
Document 1643A

Father Bobadilla's Relation

Sources: Spanish ms. that was owned by Don Carlo del Pezzo at about 1900; translated into French and published in Melquisedec Thévenot's Relations de divers voyages curieux (Paris, 1696, tome i, part ii), copy available in the Prescott Collection at Harvard; translated into English and published in B&R 29: 277-311.

Notes: The author is thought to have been Fr. Diego de Bobadilla, who lived for 25 years in the Philippines. The original ms. is unsigned, and undated, but it must have been written at the time of his voyage to Europe (1637-43). I think that it was begun, or drafted, in Manila circa 1637 (since he mentions a population of 20,000 Chinese and there is no mention of their 1640 insurrection) and finalized, or revised, in Europe.

Fr. Bobadilla was born at Madrid in 1590 and entered the Jesuit order at the age of 16. He first went to the Philippines in 1615 and spent 15 years there teaching at the Jesuit College at Manila, and then 5 years as its rector. In 1637, he went to Rome as procurator and returned in 1643 with a band of 42 missionaries. Again he became rector of the College, and in 1646 was elected Provincial. He died at Carigara, in 1648, while making a visitation of the Mindanao missions.

The relation attributed to Fr. Diego de Bobadilla, S.J.

Notes on the galleon trade.

...
Galleons much larger than those which sail the Mediterranean are built at Manila; for there is a great abundance of wood, pitch, and *abacá*—which resembles European hemp, and of which good rigging is made for the ships. The anchors are imported from Goa; and the iron for the nails comes from China in little bars, and is very serviceable.

The Spaniards of the Manilas trade throughout the islands of that archipelago, at Borneo and Cambojja, whence they carry wax, butter, *camanguien* or storax, ivory, and bezoar. They formerly traded to Japan, before the persecution of the Christians was begun...

We trade also with the Portuguese of Macao, who come to the Manilas every year with two or three ships, and bring here silks, musk, precious stones, and eagle and calambac wood—which is a sweet-scented wood that is very valuable. The inhabitants of the Manilas also go to Macao sometimes, to carry their merchandise there; but their chief trade is with the Chinese, who come annually, at the end of the month of Decem-

ber and the beginning of January, with 20 or 30 vessels, laden with products and valuable merchandise. They sail usually from Ocho [sic] and Chincheo, ports of Anay [Amoy?], a province of China which faces the Philippines. They carry small oranges, nuts, chestnuts, plums, raisins, and *chicuei*—a fruit resembling an apple, very round, transparent, and, when it is ripe, having the color of yellow amber; its peel is very loose, and its flesh very sweet and very pleasant to the taste.¹ They also bring all sorts of cloth stuffs, and some of these are as fine as those which come from France and the Low Countries; and many black stuffs of which the Indians make their clothes. They bring silk, plain and twisted, of all colors; damasks, velvets, tabbies, and double taffetas; cloths of gold and silver, galoons, and laces; coverlets, and cushions; and porcelain—although not the finest variety, as the trade in that is prohibited. They bring pearls and **gold**; iron, in little bars; thread, musk, and fine parasols; paste gems, but very beautiful to look at; saltpeter, and flour; white and various-colored paper; and many little fancy articles, covered with varnish, and gold in relief, made in an inimitable manner. Among all the silk stuffs brought by the Chinese, none is more esteemed than the white—the snow is not whiter; and there is no silk stuff in Europe that can approach it.

The Chinese return in the month of March, and carry to China **silver** in return for their merchandise.² They also take a wood called *sibuaco*, that is, brazil-wood, which is used in making their ink. Those Chinese merchants are so keen after gain that if one sort of merchandise has succeeded well one year, they take a great deal of it the following year. A Spaniard who had lost his nose through a certain illness, sent for a Chinese to make him one of wood, in order to hide the deformity. The workman made him so good a nose that the Spaniard, in great delight, paid him munificently, giving him 20 escudos. The Chinese, attracted by the ease with which he had made that gain, laded a fine boatload of wooden noses the following year, and returned to Manila. But he found himself very far from his hopes, and quite left out in the cold; for in order to have a sale for that new merchandise, he found that he would have to cut off the noses of all the Spaniards in the country. Besides the Chinese merchandise that is brought into the islands, there is wax, cinnamon, civet, and a sort of very strong cotton cloth which is called *lampotes*.

All those goods are exported to Mexico, where they are sold at great profit, and on the spot. I do not believe there is a richer traffic in the world than that. The duties that the King gets out of it is large, and, with what he gets from the islands, amount to fully 500,000 escudos. But he spends 800,000 in the maintenance of the Governor, the members of the Audiencia, the archbishop, the bishops, the canons, those who possess the prebends, and the other ecclesiastics. The greater part of that sum is employed in the equipment of the galleons that are sent to Mexico and to the Moluccas, and of those which are kept in those seas to resist the Dutch.

1 The persimmon apple.

2 Ed. note: This silver came mostly from Mexico aboard the Manila galleon.

...

[The eastward crossing of the Pacific]

The voyage from Manila to Mexico lasts four, five, six, or seven months. Manila, which lies in 13-1/2° [lat. N.], is left in the month of July, during the monsoon winds. [After leaving the Philippines], the course is taken to the north[-east] until the ship reaches 38 or 40 degrees. The pilots take that course because they are more certain of finding winds; for otherwise they would run the risk of encountering calms, which are more to be dreaded in long voyages than are the most furious gales. From the time that the Philippines are left until almost the coast of New Spain is reached, no land is seen, except a chain of islands called the **Ladrones**, or la Sa[r]pana, which lie 300 leagues from the Embocadero of the Philippines. **The people who inhabit those islands are barbarians, who go quite naked.** When our vessels pass there, those people carry to them fish, **rice**, and fresh water, which they exchange for neither gold nor silver, but only for iron—which they value much more, because of the use to which they put it in the manufacture of their tools, and for the building of their little boats.

The first land sighted after that is the island of Cedros, quite near the Mexican coast. The open expanse between that island and those of the Ladrones is subject to storms, which are to be feared, specially near the Japanese Islands—which are passed, however, without being sighted. During the whole course of so long a voyage, scarcely a day passes without seeing a bird. There are usually some birds that live in the sea, and many large whales and porpoises are seen.

As the [American] coast is neared, at a distance of 60, 80, or 100 leagues, signs are to be seen in the sea by which it is recognized that the ship is within that distance. Those signs consist of long reeds, brought down by the rivers of New Spain, which being massed together resemble a kind of raft; and on those reeds are to be seen monkeys—another sign that they are approaching the coast. When the pilot discovers those signs, he immediately changes his course, and instead of continuing east he puts the bow of the ship south[-east], in order to avoid getting caught in the land, or in some gulf whence he would have a hard time to get out; but, when he has sighted the coast of New Spain, he follows it to the port of Acapulco, which lies in 18 degrees.

Acapulco is a fine port, well sheltered from all the winds, and defended by a celebrated redoubt. There the passengers and goods are disembarked, and are afterward carried by mules to Mexico City, which is 80 leagues away from there.

...

[He goes on to give a short description of the rest of the journey to Spain.]

...

That will also be the end of this relation, which I have written in order to be obedient to a person to whom I earnestly desire that it may prove agreeable.¹

1 Ed. note: This last comment proves that the relation was written, or finalized, during Fr. Bobadilla's stay in Europe, 1638-40.