
Document 1527D

Saavedra's voyages—Primary account by Vicente de Nápoles

Source: Pacheco et al., Colección ... de Indias, vol. V, pp. 68-96. Taken from Tome 36 of the collection of transcripts left by Muñoz in RAH, Madrid. Also published by Navarrete, V, pp. 476-486 and in the Rivadaneira Collection, vol. 77, pp. 272-279.

Narrative of all that was discovered and covered by Captain Alvaro de Saavedra, who departed from the port of Zacatula which is in New Spain on the 1st of November 1527, and whose fleet was despatched by the Marquis del Valle, Don Hernando Cortés, Captain General for Your Majesties, with three ships completely supplied and equipped, including brass cannon.

Firstly, the said captain Alvaro de Saavedra was aboard the nao named **Florida**, manned with 38 landsmen and 12 seamen, for a total of 50 men, and equipped with 3 brass guns and 10 iron ones.

Aboard the nao **Santiago**, the captain was Luis de Cárdenas, a native of Córdoba. It was manned with 45 landsmen and seamen and equipped with 1 brass and 8 iron guns.

1 Ed. note: This narrative is not considered too reliable by Spanish authors, because the author was a simple sailor, and it diverges somewhat from the account of Captain Saavedra, as recorded by the clerk (Doc. 1527B).

Aboard the other ship, named **Espíritu Santo**, the captain was Pedro de Fuentes, a native of Jerez de la Frontera. It was manned with 15 landsmen and seamen and equipped with half a dozen iron guns.

On the first day of November, we left the port of Aguatlanejo [Zihuatanejo] which is on the coast of New Spain. The winds that affected us along the way will be mentioned. As the winds were from W and WNW, we headed and made our way SSW. That day we covered something like 10 leagues.¹

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On the 29th day², we discovered another leak in the same flagship, at the bow, in a false convent³, and we had one storage area of bread drowned, which would have held about 70 quintals, and all the oil and vinegar and other things. Before we discovered this water leak, the ship did not want to steer properly, and the captain asked the master what was the cause why the ship did not steer right. The master told him that he did not know the cause, and the captain sent him below deck to see what was that, but he said that it was late, that he would go in the morning and check it out.

That same night, while we were sailing, the ship was ungovernable, and because we were between the [other two] ships, to prevent any collision between us, we fell back, and were then hit by a squall. The sailor who was at the helm stalled the ship and the sail fluttered above the rigging.⁴ We were almost about to founder but finally we lowered the sail. The [other] ships passed us by and, with the strong wind we had, in a very short time they disappeared from our view. We signalled to them many times with the lamps but they never answered, so that we lost them. Our pilot was exhausted and went to sleep rather than try and follow behind them.

At daybreak, we set sail to continue our course but we were never able to see them or any sign of them again. That day we made 35 leagues.

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- 1 Ed. note: Nápoles' date count, as well as his headings and estimates of distance vary from those of Saavedra, so that it would be possible to study the differences for the whole crossing. It appears that Nápoles may have forgotten to make many entries, and that he, or someone else, later tried to assign sequential dates to them.
 - 2 Ed. note: The events about to be described occurred on the 45th day of navigation, i.e. on 15 December, according to Captain Saavedra.
 - 3 Ed. note: A convent was a space or hole between two frames, where two curved pieces of wood meet at the keel (See O'Scanlan, pp. 177 & 189).
 - 4 Ed. note: This was a nao which was caravel-rigged, with large lateen sails, and thus problematic if the ship veered out of control.

Along the same heading and with the same weather, we ran for another 30 days, sailing like we did over the previous 30 days, and in all that time not seeing any land nor sign of it.¹

On the 60th day, a Saturday at night, we changed our heading to W 1/4 SW [W by S]. That night we were becalmed. We ran something like 10 leagues.

On Sunday morning [29 December], with the sun already up, we saw **land** when we were at about one league from it. This land was baptized by Captain Alvaro de Saavedra the islands of **Los Reyes** [Kings Islands], because on the day we saw them it was the Feast of the Kings [Epiphany].² It is an archipelago of islands, because, according to what we saw, there are 10 to 12 islands, and they say that they are all inhabited.³ It is believed that there are many more of them. We cruised about them for 3 days, tacking back and forth, and we did not anchor at any of them because the bottom is so deep that, although we let go the anchor, we could not reach bottom.⁴

The native Indians of those islands came out to us with some ships of theirs that are small, but they did not wish to come close. Given that we could not take port on account of the many shoals in front of the land, the bad weather we were having, and that we could not anchor anywhere else, we continued our journey by the same heading.⁵

The people of these islands are well-developed people, somewhat brown; they keep their hair long, have no clothes, except that from some palms they make masts and some mats. The mats are so delicate that from a distance they look made of gold; they cover themselves with them.⁶ The men have long beards like the Spanish. As weapons, they have some fire-hardened sticks. What they eat, we did not see, because we did not make contact with them. These islands are in 11 degrees north of the equator.

