Peruvian Religious Truck Names

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IN PERU, AS IN many parts of the world, vehicles are frequently named. Although taxis, buses, and, sometimes, private cars are given names, probably the most distinctive and most common are those painted on trucks. This paper is a preliminary analysis of Peruvian truck names, with particular emphasis on names with religious content.

The literature on vehicle names is relatively meager. Among topics considered have been prairie schooner names in the American West, 1920s Model "T" names, the names painted on Los Angeles area hot-rods, bus names in Costa Rica, and truck names in several parts of the world.[1] In fact, a survey of the literature suggests that there have been few systematic studies of vehicle names. Only two comprehensive studies,[2] of truck names in Mexico and in Peru, have been published, and thus only these two will be compared to my recent work in Peru.

During a year of archaeological field work in 1977, I was able systematically to record Peruvian truck names in a manner that went well beyond earlier vehicle name studies.[3] In addition to the names that

[1] See, for example, B.A. Botkin, "The Lore of the Lizzie Label," *American Speech,* VI (1930), pp. 81–93 and "An Anthology of Lizzie Labels," *American Speech,* VII (1931), pp. 32–39; Jan Harold Brunvand, "A Note on Names for Cars," *Names,* 10:4 (December, 1962), pp. 279–284 and "More Car Names from the West," *Western Folklore,* XXIII (1964), pp. 264–265; Ed Cray, "Automobile Names from Los Angeles," *Western Folklore,* XXXIII (1964), pp. 43–44; Frank Golley, "Bus Names in Costa Rica," *Western Folklore,* XXXVIII (1978), pp. 58–60; Stanley Ira Hallet, "Wandering Art," *Natural History,* LXXXV (1976), pp. 66–71; Armando Jimenez, *Picardia Mexicana* (20th Edition, n.d., Libro Mex Editores, Mexico City), pp. 9–20; Don Mansell and Joseph S. Hall, "Hot Rod Terms in the Pasadena Area," *American Speech,* XXIX (1954), pp. 89–104; Mamie Meredith, "Prairie Schooner Slogans," *American Speech,* VII (1932), pp. 172–174; Arthur Minton, "Joe's Here," *American Speech,* XXVII (1952), pp. 32–35; and Robert Sonkin, "Bleeding Betty's Brakes; or the Army Names a Jeep," *American Speech,* XXIX (1954), pp. 257–262.

[2] José Mario Farfan Ayerbe, "Onomastica de Vehiculos," *Folklore Americano,* V (1957), pp. 140–154, and "Onomastica de Vehiculos," *Folklore Americano,* VIII (1960), pp. 285–286; and James R. Jaquith, "Cowboy de Medianoche—Mexican Highway Folklore," *The New Scholar,* V (1976), pp. 39–72.

[3] Peter Caton and Barbara Kus assisted in the collection of Peruvian truck names; Carol Mackey provided other examples (not included in this study) recorded during earlier research in Peru.

were painted on vehicles, notes were made on the make of the truck, approximate age, size, color, and license number, as well as the date and location of the observation. Any geographical data on the truck, such as route information, owner's address, or the like, was also recorded. All of this information could be quickly written on a common 3" x 5" card. During the course of the year, as the sample size increased, a master list of license numbers was developed in order to reduce duplicate vehicle sightings. No attempt was made, however, to avoid trucks with the same name. In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of this study became the repetition of one group of names. To this date the sample has not been computer coded; later work will deal with variation in types of names over time,[4] identify regional variation in truck name patterns, and study the role of company-owned versus privately-owned trucks in Peru.

An attempt was made to determine the percentage of Peruvian trucks with names painted on them. On 11 occasions two hour roadside truck counts were carried out. These counts were made at different times of day and at different locations: nine of the 11 were along the Pan American Highway in coastal Peru, one was on the Carretera Central east of Lima, and one count was conducted on the outskirts of Huaraz in the north highlands. In the 11 counts the frequency of trucks with names ranged from 25.8 to 65.4 percent. In view of this, I estimate that between 35 and 40 percent of all Peruvian trucks have names painted on them. The percentage seems to decrease in large urban areas (particularly Lima) and to increase in rural areas. However, since approximately half of all Peruvian trucks are registered in the Lima area, in absolute terms the largest concentration of trucks with names is there.

Vehicle names were recorded in 11 of Peru's 23 departments. Based on license numbers, the sample includes vehicles from 20 of the 23 departments. Although the sample is somewhat biased towards the north coast region, I believe that my study gives a reasonable approximation of the universe of Peruvian trucks with names.

