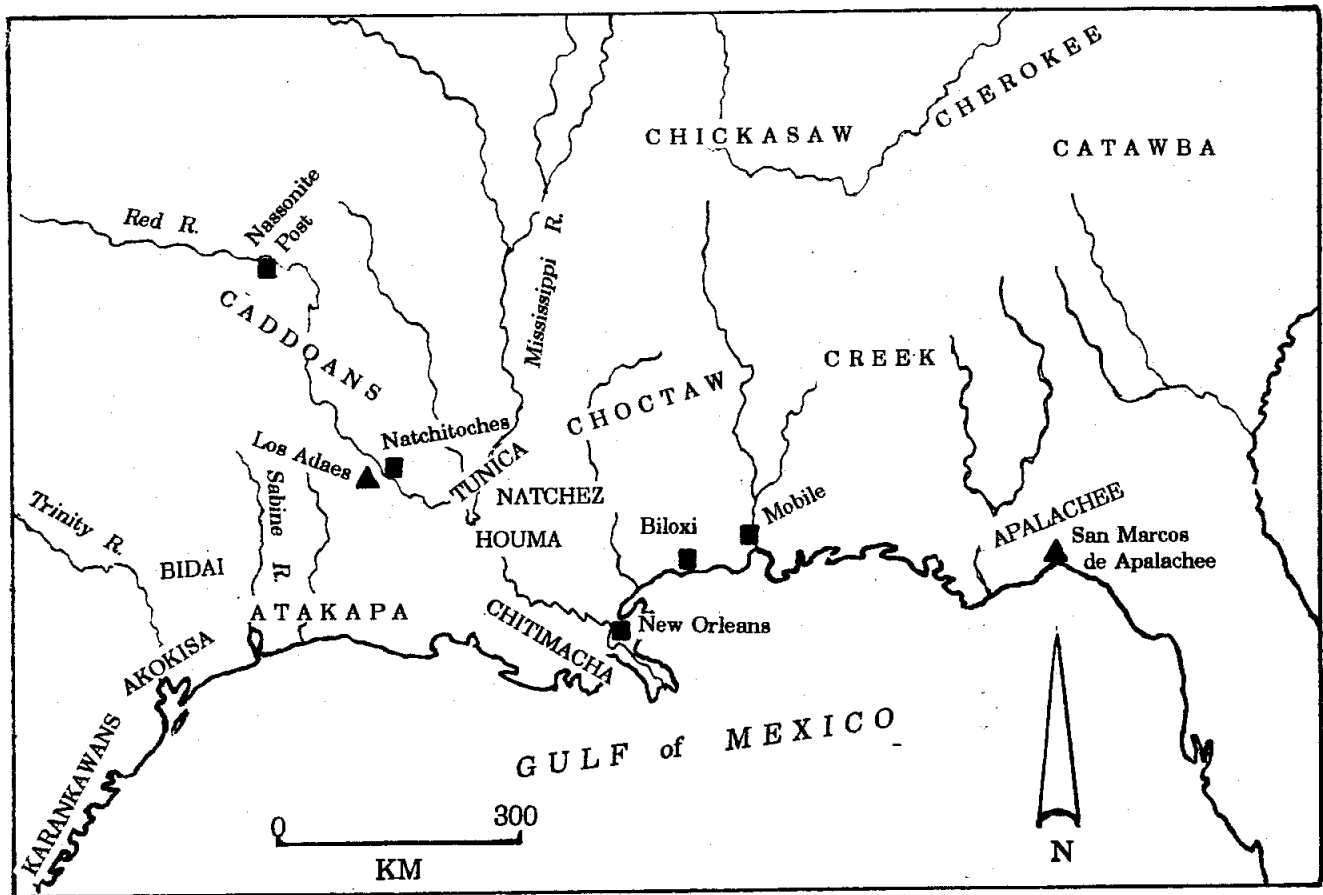
In order to understand the historical processes which were affecting the native people of the Galveston Bay area by mid-century-- and which are reflected in the archaeological record at Mitchell Ridge-- it is necessary to briefly examine developments in the larger spheres of European colonization of the southeastern part of the continent.

#### The Early Historic Period: Intensified Indian-European Interactions and the Deerskin Trade

Frenchmen first explored the lower Mississippi valley in 1682, the year La Salle made contact with the Natchez Indians who lived in the area that is today southwestern Mississippi. Sieur de Iberville, commissioned to locate the mouth of the river in 1698, quickly recognized the importance of a Louisiana colony to French interests in North America. Effective settlement and economic development of the region would drive a wedge between Spanish settlements in Florida and the Southwest, and also block westward expansion of the British colonies. Iberville realized that any effective control of the Mississippi and the surrounding region would significantly depend upon good relations and alliances with the more powerful and populous Indian groups of the region (see Figure 4.1), and suggested that such alliances should be founded upon religious conversion of the natives to the Catholic faith and development of strong economic ties through trade. Iberville envisioned a string of French forts extending from the lower Mississippi basin northward to the Ohio River. With strong alliances with important tribes in place, the forts could count upon the support of Indian warriors, which were estimated to total some 12,000 men (Brain 1979:258).

These goals were never realized to the extent envisioned by Iberville. At best, French alliances with the larger tribes remained tenuous. The efforts at religious conversion were fraught with difficulties from the beginning, as Recollet and Jesuit fathers competed for control of missionary activity. The Recollets quickly won out, excluding the Jesuits from the region by 1704. However, by 1715 only three Recollets priests were left in the entire Louisiana colony, and only one of these, Father Davion of the Tunica mission, seems to have been fit for the task (Brain 1979:260). The Indians apparently were unimpressed with what the missionaries had to offer, and baptisms generally occurred only *in articulo mortis*, that is, at the point of death (Albrecht 1946).

