

# The Transient Presence: A Re-Appraisal of Spanish Attitudes toward the Northwest Coast in the Eighteenth Century

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Historians of British Columbia have long encountered difficulties interpreting the motives behind the Spanish occupation of the northwest coast. The very idea of the stereotyped Spaniard—"indolent,"<sup>1</sup> "brutal,"<sup>2</sup> filled with the "spirit of mañana,"<sup>3</sup> and guilty of "high-handed acts"<sup>4</sup>—has thrown some historians into near apoplexy and at least opened the history of the coast on a somewhat distasteful note. Placed alongside the great explorers Cook and Vancouver or the swashbuckling British and American fur traders, the Spaniards appear to be little more than hindrances to progress and free enterprise. Published accounts left by the traders tended to confirm latent Hispanophobia and comparatively little effort has been made to balance these accounts with Spanish and Mexican documentation.<sup>5</sup> Often the "Nootka Sound Controversy" which developed into an important international incident and apparent British victory over the Spaniards, caused historians to neglect other aspects of

<sup>1</sup> Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Vancouver, 1958), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> B. A. McKelvie, *Pageant of B.C.* (Toronto, 1955), p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> T. A. Richard, *Historic Background of British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1948), p. 141 and p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141, and J. H. Stewart Reid, *Mountains, Men and Rivers: British Columbia in Legend and Story* (Toronto, 1954), p. 40, and Henry J. Boam, *British Columbia: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries and Resources* (London, 1912), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> There are notable exceptions to this statement. Hubert H. Bancroft, *History of the Northwest Coast*, I (San Francisco, 1884), made an effort to locate available Spanish documents and to evaluate the role of Spain on the coast. Henry R. Wagner, *Spanish Explorations in the Strait of Juan de Fuca* (Santa Anna, 1933), set out with the purpose of presenting the Spanish contribution. Recently, several American historians have added much new material of use to British Columbia historians. Michael E. Thurman, *The Naval Department of San Blas: New Spain's Bastion for Alta California and Nootka, 1767 to 1798* (Glendale, 1967), and Iris H. Wilson ed. *Noticias de Nutka: An Account of Nootka Sound in 1793 by José Mariano Moziño* (Seattle, 1970). For useful articles by the above historians see John Alexander Carroll, ed. *Reflections of Western Historians* (Tucson, 1969). Unpublished Masters theses by John E. Baird, Tomás Bartroli, and Oakah L. Jones provide lengthy treatment of the Spanish stay at Nootka Sound.

the picture.<sup>6</sup> It is the purpose of this paper to re-examine Spanish attitudes toward the northwest coast, its inhabitants, and the struggle with other nations for sovereignty.

Despite potential geographic advantage gained through proximity to settled areas of Mexico, weakness rather than strength characterized the Spanish position. The Mexican population from Acapulco to San Francisco was so small that the few militia units could scarcely watch over the vast empty expanses let alone provide forces for new settlements to the north of California. At sea, the vessels available were just enough to sustain coastal missions and presidios. No allowances were made for a maritime defence against a well equipped enemy squadron which might appear in the Pacific and even the fortresses of Acapulco and San Blas lacked much defensive capacity. Since Spain still claimed the entire Pacific coastline of the Americas, any suspicion of competition for territory became a real threat to the tenuous hold over sovereignty. It was just such fears of Russian expansion from bases in Kamchatka which led to the opening of the Mexican Naval Department of San Blas in 1767 and to the occupation of San Diego, Monterey, and San Francisco. The pretext was that the Philippine ships needed additional bases, but the real reason was to place some limits upon Russian expansion.<sup>7</sup>

In February 1773, the Spanish minister plenipotentiary to Russia, the Conde de Lacy, notified Madrid that Russian fur company interests already had established a number of posts in northern America. The minister of the Indies immediately informed Viceroy Antonio Bucareli in Mexico of the danger, instructing him to ascertain the extent of the penetration.<sup>8</sup> The result was the dispatch of an expedition in 1774 under veteran pilot Juan Pérez on the San Blas frigate *Santiago*. Pérez was to lay formal Spanish claim to the entire coast and at the same time to do whatever he could to win the friendship of the Indian population. Two priests who accompanied the expedition were to undertake the ambitious task of removing the Indians from the shadows of idolatry and introduce them to a quick course on eternal salvation. Unfortunately, however, after Pérez landed at the Queen Charlotte Islands on July 18, 1774, dense fogs and treacherous currents prevented adequate reconnaissance and left little

<sup>6</sup> For full coverage of the European diplomatic crisis sparked by the incident see William R. Manning, *The Nootka Sound Controversy* (Washington, 1905).

<sup>7</sup> Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Audiencia de Méjico (hereafter cited as AGI, Mexico), leg. 1530, Conde de Revillagigedo to Antonio Valdés, no. 193, December 27, 1789.

<sup>8</sup> Javier de Ybarra y Berge, *De California a Alaska: Historia de un Descubrimiento* (Madrid, 1945), pp. 25-27.

time or energy for converting the Indians.<sup>9</sup> On the way south, the *Santiago* entered Nootka Sound remaining there just long enough to engage in limited trade with the Indians before the inclement weather forced the expedition back to sea. While formal possession of the land was not taken, the stopover impressed the Indians and provided them with some California abalone shells which they coveted very highly. The Indian memory of this visit strengthened by the addition of two silver spoons pilfered from Pérez's cabin and later recovered by Captain Cook, left at least some tangible evidence of the Spanish presence.<sup>10</sup>

While the expedition of Juan Pérez was not an auspicious beginning, Spain had no intention of losing any territory through default. King Charles III named six naval officers to alleviate the shortage at San Blas and other efforts were made to bolster the resources available at the port which was to become the headquarters for northern expansion. Although little could be done to relieve the poorness of the harbour or the ravages of disease caused by the climate, the commitment to further exploration was clear.<sup>11</sup> In 1775, Bucareli commanded Bruno Hezeta to sail north to 61 degrees latitude or even further if circumstances permitted. This time, in addition to dispatching a frigate to head the expedition, a small schooner, the *Sonora* was to act as consort and to permit more adequate reconnaissance of the coastline. When the captain of the schooner lost his mind shortly after the departure from San Blas, Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra received the command.

The voyage of the *Sonora* became the first in a long series of epic maritime adventures on the northwest coast. The vessel proved to be a poor sailer, unable to keep up with the frigate even when all canvas was set and conditions were perfect. In moderate seas, waves broke over the decks soaking everyone and instilling so much fear that crewmen feigned illness or injury in order to obtain transfer to the frigate. Replacements were almost impossible to obtain and since no volunteers came forward, service on the schooner became an excellent means of punishment. Bodega, however, possessed a remarkable ability to command men; after slight friction with the group of misfits he accumulated, morale was re-

<sup>9</sup> Thurman, p. 135.

<sup>10</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1529, Esteban José Martínez to Viceroy Manuel Antonio Florez, Nootka Sound, July 13, 1789.

<sup>11</sup> Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, "Año de 1775: Navegación hecha por don Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, Teniente de Fragata de la Real Armada y Comandante de la Goleta *Sonora*; a los descubrimientos de los Mares y Costa Septentrional de California," in *Colección de Diarios y Relaciones para la Historia de los Viajes Descubrimientos*, II, ed. Roberto Barreiro Meiro (Madrid, 1944), p. 102.

stored. A successful landing in the pleasant country near Cape Mendocino refreshed the crew before the two vessels proceeded northward.<sup>12</sup>

The next landfall took place along the present Washington coast near Point Grenville. The Indians appeared to be friendly and after an exchange of gifts some trading for furs took place. Since the Indians presented little cause for alarm, on the morning of July 14, Bodega sent seven heavily armed men ashore to obtain fresh water and wood. As they clambered out of their boat through a high surf, some 300 Indians fell upon them and slaughtered them before the horrified eyes of their comrades on board the schooner. Because of the distance from the shore, shots fired from the vessel had no effect whatsoever upon the Indians and the frigate was anchored too far away to receive distress signals.<sup>13</sup> Bodega set sail for the frigate to obtain aid for possible survivors on shore, but soon found his vessel surrounded by nine canoes filled with warriors emboldened by their success. With seven men dead, another five sick, and three needed to navigate the vessel, only Bodega and two others were available to defend against the Indian attackers. When they approached the undefended bow of the schooner, the Spaniards opened fire at close range. Of the nine Indians in the canoe, six were hit in the first volleys and the others withdrew to their village.<sup>14</sup> By this time, the sound of shots had been heard on the frigate and a boat was sent to provide assistance. Bodega and his pilot requested 30 men to take vengeance against the Indians and to search for possible survivors, but the committee formed to discuss the possible options concluded that it would be too dangerous to risk further losses which might compromise the entire expedition. It was a costly lesson in which the Spaniards had been the first to learn that the outward manifestations of friendship by the Indians of the northwest coast could not always be trusted. Their highly developed sense of sovereignty coupled with their warlike spirit and cupidity for metal or other European goods would often be sufficient to trigger violence. Later, this was further accentuated by a desire for revenge against the depredations of fur traders.

