

JUAN DE FUCA - A Greek Pioneer

The body of water which separates America's Olympic Peninsula in Washington State from Canada's Vancouver Island in the Province of British Columbia is called "The Strait of Juan de Fuca." The name comes from the navigator credited for locating this passage in the year 1592. He was the first European to round the point which is now called Cape Flattery and to sail inland to a considerable depth.

Juan de Fuca, the apocryphal explorer of America's Northwest Coast, was a Greek navigator born in the island of Cephalonia in the Ionian Sea. His real name was Ioannis Phokas and he came from the village of Valeriano located on the Elios valley at the Southwestern tip of Cephalonia.

The extension of the Spanish dominion on the neighboring shores of Italy and the consequent commercial intercourse with the Ionian Islands which was carried on by Spanish vessels, offered the opportunity to the seafaring men of the Ionian Islands to serve on Spanish ships as crews or officers. Obviously adventurous and driven by ambition, the young man Phokas went to Spain where he embarked on Spanish ships as such a sailor, and being in the service of that country he sailed over the oceans. His Greek name 'Ioannis (John) Phokas' was consequently adapted into Spanish and changed to 'Juan de Fuca.' Sailing on the Spanish vessels, he learned and mastered the art of pilotage so well and he proved himself to be such a skilled pilot that he attracted the attention of the King of Spain who appointed him Pilot of his navy in the West Indies, a position which he kept for over forty years.

On one of his expeditions in November 1587, while returning to Mexico from the Philippine Islands and China in his ship "Santa Anna," he was intercepted by the English Captain Candish and was taken to Cape California where he was deprived of his cargo and own goods amounting to 60,000 ducats.

Three years later, the Viceroy of Mexico Luis de Velasco sent him as a pilot with three small ships and 100 soldiers aboard, who were under the command of a Captain, to discover along Pacific Ocean's North American coast the passage which the Spanish called the 'Straits of Anián' and fortify it against the English who, the Spaniards feared, might pass through those Straits from the North Sea into the South Sea (Pacific Ocean). The expedition however failed owing to the misconduct of the Captain; the soldiers mutinied and the ships had to return from California to Nova Spania (Mexico) where the Captain was duly punished.

After this ill fated voyage, in the year 1592, the Viceroy of Mexico sent him again with a small Caravela and a Pinnance carrying armed marines on board, to discover the Straits of Anián and a passage through these straits into the North Sea (Atlantic Ocean). Fuca sailed along the coast of Mexico, California, and up the North American coast to 47 degrees latitude. He located the passage and entered the straits there and sailed therein through many islands for more than twenty days. At the entrance of the Straits he claimed he saw a great island with a particularly high pinnacle rock. He went on shore and there he described he saw people in beasts' skins. He claimed the land was very fruitful, and rich in gold, silver, pearls, and other things, like Nova Spania (Mexico).

Having explored the Straits to a considerable depth, Juan de Fuca even thought that he already came to the North Sea and felt his mission was successfully performed. Fearing not being armed sufficiently to resist the ferocity of the savage people he came across, he decided to return home to Nova Spania and in 1592 he arrived at Acapulco. In Mexico he was greatly honored by the Viceroy who also promised him great rewards. These he never received, although he stayed there for two years, but was advised by the Viceroy to go to Spain and receive his reward there by the King himself.

In Spain he was received very well by the King's Court and heard very many pleasant things but received no rewards. In disgust de Fuca, who now was quite old, left Spain to go to Cephalonia where he

wanted to spend his remaining days. On his way through Italy in April 1596, he met an English pilot named John Douglas, in whose company he came to Venice. There he was introduced by Douglas to a man by the name Michael Lok, an English merchant-adventurer, formerly the English Consul in Aleppo, Turkey and at the time being in Venice for business reasons. Juan de Fuca through Lok he offered to serve Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth of England, in the capacity of a pilot for the discovery of the Northwest Passage from the Pacific Ocean into the Atlantic, provided she put at his disposal one ship of 40 tons and a Pinnance. He promised to navigate the Passage from one end to the other in thirty days. More likely, de Fuca told Lok an exciting tale in order to obtain financial compensation. In offering his services to the Queen of England, he expressed the hope that she would compensate him for the goods taken from him by Captain Candish.

