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# Father Ramòn and the Big Debt, Tumacàcori, 1821–1823

John L. Kessell

# *FATHER RAMÓN AND THE BIG DEBT, TUMACACORI, 1821-1823*

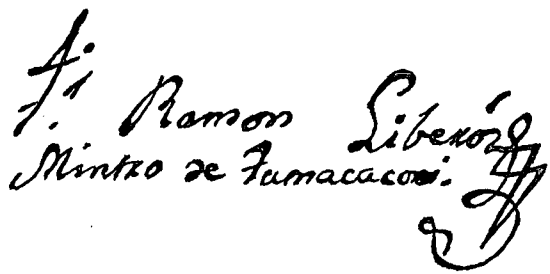
JOHN L. KESSELL

THAT MR. GADSDEN'S bargain lopped off for the United States the two northernmost remnants of a Spanish mission territory known as Pimería Alta no one much cared in 1853. A couple of crumbling mission churches, little more than curious relics of a primitive, ill-conceived imperialism. Yet today, romantic partisans who drive with their house guests eight miles from downtown Tucson to Mission San Xavier del Bac hail it the "White Dove of the Desert," finest example of Spanish colonial architecture in the entire Southwest. And though vastly outnumbered now by tourists in Bermuda shorts, local Pápago Indians still consider San Xavier their place of worship. The other church, sadly deteriorated and abandoned before United States occupation, has been patched up and for decades venerated as a secular shrine on U.S. 89, a National Monument visited by hundreds of thousands. Perhaps there would have been nothing substantial enough to commemorate at Tumacácori National Monument had the last resident missionary been less tenacious, less worldly, and less effective as a debt collector.

It all began in 1691 with the advent of Father Kino. At his behest the Pima of Tumacácori learned to cross themselves, to harvest wheat and tend livestock. After Kino, a succession of Jesuits followed. Smallpox and measles came too, and Spanish settlers. Then in 1767 the king of Spain summarily banished the Jesuits from his realms and sent the Franciscans into Pimería Alta. Now their Padre wore a grey robe instead of a black one, he began to live at Tumacácori instead of fifteen miles south, but otherwise, to the diminishing

number of Pima Indians, mission life changed little. Neither did Mexican independence greatly alter the routine, at least not for a while.

On January 2, 1821, the Padre of Tumacácori sold most of the mission's cattle to raise money for church construction. He left, however, before the proceeds were fully realized. So his successor, no less resolved to continue the building, entered into correspondence with the mission's debtor, a wily opportunist disinclined to settle up. Soon they were contending: on the one hand the missionary to whom no money meant no church; on the other, the potential cattle baron whose delaying tactics, in the context of such unsettled times, might have rid him of the obligation by default. Thanks to their letters—preserved in the Bancroft Library of the University of California—we know the outcome. But first to introduce Father Ramón.



IN HARSH, wind-swept northeastern Spain where the Ríos Jalón and Jiloca come together, the conquering Moors built Calatayud. Into this city, eleven centuries later, walked or rode Ramón Liberós, a small-town lad, barely fifteen. He sought the Franciscan convent. When he had convinced the friars of his good faith, he knelt and received on May 11, 1804, the habit of that venerable Order.[1] There, within the womb of a religious community, Ramón Liberós might have spent the rest of his life, protected from the death throes of the old regime. Instead, fortified by years of orthodox philosophy

and theology, Father Ramón chose to take his place in the world of insurgents, constitutions, and the French disease: he would become a missionary.

Recruited by the touring *comisario colectador* for the Franciscan missionary college at Querétaro in New Spain, the young priest in the spring of 1813 began the longest journey of his life. From the port of Alicante he rode out a stormy passage down the south coast and through the Straits to the Puerto de Santa María across the bay from Cádiz. There, at the expense of the liberal Spanish government he was outfitted for the Atlantic crossing, acquiring various articles of clothing and bedding, a penknife and box for writing sand, some scissors, a comb, two pounds of chocolate, two quarter-pounds of tobacco, a set of Father Echarri's[2] works, a duffle bag, a trunk with padlock, two pounds of biscuits, a crucifix with chain and hook, a breviary, and a tin urinal. Thus provided with his spiritual and temporal necessities, Ramón Liberós "of slender build and light complexion, with blue eyes, black hair, and sparse beard" climbed aboard the frigate *San José*, alias *El Comercio*, and joined six fellow Franciscans in prayers for a safe voyage. On July 16, 1813, they sailed for Vera Cruz.[3] In New Spain meanwhile, Viceroy Calleja was setting up the insurgent Morelos for the kill.

The little band of Spanish friars reached Querétaro, a hundred and fifty miles north of Mexico City, early in January 1814. Perhaps because of the depressed and unsettled conditions then prevailing on the northern frontier, Father Ramón did not continue on to the missions. For years he prayed and studied and bided his time. Back home in Spain a restored King Ferdinand swore forcefully at the liberal Constitution of 1812 and then was forced to swear by it. Seizing the moment, Mexican conservatives and opportunists struck for independence, proclaiming in addition the sanctity of the Holy Mother Church and the equality of Creole and Spaniard. Because of the guarantee of religion, the Franciscan college at Querétaro and its missions were initially little affected by Mexican autonomy. Now, in fact, Father Ramón got his chance. As secretary to the Father Prefect he rode along early in 1822 on a routine visitation of the college's northernmost missions, those of Pimería Alta.

