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## Documents 1636C

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# Letters from Governor Corcuera to the King, dated June & July 1636

## C1. Letter about commerce, dated Manila 30 June 1636

*Sources: AGI 67-6-8; there are many letters bearing the same date, but this one deals with commerce; translated in B&R 26: 136-138.*

[Summary in the margin:] “In addition to the permission given for the embarkation of cloth and silver, he asks that permission be given for 250,000 pesos more; for, if they are prevented from sending more than the amount conceded, the royal treasury is defrauded out of a great sum, through the smuggling that takes place.”

Sire:

Your Majesty's orders are not obeyed strictly in the Indies, either for want of honest officials, or because your vassals would be ruined if your orders were executed strictly and to the letter. One of the most essential ordinances is that of the permission that your Majesty has been pleased to give to your vassals of these Philippine Islands for [exporting] 250,000 pesos in cloth, and the provision that the proceeds therefrom shall not amount to more than 500,000 pesos of silver.<sup>1</sup> It neither has been nor is observed; for, if the officials were strict in not allowing more to be exported than your Majesty's ordinance states, then the merchants would do it privately, and as they would be no remedy for it. The same takes place at the return of the [investment in] silver; and after that the truth could not be ascertained.

This trouble can be obviated if your Majesty would be pleased to grant the vassals of these islands the favor to permit them to [send exports] of 250,000 pesos more. For, as the people are increasing in number, and are becoming richer, they cannot be maintained, because of the very heavy expenses that vanity causes, unless they can export a

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1 Ed. note: In theory, this should have limited the net profits to 100%.

greater quantity of merchandise than your Majesty has permitted them to. By that means they cheat your royal duties, and also by not paying the freight charges in your galleons, although those payments are the backbone of your Majesty's treasury. By those funds the said islands are sustained, as are also the soldiers and sailors, and the galleons and other ordinary expenses—a great sum.

I petition your Majesty to be pleased to have this matter examined in your royal Council; and to order me to execute what is most fitting for your service, as far as may be possible. But since I am but one man in this region, I have no-one to aid me, and I shall not be able to carry out my wishes. Another means occurs to me, namely, for your Majesty to be pleased to grant tacit permission to your governor that, for all the goods exported over and above the amount permitted, he may strike a bargain with the said inhabitants, and oblige them to pay here all the duties and freight charges that they would pay if such cloth were registered. This measure has one great drawback—namely, whether your Majesty can find vassals who will serve you as governors, whose consciences are so well regulated that they will serve you as is just.

Therefore, Sire, I think it better, in order to obviate so great a loss as your Majesty suffers in your royal treasury, for you to be pleased to grant permission for the 250,000 pesos, whether to ecclesiastics or to laymen; and to order, under severe penalties of life or of loss of office in your royal service, that it be executed or observed inviolate. Account must also be rendered to your Majesty in this matter, in which there is so much corruption in all the Indies and in these islands—with flagrant violation of law, since it has obliged me to go in person to perform the duty of a royal official by lading the vessels myself, and not permitting any consignment outside the register. The governors cannot always do that personally, because of the many occupations and responsibilities imposed by government. In consequence, they are forced to entrust it to your Majesty's vassals, on whom the same penalties are laid and executed as are laid by your Majesty on your said governors. I discharge my conscience, and am awaiting the resolution that your Majesty may be pleased to take in this matter.

May our Lord preserve your Catholic person in its greatness, as is necessary to Christendom.

Manila, last day of June 1636.

Sire, your Majesty's vassal kisses your feet.

Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera.

[Endorsement:] "Let there be no innovation. 17 June 1638."

## **C2. Letter from Governor Corcuera on general matters, dated Manila 30 June 1636**

*Sources: AGI 67-6-8; translated in B&R 27: 21-35.*

Sire:

Your Majesty was pleased to present for archbishop of this city Don Fray Hernando Guerrero, formerly bishop of New Segovia. I avow to your Majesty, in all truth,

that, [even] if I did not feel under obligation to you an account of what is going on in these your islands, which are in my charge, I would not dare to inform any other person than my natural lord of the archbishop's harsh, unbending, and irritable disposition. By the galleons which arrived last year came his bulls, which, with the decrees of your Majesty, he presented in the royal Audiencia. He was admitted to his church... A fuller account of this will be given to your Majesty by the [Jesuit] Fathers Diego de Bobadilla and Simon Costa, who are persons of great truthfulness, and have much authority in their order; they are going, as its agents, to Rome. From this your Majesty may be assured that they will give you truthful information about whatever you may be pleased to know regarding these islands. I entreat your Majesty, with all respect, that you will be pleased to command that their affairs shall be promptly and favorably despatched; for this religious order merits such favor for the services that they render to your Majesty. They provide chaplains for your galleons that sail to Ternate, on which service no-one likes to go, on account of the danger. The said Fathers are also rendering the same service in the galleons which go to Castile [sic]; they receive 12 pesos a month as pay, which has been assigned to them on account of the convenience of this service to your Majesty—although the said Fathers would serve without pay, most willingly, in order to show better the affection with which they always engage in your Majesty's service.