The 1977 Peruvian sample can be compared to two earlier studies. Between 1952 and 1960, José Mario Farfan Ayerbe recorded 1,911

[4]Farfan, *op. cit.*, 1957, p. 140, indicated that names seldom change during the working life of a vehicle, although I have noted a few examples of old trucks with "new" names. Statistical analysis of the 1977 sample should yield information on changing naming patterns.

names in Peru, mainly in Lima but also in Arequipa and Cusco.[5] James Jaquith worked in Mexico between 1970 and 1974 and collected 905 names, mainly in the northwestern part of that country.[6] Both Farfan and Jaquith developed typologies to classify the names that they had recorded. Although there are some important differences in these two schemes, it has not been difficult to rationalize the two, since the published studies include complete lists of the Mexican and Peruvian truck names recorded by Jaquith and Farfan. For comparative purposes I choose to make use of the Farfan typology (with minor changes) and to "fit" Jaquith's data to the new typology. I also used the modified Farfan typology to classify my own sample of Peruvian truck names. The results of this effort are shown in Table I.

Although there are a number of fascinating patterns revealed in an analysis of Table I, perhaps the most interesting is the great increase in the 1977 Peruvian sample in four categories: #10 (Religious Names), #11 (Male Saints), #13 (Men's Names), and #20 (Company Names). Each of these categories shows at least double the percentage of names for the 1977 Peruvian sample in comparison to the two earlier studies. One might be tempted to explain part of this increase in terms of a great wave of religious fervor sweeping over Peru (at least for categories #10 and #11), but I think that a much better explanation is that these four categories are those in which there is a substantial number of duplicate names. Since Farfan and Jaquith did not note the duplication of names, their works did not accurately record the actual percentage of certain classes of names; namely, those most often duplicated, which seem to be certain types of religious names, men's names and company names.

The duplicated names painted on numerous trucks in the 1977 Peruvian sample present several interesting patterns. Of the 2,254 vehicles recorded, 1,340 had non-duplicated names whereas 914 had names that were shared by at least one other vehicle in the sample. This latter group included 162 names that were on two trucks and ranged as high as one name that appeared on 36 trucks. For ease of discussion, I will first focus on those names that were written on five or more trucks.

Thirty-five different names were painted at least five times on the trucks in the sample. One name, *Gitano*, was classified as a name of Good Will (Category #6), and another, *Pepe el Toro*, as an item of "pop" culture, based on the cartoon character. Three of the 35 were

[5] Farfan, *op. cit.*

[6] Jaquith, *op. cit.*

TABLE I
TRUCK NAME TYPOLOGY

	Place	Mexico	Peru	Peru
	Date	1970–74	1952–60	1977
	Sample Size	n = 905	n = 1911	n = 2254
		percent	*percent*	*percent*
1.	Astronomical, Weather	2.0	2.7	1.1
2.	Foreign Names and Terms	7.1	7.4	4.3
3.	Personal and Place-Names	11.0	11.8	5.4
4.	National History	2.3	1.8	0.6
5.	Indian Terms and References	2.2	0.9	0.6
6.	Luck, Good Will, Greetings	4.1	13.0	4.8
7.	Machismo, Wit, Impudence	8.9	9.3	2.8
8.	"Pop" Culture	10.2	11.4	3.1
9.	Capricious Names	2.0	3.8	2.0
10.	Religious Names	10.5	5.0	21.1
11.	Male Saints	1.4	2.7	9.1
12.	Female Saints	0.1	2.4	2.4
13.	Men's Names	6.6	4.2	19.0
14.	Women's Names	9.9	3.0	5.0
15.	Professions and Occupations	2.2	1.7	1.2
16.	Precious Things	0.8	0.3	1.3
17.	Botanical and Zoological	5.9	3.6	4.5
18.	Romantic and Sentimental	5.6	12.0	2.0
19.	Maxims	3.3	3.0	0.5
20.	Company Names	0.9	0.0	5.9
21.	Miscellaneous	2.3	0.0	3.3
	Totals:	99.7	100.0	100.0

Sources: Farfan, *op. cit.*, Jaquith, *op. cit.*, and 1977 fieldwork

placed within the category of Men's Names: *Jose Antonio, Juan Carlos,* and *Miguel Angel*, although the latter two names could have a variety of connotations. Three of the names were company names or names of truck fleets: *Cassinelli* and *Inca Kola* (both soft drink companies) and *Bala Perdida* (used as a fleet name). All of the remaining 27 names that were repeated five or more times were religious in nature.

