

A DESCRIPTION OF SONORA IN 1772.

By ALFRED BARNABY THOMAS.

INTRODUCTION.

'The year 1772 when Governor Sastre wrote his report on Sonora was a critical one for northern Mexico. Sonora and Sinaloa in common with New Vizcaya, Coahuila, New Leon, New Mexico and Texas had been suffering for over a century from Indian raids, revolts and wars. The seriousness of the situation in the north Mexican area forced Spain, under the impetus of its able king, Charles III, to consider broad measures of defense. The first step was taken by dispatching Jose de Galvez to Mexico, clothed with regal power to effect reforms there. While the Visitor went to Sonora to view the local situation, the Marques de Rubi was dispatched to inspect the presidios along the entire northern frontier, including those of Sonora.'

The work of Galvez in Sonora and Sinaloa comprehended three major undertakings. One was the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767. The second was the pacification of those two provinces by means of a major military undertaking commanded by Colonel Domingo Elizondo during the years 1768-1771. Finally from Sonora Galvez directed the beginnings of the occupation of California. By the year 1772 this remarkable Visitor had seen his principal objectives attained.

Accordingly in 1772 Sonora was prepared for a new and important role in the history of the later "South-west." Pacified by Elizondo it was soon looked to as the sustaining base for California. Its presidios on the other hand were, as a result of Rubi's recommendation, soon to play a commanding part in the offensive against the dreaded Apaches of present southern Arizona and New Mexico.² Under these circumstances it is of no little interest to

1. Herbert Ingram Priestly, *Jose de Galvez, Visitor-General of New Spain (1765-1771)*. (Berkeley, 1916).

2. Charles E. Chapman, *The Founding of Spanish California*, (New York, 1916), devotes several chapters to the work of Rubi and O'Connor on the northern frontier of New Spain.

Southwestern history to have a view of the province in that year from the pen of its Governor, Don Mateo Sastre. The request for this description came from Bucareli who had inherited from Viceroy Croix the problem of effecting Rubi's recommended reforms on the northern frontier. To that end he had requested from the various provincial governors reports of the condition of their command so that necessary information would be available for the projected council of war bearing upon the presidios in the provinces affected. To this request Governor Mendieta of New Mexico responded and in a short paper delineated the chief problems of that district.³ These in part hinge upon those of Sonora. Likewise the governors of the other interior provinces responded. Thus Sastre's report is not only important for Sonora alone but has its place in the general picture of northern Mexico at the moment.

The description here presented is also significant in throwing light upon Sonora with regard to the projected California establishments. Early in the same year 1772 that Sastre wrote, Captain Juan Bautista de Anza at Tubac had offered his services to Viceroy Bucareli to open a route from Sonora to California. Three years later he recruited his colony of two hundred and forty souls for San Francisco.⁴ In view of the distressing conditions Sastre here outlines our appreciation deepens for the heroic efforts this province made to supply the individuals necessary, to say nothing of the hundreds of head of stock, from its depleted sources. Moreover, in the very months that the Sonorans filled this order for California, Don Hugo O'Connor, Commander-Inspector of the frontier in charge of the Apache war, commanded Governor Crespo, Sastre's successor, to present two hundred and ninety-five men for the campaign against the Apaches in present Arizona and New Mexico. Again Sonora responded and the governor

3. "Governor Mendieta's Proposals for the Defense of New Mexico, 1772-1777," Alfred B. Thomas (ed.) in *The New Mexico Historical Review*, VI., pp. 26-31.

4. Herbert E. Bolton, *Anza's California Expeditions*. 5 vols. (Berkeley, 1930.)

and his loyal followers distinguished themselves⁵ as did Anza and his brave company who marched off to the west.

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DOCUMENT¹

No. 737.

The Viceroy of New Spain is remitting a copy of the report which the governor of Sonora and Sinaloa made him concerning the state of that province. Extracted². The above is understood and approved, May 12, 1773.