Lok passed the story along to other promoters of English overseas empire, who in turn published the story in 1625. Even more than the Spanish and French, the British were keenly interested in the prospect of a Northwest Passage, i.e. a waterway through the North American continent that would greatly expedite travel between Europe and East Asia. They therefore took a strong interest in de Fucas's story, even though they also had a stake in refuting it in order to deny Spain's claim to have arrived first on the Northwest Coast. In the later eighteenth century the English explorers James Cook and George Vancouver were clearly driven in part to find the Northwest Passage that Juan de Fuca had described. When they did not find it, their priority became denigrating Spanish claims and promoting their own discoveries.

Consequently, Lok also one of the Muscovy Company directors and the man who organized and financed Martin Frobisher's three trips to Baffin Island, wrote to Lord Treasurer Cecil, to Sir Walter Raleigh, and to cosmographer Master Richard Hakluyt asking them to send 100 pounds to bring de Fuca to England. They were favorably disposed to the idea but no money was forthcoming. In the meantime de Fuca left for Cephalonia. Lok by July wrote to de Fuca to go with him to England and in September an answer was received that de Fuca was willing to go to England if Lok sent him the money. Evidently, Lok was not in a position to supply the money and the matter rested thus until June 1602, when no reply was received to letters Lok sent to de Fuca from Zante and it was surmised that the old Pilot was dead.

In the year 1854, however, Alexander S. Taylor who specialized in the study of the history of California and Oregon, asked the American Consul in the Ionian Islands, A.S. York, to investigate everything concerning Fuca and his family. The information which York sent from Zante (Zakynthos Island) to Taylor convinced him that Fuca did live and that his story, two and a half centuries after his death, remained alive in Cephalonia. In the September and October 1859 issues of the Magazine "Hutchings' California Magazine" Taylor published two extremely interesting articles, in the first of which he gives the biography of Juan de Fuca, which was sent to him by A.S. York based on manuscripts in Cephalonia, and on a book called "The lives of Glorious Men of Cephalonia" written and published in Venice in October 1843 by Rev. Anthimos Mazarakis, a Cephalonian, which was translated into Italian by Tomazeo.

According to Taylor's biography, John Phokas (Fucas) the seafarer was born in the island of Cephalonia at the beginning of the 16th century (most likely in the 1530's) at the end of which he became renowned for his venturous voyages in the Pacific Ocean as well as for his explorations in the Northwestern shores of America.

The ancestors of this fearless seafarer were those who fled Constantinople in 1453 and found refuge some in the Peloponnesus and others in the Ionian Islands. The brothers Emmanuel and Andronikos Phokas were amongst those who went first to Peloponnesus where Andronikos remained and became the head of the Phokas family branch there, while Emmanuel who was born in Constantinople in 1435 left for Cephalonia in 1470 and established himself there near a beautiful region called Elaion or commonly Elios. In York's description, Elios is a beautiful valley in the Southwestern tip of Cephalonia full of olive trees and

vines. In the center of the valley, he adds, there is the village Valeriano, upon a small height stands an old building with a wonderful view around as far as your eyes can see. This building, according to information given to him by the inhabitants around, is supposed to be the home of Juan de Fuca where he retired after his tortuous life to enjoy the comforts of peace and tranquility among his own Kindred and Countrymen.

All the numerous families of Phokas in Cephalonia hail from Emmanuel. According to the provided genealogical list, the head of the family Emmanuel had four sons, Stephanos, Emmanuel, Hector, and Iakovos the father of Ioannis Phokas who, because he was living in the village of Valeriano, was given the name Phokas Valerianos, as a distinction perhaps from the other Phokas who were living in Argostoli.

