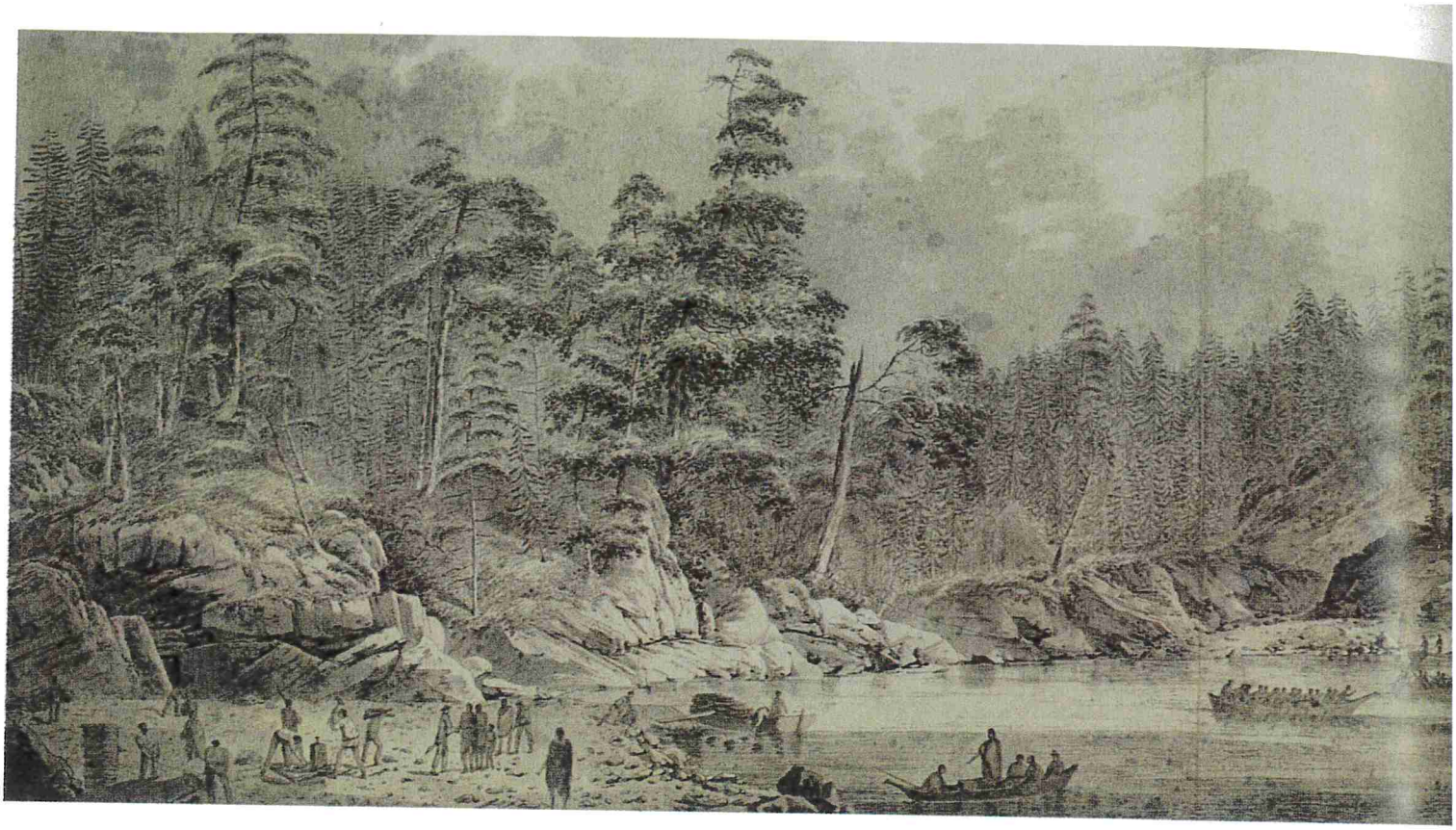
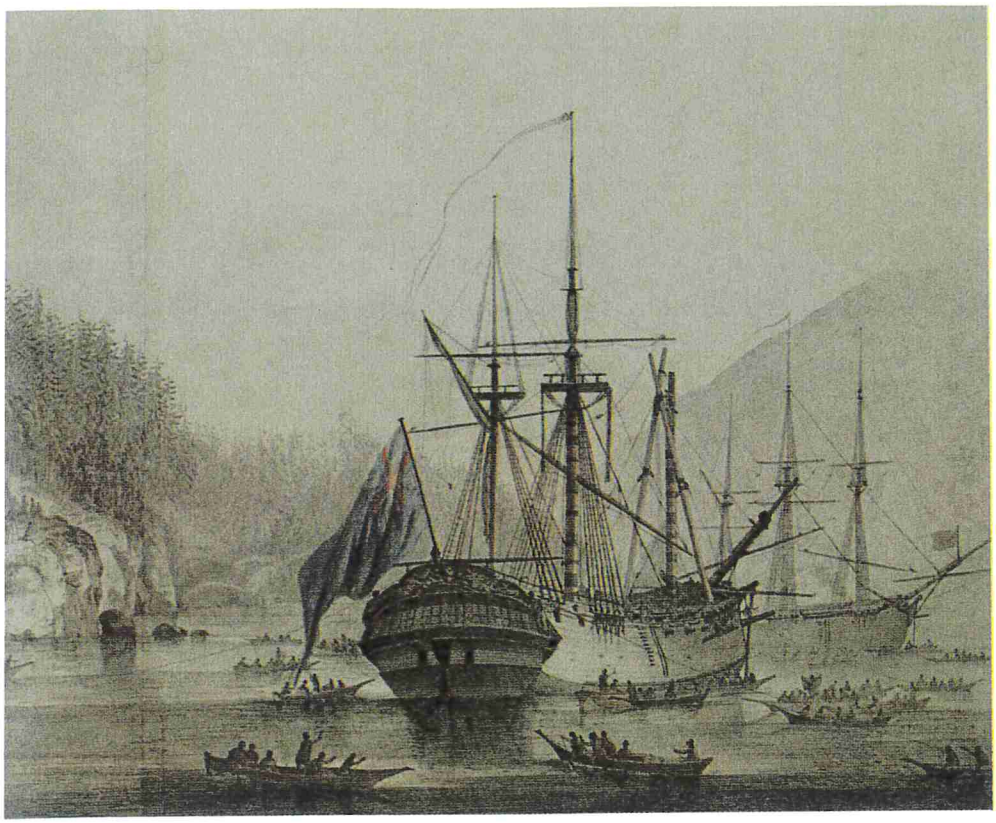


