Pedro Pino
Hart, E. Richard

Published by Utah State University Press

Hart, E. Richard.  
Pedro Pino: Governor of Zuni Pueblo, 1830-1878.  
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/9247.

For additional information about this book  
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/9247

For content related to this chapter  
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=200310
Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu was born into a rich and ancient cultural universe. The proximate environment was and is a relatively hard land, with bitter winters and smoldering summers. It is devastatingly arid; water is worth everything. Yet when it rains, a dry gulch may become a churning river in minutes. He was born into the A:shiwi, or Zuni, tribe, a people who had lived in this particularly tough country for over a millennium, who had lived in their town, or pueblo, on the same spot for five hundred years, making it (with Taos Pueblo, Old Oraibi, and Acoma Pueblo) one of the oldest, continuously occupied communities in the United States. He was born, on his mother’s side, into the Eagle Clan, and on his father’s side into the Deer Clan. His people are among the most remarkable on this continent, and he was destined to lead them politically through some of their more difficult years.

The Zunis had lived under European rule or influence for two hundred and fifty years when Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu was born in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Their pueblo was compact and architecturally beautiful, blending artfully with the environment and rising five stories into the air. The people lived in this central pueblo on the Zuni River during the winter, but through the agricultural year spread out as far as the Little Colorado to the west and beyond their Salt Lake to the south. Every available piece of arable land was cultivated. Their trade was vast for the time. Their relations with the government of Spain had been established and tested for many decades by the time Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu came into the world.

The central village of the Zunis was situated in precisely the same spot where it had been for more than a century, and within a
few yards of the place occupied by the people for at least three centuries previous to that. The boundaries of their land had been well fixed at least since the time of Coronado’s invasion in 1540. The Zunis were first known to the Spaniards as the people of the “Seven Cities of Cibola.” Later, the Zunis’ land was referred to as the “Province of Cibola.” After the Pueblo Revolt, the central village came to be known as Zuni. Zuni continued to be, as it had been before the Spaniards arrived, a focal point in cultural achievement and a trade center for distant tribes.

Though bilateral Zuni/Spanish expeditions were occasionally necessary to keep the raiding Apaches and Navajos in check, the Zunis traded with both tribes and lived with secure borders under Spanish rule. The Zunis’ own government was a theocracy. The caciques appointed the secular leaders, including the governor, but they gave him and his tenientes much personal discretion. The western pueblos of Zuni, Acoma, and Laguna (after its founding in 1699) were the outposts of the Spanish Empire in North America. In 1790 the Zuni Pueblo was considered by Spaniards to be the last bastion of civilization on the frontier. The tribe joined the Spaniards as auxiliaries, aided military expeditions, and provided many further services. They protected the northern frontiers of the Spanish domain, and in return Spain recognized the Zunis’ rights to their aboriginal land holdings. Zuni land was held in common, could not be sold, and was protected meticulously by the Crown. As a Spanish decree of 1811 put it, the pueblos were granted “the right of planting and cultivating all the land which their ability and circumstances permitted them to do so.”

Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu was reportedly an uncommonly bright and strong youth, and at an early age, thirteen or fourteen, was already joining in the retaliatory war parties sent out against the Navajos. For a number of years, it had been necessary for the Zunis to join the Spaniards as allies in these expeditions against the Athabascans. At about the time of Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu’s birth in 1788, 294 Zunis were listed as members of the Spanish army—one captain, one lieutenant, and the remainder privates.

During several campaigns against the Navajos near the close of the century, the raiders were seemingly subdued, and an uneasy peace existed in Zuni country. But as Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu reached his
teens, the fighting again broke out. In 1804–1805 depredations increased to the point that a major attack on the Navajo homeland was planned and carried out. Zunis joined the Spanish command and, in the middle of winter, attacked the Navajos in the heart of their winter territory. Moving against the Navajos from the Zuni base of operations, the allied command of soldiers met the enemy in what came to be known as Canyon del Muerto. More than one hundred men, women, and children were among the Navajo dead, while the Zunis reported that only one of their number, a leader, was killed.7

It was at about this time, while young Lai-ju-ah-tsa-lu was out on a war party with his father, his uncle, and others, that he was captured by the Navajos.8 It must have been a shattering experience to the young man: distinguished in war, only thirteen or fourteen years old, and in the hands of his people’s old enemies. Slavery was not uncommon under the Spanish rule. In fact, the Spaniards seemed to encourage it even among their enemies, the Navajos.9 Thus, it was probably because Lai-ju-ah-tsa-lu was young, strong, and intelligent, and therefore a valuable commodity as a slave, that he was not executed but instead saved to sell to the highest bidder.

