
Document 1619B

A paper on needed reforms, by Hernando de los Ríos Coronel

Source: AGI 67-6-27 (printed brief, with ms. additions), translated in B&R 18: 289-342.

Sire:

Fernando de los Ríos Coronel, procurator-general of the Philippine Islands and of all their estates, declares that, inasmuch as all that community insisted that he come to inform your Majesty of the distressed condition which it has reached, and of what was advisable both for the service of your Majesty and that community's conservation and advancement, he has come, for that reason, at the risk of his life, after suffering such great hardships, to serve your Majesty and those islands, for both of which services he has made this brief of the most necessary matters that demand reform.¹

...
He petitions your Majesty to examine this brief with great consideration, for in [heeding] it consists the welfare and conservation of the whole kingdom; for that country, being so far away, has no other remedy for its protection except your royal decrees. The first ten articles of the brief were approved by your royal Audiencia, so that you may have no doubt about them. He did not inform the Audiencia of the others for just considerations, as was advisable—the city having given him instructions for most of them, which are those that he presents. In the authority that he has presented to your royal Council, the great trust reposed in his person has been evident; for he has served your Majesty and that community for more than 30 years, with so great a desire of acting rightly as is well known, and has never tried to further his own interests, as all [are wont to] do.

1 Ed. note: This former militaryman turned priest, had already gone to Spain in 1605 to lobby for the citizens of the Philippines. He arrived back at Manila in 1611 and acquainted himself with the new conditions. He left again in 1617. Back at Madrid, he authored this paper, which he soon formalized into a larger brief, also printed at Madrid, in 1621. Both are written in the third person, for formality sake.

1. He declares that having obtained two decrees from your Majesty some years ago (while acting in this capital as procurator-general of the kingdom); with regard to the **trading ships**, ordering that your governor and captain-general despatch them some time in the month of June, as the greater part of their success in the voyage consists in that, and as that country has no other fruits and harvests except that commerce, for its conservation and increase, and also for the increase of your royal treasury: not only have they not kept the said decrees but have even done the very opposite. Thence have followed very many great wrongs and annoyances; and that community is greatly exhausted for that reason, and your royal treasury deeply in debt. [This affects the community] not only in material possessions, but also in the loss of your vassals, many citizens and sailors having perished for that reason...

He petitions your Majesty to order that this command be observed inviolate. The most effective expedient would appear to be to place the governors under a heavy penalty, which they would incur whenever they did not observe it, and that it be made an important clause in their *residencias*.

2. *Item:* That your Majesty issued a decree in the year 1605, granting favor to the citizens of that community, and ordering your governors that the posts in the **trading ships** be given to the deserving citizens for their profit, and that many be rewarded with this. Inasmuch as this is very advantageous to your Majesty's service and to the profit of trade, and inasmuch as the ex-governor always gave them to his relatives, and thus enriched them greatly, and the latter became very arrogant; and since, as this was the affair of the governor, no-one dared to bring suit against them; and since this is greatly to the harm of the royal treasury, because **they lade quantities of merchandise without registering it**, and commit many illegal acts, and will continue always to commit them, for no-one dares to speak plainly.

He petitions your Majesty to order the observance of the said decree by ordering the officials of your royal treasury, that should the governor appoint to such offices other persons than those whom your Majesty has ordered, no account be made of it in the royal books, that no salary be granted them, and that those appointed to these offices have their *residencias* taken at the end of the voyage; and that, until these shall be taken, they cannot be appointed to other posts.

3. *Item:* That your Majesty has granted to the citizens the tonnage of the said **trading ships**, and that your governors allot these, to each one according to his rank and wealth. The citizens have been greatly injured in this, as happened **in the year 1613 when the governor despatched two small ships**, and did not give the citizens one single ton; and under pretext of granting gratuities to retired officers, the citizens were obliged to buy space for their freight from those officers, at exorbitant prices. Further, he apportioned a considerable number of tons to charitable institutions, so that they may sell the space and use, and the price obtained for it; and thus these tons are given to the great injury of the common welfare. The further disadvantage follows from this (besides defrauding the citizens of the reward given them by your Majesty) that the tons are sold to whomever will pay most for them; and they are bought for this reason by

merchants who have companies in Mexico. Consequently, it is quite common for such men to own a great part of the said merchandise of the ships, and thus the citizens are deprived of the profits with which your Majesty has rewarded them.

