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# The Recovery of the First History of Alta California: Antonio María Osio's *La historia de Alta California*

*Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz*

The transformation of Alta California was as sudden as it was unexpected. From a population of less than 15,000 *gente de razón* [literally, people with the capacity to reason, meaning people born into Christianity; that is, any non-Indian people] in the mid-1840s, it contained over 100,000 inhabitants in 1850 and almost a quarter of a million two years later. Swarming over the landscape, hostile to the system of land ownership and use that had developed over the previous half century, the newcomers, imbued with their longstanding belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority, went where they willed and took what they wanted.

The *Californios* [any Mexican raised, or later, born and raised in California] adopted various strategies to meet this invasion. Some participated in the institutions set up by the conquerors, sitting in the 1849 Constitutional Convention and in the early state legislatures. Others prepared to defend themselves through North American courts and land commissions. Others withdrew from public life and public view, in the hope that they would be left alone. Others left and returned to Mexico.

This paper tells the story of another strategy, one man's attempt to preserve a world through the creation of history and autobiography. On April 4, 1851, in the city of Santa Clara, Antonio María Osio, who had been a bureaucratic functionary and officeholder in Mexican California for two decades, presented Father José María Suárez del Real with a densely written one hundred and ten page manuscript. In a cover letter, Osio told Suárez del Real that what the priest had asked him to do, "write the history of California," was beyond his ability. But he had decided, Osio said, to write a letter, a "*relación*" of events since 1815 and especially of "what I have known and seen since 1825."

Osio was well-situated to do this. A native of Baja California, he had married Dolores Argüello, the sister of Luis Argüello, the first Mexican governor of Alta California. He worked in the Customs Service in San Francisco and Monterey in the late 1820s. As a member of the *Diputación* [elected assembly that met at Monterey during the Mexican period in California] in the early 1830s, he was active in the successful movement to overthrow Governor Manuel Victoria. As a member of the Los Angeles *Ayuntamiento* [municipal government composed of a local magistrate and various members of a town council] and as *síndico* [public attorney], he participated in the movement against Governor Mariano Chico. He was a leader in the southern California resistance to Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado in 1837. In the late 1830s, he became both Collector of Customs at Monterey and a member of the *Tribunal Superior* [superior court], and he served in both positions until the 1840s. Politically and socially, Osio was a very well-connected man in Mexican California.<sup>1</sup> Yet his manuscript has never been published, or even widely studied. In this paper we would first like to demonstrate why the manuscript was consigned to historiographical oblivion. Secondly, we would like to highlight some of the reasons why we think it is an important and unique document in the history of Mexican California.

By early 1852, both Osio and Suárez del Real had left Alta California and returned to Mexico. Osio spent the rest of his life in his birthplace of San José del Cabo in Baja California, where he served as *alcalde* [local magistrate] in the 1860s and as a judge in the 1870s. The manuscript's existence remained almost completely unknown in California for a quarter century. Suárez del Real, who died in the 1850s, never returned to Alta California. Osio did return for brief visits at least twice, in 1864 and in 1875.<sup>2</sup>

By the time of that second visit, Hubert Howe Bancroft's staff, especially Enrique Cerrutti and Thomas Savage, were involved in collecting from the old *Californios* the reminiscences, dictations, and documents which would serve as the backbone of the Spanish and Mexican sections of Bancroft's seven-volume *History of California*. Osio had apparently heard about this, for he brought the manuscript with him to San Francisco. On April 18, 1875 Cerrutti wrote to Bancroft:

A few days ago Mr. Osio, a resident of California in 1826, arrived in San Francisco, dragging along with him a manuscript history of the early times in California. I believe he originally intended to give it to your library, but certain persons whose acquaintance he happened to make induced him to reconsider his resolution, and made him believe that there was money in it. Actuated by that belief, he has given the manuscript to Mr. Hopkins, keeper of the Archives in San Francisco, with a prayer for enough subscribers to pay for printing it. I believe, with judicious diplomacy and a little coin, you could get some person to purchase the manuscript for your library. (Bancroft, *Literary Industries* 647)

Osio eventually returned to San José del Cabo, where he died in 1878. However, before he departed he left the manuscript at Santa Clara with Soledad Ortega, the widow of Luis Argüello. Upon her death, the manuscript passed into the possession of J.R. Arques, the executor of the Argüello estate. He gave it to one of Osio's daughters, Beatrice Osio de Williamson, who was living in San Francisco. During the late 1870s, three copies were made of it. One was made for John Doyle, who was collecting as many old documents as he could as part of his work for the Catholic Church in California on the Pious Fund case.<sup>3</sup> The second was made for James A. Forbes, who was a translator in the San Francisco Archives. Third, in 1878 a copy of the Doyle copy was made for Bancroft (Bancroft, *Literary Industries* 647-48).<sup>4</sup>

These events had two consequences. First, the fact that Osio did not freely make the manuscript available to Bancroft's staff soured them on him. Cerrutti's comments quoted above give a flavor of the negative way in which the emerging Anglo history establishment was beginning to deride Osio and his manuscript: Osio was "dragging along with him" the manuscript and was animated solely by the desire to make money. Actually, Cerrutti's letter points to something quite different. Osio was motivated by a desire to have the entire manuscript published on its own and rendered accessible to a wide readership. Osio was in fact something of a genuine amateur historian. He had at least browsed through the government archives in Monterey and when he was a member of the *Diputación* in the 1830s he was anxious to create and preserve an accurate historical record.<sup>5</sup> He may well have sensed that offering the manuscript to Bancroft would have been in effect to cede control of the historical record to the very people who had taken over his country and who tended to be scornful of Mexico's past rule in Alta California.

