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HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHY TRENDS OF OLD CALIFORNIA

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Very little is known about the demography of the Baja California peninsula (Mexico) during the 19th century. A detailed picture of the growth, structure, and distribution of individual communities, and the peninsula as a whole, is lacking because high resolution, nationwide censuses were not instituted until 1895 AD. In this study, we used historical birth, baptismal, marriage and death records contained in the *Guía Familiar de Baja California 1700-1900* (Martínez, 1965) to unravel the demographic history of a single population, La Paz (the capital city of Baja California Sur). Using this source we were able to reconstruct 1) the age at which men and women married; 2) the age at which women first conceived a child; 3) the interbirth interval; 4) total fertility; and 5) overall population growth.

Two hypotheses guided the study. Because Mexico did not experience demographic transition until after the Mexican Revolution (Bush, 2005), we initially expected people to marry at an early age, where women would have short intervals between births and high fertility rates during the 19th century- typical of natural fertility populations. However, because the Baja California peninsula is a harsh arid environment where people held a strong cultural preference for forming economically independent, nuclear family households centered on ranching and farming, we expected ecological constraints to cause individuals to delay reproduction producing a later age at marriage and reproduction – typical of an ecological constraints model.

Analyses revealed that: 1) men were marrying at an abnormally late age (average age = 30 years). This finding held steady throughout the last half of the 19th century, even as population size increased dramatically; 2) during the 19th century, there was a strong correlation between the age of marriage of a woman and the age at which she gave birth for the first time; and 3) age of marriage for females was a strong positive predictor of total fertility. It appears that during the 19th century, La Paz, due to its unique ecological and social factors, did not follow the standard model of a pre-demographic transition population.

References

Martínez, Pablo L. *Guía familiar de Baja California, 1700-1900: Vital Statistics of Lower California*. Editorial Baja California, 1965

Virgilio Partida Bush, *Demographic transition and the aging process in Mexico*, *Papeles de Población* 45 (2005): 1-24

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