

SETTLEMENTS IN BAJA CALIFORNIA: 1768-1930

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THERE have been many changes in the number, size, character, and distribution of nonindigenous settlements in Baja California since the founding of the first permanent Spanish colony in 1697. The two and a half centuries following witnessed in succession the growth of a series of flourishing missions, the virtual depopulation of the peninsula during the nineteenth century, and resettlement within the past seventy-five years. Some of the early settlements have survived the vicissitudes of the years; decaying ruins testify to the former existence of others; yet others have arisen in modern times to take the place of those that have succumbed.

The history of the evolution of settlements in Baja California cannot be told in its entirety. Large gaps exist that probably never will be filled. Fortunately there have been compiled, at intervals ranging from four to forty-three years, more or less comprehensive lists of settlements and their populations. The first such list for the peninsula is for the year 1768,¹ when charge of the religious activities in Baja California was transferred from the Jesuit order to the Franciscan. The further transfer of religious authority from the Franciscan order to the Dominican in 1772 resulted in the compilation of a second comprehensive settlement list, and reports of individual missionaries for the years 1782 and 1800 give a picture of conditions in those times.² A government report supplies population statistics for the year 1836;³ a historical study of Baja California written a few years later contains settlement data for 1857.⁴ Finally the official Mexican government censuses furnish the necessary data for the years 1900, 1910, 1921, and 1930.⁵

Statistics from these sources have been used to construct a series of maps, Figures 1 to 10, which present a broken but nonetheless useful chronological picture of changes in the number, size, and distribution of settlements in the peninsula from 1768 to 1930.

¹ F. J. Clavigero: *Storia della California*, 2 vols. (in 1), Venice, 1789. See the translation by S. E. Lake and A. A. Gray (Stanford University and London, 1937), pp. 366-368. Earlier population figures for individual settlements are available, but no complete lists are known.

² Zephyrin (i.e. Charles Anthony) Engelhardt: *The Missions and Missionaries of California*, Vol. 1, Lower California, 2nd edit., Santa Barbara, 1929.

³ Jorge Flores D.: *Documentos para la historia de la Baja California*, Mexico City, 1940.

⁴ U. U. Lassépas: *Historia de la colonización de la Baja California*, Mexico City, 1859.

⁵ The census for 1900 was the least accurate and comprehensive; that for 1910 was somewhat better; the 1921 census was probably not greatly superior to that of 1910; the 1930 census was both accurate and complete. Census returns for 1940 were available for only a few of the larger towns in Baja California when this article was written.

The area of each circle is proportionate to population. Only settlements with a population of one hundred or more have been mapped. Inclusion of smaller agglomerations would have resulted in excessively large circles for the major settlements and would have distorted the picture of areal distribution. A few circles represent several contiguous settlements, but for the most part each town and village is indicated by its own circle.

Aboriginal settlements are not included, because of lack of information on number, location, and size. Their omission does not alter the picture greatly, since most Indians lived in small, scattered groups. Furthermore, as early as the middle of the nineteenth century only a few thousand Indians remained in the peninsula, and by 1900 fullblood Indians had almost disappeared.

SETTLEMENTS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The 1768 map depicts conditions in Baja California in the middle of the Mission Period.⁶ Fifteen settlements then had a population of one hundred or more. All but one were mission stations. Santa Ana, the exception, was a silver-mining center in the interior of the Cape District (the area south of La Paz).

The outstanding distributional feature of the settlements was their uniform dispersion throughout the length of the Spanish-occupied portion of the peninsula. The basic reason for this was the Jesuit plan to establish missions at convenient overnight stopping places along the *Camino Real*.⁷

All settlements were small. There were no towns proper, nor were there centralized settlements, since the average mission consisted of scattered Indian *rancherías* distributed about a mission-church nucleus. The largest mission, San Francisco de Borja, had an estimated population of 1500; the typical settlement had between 300 and 600. The size of a newly established settlement was determined chiefly by the number of Indians that could be drawn from the adjacent region, since there were seldom more than a few score Spaniards at a mission. As the aboriginal population of the peninsula was limited by aridity, the missions could never achieve any considerable size.

The larger settlements were located in the newly opened central part of the peninsula. The southern settlements were smaller, despite their

⁶ The 136-year period between the founding of the first successful colony in Baja California in 1697 and the passage of the Mexican Secularization Act in 1833 may be designated the Mission Period.

⁷ Missions were spaced about twelve leagues apart, a league being the distance that could be traveled in one hour on a burro. The exact site for each mission was determined only after intensive reconnaissance, which usually resolved itself into a search for an adequate and reliable water supply, the prime necessity for existence in this dry country.

greater age and somewhat more favorable (humid) climatic environment. European diseases,⁸ when once introduced, soon decimated the Indian population, and by 1768 the southern missions, established for half a century or longer, were on the decline, whereas the population of the newly founded central missions was then at its height.

