Preface

Published by

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Far from the secure agency that was portrayed by Herbert E. Bolton in his justly famous essay, the mission on the Arizona-Sonora frontier was continually threatened. There had always been detractors. Mine owner, rancher, settler, and secular clergyman resented and lobbied against the missionary’s tight-fisted, paternalistic control over his wards and their lands, particularly when it dragged on for generations. With the accession of Charles III—who cast out the Jesuits in 1767—a new breed of social reformer joined the chorus, hurling challenge after challenge at the Franciscans.

Yet the traditional, nearly autonomous, Christianizing mission lived on, through the reign of enlightened despotism, the confusion and constitutions of the Napoleonic era, and the welter of Mexican independence, primarily because the reformers failed to come up with a practical alternative. The mission, a cheap and proven element of Spanish Indian policy, survived on the hostile, economically depressed Sonora frontier because it worked. It held the Pimas in the empire, bore the brunt of Apache assault, and satisfied the crown’s traditional obligation to do something for the native American.

In the narrative that follows, an unprosperous but enduring Franciscan mission, together with the nearby and perennially undermanned presidio, provides a window on the Arizona-Sonora frontier. The view extends for ninety years, from the Jesuit expulsion of 1767 to the coming of the United States Army in 1856. Often it broadens to take in Arizpe, Querétaro, Mexico City, or the court of Spain. Against the tumultuous backdrop of Europe and New Spain, the scandals of 1815–18 in the missions loom not so bold, not so shocking.

Friars, Soldiers, and Reformers is largely biographical. Written in the active rather than the passive, it looks beyond the fact that a church was built, a battle fought, or a reform imposed, to the people involved, those very human souls who did the building, the battling, and the reforming. I have tried, so far as the documents permit, to let missionaries, presidials, and bureaucrats live. Nothing knocks a stereotype in the head so soundly as a dirty, eye-gouging fight among friars.

Indians, especially as individuals, do get short shrift, though not by design. What Josepha Ocoboa or Ramón Pamplona thought of praying the rosary or
serving in a campaign under Spanish officers, we can only infer from Spanish sources. A friar’s lament over the persistence of native ceremonialism or a captain’s praise of his Pima auxiliaries provides some insight, but always in another’s words. Too few Indians emerge above the collectives “friendly” and “hostile.” Though I regularly assign the term hostile to the Spaniards’ enemies, whether Seris, Piatos, or Apaches, I am fully aware that hostility was not often confined to one side or the other. When I use “children,” “wards,” or “these poor souls” to describe mission Indians, I do so to convey the friars’ feelings, not my own. Soldiers and settlers called some Apaches “tame,” as they would a broken horse, precisely because to their way of thinking the others were wild.

I have included the price of soap and wine in 1768, a physical description of Pima Indian recruit Pablo Espinosa, as well as the ghastly spectacle of sun-shriveled Apache heads stuck on poles around the wall of Tucson, convinced that these details, while not significant in themselves, help bridge the time gap that separates us from the people of Hispanic Arizona.

Much of what has been written about the Spanish Borderlands perpetuates the myth that they were somehow unique, that Spanish frontiersmen who pushed north to and across the present southern boundary of the United States found conditions unlike anything they had experienced before. This is pure romanticism. The military and spiritual conquests of the sixteenth century provided the precedents. The struggle to live together and survive in Hispanic Arizona was anything but unique.

A research contract with the National Park Service, guardian of Tumacócori National Monument, helped make this study possible. I am grateful to the University of Arizona Press for bringing the book into print, and to Richard E. Greenleaf for writing a foreword. And finally I should like to acknowledge the assistance and encouragement of Kieran McCarty, who shared with me his own research. To him the book is dedicated.

J. L. K.