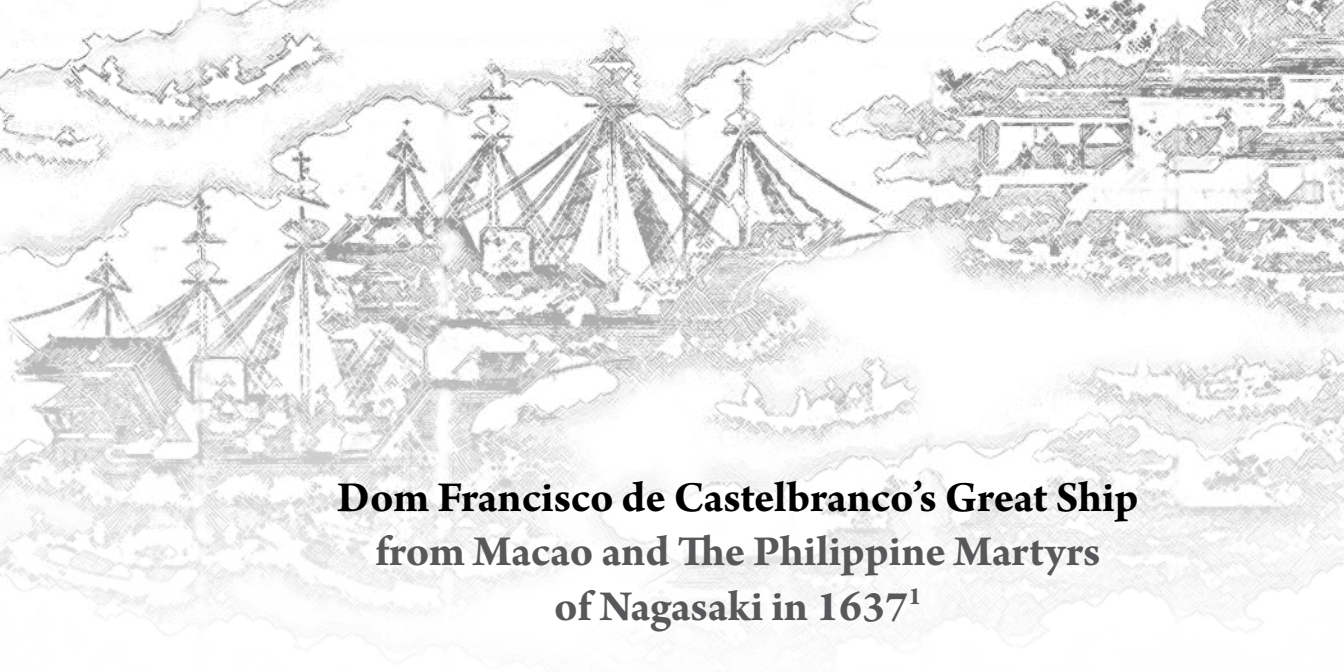




Dom Francisco de Castelbranco's Great Ship from Macao and The Philippine Martyrs of Nagasaki in 1637¹

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It is well known that the most important international trade undertaken in the Far East in the 16th and 17th centuries was that of the *Nao do trato*, or, as the English called it, “the Great Ship from Macau.” A convoy of several Portuguese galleons annually left Macau for Japan, stayed in Nagasaki for three months, and returned to base after doing a lucrative trade exchanging mainly Chinese silk for Japanese silver. That famous commercial undertaking lasted for 85 years, from 1555 to 1640, it being rivaled only by its counterpart in the Pacific, the also annual voyage of the Spanish *Manila Galleon* or *Acapulco Galleon*.

Perhaps the most important voyage of the *Nao do trato* was that of the year 1637. Commanded by Captain-major Dom Francisco de Castelbranco, the convoy consisted of six richly-laden galliots carrying a total of 942 men, including 150 Portuguese. They anchored at Nagasaki bay on August 21, 1637. The traders were lodged in a special waterfront of Nagasaki harbor. That islet was called *Deshima*. From the windows of the building and from the ships anchored in the bay, there was a perfect view of the nearby city streets as well as of an esplanade on the slopes of the mountain known in Christian history as the Mountain of the Martyrs.

For the Philippines, the most significant aspect of that year's *Nao do trato* was not commercial but religious. In September, the Portuguese watched from *Deshima* how six Christians from the Philippines, arrested in Okinawa, arrived in small boats to face trial for their Christian faith before the judges of the Shogun. They were four Dominican

¹ This article was written for a projected “International Seminar of Portuguese-Philippine Comparative History” organized by the Macau-Manila Association of History. This seminar was intended to take place in Lisbon on 20-22 April 2006. For reasons we do not know, the seminar was definitely cancelled. (The Author, F.V.)

priests (including the acting rector of the University of Santo Tomas of Manila, Fr. Antonio Gonzalez), a Filipino layman called Lorenzo Ruiz and a Japanese leper. For the next eight days, the traders saw and heard much about their trial, the torments inflicted on them, and their death sentence; they knew their names; they communicated with the interpreters of the court; they saw the victims marching on horseback along the streets of the martyrs as they passed; and finally, they witnessed their hanging in the esplanade on the slope of the hill.

When the *Nao* returned to Macau in November, 120 Portuguese traders were willing to testify to what they saw in Nagasaki. Actually, ten of them were immediately summoned before the ecclesiastical tribunal of the diocese of Macau to testify about the martyrdom of the men from the Philippines. That canonical inquiry (*processus*), was the first step taken for in the course of their beatification cause. Meanwhile, in the following December, a boat from Macau sailed for Manila carry in the authentic records of the martyrs' death for the faith, the news causing an explosion of popular acclamation.

