
Document 1620C

Letter from Governor Fajardo to the King, dated Manila 15 August 1620

Sources: AGI 67-6-7; translated in B&R 19: 90-172.

Letter from Governor Fajardo to Philip III

Sire:

1st. **[The returning ships of 1620]** While anxious, as may be understood, over the delay of the ships from New Spain, and the anticipated rise of the *vendavals* with the so great fury with which they began this year; and fearing on that account some disaster, or their making port in distress in Japan, where also there is cause for fear; and while considering the hardship that might result to this country from any one of those things: we had news that three ships of the Dutch rebels were awaiting our ships between the channel of San Bernardino and the Cape of Espiritu Santo, where the latter had to come... I had the galleys and light craft manned, so that they might go out immediately with what advices and orders seemed advisable. While preparing the ships, which were almost ready to go out, for whatever might arise, and in the midst of that anxiety, God was pleased to do us the favor of freeing us from it by the news that I received of our ships.

That news, thanks to His Divine Majesty, was most favorable, when one considers what might have come. The news was that the **flagship**—a large galleon, and, as its actions showed, not a very good sailer—happened to encounter, without its consort (which was a patache), the three Dutch ships. These approached the galleon, and ordered it to strike its sails for Mauritius [of Nassau]. Captain and Sergeant Major Don Fernando de Ayala, warder of the port at the point of Cavite (whom I had sent out in order that he might return as commander of the said ships because the person who went as commander from here was to remain in New Spain, namely, Don Luis Fernandez de Cordova, a relative of the viceroy of that province) answered them, as a valiant gentleman and soldier, with his artillery and firearms. He continued fighting and defending himself all that day and part of the night, until under cover of its darkness and a heavy fog that settled down, pursuing their voyage, the Spaniards left the enemy with

the intention of running upon the coast of an island of the strait, called Ibabao. Our Lord guided them to a port, where a ship was never known to have entered. There they anchored, and fearing that the wind with which they entered might shift to that which generally prevails in that season and with greater fury, they determined to run the said ship into the mud, and to cut away the mainmast, in order to render them less liable to drag, and to leave the port again and encounter the enemy. Accordingly, all possible haste was displayed in disembarking the men, and the silver and reals of your Majesty and of private persons, and the most valuable goods; but scarcely was that done when the storm, coming down upon the ship, drove it upon some rocks. There it foundered and sank, although in a place so shallow that but little of the ship's cargo was lost. For they continued to take out and use many things, except the articles of luxury. Although no use could be made of the ship's hull, as it was entirely ruined, the resultant loss is almost nothing, and inconsiderable when one thinks what it might have been, and what this event has gained in advantage and reputation for these islands, and for your Majesty's arms herein. For, although your Majesty, thanks to God, has had excellent successes in the islands, still it has all been by superiority of ships and men; and there is nothing, according to common opinion, so fortunate as this event, considering what the enemy will have lost in all the aforesaid respects among all the nations with whom they have relations—specially with that of the Japanese, who place their honor and ground for self-praise in war. It would appear that they will not be well esteemed there, nor even pleasantly received by their creditors—with whom, as we understand here, they were indebted for about 300,000 ducats for their preparations and the relief of their forts, having assigned to the creditors their pay from a good prize that they were to make, which must have been this galleon.

Then, in order that everything might turn out well, our Lord guided the **patache**—which was coming as *almiranta*—without its meeting an enemy. However, from the severity of the weather, the same thing happened to them as to the flagship; but they lost no cargo, for that vessel was so small that I bought it for not more than 1,000 pesos.

Although some thing that those ships did not have a more satisfactory voyage because they left Acapulco on 4 April, in my opinion that could not have been avoided; for they reached that port late because their voyage thither was long and troublesome. Notwithstanding that they had been despatched they would have found, when they arrived, *vendavals* already in these islands, as these commenced so early, as I have said. Although the viceroy wrote requesting greater haste in those despatches, yet because they are sent late from there, they also arrive late here, even if no such events happen as the above. It is almost impossible for the ships to leave here early, if the arrival of those from New Spain is delayed, unless no opportunity be given the inhabitants to receive their share of money and letters, which is a thing that they would feel keenly.

2d. I am also writing to the viceroy not to waste time and money in making unnecessary repairs on the ships, and those for which their captains and commanders do not ask; for that is of use only for those who have slaves who act as caulkers and as other

kinds of mechanics, in which they sometimes gain more in such works than they are worth.

In the same way [I have requested] that he shall not furnish rigging and other supplies unless they are requested; for I am sending the vessels from here already provided, for both outgoing and returning, with everything (even the candles), in the endeavor to avoid the expense caused to your Majesty in the past with such outlays as have been made, and with the things brought here. This can be very well avoided, because there have been certain articles that can be obtained here for one-tenth as much as they cost in New Spain, both rigging and other things that are not needed; while ammunition and arms are so extremely necessary. Of these, on the occasion that I have mentioned, there was known to be a very great lack.

...

3d. And inasmuch as I am not confident that the viceroy will be willing to admit that the appointments of offices and officials of these ships from these islands do not concern him, when those who are appointed complete the exercise of their duties on their arrival at New Spain—as, for instance, Don Francisco [Bravo] de la Serna, who is going this year as commander; and Don Luis Fernandez de Cordova, who was commander last year, as they commenced to exercise those offices from the time of their departure from those provinces and are returning in those functions through courtesy, and for just considerations—the viceroy undertakes to appoint men to those places, refusing to understand as he ought what your Majesty has ruled and ordered in this matter. On the contrary, in order to establish himself in this pretension, he has suppressed the appointments that I sent last year. Indeed, although he deprived Don Fernando de Ayala of his appointment, he did not make another appointment, but said that he was satisfied for that time with that act of jurisdiction.

