

# Don Juan de Oñate

by Ursula Martinez Olivo

Don Juan de Oñate (b. c.1550) described as the last conquistador led hundreds of families to settle one of the oldest European colonies in the U.S. only hoping to find unimaginable wealth. Among those who followed him was my 9th great-grandfather, Sargento Mayor Hernan Martin Serrano II (Chavez 1992, pp. 71-72; Esquibel Fall 2007, p. 44; Esquibel 2012, pp. 1-9). Oñate's expedition forged El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro northward and deep into the heart of New Mexico. He is both despised and venerated, and often the center of controversy between those who see him as a great explorer or sixteenth century terrorist.

Juan de Oñate was born in Pánuco, Vera Cruz, Mexico (Snyder 2004) the son of Don Cristóbal de Oñate, a "prominent and wealthy citizen of New Spain, having come to the province in 1524...one of the so-called Big Four who opened the silver lodes of Zacatecas." (Bannon 1974, p. 35) The discovery of rich silver and ore deposits set off a boom in 1540 as men rushed to find wealth and prosperity that would soon put the younger Oñate at a great advantage years later.

Between 1536 and 1583, at least five expeditions traveled north into unknown territory searching for Quivira that loomed as a mirage along the horizon. By 1595, viceroy Don Luis de Velasco was eager to send another trailblazer to la Nueva México (Bannon 1974, p. 36). "King Philip II of

Spain chose Don Juan de Oñate to represent Spanish and Roman Catholic interests in New Mexico." (National Park Service n.d.) Oñate seemed the most likely candidate, as he was willing to fund most, if not all, of the expedition. The expedition was to bring several hundred

families and enough cattle and livestock to support the large company, but the bureaucracy of indecisiveness "delayed the expedition for close to three years" (Bannon 1974, p. 36). On January 26, 1598, the company set out en masse with approximately 130 soldiers and their families, and soon followed by twenty-one Catholic clergymen (Bannon 1974, p. 36; Esquibel Winter 2007, p. 42).

El Camino Real would soon become a major thoroughfare to link Spanish colonies along its 1800 mile route between Mexico City and Santa Fe to allow the exchange of "commerce and culture" for nearly 300 years (Snyder 2004).

Oñate reached the present-day border between the U.S. and Mexico on April 20. "...while traveling north along the muddy banks of the Rio Grande, Oñate's scout party entered New Mexico." (Sociedad 2006, p. 2) They continued until April 30 resting to honor the Feast of the Ascension. Oñate conducted a formal ceremony to "take possession" of the new land and its peoples on behalf of Spain and its King." (Oñate 1953, p. 329) The next day the party continued north-



El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro was the first of many such routes to be charted 200 years before any other camino real. [Barnes 2010]

ward crossing the river through a narrow cañon described as El Paso as they traveled upstream. Within days, they reached Jornada del Muerto where scouts were sent out to find an easier route only to travel through scorched lands stretching some 90 miles. "Oñate and his colonists camped near the foot of these volcanic hills at a place they called Los Charcos del Perrillo, the Pools of the Little Dog -- so named because a dog returned to the waterless camp with muddy paws and led them back to water that had collected in pools in an arroyo." (Preston 1998) It is north of this long stretch that Oñate first encountered one of the pueblo villages, Teypama, near present-day Socorro, NM. On July 11, 1598 (Sociedad 2006, p. 3), Oñate reached his final destination about 25 miles north of Santa Fe (Snyder 2004; Sociedad 2006, p. 3). In his old age, encomendero Capítan Hernan Martin Serrano II would testify of that settlement just north of Española, NM once the site of two pueblos: Yunque-Ouinge and Ohkay Owingeh (National Park Service n.d.) He himself chose to live in the latter of the two (Chavez 1992, pp. 71-72; Esquibel Fall 2007, p. 44; Esquibel 2012, pp. 1-9).

Yunque-Ouinge Pueblo (located just north of the confluence of Rio de Chama, Rio de Ojo Caliente and Rio Grande) was soon occupied by the Spaniards and christened with unofficial status of Villa de San Gabriel (Esquibel Fall 2007, p. 44-45; National Park Service n.d.; Taylor 2001, p. 80) Within just a few years, the villa would diminish between 1604 and 1609 (Esquibel Fall 2007, 44). Oñate documented at least eleven distinct Tewa communities in the area, seven still exist today including Ohkay Owingeh, renamed Pueblo de San Juan de los Caballeros (Esquibel Winter 2007, p. 42; National Park Service n.d., Wroth 2004).

Oñate and his men spent much time venturing and mapping (see Appendix A) the lands between Kansas and Baja California. At El Morro his inscription bears witness of his mark in history, "Paso por aqui el adelantado Don Juan de Onate, a descubrimiento de la mar del sur a 16 de Abril ao 1605." (Clark 1944, p. 27) He explored

extensively hoping to find the next mother lode as many did while following advice from local Natives who were always telling them, "Poco mas alla;" just a little further (Taylor 2001, p. 12).

