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Spain and the Botany Bay Colony: a response to an imperial challenge

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The founding of the Botany Bay colony in 1788 was viewed with disquiet in Spain and its empire, accustomed as its rulers were for over three-and-a-half centuries to view the whole Pacific as their exclusive preserve. Over the following two decades, as a titanic struggle played out between Britain and France for world dominance, a defensive Spanish empire had to consider how to react to the strategic challenge of the new colony. The immediate Spanish reaction was to include a visit to the colony in the itinerary of the 1789-94 expedition commanded by Alexandro Malaspina.

1786: Announcement of the Botany Bay colony

The British Government made the decision to colonise Botany Bay on the coast of New South Wales on 26 August 1786 and the news was promptly published in the London press. The Spanish ambassador in London, Bernardo del Campo, immediately forwarded translations of the press reports to Prime Minister José Moñino Floridablanca in Madrid.¹ The *Gazeta de Madrid* of 13 and 20 October and 14 November 1786 carried articles on the matter drawn from the English newspapers. The articles were soundly based on the proposal by James Matra for colonising New South Wales. An article published on 12 October 1786 said: 'Mr Matra, an Officer of the Treasury, who, sailing with Capt Cook, had an opportunity of visiting Botany Bay, is the Gentleman who suggested the plan to Government of transporting convicts to that island.'²

The advantages of New South Wales given by Matra for a colony were that: the country was suitable for plantations of sugar, cotton and tobacco; New Zealand timber and flax could prove valuable commodities; it could form a base for trade with China, Korea, Japan, the north-west coast of America and the Moluccas; and it could be a suitable compensation for displaced American Loyalists, 'where they may repair their broken fortunes & again enjoy their former domestick felicity'. He emphasised the strategic advantages to be derived from the colony. An article

published widely in the London press in October 1786, drawn from Matra's proposal, and reproduced in the press of other countries, said:

The central situation which New South Wales, in which Botany Bay is situated, holds in the globe, cannot fail of giving it a very commanding influence in the policy of Europe ... When this colony from England is established, if we should ever be at war with Holland or Spain we might very powerfully annoy either State from the new settlement. We might, with equal safety and expedition, make naval incursions into Java, and the other Dutch settlements, or invade the coast of Spanish America, and intercept the Manilla ships. Thus this check would, in time of war, make it a very important object, when we view it in the chart of the world with a *political eye*.³

The announcement of the intention of the British Government to colonise Botany Bay and Norfolk Island in the seas adjacent was cause for concern to Spain. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the Spanish monarchy strongly defended its claim to the whole Pacific Ocean, its coasts and islands, which stemmed back to the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas with Portugal, against encroachments by France, Holland, and above all by England. Any attempt to make the Pacific more accessible to the other European nations posed a threat to the security of the Spanish empire, and the Spanish authorities were well aware that Britain, irrespective of treaties, was hostile to their claims to exclusive navigation in the Pacific.

Spanish reactions to the voyages of James Cook clearly indicated their apprehensions. On hearing of the preparations for Cook's third voyage to the Pacific, José de Gálvez, Minister for the Marine and Indies, directed the Viceroy of Mexico, Antonio Maria Bucareli, in a letter dated 18 October 1776, to arrest Cook and charge him with infringing the Spanish Laws of the Indies, if he should touch at any of the Spanish ports in the Pacific. The Laws of the Indies stated: 'No foreign ships shall pass to the Indies, and such as do, shall be seized.'⁴ Only lack of naval force in the Pacific prevented Gálvez from directing that an expedition be specifically commissioned to apprehend Cook.⁵ Similar instructions were sent to the Viceroy of Peru, Manuel de Guirior.⁶

The naval demands of the American War of Independence (1776-1783), where France, Spain and the Netherlands intervened on the side of the rebelling American colonies, prevented further British voyages to the Pacific until peace was restored after 1783. The renewal of British voyages at the close of the war prompted Spanish concern. On 23 December 1788, the Viceroy of Mexico, Manuel Antonio Flores, writing to Antonio Valdéz, Minister for the Marine and for the Indies, expressed concern about the security of Spain's claims to the Northwest Coast of America and California: 'The Russian projects and those which the English may make from Botany Bay, which they have settled, menace us.'⁷

The Russian advance on the Northwest Coast

Flores had in mind the intelligence brought from the island of Unalaska, one of the Fox Islands in the Aleutian chain, by Estéban José Martínez, who had been sent in command of two ships to the Northwest Coast of America to investigate the extent of Russian advance.⁸ This expedition left the port of San Blas in Mexico in March 1788, and upon reaching Unalaska in July 1788 learned of the Russian intention to colonise Nootka Sound (on Vancouver Island) from the head of the Russian fur trading settlement there, Potap Kuzmich Zaikov. He told Martínez that 'the next year he expected two frigates from Kamchatka which, together with a schooner, would go to settle the port of Nootka to block English trade'. Zaikov said 'his Government intended taking this action because an English trading vessel had come to Canton from Nootka in 1785 loaded with a variety of furs, and its captain had claimed that the English had a right to trade and possess land along that coast because of the discoveries of Captain Cook'.⁹ The news Martínez brought from Unalaska prompted the Viceroy of Mexico to send him back to Nootka immediately to occupy the port.

