
Document 1521F

Magellan's voyage—Secondary account by Maximilian of Transylvania

*Sources: Letter, in Latin, from Maximilian Transylvanus, secretary to Emperor Charles V, to his father Matthäus Lang, cardinal of Salzburg, dated Valladolid, 24 October 1522. There exists a manuscript copy of Transylvanus' letter in the Real Academia de la Historia in Madrid. This copy was transcribed and published by Martín Fernández de Navarrete, in Vol. IV of his **Colección de los viajes** (Madrid, 1837, p. 267). However, the first edition of this letter was published by the addressee in January 1523 as: **De Moluccis insulis** [The Molucca Islands] in Cologne, Germany. This account of Magellan's voyage was the first one published in Europe after the ship **Victoria** returned to Spain. The first English translation was edited by Lord Stanley of Alderley (Hakluyt Society, 1874). Another translation was published by B&R in 1903. Unfortunately, as will be seen, this account by Max. Transylvanus omits all details about the stopover at the Mariana Islands.*

DE MOLUCCIS INSULIS

Most Reverend and Illustrious Lord:

My only Lord, to you I must humbly commend myself.

Not long ago, one of those five ships returned which the Emperor, while he was at Zaragoza some years ago, had sent into a strange and hitherto unknown part of the world, to search for the islands where spices grow. For although the Portuguese bring us a great quantity of them from the Golden Chersonesia, which we now call Malacca, nevertheless their own Indian possessions produce none but pepper. For it is well known that the other spices, as cinnamon, cloves, and the nutmeg, which we call muscat, and its covering [i.e. mace], which we call muscat flower, are brought to their Indian possessions from distant islands hitherto only known by name, in ships held together not by iron fastenings, but merely by palm-leaves, and having round¹ sails also woven out of palm fibres. Ships of this sort they call "junks", and they are impelled by the wind only when it blows directly fore or aft.

1 Ed. note: What sailors call "round" sails are actually square in shape. The sails of Chinese junks were made of bamboo strips.

Nor is it wonderful, that these islands have not been known to any mortal, almost up to our time. For whatever statements of ancient authors we have hitherto read with respect to the native soil of these spices, are almost entirely fiction, and partly so far from the truth, that the very regions, in which they asserted that these spices were produced, are scarcely less distant from the countries in which it is now ascertained that they grow, than we are ourselves...

Now it was necessary for our sailors... to sail around the whole world, and that in a very roundabout way, before they discovered these islands and returned to Europe; and, since this voyage was a very remarkable one, and neither in our own time, nor in any former age, has such a voyage been accomplished, or even attempted, I have determined to send your Lordship a full and accurate account of the expedition.

I have taken much care in obtaining an account of the facts from the captain of the fleet¹, and from the individual sailors who have returned with him. They also have made a statement to the Emperor, and to several other persons, with such good faith and sincerity, that they appeared in their narrative, not merely to have abstained from fabulous statements, but also to contradict and refute the fabulous statements made by ancient authors...

Some thirty years ago [i.e. in 1493], when the Spaniards to the West, and the Portuguese to the East, had begun to search after new and unknown lands, in order to avoid any interference of one with the other, the kings of these countries divided the whole world between them, by the authority probably of Pope Alexander VI, on this plan, that a line should be drawn from the north to the south pole through a point 360 leagues west of the Hesperides, which they now call the Cape Verde Islands, which would divide the earth's surface into two equal portions. All unknown lands hereafter discovered to the east of this line were assigned to the Portuguese; all on the west to the Spaniards. Hence it came to pass that the Spaniards always sailed southwest, and there discovered a very extensive continent, besides numerous large islands, abounding in gold, pearls, and other valuable commodities, and have quite recently discovered a large inland city called Tenoxtica situated in a lake like Venice.² Peter Martyr, an author who is more careful as to the accuracy of his statements than of the elegance of his style, has given a full but truthful account of this city.

But the Portuguese sailing southward past the Hesperides and the fish-eating Ethiopians³, crossed the Equator and the Tropic of Capricorn [i.e. 23-1/2° S], and sailed eastward and discovered several very large islands heretofore unknown, and also the sources of the Nile and the Troglodytes.⁴ Thence, by way of the Arabian and Persian Gulfs, they arrived at the shores of India within the Ganges, where now there is the very great trading station and the kingdom of Calicut. Hence they sailed to Taprobana,

1 Ed. note: Juan Sebastian de Elcano.

2 Ed. note: Tenochtitlán, now Mexico City, was built on islands within Lake Texcoco.

3 Ed. note: Name given by the author to the inhabitants of the west coast of Africa, called Guinea by other authors then.

