

Godebert M. Reiss
Explorers, Conquistadors and Missionaries
from Portugal and Spain



Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537 – 1598)

Godebert M. Reiss

**EXPLORERS, CONQUISTADORS
AND MISSIONARIES
FROM PORTUGAL AND SPAIN**

Contemporary Books and Pamphlets from 1500 to 1700.
Jesuit Letters largely from Japan dating from 1549 to 1629.
With bibliographical and historical annotations.



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Dieser Titel wird in der *Deutschen Nationalbibliografie* angezeigt.

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek bietet nach Erscheinen detaillierte bibliografische Informationen unter <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

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Einbandgestaltung und Layout: Margarete Bramann, Frankfurt am Main

Druck und Bindung: TZ-Verlag & Print GmbH, Roßdorf, www.tz-verlag.de

Printed in Germany 2020

ISBN 978-3-95903-010-6

Contents

Important Information	7
Introduction	8
The Brito Collection	10
About This Book	16
Alphabetical Catalogue by Authors	19
Jesuit letters from 1549 to 1629	199
Index of Proper Names	225
Principal Reference Works Consulted	234

Important Information

This book is based on Auction Sale No. 40 held April 3rd & 4th, 1989 by the Auction House Reiss & Auvermann. It comprises a collection of rare books about the age of exploration and the history of Portugal and Spain. Amongst the books referred to, with respect to the centuries of early exploration (AD 1500 to AD 1700), was a considerable number of items of great rarity and their hammer price rather often achieved many times the estimate. The contents of these books in many cases were so unusual that the brief comments printed in the auction catalogue needed additional explanation.

Therefore, I made a selection of those 140 titles that seemed to me the most interesting and important ones. I added the original printed versions of more than 300 letters written by Jesuit missionaries (bound in 23 volumes and brochures, including some collective volumes or sammelbands) to their General in Rome between 1549 and 1629, mostly from Japan. Ample information, not only about the Christian mission, but also about the political situation in Japan in those days at the time when the Empire of the Rising Sun suffered from a disastrous civil war, is provided.

Each entry in this book follows the same structure comprising four elements: 1. Author, title of the book, dates of printing, illustration, collation and binding. 2. Historical and bibliographical information. 3. Reference works. 4. Estimates, followed by hammer prices achieved, at that time in Deutsche Mark (DM).

With a very few exceptions, we did not make use of abbreviations common in the antiquarian book trade. The ones used are pp. (page, pages); ll. (leaf, leaves); engr. (engraved); front. (frontispiece), cont. (contemporary).

One of the key considerations for this volume is the practical benefits for western antiquarian booksellers if they happen to come across a book on this topic. This book not only gives detailed descriptions of each item, but also an indication as to pricing.

Introduction

With the arrival of a spacecraft on the surface of the moon in the 20th century, mankind made its first step into the unknown and unexplored world of the universe. Millions of TV viewers watched with bated breath as the astronauts took their first steps onto the earth's satellite. Nevertheless, further advance into outer space will still be the preserve of a relatively small group of scientists.

A similar foray into a completely unknown (the Americas, Pacific region, Australia) or merely vaguely known world of largely still obscure outlines (East Asia, Africa south of the Equator) was undertaken by the West between 1450 and 1700 or so, but with one important difference. It was not just a small elitist group of people who experienced this huge geographical expansion as was the case in the 20th and 21st century. Instead, although small in numbers, the people who took part in these ventures came from all walks of life. Certainly, the call came from the ruling upper classes; skippers and commanders were from aristocratic families, but the people answering this call were practitioners: experienced seafarers, travellers and fighting-men from a wide range of different backgrounds. The one thing that united them, apart from the desire for adventure, was above all the prospect of a stake in the treasures that they hoped to discover and that were to make them rich. Then there was always a small but extremely important group of people: members of the clergy, predominantly friars. They came as missionaries. As they were well-versed in reading and writing, the missionaries became the chroniclers of these voyages. They made up most of the correspondents who left us accounts of what happened.

