

Writer Asks Proof of Foot-Chopping Claims

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Editor:

In the January 17 *Rio Grande SUN*, columnist Jay, Miller presented a point worth " discussing. He outlines the problems the city of El Paso is encountering in completing the statue commissioned in (honor of the Spanish colonizer Don Juan de Oñate and his journey through the area in 1598.

Miller points out the city's "perceived insensitivity" to Native Americans regarding the plight of the Acoma Indians in 1599. Allegedly, Oñate ordered the amputation of one foot from each of two-dozen Acoma Indians as retribution for an attack on the Spaniards and "the slaying of thirteen members of a Spanish scouting party."

As an amateur historian who continues to learn, I wonder why the facts are not being presented as they continue to surface.

Information from several sources, including the book, *This Miserable Kingdom* by Rev. James T. Burke, and *The Last Conquistador*, by Marc Simmons, reveals the following: The Acomas provoked the action taken by Oñate, when Juan de Zaldivar, who was Oñate's nephew and first captain, and 15 men, climbed the great rock formation upon which the City of Acoma was built. The Spaniards asked the Acomas for supplies, mostly blankets, since it was winter (December).

They were separated by being sent to different parts of the city to collect the supplies. Then they were viciously attacked by the Acomas who greatly outnumbered them, killing Zaldivar and all but five survivors who fought to the edge of the rock and jumped. One soldier was killed by the fall.

After first consulting with the priests, it was agreed the assassination of eleven men was just cause to wage war on the Acomas who had previously agreed to become subjects of the King of Spain. As required by law, the Spaniards offered a peaceful settlement. The Acoma warriors, seemingly secure in their mighty fortress, responded by tossing rocks on the Spaniards.

Battle took place and the Spaniards won. A trial was held at Santo Domingo Pueblo in February, 1599, and the sentence was handed down. No one received the death penalty. Allegedly 24 warriors were sentenced to have a foot cut off.

In 1998 as part of a CuatroCentenario lecture, historian, author and researcher Eloy Gallegos from Jacona presented an interesting finding, noting the sentence handed down to punish the Acomas was amputation of "las puntas del pie" (tips of the toes). It makes sense - who would want a servant for twenty years with a foot cut off?

During another Cuatra Centenario lecture, noted historian, author and lecturer John L. Kessell indicated that he or no other historian has 'found proof that the Acana sentence was ever carried out. My good friend Dr. Tom Chavez, director of the Palace of the Governors Museum, also confirmed this. He says he has not found proof of the alleged Acoma amputations in his research, nor does he know of anyone else that has.

Unless someone can come up with the proof, we have to assume that Oñate did not cut off any toes or feet.

Before issuing any apologies or asking for forgiveness, my suggestion to the City of El Paso is to arm yourselves with the facts and the truth. Yours is a noble cause. There is no need for embarrassment.

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