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THE BEGINNINGS OF THE APACHE MENACE OF THE SOUTHWEST

By DONALD E. WORCESTER

IT HAS BEEN customary for writers to say that the Apache troubles in the Southwest did not begin till near the end of the seventeenth century. H. H. Bancroft stated that "From about 1672 the various Apache tribes became troublesome . . ." ¹ And in another place, "Toward the Spaniards the Navajos were friendly down to 1700, but in that year they committed some depredations, . . ." ² R. E. Twitchell said, "The Spaniards first began having serious trouble with the Navajo tribe shortly after the Pueblo uprising of 1680." ³ A study of the documentary evidence reveals that these distinguished historians were mistaken, and that the Apache menace is as old as the first Spanish occupation of the Southwest. Clearly, the Apaches were better known to the early Spanish settlers and explorers than to modern historians.

Although they were not known at first by the name Apache—believed to be a corruption of the Zúñi word *ápachu* (enemy), their name for the Navajos ⁴—the nomadic bands of Athapascan linguistic stock were encountered from the outset by nearly every Spanish expedition into the

1. H. H. Bancroft, *History of Arizona and New Mexico*, San Francisco, 1888, p. 170.

2. *Ibid.*, 222.

3. R. E. Twitchell, *Leading facts of New Mexican history*, Cedar Rapids, 1912, ii, 43.

4. F. W. Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians*, Washington, 1907, i, 63.

region. The purpose of this paper is to make known some of the early meetings between Spaniards and Apaches.

The first Europeans to see the Apaches were presumably the soldiers of the Coronado expedition, 1540-42. Castañeda, chronicler of that adventure, tells that when they were ten days' journey beyond the Pecos River, they came upon Indians living like Arabs, who were called Querechos, or buffalo-eaters. He noted a peculiarity of this tribe in their prevalent use of dogs as beasts of burden, which served to identify them as the Indians who came to be called Apaches Vaqueros, a term that included nearly all the buffalo hunting Apaches.⁵ Castañeda said of the Querechos, "They have better figures than the Pueblo Indians, are better warriors, and are more feared,"⁶ indicating that some conflict between the Pueblo Indians and the Querechos must have existed prior to 1541. That the ancient pueblo tribes lived in constant fear of attacks is proven by their efforts to fortify their homes. At Coolidge, Arizona, for example, there is the ruin of the Casa Grande pueblo, which, being situated on an open plain, was surrounded by a wall, and which had a high tower that was used as a lookout for the approach of raiding parties.⁷ The last period of occupation of this village, as determined by dendrochronology, was between 1300 and 1400 A. D. Other pueblo ruins show signs of attacks upon them for which the Apaches and Navajos might well be blamed, although there is no conclusive proof of their responsibility. Contrary to the belief expressed by F. W. Hodge that the Apaches did not molest the Pueblo tribes before the seven-

5. *Ibid.*

6. G. P. Winship, *Journey of Coronado*, N. Y., 1904, p. 111.

7. It is known that the Casa Grande tower was not built to live in by the fact that the lower stories were filled in to support the weight of the upper walls. In the latter part of the seventeenth century, Kino visited Casa Grande, and wrote: "It is said that the ancestors of Montezuma deserted and depopulated it, and, beset by the neighboring Apaches, left for the east or Casas Grandes, . . ." (H. E. Bolton, *Kino's memoir of Pimería Alta, 1683-1711*, Cleveland, 1919, i, 128). Manje reported, "An arquebus-shot away are seen twelve other half fallen houses, also having thick walls, and all with their roofs burned." (*Luz de tierra incógnita*, libro ii, cap. 5). The fact that the roofs were burned suggests Apache raids, since one of their raiding stratagems was to set the roofs of buildings on fire.

teenth century,⁸ Castañeda's statement, together with the evidences of assaults upon pueblos, and the fact that "Apache" originally meant enemy, are strong indications that the pueblo peoples had reason to fear and hate the Apaches long before the coming of Coronado.