In the beginning, it was the Portuguese who were the early explorers, thus laying the foundations for 100 years of Portuguese naval supremacy in the Indian Ocean. Not least because of this, Spain felt compelled to venture westwards in search of another sea route to India, leading to the discovery of the Americas. In order to avoid future conflicts or warfare, both countries urged Pope Alexander VI (Borgia, Pope 1492–1503) to divide the newly discovered lands outside Europe between the Kingdom of Portugal and the Crowns of Castile and Aragon along a demarcation line from the North to the South. Portugal and Castile/Aragon largely followed the proposals made by the Pope and concluded the Treaty of Tordesillas on June 7, 1491 which was ratified by the Crowns of Castile & Aragon on July 2, 1491 and by the Kingdom of Portugal on September 5 of the same year. Roughly speaking, the Americas were

assigned to the Crowns of Castile & Aragon and Asia-Africa was given to the Portuguese, with Brazil incorporated in the lands allocated to the Portuguese. The Treaty was observed for a quarter of a millennium until it was superseded and declared invalid by the Treaty of Madrid in 1750.

To the present day, the linguistic division into a Portuguese-speaking and a Spanish-speaking area still holds as a consequence of this Treaty. The Spaniards eradicated the advanced civilizations they encountered, which is why the *lingua franca* in Latin America today is still Spanish.

From the very beginning, the Portuguese were in particular interested in setting up trading posts; it was only in Africa that the trading posts became larger and developed into the colonies of Mozambique and Angola. In Asia, the Portuguese met with powerful states that had an advanced civilization of their own such as the empires of China, Japan and Persia, Indian principalities and Malaysian sultanates. This is why Portuguese is the colloquial and sometimes even official language today in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau as well as in its former outposts in Goa, Diu, Damão, Macao, East Timor and the Cape Verde Islands. In Brazil, Portuguese even became the native language of the country.

The changes in the balance of political power in Europe also began to manifest themselves overseas. Following the Kingdoms of Portugal and Spain, the Netherlands experienced a short spell as a great naval power in the 17th century. Ceylon, Malacca and the outposts in what today is Indonesia were taken away from the Portuguese, only to lose Ceylon and Malacca again to the British thereafter. What today is Indonesia, Suriname (the Dutch part of Guyana) and a number of islands in the Caribbean were Dutch colonies until well into the 20th century. When England and France became colonial powers in the 16th and 17th centuries, and set the course for naval supremacy, the three older colonial powers lost much of their former significance. Some countries were largely irrelevant as colonial powers in the 19th century, such as Russia in Alaska, Italy in Africa, Belgium in the Congo and Germany in Africa and some of the Pacific Archipelagos.

The Brito Collection

One of the highlights of my professional life as an antiquarian bookseller and auctioneer was the sale of the collection of the Portuguese collector Brito. The sale of the collection was brought to the attention of the auction house Reiss & Auvermann by our esteemed friend and colleague José Telles da Silva from Lisbon in Portugal and the whole collection was given to the auction house for sale, an incredible and unexpected serendipity. The collection was the achievement of a lifetime of collecting and was mainly put together between the 1920s and 1940s. This is borne out by the copies purchased from antiquarian catalogues, mainly in England, during that period. Very little is known about the collector Brito himself, not even his first name. He was a member of the upper class and must have died in around 1950. Since his demise, his collection had remained untouched in the attic of a villa outside Lisbon. I had the opportunity to go there, together with my business partner, Detlev Auvermann, to inspect the collection at our leisure and in the presence of our facilitator, José Telles da Silva. Protracted negotiations with the owners of the collection were brought to a successful conclusion. In the autumn of 1987, the books finally arrived at our premises and my actual work could begin.

Auction catalogue 40, the culmination of one and a half year's work, with its 2077 items began with a group of manuscripts covering the development of the Portuguese colonies, but they also contained accounts about Portugal itself, such as the original manuscript of John Michell's description of the terrible earthquake that struck Lisbon in 1755 (DM 10,000 / DM 32,000). These manuscripts will not be included in my new book. They are unique copies that are very unlikely to ever be seen again in the market. Describing these manuscripts would only be of academic significance, if any.

