

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF SONORA (Vers. February 26, 2015)

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*NOTE: Being but a brief overview, this essay cannot do justice to Sonora's long and colorful history, but it hopefully provides a condensed introduction to this marvelous state. Readers with a serious interest in Sonora should consult the fine histories and geographies of the region, many of which are cited in the References section. The topic of Spanish colonial history has a rich literature, in particular, and no attempt has been made to include all of those citations in the References (although the most targeted and comprehensive treatments are included). All photographs by R.C. Brusca, unless otherwise indicated. This is a draft chapter for a planned book on the Sea of Cortez; the most current version of this draft can be downloaded at [http://rickbrusca.com/http\\_\\_\\_www.rickbrusca.com\\_inde.html/Sea\\_of\\_Cortez.html](http://rickbrusca.com/http___www.rickbrusca.com_inde.html/Sea_of_Cortez.html)*

For many reasons, Sonora has historically been rather isolated from the rest of Mexico. It is the farthest state from Mexico City and long viewed by the country's strong central government as a "frontier region" or, worse, a dry desert wasteland. Its colonial history is not as deep or rich as that of central-southern Mexico, and its archeological past lacks remains of the great civilizations from the south (Aztecs, Mayas, Toltecs, etc.). Even today, many Sonorans feel the government of Mexico City largely ignores their presence. In fact, until the completion of the "Yécora Highway" (Mex Hwy 16) in 1992, Sonora was even largely isolated from its neighbor state of Chihuahua. For these reasons, and because of the state's location on the border with the U.S., cultural and economic ties often seem stronger between Sonora and Arizona than between Sonora and Mexico City (despite the recent construction of the much-despised border fence).

## LAND AND BIOTIC DIVERSITY

The State of Sonora encompasses 69,249 mi<sup>2</sup> (179,355 km<sup>2</sup>), making it the second largest of Mexico's 31 states (not including the Federal District). Located west of Chihuahua (Mexico's largest state), Sonora shares its northern border almost exclusively with Arizona, and it is topographically, ecologically, and biologically diverse. It is the most common gateway state for visitors to the Sea of Cortez (Gulf of California). Its population is about three million.

The origin of the name "Sonora" is unclear. The first record of the name is probably that of explorer Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, who passed through the region in 1540 and called part of the area the *Valle de La Sonora*. Francisco de Ibarra also traveled through the area in 1567 and referred to the *Valles de la Señora*.

Four major river systems occur in the state of Sonora, to empty into the Sea of Cortez: the Río Colorado, Río Yaqui, Río Mayo, and massive Río Fuerte. Several smaller rivers originate almost entirely within the state, including the Río Sonoyta, Río Magdalena-Altar-Asunción-Concepción, Río San Miguel, Río Zanion, and Río Sonora, and these also once (at least intermittently) emptied into the Gulf of California although they no longer do. The headwaters of the San Pedro River also originate in Sonora, but the river flows northward, crossing into the U.S. as one the last remaining undammed rivers in Arizona. The Santa Cruz River originates in Arizona, flows South into Sonora, and then turns North again to re-enter the U.S. at Nogales, eventually running all the way to the Gila River in central Arizona.

The eastern part of the state comprises the western slopes of the Sierra Madre Occidental range—part of the great North American Cordillera. The highest elevations are in the Sierra de los Ajos and Sierra San Luis in northeastern Sonora. In addition to the Sierra Madre range, about 35 high isolated ranges (often called Sky Islands) are found west of the Sierra Madre in the northern half of the state (and another 33 Sky Island ranges occur in southeastern Arizona/southwestern New Mexico). The six highest mountains in the state are Cerro Pico Guacamayas (2625 m), Sierra Los Ajos (2620 m), Sierra San José (2540 m), Sierra La Charola (2520 m), Sierra San Luis (2520 m), and Sierra La Mariquita (2500 m).

Sonora encompasses a biological transition zone, with tropical ecosystems in the south, subtropical deserts in the north, and montane transitions in the sierras. The northern limit of Mexico's Tropical Deciduous (Dry) Forest and Sinaloan Thornscrub lies near the center of the state, whereas some of the most arid desert

regions of North America occur in the northwest, in the Gran Desierto de Altar. This topographic and climatological mix makes Sonora one of the most biologically diverse regions of the world. An estimated 5,000 species of vascular plants are reported from Sonora—20% of Mexico's total flora, in an area of less than 10% of the country.

In general, precipitation in Sonora decreases from higher to lower elevations, from south to north, and from east to west. In the pine-oak forests around Yécora (1550 m; 5085 ft) average annual precipitation exceeds 90 cm (35.5 inches), and in the tropical deciduous forests near Alamos (440 m; 1444 ft) it is around 65 cm (26 in). However, in the volcanic desert of the Pinacate region in northwestern Sonora, average annual precipitation is less than 25 cm (9 in) per year, and in the extremely arid Gran Desierto de Altar (near the lowermost Río Colorado) average annual precipitation is just 4-7.5 cm (1.5-3.0 in) per year. During summer months, temperatures exceeding 38°C (100°F) are common in the Gran Desierto, and the high summer air temperatures here drive up evapotranspiration (i.e., loss of water from plant leaves and soil). Historically, the highest temperature recorded for anywhere in northwestern Mexico was 56.7°C (134°F) in the Sierra Blanca of the Pinacate region (near where the El Pinacate y Gran Desierto de Altar Biosphere Reserve's visitor center is today). In spring and fall, rain is infrequent at best, although occasional tropical storms do reach Sonora in the fall. Summer temperature extremes are mitigated by rains, called monsoons (or *las aguas*—the waters), characterized by strong afternoon thunderstorms. Less violent winter storms, called *equipatas*, are derived from Pacific frontal storms with ultimate origins as far north as Alaska. (The name *equipatas* comes from the Yaqui language and literally means “gentle winter rains.”) This biannual rainfall pattern is a key reason that the Sonoran Desert has one of the highest biological diversities in the world. Almost all of the summer and fall moisture comes from the Sea of Cortez and adjacent Pacific Ocean that border the Sonoran Desert, thus making this a maritime desert. The traditional start of the monsoons (*las aguas*) is June 24, Saint John the Baptist's Day, or el *Día de San Juan*. Saint John, who baptized Jesus in the River Jordan, is celebrated in many ways throughout the Catholic world.

The Pinacate area of northwest Sonora is unique for being home to North America's second largest lava flow region (the Snake River Plain basalt fields of Idaho are slightly larger) and its largest active sand dune field, the latter running northwestward from just north of Puerto Peñasco (Sonora) to Yuma (Arizona). The dune field embraces the western slopes of the Sierra Pinacate, and it completely surrounds the isolated granitic Sierra del Rosario (probably the westernmost Basin-and-Range mountain in North America). This 5700 km<sup>2</sup> (2200 mi<sup>2</sup>) dune field is estimated to have developed during and following the last Glacial Maximum (~20,000 years ago). The dunes were built almost entirely from wind-transported Colorado River deltaic sands piled up over the centuries from prevailing Westerlies. Thus, these dunes are largely the eroded rocks of the Grand Canyon! East of the Pinacates, along Hwy 8 between the town of Sonoyta and the entrance to the Pinacate Biosphere Reserve, is a field of ancient, stabilized dunes. These are much older dunes, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years in age, but their origin is unclear.



**Pillowed pahoehoe lava, Pinacates**

Topographically and demographically, the State of Sonora can be thought of as having two great regions, with different geological and cultural histories (see West 1993). The eastern

mountain region, called *La Serrana* (the highland), comprises the western slopes and foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental. It was originally inhabited by Native American (indigenous) hunters and gatherers, later by indigenous farmers, and then in the 17th and 18th centuries by Jesuit missionaries and Spanish and mestizo miners and ranchers. Today it is losing population because its younger generation is moving to the cities, and it has become major marijuana and heroine-poppy growing areas and is confronting narcotrafficking as drugs move north to the U.S. The Western Lowland, on the other hand, was originally only sparsely populated by indigenous people. In the late 18th century, the lowlands were exploited by Spanish and Indian/mestizo gold seekers. Today the lowlands are characterized by recently developed government-sponsored irrigated agriculture (the so-called *Distritos de Riego*), with wells that exploit underground water sources, as well as coastal mariculture and tourism—all of which has given rise to dense farming, industrial centers, and rapid urbanization.