Such a fear would not have been unfounded. One need only contrast the paternalistic and heavy-handed manner in which the Mexican reminiscences are sometimes treated in Bancroft's *California* volumes with the reverential and awe-filled fashion in which the same author's *Popular Tribunals* handles the reminiscences of the San Francisco vigilantes of 1851 and 1856 to appreciate how pervasive was the denigration of Mexicans in the former works.<sup>6</sup>

Osio's experience made him very hostile to those who ruled the land where he had spent so many years. The experience was bitter. In 1839, he had been granted Angel Island in San Francisco Bay and in 1842 he received another grant of land near Point Reyes on the Pacific Coast north of San Francisco. He developed Angel Island quite effectively during the 1840s: by 1846 he had over 500 head of cattle grazing there and he was regularly selling beef to San Francisco. And, as the 1840s progressed, he spent more and more time at Point Reyes where he intended finally to settle so that he and his second wife could raise their young family in the country. In 1846 he had to abandon

Point Reyes because of the Bear Flag Revolt, and in the same year the U.S. Navy occupied Angel Island and slaughtered his entire herd of cattle. Soon North American squatters began to take possession of his land at Point Reyes.

Osio was associated with a group of Mexicans who had never made their peace with the American takeover of Alta California. Another of the group, Soledad Ortega, once told Mariano G. Vallejo, "They [the North Americans] rule over us in the same manner that the owner of a large farm rules his slaves. Our sweet Castilian tongue has given place to the unpronounceable English jargon—bless the Almighty I have not learned it" (Mollins and Thickens 109). Osio's manuscript was written in that same vein. It could be quite sharp on the subject of the North Americans. For instance, in relating Thomas A. Catesby Jones' premature capture of Monterey in 1842, Osio described the raising of the flag of the United States over the presidio in these words:

The true *Californios*, people who loved their country and were proud of their nationality, were forced to witness a painful ceremony for the very first time. The national flag of the three guarantees was lowered from its native flagpole so that it could be replaced by the stars and stripes. This flag was alleged to be the symbol of liberty, but this actually was a lie. It belonged to an oppressor who displayed arrogance against the weak.<sup>7</sup>

In a similar fashion, Osio described the efforts undertaken by some *Californios* to resist the North American invasion in 1846 as follows:

The North American flag waved in all the populated areas of Alta California, but the Mexican tricolor still flew in a few places as it wandered about its own country, passing through the deserted fields, unable to find shelter from the bad weather. It seemed as if the flag were revealing its despair; its brilliant colors had been faded by the strong rays of the sun, it had been torn by bullets and thorny branches, and worst of all, it had been orphaned with no distant hope of being helped. Nevertheless, the flag proudly waved in the wind, sensing the courageous heartbeats of the brave men who supported it. If they could not obtain an honorable surrender, they vowed to fight to the bitter end and die defending the flag. Let it be known for all time that even though they were unable to do more for their native land and for the country of their birth, these men should serve as an example for other places invaded by forces from the United States.

Osio's 1851 manuscript reflected the raw passions and the closely experienced bitterness of watching one's own country taken over by foreigners. In the document he described himself as "one who has experienced the sufferings of the *Californio* landowners, which the political change has caused." He was not, as were so many of the *Californios* who later gave their reminiscences to Savage or Cerrutti, ambivalent about the North American conquest.<sup>8</sup> He was emphatically and completely hostile to it. This attitude undoubtedly

contributed to a negative assessment of his manuscript in what had been Alta California.

A second consequence of the way the manuscript came to be made available in the late 1870s was that Bancroft ended up with an unreliable version, for he had to content himself with a copy of John Doyle's copy. The Doyle copy, dated 1876 and now housed at the Huntington Library, is not one hundred percent accurate. The title was changed from "*La historia de Alta California*" ["The History of Alta California"] to "*Crónica de los acontecimientos ocurridos en California desde 1815-1846*" ["Chronicle of Events That Occurred in California from 1815 to 1846"], and the scribe, Gulielmo B. Chase, appears to have been editing the manuscript as he went along. He consistently made significant stylistic and grammatical changes in an apparent attempt to clarify or improve Osio's manuscript. Words, clauses, and complete sentences are missing.<sup>9</sup>

The Bancroft copy differs significantly in content and format from both the original and from the Doyle copy. As in the case of the Doyle copy, the Bancroft scribe may have been mechanically copying the pages before him. It is evident, though, that he was not a meticulous proofreader for, in addition to the omissions already noted in the Doyle copy, the Bancroft scribe compounded the inaccuracies and corrupted the manuscript even more by omitting additional material, from entire paragraphs to numerous pages. For example, twenty one consecutive pages of the original manuscript, which deal with the complex political controversies of 1836 and 1837 in which Osio was an active participant, are missing. At some point during his work on this section, the scribe, realizing that the material he was copying was not making any sense, observed in a parenthetical note at the bottom of the page: "*En todo este capítulo se nota alguna vaguedad y no parece sino que, o el autor por precipitación u otra circunstancia no describe claramente los hechos, o el copista del original dejó algo en el tintero.*" ["In this entire chapter one notices a certain vagueness and it seems that either because the author was in a hurry or some other circumstance, he does not describe the events clearly, or the scribe who copied the original left something in the inkwell."] (290-21).<sup>10</sup>

