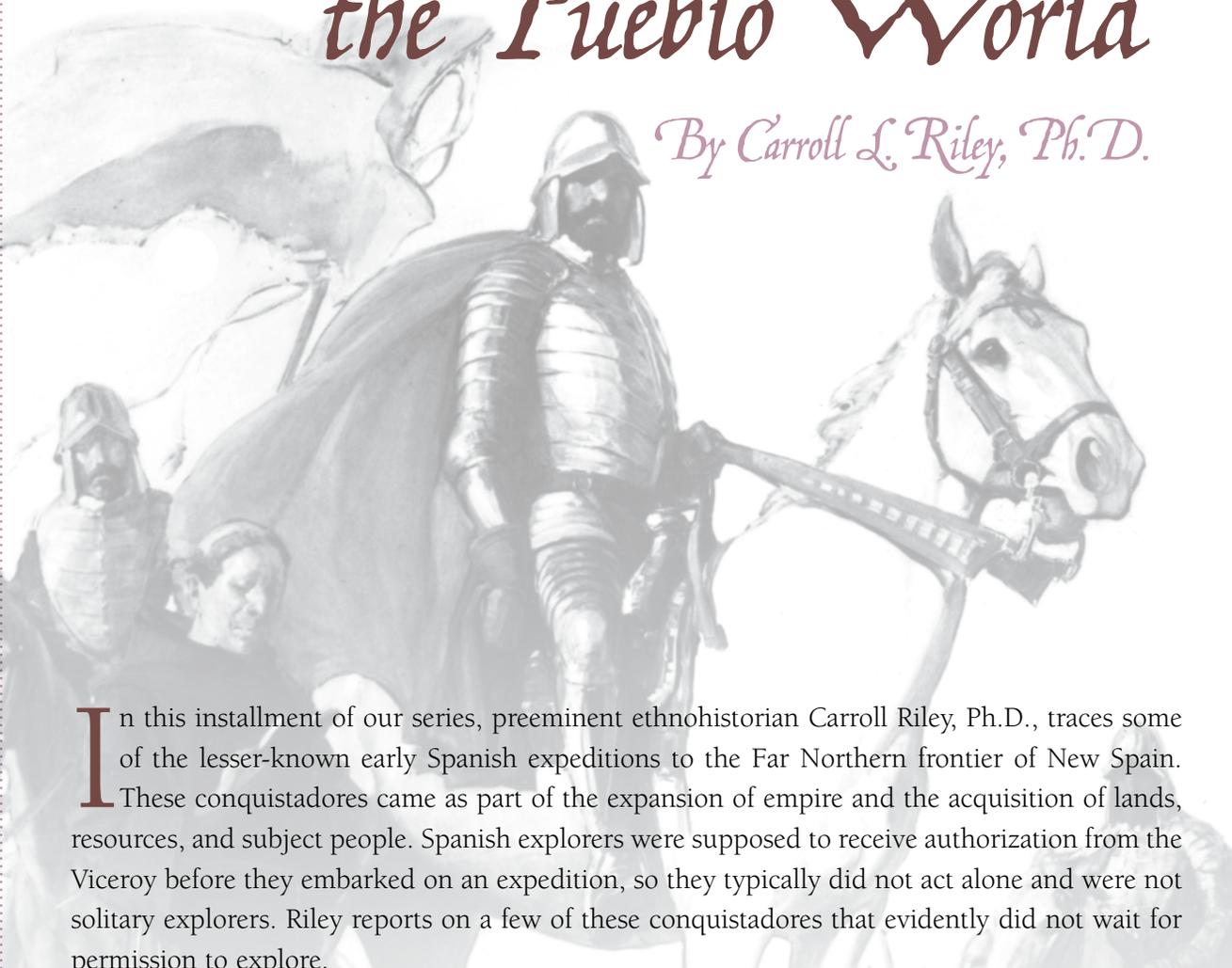


Lost Conquistadors and the Pueblo World

By Carroll L. Riley, Ph.D.



