
Document 1619D

Letter from Governor Fajardo to the King, dated Manila 10 August 1619

Sources: AGI 67-6-7; translated in B&R 18: 247-279.

Letter from Governor Alonso Fajardo de Tenza to Philip III

Sire:

In the vessels that I despatched from this bay to New Spain last year on 10 August, I informed your Majesty of my voyage and arrival, and of the condition in which I found this country. By way of Portuguese India I did the same thing in December of the said year, adding then what was new.

What news I can now give is that, thanks be to God, the said ships reached here on the return voyage on the 3rd of this month, after a long trip of 3-1/2 months—and on the outward voyage, the smaller ship spent less than 4 months, and the larger 7 days more. They have been among the most fortunate ships seen here. Glory be to His Divine Majesty for everything.

Those ships have brought two companies with 124 volunteer soldiers together with 34 sentenced by justice to serve in these districts, 32 convicts for the galleys, 378,586 pesos of 8 reals, in reals and in bars of silver, also arms, military stores, and other necessary supplies for the use of these strongholds and warehouses. Although the troops and money do not equal what was asked from here—nor what is extremely necessary, because of the very stringent need here of both men and money—according to what I have heard of the difficulty in collecting this aid, and the labor that it cost the viceroy of those provinces to expedite and send it, he is greatly to be praised for it. I am under obligations to him; but I find myself also obliged to entreat your Majesty to have him urged in vigorous terms, saying that you consider yourself served thereby, and to order him to continue it, doing the utmost possible in the reinforcements asked from here. He should also be asked to furnish those reinforcements in the same manner, in those years when ships do not reach Acapulco from these islands because of having to put back

into port in distress, or from any other forced cause that prevents their voyage; for it is certain that even if no ship arrive there, the despatch [from Acapulco] should not be discontinued, because of its vast importance for the welfare of this community, and in order to bring provisions and reinforcements, as is usual and necessary.

...

[The coming of the Dutch-English fleet in 1618]

They had only five ships with high freeboard, to which were added two others, also large ones, a part of four vessels that we heard were to come from Japan—according to what was learned from that kingdom through the Fathers of the Society, and by way of Ternate, and from some prisoners captured along this coast, not far from here.

...

The workmen on two ships, the construction of which had been ordered, had to be urged to greater haste and all that was necessary supplied, so that either one or both of them could be finished in time to serve on the occasion then presented; and a ship of moderate size, which was the only one found in this bay when I entered it, had to be repaired. The latter was so old that it was necessary almost to rebuild it.¹ Also I did the same with a small patache and the galleon in which I came, [i.e. the **Espiritu Santo**] and the Japanese vessel [i.e. **Date Maru**] which also came with me from New Spain. It needed not a little repair, and gave me a great deal of trouble with its owners, so that they should lend it. But finally they lent it, and now I have had it bought at a very cheap price. With it, and one of the new ones which were finished in time (which is the one now about to sail to New Spain),² and those above-mentioned, and another new patache which I had finished from the bottom up—altogether they comprised 2 large vessels, 2 moderately-sized vessels, 2 pataches, and 4 galleys. They were repaired, and manned in great part with borrowed slaves and Dutch prisoners (for the Dutch inflict upon the Spaniards the worst of treatment).

[He recounts how the Dutch fleet came into Manila Bay for the last of 8 times, then went off for another year.]

I also sent an order and money to Macao to buy a ship of more than medium size, which was there and belonged to the commandant of that city. According to the letters in which I have been answered, the ship can arrive here soon. With it, those that I have here, the other new one (which is now finished), and a *horca* sent me by the Viceroy of India, I shall have 7 ships, including large- and medium-size ones, besides the large one and one patache which are about to sail to New Spain, which can direct a good artillery fire.

...

I also sent money [to India, in December 1618] and an order that, if any good or suitable ship be found, it be bought; or that they should contract to have one or two built wherever most convenient—or in Cochin, because the wood is harder than that of this

1 Ed. note: This was perhaps the old **San Juan Bautista**.

2 Ed. note: This new galleon was named **San Nicolás**.

island... Captain Gregorio de Vidaña ... returned with the said *horca* which the Vice-roy gave him.