The news confirmed advice sent in February 1787 from Spain's ambassador to St Petersburg, Pedro Normande, that word had been received in Russia of English trading vessels bringing sea otter skins to China at immense profit, 'from the coasts of America facing Kamchatka, which are continuous with those of California'. This had aroused the interest of Empress Catherine. Normande wrote that Captain 'Moloski' (Grigory I. Mulovsky) had been chosen to command a squadron of four men-o'-war being sent to Kamchatka to protect Russian interests.

Normande had discovered that Catherine and her ministers were contemplating an *ukase* (decree) claiming Russian sovereignty over all of North America from Mount St Elias in Alaska eastward to the neighbourhood of Hudson's Bay. Announcement of this sovereignty would be communicated to other European powers, declaring that Mulovsky's expedition was to secure those possessions and defend them against other nations seeking to make settlements there.¹⁰ The Empress's *ukase* authorising the expedition was issued on 1 January 1787.¹¹

Upon receipt of Normande's report, Prime Minister Floridablanca asked the Minister for the Marine and the Indies to take appropriate action.¹² Orders were sent to Mexico for the two ships commanded by Martínez to go to the Northwest Coast to investigate the extent of Russian advance.¹³ Normande's report also contributed to the decision by the Madrid government to send a full-scale expedition from Spain to the Pacific.¹⁴ Commanded by Alexandro Malaspina, it left Cadiz at the end of July 1789 with among its tasks that of making an investigation of any Russian settlements on the Northwest Coast of America.

1786: Lapérouse visits Concepcion

Also contributing to the Spanish government's decision on the Malaspina expedition was a recommendation received from the military governor of Concepcion in Chile, the Irish-born Ambrose Higgins.¹⁵ He reported on 20 July 1786 to the Marques Sonora, Minister for the Marine and the Indies, following a visit to Concepcion in March that year by the *Boussole* and *Astrolabe*, French frigates on a voyage of discovery to the Pacific Ocean under the command of Jean-François Galaup de Lapérouse. In his report to Sonora on the expedition's visit to Concepcion, Higgins called attention to the important benefits brought to their respective nations by the expeditions led by Lapérouse and Cook, and strongly recommended that Spain organise a similar expedition to the Pacific.¹⁶

Higgins emphasised that 'the new expedition under a Spanish commander should concern itself with more immediate objectives, of interest to the State'. He said the proposed expedition should visit the Isles of Quiros (now Vanuatu), Tahiti, and the Sandwich Islands, with a view to preparing the way for their colonisation by Spain. He drew attention to the fact that, although the expeditions of Cook and those of his fellow countrymen who preceded him as circumnavigators – Byron, Wallis and Carteret – had been promoted by the English under the specious pretext of perfecting geography, navigation and knowledge of the globe, no one could have remained ignorant of the involvement of other ideas which necessarily formed their principal objective of establishing and possessing colonies in these regions.

Nor could the Russians disguise that they were doing the same to increase their commerce in the seas and coasts intermediate between Muscovite Asia (Kamchatka) and the neighbouring part of Spanish North America. A maritime inspection such as he proposed was therefore indispensable, a conclusion he had come to after reflecting upon the stay at Concepcion of Lapérouse, and after having afterwards read the voyages of Captain Cook.

1789: The Malaspina Expedition

In February 1787, six months after Higgins wrote from Concepcion recommending a discovery expedition to the Pacific, the port was visited by Alexandro Malaspina, in command of the frigate *Astrea*, sailing on a round-the-world voyage by way of the Philippines.¹⁷ The *Astrea* was under charter to the Royal Philippines Company, the aim of the voyage being to open up a faster route for merchant shipping to the Philippines than the Acapulco-Manila galleon route. Presumably Higgins and Malaspina discussed the concept, which led to the production in September 1788, upon the *Astrea's* return to Spain in May of that year, of Malaspina's proposal for an expedition along the lines set out in Higgins' letter.



Alexandro Malaspina in the uniform of Brigadier de la Real Armada, a rank to which he was promoted on 25 March 1795. (Anon. Museo Naval de Madrid: Wikipedia Commons, Public Domain [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alejandro_\(Alessandro\)_Malaspina.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alejandro_(Alessandro)_Malaspina.jpg))



Irish-born Ambrose (Ambrosio) Higgins, Captain-General and Governor of Chile. (Anon. Museo Histórico Nacional de Chile)

In September 1788, the Spanish court received a treatise on the new English colony in New Holland from Malaspina's fellow naval officer, Francisco Muñoz y San Clemente. In 1786, while Malaspina, in command of the *Astrea* was investigating the Cape Horn route for the Royal Philippines Company, Muñoz, in command of the *Aguila Imperial*, undertook a voyage to the Philippines for the company by the Cape of Good Hope route.¹⁸ After his return to Spain, Muñoz submitted his 'Reflexiones sobre los establecimientos Inglesas de la Nueva Holanda', dated San Ildefonso, 20 September 1788. 'The grave dangers,' Muñoz said, 'which in time our commerce will experience because of their neighbourhood to South America and the Philippines, has obliged me to treat of the [English] settlements.' Muñoz considered the advantages which New Holland offered to the English, and the sea lines of communication between the new colony and India, China, the Philippines and South America; and indicated the dangers which it posed to the Spanish possessions both in peace time from the development of a contraband commerce, and in war time as a base for British naval operations against Spain's possessions:

