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Mexico City and Puebla, detail of A. Ysarti, *Provincia d[e] S. Diego de Mexico en la nueva Espana . . .*, ca. 1682

Letters Home: Correspondence from Spanish colonists in Mexico City and Puebla to relatives in Spain, 1558-1589

EXCERPTS

Antonio Mateos, a farmer in Puebla, to his wife in Spain, 1558

Very longed-for lady wife:

About a year and a half ago I wrote you greatly desiring to know about you and the health of yourself and my son Antón Mateos, and also about my sisters and your brother and mine Antón Pérez, but I have never had a letter or reply since you wrote when I sent you money by Juan de Ocampo. . . . With the desire to prepare for your arrival, I went to the valley of Atlixco, where they grow two crops of wheat a year, one irrigated and the other watered by rainfall; I thought that we could be there the rest of our lives. I was a farmer for a year in company with another farmer there; for the future I had found lands and bought four pair of oxen and everything necessary for our livelihood, since the land is the most luxuriant, and plenteous and abundant in grain, that there is in all New Spain. But after I got your letter saying you weren't coming, nor was it your intention to come here, I decided to sell the oxen and all the equipment. . . .

I will not give a long account of the things of this land. Food provisions are cheap here, and things from Spain are expensive. I charge you not to take your son and mine Antonio Mateos out of school, but let him always learn and know more, and that way you will be

doing the best thing for you and me. Give my greetings to my sisters and to your brother and mine and to my nephews, and also to all of your cousins and relatives and neighbors, and greet everyone who asks for me. I haven't heard from my cousins for four years and nine months; they left Mexico City and went I don't know where, nor do I know if they are alive or dead. No more, but may our Lord keep you in his hand for me. . .

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Grain fields, detail of *Provincia d[e] S. Diego de Mexico*, ca. 1682

Andrés García, *tratante* (dealer) in Mexico City, to his nephew in New Castile, Spain, 10 Feb. 1571

Dear nephew:

In other letters I have written you, telling you where I am and how things are going with me, and I will keep doing the same until I should see a letter from you, as I greatly desire. After leaving you and our kinfolk, I went through many different hardships. As you saw, I came in the ship of Felipe Boquin, and in Veracruz, which is the port of this land of New Spain, he sold off everything I owned to get forty ducats that I owed him. I arrived on the point of dying, and might well have died in fact, if it weren't for a woman called Inés Núñez, who is of dark skin; she made me very comfortable, and I owe her more than my very mother. If God should bring you here safely, try to go to her house, because I have already told her about you.

Nephew, I live in Mexico City in the *tianguiz* of San Juan, among the shops of Tegada. I deal in Campeche wood and cotton blankets and wax, and I also have a certain business in cacao in Soconusco. But now, nephew, I am advanced in years and can no longer take care of all this. I wish, if it please God, that you would come to this land, as I have written you in other letters, so that I could rest and you would remain in the business.

I am married here to a woman very much to my taste. And though there in Spain it might shock you that I have married an Indian woman, here one loses nothing of his honor, because the Indians are a nation held in much esteem. And besides, I can tell you that in the ten years that we have been married we have had no children, praised be our Lord. And she is after me more every day, every since I told her that I have a nephew whom I raised from infancy and love as if he were my son; she is of the opinion that if God our Lord brings you to this land, we should leave you our property, what we have, as to a legitimate son and heir, because after the end of our days we want to have someone here to do good for our souls. . . .

Nephew, I entreat you again to come, because it is a matter of great importance to you; don't imagine remote regions far from your native land, or the hardships that are usually met on the way, but rather the ease you will have here. And if you do make this change, the merchant Alonso Moreno in Seville will provide well for you, if it is for the purpose of coming here, because I spoke to him when he left here, and I've written him about it too, and I know he will outfit you very well. . . .

Martín Fernández Cubero, cloth trader in Puebla, to his nephew in Spain, 21 March 1572

Nephew:

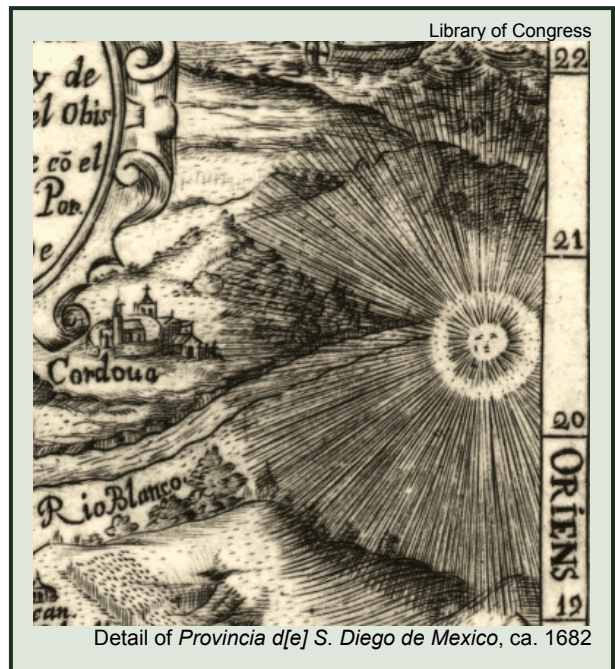
Many times I've written you telling of my life and the way in which, since coming to this country, I have managed this business and commerce and earned a living. Really, as this is a

