

## “O-Taheiti”<sup>i</sup>

Georg Forster

Trans. Antje Kühnast (draft, do not circulate)

*Quod spiro et placeo (si placeo) tuum est.* HORACE<sup>ii</sup>

In the summer of 1778, my father [Johann Reinhold Forster] received a Spanish manuscript of a few pages which dealt with the island O-Taheiti [i.e., Tahiti] in the South Seas. It was sent to him by the director of the Royal Botanical Garden in Madrid, Don Casimir Gomez Ortega, and seems to be worthy of being presented here in my translation, even more so as the original has not yet been printed.

Our notions of peoples that are seldom visited and, to the Germans at least, have only become known according to hearsay may easily become warped, especially if those readers who are eager to learn and who love truth cannot satisfy their wish (due to a lack of their own observation) to be presented with as many perspectives as possible and to compare [the observers’] reports with each other. I may perhaps flatter myself by believing that a small attempt to achieve something in this respect will not be out of place here, and that a Spaniard will not remain without praise for speaking his genuine word on O-Tahiti after the reports by other nations have long found sympathetic readers.

Every one had their unique opportunity to observe [things] that were not available to any other. Every one, however, also has their own way of seeing. National character, national politics, education, climate (and whatever else?) are like so many tiny membranes on the eye, each of which refracts the light rays differently, even though the anatomical scalpel is unable to find them. Thus, if the Spaniard, the Frenchman, the Englishman and the German each see

differently, and yet all claim their *humor aqueus* [fluid in the eyeball], cornea, and *crystallinus* [lens] are the same in each one of them, then the [36] philosopher may assess which colors those *non-physical* spectacles portray and resolve from all these colorful results the clear and honest truth.

As the Spanish report of O-Taheiti contains much that has already been conveyed by previous travel writers, a part of its importance is reduced. However, to be fair, it has to be taken into consideration that for those who seek the truth even mere confirmation of that which has already been stated is not trivial. On the other hand, [the report] offers some observations that either contradict ours or are completely missing in our works, and thus it shines a new light on some matters. In this respect, it would be desirable that the essay was more extensive.

It has long been known to me that the Spaniards visited the island Taheiti twice during my stay in the South Seas. I will present here what I have learnt about it (partly from the inhabitants' lips, partly more reliably from Spanish officers found at the Cape [of Good Hope]), as the manuscript is limited to the description of the island and does not say a word about the name of the commanders or the point in time when their journeys occurred.

*Don Juan Francisco de Lángara y Huarte* led the first enterprise of this kind. He left the Port of Callao in Peru on a frigate, most probably at the beginning of the year 1773. *Aheatua*, the king of the smaller peninsula of Taheiti, reports that a ship anchored in his port of Wai-Urua [i.e., passage of Aiurua] approximately five months before our own arrival there, thus in March or the beginning of April 1773. He counted ten days on his fingers as the period of time the foreigners stayed.<sup>1</sup> Although Tuahau, another Tahitian, stated half the

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<sup>1</sup> See my travelogue, Georg Forster, *Johann Reinhold Forster's Reise um die Welt während den Jahren 1772 bis 1775 in dem von Seiner izzregierenden Großbritannischen Majestät auf*

length of time, the young king's account is more probable because the Spanish manuscript reports the circumnavigation of the entire island in a boat, which on its own requires more time. At the time, there were several of Aheatua's people who spoke of a far longer time; yet our language skills were insufficient to determine if this was related to the Spanish frigate, or as they say it, to the *Pahai no Peppe* (the ship of Peppe). [37] All reports by the inhabitants however agreed that a Spaniard, whom they called *Pahutu*, had remained on their island. That man was actually spotted on 22 August 1773 by several of our seamen but, having been addressed by them, he hid in the crowd of locals and made no further appearance. My Spanish report confirms this situation, and even appears to indicate that they had left behind on the island not only one soldier but also several sailors. Of the return journey of this ship and the route it followed nothing further is known to us, but it seems it did not visit the Society [i.e., Solomon] Islands.

The other expedition consisted of two ships which supposedly were supplied in the same Peruvian port as the first and left the port under the command of Don *Domingo Buenchea*. The date of their arrival in Tahiti, between the fifteenth and thirtieth of May 1774, is easily clarified by the following: We left Tahiti for the second time on the fourteenth of May 1774 and reached the island of Huaheine, which is only thirty-one miles to the north-west, on the following day. The task of bartering for fresh food there only took a few days, as the island is small. Thus, already on the 23rd, we were able to leave again and visited the nearby island *Raiatea*. Not only did we have a larger number of prosperous friends and acquaintances there, but the islander Maheine, whom we had taken along for eight months, also was at home there. Here we anchored for twelve days, calm and with our minds

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*Entdeckungen ausgesickten und durch den Capitaın Cook geführten Schiffe The Resolution unternommen* (Berlin: Haude and Spener, 1778), 1:229 and 233.

at ease, when on the second of June several islanders told us that a boat from Huaheine had brought the news that two ships had anchored in the same port where we had stayed only a short time ago.

One of the two Huaheineans, who had arrived in the boat, soon after came before our captain and asserted that he had seen both ships with his own eyes, went on board of both of them, had even gotten drunk on one of them, and had learnt that *Tabane* (Herr Joseph Banks) commanded the larger one—which was far larger than ours—and Tonno (Captain Tobias Fourneaux) commanded the smaller one. Whether this was his mistake, because he may never have seen Banks and Fourneaux, or if the Spaniards (who [38] probably had already heard that we were still anchored at Raiatea) deceived him to make us feel safer, I shall happily leave open. Be that as it may, most of us were quite glad to not wait for their visit but rather continue our journey westwards on the fourth of June.

The fact that they now had visited these oceans for the second time, and indeed at the same time as they could assume we were there, was at least suspicious enough and appeared to prove that they were looking for us.<sup>2</sup> If that was indeed the case, their intentions surely were not peaceful. Had they reached us, we could have expected from their political jealousy to either be sunk immediately, or at least to be captured and brought to Lima, and possibly carried off to the mines. Anyone to whom this fear appears unfounded may consider that the Spaniards did not follow the example of the French and Americans and did not order their officers to spare Captain *Cook* on his current journey and to regard his ship as completely neutral for the love of science. Of the route that Don Domingo Buenechea took on his return journey we know as little as we know of Lángara's return journey. It seems, however, to have

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<sup>2</sup> They could have received news about our journey, which was never kept a secret, from Europe and at the same time received the necessary orders of conduct. From Cook's last journey, vol. 1, 366, it appears to be clear that the Spaniards undertook a third expedition to Tahiti.

been a fortunate one, as the author of our manuscript participated in both, as I can conclude from the tone of his account. He decided not to mention his name, but he was either an officer or a surgeon, and probably the former.

I shall now offer my translation, and after that a few remarks shall follow, in order to facilitate the comparison between this and the previous reports about Taheiti.

### **Description of the Island Amat, called Otayiti by Its Inhabitants**

The center of this island is at seventeen degrees, thirty minutes south latitude and, according to our naval calculation, two hundred and [39] thirty three degrees longitude; a different way of calculating, according to which the strong currents of the South Seas towards the west are taken into account, states the generally followed longitude of ten hours and five minutes from Paris.<sup>3</sup> The island is the longest measured from west-north-west to east-south-east, namely thirteen and a half nautical miles; its circumference is forty-one nautical miles, and its shape is quite similar to the number 8, but in such a way, that the eastern part is a bit smaller. Both halves are connected by a plain which is why from a distance the land is thought to be two islands.

In the eastern as well as in the western part, high forest mountains are visible whose fringes towards the ocean beach are enclosed by many coconut palms, pisangs [i.e., bananas] and other fruit trees. A reef (or a circular wall) of coral cliffs surrounds this island; in some locations it is only one, in others two miles away from the beach. It is entirely visible above the water, except towards the northern tip, where over a distance of six to seven miles the ocean above it is three and a half fathoms deep. Similarly, the open sea touches a part of the southern coastline of the same said length.

On the many mountains, all of which have poor soil, cultivation involves great difficulties. The innumerable low-lying grounds, however, are rich with water and can be cultivated effortlessly due to their great fertility. The expansive valley on the western side of the island also seems to have no lack of good soil in which many a seed could be sown to great advantage, although it has been planted with trees only in its lowest plains.

