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RETRATO DEL SR. D. DIEGO DE VARGAS ZAPATA Y LUJAN
Marqués de la Nava de Barcinas

(From José Pérez Balsera, *Laudemus viros gloriosos et parentes nostros in generatione sua* (Madrid, 1931). See page 208

GOVERNOR VARGAS IN COLORADO

By J. MANUEL ESPINOSA

IN THE last half of the seventeenth century (c. 1664-1680) Juan de Archuleta led a small military expedition north-east from New Mexico to bring back some Taos Indians who had fled to a spot in eastern Colorado afterwards known as El Cuartelejo—what seems to have been the first recorded European expedition to penetrate into the region which is now the state of Colorado.¹ The documentary evidence on this expedition is scant, and the route followed is conjectural. But much of Archuleta's trail must have been familiar ground, for during the two decades preceding the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 it is apparent that frontiersmen from the Spanish settlements of the Upper Río Grande were already opening up what in the eighteenth century came to be the most travelled routes from New Mexico into Colorado.²

After the Archuleta expedition it is generally stated that the next recorded Spanish expedition to enter what is now Colorado was the one led by Uribarri to El Cuartelejo in 1706.³ But it is my purpose to show that Governor Vargas of New Mexico led an expedition up the Río Grande Valley into what is now Colorado in July 1694, an episode which has been overlooked. This Vargas expedition of 1694 is the first

1. Alfred B. Thomas, "Spanish Expeditions into Colorado," in *The Colorado Magazine*, I (November, 1924), 291-292; and his *After Coronado, Spanish Exploration Northeast of New Mexico, 1606-1727* (Norman, 1935), 153, 261.

2. These were the series of trails which led north from Santa Fé to Taos, then either north up the river valley into central Colorado, the principal course followed by the slowly advancing stream of Spanish and Mexican settlement, or east over the Culebra Mountains and finally northeast to the valley of the Purgatoire River. From here explorers and Indian fighters proceeded north into the eastern plains of the state. The return was generally over one or another of these same trails. There were other routes later followed by the Spaniards to enter Colorado. One was northwest toward the La Plata Mountains in southwestern Colorado. Some expeditions went as far as the Gunnison River; one crossed the state and penetrated to the Great Basin. Cf. Thomas, "Spanish Expeditions into Colorado," 290.

3. Cf. Thomas, *After Coronado*, 16. Vargas' expedition northeast of Santa Fé in pursuit of Picuríes Indians in 1696, which came as a result of a rebellion on the part of certain Indian groups in the fall of that year, probably reached only into northeastern New Mexico.

Spanish expedition from New Mexico north into Colorado of which we have definite recorded information. The hitherto unutilized original day-to-day account of the expedition, upon which I base my story, may be found in the unpublished official campaign records of Governor Vargas for the year in question.⁴

This expedition, accidental in origin, took place during the reconquest of the Pueblo region under Vargas. The first objective in the reconquest, the reoccupation of the walled city of Santa Fé had been realized on January 1, 1694. This was significant, for Santa Fé became the base of operations from which all New Mexico was eventually reconquered. Nevertheless, for several years thereafter Vargas and his colony were to all intents and purposes stranded on a barren island, for although they were safely intrenched within the walls of Santa Fé food was dangerously scarce and all beyond was hostile. Of twenty-odd pueblos only four were the allies of the Spaniards: Pecos, and the Keres of Santa Ana, Sia, and San Felipe. These had remained faithful to their promises of 1692. The hostile natives of the other pueblos had barricaded themselves on the mesas and on the rims of the canyons. Those of Jémez and the Keres of Santo Domingo were on the mesas near their respective pueblos; the other Keres were on the mesa of La Cieneguilla de Cochití; most of the Tanos and the Tewas were on the mesa of San Ildefonso, the rest in nearby canyons; and the Picurías and Taos (the northern Tiwas) were in their original pueblos.

As for provisions, on June 2, 1694, Vargas wrote a letter to the viceroy in which he said that the Spanish colonists at

4. "Testim^o de los Autos de Guerra de la Reconq^{ta} de este R^{no} de la Nueva Mexico . . . Año de 1694," in the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, *Historia*, tomo 39. This is Vargas' official campaign journal for the period January 23 to July 16, 1694. Vargas entered Colorado on July 8 of that year. There are transcripts of these documents in the *Bolton Collection*, Bancroft Library, Berkeley. Among the badly damaged, and in this case inadequate, fragments of the original copy of the journal for this period preserved in the Santa Fé Archive, Santa Fé, New Mexico, are entries for January 28-30, February 11 to March 5, March 26 to May 30, June 16, June 23-29, July 1-6, and July 8-26.