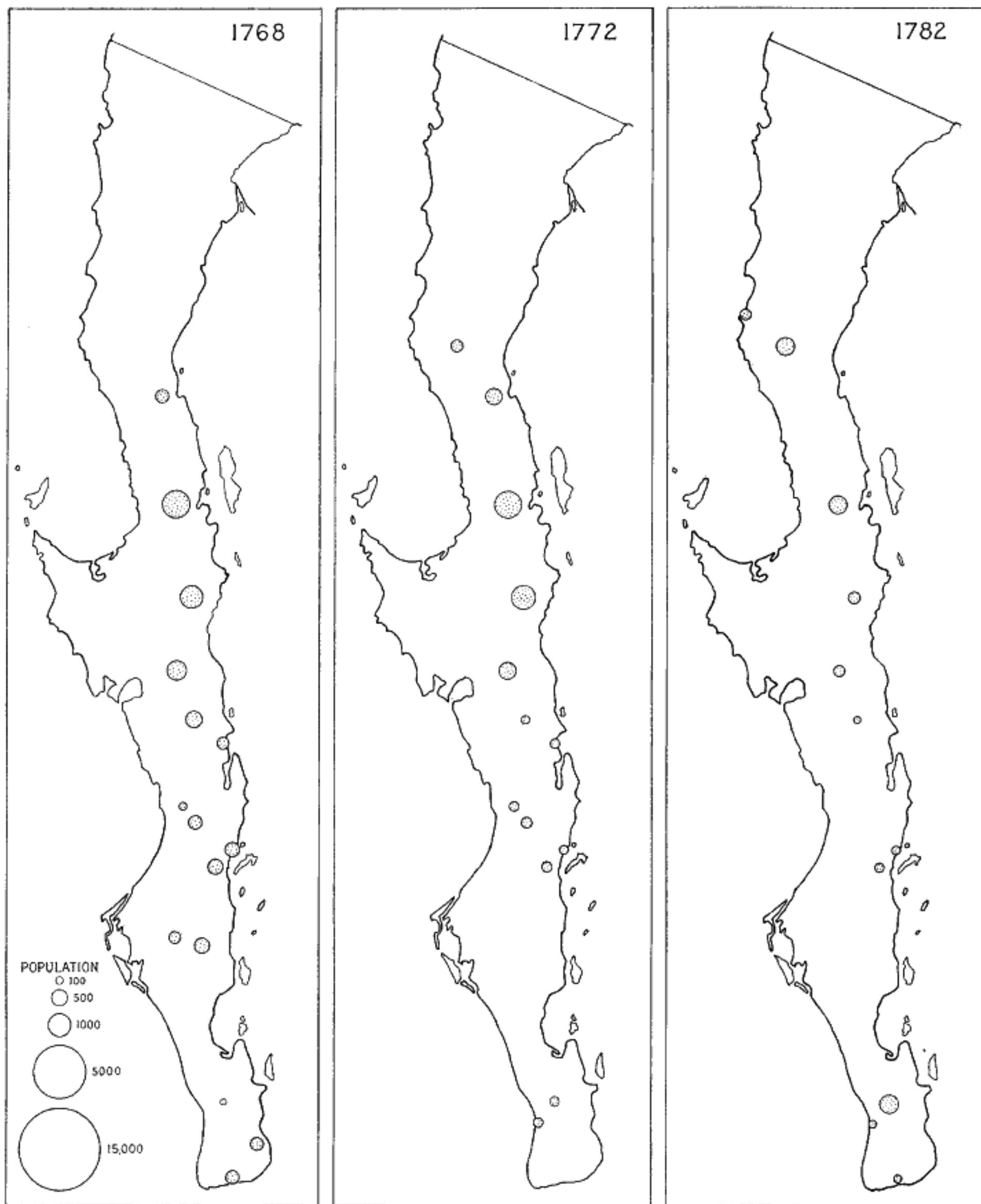
The 1772 map shows only thirteen settlements with a population of one hundred or more. The years between 1768 and 1772 witnessed a northward shift of population. No longer were settlements evenly distributed throughout the southern two-thirds of the peninsula. Instead, there was a marked concentration within the central region, due, however, to a decrease in the number of southern missions rather than to any significant increase in the number of settlements in the middle zone. The ravages of European diseases had by this time brought the population of many of the older southern missions to the vanishing point. Another factor was the Franciscans' policy of subsidizing their new Upper California missions by withdrawing large numbers of cattle and considerable amounts of goods from the long-established settlements in southern Lower California.

As was characteristic of the Mission Period, all settlements in 1772 were small. The two largest, San Francisco de Borja and Santa Gertrudis, had each slightly more than 1000 people. The central missions had remained virtually stationary in size, their populations being maintained, despite the toll taken by disease, through the addition of newly converted Indians. In the south, the typical missions, without reservoirs of un-Christianized Indians to draw upon, had between 100 and 300 people and were less than half their size four years before.

Settlements in Baja California decreased both in number and in size between 1772 and 1782. In 1782 there were only eleven settlements with one hundred people or more. All but two of the eleven were missions. The silver-mining center of Santa Ana remained one exception; the other was the garrison town of San José del Cabo, where a sizable body of Spanish soldiers was quartered. The central part of the peninsula still had the larger number of settlements. Its predominance over the south, however, was not so great as a decade earlier because of the rise of several small nonmission settlements in the Cape District and the simultaneous disappearance of four missions in the middle zone.

A noteworthy feature of the 1782 map is the retardation of settlement

⁸ The most virulent diseases were syphilis, smallpox, typhus, malaria, and measles (S. F. Cook: *The Extent and Significance of Disease among the Indians of Baja California, 1697-1773, Ibero-Americana*, No. 12, 1937).



