

WILLIAM BOLTS TO COUNT OSTERMAN

Trieste, December 27, 1782

To His Excellency Count Osterman:

Sir,

I take the liberty of submitting for your Excellency's patronage a proposal which I have the honour to make to Her Imperial Majesty of all the Russias; its execution will not only do honour to her noble house and to the glory of her name, already held in such respect by the entire world, but will also give rise to new branches of a large and lucrative commerce, to the great benefit of her subjects. It is with the permission of my sovereign, His Majesty the Emperor, that I have the honour of presenting her with this proposal, as your Excellency will be informed by letters (concerning both the plan and myself) which the State Chancellery at Vienna has sent to the Minister Plenipotentiary at St. Petersburg.

If I may say a word to your Excellency on the subject of myself, for which I hope my egotism will be forgiven, I have the honour of informing you that I have spent several years in the service of the British East India Company. I arrived in the year 1760 in Bengal, where I was employed for many years in the departments of accounting, trade, jurisprudence, finance and politics. During my time in Asia, with the great advantage of acquaintance with the Indian languages, I for many years conducted important trade, both internal and maritime, throughout India and China, which perhaps no other European has ever done there. And I am well known in England for a book entitled *Considerations on India-Affairs*, which I published in 1771. For the last six years that I was employed in the service of Her Majesty the Empress, with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, I commanded the Austrian ship *Giuseppe e Teresa* in the East Indies. During this time, Her Late Imperial and Royal Apostolic Majesty having granted me full powers to treat with the princes and sovereigns of these countries, I founded several establishments to sustain the Austrian trade which I had revived in Asia, in accordance with the authorisation granted me by Her Majesty on June 5th, 1775.

Your Excellency's wisdom and great knowledge will straightaway make clear to you the importance of this expedition, which I have proposed making under the Russian flag, to the northwest coast of North America by way of Cape Horn. If it is successful it will immediately give birth to the broadest and most advantageous commercial connections between the Kamchatka peninsula and the coasts of Asia, America and even east Africa, as well as with all the islands that lie between these vast continents.

There is one matter that I have not touched on in the plan, which, if it were realized, would be of the utmost importance and would add infinite value to the possession of the relevant part, still unclaimed by any European nation, of the northwest coast of North America that I am proposing Her Majesty the Empress should add to her realm. I mean the discovery of the channel of communication still strongly suspected to exist between Hudson's Bay and the Pacific Ocean, if this passage should be in the area of which Her Majesty would gain possession.

The following observations are equally worthy of your Excellency's consideration. Among the intervening islands in the Pacific Ocean there are some very suitable for sugar plantations, and most favourably situated to provide Russia with the means of obtaining this important commodity directly. The export items required for the trade offered in these countries can all be supplied from Russia at much less cost than I have been obliged to pay for those which I have currently gathered in this port of Trieste for this expedition. The very experienced officers whom I have engaged for this enterprise are also presently here: they made the same voyage with the late Captain Cook on his last expedition, of which I have all the charts and plans. With these means I flatter myself to be able to do more in a single expedition executed via Cape Horn than the Russians of Kamchatka could do in twenty.

For the execution of this enterprise I ask of Her Majesty only an advance of one hundred and fifty thousand rubles, of whose use I shall keep a bona fide record. I offer as security the two vessels and their cargoes, of which the greater part, including the smaller vessel, is now in readiness at Trieste: and I undertake, as stated in my plan, to repay on her orders the sum that Her Majesty will have advanced, after the successful return of the larger vessel to a port in Europe.

If your Excellency is persuaded, as I am, of the utility of this plan, I flatter myself to believe that I should receive your approval and support. And if Her Majesty the Empress deigns to agree to my proposals, I beg your Highness to be so kind as to procure for me her gracious approval in time for me to take advantage of the season suitable for the departure of the vessels, which is rapidly approaching.

At present, I am in this port of Trieste to prepare the expedition of my vessel the *Cobenzell*, destined for the East Indies and China. In the meantime, if your Excellency wishes to honour me with a word of reply, I beg you to send it to me care of His Highness Prince Gallitzin [1] in Vienna.

I have the honour to be, with the utmost respect and reverence for your Excellency, your most humble and obedient servant,

William Bolts

[1] Prince Dimitri Mikhailovich Gallitzin (1758-1782), Russian Ambassador to Vienna.

Text courtesy of Robert King. Translation by John Black. [French Original](#)