

Gazette de France Sunday June 3, 1792: the fourth year of Liberty

From Cádiz, May 8, 1792

The ardour of our argonauts has been redoubled by the happy news which we have just received of an expedition commanded by Don Alexandro Malaspina. This officer, having traversed the vast seas which bathe the northern coasts of Western America and charted these coasts with the most scrupulous precision, has found it advisable to retrace his steps and anchor at the port of Acapulco in Mexico. There he has had built two light vessels, with which he proposes to return to the North along the American coast, and to make every effort to resolve with certainty the famous question of the existence of a connection between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

The repeated attempts of the English on the eastern side of North America, combined with the efforts of the celebrated Cook in his last voyage, undertaken principally with the same intention on the opposite side, and, after his death, the return to the same seas of Captains Clarke, King et al., as well, finally, as the many voyages of the Russians and Spaniards in the same direction and with the same object, have proven incontestably that this connection cannot consist in an arm of the sea, as had been long believed. It remains open to question, however, whether the connection might be made through some river which empties into the western sea off the North American continent, and allows communication with the Atlantic Ocean by way of Baffin Bay, or, more likely, Hudson's Bay, which is much larger and extends further into the continent of America. The two vessels, now under construction in Acapulco, will be assigned to complete this investigation. No navigable river in these regions will be left unexplored in its various branches and connections to the sea.

The resolution of this important question is worthy of the greatness of our nation, of the vast colonies which she possesses in America, and of the attention and exertions of all enlightened people, whose interests are one and the same. The crews of the ships assigned to make such glorious discoveries not only are full of courage and good will, but also enjoy the best of health; and in the space of more than three years they have not lost a single man, not even to scurvy, which is so common on long voyages. All those who compose them have received from the King bonuses, pensions, or honours,

or have been promoted in rank. We can only hope that Spain will finally depart from the system she has followed for such a long time, of not making public anything about these nautical expeditions and discoveries; and that voyages undertaken with so laudable a goal will not fail to bear fruit for the sciences, but will make precious additions to the treasure of human knowledge. We must hope above all that the Spanish mariners will be more successful than the unfortunate La Pérouse.

Text courtesy of Robert King. Translation by John Black.

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