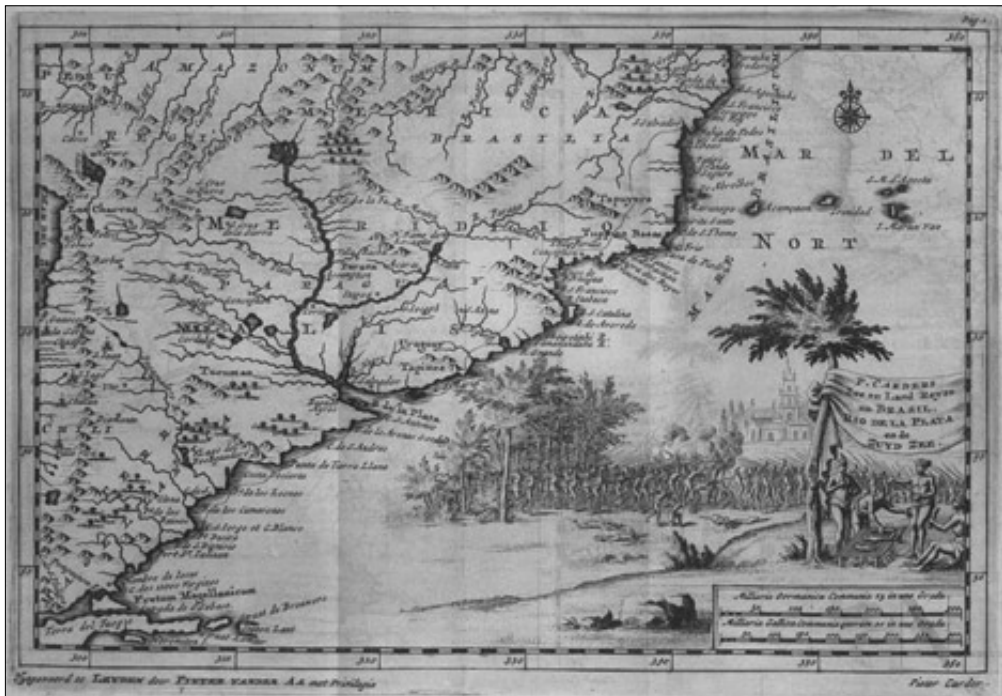


PETER CARDER'S STRANGE ADVENTURES REVEALED

By Amilcar D'Avila de Mello

Peter Carder, one of Francis Drake's sailors during his famous voyage around the world (1577–80), was born in Saint Verian, Cornwall. Carder's travel account containing his vicissitudes in South America was published in *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes* (London, 1625), and has apparently been accepted at face value ever since. The purpose of this article is to conduct a brief analysis of major inconsistencies and contradictions found in his narrative, drawing on supplemental factual and ethnographic data. New light will be cast on this Elizabethan seaman who seems to have exaggerated his story to make it more heroic. There is, however, another possibility: Carder's narrative may have been 'edited' by Samuel Purchas to meet the expectations of his adventure-hungry readership.¹ (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1. Peter Carder's voyage from the River Plate to Bahia, Brazil, as depicted by Dutch cartographer Pieter van der Aa (1659–1733). This map, entitled '*P. Carders Zee en Land Reyse na Brasil, Rio de La Plata en de Zuyd Zee*', is part of *De Wijd-Beroemde Voyagien na Oost-en West-Indiën, Mitsgaders andere Gedeeltens des Werelds, Gedaan door de Engelson* (Leyden, 1706).



FRANCIS DRAKE'S CIRCUMNAVIGATION

Leading the first navigation around the world after Magellan's, Francis Drake sailed from Plymouth on 15 November 1577. Five vessels comprised Drake's squadron: the *Pelican*, his own ship, renamed *Golden Hind* on the voyage; the *Elizabeth*, commanded by John Winter; and three smaller vessels, the *Marigold*, *Swan* and *Benedict*. In addition, three knocked-down pinnaces were carried aboard.

After reaching Cape Verde Islands, Drake's ships sailed across the Atlantic nonstop to southern Brazil (lat. 31° 30' S), but a storm and the absence of a safe haven prevented them from dropping anchor there. The squadron then sailed to the River Plate, where the ships watered and tarried for two weeks before heading south. In Port St. Julian, before traversing the Straits of Magellan, Drake accused Captain Thomas Doughty, one of his high-ranking officers, of treachery and incitement to mutiny. He was put on trial, found guilty and beheaded. Coincidentally, 58 years before, in that very same place, Magellan had quenched a conspiracy and executed Quesada and Mendoza, the mutineers' leaders.

