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CORONADO'S EXPEDITION
IN 1540

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From the City of Mexico to the
Seven Cities of Cibola

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Address

Before the Arizona Archaeological Society

By Dr. Merrill P. Freeman
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Tucson, Arizona

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Coronado's Expedition in 1540

From the City of Mexico to the Seven Cities of Cibola

Address

Before the Arizona Archaeological Society

By Dr. Merrill P. Freeman

I wonder whether you may not be justified in characterizing the statement as being somewhat paradoxical if I tell you that the first "white man" to set foot within the confines of the State of Arizona was a jet black negro from the north of Africa, one Estevan or Estevanico. This distinction should, in a measure at least, compensate Estevan for the loss of his life that followed. There is slight evidence that Juan de la Asuncion preceded the North African by a possible year, but this is not sufficiently well authenticated to give it credence.

Expedition Leaves Spain

On June 17th, in the year 1527, five vessels set sail from the western coast of Spain for that western country the discovery of whose existence had so recently awakened an old world from its centuries of ignorance. Carrying some six hundred people, colonists, soldiers, etc., after a somewhat stormy voyage these vessels, stopping for a time en route, arrived on the coast of Florida in the month of April of the following year, or just nine years after the arrival of Cortez on the coast of Mexico, and the beginning of his romantic career of conquest. Of those reaching the new world, with

the exception of the considerable number who returned with the ships which brought them over, but four ever again saw the light of civilization. These four were Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, Andres Dorantes, Alonzo del Castillo Maldonado, and Estevan, or Estevanico, the negro from the west coast of Morocco, a slave of Dorantes.

Wanderings of Castaways

Finally reaching some point on the coast west of the Mississippi river these four gradually made their way across the State of Texas, suffering great hardships and living among the Indians, by whom at times they were held as slaves, separated and then again coming together, they finally reached the Rio Grande river which they crossed at some point below El Paso, then across the State of Chihuahua and through the Sierra Madre range of mountains into Sonora, and finally, after eight years of these wanderings from the date of their landing in Florida they reached the Sonora river at a point to which they gave the name of Corazones (Hearts). This point is now identified as being the present site of Ures, about fifty miles above Hermosillo, on the Sonora river.

Pursuing their journey on toward the south, after a time they came

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in contact with a party of Spaniards who had come up from the City of Mexico in quest of Indians whom they were capturing and forcing into slavery. Following their meeting with the Spaniards, in due course Cabeza de Vaca and his companions were conducted to the City of Mexico, where they were most kindly received by the viceroy. And thus ended their eight years of wandering and hardships.

Reports of Rich Cities

Some time prior to 1539 it was reported in the City of Mexico that far away in the distant north there were seven large cities. In fact, these cities were comparable to the City of Mexico in size. An Indian claimed to have personally visited them with his father who had brought back from there a large amount of gold and silver. It was further claimed that in these cities there were whole streets of workers in silver. On the strength of these reports a force of Spaniards and Indians was organized for the purpose of visiting these reported rich cities, which became known as the Seven Cities of Cibola. This expedition, however, got no farther north than the city of Culiacan, in the State of Sinaloa. This story of these great riches very naturally excited the cupidity of the Spaniards, but no further effort was made to discover them until 1539.

Following the advent in the City of Mexico of Cabeza de Vaca, who in a measure confirmed the report of the Indian who claimed to have visited these cities, Cabeza de Vaca having in his wanderings heard of some villages where the houses were four or five stories high, new interest was aroused and in due course a second attempt was made to reach the Seven Cities of Cibola with their untold riches.

Estevan Killed by Zunies

The chief character promoting this

was Francisco Vasquez Coronado, by whom, under the auspices of Viceroy Mendoza, an expedition was organized with Coronado at its head. Coronado sent ahead one Fray Marcos of Nizza, who was accompanied by Estevan, the negro from the north of Africa, the slave of Dorantes, in search of the country and for confirmation of what had been told. Fray Marcos in turn sent Estevan, accompanied by a number of Indians, on in advance. These reached the Seven Cities of Cibola, of which they were in search, and found them to be simply villages of the Zuni Indians, in the northwest corner of New Mexico, near the Arizona line. Here the indiscretions of Estevan cost him his life, he being put to death by the Zunies. On his death, the Indians accompanying him immediately returned and reported to Fray Marcos, who notwithstanding the ill fate of Estevan, determined to push on and see these villages himself. This he did, until coming in sight of them and viewing them from a distance, he started on his return to make his report to Coronado. I think that in justice to Fray Marcos I should say that in my opinion the good padre through fear did not get near enough to learn the true character of the villages and was himself deceived. The nature of his report may be judged by the fact that steps were immediately taken to complete the organization of the expedition.