**Sand dunes of the Gran Desierto de Altar  
(Photo by Rick Westtcott)**

Since prehistoric times, people have relied heavily on the native plants of Sonora, especially the legumes—mesquite, paloverde, ironwood, etc. The most important native grasses for grazing purposes were the gramas (*Bouteloua* spp.), 18 species of which have been identified from northeast Sonora alone. The gramas turn green and lush after summer rains, drying to nutritious hay during the fall dry season. The fruits of the pitahaya dulce, or organ pipe (*Stenocereus thurberi*), saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*), and cardón (*Pachycereus pringlei*, also called sahuoso) cacti were all

important food sources, and are still collected and consumed by the Seri People (*Comcáac*) and others, as well as being enjoyed as delicacies by modern Sonorans.

The hearts, or trunk and leaf bases of agaves (what many Mexicans call *aguey*), known as *cabezas*, were gathered and slow roasted by native people to prepare a sweet and nutritious food called *mezcal*. Spaniards quickly learned to ferment and distill the *mezcal* to create the liquors we know today as mescal (and its regional variants, e.g., bacanora) and tequila. By law, tequila is always made from the blue agave, a variety of *Agave angustifolia* known as *A. angustifolia tequilana* (or *A. angustifolia weberiana*), and only in certain designated regions of west-central Mexico. Mescal can be made from many of the 400+ known species of agave (and may also have other added ingredients), although it is typically made from regional varieties of the very widespread *Agave angustifolia*. In *La Serrana* today, certain native agave plants also are used to distill *mezcal de Bacanora*, a potent artisanal mescal similar to "white lightning." [Endnote 1]



**Sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*)**

Of the native mammals, mule deer (in low elevations), white-tailed deer (largely restricted to higher elevations), rabbits, and perhaps bighorn sheep were the most commonly consumed meats in prehistoric times. Today, as in centuries past, Yaqui and Mayo Peoples use small stuffed heads with antlers of white-tailed deer as headdresses for special dancers ("deer



dancers”) during certain religious ceremonies, suggesting the prominence and importance of deer in those cultures. Hunted less commonly were pronghorn and javelina. Predators have rarely, if ever, been hunted for meat (e.g. mountain lion, jaguar, ocelot, black bear, coyote, gray wolf, and foxes). In addition to large quantities of fish and shellfish (and some sea lion), the Seri People also used to eat pelicans seasonally. However, sea turtles were their primary source of protein.



An agave roasting pit, the same design used since Pre-Columbian times



An agave plant used for making mescal in Oaxaca (not the blue agave variety)



Burro-power drives a stone wheel that grinds roasted agave *cabezas* into pulp and liquid for subsequent fermentation



The heart (“*cabeza*”) of an agave, ready for roasting to make mescal



A still used to recover the alcohol from cooked agave



The famous mescal or maguey worm – usually larvae of the cossid moth *Comadia redtenbacheri* (above), but sometimes a weevil larva (*Hypopta agavis*) is used, or the larva of a skipper butterfly (*Aegiale hesperiaris*)



The tequila bar at the Hacienda de los Santos, Álamos, Sonora, offers up ~100 varieties of the liquor. Salud!



Leg rattles (*ténaborim*) used by Yaqui and Mayo dancers are made from cocoons of the saturniid moth *Rothschildia cincta*



Larva (caterpillar) of the saturniid moth *Rothschildia cincta* (Photo by E. Pfeiler)

### ***La Serrana***

Seven major rivers drain *La Serrana*: Río San Miguel, Río Sonora, Río Mayo, Río Moctezuma, Río Matape, and the upper and lower Río Bavispe, both of which drain into the Río Yaqui, historically the largest river in Sonora (not counting the Río Colorado). Each of these is fed by snowmelt, rain, and springs in the Sierra Madre. In times past, these rivers reached the Sea of Cortez, but today they rarely flow to the ocean due to damming and irrigation diversion. The river valleys of *La Serrana* were prehistoric sites of agriculture and permanent settlement. During Spanish colonial times these valleys continued to provide most of the food for Sonora. The rugged hills and mountain ranges of *La Serrana* held silver, gold, and copper where great mineralization activity had taken place along fault-block lines. The presence of these ores has attracted miners since the 17th century.

### ***The Western Lowlands***

Geologically, Sonora is underlain by the ancient and massive North American craton, and its dominant rocks were formed 1.2-1.7 billion years ago. Many of the mountain ranges west of the Sierra Madre Occidental and its Sky Islands have been eroded down nearly to their roots, forming isolated rock masses called *inselbergs*, separated by wide bajadas (flood plains) and basins. Rich deposits of gold dust and nuggets, eroded from the former mountains, have left placers (nuggets and flakes washed downslope through erosional and sedimentary action). The



northern part of western Sonora includes the Altar Desert, part of the Lower Colorado River Valley region of the Sonoran Desert and one of



**La Serrana, the rugged western slopes of the Sierra Madre Occidental; photo taken east of Álamos (Rancho Santa Barbara)**

the driest areas in North America. However, the rivers draining *La Serrana*, over millennia, deposited copious amounts of groundwater in aquifers below the desert surface in the Western Lowlands. These aquifers have sustained rapid growth of population and agriculture in coastal Sonora since the 1950s. However, there is now little water reaching these aquifers, the rivers have been dammed for decades, and the aquifers are being pumped at a much faster rate than they are being recharged.

### **ABORIGINAL CULTURES**

Sonora was first populated by indigenous hunter-gatherers such as the Seri (Comcáac), Yaqui, and Mayo Peoples. But in the 16th century the Spanish conquest and the spread of diseases decimated these Native American populations.

The major indigenous groups of Sonora that are still with us today are the Kwapa or Cucupás (in the Colorado River Basin south of the border), O'odhams (in northern Sonora), the Comcáac or Seris (in coastal central Sonora), the Yaquis and Mayos (closely related Cahitan People of the Yaqui and Mayo River Valleys), and the little-known Guarijíos of southeastern Sonora. The Tarahumaras inhabit the high country of the Sierra Madre, or the "spine of the Sierras," but live primarily in Chihuahua.

Aside from the Comcáac (Seris) and Kwapa (Cucupás), most extant aboriginal cultures in Sonora belong to the Uto-Aztecan language group, which is widespread in Mexico.

In southern Sonora this includes the Yaqui and Mayo languages (collectively known as Cáhita). In the eastern and central parts of Sonora it included the Ópata and Pima Bajo languages. In the northwest, it was Pima Alto and the closely related O'odham (previously known as Pápago) dialects. The origin of the isolated Seri tongue, on the other hand, largely remains a mystery, although some evidence suggests a relationship with languages from the Baja California peninsula. The now vanished "Guaymas people" (*Guaimas*) evidently were the southernmost band of Seris. The Apaches, especially the Chiricahua Apache, ranged (and raided) in the northeastern corner of Sonora; they spoke an Athapascan tongue typical of northwestern America, indicating their relatively recent arrival from the north.

Even before the Spanish began to settle northwestern Mexico, aboriginal populations had dwindled, presumably due to introduced European diseases. During the 16th Century, disastrous scourges of smallpox, typhus, measles, and other diseases swept through central Mexico soon after the Spanish Conquest and probably reached all the way to Sonora. It is known that by 1592 smallpox had, at least, reached southern Sonora, causing death and famine among the Yaquis and Mayos. During the Jesuit missionization, epidemics are thought to have killed half of the Mayo population.

### **Farming Cultures**

*The Río Sonora Culture.* Most of the Indians of *La Serrana* were farmers, utilizing agricultural techniques similar to those used in Mesoamerica. Taken together, this farming culture of eastern Sonora is sometimes called the "Río Sonora Culture." Among these peoples were the Ópata and Pima Bajo, who practiced both dryfield (rain dependent) and small-scale irrigation farming. Spanish explorers (and recent archeological work) document the complex pueblos and farming of the Ópata, which included cultivation of maize, beans and squash. The Ópata region of northeastern Sonora, with an estimated 10,000 to 100,000 inhabitants, may have been the most densely populated area of northwestern Mexico when the Spanish arrived. The Ópata probably had strong trade routes to the Casas Grandes (Paquimé) people in what is now northwestern Chihuahua. However, by the time the Jesuits and miners arrived in *La Serrana*, populations had dwindled. In the south, the Yaqui and Mayo

tribes used mainly natural floodplain farming along the Yaqui and Mayo rivers, as did many O'odham and Kwapa peoples until very recent times.

