
Documents 1589A

Shipping news for 1589

A1. Letter from Governor Vera to the King, dated Manila 13 July 1589

Source: AGI 67-6-18; translated in B&R 7:83-94.

Sire:

This past year of 1588 I gave an account to your Majesty of the condition of this land. As the voyage is so full of sea-perils and danger from corsairs, and it is difficult for the despatches to reach the hands of your Majesty, the duplicate of that letter accompanies this one. Therein is declared the extreme need of the islands for reinforcements of troops and necessary supplies for the camp, and other things, of which I gave an account to your Majesty.

...

On this route to New Spain your Majesty has four ships and the new one that has just been finished, and which makes the voyage this year.¹ Of these, the Viceroy of New Spain sold the ship **San Martín** to make the voyage to Macao, where it was wrecked and burned by the Chinese. Another was taken by the English corsair, as I reported to your Majesty; and but now when another, in the port of this city, was ready to make the voyage, so great a hurricane burst on this and many other Spanish and Chinese ships that only a small boat was left unwrecked. Of the two remaining, only one is available; the other cannot be used, as it is so old.² Understanding the great need there was of ships, I had a large galleon of 600 tons, which had been built in the Pintados Islands, placed in the shipyards of your Majesty, for the above-named route. God willing, it may sail in the year '91. I have given orders for private persons to make two other ships of less tonnage. One is already finished, and both will be able to sail next year.

1 Ed. note: It seems that only a small boat made the voyage to Acapulco in 1589. No vessel of any kind came from Acapulco that year.

2 Ed. note: This old ship was probably the San Juan Bautista.

It is most important that there be for this navigation plenty of ships, both for the emergencies of war which may arise, and for the preservation of these islands, which are supported by trade. If, as I have suggested several times before, your Majesty were pleased to have about 10,000 pesos sent annually from New Spain, two ships of good capacity can be launched very easily, without harassing the natives in any way and with this help, at even less than a third of the cost elsewhere. Otherwise, there is no way to bring it about. Your Majesty will signify your royal pleasure in this.¹

For the ships sailing between these islands and New Spain, and to other places which may be found, sailors are much needed, to navigate them and to remain here to look after them; also carpenters and caulkers who must reside here to repair them. They should be paid in New Spain as this treasury is too poor. As the money for their wages must be sent, sometimes it is not brought, and at other times it is lost, thereby causing the sailors to die of starvation. Therefore, the sailors serve half-heartedly, and desert; and there is great negligence in the despatch of the fleets. The only remedy for both these evils is from the treasury of your Majesty. If it is to be spent therefor, it would be best for your Majesty to have the amount of the freight charges on the property sent from these islands in the said ships granted annually to this royal treasury up to the sum of 3,000 pesos. Thus the needs here will be met without taking from the treasury of Mexico.²

I have already reported to your Majesty the removal from these forts of a quantity of artillery, for the security of the two ships which I despatched to New Spain last year, 1588.³ That carried by one of the ships is paid for by the merchants, as well as the powder, arms, and ammunition; and that on the other was at your Majesty's expense. Part of the money received I sent to the kingdom of China in order to buy what metal could be obtained. Thence they brought me 125 picos⁴ (about five arrobas) of copper, at 13 pesos and 8 reals. With this, artillery is being cast; to take the place of the pieces carried by the ships, I had others cast from the metal which I had here. The results are very good. Bronze is so cheap in China, and so easy to transport and cast in this country, that, if your Majesty will have money sent hither from New Spain for this purpose, artillery could be provided in this country both for New Spain and Peru. Will your Majesty signify the royal pleasure in this.⁵

...

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- 1 Marginal note: "Write to the Governor to proceed with and carry out this plan, and to give orders to private persons to build ships."
 - 2 Marginal note: "A decree in accordance herewith. Meanwhile order shall not be given that the ships of this line shall sail at his Majesty's cost."
 - 3 Ed. note: They probably were the galleons Santiago and San Pedro.
 - 4 Ed. note: According to Clarke's *Weights, Measures, and Money* (N.Y., 1888), one picul weighed 133-1/3 pounds.
 - 5 Marginal note: "Write to the Viceroy of New Spain that this seems expedient, and that he may send money to the Governor, in order that some artillery may be made there, both for New Spain and Peru. Advice as to what is needed must be given to the Viceroy of Peru."

At the shipyard of these islands your Majesty's chief shipbuilder and superintendent of the works was Master Miguel de Palacio. He died and his place was filled by Master Marco, a good builder of all kinds of ships. He died also; and although I understand there is another now in charge of the galleon which is being built in the Pintados, he is old and cannot all alone attend to the work, to the repairing of the ships of the line, and the building of others. There is great need of another good officer, I beseech your Majesty to order that if possible, men be sent for this from the kingdoms of New Spain.