In both trade with the Indians and internal development of colonial enterprise, the economy of the



**Figure 4.1.** Map of the northern Gulf coast and Gulf Coastal Plain, showing locations of major native groups and selected early European settlements mentioned in text. French settlements are indicated as squares, Spanish settlements are shown as triangles.

fledgling Louisiana colony was seriously hampered by the nature of French social and economic patterns, which retained many essentially feudal policies and attitudes (Albrecht 1946; Brain 1979:261). Under these conditions, commissions for economic activities in the Louisiana colony were granted to members of the aristocracy, who usually remained in France as absentee owners of colonial entitlements. Moreover, the economic policy of France did not permit independent entrepreneurial investment of funds, but rather required potential developers to rely on royal discretion concerning such matters.

As a result of these policies, the first two decades of the Louisiana colony saw only slow and intermittent economic progress. In recognition of the situation, and realizing by 1720 that Iberville's original two-part strategy for control of the Mississippi valley had not been actualized, French authorities placed control of the Louisiana enterprise into the hands of John Law. Law embarked on a concerted promotional venture, encouraging relatively large scale settlement of French families and the importation of African slaves (Albrecht 1946). Though Law's scheme was largely speculative and poorly organized, it did result in a marked growth of the colonial population during the 1720s, most notably at New Orleans, and the establishment of plantations along the Mississippi river in the vicinity of that settlement. By 1730, the plantations were scattered along the river banks for distances of some 40 to 50 leagues (100-125 miles) above and below New Orleans, and were producing rice, tobacco, cotton, hemp and flax for export. The French settlement at Mobile (see Figure 4.1), established in 1702, was manufacturing tar and pitch (Rowland et al. 1984).

Trade with native peoples took two forms. Trading posts, established at considerable distances

from the primary centers of French settlement at New Orleans, Mobile and Biloxi, became entrepôts for the exchange of European manufactured goods for products of Indian origin. These included, among others, the Natchez post, established among the tribe of that name in 1713, the post at Natchitoches in present day western Louisiana, also established in 1713, and La Harpe's Nassonite post among the Caddo west of the great bend of the Red River, dating to 1719 (Albrecht 1946; Miroir et al. 1975; Gilmore 1992). Goods arriving from Europe-- guns, bullets, powder, cloth, iron tools and kettles and glass beads, among others-- were warehoused at such locations, to which Indians brought for exchange items such as deerskins, buffalo hides, bear fat (for tallow) and, when available, horses. Deer skins supplied the greatest economic value in the trade, and were shipped to Europe for manufacture into gloves, soft leather clothing and parchment (Usner 1988).

Trade was also significantly carried out by backwoodsmen, or *coureurs de bois*, who traveled far into tribal territories and often lived among native peoples, adopting Indian lifeways and often marrying Indian women (Albrecht 1946; Kniffen et al. 1987:63; Usner 1988). The activities of the *coureurs de bois* and other traveling traders generally preceded the establishment of formal trading posts within a given area, a pattern which, as discussed below, was the case in the Galveston Bay area.

The effects of the European incursion into the Mississippi valley and adjacent regions had, as elsewhere in the New World, profound effects on native peoples and the social, political and economic dimensions of native cultures. Surely the most drastic effect of contact, already mentioned, was the terrible toll taken by the introduction of diseases such as smallpox and measles. In addition to the impacts of epidemics, native societies were often severely disrupted through direct conflict with colonial forces, and, more often, through inter-tribal conflicts set in motion by various tribal alliances with competing European interests. Although English colonial settlement was largely confined to east of the Appalachians, British traders extended their activities far inland, beginning with the deerskin trade which operated out of Charleston after 1670 (Smith 1987). The early reach of the English traders is highlighted by the fact that they had already been operating among the Natchez when the French set up a trading post there in 1713 (Albrecht 1946:333). The aggressive nature of the British interest in the Southeast is indicated by the fact that by the middle of the eighteenth century Charleston rivaled New Orleans in the bulk of deerskin exports, with both towns sending annually some 100,000 pounds of deerskins to their respective European markets.

An aspect of the English enterprise which was particularly threatening to non-allied native groups was the slave trade. The English early-on established a systematic pattern in which they encouraged their Indian allies to carry out slave raids which extended throughout the Southeast at least to the Mississippi valley and beyond (Usner 1988). The effect was to further disrupt native societies already impacted by disease and inter-group conflict.

The more populous and powerful tribes allied with the English included the Cherokees, Catawbas, Creeks, and west toward the Mississippi, the Chickasaws. For the French, the most powerful political allies among the southeastern tribes were the Choctaw who lived in the area which is today the state of Mississippi. Other tribes such as the Tunica on the lower Mississippi and the Caddo on and near the Red River were more or less reliable trading partners, but were either too small or too far removed to provide much help as a barrier to English influence or to give protection against the raids of English tribal allies. In the case of other tribal groups, relations with the French were overtly hostile. Two specific examples suffice to show how relations often deteriorated into conflict and serve to highlight the extremely unstable conditions under which many native groups were forced to operate during the first half of the eighteenth century.

