
Documents 1565E

Legazpi—Reply from Fr. Urdaneta to the King, dated Mexico 28 May 1560, including a memorandum

Sources: Col. de Navarrete, t. 17, doc. 7; Col. Ultramar ii, doc 13, pp. 106-113; Col. diarios 5:142-145; summarized in B&R 2:81-82; translated in FBG 8:5-9.

Letter from Fr. Urdaneta to Philip II

Sacred Catholic Royal Majesty:

Early in May of this year, 1560, I received the order of Your Royal Majesty issued at Valladolid on 24 September, 1559, by which I was instructed to go in the ships of Don Luis de Velasco, Viceroy of this New Spain, which he is sending by order of Your Royal Majesty to the Islands of the West. That order I obeyed, it having come from Your Majesty, whom I have always served. I kiss Your Majesty's royal feet and hands for the favor and remuneration Your Majesty has deigned to grant me, your chaplain and servant.

The information given to Your Royal Majesty that I had gone in the expedition of Commander Fray García de Loaysa, which he made in the service of Your Majesty to the Moluccas Islands, is correct. That was in 1525; and I was in said expedition for eleven years, after which I returned to Spain in 1536 when in Valladolid I gave to Your Royal Majesty a report and account of what had happened in that voyage. For eight years of the eleven I stayed in the Moluccas and their boundaries, serving Your Majesty as a soldier and captain as well as taking charge of the Royal Treasury, until by royal order we had to leave freely those islands to the captains of the Most Serene King of Portugal. I returned, therefore, from the Spice Islands.

In 1552 our Lord God deigned to call me to the religious life in which I am now. I served Your Majesty most of the time that I was here in New Spain, where I was given positions of responsibility by Don Antonio de Mendoza, Viceroy of New Spain, in affairs of war as well as in those of peace. After entering the religious life, I have been offered similar important assignments in the service of your Royal Majesty by the Viceroy,

Don Luis de Velasco. And now, upon receipt of the order of Your Royal Majesty, I informed Fr. Fray Agustin de Coruña, Provincial of the Order of our Father St. Augustine here in this New Spain, about it and he and the whole organization willingly and with the affection they have in serving Your Majesty, obeyed it. Thus, the Father Provincial has ordered me to prepare for this voyage with three other religious. Considering my age, which is now 52 years¹ and the poor health I now have and the much work which from boyhood I have had, I felt I needed to pass in peace the little time that remains in my life. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the great zeal of Your Majesty in serving God, our Lord, and in spreading our holy Catholic faith, I have decided to commit myself to this expedition, trusting only in Divine Providence and mercy, through which I expect to serve well His Divine Majesty and Your Royal Person.

The Viceroy, Don Luis de Velasco, informed me of the order of Your Royal Majesty concerning the voyage to the West and I told him what I thought would be convenient to render better service to God, our Lord, and to Your Majesty. His honor, the Viceroy thought it wise that I express to Your Royal Person my opinions. Thus, together with this goes my opinion about the voyage so that Your Majesty may order and provide what is best for your service. I beseech Your Majesty to accept my willingness to serve our Lord and Your Majesty, whose royal person and great dominion may God keep and increase with greater kingdoms and seignories and may He thereafter take Your Royal Majesty to the celestial glory to rejoice in that Eternal Kingdom for which you were created.

Mexico, 28 May 1560.

S.C.R.M., I kiss the Royal feet and hands of Your Majesty. Your Majesty's humble chaplain and inferior servant,

Fray Andrés de Urdaneta.

Memorandum from Urdaneta to the King

Sacred Catholic Royal Majesty:

It seems that there could be an inconvenience or scruple in making the voyage which Your Majesty orders to the West from this New Spain. By the way it is ordered to be undertaken, the ships are to go directly in search of the Philippine Islands. It is also expressly declared in the order that they should not enter the Molucca Islands, in order not to break the agreement between Your Majesty and the Most Serene King of Portugal.