INTRODUCTION

El Mar del Sur

By the early sixteenth century the successors of Columbus were becoming aware that beyond the newly discovered Americas stretched an unknown ocean, possibly of great size. Its waters were first sighted by Europeans in 1513 when the Spanish conquistador Vasco Núñez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama from the Caribbean to the shores of el Mar del Sur, or the South Sea (so called to distinguish it from the Spaniards' Mar del Norte, or Atlantic). In a moment of high drama, Balboa, in full armour, strode in knee-deep to claim it for Spain, but the newcomers took many years to realise the vast extent of its waters and lands. The single most important advance in their knowledge came only a few years after Balboa's sighting.

In 1519 Ferdinand Magellan left Spain with five ships to search for a route from the South Atlantic into the new ocean and thence westward to the Moluccas (the Spice Islands), which were at this time being reached by Portuguese traders from the Indian Ocean. If the Spaniards were to find such a route it would demolish the hypothesis of Ptolemy, the Alexandrian scholar who in the second century AD



Resolution and *Discovery* refitting in Ship Cove, Nootka Sound (detail); pen, ink and watercolour by John Webber, 1778.

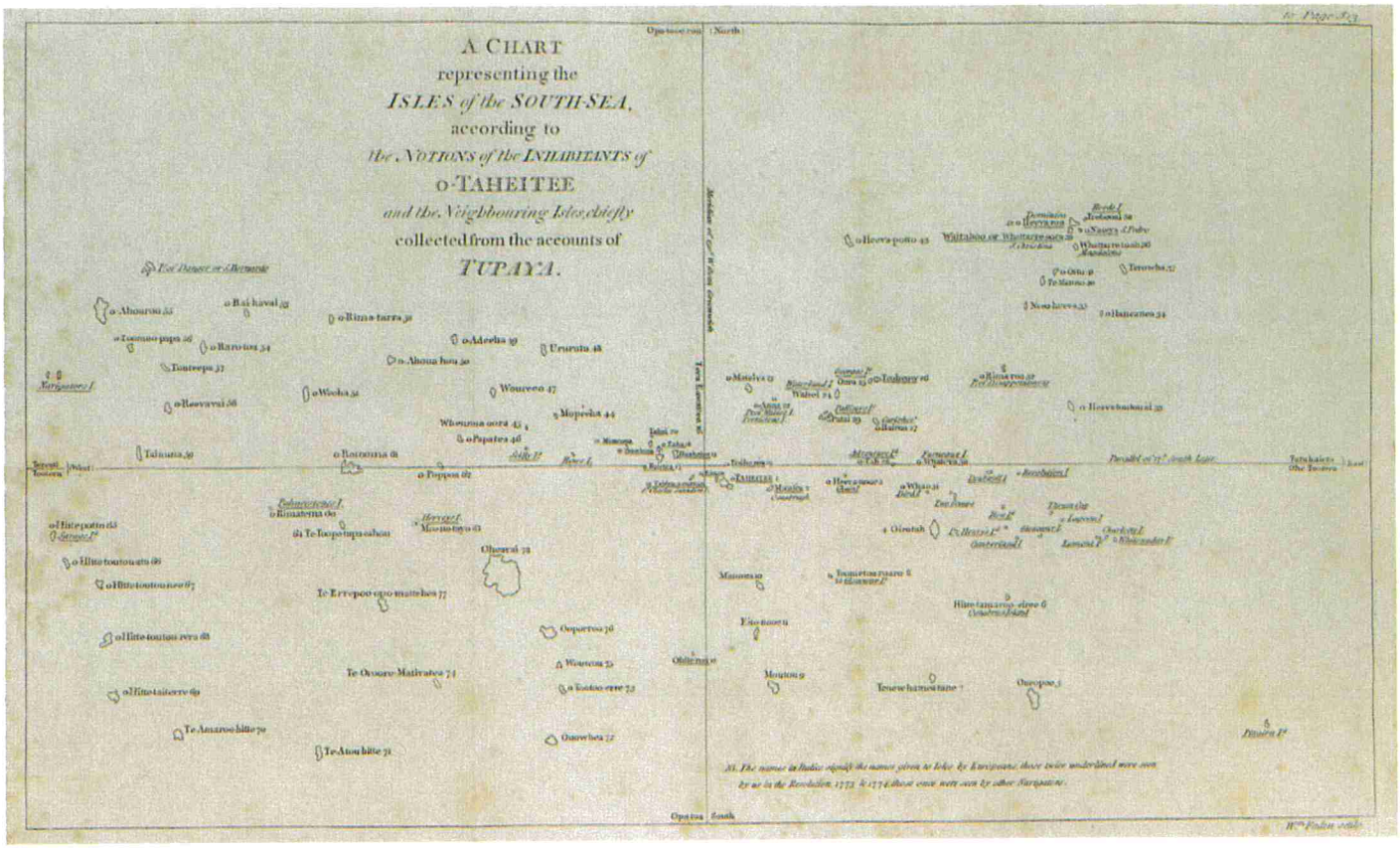
On their arrival off the west coast of North America during Cook's last voyage, his ships were in a poor condition and badly needed a refit. Webber's informative panoramic drawing shows *Discovery*'s foremast being replaced. The expedition's astronomical observatory tents have been set up on a rocky point at the centre, and energetic contact and trade with local people are evident in the number of canoes present.