On July 19, Hezeta decided to return to San Blas before incidents with the Indians and the growing problem of scurvy further reduced his crew. Bodega, however, refused to turn back until the aims of the expedition had been accomplished. He sailed northward to 57 degrees 2 minutes latitude, near Mount Edgecombe, took possession of the land for Spain

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

and constructed a large wooden cross which the Indians removed the moment the Spaniards returned to their vessel.<sup>15</sup> The expedition served to dispel fears of Russian expansion and while it gave the Spaniards a great deal of information on the resources and population of the northwest coast, no one foresaw the economic potential of the fur trade.

Bodega commanded another expedition northward in 1779 which further discounted the possibility of Russian penetration into regions claimed by Spain. The idea of settlement in the northern climate generated no enthusiasm at all amongst the Spanish and Mexican observers. While some did admire the exceptional quality of furs presented by the Indians, no markets were seen in the empire.<sup>16</sup> When Bodega returned to San Francisco, he learned that Spain was at war with Britain. The northern expeditions ended and wartime service scattered the officers of the San Blas naval station.

While the Spaniards were quite confident that their exclusive domination of the coast remained unchallenged, they had gravely miscalculated. In 1778, Captain James Cook with his two vessels *Discovery* and *Resolution* arrived at Nootka Sound from the Hawaiian Islands. His mission was to seek the fabled northwest passage through the North American continent to Europe and to explore a region which was thought to be almost totally unknown to any Europeans. Spain's secrecy and reticence to publish the diaries of her mariners had served to attract a real competitor rather than to discourage interest. Cook found that the Indians possessed some items made from iron and copper, but concluded that the metal had been traded over vast distances from tribe to tribe across the continent and had not come from maritime commerce.<sup>17</sup> When one Indian appeared with the two silver spoons of the Pérez expedition hung about his neck, Cook chose to believe that place of manufacture was not identifiable. Captain Charles Clerke, however, identified the spoons as being of Spanish manufacture similar to others he had seen while visiting a Spanish vessel at Rio de Janeiro.<sup>18</sup>

The Cook expedition uncovered little information not already known by the Spaniards, but the publication of Captain Cook's journals gave

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124. Relations with the northern Indians were relatively friendly although the well developed concept of sovereignty amongst the tribes caused near hostilities. When the Spaniards attempted to take water, the Indians informed them that it belonged to them and must be purchased.

<sup>16</sup> Ybarra y Berge, p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> J. C. Beaglehole, ed. *The Voyage of the Resolution and the Discovery, 1776-1780*, I (Cambridge, 1967), p. 322.

<sup>18</sup> Beaglehole, ed. II, "Charles Clerke's Journal," p. 1329.

him wide international acclaim as the discoverer of the region.<sup>19</sup> In addition to gaining publicity, the English seamen inadvertently pointed out the potential commercial wealth of the northwest coast. Visiting Canton, Cook discovered that Chinese merchants would offer exceptional prices for sea otter furs which had been taken in trade by the seamen for use as bedding. With the incitement of vast profits, the quiet isolation of the coast ended abruptly.

British merchants, often flying the Portuguese flag to avoid costly license fees and illegal competition with the East Indian Company and the South Sea Company, began to cross the Pacific from India and China to tap the the new bonanza. Beginning in 1785 with the expedition of Captain James Hanna on the *Sea Otter*, each successful voyage caused others to join in exploiting what appeared to be an inexhaustible supply of furs.<sup>20</sup> In 1786, at least three British expeditions were on the coast and interest increased for the remainder of the decade. Several of the merchant captains published accounts of their adventures, giving contemporary observers as well as later historians the distinct impression that the entire coast north of California had become a British sphere of influence. These accounts and particularly that of John Meares had a great impact on historical interpretation up to the present. Since these men wrote colourful and interesting descriptions of their exploits, their distortions and propaganda directed against the Spaniards have often been taken for fact.<sup>21</sup>

While the British introduced the Indians to "European civilization" and benefited from the sea otter trade, the Spaniards were left in blissful ignorance of the real threat to their claims of sovereignty. It was not until renewed reports of Russian expansion from Alaska and the first indications of American penetration into the Pacific Ocean that the Spanish imperial government awoke to the danger. When the French explorer, Comte de la Perouse informed the Spaniards that Russians had established themselves as far south as Nootka Sound, action followed very

<sup>19</sup> So pervasive was the belief that even the Spaniards began to accept the British claims of Cook's discovery of Nootka. The *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada*, XXXVIII (Madrid, 1964), p. 1062, still reports that Nootka was discovered by Cook in 1778.

<sup>20</sup> For a study of the early British fur trading voyages see Bancroft, I.

<sup>21</sup> See George Dixon, *A Voyage Round the World; But More Particularly to the North-West Coast of America: in the King George and Queen Charlotte, Captains Portlock and Dixon* (London, 1789), and John Meares, *Voyages Made in the Years 1788 and 1789 from China to the North-West Coast of America* (London, 1790).

quickly. Royal orders in January and again in July 1787, called for new reconnaissance expeditions from San Blas.<sup>22</sup>

The new information shocked Viceroy Antonio Florez of New Spain. He ordered Esteban José Martínez, a pilot and one of the most experienced mariners of San Blas, to dispatch two vessels to obtain information on the activities of any foreigners in waters claimed by Spain. After several delays the frigate *Princesa* under the command of Martínez, and the packetboat *San Carlos* under Gonzalo López de Haro, departed from San Blas on March 8, 1788.<sup>23</sup> By the middle of May, both vessels had reached 61 degrees latitude and had encountered thick fog, cold weather, and snow. On the *Princesa*, Martínez's irascible character became apparent and disputes on board resulted in the arrest of his second officer who was exiled to the *San Carlos*. Finally, on June 28, 1788, the Spaniards made their first contacts with the Russians when the Indians began to produce documents written in Russian. On June 30, several Russians boarded the *San Carlos* and opened friendly relations after an exchange of gifts. They made themselves completely at home with the Spaniards, remaining on board to eat and drink and then to provide lively entertainment with their singing and dancing. One of the visitors who became quite drunk and over-exuberant had to be put off the ship by force.<sup>24</sup> The Russian commandant who also went on board the Spanish vessel turned out to be a Constantinople Greek named Bruno Delarof, or Del Haro as the Spaniards called him, highly amused at the similarity between his name and that of their own captain. While the official Russian translator of the expedition was on board the *Princesa* which had separated from the *San Carlos*, the Russians managed to impart some useful information about their strength and future aspirations in the region, including a disquieting report that while they had not yet settled Nootka Sound, they would do so in the following year.<sup>25</sup>

In the meantime, the *Princesa* under Martínez continued to explore the Alaskan coast and arrived at the Russian settlement on the island of Unalaska. Once again, the Russians opened friendly relations offering fresh fish, supplies, and even hospital care for several sick seamen. The Russian commissary, Jaicof Potas Cusmich, spoke freely about his na-

<sup>22</sup> Thurman, pp. 257-259, and Henry R. Wagner, *The Cartography of the Northwest Coast of America to the Year 1800* (Amsterdam, 1968), p. 202.

<sup>23</sup> AGI, Estado, leg. 43, Report to Viceroy Florez, San Blas, October 30, 1788.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Ybarra y Berge, p. 105, and Henry R. Wagner, *Cartography*, p. 203. According to Delarof, the total Russian population was 422 men in six establishments.

tion's aspirations explaining that, after all, "Spain and Russia were one and the same."<sup>26</sup> The Russians had been located at Unalaska for 28 years gathering furs from the Indians who recognized the sovereignty of the empress. Cusmich estimated that the Russian population of Alaska was about 500 in total with 120 resident at the Unalaska settlement. Six small galleys tied the various posts together and gathered furs from the Indians. While the existing Russian posts hardly threatened Spanish California, Cusmich confirmed Delarof's information that an attempt would soon be made to occupy Nootka Sound. The Russians were well aware of the heavy British trading activity to the south at Port Bucareli and Nootka. They realized that furs which might have gone to them were now going to the British and ending up on the Canton market. To prevent this in the future, they expected four frigates from Siberia in the next year which would establish a settlement at Nootka Sound. They claimed greater rights to the coast than any other nation as a result of the explorations of Bering which predated all other claims.<sup>27</sup>

When the *San Carlos* arrived at Unalaska, the Spaniards could compare notes and fully evaluate the Russian information. The two vessels remained for 14 days to trade although López de Haro complained that the Russians had nothing but furs to exchange for shirts, cloth, breeches, jackets, and bottles of brandy. To many of the Spaniards, the fur trade continued to lack potential and the stay in the gray Unalaska climate was more than sufficient to satisfy the curiosity of those who had not developed a dislike for Alaska.<sup>28</sup> Martínez, while he found the Alaska settlements weakly defended and located in a country totally sterile except for the abundance of fish, did not discount the threat of Russian expansion. He had already made up his mind that Spain must garrison Nootka Sound.<sup>29</sup>

By the end of 1788, Florez had examined Martínez's reports and begun to understand the ramifications of allowing foreign activity north of California. Not only was the Russian threat to be countered, but dispatches from Chile brought news of the arrival of two American vessels on a voyage of exploration in the Pacific. This information convinced Florez that some sinister project motivated the Americans, probably the establishment of a new colony somewhere to the north of California.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1529, Martínez to Florez, December 5, 1788.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> AGI, Estado, leg. 43, Report to Florez, San Blas, October 30, 1788.

