



Alejandro Malaspina: Portrait of a Visionary

John Kendrick

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The thirst for knowledge and adventure have always been at the forefront of human imagination. In this engrossing tale, John Kendrick takes us on a voyage across the Pacific via the Philippines, New Zealand, the infant British colony at Sydney Cove, and the Tonga Islands, chronicling the life of Alejandro Malaspina, an eighteenth-century Italian navigator in the service of Spain. Malaspina arrived in Spain with a scientific background and an ardent interest in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. A skilled navigator, his 1789 Pacific voyage 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. His appraisal of the British colonies at Sydney Cove and Tonga allowed him to compare life in 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 and 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 all the present ministers were dismissed and replaced 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 a sentence of ten years imprisonment in the fortress of San Anton. At Napoleon's urging he was released after eight years and exiled to Italy. He died there 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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