A further analysis of the inventory resulted in a division into two groups. Half of the collection consisted exclusively of a portfolio of early and very early books dating primarily back to the age of exploration, which are without doubt the more significant books and, above all, the more interesting ones for a Central European and North American audience. They comprised a total of 1.050 items. Around 75 % of the 'White Elephants' (i.e. books that fetch double their estimated value, or even many times more, in my auctions) of the collection belonged to this group. I decided to devote all of my attention to this portfolio.

The other group comprised early books from and about the two states of

the Iberian Peninsula including a few special chapters such as the Inquisition, Catalonia and in particular the *Restoracão* (more than 100 items), which chronicles the successful fight for the restoration of Portuguese sovereignty under the new royal family of Braganza. Portugal had been linked with Spain in the Iberian Union, a dynastic union of the two Kingdoms, from 1580 to 1640, very much to the disadvantage of Portugal. I determined that this section was not going to be of much interest for the majority of future readers. This is why I decided to devote myself entirely to the records from the age of exploration.

Brito, the collector, was Portuguese. No wonder then that the majority of the 140 books selected and all the letters from the Jesuits deal with the countries explored by Portugal; this group also included the majority of price mavericks. Only 18 titles cover Spanish topics, 5 refer to Dutch enterprises and another 23 are the works of authors from other nations or of a more general nature. A breakdown by centuries reveals 29 titles from the 16th century and 89 from the 17th century; another 21 volumes date back to the 18th century and there is even one item from the 19th century. On reading, it becomes immediately apparent why the last 22 titles had to be included in the group of the older ones. From the more than 300 Jesuit letters, bound in 23 unites, the majority was written before 1600 starting with four letters by Francis Xavier from 1549. All of them are from a very early period, the last one being printed 1629.

Brito's passion as a collector is reflected in the fact that he had various editions and translations of the two most important books in his collection: In addition to the original edition of *Ho Preste Ioam das Indias* by Álvarez (1540), he had three Spanish versions, one French and German version, so six versions altogether. The report by Mendes Pinto (1614), the first European to visit Japan, was found in its original Portuguese version, in addition to another twelve editions.

Two titles from the Spanish interest of the collection were among the less expensive books, however, at the time when they were written, they were best-sellers and they have been reprinted repeatedly. Later editions can often be found in the market. Brito was in possession of 12 editions of *Historiarum Indicarum libri* (first published in 1588) by Giovanni P. Maffei and he owned 37 editions of *Historia del conquista de Mexico* (first published in 1684) by Antonio de Solis y Ribadeneira, in a number of different languages.

Our first job was to look at all the books for our 40th auction. For an antiquarian bookseller, it is quite common to handle groups of books with topics unfamiliar to him or, as was the case with this collection, topics that seem

completely alien. However, one must not be intimidated by such things; one must rather acquaint oneself with the subject matter of the new books so that the initiated reader cannot find any mistakes. For this purpose, an antiquarian bookseller must consult the relevant bibliographies of his reference library. If there is not sufficient reference material available, as was the case with the Brito collection, reference books must be borrowed, or the requisite pages thereof must be copied.

It was pleasing to discover that we already had some standard works such as the *Diccionario Bibliographico Portuguez* by Innocencio, 26 volumes, and *Palau y Dulcet, Manual de libro Hispano-Americano*, 28 volumes, in our possession, as well as some specialist bibliographies. At this point, I must thank our friend Telles da Silva again for providing us with some very rare and special publications, for example, the two by Boxer: on Indo-European prints and the other one on the Jesuit's own printing shop in 17th century China. These publications were unknown to us until then.

Everybody at the firm enthusiastically knuckled down to the job at hand. For all of us, it was very definitely the most unusual collection of books we ever had to handle during our professional career as antiquarian booksellers. When we finished our project, we had compiled a catalogue that is still standard reading in the reference libraries of all renowned antiquarian booksellers who specialize in the field of travel and exploration. It received much acclaim and helped to position our firm on the international market. My special gratitude goes to my recently deceased student Dirk Auvermann. After two years of training at a prestigious antiquarian bookshop in London, he mastered the English specialist terminology so well that the catalogue on this collection, written in English, never met with any criticism.