On 20 August 1578 the *Golden Hind*, the *Elizabeth* and the *Marigold* set out toward the Pacific Ocean; they passed through the Straits in 16 days, a record that would last many years. Violent storms drove the three ships to 55° latitude where, most likely, no European had ever been. Describing this tough situation, Francis Fletcher, preacher and chronicler of the expedition, suggests that a more suitable name be given to the Pacific: Mare Furiosum.² Unrelenting, the storm caused the *Marigold* to sink with all hands.

Fletcher clearly states that the *Golden Hind* and the *Elizabeth* were sailing back North in the Pacific when, at latitude 51°, the *latter* became separated from Drake, renegotiated the Straits, and returned to England.³ Unable to locate her, Drake shaped his course to loot the Chilean and Peruvian coasts, which had been exclusively in Spanish hands for two generations. After engaging in a skirmish with the natives of Mocha Island, Chile, Drake found the Spaniards so unprepared and defenceless that the '*Golden Hind* played wolf among sheep', as US Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison described this foray.⁴

After sailing as far north as Vancouver and crossing the Pacific, Drake loaded the *Golden Hind* with spices in the Moluccas. Only this ship made the complete voyage, returning with an immense booty on 26 September 1580.

PETER CARDER'S ACCOUNT, AS PUBLISHED BY SAMUEL PURCHAS

Carder wrote that on 8 September 1578, right after Drake's ships had sailed through the Straits of Magellan and into the Pacific Ocean, he and seven other shipmates – one of whom a Dutch trumpeter who was off-duty – were sent in a five-tonne open pinnace to search for the *Elizabeth*, but she was nowhere to be found. The search party also got lost in one of the world's most unpredictable, desolate and stormiest regions. For fifteen days they tried to reunite with Drake, but to no avail.

Without a compass, or chart, and with the 'only benefit of eight oars', Peter Carder and his shipmates survived on the oysters, mussels, crabs, roots and penguins found in that unforgiving region. Back in the Atlantic and convinced that their salvation was northwards, they rowed coastwise and finally pitched camp in the River Plate, on an island 'full of seals', three miles off the mainland. The eight men barbecued and ate many pups of South American fur seals (*Arctocephalus australis*). The island,

Uruguay's Isla de Lobos, holds a huge colony of these animals and is located in front of present-day Punta del Este.

The rest of Peter Carder's eventful voyage, according to Purchas, can be summarized as follows. On the mainland, while foraging in a small river for food, six men were ambushed by about 70 native warriors who shot a volley of arrows at them. Carder calls these Indians *Tapines* (*tupis*). Four sailors were captured and never seen again. Although badly injured, the other two managed to return to the boat, where they found Carder and William Pitcher. They all fled and took refuge in an islet where the two men who had escaped the skirmish soon died. Without their boat – destroyed by the islet's ragged rocks – Carder and Pitcher survived for two months, feeding on wild fruit, crabs and a type of sand 'eel'. With practically no fresh water available, they were forced to drink their own urine until it turned red.

In despair, both men finally resorted to a classic solution often stereotypically depicted: with a large plank from another wreck and the remains of their own boat, they built a makeshift raft. Three days and two nights later, they arrived on the mainland where fresh water was soon found. Disoriented, desperately craving water, Pitcher ignored his friend's advice and 'overdrank himself'. Half an hour later, he was dead. With his bare hands, the sorrowful Peter Carder buried his 'only comfort and companion' in the sand.

Alone, wielding a sword and a shield, he began walking along the coast toward Brazil. A short distance away he had a friendly encounter with a party of 30 bowmen and eight women, whom he calls *Tupan Basse* (*tupinambás*). Carder was taken to their village of four long houses laid out in a square, and inhabited by 4,000 people. (Fig. 2)

Fig. 2. Tupinambá indians. Wood carving from Hans Staden's *Wahrhaftig' Historia vnd beschreibung eyner Landschafft der Wilden Nacketen Grimmigen Menschfresser Leuthen in der Newen welt. America...* (Marburg, 1557)



This European is one of the few explorers who, in addition to describing his (mis)adventures in the New World, also boasts of his linguistic skills, acquired during his supposed captivity of six months among the cannibals. The Anglo-Saxon practicality in presenting information is wittily at play when Carder transforms the natives' staple *aipim* (manioc, cassava) into an acronym of sorts: I.P.

