DISCOVERERS & POSSESSORS:
SYMBOLIC ACTS OF POSSESSION AND SPAIN'S STRUGGLE FOR
SOVEREIGNTY ON THE NORTH PACIFIC COAST

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By

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ABSTRACT

Until the 18th century, the North Pacific coast of North America remained one of the last territories in the world unexplored by Europeans. As *terra nullius*, or land unclaimed by any Christian prince, this coastline became a coveted prize as Spanish, Russian, French, and British explorers raced to establish sovereignty on behalf of their respective monarchs. The use of symbolic acts of possession in the North Pacific and the indigenous reaction to those ceremonies has never been properly examined. Often dismissed as meaningless pageantry, symbolic acts were for centuries the principal means by which European powers established claims to territories too vast to be settled or defended militarily. By reexamining the accounts of Spanish explorers and their imperial rivals, this study reveals both the power of symbolic acts in the struggle for sovereignty and their weaknesses as ritual claiming yielded to the practical realities of effective occupation and military prowess.
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CHART OF SPANISH ACTIVITY ON THE NORTH PACIFIC COAST
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I would like to express my gratitude to the librarians of the Elmer E. Rasmuson Library for making me feel welcome, and in particular to Tamara Lincoln, the library’s Arctic bibliographer, whose knowledge of things Russian proved invaluable; to Terrence Cole for his enthusiasm and advice; to Mary Mangusso and Claus Naske for their editorial acumen; and finally to Lynn Horvath for her kind words, good sense, and infinite patience.
A NOTE ON NAMES AND TRANSLATIONS

In the interest of avoiding confusion, I generally employ the most common historical spellings of the names of well-known individuals. John Meares, for example, often spelled his own surname *Mears*, but I defer to common usage. For non-English names like those of Gregorii Shelikhov and Jean-François Galoup de La Pérouse I follow a modified version of the Library of Congress system. Spanish names -- which often appear as abbreviated family trees -- are routinely shortened for the purposes of this study. For example, Juan Josef Pérez Hernández, commander of the first Spanish expedition in the North Pacific, appears simply as Juan Pérez, again following common usage. For the same reason, a lengthy last name like that of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra is shortened to Bodega after the initial usage. The names of Russian monarchs are anglicized, and length-of-reign dates are provided in parentheses when the name of a head of state first appears. As for the names of indigenous groups, when the precise tribal identity is not known I use the term *Native*, but when a group can be identified with reasonable certainty I use the common name (e.g., Tlingit, Haida, Koniag, and Quinault).

The geographical region of concern here I call the *North Pacific Coast* (of North America), where others might use *Pacific Northwest* or *Northwest Coast*. I chose North Pacific because this study is less concerned with the coasts of Oregon and Washington than it is with those of Alaska and British Columbia. On occasion I shorten this geographical designator by referring to “northern shores” or “voyages in the North.” Because this study is not concerned with geographical naming or the origins of toponyms, I avoid obsolete place names in favor of those most used today. For example, *Nootka Sound* takes the place of the Spanish *San Lorenzo de Nuca* or British *King William Sound*. 
With regard to translated material offered here in quotation, I make no attempt to regularize spelling or capitalization, relying instead on the good sense of the translator to capture the flavor of the era. When more than one translation is available, I choose the one that I think best represents the spirit of the original. If some risk of confusion exists within quoted material, brackets are used to provide clarification. Quoted material in the appendices appears in full; ellipses and other punctuation marks are therefore the translator's own.
INTRODUCTION

Badly weakened by scurvy and battered by a fierce and fickle sea, the crewmen aboard the schooner *Sonora* prayed for salvation as they approached Alaskan shores at Kruzof Island, just twenty-five miles from present-day Sitka. When the captain of the *Sonora*, Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, at last guided the vessel into a sheltered harbor on August 20, 1775, he noted in his journal the presence of an attractive beach, a broad river (for replenishing the ship’s fresh water), and a dwelling he described as “one house not badly built, and a stockade of logs for its defense.”\(^1\) Still vigilant after a Native ambush weeks earlier that claimed seven of his crew, Bodega took special precautions as he armed his remaining crewmen and went ashore to take possession of this new land for King Carlos III of Spain (1759-1788). Describing the event in his journal, the Spanish captain wrote, “In the most protected place in the harbor I made myself a fortification with two mortars and some muskets, and leaving this spot well guarded … I proceeded to take possession on a hill, where the Cross was set up and possession was taken of these lands with all the requisite formalities set forth in the Orders.”\(^2\)

