



## AGUSTÍN FERNÁNDEZ DE SAN VICENTE AND THE QUESTIONABLE ALLEGIANCE OF ALTA CALIFORNIA TO THE FIRST MEXICAN EMPIRE

### AGUSTÍN FERNÁNDEZ DE SAN VICENTE Y LA CUESTIONABLE LEALTAD DE LA ALTA CALIFORNIA HACIA EL PRIMER IMPERIO MEXICANO

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*Resumen:* En 1822 la Regencia del Primer Imperio Mexicano comisionó a Agustín Fernández de San Vicente para confirmar la lealtad política de las Californias. Fernández ofuscó su formación profesional y hasta la fecha no se han divulgado sus verdaderos méritos para tal tarea tan sensible. El presente artículo cuenta con documentos de archivos militar, eclesiástico, académico, real y particular para rastrear por primera vez la carrera de Fernández. Este capellán de la derrotada armada real tenía las cualidades idóneas para ganar la comisión, lo que inició un proceso apurado antes de su salida para instalarlo por apoderado en la catedral de Durango. Este único proyecto geopolítico de Agustín Iturbide presagió el desarrollo del regionalismo mexicano, ya que él delegó estas “relaciones internas” a oficiales en Durango, Guadalajara, y San Blas.

*Palabras clave:* Californias; Independencia; Agustín Iturbide; San Blas; Geopolítica.

*Abstract:* In 1822 the Regency of the newly independent First Mexican Empire commissioned Agustín Fernández de

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San Vicente to confirm the political loyalty of the Californias. Fernández obscured his professional background and no previous scholarship has explained his qualifications for this sensitive assignment. This article uses military, ecclesiastical, academic, royal, and private documents from archives to trace Fernández’s career for the first time, from naval chaplain of San Blas to the Royal Literary University of Guadalajara and the court in Madrid, through his unusual appointment as commissioner and the hurried process to install him by proxy in the Durango cathedral before his departure. This unique geopolitical project foreshadowed the rise of Mexican regionalism, as Agustín Iturbide delegated responsibility for these “internal relations” to officials in Durango, Guadalajara, and San Blas.

*Key words:* Californias; Independence; Agustín Iturbide; San Blas; Geopolitics.

## INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>



Why was Fernández appointed to lead the First Mexican Empire’s commission to the Californias? That he was a ranking official and a skilled public speaker who embodied the pro-church, pro-creole new order of Iturbide’s Mexico is true but an insufficient explanation. In fact, his principal qualification was his service in the naval company of San Blas. As commissioner Fernández obscured his military background while highlighting and overstating his clerical rank.<sup>2</sup> In the Californias, he omitted the inconvenient fact that he had never yet sat in the opulent wooden seats of the Durango cathedral, and downplayed his military connections to such a degree that no contemporary account mentions his work in San Blas — an

<sup>2</sup> Aarón BRICK, “Pomp and Pretension in the First Mexican Empire’s 1822 Commission to the Californias”, *Western Historical Quarterly* 55, issue 3 (Autumn 2024), 167-182.

experience without which he would not even have been a candidate for the role. Indeed, only his naval background connected him to the regionally powerful officers and administrators that facilitated his eventual appointment.

The commissioner's appointment and dispatch occurred during the first half year of Mexican independence. Planning and preparation occurred at the highest ranks of the Mexican civil and ecclesiastical hierarchies, but was not limited to Mexico City. Regency President Iturbide was obligated in this case to rely on regional experts and resources. The project's other principals were José Manuel Herrera, the Secretary of Relations, ex-army chaplain, publisher, and diplomat; Pedro Celestino Negrete, army and navy officer, the conqueror of Durango and Iturbide's trusted right-hand man; and Juan Francisco Castañiza, the wealthy and accommodating Bishop of Durango. Fernández's commission depended on the cooperation of these three, and their roles on the country's periphery, in ways not previously examined.

The story of Fernández' pivotal commission has been tracked more closely in California than it has in Mexico. Historiography on the appointment has followed the ghostwritten account in H.H. Bancroft's *History of California* — written without knowledge of the commissioner's military chantry, his lies about his clerical rank, or the identities of the authorities who entrusted him with the task. Bancroft glosses over the creation of the commission because he lacked access to manuscripts located in Mexican and Spanish archives. Only a few documentary advances have followed. Irving Richman announced in 1911 that it was Negrete who had suggested Fernández for the role.<sup>3</sup> In 1919 Herbert Bolton published a series of correspondence

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<sup>3</sup> Irving Berdine RICHMAN, *California Under Spain and Mexico, 1535-1847: A Contribution Toward the History of the Pacific Coast of the United States, Based on Original Sources (chiefly Manuscript) in the Spanish and Mexican Archives and Other Repositories* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 231-232.

from the commission.<sup>4</sup> In 1984 Connie Cortazar recovered the fact of Fernández's military service, without, however, linking it to San Blas. She also erroneously identified him as insurgent and president Guadalupe Victoria's homonymous uncle, who was another priest in northwestern Nueva España; biographical documents published in 2021 by the author make clear that the other Agustín Fernández was several decades older.<sup>5</sup> Enrique Arriola Woog published the Regency's instructions to Fernández in 1994.<sup>6</sup>

Essential factors of the unusual political task in the Californias have remained unexplained. Near-universal reliance on Bancroft's account and a persistent lack of inquiry in Mexican archives has allowed the existing scholarship to emphasize Fernández's claimed rank of canon as his principal qualification. Besides being inaccurate — Fernández did not actually hold this office — the argument is misleading, because it does nothing to connect the responsibilities of the commissioner with those of a canon. The job of a canon was to support the bishop in running of the religious institution, a task not obviously connected to the speechifying and intelligence gathering expected of the commissioner. The position was also not as exalted as the Californios were invited to believe: Mexico's secular clergy at the time included some 124 positions with the rank of canon or higher. Furthermore, Alta California was still wholly missionized, so no Mexican diocese had administrative links to the province.

This article finally addresses the matter of how and why

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<sup>4</sup> Herbert E. BOLTON, "The Iturbide Revolution in the Californias." *Hispanic American Historical Review* (1919): 188-242.

<sup>5</sup> Connie CORTAZAR, "The *Santa Visita* of Agustín Fernández de San Vicente to New Mexico, 1826." *New Mexico Historical Review* 59, no. 1 (1984): 33-34; Aarón Brick, "Guadalupe Victoria tenía abuelo gachupín." *Relaciones. Estudios de Historia y Sociedad* 42, no. 165 (2021): 179-186.

<sup>6</sup> E. Arriola WOOG, *Sobre rusos y Rusia: antología documental* (México: Lotería Nacional para la Asistencia Pública-Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1994), 108-109.

Fernández was appointed to this unusual role. Signal political events of 1810 and 1821–1822 reveal the range of contemporary issues which bore upon the appointment. Governmental and diocesan archival materials from Mexico, Spain, and the United States detail Fernández’s career trajectory, allowing a new examination of how he came to be regarded as a figurehead and diplomat. We see how the First Empire’s claim to Alta California depended on the expertise and interests of its near northwest. This analysis is a new lens for inspecting the arm’s-length relationship between Alta California and independent Mexico. By recognizing the issues at play and the actors responsible, two hundred years after this successful commission we can better understand the concerns and operations of Agustín Iturbide and the First Mexican Empire as they asserted political authority in the far north.

#### THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF ALTA CALIFORNIA

While Baja California enjoyed close links with the mainland, the isolation of Alta California greatly tempered its economic and political integration. Maintaining Nueva España’s northern frontier had become a costly burden. The port and shipyard at “San Blas de Californias” were built principally to colonize the territory, so defending it against Russian expansion. The port was located to minimize sailing distance to Monterey; the otherwise superior ports at Acapulco and Guaymas would have required more sailing against prevailing winds. Northbound voyages carried military supplies procured by a quartermaster on the mainland as well as religious supplies for the missions. Return voyages carried raw materials, especially hides and tallow. In the words of Michael E. Thurman, “San Blas and Upper California were linked by a rigid political-economic-religious

bond".<sup>7</sup>

From 1796 the King allowed San Blas to trade with Guatemala and Peru; foreign ships and a few of the last Manila galleons also arrived.<sup>8</sup> Starting in 1803, naval officers and crew were excluded from their traditional practice of carrying personal trade goods, so leaving space for mercantile cargoes.<sup>9</sup> Imports and exports through San Blas benefitted merchants in the nearby market town of Tepic. Biting midges (*jejenes*) made San Blas uncomfortable and dangerous during the rainy season, so the naval company preferred to live uphill in the cooler and more refined town. This established routine caused a dispute with naval paymasters; one document mentions a threatened "resignation of the chaplains of San Blas if they are not permitted to serve in Tepic".<sup>10</sup>

From 1810, war in Nueva España isolated Alta California from it even more. Remote ports saw more contraband trade in general, and the provincial economy had become more self-sufficient as its mission system more effectively exploited native labor.<sup>11</sup> The years of war increased purchases of contraband from ships of England, New England, and the Russian-American Company. That Company appeared frequently after first visiting San Francisco in 1806, and in 1812 it quietly built a

<sup>7</sup> Michael E. THURMAN, *The Naval Department of San Blas: New Spain's Bastion for Alta California and Nootka 1767 to 1798* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1967), 357.

