

The Salt Monopoly, the State, and Boyacá

↪ In 1806, when Ignacio Caicedo drew a sketch of La Salina de Chita, in eastern Colombia, it wasn't much of a town, though that hardly mattered to him. An administrator who oversaw the sale of salt, all of which was controlled in theory by a Spanish royal monopoly, Caicedo was more concerned with documenting how salt was made than with explaining any other aspect of local life. Now in the Mapoteca of Colombia's Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), his sketch conveys something of the topography of the surrounding valley, which had long before been cut by the rushing waters of the Casanare River as it carved a passage from the highlands of Boyacá to the plains of Casanare. Caicedo set the town's "ruined Church" and other buildings in the background, emphasizing the elements of salt making. Here and there in the sketch he depicted mules, either fully loaded and led by muleteers or grazing freely. There were stacks of timber taller than a person, as well as men cutting or carrying wood. In the shelter of an open shed a figure tended to an oven where brine was being slowly cooked into the salt cakes characteristic of the region. In another spot, people stooped over a low-lying well fed by a thermal spring with a high saline content, a *vertiente*—the reason people had settled in this particular spot. Similar springs dot the Colombian highlands north and east of Bogotá, as well as the terrain where the mountains descend to the Llanos, Colombia's plains (running from the Southwest to the Northeast). Many springs had been used for making salt even before the Spanish came to the Americas, but few were as naturally rich as this one or those in La Salina's outlying barrio of Córdoba.

For Caicedo and his administrative successors in republican Colombia, this natural bounty was provocative and even frustrating. When he looked at salt making in La Salina, Caicedo saw what he thought should be rather than what was.¹ In 1801 the noted naturalist Alexander von Humboldt had visited the great saltworks in Zipaquirá, a city just north of Bogotá, and subsequently published a description of the works complete with recommendations for improvements. This prompted a concerted effort to increase the efficiency of salt production in New Granada and to earn more revenue for the Spanish royal treasury. In the report Caicedo sent to the viceroy of New Granada, in Bogotá, he called for more guards in La Salina. His sketch included an ambitious proposal: a dotted line indicated a wall, taller than a person and wide enough to walk on, to be built on the banks of the Casanare River. The proposed addition would protect the pool of salt water from the river during the four-month rainy season, when the swollen Casanare rose to engulf the spring, rendering salt making difficult, if not impossible. Obviously, making salt all year would be one of the most effective ways to produce more money for the royal treasury. With this in mind, Caicedo proposed an ambitious construction project through which the state would elaborate its material presence in this out-of-the-way spot.

Through the tumult of independence and the fitful birth of a republic in the 1810s and early 1820s, Caicedo's successors, particularly those who worked for the Ministerio de Hacienda, Colombia's finance ministry in the 1830s, held similar ideas and made similar proposals. After some flirtation with privatizing government-owned saltworks and a decade of arrangements where individuals ran saltworks as autonomous renters, the Finance Ministry fulfilled Caicedo's vision. In 1836 the ministry placed the works at La Salina under what it termed "direct administration." Ministry employees oversaw the construction of a wall like one the Caicedo had proposed. They also supervised improvements to local roads, the construction of an *almacén* (a combination office, store, and warehouse), and the building of new ovens for cooking salt. The goal was to create a profitable industry that would function all year. In 1837 an enthusiastic official wrote, "In the parish of La Salina . . . the state has a salt mine [*sic*] that without a doubt is worth one million pesos."² In the strictest sense his estimate was correct. In time La Salina did deliver more than a million pesos to the ministry, but it took far longer than anyone at that time anticipated. Moreover, many ministry officials felt that far too much of the million pesos had been used to finance salt production or support related administrative duties.

Despite these frustrations, administrators built up the ministerial bureaucracy in La Salina and extended its institutional presence deeper into the salt industry in a number of ways—among other things, by arranging for land purchases and supervising further construction projects. The ministry's control over the salt industry bound La Salina to the variegated rhythms of Colombia's economic and political history through the end of the century. A report issued after the devastating Thousand Days War (1899–1902) described the town in

1904: “The only things that remain standing are things that were too difficult to destroy or those things that would yield absolutely nothing of worth.”³ This civil war, the last to occur anywhere during the nineteenth century, appears to have undone the work imagined by Caicedo almost one hundred years earlier.