In this installment of our series, preeminent ethnohistorian Carroll Riley, Ph.D., traces some of the lesser-known early Spanish expeditions to the Far Northern frontier of New Spain. These conquistadores came as part of the expansion of empire and the acquisition of lands, resources, and subject people. Spanish explorers were supposed to receive authorization from the Viceroy before they embarked on an expedition, so they typically did not act alone and were not solitary explorers. Riley reports on a few of these conquistadores that evidently did not wait for permission to explore.

Several Spanish expeditions reached New Mexico before and after Coronado, and yet left no written record. While there are no surviving primary documents, later accounts tell us a great deal about what motivated early Spanish exploration of the Southwest. Riley examines the role of religion as a motivation and goal of the Spanish in expanding the reach of the empire in the 1500s and the unintended consequences of the renewed contacts between the peoples of New Spain and Mexico's indigenous peoples.

—Frances Levine, Ph.D., Director, Palace of the Governors/The New Mexico History Museum



Expeditions occasionally disappeared into the wilderness.

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Rabbit Ears Mountain range on the western edge of the high plains near Clayton, New Mexico. The Coronado party, and perhaps that of Padilla, skirted that region in 1541 and 1542. Photograph © Christine Preston.

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Coronado, members of his cavalry, and a Franciscan friar exploring the Southwest, as depicted in the Coronado Murals by Gerald Cassidy, 1921. Courtesy Palace of the Governors (MNM/DCA), Negative No. 020206.

“A Place Like No Other,” a series inspired by the creation of the New Mexico History Museum, is devoted to exploring New Mexico history through new research and recent insights of curators, artists, collections managers, educators, historians, archaeologists and ethnohistorians—work that will inspire lines of inquiry and exhibitions for years to come.

When Spain began its colonization of the Americas around the end of the fifteenth century, it quickly developed a strategy for the treatment of Native peoples. Unlike the later English, who simply killed or drove out the aboriginal inhabitants while invading and settling their lands, the Spanish aimed at incorporating the Indian populations. They did this by transforming and redefining Native Americans into a hispanicized brown-skinned peasantry.

Missionaries were crucial in carrying out this Indian policy, especially in the total suppression of Native religions and their replacement with an evangelical and uncompromising Catholic Christianity. Because Native ceremonialism was closely intermeshed with the social, political, and artistic aspects of Indian life, this policy was a catalyst for drastic change in the lives of the Indians. Within a few generations

Indians went with the Europeans to invade new lands—auxiliary *conquistadors*, as it were. Not all of these Spanish expeditions discovered riches or urban populations, but for the most part, even if unsuccessful, they managed to survive and report their findings. Occasionally, however, an expedition would disappear into the wilderness—Spanish soldiery and Indian allies alike—and its fate would remain more or less a mystery.

The southwestern expedition of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado (1539–42) was unusual in that it spun off not one but three parties of these lost conquistadors. One was truly lost; nothing was ever heard of it again. A second met with tragedy, though a few members eventually trickled back to Spanish-held lands. The third and largest, however, involving only Mexican Indian allies, may have significantly influenced the political and religious landscape of the Pueblo Indian uni-

*Esteban reached Cibola,
modern Zuni, and was killed there.*

it produced a sullen but generally quiescent people whose lives were bracketed by church, tribute, and service to the new masters. Some rebellious individuals and groups fled to remote mountain, jungle, and desert regions. Another recourse, though it meant nominally accepting Christianity, was collaboration, for the lowest rungs on the political ladder were generally reserved for Natives as *principales* of Indian settlements. An even more attractive form of collaboration was to join the Spanish military.

This acculturation process was still ongoing in the first five or six decades of Spanish contact, when much of southern North America, Central America, and South America was explored and to some degree conquered. But the military option was there from the beginning, and more and more

verse, and perhaps that of Apachean neighbors as well.

The Coronado expedition had its genesis in 1536, when three Spaniards and an African slave appeared in western Mexico, sole survivors of another group of lost conquistadors. They were part of an expedition that met with disaster somewhere along the Gulf Coast of Louisiana or Texas. The four who eventually escaped were led by an expedition officer, Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, and utilized the survival skills of the black slave Esteban. The little band worked its way from Texas across the Southwest to Sonora, where, in 1536, it met Spaniards thrusting northward.