rich land and food is quite cheap, and I have continually lived alone, I have earned a great deal, as those gentlemen who have left here can very well tell you, having seen it with their own eyes, especially Mr Alonso Hernández and Mr Alonso de Rivas, the one from Brihuega. We used to go around together while they were here and were very great friends, all being from the same part of the country; at the time when each one of them left this land, it was hard for us all to part from one another. . . .

When Mr Alonso de Rivas left this land I would have liked to go with him if I could, and he wanted it even more than I did. But since I had most of my assets tied up in sales on credit, I couldn't pull away. Yet I would have come off much better if I had left because, as I am old and loaded down with years, one day coming along the road I fell while dismounting from my horse and broke a leg. That fall cost me twice as much



as I would have spent if I had gone along with him; I would have considered well spent the half of my property that I would have left here, if I had known all that was going to happen. It must be my sins, but I'm not always able to get about now, and if a man doesn't have someone to take his affairs to heart and look after his property, everything goes badly. The time I was in bed cost me more in thefts and embezzlements that I will never find out about, which would not have happened if I had had one of you to guard my property; I need a relative here, and I would make something of him. I have been so unhappy that not one of you cowards, even having the support here that you have in me, should have had the courage to risk coming here to see me and help me enjoy my estate. I have written about it many times, as you well know; I importuned your father, and he would never make the arrangements. Why, there are others who have the courage without having any support here, who make the fortunes they can without owing anyone anything, except the favor they get for being from that part of the country. So, nephew, I beg you for the love of God, since you didn't want to when you were young, then come here now with your wife and children (you say you have two), for by God my only desire is to see people of mine in this land, in order to favor and aid them with my assets and have someone to look after me now in my old age when I need consolation more than ever, and through the will of God I lack anyone else to give it to me. Though what I have in the business is worth more than 20,000 pesos, it gives me no happiness at all,



since I have no children or heirs to leave it to. Therefore, nephew, you will give me the greatest happiness if you will come here with me; I have no one to give all this to but you, and if you do your part and come, I will do mine. As long as I live I will not leave you, because I desire nothing but to have you with me, and after the end of my days I will leave you what I have, since I have earned it for you, and if God gives you good fortune, this is what I want. But if you don't come now when there is opportunity, and if perhaps our Lord sees fit to take me, someday you will be sorry, and you will want to and not be able to. So I will say no more. . . .

Fray Juan de Mora, Augustinian priest in Mexico City, to his brothers in Spain, 29 March 1574

Gentlemen and very beloved brothers:

May our good God every dwell in your spirits and give you the health, grace and peace that I desire for you and all your families and households. Since for two years now I have not seen a letter from you in the ships and fleets that have come from Spain, I have felt some worry and care about your health and lives, so much so that I have begun to presume that there must be no one left there who remembers me. I would be greatly pleased to know that one of you is still alive, and so I am moved to write this letter, to make it known that the Lord is still pleased to grant me the health I have today. True, I am kept very busy,

since I occupy a chair of holy scripture and preach constantly, but even with all this I am, glory to God, well, and I am established here in Mexico City. If one of my nephews were man enough to want to come here and see me, and had the spirit and strength to leave those little huts they have there, I would be very glad to have him, because I no longer believe the time will come when I can return home, unless God ordains something unforeseen. Let him who should want to come understand that he must be a man who can assert himself on his own, by his own good industry and diligence, as many others do here and make their fortunes. For my part I would do what I could to

aid him and recommend him here, if he came as a man of good repute. And if he should want to bring some capital to begin with, let him invest it in some goods to be shipped with him, on the advice of some good merchant of Seville, or in some bibles that were recently printed in Salamanca, called bibles of Ruperto Estephano, and others that they call bibles of Isidoro. Of course I will see that they find a market here, and the amount invested in them will be doubled. And if there is much linen available of the good homespun that is made there in that area, then a profit could be made from that too, and it would be a good beginning, because some who begin here later make fortunes, through their good industry. But those who come have to be men and not donkeys. I would want whoever comes at least to know reading, writing and counting, and be able to



answer very faithfully for anything entrusted to him; a person like that will be greatly esteemed in this land, as anywhere. . . .

Alonso Ortiz, a tanner in Mexico City, to his wife in Zafra, Extremadura, Spain, ca. 1574-1575

Milady:

This will be to give you an account of what is happening here and how I am doing up to the day this letter is dated. For about a year now I have been in good health and working at my trade, though I had few Indian helpers. I couldn't find any who were trained, since the other tanners had them, and it was not for me to take them away from them. In this year I must have made 500 pesos profit, and if I said 600 I wouldn't be lying; it's about the same as 500 ducats of Castile. But I no longer have to take off my shoes to work, because now I have eight Indians who work steadily, and a black belonging to my partner who

aids me very well, and all I do is give instructions, buy, and sell. That is enough work, and indeed it is not little, though it seems little for me; actually I don't want to work at more than supervision so I won't get some sickness that would be the end of me, because great is my desire to see you again.

