

**THE EARLIEST HISTORICAL
RELATIONS BETWEEN MEXICO
AND JAPAN: FROM ORIGINAL
DOCUMENTS PRESERVED IN
SPAIN AND JAPAN. VO.4, NO.1**

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BY

ZELIA NUTTALL

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BY
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PUBLISHED BY THE CROCKER FUND FOR RESEARCH IN MEXICO.

It is strange but true, that whereas for many years past much has been said and written about the hypothetical transmission of Asiatic influences to Mexico and Central America by means of the ship-wrecked crews of Japanese junks, the precise date when official relations were first established between Japan and Mexico has only just been ascertained.

It is Señor C. A. Lera, the actual Mexican Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Japan and China, who deserves the credit of having instituted researches in archives and annals of Japan and succeeded in finding therein the documentary evidence which a countryman of his, Angel Nuñez Ortega, had vainly endeavored to find in the national archives of Mexico.

With the coöperation of Father Steichen, a learned missionary residing in Japan, who is known as the author of a History of Japanese Commerce, Señor Lera obtained translations of important original documents, and incorporated them in a report to the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, which was privately printed in Tokio in pamphlet form a few months ago, under the title of "First Official Relations Between Japan and Spain With Respect to Mexico."

On reading Señor Lera's valuable contribution I found evidences that he was unacquainted with the scholarly monograph privately published in Mexico in 1879, by the distinguished scholar and diplomat, Señor Ortega, under the title "Historical Note on the Political and Commercial Relations Between Mexico and Japan in the XVIIth Century." I found moreover that although Señor Lera refers to it, neither of the above writers had ever read that most valuable document, the detailed report of his embassy submitted to Viceroy Mendoza, by the first ambassador ever sent from New Spain to Japan. This is contained in Vol. VIII of that monumental work published in Madrid: Collection of unedited documents relating to the discovery and conquest and organization of ancient Spanish possessions in America and Oceania.

Finding myself deeply interested in the facts preserved in the above disconnected monographs, it occurred to me that I could not send to the San Francisco meeting of the Anthropological Association a more acceptable communication than a compilation of all three publications, with translations of the original documents contained therein. In preparing this I found it necessary, in order to fill certain gaps, to refer to a number of works on Japan, and also to incorporate certain data contained in a newspaper article recently published in the City of Mexico by the erudite Father V. de P. Andrade. I venture to believe that the data collectively presented here, for the first time in English, will be of interest and value, not only to historians and ethnologists, but also to the general public.

To them it will doubtless be a matter of surprise, as it was to me, to learn that it was no less a personage than Tokugawa Iyeyasu, surnamed "The Illustrious," who, in 1598, took the first steps towards establishing official relations with Mexico. Iyeyasu is known to have inaugurated the policy of exclusion and isolation, which was perfected by his grandson, Iyemitsu, and to have organized the form of government which secured to Japan a peace of two hundred years.

At the time, however, when he conceived the desire to enter into direct communication with New Spain, he was at the beginning of his remarkable career. Only two years had passed since

Taikun Hideyoshi had bestowed upon him, as a reward for his services as a general, the eight provinces, which were designated "The Kwanto," and ordered him to take up his residence at the then unimportant town of Yedo, the present Tokio. Considering that since 1542, when the first Portuguese trading vessels visited Japan, the Portuguese had been enjoying the monopoly of a system of trade by barter, it was certainly a new departure for General Iyeyasu to attempt to establish direct communication between his new domain and Mexico. It was his idea that this result might be obtained if he could but induce the merchant vessels which plied between the Philippines and Mexico to touch at one of the ports of "The Kwanto." With this object in view, he sought the advice and aid of the learned Franciscan friar, Geronimo de Jesús, who wrote for him a Spanish letter to the governor of the Philippines, in which, as an opening to future negotiations, Iyeyasu courteously invited the Spanish merchant vessels to seek shelter in any of the ports situated in his domain, if ever overtaken by the dangerous storms so prevalent in these regions. This letter, which was written in the same year in which the second expedition to Corea came to an end and a number of Coreans were brought from that country to Japan, was not sent when written, for the negotiations were suspended by the stirring events which culminated in the famous battle of Sekigakara, which, in 1600, established Iyeyasu's supremacy in Japan. It was not until 1601 that Iyeyasu found leisure to revert to his plan, and sent Shinkiro, a wealthy merchant of the City of Sakai, as bearer of the above letter and some costly presents to the governor of the Philippines. The latter, deeply involved at that time in the war which Spain was carrying on in Cambodia against Siam, responded by saying that Iyeyasu's proposal pleased him extremely, and that he would accept it as soon as he was free and able to do so. Meanwhile he begged him to accept certain gifts in return for those which he had received with much gratitude through the Japanese envoy Shinkiro.