In northeast Sonora, Cabeza de Vaca had heard tales of rich cities somewhere farther to the north. As it happened, these stories reinforced rumors current in Mexico of a very rich land



The ruins of Kuaua, one of the Tiguex settlements Coronado occupied as he made his way north from Compostela, Mexico. The site, now Coronado State Monument on the west bank of the Rio Grande near Bernalillo, New Mexico, includes the remains of 1,200 interconnected adobe-walled surface dwellings and storage rooms, three ceremonial plazas, and six kivas.

Courtesy Palace of the Governors (MNM/DCA), Negative No. 191708

with cities and wealth in gold, silver, and jewels. A recurring leitmotif was that of seven rich cities, perhaps those that, according to European folklore, had been settled by seven Portuguese bishops fleeing in A.D. 714 from the Muslim invasion of their country. In some misty and mysterious setting across the ocean to the west, these bishops had founded the presumably Christian “Seven Cities of Antillia.”

Coronado’s expedition began in 1539 with preliminary probing parties out of western coastal Mexico, to the north. The Franciscan friar Marcos de Niza, traveling with Esteban and a number of central Mexican Indians, led the most important group. Fray Marcos and Esteban pushed northward along the Mexican west coast, where Fray Marcos was given a name for the seven cities, a kingdom or federation called Cibola. He sent Esteban with some of the Indians ahead to reconnoiter the new territory. Esteban reached Cibola, modern Zuni, and was killed there. On hearing the dreadful news, Fray Marcos claimed to have pushed on, eventually reaching one of the Cibolan cities, which he viewed from a distance. Returning to Mexico City, he gave a rather exaggerated account of the wealth and size of Cibola.

The main Coronado expedition comprised some 350 Europeans, along with 1,300 or more Indian military allies from central and western Mexico. These latter young men had

grown up in a tradition where the normal career of males was warfare. Spanish conquest, a generation before, had severely limited the options for war, but now the Spaniards themselves were offering a chance for military glory. With the military component of the army went an unknown number of slaves, servants, and camp followers, as well as herds of animals. There were also three Franciscan priests and two lay brothers. The Franciscans brought their own particular flavor to “missionization,” for they believed that the end of the world was near, and that once they converted the great pool of heathen souls in the New World, it would usher in the millennium.

At the advanced Spanish base of Culiacán, on the Mexican west coast, Coronado split his party. A fast-moving advance group, thirty or forty Europeans with a considerable number of Mexican Indian allies, moved north toward what is now the American Southwest. The main party, with probably the bulk of the animals (sheep, cattle, horses, mules, and perhaps pigs), followed several weeks behind. Coronado reached Cibola in July 1540 and was bitterly disappointed to find only a scatter of villages made of stone and adobe, with no gold or silver. He then pushed on to the Rio Grande, where he took over a town in the province of Tiguex (Tiwa-speaking Indians) in the vicinity of modern Albuquerque. There the main army joined him sometime around the end of the year, just in time for a brutal and protracted war with the Tiguex.

This war ended in the spring of 1541, by which time Coronado was ready to search for still another fabled province called Quivira somewhere out on the plains to the east. His explorations led him as far as the Great Bend of the Arkansas River in central Kansas, where Quivira proved to be a land of hunting people, living in grass huts, again with no gold or silver, and in fact with even fewer of the trappings of civilization than the Pueblos themselves.

Returning to the devastated Tiguex settlements of the Rio Grande, a discouraged commander decided to go home to Mexico. Not all of his followers wanted to return. They had, by and large, sunk their fortunes in this venture and had very little to return to. In the new land they at least could count on a supply of Indian labor and tribute, even if the natives were now generally hostile. But Coronado was adamant: the expedition must return to the south. And so in the spring of 1542,

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disgruntled and disillusioned, the soldiers began to retrace the long trail home.