FIGS. 1, 2, and 3—Nonindigenous settlements in Baja California. (For location map see Fig. 11.)

in the northern part of Baja California. In 1772 the northernmost mission with a population of 100 or more was San Fernando. A decade later Rosario was the lone station north of San Fernando with more than 100 people.⁹

The largest settlement in 1782 had fewer than 700 people, the typical settlement between 100 and 250. The decline in the central part of the peninsula was particularly striking: towns of 500 to 1200 inhabitants in 1772 had dropped to less than half that size by 1782. The central missions were merely passing through the same stage of decimation due to disease that the southern missions had experienced several decades earlier. The only noteworthy increase in population occurred in nonmission settlements of the Cape District and in the newly established missions of San Fernando and Rosario in the north.

EARLIER NINETEENTH CENTURY SETTLEMENTS

At the opening of the nineteenth century there were fourteen settlements with a population of one hundred or more, all mission stations except the garrison town of San José del Cabo and the political-religious administrative center of Loreto.

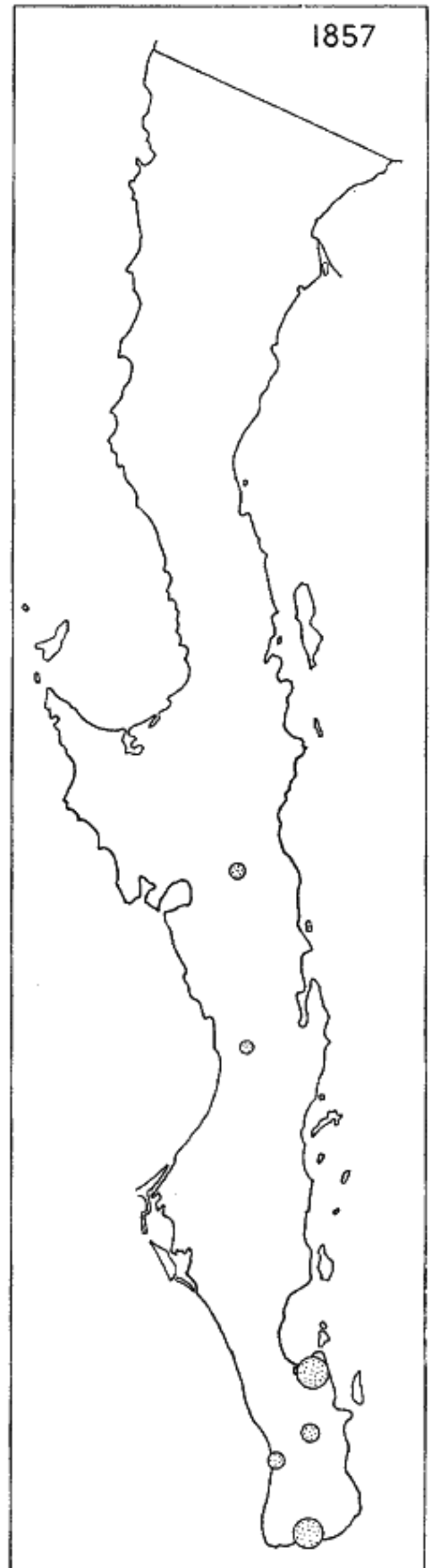
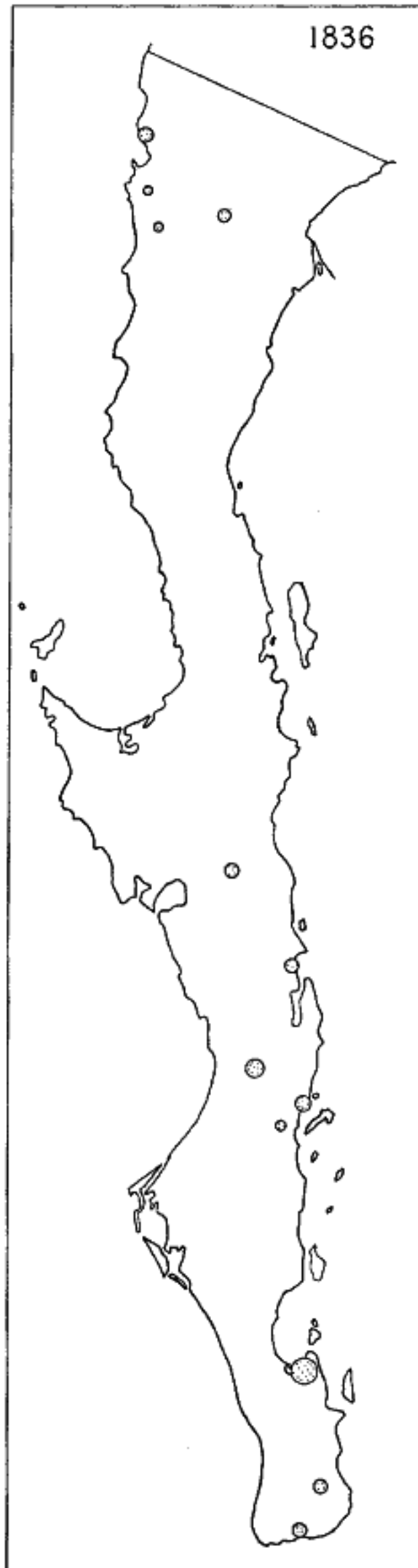
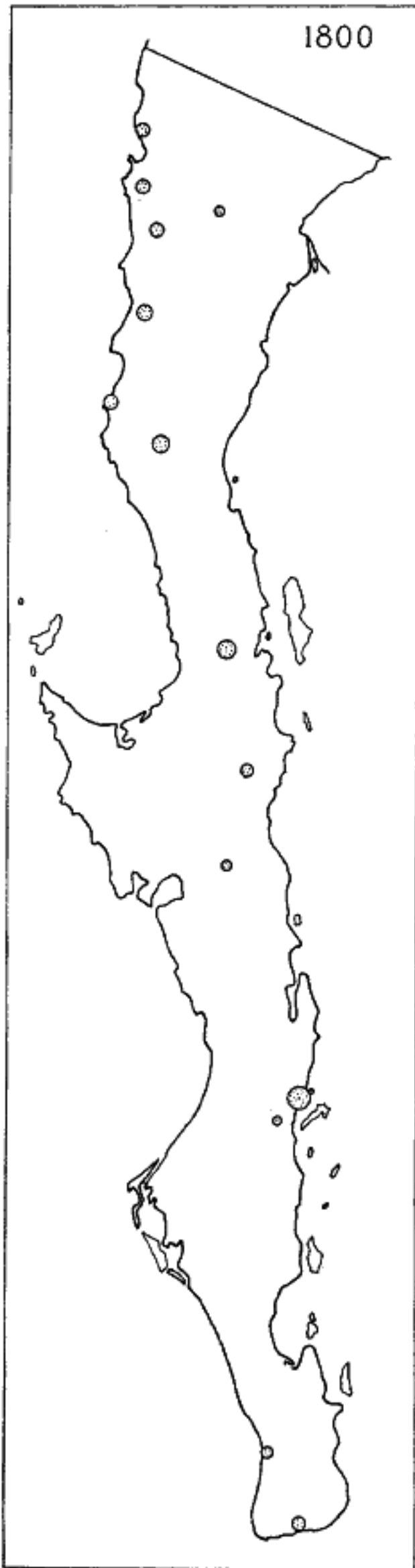
The period from 1782 to 1800 was marked by an increase in the number of settlements in the northern part of the peninsula, giving leadership to that area for the first time in the history of European settlement in Baja California. Elsewhere settlements remained stable in number. As was true throughout the Mission Period, settlements were dispersed rather than agglomerated. The same linear pattern along the *Camino Real* that had been begun in the south was continued in the north, with the exception of the mission of Santa Catalina.