*The Pima Bajo and Pima Alto Cultures.* The terms "Bajo" (lower) and "Alto" (upper), probably introduced by the Jesuits, are geographical, not linguistic categories, and the people in both regions largely spoke the same basic language. Pima Bajo extended from the middle Río Sonora (around Ures) east to the middle of the Río Yaqui, and then into and over the Sierra Madre as far as La Junta in western Chihuahua. The Pima Alto lived in the more arid northwestern Sonora and southern Arizona, especially along the Gila and Salt Rivers.

The Desert Pima (later called Papago, and now Tohono O'odham) inhabited the arid Sonoran Desert in northwestern Sonora and southern Arizona, with the most arid region inhabited by the Hia C-ed O'odham (the "Sand Papago"). Several other related tribes lived farther to the east and south, including the Soba Pima (in the lower Magdalena and Altar River Valleys), Himiris (upper Magdalena), and Sobaipuri (San Pedro, Santa Cruz and middle Gila Rivers). After the Spanish conquest, all of these peoples (including any remaining Arizona Hohokam) were considered residents of the Pimería Alta. The O'odham were hunter-gatherers who farmed scattered fields during summer rains, although near present-day Sonoyta (Sonora) they used limited canal agriculture. The Riverine Pima of Arizona had permanent villages and canal irrigation.

Of all the prehispanic cultures, one of the most interesting was that associated with curious sites called *trincheras*—terraced hillside habitations constructed on mountain slopes overlooking arable land along streams. One of the largest of these sites (and the namesake) is *Cerro de Trincheras*, located at the railroad village of Trincheras, near the town Santa Ana, Sonora. *Trincheras* sites are abundant in the Magdalena, Concepción, and Cocóspera River Basins, in the Altar Valley, and from the San Miguel and Santa Cruz River Valleys as far north as Sells, on the modern Tohono O'odham reservation in Arizona, and near Redrock (between Tucson and Phoenix). The *trincheras* are generally interpreted as having been both agricultural and defensive sites, possibly places of refuge when villages and fields were attacked by enemies. The Trincheras Culture had ties

with the Hohokam Culture to the north and may have been a forerunner of Piman Culture. Evidence of Trincheran visitation is also common along the Gulf of California coast of northern Sonora, and inland to the Caborca and Santa Ana areas.

### Hunting-Gathering Cultures

When the Spaniards arrived, two widely separated hunter-gatherer groups lived in parts of Sonora: the Seri People along the central Gulf coast (including the Guáimas people), and several Apache-related tribes of present-day Chihuahua, New Mexico and Arizona. In contrast to the Native American farming cultures, these two groups strongly resisted both Jesuit and secular attempts to "civilize," or acculturate them. The Seris were a collectively small group of fewer than 5,000, living in distinct bands along the coast between Guaymas and Cabo Lobos (Puerto Libertad), inland nearly to modern-day Hermosillo, and on Tiburón and San Esteban Islands. They spoke a distinctive language, and might have originally migrated across the Gulf from the Baja California peninsula where several Yuman-related languages were (and continue to be, e.g., Cucapá, Kiliwa, Kumiai) spoken. Seris were primarily fishers, especially for sea turtles, and shellfish gatherers, who occasionally foraged inland where they used more than 100 different plant species for food and medicines. The Seris have probably inhabited coastal Sonora in the region of Isla Tiburón for at least 2,000 years. Today, there are fewer than 1,500 Seris, and they are one of the last functioning aboriginal hunter/fisher-gatherer societies remaining in North America. The Apaches were latecomers, probably not arriving from their gradual migration from Canada into Arizona, New Mexico and Chihuahua until the last decades of the 1500s.



The border fence at Naco, Arizona

## THE MISSIONARY PERIOD (1614-1767)

Spaniards settled in Sonora (and northwestern Mexico in general) much later than in Central and Southern Mexico, due to the inclemency of the terrain and conflict with the native peoples of the region. Also, the missionary system of colonialism was distinctive from the rest of Mexico. Spanish settlement of Sonora did not occur for nearly a century after Francisco Vázquez de Coronado made one of the first explorations through the area searching for the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola. Early in the 17th Century, the Jesuit Order began to establish missions in the northwest of Mexico. By the 1640s Spanish lay settlers, mainly miners from central Mexico, had crossed the Sierra Madre Occidental into Sonora. Both forms of settlement were originally restricted to *La Serrana*, along the river valleys.



The border fence at Lukeville (AZ)-Sonoyta (SON)

Some of the most beautiful and interesting Spanish-era missions are in the Sonoran Desert. Those mission sites with still visible remains north of the border are San Xavier del Bac, San José de Tumacácori, Los Santos Ángeles de Guevavi (now an adobe ruin), and the *visita* of Calabazas. San Xavier del Bac is still an active parish, serving the descendants of the original Pimans (O'odham) for whom it was founded. The others are under the care of the U.S. National Park Service. All of these missions (though not all of the churches) were founded by the Jesuit Father Eusebio Francisco Kino. Photographs of some of the churches of Sonora (and Baja California) founded during the colonial era are provided below.

The Jesuits dominated mission activity in Sonora for more than 150 years, from their initial entry (via Sinaloa) among the Mayo and Yaqui People (1614-1617) until the order was expelled from the Spanish colonies in 1767 by edict of

King Charles III. The Jesuits were replaced by Franciscan missionaries, who arrived in the Pimería region in 1768. They quickly set out to repair or replace the Jesuit churches, often constructing new ones on or near sites of the original Jesuit churches. Before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Franciscans (of Spanish origin) were themselves banished from the northern missions, this time by the Republic of Mexico, and the buildings were left to fend for themselves. The surviving Kino mission sites include three in Arizona and nine in Sonora. One of the Sonoran churches, Caborca, is now a museum, and five are still in use—San Ignacio, Magdalena, Tubutama, Oquitoa, and Pitiquito. The “mother mission” for all of Pimería Alta, Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, founded by Kino in 1687, no longer has a standing church, and today there is only a ranch at the site.

Padre Eusebio Francisco Kino arrived in Mexico from Spain in 1681. He tried to missionize Baja California, without success, and then moved on to Sonora. His northernmost settlement was San Xavier del Bac, near Tucson (Arizona). [ENDNOTE 2] He established a mission program there in 1692 and had plans for a church, but it was not built until the 1750s. This first church was a simple adobe structure. The church we call San Xavier today was built by the Franciscans and dedicated in 1797. San Xavier church represents the finest example of baroque style architecture (with strong Moorish influence) in the borderlands region, and it maintains an almost complete, late-eighteenth century construct. To find an equally elaborate baroque church, one must travel to San Antonio (Texas) or Santa Fe (New Mexico), and even there what you will find are details, not an entire church. Walking through the front door of the San Xavier church is like stepping through a time machine into the late-18<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, one can view the skeletal remains of Padre Kino at the handsome domed crypt in the town of Magdalena de Kino, Sonora, near the church of Santa María Magdalena. Although there is evidence that Kino himself might have established a chapel near this site (perhaps in the 1690s), the existing church dates to 1832 and has been reworked several times.

Aside from his missionary work, Kino's other great contributions stemmed from his exploratory and cartography skills. He re-discovered that Baja California was indeed a peninsula, and not an island (Francisco Ulloa



had discovered this in 1539, Melchior Díaz proved it again in 1540, and Juan de Oñate again in 1604, but their writings went largely unnoticed). His maps of northwestern Mexico and southwestern United States (the Pimería Alta region) were the most accurate made to that date, and they can still be used with good precision, although there had been several earlier maps showing Baja California as a peninsula (e.g., the French Guillaume de l'Isle's *L'Amérique Septentrionale*, Paris, 1700; the Italian di Arnolde map, *America*).



Statue of Padre Kino in the city of Magdalena de Kino, Sonora. In the plaza with statue is a memorial to Kino's remains and a 19<sup>th</sup> century church. Built around 1833, the present church does not stand on the site of the original Jesuit church.



