

Alexandro Malaspina to the Viceroy of New Spain, the Count of Revillagigedo

November 10, 1791

Most excellent Sir,

In the morning of September 2 last, sailing within view of the Strait of Fuca, I was compelled to include in my journal the following paragraph: "During the day the haze grew worse, hiding the coast from our view, and as the weather does not look good to us we have remained on the open sea, leaving behind, (not) without a feeling of embarrassment, an entrance highly important for hydrography and perhaps the origin of a new route for communication in these parallels between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans."

As you well know, your Exc.^y, these hopes could only acquire new vigour when, in Monterrey, the pilot of the schooner *Saturnina* acquainted me with the greatly detailed reconnaissance of that channel; when I saw in the voyages of Captain Meares, on my arrival in this port of Acapulco, a Europe amazed by his supposed navigation in those same channels; and when, finally, during the short stop the corvette *Descubierta* made in San Blas, I realised that the two schooners lately constructed could perhaps settle, and in a single summer, a point of so much importance to Geography.

However, the narrow constraints on human endeavour, and the duty calling me to Asia, forced me to set aside these ideas, or rather to look with envy at those who could fulfil this important commission. The same thoughts were shared by many of the fine officers who make up the current expedition, and in the end some of these, not yoked as I am to the completion of the expedition, and moved by their own zeal, urged me to present to your Exc.^y their desire to confront this new series of dangers and hardships. The Frigate-Captains Don Dionisio Galiano and Don Cayetano Valdes should be preferred on this occasion; and the many proofs I have of their ability in all fields related to this commission suggest to me at the same time a happy end to the enterprise, if your Exc.^y sees fit to approve this proposal:

The two officers mentioned would be in charge of the schooners built lately in San Blas, receiving them however in Acapulco rather than in that Department, so that the spare parts and excellent artificers on board the corvettes can be used to fit them out to the satisfaction of their commanders, and at the same time so that these commanders can select from among our sailors men who are sure to be useful in any effort they undertake. The ample provision of food would cost nothing, if the bread is made using a small portion of the flour intended for the corvettes. In any case, given the need to send a vessel with foodstuffs for the frigate and establishment at Nootka, either the frigate *Aranzazu* or the packet-boat *San Carlos* will sail soon to that port, and the same could then supply the schooners at Nootka so that they can undertake the exploration of the Strait, fully stocked with all necessities, around the middle of April.

Meeting thus in Acapulco in preference to San Blas would be the more valuable in so far as we shall not waste the precious few months we have left before our departure, but will be able to avoid any risk in the transport of instruments; to take our time thinking of all precautions necessary; to receive our books and letters; to learn the detail of the coasts already charted, and finally to draw up a plan of campaign for presentation in advance to your Exc.^y.

Furthermore, given that the two commanders will be accompanied by Don Secundino Salamanca and Don Juan Vernacci, both with the rank of Second Frigate-Lieutenant, this will allow us too to avoid having to transport many individuals to San Blas in a frigate that is limited in every way; and by the end of the month, if your Exc.^y sees fit to approve it, by special courier, either one or both schooners could be at this port, guided here by whatever pilot [is available].

Finally, touching on the subject of Frigate-Lieutenant Don Francisco Mourelle, whose expertise and outstanding talents have been well known to me for a long time, it should yet be no surprise that I insist to your Exc.^y that the astronomical instruments be trusted to the officers of the corvettes, especially since, in our latest campaign, these indicated clearly which places we should best reconnoitre and which dangers we had to avoid.

Consequently, if your Exc.^y is willing to approve this voyage, the schooners could sail immediately for this port, with all the food and other supplies that Frigate-Captain Don Dionisio Galiano suggests. Don Cayetano Valdés will oversee their preparation for the voyage, ourselves assisting with whatever is in our power; and, since either of these junior officers is able to take command, the same Valdés could then go to Mexico [City] and, in collaboration with Galiano, prepare a more extensive plan of the voyage for final submission to your Exc.^y.

If my hopes do not deceive me, this voyage undertaking under the auspices and direction of your Exc.^y, will add great lustre to our national [enterprise in] navigation; and, as these officers will be able on the homeward leg to finish the [charting of] the section of coast as far as the volcanoes of Guatemala that they were unable to complete in the first months of this year, the costs will be very small and the utility very great indeed.

May Our Lord preserve the important life of your Exc.^y viceroy for many years. On board the corvette *Descubierta*, in the port of Acapulco, this November 10, 1791; to the most Excellent Sr., Count of Revillagigedo.

[Spanish Text](#) courtesy of the Naval Museum, Madrid.