The duplication of religious names on Peruvian trucks can be approached in several ways. In the material that follows I will focus on the ten most popular names, each appearing on at least ten trucks in the sample (see Table II). I will also enumerate specific uses of a name and the total references to the same name. Specific examples will be the number of times the name appears in the sample exactly as presented here, whereas the figure for total references will include diminutives and phrases such as "bless me . . .," "guide me . . .," "I follow . . .," and

TABLE II

TEN MOST POPULAR PERUVIAN TRUCK NAMES

		Specific	*Total Responses*	*Percent**
1.	*San Martín de Porres*	26	59	2.6
2.	*Señor de los Milagros*	27	36	1.6
3.	*Corazon de Jesús*	29	33	1.5
4.	*Cruz de Chalpón*	10	31	1.4
5.	*Virgen de la Puerta*	15	18	0.8
6.	*Virgen del Carmen*	14	18	0.8
7.	*San Francisco*	12	14	0.6
8.	*San Pedro*	10	14	0.6
9.	*San Isidro Labrador*	5	10	0.4
10.	*San Juan*	4	10	0.4

*Percent of the total sample of 2,254 trucks.

the like. In several cases the total number of references were double or triple the number of specific references.

The names of two male saints, *San Pedro* and *San Francisco*, appeared on a total of 14 trucks each. *San Isidro Labrador* and *San Juan* were both on ten trucks, although in each case only half of these references were specific. *San Martín de Porres* was the single most popular name in the study, being written on 36 trucks. There were a total of 59 references to San Martín. These five male saints account for almost five percent of the total vehicles in the study (see Table II). Interestingly enough, no female saints were as popular as these five male saints; the most popular female saint name, *Santa Rosa*, appeared on nine trucks. Santa Rosa is the first New World saint, is noted for her extraordinary mystical gifts, and is venerated as the patron saint of South America. Yet, as a name written on trucks, Santa Rosa takes a decidedly inferior position in comparison to the male saints.

Another important subclass of religious names refers to painted or carved images of Christ or the Virgin Mary. These images are usually associated with a particular place—perhaps a church, cave, body of water, mountain, or the like. Some of the minor saints mentioned above may well belong in this class, since the saint is actually venerated through a particular image in some local church. Three of the ten most popular religious names fall within this subclass: *Señor de los Milagros*, with a total of 36 examples, and the *Virgen del Carmen* and *Virgen de la Puerta*, each with a total of 18 references. The names of several other images were

commonly written on trucks; *Señor de Luren* on eight trucks and *Virgencita de Chapi*, also with eight, are good examples. I suggest that references to particular images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and certain saints are an important subgroup within the sample of names that I collected.

The last two important religious names are *Corazon de Jesús* and *Cruz de Chalpón* (also called the *Cruz de Motupe*). The former appeared on a total of 33 trucks in the sample, the latter on 31 trucks. These two names refer to sacred objects, or cults venerating such objects, within the general framework of Peruvian folk Catholicism. The Corazon de Jesús and its followers are probably the equivalent of the Sacred Heart Society in the English-speaking church, whereas the sacred cross on Cerro Chalpón is venerated by believers in the "miraculous powers of a rustic wooden cross"[7] found near the town of Motupe in northern coastal Peru in 1868.

At least seven[8] of the ten most popular Peruvian truck names in the 1977 sample are associated with local images, patron saints, or cult objects. The other three, all popular male saints, may well be important local images but are also venerated worldwide by the Catholic Church. The list includes only one (San Martín de Porres) of the four Peruvian saints. One of the other three, Santa Rosa, was fairly popular (nine trucks) and the two other Peruvian saints, San Juan Masias and San Francisco de Solano, might well account for the popularity of the names *San Juan* and *San Francisco*. Also interesting is the fact that several of the images or cult objects that are frequently said to be of major importance in Peru, such as Nuestra Señora de Copacabana, Nuestra Señora de Cocharcas, the Virgens of La Merced, Socorro, Guadalupe, and Belén, and the Señor del Sepulcro, appear on few, if any, trucks.

It is apparent from the 1977 sample that there is a consistent pattern in the choice of religious names painted on Peruvian trucks. The names of a select group of religious cult objects or images are frequently used whereas other folk Catholic objects or images seem to be infrequently chosen when trucks are named. The obvious question becomes: why does this pattern hold true?

The literature on vehicle names contains little to explain the choice of

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[7] John K. Hatch, *The Corn Farmers of Motupe* (University of Wisconsin Land Tenure Center Monograph No. 1, Madison, Wisconsin, 1976), p. 42.

[8] *San Isidro Labrador, San Martín de Porres, Virgen del Carmen, Virgen de la Puerta, Señor de los Milagros, Corazon de Jesús, and Cruz de Chalpón.*

names. A thorough search of the literature and a limited number of interviews with Peruvian truck drivers, however, suggest that the choice of certain religious names is tied to such things as 1) the owner's or driver's birthday, 2) the patron saint of the owner's/driver's hometown or place of residence, 3) the saint's day on which some significant event in the life of the owner, driver, or of the truck itself took place, 4) the folk cult (or *hermanidad*) to which the owner or driver belongs, or 5) the saint, image, or cult object that provided solace or otherwise "came through" for the owner or driver in time of need. Of note is the fact that most of the popular religious names are associated with folk Catholicism rather than with the formal church. Moreover, these same names are not only related to folk Catholicism, they are frequently associated with images or cult objects that play major roles in popular folk festivals. This leads us to a brief discussion of the role of the folk festival in Peruvian religious life, particularly as related to trucks and to truck drivers.

