

JOURNAL OF THE
TRAVELS AND LABOURS
OF FATHER SAMUEL
FRITZ IN THE RIVER
OF THE AMAZONS
BETWEEN
1686 AND 1723

George Edmundson



THE HAKLUYT SOCIETY

Journal of the Travels and
Labours of Father Samuel Fritz
in the River of the Amazons
between 1686 and 1723

Edited by
THE REV. DR. GEORGE EDMUNDSON

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and Labours of Father Samuel Fritz
in the River of the Amazons between
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TRANSLATED FROM THE EVORA MS AND EDITED
BY THE
REV. DR GEORGE EDMUNDSON

WITH TWO MAPS

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INTRODUCTION



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INTRODUCTION

I. THE "SAMUEL FRITZ" MS AT EVORA IN PORTUGAL: ITS CONTENTS AND ITS WRITER

I. THE FINDING OF THE DOCUMENT

IN the years 1901 and 1902, being employed by H.M. Government to carry out researches in the Portuguese Colonial and other Archives for material bearing upon the Boundary Arbitration¹ between Great Britain and Brazil regarding the delineation of the southern frontier of British Guiana, one of the documents for which I was seeking was the long-lost² Journal of the famous Jesuit missionary, Samuel Fritz, who spent 37 years of his life in converting and civilizing the Indian tribes of the Upper Amazon. In 1901 my efforts to find the Journal were fruitless, but coming across references to MSS in the Biblioteca Publica at Evora in connection with Jesuit missionary enterprise in the Upper Amazon in the very period of Samuel Fritz's activities, I obtained permission on my second visit to Portugal in 1902 to investigate the contents of these documents.

Evora is the primatial see of Portugal; and the Biblioteca Publica occupies an annexe of the Archiepiscopal Palace; and I obtained the most courteous assistance of the Librarian, being allowed to work in hours when the building was closed to the public. My search was successful. The last MS in Codex CXV (1-15) was a document of 214 pages entitled

¹ The Brazilian Government refused to accept the decision of the Arbitration Court at Paris (June, 1899) in the Venezuelan Boundary Arbitration, which assigned the so-called "Schomburgk line" as the demarcation of the southern boundary of British Guiana. The dispute, by a treaty dated April, 1901, was therefore referred to the Arbitration of the King of Italy. The King gave his decision June, 1904.

² See letter of Sir Clements Markham to the writer (Nov. 21, 1904) printed in the Appendix.

“Mission de los Ômaguas, Jurimaguas, Aysuares, Ibanomas, y otras Naciones desde Napo hasta el Rio Negro.” It was written, as its heading implies, not like the other documents in Portuguese, but in Spanish, and it contained a full narrative of the life and labours of Samuel Fritz. In answer to a letter of enquiry the Librarian¹ informed me that the documents contained in Cod. cxv (1-15) formerly belonged to the Jesuit College at Pará, but that nothing was known of the name of the author of “The Mission of the Omaguas, etc.” The author in fact never reveals his name, but as will be shown by evidence from the document itself, he was a contemporary of Father Fritz, was personally acquainted with him and was intimate with several of Fritz’s missionary companions, and himself was at one time serving in one of the mission stations of the Upper Amazon. The fact that Fritz’s Journal and letters, and the letters and notes of the other Jesuit missionaries, who worked in the Upper Amazon under and with Fritz, were accessible to and well known to the writer, is a clear indication that he (the writer) was attached to and possibly held high office in the Jesuit Collège at Quito². The document probably fell into the hands of the Portuguese during one of their raids upon the Spanish mission stations, which Samuel Fritz had planted; which raids ultimately led to their destruction and their absorption in the Portuguese dominion.

The presence of this set of documents in the Archiepiscopal Library at Evora can be easily accounted for. In the year 1759, when that greatest of Portuguese statesmen, the Marquis de Pombal, was at the height of his power, a Royal Decree expelled the Jesuits from all the Portuguese dominions. The Jesuit missionaries, who were doing excellent work on the Amazon, were deported in circumstances of great cruelty. The colleges at Pará and elsewhere were suppressed and their

¹ The letter of the Librarian—Senhor Antonio Joaquim Lopez da Silva, junior—is dated Feb. 22, 1903. His words are: *Nada posso dizer—lhe com respeito do auctor do documento intitulado “Mission de los Ômaguas, etc.” por isso que não consta do documento algum.*

² Possibly he may have held the office of Father Visitor.

possessions confiscated and carried off to Portugal, including their archives.

