

El Camino Real de las Californias: forging connections between Baja California and Alta California

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The Balances y Perspectivas conference highlights the important connections between the prehistoric, colonial, and historic inhabitants of the three Californias. The presentations focus specifically on the diverse range of heritage sites related to El Camino Real de las Californias, as well as the regional connections fostered by El Camino Real during the colonial period. For my paper, I would like to examine one aspect of the relationship between the Baja California peninsula and Alta California that was made possible by El Camino Real, namely the physical movement of people, animals, and objects within the three Californias. My particular focus will be the south-to-north migration of colonists and indigenous people from the Baja California peninsula to Alta California.

From 2005 to 2008, I conducted an archaeological research project focused on the Dominican mission of Santa Catalina, located in the Paipai indigenous reserve in the Sierra Juárez of northern Baja California. Since then, much of my research has focused on the Franciscan missions of the San Francisco Bay region, primarily Mission Santa Clara, which is on the campus of Santa Clara University where I teach. While these two missions are roughly 900 km apart, I have always wondered about the direct connections that existed between the Baja California peninsula and the San Francisco Bay region, which represents the far northern extent of Spanish California.

This question, moreover, relates directly to the definition of "cultural route" stated in the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes (ICOMOS 2008), specifically points A and B:

- A) [A cultural route] must arise from and reflect interactive movements of people as well as multi-dimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge and values between peoples, countries, regions or continents over significant periods of time;
- B) It must have thereby promoted a cross-fertilization of the affected cultures in space and time, as reflected both in their tangible and intangible heritage.

Given my interest in the missions of Baja California and Alta California, combined with the theme of this conference, I am currently examining the historical record for information about people from the Baja California peninsula who later came to Alta California during the colonial era.

Early colonial settlers

As we know, the first permanent colonists to enter Alta California did so in 1769, arriving both by land and by sea. Those who came by land departed from Mission San Fernando Velicatá

following parts of what would become El Camino Real north to Alta California. These groups included Franciscan missionaries Junípero Serra and Juan Crespí, numerous soldiers, and a large contingent of Cochimí Indians whom I will discuss further below. Two later expeditions brought several hundred more individuals to Alta California (see the general overview in Mason 1998). The first involved a group of 240 settlers who traveled overland from Sonora to Alta California, arriving in January 1776. The expedition was led by Juan Bautista de Anza, and followed a route he had previously scouted with Fr. Francisco Garcés and Cochimí Indian Sebastián Taraval (Beebe and Senkewicz 2001:193). The second was led by Fernando Rivera y Moncada, who had a long history of military service, exploration, and leadership in Baja California and later in Alta California. During what would turn out to be his last assignment, he led civilian families and colonial soldiers from Sinaloa to Alta California. Yet just as the members of the Rivera expedition entered California in 1781, the Yuma uprising began, and Rivera, along with Garcés and others, was killed. This uprising effectively closed the overland route between New Spain and California. Thus those individuals who arrived prior to 1781 formed the nucleus of the Alta California colony. Included in that count are the members of the original expeditions in 1769, the Anza party, and the immigrants from Sinaloa led by Rivera.

Historian William Mason (1998) has investigated the colonial census of 1790 with regard to the demographic patterns of the *gente de razón* in Alta California at that time (the census generally did not enumerate Indians). He speculates that fewer than 300 new individuals came to Alta California between 1790 and 1820 (Mason 1998:44), suggesting that those settlers already in the province by 1790 had a significant influence over its eventual development. With that in mind, it is interesting to note the geographic origins of colonial settlers who came to Alta California. Mason provides a tabulation of the origin or birth place of the adult individuals listed in the 1790 Alta California census by geographic region: of 395 individuals with origins listed, the majority relate to the Rivera and Anza expeditions: 189 were from Sinaloa and 64 were from Sonora. Baja California, however, provided the third most individuals, with 57. Interestingly, most of those individuals from Baja California were from the southern region of the peninsula, including Loreto and towns in the Cape Region (San Antonio, Santa Ana, and San José del Cabo).