<sup>8</sup> Claudia Patricia PARDO HERNÁNDEZ, "El departamento naval de San Blas y sus relaciones con las Filipinas a finales del siglo XVIII y principios del XIX", *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 6, no. 20 (2008): 52; Dení TREJO BARAJAS, "El puerto de San Blas, el contrabando y el inicio de la internacionalización del comercio en el Pacífico Noroeste." *Tzintzun. Revista de Estudios Históricos* no. 44 (2006): 13, 25.

<sup>9</sup> H. H. BANCROFT, *History of California, volume II: 1801-1824* (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft & Co., 1885), 185.

<sup>10</sup> Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Californias 28, exp. 2, Renuncia de los capellanes de Sn. Blas si no se les permite rendir en Tepic.

<sup>11</sup> Pablo E. PÉREZ-MALLAÍNA BUENO, et al. *Marinos de la Monarquía Hispánica* (Madrid: Desperta Ferro Ediciones, 2021), 109.

palisade fort, Fort Ross, and port facilities at Bodega Bay. In Alta California, Spain and Russia encountered each other at their greatest extents. Under a mostly cordial detente, Company ships traded in the colony for foodstuffs needed to the north, while mounting clandestine otter hunts. Although Russia and its joint-stock Company never sought to take over all of Alta California, officials in Nueva España wondered if they might.

### CAPELLÁN DE LOS BUQUES

Fernández was born in 1774 at a mine called Pozole in Nueva Galicia.<sup>12</sup> A later German guide places this in the district of Hostotipaquillo, to the west of Guadalajara.<sup>13</sup> Fernández attended the seminary in that city, being ordained in about 1797. He then moved to the Pacific coast, and worked as an assistant to the parish priest of San Blas. Seeking a promotion, Fernández applied for one of the port's naval chantries, describing himself as a graduate whose previous salary could not support his numerous family (who appear nowhere else in the evidence reviewed). In 1799 he triumphed in a hiring examination and earned the position.<sup>14</sup> As a chaplain Fernández would develop the connections to the Californias which would be the keystones of his appointment as commissioner.

The naval parish of San Blas employed one resident priest and a cohort of ship chaplains, who together provided spiritual

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<sup>12</sup> Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Guadalajara, 548, Extracto de los méritos y servicios del Presbítero D. José Agustín Fernández de S. Vicente.

<sup>13</sup> Hrn. BUSCHMANN, "Über die aztekischen Ortsnamen" en *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Aus dem Jahre 1852* (Berlin: Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1853), 785.

<sup>14</sup> AGN, Marina, vol. 114, exp. 8, Nombramiento de Capellán en favor del Presbítero Dn. Agustín Fernández por la muerte de Dn. Alexandro López Nava, 316-336.

and logistical aid on land and at sea.<sup>15</sup> Fernández arrived when the Spanish navy was at its peak size. There were seven San Blas chaplains in 1797, out of 120 in the entire Spanish navy in 1800; while he worked at the port, a period which included the rout at Trafalgar, the number of officials in the fleet declined by more than a quarter.<sup>16</sup> San Blas was in an even greater decline; its exploratory voyages, on which chaplains had an integral role in claiming new discoveries, ended when the Nootka Conventions obliged Spain to dismantle the fort it had built there.<sup>17</sup> Supplemental expeditionary pay was cancelled and the port's population dropped, while the company remained responsible for supply voyages to the Californias.<sup>18</sup>

Vessels of San Blas carried one chaplain each, who enjoyed the privilege of eating at the captain's table. Using a portable chapel and a chest of religious implements, they gave masses and performed the holy sacraments required by the officers and mariners on board. Unlike army chaplains, at sea they were obligated to obey a military superior — their ship's commanding officer.<sup>19</sup> The chaplains' ecclesiastical responsibility was to a Lieutenant Vicar, in this case the Bishop of Guadala-

<sup>15</sup> Marcial GUTIÉRREZ CAMARENA, *San Blas y las Californias: estudio histórico del puerto* (Mexico: Editorial Jus, 1956), 106; Francisco FUSTER RUIZ, *El final del descubrimiento de América: California, Canada y Alaska, 1765-1822: aportación documental del Archivo General de la Marina* (Murcia: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Murcia, 1997), 233; Juan MARCHENA FERNÁNDEZ, *Oficiales y soldados en el Ejército de América* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1983), 253-254.

<sup>16</sup> Enrique CÁRDENAS DE LA PEÑA, *San Blas de Nayarit. Vol. 1* (México: Secretaría de Marina, 1968), 189-192; Rafael SÁNCHEZ TORRES, *Historia de un triunfo: la Armada española en el siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Desperta Ferro Ediciones, 2021), 226; José P. MERINO NAVARRO, *La armada española en el siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1981), 41.

<sup>17</sup> Guadalupe PINZÓN RÍOS, "En el nombre del rey y con la bendición de Dios. El papel legitimador de los religiosos en las exploraciones marítimas del septentrion novohispano (siglo XVIII)." *Dieciocho* no. 7 (2021): 199-216.

<sup>18</sup> PARDO HERNÁNDEZ, "Departamento", 43; FUSTER RUIZ, *Final*, 446-455.

<sup>19</sup> SÁNCHEZ TORRES, *Historia*, 224-226.



jera.<sup>20</sup> Marcial Gutiérrez Camarena, author of one of the most authoritative books on San Blas, was mistaken when he wrote that the chaplains were all religious friars; in 1809, five chaplains were secular priests and one was a friar.<sup>21</sup>

Chaplains were frequently too elderly or infirm to sail. Perhaps owing to salary fluctuations, and the fact that sailing responsibilities would fall to new hires, the post could be difficult to fill.<sup>22</sup> Fernández reported embarking during his twenties and thirties on eight “maritime campaigns” as chaplain.<sup>23</sup>

When Bishop Ruiz de Cabañas visited Tepic in January of 1802, he renewed the sacramental licenses of four of the chaplains; Fernández was absent.<sup>24</sup> Voyages to Alta California usually took place during the summer and fall, suggesting that he was elsewhere. At least one of his campaigns was on board the packetboat *Príncipe de Asturias*, belonging to the naval department of the Philippines and carrying documentation and goods back and forth across the Pacific.<sup>25</sup> In 1803, when Fernández’s assignment to the ship is documented, it spent the winter in Acapulco, then made a 69-day crossing to the Philippines.<sup>26</sup>

It’s not yet clear whether Fernández had visited Alta California prior to his appointment. Reports on the state of the San Blas ships and their crews (*estados de fuerza*) were not located.

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<sup>20</sup> Santiago GERARDO SUÁREZ, *Jurisdicción eclesiástica y capellanía castrenses: El matrimonio militar* (Caracas: Italgráfica, 1976), 22, 25, 35-36, 39-40.

<sup>21</sup> GUTIÉRREZ CAMARENA, San Blas, 106-107; Archivo General de la Marina “Álvaro de Bazán” (AGM), Asuntos particulares, caja 47, documento 004, Que queden en el Apostadero de Sn. Blas los precisos Oficiales para dotar una de las Fragatas y un Bergantín, debiendo restituirse los restantes a la Península.

<sup>22</sup> FUSTER RUIZ, *Final*, 365, 455; PINZÓN RÍOS, “En el nombre”, 113, 116.

<sup>23</sup> AGI, “Extracto”.

<sup>24</sup> GI, Guadalajara, 543, Visita del Pueblo de Tepic, ff. 1055, 1066v-1067.

<sup>25</sup> FUSTER RUIZ, *Final*, 574.

<sup>26</sup> AGN, vol. 195, exp. 14, Sobre goces del Capellán D. José Agustín Fernández, Marina, ff. 343-344; AGM, caja 35, documento 080, Se participa la llegada del paquebot Príncipe de Asturias procedentes de Acapulco con caudales y varios oficiales de Ejército.

No available sacramental record shows Fernández baptizing in Alta California like some of his colleagues (José María Afanador performed some at San Juan Bautista in 1807 and San Diego in 1809).<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the naval company had deep connections to the Franciscan missionaries of Alta California. Fray Martín Landaeta, missionary in San Francisco between 1791 and 1806, wrote letters replete with references to the captains and ships of San Blas.<sup>28</sup> Captain and port commandant Juan Francisco Bodega y Quadra was buried at the missionaries' own Convent of San Fernando in Mexico City. During the years that Fernández worked for the navy, twenty-two Fernandino missionaries transited San Blas to or from Alta California. Fifteen of those serving during the commissioner's visit in 1822 were in this group.<sup>29</sup> Although similarly detailed data was not located for the Baja California missionaries of the Dominican province of Santiago, the San Blas company also transported them to their work sites.<sup>30</sup>

Fernández also had a relationship of long standing with one of Alta California's wealthiest and most powerful military officers, José de la Guerra y Noriega. The two could have met there, if Fernández did visit while working as a chaplain, or in Tepic during the upheaval of 1810-1811. In 1818 and again in 1822, De la Guerra sought to collect a debt from Fernández.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Steven W. HACKEL (ed.) and Anne M. REID (comp), *The Early California Population Project: A Database Compiled and Developed at the Huntington Library* (San Marino. The Henry E. Huntington Library, 2006), SJB Baptisms 01787, SD Baptisms 03647, 03648.