The Natchez, an originally populous group living in what is now southwest Mississippi (Swanton 1911; see Figure 4.1, herein), first came into contact with Frenchmen during La Salle's exploration of the river in 1682. In 1713, a French trading post was established in one of the principal Natchez towns (Albrecht 1946). The friendly relations which might have followed, however, were thwarted during the 1720s, and culminated with large scale conflict. During that decade, French settlers encroached upon Natchez land and showed increasing arrogance toward the Natchez people. Adding to the friction was the fact that the Natchez abstained from becoming formal political allies of the French, preferring to maintain a neutral position (Albrecht 1946:327). Conflict broke out in 1723, when the French governor, Bienville, over-reacting to the theft by Indians of some cattle, attacked the Natchez with a force of over 700 soldiers, colonial volunteers, and Indian allies. Many prisoners were taken by the French forces; adult males were killed and women and children were sold into slavery (Brain 1979:264). Several years of tense peace

followed but, in 1729, the Natchez attacked the French post of Fort Rosalie in response to the demand of the fort's commandant that they vacate one of their main villages and the surrounding rich agricultural lands. The Natchez gained control of the fort and killed or captured all but about 20 of the settlers who resided there (ibid; Albrecht 1946). In January of 1730 the French retaliated, and were successful in freeing most of the prisoners held by the Natchez. A second attack, one year later, succeeded in capturing a large Natchez village and many prisoners were taken. Though many Natchez escaped to take refuge among other native groups, particularly the Chickasaws, the tribe's occupation of its homeland was ended and its power broken.

The Natchez Wars of the 1720s were followed by a decade of conflict between the French and the Chickasaws. The Chickasaw, living north of the Choctaw, were firmly allied with the English, and thus were always a potential threat to the French colony. When they refused to extradite the Natchez refugees among them, the French initiated a series of hostilities known as the Chickasaw Wars. The French won no substantial victories, and succeeded only in dissipating a great deal of money and resources which would have better served their long-term interests in constructive development of the Louisiana colony. The perceptible ineptitude of the French toward Indian politics probably contributed to a loss of loyalty among native peoples which culminated in the subsequent rebellion of the Choctaws (Brain 1979:264).

Another native group to suffer defeat and dissolution at the hand of the French were the Chitimacha, who resided in the Mississippi delta area, west of the river, during the early eighteenth century. Prior to their dispersal by French forces, the Chitimacha were a populous agricultural people with a hierarchically ranked sociopolitical structure generally similar to that of other major Mississippi valley native societies (see Swanton 1911). The earliest well-dated conflict with the French began in 1706, when French soldiers sent from Mobile, along with allied Indian warriors, attacked a Chitimacha village in reprisal for the murder of the missionary priest Father St. Cosme. Fifteen Chitimacha were killed, some 40 were wounded, and many prisoners were taken into slavery (Swanton 1911:345-352).

For over a decade, the Chitimacha suffered slave raiding by Indians allied with the French, and most of the native American slaves in the Louisiana colony were captured Chitimachas. Finally, in 1719, the French authorities demanded that the tribe relocate its villages to the banks of the Mississippi River. Swanton (1911:342) suggests because the number of people that settled at the new location was apparently small, it is likely that only a fraction of the tribe actually relocated. In fact, a contemporary observer noted that "This nation is small in number, owing to the fact that the larger portion dwell with the Atakapas [Atakapas], who reside on the seashore in summer and live on fish" (ibid. 1911:343). Thus, as was later the case with the Natchez, one response of the Chitimacha to insuperable pressures was to disperse and find refuge among other native groups.

The fates of the Natchez and Chitimacha are only two examples of the pattern of conflict and dispersal of native populations which characterized the early decades of colonial settlement of the Mississippi valley and surrounding areas, and which is too complex to treat here. Generally speaking, smaller tribes, being more vulnerable to attacks and slave raiding, tended to either disperse to find refuge among other peoples, or amalgamated for mutual protection, as in the case with the Houma (Kniffen et al. 1987:78). Larger groups such as the Choctaw and Chickasaw were able to maintain cohesion during the eighteenth century, but began drifting westward in the late 1700s, as did various other remnant Southeastern peoples.

### **French Traders and Spaniards in the Galveston Bay Area**

The native peoples of coastal Louisiana and the upper Texas coast were probably among the last groups to be directly affected by the European colonization of the Gulf coastal plain. The Atakapa of south-central and southwestern Louisiana were apparently relatively insulated from the main thrust of events further to the east and north, doubtless in part because of the general unattractiveness of the swampy bayous of the region to European settlers. Thus the country of the Atakapas could and did serve as a refuge for Chitimacha, Houma (Kniffen et al. 1987), and perhaps other remnant lower Mississippi valley populations.

The native people living to the west in the Galveston Bay area were still further removed from these processes (though, as we shall see, the archaeological findings at Mitchell Ridge indicate that they too were absorbing refugee populations). While the Atakapan-speaking Akokisa had experienced direct contact with Europeans, prior to the 1740s, this involved only marooned individuals such as De Bellisle or

exploratory expeditions which only skirted their territory. And, although the Spanish were quick to respond to French incursions into Texas, the early mission-presidio complexes were established at considerable distances from Galveston Bay, first in northeast Texas among the Caddo (in 1691), then at San Antonio (in 1718) and finally on the coastal prairie well to the south at the various shifting locations of mission Espiritu Santo and presidio La Bahía (in 1722 on Garcitas Creek and then 1726 on the lower Guadalupe River, and finally in 1749 at the site of modern Goliad, Texas).

Following the De Bellisle episode and contact between Galveston Bay native people and the French expedition under La Harpe, over two decades were to elapse before there was again documented interaction with Europeans. By the early 1740s, rumors that French traders were operating in the area began to reach the ears of Spanish authorities. Fearing systematic French incursions into the eastern margins of their domain, the authorities commissioned, in 1745, an exploratory expedition to the Galveston Bay area to determine if in fact the rumors were true and if there were any signs of actual settlement by the French in the area.

