
Document 1598A

1598 report on conditions by Dr. Antonio de Morga

Source: AGI 67-6-18 (Simancas—Secular; Audiencia de Filipinas; cartas y expedientes del presidente y oidores de dicha Audiencia vistos en el Consejo; años 1583 á 1599); translated in B&R 10:75-102.

Report by Morga, dated Manila 8 June 1598

What is to be said of the condition of affairs in these Philippine Islands is as follows:

...

1. The evil example set by the religious through their vices, indecent behavior, gambling, banquets, and festivities.

2. They trade and make a profit in their districts from rice, wax, wine, gold, boats, fowls, cloth, and deerskins, to the great detriment of the Indians as well as that of the entire country.

3. They deal openly in merchandise of the above-mentioned articles, as well as in those of China, in the trade with New Spain.

...

14. They are very careful to exact that all the Indian girls, specially the young and most beautiful, appear at the gates of the monastery every day. They converse with them, showing partiality to the handsomest among them. When a new prior arrives or any other person for whom the religious wish to make a special display, these Indian girls dress themselves carefully and call to see them. Besides this, there are other things which it would be offensive to tell.

...

20. They are attended by a great following of Indian boys, who serve as pages and servants. These are well dressed, wearing liveries and gold chains. They carry their hats for them in the streets, while in the monastery they assist them in the cells. Each one, however, has his own special servant.

...

24. The more spiritual among them try and go to China, Japon, Camboja, and other kingdoms, in order to preach the gospel, unmindful of their duties here, for which they

were brought. This anxiety makes them restless, and they invent journeys and conquests which disturb the rulers and the Spaniards. All this gives rise to other objectionable things.

...

52. All the Japanese coming here in their vessels would better be sent back to Japan. Not one should be allowed to settle in this kingdom.

53. Those already here should be banished to their own country, for they are of no benefit or utility; but, on the contrary, very harmful.

54. On departing, the Japanese are wont to take cargos of silk and gold, which are merchandise intended for Japan. This should not be allowed until the Spaniards have made their purchases, for it increases the price of silk.

...

67. There are a great number of Indians, both men and women, in the city of Manila, who are vagabonds of evil life, living in the houses of the Spaniards...

68. The country is becoming filled with black slaves and Cafres¹ brought by the Portuguese, and these are the worst that the Portuguese have...

...

82. With regard to the weight and cargo in the ships sailing to New Spain, it is essential that those in authority protect the citizens, since there is but one August and one harvest. They should strive to allow the citizens to pursue their occupations freely and leisurely, and to have the cargo loaded by those only who can justly do so.

...

91. Warships ready for any emergency are needed; but at present we have none.

92. There are but few arms in the armory, and those few are rotten and out of order. This need is notorious; and all classes of weapons, specially muskets and arquebuses, must be made.

...

104. From New Spain many disreputable men, condemned to the galleys are brought here and allowed to disembark and go where they will, dressed and armed like the rest of the people. They are not often tried; and not only do they not pay the penalty for their crimes, but even commit other atrocities and crimes here.

...

140. In the expenditure for repairing ships and other royal ships made in Cavite, there has been spent much more than appears by Master de Ribera's statement, which was verified only by his word and oath. This is a very extensive scheme, in which there may have been considerable loss and fraud between the Factor and Master de Ribera, because the expense has been very heavy and is not clearly stated.

1 "The black people or Caffares of the land of Mozambique, and all the coast of Ethiopia and within the land to the Cape of Good Hope... The Portuguese do make a living by buying and selling them." (Linschoten's Voyage, London, Hakluyt Society translation, 1885, vol. 1, pp. 269, 277).

141. Galleys, vireys, caracoas, frigates, and other royal vessels have been lost because of inadequate shelter.

142. There are many places in which are employed sailors, gunners, caulkers, coopers, and other seafaring men, who are superfluous, unnecessary, and of no service. They create notorious expense and are maintained in these employments on account of being servants, relatives, and friends of those in authority.

...

154. The giving of positions on the trading ships of the New Spain run is a great detriment to the country. In the first place this advantage is enjoyed by those who have not served in this land, thus depriving of it those who have served.

155. As persons who have no compassion on the citizens of this country, they busy themselves only for their own interests, and not for the good of the country.

156. Many of those in the naval and military service come here who are useless and troublesome. This is a great expense to the King, and all to no purpose.

157. The soldiers come naked, unarmed, and starving, because their captains have only tried to cheat them.

158. The ships return loaded with the investments of the officers of the ships. Besides their own goods, they have been entrusted with large commissions and trusts in Mexico, which they execute and fulfil to the great deprivation of this country. They receive excessive salaries all the time until their return to Spain, which might be dispensed with if they were officials of these islands.

159. After they depart for New Spain with their ships, then for greater comfort and the better stowage of their merchandise, they throw overboard the goods of our citizens, without any necessity. This they do without any feeling of compassion for the many whom they ruin. It makes no difference to them, for they are going where they cannot be prosecuted against, and where it is impossible to follow them.

160. Usually those who come in those positions are relatives and servants of the Vice-roy of New Spain. They are mere youths and have no experience in their duties. Innumerable frauds and injuries are perpetrated in the despatch of the ships at Acapulco, of which I shall not speak in detail, for that one point alone would require a great deal of paper.

Manila, 8 June 1598.

Don Antonio de Morga