The grave of Padre Enrique Ruhen, the only priest ever to be in (brief) residence at Misión Marcelo de Sonoyta, Kino's westernmost mission, in Sonora. None of the original mission structures remain at the site—only Ruhen's grave.



Church at the site of Kino's mission in San Ignacio (San Ignacio de Cabórica), north of Magdalena, Sonora. Situated on the bank of the Río Magdalena, 9 miles north of the city of Magdalena.



The Jesuit mission of San Francisco Xavier, west of Loreto, high in the Sierra La Giganta (Baja California Sur). Founded in 1699, in an area then inhabited by Guaycura Indians, it was the first mission in Baja California to have glass windows. Construction was completed in 1758 under the direction of Padre Miguel del Barco.



An original mission olive tree, 300 year-old, still living at San Francisco Xavier mission in the Sierra La Giganta, Baja California Sur.





The spartan Jesuit mission at Mulegé, Baja California Sur, built in 1707



All that remains of the Jesuit mission at Santa Rosalía, Baja California Sur



The old mission church at El Triunfo, about an hour south of La Paz (Baja California Sur) was built by the Franciscans in the 1800s. Established as a gold and silver mining town, El Triunfo drew miners from all over the U.S. and Mexico. Once the largest city in B.C.S., it was home to over 10,000 miners in its heyday. Now a remnant of the past, the town's 115 ft-high smokestack was designed by Gustav Eiffel (of Eiffel Tower fame). Today the town has fewer than 500 inhabitants.



Mission Nuestra Señora de Loreto, the first mission built in the Californias; founded by Padre Juan María de Salvatierra in 1697 and completed in 1752 (Loreto, Baja California Sur)



The Franciscan-built church in La Paz (Baja California Sur). Hernán Cortés first landed at this site in 1535 (naming it Santa Cruz). Father Kino tried to establish a colony here in 1683, naming it Nuestra Señora de la Paz, but failed. In 1720, Jesuit Padre Jaime Bravo founded the first successful mission here, and in 1861 Bishop J. F. Escalante y Moreno began construction of the church that stands today.

Kino's expeditions to the Lower Colorado River and the Sierra Pinacate relied on the springs at Quitobaquito (now part of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument), as well as other, smaller springs and *tinajas* that his Indian guides led him to. He made four expeditions into the Pinacates: October 1698, March and April 1701, and November 1706. [Endnote 3]





**Memorial housing Padre Kino bones, in the zócalo of Magdalena de Kino, Sonora**



**Bust of Padre Kino in the zócalo of Magdalena de Kino, Sonora**



**The skeletal remains of Eusebio Kino, in the zócalo of Magdalena de Kino, Sonora**

By the end of the 17th Century, the Jesuits had founded 38 primary missions and 59 *visitas* in Sonora. According to Spanish law, a mission was to be dissolved 10 years after its founding, based on the supposition that by then the natives should be sufficiently versed in Christianity that they could be left on their own. However, the Jesuits had a habit of developing ranching and farming missions that were so economically successful that they tended to forego the 10-year rule. When they were finally expelled from the New World in 1767 (by royal edict), at the promulgation of jealous lay officials who coveted the land and cheap native labor, most of their missions were taken over by the

Franciscans (or by the Dominicans, in northern Baja California). The Jesuit enterprise of Sonora was one of the most successful endeavors of the order in the New World, on par with that of Paraguay, which was established at about the same time (recall the book "The Mission," and the movie of the same name filmed at Iguazu Falls where the countries of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay meet).



Although Padre Kino founded the town of Caborca in 1688, the mission itself was founded by Francisco Javier Saeta, in 1694. The original Jesuit church was built on the banks of the Asunción River (today known as the Río Concepción), east of the present town center, although the church standing there today was built by Franciscans (1803-1809). This Franciscan church is gradually being destroyed by erosion, especially during flood events along the river. In 1857 the church was the scene of violent fighting when the people of Caborca were driven into the church by American filibusters led by Henry A. Crabb. Crabb and his men were eventually smoked out of their adobe house-fort opposite the church, and promptly executed. The standing church in the city today (pictured above) was built by the Franciscans in 1790.

Probably the most enduring cultural changes that the missions made on native life were in agriculture, through the introduction of Old World crops (especially wheat), farm tools and techniques, and domesticated animals. During the planting and harvest periods, all men in the mission settlement were required to work the church lands 3 days/week, and their own plots 3 days/week—Sundays and feast days were reserved for compulsory church attendance. It was the introduction by the Jesuits of wheat that led to the invention of northwestern Mexico's famous flour tortillas. In Sonora to this day, thin flour tortillas (and beans and chilies) are the norm of rural diets; elsewhere in Mexico, native maize (corn) is the dietary staple. The later-arriving Franciscans were a more devotional-based sect and, not surprisingly, brought with them to Sonora the growing influence of Our Lady of Guadalupe. [Endnote 4]

While Kino and his colleagues missionized the Pimería Alta, other Jesuits, and eventually Franciscans, worked in the foothills of the Sierra Madre—La Serrana. A drive down the Río Sonora Valley today, from Cananea to Urés, takes one through a half-dozen charming colonial villages, each with its own Jesuit or Franciscan church (see images following, from north to south). This was the land of the Ópata People, and most of the names of these towns were derived from the Ópata language (e.g., Arizpe, Banámichi, Baviácora).

Although the period of initial Spanish conquest of Mexico (sometimes referred to in central Mexico as “The Rape of Mexico”) and the destruction and devastation brought by Hernan Cortés was not felt in Sonora initially, a trip to the old Playa de Cortés Hotel near Guaymas will provide a vivid glimpse of those events. In the bar of this seaside resort are four large, exquisite, and disturbing, bas-relief panels that depict Cortés’s subjugation of the Aztec people. [Endnote 5]



The Jesuit church at Arizpe, founded in 1646 by Jerónimo de la Canal. Once the capital of northern New Spain, it was from Arizpe (Horcasitas) that Juan Bautista de Anza’s expedition to Alta California was launched (in 1775), eventually leading to the his establishment of the city of San Francisco. De Anza’s remains are believed to lie in the church at Arizpe.



The Jesuit church at Huépac, founded 1639-1644, *Iglesia San Lorenzo de Huépac*. An original copy of the Mexican Act of Independence from 1810 is said to be protected inside Huépac’s City Hall.



Although the town of Aconchi, Sonora, was founded by the Jesuits in 1639, the modern church dates from the 1700s, was built by the Franciscans, and features a legendary Black Christ.



The beautiful church at Banámichi, on the zócalo. Although the mission (and town) was founded by Jesuits in 1639, the present church—*Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Loreto*—dates from Franciscan times





The town and mission at Baviácora, Sonora, were founded by the Jesuit Bartolomé Castañón in 1639. The original church stands to the left of the newer church, built by Franciscans in the 18<sup>th</sup> century—Iglesia Nuestra Señora de la Concepción de Banácora.



The beautiful Jesuit mission at Ures, along the Río Sonora, built between 1636 and 1644.



Portrait of Hernán Cortés

## SPANISH SETTLEMENT: MINES AND RANCHES

Spanish settlers began colonizing Sonora about the same time the Jesuits were founding missions. By the end of the 17th Century, ranching and silver mining had become firmly established in Sonora, eventually rivaling (but not eclipsing) the silver towns of Taxco and Zacatecas in central Mexico. The silver deposits were mostly superficial (to 150-200m depth), but below them lay copper, and after the silver ore had been mined American companies moved in during the 1800s to begin mining copper ore. Some of the original copper mines are still producing, and Sonora is the top-ranking state in Mexico for mineral extraction.

One of the most productive mining centers of Mexico was the area around Álamos in southeastern Sonora, where silver was mined for more than 200 years. In 1776, nearly two-thirds of the silver produced in northwestern Mexico came from the Álamos mines. Today Álamos is one of the most charming, largely restored colonial towns in northern Mexico.



Sketch of Eusebio Kino, by Frances O'Brien. Several interpretations of what Kino might have looked like have been prepared, including a bust in the zócalo in Magdalena de Kino



A portion of Kino's famous 1701 map of the Pimeria Alta Region, showing Baja California as a peninsula rather than an island (based on his 9 expeditions between 1698 and 1706).



Shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe, just south of Hermosillo, Sonora

With the mines came merchants, and the Sierra Madre Occidental foothills town of Hidalgo de Parral (in southern Chihuahua) came to be the merchant center for the region, being strategically positioned between the mining areas of Sonora and central Mexico. Most of the silver ore was packed out to Parral where it was assayed and then shipped to Durango or Mexico City. The Jesuits of the missions supplied food

to the miners in return for silver, which was used to purchase church furnishings and luxury items such as cloth and tobacco.

## THE INDIAN WARS

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Indian raids on mines, missions and ranches were frequently made by Apaches, Jocomes, Janos, and Sumas from the north, and Seris from the west. The Apaches began raiding in the 1680s and continued for 200 years, until the last of the bands, led by renowned chief Geronimo, was finally defeated by combined Mexican and U.S. troops in the 1880s. Even the Yaqui, who were powerfully missionized throughout most of their history, rose up against the Spanish briefly (1740-1742). The nomadic Apaches probably attacked simply because it was an easy way to acquire food, horses and slaves. Apaches became excellent horsemen, raiding the Spanish settlements for their mounts and, it is said, always choosing the best animals for riding.

It has been said that destruction by these tribes (mainly Apaches) became so rampant in the mid-18th century that Spanish officials issued regulations that all houses in Sonora were to be constructed of adobe walls with flat roofs covered with sod or dirt to avoid destruction during Indian attacks. Their weapons were bow and arrow, and occasionally the lance. Eventually, the Spaniards built a series of *presidios*, or forts, at strategic places. In addition to protecting the local population against Indian depredations, another important activity of the sierra *presidios* was escorting mule trains carrying goods from Parral over the Sierra Madre into Sonora, and returning with silver bullion. The last of the northern *presidios* was established at Tucson in 1775, from which arose the present city of Tucson, originally on the banks of the Santa Cruz River. General small-scale warfare with the Apaches continued in Sonora and Chihuahua for most of the 19th century. In the mountains of Sonora (the Sierra Madre Occidental), isolated occurrences of Apache resistance actually continued until the 1920s.

The failure of the Spanish, and later the Mexican military to make peace with the Apaches may have been due, in part, from differences of sociopolitical thought between Europeans and Indians. European ideas of hierarchy and subordination did not exist among



the Apaches, each band having temporary leaders who were not necessarily recognized by the other bands. Thus, a truce made with one group likely did not apply to members of other bands. Farther east, the states of Texas, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas confronted Comanche raids. Comanche were High Plains bison hunters of Shoshone stock that are said to have been the best riders among all the nomadic tribes of western North America. Some historians have suggested that the position of the present U.S.-Mexico border may have been largely determined by the presence of nomadic Indian bands that stopped and forced back Spanish settlement in southern Arizona and Texas.



The colonial town of Álamos, Sonora



The main zócalo and church at Álamos, Sonora

### THE U.S. INVASION OF MEXICO

The short but significant Mexican–American War lasted from spring, 1846 to fall, 1847. It followed in the wake of the 1845 U.S. annexation of Texas, which was part of Mexico's territory. Once the war began, American forces quickly occupied New Mexico and California, and then

invaded parts of northern Mexico from Baja California and Sonora, to Nuevo Leon. A force eventually captured Mexico City, ending the war in a victory for the U.S. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (*Tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo*) was signed on February 2, 1848, spelling out the terms of the victory and forcing the cession of Mexico's territory of Alta California and a large area comprising New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Wyoming and Colorado, in exchange for \$15 million. Mexicans living in those areas had the choice of relocating to within Mexico's new boundaries or receiving American citizenship with full rights (over 90% chose to become U.S. citizens). The treaty was signed in Villa de Guadalupe Hidalgo, now a neighborhood of Mexico City. In addition, the U.S. assumed a \$3.25 million debt owed by the Mexican government to U.S. citizens. Mexico accepted the loss of Texas and thereafter the Rio Grande was recognized as the border between the two countries. The war was controversial in the U.S., with the Whig Party, anti-imperialists, and anti-slavery elements strongly opposed. The Whig Party opposed Manifest Destiny and rejected this Mexican expansion strongly. The financial cost and loss of American lives was high.

### THE SONORAN GOLD RUSH

In the last half of the 1700s, long before the California gold rush, Spanish Sonorans (and some Indians, mainly Yaqui and Mayo) began panning gold from placer deposits in the Sierra Madre. As the mainly pre-Cambrian rock slowly weathered down, gold in the form of nuggets and flakes eroded from quartz veins and washed down across the alluvial fans of the mountain bajadas to form placer deposits. Most placers in southwestern U.S./northwestern Mexico were formed (trapped) between a layer of caliche (hardened calcium carbonate deposits) and the underlying bedrock. Nuggets could be obtained by "dry placering" -- tossing the broken earth, sand and gravel into the air and permitting wind to remove all but the heavier gold nuggets. "Wet placering" with running water recovered even the finer gold dust. The most productive areas were in the Altar Desert of northwestern Sonora, and there the first authentic gold rush in North America took place from 1775 to 1825. Unlike lode or ore mining, working placer deposits could be a one-person operation, or at most a small group association. It required simple tools

and nuggets of pure gold needed no further refinement. Deposits were small, however, so placer camps were ephemeral, at best lasting only a few years. Gradually the gold miners pushed farther and farther north, into Arizona and eventually west to California. When news of the discovery of large gold deposits in the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada Mountains reached Mexico in 1848, some 5,000 fortune hunters from Sonora migrated to the new gold fields. Among the many marks they left is the namesake town of Sonora, in California's Mother Lode country.

### **THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION**

So remote was Sonora from the rest of Mexico and the United States (and the world, really), and so caught up in the gold rush and other immediate affairs, that Mexico's War of Independence (early 1800s) was little more than background noise in the northwest of the country.

Sonora also played no important role during the first part of the Mexican Revolution, the so-called Maderista Period (1910-1913). However, after the killing of the great revolutionary leader Francisco Madero, in 1913, Nogales was strategically targeted by those opposed to President Victoriano Huerta. On March 13, 1913, Álvaro Obregón began his military career with the taking of this border town. The advantage that Nogales provided was access to weapons, communications, and foreign sources of financing for the revolution. Thus, Nogales came to be the place where the revolutionary government was formed by Venustiano Carranza after Madero's murder, and it remained a principal base of the revolution between 1914 and 1929.

The famous revolutionary, Francisco "Pancho" Villa, often entered Sonora from his main hangouts in the Sierra Madre of Durango and Chihuahua, and many of his most important meetings took place in Nogales. The battle that ended Villa's dominance during the revolution took place at Agua Prieta, Sonora (in 1916), when Obregón's army defeated him. Like so many Mexicans of fame, Pancho Villa's legacy is controversial; he is both revered as a hero of the Revolution and remembered as a notorious border bandit and killer! The statue of Villa in downtown Tucson was a gift to Arizona by the Mexican government in 1981. Obregón

eventually won a post-Revolution presidential election with overwhelming support, and his presidency oversaw massive education reform, the rise and flourishing of Mexican muralism, land reform, and new labor laws. Plutarco Elías Calles (who founded the PRI political party, which ruled Mexico for nearly 70 years) also came from Sonora (Guaymas). [Endnote 6]

### **"NEW SONORA"**

For most of its early years, Sonora was dominated culturally and economically by its eastern hills and mountainous *La Serrana* region. During the last half of the 20th Century, however, the arid Western Lowlands region experienced rapid economic growth, especially in irrigated agriculture along the river tracks and floodplains. This shift left the older mountainous region somewhat of a cultural backwater, characterized by quaint colonial era villages, like Álamos, Ures, Sahuaripa, Ariveche, Arizpe, Tecoripa, Suaqui Grande, Banámichi, Sinoquipe, and Bacanora. Thus, the present-day state of Sonora reveals its dual geographical personality—eastern, colonial, "Old Sonora," and the modern western "New Sonora." First to develop there were the towns of Guaymas (around 1820), the main seaport of the state, and Hermosillo, which became Sonora's capital in 1879. The first wagon road between Hermosillo and Tucson was established by 1860. The first rail line to Hermosillo opened in 1880, between Guaymas and Hermosillo, and to Nogales in 1882, which connected to southern Arizona. Grains went from Guaymas (by boat) and Hermosillo (overland) to the U.S., and machinery for the Sonoran mines was shipped to Guaymas from San Francisco.