After they complete the first necessary works, the new inhabitants will begin to dedicate themselves to agriculture and commerce ... But what could the nature of this commerce be? A clandestine one with all of South America ... The commodities of India and China introduced into that continent could be sold at much more agreeable prices than those attempted by our commerce, and this would occasion a contraband prejudicial to our interests ... These dangers are grave, but those in time of war will be even greater. The colonists will be able to fit out privateers so as to cut all communication between the Philippines and the Americas; they will think perhaps of extending their possessions, or they may influence some revolution which will diminish ours ... In sum, it all announces to us ill consequences for the future, worthy of occupying all the attention of our Government in order to forestall them opportunely.¹⁹

Malaspina echoed Muñoz in the 'Axiomas sobre la América', which he wrote in January/February 1789 as part of the preparation for his expedition, saying in relation to the new English colony in the Pacific:

What, then, may not be feared from the Botany Bay settlement if, a stock of stores being laid in there and, assisted by a climate so well provided with the grains and beasts of Europe, the voyager who departs from India finds there a comfortable station from whence, with a crossing of three or four months, without the least risk or concern, our colonies present themselves to view, to be terrorised and sacked?²⁰

The plan presented in September 1788 by Malaspina and José de Bustamante y Guerra to Antonio Valdéz, Sonora's successor as Minister for the Marine and the Indies, for a scientific and political voyage around the world referred to the recent French and English voyages of exploration and stated that the scientific part of the proposed voyage would have as its objectives the fulfilment of the aims of those of Cook and Lapérouse. The Malaspina/Bustamante plan stated that 'a voyage made by Spanish navigators should necessarily involve two other objects: one, the construction of hydrographic charts ... and the other, the investigation of the political state of America in relation to Spain and foreign nations'.²¹ Ambrose Higgins' concern to prevent encroachment on Spanish dominion in the Pacific was paralleled in the Malaspina/Bustamante plan by the proposal to investigate and prepare confidential political reports on the Russian settlement on the island of Unalaska and on the English colony at Botany Bay.

On 14 October 1788, Valdéz wrote to Malaspina informing him of the Government's acceptance of his plan. Its acceptance within such a short space of time indicates that the plan had met prepared minds. José de Espinoza y Tello, the hydrographer with the Malaspina expedition, stressed the importance of the information sent by Higgins in stimulating the Government to initiate an extensive program of exploration in the Pacific: 'At the beginning of the year 1787, the Minister for the Indies, the Marqués de la Sonora, in consequence of information

sent to him by the Military Intendant at Concepción de Chile ... advised the Viceroy of Mexico that it was the wish of His Majesty to prepare at San Blas two ships suitable for reconnoitring the coast to the north to verify if such [Russian] settlements in fact existed.²² This was a reference to the royal order of 25 January 1787 that led to the departure of the *Princesa* and *San Carlos*, commanded by Esteban José Martínez and López de Haro respectively, from San Blas in Mexico on 8 March 1788. Malaspina's expedition left Spain on 30 July 1789.

The *Descubierta* and *Atrevida* arrived at Valparaíso in April 1790, when Malaspina again met Higgins, now Captain-General of Chile.²³ Meanwhile, events had been unfolding at Nootka Sound. When he was sent north on a second voyage in 1789, Martínez had orders to forestall any Russian attempt to colonise Nootka by occupying it for Spain and to enforce Spain's claim to the Northwest Coast against all comers, including the English.²⁴ Soon after he established himself at Nootka, he arrested the English trading vessel *Argonaut*, under the command of James Colnett, which arrived there in July 1789 from Macao to set up a fur trading factory. This action by Martínez, which extended to the arrest of two other ships belonging to Colnett's company, began an 18-month long dispute that brought Britain and Spain to the brink of war.

1790: The Nootka Sound crisis

Spain's Council of State, meeting on 31 May 1790, approved a proposal submitted by Prime Minister Floridablanca that the government should base its position in the dispute with Britain over Nootka Sound on the strongest diplomatic grounds available, that being Article VIII of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), by which England had agreed that navigation and boundaries in America would remain the same as during the reign of King Charles II of Spain. This agreement had been specifically renewed by the Treaty of Paris (1763) ending the Seven Years War, which entitled Spain to prohibit British ships from operating along the Pacific coast in areas claimed by Spain, and at the end of the War of American Independence in the Treaty of Versailles (1783).²⁵ In June 1790, the Spanish Government reasserted its claims in a circular memorandum to all the courts of Europe.²⁶ The British ambassador to Madrid, Alleyne Fitzherbert, reported on 16 June 1790 to Foreign Secretary the Duke of Leeds that, at a private meeting, Count Floridablanca:

... gave me to understand that he considered our sending Ships to purchase Skins at Nootka as a shallow artifice calculated to cover a real design of making ourselves masters of the Trade of Mexico, that our Southern Whale Fishery covered a like design against Peru & Chili, and as to our colony at Botany-Bay that it must necessarily have been founded with a view to seconding these designs & of adding to our other conquests that of the Philippines.²⁷

The Spanish seizure of Colnett's vessels at Nootka had demonstrated that the fur traders were unable to form a settlement by their own efforts unsupported by government, although they had been attempting to do so since the first trading ships under Nathaniel Portlock and George Dixon had been sent from England by Richard Cadman Etches' fur-trading company in September 1785. Dixon, together with the hydrographer Alexander Dalrymple, had in July 1789 urged the need to send a ship around Cape Horn to make a settlement on the Northwest Coast to ensure that its trade would not be lost to Britain and to prevent the Russians, Americans or Spanish from establishing themselves there.²⁸



Meares Cove, Nootka Sound, the site of an abortive attempt to set up a British fur trading post in 1789. (Photographed by the author, June 1998)

Under-Secretary Evan Nepean drafted a letter to the Admiralty in early February 1790, outlining the Government's response to the events at Nootka Sound, saying, 'His Majesty has judged it highly expedient that measures should instantly be taken for affording protection to such of His ... Subjects as may have already proceeded to that part of the American Continent.'²⁹ He outlined the plan of an expedition to found a settlement on the Northwest Coast that would make use of the colony at Port Jackson. As, in Nepean's words, 'the utmost degree of secrecy' was required, the 44-gun frigate *Gorgon*, which was already preparing to take the newly formed New South Wales Corps and stores to Port Jackson, would be employed on the service.