After the Yuma uprising of 1781, the primary means of reaching Alta California were by sea and by following El Camino Real north from Baja California. For much of the Spanish period in Alta California, then, the immigration of *gente de razón* was limited primarily to soldiers serving along the Dominican frontier who transferred to the San Diego company (Mason 1998:42-43). While I have not yet compiled data on colonial settlers who moved from Baja California to Alta California after 1790, Mason's (1998) demographic analysis indicates that the Baja California families listed in the 1790 census rarely made it to northern California. El Camino Real facilitated movement of people, goods, and ideas throughout both regions, and certainly significant numbers of colonial soldiers and settlers did put down roots in the San Francisco Bay area, but it appears that much of the *gente de razón* who originated in Baja California stayed closer to what would eventually become the international border.

Cochimí participation in the colonization of Alta California

While the 1790 census offers a snapshot of individuals and families who moved north from Baja California, the census largely excludes indigenous people and others living at the Franciscan missions. In addition to the colonial settlers who came to Alta California, we can also consider the indigenous people who moved northward with the Franciscans to open Alta California to Spanish

colonialism. Among these are the 60 or so Cochimí who accompanied the expeditions of 1769 (Lacson 2009:14-17). These individuals hailed largely from the central desert missions of San Borja, San Ignacio, Santa Maria and Purísima Concepcion. In 1773, another group of Cochimí, including families and young men, made the trek north from Mission Santa Gertrudis to Alta California to bolster the agricultural program in the region's young mission system (Lacson 2009:28; Street 1996). Thus the early Alta California colony included a sizable population of Cochimí from the central peninsula. The Cochimí from that area had lived in the Jesuit missions and knew what it would take to establish new missions in Alta California, with several serving as interpreters during the initial journeys northward. Although many deserted the Franciscans after bouts of starvation and violence during their journey, the Cochimí literally helped to blaze the path of El Camino Real north from San Fernando Velicatá (Street 1996). Those who continued on to Alta California aided in the founding of several of the early missions there, including the missions of San Diego, San Carlos Borromeo, and San Gabriel (Lacson 2009:124; Street 1996).

In autumn of 1769, roughly 15 Cochimí continued on with Gaspar de Portolá to reconnoiter the port of Monterey. During that trip, the party also ventured northward and is credited with being the first group of Europeans to discover San Francisco Bay. Of course, their party was not entirely of Euroamerican descent, as it included a relatively large contingent of Cochimí men (Milliken et al. 2009:89). Seven years later, in 1776, the Spanish formally colonized the San Francisco Bay region with the establishment of the mission and presidio of San Francisco. Among the group of 75 individuals who came north from Monterey were 13 Indian servants, most of whom were from Baja California (Milliken et al. 2009:95)

Alta California sacramental registers

To obtain more detailed information about what became of these Cochimí and other native individuals who traveled El Camino Real northward to Alta California, I conducted a preliminary search for individuals from Baja California who appear in the sacramental registers from missions in Alta California. This research was conducted using the *Early California population project database* hosted by the Huntington Library (2006). This search was limited to the presence of Baja California or Antigua California in the “origins” field, or to those individuals who originated at the handful of Baja California missions that have their own codes within the ECPP database. Despite these limitations, I identified 173 individuals in the Alta California sacramental registers dating from 1772 to 1850.

This baseline population can be examined several ways, and this paper represents my preliminary observations. First, I considered the ethnicity of those individuals from Baja California who made the long trek to Alta California. One hundred and ten were recorded as *indios* or other terms denoting indigenous people, 30 were listed as *gente de razón*, and another 33 did not include direct information regarding their ethnicity. We can also look at the geographical distribution of the migrants. Forty are listed simply as coming from Baja California or Antigua California, but others list distinct missions or other locations. In looking at the origin and/or baptismal mission for those individuals appearing in the Alta California sacramental registers, two main regions of Baja California stand out: the central desert missions such as San Borja, San Ignacio, and San Fernando, as well as missions on the Dominican Frontier such as Santo Tomas and San Miguel. In contrast to the census of 1790, very few of the individuals listed in the mission sacramental registers are from the southern peninsula.