<sup>29</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1529, Martínez to Florez, December 5, 1788.

<sup>30</sup> Frederick W. Howay, ed. *Voyages of the "Columbia" to the Northwest Coast 1787-*



He was familiar with the westward overland expedition of Jonathan Carver<sup>31</sup> in 1766 and believed that with the knowledge obtained from the voyage, the new republic would attempt to sustain a Pacific settlement until a route was found across the continent. If there was not evidence enough of this plan, Florez pointed out the restless activity of the American nation which placed great expectations in the potential of commerce and navigation. He concluded that “. . . [the Americans] would have the wealth of great China and of India if they succeeded in establishing a colony on the western coast of America.”<sup>32</sup> The challenge might be a longterm endeavour, but when placed alongside the possibility of Russian expansion from Alaska and British fur trade activity, Spain would have to take immediate steps to prevent disaster.<sup>33</sup>

The scene was now set for the events which made Nootka Sound world famous. Since haste seemed essential if the foreign competition was to be overtaken, the viceroy decided to act well before he could expect to receive royal approval for his plans. The occupation of Nootka Sound was a truly bold step for a Mexican viceroy; Spain did not encourage initiative of this sort from its governors, let alone in an area where the slightest mistake might compromise imperial foreign policy. This explains Florez's caution in his instructions to Esteban José Martínez and why he referred to the operation as the “*fingido establecimiento*” or “feigned settlement” of Nootka. It also accounts for the hesitation which resulted in the temporary abandonment of Nootka after Martínez had occupied it.<sup>34</sup> It was made quite clear that just enough and no more was to be done to ensure Spanish sovereignty. It was to be a typical Spanish frontier settlement — a basically military operation supported by the government. A rough wooden building and small fort would mark Spanish control and four Franciscan missionary friars from

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1790 and 1790-1793 (Boston, 1941). The viceroy was incorrect in some of his assumptions. The American vessels *Columbia Rediviva* and *Lady Washington* had been fitted out in Boston by the merchant Joseph Barrell to participate in the trans-Pacific fur trade.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Carver, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America in the Years 1766, 1767, and 1768* (London, 1778). This account was widely read by Spaniards interested in the northwest coast as will be seen later in this paper.

<sup>32</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1529, Florez to Valdés, no. 702 reservado, December 23, 1788.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, The Viceroy did not neglect the British threat. He supposed that once Botany Bay, Australia, had been settled, an attempt to take possession of Nootka Sound might take place.

<sup>34</sup> Esteban José Martínez, “Diario,” in *Colección de Diarios y Relaciones para la Historia de los Viajes y Descubrimientos*, VI, ed. Roberto Barreiro Meiro (Madrid, 1964), p. 25.

the Colegio Apostólica de San Fernando in Mexico City would introduce the Indians to Christianity and pave the way for the creation of a mission.<sup>35</sup>

In the event that foreign vessels arrived at Nootka, Martínez was to be firm but correct in his behaviour. All were to be informed that Spain possessed the coast and that trade with the Indians was forbidden. No serious breach was expected with the Russians, due to existing alliances and the fact that Russian ships enjoyed the right to call at Spanish Mediterranean ports. British vessels were to be dealt with more firmly; they would be informed that Spanish rights to the coast predated the visit of Captain Cook and to prove the point, Martínez was to explain the evidence of the silver spoons from Cook's published journals. Possible American visitors would receive exactly the same arguments, but in their case Martínez had permission to explain the Spanish point of view in much stronger terms than he would with the powerful British.<sup>36</sup>

The Spaniards had not taken into account the possibility that Nootka Sound might already be occupied. Martínez, commanding the *Princesa* and *San Carlos*, arrived at Friendly Cove on May 5, 1789, to find that there were at least three foreign vessels in the waters of the sound. The prospect of being greeted at the harbour they expected to occupy caused embarrassment, but did not change the basic plan. John Kendrick, captain of the American frigate *Columbia*, which with the escort sloop *Lady Washington*, had already aroused fears of American intentions, proved to be friendly and little cause for alarm. The other vessel, a Portuguese ship called the *Efigenia Nubiana*, was less easy to dismiss as a friend. While the apparent captain was a Portuguese, the supercargo was Scottish and most of the crew were English. Martínez hesitated and then arrested the vessel on the incorrect grounds that it carried instructions in Portuguese to capture weaker foreign vessels.<sup>37</sup> This was likely a complete ruse designed by the Spanish commander to permit himself time to consider his position. He soon reversed his decision to send the prize to San Blas under the pretext that he could not spare men from his garrison. The *Efigenia* was freed after the captain and supercargo signed a document agreeing that if the viceroy declared the ship a fair prize, the

<sup>35</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1529, Florez to Valdés, no. 702 reservado, December 23, 1788, and Florez to Martínez, December 23, 1788.

<sup>36</sup> Esteban José Martínez, "Diario," p. 25.

<sup>37</sup> Tomás Bartroli, "The Spanish Establishment at Nootka Sound, 1789-1792," Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1960, pp. 158-159.

value of an inventory of the ship, its cargo, and equipment, would have to be paid by the owners.<sup>38</sup>

Martínez had not as yet decided on a policy for dealing with foreign ships. When the *Princess Royal* under the command of Thomas Hudson arrived off Nootka on June 15, Martínez and Kendrick went out in two launches to greet the new arrival. Hudson feared an attack and when the Spaniards asked permission to go alongside, he asked whether the launches were armed. The answer was "only with a bottle of brandy."<sup>39</sup> Martínez promised good treatment and fully accepted Hudson's claim that his ship had been severely battered in the 116 days crossing from Macao, and was in need of repairs, wood, and water. The English vessel departed from Nootka on July 1 under strict orders not to engage in commerce along the coast claimed by Spain.<sup>40</sup> It had become quite evident by this time that an alarming number of ships were intruding into Spanish territory. Unfortunately, Martínez's uneasiness was not at all relieved by his close contacts with Captain Kendrick who quite likely portrayed the aspirations of his British fur trading opponents in the worst possible light.<sup>41</sup>

When the frigate *Argonaut* under Captain James Colnett arrived at the Spanish settlement only a day after the departure of the *Princess Royal*, Martínez was well aware that the British and not the Russians were the real danger to Spanish sovereignty. This became even more evident when Colnett made no effort to hide the fact that he had been dispatched to establish a trading factory to dominate the sea otter trade and to impede the commerce of other nations. He claimed to have orders from the King of England to take possession of the coast, to establish a fort at Nootka Sound, and to create a permanent settlement. To accomplish these ends, he brought with him 29 Chinese tradesmen and a large amount of equipment including the frame for a coastal vessel. Martínez could see that the Spanish position was in jeopardy and that even if he permitted Colnett to leave Nootka, the British would un-

<sup>38</sup> Esteban José Martínez, "Diario," p. 59. Captain Viana and Supercargo Douglas, signed the document presented to them by Martínez, well aware that neither of them had the right to bind the owners of the vessel. After their hasty preparations, the Portuguese vessel set sail on May 31st.

<sup>39</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1532, Thomas Hudson to Viceroy Florez, September 18, 1789.

<sup>40</sup> Esteban José Martínez, "Diario," p. 82.

<sup>41</sup> Frederick W. Howay, ed. *Voyages of the "Columbia"*, p. xxi. In a letter John Howell explained to Joseph Barrell, "... I hardly ever saw a man in your North West Employ who was not either a fool or a rogue, and your commanders united both those characters."

doubtedly move to some other port along the coast. Colnett confirmed these fears when he requested permission to construct a stronghold near the Spanish settlement for the protection of his people and to prevent thefts of equipment by the Indians.<sup>42</sup> The almost inevitable explosion resulted when the British captain exhibited behaviour interpreted to be suspicious by the Spaniards and then refused to present his instructions for translation and scrutiny. An argument ensued in Martínez's cabin and according to the Spanish accounts, Colnett lost control of his highly volatile temper. He placed his hand on his sword two or three times and in the minor scuffle shouted "God Damn Spain" or "God Damn Spaniards" which required no interpreter for Martínez to understand the meaning.<sup>43</sup>

This insult to the Spanish flag and sovereign was the immediate pretext for the arrest of Colnett and his crew. Martínez was quite aware of the gravity of his acts from the beginning but he saw no alternative if Spanish sovereignty was to be protected and the British kept out of waters so close to the exposed California ports.<sup>44</sup> This time the prisoners were to be sent to San Blas for the disposition of the viceroy, and when the *Princess Royal* reappeared, Captain Hudson and his crew were also captured.<sup>45</sup>

In defending the Spanish claims, Martínez aroused the eternal enmity of the British fur traders and their backers. The fact that there was a Spanish side to the dispute became completely submerged in the skilful propaganda concocted during the Nootka Controversy which followed the arrests. John Meares, one of the most active fur traders and with a considerable investment in the captured vessels, blackened the character of Martínez and condemned the motives of the Spaniards on the northwest coast.<sup>46</sup> Meares claimed that in 1788 during his visit to Nootka

<sup>42</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1529, Florez to Valdés, no. 1182, August 27, 1789, and Esteban José Martínez, "Diario," pp. 83-84.