Santa Fé, over 1,100 persons, were destitute.⁵ They had no livestock except 500 horses. Continued hostilities prevented the people from planting their fields, so they still depended upon what they were able to pilfer from the granaries of the surrounding Indian pueblos and what was sent up from Mexico. Toward the end of June, Father Farfán arrived at Santa Fé with his long delayed colony of sixty-one and a half families from Mexico.⁶ This meant more reinforcements but it also meant additional mouths to feed, so with both of these ideas in mind Vargas decided to embark upon a campaign to crush the rebellious nations of Jémez and Santo Domingo. Both of these continued their murderous forays against the three friendly Keres pueblos. The plan was to make the expedition immediately. A public proclamation was made by the official crier to the sound of military instruments as was customary on such occasions, and the little army was assembled. But the Río Grande was found running dangerously high so the expedition was temporarily postponed.⁷

In view of this delay and the pressing need of feeding the colony, Vargas decided upon a quick trip to the Tano and Tewa pueblos, thence to Picuries, for the purpose of stocking up with maize from their abandoned granaries. If necessary he was prepared to go even as far as Taos.⁸ As it turned out he went even farther north, into what is now southern Colorado, before the expedition was completed.

On June 30, 1694, the expedition started, proceeding in two divisions, Vargas and the faithful Don Juan, the Pecos chieftain, in the vanguard with fifty leather-jackets and an army of Pecos allies, and fifty militia with the pack train bringing up the rear.⁹ At Cuyamungué, four leagues north

5. Diego de Vargas to the Count of Galve, Santa Fé, June 2, 1694. Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, (hereafter referred to by A. G. N.), *Historia*, tomo 39.

6. Vargas' journal, June 23, 1694, *ibid.* Bancroft erroneously states that this second colony consisted of seventy families, as did the original one. (H. H. Bancroft, *History of Arizona and New Mexico*, (San Francisco, 1889), 206.

7. Vargas' journal, June 28-29, 1694.

8. *Ibid.*, June 29, 1694.

9. *Ibid.*, June 23, 30, and July 4, 1694.

of Santa Fe, a group of Indians attacked the vanguard, and refusing to listen to peaceful overtures they did not take to flight until eleven of them had been killed. An inspection of the mesa of San Ildefonso brought forth manifestations of enmity in the form of yelling and war whoops. Vargas made no attempt to provoke a battle, and camped on the edge of the Río Grande a league from the mesa.¹⁰ Turning eastward from the Río Grande up the valley of the Santa Cruz River, the expedition passed through San Lázaro and San Cristóbal,¹¹ whose residents had planted their fields, then to the former hacienda of Moraga¹² seven leagues from where they had pitched camp the night before.¹³ Picurías, on the edge of the canyon,¹⁴ was reached toward evening. It was abandoned, but Vargas set up a cross in the square and refused to allow pillage of any kind.¹⁵

A rough and trying mountain pass led to Taos. This pueblo was likewise found abandoned, but crosses had been placed on all of the houses. Vargas believed that this had been done as an act of piety born of fear, which was exactly the idea that the crafty Indians meant to convey, hoping thus to prevent the Spaniards from molesting their property and

10. *Ibid.*, June 30, 1694.

11. These pueblos, on the site of the former Spanish town of Santa Cruz, were now abandoned. Their residents had removed to the rebel stronghold on the mesa of San Ildefonso (*Ibid.*, March 20-23, April 23, May 23, 1694). There is material evidence to show that there was an Indian pueblo at Pueblito, near the present Potrero, about two miles east of Santa Cruz, on the Santa Cruz River. This may have been the exact site of the pueblos at one time or another during the wanderings of their Tanos inhabitants, as some historians state, but this is only a surmise; there are other ruins in the vicinity.

The Tanos of San Lázaro and San Cristóbal had moved from their original pueblos south of Santa Fé to the Santa Cruz valley after the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 in order to be closer to their allies. (For a description of the location and ruins of the former pueblos in the vicinity of Galisteo, and a statement of reasons for their removal in 1680, cf. R. E. Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexican History* (2v., Cedar Rapids, 1911), I, 359-360, n. 368; F. W. Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico* (2v., Washington, 1907-10), II, 428, 446).

12. The hacienda of Moraga mentioned in the diary was probably the one later the property of Antonia de Moraga, who held land in the vicinity of Chimayó after the Pueblo Revolt. Cf. Twitchell, *The Spanish Archives of New Mexico* (2v., Cedar Rapids, 1914), I, titles 496, 1021.