Bustamante's account of the Rodríguez expedition of 1581 indicates that Querechos were seen on the journey through New Mexico. Bustamante said: "Reaching some plains and water holes, which they gave the name Los Llanos de San Francisco and Aguas Zarcas, they saw many herds of cows that come there to drink . . . There they found a ranchería of a different nation from those they had left behind, going to kill cattle for their food. They carried their provisions of maize and dates (*dátil*) loaded on dogs which they raise for this purpose."⁹

In spite of the view held by Charles Amsden that none of the sixteenth century expeditions had any contact with the Navajos, or learned of their existence in any specific way,¹⁰ Espejo met some mountain Querechos near Ácoma in 1582, who were presumably Navajos, or Apaches del Navajó, as they were first called. The relation between the Spaniards and Navajos were similar to those between Spaniards and Apaches, and due to the confusion that existed in regard to these tribes, many early accounts referred to Apaches when actually Navajos were meant. The Navajos were considered part of the Apache nation, but the chief connection was that both belonged to the Athapascan linguistic family.

In 1590 Castaño de Sosa visited the Pecos region and saw the Querechos and their dogs. Castaño spoke of them as Vaqueros, because they followed the buffalo. No friendliness whatever was shown by these Indians, for they attacked the party, and killed one member, an Indian. Moreover, they

8. F. W. Hodge, "Early Navaho and Apache," *American Anthropologist*, o.s., viii, 1895, p. 239.

9. H. E. Bolton, *Spanish exploration in the Southwest*, N. Y., 1916, p. 148.

10. C. Amsden, "Navaho origins," *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW*, vii, 1932, p. 194.

stole a number of Castaño's cattle. Captain Cristóbal de Heredia and five soldiers were soon in pursuit of the cattle thieves, and besides killing a number of them, the soldiers returned with four captives. One of these was hanged, while the other three, because of their extreme youth, were spared, and kept to serve as interpreters.¹¹ These incidents probably mark the first recorded clashes between Apaches and Spaniards, and were the precursors of nearly three centuries of bitter warfare. The practice of seizing Apaches for slaves became a profitable occupation of some of the Spanish settlers of New Mexico, and it was a constant source of irritation to the Apaches and Navajos.

Don Juan de Oñate wrote on 2 March, 1599, "We have seen other nations such as the Querechos, or herdsmen, who live in tents of tanned hides among the buffalo. The Apaches, of whom we have also seen some, are innumerable, and although I heard that they live in rancherías, a few days ago I ascertained that they live like these in pueblos, one of which, eighteen leagues from here, contains fifteen plazas. They are a people whom I have compelled to render obedience to His Majesty, although not by means of legal instruments like the rest of the provinces. This has caused me much labor, diligence, and care, long journeys, with arms on the shoulders, and not a little watching and circumspection; indeed, because my *maese de campo* was not as cautious as he should have been, they killed him with twelve companions in a great pueblo fortress called Ácoma, which must contain about three thousand Indians."¹² An alliance between the Apaches and the Pueblo Indians, such as those which were common later on, may have been the cause of Oñate's apparently erroneous belief that the Apaches dwelt in permanent pueblos. In reporting his journey to the plains in 1601, Oñate evidently considered that a safe passage through the Apache country was a noteworthy feat, for he wrote with pardonable pride, "we were not disturbed by them at all,

11. Pacheco y Cárdenas, *Colección de documentos inéditos*, Madrid, 1871, xv, 210.

12. H. E. Bolton, *op. cit.*, p. 217-18.

although we were in their lands, nor did any Indian become impertinent."¹³

Accounts concerning the Apaches and Navajos during the early years of the seventeenth century are rather scarce, but available reports run so thoroughly in the same vein as clearly to indicate that raids by those Indians upon the converted tribes, the Spanish outposts, and the Spanish horse herds were continual from the first days of Spanish settlement of the Southwest.

