

PIONEERS OF PAUROMA

A Pamphlet of a voyage to Pauroma in 1658, by Jeosua Nunes Netto and Joseph Pereira

Published by dr. J. Meyer, Paramaribo, 1954. The original booklet contains the Portuguese version as well as the English translation, and an introduction by Meyer. Meyer gives no indication of the whereabouts of the original pamphlet.

Painting: "departing ships", Gerrit Pompe, ca. 1690

The story can be read as an adventurous journey with a happy end, but there is more to it.

During centuries of suppression, the Sephardic community had reacted by building a powerful network of external relations, as well as a high degree of organization within the Jewish community. In this way they were able to react to the willful decisions of European governments with speed and accuracy. The enormous Jewish exodus from Spain and later Portugal was, to a certain extent, foreseen by the Jewish leaders, and had been prepared in advance. Political scouts had investigated countries and cities favorable to the community, and shrewd negotiators had paved the way. And when they indeed had to flee, they lost much, but not all, and they fled to countries with new opportunities.

17th century Holland was such a country. It was starting up its West-Indian colonies, and the Jewish community offered to help them (and themselves) by sending Jewish colonists. In this way they strengthened their position in Holland as well as the new colonies, and later benefited from it.

This colonization was not an individual effort by a small group of Jews. It was part of a deliberate undertaking of the European Sephardic community as a whole, with clear political and economic motives. No wonder then, that David Nassy, who colonized Cayenne and later Suriname, and who lived in Amsterdam, started his journey with a group of colonists living as far away as Livorno in Italy. Of course, Nassy had a publicity campaign to convince these people of the success of his undertaking. Alas, no campaign pamphlet has survived.

The Pauroma pamphlet is an advertisement of a similar undertaking in neighboring Essequibo. It describes a pleasant journey to a land full of fruits, and without hardship and disease. A country too good to be true. But, on the other hand, it is an honest story. It does not obviously tamper with the truth, only bends it a little – just like any good advertisement. And because it is an honest story, after four centuries it is still valuable.

It is not known what has happened to the Jewish colony described in the Pamphlet. It is a field of further research. But Meyer, in his introduction, provides supplemental archival data, alas without mentioning the source documents:

"...April 1658. There appeared Adrien van Bullestrate de Jong and represents that he is ready to hire out his ship, called "the Eendracht", skipper Leendert Stratman, 126 feet long, 25 3/4 feet broad, 11 3/4 feet hold, 5 1/2 feet deck, mounted with 20 pieces and manned with a crew of 20, to go from here to Essequibo.

Whereupon, deliberation having been had, an agreement was finally made as follows, to wit: that he for himself shall lade therein 1.000 planks, 600 half hogsheads and 100 cellars, etc. etc. On this occasion Paulo Jacomo Pinto requests that each of the emigrating passengers shall not only be allowed to take along a chest and a hogshead but also 2.000 planks and all that may be necessary for the construction of a number of houses, mills or what may be necessary for the cultivation of the land together with some provisions for their support, all of which is accorded to him, and consented to...".

The Pamphlet describes the ship as the "Concordia, under the command of captain Hendrik Strutman". Likely, this "Concordia" was the renamed "Eendracht". She was not the only colonist ship. Meyer states that the „Joannis" had already left on the 2nd. of February of that same year followed by 5 other ships. But through Netto and Pereira's pamphlet only the story of the "Concordia" is still known.

Philip Dikland, 2000

COPIA

Da relação que da barra de Pauroma em Wilde Kust mandaõ Jeosua Ninez Netto e Joseph Pereira em que descreven sua viagem e calidadesque da terra the aquelle dia puderaõ remancar datada em 15de Setembro 1658.

COPY

Of the commentary dated 15 September 1658, written by Jeosua Nunes Netto and Joseph Pereira, on the beach of Pauroma (*Pommeroon*) on the Wild Coast, in which they describe their journey and the conditions they could observe that day of the country.

