
Documents 1576A

Governor Sande writes to King Philip II

Sources: Sande's relation of 1576 has been published in Retana's Archivo, ii, n° 1; original in AGI 67-6-6. Also mentioned in Col. de Indias, vol. 34, pp. 72-79. Translated (by Rachel King) in B&R 3:312-314; 4:21-97.

Note: Both of these documents were carried to Acapulco by the ship Santiago.

A1. Letter from Francisco de Sande to the King, dated Manila 2 June 1576

Catholic Royal Majesty:

Although I have served your Majesty in New Spain as an attorney, criminal judge, and member of the royal Audiencia of Mexico, I have not written to your Majesty since the year '67, in order not to disturb you; I have always written to the royal Council of the Indies what I considered in your royal service. Now I have come to and reside in these Philippine islands, where I serve your Majesty as your governor and captain-general. As I am so far away, and have grown old in your Majesty's service, and have examined affairs here, and seen the importance, the isolation, and the dangers of this colony, I venture to address your Majesty briefly.

I write at length, however, to the royal Council of the Indies, to whom I give an account of the voyage, and its events, and of the needs of this land, and I refer you to that letter¹; I have also written of its condition, and of matters concerning the mainland of China, with what I consider it fitting for your Majesty to order. I humbly beg that your Majesty be so good as to examine the above-named relation, and provide therefor, as what refers therein to the expedition to China is a matter of great moment to your Majesty's service. This enterprise would be easy of execution and of little expense, as the Spanish people would go without pay, and armed at their own cost. They will be chosen from the provinces, and will be glad to pay the expenses. The only cost will be for the agents, officers for the construction and command of galleys, artillerymen, smiths, and engineers, and the ammunition and artillery. Food can be supplied to them here, and

1 Ed. note: See Section A2 below.

the troops are energetic, healthy, and young. This is the empire and the greatest glory which remains for the king of the world, the interest which surpasses all others, and the greatest service of God.

I think that I have drawn a true picture of the people, as they are the best in the world for tributaries. They have waged war against the king of Tartaria.¹ If they made war on this coast, his occupation, and even that of both, God helping, would soon be over. They have many enemies in this archipelago, who are more valiant than they and who will be of great help. I beseech your Majesty to provide what is most fitting, that the power and laws of so just and great a king may encircle the world.

In these Philippine islands there are at present 500 Spaniards in all, and if there were ten thousand, all would be rich. As there are so few we suffer many hardships, since we are among so many enemies. Our only consolation, and mine in particular, is that we are serving your Majesty. Our diligence is unremitting, and we hope for your Majesty's favor. Your Majesty will provide in this for your own cause, and that of the Catholic church. As I write at length to your Majesty's Council, this letter is but brief.

May our Lord guard the royal Catholic person of your Majesty, and increase your kingdoms and dominions, as is the wish of your Majesty's vassals and servants.

Manila, in the island of Luçon in the Philippines, 2 June 1576.

Royal Catholic Majesty.

From your Majesty's loyal vassal and servant who kisses your royal hands,

Doctor Francisco de Sande.

A2. Relation of the Philippine Islands, by Governor Sande, dated 7 June 1576

Catholic Royal Majesty:

[1. **Introduction.**] I sailed from the port of Acapulco, New Spain, on the 6th of April of the year 1575, as I had previously informed your Majesty from that port. On account of setting sail during the calms, we were delayed, so that it took us 70 days to reach the **Ladrones**. There we filled our water-butts, and I took on board a large anchor that I found there that had belonged formerly to the flagship lost there by Felipe de Salcedo.² In the other ship³ we placed four small boat-loads of ballast. All this detained us only a day and a half.

On nearing the Cape of Espiritu Santo in Tandaya [i.e. Samar], in the Philippines, our progress was impeded by the *vendaval*, and our pilots also gave us considerable

1 Referring to the Tartar chief Yenta, who harassed the Chinese empire from 1529 until 1570.

2 Ed. note: The San Pablo in 1568.

3 Ed. note: It appears that Governor Sande was aboard the San Juan, the second ship probably being the San Felipe.

trouble, so that I arrived at Manila on the 25th of August of the year 1575. On that day I took possession of the office of governor and captain-general.