That was not the end of the story. The beatification and canonization of these martyrs were not concluded until three hundred years later, in 1981 and 1986 respectively. When in the afternoon of February 18, 1981, Pope John Paul II was about to declare their blessedness in the Luneta Park of Manila, filled with one million people, three prelate of the Church rose to petition the Holy Father for that solemn declaration. They were Jaime Cardinal Sin of Manila, Archbishop Joseph Asahito of Nagasaki and the Bishop of Macau, Msgr. Arquimínio Rodrigues da Costa, the three ecclesiastical jurisdictions that had conducted canonical inquiries about the martyrs. Thus, Manila, Macau and Nagasaki were linked again by a religious chain as in the days of "the Great Ship from Macau," the *Nao do trato*.

Keywords: *Nao do trato, the Great Ship from Macau, Captain-major Dom Francisco de Castelbranco, Deshima, Lorenzo Ruiz, Jaime Cardinal Sin, Archbishop Joseph Asahito, Msgr. Arquimínio Rodrigues da Costa*

A triangle of three oriental cities

The most transcendental event in second half of sixteenth century, and beginning of the seventeenth, of the history of Japan was undoubtedly the political change from a medieval feudal regime to the national unification under the shoguns Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the Tokugwa dynasty. That transformation coincided with the apparition in the Far East of three western powers seeking predominance in colonial expansion: Portugal, Spain and Holland.

In the case of the two Iberian nations, their drive for conquest and commercial advantages was invariably accompanied by the zeal of their missionaries

for the spreading of the Christian Gospel and the conversion of peoples to the Christian religion. It was the combination - or confusion of – these two different but simultaneous objectives that made some Japanese and Chinese rulers fear that the Christian missionaries could be the vanguard of calculated plans for those countries eventually to launch some military invasion. Such plans either did not exist or were never near realization, while the Chinese pirate Li-ma-hong attacked Manila in 1574 with a powerful fleet, and the Japanese shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi twice threatened to invade the Philippines.

But whatever misgivings, suspicions or fears there might exist between the westerners and Japan or between the Spaniards and Portuguese themselves, a continuous and considerable commercial relationship always existed between the Portuguese and the Spaniards, officially or privately, with profits for both sides. Most of this oriental trade was done from three commercial centers that formed, like an isosceles triangle in the China Sea, the angles of which were Macao, Manila and Nagasaki. For a clear understanding of the subject of this paper, it seems necessary to explain the situation of these three cities.

The city of Macao, from the time of its foundation by the Portuguese in 1557, started to open trade relations with Japan, a trade that as far frequency of contacts, and volume and value of the merchandises had no equal in the entire Far East or in South Asia for many years to come. This was favored by its strategic position in relation to China and Japan. The Spaniards, after their occupation of Manila in 1571, were also well placed for participating in the trade with China. In fact, for two hundred years, Manila became, commercially, like a way-station where the silk and other Chinese products were exchanged for silver coming from the mines of Peru and Mexico. That was the trade of the Manila Galleon or Acapulco Galleon. But its trade relations with Japan, since their inception in 1586, were not as considerable and, besides, they were always bedeviled by mutual mistrust, because of Japanese threats against the Philippines and also because of the unfortunate affaire of the *San Felipe* galleon in 1595. The commercial traffic was closed unilaterally by Japan in 1623. For its part, the commercial line Manila-Macao, even though occasionally muddled by political rivalries and jealousies, was never cut off.²

But, as said earlier, the commercial line Macao-Nagasaki had no rival in importance and volume of trade. It became the biggest source of income for both ends of the line, as vital for Macao as the Acapulco galleon was for Manila. Besides, it was equally important for Christian Macao as a means of transportation for the

² See the authorized study on these commercial relations of CHARLES R. BOXER, *The Great Ship from Amacon. Annals of Macao and the Old Japan Trade, 1555-1640*, Lisbon 1963, pp. 72-75.

missionaries going to China and Japan. Referring to the *Nao do Trato*, historian Charles R. Boxer wrote paraphrasing two lines of *Os Lusíadas* of Camões, that “if it was the search for Christians and spices which brought the Portuguese to Asia in the first place, it can be said that “Christians and silver were the twin lodestars of their annual voyages to Japan for nearly one century”. And the ups and downs of that trade were inseparably connected with the vicissitudes of the Jesuit mission in Japan.”³

After the Portuguese established themselves in Macao in 1555, they were placed in an excellent position for developing commercial activities with the Empire of Japan, by acting as middlemen between that country and China. Every year the Macao galleons made a voyage to the port of Nagasaki where they traded Chinese silk and other Chinese products highly esteemed by the Japanese for the silver produced by the Japanese mines of which the Chinese were insatiable.⁴ And accompanying the traders, openly first and secretly later, there went the Jesuit missionaries needed to run the many mission post they had founded since the preaching of St. Francis Xavier in the 1540’s.

That annual convoy was called by the Portuguese the *Nao do Trato*, by the Japanese the *Black Ship*, and by the English and Dutch the *Great Ship from Amacon [Macau]*. In the eighty-five years that the trade lasted, from 1555 to 1640, it never failed to make the trip except on three separate years. The convoy consisted of four to eight ships, initially huge carracks or galleons, until the danger of the faster ships of Macao’s enemy the Dutch from Batavia forced Portugal to abandon the galleons for the smaller but fast sailing galliots, the type retained until the end of the *Nao do Trato*.

