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978-1-108-01350-5 - The Conquest of the River Plate (1535-1555)

Edited by Luis L. Dominguez

Excerpt

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A true and agreeable description of
 some principal Indian lands and islands, which have not
 been recorded in former chronicles, but have now been
 first explored amid great danger during the voyage of
 ULRICH SCHMIDT VON STRAUBINGEN, and
 most carefully described by him.

IN the first place, when setting forth from Antorff,¹ I came in fourteen days to Hispania, to a town called Calles,² to which one reckons four hundred miles by sea. I saw before that town a balena, or whale, thirty-five paces long, out of which thirty tuns—of the capacity of herring tuns—of fat had been extracted.

Near the said town of Calles there were fourteen great ships, well provided with all ammunitions and necessaries, which intended to voyage to Riodellaplata³ in India. Also there were two thousand five hundred Spaniards and one hundred and fifty Germans, Netherlanders, and Saxons.⁴ And our chief captain was called Petrus Manchossa.⁵

¹ Antwerp.² Cadiz.³ Rio de la Plata.

⁴ Antonio de Herrera (*Historia General de los Hechos de los Castellanos en las Islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Oceano*, Madrid, 1601-1616, viii, 5), who is the official authority, says that Don Pedro de Mendoza's expedition was composed of 800 men, very good and distinguished people, and eleven ships. Others state that there were 1,500 and 1,700 men. Schmidt alone states the number as 2,650. By his contract with the Government, Mendoza was bound to take with him one thousand men in two voyages.

⁵ Don Pedro de Mendoza.

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Among these fourteen ships, one belonged to Messrs. Sebastian Neidhart and Jacob Welser, from Nürnberg, who had sent their factor, Heinrich Paeime, with merchandise to Riodelaplata. With these and others, as Germans and Netherlanders, about eighty men, armed with arquebuses and muskets, I went to Riodelaplata.

As we were now come there,¹ we set out from Sibylla² with the said gentlemen and the chief captain, in the aforesaid year, on the day of S. Bartholomew, and came to a town in Spain called S. Lucas³ which is twenty miles' distance from Sibylla. There we were compelled, on account of much blustering winds, to stay till the first of September of the year before-named (1534).

And when we departed from there we fell in with three islands, which lie near to one another, the first of which is called Demerieff, the other Kumero, the third Palman,⁴ and from the town of S. Lucas to these islands there is a space of about twenty miles.⁵ At these islands the ships parted company. These islands belong to their Imperial Majesties, and are inhabited only by Spaniards, with their wives and children. And there sugar is made. We came with three ships to Palman, and remained there for four weeks, replenishing our store of victual.

But afterwards our chief captain, Petrus Manchossa, being at a distance of eight to nine miles from us, and having commanded us to make sail, we having on board our ship our captain's cousin, Jörg Manchossa,⁶ who had fallen in love with the daughter of a burgher of Palma, and inas-

¹ *i.e.*, to Spain.² Seville.³ San Lucar.⁴ Teneriffe, Gomera, and Palma, three of the Canary Islands.⁵ From San Lucar to the Canary Islands there are about 500 English miles.⁶ Jorge de Mendoza. No known document mentions this Jorge de Mendoza, nor the rape alluded to by Schmidt. It is not likely that a relative of the chief of the expedition should have been on board a Flemish ship which was not under his immediate command.

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INCIDENT AT PALMA.