. . . my partner has decided to send for you, and is sending you 150 pesos just for your sustenance, and the rest can be paid when you get here. You will find this money in Seville in the possession of a councilman there who is the partner of Alonso Ramos, a merchant here in Mexico City. . . .

Sebastián de Pliego, a troubadour in Puebla, to his wife in Granada, Spain, March 1581

Very desired and beloved wife:

The present letter is to let you know that, praise God, I am in good health, with much desire to see you. In the dispatch-boat I sent you a letter as soon as I arrived here in the city of Los Angeles [Puebla], telling you what to do. First, with the aid of God and his blessed mother, when you see this, sell everything you have there, the property as well as what is in the house, except for usable linen, and buy all the linen you can to bring along, and some hanks of flax to be used for the house, God willing, and a bag of rosemary and

lavender. Bring the paintings too, because here they have pictures of a different kind. Consider that you are to come with my brother and yours, and you will need everything. . . .

When you arrive in Seville go to the house of Francisco Gomez, or to the house of his brother-in-law Alonso Rodriguez de Valencia. Be sure that you have your identification as my wife and children, so that they will give you what you need when you get there. Don't take a cabin or a stateroom, but the common space like the rest, and

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Detail of *Provincia d[e] S. Diego de Mexico*, ca. 1682

remember that children in arms don't have to pay for passage. . . .

Do buy yourself a good dress skirt of blue woolen of Baeza with its trimmings, and clogs for the girls, and buy for me a doublet of Dutch linen and some knitted stockings. . . .

In the name of allpowerful God
One and three, my treasure,
I will serenade you now,

To give you present pleasure.
Mari Díaz is your name,
For me there is no other such.
I will give you a ring of gold,
A metal worth very much.

Lady for whom I long,
Woman of my heart,
How was this treason planned,
That you should stay alone so long
In such an unpromising land?

My nights and days are spent
With but a single thought;
I know well you'll come for me
Where I by God was brought,
Because I pray with such intent.

This land I'm in is so
That no one lacks to eat,
And I don't lie, my sweet,
Because wherever I go
At table I quickly take my seat. . . .

I can't live without you. So for the love of
God, come, now that everything is so well
arranged. . . .

Maria de Caranza, wife of a textile mill owner in Puebla, to her brother in Spain, 2 October 1589

Desired and beloved brother of my heart:

I have never had a reply to the many letters I have written you, except one, and it gave me great joy to know of the health of yourself and my sister-in-law and my nephews, whom I hope our Lord someday lets me see, as I desire. My husband Diego Sánchez Guadalupe was no less happy than I, though for him as well as for me, after our having so desired it, and having put so much into sending to call you here, it would be a greater happiness to see you; yet you want to stay there in that poverty and need which people suffer in Spain. I ask you for the love of God to spare me such pain from your absence, and yourself such necessity, when I have the means to give you relief. Do be sure to come quickly now, and don't make your children endure hunger and necessity. I would have sent money for your trip, but since I have had no reply to my letters, I didn't dare. Go to Ronda and collect the rent from my houses, and if you wish to, mortgage them and take four or

five years' income in advance; I leave it to your discretion. And invest all except what you need for travel in fine cloths, in Rouen and Dutch linens; be sure you do it yourself, and don't trust it to others.

Be aware that anyone who brings children must come very well prepared; six hundredweight of hardtack will be enough, but better have over that than under, and make it yourself, since you know how. And buy four cured hams from Ronda, and four cheeses; twelve pounds of rice; chickpeas and beans, rather too much than too little; all the spices; vinegar and olive oil, four jugs of each; jerked beef and mutton, plenty of it and well dressed; and as much linen and woolen clothing for you to wear as you can bring, because here it is very expensive.

Do everything in your power to bring along with you two masters of weaving coarse woolens and carding, for they will profit us greatly, and also a candlemaker, who should be an examined

journeyman and good at his trade. Buy their provisions and make a contract with them from the day they sail, and I will fulfill whatever you agree to; I will pay their passage and any debts they have when they arrive. . . .

Tell the sister of my soul to consider this letter hers: how is it that her heart doesn't melt like mine for us to see each other? I understand that she is the reason you haven't come, yet she is the one who loses and has lost in not enjoying a land where food is plenteous and she can give me

a good old age. I ask her, since it is in her own favor, to come quickly and make my old age happy with her arrival and that of my longed-for nephews.

. . . Diego Sánchez Guadalupe is not writing because he is tired of sending letters and peevish that you don't answer, so he only gave permission for me to write. Maybe I will have more luck that he has had. I am sorry that so much is necessary for your own redemption.