The climate there is hot and humid. During our [40] visit on the island and in its surroundings the weather was very rainy and, as we were told, in July, August and September severe wind gusts from the second or eastern direction are supposed to be

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<sup>3</sup> The first mentioned longitude of O-Taheiti is calculated east of Ferro. The second, if reset to the latter scale, is 151 degrees 15 minutes west of Paris, or only 228° 45' east of Ferro. Between Ferro and the Greenwich observatory there is supposed to be a difference of 18° 9' in its longitude (see Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, 1:24), thus O-Taheiti's eastern longitude, calculated based on this English observatory, is 210° 36', which closely aligns with the observations of English astronomers.

frequent. November, December and January are the most beautiful months of the year, but during the remaining time there will only every now and then be a gust of wind and with it occasionally a thunderstorm, though the inhabitants claim one has never struck. The predominant winds are from the first and second direction (northern and eastern?); but the gusts of wind [are] severe enough to uproot the trees. There is also, during the night, an offshore wind which moves as a soft breeze across the island and no further than a nautical mile from the coast from dawn until eight in the morning. Regarding ebb and flow, we observed in the port that it is high tide at one o'clock in the afternoon at full and new moon. The water afterwards only falls one fathom. The ebb however runs with great force, while the flow runs with less force due to the many rivers that flow down into the ocean.

The island possesses a high degree of fertility, has a surplus of fresh water and produces uncountable coconut palms, the same of which grow on the coast of Guayaquil [Ecuador]; five sorts of bananas, of which two are especially remarkable—one because of its size, which is three inches in diameter and nine inches long, and the other is in its shape similar to the kind which is called land banana in Lima, sour-sweet and very tasty. Further, there are batatas or sweet potatoes (*camotes*); frequent but poorly grown sugar cane; yam tubers, which are usually called achira in Lima, and when mixed with banana are a common meal; and furthermore, a very large fruit which in their language is called *Kuro* [uro, i.e., breadfruit], tastes like potato (*papas*), is shaped like an orange, and grows on tall trees. The islanders roast it and then eat it like bread.

We found other fruits unknown to us, to which we applied the names of our fruits when they had some similarity with them. To these belong the rose-colored manzano [i.e., Malay apple] which has the shape of a guava [41] and a stone in the center, but is also watery in taste; the chestnuts, which taste like ours but are differently shaped; the nuts, which look similar to ours but are very oily and cause heart burn. Finally, there is a kind of fruit that resembles the cherimoya [i.e., custard apple] and, according to the reports of those who stayed behind on the island, taste very good, and a bush whose fruit has the shape of almonds. Among the spices, only ginger has been found there. Cinnamon, clove and pepper, which we gave the inhabitants to taste, were completely foreign to them, and they assured us that their island produced nothing of the sort.

The local timber has much similarity with guayacan [i.e., *Lignum vitae*, also called iron wood], cane and *Mariaholz* [i.e., Santa Maria or *Calophyllum brasiliense*]; it is sufficiently flexible, but has a pith running throughout the longitudinal center, one inch in diameter. The inhabitants call it *fabuy* and find it extremely useful as they not only make their boats from it but also (by injuring the trunk) extract a liquid material from it, which is very similar to our tar and is called tapau in the national language and with which they coat the joints of their boats.

Apart from pigs, a few dogs and many rats, neither wild nor tame (four-footed) animals have been found on Otaheiti. The birds there are big and small parrots, wild doves, king geese and some other species that are not remarkable. The surrounding ocean offers some different species of fish, such as bonitos, flying fish, eels, trouts, and some more.

Among the molluscs, there are oysters, abalones and other snails of specific shape and size, crabs, sea urchins and lobsters. The fishing of the inhabitants is five-fold: with nets,

with throwing spears, with fishing line, with fishing rod and with torches. Their fishing rods are made of mother of pearl, some of tortoise shell, and of wood for big fish.

Not a single piece of metal or precious stone [42] has been found, but a few pearls were found whose shell is of a unique kind, namely very flat. They are supposed to be rare on this island, but according to the report of the inhabitants, they are common on other islands to which they rarely venture due to a lack of small vessels, as their boats easily get lost on such journeys.

In my view, the island accommodates fifteen to sixteen thousand inhabitants, others claim a much higher number. We sorted them into many kinds: true Indians, mulattos, mulatto-coloureds and albino-coloureds. Of the latter, only three appeared. Almost always they surpass us in height, many of them are even exceptionally tall and all are very well proportioned. They find specific pleasure in corpulence; however, people of small stature and those that have some natural afflictions are ridiculous to them, notwithstanding that such do exist among their compatriots.

They wear big, though not too thick, beards and short hair. When they came on board our ship, they often asked to have the beard shorn as proof of their kind-heartedness, since they believed it would please us. Men and women tattoo their legs, some even the body, and colour it with black-blue paint. We noted, however, that this act is not performed before the eighteenth or twentieth year. They pierce one earlobe and stick into the opening a very nice smelling flower that is similar to the *frangipani*; others hang two to three small pearls or some other trinket on a string from it. That is why they very dearly long for our glass corals, which they call pue. They anoint their entire body and head with coconut oil, which they call monoy, and which they value highly as they do any pleasant fragrance.

Their clothing consists of a loincloth, a small suit of fine mats and a kind of coat or cover of the size of a full bed sheet. The latter are of many colours: white, red, yellow, like wilted roses, like strong coffee, etc. They have so much similarity to our woven cloth that we initially doubted whether they were not made with a loom. Some among the inhabitants wear a crown of white or red feathers or flowers, others adorn [43] themselves with turbans, although neither of these two costumes is regarded as the sign of a special rank.

The men usually only wear a loincloth, at times also an under dress or a coat, now and then both at the same time. The women strap a piece of cloth around their loins that reaches to the knees and is wrapped around several times. They throw another piece across and over the neck and thereby cover the bosom, but in such a way that they expose the arms from the shoulders downwards. Finally, they wrap themselves in a very large, broad piece of cloth which reaches from their neck to the legs. Many of them, however, are half-naked, which we attributed to the most extreme poverty.

They make the cloth for these pieces of clothing from the bark of a tree, which is comparable to the [Santa] Maria. The external or first bark is discarded due to its coarse and rough texture. The adjacent [layers] are less coarse and become increasingly finer, so that the innermost skin, lying closest to the wood, is the finest and is in this regard nearly a match to good flax.

The cloth production consists of the following. The bark is stretched onto a board, and after it has been sufficiently expanded, coated with a very white sticky liquid, like a kind of starch. All imperfect spots are mended, and to render the cloth sufficiently smooth, it is beaten with a mallet in the form of a mortar pestle. This pestle has grooves of different sizes which are imprinted on the bark by the beating, giving the cloth a woven appearance. To bleach it, it is frequently washed and exposed to the sun. But it does not last long. For the deep red colour, with which some pieces are painted, the inhabitants use a fruit that looks like unripe cherries or plums, and express its juice over some leaves, which are similar to mangrove leaves, but are softer and more flexible. Once the leaves are sufficiently soaked with the juice, they are in turn pressed and the mixed juice that is thereby created is the red colour. The yellow colour is probably derived from ginger, or another closely related root. Of the other [colours], [44] nothing can be said, but we noticed that all their cloths smell of coconut oil.

The islanders are quick to learn, very intelligent and skilful. They love comfort and idleness, are cunning and larcenous (a flaw of which even their nobles are guilty), greedy when eating, and wild in their lust, to which the many statues of a shameful shape in the entire region gave testament. They let themselves be governed completely by the women—whatever they were given when they came on board the frigate they presented to their women; indeed, they begged on their women's behalf for everything that we had, with boundless impertinence, and thereby became very burdensome to us. They offered us their women with great candidness and were very astounded that we were unwilling to accept this loan. The female was indeed too in the habit of offering herself, though with a little reserve.

They appear to be nothing less than timid, apart from the fright that our rifles caused them, which cannot astonish, as they very well recognize these weapons' advantage over their own and the devastation they can cause. On the other hand, they surpassed each of our men in wrestling. Their weapons are slings, clubs, and lances, which they know to use with great skill and precision. They almost never missed a banana tree stem, put up as target, from a distance of thirty paces and more. It is worth the effort to observe their hand-to-hand fights, as they make thousands of strikes with innumerable gesticulations, which could be regarded more as pantomime than warlike movements.

We were unable to understand the language at first, but after a few days we had collected numerous words, as it is easily learned. The soldier who stayed behind on the island together with the sailors had completely acquired the language within the year that he had spent there.

The women organize the entire domestic sphere, making coats, skirts, floor mats and other clothing from cloth. The men are occupied by fishing, the construction of their dwellings and the building of their vessels. Frequently, their boats and canoes consist of several pieces, skilfully [45] joined together with precision; most curiously, a small axe is the tool with which they carry out this and many other elaborate pieces of workmanship.

We went to a lot of trouble to learn whether they fell the trees or rip them out with their roots, but we could find this out as little as we could discover the way in which they transport them down from the mountains, which, considering their enormous altitude, cannot be an easy feat. They probably burn the tree from the bottom and control the fire



so that it does not ascend too far up. Once the tree is felled, they can hollow it out in the same manner until it acquires the shape of a boat or canoe, carry it to the beach with the help of their friends and complete the work there.