He was held in captivity for what must have been an interminable time, perhaps as long as two years, but there were some positive results of his enslavement. During the period, he learned fluent Navajo and much about the habits and discipline of his people’s sometimes enemies. Traveling with his captors, he saw the homeland of the Navajos as well as the areas they traversed throughout the year. Undoubtedly he saw raiding parties go out in the spring after the Navajos’ planting had been completed, on their way to steal from the Spanish and Pueblo Indian settlements. Then, in the fall, when the Navajos were ready to harvest their corn, Lai-ju-ah-tsa-lu watched the raiding parties return and the Navajos move home to Canyon de Chelly for the winter.

Eventually Lai-ju-ah-tsa-lu was ransomed from his captors by a wealthy Spaniard, one Pedro Pino—likely Don Pedro Bautista Pino, the author of The Exposicion of Don Pedro Bautista Pino, 1812.10 Pedro Pino was one of the most influential Spaniards in Santa Fe during the period, and also one of the wealthiest. When, in 1810, the people of the Nueva Mexico province wanted a representative
to visit Spain to plead for more support, it was Pedro Pino who was chosen. He did travel to Spain and in vain tried to reach the king’s ears, but eventually, after two years of pleading, he reluctantly gave up and wrote his *Exposicion* before returning home.\(^{11}\) So the young Zuni, Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu, was in the care of perhaps the most knowledgeable person in this Spanish territory when it came to politics. And Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu was evidently also in the care of one who wanted his slave educated.

The young Zuni was still a captive but now he was learning the Spanish system. He not only studied how the New Mexican government worked under the Spaniards, but he actually met the people who held the power and ran the government. He met and spoke with the leaders of the province, who all associated with Pedro Pino. He likely learned the policies which the Spaniards wanted to maintain with the Zunis and the other western pueblos—that they were citizens in some ways, but not in others. The Zunis were allies, and their lands were undeniably their own forever under Spanish law, but they were not permitted to sell or otherwise alienate their own lands. The young Zuni also discovered that the Spanish form of government in the Southwest was almost universally corrupt. Bribery and friendship were the means to get things done, the accepted form of government. Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu evidently became knowledgeable in the ways of the “diplomats” of the time.

When he was finally returned to his own people, Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu was a different person. It was not just that he had become a man. He knew the Navajos and their lands and could speak their tongue. He knew about the Spaniards’ government and their policies and could speak fluent and indeed eloquent Spanish.

It may have been when Pedro Bautista Pino was appointed to visit Spanish authorities that he decided to return Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu to his people. Pino evidently intended that the young Zuni’s education should not end there. He apparently had high hopes for the young man and to further encourage his advancement, put him in the charge of the Spanish priest at the Zuni Mission. This must have been like a third captivity for Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu. The priest and the mission were strict. For three or four years, he was forced to endure this harshly disciplined life and continue his European
education. As an old man, Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu would recall that he had been unable to find much worth in this education. As a result, he had rebelled against the priest’s hard regimen and escaped to the Zuni village of Heshota, north of the main village, where he probably remained in semiseclusion until Mexican independence in 1821, when the Spaniards abandoned their mission at the pueblo (for some time there had been no resident priest there).¹²

Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu made a lasting tribute to his former Spanish “father.” Throughout the remainder of his life, in all of his dealings with non-Zunis, he took the name of Pedro Pino. Pedro Pino the Zuni would come to be one of the most important men to his people for the next sixty years. All of the adversity of his various captivities had prepared the young man for the future political turmoil he would face. Among his tribe, he was the most knowledgeable about “secular” life outside the pueblo. In 1821, when the mission was abandoned, he was probably one of the few who recognized the potential negative consequences which would accompany the positive results of the priests’ departure.

Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lu was able to move back into the main pueblo now that the priests were gone. He had married at the age of seventeen or eighteen and so lived among his wife’s family. He would remain with his wife for seventy or more years, living faithfully with her until his death. Living again with his own people, he was able to continue his Zuni religious education. He continued to be active in the military arm of the tribe and was first made a member of a war medicine fraternity and later initiated into the Priesthood of the Bow. He never forsook his military obligations, despite his early enslavements, and eventually became one of the highest office holders in the priesthood. Always active in his people’s religion, he would hold several other spiritual positions throughout the remainder of his long career.

