
Document 1596H

The story of the Carlettis, Italian traders aboard the San Pablo in 1596

Sources: Original ms. now lost, but a copy is in the Biblioteca Angelica at Rome, as Codex 1331 (T.3.22). Some editions of these ragionamenti or chapters are as follows: 1) in Italian: (a) Ragionamenti di Francesco Carletti fiorentino sopra le cose da lui vedute ne'suoi viaggi si dell'Indie Occidentali, e Orientali come d'altri paesi, Florence, Giuseppe Manni, 1701 (a heavily-edited version); (b) 2nd edition: Viaggi da lui raccontati in dodici ragionamenti, Florence, G. Barbra, 1878, pp. 117-138; (c) also edited by Marziano Guglielminetti in his series on Viaggiatori del Seicento, Turin, Unione Tipografico- editrice, 1967; 2) English translation: My Voyage Around the World, New York, 1964 and London, 1965; 3) Spanish translation: Razonamientos de mi viage alrededor del mundo, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1976.

Notes: My own translation follows, based on both the Italian and Spanish editions. Note the existence of a biographical and bibliographical notice by Gemma Sgrilli: Francesco Carletti, mercante e viaggiatore fiorentino 1573-1636, Rocca S. Casciano, L. Cappelli, 1905.

Introductory note, by Dahlgren.

In the other 1596 ship, the *almiranta San Pablo*, sailed the Italian merchant Antonio Carletti and his son Francesco, who has given a detailed description of the voyage. He tells us about the tricks which had to be employed in order to circumvent the regulations, which did not allow anyone to embark for the Philipines unless he belonged to the crew or intended to settle in the islands, and which fixed the lading of the vessel at a certain value. The elder Carletti was inscribed as a “constable” in the artillery and the younger as a “guardian”; the captain took charge of their money at a certain percentage. The voyage went as usual in a westerly direction, in 14° to 15° lat., with a steady favorable wind, so that they had no need to move the sails or yards. After 76 days they reached the Ladrones, where the vessel was surrounded by a swarm of canoes, whose occupants offered water and fruit in exchange for bits of iron. At the sight of these wretched natives one of the Capuchins on board was seized with a holy zeal to convert them to Christianity: he suddenly jumped down into a canoe provided only with his breviary and a crucifix, and in the attempts to recover him two members of the crew were against their will compelled to accompany him to the shore. (After the ship had sailed without them, they had to stay on the island till the following year, 1597, when,

as the ships from New Spain were again passing, the said religious and soldiers were received on board.)¹ This ship, too, was attacked by storms in the neighborhood of Cape Espiritu Santo, was driven helplessly about on the sea for many days, but finally reached Manila in safety in June 1596.

Sixth chapter on the West Indies

which deals with the voyage made from Mexico to the Philippine Islands by way of Acapulco and the events that occurred during that navigation

... After having been in Mexico from the month of June [1595]² until that of March of the year 1596, we started to make ready, firstly by overcoming the difficulty that we had with the passage, that could not be done without the express permission of the Viceroy, which is not given to anyone who does not go either with the intention to remain in those islands to live—and in such a case they go at the royal expense—or truly embarking aboard the ship to serve in it in some capacity, and the latter was the means we used. Having discussed this business with a captain of one of the two ships that had to leave that year, he got us two fictitious jobs aboard his ship: for my father, that of artillery constable and for me that of boatswain's mate, with the understanding that we should give him the salary and that the captain would provide two sailors who would actually serve in our posts...

... We returned with our silver to the said port of Acapulco, where two ships were being prepared for the voyage. Without further ado, we quickly embarked and on the 25th [rather 5th] day of March 1596 we unfurled the sails to the wind and headed westward, plowing the immensity of the sea that is more than 6,000 miles of gulf, always running at the same latitude along the 14- to 15-degree North parallel in straight line, in such a manner that if there had been left a trace where the ship passed and made its way, one would have seen a spherical semi-circle on the fourth part or more of the whole globe, that with the prosperous and very happy cruise that we had, without ever moving the sails or turning the lateen yards and with a tail wind, being always the same that softly and continuously blew throughout that whole torrid zone from the east to the west, so that it would be impossible to return by the same parallel; and it is necessary to go out of the tropics in order to find northerly or southerly winds that lead you to the east. It takes six months for this return voyage and a little more than two to go, as we ourselves did, at the end of which, that is, 76 days, we arrived in sight of the first is-