<sup>28</sup> Maynard J. GEIGER, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California, 1769-1848: A Biographical Dictionary* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1969), 135-136; Fray Martín de LANDAETA, *Noticias acerca del puerto de San Francisco (Alta California)*. (México: Antigua Librería Robledo de José Porrúa e Hijos, 1949), passim.

<sup>29</sup> GEIGER, *Franciscan Missionaries*, passim.

<sup>30</sup> FUSTER RUIZ, *Final*, 189.

<sup>31</sup> Santa Barbara Mission-Archive Library, De la Guerra Collection

Upon the commissioner's arrival in 1822, he addressed De la Guerra as "my old and esteemed Friend"; in a later reminiscence De la Guerra called Fernández "already well-known here" at the time of his visit and referred to "our old friendship."<sup>32</sup>

#### SAN BLAS IN THE WARS OF INDEPENDENCE

In 1810, as Revolutionary father Miguel Hidalgo's army approached Guadalajara, Spaniards including Bishop Ruiz de Cabañas (and two mine owners from Fernández's home district of Hostotipaquillo) fled towards San Blas and an escape by sea. Hidalgo dispatched another parish priest, José María Mercado, to take Tepic and San Blas. Mercado's parish of Ahualulco was on the way there, a day's ride south of Hostotipaquillo. With his moral authority in the region, Mercado was able to recruit soldiers as he went.<sup>33</sup> He even levied his own father, to whom he wrote, "I have become a Minister of Armed Justice, after having been one of Divine Justice"<sup>34</sup>.

San Blas was chaotic as some officials sought to secure the port while the Spaniards from Guadalajara, including household and military retainues, worked to board ships and depart. According to one frustrated port officer, "we were better defended alone than now that you all have come".<sup>35</sup> After debate, rather than fight the apparently overwhelming odds, remaining officials determined to surrender or struggled to find room aboard the escape vessels. On December 1, four such ships

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(SBMAL-DLG), 451, letter 1, José De la Guerra a José Narváez; 622, letter 7, Juan Malarín a de la Guerra.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph A. THOMPSON, *El Gran Capitán, José de la Guerra: A Historical Biographical Study* (Los Angeles: Cabrera & Sons, 1961), 71, 74.

<sup>33</sup> Josep Maria MIQUEL I VERGÉS, *Diccionario de insurgentes* (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1969), 375.

<sup>34</sup> FUSTER RUIZ, *Final*, 611.

<sup>35</sup> FUSTER RUIZ, *Final*, 615-616.

departed for Acapulco; at least three of these would arrive safely, including the brigantine *San Carlos*, which was sailed by a skeleton crew of only six men.<sup>36</sup> On the same day, officials who remained in the port, mostly European Spaniards but including a few creoles, negotiated their surrender and delivered to Padre Mercado hostages, including chaplain Afanador.<sup>37</sup> Fernández was the only clerical signatory to the capitulation agreement, which required those surrendering to retire to Tepic.<sup>38</sup>

According to the later testimony of a naval colleague and witness, when leaving the port Fernández had a personal and “disagreeable altercation” with Mercado. The rebel priest insisted on examining the contents of the chaplain’s “chest of clothing”.<sup>39</sup> Probably, this was Fernández’s sea chest, locked and containing more than just clothing, though he would not have been carrying religious implements, which chaplains only managed on board.<sup>40</sup> In demanding this inspection the rebel priest might have sought to prevent the exfiltration of documents or arms, or simply to pull rank and intrude upon his opposite number. In so doing he gave Fernández an anecdote supporting his loyalty to the crown, useful when he later sought permission to sail to peninsular Spain.

<sup>36</sup> FUSTER RUIZ, *Final*, 621; AGM, Secretaría de Estado y del Despacho de Marina, Ministerio de Marina, Sección Expediciones. Sub-Sección Expediciones a Indias, Entradas y salidas de buques, caja 47, documento 125, “Llegada (12 diciembre 1810) a Acapulco de los buques de San Blas ocupando por los rebeldes”, 5, 11-12.

<sup>37</sup> FUSTER RUIZ, *Final*, 616.

<sup>38</sup> Juan E. HERNÁNDEZ Y DÁVALOS, *Colección de documentos para la Historia de la Guerra de Independencia*. (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2008), tomo I, doc. 101.

<sup>39</sup> Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de Guadalajara (AHAG), sección Secretaría, serie Independencia, carpeta Guadalajara, caja 1, 3-3v, El Presbítero Don José Agustín Fernández.

<sup>40</sup> PÉREZ-MALLAÍNA BUENO, *Marinos*, 44-45; SÁNCHEZ TORRES, *Historia*, 225.

During December, two unsuspecting ships arrived at San Blas from the north, and were quickly impressed. *Princesa*, coming from Alta California, carried the aforementioned lieutenant and quartermaster José de la Guerra y Noriega and his family; he was arrested and sent to Ixtlán del Río. The officials under guard at Tepic were separated, some being sent to Guadalajara, where Fernández remained for most of a decade.<sup>41</sup>

Weeks later, the tide turned. Hidalgo's army was defeated at the battle of Puente de Calderón. De la Guerra was freed when Brigadier José de la Cruz retook Ixtlán. Loyal forces motivated by the parish priest of San Blas recaptured the port as well as Tepic. Afanador was detained for complicity with the rebels; he and other clerics, all with the right to ecclesiastical justice, were also transferred to Guadalajara, where they had little ongoing contact with the navy.<sup>42</sup> De la Cruz arrived at Tepic on February 8 and ordered the naval company to return to the port.<sup>43</sup> De la Guerra, reunited with his family, served the royalist forces in Tepic before returning to Alta California.<sup>44</sup>

De la Cruz put the naval officer Pedro Celestino Negrete, who he had only met in January, in charge of sorting out San Blas.<sup>45</sup> Negrete was a Peninsular naval officer recently exonerated of the charge of abandoning his post along with Veracruz

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<sup>41</sup> FUSTER RUIZ, *Final*, 617-618.

<sup>42</sup> Jaime OLVEDA, *De la Insurrección a la Independencia: La guerra en la región de Guadalajara* (Zapopan: El Colegio de Jalisco, 2011), 201; Salvador Gutiérrez Contreras, *José María Mercado: Héroe de nuestra independencia* (Guadalajara: Gobierno de Jalisco, 1985), 21-22.

<sup>43</sup> Juan Ramon de ANDRÉS MARTÍN, *La guerra del general Cruz contra la independencia de México: El brigadier realista José de la Cruz como comandante general de los Ejércitos de la Derecha y Operaciones de Reserva de la Nueva España (1810-1811)* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2020), 123; HERNÁNDEZ Y DÁVALOS, *Colección. Tomo 1*, doc. 189.

<sup>44</sup> Louise PUBOLS, *The Father of All: The De la Guerra Family, Power, and Patriarchy in Mexican California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 40, 67-68.

<sup>45</sup> Jaime OLVEDA, "Pedro Celestino Negrete, de realista a trigarante." *Estudios Jaliscienses* no. 125 (2021): 37.

commander Ciriaco Cevallos; the verdict freed him up for service against the insurgency, and he immediately transferred to the army.<sup>46</sup> Despite the terrestrial nature of the insurgency, Negrete's naval experience was still valuable. He was made interim commander of San Blas and represented the state's interests in the trial of the officials who had surrendered to the insurgents, including Commandant Labayén and Frigate Ensign José María Narváez.<sup>47</sup> The chaplains were not court-martialed since they answered to ecclesiastical, not military, jurisdiction, but presumably they followed their colleagues' travails with interest. The first declarations of the courts-martial were taken in Tepic and later ones in Guadalajara, where a recent decree gave the Audiencia jurisdiction over crimes of disloyalty.<sup>48</sup> After extensive testimony the port officials were acquitted, with Labayén returned to command, excepting only Frigate Ensign Agustín Bocalán, who had served as spokesman to the rebels and was sentenced to time served.<sup>49</sup>

Following on a year-old report that recommended that most of the port's officials return to Spain, the Naval Minister

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<sup>46</sup> Christon I. ARCHER, "The Key to the Kingdom: the Defense of Veracruz, 1780-1810." *The Americas* 27, no. 4 (1971): 446-447; "México en 1810: el fin del principio, el principio del fin", en *México en tres momentos, 1810-1910-2010: Hacia la conmemoración del Bicentenario de la Independencia y del Centenario de la Revolución Mexicana: Retos y perspectivas, vol. 1*, coord. by Alicia MAYER (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2007), 28-29.

<sup>47</sup> University of Texas Libraries, Benson Latin American Collection, Alamán Papers, series 1, box 1, no. 61, José de la Cruz a Francisco Javier Venegas.

<sup>48</sup> Jaime OLVEDA, "La insurgencia en las Provincias Internas de Occidente", en *La independencia en el septentrión de la Nueva España: Provincias Internas e intendencias norteñas*, coord. by Ana Carolina Ibarra, (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2010), 164.

