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A Late Recounting of the Vizcaino Expedition and Plans for the Settlement of California

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INTRODUCTION

THE considerable royal investment in the Expedition of 1602-1603 up the west coast of the Californias led by Sebastian Vizcaíno resulted in a mass of reports and recommendations, some effective sketch maps by the cosmographer Geronimo Martin Palacios, redrawn by Enrico Martínez (Portillo 1947:353-417; Mathes 1965, I:499-565), but very little action (Torquemada 1723, I:693-725; Mathes 1968:54-165). For more than a century what interest there was in California was to be concentrated on the pearl-oyster beds of the eastern coast and later on the evangelization of the Indians. Mathes (1968: 108-114) attributes the loss of momentum to the replacement of the Viceroy Zúñiga, Conde de Monterrey by Juan de Mendoza y Luna, Marqués de Montesclaros. The latter seems to have opposed consistently both the plans and important official appointments for Vizcaíno. Furthermore, as the return route of the Manila Galleon became better known the costly establishment of a base in California to relieve its crews was regarded as less essential, even though morbidity and mortality from scurvy took regular tolls.

From the first, the most enthusiastic protagonist for the settlement of California,

other than perhaps Vizcaíno himself, was the Carmelite friar, Antonio de la Ascención, who accompanied the voyage as second chaplain and as assistant cosmographer. He is the primary source of the best known narrative of the expedition, that of Torquemada (1723). As to actual plans for settlement, however, Fr. Ascención differed sharply from Vizcaíno. The latter planned an isolated rest stop at Monterey Bay, the first landfall made by the Manila Galleon. Ascención's strongest interest was the evangelization of all the natives of Western North America. He proposed to begin at the southern tip of Baja California and work steadily northward, completing a full spiritual conquest of the entire region. Curiously, it was approximately this plan that was begun by the Jesuits nearly a century later and accomplished in 1770 under government auspices.

In 1608, Ascención wrote directly to the king proposing a settlement at San Bernabé, as the embayment behind the line of granitic peaks at Cape San Lucas was called (Mathes 1965:*documento* 80). Writing from the Carmelite convent in Mexico City in 1620, presumably in response to an inquiry from the Audiencia, he prepared an extensive memorial giving both a narrative of the 1602-1603

expedition and a detailed proposal for the conquest of the Californias beginning with a settlement at San Bernabé (Portillo 1947: 419-435; Mathes 1965:*documento* 177). A royal *cedula* of August 2, 1628, specifically requested that the Audiencia obtain Ascención's opinion, along with that of other unnamed survivors of the Vizcaíno expedition, in order that more informed plans for the occupation of California could be drawn up (Portillo 1947:439-446). The document presented here is a further response made nearly three years later. For reasons that are unclear, Fr. Ascención did not choose to present himself personally to the *Oidores* of the Audiencia, but the elaborate notarization at the end of this document suggests that his testimony was regarded as important. This document has been published in Spanish by Mathes (1965:*documento* 188). Although Mathes cites two contemporary copies in the Archivo General de Indias in Sevilla (Patronato 30 and Audiencia de Guadalajara 133), it is clear from identity of spelling and abbreviations that he actually published this version. It is from the Navarrete Collection XIX in the Museo Naval, Madrid.

Since no part of the proposals was put into effect and since other accounts offer a more detailed narrative of the Vizcaíno voyage as well as more detailed and probably more accurate geographic and ethnographic information, the document translated here is at best a footnote on the history of the exploration and ultimate occupation of California. It does represent what may be the last direct impact of Vizcaíno's voyage on Spain's expansion policies northwestward from New Spain, but nearly a century and a half would pass before the Visitor-General José de Gálvez would give substance to Vizcaíno's original scheme. It can also be noted that the king continued to receive quite different advice from other sources. In response to the same 1628 *cedula* on July 30, 1629, the cosmog-

rapher Enrico Martínez, who had not been with Vizcaíno's expedition but who prepared its maps from field sketches, stated that California was nearly worthless and settling it would be a poor investment. While not denying the insularity of California or the existence of the Strait of Anian he noted that only 200 leagues of the Gulf of California had ever been explored (Mathes 1965:*documento* 185). Finally, Fr. Ascención wrote another letter to the king on March 4, 1633. He still urged the evangelization of the Indians of California, but the pearl fisheries of the Gulf Coast were to provide economic justification for the operation (Mathes 1970:*documento* 38).

