

CHAPTER V

FROM THE PHILIPPINES TO CADIZ

From time to time, the commander mentioned in his journal and his personal correspondence how great were the harmony and friendship among the officers. Several of those officers remained in Acapulco to prepare the following year's expedition to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and Malaspina's farewell to them must have been quite moving.

José Guío was also left in Acapulco. This artist had worked somewhat better with Pineda in Mexico, but the decision to replace him had already been made. Everyone appreciated his good nature, but it was obvious that he only knew how to do botanical drawings, and this was not enough for the commander.

The crossing of the Pacific was to follow a route similar to that of the Manila galleon, and provided no opportunity for geographic discoveries. As for the men, many of them were in poor health. As it turned out, the climate of Acapulco was more harmful than the more rigorous one of the Northwest coast. But Alessandro applied all the necessary measures promoting hygiene, and the doctors aboard the ship, fortunately, were up to the challenge.

Reflecting on the sufferings of his men, Alessandro wrote in his journal:

The science of navigation has made it easier for Europeans to cross the biggest and most tempestuous seas, but it has increased the risks they have had to face in visiting the vast areas that lie in the tropics. In the fever of discovery, possession or conquest, they have inhaled putrid miasmata which directly conspire to their destruction, to the great detriment of their well-being. If we were to make a comparison between the costs of the sacrifices made by countless Europeans in the overseas possessions and the social benefits that commerce and navigation have produced, whether in terms of the gentility of customs or the multiplication of our species, it is certain that most of the exaggerated advantages from the discovery of America would quickly vanish. Then the grandiose projects for unlimited expansion, and the ill-conceived rivalry among nations, would cease.

On February 11, 1792, the corvettes reached the Marianas. Malaspina thought it wise to make a short stop there so that the crews could rest. Remembering his previous experience, he decided to stop again at Guam, at that same Humatac Bay where the men of the *Astrea* had once found refuge. However, the rest turned out to be merely nominal, since Alessandro took advantage of the few days there to draw a hydrographic map of the bay.

As for the route to Manila, Malaspina wanted to proceed through the San Bernadino Strait, as he had in 1787. At Cape Espíritu Santo the corvettes stopped briefly in Palapa harbour, where Louis Née disembarked to gather plants. He did not rejoin his companions until they were all in Manila.

Eventually, after navigating through the archipelago with great care, the corvettes arrived on March 25 at Bocas de Mariveles, and the following day they anchored in Cavite harbour.