He petitions your Majesty to order that these not be distributed at will, but that the orders given in this regard by your royal decrees be obeyed, and that the violation of your royal will in this be made a clause of the *residencia*, with the penalty that may be assigned to it.

4. *Item:* That your Majesty has ordered that **four vessels be built for the trade**, of 200 tons' burden; and that two of them make voyages each year, while the other two remain in port getting ready for the next year.

He petitions your Majesty that they not be employed in other matters by your governors, unless it be an urgent necessity, as happened last year, when they went out to drive off the Dutch enemy who had besieged us. In such case the citizens themselves shall go out in them to defend the city, since the profit of the citizens is so necessary in order that that community may be settled, and have the sinews with which to defend and preserve itself. They shall not be sent to the Moluccas or any other district, since thus your Majesty is no less defrauded of your royal duties.

...
7. *Item:* Inasmuch as the **ships built in the Philippines** cause your Majesty great expense, and have ruined and exhausted the natives; and inasmuch as your Majesty owes them a great sum of money from the time of Don Juan de Silva, for their personal services and things that he took by force from them: it is very advisable, not only for your royal service, but also for your royal conscience, to relieve them from so great oppression.

He petitions your Majesty to order your governors that they be prohibited from doing this, and that they sent to India to have the said ships built; for, besides their incomparable greater cheapness there, one built there lasts as long as ten built in the Philippines, because the woods in India are incorruptible. In this your Majesty will save a great sum of ducats, and the natives will be relieved of so much hardship.

For that a decree from your royal Council of Portugal is needed, and it should be charged upon the governor of the Philippines to do this with the mildness and prudence advisable. If it is desired it can be easily effected, and it is of great importance...

8. *Item:* He petitions your Majesty to do him the favor to order the viceroy **not to allow a ship to go from New Spain to Japan** (which is a most serious evil), and to order that gate to be closed; and, inasmuch as the Japanese do not know how to navigate without a Spanish pilot and sailors, to have an edict published forbidding such persons under severe penalties (which he [i.e. Ríos] does not declare, because he is a priest) from sailing in such ships to New Spain. For that, in another guise, means to teach a barbarous nation how to navigate, and is rash, and opens the gate to many evils, for which afterward there will be no remedy. It will even be advisable to order Father Fray Luis Sotelo not to go [back] to Japan, for he was the one who began this, and it may be feared that he will further it.

...

20. *Item:* In regard to the **trading ships** between the Philippines and New Spain and the numerous things worthy of reform (which is advisable both for the royal treasury of your Majesty and for the community, and for the avoidance of many deaths of the seamen), that which it is advisable straitly to charge and order your governor is the following:

That the accommodations given the commander be moderated, conforming to the capacity of the ships. We have seen them during those years laden by the commanders with a third of the cargo, because they are relatives of the governor, under pretext of having a dispensation of taking the space of 50 tons.

20 [sic]. *Item:* That the said commanders, admirals, and masters, give the *residencia* for their posts before being appointed to others, which your Majesty has ordered by a decree of the year 1604.

Item: That the masters in the port of Acapulco, in addition to the duties that are paid to your Majesty, charge excessive prices for the guards of the boxes, barrels, and other articles of merchandise, without anything being done them; and these fees were not formerly charged, because their office is given to them for that purpose, and that duty [of guarding freight] is annexed to it.

He petitions your Majesty to order the royal Audiencia of Manila, or the governor, to set the price that they can charge; and, if they exceed that price, those aggrieved can make claim in the *residencia*.