In the relation written by the Audiencia are other matters, of which I give no account here, since they are there mentioned; your Majesty will please order that these be examined.

May God preserve the Catholic person of your Majesty.

At Manila, 13 July of the year 1589.

Doctor Santiago de Vera

A2. Letter from the royal treasurer, Gaspar de Ayala, to the King, dated 15 July 1589

Source: AGI 67-6-18; translated by B&R 7:112-136.

Sire:

Last year I gave your Majesty a detailed account of the events that had hitherto occurred in these islands; of what has since happened I will give account in this letter.

As soon as the ships left for New Spain, we set about building a ship of 700 tons at the cost of your Majesty's royal treasury. As purveyor thereof was appointed Captain Don Juan Ronquillo, mayor of the province of Pintados. The ship is being built in that district, and paid for out of the tributes which your Majesty has from that province; and this city provided some articles which were lacking there. The purveyor writes that he can make the voyage this coming year [i.e. in 1590].¹ This ship will be the fourth of your Majesty's vessels on that route. I understand that two of them will be of no use for this next year, as they will have to be laid aside. Thus it will be necessary, for the navigation on that route not to stop, that ships be built continually. Although Marshall Gabriel de Ribera and Captain Juan Pablo de Carrión are each building a ship, they will not be able to support them, and will be obliged to sell them at the port of Acapulco on the first voyage, for the Peru trade. Although they could be bought in these islands on the account of your Majesty's royal treasury, it seems to me better that your Majesty should save the profits that will be made after their construction; since they can easily be built at much less cost than if they were bought after they are built.

¹ Ed. note: If this was the San Felipe, it did not sail until 1591, as the Governor was predicting above.

The accounts of your royal exchequer have been audited this year, and are being sent with everything clearly expressed. The entire accounts are set forth and the data in detail, each class by itself.

...
This year there came from China eleven or twelve vessels with but little merchandise, because, as they say, there have been many wars and a severe plague. It has been reported that a ship from Panama or Peru, prepared to lay out a large sum of money, has arrived at Macao, which is on the river of Canton. As I have stated in previous communications, if it is permitted to carry on trade between Peru or New Spain and China, this country will be depopulated and ruined. The principal means of support here is the merchandise from China, and the profit which results from sending those goods to be sold in New Spain.

This would be completely done away with, should ships go from that country or Peru to China; for it is evident that, if these ships bought the merchandise needed, there would be no market or sale for the Chinese to come here with their ships to sell the goods, or at least not in such large numbers; and besides the general loss to this land, there would be lost the customs duties of import and export.

...
Your Majesty's galleys in this city are useless, and serve for nothing whatever. It will be more profitable and less costly to have a couple of small ships and another couple of armed frigates. This can be done if your Majesty will order them to be built and the galleys to be broken up.

...
This year a Japanese ship came to this port with many supplies and arms. There must have been more than 500 arquebuses and as many of their kind of swords, and some battle-axes. As the conspiracy of the Indians had taken place when the said ship arrived, it was believed that it came for the execution of the plot. On entering the port, this ship was boarded, and all its cargo was sequestered and the crew imprisoned. It was learned that they were going to sell the weapons in Cian [i.e. Siam], and they were released from custody, on condition that they would sell the goods here. This they did, and this country has consequently been supplied with weapons.

...
On the same day [i.e. 29 June 1589] there was an unusually severe storm of wind and water in this city. The natives say that they never saw one like it. The sea and the Madre [i.e. Pasig] River rose until they joined and reached the fort. Much damage was done in the houses; and worse still, two ships which were here loading a cargo for New Spain—one belonging to your Majesty, and the other to Marshall Gabriel de Rivera—were driven on the coast by the force of this storm, and it is understood that they cannot be repaired. Even should one be repaired, it cannot make the voyage this year. In all the port not one ship or frigate escaped, except one small boat, which was taken to send advices to New Spain of the condition of this land, which is most unpropitious. By this calamity, so injurious to the community, the people have become greatly dis-

heartened. Moreover, as I write this sentence, we have had thus far no news of ships from New Spain, although this is the 7th of July.

The entire support of this land depends on the coming and going of the ships; and if they are not here by May or the middle of June, by delaying longer they run great risk of being lost, and with them the welfare and support of this land. Sailing from the port of Acapulco at the beginning of March, they would arrive here in good time and without risk from storms. As this is of so much importance, I beseech your Majesty to be pleased to order your Viceroy of New Spain to exercise the utmost diligence in the early despatch of the ships which are to come to this land, in order that they may accomplish the purpose of the voyage.

...

There is nothing else at present. Only I pray that our Lord may preserve your Majesty many years in perfect health, and with increase of greater kingdoms and possessions, in His holy service.

At Manila, 15 July 1589.

The Licentiate Ayala