We sailed the next night. Another day, at noon, we came upon other **islands**, of the same type and people. We maneuvered to place ourselves within the islands, in order to see if we could take on some water, which we did, on account of the necessity we had of some water to drink. At the islands in question, we anchored at one of them which was uninhabited. All the people stepped ashore, to look for water, and we found a

1 Ed. note: As noted above, Nápoles has placed the separation date 2 weeks later than Saavedra did.

2 Ed. note: The date was not January 7th. This occurred later at Ulithi... So, we have the confirmation here that Nápoles revised his logbook later on and thus introduced some mistakes, due to memory limitations. So, we must be cautious in interpreting what is described next, as we do not know if he is referring to Guam or Ulithi.

3 Ed. note: So far he has described the Ladrões, while thinking about the Ulithi islets, which he did see and remembered when he revised his text.

4 Ed. note: How can a sailor say that they threw in the anchor, rather than the lead line? This text was obviously tampered with by copyists.

5 Ed. note: "The same heading" in the case of the Saavedra account would be southwesterly.

6 Ed. note: It is obvious to me that Nápoles' memory has played tricks on him when he revised his text. He is now describing the Marshallese he was to see in 1529.

“zaque”¹ at crossbow range from the coast. The island was small; it could have been one league in circumference. We were at this island for 8 [sic] days, taking on water and wood. Here we were unable to take the water out that was leaking into the ship. At about 3 leagues from this island, there is another inhabited island; from there the people came and approached next to the ship, but they refused to talk to us and returned to their island. This island is at 11 degrees.

Afterwards, the Indians returned and they stopped over a shallow bank, half a league from the islet where we ourselves were. There were there about 16 Indians. A Spaniard went there, wading because there was water up to the knees, and he got to the place where the Indians were. They were waiting for him and embraced him. The Spaniard then told them by signs to come to the island where we were. As they did not understand, they did not wish to come, and they went off to their island. The Spaniard returned, without having done them any harm whatever.

There we took on 18 butts of water, and the next day we set sail, with a wind from the ENE and headed W.

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[First return attempt]

The preparations for our nao were completed at the end of May 1528...

When our captain saw that the nao was ready, he decided to come aboard and made ready his rations and other necessities. Captain Hernando de la Torre gave him something like 70 quintals of clove, out of what he had set aside for the Emperor's share.

As we were about to depart, a certain Simon de Brito, a Portuguese who was there with Hernando de la Torre, and who had come there of his own free will, told our Captain that he wished to come with us. As our pilot had died, and this man told us that he was a pilot, and at the request of Hernando de la Torre, the captain was glad of it. Four other Portuguese, from those made prisoners by the fusta, were also taken in, and their wages were set. Hence, we sailed with up to 30 men on the 3 June of the said year.

From there we sailed with a SW wind, heading ENE, and we ran for 3 days at the end of which we were becalmed. The calm weather persisted for 25 to 30 days, then some wind returned and with it we ran something like 250 leagues until we reached an island, which is called the island of Oro²; there we anchored. It is a big island and highly populated with black people, with frizzy hair, and naked. They have iron weapons and swords. They gave us something to eat, in exchange for our trade goods, some chickens, pigs, rice, beans, and many other food items. We stayed there for 32 days, as we did not have sailing weather.

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- 1 Ed. note: A goat skin used to carry wine or water. What is meant could be any of the following interpretations: (1) a coconut shell fastened to a tree to collect rain water; (2) a well already dug; or (3) a well they dug themselves. In all cases, the quantity was so small as to bring to mind a drinking gourd, or else they used gourds to collect the water seeping into the pit they had dug...
 - 2 Ed. note: Transcribed Urais elsewhere. According to Arthur Wichmann (Nova Guinea I, 1909, pp. 18-19), Urais corresponds to Admiralty Island situated at 2°S and 147°E.

As we were about to sail, this Simon de Brito and the other four Portuguese, when our captain was ashore, boarded the boat, saying they were going to the island¹, but they headed offshore. Neither those aboard nor those ashore could do anything about it. When the captain realized that the boat and those men had gone, he made a raft and returned to the ship with the people he had with him. He decided to set sail just the same, which was done.