Although at the beginning of the trade the *Nao* frequented various harbors of Japan, in 1571 the ships visited for the first time the town of Nagasaki, formerly a “picturesque little village” with a splendid harbor owned by a Japanese Christian nobleman or *daimyo*, Omura Sumitada (Dom Bartolome). In 1580 this daimyo donated the harbor to the Jesuits on the sole condition that the Great Ship would pay to him an annual fee of one million ducats. Such donation of lands to foreigners was “quite unprecedented in the history of Japan”. The Jesuits possessed it for only seven years, until 1587 when the port was taken over by shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi.⁵

Usually the annual voyage left Macao in July or August when the southern monsoon winds were favorable to move the sails northward, and stayed in Nagasaki for about three months. And once the trade dealings were over they returned to

³ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁵ C. BOXER, *The Christian Century of Japan, 1549-1650*, Cambridge University Press, London 1951, pp. 100-101; also *The Great Ship*, p. 12.

Macao in the second half of October or beginning of November driven by the north winds blowing southward. In command of the fleet was the Captain mayor, who, during the sojourn in Nagasaki, was treated with great deference and respect by the local authorities. Other important people in the Nao were the pilots of the various galliots, the chief pilot being always a Portuguese, the Factors and the Jesuits. The merchants were all Portuguese, and they numbered about two hundred in each voyage. The European sailors were comparatively few, the bulk of the mariners being oriental.⁶

Castelbranco's Nao of 1637

One of the most impressive voyages made by the Nao do Trato was that of 1637 under the command of Dom Francisco de Castelbranco who had been appointed captain-major by the Portuguese authorities one year earlier. He was thirty-five years old and was described by his enemies the Dutch as a "nobleman". His expedition was to play an important role in the annals of Japans Christian martyrdoms for witnessing the great martyrdom that took lace in that year. There had been more spectacular martyrdoms in 1597 and 1622, but by a strange coincidence, no commercial voyages were undertaken in those two years. Castelbranco's *Nao*, composed of six richly laden galliots left Macao on August 2, 1637 carrying aboard "a total of 942 men, including about 150 pure Portuguese and about the same number of mestizos, the remainder being the usual brood of Lascars, Kaffirs and Blacks."⁷ The Factor of the convoy was Dom Simao Vaz de Pavia.

After thirty days of sailing the *Nao* entered the Nagasaki Bay on August 27. The panoramic view of the bay is of interest to our story. From the entrance of the bay they contemplated on both sides of the city two mountain ranges springing from the seashore forming picturesque escarpments here and there. At the far end of the bay was the Tateyama mountain, a derivation of which was known as the Nishizaka Hill or "Mountain of the Martyrs."

The aspect of the city in the background of the entrance of the bay should be noted here. It was half-encircled by mountains in the north and by the sea in the south. In the center of the city was the *shoya*,⁸ the residence of the local government, which included a tribunal hall, a jail and a torture chamber where the Christian prisoners were submitted to cruel tortures to exact retractions from their faith. From

⁶ BOXER, *The Great Ship*, p. 11.

⁷ C. BOXER, *The Great Ship*, p. 150.- *Lascar*, an East Indian sailor; applied to the 16th and 17th centuries.- *Kaffir*, a South African of negroid ancestry, in the same centuries (*Webster Dictionary*).

⁸ *Shoya*. In general, seat of the provincial or local government in those times. (*Positio*, p. 623).

the beginning of the general persecution Nagasaki was governed jointly by two *bugyo*⁹ or commissioners of the Shogun, who had the power to decree even death sentences.

Meanwhile, the trade relations between Macao and Japan, though strained in 1537, were still far from breaking apart. But the city seen by Castelbranco's traders had changed much after fifty years of existence. It had prospered and grown materially because of the big business of the *Nao do Trato*. But the Christian city founded by the Jesuits as a center of their missions had disappeared. It was now turned into a town where a special tribunal was established to judge and executed the Christians still left in Japan after twenty years of cruel persecution. The shoguns still tolerated the trade with Macao but strongly suspecting the Portuguese galliots continued to smuggle missionaries against the penal laws of the empire.

By the year 1630 the presence of the Portuguese in the city had become an almost intolerable sore in the Nagasaki-Macao relations. The traders – the Japanese authorities alleged, not without evidence – were giving aid to the persecuted Christians. Who could prevent the Lusitanians from transporting missionaries disguised as traders and from bringing financial help and letters to the Christians, even to those in prison? Strict measures were taken against many traders. A Portuguese, Duarte Correia, who brought money and help for a Japanese Augustinian was arrested for infringing the anti-Christian laws, and sentenced to death by being burned at the stake. In 1635, the authorities warned Macao that the commercial relations were in danger of being cut off “on account of the law of God and of the Fathers”. And one year later, another rigorous measure was adopted against the Portuguese. They would no longer be allowed to walk freely throughout the city. They would be kept under surveillance in *Deshima*.

Deshima was an artificial fan-shaped islet, consisting of 138,000 square feet of land reclaimed from the sea, made by the Nagasaki authorities in 1636 on the waterfront and connected with the city by a bridge. The Portuguese traders were now confined to it, strictly guarded from the time of their arrival until their departure. From the windows of their houses they had a perfect view of the main streets of the city and could even observe the happenings in the more distant Nishizaka Hill or “mountain of the martyrs”. Only the Capitan Mayor, the Factor of the convoy and a few other officers were permitted to enter and reside in the city, some times in the houses of the official interpreters of the Government.

