
Document 1527C

Saavedra's voyages—Primary account by Urdaneta

Source: Pacheco et al., Colección ... de Indias, Vol. 5, pp. 29 et seq. Also in the Rivadeneira Collection, vol. 77, pp. 235-243. While Urdaneta was in the Moluccas, he witnessed the arrival of the ship Florida and its two unsuccessful attempts at returning to New Spain in 1528 and 1529.

Urdaneta's account (cont'd)

During the month of March [1528], over 20 of us Spaniards were with the King of Gilolo laying siege to a place occupied by enemies in Batachina. While we were there, we saw a ship at sea coming toward us. We then sent two Spaniards in two proas of the King of Gilolo to see which ship it was. The ship was from New Spain, and had been sent by Hernando Cortés on orders from His Majesty to look for us. The captain of the ship was Don Alvaro de Saavedra. As soon as our people had recognized it, they went aboard and the proas returned with the news, which made us very glad. Then we sent news to Tidore to let our captain [Hernando de la Torre] know, so that he might send them some help, if necessary.

The next day in the morning, the said ship being becalmed, a fusta of the Portuguese approached and hailed the ship. When they learned that they were Spaniards, they tried to trick them, but Saavedra had been informed by our two men who were aboard. Still, he asked them to please tell him in which islands of the Moluccas there were Spaniards. The Portuguese answered that there were no Spaniards in the Moluccas, although it was true that a big nao had come to the islands, but that it could not stay afloat, that the Portuguese had offered to help them to build a new ship, that they had done so, and that the Portuguese had thus provided them with food supplies and many other things that were needed. Then they invited them to follow them to the fortress, saying that they would be most welcome there [in Ternate]. Saavedra answered why they were saying that, because he knew for certain that there were Spaniards in the Moluccas, etc. Many other words passed between them.

As the Portuguese saw that they could not trick them with words, they began to shoot their guns at them, and therefore those of the ship responded in kind. At that time, the wind began to blow a little, and the ship was able to come near Gilolo and anchor.

...

[First return attempt]

Once the ship of Saavedra had been loaded with everything necessary, it departed from Tidore for New Spain in June of the said year of 1528. The pilot was Macias del Poyo. In addition, there were some Portuguese aboard who had defected to our side, one gentleman named Simon de Brito, and the other named Bernardin Cordero. There were some prisoners as well, among them the chief of the galley that we had taken, and other men of rank, whom we had put aboard so that Your Majesty would learn directly from them what was happening there.

In the course of the voyage, when they were anchored because of contrary winds at some islands with negroes they call Papuas, these islands being located about 200 leagues east of the Moluccas, the said Simon de Brito and Fernão Romero, the captain of the galley, and other Portuguese, fled with the boat to return to the Moluccas, leaving the ship without a boat. They got lost, on account of the great currents, and wasted much time but could not reach a port in the Moluccas. They crashed upon some island where they left the boat and some of the Portuguese stayed, except Simon de Brito and the chief, who boarded a canoe with one small slave of theirs to return to the Moluccas. They went on to crash onto the eastern side of Batachina, at 50 leagues from where we were ourselves.

One day news arrived to the effect that there were in Batachina at a place called Guayamelin some Portuguese who had been wrecked there. I myself was despatched immediately by our captain, with two other companions, and ten Moro proas, in order to find out who they were, and if they were Portuguese to bring them under guard to Tidore. Thus I went to the said place of Guayamelin, found out that they were the said Simon de Brito and Fernão Romero, Portuguese, and that they had fled from the said caravel of the said Saavedra. Then I seized them and brought them under guard to Tidore, where I found Saavedra himself who had turned back, on account of contrary winds, and also because he had no boat, in case he should reach some land and wait for good weather to take on water and wood. For these reasons, the said caravel turned back, after having covered over 700 leagues in the space of six months after having left Tidore. Similarly, the Portuguese did escape for no other reason that it seemed to them that the ship, without a boat, would not dare go on.

When the said Simon de Brito and Fernão Romero were interrogated, with no need of torture, they confessed about the mode of their escape, how they thought they would do a great service to the King of Portugal by being the cause of the said ship not being able to return to New Spain, because Your Majesty would then learn what was going on in the Moluccas, and how the Portuguese occupied the lands of Your Majesty. Having taken their confession, our captain ordered as a sentence, in punishment for the bad deed they had done, that the said Simon de Brito be dragged through the city of the

Moros and afterward be beheaded and quartered, and that the said Fernão Romero be hanged from the gallows. All of this was complied with in accordance with the sentence by the said Fernando de la Torre, and then that same day they were executed.