Guaymas is one of the best natural harbors in all of Mexico. During the 19th century, large Mexican, U.S., and English mercantile firms were established there, and a regularly scheduled steamship line to San Francisco and much of the Pacific Rim developed.

Hermosillo, in 1700, was no more than a small settlement (called Pitic) housing a few Spaniards and Pima Bajo Indians. It came to serve as a *presidio* against the rebellious Seri Indians, but eventually grew to become the city of Hermosillo (named in honor of a Mexican hero of the War of Independence).





Part of the fishing fleet (sardines and shrimp) at the new dock, outer Guaymas Harbor, Sonora

After the final subjugation of the nomadic Indians in the 1880s, U.S. companies began to invest heavily in Mexico's mining industry. Foreigners and their Mexican partners reopened many of the abandoned silver, gold and copper mines (called *antiguas*), using modern techniques to exploit the deeper, poorer lode ores. Important copper mining towns such as Cananea, Nacozari de García, La Colorada, as well as Minas Pieta grew up along the southern end of the great Arizona copper belt. For a while, Cananea, with 20,000 inhabitants, was the largest city in the state. The revival of Sonoran mining was short-lived; it was arrested by the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. Today, only the rich copper mines of Cananea and Nacozari still remain highly productive, although new mines have recently opened west of the federal highway (near Querobabi).

### ***Agriculture in the Western Lowlands***

Irrigated commercial farming on the coastal river floodplains and deltas of Sonora and Sinaloa began slowly in the 1890s, but it came to be the most significant factor in the "modernization" of Northwestern Mexico in the 1950s. The fertility of floodplain and deltaic soils was well known to both indigenous peoples and Spanish settlers.

Throughout much of the latter 19th century and early 20th century, coastal farming settlements in the Río Yaqui region were ravaged by fighting between rebellious Yaqui and the Mexican military. Eventually, the government declared a campaign of extermination on the Yaqui, including taking many of them as indentured servants to work plantations in the far-away states of Nayarit,

Yucatán and Oaxaca. Many escaped government persecution by fleeing to Arizona, where some families still live on the Pasqua-Yaqui and other reservations in Tucson.

The first farmlands to be developed through the *Distrito de Riego* were along the Río Yaqui and Río Mayo in southern Sonora. Then came the Río Colorado and, finally, in the mid-20th Century, the Río Sonora and Río Magdalena-Asunción-Concepción. All were developed through government economic planning processes with no apparent regard whatsoever to water or land conservation issues. For the past half-century, the coastal plains of Sonora and Sinaloa have been Mexico's most important agricultural (and more recently, shrimp farming) lands. Major land crops include wheat, corn, rice, soy, sugar cane and vegetables, much of which finds its way to Arizona and California.

In 1926, Mexico passed the National Water Law, which committed the federal government to develop large-scale irrigation projects throughout the country. To administer the law, the government formed the Comisión Nacional de Irrigación, the main duties of which were to undertake construction of large-scale dams and canals, and to colonize the newly formed irrigation districts. In 1946, the Comisión was replaced by the Secretaría de Recursos Hidráulicos, which had cabinet-level status and thus increased access to federal funds. This initiated a period of rapid dam construction and expansion of irrigated lands. Along the larger rivers, annual summer floods were controlled by the construction of large dams and reservoirs in the 1940s and 1950s.

By the 1960s, the first signs of increasing soil salinity were appearing in the Yaqui and Mayo deltas. Excessive application of water to the land was viewed as the cause, so deep drainage ditches were built to carry excess irrigation runoff to the Sea of Cortez. Extraction of water from aquifers in the Río Sonora delta (the "Costa de Hermosillo" District) has far exceeded natural replenishment, leading to a rapid fall in the water table.

Growth in the population of the Hermosillo area (over 700,000 residents today) has exacerbated this water problem. Intrusion of salt water from the Sea of Cortez into the aquifers, caused by the falling water table, made much of the groundwater along the coast too saline for

agricultural use. In response to these problems, the government, in 1989, limited the number of permitted wells to 498, which halved the annual amount of ground water pumped, from 800 million to 400 million cubic meters per year. It was hoped that this would shift agriculture away from water-intensive crops like wheat and cotton, toward crops requiring less irrigation. However, over-exploitation of fossil water is now taking place in the Caborca area, where hundreds of wells supply water for wheat, cotton, olive groves and vineyards. [Endnote 7] Hermosillo faces serious water shortages and is in the process of completing an extensive, expensive, and highly controversial aqueduct project to bring water from the Río Yaqui to the city (over strong objections from the Yaqui community).

### **Fishing**

About the same time that government-sponsored irrigation districts were being established in western Sonora, commercial fishing was evolving along the Sea of Cortez coast. The first Mexican shrimp boats were operating out of Guaymas in the 1920s. In the 1930s the Japanese, with permission of the Mexican government, began exploiting shrimp stocks off Guaymas. John Steinbeck and Ed Ricketts observed the Japanese operations during their 1940 Sea of Cortez expedition, describing the destructive fishing methods in their classic book, *The Sea of Cortez. A Leisurely Journey of Travel and Research*. The Mexican government eventually banned the Japanese fleets from the Gulf, but their success led to the establishment of the three major fishing centers of Sonora: Guaymas, Puerto Peñasco, and Yavaros.

Due to its high productivity and subtropical location, the Gulf of California teems with many species of finfish, crustaceans, and molluscs. Over 6000 species of animals have been reported from this sea, and many still remain undescribed. The numerous marsh- and mangrove-bordered lagoons and estuaries that line the Gulf coast of Sonora and Sinaloa serve as nurseries for juveniles of many important shellfish and finfish. The majority of the fisheries catch today is shrimp, squid and sardines. Nearly three-fourths of the shrimp catch is exported to the U.S., and today the shrimp harvest (including farmed shrimp) from the Sea of Cortez makes up about 60% of Mexico's total

fishery by dollar value. Industrial ("high seas") shrimpers use one of the most destructive fishing methods known—dragging large trawls across the sea floor, ripping up the top few inches of the sea bed, capturing (and killing) virtually every animal the nets encounter. Limited data suggest that the entire benthic ecosystem of the shallow Gulf has been dramatically altered because of this continual disturbance, year after year, since the 1920s. The principal change appears to be greatly reduced species diversity, loss of rare species, and hypoxia (severe oxygen depletion) due to the rain of decomposing by-catch dumped off the shrimp boats day after day. However, no thorough scientific study of this long-term disturbance has been undertaken. The sardine catch (comprising mainly *Sardinops sagax* and *Opisthonema libertate*, and the recently reestablished northern anchovy *Engraulis mordax*) is six times the shrimp catch by tonnage, but of relatively less value. Sonora accounts for 60% of Mexico's sardine take. Most of it is processed for poultry feed and fishmeal fertilizer. It is likely that every commercial species in the Sea of Cortez is unsustainably fished today.



Shrimp boat, working out of Puerto Peñasco, 2013

### **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN SONORA**

Sonora has over 7,000 sq mi (>18,130 sq km) of protected wildlife areas. Federally-protected natural areas in Mexico are of six types: biosphere reserves, national parks, areas for the protection of flora and fauna, protected natural resource areas, natural monuments, and shrines. Sonora has about 10 federally protected areas, around 20 state-protected sites, and a number of private natural reserves. Among these is the *El Pinacate and Gran*



*Desierto de Altar Biosphere Reserve* (both a Mexican and a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and also one of Mexico's designated "13 natural marvels"), located between Puerto Peñasco and the U.S. border in the Altar Desert. The reserve comprises rich Sonoran Desert habitat, massive dune fields, and hundreds of dormant volcanic craters. Bordering the western edge of the Pinacate reserve is the 3,609 sq mi (9,348 sq km) *Alto Golfo de California y Delta de Río Colorado Biosphere Reserve*, at the head of the Gulf of California. This, and the Pinacate reserve, were created in 1993. The *Sierra de Ajos-Bavispe Natural Resource Area* is in the central interior of Sonora. The 156 sq mi (405 sq km) *Reserve for the Protection of Flora and Fauna, Sierra de Alamos-Río Cuchujaqui* is in the far southern foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental in Sonora.

