

A GERMAN INDENTURED SERVANT IN BARBADOS IN 1652:

THE ACCOUNT OF HEINRICH VON UCHTERITZ

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It is well known that during the mid-seventeenth century Cromwell shipped considerable numbers of his political and military enemies to Barbados where many of them were forced to labor as indentured servants.² One such person was Heinrich von Uchteritz, a German mercenary, captured after the Battle of Worcester in 1651, who spent about four and a half months on the island in 1652. The account of his adventures in Barbados,³ translated below, is one of only two published accounts which we have been able to discover in which persons transported by Cromwell relate their experiences on the island.⁴ It is thus unfortunate that von Uchteritz' tale is so brief, since the reconstruction of the life and treatment of 17th. century indentured servants would be greatly enhanced with longer personal accounts.⁵ Although the manner in which von Uchteritz was liberated from bondage (see below, "The First Chapter") was unusual, his descriptive passages on the island ("The Other Chapter") generally do not provide information that is not available elsewhere; yet some of the materials may be of interest to specialized researchers.

Von Uchteritz' account is contained in a twenty-eight page pamphlet which includes three main sections: (1) von Uchteritz' account *per se* (pp. 3-16), sub-divided into two chapters; (2) a "note" (pp. 16-22) written by Adam Olearius (see note 3), which offers additional details on Barbados derived from De Laet's description; (3) four short poems (pp. 23-28) written by four different authors.⁶ We have only translated von Uchteritz' account because section two is based upon a secondary source, and section three contains nothing on Barbados that is not already contained in the first section.

As a final word, it can be noted that the procedures we have employed in translating and editing this account are similar to the ones employed in a previous publication and need not be repeated here. ⁷

VON UCHTERITZ'S ACCOUNT

The First Chapter

Ever since childhood, I, Heinrich von Uchteritz, Lord of the Manor of Modelwitz in Meissen, have had the urge to try something noble, according to my station in life, and thereby to maintain and increase the praise my ancestors and kinsmen had earned through knightly virtue. For this reason I chose war as the most fitting means for my position and, when the

opportunity presented itself, I had in mind to seek my fortune in it. Therefore, in the year 1650, I left my fatherland and, for certain reasons, made my way through Norway to Scotland.⁸ There, at Dundee, I entered employment in the cavalry under the highest lord (that is, Count) *Okelbe* [Ogilvy] who was a native Scotsman, and His Majesty Charles II, who at that time was only King of Scotland, but who is now also King of England and Ireland. A powerful army was raised for this King in order to fight the rebels in England and to recapture the kingdom which the brutes and the murderers of his father, Charles I — his memory is full of glory — unlawfully usurped. Finally, when the harvest of 1651 was finished, the entire army marched to Worcester in England to beat the Cromwellians and the Parliamentarians. Although our army was stronger than the enemy's, and therefore could have easily reduced it if luck had been with us, the enemy caused us many a loss. They got the upper hand because our most noble generals were unwilling to attack courageously and let us march at random. One could readily see that our high officers showed His Majesty limited loyalty, and we were therefore dealt a decisive blow when we met in battle.

At that time, I was made prisoner by Cromwell's personal regiment and, with others, was taken to London where Cromwell himself sharply questioned us. Among other things, he asked from whence we came, and what we had in mind to serve a king who had no country. And, after many other statements, he said that fighting against him should happen no more for he had in mind to give us sugar to eat⁹ and to exchange us — which came to pass.

