

Chapter 3

Life in Cuatro Ciénegas: A Historical Tour of the Coahuila Desert Between the Sixteenth and Ninetieth Centuries, Its People, and Their Relationship with the Environment



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3.1 Early Colonial Years

To understand the history of Cuatro Ciénegas, it is important to also understand what has happened around this exceptional place, and this is not possible without considering a large number of facts that originated this town. Now everyone considers this region as a special place, but people usually think about its natural richness, the flora, and the fauna. We believe that its history is also highly original, as you will see by going through the pages that follow. There are some questions that remain in the shadows and that will be revealed by linking the documented data with those from biology, ecology, chemistry, and other natural and human sciences.

Cuatro Ciénegas has been overlooked by historians, some of whom have taken refuge in generalities and isolated data, failing to understand its odd past, giving it an essential coherence to understand the present. Cuatro Ciénegas was considered by the Spanish conquerors and evangelizers as a strange region mainly because of its geographical location: the natural border that served as a gateway to the realm of the desert, since the early Spanish explorers came from an area abundant in water, the one that surrounds the Nadadores River. It is an unusual corridor that comes from Candela, passing through Monclova and which ends precisely in that huge group of lakes, lagoons, springs, marshes, ponds, and canals. Cuatro Ciénegas was an “aquatic world,” from which one passes almost suddenly to the desert. But the opposite can also be considered: the desert is the gateway to a world that begins in

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marshes, whose water, when running, transforms everything in its path until it irrigates Monclova, the capital of the Province of Nueva Extremadura de Coahuila.

It is a natural, but it is also social border. From the moment one confronts the old manuscripts, one comes across hundreds of desert societies related to the populations of the Nadadores River and, without a doubt, with those who occupied those enclaves, which the Jesuits named “Laguneros.” In the documents we find abundant information about the indigenous nations (bands or parties) that temporarily occupied or roamed areas of the Bolsón de Mapimí.

When talking about their inhabitants, one must leave behind that the common idea of linking the desert to the words deserted, abandoned, or forlorn, since thousands of indigenous people (divided into many societies) lived in that desert before the arrival of Europeans and during the colonial era (Griffen 1969).

To understand this history, we must first clarify that the foundation of Cuatro Ciénegas was part of a political, economic, and religious struggle. When the Kingdom of Nueva Vizcaya was created, as its name indicates, a power group was installed that had a domain project that was in the hands of the Basque Country. Its governors were Basque for a long time, passing the command to each other. They incorporated the Society of Jesus into their economic empire, which played a fundamental role in their history. If Nueva Vizcaya incorporated what is now southern Coahuila (Saltillo, Parras, San Pedro), it was because they needed to occupy spaces in competition with other provinces.

We know that the first evangelizer of this area was a Franciscan, and the first European discoverer and founder was a captain: both came from Mazapil, Nueva Galicia. Friar Pedro de Espinareda arrived in 1567 and Captain Francisco Cano in 1568, legally founded a first town and, probably, a mission, since there were baptizing Indians.¹ The Basques were disregarded both among the population and by the missionary and were replaced. It has been considered that the Jesuits created the first lagoon communities, which is incorrect, but in addition to the named friar, there was a foundation that bore the name of “Parras–San Francisco” 28 or 30 years before the arrival of the Jesuit priest Gerónimo Ramírez in 1594. Then we can observe a design of strategic appropriation: to leave out Nueva Galicia and the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans) and to appropriate their lands. However, although they eventually achieved their purpose, it was a complicated process.

Historiography traditionally accepts that the Jesuits founded the first missions in the area and began by visiting the two lagoons, Parras and Mayrán, which offered adequate resources for the survival of the Indian communities who were thinking of converting to Christianity: a land rich in natural elements of flora and fauna that would ensure the subsistence of their missions. At first the Jesuits came from Zacatecas to study the possibilities of the missions, then they arrived from the city

¹ Documents from the Archivo General de Indias de Sevilla (AGI). AGI, Patronato, Letter from Fray Pedro de Espinareda, 1567. AGI, Patronato, 22, 1, 1, Report of Captain Francisco Cano. AGI, Guadalajara, Cartas al rey, 51, 138, Letter from Doctor Alarcón, February 25, 1569. Fray Pedro de Espinareda was a Nahuatlato and was fluent in Cuachichil and Zacateco.

of Durango, capital of Nueva Vizcaya. They soon discovered that some Indians spoke Mexican, albeit “rudely,” but they learned that there were those who had Zacateco as their own language, others Tepehuano, and some Cuachichil. Within their strategic calculations, they brought Jesuits who spoke those languages to the area, hence they brought Father Juan Agustín de Espinosa, who knew Zacateco and others who spoke other languages. The fundamental element of a relationship, the language, was thus covered.

A Jesuit wrote his annual letter to Father General Claudio Aquaviva in Rome (which was obligatory), to inform him that before his arrival, there were some baptized natives but that they only had vague knowledge of the truths of the faith. It was a critical reference to the evangelizing stage of the Franciscans. But once they were installed in the Parras and Mayrán lagoons, they immediately planned their expansion. Several Jesuits mentioned to their superiors that they wanted to find five more missions, one of which bore the name of “las cuatro ciénegas.” And obviously they were not referring to four landforms but to an existing settlement.

Father Nicolás de Arnaya informed Father Provincial Francisco Vázquez that:

On the way back, I came by the river of the Nassas, passing through many settlements, of the *quales* and others of the Laguna, the fathers plan to make four or five towns; and the one will be of how many people we want; because, in a few leagues, there are valleys inhabited by innumerable Indians: all very eager, both to reduce themselves to population and to receive baptism. (Zubillaga 1976, pp. 686–87).²

Other letters followed, in which they specify that they will establish a mission in each of the cardinal points and to which they already attributed names. Now Father Francisco de Arista writes to the provincial that in addition to the town of Las Parras, there are five others where the company can be employed:

The fifth and last population of what was discovered is what they call the Quatro Ciénegas, about thirty leagues north of the other part of the Laguna. There, apart from the people from the valley itself, many of the people from the Herradura valley meet; and its mountain range starts from a valley they call Tlaxcala, and from 3 other rivers and mountains, with which a town of 2,000 residents can be formed (Zubillaga 1976, p. 688).

And we will have the auction of information and plans in a later letter, in which it was now the Province of Mexico that urged Father Aquaviva to allow the creation of that mission, which would be:

The 5th population that, for now, seems the last in what is discovered in this region, without what Our Lord offers, is the one that they say here of the 4 Ciénegas, the most copious and populated of all, with an extraordinary crowd. It is about 30 leagues from this place, tucked to the north, at the back of the Laguna. The people of the valley and mountains itself attend ally ultra (...) a great crowd of Indians. Which being effected thus, with the divine grace and help that V.R. We will be emboldened, at the present time those who eagerly ask for the doctrine and evangelical fee, more than 2,000 neighbors, all of them people of good capacity and peaceful natives, and what is more to feel, destitute of all human favor in the business of their souls (Zubillaga 1981, p. 243).

