

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NOTES ON THE DISCOVERY OF
FATHER EUSEBIO FRANCISCO KINO

by

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In the initial stages of our search in Magdalena, Sonora, for the remains of Father Kino, we had only two leads on which to base our hopes: some meagre documentary evidence, a little of which eventually turned out to be misleading, and what little we knew about the architecture of the colonial period in the Pimeria Alta of northern Sonora and southern Arizona. In the final months and weeks of our investigations the relevant documentary evidence was to increase nearly tenfold and provided the archaeologists with valid interpretations of the structures they were uncovering. Long before this point was reached, however, the archaeologists had uncovered dozens of foundations beneath the streets of Magdalena, adjacent to the present church, and even in the jailyard.

At first these remnants of earlier structures served only to confuse the basic archaeological problem and prompted project leader Prof. Wigberto Jimenez Moreno to comment as follows at the end of the project: Our search had been "like looking for a needle in a haystack, but first we had to find the haystack!" There was little hope of finding or identifying Father Kino unless we could first find and positively identify the chapel in which Kino had been buried. This, in a nut shell, was our

basic archaeological problem: it cannot be more simply stated. Yet at times the solution appeared elusive if not impossible.

As an example, it had occurred to us that the chapel of San Francisco Javier might have been built upon slightly higher ground than that of the surrounding area, and that in the late 1800's when some of the modern structures were built in the vicinity of the present plaza, this area might have been levelled, leaving no trace at all even of the foundations of the earlier chapel. This unwelcome thought continued to haunt us from time to time.

Nevertheless, an intensive search was mandatory, and we needed to undertake as much excavation as possible in the general area, in order to eliminate as much ground and as many structures as possible. This approach to the problem, the step by step elimination in order to zero in on the true location of the chapel, was dictated by Prof. Jimenez Moreno. It was an excellent idea. It involved more time and expense, but it paid off in dividends. Most of the other foundations that we encountered--if not all of them--could be identified historically with Franciscan and post-Franciscan structures. ← At least we were eliminating, on the one hand, and learning more and more about post-Jesuit period foundations and architecture on the other.

For instance, there was a strong feeling among some of the local people that the chapel in Calle Pesqueira, several hundred meters southwest of the present church, was indeed the

chapel of San Francisco Javier in which Kino had been buried. Excavations underneath the floor revealed three previous excavations--where someone had searched before--and nothing else except a potpuri of artifacts, all post-Kino in time, including a bicycle chain and a cigarette lighter. These I ##### saw in 1963 during the Lion's Club excavations here, and on the basis of what I saw then, everything was too late in time to have belonged to the Kino period. Virtually everything was 19th century or later. Two years later Prof. Jorge Olvera examined this site and on the basis of the architectural style alone was able to determine that the structure belonged to the Franciscan period. A few months later Father Kieran McCarty came across a document from the archives of the Franciscan Colegio de Santa Cruz de Queretaro stating that this chapel had in fact been constructed by the Franciscan Father Ruiz in 1815. Clearly, this could not have been the chapel in which Kino was buried.

One thing that I was becoming more and more convinced about as the excavations progressed was that in the Pimeria Alta there was a basic difference between the foundations of major structures of the Franciscan period and later as opposed to those of the earlier Jesuit period. Throughout the colonial period foundations consisted of boulders set in mortar in a shallow trench. However, the mortars used were usually very different in the Jesuit period than in the later periods. During the Franciscan period the boulder foundations were set in a lime mortar, which to this day still remains quite

hard. The Jesuit boulder foundations of the Kino period, as I had earlier observed at the mission ruins of ~~###~~ Los Santos Angeles de Remedios, were set in a very clayey mortar (soquete)--much more clay-like than the mortar used in cementing unfired adobes or than the consistency of the adobes themselves. This feature had also been observed in the later Jesuit mission structure of Guevavi in southern Arizona. Throughout the colonial period, however, some boulder foundations were set in a regular adobe mortar, although the Jesuits never used a lime mortar in Pimeria Alta and the Franciscans apparently did not use the soquete mortar.

This overlap in the use of adobe mortar foundation# construction sometimes does not pose a serious problem in identification, because in wall construction the Franciscans frequently used fired brick, and in Pimeria Alta, at least, the Jesuits apparently never did. Even if only adobe foundations are found in place, the presence of fired brick in the surrounding debris or incorporated in the foundations themselves is usually a sure sign that the construction, or at least the reconstruction of a structure, was made during the Franciscan period. This observation tends to hold true as a rule, except in places like Magdalena where there is so much mixture of fill, artifacts, and building materials over the central portion of the town that it would not be impossible to find fired brick fragments in the fill and vicinity of the chapel of San Francisco Javier even if it had never been reconstructed or repaired with fired brick by the Franciscans. In fact, exactly this did happen during our search, and this is why so much evidence was needed

before we could be really sure what structures we were dealing with.

On May 13, 1966, we began to encounter in our excavations a new set of foundations. It soon became apparent that these were of the boulder and clay mortar (soquete) type) which I felt belonged to the early Jesuit period. I suggested that several of us take a trip to Remedios to verify that this was the same type of foundation as used by Father Kino in the construction of that church. Prof. Jimenez Moreno agreed to this, and on May 15th, Prof. Arturo Romano, Prof. Jorge Olvera, and I along with two laborers went to Remedios .

