

Conquistadors and Spanish Colonial Period (1528-1848)

The first Europeans to visit the region may have been a crew of shipwrecked Spaniards who wandered across the Southwest during the 1500s. Upon their return, they described cities with amazing riches. In 1539 the viceroy of New Spain sent out a small expedition, led by Father Marcos de Niza and Estévan de Dorantes to search for wealth. When Father de Niza reported that he, too, found the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola, Don Francisco Vázquez de Coronado organized his expedition. But Coronado found pueblos of stone and mud. A secondary expedition led by Garcia Lopez de Cárdenas revealed the Grand Canyon; another group, led by Don Pedro de Tovar, found the Hopi mesas.



A Hispanic culture exists today in Arizona because, unlike other European conquerors, Spain never wanted to eradicate the Indian people. Instead, Spain attempted to annex whole cultures, a philosophy that allowed for intermarriage and the continuation of the Spanish and Indian cultures. Those annexation attempts were often ruthless. Coronado and his men attacked, pillaged and killed pueblo Indian peoples. Later Spain established military forts to protect its interests.

Coronado searched for gold, but Spanish missionaries came to convert the Indians. Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, Spain's most important missionary, was not Spanish. He was a native of Trent, Austria. He was an adventurer and geographer who did not want to go to the New World. His choice was the Orient, but he lost a drawing of lots. German-educated, Kino, who was of Italian descent, named the region "Pimería Alta", and he established 24 missions in the Sonoran Desert region of northern New Spain during the late 1600s. Seven were located within the boundaries of the Pimería Alta, but only three, Guevavi, Tumacacori and San Xavier del Bac, were in full operation at the time of his death in 1711. In twenty years Father Eusebio Kino traveled 75,000 miles through the desert, once covering 70 miles in a day to prevent the flogging of an Indian. The Jesuit influence in the Pimería Alta ended in 1767 when the Spanish Crown expelled the Order. Kino's missions fell into ruin.

During this same time, in 1751, the first permanent European settlements in Arizona were established at Tumacacori and the nearby presidio (military post) of Tubac. In 1776, the Tubac presidio was moved to Tucson.

After the expulsion of the Jesuits, the Crown sent the Franciscans to convert the Indians to Christianity. At first, the missionaries posted in Arizona and New Mexico, were tolerated by the Hopi and other pueblo peoples; but in 1680 the Pueblo tribes revolted, killing the missionaries and destroying the missions. A similar uprising occurred in the southern part of the region in 1751 when Indians attacked and burned the

mission at Tubac. Spain retaliated by establishing a presidio at Tubac that same year. Another uprising was staged in 1781 when the Yuman tribe, whose land at the confluence of the Colorado and Gila rivers had become a Spanish settlement, staged a coup that destroyed the Yuma settlement.

In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain. Tucson, with a population of 65 inhabitants, became part of Mexico, a territory that extended to northern California. Since the Mexican government was unable to protect its remote northern region, and the Pimería Alta was attacked by Apaches, Tumacacori was lost and the Mexican government discouraged large property holders in the region. Due to unresolved issues over the border between Texas and Mexico, the Mexican American War began in 1846.