In the beginning of 1652, after we had been held prisoners in London for a quarter of a year, 1300 of us were sent on ships to the West Indian island of Barbados, which the English possessed. As far as I know no one returned except myself. This island lies in front of many other small islands. Its circumference is sixteen miles. Each of us was sold for eight hundred pounds of sugar. A count [*graf*] named *Weitecker*¹⁰ bought me along with nineteen others. This count was a Christian, born in England, who had one hundred Christians, one hundred Negroes, and one hundred Indians [*wilde*] as slaves.¹¹

The houses on this island all lie as if they were located in beautiful meadows. All of the best houses are constructed of cedar wood. There is only one room downstairs and adjacent to it is a small chamber. The upper part of the house is open on the sides so that air can flow through, and it is covered with thatch; thus, the pelting rain does no damage to the interior. Around the plantation yard stand the slaves' small houses. These are made of inferior wood, look almost like dog-houses, and are covered with the leaves of trees that they call *Blandin* [plantain?]. These leaves are quite wide. They are almost reed-like, and they serve well against the rain.

On the hills of the island one can see a great many lemon trees and, as in Germany, thorn hedges line the roads. Cotton also grows there in a pod not unlike a large walnut. When it is ripe, the pod opens and then the cotton is extracted. Inside the pod are seeds the size of large peas. The

seeds are sown and the plant grows in stalks, just like hemp, over a yard high. The leaves are not very different from grape leaves. They plant entire fields in cotton.

The inhabitants and English obtain their livelihood and trade entirely from sugar, tobacco, ginger, and cotton which are produced in great quantities. Money is little employed and they trade only with the above mentioned goods; one is as dear to them as the other. Slaves must do all the work. They plant and hoe tobacco, ginger and sugar. Sugar cane grows in the fields almost like reeds and to more than a thumb's thickness in moist places. The cane is first crushed and is then boiled in a kettle. The best of the cane is pressed out and the remainder is given to the pigs as fodder. After the sugar has been pressed out and refined, they let it stand in the sun or in a warm place so that the remaining moisture is removed. What remains is then sugar.

I had to sweep the plantation yard the first day; on another day I fed the pigs and thereafter I had to do the kind of work usually performed by the slaves. Our food was very bad and consisted only of roots. One such root called *batatas* [potato], is cooked in large pots and tastes almost like chestnuts. The other root is called cassava from which a small, but fruitless, tree grows. The cassava root is quite large. Before eating it must first be grated and the juice must be fully pressed out. Then it is pressed as flat as a cake, laid on top of glowing coals, and is covered with coals so that it dries fully. The extracted water is pure poison. Cassava is the slaves' food.¹² They do not receive meat and there is none to be had except for limited quantities of pork which only the gentry can afford.

The gentry make a drink from the potato root. They put the root in a sack, soak it in water and mash it together. This is then poured into a stone crock where it ferments as other drinks do. Then they add sugar and lemon juice. This makes a pleasing and fine drink. Although wine and beer are imported from other countries, they are very expensive. The slaves, however, drink only common water with sugar and lemon juice. So much for their food and drink.

Although this island lies in a pleasant location, one hears no birds. Actually the soil seems to be poisoned in some places and is not entirely healthy, because if one lies down on the ground for even one hour one soon begins to bloat and swell up. The inhabitants are of no special beauty, but generally look sallow. Those who are Christians speak English. The Negroes and Indians, however, have their own strange languages. In their dress, the Christians wear only light linen clothes which are finely made; the Negroes and Indians, however, go about completely naked except for a cloth tied around their privities.

The Christians on this island are all Calvinists. There are a number of churches and ministers, and their church services are no different from those performed in England. They also have their schools. The Negroes pray to the Devil. These poor people allege that God, who lives in heaven, is a good pious man who harms no one, but the Devil is very fierce and evil and does great wrong. Therefore they must pray to him so that he will not harm them.

If one among the slaves dies, they say he has returned to his homeland and friends and is doing well.

