
Document 1610A

Father Medina's visit to the Ladrones in 1610

Sources: Fr. Juan de Medina, O.S.A. Historia de la Orden de S. Agustín de estas Islas Filipinas, Manila, 1893. However, this history was written in 1631. Translated in B&R 23:137-138, 141; 24: 53-58.

Chapter IV

Of the voyage made by our religious to the Western Islands.

...
This island of the Ladrones where the Spaniards anchored is a lofty, mountainous land, with its coasts fringed with thick coconut groves, and other cool and shady trees. The natives of the islands eat rice, which is the chief food of all the islands. At times, when I consider how many people use rice as bread, I think that 3/4 of the world are sustained on this kind of food. These Ladrone Islands number 13, and extend north—south. As they were the first islands of which the General [Legazpi] took possession, his Majesty granted them to Melchor López de Legazpi, only son of the general, giving him the title of *adelantado* [i.e. military governor].

These Indians go naked. Both men and women are fine sailors and swimmers, for they are accustomed to jump from their little boats after fish, and to catch and eat them raw. Their boats are very narrow, and have only a counterweight at the opposite end, where they carry their sail. The sail is lateen, and woven from palms. In these craft do they venture forth intrepidly through those seas, from island to island, so that one would think that they had a treaty with wind and water.

The ships en route to the Philippines pass through these islands, at different latitudes at various times. So many boats go out to meet them that they quite surround the ships. The natives try to trade water and the products of their islands for iron, the substance that they esteem most; but, if they are able to steal the iron, without giving anything for it, they do so. It is necessary to aim an arquebus (which they fear greatly) at them in order to get the article returned. And to induce them to leave the ships free, there is

no better method than to fire the arquebus in the air, the reverberations of which cause them to hide, fear, and vanish.

While the ship in which I took passage was passing one of the islands, many small boats come out as usual. Among them came one belonging to a robust youth, who was coming to look for a Spaniard, who had been his captive, as he desired to see him. This Spaniard, with others who survived from the ship **Santa Margarita** (which was wrecked at those islands) [in March 1601], lived among those barbarians, until, by good fortune, the ships with succor passed there, and they embarked in them. The Spaniard, who had been the slave of this Indian, was with us. As soon as the latter saw him, he boarded our vessel fearlessly. And still with no signs of fear, he went among our men and threw himself into the arms of the man whom he knew, and who had eaten his bread and lived in his house.

He was quite covered with marks of teeth; and when the Spaniard, who knew something of their language and customs because of his stay among them, was asked the reason, he said that that native had but just been married, and the dowry that he had given was to receive those bites from his wife without murmuring. In that way do the women elect and choose their husbands.

The native was loaded down with scissors, knives and iron. With all this load, he dove into the water, and at the moment he was thought to have gone to the bottom, because of the weight of his load, he reappeared quite at his ease, placed his load in his little craft, then got in himself, and hoisted his sail. He himself attended to all the duties of helmsman and lookout, and ploughed those seas as if his craft were a powerful galleon. The household economy of these, as of the other natives, is uniform, as will be told later on; so that all appear as if cut out by one pair of shears—notable indications that they are all lopped from the same tree trunk.

...

Chapter XXXIII

Continuation of the preceding chapter.

[Synopsis: The band of missionaries that included Fr. Medina was well received by their brethen in Mexico. But their despair of getting vessels for the islands, “for already they were long overdue”—that is, the vessels from the Philippines, which are to return thither again. However, within a short time the **San Andrés**, bearing two Augustinians, Fathers Carrillo and Plaza, arrives in port. They bring a tale of storms and almost shipwrecks. “The *almiranta* suffered 11 hurricanes, and all had already lost hope of life. The vessel miraculously made the voyage through the courage of the pilot Toral, and that of Father Fray Estévan Carrillo who, lashed to the mizzen-mast with a crucifix in his hands, consoled the crew, and animated and encouraged them. He always shared his food with the sick.” Of the other two vessels of the fleet, the flagship [San Francisco] runs aground in Japan, but the crew are saved. “It was one of the greatest losses sustained by these islands. Don Rodrigo de Vivero was returning in the vessel. He had

governed the islands for one year, on behalf of his uncle Don Luis de Velasco. The latter sent him for that purpose until the Governor should be nominated in Spain." The vessel **Santa Ana** is repaired and makes the voyage the succeeding year. "The arrival of the *almiranta* gave great comfort to New Spain; for, as these vessels are of great profit, their loss is felt more than that of those coming from Spain. Altogether the latter do not in any way compete with those coming from the Philippines." The *almiranta* and another vessel, the **San Francisco** of Peru, return that year to the islands. The Viceroy refuses to allow all the religious who have come for that purpose to embark. Fr. Medina gives the names of the 19 Augustinians who embarked in the **San Francisco**, including himself, self-described as "of Seville, and a missionary to the Visayas." He continues, *verbatim*.]

No other Order came then. The voyage was fortunate, for, without furling our sails, day or night, we reached Manila on 6 June 1610; and no voyage like ours has been made here since [i.e. between 1610 and 1631], as we sailed on 25 March. Both vessels were very swift, the winds strong, and the rain-showers must have been a help.

We were cordially welcome in Manila, as they were not expecting a company, for the procurator sent by the province—namely, the Father Reader, Fray Juan de Pineda—was detained in New Spain.