During one of these early expeditions, circumstances quickly turned sour as Juan de Zaldívar and a few others sought to "extort provisions" from Acoma Pueblo meeting with strong resistance. He and ten others were killed in the skirmish that first December in 1598 (Bannon 1974, p. 37; Taylor 2001, p. 80). Oñate's punishment was brutal as a "three-day battle" (Bannon 1974, p. 37) brought heavy casualties to the Acoma. As further retribution, it is said that the right foot of every man was severed leaving many maimed for a lifetime (Snyder 2004; Taylor 2001, p. 80-81).

Even among Spaniards, discontent was growing and many spoke of desertion. "Of more than two hundred names found in the Oñate lists, less than forty established themselves permanently in the new land." (Chavez 1992, p. xv) My great-grandfather at the age of 70, described as "antiguo poblador y vecino de Santa Fe," would attest that even he, in 1601, as a younger cuadrillero had considered leaving the colony, but remained loyal to the Spanish crown to be counted among the original settlers of Santa Fe, NM (Esquibel Fall 2007, p. 42).

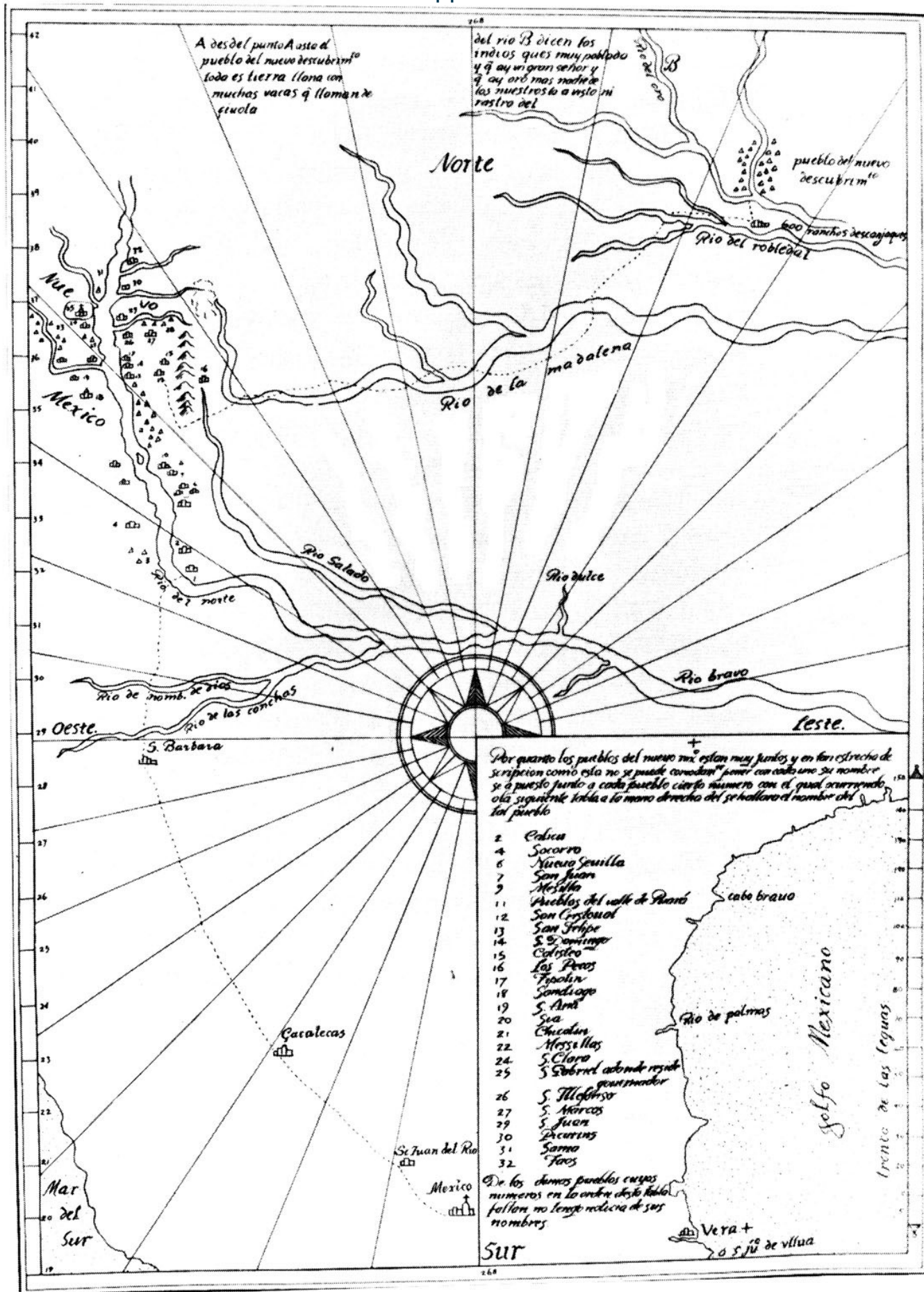
Accusations mounting, the friars urged the viceroy to deal with Oñate's adultery and abuses against not only Natives, but also colonists. In 1607, Oñate was removed from the office of governor remaining in New Mexico just long enough to witness the founding of La Villa de Santa Fe y Real Campo de los Españoles on March 30, 1609 (Esquibel Winter 2007, p. 45). By 1614, Oñate was later found guilty, "stripped of his titles and offices" and banned from the colony (Taylor 2001, p. 81). He lived the remainder of his life in Spain trying to clear his name before his death in 1626. (NMOSH 2004)

"In Northern New Mexico there's still a lot of resentment today toward Oñate..." says Hal Jackson (Snyder 2004).