Expedition Leaves Compostela

This expedition on February 23, 1540, left Compostela, a town of considerable importance at that time, now, however, but a dilapidated little Mexican village about twenty miles from Tepic. For our information in regard to the expedition we must depend on one Castaneda, who was the chief chronicler, and whom Coronado probably picked

up at Cullacan as he passed by, and to which place he returned after the expedition and where he wrote his *Relacion* (Narrative) twenty years later. In addition to Castaneda, Captain Jaramillo, one of Coronado's officers, wrote a much shorter account, and in addition to this we have the personal letters of Coronado himself.

I shall not attempt to follow Coronado on his journey, but shall only refer to the keen disappointment he must have experienced when he realized that the Seven Cities of Cibola of which he had come in search, with all of their riches of gold and silver and their "streets of silver workers" were but a group of Indian villages.

Route of Coronado Traced

My purpose is simply to trace the route that Coronado followed on his journey, a question on which there is much difference of opinion. To aid us in reaching our conclusions we have but the three sources heretofore mentioned: Castaneda, Jaramillo and Coronado himself.

After leaving Cullacan in what is now the State of Sinaloa, we can definitely locate him at Corazones. After he left there, however, the description of his route may not enable us to positively identify it. It hinges on the location of Chichilticalli, a house or ruin at that time standing in the southern part of Arizona and described by Castaneda. If we can positively establish this location, then the key to his route through Arizona is found, as he passed by this house. But this is the point on which writers fail to agree. Early writers accepted Casa Grande as the house referred to. As it was the only one still standing in Arizona and was known to have been standing 150 years before, the natural inference was that it must have been the house

referred to. Modern writers, however, pretty generally reject this view.

Chichilticalli, Red House

Chichilticalli is Aztec for red house, and is made up of the words, chichiltic, red, and calli, house. All three of the writers mention it by name, so also does Fray Marcos. Castaneda, however, describes it, saying that "the house was large and believed to have been a fortress." He further says: "It was made of colored or reddish earth." In another place he tells us that it "was a tumble-down house without any roof," and reiterating what he had previously said, he tells us that "the building was made of red earth."

Personal Conclusions

With apologies, I shall take the liberty of stating my own conclusions first, and follow these with the claims of such other writers as are worthy of consideration. My own conclusions are that Chichilticalli (Red House) was either Casa Grande (Big House), still standing between the station by that name on the Southern Pacific railroad and Florence, or it was at Pueblo Viejo (Old Town), an ancient Indian town near Solomonville on the Gila river. If Casa Grande filled the requirements, if it were a red house, or were there any evidence that it ever was such or could have been, possibly it might continue to be accepted as the Chichilticalli of Coronado's time, and his route would be definitely determined, but Casa Grande was of mud, and there is no soil in its vicinity with even a tinge of red in it, nor is there any material with which the building could have been colored red. However, Dr. J. Walter Fewkes of the Smithsonian Institution, speaking of his excavations at Casa Grande, says that "it cannot be denied that the outer wall of

this building has a marked reddish color on its surface." There is no doubt that this old building was standing in Coronado's time, although he may not have seen it, and we have no positive knowledge of any other except in its immediate neighborhood either then or since. There is no mention of any from that day to this, if we except Chichilticalli and admit its being a different house from this one.

Father Kino Sees Casa Grande

Probably the first white man to see Casa Grande, excluding the possibility of its having been the Chichilticalli of Coronado's time, was Father Kino, who visited it in 1694, being directed to it by the Indians. He visited it again in 1697. Mange, who accompanied him this time, tells us of a dozen other buildings in the immediate vicinity of Casa Grande. These other buildings, as well as Casa Grande itself, must have been there in Coronado's time, whether he saw them or not, and, very naturally, in a much better condition, as 150 years had intervened. Mange was told of other ruins "a day's journey to the north on another stream" flowing into the Gila. These must have been the Salt river valley ruins near Tempe.

Coronado at Corozones

The last place at which we can positively locate Coronado is Corozones, on the Sonora river. Being on a river, the logical presumption is that he followed up that river as long as he could do so without deviating too much from his course. This would bring him to the head of the Sonora river, to the east of Cananea, not far from the head of the San Pedro, and although still farther than the San Pedro, yet not very far from the head of the Santa Cruz. It seems to me reasonable to assume that after leaving the Sonora river he struck the head of one or

the other of these two streams, and having done so, he naturally followed down its valley so long as it did not take him too far from his regular course. Assuming that the river which he struck was the Santa Cruz, he must have come down this valley, passing the site of the old San Xavier mission, until he reached the site of Tucson. There, finding that the valley was taking him away from his course, he left it and skirting the western base of the Catalina range of mountains he reached Casa Grande, the Chichilticalli of which he had been hearing as he approached it.