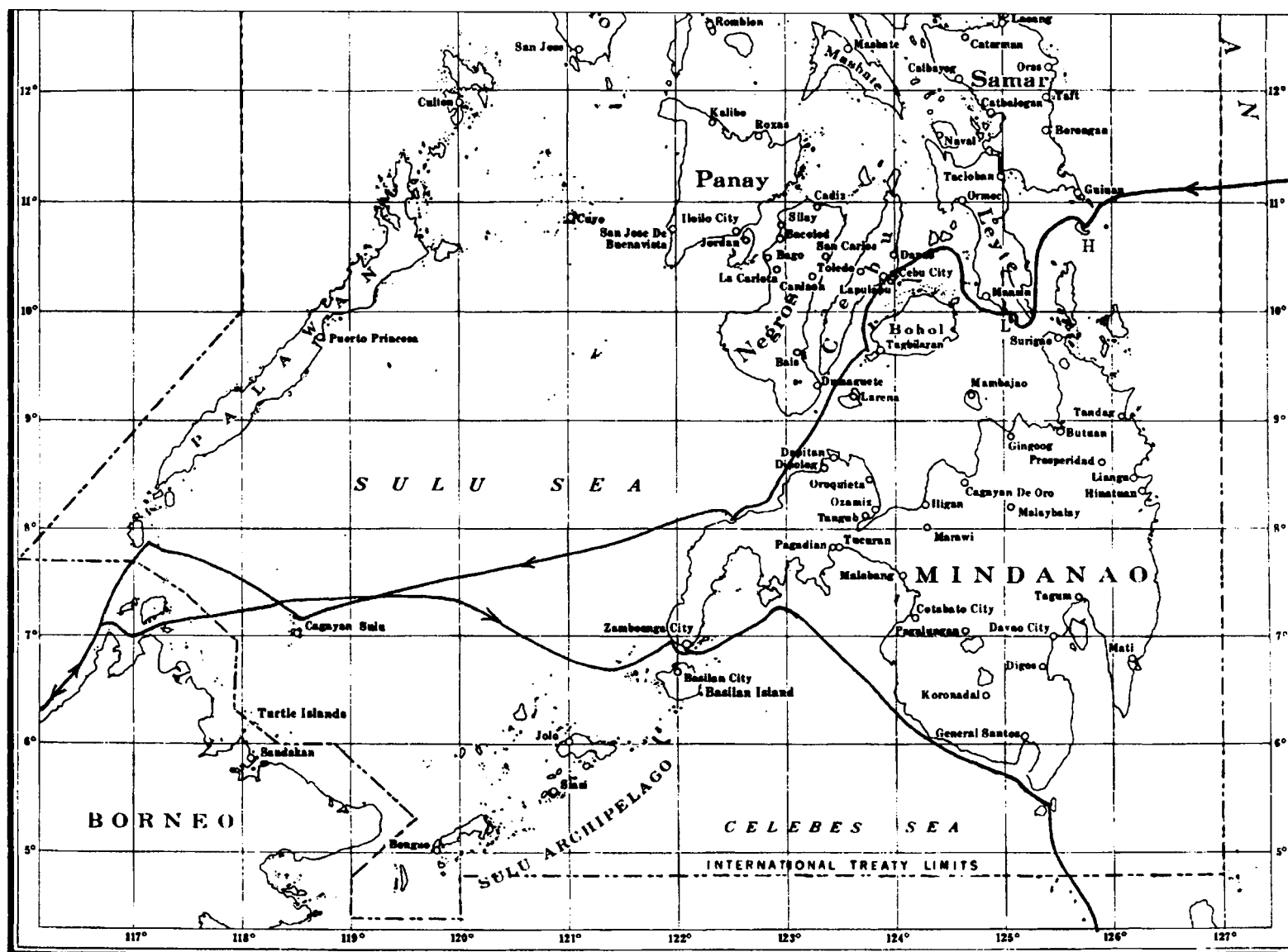
4 Ed. note: The Troglodytes were cave dwellers.

which is now called Zamatara [Sumatra], for where Ptolemy, Pliny, and other geographers placed Taprobana, there is no island which can possibly be identified with it. Thence they came to the Golden Chersonesia, where now stands the well-peopled city of Malacca, the principal place of business in the East. After this they penetrated into a great gulf, as far as the nation of the *Sinæ*, who are now called *Schinæ* [the Chinese or Chinese], where they found a fair-complexioned and tolerably-civilized people, like our folks in Germany. They believe that the Seres and Asiatic Scythians extend as far as these parts.