Fr. Ascención must have had notes and copies of his earlier memorials to use in preparing this final one. The dates and places are too consistent to come from a thirty-year memory. But a refinement of his perceptions is indicated. The Indians, with the exception of those on Cedros Island, were all friendly, though the narrative in Torquemada (1723) tells a more complex story. All harbors, especially those in Baja California, are surrounded by fertile lands, an impression that could be developed only after long absence. The Strait of Anian and the insularity of California, along with other geographic fancies, had become almost established fact in Ascención's mind. Finally, the king of Spain as the world's primate ruler, responsible for the conversion of the world and entitled to its rulership, shows clear and strong. In the mind of this friar in New Spain the *siglo de oro* had not ended.

The body of my translation attempts to represent clearly in English the writer's ideas, departing frequently from his style and syntax. Only in the elaborate notarization have I attempted to preserve the stylistic flavor. Spellings of personal names and place names have been kept as they are in the Navarrete transcript, with a note if it seemed needed for identification. Accents have been omitted as

in the manuscript. Where Vizcaíno's place name is not current but the place can be identified with some security the modern name is mentioned in the end notes. It is clear that Navarrete had modernized the 1632 usage and spelling to what was current in 1794.

Citations of other documents are to published works, if possible, rather than to the original archival material.

*University of California
Riverside*

The Year 1632

*The opinion given by Father Fr. Antonio de la Ascencion,
a member of the Order of Barefoot Carmelites,
in his convent in the City of Los Angeles in New Spain,
concerning the location and characteristics of the Californias
and the advantages to the Royal Service of His Majesty that would result
from their exploration and conquest, including the form and manner
in which this might be done as well as the settlement of the
harbor of San Bernave at Cape San Lucas.*

In reference to that which the lords of the Royal Council of the Indies wish to know, on the order of His Majesty and in obedience to his royal *cedula* and command, concerning the location and characteristics of the kingdom of the Californias, I state: That in the year 1602, I journeyed in company with two other members of the Barefoot Carmelites, and of my own religion, named Father Fray Andres de la Asumpcion, who went as our superior, and Father Fray Thomas de Aquino; they are now deceased and in heaven. All three of us were priests and confessors in an armada of three small vessels whose captain and commander was General Sebastian Vizcayno, and as admiral Captain Torivio Gomez de Corban. The armada was sent out by the Count of Monterrey, Don Gaspar de Zuñiga y Acebedo, who was then Viceroy here in New Spain. He had provided, with much prudence

and piety, all the things which seemed necessary for the expedition, an expedition which he had been ordered to undertake by command of the king Our Lord Don Felipe III in the first year of his reign. The viceroy ordered and charged me, in the name of His Majesty, that I carry out the office of second cosmographer in the voyage and explorations that we were going to make with the armada. This charge was in spite of the fact that His Majesty had sent as cosmographer Captain Geronimo Martin Palacios, who was a very skilled pilot and experienced in making nautical charts. The Viceroy ordered the latter to sail on the flagship named San Diego, and I sailed on the ship Almiranta; each of us received specific orders. Each of us was to map the land and the islands, and sound the ports and embayments, estuaries, and bays which we were to discover from the Port of

Año 1632.

*Paracer que dió el Padre Fr. Antonio de la Ascension Religioso del orden de
Carmelitas Descalzo, en su conuento de la Ciudad de los Angeles de la Nueva España, fize
el puerto y Calidades de las Californias, y las ventajas que resultarían de su descubri-
miento y Conquista al Real feruicio de S. M. con la forma y manera
en que se podía hazerlo, igualmente que la poblacion del
Puerto de San Bernabe en el Cabo de San Lucas.*

Reproduction of a portion of the first page of the Vizcaíno manuscript in the Navarrete Collection of the Museo Naval, Madrid. Courtesy of the Museo Naval.

