
Document 1629A

Letter from Governor Tavora to the King, dated Cavite 1 August 1629

Sources: AGI 67-6-8; translated in B&R 23: 47-62.

Letter from Governor Juan Niño de Tavora to Philip IV

Government matters

1. Slowness of the ships which come from New Spain.

Sire:

In a separate letter sent with this same despatch, I write to your Majesty of the matters pertaining to war, revenue, the ecclesiastical estate, and the religious orders, that have arisen in the course of the year.

In the present letter, I shall briefly mention some general points of the government, for which I take pen in hand today, 19 July, before the arrival at this port of Cavite of the ships from New Spain, or news that they have entered the islands. Consequently we (I and all this city) are as anxious as can be imagined, as it is now so late and the *vendavals* have already set in with some vehemence. May God, in His mercy, have pity on us; and will your Majesty be pleased to urge the viceroy of New Spain, by ordering him to have the aid for these islands leave Acapulco at least by the middle of March. By that the voyage will be made certain; but if it is delayed until the last of the same month or the 1st of April, as has been done these last years, these islands are in evident danger of remaining without aid, and that would mean their total ruin.¹

¹ Ed. note: The ships of 1628 were the **San Luis**, commanded by Don Juan de Quiñones, in whose ship was the Governor's wife, Doña Magdalena de Oñate, and **San Raimundo**, commanded by Don Diego Muñoz, according to Fr. Medina's History (see B&R 24: 147).

2. Despatch of the ships leaving here this year.

I am despatching these ships before the arrival of the others, to the very great inconvenience of the entire country. But the trouble would be greater if the ships¹ sailed out of season, and after the subsidence of the *vendavals*, which is their proper monsoon. May God bear them with safety. They are the two best ships which have sailed from this place. The flagship was finished recently, and the *almiranta* is the same as new, because of the thorough overhauling that was given it on this beach.

3. Their small cargo, and the lack of trade in this year.

Their cargo is small, because ships from China and Macao have not entered Manila this year, and those which were laden in the island of Hermosa have not returned. The reason why the Chinese did not come is the multitude of pirates of their own nation who have overrun their coasts; while it is understood that the reason why the ships have not returned from the island of Hermosa on time is because the *vendavals* must have set in earlier than usual. Accordingly, for both reasons the ships take less merchandise than they could, and what they take is at advanced prices. Everything has been incredibly dear in Manila this year; and we could not live here if we did not have the hope of better conditions and an abundance of all things.

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8. The fresh supply of saltpeter which was brought from India by the efforts of Don Felipe Mascarenhas, captain of Cochin.

Four galliots have come from India with flour and a certain quantity of saltpeter, of which we were in great need. The captain of Cochin, Don Felipe de Mascarenhas, is the one who has solicited it; and he aids me very punctually with what I ask from him. I am trying to have some ships built there for the New Spain line. I request your Majesty to thank him, and to encourage him to pay careful attention to the quick building of the new ships; for this would effect much, and relieve the [Philippine] islands of one of the greatest burdens that they endure, namely, the ship-yards and shipbuilding.

9. Embassy sent to the king of Camboja; the building of ships; and the trade that has been established with him.

For the same purpose I despatched an embassy this year to the kingdom of Camboja, in order to ascertain whether it has suitable timber. I have heard that those who went there have been well received by the king, and that he is answering me by another embassy composed of his vassals. They say that he has never done so with anyone else, and that the building of a ship was already being begun. I am momentarily expecting a patache which was bought there, in which the ambassadors are coming.

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1 Ed. note: They were the **San Juan**, and the **San Luis** which turned back (see Doc. 1629B).

10. Embassy and trade with the king of Cochinchina.

I also sent a message to the king of Cochinchina, with letters and presents, in order to establish a factory in his kingdom, both for the building of ships and for the exporting of iron and other metals—which can be imported from there at much less cost than what is now incurred here in the islands. I have already received a reply from the king, which contains many expressions of desire that what I am trying to do will be effected; and I am in hopes of accomplishing it this year.

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[12.] Despatch sent to Japan in regard to the burning of the junk, of which advice was sent last year; and the controversy regarding this which the city of Macao has maintained with me.

Like efforts have been made to restore the trade with Japan, which was formerly of great importance to these islands. I sent a despatch to the governor of Nangasaqui, sending him 42 Japanese whom General Don Juan de Alcarazo brought to me from a junk of that nation—which, as I advised you last year, he burned at the bar of the river of Siam. I offered them friendship and trade, giving them to understand that the burning was done without my orders; and that, if they would have trade and commerce with these islands as before, I would give satisfaction for the damage in the said burning. This despatch did not reach Nangasaqui in the time that I supposed, nor as yet have we heard from it. The news of the said burning having reached that same city at the time when the Portuguese were there with the galliots that make that voyage, trading with their merchandise, the Japanese attempted to attack them, and to force them to pay the value of the merchandise and the junk which were burned; and it is feared that thereupon they would lay an embargo on the three galliots. However, as yet we do not know with certainty or assurance, except that a suit was pending in the court of the king of Japan, the Portuguese claiming that they could not in justice be forced to repay the damage which the Spanish had done. Thereupon the city of Macao earnestly begged me to make satisfaction, and send the value of the cargo burned and lost in the said junk, in order to silence the Japanese. Being desirous of gratifying the people of Macao, and settling the matter, I called an assembly of theologians and jurists, in which I broached the subject. All agreed that so long as the Japanese persevered in locking the door to commerce with these islands, contrary to justice and reason, there should be no talk of giving satisfaction for the damage inflicted, until advice could be given to your Majesty—even though it should follow from this, by a casualty not intended, that the Portuguese with whom the said Japanese trade should have to pay for the loss.

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[14.] Erection of the bridge; and how the hospital has been given the revenue [formerly] produced by the ferry boat.

The bridge which I began in this city (as I have advised you during the last few years) is now in such a condition that we can cross by it. It will be finished in a couple of months without having cost the citizens or your Majesty a single maravedi. The Sangleys¹ have built it from their common fund, with which they have been freed from the amount that the ferry-boat cost them. The latter belonged to the hospital of the same Sangleys, which is in charge of the Dominican Fathers; and it netted them at least 2,000 pesos annually.

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16. Arrival of the aid and ships from New Spain.

Just as I reached this point in my letter, and when about to seal it, I received news that **the two ships which sailed for New Spain last year for the subsidy have returned with it**; and that they have made port in different parts of these islands, because the weather did not allow them to reach this port of Cavite. They left New Spain late, and the *vendavals* set in early. Hence the voyage has been one of the hardships, and it was a great mercy of God that they were able to make the islands, although not little is the discomfort and not few the additional expenses that have been incurred because of their inability to make this port. What I grieve over most is to see the inadequacy of the aid, which does not reach 250,000 pesos, while I informed the viceroy that we needed 400,000, as I wrote last year. Consequently, I again petition your Majesty in the same terms as in that letter, to be pleased to endow these islands with the said sum, so that it may not be at the will of the viceroys of New Spain to discontinue sending it. This is the chief point, and on it is based all the government of these islands, so that we may be able to give a good account of them to your Majesty.

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May God preserve the Catholic and royal person of your Majesty with the increase of kingdoms and states that is necessary to Christendom.

Cavite, 1 August, 1629.

Sire, your Majesty's humble vassal,

Don Juan Niño de Tavora.

¹ Ed. note: The origin of this word is said to have been derived from the Chinese word for "merchant", in the Fukienese dialect. It became the common word for any Chinaman living in the Philippines.