<sup>43</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1529, Martínez to Florez, Nootka, July 13, 1789.

<sup>44</sup> Esteban José Martínez, "Diario," p. 92. For Captain Colnett's side of the affair see F. W. Howay, ed. *The Journal of Captain James Colnett aboard the Argonaut from April 26, 1789 to November 3, 1791* (Toronto, 1940). A great deal of ink has been spilled over this incident which developed into the Nootka Controversy. While far too much attention has been placed upon the behaviour of the individual participants rather than upon the greater issues of control over the coast, it should be noted that Colnett was an untrustworthy observer. His own officers seemed to have no respect for him whatsoever, hindering rather than helping him both at Nootka and during the period of captivity in Mexico. After the arrest of his vessel, Colnett completely lost his mind and attempted suicide.

<sup>45</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1532, Hudson to Florez, September 18, 1789.

<sup>46</sup> Meares did have reason to be bitter at the turn of events which damaged his interests in the profitable fur trading operation. Martínez captured two of his vessels,

Sound, Maquinna, chief of the Nootka Indians, had granted him lands and acknowledged British sovereignty over all of his territories.<sup>47</sup> In addition, Meares stated that he had purchased lands from Maquinna upon which he had constructed a house to be used as an occasional residence and trading post. While the British captain described his house as "a structure of uncommon magnificence to the natives," this was hardly likely. Even Meares admitted that the house was well advanced in construction after only three days and the Spaniards found no trace of it at all when they arrived less than a year later. Such evidence shattered before the testimony of Chief Maquinna and foreigners who were present at Nootka in 1788, but the weakest of claims could be supported by the might of British seapower.<sup>48</sup>

To further portray the Spaniards as true eighteenth-century barbarians, Meares used a most unfortunate incident in which an Indian chief named Callicum was shot and killed by Martínez's men. Apparently, Callicum supported British interests at Nootka and when the two vessels were captured, he went out to the Spanish ships in his canoe to hurl insults and to defend his friends. Unable to attract the chief on board for an explanation and finally angered by the constant stream of invective, Martínez fired his pistol to drive Callicum away. One of the Spanish sailors mistook the intention of his commander and used the pistol shot as license to open fire. He took aim at Callicum and shot him dead.<sup>49</sup> While this isolated act of brutality was by no means unique when compared with general relations between maritime fur traders and the Indians, Meares turned it into a *cause célèbre*. According to his account, "Callicum possessed a delicacy of mind and conduct which would have done honor to the most improved state of our civilization."<sup>50</sup> While Meares' own relationships with the Indians were often terribly violent and he described the Indians generally as "nasty to a degree that rivals the most filthy brutes"<sup>51</sup> and cannibals, the defence of Callicum had the

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expelled the *Efigenia*, and appropriated the schooner *Northwest America* which Meares had constructed at Nootka the previous year.

<sup>47</sup> Meares, pp. 216-217.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115, and British Columbia Provincial Archives, Victoria, Manuscript Section (hereafter cited as BCPA), *Viaje a la Costa N.O. de la América Septentrional por Don Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, del Orden de Santiago, Capitán de Navío de la Real Armada, y Comandante del Departamento de San Blas en las Fragatas de su mando Santa Gertrudis, Aranzazu, Princesa, y Goleta Activo, Año de 1792.*

<sup>49</sup> Esteban José Martínez, "Diario," p. 94.

<sup>50</sup> Meares, p. 117.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

desired results. His journal circulated so widely that even the Spaniards began to think of Martínez as a beast guilty of oppressive acts against the foreign fur traders as well as the Indians. Once again, by failing to publish the Spanish side of the story, not only was Martínez condemned, but Spain's position appeared weak to the world.<sup>52</sup>

The murder of Callicum and the arrest of the British vessels did disturb the friendly relations which the Spaniards had cultivated with Chief Maquinna's people. For some days, the English prisoners were able to keep the Indians wary of the Spaniards, but gifts soon convinced them that the incidents did not mean any change in friendship. During the month of July, all of the prisoners except two seamen who joined the Spanish service were shipped to San Blas.<sup>53</sup> By August, the Indians had sufficiently regained their confidence to bring a daily supply of fish for the settlement in exchange for machetes, pieces of iron, copper, beads, and other trifles. When Maquinna returned to oversee the removal of planking from the abandoned houses of his village at Friendly Cove for his winter quarters at Tahsis, Martínez took advantage of the visit to present the chief with a number of gifts and a little biscuit which he could not resist.<sup>54</sup>

By this time, the small fortress of San Miguel had been constructed and armed with 10 cannon. Labour continued on the house and a number of out buildings despite continuous rains which hampered the cutting of timber. Obviously, Martínez's intentions were to solidify his position at the port and to prepare winter quarters for the garrison. Gardens had been planted which by the end of August produced lettuce, radishes, cabbage, turnips, and a number of herbs. On July 28, 1789, however, the supply ship *Aranzazu* arrived with news which shocked Martínez: Nootka was to be abandoned when winter fell.<sup>55</sup>

This order has caused historians considerable trouble, especially since Viceroy Florez issued it only a few days after Martínez departed from

<sup>52</sup> Some of the most enlightened Spaniards, José Mariano Moziño, for example, accepted Meares' interpretation of Martínez's actions. See Iris H. Wilson, ed. *Noticias de Nutka by José Mariano Moziño* (Seattle, 1970), p. 74. Alejandro Malaspina was less ready to adopt the Meares' account about the killing of Callicum. He interviewed an Indian named Natzapi who clarified the incident and demonstrated the distortion of Captain Meares. Even so, Malaspina did not pardon the actions of Martínez. See Pedro de Novo y Colson, ed. *La Vuelta al Mando por los Corbetas Descubierta y Atrevida al mando del Capitán de Navío Don Alejandro Malaspina desde 1789-1794* (Madrid, 1885), p. 354.

<sup>53</sup> Esteban José Martínez, "Diario," p. 95.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

San Blas. Opinion has varied from suggestions that something was wrong with Martínez's orders, that he wanted to get back to Mexico to explain his conduct, or that he held secret instructions regarding the British. The most widely accepted interpretation is that Florez desired only to pretend settlement in order to solidify the Spanish claim of sovereignty over the entire coast.<sup>56</sup> If this was true, however, it seems highly unlikely that Martínez would be left totally in the dark regarding the meaning of the occupation of Nootka. Certainly the arrest of the British fur traders and the heavy labour required to prepare for a winter at Nootka could have been avoided if the abandonment had been contemplated from the beginning. As has been mentioned, Florez had attempted to cover his actions should the imperial government reject his hasty initiatives to prevent the designs of foreign powers. The order to withdraw the garrison from Nootka at the outset of winter permitted the viceroy some flexibility; if Madrid agreed with his policies, he would have plenty of time to counter his previous instructions.<sup>57</sup>

Other factors intervened to complicate Florez's plans. He suffered severe arthritis in his hands and arms which made the vast administrative load of his office more and more difficult. He knew that his successor, the Count of Revillagigedo, would arrive shortly in Mexico to take charge of the viceroyalty and responsibility for Nootka Sound. Revillagigedo docked at Veracruz on August 6, 1789, probably causing Florez to breathe a sigh of relief. His relief soon evaporated, however, with the arrival of Martínez's dispatches about the arrest of the British vessels.<sup>58</sup> Fully aware of the extreme gravity of the situation, Florez informed his successor who was in no hurry whatsoever to inherit what appeared to be a disaster in the making.

The steps taken by Florez after receipt of the reports from Nootka demonstrated beyond any doubt that he did not intend to abandon the northern settlement. Instead of permitting the automatic withdrawal from Nootka, the viceroy issued orders during the month of September to meet Martínez's urgent requests for 200 regular troops as well as sup-

<sup>56</sup> Thurman, pp. 296-297, and Charles L. Stewart, "Why the Spaniards Temporarily Abandoned Nootka Sound in 1789," *Canadian Historical Review*, XVII (1936), p. 168.

<sup>57</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1530, Revillagigedo to Valdés, no. 193, December 28, 1789. Viceroy Florez was completely on his own until the matter had been considered in Spain by the *Consejo de Estado*. Not until April 14, 1789, did the imperial government issue an order calling the Mexican viceroy to employ active means to sustain the California settlements, explore the northern coast, and prevent the designs of foreign powers.