This story of Juan de Fuca's discovery of the Anián Strait is not corroborated by any other source except by the narrative of Lok, who met the Cephalonian navigator in Venice. This narrative of Lok is contained in the third volume of the "Pilgrimes" by esteemed English maritime historian and cosmographer Rev. Samuel Purchas, printed in London in 1625, but it was widely known in England before then. American historian, Robert Greenhow republished in 1847 this narrative in the fourth edition of his history of California and Oregon giving the original Spanish and the English translations of the correspondence between de Fuca and Lok.

Around the question of Juan de Fuca and his voyage to the Northwestern shores of America the historians are divided into different schools. While some admit his existence and dispute certain points only of Lok's narrative, as this is related in Purcha's "Pirgrimes", there are others, as Hubert Bancroft, who wrote the history of the Pacific Coast States of America, who consider Fuca an imaginary person, and others who, even if they admit the existence of a person with such a name, maintain that he never made the voyage which Lok reports. These last ones base their arguments on the fact that no mention is made of Fuca in any of the Spanish archives of that period, nor of any voyage to the Straits of Anián. Bancroft presented Lok's original note incomplete and inaccurately, his interpretation of the story is erroneous and quite defective. In support of Lok and his narrative, Alexander S. Taylor in his second article on Juan de Fuca published in the October 1859 issue of the Magazine "Hutchins' California Magazine" under the title "Memorials of Juan de Fuca, discoverer of Oregon," reprints this same narrative of Lok with the following preface: *"The character and truthfulness of this great navigator whose name was given to the Straits which separate the American Continent from Vancouver Island have become the topic of one of the greatest discussions in the history of naval explorations. Even the fact of whether such a person ever lived has been disputed and confirmed time and again in the course of 268 years, i.e. from 1592-1859 without any efforts as it appears on the part of the writers or of the Governments to try and ascertain the facts mentioned by the first chronicler of the notable services of Juan de Fuca to Spain and Humanity. Besides that chronicler (Lok) was a much respected English Consul and evidently a capable, clever and cultured gentleman..."*

Purchas narrates in his "Pirgrimes" that Juan de Fuca claimed he sailed *"...until he came to the Latitude of 47 degrees and there finding that the land trended North and North-East, with a broad Inled of Sea, between 47 and 48 degrees of Latitude, he entered there into, sayling therein more than twentie days, and found that land trending still sometime North-West and North, and also East and South-Westward, and very much broader sea than was at the said entrance, and that he passed by divers Illands in that Sayling. And that at the entrance of this said Strait, there is on the North-West coast thereof, a great Hedland or Iland, with an exceedingly high Pinacle, or spired Rocke, like a piller thereupon."*

In support of this claim, Coastal historian Captain John T. Walbran corroborated this report in his British Columbia Coast Names. He wrote, *"This is substantially correct; the island is Tatoche, and the spired rock, now known as De Fuca's pillar, 150 feet high, stands in solitary grandeur, a little off shore, about two miles*

southwards of Tatoche Island.”

The first English mariner to recognize Juan de Fuca’s strait was Captain Charles Barkley on the ship ‘Imperial Eagle’ in 1787. He consequently named Juan de Fuca Strait because it lay above the 47th parallel, where Lok’s report of Juan de Fuca’s exploration had designated it to be. Having had access to Frances Barkley’s diary of her husband’s 1787 voyage, Captain John Walbran recorded the perceptions of that voyage, “*The entrance appeared to be about four leagues in width, and remained about that width as far as the eye can see. Capt. Barkley at once recognized it as the long lost strait of Juan de Fuca, which Captain Cook had so emphatically stated did not exist.*” Captain Barkley concluded Juan de Fuca must have been the first European mariner to sail round the point now called Cape Flattery, but Barkley himself did not venture into the opening. Captain John T. Walbran (and most English historians) was not privy to evidence which strongly suggested the 1774 voyage of the Spanish Captain Juan Pérez was the first that recognized the opening as being the one which had been described by Juan de Fuca.

Purchas in his “Pirgrimes” narrates Lok reporting, “*When I was at Venice, in Aprill 1596 happily arrived there an old man, about threescore yeares of age, called commonly Juan de Fuca, but named properly Apostolos Valerianos, of Nation a Greeke, borne in the Iland Cefalonia, of profession a Mariner, and an ancient Pilot of Shippes...*”

Consequently, Juan de Fuca in almost all of the subject matter literature is referred widely as ‘Apostolos Valerianos.’ Based on Purchas narration, it is established that Apostolos Valerianos and not Ioannis Phokas has being the Greek name of the explorer.