In early 1746, Captain Joaquin Orobio y Bazterra, who was then stationed at Presidio La Bahía on the lower Guadalupe River, led the expedition into southeast Texas. Traveling overland more or less parallel to the coastline, the expedition reached the Trinity River on March 6 at a location some distance upstream from Galveston Bay, in the territory of the Bidai Indians (Castañeda 1939:46). A number of observations recorded by Orobio y Bazterra provide insight into the status of European involvement in the area:

Here [on the Trinity River] I found seven *rancherías* of Indians of the Vidais [Bidai] nation. I held a long conference with one of them, a chief, regarding the surprise caused by the arrival there of the Spaniards because this did not happen customarily.... [The chief] said that every year the French came with the guns, cloth, knives and other goods used by the Indians; that some of the French usually came along the seacoast in canoes and entered either the Trinity River, the Neches, or the Brazos de Dios [Brazos River]; and that other Frenchmen, who had settled six years ago, more or less, within the boundaries of the Pachina nation, which extends from the Savinas [Sabine] River to the Mississippi usually came by land as far as the Orcoquisac [Akokisa] nation, which occupies the [region] from the Neches River to halfway between the Most Holy Trinity [River] and the Brazos de Dios. He said also that the past year of [17]45, those Frenchmen who usually come along the seacoast had selected a location for the purpose of bringing their families, building their homes, and trading for chamois and the other products of the region; but that he did not know whether they had come or not, since because of the severity of the weather all the people from his *rancherías* had gone to the hills to find refuge in bear caves; and for some time they had not gone down to visit the Orcoquisac nation. He did know, however, that after the French had selected that site, some [Indians] of the Orcoquisac nation were sent to this nation of Vidais and had informed them of this decision and of the fact that they could go down whenever they wished to trade their products for guns, cloth, shirts, powder, bullets and whatever else they needed (Report of Joaquin Orobio y Bazterra, October 1, 1745).

While staying at one of the Bidai villages, Orobio y Bazterra was visited by a small contingent of Akokisas who invited him to come downstream to their village, which was situated near the mouth of the Trinity (i.e., in proximity to Trinity Bay, an extension of Galveston Bay). The captain agreed to do so and, upon reaching the Trinity delta area, saw two Akokisas villages, near which the Spanish force set up camp. Orobio y Bazterra wrote in his report that he

...treated them [the Akokisa] kindly, gave them gifts to prevent their becoming alarmed, and found them docile. However, they were surprised and said that they had never seen in their lands the Yegsa nation, as they call the Spaniards, but that they had heard about them from the Vidais who came in contact with them on the Camino Real to los Adais. The interpreter asked their chief whether there was any French settlement anywhere on the neighboring coast. He said that there was not, but that they expected some to come with their families during the summer to live among the people of their nation, because they had promised to do so last year when they had selected the site for building their

homes. For the purpose of trading, the said Frenchmen had sent these Orcoquisacs to notify the Vidais, the Doxsas, and the Tejas to come down whenever they wanted to with their chamois, buffalo hides and the other products that the French usually get from them.... He said that these [people, the French] are in the habit of coming by land annually to trade their goods; that others, namely those who selected a site for their settlement, come along the seacoast; and that about five or six moons ago, some Frenchmen came with the intention of looking for other Frenchmen who were lost in the land of the Cujanes [a Karankawan tribe], but that they did not go any farther because these said Orcoquizas told them that the nation of Coco Indians was very numerous and malevolent and would kill them, and that the same was true of the Carancaquazes and the Cujanes (Report of Orobio y Bazterra, October 1, 1745).

These references appear to sum up the general situation of Indian-European contact in the Galveston Bay area in the 1740s. It seems clear that the local native people had little or no direct contact with Spaniards up to 1746, which is in accord with the admission of Spanish authorities that as of 1740, they knew virtually nothing of the coast between the Guadalupe and Sabine Rivers (Castañeda 1939:46). The French, on the other hand, had been trading directly to the Akokisa since at least as early as 1740 by making what seem to have been more or less annual trading expeditions to the upper Texas coast.

It is, in fact, entirely possible, if not probable, that trade was taking place between Galveston Bay area natives and the French prior to 1740. French traders were operating among the Atakapan groups of the Louisiana coast by the early 1720s (Castañeda 1939:60), and these activities could well have extended westward along the coast to the Atakapan-speaking Akokisa. Certainly the above-cited description of the territorial range of the so-called Pachina nation-- from the Sabine to the Mississippi--fits the geographical range generally ascribed to the Atakapas (Swanton 1911), and it thus seems likely that the Bidai chief was describing to Orobio y Bazterra the French presence among the Atakapa speakers of that area. If French traders living among the Pachina were coming to the Akokisa on a regular basis by 1740, it is entirely possible that they had been doing so, at least occasionally, even earlier, or that the Akokisa were bringing skins and other native products to the French.

Although the expedition led by Orobio y Bazterra found no evidence that the French had actually established a settlement or trading post among the Akokisa by the mid 1740s, the reality of a French settlement was not long in coming. Rumors of French activities continued to circulate, and in 1754 the Spanish received news that a trading post had been set up near the mouth of the Trinity River. Having been apprehensive for years that French settlement in the area would soon become a reality, the Spanish authorities were quick to respond. In September, 1754, a Spanish military force from los Adaes, under the command of lieutenant Marcos Ruiz, was dispatched with the mission of ascertaining the accuracy of the reports. Ruiz left los Adaes with 25 soldiers, a force which was to be bolstered by Bidai and Akokisa Indians. In order to win the alliance of the Indians, the expedition was provided with "a superabundant supply of goods for barter to use as gifts for this estimable nation... [in order to] persuade the Indians to help" (1754 report of Don Jacinto de Barrios y Jáurigui, Governor of Tejas). Additionally, the Spaniards promised that if the trading post were located and the Frenchmen captured, the spoils would go to "the chiefs and the rest in order that the interest in pillage may thus serve as a stimulus to the Vidais and the Orcoquisacs for achieving the desired objective without bloodshed or provocation of the said nations..." (ibid.).