On May 12th. we set out from Middelburgo (*Middelburg*) on board the "Concordia", seen off by the gentlemen of the Company, under the command of captain Hendrik Strutman, to whose care the good passage and well-being of all the passengers and the Jews in particular were entrusted. Weighing anchor, we went under sail 12 o'clock at noon and sailed with the aim to reach Flesingue (*Vlissingen*), where we dropped anchor, the same being done by two raiders who had also departed from Middelburgo to try their luck.

On the 13th. of the same month, we hoisted sail since the wind was favorable. The following day we entered the Channel, the Jews and the other passengers being far from comfortable as the boat was very crowded. And thus we sailed forty miles before we arrived at the entrance of the Channel, where we were overtaken for three days by a heavy head-wind which forced us to call at Cappa in order to avoid being thrown on the cliffs of Cape Finisterre by the strong current or be forced to call at Valmuya (*Valmouth*) in case the headwind would last longer.

After three days, however, a favorable wind started blowing which kept on for a considerable time and served us well. On the 31st. of the same month we had, according to the mates, already covered more than hundred miles, and at 3 o'clock in the morning we were not far from the coast of Barbary, where we anchored. in the stillness of dawn.

The mates could not make out which country it was, but as we could ascertain later on, it was Cabo Branco.

At ten o'clock that morning a stiff breeze set in, called by us the "Blessing Wind", and we continued smoothly on our course.

On June 2nd. we sighted Forte Ventura and Lançarote on the windward side of the Canary Islands situated between these islands and Barbary, and on the same day we sailed past them, and continued on our way driven on by the "Blessing Wind".

The 7th. of that month the Captain called a meeting, attended by two Frenchmen, two Dutchmen and two Jews, none of them qualified in the art of navigation and announced that he wanted to call at the island of Sao Vicente which is near Gabo Verde. For that purpose, a small craft which was carried by the ship, would be made ready to fetch water, which was needed and he instructed each of them to inform their

countrymen of this decision and to that purpose the course was accordingly set the detour being not more than 70 miles to reach the abovementioned islands.

The Jews representing us were David Vaz and Elissa Abbas, which latter, after informing us of the proposal, was instructed by us after due consideration to inform the Captain in our name that before having called a meeting, he should have checked up on the water supply, together with the stewards and the passengers, as he should have taken in a water supply sufficient for three months while we had only sailed for 25 days now, that the Wind was favorable and although we admitted the shortage, we did not agree to calling at the port since obviously the purpose of this call was only to bring the long boat in condition for trading at Cristoval and the Martinicas Islands.

Together with Elissa Abbas we delivered this message, to which the Captain, being an experienced seaman, replied that he had not looked into the matter as this had been impossible for him and that we acted as people of experience. In reply to this we told him, that he should investigate and if he should not find the water supply adequate, he should replenish same (which could be done in three days), and then continue the journey lest we should not lose the good weather which we were having. Because the rainy season starts early in July on these coasts it was very probable that we might be becalmed and that the longboat could be rigged better at Ezequibe. Whereupon he answered that if the longboat was not rigged, no water could be hauled and that he had already taken his decision in consolation with persons on board who were in favor of his suggestion.

Seeing now that there was no other way out to escape the hardships we might suffer, we objected no more and continued our journey until the 9th. of said month when we sighted the island of Sao Vicente which we approached by a circuitous route as the mates, who were no pilots, mistook the cape of the island for the island of Santo Antao, which lies before Sao Vicente.

The next day, however, they discovered their error and again headed for the island where we dropped anchor close to shore.

There we saw anchored an English ship of approximately 50 tons, a raider, which we were told was on her way to New England. There were also a few other ships buying up slaughtered, flayed and very lean goats and also some live ones which latter they caught by running them down by dogs, and these they resold cheaply. Since the goats looked very poor we did not want to eat them and were afraid that they could die and go to waste.