Acapulco to Cape San Lucas, which is at the tip of California and is in twenty-three and one-half degrees, under the Tropic of Cancer, and from there to Cape Mendozino which would be at a latitude of a little less than forty-two degrees.¹ He charged us to carry out the task with which we were entrusted with absolute care in order that with clarity and distinction he might give a complete report to His Majesty about what exists on these coasts and seas and in the lands that surround them.

We departed from the Port of Acapulco on the fifth of May in the year 1602 to carry out these discoveries, activities that were carried out with complete care and diligence, and with a great deal of effort because our voyage proceeded against the northwest wind which ordinarily prevails along these seacoasts which themselves extend from the southeast to the northwest. This wind blows with such great force and violence and cold that many times we saw ourselves in danger of being lost and inundated because this fleet in its journey regularly made its tacks from one side to the other close-hauled. It is unbearably hard work, and it was necessary to navigate in this manner in order not to lose sight of land and to make these explorations with care and

precision as His Majesty had commanded they be made.

Following the coast of the Kingdoms of New Spain and New Galicia we arrived at Puerto de la Navidad, and from there we went on to the Isles of Mazatlan² which are beyond the Port of Compostela and in the latitude of twenty-three and two-thirds degrees, arriving on the second day of June of that year. These islands are close to the mainland and between them a very good port is formed, and nearby is the Villa of San Sebastian. From these Isles of Mazatlan in order to reach Cape San Lucas, which is at the tip of the Californias, one crosses an arm of the sea which at that place has a width of fifty leagues. Some call it the Sea of Cortes, others the Red Sea because its waters appear to be reddish, others the Mediterranean Sea of the Californias. This arm of the sea enters toward the north between the coast and land that is formed in part by the Isles of Mazatlan, Culiacan, and the lands and provinces of Nuevo Mexico, and that of the Kingdoms of the Californias. It goes on to give forth into the Strait of Anian whence it communicates and unites with the Oceanic Sea of the North. And by means of it, according to what I perceive and understand, one is able to make a voyage to our

own Spain. And in the passage across this sea at the locality there are four small islands, a single isolated one which is called San Andres, and the three grouped together which are called Las Marias. In the mountains which are found in these islands are located the rich mines of Ostoticpac as well as others with rich ores in the same ranges. These are reduced with quicksilver, and they are under the jurisdiction of the Audiencia of Guadalaxara.

Crossing the arm of the Sea of the Californias just mentioned, from these Isles we went on to Cape San Lucas, and in a bay which is close to the point we made a landing. It is a good harbor although it is not sheltered from winds from all directions. In it there is a sufficiency of notable advantages, and it is an appropriate port for the establishment of the first settlement which, as I will point out farther on, the Spaniards ought to make in this kingdom. It is so because of the richness of the pearl oyster beds, of the abundance of many and varied kinds of fish, and because it is visited by many docile Indians, of a good nature and friends of peace. There is much firewood, good water, good and fertile lands, and a climate that is good and healthy.

From this port which is called San Bernave³ we travelled onward to explore the entire coast until we arrived at Cape San Sebastian, which is beyond Cape Mendozino at the latitude of forty-three degrees. We continued to give names to the harbors which we were finding and to the islands and embayments in accordance with the [saints'] days on which we reached them. The first harbor that we found after having left the Port of San Bernave was called that of Magdalena. It is very good and has the capacity for many vessels, and at it there are many Indians who received us with peace and love which gave evidence that they were of a good nature. By way of this inlet an arm of the sea enters far into the land, and it may be that one would therein come upon some

major river. From there we continued onward, following the coast and discovering some bays and small islands until we arrived to discover the Bahia de Ballenas. There these were many peaceful and docile Indians who gave us a very friendly reception. The land appeared to be good and fertile.⁴