The canoes of the Talliarau district<sup>4</sup> are the largest, and the best constructed of all. The number of all canoes on the island is at least one-and-a-half to two thousand. They are constructed in different ways. Some are paired, with a space of one ell between the two boats, across whose front parts is fastened a grid of wooden boards. This supports a cabin, overshadowed by a roof of palm leaves. Their kings and chiefs usually use this kind of vessel. Another kind [of vessel] has a sail made from mats, to which is fixed a pole in the shape of a Flemish knife<sup>5</sup> instead of a rope. The common man only uses simple canoes, which are without exception fitted with an outrigger (which maintains balance) and are extraordinarily lightweight. They are maintained very carefully, hauled out of the water every evening and stored under cover. Each and every canoe has only one sail, and at the bottom of the mast a board extends over each side. When they sail close to the wind, one [person] will stand on the board that is directed towards the wind. I have seen them run in this manner against the wind and tide in the harbour.

During long-distance journeys, according to the four [Tahitians] whom we took with us on board, two sails are set on the twin vessels. For this purpose, [46] they put a plank at the front and another in the middle, through which the masts are placed. It is said that you can fully trust the safety of these vessels.

Polygamy is permitted for the inhabitants, but although we asked many, we found nobody who had more than one wife. The four natives whom we took on board gave us to understand that they are free to divorce their wives. I rather believe that this can only be a privilege of the chiefs, as they told us at the same time that the former wife of the chief of Taitoa now had the chief of Titurea as her husband.

It was however impossible, as long as we stayed on the island, and even when we circumnavigated it in our ship, to discover the object of their idolatry. But the already mentioned four inhabitants added to our knowledge on this issue during the journey. Every six months, thus twice a year, a great sacrificial feast is held at a location devoted to this, where all inhabitants of the entire region must be present. The men appear naked, without any covering except for their loincloth; [whereas] the women are clothed, but at a location separated from the men. No less is the presence of the Erihs (chiefs) [i.e., ari'i] required, who gird their dress or pareo around their hips. The priest, whom they call pure, puts on a different dress, which is open at the neck. After they have all gathered in the stated manner, he makes an exhortation, after which a tender piglet, all four legs bound, is brought out on a board. Immediately the entire gathering begins a loud prayer gazing towards the sky. After the prayer is done, the priest lights a big fire, slaughters the piglet, and singes it off to then be able to wash and roast it. Meanwhile, the entire crowd goes off to bathe and, upon their return, the sacrificial animal is taken off the hearth, put on the board and cut into innumerable bite-size pieces by the priest. He eats from it first, and then passes the remainder to all others present, beginning with the Erih or chief, who

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<sup>4</sup> Probably Attahruh, according to the English reports.

<sup>5</sup> That is, a little curved.

is also granted a larger piece. The four inhabitants performed the entire act before our eyes on the altar. When they [47] were finished, I asked: "To whom do you make this sacrifice?" In response they glanced towards the sky and spoke: "Teautua!" When they were further questioned whether they could see him, they answered: "No," but he came down to them during the sacrifice, like a whirlwind, with a loud roar. They gave us to understand that they were circumcised, about which there is no doubt as we examined and found it to be correct. The smallest of them had not yet been circumcised, but his companions reminded us that his youth did not allow it yet.

These islanders only inhabit the fringes of their island, from the shore to the slope of the mountains. This perimeter has black sandy soil and is one to two miles wide. Their houses or huts are quite well and spaciouly built. The roof is high in the middle and so artfully covered with palm leaves that the strongest rain cannot penetrate it. The inside has no partitions or rooms, and no furniture apart from some big bulbous baskets with narrow openings hanging from the ceiling, and some hollowed-out benches, the smaller of which are used as pillows and the bigger ones are used as armchairs. The floor is covered with dry plants or hay, and upon it the inhabitants sleep wrapped in their coats. The Erihs and other wealthy or noble people always lay a mat under themselves. They often also sleep in the covered cabins on their vessels. Some of their huts are very spacious and evenly vaulted, like a Murcian galley, and they also serve as the Erihs's residence. They erect straight poles near the houses, to which hooks are attached on each of the four sides, from which they hang baskets and bags to protect them from rats. These poles are surrounded by a fence. They call their houses *Efare* [i.e., fare]; another kind [of house], however, in which the canoes are stored and also built, is called *Efare valle*. These have the same shape and build as the dwellings. Both are spread over the country without any order and can be carried from one region to another with little effort.

The entire island consists of eight districts which are ruled by just as many Erihs. They govern with unlimited power and enforce obedience and respect of their [48] subjects through their strictness. The Erihs's sons are also called Erihs and receive power over certain estates from their fathers.

Around the island we saw several enclosures of roughly hewn and carelessly assembled rocks. Their most elaborate front presents itself like a pyramid, on top of which lies a misshapen bird. The chief of Totorea told us, these were their burial sites. When one of them dies, the body is immediately wrapped in a piece of cloth, and the relatives mourn for him by nearly constantly uncovering and then again covering his face. He remains in this state until he begins to smell foul, upon which he is buried in the location described, and onto his grave is placed a pile of coconuts, bananas and other food.

As far as I have authority to judge this report, it has the stamp of reliability. Our Spaniard has almost always observed the physical features in a manner consistent with his predecessors, and he frequently agrees with them when they deal with the character and temperament of the inhabitants, their morals and customs, and their political constitution. Regarding the location of the island, its external appearance, size and natural productions, the formation of the

inhabitants and their productions, [he] does not divert from the reports that [Samuel] Wallis, [Louis Antoine de] Bougainville, [James] Cook and I have given. He presents interesting information about the climate, the moral state and religion, and in relating the way of dressing as well as the production of cloth, a lot is described more comprehensibly than [it was] previously.

He calls his island *Amat*. Initially I thought this name could have emerged like Peru, Luzon<sup>6</sup> and so many other [names], which the explorers with great rashness and without examination used to assume. However, the Spanish almanac, through which I leafed today, reminds me that Amat is a family name [49] and that the Spanish accordingly could have named *Ysla de Amat* after some person of rank and high esteem, just as the first English explorers did *King George Island*. The native name, however, did not escape them, which they according to their pronunciation quite correctly spell as *Otayiti*.

While the comparison that the Spaniard makes of the shape of the island and the number eight is simple, it is nevertheless appropriate, as can easily be determined if the map in John Hawkesworth's collection is consulted.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, from this map it becomes obvious how precisely his information about the position of the reef, and its distance from the beach, corresponds with the English [reports]. What he states about the circumference of the island is more correct than its determination on the first voyage by Cook, who, on the second

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<sup>6</sup> "Peru" was not the answer to the question: "What is the name of your country?" but of [the question]: "Who are you?"—"We are fishermen." Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Historia de los Yncas*. The inhabitants of Manila were asked, what they called their island. But they understood: "What are you doing there?"—"Luzon; we are mashing," that is, preparing sago for a meal. [Garcilaso de la Vega, *The Royal Commentaries of Peru, in Two Parts*, trans. Paul Rycaut (?) (London, 1688), 3.]

<sup>7</sup> Hawkesworth, *Reisen um die Welt*, Bd. 2.

journey, adjusted his inaccurate estimation.<sup>8</sup> There is no need for a reminder that the Spanish nautical mile corresponds with the English, French and Dutch [nautical mile] and represents one-twentieth of an equatorial degree; however, the Roman-Spanish mile, also known as *Migero* (Latin: *milliare*), is one-eightieth of an equatorial degree or a quarter nautical mile.<sup>9</sup>

In this report, Tahiti also appears with its forested summits, its dry hills, fertile valleys, and paradisaical plains, which surround it everywhere.<sup>10</sup> The large valley, that is mentioned here is probably the Papparra district, previously the most fertile region on the entire island, which already in 1768<sup>11</sup> was devastated in a war between the chiefs of the two peninsulas. This devastation was probably the reason why the Spaniards there found trees only in the lowest areas (or, as I assume, along the creeks).

The English, French and Dutch saw Tahiti always in the same season, namely in winter,<sup>12</sup> between April and August. Even if the soldier whom the Spaniards left behind on their first visit was just a reasonably intelligent person, it must have been easy for him over the span of a year (as this is how long he stayed there) to collect more detailed observations about the climate than we had before. As far as the report relates, it has been securely confirmed, that the Tahitian climate is one of the best in the whole world. Curious is the

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<sup>8</sup> Hawkesworth, *Reisen um die Welt*, Bd. 2, 168; Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 1, 275; Cook's *Voyage* vol.1, 188.