The orders Bodega carried included a lengthy claiming formulary calling for ornate speeches praising God and King, a chorus of the canticle *Te Deum Laudamus*, an invocation of the 1493 papal bull granting America to Spain, and a full Catholic Mass [see Appendix A]. As the sailors’ Latin chorus floated across the water and under the canopy of

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2 Ibid. Note: The *Sonora*’s second pilot, Francisco Mourelle, also noted that after planting the cross, the Spanish sailors carved a second in a rock and displayed the Spanish royal banners. Francisco Antonio Mourelle, *Voyage of the Sonora in the Second Bucareli Expedition . . .*, trans. Daines Barrington. Reprinted from Barrington’s *Miscellaneies*, London, 1781 (San Francisco: Thomas C. Russell, 1920), 44.
the spruce forest, Bodega performed this battery of rituals much as Spanish explorers had for nearly three hundred years. The climax of the solemn ceremony involved a series of curious gestures intended to establish the Crown’s terrestrial claims: “As a sign of possession ... drawing out his sword which hung at his side, he cut trees and branches and plants, and he moved stones, and he walked back and forth on the fields and beaches without encountering opposition.”3 While evidently Bodega was able to perform these symbolic acts unhindered, it can scarcely be said that he did so “without opposition.”

Soon after the landing party returned to the Sonora, both Bodega and his second pilot, Francisco Mourelle, reported that their work was being undone: “We soon perceived them [Native warriors] approach the place where we had fixed the cross, which they took away, and fixed it on the front of their house ... whilst at the same time they made us signs with their open arms, that they had thus taken possession of our cross.”4

The Sonora’s brief landfall on Kruzof Island marks the first of many Spanish attempts to claim land in present-day Alaska and British Columbia while the expropriation of Bodega’s cross by the Tlingits hints that this would not be the last time Spanish claims to sovereignty were contested. What follows is a study of the Spanish use of symbolic acts in claiming land along the North Pacific coast and of challenges to those claims both from the region’s indigenous inhabitants and from Spain’s French, Russian, and British rivals in empire. Although much has been written about the European experience in the North Pacific, scholars have seldom considered the actual mechanics of claiming, the varied forms

3 Antonio María Bucareli y Ursúa, “The Instructions of Viceroy Bucareli to Ensign Juan Pérez,” trans. Manuel P. Servin, California Historical Society 40 (September 1940): 245. Note: While this claiming formulary was originally composed for the 1774 Pérez expedition, it was also employed during each of the following Spanish expeditions to the North Pacific. This document describes the explorers’ actions in advance, with spaces for the dates, locations, commanders’ name, and the names of witnesses left blank. See Appendix A for full text.

4 Mourelle, Voyage of the Sonora, 44.
of national claiming traditions, or the strategic use of possession-taking ceremonies during what one writer called "the great scramble for the northwest coast of America."5

A reexamination of events beginning with the arrival of Russians in the Aleutian Islands during the mid-1700s and ending with the Anglo-Spanish conflict at Nootka Sound in the 1790s reveals much about the motives of these rival claimants and the tactics they employed in taking possession of a distant and little-known corner of North America. For centuries, territory beyond the dominion of European monarchs was legally defined as terra nullius, or land not claimed by any Christian prince.6 Until the end of the 18th century, the Spanish Crown adhered to the doctrine that sovereignty over terra nullius could be obtained solely by the execution of symbolic acts of possession. The Spanish were not alone in this belief, for Europe's maritime powers had each developed their own protocols of possession-taking based upon medieval tradition and common-law practices. Though these practices varied in form, their function was universally recognized as European explorers ventured further into uncharted realms. Despite this general agreement on the power of symbolic acts of possession, the thrust and parry for regional sovereignty between Spain and her rivals in the North Pacific demonstrated that the symbolic acts upon which the Spanish relied so heavily were becoming outdated as ritual claiming gave way to the more practical realities of effective occupation and military prowess. During the 1790s, as Spanish and British interests collided over this issue and both powers prepared for war, the world saw a final frenzy of claiming by symbolic act before the practice was abandoned entirely.