...
The sending by your Majesty of the fleet that you have offered to these islands becomes unavoidable.¹ You should see that the infantry contingent be in excess of 2,000 men; that the contingent of sailors and artillerymen reach 900—embarking them in such vessels as can come with comfort. It should be noted that ships for these regions and for the journey from Spain must not be less than 500 tons, nor much greater than 600. Vessels of this capacity, if new and strong, will be of very great service both for war and for trade and commerce with New Spain; and each one will be assigned to the use most fitting to it, in accordance with its build. And if they carry efficient troops and artillery, a quantity of anchors and cables, capable commanders and sailors, and an order that the money for their sustenance be provided, they will be very welcome, whatever may be their fashion and build, as the restoration of this country will be certain. This is the only remedy hoped for.

...
I have been unable to make any investigation in the [1617] loss of the six galleons that had occurred when I reached this country, of which I immediately informed your Majesty. For, as Don Gerónimo de Silva would have to be blamed for it, as the one who was Captain General on sea and land, and in the event of his acquittal, the blame must fall upon another, or he would remain guilty; and inasmuch as he is protected by the judge conservator with bulls from his Order (that of St. John), to which likewise is joined the assertion that an order from your Majesty is necessary to make that investigation: for that reason, I have been unable to investigate fully and specifically, but I shall fulfil whatever your Majesty shall command, on the arrival of those orders. If now I should try to make any investigation I could not do so, as I have heard so much different talk about it. In my opinion such and greater disasters may happen, without any blame resting on those who give the orders, or on those who execute them. Many such disasters have been seen to occur, thus in the sea, when it is excited by any violent storm—and more, since it is among islands, where there is no place for the ships to run free.²

[He mentions the names of the two new auditors who arrived in 1618: Licentiate Gerónimo de Legaspi y Echevarria, and Doctor Alvaro de Mesa y Lugo, and the one who arrived in 1619: Antonio Rodriguez de Villegas. The fiscal was then Licentiate Juan de Alvarado Bracamonte, a man of “rectitude and integrity, the qualities most to be esteemed in the ministers of the Indies.”]

1 Ed. note: After many delays, this fleet was finally despatched in December 1619. A storm forced it back into Cadiz. The whole squadron went out again and was driven upon the Spanish coast on 3 January 1620.

2 Ed. note: Finally, the good governor has come to his senses.

[Japanese affairs]

It has been the custom to send presents and gifts at your Majesty's cost from this place to the king of Japan and to certain private persons, great vassals and lords of the ports of that kingdom, every year when a ship was sent to that country for the necessary commerce, and the provisions which it sends to this country—inasmuch as it is the fashion not to deliver an embassy or message without taking a present. For some few years back we have neglected to send any. Some religious persons, zealous for the service of God our Lord, and for the conversion of that nation and the salvation of its souls, and likewise for the welfare of these islands, desiring to have them as our best friends in all this archipelago, have considered the decrease of the commerce, and attributed it to a disrespect for their friendship; and that consequently they were bound by treaty to prefer now that of the Dutch—whom they loved not a little, because they gave and continue to give them rich presents from what they plunder, since these do not cost them much.

Having considered this matter and that there are certain conveniences in having friendly relations with that country, which has and gives to this country many necessary and useful things, and where our ships which ply between here and New Spain are liable to turn back in distress on both the outgoing and return voyages when obliged by contrary weather as has been already seen and experienced—and on such occasions it has been important not to have them as enemies, for then the Japanese have given the crews of our ships a good supply of necessities, and have shown them a positive proof of good treatment in not seizing the so great profits and wealth carried on the said ships; likewise having considered the friendship that they have established with the Dutch, and the persecution there inflicted on Christians and their ministers, the Spanish priests who preach the holy gospel: I have esteemed it advisable to give a report of the matter to your Majesty, so that you may have it examined and considered, together with the written reports of certain religious, experienced in those regions, as well as that of the fiscal of the Audiencia, who also, I am told, discusses it. Will you order the procedure most advisable for your royal service.¹

...

I shall close at this point, acknowledging the receipt of only one letter that has come to me from your Majesty in these vessels that have just arrived. It is dated El Pardo, 20 November 1617. Consequently, with what I have written, I have nothing more to reply to it than that I shall do all in my power, as I ought and as I am obliged to do in fulfilment of its commands, and in all that concerns your Majesty's service.

May God preserve the Catholic and royal person of your Majesty, as is needed by Christendom.

Manila, 10 August 1619.

Don Alonso Faxardo de Tença.

1 Ed. note: Unfortunately, he fails to mention the fate of the Japanese ambassador who crossed the Pacific at the same time as he did.