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The Silva Nieto Inscription at El Morro (Editorial)

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EDITORIAL

THE SILVA NIETO INSPECTION.—An English visitor recently showed up at El Morro National Monument who has suggested a revised reading of the inscription of Governor Don Francisco Manuel de Silva Nieto (1629-1632).

Under date of November 28, the custodian, Mr. Evon Z. Vogt, wrote to the editor that Mr. A. W. Barth (M.A., London) had arrived there *afoot* on October 6. "He had hiked and caught rides all the way from San Diego in order to satisfy a long, long desire to visit El Morro. Apparently he has read and studied nearly everything ever written about the *escrituras* and the history of the old conquistadores."

Mr. Barth had already written to the officers of the Historical Society, and there has been further correspondence since. The inscription is partly obliterated, so that there has been some doubt as to the correct reading at three places. Mr. Barth's contribution concerns the last line especially.

The Spanish text reads as follows:

Aquí [llegó el señor y gobe] rnador
Don Francisco Manuel de Silva Nieto
Que lo imposible tiene ya sujeto
Su brazo indubitable y su valor
Con los carros del Rey nuestro señor
Cosa que solo el puso en este efecto
De Agosto [de Mil] seiscientos Veinte y Nueve
Que sbyen a Çuni pase y la Fe lleve

The two passages in brackets are conjectural; the latter may be a numeral for *cinco* or possibly *nueve*. Mr. Barth believes that the inscription was meant to be read in pentameter verse. It would seem to be somewhat difficult to handle some of the accents in such a reading, but it is one of the

arguments advanced by Mr. Barth to show that the two verbs of the last line must be in the third person, subjunctive, rather than in the first person, past tense, as the reading has been hitherto.¹

In this same line, in the curious "sbyen" the letter *b* has a crossline through the lower part which cannot be reproduced without a special type. In other words, it is a double letter from which Mr. Barth gets "se bien", and his reading of the last line is: "That he (Silva Nieto) may well pass to Zuñi and carry the Faith."

The editor is in accord with Mr. Barth in his revised reading except as to one point. We believe that the subject is impersonal: "That one (anyone)" may now go to Zuñi and carry the faith. None of the "royal carts" had ever before gone westward from the Rio Grande with supplies for the missionaries; never before had missions been established at Acoma or at Zuñi or in the Hopi country. This has now been accomplished and Governor Silva Nieto is on his way back to Santa Fé with the father custodian, Fray Estévan de Perea, when this record is inscribed upon El Morro. The governor's part is done; he has opened the way for permanent missionary work in the Zuñi and Hopi pueblos.

Father Perea wrote two short reports, *relaciones*, of this event which were published later in Spain. These were to have been included in the present issue of the HISTORICAL REVIEW but they must be held over to a later number. They may well accompany a fuller study of Fray Estévan de Perea who was certainly one of the most remarkable characters in New Mexico history.

L. B. B.

1. Twitchell, *Leading Facts of New Mexican History*, I, 338, note, gives a partial translation of this inscription, and also of another of which he gives (at p. 288) a full page reproduction. He attributes this second also to Governor Silva Nieto, but the date is clearly "1620", not "1629", and therefore must belong to Governor Juan de Eulate. Bancroft, *History of Arizona and New Mexico*, 159, follows Simpson in reading the "1620" correctly, but Coan, *History of New Mexico*, I, 190, follows Twitchell in the misreading of the date, with the result that he has Silva Nieto returning from Zuñi in July and going to Zuñi in August.

The awkward, and improbable, change from third person to first person in the verbs of the Nieto inscription (according to the translation hitherto accepted), is eliminated by Mr. Barth's reading.