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## Document 1522A

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# Espinosa's account of his attempt to reach Panama and of the discovery of the Northern Mariana Islands

*Sources: Letter from Gonzalo Gómez de Espinosa, former captain of the Trinidad, to the King of Spain, dated Cochin (India), 12 January 1525. Manuscript located in AGI Seville, General: est. 145, caj. 7, leg. 7 and transcribed by Garrigós (Doc. N° 198) and by Llorens Asensio. Translation by R. Lévesque.*

**Letter to His Majesty from Gonzalo Gómez Espinosa, captain of the nao Trinidad of Magellan's fleet, giving him an account of his departure from the Moluccas in 1522, and of his return in distress to Tidore seven months later, with the discovery of 14 islands in the northern hemisphere, etc., dated Cochin 12 January 1525.**

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Sir,

Your Sacred Majesty will now learn about the things that have occurred after the nao **Victoria** left the Moluccas. It was necessary for us to stay with the other nao, [i.e. the **Trinidad**]. With much labor and much danger, we careened her and were busy with the careening and the transport of cloves during four months at the island of Tidore where its King made us welcome in the name of Y.S.M.

From this island, Sir, I took my departure on 6 April 1522 and we made our way towards the mainland where Andrés Niño built the caravels<sup>1</sup> which is in the South Sea where, Sir, I found that from the Moluccas to the first land there were as many as 1,800 leagues; the said land, for most of the way, would bear to the E 1/4 NE [= E by N].

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1 Ed. note: Towards Panama, but Espinosa could not have known then (in April 1522) that Gil González de Avila and Andrés Niño had **already** gone to explore the Pacific coast toward Nicaragua and as far as Tehuantepec (Mexico) in February 1522. His destination must have been simply the reach the place that he knew had been discovered by Núñez de Balboa in 1513.

Along the way there, Y.S.M. will learn how **I discovered fourteen islands** which were full of an infinite number of naked people, the said people being of the same color as the people of India. There, Sir, I took an interpreter to learn what they contained and, because we could not understand the language, I did not learn what the above-mentioned fourteen islands contain.<sup>1</sup>

Sir, they are from 12 degrees as far as 20 degrees north of the equinoctial line. That is why, Sir, I took my departure from these islands on St. Barnabe's Day<sup>2</sup> and continued my route where Y.S.M. will learn that I went on ploughing the sea and making efforts to give a good account of myself. I went up, Sir, as far as 42 degrees on the north side where, Sir, it became necessary for me to cut the castles and the quarter-deck because the storm was so big and the weather so cold that aboard the nao we could not cook any food. That storm lasted twelve days and because the people did not have any bread to eat, most of them lost weight and when the storm had passed and the people could once again cook food, on account of the many [intestinal] worms that we had, it gave them nausea which affected most of the people. When I saw the people suffering, the contrary weather and that I had been at sea for five months, I turned back to the Moluccas and by the time we got to the Moluccas it had been seven months at sea without taking any refreshments and when I got to the islands of the Moluccas I found, Sir, three hundred Portuguese who were building a fortress on Ternate Island.

There I was rewarded for my labor by threats of being hanged from the yardarms and the seizure of the nao loaded with cloves and of all the equipment. I found, Sir, that they had also seized the factory of Y.S.M. and the clerk and four other men who were also captive in many leg irons. That, Sir, is what they did to me and to the other people whom I had with me, dishonoring me and saying that I was a thief in front of the native people and not paying attention to me at all and saying: "Now we'll see who [will prevail], the King of Spain or that of Portugal".

Now Y.S.M. will learn that they took from me all the nautical charts, the logbooks, the astrolabes, the quadrants, the nautical books<sup>3</sup> with all the equipment of the pilots and more.

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1 Ed. note: As we shall soon learn from other evidence (the Genoese pilot, Doc. 1522C), the native Chamorro they took along at least gave him the names of the 14 Mariana Islands correctly, but this information was later seized by the Portuguese.

2 Ed. note: On June 11th.

3 Ed. note: The Spanish word *regimientos* means printed reference books, almanachs and tables for determining latitudes from astral positions.



