

Joris van Spielbergen in Manila and the Moluccas, 1615

Jan Corneloszoon May



Contrary to what could have been expected, the armistice of April 1609 between Spain and the United

Provinces of Holland – known as *The Twelve*

Years' Truce – did not result in the end of conflict between the two parties in most of the vast Iberian colonial world. One of the objectives that the Dutch continued to pursue was the foundation of a colony in South America – either in Brazil or in Chile – to support navigation to Asia. With that purpose, the Dutch East Indies Company had a fleet of 6 vessels prepared to cross the Pacific Ocean sail from Texel in August 1614. On board there were around 800 men. The admiral chosen by the directors of the VOC was Joris van Spielbergen, who had been instructed to reach the Moluccas islands. After being expelled from Brazil by the Portuguese, Van Spielbergen went into the Pacific in February 1615, unleashing a series of acts of piracy upon the coast of the vice-kingdoms of Peru and New Spain. After a fruitless wait for the Manila galleon off the coasts of Mexico, he crossed the Pacific, reaching Manila in mid February 1616. He toyed with the idea of sacking some of the Chinese junks which sailed to the Spanish colony. After finding out that the governor of the Philippines had sent a military expedition to the Moluccas, Spielbergen headed south and once again met his own countrymen in Batavia. He returned to Europe in June 1617 with two ships of the original fleet and a valuable cargo. The account of his voyage, which is attributed to Jan Corneloszoon May, one of his captains, was published for the first time in Leiden in 1619, where it was republished in the same year. The first edition appeared without the authorization of the VOC, whose directors tried to prevent its circulation thinking that the text included information that should remain secret. This account saw a Latin version included as an appendix to volume XI of *Petits Voyages* de Johann Theodor and Johann Israel de Bry (Frankfurt, 1620), and it was also included in volume II of the collection *Begin ende Voortgang* by Isaac Commelin (Amsterdam, 1645).

Source: J. C. M. Warnsinck (ed.), *De reis om de wereld van Joris van Spielbergen, 1614-1617* [Amsterdam: Linschoten-Vereeniging, 1943, pp. 99-108]. The text was translated from the Dutch to English by Gijs Koster.

Ao contrário do que poderia ser esperado, o armistício de Abril de 1609 entre a Espanha e as Províncias

Unidas da Holanda – reconhecido como *Trégua dos*

Doze Anos – não teve como consequência a cessação dos conflitos entre as duas partes na generalidade das áreas do imenso mundo colonial ibérico. Um dos objectivos que continuou a ser perseguido pelos holandeses foi a fundação de uma colónia na América do Sul – fosse no Brasil, fosse no Chile – que servisse de apoio à navegação para a Ásia. Com esse intuito, a Companhia Holandesa das Índias Orientais fez sair do Texel, em Agosto de 1614, uma frota composta por seis navios adequados à travessia do Oceano Pacífico. A bordo seguiam cerca de 800 homens. O almirante escolhido pelos directores da VOC foi Joris van Spielbergen, que levava instruções para atingir as ilhas de Maluco. Depois de expulso do Brasil pelos portugueses, Van Spielbergen passa ao Pacífico em Fevereiro de 1615, desenvolvendo uma série de acções de pirataria e pilhagem ao longo das costas dos vice-reinados do Peru e de Nova Espanha. Após ter montado uma espera infrutífera ao galeão de Manila ao largo das costas do México, atravessa o Pacífico, chegando às proximidades de Manila em meados de Fevereiro de 1616. Traz na ideia saquear alguns dos juncos chineses que navegavam até àquela colónia espanhola. Depois de saber que o governador das Filipinas enviara uma expedição militar para as Molucas, Spielbergen rumo a sul e reencontra os seus em Batávia. Regressou à Europa em Julho de 1617 com dois dos navios da frota original e uma carga valiosa. O relato da sua viagem, que anda atribuído a Jan Corneloszoon May, um dos seus capitães, foi publicado pela primeira vez em Leiden em 1619, sendo reeditado na mesma cidade nesse mesmo ano. A primeira edição surgiu à revelia da VOC, cujos directores tentaram impedir a circulação do texto, ao que se pensa por considerarem que incluía informações que deveriam permanecer secretas. Esta narrativa conheceu uma versão latina, incluída como apêndice no volume XI das *Petits Voyages* de Johann Theodor e Johann Israel de Bry (Frankfurt, 1620), tendo ainda integrado o volume II da colectânea *Begin ende Voortgang* de Isaac Commelin (Amsterdão, 1645).