had visualised the seas of the southern hemisphere as enclosed by a huge southern continent that was joined to both Africa and Asia. The Portuguese navigators who rounded the Cape of Good Hope had shown that there was open water between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and Magellan in turn found a route near the tip of South America in the form of the tortuous 350-mile strait that was soon to bear his name. Battling against squalls, desertions and shipwreck, he took 37 days to get through it and reach the ocean which he (or his chronicler, Pigafetta) named the Pacific. As later storm-tossed mariners were to point out, it was not always the most appropriate of names. Picking up the South-East Trades, Magellan's two remaining vessels followed a diagonal route north-west across the ocean. For 15 weeks they sailed on, sighting only two small, uninhabited islands. Men died of scurvy and starvation as the crews were reduced to eating the leather sheathing off the rigging until, in March 1521, the ships reached the island of Guam in the North Pacific, and from there sailed to the Philippines and the Moluccas. Magellan died in the Philippines and only his ship, *Vittoria*, now commanded by Juan Sebastián de Elcano, returned to Spain in 1522 to complete the first circumnavigation of the globe. 'No other single voyage has ever added so much to the dimension of the world', Oskar Spate has written, and dimension is the key word. For the tracks of his ships had shown the daunting and apparently empty immensity of the Pacific, where a voyage of almost four months' continuous sailing had encountered no more than two specks of land.

An ocean traversed only across unprecedentedly unimpeded distances had been revealed; but to talk of its being 'unknown', then 'discovered' and 'explored' by Europeans – which this book necessarily does – hides the fact that long before Magellan it had already experienced a complex process of exploration, migration and settlement. The chart drawn for James Cook in 1769 by Tupaia, a priest, or *arii*, from the Society Islands, gives some indication of the range of geographical information held, almost solely in memory, by Pacific peoples before Europeans arrived. Centred on Tahiti, it marked 74 islands, scattered over an area of ocean 3,000 miles across and 1,000 miles from north to south. The type of craft used in Pacific voyaging ranged from the small single-hulled outriggers of Micronesia to giant double-hulled ones in Polynesia, some of which were longer than European discovery vessels and could make voyages of several thousand miles. Navigation was by observation of stars, currents, wave and wind patterns, and by the shape and loom of the land, rather than by instrument. Long-distance voyages were made that led to the occupation by Polynesians of lands as far distant from one another as the Hawaiian Islands and New Zealand. Europeans were slow to appreciate the navigational skills of the Pacific's inhabitants, and today there is still uncertainty about how many great voyages of the pre-European period were planned rather than fortuitously accidental, or a mix of the two.