Ruiz succeeded in winning over the needed Indian allies, and the combined Spanish and Indian force reached the French establishment on October 10, 1754. They found that the post consisted of *jacal* structures including a house and several warehouse facilities, and that it was manned by a small handful of men and the trader Joseph Blancpain. Blancpain and the others were captured and his goods either confiscated by the Spaniards or taken by the Indians.

Blancpain was taken to Mexico City where he was interrogated by the authorities (and where he became ill and died). During his testimony Blancpain stated that he had been operating his trading post for only a few months at the time of his capture, and had traded 300-400 pesos worth of goods. Though he already had a home among the Houmas of the lower Mississippi valley, the post was intended as the first stage in French settlement at Orcoquisac (as the location was known), with the trading facility to be followed by a civilian settlement involving 50 French families. He also stated that the French had been trading among the Atakapa for 32 years (Deposition of Blancpain, February 19, 1755); the post at

Orcoquisac was, in the perception of the French, only a natural extension of activities among coastal tribes in which they had been engaged for some considerable time.

Blancpain's testimony created concern among the authorities, since the list of goods which he claimed had been confiscated was far longer than that reported by Ruiz (compare the two lists, presented here as Tables 4.1 and 4.2). Blancpain stated that, contrary to the lieutenant's report, most of the goods at the trading post had been illicitly taken by the soldiers. There is some reason for concluding that the list provided by Blancpain was far closer to reality-- and therefore more representative of the kinds and quantities of goods involved in the local deerskin trade--than that reported by Ruiz. The short list provided by Ruiz hardly seems to be congruent with the effort and expense in building and manning a post intended to become a permanent trading facility. Ruiz' inventory lacks many classes of items generally reported to have been important, including common trade items (e.g. iron knives and other tools, kettles, bells, shirts, gun flints), all of which are found in Blancpain's list.

Accepting Blancpain's list as more or less representative of the kinds of goods being traded, it is apparent that by the mid-eighteenth century the native people of the Galveston Bay area had access to a wide range of European products. While the variety and quantity of goods available from traveling traders may have been less than from the warehouses of an established, local trading post, the fact that such trading was a regular activity by 1740 suggests that a significant quantity and variety of European items was in use in the area by that time. Although the native people of the Galveston Bay area may not have yet become dependent on European goods, as apparently were the tribes of the Mississippi valley by that time (see Rowland et al. 1984:275, 289), they seem to have shown considerable demand for the items which could be procured through trade. Blancpain had acquired as many as 2,300 deer skins during the short period during which his post was operative, suggesting the Indians in the area were quick to respond to the post's existence by trading a considerable volume of hides.

It is difficult to determine to what extent the overall availability of trade goods may have diminished with the termination of Blancpain's venture. French traders must still have been active to the east among the Atakapa groups, and could have engaged in exchange with people in the Galveston Bay area. However, the Spanish, determined to prevent a French settlement of the area, constructed a presidio at the site of Blancpain's post in 1756, along with a mission for the Akokisa. An ongoing Spanish presence at the site would have hampered the local French fur trade, and probably reduced to some extent the quantity of goods readily available to the Indians of the area. At the very least, the Spanish intervention must have temporarily retarded what seems to have been a growing influx of European goods into native hands via water transport through Galveston Bay.

The Spanish did attempt to initiate their own trade with the Akokisa and Bidai, which would effectively take advantage of the exchange network initiated by the French traders. However, the Spanish mission-presidio complexes were never conceived in an entrepreneurial mode and did not stock the kinds of provisions required to maintain an ongoing trading partnership with aboriginal groups (Castañeda 1939:71). Indeed, the Texas and Louisiana centers of Spanish activity often had difficulty finding adequate provisions for their own needs (Corbin 1989), much less a surplus of goods for trade. Thus native groups of inland east Texas continued to take hides and horses for trade to the French settlement at Natchitoches long after the Spanish established their first settlements.

Given the scarcity of goods in the Spanish settlements, the trade which did take place between Spaniards and Indians tended to involve a three-cornered network in which Spaniards effectively were middlemen, exchanging hides, horses and other items obtained from native groups for French goods at Natchitoches, and then trading the French goods to the Indians for another round of exchange at Natchitoches. This sort of activity was officially forbidden by the Spanish colonial viceregal government, and thus was carried out covertly. The illicit nature of the Spanish-French-Indian exchange system did not, however, prevent the participation of certain colonial officials, and the most active promoter, until his departure from Tejas in 1760, was the governor, Barrios y Jáuregui (Castañeda 1939:52). The fact that this kind of trade was illegal and covert renders any precise evaluation of its scope or impact on aboriginal groups impossible. Barrios y Jáuregui did allow French traders to continue to travel into Texas (ibid:53), so it seems safe to assume that native groups on the upper Texas coast had some access to a continuing flow of trade goods, and French traders did continue to do business with the Akokisa, at least intermittently (e.g. Bolton 1915:361-362).

Meanwhile, the Spanish plans for settlement at Orcoquisac progressed slowly. The original intention was to set up a civil settlement which would initially house 50 families but, due to lack of funds

**Table 4.1.** List of items observed in possession of Joseph Blancpain at his Trading post near the mouth of the Trinity River, October 10, 1754 (from Memorandum of Lieutenant Marcos Ruiz).