The Other Chapter

After I had spent from sixteen to eighteen weeks of my miserable life in such difficult bondage it is easy to see with what desire I longed for my beloved fatherland and for my precious freedom. After having given up all hope, God heard my lamentations and prayers and so it wonderously happened that I was ransomed — as is to be seen from the following account: Once, when several ships arrived from Germany with merchandise to be traded, according to custom, I beseeched Count *Weitecker* to set me free so that I might see my parents and my fatherland again. Thereupon he asked who I was and for the name of my family. I answered that he would perhaps not believe me if I were immediately to relate to him my family background. However, one of the prisoners, who was sold with me on this island, was a lieutenant (whose name I do not remember, but I believe he had the baptismal name *Johann Christoph*, the son of an innkeeper of Borna in Meissen) who certainly could tell the count about my family. The count immediately sent for this lieutenant who told him that my parents were of noble birth, and that he was certain if they knew where their son was, and how he could be ransomed, they would not hesitate in freeing him, no matter the cost. When my master, Count *Weitecker*, heard this, he personally went to the German merchants and related to them how he had bought a German prisoner who was of noble birth, and who had beseeched him to be set free so that he could return to Germany. He said that he would be willing to let the prisoner go if he could get back the eight hundred pounds of sugar which he had payed for me.

Now these merchants wanted to know my name. Since, at that time, my name was still unknown to the count, he returned home and asked me for it. But when I answered that I was called *Heinrich von Uchteritz*, he misunderstood and wrote down *Heinrich von Lueder* and conveyed this name to the merchants. One of them was named *Hans Lueder*, who was from Holstein and he requested that I personally come to see him. After I had given an account of myself and they talked to me about one thing and another concerning my release, they found out from me that I was not called *Heinrich von Lueder* but *Heinrich von Uchteritz*. Upon hearing this name, they were reminded of my dear cousin *Hans Christoph von Uchteritz*. Immediately, they asked me if I knew him, and if I knew something of his journey to the Orient. Whereupon I answered yes, he is my own brother, and although I knew that he had travelled with a delegation from Holstein to Persia, I had actually forgotten the year because of my youth at the time. Initially the merchants did not want to believe my account and even suggested that I had perhaps been the servant of *Hans Christoph von Uchteritz* — and therefore could not be his own brother.

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IN 1652

Even though I knew that Mr. *Hans Christoph von Uchteritz*, at present eldest Kammerjuncker¹³ to His Serene Highness at the Gottorff court in Holstein, was not my brother but only a distant cousin, I pretended that he was my brother in order to make myself acceptable to the merchants who knew and thought highly of him. After many other exchanges of words they produced the fine first edition of *Orientalische Reise-Beschreibung* [Description of Travels in the Orient] edited by Mr. Olearius,¹⁴ which they had with them. In this volume there was an engraved portrait of Hans von Uchteritz, who was a member of the delegation to Persia. After the merchants had pasted paper over the names on the copper engravings, they gave them to me with the demand that I should look among them for my brother and show him to them; only then would they believe me. I didn't feel too good about this because I hadn't seen my cousin since childhood, and I had fairly well forgotten what he looked like. Therefore I diligently, but woefully, looked at each of the engravings. Finally I decided which it had to be: The clothing and lively bearing suggested it to me and I showed it to the merchants. They then removed the paper and showed me the name, saying that I had guessed correctly, and that they now believed that Hans was my brother.

After all this had happened, they bargained with the count for my release and made good the eight hundred pounds of sugar through other goods; upon return to my homeland I was to pay them as much money as the eight hundred pounds of sugar would bring in Germany. I was very well satisfied with this arrangement. Because I was poorly dressed, I asked the merchants to have a couple of good garments made for me. They gladly agreed and from their goods there were forthwith made two fine garments befitting a free man of the nobility. Then they calculated what I would owe them. The sugar, garments, and the cost of passage to my fatherland were calculated in money; altogether it came to 450 *Rthal*,¹⁵ for which I gave them a promissory note.