2. THE CONTENTS OF THE EVORA MS AND ITS SOURCES

The writer of this MS, as will be seen from his own statements, has embodied in his narrative a very large portion of Samuel Fritz's Journals and has supplemented them by the use of other and most valuable material, *i.e.* official letters written by Father Fritz himself; information derived from the letters of, and from notes made by, his companions; and from personal intercourse with them. It is divided into nine sections, each with its distinctive heading.

§ 1. PACIFICATION AND CUSTOMS OF THE OMAGUAS

The early part of this section is introductory, and gives a most interesting description derived from personal and first-hand sources of the customs, the mode of life and the habitations of the Omaguas. The writer then relates how in 1681 the headmen of this tribe, at the invitation of certain Christianized Indians of the Cocama tribe, paid a visit to the Spanish mission station, Pueblo de la Laguna, higher up the river; with the result that they prayed Father Herrero, the Jesuit Superior at that place, to send to them a Father to instruct them. He undertook to grant their request, but was unable to do so until 1686. It was in that year that Samuel Fritz arrived from Spain at the Jesuit College of Quito, and was sent by his Superiors to the Marañon to be the missionary of the Omaguas. Here follows a brief but most vivid description of the wonderful results of the first three years of Father Samuel's activities and ceaseless journeyings. The Omaguas received him in the most friendly manner, and going from island to island preaching, teaching, and baptizing, he met with extraordinary success in converting these people to the Christian faith. On the island, where he most frequently resided, he established his principal mission-settlement, and built there a church dedicated to San Joaquim, his patron saint.

Not content with so great an achievement, Father Samuel

proceeded to extend the sphere of his labours to a tribe, the Jurimaguas, who lived lower down the river. These people had already heard many reports concerning the teaching of the Father, and received him as being something more than a mortal man. He had here to combat among other heathen superstitions the firm belief of the Jurimaguas in the visits of an evil demon, who cruelly oppressed them; but once more the fervour and the deep faith of the missionary overcame all obstacles, and the Indians came in crowds to listen to his teaching and to be baptized. His personality seems to have exercised an almost mysterious power over these barbarians; and the Aysuares and Ybanomas, who lived still nearer to the mouth of the Rio Negro, expressed a wish that he should visit them. But no man, single-handed, could possibly deal with so extended a mission-field, and, despite his appeals to Quito, he found that he could get no help. But consumed by burning zeal, "without pause by day or night," he voyaged up and down the great river, trying to keep in touch with all his converts and catechumens, until at last in the principal village of the Jurimaguas he was stricken with a terrible illness. After prolonged sufferings the Father, feeling himself growing daily worse, determined to descend the river and to seek medical remedies in the city of Gran Pará.

The narrative up to this point is due to the writer of the MS, using the sources at his disposal. He now proceeds to make an interesting statement in his own person, as follows:

For the sake of the learned I will copy here to the letter the Journal of the said descent to Pará and return from Pará to the Pueblo de la Laguna, the head-place of the missionaries of the Maynas, just as the Father himself left it written; who speaking in his annotations to the Map that he drew on this occasion (and that Father Juan de Narvaes afterwards in a reduced form published in the year 1707¹) said thus:

For better knowledge and general information concerning this great river Marañon or Amazon, I have made this geographical

¹ This is a statement of much interest. This map of 1707 was found by me on my visit to the Evora Library. Both maps, that of 1691 and that of 1707, were published by H.M. Government in the volume of maps accompanying the British case in the Boundary Arbitration, 1901-4.

map with no little toil and exertion, having navigated it in the greater part of its course as far as it is navigable. Although up to now so many maps have appeared, without prejudice to any one, I say that no one of them has been drawn with the proper survey of levels, since they neither saw nor took the levels of this great River, or they extracted them from authors, whose writings left them confused. With this new exploration of the whole of this river Amazon, that I have made and brought to light, I do not appraise my work for the carrying out of the duties of my undertaking, when one sees other greater undertakings of human diligence in this same enterprize either disappointed or hindered by fate, so that no one up till now has been able to accomplish his designs, unless I proclaim that, as a work wholly under the guidance of the Divine Providence, it was his pleasure to prostrate me with mortal attacks of illness the better to make use of me, as one of his chief instruments.