17 <i>fusils</i> (guns)	200 hats
4 barrels of gunpowder	23 axes
4 barrels of bullets	24 hoes
12 dozen razors and knives	10 shovels
1 box of mirrors and glasses	3 bolts of red flannel
1 bolt of <i>fuertediablo</i> cloth	17 treta shirts
3 bolts of <i>barracan</i> cloth	2,000 gunflints
1 1/4 bolts of blue lenbur	8 pistols
1 box of beads and vermilion	1 trunk of razors and <i>belduques</i>
21 ounces of cottonade	17 ollas of gypsum
19 blankets	1,300 hides

and other resources, as well as a lack of interested settlers, the idea was abandoned in 1758. The Presidio of San Agustín de Ahumada was established by July, 1756 on the precise location of Blancpain's trading post near the east bank of the Trinity about two leagues (8 km) upstream from Trinity Bay (Bolton 1915:346; Tunnell and Ambler 1967). At about the same time, the Mission of Nuestra Señora de la Luz del Orcoquisac was established at the same location. By 1764 the mission, never an impressive facility, was in a dilapidated state. In that year captain Rafael Martínez Pacheco, commander at the presidio, attempted to rebuild the mission and to kindle enthusiasm for mission life among the Akokisa by supplying a herd of beef cattle and tools for agriculture. However, the necessary official support was not forthcoming and, despite a temporary revival, the mission soon relapsed to a virtually dysfunctional condition. By 1771, only 30 Indians had been baptized in the Catholic faith. In that year the presidio was closed and within a few weeks the mission of Nuestra Señora de la Luz del Orcoquisac was abandoned (Bolton 1915:370-371).

### **Native Culture of the Upper Texas Coast in the Mid-Eighteenth Century**

One result of the flurry of Spanish activity around Galveston Bay in the middle part of the eighteenth century was the generation of a body of documentary material which contains information on the native people of the area. The Spaniards did not set out to produce a coherent summary of the nature of native culture, and the observations which they left thus consist of disconnected bits of information. These fragments must be examined with an eye to reconstructing certain basic outlines of the regional culture. Much of this work has been accomplished by Aten (1983a), who relied heavily on the syntheses of the primary Spanish archival materials carried out by historians such as Bolton (1915) and Castañeda (1939) to infer certain basic sociocultural patterns. Since Aten was able to construct a useful model of the structure of the native way of life using the extant evidence, the following overview draws heavily upon his work, though certain other pertinent bits of ethnohistoric data contained in primary archival documents are cited as well.

It seems fairly clear that on the eve of European intrusion into the area, the native adaptation relied upon non-agricultural subsistence. The relations of Cabeza de Vaca and De Bellisle, discussed above, appear to be unambiguous on this point. Cabeza de Vaca's early sixteenth century account describes his observations of a yearly round of subsistence activities centered upon fishing, gathering of wild plants and hunting; no horticultural activities are mentioned. Nearly two centuries later, De Bellisle also describes a mobile life based on hunting and gathering, and in fact explicitly states that the Indians moved about a good deal because "they possess no cabins or fields" (Folmer 1940:216). If the people among whom either



Table 4.2. Items which Blancpain claimed had been confiscated from his trading post near the mouth of the Trinity River, October 10, 1754 (from Deposition of Joseph Blancpain, made at Mexico City, February 19, 1755)

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24 ordinary French <i>escopettes</i>	1 gross if ordinary combs of horn and wood
6 ordinary English <i>escopettes</i>	1 gross of <i>eslabones</i>
4 ordinary Dutch <i>escopettes</i>	10,000 gun flints
3 superior master <i>escopettes</i>	1 gross of awls
6 pairs ordinary horse pistols	1 gross of small crosses of gilded copper
1 pair superior horse pistols	1 gross of gilded copper earrings
1 pair of pocket pistols	2 gross of buttons or links with ordinary stones
24 ordinary machetes	2 gross of small metal rings
24 ordinary narrow sword blades	4 gross of yellow copper bells
4 1/2 <i>quintales</i> of powder	1 gross of bronze bells
1,000 pounds of lead bullets	500 children's steel trumpets
200 pounds ammunition	1 skein of iron wire
2 bolts of blue cloth	6 skeins of assorted brass wire
2 bolts of red cloth	100 large fishhooks
12 bolts of red <i>bayeta</i>	36 skeins of fishing line
2 bolts of green serge	3 dozen harpoons
24 bolts of camlet in colors	20,000 assorted sewing needles
2 bolts of white <i>mofort</i>	12 dozen small ordinary mirrors
2 bolts of ordinary velvet	24 needles for sewing pelts
2 bolts of blue <i>barracan</i>	4 reams of paper
2 bolts flowered silk and cotton	4 pound of ordinary thread
4 bolts of striped ribbon	4 pounds of thread for sewing boat sails
2 bolts of embroidered ribbon	6 curved knives for preparing pelts
4 bolts painted Marseilles linen	50 pounds iron nails
2 bolts of white braid	4 dozen needles for sewing boat sails
8 dozen handkerchiefs	12 bridle bits
36 ordinary men's shirts	4 dozen iron sickles
12 ordinary women's blouses	4 dozen crystal glasses
12 ordinary European blankets	2 carpenter's woodworking knives
36 superior European blankets	2 iron compasses
6 dozen pairs cotton stockings	2 saws, large and small
2 bolts of triped cotton duck	2 iron tongs
25 pounds superior vermilion	50 iron kettles, from 4 to 24 <i>quartillas</i>
50 pounds of verdigris	100 large axes
50 pounds assorted colored glass rosary beads	50 small axes
25 pounds large glass beads, sky blue	4 carpenter's axes
25 pounds small colored glass beads	4 dozen tin spoons
500 pounds of salt in a cask	36 hoes
1 box of assorted gunsmith tools	a set of scales
500 ordinary razors with wooden handles	2 yellow copper kettles, 50 <i>quartilla</i> capacity
200 razors with horn handles	6 iron shovels
2 Flemish knives	1 small iron bar with a 30-pound weight
150 large knives with cleft handles	2 sets of calker's tools
2 long-handles curved <i>anzuelas</i>	500 pounds of tobacco
6 very long drills	2,300 deer skins
6 medium drills	
2 bolts <i>masame</i> cloth	

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Cabeza de Vaca or De Bellisle lived had any economic reliance on horticulture, it is difficult to believe the fact would have gone unrecorded, since both men spent an entire year living with an aboriginal coastal group and thus were able to observe a complete annual round of seasonal subsistence activities.