**Ternate and the fortress built by the Portuguese in 1522. Governor Brito began the building of this fortress on Ternate Island to establish Portuguese hegemony in the Moluccas. The Dutch later improved and maintained the colony.**

Sir, they took from my chest your Royal standard which I kept very well folded and packed, the one Y.S.M. gave upon leaving on the voyage of discovery, saying very loudly: "This is [made of] a better cloth than that of the Moros".<sup>1</sup> That is why, Sir, I asked for an inventory listing of all they had taken, to which the captain and the officers replied, about the inventory list I was asking from them, that I should thank God that it was not given in the form of a hanging from a yardarm.

So it is that they kept me and the 21 of us in prison for four months and from here they took me to the Banda Islands which belong to Y.S.M. From those islands, Sir, they took me to Malacca where they kept me five months and from Malacca they took me to be presented to the Governor of India at the city of Cochin, where they load the pepper, and I have been here ten months. The said Governor told me he would give passage to me and the people who had come with me. Now Y.S.M. will learn that this viceroy whom the King [of Portugal] has sent to India had me arrested when he learned that I was in this city of Cochin, threatening me and telling me that he should have my head cut off, dishonoring me with many bad words, and that the others should be

1 Ed. note: Implying the opposite, of course. The Moluccan natives were Moslems. There is a document in AGI Seville about the 8 flags that had been specially made for Magellan:  
*"Nº 85.—Detailed list of the costs made for Magellan's fleet, in which appears the cost of the flags and who made them.—Year 1518-1519.—AGI 32-3-7-26: On 15 November of the said year [1518], there were paid to Diego Fernandez, painter, for 8 flags that he painted, one of the Consolation of Our Lady, and another with the royal standard, and 6 with the insignia of Santiago [St. James]; the flag of Our Lady and the royal standard were 6 reales each, and the others were 2-1/2 reales each, for a total of 27 reales."*

hanged. It had been one month that I was in prison when I requested that on behalf of the King of Portugal and of Y.S.M. they give me a passage which they refused to give me. Y.S.M. will learn that I have been in prison for twenty seven months.

From there I have petitioned You and I requested many times to be given [money to buy] food from the property of Y.S.M. which they took from me in the Moluccas. They told me to bring another one, [because] this one already had an owner. Thus Y.S.M. will learn that out of 21 men that we were in the Moluccas, for lack of food and as I had gone myself to look for some, they went away with the junks and native ships, so that, Sir, here in Cochin we are now only six men. Hence Y.S.M. will learn that the lack of food is more painful to us than the imprisonment because, Sir, we are treated worse than if we were in Barbary.

That is why I kiss the hands of Y.S.M. and hope that You will remedy this [situation] and be willing to free us from the power of Christians and may remember my services. That is the favor I beg of Y.S.M.

Sir, Y.S.M. should not underestimate the islands of the Moluccas and of Banda and Timor because, Sir, they are three of the best orchards there are in the world, the Moluccas for clove, Banda for nutmeg and mace<sup>1</sup>, Timor for sandal-wood. Hence, Sir, Y.S.M. will learn that among all the [other] islands that have been discovered none of them have such products. It is also certain, Sir, that they belong to your Royal crown. However, I let Y.S.M. know that in India they are making ready a fleet of many *fustas* and ships to go to the Moluccas to fight the Spanish if they should go there, of which Don Pedro de Castelblanco is Captain Major.

Sir, the donjon of the fortress in the Moluccas is 14 feet in width; I paced it myself with my feet. Also, Sir, they say here that, even if the said King of Portugal were to let go of the said Moluccas, they themselves would not let them go, but instead defend them very well. Also, Sir, they are sending another good fleet to Banda of which Francisco de Saa [i.e. Sá] goes as Captain Major, to build another fort. Sir, my opinion would be to cut off the roots so that the branches would not grow too much.

Sir, I write no more because Taimo [or Taimon], a servant of Doña Leonor<sup>2</sup>, will give Y.S.M. a more complete report about what goes on here. This man always was a [ship] captain and he knows very well what has happened in these parts. Hence Y.S.M. should believe him because he is a man who has served the King [of Portugal] and has given a good account of himself with everything he has entrusted him with. Y.S.M. will learn that he had recommended the said Taimo [or Taimon] as Captain Major of Malacca, which is one of the best captainships there are in these parts. I leave unsaid all the wrongs that I have suffered here because he has seen how they have refused to give me a passage. He has sworn never to take up arms here in India until he has told the King all that they have done to me here. Sir, the said Taimo [or Taimon] has consented

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1 Ed. note: Mace is a spice made from the dry outer covering of the nutmeg.