Aware that the two well-armed men-o'-war of the expedition led by Malaspina were already in the Pacific, Foreign Secretary Leeds had requested the British embassy in Madrid on 2 February 1790, as soon as he had heard of the incident at Nootka, to discover the size of 'the Ships which sailed a few months ago for California under the command of M. Melaspina' and the number of their guns and men, and whether any other Spanish ships had sailed on the same expedition.³⁰

Anthony Merry replied from the British embassy in Madrid in response to Leeds' query that Malaspina's ships were similar in size to those of Captain Cook, were each of 16 guns and had crews of about 100, and that Martinez had two 20-gun ships and a brig, with another 20-gun ship at San Blas.³¹ Malaspina for his part was quite ready to employ his ships in offensive operations against the British in the Pacific if need be, as he told the Viceroy the Conde de Revillagigado when he reached Mexico in January 1791.³²

In view of the formidable Spanish naval force the *Gorgon* might encounter in the Pacific, the *Discovery* (10 guns) would be assigned to accompany her. As it was public knowledge that the *Discovery* was readying for a voyage of exploration under Henry Roberts, her departure would 'not be likely to create a suspicion of the intended operation'. Upon arrival at the English colony in Port Jackson, the *Gorgon*, having sailed from England *en flute* (with only her upper deck guns mounted) would have her lower deck guns re-mounted, ready for action. If the *Sirius*, the 26-gun frigate stationed at Port Jackson, was available, she could accompany the *Gorgon* to Nootka, leaving the *Discovery* to take her place in New South Wales. It was not known at this time in London that the *Sirius* had been wrecked on Norfolk Island in March 1789. The ships' crews could be replenished at Port Jackson and Governor Arthur Phillip would provide a party of marines from the detachment stationed there. As it was intended that the expedition should form a permanent settlement on the Northwest Coast, Governor Phillip would also provide workers with the requisite skills from his convict settlers.

This plan was considered at a cabinet meeting on 23 February 1790, following which it was revised.³³ From Port Jackson, the two ships were to proceed to Hawaii instead of Tahiti, where they would rendezvous with a frigate detached from the East India Squadron. From Hawaii all three would proceed in May 1791 under the command of the frigate captain to the American coast.³⁴ Secret instructions were drafted for Henry Roberts, which were not to be opened until *Discovery* had sailed: he was 'to make the best of your way to Port Jackson on the Coast of New South Wales, and on your arrival there deliver the inclosed Packet to Governor Arthur Phillip', under whose orders he was then to proceed.³⁵

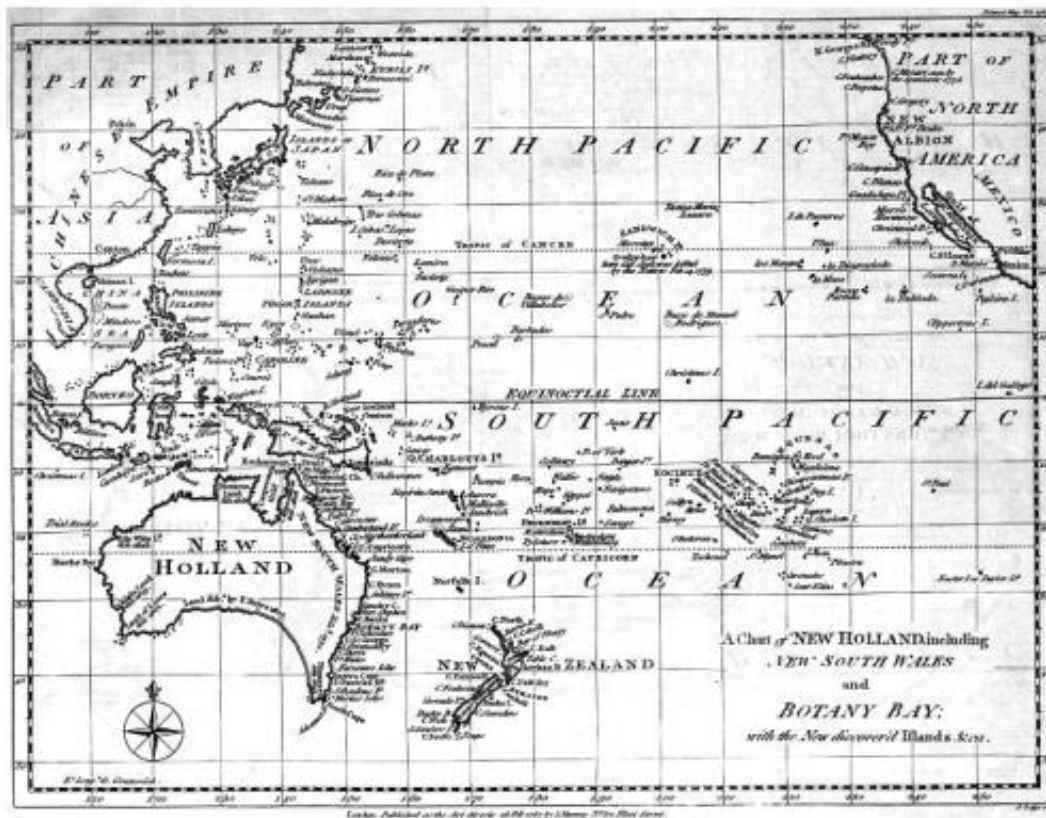
Instructions were drawn up for Phillip to supply a detachment of marines under 'a discreet Subaltern Officer' and convict workers – 'thirty persons altogether, with stores' – to an expedition whose object would be to form a settlement on the Northwest Coast, which would 'lay the foundation of an establishment for the assistance of His Majesty's subjects in the prosecution of the Fur trade from the North West Coast of America'.³⁶ As the Northwest Coast of America was not one of those places specifically nominated in Orders-in-Council issued under the Transportation Act of 1784 as a place to which convicts could be sent, Phillip needed to be given authorisation to be able to provide the workers.