<sup>9</sup> More details about the mile measures can be found in Johann Christoph Gatterer, *Abriß der Geographie* (Gottingen: Dieterich, 1775), 24.

<sup>10</sup> Louis Antoine de Bougainville, *Voyage autour de monde par la frégate du Roi, La Boudeuse, et la Flûte l'Etoile; en 1766, 1767, 1768 et 1769* (Paris, 1771); Hawkesworth, *Reisen um die Welt*, Bd. 1 and 2; Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 1, 192, 239, passim; John Reinhold Forster, *Observations Made in the Course of a Voyage Round the World* (London, 1778) 4, 15, 33, 161, 214 etc.

<sup>11</sup> My travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, 2. Bd.

<sup>12</sup> Distance of the sun, on the opposite hemisphere; therefore, a little cooler weather, although not winter according to our European sense, as it is then still always as hot in the tropics as it is in our summer.

claim that November, December and January are the most beautiful months of the year. According to the ordinary rule for the hot zones, the rainy season begins when the sun passes the zenith, and this occurs in Tahiti at the beginning of December and the middle of January. Thus, the moderate change of the dry and wet weather cannot occur in the middle of the greatest ocean. It will never be as hot as in Cayenne and Guinea thus it will never require those severe rainfalls which soak everything there for three to four months. Instead, spring and autumn kiss each other all year. At all times, mist evaporates from the ocean, attaches to the mountains and drips down as morning dew; at all hours of the day the eastern wind cools the plains, softening the power of the sun's rays, and in the night that benevolent inland air, those freshest, mild western winds, with dew-dripping wings, descends from the summits.

Regarding the severity of the wind gusts, it is easy to rip out palm trees and other trees with very small roots from a loose fertile soil. I doubt however the remark that no thunderstorms strike Tahiti. Had we not, on the 24th of April 1774, installed a lightning rod at the tip of our mast, the flash of lightning<sup>13</sup> that nevertheless rocked the whole ship would, by all appearance, have split the mast and possibly caused even worse misfortune. If this can happen in the harbor, a rifle shot from the beach, it can easily happen inland.<sup>14</sup> It is probably a minor error that the prominent winds are stated as northern and eastern, instead of south-eastern. In this region the wind only sometimes travels east, and even more rarely north. Singular wind gusts that sometimes last between one or two days and mostly bring rainy weather with them, at certain times also come from the west; and without the latter it would

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<sup>13</sup> My travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, 2.Band.

<sup>14</sup> The entire island would then have to be idioelectric [self-electrifying], of which we have found no proof.

be nearly incomprehensible how the inhabitants would find their way back when they undertake long voyages.<sup>15</sup>

Where nature was so generous, human diligence could complete her beautiful work with little effort, trust to her fertile womb the most useful plants and receive them back in abundance. Despite this, however, it is rarely the case that Tahiti and the Society Islands have humans as inhabitants that modestly know how to appreciate their luck, to not only fulfil their most urgent needs, but to enjoy, through a little step further in civilization [*Kultur*], the small conveniences of life. The difference is astonishing between their farming, their finery, their affable character (as all of these are connected), and the farming, the finery, the savage distrustful nature of the Malekulans [i.e., the Ni-Vanuatu people/Vanuatu] who inhabit islands just as beautiful and rich. Apart from the nourishing breadfruit tree, the Tahitian cultivates bushes that provide him with clothes and flowers whose scent refreshes him. His dress competes with the simplicity and beauty of Greek ideals; his heart melts from the enjoyment of the softer pleasures of social life. The Malekulan, in contrast, plants in the most interior forests a small supply of roots and fruit, hardly enough to satisfy the hunger, whose nagging irritation he seeks to control with a cord tied around his belly. He creeps around naked, his finery [are] a rock in the nose and black paint, which increases his characteristic ugliness. His weapons [are] poisoned arrows, without which he does not dare take one step out of his derelict hut. Into which state did these two nations develop, each of them in their specific location? This important question must be answered first, before we can speak of the influence of the climate. And how is it possible to answer it? Could we also know which useful plants each of these people encountered on their island, and which they brought with them from their original abodes? Was Tahiti naturally richer than the New Hebrides [i.e.,

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<sup>15</sup> Forster, *Observations*, 511.

Vanuatu], and is it to the credit of the savages that settled there to have made use of these treasures through their reason? Or did they take coconuts, bananas and mulberry trees, potatoes, yams, etc.—their long-accustomed garden plants—with them, saved them on the way from soaking by saltwater and its subsequent rot, planted them into still unknown soil, and thereby gave into the care of the heavens the fate of their future generations: happy, gentle people, if the only surviving coconut sprouted, the last banana shoot sprung up anew—savage fish- and man-eaters, if one or both were lost! And, in which case should we admire the human spirit more? There the inventor, here the survivor? In both unfathomable wisdom of the human disposition for perfection is revealed! [52]

Let us now see what the Tahitian plants in his garden, as that is the name the inhabited part of the island deserves.

The proud growth and the crowned head of the coconut palm<sup>16</sup> (*Cocos nucifera* Lin.) appears to be also favoured by the Spaniard: he begins with it and notes their innumerable quantity. I am not aware that the palms of Guayaquil, to which he compares them, are special, maybe the comparison is merely general. There are very high slender trees of this kind that reach sixty to eighty feet upwards, bend towards the west at the top and are swayed by the wind. The inhabitant climbs it with unimaginable skill, using instead of a ladder a simple mechanism by which the foot soles are connected with bast fibre or rope. Another [53] variety [of coconut palm] is a lot thicker and also shorter and is mostly found close by the beach.

The fruit of the pisang, or paradise fig (*Musa paradisiaca* Lin.), is one of the most popular and nourishing food in hot countries, although I always detested its repugnant sweetness. I am astonished that the report only refers to five varieties. The Tahitians know of

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<sup>16</sup> My travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 1, 192.

thirteen in addition to the exceptionally tall variety which the Spaniard specifies as somewhat peculiar and which grows almost uncultivated in the higher valleys. The inhabitants have a special name for it, *Wehi* or *Fehi* [i.e., Fé'í], whereas the thirteen other sorts have the common species name *Meiya* [i.e., Mei'a].<sup>17</sup> Just by the number of these varieties one recognizes a refined cultural state.

[There are also] the bulbous sweet batata root, a kind of bindweed (*Convolvulus*); the exquisite yam root (*Dioscorea alata* Lin.), which grows two to three and a half feet long, and has snow-white or peach-coloured flesh; the two kinds of taro (*Arum esculentum* et *macrorrhizon*), which the Spaniard probably takes to be yams or achiras; and yet another sticky root [i.e., Polynesian arrowroot], which is called Takka in Rumph's Amboinese herb book, and yields snow-white flour:<sup>18</sup> These five kinds [of tuber] provide sustenance, are tasty and healthy. Of all the plants, however, the famous and beneficial breadfruit (*Artocarpus communis*) is the best and most nourishing food of the inhabitants. Nobody coming to Tahiti can fail to know the tree with which the plains are planted far and wide, and which bears fruit for seven months. The Spanish report even states its native name, albeit garbled, as it is pronounced uru and not kuru. There are three varieties [54] of this fruit, all of which betray a high degree of cultivation as they lack seed, as do the bananas.<sup>19</sup>

This would satisfy all needs; however, even though the consumption of fruit is not indispensable for life's sustenance, it certainly makes its contribution to the maintenance of

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<sup>17</sup> Forster, *Observations*, 442ff regarding the plant breeding in the South Sea nations.—The English call the Wehi, or wild pisangs, horse plantanes, just as they attach his prefix to anything coarse in the plant kingdom: horseradish (*Meerrettig* [sea radish]), horse-beans (*Schweinsbohnen* [pig beans]), etc.

<sup>18</sup> Georg Eberhard Rumphius, *Herbarium Amboinense*, vol. 3 (1741), *Tacca pinnatifida*; Johann Reinhold Forster and Georg Forster, *Characteres generum plantum* (London, 1776); Forster, *Observations*, 443.