Magellan's successors made slow progress in filling in the blanks on the map. Spanish attempts to follow his track and reach the Spice Islands from the east failed to find a commercial route, and in 1529 such ventures lost their point when the Treaty of Zaragoza assigned the Moluccas to Portugal, whose vessels came by way of the Cape of Good Hope. Shut out from the Spice Islands, the Spaniards turned northward to the Philippines, which they conquered in the mid-1560s. On the eastward return of the Spanish invasion fleet to Mexico, two vessels were pushed by wind and current far to the north. The curving track they followed soon became the regular route of the galleons sailing from the Philippines to Mexico with Chinese silks and porcelain, which were then taken overland to Vera Cruz before being shipped to Europe. At Acapulco the galleons loaded Peruvian silver for their return voyage, which followed a route well to the south of the eastbound track. West or east, it was the longest unbroken trading voyage in the world, and the galleons sailing from the Philippines took five to six months to make the run.

As Spanish settlement grew in Peru, efforts began to explore the South Pacific, spurred on by the long-standing belief in the existence of a southern continent, Terra Australis Incognita, a gigantic leftover from Ptolemaic concepts of the world. By the second half of the sixteenth century many world maps showed such a continent, including those constructed by the most celebrated geographers of the age, Mercator and Ortelius. In their depictions the continent covered most of the southern hemisphere, stretching towards the Equator as far as New Guinea, which



TUPAIA'S CHART.

The Tahitian priest/navigator Tupaia, who joined the *Endeavour* in Tahiti, knew of over 70 Pacific islands and sketched their positions from the ship's deck. His chart was reproduced on paper and later copied by J.R. and Georg Forster, the father-and-son team of naturalists who sailed on Cook's second voyage. The Forsters' chart attempts to accommodate the bearings, distances and identities of Tupaia's islands within the map of the Pacific being developed by Cook. It was later published in the Forsters' narrative of the voyage.

was often shown as a promontory. If an unknown continent was not incentive enough, there were also fabulous islands: those rumoured to have been found by the Incas sailing west from the coast of South America; Ophir, where King Solomon's ships were reported to have found gold; and Marco Polo's Locach. In 1567 ships commanded by Álvaro de Mendaña left Peru, and after sailing westward for two months reached islands which Mendaña named Yslas de Salomón. Despite the triumphant naming, no gold, silver or spices were found, and the expedition's estimate of the location of the islands was so erroneous that they were to be 'lost' for another two centuries.

Mendaña's voyage revealed the problems that faced navigators trying to establish their position in the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. European voyagers in the sixteenth century had no serious problems in finding latitude. Celestial observations of the Sun or stars could be made by astrolabe, simple quadrant or backstaff. Longitude was a very different matter, however, and no satisfactory solution was found until the


TYPVS ORBIS
AMERICA SIVE INDIA NOVA. Ao 1492. a Christophoro Colombo nomine regis Castellæ primum detecta.
CIRCVLVS ARCTICVS
ANIAN regnum
QVIVIRA regnu
Tolm
Chilaga
Noua Francia
Tagil
Calicuas
Marata
Florida
TROPICVS CANCRI
MAR DEL NORT
Archipelago di
Lazaro
CIRCVLVS AEQVINOCTIALIS
Caribana
Peru
Amazones
Brasil
MAR DEL ZVR
TROPICVS CAPRICORNI
EL MAR PACIFICO
Hanc continentem Australem, nonnulli Magellanicam regionem ab eius inventore nuncupant.
Chile
Chica
Rio de la Plata
Terra del Fuego
CIRCVLVS ANTARCTICVS
TERRA AVSTRALI
MERIDIES
QVID EI POTEST VIDERI MAGNVM IN REBVS
OMNIS, TOTIVSQVE MVNDI NOTA S

TYPUS ORBIS TERRARUM; world map by Abraham Ortelius, 1573.

Ortelius's world map is typical of many of the period in that it shows an immense southern continent, though the legend, Terra Australis, is accompanied by the cautionary words *Nondom Cognita* ('not yet known'). The continent occupies most of the southern temperate zone, crosses the Tropic of Capricorn near New Guinea and the East Indies, and includes Tierra del Fuego off the tip of South America.

