
Document 1588A

Letter from Governor Vera to the King, dated Manila 26 June 1588

Source: AGI 67-6-6; translated in B&R 7:52-63.

News of Cavendish, the English pirate

Sire:

In the past year of '87, I sent your Majesty an account of the condition of this land, by the usual route, and also one by way of India. As the voyage is so uncertain and dangerous, another duplicate is sent herewith; and I beg your Majesty to have it examined, as it is important for your service.

On the 27th of February of this year, I had news from the Pintados [i.e. Visaya] Islands that, on the 7th¹ of the said month, at one of the islands about 80 leagues south of Luçon, an English ship had been seen. With their small boat they had seized a Spanish sailor who was coasting along carelessly in a small bark. He did not flee from the enemy, as he took them to be Spaniards and friends; for it is unusual for ships from England to come here. Next day the English learned that a galleon of your Majesty was being built in the shipyard of Caigoan on the island of Panay. An attempt was made to land troops for the purpose, as is supposed, of burning it; but it was defended by some carpenters and caulkers who were working thereon. By this it may be inferred that the enemy carried but a small force. After this resistance, the enemy went to Mindanao, leaving on an islet in their course the mariner whom they had taken prisoner. From him I ascertained the fresh destruction planned for this country. He says that several Spaniards, who were his fellow-prisoners on the English ship, told him that your Majesty's galleon **Santa Ana** had been captured near California, a country on the mainland which is continuous with New Spain. The galleon left this port in June of the past year, '87; and as no other ships but ours have ever been sighted on this voyage, which is through such remote regions, they have always sailed with little or no artillery, and with

1 Ed. note: The English date would have been 28 January.

as little fear from corsairs as if they were on the river of Seville. Thus the English easily captured the galleon, plundered and burned it, and hanged a canon of our church. The other persons were sent in a small boat to land, where it is believed that some of them have died of starvation and hardships. From this galleon there was plundered a thousand marks of registered gold, and there must have been as large a sum unregistered, 22-1/2 arrobas of musk, an abundance of civet, and many pearls, and the richest of silks and brocades.

At this capture, the enemy took with them [from the *Santa Ana*] several skilful mariners and a pilot, to guide them to these islands, The captive mariner knew these men, and in conversation with them he learned what I have related. This ship left England with two others, and plundered 16 ships off the coast of Peru. One of the three was lost; the remaining two captured the said galleon *Santa Ana*, and came to these islands. They were separated in a storm, and only this one arrived.¹ It brought about 50 men, most of them pilots. This mariner noticed that this vessel carried 25 pieces of bronze, and cast-iron artillery, and much ammunition. The ship is small, of about 150 tons, staunch and well fitted. There is no doubt that they have plundered more than a million [pesos] worth of gold, pearls, musk, civet, and rich merchandise, which all belonged [to merchants] in New Spain. The Spaniards there would have been diligent in pursuing this corsair; but, as I received information so late, and the enemy only reconnoitered here, without remaining at any place, to inform them would have done no good. I sent word to the Moluccas, whither it seems the enemy directed his course, to the captain general and to the sea-captains who might be there with their galleons; also to the petty kings friendly to your Majesty, and to the fort at Amboina—where it is understood this corsair is going to spend the winter and repair his ship. Captain Francisco is at an island of that archipelago called Jula, near either Macassar or Japara. I advised the sending of a message to him, and the exercise of diligence, as they have greater facility for obtaining news there on account of the many ships which are usually near at hand. And I advised them to follow the Englishman and ascertain where he was going to winter; for it was impossible to return immediately to his own country, because the weather began to be contrary.

It would be necessary to pass out through Sunda and other straits, of which the Portuguese are warned; and there it would be easy to await him and cut off his passage, as they hold him so closely. This account was given by a sailor—a native of this land—who was seized in the galleon, and carried away by the Englishman. He escaped at the mouth of the channel of these islands, and I have kept him here with me. His declarations accompany this letter.²

The first time when this galleon *Santa Ana* sailed from here [i.e. 1585], I sent by her some artillery removed from your Majesty's forts, in order to provide greater security.

1 Ed. note: The ship Content disappeared and only the flagship Desire made it across the Pacific and back to England.

2 Ed. note: They are not available.

In New Spain the artillery was taken out, and the ship returned without it. I thought that if I sent more on the ship, and it were taken out over there, the forts here would be in need, while the ships would gain nothing. Understanding that there was no danger from corsairs on the voyage, I sent the ships, as usual, without artillery. Now that I have seen the need for artillery, and the risk that they run, if it is not carried, **I am sending two ships this year**, each with four heavy pieces of artillery, two falconets, and arquebuses and other arms carried by the sailors and passengers. I am collecting what metal I can find and making thereof some pieces of ordnance with which to fill the place of those sent from the said forts. The merchants are paying your Majesty the value of the artillery, arms, and ammunition carried by one of the ships, and I have loaned the price of those of the other. They will pay this also in the coming year, and the ships will sail armed at the account and cost of the merchants. I beseech your Majesty to command the Viceroy of New Spain to have the artillery and arms returned by the same ships; and that the pieces carried by the **Santa Ana** be returned to these forts, which greatly need them.

In another letter I have written to your Majesty about the general fire in this city. The powder and military supplies were burned and the artillery destroyed. Although I have had the pieces recast, using the metal which was left, there are only 25 heavy pieces and several lighter ones. This is but little artillery for the needs of this land, for defence and the expeditions that are made.

...
According to the commission of your Majesty, I have proceeded against the royal officials in regard to their traffic and trade in merchandise. By the convictions of guilt which have resulted from the investigations and process of law, I have condemned the guilty to pay fines to the treasury. There seems to have been no traffic with funds in the royal treasury; or, if there were any, no damage or injury to it has resulted. I am sending the testimony of the sentences and proceedings to your Majesty's royal Council, where your Majesty will order their examination, if such is your pleasure.

May God guard the Catholic person of your Majesty.

Manila, 26 June of the year 1588.

The Licentiate Santiago de Vera.