

The Strait of Anian and British Northwest America: Cook's Third Voyage in Perspective*

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For local patriots of British Columbia, Captain Cook's third voyage is unsatisfactory. His stay at Nootka was so brief, his exploration of the coast so perfunctory, and his preoccupation with Alaska so much to be deplored. We are driven, in asking the reasons for these solecisms, to examine his instructions from the Admiralty for the third voyage. Alas, they hardly mention the coast of Northwest America between 45° and 65° North. Did their Lordships of the Admiralty slip up? Was Cook, that supreme professional who had had a hand in drawing up his own instructions, at less than his expert best? Did Palinurus nod at the helm?

Cook's landing at Nootka was the result of his instructions "to put into the first convenient Port to recruit your Wood and Water and procure Refreshments . . ." ¹ But the prolongation of his stay to four weeks (29 March to 26 April 1778) was traceable to the bad fitting-out of his ships by the Navy Board, which resulted in the rotten foretop and mizzen masts of the *Resolution* having to be replaced after the strain of the spring gales of the North Pacific. Further, the avoidance of virtually all the rest of the British Columbia coast was in accordance with those instructions, since Cook was ordered to:

. . . proceed Northward along the Coast as far as the Latitude of 65° , or farther, if you are not obstructed by Lands or Ice; taking care not to lose any time in exploring Rivers or Inlets, or upon any other account, until you get into the before-mentioned latitude of 65° When you get that Length, you are very carefully to search for, and to explore, such Rivers or Inlets as may appear to be of a considerable extent and pointing towards Hudsons or Baffins Bays; and if, from your own Observations, or from any information you may receive from the Natives (who, there is reason to believe, are the same

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¹ James Cook, *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his voyages of discovery. III. The voyage of the "Resolution" and "Discovery," 1776-1780*, ed. by J. C. Beaglehole. Part I (Cambridge, 1967), p. ccxxi.

Race of People, and speak the same language, of which you are furnished with a Vocabulary, as the Esquimaux) there shall appear to be a certainty, or even a probability, of a Water Passage into the aforementioned Bays, or either of them, you are, in such case to use your utmost endeavours to pass through with one or both of the Sloops, unless you shall be of opinion that the passage may be effected with more certainty, or with greater probability, by smaller Vessels, in which case you are to set up the Frames of one or both the small Vessels with which you are provided. . . .

You are with the consent of the Natives to take possession, in the name of the King of Great Britain, of convenient Situations in such Countries as you may discover, that have not already been discovered or visited by any other European Power, and to distribute among the Inhabitants such Things as will remain as Traces and Testimonies of your having been there; but if you find the Countries so discovered are uninhabited, you are to take possession of them for His Majesty by setting up proper Marks and Inscriptions as first Discoverers & Possessors.²

It is clear from the instructions that Cook was to search for a passage through North America which was to be found north of 65° North if at all, and to sail it if discovered; and that he was to claim for His Britannic Majesty the uninhabited territories, and the inhabited ones with the consent of the natives. But the instructions also raise several questions: Why was Cook engaged on this search north of 65°? And what is the significance of Cook's sojourn at Nootka and his exploration of Northwest America for the future history of the area — in particular for British sovereignty and British settlement of British Columbia?

The answers to these questions are related to the economic inspiration for European exploration of non-European lands in early modern times, and to the perspective the Europeans acquired on the exploitation of those lands — specifically, whether that exploitation was to be punctiform or areal. This choice, in turn, helped to determine the activities of two contrasting types of geographers: the romantic and the commercial. It was the imaginative work of the romantic geographers, seeking a punctiform solution to the problem of exploiting the resources of the non-European lands, which inspired the presence of Cook on the coast of British Columbia. It was the solid, unimaginative work of the commercial geographers, pursuing an areal pattern of exploitation, which ensured the presence of British sovereignty and settlement on this coast, and the founding of British Columbia.

To understand how this came about we must begin by examining the economic circumstances in which early maritime explorations of the route

² *Ibid.*, pp. ccxxi-ccxxiii.

from Europe to Asia were made. The Western European economy in the latter part of the fifteenth century, at the beginning the explorations of the non-European lands, was labour intensive: it depended heavily upon labour, and increases in productivity and wealth depended on increases in the size of the population. Unfortunately three factors limited the expansion of the economy by such means: increases in population rapidly outran food resources causing subsequent declines in population; the European population was still very much depleted as a result of the demographic disasters of the fourteenth century associated with the Black Death; and, most important, production of goods was primarily dependent upon animal- and vegetable-based raw materials, rather than mineral ones. Animal and vegetable raw materials were produced in small quantities on many widely scattered sites, unlike mineral raw materials, whose production was concentrated on a few sites. As a result of this circumstance, production of animal and vegetable raw materials and foodstuffs required a wide dispersion and relatively extensive and uneconomic use of labour, and widely dispersed, but sparsely used, networks of transportation to bring those raw materials and foodstuffs into economic use. Thus, in the fifteenth century, European entrepreneurs were faced with a double difficulty in increasing productivity and wealth: there was a shortage of labour; and that labour was uneconomically used in the exploitation and transportation of widely dispersed raw materials.

The transportation systems of Europe and Asia consisted mostly of primitive roads and tracks over which raw materials and goods were carried by pack animal, and of unimproved rivers along which necessarily small vessels were plied by human, animal and wind power. These dispersed systems of exploitation and transportation are called *areal*.

To improve them required substantial capital investment — for the building of roads and canals and the deepening of rivers. But the cost of such improvement would be enormous and quite beyond the capacity of an early modern society; and the economic incentive for doing so was small, so long as the exploitation of resources remained on this areal pattern — that is, so long as production still depended upon the exploitation of dispersed animal and vegetable raw materials. In the long run the problem would be solved by the exploitation of mineral resources, bringing about a concentration of transportation routes between the single source of raw material — the mine producing coal, iron, base metals, even precious metals — and the central location of manufacture or consumption. Such a concentration would mean the intensive use of a few routes of transportation and provide an economic incentive for investment

in such routes — in improved rivers, canals, roads and, eventually, railroads. The ultimate solution to the transportation and labour problems facing the early modern Europeans was the conversion of their exploitation of resources and their transportation system from an *areal* configuration to a *punctiform* one — that is, to one in which traffic was across a few intensively used routes between a few points.

