

[ALESSANDRO MALASPINA](#) TO [GHERARDO RANGONI](#) (*)

Cádiz, July 17, 1789

I send this to you as I am just on the point of leaving; not only to avail myself again of a correspondence that will always be most valuable to me, and to thank you again for the scientific fervour you have demonstrated on our behalf, but also to acquaint you with the principle objects of our expedition, about which Cavalier Belmonti will inform you later with more details than is possible in such a meagre letter.

It is my honour to give you a list of the two sets of armament. The dimensions of the corvettes, exactly the same in each case, are included in the attached (1), and I can assure you that in the trials carried out in the past few days we have seen clear evidence that neither rough seas, nor calms, nor excessive proximity to the coasts present any obstacles at all to our smooth sailing. We can carry enough food for two years, and have with us four years' worth or more of ship's equipment of all kinds; all the men are comfortably accommodated (2); we have five small boats (3) for the different needs we may have, both scientific and pertaining to health. We did not follow the example of other navigators by taking a large vessel in pieces (4); firstly, because even in the dangerous conditions of the Americas, both North and South, we will have boats suitable for our purposes; secondly, because it would create too great a temptation to abandon the main vessel when it may be unnecessary to do so; thirdly, because up to now, and even in many more perils than those we have encountered, we have never believed this recourse of any use – indeed [if it had been adopted] it might have led to the loss of the *Endeavour* during Cook's first voyage (5).

Given the scope which His Majesty finally gave it, this voyage deserves the interest of learned men, whatever its results may be, perhaps as a model to burden "other shoulders than mine." The exploration of the Patagonian coast will be compiled soon after I return to land, in the second year if not in the first, either in the Chonos Archipelago or in some part of Chiloé, since [how] the winter [will go] remains unknown. Without offending those who have preceded us, we shall make also a new reconnaissance of the North Pacific coast, as long as the successful completion of our primary goal, the maintenance of good conditions, and any further instructions consequent upon our discussions and reflections, seem to demand it.

You will soon be more fully informed, and I will include answers to any points raised by you, the most worthy [Abbot Spallanzani](#), or any others of your learned friends, to the extent that the case demands and a solution is possible. You will understand how busy we will be with physiology and all the natural sciences. I hope that we may be helped greatly by knowledge of different languages, resistance to prior assumptions, and communication in which our conclusions are deduced from authentic testimony. The investigations into the health of the sailors will be no less interesting: we shall pay constant attention to using aerated water, experimenting with vegetables, and using all the fresh foods that come to hand (6). I finish now, esteemed Marchese, by taking my leave of you once more, reminding you of my gratitude and desire to serve you, and reaffirming the great respect in which I hold you.

(*) Original in BEM; G. Campori, "Della vita e delle avventure del marchese Alessandro Malaspina", Memorie della Reale Accademia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti di Modena, vol. IV, 1862, pp. 143-155, esp. pp.148-149; D. Manfredi, *Alessandro Malaspina e Fabio Ala Ponzone. Lettere dal Vecchio e Nuovo Mondo (1788-1803)*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1999, pp. 191-194. [[Editing Criteria](#)]

(1) Evidently the dimensions were described in the prospectus that was supposed to be included in the letter.

(2) Knowing Malaspina's attention to hygienic and sanitary matters, we can well believe that the corvette accommodation was better than on any previous expedition. As for the comfort of the arrangements, however, we here reproduce a passage from the private diary of Tomás de Suria, who was part of the expedition during the Northwest campaign: "I'll say only that, lying on my bed, I have my feet on the side of the corvette and my head on the bulkhead (as they call the wall that forms the stateroom) and between my chest and the deck there is a distance of four fingers, which leaves me no room to move around in bed, and I have to cover my head with an almost suffocating roll, because it is less evil than seeing the millions of cockroaches, of which there is such an infestation that some individuals have sores on the forehead and fingertips."; v. A. Rey Tejerina (ed.), *Tomás de Suria a l'expedició Malaspina. Alaska 1791*, Valencia, Generalitat Valenciana, 1995, p. 120.

(3) More precisely, these were launches, dinghies and skiffs.

(4) I.e. dismantled.

(5) In 1770, the *Endeavour* ran into the great coral reef stretching along the eastern coast of Australia and some breaches opened in the hull. The awareness that there was no space in the launch for everyone motivated the crew to extreme measures, so that the holes could be ingeniously filled, the water pumped, and the refloated ship sailed to a nearby bay for the emergency repairs.

(6) Rangoni had recommended the consumption of fresh vegetables and fruits, as effective antiscorbutics, and had even spoken of carrot jam.

Text courtesy of the [Centro di Studi Malaspiniani](#), Mulazzo, Italy; notes by Dario Manfredi; translation by John Black.