
Document 1594C

The round-trip voyage of Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeño in 1594-95

Sources: As stated by Wagner (Spanish Voyages, Chapter IX), most of the documents relating to this expedition are in AGI 58-3-11 and 58-3-12, with Cermeño's narrative being in the latter, another copy being in 58-3-16. The small excerpt translated below was made from a copy in MN ms. 1509, folios 49-58, from the "Colección Guillén, California, 1645" and is comparable to the abstract published by Wagner (See Wagner, op. cit., p. 156).

Introductory note.

On 17 January 1594, the King wrote a letter to the new Viceroy of New Spain, Don Luis de Velasco, ordering him to undertake a better exploration of the California coast, the approach to be made along the galleon route from the Philippines. On 6 April, 1594, Velasco acknowledged receipt of the order and said that he had bought the **San Pedro**, in case no better ship could be found at Manila, and he had appointed Cermeño, who was going out as pilot of the flagship [**Santiago**], to make the eastward voyage of exploration.¹

The ships left Acapulco on 21 March 1594. Once in Manila, the **San Pedro** was not considered fit to make the return voyage. One year was lost while a suitable replacement was being sought. Finally, the small **San Agustín** was purchased from its private owner, army Captain Pedro Sarmiento, and Cermeño took it under his command. Some 130 tons of freight were placed on board, as well as a dismantled launch to explore the northwest coast.

¹ Ed. note: Would it be possible that this San Pedro was the same small ship mentioned by Ordoñez in connection with his (fictitious) voyage of 1590? Cermeño was a Portuguese.

Abstract of Cermeño's own account of the eastward voyage

“[5 July 1595-24 April 1596]. Account of the voyage made by Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeño from the Philippine Islands to Cedros Island, with the survey of part of the coast of California. Copy of the original in AGI Audiencia of Mexico—*Cartas y expedientes del Virrey vistos en el Consejo, Años de 1595-97.*”

In the name of God, Amen.

The account of what happened during the voyage that I, Captain Sebastian Rodriguez y Cermeño, am going to make regarding the discovery of Cape Mendocino is as follows.

We left the port of Cavite in the Philippine Islands on 5 July [1595], a Tuesday in the morning, and that day we anchored at the foot of the Fraile.¹ The next day, the 6th of the said month, we set sail with a *vendaval* and by 4 in the afternoon the wind rose so much that we were forced to seek shelter in the lee of the Island of Mariveles [i.e. Corregidor]...

...

[He passed the meridian of the Marianas and, in mid-August, he sighted the three **Volcano Islands**, between 23° and 25° N. Then he crossed the North Pacific at latitudes varying between 34 and 42°, finally reaching the coast of California. His major discovery was that of San Francisco Bay.]²

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Made at Mexico, 24 April 1596.

Signed: Sebastian Rod. Cermeño

1 Ed. note: A rock island at the mouth of Manila Bay.

2 Ed. note: Modern historians say that this bay corresponds in fact to Drake's Bay today and that the shipwreck occurred near Point Reyes, north of San Francisco Bay. The survivors escaped in the launch, named San Buenaventura.