

## State Library secures major haul of rare 18<sup>th</sup> century Spanish sea charts

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The State Library of NSW has just acquired a series of rare, hand-coloured charts which document a significant yet largely forgotten story of late 18<sup>th</sup> century Spanish exploration in the Pacific, it was announced today.

The collection of 24 original Spanish sea charts from the 1770s, acquired from a dealer for \$300,000, contains some of the earliest detailed charts of the Spanish expeditions to Tahiti and Easter Island.

Three of the most highly decorative charts from the collection will go on public display in the State Library's Amaze Gallery from today, Friday 28 November.

According to Maggie Patton, the State Library's maps expert, "The Spanish were eager to retain a foothold in the Pacific region before the English or French and subsequently, in 1774, established a small colony in Tahiti including two Franciscan priests. The colony failed and the settlement was abandoned a year later."

"This exciting haul of Spanish charts fills an important gap in the Library's collection from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century," said Ms Patton

The State Library holds extensive cartographic material on the French and English exploration of the Pacific in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, including beautiful maps and published volumes of the voyages of Cook, Flinders, Baudin, Freycinet, Phillip Parker King and Bligh.

"The Spanish were more secretive with their records because of fear of competition for political and economic influence, which is why these charts are so historically significant for this period."

The collection documents Spanish expeditions to Easter Island led by Felipe González (1770) and two expeditions to Tahiti and various Polynesian islands led by Domingo Boenechea (1772-3 and 1774-5).

The charts come from the personal library of Commodore Joseph de la Somaglia who was in charge of the Spanish Fleet in the South Pacific from 1770 to 1778.

"Interestingly, the charts document the 'last hoorah' for Spanish influence in the Pacific – domestic politics and territorial issues in the Americas diverted their attention away from the region leaving an opportunity for the English and French to establish colonial interests in the Pacific," said Ms Patton.

**Maggie Patton is available for interviews.**

**For more information, interviews and images, please contact:**

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