THE SHALLOW Río Santa Cruz flowed on north. Big cottonwoods, freshly leafed out in early April, marked its course through the dry country ahead. In contrast, bare, scrubby mesquites covering the rolling mesas encroached from both sides on the narrow and meandering green line. The two Padres, who had crossed the Atlantic together, now followed an acequia that struck off from the river's west bank through meager farm plots toward the base of a rugged and parched sierra. Likely it was getting warm.

Tumacácori lay there in the spring sun, an unprosperous-looking village, its barren plaza dominated by the hulking adobe walls of what was to be a new church, begun nineteen years before and still unfinished.[4] The mission's barefoot congregation—some one hundred and twenty Indians and seventy-five *españoles y castas*[5]—worshipped, those who still bothered, in a cramped and frequently patched chapel inherited from the Jesuits two generations before. Presumably, amid these poor surroundings the visitor and his secretary found resident missionary Juan Bautista Estelric, a native of Majorca possessed of an unfortunate penchant for trouble.[6]

The inspection lasted several days, and turned up some disquieting irregularities. Estelric had served at Tumacácori little over a year. Yet during that short tenure, word of his quarrel with the Creole commandant at Tubac had reached the Bishop of Sonora; Father Juan's illnesses and "his phlegmatic nature" had brought the Father President one hundred and fifty miles to investigate; and now, most serious of all, he was linked in scandal to *una mujer que le asistía.*[7] To his credit, Father Juan had tried to complete the church, though even this good intention had gone awry when a bad debt he contracted caused suspension of the work. Unworthy as he was to continue his ministry, Estelric stayed on at Tumacácori a few more weeks, while his superiors decided what to do with him. Then, sometime after he recorded the burial on May 2, 1822, of little Mariana de Jesús, a Pima, Juan Bautista Estelric rode out of the village in disgrace.[8]

As Tumacácori's new Padre, Ramón Liberós set about familiarizing himself with mission administration. While sorting through the archive he came upon a document that seemed to demand his

immediate attention. It was a legal contract between the mission and a certain Lieutenant don Ignacio Pérez[9] entered into by Estelric on January 2, 1821, soon after the latter had arrived at Tumacácori. Having seen at once the need for a new church and at the same time thousands of rangy Mexican cattle grazing the mesas, Father Juan had made up his mind to sell beef and hire builders. Lieutenant Pérez, it seemed, needed cattle to stock a new hacienda. So the bargain was struck: four thousand Tumacácori cattle at three pesos a head.[10]

That Tumacácori had four thousand cattle to sell in 1821—of a total 5,500 head—was the result of more than a decade of generally good range conditions in the Santa Cruz Valley, a lessening of Apache raiding, and the stockman's touch of Father Narciso Gutiérrez, a tough Castilian who endured as missionary from 1794, when mission herds were reckoned in hundreds, until 1820, when they roamed by the thousands. So rapidly did the mission's livestock increase under the supervision of Father Narciso, that the people of Tumacácori petitioned in 1807 for deed to the range lands of a neighboring *pueblo despoblado*. By 1818 the count stood at five thousand cattle, twenty-five hundred sheep and goats, and six hundred horses. The cattle herds of Tumacácori and San Xavier del Bac together accounted for more than half the total run by all eight Pimería Alta missions.[11] When don Ignacio Pérez and his kind began buying on such a large scale, however, mission herds were rapidly diminished. One missionary advised Pérez in the spring of 1821 that anyone wishing to buy cattle in Sonora had better have with him a mold for coining spot cash. Speaking of cash, he continued, it had been rumored that Pérez could not pay for all the stock he was accumulating. "Where," inquired the Padre pointedly, "*are* you going to get that much money?"[12]

The terms of the Tumacácori sale called for four thousand pesos in cash upon receipt of the herd, another two thousand in six months, and the remaining six thousand within a year and a half. In mid-February Pérez' associate, don Rafael Elías,[13] paid the initial installment and his vaqueros headed up the herd and moved it south. When the second payment fell due, don Ignacio tarried.

Estelric, with a payroll to meet, boldly wrote a sight draft for a thousand pesos on the cattle buyer's account.[14] It had been honored, but as far as Liberós could tell, no further payment had been received. As a result, the new church stood far from complete as envisioned by his predecessors, but not really, in the opinion of Father Ramón, that far from utilization. In fact, if the debt owed Tumacácori were collected, the church might be put to the Lord's use in a matter of months.