²Zubillaga rescued and paleographed thousands of annual letters sent by missionaries to Rome. The letter is from 1596.

When we read the letters that said what they wanted to communicate to their superiors, we can see with ease, that the first letter indicated “the one they called de las Quatro Ciénegas” and the last letter indicated “the one they say here de las 4 ciénegas”. That means that the place already existed and that they intended to expand that way because of the wonderful conditions that the place offered. Where would such a village have come from? Where did they extract data to imagine a mission of 2000 inhabitants? (see Fig. 3.1).

For what has to do with this story, it is necessary to say that there was a first foundation of Cuatro Ciénegas, in which both the Audiencia of Guadalajara and a Franciscan participated (i.e., neither the Nueva Vizcaya nor the Jesuits). We know the data because some friars dared to go to evangelize the Indians of New Mexico and the time passed without knowing anything about them. It is necessary to know that Fray Bernaldino Beltrán asked Durango, capital of Nueva Vizcaya, for help to go rescue his brothers. Antonio de Espejo, a rich man, risked his fortune for this company and hired 14 soldiers and got 115 horses and mules:

...and thus, having understood the holy zeal of the religious saying, and my intent, Captain Joan de Onteveros, mayor by His Majesty in the towns that call the Cuatro Ciénegas, which are in the said Government of Nueva Vizcaya on the part of East, seventy leagues from the said mines of Santa Bálbola, at the request of the said Fray Bernaldino, gave his command and commission, so that I with some soldiers could enter the said New Land, to bring and help the said religious and people who in she stayed.³

Again, an imprecise reference appears: “the towns they call the Cuatro Ciénegas.” Note that it is spoken in the plural. More important is the existence of a mayor who extended a permit. Now we can glimpse that a place dependent on Nueva Vizcaya had been created. Someone denied the existence of that mayor, but there would have been no possibility that Antonio de Espejo, an official of rank, lied in Spain about the position of mayor, a position that was dispensed and controlled by the provincial governor, by the viceroy, and even by the Seville bureaucracy. From this report sent to the king we know that in 1581 there were towns in Cuatro Ciénegas and a mayor. Something that differs from the information proposed by Canales Santos (2000, p. 61) stating that Captain Alberto del Canto founded Saltillo, Monterrey, Monclova, Cerralvo, and Cuatro Ciénegas in 1577.⁴

³“Report of the trip, which I, Antonio de Espejo, a citizen of Mexico City, a native of the city of Córdoba, made, with fourteen soldiers and a religious of the order of San Francisco to the provinces of New Mexico, whom I put by name, New Andalusia, in the contemplation of my homeland, at the end of the year 1582 one thousand and five hundred and eighty two.” In: *Colección de documentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento, conquista y colonización de las posesiones españolas en América y Oceanía*, taken for the most part, from the Real Archivo de Indias, Madrid, Printing of Manuel B. Quirós, 1864.

⁴Canales Santos does not cite a document that supports the data. Del Canto founded Saltillo in 1572, Ojos de Santa Lucía and Minas de la Trinidad in 1577, but not Cuatro Ciénegas. It is possible that Canales follows Alessio Robles (2001, p. 33), who quotes Luis de Carvajal’s statement before the Holy Office in which he affirmed that he commissioned Espejo. He states that Carvajal could have founded Cuatro Ciénegas “before 1585” but mentions Onteveros who served as Mayor of Cuatro Ciénegas in 1581.



Fig. 3.1 Map of North America. José de Urrutia, 1728–1800. Nicolás de Lafora, approx. 1730–1769 (Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, Louisiana: European Explorations and the Louisiana Purchase. Washington, DC. 20,540–4650)

However, something happened, because afterwards the place was not mentioned again. According to Canales Santos (2000), the mission stopped generating news in 1603. And, according to Rodolfo Escobedo, the bishop of Durango, Fray Gonzalo de Hermosillo, was not in Cuatro Ciénegas during his pastoral visit in 1610, no doubt because it no longer existed (Escobedo Díaz de León 2008). The statement is true, but it must be clarified that the Diocese of Durango did not yet exist: he was bishop of Guadalajara.

It is unavoidable to believe that an event of the utmost importance necessarily took place, so that this highly planned community suddenly ceased to exist. Perhaps we can deduce something that explains its abandonment. The two dates indicated in the previous paragraph, 1603 and 1610, are around an event that took place in 1606, in the area of the Nadadores River, in the community of Santa Rosa de Viterbo, where the friar Martin de Altamira was accompanied by four indigenous catechists from San Esteban de la Nueva Tlaxcala, who helped him preach the Gospel as many Tlaxcalans learned the languages of the nomads with some ease. Something happened that year, because there was an uprising of Quamocuan Indians that caused the murder of the priest, his four Tlaxcala collaborators, and some Indians from the region who had converted. One manuscript states that they ate those who had become Christians.⁵ Clearly, the indigenous people were against those whom they considered to be invaders of everything that represented them, and Nadadores is too close to Cuatro Ciénegas for its population to not be affected by this act of violence. From the absence of news in 1603 to the murder of Altamira in 1606 and the nonexistence of the mission in 1610, there must be a cause-and-effect relationship. Besides the reference to cannibalism, the sacrifice of Fray Martin de Altamira has been mentioned by not a few “historians,” introducing legends which they want to pass as facts. It is said that he was moved to Monterrey and buried on the slopes of Cerro de la Silla, where there is indeed a tomb. It is also stated that Captain Francisco de Urdiñola took his body to bury in Saltillo, something impossible since he went to punish the quamocuanes until a year later. And we must not forget that Urdiñola used the crime to his advantage: as punishment and under his care, he transferred the entire Quamocuan gang to his farm in San Francisco de los Patos, where they would serve as free labor. “Obviously, it was at this time that Urdiñola acquired land titles in Castaño, Boca de Tres Ríos and Cuatro Ciénegas” (Gerhardt 1996, p. 406).⁶

This is relevant information, because it was the beginning of the depopulation of the region both at the desert and at the rivers: the Spaniards will force Indian groups, such as chizos, bobosarigames, or salineros, to the Parral mines. They also moved to Parras, as entrusted, various desert societies, such as the hueyquezales and the cabezas, and the boboles and alazapas to Monterrey. By 1673, the governor of Nueva Vizcaya kidnapped all the women and children of an ethnic group as a form

⁵The quamocuanes were a band or party of the great Coahuileños ethnic group, who inhabited the Nadadores River and many other territories as far as southern Texas, northern Nuevo León, and much of Coahuila.

of control: this fact is what led to the creation of the missions of Coahuila by Father Juan Larios and his colleagues.