The corruptions of the Bancroft copy were taken to be inherent weaknesses of the manuscript itself. Bancroft himself called attention to some of these weaknesses and attributed them to Osio, rather than to the fact that he was using a corrupt copy of a copy.<sup>11</sup> In sum, the carelessness of the Bancroft scribe resulted in a confusing, unintelligible, and incoherent copy, and this is doubtless another reason why researchers have not consulted the Osio manuscript more frequently.

However, Bancroft did more than just criticize the Osio manuscript; he subsumed it into his own work. Had Osio been alive when *California* was



published, he surely would have been outraged to learn that Bancroft had appropriated his manuscript into the corpus of dictations and reminiscences which *he* had collected. At the beginning of the first volume of the series Bancroft wrote:

The memory of men yet living when I began my researches, as aided by that of their fathers, covers in a sense the whole history of California since its settlement. I have therefore taken dictations of personal reminiscences from 160 old residents. Half of them were native, or of Spanish blood; the other half foreign pioneers who came to the country before 1848. Of the former class, twenty-four were men who occupied prominent public positions, equally divided between the north and the south. (1: 55)

At the bottom of that page, in a footnote, right between “Ord” (actually Angustias de la Guerra y Noriega, the daughter of José de la Guerra y Noriega, longtime Commander of the Santa Bárbara Presidio) and “Palomares” we read “Osio” (1: 55).<sup>12</sup> In other words, Bancroft presented himself as the one who had called Osio’s manuscript into being in the 1870s! In the pages of *California*, Bancroft and his staff stripped Osio of his own authorship.

The fate of the manuscript after Savage reported in 1883 that it was in the possession of Osio’s daughter Beatrice is not entirely clear. Beatrice Osio de Williamson continued to live in the San Francisco Bay area for some time after her father’s death.<sup>13</sup> We do know that the manuscript eventually came into the possession of Vallejo Gantner, son of John Gantner of the firm of Gantner and Mattern in San Francisco. It had probably come to his attention through some historic preservation efforts of the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West.<sup>14</sup> In the 1950s, he gave it to two of Herbert Eugene Bolton’s research assistants, Margaret Mollins and Virginia Thickens, who planned to translate and edit it. When Herbert Eugene Bolton became ill and died, they had to return to teaching and were not able to complete the project. Later they arranged for the manuscript to be deposited at Santa Clara, its original home.<sup>15</sup>

Osio’s manuscript is a significant document in the history of Mexican California for a number of reasons. First, it is the earliest narrative account of the period 1821-1846 that we have. The most utilized primary sources for the history of Mexican California have been documents concerning governmental and ecclesiastical affairs. Most of these sources have an ad-hoc quality about them. They were written to compile a required annual report, to deal with a current problem, or to answer a specific question. These sources have the closeness and the texture of day-to-day life, and that often gives them much of their value. However, historians know that to understand a culture and a people, one needs to know not only what they did in the lived ordinariness of their lives, but also how they viewed what they were doing. Explicitly self-

reflective work—fiction, autobiography, memoirs—can be of great assistance as we seek to understand the past. Imagine, for instance, how incomplete our understanding of the Pilgrims would be if we did not have William Bradford's *Of Plimouth Plantation* or Mary Rowlandson's *Narrative of Captivity*, of colonial and revolutionary America if we did not have *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, or of the Jewish immigrant experience if we did not have Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*. Analysis of these works, of course, is far from simple. However, they often provide a unique entry into a culture. Osio's manuscript does the same.

This leads to the second reason for its importance. The manuscript is clearly based on two types of sources: what Osio directly participated in and what he was told by others. The sources are then personal and oral. The oral nature of the sources is clearly revealed, for instance, in the way Osio treats non-Spanish names—he spells them out phonetically in the manuscript.<sup>16</sup> He had never seen these names in any sort of document; he had only heard them in the oral tradition of his people. The manuscript, therefore, brings together a number of stories that were undoubtedly current in Alta California in the 1830s and 1840s. Some of them, at least, bear the marks of having been worked on and refined either by Osio or by the tradition.<sup>17</sup>

Third, Osio's presentation of these stories is about as close as we are ever going to get to the oral culture as it existed before the North American invasion. The Osio manuscript differs markedly from other reminiscences by his contemporaries, notably the multi-volume works of Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo and Juan Bautista Alvarado, which were composed in the 1870s, more than a quarter century after the conquest and in some cases more than fifty years after the events they describe. With the passage of time a person's recollections do not always remain unchanged, memories tend to fade or become confused, and facts may be exaggerated or forgotten. People continually revise the memories of their lives to harmonize with the events that have happened or are happening at the present time (Couser, *Altered Egos* 17).