In the month of May of the following year, a new governor, Don Pedro Bravo de Acuña, was appointed for the Philippines. In September of the same year Iyeyasu dispatched Shinkiro again with another letter, also written in Spanish by the

Franciscan friar, Geronimo. The original draft of this interesting document, which is preserved in Japan, is in Japanese, from which language it was translated into French for Señor Lera, so that he, in turn, could translate it into Spanish, from which language I have made the following literal translation.

I venture to suggest that it would be an interesting experiment for some scholar to translate my version back into Japanese, and to compare his translation with the original document and verify the changes which must have been produced by its passing through the crucible of three European languages.

“Minamoto Iyeyasu of Japan, to his Lordship the Governor of Luzon:—

“After a long voyage your envoy has arrived at last with your letter. He has spoken to me of the mode of government and the flourishing condition of your country, and, at the same time, delivered to me the five objects which you have deigned to send me as presents.

“Although I have never had the honor to see or listen to you, your amiable behavior makes me realize how all men are members of a single family; which reflection has moved me deeply.

“Nothing would satisfy my desires so much as to see merchant vessels establishing frequent communication between my country and New Spain. In formulating this wish, it was not only the interests of Japan which moved me, but also, in equal measure, your own advantage. Many of your people have assured me that it would be a considerable advantage to them to be able to count upon a port in the Kwanto as a shelter for their ships during tempests. They have also manifested to me the pleasure with which they would see Japanese vessels making voyages between the Kwanto and New Spain.

“I shall await your answer with eager anticipation.

“If you render me this service, I, in turn, will severely prohibit piracy even in the most remote islands of Japan, and, if you so desire, I will condemn all pirates to death. You, in turn, can execute all Japanese who in the Philippines violate your laws. If any of the merchants who with my authorization visit your country, prove to be rebellious to your authority, I will, upon being informed of their names, prohibit their embarking again.

“Although unworthy of you, deign to accept as a sign of friendship the Japanese suit of armor, which I send you.

“My ambassador will tell you all that I have failed to express in this letter.”

It is related that Iyeyasu's assurances did not disarm the

suspicious of the Spaniards, nor convince them that he would or could keep his promise. Indeed the Spaniards' fear to send their galleons to Japan was not unfounded, for, but eight years previously in 1596, Hideyoshi, since surnamed the "Napoleon of Japan," had confiscated without provocation the Spanish vessel named "San Felipe," and a month before the date of Iyeyasu's above letter another galleon, the "Espirito Santo," almost incurred the same fate. It was sailing with contrary winds from Manila to New Spain, and touched the coast of Tosa in August, 1602. It was immediately attacked by the natives of this province, and its captain, Lope de Ulloa, had to resort to arms in order to defend it against its assailants. As soon as the news of this singularly inopportune episode reached Iyeyasu, in October, he hastened to write to the governor of the Philippines, protesting that what had occurred had been without his knowledge and consent. He laid stress upon the amicable relations then existing between both countries—adding that they might almost be regarded as an alliance. Refusing to admit that his subjects were in fault, he adroitly suggests that it was probably only the fear of a repetition of the "San Felipe" episode, which had caused the Spaniards to take alarm and precipitate their departure from the Japanese coast. He adds: "Henceforth, in case of any kind of accidents, let your people not hesitate to take refuge in the ports of my domain, for I have sent to all quarters severe orders relating to this matter. Through your merchants I have learned that the eight galleons which leave Luzon every year for New Spain desire to obtain a license permitting them to take refuge in the ports of my country. Full of compassion for these foreigners I have had eight licenses written and sealed. These will preserve them from the rapacity of the people, and thanks to them they will without fear be able not only to take refuge in the ports and islands, but also to land and penetrate into all villages and towns throughout Japan, without incurring the risk of being treated as spies, even should they devote themselves to studying the usages and customs of the land."

While nothing could exceed the courtesy and good will expressed in this letter, it utterly failed to reassure the governor