Peter Carder claims to have taken part in an incursion against the enemies of the village and makes no mistake in calling them *Tapwees* (*tapuias*), the Tupi-Guarani word for enemy. The story also contains gore, an element appreciated by awe-stricken readers. Once, a Portuguese slave-hunting expedition with black slaves and Indians – whom Carder calls 'Brazilians' – tried to sneak up on them, but their presence was detected. Two Portuguese and a few Negroes were caught, killed, roasted and devoured.

Right after this failed raid, Carder asked the native 'King' Caiou to set him free. His idea was to reach a port in Brazil, from where he hoped to sail home on board an English or French ship. The Indian chief offered four warriors to help Carder in this journey. About ten weeks later he arrived in Salvador, Bahia de Todos os Santos (All Saints' Bay), then the capital of Brazil.

A DIFFERENT STORY TAKES SHAPE

How did Carder miraculously appear in Salvador, more than 1,900 nautical miles (3,500km) away? What is the explanation for the 'leap' he took over the havens of Santa Catarina, Paraná, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo? Is it not strange that someone paddling a frail canoe would omit from his narrative these central landmarks in sixteenth-century coastwise navigation so often described by other visitors?

Part of the answer to these questions is found in the account of Edward Cliffe, who sailed on board the *Elizabeth*, the self-same ship that Carder said he had been dispatched to search for. Cliffe wrote that after going astray and getting lost, Captain John Winter's *Elizabeth* sailed back into the Atlantic. In the River Plate, her crew stayed fifteen days on Seal Island, slaughtering these animals for their meat and setting up a pinnacle. On 1 January 1579 they set out for England. Cliffe then adds the most valuable piece of the puzzle: in São Vicente, Brazil, close to the Tropic of Capricorn, on 20 January, 'by reason of foul weather we lost our pinnacle, and 8 men in her, and never saw them since'.⁵ Evidently, he refers here to Peter Carder's group. No wonder they reached Bahia so quickly. (Fig. 3)

The mystery is unravelled a little bit more in the *Relación y derrotero* submitted by Captain Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa to King Phillip II in 1580. This brave and highly skilled mariner from Galicia reported that on 19 July of that year, when his ship *Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza* was moored in Angra, Terceira Island, Azores, and about to complete the last leg of the famous record voyage from Peru to Spain by way of the Straits of Magellan, two Portuguese ships dropped anchor there. Coming from Brazil, their captains told Pedro Sarmiento that in November, five Portuguese and 15 natives who had left the Island of Tinharé, Bahia, stumbled upon ten Englishmen who were drying the sails of their boat in the mouth of the River das Contas.⁶ (Fig. 4)

Disarmed, two of the seven foreigners on land were caught. Five others were injured by the assailants' arrows, but made it to the boat that was guarded by three sailors. The Portuguese sighted them again in Quiepe Island, Camamu Bay, where the five men who had been seriously wounded at the River das Contas were left to

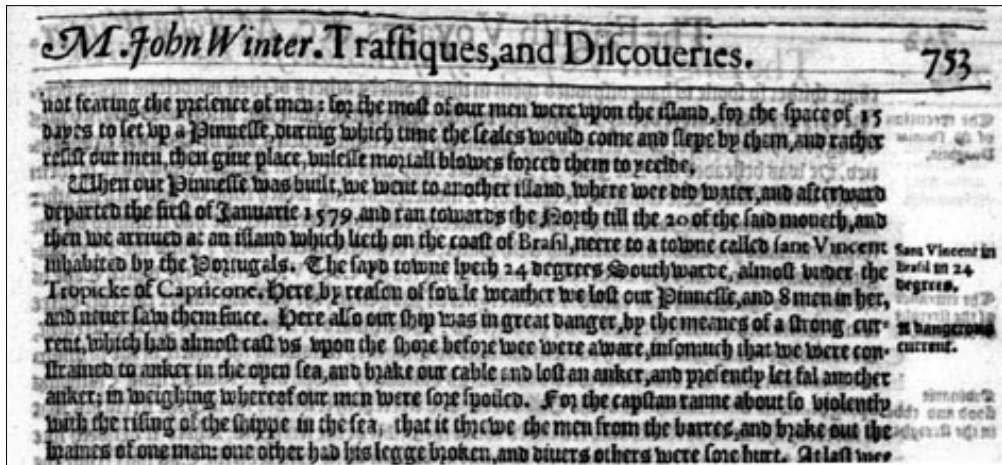


Fig. 3. Detail of Edward Cliffe's travel account revealing a major flaw in Carder's narrative. Published in R. Hakluyt, *The principal navigations, voyages, traffiques and discoveries...*, (London, 1600), vol. 3, 753.



