

Although I am very disconcerted by the complete disruption of my plan, having spent more than three months this year between Panama and this port as a result of calms, and contrary winds and currents, and having read the two letters you were most kind to send on August 23 last year, in which I received the journal of Dixon's voyage [2], as well as the memorial on China, I find it a most essential duty to answer them immediately, though perhaps the hurry with which I write and my little recent use of our sweet idiom may be rather inimical to clarity and the development of my ideas.

We have perhaps acquired enough of an idea of the platina tree [3] to elucidate, at least in part, the questions raised about it, but for now it is impossible to put them in order in the fashion of the most intelligent research; however, it will be sufficient for our purposes if, when all the materials have been organised, either in Manila or in Europe, we can compile a detailed report. It is not so, though, for the china-china of the Kingdom of Santa Fe, whose shores, almost all on the Atlantic, did not allow us to approach them, thus forming a great impediment to our forming any idea of this fever medicine; it was the same near Quito and Guayaquil, where they grow well in Jaen and Loja, according to the latest analyses made in Spain and America, which do indeed allow them some virtue, but not enough to permit comparison [4].

As I express again my thanks for your most kind and fruitful attention to me, which has enabled me to acquire the journal of Dixon's voyage, most esteemed Marquis, let me convey to you my thinking on the subjects it addresses, and in particular on the part that is related most closely to Spanish naval exploration. We have been falsely and maliciously accused, since, far from it being the case that the journal of Mourelle [5] contained false claims, on the contrary, there is no hint of truth in what is inopportunistically said in the miscellanies mentioned by Doctor Barrington [6]. When in the next edition of our journal we reveal to the public eye [a full account of] the voyage of the schooner in question, which was commanded by the officer Quadra [7] with Mourelle as pilot, this will perhaps make clear, against these accusers, the injustice of the self-serving interpretation that until now our inveterate habit of silence has given them the chance to promulgate. Of the voyages and discoveries of this very able officer, and even more of his most valiant actions against the Indians when he was attacked by them (there having been only five men in all [in his party], of whom one was watching out for the rocks among which they sailed, another was at the helm, and the other three, including the captain, succeeded in repelling with muskets the crews of eight canoes, who were well-armed and emboldened by having the day before surprised and slaughtered seven sailors from the same schooner who had gone to look for water and wood), they focus their complaints on only the part they wish to criticize, alongside which I shall restore various originally omitted passages of the journal, so that there can be no possibility of being deceived.

There is no doubt that Quadra searched for the Strait of Fonte [8] in latitudes higher than 49°, but how far would have depended either on the confusing information he had or on his intention to continue the investigation to the south, had not his too difficult circumstances prevented him. However, those who read one of the journals in its entirety cannot be misled about the fact that, as they say several times, the lands carefully surveyed were between 57 and 55 degrees, so that, in order not to compromise their now too precarious safety, would they not have tracked [the coast]

stretch by stretch by keeping it in view at a distance of eight or ten leagues, to determine only its general direction and planning to return at some later time?

Whatever their aim, which although we may know it ourselves is much less known to other nations, there is no doubt that five years before the English, without any information from the Russians, without astronomical observations, without the wise direction of a learned society, without a thousand preparatory steps, one of our schooners reached the fifty-nine degree; and a schooner, perhaps, than which no poorer and more poorly armed has been seen, as is demonstrated in every draft of the journal.

Isn't this just the spectacle of weak, even if more educated, nations, with a greed for glory much baser than that for money, given how much more difficult it is to detect the former than the latter when it is being unjustly procured? But let us now leave these arguments, which I would hesitate to bring to your attention if they were not derived from the love of truth. Every day, our navigators discover new islands between the fifties and sixties, and confirm the beautiful harmony of nature, which, at both poles, intermixing water, fire and stone with the most vigorous action, gives sustenance to so many volcanoes, and which everywhere moulds the land-surface next to the sea. The isthmus of Magellan is so narrow because here its action was far stronger; elsewhere there are two causes, namely the greater extension and the constant frozen state of the northern coast, which largely impede its harmonious action.

But a single letter and the short time allowed me now by the need to take horse for the City of Mexico, where I shall spend only six or eight days, prevent my going further; towards the end of April, when the other corvette, which is now in San Blas, has rejoined us, we shall sail to the Isle of Sandwich [9], whence we shall then return to our Californian coasts to fix their geographical positions with exactness. Having spent the fine season on those shores, we shall then seek acquaintance with the small inlets [10], between Acapulco and Panama, which poor weather has forced us to pass over; and after that, keeping to the parallels between four and ten degrees, we shall slowly make our way to Asia. The sky has been very favourable to our astronomical work, the results of which we communicate from time to time to Europe. I humbly ask you, Marquis, to forward our news to our friend Belmonti, reminding warning him, though, that he owes us various answers. Keep yourself well and please accept my sincere thanks.

[1] Original now lost; copy in [APSF](#); [PICANYOL](#), pp. 46-48; Manfredi, 1999, pp. 247-252.

[\[Editing Criteria\]](#)

[2] George Dixon (1755-1800) sailed to the American Northwest in 1785 with fellow countryman Portlock, and during that voyage discovered the Bay of Mulgrave and visited Nootka Sound; there he met his fellow-countryman John Meares. Before that he had participated in Cook's second voyage. Gherardo Rangoni procured for Malaspina the first edition, recently released from the presses, of: G. Dixon, *A Voyage Round the World, but more particularly to the North-west Coast of America*, London, George Goulding, 1789.