13. Vargas' journal, July 1, 1694.

14. Vargas must have turned north through the Truchas country.

15. *Ibid.*, July 2, 1694.

looting their granaries.¹⁶ A cross was set up by Vargas in an open square between the two great communal dwellings. Sergeant Major Antonio Jorge was sent to plant another cross at the entrance to the heavily wooded mountain canyon about a half a league north of the pueblo, which was known to be their place of refuge. On the way a group of Apaches appeared. They shook hands in friendly manner, and said that they had been trading with the Taos when Governor Pacheco heard of Vargas' coming, for which reason he and his people had fled to the entrance of the canyon, whence the Apaches had accompanied them.

Vargas went with fifteen men to plead with Pacheco at the mountain retreat, with Don Juan, the Pecos leader, as interpreter. But Pacheco stubbornly refused to talk. Don Juan, then, blind to Vargas' warnings, decided to spend the night in the mountains with Pacheco in order to speak with him and attempt to win him over. In the presence of everyone he divested himself of his spurs and powder pouch, put down his cloak, shield, and arquebus, embraced Vargas, and leaving even his mule behind, went unarmed to join the enemy. Whereupon Vargas returned to where his men were, and pitched camp by the river a short distance below the pueblo, there to await an answer.¹⁷

But no answer was forthcoming. And on the following morning, when Vargas returned to parley with the enemy, it was learned that they had moved farther into the mountain, at the entrance to which guards had been posted behind the rocks and thickets. And when Don Juan was asked for, the rebels answered with vague and ambiguous phrases. He was never seen again. Vargas waited till past noon, and then he ordered the sacking of the pueblo. The lower rooms were broken into with an iron crow bar, and until evening the Indian allies were engaged in loading the mules with fresh maize.¹⁸ That night all was silence in the direction of the mountain retreat of Taos, but across the canyon leading

16. *Ibid.*, July 4, 1694.

17. *Ibid.*, July 3, 1694.

18. *Ibid.*, July 4, 1694.

south to Picurías a great smoke could be seen in the moonlight. On the following day smoke signals in increasing numbers could be seen on the mountain tops all around the valley of Taos.¹⁹

Since it was impossible to transport the recently acquired heavy loads of grain over the difficult mountain passes by way of Picurías without great risk, even danger of the camp being trapped by the rebels and annihilated, Vargas and the leaders decided that it would be much safer to return to Santa Fé round about through the Ute country, on the fringes of what is now southern Colorado, thence to the capital by way of the Chama River.²⁰ The expedition left at midnight, July 6, supposedly unobserved. But after having traveled about a half a league northward along the edge of the mountains in which the Taos had hidden themselves, the sight of a low fire signal gave indication that they were being followed. The Spaniards marched in three divisions, each one close at the heels of the other: forty soldiers in the vanguard led by the field captain Juan Olguín, with the train and luggage, Vargas and the fighting squadron in the middle, and Eusebio de Vargas and thirty soldiers in the rear, all travelling on horses and mules.²¹

On the morning of July 7, about six leagues north of Arroyo Hondo, the camp was ambushed by about eighty Taos Indians, five of whom were killed and two captured before the others took to flight. The captives were questioned, and from one of them it was learned that Pacheco had thirty Indians spying on the Spaniards all the way, and that Governor Juan of Pecos was alive but held prisoner. Both of the Indians were absolved and shot.

19. *Ibid.*, July 5, 1694.

20. *Ibid.*, July 6, 1694. This plan was suggested by some of the older members of the expedition, former residents of New Mexico who apparently knew the route.

21. *Ibid.*

Vargas continued on to the Río Colorado,²² the confines of which were inhabited by the Apaches del Acho²³ and whose meadows were the pasture ground of the buffalo, as the great amount of dung indicated. After passing through a beautiful country of many fertile river-valleys and tree-arched arroyos, Vargas camped on the edge of the Culebra River,²⁴ nine long leagues north of the Río Colorado.²⁵ The Culebra River was followed westward four long leagues to where it emptied into the Río Grande, then down the Río Grande

22. *Ibid.*, July 7, 1694. The route: two and a half leagues from the camp near Taos to the Arroyo Hondo; ten leagues to the Río Colorado, including the two and a half leagues to the Arroyo Hondo.

23. *Ibid.*, July 8, 1694. This is the first known reference to this Apache tribe. Twelve years later Juan de Uribarri refers to the "Achos" among the Apache groups which lived in the same region when he passed through on his way to El Cuartelejo (Cf. "Diary of Ulibarri," in Thomas, *After Coronado*, 63). Are these Apaches del Acho the "Acha" of Castañeda's account of the Coronado expedition, whom Bandelier identified with the Picuries? (Cf. Hodge, *op. cit.*, II, 245.)

24. *Ibid.* Vargas' route between Taos and the Culebra River seems to have been approximately the same one later followed by Anza on his way back from the Comanche country in 1779. Compare with the diary of Governor Anza's expedition against the Comanche in Thomas, *Forgotten Frontiers*, 137, and Anza's map, *ibid.*, frontispiece.