<sup>58</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1529, Martínez to Florez, Nootka, July 13, 1789.

plies of medicines and other materials needed to sustain the port.<sup>59</sup> He wrote to Revillagigedo, asking him to come to Guadalupe near Mexico City for discussions on the developing crisis. The First Company of Volunteers of Catalonia<sup>60</sup> stationed at Guadalajara, was ordered to be ready to march at a moment's notice for San Blas. While there were only three officers and 80 men in this unit, the viceroy considered them suitable for the mission since they were mostly Europeans by birth. As for the remainder of the 200 troops requested by Martínez, Florez decided to leave the decision to his successor whether soldiers should be drawn from the regular Mexican infantry regiments or if the Second Company of Volunteers of Catalonia should be recalled from frontier service.<sup>61</sup> Even though the viceroy did not completely applaud the actions of Martínez, he agreed that his instructions preventing trade between foreigners and the Indians made the arrests necessary.<sup>62</sup>

It is difficult to understand the position of Revillagigedo with regard to Nootka other than to say that he went to extraordinary lengths to avoid responsibility. At first, he approved the actions of Martínez and discounted the British threat, supposing that Colnett represented a private commercial venture with no official support from Britain. The vast distance from the northwest coast to Britain seemed to preclude any real fear of confrontation in the region.<sup>63</sup> In the light of this information, it is remarkable that Revillagigedo would later claim to have been totally ignorant about the events at Nootka when he finally took command of New Spain in October, 1789. He agreed that a series of lengthy confer-

<sup>59</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1529, Florez to Valdés, no. 1182, August 27, 1789.

<sup>60</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1515, Florez to Valdés, no. 155, February 25, 1788. Since historians often confuse the nature of these troops in various ways, a little background is in order. In 1768, a company had been removed from the Regiment of Catalonia for service in New Spain and another had been raised in Mexico City. During the 1770's and 1780's, both companies saw service on the frontiers and in mining towns like Guadalajara and Pachuca where the population caused numerous disturbances. The Catalanian enlistment fell off with the passage of time, but efforts were made to secure European replacements from the ranks of illegal immigrants and vagabonds found in Mexico.

<sup>61</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1525, Florez to Valdés, no. 1245, September 26, 1789, and BCPA, Pedro Alberni Correspondence (Photostats from the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico), Antonio Villa Urrutía to Florez, Guadalajara, September 4, 1789.

<sup>62</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1525, Florez to Valdés, no. 1245, September 26, 1789. The viceroy did not believe that the *Argonaut* and *Princess Royal* would be declared legal prizes. One of the problems was that Spanish law still regarded any foreign vessel found in the Pacific as enemies whether or not they flew the flag of friendly nations. The Viceroy of Peru had removed the Governor of the Island of Juan Fernández for not having detained the vessel *Columbia*.

<sup>63</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1531, Revillagigedo to Valdés, Veracruz, August 31, 1789.



ences between himself and Florez had touched upon a great number of important matters and current problems, but stated that no mention had been made of the settlement of Nootka Sound or the capture of the British ships. Florez's neglect of the subject could be traced either to "natural forgetfulness or because there were a multitude of similarly grave matters to be discussed."<sup>64</sup> Clearly, the new viceroy was less than candid in his efforts to blame possible wrong-doing upon his predecessor. With Colnett, Hudson, and other prisoners in Mexico, Revillagigedo altered his previous support for Martínez's policies; he saw the potential dangers and came to oppose the arrests. Since Florez had sanctioned them, however, he saw no alternative except to await instructions from Spain on the matter.<sup>65</sup>

In the interim, Martínez had delayed until late October before packing up his garrison and returning to Mexico. The slowness of the two viceroys, combined with the fact that reinforcements were not ready to depart from San Blas, meant that little could be done in 1789. Captain Pedro Alberni, commander of the First Company of Volunteers of Catalonia reported that he was short 15 men and had another 23 who were either too old or otherwise unfit for northern service.<sup>66</sup> Besides, the muskets used by the company were completely worn out after more than 13 years continuous use. Alberni risked court martial by his refusal to move his unit, but he insisted that his men be properly armed and equipped before they undertook the rigours of northern frontier duty.<sup>67</sup>

Revillagigedo, by this time having received imperial orders to protect the coasts north of California, carried forward Florez's preparations to dispatch another expedition. Although there had been no effort to prevent Martínez from following through with his instructions, the viceroy now called the abandonment of Nootka "an inopportune" move. He directed Juan Francisco Bodega y Quadra, now commandant of the San Blas naval department, to hasten the reoccupation of Nootka Sound in the spring of 1790. This time, while Spain could tolerate no foreign

<sup>64</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1532, Revillagigedo to Valdés, no. 50, October 27, 1789, and no. 530, May 1, 1790.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, The imperial government ordered the release of the prisoners on January 26, 1790. In the meantime, however, both the *Argonaut* and the *Princess Royal* had been pressed into the Spanish service to re-establish the base at Nootka.

<sup>66</sup> BCPA, Pedro Alberni Correspondence, Alberni to Florez, Guadalajara, September 25, 1789. On this occasion, replacements were sent from the Regiment of Puebla which was being formed and could spare a few of the men who had been sent from Spain.

<sup>67</sup> BCPA, Pedro Alberni Correspondence, Alberni to Revillagigedo, Guadalajara, December 18, 1789.

opposition, the new commander, Lieutenant Francisco de Eliza, was to be polite to ships encountered on the coast. Commerce with the Indians was still forbidden in theory, but recourse to arms was restricted to cases of direct attacks or grave insults. In addition, full scientific investigations were to provide information on the flora, fauna, minerals, and weather conditions of the north with appropriate collections and statistics being forwarded to Mexico City for evaluation. Eliza was to take great care to collect ethnological data on the spirit, character, and numbers of the Indian tribes and above all to cultivate their friendship.<sup>68</sup> While all of this took place, Pedro Alberni and his Volunteers of Catalonia were to rebuild the small fortress of San Miguel and arm it with sufficient light cannon to prevent challenges against Spanish sovereignty.

Poor Martínez, the man who had prevented the British from occupying Nootka Sound, now suffered demotion to the rank of pilot in the new expedition. Few Spaniards and even fewer foreigners would remember him as anything more than a violent hothead, a person sadly equipped for frontier diplomacy or the command of Spain's northern outpost. Martínez, however, was the one Spaniard who really understood the potential of the northwest coast and the fact that Spain would have to develop something more than a small military garrison if true sovereignty was to be guaranteed. From the beginning, Martínez recommended that Spaniards and Mexicans form a powerful commercial company under a 50 year royal monopoly for the purpose of exploiting the sea otter and seal skin trade with Canton. In exchange for the monopoly, the company would be obligated to establish at least four presidios on the coast manned by 100 troops in each garrison and sixteen missions which would undertake the task of converting the Indians. Twelve armed vessels would maintain the settlements, engage in the trans-Pacific fur trade with China, and halt clandestine trade of foreign nations.<sup>69</sup> The company would be fully responsible for the maintenance of the troops, missionary fathers, and the transports. Martínez pointed out that the Russian system was in some ways similar to the one he envisioned, but with the proximity and wealth of Mexico, his proposal presented many opportunities for success.

To begin with, the monopoly company would remove the intolerable drain upon the Mexican treasury caused by profitless voyages up the

<sup>68</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1537, Instrucciones secretas para el Teniente de Navío, Don Francisco Eliza, Comandante de la Fragata Concepción, San Blas, January 28, 1790.

<sup>69</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1530, Martínez to Florez, Nootka, July 24, 1789.

coast. The company might also be able to occupy the Hawaiian Islands and to develop them as a source of provisions for the northern settlements as well as a base in the trans-Pacific trade to the Philippines and Canton.<sup>70</sup> Martínez urged his countrymen to see the vast potential of the fur trade and envisioned a great triangular system encompassing the entire Pacific Ocean. Furs from the northwest coast would be carried to China where they would be exchanged for silk, porcelains, and other Oriental products for Mexico as well as supplying the needs of the new settlements. Perhaps even more important for Mexico, however, was the possibility of opening a commerce in Chinese mercury, a metal of vital importance in the production of silver which was the chief industry of New Spain. If this proved to be a viable alternative to mercury produced in Spain, the viceroyalty would be able to increase silver production and free itself from wartime disruptions which customarily saw Britain sweep the Atlantic clear of vital Spanish shipping. Finally, Mexican industry would be stimulated by the expansion to the northwest coast. Here, Bodega y Quadra and others would agree with Martínez that Mexicans should be able to dominate trade in copper, abalone shells, iron, and textiles to meet the almost insatiable demands of the Indians. Even if one did not fully agree with the idea of a monopoly company, the mere proximity of Mexico convinced many observers that Spaniards should have a definite advantage in commercial competition against the British and Americans. Then the existing commercial connections with the Spanish Philippines by way of the Manila galleons would allow easy access to Chinese markets.<sup>71</sup>

Viceroy Florez rejected what he considered to be the grandiose projects of Martínez, but Revillagigedo saw merit in some aspects of the plan. The possibility of obtaining mercury itself demanded further consideration of the idea. With the existing commercial machinery of the *Consulados*<sup>72</sup> of Mexico and Manila, both the American and Asian operations of the fur trade could be managed without difficulty.<sup>73</sup> To test the market potential, Revillagigedo dispatched a shipment of 3,356 sea

<sup>70</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1530, Revillagigedo to Valdés, no. 199, December 27, 1789.