<sup>49</sup> *El telégrafo de Guadalajara*, 1 de octubre de 1812, 497-498; CÁRDENAS DE LA PEÑA, *De San Blas. Vol. II*, 104-199.

ordered that all but a few port officials, including all but the two chaplains with the shortest tenures, should do so.<sup>50</sup> Under this order, the religious company disintegrated. Fernández remained in Guadalajara and may never have been disciplined for it. In 1817 Bishop Ruiz de Cabañas wrote to the viceroy with an update on the corps of chaplains, which was down to three clerics: Anastasio Gómez was still working but “very aggravated in his illnesses”, Fernández refused to return to his station, arguing that he hadn’t received his salary for “almost eight years”, and Afanador, who had repented and been pardoned. The bishop inquired whether he might send Afanador back to the port and assign Fernández different work in the diocese; the viceroy assented.<sup>51</sup>

Although the naval company was greatly diminished, when Father Morelos seized Acapulco in 1813, private foreign shipping at San Blas boomed. Taxes on this trade significantly increased the economic autonomy of Nueva Galicia.<sup>52</sup> Trade and revenues at Tepic and Guadalajara, the location of a new mint, broadly increased, greatly benefitting the commanders De la Cruz and Negrete.<sup>53</sup> However, the insurgency remained a major headache for them. De la Cruz reassigned Negrete and San Blas officials including Narváez, Bocalán, and the pilot Felipe García to the campaign against the insurgents’ island stronghold in Lake Chapala. In four years of fighting the royalist side

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<sup>50</sup> FUSTER RUIZ, *Final*, 607-609; AGM, “Que queden”.

<sup>51</sup> AGN, vol. 2, exp. 17, El Ilmo. Sr. Obispo de Guadalajara dice que en el Departam.to de Sn. Blas no hay otro Ministro que administre los Sacramentos que el P. Don Atanacio Gómez, Provincias Internas, ff. 173-176v.

<sup>52</sup> Ernest SÁNCHEZ SANTIRÓ. *La imperiosa necesidad: Crisis y colapso del Erario de la Nueva España (1808-1821)* (México: Instituto Mora, 2016), 52-54.

<sup>53</sup> Deni TREJO BARAJAS, “Implicaciones del comercio por el puerto de San Blas durante la Guerra de Independencia”, *Revista de Indias* LXVI, no. 238 (2006): 717-718; Jaime E. RODRÍGUEZ O., “*We Are Now the True Spaniards*”: *Sovereignty, Revolution, Independence, and the Emergence of the Federal Republic of Mexico, 1808-1824* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 191; OLVEDA, *Insurrección*, 317.

suffered setback after setback, García being killed and Negrete losing two fingers before finally concluding a generous settlement with the rebels.<sup>54</sup>

#### CAREER ADVANCEMENT

As the wars of independence wound up, Fernández was looking to get a better job. He was well aware of the decimation of the clerical ranks during the wars and the fact that first-class posts paid vastly higher wages to better educated priests.<sup>55</sup> In 1818 he completed a four-year course of civil law at the Royal Literary University of Guadalajara, declining to spend a further four years on a licensure and the right to the title Doctor.<sup>56</sup> The next year Fernández lodged for some time at the Convent of Santo Domingo in Mexico City, the principal monastery in the Dominican province of Santiago that staffed the missions of Baja California. Quite likely, his connection to it arose from past acquaintance with those missionaries. Fernández was a secular priest, but unemployed or underemployed, he was happy to stay with the Dominicans, living by the Rule of his namesake Saint Augustine.

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<sup>54</sup> Christon I. ARCHER, “The Indian Insurgents of Mezcala Island on the Lake Chapala Front 1812-1816”, en *Native Resistance and the Pax Colonial in New Spain*, coord. Susan SCHROEDER (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 96-98, 100, 101, 106-107, 114, 125-126.

<sup>55</sup> Juan ORTIZ ESCAMILLA, “El bajo clero mexicano durante la guerra civil de 1810”, en *El nacimiento de México* coord. Patricia Galeana (México: Archivo General de la Nación y Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999), 17; William B. TAYLOR, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 138-140.

<sup>56</sup> Archivo Histórico de la Universidad de Guadalajara, I-2-A-31-6-112v, Certificación de cursos y alumnado de la Real Universidad Literaria de Guadalajara; M. Claudio JIMÉNEZ Y VIZCARRA, “Matricula de colegiales de la Facultad de Leyes de la Real y Literaria Universidad de Guadalajara 1792-1826”. *Estudios Históricos* no. 6 (1978): 20-21.



While there, Fernández sought permission to sail to Spain from Viceroy Apodaca — himself once a naval officer. His stated intention was to petition the King for a better job, and if that failed, stay there and keep working in the navy. The viceroy responded that a license from his bishop would be needed. Fernández turned to friar Luis Carrasco, Provincial Prior and the top authority of the province of Santiago, who wrote a letter on his behalf to Bishop Ruiz de Cabañas in Guadalajara.<sup>57</sup> The license apparently came through, because Fernández then sailed to Spain in the company of three boys going there to attend school.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps, he paid his passage by tutoring and watching them.

Fernández arrived on the peninsula in 1820 around the time that Rafael Riego's revolt forced King Fernando VII to restore the 1812 Constitution. In Madrid, the chaplain sought to obtain the post of *racionero* at the Cathedral of Durango in Nueva Vizcaya, a position paying an annual salary of 2,800 pesos. While fifteen contenders had applied, including two serving *medios racioneros* of the same cathedral chapter, someone pulled strings in his favor.<sup>59</sup> A handwritten annotation on his printed curriculum vitae indicates that a royal order, communicated through the Naval Minister, ensured that he got the Council of State's particular attention.<sup>60</sup> The order was not located for this study, but the Council looked favorably on his application, and the King issued a *cédula* formalizing his appointment in January of 1821. In a letter from Madrid, Fernández announced to his new cathedral colleagues that the

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<sup>57</sup> AHAG, sección Gobierno, serie Parroquias, San Blas, 1800, caja 1, El Presbítero Don José Agustín Fernández; Luis Carrasco a Juan Cruz Ruiz de Cabañas, 1.

<sup>58</sup> AGI, "Extracto".

<sup>59</sup> AGI, Guadalajara, 548, Lista de pretendientes á la Racion vacante en la Catedral de Durango"; "Secretaría del Consejo de Estado. — Vacantes en Ultramar", *Gazeta del Gobierno (Madrid)*, 9 de julio de 1820, 43.

<sup>60</sup> AGI, "Extracto".

king had awarded him the job.<sup>61</sup> He also wrote to his new superior, Bishop Castañiza, promising to obey any instructions he received on the way back.<sup>62</sup> However, ongoing strife and his commission to the Californias would make it more than two years until he reached Durango.

#### BATTLE OF DURANGO AND TRIUMPH OF ITURBIDE

After a decade of war, the independence struggle had reached a stalemate, at which point army coronel Agustín Iturbide triangulated a plan to assume political leadership. Ostentatious piety would inform Iturbide's project. After communicating with various stakeholders and composing his appealing Plan of Iguala, Iturbide swore oaths to defend the Church, independence, and King Ferdinand VII, who he still upheld as the legitimate monarch of independent Mexico. These were administered by military chaplain Fernando Cárdenas.<sup>63</sup> Just afterwards, Iturbide wrote to Bishop Ruiz de Cabañas: "Either the religion of Nueva España must be upheld, pure and unmixed, or Iturbide must not exist."<sup>64</sup>

Iturbide's Plan, well-designed and well-timed, attracted attention around the country for its potential to end the wars of independence. The monarchist sought to coopt high clerics and shut out the old insurgents. His enemies during the decade of war. This proposal gained great momentum and in June,

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<sup>61</sup> New Mexico State University Library, Rio Grande Historical Collections, Archivos Históricos del Arzobispado de Durango (NMSUL-AHAD), 246, Nombramiento de Agustín Fernández San Vicente a una ración en la Catedral de Durango, 284, 297-299.

<sup>62</sup> NMSUL-AHAD, 479, Agustín Fernández de San Vicente a Marqués de Castañiza, 802-803.

<sup>63</sup> Rodrigo MORENO GUTIÉRREZ, *La trigarancia: fuerzas armadas en la consumación de la independencia: Nueva España, 1820-1821* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2016), 245.

<sup>64</sup> CALVILLO, *República*, 99.

Brigadier General Negrete and Intendant José Antonio Andrade brought Guadalajara's military establishment on side; Bishop Ruiz de Cabañas followed.<sup>65</sup> Field Marshal José de la Cruz, the commander that Negrete had betrayed, chose Durango as the base for his last stand. Economic interests in the capital of Nueva Vizcaya relied on the crown, and according to César Navarro Gallegos, repression had previously kept the peace.<sup>66</sup> When De la Cruz arrived, his royalists occupied public buildings including the cathedral and the convent of San Agustín.