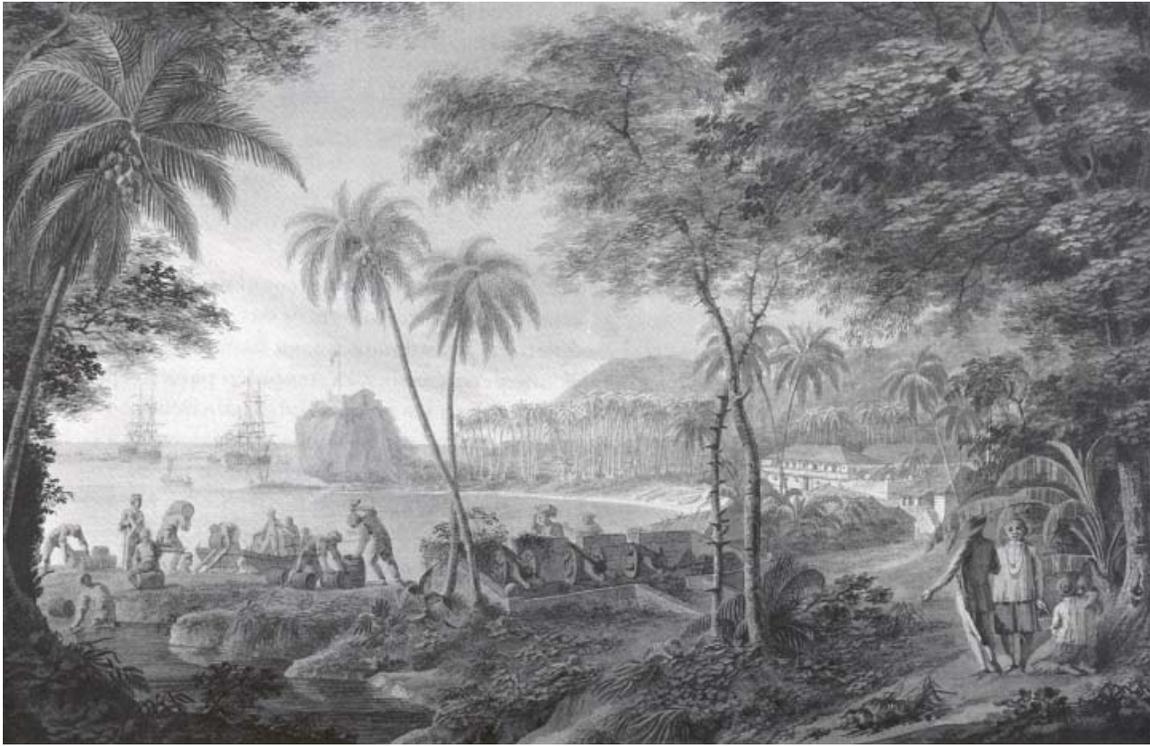


Figure 15. View of the *Fondeadero de [Anchorage of] Humatac* on the island of Guam. Fernando Brambilla. Museo de América.

There was little rest for the men after this great ocean crossing. On April 1, the *Atrevida* set off for China, where plans were to do experiments with the pendulum in Macao. Two days later the *Descubierta* began to explore the northern coast of the island of Luzón.

Taking along some soldiers and porters, Antonio Pineda penetrated into the interior of this island, where he planned to gather samples of new or rare plants and, if possible, to encounter the tribal communities who lived in the interior. Some of these tribes were belligerent and had never accepted peaceful contact with the Spaniards. In other areas there were less hostile settlements which the Augustinian missionaries were seeking to convert, although actually it was the Muslims who were finding more followers by the day.

Pineda's small party advanced with difficulty through the hot and humid forest, where the men had to defend themselves against wild animals, natives, and other natural hazards. The naturalist's health did not hold up for long. On June 23, after some days of delirium which are dramatically documented in his increasingly incoherent scientific reports, he died, attended by the Augustinian friars in the little hamlet of Badoc.

Alessandro felt this loss profoundly. Not only did he hold the man in great esteem, but the two enjoyed a deep friendship. There had been disagreements between Pineda and some of the officers about how to lead the men, but in the face of his death these were forgotten. The commander decided to have a commemorative column erected

for the Guatemalan *criollo* naturalist in a garden near Manila. As if to show off the pan-European



Figure 16. *Monument erected to the memory of Antonio Pineda.* Fernando Brambilla. Engraving by Bartolomé Vázquez, 1796. Museo de América.

nature of the expedition, the design of the monument was by the Italian Brambilla, and the Bohemian Haenke proposed a Latin inscription for it. Although Spain had been in the process of colonizing the Philippines for more than two centuries, this was the first monument erected in the archipelago. Unfortunately the column was destroyed during the Spanish-American War.

Haenke replaced Pineda as Director of the Natural Sciences Division, and Arcadio Pineda was given the task of organizing his brother's papers.

As the weeks passed, Ravenet did some very interesting portraits of members of Negroid tribes that nowadays are nearly extinct on the island. Other studies could have been undertaken if it had not been so late in the year, but the fact is that November was a good month to head due south, and the commander did not want to miss the opportunity. Still, there were certain hydrographic charts that had to be drawn, so Malaspina decided to leave behind in Cavite an officer, Martín de Olavide, accompanied by three pilots, to complete these assignments. Afterwards these would return to Spain on a merchant ship.

Before leaving, Alessandro wrote to his friends. He had not changed his plans at all. If anything, he had redoubled his commitment to them. Thus he wrote to Paolo Greppi:

These many islands are so complicated and important that another year of incessant work here would hardly provide a detailed description of them. But with such work we should very soon bring prosperity to them. ...

