



The Jar of Severed Hands: Spanish Deportation of Apache Prisoners of War, 1770–1810

Mark Santiago

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More than two centuries after the Coronado Expedition first set foot in the region, the northern frontier of New Spain in the late 1770s was still under attack by Apache raiders. Mark Santiago's gripping account of Spanish efforts to subdue the Apaches illuminates larger cultural and political issues in the colonial period of the Southwest and northern Mexico. To persuade the Apaches to abandon their homelands and accept Christian "civilization," Spanish officials employed both the mailed fist of continuous war and the velvet glove of the reservation system. "Hostiles" captured by the Spanish would be deported, while Apaches who agreed to live in peace near the Spanish presidios would receive support. Santiago's history of the deportation policy includes vivid descriptions of *colleras*, the chain gangs of Apache prisoners of war bound together for the two-month journey by mule and on foot from the northern frontier to Mexico City. The book's arresting title, *The Jar of Severed Hands*, comes from a 1792 report documenting a desperate break for freedom made by a group of Apache prisoners. After subduing the prisoners and killing twelve Apache men, the Spanish soldiers verified the attempted breakout by amputating the left hands of the dead and preserving them in a jar for display to their superiors.

Santiago's nuanced analysis of deportation policy credits both the Apaches' ability to exploit the Spanish government's dual approach and the growing awareness on the Spaniards' part that the peoples they referred to as Apaches were a disparate and complex assortment of tribes that could not easily be subjugated. *The Jar of Severed Hands* deepens our understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between Indian tribes and colonial powers in the Southwest borderlands.



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