



Alejandro Malaspina: Portrait of a Visionary

John Kendrick

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Malaspina arrived in Spain with a scientific background and an ardent interest in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. A skilled navigator, the Pacific voyage on which he sailed in 1789 was the last and most important of his career - a five-year scientific and political examination of the Spanish colonies in the Americas and the Philippines. He appraised the British colony at Sydney Cove and Tonga, allowing him to compare life at a place almost untouched by European contact with the situation in the colonies. Malaspina eventually returned to Spain, where he was received by King Charles IV. He was commissioned to produce a work covering all aspects of his studies that would establish Spain's reputation as a modern enlightened state. Malaspina advised the King that this could be achieved only if he dismissed all of his ministers and replaced them with a slate of Malaspina's choosing who would back his visionary ideas. This seemingly naive proposal resulted in a unanimous vote by the council that his plan was false, seditious, and injurious to the sovereignty of Their Majesties, and he was sentenced to ten years imprisonment in the fortress of San Antón. At the urging of Napoleon he was released after eight years and exiled to Italy, where he died in 1810, just as the revolts in the Americas were starting, as he had predicted. Using Malaspina's writings, including the journal of his great voyage and his personal letters, John Kendrick makes the life of this extraordinary man available for the first time in English.

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