Pedro Pino the Zuni likely knew why the Spaniards valued the Zunis’ alliance and territory. When asked why the Zuni territory was so important to the Spaniards, he could explain that it constituted what the Spaniards believed was a route to the Pacific Ocean. Ever since the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, the Spaniards had conjectured that this possibility existed, and thus the western pueblos had often received somewhat better treatment. It was not
just because appropriations from the crown depended on the territory administered by the province, nor because of the relatively long distance between Santa Fe and the pueblos of Zuni, Acoma, and Laguna, but also because this valuable corridor had to be protected and the Spaniards could not do it by themselves. They were forced to treat the western pueblos, and especially the Zunis, as allies. San Diego was founded in 1769 and Monterey in 1770. After the Dominguez-Escalante expedition established the possibility of a Spanish Trail to California, Spanish authorities supplied Zuni with arms and ammunition and went on joint expeditions to protect not only the Zunis’ land but the territory which they hoped would someday provide the province with an overland route connecting their California settlements to New Mexico.

If Pino had learned this much from his namesake, he probably also deduced the potential meaning when, on September 27, 1821, Mexico gained her independence from Spain, and New Mexico became a province of the new republic. Many of the villages of Mexicans celebrated independence with a small fiesta, but to most of the inhabitants of New Mexico, Indian and Mexican alike, independence made little difference in their daily lives. Pino may have known from his namesake that trade between the United States and Mexico was beginning to open up and that goods and people were starting to flow across the Santa Fe Trail. This movement was in part responsible for the sudden new presence of American fur trappers in Zuni territory. And young Pedro may have suggested that, since the mission was now abandoned and Mexico was independent, closer ties with the government in Santa Fe would be necessary. The alliance must be kept.

Pedro Pino’s people in the period numbered perhaps three thousand inhabitants, most of whom lived in the central village of Halona:wa. They raised extensive corn and wheat crops in fields spread over an area from present-day St. Johns, Arizona, to the Zuni Mountains in what is now western New Mexico. Their herds of more than fifteen thousand sheep grazed across an area from the Little Colorado to the Zunis’ Salt Lake and beyond. The potential enemies of the Zunis were across the Rio Puerco (the Navajos) and south beyond the Zuni Salt Lake in the mountains (Apaches—from a Zuni word meaning “enemy”).
Zuni country has an ageless quality, and each season illuminates it from a new, scrutinizing perspective. With the hard winters, hot and dry summers, and magnificent desert spring and fall seasons, there was good hunting for bear, deer, elk, and other big game in each of the four directions. All of the land in the province of Zuni was used by the people, whether for practical or spiritual preservation. The Ashiwi knew which clay lay in which strata in a mesa to the south and that it was best for a certain type of pottery. They knew that a specific herb along the Little Colorado (in what is now Arizona) would treat a certain malady. They knew that they had grazed their sheep (acquired from the Spaniards) near the base of the Zuni Mountains for centuries.

Most importantly, the Ashiwi knew the boundaries of their land. No one person owned a plot here and another there (although clans held hereditary use rights). The people held the land communally. No one could sell a piece of what belonged to all. The boundaries were specific: in the northeast, Mount Taylor provided the boundary point of Zuni territory; to the east, lava beds formed a natural barrier between the people of Zuni and the Ha-ku-we (people of Acoma); to the south, after the conquest of the Keresan pueblos of Marata around 1540, the mountains encircling the valleys around the Zuni Salt Lake and Rito Quemado created the boundary; to the southwest and west, the Little Colorado formed another natural barrier between the Zunis and the Western Apaches (who habitually raided Zuni nevertheless); the A’muk wikwi or Hopis were to the northwest, and a division line between them and the Ashiwi existed near Pueblo Colorado Wash; to the north, the marauding bands of Navajos did not venture to settle farther south than a longitudinal line which would run (approximately) through the present-day town of Gallup, New Mexico and extend westward to Twin Buttes, the boundary of the A’muk wikwi (Hopis).

The Zunis had been secure under Spanish rule. The Province of Cibola boundaries had been rigid and acknowledged by the government. Now it appeared that things might get better still. The people were free of the priests and thus able to practice their own religion unhampered by the Catholic Church’s manipulations. They had always been a trading people and, with the opening of
the Santa Fe Trail bringing Americans into their territory, their
commerce would increase.

