
Documents 1615B

The letters and diary of Richard Cocks in Japan, 1615-1622

Sources: The diary is from BM Add. mss. 31,300 & 31,301 while the correspondence is from the India Office; published by the Hakluyt Society as: Diary of Richard Cocks, Cape-Merchant in the English Factory in Japan, 1615-1622, with correspondence. Edited by Edward Maunde Thompson, 2 vols., London, Series I, Nos. 66-67; reprinted in 1964 by Burt Franklin, New York.

Introductory note.

The editor of this book has given an excellent introduction to the history of Japan for the period that Cocks lived there, including references to William Adams, in the preface of his work. Basically, the history of the English trading settlement at Hirado was a failure; it lasted only 10 years, from 1613 to 1623. Cocks' name was also written Cox by his relatives and contemporaries. Although Cocks was the only English merchant to have lived in Japan for the full 10 years, the parts of his diary that have survived cover only intermittent periods between 1615 and 1622. He died in the Indian Ocean on 27 March 1623, when returning to England.

He was well acquainted with William Adams and made at least three trips to the court with him (1616, 1617 and 1618); in two cases, he made side-trips to Adams' fief of Hemimura (Hemi Village), near Uruga. Unfortunately, the part of the diary covering the death of Adams (16 March 1620) is missing. However, he writes in 1616 that "The Emperor [Ieyasu] esteemeth him much, and he may go and speak with him at all times, when kings and princes are kept out." In 1620, he adds: "I cannot but be sorrowful for the loss of such a man as Captain William Adams was, he having been in such favour with two Emperors of Japon as never was any Christian in these parts of the world, and might freely have entered and had speech with the Emperors, when many Japon kings stood without and could not be permitted."

This diary adds important elements to the study of the causes of the break in relation between Japan and Christian traders of all nationalities, except the Dutch. It was Shogun Hidetada who had determined to suppress Christianity, even before the death of Ieyasu, who had, it is true, passed an edict to expel the Jesuits but they had been tolerated by some *daimyos*. Cocks was a witness to several persecutions, notably the

crucifixion of 37 Japanese Christians at Kokura in 1618, and the martyrdom of the last Portuguese and Spanish missionaries at Nagasaki and Omura in 1622. In 1620, the 10-12 churches and the monasteries in the Christian stronghold of Nagasaki had already been levelled to the ground. However, it was after 1623, when Hidetada handed over the Shogunate to his son Iemitsu, that the break was formalized.

In another vein, Richard Cocks may be remembered as the man who imported and grew the first European potatoes in Japan...

Extracts from letters written at the English factory

Ralph Coppindall¹ to Robert Larking and Adam Denton, dated Hirado 5 December 1615.

Loveing frendes,—Wishing your welfare, etc.

...
Upon the 11th September I departed from hence towards the Emperours court with a present (which every shipp or juncke that cometh hither must of force performe), which with charges much surmounted an indifferent custome, espetially when a shipp cometh with a small capitall, and sales soe base and slacke that nothings is here to be expected but losse...

The Portingalles are quite out of favour with the Emperor. They attended 40 daies at the Emperors court to deliver theire present, which at last was recd., but none of them admitted to his presence. It is thought that they will com noe more hither with any great shippes from Amacon [Macao].

[Important, but garbled, report on the arrival of the Date Maru in 1615]

Certaine Jesuites came out of Nova Espania in embassage unto the Emperor, with a letter and a present from the King of Spaine, which, after a moneth or 6 weekes attendance, the Emperor recd., but none of the ambassadors admitted to his presence. All the answer to their embassage was, to gett them foorth of this cuntry with speede, upon paine of his displeasure.²

His cuntry is now in peace, for that the old Emperor hath made an absolute conquest, haveinge driven the young king quite out of this cuntry and made away most of his principall partakers.

...
Thus for present I committ yow and your affaires unto the protection of the Almighty.

Your loveing frend to commaund,
Ralph Coppindall.

1 Ed. note: He arrived in Japan in September 1615.

2 Ed. note: The Spanish religious were not Jesuits, but Franciscans, sent by the Viceroy officially, not really by the King of Spain, as Ambassador Hasekura was still in Europe.

Richard Cocks to [John Gourney],¹ dated Hirado 6 December 1615.

Worshipfull,—

...

As I advised in my last the Emperor did very graciously accept of the present Capt. Coppendall carid up unto hym, as Capt. Adames can better enforme yow whoe was an eye witnesse, the Emperour offering to geve us anything that might be for the benefit or good of our nation; esteeming us above all other Christian nations whatsoever.

...

[What Japanese merchants brought from Acapulco aboard the Date Maru in 1615]

Also yow may understand how a shipp arived at Quanto in Japon this yeare, which came out of New Spaine and brought good quantety of broad cloth, kersies, perpetuanos, and raz de Millan, which they offer at a loe rate; but I thinke it is the last that ever will be brought from thence, for it is said the Spaniardes made proclemation with 8 drums at Aguapulca and other partes that, upon payne of death, their should neaver any more Japons com nor trade into New Spayne, and that both they and all other strangers of what nation soever should forthwith avoid out of all partes of New Spaine. But in requitall hereof the Emperour of Japon hath made proclemation, in payne of death, that neaver hereafter any Japon shall trade or goe into New Spaine, and commanded the fryres or padres which came in this shipp should avoid out of his dominions; for the truth is, he is now frend nether to Spaniardes nor Portingalles.