Location of Chichilticalli

But if instead of striking the Santa Cruz, he came to the head of the San Pedro, this he followed down to, we will say, the vicinity of Benson, when, finding that the trend of this stream was taking him too far west, he left the San Pedro and struck off to the east of north, and should he have pursued an air line from Benson to the Zuni villages he would have found Pueblo Viejo directly in his path and Chichilticalli awaiting his coming.

There is one other possibility, as, for instance, near Tempe in the Salt river valley, where Cushing did his excavating several years ago, evidently the ruins referred to by Mange in 1697, but there is no point possessing the strong probability of Pueblo Viejo.

In its favor is the fact that its location is directly on the logical route that Coronado should have taken if he knew just where the Seven Cities of Cibola were located, and Fray Marcos must have been directed to them by Indian guides whom he picked up en route and who must have been perfectly familiar with their location and the route to them. What seems to me as conclusive proof that the house referred

to was at Pueblo Viejo is Jaramillo's tracing of the route they followed. He says: "From here"—some place on the head waters of the Sonora river—"we went through a deserted country for about four days to another river, which we heard called Nexpa"—(San Pedro). "We went down this stream two days"—to the vicinity of Benson—"and then left the stream, going toward the right to the foot of the mountain chain"—Graham mountains—"in two days' journey, where we heard news of what is called Chichilticalli. Crossing the mountains, we came to a deep and ready river"—the Gila, near Pueblo Viejo. "Then from this river back at Nexpa, as I have said, it seems to me the direction was nearly northeast." He undoubtedly means to convey the idea that their course was nearly northeast from the Nexpa river.

Views of Other Writers

Having stated my own position as clearly as possible, I shall now take up the claims of a number of other writers, in fact, all of whom I have knowledge, whose views are worthy of consideration. For the possible reason that his views so nearly coincide with my own I shall first take up Mr. F. W. Hodge of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., a man for whose opinions I have so high a regard that they would have largely influenced mine had I known them before reaching my own conclusions.

In his comment on Castaneda's mention of Chichilticalli, Mr. Hodge says: "This ruin is supposed to have been in the vicinity of the present Solomonville, Graham county." In reaching this view he has Coronado pass through Dragoon Pass, not many miles east of Benson, but not stating how he should have reached this pass, whether by coming down the San Pedro.

Of Chichilticalli, Brancroft says: "Chichilticalli has been generally identified with the familiar Casa Grande of the Gila, and I haven't any reason to question the identity."

Mr. Thomas E. Farish, Arizona historian, in his History of Arizona, locates Chichilticalli "about thirty miles east from the present town of Solomonville." I notice that Mr. Farish translates Chichilticalli as being "Little Red House." In this he is in error. It means simply red house, no more and no less, being made up of the two Aztec words "chichiltic," red, and "calli," house. Little red house in Aztec is "chichilticatontli," and big red house would be "chichilticapoll," the diminutive and augmentative of chichilticalli. Castaneda, the only one who has described the house, tells us that "the house was large and appeared to have been a fortress."

Colonel James H. McClintock, in his most excellent work, "Arizona, the Youngest State," locates Chichilticalli at "a point in the San Pedro valley, not far from the junction of the San Pedro with the Gila." This would be about seventy-five miles west of north down the San Pedro from Benson, or about forty miles east of Casa Grande.

General J. H. Simpson in the Smithsonian report for 1869, adopts Casa Grande, but this was half a century ago, and I think it probable that if the general were writing today he would revise his views.

Doctor Elliott Coues in his "On the Trail of a Spanish Pioneer," accepts Hodge's location near Solomonville.

Lowry, in his "Spanish Settlements," locates it in the neighborhood of Fort Grant at the southern foot of Mount Graham. Mr. Lowry is probably as nearly correct in this as he is in locating the Santa Catalina mountains on the eastern side

of the San Pedro river, which might be quite correct if, as a fact, this range of mountains were not on the western side of the San Pedro.

Dallenbaugh places it so far to the east of and away from any possible location that he hardly justifies quoting.

George Parker Winship in his translation of Castaneda and Jaramillo does not indicate his own choice for the location of Chichilticalli, if he had any that was fixed, which possibly he had not, not being familiar with the country, never having been in the southern part of the state, although he visited the northern part. While he quotes Bandelier, as he understands him, he does not commit himself.