Despite the fact that colonial territories from the Ivory Coast to Indonesia and from Patagonia to Hudson Bay were originally acquired by symbolic acts of possession, this phenomenon has been a subject much neglected. Often historians briefly mention instances of possession-taking without commenting on their meaning while others flatly deny that the ceremonies are historically significant. For example, historian Frederic Howay dismisses Spanish acts of possession as “an empty ceremony frequently performed,” while Robert Greenhow, in his history of Oregon and California, declares “such acts are, and were then considered empty pageants, securing no real rights to those by whom, or in whose names, they were performed.” Yet careful study reveals Howay and Greenhow to be wrong on several counts. Not only did Europe’s colonial powers perform these “empty pageants” for hundreds of years with remarkable consistency and persistence, but in fact, both Europe’s monarchs and the explorers they dispatched were keenly aware that symbolic acts of possession formed the legal foundation upon which they based claims to vast colonial holdings. While political and legal scholars recognize the importance of long-established claims as they relate to modern border disputes or other recent diplomatic wrangling, historical literature consistently ignores the importance of these same claims in the historical context in which they were originally established. Rather than viewing symbolic acts of possession as potent weapons in imperial battles for territory and commercial gain, historians continue to dismiss them as mere empty pomp.

That today ritual claiming receives little mention may be explained, in part, by the practices of the explorers themselves who frequently echo Captain Bodega in noting simply “I took possession with all the requisite formality.” Such brief mention, however, cloaks a rich tradition of possession-taking and one that proved to have both immediate and long-

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term significance as European powers struggled to subdivide the globe. For Europeans, symbolic acts of possession not only secured legal right to lands, but even isolated claims, centuries old, provided a pretext for further claiming in lands previously claimed by others. Claims in contested areas often sparked energetic counter-explorations and colonization by rival powers. In certain cases, overlapping claims brought colonial antagonists to the brink of war and to either humiliation or triumphant vindication. To Native peoples, symbolic acts of possession represented the first provocation of would-be conquerors, often followed by violations of Native concepts of ownership and propriety. The conflicting claims and cross-cultural misunderstandings that resulted frequently undermined European efforts and mobilized Native peoples in defense of land, property, and dignity. As European ships converged on the North Pacific coast, each of these scenarios was visited in turn, revealing a tale ripe with tense confrontation, subterfuge and international imbroglio.

Until the latter half of the 18th century, the North Pacific coast of North America, from the Aleutian Islands to Spain’s California missions, remained one of the last coastlines in the world untouched by Europeans. Although by 1741 Russian mariners had briefly visited the mainland and a few Aleutian islands, these northern shores would remain for decades beyond the horizon of European knowledge. While unfavorable winds and vast distances conspired to keep mariners from learning the truth, armchair geographers relying on myth and hearsay speckled this uncharted realm with apocryphal islands and waterways piercing the heart of the continent. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Spanish were well positioned to explore the northern corners of the continent, but Spain’s rulers were content with the annual Manila galleon, which delivered American goods to Asia and returned with Chinese porcelains, silks, exotic drugs, and mercury for mining Mexican silver. This trans-oceanic trade was so profitable that the Crown jealously guarded the

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Pacific Ocean as a Spanish lake while regarding exploration to the north as an economic
dead-end. Despite Spain’s efforts to exclude others, the North Pacific was home to one
mystery so tantalizing that neither Spanish threats nor a policy of official secrecy could
dampen the curiosity of Europe’s maritime powers. The North Pacific coast, it was said,
concealed the entrance to a warm-water passage linking the northern Atlantic with the riches
of the Indies.

