

cumstances. The circumstances were as follows. By the late 1750s, mounted Comanche raiders had extended their domain deep into Texas, where they repeatedly battled both the Apaches and the Spanish; they destroyed a newly established mission and presidio in 1757. Despite several peace pacts with the Spaniards, hostilities inevitably resurfaced. In one four-month period in 1774, while the British Parliament imposed the Coercive Acts on the rebellious citizens of Boston far to the east, the Comanches launched no fewer than five raids on Spanish settlements in New Mexico. In 1778, the Comanches again "swept over the province," wrote Teodoro de Croix, commander general of the Interior Provinces of New Spain. Scattered about in widely dispersed missions and towns, the settlers "were unable to resist," and New Mexico's Spanish outposts lost "127 persons dead and captured" in the raids.²⁰

Then, in August 1779, New Mexico's governor, the indomitable Indian-fighter Juan Bautista de Anza, determined to rein in the warlike horsemen of the plains. With six hundred men, he set out from Santa Fe on a punitive expedition to the north. (A year later, on a more conciliatory mission, Anza was to witness the great drought in Hopi country.) On August 31, in the Rocky Mountain foothills above what is now Colorado Springs, the governor's forces spied a party of more than a thousand Yamparica Comanches to the east. A running battle ensued, in which the Comanches fled, and Anza took thirty-four women and children captive. From these, the governor learned that he had come upon the band of Cuerno Verde, or Green Horn, the single Comanche leader most feared by the Spanish. Anza's heart quickened, and he decided "to see if fortune would grant me an encounter" with the great Comanche war chief.²¹

For three days, Anza's men pursued the Indians until Cuerno Verde deliberately engaged the Spaniards so his people could escape, leading fifty warriors into battle against a Spanish force of six hundred. In an action that even Anza admitted was "as brave as it was glorious," Cuerno Verde made his stand alongside his son and

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fifteen others in a boggy ravine. The Comanche headman died in the clash, but his people got away as their chieftain went down. "Nothing was seen but the dust and smoke of their retreat," wrote the New Mexico governor, "which was made out for a distance of twelve leagues." Two months later, when Anza sent his diary of the campaign to the commander general, he accompanied it with the distinctive horned headdress of the fallen Comanche leader.²²

The 1779 battle, marked by Cuerno Verde's demise, was a notable disaster for the Comanches. In its aftermath, their raids on New Mexico waned, but their attacks on Spanish settlers in Texas did not. Ranches, missions, and presidios from Rosario to Nacogdoches bore the brunt of Comanche assaults for another two years. "Every day," Governor Domingo Cabello wrote from San Antonio, "I receive news of people in these environs finding signs of the hostiles." Then, in late 1781, the Comanches disappeared altogether from the view of the Texas colonists. "There was no direct contact for almost eighteen months," writes the historian Thomas Kavanagh, speculating that the cause might have been smallpox. Contact was also very limited in 1783 and 1784.²³

But was smallpox indeed the reason? Very possibly. In the spring of 1780, smallpox traveling northward from Mexico City began to erupt in the northeastern provinces of New Spain known today as the states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, and Coahuila. The pestilence appeared at Santander Jiménez, Tamaulipas, less than 150 miles south of the Rio Grande, in March 1780. Parish priests at Jiménez identified the first smallpox death on March 14 and the last on July 20, 1780. In April, the pox also appeared in the parched but rugged hills of what is now southern Coahuila, in the parishes of Parras and Saltillo, occupied by some 15,674 inhabitants. In the three months from April through June, about 4 percent of the region's population died: 288 in Parras, and 284 in Saltillo.²⁴

As the pox crept closer to the great river, mortality leaped upward in Monterrey, the capital of Nuevo León, from June through

August 1780. The plague probably struck Monclova next and then the little cluster of missions on the south bank of the Rio Grande upstream from Laredo. "These four missions of the Rio Grande at one time were well populated with Indians," a visitor wrote six years later, noting a dramatic decline. "The cause of their depopulation (in my opinion) cannot be other than the contagious diseases to which they are subject by their natural constitution."²⁵ The impact of the epidemic on the Apache and Coahuiltecan hunter-gatherers who inhabited the surrounding countryside appears to be completely undocumented.

Documented or not, *Variola* kept moving. By October 1780, the pestilence had reached the Lipan Apaches around the presidio of La Bahia del Espíritu Santo, near the Texas coast and Matagorda Bay. In the eyes of Texas Governor Cabello, it was a most welcome arrival. During the previous year, the Spaniards had done their best to incite other tribes—including the Mescaleros, Tejas, and Tonkawas—against the Lipans. But now *Variola* did this dirty work for them. "The smallpox epidemic that has so afflicted the outlying provinces of this kingdom has now spread to this province," Cabello wrote to Commander General Croix from San Antonio, informing him that the epidemic had erupted near Matagorda Bay. "And without offending decency," he added, "one might hope that not a single Lipan-Apache lives through it, for these Indians are pernicious—despite their apparent peacefulness and friendliness."²⁶

The governor soon had reason to regret his words, as the plague struck closer to home. A month after he had taken pleasure in the pox's ravages among the Lipan Apaches, a distraught Cabello told Croix that the presidio of San Antonio was "so infected with the said contagion" that he was "reduced to the greatest consternation." The villa had no medicine and no doctor, and the number who had fallen ill was "uncountable." The sixty-two-year-old settlement had taken on a most doleful air. "One does not hear or see anything day or night except the tolling of bells and the sight of burials," Cabello reported. In the surrounding