Let it be noted, on the other hand, that if one hand the relations between the Japan and the Macao were now at breaking point, on the other the antagonism

⁹ *Bugyo*. Governor of a shogunal city. Generally it referred to the governor (or co-governors) of Nagasaki, under the direct control of the central government of the Shogun (*Positio*, p. 619).

formerly noted between the Spaniards of Manila and the Portuguese of Macao and between the Jesuits and the friars, appeared far removed from the bitterness generated by the martyrdom of the Franciscan Pedro Bautista and Companions in Nagasaki in 1597.¹⁰ The moment was about to come. A martyrdom of the last Dominican missionaries who ventured to go to Japan in 1637 was going to create a friendly and brotherly relationship between the two sides.

The last missionaries from the Philippines

For the first twelve years of missionary work in Japan since they arrived there 1602, the Philippine Dominicans had little difficulty in traveling reaching that country by the commercial vessels of Manila commuting with Nagasaki. But in 1614 Shogun Tokugawa Yeyasu issued a decree of general persecution against Christianity forbidding the practice of this religion under penalty of death. Furthermore, in 1623, Japan officially closed all commercial relations with the Philippines, a measure that obliged the missionaries who still ventured to go to Japan to do it in Chinese *champan*¹¹ at high price and risking their lives. If they were discovered, their fate was imprisonment and sure executed in cruel martyrdom. In the case of the Dominicans the statistics are revealing. By 1634 all the nineteen Dominican priests who were in Japan since the decree of general persecution had been executed for the cause of the faith. The other religious Orders and the Jesuits had similar figures in their respective martyrologies. The result was that the once flourishing Japanese Christianity, now deprived of pastors, was agonizing.¹²

In this critical situation, the Superior Provincial of the Dominicans in Manila received in 1636 a secret message from some Christians in Okinawa appealing to him for some priest to help the helpless and dying Japanese missions. The Superior

¹⁰ On the opposing attitudes and mutual recriminations between Spaniards and Portuguese, and between friars and Jesuits before and after the crucifixion of the 26 protomartyrs of Nagasaki in 1597, see C. BOXER, *The Christian Century*, pp. 166-171.

¹¹ *Champan*. Spanish form of the Chinese word *san-pan*, meaning big boat with flat bottom used in China and Japan generally for navigation by river.

¹² For the history of the early Dominican missions in Japan, 1602-1640, see the contemporary work of DIEGO ADUARTE, O. P., *Historia de la Provincia del Santo Rosario de Filipinas* (Manila 1640), quoted in this study from its edition of Madrid, 1963-1964, 2 vols. – For a condensed exposition of the period of the anti-Christian general persecution declared in 1614 until the martyrs of the present study, see the historical presentation of their cause of beatification to the Holy See. This voluminous work was composed in Spanish, though its title is in Latin following the norms and style of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints in the Vatican: [F. VILLARROEL, O. P.], *Nagasakien. seu Macaonen. seu Manilen. Beatificationis seu Declarationis Martyrii Servorum Dei Dominici Ibañez de Erquicia, O. P. et XVI Sociorum in odium fidei, uti fertur, annis 1633-1637 interfectorum POSITIO super introductione Causae et Martyrio concinnata. Romae 1979*. In the present study it will be cited a *Positio*.

was placed in a most painful dilemma between being deaf to an evangelical appeal or sending some of his subjects to an almost sure death. In the end, the Provincial and his counselors decided to make one last sacrifice. They selected four Dominican priests for the risky enterprise of entering in Japan if it were possible. The chosen ones were Frs. Antonio Gonzalez, then acting rector of the Colegio de Santo Tomas of Manila, Fr. Guillermo Courtet, professor of theology in the same college, Fr. Miguel de Aozaraza, missionary in Luzon, and the Japanese Fr. Vicente de la Cruz. Accompanying them were the laymen Lazaro, a Japanese leper, and the Filipino Lorenzo Ruiz.

Their first problem was how to travel to Japan, since the Manila-Nagasaki trade had been cut off thirteen years earlier, and to look for accommodation in the *Nao do Trato* of Macao would be unthinkable. Finally, the six left Manila in a dramatic eluding the surveillance of the Spanish authorities, using boat owned by the Dominican corporation manned by an expert lay brother. The small boat took them to Okinawa where they landed secretly far away from continental Japan. But neither the secrecy of the landing nor the distance from the center of the anti-religious fury saved them from being discovered, arrested and imprisoned for one year. In September of next year 1637, on orders from the Shogun, they were taken to Nagasaki to stand trial for contravening the penal laws of Japan.¹³

Divided into two groups of three,¹⁴ the first three, namely, Frs. Courtet, Aozaraza and Vicente Shiwosuka, disembarked on September 13 before the curious eyes of the Portuguese traders who were looking from the windows of their residences in *Deshima*. The religious prisoners were wearing Spanish dresses, and had their hands tied behind their backs. From the port, they were taken to the *shoya* to be tried by the tribunal of the city.

¹³ A reliable contemporary narrative of the martyrdom of this group is that of DOMINGO GONZALEZ, O. P., *Relación del ilustrísimo martirio de los Padres Fray Antonio González, Vicario Provincial, Fray Guillermo Courtet, Fray Miguel de Aozaraza y Fray Vicente de la Cruz, religiosos de la Orden de Santo Domingo, y dos compañeros suyos seglares, el año pasado de 1637*. Manila, 1638.- For an easy reading on the same martyrs, in popular style, but based on the above cited primary historical sources, see FIDEL VILLARROEL, O. P., *Lorenzo de Manila, the Protomartyr of the Philippines, and his Companions*, (3rd. edition), Manila, 1988.

