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Disparatario del suroeste 1 (in English)

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Disparatario del suroeste 1
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This paper, and others which I hope will follow, contains occasional notes concerning words or phrases that have caused some considerable trouble among scholars of the Southwest through inaccurate translation or failure to understand their meaning.

1. “**matadillos en los encuentros**”: Vicente de Zaldívar in 1598, observes, concerning the dogs used by plains Indians to pull travois, that they have ‘sores on their (shoulder) joints’ (cf. Hammond and Rey 1953, 1:401, who give the reasonable version “with sores under the harness”; cf. Craddock and Polt 1999:29, 34 “with sores on their shoulders”).

In this instance, it was the great Herbert E. Bolton who started the trouble, with a dramatic misrendering of the original (1916:227):

“It is a sight worth seeing and very laughable to see them traveling, the ends of the poles dragging on the ground, nearly all of them **snarling in their encounters**, traveling one after another on their journey.

Note 2. This is an excellent description of the *travois*.”

The allegedly quarrelsome beasts were taken up by Alfred B. Thomas (1935:7):

“To drag the tent poles, supplies of meat and pinole or maize, the Indians used medium-sized dogs. Harnessed round their breast and haunches and **snarling at one another**, they kept pace with their masters, who followed the roaming buffalo.”

No competent popularizer would resist elaborating on such a dry description of canine brawling, such as Paul Horgan (1938:22):

“He watched the animals pulling the parallel poles along the ground and saw the freight bobbing above the hurrying backs. It made him laugh to see the vain fury of the dogs, “**nearly all of them snarling**,” and the Indian women with their whips making small noises like angry birds and the men trotting behind in indifference.”

A final rather depressing note is provided by a contemporary anthropologist William R. Swagerty (2001:260), who quotes Bolton without comment. Not to have preferred Hammond and Rey to Bolton in this instance suggests a real lack of inter-disciplinary communication.

2. “**mugeres criconas**”: This phrase is cited by Antonio Valverde y Cossío, governor of New Mexico 1717-1722, who undertook an expedition in 1719 to punish the Utes and Comanches, or at least reach a reasonable accommodation with them, but also to reconnoitre the region northeast of New Mexico in search possible French intruders.

Alfred B. Thomas 1935:132.

“At the time of the fight the Apaches had told them that they would advise their friends, the Spaniards, in order that they might defend them. To this the French responded that they were greatly pleased to have them notify them and bring them there, for they are **women criconas** (these are words, however rude, that the Indians are accustomed to use to incite ire).”

The original text (Don Antonio Valverde y Cossío, *Diario y derrotero...* Bancroft Library, MS P-E 43, p. 52) reads thus:

“al tiemp[o] | de la rrefriega dichos apaches les hauia | dicho *que* avisarian a sus amigos los españo- | les para *que* los defendiessen y *que* los fran- | zesses respondieron se holgauan mucho de *que* | los avissassen y lleuassen alla *que* heran | vnas **mugeres criconas** (Palabras son estas | y otras *que* suelen vssar los yndios aunque | baruaros para ynzitar a la yra).”

A contemporary historian honestly confesses his inability to understand the phrase:

“The Indians reported Frenchmen had built two towns, each ‘as large as that of Taos’; they had armed the Pawnees and insulted the Spaniards, calling them ‘women’. [note] The full term, “**women criconas**,” was apparently still more derogatory, but neither Thomas nor I can translate it.” (David J. Weber 1992:168; 426, note 96).

It is just possible that Thomas, rather prudish by reputation, was reticent rather than ignorant. “Hablando con perdón,” I refer the reader to *DRAE*, s.v. *crica* ‘partes pudendas de la mujer’. The epithet *cricona* is an augmentative formed like *tetona* (*DRAE*, s.v. ‘dícese de la hembra de tetas grandes’), derived from *teta* ‘teat’, and I suppose might be rendered as ‘female with prominent unmentionables’. My advanced age and inveterate delicacy prevent me from using a more vernacular gloss. In any case, it is unclear to me why Valverde attributes the expression to the Indians, since he had just said that it was the French that hurled the insult. I suspect that the Spaniards would have been more effectively incited to wrath if the epithet had been applied to their mothers, sisters, or wives, than to themselves. What may have been involved is a calque on an actual French insult, to wit, *connasse* ‘con de vielle femme’ that was applied to men figuratively, cf. ‘homme crédule’ (*FEW*, s.v. *cunnus*). *Connasse* is an augmentative of *con* ‘pudenda muliebria’, which also occurs as an extremely common epithet meaning ‘stupid’, applied to either gender and indeed to inanimate objects.