He began courteously, writing from Tumacácori, May 29, 1822:

> My very dear brother[15] and Señor:
>
> I greet you most warmly, and inform you that I am now in charge of this mission. . . . While examining its papers I came across one from which it appears that . . . you are obligated to deliver to this mission the sum of one thousand pesos in cash, over and above the five thousand that it seems have already been paid. As for the remaining six thousand, it appears that the full amount is due in October of this year.[16]
>
> I beg that you be so kind as to deliver to this mission the said amount due, and the remainder just as soon as it is possible, for the mission needs the money to continue its building program. It was for this reason that the cattle were sold.
>
> I am your most affectionate brother, servant, and chaplain, who kisses your hand.
>
> Fray Ramón Liberós[17]

As the Padre of Tumacácori phrased his polite opening bid, don Ignacio Pérez was making good his claim to the sprawling San Bernardino grant. On May 21, 22, and 23 in Arizpe, the provincial capital, he purchased at public auction the legally-allowable four *sitios* of land—17,354 acres—for ninety pesos plus fees. At that rate, roughly two hundred acres a peso, each head of cattle bought from Tumacácori was equivalent in cash value to six hundred acres of land. Moreover, Pérez' San Bernardino bargain included control of so-called "overplus" lands that must have swelled the total grant to a hundred thousand acres. Don Ignacio plainly hoped to become a cattle baron, but in his original petition he had sought to impress

the authorities by suggesting that the San Bernardino under his ownership might become a frontier buffer state where raiding Apache would trade lance for seed and plow.[18] The Apache would come all right, but hardly on don Ignacio's terms.

To the enterprising and ambitious Pérez, almost certainly a Creole if not a mestizo, Mexican independence offered exciting prospects. He admired the dashing opportunist Iturbide, and found it profitable, accepting humbly a captain's and then a lieutenant colonel's commission. Even though Iturbide's Three Guarantees ostensibly protected the Church and Spaniards, there had been talk to the contrary. What effect, Don Ignacio might have pondered, would the disenfranchisement of the Church and the expulsion of all *peninsulares* have on the debts he owed to Tumacácori and several other missions administered by Spanish Franciscans? Only a fool, or a poor businessman, would have failed to grasp the implications.

Pérez now hit upon what must have seemed to him a clever stratagem. From Arizpe on July 2, 1822, he wrote directly to Father Prefect Francisco Núñez. He described in detail the current pitiful state of his personal finances, and then proposed that he be allowed to provide toward his debts not cash, but "blankets from Encinillas, delivered at Tumacácori at two pesos each."[19] Not only would the Pérez household be saved from utter ruin, but the Padres, by reselling these marketable blankets, would reap a handsome profit. "And though it becomes nothing more than a matter of raising revenue, this is always preferable to contemplating a bad debt." He must have smiled at the thought of Franciscans-turned-blanket-salesmen —until he got the Father Prefect's reply: "As for the proposal you make me about the blankets, it is not within my authority to resolve, for the missions act separately, one from the other, in the management of their temporal affairs. . . . Accordingly, I suggest that you correspond with them separately."[20] It was, at least, a very good try.

In the City of Mexico and elsewhere throughout the realm, thoughtful and hungry Mexicans were reflecting upon the first hundred days of Agustín I, their emperor *hecho en México*. Not a

few were disenchanted. At Tumacácori the insects were worse than ever. It had been sticky hot. Father Ramón ticked off the days. On September 6, 1822, precisely three weeks after the final payment should have arrived, he wrote again. When he had carefully reviewed for Pérez the terms of the contract, he reminded his adversary that a thousand pesos had been overdue for more than a year "despite the repeated letters that Father Estelric, my predecessor, informed me that he had written you." And what of the courteous letter Liberós himself had directed to Pérez at Arizpe? While construction of a church languished for lack of cash, Pérez, it seemed, had not the decency to reply. "In view of all this," reasoned Father Ramón, "I can do no less than insist, with heart-felt regret, that you arrange for delivery at this mission of the seven thousand pesos you owe without any more delay." If Pérez failed to act, Father Ramón was now prepared to take the offensive by whatever means "seem appropriate." "The lack of an answer to previous letters," he concluded, "is reason enough for sending this one to you certified. . . ."[21]

The firm line paid off. On September 24 from Chihuahua, don Ignacio deigned to answer. It was a letter calculated to melt the resolve of even the most hardened debt collector. Pérez' father had died. His mother and a flock of dependents had narrowly escaped "a thousand evils" at the hands of the creditors, thanks only to don Ignacio's timely scraping together of fourteen thousand pesos. There were unfortunate circumstances, all of them beyond his control, to explain why he had not answered the first letter. As for the "numerous letters" of Father Estelric, that was clearly a matter of exaggeration: he had received only one "so full of indignities" that he could hardly believe it.[22] Lastly, don Ignacio himself had been gravely ill with incapacitating chills and fevers. In view of all he had suffered, and with the alleged sympathy of his "great friend" Father Núñez, Pérez suggested that he send one thousand pesos in cash and one thousand in goods with his mother when she returned to Sonora in October. Surely Father Ramón would consent to an extension on the remainder.

