Friars, Soldiers, and Reformers

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Foreword

Many years ago the great Borderlands historian Herbert Eugene Bolton wrote a classic essay on the Spanish mission as a frontier institution, and he encouraged others to examine missions as multifaceted agencies of conquest, colonization, and governance of the Indian peoples. Even though a respectable number of his colleagues and his disciples did follow Bolton’s lead, few in-depth studies of individual missions based on extensive archival documentation have appeared.

A generation of pioneers — John Tate Lanning, France V. Scholes, Eleanor B. Adams, Fray Angélico Chávez, Maynard Geiger, Peter M. Dunne, Charles E. Chapman, Bolton himself, and others — made distinguished contributions to mission history in several areas of the Southwest and Southeast, but somehow Arizona and parts of Texas were neglected. In the present generation of Borderlands scholars, Robert S. Weddle’s intensive studies of Texas missions have been paralleled by John L. Kessell in meticulously researched and graphically written histories of individual Arizona missions.

Kessell takes a realistic and unromantic view of mission affairs on the Arizona-Sonora frontier, and he bases his account on masses of manuscript materials drawn from the archives of Spain, Mexico, and the United States. His important work in local Borderlands history points the way for yet another generation, because local history — micro-history as some scholars are now calling it — is essential if we are ever truly to understand the processes of acculturation and the ethnohistory of the Southwest.

In this vivid documentary dozens of missionaries, presidials, and bureaucrats, nameless in histories until now, emerge as living, swearing, praying individuals. A few of the early episodes are familiar — the explorations of Francisco Garcés, Anza’s expeditions, and the Yuma massacre — but most are not: the epic struggle between Bishop Reyes and Father President Barbastro; the missionary scandals of 1815–18; the bloody victory of Mexican civilian volunteers, La Sección Patriótica, over Apaches in Arivaipa Canyon in 1832.

Certain themes run through the book. Over and over on this unmoving frontier the expansionist saw his plans dashed, by Yumas, Apaches, unwilling
military officials, or lack of financial support. The mission as an institution was anything but secure. Reformers championing civil rights for the Indians time and time again challenged the friar's jealous and exclusive jurisdiction over his mission wards.

*Friars, Soldiers, and Reformers* brings into sharp focus for the first time that long blurry interval between Jesuit Sonora and Territorial Arizona.

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