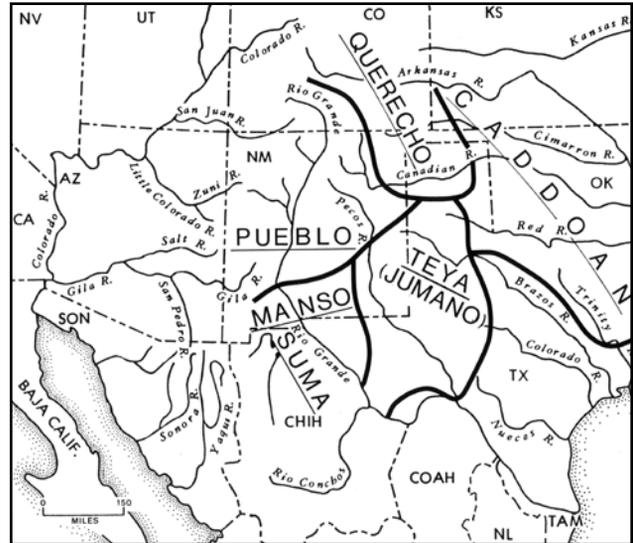
Not all members of the party were under Coronado's control. The Franciscans answered only to their provincial, and two of them, with small groups of followers, decided to stay in the new lands. In addition, a number of Mexican Indians, once military allies of the Spaniards, remained in the north. Each of these three parties had a different motive, and each came to a different end.

Luis de Ubeda

The Franciscan lay brother Luis de Ubeda reached New Spain in 1535. Ubeda had a reputation for gentleness and piety, with the habit of constant prayer. He was perhaps the best exemplar among Coronado's friars of the Franciscan millenarian dream, and that is almost certainly why he decided to stay behind at Pecos Pueblo when Coronado left the Southwest. The chronicler Juan Jaramillo reported that certain Mexican Indians remained with Ubeda, plus three black slaves, one with a wife and children. Ubeda and his group headquartered at Pecos Pueblo, and the friar was last seen shortly before the expedition departed. Soldiers who had been dispatched to take a flock of



A buffalo as pictured in *Historia de la Conquista de México*, by Francisco López de Gómara (1552–53, reprinted in 1554). The buffalo or, more technically correct, bison, was an enormously important animal in the economy of both to the Pueblo Indians and those of the Plains. Coronado and his men saw vast numbers of these animals especially in the Llano Estacado. Courtesy Palace of the Governors (MNM/DCA), Negative No. 152668.



Southwest and Plains Indian groups as of the time of Coronado.

Courtesy Carroll L. Riley.

sheep to him met him on the road from Pecos, probably on his way to the Galisteo towns.

Nothing was ever heard again from Luis de Ubeda or his companions. Nor, when the next expeditions arrived in New Mexico forty years later, was there any sign of domesticated sheep. Later expeditions reported nothing of Ubeda's fate, even though one or more of Coronado's Indian military allies were discovered in residence at Pecos. In the face of such evidence we are left to wonder whether questions about Ubeda were ever asked.

The Padilla Party

Fr. Juan de Padilla had come to Mexico as a young man, probably in 1528 or 1529, and there is a suggestion that he had been in military service earlier in life. I get the strong feeling that Padilla was at best only peripherally interested in the millenarianism of the Franciscans. He seems to have been rather bellicose; for example, on a side expedition to Hopi, in 1540, he precipitated a battle between the recalcitrant Hopi Indians and the Spaniards.

Padilla was with Coronado on the Great Plains in 1541 and was convinced that Coronado had simply not gone far enough.

Traces of Mexicanization

What of those possibly one hundred to two hundred Mexican Indians who, though allies of Coronado, chose to remain with the Pueblos instead of returning with him to Mexico? What might these former conquistadors have contributed to their new home and their adopted Pueblo society?