A Salt Monopoly

Considering La Salina’s history renders questions about the state concrete rather than theoretical. The value of theoretical accounts of state processes notwithstanding, pursuing the concrete allows us to ground various points in material life rather than abstract concepts. A saltworks of the preindustrial world is particularly well suited to a practical inquiry into the nature and operational methods of a state. Salt-production centers, such as La Salina, have been loci of state power throughout human history. In contrast to its contemporary status as a cheap and abundant product, salt was a valuable article in the preindustrial world, making it an inviting object for taxation. Salt, or more precisely, the monopolies exercised over the production and sale of salt, was an important element in the global history of states and state building. Salt trades and salt monopolies played important roles in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, in imperial China, and in early modern France, to cite only a few examples. In considering salt’s global history, S. A. M. Adshead observes that “salt administrations belong to the adolescence or senescence of central power.”⁴ In this taxonomy, the survival of the Colombian salt monopoly for decades after independence implies that the state blended the senescence of imperial Spain and the immaturity of its replacement for decades. In other words, Adshead’s argument predicts continuities in Colombia, which is just what occurred.

Where other Spanish American countries moved away from salt taxes, in Colombia the government maintained monopoly control over the production of salt after the Wars of Independence, in parts of the country continuing through the economic reforms of the mid-nineteenth century and the doctrinaire liberalism of the 1860s and 1870s. While many factors were involved in its survival in each case, the monopoly endured because it generated desperately needed revenue for the national government. Decade after decade, the pointed criticism of national elites and the widespread resentment of the tax were not enough to overcome fiscal reality. From the 1820s until 1900 profits from ministry saltworks managed under the monopoly accounted for about 10 percent of Colombia’s total federal revenue. The impact of this 10 percent was enhanced because the monopoly was a consistent revenue producer. Receipts from taxes on imports and exports provided much more than the salt monopoly but tended to fluctuate. The steadiness inherent in salt sales was part of the monopoly’s worth. For example, the government might issue promissory notes redeemable for salt at government sites as a guarantee for loans made during moments of civil war.⁵

This steady stream of revenue was produced by a handful of saltworks scattered throughout Colombia’s eastern highlands, the most important being the

operation at Zipaquirá, a city just under fifty kilometers of easy travel north of Bogotá. There the Finance Ministry's administration oversaw sales of, on average, more than eight million kilograms of salt a year. Zipaquirá was the site where the great rebel army of the Comuneros, who rose in part to protest the introduction of new monopolies and taxes, camped as its leaders debated seizing a defenseless Bogotá in 1781. Not only did it attract Alexander von Humboldt when he toured New Granada, but today Zipaquirá boasts an internationally known cathedral (the Catedral de Sal) dug out of its vast underground salt banks. In fact, the works at Zipaquirá casts a shadow that at times makes it hard to see the historical importance of La Salina. Salt from Zipaquirá was traded across central Colombia and consumed by a huge portion of the national population. Tellingly, however, while there are studies on Zipaquirá in the colonial era and on republican saltworks, little scholarship exists on the great works after independence.

There is, however, a meticulous study by Anuar Herna Peña Díaz on smaller saltworks, *Sal, sudor y fisco: el proceso de institucionalización del monopolio de la sal en las salinas de Chámeza, Recetor y Pajarito, 1588–1950*, which serves as an introduction to this issue after independence. Peña Díaz argues that the ministry-run saltworks of Chámeza, Recetor, and Pajarito provide a vantage point for examining the institutional links between Bogotá and Casanare. He also stresses the degree to which the history of the salt monopoly over several centuries documents the process of institutional centralization based in Bogotá. Placing the history of the salt monopoly in a broader context, as I do here, extends these arguments into a larger discussion. Peña Díaz focuses on institutional growth as a narrative structure, but the institutional nature of the salt monopoly can serve as evidence that the project of state building was an important factor in nineteenth-century Colombia. In fact, the fitful process of state building, both as a part of daily life in La Salina and as an element of politics in Bogotá, embodied much of Colombia's national history.

In Colombia the nineteenth century was marked by disjuncture and contradiction. The radical promises of change and equality implicit in independence and the subsequent waves of change clashed with the efforts of those who felt themselves responsible for governing this unruly and economically underdeveloped society. The salt monopoly provided a template for this conflict. A powerful or wealthy state would not have maintained the salt monopoly. Even other Spanish American governments, which were generally neither wealthy nor powerful, ended their salt monopolies relatively quickly. The Colombian Finance Ministry's failure to free itself from this fiscal anachronism was an ongoing reminder of its own limitations, its inability to implement the fundamental reforms so many elites deemed necessary for progress. Moreover, the salt monopoly did not simply survive; it grew. This growth demanded the creation of an institutional bureaucracy to manage the monopoly, a bureaucracy that embodied the contradictory role of the state in the nineteenth century. The bu-

reaucracy's *raison d'être* was to provide the state with necessary revenue, yet its inefficiencies and proclivity for corruption hindered the execution of these tasks. At the same time, the growth of this bureaucracy was a crucial element of state growth, particularly in the realm of information gathering. Reports on salt making and related policies filled the pages of official newspapers and other government publications, forming part of a public discussion about the proper role for the state.⁶