2 Ed. note: This Doña Leonora [1498-1558] was the sister of Charles V. She became the wife of King Manuel of Portugal in 1518; after he died 3 years later, she moved to France to become the wife of Francis I, but Espinosa did not know that yet.



**Close-up view of the fortress where Espinosa and his men were held prisoners (in lower left corner).**

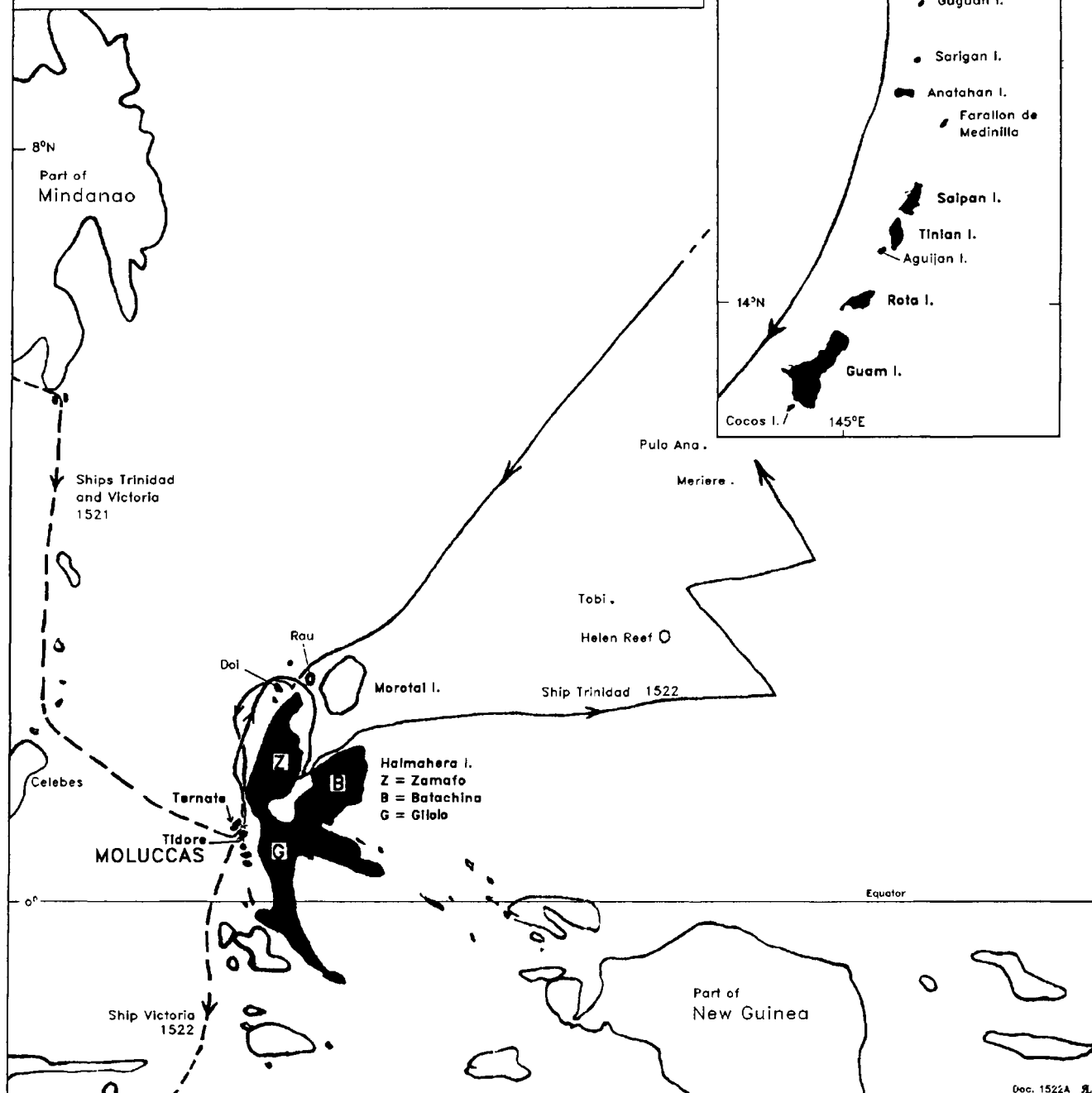
to lend me in the name of Y.S.M. a little money because he saw that I was much in need of it for my expenses. He carries a receipt from me. I beg Y.S.M. to reimburse him out of my wages.