Fig. 4. While drying the sails of their boat, Carder's shipmates were attacked by a party of Portuguese and Tupi in the mouth of rio das Contas, near present-day Itacaré, Bahia. Digital rendering by the author.

die. The survivors managed to escape, but a ship coming from Ilhéus later found them stranded on a beach, three or four leagues to the north. When captured, these men – who had lost their boat and were surviving precariously – confessed that they belonged to an English fleet that had crossed the Straits of Magellan into the Pacific, and then turned back to the Atlantic. The prisoners also declared that they had been lucky to be on land when a sudden storm caused their flagship to run aground. After the disaster, they sailed to Porto Seguro and from there to River das Contas, where they were surprised and attacked as described above. All evidence indicates that Carder was the ‘30-year-old, very skilful lad and great mathematician’ who, together with other mates, had been captured on the coast of Bahia, as the Portuguese captains told Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa in the Azores.⁷

The stopover on Seal Island to slaughter and feed on these animals, the attack and arrow wounds to English sailors at the mouth of a river, the retreat to a small island where some of these men died, the loss of their boat, and their being stranded on the beach are just a few of the remarkable similarities between these narratives. The parallel is too uncanny to be a coincidence. One detail mentioned by the prisoners in the Bahia incident is, however, the most revealing: they had sailed back into the Atlantic Ocean, right after entering the Pacific – this feat had only been achieved by the *Elizabeth*.

There is no doubt that Peter Carder was in the River Plate, but with the *Elizabeth*. His descriptions of the Isla de Lobos, of the region’s armadillos, and of ‘ostriches as high as a man’ (the flightless emus of the Pampas) attest to that. Perhaps the most problematic point of his narrative is that he calls the group of natives with whom he claims to have lived in the Uruguayan coast *Tapines* and *Tuppan Basse* – *tupis* and *tupinambás*. It is well known and undisputed among scholars that it was the Charrua and Minuano who roamed that swathe of coastal land, ethnic groups altogether different from those of Tupian stock. The southernmost point reached by the Tupi was Cananéia, in southeastern Brazil, except when they raided the Carijó-Guarani of Santa Catarina.⁸

Another detail of Carder’s narrative jeopardizes its veracity: the failed raid to the ‘Tupinambá’ village, as already described. He says that the slave-hunters were trying:

to see whether they could surprise any of our Savages, and to harken what was become of me, for that they had heard by this time that some of Sir Francis Drake’s company were cast ashore amongst the Savage people.⁹

How could these raiders know about Peter Carder, let alone of Francis Drake’s fleet, if it had sailed nonstop from Africa to the River Plate without contacting any Christians on South America’s Atlantic coast?

In *Purchas His Pilgrimes* we read that once in Bahia, some four or five miles before arriving in Salvador, Peter Carder identified himself as an Englishman and surrendered to a Miguel Jonás. This is probably the man who found Carder stranded on the beach. Miguel Jonás then took him to the house of Antonio de Paiva, who spoke good English and served as his interpreter when the authorities interrogated him. According to Captain Sarmiento de Gamboa, the young man arrested in Bahia – presumably, or most certainly, Carder – told the Portuguese that his fleet had arrived:

in an island of the land of the Carijó, that we call *caribes* [cannibals], where a big storm rose, causing nine ships to set sail. The flagship, unable to weigh anchor as fast as needed, ran aground.¹⁰

According to this young mariner, the wrecked 900-tonne galleon carried, in addition to her crew, 400 soldiers and 100 colonists. Richard Hakluyt, the famous sixteenth-century English geographer and editor of explorers' narratives, does not mention an armada of ten ships touching this latitude in 1579, let alone the loss of its flagship, nor does N.A.M. Rodger in his book *The Safeguard of the Sea*.¹¹ This story was clearly made up by the prisoner to justify his presence in Brazil, then under Spanish rule. Being a crew member of a powerful armada could ensure him more lenient treatment by the Portuguese, who would certainly fear the return of these ships.

After spending some time in jail, Peter Carder was released to live under Antonio de Paiva's custody while the Governor awaited word from Portugal on how to proceed with the case. For many years Carder worked in the fields with black slaves and Indians, until his seafaring skills were put at the service of coastwise trade. He piloted ships to Ilhéus, Porto Seguro, Espírito Santo, Rio de Janeiro and São Vicente.