The early modern Europeans already had the beginnings of such a punctiform system in the fifteenth century in their coastal shipping traffic. The movement between port and port was very similar to that between minehead and factory. The ship represented an important capital improvement on the primitive, labour-intensive, areal land transportation. Around the coasts of that peninsula of peninsulas which is Europe, coastal shipping was very effective. Bulk cargoes, as the Hansa and the Dutch were demonstrating, could be carried between two or more ports, and the goods — whether raw materials or finished products — arrived in better condition and more quickly than by land. But there were serious limitations to sea transportation. Ships could not sail across the Asian and African continents. Already the tales of Marco Polo and other, more reliable, land travellers had suggested to Europeans that there was wealth in these continents in readily exploitable form; indeed, needing no further labour to give it value. This was the treasure of Golconda, the Golden Chersonese and Ophir, and the spices and silks of the Indies and of China. If only European ships could sail to these storied lands they could on-load instant wealth. They could develop a punctiform and capital-intensive exploitation and transportation system which would enormously multiply the wealth of Europe without overburdening its limited labour force.³

The early explorations of the routes to Asia were a terrible disappointment. One route to Asia was not quick and easy, but a long, stormy scurvy- and fever-ridden haul around Africa into the Indian Ocean. The other route was even more disappointing: it led across the Atlantic to a continent which — it quickly became clear — was not Asia at all, but America. The haul south around this barrier was even longer and more storm-tossed. To the north of both continents was ice, which defeated a succession of explorers in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries seeking for a Northeast or a Northwest Passage. It also became apparent quite quickly that the immediately usable treasure was still elusive (in the case of Ophir), or greatly exaggerated (in the case of Golconda). Soon it

³ This discussion of areal and punctiform exploitation relies heavily upon the important article by E. M. Wrigley, "The supply of raw materials in the industrial revolution," *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, XV/1 (1962), pp. 1-16.

dawned on the Europeans that the most abundant wealth of the newly discovered lands (both East and West) was not in treasure but in horticulture and agriculture; not mineral, but vegetable and animal, and requiring *areal*, rather than *punctiform*, exploitation. It was a repetition of the situation in Europe from which they were hoping to break away. The sparse plantations of population which the Europeans could spare for the new lands — augmented, where possible, by slave labour — were devoted in both hemispheres to the areal production of animal and vegetable raw materials: wheat, corn, rice, indigo (later cotton), spices, tropical fruits and vegetables, timber, cattle, fish and furs. Such a use of population discouraged sprawl across the continents, and each of the colonial powers in North America, in particular, was reluctant to undertake the exploitation of new land while currently occupied land remained under-exploited, unless there was an imminent danger that a rival might preempt it. This reluctance accounts, for example, for the failure of the Spanish to occupy the Pacific coast of North America north of 38°N before the Nootka Crisis of 1790, though they had occupied Lower California since the sixteenth century.

The legends of instant wealth in treasure in Asia and Africa — to which was added the American version of El Dorado, inspired by the discovery of genuine silver mines in Mexico and Peru — continued to lure some Europeans on to further exploration. The schemes of exploration and development based on these legends were — to apply a description by R. H. Tawney in a slightly different context — efforts “to secure, at great expense, exclusive access to the point where the rainbow ends.”⁴ More, they were endeavours to secure an easy punctiform exploitation of resources. Most important for the purpose of this discussion, they led to wishful thinking about the geography of North America. The most notable example was the idea of the Northwest Passage through the heart of North America. The mundane, areal exploitation of North America's resources was to inspire slow, careful exploration of the interior of the continent, leading to its eventual mastery. By the end of the seventeenth century this dichotomy of approaches was well established.

To understand why Cook was looking north of 65° on the coast of Northwest America for a Northwest Passage we have to examine the changes which romantic geography and, in particular, the theme of the Strait of Anian (which was inspired ultimately by a search for a punctiform pattern of increasing wealth) brought about in the otherwise geo-

⁴ R. H. Tawney, *Business and politics under James I* (Cambridge, 1958), p. 3.

graphically sound search for a Northwest Passage. The original searches in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by Frobisher, Davis, Baffin, Bylot, Weymouth, Button, Hawkrige, Fox and James had been simply for a passage *around* the continent as a quick route to the East. An exception may be made in the case of Hudson, who was misled twice — by his river and his bay — into believing that a passage *through* the continent was to be found.

In these years the “Strait of Anian,” a term resulting from a misreading of Marco Polo’s garbled account of the geography of Hainan and Annam, was assigned to the strait of water supposed to separate the continents of Asia and America (the modern Bering Strait). It was first drawn on a map attributed to “Bolognino Zaltieri” in 1566.⁵ [Fig. 1] But toward the end of the seventeenth century the term came to be attached to a strait supposed to run northeast to southwest through the heart of the North American continent from Hudson Bay to a large gulf north of the farthest explored coastline in about 42°N, and called by the French the “Sea of the West.” The idea of the “Sea of the West” was inspired by stories which the Indians told to French fur traders of a great sea in the west, attributed successively to Lake Michigan, Lake Winnipeg, Great Slave Lake and the Great Salt Lake. Its appearance with a Strait of Anian running across the continent came at a time (c. 1690-1713) when the French controlled Hudson Bay. Such leaders of the French endeavour there as that early Canadian hero, d’Iberville, and Denis, Sieur de Riverin, argued that the French now had the opportunity to discover and control the Strait of Anian leading to the South Seas and that this should be one of the principal endeavours of French power.⁶ The first identified cartographic appearance of this strait was in a manuscript globe by the leading French cartographer, Guillame de l’Isle, from which various versions were printed, notably those of Pierre Mortier in 1705 and J. B. Nolan in 1708.⁷ [Fig. 2] It seems clear that it was French imperial ambition, at the height of French power on the continent, which provided the main inspiration for pursuing this tempting prospect of providing the easy punctiform trade *through* the continent which French efforts on the continent had thus far conspicuously failed to secure.

⁵ George E. Nunn, *Origin of the Strait of Anian Concept* (Philadelphia, 1929), *passim*.

⁶ E. E. Rich, *The fur trade and the Northwest to 1857* (Toronto, 1967), pp. 61-62.

⁷ H. R. Wagner, “Apocryphal voyages to the northwest coast of America,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, New Series, XLI (1931), pp. 206-07; Glyndwr Williams, *The British search for the Northwest Passage in the eighteenth century* (London, 1962), pp. 12-13.