21. *Item:* That your Majesty be pleased to order your governor to be careful in the muster-roll of **seamen and common sailors** made out by the royal official, that all such be efficient; for it happens that a ship may take 60 sailors, 30 of whom are men who have been named as sailors without any knowledge of their duties, but only by favor. Then in times of need there are not any to work, and the few who do understand it cannot attend to the work, which should be divided among so many. Consequently there is signal danger, because the voyage is too long and difficult.

22. *Item:* That it be ordered that the **common sailors** who serve in the said ships, who are always Indian natives, be all men of that coast, who are instructed how to navigate; and that they be made to wear clothes, with which to shelter themselves from the cold; for, because they do not, most of them die in high latitudes, of which he [the writer] is a witness. Inasmuch as the factor enrolls other Indians who live in the interior, and who do not know the art of sailing, and as they are a wretched people, they are embarked without clothes to protect them against the cold, so that when each new dawn comes there are three or four dead men (a matter that is breaking his heart); besides, they are treated inhumanly and are not given the necessaries of life, but are killed with hunger and thirst. If he were to tell in detail the evil that is done to them, it would fill many pages.

He petitions your Majesty to charge your governor straitly to remedy this.

Item: That inasmuch as the **kitchens** where the food is cooked are not located in the first part of the forecabin, as is seen in [ships on] these seas, but in the waist; and

inasmuch as at the first storm the sea carries them away, after which each one cooks his food in his messroom where he can make a fire (and it is a miracle from God that the ships are not burned).

He petitions your Majesty to order your governor [i.e. Fajardo] to remedy that, since he is so excellent a sailor. The reason for that abuse is that the officers appropriate the largest storerooms of the ships.

23. *Item:* That **slave women** not be conveyed in the ships, by which many acts offensive to God may be avoided. Although that is prohibited by your royal decree, and it is also entrusted to the archbishop to place upon them the penalty of excommunication and to punish them, this evil has not been checked; and many sailors—and even others, who should furnish a good example—take slave women and keep them as concubines. He knew a certain prominent officer who carried with him 15 of these women; and some were delivered of children by him, while others were pregnant, which made a great scandal.

24. *Item:* That no sailor, and no passenger unless he be a person of rank, be allowed to take more than one **male slave**; for they load the ships with slaves who eat the provisions, and steal whatever they lay hands on, besides the risk that is run of a plague being started by them. He also petitions your Majesty that the 50 pesos paid as duty on each slave be moderated, and that these imposts be paid according to the tariff in Spain; and that these duties be paid in the port of Acapulco—where by selling the slaves, their owners may have the wherewithal to pay the imposts; for it is a great inconvenience to pay them in Manila. For that reason, great deceits are practiced on the royal treasury now; for they take the slaves without being registered, because of the high amount of the duties, and are allowed to take them off at the port [of Acapulco] for 20 pesos. If the said duties were moderated, and paid in the port, no-one would take them without registering them, specially since the said slaves serve and aid the sailors in their necessities, and your Majesty gives them no allowance of either food or water. Consequently in no part of the Indies is so large a duty paid.

25. *Item:* Inasmuch as the good treatment of the **sailors** is so important, in order that they may be inclined to go there, since there is such a great need of them, he petitions your Majesty to order that good treatment be shown them, and they be given leave to take away their boxes in which they carry their clothing and certain small wares for free, without having to open them. For in this matter the guards practice many extortions on them, and take away their little possessions, and harass them so that many refuse to return, and many acts of oppression are practiced.

26. *Item:* Inasmuch as the officers of the vessels, such as commander, master, boatswain, etc., lade a quantity of merchandise beyond the share given them, and overload the ships by occupying the place of the ship's stores in the storerooms and magazines; and inasmuch as this cannot be checked, as has been seen: there is no other remedy unless your Majesty order the clerk of the register not to receive on the register more than only the allotment of shares that your governor makes; for he proportions the cargo which the vessel can carry, in accordance with its need, and anything more only over-

loads the ship. But if these goods were not admitted to register, the officers would not dare to lade them, because of the great risk of their being seized as smuggled goods. Consequently great losses would be avoided by proceeding in the above manner.

