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**Document 1542B**

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**Villalobos—Narrative of García de Escalante Alvarado,  
dated Lisbon 1 September 1548**

*Sources: Navarrete's Colección ... de Indias, vol. V, pp. 117-209, from Muñoz' Tome 36.*

**Narrative of the voyage made from New Spain to the  
Western Islands by Ruy Gomez [sic] de Villalobos, by  
order of the Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza**

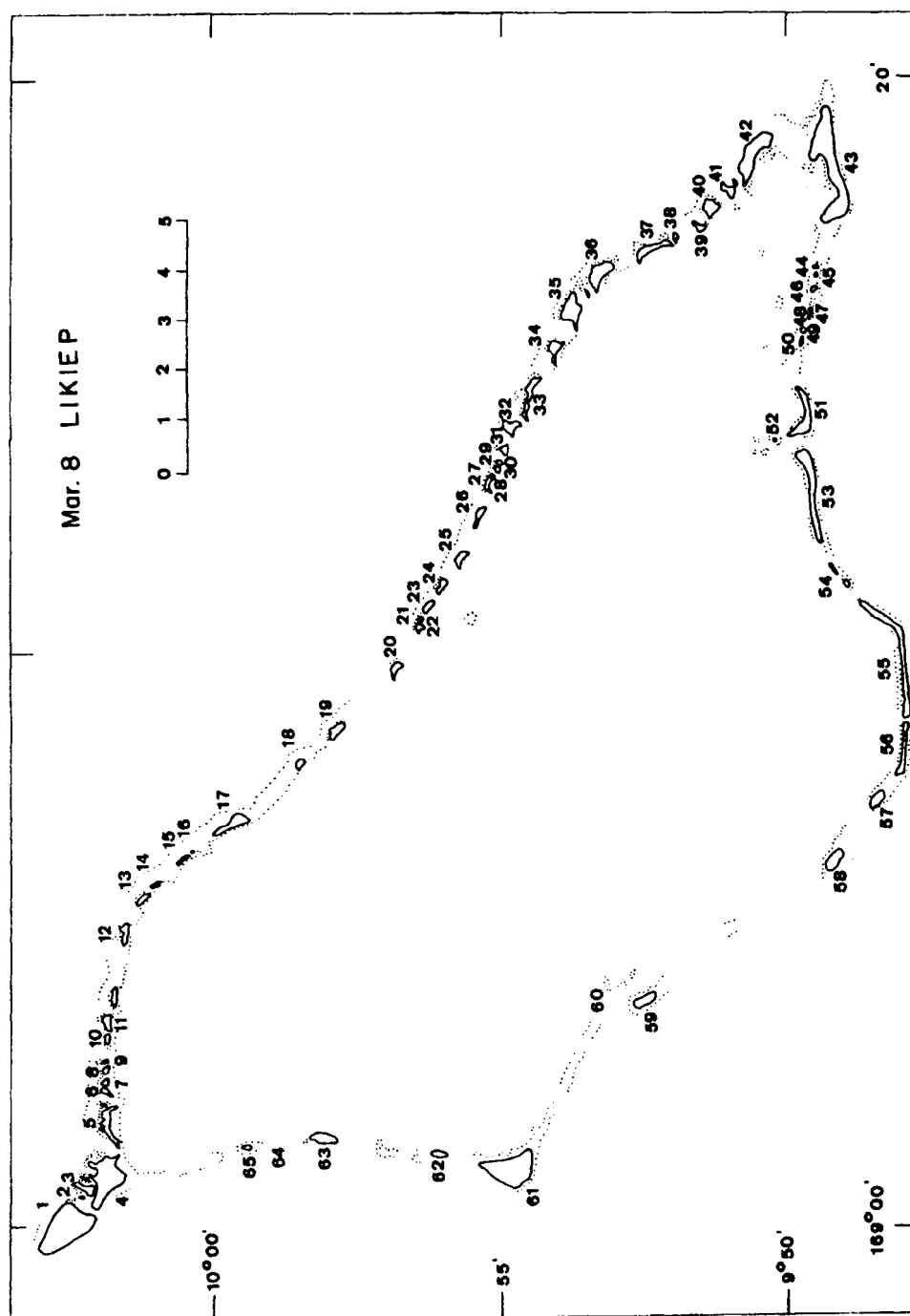
Most Illustrious Sir:<sup>1</sup>

As always I looked upon myself as the servant of your Most Illustrious Lordship, and I wish to remain so until I die, and, having this opportunity to bring it to the attention of your Most Illustrious Lordship, I have dared to give you an account of the outcome of the fleet that your Most Illustrious Lordship sent to the Western Islands. I beg your Most Illustrious Lordship to forgive my error, if it is not done as well as your Most Illustrious Lordship would like to read it, and look only at my willingness, as a servant, to serve your Most Illustrious Lordship with a clear will.