The largest settlement, Loreto, had about 600 people. With few exceptions, villages in the southern two-thirds of the peninsula had experienced a decrease in population. Only Loreto had a pronounced increase, due to its growing significance as an administrative center.

The 1836 map shows the twelve settlements existing in Baja California during the early Post-Mission Period.¹⁰ For the first time in the history of white settlement in the peninsula there was a majority of nonmission vil-

⁹ Four new missions were established in Baja California between 1772 and 1782, but only Rosario had attained a population of more than 100 by the end of the decade. The San Fernando mission has been described in detail by Carl Sauer and Peveril Meigs: *Lower Californian Studies, I: Site and Culture at San Fernando de Velicata*, *Univ. of California Publs. in Geogr.*, Vol. 2, No. 9, 1927. See also Peveril Meigs, 3rd: *The Dominican Mission Frontier of Lower California*, *ibid.*, Vol. 7, 1935.

¹⁰ The term Post-Mission covers the period between the passage of the Mexican Secularization Act in 1833 and the beginning of widespread settlement in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.



FIGS. 4, 5, and 6.

lages and towns. Seven of the twelve were agricultural, and one, La Paz, was an administrative center, replacing Loreto, which had been virtually destroyed by a hurricane in 1829 and its population greatly reduced. The remaining four were mission stations.

The period from 1800 to 1836 witnessed the definite breakdown of the missionary settlement pattern, with its linear arrangement of relatively evenly spaced villages and towns distributed along the *Camino Real*. In its place a nodular settlement pattern began to develop. Three small village clusters are apparent. One in the Cape District and a second, more dispersed, between Loreto and San Ignacio were agricultural agglomerations, depending on favorable water supplies (springs and small streams) for irrigation. The third cluster, the group of four missions in the extreme north, owed its existence to the presence of the sole remaining aborigines in the peninsula.

Settlements continued small. The largest, La Paz, had a population of about 780. Mission stations in the northern region, with the exception of San Miguel and Santa Catalina, had decreased in number and size, because of dwindling Indian population. On the other hand, nonmission settlements in the southern and central parts had grown in size¹¹ with the beginnings of an influx of mestizo farmers.

By the mid-century settlements were at their lowest ebb, since immigration of mestizos from mainland Mexico was not yet sufficient to counteract the disappearance of aborigines in most of the peninsula. Only six towns had a population of one hundred or more. All were secular; missions had disappeared completely.¹² Four of the six were agricultural villages, San Antonio was a mining town, and La Paz an administrative and pearl-fishing center.

Both southern and central village clusters existed, but the northwestern group had vanished with the disappearance of aborigines from that region.¹³ The most important part of Baja California was the Cape District, with four of the five settlements. Favorable conditions for small-scale irrigation agriculture, the presence of valuable metallic ore (silver), and the existence of pearl beds in near-by waters were factors that drew people to this area.

La Paz had a population of less than 1300, and most villages had between 200 and 400. Certain of the settlements, however, were at last growing

¹¹Loreto and the mining centers of Santa Ana and San Antonio were exceptions.