§ 2. JOURNAL OF THE DESCENT OF FATHER SAMUEL FRITZ, MISSIONARY OF THE CROWN OF CASTILE IN THE RIVER MARAÑÓN, FROM S. JOAQUIM OF THE OMAGUAS TO THE CITY OF GRAN PARÁ, IN THE YEAR 1689, AND RETURN OF THE SAID FATHER FROM THE SAME CITY TO THE PUEBLO DE LA LAGUNA, THE HEAD CENTRE OF THE MISSION OF THE MAYNAS, IN THE YEAR 1691

Father Samuel begins by stating that he left San Joaquin at the end of January, it being the time of rising flood; and in February he signalized his arrival at the village of the Jurimaguas by the building of a church dedicated to *Nuestra Señora de las Niebes*. This year the annual flood rose to such an extraordinary height that it submerged the whole village. Here while occupying a shelter placed upon a roof the Father was attacked by grievous sickness—fever, dropsy and other complaints. In this shelter “only a handbreadth” above the rushing flood of water he remained for three months. Sleepless from pain and from the gruntings of alligators roving round, and with his small supplies of food half consumed by swarms of rats, the marvel is that the sick man survived.

The Journal here contains interesting particulars of the manners and gross superstitions of the Jurimaguas, and of the acquaintance that the Father made with Indians of other tribes—Ayuaires, Ybanomas and Manaves.

As the waters began to fall, hearing from certain Ybanomas that some Portuguese from Pará were searching for sarsaparilla some eight days lower down, Fritz determined to go down and ask these Portuguese to allow him to accompany them to Pará for medical aid. He left the Jurimagua village on July 3rd. Convoyed by friendly Indians, he found a kindly welcome from all the tribes that he passed on his way downstream. He did not meet any Portuguese, however, until he had reached on July 30th the mission-station of Urubú, some distance below the mouth of the Rio Negro. The missionary, Father Theodosio Vegas, a Mercenarian, gave him the kindest reception. Here he remained for a fortnight; but despite the care and attention bestowed upon him his illness increased, until he was so weak that he could not walk. The chief officer therefore of a Portuguese troop, which had arrived at Urubú on August 1st, determined to send the sick man to Pará in one of his canoes. His journey, which is fully described, was a long one, as he did not reach Gran Pará till September 11th—"more dead than alive." He was taken to the Jesuit College, where the Rector, Father Orlandini, lavished upon him every kindness and care, even personally serving him, as an infirmary attendant. Here Fritz stayed for two months. At the end of the two months Father Samuel was already on the way to convalescence; only to find that by the orders of the Governor and his Council, who regarded him as a spy, he was to be kept a prisoner at the college and not allowed to return to his mission, until the matter had been referred to the King at Lisbon. Here Fritz was kept in ward for 18 months, as he writes, "to the bitter affliction of my heart for the abandonment, in which meanwhile my neophytes remained." The cause of his detention, he explains, lay in the rival claims of the Spaniards and Portuguese as to the position of the boundary mark between their respective possessions set up by Pedro Teixeira in 1639, in his famous voyage from Pará to Quito and back¹.

¹ This question of the position of Pedro Teixeira's Act of Possession occurs many times in Samuel Fritz's Journals and Letters. It is discussed at length in the following section of the Introduction.

At last a letter arrived from Lisbon censuring the action of Governor Albuquerque for detaining the sick missionary, and ordering that he should at once be sent back at the expense of the Royal Treasury. Three more months passed before the preparations for the upstream voyage were completed; but on the 6th of July, 1691, Fritz set out from Pará in charge of an officer and six soldiers with a number of Indian rowers and servants. Day by day the Journal records the stages of this voyage. On arriving on September 2nd at the mouth of the Urubú the Father had again a most kindly welcome from the Mercenarian missionary at this place, Fr. Theodosio Vegas. Here evidence was brought to him of the extraordinary repute he had obtained among the natives. His imprisonment at Pará they held to have been the cause of a terrible earthquake that had recently been very destructive; and they were terrified, and believed that they would all perish if he were not released. All sorts of reports were current as to his wonder-working powers; and Father Vegas had much difficulty in persuading them that he was only a mortal man.

