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Publication Date

2015-07-12

**Fray Juan de Escalona, Comissary of the Franciscan Missions
of New Mexico, to King Phillip III
Concerning Conditions in the New Colony
October 15, 1601**

Archivo General de Indias, Patronato 22, ramo 12, fols. 930r-932v

**Transcribed by Jerry R. Craddock
Translated by John H. R. Polt**

**Published under the auspices of the Cíbola Project
Research Center for Romance Studies
Institute of International Studies
University of California, Berkeley**

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Preface

Fray Juan de Escalona is known particularly for two letters he wrote concerning the deplorable state of the fledgling colony of New Mexico, the first dated October 1, 1601, directed to his ecclesiastical superior, and the second, dated October 10 of the same year, sent to the Viceroy of New Spain. The former was published in the *Morarquía Indiana* (León Portilla, ed. 1986, 1:673-675; 1st ed. 1615); the latter, unpublished in Spanish until recently (see De Marco and Craddock 2014:92-96, with facsimile), was translated by Hammond and Rey along with the former (1953, 2:692-700; they give the erroneous date of October 1 to the letter to the Viceroy). That Escalona wrote a third letter, dated October 15, to the King seems to have been overlooked by translators and historians and that is the text edited here.

Appointed as commissary to the Franciscan missions of New Mexico, Fray Juan went there with the reinforcements sent to the colony in 1600 (see Cerrudo et al. 2014). At the time of Juan de Oñate's expedition to Quivira in 1601 (see Craddock and Polt 2013, De Marco and Craddock 2013), when a majority of the colonists left in San Gabriel deserted and returned to Mexico (see Carlin et al. 2013abc), Fray Juan remained loyal, but penned the three letters mentioned above, all extremely critical of his governor and the behavior of the Spaniards in general. He remained in New Mexico for some time, at least to 1604, when a document attests to his presence there, still exercising the office of commissary (Craddock and Polt 2015).

Fray Juan's letter of October 15, 1601 is extant in an uncertified copy, Archivo General de Indias [AGI], Patronato 22, ramo 12, fols. 930r-932v. Fray Juan's subscription at the end is not a signature, nor does a rubric accompany it. There are no notes or marginalia to indicate that it was in fact received by the King or his Council of Indies, but I believe this is the letter from Fray Juan referred to in a report of the Council to the King dated July 7, 1602 (see Craddock and Polt 2010): "Tres cartas se an reçiuido en el Consejo, vna para vuestra magestad | en sus reales manos y otra de fray Joan de Escalo- | na, comisario de los religiosos franciscanos que fueron en la | jornada y descubrimiento de la Nueva Mexico, y otra de | don Luis de Velasco, thessorero de vuestra magestad en la misma | jornada..." (AGI, Patronato 22, ramo 13, fol. 1312r).

The transcription is paleographic, but abbreviations have been tacitly resolved. Punctuation, word division, and the use of capital letters have been modernized. Editorial deletions are enclosed in parentheses (. . .), editorial emendations and additions in brackets, [. . .]. Uncertain readings have been highlighted in yellow. Any assistance with deciphering them would be greatly appreciated.

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Fray Juan de Escalona al Rey
15 de octubre de 1601

Archivo General de Indias, Patronato 22, ramo 12, fols. 930r-932v

[fol. 930r]

†

Señor

Mucho quisiera tener tanta çiençia y eloquençia qu'en breues palabras sin ser prolixo dixera a vuestra alteza lo mucho que ay que deçir de estas prouinçias y tierras del Nuevo Mexico, a las

quales vine en el socorro que el virrey de vuestra alteza enuio a esta tierra, al qual en parte me huelgo aver uenido por desengañar a vuestra alteza de lo que en ella ay. Lo primero
5 digo que no es todo como a vuestra alteza se lo an pintado ni tiene la gente que ha(e)n escripto.

