

A PROJECT FOR EXPLORATION PRESENTED BY JUAN BAUTISTA DE ANZA

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Two hundred years ago the mission district of Pimería Alta, in northern Sonora, marked the limit of settlement in northwestern New Spain. The region beyond, now southern Arizona, because of desert stretches and a rather sparse native population offered no great attraction to anyone other than Jesuit missionaries, and the cost of establishing and maintaining new missions made the Spanish government chary of support to efforts whose sole return would be the conversion of a few native tribesmen. In spite of this, projects were presented occasionally which looked toward an advance of the Sonora frontier. In most cases these were sponsored by the Jesuits, but some were presented by officials friendly to the order who likewise hoped for possible fame or advancement through the discovery of mines or other items of value to the empire.¹

The document translated below covers a proposal made by Captain Juan Bautista de Anza,² an officer at the time in command of the royal presidio of Santa Rosa de Corodeguachi, or Fronteras. Shortly before the date on which his letter was written a sensational silver strike had been made, and Anza felt that this discovery of mineral wealth in his district might prove to be a motive powerful enough to cause the governmental authorities to grant the necessary permission and backing for an expedition to the Colorado River and beyond. As additional arguments he made reference to the stock tales of fabulous cities, rich lands, and the fabled Strait of Anian, all of which had influenced for two centuries the exploration of North America.

The Anza proposal was received with some favor by the higher authorities, for the expedition was well planned and would not be exorbitant in cost. Captain Anza was likewise recognized as a capable officer with much experience to his credit in regard to conditions in the region. His proposal was not translated into action immediately, however, and Indian revolts which broke out in Sonora shortly afterward shelved it indefinitely. Anza himself was killed in an encounter with Apaches in 1739. No effective action was taken in regard to a military expedition beyond the Colorado until thirty-five years later, when his own son led a troop of soldiers and

¹ For standard works on exploration and settlement in this region, see: Charles E. Chapman, *The Founding of Spanish California* (New York, 1916); Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Kino's Historical Memoir of Pimería Alta* (Cleveland, 1919), 2 vols; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The History of the North Mexican States and Texas* (San Francisco, 1884), 2 vols.

² He was the second of three men of that name, all of whom served with distinction in Sonora.

colonists north and west to the settlements which at last had been established on the California coast.³

As Captain Anza was somewhat more adept at fighting than writing, it has been necessary to modify sentence structure occasionally to conform with modern usage.

Illustrious and Excellent Señor:⁴ Having reported to your Excellency under date of yesterday concerning the balls and slabs of virgin silver which have been found in Pimería Alta, I ought not to omit calling to the attention of your Excellency certain conditions existing in the newly converted districts of the Indians of the Pima nation.

The last three missions thrown to the north were founded in the year 1732, through the aid of his Majesty, whom God guard, and through the statement and request of the most illustrious Señor Don D. Benito Crespo, then bishop of these provinces. The most excellent Señor Viceroy Marqués de Casafuerte had the kindness to thank me, whom he had ordered to assist so that the said missions might be established and might receive the attention which had been procured for them, for what I had at that time carried out in connection with the entrada of the reverend missionary fathers. He also ordered me to give him a report on the site and conditions surrounding the new missions covering the number of Indians and the opportunities which were offered for subsistence, and for this purpose, in obedience with lawful procedure, I remitted to his Excellency the representations made by the three reverend fathers upon the rancherías to which they had been appointed by their superior. By means of these his Excellency attained the fundamental understanding which he desired. He had previously ordered me to give him an account of all that occurred, and of whatever else might seem worthy of inclusion to his Excellency, and this order I also had executed, including with my report some statements which I had acquired concerning the interior of these lands (which were to his liking). All of these documents will ap-

³ The story of this expedition is most fully narrated in Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Anza's California Expeditions* (Berkeley, 1930), 5 vols.

⁴ Juan Bautista de Anza to the viceroy, January 14, 1737, A. G. I., Aud. Guad. 185. A short summary of this letter is in Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

pear in the archives of the superior government of your Excellency.

It would seem desirable, Señor, that they⁵ be explored, so that the most happy day of enlightenment through the Holy Faith of our God and Master will arrive for their inhabitants, as our most pious monarch desires. The reverend father Joseph de Echevarría,⁶ as a most zealous son of the grand patriarch San Ignacio de Loyola, at the time he was visiting the missions of these provinces asked me to transcribe for him some of the aforesaid statements in order that with the information acquired he could inform the government and certain pious persons in that city⁷ with the purpose of initiating a task so holy. However, he did not carry out this plan, as I have learned, either because of his infirmities, or because of an appointment to which he gave obedience. Today he may be found, according to the news which I have, at the Pueblo de Los Angeles as rector of his college, which fact I cite to your Excellency so that by deigning to take a statement on the matter from his Reverence, all security may be furnished.