Pursuing the journey we went on to encounter two islands, one of which is called Las Nieves and the other San Roque. In them are very good ports, a great quantity of various kinds of fish, which are good and nutritious, and on the mainland there are many Indians who are peaceful and docile. They received us with affection and were astounded to see people wearing clothes and bearded and at the ships in which we travelled. Near here, on pursuing our journey along the seacoast, we discovered a long mountain range, barren and without vegetation and without a single tree. The entire range is crisscrossed by veins of different colored ores which appeared to be rich. In the range there must be a very great treasure of silver and gold and of other ores.⁵ This sight raised everyones' eyes and even their hearts. We were unable to land here since the mountains cut right into the sea, and the coast is wild and the seas were heavy, so we went onward. Farther along the coast the harbor of San Bartholome⁶ was encountered, and along its beaches there were many pieces of ambergris, as we were advised by those who were familiar with the substance when we had described what it was like. Since we did not know what it was we had not paid any attention to it; if it was amber it was a great resource.⁷

We further pursued our journey until we reached Cedros Island, which was recognized by everyone. On it there were some wild and warlike Indians who did not wish us to be where we were, and who threatened us and by signs gave us to know that we should leave the locality. Having reconnoitered the island

we returned to the mainland coast, and following it we encountered several good embayments, and the lands inland gave evidences of being fertile, and that the entire area is heavily populated with Indians because all the trails that go inland are heavily travelled and broad. We reached and recognized Cabo del Engaño; farther on is the Isla de Cenizas and the little island of San Geronimo near which is the famous Bahia de las Virgines⁸ at which a good harbor is formed. Here there are many Indians who are good and peaceful; the land is fertile and there are good trees like those of our own Spain. This port might very well be settled with Spaniards, because the land is good and well inhabited and should not fail to be rich.

From here we proceeded, following the coast and discovering along it several embayments filled with Indians and many islands, small and middle sized, and on all of them there were peaceful and friendly Indians, until we arrived at the harbor of San Diego, which is the greatest one, broader and more capacious than any of the others along this coast. There are many docile and peaceful Indians, and on a sandbar like an island inside the bay there were many pieces of amber as we were informed by those who know the material after we had described its characteristics. If that is what the stuff was, there was a quantity sufficient to load a good-sized ship. No one recognized it, however, and so no attention was paid to it. In the uplands which surround the harbor, it is believed that there is a great treasure because in the little embayments and spits that the water forms in the beach sands there was a great quantity of golden pyrites in the form of small leaves.⁹ There is much hunting of wild-fowl, lots of fish, and the locality has a good climate.

The Indians here informed us that not far from where we were there had been people who were dressed and bearded like the Spaniards who travelled with us, and that they wore

fine clothing. It is assumed that these people populated the area toward the north along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea of California at this latitude. These Indians are acquainted with silver and said that these people had some and that they took it out of these mountains. Here we careened and cleaned our ships and caulked them with wax and pitch in order to be able to sail better in high latitudes.

Having taken on water and wood for fuel we left the harbor of San Diego, and continuing the voyage the islands of Santa Catalina, Santa Barbara and San Clemente were discovered. All of them are densely populated by Indian fishermen, peaceful and friendly. From the mainland a king of that region came out to view our ships. He invited our General to come to his land and asked his people to come with him, offering gifts for all. It was already nearly nighttime, and we had previously agreed that we would depart the next morning, but we went on in order to see what the gift we were to receive was. While en route a favorable wind came up, and it was necessary to take advantage of it, deferring seeing the gifts until the return trip. With the favorable wind we sailed well during that night, and afterwards, travelling through calms as well as it was possible to do, we arrived to recognize the harbor of Monterrey and in it we celebrated Christmas. It is a good harbor and has desirable features and many docile Indians. It is in the latitude of thirty-seven degrees, the same parallel as Sevilla. It is a harbor that it is well-fitted for Spaniards to occupy because the Philippine Ships that come to New Spain, when they reach it, can find there relief from the labors which caused them torments and deprivations until they arrived here, having suffered those in four or five months of sailing. This is a harbor with abundant trees for ship building, of abundant hunting, of many and excellent fish, and of Indians of good nature. I believe that the surrounding mountains contain great trea-

tures, and there are many animals like those of Spain. The entire area has a climate like that of Castile.

