

Diego de Medrano

## Relación: Report on the “Riots and Ruin Wrought by the Rebellious Indians” in Nueva Vizcaya

1654 EXCERPTS

A Report by Licenciado Diego de Medrano, Priest of the City of Durango, Capital of the Kingdom of Nueva Vizcaya, which Describes the State of the Kingdom Resulting from the Riots and Ruin Wrought by the Rebellious Indians. Durango, August 31, 1654.

Señor Visitador and Contador Mayor, Don Juan de Cervantes Casaus:

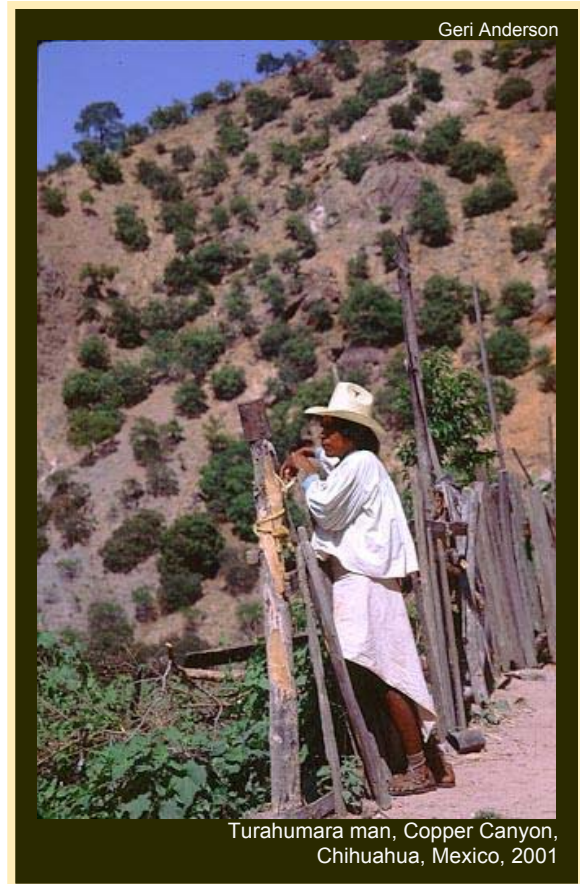
. . . First let me say that there have been many different Indian uprisings in this kingdom during the past fifty-four years. The first was that of the Acaxee during the time of Rodrigo de Vivero. The second was that of the Xixime during the time of Francisco de Urdiñola, and the third was that of the Tepehuan during the time of Gaspar de Alvear. During the years of Mateo de Vezga [1620-1626] and the Marqués de Salinas [1626-1630], the Tobosos and the outlaw Tepehuanes rebelled. The Masames rose up under Gonzalo Gómez de Cervantes Casaus [1631-1633]. During the subsequent administration, that of Luis de Monsalve [1633-1638], a brief spark of discord surfaced among the Tepehuanes of San Pablo, but it was easily extinguished. The Salineros and Conchos rebelled during the government of Luis de Valdés [1641, 1642-1648], as did the Tarahumaras during the latter part of his term. Diego Guajardo Fajardo [1648-1653], his successor, finding some of the Tarahumaras had risen up, remained in Parral only fifteen days before launching a campaign of reduction and punishment. This occurred early in 1649. The Tarahumaras became increasingly bolder in 1650, 1651, 1652, and through the spring of 1653. The Salineros, Tobosos, Cabezas, and their allies, seeing Spanish arms diverted to another cause, wrought great havoc and inflicted irreparable damage upon what was at that time the most populated and principal part of the kingdom. This, in time, will be described in greater detail.

This brings us to the present administration, that of Enrique Dávila y Pacheco. With the exception of the Acaxee, Xixime, Sinaloa, Tepehuan, and Tarahumara, all the other nations, because they have never received any deserved punishment, have continued to rebel and cause further damage. The motives and causes of these rebellions can be reduced to a generality which pertains to them all. Of course there are certain peculiarities which influence particular cases and render the hostilities more bitter. Nonetheless, the causes of rebellion can be found in the instability and inconsistency of the Indian temperament, their thievish and innately cruel nature, and in their great hatred of Spaniards. The Indians are also subject to the influences of shamans, instruments of the devil, who incite their listeners to rebel and commit atrocities. . . .

