
Document 1573B

Letter from the Viceroy of New Spain to the King, dated Mexico 5 December 1573

Sources: Ms. in AHN; published in Cartas de Indias (Madrid, 1877, pp. 290-296; translated in B&R 3:209-219.

Letter from the Viceroy of New Spain, Don Martín Enriquez to King Philip II

Royal Catholic Majesty:

On the 15th of November [1573] there arrived at the port of Acapulco one of two ships¹ which sailed from the Philippines on the 1st of July. The second, the flagship, entered on the 24th, for it was leaking so badly that they succeeded in making port only with great difficulty. On account of this danger, knowing the nearness of the land, the flagship had determined to keep off shore, thinking this course possible because of its better sailing qualities. Ultimately they availed themselves of the land only for the purpose of taking aboard water because their supply was failing. They entered harbor without having lost either any people [sic] or any of their cargo. Don Pedro de Luna, the captain, died of illness 200 leagues away from land, as did a few sailors also.

Fray Diego de Herrera had taken passage in one of these vessels.² It was his intention to continue the journey to Spain to give your Majesty an account of the wrongs committed in those islands, because of the lack of justice; and to tell you that the soldiers, inasmuch as they are unpaid and receive no rations, are being supported at the Indians' expense, and that on this account many extortions are practiced. The factor Andrés de Mirandaola, Captain Juan Pacheco, and Sergeant-Major Juan de Morones,

1 Ed. note: They were the flagship *Espiritu Santo* and the *almiranta* *Santiago*.

2 Ed. note: This was his second absence from the mission.

also came. The factor and Sergeant-Major were sent because of certain crimes which they are said to have committed; however, I do not think that these are very serious.

...

He who at the present time exercises the duties of General¹ is not, I believe, held in much esteem; for they knew him when he held the inferior position of a bookseller here.

...

[Trade with China]

Commercial relations are now beginning to be established with the Chinese; but until this is definitely completed the hopes of the merchants here will not rise, in spite of all I do and contrive with them to encourage and spur them on; for, to tell the truth, no certain information comes of a nature to induce them to go. And one of the difficulties consequent upon this commerce and intercourse is, that neither from this land nor from Spain, so far as can now be learned, can anything be exported thither which they do not already possess. They have an abundance of silks, and linen likewise, according to report. Cloths, on account of the heat prevalent in the country, they neither use nor value. Sugar exists in great abundance. Wax, drugs, and cotton are super-abundant in the islands, where the Chinese go to obtain them by barter. And thus, to make a long story short, the commerce with that land must be carried on with **silver**, which they value above all other things; and I am uncertain whether your Majesty will consent to this on account of having to send it to a foreign kingdom. I beg your Majesty to consider all these matters, to inform me concerning them, and to give explicit orders to the person in charge here so that no mistakes may be made.

The management of affairs here is attended with great difficulty, especially concerning the people who shall go; for it is almost necessary to force them to go. Also with regard to the ships, which are taken wherever they can be found. Usually they are miserable little vessels, which draw but little water, and cost almost as much in running them as a ship of 600 tons—necessitating, as they do, pilot, master, boatswain, and sailors. Nor is it possible to get along with fewer, specially for the different watches, for otherwise the vessels could not possibly be navigated. And, inasmuch as it does not appear that the merchants are inclined to buy and fit out ships with a cargo, I am not sure, if this business is to go on at your Majesty's expense, whether it would not be wise to have two ships of about 500 tons constructed; and to arrange them so that one of them should not return [to Manila] the same year it went, in order to have time to collect thoroughly all the trade articles, but that it should return the following year, and another ship then set forth from here. In this way, and in accordance with this plan, after the first expedition a ship would sail from there hence every year. One of them alone would be sufficient to contain the people going to those islands, and keep business progressing and increasing there, since there is no regular expedition.