The fleet of your Most Illustrious Lordship departed from that New Spain, from the port of Juan Gallego [i.e. Navidad], on All Saints' Day of the year 1542. Having sailed 180 leagues, at a latitude of 18°30', we arrived at two uninhabited islands, 12 leagues one from the other; we baptized the first one Santo Thomás, and the other

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<sup>1</sup> Ed. note: It was addressed to the Viceroy of New Spain. The editing was not done carefully; there were even two sheets of transcripts that are missing from page 191 of the Colección.



**Map of Likiep, discovered by Villalobos on 26 December 1542.** *The atoll was named by him the Coral Islands. He stayed here for 11 days on Islet N°43 which he baptized St. Stephen, in honor of the patron saint of Fr. Santiesteban. He may also have named the neighboring islet of Lado in honor of the head clerical priest, Father Lazo (Note that Lazo in Spanish is pronounced almost like Latho in English).*

“la Añublada”.<sup>1</sup> Eighty leagues farther we came up to another island; we baptized it “la Roca partida” [i.e. Split Rock Island].

After 62 days of sailing, during some of which we wallowed in bad weather, we found an archipelago of low **islands**, all of them with trees, and with much difficulty, because they are very soundable<sup>2</sup> so that [even] at a distance of one arquebus shot bottom was not found near them, we took port at one of them. They are inhabited by poor people, with little polish<sup>3</sup> and, at the time we anchored at one—which was baptized Santisteban [i.e. San Estevan or St. Stephen] because we touched at it on his day [i.e. 26 December]—its people leaving by the other end, fleeing. Only 23 women were left whom we found hidden in the thickest part of the island, whom we rounded up as I have said. We gave them a few trade goods and we treated them all very well. Having taken on water, the fleet left this archipelago, which we named “el **Coral**” on account of the specimens that were seen there.

On the feast day of the [Three] Kings of the following year [i.e. 6 January 1543], after having sailed 35 leagues, we passed by 10 other **islands** that looked like the others and, on account of the greenness shown by their trees, were named “los **Jardines**”; the latitude of the ones and the others is from 9 to 10 degrees.

After having sailed 100 leagues to the west, a storm hit us and, although its fury threatened our lives, God consented to free us from it. Still, as a result of it, we lost [sight of] the galley which gave us all much sorrow.

On 23 January, having made 100 more leagues, at a latitude of 10 degrees, we passed by a small **island**, well populated, which appeared very beautiful. We did not anchor here. Rather, Indians came out with proas making the sign of the Cross with their hands and they were heard to say in Spanish: “*Buenos días, matalotes*”, reason for which we baptized it **Matalotes**.

At the same latitude, 35 leagues to the west, we passed by another major **island** and, on account of the reefs that came out of it, we could not anchor at it. Indians came out of it in canoes. We baptized it with the name “*islas de Arrecifes*”.