First, it might be well to say what they failed to contribute. Though the Spaniards, when they returned in the 1580s, claimed to have seen crosses and thought that Christianity might have gained a foothold, this is almost certainly not true. The so-called crosses were the four-pointed star, a symbol of the planet Venus and important to the warrior societies. Another introduction that one might expect was animal husbandry, since the Spaniards left domesticated sheep and possibly Spanish chickens in the Southwest. We have, however, no evidence that any Spanish domestic animal survived. Nor did metallurgy take hold. In fact, metal, especially iron, was probably near to nonexistent among the Indian allies and there is no likelihood that smiths or miners were among those who remained. Pueblo pottery had been influenced as early as the thirteenth century by techniques from Mesoamerica, but no changes can be related to a Mexican Indian presence in this interregnum period. Nor do other Spanish or Mesoamerican crafts appear to date from this time.

Somewhat problematic is the ritual board game called *patol* in the Pueblo world, from its central Mexican name, *patolli*. This game had a centuries-old evolution in Mexico, whereas it appears full-blown in the Southwest. On balance, however, I think it more likely that *patol* was part of the vast intrusion of ceremonial items, like star lore and color-direction symbolism, which accompanied the *kachina* cult in the early fourteenth century. Of course, the *patol* game may well have been updated by the new Mexican arrivals.

So what do we have to show for the Mexican intrusion? There is a good chance that certain domesticated plants, Spanish melons, and possibly chile took root in the Rio Grande Valley and at Pecos. If so, it is difficult to believe that Mexican Indians were not involved in the propagation of these wonderful new foods. But it is mainly in the ceremonial and political arenas that traces of mexicanization can be found. (continued next page)



Percy Sandy, Zuni, *The Shalako Blesses the New House*, watercolor, heavy wove paper, image measures 23" x 14 1/2".
Courtesy Museum of Indian Arts and Culture / Laboratory of Anthropology.

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I strongly suspect that certain kachina and other ceremonial practices may have been fine-tuned by Coronado's Indians, though I must admit that sorting out these new elements from the background would be very difficult indeed. Along the same lines, it is extremely likely that the military knowledge of the Mexicans would be incorporated into the Pueblo warrior societies, already centuries old. Again, with the present state of our knowledge, identifying what was old and what was new is daunting.

One ceremonial probably was introduced by the Coronado Mexican allies. This is the great Zuni and Hopi winter ceremony of Shalako, not specifically kachina, but still part of an overall ritual complex. The distinguished ethnologist and expert on Pueblo religion, Elsie Clews Parsons, pointed out more than seventy years ago the quite detailed Aztec nature of this ceremonial. Unlike the generic similarities of the kachina cult to Mesoamerican prototypes, Shalako shares with the Aztec twelfth-month Teotleco celebration a large number of parallels, some of them highly specific. Of course a proto-Shalako cult must already have existed in the Pueblo world, as indicated by prehistoric rock art depictions of Shalako figures. The Mexicans simply introduced items from the Teotleco ritual complex, producing a basically new ceremonial.

The contribution of the Mexican Indians to Southwestern pueblos thus seems to have lain more in augmentation than in innovation. They reinforced the powerful kachina cult, which with its associated societies helped integrate larger political groupings among the Pueblo towns. In all probability, they introduced certain modern innovations in the kiva and rock face oriented art. As yet, this particular problem has not been greatly addressed by archaeologists, and perhaps our temporal discrimination is not fine enough for such a study. But it would be very interesting to know the extent to which Pueblo artistic traditions at the beginning of the sixteenth century differed from those at the end of that fateful century.

Again, let me stress that the initial introduction of these new religious, political, and artistic ideas came during that earlier influx of Mexican culture, centuries before Coronado. Nevertheless, the young people from central and western Mexico who came with the Spaniards and stayed to become Pueblo Indians must have played a part. It led to a strong Mesoamerican flavor in Pueblo cultural life even today. ■

Somewhere *más allá* were the real seven cities, inhabited by descendants of the seven Portuguese bishops and their followers. The Franciscan historian Angélico Chávez believed that Padilla recruited the Portuguese soldier Andrés do Campo (reluctantly released by Coronado) in order to have an interpreter in the Seven Cities. Father Padilla apparently was unaware that when the bishops and their followers fled the Iberian Peninsula in 714 the Portuguese language had not yet evolved.