¹²Most of the missions of Baja California had been closed by 1840. The last missionary padre left the peninsula in 1849.

¹³A few thousand aborigines remained in the extreme northeastern part of the peninsula, both on and near the delta of the Colorado River. These Indians never came under the jurisdiction of the missions.

rather than declining in size, as had been the almost universal trend during the last half of the Mission Period.

No population data are available for Baja California from 1857 to 1900.¹⁴ Conditions can only be surmised.

The history of settlement during these forty-three years was marked by two main trends: (1) the rapid development and decline of important gold and silver mining centers; and (2) the slower but more stable growth of certain agricultural, commercial, and administrative settlements. This was the boom mining period of the peninsula. Several gold rushes, including one in the Cape District and another in the northwest, drew many thousands of Mexicans from the mainland and also hundreds of foreigners, and towns sprang up almost overnight.¹⁵ Most of the mining centers depended on quickly depleted ore deposits and consequently declined or disappeared within a few years. They exerted a permanent influence on other Baja California settlements, however, by attracting numerous farmers and cattlemen to the peninsula with their profitable markets for food.¹⁶

SETTLEMENTS IN 1900 AND 1910

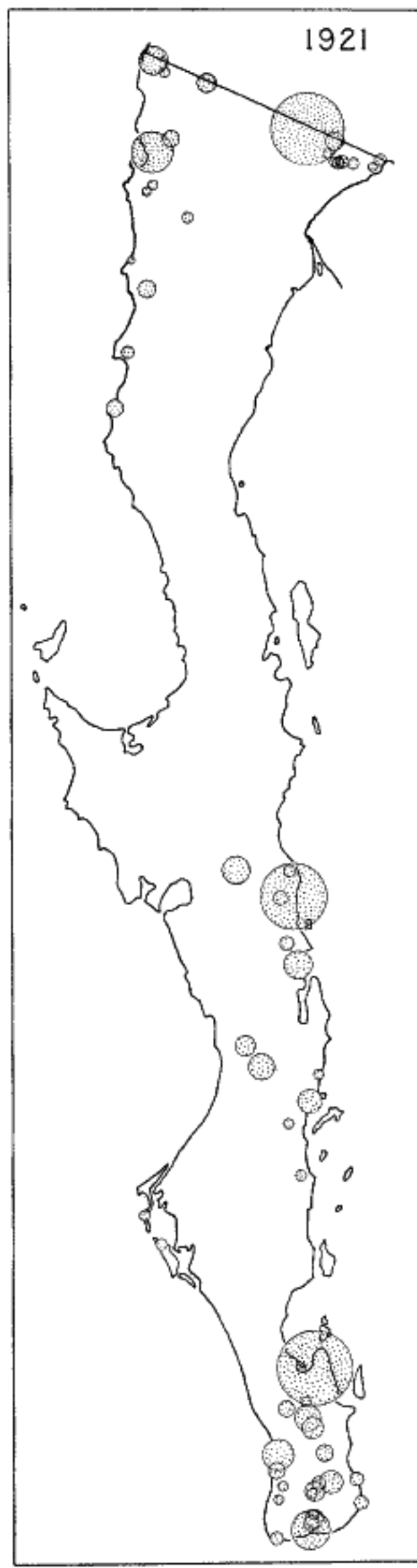
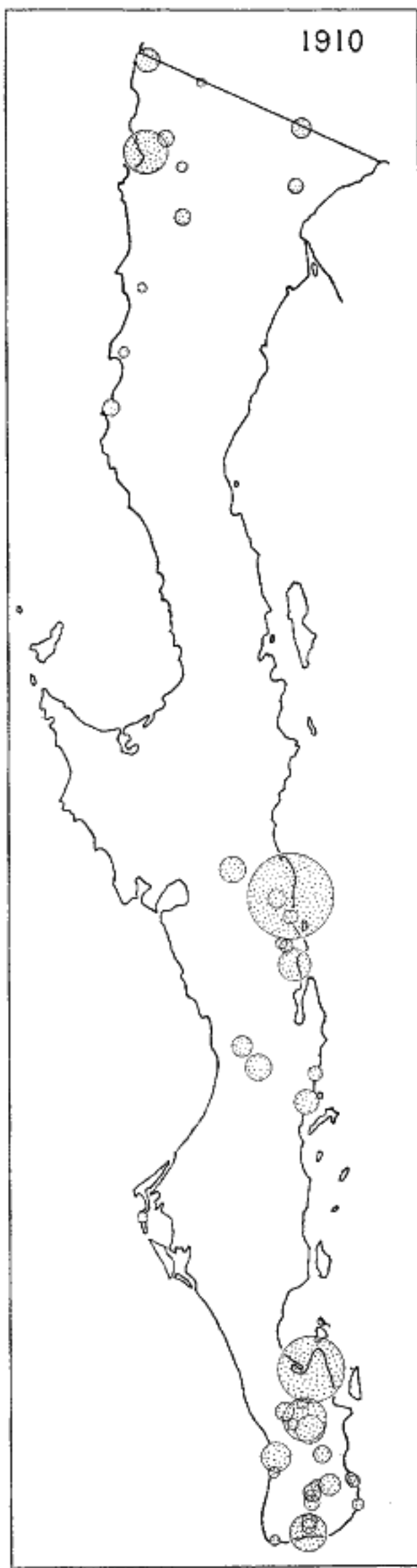
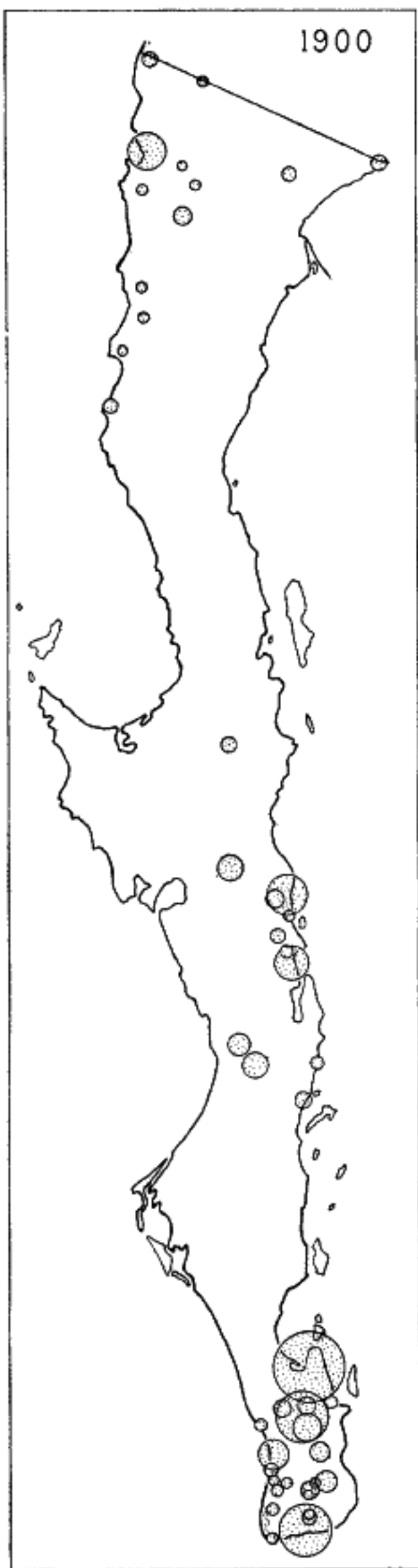
At the opening of the twentieth century the outstanding feature of the map is the great increase in number of settlements over that of any previous period, which may, however, be due in part to more comprehensive statistical returns. Undoubtedly the primary cause of increase was the considerable influx of Mexicans from the mainland. By 1900 fifty settlements had a population of one hundred or more.¹⁷ Most of these towns were

