
Document 1521H

Magellan's voyage—Letter from a Spanish spy in Portuguese India to the King of Spain

Source: Original ms. in the Simancas Archives: Secretaria de Estado, leg. 367, fol. 94, as given by B&R I, pp. 92, 297-301, 343: Extract of a letter from the Indies, dated Cochin, 23 December 1522. The information is hearsay evidence from 2 young sailors of the Magellan Expedition who had deserted at Timor. As expected, the report is somewhat garbled.

Extract of a letter from the Indies

...
After I had written the above to your Lordship, Iñigo López arrived on the 18th [December 1522] from Malacca with the news that the Spaniards were in the Moluccas; that three vessels had left Spain under the command of Fernando Magallanes... He continued on his forward course [through the Pacific] although he had but little food and water, and finally came in sight of an island which was the island of Borneo. They tried to land there against the will of the inhabitants. A great fight ensued between them, in which Magallanes and many of his fighting men were killed. When the fleet, deprived of many men, was at the point of having contemplating surrendering to the natives ashore, a Portuguese pilot¹ who had come with Magallanes, came forward, took the tiller, and steered for the Moluccas. When he reached them, he found there one of the men of Don Tristan de Meneses (may God have him).² They grabbed him and learned from him everything they wanted. Then they carried on their trade at leisure and with the goodwill of those ashore disposed of their red bonnets and clothes which they carried with them. In exchange, those ashore loaded their vessels; these left the Moluccas laden with cloves, but in very poor condition as to their rigging and hulls.

1 Ed. note: This pilot was Juan Bautista, according to Governor Brito (See Doc. 1521J).

2 Ed. note: This man was named Pedro de Lorosa.

They left two or three men with small boats and defenses, and some shot to use for signals. It was their intention to go with these ships by way of the Maldiv Islands because the route they [first] intended to follow could be dangerous. However, the weather made them land at Borneo from which place one of the vessels [i.e. the **Victoria**] which was in the better condition started for those kingdoms [i.e. Europe], and may God grant her relief! The other vessel [i.e. the **Trinidad**] returned with 60 hands to the Moluccas because it was leaking badly and not in a condition to undertake the voyage. They resolved to stay at the Moluccas with their artillery and wait there for news of the vessel which had left for Spain; may it please our Lord not to bring her there unless it be for His service! All this news was had from two common sailors of the said vessels who had remained at Borneo for fear of embarking in them while in such a poor condition. From this place, Don Juan¹ brought them to Timor² where Pedro Merino was in charge of the soldiers, and from there he took these two sailors to Malacca where he found Iñigo López about to leave [for India]. Joining with him, they both arrived safely at Cochin with the Spanish sailors from whom was obtained all the above information.

[To] His Sacred Cesarean and Catholic Majesty,
[Dated] From Cochin, 23 December 1522.

[Endorsement:] Advices of Magellan's voyage and of his death, and news from Portuguese India.

(Overleaf) **Photo taken on the 450th anniversary of the first mass to have been said in the Philippines, on 31 March 1971. The site at Limasawa Island is now owned by the Philippine Independent (or Aglipay) Church. (Courtesy of the Ayala Museum-Library and Iconographic Archives, Manila)**

1 Ed. note: Bautista, as mentioned in the note above.

2 Ed. note: As a matter of fact, the two common sailors had deserted at Timor. From Doc. 1522E, we know their names: Martin de Ayamonte [N° 190] and Bartolomé Saldaña [N° 202].