We went on shore of said island, which is a desert and very dry and has no running water save that of the Casimbas, and because it was very quiet there the longboat was rigged and we filled 50 barrels with water,

Anchored in the bay, we stayed 13 days at the island although the sea was rather rough by the strong winds descending from the mountains down into the bay. The bay is famous for it's capacity to harbor 200 warships at a time.

On the 23rd. of June we left the island of Sao Vicente, the weather being very good and the wind favorable which lasted till the end of the month. However, we were in grave danger of going down, because the rigged longboat being attached by two cables to the stern was towed by us, slowing down our speed, since the ship was a poor sailer.

On the first day of the Conjunction (*the first day after the new moon*) we were becalmed, which lasted for eight days and was followed up from time to time by a gust of wind, and we sailed into a latitude of 4 degr. 40" on the 24th. of July. On the 25th. we observed an enormous foam-line in front of us, which was recognized by some of the pilots as the gulfstream of the Amazon river being weighed down by the power of the sea.

Thus we sailed in South-Western direction till 12 o'clock at noon of the 27th. of said month and the mates were astonished that they saw neither land or change in the water, which discouraged the passengers. The cause of this delay was the longboat which slowed us down.

On said day and hour until the 29th. of July 12 o'clock at noon, while sailing from West to West South-West, the sun's altitude was taken and we had made leeway till 6 1/2 degr. For ten days we already had received from four to ten units of rationed water, and we could truthfully state that there were more days of four than ten units; however, it is worth quoting that on the days of four units we received an additional two units of French wine and half a unit of liquor, which was distributed on the insistence of the passengers, sailors and soldiers. Since the distribution of the six units of water, no fire was made and no cooking was being done anymore.

When the mates had noticed the error caused by their wrong navigation, they had the course changed to South-South-West till August 7th., which brought us to a latitude of 2 degr. after we had discarded the longboat which had caused us so much trouble, the latter sailing away under her own canvas with a crew of four sailors.

On this day, the event of Tisabeab, 10 o'clock at night, it rained heavily and with the aid of sheets we gathered much water, which we saved until the next evening, the end of the fast. We thought it better to gather the water but not to drink of it, just like the Supreme Being had shown to Moses the Promised Land but had pointed out to him that he should not enter it.

On the 8th. of the month, the day of Tisabeab, which we spent in lamentations because of the riches and good things we had lost by the sins of our ancestors, we were consoled by the Lord of Creation and saw a change in the water from blue into green, a sign that we were close to land.

On the 9th. of the month we gauged 83 fathoms of water which made us happy since we were constantly afraid of a catastrophe due to the uncertainty of the pilots in establishing the right course. Although we and some Frenchmen, also navigators, had noticed this, nothing had been said and we had refrained from speaking about navigation because everybody wanted to try his hand at being a mate, even the women had their say.

After sounding had taken place, everybody rejoiced.

On the 10th. land was sighted, at a latitude of 4 degr. 56". Low land, very peaceful because of the forest, and we sailed in approximately 6 fathoms of water, while all of us were in a festive mood. In this manner we sailed along the coast until the 13th. and on this day the first mate, accompanied by sailors and soldiers who were armed with guns, went ashore in the longboat to explore the land and the mouth of the river (which are all very wide here on this coast). They met a boat with some 40 Indians, armed with bows and arrows, and talked to them while they sent our companions to the weatherside and the natives asked if they were Dutchmen. They confirmed this, but the Indians did not want to believe them or trust them, stating that if they were Dutch, why they did not carry a flag (it was stupid of them not to have taken one along), and that they must either be French or English. At last, by means of sign-language they made us understand that the river was the Corantina (*Corantijn*), and that downwards there was the Berbiche river, and still further down the Ezequebe (*Essequibo*).