...

According to the news received here of what has come in the said ships, the aid in silver [bars] and reals that has come on your Majesty's account amounts to 352,000 pesos; while the supplies that I asked both this year and last come to less than one-third of the amount that was generally brought in several former years—for I am very careful not to exceed what is actually necessary and unavoidable, in order to save the so excessive expenses which were generally incurred in this; since other expenses are not wanting that render that saving very necessary.

The infantry does not amount to 200 men, in three companies. If these men were that number, and Spaniards, it would not be so bad; but, although I have not seen them because they have not yet arrived here, I am told that they are, as at other times, for the most part boys, mestizos, and mulattoes, with some [Mexican] Indians. There is no little cause for regret in the great sums that reinforcements of such men waste for, and cost, your Majesty. I cannot see what betterment there will be until your Majesty shall provide it, since I do not think that more can be done in New Spain, although the viceroy must be endeavoring to do so, as he is ordered.

4th. I wrote to the viceroy last year that if, in any year in the future—through any misfortune, or for any other cause or obstacle that might prevent it—no ships from this country should reach those provinces, he should try to send what aid he could, as is usually requested, specially that of money; so that in case of such a lack, the need should not increase, or the danger caused when ships of this commerce do not sail. According to his reply, it seems that the viceroy does not dare assure it, because he doubts whether he can find ships in the ports of that country for that purpose.

[The Governor goes on to suggest that the Manila ships should visit Panama, instead of Acapulco. However, in a marginal note, the Council rejected this idea.]

...

10th. I have had no other advices of anything new, or of matters of greater importance, in those forts [of the Moluccas] than the above-mentioned entrance of the reinforcements. From the people sent overthere, and from those who wrote me from Japan, I have learned that the reinforcement was very timely; for the Dutch had crews of Japanese, whom they hired with the intention, as was understood, of attempting with them some deed of arms in that place, or something else that would have meant evil to our forces and fortifications.

I was also advised from Japan that a squadron of Dutch ships was to sail thence to run along these coasts, in order to hinder the commerce of the Chinese ships, awaiting and robbing them on their way. In order to obviate this mischief, I prepared two strong ships, one patache, and two galleys, with which to make the said coast safe. I gave warning to China; and thus, in consequence, many ships and merchants of China, thanks to God, have arrived in safety. That squadron is in charge of Admiral Juan Baptista de Molina, a man who has served many years, and who has served here with special courage and good fortune. And since every one in this country considers that he is the one who deserves most, and in order to avoid the punctilios of those who hesitated in embarking and in taking charge of those vessels—desiring perhaps, under pretext of this to remain ashore—I gave out that the squadron was to be in charge of Don Luis Fajardo, my brother. Thereupon all followed him, and he obeyed the orders of the said admiral, Juan Baptista de Molina, like the meanest soldiers of those who embarked with him. The enemy must have heard of it, or they must have had more important business to look after, for they did not approach these coasts. On the contrary, it has been learned that they lost one of their large vessels¹ (the best that had ever sailed), at the head of the island of Hermosa; and that, for the last two years, they have obtained

1 Ed. note: The Governor's report about the Dutch fleet of 1620 is not accurate. Richard Cocks in his diary says that a combined Dutch and English fleet left Hirado on 3 January 1620. Only one English ship, the **Unicorn**, was cast away on the China coast, but that had nothing to do with the fleet of 9 ships, which returned from Manila on 29 June. They had captured 5 Chinese junks in all. The names of most of those ships are given as: the Bantam, Moon, Bull, Palsgrave, Elizabeth, Hoop, Swan, and Trouw [i.e. Glad Tidings, or Fidelity]. This last ship was shipwrecked at the Sangi Islands (north of Celebes) in 1625.

nothing from this coast beyond the destruction of what had been made for equipment of our vessels, and the loss of the ships that have been wrecked.

...
11th. That ship that I bought at Macao has come, with some freight charges and duties on goods that it carried. That goes a good way toward aiding the cost of its purchase and the expense [of maintaining it]. The price was 11,000 pesos, with sails, rigging, seven anchors, and four good cables. I am satisfied with it; and it appears at least to be made of better of better woods than those here. It was made in India, and its burden is more than 600 tons of the Northern Sea.¹ Contract and agreement have been made to build another ship in Satsuma, a province of Japan near here. I am assured that it can be built there very well, and it will be strong and of good timber, and very well-proportioned and suitable as is needed for this line and trade with New Spain.²

...
43d. A ship just now in from Malacca brings as news that the Dutch and English were already allied; but when the relief that we are awaiting arrives, I hope, with Divine favor, for better results.

May our Lord give them to us, as He is able; and may He preserve the royal Catholic person of your Majesty, as Christendom needs.

Manila, 15 August 1620.

[P.S.] While about to send these despatches, so that they might cross over to Mindoro—where the ships generally stop in order to lighten and get sailors for their voyage—I am told that the ships had not even been able to double the island of Fortún, because of the violent headwinds...

I trust, God helping, that the weather will moderate, for the sake of all.

Don Alonso Fajardo de Tença.

1 Ed. note: That is, of the Atlantic, which was equivalent to about 400 tons in the Pacific. This ship was perhaps the **San Andrés**, the ship that made the 1620 voyage.

2 Ed. note: The intent was perhaps to contact Will Adams and have him build another ship, but, unknown to the Governor, Adams had died 3 months before. Nothing more is heard about this plan to build a ship in Japan.