¹⁴ For details of the succession of events from the moment of their arrival in Nagasaki on September 13, 1637, the fundamental source is the narrative of the two interpreters of the tribunal of Nagasaki, namely Antonio Carvalho and Pedro Rodrigues, both of them Japanese with Portuguese names. Their narrative, *Martirio dos Padres etc.*, will be commented later in this study. It is reprinted in its Portuguese original, with a Spanish version, in *Positio*, pp. 403 ff. This narrative was complemented by DOMINGO GONZALEZ' *Relación* (cited *supra*, note 10). And for the English version of some dialogues of the trial, see F. VILLARROEL, *Lorenzo de Manila*, chapters 8 and 9.

Long interrogations were put to them, which alternated with various kinds of tortures to soften their resistance to confess. One of the questions must be noted here:

- “Did the Portuguese of Macao help you in sending letters to Japan or in receiving correspondence from there?
- No, Fr. Courtet answered – *we know nothing about the Portuguese, and we do not expect anything from them.*

The other three prisoners, namely, Fr. Antonio Gonzalez and the two laymen, arrived one week later, on September 21. Again the Portuguese traders witnessed the landing exactly, as they later declared – “at ten o’clock in the morning in front of *Deshima* and in full view of the Portuguese traders from Macao.” Fr. Antonio – they recalled – came ashore with a calm and dignified demeanor, and lifting his eyes to heaven as one expecting aid therefrom, he raised his hand in an elegant gesture and crossed himself slowly in the name of the Most Holy Trinity as the martyrs of the primitive Church used to do. While the Portuguese looked on curiously, a big crowd of Japanese began to flock around. Fr. Antonio, elegant and tall, was perfectly visible as he towered over the spectators “as King Saul stood among the Hebrews head and shoulders taller than them all”. The prisoners were led towards the *shoya* or government buildings. Fr. Antonio walked very slowly on account of his infirm legs but with a dignified countenance. He wore the Dominican scapular, though very short, as it did not reach below the knees.

They were led to the *shoya*. Inside it no foreigners were allowed. The interrogations started noted down by the interpreters, two Japanese, Cristian renegades, who spoke well Portuguese and Spanish besides their maternal language. In the background there was a silent European, whom Fr. Antonio rightly suspected to be the Portuguese Cristobal Ferreira,¹⁵ ex-Superior Provincial of the Jesuits of Japan who had had the misfortune of apostatizing in the midst of the final torture of the *ana-tsurushi* (hanging head down from a gallows into a pit).¹⁶ His life having been spared, he became an official interpreter of the court of Nagasaki.

¹⁵ Christovao Ferreira, Vice-Provincial of the Society of Jesus in Japan, had preached the Gospel in Jaapan for many years. In October of 1633, after being arrested, he was subjected to the torture of the *ana-tsurushi* (hanging head down from a gallows into a pit) together with other missionaries and other Japanese Christians, including the Dominican Fr. Lucas del Espiritu Santo (now canonized). But after having endured the torment for six hours, Ferreira asked to be brought up from the pit, and he renounced the faith. He was released and was later employed by the government as interpreter of the court of Nagasaki. It was in that tribunal hall that he was seen by Fr. Antonio Gonzalez four years later.

¹⁶ *Ana-tsurushi*. See a short description in *Positio*, p. 619.

These facts are clear in the ensuing interrogations put to Fr. Antonio. The judges asked him:

- “Was the governor of Manila aware of your departure? Did the Portuguese (of Macao) know? Are the Portuguese going to send you any financial help?
- *The Governor of Manila knew nothing, and the Portuguese even less.*
- Your companions have told us that you bring some letters. Is it true?
- *Yes, I bring two letters handwritten by myself, one in Latin for you, and another in three copies for a renegade priest who resides in Nagasaki.*

At this point, Cristobal Ferreira intervened:

- *I am he.*

Fr. Antonio then said:

- *There you have the letter.”*

And he handed the letter in triplicate to Ferreira and the four-page letter in Latin to the Judges.

It is obvious that Fr. Antonio’s letter to Ferreira contained a fraternal appeal for him to reflect and to seek reconciliation with God and with the Church. Doubtless also, the exposition made to the Governors was intended to assure them about the purely religious intentions of the missionaries and to convince them to embrace the Christian faith or tolerate its preaching in Japan. Whether Ferreira read the letter right there, or, if at all later on, we do not know. Nor are we told if the Governors paid much or no attention to the message addressed to them. But immediately after handing the letters, Fr. Antonio began to deliver a speech about “our holy faith” (as the interpreters put it), at which the Judges were very indignant.

For six days, as the interrogation were not producing the desired confessions, the prisoners were subjected to terrible tortures in the hope of extracting from them a renunciation of their faith. Among the torments were the so-called “water torture” and the thrusting of long needles between the flesh and nails of their hands. The repeated torments caused such fever in Fr. Antonio that he died in prison in the early hours of September 24. Three days later the other five were condemned to be executed in the “mountain of the martyrs”, the Nishizaka Hill outside of the city, where they were taken in prepared show of public fanfare.

Coming out of prison, the five companions were led to their execution in a procession, because the authorities intended to impress both the crypto-Christians still remaining in the city and the non-Christians. The news of the parade leading to the execution of five Christians spread like wildfire throughout the residences of Deshima. The Portuguese traders rushed to their windows to witness the march. We even know the names of a number of witnesses: Rodrigo Sanchez de Paredes, Factor of the commercial convoy of that year, Luis de Acebedo, Gonzalo da Silva, Francisco Gonsalves, Juan Barreto, Feliciano Leitaó de Souza, and many others who are our source of information about the details of the imposing parade.