Continuing his voyage, the terrible effects of the earthquake were plainly visible and are graphically described in the Journal. At the mouth of the Rio Negro the Taromas¹, a native tribe on the north bank, besought Fritz to remain with them and to be their Father. During the whole of September the journey lay through a long stretch of the river without meeting any inhabitants. The villages that they passed were burnt and deserted; the people having fled to the forests through fear of the Portuguese slave-raiders. It was not until they reached the mouth of the Jupura that they found several of the villages of the Ybanomas and of the Aysuares tribes, with which Fritz had already made acquaintance, still inhabited, though even here some had fled at the

¹ A Portuguese mission was established a little later by the barefooted Carmelites among the Taromas; and a flourishing mission-settlement for a time existed. Later these people suffered at the hands of the slave-raiding troops and fled northwards to the sources of the Essequibo, where the remnants of the Taromas still dwell in British territory. This first Portuguese mission-settlement on the Rio Negro lay almost opposite the modern town of Manãos.

news that a Portuguese troop was coming up the river. On October 13th the Father was grieved to find that the mission station of the Jurimaguas, which he had founded and named *Nuestra Señora de las Niebes*, was deserted; and the church burnt to the ground. He thereupon, now that he was back in his own mission district, begged the Portuguese captain, Antonio Miranda, to return to Pará. Miranda however insisted that he had the orders of the Governor to conduct him as far as the first settlement of the Omaguas. On October 18th they arrived at the lowest Omagua village, only to find it abandoned. Pressed by Father Samuel the Portuguese at length consented to start on their homeward course, but not before the captain confessed that he had secret instructions from the Governor to take possession of all those lands for the Crown of Portugal. This statement and the claims put forward met once more with a strong protest from the missionary, but left him anxious and perturbed as to the future of these poor Indians, for whose conversion and welfare he had suffered so much. After returning to *Nuestra Señora de las Niebes*, he spent the month of October in gathering together his scattered Jurimagua converts. On November 3rd he started upstream to visit the Omaguas; and voyaging day by day without a pause, such was the distance he had to cover, that his mission station and church of San Joaquim was not reached until December 22nd. Here after so long an absence he was greeted with much rejoicing, and remained amongst his Omaguas until the beginning of February. It was now his duty to proceed to La Laguna to make his report to his Superior at this head mission-station. This journey occupied 25 days; and he there found that he had been regarded as dead and that supplications had been made for the repose of his soul.

Here follows an important passage from the author of the MS concerning the Journal of Samuel Fritz and the sources from which he compiled this narrative:

The Journal of Father Samuel touching his descent to Gran Pará and return to the Settlement of La Laguna ends at this point; this I have copied to the letter, adding only some clauses

concerning the dispute that he had with the Portuguese extracted from a letter the said Father wrote to his Superiors on this subject. Onwards from here, since his Journals are exceedingly prolix, and with some interruptions through certain leaves having disappeared, I will pursue the thread of my narrative, extracting from the said Journals whatever would appear to me most worthy of public remembrance, and supplying what is missing with notices that I have found in letters of other missionaries, contemporaries of the Father.

§ 3. FATHER SAMUEL PASSES FROM THE MARAÑON TO THE COURT OF LIMA, AND FROM THERE RETURNS ONCE MORE TO HIS MISSION OF THE OMAGUAS¹

Father Samuel on his arrival at La Laguna was anxious to bring the question of the Portuguese encroachments before the *Real Audiencia* at Quito, but the Governor of Maynas happening to visit La Laguna thought it more advisable that such a serious matter should be brought before the Viceroy at Lima. It was accordingly decided that the Father should journey thither. It was a long, rough and dangerous journey, the details of which, our author tells us, he did not find in Fritz's Journals. The Father arrived at Lima on July 2nd, and at once directed his steps to the Jesuit Church of St Paul, where the whole community was assembled. In that community our author was almost certainly present, for the description of Father Samuel's personal appearance and garb, and of the reception that he met at Lima, appears to be that of an eyewitness, as may be gathered from the following extract:

Father Samuel was a tall man, ruddy, and spare in appearance, venerable, with very curly beard. His dress was a short cassock reaching to the middle of his leg made of palm fibre, with hempen shoes on his feet, and a cross of *chonta*-wood in his hand. When our people suddenly saw that Apostolic Man accompanied by some Indians of strange face and dress, that he had brought with him from the Marañon, they were struck with astonishment thinking that they saw a Pachomius² that had just come up from the deserts of the Thebaid. A large part of Lima ran together for the spectacle;

¹ The narrative of this section is wholly due to the author of the MS.

² An Egyptian Cenobite monk of the 4th century.