And although there was a somewhat doubtful rumor afloat, that the Portuguese had advanced so far to the east, that they had come to the end of their own limits, and had passed over into the territory appointed for the Spaniards, and that Malacca and the Great Gulf [i.e. Pacific] were within our limits, all this was more said than believed, until, four years ago, Ferdinand Magellan, a distinguished Portuguese, who had for many years sailed about the Eastern Seas as admiral of the Portuguese fleet, having quarreled with his king, who he considered had acted ungratefully toward him, and Christopher Haro, brother of my father-in-law, of Lisbon, who had, through his agents for many years carried on trade with those eastern countries, and more recently with the Chinese, so that he was well acquainted with these matters (he also, having been ill-used by the King of Portugal, had returned to his native country, Spain), pointed out to the Emperor, that it was not yet clearly ascertained, whether Malacca was within the boundaries of the Portuguese or of the Spaniards, because hitherto its longitude had not been definitely known; but that it was an undoubted fact that the Great Gulf and the Chinese nations were within the Spanish limits. They ascertained also that it was absolutely certain, that the islands called the Moluccas, where all sorts of spices grow, and from which they were brought to Malacca, were contained in the western, or Spanish division, and that it would be possible to sail to them, and to bring the spices at less trouble and expense from their native soil to Spain. The plan of the voyage was to sail west, and then coasting the southern hemisphere round the south of America to the Orient. Yet it appeared to be a difficult undertaking, and one of which the practicality was doubtful. Not that it was impossible, at first thought, to sail westward round the southern hemisphere to reach the east, but that it was uncertain, whether Ingenious Nature whose works are all wisely conceived had so arranged the sea and the land that it might be possible to arrive by this route at the Eastern Seas. For it had not yet been ascertained whether that extensive region, which is called *Terra Firma*¹, separated the Western [i.e. Atlantic] Ocean from the Eastern [Pacific], but it was plain that [the east coast of] that continent extended in a southerly direction, and afterwards inclined to the west. Moreover, two regions had been discovered in the north, one called Land of the Cod-fish² from a new kind of fish, the other called Florida; and if these were connected with *Terra Firma*, it would not be possible to pass from the Western Ocean to the Eastern. Since although much trouble has been taken to discover any strait which

1 Ed. note: The mainland, or South America.

2 Ed. note: A reference to Newfoundland.



might exist connecting the two oceans, none had yet been found. At the same time it was considered that to attempt to sail through the Portuguese concessions and the Eastern Seas would be a hazardous enterprise, and dangerous in the highest degree.

The Emperor and his council considered that the plan proposed by Magellan and Haro, though holding out considerable advantages, was one of very considerable difficulty as to execution. After some delay, Magellan offered to go out himself, but Haro undertook to outfit a fleet at the expense of himself and his friends, provided that they were allowed to sail under the authority and patronage of His Majesty. As each resolutely upheld his own scheme, the Emperor himself outfitted a fleet of five ships, and appointed Magellan to command it. It was ordered that they should sail southward by the coast of *Terra Firma*, until they found either the end of that land or some strait, by which they might arrive at the spice-producing Moluccas.

Accordingly, on the 10th of August 1519, Ferdinand Magellan with his five ships sailed from Seville...¹

Yet even though our sailors in so long a voyage and in one so distant from the land lay down and mark certain signs and limits of the longitude, they appear to me rather to have made some error in their method of reckoning of the longitude than to have attained any trustworthy result. Meanwhile, however this may be, until more certain results are arrived at, I do not think that their statements should be absolutely rejected, but merely accepted provisionally...

The natives of all unknown countries are commonly called Indians...

(Facing page) **A modern map of the southern half of the Philippine Islands upon which the route taken by the Magellan Expedition in 1521 has been superimposed.** *The letter H indicates the position of Humunu or Humonhon Island, and L is Limasawa I. where the first mass in the Philippines was celebrated. (Map #3083 of the Philippine Coast and Geodetic Survey)*

1 Ed. note: See next document by Peter Martyr for a description of the voyage before they reached the Pacific.

[Crossing of the Pacific]

They kept on this perpetual course, with headings between west and north, in order to place himself once again under the equinoctial line, and he did not deviate from this course except when storms would sometimes prevent him from following a strait course. When they had in this manner been carried for 40 days by a strong and generally favorable wind, and had seen nothing but sea, and everywhere sea, when they had almost reached the Tropic of Capricorn once more, two islands were sighted, but small and barren. These they found uninhabited when they tried to land; still, they stopped there two days for their health's sake, and general recruiting of their bodies, for there was very fair fishing there. They named these the Unfortunate Islands by common consent.¹

Then they again set sail thence, following their original course and direction of sailing. And when, for three months and twenty days, they had been sailing over this ocean with very favorable winds, and had traversed an immense part of the sea—more vast than mind of man can conceive, for they had been driven almost continuously by a very strong wind—they were now at last arrived on this [N] side of the equinoctial line, and at last they saw an island, called, as they learnt afterwards **Inuagana** by the natives. When they had approached nearer, they discovered the altitude of the Arctic pole to be 11 deg. The longitude they thought to be 158 deg. west of Gades². Then they saw other and still more islands, so that they knew they had arrived at some vast archipelago. When they reached **Inuagana**, the island was discovered to be uninhabited.³

1 Ed. note: This 2-day stopover did not happen at the Unfortunate Islands, according to the primary sources, but later at the Ladrones. It is possible, of course, that the ships stopped in the lee of Tiburones Island to fish for sharks.

2 Ed. note: West of Cádiz, i.e. 164°17' W of Greenwich.

3 Ed. note: Many historians have misconstrued the above-mentioned islands in the Archipelago of San Lázaro, later called the Philippines, for the neighborhood of Guam and Rota. Such is not the case, as **Maximilian simply did not mention Guam**. The islands which he mentioned can clearly be recognized along Magellan's route south of Samar and Leyte Islands. Inuagana and Acaca were not mentioned in the primary accounts, such as Pigafetta's. However, no credibility should be given to Guillemard (and others who copied him) who presume that Inuagana somehow corresponds to Agaña on Guam, and Acaca, if written Açaça, would somehow correspond to Sosa or Sonson on Rota. I have determined (See my book entitled: **The Philippines** (1980), after studying Pigafetta's detailed account of the arrival at Samar and consulting modern maps and charts, that **Inuagana corresponds to Guiuan**, the peninsula at the southern tip of Samar Island situated at about 11°, the reported latitude; Caliocan Island, which is like a continuation of the Guiuan Peninsula (see map), was then uninhabited. The natives they met lived on Suluan Island.