2. [Seasons.] Although your Majesty may know better than I the matters I am about to relate, still, like a countryman, I wish to speak, and to tell what I myself have experienced. I am informed here that throughout the entire sea in these latitudes there are two general seasons. During one, the dry season, the *brisas*, as they are called, blow from the southeast to the north, finally blowing directly from the north; while in the other, or wet season, the *vendavals* blow from northwest to south-southeast. Thus, during these two seasons, the winds blow from every point of the compass. For this reason it will be seen that coming from New Spain, from the east toward this western region, the *brisas* would help; while the *vendavals*, especially the usual one, which is a southwesterly wind in the channels of these islands, would impede the progress of the ship.

These two general seasons begin in some years somewhat earlier than in others, and in some places before they do in others. However, it is quite clear and evident that by the end of May and the middle of June, the *vendaval* begins here from the west (and I believe that this is true of all the southern sea), and blows strongly night and day. Now if for any reason it should cease for a moment it would only be to burst forth again with renewed vigor. Such a period of quietness is called here *calladas* ["silences"].

The *brisa* begins in November, and lasts until the end of May. Between these two general seasons two others exist, called *bonanças* ["gentle winds"] which last from the middle of March to the end of May, and comprise also part of September and October. During that time the *bonança* of April and May is the most prevalent wind, although other winds are blowing constantly. Should the usually mild winds prove severe, then the opposite season would develop, so that in April a *vendaval* often presents itself, and in September a violent *brisa* may blow. These seasons, I think, correspond to those of the northern sea [i.e. Atlantic], as you may be already aware...

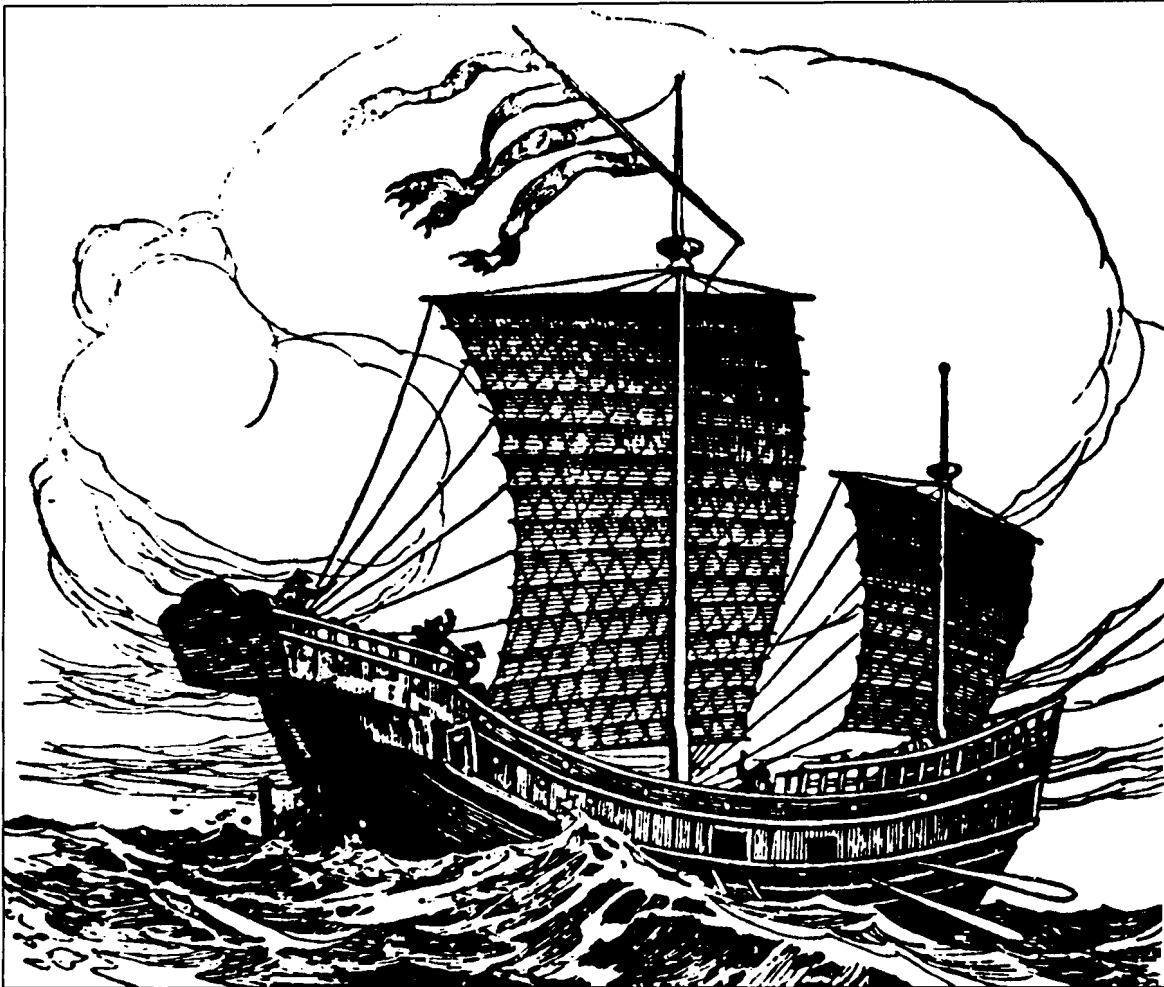
3. I learned in these islands that this city had been burned by a pirate and there had been a war.¹