This long interruption in the data that we have so far about Cuatro Ciénegas and its influence suggests that its aboriginal inhabitants had to live years of restlessness, searching for solutions to their problems and exploring other spaces outside of those they had occupied for centuries. An example is the attack on the small mission of San Buenaventura, on the Nadadores River by desert Indians. They kidnapped two children, stole some objects, some beasts, oxen, farm implements, and, especially, the sacred vessels, priestly ornaments, a missal book as well as the appointment of the Indian governor of the town of Santa Rosa. Captain Retana would catch them with the loot in Chihuahua, 700 km from the place, with handwritten documents of the mission. Everything indicates that the Hispanic presence demolished indigenous societies in a short time (Valdés Dávila and Corona Páez 2002).

Sixty-seven years had to pass for the Spanish State to reestablish its control in the region using in part the abduction of women, since Fray Juan Larios was asked by the cabezas and salineros Indians to intercede with the governor to free their families. Larios walked from Monclova to Parral, passing through Cuatro Ciénegas, but failed before the governor, who refused to release them. Faced with failure, it occurred to him to ask the Audiencia of Guadalajara for permission to create four missions. The Audiencia supported him but went further: he created the Province of Nueva Extremadura de Coahuila, to which both Nueva Vizcaya and the Nuevo Reino de León opposed, since they had the Coagüila region almost as a reserve, where they could capture people who would serve as free labor, as can be appreciated from the following reference:

In 1673 the Franciscan Juan Larios arrived with the intention of founding self-sufficient missionary communities in Coahuila. The residents of Saltillo, led by their mayor, Agustín de Echeverz y Subiza, forced him to return. Echeverz, who had inherited Francisco de Urdiñola's vast estates, rightly saw the missions as a threat to his [free] labor endowment (Gerhardt 1996, p. 406).

We will always lack data and details to understand the dynamics between people who encountered different types of fatalities, but we believe that both Indians and missionaries had to negotiate their own symbolic patrimonies, finding that they were needed and that together they managed to overcome certain problems. And after 70 years of misery on the part of the aborigines and of yearnings for the moral demands of the preachers, or the policies of the ecclesiastical authorities, there was a respite.

Somehow, the Franciscans had to accept the imposed rules. Fray Juan Larios arrived with several priests from San Francisco along with a lay brother as the only human capital. The bishop imposed himself on the Diocese of Durango, which until then, without sufficient Christian personnel, he was the owner of an imaginary area. The Indian misfortune, without being aware of it, created the circumstances for a

⁶This appropriation and exploitation of the Indians also took place in Patos, Nieves, Bonanza, and other places.

strategic change. In effect, the alliance with a strange religion and its promoters started from convenience and experience.

Thus, the arrival of the friars to New Extremadura brought other forces whose reason was beneficial to the nomads, which can be verified by the immediate arrival of the bishop to establish his royal offices, expanding his enormous diocese, marking limits, borders, and obedience. In his first pastoral visit to a place far from his headquarters, Bishop Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz traveled from Guadalajara to Coahuila in 1676 and he did not forget to inform the Viceroy Bishop Fray Payo de Rivera that:

To the Catujanes I pointed out for their population the site of the Baluartes, about sixteen leagues distant from the Coahuila post, and distributed the lands and waters necessary for its conservation. To the salineros and cabezas in the place called de las Cuatro Ciénegas, at the same distance from Coahuila⁷ (see Fig. 3.2).

It is important to note that the word *coahuila* suffered many vicissitudes, because in the manuscripts it was used according to what the Spanish believed to hear. There are at least 18 spellings. But in the previous paragraph that name is the one that was initially given to what would be the capital: Monclova. This would bear the nickname San Francisco de Cuagüila, hence the bishop took the place as a term that indicated a reference. Cuatro Ciénegas was the same distance from Monclova as Candela. The first toward the west and the other toward the east. Even if the existence of this Candela-Cuatro Ciénegas corridor had already been pointed out

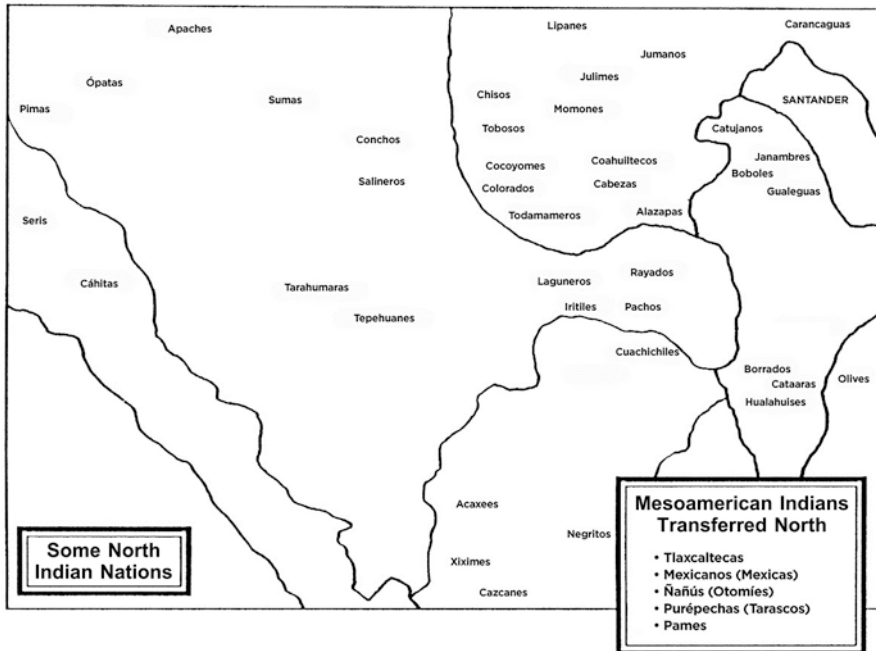


Fig. 3.2 Map prepared by Carlos Manuel Valdés

previously, what could be the reason behind considering this corridor? Perhaps it is not only the water, since between Monclova and Candela there is a good desert section, although there is a small river in that mission. The answer could be that nomads, that is, the indigenous people, were the ones who had those borders. This seems to be verifiable by the thousands of contacts between Indian gangs and in the alliances that they established between them to fight the Spanish. From the Bolsón de Mapimí, with its entrance gate that was Ciénegas, to Candela, confederations motivated by impiety would take place.

It does not seem out of place to warn that there was also external political force, not only for the Indians but also for the Spaniards (i.e., missionaries, bishop, Audiencia...) and this was that of the queen. Since 1675, when just the first foundational entry was made, the Queen of Spain wrote a letter encouraging these new conversions. And it is worth noting that other queens (consorts or queen mothers) will defend “my beloved Chichimeca subjects” and will forcefully lash out abuses, including those of the provincial governors. Something that is found in manuscripts almost always generated by the interventions of some bishops.