From there we ran with a southerly, and we ran to the E 14 leagues to an island, and from it we ran 100 leagues by many islands and came to anchor at an islet that was populated. The natives from there came out to us aboard some proas, two leagues at sea, to throw arrows at us. These people are black, naked and ugly. We were there 3 days. There we took 3 Indians, put them inside the ship and made sail. We ran for about 250 leagues until we came upon other [Caroline] **islands**, populated by white [sic] people, bearded, who came out to us aboard their proas with slings and stones. This island is at 7 degrees.²

From there on, we ran to the N and NNW until we reached 14 degrees. There some very strong contrary winds from the ENE hit us and forced us to turn back from whence we had come. With this weather, we ran as far as an island, which is at 380 leagues from the Moluccas, and is one of the islands that are called Ladrones.³ We passed south of it and headed W until we came to the island of Mindanao.

This coast is called Visaya, from the name of the natives of this land. From there we went to Sarangani where we had left one Spaniard when we passed by there before, and who had been sick. There we anchored and stayed for 2 days, waiting for Indians to give us water and give us some news about the Spaniard. They finally came and told us that the king was not at the island, that he had taken the Spaniard away with him. They were lying, because they had sold him off, as we were to learn later in Malacca, from the same Spaniard who was then there, and whose name is Grijalva. As we did not have any boat and no means to get water, and the Indians did not wish to bring us some, we made our way until we recognized the island of the Mehao⁴ which is 20 leagues from the islands of the Moluccas, and from there we went to the island of Tidore, from where we had departed the first time. There we found Hernando de la Torre, with the people he had with him before, and here we anchored. It was October 1528 when we got back. We again beached the nao, careened her, and made new plans, and in this business we spent 6 months.

1 Ed. note: To fetch the captain.

2 Ed. note: At 6 degrees, says Saavedra (Granado), and he is more authoritative. There are insufficient clues to enable us to identify these Carolinian islands. The most likely candidates are one of the Mortlocks, Losap-Nama, even Mokil, since they did not see other Caroline islands on this voyage, beforehand or afterward. However, we cannot be sure of the latitude, and it could have been any one of a number of other islands.

3 Ed. note: At 14° N or less, this island had to be either Rota or Guam, or both, as they had done the year before.

4 Ed. note: First recorded as Meao by Pigafetta. Also called Mayo. It is an island near Siau at the northern tip of Celebes.

Here we found Simon de Brito, and one other who had fled with our boat. He had told the story that our ship and all of us had been lost and that he had escaped in the boat. Captain Hernando de la Torre proceeded against him and sentenced him to be quartered, and the other man to be hanged; this was done.

[Second return attempt]

It was from here that we again set sail, on 8 May [1529]. We left to ENE, and ran along the same route that we had followed before, by the same islands, and we arrived at the same island from where we had taken the 3 above-said Indians. Two of them had jumped into the sea during the return voyage, but one we had carried this far. There we let him off at the same island where we had taken him from; he was now a Christian and very fluent in our language. He was let off so that he could tell the Indians what sort of people we were, and that they should bring us some food supply that would be paid for. Because the boat was not lowered, and because he was willing to swim, the captain let him go by swimming as he wished. However, we saw that the natives were attacking him in the water; he was shouting for us but finally they killed him.

[Probable discovery of Ngatik and/or Pohnpei, Ujelang, and Eniwetok]

We set sail and made our way to the ENE and, at some 250 leagues, we found other small **islands**. One of them would be about 4 leagues [in circumference] and the other 4 would be about 1 league each¹, all populated with brown people, bearded, naked, with some palm coats.

Here they came out to us in a proa, four or five Indians, and they came so close to us that they were talking to us, and by signs it seems as if they wanted us to lower the sails. One of them shot a stone at us, so hard that it hit the side of the ship at the poop and the blow split a plank. The captain ordered one musket to be made ready to shoot them, but it did not happen; thus, they went back to their island and we went on our way. These islands are in 7 degrees, 1,000 leagues from our departure point and as many from New Spain.

From there we ran NE and made 80 leagues and found other low islands.² We anchored at one of them. When we were anchored, we raised a flag and, when we saw people, we waved the flag. Six or seven proas came to our ship and they anchored at the bow of our ship. The captain went to the bow and threw a coat and a comb overboard, which they took. To recover that, they came alongside and they all came aboard. There were as many as 20 men, and among them one woman, believed to be a witch. It

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- 1 Ed. note: Sharp ("Discovery of the Pacific Islands") is of the opinion that these are Ponape and Ant Islands. Ngatik is also a possibility, because they were becalmed in its vicinity, according to Saavedra, and finally saw an island from a position 12 leagues (38 nautical miles) east of it. We can safely assume that, after sighting Ngatik, although they had an error of over 1° in latitude, then they passed between Pohnpei (the island they could have seen from such a long distance) and Mokil. They were then headed NE, and could only have met with Ujelang and Eniwetok later on.
 - 2 Ed. note: Nápoles does not mention their having passed by low islands in 9 degrees plus (Ujelang), but they are mentioned by Saavedra.