The Apaches began acquiring horses as soon as there were any to be had. Ranches were begun in New Mexico about 1600, and the Apaches soon found horse stealing an occupation which was well suited to their way of life. So troublesome were their depredations during the first years of the province, that early in 1608 Father Lázaro Ximénez informed the viceroy that the Spaniards and Christian Indians of New Mexico were regularly harassed by the Apaches who destroyed and burned the pueblos, waylaid and killed the natives, and stole the horses of the Spaniards. He asked that the governor be required to keep some soldiers in the field for the defense and security of the land, as there was much grumbling among the natives.¹⁴ This served as the official declaration of a long and sanguine conflict between Spaniards and Apaches, which greatly hindered the Spanish advance into the rich mining and agricultural regions of northern New Spain. When the Spaniards gained control of the pueblo tribes, they were forced to protect them from Navajo and Apache raids. Thus, they inherited indefatigable foes who were to make their hold on the entire area a tenuous one for centuries to come.

The acquisition of the horse by the Apaches served greatly to augment the Apache danger, for horses furnished them a certain food supply and at the same time made pos-

13. *Ibid.*, 253.

14. Mandamiento para que el governador de la nueva mexico conforme al numero de gente y armas que obiere en aquel pressidio procure que ande una squadra que acuda al remedio de los daños que hacen los yndios apaches de guerra en los amigos y cavallada de Españoles, 6 de março, 1608. A. G. I. 58-3-16. Bancroft Library transcript.

sible the extension of their range and increased their fighting ability. Mounted, the Apaches presented a problem unlike any by which the Spaniards had previously been plagued. Whereas it was fairly simple to surround a pueblo and force the occupants to surrender, the Apaches had no homes or towns to be defended, and no large armies to be defeated. Furthermore, they generally did not risk battle without first making sure that their force was superior in strength to that of their enemies, not from any cowardice, but because the loss of warriors was severely felt. Plunder was the main objective in their raids; if this could be accomplished without fighting, so much the better.

Apache hostility was mentioned in a memorial on New Mexico by Fray Francisco de Velasco, probably written in the summer of the year 1608: "The second [reason not to abandon the converts] is that those Indians have become so friendly with the Spaniards, they have lost the friendship of the Picurías, Taos, Pecos, Apaches, and Vaqueros. The latter have called a general convocation among themselves and among other barbarous tribes for the purpose of killing and putting an end to our friends as soon as the Spaniards leave them. This will most certainly come to pass. If the colonists are withdrawn and the religious remain among the Indians, we must believe they will have no better fortune than the Indians."¹⁵

In the royal cedula of 20 May, 1620, the king referred to a letter from the *cabildo justicia y regimiento* of Santa Fé, of the year 1617, in which there was a description of the perilous state of that new settlement, because it had only forty-eight soldiers and was surrounded by several Indian nations. Part of the danger, at least, was probably due to the Apaches. In 1622 the converted Jémez Indians were forced to abandon one of their pueblos because of raids of the Navajos from the northwest.¹⁶

Fray Alonso de Benavides, in his report on New Mexico

15. Fray Francisco de Velasco, *Memorial de Nuevo Mexico* [considered in Council], 9 April, 1609, A. G. I. 59-1-5 (Mexico 128). Bancroft Library transcript.

16. F. W. Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

in 1630, gave an account of the different bands and divisions of Apaches then known. First were the Apaches del Perrillo, of whom he wrote, "... and although these Apaches are very bellicose, they are more confiding than the preceding nations, and we can pass by them with less fear,..."¹⁷ Benavides considered as Apaches all of the outlying tribes of New Mexico, and believed there were more Apaches than all the tribes of New Spain together, a gross exaggeration, needless to say. "They are a very energetic people and very fierce in war...."¹⁸ It is a nation so bellicose that it has been a crucible of courage for the Spaniards, and for this they esteem them very much, and say that the Spaniards deserve the title of people, and not the nations of the Indian pueblos."¹⁹ Fray Alonso had more to say concerning the Apaches del Navajó. A convent and church had been founded in the pueblo of Santa Clara, consisting of the Christian Tehua nation, who were near the frontier and who suffered much damage from these Apaches. "This is the most warlike Province of all the Apache Nation, and where the Spaniards have well shown their valor."²⁰ He stated that all of the pueblo tribes were inclined to painting, but to do so they needed a certain light stone (*piedra lumbre*) which was found only in the Navajo country. Two or three thousand Indians, according to Benavides, would go to the Navajo lands to get the stone. They would fight with the Navajos, and many would be killed. The Navajos would then wage a war of retaliation against the Christians. Said Benavides, "There were so many Navajos that in two days they could assemble more than 30,000 warriors, and this is no exaggeration because sometimes the Spaniards have gone there to punish them for the many Christian Indians they killed, and although they