FIGURE 1

Strait of Anian and North America
(After Zaltieri, 1566)

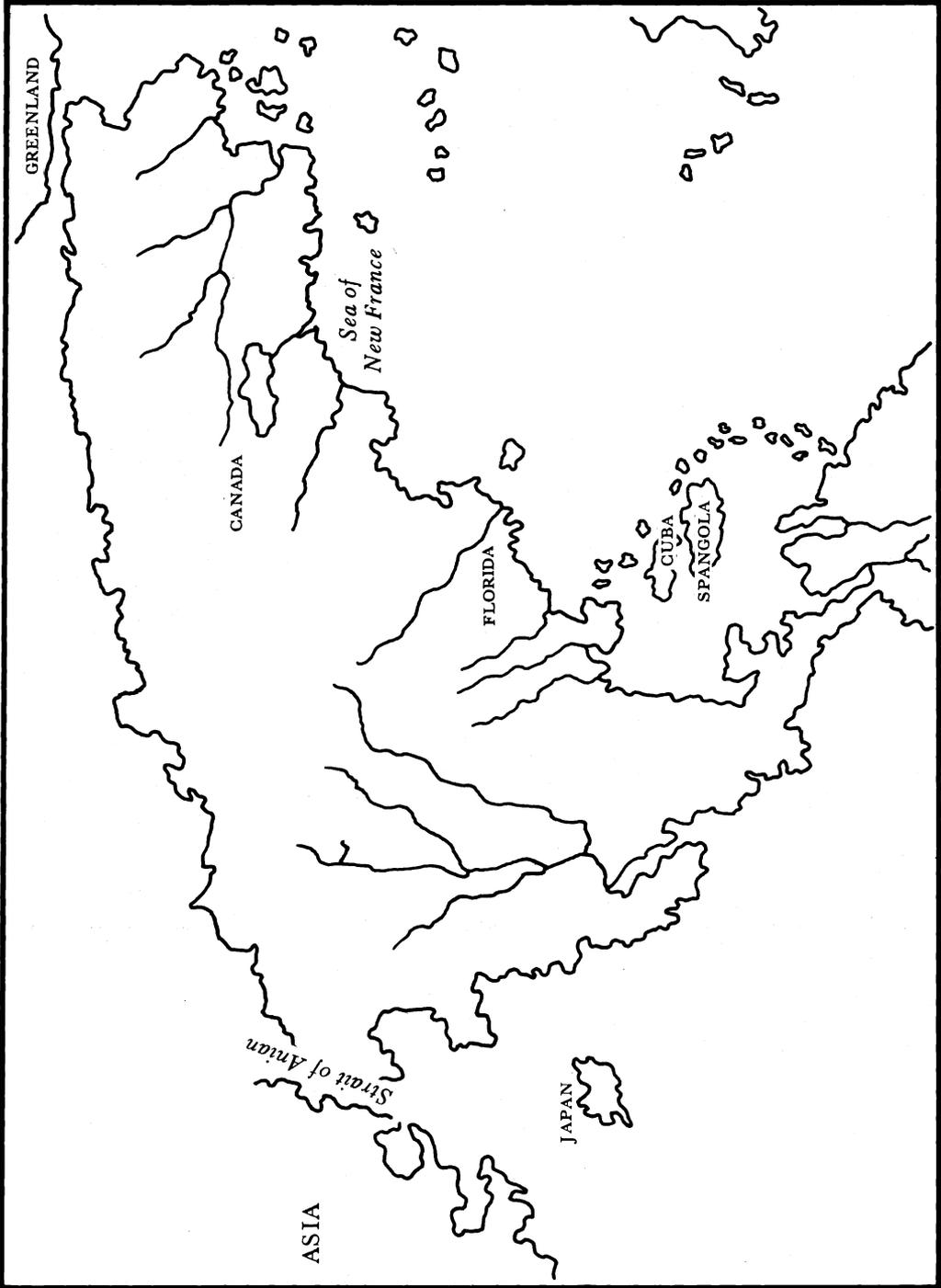
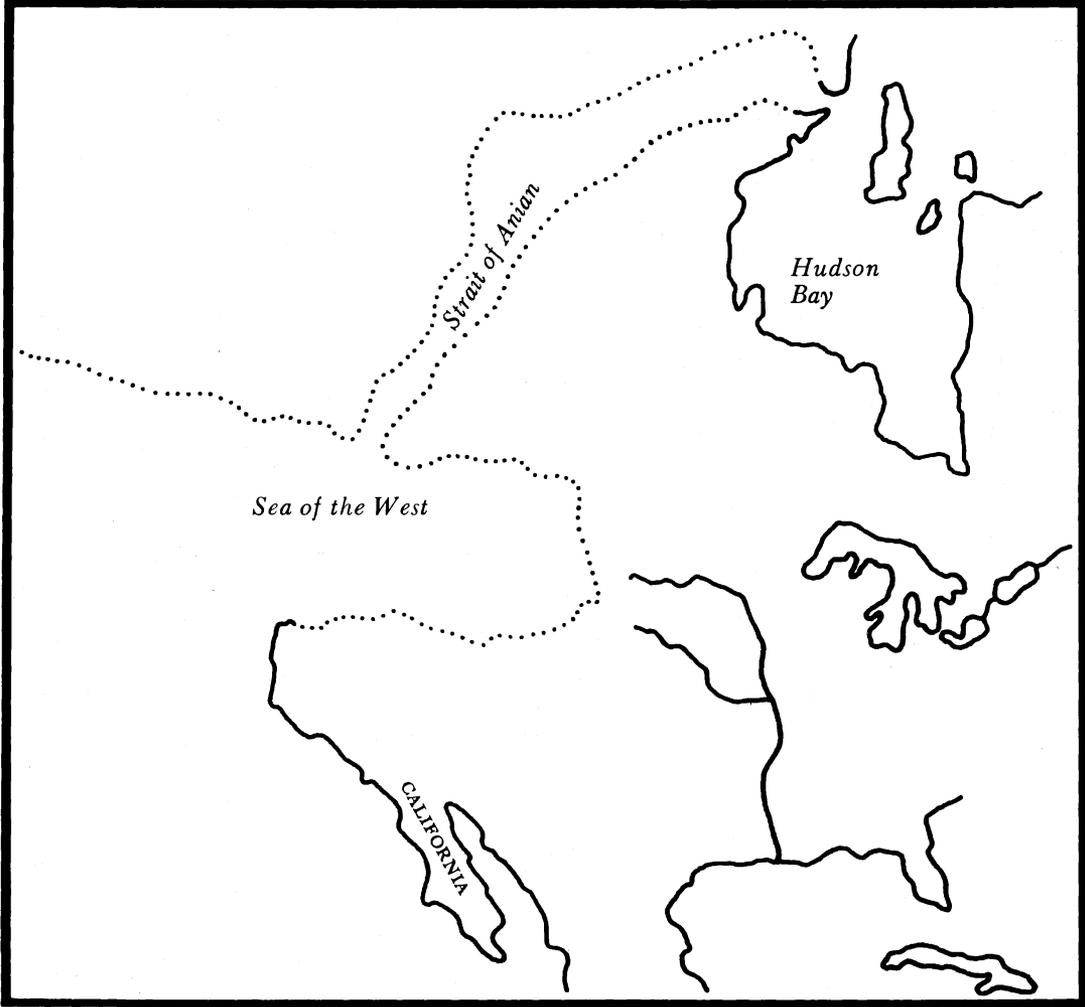