The Osio manuscript, on the other hand, was written a mere five years after the North American conquest of Alta California. The accounts of various events often tend to be more sober, less exaggerated, and less given to the grandiloquent pathos which one can find in some of the other reminiscences. In general, Osio's more matter-of-fact accounts are probably closer to the way these events were remembered to have been experienced by the *Californios*.<sup>18</sup>

Fourth, Osio offers a definite interpretation of the period he covers. We can gain the best perspective on his interpretive scheme by considering (a) his authorship; (b) the literary form of the manuscript, and (c) the emergence of Osio the man in the course of the work.



### *His Authorship*

Osio clearly regarded his role as more than simply being the person who would collect and preserve a bundle of stories. He was deeply aware of what today we would term his authorship: he was the one who decided which stories to include and how to group them. This may well be the reason he decided to begin his account in 1815, even though he did not arrive in Alta California until 1825. For then there could be no doubt that he was the one responsible for the order which existed in the manuscript. He uses the pre-1825 section of his work, in fact, to introduce all the themes he wants to cover in the body of the work.<sup>19</sup>

The manuscript begins with a description of the sadness and sense of loss felt by the inhabitants of Alta California when their governor died and it ends with Osio stating that he himself has experienced the sufferings of the *Californio* landowners which the recent political change has caused. These themes of sadness and loss frame the entire manuscript. The work is Osio's lament on his and Alta California's lost possibilities and on the disorder and chaos that affected both of them after the North American invasion. Osio's history of California is not simply a record of scattered recollections but rather a carefully crafted response to the changes that were occurring around him.<sup>20</sup> Osio is attempting to come to terms with what it meant to be a *Californio* in 1851. The result is a historical manuscript that can also be read as a personal and collective autobiography.

Osio differs from the other *Californio* authors in that he maintained complete authorial control over his narrative and it is his voice that resonates throughout. Osio, alone, decided on the material that would be included and on the manner in which it would be presented and the manuscript was written in his own hand. The other *Californio* authors were not able to maintain this degree of control over their work because the material for their narratives was obtained through oral interviews conducted by Bancroft's staff.<sup>21</sup> The topics and the order in which they were to be discussed were partially controlled by the interviewers who would take notes as the person spoke. Later, the information would be transcribed. During the transcription process it was not uncommon for the material to be edited or "filtered" through the scribe's pen.<sup>22</sup> Informants' responses and opinions were often influenced by the manner in which the interviewer would ask the questions, which could be considered a form of manipulation. Osio, on the other hand, did not answer a set of pre-determined questions nor did he allow anyone but himself to edit the manuscript.<sup>23</sup> The form of the work was his and his alone.

### *The Literary Form of the Manuscript*

Evidence of Osio's familiarity with many different literary traditions appears throughout the manuscript and Osio drew on a number of them.<sup>24</sup> For example, he could employ classical mythology. In one highly symbolic episode, Chico (whom Osio calls "Argos the observer") catches his mistress ("the beautiful Napea") flirting with a handsome young American ("Narcissus") she has met aboard ship.<sup>25</sup> Osio's obvious knowledge of and appreciation for a wide variety of literary genres may have influenced the stylistic framework he chose for his manuscript. Characteristics of three literary genres—epistle, memoir, and autobiography—appear in his work. The manuscript begins with the letter to Father Suárez del Real and ends with closing lines addressed to the same man. In this manner, the letter, which on the surface simply appears to be Osio's reply to the priest's request that he write a history of California, becomes the exterior framework for the work as a whole.

The conversational or dialogic tone of the narrative is characteristic of epistolary literature; the author writes the way that he speaks. Underlying the epistolary discourse is the important relationship between the reader and the author which will dictate the manner in which the information in the manuscript is conveyed.<sup>26</sup> The reader, Suárez del Real, plays a generative role in the creation of the work, for, the common memories, experiences, and trust shared by the two men give Osio the freedom to be honest, objective, and sincere as he composes. If one were to read the letter, or for that matter the entire manuscript, aloud, it would be easy to imagine Osio engaged in a long evening of conversation as he reminisced with his friend.<sup>27</sup> The dialogic motif is maintained throughout the entire manuscript. There are numerous instances where Osio adopts an explicitly conversational relationship with the reader as he says "Take note," "Look," "Notice," or "Imagine."<sup>28</sup>

Osio concludes the introductory letter by suggesting that Suárez del Real obtain letters from other friends who can provide him with information that Osio does not include. Although Osio appears to have taken his role as author very seriously, he never claims to be the supreme authority on California history. In fact, he openly submits his work to the scrutiny of others when he suggests that Suárez del Real ask for assistance from another friend who has the proper training and attributes of a good writer and who can help him compile a comprehensive history of California.<sup>29</sup> The closing lines of the introductory letter parallel the closing lines of the manuscript in which Osio states,

As one who has experienced the sufferings of the *Californio* landowners, which the political change has caused, I would ask that you please allow me to conclude

the present letter here. Another friend of yours, with a very small pen, might continue the story. Please accept this brief work which your dear, devoted servant dedicates to you as a token of our friendship.