Four missions were founded, one “in the year 1674, by Fray Manuel de la Cruz, in a place called Cuatro Ciénegas with indios cabezas, contotores and bauzarigames, but he could not stay there for many years, because of the hostilities of the barbarians” (Alessio Robles 1938). These hostilities should be considered normal, since the raids of the slavers, i.e., the kidnapping of Indians by the Spaniards of Nueva Vizcaya and the Nuevo Reino de León, continued without rest. The indigenous people did nothing but fight for their ancestral territories and for their lives. There is important information, such as *respect* for the law: since the slavery of the Indians was prohibited since the reign of queen Isabel the Catholic, and was ratified by Carlos I and his son Felipe II, everyone knew that enslaving them was a serious crime. A Spaniard let the authorities know that men (adults) were respected but that the law did not mention women or boys, so they kidnapped these categories without the slightest fear of legal process.

Faced with the Indian onslaught, Bishop Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz himself, who had already been transferred to Puebla, recommended the implantation of military prisons:

“in the new conversions of Coahuila and the Cuatro Ciénegas, and in the latter it would be advisable to take special care in restraining its natives who are the Salineros, a very bellicose nation and who have committed many deaths and robberies, taking the mules and horses of this Kingdom, and by putting a presidio in the said Cuatro Ciénegas, the peace of this Kingdom and of a large part of Vizcaya will be assured and the population of all the real mines that His Illustrious Mines reports in the antecedents, with which His Majesty would have very grown fifths.”⁸

The bishop himself will pressure the viceroy to derive the support for farm and food implements that are granted to the cuachichiles of Mazapil and Saltillo, to the

⁷Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Cartas al rey del virrey Payo Enríquez de Ribera, México, 50, N 6.

creation of those presidios. Either way, the truth soon came to light: in Mazapil there was only one cuachichil and in Saltillo six, so some bureaucrat was taking advantage of those resources.

Had the Christianization of the Indians of the Bolsón de Mapimí and the Cuatro Ciénegas failed? Everything indicates that it did not. Brother Fray Manuel de la Cruz must have been very loved, since he would soon receive priestly ordination in Guadalajara, so that from now on, in addition to baptizing and marrying, which is permitted to a layman, he could officiate mass and confess. How do we know that it was successful? We have now found out because the reports of sacraments received by the indigenous people of that mission were found. The name of Fray Juan de León appears as a doctrinaire of the mission, since the Order of San Francisco did not favor the isolation of a friar, but rather assigned at least two preachers to each mission, but the presence of Fray Manuel was not clarified.

According to a list of all the indigenous people who received sacraments, signed by the custodian father, Fray Francisco Peñasco in 1681, and ratified by Miguel de San Miguel, protector of the Indians of the Pueblo de la Virgen de los Dolores, we know the results of those efforts. The mission had 532 Indians, while the town numbered just over a thousand inhabitants. Between the years 1676 and 1680, 249 were baptized and 35 were given a Christian burial, which indicates that there was no epidemic such as those that devastated villages and missions from time to time. We must add an interesting fact, which the Spanish San Miguel highlights. There were:

two prosecutors, Pedro, and Domingo, from the Babosarigames nation, who are very devoted to divine worship. They have settled their people in the form of the babosarigames, salineros, cabezas, contotores, conianes, babaimamares, and daimamares, deer feet, totonacas, colorados, cacalotes and tobosos nations that make a number of more than a thousand Indians.⁹

This report was signed by two authorities, one religious and one civil, and is very important, because despite the lying information transmitted to the viceroy and the king, they give concrete, precise, dated data, with the name of each of the people who received a sacrament. In particular, we know for the report that the mission had the capacity to shelter Indians from various nations. Let us remember that some of them were constantly accused of being barbarians, thieves, and murderers, including the tobosos, the salineros, and the cabezas.¹⁰

It is necessary to stress that the idea transmitted in several books and articles about the abandonment of Cuatro Ciénegas must be changed: it did not happen in those years or in the following years, as will be seen. If there was a detailed account of the sacraments imparted, it is proof that religious people and agents of the Spanish monarchy were there. The protector and his relatives are warned of these. The friars are named Fray Juan Macias, Fray Francisco Navarro, and Fray Juan de León, but it is clarified that Father Manuel de Santa Cruz previously attended the mission.

The copy of the sacramental books was delivered signed dated 1681, while mayor Joan de Onteveros was the head of the Cuatro Ciénegas commune in 1581,

⁸ AGI, Cartas al Rey, México, 50, N 6, 6 de marzo de 1677.

that is to say that 1000 years had passed. It is not clear whether it can be called a village, mission, Indian town, or presidio or to recognize that it was holding the name of each of these institutions through which the Spanish state was present. At least in 1681 we know that two corporations survived that were always linked: mission and town. Everything indicates that the town had already disappeared and that a presidio had not been built, until then.

A year later, one of the bishops who condemned the mistreatment of the Indians of northeastern New Spain, to whose combat he dedicated 8 or 9 years, would arrive on a pastoral visit: Juan de Santiago León and Garabito. As bishop of Guadalajara, he oversaw one of the largest dioceses in the world. He demanded a lot from the priests and the religious, from which he had many problems, but his main fight led him head-on against the slave owners and the *encomenderos*. It was up to him to install secularization, which consisted in the fact that a mission, once it had been successful and whose Christians persevered in the faith, had to become a parish. As a mission disappeared and became a parish, it came under the power of the bishop. Evidently, the Franciscans were furious. How, after so many years of sacrifice, were the diocesan priests now going to supply them? And knowing that the bishop was approaching Monclova, after touring the missions of Tamaulipas and Nuevo León, they organized the resistance to that transformation. The friars of Coahuila announced to the Indians that they would abandon the missions, which created a great problem among thousands of indigenous people from no less than 20 nations, both from the desert and from the entire *Nadadores* basin, to which Cuatro Ciénegas belonged.

The indigenous people knew that the missions were the best refuge to protect themselves from their persecutors. They saw the most feared threat coming upon them, because without friars they would be easy prey by slavers and other businessmen. They learned that the bishop would travel from Monterrey to Monclova, passing through Saltillo, and leaders from 18 nations rushed to this town to demand that he would not allow the missionaries to abandon them.

They walked or jogged 200 km to be there before him. When he arrived, they were already waiting for him and asked for an audience, which the bishop granted immediately and spoke with them, the translator involved:

The said chichimeco Indians said (...) to His Excellency they came to give him an account and news (...) of how all the religious missionaries of the four missions that are in the said province of Coahuila, had been summoned and were already together and congregated in the town and mission of San Francisco de Coahuila (...) to get out and abandon the said missions.¹¹

They had assimilated the ecclesiastical rules and knew that a bishop was the highest authority. It should be noted that 11 of them were gentiles and only 7 Christians, which means that without being all members of the church, they knew, from

⁹AGI, México, 52, N. 29, Cartas del Virrey Marqués de la Laguna. Information made in the mission of San Buenaventura de las Cuatro Ciénegas.