> You may be sure that I shall remit by my mother the one thousand pesos in cash and as much again in goods. And, if you wish, I shall send you one hundred serapes of fine colors at eight pesos each, these being the sort that are sold with much esteem in that province for ten to thirteen pesos. Concerning this, I await your decision.
>
> I hope that the openheartedness of the Father Prefect, moved by an unfortunate family and its great financial burden, is, because of its merit, fully engraven upon the heart of your Reverence, and, taking it into consideration, that you will grant me the already facilitated extension. As for the need you have alluded to, rest assured that I shall cover the account I have pending at that mission.
>
> Consider me, your Reverence, one of your most reliable brothers. Because of what I beg you, please impose upon me your orders as your attentive friend and loyal servant who kisses your hand.[23]

With partial payment seemingly assured, Father Ramón stepped up the construction. On October 1 he blessed an adjunct to the new church, a spacious, walled cemetery. Then ten weeks later he had the bones of Father Narciso Gutiérrez dug up from beneath the packed-earth floor of the old church. Solemnly he bore them the forty yards to a fresh grave in the sanctuary of the new church, and there on the second anniversary of Father Narciso's death he reburied them within the walls begun by that enduring missionary two decades before.[24] Perhaps the sanctuary with its impressive dome was now complete, but work on the body of the church went on. Father Ramón was counting on the pesos and goods promised in Don Ignacio's letter. By the end of January, however, his patience had expired. There seemed to be no alternative: he would have to carry the battle to the camp of his adversaries.

Doña Gregoria Pérez was startled indeed by the presence of Father Ramón in Arizpe. One thousand pesos in cash? as much again in goods? Why, no, Ignacio had said nothing to her. Well and good; he would ride over the mountains to Janos, another hundred and fifty miles, and meet the wily Pérez face to face. "This very day I would have undertaken the trip had not yesterday my friend Don Rafael Elías arrived in this city." Elías, acting for Pérez, had brought a token payment of three hundred and sixty

pesos in cash and seven hundred and thirty-two in goods. Welcome as this gesture was, Father Ramón refused to relent. "As for the extension you proposed to me, I regret deeply that it cannot be granted." The plight of "a village without a church" was to Father Ramón's way of thinking far more serious than that of a careless speculator temporarily down on his luck. Nevertheless, that day, February 3, 1823, Father Ramón credited the account of Don Ignacio with one thousand thirty-two pesos two grains, holding out sixty pesos in goods, perhaps for travel expenses.[25]

A week later he was back at Tumacácori where an episcopal circular awaited him. It requested that public prayers be said to aid Emperor Agustín on his trip to Vera Cruz, a trip that had taken place during the past November. On February 9, Liberós signed the circular in compliance,[26] unaware of how desperately the Emperor now needed prayers. Anti-imperial sentiment had burst forth all around him and its forces were converging on the capital. In a matter of weeks the empire of Iturbide would fall. Anti-clerical, anti-Spanish republicans would inherit the government. And while Lieutenant Colonel don Ignacio Pérez would support the empire "until its final hour," he would make no hasty payments to missions that stood every chance of extinction under the new regime.

Despite the manifold uncertainties of these times, Ramón Liberós did not lose sight of his high calling. He was first and foremost a priest. As minister of the mission at Tumacácori and interim chaplain to the run-down Tubac garrison three miles north, he took seriously his role of spiritual shepherd. He baptized their newborn, married their lovers, and buried their dead; but even more, he worried about their souls. He took to heart their transgressions, and when the burden seemed too much to bear, he wrote to the Bishop. How, he craved to know, could he put the fear of God into his apathetic flock? "I have not ceased, insofar as it has been possible for me, to guide them along the path of salvation. Yet some individuals, forgetting the end for which God Our Lord created them, live as though they were not Christians and scorn the precepts of Our Holy Mother Church." Since Ash Wednes-

day, six weeks before, he had been exhorting them "from the pulpit and in private" to fulfill their annual spiritual obligations. Furthermore, he made clear the consequences they might expect if they did not. "And the result has been scorn, babbling, and a reluctance to confess. I tell your Most Illustrious Lordship (it is public knowledge and notorious) that some of them have not confessed for seven or eight years!"[27]

The Bishop had no sympathy for transgressors. He advised Father Ramón to use formal admonition, public excommunication, and even anathema to shape up his congregation.[28] But then the Bishop did not have to live with these people.

If only he could bring these weapons of the Church to bear on don Ignacio Pérez. By late spring, Father Ramón's dander was up. Writing to Pérez "wherever he is," Tumacácori's Padre told of the measure he had taken and why.

> Finding myself without a church and suffering certain indignities in order to borrow the little with which work has been done, I have resolved to dispatch with full authority don José María Sotelo, along with the foreman of this mission, don José Antonio Orosco. To them you will pay in cash, current coin, the entire amount you owe, and in addition, whatever they demand of you for the losses and expenses suffered by this mission because you have not fulfilled your part of the contract.
>
> If you do not turn over the entire amount immediately (*pronto pronto*), turn over to these men without delay the two thousand cattle that have not been paid for, with all of their increase for three years. One or the other, cash or cattle, must be delivered at this mission at your expense and risk: it being understood that if you do not, these men have my authority to take whatever steps they feel are warranted, for which they already have instructions.[29]