Made in Cochin on the 12th day of January of 1525.

Your loyal vassal

[Signed] Gonçalo Gomez de Spinosa [sic].

Part of the track of the ship *Trinidad*, Captain Gómez de Espinosa, as he attempted to reach Central America in 1522 but was forced back to the Moluccas. The ship, mostly loaded with cloves, left Tidore on 6 April 1522 and went to the Port of Kau in Zamafo to pick up food supplies. It left Kau on 25 April and met headwinds that prevented a route to Central America via Chile. After changing course, the Sonsorol Islands were discovered on 6 May, Asunción in the Northern Marianas on 11 June. On the return voyage, they could not touch at Agrigan as intended, but went to anchor at Maug instead, at about the end of June. They arrived back at the Moluccas at the end of October and fell under the power of the newly-arrived Portuguese governor, António Brito.



## Actual transcript of Espinosa's letter to the King

**Carta a S. M. de Gonzalo Gómez Espinosa, capitán de la nao Trinidad, de la Armada de Magallanes, dándole cuenta de su salida del Maluco, en 1522 y arribada a Tidore siete meses después, con el descubrimiento de 14 islas en el hemisferio del Norte etc., fecha en Cochín a 12 de Enero 1525.**

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Señor,

*Sabra vuestra sagra majestad las cosas que ahora han sucedido despues que la nao vitoria [sic] partio de maluco nos fue necesario de quedar con la otra nao con mucho trabajo y mucho peligro la corejimos y estovimos in corejilla y en cargalla de clavo quatro meses en la ysla de tidori [sic] en la qual nos hizo el Rey della muy buena compañía en el nombre de vuestra sagra majestad y desta ysla señor me parti seis dias del mes de abril de mill y quinientos y veinte y dos años y hizimos nuestro camino para yr a demandar la tierra firme donde hizo andres niño las caravelas que es en la mar del sull donde señor hallava que de maluco a la primera tiera no avia sino mill y ochosientas leguas la qual tiera me demorava la mas parte del camino a leste quarta del nordeste y en el camino a quinientas leguas de maluco sabra vuestra sagra majestad como descubri quatorze islas las quales heran llenas de infinitisima jente desnuda la cual jente hera de la color de la jente de las indias donde señor tome lengua para saber lo que avia en ellas y por no entender la lengua no supe lo que avia en las estas dichas catorze islas.*

*Señor estan desde doce grados hasta veinte grados de la parte del norte de la liña hequinunçial por lo qual señor parti destas el día de san bernabe siguiendo el dicho mi viaje donde sabra vuestra sagra majestad que anduve arando la mar haziendo mis fueras para dar buena cuenta de mi donde señor hallege hasta quarenta y dos grados de la parte del norte donde señor me hizo menester cortar los castillos y toldas porque la tormenta hera tan grande y los frios heran tan grandes que en la nao no podiamos hazer de comer la qual tormenta duro doze días y porque la jente no tenia pan que comer enflaquesio la mas parte della y quando la tormenta fue passada que torno la jente a hazer de comer de llazor<sup>1</sup> que teniamos mucho les dio fasti[di]o donde adolesio la mas parte de la jente y quando vi la jente doliente y los tiempos contrarios y avia sinco meses que andaua por la mar arrybe sobre maluco y antes que llegase a maluco avia siete meses que andaua por la mar sin tomar refresco ninguno y llegado a las tieras de maluco halle señor trezientos honbres portogeses que estauan haziendo una fortaleza en la isla de ternate donde fue tan bien reçibido sobre mi trabajo que me amenazauan de me ahorcar de las antenas y tomandome la nao cargada de clao con todos sus aparejos y halle que tambien señor avian tomado la fatoria de vuestra sagra majestad y el escriuano y otros quatro hombres que estauan con el presos con muchas prisiones y assi señor hizieronme a mi y la otra jente que conmigo tenia dezonrandome y diziendo que era la-*