¹⁰A list of Christian Indians is inserted in a separate box.

experience, that missions were a protection and, in a certain sense, a right. The bishop expressed intelligent determinations in support of the caciques, which are preserved in the Saltillo archive.¹² Then they undertook the trip to Monclova together, where they were met with the incredible surprise that the friars locked themselves in the convent, refusing to dialogue with the bishop. It was too difficult a negotiation, due to the radical position of the friars. In the end they both had to give in: the friars would stay, but they were given the appointment of parish priests. The triumph was due to the indigenous people, and it benefited them in the first place. San Buenaventura de las Cuatro Ciénegas, which was the one that was most exposed due to its geographical position between the desert and the oasis, also won, but its achievement was short-lived, and its Indians would soon be seen making peace in Saltillo, whose mayor found that “pacification” as an unforeseen gift. Those who delivered were a thousand indigenous people from various nations, including the cabezas, the hueyquetzales, the cuechales, the coahuileños, and others.

Then, the mayor made a terrible decision by handing them all over to Mrs. Francisca de Valdez, a large landowner from Parras and a descendant of Urdiñola. For a short time, they endured the regime of oppression, and one fine night they secretly escaped and returned to the Franciscan missions, especially San Francisco and Santa Rosa. What had happened? We do not know, only that the yoke of forced labor weighed on them: they preferred the mission with its collective work obligations, the imposed Christian rites and obedience (Valdés Dávila and Carrillo Valdez 2019). The manuscript of Parral comments on it with offensive words:

And the forementioned cacique Lázaro as a ladino Indian does it in order to disturb the domestics and live in their freedom and wickedness and this is their purpose and not to be baptized and live quietly, because if they had another pretext they would have been in the town of Parras in the hacienda of Doña Francisca de Valdez, whose charge was the chief Esteban de los Hueyquetzales, where he descended from peace and was baptized and was in doctrine, having to eat and dress and left everything to return to his natural and bad life.¹³

It is hardly credible that the Spanish authorities did not understand that people preferred to be free, even if they were fatigued to find their food in the desert and the mountains, than to have a safe house and food in seclusion. In the years immediately following, information on Cuatro Ciénegas as a mission is lost. There is another type: as a place of passage for travelers and the military or as the headquarters of ranches and farms. A casual action will reveal something similar in terms of strategy

¹¹ Biblioteca Nacional de México, Reserved Fund, Franciscan Archive, 1680. See the supplementary document of the Archivo Municipal de Saltillo, PM, e32, 1680, Information at the request of Father Fray Francisco Peñasco, Commissioner of the new conversions of Coahuila.

¹² Let us remember that Saltillo did not belong to Nueva Extremadura or to the diocese of Guadalajara, both instances where these nations were located. It was not the first time that the mayor of Saltillo played the role of intermediary for problems outside his jurisdiction. In this case it was Mayor Diego de Valdés.

¹³ Archivo Histórico Municipal del Parral, Colonial Fund, A 21, 001.



Fig. 3.3 Map prepared by Carlos Manuel Valdés. Villages, towns, and missions during the colonia

but in the field of armed struggle. In a battle, the Spanish captivated one of the leaders: Domingo, from the Bobosarigame nation. When questioning him:

He confessed that he had been baptized in the mission of Cuatrociénegas, that he left his land with Captain Salvador, of the Colorado tribe, and with Captain Marcos, of the Odame nation with the intention of killing the Spaniards who traveled along the roads that they go from the Nuevo Reino de León, Saltillo and Parras to the reales de Zacatecas and Sombretete; that they killed a Spaniard in the port of San Juan and stole Patos's horse.¹⁴

It is necessary to return to the aforementioned about the town of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores and remember that one of its two prosecutors was precisely Domingo Bobosarigame and that his two colleagues, Salvador Colorado and Marcos Odame, received baptism, one in 1676 and the other in 1677. And Indians like these, whom they named apostates, for having deserted the faith, abounded in colonial Coahuila.¹⁵ Let us point out that the various leaders, Don Dieguillo Cuechal, Don Esteban Hueyquetzal, Cacique Lázaro, and many more, had their origin in the region that encompasses the desert and the rivers of the mission of Cuatro Ciénegas (see Fig. 3.3).

One last piece of information appears in 1692: the foundation carried out by Fray Martín Ponce in the Nadadores River of the mission of San Buenaventura de los

¹⁴The quote belongs to Portillo (1886b, pp. 183–218), and it refers to the trials ordered by Governor Alonso de León, pp. 183–218. It also appears in Alessio Robles (1938, p. 305).

¹⁵An apostate, as is known, was the one who abandoned the previously accepted religion. An apostate deserved the death penalty according to viceregal ordinances.

Colorados, which means that the mission of Cuatro Ciénegas had disappeared and that it replaced it without changing its name, only attributing it to a specific society, the colorados. Somehow, Bishop Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz and Fray Juan Larios had suspected it from the beginning.

Several years will pass with little or no information, except marginal, as is the following case: Juan Vázquez, Marquis of Casa Fuerte, viceroy of New Spain, ordered the exploration of the Río Grande region, which was already besieged by groups of indigenous people who arrived from the north, especially Apaches. The governor of Nueva Vizcaya appointed José de Berroterán, who was captain of the San Francisco de Conchos presidio, to take care of the matter. And the first thing he did was a trip of inspection and knowledge of the territory that was entrusted to him. The interesting thing is that he mapped out several routes in which he indicated specific data for each presidio, mission, or village in a large part of Coahuila and Texas, thanks to which we can have data from the year 1729.

This novel concern had not been born from an occurrence of the viceroy, but from the changes that had been implemented since the year 1700 and increasingly became more present in New Spain. It all started with the decline of the Spanish empire and the impoverishment of Castile. The Habsburg dynasty had reigned since Carlos I, and now, two centuries later, the Spanish crisis led to the imposition of a Bourbon king of French origin, Felipe V. From this, a series of reforms emerged in terms of tax control, the control of the territories, and the reorganization of the Navy, which came to affect the entire province of Coahuila and, in addition, Cuatro Ciénegas.

From here on the original Indians will be mentioned less and less and others that were not native much more frequently: apaches, lipans, comanches, caíguas, and others. It is about them that the chroniclers will write and not those referred before. Not that they no longer existed, but their number had rapidly decreased, either because of the slave raids, or because of the epidemics of cholera and smallpox, or because they were transferred to the south of Coahuila, to the estates of Nuevo León, to the mines from Zacatecas, or even to the Antillas (Montemayor Hernández 1990; Venegas Delgado and Valdés 2013).

From the Berroterán report, we must emphasize that one of their concerns was to repress horse robberies, assaults, and deaths carried out by indigenous people in many places, often very distant from each other. Now the aborigines were horsemen who could move quickly, since they brought spare horses so as not to tire them. Hence, it seems that Berroterán was interested in trivial data if you look at its importance, but that once grouped they represent a true state of war:

During his stay in the presidio and in the capital of Coahuila, Berroterán also held consultations and exchanged opinions with the governor and captains to be able to follow the trail of the Indians that he had lost in Cuatro Ciénegas; Although he did not obtain useful indications, he did obtain the loan of four Indians who were considered the most skilled spies (Rodríguez Sala 1999).

