
Document 1639A

Jesuit annual report for 1638-39

Sources: RAH Jesuit tome 4, n° 34, fol. 268+; published in B&R 29: 141-171.

Note: Although the document is unsigned, it is thought to have been written by Fr. Juan López.

Events in the Philippines from the year 1638 to that of 1639

...
At midnight of 10 November, such a fierce gale of wind came from the south that it broke five of the moorings of the flagship [galleon] **San Luis**, which was laden and with its artillery aboard. The wind carried away its shrouds, and grounded it in the sand near Parañaque, but in such a manner that it could be floated off after five days.

...
Early on the night of 21 November, the two galleons, the **San Luis** as flagship and the **San Juan** as almiranta, left for Ternate. The Commander-in-chief is Don Pedro de Almonte, and the admiral Don Alonso de Alcoçer, although with the title of governor of the almiranta galleon. The commander of the flagship as far as Zamboanga is Don Pedro Fernández del Río, who is captain and sergeant-major for the voyage.

...
January 15, General Don Gerónimo de Sumonte took possession of the post of fort commander and other offices at this port [of Cavite].

...
March 20, there came tidings that large pieces of planking, masts, and the ribs of a vessel which had suffered shipwreck had been found on the coast of Paracali, opposite [that of] Manila. From appearances, it is thought that it is the almiranta **San Ambrosio** which sailed for Mexico from these islands last August, *quod Deus avertat*.¹

1 Ed. note: Latin phrase meaning: "God forbid!" The wreck was not that of either galleon sent to Mexico, as the Concepción ran aground in Saipan, and the San Ambrosio made it alright to Acapulco. It must have been the wreck of a marauding Dutch ship.

A champan arrived here on 30 May with 50 arrobas of nails which had been taken from the wreckage of the ship which, as I said, had run aground on the coast of Paracali. Those whose opinion is most accurate in that matter have examined it, and believe that it is all from the almiranta **San Ambrosio**. On that account the profound sadness that was general in April and May has ceased; or it had been reported that indubitable signs were found that the flagship [**Concepción**] had been wrecked.¹

...
27 June, a destructive hurricane came down upon this port from the northwest, and veered about to almost all points of the compass. It overturned some houses, and did great damage in all the others and in the churches. It blew the tiles through the air as if they were bits of paper. The galleons along the shore were a great cause for anxiety; and the commander, Don Gerónimo de Sumonte, and Captain Pedro Muñoz hastened to them quickly, with the prominent men of this port, all of whom worked valiantly. That was very necessary; for the galleon **San Juan Baptista**, although held by 11 cables, came dragging upon the **Concepción**, which was being made ready to sail to Mexico.² They would infallibly have been dashed to pieces, had they not been attended to so carefully and diligently. Of the other smaller craft, some have been wrecked; and some men were drowned. It was God's pleasure to allow the wind's fury to last only four hours. Had it blown with the same violence during all the 24 hours while it lasted, no ship would have escaped, and not a house or church would have been left standing. Two hundred houses were overthrown in the village of the Indians. But what caused most fear to those natives (and the old men say that they have never seen such a thing, or heard it told by their ancestors), is that the hurricane carried into the air the small boats that they use, which are called *bancas* and resemble canoes. It is said that they were blown about like paper, and that when they fell again they were broken to pieces. The hurricane blew with the same violence in all the surrounding villages, and caused the same damage; it blew down 170 houses in Parañaque.

Since 7 July there have been very severe storms of wind and rain. On the 19th the ferry boat was wrecked in the bay and it is said that 18 persons were drowned. Many illnesses have occurred during that time, in which a great number of people of all nations have perished. Because of this, and because many have been persuaded that the two ships of the past year have been wrecked—not only because of the signs that the sea has thrown up, but because news of their arrival in so belated—there is a universal gloom and sorrow over the whole country, such as it has never had before. May God in His mercy console the land.

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- 1 Ed. note: This can only be interpreted to mean that the flagship had been indeed carrying more people and goods than the almiranta.
 - 2 Ed. note: This is not an error. This Concepción was nicknamed "Cambojana", because she had been built in Cambodia. The other Concepción was, of course, lying shipwrecked off the southern coast of Saipan.

[News of the Concepción shipwreck in the Ladrones]

In the afternoon of 24 July [1639], six of the men who had sailed in the flagship of last year, which was wrecked on 20 September 1638, by the fury of a tempest in the Ladrones Islands—on an island 35 leagues away from the islands where our ships generally land on the voyage—arrived here. Besides those who were drowned, many were killed by lance-thrusts from the natives. Those who escaped went from island to island to those of Uan and Harpana, where they were well treated.¹ The reason alleged for that was, that the Spaniards are good men, and leave them iron when they pass there. From the island of Uan the natives despatched six Spaniards and two Indians in two canoes, furnishing them with food from what they had. They commended themselves to God, crossed the open stretch of more than 300 leagues, which they did in but one fortnight—a wonderful thing, if one will but consider those small boats which are of much less burden and steadiness than pirogues and canoes, and even smaller than they. They arrived almost dead with hunger, thirst, and lack of sleep. Our Fathers of the Society of Jesus received them in Palapag, and cared for them for several days; after that they recovered, and immediately set out [for Manila] in a champan with a good supply of food. The Indians of Uan sent those Spaniards, so that they could give the news and send a boat for the other 22 Spaniards who are there alive, with some Indians and negroes, and carry them iron, etc.

As soon as the tidings were told in this port of Cavite, the sobs and cries were so many that all were stunned, for there is no-one who has not lost a son, a father, a brother, a brother-in-law, a father-in-law, a son-in-law, or a husband. The loss has been one of the greatest that has ever visited these islands, because of the loss of men and the poverty of the islands.²

Good news is received of the almiranta [**San Ambrosio**], for they say that they saw it but shortly before they were wrecked, sailing on a good tack; and that it is thought that it has arrived at New Spain. May God grant that it has so happened.

1 Ed. note: Since Harpana is recognizable as Zarpana, i.e. Rota, Uan may similarly be a misprint for Guan, i.e. Guam.

2 Díaz states (Conquistas, p. 402) that this galleon (“Nuestra Señora de la Concepción”) was “the largest one built up to that time,” and that it contained the greatest wealth of the islands. The few men who escaped to land were afterward rescued by Spanish ships, and taken back to Manila.