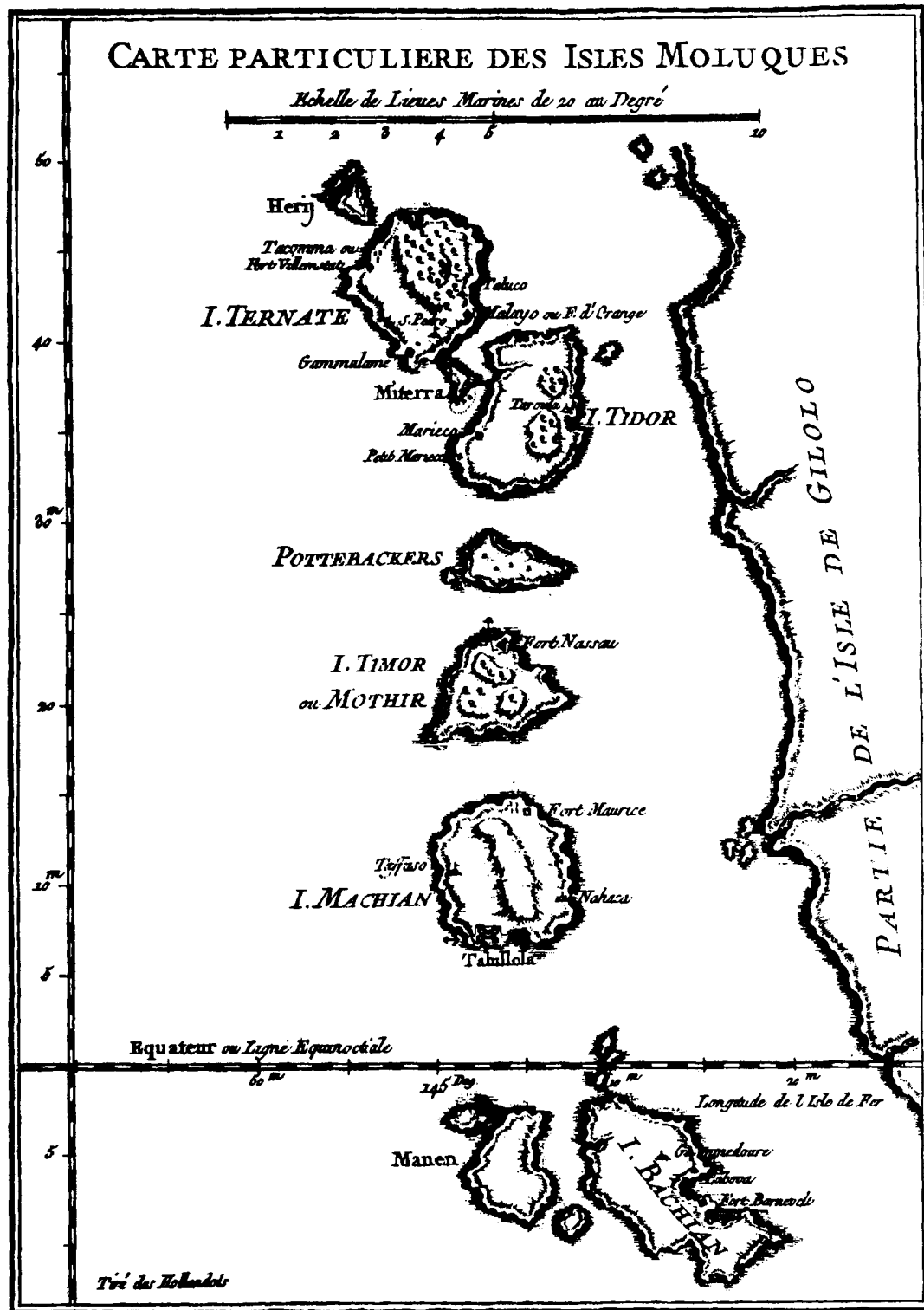
They then approached a rather small island, where they saw two Indian canoes—for that is the name by which this strange kind of boat is called by the [West] Indians. The canoes are cut and hollowed out of a single trunk of a tree, and hold one, or, at most, two men; and they usually speak by gestures and signs, as if the dumb were talking with the dumb. They asked the Indians the names of the islands, and where they could get provisions, of which they were in great want. They understood that the island in which they had been was called **Inuagana**, and that the one where they now were was **Acaca**, but both of them uninhabited.¹ They said that there was an island not far off, which was called **Selani**, and which they almost showed with their finger, and that it was inhabited, and that an abundance of everything necessary for life was to be found there. Our men, having taken in water in **Acaca**, sailed towards **Selani**; here a storm took them, so they could not bring the ships to that island, but were driven to another island called **Massaua**, where lives a king of three islands, after that they arrived at **Subuth**...²

...But as our men were not in search of monsters but of spices, they did not pay attention to such stories, but sailed direct [from Mindanao] to the Moluccas, where they arrived in the 8th month after their admiral Magellan had been slain in the island of Mauthan [i.e. Mactan]. The Molucca Islands are five in number, and are called Tarante [Ternate], Muthil, Thedori [Tidore], Mare, and Matthien [Machian], situated partly to the south [of], and partly on the equator; the products are cloves, nutmegs, and cinnamon; they are all close together, but of small size...

