

## **THE ELUSIVE PHILIPP VON HUTTEN: COLONIZER IN VENEZUELA**

By

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One of the earliest and most illustrious — at least by family background — “travelers” in the Americas was Philipp von Hutten (b. Germany ca. 1511, d. by assassination Venezuela, Holy Week 1546). Knight, Imperial Colonel and Councilor, one of the leaders of the Welser family’s colonizing efforts in Venezuela and since 1541 Spanish Captain-General in that province, he left us significant accounts in diary and letter form of his ocean crossing from Spain (Oct. 1534), where he had been a page to Charles V, by way of the Canary Islands, to Venezuela and there of his participation in various exploratory and colonizing expeditions (1535-1541).

The main part of Hutten’s accounts was first published anonymously in 1550 as the first of two appendices to the narrations of Ferdinand Cortés to Charles V of the conquest of Mexico. This first publication of Hutten’s papers fell into almost total oblivion and has remained virtually unknown to this day although at least two references to it are extant, one by Karl Klunzinger of 1857 and one by Konrad Haebler of 1903. In 1785 a second version of the Hutten papers appeared, published by Joh. Georg Meusel who had no knowledge of the 1550 printing. Meusel’s edition contains Hutten’s reports from Venezuela as well as letters to members of his family in Germany, which are not included in the 1550 printing, but it does not contain Hutten’s account of the voyage from Spain to Venezuela and his first impressions of that country, its Indian population and some of their living habits. We thus gain a complete picture of Hutten’s adventures only by viewing the two editions side by side.

The purpose of this paper then is to give a concise publication history of Hutten’s papers as most likely the first

published German report on America by a visitor, as well as an evaluation of its contents and form.

The fact that German interest in the Americas is as old as Columbus's discovery is a commonplace.<sup>1</sup> One thinks of Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* of 1494 and its first reference in the German language to Portuguese and Spanish explorers who have "vberall / Golt/jnslen funden / vnd nacket lüt / Von den man vor wust sagen nüt/." One also remembers the German translations of the first accounts of the New World given by Columbus, Vespucci, Pizzaro and Cortés, as well as the many maps, atlas-like nautical charts and globes produced by German artisans during the first half of the 16th century. And mention should be made, of course, of Martin Waldseemüller's famous *Cosmographia* of 1507 where the name America is used for the first time, albeit in somewhat tongue-in-cheek fashion as we gather from the English translation of the passage in question by Harold Jantz: "... I do not see why anyone should rightly forbid naming it Amerige, land of Americus as it were, after its discoverer Americus (Vespucci), a man of acute genius, or America, inasmuch as both Europe and Asia have received their names from women."<sup>2</sup>

Although Germans were involved in the very early colonization efforts, the first eye witness reports by Germans who had been to America were not published in their homeland and in their native tongue until the 1550's. The three most outstanding known accounts are those of Nicolaus Federmann, Hans Staden and Ulrich Schmidel. Federmann's *Indianische Historia* of 1557 describes his first voyage through parts of Venezuela for the Welser family of Augsburg in 1529-30. Schmidel, in his *Neuwe Welt* of 1567, gives an account of his twenty years in Brazil commencing in 1534, and Staden, in his *Warhafftig Historia* of 1557, relates his American adventures between the years 1547 and 1554, the last of which he spent as a prisoner of cannibalistic Indians.<sup>3</sup>

A fascinating fact which has escaped most historians, however, is the publication in 1550 of some of the letters of Philipp von Hutten describing his voyage to and first adventurous

expedition in Venezuela between October 18, 1534, and January 16, 1540. It may be safely assumed that this is actually the first printed account by a German of his experiences in the New World.