<sup>71</sup> BCPA, *Viaje a la Costa N.O. por Don Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, 1792*, and *Novo y Colson*, pp. 371-372. Also see José Porrúa Turanzas, ed. *Relación del Viaje Hecho por las Goletas Sutil y Mexicana en el Año de 1792 para Reconocer el Estrecho de Fuca* (Madrid, 1958), p. CXLVIII. In the lengthy introduction to this journal which was published in 1802 by Martín Fernández de Navarrete, the commercial potential of the fur trade was finally made known to the Spanish speaking world.

<sup>72</sup> Merchant guilds.

<sup>73</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1530, Revillagigedo to Valdés, no. 244, January 12, 1790.

otter skins on the British sloop *Princess Royal* which was to be returned to its owners at Canton. The consignment included a variety of skins from different locations to gauge market acceptance with 208 of the finest quality pelts from the Strait of Juan de Fuca.<sup>74</sup>

The results of this commercial experiment while not altogether negative did not attract the speculative capital of Mexican merchants. Of the 2,803 skins actually marketed, the government received a total of 45,717 pesos of which 7,370 pesos were paid out for expenses. This left a sum of 38,347 pesos, without considering the original purchase price of the furs on the northwest coast or costs of curing and shipment from the north to San Blas and Acapulco. While these figures hardly drew capital from private sources, the government did manage to obtain 351 *quintales*<sup>75</sup> of mercury which after extensive tests proved to be equal in quality to the European metal.<sup>76</sup> Any remaining interest which might have been generated in the fur trade was soon lost when reports arrived from Manila that the Chinese Empire subsequently had prohibited the import of furs. The statistics spoke for themselves even without the negative news from China and indications of rising prices on the northwest coast as the Indians became accustomed to dealing with the fur traders. If this was not sufficient deterrent, some Spaniards began to fear that overkilling of the sea otter resource would soon destroy the fur trade.<sup>77</sup>

Without an economic base of any kind, the Spanish occupation of Nootka Sound could hardly be justified except for strategic and political reasons. As long as the possibility remained that a passage might be discovered to Europe and until the conclusion of the controversy with Britain over the capture of the merchant vessels and British rights on the coast, Spain would not budge from Nootka. Even in 1790, however, Viceroy Revillagigedo stated that in the event of war with Britain, Nootka should be abandoned in order to improve the defences of the older settlements of California.<sup>78</sup> This does not mean that Spanish activities on the northwest coast during the early 1790's would lose significance or interest for the historian. The very lack of economic exploita-

<sup>74</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1540, Revillagigedo to Pedro de Lerena, no. 320, March 31, 1791. Most of the remainder of the skins had come from trade conducted by the friars of the California missions.

<sup>75</sup> One *quintal* equals 100 pounds or about 46 kilograms.

<sup>76</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1548, Revillagigedo to Diego de Gardoqui, no. 118, June 30, 1792.

<sup>77</sup> Novo y Colson, p. 368.

<sup>78</sup> AGI, Mexico, leg. 1532, Revillagigedo to Conde del Campo de Alange, no. 22, July 27, 1790.

tion combined with traditional Spanish ethnological approaches to the Indians and the modern scientific spirit from the European Enlightenment, made these men into interested observers and recorders of this early period in coastal history. Since the Spanish settlements remained military rather than civilian posts the discipline which was so sadly lacking amongst the maritime fur traders could be maintained in all but a few instances. The Indians suffered less from the presence of Spain than they did from any of the other nations there to make profits from the fur trade.

The settlements at Nootka Sound and Puerto de Nuñez Gaona<sup>79</sup> in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, provided much more opportunity for observation and experimentation than did occasional visits by fur traders. At Friendly Cove, Francisco Eliza and Pedro Alberni laboured to form a permanent garrison on the site previously occupied by Maquinna's summer village. Alberni, in addition to his duties as commander of the fort, interested himself in testing the agricultural potential of the new land. On several garden plots, he experienced great success cultivating cabbages, lettuce, onions, garlic, salt-wort, radishes, turnips, carrots, parsley, and artichokes — all of which helped to reduce scurvy and to maintain general health and morale. While corn, wheat, and chickpeas did not mature, barley produced 12 to 14 fanegas<sup>80</sup> for every one planted; beans and peas were a little less bountiful, ripening well only if the rains were not excessive.<sup>81</sup> The soil proved to be richer than might have been expected, but with the gardens located on the site of the old Indian village, the land was very well manured.<sup>82</sup> Poultry, sheep, pigs, goats, and Mexican cattle thrived in the northern climate although limited feed in the winters caused problems.<sup>83</sup> The only major concern in agriculture and animal husbandry as well as in the storage of all kinds of goods was the plague of rats which had multiplied prodigiously after their introduction from the ships which stopped at Nootka.

Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, an exponent of northern settlement and resident at Nootka Sound in 1792 during the negotiations with Captain George Vancouver, lauded the fertility of the land. He

<sup>79</sup> Neah Bay on the Washington State side of the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

<sup>80</sup> One *fanega* measures 1.60 bushels.

<sup>81</sup> Novo y Colson, p. 363.

<sup>82</sup> C. F. Newcombe, ed. *Menzies' Journal of Vancouver's Voyage, April to October, 1792* (Victoria, 1923), p. 111.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, and BCPA, *Viaje a la Costa N.O. por Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra 1792*.

saw no reason why a permanent garrison could not be maintained without difficulty for potatoes grew to enormous sizes and in quantities sufficient to supply the needs of the entire population in cases of necessity. His surveys in the vicinity of the post indicated that there was enough land to raise grain and maize for a population of about 1,000 persons.<sup>84</sup> Even if all cereal crops failed, he pointed out, the settlers could always eat the plentiful Kamchatka lily which might even provide bread for the inhabitants once they learned how to cultivate and utilize it. In addition to the agricultural potential, Bodega could not help being impressed by the vast forest resources which might permit the development of a ship building industry. There was even evidence of mineral deposits located in the mountains surrounding Nootka Sound. While the commandant lacked equipment needed for analysis, he collected samples of ores which he identified as copper, lead, iron, and other metals which he forwarded to Mexico City.<sup>85</sup>

By 1792, the Nootka settlement, while not at all self-sufficient in any sense, had developed a degree of respectability which impressed both Spaniards and foreigners. Houses, barracks, warehouses, bread ovens, and other out buildings were more than sufficient for the garrison of 200 to 250 men. Time solved early problems experienced in constructing buildings of green lumber and Bodega introduced the practice of burning oyster shell to make whitewash and mortar. The governor's house was by this time a fairly large two-storey edifice which Bodega made into the centre for his lavish hospitality.<sup>86</sup> If the fortress which guarded the port did not particularly frighten foreign visitors, it was more than sufficient to maintain Spanish sovereignty against foreign competitors as well as to deter the Indians from violence.<sup>87</sup> Under Bodega, the establishment which once excluded foreigners, now became a famous stopping place for the fur traders. Not only did the governor provide repair facilities and generous gifts of supplies, but his banquets, served on solid silver plates, often seated more than 50 guests.<sup>88</sup> Archibald Menzies, the botanist with the Vancouver expedition, summed up the foreign reaction to Spanish Nootka when he stated, ". . . the Spaniards seem to go on here

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, and George Vancouver, *Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Round the World*, I (London, 1798), p. 393.

<sup>87</sup> Frederick W. Howay, ed. *Voyages of the "Columbia"*, p. 410. Boit reported in his journal that ". . . their fort was no great thing, mounted with 6 twenty-four and 30 six pounders the platforms would not bear the weight of the metal."

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411.

with greater activity and industry than we are led to believe of them at any of their other remote infant settlements."<sup>89</sup>

It becomes quite clear from many of the accounts left by foreign visitors that the Spaniards had developed a highly successful relationship with the Indians. Vancouver expressed what he described as "a mixture of surprise and pleasure" at seeing how Bodega had completely gained the confidence of the Nootka tribes. Chief Maquinna, turned away unrecognized when he went to visit Vancouver's ships, complained openly to Bodega about the possibility of the Spaniards abandoning his people to some other European power.<sup>90</sup> Joseph Ingraham of the American vessel *Hope* expressed the same surprise at seeing how the Indian chiefs had adopted European manners, ". . . meeting and parting with strangers with a great deal of bowing and scraping 'Adiós Señor' in the most approved Castilian style." He went on to exclaim ". . . that if the Spaniards had the tuition of these people but a few years longer they would be quite civilized."<sup>91</sup>

The achievement of such excellent relations with the Indians seems remarkable in view of the barbarities committed by many of the fur traders. Certainly the shooting of Callicum had not done anything to endear the Spaniards to the Indians. Cool relations had been patched up by Pedro Alberni, who learned that the Indians used flattery and songs in diplomacy; he taught his troops to sing a simple verse in praise of Maquinna to a European tune.<sup>92</sup> The song attracted Maquinna, as had been planned, but injustices continued to result from the basic lack of humanity of the common soldiers and sailors toward the Indians. The troops opened fire at night upon Indians who came to steal barrel hoops and other bits of metal; excessive punishment for the crime. On several other occasions during the construction of the settlement, seamen dispatched to purchase lumber from Indian villages could not resist using a show of force to steal boards from Indian houses.<sup>93</sup> The worst breach occurred at the new settlement of Nuñez Gaona where in July 1792, a Spanish pilot named Antonio Serantes was murdered by the Indians. The commander, Salvador Fidalgo, fell into a rage when he received

<sup>89</sup> Newcombe, p. 111.

