

## A report from Spanish California, 1776

### Introduction

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Fernando de Rivera y Moncada, military commander of Alta California, wrote this letter from Mission San Gabriel. Rivera y Moncada was instrumental in the development of missions in California and was in a sometimes-contentious relationship with Father Junipero Serra, the Father President. When Rivera y Moncada wrote this letter, he was returning to his headquarters at the Presidio of Monterey after a nine-month stay at the Presidio of San Diego. There he had supervised the hunt for the leaders of an Indian uprising that had destroyed Mission San Diego in November 1775. In this communication to the viceroy, Antonio Bucareli, Rivera y Moncada relates some of the steps being taken to rebuild Mission San Diego and to refound Mission San Juan Capistrano, which had been evacuated after the destruction at San Diego:

I gave the soldiers their orders and informed them that they would be reporting to him. They are to assist in the reconstruction of Mission San Diego and then begin working on Mission San Juan Capistrano. At both missions they are to build their guardhouse. They are to assist the Fathers in whatever manner possible. Even though I am not ordering them to prepare the mud and make adobe bricks, there are always many other tasks and ways in which they can offer assistance, and by doing so they will be serving God and the king.

He then mentions the plans for to the construction of two missions that had recently been approved for the San Francisco Bay area:

I am leaving with the intention of later heading to San Francisco. I will take the families that had stopped in Monterey. Work will begin on the first mission and I will not move on to the other one until I receive new orders from Vuestra Excelencia to that effect. Just recently I learned that the Father President wants to situate the second mission along the riverbank and the route from Monterey to that port because it would then be far from the fort. Since that is not the order I was given by Vuestra Excelencia, I await further orders.

*Notes: Transcript, translation, and the basis of the introduction by Rose Marie Beebe, Santa Clara University, October 2013.*

## A report from Spanish California, 1776

### Questions for Discussion

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Read the introduction and the transcripts (provided in Spanish and followed by a translation in English) and view the image. Then apply your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions:

1. Use a map of California to locate the following: San Gabriel, Monterey, San Diego, San Juan Capistrano, and San Francisco. To the extent possible, calculate the distance between the mission locations.
2. What event took place that caused Fernando de Rivera y Moncada to write his letter?
3. How were the Spanish military forces expected to assist the Mission Fathers?
4. From the evidence in the introduction and the translation, describe the role of the Catholic Missions in Spanish Alta California.

## A report from Spanish California, 1776

### Transcript

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Oct<sup>o</sup> 20 de 76

Excmo Señor

El dia 14 del presente marche de S<sup>n</sup> Diego, quedo quieto sin nov<sup>d</sup> aquel terreno, y trece presos apricionados, y en dos cepos; me acompañan los 13 soldados q<sup>e</sup> alli se hallavan de Monterrey. Poco antes de salir estuve en el cuerpo de guardia, llame p<sup>a</sup> esso al Then<sup>e</sup> D<sup>n</sup> Jph Francisco de Ortega y presente los mande y previne a los soldados la debida subordinacion; y q<sup>e</sup> en saliendo a la redificacion de la de S. Diego, y a continuar los principios de la de S<sup>n</sup> Juan Capistrano, q<sup>e</sup> en ambas lebanen su casa de Guardia, y q<sup>e</sup> en lo demas aiuden a los P. P. q<sup>e</sup> aunque no les mandava hazer lodo, ni adobes, q<sup>e</sup> siempre ay muchos otros q<sup>e</sup> hazeres y modos en q<sup>e</sup> aiudar, q<sup>e</sup> hazian en esso servicio a Dios, y al Rey; Me ha parecido exponer a V.E. la noticia conforme lo execute para demostrar q<sup>e</sup> no omito passo ninguno. Para el tiempo en q<sup>e</sup> se ha de dar principio a las referidas Misiones no he dexado otra orn al Then<sup>e</sup> q<sup>e</sup> la sola, de q<sup>e</sup> proceda al primer aviso q<sup>e</sup> le de el Padre Presid<sup>te</sup> q<sup>e</sup> queda en aquel Presidio. Dicho Padre me hablo sobre la segunda, q<sup>e</sup> asistirian los Indios de Californias, y con gusto le oi la noticia; deje para essa un moso sirviente.