In contrast to these accounts is an observation of 1748 left by Orobio y Bazterra, the Spanish commander already mentioned above in connection with his exploratory expedition to Trinity Bay in 1745. In January of 1748 Orobio y Bazterra received orders from the Viceroy to explore the coast between the Guadalupe and Trinity Rivers, in order to determine suitability for settlement as well as the nature and number of the Akokisa Indians (Castañeda 1939:49). After some delays, the expedition left the presidio of La Bahía on May 15. Orobio y Bazterra arrived at the Trinity River on June 10, at a point approximately 15 leagues (60 km) from its mouth at Trinity Bay. Here the captain was met by a group of Akokisa who had arrived by canoe, and these Indians invited him to come to their village at the mouth of the Trinity. Orobio y Bazterra accepted the invitation, and spent June 12 and 13 exploring the village, its environs and the river mouth. At this time, he noted that the Indians cultivated garden plots, in which they raised corn and other vegetables (Report of Orobio y Bazterra to the Viceroy, July 22, 1748, cited in Castañeda 1939:51-52). Given the facts that the geographical location is well documented and that Orobio y Bazterra had previous experience in the area and presumably could correctly identify Indian groups, it would appear that by the 1740s the Akokisa were to some extent practicing horticulture to meet their subsistence needs.

This being the case, the question arises as to whether the people and lifeway observed by Orobio y Bazterra were directly descended from those recorded by Cabeza de Vaca and De Bellisle, or whether a culturally somewhat different group is represented. In the first case, the observation of Orobio y Bazterra would imply that a shift from a strictly hunting-fishing-gathering subsistence economy to a partly horticultural lifeway had taken place between De Bellisle's time and 1748. If, on the other hand, different groups are represented, then it would follow that there was more than one basic traditional adaptive strategy operating in the Galveston Bay area. As will be shown further on, there are skeletal data from the Early Historic Period at the Mitchell Ridge Site which appear to be congruent with the first scenario, insofar as a shift in dietary patterns during the first half of the eighteenth century is indicated. A rapid shift in subsistence patterns thus seems to have been one of a number of significant changes which took place during Early Historic times.

Drawing upon information originally presented in the reports of Orobio y Bazterra and others, Aten (1983a:68-83) constructed a general model of sociopolitical organization among upper coast populations. Assuming that the Akokisa and Karankawa had generally similar kinds of adaptation, and noting the fact that the two linguistic groups had adjoining territories, Aten suggests, with due caution, that the fragmentary data available for both groups can be combined to arrive at a general picture of organizational patterns.

Aten notes the repeated references by the mid eighteenth century Spaniards to the effect that the Akokisa were divided into several subgroups, each of which was represented by a headman or "chief". There appear to have been five such groups, with a total population of about 1,200 people. Because neither Cabeza de Vaca nor De Bellisle recognized political authority among their native groups, Aten (1983a:68) suggests that authority was of a "subdued" nature, meaning that headmen fulfilled the role of facilitators of decision making at the group level but did not exercise independent authority within a strictly ranked sociopolitical structure. The "power" of the headman was thus only that which was willingly ascribed to him by the group.

Each headman seems to have been associated with a single "village" or aggregation of the small socioeconomic band units (each band consisting of perhaps as few as 25 people) which would have periodically dispersed to carry out various kinds of subsistence tasks and other activities. Noting that individual headmen and their "villages" seem to have shown divergent alliances with the Spanish and French, Aten (1983a:78) infers an absence of overarching authority which would have integrated the various Akokisa groups or villages.

The villages are suggested by Aten to have been a seasonal phenomenon, with several small constituent bands coming together during fall-winter to form population aggregates of between 100 and 400 people (Aten 1983a:77). During these periods of aggregation, the bands were presumably integrated under the leadership of the village headman. During the warm season, the population dispersed into small bands, presumably the kin groups implied by Cabeza de Vaca. Each small group may have practiced the highly mobile subsistence activities described for the summer season by De Bellisle (see earlier discussions,

herein).

Aten (1983a:68) suggests that authority patterns among the Karankawan groups may have differed somewhat from those of the Akokisa. Whereas only village headmen are recorded for the latter group, the Karankawa were said to have had two kinds of chiefs, namely "civil chiefs" and "war chiefs". The reliability of this is difficult to evaluate, as Aten indicates, because the observation is derived from Gatschet (1891) who does not cite his original source. However, the implied dual authority structure is reminiscent of an observation made in 1767 by Fr. De Solís, who stated that the Karankawa had two kinds of particularly influential individuals, namely "priests" called *Conas* and "captains" called *Tamas* (Kress and Hatcher 1931:43). Of course, De Solís may have only been identifying the role differences between the shamans and village headmen already noted.

Aten also identifies a number of "statuses" within native society in addition to that of village headman, each of which essentially represents a social or economic role. Roles based on gender involved division of labor, common distinctions among hunter gatherer societies (e.g., Lee and De Vore 1968). Shamans apparently were males, and Aten (1983a:68) notes Cabeza de Vaca's observations which indicate special status for shamans (i.e., cremation burials and multiple wives, as cited above, herein). As mentioned earlier, Cabeza de Vaca's observations imply a higher status for adult males and children than for adult females, and this is apparently also reflected in the mortuary patterns documented archaeologically at the Mitchell Ridge Site.