Our biggest headache when studying the material was to determine the estimated values. We had nothing to go by and there were no decision-making guidelines or suggestions from the consignors. We always do our utmost to present fair estimates to our clients. My rule of thumb has always been that the private collector pays a reasonable price if he or she buys an item for the estimate or less. Exceptions aside, the re-seller usually pays the estimate plus/minus 30 %. Everybody benefits from a realistic estimate. In addition to a well-sorted reference library, personal experience in the trade and a certain amount of gut instinct, there is another tool of the trade at the disposal of the antiquarian bookseller: he or she can compare the book he or she is working on with

copies of the book that have been auctioned earlier. Such information has been available from annually published Book Auction Records in Great Britain, France, the United States and Germany since about 1950 or even earlier.

However, 30 years ago, there was no guidance on prices for 95 % of the books from the Brito collection. Now that we have reached the digital era, the sky is the limit when it comes to sourcing information. The research for this new book revealed that the situation has not noticeably improved. I have been able to find no more than a handful of the 140 books described by me in the more recent records since 1989. When working on the catalogue we mostly had to rely on our own gut feeling when setting the prices. Although we had our knowledgeable Portuguese friend, whom we could rely on for support, we came across a lot of things that were unknown even to him. This is the reason why we reached so many sensationally high prices. Due to the amount of material that needed sifting through and due to the difficulty of assessing its value, we took our time to get things right, so that it was the beginning of 1989 when the auction catalogue was finally available. Soon after its publication, we sent out several thousand copies of it.

We made provisions for an ample period of two months to exhibit the items of the collection before the auction proper on April 3rd/4th 1989, and this paid off. During those two months, we were approached almost daily by interested parties who handed over very long lists with requests. They were private collectors, mainly from Portugal, Spain and even Brazil, as well as the usual international specialist dealers, who sometimes spent two or even three days tirelessly browsing through books.

When I stepped up to the rostra on 3rd April 2019, I saw a packed room in front of me. We had 120 seats in that room and every single seat was taken. One interesting observation I made was the number of different nationalities of the visitors as I can recall them: there were dealers from England, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, Sweden, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States. There was even one dealer from Goa. No Japanese dealers were present that day. They placed their bids through Nico Israel from the Netherlands who, at that time, was the most prestigious dealer for travel books and atlases and someone who had been trading with the Japanese booksellers for a very long time. Private collectors from Portugal, Spain, Brazil and Mexico were also present. Our friend Telles da Silva had his very own delegation, consisting of himself, fellow colleagues, 11 or 12 Portuguese private collectors and

even his own press photographer. At a later stage, we were able to admire a lavishly illustrated article covering several pages in a leading Portuguese magazine. However, the two most outstanding visitors were representatives of the National Libraries of Portugal and Spain, who accounted for approximately 20% of the proceeds from the auction. I eventually also discovered two German antiquarian booksellers in the room.

Not much remains to be said about the auction process, the results of the auction speak for themselves. Manuscripts and books about travel and exploration sold extremely well and often enough at tremendous prices. The same applies to a small number of items from the Portuguese-Spanish section. Among the early printed books from the Iberian Peninsula were for example the first Portuguese grammar, printed in 1540 (DM 45,000/estimate DM 8,000) as well as the most expensive book of the sale: A rather unknown issue of the *Siete partidas*, Spain's most famous law book compiled under the protection of King Alfonso X of Castile (1221–1284), *el Sabio*. Our copy was printed in Venice in 1501 for which a private collector paid a hammer price of DM 280,000 (estimate DM 50,000). The take-up of chronicles, landscape descriptions and booklets about the homelands was rather disappointing and the proceeds for these were typically lower. This is presumably the reason why the total proceeds exceeded the estimate by only about 100%. The auction went according to plan and was a huge success, much better than expected. The invitation that our friend, Telles da Silva, extended to my staff and me for a week's company excursion to Portugal some months after the sale provided a pleasant conclusion. With the books they purchased from us, the Portuguese National Library organised a small but very impressive exhibition. We were personally invited to visit the exhibition and to attend a reception by the head librarian for lunch afterwards. (For more details, please refer to my book *Von Büchern und Büchernarren*, p. 180ff.).