The Transportation Act authorised the sending of convicted felons to any place appointed by the King in Council. When Botany Bay and Norfolk Island were chosen in 1786 as destinations, a series of Orders-in-Council were issued, starting on 6 December 1786, specifying the eastern coast of New South Wales or some adjacent island or islands (to wit, Norfolk Island) as the places where the sentences were to be served. An act of Parliament passed in May 1790 enabled Phillip to send convicts to the Northwest Coast.³⁷

The General Evening Post of 22 April 1790 reported that, 'The ship called the *Discovery*, which is going out, by order of Government, on discoveries in the South Seas, &c. is under sailing orders, and will proceed on her voyage in the course of the next week.' The same edition of the newspaper announced the arrival from China of 'Capt John Mears' on the *Ganges* East Indiaman. Meares, the Etches company agent in Macao, claimed that Colnett had been directed by him 'to erect a substantial house on the spot purchased by him [Meares] in the preceding year', and that Colnett's ships had carried a party of Chinese artisans and labourers, 'who intended to become settlers in the country, under the protection of the associated company'. He accused Martinez of taking possession 'of the lands which [he] had purchased and built a temporary habitation upon, *pulling down the British Flag and hoisting the standard of Spain* thereon'.³⁸

Accepting Meares' claim, the British Government now viewed the Spanish action at Nootka as an eviction from an already established British settlement. The proposed expedition of the *Gorgon* and *Discovery* was cancelled and the Pitt Government decided to send an ultimatum to Madrid, backed by the mobilisation of the entire fleet, subsequently referred to as the Spanish Armament. Events moved toward an international crisis, threatening an outbreak of a general European war.

Plans were also made for naval expeditions against Spain's possessions in the Americas and the Philippines.³⁹ Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Campbell was appointed to overall command of these operations. He set out his plan in a memorandum to Pitt written in July 1790, saying: 'The Phillipine Islands are to be attacked with most Effect from the Presidency of Fort St George in the East Indies [Madras]. Mexico and the Western Coast of South America from the Island of Jamaica in the West Indies. If the West Indian Army could be supported from the East Indies, across the Pacific Ocean, their Operations could not fail to meet with complete Success.'⁴⁰ Lord Mulgrave, one of the Admiralty Lords, considered several alternative routes an expedition against Spanish America might take after Manila had been captured, and said that 'the expedition might proceed South' from Manila, 'touching at New Holland or New Zealand for Refreshments and crossing the Pacific Ocean in South latitudes by this Rout'.⁴¹



'A Chart of NEW HOLLAND, NEW SOUTH WALES and BOTANY BAY, with the New discover'd Islands, &c.', *Political Magazine*, February 1787.
(Source: nla.gov.au/nla.obj-230619603)

The *Whitehall Evening Post* of 5 June 1790 noted that, 'without the aid of France, the Spaniards could never sustain a conflict with Great Britain and Holland'. Alone, Spain could not match Britain's naval might, and in 1790 Louis XVI, entangled as he was in the toils of a revolution, was in no position to offer effective assistance to his cousin Carlos IV. Spain, deprived of the support of her ally, France, and informed from Mexico by Revillagigedo of crucial weaknesses in the economy and naval defences in the Americas after the strains of the American War of Independence, was forced to back down. Revillagigedo advised Madrid: 'There are not enough forces in our South Sea and Department of San Blas to counteract those which the English have at their Botany Bay'.⁴²

The Convention reached between Madrid and London on 28 October 1790 resolving the Nootka Sound dispute effectively marked the end of Spain's claim to a *mare clausum* in the Pacific. By Article III of the Convention, Great Britain and Spain agreed 'that their respective subjects shall not be disturbed or molested, either in navigating or carrying on their fisheries in the Pacific Ocean, or in the South Seas, or in landing on the coasts of those seas, in places not already occupied, for the

purpose of carrying on their commerce with the natives of the country, or of making settlements there'.⁴³ This definitive statement marked the official end of Spain's claim to a right of exclusive navigation in the Pacific, which harked back to the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas.

