
Documents 1596I

Fr. Antonio de los Angeles, first missionary of the Ladrones

Sources: 1) AGI 67-6-6; translated in B&R 10:245, 261-262; 2) AGI 67-6-7; reproduced (in part) as a footnote in Fr. Lorenzo Pérez' article in the Archivo Ibero-Americano of 1918; 3) Fr. Marcelo de Ribadeneira, Historia de las Islas del Archipiélago Filipino, Madrid, 1947 (pp. 42-43, 81-88); a translation (not literal enough and inaccurate in some places) was made by the Philippine Historical Conservation Society, Volume 17, but the following translation is my own.

II. Letter from Governor Tello to the King, dated Manila 12 July 1599

...

20. As the royal instruction which I received had not been brought here when I came to serve your Majesty in this government (as I have explained),¹ your Majesty ordered in one clause of it, that upon passing by the island of the Ladrones ministers for religious instruction to those Indians should be left there—such persons as I might select—has not been executed. Accordingly, I have considered it with the royal Audiencia here; and, together with their opinion, the intention of your Majesty was communicated to the Viceroy of New Spain, so that he might carry it out, by ordering the officers of the ships which shall come in the year 1600 to leave there a couple of religious and 10 soldiers as a guard. But as the ships arrived here from a different direction, and the voyage was a difficult one, the will of your Majesty has not been carried out. I believe this will be a work very important for the service of God our Lord and of your Majesty; for in the year 1596 a religious of the Order of St. Francis, with a sailor, who were passing by the islands of the Ladrones, disembarked from the *almiranta* **San Pablo** in the boats of the Indians of those islands, more than 300 canoes having come alongside of the said ship.

The Indians took them on board and carried them ashore where they remained during the period of one year, up to 1597, when, as the ships from New Spain were again

¹ Ed. note: He got a copy of the 1596 instructions only in 1598.

passing on their way to these islands, having as commander Don Lope de Ulloa, the said religious and soldiers [sic] arrived alongside the ships in the boats of the Indians, and were received on board. When they arrived here, the religious gave an account of what he had seen in the islands of the Ladrones, saying that there were many islands thickly populated with Indians, who are men of good stature, and strong. They are tractable and kindly people. They regalled him and his companion, and showed them much respect. The land abounds in fish, rice, and [sweet] potatoes.¹ They are heathen, but if the religious would enter there with love and tactfulness they would reach them. I hope in our Lord that He and your Majesty will be served in bringing those heathen to a true knowledge of God.²

I2. Letter from Governor Tello to the King, dated Manila 28 June 1601

...
In the islands of the Ladrones there is much disposition to plant the law of the gospel, as your Majesty wishes and had ordered. About this matter, as I wrote last year, a religious of the Order of St. Francis and a Spanish sailor who have resided among the Indians for one year have given us good news about it. They were very well taken care of and feared by them. Since they left the next year, every time the Indians come out to the ships, they ask for Franciscan fathers.

And in order to give a beginning to this conversion, which it seems God has ordained, because the voyage from these [Philippine] islands to the Ladrones is difficult on account of the great currents that prevent the forward trip, I wrote to the Viceroy of New Spain last year for him to order the General of the galleons for the year 1600 to leave in passing by the island of the Ladrones two Franciscan religious and 10 soldiers to keep them company, with everything else necessary.

I shall advise your Majesty of what has been done, because until today, 28 June, the galleons have not yet arrived.

1 Ed. note: These tubers were probably yams, as the true sweet potato was introduced later into the Marianas by the Spanish themselves.

2 Ed. note: A summary comment made by the secretary of the Council of the Indies was added as follows: "That it is necessary to establish religious instruction in the Ladrones: and, as it cannot be sent from here, I have written to the Viceroy asking him to order the officers of the ships from New Spain to leave ministers there."

13. Extracts from the History of the Philippines and of Great China by Father Ribadeneira

Chapter VI. How the discalced friars arrived at the Philippines and began the conversion.

The friars leave New Spain.—Island of the Ladrones.—The friars arrive at the Philippines.—The friars build a church and a house.—The friars divide themselves among the Indians.

As New Spain was very poor in religious in those days, because they were few in number and were spread out in the conversion of the Indians, which entailed much work, some people advised the religious meant for the Philippines to stay in that country, given that the spiritual benefit that the Lord was making in it through His faithful servants, the Minor friars, could be seen very clearly. However, as they intended to offer themselves very completely to God and to crucify themselves with Christ with bigger works, making themselves invincible to such requests with fortitude and heavenly spirit, they did not fear to offer themselves to the hardships of the sea and the risk that the voyage would entail. The bad news that some were giving them about the country of the Philippines, which was then recently known, did not cause any fear in them, not even [the news about] wild and savage Indians. Only the love of God which lived in their breast could render sweet what some found difficult and hard. However, the spiritual soldiers and followers of Christ were not frightened by hard work, given the hope of glory that went along with it, the harder the better, because they considered how much they owed their God and how well He pays those who serve Him.