¹⁴ Population figures for a few towns are available for various years, but no statistics for the peninsula as a whole can be obtained for any one year.

¹⁵ During a gold rush of the 1880's, Calmallí had "thousands of prospectors." At one time the population of El Álamo, a gold-mining center in northern Baja California, was estimated to be 5000. As another example, in 1870 Real del Castillo had probably 1000 people.

¹⁶ In connection with the expansion of agriculture in Baja California from 1857 to 1900, mention should be made of a series of attempts at large-scale agricultural development by certain companies that had obtained vast grants of land on the peninsula. All the attempts failed, largely because of the inhospitable character of the country and the fact that the schemes were fostered by men whose knowledge of the region was inadequate. Among these companies were: (1) the Lower California Colonization and Mining Company, which, in 1864, obtained a grant of land lying between 24° 20' N. and 31° N.; (2) the Peninsula Plantation and Homestead Association, which, in 1865, secured title to a large tract of land near Mulegé; (3) the Colorado Hemp Company, which, in 1866, acquired land on the Colorado River delta; (4) the Chartered Company of Lower California (Magdalena Bay Company), which, in 1870-1871, obtained 12 million acres of land near Magdalena Bay; (5) the Gulf of California Commercial Company, which, in 1871, attempted to develop an American colony near Mulegé; (6) the International Company of Mexico, which, in 1885, took title to 18 million acres of land extending for 300 miles south of the United States border; and (7) the Lower California Development Company, which, in the late 1880's, attempted to colonize the area near San Quintín.

¹⁷ Forty-seven of these are mapped. Three small villages could not be located on available maps.



FIGS. 7, 8, and 9.