Fonte utilizada: J. C. M. Warnsinck (ed.), *De reis om de wereld van Joris van Spielbergen, 1614-1617* [Amsterdão: Linschoten-Vereeniging, 1943, pp. 99-108]. O texto foi traduzido de neerlandês para inglês por Gijs Koster.

ENCONTROS E DESENCONTROS EUROPEUS NO MAR DO SUL DA CHINA II

FEBRUARY 1615

For a number of days we sailed on, making rather good headway, until the ninth of February at the first streak of dawn, when Cabo de Espírito Santo came into view. Sailing past it we made such progress on that day that in the evening we anchored in the entrance of the Strait of Manila at 13 degrees and 15 minutes, where, according to our estimate, the island of Capul was situated. On the 10th we landed, signalling our peaceful intentions in every possible way, and when we conferred with the Indians, they told us that the island of Capul was situated still further ahead, showing it to us with some gestures.

We requested from them some victuals to replenish our stock, but this was refused to us because, so they said, they knew quite well that we had come with no other aim but to fight the Spaniards, their allies. And in spite of many and friendly requests made by us, they would never agree, and because the admiral and the council did not permit the use of violence, all the boats were again called back aboard. On the 11th before daybreak, we weighed anchor, sailing to the island of Capul, which we reached in the afternoon, casting anchor in a very pleasant harbour near some houses standing on the edge of the water. We had hardly landed when the Indians were trafficking and trading with us, although they knew fully well that it was our intention to be as hostile and damaging to the Spaniards as we could.

They brought us at first poultry, pigs and suchlike, promising to do the same the next day, which indeed they did, but everything with an admixture of little titbits. We continued in the same manner until the 19th, when we weighed the anchor, setting our course northwest and by north, sailing straight into the Strait of Magellan [of Manila], and with the help of two Indians who served us as pilots, we thus did our best to reach the harbour and cape of Manila in a short time.

During the time we were sailing through this strait, we went ashore every day to pluck nuts and other fruits, which were very wholesome and healthy for our sickmen. Therefore, we laid up a big provision of these. The inhabitants here were people of some discretion, dressed in long skirts made in the manner of a shirt. They have great respect for clergymen, which we noticed with one of our monks, whose hands they kissed as soon as they saw him, showing great meekness and humility in his

presence. Their women did not show themselves to us but hid themselves in the forests and elsewhere.

On the 19th in the evening we anchored close to the large island called Luzon, on which the city of Manila is situated. Here we saw a house cleverly built on some trees, which from afar seemed to be the house of some nobleman or lord. The same evening the plenary council convened to deliberate on what would be best to do in this situation. On the 20th at the crack of dawn, after the council had convened once more, four well-equipped boats were sent off to reconnoitre the situation at the aforesaid house, which on their return declared that it was an old and dilapidated building, and that they had not found any living soul in its vicinity. It was our intention to capture a Spaniard to hear from him about what we had learned in Capul, namely that a Spanish fleet had already been long in Manila awaiting our coming, something we had thus far not been able to verify.

The same day, sailing along the shore, we passed a mountain of incredible height that was always burning, called Albaca [Albay], which was full of sulphur and the like, until evening, when we anchored on twenty-five fathoms, close to a cape in the land where the inhabitants had lit a fire to inform their neighbours about our coming. On the 21st we again set sail, continuously making headway in the strait. We continued doing so, sailing day and night making reasonable progress until the evening, and then we saw the mouth or exit of the strait, which seemed very narrow, and because of the arrival of night we cast anchor there. On the 25th three boats were sent ahead, which very soon gave us a sign, upon which we followed with the entire fleet, and with the help of the current we passed through and again came onto the high sea without lowering sail the least bit the entire following night.

On the 26th the entire day we did our best to sail to the harbour of Manila, but because the calm and the wind were against us, we could not accomplish anything. On the shore we saw fires in several places and other lights, wherefore we supposed that our arrival had been made known everywhere, a suspicion that was all the more confirmed because during our passing of the strait and also thereafter a small boat had always followed us, sailing hither and thither with such a speed that it had been impossible for us to overtake it, which boat spied on us and reported on us everywhere. From the 27th to the 28th we constantly struggled, tacking to

EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS AND CLASHES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA II

and fro to reach the harbour of Manila, but we made but little headway and at last cast anchor about a mile from the harbour on forty fathoms, close to a cape that stretched out from the harbour.

Here we did not remain longer than until midnight because the admiral then fired off a shot as a sign to make sail again, which was done, and we tacked the entire night without making any headway, doing the same the next day, but did not succeed in sailing in, and in the evening we cast anchor before the entrance to the harbour before the island called Maribela [Mariveles], on which there are two very high rocks, behind which the city of Manila is situated. On this island of Maribela [Mariveles], one usually keeps guard during the night, and that is where they keep their pilots, who await the ships from China to bring them before the city of Manila because the entrance in some places is very dangerous, of which we were warned by our Spanish pilot.