De S<sup>n</sup> Diego avise a V.E. q<sup>e</sup> la escolta de esta en donde escribo la dejaria de ocho, ultimam<sup>te</sup> me ha parecido, q<sup>e</sup> pues haze tiempo q<sup>e</sup> la mantenia con nueve, no disminuirla por ahora.

Boy con el animo de passarme luego a S<sup>n</sup> Francisco, llevare las familias q<sup>e</sup> se detuvieron en Monterrey; se pondra mano a la primera Miss<sup>n</sup> y no procedere a la otra hasta nueva orn de V.E. por la razon, q<sup>e</sup> a lo ultimo supe el pensam<sup>to</sup> del Padre Presid<sup>te</sup> en querer se ponga a la costa y camino de Monterrey para aquel Puerto, por lexos del Fuerte, y no ser essa la orn q<sup>e</sup> V.E. me tiene dada, espero me mande; y en assunto a la esc<sup>ta</sup> por q<sup>e</sup> no considero suficiente la de seis hombres; Dos son los Parajes el uno distara del Fuerte acia 18 leguas. Y el otro passaran de 20.

Quando se marchó el Barco se me quedo la memoria de lo q<sup>e</sup> sup<sup>co</sup> a V.E. para la Yglesia de S<sup>n</sup> Carlos, la q<sup>e</sup> acompaña a esta.

Dios gue la importante vida de V.E. por muy dilatados años.

S<sup>n</sup> Gabriel y Oc<sup>te</sup> 20 de 1776.

## A report from Spanish California, 1776

Excmo Señor

Fernan<sup>do</sup> de Riv<sup>a</sup> y Moncada

Excmo Señor B<sup>o</sup> Fr. D<sup>n</sup> Antonio Bucareli y Ursua

## A report from Spanish California, 1776

### Translation

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October 20, 1776

Excelentísimo Señor<sup>1</sup>

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of this month I left San Diego. Nothing new to report. All is quiet at that site. Thirteen prisoners shackled and in two stocks. The thirteen soldiers from Monterrey who were there are accompanying me. Shortly before leaving, I went to the guardhouse. I sent for Lieutenant Don José Francisco de Ortega. As soon as he arrived, I gave the soldiers their orders and informed them that they would be reporting to him. They are to assist in the reconstruction of Mission San Diego and then begin working on Mission San Juan Capistrano. At both missions they are to build their guardhouse. They are to assist the Fathers in whatever manner possible. Even though I am not ordering them to prepare the mud and make adobe bricks, there are always many other tasks and ways in which they can offer assistance, and by doing so they will be serving God and the king. I felt that I should share this information with Vuestra Excelencia exactly as I carried it out so as to demonstrate that I did not omit one single step. With regard to when work should begin on the missions I just mentioned, the only order that I gave the lieutenant is that he should not proceed until he is notified to do so by the Father President, who has remained at the presidio. That Father spoke with me about the second mission and he said that Indians from the Californias would be helping. I was pleased to hear that news. I left a servant boy behind to help at that mission.

When I was at San Diego I informed Vuestra Excelencia that I was planning on reducing the number of soldiers of the escort at this mission from where I am writing to you<sup>2</sup> from nine to eight. Ultimately, I have decided not to reduce the number of soldiers for the time being, since this mission has been defended by nine for quite some time.

I am leaving with the intention of later heading to San Francisco. I will take the families that had stopped in Monterrey. Work will begin on the first mission and I will not move on to the other one until I receive new orders from Vuestra Excelencia to that effect. Just recently I learned that the Father President wants to situate the second mission along the riverbank and the route from Monterrey to that port<sup>3</sup> because it would then be far from the fort. Since that is not the

## A report from Spanish California, 1776

order I was given by Vuestra Excelencia, I await further orders. And with regard to the escort, I do not believe that six men is sufficient; there are two sites under consideration– one is eighteen leagues away from the fort and the other is more than twenty leagues away.

The ship had already set sail when I realized that I had not sent Vuestra Excelencia the requisition in which I am requesting items for the church of San Carlos. That requisition accompanies this letter.

May God protect the esteemed life of Vuestra Excelencia for many years to come.

San Gabriel, October 20, 1776.