Since then, the Brito collection has become one of the best memories of my professional career. But, right from the beginning, I kept thinking about the fact that the remarkably high sales prices would provide reason enough for further investigations. As the years went by, my view was confirmed that the literature of explorers, particularly from the early period until 1700 or so, was in a league of its own, because it is so extremely rare. This thought was triggered some 20 years ago when a small collection of a similar nature was put up for auction by one of the famous London auction houses. The gist of the foreword from the editor of the catalogue was that they were proud of

this small collection, but that it could by no means be compared to the ‘famous Reiss sale’.

I can remember one other document of the same calibre from later years. In 1501, Ismail, the first Persian Shah of the Safawid dynasty, made the *Twelver Shiite branch* of Islam the state religion of his empire. When browsing through the books before the auction held by a colleague of mine sometime between 1990 and 1995, I came across the German edition of an early voyage to Persia from 1501. One single line, in fact the very last one on page two of the few pages of the small booklet mentioned the above event and even highlighted it. The estimate was DM 400. At the time, I had a very enthusiastic Persian client and so I plucked up the courage to pay a hammer price of DM 13,000. It turned out that this one line was actually the very first mention of an event in a Western print work that was comparable in terms of its significance with Luther’s Reformation. Purchasing this booklet has been a lucrative deal for me.

My view was further corroborated by the prices that were reached for some items years ago (See *50 Weisse Elefanten*, chapters 38 and 39). In 1502, Vasco da Gama started his second voyage to India. The only printed document of this voyage is a description in German, printed in Nuremberg in 1505 / 1506 in a very small, nearly unknown press. With the exception of the copy sold by us, only one more copy is known. This fully explains the extraordinary hammer price of € 220,000 (estimate € 8,000).

In the same sale, we also sold two contemporary German translations of original reports by Amerigo Vespucci about two of his four voyages to America. They were printed by M. Furter, Basel, in 1505 and J. Grüninger, Strassburg, in 1509, respectively. Although both were largely incomplete, each one nevertheless sold for more than five times their estimate. The final incentive to dedicate the free time of my twilight years once again to the study of this topic culminated in finishing my book *50 Weisse Elefanten*. I have already defined what is meant by a white elephant. I wrote fifty such accounts about such special books, the first one was auctioned off in 1966, the last one in 2017 – hence, they were sold over a period of more than fifty years.

About This Book

On the advice of a friend of mine, I meticulously searched through our catalogue number 40 for price mavericks. I could not have been more surprised at what I found: The total number of 'White Elephants' in this very special catalogue was baffling – there were actually no fewer than 175 (one hundred and seventy-five)!

Literature about explorers accounted for the lion's share of this enormous figure. Manuscripts were not included due to the fact that they are unique copies. The books about the Iberian Peninsula were of less interest to international collectors, dealers and libraries. I therefore decided to devote my time solely to travel literature. Whilst I was browsing through books of this nature, I noticed that most of the 'White Elephants' dated from the period from 1500 to 1700, with Portuguese and Spanish being the languages used by most of their authors, besides Latin.

Among the 100 'White Elephants' of travel literature was a large number of volumes that were in the 'lower price bracket'. They were mainly *Relações*, comparable to German pamphlets of the 16th and 17th centuries breaking news immediately after the respective event occurred. They were valued at approximately DM 300 to 600 and sold at the usual surcharge in many cases. However, they would often attract surcharges of DM 1,500 and even up to DM 5,500. From among these, I picked only those that were of particular interest due to their unusual content, such as the Founding Charter of the short-lived Portuguese East India Trading Company.

Aside from the price mavericks, there was also a wealth of important titles that, in many cases, were sold at almost double their estimated price. These were included in my analysis, as well as other titles in the middle to high price bracket, which were actually sold for less than their estimated price. If the content of a book justified a broad coverage and it was a title that was hard to find on the Central European Market, I included it as well. Another important reason for the choice for my collection was the publication period. It became apparent to me that books dating from the first two centuries of exploration fetched the highest prices (books from before 1500 on this topic are nearly impossible to come by!), which is why books printed during this period are highly sought after and extremely difficult to find. Their contents, for this reason, are fairly unknown and usually require more detailed explanations.