17. Alonso de Benavides, *Memorial*, 1630. (In Gaspar de Villagr a, *Historia de Nueva Mexico*, 1610 (Mexico, 1900 edition), Apndice segundo, p. 13) "y aunque estos apaches son muy belicosos, son de mas confianza que las naciones antecedentes, y pasamos por ellos con menos cuidado..."

18. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

approached cautiously and took them unaware, they always found the fields full of countless people.”²¹

In Benavides' day there were a number of attempts to convert the Apaches and Navajos. Those Spaniards who were engaged in the profitable, albeit illegal, occupation of selling Apache captives for slaves in the mines of El Parral, were not kindly disposed toward the conversion of Apaches. Benavides told of persuading a certain chief of a *ranchería* of Apaches Vaqueros to agree to conversion for himself and his people. Unfortunately, the Spanish governor sent out a large force of friendly Indians to capture for him as many Apaches as they could. The *ranchería* of the chief who had promised to accept Christianity was raided, and the chief, among others, was killed.

Such acts as the above mentioned one crystallized Apache hatred of the Spaniards, and widened the breach between them. The Apaches gradually became a more serious threat to the security of the province. On 26 September, 1638, Fray Juan de Prada wrote concerning the state of affairs in New Mexico: “These encomenderos are under obligations to participate with their arms and horses in the defense both of the natives as well as of the religious who are in the frontier pueblos and live in constant danger from the Apache Indians. These are a very warlike people who live in *rancherías* in the environs of the converted pueblos, against which that nation [the Apache] makes continuous attacks. Thus, in order to guard against these attacks, soldiers are always provided, and in times of special danger they are accustomed to hire others to assist them to form convoys, and for this they give them, at their own expense, arms and horses.”²² Fray Juan furthermore mentioned a tendency of the Christian Indians to flee to the Apaches whenever they were annoyed at the soldiers or settlers. This coöperation between Apaches and pueblo Indians was of par-

21. *Ibid.* Clearly, 30,000 warriors would have been more than the Apaches and Navajos together could have assembled.

22. C. W. Hackett, *Historical documents relating to New Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya, and approaches thereto*, Washington, iii, 110, 1937.

amount importance during the era of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680.

Also referring to New Mexico are the words of Francisco de Baeza of 12 February, 1639. "There are perhaps in the entire [province] and its settlements two hundred persons, Spaniards and *mestizos*, who are able to bear arms, as they do in defense of the converted Indians, who frequently suffer injuries from the neighboring Apaches. These are warlike and, as barbarians, make unexpected attacks upon them. To their defense the governors and [Spanish] inhabitants repair, punishing the Apaches severely. As a result the Apaches restrain themselves and the converted Indians are saved, for the Apaches see that the Spaniards defend them and that those are punished who disturb them."²³

During the term of Governor Hernando de Ugarte, 1649-53, the Jémez Indians revolted, aided by the Apaches, and a Spaniard was killed. The disturbance was soon quelled, and by order of the governor, twenty-nine Indians were hanged. In 1650 a plot of the Tehuas and Apaches to kill the friars and soldiers on Thursday night of Passion Week was discovered in time to prevent a massacre. Ugarte wrote from Santa Fé in September, 1653, that he had discovered a very large league and convocation between Apaches and Christian Indians.²⁴

Apaches raided the Jumano village east of Abó during the administration of Governor Juan de Samaniego, 1653-56, and carried off twenty-seven women and children. An expedition led by Juan Domínguez de Mendoza was sent against them, and he left them severely punished. The following year the Navajos attacked the pueblo of Jémez, killing nineteen and taking thirty-five captives. Once more Juan Domínguez led the pursuit. He surprised the Navajos during a native ceremonial, killed several, captured two hundred and eleven, and freed the prisoners, including a Span-

23. *Ibid.*, iii, 119-120. Baeza had been governor of New Mexico in 1635-37.