En quanto a la tierra digo es es muy frigido en demasia y muy esteril sin genero de consuelo para poder poblar y auitar en ella si vuestra alteza no la ayuda con algun socoro, porque la gente della es muy pobre y no tienen sino vnas mantillas de algodón con que se cubren o cueros de animales, porque
10 es gente que de suyo anda desnuda y su comida y regalo es vn poco de maiz y frixoles y en toda ella no se a hallado plata asta agora y en quanto el gentio habra como veynte mil veçinos en todo lo descubierto y no se ha asta agora descubierto cosa nueva que aya ni se supiese, demas desto an puesto los e[s]cri-
tores de esta tierra pueblos por prouinçias como la prouinçia de Santo Do-
15 mingo, la de Puaray, la de los pecos y taos y las demas ban por este estilo, que siendo pueblos de a doçientos y treçientos veçinos los han puesto por prouinçias y no tienen señor a quien reconozar porque todo es be[^he]tria, avnque se rrigen y conseruan publicamente segun ley natural y es
la mejor gente que he uisto de ynfielos y con todo esso se les a hecho no-
20 tables agrauios porque los españoles an saqueado muchas vezes sus pueblos, quitandoles su sustento de mayz y quanto en sus casas tienen y mantas y queros de çiuola con que se cubren, sobre lo qual se leuanto la guerra de Acoma que ya vuestra
alteza

abra tenido notiçia dello y agora vltimamente la que se dio a los jumanas, de las quales guerras no queria tratar ni acordarme por no traer a la memoria
25 las grandes crueldades que con ellos vsaron, que el corazon se me rrasga de pena de ver que a las animas que veniamos a conuertir y ayudar a saluar como nuestra madre la yglesia y vuestra alteza a ello nos enviaron, las ayan hechado al ynfierno sin por que ni lo yndios auian dado ocassion a que con ellos se vsa

[fol. 930v]

de tales crueldades, que por deçir los ynpedimientos que en la predicacion del santo evangelio ay (^q) las dire por los cuales ynpedimientos (^que) en (^la predicacion del santo evangelio) ninguna manera se puede predicar el santo evangelio en esta tierra como en efecto no se predica sino que los
5 religiosos quisieran mas estar cautiuos y haerrogados en Argel que estas cossas y no poderlas rremediar. Lo primero digo que desde que aqui entraron los españoles y el gouernador les envia por los pueblos por mayz y a que les den tilmas de tributo y en no quiriendolo dar los yndios, por mexor y mas berdad deçir no pudiendo, les quemar las cassas y matan algunos yndios y
10 para sacar el mayz de sus cassas les contraminan y ronpen las paredes y para pedirles las mantas acaçe a la pobre yndia que no tiene(n) mas de la con que esta cubierta quitarsela al redopelo y dexarla en cueros llo- rando y hecha vn obillo porque esta en queros con su hijo en los brazos y de aqui se leuanto la guerra de Acona y la vltima que agora a los
15 jumanas se dio, contra los cuales se vso lo que turcos ni alarues con xpistianos vsaron porque despues de rendidos los yndios y dicho que querian paz y ser sus amigos y que no los matasen, con juramento y engaño le dio el sargento mayor la palabra en nombre de vuestra alteza de que no les aria mal y asi con este engaño ato a toda la gente que abaxo abaxo de donde estauan, los
20 metieron en vna estufa y de alli los fueron sacando vno a vno y dan- do de puñaladas, que vn negro del sargento mayor me dizen mato por man- dado de su amo mas de doçientos y los yndios despues que entendieron lo que pasaua se hicieron fuertes en la estufa por lo que les hecharon mucha cantidad de leña ençima y los quemaron biuos y luego a todo el pueblo junto, don-
25 de se quemaron niños y mugeres, casi todo el pueblo, que vbo cassa (que vbo casa) donde se allaron cassi seisçientas personas de niños y mugeres y barones muer- tos del fuego y humo y a los que quedaron y escaparon lleuaron cautiuos y a los barones por el camino a trechos yban aorcando como si fueran peros y no dere- midos por la sangre de Xpisto y a los que quedaron biuos cortaron vno de los
30 dos pies, por lo qual murieron casi todos. En la otra guerra de los juma-
nas