FIGURE 2

Strait of Anian and Sea of the West
(After de l'Isle, 1695(?) & Montier, 1705)



To this officially countenanced French distortion were soon added two others from English sources. One, already used by Narborough and Dampier to justify schemes for exploration of the North Pacific, was the old story of Juan de Fuca, the Greek pilot in the service of Spain, who in 1592 was supposed to have discovered a strait between 47° and 48° N on the Pacific coast, sailed through it into a land "very fruitfull, and rich of gold, Silver, Pearle, and other things," to the Atlantic, and returned, only to be disregarded by his employers. The story was an invention either of Juan de Fuca or, more probably, of his interrogator Michael Lok who, in the account published by Purchas, explained the Spanish disregard of Juan de Fuca by their anxiety not to publicize the existence of a passage to their colonies on the Pacific which might be used by interlopers, particularly since the English had not discovered it and might not do so since, by the time of Lok's account, they had apparently given up the search for the Northwest Passage.⁸ The other distortion from an English source was the fictitious letter of the fictitious Admiral Bartholomew de Fonte, describing a voyage north from Callao in 1640, during which he and his subordinate, Captain Bernarda, discovered and explored a maze of waterways penetrating the continent, and beginning on the Pacific coast at 53° N. [Fig. 3] At the eastern end of one of these de Fonte encountered a Captain Shapley, out of Boston, who had been trading for furs in Hudson Bay. De Fonte, after exchanging amenities with Shapley and determining that he had indeed come from Hudson Bay, turned around and sailed back to Callao. The account appeared originally in 1708 in the short-lived London periodical *The Monthly Miscellany or Memoirs for the Curious*, edited by James Petiver, and has no known further provenance.⁹ It was given currency by Arthur Dobbs in his endeavours, in the 1730s and 1740s to secure official British support for expeditions to Hudson Bay to discover the eastern end of the supposed passage. The lack of evidence for the voyage, or even for de Fonte's existence, was explained away by the supposed anxiety of the Spanish to prevent Britain and French interlopers using the passage. Thus national rivalries not only quickened the anxiety to secure a punctiform exploitation of the continent, but heightened the temptation to invent the means of such exploitation where none existed.

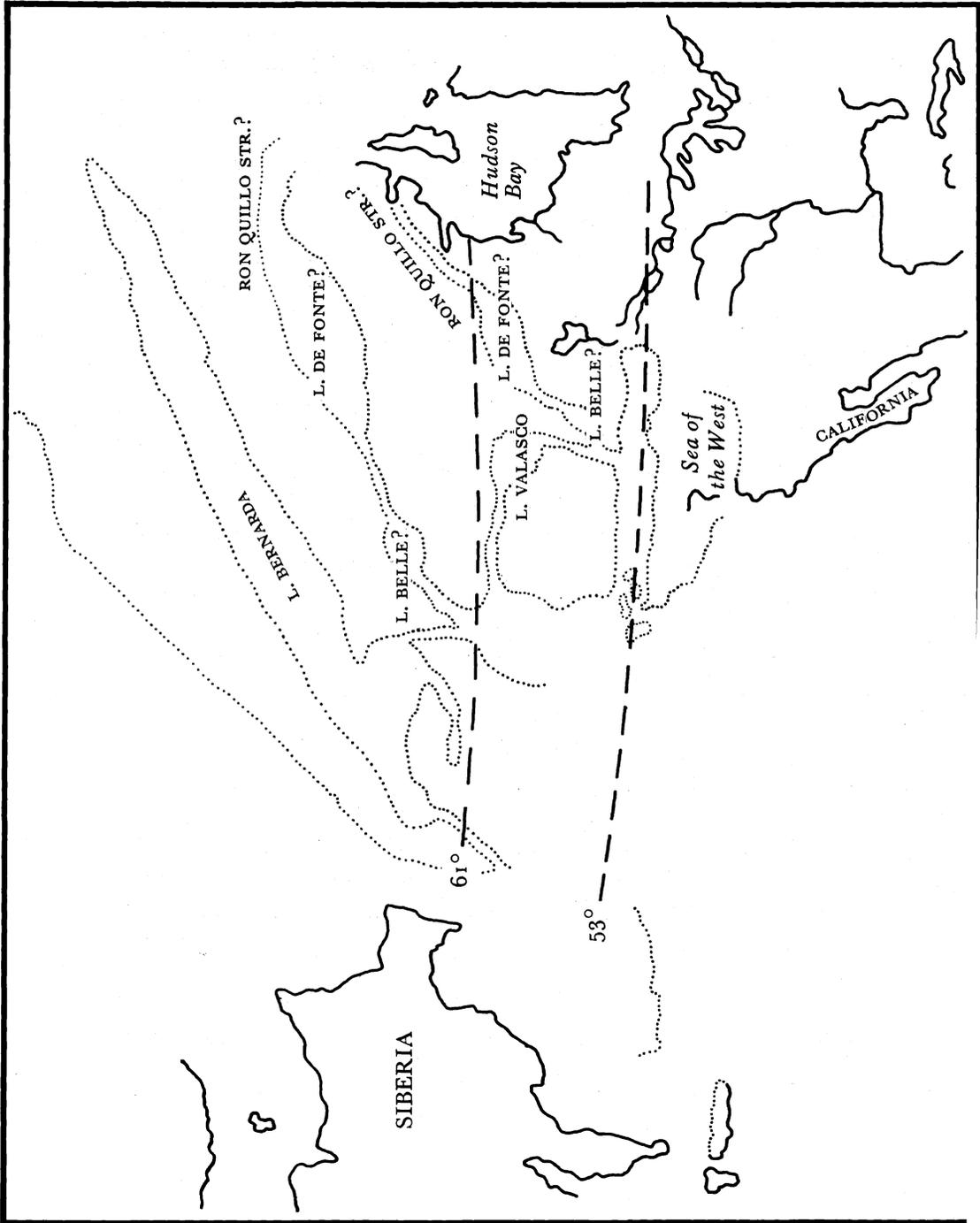
Meanwhile British recovery of control over Hudson Bay in 1713 had inspired other searches. Most of these were connected with the endeavours

⁸ Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 273-76.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 277-82.