The history of salt making, of ministerial efforts to control salt making, and of local responses in La Salina runs through three intertwined stories. The first concerns fiscal policy and the way its implementation shaped life in La Salina, the second centers on regional responses to the state's monopoly control, and the third is a chronological account of the course of national politics in La Salina and Boyacá. Each story draws on the same cast of characters, including the Finance Ministry as an institution, finance ministers, ministry employees across Boyacá, entrepreneurs, local contractors, residents of La Salina, migrant workers, and communities in Boyacá's eastern cantons. Taken together, these stories provide a portrait of Colombia as a place where state action and state weakness dramatically shaped history, though, as was the case throughout Latin America, not in the manner envisioned by these would-be architects of the state.

The State

Questions concerning the state and state formation loom large in examinations of nineteenth-century Latin America published during the two decades spanning the turn of the twentieth century. Although scholars disagree about the exact nature of the state in the republican era, a number of them argue that measuring individual states as successes or failures by some Weberian rubric is a fruitless pastime. Attempts to conceptualize states by this dichotomy lead almost inevitably to the apparent contradiction where, in the words of Fernando López-Alvez, Latin America appears as a region of both "weak states with ill-trained bureaucracies" and "centralist, corporatist institution[s]."⁷ But the problem lies in the attempt to cast these conditions as contradictory forces rather than as two facets of the republican state. As Stacey Hunt has argued, "few states, if any, meet Weber's ideal in absolute terms. When held up to this ahistorical myth, the 'failure' of states is the rule rather than the exception."⁸ The history of La Salina demonstrates that Hunt's urge to reconcile seeming contradictions applies equally to the quandary described by López-Alvez. The centralist institution of the salt monopoly was an ill-trained bureaucracy, and the institutional state manifest in La Salina was neither a success nor a failure. It was, however, a significant historical actor.

The means for examining the state in this fashion were laid out by Oscar Oszlak in "The Historical Formation of the State in Latin America: Some Theoretical and Methodological Guidelines for Its Study." In this essay Oszlak argues for a methodology that distinguishes between the abstract state, which

is the entity that seeks a monopoly on the legitimate use of force and the corresponding authority, and the material, institutional state, which is an interlocking collection of buildings, bureaucracies, mail routes, and other pedestrian items. “The state apparatus manifests itself as a multifaceted and complex social actor, in the sense that its various units and arenas of decision and actions express a diffuse and, at times, ambiguous presence in the network of social relations.”⁹ I am particularly concerned with the third of Oszlak’s four steps for research, documenting the degree to which a state developed public institutions with “(a) a recognized capacity to extract, on a regular basis[,] resources from society; (b) a certain degree of professionalization of their functionaries; and (c) a certain measure of centralized control over their multifarious activities.”¹⁰

Remarkably, given the rich social science literature available, historians seldom focus on the state, particularly the material or institutional state. Historians often consider the state as one element that serves as an analytical pivot in a broader topic, something to touch on before turning to other issues, usually ones relating to political culture.¹¹ This tendency resulted from the paradigm shift in Latin American historiography during the 1990s, when approaches that privileged labor, the particularities of class, and various versions of dependency theory ceded intellectual terrain to a focus on discourse and identities as a means of charting popular contributions to politics, national formation, and political culture. While the general turn toward examining political culture has produced a rich understanding of Latin America as a place with a dynamic political history, it has not brought a commensurate appreciation for the state as a historical actor or for state building as a historical force.¹² A focus on the state, even an inchoate state, therefore permits a fresh look at Colombia’s early republic. More specifically, fiscal policy, often examined in terms of economic history, offers a rich source for examining contact between the institutional state and society.¹³

Thus the material reality of salt and the institution that developed around the salt monopoly provide a concrete base for a discussion that can otherwise be overly theoretical.¹⁴ For example, there were marked continuities in the Colombian state despite political fluctuations and various new constitutions. This continuity was manifest most clearly in the material presence of the institutional state dedicated to managing the salt monopoly. Conceptualizing state building as an institutional process while charting its material presence provides a methodology for recasting the state as an important historical force in the nineteenth century.¹⁵ This approach has value beyond Colombia, for state presence was weaker there than in other parts of Spanish America.¹⁶ If the state can be recast as a relatively important historical actor in Colombia, then the same approach will likely shed new light on the rest of the region.