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22. Diary of Governor Anza's expedition, in Thomas, *Forgotten Frontiers*, 136. On the headdress, see Anza to Croix, Santa Fe, November 1, 1779, in Thomas, *Forgotten Frontiers*, 134-35, 142.
23. On the continuing hostilities in Texas, see Cabello to Croix, Béxar, September 19, 1780, Bexar Archives, 2C42, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin (hereafter cited as IXA [CAH]); Cabello to Croix, Béxar, October 20, 1780, Bexar Archives, 2C43, IXA (CAH); Cabello to Croix, Béxar, December 6, 1780, Bexar Archives, 2C44, IXA (CAH). On the Comanches' disappearance, see Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History*, 95.
24. On Santander Jiménez, see Iglesia Católica, de los Cinco Señores (Santander Jiménez, Tamaulipas), Registros parroquiales, 1749-1911, Archivo de la parroquia de los Cinco Señores (microfilm, reel 0640389, FHL). The 15,674 population figure is from 1760-61. See Gerhard, *North Frontier of New Spain*, 171, 223. For mortality in Parras and Saltillo, see Iglesia Católica, Santa María (Parras, Coahuila), Registros parroquiales, 1627-1908, Archivo de la parroquia (microfilm, reel 0605294, FHL); and Iglesia Católica, Sagrario Metropolitano (Saltillo, Coahuila), Registros parroquiales, 1684-1906, Archivo del Sagrario Metropolitano (microfilm, reel 0605106, FHL).
25. On Monterrey, see Iglesia Católica, Catedral (Monterrey, Nuevo León), Registros parroquiales, 1667-1968, Archivo de la parroquia del Sagrario Metropolitano Catedral en Monterrey, Estado de Nuevo León (microfilm, reel 0605196, FHL). On the Rio Grande missions, see José David García, Estado actual de las misiones de la provincia de Coahuila y Río Grande de la misma jurisdicción, año de 1786, March 3, 1786, Documents relating to the missions of New Spain, 1781-90, BANC MSS M-M 431, folders 3 and 34, RQE. Note that there are two copies of García's report in this collection.
26. On the cultivation of hostilities toward the Lipans, see Croix to Cabello, Chihuahua, August 16, 1779, Bexar Archives, 2C35, IXA (CAH); Cabello to Croix, Béxar, September 3, 1779, Bexar Archives, 2C36, IXA (CAH); and Croix to Cabello, Arispe, September 10, 1780, Bexar Archives, 2C42, IXA (CAH). Cabello's "pernicious" quotation is from Cabello to Croix, Béxar, October 20, 1780, Bexar Archives, 2C43, IXA (CAH). For more on Espíritu Santo, see Cabello to Croix, Béxar, November 30, 1780, Bexar Archives, 2C44, IXA (CAH).
27. The quotations are from the following: Cabello to Croix, Béxar, November 20, 1780, Bexar Archives, 2C44, IXA (CAH); Cabello to Croix, Béxar, December 6, 1780, Bexar Archives, 2C44, IXA (CAH); Domingo Cabello, Strength report and daily record of occurrences at San Antonio de Béxar

Presidio for January 1781, Béxar, January 31, 1781, Bexar Archives, 2C44, IXA (CAH). The epidemic's impact is visible in the following two sets of records: Misión de San Antonio de Valero, San Fernando Cathedral Missions (San Antonio, Texas), Parish Registers, 1731-1860, Archdiocese of San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas (microfilm, reel 0025437, FHL); and Libro de entierros de la iglesia parroquial de la villa de San Fernando y presidio de San Antonio de Béxar, 1761-1801, San Fernando Cathedral (San Antonio, Texas), Parish Registers, 1703-1957, Archdiocese of San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas (microfilm, reel 0025450, FHL). Other San Antonio burial records are too incomplete to yield meaningful data. Smallpox and its attendant population loss are identified at the Texas missions in 1780 in José Francisco López, Informe, May 5, 1786, [Report on the Missions of the Province of Texas, copy], Documents relating to the missions of New Spain, 1781-1790, BANC MSS M-M 431, RQE. The population estimates from 1777 and 1783 are from Marion A. Habig, *The Alamo Chain of Missions: A History of San Antonio's Five Old Missions* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1968), 270.

28. Domingo Cabello, Strength report and daily record of occurrences at San Antonio de Béxar Presidio for January 1781, Béxar, January 31, 1781, Bexar Archives, 2C44, IXA (CAH); and Cabello to Croix, Béxar, December 6, 1780, Bexar Archives, 2C44, IXA (CAH).
29. Pedro Vial and Francisco Xavier Chaves, "Inside the Comanchería: The Diary of Pedro Vial and Francisco Xavier Chaves," ed. Elizabeth A. H. John, trans. Adán Benavides, Jr., *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 98 (July 1994): 35n, 37-38. See also Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History*, 97. The identification of La Zarca's location comes from Anderson, *Indian Southwest*, 212, 220. While Anderson's identification is almost certainly correct, it is conceivable (but extremely unlikely) that the infection came from Hacienda de la Zarca in the Mexican state of Durango, where the pox almost certainly struck around this time. For other possibilities, see Vial and Chaves, "Inside the Comanchería," 38n; Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History*, 500n; and Herbert E. Bolton, "French Intrusions into New Mexico, 1749-1752," in H. Morse Stephens and Eugene Bolton, *The Pacific Ocean in History; Papers and Addresses Presented at the Panama-Pacific Historical Congress* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 394.
30. For references to the unnamed epidemic, see Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1768-1780* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1914), 1:83-84, 2:231-32, 250; John C. Ewers, "The Influence of Epidemics on the Indian Populations and Cultures of Texas," *Plains Anthropologist* 18 (1973): 108; and Pat Ireland Nixon, *A Century of Medicine in San Antonio: The Story of Medicine in Bexar County, Texas*

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