
Document 1638C

Letter from the Treasurer at Manila to the King, dated 31 August 1638

Sources: AGI 67-6-8 (Simancas—Secular; Audiencia de Filipinas; cartas y expedientes del gobernador de Filipinas visto en el Consejo: años 1629 á 1640); published in B&R 29: 52-65.

Letter from Baltasar Ruiz de Escalona to Philip IV, dated Manila 31 August 1638

Sire:

If my so great obligations to your Majesty—not only since you are my king and natural sovereign, but since you have honored me so generously in these islands by employing my person in the post of official judge-treasurer of your royal estate—necessarily and strictly did not oblige me to inform your Majesty of the manner in which the said royal estate is administered here, its condition, and the so great ruin that it has suffered and is suffering since it was your Majesty's pleasure to have Don Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera come to govern these islands in the year '35, I should have to arouse myself and take courage to place before the pious eyes of your Majesty this list of disasters...

Don Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera entered this city in the latter part of June 1635, to assume this government. He showed apparent signs of an endeavor to excel, in his honest and careful attitude toward your royal estate; but we were soon undeceived by his so unexpected and inconsiderate resolution not to despatch the ships [in 1635] which your Majesty has ordered, by so many decrees and ordinances, to be sent annually to New Spain with the property of the inhabitants of this city—so that the usual subsidy might be sent to these islands from the proceeds of your royal duties, and serve as a help to the great and numerous expenses which your Majesty is incurring annually in the increase and preservation of so many of the faithful as have in these regions deserved to receive the holy water of baptism. Yet it was a fact that Don Juan Cerezo de Salamanca (who was concluding his governorship, to which he had been appointed by the Viceroy of New Spain), had prepared two ships, and their cargoes were aboard—the

lading-space having been allotted, in accordance with the orders given by your Majesty, among the inhabitants of this city. The losses and damage that have resulted, both to your royal estate and to the property of the merchants of these islands, are so considerable and momentous that I would not dare to name them. Your Majesty's ministers in Mexico, in whose charge is the management of your royal estate, will have already reported them to you, for they will be able to do it with more accurate knowledge and certainty; and, consequently, I think that they will already have come to your Majesty's ears.

...
[Some of the current wage rates at Manila are mentioned, e.g. the pay of a Spanish calvalry captain was 1,200 pesos per year, whereas that of a Filipino infantry captain was only 240 pesos per year. The construction of an eleventh church was begun within the walls of Manila and had already cost over 80,000 pesos, Corcuera having taken 18,000 pesos from the soldiers' salary account, and the rest from the King's account.]

Consequently, it has been necessary that the remaining amount be supplied from the royal treasury, although it would be more proper to expend that sum in building galleons to carry the goods of this city to New Spain. For with galleons the royal treasury will be increased, and thereby will the governor obey the many and urgent orders which your Majesty has been pleased to issue in this regard; and the vassals and inhabitants of these islands would not be so ruined, and so hopeless of returning to their former state. It was all occasioned by **the governor's resolution not to despatch any ships during the year 1635 and that of 1637**; and even next year, 1639, there is little assurance that he will despatch them, for there is no money with which to prepare them. If that were done, we could entertain stronger hopes; because, as I write this, the usual succor from Mexico¹ has not yet arrived, as only one very small patache was despatched last year [to Mexico in 1637], and there is doubt that it was able to reach port. On that account we are so perplexed and afflicted that it is even a special providence of God that we are able to breathe.

The ships which are being despatched this year are sailing without a register; for, as yet, the inhabitants have not registered a shred of cloth with which to lade them, as they do not know the condition of their property in New Spain. As they are so ruined as regards their capital, they are, according to my way of thinking excusable. But I have been unable to find any excuse in any way for the governor, who has, by his so extraordinary and unadvised resolutions, placed this city in the last straits; and has paid no attention to those who, with foresight, have represented to him these great damages, besides those which have followed and will follow to the royal estate of your Majesty. For this year alone (and I do not speak of former years), more than 150,000 pesos have

1 Ed. note: The word Mexico was only then beginning to be applied, not just to Mexico City, but to the whole of New Spain.

been spent on these ships, both for the preparation that has been necessary, and for the pay of the commanders, pilots, and other seamen and other officials who sail in them, and for the food. Your Majesty will never be reimbursed for that sum, for, as **no cargo goes in the ships**, there can be no duties collected;¹ and it is from these duties that the funds for these expenses must be obtained, as your Majesty has ordered and commanded. Hence, Sire, it becomes necessary to say that it seems as if your Majesty had sent the governor to these islands to ruin and destroy your royal estate, rather than to increase and preserve it. This conclusion, if relief does not come speedily, will be seen to be verified with the great loss of all, and the special sorrow of us who, as your Majesty's faithful ministers and servants, are bound to strive for the increase of your royal estate.