...

Your loving frend at comand,
Ric. Cocks.

Richard Cocks to the East India Company, dated Hirado 25 February 1616.

Right worshipfull,—

...

I know not whether it be come to your W[ors. to understand the] conclusion of these greate wars in Japon [wherein Fidaia] Samme,² the sone of Ticus Samme,³ lost [his life, with the] slaughter of abbove 100,000 men which took his [parte. Some] report he was burned in his castell, it being fired; others think he escaped and is in Shashma [Satsuma] or the Liqueas [Okinawa]. His mother cut her own belly, and his littell childe was executed by comand from the Emperour, as also all others were the lyke which were knowne to take parte with hym. And Osakay and Sackay, two great citties, burned to the grownd, not soe much as one howse being saved...

...

1 Ed. note: India Office, Original Correspondence, vol. iii, n° 319.

2 Ed. note: Otherwise known as Hideyori.

3 Ed. note: Taikosama, or Hideyoshi.

Extract from the diary of Richard Cocks

...

[First record of Japanese interest in Micronesia]

September 18 [1616]

Capt. Adames went againe to the Cort [at Edo] to procure our dispatch, and fownd all the Councell busied about matters of justice of lyfe and death; and, amongst the rest, one man was brought in question about Fidaia Samme [Hideyoshi's son Hideyori], as being in the castell [of Osaka] with him to the last hower. This man was racked and tormented very much, to make hym confes where his master was, or whether he were alive or dead;¹ but I cannot heare whether he confessed any thing or no. Also the Admeralls sonne (our great frend), called Shonga Dono, came to towne, having byn sent out by the Emperour before about busynesses. He had much talk with Capt. Adames about sea matters, and other great men in company with them. And, amongst other matters, they tould Capt. Adames that they understood theire were certen ilands to the northward, very rich in mynes of gould and silver, which the Emperour ment to conquer, and asked hym whether (upon good termes) he would be pilot. He made answer, he was not now at his owne dispose, being servant to the English nation, and therefore could not serve two masters. They asked hym whether he had heard tell of any ilands called **les Ladrones**, or of the theeves. He answered yis, but that his opinion was that they were of no moment, in respect the Spaniards had not taken them, they lying in his way as they passed from New Spanie to the Philippinas. They also spoake of an other iland, called by the Spaniards Hermosa (or **Rico en oro y plata**). He answered he had heard of such a place in conference with Spaniardes.

In fine, the Councell tould Capt. Adames all our dispatch was ready, only they wanted Codgkins Donos hand, he being sick. So he was referred to com to morrow and bring Codgskin Donos letter.

...

September 19.

We went to the Admerall yonger, Shongo Dono, and carid hym a present. And Capt. Adames gave hym 3 gilt Syam skins and a tigers skyn. He took our visitation kyndly, and offerd us to do for our nation what he could. This man and his father are the trustiest frendes we have in these partes. And I thought good to note downe how this man entred into speeches about the ilandes **Ladrones**, taking them to be rich in myne of gould and silver. My answer was, that I knew no such matter, but to the contrary esteemed that yf the[y] had byn such, that the Spaniard would have had them before now, they lying in the way from Agua Pulca to the Philippinas. But my opinion was that yf the Emperour pretended to make a conquest of any, that the Philippinas them selves were of more emportance, and the Spaniardes weake and ill beloved of the contrey

1 Ed. note: After the massacre and destruction of Hideyori's castle at Osaka in 1615, the body of Hideyori was not found, and rumors abounded as to his having survived the bloody incident.

people, and that herein his Majestie needed not to dowbte the assistance both of the English and Duch, as occasion should serve. At which speeches he seemed to make a pawse, and in the end said that they wanted such shipps as ours were. Unto which I answered, I marveled the Emperour did not make such, haveing both men (I meane workmen), tymber, and all things else necessary. Yt seemed to me that he tooke notis hereof.

...
Capt. Adames went to the Court againe for our dispatch, but was put affe till to morrow.

September 20.

Gonosque Dono retorned to Firando, and viseted me at my lodging, offring to carry my letter yf I would write; for the which I gave hym thanks, telling hym I hoped to follow after to morrow.

Capt. Adames went againe to the Court with our *jurebasso* [interpreter] to procure our dispatch, but could not dispatch till to morow.

...
September 21.

...
Capt. Adames and our *jurebasso* went againe to Court to procure our dispatch, but could not.

...
September 22.

The Emperour sent me 10 *kerimons*¹ and an armor for a present, 2 *kerimons* to Mr. Eaton, and 2 to Mr. Wilson. And Oyen Dono sent me 5 *kerimons*, and 1 and 2 *catabras*² to Mr. Eaton, and the lyke to Mr. Wilson and our *jurebasso*. And we receved our priveleges and *goshons* [licences] from the Emperour.