[3] Antonio de Ulloa himself had also looked into this in the preceding years; see. F. Paredes Salido, "El Descubrimiento del Platino: La Ilustración y Don Antonio de Ulloa in the Isla de León. Aspectos

biográficos sobre Antonio de Ulloa antes de su llegada a la Isla de León en 1769. La Platina antes de Ulloa”, *Memoria de la Academia de San Romualdo de Ciencias Letras y Artes. San Fernando, Curso 1987-88*, San Fernando, 1988, pp. 53-77.

[4] The china-china tree grew mostly in the mountains of Loja (the Real Audiencia of the Kingdom of Quito, now Ecuador). Botanically it was called *chinchona china*, from the name of the countess of Chinchón, wife of Luis Jerónimo Fernández de Cabrera Bobadilla y Mendoza, count of Chinchón and viceroy of Peru, who recovered from tertian fever thanks to this remedy, suggested by the Jesuits. Francesco Redi wrote about it: “... I always see very evident effects from the marvellous bark of that Peruvian tree of the mountains of Guayaquil which is commonly called China China, and by the Spanish Cascarilla de la Oja; it is used to disrupt and eradicate the worse symptoms of the fever [...] And for this the whole world gives great thanks to those Fathers (of the Society of Jesus) who before any others, with so much glory, brought it to Europe.” (F. Redi, *Esperienze intorno a diverse cose naturali e particolarmente a quelle che ci sono portate dalle Indie*, Florence, 1671.) The identification of a variety of china in the province of Santa Fé would also provoke a controversy (between Celestino Mutis and Sebastián José López) about who made the prior discovery, and Alexander von Humboldt would write that the first recognized it in 1772 and the second in 1774. See A. De Humboldt, *Cartas americanas*, edited by Ch. Minguet, Caracas, Ayacucho, 1980, pp. 109-119. For a valuable investigation into the various historical aspects connected to the china see A. R. Steele, *Flores para el Rey. La expedición de Ruiz y Pavón y the flora of Peru*, Barcelona, Serbal, passim. We sincerely thank Ambassador Bernardino Osio for kindly bringing this to our attention.

[5] The pilot Francisco Antonio Mourelle de la Rúa (1755-1820) made two expeditions to the north-west coast of America (1775 and 1779) and one to the Philippines (1780-81). Here the first is meant. The frigate *Nueva Galicia* (alias *Santiago*) and the schooner *Sonora* (alias *Felicidad*) took part in the expedition. The former was captained by Bruno de Heceta [sometimes spelt “Hezeta”] and the latter by Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra (concerning whom see Note 6). Mourelle, the pilot of the schooner, kept a journal of the voyage; see A. Landín Carrasco, *Mourelle de la Rúa. Explorador del Pacífico*, Madrid, Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1978, pp. 171-214.

[6] This is the English translator of Mourelle’s journal; see *Miscellanies by the honourable Daines Barrington*, London, 1781, pp. 469-534. Malaspina accuses the Englishman (and was not alone in doing so) of having introduced falsehoods detrimental to Spanish honour; however, Landín Carrasco (*op.cit.*) suggests that the variations of the English translation from the original manuscript were minimal.

[7] In 1775 Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra (1743-1794), having left the frigate *Santiago*, proceeded in the schooner *Sonora* towards the North, sailing as far as latitude 58° N, thus surpassing the first Spanish expedition led by Juan Pérez in 1774; see S. Bernabeu Albert (ed.), *Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra: El descubrimiento del fin del mundo (1775-1792)*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1990.

[8] It is worthwhile to spend a few words on the mythical “Admiral” Bartolomé de Fonte (or Fuente). When it comes to the apocryphal 16th and 17th-century voyages to the Northwest Passage, the claimed journey of Fonte is usually juxtaposed with those of Lorenzo Ferrer Maldonado and Juan de Fuca, without any mention of a particular piece of evidence which clearly differentiates the three stories, it being understood that all three are false. The truth is that both Ferrer Maldonado and Juan

de Fuca claim to have found the Passage, whereas Bartolomé de Fonte - contrary to what is claimed - not only does not state this, but, on the contrary, explicitly declares that the passage explored by him and his officer Bernardo, *does not in fact lead* to the Atlantic. Fonte's account lays claims only to the discovery – between 47° and 49° N – of an archipelago, which he called San Lazzaro, and of a large gulf, which he called the Western Sea. The voyage in question would have occurred in 1640 but the first news of it appeared, in the English periodical *Monthly Miscellany or Memoirs for the Curious*, only in 1708. Fernández de Navarrete faithfully summarizes that account, which ends with the statement that Fonte “having seen that there was no Northwest Passage, returned to his own country”; see M. Fernández de Navarrete, *Examen, cit.*, p.143. Many years earlier, the same author had written similar things in the *Introductio* (unsigned, but with certainty attributable to him) to the report of the voyage of the schooners *Sutil* and *Mexicana*; see *Relación del viaje hecho por las goletas Sutil y Mexicana en el año de 1792 para reconocer el estrecho de Fuca*, Madrid, Imprenta Real, 1802, pp. 3-20. The responsibility for having distorted the story of the alleged Admiral Fonte has been attributed to the French geographers Joseph Nicolas Delisle and Philippe Buache [the latter not to be confused with his namesake and nephew who in 1790 would attest to the veracity of the voyage of Ferrer Maldonado], who created a map (presented in 1752 to the King of France) which, while including the gulf and the archipelago, suggested that there might also be a strait that led to Hudson's Bay. Finally, let us add that the very existence of Bartolomé de Fonte is denied today; in all probability he was a contrivance of the publisher of the *Monthly Miscellany*.

[9] In the event the Sandwich [Hawaiian] Islands were not included in the exploration.

[10] Translation (of “squarcetti”) tentative.

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