The five Christian heroes marched on horseback in the following order: *First*, the “Japanese from Kyoto”, that is *Lazaro*, “who had gone to Japan as a guide and now led his companions to the place of martyrdom”. In *second* place there went “*the mestizo Lorenzo Ruiz giving honor to this country and to his pueblo of Binondo for having valiantly suffered for the Lord and for going joyfully to die for his faith*”. The *third* was *Fr. Vicente Shiwozuka de la Cruz*, the Japanese, “bravely confessing the Lord for whom he was suffering”. In *fourth* place was *Fr. Guillermo Courtet* “so weak and feeble that he could hardly stay on the horse, but strong enough to ride with his eyes raised to heaven”. The *fifth* and last was *Fr. Miguel de Aozaraza* “with a joyful and happy face, admired by those who were looking at him”.

On arriving in front of *Deshima*, *Fr. Miguel* looked up to the windows of the houses and greeted, with three courteous and gentle bows, the onlooking Macaonese traders. The Portuguese corresponded devoutly with the same triple gesture in admiration, some of them with tears in their eyes, and some starting to sing the Psalm 1 *Beatus vir* (Happy the man who never follows the advise of the wicked).

Verbal greeting were not possible because the Servants of God (including *Lorenzo*) had their mouths muzzled to prevent them from preaching to the crowds or giving testimony of their faith in public. The three Dominicans had one half of their heads razor-shaved and with the left side of their faces painted ocher-red to expose them to derision, as in fact they were ridiculed by over two hundred pagan boys who followed the procession shouting vulgar insults at them.

In front of the procession some officers carried placards in which the cause of the death sentence was written in Japanese characters. Although the text of the placards has not been recorded, it must have been very similar to the proclamation carried at the martyrdom of the Jesuit *Fr. Marcelo Mastrilli*, executed in Nagasaki one month later, which read: “The Shogun of Japan (*Yemitsu*), through his Governors *Sakakibara Hida-no-kami* and *Baba Saburozayemon*, orders the execution of this

mad man for having attempted to preach in this kingdom a foreign law contrary to the law of Shaka, Amida and other *hotokes* (divinities),¹⁷ so that other people take warning”.

Reaching the plateau of the hill, the five prisoners were hanged head down from a gallows, their bodies falling until the waist into a pit, and they remained there for two days and a half. The two laymen, that is, the Japanese leper and the Filipino Lorenzo, died of bleeding and suffocation. The three priests were finally brought alive and they were beheaded. The dramatic spectacle was contemplated from the city, from the galliots anchored in the port and from the houses of Deshima on the waterfront.

The *Nao do Trato* returns to Macao with the eye witness

On November 15, 1637, the Portuguese convoy of six galliots, under the captainship of Don Gonzalo da Silva,¹⁸ arrived in Macao bringing aboard the 942 men who had departed, including 150 Portuguese citizens. As soon as they landed, the topic of their conversation was not only about their successful business at the Nagasaki fair but also about the two impressive martyrdoms they had witnessed, namely, of the Dominican Fathers and two lay companions, and of the Jesuit Father Marcello Mastrilli.¹⁹

Perhaps few people in the Portuguese colony received the news with greater interest, excitement and emotion than a Spanish Dominican priest, accidentally in town, Father Francisco Pinelo. Fr. Pinelo had just arrived from Manila on a journey to Rome and Madrid where his Superiors were sending him to handle important matters of their Order. Fortunately his stopover coincided with the arrival of the galliots, and he lost no time contacting as many sailors and traders as he could to realize that many had witnessed, and most of them had heard about, the death of his fellow-Dominicans whom he knew personally. Fr. Pinelo rushed to the Episcopal

¹⁷ *Hotokes*. Buddhist divinities.

¹⁸ The return trip of the *Nao do Trato* was commanded by a new caaptain major, Dom Gonzalo da Silveira in replacement of Dom Francisco de Castelbranco. The latter had to stay in Japan, because he had to make the customary annual mission to the Colurt of Yedo by the end of November. At the end of the mission he was told to return to Nagasaki where he was held as prisoner on suspicion of being implicated in the Shimabara rebellion of Christians against the government (cf. C. BOXER, *The Great Ship*, pp. 152-154).

¹⁹ Fr. Marcello Mastrilli, S. J., arrived in Japan on August 4, 1637 and suffered martyrdom in Nagasaki on the following October 17. The traders of the *Nao* witnessed his martyrdom and testified about it in a canonical *Processus* instructed in Macao in that same year (cf. JOSEPH FRANZ SCHUTTE, S. J., *Introductio ad Historiam Societatis Jesu in Japonia (1549-1650)*, Rome, 1968., pp. 368-369.

Curia and requested the Prelate of the diocese that an official canonical inquiry (*Processus*) be instructed made about their martyrdom, so that he could present the proceedings to the Holy See as an initial step for their Beatification Cause.

Many reliable witnesses were at his disposal. Of a total of at least 101 persons who reported to have seen the martyrdom or who had certain knowledge of it from testimonies of eyewitnesses, Fr. Pinelo chose nineteen and summoned them to appear before the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Macao.