When I saw that the passage home was so high I became very worried, since I did not know what my dear parents would say, even though I would have been glad to get rid of this difficult bondage. Thus, I walked about dejected and sad. However, I was consoled by the merchants (namely *Hans Lueder* and *Curt Hermann Riemer*. The latter is from Tønning; both are from Holstein and, in my opinion were the most distinguished persons on the ship. I do not recall the names of the others). They told me that I should not worry myself so much, but thank God with all my heart that I am free again and able to return to Germany. *Lueder* and *Riemer* also wanted to discuss matters with the other merchants on the ship in order to find out if it could be arranged that I did not have to pay back the money. The other merchants agreed, and the entire company told me that they would forgo the entire demand of the 450 *Rthal* because of my brother Mr. *Johann Christoph von Uchteritz*. Thereupon my promissory note was immediately torn up, and my sadness soon changed to joy. They wanted nothing more of me than when I return to Germany I should go directly to Gottorff in Holstein and report to my brother what they, for his sake, had done to release me from the island of

Barbados. His Serene Highness, the Duke of Holstein, is the merchants' merciful sovereign. They well knew that my brother was in particular favour with him and could someday, when an opportunity arose, do them a good turn, if they needed it, with a good recommendation to make up for what they were now doing for me. Rather than having to pay the money, I could do no more than readily agree to these requests.

Meanwhile several ships had come from Brazil and wanted to sail to Amsterdam. The German merchants contracted passage for me on one of these ships. They gave me a note so that I could exchange it in Amsterdam for 10 *Rthal* to be used for travel to my brother in Holstein. The merchants remained in Barbados because of their business in the West Indies. After I had expressed my gratitude to them for the very great service they had rendered me, I went on board. Since we had a good wind when we came from England to Barbados, we completed the trip of about 1600 miles within eighteen weeks, and with a good wind the trip to Amsterdam took about the same time. In Amsterdam I exchanged the note and received the 10 *Rthal*.

I then proceeded directly to my cousin in Gottorff and related all that had happened to me — how his authority and prestige in so distant and barbaric places resulted in my welfare, and how I was also saved from slavery among the uncultivated people of Barbados (where I, like other prisoners and those sold there, would have had to spend my life in difficult bondage and would have had to die). I thanked my cousin from the bottom of my heart not only for this, but also for keeping me with him at Gottorff for awhile without charge. Moreover, at his own expense, he conveyed me to my blessed father and also paid the merchant *Lueder* some money in gratitude. Every day I pray that God will repay my cousin with good fortune for the great deed he has performed for me.

NOTES

1. This article is the third in a series designed to bring to the attention of readers of this journal little known early foreign language accounts of Barbados. Others have been: Jerome S. Handler, "Father Antoine Biet's Visit to Barbados in 1654", *Journal of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society*, Vol. 32, 1967, pp. 56-76; Alexander Gunkel and Jerome S. Handler, "A Swiss Medical Doctor's Description of Barbados in 1661: The Account of Felix Christian Spoeri", *Journal of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society*, Vol. 31, 1969, pp. 3-13.

2 Cf. V.T. Harlow, *A History of Barbados, 1625-1685* (Oxford, 1926, pp. 117, 294-295); Robert H. Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados* (London, 1848, p. 144).

3. *Kurtze Reise - Beschreibung Hern. Heinrich von Uchteritz, Lieutenants, Erbsassen auf Modelwitz in Meissen und Worinnen Vermeldet was er auf derselben fur Ungluck und Gluck gehabt sonderlich weiler gefangen nach* ✓

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West-Indien gefuhret zur sclaverey verkufft and ^{and} der insul Barbados
[Brief description of the travels of Mr. Heinrich von Uchteritz, Lieutenant, Lord of the Manor of Modelwitz in Meissen, wherein is recorded what misfortune he had, particularly how he was taken prisoner, taken to the West Indies, sold into slavery and on the Island of Barbados . . .] Schleswig, 1666. ✓

P. M. Palmer (*German Works on America, 1492 — 1800*, University of California, Publications in Modern Philology, Vol. 36, 1952, p. 398) worked in forty-seven major libraries in the United States and Europe, and was only able to locate two copies of this edition: one in the Preussische Nationalbibliothek (Berlin) and the other in the John Carter Brown library (Providence, Rhode Island). Palmer also notes that two later editions were published in Weissenfels, in 1705 and 1712, by Johann Christian Wohlfarten. He locates only one copy of the second edition (in the Preussische Nationalbibliothek) and four of the third edition (Preussische Nationalbibliothek, Bayrische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, British Museum, and Library of Congress).