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May our Lord guard the Catholic person of your Majesty, as Christendom has need. Manila, on the last day of June in the year 1636.

Sire, your Majesty's vassal kisses your feet.

Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera.

### C3. Letter from Governor Corcuera, dated Cavite 11 July 1636

*Sources: AGI 67-6-8; translated in B&R 26: 269-290.*

Sire:

#### **[Two galleons sent from Manila in July (?) 1636]**

1. I am at this port of Cavite, lading the two galleons belonging to your Majesty that carry the merchandise which you have been pleased to grant and permit to the citizens for their navigation and trade with New Spain. These two ships will carry this year a greater registered cargo than formerly the 10 galleons of the past 5 years carried. The usual amount registered was from 300 or 400 to 500 chests of silks, stuffs, and cloths [*lienzos*] (which here they call *manteria*); but now I have laden the flagship,<sup>1</sup> and the

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1 Ed. note: This smaller 100-ton ship, named the **San Juan Bautista**, is known to have completed the voyage.

registration exceeds 1,000 chests, while the *almiranta*, which has a larger hold, will probably carry 1,200 chests.<sup>1</sup> The royal duties which belong to your Majesty will amount to 3%; the freight charges and further duties at the port of Acapulco will come to 600,000 or 700,000 pesos. Accordingly, if your Majesty's viceroy will send me even the proceeds of the said royal dues alone, I shall be able, in the four years' [service] that I have offered your Majesty, to relieve this your royal treasury of more than 300,000 pesos of debts, and to maintain these islands with what can be obtained from them—a thing your Majesty has so desired, and which you have so often charged so many governors to do. If God grants me life, that I may employ it wholly in the service of your Majesty, and in efforts to increase your royal estate, I will not content myself with that, but more and more will send you all the **cloves** from the Moluccas which can be procured in trade at your forts in Ternate.

...

I have also decided to purchase all the **wax** that comes from the *encomiendas* of your Majesty's vassals, and place it with that which comes from your royal *encomiendas*, to be sent on your Majesty's account to New Spain, so that the proceeds of the wax may be sent to your Majesty with that from the cloves.<sup>2</sup>

### **[Two small ships arrive from Acapulco on 6 July 1636]**

2. I was occupied in this service on the morning of St. Peter's Day [6 July], being engaged in celebrating a feast to the blessed sacrament and giving thanks to God for the favor that He has shown to your Majesty in bringing to this port, at the same time and hour, your two galleons which I sent with the relief to Ternate—of which affair I will give account to your Majesty in another letter. There were two other ships, small ones, which the viceroy, the Marquis of Cadereita, sent to these islands with the usual aid, because last year, he had not sent galleons which could carry it.<sup>3</sup> In other letters, I have told your Majesty of his reasons of convenience. By these ships I received the decrees which your Majesty has been pleased to command me to issue. ...

5. In another decree from Madrid, dated Madrid 4 May of last year, your Majesty commands, that in order to prevent the frauds which hitherto have been committed on the ships which sail with merchandise to New Spain, I shall, since this port [of Cavite] is so near [to Manila], sometimes go to examine and direct the lading, or entrust this duty to some careful person. Before the said decree arrived, I came (as I have informed your Majesty in another letter) to the said port to serve as a royal official; and I have already laden the flagship—which is an undertaking of so much importance that the governor who does not attend to it in person, but entrusts it to someone else whom he

1 Ed. note: A rare case, in which the *almiranta* is larger than the *capitana* or flagship.

2 Ed. note: The above details are reproduced here because of their connection with the cargo that was aboard the galleon **Concepción** two years later when she was wrecked in Saipan.

3 Ed. note: Meaning purposely made obscure to hide the fact that the writer did not despatch the regular ships to Acapulco in 1635. Hence he implies that he did so by order of the viceroy.

supposes to be trustworthy, does not comply with the dictates of his conscience or with the obligations of his office.