1 Ed. note: For the story of Father de los Angeles, see Doc. 1596I.

2 Ed. note: From the Cape Verde Islands, the Carlettis had gone to Panama, then to Lima, and to Acapulco, with a side-trip to Mexico City. From Manila, they went on to Japan, and Macao, after which they went to Goa, and back to Europe via Mozambique and St. Helena Island. However, they met with Dutch ships and were carried to the Low Countries. The author did not reach Florence, his hometown, until 1606.

lands, situated at a latitude of 7° [sic] to 15° north, about 950 miles from the Philippines, that the Spaniards call the **Islands of the [Lateen] Sails or of Thieves [Ladrones]**: appropriate names, the first one on account of the great quantity of canoes that were seen to come out of these islands to the sea, all with sails, as soon as these islanders had seen our ship, that it seemed they covered the sea all around us; as they are accustomed each year when the Spaniards pass there, they approach the ship, as they were doing to ours, because the other one, that is the flagship, had already left us as we lost it at the beginning of our cruise and we did not see it again until we arrived at the Philippine Islands. And they began to show us what they carried, which was a quantity of big canes marvelous to see, and green and full of fresh water, each section holding between two nodes no less than 4 or 5 bottles of it; they brought also fresh and salted fish and rice and fruits of many kinds and various other little things, all to barter for some small pieces of iron that we threw tied to a little cord, that were untied with undescrivable speed and, when it appeared that they had untied enough, they in turn tied to the same cord some thing that they carried, with parsimony, because, there being many [of us] who at the same time throw from the ship the iron tied to the cord, they for their part wait to untie it and to few [of us] they give the exchange: and for this also they are called thieves.

[Canoes of the Ladrones]

For a while they gave us great pleasure and a wonderful entertainment, to see their canoes so well made, of narrow boards painted in various colors and skilfully joined and laced together, in a fine and very beautiful form, so light that they looked like birds that fly in that sea, with sails made like a mat of reeds; and because they are very narrow and long, so that the waves of the sea and the force of the wind that touch the sails do not capsize them, they carry always on one side a counterweight [made] of a big wood almost as long as the canoe that is supported at the ends by two small poles that cross each other in the center of the canoe and come out by 3 fathoms and, skimming the sea, sustain it so that it cannot capsize nor sink even when full of water; and it so happens that the sail is always on the other [side], and without changing either one or the other they sometimes make the poop the prow and the prow the poop, sailing with whatever wind it is necessary to use, taking it as it comes without turning the canoe.

The canoe has both ends pointed, and in each go 4 or 5 Indians, completely naked and with bodies that are robust, fat and of a reddish color [as if] burnt by the sun, and without covering the part of themselves that is shameful among us, that among themselves they do not take into account, given that I heard that these men are very simple and pure on this point, and further that they hold everything in common, even their women.

[A Franciscan friar jumped ship]

Sailing along with us in this way, they were doing their barter, exchanging their aforementioned things for our iron. But all this pastime was disturbed by the accident and

occurrence that happened to a Franciscan capuchin friar,¹ of those they call disclaled in Spain, who, moved by a holy and good zeal, although with little premeditation, it looked to him like these poor people would be lost for lack of someone to teach them the knowledge of God, and having thought about this with a very intense charity and compassion for these people, prepared himself and decided to ask in humble simplicity, guided by the love of his neighbor, permission from his Father Superior to stay in these islands to indoctrinate and teach them the way to Heaven. The Father Superior, hearing such a request from only one mess mate [from] among 25 friars whom he had under him, was greatly surprised and, in order to keep him in such holy zeal and purpose, answered that he should follow his wish and inspiration, although he did not then know how it could be accomplished. However, the good friar [who was] soliciting and who had already premeditated the manner in which to accomplish his plan, having [then] the blessing and permission of his superior, went down immediately to a room below deck where they all stayed and, having taken his breviary and a small wooden cross on which was painted a crucifix, and putting everything in the sleeves of his habit, once above, without saying a word, stealthily approached one of the sides of the ship where there were many of those canoes, trading their wares for our iron, and, addressing me said: "*Oh qué lástima de estos pobres hombres!*" ["Oh, what a pity for these poor people!"] that is, "What compassion [I have] for these poor people!" and he wanted to say more, that they do not have anyone to teach them how to know God, when suddenly, the canoes being closer to our ship, he let himself fall right into one of them. Upon this, the barbarians who were in it, amazed and almost frightened, suddenly tried to move away from the ship, not doubting perhaps that others would like to do likewise, and they started to lift the habit of the friar and touch him all over the body, as if to know what sort of man he was; as for him, he put his hands in his sleeve, pulled out his cross, and kissing it, was offering it for them to kiss, but they, not understanding nor knowing this mystery, took it and, putting it in another place, put their hands to the sails to raise them and steer their canoe toward one of these islands that the Father pointed out to them, by signals that he made, that they should take him there, and so they did in a jiffy.