With such a spirit they went from Mexico to the port of Acapulco to embark, testing themselves on the rocks and hills of the road which they covered on foot, like the poor, the same as they would have to do afterward at the beginning of the conversion. As they went along, trusting in God, they lived very carelessly about their bodily health by laying out many fasts, continuous prayers and other laudable exercises in order to accomplish their holy design and the difficult aim which they sought, to convert those barbarians.

When they arrived at the islands called the **Ladrones**, seeing the natives coming in their canoes, well-made but not strong, and that they demonstrated by their total nudity that they were rough and rustic people, and showed themselves to be peaceable, obviously fond of iron, giving themselves willingly to whatever their heart desired, every one of the religious considered himself lucky if he could have gone with those barbarian men to teach them the way to Heaven (as another religious did afterward, about which islands he gave an account of their many things, as will be narrated in this book later on); however, the little trust that could be placed in people so brutish in that they would not take the life of whomever would stay among them, and for other just reasons, did put a stop to the desire of those who would have stayed, and they begged the Lord to send the light of His gospel to them.

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Chapter XIX. How one discalced religious remained at the islands of the Ladrones.

Why they are called Ladrones.—The inspiration of a friar.—Weapons of the Ladrones.—Idolatry of the Ladrones.—Burial customs.—Funeral chants.—Feasts of the Ladrones.—Marriage customs.—Female dress.

During the course of the voyage from New Spain to Manila some islands are sighted that they call the Ladrones, the name given to them because the Indians there are very adept at stealing iron. The Indians who come out of them in their canoes are very well built, rather tall, somewhat white. When our ships pass by, they come to barter palm mats that are very well made, coconuts and fish, for iron, of which they are very fond, not caring for gold nor silver.

Upon seeing this, then, one religious, among 22 who were on their way, whose name was Fray Antonio de los Angeles, moved by an inner impulse which moved him effectively to desire the salvation of those barbarians (who show that they are such by the total nudity of their bodies, as well as the very great fondness they have for iron and for other things), he asked permission from the one who was their band leader to remain among those people. The commissioner, who thought that he was kidding, granted his request. But the friar, taking it seriously, carried away by good zeal and not paying attention to the danger into which he was putting his life since he had no experience of the condition of those people, taking only a cross and his breviary, let himself fall into a canoe (from among many that came) which was nearest to the ship, without anyone being able to prevent him from doing so nor the leader to order him not to go. As he himself said later on, he could not talk even if he had wanted to order him. Therefore, he understood it to be the God's will to let him go, so, he gave him his blessing. Upon seeing this, two men from the ship threw themselves after him to bring him back. But, as the canoes are very light, they did not overtake him; rather, they went aboard other canoes almost by force and they were carried off along with the religious. They were distributed among three islands [sic]¹ from which the canoes originated.

They remained there until the next year, 1597, when Don Lope de Ulloa y Lemos, a gentleman of much virtue and discretion, who was acting as General, passed by those islands. Intending to find out what had happened to the religious and to the two Spaniards, he detained a few of the Indian natives of the islands who went aboard his ship and made them gifts and treated them well until the religious was brought over. However, as they had all been warned [already], very soon the religious and the two others came up. The religious was hoping to meet the archbishop of Manila aboard, with a few religious, so that he would get his provision to say mass, with his saintly blessing for others to stay behind with him. However, not finding what he had hoped for, seeing himself without [the possibility of] a companion and without provision to say mass, he

1 Ed. note: The word "islands" is often used in this context to mean "villages".

came to the Philippines with the General, as well as the two Spaniards, to report on what they had seen in those islands. In order that the customs of those Indians and their disposition for being taught God's law, and in order for me to be able to truthfully say what they had seen, I spoke with two of them and I took [a copy of] the account which the religious wrote to send to his Majesty.

[Customs of the Ladrones]