(Overleaf) **The Spice Islands or Moluccas** were, as drawn by Pigafetta: *Hiri*, *Tarenate* [=Ternate], *Maitar* [=Mitterra], *Tadore* [=Tidore], *Mare*, *Mutir* [=Mothir], and *Machian*.

The large inscription in French reads: "All the islands in this book are in the other hemisphere of the world at the antipodes." The inscription around the tree reads: "Caiu Gomode is the clove tree" [in the Moluccan language].

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- 1 Ed. note: **Acaca** corresponds to **Homonhon** Island, written Humunu by Pigafetta; it is where the expedition made the first stop; the Spanish referred to the place as the *Aguada* or "Watering Place", Pigafetta says, after they found two springs of clear water on it. A transcription error, no doubt, has converted *Aguada* into *Acaca*. In the days that followed, the Spanish also found signs of gold on this 40-square-mile island; hence the full name they gave to it: "the watering place of the good signs".
 - 2 Ed. note: Working backward, *Subuth* being Cebu, *Massaua* is Limasawa Island south of Leyte, and *Selani* is a peninsula of southern Leyte north of Limasawa Island; this is confirmed by later accounts of the discovery of the Philippines. It is relevant to note at this point that the RAH Madrid ms. writes *Jubagana* instead of *Inuagana*, and *Acacán* instead of *Acaca*, *Selan* instead of *Selani*, and *Masana* instead of *Massaua*. So, transcription errors are always to be reckoned with.



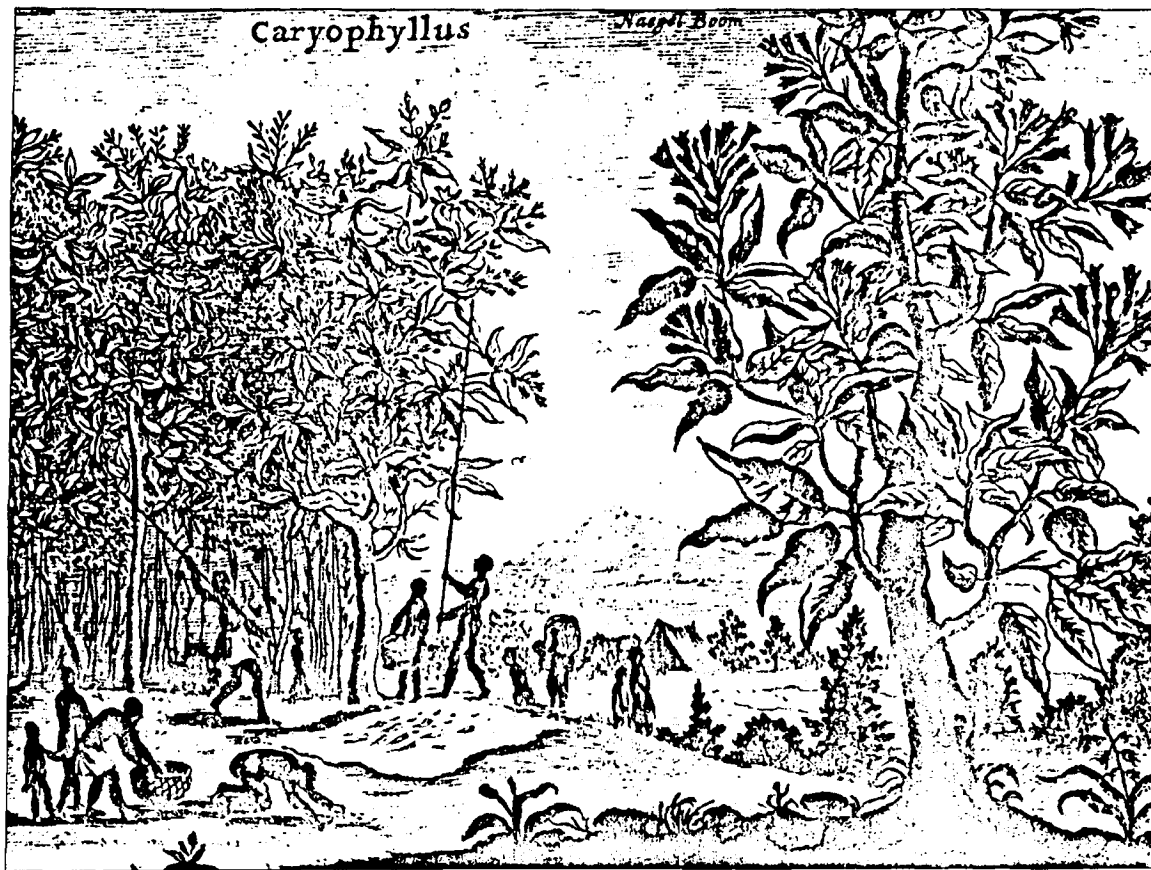
A 17th-century French map of the Moluccas. It is based on a Dutch original because Mare is called Pottebackers. Giallolo, or Gilolo, is the main region on the large island of Halmahera on the right.