Bishop Juan Francisco Castañiza hosted De la Cruz in his home.<sup>67</sup> The bishop had inherited the enormous fortune and royal title of his Spanish merchant father. According to a later discussion in the Imperial Constituent Congress, he had obtained the miter of Durango by promising the King one third of his estate's income.<sup>68</sup> Castañiza was a strong royalist, a participant in the formal degradation of father Morelos that preceded his execution, and founder of a correctional college for ex-revolutionary priests, but he would shortly have reason to reconsider his loyalty.<sup>69</sup>

Iturbide delegated Negrete to take Durango. Upon establishing his base at the Sanctuary of Guadalupe, Negrete

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<sup>65</sup> Enrique FLORESCANO, coord. *Actores y escenarios de la Independencia: guerra, pensamiento e instituciones, 1808-1825*. (México: Museo Soumaya – Fundación Carlos Slim, 2010), 311; CALVILLO, *República*, 207.

<sup>66</sup> César NAVARRO GALLEGOS, "El tercer Marqués de Castañiza: Un obispo criollo de la época de independencia." *El poder y el dinero. Grupos y regiones mexicanos en el siglo XIX* (México: Instituto Mora, 1994), 35.

<sup>67</sup> José de la Cruz PACHECO ROJAS, *El movimiento de independencia en la intendencia de Durango: Durango y Chihuahua 1810-1821*. (Ciudad Juárez: Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez: 2016), 251, 253.

<sup>68</sup> *Actas constitucionales mexicanas (1821-1824), tomo II, vol. I* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1980), 198.

<sup>69</sup> Miguel VALLEBUENO Garcinava y Rubén DURAZO ÁLVAREZ, *Durango 450: Conservación de un patrimonio histórico* (Durango: Gobierno del Estado de Durango, 2013), 83.

sent representatives to propose that the royalists surrender, a suggestion that was rejected.<sup>70</sup> One report says that some members of the cathedral chapter escaped to join the revolutionaries.<sup>71</sup> On August 24, after the rebel victory in the battle of Azcapotzalco, Iturbide and Juan O'Donojú signed the Treaty of Córdoba. The same day in Chihuahua, the General Comandant of Nueva Vizcaya, Alejo García Conde, adopted the Plan of Iguala.<sup>72</sup> Durango city was the last contested location in mainland Nueva España.

Fighting commenced there on August 28. In the first engagement Negrete was shot in the mouth. Though disfigured, he lived, and his forces took the cathedral on September 3.<sup>73</sup> The Army of the Three Guarantees so completed its conquest of mainland Mexico, hardly “without shedding a single drop of blood” as Iturbide had advertised in the Plan of Iguala, but more conclusively than any of the previous insurgent campaigns, in large part because the Church was on side.

Bishop Castañiza, magnanimous in defeat, produced some exculpatory “motives for not swearing independence up until this date”.<sup>74</sup> Reconciling himself to the new regimen, he demonstrated a flexibility hinted at in his pastoral letter of 1820, which emphasized the moral importance of obedience to

<sup>70</sup> José de la Cruz PACHECO ROJAS, “Independencia y autonomía en la intendencia de Durango, 1808-1824”, en *La independencia en el septentrión de la Nueva España: Provincias Internas e intendencias norteñas*, Ana coord. Carolina Ibarra (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2010), 145.

<sup>71</sup> Fernando PÉREZ MEMEN, *El episcopado y la Independencia en México (1810-1836)* (México: El Colegio de México, 2011), 171-172.

<sup>72</sup> DEL RÍO, *El noroeste*, 90-93.

<sup>73</sup> Javier GUERRERO ROMERO, “La última batalla de la Independencia en Durango,” en *Ciclo de conferencias en el papel de Durango en la Independencia*. Filmado 27 septiembre 2021, publicado 25 octubre 2021. Web: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ndKYRJe4VY> 28:29-33:15.

<sup>74</sup> Vicente de Paula ANDRADE, *Noticias biográficas sobre los ilustrísimos prelados de Sonora de Sinaloa y de Durango* (México: Museo Nacional, 1899), 266; PÉREZ MEMEN, *El episcopado*, 169.

the authority of secular law (this after King Fernando VII was forced to restore the liberal 1812 constitution).<sup>75</sup> In Iturbide, Castañiza saw a maximally pious figure who, like himself, was also the son of a wealthy Spaniard. In Iguala, he saw the promise of a new constitutional order that could let provincial elites, like himself, retain the devolved powers they enjoyed under the 1812 constitution.<sup>76</sup> Bishop Antonio Joaquín Pérez de Puebla, Nueva España's only other creole prelate and another staunch conservative, provided political cover by going over to Iturbide's side first.<sup>77</sup>

Manuel Calvillo called Castañiza a “convert to Iturbidism”.<sup>78</sup> As much as he was a theologian, he was an institutionalist, who had previously served as rector of the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico and the College of San Ildefonso.<sup>79</sup> Castañiza found the Three Guarantees of Iguala to be “friendly and satisfactory”, and while hoping to be allowed to stay out of politics, declared himself to be at Iturbide's service.<sup>80</sup> In the coming year, he would approve a diocesan contribution to the government of 20,726 pesos, after the Secretary of Hacienda requested 150,000.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Francisco MORALES, *Clero y política en México 1767-1834: algunas ideas sobre la autoridad, la independencia y la reforma eclesiástica* (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1975), 85.

<sup>77</sup> Jaime del ARENAL FENOCHIO, *Un modo de ser libres: Independencia y Constitución en México (1816-1822)* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 2002), 144-145, 174.

<sup>77</sup> Ana Carolina IBARRA, *El cabildo catedral de Antequera, Oaxaca y el movimiento insurgente* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 2000), 244.

<sup>78</sup> CALVILLO, *República*, 268.

<sup>79</sup> J. I. GALLEGOS, *Historia de la Iglesia en Durango* (México: Editorial Jus, 1969), 253.

<sup>80</sup> NAVARRO GALLEGOS, “Tercer Marqués”, 44; MORALES, *Clero*, 90; ANDRADE, *Noticias biográficas*, 266.

<sup>81</sup> Biblioteca Nacional, Archivo Franciscano 18/390.1, “Correspondencia relativa al préstamo de 150 000 pesos que la iglesia catedral de Durango hizo al gobierno imperial”, f. 1-24.

On September 27, Iturbide victoriously entered Mexico City. The next day he installed a Provisional Governing Junta which immediately declared the independence of Mexico and installed a Regency over which Iturbide himself would preside. Among its members were the archdeacon of the cathedral of Michoacán, Manuel de la Bárcena, and the Superior Political Chief of Nueva España, Juan O'Donojú, upon whose death Bishop Pérez took his seat. Iturbide had kept the church on-side by guaranteeing Roman Catholicism in the Plan of Iguala and always sought the continuation of close ties between the ecclesiastical and secular states. He coopted powerful secular clergymen, also receiving adoring letters from several abbesses and prioresses.<sup>82</sup> His strategy only fell short with regard to Archbishop Pedro José Fonte of Mexico, who would quietly resist the project and eventually decamp to Spain.

#### GOVERNMENT OF ITURBIDE

The new government organized itself fitfully. On October 4 the Regency and Junta together created a Ministry of External Relations, to be led by Secretary José Manuel Herrera and Sub-secretary Andrés Quintana Roo, with a staff of fifteen. The ministry's portfolio grew to include responsibilities for internal relations, those with provinces and domestic corporations.<sup>83</sup> It was organized in four sections: state, government, charity, and

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<sup>82</sup> Carlos G. MEJÍA CHÁVEZ, "‘Mi más estimado Padrecito’. Correspondencia de monjas a Agustín de Iturbide (enero de 1821-febrero de 1822)." *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* no. 9 (2021): 8-36.

<sup>83</sup> Jorge FLORES, "Apuntes para una historia de la diplomacia mexicana" *Estudios de historia moderna y contemporánea de México* no. 4 (1972): 12-13; Bertha GONZÁLEZ COSÍO, "José Manuel de Herrera", en *Cancilleres de México. Tomo I*, Galeana, Patricia, coord. (México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2009), 22.

growth.<sup>84</sup> The eventual commission to California would pertain to the government and state sections, since the commissioner was expected to address the allegiance of citizens and the threats to national boundaries.

Herrera brought unique religious, military, and documentary experience to the office. He had served as chaplain to both Morelos and the Army of the Three Guarantees, editing political publications in both jobs.<sup>85</sup> He and Quintana Roo both participated in drafting the Constitution of Apatzingán, which defined Mexico geographically, notably excluding Alta California and other far northern provinces.<sup>86</sup> Herrera had also acquired some diplomatic experience in a unique trip to the United States. His goals there were to obtain weapons and support and to deliver Morelos's son Juan Nepumucemo Almonte for his education (much as Fernández would later accompany the three boys to school in Spain).<sup>87</sup> In New Orleans Herrera learned of the defeat of Morelos, and after returning, obtained a pardon, soon making himself useful to Iturbide.

In the military realm, the new government rewarded its serving officers by redistributing offices and ranks. Iturbide kept himself atop the resulting hierarchy, with Negrete just below, as lieutenant general and Captain-General of Nueva Galicia.<sup>88</sup> Since the two met in 1812 Negrete had always previously held the higher rank.