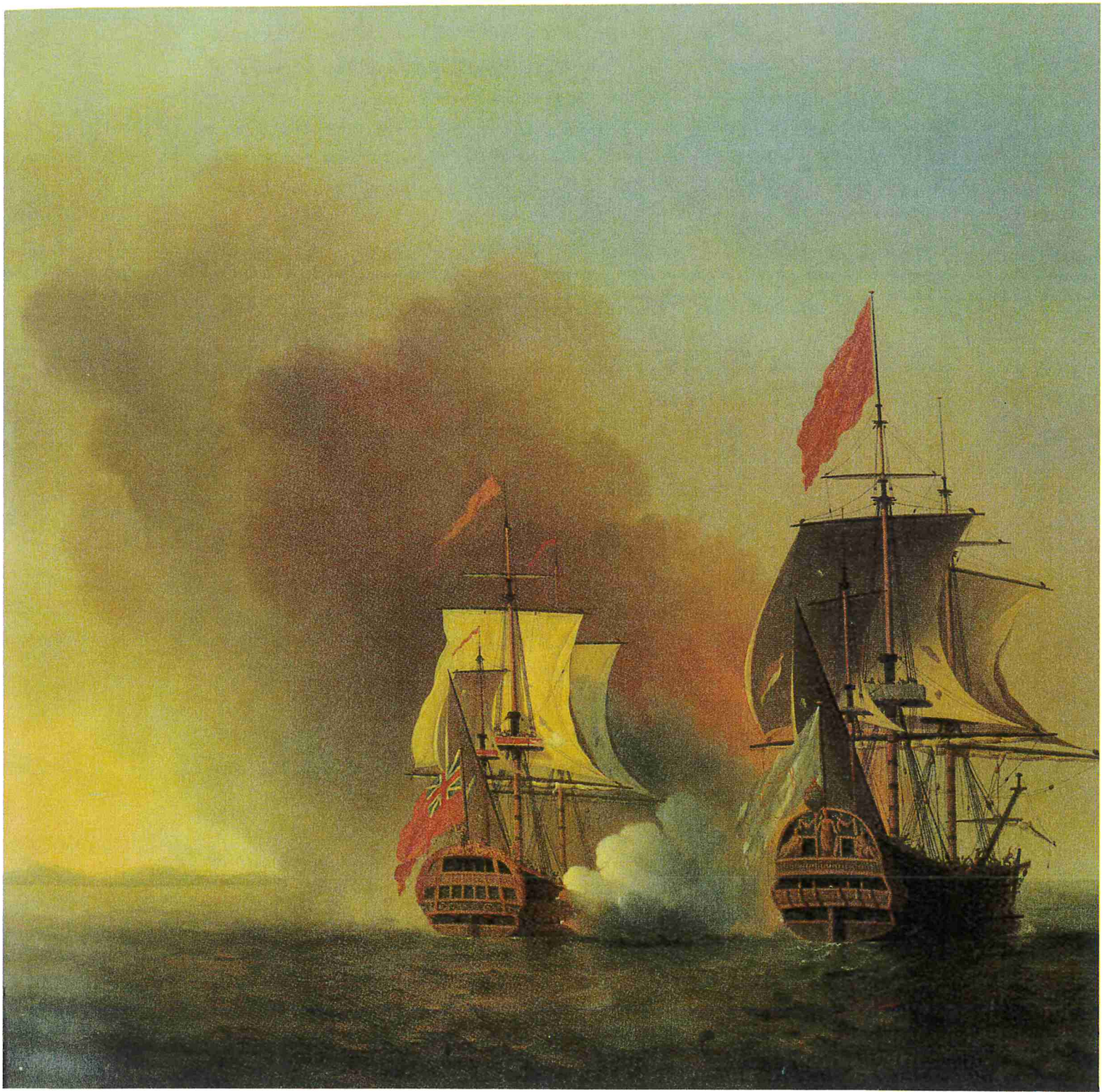
development of the chronometer in the eighteenth century. Before then, navigators relied on keeping check of their longitude by dead reckoning. This involved a series of different estimates – compass course and magnetic variation, speed through the water, leeway and current. Many were not precise, leading to easy but significant errors that could accumulate on long Pacific crossings. Mendaña's sailing master underestimated the westward drift of the Pacific Ocean Current, and placed the Solomon Islands more than 2,000 nautical miles east of their true position.

A further handicap to comprehensive exploration was the system of prevailing winds. Ships entering the Pacific from the South Atlantic had to battle against gale-force westerlies – the notorious 'roaring forties' of sailors' narratives. Once in, they found themselves in the South-East Trades, carrying them on a diagonal line towards the Equator, which skirted the main island groups, while in the North Pacific they faced the even more persistent North-East Trades. Though the wind systems were helpful once known, they tempted sailing ships into relatively narrow sailing corridors, and venturing away from these could involve months of beating against head winds. It was not just a matter of extra time and heavy financial loss; the longer the voyage, the greater the chances of scurvy afflicting the crew. The only known cure for this terrible sea scourge was fresh food and rest on land, but in the Pacific ships were on unbroken passage for months while their crews, living on a diet of salt meat, stale biscuits and contaminated water, sickened and died.

Notwithstanding all the difficulties, by the second half of the sixteenth century the outlines of Spain's new Pacific empire were clearly visible. Its eastern rim along the American coastline had been explored from the Strait of Magellan to the Californian coast. From Peru silver was shipped to Panama on the first stage of its journey to Spain, while further north, New Spain (Mexico) tapped the resources of China by way of the Philippines. Through diplomacy, exploration and conquest, Spain claimed an ocean whose lands and waters covered one third of the surface of the globe. It was at this time that its position was challenged by the unexpected intrusion of another European power – the English. As relations with Spain worsened in Europe, so English mariners supported by the court and by merchants sailed for the South Sea in search of plunder. The first of these voyages was also the most famous: Francis Drake's circumnavigation in the *Golden Hind* (1577–80), which returned to England with a cargo of treasure that captured the public imagination and Queen Elizabeth's favour. None of its immediate successors enjoyed the same success, but it set the pattern for a tradition of further predatory raids. Drake's voyage and his landing somewhere on the coast of northern California or Oregon also left a tantalising English claim to the vast region of America north of New Spain, marked as New Albion on the maps. Almost 200 years later James Cook would be the next English navigator to sight that coast, and it was Drake's name of New Albion that he entered in his journal.

