
Document 1621A

Jesuit annual report for 1620-1621

Sources: RAH Jesuit Tome 87, N° 48 (as reported in B&R 20: 306) but Tome 84, N° 10 (as reported in B&R 53: 287); translated in B&R 20: 25-39.

Notes: The 1620-21 events have also been transcribed by Navarrete, in his Col. doc. (1973), Vol. 6, fol. 51 et sequitur. Also in the Library of the Royal Palace at Madrid, there is a relation by him dated Manila, January 1621 (B&R 53: 286); however, since the document itself is undated, the above date must have been taken from the first line of the report.

News from the Philippines for this year, 1621, by Fr. Alonso Roman, S.J., dated July(?) 1621

By letters which we have received from Japan this January 1621, we heard how bitterly the persecution of God's religion is carried on in Boxu [i.e. Oshu], the country of Masamune, who has been accustomed to send embassies to Spain in past years. The spread of the holy Gospel and uninterrupted preaching went on until the return of the ambassador [i.e. Hasekura]. Hitherto Masamune had dissimulated for reasons of state, hoping that he would be allowed to send one ship from his kingdoms to New Spain, where he had large interests. Seeing that this would not be conceded, he commenced to persecute Christians openly and secretly.

On 20 September 1620, he ordered prohibitions and edicts to be issued in various places, in which it was ordered that no-one should receive the religion of God; and that all those who had adopted it should abandon it, under penalty of being deprived of the property and incomes which the chiefs of equal rank hold from the *tono*, while in the case of the common people, the plebeians, they should be put to death. He also commanded that any person having any knowledge of any Christian should denounce him; and that all preachers of the holy Gospel should leave his kingdom and state. In case that they would not abandon the religion which they preached, the officials of Masamune commenced to execute their orders. Many were therefore banished and dispossessed of their property, others abandoned their faith, and to six fell the best lot of all in giving up their lives, being beheaded for this reason.

In the city of Nangasaqui, as all its people are Christians, the persecution is directed not so much against the Christians, for that would utterly destroy the place, as against those who conceal the religious who are under penalty of death.

...

On 26 July [1620], there arrived at the port of Firando two Dutch [ships] with some of their men wounded and their masts pierced by shots; they had fought in the Philippines with the ships that had come from New Spain, and had sunk [sic] one of them. The truth of the affair was afterward found out...

...

In the beginning of February of this year, 1621, 9 hostile ships arrived in the bay of Manila, 5 Dutch and 4 English,¹ who seized the passage by which enter the ships of all these islands from Japan, China, Macao, Moluccas, and India. The commander of this fleet was an Englishman, according to the agreement between them.

...

[Camouflaged ship pass undetected]

At this same time the king's ship arrived which had carried to Macao artillery for the defence of that city, and it brought back a cargo of silks. Being informed that the enemy was lying off the entrance to the port of Manila, they rowed over to an island near here, and collected a quantity of green boughs and trees, putting bunches of palm-leaves on the tops of the trees, so that they seemed to be coconut palms, of which there is a great abundance on that island. The stratagem worked, because the ships went about from one tack to the other without being seen by the Dutch. In the same way, another Portuguese galliot, also from Macao, escaped, although it cut down its masts. The Dutch, having seen that they were likely to get little booty on this coast, made sail for that of Macao, to lie in wait, as we understood, for ships from India.

[The outgoing ships of 1620]

Last year two ships sailed from these islands for New Spain. The *almiranta*, while sailing out of a strait where these islands come to an end, encountered [in the North Pacific] 7 hurricanes, so furious that it seemed as if the sea would swallow it up; and those who were aboard gave themselves up a thousand times for lost. They tried to make port in Japan, but it was impossible; and they finally arrived at Manila, rounding Cape of Bojeador.² The men arrived in very bad condition, and many of them blinded with the salt water which had dashed into their eyes. Three days before these tempests commenced they sighted the flagship, but they never saw her again.³ We do not know what became of her, whether she was lost or arrived safely in New Spain.

1 Ed. note: Richard Cocks in his diary mentioned the fleet that went for a second voyage to Manila on 23 November 1621 was composed of the following 8 ships: 4 Dutch (Bantam, Trouw, Harlem, Hoop) and 4 English (Moon, Palsgrave, Elizabeth, Bull).

2 Ed. note: That is, after they had gone around Luzon Island counter-clockwise.

3 Ed. note: I think that her name was the **San Andrés**, a ship built in India and recently bought from Macao. She made it to Acapulco.