<sup>19</sup> Forster, *Observations*, 441.



health. On a small island too much variety of fruit cannot be expected, since the little it has is already a great deal. Apart from sugar cane, which is consumed for its sweet juice and as a pastime, there is a kind of Malay apple (*Eugenia malaccensis* Lin.) which the Spaniard calls the rose-coloured manzano, comparing it with a guava;<sup>20</sup> and the magnificent fruit *Evih* [i.e., *Ví*], or the so called Tahitian apple that equals the pineapple in taste, and therefore is compared by the Spaniard with the best Peruvian fruit, the cherimoya.<sup>21</sup> This apple and some sorts of bananas are counted as the best fruit of the hot countries, and the former can indeed compete with our tastiest fruit. The Tahitians have a further fruit that they call *ahih* or *ratta* [i.e., *Mápé*], and whose taste our Spanish report (as do the English) compared with the taste of our chestnuts.<sup>22</sup> I will not dare to speak with certainty of the nuts and almond-like fruits mentioned in the Spanish report. The bad habit not to name natural products according to their own [55] attributes, but to give it names based on their often merely imagined similarity

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<sup>20</sup> What manzano actually means, I cannot discover at the moment. The guava, however, (*Psidium pyrifera* Lin.) whose shape it is supposed to have, looks like a pear. The Malay apple is accurately depicted in Hendrik Adriaan van Rheedee tot Drakestein, *Horti malabarici pars prima*, 12 vols. (Amsterdam, 1673–1703/London, 1774). The Tahitians call it *e-Haya*.

<sup>21</sup> All travel writers praise the famous cherimoya, the fruit of the custard apple tree which in Peru and Chile is preferred to all other fruit, even the pineapple. See Philipp Miller, *The Gardener's and Florist's Dictionary, or a Complete System of Horticulture*, 2 vols. (London, 1724); Amédée François Frezier, *Relation du voyage de la mer du Sud aux côtes du Chily at du Pérou*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1716/Amsterdam, 1717), 407; Antonio de Ulloa and George Juan., *Relación histórica del viage a la América meridional* (Madrid, 1748) [*A Voyage to South-America: Describing at Large the Spanish Cities, Towns, Provinces, etc, On That Extensive Continent*]. The Tahitian apple is in fact a kind of *Terminalia* [*Myrobalanen*] (*Spondias dulcis*) which must find its comparison with the cherimoya laudable. My travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Hawkesworth, *Reisen um die Welt*, Bd. 2; Sidney Parkinson, *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas, in his Majesty's Ship, The Endeavour* (London: Stanfield Parkinson, 1773); my travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*; Forster, *Observations*; Forster, *Characteres generum plantum*, where this chestnut tree is called *Inocarpus*.

with known things, has also in this case hindered comprehension. If I may nevertheless utter my suspicion that those oily nuts which cause a burn in the throat are the fruits of a then still unknown tree, that we named *Aleurites*<sup>23</sup> [i.e., candlenut] and which, by the way, is important to the inhabitants in many ways. The almond-like [nuts] are a new kind of tropical almond (*Terminalia glabrata*) which grow on tall shady trees around the inhabitants' huts.<sup>24</sup>

As considerable as this list of edible plants is, there are also others cultivated that serve other economic purposes. [Shampoo] ginger (*Amomum Zerumbet* Lin.) I cannot count as a cultivated plant as it is not even of the right sort and grows, as far as I know, wild in the local valleys. The kava pepper has a prominent position as it is cultivated on large pieces of land. Its name (*Piper methysticum*) already indicates its evil characteristics. Nature had concealed it in its roots, but the human tendency to seek out its own destruction has been busy here too and found in the roots the powerful essence with which the senses can be overwhelmed and reason, the spark of heaven, can be numbed. It must, in any case, be mentioned for the honour of the Tahitians, that the nasty pepper drink nevertheless is used only by persons of status and mainly older people.<sup>25</sup>

More useful is the cultivation of bottle-gourds (*Cucurbita lagenaria* Lin.) and wax gourd (*Cucurbita pruriens*), in which they store oil and a variety of fluids; the paper mulberry tree (*Morus papyrifera* Lin.), from whose fine sapwood most Tahitian cloth is made; the bamboo cane (*Arundo bambos* Lin.), which can easily be cut into fishing rods and other tools; the black nightshade [56] (*Solanum nigrum* Lin.) that serves frequently as remedy for

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<sup>23</sup> Forster, *Characteres generum plantum*; Forster, *Observations*; my travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 2.

<sup>24</sup> The genuine tropical almonds [*Katappnüsse*] are described and depicted in Rumph, *Herbarium Amboinense*. They are also found in the South Seas, on the island Tanna [Vanuatu]. My travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 2.

<sup>25</sup> My travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 1, 306, 352.

different illnesses; the she-oak (*Casuarina equisetifolia*), the wood of which is made into the most durable and beautiful weapons and tools (among others the pestle for the beating of mulberry bark); the Chinese hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa sinensis* Lin.), the pretty zebra wood (*Guettarda speciosa* Lin.), and especially the so-called cape jasmine (*Gardenia stellata* Banks.) [i.e., probably Tahitian gardenia, or Tiare (*Gardenia taitensis*)], whose extremely beautiful and marvellously fragrant flowers girls and boys wear as decoration. Of all these, the Spanish report only mentions the paper tree without describing it, and a nice-smelling flower that is worn behind the ear by the inhabitants.

The author also contents himself with comparing the construction timber of this island, from which they build their houses and boats, with guayacan—quite the rash treatment, especially because in the Spanish parts of the South Americas any hard wood that is useable for building is commonly called guayacan.<sup>26</sup> He only deals with an examination of how the trees are felled and transported from the mountains to the sea. While he mentions the Tahitian name of one kind, *fabuy*, this is probably the same as *tutuy* [i.e., Ti'a'iri], and that refers to just the [candlenut] tree (*Aleurites triloba*) to which I ascribed the oily nuts. He notes quite rightly its spongy marrow, the resin-like liquid flowing from its wounds and the inner netlike bark. He should have added that the oily nuts, when pinned onto a wooden stick are used as lights and candles. But of the best and most useful timber nothing can be found, probably because his visit to Tahiti was too short to get information about this from the inhabitants. The already mentioned she-oak, bread tree, the Tahitian apple tree, or rather *Terminalia*, the Tahitian chestnut or ratta tree (*Inocarpus*), the Alexandrian laurel (*Calophyllum inophyllum* Lin.), the fish-poison tree (*Barringtonia speciosa*), the bur tree (*Nauclea orientalis* Lin.) and others, some of which are planted in the valleys and some on

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<sup>26</sup> Nicolai Josephi Jacquini, *Selectarum Stirpium Americanarum Historie* (Vin dobonae, 1763), 130.

the [57] highest mountains, provide the Tahitians sufficiently beautiful and durable timber for all their needs.

If we transplant farming peoples into a new part of the world, far away and different from their old homeland, time will teach them how to use the natural products that are initially unknown or even harmful to them. Who does not know of the coincidence by which the always alert providence opens up new sources to the helpless human for its preservation and comfort, through which it allows for so-called inventions that sometimes determine the fate of entire states? The poor savage has the same share in this providence as the most cultivated European. He finds in the forest remedial herbs for his few illnesses; and no need will emerge without the discovery of a way to satisfy it. Countless examples have taught us that the Tahitians too know how to make use of their wild native plants. I will relate what we learnt, although most remained unknown to us.

Whereas the beautiful sky and the desired fertility of the soil promise the inhabitants constant rich harvests, the soil has its occurrence of disease just as the human body does. Whether it is, as in the latter, due to its own faults, the sun and the moon may decide. Suffice to say, heating and cooling result in fever and colds in both hemispheres. Tahiti has its unproductive years, albeit rarely. They must have been terrible for a people that lives each day carefree about what happens the next morning. In this sad situation, they eventually sought wild roots and tasteless fruits, and scarcely lived on them until the return of better times. In desperation, the root of leafy elephant ear (*Dracontium polyphyllum* Lin.), the root of brake ferns (*Pteris*), the leaves of green nightshade (*Solanum viride*) and native yellow purslane (*Portulaca lutea*), the stems of erect spiderling (*Boerhavia erecta*), the fruits of the Indian mulberry (*Morinda citrifolia* Lin.) and the pandanus (*Athrodactylis spinosa*) are eaten. Indisputably, the Tahitians use a lot of plants as medicines since there are a few people

among them who specialise in it.<sup>27</sup> [58] Our short stay, however, did not allow us to acquire more detailed knowledge. We only know this much: that a kind of leucas (*Stachys decemdentata*) and a kind of button weed (*Cotula*) together with some other herbs are applied as compresses to wounds.