This is a long journey, my friend, and by now the spirit suffers daily attacks. On top of that, maintaining the integrity of the expedition demands an exact accounting of all expenditures, and requires, as well, that we overlook all the errors in political economy which, along with an ignorance of the reciprocal advantages for the Monarchy, form the main obstacle to its success. These worries upset the tranquillity that I need to put my ideas in even poor order, and, what is worse, they hardly allow me to save enough, even living most frugally, to spend a year in Italy. ...

Do not forget my Malta matter, on which I propose to work with my brother. I have not changed my plan at all in two more years of thinking. In fact, I am daily more inclined to embrace it without delay.

It seems that this man, who since his adolescence had not had a house to speak of at his disposal, was increasingly haunted by the desire to have a true home. Around this time, when writing to Gherardo Rangoni about his ideas on the origin of the [indigenous] Americans, he concluded:

But where shall I go with my pen? These matters may be the stuff of a relaxed conversation by a good hearth on a harsh winter night, but surely they cannot claim my attention when a thousand different and conflicting ideas clamour around me. Quiet study is the polar opposite of the wandering life I lead.

Before leaving the Philippines, the voyagers stopped briefly in Zamboanga on the island of Mindanao. There they had to confront raids by Malayan pirates. Felipe Bauzá, who had strayed a little in a small boat, came perilously close to being captured by them. From the Philippines they planned to sail along the coasts of the Celebes and Molucca Islands, and then to set course toward New Zealand and eastern Australia.

During the first leg of the voyage the officers had an opportunity to correct the position of many islands which appeared with various names from time to time on British maps. Then, having sailed along the islands of Tana, Anatan and Pinos, the corvettes headed due south through a dense fog that made navigation difficult.

On February 24, 1793, when the fog had cleared, the men were elated to find themselves near Dusky Bay. The bay had already been visited and studied by Cook, and once again Malaspina had occasion to be pleased with the surveys of the British navigator. However, the chart drawn by Felipe Bauzá is far more detailed than the one produced by the officers of Cook's second expedition.

At Cavite, Malaspina had had to add many Philippine sailors to the crews. They were less resilient than the Europeans and were somewhat weakened by the trip. Consequently, the commander decided to shorten the stay at Dusky Bay and to sail to the Australian coast, where they could take all the time necessary for the sick men to recover.

To be precise, the corvettes went to Botany Bay, near to where the British had recently established a penal colony that was inhabited mainly by people condemned to hard labour. Of course, there were also a substantial garrison and a few civil servants.

Spain had no claim on either Australia or New Zealand, but a visit to these colonies had been planned in order to verify their exact position, and to observe how they were organized. In addition, Alessandro was eager to learn as much as possible about the commercial prospects and the future potential of that remote region.

They were greeted with a festive welcome, similar to that received by La Pérouse a few years earlier. On that occasion the Frenchman had commented that all Europeans felt like compatriots when they found one another far from their native lands. Indeed, the receptions and feasts came one after the other, to the great consternation of Malaspina, who wanted to work quietly on his charts and worried, moreover, that the festive climate might lead his sailors into excesses that could provoke friction with the British colonists.

The layover lasted one month and the commander's pessimism turned out to be well founded, for after their departure on April 11 he wrote in his journal that the behaviour of his people had been truly execrable. Fortunately, the officers, at least, managed to take their leave of the British authorities on excellent terms. Malaspina held the British in high esteem for many things, from their philosophy to their political pragmatism. This visit must have enhanced his admiration.

The following leg of the journey – to the Vava'u Islands (present-day Tonga) – was the one most anticipated by the crews and, at the same time, most dreaded by the officers. The cordial welcome bestowed there upon Cook was already legendary, and since Bougainville's return from the Pacific the myth of the "Isles of Happiness" had spread throughout Europe. There had been a great deal written and a lot of talk about that far-away terrestrial paradise, where the climate was always mild and food was easily obtained from the trees and the sea, where the men were naturally peaceful and the women uninhibited, a subject of great interest to the sailors.

