
Document 1620D

Eyewitness account of the 1620 voyage by Fr. Alonso Roman, S.J.

Sources: RAH Jesuit Tome 112 (new number 9/3685), last document; transcribed by Ventura del Arco, Ayer ms. 1300, vol. I, pp. 487-496 in Chicago's Newberry Library.

Relation of what happened to two ships that left New Spain for the Philippines this year of 1620

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[Folio 271v]

On 4 April, the two ships left Acapulco, a port of New Spain, and after 15 days of navigation they found that they had sailed very little, because the *almiranta* was slow and heavy, and the flagship had to wait for it. Therefore, the flagship, fearing that the [contrary] winds might come before getting to the Philippines, it was decided to run and to let the *almiranta* come alone. [Nothing more has been heard from it since; either it has gone back to Acapulco or it has arrived in distress in Japan, but it has not arrived here, and there is no news about it.]¹ Hence, the former pursued its voyage.

On Thursday of the octave of Corpus Christi, 25 June, our flagship came into sight of the Philippines and, at daybreak, sighted the three Dutch ships that were waiting for it. Our ship, thinking that it was a Philippine fleet, went toward them [because General Fernando de Ayala had been told here that they would be waiting for him with our fleet when he returned, in the neighborhood where he met with the enemy].²

At 9 a.m., they were so close that it could talk to the enemy, which said very clearly in Spanish: "Que esperas, hombre? Quieres que te eche a fondo? Amayna por Mauricio. Date a buena guerra." [What are you waiting for, man? Do you want me to send you to the bottom? Lower your sails in the name of Mauritius. Give yourself up as a fair prize.]

1 Ed. note: It is mentioned again in the postscript. This last sentence appears only in the Ventura del Arco copy, and has been suppressed in the Seville copy.

2 Ed. note: Again, this sentence appears only in the Ventura del Arco copy.

Our people, who had suddenly recognized that they were enemies, answered with a 20-pounder loaded with a ball. Everyone got ready for war with the intention to fight until death, rather than give up the ship. There was no lack of people to advise the General to jettison the silver, but, as the very valiant and great captain that he really is, to whom after God is due this good outcome, he did not wish to do so. Rather, he wished to continue fighting, and he said that this would be the greater damage he could do to the enemy. The problem was that our ship carried only 6 cannon, even though [fol. 272]

they were good ones brought from here [i.e. Manila], but two of the enemy ships had 30 guns each and the small one 14.

The soldiers, although they carried arquebuses and muskets, had only 16 powder horns between them; the powder was so little that there was only for about 60 shots from the guns. What inspired them enough was that our ship was so strong that their shots did not go through and our people were piercing their galleons, as if they were paper. The Dutch flagship and *almiranta* got our ship in between them, and the other was behind. They were shooting at it all day with the large battery of guns they were carrying. Ours kept defending itself, moving ever closer to the coast as best it could, whenever the weather closed in. The night arrived, but the battle did not cease. Rather, the Dutch *almiranta*, which was a pretty galleon, very light and well equipped with guns, was always next to our ship, pounding it. Ours was defending itself and, at about 3 a.m., ours gave it such a good shot that it made it retreat, not to say flee. It went off and, with voice horns, spoke with its flagship.

At daybreak, the General decided to run the ship aground, and to save the silver and the people as best as possible, because if the enemy assaulted him at sea one more day, it could be feared that he would unrig the ship and [make it] give up by force of guns (it was never the intention of the enemy to grapple). In fact, our ship was making for the land and it was placing itself in unknown waters when, little by little, it was realized that it had entered a very narrow strait between two islets and found a port. Once there, it put out the anchors. Then came a furious wind which meanwhile must have blown off the enemy to parts unknown, because it was never seen again and it is thought that it was very well broken up.

At noon of this day, which was Friday 26 June, there came a furious storm which, if it made the enemy sick to their stomachs, still it did not do any good to our ship that was in port either, because it caused all the mooring cables to break, leaving it with only one anchor and it forced [us] to cut down the masts. Some Indians came from ashore and they pulled the ship further in between two rocks to a place where it is very muddy, and there the ship stayed.

Later on there arrived two Fathers of our Society from among the four who reside [fol. 272v]

at the nearest town called Borongan (the whole of that island [of Samar] and other ones in its vicinity are assigned to the Society). It was then planned to take the silver ashore. This was done, and it was placed inside our house under guards. They

despatched to Manila one of the Fathers in our band to give advice of the happy outcome. He arrived with the news at this city on 19 July. There was great joy and rejoicing, the more so that the suffering had been acute, and the risk that everyone had been in.

Benedictus Deo, que dedit nobis victoriam per Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum.
[Thanks be to God, who has given us victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.]
Manila, 22 July 1620.¹

[P.S.] After this paper had been written, on 22 July, news arrived that our *almiranta* had met with a stiff wind on the same coast, next to the residence of the Society, called Palapag. It was in danger of being pushed onto some reefs, where the people and what was aboard would have perished, but finally it ran partially aground and what was aboard was saved. It sighted the Dutch enemy that was coming from the battle with our flagship; it was sailing toward Japan, but it appears that the enemy did not see our *almiranta*. It seems miraculous how these two ships have escaped.

[P.S.S.] Pass on this relation to friends, and give my regards to Father Pangua.
[Signed:] Alonso Roman, S.J.

1 Ed. note: From the date, it can be inferred that he, the writer, had been despatched to Manila ahead of his companions.