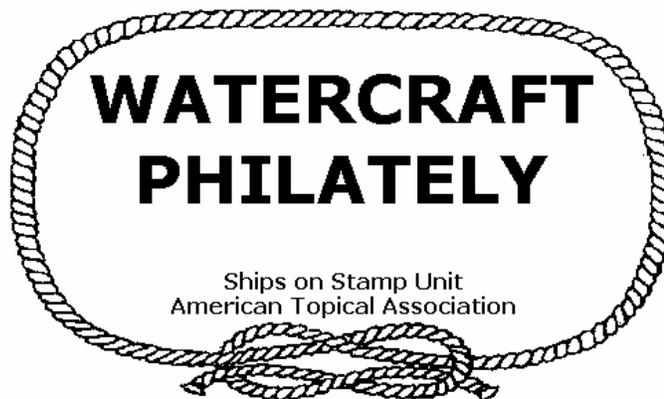


Anyone with information on the ships on this stamp from 2002?.



## The Royal Spanish Expedition to Vaccinate Against Smallpox by: Emilio Bonaplata, Spain

**MARÍA PITA** (sail corvette)  
Spain #3332 (2004) 77e

On Nov. 30, 2004, the Spanish Post Service, 'Correos', issued a nice stamp depicting the sail corvette **MARÍA PITA** and people of La Coruña waving hands to the departing ship. The stamp reproduces a drawing as published in a magazine of the time.

Two hundred and one years before that date, on Nov. 30, 1803, a philanthropic expedition onboard the **MARÍA PITA** departed from the port of La Coruña, led by Francisco X. de Balmis, a doctor who had spent many years as a military surgeon. Balmis had been aboard Spanish Navy ships in many expeditions and battles. As a civilian doctor, he traveled several times to the Spanish American colonies, where he did much research on the use of medicinal plants.

Just a few years prior, in 1796, Edward Jenner, an English doctor, had successfully experimented with an inoculation of what became the first vaccine against smallpox. In 1800, Spanish doctors also made great success with the first vaccinations in that country. By 1802, several colonies requested court actions to fight the smallpox epidemics that were desolating their populations.

An idea began to take shape to send an expedition to inoculate the vaccine and teach doctors in those regions how to fight the illness. It happened that Spain's King Charles IV had a daughter with the illness, and he became a strong supporter of the idea.

In 1803, Balmis translated into Spanish Jenner's book

on his experiments. Balmis, an enthusiastic proponent of the new treatment, was then selected to direct a mission.

A total of 10 doctors and medical assistants were in the ship's roll. First assistant to Dr. Balmis was Dr. Salvany. The plan of the Royal Philanthropic Expedition of the Smallpox Vaccine included visits to the cities, towns and villages of the Canary Islands, Spanish America and the Spanish Pacific islands.

The ship selected was a 200-ton three-masted merchant sailing corvette, the **MARÍA PITA**, which among other options was cheaper to rent and ready to sail. She was not the only ship in the expedition, as other local boats were employed during the navigation along the American and Pacific coasts: the coastguard boat **RAMBLI**, the war/packet brig **EL**



**PALOMO**, the brig **SAN LUIS**, the schooner **NANCY**, the galleon **SAN FERNANDO DE MAGALLANES**, the Portuguese sailing ships **DILIGENCIA** and **BOM JESUS DE ALEM**, as well as some smaller boats and launches. Ashore and inland, horses, mules, river canoes, and porters transported the expeditionaries and materials.

The key to obtaining and conserving the vaccine was to produce and maintain in a human body, especially a child's body, the pustule with the virus alive. That inoculation, initially made with the cow-pox agent, did not cause any harm to the virus bearer. In this manner, Jenner conducted the first experiment, and other doctors followed the same procedure.

*(The Royal Spanish, continued on page 18)*