The engagement between George Anson's *Centurion* and the Spanish *Nuestra Señora de Covadonga* off Cape Espiritu Santo in the Philippines, 20 June 1743 (detail); oil painting by Samuel Scott.

The action was a one-sided affair between a specialist fighting ship and a poorly armed and smaller galleon, but it redeemed a venture that until then had been marked only by its losses of men and ships. The colossal treasure taken from the *Covadonga* seemed to epitomise the wealth of the South Sea and helped to pave the way for a renewal of British interest in it.



The English raids into the Pacific distracted Spanish energies from further significant exploration until 1595, when Mendaña once again sailed for the Solomon Islands, where he hoped to establish a new Spanish colony. He failed to find the islands of his earlier visit, although the ships touched at the Marquesas, where the slaughter of perhaps as many as 200 of the islanders made an ominous beginning to the relationship between Europeans and Polynesians. Mendaña died on the expedition but his chief pilot, Pedro de Quirós, returned to the South Pacific ten years later in an attempt to find and settle the great southern continent. In May 1606 he sighted and named Espiritu Santo, the main island in the group later known as the New Hebrides (today's Vanuatu), and decided that it was part of the continent. The attempt by Quirós to found a settlement there, New Jerusalem, ended in violence and abandonment of the venture. It was left to his second-in-command, Luis Váez de Torres, to make the more significant discovery that there was a passage between New Guinea and the coast stretching away to the south. Memory of this soon faded, until in 1770 Cook proved the existence of the Torres Strait by sailing through it. The discovery of Espiritu Santo was inflated by Quirós to epic and mystical proportions. It was, he claimed, 'the fifth part of the Terrestrial Globe', an earthly paradise, rich in spices, silver and gold, with numerous inhabitants, whom it would be the mission of the Roman Catholic Church to convert to Christianity. Despite all his hopes, Quirós never returned to the South Pacific, and it was appropriate that a different and more realistic view of the region should be taken by the Dutch, enemies to Spain both in Europe and overseas.

The Dutch in the East

As the Dutch East India Company began to establish itself in the Spice Islands at the expense of the Portuguese, it sent out expeditions to investigate the unknown seas and lands to the south. In 1605, a year before Quirós reached Espiritu Santo, the Dutch made their first landfall on the Australian coast, in the Gulf of Carpentaria. This was the first of a series of probings along the continent's northern and western coasts in the first half of the century, which culminated in the ambitious explorations of Abel Tasman. In 1642–43 he sailed south of New Holland (the original Dutch name for Australia), touched on the coast of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and then sailed east to a land he named New Zealand before heading north to Tonga. In 1644 he surveyed much of Australia's northern shoreline but failed to find the Torres Strait. By circumnavigating the Australian land mass, albeit at a distance, Tasman had shown it could not be part of a greater unknown southern continent, which was pushed away south-east at least as far as the stretch of New Zealand coastline he had sighted. Maps of the region made that clear, but

they could not convey the unenthusiastic Dutch reaction to New Holland, whose proud name flattered to deceive. Landing only briefly, and for the most part along the north and west coasts, the Dutch described a land that was arid and barren, devoid of exploitable resources, and inhabited by a few nomads who seemed as backward as any people in the world.

Tasman's brief encounter with the Maori of South Island, which left four of his men dead, strengthened the generally unfavourable view of the region. Amid the disappointments there were also some notable Dutch achievements, for it was in this period that the expedition of Jacob Le Maire and Willem Schouten (1615–16) found an alternative route into the Pacific from the east. Their ships sailed past the Atlantic entrance to the Strait of Magellan, round Cape Horn and into the South Sea; and in time the passage round the Horn, rather than through the narrow windings of the Strait of Magellan, became the normal route. A postscript to the seventeenth-century Dutch voyages was written in 1722, when ships under Jacob Roggeveen sailed far enough south as they rounded the Horn to encounter icebergs, touched at Samoa and the fringes of the Society Islands, and brought home the first reports of Easter Island and its mysterious statues.

Buccaneers and Wandering Islands

Juxtaposed with the discoveries, mostly disheartening in terms of potential utility, was a continuing hope that somewhere in the unexplored stretches of the southern ocean lay rich and fertile countries. As the Americas and the Far East became known and exploited by Europeans, speculative attention focused on the Pacific. There the Quirós fantasy still shed its glow, and utopian visionaries set extraordinary lands and societies in the region that they vaguely identified as Terra Australis.