On several of its pages the names of the places of our interest appeared. Thus, for example, we know that in 1729 he was in Aguachila and “from that place Berroterán sent, again, in search of water and pastures, indigenous explorers on horseback, in the direction of the site named Cuatro Ciénegas” (Rodríguez Sala 1999 p. 49).

Berroterán needed to be aware of natural resources if he was to be successful in his assignment. He knew that all geography, in its smallest details, was known to the Indians and that, furthermore, they surpassed it because they knew how to use every plant that could serve as food.¹⁶

Based on his field explorations, always accompanied by indigenous people who guided him, Berroterán reaches somewhat defeatist conclusions. It was not one but several reports that he wrote, but that of 1748 seems to be, without a doubt, the clearest and richest in results. He explained that the Bolsón de Mapimí:

It cannot be inhabited or populated by christian rational, because the one who could have communicated this good to them, if there were anything populable, it would be by its watering holes, and these are at distances from each other from twenty to twenty-five and thirty leagues, and so short that he can maintain a neighbor in each one of them, with the short set of one hundred and fifty head of large cattle and horses, and the more interned in the mountains, varying their situations in different directions (Navarro García 1965, p. 80).

Knowing that Berroterán had military experience as a horseman and in the field, those statements are incredible. When it says that the Bolsón was not populated, it means that no sustainable population can be established, which contrasts with the experiences of its first inhabitants, the aborigines, who were always mentioned by thousands. However, people of the desert had managed to reproduce biologically and culturally for millennia. The very dissimilar system of conceiving the environment is evident between those who are heirs of Western culture and those who learned in its long duration to master the resources offered by the desert.

Let us take an example of your perceptions about a resource, water. José de Berroterán let it be known that:

Only in Acatita la Grande and the Charquerias from rain could a company of fifty soldiers be maintained at the time of these. The population of the bosom was the area from the Sierra de San Marcos de las Cuatro Ciénegas, to the Río Grande, to the east, at its intervals to those of Nadadores and Santa Rosa. And from here to the west everything was desert and no mountains had a name (Navarro García 1965, p. 80).

It is evident that Berroterán is only learning the results of two centuries of unequal struggle and murder. For these Spaniard settlers, the Indians were not the subject of history but beings at the service of those who dominated them. The paradigm changes the whole model, so people like Berroterán cannot understand that places that are inhospitable for them could have been populated by thousands of human beings who, otherwise, were tall, strong, and tireless. Berroterán knows what exists, without knowing what preceded it:

In 1744, the named Labor of Our Lady of Sorrows is the property conferred on Pedro Ignacio Valdivielso Espinal, fourth Marquis of Aguayo, thus this place is cited in an inventory of the belongings assigned to him; in another later inventory it is called San Juan de las Cuatro Ciénegas. (Peña Chávez 2013, p. 287)

¹⁶It is known that in the Chihuahuan Desert there are hundreds of edible plants (Valdés Dávila 1995).

With the reforms of the Bourbon kings, new relations between the monarch and his subjects began. The almost personalized epistolary treatment of Felipe II, his viceroys, and the bishops were put aside. Now the state appears for what it is: an entity that without doing so in an obvious way oppresses all those who are under its control, a control that appears in the form of a defined organization that is implanted in a territory, between human beings who inhabit it and that they are objects of an all-embracing power that is perceptible only by its effects – legislation, bureaucracy, a single and compulsory religion, a social division based on racial definitions.¹⁷

One of the institutions that an emperor, a monarch, or any dictator imposes from time to time is that of recourse to registration: How many are the subjects, what do they do, what characteristics do they have? Thus, the Bourbon kings imposed a large census that took place in the year 1777. Detailed results were obtained and preserved for most of the large and small populations. Some have not been found, but in the case of Cuatro Ciénegas, we have several registers of very different origin: there are some missions, a few farms, a presidio, and parishes. What matters in this study is that they reveal curious and interesting facts: registers are found in the magnificent Historical Archive of the Parish of Santiago in Monclova, including the number of those raised in haciendas and *rancherías* who fulfilled the sacraments. It is amazing that they documented recourse to the sacrament of confession, writing the names of each penitent. It is known who went to confession at the Hacienda de Sardinas, and it is clarified who took communion the next day, that is, who did or did not sin that night. Does not this show an excessive control system not only of the bodies, which were dominated through daily work, but also of their souls to the most subtle, the intimate?

We found a “Register of the workers of the Hacienda de Nuestra Señora de los Dolores de Cuatro Ciénegas, confession and conversion and toddlers that as perceived by their games, there are the number of 79 people of confession, communion and toddlers,” in which it is observed not only the recourse to the fulfillment of the commandments of the Church but (and also) the description of the race or caste of each adult: mulatto, Spanish, Indian, *lobo*, *albarazado*. The sacrament of penance serves the maintenance of the circumstances of power.

There are registers of subsequent years: 1757, 1758 (two), 1761, and others, but not always from the same hacienda or parish, which enriches the knowledge of the populations regarding their composition, inter-ethnic relations, or the number of children a family has.

¹⁷A monarchy (from the Greek monos: one; arqué: power). The Bourbon kings decided what was good, what was bad, what and when each one must do something, defining obedience and institutional submission.

Hacienda de Cuatro Siénegas, 1781

María de Torres, a free mulatto, widow, has a daughter and two toddler children.

Eugenio de Hortiz, a free mulatto, married to Gertrudis de Mata, a free mulatto: he has 3 toddler children.

Mexandro Valenzuela, married to María Francisca Segura, a free mulatto: he has a toddler daughter.

Estevan de Lerma, free mulatto, married to Juana Francisca de la Cruz, free mulatto.

Blas María Ruiz, free mulatto, married to María Jossefa de la Cruz, free mulatto.

Vicente de Luna, free mulatto, married to María Petra Álvarez, has 2 free mulattoes and 2 (?) Single.

Note: the census includes Monclova town register, hacienda de la Estancia, hacienda del Señor San Josef, Las Adjuntas ranch, San Vicente ranch, hacienda de Santa Gertrudis, San Buenaventura village, hacienda de San Diego de Sardinas, hacienda del Señor San José de las Encinas, hacienda de San Ignacio del Tapado, and hacienda de Cuatro Ciénegas. The total number of parishioners that make up the Ciénegas parish appears, and we note the *quality* of its inhabitants: 1410 Spaniards, 435 mestizos, 1249 mulatto, and 214 Indians, giving a total of 3308.

The concept of *quality* was applied to people to define their belonging to a racial or caste sector. Even the peninsular Spaniards were attributed a higher *quality* than that of the Spanish born in America.

Valdés Dávila CM, Martínez Loera S, et al. (2018/2019). Catálogo del Archivo Histórico Parroquial de Santiago, Vols. I–IV.