We are not certain how many were in this party, but there may have been twelve or more Native Americans, most or all from west Mexico, including two young men called *donados*, that is, they were donated to the Franciscans from childhood. According to Jaramillo and his fellow chronicler, Pedro de Castañeda, there was also a free black interpreter (it is not known what languages he spoke) and a mestizo.

What happened to the party can be answered only in part. At some point the two *donados* fled and returned to western Mexico. According to Campo, who also escaped and eventually reached the east coast of Mexico, Padilla penetrated far into the plains, perhaps as far as eastern Kansas. It was there that hostile Quivirans killed him. Reasons for his demise vary, but Campo believed that Padilla's death was the direct result of his arrogance and mistreatment of the Quivirans. The fate of the other ten or so unaccounted members of the party will likely never be known.

The Mexican Allies

The most intriguing groups left behind by the Spaniards were central and western Mexican natives. They had embarked on the journey with Coronado to find glory and wealth in the new northern lands. Because neither was forthcoming, some of the Indians were reluctant to return to Mexico. To many of these Mexican Indians, Spanish cultural ways, including Christianity, were very shallow. They were young men for the most part, though possibly some women or even families also chose to remain. For these Mexican allies, a chance to escape their Spanish overlords apparently was too tempting to pass up, and Coronado really had no way to force them to return. From the account of Castañeda, when Coronado left Cibola/Zuni for the last time, people from the Cibolan pueblos followed the expedition for two or three days, successfully persuading additional Mexican Indians to desert.

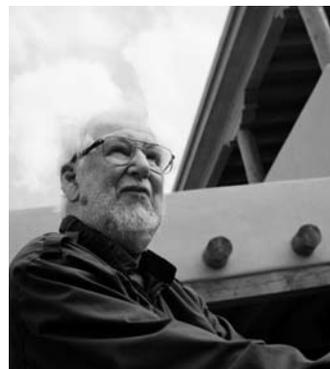


Battle of Hawikuh, a 1915 depiction by anthropologist and artist Kenneth Chapman of the siege of the Cibolan town of Hawikuh by Coronado's forces, June 1540. Courtesy Palace of the Governors (MNM/DCA), Negative No. 048918.

I have often wondered why we routinely fail to ask the obvious question: what made the people of Zuni so eager for those allies of the Spaniards to stay? They were, after all, enemies. The answer, I believe, lies in Pueblo Indian affinity for the mysterious south. Around A.D. 1300, a wave of Mexican influence took place in the upper Southwest. It centered on the kachina cult and connected societies, part of a massive influx of traits from Mesoamerica (the technical name for the prehistoric civilizations of Mexico and parts of Central America), involving, among other things, worship of the Mesoamerican gods Tlaloc and Quetzalcoatl. A new political system, sometimes called the cacique model, in which leadership was validated by the ownership of particular religious objects or ceremonies, seems to have been introduced at this time. These new lifeways permeated the Greater Southwest, and their influence was still strong in Coronado's time. To the Pueblo Indians, the refugees from Coronado probably represented long-lost contacts with the southern spiritual homeland of the Pueblo world.

Years ago, I estimated that one hundred or perhaps even two hundred Indians from the south remained with the Pueblos. Other scholars have adopted these numbers, but I

should stress that they still, at best, are speculative. In addition to Castañeda's report, we have testimony forty years later from the expedition of Antonio de Espejo (1582–83) about four individuals, two from central Mexico and two from the west, who remained with the western pueblo, and also about an unnamed person who stayed at Pecos. Because the various deserters from Coronado's army could hardly have been pro-Spanish, those willing to identify themselves were surely the exception. The great majority simply became part of the fabric of Pueblo society—conquistadors no more. ■



Carroll L. Riley, Ph.D., is the author of *The Frontier People: The Greater Southwest in the Protohistoric Period*, *Rio del Norte: People of the Upper Rio Grande from Earliest Times to the Pueblo Revolt*, *Kachina & The Cross*, and *Becoming Aztlan: Mesoamerican Influence in the Greater Southwest, A.D. 1200–1500*. He lives in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Photo by Eliza Wells Smith.