Accounts of voyages, real and imaginary, became bestsellers, especially in England, whose seamen were once more active in the South Sea as a multinational wave of buccaneering raids swept along the Pacific coasts of Spanish America in the later seventeenth century. Buccaneers from Henry Morgan onwards held a place in popular esteem that reflected admiration both for their perceived role as fighters against Spain and popery, and for the 'rags to riches' aspect of their depredations. An essential element in this heroising process came from their own writings, for some buccaneers went to sea with pen as well as sword in hand. Among them was William Dampier, who recounted his several South Sea voyages in books that became bestsellers. Dampier's visit to the western shores of Australia in 1688 produced a dismissal of the Aboriginal inhabitants as 'the miserablest People in the World', and it was this account that Cook turned to in 1770 when he viewed the east coast of Australia and its people for the first time.

Although on one of his voyages Dampier discovered and named the island (in fact three islands) of New Britain just east of New Guinea, his books and those of other buccaneers and privateers such as Bartholomew Sharp, Woodes Rogers and George Shelvocke provided literary entertainment more than they increased geographical knowledge. Certainly they influenced two of the best-known writers of early eighteenth-century England, Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift. The island adventures of Defoe's Robinson Crusoe were inspired by the marooning of the privateer Alexander Selkirk on Juan Fernández, while in *Gulliver's Travels* the first identifiable person named was 'My cousin Dampier', and many of its hero's experiences were set in Dampier's South Sea.

A map of the Pacific in the early eighteenth century makes it clear that the uncertainties still outnumbered the certainties. Although from Magellan onwards Europeans of several nations had ventured into and sometimes across the great ocean, their explorations were mostly inconclusive if not confusing. The immensity of the ocean, problems in establishing longitude, the twin threats of scurvy and mutiny on long voyages, and the constraints of wind and current presented formidable obstacles to methodical exploration. In the North Pacific stretched the one regular European trade route across the ocean – the galleon run between the Philippines and Mexico – but little was known outside the galleons' tracks. Japan's coasts had been charted by the Dutch, but the ocean to the north and east remained unexplored, and the Pacific coast of America was known only as far north as California. Russian expeditions sailing east from Kamchatka would be the first to explore the northern waters between Asia and America, but reliable information about their discoveries was slow to reach Europe. In the South Pacific there had been sightings of some of the island groups near the diagonal sailing course between the tip of South America and the East Indies, but their location seemed to shift from voyage to voyage. 'There are in the South-Sea many Islands, which may be called Wandering-Islands,' the English geographer John Green complained. The coasts of the western half of New Holland and of New Guinea and New Britain, together with short stretches of the shoreline of Van Diemen's Land and New Zealand, had been roughly charted, but their relationship with one another and with the hoped-for southern continent was unknown.

Cultural Cross-purposes

If the geography of the Pacific was blurred, so was knowledge of its inhabitants, for successive surges of migration across the ocean had produced a complex racial and cultural pattern. European explorers were entering a region where societies were organised in overlapping layers: there had been a mingling of peoples after

migration, and a seeping of cultural influences from one island group to another. Once in the Pacific, Europeans found a bewildering and unpredictable variety of appearance and behaviour among the inhabitants. Their one undeviating characteristic, by European norms, was being incurably thievish, owing to differing concepts of property: as societies without metal, that was a principal lure, iron (being commonest) in particular. The constant conflicts arising from it, small and large, overshadowed attempts at understanding it and led to countless deaths. The observations of the discoverers were usually hasty and superficial, often the result of a visit of only a few days, even just a few hours. To Europeans, and only partly for language reasons, the beliefs and taboos on which Pacific island societies were based defied easy understanding but, being 'pagan' and 'uncivilised', they were axiomatically 'inferior'. To the islanders the strangers seemed apparitions, *atua*, or men from the sky, appearing and disappearing without warning. Encounters ranged from friendly to violent, but a concluding blast of gunfire on one side and a shower of stones and spears on the other was also often the outcome of confused mutual misunderstanding.

The Eighteenth-century Revival

The intrusion by buccaneers, privateers and illicit traders into waters Spain regarded as its own was short-lived. The collapse in England and France in 1720 of a host of financial 'bubble' projects had a depressing effect on ventures to distant regions, and the Pacific became associated with the early South Sea Company, whose failure had ruined investors great and small. Revival of interest came with heightening international tensions in the middle decades of the century, and in particular after Commodore Anson's voyage across the Pacific and around the world (1740–44). This melodramatic episode of wartime achievement and disaster brought back memories of Drake and the feats of English arms against the Spain of Philip II. Anson's capture of the Acapulco treasure galleon off the Philippines brought back a colossal fortune to wartime Britain but at an appalling cost in lives. Out of over 1,900 men who left England with him almost 1,400 died – just four from enemy action, a few from accidents, and the rest from scurvy or other diseases. It was a grim reminder, if any were needed, of the perils of long oceanic voyages, and it prompted intensive research by Dr James Lind and other medical men into the causes of scurvy. The official narrative of the voyage became a bestseller, but it was more than a tale of adventure on the high seas. At one level it was intended to encourage 'navigation, commerce and the national interest'. At another it made an appeal to the imagination, for the life-saving months spent by Anson's scurvy-ridden crews at Juan Fernández and Tinian brought reminders of Crusoe's island, Rousseau's Nouvelle Héloïse and other tropical-island fantasies.