Malaspina undoubtedly had his mind set on the usual geographic, naturalist and ethnological tasks. Besides, he was the bearer of an urgent mission for the Spanish government: to establish that Spain reaffirmed its rights to the islands – at least those to Vava'u – since the first European to land there had been the Galician, Francisco Mourelle de la Rúa.

The first island was sighted on May 20. Even before they entered the bay the corvettes were surrounded by the canoes of the indigenous people in a demonstration that showed they deserved their fame as warm-hearted hosts. After taking the usual measures to prevent disorder and theft, the officers invited some of the natives to come aboard. Among them Dobou, the local chief, stood out. On the following day, Vuna, the chief of the entire archipelago, appeared. This inaugurated a long series of receptions and reciprocal festivities which the officers used to produce a dictionary and to gather rich stores of information on the customs, beliefs and history of these people.

Alessandro, always an attentive observer of the mentality of native peoples, noted that in reality violence was not foreign to these people, and that human life itself was not held in high regard. On a few occasions Vuna proposed to kill one of his subjects who had given offence to his hosts, and it was the Spaniards who always had to intercede in favour of the condemned man.

In the days that followed, the men took trips to the surrounding areas until the commander realized that it could be dangerous to remain in that paradise for longer than ten days. How would he be able to convince the crewmen to leave such a pleasant place

that was inhabited by complaisant women who, in broad daylight, surrendered themselves without any reserve?

In fact, Malaspina had laid down some rather severe rules in regard to excessive contacts between the sailors and the young women. However, although the problem is never mentioned in the journal, it seems certain that these rules were not followed, and that even the officers, far from enforcing them, adapted themselves on occasion to the welcome permissiveness of the island. As for Alessandro himself, there is a drawing by Ravenet that is more eloquent than any long disquisition. In it, one sees the commander seated at the beach in a rather casual outfit, quietly being combed by two nubile young girls. It is a valuable document, which lets us understand that, although he guarded his privacy, he was, like everyone, made of flesh and blood.

Actually, he was convinced that the native people of Vava'u simply followed "*la legge aurea e felice / che Natura scolpi: s'ei piace ei lice*" ("the happy golden rule of nature, that anything that pleases is licit"). In his journal Alessandro develops precisely this theme when he quotes these verses by Torquato Tasso, his most beloved Renaissance poet. In this way, Malaspina was expanding on the concept of untroubled carnal pleasure which he had so adamantly defended against the chaplain of the frigate *Santa Clara* eleven years earlier.

In any case, the call of duty came for everyone soon enough. The corvettes set sail on June 1 to tears from the women and long faces from the men. Even the mighty Vuna was saddened. He had taken a liking to the voyagers and he had even granted royal honours to Lieutenant Ciriaco Cevallos.

The ships headed eastward. According to plans they expected to complete the cartography of those zones of South America they had had to bypass on their way over because of inclement weather. While at sea, quite a few of the men showed the vexing symptoms of venereal disease, a final souvenir from the young women of Vava'u. Otherwise there were no major problems, since great care was taken over navigation, especially at night.

Crossing the Pacific, Alessandro, probably impressed by its immensity, is caught up in lyrical images even when he is occupied merely in observing the winds. Thus, one can read in the journal:

The navigator who looks philosophically at the surrounding world cannot but admire and give thanks for nature's eternal vigilance over her mysterious works. In the tropics, where the frequent shoals and coral banks serve to increase the habitable surface, the winds are more sporadic and fair, navigation is slower, and for this very reason less dangerous. The nights are as proportional with the days as winter is with summer, as the pale light of the moon in the firmament is with the vivifying brightness of the sun. But in sailing toward either of the poles from that region which is so favourable to the multiplication and comfort of the human species, the scene immediately begins to change. The islands rise from the surface of the sea to extraordinary heights, and the navigator, even in the long nights and bitter cold of winter, can perceive them without fearing running aground upon them. The fact that they stand alone and are usually steep provides, in spite of the frequent storms, for this necessary escape. Finally, an arid and sad vista, some rocks and some caves appear, among which nature seems to contribute the same tender care to a thousand species of birds, fishes and

amphibians that in other parts of the world she has bestowed on the quadrupeds. We see nature's true intent in this unequivocal pattern, that these places are not meant to be shelter for man, but instead some of the many means that facilitate the migration necessary for his navigation, commerce and constant multiplication.