Now, your most serene Highness² may easily imagine the confusion, the amazement and the shouts and laments that arose aboard our ship upon seeing that those barbarians were carrying away the poor good friar, and the compassion caused in all by this incident and unexpected event, the solution of which, after everyone had a say in the matter, was the decision to capture one of these canoes by some trick, in order to hold [captive] the Indians in it and with them see if they could ransom the friar. Of these canoes, there were then a large quantity all over the sea and many right next to our ship, and notwithstanding what had happened, asking for friendship, by rubbing the palm

1 Ed. note: His name was Fray Antonio de los Angeles (See Doc. 1596I).

2 Ed. note: The author was writing for his patron, Ferdinand Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany.

of the hand on the chest on the side of the heart, saying: "*Chamarri, her, her*" which means "Friends, iron, iron"¹ with signs to barter it for those things they carried. And we having offered it, they came near freely with the same [sense of] security they had before, such that one of them was lassoed with some loops of cordage and remained captive, but not so the Indians who were in it, as had been thought and hoped for, because in one instant, as if they had been so many frogs, they jumped from the canoe into the sea and for awhile were not seen anymore; and thus our design was futile. To remedy it, we then made a second mistake, as it often happens in things made upon the advice of a crowd that is agitated by sudden accidents and unexpected cases. And instead of recuperating the friar, there were lost two more persons who, along with five other sailors and soldiers, had boarded the captured canoe [that had been] left empty, with the intention to guide it toward the others that ran about the sea, startled by what happened to their companion; but what happened to them is what precisely happens to those who put it into their head to do something they do not know how to do, and not succeeding in sailing such a canoe, they found themselves so confused that they did not know how to make it go nor move nor guide it, either one way or the other. And during all this, all the other canoes were disappearing and the Indians who were swimming in the sea, in order not to be seen for the fear they had of the arquebus shots, were hiding themselves below our ship, now coming out of the water on one side, now on the other, in order to catch their breath, and immediately dived again, being in all this such good swimmers that they had nothing to envy the fish; and many times [earlier] it happened that [when] a piece of iron fell or was thrown into the sea, they, throwing themselves after it at once, recovered it in the water as it was on its way to the bottom and brought it up again: something for sure [that is] wonderfully skillful and stupendous, but why wonderful, if these men are always at sea and make a living by fishing in it? As many [aboard] were saying that they were doing it by [means of] witchcraft or incantation, so when some were under the ship, not a few could be found to say: "Pilot, Sir, these people are very great witches and by putting themselves under the ship, as you see them do, I would not be surprised if by some magic of theirs they pierce it and make us all sink." The majority of them usually do not know even how to read and they gave more credit to him perhaps for lack of more intelligence; so, upon hearing this, the pilot suddenly ordered the rudder moved to straighten the ship so that the sails would catch the wind, forgetting on the other hand our men who remained aboard the canoe, not knowing how to guide it nor make it run in either direction. As for them, seeing that the ship had caught the wind with her sails and was leaving, not knowing what else to do, suddenly left the canoe and threw themselves into the sea. Those who had more strength and spirit swam until they got to the ship before she caught the wind completely in her sails and, being pulled aboard, were saved. However, two in that company, a soldier of Flemish descent, and the other, a Spanish sailor who was a mulatto,

1 Ed. note: In Doc. 1565Q, we have seen that the Chamorro word "ruro" was being modified by them to sound more like "hierro" [iron] in Spanish.

that is, born of a black woman and a white man, lost his spirit seeing that the ship started to hasten the pace and not being able to swim anymore, perhaps because they were already exhausted, they turned back toward the canoe that was already in the possession of those barbarians who had gotten back aboard it, and swimming toward it put themselves willingly into their hands in order to escape those of Neptune; and they, having received them, headed for the land where they had taken the friar.

