
Document 1623

The first Austrian visitor—Fernberger's account of the Ladrones

Sources: Diary of a voyage around the world, by Cristoph Carl Fernberger, kept in the archives of the Counts of Harrach in Vienna (Codex N° 473); published in the original German as: Karl R. Wernhart (ed.), Christoph Carl Fernberger, Der erste österreichische Weltreisende (1621-1628), Wien, 1972.

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A pre-missionary manuscript record of the Chamorro, Micronesia, by Karl R. Wernhart

Introduction.

The [ancient] Chamorro culture of the Marianas in Micronesia disappeared long ago and as the historical sources are rare and unproductive we know comparatively little about it. We derive our knowledge only from the fragmentary reports of voyages of former centuries.

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From the period before 1668 there are only a few accounts of the Chamorro, so that any surviving documentary material becomes important evidence in evaluating the accounts of the missionaries. In the private archives of the Counts of Harrach in Vienna there is a diary (*post eventum*) of an Austrian nobleman, Christoph Carl Fernberger, who visited the Marianas in 1623 in the course of his navigation of the world. Although Fernberger's account is very brief and somewhat incomplete, it provides some interesting details of Chamorro life in the period in which first contact between Europeans and natives took place. At that time stereotype patterns came into being on both sides

which had disastrous consequences for the Chamorro. Those who opposed the process of assimilation and acculturation were exterminated and the few who survived were forced into mixing with Spaniards and specially with Tagalogs, brought by them from the Philippines to the Marianas.¹

Unfortunately we do not know much about the personality of Christoph Carl Fernberger von Egenberg. He belonged to a noble family of "Upper Austria". His father was Carl Ludwig Fernberger von Egenberg; his mother was Johanna Geyerin Edle von Österburg. His parents' marriage took place on 4 December 1594 at Ybbs on the Danube. Christoph Carl was probably born between 1596 and 1600. It seems that he got a good education and was greatly interested in the new knowledge of his time, specially in geography as well as language studies. At the beginning of the Thirty Years' War he became a captain in the imperial Spanish army. He fought in the war of independence in the Netherlands and was captured near Rosenthal. After his release, Fernberger went from Rotterdam to Amsterdam. This was the seat of the Netherlands East India and West India Companies, which had factories in the Indies and ships sailing there.

Searching for a chance to return to Austria, Fernberger found a captain who hired him as a kitchen helper on a ship bound for Africa. However, the ship was wrecked in the Cape Verde Islands at the end of January 1622 and the crew was picked up by a Dutch ship bound for the Indies via South America. The ship passed through the Strait of Magellan between 18 September and 2 October; touched at Quintero [sic], Guayaquil and Panama; and crossed the Pacific from the southern tip of the California peninsula. **On 30 March 1623 the ship reached the Marianas**, and from there she went on to Ternate via the Cape of Espiritu Santo in the Philippines. She arrived in Batavia on the island of Java on 25 July of the same year.

Having quit the service of the Netherlands India Company in 1624, Fernberger became a merchant in the Malayan archipelago, specially in Celebes and Banda; then he went as far as Formosa and from there to Chuanchow in China. He made the acquaintance of the Portuguese Emmanuel Rodrigo and accompanied him to Siam. He took part in a campaign of the Queen of Patani against the King of Siam and his strategic and military knowledge secured the victory for the queen. Having returned to Batavia via Japan and Amboina, he set out for home on 18 August 1625. On 1 September he came to India (Gujarat) and when he continued his voyage was shipwrecked again near Ormuz. Saved by Arabs he was sold to an Armenian merchant whom he accompanied on his travels to Persia (Ispahan). After he had purchased his liberty he again returned to Batavia via Macao and set out for home for the second time in 1627. With the fleet of the retiring Governor of Batavia, de Carpentier, he came to the southern tip of Africa and after rounding the Cape of Good Hope landed at Table Bay. From here they sailed along the west coast of Africa northward; on 11 June 1628 they came to the

1 Ed. note: The Jesuits brought Filipino missionary workers from many regions of the Philippines, not just Tagalogs. Most of them seem to have been from the Pampanga Province of Luzon; the same can be said about the soldiers accompanying them.

Channel and stopped at Dover. Finally the fleet and with it Fernberger arrived at Amsterdam on 26 July 1628. From there he travelled to Vienna via Hamburg and Prague, completing his journey round the world.

On his long voyage Fernberger made notes on tablets and sheets of paper about his adventures. After his return to Vienna he turned them into a continuous diary. On the last page of the diary his brother, Christoph Adam Fernberger ... added that this was the "Raisbuch" [Diary] of Christoph Carl Fernberger, who had personally undertaken this voyage. The Vienna manuscript has 271 continuously-numbered pages and two unnumbered preceding pages. It measures 15 by 20 cm. In the University of Salzburg there is a copy of the Vienna original, but it has gaps in the contents as well as omissions in the text. The style of handwriting is of the baroque period. The Vienna manuscript is the oldest Austrian handwritten diary of a voyage round the world. It contains geographical, cartographical, historical and ethnographical information on Indonesia, America and finally the Chamorro people of the Marianas.

