

PROJECTOS PROJECTS

Britannia Rules the Waves, From China to Peru: Thoughts Concerning Lord Anson's *A Voyage Round the World...* (1748)

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The book I will present bears the full title of *A Voyage Round the World In the Years MDCCXL, I, II, III, IV. By GEORGE ANSON, ESQ; Commander in Chief of a Squadron of His Majesty's Ships, sent upon an Expedition to the South-Seas. COMPILED From Papers and other Materials of the Right Honourable GEORGE Lord ANSON, and published under his Direction, By RICHARD WALTER, M.A. Chaplain of his MAJESTY's Ship the Centurion, in that Expedition.* [1748]

The edition used was Lord Anson, *A Voyage Round the World. With an Introduction by John Masefield.* London: Heron Books, [n.d.]. The book was addressed by Richard Walter to John, Duke of Bedford, "(...) both on account of the infinite obligations which the commander-in-chief at all times professes to have received from your friendship, and also as the subject itself (...) claims the patronage of one under whose direction the British navy has resumed its ancient spirit and lustre, (...)." [1] (Fig.1):

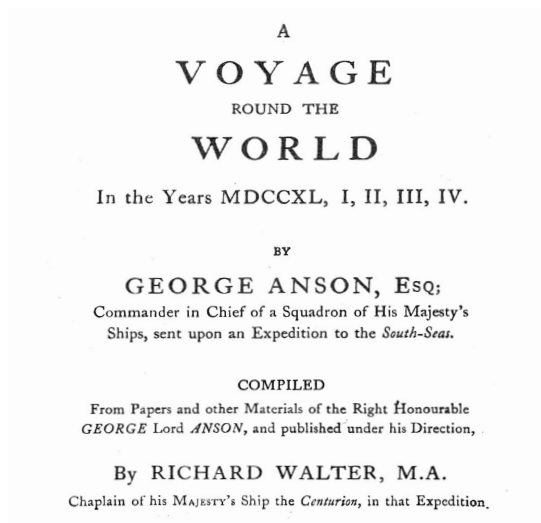


Fig. 1

Before I proceed, my title binds together a half-line of James Thomson's (1700-1748) and Thomas Arne's (1710-1778) masque entitled *Alfred* (himself an important name in the history of English/British naval history and patriotism) and performed for the first time in 1740 – the very year when the “Centurion” set sail –, as well as another half-line by Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), in *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749). According to the bionote provided in my copy, George Anson (1697-1762) entered the navy in 1712; commanded a squadron in the Pacific and sailed round the world, as Magellan (c.1480-1521), Francis Drake (c.1540/3-1596), and William Dampier (1651-1715)¹ had done; he was made a peer (1747), First Lord of the Admiralty (1751) and Admiral of the fleet (1761). Anson, here portrayed by Reynolds, (Fig.2) has been described as “(...) a transitional figure: commander of the first official naval expedition into the Pacific (...) and (...) the last of the privateers.” (Bohls and Duncan, 434)

1. Author of *A New Voyage Round the World* (1697).



George Anson after Reynolds.

Fig. 2

As to the text itself, presented by John Masefield as "(...) one of the most popular of the English books of voyages", (xvii)² it may be viewed as a product of the late Stuart to mid-Hannoverian period, whether in the assertion of a naval supremacy heralded by the Navigation Acts, the Anglo-Dutch wars, or those of the League of Augsburg (1688-1697), the Spanish and the Austrian successions (1702-1713 and 1740-1748, respectively);³ in the philosophical and scientific appeal of (and to) empirical observation, information and data, conveyed with objectivity and conciseness, as prescribed by the Royal Society;⁴ and in the self-confident and optimistic tone usually

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2. According to James Sambrook, the book "(...) ran into fifteen editions between 1748 and 1776 (...)." (193)
 3. See on this Paul Kennedy, especially chapter 3, "The Struggle against France and Spain (1689-1756)" (80-110). The author argues that "(...) it would be (...) well to remind ourselves of the basic political and economic developments in the country between the late seventeenth and mid eighteenth centuries; for it was upon such foundations that the increasing sea power of Britain was being built." (81)
 4. As Thomas Sprat puts it in *History of the Royal Society* (1667), "They have exacted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness; bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that, of Wits, or Scholars." (*Apud* Ford 139)

associated with the Augustan age and crowned, at the very end of the book, with a moral message.⁵