Cartographers, borrowing clues from Marco Polo’s accounts of the Orient, named
this fabled passage the Strait of Anian, a name that captured the imagination of mariners
throughout Europe.9 England’s Sir Francis Drake, after plundering Spain’s Pacific
settlements in 1578, searched in vain for this northern route home to avoid running a
gauntlet of angry Spanish captains on his way back to Cape Horn. In 1609 a Spanish
captain named Lorenzo Maldonado claimed to have traveled via a northern route into the
North Pacific and back to the Atlantic as early as 1588. Periodically during the next two
centuries, other apocryphal accounts circulated among Europe’s mariners and court
officials, ensuring that interest in a northwest passage would seldom wane.10 In the 18th
century, as European powers extended Enlightenment science into the Pacific, the Strait of
Anian remained a geographical curiosity and a potential gold mine, prompting home
governments to make the search for a northwest passage an indispensable part of every
mission.11

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163-164.

10 T.A. Rickard, “The Strait of Anian,” British Columbia Historical Quarterly 5 (July 1941):
177-178. See also Henry R. Wagner, “Apocryphal Voyages,” Proceedings of the American Antiquarian
Quarterly 30 (1929): 14-32.

11 It should be noted that the Strait of Anian was one of several passages thought to traverse the
North American continent. Explorers also searched for passages named after the authors of fanciful
accounts. For example, the Strait of Maldonado, of Bartolomew de Fonte and of Juan de Fuca were all
popular in their day. The Strait of Juan de Fuca is the only one found today on maps (of Washington
state), where a labyrinthine strait offers just the sort of geographical possibilities that tantalized mariners.
To the Spanish, the Strait of Anian represented more of a strategic liability than a conduit for wealth. For many years Spanish authorities discouraged exploration in the North, reasoning that if Spanish mariners discovered the passage, colonial officials would be unable to keep that information from hostile foreigners. Further, if a rival power were to gain control of the passage, Spanish America might soon be encircled by enemy ships threatening both the American colonies and the route of the Manila galleon. During the 18th century, this nightmare scenario, augmented by concern over advancing Russian fur traders, made it impossible for the Spanish to ignore the unexplored region north of their California settlements. Beginning in 1774, the Viceroy of New Spain, Antonio Bucareli, began dispatching ships to the North in an effort to confirm what he already feared -- that Spain was not alone in coveting northern shores.12

When Catherine II of Russia (1762-1796) came to the throne, she soon realized that the American coast could no longer be considered the exclusive domain of the freelance fur hunters and traders known as promyshlenniki. As Russian merchants began to face stiff competition from foreign ships trading for furs along the coast, the Tsarina took steps to secure her territories against the aggressive interlopers by promoting exploration and an insisting upon an increased Russian naval presence. Well-versed in the literature of Enlightenment thought, Catherine II also sent scientific expeditions to Russian America to chart the coast and the investigate long-term commercial potential of the region. In 1778, when Captain James Cook sailed from the Hawaiian Islands to the coast of North America, the British navigator was following orders from King George III (1760-1820) to search for a northwest passage while at the same time demonstrating British advances in Enlightenment science. However, when Cook’s Journals were published in 1784, they

12 The principal Spanish expeditions along North Pacific shores are those of Juan Pérez (1774), Bruno de Hezeta and Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra (1775), Ignacio de Arteaga and Bodega y Quadra (1779), Esteban José Martínez and Gonzalo López de Haro (1788), Salvador Fidalgo (1790), Alejandro Malaspina (1789-1794), and Jacinto Caamaño (1792).
lured to the region not scientists but British adventurers and entrepreneurs seeking overnight wealth selling sea otter furs to Chinese merchants in Canton and Macao. Not to be outdone, Louis XVI of France (1774-1792) dispatched two ships to the Pacific in 1785 in an effort to win for France some of the glory Cook had gained for the British Empire. During a four-month survey of the North Pacific coast, an assembly of notable scientists traded with coastal Natives, conducted astronomical studies, and noted the enormous potential for profit trading in sea otter furs.