He says, then, that among those people, the elders are those in command, and they are obeyed by all. And, as a sign of love, they bite one another on the arms, and they sometimes even cause sores that are left uncared for, because, since they were done out of love, they let time take care of them. Their natural disposition is a loving one; when they welcome someone they kiss him on the face and they make a great display of affection. They value iron very much, to work their fields with, to sow their rice and a few local vegetables, which they use to sustain themselves. Their weapons are fire-hardened spears and slings with which they shoot round stones; they are so skilled that they hit their mark even from afar. They polish the stones they use as missiles with such effort that they look like jasper. There are some places with as many as 1,000 houses. Although they eat fish raw, without opening it, they are very healthy; they are well-shaped people and many of them look like giants. They use coconut oil to anoint their bodies to make them smell good and to get protection from the cold and the water when it rains, in order to become warm and to drain the water that falls upon them [respectively]. They are accustomed to bring presents when they go visiting; he who brings bigger gifts gets more honor. The guests are made welcome with warm water to wash themselves, and they are given something when they leave. If the object of the visit is to do some business, upon their departure they are called apart to talk business. They are happy people who love jokes. They rarely get angry; rather, if they are given an occasion to get angry, they laugh it off. Once, one of the Spaniards gave a slap in the face to one of them, because he was making some indecent gestures, but he turned the other cheek as if to invite another blow, being much vexed to see the Spaniard angry. They do the same thing among themselves, showing regret when they see others get angry. Their occupation is fishing and bartering the fish with the islands [sic] where they do not have any, bringing back as a reward what they need and is lacking in their island [sic]. In their feasts, they make banquets out of rice, cooked with only in water and out of some very healthy tubers that they have. They first offer what they are about to eat to their idols, whom they call *Maganitos*.¹ They say that they are the souls of their dead fathers, children and relatives, whom they bury in front or under their house, out of love and respect.

When a sick person is about to die, they take him upon a board to the house of a friend and they give him a little raw fish to eat, and those present eat some of it also. Later, upon his death, they warn the people of the town and they place the outstretched

¹ Ed. note: A custom similar to that of the Philippines, where spirits were also called "maganito" (singular, *anito*).

body in the upper floor of the house. As the people begin to arrive, they begin to chant. To those who have chanted they give some drink and cooked rice, from the belongings of the deceased, or from some leading man, if the deceased be poor. They do not take down the body to bury it until it begins to smell bad. When they bury it, they specially hate the spitting, and nothing else is more loathsome.¹ They placed on top of the burial site a paddle or a [model] canoe, a bow and arrow, or all the fishing nets, fishhooks and knives, all of it made into bundles. They say, in their chant to the deceased, that he ought to rest among the stars, the sun and the moon, and to travel through space to come home and eat rice. They praise him for his skill at fishing and the great strength with which he used to throw spears and shoot the sling, that he would go to the Spanish ships passing by there and bring back iron, that he built canoes, gave feasts to which he invited the town people, and that he owned many tortoise shells, which they placed on the grave and which they value a great deal. Those who love the deceased well cut one of his hands off; thus, some carry with them inside little boxes the hands of the dead, already dry, anointed with coconut oil, as a sign of their love.²

They hold their feasts with great arrangement, specially the games they are accustomed to hold to recreate themselves and to honor their idols. To the latter, they offer their seeds, the fishing nets and fishhooks, and small rice cakes which they keep later on as relics to feed the sick. And, as they are people of coarse understanding and blinded by idolatry, they understand that they were born from a [sacred] stone; every year they all go there to have a festival. Whenever the religious would tell them something about Heaven, after he had learned the language, they understood it all in the physical sense. They say that a woman gave birth to the land and the sea and everything that can be seen. When they are asked how the stone, having no eyes and unable to eat, gave birth to men, they answer that it gave birth to two men, and that one of them changed himself into a woman, and other such nonsensical things. They worship their *maganitos*, in the shape of stones or in whatever thing they might fancy. Even though they are thieves, they consider theft to be bad. In these islands there are no hares nor any other similar animals, and so, they do not eat meat.

Their marriage custom is as follows: the man sends a gift to the father or owner of the woman, and they [in turn] invite him or send another [gift], and they all go to the man's house; this done, they are considered married and they live together until they get annoyed at each other, or quarrel, or find someone else they prefer. If the first husband should leave the woman pregnant and she marries someone else, the child belongs to the second husband, or to the third, if she leaves the second one. The first time the woman gets pregnant, she goes to her father's house or that of the leading man. Everyone brings her presents of something they have. When she feels that her time has come to give birth, she goes to the house of some relative where they indulge her the most. During childbirth, she is not to complain, no matter how much pain she may get.

