

NOTES AND COMMENT

A FURTHER NOTE ON COCONUTS IN COLIMA

Since the publication of my article on "Early Coconut Culture in Western Mexico" (*THE HISPANIC AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XXV (May, 1945), 212-223), Mr. G. R. G. Conway of Mexico City has sent me some additional information that adds an important footnote to the early history of the coconut in New Spain. In my discussion (pp. 213-215) of the origin of coconuts in Colima, I reject the likelihood of a Spanish introduction from the Antilles or from the Philippines because of the insufficiency of the time available, and incline toward a casual translocation of coconuts from the neighborhood of Panama by means of the long-shore current. It now appears that the Spaniards themselves engaged in the transfer of coconuts northward along the Pacific coast.

A letter from Álvaro de Guijo to Hernán Cortés, dated at Panama, April 18, 1539, reads in part as follows:¹

Yo supe que alla no ay esta fruta que aca llamamos cocos e hize yr vn barco myo por esta costa donde estaba vna palma dellos. y no traxo de sazón sino hasta dos dozenas que enbio a v̄ra señoría/ Algunos de los mas curados podra v̄ra señoría mandar senbrar y a mi parescer sera bien ponellos muy someros por aquellos se nacen donde la mar los suele echar siendo v̄ra señoría serbido bien se podran enbiar otra bez mas. y algunos nacidos/. la muy yll^e persona y estado de v̄ra señoría n̄ro señor abmente como por v̄ra señoría es deseado/ de panama a xvij de abril de dxxxjx años.

Serbidor d. v̄ra s.^a
albaro de guijo

The letter indicates that coconuts were unknown along the Pacific coast of Mexico before 1539, and that two dozen ripe nuts were brought up from Panama in that year with the suggestion that they be planted. It is not entirely certain just where the coconuts were taken, but the circumstantial evidence points to Colima.

Cortés was greatly interested in Colima in the 1530's, and looked upon that coast as a springboard for further exploration of the South

¹ I am greatly indebted to Mr. Conway for forwarding a photostat and partial transcript of this letter, the original of which is in his possession. Thanks are due also to my colleague, Professor M. A. Zeitlin, for his help in deciphering a number of difficult words.

Seas. He himself had been in Colima in 1535 before leaving on his unprofitable expedition to Baja California.² In a letter dated at Cuernavaca, June 20, 1539,³ addressed to Diego de Guinea, his agent in Oaxaca, Cortés commanded that the ships *Santa Agüeda* and *La Trinidad* be ordered to sail to the port of Santiago de Buena Esperanza on the Colima coast. In the same letter he reported that the *San Lázaro* had arrived from Panama, and that she had now been given orders to proceed to Tehuán-tepec rather than to Acapulco. There is good internal evidence in the letters of Guijo and Cortés that the *San Lázaro* was the ship in which the coconuts were brought to Mexico. The *San Lázaro* had left Panama in April. Where had she docked when she arrived from Panama, as Cortés reports? Since she was neither in Tehuán-tepec nor in Acapulco, it seems likely, in view of Cortés' interests, that she had come to Colima some time before June 20, 1539.

The most convincing evidence that Colima was the destination of the coconuts is, of course, Alonso Ponce's account, four decades later, of the great profusion of coconut palms in that area.

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² Cortés made a will in Colima, which was signed and witnessed on January 9, 1535 (cf. Mariano Cuevas, ed., *Cartas y otros documentos de Hernán Cortés* . . . [Sevilla, 1915], pp. 151-170).

³ Original in the possession of Mr. Conway.