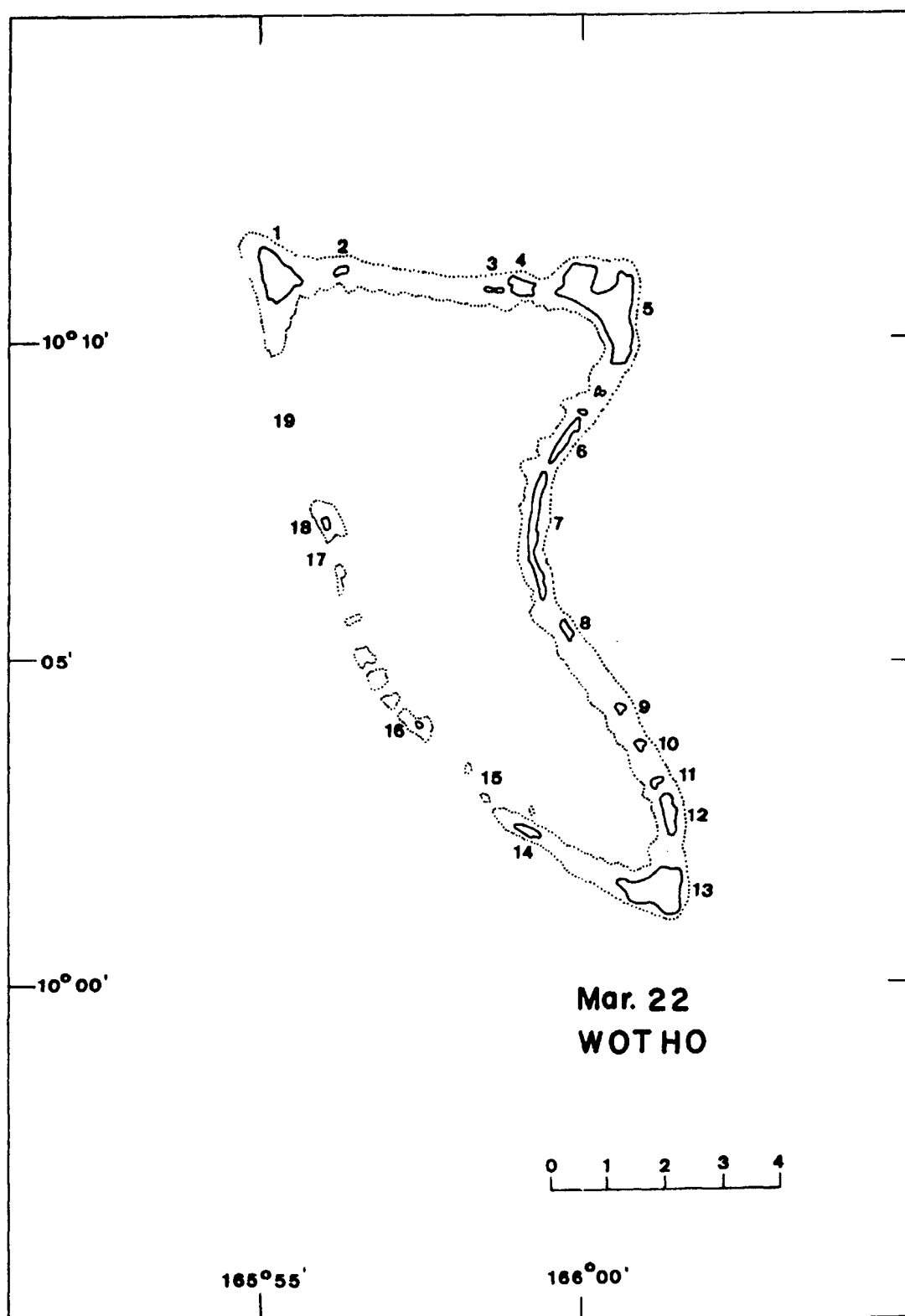
Continuing our course to the west, on 2 February, we arrived at a big island, in which there was a bay which we baptized Málaga, which is at a latitude of 7°40’.<sup>4</sup> The fleet was anchored here for a month. The General wished to make a settlement in the said bay, [but] as the site was very pitiful, he would have us look for another. Possession of the island was taken for your Lordship; we baptized it *Cesárea Karoli*, as it was big and we saw there proofs that it was worth the majesty of the name. The pilots who later circumnavigated it say that it has a circumference of 350 leagues; they estimate a distance of 1,500 leagues from the port of Navidad to this island.

1 Ed. note: Bad transcription for “La Nublada”.

2 Ed. note: Meaning the opposite, that they are too deep for an anchor to touch bottom. He will now describe Likiep.

3 Ed. note: This is a translation of “policia” which in this context means order, discipline, good government; hence little polish means a little savageness.

4 Ed. note: The bay situated at that latitude on Mindanao’s east coast is Baganga. It was re-named Málaga after the birthplace of Villalobos.