One might note that even in this lyrical passage Malaspina makes an allusion to the necessity of commerce.

On July 23 the corvettes were again at Callao. Quite a few of the sailors required medical attention and the commander made sure that they were admitted to the best hospital. Some of the officers as well were in poor health. The sickest among them was Felipe Bauzá. The doctors preferred that he proceed to Buenos Aires by land rather than take on the rigours of Cape Horn. Presumably crossing the Andes and the Pampas was more restful than going around the Cape! Not even José Espinosa was in full health, although he was already convalescent. Malaspina decided that he should accompany Bauzá, so that they could write a report on the physical situation of the interior regions. There are those who have assumed that Malaspina used Bauzá's illness as a pretext for getting rid of Espinosa for a while, since the relationship between the two had seriously deteriorated.

Tadeusz Haenke also separated himself from his fellow travellers. He planned to continue his botanical studies and then return to Spain on his own. But the Bohemian never did complete his study of South American flora. He died in Cochabamba in 1816 (poisoned by a woman, according to rumour) after having for years flooded the gazettes of all Europe with articles on the geography and vegetation of the vast region which nowadays comprises the altiplano of Chile, Bolivia, Perú and Argentina.

Bad news arrived from Europe while the voyagers were at Callao. The new Prime Minister, Manuel Godoy, had changed the nation's foreign policy and Spain was now at war with France. In fact, however, the expedition was too far away from the waters frequented by French ships for Malaspina to be excessively concerned by the news.

Finally, on October 16, the corvettes left Callao for the last time and scarcely a month later anchored at Talcahuano. This time it was Louis Née's turn to disembark. It was important to study the Province of Mendoza and he was asked to take charge of the project. Since he had to cross the Andes and the Pampas, he was expected to rejoin his companions in Buenos Aires or Montevideo.

The expedition sailed around Cape Horn, which is relatively easier from the Pacific than from the Atlantic. After a final separation between the two ships, scientific work was carried out in the islands of Diego Ramírez and the Falklands, as well as along certain stretches of the Patagonian coast.

In mid-February, 1794, the ships arrived at Montevideo, where Bauzá, Espinosa and Née greeted them. Because it was necessary to do some repairs on the ships, the departure was delayed till June. Meanwhile various geographic measurements were made that had been omitted on the way over for lack of the proper instruments. By June all the assigned tasks had still not been completed, so Malaspina decided to leave behind Juan Gutiérrez de la Concha and the pilot Juan Inciarte to finish the assignments, with the understanding that they would leave Río de la Plata the following year.

Meanwhile more war news arrived from Spain and it was profoundly unsettling. With the advent of the French Republic, and consequently with the institution of a republican popular army, the nature of international conflicts had been completely changed. Previously the fighting had been only between mercenary armies, led by officers drawn from the nobility who participated in battles almost in the spirit of medieval jousting. The civilian population had remained relatively safe. Now, however, the battles involved large masses of men. Malaspina was horrified and expressed deep misgivings about the dramatic upheavals of the epoch. Before leaving Montevideo he wrote again to Greppi, who was now in Milan:

Nothing is more surprising than the turn of affairs in France, and therefore in the whole of Europe. I had never expected it and I am afraid that it will last long enough to affect me. It is more carnage than war, and it is difficult to see what its object is and where it will end.

From Río de la Plata a convoy was to leave for Spain. Other vessels were to arrive from Lima any day, also bound for the mother country. They carried a very important cargo of gold and silver which the Government awaited impatiently to pay for the enormous expenses of war, not to mention the dissipations of the court.

