
Documents 1599

Comments about the galleon trade by the Royal Fiscal

Source: AGI 67-6-18: Audiencia de Filipinas, 1595-1606; translated in B&R 11:112-119.

Letter from Licentiate Salazar to Philip II, dated Manila 21 July 1599

Sire:

Since I have given to your Majesty an account of the affairs of the administration of justice and of the royal treasury of these Philippine Islands by two other letters which accompany this, I will here discuss affairs of government.

...

The main object of your Majesty's royal decrees, provisions, and orders given to your governors of these islands, is the prosperity of the citizens thereof; for in that way they become established and settled and the islands populated. The governors have not always attended to this as they should, for they have regarded this, which is their principal obligation, as accessory and dependent upon their private interests in order that they may become rich with what the citizens are to gain, as is already well known. And so little is the profit, and so poor the subsistence, of those who live here, and so much is their living interfered with by the governors, and the relatives and dependents whom they bring with them, that, as a result, so little is left for the citizens that they cannot in twenty years make the profit and gain which is acquired in a few years by some of those whom the said governors bring with them. This has often been experienced. For the remedy of this I suggest the following things.

The lading of the ships which go to New Spain, the allotment of space in them, and other matters touching this, should be conducted according to, and after the manner

directed by, clause 5 of the letter which accompanies this, regarding matters which concerns the royal treasury.¹ No cloth should be laded except that which goes according to the allotment; nor should the governor have any authority therein, because, as the superintendents of lading are persons appointed by him and in his confidence, with letters and orders which he gives, much other cloth is laded after the allotment is made. For the most part this belongs to persons who are underlings, kinsmen, or creatures of the governor, and must necessarily occupy space belonging to the cloth of the citizen, who is thus obliged to give up his cargo. What I describe is the ordinary way that things go.

...

By order of your Majesty, the viceroy of New Spain appoints the general, admiral, captains, masters, and other officers of the ships which are despatched from here to that province with merchandise, at the time when the said ships return thence. The persons so appointed bring so large a quantity of **money unregistered** in the ships as, it may be readily seen, they can do, with the power attached to their offices, since they are the servants and underlings of the said governor; accordingly, when they have arrived here they invest their money, and lade the goods in the said ships, although they are prohibited from doing so. This is another opportunity, almost equal to that of the governors who come.

In order for that to be used by the said citizens, it would be fitting that the said general, admiral, masters, and officers of the ships be appointed here, in the sessions of the Audiencia, by vote of the president and auditors; and that those appointed should be citizens of this city of Manila, or of some of the other towns of these islands. The salaries which hitherto have been given to the said general and admiral in New Spain should be diminished. With the little which is given here to those who are appointed, and from the profits which they will make, there will result no little benefit; since every year, in the ships which are to go, there would be 5 or 6 men, and they would return with a profit large enough to maintain themselves, and face the enemy. The ships would be better administered and governed, by persons who understand that better, through the continual practice which they have in these islands in maritime and military affairs; for at times persons come in the said offices who have no experience whatever in the one branch or the other, which is ordinarily the cause of much loss.

...

There is a great carelessness in appointing gunners for the said ships, for a ship which carries one piece of artillery has had six gunners appointed, whereas one ordinary gunner would be sufficient. If your Majesty be pleased, it would be well to command that for each piece of artillery no more than one gunner should be appointed; because,

1 Ed. note: Fully stated earlier (B&R 11:92-93) and summarized hereafter; the governors appointed their friends to lade in the ships their own property, outside of the amount allotted, thus avoiding paying duties to the royal treasury.

besides their cost to the royal treasury, they are likewise a damage to this community, on account of the quantity of money which they bring and carry back invested to New Spain.¹

In the ships which come from New Spain a great deal of money is brought which is not registered. Beside not paying in Acapulco the duties of 2-1/2% which are due to your Majesty, there results to this commonwealth a great deal of damage; for this money belongs for the most part to merchants and citizens of Peru and Mexico. Although in the sale which is made of the said ships, when they arrive at the port of Cavite, investigation is made—as I did this year, when I asked permission from the Audiencia to go and inspect the ships which came—and although I went there, only a very small quantity of this money was found, on account of the great care which was taken to hide it. At times, it even belongs to the most powerful people here; consequently, those who are bringing it are very bold, and it is necessary to inspect the vessels before they arrive at the said port. It would be expedient for your Majesty to command that the fiscal of the said Audiencia should always be present at the making of this inspection, so that he can take all measures which appear to him suitable for that purpose, and can make the inspection before the ships arrive at the port, wherever he may wish. All the coin or silver bullion which is seized for registry should be applied for the royal treasury, some moderate portion being given to the person who denounces the culprit, so that there may be persons to do this.²

At present nothing else occurs of which your Majesty should be advised in matters concerning the government. I shall continually look out for what is most expedient for it, and will advise you of what should be done.