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much as we were going to leave on the following day, the said Jörg Manchossa went ashore that very night, at twelve o'clock, with twelve of his good companions, and brought secretly with them, out of the island Palma, the said burgher's daughter and her maid-servant, with all their clothes and jewels, and money also, and came aboard again, but secretly, to the intent that neither our captain, nor the aforesaid agent, nor anybody else on the ship might know aught about it; only the watch saw them, for it was about midnight. And as we were intending to depart from there in the morning, and were only about two or three miles away, a mighty wind sprang up, so that we needs must turn back to the same harbour, where we were lying before. When we there cast anchor, our captain, the aforesaid Heinrich Paine, would go aland in a small vessel, which is called pat or podell (*bote*). And as he went, and was about to land, there were awaiting him more than thirty men, armed with arquebuses, spears, and halberds with the intention of taking him, the said Heinrich Paine. At the same time one of his crew besought him not to land, but to return to the ship, which advice the captain would have gladly followed, but that he could not, seeing that the men on land had come too near to him in another little ship, which they had in readiness; however, he escaped at length in another ship which was near the land. When the armed men saw that the others did not fire upon, nor could take the captain Heinrich Paine, they caused the town of Palma to sound the alarm, swiftly loaded two great guns, and fired four shots at our ship (which lay not far off from the land). With the first shot they breached our earthen pot, which was on the poop and full of fresh water, whereby five or six pails of water were lost. Secondly, they shot in pieces also the mizzen, that is, the hindmost mast nearest the stern. Thirdly, they shot in the waist of the ship a big hole whereby a man was struck and killed. But with the fourth shot they missed us.

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There was also another captain, whose ship was lying by our side, and who intended to sail for Nova Hispania, in Mechseckheim¹; he was on shore with one hundred and fifty men, who, when he knew of our quarrel, made peace between us and those of the town, on condition that Jörg Manchossa² and the burgher's daughter and her maid-servant should certainly be delivered into their hands.

Then the stadthalter, and the judge, our captain, and the captain spoken of above, came aboard our ship, intending to make prisoners Jörg Manchossa and his paramour.³ Thereupon he answered them that she was his wife, and she did not show herself in another light and they soon got married; the father, however, was very sorry and anxious, and our ship was through them badly treated by the firing at it. After all this, we left Jörg Manchossa and his wife ashore, for our captain would not have them any longer on board his ship.

Now we again made ready our ship, and sailed to an island or land, the name whereof is S. Jacob, or, in Spanish, Sancte Augo (Santiago); there is a town belonging to the King of Portugal; the Portuguese entertain that town, and the Blackamoors are their subjects: this town is at a distance of three hundred miles from the said Island Palman, from which we sailed.⁴ We remained there five days, and again furnished our ship with new and fresh victual, as bread, meat, water, and all that necessity demands at sea. The whole fleet, namely, fourteen ships, were now once more together. We then went again to sea and sailed for two whole months,

¹ Mexico.² Jorge de Mendoza.³ In orig.: "Bulschafft," lit. love intrigue.

⁴ All distances given by Schmidt are erroneous, and it is astonishing that Don Felix de Azara, a geographer, should have written to the contrary. By the distance given in miles between Palma, one of the Canary Islands, and St. Iago, one of the Cape Verd Islands, it may be seen that Schmidt's miles are more properly *Castilian leagues* of $17\frac{1}{2}$ in a geographical degree, the legal measure of distance in his time.

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and then arrived at an island wherein there was nothing else than birds, in such quantities that we killed them with sticks. Here we lay three days. This island is entirely uninhabited; it is in length and breadth about six miles either way, and is distant from the above-mentioned island, *S. Augo*, whence we sailed, fifteen hundred miles. In this sea there are flying-fishes and other marvellous great fishes of the balena kind, and great fishes called *schaubhut*, for that they wear on their heads a large trencher, with which they may become dangerous in fighting with other fishes; it is a wondrous great and evil fish. There are also other fishes which have on their backs a knife of whalebone, and are called in the Spanish tongue *Peschespate*,¹ and furthermore, other fishes which have on their backs a saw of whalebone, and are also evil fishes; their name is *Peschedeferre*,² and also there are several other rare fishes whose form, size, and other features I cannot at this time describe.

Afterwards we sailed from this island to another, named Riogenea,³ at a distance of five hundred miles from the former, belonging to the King of Portugal; this is the island Riogenea in India, and the Indians are called Toppis.⁴ We lay there about fourteen days. There Petrus Manchossa⁵, our chief captain, ordered Hans Ossorig,⁶ as his sworn brother, to take the command over us in his stead, forasmuch as he was always melancholy, weak, and ill. But he, Hans Ossorig, very soon was belied and ill-spoken of to Petrus Manchossa, his sworn brother, even as though he had in his mind to cause a mutiny among the people against Petrus

¹ Peje-espada, or sword-fish.² Peces-sierras.

