

On the Name of the Gulf of California

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The Gulf of California has been called many names through history, most commonly Mar de Cortés (or its Anglicized version, Sea of Cortez), Mar Bermejo (Vermillion Sea), Mar Rojo (Red Sea), and Golfo de California (Gulf of California). While Mar de Cortés has claim to a legitimate name today, in recent years Mexico's official government documents have moved to consistently call this body of water Golfo de California (Gulf of California). A brief summary of some relevant historical citations follows.

In 1539 Ulloa sailed to head of Gulf and is the first person (in historic times) to prove that Baja California is a peninsula. He named the Gulf, Mar Bermejo (= Vermillion Sea). His specific phrase was, "We named it the 'Ancon de San Andrés y Mar Bermejo' because it is that color and we arrived there on the day of San Andrés" (translation from *Voyage of Francisco de Ulloa* by Henry R. Wagner, in *Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America in the Sixteenth Century*, California Historical Society, San Francisco, 1929). NOTE: Ulloa was naming the tidal channel at the head of the Gulf "Ancon de San Andrés" and the entire Gulf the "Mar Bermejo." In all likelihood, Ulloa, Alarcon, Consag, Ugarte, and others first used the term "Vermillion Sea" in reference to the brick-colored sediment-laden waters of the Colorado River Delta and Upper Gulf, and not to a discoloration of delta waters due to phytoplankton blooms.

In 1602 Father Ascension accompanied Vizcaino on his voyage in the Gulf; Ascension's report referred to the Gulf by several names: Mar Vermejo, Mar Rojo, Mar de la California, Sea of California, Mediterranean Sea of California, and Mar de Cortés [because, Ascension stated, "he was the first to discover it"]. (From, Henry R. Wagner, *Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America in the Sixteenth Century*, California Historical Society, San Francisco, 1929.)

In 1632 Nicolas De Cardona called it Gulf of California. (From *Descriptions of Many Northern and Southern Lands and Seas in the Indies, Specifically of the Discovery of the Kingdom of California*. Translated and edited by W. Michael Mathes, Dawson's Book Shop, Los Angeles, 1974.)

In 1656 de Jansson's *America Septentrionalis*, showed Baja as an island and labels the sea "Mar Vermeio."

In 1668. Father Cavallero Carranco called it Vermillion Sea (Juan Cavallero Carranco, *The Pearl Hunters in the Gulf of California*, 1668. *Summary Report of the Voyage made to the Californias by Captain Francisco de Lucenilla*, transcribed, translated and annotated by W. Michael Mathes, Dawson's Book Shop, Los Angeles.

In the late 1600s/early 1700s, the great Jesuit explorer Padre Eusebio Kino prepared several maps of the region in which the term he most commonly used was Mar de la California (although he also used Mare de las Californias o Carolinas, Mar Vermeio, Mar Vermejo, and Mar de California). In the text of his writing he most often used Mar de California.

In 1746 Nascimben's redrawing of Consag's early map (in The Huntington Library) shows Baja as a peninsula and labels it Mar de Californias.

In 1753 Buache's *Cartes de la Californie*, shows Baja as a peninsula and uses Mer de la Californie.

In 1762-1778 Wenceslaus Linck consistently used "Gulf of California." (*Wenceslaus Linck's Diary of his 1766 Expedition to Northern Baja California*, translated into English, edited and annotated by Ernest J. Burrus, Dawson's Book Shop, Los Angeles.)

In 1764. Consag (in Zevallo) used "Mar Roxo or Gulf of California." (Francisco Zevallos, *The Apostolic Life of Fernando Consag: Explorer of Lower California*, translated and annotated by Manuel P. Servin. Dawson's Book Shop, Los Angeles.)

In 1757 Miguel Venegas' *Noticia de la California* uses (on his map) "Golfo de California ó Mar Roxo de Cortes."

The Jesuit map of 1767 included the results of the Kino, Ugarte, and Consag voyages, and labeled the sea "Golfo de Californie ó Mer Rouge de Cortés."

In 1770, Francisco Antonio Lorenzana used "Golfo de California o Mar Vermejo" in, *Viage de Hernán Cortés a la Península de Californias, y Noticia de todas las Expediciones, que á ella se han Hecho Hasta el Presente Año de 1769, para la Mejor Inteligencia de la Quarta Carta de Cortés, y Sus Designios*. (Joseph Antonio de Hegal, Mexico City)

In 1772 Vaugondy's *Carte de la Californie*. Suivant, depicted Baja California as a peninsula and used both "Golfo de California" and "Mer Rouge."

The *Diderot Encyclopedia* maps of 1779 either showed Baja as a peninsula or an island, but always labeled the sea "California."

In 1796 José Joaquín Arraillaga used "Gulf of California" (*Diary of His Surveys of the Frontier*, translated into English by Froy Tiscareno, edited and annotated by John W. Robinson. (Dawson's Book Shop, Los Angeles, 1969.)

In 1853/1854 William Walker, the famous American filibuster, used Gulf of California on his maps.

In 1908 Arthur Walbridge North used Gulf of California and Sea of Cortez in *The Mother of California*, Paul Elder and Co., San Francisco & New York. North also implies that Ulloa gave it the name Sea of Cortés (shortly after naming it Mar Bermejo).

In 1922. Edward W. Nelson used Gulf of California, noting it was named "Mar de Cortés by the Spaniards." (*Lower California and its Natural Resources*, National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C.)

In 1929 Henry R. Wagner used Gulf of California in his *Voyage of Francisco de Ulloa*, in *Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America in the Sixteenth Century*, California Historical Society, San Francisco.

In 1949 Herbert E. Bolton, in *Coronado: Knight of Pueblos and Plains* (University of New Mexico Press) used Sea of Cortés.

In 1968 Francis J. Weber (*The Missions and Missionaries of Baja California: An Historical Perspective*) referred to it the “Sea of Cortes [no accent mark], more commonly known as the Gulf of California.”