
Documents 1632B

Letters from Governor Tavora to the King, dated Manila 8 July 1632

Sources: AGI 67-6-8; translated in B&R 24: 197-224.

B1. Letter to Philip IV on government affairs

Sire:

I sent a despatch by way of India in the month of November of the past year of 1631, because the flagship [Santa María Magdalena] which sailed for New Spain sank here in port, and the *almiranta* [Santa Margarita] put back. A copy of the despatch which they carried goes in the first mail, with this, and I refer to it. Accordingly I shall now begin to give an account to your Majesty of what has happened since then.

The ships which had remained in New Spain last year, reached here during the last part of May after a favorable voyage.¹ Therefore I trust that they will depart earlier than in previous years, and that the voyages may become regular.

The ships brought as a subsidy 234,000 pesos for the royal treasury. Last year, we receive 200,000. The viceroy writes that he can do no more. The visitor here will not, I believe, consider it little, since he does not have it in his charge. Certain it is that the last 6 remittances which the viceroy has made to these islands have all been smaller than those made by the other viceroys. I confess that the times have become hard; but one can but ill sustain a number of men, or take care of the expenses of war, on less than what their pay and salaries amount to. The accounts for the five years which were asked are enclosed, and have been made out with all clearness. For the last three, it will be seen how much smaller have been the receipts and expenses than those of my predecessors.

Neither have the men come who are needed; for the past year came 80-odd soldiers, and this year 90. That is but a scant number for the many men who die here, for our forces are steadily diminishing. I can do no more, for money has not been coined here,

1 Ed. note: These were the **San Luis** and one other, unnamed, ship.

nor do the people multiply. I ask, Sire, for what is needed to fulfil my obligations. The viceroy does not send the orders which are given him from there; they can not be so illiberal. As this is a case of need, I give notice of it, in order that blame may not be cast on me at any time.

...

I humbly kiss your Majesty's hand for the honor and reward which you have conferred upon me in having an answer written to me with such a great promptness to the despatches of the years 1628 and 1629. In what you charge me, namely, that I preserve friendship with **Japan**, I have had very great care; for, after the events of the year 1627, I have managed to give that king to understand the irregularity of the case,¹ and your Majesty's desire for friendship with his kingdoms. My efforts have already succeeded so well that this matter is already settled with the inhabitants of Macao, and the embargo has been removed from their ships. Having invited the same Japanese to come to trade with this city of Manila, two ships came last year, as I wrote in the last despatches. The answers which we gave to their proposals and letters seemed somewhat satisfactory to them; for this year they have again sent two ships, with letters from the Governor of Nagansaquei. In these he tells me that the trade is open as before, and that ships may go there from here, and that others will come here from there. That nation is very cautious, and there is little confidence to be put in them. If a person should come here whom they wished to go there to trade, I would not dare for the present to permit it, until matters are on a more firm basis; for it is certain that their hearts are not quiet, nor will they easily become so. They take vengeance at a fitting time. May they bring us bread and ammunition, as they are doing. I gave them good treatment here, so that it is now procured that the gains which they make on their merchandise and the lapse of time will accommodate all things. Their king died, leaving his son as heir. There are fears of war, that Christianity may not be so persecuted. I do not think that it would be a bad thing to have a bit of a revolution because of their contempt and selfishness.

In these [Japanese] ships were sent 130 poor lepers exiled to these islands, whom the heathen had tried to make renegades to the faith of Christ (as many others have become); but their entreaties had no effect on these people. I called a council of state to determine whether those lepers should be received, and in what manner they should be received. It was not because I hesitated to receive them; for, even though they might fasten the disease on me, I would not dare to leave an apparent Christian in the sight of so many opposed to the faith, and in the face of the persecution which had been raging in that kingdom. It was determined that they should be received immediately, and taken straight to the church; and that they should be welcomed, entertained, and supported with the alms which this community desired to apportion. A beginning has been made in collecting alms, and a room has been arranged in the hospitals of the natives where they are to be put.

1 Apparently a reference to the capture and burning of the Japanese junk in Siam.

Your Majesty gives that hospital a yearly alms of 500 pesos and a quantity of fowls and rice, with which aid it has now so increased the number of sick [who are cared for]. For a work so pious, and so worthy that your Majesty accept it as your own, I do not doubt that you will have its alms increased somewhat, in case that the fervor that is now beginning in the charity of the inhabitants should become somewhat cooled.

I am awaiting a ship from **Camboja** which has been built there on your Majesty's account. I am informed that it is already about to be launched in the sea. If it arrives before the sailing of this despatch, I shall advise you.

...

Trade with the kingdom of **Cochinchina** is of no importance to us... Shipbuilding cannot be effected in the said kingdom, as I wrote you in the year of 1630. May God have allowed you to have received the letters.

...

A ship has arrived from **Macao**, and several from **China**. With the goods which they brought, those from the ship that put back, what came late from Macao last year, and others which were recovered from the ship that sank, this community has enough to make a shipment.