Fernberger's account of the Marianas

The German text.¹

Den. 30 Marti haben wir die inssel Delo Latrones gesehen, welches von ferne ein ser schöne inssel ist, und ligt auf 13 graden, und 18 minuden, und alss wir davor unsser anker lissen fallen, so sein alssobalt in die 60 kleiner schifflein bey unsser schiff komeben; disse schifflein sein ober 2 schuch nit breit und 8 schuh lang und auf iedem 5 oder 6 persohnen gesessen, und als sie bey den schiff komeben, so rufen sie hiero hiero, das ist eisser; wir winkhen ihnen sie solten herauf komeben, so sein alssobalt in die 30 komeben; die andern wolten auch komeben aber wir liessen nit mehr auss forcht dass sie unss möchten schiff ablaufen; disse leit sein ganz schwarz und wolgestalt von angesicht, von persohn win wenig lenger und ganz nackhent; alss sie ein lediges eisser ersehen, so namen sie es und sprangen ins wasser; ihre frauen etliche die kamen auch mit ans schiff, nahmen ihre kinder so knäblein sein mit; ob sie zwar schwarz sein sie doch wol gebilt, aber sehr geil den sie wissen uns dass wir solten unzucht mit ihnen dreiben, wie es auch von etlichen beschehen, aber es hat ihnen übel bekommen, dass sie es mit den todt bezahlen muessten; ihren knäblein thun sie allen nögl durchs haubt von ihrer mänligkeit und krümben dieselben umb, dass sie es nit herauskrigen; und wan sie die muetter vor vogtbar² erkundt, so thuet sie ihnes herauss, sonst sagen sie wurden sich in ihren jungen jahren verderben; ich hab durch einen von unssern volkh lassen fragen, diessen so wol spanisch kundt, sie solten mir sagen was sie glaubten; so sagten sie an den gressten fisch imb wasser, den wer derselbige ihr freundt nicht, so muessten sie alle erdrinkhen, destwegen opfern sie ihn zwen man und zwo frauen mit vier kindern welche weren in

1 The German text is from the original version of the 17th century ms., pp. 69-72. See Wernhart, op. cit., 82-84.

2 "Fruchtbar" in the Salzburg manuscript.

stuckh gehackht, und mit grosser selenitet ins wasser geworfen, so bleibt er ihr freundt; ich liess auch fragen ob einer mer als ein frau hat, sagten sie, das die macht bey den frauen sey sovil männer zu nemen als sie wolt und die kinder gehören den frauen, diweil sie es auferziehen, so mögen sie mit ihnen leben wie sie wollen.

Sie brachten uns cocosnuss und penanes, welches ein sehr süsse frucht, auch gaben sie unss etlich wenig gesalzene und von der sohnen gedruckhnete fisch, wier entgegen gaben ihnen alte nögl, und waren damit zufriden; wir liessen ihnen andeuten unsser atmiral sagt sie solten heimbfahren, und wen sie geschlafen, so solten sie wider koben; jeder gieng in sein schifflein doch muesst er ein wenig eistter haben, all wer es nur ein nagel.

Den 1. April giengen wir ser frue zu segel; als sie unss sahen wökh gan, folgten sie unss ein weil nach, aber wegen des gueten fortgangs kunden sie unss nit erlangen.

Translation of the above.

On 30 March [1623] we saw the island called Delo Latrones [sic], which seen from afar, is a very beautiful island and is situated at a latitude of 13 degrees and 18 minutes;¹ as soon as we had dropped anchor there came about 60 small boats to our ship; these boats are not broader than two feet and not longer than eight feet and in each of them there were five or six persons; and when they came to the ship they called "hierro hierro", which means iron; we signalled them to come on board ship and soon there were about 30 who came; the others also wished to come but we did not allow that because we feared that they would overrun the ship; these people are completely black and of a fine shape, a little bit bigger than we are and completely naked; the moment they saw a bit of loose iron, they took it and jumped into the water; some of their wives came with them to the ship and had their male children with them; although they are black they are well-shaped but very wanton because they showed us that we should do prostitution with them, which some of us actually did, but they had to suffer for it and to pay with their deaths;² they put nails through the heads of their boys' penis and bend them; only when the mother finds them procreative she removes it because, they say, otherwise they would get spoiled in early years;³ one who could speak Spanish⁴ was asked

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- 1 Ed. note: This corresponds to the island of Guam. Wernhart thinks that the ship probably anchored on its east coast, but no prudent captain of a sailing ship would do that, when the prevailing winds are easterlies.
 - 2 Ed. note: Unexplained statement. They were probably lured ashore by the women and killed by the men, some thing that also happened to other Dutchmen 2 years later (see next documents).
 - 3 Ed. note: This is the only reference I know of to the effect that such a custom was practiced in Micronesia. This custom is called *palang* with reference to the Philippines and other parts of greater Malaysia. I personally think that, upon organizing his diary years after his return to Austria, Fernberger forgot that he had first met with this custom in the Philippines, and not in Guam.
 - 4 Ed. note: Here again, it is highly unlikely that any Chamorro could have spoken Spanish in 1623, but in the Philippines many natives already did. Hence, the following sacrificial practice can be taken with a grain of salt.

by one of our crew what belief they had; they said they believed in the greatest fish in the water because if it would not be their friend they would all be drowned; therefore, they sacrifice to the fish in the form of two men and two women with four children; these are chopped into pieces and thrown into the water, so the animal remains their friend; I also asked if one man has more than one wife; they said that it was the power of the women to have as many men as they like and the children belong to the women, because they are brought up by them and they may live together as they like.

They brought us coconuts and bananas, which is a very sweet fruit; they also gave us several salted and sun-dried fish, we in return gave them old nails and they were satisfied with them; we showed them that our admiral said that they should go home and after they had slept they should come again tomorrow; everyone went into his boat, but first he had to have a little bit of iron even if it were no more than a nail.

On 1 April we weighed anchor very early in the morning; when they saw us sailing away, they followed us for a while but because of our good start they could not reach us.