[fol. 931r]

casi fue desta manera, solo falto no cortarles los pies. La ocasion que para esto vbo fue dezir que hauian los yndios muerto al maese de canpo y a no se quantos soldados y es verdad que los yndios de Acoma los mataron, mas fue por defender sus haziendas y sustento como arriva
5 se dixo, avnque ya les auian dado para su biaje quanto bastimento hauian menester asta dexarlo sobrado y los hauian salido a receuir de paz, sino que despues de ydos boluio el maese de canpo y los que con el murieron a quitar a los yndios mas bastimento y sus mantas con que se cubren y visto los yndios que les hauian dado lo que les pidieron de vastimentos
10 para su camino y voluian ha azerles mal, aluorotose el pueblo y vinieron a matarlos los yndios y para castigar este hecho ynuio el gouernador a vn sobrino suyo y sargento mayor, hermano del maese de canpo que mataron los yndios, el qual hizo el estrago

sobredicho sobre la muerte del hermano y con mucha menor ocasion
15 que la que se dio a los jumanas, el qual dicho sargento mayor se la dio; sobre
las quales vatallas aze el gouernador aca vnas yformaciones
para justificar sus causas a la medida y gusto de su deseo y no de
lo que es justicia y los [te]stigos que en ellas van dicen no poder hazer
otra cossa en la tierra donde estan y ansi me lo han çertificado
20 y dicho, para aueriguacion de lo qual y de otros muchos males conuiene
mucho a la consciencia de vuestra alteza y no a el virrey de la
Nueua España, lo qual ablando con el deuido acatamiento si ello
es asi seria muy gran cargo de consciencia por muchos yncon-
uinientes y cossas que aca subceden y advierto a vuestra alteza que quando en
25 el Peru se da alguna batalla a los yndios, a los rendidos no los
tratan de esta suerte sino porque conozcan la clemencia de vuestra alteza
los señalan sitio donde pueblen y esten sujetos a vuestra magestad, pagan-
do sus tributos y no los cortan los piez ni los hazen esclauos

[fol. 931v]

ha ellos ni a sus hijos como aqui al presente los vemos todos
aherrojados, que si asi se pro[^{ce}]de en esta tierra presto seran todos muer-
tos y hechos esclauos. Todo e dicho para dar a entender los enpe-
dimientos de la predicacion evangelica pues vuestra magestad m'embio
5 a mi y a mis frayles a pedricar esta tierra y pues venimos a esto seriamos
traydores a Dios y a vuestra alteza si de la verdad no auisamos.

~ A el presente nos vemos en vna extrema necesidad que si el gouernador fuera
otro y hubiera querido tomar consejo de lo que se le ha dicho, estu-
biera bien rremediada y es el casso que de quatro partes de este real
10 se van las tres a tierra de paz por no perezar aca de anbre, porque como
los españoles an tomado y gastado a los yndios todo su maiz
que de seis años atras tenian rrezagado y el gouernador no ha querido
hazer vna sementera de comunidad para todos, ha uenido a
poner la tierra en tanto extremo de necesidad que los yndios comen caruon
15 molido con simillas del canpo y ha uenido a morir mucha gente
de los naturales y a nosotros a y[r]nos a tierra de paz, avnque yo y el
alferez real con otros algunos españoles nos quedamos aca aguar-
dando el socorro de vuestra alteza o que nos mande yr a todos, avnque de
ninguna manera conuenia a su consciencia de vuestra alteza dexar
20 y desanparar esta tierra, lo uno
para yr adelante azia el leuante a buscar la Mar del Norte
o azia el puniente a buscar la Mar del Sur, pues desde Mexico aqui tenemos
andadas quatroçientas leguas sienpre el norte en proa y tenemos
noticia de grandes poblaçionces adelante como estos propios naturales
25 lo dizen, los quales son aduenediços de alla en estas tierras y la rriqueza
y grandes poblaçiones (^a de la rreconoser los propios naturales)
deuen de estar al norueste y la otra caussa por donde no conuiene
a la consciencia de vuestra alteza dexar esta tierra es por hauer ya