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<sup>84</sup> Juan MANUEL HERRERA, *Memoria presentada al soberano congreso mexicano por el secretario de estado y del despacho de relaciones interiores y exteriores* (México: Alejandro Valdés, 1822), 3.

<sup>85</sup> José Luis SOBERANES FERNÁNDEZ, "Don José Manuel de Herrera. Un huamantleco insurgente", *Publicación electrónica* no. 9 (2013): 2, 5.

<sup>86</sup> Ignacio DEL RÍO, *Estudios históricos sobre la formación del norte de México* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México: 2009), 121.

<sup>87</sup> FLORES, "Apuntes", 9-10; Ernesto Lemoine Villicaña, *Morelos: su vida revolucionaria a través de sus escritos y otros testimonios de la época* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1965), 126.

<sup>88</sup> OLVEDA, "Pedro Celestino Negrete", 39-40, 41; Timothy E. ANNA, *The Mexican Empire of Iturbide* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 40.

On October 9, the Regency validated the previous order of King Fernando VII appointing Fernández to the Durango cathedral.<sup>89</sup> Although the royal order predated the Mexican declaration of independence, the idea of a Bourbon monarch of Mexico was still under discussion. Fernández was residing “for now” in Mexico City on October 31, not yet installed in the cathedral chapter.<sup>90</sup> By his own account, on or before that day Iturbide (*el Ex.mo S.or Generalísimo*) transmitted to him a Regency order that he stay near the court in order to serve the empire in an unspecified way.<sup>91</sup>

The same day, the Regency communicated through its Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Business to the bishop and cathedral chapter of Durango that Fernández ought to be installed by proxy since his insight (*sus luces y conocimientos en algunos asuntos*) was required in the capital.<sup>92</sup> These letters were conspicuously vague with regard to Fernández’s role in the imperial project. Fernández immediately wrote to Durango as well, indicating that he had been asked to stay near the court, and that he did not know why.<sup>93</sup> Appearing in the capital before a notary and witnesses, he deputized Canon José Ignacio Iturribarría as his proxy.<sup>94</sup> The same canon, serving in Durango’s provincial deputation, had previously claimed to acquire a letter of repentance written by Hidalgo before his execution.

In line with his other recent actions, Castañiza elected to cooperate and to serve Iturbide. On either November 19 or 20, he hosted an extraordinary meeting of the Durango cathedral

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<sup>89</sup> NMSUL-AHAD, “Nombramiento”, 297-298.

<sup>90</sup> NMSUL-AHAD, “Nombramiento”, 285.

<sup>91</sup> NMSUL-AHAD, “Nombramiento”, 288-289.

<sup>92</sup> NMSUL-AHAD, “Nombramiento”, 293-294, 306-307.

<sup>93</sup> NMSUL-AHAD, “Nombramiento”, 289; 479, Agustín Fernández de San Vicente a Marqués de Castañiza, 868-869.

<sup>94</sup> NMSUL-AHAD, “Nombramiento”, 295-296.



chapter at his riverside Hacienda de San Agustín to the south of the city. Fernández, represented by his kneeling proxy Iturribarría, was awarded his prebend through the formal acts of collation and canonical institution.<sup>95</sup>

With his cathedral rank and income finally confirmed, planning for the commission to the Californias could commence. However, Iturbide was distracted. Governmental crises arose before a formal appointment could be made, principally to do with the eventual composition and powers of the incoming Congress. On November 25 Iturbide learned from Negrete about a supposed plot to imprison him and so prevent him interfering with the election of deputies.<sup>96</sup> Whether or not the arrests of 17 the next day prevented such an action, they began to erode his reputation. His enmity with Congress, which began even before members of the body were elected, was his Achilles' heel.

The legislative body was installed on February 24 after a complicated and botched apportionment process.<sup>97</sup> The Church was well represented, with Bishop Castañiza and Canon Iturribarría among the clerics seated (civil statutes would soon prohibit the legislative service of high clergy, much as canon law in any case barred clerics from political office).<sup>98</sup> Iturbide clashed with Congress over its priorities, a tension which may have encouraged clandestine pro-Spanish interests; De la Cruz was denounced for irredentism and returned to Spain, where he served as Minister of War.<sup>99</sup> In April these tensions came to

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<sup>95</sup> NMSUL-AHAD, "Nombramiento", 313.

<sup>96</sup> MIQUEL I VERGÉS, Diccionario, 420.

<sup>97</sup> ANNA, *Empire*, 50-56.

<sup>98</sup> Anne STAPLES, "La participación política del clero: estado, iglesia y poder en el México independiente", en *Las fuentes eclesiásticas para la historia social de México*, coords. Brian CONNAUGHTON y Andrés LIRA (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1996), 337-338; Isidro de la Pastora y Nieto, *Diccionario de derecho canónico. Tomo I* (Madrid: José G. de la Peña, 1847), 301.

<sup>99</sup> CALVILLO, *República*, 263-264; Rafael DIEGO-FERNÁNDEZ y María Pilar GUTIÉRREZ LORENZO, "José de la Cruz en el *Theatro* de la Nueva Galicia (1811-1821)" en José Antonio Serrano Ortega, coord., *El sexenio absolutista, los años*

a head, as Iturbide accused deputies and regents of treason for dissenting from his military budget.<sup>100</sup>

The first months of 1822 were tense times in the government as external threats and interests manifested around the borders of the new empire. From the northeast, Stephen Austin arrived in the capital seeking the right to distribute land in Texas.<sup>101</sup> In the east, the castle of San Juan de Ulúa was still occupied by a Spanish force. From the south arrived the envoy of Gran Colombia, Miguel Santa María, a native of Veracruz and a republican, who proceeded to scheme against Iturbide.<sup>102</sup> To the southwest, the First Chilean Navy Squadron under Vice Admiral Thomas Cochrane, suspected of being international pirates, arrived in Acapulco.<sup>103</sup> To the northwest, the report of a foreign relations committee had just said of Russia that “its neighborhood is very dangerous”, putting Alta California and even other provinces at risk.<sup>104</sup>

## SOLVING THE ALTA CALIFORNIA PROBLEM

Iturbide’s project sought to consolidate authority over as much territory as possible. Despite the battle of Durango and the Spanish presence at San Juan de Ulúa, central Mexico had taken up the Iguala and Córdoba program with remarkably little dispute. Less clear was the state of popular opinion in

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*insurgentes: Nueva España (1814-1820)* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 2014), 267.

<sup>100</sup> ANNA, *Empire*, 57; CALVILLO, *República*.

<sup>101</sup> Eugene C. BARKER, *The Life of Stephen F. Austin, Founder of Texas, 1793-1836: A Chapter in the Westward Movement of the Anglo-American People* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 40-44.

ANNA, *Empire*, 87, 100.

<sup>103</sup> Carlos LÓPEZ URRUTIA, *La escuadra chilena en México (1822): Los corsarios chilenos y argentinos en los mares del norte*.

<sup>104</sup> Juan Francisco AZCÁRATE, *Un programa de política internacional* (México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1932), 26-27.

the remote and isolated territories of Central America and Alta California. The degree of autonomy these marginal regions enjoyed during the wars of independence made them natural supporters of federalism. In the event, the majority of the Central American regions subscribed to Iguala and Iturbide.<sup>105</sup> However, communication with Alta California was poor and suspicion about the attitudes and actions of local officials reigned. Secretary Herrera reported to Congress: “With the exception of the Californias, from where not even a letter has yet been seen in the Government, the other provinces keep themselves in the most profound stillness and exact subordination.”<sup>106</sup>

This quiet was connected to the nearly complete suspension of the previously annual supply voyages, which had brought required goods without fail from 1773 to 1811, afterwards only sporadically and with less to offer.<sup>107</sup> Trading instead with foreign ships, the Spanish-speaking community in Alta California, like other marginal populations, had complicated and questionable political allegiances.<sup>108</sup> They were suspected by the central government, not without reason, of having permitted Russian advances and of sustaining their prior loyalty to Spain.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, Alta California welcomed extralegal immigrants, maintained economic links that crossed imperial boundaries, and had not at all been swept up in Mexico’s revolutionary movement.

All of Alta Californian society was out of step with the mainland, as one of the few places in Nueva España not directly affected by the wars of independence. Since their grandparents’ time, the Californios had worshipped with Spanish Franciscans

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<sup>105</sup> ANNA, *Empire*, 44-46.

<sup>106</sup> HERRERA, *Memoria*, 7.

<sup>107</sup> FUSTER RUIZ, *Final*, 79.

<sup>108</sup> Owen LATTIMORE, “The Frontier in History”, en *Theory in Anthropology*, coords. Robert A. MANNERS y David KAPLAN (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 374.