MARCH 1615

On the 1st day of March, early in the morning, we spotted two sails going from one coast to the other, after which we sent three well-manned boats with orders to do their best to make a prisoner from whom we might obtain information, but these boats, which exerted themselves in vain because of the rapid progress of the aforesaid ships, returned to the fleet towards evening. On the 2nd, after the admiral had called together all steersmen, skippers and other officers, it was decided that, as soon as we could gain any advantage from tacking, we would raise the anchor and would do our best to enter the harbour. On the 3rd in the morning we raised the anchor, and, after having tacked all day, we still had not made much headway in the evening,

so we anchored again close to a small islet stretching out in the direction of the shore....

And because we considered it above all necessary to get a living human being to obtain information from that same person both about the country as well as about other circumstances, again four boats with many armed men were sent to shore, who there found a sampan loaded only with chalk without any men, but in the distance they saw a great number of people who did not want to talk with them, and therefore in the evening they came aboard again. At sundown close to the shore we spotted a sampan with raised sail, after which two well-equipped boats were hastily sent, which in the night overtook and captured it, but because the wind was very boisterous and the sampan was only loaded with wood

useful for carpentry, they let it lie at anchor, taking with them six Chinese they had captured. What the plenary council convenes for is to interrogate them about what they might know.

At first they revealed to us that in the vicinity there were other sampans loaded with sundry kinds of victuals and some merchandise. Therefore, two boats were sent out with the order to exert themselves to the utmost to find these same sampans. On the 5th in the afternoon we saw two sails coming straight at us, to which our *Jager* and the other small ship (which we called *Perel*) were sent to capture them. In the night our two boats attacked and captured two sampans, which were sailed by some Chinese and a Spaniard, whose task it was to collect the tributes given yearly by the surrounding places to the city of Manila. These same sampans were loaded with rice, poultry, other victuals and some merchandise.

On the 6th the yacht and *Perel* returned, bringing three sampans with them, of which two were loaded



Map of the Moluccas. In Willem J. Blaeu, *Atlas Mayor o Geographia Blaviana*, Amsterdam, 1669.

ENCONTROS E DESENCONTROS EUROPEUS NO MAR DO SUL DA CHINA II

with deer skins, tobacco, poultry and other wares of little importance, which were distributed generally. From those who were in the sampans we learned that the Spanish fleet lying ready in Manila had sailed to the Moluccas under the command of Don Juan de Silva to wage war on us with ten surprisingly large galleons, two yachts, and four galleys, with two thousand Spaniards besides also great numbers of Indians, Chinese and Japanese¹. May God grant that their intention not be realized and be brought to nought.

On the 7th our admiral sent three Chinese into the city of Manila in a sampan with letters to the main councils there offering to exchange some prisoners, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese, against the prisoners they might keep there from our country². On the 8th our yacht sailed to the shore with some boats to collect four sampans which had previously been conquered by our men but had remained lying at anchor there because of the stormy weather. The next day, being the 9th, the yacht returned with the boats, bringing with it the aforesaid four sampans loaded with nuts and other fruits, and also two oxen and a deer which they had shot with a musket. On the same day, the plenary council convened and took the decision that, because the Chinese were not coming back, we would set sail the next day and go help our people in the Moluccas.

Having understood that Don Juan de Silva had only on the fourth of February begun his voyage from here to the Moluccas with such preparations as have been told of before, and aware, after previously discussing the matter in the plenary council, that the monsoon would only change in the month of April, the admiral determined not to lose any time, which would have given us another half year of delay. It is true that about the middle of April the junks from China pass here, from which we could have obtained a great booty and much profit, but in the common interest it was considered more advisable not to tarry any longer but as soon as possible to set our course to Ternate to come to the help and rescue of our people there, as was stipulated in our commission.

We were all the more motivated to do so by our consideration that our fleet still consisted of six ships and was equipped with healthy soldiers, without our lacking anything in our ammunition. Also, as we understood, it was the intention of Don Juan de Silva

on this voyage with such a powerful fleet, for the preparation of which he had needed three years, to take possession of the entire Moluccas—something we hoped (with the help of the Almighty) to prevent him from doing, giving our friends all the help and assistance we could.