The competition between state agents and other actors was a quotidian reality focused on economic results. More specifically, these competitions took place in carefully demarcated spaces defined by the institutional state as vital elements of state infrastructure. Just as elites found that subordinate actors took advan-

tage of new political spaces and discourses to promote their own interests, the Finance Ministry found that the institutional spaces of the salt monopoly—the sites of production, sale, and transport—were transformed into arenas for popular defiance. As in the political arena, it was easier to define a space than to control what occurred in it. But these moments of contestation most clearly show the utility of eschewing success or failure when considering state building, for during them the state's roles as an entity with power and a concrete institutional presence ran together. Thus, while Oszlak's bifurcation of an abstract and material state provides a useful analytical tool, this distinction did not play out in real life. In the experience of people who lived in La Salina, the institutional state was not an abstraction but rather a daily practice. The question of state legitimacy, so prone to theoretical parsing in scholarship, was a matter of profits and the prices buyers paid for salt.

Boyacá and Colombia

Within Colombian historiography we need to address a number of questions beyond the role of the state. The dominant themes of scholarship on the nineteenth century include the development of political parties; the pattern of civil wars; regionalism; and more recently, the role of ethnicity in all these issues.¹⁷ Colombian history contains no single significant event (such as the Mexican Revolution) or figure (such as Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina) that throws stark light on the meaning of the state.¹⁸ Equally important, the broken topography of Colombia and the intensity of its regionalism and regional histories make it a challenge to even conceptualize a national state.¹⁹ An emphasis on the monopolies of the Finance Ministry, however, offers one method for charting the reach of the institutional state. The ministry's bureaucracy was in a sense an archipelago. Scattered across Colombia's daunting terrain were regional boards, offices, contractors, subcontractors, and collection centers, linked precariously by mail routes and mule paths.²⁰ Though the network was designed to pass instructions from core to periphery and carry information and receipts in the other direction, these islands of the bureaucratic state were also supposed to be points of authority and control. In practice, however, these islands often developed into focal points of defiance to the state and its authority.

La Salina was one such place. Moreover, the steady correspondence written by Finance Ministry employees and forwarded to Bogotá makes it possible to document two important dynamics. First, profits from salt revenue were intended to stimulate market activity, but the monopoly demanded that the state control as many local resources as possible in an aggressively antiliberal fashion, thereby limiting the markets.²¹ Second, elites, whether critics or ministry officials, sought to promote both moral and economic progress, which they often conflated. In La Salina, these dynamics often intertwined, heightening expectations and frustrations.

This history would have been notable in any region, but the setting in Boy-

TABLE 1.1. *Population in selected Colombian provinces and Colombia, 1810–1905*

Year	Province					Colombia
	Antioquia	Boyacá	Cauca	Cundinamarca	Santander	
1810	111,000	231,000	200,000	189,000	237,000	1,309,000
1835	159,000	288,000	210,000	255,000	280,000	1,571,000
1843	190,000	332,000	269,000	288,000	324,000	1,814,000
1851	243,000	381,000	312,000	319,000	382,000	2,094,000
1870	366,000	499,000	435,000	414,000	433,000	2,713,000
1887	520,000	615,000	635,000	550,000	565,000	3,666,000
1898	620,000	685,000	800,000	630,000	640,000	4,262,000
1905	897,000	503,000	765,000	631,000	550,000	4,144,000

Source: Jorge Orlando Melo, “La evolución económica de Colombia, 1830–19300,” in *Manual de historia de Colombia*, 4th ed., ed. Jaime Jaramillo Uribe, 3 vols. (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1992), 2:138.

Note: This table does not include Bolívar, Tolima, Magdalena, or Panama, which broke away in 1905.

acá, one of Colombia’s most populous regions, makes it particularly important, for the historiography of this region is underdeveloped by almost any standard, adding weight to any attempt to further the understanding of Boyacá’s internal heterogeneity and its role in national politics. While the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia at Tunja has published well-researched regional studies, often based on sources in the Archivo Regional de Boyacá, and although a body of work that celebrates Boyacá’s accomplishments does exist, this literature does not equal the other regional historiographies of Colombia.²² Boyacá is too often portrayed as a region where history was received rather than generated, in stark contrast to Antioquia, Cauca, Santander, or the Caribbean, but its size alone means that it could never be entirely absent from nation affairs (see table 1.1). An understanding of Boyacá is thus necessary for understanding the history of La Salina and the history of Colombia. As with all Colombian history, a review of the relevant geography is a necessary prelude to the history that follows.