Biographical information on the first 23 years of the life of Philipp von Hutten is rather scant. It is provided by Friedrich Ratzel<sup>4</sup> who tells us that Philipp, a cousin—sometimes also called a nephew—of the more famous Ulrich, was born ca. 1511 in Birkenfeld, near Marktheidenfeld am Main, became a page at the court of Charles V and there was educated by Count Heinrich of Nassau-Saarbrücken. He attained the ranks of “kaiserlicher Oberst und Rath,” as well as that of a “General-Kapitän von Venezuela.” His ambition to become governor of that province was never realized. On August 17, 1534, he took his leave of Count Heinrich, and on the 22nd of the Emperor. Two months later he left Spain in the company of Georg Hohermuth von Speyer, 4th Governor of Venezuela in the service of Augsburg’s famous Welser Family. Being heavily indebted to the Welsers, Charles V granted the Augsburg bankers and merchants the right to settle in the New World. As early as 1526 the Welsers established themselves in Santo Domingo, capital of Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti), and were represented there by Ambrosius Alfinger from Ulm who was the founder of the cities of Coro and Maracaibo and became Venezuela’s first governor, after the Welsers had signed a contract with the Spanish Crown on March 27, 1528, giving them the right to conquer extensive areas of Venezuela.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the names of German colonizers in Venezuela already mentioned there are many others attesting amply to the extent of the Welsers’s interest and influence in that area. Some of the more important ones named by Hutten and elsewhere, are the brothers Georg and Heinrich Ehinger, Sebastian Rentz and Franz Lebzelter—like Alfinger and Federmann all from Ulm—, Hieronymus, Heinrich and Ulrich Sailer, Andreas Gundelfinger, Johann Seissenhofer and Bartholomäus Welser the Younger who, in the Holy Week of 1546, met a violent death by order of Juan de Carvajal on the

same day as Philipp von Hutten and two Spaniards who also opposed the power hungry Carvajal. It should not be forgotten that some 35-50 German miners from Joachimsthal in the Erzgebirge had been hired by the Welsers and shipped to Santo Domingo to aid in the attempts to mine silver and gold (see Hantzsch, fn. 5, pp. 24-27 and Haebler, *ibid.*, 60 ff.) and to supervise and train Indians and black slaves, the latter having been brought over from Africa as early as 1510 (s. Haebler, pp. 70 ff.).

Philipp von Hutten arrived near Coro, Venezuela, on February 6, 1535, after a voyage that began in Sanlúcar de Barrameda in the Gulf of Cadiz on October 18, 1534. Four times their ships had to return to port because of adverse weather conditions, until, on December 8, they had a successful departure, this time from Cadiz. Ten days later they sighted Lanzarote, the northernmost of the seven Canary Islands, and on December 20 they landed on Gran Canaria. They left the islands on the 27th, having taken on fresh supplies and an additional 100 men. They must have had smooth sailing, for Martinique in the Windward Isl. was sighted on the 20th of January. They passed the islands of Dominica, Guadeloupe, Montserrat in the Leeward Isl., and St. Croix in the Virgin Islands, and on January 26 they landed in San Germán on San Juan Bautista, now Puerto Rico. After a stay of four days sails were set again and on February 7, 1535, Georg Hohermuth and his party, including Philipp, arrived at Coro, "ain Stat da sich die Christen halten" and there "kamen ... dem Gubernator entgegen / die Obersten vnd Justitia / mitsamt dem gmainen volck / ward mit grossen freuden empfangen / vnnd nach dem selbigen tag von allem volck dem Gubernator geschworn." <sup>6</sup>

There follows in Ch. 3, "Von Caro (sic) / vnd jren Innwonern . . . /" this noteworthy description:

ES ist hie herumb ain arm Land / ain bloss / nackend / Bestialisch volck / aber in aller bosshait fast listig / gehn gantz nackt / b̄arfuss / vnd barhaupt / Bedecken die Weiber jr scham mit ainem th̄uch / hinden vn fornen fast / wie ain Badmaid bedeckt.