FIGURE 3

de Fonte's Explorations (After Philippe Buache, 1752)



of the Hudson's Bay Company, and later of the North West Company as well, to make contact with tribes to the westward and encourage them to trade their furs — that is, to extend the areal exploitation of the fur resource. When the fur supply periodically dwindled at the Bay, the Hudson's Bay Company sent out agents to make contact with Indians at increasing distances into the continent: Henry Kelsey to the Manitoba prairies in the 1680s, William Stewart to the Chipewyan country in 1716, and Anthony Henday across the prairies to the Rockies in 1754. Each of these expeditions added notably to the knowledge of the continent and made the existence of a Strait of Anian through the temperate regions of the continent increasingly improbable. The exceptions to this pattern of exploration were those forced on the Company, or undertaken by outsiders: James Knight's schemes between 1715 and 1719 for the discovery of the eastern entrance of the Strait of Anian on the western coast of Hudson Bay; and the series of agitations and the expeditions of 1741 and 1746 with the same purpose, which were inspired by Arthur Dobbs. Dobbs' schemes, indeed, trailed clouds of glory after them, for they gave currency to the de Fonte letter, persuaded the British Parliament to offer a £20,000 reward for the discovery of a Northwest Passage, and forced the Hudson's Bay Company to indulge in maritime and land exploration in the 1760s and 1770s beyond the extent demanded by trade. These latter explorations in the interests of punctiform transportation and exploitation were further stimulated by Indian tales of a copper mine, of "yellow metal," and of a great river that flowed into the "Western Ocean," combining the hope of a Northwest Passage with the hope of a new El Dorado. The explorations established, by 1765, that there was no entrance to any Northwest Passage on the west coast of the Bay. As a result of Samuel Hearne's great journey to the mouth of the Coppermine River in 1771-3, it was further established that if there was a Northwest Passage it must begin on the Arctic Ocean no further east than 115°W and no further south than 71°55' (later 68°) N [Fig. 4], and that it must debouch on an ocean that was at least partly frozen. Hearne's journey, diagonalling as it did across the corner of the continent contiguous to Hudson Bay, like every other major journey in these years across a part of the continent did far more than any partial exploration of any coastline to settle the question of the Strait of Anian. With every sector of the continent that was crossed in a generally north and south direction, the improbability of that Strait grew.

Hearne's journey also ended the few enterprising attempts to convert the exploitation of the Northwest from an areal to a punctiform pattern.

FIGURE 4

*Journeys of Henday, 1754-5 (-·-·-·-·-), Hearne, 1771-3 (-----)
and Mackenzie, 1789 & 1792-3 (.....)*



Further penetration and exploitation from the east would continue to be areal. Indeed, the most successful of the explorers of the continent, Alexander Mackenzie, was to state that the purpose of seeking a route across the continent (and by this he meant a canoe route) was so that the North West Company might exploit it for the fur trade and use it as evidence of their competence so as to induce the British government to grant them a monopoly of the fur trade, and hence of the areal exploitation of the Northwest.¹⁰

In these circumstances of increasing realism concerning the eastern end of the Strait of Anian and increasing fantasy concerning its western end, the task was taken in hand at last to explore systematically the coast of Northwest America. The Spaniards in the 1540s had made an attempt to find the Strait of Anian, and their galleons, returning from Manila, made landfalls and from time to time even landings on the coast north of 40°N. In 1602-3 Sebastian Vizcaino and Martín de Aguilar reached 42° or 43°N and found an entrance in the coast (probably the mouth of the Umpqua River in Oregon). But these explorations apparently were not pushed farther until the Perez and Bodega-Quadra expeditions of 1774 and 1775, which produced perfunctory surveys of the coast to 55° and 58°N respectively. More important, for our purposes, was the activity of the Russians to the north. The Russian Cossack Dezhnev had rounded the eastern promontory of Asia and sailed through the Bering Strait as early as 1648, and Bering had done so in 1728, though neither had sighted the American coast. In 1732 it was actually sighted by M. S. Gvosdev, who mistook it for an island. Finally, in 1741, Bering and his second-in-command Chirikov saw the coast of Northwest America in 60°N and 55°21'N respectively, and Bering landed at the foot of Mount St. Elias.

For the moment these disjointed discoveries merely roused new controversy — between two Russo-German geographers. Gerhard Müller in 1758 got the geography of Alaska roughly right [Fig. 5], but J. von Stählin in 1773, in an endeavour to preserve vestiges of the Strait of Anian as the Northwest Passage, pictured Alaska as an island past which a strait, beginning in 65°N, ran between it and the mainland of America and ended at Hearne's 71°N on the Arctic Ocean [Fig. 6]. Thus it was that the Strait of Anian, once the north-south separation of the continents, and moved by the romantic geographers to an east-west bisection of North America, was moved by the work of the commercial explorers of the continent bit by bit back to its original position. Stählin's was the last substan-

¹⁰ Rich, *op. cit.*, pp. 179, 184-85.

FIGURE 5
Alaska & Russian Explorations
(After Gerhard Müller, 1758)*

* Gerhard F. Müller, *Voyages from Asia to America, for completing the Discoveries of the Northwest Coast of America* (ed. Thomas Jeffreys, 2nd. ed.; London, 1764), frontispiece.