As the Andes run north along the western coast of South America to the city of Pasto in southern Colombia, they split into three separate ranges. The eastern range is the largest of the three, sprawling hundreds of kilometers east to west; it contains the bulk of Colombia’s densely settled highland plains and valleys. Of the three ranges, this one comes closest to reaching Colombia’s Caribbean coast, though it splits again near Cucuta. From here one line of waning peaks continues north only to end with the dramatic coda of the towering Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, while the other arm runs into Venezuela. The central and eastern ranges are not as high or as broad as their eastern sibling, but they too boast snow-capped peaks and rich highland valleys. The three ranges are separated by the Cauca and Magdalena Valleys, making east-west travel difficult and time consuming. Colombia’s other major geographic features include deserts, swamps, plains whose constant flooding makes them ill-suited for settle-

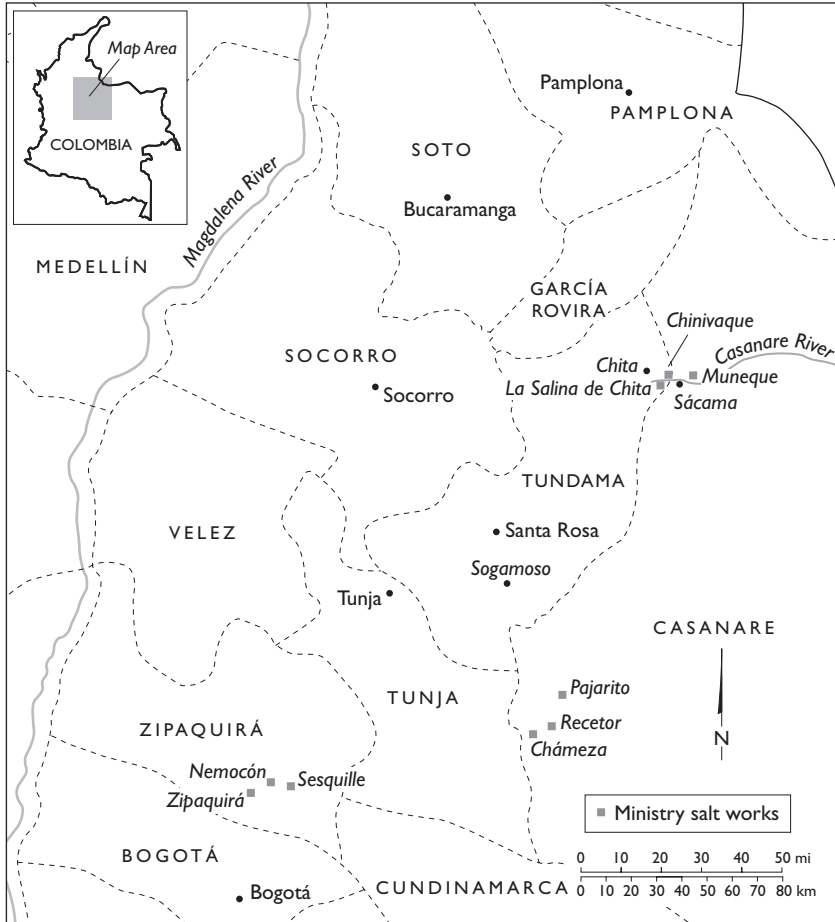


FIGURE 1.2. “The Eastern Highlands until 1856.”

ment, a Caribbean coast, a Pacific coast, and areas with some of the highest annual precipitation in the world. This variation carves the country into regions with distinct demographic, cultural, political, and economic histories. Accordingly, regionalism and regional differences are important topics when considering the country’s political and historical development, though scholars disagree over the precise number of regions.²³

One important element documented in regional literatures but rarely detailed for Boyacá is that even the most recognized region was a composite of microregions and that regional identities were in part social constructions.²⁴ Seen from a national perspective, Boyacá is often grouped with Cundinamarca and Santander as the territories making up the eastern highlands.²⁵ During the nineteenth century, Boyacá was sometimes linked to Santander and the combination dubbed “the North.” At times this region was taken to include Cundinamarca.