But our avarice and insatiable desire of the luxuries of the table has urged us to seek spices even in those distant lands. To such a degree has the perversity of human nature persisted in driving away as far as possible that which is conducive to happiness, and in seeking articles of luxury in the remotest parts of the world!

[The Spice Islands]

Our men having carefully examined the position of each separate island, and also into the characters of the chiefs, sailed to Thedori, because they understood that this island produced a greater abundance of cloves than the others, and also that the king excelled the other kings in prudence and humanity. Providing themselves with presents they went ashore, and paid their respect to the king, and handed him the presents as the gift of the Emperor. He accepted the presents graciously, and looking up to heaven said: *"It has now been two years since I learned from observation of the stars that you were sent by the great King of kings to seek these lands. Therefore, your arrival is the more agreeable to me, inasmuch as it has already been foreseen from the significance of the stars. And since I know that nothing happens to man, which had not long since been ordained by the decree of Fate and of the stars, I will not be the man to resist the determinations of Fate and the stars, but will spontaneously abdicate my royal power, and consider myself in the future, as carrying on the government of this island as your king's viceroy. So bring your ships into the harbor, and order the rest of your companions to land in safety, so that now after so much tossing about on the sea, and so many dangers, you may securely enjoy the comforts of life ashore and recruit your strength; and consider yourselves to be coming into your own king's dominions."* Having thus spoken, the king laid aside his diadem, and embraced each of our men, and directed such refreshments as the country produced to be set on the table. Our men, delighted at this, returned to their companions, and told them what had taken place. They were much delighted by the graciousness and benevolence of the king, and took up their quarters in the island. When they had been entertained for some days by the king's munificence, they sent envoys thence to the other kings, to investigate the resources of the islands, and to secure the good will of the chiefs.



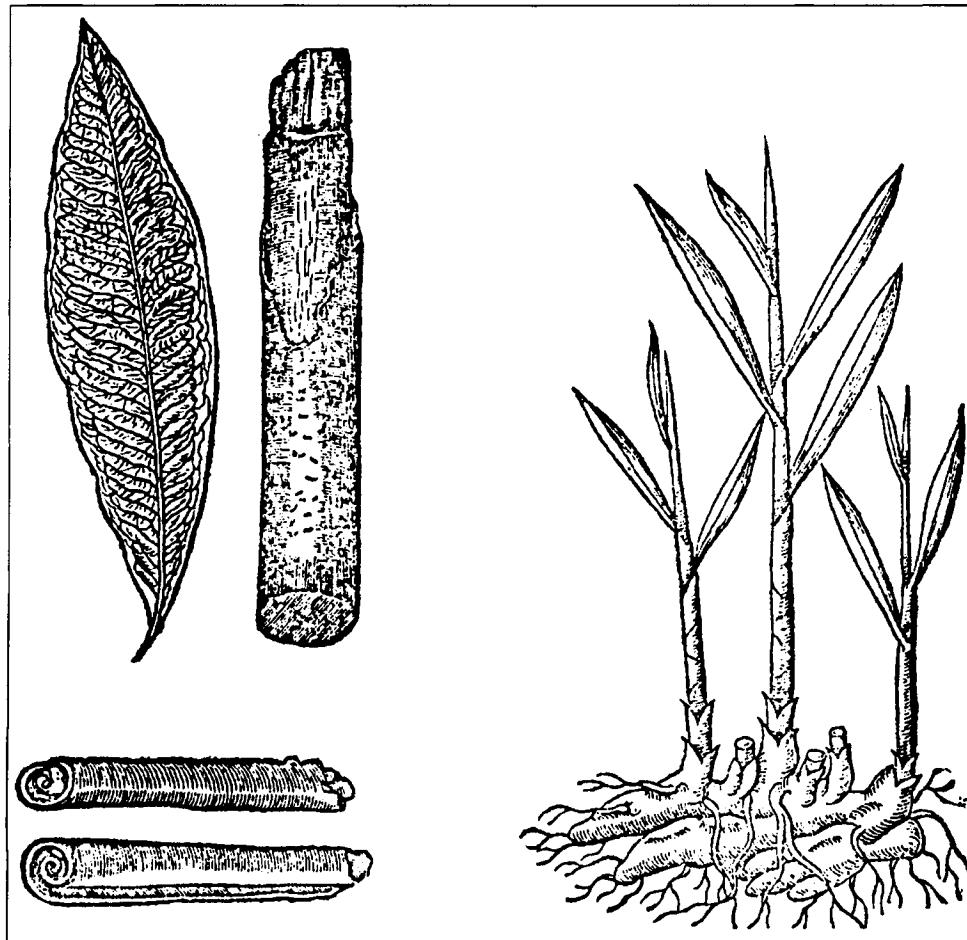


Harvesting clove in the Moluccas.