Also I sent a present to Chubio Dono; and towardses night he sent me thankes with letters for the King of Firando, and sent me a *wakadash*³ for a present, and 2 peces taffate to Mr. Eaton.

...
[After a short interval at Febys (which he also writes as Febe, or Phebie) and Uraga, Cocks and Adams returned to Edo to try and renew their request for a clearance to trade in the Osaka area].

...
October 3.

We went to the secretary Oyen Donos howse to have spoaken with hym about our occation of retorne...

1 Ed. note: A *kirimo*, or robe.

2 Ed. note: *Katabira*, or summer robe.

3 Ed. note: *Wakizashi*, or short sword.

Also we met there a Spaniard, com from the iland near Langasaque, where he was arived in a small shipp by contrary wynds going to Manilla, and might not be sufferd to goe out againe without lycence from the Emperour.¹

...

October 23.

[Safian Dono told me that] it was the littell Spanish shipp that is cast away neare Shashma [Satsuma], and not the greate. Also he says that the great shipp which is in Shashma bringeth newes that the Kyng of Spaine hath mad proclemation that all the English and Dutch pirattes that rob at sea, that he will take them under his protection, and geave them freely all such goods and shippes as they shall take, without reserving any part to hym selfe.

Richard Cocks to the East India Company, dated Hirado 1 January 1617.²

...

Soe we withdrew all our factors from Edo, Miaco, Osakay, and Sackay to Firando.
[Mention of the Acapulco ships of 1615 and 1616]

The fathers which came in the shipp from Aguapulca [in 1615] brought a present from the King of Spaine to the Emperour; but, after he had kept it halfe a yeare, he returned it back, not reserving any thing, but bad them be gon.

And I had allmost forgotten to adviz your Wors. of a Spaniard, which was at the Emperours court at Edo when I was theare [in August 1616]. He went out of a ship of theirs from Xaxma, where 2 greate shippes of theirs arived out of New Spaine, bound, as they said, for the Philippinas, but driven into that place per contrary wynd, both shippes being full of souldiers, with greate store of treasure, as it is said, above 5 millions of pezos.³ Soe they sent this man to kis the Emperours hand; but he never might be suffered to com in his sight, although he staid theare above a month; which vexed hym to see we had axcesse to the Emperour and he could not. So that he gave it out that our shippes and the Hollanders which were at Firando had taken and robbed all the China juncks, which was the occation that very few or non came into Japon this yeare. And som greate men in the court did not want to aske me the question whether it were true or no, Mr. Wm. Adames being present. Which we gave them to understand that, concernynge the Englishe, it was most falce. And withall I enformed the two secretaries, Oyen Dono and Codsquin Dono, that, yf they lookt out well about these 2 Spanish shippes arived in Xaxma full of men and treasure, they would fynd that they were sent of purpose by the King of Spaine, haveing knowledg of the death of the ould Emperour, thinking some papisticall *tono* might rise and rebell and so draw all the papistes

1 Ed. note: This was the patache that had come from Acapulco with the galleon Angel de la Guarda, Captain Bravo de la Serna (see Doc. 1616C2).

2 Ed. note: India Office, Original correspondence, vol. iii, n° 342.

3 Ed. note: Actually, there were only 800,000 pesos aboard (see Doc. 1616C2).

to flock to them and take part, by which meanes they might on a sudden seaz upon som stron place and keepe it till more succors came, they not wanting money nor men for thackomplishing such a strattagim. Which speeches of myne wrought so far that the Emperour sent to stay them, and, had not the greates shipp cut her cable in the howse so to escape, she had byn arested, yet with her hast she left som of her men behind; and the other shipp being of some 300 tons was cast away in a storme and driven on shore, but all the people saved. So in this sort I crid quittance with the Spaniardes for geveing out falce reportes of us, yet since verely thought to be true which I reported of them.

Also may it please your Wors. that, at our being at themperours court, the amerall of the sea was very earnest with Mr. Wm. Adames to have byn pilot of a voyage they pretended to the northward to make conquest of certen ilands, as he said, rich in gould; but Mr. Adames exskewced hym selfe in that he was in your Wors. service and soe put hym afe. And as I am enformed, they verely think that our pretence to discover to the northward is to fynd out some such rich ilandes and not for any [northwest] passage. Yet I tould the admerall to the contrary, and tould hym that my opinion was he might doe better to put it into the Emperours mynd to make a conquest of the Manillas and drive those small crew of Spaniardes from thence, it being so neare unto Japon; they haveing conquered the Liqueas allready. He was not unwilling to listen hearunto; and said he would comuncate the matter to the Emperour. And out of dowbt yt would be an easy matter for the Emperour to doe it, yf he take it in hand, and a good occation to set the Japons heades awork, to put the remembrance of Ticus Samme and his sonne Fidaia Samme, so lately slaine and disinhereted, out of their minds.

...

Your Worsp. most humble [servant] at command,
Ric. Cocks.