[He goes on to relate the two expeditions against the Moslem Filipinos in Mindanao and Jolo in 1637, in which over 57,000 pesos were spent from the royal treasury.]

He [Corcuera] has tried and is trying to cover the expense of both expeditions by the value of the slaves, and other things of little account, which he took as booty in both expeditions; and by other communications, which will be seen in your Council, according to the relations or certifications which he has given to us. Most of it can have but little foundation, as there is nothing more than what the governor has been pleased to give. But it will be well to consider that although the fifth part of any booty taken belongs to your Majesty (as is a fact), he has ordered all the artillery, and other war supplies and ammunition to be valued and adjudged as part compensation for the expenses incurred. That is a thing which, according to my understanding, could not be done; for he is attempting to persuade your Majesty that he is giving you something. Since that is clearly yours by law, there is no reason for [thus] adjudging it, under any of the pretexts of which, [to judge] from appearances like these, he always avails himself to accredit his own actions...²

[The case of the weigher of coins]

At the beginning of his governorship, the said Don Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera tried to change the inferior employees of the tribunal of your royal officials.

Among the others whom he appointed was the weigher of coins, notwithstanding that we opposed that. For your Majesty has been pleased to honor us with your special decrees, in which you order that we ourselves choose our employees, so that they may be to our satisfaction; and that your governors give their titles to those whom we should thus propose to them. [We also opposed it] because the said governor ordered

1 Ed. note: This information was misleading, to say the least, as 4,000 pesos were collected in duties... Only the galleon San Ambrosio was to make it through to Acapulco, the richer galleon Concepción being shipwrecked in Saipan.

2 Ed. note: A summary list the seizures in Jolo is given in B&R 29: 135-138. Some 192 Filipino prisoners were sold as slaves, for 20,815 pesos. The list of cannon and other weapons is interesting: there was 1 English and 1 Portuguese bronze cannon; the cast-iron cannon were mostly English and Dutch; among the firearms, there were 7 light muskets, all made-in-Japan, etc.

us to admit the said weigher to the enjoyment and exercise of his office without bonds, although all those who had thus far exercised that office had given bonds in the sum of 4,000 pesos for the security of your royal estate, as it is an office that requires great faithfulness because of the many and continually-recurring opportunities that present themselves for him to make considerable thefts without your royal officials being able to stop it.

This has been proved to us by experience, for, notwithstanding all our efforts in watching him, at the end of a year and slightly more (for so long a time did he hold the said office) we found that he had stolen more than 3,500 pesos from your royal treasury. We began a prosecution in your royal Audiencia. The said governor, seeing that the weigher was proved to be a criminal by what was enacted, and by his confession and deposition, in order that he might not be completely exposed, had a memorial presented [to the Audiencia] through a Father of the Society of Jesus—in which it is stated that a man had declared in confession that he was the thief, and that the said weigher was not guilty; and had given him a certain number of pay-warrants with which to satisfy, by way of restitution, the [claim for] 3,500 pesos. The said governor ordered that this reparation should be accepted; and although the pay-warrants had no justification—as their owners had been dead for many years, and the papers contained no cessions or powers by virtue of which receipts should be given and signed—we had to receive them, because, as they had been examined before the auditor of accounts, and attested by him, they were [technically] entirely sufficient, and could and ought to be received. Thereupon, the said weigher went scot free from prison. The said governor immediately sent him to Macan, in order to remove him from the danger that might meet him at any time in this city.

In this manner, Sire, was so serious a crime as the aforesaid punished; and in this wise does the governor protect his henchmen, for there is no human strength which can oppose his. This is a consideration that causes not a little sorrow to your Majesty's servants and ministers; for only that name is left us, for we have been stripped, for the sole purpose of being able to depreciate and even disaccredit us, of all the power and authority which your Majesty was pleased to give us in our titles, and in the ordinances and many other decrees. However, I think and trust, God helping, that that will not be attained, however vigilant the governor may be; for we are and shall be always in your Majesty's service, and hope that, as our pious king and sovereign, you will always examine our causes, and that you will pity us for the calamities and miseries that we are suffering for the sole reason of being so far from your royal presence, and that you will take what corrective measures are most pleasing to you.

With that hope we receive new courage, although in the midst of so many perils, to fulfill our obligations, as faithful and grateful vassals and ministers of your Majesty, whose royal person may our Lord preserve, with the increase of greater and more extensive empires, as is necessary to us all.

Manila 31 August 1638.

Don Baltasar Ruiz de Escalona