Here, as in the introductory letter, the ritual of closing allows Osio to reiterate the mood of the entire work, the tone of sadness and loss. He also implies that his work is incomplete and that it will take on a larger significance when different perspectives and interpretations are added to it. Epistolary texts are never closed. Rather, they are merely a selection from a larger body of information or just one side of an exchange (Altman 144-5, 162). The epistolary text is not merely a historical object or an antique curiosity but rather a living thing that can be framed and re-framed as part of an ongoing process of textual creation, transmission, and interpretation. A work such as Osio's becomes the sum of its readings and contains not only numerous readers but all the years of its existence (Blasing xxiv).

### *The Emergence of Osio the Man*

While Osio is the narrator of the manuscript, his own personal presence does not stand out. Osio does not assume the role of narrator-protagonist and never overshadows or dominates the work. He chooses, instead, to slowly and subtly appear on the social and political scene, presenting different sides of himself in different contexts. He thus engages in an exercise of self-creation in which the reader is a witness and an indirect participant. This technique of subtle, progressive self-disclosure allows Osio, as narrator-observer, to position himself both inside and outside of his "history."

Osio refers to himself by name only twice in the manuscript, and then he calls himself "some fellow named Osio." As he becomes more involved in the political and social arenas, he appears in the text more frequently. However, he always describes himself in cryptic, indirect, or self-deprecating ways. He refers to himself as "the lowly Customs employee" or disguises himself as the "friend of Sepúlveda," "Gutiérrez' friend," or "the clumsy, foolish narrator." The restraint he employed in "creating" his public persona and in positioning himself in the manuscript in relation to other people indicates that he did not view himself as a person who operated and developed in isolation, but rather as someone who had been shaped by a collective experience.

Those two aspects of Osio—being described in a deprecatory fashion and being formed by a collective experience—also define the life of the other main character in the manuscript. That character is nothing else than Alta California itself. "Alta California" are the fifth and sixth words Osio placed in his manuscript, and it is never very far from the center of attention. Throughout the work, Osio often, indeed repetitively, adopts the point of view of the *Cali-*

*formio* elite and criticizes Mexico for neglecting its welfare.<sup>30</sup> For instance, he breaks off an account of an artillery battle between the defenders of Monterey and one of Bouchard's ships to state, "*No hijo del país* [native son] was recognized by the Mexican government during its different periods." Or again: "The Mexican government declared itself California's stepfather and denied it protection as if it were a bastard child." Or yet again: "The government [of Mexico] never considered the advantages to be gained by stimulating development in different parts of this territory, which was so ready for it." The modest way in which Osio speaks of himself is matched in the manuscript by the minimal fashion in which the central government treats its faraway territory.

Osio emerges fully only at the end of the manuscript, as he writes about his own part in the history of the Bear Flag Revolt and the North American invasion. In this section he consistently refers to himself as a "*Californio*." But in his mind this identity is inextricably intertwined with another identity. As he describes the help given to Stockton in San Diego by "some corrupt *Californios* and some Mexican traitors," he fumes, "Because I am a *Californio* who loves his country and a Mexican on all four sides and in my heart, as a point of honor, I should keep quiet about the following event or let it go unnoticed or be forgotten, but this would not be in keeping with the purpose of my narrative." This is the only time in the narrative section of the work that he refers to himself in the first person and refers explicitly to a design in the manuscript. For Osio, to be a *Californio* was always to be Mexican. And more: the "purpose" of this whole manuscript is to make that point against those who in 1851 were thinking that they could successfully negotiate the transition to North American rule. The quarrels with Mexico, really quarrels within an extended family, had blinded too many people, Osio thought, to their own identity.<sup>31</sup>

At the end of his work Osio describes the negotiations between Andrés Pico and John C. Frémont after the battle of San Pascual. He writes that even though the *Californios* might well become "*buenos ciudadanos de los estados de Washington*" [good citizens of the states of Washington], they would always be "*en su propio país...extranjeros de México*" [in their own country...foreigners from Mexico]. Less than a year after he wrote those words, on February 2, 1852, Osio filed a claim before the United States Land Commission in San Francisco for Angel Island. Testimony on his behalf was offered by former Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado, former San Francisco Harbor Master William A. Richardson, and Jean Jacques Vioget, who had made the first survey of San Francisco and who testified to the Commission "I have never heard the title of Osio to the said Angel Island questioned or disputed" (Papers of the Land Commission). The Land Commission found in Osio's

favor, and in 1855 the District Court in San Francisco upheld that judgment. However, in December 1859 the United States Supreme Court, straining for technicalities, threw out the claim in the case *United States v. Antonio María Osio*.<sup>32</sup> We would like to think that when Osio heard of that decision, he reached for his manuscript, re-read it, and realized that he had written more truly than he had known.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>No biography of Osio exists. The most convenient compilation of events in his life can be found in Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California* (4: 761-62). Bancroft states, "But for the record of offices held by him, there is a remarkable lack of information about the man." The information about Osio's life that we offer in this paper generally comes from the manuscript itself and from various other manuscript collections in The Bancroft Library and the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City.

<sup>2</sup>Maynard Geiger, O.F.M., *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California, 1769-1848* (249-51), gives biographical information on Suárez del Real. Osio's 1864 trip is inferred from a letter from Edward Vischer to Osio at Santa Clara, September 30, 1864.