[fol. 932r]

muchos niños y adultos vatizados en ella y que no se como se an de quedar asi y con çinquenta hombres que vuestra alteza ubiera enuiado a esta tierra bien auiados y no cargados de mugeres y de gente ynutil como el gouernador traxo, vbiera
5 ya descubiert todo este orbe(n), el qual no se descubriera avnque el gouernador este aca veynte mill años por ser pobre y estar inposiuitado para hazer estos descubrimientos ni tener modo ni todo para conseruar la gente que esta toda tan opresa que ninguno osa escreuir a tierra de paz ni hablar en
10 esta tierra diciendo mal della que no lo publican por traydor. A todos los españoles a tenido metidos en vnos medanales sin dexarlos boluer atras ni dexarlos yr adelante y agora que quiso salir a esta jornada donde fue, si no fuera por el ayuda de sus capitanes y soldados que le dieron armas y caua-
15 llos y los naturales el bastiemento y pertrechos y yo que en nombre de vuestra alteza le di seis carros y sesenta mulas y dos negros que el virrey de vuestra alteza nos dio para venir desta tierra, no pudiera hazer la jornada. Con çinquenta onbres labradores podria vuestra alteza sustentar este tierra dandoles algun socorro de lo que en
20 esta tierra carezen, so pena de que andaran en cueros como los yndios y a el gouernador o a quien vuestra alteza fuere seruido podria dar estos pequeños pueblos y que el pusiese ministros para los naturales, con lo qual descargaria vuestra alteza su conçiencia por hauer como digo gente ya uatizada aca y no es justo se dexen
25 y poco a poco se podria descubrir toda esta tierra y lo que ay en ella especialmente la Mar del Sur, que si por alli se pudiese allar puerto para que las naos que vienen a reconozet esta tierra de la China diesen socorro a esta tierra de lo que de alla traen,

[fol. 932v]

seria grandisimo consuelo para esta tierra. Y pues nuestra madre yglessia encomendo esta obra de la predicacion evangelica a vuestra alteza para que la ayudase a llevar almas al çielo y descubrirse este nueuo orue para el qual fin dio y ad-
5 judico a vuestra alteza este nueuo orbe y vuestra alteza como tan christianisimo rey y hijo suyo lo tomo a su cargo y se encargo dello. Por las entrañas rasgadas de Jesu Xpisto se sirva vuestra alteza de azer y tomar a su cargo estas conquistas y descubrimientos para que ello se aga xpistianamente y lo que se ganare se ponga debaxo de la
10 corona real y no la encomiende a quien en lugar de ganar almas a Dios las heche en el ynfierno y hagan blasfemar su santo nonbre entr'estas gentes por los males y agrauios que se les haze y a vuestra alteza tengan por yniquo y cruel que tales gentes a su tierra enuia aunque bien alieno e ynculpable en esto que la magestad de Dios a-
15 ca escontara a vuestra alteza sus reales rrentas y en todo le ayu-

dara aciendole mil fauores, cuya magestad diuina nos guarde
a vuestra alteza para el bien y conseruacion de toda la xpistiandad
de estas prouinçias. De la Nueva Mexico, en quinze de
otubre de mill y seisçientos y vno, menor sieruo y capellan
20 de vuestra alteza. Fray Juan d'Escalona comisario.

Fray Juan de Escalona to the King
15 October 1601

Archivo General de Indias, Patronato 22, ramo 12, fols. 930r-932v

[fol. 930r]

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Your Majesty:

How I wish I were learned and eloquent enough to tell Your Majesty,¹ briefly and succinctly, the great deal there is to say about these lands and provinces of New Mexico, to which I came with the reinforcements that Your Majesty's viceroy sent to this country, with which I am glad to have come, in part so that I may disabuse Your Majesty concerning what is to be found here.

To begin with, I say that not everything is as has been portrayed to you, nor does it have the population of which they write. As for the land, I say it is exceedingly cold and very barren, with no relief that would allow it to be settled and inhabited if Your Majesty does not send some help, because its people are very poor and have only little cotton blankets, or animal skins, with which to cover themselves, because these are people who normally go about naked; and for them food and feast consist of a little maize and beans. And up to now no silver has been found anywhere in this country. And as for the population, there might be some 20,000 people living in all of what has been explored, and until now nothing new has been found or heard of. Besides, those who write about this country have spoken of villages as provinces, such as the province of Santo Domingo, that of Puaray, that of Pecos, that of Taos, and others of the same sort, which, though they are villages of two or three hundred inhabitants, they have listed as provinces.