**Map of Wotho, discovered by Villalobos on 8 January 1543.**

Having come out of this bay with the intention of going north in search of the island of Mazagua [i.e. Limasawa], because it had thus been discussed at the Coral Islands, and having spent 10 days trying hard to do so and not being able to make any headway on account of the contrary winds and currents, it turned back south. Having coasted Cesárea Karoli for 70 leagues, we came to two islets separated from the big one 4 leagues southward. The General, thinking that it would be better to settle at one of them until we had learned enough about the country, sent a ship to talk to them and make peace. As peace was granted by them, the fleet went to anchor at one named Sarragan [i.e. Sarangani]. However, upon arriving at the bigger town, it appeared that they had had second thought about friendship with us, because we found them up in arms, with palisades and barricades made with boats filled with sand. Seeing that it was not convenient for us to go from there, on account of the necessity for the fleet to get food supplies, which was great, until we found something better, after having repeatedly begged the islanders to sell us food, reason was not sufficient to make them virtuous. So, as it appeared that we had just reason to want to make war upon them, having used up all the formalities that reason dictated, on Monday 2 April, they were given battle and in a brief space of time the town was taken, and we did not pursue our advantage because we thought we could convince them to return in peace. During the battle, they wounded a few Spaniards, six of whom died. This island, which was baptized Antonia, is 6 leagues in circumference and has 4 towns...

### **First return attempt of 1543**

... In Sarragan one ship was wrecked on its side, and the others were on the point of being lost but they put off... It was decided to send a ship to new Spain.

Because all the ships arrived so badly equipped, when we arrived the small one was despatched, because we had work to do on the others. Because there were little food-stuff with which to go, it was decided to send the galliot to some islands where it had been before, which are called Filipinas after our lucky Prince, and which they said were well supplied, in order to buy food there; so it was done. The ship left Sarragan on 4 August 1543 to go to New Spain and the galliot to bring food.

Three days after the ship and the galliot had been despatched, three proas came from the Moluccas with Portuguese. They asked for a safe-conduct in the name of H.M. and it was given; the General tried to give them a good reception. A gentleman came ashore with a letter and request, signed by Don Jorge de Castro, captain of the Moluccas, in which he said that all these islands belonged to the Most Serene King of Portugal, and he asked and requested us to leave them...<sup>1</sup>

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1 Ed. note: The Spanish moved closer to Ternate instead, as they went with the rest of the fleet (3 vessels) to Gilolo. A contingent was later sent to Tidore, the old Spanish stronghold. In June 1544, the writer Escalante, was coasting north along the coast of Mindanao on the way to the Leyte Gulf when he found a letter left by Captain de la Torre who had turned back with the San Juan.

While I was coasting up the coast, I arrived at the Bay of Resurrection, and found the letter that the General had left there, and two others: one from Father Friar Gerónimo de Santiesteban, prior of the Augustinians who, according to what he said, had passed there during April 1544... and the other letter was from Bernardo de la Torre, captain of the ship that had gone to New Spain, who was saying that he had turned back because he had left late<sup>1</sup>, and that he had picked up the 21 Spaniards that the prior had left at Tandaya and whom he had ransomed, and that he was going [south to Sarangani] in search of his General and, should he not find him [there], he was going to go to the fortress of Ternate, because the ship was on the point of sinking...

I came back to Tidore on Friday 17 October.. and I found there the General with all the men who had moved from Gilolo, and the ship **San Juan** that had turned back from New Spain, which they were making ready to send again, and the voyage it had made I will relate.

Those who were aboard the ship say that, after departed Sarrangan, they went to get food at the Felipinas [i.e. Philippines], at the Tandaya River. Having taken it in, they departed Tandaya on 26 August 1543, and at a latitude of 26° they saw a small **island**, and 26 leagues further on, they saw two other **islands** that are in line North—South with the Ladrones Islands, and further on they saw three other **islands**; one of these was a volcano that spewed fire by three mouths. On 18 October, the pilots found that they had sailed [the equivalent of] 750 leagues in straight line<sup>2</sup> and were at almost 30°. Here they were hit by such a storm from the north that it made them turn back, because the ship was small and they carried badly-seated masts that would not suffer that heavy sea in progress. They returned to the island of Tandaya in 13 days, and they came to it on its north side and anchored in a large bay<sup>3</sup> which is well populated and a good port for ships. There they found as much food as they wished in the way of rice, pigs and chickens, which they bought with the porcelain and the samples they had carried for your Lordship and which had been procured at Sarrangan...

Having determined to go in search of the General, because the winds did not let them go by the eastern side, they had to go by the lee side. Sailing thus along that coast, they saw many islands and towns, and on 3 January 1544, they arrived at a town where the pilot went ahead to sound a canal that existed between two islands. On the other side there was a town; while they were heading for it, the ship hit a shoal and it was caught between two rocks, and they passed the whole night high and dry, so that to get out of there, they had to unload everything the ship carried; they threw overboard the food and the ballast and there they had the runners on the starboard side broken.