Die m<sup>e</sup>nner haben ain aussgehilerten Kirbsen / wie ain horen / da sy jr scham einth<sup>u</sup>n / . . . / Hie wechst weder wein noch brot / auch kain flaisch dann Hirschen / vnd dero vil / aber nit so gross als in vnsern Landen / es hat auch Tiger vnd Leoparden / vnnd villerlay gefigels / es hat kain gelt / sy handeln vnder ainander mit klainen subtilen Pater-nusterlen / die sy von Meer sch<sup>u</sup>pen / oder muschlen machen / das ist jr gelt / . . . / sy machen brot von weissen k<sup>o</sup>rnern / das sy Mayz nennen / wechst an stenglen / vnd in Ehern schier wie das koren / vnd schneidens vnd s<sup>a</sup>ens wider z<sup>u</sup> seiner zeyt / gibt ain wolgeschmach krefftig brot / allain das sy es nit saltzen / . . . / sy haben hie kain Winter / so ist der tag durch das Jar fast gleich / das er vmb ain stund nit ab oder z<sup>u</sup> nimbt.

. . . . est ist ain bloss volck / haben kaine weer / dann lang Spiess auss balmen gemacht / vñ Flitschenbogè / damit sy fast gewiss sein / haben vornen spitzen / wie ain eysen von Vischbainen gemacht / sehr scharff / . . . / darumb ob sy schon kain eysen haben / sein darumb nit z<sup>u</sup>uerachten / Es ist z<sup>u</sup>uerwundern / vnd nit wol z<sup>u</sup>glaubè / was rainer oder subtiler h<sup>u</sup>pscher arbeit / sy von Gold an werckzeug allain mit herten stainen machen. (1f. 52r)

The reason for giving this rather detailed account of Hutten's voyage and description is the fact that it is contained in the first printing of his travels which has escaped almost entirely the attention of historical research and has never been reprinted in this form. Philipp's report appeared anonymously in 1550 on lvs. 51<sup>r</sup>-57<sup>v</sup> as the first of two appendices to the first—and most likely only—German translation of Fernando Cortés' narrations to Charles V of 1520 and 1522. The second appendix, it may be mentioned here, although it has no bearing on this paper, is the first printing as well as translation of a long letter dated Santo Domingo January 20, 1543, by the famous historian and "Schlosshauptmann zu Santo Domingo" Consalvo Hernando de Oviedo (1478-1557) to Pietro Cardinal Bembo (1470-1547) of Venice.

There is every indication as far as I could determine that only two scholars out of many who have dealt with Philipp von Hutten as well as with the colonization of Venezuela have been aware of the existence of this first printing. These were Karl Klunzinger and Konrad Haebler (s. fn. 5). The author of the Welser article in the *Allg. deutsche Biographie* (*sub nomine*, p. 686) states that the historian Franz Wieser was of the opinion that "der Bericht des Schlosshauptmannes in San

Domingo..., abgedruckt in [den] Geschichten Fernandi Cortesii von dem Neven [sic] Hispanien (Augsburg 1550, S. 58 ff.)” had come to Germany through the good offices of the Welsers. Wieser does not mention the Hutten text, however, which immediately precedes that of Oviedo. Even Juan Friede in his definitive study *Los Welser en la conquista de Venezuela* (1961) has no knowledge of it although he does refer to Klunzinger and Haebler, nor does the Wolfenbüttel Catalogue, *The New World in the Treasures of an Old European Library*, ed. Harold Jantz (Braunschweig: Waisenhausdruckerei, June 1976), where we read that Philipp von Hutten’s “letters were published for the first time in 1785.” (p. 80)