The mission of Los Santos Angeles de Remedios, about 45 Kms. by road northeast of Magdalena, was founded by Father Kino. ~~###~~ He began construction of the church in 1695 and dedicated it in January, 1704. It is the only church built by Father Kino, to my knowledge, that was not subsequently rebuilt or built upon. Secondly, I also knew that one end of this church extends over the ~~#####~~ edge of the mesa on which it was built, so that with a minimum of excavation it would be possible to clear away enough dirt in an hour or two to expose enough of the foundation to be able to examine the precise nature of its construction. What we found was exactly the same type of construction, river boulders set in soquete mortar, that we had just uncovered in Magdalena. Back we went, only to find that in our absence Prof. Jimenez Moreno had found a second set of similar foundations that same day. While we were not exactly elated with this news at first, it soon became

apparent that we were probably faced with trying to determine which of these two structures (if either) was the finished chapel in which Father Kino had been buried and which (if the other) was the church that Father/^{Agustin}Campos had already started at the time of Kino's death. This was the real challenge, for finally we felt certain that we were working with Kino period structures. We felt that we might be getting close to the solution, but we still needed proof as to which structure, if either, was the chapel dedicated to San Francisco Javier in which Father Kino had been buried.

While all of this prowling around for walls and foundations ~~#####~~ had been going on in the dusty streets of Magdalena, the historical researchers had been prowling through dusty archives searching for--and finding--more documentary evidence that should help/^{provide}~~make~~ a positive identification of the chapel. Their data began pouring in to us almost faster than we could dig.

The amazing finds were these:

1) The historical researchers found documentary evidence that the Jesuit missionary Father Gaspar Stiger, a German, had buried a Salvador de Noriega, in life employed by Lorenzo Velasco, just outside the door of the chapel of San Francisco Javier in Santa Magdalena, in August# of 1739. The archaeological crew uncovered a burial in just such a spot with reference to one of the Jesuit period structures.

2) The historical researchers revealed that in 1828

the inspector Fernando Grande had stated--for the first time in all of the historical records that we know about--that the chapel faced to the south ("al medio dia") and that it had a small tower. It was not long after#### this that the archaeologists were able to determine from the foundations that this same structure did face to the south. It was much later, however, at the very end of the project and actually during the process of winding everything up that Prof. Jorge Olvera finally found the foundations of the tower.

3) In this same document the historians were able to ascertain that the image of San Francisco Javier had been moved from the altar to about the midpoint of the nave of the chapel by 1828. The reason for this, we have to assume, was that the Fiesta de San Francisco Javier, celebrated annually and currently reaching an influx into Magdalena every year of an additional 10,000 people, had reached impossible proportions 140 years earlier in the tiny chapel, and the image had been moved to provide better traffic circulation through the chapel. In 1837, the historical documents reveal, an elderly man of 90 years # died and was buried inside the chapel in front of the niche of San Francisco Javier. The archaeologists found, at one side of the structure, about half way down#### the length of it, the burial of an old man with his feet towards the far side of the nave. The historical documents would seem to provide the identity of the burial, while the #### position of the burial would indicate that the image of San Francisco Javier, at the time that it was moved from the altar, had been

installed on the west side of the nave.

4) The historical researchers found documentation to the effect that Father Perez Llera was about to build a buttress to support one of the walls of the chapel. The buttress must have been built, because we found one outside the east side of the chapel. It was the only one we encountered.

There were a few other points of historical evidence, minor in terms of what we ~~needed~~ really needed, to indicate that this structure was indeed the chapel of San Francisco Javier in which Father Kino was buried. One of these was the sketch of the ^{ruins of the} chapel made by the historical buff, Alfonse Pinart, in 1879.

In terms of the archaeological-historical data, we had still to find Father Kino's remains flanked on either side by the re-interments of Father Gonzalez on Kino's right and Father Iturmendi on his left. , with Kino on the gospel side with his head towards the altar. Actually, by this time, we had found the primary burial (that of Father Kino) with its head towards the altar, and we had found the two secondary burials. I still wanted to determine that Father Kino was in fact on the gospel side of the chapel. In order to do this, and in order to tie up several other loose points, it was necessary to continue excavations in order to find the west wall of the chapel. This endeavor was only moderately successful. We did find enough of the west wall to be able to determine that the primary burial, that of a priest on the basis of its orientation , was also buried on the gospel side

of the chapel as Kino had been. However, the fragmentary condition of this wall allowed us to accomplish little else beyond determining the width of the chapel and the fact that a later burial had been intruded into the foundation. We were not able to find the west side of the door.

Although the archaeological evidence, supported to a considerable extent by historical documentation, has conclusively demonstrated that the remains of Father Eusebio Francisco Kino have been found, neither archaeology nor history by themselves could have established this fact. On the other hand, the physical evidence of the burial itself (including orientation, the coffin, and the crucifix on the left clavicle) and the physical anthropological characteristics of the skeleton as ^{interpreted} ~~determined~~ by Prof. Arturo Romano would alone have established the fact that this was Father Kino. In other words, the nature of the burial establishes it as belonging to a priest or missionary, while the physical characteristics of the skeleton establishes it as belonging to a European of Alpine stock. As far as I have been able to determine, ~~there is~~ no other ~~person~~ priest of European ancestry and Alpine stock was ever buried in Magdalena!

Is there any thing else from an archaeological point of view that should be done in the future# to clarify more of the segment of history that deals with the final resting place of Father Kino? There is. When the present Ayuntamiento structure is razed to permit the construction of an appropriate monument to Father Kino, there is a good chance of finding through

archaeological exploration one or more of these four things:
1) more of the west wall of the chapel; 2) the room(s) (one or two) that comprised Father Campos' quarters in which Father Kino died; 3) the quarters that Father Font used in 1776; and 4) ~~##~~ a possible sacristy adjunct of the chapel.