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EUSEBIO FRANCISCO KINO: EL CARIBLANCO

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Whoever comes to southern Arizona is bound to hear the name "Kino." Actually this has been the case for centuries. Maybe Kino is not as well known in other parts of the nation, but here he is hero, pioneer-explorer and priest. In 1687 he came to the *despoblado* that Coronado had abandoned and that Spanish colonists feared to cross. Kino saw here a rich land, an industrious people and an unexcelled potential for new missions. Not all agreed with Kino; not even all agree today.

Who was this forceful man? What ambition drove him into the desert? What did he see that others rejected? What dreams did he have that escaped others?

Eusebio Francisco Kino was born Eusebio Chino in Segno in the Tyrol mountains of southeast, central Europe. His parents were modestly influential in the foothill life of northern Italy. They sent young Eusebio to Trent for schooling under the touted Jesuits from upper Germany. Under their tutelage he advanced rapidly and was attracted to pursue higher studies in Innsbruck. While enrolled as a college student in the mountain fastness of the Alps, he became desperately ill and despaired of his life. He promised that if he should recover, he would dedicate his life as a missionary in the Society of Jesus, like his patron Francis Xavier and like his cousin Martin Martini, a famous China missioner. Fortunately for the Southwest, Eusebio recovered and began his career as a Jesuit.

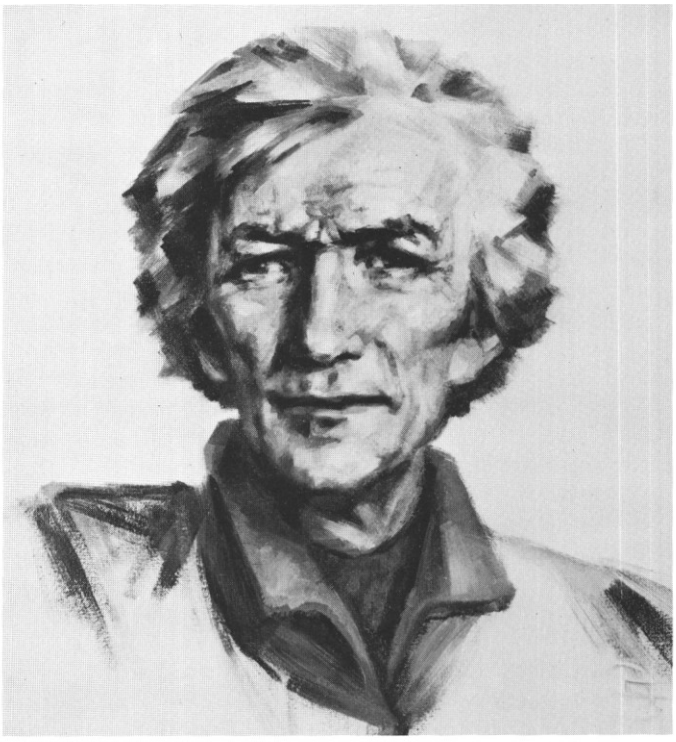
Nothing is automatic with the Society of Jesus. Kino may have promised himself that he would be a missionary, but that decision was left to major superiors in the Order. After many and continual appeals, he was finally approved to join the missions of the Spanish Empire. America's gain was Europe's loss because he had already begun to distinguish himself as a mathematician and scientist. He had to relinquish the chair of mathematics at Ingolstadt for the unknown challenges of the New World. He left his homeland in 1678, three hundred years ago.

Nothing was automatic with the Spanish Empire either. Braving pirates and storms in the Mediterranean, Kino arrived at Cadiz, the official port of debarkation for the New World, too late to catch the viceregal *flota.* The delay in Spain proved providential because he had a chance to adapt his native Italian to polished Spanish. When he finally booked passage on the *Nazareno* in July, 1679, he was off for America. But he only reached the harbor's mouth because the seventeenth century "liner" smashed into a sandbar as the rest of the armada scudded across the horizon. What an embarrassment for a zealous missionary. That unfortuitous event cost Kino the legality of his passport and entry visa for Mexico. But the ways of bureaucracy then were like those now. Kino became a white-faced, curly-headed native of Córdoba named Eusebio Francisco Chavez. Once in Mexico in the spring of 1681, he changed his name back to the familiar Kino. But even then he had problems. If he used the Italian "Chino," it meant a Chinese to the Spaniards of the New World. If he wrote "Quino," as the Latins did, they mispronounced it. So he clung tightly to Kino and accepted the disdain of the Spaniards for being "un cariblanco Aleman" (a white-faced German).