Finally, Anson's *Voyage* displays that adventurous drive towards maritime exploration, also materialized by James Cook (1728-1779) later in the century,⁶ to say nothing of such early novels as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) or Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). This overall patriotic, 'proto-imperial' framework may lean towards, or border on, chauvinism:

I cannot finish this Introduction without adding a few reflections on a matter (...) neither destitute of utility nor unworthy the attention of the public; (...) the animating my countrymen (...) to the encouragement and pursuit of all kinds of geographical and nautical observations, and of every species of mechanical and commercial information. It is by a settled attachment to these (...) particulars that **our ambitious neighbours** have established some part of that power with which we are now struggling: and as we have the means (...) of pursuing these subjects more effectually than they can, it would be a dishonour (...) to neglect so easy and beneficial a practice. For, as we have a navy much more numerous than theirs, great part of which is (...) employed in (...) distant nations either in the protection of our colonies and commerce, or in assisting our allies against the common enemy, this gives us (...) opportunities of furnishing ourselves with **such** (...) **materials** (...) as might turn greatly to our advantage either in war or peace. ("Author's Introduction" 6; our bold)

In the words of Elizabeth A. Bohls, "If the early modern period saw a shift in the ethos and language of travel writing 'from chivalric adventure to venture capitalism', the eighteenth century saw mercantile capitalism mature and mesh with national interests in imperial

5. "(...) though prudence, intrepidity, and perseverance united are not exempted from the blows of adverse fortune, yet (...) they usually rise superior to its power, and in the end rarely fail of proving successful." (380)

6. According to Alan John Villiers, Cook's expeditions took place in 1768-1771, 1772-1775 and 1776-1779 (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/James-Cook>). The similarity of the sea routes followed by Anson and Cook is indeed quite striking.

expansion." (xvii-xviii) In our view, however, the reference to "our ambitious neighbours" somehow backfires and rebounds on the British themselves, considering that this quotation makes perfectly clear that the ambition for "such materials" was, after all, a **common** goal... Thus any alledged 'moral superiority' proclaimed by any emerging (or declining...) proto-imperial nation can hardly be taken seriously and truly believed in.

Moreover, speaking of war, it should be added that the conflict in question is the so-called War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-1748), Spain – not just France (n)or Austria – still coming across as one of Britain's enemy Others.⁷ But, in the age of the mercantile system, the kind of warfare pursued and depicted in *A Voyage* characteristically intertwines naval, commercial, and colonial motivations and dimensions;⁸ in Linda Colley's words, "Trade followed the flag, (...) but it also helped to keep the flag flying." (80)

The westward route followed by the "Centurion" from England to Canton through the South Atlantic and the Pacific (a voyage lasting three years and nine months) includes a few places then part and parcel of the Portuguese empire, like Madeira (Book I, chapter II, 24), the island of Santa Catarina in Brazil (Book I, chapters IV, 45-46 and V, 47-60), and Macau (Book III, chapters VI-VIII, 322-341), calling for a closer and specific analysis of this travelogue in the scope of Anglo-Portuguese studies, not just from the viewpoints of the literature of empire and/or travel writing.

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7. "When, in the latter end of the summer of the year 1739, it was foreseen that a war with Spain was inevitable, it was the opinion of some considerable persons then trusted with the administration of affairs, that the most prudent step the nation could take (...) was attacking that crown in her distant settlements; for by this means (...) we should cut off the principal resources of the enemy, and (...) reduce them to the necessity of sincerely desiring a peace, as they would hereby be deprived of the returns of that treasure by which alone they could be enabled to carry on a war." (Book I, chapter I, 11-12; see also chapter IX, 93) In terms of naval warfare, the main British target seems to be the Manila trade route carried out by the Spanish galleons between the Philippines and Acapulco. (Book II, chapter IX, 214-215)
8. As the author puts it in the Introduction, "(...) from accounts of this nature, if faithfully executed, the more important purposes of navigation, commerce, and national interest may be greatly promoted: (...)", (3) whereas Nigel Leask argues that "The eighteenth-century popularity of books of voyages and travels reflected the rise of European commercial and colonial expansion." (*Apud* Youngs 40)

