

Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project

Education Initiative

2003-2004



Restoring water to ensure the continuity of the Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh tradition of agriculture

Cultivating New Social and Political Relationships

Part 47

When Juan Bautista de Anza led a delegation of 240 men, women and children from the small village of Tubac in the Santa Cruz Valley south of Tucson to establish a Spanish colony in Monterey, California, in the fall of 1775, he passed through the Pima villages. Anza found sufficient forage for his 1,000 head of cattle, oxen and mules on the east side of the Sacaton Mountains.

Traveling up the Santa Cruz River to Picacho, Anza turned north-northwest to the Gila following McClellan Wash, where he was met by “the governors and justices” of the Pimas while yet ten miles from the village of Comari (Blackwater). Arriving in Uturituc on November 1st, Anza was met by a thousand Indians, “the men on one side and the women on the other.” In a show of their chivalry, the Pimas shook the hands of all in the Anza party. They also entertained the leading men of the party “in a great arbor which they made for this purpose and in front of which ... they had set up a large cross.”

Anza reciprocated such good treatment when he distributed glass beads and tobacco in abundance to all in attendance. While Anza clearly enjoyed this reception, the Pimas had reasons of their own for such kindness. They viewed Spain as an important ally against hostile Apaches and understood friendly terms with Spain could result in new trade relationships. It could also provide the Pimas with Spanish trade goods that they in turn could barter with tribes further in the interior, thereby giving them an advantage over such tribes.

While it is unclear how much the Pimas understood the meaning of Christianity, their inclination toward “religious morality [was] great and decided.” Demonstrating their desire to incorporate elements of Christianity into their culture, the Pimas looked forward to one day “build[ing] a church themselves.” Spain, however, was unable to accommodate this desire for permanent missions and deeper religious instruction. Francisco Garces in particular was grieved that he “could not gratify such desire as they manifested to become Christians.” While the Pimas were open to Christian instruction, Garces lamented that it “does not appear that the time has come to gather the sheep into the fold of the church.”

While the goal of its relationship with the Pimas was “the progress of our holy Faith and the spiritual benefits” of Christianity, the driving force of Spain’s activity was economics. Since Marcos de Niza’s 16th century tales of the cities of gold, Spain hungered for the mineral wealth of the frontier lands. Nomadic and militarily powerful, the Apaches controlled the exploration and development of these mountain resources throughout large areas of Arizona, New Mexico and Sonora.

To accomplish its objective of mineral exploitation, Spain needed an ally to help tame the frontier. Such an ally could extend the rim of Christendom and open up valuable mineral lands to the north. The concurrence of the Pimas “as a means ... of securing the conversion of the other tribes” was essential since they administered the gateway to the north. Father Kino saw the “promotion of these new conversions not only [aiding] the Christian settlements already formed” but also as a means of opening “many other new conquests and new conversions.” Jesuit priest Jacobo Sedelmayr envisioned “a flourishing Christian country” extending from the Casa Grande ruins to the mouth of the Gila River.

Having participated in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, driving the Spanish—and the Franciscan priests—from New Mexico, the Hopi remained the key to connecting Santa Fe and California via a northern route. Unsuccessful in persuading the Hopi to allow them access to their mesa top villages from New Mexico, after 1692, Spain saw the Pimas as the key to accessing the Hopi from the south. “[I]f we establish missions at the Casa Grande of the Gila and hold as subjects of the royal dominion the Pima Indians of the district, who are good fighters,” Sedelmayr wrote in 1744, “they would be able to accompany the missionaries as guides, as messengers and as an escort all the way to Moqui [Hopi].”

Conversion of the Pimas would extend the Spanish frontier to the Gila and Colorado Rivers, giving Spain “an advantage over [other] European nations” in maintaining its claims to the interior west. Kino saw Spanish influence over the Pima and Hopi as a means of opening “communications with New France” as it made its own “apostolic journeys from east to west.” Sedelmayr, aware of growing French influence in the Mississippi River Valley, eyed the Colorado River frontier as one means of stemming French hegemony in the Mountain west.

Bringing the Pima villages under the influence of the Church would also aid Spain in its immediate objective of establishing a presidio on the upper Gila River “where it issues forth from Apache Country.” Combined with presidios in Terrenate (on the San Pedro River), Janos (Sinoloa), El Paso (on the Rio Grande) and in New Mexico, Sedelmayr assumed the Apaches would have little choice but to confine their attacks on “the heathen [tribes] of the north,” rather than on Spanish and Pima settlements, missions and outposts to the south. This in turn would open up new “districts, ranches, haciendas, and mines of good quality” to Spanish settlement, the ultimate goal of the Crown. Should the country be settled, Sedelmayr wrote to Rectors Jose Echevarria, Juan Maria Casati and Andres Garcia in Mexico City, “God would reward the royal largess for all disbursement with this additional allurements of mines of gold and silver.” The Pima were at the center of this goal. As “enemies of our enemies, friends of the Spaniards, given to trade and barter with Christians,” the Pima were in the position of influencing the success of the Spanish objective in the Southwest.

It was not lack of desire on the part of the church and local civic leaders that missions failed to be established in Pima country. Aware their villages were “very fruitful for ... crops as well as for cattle and horses,” Sonoran Governor Mateo Sastre envisioned as many as five missions being established among the villages. Garces believed the most opportune location for a mission to be Sutaquison, which had sufficient pasturage to feed the livestock necessary in a self-sustaining mission. Other potential mission sites included Uurituc, Pitac and Comari. While Sastre encouraged Sonoran Viceroy Frey don Antonio Bucareli y Ursua to give due consideration to this request, it was denied.