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1 Ed. note: That is, too late in the season to catch favorable winds.

2 Ed. note: This must be the round-trip distance, as they could not have sailed at 60 leagues per day, although even 30 leagues per day is a high average...

3 Ed. note: It is clear from these remarks and the following ones that they had entered through the San Bernardino Strait into the Samar Sea and would find the narrow passage between Samar and Leyte to reach the Leyte Gulf.

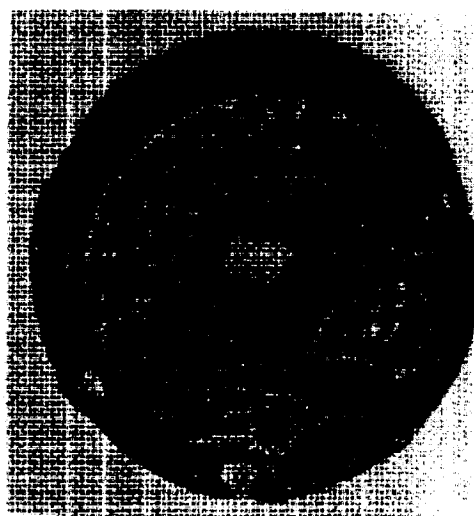
On Saturday evening they pulled the ship from the shoal and from there went to a small island which was all cultivated and where they found a canoe that was 33 cubits in length with a deck. From there they went to another town whose chief is called Si-cabatuy.<sup>1</sup> There they learned that there was a passage between those islands to go to Tandaya. The captain sent 8 men in a canoe to reconnoiter...

### Second return attempt of 1545

When the ship **San Juan** was ready to return to that New Spain, it departed from Tidore on 16 May 1545...

The nao that had been left in Gilolo was brought to Tidore and the General said that she could not be equipped to return to New Spain. Therefore, he sold it to the Portuguese for 600,000 *cajas*.<sup>2</sup> She was equipped at Ternate and went to India loaded with clove on 11 June of the said year...

I have already said above that on 16 May of the year 1545, the ship had left for New Spain. Four and a half months had passed since it had left this island of Tidore and everyone had much hoped that it would make it and were waiting for the relief from your Most Illustrious Lordship. At the time hope had reached a peak, God willed that on the 3rd of October the said ship anchored at this island, having turned back from the voyage it was going to do.



**An old Chinese coin unearthed at Calatagan, Luzon.**

...  
Already at this time over 20 Spaniards and 3 priests had gone over to the Portuguese...

Another day I went again to the General's inn, and told him how many soldiers and sailors were whispering and saying that the ship had not made it because it turned back at the time it should have sailed by the southern route. It was so, what had to be done was not being done, in not sending it once more, as there was weather good enough to send it. Until then, the weather had not been good since the ship was sent the last time,

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- 1 Ed. note: In most Filipino languages, the prefix "Si" is used to mean "It is", "It's" or "Tis", as in: What is your name? 'Tis Cabatuy.
  - 2 Ed. note: These were not boxes or packages of clove as the Spanish editor pretends, but this was a Chinese monetary unit pronounced "caixa" by the Portuguese. The Portuguese word is at the origin of the Spanish word "caja" used here, and of the English word "cash". Escalante himself says later on in the same report that 5,000 cash was equivalent to almost 2 ducats. So, the ship was sold for less than 240 ducats.

because the skies had always been contrary and the winds had [not] been favorable. I begged him to let me have the ship to make the voyage, and I offered myself to do it and to find sailors who would return to New Spain with it, after making some repairs. The repairs that were required were minimal, because it did not need to be caulked because it was still water tight. As far as the sails were concerned, it could sail with those it carried, plus others that could be made out of the canvas reserved for the sails of the galley. As far as food supplies for the voyage, there were 600 bundles of rice in Zambo, that would be about 300 *fanegas*<sup>1</sup>, and at the towns of Camola and Lobata they had 800 bundles of sago that could be used to make biscuits, and there was rigging and cables in the country. The only thing that was necessary was to go over some carpentry work, and that could be done in a short time. I added that, after having despatched the ship, he could make whatever agreements that he wished, or carry out those he had with [the Portuguese captain] Hernando de Sousa, that he and all his people could go to India, as he had agreed to do, but I would make the voyage to New Spain with 20 or 30 men.