<sup>109</sup> BANCROFT, *History*, 455.

that had no particular affinity for the Virgin of Guadalupe.<sup>110</sup> Archbishop Francisco Lorenzana and King Carlos III had earlier prevented the College of San Fernando from operating the missions of both Californias, concerned that these missionaries might develop divergent interests.<sup>111</sup> Because of Alta California's unique social dynamics, the Three Guarantees of Iguala did not have the same resonance there. Faraway events forced its residents to swear allegiance to a new nation that foregrounded Neo-Aztec and Guadalupan symbolism. Deeply unsure how this would go over, Regency President Agustín Iturbide required intelligence, particularly about Governor Solá, who had been in charge of its military and civil establishments for six years. Suspicions about his continued allegiance to Spain were justified; he had written letters calling independence “a dream” and “absurd”.<sup>112</sup>

Unfortunately for Iturbide, the First Mexican Empire was insolvent. Revenues were vastly lower than in the Spanish period, and the military already accounted for most state expenses. How could he assure the observation of independence in Alta California? On New Year's Day of 1822, Lieutenant Gonzalo Ulloa, the commandant of San Blas, sent a letter reviewing the options to Iturbide's right-hand man Negrete. In his view, sending a convincing bundle of documents to Monterey would be advantageous and economical. A military option would be challenging: the *San Carlos* could carry a crew of forty to fifty sailors plus one hundred fifty infantrymen serving under an

<sup>110</sup> Angela MOYANO PAHISA, *La resistencia de las Californias a la invasión norteamericana (1846-1848)*. (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1992), 42.

<sup>111</sup> Ignacio del RÍO, *El noroeste del México colonial: estudios históricos sobre Sonora, Sinaloa y Baja California* (Universidad Autónoma de México, 2007), 194.

<sup>112</sup> Louise PUBOLS, “Becoming Californio: Jokes, Broadsides, and a Slap in the Face” en *Alta California: Peoples in Motion, Identities in Formation, 1769-1850*, coord. Steven W. HACKEL (Berkeley: University of California Press & San Marino: Huntington Library 2010), 137; BANCROFT, *History*, 450.

appropriate official “of known Military, and Political, conduct”, but this would incur “great costs and resulting damages”.<sup>113</sup> According to Irving Richman, Iturbide was undeterred by this argument and on February 8 ordered troops to depose Governor Solá and take control of Alta California. Before this could occur, Negrete reiterated Ulloa’s conclusion that a commission without troops could achieve the same ends at a much lower expense.<sup>114</sup>

Iturbide had already ordered a division of troops to Guatemala, reduced to a symbolic two hundred men when it became clear that its capital was already on side.<sup>115</sup> He was also about to order the invasion of San Salvador for failing to recognize his empire.<sup>116</sup> However, in light of the uncertainty about Alta California, and with Negrete’s advice, he was willing to reconsider a nonmilitary option.

One good reason to cancel the dispatch of troops was that a similar operation had backfired only three years earlier. After the River Plate expedition of Hipólito Bouchard sacked and burned Monterey in 1818, Viceroy Juan Ruiz Apodaca, against the recommendation of the commandant of San Blas, dispatched infantry and cavalry companies of two hundred men to reinforce Alta California.<sup>117</sup> Governor Solá complained that they arrived with insufficient provisions and arms, becoming a burden and committing crimes; his objections created a spat with Apodaca.<sup>118</sup> Iturbide, who could not hope to pack off his

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<sup>113</sup> AGN, Provincias Internas, vol. 23, exp. 12, Gonzalo Ulloa a Pedro Celestino Negrete, ff. 118-119v.

<sup>114</sup> RICHMAN, *California*, 231.

<sup>115</sup> Genaro GARCÍA, coord. *La Cooperación de México en la Independencia de Centro América por el General Vicente Filisola. Documentos inéditos ó muy raros Para la Historia de México, tomo XXXVI* (México: Librería de la Vda. de Ch. Bouret, 1911), 102.

<sup>116</sup> ANNA, *Empire*, 46.

<sup>117</sup> OLVEDA, *Insurgencia*, 174.

<sup>118</sup> BANCROFT, *History*, 252-257.

own soldiers with any more cash for their provisions, surely wanted to avoid repeating this frustrating experience.

Again, according to Irving Richman, Iturbide assented and changed his strategy on fiscal grounds. In his new thinking, while a show of force might not be necessary to keep California on side, an impressive official would still be. Who would then serve as his commissioner? Iturbide often sought Negrete's advice on military appointments, and did so again in this case.<sup>119</sup> Negrete proposed Fernández, who he knew from Tepic or Guadalajara. Members of the Durango cathedral might also have reminded Negrete about him.

On April 10 the Regency and Herrera issued the commissioner's instructions. Only four regents signed the document: Iturbide was absent, possibly reflecting the acrimony that had just erupted between himself and his colleague José Isidro Yáñez.<sup>120</sup> Other Regency documents consulted have five signatories. The very next day, Congress removed Iturbide's supporters Bárceña, Pérez, and Manuel Velázquez from the Regency, retaining Yáñez, who would continue to advocate for a radical reduction in the size of the army.<sup>121</sup> Iturbide later characterized the reorganization as an action "to reduce my vote".<sup>122</sup> Appointment of a priest as commissioner might have appeared less opportune to the Second Regency; in any case, the body would become obsolete one month hence, when military pressure convinced Congress to name Iturbide as emperor.

Fernández's instructions directed him to inform the governor and missionaries of both Californias about the new Empire; to report on the strength of foreign establishments north of San Francisco; and to reiterate that Mexico extended to the

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<sup>119</sup> RICHMAN, *California*, 231; ANNA, *Empire*, 183-184; Rodrigo MORENO GUTIÉRREZ, "Las fuerzas armadas en el proceso de consumación de independencia: Nueva España, 1820-1821", tesis doctoral (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2014), 250.

<sup>120</sup> ARRIOLA WOOG, *Sobre rusos*, 108-109; CALVILLO, *República*, 264.

<sup>121</sup> CALVILLO, *República*, 282.

<sup>122</sup> CALVILLO, *República*, 270.

42nd parallel north, as agreed in the 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty between the United States and Spain. C. Alan Hutchinson observed that the instructions reflected how seriously the Regency had taken the recent committee report on the dangers to Mexico of Russia and the United States.<sup>123</sup>

## PERSONNEL AND PREPARATION

San Blas, the port that had so economically empowered Nueva Galicia during the war years, would retain for the moment its colonial role of political conduit to Alta California. Negrete, relying once more on his maritime experience, sent the port naval instructions on April 13 to prepare for the voyage.<sup>124</sup> On the 28th, he was made Captain-General of Nueva Galicia, Zacatecas, San Luís Potosí, and the Californias, thus becoming the military superior of officials in both San Blas and Alta California.<sup>125</sup> In this role he oversaw the officials and port workers that prepared resources for the commission along the axis from Mexico City through Guadalajara and Tepic to San Blas.

Negrete's instructions specified that the *San Carlos* would undertake the voyage after being careened, repaired, and refitted with new rigging and copper plating, at a cost of three thousand pesos.<sup>126</sup> Despite its age it was the best ship in San Blas.<sup>127</sup> The ship was also fitted with the new imperial flag, displaying the crowned eagle.

The commission staff was drawn principally from the ranks of the by-then decrepit San Blas company. Veteran officer José

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<sup>123</sup> HUTCHINSON, *Frontier*, 99.

<sup>124</sup> Ignacio CUMPLIDO, *La ilustración mexicana, vol. II* (México: I. Cumplido, 1855), 165.

<sup>125</sup> ANNA, *Empire*, 48.

<sup>126</sup> CUMPLIDO, *Ilustración*, 164-167.

<sup>127</sup> SBMAL-DLG-701, letter 5, José María Narváez a José de la Guerra.

María Narváez would serve as captain of the voyage. As a young man he had been on the *Princesa* in 1788 when it visited Russian-American Company establishments on Unalaska and Kodiak. After five voyages to Alta California prior to 1810, he still had connections there.<sup>128</sup> In an 1818 letter to José de la Guerra he expressed frustration about not being able to return:

... you have me still buried at this post without knowing when I might leave it, full of desires to navigate particularly to those delightful lands to see my friends. But misfortune wants me to see it as so far off that if it happens to come true it will be so late that I can no longer obtain it, as on no side do I see signs of financial resources...<sup>129</sup>

Finally getting one last chance to visit Alta California, Narváez would be on this voyage accompanied by his son Miguel.<sup>130</sup> Also sailing, as ship's chaplain, was his old colleague Afanador.<sup>131</sup> The clique of Fernández, Narváez, and Afanador, who had all surrendered together in San Blas in 1810, now represented the independent Mexican empire, successor to both the Spanish establishment and to the insurgents.

On the commission Fernández would earn eight pesos a day, a figure remarkably similar to his cathedral wage, plus travel expenses; he managed to collect 4,000 before departing, and procured suitably impressive clothing for the tour.<sup>132</sup> He probably also studied the 1768-1769 official visit of José Gálvez to Baja California and Sonora. Personally implementing Bourbon reforms, Gálvez had attempted a radical and difficult

<sup>128</sup> Enrique CÁRDENAS DE LA PEÑA, *Historia marítima de México I: Guerra de independencia 1810-1821. Tomo IA* (México: Lito Ediciones Olimpia, 1973), Facsímiles no. 2.

<sup>129</sup> SBMAL-DLG 701, Narváez a De la Guerra.

<sup>130</sup> BANCROFT, *History*, 458, note 20.