There they asked me for lead, and I readily complied with their requests, until I was weary of granting petitions. I thought that we had some lead; but on summoning my men, and searching for it, only five or six arrobas were found; and that was in sheets, such as are used to stop leaks in ships. Arriving at Manila, I could get no lead; and, not being able to obtain it elsewhere, we took from the sides of the ships somewhat less than 70 arrobas, some of which was used. With what is left we remain, hoping for the grace of God; for had not the ships arrived sheathed with lead, I do not know what would become of this camp of your Majesty...²

1 Ed. note: Referring to an attack by the Chinese pirate Limahong in 1574. For the story of this war, see the book by René Jouglet, *The Treasure of Limahong* (Lévesque Publications, 1982).

2 Ed. note: This may have been one of the reasons why the ship San Felipe, minus some lead sheets, was lost that year.

Your Majesty will understand, then, the condition of affairs here; and will please have pity and consideration for the men who are serving your Majesty here, so far away, and with so much hardship and so much danger.



Chinese junk.

59. [**Chinese junks**] These people never travel by water except during the months of the *bonanças*, which I have explained. Their ships cannot stand the wind astern, because both bow and stern have the same form and are flat, like a square table; they are so made in order that either end can be used. They navigate always, in either direction, by means of side-winds. These vessels rock to and fro, like cradles with oars.

60. The sails of their ships are made of bamboo, like matting. They do not use a yard on the mast, but raise the mainsail on the mast fastened to a pole as an infantry flag is placed on a pike; and the sheets hang down from the other side with which the sail is turned to this or that side, according to the direction of the wind. The sail is half the width of the ship, and the mast is large and high. The sail is raised by means of a

windlass, which contrivance is used also for a capstan. The rigging is made of reeds and grass, which grow wild. The mast is stepped about two-thirds of the length of the ship nearer the prow, in order that the ship may pitch forward. The foremast is not stationary, being moved to port or starboard, according to the weather or other requirements. The sheets are worked in the same way. The compass is divided for fewer directions than ours. They also use stern-masts as mizzenmasts, which, like that at the bow, are changed from one side to the other, so that they do not need quadrants (?). They go from one side to the other with the wind which helps them. They use two oars at the bow to turn the ship, and two others at the stern that assist the sailing. The compass consists of a small earthenware jar, on which the directions are marked. This jar is filled with water and the magnetized needle placed in it. Sometimes before they happen to strike it right, they could go to the bottom twenty times, thus, although it is marvelous, considering that they are a barbarous people, that they should understand the art of navigation, it is very surprising to see how barbarous are their methods.

61. All their arms, for both sea and land, are firebombs. They have quantities of gunpowder, in the shape of loaves. Their artillery, although not large, is poor. They have also, and quite commonly poor, culverins and arquebuses, so that they depend mainly on their lances. I am informed that they do not fear the arquebuses very much, because they themselves are so poor shots with them, and are amazed at seeing a hen or a pigeon killed with an arquebus-shot. They fear lances more than other weapons.

62. The chief captains and the king never cut their finger-nails, and allow one to grow as long as the finger, and longer. These go to war seated in chairs, carried on the shoulders of other men. They frequently become intoxicated, and are very libidinous.

...

93. [**Ship-building.**] There is in these islands an abundance of wood and of men, so that a large fleet of boats and galleys may be built. There is a quantity of cheap iron from China, worked by the natives here, who can make what is necessary from it—which they cannot do with Spanish iron, for it is exceedingly hard.