He answered that he was very happy to give me the ship if I could only find some willing to go with it. I went to see the pilot Alonso Fernandez, the man from Tarife, who had gone on the first return voyage in the ship with Bernardo de la Torre, and he told me that he volunteered to navigate the said ship, because he knew that he could make it. I talked to a few sailors and officials and they volunteered to accompany me on the said voyage, saying that they would rather go back poor to New Spain than rich to India. Given their intention, I went back to the General and told him that I had found a pilot, sailors and other gentlemen and soldiers who volunteered to make the said voyage with me, to which he told me not to believe them, because in the end they would not carry it out. Once again I begged him to give it to me, that with the help of Our Lord and in benefit of H.M. I thought I could discover the return route. He answered back to me that he would see how his negotiations with Hernando de Souza would come out, that to initiate something new like sending the ship would jeopardize them, that he could not do it, because he had so told Hernando de Sousa.

Seeing his decision, which was that the ship should not make a third return attempt, I did not talk to him about it anymore.<sup>2</sup>

...  
So, we embarked aboard the Portuguese ships, and a few stayed behind of their own will at Ternate. On 18 February [1546], we made sail with winds from the NW, and heading south, we arrived at the port of Ambon [Amboina] on Shrove Tuesday, where we stayed until 17 May, as the winds were blowing from Banda. During the time we were there, a few Spaniards died from a disease they caught there and others had come with it from the Moluccas. This disease usually recur at these islands. When you are at-

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1 Ed. note: A fanega was a Spanish bushel of 55-56 litres.

2 Ed. note: The factor, Martin de Islares, also wrote a letter to Villalobos on 1 November 1545 begging him to let the ship sail, but to no avail. The officials exchanged notarized correspondence with Villalobos but failed to convince him.



tacked by it, first it paralyzes your feet and hands, so that you do not feel them any more than as if they were dead. Then it hits you in the chest and suffocates you. Among those who died there, was General Ruy Lopez de Villalobos, who died on Palm Friday 1546 from the fever that he caught there. He was buried in the town of Zozanibe.

...

The winds for going south having returned, we left Ambon on 17 May of the said year, and arrived at the island of Java, where we made two stopovers, one at Prazada and the other at Cajongan...

We left Java and arrived at the strait between Zumatra and other islands that are called Palynbaon<sup>1</sup> and, coasting the island of Zumatra by day, and anchoring in the shallow ground that was there by night, we arrived at another strait called Savaon.<sup>2</sup> The next day, on 11 July, we arrived at the settlement of Malaca, where we remained for 5 months...

### **News of Japan and possible news of the lost ships of Saavedra**

At Malaca a Chinese pilot asked me about our navigation. He told me that at the island of Japan, he had heard that there were two ships, a big one and a small one<sup>3</sup>, with men like us aboard them, at an island beyond that of Japan, more toward that New Spain.<sup>4</sup> They were at war with the natives of those islands. That news made me think that they would be ships of your Lordship.

After 5 months had passed, we embarked for India, and arrived in January [1547]...

When we were [still] at Tidore, we had learned from Diego de Fretes [Diogo de Freitas], the older brother of Captain Jordão de Fretes, a man to whom one must give entire credibility on account of his age and status, news about some countries that seem to me appropriate to narrate in relation with those I have already mentioned in connection with the archipelago of the Philippines, and they are as follows. What he said is that, when he was with a ship at the city of Siam, which is on the mainland between Malaca and what is called China, there came there a junk from the Lequios and he had many conversations with the people aboard. He said that they are well-built people, white and bearded, dressed with silk and clothes styled almost like our own. They said that their King did not let a native of their country leave unless they were married and had children and property, and that the captain was responsible to bring back the people, alive or dead. He had himself seen them salt [the bodies of] three Lequios men in Siam in order to bring them back home. Their merchandise is gold and silver...

