

The Introduction of Double Reeds to New Mexico 1624-1633

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The mass conversion of Native Americans to Catholicism began with the fall of Mexico City to Cortés in 1521, and continued unabated as Spain extended its boundaries northward into what is now the American Southwest. Since many Spanish missionaries were also musicians, they brought not only a new religion to the region, but a new music as well. Records left by religious orders attest to the exciting dangers and challenges faced by Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century American Southwest. At the same time, these records also illustrate the role played by priest-musicians such as Fray Alonso de Benavides, Fray Estevan de Perea, Fray Roque de Figueredo, Fray Eusebio Kino, and Padre Pedro Méndez in establishing the early baroque use of double-reeds in the liturgy of their newly conquered territories.

Double-Reeds Come to the America Southwest

In 1624, Fray Alonso de Benavides entered what is now New Mexico to begin religious duties as custodian of the region. The Franciscan brought with him a set of *chirimías* and *bajones*, the ascendant forms of our modern-day oboes and bassoons, destined for use in the ten missions that he would eventually establish in New Mexico. Benavides kept a detailed diary of his travels. Published in 1630 and revised in 1634, the diary notes that Benavides requested a set of *chirimías* and *bajones* for every five friars in 1631, as well as sets of trumpets, which most likely included sackbuts. Since most missions lacked organs, these consorts of double-reeds and brass instruments were to be used to accompany church choirs, doubling the vocal parts, an early baroque practice common to the cathedrals of both Europe and Mexico where sacred choral music was at its height. Missionaries armed with *bajones* and *chirimías* transported the musical practice of cathedral musicians to Mexico's northern-most provinces, today's New Mexico, Arizona, Southern California, and the northwestern Mexican states of *Sonora* and *Sinaloa*. Between 1620 and 1630, there were as many as sixty-six Franciscans working in New Mexico at any time. This figure suggests that at least thirteen *bajones* and as many as forty *chirimías* in consort were in use in New Mexico in the first quarter of the seventeenth century.



The Old Mission Church, Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria of Zuñi, New Mexico, formerly known at Halona. Established by Fray Agustin de Cuellar in 1629; rebuilt in 1700.

Fray Roque de Figueredo and the Village of Hawikuh

Hawikuh, largest of the Zuñi pueblos (towns), had a long history of contact with the Spanish. Fray Marcos de Niza led the first European encounter with Hawikuh in 1539. During this encounter, Fray Marcos wisely decided to observe Hawikuh from a distance while sending his black slave, Estevanico, for a closer look. Estevanico was immediately killed. Deeming the village too dangerous to enter, Fray Marcos returned to Mexico without making further contact with Hawikuh. Upon his return, he told tales of having discovered the fabled Seven Cities of Gold.

The excitement generated by Fray Marcos' news led to a fully equipped expedition

organized by Coronado in 1540. After being knocked off his horse by a well-aimed rock from the pueblo summit, Coronado surveyed the brown adobe walls of Hawikuh, branded Fray Marcos a liar, and with shouts of "Santiago," stormed and occupied the settlement.

In 1628, eighty-eight years later, the Franciscan Fray Roque de Figueredo entered Hawikuh with a band of twelve soldiers and twenty-nine Franciscan priests. In Figueredo's entourage was the new governor of New Mexico, Francisco Manuel de Silva Nieto, and Fray Estevan de Perea, Benavides successor as the Custodian of New Mexico. In the year following his arrival in New Mexico, Figueredo established the first Zuñi mission church, *La Purísima Concepción*.

As it happens, Figueredo was an energetic bajonista (bassoonist). A native of Seville, Spain, he had been ordained in 1600 at the *Convento Grande* of Mexico City. He gained missionary experience working in the valley of Mexico where he was valued for his skill with Indian languages. Although there seems to be some confusion concerning details of Figueredo's entrance to New Mexico, the 1628 trip is well documented by both Benavides and Perea.

Figueredo had been in poor health during the journey. Suffering from recurring fevers, he was forced to ride the wagons, but recovered in time to enter Hawikuh in good health. In his *Relaciones* of 1632 and 1633, Perea wrote of the arrival of Figueredo's party at Hawikuh:

They arrived at the Province of Zuñi, some distant from the *villa* [Santa Fe] 56 leagues, and its natives having tendered their good will and their arms, received them with festive applause — a thing never [before] heard of in those regions.

The missionaries interpreted the festive applause of the Zuñi people as an auspicious beginning for their missionary work.