And they are not subject to any single lord, but each village has its chief,² although they guide and govern themselves in keeping with the natural law; and they are the best people that I have seen among infidels, despite which they have borne grave injuries, because the Spaniards have often sacked their villages, seizing the maize they live off and whatever they have in their houses and the blankets and buffalo skins with which they clothe themselves, which was the cause of the war against Acoma, of which Your Majesty will have been informed, and more recently the war against the Jumanos, wars that I did not want to discuss or remember so as not to recall the great cruelty inflicted on them, for my heart breaks with sorrow when I see that the souls we came to convert and lead to salvation as our mother the Church and Your Majesty sent us to do have been condemned to Hell for no reason without the Indians' having given grounds for treating them [fol. 930v] with such cruelty, which I shall speak of in order to explain the obstacles that stand in the way of our preaching the Holy Gospel, because of which obstacles there is no way to preach the Holy Gospel in this country, as in effect it is not preached, but the religious would rather be captives and in chains in Algiers than [see] these things and be unable to do anything about them.

¹ *vuestra alteza*, 'Your Highness,' long used to address Spanish kings. I think its tone is better

² *todo es behetria*, which can mean either that each place has its own ruler or that all is confusion. The former interpretation seems to me more likely in the case of New Mexico.

First of all I say that ever since the Spaniards came here and the governor sends them out to the villages for maize and to collect blankets as tribute, if the Indians refuse to pay—or better and more truthfully said, cannot pay—they burn their houses and kill some Indians. And to take the maize from their houses they pierce and break down their walls, and when they demand the blankets they will sometimes snatch one from the poor woman who has only the one that covers her and leave her weeping naked and curled up because she is naked with her child in her arms.

And this led to the war against Acoma (and to this latest one waged against the Jumanos, who were treated as neither Turks nor Arabs treat Christians), because after the Indians had surrendered and said that they wanted peace and friendship and that they should not kill them, the sergeant major deceitfully swore to them and gave his word in the name of Your Majesty that he would not harm them; and by means of this trick he tied up all the people who came down from where they were, and they put them in a kiva and brought them out of there one by one and stabbed them, and they tell me that a black slave of the sergeant major killed more than 200 of them by order of his master. And once the Indians realized what was happening they barricaded themselves in the kiva, because of which they piled a lot of firewood on top of them and burned them alive; and then they burned the whole village, where children and women were burned, almost the whole village, and there were houses where they found almost 600 persons—men, women, and children—dead from the fire and smoke. And those who survived and escaped were taken away as prisoners; and along the way they would every now and then hang some of the men as though they were dogs and not [souls] redeemed by the blood of Christ, and they cut off one foot of those who remained alive, as a consequence of which almost all of them died. In the other war, against the Jumanos, [fol. 931r] things went much the same way, except for not cutting off their feet.

The grounds for this³ was the allegation that the Indians had killed the colonel⁴ and I do not know how many soldiers; and it is true that the Indians of Acoma killed them, but they did so in defense of their property and sustenance as stated above, although they had already given them all the supplies they needed for their voyage to the point of superfluity and had gone out to receive them peacefully. But after leaving, the colonel and those who died with him came back to take more supplies from the Indians along with the blankets with which they cover themselves, and when the Indians saw that they had given them the supplies they had requested for their journey and they were returning to do them harm, turmoil arose in the village and the Indians ended by killing them. And to punish this deed the governor sent the sergeant major, a nephew of his and brother of the colonel whom the Indians had killed, who carried out the aforesaid ravages because of the death of his brother; and this sergeant major did this with far less justification than that given in the case of the Jumanos, concerning which battles the governor is writing reports here to buttress his cases in keeping with his wishes and not with what is justice. And the witnesses⁵ cited in them say that there was no other way to act in the country where they are, and so they have told me and assured me, to investigate which, along with many other evils, is a matter of conscience for Your Majesty, and not for the viceroy of New Spain, which, speaking with all due respect, would be a very great burden on Your Majesty's conscience because of many difficulties and things that happen here. And I can tell Your Majesty that when there is some battle with the Indians in Peru, they do not treat them like this when they surrender, but, so that they may recognize Your Majesty's mercy, they assign them a place where they may settle and be subject to Your Majesty and pay their tribute, and they do not cut off their feet or enslave [fol. 931v] them or their children as here we now

³ That is, the war against Acoma.