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10. In another decree, dated Madrid 30 December 1635, your Majesty commands that these ships shall sail from here so that they will reach Acapulco on December 1st. Your Majesty gave me the same orders last year by another decree that they should leave this port, without fail, by June 1st. Having called a council of all the pilots, both chiefs and subordinates, they affirm and assert that the said ships cannot leave until the 12th or 15th of July, because the *vendavals*—the winds with which they must sail—do not begin until that time, nor are they strong until the early days of August; and the ships waste the said 15 days in sailing the 80 leagues which they have to make among the islands to reach the mouth of San Bernardino Strait. For at times when they have sailed earlier they have been detained, before they could leave the channel, one or two months, in which time they have consumed a large part of the supplies for the voyage; and as a result, many of the men have died, from the hardships of the voyage or from want of food. For all these and many other reasons, I entreat that your Majesty will be pleased to believe that I shall not waste time in these despatches, as best suits the service of your Majesty and the benefit of your vassals.

I have spared the viceroys of Mexico from sending flour, oil, fodder, and a thousand other things for the equipment of the soldiers, of which there is no lack there—as how I am informing the viceroy, the Marquis of Cadereita, in the memoranda which I am sending him. By this your Majesty has been saved a great part of your revenue, as well as by the galleons not being repaired in Acapulco; for the viceroy did nothing more to them after the necessary repairs from the caulkers and carpenters who went on the ship. In a little more than a month, they could be again sent to sea; and they did not spend, at most, more than five months in going from here, three in returning, and one in port.

[Marginal note:] “Tell him that those ships are to depart at the time which shall seem most seasonable, since the orders do not intend that they shall set out with evident loss and risk at the time which has been fixed. While matters remain as they are, therefore, he shall make such arrangements as are most expedient.”

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18. Don Pedro de Quiroga y Moya, whom your Majesty has been pleased to send to Mexico to take the *residencia* of the Marquis of Cerralvo, sends me a certified copy of a section of the instructions which your Majesty gave him, in which your Majesty has commanded me, by one of your royal decrees that, in order to stop the illegal transportation to New Spain of more merchandise than is permitted to the citizens, the ships shall be built thus: the *almiranta*, of 400 tons’ burden; and the flagship, of 500 to 600 tons’ burden. These decrees, Sire, have not come to my hands thus far, further than a copy which the said royal visitor sends me, issued in the term of Don Juan Niño de Tavora. This shall be very punctually obeyed in the future construction of the ships; but it is necessary to make the present voyage with the galleons that are already built.

I must remind your Majesty that the islands are at the end of their resources, as far as the Indians in them are concerned; for it is they who bring the timber from the forests for the said shipbuilding. I have thought of an expedient for this, in order not to complete the destruction of the Indians; it is, to ask the viceroys of your Majesty in New Spain and Peru to send vessels here. Every two years, let the viceroy of Peru send to New Spain a ship with the permission which your Majesty has given, one of those which the viceroy the Count of Chinchon caused to be built in the time when I served your Majesty there; they were of 300 to 400 tons' burden, and carried 12, 14, or 16 pieces of artillery. The cost of these will be paid here, on the account of this royal treasury. With this, and with rebuilding the galleons that are here, and repairing them every year, may be remedied the loss in the shipyards, and the destruction and ruin of the Indians. It is no light burden to maintain the laborers who cut the timber for the repairs every year.

Will your Majesty be pleased to command the said viceroys to do what I have proposed; and thus in the course of time the ships will come to be of the burden and lading that your Majesty requires. Meanwhile, until the matter is arranged, the galleons will go from here to New Spain every two years, each with two registers—one for the previous sailing, and one for the present year—as they go now. In the year when they go, they will bring back the half of the silver from the proceeds [of the sale of the merchandise]; and in the following year, when they do not have to go, the rest of the money will be brought in the ship which will be sent from Peru. I hope that your Majesty will approve this, and give such commands as are most expedient for your royal service, in order that these vassals who are so poor may be encouraged, and the merchandise that they export may bring in good returns when nothing goes unregistered, and that the Indians may be saved from ruin.

[Marginal note:] “Let there be no innovation in this matter which he proposes, and follow the orders which have been issued in regard to the building of ships; and tell him that, as he has been commanded, he shall make no innovations without first consulting the government in regard to the matter, so that orders may be given him to be put into execution.”

May our Lord guard the Catholic person of your Majesty, as Christendom has need.  
At Cavite, 11 July 1636.

Sire, your vassal kisses your Majesty's feet.

Sebastián Hurtado de Corcuera.