1 Ed. note: Apparently the contemporary slang word for some intestinal worms, according to Navarrete.

*dron delante de la jente de la tiera y que no me tenian en quenta ninguna y diziendo agora veremos quien es el rey de castilla o el de portogal donde sabra vuestra sagra majestad que me tomaron todas las cartas de marear y libros de derotear y estrolabios y quadrantes y rejimientos con todos los aparejos de pilotos y mas señor me tomaron de mi caxa vuestra vanderá real la qual tenia muy bien plegada y cojida la qual vuestra sagra majestad dio para ir a descubrir el dicho viaje diziendo a grandes boses mejor ropa es esta que ropa de moros por lo qual señor yo le demande conossimiento de todo lo que me avia tomado donde me respondió el capitan y los oficiales que el conossimiento que yo les demandava que agradiesse a dios como no me le dauan ahorcandome de una antena y assi me tovieron preso quatro meses a mi y a veinte y un hombre que heramos y de aqui me llevaron a las islas de banda las quales islas son aquellas que dan la nuez moscada y la masa las quales islas son de vuestra sagra majestad y destas islas señor me lleuaron para melaca donde me tovieron sinco meses y de melaca me llevaron a presentar al governador de la yndia en la çibdad de cochín donde se carga la pimienta donde ha diez meses que estoy diziendome el dicho governador que me daria pasaje a mi y a la jente que conmigo venia agora sepa vuestra sagra majestad que este visorey que enbio el rey a la yndia me mando prender quando supo que yo estava en esta çibdad de cochín amenazandome y diziendome que me cortasen la cabeza y dezonrandome con muchas malas palabras y diziendo que a los otros ahorcase dende day a un mes que yo estava preso de la prission requeri que de partes del rey de portogal y de vuestra sagra majestad que me diesen pasaje el qual no me quisieron dar sabra vuestra sagra majestad como ha veinte y siete meses que estoi preso donde le requeria y requeri muchas vezes que me diesen de comer de la hazienda de vuestra sagra majestad que me tomaron en maluco y me dizian que traxiese otra que esta dueño tenia y asi sabra vuestra sagra majestad que de veinte y un hombre que estavamos en maluco por falta de comer y por yr llo a buscar yranse con los juncos y navios de la tierra donde señor agora nos somos aqui en cochín sino seis hombres lo qual sabra vuestra sagra majestad que el comer que no tenemos nos es mayor pena que la presion [sic] porque señor somos peor tratados que si estoviesemos en la beruería.*