The three provinces shared a number of traits and had strong ties of interregional trade, but on closer examination the notion that the eastern highlands formed a single region loses most of its meaning, as does the idea that Boyacá itself was internally homogeneous.²⁶ Adding to the complexity of these issues, the region's political boundaries were altered several times during the nineteenth century. In the years following independence, this region was the province of Tunja. In the 1850s the eastern cantons were separated to form the province of Tundama, which included La Salina. Then, in the late 1850s, Tundama was reincorporated into the newly named state of Boyacá. To avoid confusion between the city and the province of Tunja, I will refer to the entire region as "Boyacá," with intermittent references to Tundama even in decades when it was not a separate province.

For the most part Boyacá is and has always been highlands, with major population centers between 1,900 to 3,000 meters above sea level. At an altitude of not quite 1,500 meters, La Salina was one of its lowest towns. In the present day, Boyacá stretches from the Magdalena River valley in the west to Venezuela in the east, though the slender arm that reaches to the west was a late addition.²⁷ In the south of the province the Tensa Valley descends to the Llanos, an area of agricultural colonization in the nineteenth century. The valley contained the cantons of Guateque (sometimes called Tensa), Garagoa, and Miraflores. East of the Tensa Valley the descent from highlands to llanos becomes precarious, with the border running along present-day Casanare and, further east, Arauca.²⁸ To the north Boyacá is bordered by present-day Santander and Norte de Santander. In the early republic these were the provinces of Pamplona and Socorro, though later these were divided; the provinces of García Rovira and Velez also lay on the northern border.

La Salina lies at the border between Boyacá and Casanare, a part of the former in the nineteenth century and now encompassed by a slender spike of the latter that wedges between Boyacá and the department of Arauca. The town lies in a valley that climbs west to the highland cantons that formed Tundama: Santa Rosa, Sogamoso, El Cocuy, and Soatá.²⁹ Trade linked Tundama to the cities of San Gil, Socorro, Málaga, and Pamplona in present-day Santander and Norte de Santander. In the 1850s this area comprised the provinces of Socorro, Soto, Pamplona, and García Rovira.

A number of countervailing forces were woven into this geography. One pair lay in the contrast between La Salina's institutional links to Tunja and Bogotá and its regional market orientation with the cantons of Tundama and what is now Santander. Another arose from its location on one of Colombia's internal frontiers. The highlands to the north and west had long been settled, and some cantons were marked by increasing smallholding and subsistence agriculture. In contrast, the llanos to the south and east remained an open frontier, a place of people and nature equally untamed. To would-be state architects, Casanare

married the threat of disease and a wilderness not worth taming to the endless promise of bountiful nature.³⁰

Focusing on La Salina and Tundama corrects the misleading tendency to treat the area around Tunja as representative of Boyacá as a whole.³¹ In scholarship, literature, and popular culture, this monolithic Boyacá is often portrayed as the home of a peasantry that, though generally passive, was fierce when it was aroused—a feat that only the region's conservative clergy could accomplish.³² However accurate this stereotype might be, conflating Tunja and its environs with all of Boyacá obscures a reality of internal variation and intraprovincial rivalry. The simplified version of a homogeneous Boyacá dovetails with the view that the whole region reached its zenith in the seventeenth century and then entered a four-hundred-year decline.³³ This idea itself has a long pedigree. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Manuel Ancízar observed that “Tunja is for *Granadinos* an object of respect” because of its past, but he did so only after he had asked, “What is left for Tunja, city without arts, without agriculture, without commerce?”³⁴ In the late twentieth century, Germán Colmenares began his study of colonial Boyacá by explaining, “The city of Tunja does not provoke sympathy from visitors. . . . It is not easy to convey what Tunja signified in the early years of New Granada.”³⁵

Had it been located in a moderately prosperous region, the saltworks at La Salina might have been only a single element in a larger economic picture, but in Boyacá it stood alone.³⁶ Writing in 1823, Gaspard-Théodore Mollien, a French traveler, reported, “Today [Tunja] is no more than a dead city.”³⁷ The intendant of Boyacá, Bernardino Soban, penned a similar report in 1830, but he also proposed a plan to better the situation:

As peace has returned to this department, I have tried in many ways to promote and secure its prosperity. Since taking charge I have been struck by how [in] the whole [province] and especially in this [canton] and this city there is no industry, there is no commerce, there is no agriculture, nor are there mines or arts, or any other elements of prosperity that exist in the other parts of the Republic. The subsistence of this city is very precarious as it depends solely on the fact that it is the Capital of the department, and is affected by any change in circumstances. The only money that circulates here is the salary of the departmental employees. . . . Seeing such a state of misery, and the exposure to absolute destruction, I have used my limited understanding to find a source of wealth and abundant public prosperity. My solution is to establish in this city a textile factory for wool that would increase the value of the province's most abundant resource, encourage raising sheep, attract commerce as the base of other ventures, [and] employ a thousand workers, increasing the number dependent on agricultural products, which in turn will stimulate farming.³⁸