From (this place) we sent back the ship *Almiranta* with accounts for the Viceroy the Count of Monterrey of all that we had seen and discovered. In his name and in his honor we gave the place the name, Port of Monterrey. Having directed the dispatch of the returning ship we continued our exploration and arrived at Cape Mendozino, and continuing onward we identified another cape which was named Cape Blanco. Near the latter there is a river to which we gave the name Santa Ynes; it is at the latitude of forty-three degrees.¹⁰ There are more than eight hundred leagues of seacoast between this locality and Cape San Lucas which is at the [southern] tip of California. From here onward the shoreline turns toward the northeast, and here we turned around to return to New Spain. We did this because many of our soldiers and sailors had died, and all of those who remained were very sick, so much so that they could scarcely handle the sails. Also our remaining food supplies were few and without substance. The day on which we began our return voyage to New Spain was the Twentieth of January, 1603.

The entire coastline of continuous land from Cape San Lucas at the tip of California to Cape Mendozino is heavily populated with Indians. Wherever we arrived they came to see us as though we were something that they had never seen before. They received with simplicity the things which we gave them, and they gave us, with love and good will, that which they had. By means of signs they invited us into their lands and their houses. It was understood from them that the land was good and that it was full of people, and that there were many mines of silver and gold and a great treasure store of pearls and of amber. This accords, as will be seen in reference, with all that occurred to us on this exploration and that which was seen and discovered. I wrote a

brief account which was sent on to His Majesty. That which I feel, because of what we saw and discovered, is that it would be appropriate in the service of our Two Majesties, divine and human, to act so that some of the harbors referred to above come to be peopled with Spaniards. This is because from them the Holy Gospel could be preached to these peoples and thus salvation could be obtained for as many souls as there are in this entire land. And the resources that are in this land would be discovered that they might be enjoyed by His Majesty as the supreme Lord and Emperor of all the Indies that he is. With this his dominions would be expanded to almost double that which he possesses today that is populated by Spaniards. It would be possible to establish settlements at the port of Monterrey, at the port of San Diego, at the harbor of Las Virgines, at the harbor of Magdalena and at the harbor of San Bernave at the southern tip of the Californias. The latter should be the first place to be settled, and it could serve as a gateway and starting place for the settlement of the other localities. For that end it should be established with a *plaza de armas* for the conquest and pacification of this great Kingdom of the Californias, and it would serve as the starting place for the preaching of the Holy Gospel.

The first settlement should be at the already mentioned harbor of San Bernave which is located at Cape San Lucas because here there is a little lake of very good water and another lake of salt. And there are very good lands for planting crops, cultivating fields, and making gardens, an abundance of firewood, and many docile and peaceful Indians. There are many and excellent fish, pearl-oyster beds, and near this place are mountains with ores of silver and gold.¹¹ And this is a place with the loveliest of climates. On the point there is a high peak and on it a fortress could be constructed for the defense of the harbor and for support of the settlers

in the event that the Indians wished to create some sort of uprising or mutiny against the Spaniards.¹²

Note this:

In order to settle this harbor, and from it to pacify this entire Kingdom, and to teach in it the Holy Gospel, I have found a means and method that is easy and cheap. It is necessary to utilize three large frigates or *tartanas* which draw little water. These could be constructed in the Port of Realexo in his Majesty's account. Or they might be purchased since such vessels are not lacking along this coast, along with their crews,¹³ providing them all the necessary equipment, sails, rigging, arms, and food supplies.