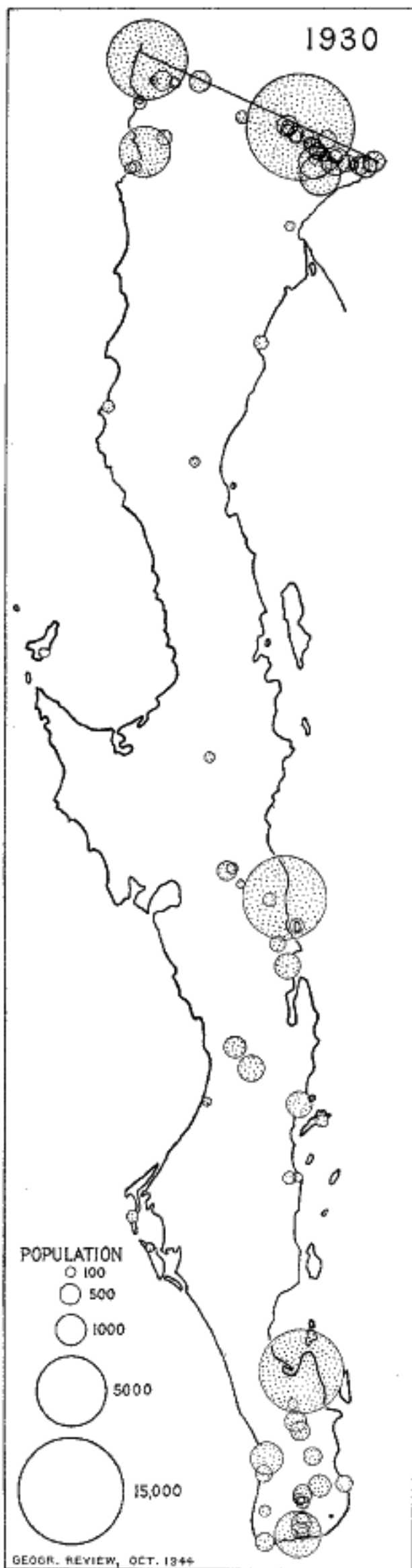


FIG. 10

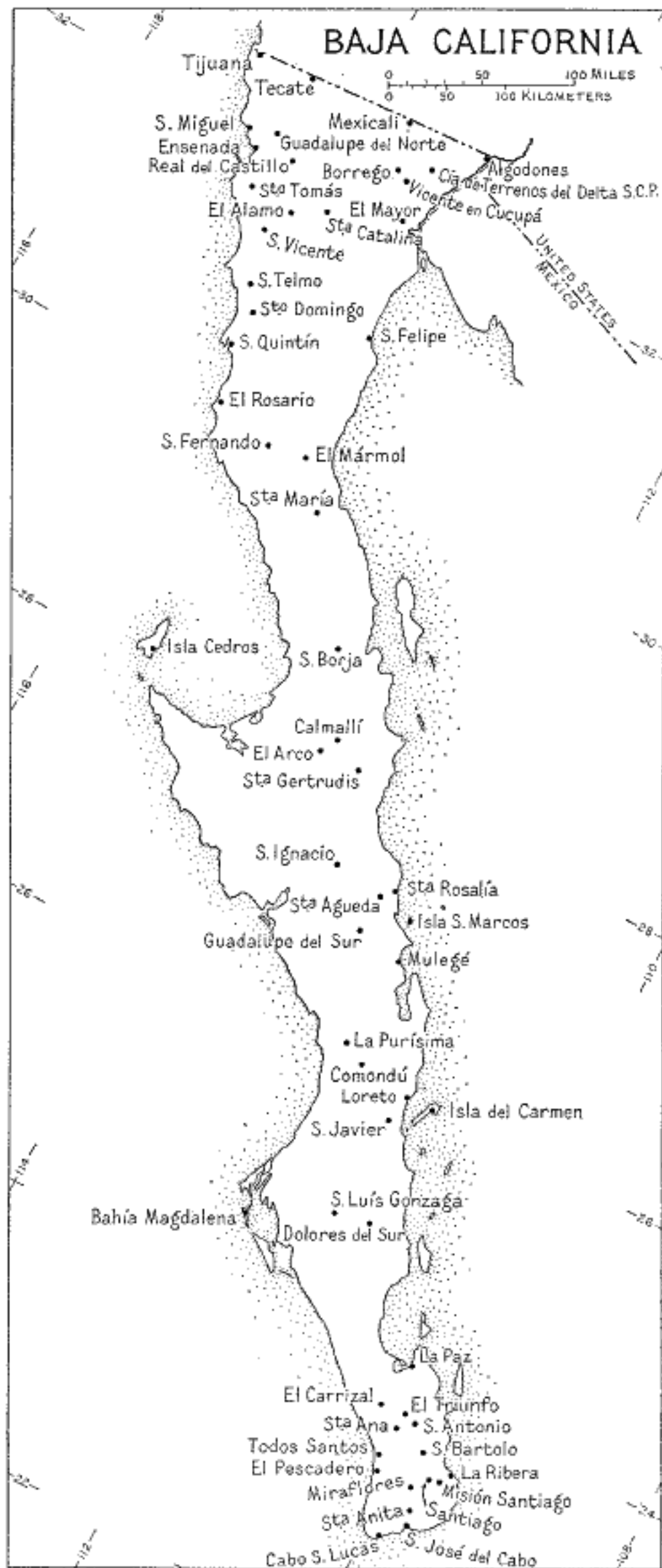


FIG. 11—Location of selected settlements (1768-1930).

agricultural, the mining boom of previous decades having ended. Among the nonagricultural settlements were six mining centers, Triunfo and San Antonio in the south, Santa Rosalía and Calmallí in the center, and Real del Castillo and El Álamo in the north; one administrative-commercial-pearl-fishing town, La Paz; one commercial-agricultural center, San José del Cabo; and one Indian village, Borrego.

There were three distinct clusters of towns and villages, one in the northwest, another in the center, and a third in the south. This nodular distribution was primarily a response to the presence of favorable water supplies for agriculture, since each cluster was located in an area where mountain streams, springs, and wells¹⁸ (together with moderate amounts of precipitation in the northern and southern regions) gave some assurance of successful farming. Moreover, each group was aided by the presence of near-by mining markets for farm products.

By 1900 migration and natural increase had enabled certain towns to attain considerable size, and for the first time there were true urban centers in the peninsula. The largest, La Paz, had more than 5000 population, and three others had more than 2000. Small villages still greatly outnumbered the larger towns, however.