But the prospects for reviving eastern Colombia's textile industry were not good. In his annual report for 1831, Finance Minister José Ignacio de Márquez noted

the influx of cheap imported textiles and the damage they had done to local industry: “If there is any doubt that this is the truth, one has to do no more than tour the industrious provinces of Socorro, Tunja, Bogotá, and Pamplona, previously quite productive and today abandoned and poor.”³⁹ In 1833 the newspaper *El Constitucional de Boyacá* complained that imported textiles had “damaged [the area’s] few factories,” where cotton and wool had formerly “flourished.”⁴⁰ There is no evidence that Soban’s plan went anywhere.

The dominant activity in the region was agriculture, dedicated mostly to crops consumed locally. Animal husbandry and ranching were also present to an extent. One of Boyacá’s industries was fattening cattle from Casanare, thinned by the arduous journey from the plains, which were then sold in Santander or Cundinamarca. Salt was a key element of that industry. In a survey of industry for Boyacá, Agustín Codazzi mentioned the manufacture of shoes; hats; honey; wax; sugar products (mainly *aguardiente*) in regions with lower altitudes; some ceramic items, including tiles; prepared wood; and metal objects, which were produced by a few dozen blacksmiths.⁴¹ His optimism for the prospects of the regional economy did not preclude frank descriptions, as when he conceded that “properly speaking,” Miraflores, in the Tensa Valley, had no true manufacturing: “Everything in this canton is to be created. There are hardly 100 pieces of cotton cloth woven in a year, of which half, worth about 300 pesos, are exported.”⁴²

La Salina, in the canton of El Cocuy, stood out. A special tax on individual wealth, established in 1821 but not collected in Boyacá until in 1823, offers a benchmark for comparing the canton of El Cocuy’s economy to the rest of Boyacá’s. By canton, Sogamoso had the highest average payment, followed by El Cocuy, Santa Rosa, and Garagoa, with Soatá and Tensa falling below the provincial rate (see table 1.2).⁴³

TABLE 1.2. *Special contribution of 1823*

<i>Canton</i>	<i>Population^a</i>	<i>Tax^b</i>	<i>Individuals taxed</i>	<i>Percentage taxed</i>	<i>Average payment^c</i>
Santa Rosa	23,221	1,341	497	2.0	2 p 6 r
Soatá	27,683	1,230	503	1.8	2 p 3 r
Sogamoso	30,592	1,552	419	1.4	3 p 6 r
Cocuy	20,220	792	293	1.5	2 p 6 r
Tensa	28,506	1,449	612	2.1	2 p 3 r
Garagoa	12,893	655	252	2.0	2 p 5 r
Total	143,115	7,019	2,576	1.8	2 p 6 r

Source: Population figures in this and the following tables come from the census of 1835.

Note: The legislation was passed in 1821, but collections occurred only in 1823.

^a Population figures include only the districts reporting in the tax levy, not total population of Boyacá.

^b In pesos.

^c Per individual, in pesos and reales.

TABLE 1.3. *Occupation by canton in Boyacá in 1845*

WESTERN BOYACÁ				
<i>Canton</i>	<i>Landowners</i>	<i>Laborers</i>	<i>Traders</i>	<i>Artisans</i>
Centro	2,940	6,039	630	1,443
Leyva	1,700	2,310	118	59
Ramiriqui	1,923	6,095	145	163
Total	6,563	14,444	893	1,665
TUNDAMA				
<i>Canton</i>	<i>Landowners</i>	<i>Laborers</i>	<i>Traders</i>	<i>Artisans</i>
El Cocuy	1,620	2,065	60	103
Santa Rosa	835	3,130	600	471
Soatá	334	3,430	124	179
Sogamoso	4,375	8,085	1,343	1,520
Total	7,064	16,710	2,127	2,273
VALLE DE TENSA				
<i>Canton</i>	<i>Landowners</i>	<i>Laborers</i>	<i>Traders</i>	<i>Artisans</i>
Garagoa	379	3,668	52	40
Tensa	403	6,345	360	996
Total	782	10,013	412	1,036

Sources: AGN, SR, Gobernación de Tunja, leg. 30, fols. 469–568, Oct.–Nov., 1845, eighty-eight responses to a questionnaire entitled “A Table showing what the district of _____ produces in agriculture, livestock, industry, and mining.”