<sup>90</sup> Vancouver, I, pp. 385-386.

<sup>91</sup> F. W. Howay, ed. "The Voyage of the Hope: 1790-1792," *Washington Historical Quarterly* (1920), p. 25.

<sup>92</sup> Wilson, *Noticias de Nutka*, p. 78. The song went, "Maquinna, Maquinna, Maquinna, is a great prince and friend of ours; Spain, Spain, Spain is the friend of the Maquinna and Nootka."

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

this news and opened fire on two canoes killing all but two of the occupants. This was the single Spanish act which was comparable to the atrocities committed up and down the coast by the fur traders. The only difference was that Fidalgo received severe reprimands from Bodega, the viceroy, and finally from the Spanish king.<sup>94</sup>

From the date of his arrival at Nootka, Bodega had done everything within his power to halt even minor incidents with the Indians and to open a radically different kind of relationship. To begin with, Maquinna always received treatment as a special friend and was distinguished from all other chiefs by clear demonstrations of esteem. When he came as he often did to dine at Bodega's residence, the Spanish commander undertook to serve him and to provide special gifts. Maquinna was soon boasting about his special friendship with Bodega to all other chiefs he encountered.<sup>95</sup> Before long, the Indians were adept at managing forks and spoons, thoroughly impressed with the privilege of eating with the commandant. Maquinna developed a taste for wine which he called "Spanish water," leaving it to his subordinates to limit his intake so that he should not become overly intoxicated. Indians filled Bodega's house, often spending the night there without causing any damage other than a few small thefts.<sup>96</sup> Bodega described his policy as having resulted from his own natural propensity to establish "a system of humanity." The results were excellent: Spaniards were almost always welcome in Maquinna's villages. With the addition of gifts such as a showy tin-plate coat of mail presented to the Indian chief, Bodega solidified good relations.<sup>97</sup>

Besides the policies of Bodega, the Spaniards who accompanied the scientific and exploratory expeditions under Alejandro Malaspina in 1791, and the following year under Dionisio Galiano and Cayetano Valdés, brought little other than credit to their nation. Wherever possible, they exercised great care to respect Indian customs and civilization. Often this meant that robbery, poor faith, and other insults would be tolerated in the name of science and humanity. These men fully understood that they were the agents of an enlightened Europe and that as Spaniards, they must exercise special care in order to avoid the misrepresentations which enemies in the past had used to stain the Iberian record.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Wagner, p. 64.

<sup>95</sup> BCPA, *Viaje a la Costa N.O. por Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra*, 1792.

<sup>96</sup> *Relación del Viaje Hecho por las Goletas Sutil y Mexicana*, p. 16, and Wilson, *Noticias de Nutka*, p. 84.

<sup>97</sup> BCPA, *Viaje a la Costa N.O. por Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra*, 1792.

<sup>98</sup> Francisco Xavier de Viana, *Diario de Viaje*, II (Montevideo, 1958), p. 62.



The accounts of these scientists and explorers provide insights into Indian societies which were undergoing transformations resulting from the onslaught of European culture.<sup>99</sup>

The view seen by the highly moralistic and exceptionally puritanical Spanish observers is most interesting. Modesty was not an encumbrance to many of the tribes whose traders would literally sell the sea otter skin garments off their backs if the bartering was good. This amused more than bothered the Spaniards although when the Indians purchased old European clothing, they were often difficult to distinguish from the Mexican sailors. Where the women appeared indecent, however, the officers were considerably less willing to express amusement. It was difficult enough to restrain the seamen even where provocations were not offered. The Nootka women caused no trouble in their deportment, but those of Nuñez Gaona dressed only in a cloak of skins tied at the neck and an absolutely insufficient fringed sash about the waist; they "... carried themselves in their canoes with little restraint and very little modesty."<sup>100</sup> Some of the Indian entertainments provided even more concern, evoking comparison by the Spaniards to the debauched spectacles of the ancient Greeks and Romans.<sup>101</sup>

With considerably more discipline than the fur traders, the Spaniards did not accept frequent offers of women slaves or prisoners of war which were made by the Indians. Although the Indians appeared to be curious or amused to experiment with the sexual behaviour of Europeans, it was almost certain that any contacts would introduce venereal diseases into their societies. Most if not all ships of the several nations which frequented the northwest coast carried venereal complaints.<sup>102</sup> Cook's expedition, which might in many ways be described as a voyage of seduction as much as exploration of the Pacific, introduced the Nootka women to the lusty sexual appetites of Englishmen. Beauty applications of rancid whale oil, soot, red dirt, and other things which completely extinguished the lust of most Spaniards and other foreigners, increased the interest of Cook's sailors.<sup>103</sup> Cook made efforts to prevent those of his men who

<sup>99</sup> See Novo y Colson, and the *Relación del Viaje Hecho por las Goletas Sutil y Mexicana*.

<sup>100</sup> *Relación del Viaje Hecho por las Goletas Sutil y Mexicana*, p. 30.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>102</sup> Captains almost invariably referred to the health of their crewmen as being excellent except for those suffering venereal complaints. For two examples see Viana, I, p. 20, and William Robert Broughton, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean . . . performed in His Majesty's Sloop Providence and her Tender in the Years 1795, 1796, 1797, 1798* (London, 1804), p. 48.

<sup>103</sup> Beaglehole, II, "David Samwell's Journal," p. 1100.

suffered venereal diseases from going ashore, but he failed miserably. The Spaniards had absolutely no intention of permitting any repetition of the British example.<sup>104</sup> When Chief Maquinna expressed fears that Spanish seamen would molest the women of his tribe if he moved his village close to the Nootka settlement, he was given absolute promises that no passage of mariners to his houses would take place under any circumstances. The chief had to agree that the Spanish officers had never given any cause for disgust in their relationships with the Indians.<sup>105</sup>

Spanish observers feared that venereal diseases introduced by the fur traders would within a relatively few years destroy the Indians of the northwest coast in the same way that they had wiped out the tribes of Baja California. With only about 2,000 Indians in the Nootka tribe and small populations scattered in other locations, it appeared quite evident that sterility would greatly contribute to a disastrous population decline which seemed already to have begun.<sup>106</sup> In 1791 for example, Casacan, Chief of the Nitinat tribe suffered from venereal disease and passed it to his wife. Apparently he sold a female slave to a trading vessel for some copper sheets; when it departed, she had been sent ashore infected with the disease. The chief later cohabited with the woman, caught the disease and passed it on to his wife.<sup>107</sup>

Disease was only one threat to the Indians perceived by the Spaniards. Another was the deleterious influence of the fur traders who introduced some of the worst aspects of their own culture and permitted the Indians to gain possession of large numbers of muskets which were dangerous both to themselves and to subsequent visitors. By 1792, they had begun to abandon their traditional arms in favour of muskets and pistols. Warfare, often stirred up by the fur traders to stimulate the arms market, became much more bloody when fought with the new weapons. It took very little time to learn how to fire accurately and to refuse to trade for anything but muskets, ammunition, and powder.<sup>108</sup> The Spaniards, true to their traditional policies, refused to join in this practice although a few of their muskets did find their way to the Indians. At times, the

<sup>104</sup> Novo y Colson, p. 157, and Viana, I, p. 47, and H. R. Wagner, ed. "Journal of Tomás de Suría of his Voyage with Malaspina to the Northwest Coast of America in 1791," *Pacific Historical Review*, V (1936), p. 250.

<sup>105</sup> Viana, II, p. 94.

<sup>106</sup> Wilson, *Noticias de Nutka*, p. 43, and *Relación del Viaje Hecho por las Goletas Sutil y Mexicana*, p. 147.

<sup>107</sup> Howay, *Voyages of the "Columbia"*, p. 196.