Juan Corominas, *DCECH*, s.v., documents the original meaning of *crica* as ‘clitoris’ and declares it to be an “onomatopeya,” but that characteristic, I suppose, applies rather to the variant *clica*

‘cierto molusco de mar, comestible’: “onomatopeya de la concha al romperse... Es la misma palabra que *críca*.” And on that note, so to speak, I conclude this first installment of the “Disparatario.”

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DCECH = Corominas 1980-1991.

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DRAE = Real Academia Española 1995.

FEW = Wartburg 1922-.

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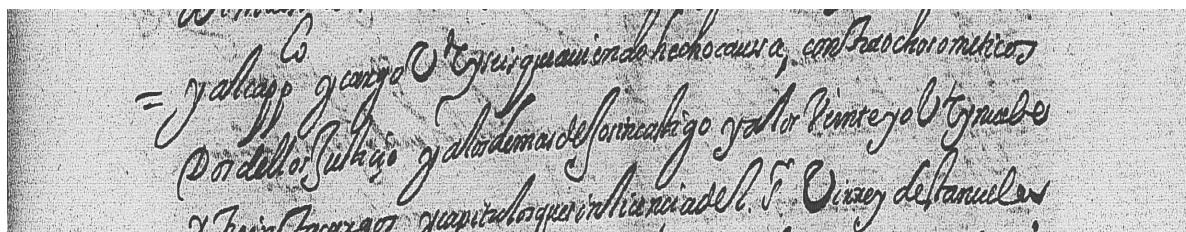
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3. “**sometricos**”: Barbara De Marco, Editor-in-Chief of *Romance Philology* and Manager of the Cíbola Project, has undertaken, with the support of a generous grant from the American Council of Learned Societies, a major project to catalogue and publish the Spanish texts of the documents concerning the exploration and settlement of New Mexico by Juan de Oñate, including those pertaining to his resignation as governor of New Mexico, his trial and conviction for numerous offenses, and his eventual judicial vindication, embracing the period from 1595 to 1628. These texts have been available to historians and scholars of all disciplines only in the English translation brought out by George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey (1953). The two translators committed numerous errors which have found their way into the secondary literature, since, to my knowledge, the historians of the Hispanic Southwest have not in general made a practice of consulting the originals of the translated documents.

Another remarkable instance of mistranslation has been revealed by De Marco’s work, with regard to the sentence pronounced against Oñate by the Viceroy on May 16, 1614. The twenty-sixth charge reads as follows:

Archivo General de Indias, Seville
Audiencia de México, legajo 28, número 17B
“Sentencia contra el adelantado don Juan de Oñate”



“Y al cappitulo y cargo veinte y seis, que aviendo hecho caussa contra ocho **sometricos** dos dellos justicio y a los demas deo sin castigo.”

Hammond and Rey (*Oñate, Colonizer of New Mexico* [1953], 2:1111) translate thus (identical to the translation in Hammond 1932):

“And to the twenty-sixth chapter and charge, that, having preferred charges against eight **mestizos**, he punished two of them and let the others go without punishment.”

In fact the prosecutor was not accusing Oñate of the judicial murder of two mestizos, but rather of *only* executing two accused sodomites while letting six others go free. In the prosecutor’s view, inexcusable leniency, not excessive rigor, on the part of the governor of New Mexico, is recommended for punishment. However, Oñate was absolved of this charge by the judicial authorities.

The word that caused the trouble, *somético*, is an antiquated popular variant of *sodomítico*, though the former can still be found in the current edition of the Spanish Academy's dictionary.

Martín Rodríguez 2009:248 transcribed the relevant phrase as “contra ocho semíticos”, but anti-Semitic persecution is not involved in the charge.

In an earlier version of this *disparate*, I unjustly accused some historians of repeating Hammond and Rey's blunder. In fact, they were referring to a different accusation, number 5:

“Y en quanto al cappitulo y cargo quinto de la acussazion del fiscal de su magestad, |²⁰ de que el dicho don Juan de Oñate hizo aorcar dos yndios del pueblo de | [A]coma por decir avian muerto estos dos yndios a un mejicano del campo | que despues parecio bibo.”

Thus in Hammond's ground-breaking monograph of 1927 (*Don Juan de Oñate and The Founding of New Mexico*, p. 184):

“... for the hanging of two Indians at Ácoma without cause...”

Simmons, *The Last Conquistador* (1991), p. 188:

“His crimes included unjustly hanging two Indians...”

Kessel, *Spain in the Southwest* (2002), p. 95:

“Judged guilty on twelve counts—ranging from the unjust hanging of two Acomas on hearsay...”

Oñate was convicted of this charge.

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