On the 14th. the first mate returned aboard ship and told us all this. After taking the same safety measures, the first mate went back ashore on the 15th., while the ship sailed along the coast. He recognized by means of certain marks in the course of the river and by the map, that it was a river with a wide mouth, the Berbiche river; he came back to inform us of this and at the same time brought along six barrels of water. Until this day we had not eaten cooked food and only four units of water were distributed daily. Immediately we received full rations and cooking was started. We went downwards along the coast until night and dropped anchor, while the mate continuously sailed along the coastline, exploring same.

On the 18th of the month, one of the passengers (a Commander. in the service of the owners of the ship who had gone to Guiné to get the Negroes, for those we had on board were delivered by their masters, and he had gone to Ezequeb (*Essequibo*) to wait for the ship and return with it, and he knew this coast well) went along with the mate, to explore the river where we had dropped anchor, and informed us that it was the river of Merary (*Demerara*), three miles past the Ezequebe river.

On the 19th. of the month the Commander of the soldiers went with the longboat to Ezequebe to inquire about the where-about of our settlement. Five o'clock in the afternoon of that same day a sail was sighted which approached and a ship dropped anchor alongside us. The next day the Commander and someone who did the buying, came on board and informed us that this was the frigate which had collected the Negroes and that they had 300 Ardas (*Ardas, a special Negro tribe*) on board who were good people. It was a relief to see that everything went so punctually.

On the 22nd. of the month the Commander and the former Governor of the settlement, returned by a big boat and they informed us that the settlement lay on the Pauroma (*Pommeroon*) river. The people who lived there had been there for one year already, together with those who had arrived from Middelburgo by the previous boat, also some people from the island of Martenica and from Castello de Arguim. Altogether more than 120 dwellings.

In his boat he had lots of sugar-cane, lemons, oranges as large as small melons, bananas and other fruit, which were handed out among the passengers and our Captain gave a party in honor of the Governor.

The next day, the 23rd. the Governor paid us a visit in the saloon where we stayed and we merrily toasted him, while we offered him our services and paid him homage. All this, after he had scrutinized us and received recommendations regarding our persons from the Captain, who was our friend. Between some jokes (explained to us by the Captain), the Governor (who was a fat man) said to Ieosua Nunez Netto, that he must be of good faith, that all necessities of life were abundant, the country fertile and that his own corpulence which he had acquired in this country was proof enough for this, with this he bade us farewell.

On that day our ship and the one with the Negroes, as well as the barge, went under sail and the next day we dropped anchor at the mouth of the river in one and two third fathoms of water.

The mouth of the river is 9 to 10 feet deep and from there as far as the fort, which lies 12 miles inland, the depth is 11 feet. The mouth of the river is 4 miles wide and. scattered over forty miles upstream people live. Concerning the country and its climate I will give an account of which I have been able to observe from the boat. This, because I stayed on board till after our luggage was discharged.

That day, it was Sabath, all the French and Dutch passengers together with their chests, beds and luggage were disembarked in three big boats, one from the ship and two from Ezequeb and Pauroma. Also the soldiers, the Commander and the Governor left. After the two boats had left, the Captain wanted all the Jews together with some Dutchmen to disembark in the other boat, which we refused to do, because it was Sabath, and told him that the boat would have to wait until night when we would board it. He stubbornly persisted but with no avail, as we told him that the only way he could make us go on board the boat was by force. He went into a rage and ordered the carpenter to dismantle the cooking stove and that we should not get any food until the two other boats had returned, as he actually did on Sunday.

Monday we requested him to supply our rations which usually were stored in the hold and he let us cook, but did not give us any biscuits as there were none on board.

On the following Wednesday, the 28th, all the Jews with some hand-baggage were disembarked in the big longboat and in another small ship's boat, but we stayed on board to have our luggage unloaded, which happened very slowly as the boats took five days going and coming.

The 7th. of September a ship, sailing under the Dutch flag, joined us. She was one of the two raiders which had left Middelburgo together with us, coming from the coast of Brazil, where they had captured a corvette which was en route to the Cape coming from her home-country. They also raided a ship coming from Rio en route to the island of Terceira which is close to Tamaraci. This ship had 600 chests on board and the passengers escaped to the shore in a longboat. Three men who had stayed on board, the Captain, the first mate and a Spaniard, saved the ship from falling into the hands of the pirates by grounding her, where she went down immediately, no salvage whatsoever being possible.