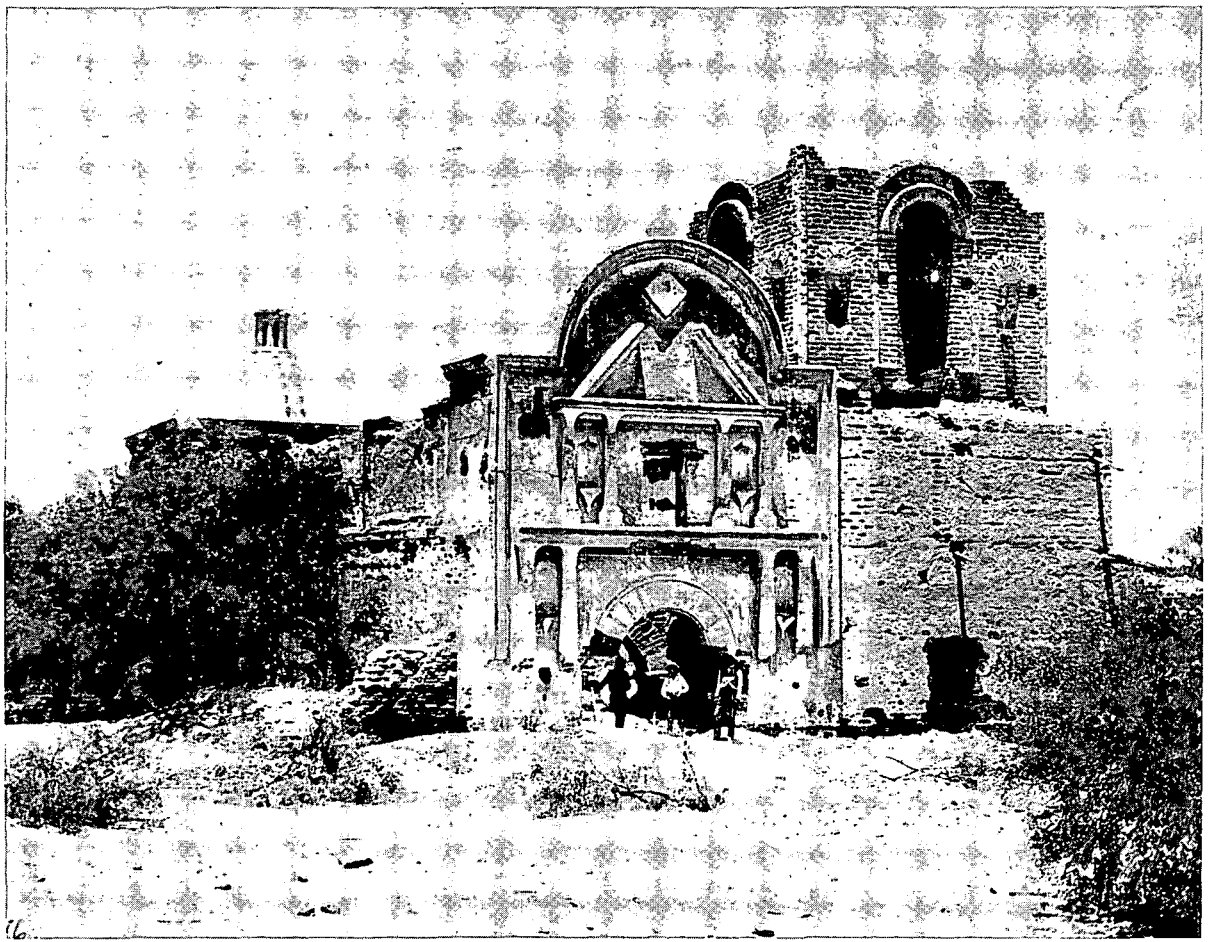
Sotelo and Orosco, both residents of Tubac and frequent godfathers to local babies, were no match for the slippery Pérez. Once they caught up with him at the Chihuahua presidio of Janos, he stalled them unmercifully. And not till mid-August did he offer an explanation to Father Ramón. His every effort, he then assured

his creditor, had been directed toward raising money to pay the debt. Before leaving Chihuahua City he had arranged for an advance large enough to cover the whole thing; he had merely to return to that capital and pick up the cash. "But days passed, to my concern and to that of your envoys, to whom I have not ceased to manifest sufficient documentary proof of my good intentions." He had even suggested a plan to his general whereby the money might have been raised. "Now," he was forced to admit, "at a most inopportune time the General has left for Durango."

But Pérez had yet another scheme, one he now proposed directly to Liberós, because Sotelo, he claimed, did not have enough authority to decide the matter. It involved a herd of two thousand cattle belonging to don Ignacio "in that far province." Since the government had seen fit to leave him at Janos with his "arms folded," he suggested that Sotelo, Orosco, or one of his own trusted agents accompany the herd to market in his behalf and collect the money. Or perhaps Father Ramón preferred that a draft be issued against the drover of the herd. Either way, enough to pay Tumacácori could be raised. There was, however—and here don Ignacio pressed his point—an even better way. If Father Ramón would merely consent to wait a little longer, only till October, the value of the herd would go up, almost certainly to triple the amount due. "Therefore, my friend, have a little patience" and, he might have added, "join me in speculation."

So that Father Ramón would not think ill of him, don Ignacio explained why he had delayed this long. He might indeed have sold the herd earlier to the government, but that solution was risky at best because of the treasury's critical shortages. As for driving the herd overland to Tumacácori, that was out of the question. The drought of the past year had been so severe that not a single head would have survived such a drive. Furthermore, "rapid political changes" had rendered the transfer imprudent. It was, therefore, up to Father Ramón to choose from the alternatives offered. "Any other measure is unnecessary and excessive in view of the very substantial payment I am making [not to mention] embarrassing for me and dilatory for your Reverence."