Furthermore, there are wild plants in Tahiti, that are not directly used for the sustenance of the inhabitants but help in the supply of food from the animal kingdom. I include [in this category] smelly daphne (*Daphne foetida*), poisonous cress (*Lepidium piscidium*), the anaesthetic rue (*Galega littoralis* Lin.) and the fruit of the fish-poison tree (*Barringtonia*) with which the fish are dazed and the catch is facilitated. If one wishes to continue, one can add nettle (*Urtica argentea* Lin.), Java grass, beach hibiscus (*Hibiscus tiliaceus* Lin.), dyer's fig (*Ficus tinctoria*), the wild pea (*Phaseolus amoenus*) and hairy cowpea (*Dolichos littoreus*), whose fibres are made into durable nets and ropes for this same purpose. Even with regard to clothing the Tahitian uses wild native plants. He takes the palm leaves of the pandan and the bark of the beach hibiscus to weave them into mats, and he finds in the bread tree as well as in the big and rough fig tree a net-shaped inner bark (*liber*), which he can substitute for the inner bark of a paper mulberry tree. To dye the cloth yellow many plants can be used, namely the Indian mulberry (*Morinda [citrifolia]*), the beach hibiscus and the Alexandrian laurel; to our knowledge, however, ginger is not used for it, as the Spaniard assumes, unless he understands it to be tumeric (*Amomum Curcuma* Lin.). The leaves of the cordia (*Cordia Sebestena* Lin.), the shimmering soldier bush, morning glory (*Convolv. brasiliensis* Lin.) and the Pacific tomato (*Solanum repandum*) all provide red colour after soaking up yellow fig juice. Tahitian luxury, insofar as it concerns pleasant fragrances, also

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<sup>27</sup> Hawkesworth, *Reisen um die Welt*, Bd. 2, 233; Forster, *Observations*, 494.

has its source in wild plants. No less than fourteen species<sup>28</sup> are used to apply perfume to coconut oil, among them primarily yellow sandal wood. [59]

Having finished the plant kingdom, our Spaniard addresses the remaining natural things. Rats, dogs and pigs are, as we too have observed, the only four-footed animals. His list of birds only consists of three categories, namely parrots, wild pigeons and king geese. There are two parrot and three pigeon species. By king geese the so-called boobies (*Pelecanus piscator Lin.*) may be meant.<sup>29</sup> But he does not even give the common chickens a single word. Indeed, we only saw a few on the entire island, as the French during their stay had bartered for several hundred pairs of them and thereby nearly extinguished the species.<sup>30</sup> Of the fish, I only recognize the bonito (*Scomber pelamys Lin.*), flying fish (*Exocoetus volitans Lin.*) and sea eels. I am completely unaware of eels and trout existing in the local waters; I rather believe these names were given to unknown fish due to some minor similarity. The other names which I relayed in Spanish remain indeterminable for now as they are local names which probably only apply to Peru. We found about twenty small bird species in Tahiti that have previously not been described, and our descriptions of new Tahitian fish are of roughly the same quantity because our catch was not at all successful during our short stay. Herr Banks related that he received from the inhabitants the names of one hundred and fifty fish during the three months he stayed there.<sup>31</sup> Anything on fishing with nets, lances, lines and torches that our Spanish report just touches on is more

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<sup>28</sup> My travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Don Anton Ulloa regards the king geese as the most common and largest species of geese in the South Americas. Antonio de Ulloa, *Noticias Americanas* (Madrid, 1772), 152. Frezier only states [that] it is a kind of duck with a red comb above the beak. Frezier, *Relation du voyage*, 140. Did he not mean the red naked skin surrounding the booby's eyes?

<sup>30</sup> Bougainville, *Voyage autour de monde*.

<sup>31</sup> Forster, *Observations*, 441.

comprehensively described by Cook's [report of the] first voyage,<sup>32</sup> where the fishing rods are also described in more detail. [60] It is, however, completely correct that Tahitian mother-of-pearl is of a unique kind, and what is reported on the seafaring of the inhabitants to the pearl islands [i.e., parts of Tuamotu Archipelago] is also real news.

[The island's] mineralogy is dismissed with one remark that neither metals nor precious stones existed in Tahiti. Anyone who is not an investigator of nature by profession can say little more of the local kinds of rock, which in the majority consist of layers of clay and porous, solid masses that are regarded as volcanic products. Herr Doctor *Ortego*—the same, whom we can thank for this Spanish report—told me in London that the Spaniards had brought back from Tahiti an enormous lump of pure crystalline sulphur.<sup>33</sup> The stone axes that the inhabitants use for work, and which the report mentions, are made of black basalt.

From climate and natural products the Spaniard proceeds to the human. We can easily forgive him his underestimation of the population, as the English estimates thereof were just as erroneous after the first two voyages. The most reliable facts and the calculations based on them taught us better on our last voyage. Instead of sixteen thousand, we count at least one hundred and twenty thousand, some even allege two hundred thousand. One should not object to the Spanish division of this people into four tribes (*castas*), which is not unnatural, if one has been on the island for only a few days and observed such different nuances of facial colour. It is, furthermore, not yet decided whether the feudal system that is woven into the Tahitian form of governance<sup>34</sup> is not in reality caused by the intermixing of different peoples. Bougainville found the difference between the common man and the noble classes so remarkable that he dared to divide them into different races. My father explained this view

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<sup>32</sup> Hawkesworth, *Reisen um die Welt*, Bd. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Forster, *Observations*, 22.

<sup>34</sup> Hawkesworth, *Reisen um die Welt*, Bd. 2; My travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd.1, 276.

in more detail and linked it with some other ideas about the populations of the South Sea Islands' inhabitants.<sup>35</sup> [61]

The inhabitants of the lowest class, who are called *Tautaus* and are most similar to peasants, are apparently called *genuine Indians* by the Spanish as they have the brown colour that makes them similar to the American peoples (*Indios*). Those, however, who are called mulattos and mulatto-coloureds in our report are undisputedly of the classes of the *Ehris* and *Manahune*, or: chiefs and vassals [i.e., landholders]. Their lighter-coloured skin, their fine contours, their taller, beautiful build, their natural disposition to grow fat (which is almost entirely missing in the Tautaus)—all of these are characteristics by which they can immediately be discerned. The Erihs, or chiefs, are still ahead of the Manahune, and I think the latter show an admixture of the lesser bloodline, which does not exist in the Erihs. The report mentions a fourth kind of person under the name of the albino-coloured, although only three were seen. For the Portuguese and Spanish, albinos are only individuals found among the Negroes, Asians and Americans, who instead of their natural dark colour have milk-white skin and pale eyes—also known as *dondos*, the moon-eyed, white moors, night humans, cockroaches, blafards, etc. [Albinism is] a vicious disease,<sup>36</sup> which, according to the most detailed observations, develops a white coating on the skin as a characteristic of these unfortunate beings. On Cook's first and last journey only one or at most a few Tahitians of fairer colour were seen; [they were] sprinkled all over with tiny brown dots like freckles and had sand-yellow or even yellow-red hair. Red hair and freckles combined with a very white complexion, however, are found in Europe too without it being considered a disease. Maybe

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<sup>35</sup> Forster, *Observations*, 358.

<sup>36</sup> Herr [Johann Friedrich] Blumenbach's dissertation *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa* (Gottingen, 1776)].



the alleged Tahitian albinos should also not be regarded as sick and not be compared with true albinos [*Kackerlacken*]. I, myself, have not seen one white Tahitian.<sup>37</sup>

The Spanish report confirms everything the English [62] and French seafarers have related about the sublime stature and the beautiful build of the islanders.<sup>38</sup> A healthy climate, nourishing food, comfortable dress, cleanliness and unspoilt morals maintain the body and give parents well-founded hope to create faultless children. That is why in wild hordes, and also in all peoples standing on the lowest steps of culture, so few cripples and misshapen persons exist; not to mention that in some savages there exists a disgust towards any fault in formation, which leads them to the cruel act of killing any weak child as a useless and burdensome creature. This cannot be the case in Tahiti, as the Spaniard came across fragile persons; however, as the beforementioned conditions promote the creation of healthy children, exceptions are most rare. In light of the charming anecdote of the good-heartedness of the people who had their beards shorn in the belief that this was favourable to the guests, the rash comment “they held misshapen people up to ridicule” is misplaced. One or another person’s thoughtless mockery may have occasioned that remark, however, it would be unreasonable to burden with it an entire people of whose kind customs so much proof exists.

Obviously, the human differs from the animal in that it is not content with the beauty of its body. There are some nations in hot countries who walk completely naked and even

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<sup>37</sup> Herr Kanonikus Pauw of Xanten has carefully collected everything that has been said about albinos. Cornelius de Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains, ou, Mémoires intéressants pour servir a l’Histoire de l’Espèce humain* (Berlin, 1769), 2:5.