Tarante [Ternate] was the nearest; it is a very small island, its circumference being a little over six Italian miles. The next is Matthien [Machian], and that also is small. These three produce a great quantity of **cloves**, but every fourth year the crop is far larger than at other times. These trees only grow on precipitous rocks, and they grow so close together as to form groves. The tree resembles the laurel as regard its leaves, its closeness of growth, and its height; the clove, so called because of its resemblance to a nail¹ grows at the very tip of each twig; first a bud appears, then a blossom much like that of the orange; the point of the clove first shows itself at the end of the twig, until it attains its full growth; at first it is reddish, but the heat of the sun soon turns it black. The natives share groves of this tree among themselves, just as we do vineyards; they keep the cloves in pits, until the merchants come and take them away. The fourth island, Muthil, is no larger than the rest. This island produces **cinnamon**; the tree is full of shoots, and in other respects fruitless, it thrives best in a dry soil, and is very much like the pomegranate tree. When the bark cracks through the heat of the sun, it is pulled off

¹ Ed. note: From the word *clavus* in Latin.

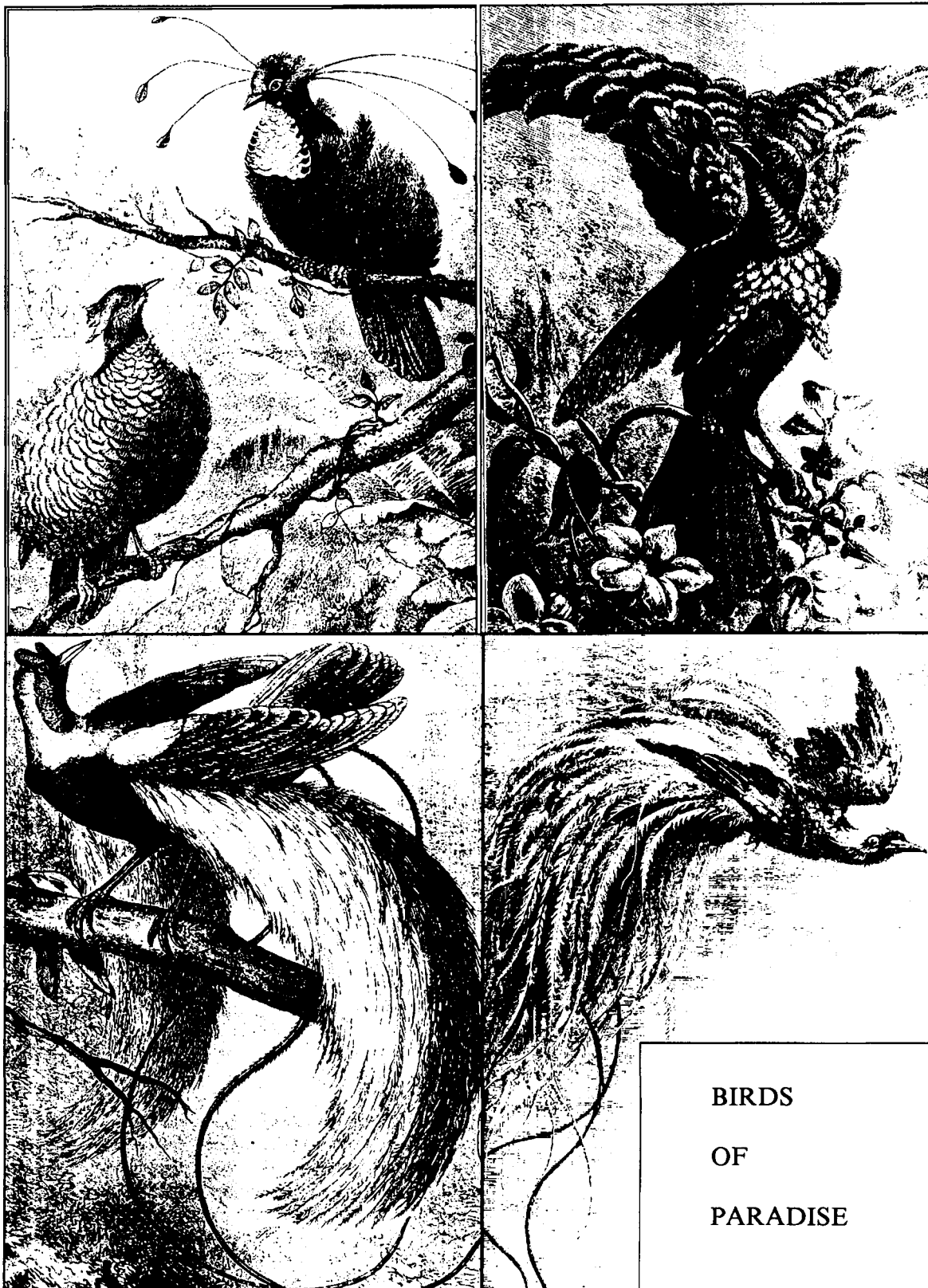
the tree, and being dried in the sun a short time becomes cinnamon. Near Muthil is another island, called Bada [=Banda?], the more extensive one of the Moluccas; in it the **nutmeg** grows. The tree is tall and widespread, much like the walnut tree; the fruit too is produced much the same way as a walnut, being protected by a double covering, first a soft envelope, and under this a thin reticulated membrane which encloses the nut. This membrane we [Germans] call *Muskatblüthe*, the Spanish call it *Macis* [mace]; it is an excellent and wholesome spice. Within this is a hard shell, like that of a filbert, inside which is the nutmeg properly so called. **Ginger** also is produced in all the islands of this archipelago; some is sown, some grows spontaneously, but the sown ginger is the best. The plant is like the saffron plant, and its root, which resembles the root of saffron, is what we call ginger.