Bandelier a Disappointment

I have been disappointed on reading Bandelier's final report of investigations among the Indians of the southwestern United States, to be unable to determine whether he locates Chichilticalli at Fort Grant at the foot of Mt. Graham, in Graham county, or on the San Pedro, at the mouth of the Arivaipa, although the two points are over one hundred miles apart. He is evidently confused as to their geographical relationship, saying that Arivaipa creek flows not far from Fort Grant, when as a fact, the Arivaipa does not flow anywhere near Fort Grant. He knew where Fort Grant was situated, because he speaks of it as being "on the southern foot of Mount Graham." But then he speaks of the "ruin being situated where Fort Grant is, on the south of the Gila river, near the Arivaipa." Notwithstanding the confusion in his statements, I incline to the opinion that in locating Chichilticalli he really had in mind some point near the junction of the Arivaipa and the San Pedro. Jaramillo's

description of the route of Coronado could by no possibility have taken him anywhere near there. In treating this matter Mr. Bandelier fails to sustain his high standing as an authority.

A Visit to Chichilticalli

Before closing I will again revert to my own individual conclusions. You will have noted that following what seemed to me to be the logical route from Corazones, I located Chichilticalli at Pueblo Viejo, near Solomonville. Then following the route as outlined by Jaramillo, a member of the expedition, and I was again led directly to the same point; the two routes coinciding exactly.

Now, having located Chichilticalli at Pueblo Viejo, by what seemed to me to be conclusive evidence, it occurred to me that I might be able to verify my conclusions by a personal investigation, and this I have recently made. This resulted in the discovery of what I have every reason to believe, to be the ruin of the identical Chichilticalli. It is on the banks of the Gila river, about three miles above Solomonville, that is, at Pueblo Viejo. Locally it is known as Casa Montezuma, just as Casa Grande is also known. It is that of a house 150 by 150 feet in size. The walls, tumble-down, of course, are still standing clear around the entire building and reaching above the ground from three to seven feet. The ruin is that of a building of a different type and construction from that shown by any other old ruin of which I have any knowledge. The walls, still standing, show the building to have been a combination of cobblestones and earth; being quite close to the river, its builders found no difficulty in securing the necessary cobblestones, which probably accounts for their use at this particular point.

What Tello Says in 1650

You will recall that Castaneda, the only writer describing the building at all, tells us that it was built of red earth. While I have every reason to believe the color of the building to have been red, all agreeing on that point. I firmly believe that its color was produced by its being plastered over with some red material, and that Castaneda was led astray in concluding that the entire building was of this same material.

Fray Antonio Tello, in his "Cronica Miscelanea" (Miscellaneous Chronicle), written in 1650, speaks of the house as being daubed or overlaid with red earth, not that it was built of red material, and from the time of Tello's writing, over two and a half centuries ago, I think we are justified in assuming that he had knowledge of the character of the building other than that obtained by us through Castaneda's narrative. Mota Padilla, writing in 1742, confirms Fray Tello, saying nothing of the house being built of red earth, but that it was plastered over with red material.

Modern Writers Ignore Color

Modern writers have seemed to completely lose sight of the fact of the house being red; at least, they utterly ignore this by telling us where it was located and then leaving us to discover where the red earth could have come from with which to built it, or any sort of red material with which to plaster it over. One of the chief objects of my recent visit was to see whether I could find either one of these two things, and in this I feel that I was equally successful. About five hundred yards from the ruin of the building, just as you go up out of the valley and on to the mesa, there is a bank of beautiful red clayey earth, a material so valuable for

road work that it is being hauled as much as a mile and used in road repairs. It packs hard and makes a firm smooth and compact finish. I have no doubt that it was this same material that furnished the red plaster to our Chichilticalli. Of course in those prehistoric times the builders of this old house had neither conveyances nor animals of any kind with which to transport sufficient material the five hundred yards distance with which to build a house, but I have no doubt they utilized their women for the purpose, just as the natives do in modern times, and carried sufficient of this material to the site of the building to plaster it, possibly both inside and out, having ascertained the splendid finish that it would give the walls. I know of no other suggested site anywhere in the state where the red material exists either for the building of the house or for its plastering.

Writers Fail to Mention Ruin

A singular thing to me in connection with this old ruin is the fact that I have never seen any mention of it by any writer, nor have I heard it spoken of by anyone. This, notwithstanding its conspicuous appearance and unusual construction. Around it and in it are large quantities of broken pottery, beautifully and symmetrically marked, as is so characteristic of the old prehistoric pottery of which so many broken pieces are found in the vicinity of these old ruins, of which we find so many in the southern part of our state.

After Coronado's return to the City of Mexico from his disastrous expedition in 1542, I know of but two instances where he is even mentioned. Fray Antonio Tello tells us that in 1545 he resigned the governorship of New Galicia, after having served two years. Winship speaks of his being accused in 1547, five years after his return, of holding more Indians to labor on his estates than were allowed by the royal regulations. I do not know Mr. Winship's authority for his statement, but it would not be made by him without his being fully justified.