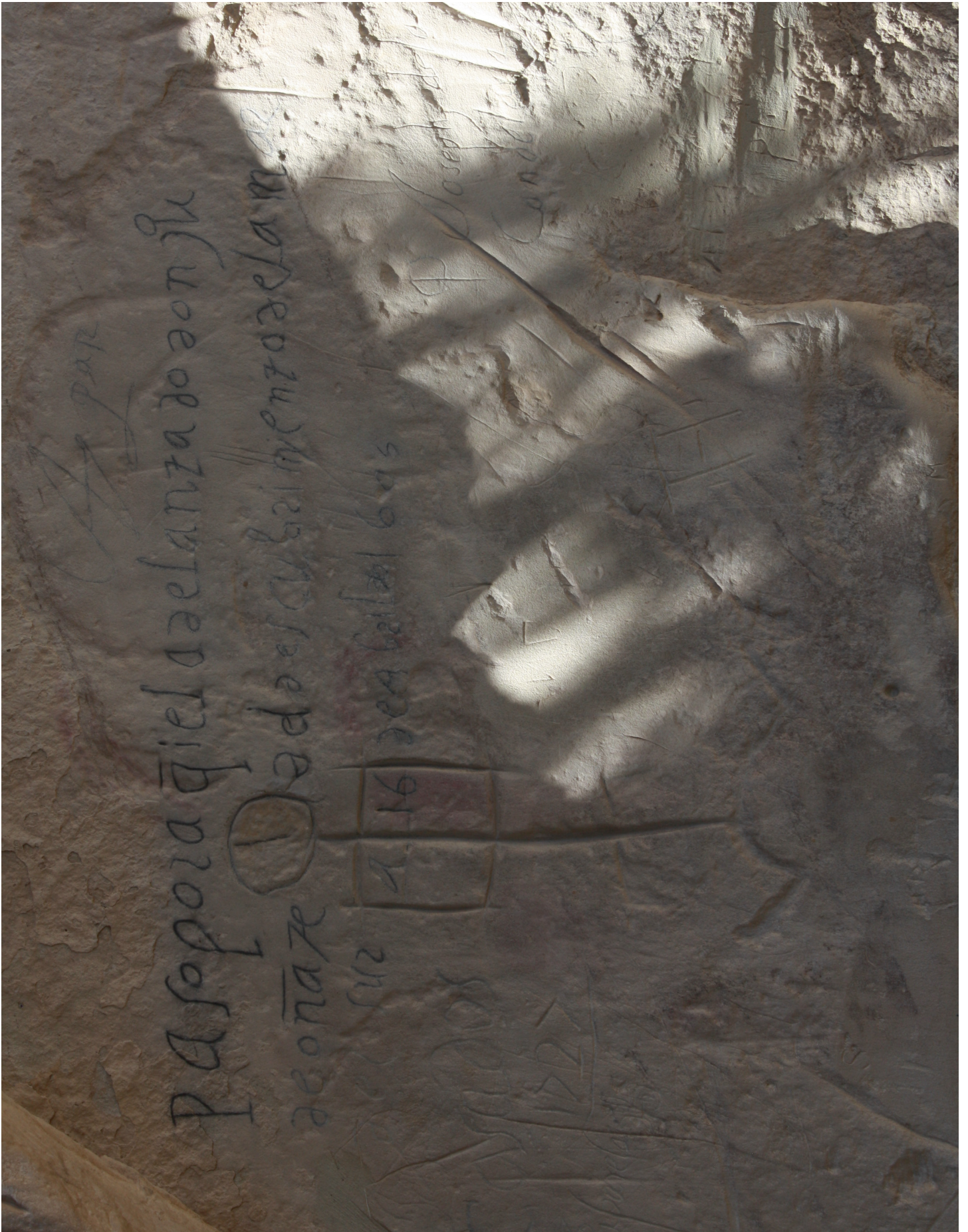
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# Appendix A



Appendix B





Español con India  
Mestizo.



Mestizo con Española  
Castizo.



Castizo con Española  
Español.



Español con Negra  
Mulato.



5

Mulato con Española  
Morisco.



6

Morisco con Española  
Chino.



7

Chino con India  
Salta atas.



Salta atas con Mulata  
Lobo.



9

Lobo con China  
Gibaro.



10

Gibaro con Mulata  
Albarazado.



11

Albarazado con Negra  
Canbujo.



12

Canbujo con India  
Sanbaigo.



13

Sanbaigo con Loba  
Calpanulato.



14

Calpanulato con Canbujo  
Tente en el Aire.



15

Tente en el Aire con Mulata  
Nateentiendo.



16

Nateentiendo con India  
Tornatraz.