<sup>3</sup>The Pious Fund was an endowment established by Spain in 1697 to support the missions in Baja California. It was later used for the Alta California missions as well. In 1842 Antonio López de Santa Anna sequestered the principal and intermittently paid the interest until California became part of the United States. The Catholic bishop of California, Joseph Alemany, then claimed control of the fund. He successfully pressured the United States government to have the matter submitted to international arbitration.

Doyle served as Alemany's attorney in the case. He was also the first president of the California Historical Society. See Francis J. Weber, "The Pious Fund of the Californias" and "John Thomas Doyle, Pious Fund Historiographer."

<sup>4</sup>At the head of the copy of the manuscript made by Savage for Bancroft, which is now in The Bancroft Library, is this note from Thomas Savage:

San Francisco (Calif.)

January 8, 1883

I have this day examined a copy of the history of California, whereof the annexed is another copy; or rather, the former is, to the best of my knowledge and belief in the handwriting and bears the signature at the end of its author, Antonio María Osio, occupying about 162 pp. of paper of about fool's cap length. Sewed onto the first page is what purports to be the rough copy of a letter without a signature, from said Osio to Fray José Ma. Suárez del Real, dated at Santa Clara April 4, 1851, from which I conclude that Real had asked Osio for facts to enable him to write a history of California, and for the earlier parts of the history of the Californias, and the administrations of the various governors to Arrillaga inclusive, he refers to the works of Piccolo and others.

The original alluded to is in the possession of Mrs. Williamson, a Mexican lady who I understand is a daughter of the late Ant. M. Osio and lives now at 326 Polk St in this city, her husband being in Mexico.

Thos. Savage

The original of the manuscript is now in the archives at Santa Clara University. The Doyle copy is at The Huntington Library, and the Forbes copy is at The Beinecke Library.

<sup>5</sup>In the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City [General Archives of the Nation (AGN)], there are, for instance, a collection of copies of the minutes of the 1832 *Diputación*. At the conclusion of a number of the copies is the phrase “*Es copia, San Diego, 15 de mayo de 1832. Juan B. Alvarado.*” [“This is a copy, May 15, 1832. Juan B. Alvarado.”]. On the top left hand side of the first page of the same proceedings we find written in Osio’s hand, “*Como de oficio para los años de 1832 y 1833, Osio.*” [“Officially for the years 1832 and 1833, Osio.”]. This indicates that at a later date Osio was asked by someone—or perhaps took it upon himself—to verify the accuracy of the copies. On the top of another document dealing with trade, again in Osio’s hand is written “*Havilitado provisionalmente por la comisaría provisional de la alta California para el año de 1832, Osio.*” [“Provisional quartermaster for the provisional commissariat of Alta California for the year 1832.”]. This indicates the same type of verification on Osio’s part (AGN, Gobernación, Legajo 120, Caja 191, Expedientes 2-4).

<sup>6</sup>In fact, the Mexican dictations and reminiscences in Bancroft’s *History of California* were used in procrustean ways that made them serve the conquerors’ notions of the superiority of what they termed Anglo-Saxon progress and development over what they were certain were Mexican indolence and laziness. On the denigration of Mexicans in Bancroft, see the comments of Genaro Padilla in *My History, Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography*, 254-55. On Osio’s manuscript and the Mexican reminiscences in general, Bancroft states in *California*, “It [Osio’s manuscript] is a work of considerable merit, valuable as a supplement to those of Vallejo, Alvarado, and Bandini, as presenting certain events from a different point of view; but like all writings of this class, it is of very uneven quality as a record of facts. None of them, nor all combined, would be a safe guide in the absence of the original records; but with those records they have a decided value” (4: 762). This statement, and others like it, might seem unobjectionable, until it is contrasted with statements like the one in *Literary Industries* about Andrés Pico: “There were several of the brothers Pico, all, for native Californians, remarkably knowing. Whether they caught their shrewdness from the Yankees I know not” (490). In *Popular Tribunals* (which was dedicated to “William T. Coleman, Chief of the Greatest Popular Tribunal the World has ever Witnessed”)—Coleman gave Bancroft a dictation—the vigilante reminiscences are fairly consistently treated as the gospel truth, and the givers of the dictations congratulated for throwing one or other type of brilliant light on a difficult point. Vigilante Chauncey Dempster’s reminiscence, for instance, is characterized as “able and eloquent...prepared for me with great care, in which the heart-beats of the movements seem to pulsate under his pen” (2: 73; see also 1: viii, 191). In *California*, on the other hand, the Mexican narratives are subject to a seemingly endless series of critiques in extensive footnotes (and it should be noted that both the critiques and the footnotes are absent from *Popular Tribunals*). Thus the reader is informed, for instance, that Osio’s account of one scene is “amusingly absurd” (3: 208). Bancroft simply takes a figure of speech which Osio used (“But, in the end, providence proved the best commander at preventing bloodshed”) interprets it literally, and then patronizingly denigrates it. The vigilante reminiscences were also at times inconsistent with each other, but Bancroft did not feel compelled to point this out to his readers. See Robert M. Senkewicz, *Vigilantes in Gold Rush San Francisco*, 193-94.

<sup>7</sup>All quotations from this point on, when not otherwise noted, are from our critical, annotated translation of the Osio manuscript.

<sup>8</sup>On this point, see especially Genaro Padilla, *My History, Not Yours*, 77-152.