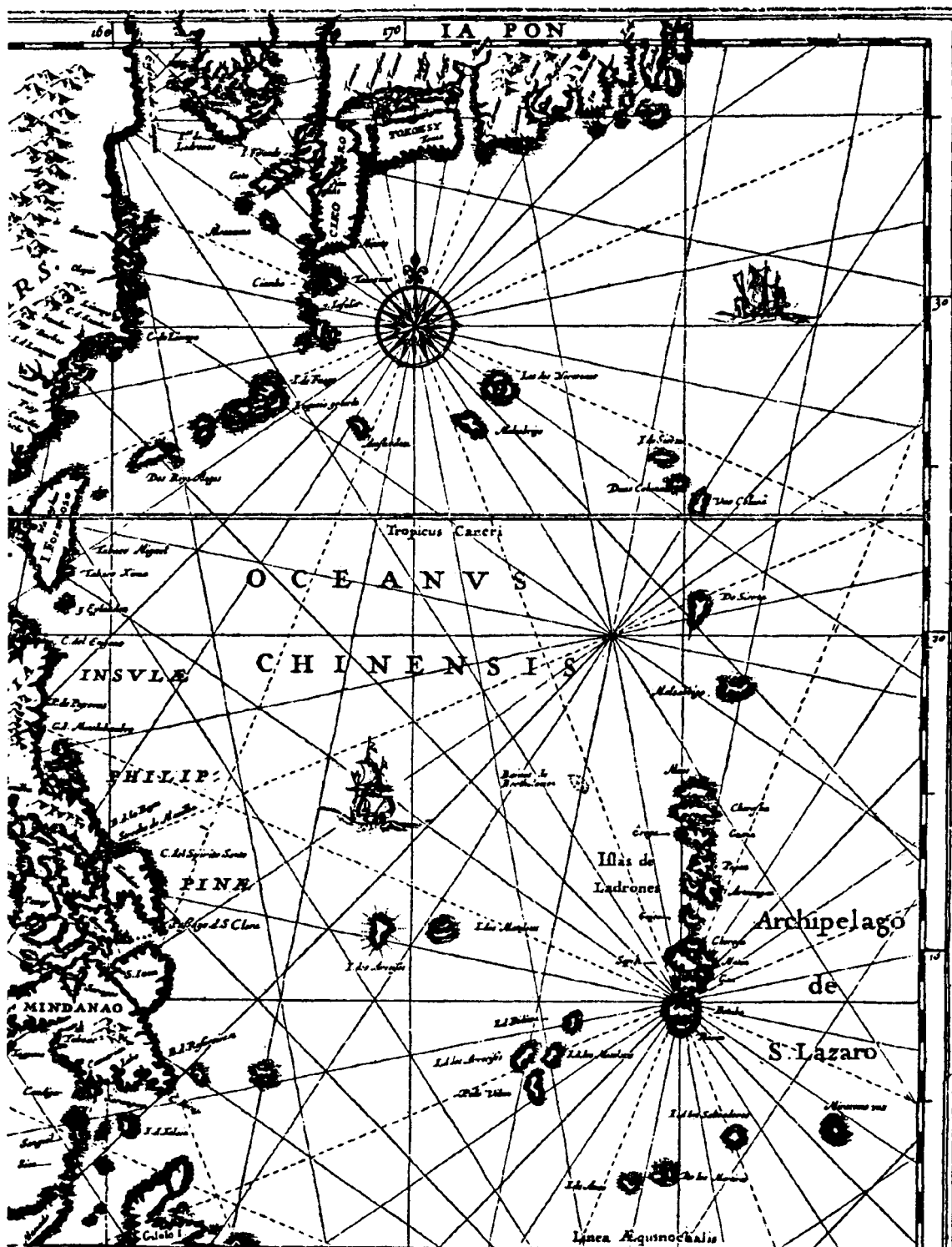
1 Ed. note: This must have been difficult for most of the participants who regularly chewed betel nut.

2 Ed. note: This custom of cutting off one of the corpse's hands was probably exceptional.

The women make much use of wreaths of jasmine and [other] flowers. They go about covered with some mats from the waist down and the rest without clothing. When the couple quarrel, they do not [usually] come to blows; rather, they separate. If they fight, the women come out and pull them by the hair until some village elders come up and reconcile them. The reason is that they have no king, other than them. To the aggrieved party they send a present, and they then become good friends. Because they do not take offence, they forgive easily.

May the Lord make them see the light and send them some preachers. One can be sure that they would welcome them very well, given the good treatment they gave the religious and the [two] Spaniards. According to what the three of them say, they wish very much to play hosts to the Spanish who pass by there. As they understand that they might take port there every year, they are ready with gifts of vegetables and they hope very much to barter with them, because they have a great affection for them, although they have [almost] no contacts with them.¹

1 Ed. note: Father de los Angeles was sent to Spain by his provincial, Fr. Juan de Garrovillas, as soon as he arrived at Manila, for the purpose of furthering the cause of the holy martyrs of Japan. This information is contained in a letter from Fr. Garrovillas to the King, dated Manila 29 June 1597 (ref. AGI 68-1-12; reproduced on pp. 463-465 of the Archivo Ibero-Americano of 1918). In this letter, the following remarks are made about the Ladrones: "One of the Fathers whom your Majesty sent last year to these islands stayed for one year at the islands of the Ladrones. He reports that he was treated well by them and says that they are peaceful and have excellent dispositions."



Part of a map of the East Indies by Hondius, 1599. Kyushu I. in Japan is mislabelled Cikoko, whereas Shikoku itself bears the name Tokoesy. Note the soon-to-become famous province of Boshio [Voxu, or Oshu] on the far right.