All should be brought to the Port of Compostela or to that of the Isles of Mazatlan where there are available all the things that the settlers would need: horses, cows, sheep, goats, and pigs. This livestock could then be embarked on the ships and taken to the port of San Bernave: Since at that point the Mar Roxo has a width of no more than fifty leagues, the crossing might be made to the other side in two days or less. Thus, it would be possible to stock that locality with these animals with ease, and then they would multiply after their fashion and with them the entire kingdom could be stocked. Thus, the Spaniards would have an abundance of all these resources, both for their sustenance and to provide for their other requirements. With two hundred men, who should be both good soldiers and sailors at the same time, as I indicated in another place, it would be possible to settle and pacify all of this great kingdom. In a brief report that I prepared concerning how His Majesty should have things done in the conquest of recently discovered kingdoms, it is maintained that in them the Holy Gospel should be preached. Thus, with a good and secure conscience he would come to be the just possessor and lord of the lands that were pacified and subjected

to the yoke of the Catholic Church with peace, love, and gentleness; it would not be necessary to wage war against the gentile Indians except in very rare and unusual cases.

The Spaniards who would have landed and settled at the indicated site of Cape San Lucas could form there a fine community. Some could establish fisheries for pearls and for other kinds of fish. Others could prepare gardens and fields for planting wheat, maize, and barley and other seed crops and vegetables, for the land is fertile and has a good climate so that all crops would yield well. With them within a short time the settlement would come to have its necessary supplies, and it would not be necessary to forward further foodstuffs to it. Others could work the mines, signs of the existence of which are present in the vicinity. From the *quintas*¹⁴ the king our lord could recover his expenses, and there would even be a surplus of thousands that might be used to meet other expenses.

In the meantime, while the above-mentioned things were being accomplished, the captain or commander of the Spaniards could send an expedition to explore the entire Mediterranean Sea of California, using the two frigates with orders that each of them carry out a separate mission. One would travel up the coast from the Isles of Mazatlan and the other up the California side, and they would proceed until they reached the latitude of forty-two degrees. There they would change their courses to meet and communicate with each other, giving an account of that which they had seen directly and that which they had learned from the Indians concerning these coasts. Each ship could be manned by thirty men who should be both good soldiers and good sailors, and they should carry the order that they mark carefully every feature along the coast and that they explore all the harbors, embayments, rivers, and islands that were there. They

should treat with kindness the Indians whom they encountered, and they should manage to learn from them about the lands in the interior, including data on their people as well as on their cities and on their natural resources. Concerning all this they should prepare a clear and specific report and narrative.

In this fashion, one would come to know if this sea extends to communicate with the Oceanic Sea of the North by the Strait of Anian, and whether by means of it one could make passage and sail on to our own Spain, as I believe to be possible. One could learn in what place and locality the great city of Quivira is located, and of the Rey Coronado (crowned king),¹⁵ in the sector that is on the New Mexican side of the gulf. To learn in what place the Rio del Tizon¹⁶ is located would be of very great advantage and importance, since it might be convenient to His Majesty's service to ship by sea and by the river the ordinary supplies that are being sent to the Province of New Mexico.

On the California side, one could come to know in what regions the population of which I spoke in number six¹⁷ are settled, and what valuable resources are present in the mountains there, and what harbors and rivers there are where settlements might be established to use as bases for preaching the Holy Gospel to the natives. Concerning all this the pilots should maintain a complete account so that they can give advice and a full accounting of everything to His Majesty and to his Royal Council of the Indies in order that they can direct the most appropriate plan of action in the service of the Two Majesties.

The third frigate could be used to transport people for the settlement and everything else that would seem to be necessary such as foodstuffs, and animals: mares and horses, young male and female cattle, ewes and rams, goats, and male and female pigs to be used both for breeding and for food. There is an abundance of these animals at Compostela

and in the surrounding provinces so that they could afford support easily and with little effort.

