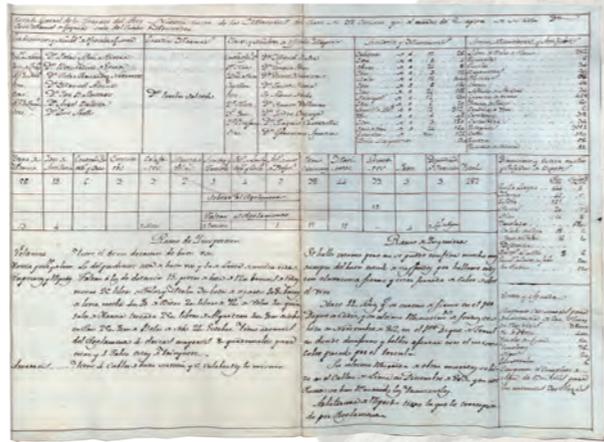




On 18 May 2007, the US treasure hunting firm Odyssey Marine

Exploration Inc. announced the discovery of the largest collection of coins ever found. More than half a million pieces of gold and silver, extracted from somewhere in the Atlantic, were secretly transported to the United States. Spain suspected that they came from a Spanish ship and immediately filed a lawsuit in the United States through what was then the Ministro of Culture. After five years of litigation, the US courts ruled in favour of the Spanish state, recognising its rights over those cultural assets and ordering their return. The plundered ship was none other than the Spanish Armada's frigate *Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes*, which sank in 1804 when attacked by a British fleet off the Portuguese coast. Its tragic disappearance prompted Spain to declare war on Great Britain during the tumultuous

period prior to the Peninsular War and was a dramatic episode that left a mark on history, literature and the survivors' lives. Focusing on the coins and other archaeological objects retrieved, *The Last Voyage of the Frigate Mercedes*. A *Cultural Treasure Recovered*, on view at the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, tells of the common history of Spain and America, the action of the leading figures of the period and those involved in the unfortunate incident and the mark it left on archives, books and art. With the legal battle waged by the Spanish government as a backdrop,



the exhibition stresses the importance of promoting the protection and safekeeping of Underwater Cultural Heritage. More than just thousands of coins, these assets symbolise ideas, experiences and customs of our past. It is this that truly makes the *Mercedes* a recovered cultural treasure.



Museo Arqueológico Nacional  
C/ Serrano, 13 • 28001 Madrid  
From 12 June to 30 November 2014

**Opening hours**

Tuesday to Saturday from 9:30 to 20:00  
Sundays and holidays from 9:30 to 15:00  
Closed on Mondays

**Free entry**

**Information**

Tel.: (0034) 91 577 79 12  
www.man.es  
www.accioncultural.es

**Microsite**

<http://www.mecd.gob.es/fragatamercedes>



MAN

MUSEO ARQUEOLÓGICO NACIONAL

AC/E ACCIÓN CULTURAL ESPAÑOLA



Con el patrocinio de  
**Comisión Nacional Española de Cooperación con la UNESCO**

THE LAST VOYAGE OF THE  
*Frigate Mercedes*  
REASON VERSUS PLUNDERING



More than two centuries ago, on 5 October 1804, a Spanish fleet laden with riches and wares was returning from the Viceroyalty of Peru when it was attacked, without a previous declaration of war, by a British fleet lying in wait for it off the coast of the Algarve. The Spanish frigate *Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes* exploded and sank as a result of the attack off Cape Santa María, when the Spanish seamen had already sighted the Monchique mountain range. The valuable cargo of the *Mercedes*, along with the underwater grave of more than 200 Spaniards, was plundered in May 2007 by the treasure hunting firm Odyssey

Marine Exploration. More than two years ago, on 31 January 2012, the Supreme Court of the United States rejected the treasure hunting firm's last appeal, putting an end to the lengthy legal dispute initiated by Spain's institutions and finally ruling in favour of Spain. The treasure was returned to our country and the *Mercedes* was able to complete its voyage.

The Museo Naval is now holding an exhibition that contextualises those events and presents the key player, the frigate *Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes*: what it looked like, the mission it was performing, why it was attacked in peace time, the background situation of the Spain from which it departed and of the Royal Armada it belonged to. It furthermore examines two issues that are relevant to today's Navy: its work in protecting Underwater Heritage and the importance of the historical archives in its care. The naval records Spain provided were crucial to the



court ruling that made it possible not only to recover the plundered heritage but to demonstrate that the reasons safeguarded by the manuscripts prevailed over purely financial interests. *The Last Voyage of the Frigate Mercedes. Reason versus Plundering...*



**Museo Naval**  
 Paseo del Prado, 5 • 28014 Madrid  
 From 12 June to 30 November 2014

**Opening hours**  
 Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 to 19:00.  
 In August, Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 to 15:00.  
 Closed on Mondays  
 (For security reasons, the rooms will begin to be vacated 15 minutes before closing)

**Information**  
 Tel.: (0034) 91 523 85 16  
 www.armada.mde.es • www.accioncultural.es  
 www.fundacionmuseonaval.com

@Museo\_Naval • www.facebook.com/FundacionMuseoNaval

**Guided visits for groups**  
 Reservas\_museonaval@fn.mde.es  
 (It is necessary to book at least 10 days in advance through)

**Visitor Services**  
 Tel: 91 523 85 16  
 Mobile: 609 467 117  
 (Monday to Friday from 09:00 to 14:00)

A voluntary contribution of €3 is requested for the museum's upkeep



DL: M-17/69-2014 Impreso en papel 100% reciclado