We were able to obtain a copy of the third edition from the Library of Congress and compare it with the first edition located in the John Carter Brown Library. The third edition is a faithful reprinting of the first except for some dedicatory pages by Wohlfarten; in gratitude for favours rendered, he dedicates the volume to two noblemen of the court at Saxony.

Von Uchteritz' account was originally published under the editorship of Adam Olearius (*Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Leipzig, 1895, Vol. 39, p. 126). Olearius (actually, Olschlager) was secretary, advisor, and even librarian, to Duke Frederick III at his court in Gottorf (Schleswig-Holstein) from 1633 to his death in 1671. A traveller, scientist, and writer, Olearius' interests ranged from geography, history, and mathematics to map production, editing, and publishing (*Allgemeine* 1887 Vol 24). It was undoubtedly at Frederick's court that Olearius first heard von Uchteritz' story (see "The Other Chapter") and, it might be assumed that his interests in geography, travel, etc. prompted him to encourage von Uchteritz to write-up his adventures. ✓

4. See, for example, Jerome S. Handler, *A Guide to Sources ^{Materials} for the Study of Barbados History, 1627-1834* (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, forthcoming). ✓

The other account in Cromwellian times ^{is} *England's Slavery, or Barbados Merchandize. Represented in a petition to the high and honourable court of Parliament, by Marcellus Rivers and Oxenbridge Foyle, gentleman, on behalf of themselves and three-score and ten more of freeborn Englishmen sold, (uncondemned) into slavery* (London, 1659). The petitioners claim that they had been falsely accused of having participated in the 1655 Royalist plot, commonly known as "Penraddock's rising" or the "Salisbury uprising." They were imprisoned in England for about a year, then shipped to Barbados where they arrived in May, 1656. Sold as indentured servants, they were "in- ✓

humanely" treated on the island, but only one paragraph of their account describes the conditions under which they lived. A copy of this seven page pamphlet is located in the British Museum, but it is reproduced, with other materials related to the case, in L.F. Stock (editor) *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliaments Respecting North America* (Washington, D.C., 1924-1941, Volume 1, pp. 247-266).

5. A third published account dates from post-Cromwellian times: *A Relation of the Great Sufferings and Strange Adventures of Henry Pitman, Chirurgeon to the late Duke of Monmouth...* (London, 1689, 37 pp.). After the defeat of Monmouth's army at Sedgemoor in 1685, Pitman was imprisoned in England, and subsequently shipped to Barbados. Only a few pages of the account are devoted to his approximately sixteen month stay on the island and the harsh treatment he received while there; however, he describes the manner in which he clandestinely procured a boat and escaped from Barbados in the company of seven other indentured servants. The "Monmouth Rebels" were considered a special category of indentured servant; reproduced in this work is the stringent law of early 1686, passed to regulate their behaviour and prevent their removal from Barbados before their ten year indenture period expired.

Richard Hall (*Acts, Passed in the Island of Barbados ...* London, 1764, p. 455) only reproduces the title of this law, "An Act for the Governing and Retaining within this Island, all such Rebels convict...", and comments on it, in a footnote: "...the condition of these rebels was by this Act, made as bad as, if not worse than the Negroes; but King William III, was pleased to release them from servitude, and this Act was repealed, March 17, 1690".