Thus, this settlement would come to be populous, rich, and supplied with everything, and there might well develop in it increasing commerce and contracts. The ships from Piru could make port here, since they come and make landfall at this place before they go on to Acapulco.¹⁸ And those who come from the Philippines, who ordinarily arrive with death between their teeth, could there find refreshment and alleviation from the ills that afflict them. And people of the neighboring lands could have dealings and communication with the settlers, for I believe there are peoples who, if they found a gracious reception, would be able to enter into faithful and Christian relations with the Spaniards. I hold it for certain that by way of this sea it is possible to go to the kingdom of New Mexico, to that of the Rey Coronado, and to Quivira, and to the kingdom of Anian. From there one could travel to Great China and to Great Tartary and to all the other kingdoms that bound them, and also to sail freely and securely on to our own Spain. In all those places, one might travel preaching the Holy Gospel, with which the entire world would come to be converted to our Holy Faith, *et fiet-unum-ovile, et-unus-pastor*.¹⁹ And our king Felipe IV (whom may God guard and prosper for many and happy years) would become the universal lord of the entire world, a situation which, until today, no other earthly king has been able to enjoy since God created the world. He would be alone a greater lord than all his elders or his predecessors, and this would be easy if that which I am recommending in the treatise which I prepared and am referring to is undertaken and put into execution.

The people who would be chosen to go on this conquest from Mexico, and to populate this new kingdom, could make their journey

by land, passing by way of the Province of Mechoacā (Michoacan) and the Province of Guadalajara on to the Port of Mazatlan. These lands are well peopled with Spaniards, and with abundant and good food supplies, and from Mazatlan one could embark in order to pass over to the Californias. Or to do it another way, in the lands of Compostela and of Culiacan and of Topia there are many habitations of Spaniards who would like to see California settled that they might cross over to live there with their estates and cattle. If only they were given free passage they would go there to serve the king as they did who bore the favor which His Majesty granted to the conquerors and settlers of New Spain. And this would be the easiest and least costly conquest of the many that have been made in these kingdoms until today. From that which has been said in this report it will be evident how poorly informed have been His Majesty and the members of the Council of the Indies since it says in his Royal *Cedula*, of which I was informed, that this conquest and discovery had been held by the Council to be of little significance. Indeed one sees clearly that the contrary is true by that which I have stated and declared in this brief account and response that I was asked to make by the above-mentioned *cedula* which was promulgated on August 2, 1628 in Madrid.²⁰

In sum, I say that His Majesty does not have in his kingdoms an opportunity that could be more advantageous nor of greater importance for the expansion of his kingdoms and for the increase of his royal possessions. Further in good conscience, he is obliged to act so that throughout all these kingdoms the Holy Gospel is preached and to bring about, by all means possible, the conversion of their native peoples to Our Holy Faith even though doing so afforded no other advantage. Indeed, one soul is worth more than a thousand worlds together. Feeling this way I sign my name in this city of Los Angeles²¹ of New

Spain on March 22, 1632. *Fray Antonio de la Acension*.

** ** **

In the very noble and very loyal city of Los Angeles in New Spain on the 22nd day of the month of March, in the year 1632, before me the Notary Public and witnesses appeared Father Fray Antonio de la Acension, a religious of the Order of Barefoot Carmelites, resident in the Convent of this city, concerning whom I affirm that I know him. And he said: That in obedience and compliance with that which His Majesty the King, Don Felipe our lord (whom God guard and prosper in his holy service and in greater kingdoms and possessions) has ordered concerning the discovery of the Californian Islands in his Royal *cedula* sent to the gentlemen President and *Oydores* of the Royal Audiencia of Mexico dated in Madrid on August 2 of the recent year 1628, countersigned by Andres de Roxas, in which he commands that he be informed and advised of the manner in which he might make the said exploration in case it is appropriate to put the plan in execution, having first heard the above mentioned Father Fray Antonio de la Acension and other persons who may have information concerning that land. And since the party concerned is under monastic rule²² in this city and cannot go personally to the City of Mexico to give an account of that land and islands, and matters concerning it which he feels and has experienced with his own eyes, are what this account contains. It appears written six double pages (*foxas*) along with this one which bears his signature. And so he asks me the Notary that I validate it for your appraisal and that I transmit it to His Majesty and to the Lords of the Royal Audiencia. And I sign it—Witnesses *Diego de Reyna*, *Diego Cortes de Brito*, and *Juan Guerra* Notaries—*Fray Antonio de la Acension*—Before me, and I have affixed my seal in testimony of its truth—

Alonso Corona, Notary Public.