...

34. *Item:* That the **trading ships** that navigate to New Spain have sometimes not been despatched, for personal purposes of the former governors, which is to the great injury of your royal treasury and of the citizens, since those ships are the sinews of that community. He petitions your Majesty to order your governor to prevent such a thing, so that, unless compelled by a very great necessity, the annual despatch be not neglected.

...

38. *Item:* That about 2,000 **Japanese** generally reside in that city; and that, as trading ships come annually, many Japanese remain there. But they are not only of no use to the community, but a signal danger, since they have three or four times placed the city in danger of being ruined. In this last encounter with the Dutch, Japanese went to them who gave them information; and on the day of the battle a company of them who fled from Manila went to help the enemy. He petitions your Majesty to show that kingdom the favor to order straitly that no Japanese remain there; but that those who go there every year must return to their own country.¹

...

39. *Item:* Inasmuch as the Indian natives have been so ruined by the past **shipbuilding**, and your Majesty is indebted to them, for personal services and things taken from them by Don Juan de Silva for your royal service, more than one million [pesos]: he petitions your Majesty to order your governors that now and henceforth they shall endeavor most carefully to avoid, as far as possible, harassing the Indians; and that they shall also avoid the building of galleons, since, as stated in another brief, these can be brought from India at a much less cost to your Majesty; and that an effort be made to remunerate the natives for a part of the debt due them.

1 Ed. note: In a postscript note, Rios amplifies this recommendation thus: "It is fully advisable that no Japanese be [allowed in the city], which is a great cause of trouble. For they are, on the one hand, a warlike race, and easily come to blows with the Spaniards, for they will not suffer ill-treatment. Consequently they have sometimes risen against us, and have seized arms. This has occurred because some soldiers have desired to harm or injure them, whereupon they, to revenge themselves, seize certain cutlasses that they carry, and begin to assemble together. They may place us in exceeding great danger. On the other hand, if we are careless in permitting them, many Japanese will come. We are in great danger, besides, lest some take to the highways, for among those who come from those kingdoms of Japan are many who have fled for crimes, and who have no right to return to their country. [Ed. note: Either for having been expelled for being Christians, or being disgraced fighters, or *ronin*, having been on the losing side in a battle]. Likewise it is advisable to restrict their coming in order to preserve the friendship of the emperor; since, if we do not retain them in that kingdom, there will be no occasion for any event of treachery that should force us to break friendship with him. I petition your Highness to order this straitly, and that the said judge also have it in charge.

40. *Item*: He petitions your Majesty to command that a copy of the commercial decrees be given him, that he obtained formerly when he was in this court in this same office; for the last governor took possession of the decrees when the packet in which they were sent to the city fell into his hands, and refused to give them up, but kept them,

Additional notes by Ríos.

[A vision of Midway Island]