24. Letter of El General Hernando de Ugarte y la Concha, A. G. I., 67-3-33 (Guadalajara 139). Bancroft Library transcript.

ish woman.²⁵ Most of the captured Navajos were undoubtedly divided as booty among the soldiers, following the custom of punitive expeditions. Navajo and Apache slaves were apparently always in demand, and large numbers of them were sold during the 1650's, which contributed to the ever-growing hostility of the Apaches. Punitive expeditions were the chief means used to acquire Apache slaves, but governors and colonists were not averse to employing other methods, such as seizing Apaches when they came to settlements to trade, and provoking trouble on 'peaceful' trading ventures to the Apache rancherias, or by enlisting Indian allies to capture Apaches for them.

The administration of Governor Manso de Contreras, 1656-59, was characterized by the usual campaigns against the Apaches. In 1658, Apaches (Navajos?) raided the Zuñi pueblos, and in the following year they attacked other frontier pueblos. Manso's successor, Bernardo López de Mendizábal was chiefly concerned with the speedy aggrandizement of his personal fortune, and he followed the example of his predecessors in sending Navajo and Apache captives to the slave markets of New Spain. He was accused of forcing the citizens to sell their Apaches to him or seizing them outright, to increase the number he had to offer for sale.²⁶ Fray Juan Ramírez testified against Mendizábal, on September 8, 1659: "Very great, Sir, has been the covetousness of the governors of this kingdom wherein they have, under color of chastising the neighboring enemy, made opportunity to send, apparently in the service of his Majesty, squadrons of men to capture the heathen Indians to send them to the camps and mines of El Parral to sell (as Governor Don Bernardo de Mendizábal is doing at present, he having sent there more than seventy Indian men and women to be sold). This is a thing which his Majesty and the señores viceroys have forbidden, under penalty of disgrace, deprivation of office, and loss of property, but no attention is paid to the

25. F. V. Scholes, "Troublous times in New Mexico 1659-70," *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW*, xii, 149.

26. *Ibid.*

order on account of the great interests involved; hence God, our Lord, through this inhuman practice is losing innumerable souls of the heathen hereabout, who have, from fear of it, conceived a mortal hatred for our holy faith and enmity for the Spanish nation. For this purpose of making captives, the governor on the fourth of September of this year, 1659, sent out an army of eight hundred Christian Indians and forty Spaniards, though there was evident risk at the time the army set out that trouble would ensue, for the kingdom was then full of bands of heathen who have entered the pueblos of Las Salinas, the *camino real*, and the farms of El Río, and also the pueblos of Hemes, San Ildefonso, and San Felipe. In these pueblos they have killed some Christian Indians and have carried off others alive to perish in cruel martyrdom. They have also driven off some herds of horses and mares. All this is because the populous region is undefended, the troops having been sent off inland for slaves under the pretense above stated, and we are afraid, lest the heathen may come in suddenly while they are absent and destroy some of the settlements. And even though this might not happen, there cannot fail on this account, Sir, to come great hunger and loss of life, for the army went away at the time when the corn was maturing, and there are eight hundred and forty cornfields left to go to ruin without their owners, at the mercy of the bears and other wild beasts, which constantly destroy the crops, while the heathen lay waste the one and catch the other. But on account of the absence of the inhabitants, it is to be expected that grave ruin will come to this poor kingdom, which has just been through so serious a famine that the natives had to sustain themselves on seeds of grasses, *tierra blanca*, . . .