⁴ *maese de campo*

⁵ The ms. reads *castigos* 'punishments,' which we take to be a scribal error for *testigos*.

see them all in chains, so that if things continue this way in this country they will all be dead or enslaved.

I have said all this to explain the obstacles to the preaching of the Gospel, because Your Majesty sent me and my friars to preach to this country, and since we came for this purpose we should be traitors to God and Your Majesty if we did not report the truth.

At present we see ourselves in dire straits, which would be easily remedied if the governor were not as he is and were willing to be guided by what he has been told. And the fact is that of every four men in this army three are leaving for pacified country so as not to perish of hunger here, because since the Spaniards have seized and used up all the maize that the Indians had stored up for six years and the governor has refused to have more planted for the use of all, he has brought this country to such a state of penury that the Indians eat ground charcoal mixed with wild seeds. And the result is that many of the natives have died and that we are leaving for pacified country, although I and the royal ensign and some other Spaniards are staying here awaiting either reinforcements from Your Majesty or your ordering us all to leave, although it would by no means befit Your Majesty's conscience to leave and abandon this land, for one thing so that we may advance eastward to look for the Northern Sea,⁶ or westward to look for the Southern Sea,⁷ for we have traveled 400 leagues ever northward from Mexico and we have heard of large towns farther on, of which these natives themselves speak, having come here from those lands, and the wealth and large towns must lie to the northwest.

And the other reason why it does not befit Your Majesty's conscience to abandon this land is that there are already [fol. 932r] many baptized children and adults in it, and I do not know how they can be left in this state; and if Your Majesty had sent 50 well-equipped men to this country not weighed down with women and useless people such as the governor brought, they would have explored this whole region, which will not be explored even if the governor stays here 20,000 years, because it is poor and not suited for such exploration and there is no way or any means to maintain the men, all of whom live under such oppression that none dares to speak ill of it, either when writing to pacified country or talking here, but he is denounced as a traitor. [The governor] has all the Spaniards trapped as though in quicksand, not letting them go back or forward; and now when he was readying to set out on the expedition⁸ on which he has gone, he would not have been able to do so had it not been for the help of his officers and men who supplied him with weapons and horses, and for the natives who supplied rations and equipment, and for me, who in the name of Your Majesty gave him six carts and 60 mules and two blacks that Your Majesty's viceroy gave us to bring us to this country.

Your Majesty could maintain this country with 50 farmers if you supplied them with some of the things they lack in this country, so that they would not have to go naked like the Indians; and Your Majesty could assign these little villages to the governor or to whomever you pleased and have him assign ministers for the natives, whereby Your Majesty would unburden your conscience because, as I said, there are people here who have already been baptized and it would not be right to abandon them. And little by little all of this country and everything in it could be explored, especially the Southern Sea, because if one could find a port there so that the ships that come from China to explore this country could supply it with what they bring from there, [fol. 932v] it would be an enormous relief for this country.

And since our mother the Church entrusted this work of preaching the Gospel to Your Majesty so that you might aid her to bring souls to Heaven and so that this new world might be explored, for which purpose she gave and assigned this new world to

⁶ The Atlantic Ocean

⁷ The Pacific Ocean

⁸ To Quivira.

Your Majesty, and Your Majesty, as her son and a most Christian king, accepted the charge, [I beg] by the bleeding body⁹ of Christ, that Your Majesty may be pleased to carry out and take charge of these conquests and explorations so that they may be done in a Christian manner and so that what is gained may be subject to the royal Crown and not entrusted to those who instead of winning souls for God cast them into Hell and foment blasphemy against His holy name among these people by the harm and offenses committed against them, and make them consider you wicked and cruel for sending such men to their country, although you are quite unaware of these matters and blameless in them. For God's majesty will here increase¹⁰ Your Majesty's royal tributes and in everything assist you with countless favors, and may He save Your Majesty for the good and preservation of all the Christian people of these provinces.

From New Mexico, on 15 October 1601.

Your Majesty's most humble servant and chaplain,

Fray Juan de Escalona, Commissary

⁹ The ms. is rather more graphic: *las entrañas rasgadas*, 'the lacerated entrails.'

¹⁰ *escontara*, a verb unknown to me but which from context must mean 'increase' or 'augment.'