Although Spanish interest in the fur trade was minimal and the Crown’s military concerns in the North were purely defensive, Carlos III shared with his rivals a desire to test Enlightenment thinking in this distant, uncharted realm. As one of Europe’s enlightened despots, the king was keen to reverse what he viewed as Spain’s cultural and economic backwardness by promoting domestic reforms and endeavoring to change the tone of Spanish imperialism abroad. To do this, the king insisted that officers and clergy aboard Spanish ships in the North keep detailed journals on topics ranging from botany and geology to Native culture and politics. In addition, he ordered expedition commanders to implement a novel Indian policy that dictated, in short, that the Spanish would treat Native peoples with courtesy, avoiding violence in all but the direst circumstances. This surprising reversal of the common Spanish practice of conquest and conversion revealed the king’s sensitivity to the so-called Black Legend, or leyenda negra, which held that the Spanish were little more than barbarians with a penchant for spilling indigenous blood.13 This opinion, promoted enthusiastically by Spain’s rivals, was best expressed in the late 18th century by the British trader Nathaniel Portlock who asserted that the Spanish “are a nation designed by Providence to be a scourge to every tribe of Indians they come near, by one

means or another." Hoping to refurbish Spain's image, Carlos III used the North Pacific as a proving ground to demonstrate his country's commitment to scientific curiosity and an enlightened approach to colonization.

Whether seeking military security, fur trade profits, a laboratory for enlightened science, or a chance to redeem a nation's reputation, by the latter half of the 18th century it was clear that Spain and her rivals could scarcely afford to ignore this distant parcel of *terra nullius* or to neglect questions of discovery and claiming. When writing about the arrival of Europeans in the North Pacific, historians have traditionally divided the subject into three discrete events: Russian-American colonization, the maritime fur trade (dominated by the British and Americans), and the scientific expeditions of James Cook and George Vancouver. Although it is difficult to tell these stories without some mention of territorial rivalry, writers often fail to acknowledge the full range of international competition for sovereignty in this region or to address the symbolic acts of possession with which this study concerns itself. In addition, this tripartite treatment too often neglects the contributions of Spanish (or for that matter, French) explorers to the history of the North Pacific coast. The present study offers compelling evidence that Spanish efforts to defend Crown sovereignty in the North and the use of symbolic acts of possession by Spain and her rivals are two subjects that deserve to be better represented in Alaskan and Pacific historiography.

Scholarly works concerned with symbolic acts of possession are few and far between. The first significant attempt to document the phenomenon of claiming by symbolic act was the monograph *Creation of Rights of Sovereignty through Symbolic Acts, 1400-1800* (1938) by Arthur Keller, Oliver Lissitzyn and Frederick Mann. This investigation of the Portuguese, Spanish, English, French, Dutch, Scandinavian, and Russian

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14 Nathaniel Portlock, *A Voyage Round the World: But More Particularly to the North-west*
claiming traditions provides the bedrock for all study of symbolic acts of possession today. Though this seminal work offers numerous examples of ritual claiming, its authors offer only superficial comparisons of the various claiming practices and reveal little about the origins of possession-taking ceremonies. Patricia Seed’s Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640 (1995) attempts to remedy this oversight with examination of the historical origins of symbolic acts of possession. Unlike Keller et al., Seed examines actual examples of claiming only briefly before departing into the realms of philology, medieval law, and Biblical interpretation. While Seed is skilled at identifying the differences between various culturally-specific claiming rituals, she fails to explain how rival imperial powers reacted to one another’s ceremonies.

Though Keller et al. and Seed are concerned with the same subject matter during roughly the same time period, they often arrive at radically different conclusions. For example, when examining the French claiming tradition, Seed relies entirely upon examples of claiming along the Brazilian coast in the early 17th century which lead her to conclude that “French possession-taking ceremonies were more elaborate, lengthy, and rigidly structured than any other European power’s.” Meanwhile, Keller et al. examine a distinct set of examples during the same time period and assert that “French practice in formally taking possession of terra nullius ... was characterized ... by an almost extreme simplicity.” Even a cursory comparison of these two works reveals more glaring contradictions like the one above, leading to the conclusion that the study of symbolic acts of possession is still in its infancy.