Whilst on a fishing expedition, Carder fled to Pernambuco, where he embarked on a ship heading for Europe. Near Pico Island, in the Azores, his ship and its four consorts were caught by Captains Raymond and George, Drake's squadron. Bad weather drove them to Baltimore, Ireland, from where they finally sailed to Chichester, England. It was the end of November 1586, nine years and fourteen days after Carder's departure from home with the now famous and extremely wealthy Sir Francis Drake.

Lord Charles Howard, High Admiral of England, heard about Peter Carder's strange adventures and took him to Whitehall Palace. There he had the opportunity to hold a long conversation with Queen Elizabeth, who bestowed 22 angels upon him.¹² His narrative ends like this:

With many gracious words I was dismissed; humbly thanking the Almighty for my miraculous preservation, and safe return into my native Country.

Peter Carder's story as published by Purchas is fraught with inconsistencies. By understating the advantages and, conversely, overstating the adversities faced, the protagonist-narrator (or his editor) spun a yarn that either omitted or added facts to the story. His party was never attacked in the River Plate, nor was he ever held captive there. The weaving of such episodes into his account was a sensationalistic piece that he or Purchas used to impress readers. Gory adventures in the New World – particularly among cannibals – were the essence of a riveting bestseller, like the one written by Hans Staden, the German who was almost devoured by the Tupinambá in the 1550s.¹³ Peter Carder's shrewd observations of a Tupi village and the language spoken by its inhabitants were certainly made when he lived in Bahia as a prisoner of the Portuguese – strange adventures, indeed.

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I am grateful for the comments and suggestions of anonymous referees.

1 Samuel Purchas, great editor of travel accounts and seafaring adventures, was born in Thaxted, Essex, c.1577 and died in London in 1626. He took Richard Hakluyt's work one step further by publishing *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes, contayning a History of*

the World, in Sea Voyages, and Lande Travells by Englishmen and others, 4 vols (London, 1625). Educated at St John's College, Cambridge, Purchas was vicar of Eastwood from 1604 to 1614. Prior to the publication of his *Pilgrimes*, he had written *Purchas His Pilgrimage, or Relations of the World and the Religions observed in all ages and places discovered from the Creation unto*

this Present (London, 1613), with new editions in 1614, 1617 and 1626. He had also written *Purchas his Pilgrim; Microcosmus, or the Historie of Man* (London, 1619).

2 F. Fletcher, *The world encompassed by Sir Francis Drake, being his next voyage to that to Nombre de Dios formerly imprinted; carefully but collected out of the notes of Master Francis Fletcher preacher in this employment, and divers others his followers in the same* (London, 1628), 39.

3 *Ibid*, 40–1.

4 S.E. Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The northern voyages 1492–1616* (New York, 1974), 650.

5 E. Cliffe, *The voyage of M. Iohn Winter into the South sea by the Streight of Magellan, in consort with M. Francis Drake, begun in the yeere 1577. By which Streight also he returned safely into Engrand the second of Iune 1579, contrary to the false reports of the Spaniards which gaue out, that the said pasage was not repassable: Written by Edward Cliffe, Mariner.* In R. Hakluyt, ed., *The principal navigations, voyages, traffiques and discoveries of the English Nation* (London, 1600), vol. III, 753.

6 P. Sarmiento de Gamboa, *Viajes al Estrecho de Magallanes* (Madrid, 1988), 183.

7 *Ibid*, 184 (translation of quotation author's).

8 A.D. de Mello, *Expedições e Crônicas das Origens: Santa Catarina na Era dos Descobrimentos Geográficos (1501–1658)*, (Florianópolis,

2005), vol. I, 349.

9 P. Carder, *The relation of Peter Carder of Saint Verian...* In Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 1189.

10 Sarmiento de Gamboa, *Viajes*, 184 (translation of excerpt author's).

11 N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A naval history of Great Britain* (London, 1997), vol I, 660–1649. Also, emails exchanged with Prof. Rodger in August 2003.

12 The angel was an English gold coin issued from 1470 to 1634, varying in value from 6s 8d to 10s and bearing on its obverse a figure of the archangel Michael killing a dragon; see *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* (1999).

13 H. Staden, *Wahrhaftig' Historia vnd beschreibung eyner Landschafft der Wilden Nacketen Grimmigen Menschfresser Leuthen in der Newen welt America...* (True story and description of the naked ferocious and savage people of the New World, America...) (Marburg, 1557).

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