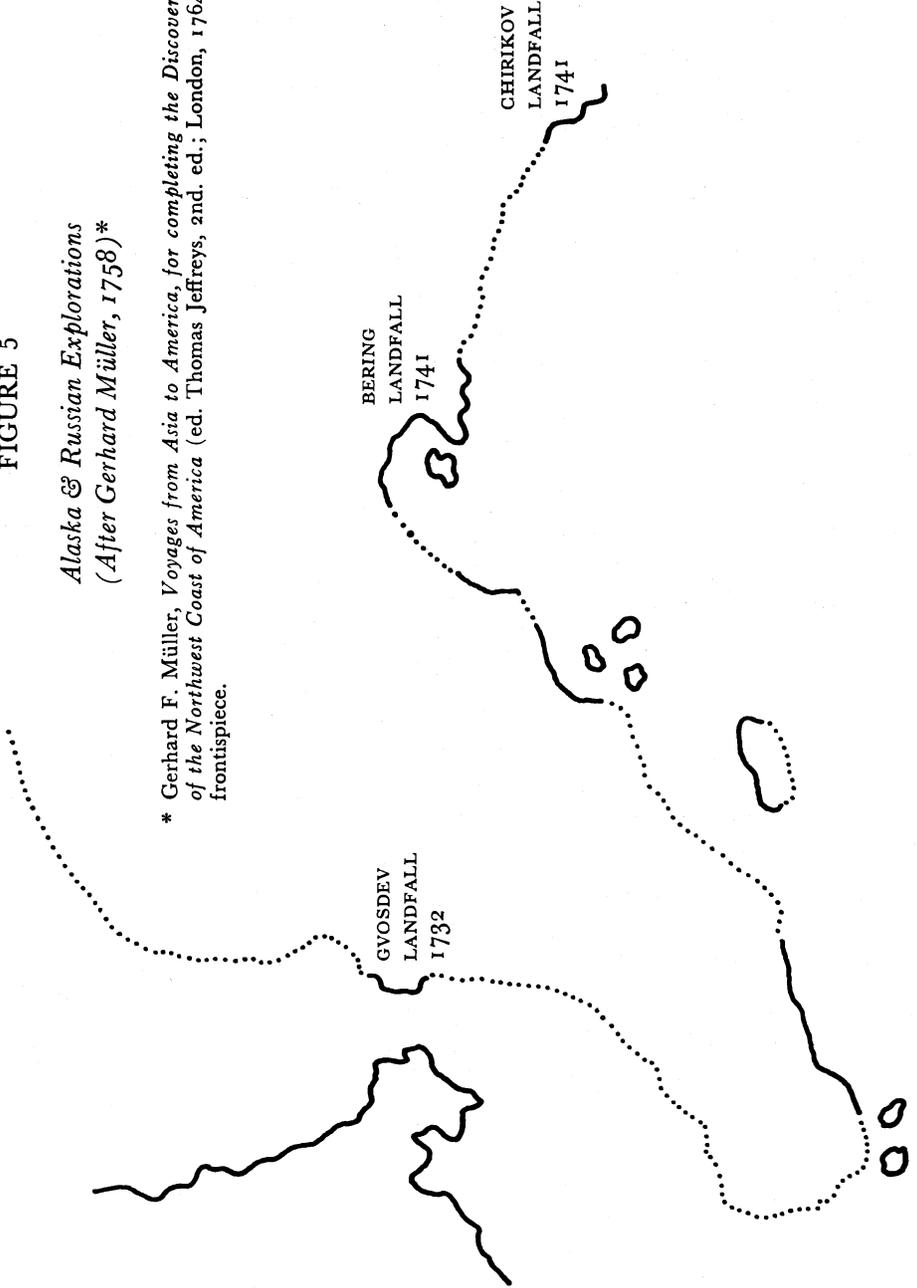
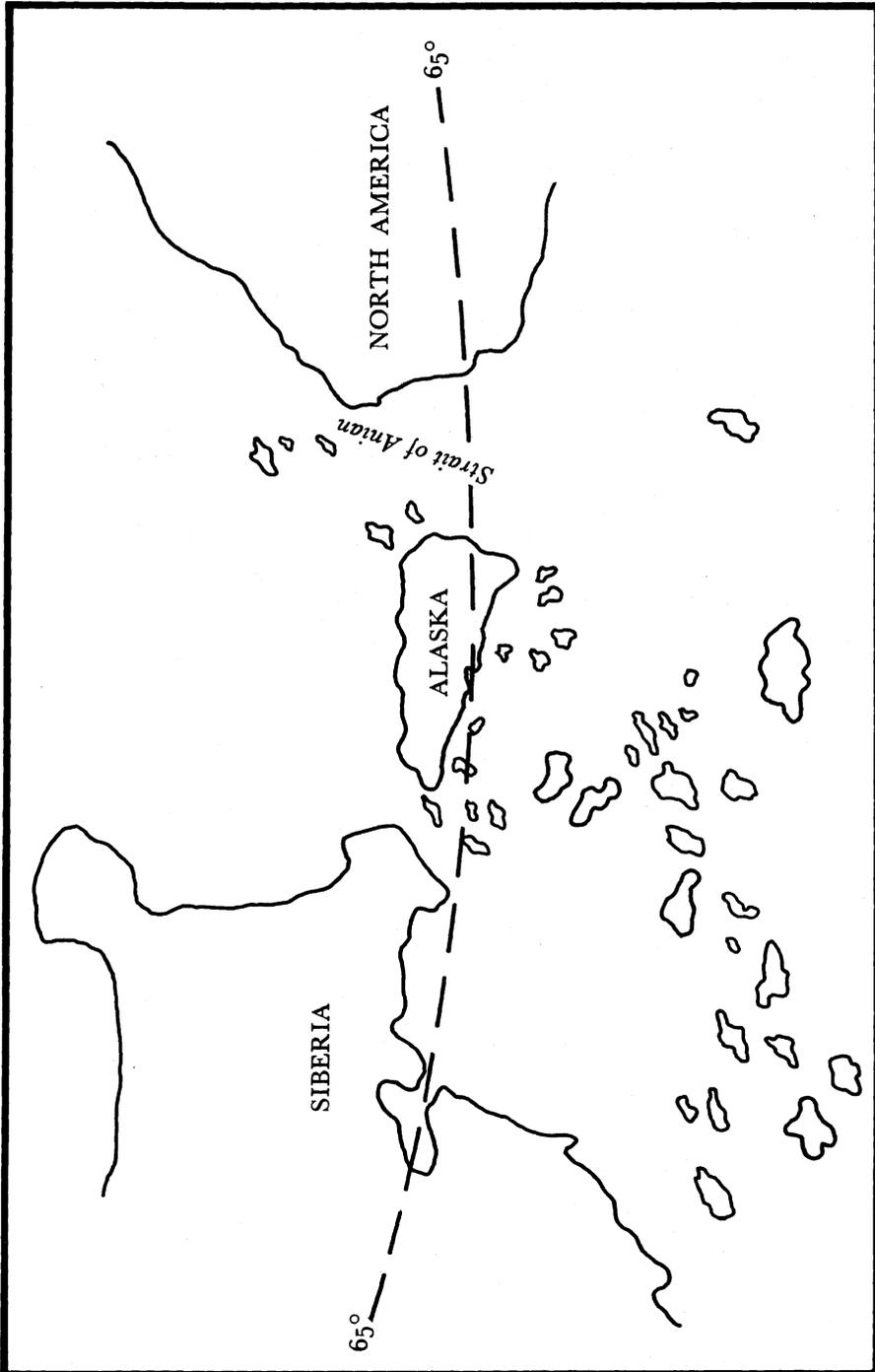