Coast of America ... (London: Stockdale and Goulding, 1789), 271.
15 Seed limits her research to Portuguese, Spanish, English, French, and Dutch examples.
17 Keller et al., Rights of Sovereignty, 102.
After completing his monumental *Cartography of the Northwest Coast to the Year 1800* (1937), Henry Raup Wagner was inspired by the work of Keller and his colleagues to also examine the phenomenon of ritual claiming. Borrowing the title of the groundbreaking monograph, Wagner’s “Creation of Rights of Sovereignty through Symbolic Acts” (1938) combines early examples of Spanish, British and French claiming with analysis of the 18th century struggle for sovereignty on the North Pacific coast. Wagner’s brief examination of overlapping claims and the Nootka Sound Controversy of 1789-1794 provides an excellent introduction to the material considered in the present study. Historian Manuel Servin also combines an interest in symbolic acts and the exploration history of the North Pacific. In “The Instructions of Viceroy Bucareli to Ensign Juan Perez” (1940), Servin offers a translation of this important document while also commenting on Spain’s long-standing dependence upon symbolic acts in claiming *terra nullius*. This article was followed by “Religious Aspects of Symbolic Acts of Sovereignty” (1957) and by Servin’s dissertation “The Act of Sovereignty in the Age of Discovery” (1959). Though unpublished, Servin’s dissertation is the most comprehensive examination of possession-taking available, probing the historical origins of symbolic acts of possession and their application around the world.

As noted earlier, literature concerned with North Pacific history often either neglects or rejects ritual claiming. There are exceptions however. For example, historian Hubert Howe Bancroft in *History of Alaska* (1886) takes the time to describe several examples of Spanish and Russian claiming and ably depicts the multinational race to establish sovereignty in the region. Capturing the frenzy of this northern land-grab in a single line, Bancroft writes, “Englishmen under the English flag, Englishmen under the Portuguese flag, Spaniards and Russians, were cruising about often within a few miles of each other,
taking possession, for one nation or the other, of all the land in sight."\textsuperscript{18} Although Bancroft does describe the fundamentals of ritual claiming, he often repeats the standard refrain "the usual forms of taking possession were observed," leaving much to the imagination of the reader.

Warren Cook's *Flood Tide of Empire* (1973) is the seminal work on Spanish efforts to colonize the North (or as Cook defines it, the Pacific Northwest), beginning with the Spanish arrival on Pacific shores and ending with the 19th century revolutions that put an end to Spanish rule in the Americas. Cook argues that analysis of Spanish actions in the North Pacific must be understood in a cultural context, as well as a diplomatic one, but like most other historians, he consistently overlooks ritual claiming as a phenomenon essential to the Spaniards' political and cultural performance.

The Canadian historian Christon Archer is by far the most prolific author on the subject of Spanish efforts to secure northern shores against interlopers. Archer's "The Transient Presence: A Re-Appraisal of Spanish Attitudes Toward the Northwest Coast in the Eighteenth Century" (1973) is the first in a series of six scholarly articles investigating Spain's tenuous hold on northern shores. Archer's work relies heavily upon his own translations of travel accounts and diplomatic correspondence, and as such it rivals Warren Cook's efforts at documenting this period in North Pacific history. Regrettably (and inexplicably) Archer joins his fellow historians in overlooking the importance of symbolic acts of possession in the Spanish struggle to maintain a foothold in the North. Perhaps more useful to the study of Spanish possession-taking are Archer's studies of the role of Native peoples in Spain's colonial schemes, mentioned later in this literature review.

Much of the available literature concerning Spanish claiming takes the form of translation, often with editorial comments. The accounts of Spain's northern expeditions

\textsuperscript{18} Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Alaska, 1730-1885* (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft &
long remained untranslated and unpublished on archive shelves in Madrid and Mexico City, but in recent years more academics have taken an interest in these manuscript sources. Principal among them is Katrina Moore, whose translations of the accounts of Ignacio Arteaga (1779), Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra (1775, 1779), Gonzalo López de Haro (1788), and Salvador Fidalgo (1790) were commissioned by the late Elmer E. Rasmuson. Although Moore’s work remains in the Rasmuson Library in an unpublished form, the collection is enormously valuable to scholars. Historian Herbert Beals has translated and analyzed documents pertaining to the expeditions of Juan Pérez (1774) and Bruno de Hezeta (1775), completing the list of early Spanish exploration narratives in the North Pacific. The journals of Franciscan friars taking part in these expeditions are also available in translations by George Griffin (1891), Walter Thornton (1918), and A.J. Baker (1964), each with their own editorial commentary. These translated accounts -- as well as the accounts of French, Russian, and British explorers -- serve as the backbone of the present study.