I now leave it to your most serene Highness to imagine the condition of the heart of these poor men who, for having had pity on the religious, ended up in either a similar or even worse fate: truly deserving our greater compassion for being greater their sorrow, given that neither the will nor the charity that they had to die as martyrs was corroborated, as maybe this Father had a burning desire to do and who, of his own will and love of Jesus Christ had put himself into their hands from which, according to what happened later, God delivered him without any harm. They were ransomed in exchange for much iron by the ships that passed there the following year and went to the Philippine Islands; and the friar, who could not speak nor understand their language, did not obtain as much fruit as he had hoped for. The other two gave news of these islands, that they are all inhabited by poor people, without any gold or silver or anything else of value; and because of this, one may believe that these men will remain awhile without the light of religion, unless God in His mercy provides it to them by some means other than the one to which the Spaniards are accustomed in their conquests, which is that they do not go near [places] where they do not perceive any riches, as such [things] serve to attract the soldiers to open the way for the religious and to defend them against barbarians, as they say.

But to return to the purpose of our navigation, after having lost the three men and altogether hope of recuperating them, we directed our voyage toward our destination and we were not yet out of sight of these islands when we were met by one of the above-mentioned canoes that was coming out to sea, and approaching our ship, showed by signs to want to give us fish that they carried in exchange for iron, but the sea being a little rough, made it bump against our ship in such a way that it broke and, flooded by sea water, was left half submerged. The Indians who were inside it went out of it and [while] swimming tried to raise it by bailing the water out, while we at this moment ordered to put out the ship's boat, in order to get to the canoe and make prisoners of the Indians who were there. However they, with greater industry and haste than us, fixed the canoe and, when our boat was out and already in the water, they were raising their sail and leaving us behind, so that our plan was completely frustrated and it appeared to us like an impossible and almost diabolical thing, but, as it was, they escaped on their way to their island and we [went] on our way to the Philippines.

Within a few days we sighted Cape Espiritu Santo which is a headland of the island called Luconia, or Luzon, as the Indians call it, situated under 14° and $1/2$ on the north side of the equinoctial, one of the more important and largest of the Philippine islands. While in sight of the cape, a storm wind arose that pushed us many miles from the cape. We lost sight of it and became engulfed by the sea and terrible wind, with the ship in

danger of sinking; we remained in danger and affliction for 18 days, with all sails furled and the topmasts taken down and the yards battened down as well, not making any headway other than where the ship would take us, battered as she was by the sea and the wind storm which blew with such fury that, in order to move about the ship, it was necessary to grab the rigging that had been laid along it from poop to prow. It was not possible to show one's face to it, so great was the violence with which it blew. However, what made us even more disconsolate was to realize that the drinking water was already lacking, and that for 200 or more persons there could not be found aboard ship more than 5 or 6 casks of water altogether, each containing from 12 to 15 barrels, but half putrid. Out of this, half a quart was rationed off to everyone each day. It was ordered that drinking water would not be used for cooking and that only bread soaked in water or vinager would be eaten; by adding a little sugar on top, thirst was somewhat lessened. However, as for myself, I discovered that by eating in the morning a soup made with white wine, then drinking some water right after it, I would remain all day without [feeling] either hunger or thirst. Others would take much sugar and place it in salt or soft water, thus making a drink neither good nor healthy.

Finally, in the middle of such miseries, the bad wind ceased and the good one came which took us back to the above-mentioned Cape of Espiritu Santo. We went in through a certain channel, very narrow between two islands, through which the water was flowing and ebbing with such speed that it would be impossible to imagine a river with more furious current, so much so that the ship could not make any headway, in spite of the fresh [favorable] wind, unless the water was ebbing; while the tide was rising, the ship would anchor. Otherwise, the ship would have sailed backward, or else would have been pushed ashore in that channel. Here we met with many things brought by the Indians of that place to our ship for our comfort. Once again we had plenty of fresh water, in big green canes as I said before, and it was a pleasure to see them and more so to taste them...