³ The discoverers were Spaniards, and this is proved by the name *Rio de Henero*, as the word *Enero* was spelt in the sixteenth century. The *h* was at the time aspirated (especially by the natives of Andalusia), and hence the name became corrupted into *Jenero*, changed afterwards into *Janeiro* by the Portuguese.

⁴ Tupys.⁵ Don Pedro de Mendoza.⁶ Juan Osorio.

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Manchossa, the chief captain. Thereupon he, Petrus Manchossa, ordered four other captains, named Johann Eyollas, Johan Salleisser, Jörg Luchsam,¹ and Lazarum Salvaischo,² that the aforesaid Johan Ossorig should be killed with a dagger or otherwise put to death, and should be exposed in the midst of the place as a traitor; and besides he ordered and proclaimed to the effect that no one should dare to pity Ossorig, for that he himself, whoever he might be, would meet with no better fate. Yet Ossorig was treated wrongly, God Almighty knows it, and may He be merciful to him, for he was a pious, fair-dealing, and valiant warrior, and kept well all the warriors.

From there we sailed to Riodelaplata, and came into a river³ called Paranau Wassu,⁴ which is in width at its mouth, where one leaves the sea,⁵ twenty-four miles. And from Riogenea to this river there is the space of five hundred miles. There we came to a haven, the name whereof is S. Gabriel, and there, in the said river Paranau, we anchored the fourteen ships.

As we were constrained to ride at a gunshot's distance from shore with the great ships, our chief captain, Petrus Manchossa⁶ ordered to set the people ashore in the small ships, which are for that purpose intended, and are, therefore, called pat or podel.

So by the grace of God we arrived at Riodelaplata, Anno 1535, and found there an Indian place inhabited by about two thousand people, named Zechurias,⁷ who have

¹ Juan de Ayolas, Juan Salazar, and Jorge Lujan.

² If this name is rightly spelt, it may be one of the Flemish who took part in the expedition. In Barcia's Spanish translation, Salvaischo is interpreted as Salazar; but there is no mention in any document of a Lazaro Salazar.

³ In orig.: "süss fliessend wasser."

⁴ Parana Guazú.

⁵ Between Cape Santa Maria and Cape San Antonio there are 188 English geographical miles.

⁶ Don Pedro de Mendoza.

⁷ Charúas.

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nothing to eat but fish and meat. These, on our arrival did leave the place, and fled away with their wives and children, so that we could not find them. This Indian people go quite naked, the women having only their privities covered, from the navel to the knees, with a small piece of cotton cloth.

Now the captain, Petrus Manchossa, commanded to bring the people into the ships again, and to convey them to the other side of the Paranau, where it is not broader than eight miles.¹

There we built a new town and called it *Bonas Acières*, that is, in German, *Guter Wind*.

We also brought from Hispania on board the fourteen ships seventy-two horses and mares.

Here, also, we found a place inhabited by Indian folk, named Carendies,² numbering about three thousand people, including wives and children, and they were clothed in the same way as the Zechurias, from the navel to the knees. They brought us fish and meat to eat. These Carendies have no houses, but wander about, as do the Gipsies with us at home, and in summer they oftentimes travel upwards of thirty miles on dry land without finding a single drop of water to drink.

And when they meet with deer or other wild beasts, (when they have killed them) they drink their blood. Also if they find a root, called Cardes,³ they eat it to slack their thirst. This—namely, that they drink blood—only happens because they cannot have any water, and that they might peradventure die of thirst.

These Carendies brought us daily their provision of fish and meat to our camp, and did so for a fortnight, and they did only fail once to come to us. So our captain, Peter

¹ From the Island of San Gabriel to the place where Buenos Ayres was founded there are 29 English miles.

² Quirandis.

³ Cardo, *i.e.*, thistles.