To escort these ships there was only the schooner *Gertrudis*, and she did not offer enough protection, since it was likely that the convoy would be attacked by the French fleet during the Atlantic crossing. For that reason the Viceroy of Río de la Plata asked Malaspina to join the convoy and to assume command of the formation. Naturally the commander agreed, although he was quite aware that the poorly armed *Descubierta* and *Atrevida* would be of little help in the event of an enemy attack.

To compensate for this inadequacy Alessandro devised a stratagem. He disguised the odd assortment of vessels so that it looked like a squadron of the Royal Navy. He had the master ensign hoisted on the largest ship and established the order of the line. All the while, the ships carried out experiments on the salubrity of the air, and from time to time performed various manoeuvres. It is amusing to read the account left by Alessandro:

A signal was given to work to windward and at the same time to hoist the Royal Ensign on the *Levante*. After the broad pennant was raised and a cannon was discharged, the whole of the line that was keeping with the wind seemed truly respectable. A half-hour later we realized that the illusion would lose most of its usefulness if it became too familiar, and so we ordered the ships to veer away from this formation and to lower the Ensigns.

Fortunately there was no encounter with the French. Moreover, as they were approaching the Iberian peninsula a Spanish ship came out to meet them and informed them that the waters were completely free. The emotions of the voyagers when they sighted Cádiz must have been profound. Malaspina, reserved as usual, did not dwell on the emotional aspects of the return, but one can sense it in the page where he describes their arrival:

The coasts of Rota, the city of Cádiz, and the city's extensive bay were already visible by five o'clock in the morning. One could see innumerable ships

anchored in the bay, looking like a dense forest. Among them towered many warships, most of them national, with their very high mastheads. Their flags fluttered in the last puffs of the land breeze, as all the vessels of our convoy pushed forward toward the harbour.

Soon various boats and coastal feluccas came alongside, and others spread out in the same way toward the largest ships. Afterward the pilots boarded.

An increasingly variable wind changed from northerly to easterly and then to east-south-easterly, and by nine in the morning, with the bows at starboard, and with all sails deployed, we headed toward the harbour. Arranging the position and distancing of the ships in a felicitous and unhasty manner so as to avoid collisions, we maintained a regular order of convoy, led by the three ships of the Royal Navy.

The appearance of an extremely dense fog at the time was most annoying. It forced the larger ships to maintain their topsails and to keep a distance off shore for more than an hour. We were, however, able to proceed toward the harbour, and were fortunate not to see it disappear in the fog until just after we had berthed the first ships and dropped anchor. As we entered the harbour we saluted the flag of Lieutenant General Juan de Lángara, which flew on the ship *Reina Luisa*, and then we encountered the many merchant ships anchored at the mouth of the harbour. Most of these vessels were British and Dutch, and were preparing to sail the next day, escorted by four British warships.

At ten o'clock, approaching the Corrales and having saluted the Commanding General's flag, near which we found ourselves, we anchored in a depth of four fathoms, mud. Soon after, the corvette *Atrevida* and the frigate *Gertrudis* executed a similar manoeuvre with equal success. Afterward, the ships of Lima entered in single file, directed, as is customary, to the Basin of Santa Isabel. His Majesty's ships remained moored and in this period maintained their crews in such good health that it was not necessary to send even one sick man to the hospital.

In this passage we see, once again, the meticulousness of the commander. He even tallies the "four fathoms, mud" in the Bay of Cádiz with the same precision he had applied for the past five years in recording the anchoring places of America, Asia and Oceania. And when he emphasizes that there had been no need of a medical doctor we can also see a kind of impulse for personal vindication. Obviously he had not forgotten his dramatic return on the *Astrea*. Malaspina could feel proud of a more flattering result this time, for during the entire trip, according to him, only ten men had died, and only eight of those as a result of illness. The last words of his diary are dedicated to another victim whom he particularly loved, Antonio Pineda, "whose early death will always be lamented by those who knew him in the great theatre of his military and scientific endeavours!"