. . . The Tarahumara . . . are not a troublesome people, nor did they conspire in the Tepehuan uprising in 1616. It was never thought that they were the brave and aggressive warriors they have proven themselves to be in the past few years. Never have they engaged in treachery or ambushed us during war; in fact, they have met us in battle at an appointed time and place. They have never engaged in raids nor have they murdered a single person or stolen a single animal. They are an extremely docile people and are easily reduced [pacified]. Without a doubt the Tarahumaras are the most useful nation in this kingdom, especially to the real of San Joseph del Parral, which they abundantly supply with maize. Spaniards used to go into the Tarahumara alone and unprotected to trade and come back with maize, vegetables, other goods, and cloth obtained at little cost. These Indians are so honest and punctual that Spanish traders who have left maize with them that could not be easily transported have returned to find not a single ear missing, even though other traders offered to buy it in the interim. The excellent qualities of this nation manifested themselves in the way they welcomed instruction in the holy faith when it was introduced gently and without force.

It is a great shame, and enough to bring tears to one's eyes, that greedy Spaniards buy maize from them and resell it at inflated prices in Parral. Thus bread becomes too expensive for the poor, and this avarice saps the juices and sustenance of the [Spanish] miners. What is even worse is the unquenchable thirst for quick riches that drives men to enslave Tarahumara women and children. The mistreatment the Tarahumaras have received has transformed them from meek lambs unskilled in the use of arms into extremely brave warriors. It cannot be denied that, in making war on this nation which did not first make war on us, royal funds have been wasted and the kingdom as a whole has gone to perdition. It has always been understood and recognized that the Tarahumaras are justified in their wars because they have sought only to defend themselves. In the long run, after great expense, irreparable damage, and great perdition, we have had to concede what they asked us in the first place.<sup>1</sup> . . .

The Salinero nation lies more to the east and in that direction borders the Coahuilas. . . These Indians do not practice agriculture, nor do they work in the mines, nor do they clothe themselves. They have always supported themselves by theft, the magnitude depending upon the opportunity. Although the harm they caused in the past was great, it is nothing compared to their present excesses. The reason for this is that in times past there were infinite numbers of maverick livestock on the plains of La Zarca and Magdalena which they would prey upon without doing us direct injury. The Salineros would also descend in droves upon travelers at Río Florido, Santo Domingo de Naiza, and El Gallo, all of them at passes, and there demand flour, maize, and other provisions. Travelers knew they had better accede to the requests so that some calamity would not befall them; many a solitary traveler has perished miserably along this road. When the Salineros had decimated the wild cattle and herds, they turned their greedy and vicious eyes upon the settled areas of this kingdom and together with the Tobosos and Zeguaces have stolen more than 15,000 animals in six years, including miners' mules. This is an important point because even if the



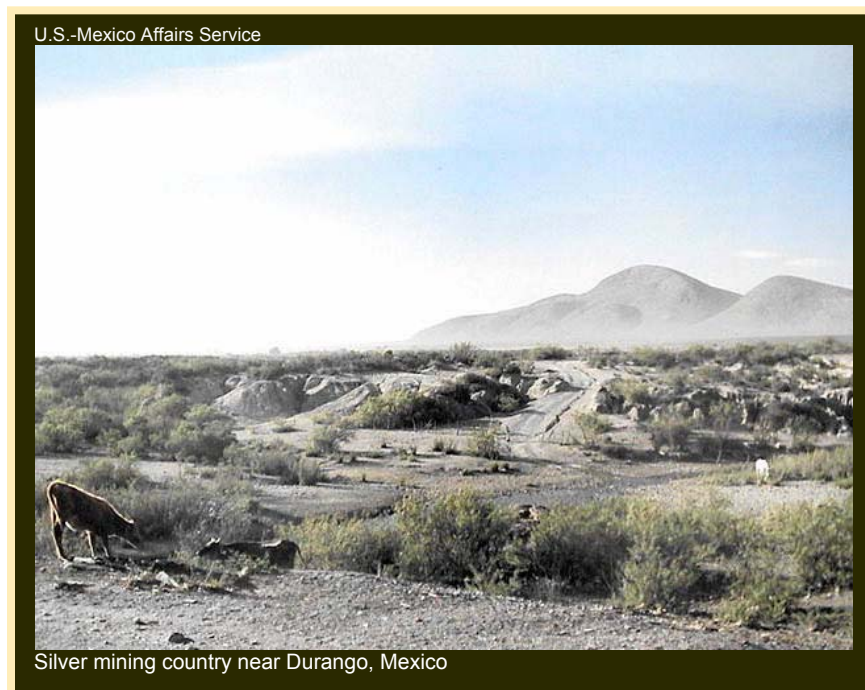
<sup>1</sup> By this comment Medrano shows that he considered the Tarahumara revolts up to that time to have been a justifiable response to Spanish encroachment. The Jesuit missionaries and others realized this, also. The Indians were asking only to be left alone. [Naylor & Polzer, p. 423]

murders done by these barbarians should be forgotten [although they never will be], one cannot ignore that without mules there can be no processing of metals. If silver cannot be transported, then his majesty's interests will be prejudiced. . . .