In addition to these, and others, all of the islands of the Sea of Cortez comprise the *Protected Natural Resources of the Flora and Fauna of the Islands of the Gulf of California*. Additionally, the entirety of Bahía Adair, between the towns of Puerto Peñasco and El Golfo de Santa Clara, is a Ramsar Designated Wetland. Also, the Seri coast is a designated Ramsar Wetland. The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, known as the Ramsar Convention, is an international treaty that defines actions and areas of cooperation for conservation of sustainable wetlands.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

My deepest appreciation to friends and colleagues who read and commented on early drafts of this essay, including: Clare Aslan, Michelle María Early Capistrán, Dan Lynch, Larry Marshall, Cathy Moser Marlett, Ed Pfeiler, Alberto Suarez, and especially ace editors Lloyd T. Findley and Linda M. Brewer. Thanks to John Palting and Wendy Moore for help with agave "worm" identifications.

## ENDNOTES

*Endnote 1.* According to one popular myth, the Aztecs discovered the beverage *pulque* (later distilled into mescal/tequila by the Spaniards) when a bolt of lightning struck an agave field. The bolt instantaneously cooked the heart of one of the plants, and caused it to quickly ferment. The Aztecs noticed the aromatic nectar exuding from the cooked plant, and deemed it to be a miraculous gift from the gods (which they named *pulque*). Subsequently, during colonial times, it was distilled into *vino mezcal* ("mezcal wine"), the most popular version of which came to be tequila. (In Mexico, it is usually spelled *mezcal*; in the U.S. it is usually spelled *mescal*.) There are today around 30 tequila distilleries in Mexico, producing hundreds of brands/varieties of tequila in six categories (fixed by federal law): (1) 100% agave tequilas are required by law to be made from 100% fermented juices from the blue agave, with no additives, not even sugar. (2) *Mixto* tequilas must be at least 51% fermented juices from the blue agave, but additives may be used, such as fermented cane sugar juices (ethanol). (3) *Blanco* tequila is tequila in its youngest and purest form, just as produced by the distillation process, without the effects of any barrel aging. Blancos can be 100% agave, or *mixto*. (4) Gold (*joven abocado*) tequilas are usually *mixtos*, unaged blanco tequila to which additive colors (usually caramel) and flavors are mixed after the distillation process. (5) *Reposado* tequilas are, literally, "rested." By law, a *reposado* must be aged in wood for at least 60 days, but most are actually aged closer to a year. They are aged in large wooden tanks, or sometimes in small oak barrels. (6) *Añejo* tequilas are "aged" or "old." By law, *añejos* must be aged for at least 12 months in government-sealed barrels that are no larger than 600 liters. Often, the barrels used are old 190-liter whisky barrels from Kentucky. The longer the aging process (in wood), the darker the tequila becomes.

Many mescal makers put a "worm" in the bottle, said to enhance the flavor (also said to be a marketing ploy). The "worm" is actually an insect larva, typically either of a cossid moth (*Comadia redtenbacheri*), a skipper butterfly (*Aegiale hesperiaris*), or a weevil (*Hypoapta agavis*). All are found associated with living agaves, but only the weevil causes any real damage to the plants. In Oaxaca, these dried and ground-up larvae are often added to chile

(and other secret ingredients) to concoct a tasty powder that one sprinkles on a citrus slice to accompany a glass of mescal. Locals insist the insect larva enhances the flavor and enjoyment of the drink, and perhaps even gives the drinker temporary special powers of love and intellect.

*Endnote 2.* San Xavier del Bac, about 12 miles south of Tucson, is the best known and most elaborate colonial mission church in the Pimería Alta. Padre Kino first visited this site in 1692, and that year he established a mission program for the Piman (O'odham) People that lived in the area. His plans for a church, however, never came to fruition. In the 1750s, a simple adobe hall church was constructed by Jesuits. In 1767 the Jesuits were expelled from the Spanish colonies and replaced (a year later) by Franciscans, and it was they who built the church that stands today. The old adobe church was dismantled and moved, piece by piece, to the east side of the new one, where it was recycle into the convento wing that still stands. The new church was dedicated in 1797. The eastern bell tower was never finished, perhaps because the builders ran out of money. The famous cat and mouse that occupy the front church facade have been there since the church was built, but no one today knows what they represent (although there are no shortages of interpretations). Today the church functions under the auspices of the Franciscans (the Order of Friars Minor), and it continues to serve the local O'odham community (although everyone is welcome at the services).

It is often said that all Jesuit churches in the Pimería Alta were built with the entrance facing south. While this is true for San Xavier church, it is not the case for all, many of which face west, south-by-southeast, or west-by-northwest.

*Endnote 3.* On Kino's first Pinacate expedition, he saw the mountains of Baja California and judged that there could be no seaway separating them from the mainland. On his second and third expeditions, he saw the head of the Gulf of California, the actual land connection between Baja and the mainland, confirming the peninsular nature of the former; on these trips he also reached the Sea of Cortez, on the coast of Sonora. On his fourth expedition, he took "official witnesses" to the top of Sierra Pinacate, to prove to them the peninsular nature of Baja California. Kino was 61 years of age on this fourth expedition to the Pinacates.



*Endnote 4.* The Virgin of Guadalupe has been known by many names (the Dark Virgin, the Virgin of Tepeyac, *La Criolla*, etc.), and the hold that devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe has on the Mexican people is legendary and profound. In fact, she has come to be venerated throughout Latin America and is sometimes referred to as the Empress of the Americas. This devotion is based on the story of the Virgin Mary's appearance to the newly converted Aztec (Náhuatl) Indian, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin, in 1531, in the village of Tepeyac, near Mexico City. The apparition occurred early in the conquest of Mexico, just ten years after the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán fell to the conquistador Cortés. Not only did the Virgin appear, but also she left her beautiful image on Juan Diego's cloak, in which he carried "miraculous roses" (unknown in the New World at that time) from Tepeyac Hill to Bishop Zumárraga, with a request from the Virgin that a new church be built on the hilltop site. The cloak is now on display at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. Zumárraga was a compassionate man who built the first hospital, library and university in the Americas. He was also the "protector of the Indians," entrusted by Emperor Charles V to enforce his decree of 1530 that Indians could not be made slaves. Shortly thereafter, an adobe structure was built atop Tepeyac Hill in honor of the Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Guadalupe. It was dedicated on December 26, 1531, the feast of St. Stephen the Martyr. This was 76 years before the first permanent English colony was established in the New World (Jamestown, 1607)

The first published account of the apparition came more than 100 years later, in 1648, by the Oratorian priest, Miguel Sánchez. Sánchez's account was responsible for the popularization and spread of the devotion among the *criollos* of Mexico City – that is, among those people of European stock who had been born in the New World. Though the only difference between *criollos* and Spaniards from Europe (from the Iberian Peninsula) was their place of birth, the *criollos* saw themselves as marginalized. Disdained by the Spaniards of New Spain (the Spanish colonies of the New World), excluded from the topmost positions of local government, and suppressed by what they regarded as second-class citizenship, they reacted by developing a strong sense of group and regional identity. Thus, Sanchez's book was not only a

devotional treatise but a complex celebration of *criollismo* that used the vision of the Virgin of Guadalupe as proof of special divine favor toward the *criollos* – the Virgin Mary had revealed herself to the *criollos*, even if through the agency of a lowly Náhuatl Indian. The devotion soon spread throughout New Spain. It reached Europe through the efforts of Pedro de Gálvez, a former *visitador* in New Spain and a member of the Council of the Indies, who in 1662 subsidized publication of Mateo de la Cruz's version of the apparition story.

The first political use of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a national symbol was during the Mexican War of Independence (1810), when the Virgin appeared on the banners of the military general Miguel Hidalgo, while his troops proclaimed long life to her and death to the Spaniards. Thus, the long-standing rivalry between the Virgin of Guadalupe (*La Criolla*) and the Virgin of Remedios (*La Conquistadora*) became clearly marked along nationalistic and political lines. It is not surprising, therefore, that, after independence was attained, the Virgin of Guadalupe emerged as the preeminent national religious symbol of Mexico. As the famous writer-philosopher Octavio Paz once observed, "The Mexican people, after more than two centuries of experiments and defeats, have faith only in the Virgin of Guadalupe and the National Lottery." The narration of the Virgin of Guadalupe is sometimes called the "fifth gospel." It has been one of the most important evangelizers in the history of the Americas.