During the final years of Spanish administration in the Pimeria Alta (1790-1821), there was little commerce between Spain and the Gila River Pimas. Diego Bringas, traveling north from Sonora to resolve internal squabbles among the priests laboring in the Pimeria, visited the Pima in 1796-1797, seeking once again to persuade the Crown to authorize missions on the Gila River. Reminding the King of Spain that providence had placed the Pimas “at the doors of a large gentile population so that, blessed by religion and the rule of His Majesty, they might give to those barbarous peoples proofs which are unmistakable that they, too, may share in this happiness by following their example,” Bringas boasted a road from Tucson to the Pima villages could easily be constructed to tie the village missions with those to the south. “If you wish to consider [crops] which can be grown there,” the Franciscan explained, “every species of grain, tree and legume would do well because of the mild climate and even temperature.” Events in other parts of the world, however, distracted the Crown and soon it would lose its empire with the independence of Mexico in 1821.

In Their Own Words

Read the excerpts from the diaries of Juan Bautista de Anza, Pedro Font and Francisco Garces and then complete the exercise that follows.

Journal of Captain Juan Bautista de Anza

Monday, October 30, 1775 “[W]e arrived at the Gila River at a site with abundant pasturage and water which by its inhabitants is called Comari (Blackwater). . . .”

Wednesday, November 1, 1775 (Village of Uturituc or near Sweetwater) “The affability and friendly treatment which I experienced from these people in my last expedition I have found repeated on this occasion. They all had the good manners to salute me and to prepare a bower or arcade of five naves in which to lodge us, and where they voluntarily supplied us with an abundance of water, wood, and some provisions of the kinds which they use.”

Thursday, November 2, 1775 “The same affection and the same demonstrations which they showed us at the pueblo of [Uturituc] we experienced in this one of Sutaquison (Vah Ki).”

Journal of Franciscan Priest Pedro Font

Monday, October 30, 1775 “[T]he governor of Sutaquison, and other Indians, all on horseback, came out on the road to meet us. . . . [T]hey seemed very happy at our coming.”

Wednesday, November 1, 1775 “[A]t one in the afternoon [we] arrived at the pueblo of San Juan Capistrano de Uturituc, having traveled four leagues (12 miles) to the west-northwest. We were welcomed by the Indians, whom I estimated at a thousand persons, arranged in two files, the men on one side and the women on the other. As soon as we dismounted they all came to salute us and to shake our hands. First the men and then the women. They manifested great satisfaction at seeing us, and entertained us in a great arbor which they made for this purpose, and in front of which, although they were heathen, they had set up large crosses. Immediately they brought water to the camp for the people, for the Gila Pimas are very gentle and good hearted.”

Journal of Franciscan Priest Francisco Garces

Wednesday, November 1, 1775 “Since whenever I have been among these poor gentiles they have received me with equal kindness, I have felt deep grief to find that I could not gratify such great desire as they manifested to become Christians; but on this occasion particular was my pain to see so many people unite in begging us to remain here to baptize them, who in plentitude of affability and mode of living together in their pueblo surpass all others of their nation. . . .”

Thursday, November 2, 1775 “There came forth to receive us the Indians of the pueblo (Sutaquison) with demonstrations of much joy, and me thought that they might be about 500 souls. In all these pueblos they raise large crops of wheat, some of corn, cotton, calabashes, etc., to which end they have constructed good acequias (canals), surrounding the fields in one circuit common (to all) and divided (are) those of different owners by particular circuits.”

Wednesday, November 8, 1775 “[We] arrived at the Pueblo de los Santos Apostoles San Simon y Judas (Opasoitac) of the Opa nation, or Cocomaricopa, which is the same, who received us with great joy. There gathered in this pueblo to see us some 10 hundred (1,000) souls, and they were given tobacco and glass beads. Here the Indians raise all sorts of grain, and regularly two crops each year, whether the season be good or bad.”

Teacher Plan for “Cultivating New Social and Political Relationships”

Terms to know and understand

- Chivalry
- Reciprocated
- Morality
- Lament
- Hegemony
- Providence

Critical Thinking:

- There are few recorded words of Pima or Maricopa speakers regarding their thoughts of the Spanish. What remains are Spanish records that are not always accurate in their reflections of the Pima and Maricopa. Nonetheless, the Pimas and Maricopa appear to have desired instruction in Christianity. What might be some of the reasons the people accepted elements of Christianity when they already had their own spiritual beliefs? Did the people have anything to gain from such acceptance?

Activities

- After you have read the excerpts from the diaries of Anza, Font and Garces, draw some conclusions about the Pima and Maricopa, their environment, diet, way of life, values, etc. What can we learn about the people from reading these Spanish interpretations of what they saw, understood and believed to be true?
 1. What makes you believe there was an abundance of wildlife in the Gila River Valley along the Pima villages?
 2. What evidence do you have of the friendliness of the Pimas and Maricopas?
 3. What makes you believe the Pima and Maricopa had an abundance of natural foods to eat (in addition to their cultivated foods)?
 4. Is there any evidence that the Pima and Maricopa grew crops?
 5. What evidence is there that the Pimas and Maricopas were good mannered? How do you know all the villages were friendly?
 6. What tells you the Pimas understood engineering techniques?

About P-MIP

The Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project is authorized by the Gila River Indian Community to construct all irrigation systems for the Community. When fully completed, P-MIP will provide irrigation for up to 146,330 acres of farmland. P-MIP is dedicated to three long-range goals:

- Restoring water to the Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh.
- Putting Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh rights to the use of water to beneficial use.
- Demonstrating and exercising sound management to ensure continuity of the Community’s traditional economy of agriculture.

Students will be able to:

1. Identify possible reasons why both Spain and the Pimas chose to form an alliance and maintain friendly relations.
2. Glean evidence from the reading to make factual statements regarding the way of life of the Pima and Maricopa people.

Objectives