
Document 1618A

Letter from Governor Fajardo to the King, dated Cavite 10 August 1618

Sources: AGI Fil. 67-6-7; translated in B&R 18: 116-149.

Letter from Governor Alonso Fajardo de Tenza to King Philip III

Sire:

Having left the port of Acapulco on 2 April [1618] with the two ships,¹ men, and other things, as I wrote your Majesty from there, God was pleased to allow us to anchor in this port of Cavite on the 5th of the past month. One could esteem it a good fortune that, although the season was so advanced, there were as yet no *vendavals* in the channel of these islands; for we had suffered many light winds and even calms, and had waited for a ship that joined us,² in order not to desert it, contrary to the advice of some. Thanks to His Divine Majesty who gave us so prosperous a voyage, not 10 persons died in both ships.

The events of which I found news here are indeed to be deplored. Not only was the small *almiranta* from New Spain wrecked in Japan [in 1616] (news of which was sent in the ship of last year)³ but its flagship was also destroyed, having been burned on this coast with two other vessels, frigates, which were with it; and I learned of the loss of the galleon **San Marcos** and the burning of two other ships which were being built in the shipyards, to which the Mindanao enemy set fire, encouraged thereto by the Dutch. I found also that, of the squadron that was being sent to aid Ternate, one boat was wrecked, while another mutinied—thereby casting shame on the Spanish nation and

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- 1 Ed. note: A ship named **Espiritu Santo**, and a patache, as Governor Fajardo himself would mention in another letter to the King in 1619.
 - 2 Ed. note: Referring to the Japanese ship **Date Maru**, which he had ordered to follow him, and go back to Japan by way of Manila.
 - 3 Ed. note: However, since the 1617 ships did not make it to Acapulco, he repeats the news about the flagship **Angel de la Guarda** and the lost patache.

their loyalty, and even giving occasion for some to make comments and to say that the needs of this place, their lack of confidence in its relief, and the departure for another region, could furnish some reason for a similar act of desperation.

...

After our aforesaid misfortunes, the six galleons that were to be fitted up at the shipyards were, while going there, overtaken by a hurricane, and were all wrecked, together with 700 persons whom, it is said, they were carrying—namely, natives, Sangleys, and Spanish sailors and shipbuilders, and some infantry-men—besides those who escaped, who were very few. Consequently, these islands were left without any naval forces and with few enough on land, by the above-mentioned disaster and the many private persons who died on the expedition to Singapore or Malacca.

The result was very great sorrow to the citizens, because of these troubles, and because General Ruy Gonzales de Sequeira carried an amount of property for them to Portuguese India, where he died; while the enemy, coming unexpectedly, seized another very large quantity of property, which some say was in excess of 300,000 pesos. It is certain that the enemy freighted with riches two vessels, with which they came to this coast, lading them even to their small boats; and the same with some Chinese craft, with what they pillaged from the Sangleys of that kingdom. Thus such a heavy loss was caused to this community, which with two such strokes might fear its total ruin; on that account there has been no allotment of the lading space for New Spain this year, since that of last year, and that trade is the harvest that sustains this country.

...

Will your Majesty please have this matter considered, and have an efficient reinforcement of seamen and soldiers sent—all at once, or as soon as may be possible—so that having their arms in one fleet, aid may be thus given where and how it is considered most advisable to your royal service... If only I could built another fleet like [that of Don Juan de Silva]; but he impoverished the wealth of these loyal vassals of your Majesty, the Spaniards, and of the wretched natives, to such an extent that many are now in the most dire need. Besides, the royal treasury is deep in debt, so that nothing can be extracted from it or from them, which may be worth considering in the present needs. This and the lack of iron and other materials oblige me to reduce the building force for 5 ships that, I found, had been ordered to be built, to three, so that I should not run out of the necessary materials, and all of them be left unfinished. Then, in case that I have enough, those men could also build the other two. Besides, that is also important in order that those ships which are to sail to New Spain in the coming year [1619] may be finished and equipped promptly.¹

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Because of the short time since I arrived here, and the many occupations that I have had in overcoming the hindrance of despatches, in arrears, and in attending to the preparation of many necessities that demanded it, and to the furnishing of these ships that

1 Ed. note: One of those ships, named the **San Nicolás**, is known to have made the voyage in 1619.

are being despatched now to New Spain—in which there were very many things to do, to which no beginning had been made—I have not been able to ascertain with certainty who is to blame for the wreck of the six galleons, and why they did not sail out to drive from the coast the enemy who were pillaging along it.¹ Consequently, I shall leave that report to your Majesty for another occasion.

...

[Governors as traders]

I have been told that Licentiate Fernando de los Ríos Coronel, who left this country with power to negotiate its affairs² was, among other things, to petition your Majesty that a certain portion of lading space be given and assigned to the Governor of these islands. Although I might be inclined to embarrass myself in this trade, in order to fulfil my obligations to your Majesty's service, I would petition—as I do—that no opportunity or occasion be given, so that such governor may be humiliated and declared to be a merchant. For with a limited permission of lading space that may be given him, one can fear that the governor might stretch out his hand farther, and make that his chief occupation—since even without that permission the governor has sometimes cherished that covetous vice too much; and, by whatever path that vice comes and is allowed scope, it tarnishes all the other good qualities that a governor may have, and almost always hinders their use. But if, notwithstanding, your Majesty think it not a considerable obstacle, let it be conceded to him who shall succeed me, or to such others as you may please to give it. Thereat I will rejoice greatly to have advantages added to this office which will oblige more persons of high standing to covet it, although I would not be satisfied with those whom this opportunity would incite.