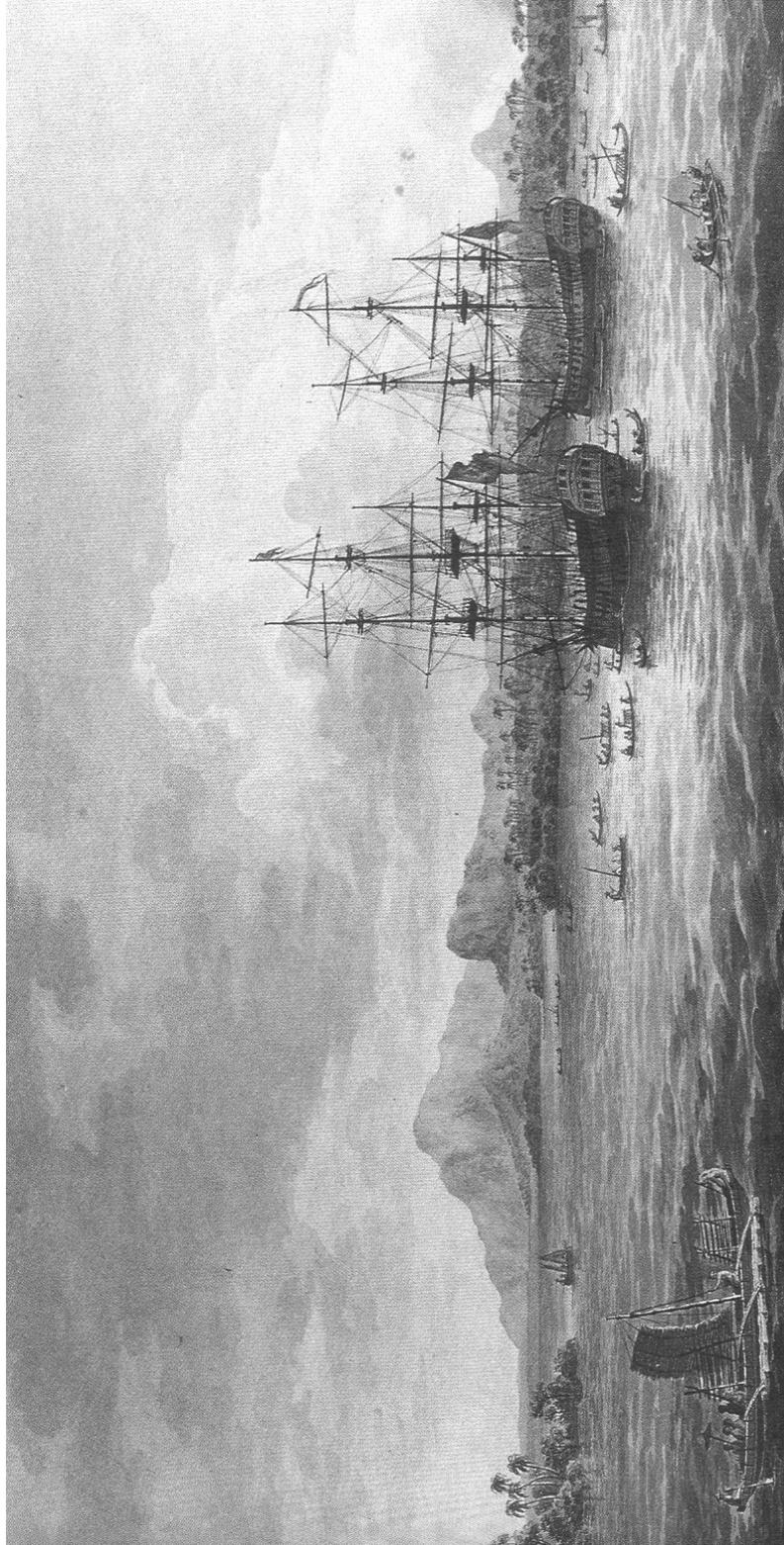


Figure 17. *View of the port of Palapa on the island of Samar.* Fernando Brambilla. Museo de América.