The Franciscans bought an adobe house that became the *convento* where the priests and lay brothers lived while establishing both the first church in the province, and its *visitas* in outlying areas. Soon after, the governor departed with his company of soldiers and priests, leaving Figueredo, the priest Agustin de Cuellar, and Fray Francisco de la Madre de Dios, a member of the Lay Religious, to administer to the Zuñi Indians. Three soldiers stayed behind to protect the missionaries.

The morning after the governor's departure, the Franciscans sang Mass and began converting the Zuñi, changing their way of worship and requiring them to assume the troublesome responsibility of providing water, wood, and other necessities for the missionaries. Figueredo stayed in Hawikuh, while Fray Cuellar established a second church, *Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria*, in nearby Halona, site of the present day town of Zuñi.

Perea wrote:

Fray Roque de Figueredo, well known throughout this Kingdom for his great wisdom, virtue, and knowledge, asked most insistently to be allowed to remain there [at Zuñi Pueblo] to convert these heathens. He possessed a great many accomplishments, the principal and most necessary of them being able to minister to those Indians and instruct them in the divine cult; he was proficient in the ecclesiastical chant, harmony, and plain music as well, expert in the playing of instruments for the choir, such as the organ, bassoon [*bajón*], and cornet; experienced in preaching many years in the Mexican [Aztec] tongue and in Matalizinga; of clear understanding and quick to learn any difficult language.

Figueredo's proficiency in the ecclesiastical chant and harmony suggests considerable skill as a composer. It is likely that Figueredo would have followed what was then common practice in the missions, and composed liturgical music for sacred verse he had written in the local dialect. The musicologist Lincoln Speiss speculates that given Figueredo's musical skills, compositions by him may someday be found in Mexican musical archives.

Singing God's Praises: Musical Instruction at the Pueblo

Religious instruction of the general population relied heavily on music as a mnemonic device. Prayers and doctrine were either set to simple chants and Spanish folk songs, or to melodies composed by the missionaries. At Hawikuh, Figueredo immediately set about learning the local language and teaching polyphony to the boys and the best adult singers. He also taught his singers Latin, Spanish, and mensural notation. We do not know what music was actually played. The supply list that accompanied Benavides to New Mexico in 1626 included eleven missals, recently

revised and bound. The recent revisions were probably those of the Council of Trent (1545-1563). According to Speiss, the only missals printed in Mexico were from 1561. The "recently" bound missals that accompanied Benavides to New Mexico in 1626 had to have been of European origin, possibly from the 1615 shipment from Spain to which Speiss refers.

There is no documentation to support the theory that Figueredo taught people to play *chirimías* and *bajones* at Hawikuh. However, given the prevalence of these instruments in mission churches and their importance in mission services, it is very likely that Figueredo would have both used them and instructed his singers in their use. Passages from Benavides' *Memorial* of 1630 include numerous references to the teaching of music in the missions of New Mexico. These passages tell us that the Pueblo Indians were taught to read and write, to sing, and to play all the instruments. References to polyphonic vocal music are numerous. What is missing, except for a few references discussed later, is explicit reference to how the double-reed instruments were used in the missions. To find such references, it is necessary to look to the memoirs of Fray Andrés Pérez de Ribas, a contemporary of Figueredo, and a missionary from the Company of Jesus of New Spain.

Fray Pérez de Ribas worked in the Mexican states of Sonora and Sinola between 1604 and 1620. His writings are both a record of his own experiences, and a collection of letters from his colleagues in the field. One of the letters, written in 1628 by Padre Pedro Méndez to his superiors, reveals the common musical practice in the mission churches:

I found a great congregation of Indians awaiting me, all on their knees, with crosses upraised in their hands, chanting the hymns of the church in the manner common to the Indians of Mexico. On the parapet of the church there were musicians playing kettle drums, trumpets and oboes [*chirimías*].

Méndez also wrote that dancing took place to the music of trumpets and *chirimías*.

Pérez de Ribas' comments on the early church reveal an institution that was not only culturally rich, but very sophisticated in its use of both vocal and instrumental music during Mass, processions, dances, and fiestas:

Although from the beginning much

attention was given to their hearing music of the church, little progress was made until their children were taught to read and write, and then to read the notes of the chant.

There were eventually named choir masters, from among the older and more educated Indians who showed a talent for music, and the chapel singers became quite proficient in each of the churches. At present (1645) there are celebrated impressive fiestas with organ music [polyphonic chant], choruses, and playing of musical instruments such as bassoons [*bajones*], sackbuts, oboes [*chirimías*], and flutes.