Native perspectives on the arrival of the Spanish and other Europeans on North Pacific shores is a subject that remains largely in the realm of anthropology. Anthropologists George Emmons (1991) and Frederica de Laguna (1972), for example, rely heavily upon explorers’ accounts in describing Tlingit culture in Southeast Alaska, though quoted material is used to illustrate specific cultural traits rather than to reveal the history of Native-European relations in the North in a particular time or place. The only anthropological works that specifically address Native-Spanish relations in the North Pacific are Stephen Langdon’s “Engagement, Assessment and Response” (1994), an

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19 Bruno de Hezeta was the expedition commander who turned back from the coast of Washington following an attack by Native warriors that killed seven Spanish sailors. Bodega, captain of the much smaller Sonora, took the opportunity to sail north. Beals’ translation of Hezeta’s journal provides important context for Bodega’s later exploits on the Alaskan coast.
examination of encounters between Tlingits and Spaniards before 1792, and “Efforts at Humane Engagement” (1997), which continues this research with a study of the Spanish Indian policy at work in Bucareli Bay circa 1779. Though clearly writing as an historian, Christon Archer contributes to understanding of Native-Spanish relations with “The Making of Spanish Indian Policy on the Northwest Coast” (1977) and “Seduction before Sovereignty” (1993). Both articles examine Spanish motives in their treatment of northern coastal peoples and the indigenous reaction to these efforts. Mary Gormly (1977a, 1977b) and Wallace Olson (1996) have assembled bibliographies of Spanish source material relating to Natives in the North Pacific. These collections reveal both the opportunity and the need for further scholarship -- historical and anthropological -- in the field of Native-Spanish relations.

Unlike the efforts of Keller et al. (1938), Wagner (1938), Servin (1959), and Seed (1995), the present study of ritual claiming is limited geographically and chronologically, isolating an exceptional setting for the study of symbolic acts of possession. For example, the 18th century struggle to establish claims in the North Pacific reveals the energetic use of symbolic acts by their fiercest defenders, the Spanish; examples of both Native rejection of and participation in European claiming; a French renunciation of the very concept of ritual claiming; the development of an entirely new system of claiming by the Russians; and the eventual demise of the practice in the face of challenges from the British government. In short, there could be no more appropriate place or time in which to study symbolic acts of possession.

Spanish efforts to establish Crown sovereignty in the North serve as a central theme in this study for two reasons: first, because the importance of Spanish exploration in the

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20 Though only tangentially related, Archer’s “Cannibalism in the Early History of the Northwest Coast: Enduring Myths and Neglected Realities” (1980) provides readers with a unique insight into Native-Spanish relations and the cultural misunderstandings that complicated encounters between Natives and Europeans throughout the North Pacific.
North Pacific has been frequently overlooked; and second, because Spanish explorers approached this region not as settlers or entrepreneurs but as the jealous defenders of an imperial dominion they believed was under siege. Forever reacting to real and imagined threats from rival claimants, the Spanish ultimately became some of the first and last to employ symbolic acts of possession in the North. Their story, therefore, provides a fitting frame through which to examine Russian, French, and British possession-taking tactics as well as the Native reactions to this foreign intrusion.
CHAPTER I: SPANISH CLAIMS AND NATIVE RESPONSE