6. Olearius, in his "note", appends further information on Barbados derived entirely from De Laet's *Descriptione Utriusque Americas (i.e. Novvs Orbis, Seu Descriptionis Indiae Occidentalis ... 1633)* so that the reader can judge the veracity of von Uchteritz' description as well as derive additional information "because [Barbados] is one of the principal islands of this area". He briefly summarises De Laet's discussion of physical geography, history, and agricultural produce. A relatively extensive treatment of the potato and cassava is based upon additional sources, and becomes a minor treatise on these plants in the West Indies in general; there is also a brief subjective discussion of religious beliefs in the East and West Indies and Mexico.

The four brief poems, written by Olearius and three others, have varying emphases, but all are based upon von Uchteritz' account and, in general, extoll his adventuresome spirit and praise him and members of his family.

7. A. Gunkel and J. S. Handler, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

8. We have been unable to find any biographical details on von Uchteritz other than those which are presented in his account; thus, we can only conjecture on the series of events that precipitated his move to Scotland and his involvement in the "Great Civil War". The Thirty Years War in Germany was formally terminated in November, 1648, and the devastation it caused

greatly contributed to the massive demobilisation problems faced by the armies. Thousands of German soldiers were left "...without other hope for the future save that which the career of soldier had afforded them", and many left Germany to enlist as mercenaries in the service of the French, Spanish, Venetians, and English; in addition, the war had created "... a class of landless nobility, pretentious parasites who lived on their kinsfolk and on their wits" (C. V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1939, pp. 506, 508, 517). It might be that von Uchteritz was one of this "class of landless nobility" as well as one of the many demobilized soldiers who perceived their future in Germany in uncertain terms and continued to pursue the only occupation they had known — soldiering — but this time in more fertile fields. The sympathy that von Uchteritz expresses for Charles I makes it apparent that the support given by the English King to the Protestant cause in Germany during the Thirty Years War was not forgotten; such sympathies were perhaps instrumental in von Uchteritz' decision to go to Britain and join the cause of Charles II.

In sum, it can be conjectured that the major reasons for von Uchteritz' removal from Germany were more pragmatic and materialistic than he himself suggests, and that an uncertain future in Germany, pecuniary motivations and his own politico-religious sentiments precipitated his travel to Scotland and participation in the "Great Civil War".

9. *uns zucker zu essen zu geben.*

10. This is undoubtedly a transliteration of the English name *Whittaker*. Richard Ligon, who lived in Barbados from 1647 to 1650, presents in his classic *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London, 1657) the earliest known detailed map of the island. This map locates and names the island's plantations and there is one on the leeward coast (between "the hole" and "Black Rock") identified as *Whittak* — the symbol κ being a traditional abbreviation for *er*. It is quite likely that this was the plantation on which von Uchteritz lived. ✓

11. The number of Amerindian slaves on one plantation at this period seems rather high and the figure may be exaggerated. For more details on Barbados' Amerindian slaves see Jerome S. Handler, "The Amerindian Slave Population of Barbados in the 17th and Early 18th Centuries" (*Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 8, 1969, pp. 38-64) and "Aspects of Amerindian Ethnography in 17th Century Barbados" (*Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 9, 1970, pp. 50-72). ✓

12. See J. S. Handler, "Aspects of Amerindian Ethnography..." for more details on the seventeenth century use of cassava and sweet potato and the preparation of drinks from them.

13. *Kammerjuncker* refers to a court position held by a young nobleman, below a chamberlain but above a personal page. *n. m. d. h.*

14. See note 3. Olearius had also been a member of delegations sent from Frederick's court in the 1630s, to both Russia and Persia. The trip to Persia was made from 1635-1639 and resulted in the 1647 publication of his *Newen Orientalischen Reise*, a book that went through eight subsequent editions in ✓ German alone (*Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Leipzig, 1887, Vol. 24)
15. *Rthal*— abbreviation for *Reichsthaler*, a unit of currency used in Germany from the 16th. to 19th. centuries.
16. This is probably a printing error; the name should read *Hans Christoph*.