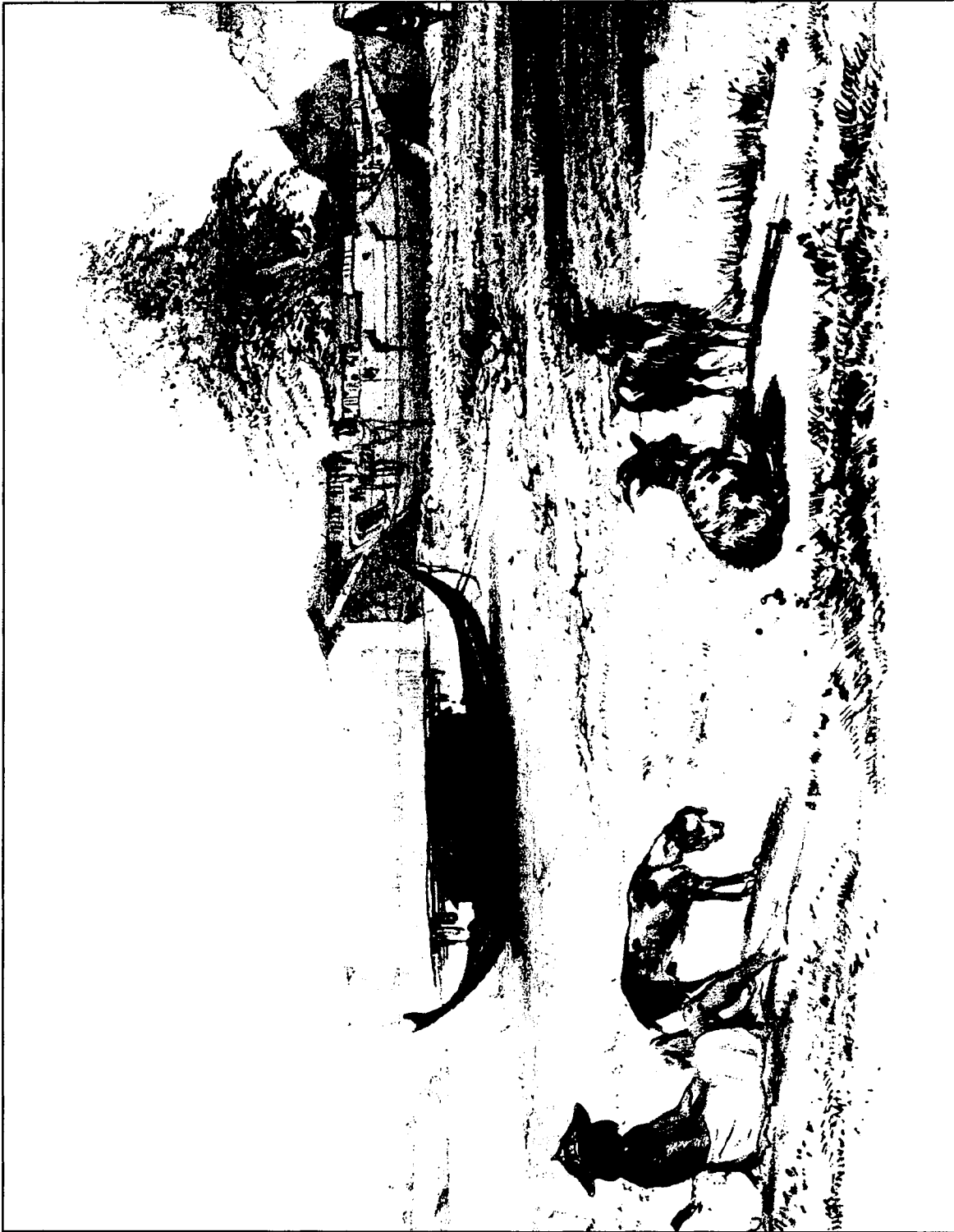
*---y en esto beso las manos de vuestra sagra majestad que ponga remedio en esto y nos quiera sacar de cativos de poder de cristianos y se acuerde de mis servicios que esta la merçed que yo demando a vuestra sagra majestad señor no tenga vuestra sagra majestad en poco las islas de maluco y las de banda y timor por que señor son tres verjeles los mejores que ai en el mundo maluco por el clavo banda por la nuez moscada y masa timor por el sandalo donde señor sabra vuestra sagra majestad que en todo lo descubierto no se hallan otras yslas que tengan tales frutos esto es asi sierto que son de vuestra corona Real mas hago saber a vuestra sagra majestad como en la yndia se haze una armada de muchas fustas y navios para yr a maluco para pelear con los castellanos si alla fueren donde va por capitan mayor don pedro de castel blanco señor la tore del omenaje de la fortaleza de maluco es de catorze pies en ancho de muro que yo la medi con mis pies y tambien señor aca se dize que aunque el dicho Rey de portogal large el dicho maluco que ellos no lo quieren largar sino defendelle muy bien tambien señor en-*



*bian otra buena armada para banda donde va por capitan mayor francisco de saa a hazer otra fortaleza señor mi parescer seria que se cortasen las rayzes porque no cre-siessen tanto las ramas señor no escrivo mas por que taimon [or taimo] criado de la reina doña lionor dara a vuestra sagra majestad cuenta mas por entero las cosas que aca pasan el qual anduvo siempre por capitan y sabe muy bien todo lo que en estas partes se a pasado lo qual vuestra sagra majestad le puede dar credito por que es hombre que ha servido bien al rey y ha dado mucha buena cuenta de si de todo lo que le an encargado y sepa vuestra sagra majestad como el dicho taimon [or taimo] le dava que fuese por capitan mayor de la mar de melaca el qual es una de las mejores capitancias que ai en estas partes y dexo todo por los agravios que el vido que me hizieron aca por que no me quissieron dar pasaje el qual hizo juramento de nonca tomar armas en la mano haca en la yndia hasta que contase al Rey todo lo que aca me han hecho señor el dicho taimon [or taimo] tuvo por bien de me emprestar en el nombre de vuestra sagra majestad un poco de dinero por que el vido que yo le tenia mucho de menester para mi despena el qual lleva un conosimiento mio suplico a vuestra sagra majestad que de mi sueldo ce lo mande pagar.*

*Fecha en cochin a los 12 dias de henero de 1525 años.*

*Su leal vasallo gonalo gomez de spinosa—(hay una rúbrica).*



**The wreck of the Trinidad in the harbor of Ternate Island. *This drawing can be used to represent the hulk of Magellan's flagship which ended up on the beach at Ternate.***