Most Excellent Senor:

My dear Sir: Under date of March 11 of the past year, I advised the governor of Sonora and Sinaloa, Don Mateo Sastre, after he had made an inspection of that province, to inform me of its true and present state, and of their condition before the expulsion of the Regulares of the Company,³ setting forth with the greatest clarity whatever he should consider necessary to give me a perfect understanding of their population, mining, presidios, agriculture and missions. Having done this in the terms which the adjoined copy indicates, authorized by his last letter of October 14 of the said year, I am passing it to his Majesty.

In accordance with the information which it comprehends, I have charged the above-mentioned governor to take advantage of all means which his zeal and prudence dictates to him to keep the reduced Indians in submission and to dedicate himself to the protection of the settlements, so that a government, disinterested, pure and gentle may make its inhabitants happy. I also intimated to him to take suitable measures for the rebuilding of the abandoned church of El Charay and the pearl fishery.

May our God guard your Excellency many years. Mexico, January 27, 1773. Most Excellent Senor, your most submissive and obliging servant,

(signed) ANTONIO BUCARELI Y URSUA.

Most Excellent Senor Bailio Fray
Don Julian de Arriaga.

(rubric)

5. Alfred B. Thomas, *Forgotten Frontiers*, pp. 10-13 (Norman, 1932).

1. Antonio de Bucareli to Julian de Arriaga, No. 737, January 27, 1773. Archivo General de Indias (Seville), Guadalajara, 513.

2. The above note is the action of the Council of the Indies taken in regard to Bucareli's letter.

3. That is, the Jesuits.

Most Excellent Senor:

Although I have not yet entirely recovered from my accident, I am making the greatest effort to prove my blind obedience to the orders of your Excellency to comply with the reiterated command which I have just received dated July 15th preceding, concerning the report which I was to make to your Excellency to give you a perfect understanding of the population of these provinces, mining, presidios, agriculture, missions, *mariscadas*, and the rest of the things which I consider proper, as commanded in the preceding letters. I am placing before your Excellency the following:

1. The settlements exist generally with very little difference in their number as previously, with the exception of the Villas of Culiacan and Sinaloa which have become smaller due to the inundation which they suffered, particularly Sinaloa where destruction occurred when the river carried off the church and most of the houses. Because of this event, many settlers abandoned it. Some have returned and I have seen the building of different houses on other terrains more elevated. Accordingly, I conjecture that it will soon be in its original state. The pueblo of Charay which consisted of more than five hundred Mayo Indians is in a similar condition as that of Sinaloa, almost entirely destroyed, situated, as it is, three-quarters of a league more or less on a height above the Rio del Fuerte (or as other say, the Suaqui), which had risen to this height (over a space of) some five leagues and a half. Because of this the houses and church were carried away. They were in a very decent condition and considerable people were drowned. Besides this misfortune, the said Mayos were at war by reason of their last uprising and some had been executed. As a final misfortune, a pestilential sickness carried off a very large number of them. It has been reduced to some thirty families more or less. But it is true that of some of the missing ones, there are some families established in the hills and heights close to the pueblo. That of Saracache is entirely depopulated as your Excellency is aware. That of Sayopa is likewise depopulated; that of San Antonio which was a pueblo quite large in the time of its mines and placers, is now being depopulated without other reason than that of the great decline in the riches which it had and that its inhabitants have been leaving to seek those which La Cienega is now supplying. The latter is in the same condition as that which your Excellency was pleased to indicate to me in your letter dated April 4 of this year. To avoid a similar misfortune, I shall avail myself of the resources that may appear proper to me and shall give your Excellency a report concerning them.

2. Regarding the mines, I have written your Excellency from Culiacan, dated May 30th. I suspended the inspection of them by reason of the order from your Excellency of the 27th of April which transferred this responsibility to the Intendant, *ad interim*, Don Pedro Corbalan, because it was an affair attaching to his office and that from

his inspection many useful results can come to the royal treasury. He no doubt will give a report to your Excellency of the state of them.

3. On the point of the presidios, although I have not yet seen more than two, it appears to me their companies are complete and well equipped with arms and horses. Only that which is called the Flying Company, attached to the presidio of Terrenate, I have taken some care with them because of the desertion which it has experienced in the last few days. As I came (into the province) I gathered men from Sinaloa where they were awaiting to present themselves to me. Of this I shall report to your Excellency, separately. Having despatched these to their proper company, it is now complete and ready for service like the rest.