Chants have been translated so that the children, especially, can enjoy singing hymns in their own language.

The church bells rang in welcome. There was singing from the chapel choir, accompanied by numerous instruments. They passed under arches formed from green boughs, while a choir sang *Te Deum Laudamus* composed for the great doctor of the church, Saint Augustine.

We can infer from Pérez de Ribas' writings that Figueredo used similar practices in the Zuñi missions of New Mexico.

In Danger of Martyrdom

Despite the warm welcome Figueredo and his colleagues had received, trouble soon developed. Local religious leaders began to speak out against the Franciscan, telling their people that the baptismal water would kill them. They exhorted the Zuñis to expel the "strange priest." Support for the mission church halted, as did the daily deliveries of food, water and wood. The sounding of war drums followed, and it soon became apparent that Figueredo was in imminent danger of martyrdom.

Returning to the Fray Roque de Figueredo, in Zuñi where he was, the General Adversary [Zuni religious leader] made the same treachery, saying to the Indians, with menace, that they should eject the strange priest from their country. They put it into operation, all manifesting themselves in such manner that now they did not assist, as they were wont, to bring water and wood, nor did one [of them] appear. By night was heard a din of dances, drums and rattles, which

among them is a signal of war. And holding it [war] for certain, although he was already prepared for every adversity, [Figueredo] was then in the surrounded peril with the most lively concern. But God succors His own in their greatest necessity. And so, as [Figueredo], one of these nights, was beseeching God with fervent petitions that He would communicate His eternal light to the abyss of that darkened people — at midnight he saw enter his retreat two Indians of tall and gallant stature, to appearance captains, with plumes of feathers and weapons prepared, ready for war. Well might the famous soldier of the church conceive that that crisis was the last of his life, and going upon his knees offered [his life] to God, with more desire to suffer triumphantly than fears of the fatal blow at the barbarous hand of the Indians.

The warriors were *caciques* (captains) from the neighboring pueblos of Mátgaki and K'íákima, some five leagues (thirteen miles) away. They let Figueredo know that they had come not to murder him, but to invite him to establish a church in their villages, where, they promised, he would be better appreciated. They remained the night, calming the passions of the Pueblo. The Hawikuh *caciques* arrived the next day, begging pardon for their lack of faith, explaining that the oracles of their gods had misled them. Figueredo thereupon instructed the *caciques* in the Faith and held a public baptism in the plaza, followed by Mass and the singing of *Te Deum Laudamus*, a polyphonic work traditionally accompanied on the *chirimía*.

It is unclear just how long Figueredo remained in Zuñi. He was there at least through February of 1632, when the arrival of two new missionaries, Fray Francisco Letrado and Fray Martín de Arvida, provided the catalyst for the hostilities that began. Being of a fiery and zealous nature, Fray Letrado attained martyrdom soon after arriving at Zuñi:

He met some idolaters, and began to chide them. He saw at once that they were bent on killing him, so he knelt down, holding a small crucifix, and continued to remonstrate while in this attitude. The Indians shot him dead with arrows, carried off the corpse and scalped it, parading the scalp afterwards at the usual dance.

Apparently the supplications that worked for Figueredo did not work for Letrado, or for Fray Arvida, who, overjoyed, prophesized to Figueredo that he would soon win the palm of martyrdom. Five days later, he did. It is not known how or why Figueredo, Fray Cuellar, and the Lay Religious escaped being murdered. In his *History of Hawikuh*, Hodge speculated that either Figueredo had been away at a distant village when the murders occurred, or that the respect and affection he had earned during his three years among the Zuñi had saved his life. In either case, he most likely returned to Mexico City with a supply train in 1633.

We next hear of Figueredo on September 26, 1638 with reference to a consultation by the Commissary-General of the Franciscan Order, Fray Juan de Prada, on the establishment of a bishopric to replace the custodial system in New Mexico. It was at that time that Figueredo, collaborating with Cuellar, wrote the treatise, *Foundations of the Seraphic Orders in New Mexico with the Life and Martyrdom of the Illustrious Apostolic Men of the Custody, Fray Martín de Arvida and Fray Francisco Letrado, in the Years 1625-1629*. In 1649, Figueredo entered the monastery in Tlaxcala, Mexico, slipping away from public view.