1793-1795: Malaspina's report on the British colony

The corvettes *Descubierta* and *Atrevida* under Malaspina and Bustamante finally reached Port Jackson on 12 March 1793. During their stay there, and after, the Spanish officers collected as much information as possible relating to the purpose and condition of the colony, both from direct observation and from published sources. Malaspina's own report was entitled 'A Political Examination of the English Colonies in the Pacific'.⁴⁴ In 1796, Bustamante submitted a memorial to his government in which he discussed the threat he considered it posed to Spanish interests in the Pacific.⁴⁵

Malaspina observed the situation at Port Jackson: the sterility of the soil; the poverty of agriculture; the absence of good timber or any other commercial produce; and the great expense of sending out and maintaining the convicts, the administration and the 500 soldiers of the New South Wales Corps. He noted the extent of the territorial boundaries of New South Wales defined in Phillip's commission, which he understood from Watkin Tench's *Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, 'to reach from the Latitude of 43°49'S to the Lat. of 10°37'S being the Northern and Southern extremities of New Holland. It commences again at the 135th degree of Longitude East of Greenwich, and proceeding in an easterly direction includes all Islands within the limits of the above specified Latitudes in the Pacific Ocean.'⁴⁶ The southern limit was actually 43°39' South.⁴⁷ 'Here begins to be discovered the true ideas of the British Government,' he declared. He saw the territorial limits thus defined as the foundations of a new empire for Britain in the Pacific.

Talk about rehabilitating criminals by using them to establish a thriving agricultural community producing exportable surpluses of wine, tobacco and linen had been proven vain by the difficulties encountered by the settlers. He saw the transportation of convicts as 'the means and not the object of the enterprise. The extension of dominion, mercantile speculation, and the discovery of mines, were the real object; and to these, albeit vain, hopes, were sacrificed the restraints of Legislation, the principles of sane policy, and above all the compassionate cries of oppressed Humanity'. Echoing the fears voiced by his colleague, Muñoz, he said that from Port Jackson, 'a crossing of two or three months through healthy climates and a secure navigation could bring to our defenceless coasts [of South America] two or three thousand cast-away bandits to serve mixed with a picked body of regular Troops'.

While recognising the strategic threat it posed in time of war, Malaspina preferred the peaceable approach of drawing attention to the commercial opportunity the new colony offered for a trade in food and livestock from Chile. Having seen carts and even ploughs being drawn by convicts for want of draught animals in the colony, and having eaten meals with the colonists at which beef and mutton were regarded as rare luxuries, he saw the trade in Chilean livestock as the key to a profitable commerce. He proposed that an agreement be signed with London for an Association of Traders, and for an agent of the colony to be resident in Chile. He claimed that 'this affair is exceedingly favourable to the commercial balance of our Colonies', and it would have the advantage of calming and tranquilising 'a lively, turbulent and even insolent neighbour ... not with sacrifices on our part but rather with many and very considerable benefits'.

Like Malaspina, José de Bustamante saw the strategic threat posed by the English colony to Spain's interests in the Pacific, but in contrast to him, Bustamante said: 'I believe that the destruction of the English Colony in Botany Bay, today transferred to Port Jackson, is one of the points of most interest to the Crown as easy to execute in the space of six or seven months by the Royal Squadron in Peru.'⁴⁸

Ambrose Higgins maintained a similar opinion, as expressed in a despatch to the Prime Minister, the Count of Aranda, dated 18 October 1792, which he wrote following a visit to Valparaíso by the *Mary Ann*. That ship was a British whaler that called there after having transported 150 female convicts from England to Port Jackson in 1791 and subsequently sailed with provisions to Norfolk Island and then to the coasts of Peru and Chile seeking whales. From her master, Mark Monroe, Higgins learned of the colonisation of Norfolk Island. He wrote to Aranda:

I fear that the numerous settlers situated at Port Jackson are thinking of extending their colonies from that place little by little throughout the whole Pacific Ocean, as they have already advanced as far as Norfolk, founding there the colony concerning which Mohonro [Monroe] has given us notice, passing further and having such settlements in the Sandwich and Friendly Isles, and those of the Society, or what is more probable, in Tahiti, forming a chain of possessions with which they may approach these coasts and disturb in the near future our own exclusive commerce; my concern in this regard is longstanding.⁴⁹

Following the return of the expedition to Cadiz on 21 September 1794, Malaspina and Bustamante were received by King Carlos IV and Queen Maria Luisa, and they were promoted to the rank of *brigadier de armada* (rear-admiral).⁵⁰ It was estimated that the reports of the expedition would fill seven large volumes when published, at a cost of two million *reales*. The Spain to which Malaspina had returned was in the midst of a disastrous war with revolutionary France and he was appalled by the incompetence and corruption of the government headed by the

Queen's favourite, Manuel Godoy. He became involved in a plot to replace Godoy who, when he learned of it, acted swiftly. An order for Malaspina's arrest was issued on 22 November 1795 and, following consideration of the case Godoy brought against him at a closed meeting of ministers at which he was not heard, he was condemned to 10 years imprisonment. All work on publication of the results of the expedition was halted.