The newfound freedom of religion was extremely important to
the Zunis. Religion permeated their existence. The land was their
church. Practically every spring of water in the area was visited
periodically for purely ceremonial purposes. Kothluwalawa
(Kolhu/walaw:wa), the sacred lake in Arizona, is one of the most, if
not the most, spiritual spots to the people of Zuni Pueblo. 18 There
and at the Zuni Salt Lake to the south many important ceremoni-
als were performed throughout the year. The Zunis’ life was filled
with ceremony, with beauty in ritual, symbol, and metaphor. Theirs
was the “Middle Place,” not only the center of the six directions—
east, west, north, south, zenith, and nadir—but also a metaphorical
middle or moderate lifestyle. A person’s “road” was his or her life.
It might be a rough or an easy road, but one should never worry
about the eventual destination. “Worry is the most serious of all ill-
nesses; it is the sickness of the spirit.” 19 Prayers for another person
include the plea, “May their roads come in safely.” 20

The Zunis’ origin story is one of the classic pieces of religious
poetry in existence. Many have translated and written of it. 21 The
story begins, “Laying their lightning arrow across their rainbow
bow, they drew it. Drawing it and shooting down, they entered.” 22
When the Zunis finally came into the light, they exclaimed, “Oh,
Dear! Is this what we look like?” 23 The remarkable description of
their human appearance in the first light of day includes “slimy
tails, slime-covered bodies, and webbed fingers.” 24 The Zuni cul-
ture spans a period equal to that encompassed by our scientific
appraisal of the human condition.

The humility of the people of Zuni is represented in the
prayer of the bow priest in summer retreat:

All my ladder descending Children
All of them I hold in my hands . . .
Those yonder in the east,
In all the villages that stand against the place of the rising sun,
Even to all those villages
That stand against the place of the setting sun,
Even every little bug,
Even every dirty little bug,
Let me hold them all fast in my hands
Let none of them fall from my grasp—
In order that this may be,
My fathers,
I ask you for life.\textsuperscript{25}

To the Zunis, the road of life was a serious matter. Crossing another’s path involved a commitment to that person. “Here where I live happily you have passed me on my road.”\textsuperscript{26} People’s fates intersected and interconnected: “Sit down. Now speak. I think there is something to say. It will not be too long a talk.”\textsuperscript{27} There was a commitment to all other life in the Zuni system, and death came “when the heart wears out,”\textsuperscript{28} after old age and “snow upon their heads,/With moss upon their faces,/With bony knees,/ no longer upright but bent over canes.”\textsuperscript{29}

This was Pedro Pino’s world. It was a world in which the idea of suicide was so remote and unknown that when it was first mentioned by Europeans, the Zunis laughed.\textsuperscript{30} It was a world in which many things taken for granted in our culture were taboo. “Initiative, ambitions, an uncompromising sense of honor and justice, intense personal loyalties—not only are not admired but are heartily deplored.”\textsuperscript{31} Compromise was necessary to peace. Ambition does not fit in a truly communal society. Chauvinism and egocentrism were frowned upon. Either men or women could take the initiative necessary for courtship.\textsuperscript{32} The terms “rich” and “poor” in Zuni poetry do not refer to physical possessions but to the spiritual attributes of an individual. A rich man was a spiritually secure one, and a poor man was spiritually insecure.\textsuperscript{33}

Zuni poetry and art demonstrate how the lifestyle survived. Secular affairs were left out of poetry and ceremony. In a way there was a separation of church and state. For instance, there were no ceremonies whatsoever at marriage.\textsuperscript{34} Social contracts were not a part of Zuni religion. Love was respected in poetry and ceremony, but “the priests do not act in secular affairs, being too sacred to contaminate themselves with dispute or wrangling.”\textsuperscript{35}

Each person’s place in Zuni society developed slowly, over the years; each individual was unique, so that no one was uneasy about
his or her social station. The word for life in Zuni is literally “daylight.” “Violence [was] culturally taboo in Zuni.” Their lifestyle and culture were that simple and that complex.

It is not, then, unusual that the Zunis were famous throughout the land for their hospitality. For generations writers have spoken of the people’s kindness and generosity. These traits were shown to the first Americans who came into the area. Perhaps Pino had told his people stories he had heard in Santa Fe of the Americans’ much-heralded wealth. More likely the first Americans were treated just like all visitors. In any case, when the first fur trappers came to Zuni land in the 1820s, passing through the country to trap beaver in the mountains, they were met with unexpected friendship.