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Manchossa,¹ sent to them, the Carendies, a judge, named Johan Pabon, with two foot-soldiers, for they were at a distance of four miles from our camp. When they came near to them, they were all three beaten black and blue, and were then sent back again to our camp. Petrus Manchossa, our captain, hearing of this from the judge's report (who for this cause raised a tumult about it in our camp), sent Diego Manchossa, his own brother, against them with three hundred foot-soldiers and thirty well-armed mounted men, of whom I also was one, straightway charging us to kill or take prisoners all these Indian Carendies and to take possession of their settlement. But when we came near them there were now some four thousand men, for they had assembled all their friends. And when we were about to attack them, they defended themselves in such a way that we had that very day our hands full. They also killed our commander, Diego Manchossa, and six noblemen. Of our foot-soldiers and mounted men over twenty were slain, and on their side about one thousand. Thus did they defend themselves valiantly against us, so that indeed we felt it.

The said Carendies² use for their defence hand-bows and tardes³ which are made in the shape of half-pikes, and the head of them is made out of flint-stone, like a flash; they have also bullets made out of stone with a long piece of string attached to them, of the size of our leaden bullets at home in Germany.

They throw such bullets round the feet of a horse or a deer, causing it to fall; it is also with these bullets that they killed our commander and the noblemen, as I have seen it done myself, but the foot-soldiers were killed by the afore-said tardes.

Thus God Almighty graciously gave us the victory, and

¹ Don Pedro de Mendoza.

² Quirandis.

³ Darts.

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FIGHT WITH QUIRANDIS.

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allowed us to take possession of their place; but we did not take prisoner any of the Indians, and their wives and children also fled away from the place before we attacked them.¹ At this place of theirs we found nothing but furrier-work made from marten or so-called otter; also much fish, fish meal, and fish fat. There we remained three days and then returned to our camp, leaving on the spot one hundred of our men, in order that they might fish with the Indians' nets for the providing of our folk, because there was there very good fishing.

Every one received only six half-ounces of wheaten flour a day, and one fish every third day. The fishing lasted for two months, and if one would eat a fish over and above one's allowance, one had to go four miles for it.

And when we returned again to our camp, our folk were divided into those who were to be soldiers, and the others workers, so as to have all of them employed. And a town was built there, and an earthen wall, half a pike high, around it, and inside of it a strong house for our chief captain. The town wall was three foot broad, but that which was built to-day fell to pieces the day after, for the people had nothing to eat, and were starved with hunger, so that they suffered great poverty, and it became so bad that the horses could not go. Yea, finally, there was such want and misery for hunger's sake, that there were neither rats, nor mice, nor snakes to still the great dreadful hunger and unspeakable poverty, and shoes and leather were resorted to for eating and everything else.

It happened that three Spaniards stole a horse, and ate it secretly, but when it was known, they were imprisoned and interrogated under the torture. Whereupon, as soon as

¹ This fight with the Quirandis took place at a few miles' distance from Buenos Ayres, on the banks of the river which since then is called *de la Matanza*.

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they admitted their guilt, they were sentenced to death by the gallows, and all three were hanged.

Immediately afterwards, at night, three other Spaniards came to the gallows to the three hanging men, and hacked off their thighs and pieces of their flesh, and took them home to still their hunger.

A Spaniard also ate his brother, who died in the city of Bonas Aeières.¹

Now our chief captain, Petrus Manchossa,² saw that he could not any longer keep his men there, so he ordered and took counsel with his head men that four little ships (called *Parehkadienes*³) should be made ready, which must be rowed, and three more yet smaller ones, which are called *podell* or *patt*.

And when these seven little vessels were ready and equipped, our chief captain ordered all the people to assemble, and sent George Lauchstein⁴ with three hundred and fifty armed men up the river *Paranau* in order to find out the Indians and so obtain victual and provisions. But as soon as the Indians were aware of us, they wrought us the most abominable piece of knavery, by burning and destroying all their victual and provisions and their villages, and then all took to flight; in consequence whereof we had nothing to eat but three ounces of bread a day. One half of our people died during this voyage through hunger, therefore we had to return again to the said place, where was our chief captain.

Petrus Manchossa desired to have a relation from George Lauchstein, our commander, as to the circumstances of our voyage, why so few of them had returned, since they had only been absent for five months. To whom our commander

¹ All this is exaggerated and incredible, though accepted as true by the pseudo-poet, Barco Centenera, in his *Argentina* poem.

² Pedro de Mendoza.

³ Brigantines.

⁴ George Lujan.