25. Vargas' journal, July 8, 1694. The present Culebra River in precisely this vicinity enters the Río Grande about fourteen miles north of the New Mexico-Colorado line. I here reproduce in translation the extract from Vargas' diary which tells the story of the crossing into Colorado:

Said governor and captain-general reaches the Culebra River and with the camp spends the night there.

On the eighth of the present month of July of this year, I, said governor and captain-general, called upon the interpreters of this expedition, and they informed me that the mountains that run along the edge of the Río Colorado are inhabited by the Apaches del

Acho, and that the Ute nation, which we are looking for, does not countenance them in their land, for which reason I should flee from this place, which is also the farthest point to which the rebel Taos Indians, who still have sentinels and spies watching us, come out on the trail of the buffalo, the dung of which has been found in different parts, as along the descents from the mountain to the river.

And in order that the Utes, whom we are seeking, may know of our arrival in the kingdom of New Mexico and the villa of Santa Fé, I ordered that large smoke signals be raised, and I marched on with the camp to the Culebra River, it being nine long leagues distance, and all country of extended valleys and many arroyos with groves of trees. It is evident, from the dung which was found, that the buffalo pastures here. Having reached the Culebra River at six o'clock in the evening I pitched camp in order to spend the night with my men on its bank.

In testimony of said march I signed this with the military leaders and my secretary of war and government.

Don Diego de Vargas Zapata Lujan Ponce de Leon—Antonio Jorge—Diego Arias de Quiros—Antonio Valverde.—Before me, Alfonso Rael de Aguilar, Secretary of War and Government.

several leagues to a steep walled ford,²⁶ and across four leagues west of this point to the San Antonio River, which faced the mountain of the same name.²⁷ Here several days were spent hunting buffalo and elk. On one occasion a herd of over five hundred buffalo was seen in a meadow in the San Antonio Mountains, but they stampeded when an attempt was made to hunt them down, and only about twenty-three were killed.²⁸

Suddenly, on July 11, just before dawn, the camp was raided by a group of Utes armed with bows and arrows and war clubs.²⁹ The Spaniards were taken completely by surprise, and six were wounded before the alarm brought resistance. After eight Utes had been killed, the others fled across the river.³⁰ From there they waved a buckskin as a flag of peace, and cried out "Anche pauiche," meaning in their language "My friend and brother." Then they re-crossed the river and mingled peacefully as though nothing had occurred. They were given gifts of maize, dried meat, a horse, and numerous European trifles. There were about three hundred of them counting the women.³¹

Their apologetic explanation of the reason for their surprise attack was quite plausible. They pointed out how before the revolt of 1680 they had been the friends of the Spaniards, but had always been the enemies of the Tewas, Tanos, Picurías, Jémez, and Keres. During the period of pueblo independence these rebels had often come to this region to hunt buffalo disguised as Spaniards, mounted, and with leather jackets, leather hats, firearms, and even a bugle, all of which they had taken from the Spaniards at the time of the revolt. Whenever they went on these excursions the

26. *Ibid.*, July 9, 1694.

27. *Ibid.*, July 10, 1694.

28. *Ibid.*, July 10-11, 1694.

29. *Ibid.*, July 11, 1694. Not the night of the 12th as Bancroft states. (Bancroft, *op. cit.*, 210.)

30. Vargas' journal, July 11, 1694. Bancroft is again erroneous in his statement that eight Spaniards were killed, instead of eight Utes. (Bancroft, *op. cit.*, 210.)

31. Vargas' journal, July 11, 1694.

Utes had attacked them, hence the recent misfortune, a result of mistaken identity.³²

From here the expedition proceeded southward to the vicinity of Ojo Caliente, and by way of the Chama River to San Juan.³³ Thence the pack train and most of the camp were sent directly to Santa Fé, while Vargas, with forty soldiers, went to reconnoiter the mesa of San Ildefonso. The rebels were still strongly intrenched there. As he had no desire to provoke a battle, he joined the vanguard at Jacona, and the united expedition entered Santa Fé by way of Tesuque on July 16.³⁴

During the seventeen day excursion the expedition had covered over one hundred and twenty leagues,³⁵ a protracted journey, but all of the much needed grain reached its destination safely, so the trip was a success.³⁶ For this reason alone the expedition was important. The large amount of maize pilfered at Taos was now distributed among the families at Santa Fé.³⁷

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Saint Louis, Missouri*

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, July 12-15, 1694.

34. *Ibid.*, July 15-16, 1694.

35. *Ibid.*, July 16, 1694.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, July 17, 1694.