The only road to the trappers’ frontier in the Southwest led through Zuni. Here the trappers traded and outfitted themselves to go into regions as yet unexplored by the Anglos. Indeed, the last place where trappers could outfit themselves before entering the “wilderness” was Zuni Pueblo. To trap in these parts of the country, Americans were ostensibly required by the Mexican government to obtain a license from the authorities, but in California and the Southwest, many Americans slipped easily in and out without consulting the authorities. The Zunis helped those parties that came through their area. By welcoming the Americans, the Ashiwi not only honored their traditions of friendship and respect but improved their material position as well, for the Americans were able to generate more trade goods and thus made trading a more profitable experience for both parties.

One of these early trappers was William Sherley “Old Bill” Williams, who in 1826 was illegally trapping beaver in Apache country, north of the Gila River. Trapping alone one day, he was captured in this remote country by a band of Apaches, who relieved him of everything he owned—his clothes, his weapons, his stock, supplies, and traps.

“Stark naked, afoot, and without a weapon,” he headed northeast toward Taos. After a 160-mile travail through the White Mountains, the arid valley of the Little Colorado (the boundary of Zuni territory), and then across the stream and into the desolate country beyond, he was finally found wandering among the dry
mesas by a party of Zunis. He was transported to the pueblo, “ceremoniously welcomed, provided with a blanket and moccasins, and ‘treated with great veneration . . .’”

Old Bill continued to pass through the Zuni country for the next few years, and later became the first American to set eyes on the Zuni Salt Lake. Trapping on the periphery of the Zunis’ land, in the Datil Mountains, Williams chanced to pass through the lava beds bordering Zuni land. Topping an ordinary-seeming rise, he came in full view of the marvelous lake with its craters and fields of salt. The fabled lake had been known to the Spaniards since their arrival in 1540, when Coronado came across it after conquering the Zuni pueblo of Hawikku. Coronado had reported with some surprise that in the village there was “salt, the best and whitest I have seen in all my life,” and that it had been brought from a “lake a day’s journey distant.”

Old Bill looked down on a beautiful volcanic lake hidden in a desert crater and fed by underground saline springs. In the middle of the waters rose up imposing black cinder cones, and around the edges of the lake were flats of pure salt, which was, as the Spaniards had said, of the purest quality. He must also have seen that, stuck in the ground around the lake in the salt flats, were many prayer feathers, or sticks with various colorful feathers tied to them. These were offered in prayer by the Zunis when salt was gathered.

Pedro Pino was likely among some of the groups of Zunis who journeyed to the lake once a year to gather salt for domestic use and trade. The lake had long made Zuni important as a trade center. A fair number of other tribes were allowed by the Zunis to gather salt at the lake, including Acoma, Laguna, the White Mountain Apache, the Cibicue Apache, and some Navajos, but “in recognition of the ownership of the Zunis in this lake, other Indian tribes who [gathered] salt there have always paid them toll for the privilege, and the lake has been a considerable source of revenue for them.”

Old Bill Williams always spoke highly of the Zunis and their marvelous country, but there were few beaver in the area. By 1830 what beaver had been in the mountain streams were so depleted that the fur trappers moved on to other horizons. Perhaps Pino
and the Zunis felt some small affinity for the traders, for the Zunis were themselves hunters. They regularly hunted bear, deer, elk, moose, groundhogs, antelope, rabbits and many game birds. Bear were important in the stories of the people, and deer were one of the most important sources for motifs on their strikingly beautiful pottery. In earlier times, the Zunis had hunted buffalo and traded the skins for shells and other items from Indians as far away as present-day Sonora.

Pedro Pino must have participated in the large communal rabbit drives which took place near the summer farming village of Ojo Caliente. He would have used a throwing stick, or boomerang, to bring down not only rabbits but coyotes and other small game. The rabbit sticks were hand carved and often quite elaborate. Another method of communal hunting was described by John G. Owens, who, writing in 1891, said, “I saw a fence about fifteen miles to the southeast of Zuni which, I was told, extended for seventy-five miles, and was formerly used to direct the herds of antelope to a certain spot.”

Pino probably also went out once a year to gather the pine nuts from the pinyon trees in the Zuni Mountains. The nuts from these trees were such an important resource to the Zunis that apparently their theft from the Zuni Mountains by Navajos precipitated a war. In other parts of the West, notably Nevada, when whites arrived, they indiscriminately destroyed pinyon forests, thus annihilating the staple of the native peoples and initiating conflicts and wars.