Regional differences in size of settlements are plainly evident. Most of the large towns were located in the long-developed Cape District. The central region had two sizable towns; the newly developed northern region had only Ensenada. There was likewise a noteworthy difference in size between agricultural and nonagricultural settlements. The former were generally small; those whose function was primarily administrative, commercial, or mining were large.

Settlement showed no great change during the next decade. In 1910 forty-six towns and villages,¹⁹ of about the same size as those in 1900, were distributed in the same three clusters. Agricultural villages continued most numerous. The Cape District was still the most important region, with one-half of the total number of settlements and several of the larger towns.

Of the minor changes, the most suggestive was the rise of Mexicali, the first large agricultural settlement in the Mexican portion of the Colorado River delta. Also noteworthy was the growth of the copper-mining town of Santa Rosalía to become the largest urban center in the peninsula. A third

¹⁸ This is the first map showing settlements the location of which had been determined primarily by the presence of wells. None of the settlements shown on the earlier maps used wells to supply water for crops.

¹⁹ Forty-five of these are mapped. One small village could not be located on available maps.

trend was the decline of the gold and silver mining towns, a portent of their gradual disappearance from Baja California.

SETTLEMENTS IN 1921

In 1921 sixty-four settlements had a population of one hundred or more.²⁰ All except seven were agricultural centers. The nonagricultural settlements included all the large towns: Mexicali (administrative and commercial), Ensenada (administrative),²¹ Santa Rosalía (mining and commercial), La Paz (administrative and commercial), San José del Cabo (commercial). The small nonagricultural centers were Triunfo and San Antonio, both mining villages.

The former three clusters of towns and villages had been augmented by a fourth one, around Mexicali, a development based on the rapid spread of irrigation cotton agriculture in the Colorado River delta. Nine settlements thrived where there had been only barren desert a decade earlier, and Mexicali grew from a small agricultural village to be the second largest town.

Settlements in the northwest had increased only slightly in number and size by 1921. They remained agricultural, tourist trade being of little consequence at that time. In the middle of the peninsula the only significant change was the temporary decline of the copper-mining center of Santa Rosalía. Likewise, little change had occurred among the settlements of the Cape District. La Paz had continued to grow and had become the largest town in Baja California, but the mining centers of Triunfo and San Antonio had declined still further in size.

SETTLEMENTS IN 1930

The map for 1930 presents conditions in Baja California during the latest year for which complete population data are available.²² Ninety-five settlements then had one hundred people or more.²³ This was a larger number than at any previous period in the history of the peninsula.

All except twelve of the settlements were agricultural towns and villages. The larger nonagricultural settlements were invariably administrative, commercial, mining, or amusement centers: Mexicali (administrative

²⁰ Fifty-seven of these are mapped. Seven small villages could not be located on available maps.

²¹ Although Mexicali had become the administrative center for the Northern District by 1921, Ensenada remained the unofficial summer capital.

²² Complete 1940 census data for Mexico had not been released at the time this article was written. Population figures were available for only a few of the larger towns.

²³ Eighty of the ninety-five are mapped. Fifteen small villages, mostly in the Mexicali Valley, could not be located on available maps.

and commercial), Tijuana (amusement), Ensenada (administrative and amusement), Santa Rosalía (mining and commercial), La Paz (administrative and commercial), and San José del Cabo (commercial). The smaller nonagricultural villages were El Mármol (a marble-quarrying center), Isla Cedros (a fishing and fish-packing village), Isla San Marcos (a gypsum-mining village), Isla Carmen (a small salt-mining settlement), El Arco (a gold-mining village), and San Felipe (a fishing village).

As in 1921, four centers of population existed. Outstanding development had taken place in the irrigated cotton region of the northeast, where scores of small villages had sprung up along the railroad and Mexicali had become the largest town in the peninsula. Considerable increase in size of settlements had also occurred in the northwest, based on the tourist industry and fostered by the prohibition era in the United States. Both Tijuana and Ensenada had become sizable towns and were at the height of their boom period.²⁴

Settlements in the central area remained relatively unchanged in size and character, with the exception of Santa Rosalía. The Cape District likewise remained relatively unchanged. La Paz and San José del Cabo had continued to expand, but the former mining centers of Triunfo and San Antonio had almost disappeared. The relatively stable population conditions in the central and southern parts of the peninsula were largely due to the fact that most of the villages were subsistence agricultural settlements that had expanded by 1900 to the limit of their water supplies.

SUMMARY

The past century and three-quarters have witnessed the migration of the major settlement agglomeration in Baja California from the middle of the peninsula (1768, 1772, and 1782 maps) to the north (1800 map), back to the middle (1836 map), to the south (1857, 1900, 1910, and 1921 maps), and finally to the north again (1930). During this time missions were supplanted by secular towns and villages; settlements increased in number manyfold, after virtually disappearing in the middle of the last century; the size of settlements increased considerably; and a nodular distribution pattern replaced the initial linear pattern.

²⁴ The repeal of prohibition in the United States in 1932 and the enforcement of Mexican anti-gambling laws after 1935 were severe blows to Tijuana and Ensenada.

Forrest Shreve has pointed out the fluctuating nature of the population in border and mining towns and has expressed the opinion from his own observations that the population of 94,469 at the 1930 census was not much more than 60,000 five years later (*The Human Ecology of Baja California, Yearbook Assn. of Pacific Coast Geogr.*, Vol. 1, 1935, pp. 9-13).