

MAURICE A. MOOK

SHORTLY AFTER THE DEATH, late last year, of my long-time friend, anthropologist J. Alden Mason, I was led to reread some of his earlier publications.¹ In one of these I found an unusual onomatological item – a long anonymous poem of 44 lines, secured from an informant in Puerto Rico, and every word of the poem is a Spanish-American personal name.

One of Dr. Mason's earliest and most interesting publications is his monograph on "Porto-Rican Folklore." He did his field collecting of this lore in 1914–1915, and he published his material in a series of ten articles in the *Journal of American Folklore*.² Dr. Mason's material derives from practically all of the geographical districts of Puerto Rico. At the time of its publication it was called "an extraordinarily large and important collection of folklore" and "the most abundant and best Spanish-American collection of folktales yet collected."³ Seven of the articles deal with folktales, while the other three discuss and illustrate other Puerto Rican oral art forms. Taken together these articles offer us one of the most complete collections of folklore we have for a Latin-American people.⁴

¹ My obituary of Dr. Mason was published in *Keystone Folklore Quarterly*, XII (1967), 280–5. Although Dr. Mason's publications cover the whole field of cultural anthropology, including archeology, ethnology, ethnography, linguistics, and folklore, this obituary emphasizes his contributions to linguistics and folklore.

² "Porto-Rican Folklore," collected by J. Alden Mason, edited by Aurelio M. Espinosa, *Journal of American Folklore*, vols. 29, 31, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, and 42, from 1916 through 1929. Mason's texts are in Spanish; Espinosa's editorial commentary is in English. (This *Journal* will hereafter be designated *JAF*.)

³ Mason also collected 20 traditional ballads in Puerto Rico, which he found in 35 versions. These were published, also with editorial comment by Espinosa, in *Revue Hispanique*, XLII (1918), 309–64. This collection has been called "in all respects one of the best from Spanish America" (*JAF*, XXIX [1916], 423; *Ibid.*, XXXI [1918], 289). Two of these are musically transcribed in *JAF*, XXXIII (1920), 76–79.

⁴ The 1916–1929 *JAF* material has been recently published in book form: J. Alden Mason, *Folklore Puertorriqueño*. Editadas por Aurelio M. Espinosa (San Juan, Puerto Rico, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1960).

In his article on the folk poetry of the Island⁵ there is a large body of material consisting of metrical compositions of the type called *décimas*. A *décima* is a stanza of ten lines, usually in octosyllabic metre (in Puerto Rico at least), with the lines ending in the rhyme-pattern abbaaccddc, or some close variant thereof. The metre may also be hexasyllabic, although this is found less frequently in the Puerto Rican material. The word *décimas* is also applied to whole poems, consisting of several stanzas of such structure. Most *décimas* in Puerto Rican tradition are poems of several stanzas, and the word, therefore, is usually used in its plural form.

Dr. Mason's collection of Puerto Rican traditional poetry consists of 372 items, of which 231 are *décimas*. Mason's editor, Espinosa, classifies *décimas* into five types, of which his "Type A" is much the most frequently found in the Puerto Rican collection, 121 of Mason's 231 *décimas* being of this type. This type consists of an introductory stanza of four lines, followed by four stanzas of ten lines each, with the last line of each ten-line stanza repeating one of the four lines of the introductory stanza, in the order in which the lines occur in the introductory quatrain.

This highly patterned style of folk poetry is known to occur in the traditional poetry of Spanish-Americans in California and New Mexico; it is also found in Chilean folklore, as well as in the "oral literature" of Puerto Rico. It was also a popular literary form used by published authors in the classic period of Spanish literature. This has elicited discussion as to whether such poems are of oral-traditional or of literary derivation. That they were orally transmitted and existed in the living oral tradition of Puerto Rico at the time Mason made his collection is quite certain. Most of Mason's material was secured from Puerto Rican school children and other incompletely literate informants. Espinosa admits that one may suspect "semi-learned" (i.e. literary) influences in some examples of Mason's material. But most of the poems have no known authors, they are considered to be anonymous by those who transmit them, and in these respects Espinosa concludes, and Mason agrees, such compositions can be regarded as truly traditional folk poems, the viable "poetry of the people."⁶

⁵ "Porto-Rican Folklore: Décimas, Christmas Carols, Nursery Rhymes, and Other Songs," *JAF*, XXXI (1918), 289-450.