GEORGE ANSON, 1ST BARON ANSON, ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET, 1697–1762; oil painting by Thomas Hudson (?), before 1748.

Anson's voyage of 1740–44 revived British interest in the Pacific Ocean, but its terrible cost in human lives demonstrated yet again the difficulties of long-distance voyaging. This portrait shows him as a captain in the 1740s.

The publicity surrounding Anson's voyage led to new international speculation about the potential of the Pacific region. In France in 1756, Charles de Brosses published the first collection of voyages devoted exclusively to it, *Histoire des Navigations aux Terre Australes*, which was soon plagiarised by John Callander in an English edition. The narratives in these volumes confirmed that the earlier voyages had caused confusion as much as they had brought about enlightenment. Islands had been sighted and resighted, identified and then lost again; clouds on the horizon had been mistaken for continental ranges; straits had become bays, and bays straits. The map of the Pacific was marked by squiggles of coastline that hinted at lands of continental dimensions, and it was dotted with island groups whose names and locations changed with the whims of cartographical fashion. But for de Brosses, further exploration, especially the discovery of a southern continent, was a nobler objective of French ambitions than the endless European wars. Likewise, in Britain the geographer Alexander Dalrymple suggested that the southern continent might be 5,000 miles across and populated by 50 million inhabitants. The 'scraps' from

its economy, he declared, 'would be sufficient to maintain the power, dominion and sovereignty of Britain, by employing all its manufactures and ships'.

After the ending of the Seven Years War in 1763 both Britain and France experienced a 'Pacific craze' in which a new type of naval hero emerged – namely, the explorer whose ships left for the unknown, to return years later laden with specimens from the South Seas, and with crews eager to publish accounts, maps and views of the exotic places they had visited. At home enthusiasts assumed that the unexplored lands of the Pacific held sufficient resources to tilt the commercial balance of power in Europe; for Britain, these would, they believed, confirm the overseas superiority brought by the wartime conquests of 1756–63, and for France, they would redress the humiliations that had led to an imposed peace. The first voyage in the new era of state-sponsored Pacific exploration was Commodore John Byron's in 1764. It was an unconvincing start, for Byron (the poet's grandfather) followed the normal north-westerly slanting sailing route from Cape Horn and made few discoveries of note. Perhaps sensibly, he ignored the part of his instructions that ordered him, after he had made discoveries in the South Pacific, to sail to its distant northern reaches in search of an entrance to the fabled North-West Passage. That formidable task would have to wait for Cook, on his final voyage. In 1766 the Admiralty sent out two more ships, commanded by Captain Samuel Wallis and Lieutenant Philip Carteret, with orders to sail into high southerly latitudes in search of the fabled southern continent. A few months later ships of the French navy also left for the Pacific under the command of one of the outstanding Frenchmen of the day, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville.

After becoming separated from Wallis's ship, the enterprising Carteret crossed the Pacific further south than any of his predecessors and in doing so removed part of the supposed southern continent from the maps. Wallis took a more cautious route, but his voyage was marked by a chance discovery whose emotional impact was out of all proportion to its geographical significance. In June 1767 he sighted Tahiti, an island of idyllic beauty, which for generations was to conjure up voluptuous images of the South Seas. To the crew of a discovery vessel after months on passage, the islands of Polynesia were an earthly paradise. To the breaking surf, the palm-fringed beaches and the towering volcanic peaks were added sensuous overtones – of women and girls, nubile, garlanded and welcoming. The opportunities, in the words of one of Wallis's officers, 'made all our men madly fond of the shore, even the sick who had been on the doctor's list for some weeks'. When Bougainville reached Tahiti the following year, reactions were even more effusive and extravagant. He called the island New Cythera after Aphrodite's fabled realm, while his naturalist, Commerson, preferred an even more resonant name – Utopia. From Tahiti, Bougainville sailed west through the Samoan group and on to the Espiritu Santo of Pedro de Quirós, which he found to be insular, not continental as

the Spanish navigator had imagined. The expedition continued westward in search of the unknown east coast of New Holland before the outliers of the Great Barrier Reef forced it away north.

For all the activity that these voyages represented, the central issues of Pacific geography were no nearer to a solution. The fabled continent of Terra Australis had simply receded a little further south; New Holland was still the western outline of a land of unknown extent; islands discovered and undiscovered remained to be properly identified and located. In the North Pacific, Russian expeditions had found a few pinpricks of land that might or might not be part of the American continent, but a navigable North-West Passage remained as elusive as ever. Yet within a decade the outlines of both the North and the South Pacific took shape on the maps in much the same form as they stand today. The man responsible for this leap in knowledge was James Cook. As following chapters will outline, his three expeditions, begun in 1768 and ending in 1780 – a year after his own death on Hawaii – revealed the lands and peoples of the Pacific to Europe in a way none of those who had preceded him there had done.