

M0009851: An account of poisoned arrows by Richard Hakluyt

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After we reached to the head of the pland, called Assapana, a little to the Westward on the right hand there opened a riuer which came from the North, called Europa, and fel into the great Riuer, and beyond it on the same side, wee ankered for that night, by another pland six miles long, and two miles broade, which they call Ocaywita: From hence in the morning wee landed two Guianians, which wee found in the Towne of Toparimaca, that came with vs, who went to giue notice of our comming to the Lord of that countrey called Putyma, a follower of Topiawari, chiefe Lord of Aromaia, who succeeded Morequito, whom (as you haue heard before) Berreo put to death: but his towne being farre within the land, he came not vnto vs that day, so as we ankered againe that night neere the bankes of another pland, of bignesse much like the other, which they call Putapayma, ouer against which pland, on the maine lande, was a very high mountaine called Oecope: we coueted to anker rather by these plands in the Riuer, then by the maine, because of the Tortugas egges, which our people found on them in great abundance, and also because the ground serued better for vs to cast our nets for fish, the maine bankes being for the most part stonie and high, and the rocks of a blew metalline colour, like vnto the best Steele-ore, which assuredly take it to be: of the same blew stone are also diuers great mountaines, which border this riuer in many places.

The ple of Ocaywita.

The ple of Putapayma.

Steele ore.

The next morning towards nine of the clocke, wee weighed anker, and the bryze increasing, we sailed alwayes West by the riuer, and after a while opening the land on the right side, the countrey appeared to bee champaine, and the bankes thewed very perfect red. I thercofe sent two of the little barges with Captaine Gifford, and with him Captaine Thyn, Captaine Calfield, my cosen Greeneuile, my nephew Iohn Gilbert, Captaine Eynus, Walter Edward Porter, and my cosen Butthead Gorges, with some fewe souldiers, to march ouer the bankes of that red land, and to discouer what maner of countrey it was on the other side, who at their returne found it all a plaine leuell, as farre as they went or could discerne, from the highest tree they could get vpon: And my old Pilot, a man of great trauell, brother to the Casique Toparimica tolde mee, that those were called the plaines of the Sayma, and that the same leuell reached to Cumaná, and Caracas in the West Indies, which are a hundred and twentie leagues to the North, and that there inhabited foure principall nations. The first were the Sayma, the next Assawai, the thirde and greatest the Wikiri, by whom Pedro Hernandez de Serpa before mentioned was ouerthrowen, as hee passed with three hundred horse from Cumaná towards Orenoque, in his enterprize of Guiana: the fourth are called Aroras, and are as blacke as Negros, but haue smooth haire, and these are very valiant, or rather desperate people, and haue the most strong popson on their arrowes, and most dangerous of all nations, of which popson I will speake somewhat being a digression not vnecessary.

The plaines of Sayma stretch- ing to Cumaná, and the Caracas.

Aroras a blacke people being breuious arrowes.

There was nothing whereof I was more curious, then to finde out the true remedies of these popsoned arrowes: for besides the mortallitie of the wound they make, the partie shorte indureth the most insufferable torment in the world, and abiderth a most vgly and lamentable death, sometimes dyinge starke mad, sometimes their bowels breaking out of their bellies: which are presently discoloured as blacke as pitch, and so vnfauoury, as no man can endure to cure, or to attend them. And it is more strange to know, that in all this time there was neuer Spaniard either by gift or torment that could attaine to the true knowledge of the cure, although they haue martyred and put to inuented torture I know not how many of them. But euery one of these Indians know it not, no not one among thousands, but their soothsayers and priestes, who doe conceale it, and onely teach it but from the father to the sonne.

Those medicines which are vulgar, and serue for the ordinary popson, are made of the iuice of a roote called Tupara: the same also quencherth marueilously the heate of burning featers, and healeth inward wounds, and broken veines, that bleed within the body. But I was more beholding to the Guianians then any other: for Anthonio de Berreo tolde mee that hee could neuer attaine to the knowledge thereof, and yet they taught mee the best way of healing as well thereof, as of all other popsons. Some of the Spaniards haue bene cured in ordinary wounds, of the common popsoned arrowes with the iuice of garlike: but this is a generall rule for all men that shall hereafter trauele the Indies where poisoned arrowes are vsed, that they must abstaine from drinke, for if they take any licour into their body, as they shall bee marueilously prouoked thereunto by drought, I say, if they drinke before the wound bee dyessed, or soone vpon it, there is no way with them but present death.

The iuice of garlike good against ordi- nary popson, Speedy dy- king to be a- uoided of such as are wound- ed with pop- soned arrowes.

And so I will returne againe to our journey which for this thirde day we finished, and cast anker againe neere the continent or the left hand betweene two mountaines, the one called Aroami, and the other Aio: I made no stay here but till midnight, for I feared hourly least any rafne should