Bustamante attempted to have the journal and reports of the expedition published, but the cost was beyond the resources of the Spanish treasury during the years of strife that followed Malaspina's arrest.⁵¹ There was some contemporary publication, but it took 200 years for the definitive version of the expedition to be published, in nine volumes from 1987 to 1999.⁵² Malaspina's journal was published in an annotated English translation between 2001 and 2005.⁵³ He remained confined in the island prison of San Anton at Corunna for eight years, when he was allowed to retire to his native Italy. He died of bowel cancer on 9 April 1810 at Pontremoli, not far from Mulazzo, where he was born 55 years earlier.⁵⁴

The crises of 1796 and 1805-07

In August 1806 an article in *The Enquirer*, a newspaper published in Richmond, Virginia, observed: 'It is not very generally known, though intelligent and inquisitive politicians cannot be wholly ignorant, that an [English] attack upon the Spanish colonies of South-America, has been for half a century a favorite object of contemplation, and that the scheme has been in almost every war within that period called up and on the verge of being carried into execution.'⁵⁵

Spain's war with France, the disastrous conduct of which so appalled Malaspina, ended in August 1796 with the Treaty of San Ildefonso, under which Spain was compelled to side with France against Britain. The British plan for an attack on Chile and Peru using Port Jackson as a base was at once revived. Command of the expedition was given to Major-General Sir James Craig, who had been involved with Campbell in planning for the 1790 expedition. The Craig plan involved the expedition staging at 'Botany Bay' (that is, Port Jackson) drawing 500 recruits from the convicts and troops at that settlement:

In order to form an Expedition from the Cape for the Coast of South America it is proposed that the Garrison of that Settlement should furnish two *Battalions* of 800 rank & file each and three Troops of Cavalry of not less than 60 each ... It is proposed that the Force from the Cape should be joined in its passage to the South Seas by 500 Men from Botany Bay, part to be recruited from the Convicts & the remainder from the Corps now there into which the former would be received.⁵⁶

Governor John Hunter, who had succeeded Arthur Phillip, was ordered to recruit extra troops for the New South Wales Corps, and to prepare provisions for

the expedition.⁵⁷ But events conspired to thwart the ambitions of the strategists: in early 1797, Britain's naval and military resources were stretched to the full by commitments in Haiti and the other West Indian islands, as well the danger of invasion of Ireland and Britain, which sufficed to cause abandonment of the expedition. The British Government received a number of proposals for using Port Jackson as a base for operations against Chile and Peru, but took no action on them before peace negotiations with France brought hostilities to a halt in 1801.⁵⁸

The state of war between Britain and Spain was renewed in late 1804, following the capture of the treasure fleet from Montevideo and its commander, none other than José de Bustamante, by British warships.⁵⁹ In June 1805, Buenos Aires was captured by a small British force from Cape Town.⁶⁰ Plans were drawn up for expeditions against Chile, Mexico and the Philippines. Brigadier-General Robert Craufurd was given command of a force of 4000, with instructions to sail for Chile in a fleet commanded by Admiral Sir George Murray, with the object of capturing Valparaíso and other ports and reducing the whole of that country to British rule.

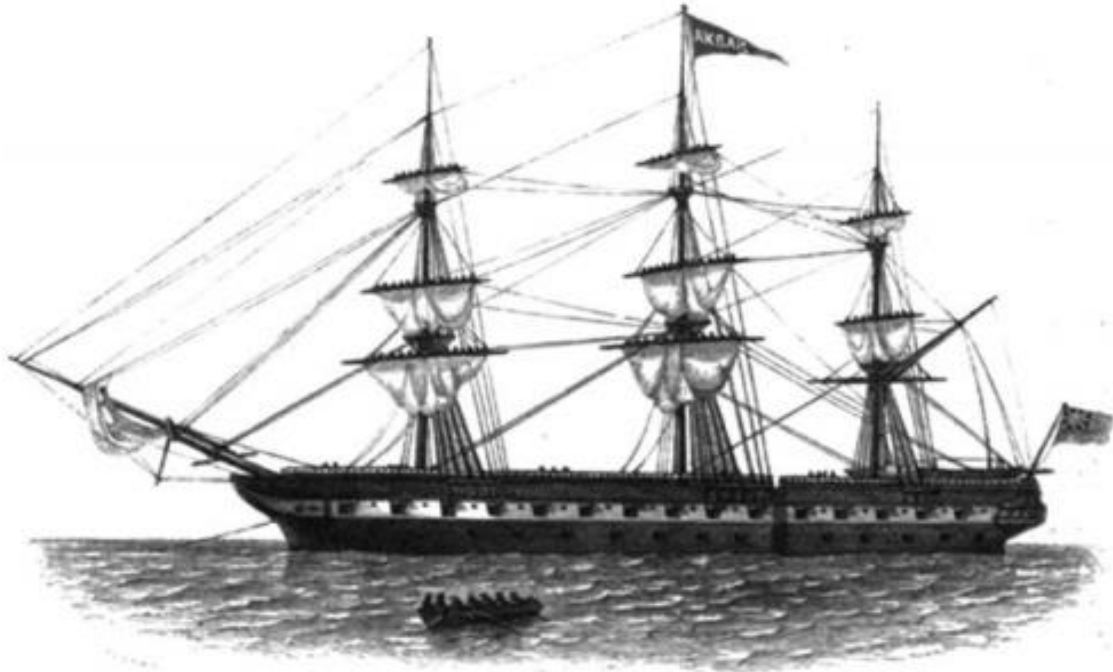
Murray intended to take his fleet to Chile by way of Cape Town and Port Jackson, in accordance with advice from Lord Buckingham, a minister in the administration of his uncle, Lord Grenville, who had urged him to 'advert very particularly to the advantage of ordering Murray to carry Craufurd's (sic) force direct from their *rendezvous* (at Cape Town) through Bass's Straits to refresh at New South Wales—Port Jackson; and to exchange their less active men for the seasoned flank companies of the New South Wales Corps; and to take with them 100 convict pioneers, who will invaluable, as seasoned to work in the sun'.⁶¹