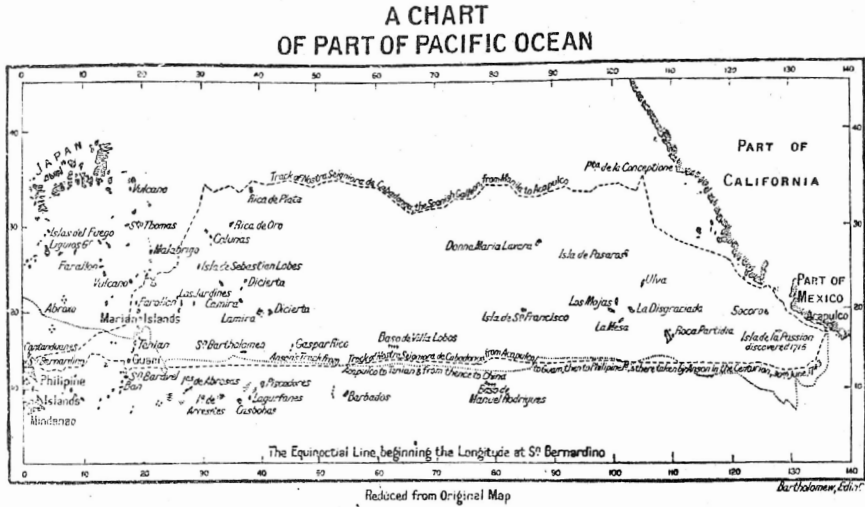
For the time being, let us just look at two maps, both of them included in the chosen edition (n.p.), and note that the first one, depicting the island of Juan Fernandez (where Alexander Selkirk was marooned, inspiring Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*), invites further studies on how geography and literature, fact and fiction, charts and words, can coexist, inspire, and feed upon each other.⁹ As to the second map, it displays the sea route followed by the Spanish galleon "Nostra Señiora de Cobadonga" [sic], as well as her tracking by Anson's fleet (Figs.3 and 4):



L.A.—2

Fig. 3

9. "Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex (...) because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings." (Said 6)



The Chart shows Anson's track in the *Centurion* from Acapulco to Tenian, and thence to China.

Fig. 4

Considering the expertise of Prof. Rogério Puga, our colleague at NOVA FCSH and fellow researcher at CETAPS, I will skip Macau and only say a few brief words on Madeira and Brazil. As far as the former is concerned, the author offers some comments on the topography of the island, its warm climate and wines, Funchal (“Fonchiale”) and its harbour:

This island of Madera [*sic*] (...) is famous through all our American settlements for its excellent wines, which seem to be designed by Providence for the refreshment of the inhabitants of the torrid zone. It is situated in a fine climate, in the latitude of 32° 27' north; and in the longitude from London (...) of 18.1/2° to 19.1/2° west, though laid down in the charts in 17°. It is composed of one continuous hill, of a considerable height, extending itself from east to west: the declivity of which, on the south side, is cultivated and interspersed with vineyards: and in the midst of this slope the merchants have fixed their country seats, which help to form a very agreeable prospect. There is but one considerable town in the whole island; it is named Fonchiale [*sic*], and is seated on the south part of the island, at the bottom of a large bay. Towards the sea, it is defended by a high wall, with a battery of cannon,

besides a castle in (...) a rock standing in the water at a small distance from the shore. Fonchiale [*sic*] is the only place of trade, and a violent surf continually beats upon it; so that **the commodore did not care to venture the ships' long-boats to fetch the water off, (...) and therefore ordered the captains of the squadron to employ Portuguese boats on that service.**

We continued about a week at this island, watering our ships, and providing the squadron with wine and other refreshments. (...) The water for the squadron being the same day completed [*sic*], and each ship supplied with as much wine and other refreshments as they could take in, we weighed anchor in the afternoon, and took our leave of the island of Madera [*sic*]. (Book I, chapter II, 24-25; our bold)