Cinnamon and ginger.



The nutmeg tree. Mace is the shell covering the fruit. *(From the book by Davenport Adams: "The Eastern Archipelago", London, 1880)*



BIRDS
OF
PARADISE

Our men were kindly received by the various chiefs, who all, after the example of the king of Thedori, spontaneously submitted themselves to the Imperial government. But the Spaniards, having now only two ships, determined to bring with them specimens of all sorts of spices, etc., but to load the ships mainly with cloves, because there had been a very abundant crop of it this season, and the ship could contain a very great quantity of this kind of spice.

Having laden their ships with cloves, and received letters and presents from the chiefs to the Emperor, they prepared to sail away. The letters were filled with assurances of fidelity and respect; the gifts were Indian swords, etc. The most remarkable curiosities were some of the birds, called *Mamuco Diata*, that is the Bird of Paradise, with which they think themselves safe and invincible in battle. Five of these were sent, one of which I procured from the captain of the ship, and now send it to your Lordship, not that you will think it a defence against treachery and violence, but because you will be pleased with its rarity and beauty. I also send some cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves, that you may see that our spices are not only not inferior to those imported by the Venetians and Portuguese, but of superior quality, because they are fresher.

Soon after our men had sailed from Thedori, the larger of the two ships [i.e. the **Trinidad**] sprang a leak, which let in so much water that they were obliged to return to Thedori. The Spaniards, seeing that this defect could not be corrected except with much labor and loss of time, agreed that the other ship [i.e. the **Victoria**] should sail to the Cape of Cattigara [i.e. Cormorin], thence across the ocean as far as possible from the Indian coast, lest they should be seen by the Portuguese, until they came within sight of the southern point of Africa, beyond the Tropic of Capricorn, which the Portuguese call the Cape of Good Hope, from thence the voyage to Spain would be easy. It was also arranged that, when the repairs of the other ship were completed, it should sail back through the archipelago and the Vast [Pacific] Ocean to the coast of the continent which we have already mentioned [i.e. South America], until they came to the Isthmus of Darien, where only a narrow neck of land divides the South Sea [i.e. Pacific] from the Western [Atlantic] Sea, in which are the islands belonging to Spain.

The smaller ship accordingly set sail again from Thedori, and though they went as far as 12 degrees south, they did not find Cattigara, which Ptolemy considered to lie considerably south of the equator; however, after a long voyage, they arrived in sight of the Cape of Good Hope, and thence sailed to the Cape Verde Islands. Here this ship also, after having been so long at sea, began to be leaky, and the men, who had lost several of their companions through hardships in the course of their adventures, were unable to keep the water pumped out. They therefore landed at one of the islands called Santiago, to buy slaves. As our men, sailor-like, had no money, they offered cloves in exchange for slaves. When the Portuguese officials heard of this, they committed 13 of our men to prison. The rest, 18 in number, being alarmed at the position in which they found themselves, left their companions behind, and sailed directly to Spain. Sixteen months after they had sailed from Thedori, on the 6th of September 1522 they arrived safe and sound at a port near Seville.

These sailors are certainly more worthy of perpetual fame than the Argonauts who sailed with Jason to Colchis; and the ship itself deserves to be placed among the constellations more than the ship Argo. For the Argo only sailed from Greece through the Black Sea; but our ship, departing from Seville sailed southward at first, then through the whole of the West, into the Eastern Sea, then back again into the Western.

I humbly commend myself to your Most Reverend Lordship.

Written at Valladolid on the 24th of October 1522.

Your Most Reverend and Most Illustrious Lordship's most humble and perpetual servant,

Maximilianus Transylvanyus.

Cologne.—Printed by Eucharius Cervicornus¹ A.D. 1523, in the month of January.²

1 Ed. note: His real name in German was Hirschorn.

2 Ed. note: A second edition was printed in Rome in November 1523. As for a tertiary source like Oviedo's *Historia*, we find that it was plagiarized entirely from the above account by Transylvanus, but that the place names are those of the RAH manuscript. For Pigafetta's story of the discovery of the Philippines, see Lévesque (ed.), *The Philippines*. This story is not repeated here.