FIGURE 6

Strait of Anian & Alaska
(After J. von Stählin, 1773)*

* J. von Stählin, *An Account of the new northern Archipelago, lately discovered by the Russians in the Seas of Kamtschatka and Anadir* (London, 1774).



tial attempt to preserve the idea of the east-west strait. It was to be given the coup de grace by Cook's mapping of Alaska.

Thus it was that Cook's instructions ordered him not to examine in detail the coast south of 65°N. Apparently the Admiralty were convinced that if the Northwest Passage did exist, it was no more than a minor sub-polar concern. Cook himself appears to have shared this conviction. For 22 March 1778, when he was coasting past the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, which he failed to observe, he wrote in his *Journal*: "It is in the very latitude we were now in where geographers have placed the pretended *Strait of Juan de Fuca*, but we saw nothing like it, nor is there the least probability that iver any such thing existed."¹¹ And again, while passing 53°N, where the reputed strait of Admiral de Fonte was supposed to begin, he writes:

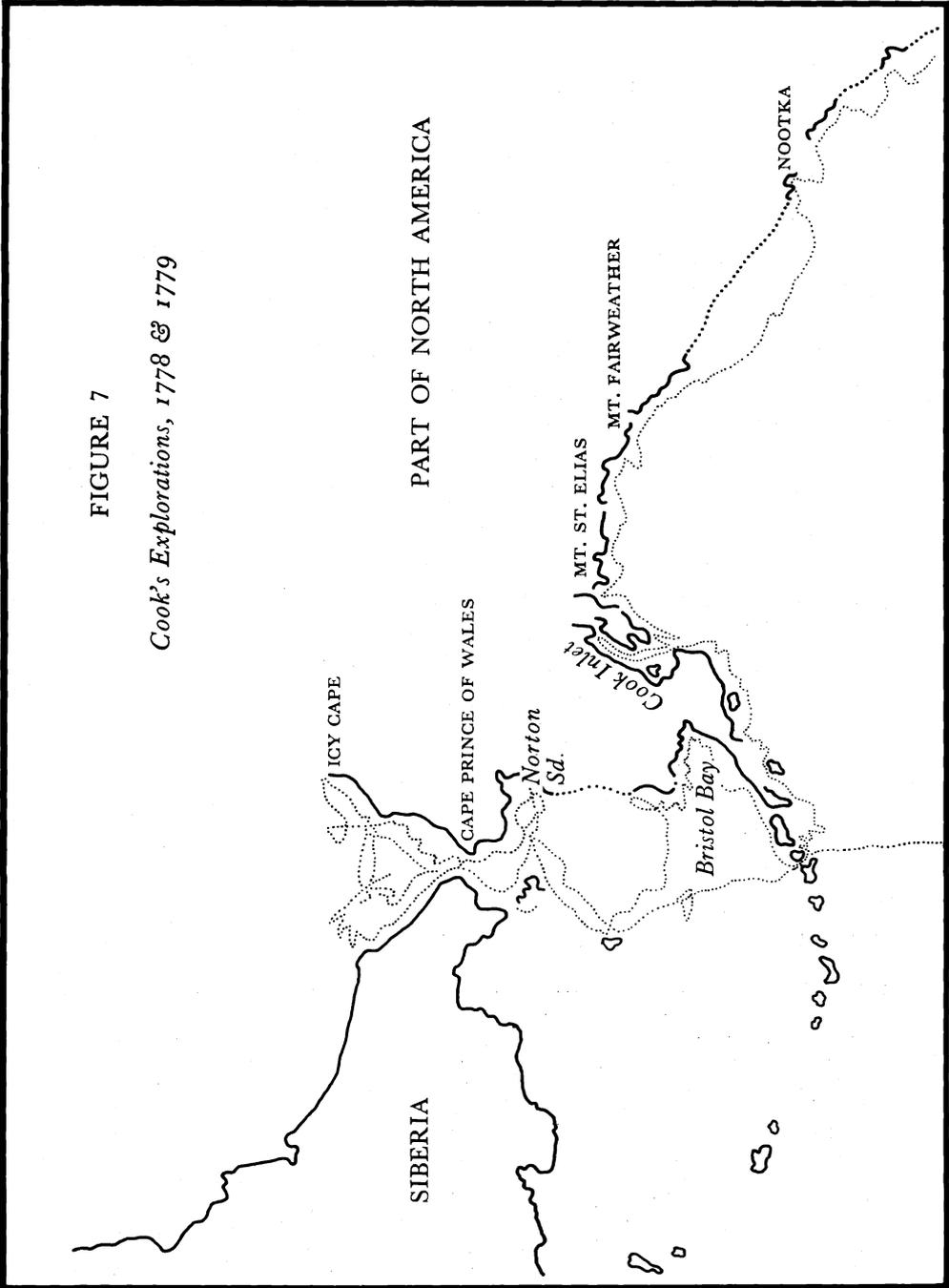
... I steered N by W in order to make the land, regreting very much that I could not do it sooner, especially as we were passing the place where Geographers have placed the pretended Strait of Admiral de Fonte. For my own part, I give no credit to such vague and improbable stories, that carry their own confutation along with them nevertheless I was very desirous of keeping the Coast aboard in order to clear up this point beyond dispute; but it would have been highly imprudent in me to have engaged with the land in such exceeding tempestuous weather, or to have lost the advantage of a fair wind by waiting for better weather.¹² [Fig. 7]