...

The construction of galleys [rather galleons] in Cavite has been changed; for one unfavorable result changes the opinions of men which are of but little stability. Certain workmen declared that the woods of which the ship **Santa María Magdalena** was made (which was the one which sank last year) were heavy; and that for that reason it had become worthless—and not because its sides were defective. That was a lie, for having drawn it ashore, as I wrote, laden (which was a heroic task, and which could only have been done where there was so much apparatus for it) the ship was then repaired with a lining of knees. It has been tested in this bay, and it is very staunch, and carries all the sail that can be spread. Hence it was a lie to cast the blame on the lumber; but, as the common people and the friars (who desire that there should be a shipyard near here) urged it earnestly on account of this rumor, it was necessary to order that a shipyard be sought in another place. Consequently, the master-workmen have been sent to the San Bernardino Strait to build a ship for the coming year; for **those ships which came from Acapulco this year are not to return there**. They have well earned their cost. I sent the measures for a galleon, of the burden that we need here, to Cochin, and I trust that some agreement which will prove very advantageous to these islands will be made; for scarcely is there anything that will be more important than to suspend shipbuilding here for some time.

I am glad of the decree for Don Felipe Mascarenhas, and that the Council of Portugal has ordered that thanks be extended to him because he assisted these islands with ammunition and the other things which were asked from him.

[Lack of ship register]

The galleons have been repaired this year, and were completely overhauled so that they will last another four years. That is the best that can be done, because of the poor quality of the woods.

In the year of 1628, the ships left here without register. I have had no answer from your Majesty to the causes which, as I wrote to you, existed for that. I have heard that some reports have been made in that royal Council against me, in regard to it, by persons who did not understand or know the matter thoroughly. They used up much time in writing treatises to your Majesty; and lest, perchance, I did not give entire satisfaction by what I lately wrote, the acts and messages which were despatched in regard to the matter are herewith enclosed, in order that the reason which caused the ships to go without register may be seen. The good which the officers of the ships carried were in their own boxes, and not in a collection of boxes or bales, for they were not allowed to embark them in that way. If any official embarked anything, it was secretly. The penalty which was imposed (which will be seen by the records) could have been executed in New Spain.

...

May God preserve the Catholic and royal person of your Majesty, as Christendom needs.

Manila, 8 July 1632.

Sire, your Majesty's humble vassal,
Don Juan Niño de Tavora.

B2. Letter to Philip IV on military affairs

Sire:

I am duly grateful that your Majesty ordered the letters which I wrote from here in the years 1628 and 1629 to be examined in that your Council of War of the Indies.

...

I wrote about affairs pertaining to **Japan** last year, by way of India. In this despatch I enclose a copy of it in the first mail. May God bear it in safety; for, judging by what the fleets of the Northern Sea [i.e. Atlantic] encounter, we are always in fear. This year those of Japan have come with their ships; and the Governor of Nangasaqui says in answer to my letters that the trade may be considered as open, and that the ships from both sides may go and come, and that they will be well received. In regard to the *chapa* [passport] of the emperor, which is the licence that they usually give for trade with their kingdoms, he says that he will arrange that. They sent 130 lepers in these ships, who were exiled for the faith. We believe, through the assurance that we have of the bad disposition of that race, that this action has been a sort of vengeance or contempt; but it is quite certain that, although they may have done it for that purpose, it has resulted very well for us; for we have exercised an act of charity, which I hope, God helping, will confound them. For we received the lepers with great pomp and display of charity; and this city, aided by the religious orders, is striving to collect liberal alms for them.

Those ships have brought a quantity of bronze for the founding of artillery, besides an abundance of flour. Since they are doing this, and we are not for the present going there in safety, the matter is to be considered as more evil-intentioned than they may regard it. I shall endeavor, as heretofore, to promote peace and cordial intercourse, and that they may obtain all satisfaction for the affair in Siam. If they come to ask for it rightly, satisfaction will be given them, and the guilt of the commander who had charge of the galleons will be settled.

...

New Spain aids me with very little money; for this year not more than 234,000 pesos have come for the expenses of the treasury, and during all the past years aid came in almost the same way.

...

I am advised from **Camboja** that a galleon which I am having built there at your Majesty's account has been already launched. No-one thought that this would be accomplished; but it has been God's will that the difficulties should be conquered at last, and that this shipbuilding should be established in a place where this ship has been built at much less cost, and from more durable woods, than [it could have been] in these islands. As this one has been built, so can many others be constructed; and these provinces can be relieved from the great burden of their shipyards. I also have under discussion another negotiation with the city of Cochin in regard to this same matter; and, if it succeeds, it will be of great service to your Majesty.

...

May God preserve the Catholic and royal person of your Majesty, as is necessary to Christendom.

Manila, 8 July 1632.

Sire, your Majesty's humble vassal,

Don Juan Niño de Tavora.