May God protect your Majesty, according to His power, with a large increase of kingdoms and dominions, according to the needs of Christendom.

Manila, 21 July 1599.

The licentiate Hieronimo de Salazar y Salzedo

Note on the 1599 galleon.

Source: Chirino's Relation; translated in B&R 13:30, 65.

How Father Francisco de Vera returned to Spain for more fathers. Chapter 37.

... It was agreed to despatch Father Francisco de Vera, as a person who had been most successful in conveying the last reinforcement, so useful and so large—which, however, was now too small for so greatly increased a harvest, and more reapers were needed. The father set out from Manila on this journey, in the month of June 1598 in the ship **Santa Margarita** which, after a prosperous voyage of 4 months, reached New Spain. Soon afterward, orders arrived there from our very reverend Father-General,

- 1 Note in margin: "Have a letter written to the viceroy together with this report, that, if this be so, it appears excessive, and he shall correct it."
- 2 Note in margin: "Write to the governor that it is understood that this practice has become established, and let him try to prevent and correct it. Let the fiscal accompany the royal officials in the inspection of those ships..."

Claudio Aquaviva, that Father Diego García, who had completed his term as rector of the college of Mexico, should repair at once to the Philippines, to visit and console, on behalf of his Paternity, our people who were there, and should take with him a reinforcement of earnest laborers in the vineyard of the Lord, which was the same object for which Father Francisco de Vera had gone... So, the Father visitor departed, as we shall later see, with some companions for the Philippines.

...
The arrival in the Philippines of the Father visitor, Diego García, and how he began his visitation. Chapter 51.

When affairs were in the condition which we have described, the Father visitor, Diego García, very opportunely arrived in the islands, with some companions¹ on the 17th of June in the year 1599.

...
 I will relate, in order to show the mercies of God toward our fathers, a special instance of this which His Divine Majesty displayed toward them and the vessel which brought them from the port of Acapulco to the Philippines. The pilots were confidently sailing over their accustomed course, heedless that in it there were shoals. One evening at the hour when the *Salve* is wont to be recited, and while all were reciting it, a young man fortunately (or rather through the singular providence and mercy of God) descried **shoals** from the maintop and immediately began to shout a warning. With that the crew—even though everyone was agitated and fearful lest, with the freshening of the wind, they would be driven upon the shoals—hastened, some to the sails, ropes, and rigging, others to the helm, and the pilot to direct the ship's course. Our fathers, meanwhile, repaired to their quarters and berths to invoke the most blessed Virgin, to call upon God, and to pray for the intercession of the saints—all of them specially invoking that of Blessed Father Ignatius,² a relic of whom the Father visitor carried with him. Showing this to his companions while the rest were busied in the other occupations, he augmented the fervor with which they cried to Heaven, and at the same time their confidence that by means of that holy relic our Lord would deliver them from their danger. And so He did; for, upon steering so as to direct the vessel to one side, to avoid the shoals, the vessel, in spite of their efforts, would not obey, but, turning in the other direction, doubled the shoals. If their attempt to steer had been successful, not only could they not have passed the shoals, but they would have drifted hopelessly upon them; but, as it was, the flagship was saved. Moreover, her lighted lantern (for evening had already arrived) guided the other ships, which followed behind her, through the channel, and in this manner all of them were saved.³

1 These were Father Melchor Hurtado and Francisco González, and the brother coadjutor Diego Rodríguez.

2 Referring to Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Jesuit Order, and afterward a saint; he is here mentioned as "blessed" as he was not canonized until 1622.

3 Ed. note: The flagship was the Santa Margarita. The other two ships were: the San Jerónimo and the Contadora.