The Bourbon Reforms did not stop at a people count: the kings forced the inhabitants of America to pay taxes. The Census had to be complemented with a field audit that reflected reality. It means that all populations should be visited to make a count of the resources they had, not only the villages but each of their neighbors, which implied the use that was given to the land, water, products, and the trade of the same. For a large part of the North, an envoy of great experience was chosen. It is about Fray Juan Agustín de Morfi, son of Irish and Asturian, who joined the Franciscan order in Mexico and left many writings. His stay in Coahuila dates from 1777.

From Cuatro Ciénegas, he highlighted the most important resource: “The Nadadores river carries nine cubic rods of water in this part, it goes through hills higher than the rest of the plain that facilitates irrigation at low costs. He was born on the hacienda de Cuatrociénegas” (Morfi 1980). In his traveler notes, Morfi wrote down other things that should reveal to the viceroy the problems of each of the peoples and their causes. He recorded that:

A report was received from Captain Montero, stationed at Cuatro Ciénegas, in which he reported that six soldiers and a corporal from his company and detachment of Sardinias, who were escorting a pack of mules loaded with flour, met thirty apaches; that they attacked and killed two, taking the mules (Morfi 1980, p. 397).

In one sentence, he captured data that could be read from various senses: there is a hacienda, Sardinias, which produces corn, wheat, and cotton, which has several mills, hence the theft of the Indians is a problem that affects social peace when the same time as the commerce, the muleteer, the life of the workers.

Morfi was a keen observer, so much so that he raised issues that many others had never noticed. He said something interesting about Texas that could be applied to the Bolsón de Mapimí and Cuatro Ciénegas: “Nothing proves the imponderable abundance and fertility of these lands more effectively than the multitude of nations that inhabit them. The interior of the country, the coast and even the islands are full of people” (Curiel 2003).

From when the foundation of a mission was simply considered to be in the year 1597, it was already mentioned that in “las Cuatro Ciénegas” there were a multitude of Indians, as if to form a community of 2000, which coincides with Morfi’s idea that if there were so many Indians, it was because there were many resources to feed themselves. The terrible question we ask ourselves today is: why did these thousands of human beings become extinct in 300 years of Spanish and Mexican governments?

In these years, a stage begins in which two strategies will be developed: the fight against the North American Indians, whom everyone will call “the barbarians,” and the fight for spaces. It was a century of savagery, from one side to the other. The military will take an exceptional place in the construction of economic power since they hold the political and the monopoly of legitimate physical violence. It is not difficult to reveal that the families that were consolidated in that century that goes from 1791 to 1890 achieved it thanks to their double game. A registered case says that:

In Coahuila there was news of the entry of large groups of lipanes, lipiyanes and mezcaleiros. The governor reported on the activities of Captain Panocha and Poca Ropa, who seemed faithful. San Fernando de Austria and Cuatro Ciénegas suffered undoubted damage and therefore Teodoro de Croix decided to send half of the third company flying from Chihuahua to Coahuila. (Navarro García 1965, p. 346)

But it was not just about the two towns that are named there but about the entire province. Hence the army was deployed throughout the territory; 250 soldiers were installed, of which two positions of 50 men were assigned: from Saltillo to Monclova 100, fixed in Monclova 30, in Nadadores 30, in Sardinias 40, and in Cuatro Ciénegas 50 (Navarro García 1965, p. 355). How did the change come about? How did it go from the combat or submission of the nomads to the attack on the apaches, lipans, and others? The change was brutal. They were experienced soldiers, such as Don Ramón de Castro, from a noble family from Castilla La Vieja, who was appointed commander of the eastern provinces with the task of suppressing the Indian attacks:

He entered Coahuila through Monclova and went to Cuatro Ciénegas to recognize the ports and canyons of Santa Rosalía, Jara, San Marcos, Ciénegas, El Marqués and Menchaca, where the *mezcaleros* from Bolsón entered Saltillo, Nuevo León, Monclova, and finally through Sardines, Santa Gertrudis and San Buenaventura he arrived in the Santa Rosa Valley, ill, but having acquired the knowledge he believed necessary (Navarro García 1965, p. 483).

From that entry, he considered definitive that “the most populous part of the bosom was the area from the Sierra de San Marcos de las Cuatro Ciénegas, to the Río Grande, to the east, in its intervals to those of Nadadores and Santa Rosa. And from here to the west, everything was deserted, and no mountains had a nomination” (Navarro García 1965, p. 80). He found what Berroterán had discovered and reported to his superiors 67 years ago. And again, the difference between the original indigenous people and the Europeans and mestizos appears against a specific environment.

The Bourbon administration would soon institutionalize their dominance by creating fixed populations that would acquire interests, compelling them to defend their families, their possessions, and their horse, sheep, and cattle. The idea was to create villas in which each owner had a family heritage and that each community identified with a territory and a past. Hence, the institutions necessary to create identities, such as schools, were soon generated. But first they had to create the human nucleus.

In 1797, the governor of Coahuila, Antonio Cordero y Bustamante, visited Cuatro Ciénegas, “which found it inhabited, for which he believed it necessary for such a settlement to be legally formalized” (Peña Chávez 2013, p. 287). Another document reports the opposite, that Cuatro Ciénegas looked abandoned and only the vineyard was in good condition. Either way, the governor made the decision to formalize the existence of that population as a town and head of the municipality. He made a report and spread propaganda inviting families from Coahuila to go live in Cuatro Ciénegas, although he let it be known that he would carefully review the qualities of the candidates (Canales Santos 2000, p. 105). A chronicler at the time recorded the details about this new foundation: “this town was founded in the year 1800, by orders and instructions of the Governor of the Internal Provinces D. Pedro de Nava, addressed to the Governor of the Province of Coahuila D. Antonio Cordero” (Portillo 1886a, p. 485). The mention refers to an authority that had a broader vision and saw the problems of Coahuila as much as those of Chihuahua, Nuevo León, or Texas. Pedro de Nava considered Cuatro Ciénegas as the enclave that could unite parts of the internal provinces.

When creating the municipality, authorities had to be appointed: President Jesús Carranza, first councilor Lázaro Maldonado, second councilor Alvino Morales, third councilor Cayetano Arambírez, and fourth councilor José María Salinas Arreola. It was found that there were three physicians, two schools for boys and two for girls, an inn, a priest, a temple, and ten springs. At first, 11 heads of household were registered, which would increase to 17. The temple of San José de las Cuatro Ciénegas was built, giving the earthly father of Christ the invocation.

Very soon the bureaucrats and the military would cease to have the prerogative of information. Periodical publications (newspapers, weeklies, monthly magazines) began to arrive, attracting the attention of neighbors. News came of events in Europe, even Constantinople or Russia: the gossip of royalty was read but also the problems themselves. Some of the front page columns are noted:

El Monitor Republicano, February 27, 1852: “The newspaper *El Ensayo Republicano* that appears in Saltillo, Coahuila, reports on the defense plan against the barbarians that is being prepared by the commissioners of the states. The collegiate states are expected to give prompt approval.”