For many years the reverend missionary fathers of this sacred family have made numerous entradas as far as the Gila River and the coast,⁸ and have found many rancherías of Indians; they desired to reclaim their souls, of which something has been accomplished, and to learn at the same time whether California were island or peninsula (which could not be done because of difficulties which arose, even though they arrived by following the coast at the disembouchment of the Colorado River into the sea, on one visit. However, it is considered most probably to be an island).⁹ Such an advance, Señor Excellency, has resulted in the discovery of this unprecedented silver deposit, a fact which is in

⁵ The regions beyond Pimería Alta.

⁶ Procurador Echevarría of the Jesuit order was *visitador general* to the missions of Sonora and Lower California in 1729 (Bancroft, *N. Mex. States*, I, 449).

⁷ Mexico City (?).

⁸ Of the Gulf of California.

⁹ Anza either was not informed of, or ignored, Father Kino's reasoning that Lower California was a peninsula (see Bolton, *Kino's Historical Memoir*).

the highest degree valuable to Christianity since wise, zealous, and prudent men judge it as a token which has begun to appear that God the Merciful has granted all things for a speedy penetration of these pagan lands. It is also not beyond reason that there remain even greater riches, for by this means there follows the reclamation of souls, as has happened before in both Americas, and where to this end, and as yet without the stimulus of them, our king and master spends liberally, in various kingdoms and provinces, from his royal treasury. This conjecture that there are riches of silver, gold, and pearls on land and sea in those parts, I wish to state immediately is expressed in various documents; there is also quicksilver, of which the Indians who live on the Gila River gave information to the said reverend fathers and to Don Juan Matheo Mange, by signs. The great number of the gentiles themselves is clear through statements of the adelantado Don Juan de Oñate concerning the trip which he made from the kingdom of New Mexico toward the coast of the South Sea,¹⁰ and through various other expeditions made by religious and lay explorers.

It is a tradition still very common among some native Indians of these lands that the ancestors of the kings of Mexico first appeared in Pimería, and they await the Great Emperor, of whom, when he comes, they expect to receive many benefits. Some also believe that when they die they go to him; Satan induces these chimeras. On this bank of the said Gila River there are buildings¹¹ of four stories in height in the middle and of three on the sides, with walls two varas in thickness and of strong cementation and foundation, also other ruins; fifteen leagues from the presidio of Janos there are some of a capacity such as that of the palace at Madrid. From these ruins and others have been taken axes of flint, painted jars, and metates, which, it is to be inferred, were fabricated by the said Mexicans in their migrations since the natives who now live in the neighborhood do not use axes so made, nor any of the other things mentioned, in the same model.

From all that I have mentioned and from the other data

¹⁰ In 1604-5.

¹¹ The famous Casa Grande ruins.

which will be found on record at the headquarters of your superior government as a result of expeditions which have been ordered by land and sea by predecessors of your Excellency (especially that of Captain Francisco Vásquez de Coronado in the time of the Señor Viceroy Don Antonio de Mendoza) it will be seen that there is much heathenism. This was the main subject of the memorial which Don Andrés de Medina presented to the Señor Viceroy Marqués de Manzana¹² concerning the exploration of these unknown lands so that a verification of what had been stated concerning the possibility of navigation to the North Sea might lead to the conveniences which it would offer, or a part of them. It would be most useful if this passage could be found to exist in the strait which this coast of New Spain and California possesses, as I have heard asserted by men who knew something of navigation, and which would be of great aid to the colonies which will be placed (if God is served) on these coasts. In one statement it is evident that a vessel which was commanded by one Miguel Delgado¹³ because of tempest which struck it near Newfoundland passed to the South Sea on this coast of New Spain, and sailing up a mighty river discovered a great city, whose chief came to see the vessel borne by his subjects on a gilded litter. Because of a certain mischief by a sailor they departed secretly.¹⁴ The statement which was made on this affair, and which I have cited, the aforesaid Señor Marqués de Casafuerte was pleased to send to my governor and captain-general, Don Manuel Bernal de Huidobro, who imparted it to me in the past year of 1735 when he came to this province to inspect it. He was not able to follow it to a conclusion (so he committed it to me, uselessly), or to visit Pimería, since by order of the superior government he had to go to pacify the rebellious Indians of [Lower] California. While there he yet contemplated the project, because of his

¹² Viceroy from 1664 to 1673. The memorial mentioned was not available.

¹³ No document covering this interesting tale could be located from material at hand.

¹⁴ It is not certain whether Anza meant that the natives had stolen away, or whether the visitors had found it necessary to escape.

zeal, but has been unable to include the affair among those which have engaged his attention.

It is certain also that no presidio of those of the kingdom has more to attend to than this one in my charge, for it is situated in very rugged country. Likewise, its frontier and the whole of this province are more dangerous than others because of the Apache enemy; the care of the Seri nation, on whose frontier are placed as guard some soldiers from the presidio of Sinaloa and some from my company; and the attention necessitated at the same time by the Indians of the Pima nation whom, although of good character, the Enemy of humankind has moved to some inquietude because of the introduction of the Holy Faith, and while they have been pacified with ease and I do not distrust them, none in general are obedient. In short, there is much work done in keeping the peace.