“For the said *entrada* the governor has used the corporal and his squad which is in his Majesty’s pay for the sole purpose of guarding the wagons and mules which belong to the *real hacienda*, and has left the latter in the country with no defense whatever, in manifest danger inasmuch as the heathen have entered our settlements, that the latter will

carry off the mules and kill the muleteers.”²⁷ The evils outlined by Fray Juan Ramírez, which were certainly not peculiar to the administration of López de Mendizábal, deserve serious consideration in a study of the causes of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, for ensuing famines and Apache raids reduced the population of the settlements and the number of horses and cattle, and gave the Christian Indians much cause for dissatisfaction with the Spaniards. Diego de Peñalosa was questioned concerning the Indians whom Mendizábal held as slaves. “He said that they were not property, for the audiencia of Guadalajara has commanded that Indians shall not be sold or enslaved, and has declared them free, ordering that all those whom Don Juan Manso and Don Bernardo had sold in El Parral, or whom the governor had sold in Sonora, should be placed at liberty, and that those who had bought them should demand the price from the sellers. [He mentioned] reports . . . in which it was shown that Don Bernardo had sold seventy or eighty Indians.”²⁸

Relations with the Apaches became more acute during the 1660's. Even so, some Piros were so discontented with their lot under the rule of the Spaniards, that they conspired with the Apaches, as during the administration of Governor Villanueva, 1665-68, when five Spaniards were killed at Senecú. By 1669 the situation was so bad that Fray Bernal wrote, on April 1 of that year, “. . . this kingdom . . . is nearly exhausted from suffering two calamities which were enough to put it out of existence, as it is even now hastening to its ruin. One of these calamities is that the whole land is at war with the widespread heathen nation of Apache Indians, who kill all the Christian Indians they can find and encounter. No road is safe; everyone travels at risk of his life, for the heathen traverse them all, being courageous and brave, and they hurl themselves at danger like a people who know no God nor that there is any hell. The second misfortune is that for three years no crops have been harvested.

27. C. W. Hackett, *op. cit.*, iii, 186-7.

28. *Ibid.*, iii, 262.

In the past year, 1668, a great many Indians perished of hunger, lying dead along the roads, in the ravines, and in their huts. There were pueblos (as instance the Humanas) where more than four hundred and fifty died of hunger. The same calamity still prevails . . ."²⁹ Apache incursions caused the abandonment of the Zuñi pueblo of Hawikúh in 1670. Fray Francisco de Ayeta outlined the disasters of the next few years, in a petition for aid in 1679. "It is public knowledge that from the year 1672 until your Excellency adopted measures for aiding that kingdom, six pueblos were depopulated—namely, that of Cuarac, with more than two hundred families, that of Los Humanas with more than five hundred, that of Abó with more than three hundred . . . that of Chililí with more than one hundred, Las Salinas with more than three hundred—restored, as has been said—, and Senecú, both of these last being frontiers and veritable keys to those provinces."³⁰ Thus, because of Apache raids, drouths, and famines, the Salinas pueblos, as well as others, were deserted during the turbulent decade preceding the Pueblo uprising of 1680.

Fray Francisco de Ayeta, *procurador general* and custodian of the provinces of New Mexico after 1674, took up the struggle to save the province from the imminent destruction by the Apaches. He accompanied one wagon train of men, arms, munitions, and horses to New Mexico in 1677, and then returned to Mexico City to petition for more assistance. His second train was nearing the Rio Grande in 1680 when disaster struck the New Mexican settlements. The pueblo Indians, allied with the Apaches, had snapped the last vestiges of the flimsy Spanish control, and the surviving Spaniards and their allies were forced to retreat toward El Paso del Norte.

Thus, the Spanish colonization of the Southwest proceeded from the very beginning under the cloud of Apache terror. Once the Apaches perfected mounted warfare, their

29. *Ibid.*, iii, 271-2.

30. *Ibid.*, iii, 298.

opposition to the Spaniards became more destructive, because they were able to strike at undefended settlements and ranches over a wide area, and then to flee to mountain strongholds where pursuit was extremely hazardous if not impossible. The fourth century Europeans must have felt no greater fear of the Huns of Attila than that inspired in the Spaniards and pueblo Indians by the Apaches who, like the Huns, "were fiercer than ferocity itself." The whitened bones of unfortunate travellers which marked New Mexico's trails, the smoke-scorched foundations of lone ranch houses, and the crumbling walls of deserted pueblos and missions presented mute evidence of the terrors that awaited those who dared to make their homes in Apachería.