From November 26 to December 6, the Tribunal, presided over by the Most Reverend Pedro de San Juan, O.P., Ecclesiastical Governor of Macao in the absence of a residential Bishop, and with D. Blas Pinto as Court Notary, heard the testimonies of the nineteen witnesses, whose name are worth recording here: Ruy Dias de Acebedo, Ignacio Monteiro da Silva, Juan Coelho de Macedo, Juan Alvares, Baltasar dos Reis, Juan Cerqueira de Carvalho, Antonio Ferreira de Carvalho, Antonio de Rocha Fronteiro, Antonio Lobo de Siqueira, Pedro de Crasto, Pablo Garcia, Manuel de Mata, Francisco Barreto Javares, Rodrigo Sanchez de Paredes, Luis de Acebedo, Gonzalo da Silva, Francisco Gonzalez, Juan Barreto, Feliciano Leitao de Souza. All of them were Portuguese born in various towns of Portugal (Lisbon, Braga, Coimbra, Homar, Evora, Larnego) and three natives of Macao. Some were then residents of Macao, Goa and Cochín. Three of them had held important post in the *Nao do Trato* as factors or procurators.²⁰

At the Inquiry, these witnesses answered to a prepared questionnaire regarding the circumstances of the martyrdom, the basic questions being around whether they saw the Servants of God suffer and die, in what manner and for what motive. Some of them had had frequent relations with the interpreters of the tribunal, other had had conversations with direct witnesses, and all of them had seen the martyrs marching in procession towards the place of execution. All of them were certain that the motive of their death was their profession of the Catholic faith. They were lacking in details and circumstances, but their declarations would become key testimonies for a beatification cause in the future.

The narrative of the interpreters

Perhaps very few merchant aboard the *Nao* knew that one of the most valuable items carried in one of the galliots was not a declared piece of merchandise, but a

²⁰ *Proceso Ordinario instruido en Macao, 1637.* (Original mss. in the Archives of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Vatican City-. Published in *Positio*, pp. 385-396. A scholarly introduction to it with the evaluation of the testimonies and declarations of the eye-witnesses, *ibid.* pp. 385-389.

smuggled narrative of the martyrdom written by no other than the interpreters of the tribunal of Nagasaki. In the month that elapsed between the martyrdom (September 29) and the departures of the *Nao* on November 6, the interpreters wrote, either by personal initiative or upon request of someone, the account of the passion and death of the six Christians, and the handed it to an unknown Portuguese merchant for him to deliver it to the Superior of the Dominicans in Manila.

The document was written in Portuguese and had the following title: “*Martirio dos Padres frei Migue, frei Tomás, frei Vicente, frei Antonio, Religiosos de S. Domingos e de Lourenco Roiz, indio de Manila, os quais vieram de Manhila e chegaram a este Nagasaki em 13 de Setembro de 1637*” (Martyrdom of the Fathers, Fray Miguel, Fray Tomás [i.e. Guillermo Courtet], Fray Vicente, Fray Antonio, Religious of the Order of St. Dominic, and of Lorenzo Ruiz, Filipino from Manila, who came from Manila and arrived in this (city of) Nagasaki on September 13, 1637).²¹ The narrative was signed by *Antonio Carvalho* and *Pedro Rodrigues*. Their names sound Portuguese, but they were really two Japanese men, formerly Christian, who, presumably out of fear, had renounced their faith, and now were employed as official interpreters of the court of Nagasaki. They spoke Portuguese very well and Spanish quite well, and in their report they reflect not resentment against the faith they had denied but knowledge of it and even sympathy and respect for it.²²

Somehow the existence of this narrative and its contents came to the knowledge of Father Manuel Dias, Visitor or Major Superior of the Society of Jesus, for whom the document had particular interest. It contained valuable information about the whereabouts of the renegade ex-Provincial Christovao Ferreira, whom the Jesuits were anxious to contact and bring back to the fold of the Church. Fr. Dias managed to borrow the document and had his secretary make a copy of it, which he transmitted to his Superior general in Rome, where it has been kept until today.²³

Meanwhile, the original document waited in Macao for the first opportunity to be sent to Manila. It came soon. On December 27 a Macaonese *patache* or merchant

²¹ The original manuscript of this narrative was sent from Macao to Manila and delivered to the Dominican authorities there. Since it could not be published in Manila in its Portuguese original, Fr. Domingo Gonzalez, who had just finished his term of office as Superior Provincial, was charged with publishing a Spanish narrative of his own, using the Portuguese narrative of the interpreters as his main source and complementing it with testimonies of other witnesses (see *infra*, footnote 19). After its publication, the original was lost, but a copy made by the Jesuits of Macao was sent to Rome where it is still extant today (see *infra*, note 17).

²² For the identities of Antonio Carvalho and Pedro Rodrigues, see *Positio*, pp. 399-401, and the sources cited therein.

²³ This ms. copy is in the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus (ARSI, *Jap. Sin.*, 64, fols. 208-214), located in the Jesuit Central House in Rome. The entire text, with a Spanish version, is printed in *Positio*, pp. 403-418.

ship arrived there bringing the tidings about the martyrdom of the Dominican group as well as that of the Jesuit priest Marcello Mastrilli, also executed recently in Japan for the Christian faith.²⁴ Some of the Portuguese made the voyage to Manila too.²⁵ Immediately the news set in motion spontaneous religious demonstrations of enthusiasm in the churches of both religious institutes, in the cathedral and in other churches of the city, with the participation of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities in celebration of the triumph of those Christian heroes. One name stroke particularly the hearts of the Manilans with deep emotion: *Lorenzo Ruiz*, the layman and married man from Binondo with three children.

One of the participants in these festivities was Father Juan Lopez, S.J., at that time Rector of the Jesuit College of Cavite. Reporting on the celebrations to the Society's Procurator in Madrid, he described the above-mentioned celebrations and outbursts of joy, ending his report with this remark: "Together with the Dominican Fathers, there died a *mestizo from Binondo*, son of a Chinese and a Tagala ... The witnesses of this martyrdom never stop telling about the courage, fervor and high spirit of this saintly mestizo (*de este santo mestizo*) who suffered cruel tortures with rare constancy, always preaching the divine law of God".²⁶

The story of these martyrs seemed to be sufficiently documented. But the Philippine Dominicans did one thing more. They took care to compile a list of all the Portuguese of Macao who had witness the martyrdom in case they would be needed in any other possible canonical inquiry in the future. The full list is still extant today and kept in the archives of the University of Santo Tomas of Manila. Here is its heading: "*Memoria de los Testigos Portugueses que se hallaron en la Ciudad de Nagasaki en el Reino de Japón al martirio de los gloriosos Mártires el P. Fr. Antonio González y sus Compañeros, P. Fr. Guillermo Courtet, P. Fr. Miguel de Aozaraza, etc. Año de 1637*".²⁷ Among those enlisted are eighteen who had testified in the above-mentioned *Processus* of Macao in 1637.