The Indian hostilities of today continue to be the same as those previously referred to. By stealing horses, often on the same day in all corners of the kingdom, they are destroying the mining and stockraising industries while eluding capture. The Indians divide themselves into squadrons and stage ambushes along desolate stretches of road. Placing spies upon hilltops in order to spot travelers, they fall upon them, robbing and killing. Then they use the spoils to attract other remote nations to their cause. Ever since the two Indians were flayed alive in the streets of Parral, the martyrdoms inflicted upon unfortunate travelers who fall into their hands are incredible.

It has been suggested that no one would be killed if we were to neither travel the roads nor leave our homes. This would indeed be good and sane counsel if the kingdom could be maintained without commerce, or if some means could be devised to transport the salts, alloys, and supplies needed by the mines through the air. It would also be necessary to relocate the haciendas [ranches] closer to the mines, to move the forests closer so that the woodcutters and charcoal makers can work in safety, and to make the oxen and other livestock work without needing pasture, since there are no safe grazing areas. What is most painful is that a man can go no farther than a league from his house without the danger of being killed, whereas during past governments a man could safely travel alone as far as New Mexico. Just because two men occasionally survive the dangers of traveling by turning nights into days and days into nights—hiding among the thickets and brambles during the day—it never fails that someone will make the specious argument that the land is at peace and no danger exists. . . .

I have mentioned how some have tried to attribute the decline of mining revenues and the general ruin of the silver industry to the decay of the mines and the reduced yields of the ore. The truth is that the



minerals in the mines of the province of Santa Barbara are more abundant and richer than anywhere else in New Spain . . . All the ranches and charcoal camps are abandoned, and the Indians have stolen all the mules and horses. The suppliers of goods are ruined. The people from all walks of life cannot work because their lives are constantly in danger. They do not have the means to work the mines and only with the greatest exertion can they even work the slag piles and tailings. In the final analysis it is this depopulation that has caused the decline in [mine] output and not the decreasing ore quality. This same

problem also exists in Cuencamé; both Spaniards and laborers have abandoned it because of the certain risk of Indian attack, since Cuencamé is six leagues distant from the mines. There the quantity of the ore is greater than it has been in many years, proving that lower silver production is not due to the decline of the mines themselves, but to depopulation and the breakdown of supply. . . .



In the introduction to this account, all the Indian rebellions and uprisings in this kingdom during the past fifty-four years were recounted, as well as the punishment which each Indian nation received. If one tried to explain why the Acaxees, Xiximes, and Tepehuanes have not conspired to revolt again, there is no better answer than that they were restrained and punished, either by a formal army or by squadrons in different places, the method generally observed to be the most practical. From this it can be deduced and inferred that the Salineros, who since 1645 have not been punished or bridled, are the ones responsible for the ravages, thefts, and murders that have been committed in the region between this city [Durango] and Parral. As many accounts and reports show, they are clearly masters of all the land between the two cities. . . .

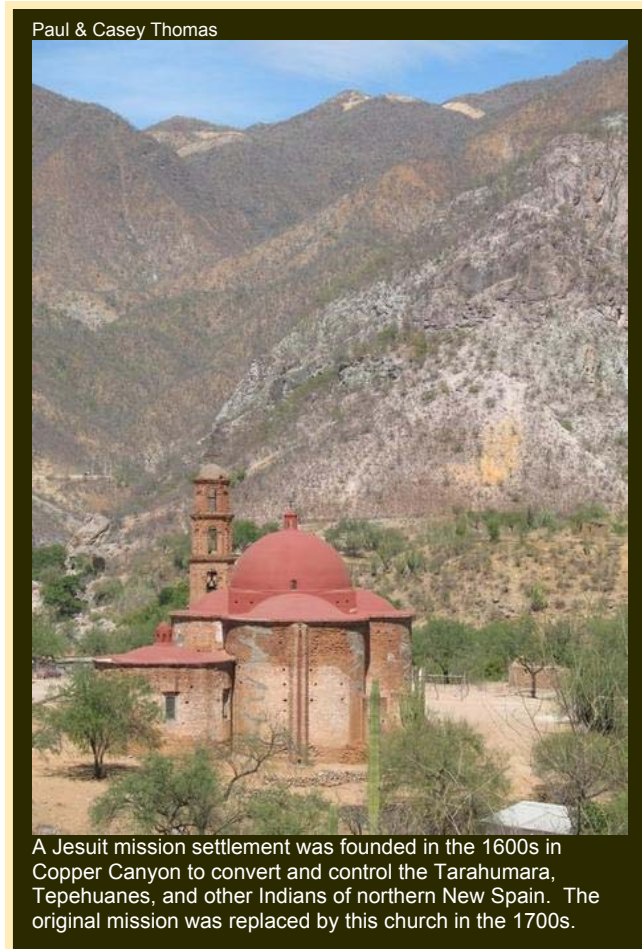
. . . I propose the method which to my mind will most efficiently and economically remedy the problem and which does not include either a deliberate or haphazard use of bloodshed, mutilation of members, or any other sort of corporal punishment.

