Missionary Kino
Edward H. Spicer
"Cycles of Conquest"

Kino began the work of missionization of the Upper Pimas [O'odham] and thus had the advantage of a long period of almost singlehanded building of social relationships between them and the Spaniards of the region. He built his own personality into these relationships.

Typical of Kino's finding of good will on the part of the Pimas wherever he went is the statement in a letter of 1687 describing his first tour of duty: "In all places they received with love the word of God for the sake of their eternal salvation." But this was not merely an expression of first enthusiasm in a new task, for in the following year he was even more enthusiastic: "God willing, hundreds, and later thousands will be gathered into the bosom of our sweet, most holy Mother Church, for about five thousand of the neighboring Indians have come asking at this time with most ardent pleading for holy baptism. They envy the happy lot of those in the three new settlements." And again five years after the first, of a visit to the Sobaipuris on the San Pedro River, he wrote "Captain Coro and the rest of them received me with all kindness." Two years later of a trip to the Gila Pimas, he wrote: "All were affable and docile people." In 1696 with nearly ten years of missionary work behind him and after previous visits to and work with the Sobaipuris of the Santa Cruz Valley, he wrote that at Bac he was "received with all love by the many inhabitants of the great ranchería and by many other principal men, who had gathered from various parts adjacent." In 1698 he again wrote after a trip through the whole Papago country that he was "grateful for the great affability and cheerfulness of everybody whom we met." And so it went throughout his life until he died in Pima country at Magdalena. Wherever he went, according to his accounts, among Pimas or Yumans, his reception was warm and hearty and he came away with feelings of great friendliness. He apparently was able to charm and to be charmed by all the Indians, whether on first visits or in the missions where they knew him well.

At the bottom of Kino's pleasant and easy relations with the Indians seems to have been a tolerant spirit. Not only has he left no record whatever of suppression of Indian ceremony, but in his writings there is no particular concern with Indian ways as evil. He does not inveigh against drunkenness, which was a common ceremonial practice among the Upper Pimas, as it was among the Tarahumaras. He spends no words on condemnation even of Pima witches. One would think that somehow he managed to remain blandly unaware of the existence of Indian ceremonial life away from the missions, if it were not for the fact that there are accounts [316] of all-night dances and other ceremonies which took place at villages where be spent the night or visited for a period. Many such all-night gatherings with dances and music he evidently felt honored by, believing (probably correctly in some instances) that they were given in his honor.

Moreover, he gives a one-paragraph account of a scalp dance among the Sobaipuris, saying: "We found the Pima natives of Quiburi very jovial and friendly. They were dancing over the scalps and the spoils of fifteen enemies, Hocomes and Janos; whom they had killed a few days before. This was so pleasing to us that Captain …. Bernal, the Alferez, the Sergeant and many others entered the circle and danced merrily in company with the natives." This of course was a situation in which the Spaniards were delighted to celebrate a victory over mutual enemies, the eastern tribes associated with the Apaches, but it is also characteristic of the pleasant and noncritical way in which Kino took note of and sat in the midst of so many native ceremonials. He almost never permitted himself to be even mildly critical of native practices, if indeed it actually bothered him. Such tolerance must have made him welcome everywhere and caused him to be viewed only as a constructive bringer of new good tidings and never as one who was prepared to destroy what the people already had.

There was also a certain amount of give and take in his relations with the headmen of the many Pima villages which he visited. Repeatedly he describes how he sat and talked for hours in such villages. What he said must have had a great deal of interest; an example is the following - describing his visit to Bac in 1692 - which shows his teaching methods very clearly: "I spoke to them of the word of God, and on the map of the world I showed them the lands, the rivers, and the seas over which we fathers had come from afar to bring them the saving knowledge of our Holy Faith. I told them also how in ancient times the Spaniards were not Christian, how Santiago came to teach them the faith, and how the first fourteen years he was able to baptize only a few, because of which the Holy Apostle was discouraged, but that the Holy Virgin appeared to him and consoled him, promising that the Spaniards would convert the rest of the people of the world. "

"And I showed them on the map of the world how the Spaniards and the Faith had come by sea to Vera Cruz and had gone into Puebla and to Mexico, Guadalajara, Sinaloa, Sonora and now to ... Dolores del Cosari, in the land of the Pimas ... that they could go and see it all, and even ask at once their relatives, my servants, who were with me. They listened with pleasure to these and other talks concerning God, heaven, and hell, told me that they wished to be Christians, and gave me some infants to baptize."

This was, of course, the general method of teaching and preaching of the Jesuits. Certainly Kino was merely one of many capable missionary teachers who knew how to employ concrete demonstration, in this case maps and charts, and to spice the doctrine with history, and even to meet the skeptics with reference to Christianized Indians who could be questioned right there in their own tongue about it all. These merely show that Kino was capable in the missionary teaching tradition.

His special genius was his capacity to sit down immediately afterwards and listen to the Pima headmen. Over and over again in his accounts, he tells how he [317] was invited to sit through a night or even two days and nights in which be must have done as much listening as talking, Thus in 1700 on one of his trips among the Yumas, he was persuaded to stay, even though he had wanted to push on, because people wished to hear him. He preached in his usual way. Then, he says, "These talks, ours and theirs, lasted almost the whole afternoon and afterward till midnight, with very great pleasure to all." He was not annoyed by having been put off schedule; rather he relaxed and enjoyed a day of mutual give and take. How much he understood, even though he always had interpreters with him, we shall never know, nor are we sure of his attitude about the content of the long talks of the Indian spokesmen. He never mentions the content unless it had some direct bearing on his mapping interests or the building of the mission chain. But at any rate he behaved in a way, at very great cost in time, which was regarded as courteous and must have made him a delightful guest. He behaved in this respect. in fact, in the way that any visiting headman among the Indians was expected to behave. Long talks by all parties were the rule, but they must not be one-sided - and this Kino seemed instinctively to understand.

Another of Kino's qualities, which was not by any means unique among the missionaries, but most abundantly developed in him, was that of organizing ability. He believed in gathering people together for particular and dramatic purposes. He showed his ability for this when Chief Coxi was baptized at Dolores shortly after the founding of that mission. Kino made it the occasion for inviting other Pima headmen from far to the west where he had made a beginning at contacts ­ and five attended. He also brought "Spanish gentlemen" from the mining town of Bacanuche to the ceremony. This sort of thing he continued to do on a grander scale as time went on. He brought hundreds of people from all over the Upper Pima country to the dedication of the church when it was finished at Dolores. He brought a large group of Pima headmen from the Santa Cruz and San Pedro valleys and elsewhere to Dolores and then had them go on a pilgrimage through the northern Opata country to have an audience with the Father Visitor at Bacerac and ask for missionaries to be sent to their villages. He called meetings at Bac and other Pima villages to discuss his interest in the problem of whether California was an island or not. His accounts indicate that he got great responses in such meetings and that he participated in the discussions rather than addressed the groups. He had some sort of genius for getting people to do things together and this must have been an important factor in establishing communication among Upper Pimas who had been isolated from one another before.

It would seem, however, that it was Kino's personal characteristics - his enthusiasm, his warmth of feeling for individuals such as Captain Coro, Coxi, and others with whom he became associated, his tolerance of ways not in accord with European, his delight in big and ceremonial gatherings - rather than any inclination or ability to understand other ways and reconcile them that lay at the bottom of his successes in the Pima country.

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