When this raider left Middelburgo she sailed under the name of "S. Catherina", but later the pirate Matheos Quart changed the name into "Flandre". An English ship coming from Angola was also raided by them in the vicinity of the Cape. They carried 850 Negroes, a Governor, two Captains and his Secretary, also a lot of riches in silver and ivory. Because said ship had fired at them, they captured it. We inquired after the name of the Governor, which they did not know. The Governor had been shot. A Portuguese ship with twenty loads of cargo was seized too. The raider left the ship at the mouth of the Ezequibo and went up the river in longboats to find out if the Governor or the colonists wanted to buy Negroes.

On the 12th. of that month, the Pirate-Captain boarded the ship he had captured in Brazil with 250 Negroes from Angola on board. Aiming to sail up river, he first visited us as the Governor did not want to pay a good price.

That same day an English ship, sailing under the Dutch flag, came alongside. Aboard were three noblemen and one hornblower who came from Serenan (Surinam) where they had made peace with our settlement. They wished to trade here as well as in Serenan, which was allowed them by our Governor, after his having first obtained the approval of his principals in Zeeland.

These gentlemen from Serenan said that they were Royalists, and since it was poor trading in England, they wanted to try it this way. After we had expressed our opinion about the Confederation, they left immediately. May God grant that the decision made by the Gentlemen in Zeeland. be beneficial for the common good.

As far as I have been able to observe, the country is covered with not too dense forest and some Indian villages upstream. The Indians are very gentle and peace-loving, and on such good terms with the Governor that he has asked the Gentlemen in Zeeland not to send anymore soldiers. The soldiers who had arrived in this ship were put off duty. There was a Jew in a boat with Indians, and I spoke to one who could speak Spanish rather well.

In a word, the country is as I had always dreamed it to be. There were no snakes and no mosquitoes, few or no ants, the plantations were excellent and the most fertile they had discovered up till now, on which all plants could be cultivated. Those who had been here for a year already had a plantation, which provided their food. They had selected some tobacco and sent same to Middelburgo by the previous boat on which our people had arrived. They really had a better journey because it only lasted seven weeks and four days. Only they had not had beer to drink.

The sons-in-law of Jacob Gabai and David Torres bought a plantation from someone who had first arrived here, on which there were 6000 cassava-plants and other crops, as well as buildings, for three Negroes and fifty guilders in cash, thus providing for their food and safeguarding their lives. The cassava I have seen is excellent and many bunches of bananas are bigger than a man's size. The tobacco is of the same variety as that of Orinoco (*Orinoco*); a lot of pimento, potatoes and yams and many other vegetables. Now they will start working the plantations on a larger scale with the Negroes and plant to make the grounds ready; this looks very promising also with regard to the trading we intend to practice here. With an abundance of time we think that especially those who have some ready money, will have plenty of opportunities and that they will prosper with the Help from Above.

A lot of sugar-cane is being planted here, which is renowned as they tell us. There are many wild pigs, which the Indians kill and sell for one knife, also a lot of wild fowl. There are only few ordinary chickens and all are of a different breed. The white men and the Indians make a drink which is very refreshing and stronger than beer, but one has to be careful not to drink too much of it, because it will soon make one drunk.

The whole country is very healthy and one can dress or undress under any condition without danger of becoming ill. People here die normally of old age because the breeze is refreshing and perceiving all this we trust the Supreme Being. We shall forward some copies of this summary, completed by more observations we shall be able to make later on, all according to truth and without any exaggeration truthfully recording our findings and on the strength of this good news we shall thank God that He has delivered us from the hell of snow and has brought us in peace to this beautiful country, where after many, many years we shall lay our bodies to rest, till when the time has come we shall gather them for our Fatherland.

AMEN