
Document 1588E

More about Cavendish in a letter from Juan Bautista Roman to the King, dated Manila 2 July 1588

Source: AGI 67-6-29; translated in B&R 34:392-402.

Letter from Juan Bautista Roman¹ to Philip II

Sire:

For the last eleven years that I have been serving your Majesty in these regions of the Indies, I have continually written what has occurred to me regarding your royal service and the benefit and increase of the treasury; and although nothing of notoriously great convenience has been enacted, I shall not neglect to inform your Majesty of the things that occur to me at present in order that I may fulfil my obligation and discharge my conscience so that your Majesty may enact what measures are most advisable.

Your Majesty will have heard from New Spain of the depredations that the English pirates have committed, and that two extremely small ships, one of 150 tons, and the other of 100, and carrying 70 men in both ships, captured your Majesty's ship **Santa Ana** of 600 tons' burden, on the coast of New Spain. It contained 2,300 marks of gold belonging to private persons and 1 million [ducats] worth of merchandise with which it was laden. Then they burned the vessel.

Inasmuch as your Majesty will have as definite information as that known here, I shall only relate what happened to the English later according to what has been learned from them themselves and what we have seen. After they had burned the ship, they sailed toward these islands, but the smaller vessel² went adrift in the open sea. The other arrived in January of this year at the island of Capul, the first island of these Philippines, which forms a strait with this large island of Luzon.

1 Ed. note: The author of this letter was royal factor and treasurer.

2 Ed. note: The Content, consort to the Desire, disappeared without a trace.

The captain bought some food from the Indians at Capul, for which he paid them very liberally and did them no damage. He hanged a Spaniard whom he had brought from the ship **Santa Ana**, one Alonso de Valladolid, because he found on him a letter in which he advised the President of the royal Audiencia of all that had happened. The Indian who was to carry the letter and who was the servant of the said Spaniard, escaped by swimming and concealed himself so securely in the island that the English were unable to find him. They told the Indians of the island that they were hostile to the Spaniards, and that they had left their country for the sole purpose of harming us. They said that they would return with a fleet within three years, in order to colonize these islands and drive us out of them; and that they did not come for any tribute, but only for their friendship and trade.

After a stay of eleven days they set sail and went to another island called Panae, more distant from this settlement of Manila, and toward the south. There is a small city in that island called Arevalo of which Captain Don Juan Ronquillo is mayor. A large ship was being built nearby at the expense of the royal treasury. The Englishmen arrived between the hamlet and the shipyard where the ship was being built on the 7th of February, where he captured by means of his ship's boat a sailor who was coasting along in a boat quite inapprehensive of any such danger. All the information that could be desired was learned from that sailor. Next day, the Englishman landed the sailor with a letter for one Manuel Lorenzo, who had the construction of the ship in charge. The letter contained some threats and arguments of little moment and was signed Tomas Candis of Trimbley [sic], as your Majesty will see by the original in the papers sent by the President.



Thomas Cavendish was a young English pirate captain.

At that time, that sailor learned of the disaster to the **Santa Ana**, from one of the Portuguese who had been captured and from certain Flemish sailors whom he knew. It was also learned immediately from the Indian who had escaped in Capul. Both of them declared the captain to be a youth of twenty-two or twenty-three, and that the ship contained scarcely 40 Englishmen. After having done that the English set sail and laid their course toward the island of Mindanao, the last one of these Philippines lying toward the Moluccas. They will necessarily be forced to winter in some desert island near the Moluccas (as Francisco Draque did) until the month of December, for they cannot make use of the *brisas* of this year for the voyage to, and the doubling of, the Cape of Good Hope, as it is already very late. And especially since it would take all the rest of February

and March to sail to the Javas, where one can clear this archipelago and reach the open sea, for that distance is more than 400 leagues, and one can sail only by day...

...
If your Majesty be so pleased you may consider that the royal Audiencia boasts that there are here in these Philippine Islands six Spanish settlements, one Master-of-Camp, 35 captains, 3 galleys, and 3 ships with high freeboard, the smallest of which is of 300 tons' burden, besides many frigates and native ships, powder and weapons, and 400 soldiers, all of which has not served or serves for an affair of such little difficulty and one so necessary. I was constantly of the opinion that the pirate should be pursued immediately, and some others were of the same opinion, but the Governor and the majority (which always temporizes in regard to following their opinion) held contrariwise, and said that it was possible that a fleet was coming from England after the ship, and that if we pursued the latter, this city and fort would be left with insufficient defenders.

...
It would not be difficult to capture it with a single galley, and the capture would be much easier with 12 or 13 frigates that could be assembled...

Many useless expenses to the royal treasury result from the poor administration in many things in the government of these islands, especially in the **cost of the ships of this line**. All of the ships belong to your Majesty, although they could belong to private persons. In the former year of 1585, Captain Esteban Rodriguez de Figueroa brought a new ship of 300 tons to the port of this city, in order to freight it for New Spain; but instead of encouraging and aiding him in it, he was denied all protection, so much so that in order that the ship might not rot in the port, he was obliged to sell it for a certain exploring expedition which was made at your Majesty's expense by order of the archbishop of Mexico. Consequently, all those who intended to build ships were discouraged. The reason for this is that since the governors engage in trade and traffic, they do not want any ships belonging to private persons where heavy freights [would] have to be paid. It is known what goods are exported and whose they are if they do not belong to your Majesty, and that his merchandise goes under false pretence and that he does not pay such heavy freight duties. Consequently, in order that the Governors may gain one real, it must cost your Majesty one hundred.

Two of your Majesty's ships are being despatched this year [1588], one of 600 tons and the other of 400, at an expense of more than 50,000 pesos.¹ It is unnecessary to despatch more than one ship, for one ship of 100 tons is sufficient to bring the ammunition and soldiers to be sent from Mexico. However, in order that those two might be laden with merchandise they are sent, and this is one of the incongruities above mentioned. If the merchants of Mexico and of these islands wish commerce they should build ships, and not all carry on their business to such a great harm and loss to the royal treasury.

1 Ed. note: These ships were most probably named Santiago and San Pedro respectively.

Finally, these islands have never been or are of further use than to enrich the Governor, and to enable him to gain 200,000 ducats, while your Majesty loses ten times as much. Things will constantly get worse in this direction, unless your Majesty orders the matter corrected. I am serving your Majesty as factor and treasurer, but I have no part in anything, for the Governor manages things to suit himself. I have always advised your Majesty of these and other incongruities, but no relief has ever been given to anything that I have mentioned touching your royal service, and my letters cannot have had the credit that my faithfulness merits. However, I shall at least have performed my duty as your Majesty's servant and vassal, and to my conscience.

...

May our Lord preserve your Majesty many years with the increase of kingdoms and dominions that we your subjects and vassals desire.

Manila, in the Philippines, 2 July 1588.

Juan Bautista Roman