[Second return attempt]

As the ship had turned back, a boat was then made. As the said ship was now eaten by worms and leaked a lot, we plugged it with a layer of planks on the outside of the ship's side with some pitch which they usually use on ships there. Once ready with everything necessary, food supplies as well as all the rest, we send it out again. As far as our captain, the said Fernando de la Torre, and all those of us in his company were concerned, we were of the opinion that the said ship should go by way of the Cape of Good Hope, given that we found the winds contrary to go to New Spain. However, the said Saavedra refused and insisted in following the same route as before. He left in May 1529.

In the meantime, we continued to have very great battles with the Portuguese, and we gained by force of arms the whole island of Machian...

...
During the month of December 1529, the said caravel of Saavedra returned once again, not having been able to make it to New Spain. It reached the port at the said place of Zamafo.¹ During this voyage, the said Saavedra himself died, along with 4 or 5 others from the said nao.

When the said Fernando de la Torre saw that the said caravel had not made it to New Spain, and having realized that what we had told him [about defending Gilolo] made sense, he agreed to go to Gilolo where we were, and thus he came with the said caravel and the brig, so that we were altogether now something like 70 men, and the King of Gilolo was feeding us all. Once again, we began to make war on the Portuguese, and we maintained it until the middle of 1530...

[The aftermath]

We came to an agreement as well with the Portuguese and those of Ternate to make friends, and we carried it out. In this way, we became very good friends with the Portuguese as well as with the [Ternate] Indians.

During the said year of 1531, I gave the report about of all the things that had occurred, written by Fernando de la Torre to Y.M., to a certain Anibal Cernichi in the Moluccas. The latter swore upon a consecrated altar that he would bring it [to Spain], unless he died along the way.

In the year of 1532, given this great friendship that existed between ourselves and the Portuguese, we begged the captain of the Portuguese, who was Vicente de Fonseca, to give us a vessel as we wished to send an ambassador to their governor in India. The said Vicente de Fonseca answered that he was pleased that we had decided as much.

1 Ed. note: Captain General de la Torre had been forced to make peace with the Portuguese and seek refuge in Zamafo, a part of Halmahera I.

Thus we sent Pedro de Montemayor to the Governor of Portuguese India, to let him know that we had been in the Moluccas a long time, that in all that time we had not received any word from Y.M., that we had heard that Y.M. had given up the Moluccas [in 1529] to the King of Portugal for 300,000 ducats, and that we had therefore decided to return to Spain, leaving the land to the said Portuguese, but that we had no ship in which to do so. We begged him to send us a vessel to return to Spain, and also we asked him for 1,000 ducats on Y.M.'s account for our expenses, as we were completely out of funds.

The said Montemayor left the Moluccas for India in January 1532. When he left, there were 27 or 28 of us left, because all the others were dead of sickness as a result of the great labors we had gone through, in the spirit as well as in our bodies.

...
In the year of 1533, in October, the said Pedro de Montemayor returned from Portuguese India to the Moluccas, in the company of a Portuguese captain whose name was Tristão de Atáide, who came as Captain General and Governor of the Moluccas. The Governor of the said India sent us a ship in which we went, whose captain was Jordão de Fretes [Freitas], a native of the island of Madeira. He also sent us the 1,000 ducats that we had asked him for, although the said Tristão de Atáide did not wish to give them to us until we had given ourselves up to them. Also the Governor sent us a letter, which we had asked for, to the effect that no captain of the King of Portugal should detain us in any of the fortresses through which we would pass, nor take us under their jurisdiction.

When the Indians of Gilolo sensed that we would like to give ourselves up to the Portuguese, they resented it very much and wishing to detain us they began warring with the Portuguese, although we did not like it. The Portuguese thought that we were at the root of it all; so, they sent us many threats...

The Portuguese came to the city of Gilolo with a great fleet... The next day at day-break the Portuguese and their Indian allies landed and took the city of Gilolo, because as the Indians saw that we did not want to fight, they began to flee. As they came in, they killed our factor Diego de Salinas with an arquebus that malfunctioned. Thus, we went with the Portuguese to their fortress without receiving from them the least prejudice. At that time, there were no more than 17 of us left, because all the others were dead...¹

1 Ed. note: The actual date of the surrender was the 26th of November 1533.