If the right of the commodore to give orders to his captains can hardly be questioned, and notwithstanding also the sensible cautionary nature of this instruction, the 'subalternization' of the Portuguese boats, as if Madeira was a British colony, dominion, or protectorate, could be read in the light of the ideological practices scrutinized by Edward Said, albeit for the 19th and 20th centuries (not the 18th), in his seminal *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

Regarding Brazil – the jewel of our crown in the Joanine period – three things should be highlighted: firstly, the recall of the historical background leading to the Papal endorsement of the treaty of Tordesillas (1494), done by the Anglican chaplain with a sense of humour and a touch of satire;¹⁰ secondly, the allocation of the dis-

10. "(...) these two nations of Spain and Portugal, who were thus prosecuting the same views, though in different quarters of the world, grew extremely jealous of each other, and became apprehensive of mutual encroachments. And therefore, to quiet their jealousies, and to enable them with more tranquillity to pursue the propagation of the Catholic faith in these distant countries (they having both of them given distinguished marks of their zeal for their mother church, by their butchery of innocent pagans), Pope Alexander VI granted to the Spanish crown the property and dominion of all places, either already discovered, or that should be discovered, an hundred leagues to the westward of the islands of Azores, leaving all the unknown countries to the eastward of this limit to the industry and disquisition of the Portuguese; and this boundary being afterwards removed two hundred and fifty leagues more to the westward, by the agreement of both nations, it was imagined that this regulation would have suppressed all the seeds of future contests. (...) But it seems that the infallibility of the Holy Father had, on this occasion, deserted him, and for want of being more conversant in geography, he had not foreseen that the Spaniards, by pursuing their discoveries to the west, and the Portuguese to the east, might at last meet with each other, and be again embroiled, as it actually happened within a few years afterwards." (Book II, chapter X, 216-218)

covery to Vespuccio, rather than Cabral;¹¹ and thirdly, the extensive references to the gold and diamonds pouring into Portugal during D. João V's reign (1706-1750):

(...) this country, which for many years was only considered for the produce of its plantations, has been lately discovered to abound with the two minerals which mankind hold in the greatest esteem, and which they exert their utmost art and industry in acquiring. I mean gold and diamonds. (...) It is now little more than forty years since any quantities of gold worth notice have been imported to Europe from Brazil, but since that time the annual imports (...) have been continually augmented by the discovery of places in other provinces, where it is to be met with as plentifully as at first about Rio Janeiro [*sic*] (...).

I have already mentioned that besides gold this country does likewise produce diamonds. The discovery of these valuable stones is much more recent (...), it being (...) scarce 20 years since the first were brought to Europe. (Book I, chapter V, 53-54)

Whether gold or diamonds, this is a subject I will not be looking into, as it was studied by Sandro Sideri,¹² H. E. S. Fisher¹³ and David Francis,¹⁴ to name but a few. Still, a comparative and critical history of the main European empires since their earliest origins in the modern period to the late 20th century remains to be written.

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11. "This country was first discovered by Americus Vesputio (...) who had the good fortune to be honoured with giving his name to the immense continent, some time before found out by Columbus. Vesputio being in the service of the Portuguese, it was settled and planted by that nation, and, with the other dominions of Portugal, devolved to the crown of Spain when that kingdom became subject to it." (Book I, chapter V, 52)
 12. Sandro Sideri, *Comércio e Poder. Colonialismo Informal nas Relações Anglo-Portuguesas* (Lisboa: Edições Cosmos, "Coordenadas", 1978)/ *Trade and Power – Informal Colonialism in Anglo-Portuguese Relations* (Rotterdam: Rotterdam University Press, 1970).
 13. H. E. S. Fisher, *De Methuen a Pombal. O Comércio Anglo-Português de 1700 a 1770* (Lisboa: Gradiva-Publicações, Lda., "Construir o Passado", n.º 6, 1984)/ *The Portuguese Trade. A Study of Anglo-Portuguese Commerce 1700-1770* (n.p., n.ed., 1971).
 14. David Francis, *Portugal 1715-1808. Joanine, Pombaline and Rococo Portugal as Seen by British Diplomats and Traders* (London: Tamesis Books Ltd., Série A, "Monografias", CIX, 1985).

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