Two hundred years after Juan Diego's vision, in the 18th Century, the road to fame for aspiring composers in Italy had come to be the writing of operas. For their Latin American, New World counterparts, however, the most prestigious genre was *Maitines* (or *Matins*), a Roman Catholic service traditionally performed in the early hours of the morning. The *Matins* provided a range of opportunities to display compositional skill, as it juxtaposed a wide variety of textures and style, commonly paralleling that of an Old World opera but with monophonic *Psalms* in chant, intoned *Lecciones* that could preach or weave a story, and sets of *Responsorios* that elegantly combined voices with instruments. In 1742, the Italian composer Ignacio de Jerusalem was recruited to Mexico City to help strengthen the music resources of New Spain's growing empire. In 1750 he was appointed to the top post of Chapel Master at the Cathedral. In

1764, in Mexico City, he presented his masterpiece, “*matins* for the Virgin of Guadalupe.” Jerusalem’s *matins* have rarely been recorded, but several versions of this stunning composition do exist; my favorite is “*Matins* for the Virgin of Guadalupe, 1764,” by Chanticleer (Teldec 3984-21829-2).

The name “Guadalupe” may derive from the Aztec word *tlēcuātlēcupe*, which means “one who crushes the head of the serpent.” When pronounced correctly, the name sounds like “Guadalupe,” and this is how the Spaniards interpreted it. There is, in Spain, a town (with a prominent Marian shrine) by the name of Guadalupe, in the province of Cáceres. The feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe is December 12. The feast day for Juan Diego, who was declared a saint in 2002 by Pope John Paul II, is December 9. And, the Virgin of Guadalupe in Spain is also dark skinned!

Endnote 5. The artist Dick Wiken was born and died in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1913-1985). He was a self-taught sculptor, designer, and craftsman. Wiken attended the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee for two years, studying journalism, English and history, but did not receive a degree. During World War II, he served in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (1943-1946). Although self-taught, Wiken eventually became an Instructor of Sculpture at the Art Institute in Milwaukee (1934-1937), and then at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee (1938-1943). His works in wood, stone and metal decorate many buildings and homes in the Milwaukee area and beyond. Among his most unusual and interesting work is a set of wood carved panels at the Playa de Cortés Hotel, near Guaymas (Sonora). The panels depict the “Rape of Mexico” during the Spanish Conquest. The hotel was built in 1934 by a railroad baron, to facilitate the arrival of the passenger train to Guaymas. Wiken’s four, commissioned, bas relief wood sculptures, which are displayed in the hotel’s bar, are each about 4 ft X 6 ft, and they are crafted in deep rich mahogany. The scenes are of conquistadors and naked Aztec women, and lust and violence mingle as Spanish armor meets bare skin. Wiken carved these in 1946/47, with the intent of depicting the story of the Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortés overthrowing the Aztec Empire. Wiken titled the works, “The Rewards of Conquest—Wenching, Gambling, Drinking and Indolence.” One of the panels shows Cortés and his mistress, La

Malinche, who betrayed her own people. Her legacy lives on today, in the word “*malinchista*,” which refers to a person disloyal to their country. Another panel depicts Cortés mourning his losses after the great battle of *La Noche Triste* (The Night of Sorrows) where he lost many soldiers in a trap set by Aztec warriors. There is also a series of nine smaller panels by Wiken above the bar called “The Court of Cortez,” and these illustrate the sacrifices, impalings, and destruction of Aztec icons by the Spanish soldiers. All this work is beautiful, and disturbing. The juxtaposition of these carvings in the bar of a happy seaside resort is somewhat jarring, and most visitors seem to prefer drinking their margaritas to studying the details in Wiken’s exquisite art. Photos of Wiken’s four panels follow.







Shortly after the expeditions of Christopher Columbus, and for much of the time that Baja California was thought to be an island, its mystery was also shrouded in legends of gold, pearls, griffins, and beautiful Amazon women. Most of the mystique about the “island” of California came from a famous chivalric novel titled, *Las sergas de Esplandián* (The Sagas of Esplandián), by the Spanish writer Garcí Ordóñez de Montalvo. This romantic novel had become beloved in medieval Spain, inspiring the ambitions of sailors, soldiers, and adventurers. The novel was greatly admired by Hernán Cortés and, in fact, the writings of Cortés also leaned toward the fantastic, as was the tendency of the times. In Ordóñez de Montalvo’s story, the noble knight Esplandián survives the siege of Constantinople by a pagan group of Amazons from the “Island of California,” riding griffins and led by Queen Calafia. The women of California were black skinned, valiant, with wondrous bodies, great strength, and ardent hearts. Their weapons were made of pure gold, the only metal that existed in California. The Island was said to be in the New World, west of the land that Columbus had

discovered, and “on the right hand of the Indies.” Many Europeans already believed that “the Indies” of Marco Polo lay not far beyond the lands of the New World. Cortés first received news of the Pacific Ocean in 1522, less than a year after the fall of Tenochtitlán (the ancient capital of the Aztec Empire), and 12 years after *Las sergas* was published. The report came from one of Cortés’ captains, Gonzalo de Sandoval, who had been sent to explore the western sea of México. De Sandoval reported seeing an island rich in pearls and gold, and populated by women who killed their male offspring—no doubt a story inspired by Ordóñez de Montalvo’s classic novel. In 1532, Cortés sent Captain Diego Hurtado to seek out the Island of California. But what Hurtado found were primitive people (and no Amazons) living in a parched desert with no gold and little water. None-the-less, Cortés officially named the land California, reasoning it must be the place described in Ordóñez de Montalvo’s novel. In 1535, Cortés embarked on his own expedition to colonize California, placing 320 people in Bahía de la Santa Cruz (now known as the Bay of La Paz). Cortés claimed it for Spain, and as navigators pushed northward, the name California came to include Spanish claims from the tip of the peninsula to Puget Sound. But the colonists could not survive in La Paz, for lack of food and water, and probably because the locals were unfriendly. María Early Capistrán (2014) notes, had they discovered that sea turtles were a rich source of food, they might have fared far better; but records suggest that, for whatever reason, they did not take advantage of that abundant seafood.

*Endnote 6.* Pancho Villa was named by his parents, Doroteo Arango Arambula. He fled from his home (in Durango) to the sierras at the age of sixteen, after shooting the master of the hacienda in the foot for trying to rape his younger sister (or so the legend goes). It was then that he changed his name to Francisco “Pancho” Villa, and took up a life of crime and rebellion. The reason Pancho Villa was killed seems to be shrouded in mystery. The Revolution was over and he was “in retirement” in the Sierras, breeding fighting cocks and running his estate at Canutillo, Durango. It is said that, when the assassins murdered him in 1923 (in Parral, Chihuahua), he had more than 8000 rifles, a half-million cartridges, and a large supply of bombs and hand grenades at his hacienda. He was, as he liked to say, “hated by

thousands and loved by millions.” President Obregón may have feared that Villa had more revolutionary ideas in him, and ordered his murder. Today, a statue of Villa also stands in the plaza of Canutillo—the state’s most famous native son. And the Francisco Villa Museum in Parral (Chihuahua) interprets his unique and colorful history and, every year in July, reenacts his assassination. To say the man was complicated is an understatement. After invading the U.S., and sacking and burning the town of Columbus, New Mexico, General Peshing himself went after Villa in Mexico, spending nearly a year perusing him to no avail. It is said that, during the revolution, Villa once ordered the killing of 90 women by firing squad in Camargo (Chihuahua), for consorting with the enemy. He was fearless of death, leading his cavalry charges himself. He married 26 times, and was a compulsive womanizer.

*Endnote 7.* The vineyards provide table grapes and also supply several wineries in northwest Mexico, including the Domeq winery, which produces good brandies and wines, including the famous "Padre Kino Vino Tinto"—at about \$5/liter, an agreeable red table wine (Mexico’s version of “Three-Buck Chuck.” As of 2014, over 2000 acres of vineyards were under cultivation just north of Hermosillo.

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