1 Ed. note: Guido de Lavezaris.

These ships brought 136 marks of gold for your Majesty and some few gold jewels and other things, as your Majesty will order confirmed by this memorandum which the General sends. As for cinnamon, they brought almost 280 quintals of it, besides some belonging to individuals, which I have not seized from them, but have paid them a moderate price for it, of which a previous account has been given to your Majesty. Since your Majesty has not had any answer sent me regarding it, I gather that your Majesty does not desire that this should be done. Likewise I infer the same with regard to other things to which your Majesty has had no answer made me. And besides all this, the ships brought silks of different colors, as well as damasks and satins, cloth-stuffs and some gold, and a quantity of cotton mantles, both white and colored; a quantity of wax, glazed earthenware and other knick-knacks such as fans, parasols, writing desks, and also thousands of small boxes. On account of its being an initial attempt, and because the merchants' interest in this commerce has not been roused or acquired, the matter of import and export duty, as I have written your Majesty, has not yet been settled upon. For the future, however, I will see that they make payment like the rest.

...

[Ships and ship-building]

As I have already written your Majesty, there is a lack of artillery here, for those islands take it all, so that I have no artillery for **a ship which I am now despatching, and which was built in the port of Acapulco**¹; and I shall have to take some of that brought by the other vessels coming here. In future, will your Majesty kindly order some to be sent both for an emergency like this, and for these royal settlements?

Together with this ship, I will endeavor to send one of those that have arrived here which may be repaired; and in them I wish to send all the people able to go—a number not in excess of 180 men—and some munitions. The flagship, which is of larger tonnage, will be repaired and put into shape, for it is in bad condition; as well as another ship which was to sail from there within 20 days.² Afterward, the vessels will remain, in order that they may go from here in a year, and take more people with them. Meanwhile, your Majesty will have time to make such provision as you think best.

The rigging which is bought here is that conveyed by the ships from Spain, and is very costly and very inferior in quality; but nothing else can be done. I beg your Majesty, therefore, to send yonder a large quantity of rigging, both small and cable size, for ships of small tonnage and for larger vessels (provided your Majesty think it best to do so). Please have sent also a lot of canvas. Your Majesty will have to order the officials to make selection of both, and to see that it is very good; or else let them send to

1 Ed. note: It appears that this new ship was the San Felipe and that it was despatched, not in 1574, but only in 1575. In 1574, the same two ships were sent back to the Philippines.

2 Ed. note: What the Viceroy did not know was that the San Juan had been forced back to Manila and tried again only in 1574.

Bilbao where they say the best rigging is made, and at the most reasonable prices. This must come, moreover, with the fleet, if it is to be utilized by these ships.

[Legazpi's legacy]

The accountant Melchor de Legazpi, upon hearing of the death of his father, wished to go to throw himself at your Majesty's feet, in order to beg you to remember his father's services, and how he had died in your royal service; and he had for this purpose sold his property, and was poor and even not free from debt. However, I prevented him from going, by telling him to write to your Majesty, and recall his father's services; and I understand that he was a good man, and served with all possible loyalty.

The favor which his son desires does not lie in those islands, but must be given by your Majesty in this land, and to the extent that seems best to you, in order that certain of his sisters, who are of a marriageable age, may not be left unprovided for... Your Majesty could order the accountant Legazpi to be given such recompense in this land as your Majesty may be pleased to give him; for by remembering the dead your Majesty will encourage the living, so that, in addition to the mere duty involved, they may die for you with the utmost zeal. Whatever your Majesty may do for him, moreover, I shall consider as a favor done to myself.

...
May our Lord preserve the royal Catholic person of your Majesty many years, and grant you the increase of kingdoms and dominions, as we your Majesty's servants desire.

Mexico, 5 December 1573.

Your Majesty's loyal servant, who kisses your royal hands,
Don Martín Enriquez.¹

1 Ed. note: Don Martín Enriquez was the 4th Viceroy of New Spain, from 1568 to 1580. In 1580, he became Viceroy of Peru, until his death in 1583.