[The tragic love affair of the Governor's wife]

At 9 o'clock in the evening of the 11th of May, there was an occurrence in this city as pitiable as it was unfortunate, the cause of it being a man who had been expelled from our Society. After having been a member of it for 7 years, he left the Society, and was married 3 times, although he was not yet 30 years old. Our Lord often brought him back, warned by bitter experience of troubles and remorse of conscience; so that for a long time he did not dare to go to sleep without first confessing himself, specially on the long trip from New Spain to these islands, where he was wrecked on a ship which was on its way with silver and other wealth belonging to these islands. The vessel escaped miraculously, with sails torn by shots from three Dutch vessels, which they took for one of their own. They ran aground, but all the silver was saved. Among others, Juan de Mesa (the name of the outcast of whom I have just spoken) removed all the silver and goods, to the value of 30,000 pesos or more, belonging to people in Mexico. It had been entrusted to him, and he kept it, as was done by all, in a house and church of one of our residences, situated where the ship happened to halt.¹

While he was there he proceeded as if he were a religious, both in example and in frequenting the sacrament, until he came to this city of Manila where, with certain curious articles, he obtained entrance to and communication with the wife of the Governor of these islands, Doña Catalina Zambrano, who had little care for what her position and her dignity demanded. Their sin began on Holy Thursday, with so little secrecy and so bad an example that the affair was beginning to leak out. So badly did it appear that certain persons came to one of our Fathers, advising him to warn Juan de Mesa that they would kill him. The Father did, but Mesa took no notice of it.

The Governor, meanwhile, was informed of his wife's evil conduct; and, wishing to detect them, he pretended to go down to the harbor and fort of Cavite, situated two leagues from here. He had been wont to do this on other occasions, because the enemy with 9 ships was within sight of the fort. He retraced his steps, leaving his entire retinue about a league from here. He entered the city with the intention of accomplishing the deed (which he did later) in his own house; but before entering it he was informed by a page that his wife had gone, disguised as a man, to the house of Juan de Mesa, where she had often gone in the same dress.

After receiving this information, he sought his retinue, taking counsel with his servant and three captains, whom he placed in four streets in order to let no-one pass. The Governor alone arrived at the house at the very moment that his wife entered, and was going upstairs with Juan de Mesa, and behind them a very noted pilot, on account of whom the ship that I mentioned above was celebrated. The Governor attacked him [the pilot] and pierced him with a mortal thrust. With that he rushed out of the house, calling for confession; but, those who guarded the street, not giving him time for that, put him to death. Immediately Mesa went up the stairs, and safely reached a large room where two candles were burning on a buffet. If these had been extinguished, he might

1 Ed. note: Fr. Roman had been aboard the same ship as this renegade (See Doc. 1620D).

have escaped. He drew his sword and defended himself for some time. As the Governor perceived that he was clad in armor, he aimed at Mesa's face and pierced him through the neck, so that he fell down stairs, where he who guarded the door tried to finish him; but as Mesa was well armed he could not do so readily until he wounded him in the face. During all this time Mesa was not heard to ask for confession or even say "Jesus", or any other word, except: "Whoever you are, do not kill me; consider the honor of your lady." While this was going on in the street, the Governor found his wife in hiding. After wounding her three times, she asked for confession; and he, as a knight and a Christian, went out to look for a confessor, and brought one. He resigned her to the priest, urging her to confess herself well and truly, which she did for some time, until the confessor absolved her. With three or four more wounds, and the words with which he aided her to die, he finished with her.

The three dead bodies remained there until 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning before anyone dared to remove them. The Master-of-camp, Don Gerónimo de Silva, who had been governor of the Moluccas and was a knight of St. John, had the body of the Governor's wife removed to his house, to wrap it in a shroud; and that night she received solemn burial by the Recollects of St. Augustine. The two bodies of Juan de Mesa and the pilot remained in the street all day, while a multitude of people, of the various nations who are in this city, collected to gaze at them, manifesting awe at seeing a spectacle so new to them, and one never seen before in these regions. At night, some members of La Misericordia carried them away, without clergy, lights, or funeral ceremony. They carried the two bodies together on some litters, and buried them both in the same grave.

This was the disastrous end of a poor young fellow, upon whom our Lord lavished many and most gracious gifts, although he knew not how to profit by them, but offended Him who had granted them. Those who will feel it most are the owners of the property [confided to him] for God knows when they will collect it, because it has been confiscated.

Will your Reverence communicate this to Brother Juan de Alcazar.

Alonso Roman.¹

1 Ed. note: According to a separate report of the affair, the full name of the ex-Jesuit was Juan de Mesa Suero, and he had been expelled from the Jesuit house at Coimbra, Portugal. The royal Audiencia took charge of the case. They found almost 200 notes from the Governor's wife among Juan de Mesa's belongings, and in hers a great number from him. A report was sent to his Majesty, but the Governor continued to exercise his functions for many years as if nothing had happened.