<sup>108</sup> Novo y Colson, p. 193. In a visit to Maquinna's village, Malaspina was shocked to see Indians armed with muskets and a stand of 15 muskets in the chief's house.

fur traders used Spain's rejection of this trade in the development of their propaganda. James Colnett, for example, told one chief that Spanish policy proved beyond any doubt their intentions to extirpate the Indians from the face of the earth.<sup>109</sup>

The Spaniards were never strong enough to guard the Indians against the fur traders. Fraud and violence were regular occurrences particularly since the traders knew that they never had to return to a given locality. Often the muskets received by the Indians at highly inflated prices exploded in their faces when discharged.<sup>110</sup> Cannon fire destroyed entire villages after real or imagined attacks against vessels. If the Indians refused to trade or set prices too high, it was not unusual for the traders to remove their furs by force and to pay whatever sum, if any, that the captain considered adequate. Certainly a large number of the atrocities went unrecorded, but even when Maquinna complained to the Spaniards, nothing could be done.<sup>111</sup> Violence caused by one ship against a certain tribe bred hostility and the desire for revenge which could only be taken when the next fur trader arrived in the vicinity. Sometimes, the cruelty of the visitors owed more to their own lack of humanity than to their desire for profits. Maquinna told Martínez of an incident which had taken place when he went on board the English vessel *Sea Otter* commanded by Captain Hanna. Several seamen had placed a little black powder under the chief explaining that this was an honour given only to princes. The "honour" became evident when they ignited the charge and blew Maquinna from his seat. He received burns and scars which he exposed to show Martínez the extent of the damage.<sup>112</sup>

Without complete control over the fur trade, the Spaniards could not hope to exercise much influence over the Indian cultures. Since no large scale missionary assault upon the pagan religions was possible during the 1790's, the few friars available at Nootka and on the various expeditions of discovery had to improvise. They began to promote the purchase of children who were brought to the Spaniards for sale by the Indians. At first, such a policy seemed only humane because the accounts of Meares and widespread rumours circulated by the fur traders purported that the chiefs or at least Maquinna, frequently feasted upon human flesh.<sup>113</sup> But even if the charges of cannibalism were completely

<sup>109</sup> Howay, *The Journal of Captain James Colnett*, p. 192.

<sup>110</sup> George Vancouver, II, p. 364.

<sup>111</sup> BCPA, *Viaje a la Costa N.O. por Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra*, 1792.

<sup>112</sup> Esteban José Martínez, "Diario," p. 125.

<sup>113</sup> John Meares, pp. 255-257. Meares did much to convince later visitors to the coast

false as Malaspina believed after interviewing a number of Indians,<sup>114</sup> some Spaniards continued to purchase children. The friars believed that the political and religious interests of Spain would be served by sending them to Mexico where they might be raised as Christians by persons of good quality. Upon reaching adulthood, they would be free to do what they pleased or could be sent back to their tribes to spread their new religion.<sup>115</sup> Malaspina was not at all convinced about the merits of this traffic which dispatched 22 children to San Blas during his short stay at Nootka in 1791. Although Father Nicolás de Luera had been zealous in his efforts to acquire children, offering one or two sheets of copper, a musket barrel, or some lengths of cloth for each one, the danger of committing them to near slavery made it necessary to place severe restrictions over the traffic. He did agree, however, that the conversion of the tribes to Christianity might be served by training a few of the children in Mexico. He noted from the journal of the English traveller, Jonathan Carver, that the French Jesuits in Canada had purchased Indian children in the hope of using them later to establish a beachhead with the Indian population.<sup>116</sup>

The negotiations between Bodega y Quadra and Vancouver in 1792 to settle the controversy over Nootka Sound ended in failure, but by this time the strategic importance of the northwest coast had begun to wane. The expedition of the *Sutil* and the *Mexicana* which circumnavigated Vancouver Island proved beyond doubt that there was no fabled passage

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that Maquinna and other Indians were cannibals. He wrote a detailed description of the ceremonial selection of sacrificial victims and procedures. At first, Meares believed that the descriptions provided by the Indians of Maquinna's banquets were contrived by enemies of the chief. Maquinna confirmed Meares' worst suspicions when he cut himself while climbing onto the deck of the British ship. He refused treatment of his wound "... but sucked himself of the blood which flowed freely from it: and when we expressed our astonishment and disgust at his conduct, he replied by licking his lips, patting his belly, and explaining *cloosh cloosh*; or good, good." Following this incident, Maquinna told Meares that he ate human flesh and enjoyed doing so. This evidence is dubious for a number of reasons, but most of all because Maquinna would probably have enjoyed playing to his horrified audience as he cleansed his wound. Many accepted Meares' findings without question although it was in the interest of the fur trader to frighten off potential competition with gory tales of Indian cannibalism.

<sup>114</sup> Novo y Colson, pp. 355-356. Malaspina concluded that the charges of cannibalism were false. Other chiefs desired to discredit Maquinna and used any arguments possible including cannibalism against their superior chief. The children purchased by the Spaniards confirmed the charge, but never with any information other than what they thought the Spaniards might wish to hear.

<sup>115</sup> Viana, II, p. 91.

<sup>116</sup> Novo y Colson, p. 361. See Jonathan Carver, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America*, pp. 346-347.

to Europe. Certainly Bodega emerged victorious in the negotiations if one cares to look into the relative merits of the claims,<sup>117</sup> but since Vancouver refused to accept the Spanish offer of a boundary at the Strait of Juan de Fuca, a complete stalemate resulted. Without an agreement on the frontier, Bodega ordered the abandonment of the new settlement at Nuñez Gaona and returned to San Blas. By 1793 and 1794, the Nootka settlement had become little more than a liability to the Mexican authorities; even Bodega y Quadra lost his enthusiasm for northern settlement because of chronic shortages of shipping and supplies at San Blas.<sup>118</sup> Viceroy Revillagigedo agreed with his naval commander, proposing to the imperial government that a more realistic policy in the Pacific would be to concentrate what forces there were in the California settlements.<sup>119</sup>

With no support for the maintenance of the northern post coming from Mexico and with the British alliance to consider in Europe, Spain agreed to a mutual withdrawal from Nootka Sound. In March 1795, the Spanish commissioner, Brigadier Manuel Alava, met with the English commissioner, Lieutenant Thomas Pearce, to complete the ceremonies at the Nootka settlement.<sup>120</sup> What remained after the removal of useful materials was taken over by the Indians. They were overjoyed at the restoration of their summer village site and fell upon the Spanish buildings to salvage bits of metal, planks, and anything else which had been left behind. Having removed the visible remains, they attacked the cemetery and removed coffins to recover nails which could be turned into useful fish hooks.<sup>121</sup> When the American captive, John Jewitt, resided with the Nootka Indians in 1803, the Indian village had completely replaced the Spanish settlement; the only visible signs of the Spanish presence were the foundations of the governor's house and the church, and a few degenerated self-propagating European plants.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>117</sup> BCPA, *Viaje a la Costa N.O. por Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, 1792*. Bodega collected testimony from witnesses who had been in Nootka during 1788 when Meares claimed to have been granted lands and control. From Maquinna to every foreigner interviewed, all denied Meares' ridiculous claims. The evidence pointed towards the suggestion that Meares' vessels sailed under the Portuguese flag which made the British defence of his claims even weaker.

<sup>118</sup> Michael E. Thurman, "Juan Bodega y Quadra and the Spanish Retreat from Nootka," in John A. Carroll, ed. *Reflections of Western Historians* (Tucson, 1969), p. 61.

<sup>119</sup> Manning, p. 469.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 471.

<sup>121</sup> F. W. Howay, "The Spanish Settlement at Nootka," *Washington Historical Quarterly* VIII (July 1917), p. 170.

<sup>122</sup> John R. Jewitt, *Narrative of the Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt; only*

The Spanish abandonment of the northwest coast was hardly irrational or overly hasty. The alliance with Britain proved to be an unmitigated disaster almost from the beginning and even in the Pacific Ocean, the Spaniards became convinced that the extended negotiations over Nootka Sound were nothing more than a front to spy on Mexico and California. British seamen and negotiators travelled overland through the Viceroyalty of New Spain which could not help but provide them with information on the military strengths and weaknesses. Captain Vancouver's vessels and others seemed to visit Monterey and San Francisco much too often for mere social calls. With only 740 men of all ages to defend the vast underdeveloped province, it was little wonder that the Spanish regime saw the need to entrench rather than to expand.<sup>123</sup> When the xenophobic Marquis of Branciforte became viceroy in 1794, he determined to tighten up controls over foreign visits and to enlarge the military garrisons in the California settlements.<sup>124</sup> Like his predecessor, Viceroy Florez, he feared the United States — particularly if Britain supported American claims to the north of Spanish territory.<sup>125</sup> After war broke out between Spain and Britain in 1796, there were no more attempts to exert a Spanish presence to the north of California.

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*survivor of the crew of the Ship Boston, during a captivity of nearly three years among the savages of Nootka Sound* (New York, 1815), p. 51.

<sup>123</sup> AGI, Estado, leg. 28, José Miguel Azanza to Luis de Urquijo, December 20, 1799.

<sup>124</sup> Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico, Correspondencia de los Virreyes, Vol. 32, Branciforte to the Duke of Alcuía, no. 133, July 3, 1795.

<sup>125</sup> AGI, Estado, leg. 24, Branciforte to the Prince of Peace, no. 64, May 27, 1796.