Double-Reeds as Instruments of Peace

At the same time Figueredo was establishing the church in Hawikuh, Fray Alonso de Benavides was busy in other parts of New Mexico. In 1629, Benavides traveled on a diplomatic mission to Santa Clara Pueblo, a settlement twenty-five miles south of present-day Santa Fe. The pueblo had been repeatedly attacked by hostile Navajo-Apaches. Hoping upon his arrival to negotiate peace between the nomadic Navajos and the Santa Clara people, Benavides, accompanied by a group of clergy and Indians, sent an Indian messenger to the Navajos seeking a meeting. Suspicious but impressed by the boldness of Benavides, the Navajo chief arrived at dusk with four of his men. In the meeting that followed, the Navajos and Santa Clara Indians exchanged arrows and expressed good will toward one another. In his *Memorial*, Benavides wrote:

The church was prepared and beautified with many lighted candles, as night had already fallen. It all looked very holy. When they approached the altar, they found me seated in a chair, and the governor of the pueblo [*rancheria*], without my having suggested it to him, came forward after prayers and kissed my

feet, an act which I then consented as being necessary, since it was the first time that that proud and bellicose people had seen it. The captain of the Apaches [*de Navajo*] did likewise. I made them rise. Then our governor presented him with his bows and arrows [a peace gesture]. . . At this [the announcement of peace] they all embraced one another. I ordered the bells to be rung and the trumpets and flageolets [*chirimías*] to be sounded, which greatly pleased the [Navajo chief].

This was apparently the first time the chief had heard a double-reed instrument, or, for that matter, Western music. The next morning, the chief was entertained with a polyphonic rendering of the *Salve Regina* accompanied by *chirimías* and trumpets. Then Benavides sang the prayer and began the conversion of the Navajo chief.

The account of Benavides' meeting with the Navajos raises two important questions: whom were the musicians singing and playing the trumpets and *chirimías*, and what polyphonic music were they using for the performance? The answers to both questions are unknown. However, since Franciscans placed music at the center of Catholic education, it is possible that the musicians could have been converts, local Santa Clara Pueblo Indians, or Tlaxcaltecas Indians who had emigrated to Santa Fe with the Spanish. They could also have been Franciscan priests, members of the Lay Religious, or any combination of individuals from these groups. The polyphonic music could have been music of the Mexican choral school, Spanish music from the Iberian Peninsula, or music that had been composed locally by the Franciscan priests or natives of the pueblo. While native composers have not been documented in New Mexico, they have been documented in other parts of New Spain.

Men of Distinction: Warriors, Leaders, and Musicians

Missionary work continued in the American Southwest well into the nineteenth century. In 1698, a noted Jesuit missionary, Fray Esuibo Kino, had an interesting encounter in the Sonora Desert. While on his way to establish a mission among the Sobaipuris Indians, he halted in Quiburi, a village with a population of approximately four hundred, where he was entertained by two chiefs, each of whom had been given nicknames related to his musical abilities. The head *cacique* was called El Coro (the chorus), and his lieutenant, El Bajón (the bassoon). Fray

Kino baptized both chiefs, along with their children. In a later skirmish with raiding Apache warriors, El Coro fought with distinction while protecting the mission of Cocospora, Arizona. Unfortunately, El Bajón did not survive the same attack.

It was not coincidental that El Coro and El Bajón were leaders of the pueblo and church musicians; the precedence had long been established in the Aztec pueblos of central Mexico and Even after the conquest of 1521, musicians were held in high esteem by Aztec society, where there was little separation between the secular and the sacred. Often, the role of church musician was used as a stepping stone to higher political office. Musicians not only contributed large sums of money for the maintenance of the church and the purchase of musical instruments and music manuscripts, they also acted as witnesses for various community transactions. Considering the religious and political functions of El Coro and El Bajón, it would seem as if the custom of elevating musicians to the rank of societal leaders was also practiced in the less-civilized northern frontier of the Spanish Empire.

There are many historical anecdotes that tie missionary work in the American Southwest and northern Mexico to sixteenth-century methods of conversion used in Mexico after the Conquest. Drawing on experiences with the church music of central Mexico and Spain, priest-musicians such as Figueredo, Benavides, Perea, Kino, and Méndez extended Western musical traditions, including the use of double-reeds, to the northern frontier of Mexico. The appearance of these men in the high drama of a real and dangerous "Wild West" creates a poignant record of a difficult age in North American history, and of the double-reed musicians who were part of the adventure. ❖

About the Author ...

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