
Document 1593

Letter from the King to Governor Dasmariñas, dated Madrid 11 February 1593

Sources: AGI 105-2-11 (letter) and 1-1-3/29 (Decree); translated in B&R 8:301-318.

The King restricts the China trade to the Manila galleon

The King:

To Gómez Pérez Das Mariñas, my Governor and Captain General of the Philippine Islands.

I have received the letters that you wrote me by the last fleet from New Spain.

...

What pertains to the navigation from those islands will be determined as soon as possible—namely, whether it shall be at my account, or at that of private individuals, and you shall be advised of the resolution taken. In either case, you shall send information, now and henceforth, upon all occasions, to my royal Council of the Indies, of all vessels leaving there, and of their registers, with itemized cargo—as, so much in gold, and so much in merchandise, with the declaration of the different kinds.¹

...

In undertaking the construction of the galleys, you shall advise me of its progress, and of their cost, and for what purpose they can best be used.

I am ordering Juan de Ledesma to send you, with this, signed copies of the decrees prohibiting Peru and Guatemala from trading in those islands and in China. In accordance with these decrees, you shall regard as confiscated everything that may be traded in violation of those orders.

¹ Ed. note: Obviously, if this order had been obeyed, copies of the registers of all galleons as of 1593 would have found their place in AGI, Seville.

It is not advisable to make any innovation in regard to the permission which you request—namely, power to despatch vessels to Peru and other points; but you should observe the decree.

The other points of your letters are being discussed, and an answer will be sent to you upon the first occasion.

Madrid, 17 January 1593.

I, the King.

By order of the King, our sovereign:

Juan de Ibarra.

Countersigned by the Council.

Royal Decree of 1593 regarding commerce

The King:

Inasmuch as, whenever we have promulgated ordinances prohibiting trade between the Western Indies and China, and regulating that of the Philippines, I have been informed that there has been neglect in the execution thereof; and that, as the merchants and other persons in the North Sea [i.e. Atlantic] who trade in these our kingdoms of Castile, and in the Indies, have suffered so many losses during past years, and those engaged in the profits of the Chinese trade have gained so much, the latter has increased greatly, while the commerce of these my said kingdoms has declined, on which account both these kingdoms and my royal income have received great damage: therefore, since it is so important that the commerce of these my said kingdoms and of the Indies be preserved and increased, and that there be quite usual communication and trade between them, I have, with the concurrence of my royal Council of the Indies, determined to prohibit by new orders—as by this present I do prohibit, forbid, and order—in the future, in any manner and under any circumstances whatever, any vessel from sailing from the provinces of Peru, the mainland, Guatemala, New Spain, or any other part of our Western Indies, to China, for trade or traffic or for any other purpose. Neither can they go to the Philippine Islands, except those from New Spain, which are permitted to go by another decree of this same date.

We have ordained that should this be done, such vessel will be regarded as confiscated, with all its money, merchandise, and other cargo. One third part of all of this shall be turned over to our treasury, a second third to him who shall give information thereof, and the other third to the judge who shall pass sentence. And further, we forbid that any merchandise brought to the said New Spain from the Philippine Islands be transferred to the said provinces of Peru and the mainland, even when the duties imposed on such merchandise have been paid. For our purpose and will is that nothing from China and the Philippine Islands be used in the said provinces of Peru and the mainland, except that may be there at present, and for which we allow them four years, to be determined from the date on which this our decree shall be promulgated. For this purpose every person shall register what he has at present, before the justice of the city, town, or hamlet, where he lives, or of which he is a citizen. Henceforth whatever of the

aforesaid merchandise shall be taken to the above-named provinces, or whatever shall be found in the possession of any person whatsoever, outside of the said register, or after the conclusion of the above deadline, we order that it be confiscated also, and divided and shared as above stated. But we permit them to bring to these kingdoms, anything of the above-named articles that they may have had heretofore, within the limit of the said four years.

I order my viceroys of Peru and New Spain, my Governor and Captain General of the Philippines, the presidents and auditors of my royal Audiencias in the Indies, and all other magistrates therein, that they observe and fulfil this our decree, strictly, inviolably, and punctually; and that they execute the penalties contained herein without any remission or dispensation whatever, as is thus my will, and as is fitting for my service. They shall promulgate it in all places where this shall be necessary and desirable, so that all may have notice of it, and none may plead ignorance.

Given in Madrid, 11 February 1593.

I, the King.