We affirm that Alonso Corona is the one by whom the communication contained above was signed and sealed. He is an appointed Notary Public of this city of Los Angeles, and as such all the writings and other decrees which have passed and pass before him are to be given full faith and credit in his judgment and jurisdiction. Dated in Los Angeles March 22, of the year 1632—*Juan Guerra*, Notary of His Majesty—*Diego Cortes de Brito*, Notary of His Majesty—*Diego de Reyna*, Royal Notary.

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This has been extracted from a *legajo* of decrees which exists in the *Archivo General de Indias* of Sevilla: among the Simancas papers, Legajo 1°, rot°: Papers concerning the discovery of California collected in the year 1638—accomplished Feb. 15, 1794.

Martin Fernandez de Navarrete

NOTES

1. The measured latitudes given in this document are remarkably accurate. This is in sharp contrast with those of the Jesuits in Baja California a century and a half later, which were commonly a degree or more too high (Aschmann 1959:36-38; Leon-Portilla 1973:n. 341, 352). Observations from shipboard with an oceanic horizon retained their advantage over land observations.
2. The volcanic peaks that shelter the modern port of Mazatlan are now tied to the mainland by sandbars. This is an aggrading coast and quite different from the one shown in Enrico Martínez' sketch map of 1603 (Portillo 1947:358; Mathes 1968:63).
3. The name San Bernabé is no longer in use, both the bay and the town on it being called San Lucas. The bay continued to be known as San Bernabé, at least to the end of the Jesuit period (Aschmann 1966:Plate 5).
4. This locality is as sterile and desolate as any in North America. Fr. Ascención's desire to depict Baja California as an attractive place seems to be aided by a failing memory.
5. In this instance, the observation of mineralization may have been valid. In the late nineteenth century, there was a small gold rush in the Sierra de Santa Clara or Sierra Pintada (Eisen 1900).
6. Now known as Turtle Bay or Bahía Tortugas, but called San Bartholomé as late as 1900 (Eisen 1900).
7. Here and at San Diego, Fr. Ascención reports the existence of ambergris. In his 1620 memorial (Portillo 1947:425), Ascención gave a further description of the material, noting its softness but none was brought back to New Spain. Since, however, he uses the terms *ambar* and *ambar gris* interchangeably, it is likely that he believed he was dealing with amber, useful for jewelry, rather than the whale secretion used in perfumery.
8. The embayment south of Bahía San Quintín.
9. Mathes (1968:161) translates this phrase as golden flowers, but the word in this manuscript and in the 1620 memorial (Portillo 1947:425) is clearly *margajita*.
10. A clear identification of this river is not possible from this or any of the other Vizcaíno documents. The Rogue River, Coos Bay, and the Umpqua River seem most likely.
11. Although the fairly important silver mining district of Santa Ana was later discovered in the Cape Region, Fr. Ascención never came close to it. This, and most of his references to mineral wealth, come from an optimistic imagination.
12. This topographic detail is highly accurate, but because of lack of water San Lucas remained a minor settlement and no fort was built. A few years ago a luxury tourist hotel was constructed at the site Ascención recommends.
13. The copied text says *crapularan* (referring to becoming drunk), but in a side note the scribe says that the word might be read as *tripulacion* (crew). The latter makes sense.
14. The twenty percent tax levied by the king on the gross production of precious metals and stones, including pearls.
15. The legends of the early sixteenth century,

despite the failure of Coronado's expedition, are still vital, at least for Fr. Ascención.

16. The Colorado River.

17. The reference is unclear, perhaps the sixth *foja* of the original manuscript.

18. Although Baja California seems far out of the way for a trip from Peru to Acapulco, northward bound ships bore far to the west to avoid headwinds and headed east well north of their destinations, knowing that they would have following winds as they travelled southeastward.

19. "...and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" – John 10:16.

20. Fr. Ascención's aggressive and contradictory tone is not the normal form for addressing the *oidores* of the Audiencia. He had some protection from the cloth but more from his age. He was justifying his views rather than seeking preferment.

21. Puebla.

22. This is a doubtful excuse for failing to appear in person before the Audiencia.

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