On the 10th, when we still did not hear from the Chinese, we weighed the anchor and set sail, setting our course straight for the Moluccas. On the same day, on the orders of the admiral, all our Chinese and captured Japanese were released and sent to shore with their sampans, and we only kept the aforesaid Spaniard and an Indian, whom we took with us to the Moluccas. On that day we made little progress because of the total calm, and towards evening we cast anchor close to the shore. On the 11th very early we set sail again, also the entire forenoon making very little progress until the afternoon, when the wind blew us forward with such a force that in the evening we arrived at a large number of islands, and there we found ourselves surrounded by such a great number of them that we neither on the one side nor on the other saw a passage.

Therefore, we summoned the Spanish pilot, who, knowing the place, advised us not to go on any further because night was approaching, and so we spent our time tacking on this side and then again on the other. On the 12th in the afternoon, with a favourable wind and the help of the aforesaid pilot, we sailed through all the straits until we reached the open sea. Before we properly arrived in the sea, in the direction of the shore we spotted a small bark, to which were sent three boats with armed men, but those in the bark, seeing our men coming, set course to the shore, leaving everything behind and fleeing. Our men brought the bark back to our fleet, where its cargo of rice, some fruits and some chests was unloaded.

On the 13th we kept our course south-southeast and sometimes southeast and by south, with rather favourable wind. On the 14th we lay still directly off the island of Paney [Panay] because our Spanish pilot warned us that hereabouts there were many shoals which one could not pass at night without danger. On the 15th we sailed along the shore all day making good progress until the evening, when we again lowered some sails to avoid all danger at night. On the 16th we again set all sails, proceeding at a good rate on a southeasterly course. Thus we continued

EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS AND CLASHES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA II

until the 18th, very early in the morning, when we found ourselves off the island of Mindanao, and then we sailed along the coast until the evening, when some people explained to us that there were sunken rocks hereabouts, and therefore we again set our course to seaward.

The next day, on the 19th, we sailed to landward again, but because of the calm we made very little progress. In the evening we cast anchor on thirty-six fathoms, close to a promontory, from where a small boat immediately came to one of our ships, promising us that the next day they would bring all kinds of victuals to us without it being necessary that one of us would come ashore for it. On the 20th those on the land, as they had promised, brought us with their canoes many victuals, among others poultry and fresh fish, which they sold to us very cheaply, and if there had not been the wind, which was blowing in a very favourable direction, they would also have brought us a large quantity of pigs, but it was deemed good and most advisable to make sail again and to continue our voyage, which we did with such good progress that in a short while we reached Cape de Cadera [de la Caldera], where the Spanish ships going to the Moluccas take in their provision of water.

As soon as we had arrived there, some boats were despatched to get news about Don Juan de Silva, but the inhabitants pretended as if they knew nothing about it, only saying that two days ago a Spanish ship and a yacht had been there, which were sailing to the Moluccas, and that they had taken in their provision there. From the 20th to the 23rd there was a great calm, so we made almost no headway, except only by drifting with the stream; each time when it had changed direction we dropped the anchor again. Between the two islands of Mindanao and Taguima [Basilan] we met a strong counter-current, which all the more impeded our progress. On the 23rd we received a strong wind, so we passed through the strait between these islands in a short time.

During our stay here, the local canoes brought us much poultry, pigs, goats, fresh fish, tobacco, sundry kinds of fresh fish and other victuals, for which our merchants gave some money, cloth, knives, coral and things like that, with which the savages were very content. The admiral also gave permission to everybody to carry on some private trade, such as in tobacco, fruits and things like that because this place was richer in

produce and more fertile than all others, and its inhabitants also showed themselves to be great friends of ours and enemies of the Spaniards. We were all the more assured of this because their commander-in-chief proposed to our admiral to join our expedition with fifteen small ships, equipped in their manner, to give us assistance against the Spaniards.

They also showed us an open letter signed by Laurens Reael, by which he informed us that the inhabitants of Mindanao were our great friends and requested us that we on our side would in return show them all the respect and friendship we could. In this manner we progressed until the 26th, always sailing southeast and sometimes by south under favourable conditions. That same day towards noon a rough and boisterous weather came up, and that with a constant rain, which tore the admiral's sail to pieces, also damaging other ships and sails. On the 27th, with a favourable wind blowing, keeping a south-easterly course, we passed the island of Sangnijn [Sangihe], besides which many more islands, both large and small ones, showed themselves, which we have not found it necessary to mention individually because of their great number. **RC**



NOTES

- 1 The large fleet of Don Juan de Silva was supposed to meet four Portuguese galleons coming from Malacca to launch a joint attack on the Dutch outpost of Bantam. This expedition never took place, although he managed to expel the Dutch from some of the Moluccas.
- 2 Spilbergen at the time, among other things, requested the release of Admiral Paulus van Caerden, who had died briefly before this request was made.