When Kino made the Atlantic crossing in 1681, people on both sides of the ocean had experienced the brilliant display of a rare comet. Mexico's scientific savant, Don Carlos Sigüenza y Górigora, had written impressively about the astronomical phenomenon; Kino saw a chance to rebut the modernist with sound medieval physics. Kino's little treatise, the *Exposition Astronómica,* regaled the hearts of the traditionists, and now, fortunately, it has become an ultra-rare book.

Whether one agreed with Kino's resounding theological arguments on comets or not, his learning captured the attention of Mexico City's leaders. Coincidentally there was a demanding position open as Royal Cartographer for a new expedition to the Californias. Kino would be ideal, as scientist and missionary. So Kino's coming to the Southwest was sealed in 1682 when he received an assignment with Admiral Don Isidro Atondo y AntiIlán, Governor of Sinaloa.

California was the land of wild fantasy and pearl-laden dreams. It was also distant, forbidding, desolate and unconquered. When Atondo's tiny armada landed on the shores of Bahia La Paz, there was hope that this expedition would succeed where others failed. But hopes become realities only when men do things correctly. This time they did not, and the Spaniards found themselves driven to the edge of the beach by hostile and vengeful natives. La Paz was a pure contradiction;



Kino—"El Cariblanco"

this was war to the death. Providentially, though, a rescue fleet appeared in the bay just in time to snatch the hard-pressed defenders from the narrow shore.

Atondo wanted to try again. After several months of refurbishing the expedition with other men and more supplies, he sailed again to California, this time farther north near present day Loreto. The tiny Spanish community was named San Bruno. It balanced on a thin blade of land overlooking the Gulf shore. To the west the massive bulk of La Gigantea blocked passage across the peninsula. San Bruno was also destined to failure after the scorching drought ruined crops and dried up hopes.

Kino came back to the mainland, having been outvoted by the leaders of the expedition who wanted to give up. But he was soon reassigned to the missions of Sonora by his religious superiors in Mexico. If he could not be in California, at least he would be close.

Problems with the Pima Indians who lived north of the line of Spanish colonies in Sonora drew attention in the late seventeenth century. A solution seemed to be the establishment of peaceful missions among them. Eusebio Kino, ex-cartographer of California, was thrust into their midst to initiate a whole new program of expansion and pacification. It was a tall task for one, forty-two year-old "blackrobe." He came to the village of Cosari in the Pimeria Alta in March, 1687. From that base he worked for the next twenty-four years opening new trails, building communities and converting the docile Indian people to Christianity (fig. 1).

Cosari huddled on the edge of the San Miguel River where it pinched through a narrow defile. With characteristic German industry Kino changed the course of the river to take advantage of its water and power. Within a few short years his mission of Dolores, as he renamed Cosari for a painting of Our Lady he had carried from Mexico, provided life sustaining crops of wheat, corn, fruit and cattle. From Dolores he mounted expeditions to the west and north where he found even larger concentrations of Piman Indians. They all asked for missionaries and Spanish aid.

Up to the time of Kino's coming the mission frontier had been stalled in the northwest of New Spain. Years and years of costly development had dulled the King's zeal for expansion. Even the "blackrobes" were less anxious to move into unknown lands. They reasoned that there was more than enough work to do in consolidating the already vast mission frontier. So Kino's views were not always the most popular, even among some of his fellow Jesuits in Sonora. Like any man he had his friends and supporters, and he had his enemies and detractors. The presence of Spaniards and missionaries in the Pimeria Alta (northern Sonora and southern Arizona) was so rare that Kino was nicknamed "El Cariblanco" by his detractors. Cariblanco was a derogatory term often heard in the Caribbean among native peoples. In this case the carping critics of Kino applied it to a zealous German missionary. "El Cariblanco" or "old whiteface" was the only one these Indians had ever seen! While that was an exaggeration, because other Spaniards and missionaries had penetrated the Piman lands, it expressed the distaste the frontier folk had for more expansion.

Kino showed little compassion for those who sought a comfortable, regulated social life. He saw the advantages of advanced technology and organization for the scattered peoples of the desert. He knew their hunger, their poverty, their fears. He knew their gentleness, their strength and their faith. Repeatedly he led expeditions to Indian settlements dotting the rivers and streams of the Sonoran Desert. At each place he left small herds of cows, horses, sheep and goats. He assigned more-skilled Indian cowhands and carpenters to build corrals, houses and churches. While others complained, "El Cariblanco" transformed life in the desert. Deep down, Kino's motives always had an element of concern for California. As he saw the Sonoran Desert come alive with agricultural produce, he schemed for ways to deliver the surplus to the "abandoned peoples" of the peninsula.