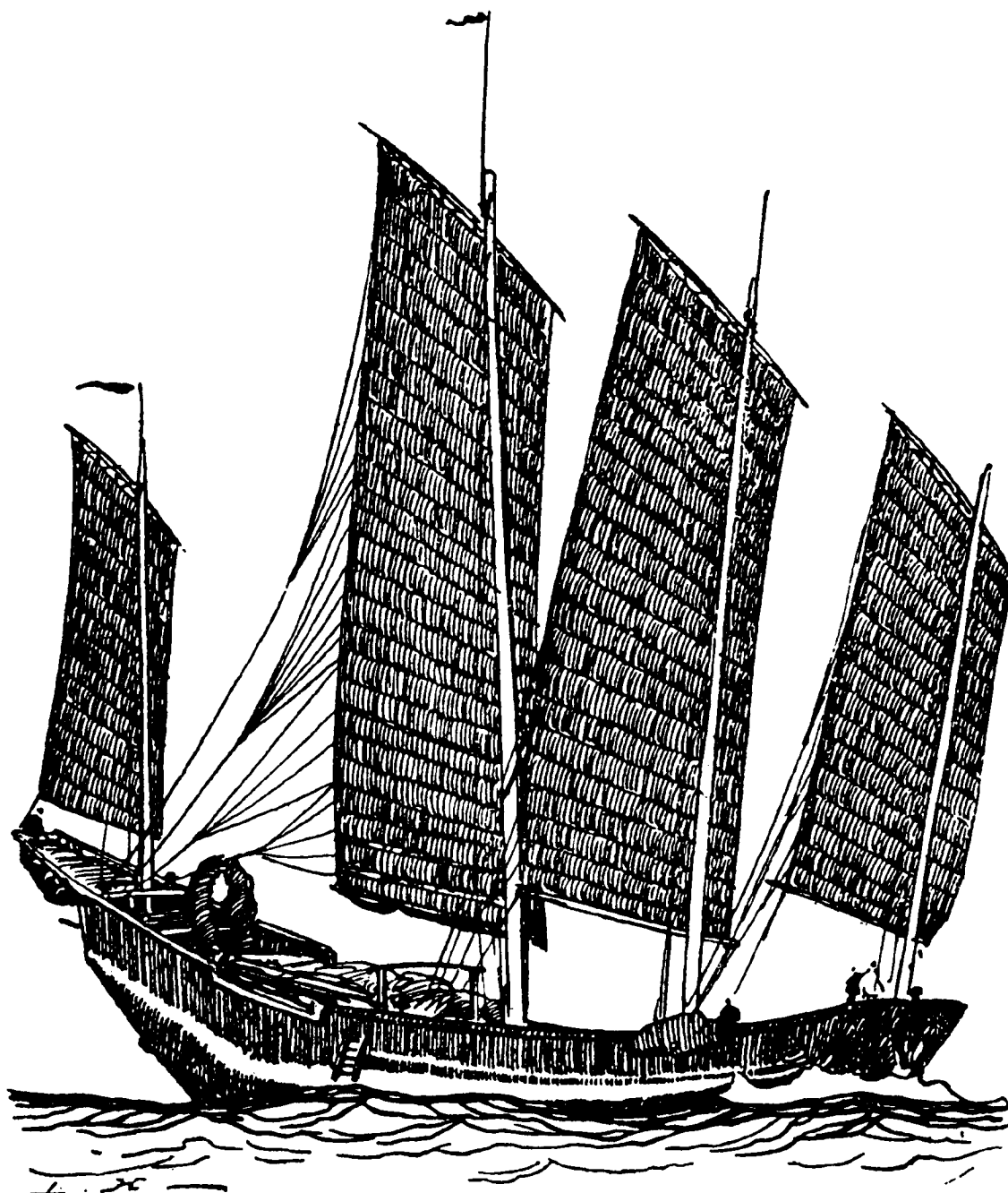
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1 Ed. note: Probably the Billiton Islands today.

2 Ed. note: The Riau Passage at the mouth of the Strait of Malacca.

3 Ed. note: The reader will recall that in 1527, the "lost" ships of Saavedra, i.e. the big Santiago, Captain Cárdenas, and the little Espiritu Santo, Captain Fuentes, probably tried to find the return route east of Japan.

4 Ed. note: Either the Lequios [Okinawa] Islands which would appear as lying beyond Kyushu to a Chinese coming east across the Yellow Sea, or Honshu proper.