Fernando de Rivera y Moncada

Excelentísimo Señor B<sup>o</sup> Fr. D<sup>n</sup> Antonio Bucareli y Ursúa<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>When translating from one language to another, some words and phrases do not have a precise English equivalent, such as words that name positions in an official bureaucracy or semi-official titles. In this Rivera y Moncada letter, titles such as “Excelentísimo Señor” and “Vuestra Excelencia” have been left in the original Spanish. Substituting these titles with the English “Most Excellent Lord” or “Your Excellency” would bestow an inaccurate tone to the letter. These phrases were simply the normal polite phrases of the day, for which we really do not have an equivalent meaning in American English of the twenty-first century.

<sup>2</sup> He is writing from Mission San Gabriel.

<sup>3</sup> The port he refers to is San Francisco.

<sup>4</sup> Excelentísimo Señor Bailio Fray Don Antonio Bucareli y Ursúa. “Bailio” refers to Bucareli being a Knight of the Order of San Juan.



## A report from Spanish California, 1776

Image

Oct 20 de 76

Como señores

El día 14 del presente marche de San Diego, quedo quieto sin nov. a qual Ferrero; y tres paxos apañados y en dos cepas me acompañaron 13 soldados q allí se hallavan de Monterrey. Poco antes de salir estuve en el cuerpo de guardia, llame a esso al Sr. D. Jph Francisco de Ortega y presente, les mande y previne a los soldados la debida subordinacion; y q en saliendo a la edificacion de la de S. Diego, y a continuar los principios de la de S. Juan Capistrano, q en ambas levantar su casa de Guardia, y q en lo de mas aiuden a los P.P. q aunque no les mandava hacer todo, ni adobes, q siempre ay muchos otros q hazer y modos en q aiudar, q hazer en esso servicio a Dios, y al Rey; me ha parecido exponer a V. E. lo confora lo execute para demostrar q no omito nada ninguno. Pasa el tiempo en

Fernando de Rivera y Moncada to Antonio de Bucareli y Ursua, October 20, 1776, p. 1. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC06287.08)



## A report from Spanish California, 1776

q̄ se hade dar principio alas referi-  
 das Misiones no he de tado otra  
 oia al t̄ter. q̄ la sola de q̄ proce-  
 da al primer aviso q̄ le de el Padre  
 Presid.<sup>te</sup> q̄ queda en aquel Presidio  
 Dicho Padre me hablo sobre la  
 segunda, q̄ asistirian los Indi-  
 os de California, y con gusto le  
 oi la noticia; deje para esa in-  
 moso dixiente.

De San Diego avise a V. q̄ la  
 escolta de esta en donde ocu-  
 la dejaria de ocho, y ultimam.<sup>e</sup> me  
 ha parecido, q̄ pues haze tiempo  
 q̄ la mantenia con nueve, no dis-  
 minuita por ahora.

Soy con el animo de passar  
 me luego a San Francisco, lleva-  
 re las familias q̄ se detuvieron  
 en Monterey; se pondra mano  
 ala primera Mis.<sup>n</sup> y no pro-  
 cedere ala otra hasta nueva  
 oia de V. por la razon, q̄ alo  
 ultimo supí el pensam.<sup>to</sup> de la  
 de Presid.<sup>te</sup> en que se ponga  
 ala costa y camino de Monterey  
 para aquel Puerto, por la oia  
 del Norte, y no sea esa la oia q̄  
 V. me tiene dada, yo pero me  
 mande; y en asunto ala l.<sup>ta</sup>  
 por q̄ no considero suficiente la

Fernando de Rivera y Moncada to Antonio de Bucareli y Ursua, October 20, 1776, p. 2. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC06287.08)



## A report from Spanish California, 1776

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 Quando se marcho el Barco  
 se me quedo la memoria de lo q  
 sup. a V.E. para la Iglesia de  
 S. Carlos, la q acompaña a esta.  
 Dios que la importante vi-  
 da de V.E. por muy dilatados años  
 S. Gabriel y Ci. de 20 de 1776.

Excmo Señor

Fernando de Riv. y  
 Moncada

Excmo Señor B. H. D. Antonio Bucareli y Ursua

Fernando de Rivera y Moncada to Antonio de Bucareli y Ursua, October 20, 1776, p. 3. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC06287.08)