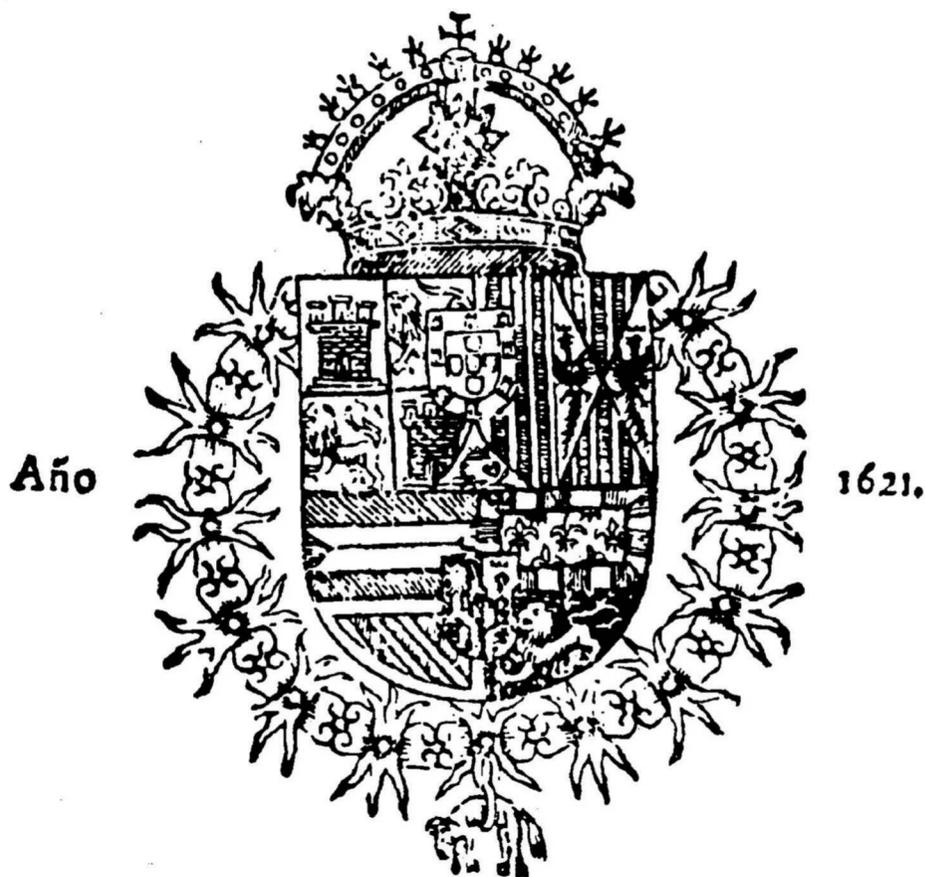
Inasmuch as that [eastward] voyage is so long, and no fresh provisions can be obtained on the way, very many fall sick. For a remedy to that, God has placed, midway in the sea and on the voyage, an island that serves as an inn in the middle of their way, just as the Portuguese in their voyage have one at the island of St. Helena, where they get fresh food. That island, which I call **Rica de Plata**, is large, and over 100 leagues in circumference [on the chart]. Although some ships sight it in passing, inasmuch as its ports are unknown, no-one dares to get fresh food there. It is thought to be uninhabited, but some signs of habitation have been seen. It is very necessary that a small vessel sail from Manila to explore it, and that it look there for a good port, so that the ships can get water and wood, and reprovision. The exploration of it may be of the highest importance. It is necessary also because near that region the ships generally lose their rigging in storms, and they can be refitted and repaired there, and can continue their voyage without having to put back to Manila. I advised your Highness of that some years ago, as it is so important; for that voyage I believe that a decree was sent to the governor in a former year to explore it; but that must be ordered again. A man of experience should be sent, so that he may display the prudence and make the exploration requisite, in accordance with the art and science of hydrography; and likewise so that he may live in Manila and examine the pilots of that line, and make faithful and accurate sea-charts. For that purpose, I shall give him considerable enlightenment by giving him the documents on the demarcations, and the information that I possess, on which I have labored much in order to serve your Highness. Nowhere does your Highness need a cosmographer so much as in that land, for many things that arise and may arise.

Editorial comments.

In 1621, Ríos published a revised Brief in which the above themes were further developed and form the core of the book. To this were added a summary of Philippine history, up to 1617, when the author left Manila. The third part, in five chapters, is related to the ecclesiastical matters in the Philippines, and contains some remarks on Moluccan affairs. For those interested, copies of this Brief can be found in BNM, BNP, BM and LC. An English translation of most of it is in B&R 19: 183-297.

(Overleaf) **Title page of Hernando de los Ríos' Brief of 1621.**

MEMORIAL
Y RELACION
PARA SV Magestad, DEL
PROCVRADOR GENERAL DE LAS
Filipinas, de lo que conuene remediar, y de
la riqueza que ay en ellas, y en las
Islas del Maluco.



EN MADRID
Por la viuda de Fernando Correa.