<sup>38</sup> Bougainville, *Voyage autour de monde*; John Hawkesworth, *Captain Wallis’s Voyage*, in *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty For Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere* (Dublin: James Williams, 1775), 1:115–245, 211; John Hawkesworth, Lieut[enant James] Cook’s *Voyage*, in *Account of the Voyages*, 1:367–480.

feel *ashamed* at the thought of covering [the body],<sup>39</sup> and also in the unfriendliest corners of the earth on which the sun never shines, [there are people] who seem to hardly know that they exist and have not enough instinct to protect themselves from the cold<sup>40</sup>—both nevertheless agree with the cultivated European on wearing something as adornment, be it a bone through the nasal septum, a necklace, an earring or a coloured picture on the skin. The islander in the South Sea shows off with charms which he cannot [63] achieve without the suffering of most severe pain. He dares to be pierced bloody on the most sensitive parts of the body and then to have the punctures penetrated by black-blue ink that will never again vanish. It is futile to attempt to seek the motivation for an act that is accepted as an ancient tradition and [thus] regarded as inviolable. Many peoples have sought to separate childhood from the stage of adulthood by external markers and tied the introduction to the latter to great festivities. As is well-known, the priests of the Hottentots do not do this in a modest way.<sup>41</sup> Maybe the Tahitian puncturing or tattooing has just this purpose, as it is performed at this critical point in time and also done by priests. I just do not understand why the Spanish report locates the puncturing in the twentieth year [of age]. It is hard to imagine that a Spaniard would *delay* the onset of manhood.

Apart from this adornment, which the European rather thinks of as disfigurement, the Tahitians also have the custom of decorating themselves with feather crowns, flowers behind the ears and pearls, which is the reason for their desire for corals that they call pohe (not pue).

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<sup>39</sup> José Gumilla, *Histoire naturelle, civile et géographique de l'Orénoqueet des principales rivières qui si jettent* (Avignon, 1758), 1:187–89, 256. The inhabitants of the Pelew islands also go completely naked.

<sup>40</sup> The Fuegians. John Hawkesworth, *Des Capitain Cook's Reise um die Welt*, in *Reisen um die Welt*, 2:221–478, 304.; my travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Kolbe, *Beschreibung des Vorgebirges der Guten Hoffnung, und derer darauf wohnenden Hottentotten* (Frankfurt und Leipzig: Peter Conrad Monath, 1745), 147–49.

Considering the climate, even the clothing is more a sign of luxury than a natural necessity. The Spanish compare the Tahitian costumes with the taparrabo, poncho and manta of the South American peoples. Detailed descriptions of these Peruvian and Chilean pieces of clothing can be read in [the works of] Frezier and Ulloa.<sup>42</sup>

The purpose of the taparrabo can be sufficiently derived from the meaning of the word [i.e., breechcloth]. The poncho or undercoat is a simple piece of cloth, approximately four ells long and two ells wide, into which a longitudinal opening is cut in the middle just so that the head can be stuck through it. It thus hangs off the shoulders, one half at the front, the other at the back, down to the knees. [64] It is made from either fine mats or the strongest cloth that consists of many glued layers of bark. The overcoat (*manta*), in contrast, consists of the finer, muslin-like kinds of cloth; [it] is wider than the undercoat and sometimes of such extreme length that it can be wrapped around the body innumerable times. Despite all its simplicity, this dress has great variability and can be folded into the most beautiful drapery.

Just as we wear a coat on the street but in hotter weather only wear a shirt, the Tahitian also chooses his dress according to the weather, with the difference that he does not shrink from showing himself to anyone and everywhere dressed only in his lightest dress, that is, wrapped in a small cloth. It would thus be far off the mark to declare every scantily clad girl as extremely poor. Without ill intent, I consider this conclusion to be a sign of the formality of [the Spaniard's] national character, which finds it shameful to be seen without a coat even when behind the plough.

Those who have read the English and French reports on Tahiti without prejudice will also find traces of the Spanish way of thinking in the description the anonymous writer gives of the islanders' character. I aim in no way to deny their natural capacities and dispositions,

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<sup>42</sup> Frezier, *Relation du voyage*; Ulloa and Juan, *Viage a la América meridional*.

neither the slyness and the thieving nature, nor their tendency for comfort and lust, about which so much has been made known elsewhere.<sup>43</sup> It may nevertheless be granted to me to make a comment about it in a few words: Virtues and vices are relative concepts, which can only be applied to the national character in relation to other peoples; and even then you cannot judge a people without addressing the guiding principle of its morals. This way we avoid the accusation that we impose our own ideas on foreign peoples and regard it as our right to find fault or allow leeway based on this unreasonable premise. If one talks of the Tahitians' thieving, [65] one has to at least consider that the sight of European goods exposes them to irresistible temptation. Speaking of their idleness requires an acknowledgement that their few needs are easily satisfied, and that industry is the child of want. If calling them greedy and gluttonous, one should remember the descriptions of their tall build, their exceptional strength in wrestling and their corpulence. In Italy and Spain, a traveler from the north can hardly eat a regular meal without being called an insatiable glutton. Anatomists and physicians, however, know that his muscular build requires more food than the thin and small body of those southern Europeans.

The Tahitians' lust is indisputably the worst side of their character. But if one considers how easily the physical human crosses the boundary between need and excess; if one encounters at all times in history in all parts of the world the same non-abstinence; if one furthermore observes that Christianity's strong motivation for chastity<sup>44</sup> was in medieval times almost constantly improperly forgotten even by the clergy, and that the pure, virtuous behavior of the one half of our contemporaries does not balance the boundless excesses of the other—then the Tahitians may not be guiltier than many a people. The outrageous way of life

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<sup>43</sup> Bougainville, *Voyage autour du monde*; Hawkesworth, *Reisen um die Welt*, Band 1 and 2; my travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd.1 and 2.

<sup>44</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:18–19.

of the Erioy society [i.e., Ariori order] and their occasional infanticide<sup>45</sup> are horrible examples of the depravity of the nobles. On the other hand, there is convincing evidence for the proper way of life of the majority: their healthy physical condition, the astonishing size of their population on their small island, and especially the high number of children we saw in every house. Indeed, their married women are true models of fidelity, even though virginal chastity is observed as little as in many other peoples. The man must provide for wife and child; therefore the wife is the husband's serf. The good reputation of the unmarried women is not at risk by the fact that the palm forests seem to become Amathusian myrtle groves where both the [66] natives and foreigners are granted, and even offered, any favor. Should it be concluded from this that even in Tahiti the opposite sex is nothing but a tool for the satisfaction of physical needs, almost in the same category as pork and breadfruit? Just this conclusion disproves the Spaniard's opinion that the men there are governed by their wives. It is true, the good creatures have permission to breathe free air as often and as long as they please, and to flutter around their good husbands in merry dances. No duenna [i.e., chaperone] guards them, and neither window bars nor triple veils ensure their fidelity. But is this proof for a female regime? It honors the author and his travel companions that they steadfastly withstood those charms which carried away the English and the French; merely the offer that they received was proof of the superiority of our sex in Tahiti as the offered good must have belonged to the [male] sellers. While the kind-heartedness can be exaggerated, and every now and then betray a high degree of weakness, it can nevertheless not be designated as an emasculation of character that the hospitable Tahitian feels obliged to have the foreigner fulfil every main function of their physical existence in his huts. If there was no better evidence for the alleged Tahitian gynocracy than the men's begging on behalf

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<sup>45</sup> My travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 2; Forster, *Observations*, 413.

of their wives, the entire claim stands on very weak feet. “*Tayo veheine!*”—“Your beloved girl!”: This was the signal that opened the British seamen’s trunks without fail and let the colorful shirts, shoemaking nails and glass corals fly. Must this lavish love not have initiated similar assaults on the generosity of the Spanish? If the report that polygamy occurred there was reliable, this would be yet another reason to doubt the power of the women. I, however, have every reason to believe that monogamy is established in Tahiti.<sup>46</sup> Divorces appear to prove this in part and also seem detrimental to female dominance. [67]

The men’s [alleged] subordination may thus have the same explanation as the shameful statues the Spaniard claims to have noticed in Tahiti. Both situations were rashly observed and even more rashly judged. The carved human figures, which are found as ornaments on some canoes and also surround burial sites as the soul’s residence after death, are not intended to arouse improper ideas and they have no immoral meaning. I have never encountered a *tihī* (that is what the wooden likenesses are called) [i.e., *ti’i*] that had even the slightest similarity with certain immoral Greek or Roman deities. They deserve condemnation purely in view of their craft, as they indeed represent the worst caricatures of the human form.<sup>47</sup>

The observation that the Tahitians are courageous warriors is more accurate, even though the Europeans scared them with their murderous weapons. Compared to gunpowder all other weapons are mere straw arrows; and while it can be claimed, on the one hand, that modern wars are less bloody since [Berthold] Schwartz’s invention, it remains, on the other hand, also true that the brave man is no less safe from the enemy bullet than the cowardly and weak, so that in Europe individual bravery and all its associated virtues shall vanish over

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<sup>46</sup> Forster, *Observations*, 424.