The discovery of the Americas by the Spanish, the names and exploits of Christopher Columbus, Cortes, Pizarro and others are largely known, while hardly anybody knows anything about the exploitation of Africa, South-East and East Asia by the Portuguese. Since most of the books in Brito's collection depict the Portuguese region of influence, I wish to start with a description of the endeavours of the Portuguese before continuing with individual accounts.

It all began with one person: Henry, Prince of Portugal, better known as the 'Navigator' (1394–1460). He was one of the younger sons of King João I. (1358–1433). In an attempt to gain a foothold in Morocco, King João I. conquered Ceuta in 1415, which still belongs to Spain today. However, these ambitions came to an abrupt halt with the defeat and demise of King Sebastião I. (1554–1578) in the battle of Alcácer-Quibir in 1578. Some of the titles covered in this book depict this North-African episode.

Henry the Navigator himself failed to take Tangier in 1437. It was roughly at that time that he systematically commissioned ship captains to explore the West African coast further to the South. By doing this, he acquired the byname 'Navigator', while he never actually took part in any voyage himself. The first captain he commissioned was Gil Eanes (no details of his life known), who was the first to circumnavigate Cape Mogador in 1434 and then continued on further south. He provided evidence that the Atlantic did not become hotter and hotter to end up in a sea of blazing fire the further south one sailed, which up to then had been the general assumption. So, the Portuguese ventured further south until Bartolomeu Diaz (~1450 to 1500) sailed round the Cape of Good Hope in 1487/88. They then followed the Eastern coastline to the North, until Vasco da Gama discovered the sea route from there to India in 1498.

The establishment of the precursor to the 'Casa da India', a kind of colonial ministry bringing together all the activities of the 'Estado da India' under the authority of the Crown, is also attributed to the Navigator. The 'Estado da India' on the other hand, though dependent on Lisbon, was an autonomously acting and administrated control structure under a viceroy. It comprised all Portuguese outposts around the Indian Ocean from Mozambique to Hormuz (or Ormuz) and Goa, and later Malacca.

In 1498, Vasco da Gama landed in Calicut (what is today Kozhikode) and founded the first outposts on the Malabar Coast. Francisco de Almeida (~1450–1510) was the first governor of Estado da India since 1505. He imposed a crushing defeat against a seemingly superior Arabic-Egyptian-Indian

fleet at Diu in 1509. This laid the cornerstone for some one hundred years of Portuguese naval supremacy in the Indian Ocean. In 1510, Da Gama's successor, Afonso de Albuquerque (1453–1515) conquered Goa and made it the administrative seat of Portuguese overseas territories, including its East-African outposts. He initiated a further expansion which, among other things, led to the conquest of the city and fortress of Malacca in 1511, from where the Portuguese controlled the Strait of Malacca. This was and still is the main shipping channel between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, including the route to China and Japan.

The Indonesian Islands, which were taken by the Portuguese, were lost again soon after, with the exception of East Timor. In 1557 the Portuguese acquired a permanent lease from the Chinese Empire for Macao. This important trading post, situated across the Pearl River Delta from Hong Kong, was kept until 1999. It is from there that the Jesuits began their initially successful missions into China and Japan.

Brazil, which for a long time was the most important Portuguese colony, still enjoys very close ties with Portugal, as well as having its own history. In 1500, Pedro Álvares Cabral (1468–1520) led the second Portuguese expedition to India. He failed to leave the West African Equatorial current early enough to benefit from the trade winds further south. He consequently drifted westwards and accidentally landed on the coast of Brazil, where he took possession of the land for the Portuguese Crown. As the land was situated to the east of the dividing line of Tordesillas, it remained part of Portugal, which shortly thereafter began to make use of the land on a grand scale. Its first governor, Tomé de Souza, ran the country independently. Fernão de Noronha (1470–1540) who established a flourishing trade in brazilwood, was highly influential, as were the first Jesuit missionaries. Later it came under the control of the Casa da Índia. An array of significant books discusses the topic of this colony.

I have deliberately sorted the following descriptions into alphabetical order by author. The original imprints of more than 300 letters, bound in 23 units have been added to this. They were written, at regular intervals, by Jesuit missionaries in the years 1549 to 1629. The letters came mostly from Japan and were addressed to the 'General' (so his official title) of their order at his Roman residence.

Alphabetical Catalogue by Authors