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Remote Beyond Compare: Letters of don Diego de Vargas to His Family from New Spain and New Mexico, 1675-1706. Edited by John L. Kessell. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989. Preface, introduction, maps, illustrations, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. xiv + 596 pp. \$32.50.

"Spain was but a stepmother to me, for she banished me to seek my fortune in strange lands" (130-31). Thus Diego de Vargas, a member of the untitled nobility, explained why he had set out for the Indies at age twenty-eight, leaving his wife and four children behind in Madrid. Thirty-two years later when Vargas died while on campaign against Apaches in New Mexico, he had not made his fortune nor returned to Madrid as planned. He had won fame, however, in New Mexico and New Spain. For his intrepid leadership of the reconquest of New Mexico following the stunning Pueblo Revolt of 1680, Vargas won the title of Marqués de la Nava de Barcinas and a place in the history of a land that he described as "at the ends of the earth and remote beyond compare" (168).

As with nearly all of the outstanding figures on New Spain's far northern frontier, Vargas has been known to historians only through official correspondence. The private side of this conquistador was lost to memory until 1982, when historian John Kessell, with the help of the twelfth Marqués de la Nava de Barcinas, located some of Vargas's personal correspon-

dence in a private collection in Madrid. Those remarkable private letters, transcribed and translated into English, form the body of this bilingual edition. They do not alter our understanding of the broad contours of the reconquest of New Mexico, but they do add human dimension to the Vargas known only by his public deeds.

To historians, the public Vargas had seemed to be a wealthy man, for they had taken at face value his claim that he conquered New Mexico at his own expense. Kessell points out, however, that Vargas was not wealthy and that he conquered New Mexico with considerable help from the Crown. Indeed, Vargas's principal preoccupation, as revealed in these letters, was with his personal finances: management of his estates in Spain; repayment of debts in two hemispheres; support of his children in Spain and support of a second family in New Spain; and winning further honors and offices that would enhance the name of Vargas and augment his income as well as his prestige. The letters also provide a vivid view of Spain's seventeenth-century bureaucracy, where one advanced through bribery, nepotism, personal contacts, aggressive self-promotion, and vicious political infighting. It was thoroughly modern.

The Vargas letters, written in a difficult seventeenth-century Spanish, have been expertly translated and edited by John Kessell, who introduces them with a fresh, richly detailed biography of Vargas. Handsomely printed, lavishly illustrated, and bargain-priced, this is the first title to emerge from the Vargas Project, Kessell's research group at the University of New Mexico. *Remote Beyond Compare* will become the companion to the Vargas Project's forthcoming multivolume series, *The Journals of don Diego de Vargas, 1691-1704*, which will contain translations of the official correspondence from the Vargas era in New Mexico. Kessell has launched the Vargas Project magnificently.

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