seemed as if they had brought her to tell them which type of people we were, from what could be judged from the Indian woman going to every one of us and probing us with her hands. The captain treated all of them well, and he let them have some of the things we had aboard. We made friends with them, so much so that a Spaniard dared go with them ashore, and so he did. When he stepped ashore, the chiefs of the land then came to speak with the Spaniard, and they took him along to their houses which are big and covered with palm. These people are white and have the arms and body tattooed. The women are pretty, with black hair and big eyes. They go around with the whole body covered with some palms, very fine and delicate, and they go barefoot. They have for weapons some fire-hardened sticks, and for food coconuts and fish. This island would be about 1 league. There the captain and all the people landed, and men and women came out to greet them with drums and songs. The captain sat down in a hut with the chief who, among other things that he was asking the captain, asked what was a musket that he saw. By signs, he was asking that it be explained to him; he said to shoot it. In order to please him, the captain ordered it to be fired. Their fright was so great that all hell broke loose and they all fell upon the ground stunned. The chief was trembling and all the people began to flee out of the huts and through the palm groves in front of them, but the chief and some others stayed put, although well shaken up. He and all the people having gone out of there, as many as 1,000 souls in all, boarded their proas and went to an island 3 leagues from there.¹ As for us, we stayed put, without doing them any harm.

Because the captain was indisposed, we remained 8 days at the said island, during which time the Indians returned and helped us take on 18 butts of water. They gave us 2,000 coconuts, and they were doing everything we asked them to do. These islands are at 11 degrees north of the equator.

From there we departed with a ENE wind to the N and we ran until we reached 26°, and here our captain died. As he was near death, we had called all the people, and begged all of us to sail as far as 30°, and that once there, if we did not find weather to take us to New Spain, we should return to Tidore and give the ship and everything in it to Captain Hernando de la Torre, for him to do what would be in the service of Our Lord and the Emperor. As captain he appointed Pedro Laso, a native of Toledo, but he himself died within 8 days, and as leaders we were left with the master and pilot.

Thus we ran until we reached 31 degrees, always with contrary winds, and since we did not find any favorable winds there, we were forced to turn back to where we had come from. From 31°, we ran W until we came to one of the Ladrone islands², and there we anchored.³ When we were at 31°, we found ourselves 1,200 leagues from the Mol-

1 Ed. note: They probably went from Eniwetok proper to Parry I.

2 Ed. note: It is obvious to all that from 31°, one does not head W to reach a latitude of less than 20°. Therefore, this is a sure example that the directions expressed by Nápoles, and some others, cannot always be interpreted literally, but only generally; west in this case can only mean westward.

3 Ed. note: This is probably Guam once again, but this time they were able to tack back to the lee coast.

uccas with yet another 1,000 leagues to New Spain. At this island, we stayed one day taking on some refreshments, and there we lost one anchor.

From there we set sail to return to the Moluccas. We ran as far as the island of Visaya, and could not touch at it. So, we passed it by and went to the islands of Taraole [Talaud], that are 120 leagues from the Moluccas. However, we were unable to find bottom and for that reason we passed them by and went to the island of Gilolo, and from there to Zamafo, which is on the same coast of the island, and there we anchored in the port.

We reached this port at the end of October and there we found Captain Hernando de la Torre who had lost the fortress of Tidore which had been taken by the Portuguese. The ship was turned over to him, with everything that was in it. The captain came aboard and he thus took possession of the ship, as well as the clothing and effects that had belonged to our captain.

All the people aboard, and that would be as many as 18 men, we went ashore, and in view of the fact that the ship was eaten up by worms and that the people ashore there had such a hard time on account of the disorder, some of us gave ourselves up and went to Malacca, and the others remained there. Those of us who went to Malacca were made prisoners by Captain Jorge de Castro who ordered us not to leave the place, and others not to let us leave. So, we were there for two and a half years. Out of the 20 men who went there, only nine of us survived, and until the King of Portugal had it ordered to let us go, they kept us there.

[Note added by someone else:] The author of the above is Vicencio [sic] de Nápoles, who departed with the said fleet from New Spain and was an eyewitness to it all, who came to Portugal and from there to Spain, went to the court of H.M. and made a report of the voyage; having asked for some assistance for his labor, they ordered he be given 14 ducats, and those were the favors done by the Council.

All the accounts and official charts of the navigation were seized by the Governor of India, Nuño de Acuña¹, from Hernando de la Torre, because they had remained in his possession.

1 Ed. note: Nuño da Cunha was Governor of Portuguese India, ca. 1535. It was he who sent Galvão (See next document) to the Moluccas.