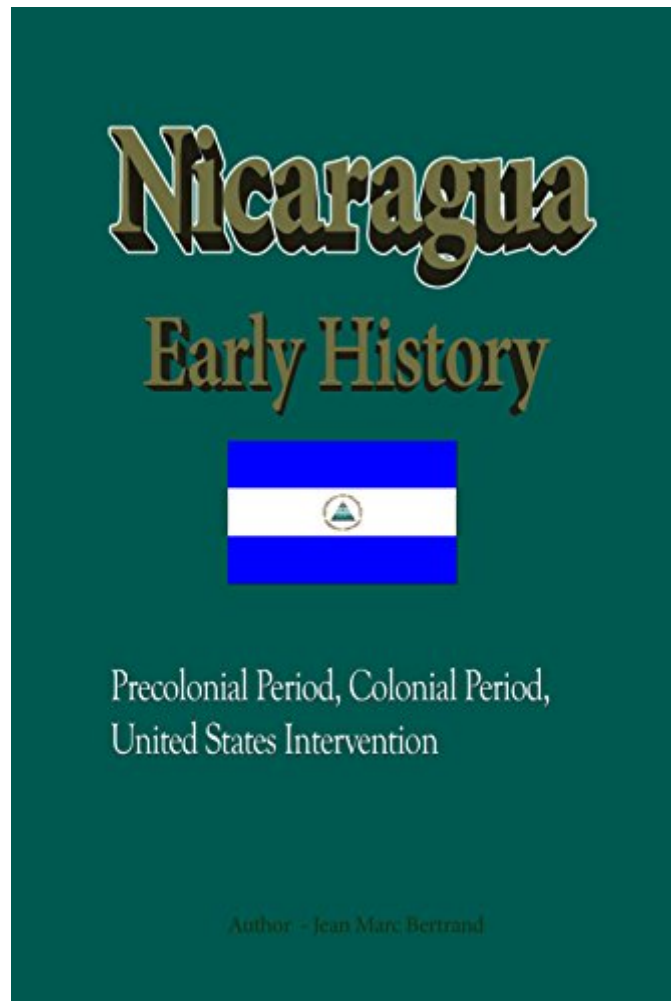


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Nicaragua Early History: Precolonial Period, Colonial Period, United States Intervention



Synopsis

History of Nicaragua. Present-day Nicaragua is located south of the pre-Columbian culture areas of the Maya and the Aztec in Mexico and northern Central America. Although conventional wisdom states that the culture of lower Central America did not reach the levels of political or cultural development achieved in Mexico and northern Central America, recent excavations in Cuscutlatán, El Salvador may prove that assumption erroneous. Two basic culture groups existed in precolonial Nicaragua. In the central highlands and Pacific coast regions, the native peoples were linguistically and culturally similar to the Aztec and the Maya. The oral history of the people of western Nicaragua indicates that they had migrated south from Mexico several centuries before the arrival of the Spanish, a theory supported by linguistic research. Most people of central and western Nicaragua spoke dialects of Pipil, a language closely related to Nahuatl, the language of the Aztec. The culture and food of the peoples of western Nicaragua also confirmed a link with the early inhabitants of Mexico; the staple foods of both populations were corn, beans, chili peppers, and avocados, still the most common foods in Nicaragua today. Chocolate was drunk at ceremonial occasions, and turkeys and dogs were raised for their meat. Most of Nicaragua's Caribbean lowlands area was inhabited by tribes that migrated north from what is now Colombia. The various dialects and languages in this area are related to Chibcha, spoken by groups in northern Colombia. Eastern Nicaragua's population consisted of extended families or tribes. Food was obtained by hunting, fishing, and slash-and-burn agriculture. Root crops (especially cassava), plantains, and pineapples were the staple foods. The people of eastern Nicaragua appear to have traded with and been influenced by the native peoples of the Caribbean, as round thatched huts and canoes, both typical of the Caribbean, were common in eastern Nicaragua

Book Information

File Size: 721 KB

Print Length: 165 pages

Simultaneous Device Usage: Unlimited

Publication Date: July 15, 2016

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01IKOFS90

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #239,216 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #9 in Books > History > Americas > Central America > Nicaragua #66 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Americas > Latin America > Central America #147 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Latin America

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