We should take an issue with the name Apostolos Valerianos, and I present the following analysis: One should accept the notion that the Greek name ‘Ioannis (John) Phokas’ was conveniently changed into Spanish as ‘Juan de Fuca’ to sever connection by name to his Christian Orthodox origins, an undesirable and possibly dangerous affirmation at that time. The ‘Valerianos’ added distinction, must also be accepted for its use in differentiating his family’s place of origin from the other Phokas families in Cephalonia. Finally, the fist name ‘Apostolos’ should be questioned, since this name is much isolated and confusing, suggesting Phokas was using various pseudonyms and consequently, his story is a conspicuous fabricated tale. In an attempt to explain this, I propose a new theory which suggests that either Lok or Samuel Purchas, inquiring for the ‘real’ Greek name of Juan de Fuca and having access to the letters sent from de Fuca (one of these letters sent to Lok by Juan de Fuca, on October 1598, was written in the Greek language), they could have possibly misunderstood and assumed in error the ‘Apostolos Valerianos’ name, right off the sender’s information on the mail itself; this is explained as follows:

If the sender’s address from Juan de Fuca’s mail was written in our familiar English, most likely could have been in the form:

***Sender “Juan de Fuca” of Valeriano
Cephalonia.***

The sender’s address from de Fuca’s mail being written in Greek, respectively should have been in the form:

***Αποστολεύς “Juan de Fuca” Βαλεριανός (i.e. Apostoleus “Juan de Fuca” Valerianos)
Κεφαλονία / Cephalonia.***

Or even in the slightly different form:

***Αποστολ. “Juan de Fuca” Βαλεριανός (i.e. Apostol. “Juan de Fuca” Valerianos)
Κεφαλονία / Cephalonia.***

The second example shows, what is common practice in Greek letter writing, to abbreviate and shorten the word ‘Apostoleus’ to just ‘Apostol.’ and this way add to the ‘name’ confusion.

The word 'Apostoleus' or 'Apostolos' (is the same word as in 'Apostle'), literally stands in Greek for the word 'Sender'. This may explain how the name Apostolos Valerianos could be derived in error by those seeking the 'real' Greek name of the man the Spanish called Juan de Fuca.

From another perspective, Rev. Anthimos Mazarakis, in his book "The lives of Glorious Men of Cephalonia" suggests the name 'Apostolos' which they also attach to him could be a middle name given to him at baptism. This is possible, considering this middle name was added to emphasize 'John' being named after John the Apostle and not after John the Baptist; Saints who have different commemorating calendar dates, which is significantly important for the related celebration in the Orthodox Christian faith.

Finally, it should be noted, that the name 'Straits of Juan de Fuca' was given to the passage north of Cape Flattery by John Meares of the ship 'Felice' in 1788. It was also John Meares who gave the name 'Olympic Mountains' to the mountain range on the large peninsula south of the Straits and named their highest peak that stands 7965 ft (2428 meters) high 'Mount Olympus' specifically to honor the Greek explorer from Cephalonia.

That Juan de Fuca, however, for some the 'Ioannis Phokas' and for many the 'Apostolos Valerianos' of Cephalonia Greece, was a Pilot and that he may have sailed up to the Mexican and California coasts, we have no reason to doubt that he was the first to navigate and explore the wide Straits north of the 47th parallel.

Article by: Anthony G. Maroussis

Sources: Hakluytus Posthumous or Purchas His Pilgrimes, pages 415-418.
Mazarakis, Anthimos, The Lives of Glorious Men of Cephalonia (Venice, 1843).
A History of the Greeks in the Americas, Koken, Constant, Conoutas.
The Consulate of Greece in Vancouver, Canada.

The Fuca Pillar - Tatoosh Island - Washington State

"...with an exceedingly high Pinacle, or spired Rocke, like a piller thereupon."