A district survey from 1845 adds information on the varying social composition of each canton. The Canton del Centro, along with those of Tunja, Santa Rosa, Sogamoso, and Tensa, had occupational breakdowns suitable for centers of trade and artisan production, while the high ratio of landowners to laborers in Leyva and El Cocuy reflected advanced smallholding (see table 1.3).

El Cocuy was the smallest of Boyacá’s eastern cantons, those that would form Tundama in the 1850s, and its habitable highlands were densely settled. Most of its towns were located more than 2,000 meters above sea level, except for Espino and La Salina, which stood at 1,994 and 1,439 meters, respectively.⁴⁴ Codazzi described the climate in the canton of El Cocuy as “cool and healthy,” except for La Salina, which because of its lower altitude was “warm and healthy.” El Cocuy’s economic mainstays were typical highland crops: potatoes, maize, and beans. In the municipalities of El Cocuy, Chita, Guicán, and Chiscas, sheep and goats were notable. Local industry included small-scale textile production and two forges. The canton traded with its neighbors, the Tunebo Indians (a relatively unacculturated group of eastern Boyacá and Santander) and distant Bogotá. Manufactured goods from Santander or Bogotá and agricultural products from warmer climates were brought in, as were cattle from Casanare. Wheat, handmade textiles, and salt were also exported. None of this suggests a robust economy, but Codazzi noted that the canton’s “healthy climate” and rich agri-

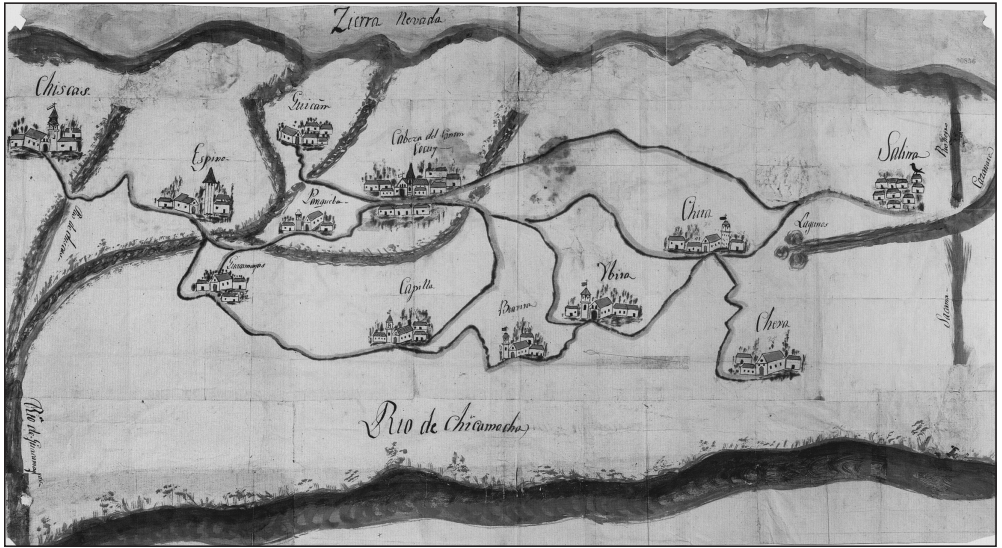


FIGURE 1.3. “Canton del Cocuy, 1825.”
AGN, Mapas y Planos, Mapoteca No. 4, ref. 130 A.

culture would allow for a rapid population increase that would be “white and robust.”²⁴⁵

Manuel Ancízar, who was a part of Codazzi’s *Comisión Coregráfica*, was similarly optimistic about El Cocuy’s potential, in part because its population comprised “well-formed whites and Indians, patient and vigorous, in whom routine guides the duties of the soul, and humility is the least of all their virtues.”²⁴⁶ Ancízar even had optimistic words for Chita, La Salina’s neighbor and the source of its official name, which was generally viewed as a troublesome town. He offered his praise, however, in the racialized terms of the era: “The entire district includes a little more than 7,900 white *vecinos*, robust with glowing cheeks. . . . The town, like all those old Indian towns, resents its origin and shows it in the disorder of its streets and the terrible state of its houses. In contrast, all the people have a healthy disposition and simple manners, virtues that, united with honest labor, would produce a population morally unsurpassed yet removed from the superficial nature of the cultures of other nations.”²⁴⁷ For these men, El Cocuy resembled the cantons of Santander, a region possessing enormous potential. Such developments, however, lay in an ever-receding future. In fact, the saltworks of La Salina was the canton’s most important industry. In this impoverished world, already full of promise and disappointment, the story of salt and the state played out.