<sup>47</sup> Forster, *Observations*, 459, 543; my travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 2.

time. The Spaniard compares the Tahitian *manoeuvre* mockingly with pantomime; but I ask nevertheless: How is our parade-ground drill anything but the pantomimic performance of battle? With time to observe the evolution of these islanders in more detail, all that appears pathetic disappears.

Language and morals always remain in a close relationship; therefore, the kind but also natural, simple and unrefined character of the nation can be recognized in the Tahitian vocalic language, with the simplest [sentence] constructions, no harsh consonants, and no inflections. Now, as kindness and good-heartedness are the main characteristics of the Tahitian, it is incomprehensible how, to our Spaniard, the governance of the Erihs appeared to be strict. All other reports contradict this remark, which I can as little confirm as the division [68] of the island into eight districts, since according to Cook there are forty-three. In some way the Spanish population estimate concurs with the fewer districts; the number of canoes or vessels that they have counted as to up to two thousand, however, corresponds to our calculations based on a fleet review.<sup>48</sup> Despite their elaborate reference to different kinds of canoes with or without sails and planks, and the latter's safety—declared by the four islanders who travelled with them to Peru—they appear not to have known Tahitian war vessels. We indeed struck it lucky when, in April 1774, we encountered a fleet of a hundred and fifty-nine war canoes, each manned with a crew of fifty. Four voyages to Tahiti had passed, [and] we had already been there once without even suspecting such armament existed, although it represented only a small portion of the local naval power. I shall not provide further description as it can be found elsewhere in more detail.<sup>49</sup> Only the following

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<sup>48</sup> Forster, *Observations*, 217; my travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 2.

<sup>49</sup> James Cook, *A Voyage Towards the South Pole, and Round the World* (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1777), vol. 1; my travelogue, Forster, *Reise um die Welt*. Further reports on the different kinds of canoes can be found in Hawkesworth, *Reisen um die Welt*, Bd. 2.

deserves to be mentioned here: the houses where the boats are stored do not have the same design as the residences and are also not called Efare-balle, but Hwarre-Wàha. Their roofs extend to the ground whereas the houses, whose sparse household goods do not stand out, rest on high thick pillars made from breadfruit tree wood.

In the aforementioned, many differences from the English travel writers have been noted, preparing the reader sufficiently for the difference in their reports on religion. The most abstract ideas, the most sublime impetus of human thought, the most clandestine doctrines [that are] often shrouded in the darkness of allegory are transmitted from and to different [69] observers. How could they not take on a different shape and then, in the form of heterogenous fragments, collected without any plan, defy any attempt to re-form them into one piece? What Bougainville, Cook and their successors relate about Tahitian religion, they heard from the inhabitants' lips, and there is no doubt about the authenticity of either. I believe, however, that the idea of deities marrying cliffs<sup>50</sup> can without a doubt co-exist on the same island with a more refined polytheism,<sup>51</sup> and both [can co-exist] with a belief in one highest god. In China, the Mandarin who believes in nothing is very different from the Bonze who believes in everything.<sup>52</sup> The difference is conspicuous between the millions of superstitious Indians who take the allegories of their eighteen Puranas literally and believe this nonsense is sacred, and the sophists whose perfidiously clever pride came up with the shastras, and the few Brahmin (if such still exist) who preserved the first Vedas.<sup>53</sup> The

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<sup>50</sup> Hawkesworth, *Reisen um die Welt*, Bd. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Forster, *Observations*, 539.

<sup>52</sup> Jean-Baptiste du Halde, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise*, 4 vols (Paris, 1735).

<sup>53</sup> Johann Ith, *Ezour-Vedam, oder der alte Commentar ueber den Vedam* (Bern, 1779).



plebians of Athens had different concepts of religion than Socrates or other devotees<sup>54</sup> in the Eleusinian Temple held.

Of all others the Spanish report contains the simplest account of the Tahitian sacrificial customs, honestly put in the context of the concept of God<sup>55</sup> as an invisible being. Having had the opportunity to come to a favourable opinion about the Tahitian religion, [the report] could have done without the harsh word that right from the start disparages it as idolatry. Unfortunately, it is the Christians who still utter the names Jew, Turk, heathen in a tone of contempt rather than heartfelt sympathy! [70]

That the custom of consuming sacrificial offerings was generally widespread is too well known to justify my comparison of examples from all continents; it suffices that Tahiti adds to their number. Whether certain concepts that can be found in the most distant and even most savage peoples have a common source has to remain undecided until complete knowledge has been achieved. I, for my part, do not endeavour to derive the Tahitian from the Jewish religion, although circumcision is common in both. Whoever admits that there is a difference between circumcising and incising will admit that the Tahitians are ignorant of proper circumcision.<sup>56</sup> Where, however, does the more remarkable commonality in all those innumerable peoples of the earth come from, such that they believe in a connection to a higher being and regard themselves as the lucky mortals upon whom the deity from time to time bestows its direct presence or beneficence? This belief is so common, that I would like

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<sup>54</sup> Ioannis Meursi [Johannes van Meurs], *Eleusinia. Sive, de Cereris Eleusinae sacro, ac festo. Liber singularis* (Leiden, 1619); Christoph Meiners, *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, Bd. 3. (Leipzig, 1775–1778).

<sup>55</sup> I note here that the deity is not called Teautua, as the Spaniard writes, but Eatua [i.e., te atua]. The “t” is an article. The priest is called tahauwa [i.e., tahu’a], and not pure, which means prayer.

<sup>56</sup> Hawkesworth, *Reisen um die Welt*, Bd. 2.; Forster, *Observations*, 556.

to know if it is also present in the hostile Huilliche<sup>57</sup> people who live their arduous existence in Tierra del Fuego.<sup>iii</sup> Should one find in all corners of the earth only the deceived and [their] deceivers? Or should one believe that the legend of an original revelation was preserved from father to son in all humans, even those who due to unfavourable fate became completely wild? Or may this be the explanation: That the recognition of the objective existence, which is inherent in consciousness, turns into worship the moment the barbarous human does not just suffer from their arduous existence but also feels restricted and overwhelmed by it? The Tahitians believe the deity is in the whirlwind and comes with a roar. One could possibly be as lenient with them as that astute scholar who regarded Socrates's genius as just an effect of the Greek sage's fanaticism. [71]

Religion transcends all earthly affairs. The thought of God is joined by the joyous hope for an existence after death. Just as the former could degenerate from the pure service of the highest being into polytheism, or conversely ascend from the rawest feeling to an abstract concept, the latter often became the source for the strangest ideas or the most important appearances. It has probably contributed more than love or friendship to the emergence of various customs that honour humans after death. The Tahitians deposit fruit, birds and pigs next to the grave, as a sacrifice to the deity. They have this custom, and that of letting the corpse decay in fresh air before it is buried, in common with many peoples. Their monuments are a little more peculiar—truncated pyramids made from hewn rock, which concurrently serve as places of congregation where public ceremonies are performed. Each of these monuments is named after the current chief of the district. Already during his lifetime the

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas Falkner, *A Description of Patagonia and the Adjoining Parts of South-America; Containing an Account of the Soil, Produce, etc., of Those Countries*, vol. 4 (London: Hereford, 1774). This same tribe is called *Pesseräh* by other travel writers, based on the word that is uttered most often by them. See Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Bd. 2.

location is assigned to him where his bones shall rot with his ancestors. Whenever he passes it, he uncovers his shoulder reverently, as if [standing] before a holy altar where the deity is called upon and where he believes he feels its presence through sensory signs. This place becomes doubly important to him, as the grave is the entrance to his creator!

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<sup>i</sup> Georg Forster first published his essay on Tahiti in 1779 [*Göttingisches Magazin der Wissenschaften und Litteratur*, ed. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg and Georg Forster, vol. 1, nos. 1 and 3 (1 November 1779/1780): 69–104, 420–58]. This translation works from the *Werke* edition of the essay [*Georg Forsters Werke. Sämtliche Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe*, vol. 5, ed. Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), 35–71] which reproduces a later, slightly amended version of the essay [*Kleine Schriften. Ein Beytrag zur Völker- und Länderkunde, Naturgeschichte und Philosophie des Lebens, gesammelt von Georg Forster*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Kummer, 1789), 275–354.] The page number indicated in this draft translation refer to the *Werke* pagination. Footnotes are Forster’s, endnotes are translator’s notes. Square brackets indicate translator’s additions to the text and footnotes. Please note: Forster’s notes have been adjusted to a modern format but not checked for their accuracy.

<sup>ii</sup> Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. and trans. Niall Rudd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 227 (“the fact that I breathe...and give pleasure (if I do give pleasure) is all of your doing”).

<sup>iii</sup> Forster erroneously located the Chilean Huilliche people (or “Southerners”) in Tierra del Fuego.