That date refers to the second printing under the title “Zeitung aus Indian Juncker Philipps von Hutten. Aus seiner zum Theil unleserlich gewordenen Handschrift,” edited by Johann Georg Meusel in his *Historisch-litterarisches Magazin*, Erster Theil (Bayreuth und Leipzig: Verlag Lübecks Erben, 1785), pp. 51-117. This is the version that has served as the primary source to all subsequent studies on Hutten’s involvement in Venezuela. Meusel tells us in his preface that Freiherr Karl Friedrich von Gemmingen found Hutten’s letters “unter den Papieren des vor zwey Jahren verstorbenen letzten mannlichen Spösslings des uralten . . . Huttenschen Stammes, lies sie aus der hin und wieder unleserlich gewordenen Originalhandschrift so genau als möglich abkopiren, und theilte die Kopie dem Herausgeber grossmüthig mit.”<sup>7</sup>

This raises, of course, the question regarding the whereabouts of the MS mentioned by Meusel. It was apparently seen as recently as the beginning of this century by Konrad Haebler who states: “Die Handschrift, die [Meusel] als Vorlage gedient hat, befindet sich im Familienarchive der Herren von Gemmingen, durch deren Güte ich sie benutzen durfte. Sie ist *nicht* das Originaltagebuch des Philipp von Hutten, wohl aber eine gleichzeitige Abschrift” (Haebler, p. 243, fn. 1). In June of 1977, members of the Gemmingen family on the castles of Guttenberg and Hornberg on the Neckar were kind enough to let me look through their respective archives and libraries.

They also informed members of other branches of their family of the search. In spite of all efforts to date neither the original nor the copy mentioned by Meusel and Haebler have been seen again.

This cannot be the place even to attempt a comparison of the two printings of Hutten's letters. That could be accomplished only by way of a parallel edition which is, in fact, in the planning stages. Suffice it to say that there are enough differences in details, although not in substance, to allow making the assumption that the two versions cannot have been based on the same MS. Variants are found primarily in the spelling of place and proper names and in slightly altered or omitted numerical references and parts of sentences in the 1785 printing. The bulk of the 1550 ed. contains Philipp's description of his travels between leaving Spain and returning to Coro at the end of his first expedition undertaken in the company of Georg Hohermuth. This report, according to information given in the second printing only, was sent to his father, Bernhard v. Hutten, and is dated, in both eds., October 20, 1538. The remainder of the first printing, almost one and one half leaves, consists of information also to be found, mostly verbatim, in Philipp's letter of January 16, 1540, to his brother Moritz, Bishop of Eichstätt, but in a sequence different from that in the second printing. Style, tone and an increasing adherence to details as the narrative progresses suggest that Philipp probably took notes, perhaps in diary fashion, during his first expedition, and then rewrote these notes after his return to Coro, remembering more and more details as he began reporting the not so distant past.

The Meusel printing of 1785 contains additional letters by Philipp to his family (father, mother, brothers Moritz and Wilhelm) and one to a friend, a certain Georg Geuder in Nürnberg. The remaining 16 pages of Meusel's edition contain letters by Moritz and others after the family got word of the death by murder of Philipp, the younger Bartholomäus Welser and two Spaniards. In these letters Moritz appeals to the Bishop of Würzburg, King Ferdinand and even the Emperor himself that justice be done to all guilty parties as it had

already been done through the execution of Juan de Carvajal, and that restitution to the heirs be made of the property and possessions of Philipp and the young Welser. All of which was to no avail.

In conclusion it should be said that Philipp's accounts of his adventures and tribulations are as fascinating as any from that time and place. He always captivates the reader whether he is describing dealings with and treatment—often cruel and murderous—of the Indians, dreaming of reaching the fabulous El Dorado, relating the legend of Amazones, or telling the horrors of cannibalism among Christians. And finally there is the as yet unexplained remark in his letter to Moritz of January 16, 1540, regarding the most famous of all German magicians. While complaining about all kinds of hardships he makes one of the earliest references—and certainly the first one from the New World—concerning this well known master of necromancy when he says, “dass ich bekennen muss, dass es der Philosophus Faustus schier troffen het, dann wir ein fast bösses Jahr antroffen haben, aber Gott hab Lob ist uns fast unter allen andern am besten gangen” (Meusel, p. 93).<sup>8</sup>

## NOTES

1 Paper presented at the 1977 MLA Convention in Chicago during Special Session 291: Continental Travelers in the Americas.