Tumacacori in the 1820's. Painting by Cal N. Peters, 1965. Courtesy National Park Service.



Tumacacori in ruins, 1889. Arizona Pioneers' Historical Society.

> Understand, your Reverence, my just reasons and rest assured that I am wholly dedicated to closing our account at the earliest moment. Gratified by the kindness and consideration with which you have been so good as to favor me thus far, I hold your Reverence in the highest regard. I shall come to that mission in person just as soon as I am relieved of this garrison, for I am anxious to give you an *abrazo* and reiterate that I am, as always, your humble friend and servant who kisses your hand.[30]

Father Ramón tore open the long-awaited letter. He should have known. What was he to do now? Thanks to Pérez' duplicity, he himself was now a debtor, unable to repay the money he had borrowed. Worse, with his credit gone, he had been forced to take the step he dreaded—he suspended work on the church for lack of funds. The bitter disappointment only strengthened his resolve. He called for a horse and provisions. There was no other way. He rode south and west, paying little heed to the thunderheads building over the mountains. He had determined to lay the whole tedious matter before his superior and beg for permission to go find Pérez. Have a little patience. *Madre de Dios!*

Father President González was sympathetic. Don Ignacio owed the mission of Caborca money too. But perhaps another letter would suffice, an appeal to Pérez as a decent and sensitive human being and as a brother of the Third Order of Saint Francis. Surely he must not realize the anguish he was causing Father Ramón. "Now wearied of chasing hopes with no consolation, he arrives here asking for permission to come there and, by virtue of the right which the contract gives him, to collect the money or the two thousand head of cattle. He is determined," continued the Father President, "not to return until he has obtained complete satisfaction." Father Ramón did not enjoy the business of debt collecting. "This task saddens him. It is contrary to his compassionate nature, and to true and fraternal affection."

For Father Ramón's own good, the Father President denied his request. Instead he told Pérez to forward "two thousand pesos and the envoys' expenses" to Tumacácori immediately, and the balance

within the year. "I hope you will take advantage of this moderate and fraternal compromise and of the fact that I did not deem necessary the Father's coming or the measures he might have resorted to . . . that the mission receive what it so justly deserves and needs so badly."[31]

Toward the end of his long ride home, a dejected but still determined Father Ramón reined up at the rancho of Calabasas, ten miles short of Tumacácori. He carried in his saddlebags the letter from Father President González to don Ignacio Pérez. Yet the trip had been a failure. His superior had not only denied him the satisfaction of a personal confrontation with Pérez, but he had compromised with the scoundrel. Perhaps while the courier waited, the Padre of Tumacácori sat down at Calabasas and wrote a letter of his own to accompany the Father President's. Time had run out. Don Ignacio must pay cash or take the consequences. Sotelo was empowered to do whatever was necessary to get results: "Either he has the authority already or I can grant it!" In addition to the two thousand pesos, Father Ramón demanded that Pérez pay the envoys' expenses:

> That is, five pesos daily for the three, from the day they left Tumacácori. Otherwise, you may expect me at any moment, knowing that I shall not be earning two pesos or five, but whatever fits my mood and the discomfort I shall be forced to suffer on your account. . . .
>
> These measures by me may seem irregular to you, but, my friend and brother, ever since I took charge of this mission and made clear to you the straits it was in, you have (speaking in Castilian as we were taught) entertained a pure fraud! What do you expect me to do? First you arranged with my Reverend Father Prefect to send immediately one thousand pesos, and nothing happened; afterward you promised to send with your good mother by October a thousand pesos in cash and a thousand in goods, and still I am waiting. You have declined to answer my letters and have paid no attention to the debt, and now you have cajoled my envoys four months with fond and always false hopes.
>
> In view of all this, what can I expect? *You* can expect *me* soon, for I am now resolved not to give up the matter at hand. I shall come to Chihuahua, Durango, Mexico City, or wherever I must if you

> continue deaf and oblivious to my supplications. I wish you the best of health. Command this your wretched brother (which truly I am, seeing that on your account I cannot continue the church) and loyal servant who kisses your hand.[32]

That did it. Father Ramón had an answer in less than three weeks. Written by Pérez' business associate, Don Rafael Elías, it came from San Bernardino and was dated September 7. In tone it was almost contrite. "Things have come to such a pass that I consider it necessary to make the greatest sacrifices in order to pay in cash the remainder due that mission." The herd was on its way to market. Furthermore, don Rafael agreed to underwrite the entire debt just in case the cattle sale did not proceed as expected. "And as of now, I endorse this letter with the full validation necessary, or I shall give separately whatever proof of obligation your Reverence wishes."[33]

Quickly, before anyone had second thoughts, Father Ramón accepted. Don Rafael Elías, prominent rancher, businessman, and public servant was a far better risk than Pérez.