...

One of the things that your Majesty needs most in this country is intelligent **clerks** for the efficient administration of the royal revenues. And because it is certain that much would be gained by it, I petition your Majesty to send half a dozen of them, who shall have been reared in a good school.

...

The **shipbuilding** carried on in these islands on your Majesty's account is the total ruin and death of these natives, as all tell me. For, in addition to the damage caused by it in withdrawing them from the cultivation of their lands and fields—whereas the abundance of the foods and fruits of the country is destroyed—many of them die from severe labor and harsh treatment. Joined to this is another evil, namely, that every Indian who takes part in the shipbuilding is aided by all the neighborhood where he lives with a certain number of pesos, on account of the small pay that is given them on behalf of

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- 1 Ed. note: Why he would consider blaming some humans for the result of a hurricane is beyond me. They did not go to fight the Dutch because they were unfinished, just being moved from the Visayas to the docks at Cavite.
 - 2 Ed. note: This was the second time that he was sent as a lobbyist to Madrid. He probably had just come from Manila aboard the *Espíritu Santo* and met Governor Fajardo in Mexico. See his paper on reforms (Doc. 1619B) and his brief that was published in 1621.

your Majesty. Hence many are being harassed and worn out by these methods, and a great expense is being caused to your Majesty's royal treasury. For although the cost of employing the natives seems moderate, their decrease is a very great detriment; while the planking, sheathing, and masts are so poor that they must all be renewed every two years, and sometimes oftener, when the only still useful parts are the futtock-timbers. But all the above can be found and made so much better in Portuguese India that, considering the avoidance of the above wrongs and the bettering and more satisfactory price of the work, I shall try my utmost to avoid building ships here, sending to Cochin to have them built, or to buy them ready built, or sending wherever they may be found better and cheaper in those regions.¹ If, when this should be negotiated, there should be some cloves to send on your Majesty's account, the purchase of vessels, as well as that of slaves for the galleys, would be made very comfortably.

In the construction of ships that private persons are trying to build in these islands, about which the Audiencia is writing to your Majesty, I do not find so great an obstacle; for they take no Indian forcibly from his house and land for this task, and no Indian works at it unless he consents of his own accord to do so. That is done without oppression, and the Indian is wholly paid for his work, without the others having to contribute for it. For the smaller-sized ships some better woods are found, which, because they are small, cannot answer for the necessary uses to which they are put in the larger ships. Since I do not find any noticeable difficulty in this, I would consider it as very advantageous that leave be granted for the building of those ships, and for navigation among the islands and coasts of this archipelago, so long as they do not extend their voyages to New Spain and Peru. From that it will result that the inhabitants will get some profit, and it will not be necessary to hold all the trade with New Spain. It will not be unprofitable for your Majesty's service to keep some ships here, so that, if need should arise, they might be employed and made useful with the seamen by whom they shall have been manned. Since it is necessary that whoever should have a vessel have paid and well-treated sailors, your Majesty would come to have all that at no more expense than that of the time while you would employ them; and these your vassals, the natives of this country, would have more relief from the burden; and surely it is pitiful to see the burdens that they carry, and what they endure.

...
He who goes as commander or chief of the flagship this year is Don Antonio de Leoz, while Captain Juan Baptista de Molina—who has already served in that capacity before, and who has been fort commander at this port—fills the post of admiral. They are men who have rendered much service to your Majesty; and for many years past they have been enrolled as citizens in this country, so that all the inhabitants here have applauded their selection.

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1 Ed. note: See Doc. 1619A for more discussion on this subject matter.

With this letter I send your Majesty the declaration of a notary who was prisoner among the Dutch, and a document written to me by a Father of the Society [of Jesus], which came together the day before yesterday from Ternate; and also two copies of letters from Lucas de Vergara Gaviria, governor of those forts, and from the king of Tidore, which were received a few days before. Will your Majesty have them examined, for they contain the latest news from the Moluccas.¹

The two vessels that are being despatched to New Spain are now able to set sail, and will do so (God willing), when the weather is favorable. They go well equipped for the voyage, and the lading well adjusted—more so that has yet been usual here. They carry excellent crews, artillery, sufficient arms, and good rigging, and a great quantity of that, in order to spare your Majesty the expense that is incurred in New Spain—where each quintal costs, delivered to Acapulco, about 50 pesos; while here it costs only one-tenth as much. As great preparation has been made in the candles for the lanterns, and other things, for the same purpose of lessening the expense.

And, while discussing this matter, I cannot refrain from again petitioning your Majesty, in order to fulfil my obligations and my desire for your royal service, to order that the clerks and the treasury employees that I have requested for this place be sent to me; for they are very necessary in order to aid more efficiently the service of your Majesty, whose Catholic person may our Lord preserve, as is necessary to Christendom.

In this port of Cavite, and bay of Manila, 10 August 1618.

[P.S.] Already on this day (the above date) the ships are to leave this bay, because of the favorable weather that has come. All the pilots are of the opinion that they will not be lost, and that our Lord will guide and convey them with all safety...

Don Alonso Faxardo de Tença

1 Ed. note: The letter from Vergara, dated Tidore, 30 June 1618, is interesting in that he mentions the use of Will Adams' first ship, the **San Buenaventura** then stationed at Ternate and used to carry his letter to Manila. Other ships then assigned to the Moluccas were: the ship **Santa Margarita**, the frigate **San Miguel**, and the ship **San Antonio el Chico**. The latter was also then sent to Manila.