What were the motives and intentions of the Admiralty in sending Cook on such an expedition which, taken at its narrowest, constituted little more than an endeavour to test Stählin's speculations? It must be noted at the outset that the Admiralty were not entirely free agents, being under pressure from the *illuminati* of the Royal Society, notably Daines Barrington. Certainly since the Seven Years War, which had resulted in giving Britain a dominant position in North America, there had been a growing concern on the part of the Admiralty to dominate the Pacific for strategic reasons. They may have had in mind to secure control of what would certainly be the strategically most important entrance to it, if such could be shown to exist. But at least as important was the somewhat dilettantish and romantic scientific curiosity on the part of Barrington and his friends in the Royal Society to settle the question of the Strait of Anian — an enthusiasm shared by Lord Sandwich, the First Lord of the Admiralty. Much less important was the possible commercial value of the passage, since it was now supposed to be at anywhere from 65° to 71°N. But it

¹¹ Cook, *Journals*, III, Part I, pp. 293-94.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 334-35.

FIGURE 7
Cook's Explorations, 1778 & 1779



might be usable, if Barrington was right and the theory of Samuel Engel that sea-ice did not exist was correct. Engel, an enterprising Swiss geographer, was convinced that the ice in northern seas was freshwater ice, caused by the run-off of rivers in the late spring, and that if only navigators would come to the Arctic at the right season, they might expect to have clear sailing. This would have been news to the early Arctic explorers, as to the Greenland whalers of the eighteenth century, who encountered sea-ice at all seasons of the year; but the scientists of the Royal Society do not appear to have consulted them. Given the clear seas that he anticipated, Engel was convinced that passages north of both continents were easily accessible. He envisioned a flourishing punctiform trade through northern waters, and urged the building of depots on this route to China.¹³ And so it was that Cook sailed on his last quest, stopping ever so briefly at Nootka Sound in the spring of 1778.

What was the significance of this brief visit for the future of British Columbia? It may be argued that by publicizing the pelagic fur trade (in which the Russians were already engaged), Cook's visit did indeed bring about that punctiform trade with China which was a motive of his voyage, though it was not secured in the way anticipated — by the discovery of the Strait of Anian back to Europe. But the visit was not the beginning of British settlement on this coast. The British presence for the next thirty years was dependent upon the trade in sea-otter furs, upon the settlement of claims to occupancy, and upon further exploration, but when permanent settlement came it was to be the work of those commercial men who had explored the continent in pursuit of the areal exploitation of the continental fur trade.

Nor did the visit establish British sovereignty on this coast as is often supposed. Cook did not make a territorial claim at Nootka — there is not even a record of his having asked permission of the natives as required by

¹³ Samuel Engel, *Memoires et observations geographiques et critiques sur la situation des pays septentrionaux de l'Asie et l'Amérique, d'après les relations les plus récentes. Auxquelles on a joint un Essai sur la route aux Indes par le Nord & sur un Commerce très vaste & riche à établir dans la mer du Sud* (Lausanne, 1765), pp. 188-268 *passim*. The views of Engel have been much ridiculed, but these did not arise from unpragmatic stupidity as has been supposed. In the high middle ages ice conditions had been sufficiently favourable to allow ships to sail as far as 84° North of Spitzbergen; and though ice conditions in the waters between Greenland and Europe were severe for most of the eighteenth century, they varied sufficiently to give the impression that there might indeed be a substantial seasonal remission (H. H. Lamb, "Climatic change within historical time as seen in circulation maps and diagrams," in Symposium: "Solar variations, circulation changes and related geographical problems," 5 October 1961, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* (1961), 95/1: 124-61).

his instructions. Perhaps he thought it not worth the effort. His instructions had referred to "convenient situations," and Ship Cove, Nootka hardly fits that description. In any case, the British argument in the Nootka Sound controversy of 1790, which was embodied in the Nootka Convention, put into the melting pot all claims on the coast and declared the area to be open for all nations. Again, it was the presence of the continental fur traders in effective occupation of the inland parts of the Pacific slope that eventually established British sovereignty in British Columbia, though no doubt the interest of the world's most powerful navy in the coast, established by the work of Cook and Vancouver, helped to make the claim effective.

Finally, and most ironically, Cook's third voyage, for all his careful mapping of Alaska, did not settle the question of the Strait of Anian. Because he had missed all the coast from 45° to 55°, the romantic geographers could still claim that the Strait existed. The piecemeal explorations of the pelagic fur traders and Spanish navigators in the succeeding fifteen years — James Strange (Queen Charlotte Sound and Cape Scott), Nathaniel Portlock and George Dixon (Dixon Entrance and the rediscovery of Hecate Strait), William Barkley (Barkley Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca), James Colnett and Charles Duncan (The Queen Charlotte Islands), Manuel Quimper, Salvador Fidalgo, Alejandro Malaspina, Francisco Elisa (the Strait of Georgia), Dionisio Alcalá-Galiano, Cayetano Valdés and Jacinto Caamaño¹⁴ — clarified various bits of coastline, but at the same time provided new possibilities of the Strait of Anian for believers. In the years 1789-90 one of the most convinced of these, Alexander Dalrymple, the sometime rival of Cook for navigational fame, expounded a world-wide scheme, involving the Hudson's Bay Company, the moribund South Sea Company and the East India Company, for the punctiform exploitation of the sea-otter-fur and other trade with China and the Indies through the Strait of Anian.¹⁵ But the Nootka Sound crisis of 1790 postponed the necessary preliminary discovery of the Strait from the Pacific side, and Vancouver's enormously detailed mapping of the coast from Oregon to Alaska virtually ended the question.

But not quite. Even Vancouver, oddly, missed exploring the outlets of the three great rivers of the Northwest — the Columbia, the Fraser and the Skeena; and so long as a single bay or inlet remained unexplored, so long as there was not a continuous coastline on the map, the dream of

¹⁴ Tomas Bartroli, *Spain on the Pacific coast of Canada and the U.S.A.* (Vancouver, 1968), pp. 26-28.

¹⁵ Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-45.

the Strait of Anian to Asia and to fortune would persist. The question was finally settled, as it was bound to be, by the crossing of North America. The true epitaph on the long search for the Strait of Anian is contained in four words in a message painted on a rock on North Bentinck Arm by Alexander Mackenzie in 1793: "from Canada, by land."