El Monitor Republicano, March 1, 1852, San Buenaventura, Coahuila. “The residents of this place presented the government with five hairs and a live Indian, after a meeting between the neighbors and the barbarian Indians.”

El Monitor Republicano, July 10, 1852, Villa de Ciénegas, Monclova, El Pozo. “There are two pieces of news that come from the newspaper *Ensayo Republicano*, in which there are reports of murders committed by the Indians; one in the person of Mr. Jesús Rodríguez and the other in a family. The president of the city council, D. J.M. del Valle issued orders to all the rancherías for a force of 25 residents to persecute the Indians.”

El Universal, July 10, 1852, Saltillo, Villa de Ciénegas, Monclova. “From *Ensayo Republicano* of Saltillo a piece of news is published that describes the way in which Mr. Jesús Rodríguez was assassinated by a group of barbarian Indians.”

Rojas Rabiela T, Ramos JL et al. (1987) *El indio en la prensa nacional mexicana del siglo XIX: catálogo de noticias*. Vols. 1–3, CIESAS, Mexico.

El Coahuilense, March 16, 1868. Antonio Garza gave a verbal report that the barbarian Indians had raised 40-odd mule beasts from El Pozo, two leagues distant from the town of Cuatro Ciénegas, which belonged to Jesús Carranza. A party of ten men left, but they did not catch up with the Indians.

El Coahuilense, March 20, 1868. The presidency of the Sacramento City Council to the Secretary of the Government of the State of Coahuila, reveals the way in which the barbarian Indians have robbed and attacked various people in different parts of the town.¹⁸

¹⁸The newspaper library of the Archivo Municipal de Saltillo is under the care of Ernesto Terry Carrillo.

The “barbarians” of the north, on the one hand, and the two foreign invasions, on the other, severely affected Cuatro Ciénegas. The sufferings were enormous, but not exclusive to this town: the Cieneguenses suffered just like the residents of San Fernando de Austria, Santa Rosa (Múzquiz), or Peyotes. Lacking support from the center of the country, the villages organized to stop the attacks from the northern nomads, defending their families. There were many parents who traveled to Texas or Kansas in search of their children or women kidnapped by the American Indians and openly sold in a “Casa de Trato”; a father paid 50 pesos and a horse for his own son. The people of Coahuila had to organize armed resistance, and they were very efficient. Neither the Mexican government nor the US military did anything to control systematic robbery and kidnappings.

It is important to rescue the opinion of an American who arrived in Coahuila with the invading troops in 1846, the surveyor George W. Hughes, who was stationed in Monclova and was forced to travel to Cuatro Ciénegas. He praises the people of Ciénegas: “the town of Ciénegas has, according to the latest census, 1,428 inhabitants (...) Its inhabitants are distinguished by being industrious, sober and deeply religious people. In politics, unlike the people of Monclova, they are mostly federalists and enemies of the current government of Mexico. His hospitality is proverbial” (Villarreal Lozano 2007, p. 30).¹⁹

Perhaps for the reasons that Hughes gave about their complaints against the central government, the powerful families of Coahuila, among them the Carranza, Madero, Garza, Galán, Salinas, and others, supported the annexation of Coahuila to the state of Nuevo León proposed and established by the dictator Santiago Vidaurri. Voluminous correspondence between Vidaurri and Jesús Carranza is preserved, including a letter in which Vidaurri, wanting to solve the Apache-Comanche problem, proposed to destroy Cuatro Ciénegas pools. He sent Carranza some cans of poison with the order to pour it into the desert watering holes, to see “if with the fear of dying just by drinking water, we can banish those beasts with human figures.”²⁰ Don Jesús Carranza did not obey the orders, since he himself was a rancher and hunter and knew that in addition to harming the Indians, he would harm the inhabitants of his town, as well as other animals without a human figure.

Clashes also arose between municipal and ecclesiastical authorities. The influence of Juarista politics was felt, and the Reform Laws of 1857 were radically adopted from Cuatro Ciénegas to Monclova. Cemeteries were taken away from parishes, families were forced to take newborns to the Civil Registry before baptizing them, a mayor prohibited the ringing of bells, arguing that some citizens might not be believers, which would upset them; in short, things were conducted to subtleties

¹⁹ Cited and translated by Javier Villarreal Lozano.

²⁰ The letter is in the Archivo Histórico del Estado de Nuevo León. The Vidaurri signature and the recipient is Jesús Carranza. The historian José Luis García Valero communicated it to us.

and mediocrities. For its part, the church tried to survive these attacks, although with no few difficulties. Very soon the neighbors had forgotten that when the Independence of Mexico was sworn in Ciénegas, the one who took the oath to all its inhabitants was the priest.

As a conclusion, we can say that events described above are without doubt important and enlightening making justice to the fame of Cuatro Ciénegas for its natural rarity and global importance. Topics and characters dealt with deserve more biographical, social, cultural, and anthropological studies. But what has been discovered so far is a window that reveals a long, complicated, and splendid past (see Figs. 3.4 and 3.5).



Fig. 3.4 Field day at Molino del Rey. Cuatro Ciénegas, June 21, 1899. Donated by Eloísa Zarza de Cantú (Archivo Municipal de Saltillo, Fototeca, F, c 1.1, p 2, f 2)



Fig. 3.5 Walkers during a picnic in Molino del Rey. Cuatro Ciénegas, June 21, 1899. Donated by Eloísa Zarza de Cantú (Archivo Municipal de Saltillo, Fototeca, F, c 13.1, p 6, f 6)

Information made in the Mission of San Buenaventura de las Cuatro Ciénegas

In the town of San Buenaventura de las Cuatro Ciénegas, jurisdiction of the province of Coahuila, on the 14th day of the month of January, 1600 and 81 years, Captain Miguel de San Miguel, protective captain of said town by His Majesty, in pursuance of what was requested by the custodial father Fray Francisco Peñasco, which consists of the request of four of the current, I came to said position, and said Custodian father through Father Fray Juan de León, doctrinal of the mission, presented the books of her congregation of baptisms, marriages, and burials, of which to certify which items that are settled in them and are as follows:

In the year of 1600 and 76 this mission was founded and on April 20 of that year the following were baptized and put the holy oils on: Diego, Lucas, Bernardino, Marcos, María, Jacinto, Bernabé, Josepha, Marcos, Isabel, Diego, Ana, Isabel, Teodora, Lázaro, Marcos, Cecilia, Santiago, Juan, Francisco, Manuel, Esteban, Antonio, María, Teodora, Cristina, Verónica, Marcos, Juan, Cristóbal, Pedro, Antonia, Francisco, Catalina, Isabel, Juana, Luisa, Ventura, Lorenzo, Andrés, Esteban, Fabián and Santiago.

[And so on, many other names of baptized, married and buried for several years are named].

Archivo General de Indias, México, 52, N. 29, Cartas del Virrey Marqués de la Laguna al Rey.

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