

Spanish Navigation in the SPANISH LAKE (Pacific Ocean) and its Precedents

Good Afternoon

First let me introduce you to how I became interested in the subject of Maritime Explorations:

The most obvious, my parents and family. I was born in the most important Navy Port on the Atlantic Coast of Spain, My father and all the males in his family were Naval Officers, my grandfather and grand-uncles were in Philipines and Cuba during the Spanish American War and were held prisoners by the US. My mother was an Oceanographer. I listened to my father and grand-uncle discuss the Philipiners and Cuba and the long Pacific navigations.

As a young child, I read my father's books of letters of Cortes to the king, diaries of Columbus, the accounts of the conquest of Mexico, to name a few. I acquired a longstanding interest in history and exploration, the accounts are more entertainning than any novel.

I did not become a Naval Officer myself because in my time women were not accepted in the Naval Accademy, and became an Architect instead.....

Today I will give you my "spinn" on the Pacific Explorations, since there is no time to describe in detail the almost 400 years of history, so I will do three things:

1. I will take you quickly through almost 400 years of exploration in the Pacific. LAGO ESPAÑOL.
2. I will give you the possitive image that the efforts of these brave men, and women deserve.
and
3. I will describe quickly a few of what I consider major episodes, that do not get the recognition that they should.

SO, LETS BEGIN

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From the moment of the discovery of the New World Spanish explorers threw themselves with “gusto” into further discoveries and expeditions. They were not just adventurers or pirates, they were people of high responsibility contracted by the crown, who had a great curiosity for the new world around them, wanted to learn and share their knowledge. Once the Pacific Ocean was discovered by Vasco Nuñez de Balboa (1513) with the aid of the natives of the Americas, the Spanish threw themselves into the exploration of that great new sea, first hugging the coastline, later entering deep into the great sea.

In Spain, the question of the sphericity of the Earth was paramount, and the king resolved to support an expedition that would find the connection between the Atlantic Ocean and the newly discovered South Sea. In 1519, barely 6 years after the original sighting of the South Sea, a new expedition of discovery headed by Fernando de Magallanes, was launched to find the Atlantic-Pacific connection. By 1522, after a veritable maritime and human saga, the Nao Victoria returned to Spain with Juan Sebastian Elcano at the helm, and the news, proving that the Earth was spherical, and much larger than Columbus’ thought.

At the completion of the Magallanes-Elcano Expedition, Spanish mariners launched a veritable epic saga of discovery, exploration, and documentation that lasted almost 400 years, during which time the Pacific Ocean was known as the Spanish Lake. So much so, that the Manila Galleon did not need a military convoy until late 1770’s when, after loosing a portion of its American colonies, England became much more active in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. For 250 years Spain was the sole maritime and mercantile power in the Pacific Ocean, commonly known as The Spanish Lake.

During the 400 years, there were more than 120 major Expeditions of Exploration and Discovery. These explorations were perfectly designed to collect data on currents, winds, water temperature, fauna and flora, linguistics, cultural, historic and archaeological information. The Spanish Galleons carried in addition to mariners, scientists, artists, linguists, medical doctors, priests and others who noted possible routes for further exploration. Maps, artistic and written descriptions were prepared of the lands, animals, plants and peoples encountered, and multiple dictionaries were prepared to assist in communication with the natives.

Overall, the exchanges with natives were truly friendly and so documented with festivities and celebrations whereby the local chief recognized the protection of the Spanish. Explorations were assisted and facilitated by the natives with great interest on their part, curious about the technical processes and equipment used by the Spanish in measuring and recording data. In fact a recurrent problem was that the natives often stole the equipment out of plain curiosity. They were proud to be part of a great enterprise. Probably, the most important part of the Spanish explorations, contained in the thousands of documents available, is the extent to which natives became part of the Spanish exploratory endeavor. It was the objective of the crown that friendly relations and integration be made with natives encountered, as established clearly in the Capitulations and Laws of Indies of 1492 and 1500 respectively.

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A lengthy table has been prepared listing all the 120 major expeditions that do not include regular trips to establish and supply colonies, nor do these include mercantile contacts such as the Nao de Acapulco-Manila which made one to two such trips per year, or regular military voyages.

Generally speaking there were four periods of Spanish activity in the Pacific Ocean:

PERIOD I

1500's were primarily voyages of Discovery-Exploration.

During this period Spain sought to discover, map, document and name numerous localities along the American Pacific coast all the way to Alaska, as well as Patagonia, Galapagos, Marias, Philipines, Australia, New Ginnea, Marshall, Carolines, Salomon, Tahiti, Palaos, and Hawaii island groups, and Japan. Except for the Philipines, no settlements were made. The objective at the time was to learn the currents and winds, and find the route of the "return" trip from Asia to the Americas, and from the Pacific to the Atlantic, and search for the northern connection between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (straight of Anian).