²⁴ On Fr. Mastrilli, see *supra*, footnote 18.

²⁵ As it was said earlier (*supra*, footnote 15), the original manuscript was used by Fr. Domingo Gonzalez to write in Spanish his own narrative based mainly, but not only, on this manuscript of the interpreters Antonio Carvalho and Pedro Rodrigues, but also on other information he obtained from some of the Portuguese traders of the *Nao do Trato* whom he saw in Manila. Gonzalez' work is entitled *Relación del ilustrísimo martirio de los Padres Fray Antonio González, Vicario Provincial de Japón, Fray Guillermo Courtet, Fray Miguel de Aozaraza y Fray Vicente de la Cruz, religiosos de N. P. Santo Domingo, y dos Compañeros suyos seglares, el año pasado de 1637. Manila, 1638. Imprenta del Colegio de Santo Tomás.* (30 pages). The entire narrative is reprinted in *Positio*, pp. 428-475.

²⁶ JUAN LOPEZ, S.J., *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas desde 1637 hasta 1638* (Ms. in Biblioteca de la Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid, *Jesuitas-Tomos*, t. 84, n. 35, fols. 1r-2r.

²⁷ Archives of the University of Santo Tomas (AUST), *Libros* 49, fol. 248.- A note at the end of the list says that the total number of witnesses is 120. Actually, the real total is 118.- The first page of the list is published in the *Positio*, pp. 421-422.

Epilogue: 344 years later

The foregoing story of merchants and martyrs ended in 1637 with a ray of light projected on a possible cause of canonization of the martyrs. Although the cause remained dormant for three centuries, the fame of the martyrs was never lost in chronicles, histories and documents of all kinds century after century.²⁸ But it was not until the twentieth century that the Dominican Order undertook with great determination the promotion of the cause of canonization, not only of these six martyrs but also of other nine executed in Nagasaki in the years 1633 and 1634. In 1979 the required *Positio* was finished, published and presented to the Holy See. This work contained all the available historical documentation that proved the death of the martyrs in an authentic martyrdom. In that study the *Processus* of Macao of 1637 plays a central and fundamental role. Fortunately, at that juncture the narrative in Portuguese of the interpreters of the court of Nagasaki was located in the Jesuit archives in Rome on time to be included in the *Positio*. Finally, in 1980 the beatification cause was approved by Pope John Paul II, who decided to hold the ceremony in Manila, birthplace of the Filipino layman Lorenzo Ruiz.

The historic declaration of blessedhood by the Pope took place on February 18, 1981 in the centric Rizal Park of Manila (the Luneta Park), before a multitude of two million Filipinos eager to hail their very first saint on the altars. And just as the Pontifical Mass was about to start, three Prelates of the Church rose to ask the Holy Father, on behalf of the universal church, to declare the blessedness of these martyrs. They were prelates of the dioceses where canonical processes had been held in the far and recent past. They were Jaime L. Cardinal Sin, Archbishop of Manila, the Archbishop of Kyoto who attended in place of Joseph Asajiro Cardinal Satowaki, Archbishop of Nagasaki, and Bishop Arquimínio Rodrigues da Costa of Macao. In consideration of the subject of this study, the petition of the bishop of Macao deserves to be quoted here:

“Most Holy Father:

In the year of the Lord 1637 my predecessor in the church of Macao, Most Rev. Pedro de San Juan, gave his approval to a Canonical *Processus* about the martyrdom of nine Servants of God who had died in Nagasaki in testimony of their Christian faith. It was the desire of the Postulator and of the Episcopal Curia of Macao that the said Servants of God be exalted by the Church with the honors of blessedhood.

²⁸ See the very numerous instances of those records in *Positio*, pp. 484-584, including two canonical *Processus* about the fame of martyrdom instructed in Manila and Nagasaki in 1959.

The nine martyrs, all of them priests of the Order of St. Dominic, were the following: *Domingo Ibañez de Erquicia, Jacobo Tomonaga de Santa Maria, Lucas del Espíritu Santo, Jordan de San Esteban, Tomas de San Jacinto, Antonio Gonzalez, Guillaume Courtet, Miguel de Aozaraza and Vicente de la Cruz.* The *Acta* of the *Processus* constitute an authentic and marvelous record of the faith, love and fortitude with which these priests sustained a heroic death in martyrdom.

Therefore, reiterating the desire of my predecessor, conscious of the constant memory of the martyrdom of these priests throughout the centuries, and desirous of the greater glory of God and of the good of Mother Church through the example of her saints, I humbly beseech Your Holiness to raise to the honors of the altars the above-mentioned Servants of God".²⁹

The beatification was a most fitting acknowledgment of the service done to the Church in general, and the Philippine Church in particular, by the Portuguese merchants of Dom Francisco's "Great Ship of Amacon" in 1637.

Humanly speaking, it would have been difficult for the Philippines to have its first canonized saint in the person of Lorenzo Ruiz but for the testimonies of the eyewitness of his martyrdom, the Macaonese traders of that voyage. ■



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²⁹ From a copy in possession of F. Villarroel, O. P.