

THE *JECH* GALLERY.....

Francisco Xavier Balmis (1753–1819), a pioneer of international vaccination



Photograph of a bronze bust of Balmis donated by the Rotary Club of Mexico City to the Faculty of Medicine in Alicante. Photo by Eduardo Lastres.

Born in Alicante, Spain, a physician and army surgeon Francisco Xavier Balmis, was the author of the first translation into Spanish of Moreau de La Sarthe's book on vaccine. In his edition, Balmis added a foreword to make the book more complete and understandable to the Spanish readers of both hemispheres.

Recognition of his work in this translation and his previous travels in America to collect plants and medical data, made him the best candidate to conduct his own project of spreading the vaccine in all Spanish territories from Spain and through America to the Philippines.

By order of King Carlos IV, an expedition sailed from La Coruña with the aim of sailing round the world and spread Jenner's vaccine overseas.

On board the corvette "María Pita" were Balmis as commander of what was already called "Real Expedición Filantrópica de la Vacuna", Antonio Salvany as second in command, three surgeons, two first aid practitioners, four male nurses, and 22 orphan children.

Besides the usual medical items the expedition carried two thousand copies of Balmis' translation of Moreau de La Sarthe's book, which were to be handed to the medical and political authorities everywhere they were to stop along their journey.

The vaccine was maintained during the journey by sequentially vaccinating arm to arm every 9 or 10 days the 22 children who thus constituted a living transmission chain.

The expedition and the men who took part in it were an example of the spirit of that century of enlightenment, philanthropy, and a faith in science and ability of men to know and change the world.

It took almost four years to complete the voyage round the world, and that task can now be considered the first global campaign in what we now call public health, and a success in spreading world wide Jenner's vaccine that cannot be praised enough.

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