<sup>131</sup> BANCROFT, *History*, 687.

<sup>132</sup> ARRIOLA WOOG, *Sobre rusos*, 113; BRICK, "Pomp".



administrative reorganization, and ended his long tour suffering from a malady that might have been manic depression.<sup>133</sup> Fernández planned to exercise his authority without getting bogged down in administrative details. He would impress the Californians, inform them about the new order of things, report his findings, get paid, and finally head to Durango.

The commission waited in Tepic for the *San Carlos* to be ready to sail, which according to Ulloa, was complete by June 9.<sup>134</sup> Narváez and Fernández may have shared the captain's quarters, as on the return journey Fernández and Solá would share them, Narváez then moving into a shelter newly built on deck.<sup>135</sup> The brigantine carried a crew of 88.<sup>136</sup>

After the commission's first, simpler stop in Loreto, capital of Baja California, it proceeded on the long journey northward toward Monterey Bay. As instructed, Narváez anchored the *San Carlos* at Santa Cruz to inquire about conditions at Monterey before going there.<sup>137</sup> On arrival, local officials could not recognize the new imperial flag.<sup>138</sup> Although the commissioner's authority was obvious, his instructions were not recorded in Alta California, leading later to confusion and suspicion. The commandant of San Diego reported that "the Lord Prebendary, they say, carries great authority over the military and the clerics."<sup>139</sup> Bancroft's ghostwriter implied that Fernández contrived a procedure for choosing the next governor on the spot.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> DEL RÍO, *El noroeste*, 187-188.

<sup>134</sup> BOLTON, "Iturbide", 208; CUMPLIDO, *Ilustración*, 165.

<sup>135</sup> Kiril TIMOFEEVICH KHLEBNIKOV, *The Khlebnikov Archive: Unpublished Journal (1800-1837) and Travel Notes (1820, 1822, and 1824)* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1990), 117.

<sup>136</sup> AGN, Gobernación, sin sección, caja 25, exp. 7, doc. 2, Californias, f. 3v.

<sup>137</sup> CUMPLIDO, *Ilustración*, 166.

<sup>138</sup> Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, BANC MSS C-D 1, Juan Bautista Alvarado, "Historia de California", 1876, 194.

<sup>139</sup> SBMAL-DLG-852, letter 34, Francisco Ma. Ruiz a José de la Guerra.

<sup>140</sup> BANCROFT, *History*, 466-467.

## CONCLUSIONS

Iturbide's appointment of Fernández, a prosperous, savvy cleric not implicated in the violent struggles of independence, succeeded. Though the commission was pompous like other elements of the First Mexican Empire, it was also an example of cost-conscious planning and practical delegation on the part of Iturbide. In accordance with his instructions, Fernández acquired the consent of the Californios and obtained intelligence on the Russians, so the emperor might have been pleased with the commission's result if he had still been in power at its conclusion. Of course, chaos ensued instead. Iturbide abdicated just as Fernández and Solá returned to Mexico City. Herrera had already left government service. In 1824, Iturbide was executed after returning from exile. In 1825, Castañiza died, and Herrera was arrested for criticizing Negrete, who was subsequently exiled along with other peninsular Spaniards.<sup>141</sup> At the time of the commission, however, their collective authority in San Blas, Guadalajara, Durango, and the capital created a viable project that kept Alta California loyal to independent Mexico.

Pedro Celestino Negrete's recommendation was essential to the appointment. His support was linked to the naval experience he shared with Fernández. Although the general had not been at sea for a decade, as military commander in the far west of the country he was well aware of the San Blas company's unique connections to Alta California. He had close contact with it during the court-martial of its officers and thereafter at the Lake of Chapala. The same sort of connection soon made Lieutenant Francisco de Paula Tamariz, who also worked at San Blas, the leading light of the subsequent Californias Development Junta.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> SOBERANES FERNÁNDEZ, "Don José", 4.

<sup>142</sup> Ignacio DEL RÍO, "Las Californias en el horizonte político de los primeros gobiernos de México independiente (1821-1827)." *Meyibó*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2010): 11-13.

Juan Francisco Castañiza's support for the commission, letting Fernández be installed and paid in advance of his service, can be attributed to his desire to please Iturbide and support his church-backed state. Fernández's paid absence in no way served the Durango diocese, but it was important for its bishop to be seen to contribute to the independence project, just as he subsequently approved a substantial donation of money to the central government. He would also have appreciated that the sensitive mission was entrusted to a cleric. Castañiza was awarded two political appointments; not only was he seated in the First Constituent Congress, he would also be made president of the short-lived National Instituent Junta with which Iturbide attempted to replace it.<sup>143</sup>

José Manuel Herrera is unique among the principals of this story in being affiliated with the insurgency as far back as 1812. Iturbide and Negrete were publicly royalists until the former published the Plan de Iguala; Castañiza until Negrete's victory in Durango. The first sign noted from Fernández that he could support independence was his willingness in late 1821 to stick around Mexico City and be given a special task by Iturbide.

Herrera was himself once sent on a diplomatic mission to the north, and now as Minister of Relations he could have relished the chance to do the dispatching. Like himself, Fernández was another secular ex-military chaplain with a graduate education. His recent course in law had probably improved his rhetorical skill and his institutional fluency. Both would have helped him to obtain his cathedral post, and prepared him to perform as commissioner. Castañiza, and perhaps Herrera as well, held doctorates in theology; Castañiza was rector of the University of Mexico at the time that Herrera studied there.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> José Luis SOBERANES FERNÁNDEZ, "El primer Congreso Constituyente mexicano", *Cuestiones Constitucionales* no. 27 (2012): 348-350.

<sup>144</sup> Guillermo S. FERNÁNDEZ DE RECAS, *Grados de Licenciados, Maestros y Doctores en Artes, Leyes, Teología y todas facultades de la Real y Pontificia*

Although the military men Iturbide and Negrete were not members of the academic elite, they were satisfied to work with clerics who were.

Other aspects of the commissioner's identity mattered more. Only certain sorts of appointees would have been acceptable for the bespoke position, and the intersection of factors make clear that Fernández was a nearly ideal candidate. First, consider his religious background. The commissioner would bring dramatic political change through rhetoric and ceremony, rather than with visible force, and to achieve this his moral authority would be of the utmost importance. The service of God was an even higher calling than that of the Army of the Three Guarantees; a religious figure would inspire trust and his presence would emphasize the divine bases for peace and continuity. Nonetheless, he certainly could not be one of the Franciscans or Dominicans already running the California missions, nor a friar of some rival order; the emissary had to be a secular priest.

Second, the commissioner would also have to be an eminence worthy of respect from his intended audience. A mere naval chaplain would have failed to impress, and any priest implicated in the long insurgency would need not apply. Both Herrera and Afanador, among many others, had received royal pardons for their actions on behalf of the insurgency. By contrast, prestige attached to a loyal cathedral priest. Fernández, who had not yet even gone to his work site, bolstered his suave and dramatic presentations in Alta California by lying about his rank. He may even have succeeded in hiding this lie from his cathedral colleagues. In any case, the emissary had to be a cleric of high rank who had never needed a pardon.

Third, it was imperative that the commissioner have advance understanding of the needs and concerns of Alta California.

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*Universidad de México* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1963), 146, 187; ANDRADE, *Noticias*, 263.

Owing to its scarce communications with the mainland, intelligence on the small colony was limited and often dubious. Therefore, an appropriate candidate would have personal experience of its situation, through prior visits or personal links to well-connected citizens there. This criterion greatly limited the pool of possible commissioners. Moreover, many potential appointees might have declined the deprivation and risk of spending uncomfortable months on board ship. The emissary had to have prior knowledge of Alta California and be robust enough to undertake the voyage.

Fourth, the racial profile of the eventual commissioner was also predetermined. Iturbide had asked the advice of a Spaniard on the commission, and a Spaniard might have been well received in Alta California, but his presence would have sent a confusing message about independence. Sending an indigenous or *casta* commissioner was out of the question, both because of the elite audience's potential reaction, and since the previous empire's race policies had ensured that no such person had the necessary high rank. The commissioner would need to be someone of Mexican birth and considered to be Spanish by the residents of Alta California. Sending anyone strongly identified with the viceregal capital could have inflamed concern about centralism. The emissary had to be a creole of provincial origin, ideally one from northwestern Mexico where most Californios had roots.

These criteria coincided, so far as we know, in a single, quickly identified, candidate. Fernández was a Mexican creole, a high-ranking secular priest, among the tiny sliver of officials who had sailed both in the *Carrera de Indias* and the *Galeón de Manila*, and he enjoyed connections to Alta California. Despite Commandant Ulloa referring to his "well-known talents", for two hundred years these facts were lost to scholarship.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> CUMPLIDO, *Ilustración*, 166.

Bancroft's ghostwriter was only able to describe the mission as "a delicate one requiring high and peculiar abilities, such as were believed by Iturbide with much reason to be possessed by Agustin Fernandez de San Vicente".<sup>146</sup> Why Alta California received the commission of this particular priest, his qualifications for the role, and the connections that put him there, are no longer such a mystery.

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<sup>146</sup> BANCROFT, *History*, 456.