. . . [Y]our grace will recognize that that the Salinero nation has consumed, laid to waste, and annihilated this entire kingdom and that before 1644 when they began to rebel, not a single domestic animal was lost. It is the Salineros who have stolen livestock and who, under the guise of being at peace, commit murders, assaults, and threaten people along the roads. Their incursions have never been halted, much less punished. Instead, they have been aided and supplied with food and clothing. Barraza, during the last dry season, employed them as scouts and trackers. This policy—which I call a traitorous cancer since it allows the Salineros access to information which furthers their depredations and prevents their capture—has not alleviated, but rather aggravated, the damages which now take place within twelve leagues of this city. The Indians have it in their power to advance even closer since no one can stop them. All this serves to justify my plan, which follows.

Since your grace will soon leave for Parral, on the way you should pass through the villages of Tizonazo, San Cristóbal, and El Navío, all populated by Salineros. You should treat them with honor and kindness and explain that his excellency wishes to show his appreciation for their services. Then they should be told that they are to be divided into different groups to be attached to all the presidios [forts] of the kingdom, where they will aid by exploring the country, protecting the roads, and halting the ravages committed in this kingdom by rebellious [Indian] nations. To accomplish this and to pay them, clothes and supplies will be brought to Cerrogorido or Parral, where a general assembly will be held and the tasks and destination of each Indian squadron determined. After this has been done and your grace has seen and verified in Parral the reports of the grave damages caused by this nation under the guise of peace, you will summon the caciques [Salinero leaders], give them some clothing, and let them see two wagonloads of clothing leave for Cerrogorido, making it appear that provisions are being readied for them there. Then the Salineros will be told what day they are to meet there to receive their assignment and pay. On this day all the soldiers from the presidios, having been previously summoned, will fall upon and shackle all the Indians and their women and children gathered in the patio of the casa real in Parral or in Cerrogorido. Once the Indians are our prisoners, they will be sent to labor in the workshops of Puebla or México [to the south], and they will pay the costs of the trip. At the same time, deprived of their opportunities to rob and

kill Spaniards, they will also be instructed in the holy faith while doing a great service to God and king. In this manner the kingdom will be freed of its astute and dangerous enemies just as Spain was when it expelled the Moors. . . .

. . . I not only wish to see this kingdom restored to its former glory through the resettlement of haciendas and reales de minas which were abandoned in the face of calamity, I also want to see it grow with new settlements. All this will assure a perpetual flow of silver and a steady income from the mining taxes without incurring additional royal costs, barring any new Indian dangers. . . .



Mendrano further explains his proposal to create new mission settlements among the Indians, administered by the Jesuits.

It is well known that the most effective means to control the Guachichil and Zacateco Indians was to settle Tlaxcaltecs, Tonaltecs, and other pacified people among them. This was successfully done in the Villa de Nombre de Dios, Chalchihuites, Mezquitic, Tepic, Santa María, Venado, San Luis de la Paz, and in various other places. Furthermore, the provinces of Sonora and Sinaloa are well populated, at peace, and trouble-free; it is said that more than 40,000 Indians have been converted to the brotherhood of our holy faith. It would be impossible for a presidio of only fifty men to keep these Indians at peace if their natural tendency to be calm and tractable were not encouraged by the doctrine and saintly example of the Jesuit fathers. Apostles in those parts, as well as in many other provinces of the world, the fathers zealously look after their parishioners. To better ensure that the Indians do not run away and forget the rudiments of the faith, guards are posted along the roads. Since some priests have been in these missions for twenty or thirty years, most members of their congregations are like godchildren and family to them. All this presents an attractive possibility that his excellency