4. Agriculture is moderately advanced among the nations of the Yaquis, Opatas and Egudebes who sow with some systematic order and reap abundantly wheat, corn, garbanzos, beans, and lentils, but the others such as the Piatos, or Pimas Altos, Mayos, Guaimas, and Pimas Bajas, although they reap their crops of corn, and some maize and very little of the other seeds, they carry on their work without any skill. I am not surprised at this, as they have had no director to teach them but practice itself in time will supply without doubt competent direction.

5. Concerning the missions, I am stating to your Excellency that they were much better administered and equipped with supplies before the expulsion of the Jesuits than now, as they had an abundance of herds of all kinds and an abundance of grains. Now they are quite poverty stricken. Some have declined since the time of the transfer of the haciendas and the rest of the things to the administrators who were appointed for them. Although they were delivered with an inventory to the new fathers missionaries, they tell me some missions lacked a great many things and, in short, that the delivery was very rapid. It is true that the decline of the herds is due in a great part to the lack of rain which has occurred, a drouth unknown ever to have existed in these provinces. Likewise a large number of the animals have died and been stolen by enemies.

With regard to the Pueblo of Charay, it is now without a regular church and with regard to what can be done for the advance of God among them, may your Excellency be pleased on reflecting upon this circumstance to commend a new one constructed at the expense of the royal treasury. They need it so much that I pray for the very benign and Christian action of your Excellency.

6. Having understood that the *mariscadas* will be the pearl fisheries, I report to your Excellency that, as I am informed, these

4. The Flying Companies referred to here have reference to lightly armed squadrons of troops and settlers organized for rapid action against Indian attack at the time of Galvez. Priestly, *Jose de Galvez*, pp. 48, 235.

have ceased operation since the past year because I am told also, that there are a number of them along the coasts of California and on those of Tepoca, close to the Isla de Tiburon, on the north. Their *placeres* being much more abundant than those of the first stopping place of (Lower) California I do not believe anything would be lost if your Excellency commanded that the larger of the two, Tahuas del Rey, be armed and that the fishery be developed at the expense of his Majesty. This can be done quickly by the Yaqui Indians who are skilled, because of the extensive experience they have had. From that some profit should redound to the royal treasury.

7. The successes which have been achieved since the Expedition into this province are that they have remained almost entirely peaceful, as they have not suffered any major uprisings. Occasionally individuals of the nations reduced attack travelers, steal or kill any herds which they encounter. Thus as to those, I consider them, as I have already stated to your Excellency, but some vagabonds, petty thieves, whose people no longer recognize them, since the measures I have taken concerning patrols, about which I have reported to your Excellency. Even yet, however, I am not very certain of the Suaquis or Sibupapas because of the reasons which in a letter I have signified to your Excellency under date of the 28th of July and because of late advance I have made in reducing the Tiburones. The latter also have been increased, up to today, by more than two hundred and fifty families which have settled on a secure footing in La Cieneguilla, without counting either the Yaquis and different Indians of other nations, or many *hombres de razon* who are at work, whose number amounts to more than five thousand souls, compared with the latter, I am persuaded that the former is more numerous.

This is as much as I am prepared to present to your Excellency as you order me and as my poor abilities permit me. Desiring to achieve complete satisfaction so that your Excellency may be entirely informed, if anything is lacking from this report, I beg you may be pleased to forgive me, for my purpose has been none other than to comply with the obligations to which I am sworn and to serve your Excellency in all things.

I pray our Lord to guard your most excellent person many years as it is important to me.

Royal presidios of San Miguel de Orcasitas. October 14, 1772.
Most Excellent Senor, your most attentive servant. Mateo Sastre.
Most Excellent Senor Fray Don Antonio Bucareli y Ursua.

It is a copy of the original which remains in the Secretariat of the Office of the Viceroyalty, which is under my charge, which I certify. Mexico, January 27, 1773.

MELCHOR DE PERAMAS.

(rubric)