In examining the geographic distribution of where individuals from Baja California were

noted in Alta California sacramental registers, it is clear that many stayed in southern California, particularly in regions around San Diego and Los Angeles. Yet there is a notable presence in the north as well. There were roughly 25 marriages recorded in the greater San Francisco Bay region that were between local indigenous people and Indians who came north from Baja California. These types of marriages often took place soon after the founding of particular missions: of the first dozen weddings at Mission Santa Clara, for example, the grooms in three cases were Indians from Baja California (Milliken 1995:70; Milliken et al. 2009).

In terms of indigenous people from Baja California, it appears that they enjoyed a relatively high status in the Alta California missions. Many have occupations indicating that they worked closely with the Franciscans in the management of the missions (Milliken 1995:93-94). One notable Baja California Indian who came to Alta California was Raymundo Morante, who lived at Mission San Francisco de Asís. He is well known for leading punitive expeditions against rebellious Indians from the San Francisco Bay area in the late 1790s (Milliken et al. 2009:104). Another man listed as an Indian from the Baja California mission of San Ignacio even married a woman listed as *gente de razón*, which is an extremely rare form of interethnic union for Alta California (San Gabriel marriage #606). The groom was living at Mission San Gabriel, while the wife was from a *vecino* family in the pueblo of Los Angeles.

In addition to the individuals listed in sacramental registers for baptism, marriage, or death, I also searched the Early California Population Project database for people from Baja California who served as godparents in the Alta California missions. The database holds records for nearly 400 such baptisms. Because serving as a godparent implies certain kinds of social relationships, these records are especially important for understanding which Alta California missions had influential populations of Indians from Baja California. As with the Baja California population as a whole, godparents from Baja California were most common in the southern missions, including 25 at Mission San Diego and an astounding 231 at Mission San Gabriel. However, Mission San Carlos on the central coast of Alta California did have 55 such records, possibly reflecting the importance of the Cochimí Indians who accompanied the Franciscans during their early expeditions northward. Little information is available regarding the specific origins of the Baja Californian godparents, but Mission San Borja has by far the highest representation with 75, all at Mission San Gabriel.

Archaeological connections?

While certainly more work could be done with these demographic datasets, it is clear that El Camino Real facilitated meaningful contacts between populations from diverse regions. In terms of the archaeological evidence for contacts between New Spain and Alta California, the material is of course abundant. Archaeological materials that originated in New Spain include metal implements, ceramics such as majolica and other glazed ceramics, as well as introduced species of plants and animals. Some of these, such as animals brought overland, relate directly to El Camino Real, while others such as the ceramics likely arrived on the supply vessels that sailed annually from San Blas until the 1810s (Perissinotto 1998; Skowronek et al. n.d.). In terms of individuals who journeyed from New Spain, bioarchaeological work at presidio chapels has identified the remains of several colonial settlers (e.g., Carrico 1973; Costello and Walker 1987). The intercultural connections fostered by El Camino Real are also archaeologically apparent. Prior to colonization, for example, no Native Californians living on the coast north of San Diego regularly manufactured or used ceramics. Yet archaeological investigations at the missions of Alta

California have revealed enormous quantities of ceramic artifacts, most of which were manufactured by Native Californians who had been taught the skills necessary for pottery making from colonial artisans or possibly native people from Baja California.

Conclusion

Those of us living in Alta California often have a fairly limited understanding of the history of Spanish colonization. For too many of us, the historic period begins in 1769 with the arrival of the Franciscans, and is conceived of as an interaction between “Europeans” and “Indians”. The historical and archaeological investigation of El Camino Real de las Californias requires us to take a broader perspective. The majority of the early colonial settlers in Alta California were not originally from Spain, but rather represented individuals and families from New Spain, including a sizeable number from Baja California. Similarly, the Alta California missions were only founded with the help of Cochimí neophytes who traveled northward from the Baja California peninsula. For the most part, they are less well known than the *gente de razón* whom they accompanied, but their presence is attested by the documentary record. And during the following 60 or 70 years, numerous soldiers, Indians, and others came to Alta California from Baja California. These are just some of the few examples of the movements and exchanges that took place along this important “cultural route.”

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