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## Why Settle the Lands of the Seno Mexicano?

Armando C. Alonzo  
*Texas A & M University - College Station*

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### Key Developments that influenced the history of New Spain's Northern Frontier: Spain's Imperial Perspective

1. The British took over Jamaica from Spain in 1650. This was seen as a threat to the New Spain's northern frontier.
2. Arrival of La Salle in Texas in 1680s led Spain to occupy Texas first in the 1690s and then again in 1716.
3. Native Americans were belligerent and attacked settlers in Nuevo León.
4. The coastal lands from Tampico to Texas were unsettled, home to warlike Native Americans groups. Also, the British could sail to the coast, drive inland, and march into the rich mining country.
5. As these concerns grew, the king and the viceroy agreed that the Seno Mexicano must be occupied, settled by Spaniards, and the Natives were to be pacified.
6. Candidates vied for selection of leader to colonize the new lands. In 1746, Col. José de Escandón was selected to lead the enterprise.
7. Selection on the basis of his military experience and wealth. The Crown was not willing to pay for all the costs.
8. The new plan focused on pobladores and not on missions and presidios, two of the most important institutions in New Spain's policy for control of new territories and Native People.

This is how the Viceroy Primer Conde de Revillagigedo, outlined the steps taken to the final selection of Escandón. He said that there had been several proposals and that in a real cedula of July 10, 1739, the king "ordered that a junta be formed here [in Mexico] with the assistance of the then viceroy, with some of oidores of this Real Audiencia and other persons knowledgeable about the land, Indians, and the corresponding means and costs necessary to maintain that which is pacified, and the achievement that God be known and adored by these Indians, [and] that with understanding and prudent agreement the same Excellency elect the most apt person for the expedition [to the Seno Mexicano], and that he be given the necessary help and assistance."

He then added that Escandón had performed a valuable commission in the pacification of the Sierra Gorda, and that he had received Escandón's autos testifying to what he had done. That the Sr. Marques de Altamira, now deceased, and auditor general de la guerra, had assessed those autos, and he consulted with me that I designate and charge Escandón with the reconnaissance of the coast of the Seno Mexicano; and being this matter so forgotten but useful to the service of God, of the king and of the public matter, and the time had come to give God not one but innumerable souls of the very many barbaric nations (tribes or groups), and to remove the burdens on the lives, honor, haciendas, and assets of those vecinos and jurisdictions ...."

Source: Instruccion del Conde de Rivillagigedo al Marques de las Amarillas Sobre lo Ocurrido en El Nuevo Santander y Su Pacificacion Por el Conde de Sierra Gorda in **Instrucciones y Memorias**

**de los Virreyes NovoHispanos**, Ramiro Navarro de Anda, comp., Mexico, 1991, v 2, 838-'39.  
The instruction is dated October 2, 1755.