should discuss with the reverend father provincial of the Society of Jesus and other high officials. May their fervor and zeal allow them to release seven experienced missionary fathers for an undertaking which would greatly serve our Lord God, his majesty, and the public good. Each of these Jesuit fathers would solicit 200 families from their missions to be used in settling the seven new missions. . . For several years, the costs of building, moving the Indians, and supplying them with oxen and plows for plantings should be paid with funds previously allocated to the two presidios, that is, after the stipends for the three new missions are subtracted. The Indians of Sinaloa and Sonora should not be prevented from leaving their villages but should be attached to the new missions. Two columns of soldiers from the presidio of Cerro Gordo should aid by patrolling the villages each month. . . . In this way, we shall restrain and keep the nations of the interior within their borders. Eventually they too will be pacified and will join the settlements and enjoy the benefits of the holy faith. . . .

With this plan the real of Mapimí will be repopulated and its strength and productivity will greatly exceed that enjoyed before its abandonment. All the mining centers will be resettled, and many new ones will be founded. There will be bountiful harvests, prices of supplies and livestock will go down, and the

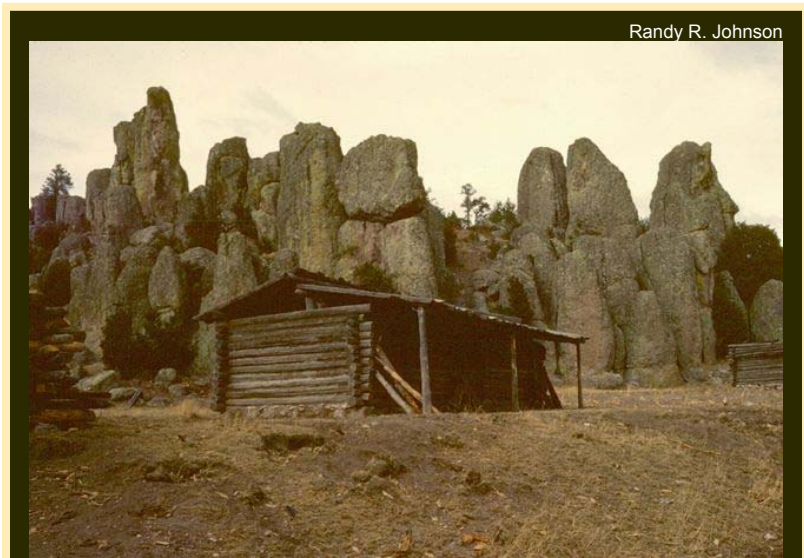
cattle and mule herds will multiply free of Indian threat. In a few years this kingdom will once again be powerful, his majesty's revenues will increase, and without doubt more money will be available in the royal treasury without the constant drain caused by Indian uprisings. . . .

The Tarahumara are distinguished by their courtesy and quick intelligence. Since they form a commonwealth and are a people who toil and labor to feed and clothe themselves, we should contact them through zealous and capable persons, proposing that they settle in the villages which are contemplated. These emissaries would promise them land, water, oxen, and whatever implements are needed as well as assure them that they will be free of vexations from Spaniards and free to choose the religious order they prefer for their missionaries. . . The missionaries will receive a sufficient stipend from his majesty to ensure that they will need neither to use Indian lands nor force the sale and distribution of goods upon the Indians, but rather allow them to participate freely in the market. This is important, for the Tarahumaras are a sensitive as well as diligent people. I really can see no reason why this plan would not work with the Tarahumaras. Captain Cristóbal de Nevaes, who has made various expeditions into their lands, has told me that the Tarahumaras themselves have proposed that, if they were supplied with land and water and treated well, they would settle in villages. . . Furthermore, if the Indians of the interior were to rebel, these Tarahumaras would, at no cost to the royal treasury, be able to call upon their brothers to take vengeance upon the aggressors and utterly destroy them. . . .

. . . If I have been too wordy or have had to be a talebearer, I have done it only out of obligation to his majesty. When asked about the futility of so many inflated expenses, I felt compelled to answer. May God grant a disastrous end to me if any sort of hatred, passion, or ill-will has motivated my proposals. . . .

May God preserve and favor your grace, as I ardently desire. Durango, August 31, 1654. Your chaplain kisses the hand of your grace.

Bachiller Diego de Medrano



Randy R. Johnson

Tarahumara settlement, Copper Canyon, 2006



Randy R. Johnson

Copper Canyon, Chihuahua, Mexico, 2006