These inconveniences which are patent have been able to act as a hindrance to the presentation of a project for the discovery of new lands; yet, Señor Excellency, a force which I am not able to resist drags me along toward an opposite course into a conflict to which God our Lord orders me, and before whom I protest that I am not carried away by the inducements of human convenience nor the ambition of having for myself that which others could carry out with greater efficiency and prudence—in which case I feel certain that I would cede it, for the service of both Majesties. I take into consideration, also, that many projects which in former years have been proposed (and with good zeal) have not been carried into effect because of the difficulties which were encountered in regard to the various provisions and contingencies necessary for their execution. These have caused great expense, but the undertaking (here begins my own project) of an exploration as far as the Colorado River and beyond for some leagues would not entail great expenditure, and this could be met by some of the pious here; I myself would assist by means of some cattle, horses, mules, and small gifts for the Indians. The greatest difficulty is to obtain two *canoas* for crossing the Colorado (and also the Gila), since they are to be contemplated as mighty streams; as large trees

will not be lacking, I plan to make this easy by taking along two or three carpenters.

By such an expedition knowledge would be gained of the nations which inhabit the banks of these streams, and other spots, if such are fertile, and with the advantages which would be offered and the true information gained it would be possible to advise his Majesty so that, it being deemed suitable, some town could be planted on the aforesaid Colorado River. This would be a step by which with greater ease could be discovered (if what the reports state be true) the Seven Cities, the Gran Teguayo or Quivera, and also if there be a passage to the North Sea and the riches which could be obtained on it, and on land. Most precious of all, it would provide diligence in the salvation of souls, which should be the principal object.

The first effort could be carried out with fifty or sixty armed men, such as may be available, detaching one small squadron of soldiers from the company under my command and gathering the rest of the men from other places. It should also include a hundred friendly Pima Indians, and two willing Jesuit missionaries; the latter could be obtained with ease since all of those who live in the missions of these provinces favor the idea in the highest degree since they are very zealous for the good of souls and the service of the king, and those who can never omit their aid in similar expeditions. Also I wish to state, Excellency, that in regard to the soldiers none are more occupied than those under my command, particularly because of the ferocious Apaches. While some branches of the nation, as I have notified your Excellency, have been somewhat tranquil for the space of a year and a half, and in the hope of peace I have aided them from my small stores with food, a few horses, and clothing, their gratitude has been to commit treason and to start to rob (as I have also advised your Excellency). I followed them during the past month of August, and having joined with the forces of the presidio of Janos (and of auxiliaries) under their captain, Don Francisco de Mendizabal, some punishment was effected. An Indian who had surrendered his arms was sent out with instructions to tell them that if they would be peaceful and

would leave for the interior without doing damage in some other region, and that if some would come in, I would return the women and children who had been captured; this they have not carried out, although they refrained from entering this province from the said month of August until some twenty days ago, when they appeared in this region ready to rob and kill if possible. I admit that it is probable that both on these frontiers where they enter to commit hostilities and in the interior there are some spots and some good country, although widely separated, where they may be followed and some punishment effected, but it is not possible to do this constantly because we have had to assist in putting down the uprisings of the Seri Indians, and in other such affairs which demand prompt treatment. It would be possible to act temporarily on the same business¹⁵ in the effort toward discovery which I propose, later taking a convenient direction. Some soldiers might be selected from this presidio if no other means be found, but it would be well to leave the greater part of the company on guard on the frontier.

I have not communicated to my aforesaid governor, Don Manuel Bernal de Huidobro, anything to which I have referred because he is in [Lower] California, but since it seems that it should be gone into immediately, I am reporting to your Excellency so that as head of these provinces your zeal may choose what is expedient. I affirm that in the affair of exploration to the Colorado River and beyond, the plan which I have proposed is in my view the best means of quickly attaining that end. If the inhabitants are industrious,¹⁶ and this is to be presumed, it will not be difficult to reduce them; if, on the contrary, they defend themselves with what they have, the bow and arrow and such rude forces and supplies that the wilderness offers, it may be judged almost an impossibility,¹⁷ for concerning this I have had some experience. It is also worthy of much attention that at the

¹⁵ The campaign against the Apaches.

¹⁶ Sedentary (?).

¹⁷ It is not clear whether Anza meant that successful resistance by the natives with such equipment would be impossible, or whether it would be impossible to subdue them.

same time when the foundation of the said missions of Pimería was carried out they started to find small mines of little value on its boundaries, which sometimes have been so increased that from their *quintas* has been repaid to his Majesty all that had been expended from the royal treasury; finally there has been this marvel of the silver discovery.

I do not maintain greater probability in that to which I have referred concerning human conveniences than is furnished me by the cited statements which are in this province or in that city, and which your Excellency may see and examine in regard to the measures which I have proposed for the discovery, and in view of them to resolve, with your customary understanding, what course would be most suitable. Our God guard the most excellent and illustrious person of your Excellency the many years that this kingdom needs it for its greater glory. Real Presidio de Santa Rosa de Corodeguachi, January 14, 1737.

Juan Bautista de Anza

