

the most highly-esteemed marine charts. On the morning of the 15th, when the time-keeper placed us in $66^{\circ} 1' 15''$ longitude, we were not yet in the meridian of Margareta island; though according to the reduced chart of the Atlantic ocean, we ought to have passed the very lofty western cape of this island, which is laid down in longitude $66^{\circ} 0'$. The inaccuracy with which the coasts were delineated previously to the labours of Fidalgo, Noguera, and Tiscar, and I may venture to add, before the astronomical observations I made at Cumana, might have become dangerous to navigators, were not the sea uniformly calm in those regions. The errors in latitude were still greater than those in longitude, for the coasts of New Andalusia stretch to the westward of Cape Three Points (or tres Puntas) fifteen or twenty miles more to the north, than appears in the charts published before the year 1800.

About eleven in the morning we perceived a very low islet, covered with a few sandy downs, and on which we discovered with our glasses no trace of habitation or culture. Cylindrical cactuses rose here and there in the form of candelabra. The soil, almost destitute of vegetation, seemed to have a waving motion, in consequence of the extraordinary refraction which the rays of the sun undergo in traversing the strata of air in contact with plains strongly heated. Under every zone, deserts and sandy shores appear like an agitated sea, from the effect of mirage.

The coasts, seen at a distance, are like clouds, in which each observer meets the form of the objects that occupy his imagination. Our bearings and our chronometer being at variance with the charts which we had to consult, we were lost in vain conjectures. Some took mounds of sand for Indian huts, and pointed out the place where they alleged the fort of Pampatar was situated; others saw herds of goats, which are so common in the dry valley of St. John; or descried the lofty mountains of Macanao, which seemed to them partly hidden by the clouds. The captain resolved to send a pilot on shore, and the men were preparing to get out the long-boat when we perceived two canoes sailing along the coast. We fired a gun as a signal for them, and though we had hoisted Spanish colours, they drew near with distrust. These canoes, like all those in use among the natives, were constructed of the single trunk of a tree. In