In keeping with a level of sociocultural complexity in which statuses are ascribed by the group or based on age and gender, the attitudes toward wealth apparently reinforced a general reciprocity in which resources and goods tended to be shared by the members of the group (Aten 1983a:81). Aten cites Cabeza de Vaca's observations that "[they] are very liberal towards [sic] each other with what they have" (Bandelier 1905:71), and that during visits "the one who receives the visit rises and gives to the other all he has" (Bandelier 1905:72). The Karankawa living around Matagorda Bay in the 1830s were said to have been "ignorant of any rights of property in our sense of the word" (Gatschet 1891:64, cited in Aten 1983a:81).

Based on data gleaned for the historic Atakapa of southwestern Louisiana, Aten (1983a:81-82) infers that marriage rules involved virilocal and perhaps patrilineal band exogamy, and suggests that this pattern probably obtained for the other Atakapa-speaking Bidai and Akokisa, and perhaps the Karankawan groups as well. It is further suggested that this practice would have strengthened ties between bands through intermarriage, thus maintaining larger tribal identities.

Regarding tribes, Aten suggests that for the Akokisa and Bidai, the tribe (*sensu* Service 1971; Adams 1975) was an organizational unit which was comprised of the several aggregate band or "villages" documented for the eighteenth century. The Bidai and the Akokisa were, then, essentially tribal ethnic entities made of villages or macrobands held together by a shared territory, a common language and lifeway, and by the mechanism of virilocal band exogamy.

Concerning the Karankawa, it should be kept in mind that the name most accurately represents several distinct groups which shared a common language (Newcomb 1983; Troike 1987). These groups, known to the eighteenth century Spanish as the Cocos, Cujanes, Carancaguases (or Karankawa proper), Guapites and Copanes may each have been a tribal entity in the sense used by Aten for the Akokisa and Bidai, since each was probably comprised on several macrobands under headmen, and these were in turn formed on a seasonal basis by the aggregation of several small band groups (see Ricklis 1990).

The native populations of the upper Texas coast are poorly documented during the latter part of the eighteenth century, primarily because of the failure of local Spanish settlement and a resultant dearth of direct documentary evidence. Aten's research has shown that the period saw marked population decline in response to periodic epidemics of smallpox and other diseases. By the late 1700s, the mid-eighteenth century population of about 1,200 for the Akokisa had declined to a few hundred (see Aten 1983a, Figure 4.1). Although the French were officially expelled from North America with the conclusion of the French and Indian Wars in 1763, French and *Métis* (French-Indian mixed blood) traders continued to operate west of the Mississippi, often in cooperation with Spanish traders who were extending trade networks established in the Southwest (Swagerty 1988). It is therefore likely that local native people in the Galveston Bay area continued to have access to European goods.

As regional populations suffered attrition from the effects of epidemics, and pressures were exerted on traditional territorial boundaries by Euroamerican incursions and dislocated native peoples, mergers took place between previously separate sociocultural groups, resulting in what Aten (1983a) has called

composite bands. As noted above, remnants of some native populations in the Lower Mississippi Valley sought refuge among the coastal Atakapa. Within the boundaries of what is today Texas, the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a highly dynamic and volatile sociocultural situation, as southward-moving Apaches, Comanches, and other groups displaced local populations (see Campbell 1988; Newcomb 1993). Indigenous survivors of the various Early Historic epidemics were pushed out of their traditional homelands, or joined other groups, thus bolstering depleted population levels and maintaining social and economic viability. Thus the Tonkawa, an important native group documented during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were probably a composite of local peoples and the Tancoa, whose aboriginal home was far to the north in north-central Oklahoma (Newcomb 1993:26-29). Depleted coastal populations were apparently bolstered during the eighteenth century by the influx of interior people such as the Mayaye, who were absorbed culturally and biologically by Karankawans (Ricklis 1990:513-515).

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the much-reduced (and probably composite) Akokisa population still occupied its traditional homeland, and continued to reside in groups associated with headmen who were recognized as such by Spanish authorities as "medal chiefs" (Bexar Archives, letters of December 10, 1808, January 1, 1809, January 30, 1809). In 1811, the Spanish colonial authorities received a petition for a trading post on the lower Trinity River (Bexar Archives, Petition for Trading Post dated January 1, 1811), suggesting that the native groups in the area were still economically attractive as potential trading partners. Aggressive Anglo-American settlement after 1820, along with continued attrition of population, sufficiently undermined the Akokisa that the survivors moved inland to join the Bidai, and the tribe ceased to exist as a definable entity (Aten 1983a). However, R. Moore has recently presented remarkable documentary evidence which shows that a few Akokisa/Bidai, who spoke the Atakapa language, continued to reside as small groups in Harris county as late as the early twentieth century (Moore 1992:43-44, 104-11), suggesting that such groups were able to maintain an adaptive flexibility and resilience not available to larger, traditional sociopolitical organizations.

The population level of the combined Karankawan groups seems to have declined precipitously in the early 1700s and then to have remained more or less stable from about 1750 to 1820 (Ricklis 1990:499-522). The relatively slow rate of decline or near stabilization of population probably represents mergers of inland populations with the Karankawans, whose coastal habitat served as a refuge from Apache and Comanche intruders from the north and west and from Spanish soldiers in times of conflict (*ibid.*). By the beginning of the nineteenth century, some Karankawan groups expanded their traditional range well into the Galveston Bay area, or occasionally even further east into southwest Louisiana (see Aten 1983a), presumably filling the partial void created by a declining Akokisa population. However, the Karankawans, though having established, by 1800, peaceful relations with the Spanish at the mission and presidio complex at Refugio, could not successfully resist the aggressive Anglo-American settlement of the Texas coastal prairies which began in the 1820s. Like the Akokisa, the Karankawans were forced to move from their traditional homeland, though in contrast to the Akokisa many, perhaps most, moved south into northeastern Mexico (see Ricklis 1992a).