**Chinese junk of this type was used by the Portuguese. *It was aboard such craft that some Portuguese trader first saw Japan in 1542 or 1543. (Drawn by L. Haffner).***

It happened also that two Portuguese, from those who were there, while going in a junk to trade on the coast of China, were carried by a storm to the island of the Lequios where they were well treated by the king of those islands, through the intervention of the friends with whom they had traded in Siam, and, after having received food, they went away. On account of the general order and wealth they saw there, other Portuguese went back there as traders aboard Chinese junks. By sailing east from the China coast, they arrived at the said island but that time they were ordered not to step ashore but to give a list of the merchandise they brought and of the prices they wanted for them, that they would be paid later. So, they did so, and they were paid for everything with silver. Then they were given food and told to go away.

After we had heard that news, it was learned that there was a man at Ternate, a Galician from Monterrey named Pero Diez [Pedro Díaz] who had just come aboard the naos from Borneo [Borneo], and who had gotten there aboard a junk from the islands of Japan. The General sent someone to talk to him and beg him to report what he had seen. As this man was anxious to serve H.M., he wrote a letter, and afterwards he came to the island of Tidore and in person narrated a few things as he remembered them.

What he narrated is that, in May of the previous year of 1544, he left Patani<sup>1</sup> aboard a Chinese junk and arrived at Chincheo [Chang-chau, or Ch'uanchow] which is on the coast of China... From Chincheo they went to a city called Lionpu [= Ning-po]... From there they went to another city [i.e. province] on the coast, named Nenquin [Nan-king] ... From there they crossed to the island of Japan, which is in 32°. <sup>2</sup> From it and Liompu, there are 155 leagues. It trends almost East—West; it is a very cold land and along the coast the towns they saw are small. In each island there a lord, and he could not tell where the king of them all resides. The people there are well-built, white and bearded, with the hair cut. They are gentiles, their weapons are bows and arrows. They have no poison [on their arrows] as in the archipelago of the Philippines. They fight with sticks whose points have sharp nails [sic] fixed to them. They have no swords [sic] nor lances. <sup>3</sup> They read and write like the Chinese, and their language sounds like German. They have many horses which they ride; the saddles do not have any cantles and the stirrups are made of copper. The working people dress themselves with woolen clothes that look like serge... but the leaders wear clothes made of silk, damask, smooth and taffeta. The women are in great manner very white and beautiful; they go about dressed like Spanish women with cloth or silk, in accordance with their status. The houses are built of stone and adobe, whitewashed on the inside, with the roofs tiled like ours, with upper floors, windows and corridors. They have all the same foodstuff, cattle and fruits as on

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1 Ed. note: The southernmost province of Siam, or Thailand on the east coast of the Malayan Peninsula. The Portuguese has only seen Japan for the first time 1 or 2 years earlier..

2 Ed. note: They had reached the coast of Kagoshima, formerly Satsuma, which St. Francis Xavier was to reach in 1548-49.

3 Ed. note: Díaz had obviously not seen the samurai.

the mainland. There is much sugar. They have falcons and goshawks with which they hunt. They do not eat beef. It is a land with many fruits, specially melons. They work the earth with oxen and plows, wear leather shoes, and on their heads they wear skull-caps<sup>1</sup>, like Albanians, of horsehair<sup>2</sup>; they take those off to salute one another out of courtesy. Fish is abundant at those islands. Their wealth is in silver, which they have in small bars, some of which we had sent to your Lordship on the ship that turned back the last time [i.e. in 1545]. He says that they sold 10 quintals of pepper for 6,000 ducats. He says that while they were in port five junks of the Chinese who live in Patani [came] with a few Portuguese aboard. On the way, they were attacked by 100 Chinese junks, tied together with chains, and that the Portuguese in 4 boats, with 3 small guns and 16 arquebuses, went out and dismantled the Chinese junks and killed many of their people. He saw at this island very little gold and a very large quantity of iron and copper. There they were joined by other Portuguese who were coming from the islands of the Lequios which they said were very rich in gold and silver; the people [there] are robust and bellicose.

...

May Our Lord keep the Most Illustrious person of your Lordship and increase his estates for many years.

From this city of Lisbon, 1 August 1548.—

Most Illustrious Sir.—

[From] the true servant of your Most Illustrious Lordship who kisses your most illustrious hands.—

García Descalante Alvarado.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Ed. note: The Spanish word used is “capelete”, a diminutive of “capelo” which is like a cardinal’s hat.

2 Ed. note: Probably made of felt.

3 Ed. note; Escalante attached the list of the survivors of the Villalobos expedition as he knew them; there are 144 persons listed, out of the 370 or more who had departed from Navidad.