We have no pitch, tallow, or rigging worth mentioning, because what there is is so scarce and poor that it amounts to nothing. There is no oakum for caulking. Large anchors cannot be made; but the rest of the tackle can be obtained here in good condition. There is good timber also; to my way of thinking, therefore, the ship that would cost 10,000 ducats in Guatemala, and in New Spain 30,000, can be made here for two or three [thousand], should strenuous efforts be employed.

When I came here I found the city burned and razed to the ground. I erected two separate **shipyards**, separating the workmen, so that they might accomplish more if they entered into competition. The one in Manila has turned out a galliot of 16 or 17 benches and has repaired the ship that brought me here [i.e. the San Juan], and also one that was made in Acapulco [i.e. the San Felipe], which I believe cost more than 15,000 ducats. They were about to burn the latter ship for the iron that they could thus obtain; but through promises and diligence on my part the keel and stern-post, which were rotten were removed, as well as half the hull of the ship; and, God willing, she will sail from

here one month after this ship [i.e. the Santiago]. One fathom was cut off near the bow, on account of its unsatisfactory shape; and more than two fathoms will be added to the original length. This will make a vessel capable of carrying 200 soldiers which, as this ship had been condemned, means that we have, from nothing, made 20,000 ducats. I found that the ship which had been repaired was destroyed during Limahong's attack. Rigging, masts, sails, and everything else necessary have been placed in it, and the ship is called **San Felipe**.

On finishing this, they will begin to work on another galley and, besides, will repair another vessel that is rotten, and whose keel, although of a better pattern, will require as much labor as the other. However, God willing, it will be completed by January, so that there will be two galleys here. In Oton, on the island of Panae I have finished another galley, 34 yards in length, with 20 benches. Still another will be ready by September and I shall continue with the work.

97. It is necessary that two master [carpenters] to build ships and galleys should be sent from New Spain so that, if it were necessary, those here, who are becoming lazy, might be changed. It is necessary to change them and to keep them in two shipyards, as I have done, so that the expense at Acapulco, in New Spain, might cease. All the work done there is thrown away; for the vessels from New Spain alone detain the workmen here in repairing them, and prevent them from building new ones. We need commanders of galleys who know how to manage the lateen sail.

98. We have no lead here, but it abounds in New Spain; it will be necessary to order that more than 500 quintals be brought from that country, for this is our sustenance—besides 300 quintals of gunpowder, for present use.

...
119. [**Loss of the Espiritu Santo.**] Since this letter was written, we have received word that the ship sent by the Viceroy this year [i.e. the Espiritu Santo] with the usual help was lost. It was the pilot's fault, or at least they say that it was. May God find a remedy for this loss, for I dare not speak of it.

120. With this I enclose a copy of the letter that I have written to the Viceroy. With it I send a list of all that is needed here. This ship [Santiago] sets sail at a favorable season, the beginning of June of 1576; and, please God, another will leave in about a month, as it lacks but a little carpentry work. We have been working at it five months.¹

...
122. I am sending also the inquiries that were made about the reasons why a ship did not leave last year [1575]; and about not compelling anyone to assay gold that is mined and traded with here.

123. I am sending the originals, and translations of the letters from China, together with the *residencias*; and other papers, consisting of a **Chinese map** and another small map that I had made here, some stories of China, and those that they call "Flowers of

1 Ed. note: This ship, the San Felipe, was lost.

Silver”, all in a box directed to the Viceroy of New Spain, so that it may be sent to your Majesty.

...
124. Because, as I have said, this year’s ship from New Spain was lost, will your Majesty please order new copies of all the papers sent in it.

...
126. We have shipped in this vessel 90 bundles of cinnamon belonging to your Majesty; and as many more, which remained here, will be shipped in the next vessel, which will sail next month. I have gathered articles of barter, in order to send a commander of troops to Mindanao for next year’s barter; then I will advise you of what is in that island.

...
May our Lord preserve the Royal Catholic person of your Majesty, and bestow upon you greater kingdoms and dominions, as is the wish of your servants and vassals.

Manila, in the island of Luçon, in the Philippines, 7 June 1576.

Catholic Royal Majesty.

Your Majesty’s loyal vassal and servant, who kisses your royal hands,

Doctor Francisco de Sande.