

## Slavery in the Philippines

**Guido De Lavezaris, royal Spanish commissioner in the Philippines,  
letter to Philip, King of Spain, 1573**

Some are slaves from their birth. Their origin is not known, because their fathers, grandfathers, and ancestors were also slaves. Some are captives in wars that different villages wage against each other, for certain injuries and acts of injustice, committed either recently or in ancient times. Some are made captives in wars waged by villages that have neither treaty or commerce with them, but go only to rob, without any cause. This is because a chief of any village, when he dies, imposes upon it a sort of mourning or grief; all his near relatives promise to eat no bread, millet (which is rice), or borona (bread made with corn), and to wear no gold or any holiday dress, until they take some booty, or kill or capture men. Some are enslaved by those who rob them for a very small matter—as, for instance, a knife, a few sugar-canes, or a little rice. Some are slaves because they bore testimony, or made statements about some one, which they could not prove. Some are thus punished for committing some crime; or transgressing rules regarding some of their rites or ceremonies, or things forbidden among them, or not coming quickly enough at the summons of some chief, or any other like thing; and if they do not have the wherewithal to pay, they are made slaves for it. If any one is guilty of a grave crime—that is, has committed murder or adultery, or given poison, or any other like serious matter—although there may be no proof of it beyond the suspicion of the principal person against whom the hurt was done, they take for their slaves, or kill, not only the culprit but his sons, brothers, parents, relatives, and slaves. If any one who is left an orphan come to the house of another, even of a kinsman, for food only, its inmates enslave him. Likewise in time of famine and distress, during which they may have given relatives food only a few times, they have sold the latter for their slaves. Many also become slaves on account of loans, because these loans continue to increase steadily every three or four months; and so, however little may be the sum loaned them, at the end of little more or less than two years they become slaves. And now, sacred Majesty, if it be forbidden, in those places where the Spanish live, to acquire slaves in any shape or manner—those who were made slaves and were slaves before we came here and are slaves now, and whom the natives buy and sell among each other, as merchandise or other profitable wares that they possess—without them this land cannot be preserved. This, your Majesty, is all known here of the slaves that I have been able to find out, having diligently sought and made the acquaintance of persons who know their language and customs.

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