News that the local population had thrown the British out of Buenos Aires on 12 August 1806 caused orders to be sent to Murray to take Craufurd's force from Cape Town to the Rio de la Plata to reinforce the British forces there. This was done, with the result that five months later Craufurd was involved in the debacle of 5 July 1807 when the combined British force was defeated in a second attempt to capture Buenos Aires. News of the English defeat at Buenos Aires was received with general relief and rejoicing in Chile and it is probable that a British force arriving there would have met with a reception very different from that hoped for by the strategists.⁶²

1807: The cruise of the *Cornwallis*

The despatch of the Craufurd/Murray expedition was the last occasion on which the British Government attempted to use the New South Wales colony in the role that had been envisaged for it by its founders in 1786 for major operations against the Spanish empire in the Pacific. On a lesser scale of operations, the East India Squadron frigate *Cornwallis*, commanded by Captain Charles James Johnston, used Port Jackson as a base for refreshment during a cruise against Spanish shipping on

the west coast of South America between May and October 1807. From Port Jackson, Johnston proceeded first to Juan Fernandez, then cruised northward along the coasts of Chile, Peru, Panama and Mexico, capturing 17 vessels (most of them small), three of which were sent as prizes to Port Jackson.⁶³



HMS Akbar, formerly Cornwallis, at the Birkenhead Float, Liverpool, 1856. (W. H. Smith, KSF, DCL, Admiral, Adenda to the Aedes Hartwellianae, Bowyer, London, 1864, p 32)

The cruise is commemorated in the name Johnston Atoll, sighted by Johnston on 15 December 1807 while proceeding on his course from Hawaii to Canton. In New Zealand, Port Pegasus on Stewart Island and Pegasus Bay on the Banks Peninsula are so called after the captured ship *Pegaso*, renamed *Pegasus* after being sent to Port Jackson by Johnston and sold as a prize, then employed by her new owners in the sealing trade on the coasts of New Zealand. The *Pegasus* was nearly wrecked in Foveaux Strait, and the report of this brought to public knowledge the existence of the waterway between Stewart Island and the South Island, which had been missed by James Cook in 1770.⁶⁴

Conclusion

The three Pacific voyages of James Cook, 1768-1780, dispelled the vision of a great Terra Australis Incognita, the seat of a high civilisation with a population of many millions. Instead, what was revealed was a Pacific world of immense resources ready to be exploited by Britain. By the 1780s, Britain was the world's strongest naval power, capable of providing officers like Arthur Phillip, who had the

administrative ability to found and maintain a colony on the other side of the world. Such a colony was proposed by Charles de Brosses in *Histoire des Navigations aux Terres Australes*, published in 1756 and translated, or more strictly plagiarised, by the Scottish publisher John Callander 10 years later with the proposal for a South Sea colony directed to Britain.⁶⁵ A copy of Callander's book was carried on the *Endeavour* during her 1768-1771 voyage, and inspired Joseph Banks.⁶⁶ From March 1779, Banks advocated establishing a colony at Botany Bay when he proposed it to the House of Commons Select Committee on the Transportation of Felons, on the general grounds that 'it was not to be doubted that a Tract of Land such as *New Holland*, which was larger than the whole of *Europe*, would furnish Matter of advantageous Return'.⁶⁷

Any plans for founding new colonies had to wait until the American War of Independence was concluded, but as soon as peace returned in 1783, Banks and his associates recommenced their advocacy. In July 1783, he accepted an offer of assistance from James Matra, who had served on the *Endeavour* as a junior officer. As an American Loyalist, Matra found himself in London as a 'solitary fugitive', or refugee in modern parlance and, like many of his fellow Loyalists, in search of a new home, perhaps in a new colony. A position was found for him at the Plantation Office, the part of the Home Office that administered colonies and by 23 August – that is, less than three weeks later – he had produced 'A Proposal for Establishing a Settlement in New South Wales', with a fully developed set of reasons for a colony composed of American Loyalists, Chinese artisans and South Sea Islanders (but not convicts). He wrote: 'Sir Joseph Banks highly approves of the Settlement, & is very ready to give his opinion of it, either to His Majesty's Ministers, or others, whenever they may pleased to require it.'

In fact, only Banks had the information at his disposal to allow the preparation of Matra's memorial within so short a space of time: there is no evidence that Matra had thought in detail about Botany Bay prior to 28 July and Banks evidently used him as an indirect means of putting forward his ideas publicly. Following an interview with Home Secretary Lord Sydney in March 1784, Matra amended his proposal to include convicts as settlers. Matra's plan can be seen to have 'provided the original blueprint for settlement in New South Wales'.⁶⁸ A cabinet memorandum of December 1784 shows the Government had it in mind when considering the erection of a settlement in New South Wales.⁶⁹ As noted above, the advantages of a colony in New South Wales were all set out in his proposal and pursued once it was established.

Although in the American War of Independence Britain came off badly in the naval contest when faced with the combined French, Spanish and Dutch fleets, the balance changed when from 1789 revolution in France ruptured the alliance of that country with Spain. An attempt was made in 1790 to establish a subsidiary British

settlement at Nootka Sound in an area Spain considered it had prior rights to, but it found itself unable to resist British naval might when deprived of French strength and was soon seeking British support against the revolutionary French. Although the projected settlement at Nootka Sound was blocked, British activities in the Pacific were otherwise able to proceed unmolested by Spain, which had to look on while a centuries-old claim to an exclusive right to navigation there was dismantled, a process in which the New South Wales colony played a key role.

Member RAHS

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