> Be it recorded by this document which I am sending to don Ignacio Pérez that, in accordance with the letter which don Rafael Elías wrote me from San Bernardino dated September seventh, eighteen hundred and twenty-three, I recognize the transfer of the debt said don Ignacio Pérez owes this mission to the above-mentioned don Rafael Elías. Said debt consists of the five thousand eight hundred and forty-three pesos four reals remaining on the herd of four thousand cattle sold to him,[34] plus five hundred and twenty-three pesos for the expenses that the agent and envoys of the mission have incurred in the attempted collection of the expressed sum. This amount in full don Rafael Elías must pay, by virtue of the above-mentioned letter which I admit under obligation toward payment of the debt, within eight months from today's date. Tumacácori, September fourteenth, eighteen hundred and twenty-three.
>
> Fray Ramón Liberós
> Minister of Tumacácori[35]

If he did not go immediately into his unfinished church and say a prayer of thanksgiving, he should have. He had won.

PRESUMABLY Don Rafael Elías kept his promise to pay the 6,366 pesos four reals, for subsequent correspondence is silent regarding the matter of the big debt. Father Ramón continued to supervise construction of the church, and though it was never entirely finished, he put it to use.[36] Perhaps the new structure served to bring his wayward congregation closer to God. He himself was forced to leave them abruptly, not of his own choice, in the spring of 1828. Soldiers escorted him out of the village. In Sonora anti-mission interests had finally prevailed and the Spanish Franciscans were being banished. He may have looked back. The church stood over the village, mute and impressive, with scaffolding still clinging awkwardly to its facade.

Somewhat later, in Arizpe, the town council was involved in raising funds for a campaign against the Apache. It was having trouble with a debtor. One of its members had written "imploring him earnestly" to pay up "all or some part of the fifteen hundred pesos he owes for the hacienda of Santa Rosa." But the councilman was skeptical. "I doubt very much that he will help out this treasury, which, in my opinion, will have to sue Citizen Ignacio Pérez. . . ."[37]

But that, fortunately, was of no concern to Ramón Liberós, wherever he was.

## *NOTES*

1. Lista de los Religiosos de este Apostolico Colegio de la Santa Cruz de Queretaro . . . 1824, photocopy, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (cited below as BL), Bolton Research Papers, No. 380. Liberós was born in the Villa de Mazaleón, archbishopric of Zaragoza, on April 7, 1789.

2. Fray Francisco Echarri, author of *Directorio Moral* (Valencia, 1770, and later editions).

3. Documents concerning the "mission" to the college of Querétaro of 1811-1813 are in the Archivo General de Indias, Seville (AGI), Audiencia de México, leg. 2736. The group with which Liberós sailed constituted the sixth and final wave. Lista de la misión que colectó el P. Comisario Fr. Francisco Núñez que vino en trozas incompleta . . . , Archivo General de la Nación, México (AGN), Misiones, tomo 18.

4. As early as May 18, 1803, F. President Francisco Moyano had written that Tumacácori's church was being "erected anew." Noticia de las Misiones que ocupan los Religiosos del Colegio de la Santa Cruz de Querétaro . . . 1802 . . . , AGI, Audiencia de México, leg. 2736.

5. Estado de las Misiones de la Pimeria Alta . . ., 1820, F. President Faustino González, Caborca, January 4, 1821, Archivo del Gobierno de la Mitra de Sonora, Hermosillo (AGMS).

6. A brief notice of the visitation appears in Tumacácori's Libro de Bautismos dated April 6 (or possibly 8), 1822. From the surviving baptismal, marriage, and burial records, it appears that Estelric had served at Tumacácori since January 1821. These records, bound in one volume and labeled "De Calabasas Bautismos," are preserved in the Archive of the Bishop of Tucson. Also extant is the Tubac Libro de Entierros y Casamientos, 1814-1824, MS in the A. L. Pinart Colección de Pimería Alta, BL.

7. At first F. President González explained to the Bishop of Sonora that Estelric had been removed from Tumacácori because of his poor health. González to the Bishop, Caborca, October 4, 1822, AGMS. Later he was forced to lay the whole sordid affair before the prelate. González to the Bishop, Caborca, December 4, 1822, AGMS.

8. For several years scandal followed wherever Estelric went and "secret communiqués" kept the Bishop informed. But because the Sonora frontier was chronically short of priests, Father Juan survived. Not till late 1835, at the run-down mission of Guásavas did his career finally end. He died at the age of fifty-one, suddenly, *sin sacramentos*. Notice of his death appears on a fragment of the Guásavas Libro de Entierros preserved in the parish archive of Granados, Sonora.

9. For a short biographical sketch of Ignacio Pérez, see Francisco R. Almada, *Diccionario de Historia, Geografía y Biografía Sonorenses* (Chihuahua City, 1952), pp. 562-63.

10. Liberós to Pérez, Tumacácori, May 29, 1822, Sept. 6, 1822. A. L. Pinart, Colección de manuscritos relativos a la región septentrional de México, BL. In this collection, cited below as Pinart Col. mss., there is a whole series of documents concerning Pérez' cattle buying activities, for the most part original letters from missionaries demanding payment and unsigned, rough draft answers apparently used by Pérez as file copies. There is of course some chance that the clean, signed letters sent out by Pérez varied slightly from the drafts he retained. Hubert Howe Bancroft in his *History of Arizona and New Mexico, 1530-1888* (San Francisco, 1889; reprint, Albuquerque, 1962), p. 385n, wrote: "In 1822 a new church was in process of construction or extension, but work was for a time suspended on account of trouble about the pay for 4,000 cattle that P. Estelric had sold to obtain funds." Tubutama, Caborca, Sáric, and Bacadéguachi were among the other missions suffering because of Pérez' failure to pay off his debts. Presumably the pesos involved were *pesos de plata* of eight *reales,* or reals, each, then on a rough parity with the U.S. dollar.