But it is clear and evident that the Philippine Islands are not only inside the demarcation of Portugal, but also that the easternmost point of the said Islands is in the meridian of the Moluccas and the main portion is West of the meridian of the Moluccas.² The agreement on the demarcation is that to the east of the Moluc-

1 Navarrete says in a marginal note: This is a mistake, because according to the writers of his Order, he was born in 1498, and, therefore, he should have said 62 years.

2 Ed. note: Emphasis mine.

cas Islands from 17° N latitude, measuring 297-1/2 leagues from the equator, a line is drawn from pole to pole. To the West of the said line, which forms a semi-circle, none of the ships of Your Majesty and none of your subjects may enter, or settle, or trade, until the cancellation of the existing sale or agreement. The said Philippine Islands, as I have said, are not only inside the demarcation [of Portugal], but the greater part of them lies in the western part of the meridian of the Moluccas.

In view of this, it seems there could really be a kind of inconsistency in the order of Your Majesty directing the expedition to go to the Philippine Islands without either a legitimate or a pious cause. It appears to me that Your Majesty would better be served if you order two galleons and a patache to set sail from this New Spain to discover the sea West of this in the regions that the Viceroy, Don Luis de Velasco, may order; going up to the border of the demarcation line of the Most Serene King of Portugal, which is, as I have already said, that line which stretches from pole to pole 297-1/2 leagues from the easternmost point of the Moluccas, so that Your Royal Majesty may know about the lands, islands and people that are inside your demarcation. Once those lands are discovered and known, Your Majesty may provide and order what is best to be done for the service of our Lord, God, and of Your Majesty, and for the welfare of the natives of those lands that have been discovered.

Besides, Your Majesty has been informed that in the Philippine Islands and in other islands nearby, some Spaniards, the subjects of Your Majesty, were lost. They had gone there with the Loaysa expedition, which left Spain in 1535; as well as in the ships sent by the Marquis del Valle from New Spain in 1527, as in those sent by the Viceroy, Don Antonio de Mendoza from New Spain also, in 1542; not to mention others who were lost in a ship¹ of the Marquis del Valle in bad weather as they were coming to New Spain from Peru. It will be a good and a pious thing to do if Your Majesty send for them; as according to information given Your Majesty, said Spaniards who were lost from those vessels are prisoners and captives of infidels in the said Philippine Islands. Your Majesty will be well served, as well as our Lord, God, if for the sake of those Spaniards, Your Majesty's subjects, and out of pity to them, the said ships that shall set sail for the discoveries shall reach the Philippine Islands where said Spaniards are held captives; and upon arriving and landing in them learn from the natives of those Islands what Spaniards are present there and in the neighboring islands; and, having learned about them, pay their ransom or buy them and their children, if they have any, to save their souls,

To effect their rescue, the ships should carry such merchandise as would please the natives best. Rescued or ransomed in this manner, the said Spanish captives shall be brought back to New Spain when the weather is favorable for their voyage, without going to the Moluccas nor engaging in trade or bartering, with the exception of buying some goods that are worthwhile seeing as samples or purchasing supplies and other things needed for the voyage. And to make this expedition successful, may it please

1 Ed. note: The ship Sntiago, Captain Castilla, of the Grijalva expedition.

Your Majesty to order a search for the best pilots possible; besides the previously mentioned persons, for the said expedition. Thus, the most accurate reports can be made about the new discoveries as well as about the route, and distance from New Spain to the Philippine Islands and their neighboring islands; and determination can also be had of the place where the 180° longitude of the demarcation of Your Royal Majesty reaches.

It appears then that there is not only a justifiable cause in going to the Philippine Islands in search of your captive subjects and in liberating them, but also in our obligation to look for those who got lost while serving Your Royal Majesty. Aside from serving God, our Lord, and liberating the captives from the infidels, the expedition can take advantage of learning the language and of getting information, of which Your Majesty will be very much pleased.

Fray Andrés de Urdaneta.