<sup>9</sup>The Doyle copy did include a portion of text material which is missing from the original manuscript. In the original manuscript (page 101A), Osio indicated with a # symbol, as he had done in a previous section, that the rest of the paragraph on that page was written on a separate sheet. This particular sheet must have been lost or inadvertently discarded after 1876, because it

is not with the original. Fortunately, Chase had access to that extra sheet and included the information in his copy.

<sup>10</sup>Other examples of the corruption of the Bancroft copy are *Capítulo XII* [Chapter XII], where six pages of the original are missing, and *Capítulo XIII*, where the last six and a half lines are misplaced on the previous page.

<sup>11</sup>For instance, in *California*, Bancroft describes the maneuvers against Alvarado in 1837, noting that some of “the succeeding particulars are not expressed intelligibly by Osio” (3: 496).

<sup>12</sup>In his biographical sketch of Osio, Bancroft insists that Osio wrote his manuscript “in his later years,” despite Savage’s clear statement to the contrary. See Bancroft, *California* 4: 762.

<sup>13</sup>According to the 1900 census, she lived in enumeration district 357 on Maple St. in Oakland.

<sup>14</sup>John Gantner had married Adela Frisbie, who was the granddaughter of Salvador Vallejo, brother of Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo. Both John and Adela were quite active in the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, who were interested in the preservation of historical documents. We speculate that the manuscript became known to John Gantner or Adela Frisbie through their connection with the Native Sons or Daughters. Since the manuscript mentions both Mariano and Salvador Vallejo, it stands to reason that John Gantner or Adela Frisbie would have been interested in it. See John O. Gantner, “Gantner and Mattern,” a brief appendix to a longer manuscript, John Oscar Gantner, *Notes on the Life of My Father*. The information on Gantner’s involvement in the Native Sons comes from the obituary of John Gantner, which is appended to the end of the “Gantner and Mattern” essay.

<sup>15</sup>This information comes to us through correspondence with Margaret Mollins and Virginia Thickers.

<sup>16</sup>“Bouchard,” for instance, becomes “Buchard,” and “Riley” becomes “Rayle.” When he is discussing the Bear Flag movement, Osio has occasion to mention one of its leaders, William Ide. He assumed that “Ide” contained a silent Spanish “h” and was spelled “hide.” So he joked that Ide could have been called *Señor Cuero* [Mr. Hide] since *cuera* means “hide” in Spanish and American merchants were dominating the hide and tallow trade. In addition, because of their leather jackets, Spanish and Mexican soldiers were called “*soldados de cuera*,” and so Osio is also probably being sarcastic about the military escapades of the Bear Flaggers.

<sup>17</sup>In some places in the manuscript we can see Osio reacting to parts of the oral tradition. In describing the 1832 Battle of Cahuenga in which Governor Victoria’s detachment forced a rebel group to flee, Osio becomes very critical of the rebel commanders José Antonio Carrillo and Pablo de la Portilla. He wrote, “It should be noted that even though they have bragged tremendously since the insurrection, they had twice as much left in reserve as their opponents. They never had the decency of saying later why they had not somehow aided Ávila and Talamantes, the only two men out of more than 200 in the force who joined the battle and distinguished themselves courageously.”

<sup>18</sup>For instance, in his discussion of the Bouchard raid, Alvarado has a long story about how Bouchard, disguised as an English captain on a scientific expedition had visited Monterey in 1817 to scout Monterey’s defenses (Alvarado, *History of California* 1:108-09). Speaking of the same episode, Vallejo says that Bouchard was frightened away from attempting to land at San Francisco when Commander Luis Argüello posted all of his soldiers in plain view of the privateer and fired a cannon at him (Vallejo, *Historical and Personal Memoirs* 1: 136). Neither account reflected what actually occurred, and are doubtless the results of the passage of time and perhaps of the designs of Alvarado and Vallejo as they were talking to the Bancroft staff almost sixty years after the events they had witnessed. Osio, whose oral sources included Luis Argüello, has neither story in his account of the Bouchard affair.

<sup>19</sup>The introductory section of the manuscript contains three large episodes: the attempts by Luis Argüello to develop San Francisco, the Bouchard raid, and the 1824 Chumash uprising. Osio chooses these three episodes to allow him to introduce three themes which will dominate his work: (1) the *Californios* did try to develop the resources of Alta California; (2) Spain, and later Mexico, never gave Alta California the support it needed if development were to succeed; and (3) the mission system never was so effective in converting and/or Hispanicizing the indigenous peoples as its proponents claimed. In fact, the very first incident that Osio recounts in his work sets a tone. Osio describes the scene when the head of the missions, Father Vicente Francisco de Sarría, finished his first meeting with Governor Pablo Solá: "When the Superior returned to the room in which he had left the other Fathers, he found them with some officers. One of the Fathers gestured with his head, as if to ask him if he had succeeded. The Superior understood, and in response placed his right arm all the way up his large left sleeve to indicate that he already had him in his pocket." This vivid picture of clerical manipulation and power is gradually undone in the course of the manuscript. In fact, the very last scene in the manuscript describes the Fathers' inability to find gold in California.