It is easy today to write about California as a peninsula, but Kino's age only knew of it as an island. The problem he had in building an agricultural empire in the Pimeria Alta was compounded by the need to deliver the produce to the natives in distant California. He tried building a boat from cottonwood and mesquite, but scoffing detractors prevailed and the wooden frame ended up as firewood. On one of his excursions into the north friendly Indians from the west asked him to visit them; as a present Kino was given a handful of attractive blue shells. Some days later he realized he had only seen abalone like this on the Pacific coast.

Inquiring about the shells, Kino suspected that there might be a land passage to California. He called an important conference at San Xavier del Bac, a mission always close to his heart. The evidence was cogent. There had to be a land passage to the mysterious and unconquered "island." By this time it had become urgent to find new ways to supply California because the Jesuits had followed Kino's urgings to reopen California as mission territory. In 1697 a fellow Italian Jesuit, Juan Maria Salvatierra, led a new and rather revolutionary effort to found a chain of missions on the "island." Salvatierra himself had caught Kino's enthusiasm for expansion and service. The missions he erected in California would succeed only if the mainland could sustain an ample supply line.

The turn of the eighteenth century came as Kino probed farther into the western deserts. He reached the confluence of the Gila and Colorado rivers. Undaunted by the swift and broad waters that drained the slopes of the great northern mountains and plateaus, he crossed to northern Baja California. From there he saw the sun rise over the Gulf as positive proof that California was not an island. But he could advance no more because time and missionary obligations forced a return before he could reach the "opposite coast." Yet Kino had proven to himself and others that California was indeed a peninsula and an overland supply was possible. Only Kino never realized there were few others like him who could accomplish as much as well.

For the first five years of the new century Kino stirred the Pimeria Alta into flurries of activity. The whole territory was being woven into a masterful defensive frontier against the Apache and a productive agricultural base to help the foundation of California. Only Kino did not foresee the temporary victory of his detractors. Although elegant, twin churches arose at Cocospera and Remedios, although Indians traveled safely and joyfully across hundreds of miles of desert, although the missions were surging toward success, scrupulous superiors in Mexico City choked the very life from the mission system. Legally owned properties were sold off; pack trains were outlawed; mission Indians were reduced to selling crude calendars to support their once proud communities. Expansion turned to contraction, and missionaries were ordered to stay home. It was a sad time for the whole frontier. In 1707 Kino



Figure 1. Kino's Pimería Alta.

was told to stop his expeditions. He did. Then, he went to work on the churches he had promised to build or rebuild. But the day of the cavalcades across the desert horizons had come to an end.

Then, almost twenty-four years to the day after Kino had first come to the tiny settlement of Magdalena in the Pimeria Alta, he was taken ill while celebrating a dedicatory Mass in the chapel of St. Francis Xavier. During the night he died. Agustin de Campos, the gruff but loyal missioner who had worked nearly two decades with Kino, buried him on the Gospel side of the chapel. The curtain drew closed on the dramatic life of Eusebio Francisco Kino.

But not really.

For more than two and a half centuries generations of native peoples who knew and remembered him through their children came in pilgrimage to his grave. "El Cariblanco" was fondly recalled even if the rank and file of Spanish and church authority ignored him. Time finally erased the traces of the chapel and Kino's grave within it. His memory lingered on in confused stories of the fading past, and it persisted through the devastating years of revolutions and persecutions.

Then in 1965, following a series of commemorations and celebrations in Kino's honor in the United States, the Mexican federal government ordered that his grave be found and a suitable memorial be erected to this "Hero of Mexico." Already the State of Arizona had chosen Kino to be its second pioneer figure in the National Hall of Statuary in Washington, D.C. It was past time Mexico recognized the persistent fame of this missionary "blackrobe." In May, 1966, a team of archaeologists announced the discovery of Kino's grave in front of the mayor's office in Magdalena, Sonora (fig. 2). It was a marvel of historical and archaeological method. And there was no doubt — Eusebio Francisco Kino still rested where he was laid by Campos.



Figure 2. Kino's remains at Magdalena de Kino, Sonora.

For four more years Kino's remains were covered by glass. Townspeople and itinerants came daily to lay fresh flowers on the grave, to light candles and to pray that the man who gave his life for the people of the Pimeria might help them. Finally, in 1970, Kino received the extraordinary tribute of having the town renamed Magdalena de Kino. A massive, tasteful colonial-style plaza was built around his humble tomb. It was a much belated honor for a man who sacrificed himself for the native peoples of this region. He was truly a pioneer padre. And the epithet of "El Cariblanco" spoken in scorn has now receded into the forgotten dust of archives. No words, no actions can ever take away from the memory of the great. "El Cariblanco" is forgotten; Padre Kino will be long, long remembered.