

AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT

HERNANDO GALLEGO

Account of a voyage to the Solomon Islands, 1567-69

Reel M1557

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HISTORICAL NOTE

Very little is known of the early life of Hernando Gallego. He was born, possibly in 1514, in the town of La Caruna in Galicia, Spain, and went to sea at a very early age. In 1557 he and his brother Pedro were selected by Juan Ladrilleros as pilots for two ships sent from Valdivia to explore the southern coast of Chile as far as the Straits of Magellan. For the next ten years he seems to have been a pilot on the Pacific coast. In 1567 he was selected as chief pilot on the expedition led by Alvaro de Mendana which explored the western Pacific Ocean.

Alvaro de Mendana y Neyra (1542-1595) was the nephew of the Viceroy of Peru. He was commissioned by his uncle to discover rich islands that lay between New Guinea (named in 1545) and the American coast. Stories of islands of gold had been circulated for several years and, in particular, a Spanish soldier, Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa (1532-1592), claimed that an Inca voyage to the western Pacific had discovered great riches. Sarmiento expected to be given command of the expedition, but the youthful Mendana was given preference. Mendana, Sarmiento and Gallego sailed on the *Los Reyes*, while the pilot Pedro de Ortega was on the *Todos Santos*.

The two ships left Callao on 19 November 1567 and sailed west south west for 26 days. Not finding any land, Gallego recommended a more northerly course. After passing south of the Marquesas, they sighted an island, probably Nukufetau, on 15 January 1568. On 7 February 1568 they reached the Solomon Islands, landing on the island of Santa Ysabel (named after the patron saint of the voyage). They built a brigantine, the *Santiago*, and Gallego and Ortega used it to explore the island and surrounding seas. On 19 April 1568 they discovered Guadalcanal. On 8 May 1568 the two ships sailed to Guadalcanal, while Gallego in the brigantine sailed to Malaita, Ulawa and Ugi.

On 7 August 1568 a 'parliament' was summoned to discuss the future of the expedition. Mendana and Sarminento argued that they should form a settlement on one of the islands, convert the Islanders, and continue the search for gold. Gallego and Ortega considered this impractical, in view of the hostility of the Solomon Islanders, and pointed to the poor condition of the Spanish ships. Their view prevailed and they sailed eastwards from San Cristóbal on 11 August 1568. The *Los Reyes* reached the Californian coast on 19 December 1568. After resting at Santiago de Colima for 40 days, the ships sailed southwards and eventually reached Callao on 26 July 1569. A third of the crew perished on the voyage.

Mendana did not name the Solomon Islands, but the name soon came into use. Gallego rightly guessed that the Solomon Islands were not far distant from New Guinea, but he greatly underestimated their distance from Peru. Partly for that reason, later voyages in search of the islands of gold were unsuccessful, and it was only in the late eighteenth century that French and British navigators re-discovered the Solomon Islands.

There are three known copies of Gallego's account: the first in the British Library, the second in the National Library of Spain, and the third in the National Library of New Zealand (formerly in the possession of Lord Amherst). The latter manuscript is translated in Lord Amherst and Basil Thomson, eds. *The discovery of the Solomon Islands by Alvaro de Mendana in 1568* (London, Hakluyt Society, 1901). The British Library manuscript is partly translated and partly summarised in H.B. Guppy, *The Solomon Islands and their natives* (London, Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey, 1887).

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British Library Add MS 17623

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Hernando Gallego. 'Relacion cierta y verdadera de la navegacion de las Islas del Poniente en la Mer del Sur', November 1567 – July 1569. (In Spanish, 91 folios).

Gallego described the periods at sea very succinctly, usually just giving the distance covered and the latitude. He discussed the failure to land at Nukufetau (15 Jan. 1568) and from 7 February 1568 onwards the account becomes much more detailed. He recorded encounters with the Islanders, difficulties in navigating reefs, the construction of the brigantine, conflicts with Islanders, the discovery of islands including Florida, San Dimas and Sesarga, the annexation of Guadalcanal (12 May 1568), the second voyage of the brigantine along the coast of Guadalcanal, the topography of the island, attacks on the brigantine, descriptions of Malaita (25 May 1568) and San Cristóbal (14 June 1568), the third voyage of the brigantine, ambushes by Islanders, the discussions about the future of the expedition, and the kidnapping of three Islanders to serve as interpreters. The return voyage is described briefly, with references to the sighting of Wake's Island, the separation of the two ships (16 Oct. 1568), storms and wild seas, the sighting of the American coast, the re-appearance of the *Todos Santos* (25 Jan. 1769), and the final leg of the voyage along the Mexican coast.

The transcript probably dates from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. It was purchased by the British Museum in 1848.