<sup>20</sup>At one point in the manuscript, when he is discussing "the veil of schemes which was drawn to hide the uprising by foreigners in 1840, an uprising which finally took place in 1846," Osio remarks, "That is why, today, those people with their *considerandos* [the word with which each item in a judgement begins... "whereas"] need to be reminded of a familiar story about two people who inherited vast expanses of adjoining lands." The reference to "*considerandos*" is a reference to the 1851 California legislature, which was meeting in San José, immediately adjacent to the city of Santa Clara, while Osio was composing the manuscript. Some *Californios* sat in this body and Osio may well have been specifically referring to them.

<sup>21</sup>Although, as Rosaura Sánchez says, Vallejo and Alvarado maintained authorial control over their memoirs by dictating the conditions of the sessions, they did not have the degree of control that Osio had over his manuscript. In his case there was no one else involved. There was no interviewer and no list of questions. See Rosaura Sánchez, "Nineteenth Century Californio Narratives: The Hubert Howe Bancroft Collection," 283.

<sup>22</sup>Sánchez states, "The manuscripts were always re-copied and carved up by topics, periods, etc., to create files of notations, excerpts and documents for the various writers hired to write Bancroft's California history" (286).

<sup>23</sup>There is evidence in the manuscript that Osio acted as his own editor, for at times he crossed out words and placed the corrections in the space above.

<sup>24</sup>Some of the authors and texts which served as sources for Osio include *The Bible*, Sir Walter Scott, the epic poem *Amadís de Gaula*, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Lope de Vega's epic poem *La gatomaquia*, Samaniego's *Fábulas*, and Lesage's picaresque novel *La historia de Gil Blas de Santillana*.

<sup>25</sup>In another episode, Osio recreates a meeting between Mariano Chico and Abel Stearns and uses a biblical reference as metaphor. Referring to the Gospel of Mark (chapter 15, verse 16), Chico is cast in the role of Pontius Pilate, administering bad justice.

<sup>26</sup>Janet Gurkin Altman writes: "The *I* or epistolary discourse always situates himself vis-à-vis another; his locus, his address, is always relative to that of his addressee. To write a letter is to map one's coordinates—temporal, spatial, emotional, intellectual—in order to tell someone else where one is located at a particular time and how far one has traveled since the last writing. Reference points on that map are particular to the shared world of writer and addressee" (87, 119).

<sup>27</sup>Osio recounts at least one episode at which he and Suárez del Real were both present: a wedding of an indigenous *alcalde* performed by the priest, which Governor José Figueroa also attended.





<sup>28</sup>Mutlu Konuk Blasing observes, “The *I* and the *YOU* whom the *I* addresses are both on stage; consequently, the work should not be seen as an object, because one cannot simply speak for oneself. Whom else one is speaking for depends upon which stage one is speaking from, what the props are, and who one’s audience is” (xxvi). We might also note that Osio’s clear division of the narrative into two parts, events before and after 1825, indicate that he was aware of the distinction between a *crónica* [chronicle] and a *memoria* [memoir]. In the *memoria*, the author explicitly states that he will only narrate what he has seen and experienced, however, he will highlight the narration with appropriate commentary. The *crónica*, on the other hand, may include material of which the author has no personal experience and no attempt is made to distinguish between the two. The inclusive nature of Osio’s own personal experiences as well as those of his family and friends expands the structural dimensions of the text. Now the reader sees that the exterior epistolary framework is supported by a sub-structure, the *memoria*, which can be classified as both a personal and a collective autobiography.

<sup>29</sup>Osio suggests that Suárez del Real consult the work on Junípero Serra by Francisco María Piccolo, and, at another point in the manuscript, suggests that the author of the full history of California would have to take into account another published source, the work of Governor Figueroa on the abortive Híjar-Padrés colonizing effort: “Señor Figueroa, who was now free of the immediate problem, decided to print the official communications which had been exchanged between the *Jefe* [leader] of the territory, the *Diputación*, and the principal director of colonization. For the satisfaction of the public, this was done in the form of a printed manifesto. When the manifesto was finished he did not have time to have it printed since he became seriously ill and died in September 1835. However, his secretary, *Don* [title of respect] Agustín Zamorano, attended to it. After he had compiled various notebooks, he distributed them among the friends of the deceased general. In the notebook one is given an extensive view of everything that happened during Señor Figueroa’s tenure in government. Therefore, it would be advantageous for the person who is entrusted to write the history of Alta California to make use of the notebook.”

<sup>30</sup>See David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico*, 240-41.

<sup>31</sup>A major theme of the section of the manuscript which deals with the North American invasion is the loss of “*nacionalidad*” [nationality]. For instance, in describing the North American capture of Monterey, Osio writes, “At eleven o’clock the inhabitants of Monterey experienced the sorrow of seeing the stars and stripes wave for the second time from the flagpoles that had been erected for the tricolor flag of the three guarantees. However, this time it seemed worse as they began to think about the loss of their nationality and of everything they had worked so hard to create. For experience has always shown that conquerors never have been able to maintain a brotherhood with those they have conquered.” And, in the same vein, Osio describes the resistance to the invasion: “Many people around Monterey and San Francisco were willing to defend with one last effort the nationality which they held so dear. In several skirmishes with the American troops, they fought like true Mexican soldiers and courageous victors.”

<sup>32</sup>Osio sold his claim to Angel Island in 1853 (United States v. Osio, 23 Howard 273).

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