Pagan beliefs have probably long existed side by side with the "official" Catholic faith in Peru.[9] In many ways, the best examples of the retention of pagan beliefs, customs, or ceremonies are probably the festivals that take place in many towns in conjunction with the celebration of masses for a saint, image, or cult object. It can be demonstrated that a number of popular festivals probably have pre-Hispanic origins. For example, both the Peruvian Virgen de Guadalupe and Nuestra Señora de Copacabana are associated with reputed miraculous events that took place in or near pre-Hispanic sacred sites.[10] An even better case can be made for the celebration of the festival of the Cruz de Chalpón. The mountain on which the cross was found is said to have had great magical properties for pagan Peruvians[11] and the supposed date of the discovery of the cross, August 5, corresponds to the festival of Pachamama, one of the major pagan celebrations of pre-Hispanic Peru. What better way is there to transform local pagan traditions (even in nineteenth century Peru) than to convert them into folk Catholic ones? Other important festivals, such as the Virgen de la

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[9]Robert J. Smith, *The Art of the Festival* (University of Kansas Publications in Anthropology No. 6, Lawrence Kansas, 1975), pp. 17–21; and George Kubler, "The Quechua in the Colonial World," *Handbook of South American Indians,* Julian H. Steward, Editor (Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 143, 1946), II, p. 349.

[10]*Ibid.*, p. 361.

[11]I am indebted to Douglas Sharon for this information and for serving as a guide at the Motupe festival.

Puerta, cannot be traced to pre-Hispanic origins, simply because, as Robert Smith has said for the Otusco festival, "it seems that we have no idea at all as to the historical origin of the name of La Virgen de la Puerta or of her fiesta."[12]

Two aspects of folk festivals stand out. On the one hand, the festivals are usually the scene of intense religious activities. Various masses, celebrations, and individual religious acts take place throughout the festival period and usually culminate in one or more public spectacles in which all of the festival participants take part. Pilgrims travel long distances (frequently by truck) to join the celebration, often at great personal sacrifice. On the other hand, the festivals are usually the scene of numerous secular activities, such as a market, dancing, eating, drinking, socializing, and sometimes licentious behavior.[13] According to Hatch, the annual celebration at Motupe attracts "upwards of a quarter million tourists and pilgrims."[14] For many small Peruvian towns and cities and for literally millions of people, therefore, the annual religious festival held to venerate some saint, image, or cult object becomes the major event in the yearly cycle.

Trucks and truck drivers can be tied into the folk religious festival system in several ways. First, not surprisingly, trucks form an important means of public transportation in Peru and are often used to carry pilgrims to festivals. It is not surprising, too, to see a concentration of *Cruz de Chalpón* trucks at the Motupe festival, simply because that might be a good form of advertising for them. Second, the religious name on the truck might be indicative of the owner/driver being a member of the folk Catholic cult. Third, it may well be that the owner or driver is invoking the name of the saint, image, or cult object because of a past intercession by that figure in time of trouble. Trucking in Peru is admittedly a dangerous occupation with many potential risks; many truck names are certainly the result of a conscious desire to obtain the help of the local religious power figure (as represented by the most important local festival). Finally, one can suggest that the use of some names comes as the result of a subtle diffusion process, probably by way of word of mouth (or, better stated, front of truck), that puts elements of the transportation system at the forefront of any diffusion wave. Thus

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[12] Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 109–136; and Robert J. Smith, "Licentious Behavior in Hispanic Festivals," *Western Folklore*, XXXI (1972), pp. 290–298.

[14] Hatch, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

the appearance of a locally licensed truck with the name *Cruz de Chalpón* in Nazca, more than a thousand kilometers south of Motupe, may well have been the result of this diffusion process rather than a result of any actual contact with the sacred cross at Motupe or with its festival.

In conclusion, it seems likely that names associated with popular folk religious festivals represent one of the most important subclasses of names painted on Peruvian trucks. At least 80 percent of the most popular names in the 1977 study are related to religious figures or images associated with such festivals, and those names comprise about ten percent of the entire sample. The importance of this subclass has not been recognized in previous studies of vehicle names, simply because most such studies have not considered the duplication of vehicle names.[15] It is my belief that this subclass is worthy of additional study, as, indeed, is the whole matter of names painted on trucks.

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[15]St. Michel, a "vanquisher of demons," was, however, noted as the only widely duplicated canoe name in Martinique by Richard and Sally Price, "A Note on Canoe Names in Martinique," *Names,* 14:3 (September, 1966), p. 158.