11. At the end of 1820 Tumacácori stood second in estimated number of cattle to San Xavier del Bac which had 5,700 head, but first of all the missions in sheep and goats (1,080), horses (590), and mules (60). Estado de las Misiones de la Pimeria Alta . . . 1820. Ray H. Mattison, "The Tangled Web: The Controversy Over the Tumacácori and Baca Land Grants," *Journal of Arizona History,* vol. 8 (1967), p. 73. Estado Espiritual y Temporal de la Pimeria Alta . . . 1818, F. José Pérez, Oquitoa, December 31, 1818, AGN, Misiones, tomo 3.

12. F. José Gómez, Tubutama, March 23, 1821, Pinart "Col. mss."

13. Don Rafael Elías González, a member of one of Sonora's most illustrious families, later served as governor of his state. He was a great-grandfather of President Plutarco Elías Calles. Almada, *Diccionario,* pp. 241-42.

14. Estelric to Pérez, Tumacácori, September 10, 1821, Pinart "Col. mss." The attached sight draft was dated at Tumacácori the same day and later receipted by Félix Antonio Bustamante, who may have been master builder on the Tumacácori project.

15. Pérez was a member of the lay Third Order of Saint Francis.

16. Here Liberós erred. The final payment was due in mid-August, not October.

17. Liberós to Pérez, Tumacácori, May 29, 1822, Pinart "Col. mss."

18. Mattison, "Early Spanish and Mexican Settlements in Arizona," NMHR, vol. 21 (1946), p. 311. As part of the legal procedure attending the

grant, three witnesses testified that Pérez had a sufficient number of cattle, over four thousand one of them declared, with which to stock the San Bernardino.

19. Pérez seemed to have had some trouble deciding on the price. He first wrote the word *trece* and scratched it out, then the figure 14, apparently reals. Finally, over the 14 he wrote what appears to be 2 ps. Unsigned draft, Pérez to Núñez, Arizpe, July 2, 1822, Pinart "Col. mss." The Encinillas district in the state of Chihuahua lies some fifty or sixty miles north of the capital city. During the colonial period an *obraje,* or textile mill, was established at the hacienda of Encinillas and worked by prison labor. It continued to operate after Mexican independence. See Almada, *Resumen de Historia del Estado de Chihuahua* (México, 1955), p. 125.

20. Núñez to Pérez, Santa Magdalena, July 5, 1822, Pinart "Col. mss."

21. Liberós to Pérez, September 6, 1822.

22. Here Pérez was exaggerating. Estelric had been guilty of bluntness perhaps, but not indignities. "Because of the dire straits in which I find myself to continue the construction I have begun, I have felt obliged to issue a draft in the amount of one thousand pesos. . . . I urge you please to pay the amount on sight, in the knowledge that if you do not I shall be forced to take other measures to recover it and provide for my needs, steps which will be for me most painful but indispensable." Estelric to Pérez, September 10, 1821.

23. Unsigned draft, Pérez to Liberós, Chihuahua, September 24, 1822, Pinart "Col. mss."

24. De Calabasas Bautismos. In 1935 F. Narciso's remains were moved again, this time to the mortuary chapel at San Xavier where they rest today beneath an inscribed marble slab.

25. Liberós to Pérez, Arizpe, February 3, 1823, enclosing receipt of the same date, Pinart "Col. mss."

26. Circular of the Bishop of Sonora, Culiacán, December 6, 1822, signed by Liberós, Tumacácori, February 9, 1823, AGMS.

27. Liberós to the Bishop, Tumacácori, May 8, 1823, AGMS.

28. Unsigned letter book copy, the Bishop to Liberós, Culiacán, June 6, 1823, AGMS.

29. Liberós to Pérez, Tumacácori, May 21, 1823, Pinart "Col. mss."

30. Unsigned draft, Pérez to Liberós, Janos, August 15, 1823, *ibid.*

31. González to Pérez, Caborca, August 24, 1823, *ibid.*

32. Liberós to Pérez, Calabasas, August 27, 1823, *ibid.*

33. Unsigned draft, Elías to Liberós, San Bernardino, September 7, 1823, *ibid.*

34. Between February 3 and September 14, the date of this document, the principal seems to have been reduced by one hundred and twenty-five pesos.

35. Transfer of debt, Liberós, Tumacácori, September 14, 1823, Pinart "Col. mss."

36. The last letter written by Fr. Ramón from Tumacácori yet come to light was dated November 25, 1825. John L. Kessell, "A Personal Note from Tumacácori, 1825," *Journal of Arizona History*, vol. 6 (1965), pp. 147-51.

37. José María Mendoza to the Governor, Arizpe, June 22, 1833, Archivo Histórico del Gobierno de Sonora, Hermosillo.