Hernan Cortes in Mexico, sponsored expeditions with the objective of finding ways to reach China and expand trade. Ultimtedly he did not reach China but instead learned a great deal about currents and winds, with many new routes and places documented thanks to his efforts. The early expeditions to California, Oregon, Washington all the way to the Strait of Juan de Fuca near Alaska, indicated that the return trip from the Philipines had to veer north in order to get the appropriate currents and winds to bring it southward towards the Mexican coast. This effort eventually allowed the establishment of the Nao de Acapulco-Manila in 1566, and encountered contact with Japan in 1565 which resulted later in formal relations and exchange of Ambassadors with Spain.

Women also headed expeditions; Isabel Barreto (1595) finished her husband's voyage from Callao to the Solomon Islands and continued the trip from the Solomons to Manila raturing from Manila to Callao. The other woman explorer was Sor Jeronima de la Asuncion, a clarissa nun who sailed from Seville to Veracruz, crossed Mexico by mule, and sailed from Acapulco to Manila in 1602. She headed an expedition that took some nuns to the Philipines to establish a convent, and became very involved socially and politically in the affairs of Philipines.

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PERIOD II

The 1600's were voyages of Exploration, where detailed information was gathered along the various known routes for purposes of future settlement or to establish formal links, following the success of the Spain-Japan relations with Sebastian Vizcaino of "California" fame, who became the first Ambassador from Spain to Japan (1611) .

Maritime explorations were complimented by land explorations. The search for pearls resulted in a number of explorations prospecting for the trade. This is how the Gulf of California was documented in detail, and settlements were made in Baja California. Australia is so named by Pedro Fernandez de Quiros y Torres (1605).

It is the era of the Missions, when Jesuits sailed the seas for purposes of establishing "missions". The question of Baja California being an island or a peninsula was finally settled through a combination of maritime and landward explorations. The Pacific Islands continued to be visited and documented, and Australia was considered a large land mass connected to other large islands.

PERIOD III

The 1700's with voyages of Resource Protection and further Exploration, this time much more specific. Voyages to the North Pacific searched for the northern connection to the Atlantic first suggested by Juan de Fuca and others in the 1500's.

The settlement of Nutka, near Alaska was established by the Spanish, and from there expeditions were launched to the north as high as the 60 degree Latitude. The North Crossing was never confirmed and finally the effort was abandoned by Malaspina who concluded it could not exist.

Alta California (us!!!) was settled to discourage Russian and English decimation of natural resources by the Fur Trade. Efforts were also made to colonize Polynesia (Tahiti) but were abandoned after a year.

The Illustration Years encouraged European nations to undertake "modern" scientific explorations, and towards the middle of the century many others entered the Pacific Ocean. French, Dutch, English, and Spanish sponsored Great Scientific Expeditions to find natural resources that could be commercially exploited.

Amazingly; in spite of the competition there was a lot of coordination among these Scientist Explorers of various nations. One example was the relationship of Juan Francisco Bodega y Cuadra with George Vancouver in Nutka. In 1789 Alejandro de Malaspina and Jose Bustamante undertook the most impressive and detailed scientific exploration ever made of the territories that were first described by the Spanish mariners. Navigation Manuals were written and published based on data collected and confirmed by prior Spanish mariners.

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PERIOD IV

The 1800's saw a substantial reduction of Spanish activity, primarily due to the convulsions of Europe during the Napoleonic Wars. However; Interesting activities still took place, such as:

In 1803, after the English discovery of the smallpox vaccine, the Spanish Royal Philanthropic Expedition was launched, headed by a medical doctor Francisco Javier de Balmis y Berenguer, with other doctors, nurses and 25 children carriers of "live" vaccine. The purpose was to bring "live" vaccine since there was no refrigeration available, to the Americas where smallpox was decimating native populations. Sailing from La Coruña, they stopped in Tenerife, Puerto Rico, Habana, Venezuela, Yucatan, Puebla, Mexico, Acapulco, Manila, Canton, Macao, Santa Helena and Lisbon, where thousands of people were vaccinated. The Chinese were specially interested and they took their own "live" carriers deep into China to continue the program.

By the mid-century, the United States, already independent, under the Monroe Doctrine "America for the Americans", was beginning to make its youthful energy and imperial designs known supporting the independence of all other states in the Americas, With the loss of the American colonies, Spain tried unsuccessfully, to acquire lands in the Arab Peninsula, Erithrea or Somalia to establish a base to continue supplying the Philipines.

In 1862, Spain made one more effort to use Maritime Explorations as a "friendship" voyage to the ex-colonies, to overcome the persistent negative attitude towards Spain. Although this Expedition was successful in collecting an enormous amount of material, making a great contribution to all the sciences with thousands of data and samples, the expedition did not live up to its objective and got Spain embroiled in yet another battle in Callao.

Finally the Spanish American War exploded and Spain lost to the US the colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philipines, selling the left overs, the Marianas, Carolines and Palau to Germany in the process. This ended the Spanish role in the Spanish Lake.