2 Harold Jantz, “Images of America in the German Renaissance,” in: *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiapelli (University of California Press, 1976), p. 98.

3 For a detailed analysis of these three works see Duncan Smith, “... beschreibung eyner Landtschafft der Wilden / Nacketen / Grimmigen Menschfresser Leuthen’: The German Image of America in the Sixteenth Century,” in: *The German Contribution to the Building of the Americans: Studies in Honor of Karl J. R. Arndt*, ed. Gerhard K. Friesen and Walter Schatzberg (Worcester, Mass.: Clark University Press, 1977), pp. 1-19. It should be noted that Federmann's and Standen's accounts were reprinted by Karl Klüpfel in *Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart*, Vol. 47 (1859).

4 Friedrich Ratzel in *Allg. deutsche Biographie, sub nomine*, and in *Jahresbericht der geographischen Gesellschaft in München*, Vol. 6 (1877-79), pp. 153-156, this text being identical almost verbatim with the one in *ADB* except for the complete Latin text of the inscription by Hutten's brother Moritz, Bishop of Eichstätt, on the monument erected in Philipp's memory in the church of Maria-Sondheim near Arn-



stein an der Wern, not far from Schweinfurt. The German translation of this text is provided by Viktor Hantzsch (s. footnote 5), p. 46.

5 Some of the best and most reliable accounts of the settlement of Venezuela by Germans are found in

a) Karl Klunzinger, *Antheil der Deutschen an der Entdeckung von Südamerika...* (Stuttgart: Sonnewald, 1857),

b) Viktor Hantzsch, *Deutsche Reisende des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Leipziger Studien aus dem Gebiet der Geschichte, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1895),

c) Konrad Haebler, *Die überseeischen Unternehmungen der Welser und ihrer Gesellschafter* (Leipzig: Hirschfeld, 1903),

d) Germán Arciniegas, *Los Alemanes en la conquista de America* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1941); English transl. by Angel Flores, *Germans in the Conquest of America...* (New York: MacMillan, 1943),

e) Juan Friede, *Los Welser en la conquista de Venezuela...* (Caracas-Madrid: Ediciones Edime, 1961).

6 (Philipp v. Hutten), "Ain andere Histori / von newlich erfundnen Inseln / der Landtschafft Indie," in: *Ferdinandi Cortesii. Von dem Newen Hispanien / so im Meer gegem Nidergang / Zwo gantz lustige vnnd fruchtreiche Historien / an den grossmächtigisten vnüberwindtlichisten Herren / CAROLVM V. Römischen Kaiser &c. König in Hispanien &c....* (Augsburg: Philipp Vlhart, 1550), 1f. 52<sup>r</sup>.

7 See also J. G. Meusel, "Nachtrag zu der Abhandlung über El Dorado..." in: *Allgemeine Geographische Ephemeriden*, 25 (April 1808), No. 4, pp. 483-489; this is in reply to an article by T. E. Ehrmann, "El Dorado..." in: *Allg. Geogr. Eph.*, 25 (February 1808), No. 2, pp. 136-165.

8 On this early reference to the historical Faust see Siegfried Szamatólski, "Der historische Faust," in: *VjLG* 2 (1889), pp. 156-159, Alexander Tille, *Die Faustsplitter in der Literatur des sechzehnten bis achtzehnten Jahrhunderts nach den ältesten Quellen herausgegeben...* (Berlin: Felber, 1900), pp. 10-11, No. 7, as well as Hans Hennig, *Faust-Bibliographie*, Teil I: Allgemeines. Grundlagen. Gesamtdarstellungen. — Das Faust-Thema vom 16. Jahrhundert bis 1790 (Berlin-Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1966), p. 80, No. 717.

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