⁶ The folk *vs.* learned, or traditional *vs.* literary nature of the *décimas* in the

The Puerto Rican *décimas* deal with a variety of popular themes – love, adventure, religious experiences, daily life, folk beliefs, etc. Such themes are, of course, characteristic also of the oral art forms of all semi-literate populations. The social or communal origin of traditional material is often emphasized. But all traditional oral art creations must ultimately derive from the minds of individual persons. The individuals may be inconspicuous members of the societies to which they belong, and what an individual creates may be limited, indeed determined, by the forms and patterns which the fellow-members of his folk society know and closely adhere to. Nevertheless, the creation of poems – or the invention of anything else in a folk society – comes from individuals, whether we know their names or not, and each such poem, of other artifact, must be accordingly regarded as originally an individual creation.

Although all traditional poems, such as those in the Mason collection, both in form and in content are composed well within the limits set by the culture pattern of the group, certain of the poems in Mason's collection show evidence of having been composed with the primary goal – indeed the sole purpose, in some cases – of showing the anonymous author's skill in rhyme and metric composition. Such surely is the case with Mason's *Décima* No. 115⁷, which I here reprint as of interest to onomatologists, especially those who may be familiar with the Spanish use of personal names. It is a "Type A" *décima* of 44 lines, divided into five stanzas, and every single word of each line of each stanza is a Spanish-American personal name.

Juan, Pedro, Saturnino,
José, Eustaquio y Martín,
Antonio, Lorenzo, Cerafin,
Andrés, Luis y Marcelino.

Tadeo, Judas, Trinidad,
Domingo, Claudio, Agapito,
Quírico, Estéban, Francisco,
Nicacio, Higinio, Soledad,
Ambrosio, Casto, Damián,
Tiburcio, León, Albino,
Augusto, Julián, Longino,

Mason collection is discussed by Mason, Espinosa, and Louise D. Dennis in *JAF*, XXXV (1922), 99–104.

⁷ *JAF*, XXXI (1918), 360–361.

Ciriaco, Eulalio, Severo,
Santiago, Delfín, Anacleto,
Juan, Pedro y Saturnino.

Clímaco, Lucilo, Isabelo,
Mario, Fermín y Marcelo,
Rufo, Danfel, Valerio,
Enrique, Sandalio, Desiderio,
Amalio, Soilo, Quinterio,
Antonino, Eulogio, Joaquín,
Laureano, Javier, Felipe,
Victoriano, Dionisio, Ulises,
José, Eustaquio y Martín.

Nicolás, Luis, Neftalí,
Justo, Tomás y Sabino,
Pascual, Pascacio, Benigno,
Teófilo, Ramón, David,
Emilio, Eduardo, Leví,
Heriberto, Pablo, Cristino,
Raimundo, Manuel, Quirino,
Natalio, José y Benjamín,
Euclides, Vicente, Severino,
Antonio, Lorenzo, Cerafín.

Nicomedes, Melitón, Galo,
Guillermo, Gil, Maximiano,
Guadalupe, Pío, Maximiliano,
Ismael, Fulgencio, Abalo,
Deogracia, Emeterio, Carlos,
Wenceslao, Cornelio, Carlino,
Eurípides, Narcizo, Elpidio,
Jesús, Lao, Sotero,
Bárbaro, Bruno, Anselmo,
Andrés, Luis y Marcelino.

As Espinosa says, here with “a mere list of names, but with great skill, the popular poet has composed a perfect *décima*.”⁸ Aside from the fact that a line is apparently missing in the third stanza, it is, indeed, structurally at least, a “perfect *décima*.” It is also a *décima* quite completely onomatological – una *décima* onomástica.

The Pennsylvania State University

⁸ *Ibid.*, 311, n. 16.

Editor's Note: A song with a chorus composed entirely of personal names is reported both in E. B. Greenleaf and G. Y. Mansfield's *Ballads and Songs of Newfoundland* (Cambridge, Mass., 1933, p. 345) and in Lester A. Hubbard's *Ballads and Songs from Utah* (Salt Lake City, 1961, pp. 343-344). Greenleaf and Mansfield identify this "Longest Name Song" as a music-hall piece, citing an 1878 publication of it. The first person narrator, in stanzas phrased in a faintly Irish dialect, describes problems caused by his extraordinarily long name, as recited in the chorus (Utah version):

Jonathan, Joseph, Jeremiah,
 Timothy, Titus, Obadiah,
 William, Henry, Walter, Sim,
 Reuben, Rufus, Solomon, Jim,
 Nathaniel, Daniel, Abraham,
 Roderick, Frederick, Peter, Sam,
 Simon, Dimon, Nicholas, Pat,
 Christopher, Dick, Jehoshaphat.

The refrain line "Parsley, Sage, Rosemary, and Thyme" from the renowned English ballad "The Elfin Knight" (Child 2) is an instance of this device using herbal names, and I also recall that there is a melody used to sing the names of all the books of the Bible, a practice once popular at Sunday school picnics and church camps. Possibly there are similar mnemonic songs for names of American presidents, kings of England, capitals of states or nations, and the like; the subject deserves further study.

J. H. B.