Discussion of European claiming in the New World invariably begins with Christopher Columbus's American landfall on October 12, 1492. However, to fully understand the Admiral's actions on that day, as well as those of his fellow conquistadors, one must look beyond that fateful beginning to a centuries-old conflict that was coming to an end just as Columbus set sail. Christian efforts to reclaim the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors began in the 8th century when the first Muslims streamed north across the Straits of Gibraltar. Nearly seven hundred years later, the Iberian \textit{reconquista}, or reconquest, came to a close as King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella accepted the keys to the fortified palace known as the Alhambra from the last defeated Moorish commander at Granada.\textsuperscript{21} The ceremonies described by royal notaries on this momentous occasion reveal a uniquely Hispanic flair for pageantry that combined religious rites and elaborate symbolic acts of possession:

\begin{quote}
King Don Fernando took the keys and gave them to the Queen, and the Queen gave them to the Prince, and the Prince gave them to the Count of Tendilla, whom with the Duke of Escalona \ldots{} he sent to enter into the Alhambra and to take possession of it. And, they entered and took it and took possession of the high places and the low places. And, they went and entered and exhibited in the highest tower first the insignia of Jesus Christ, which was the Holy Cross, which the King always had with him on the holy conquest. And, the King, the Queen and the Prince and all the troops humbled themselves to the Cross, and gave many thanks and praises to Our Lord. And, the Archbishop and the clergy recited the \textit{Te Deum Laudamus}. And, then they showed to those inside the banner of Santiago \ldots{} together with it the royal banner of the King Don Fernando. And, the King's heralds proclaimed in loud voices 'Castile, Castile.' And these heralds did here and said here what was
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{21} Ferdinand reigned in Spain from roughly 1479 to 1516. Isabella ruled by his side until her death in 1504.
demanded by their office, and they gave their proclamations. And, present at this act and blessed victory with the King and Queen, were the Prince Don Juan, and the Infanta Doña Juana, their children; the Cardinal of Spain; the Archbishop of Seville ... and so many others that it would be prolix to write ...  

And with this, the monarchs of Spain not only rid their land of the hated Moor but found time to turn their attention to an Italian navigator who had long petitioned for permission to sail west seeking the wealth of the Indies. Within a few months, Christopher Columbus had carried the *reconquista* to America, performing a possession-taking ceremony bearing striking similarities to that of Ferdinand and Isabella.

According to the Dominican scholar Bartolomé de las Casas, on the morning of October 12, Columbus filled a longboat with all the armed men it could hold and ordered his two captains, Martin Alonso and Vicente Pinzón, to do the same. Approaching the sandy shores of the island he called San Salvador, Columbus held aloft the royal standard of his benefactors while each of his captains displayed banners bearing green crosses. Columbus is said to have knelt to give thanks to Almighty God for delivering them to safety before he turned the legal procedure necessary for claiming:

> The Admiral called to the two captains and to the others who had jumped onto land, and to Rodrigo d’Escobedo, the notary and registrar of the whole fleet ... and he said that they should bear faith and witness to how he, in the presence of all, was going to take, and in fact, did take possession of said island [San Salvador] for the king and for the queen, his lords, making the solemn declarations required to preserve their rights, as is contained at greater length in the legal instruments of proof made there in writing.  

Although Columbus’s “solemn declarations” do not survive, the fundamentals of the Spanish claiming tradition were all evident on that day: religious acts of thanksgiving, a

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23 Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, eds. *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America, 1492-1493* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 62-64.
display of spiritual and temporal symbols, and speech acts announcing the intent to possess, all dutifully documented before witnesses. Columbus’s later claiming ceremonies in the Caribbean added the final ingredient, a cross (or a similar monument) to mark the site, welcoming later arrivals and warning off rival claimants.24 Columbus’s ceremony on San Salvador did, however, differ in one significant way from that of his royal sponsors: Columbus and his men did not announce their claim before a vanquished foe. Indeed, one can imagine that Arawak Indians observing from the trees were greatly alarmed and perhaps puzzled by this inexplicable intrusion. As it happened, the bloody clashes between Spaniards and Native Americans that began on that day would in time add a uniquely Hispano-American twist to the Spanish possession-taking tradition.

Christopher Columbus’s return from the Americas complicated an already heated debate between Spain and Portugal over control of newly discovered territories along the Atlantic littoral. Upon hearing of Columbus’s arrival in Lisbon, Portugal’s King João II (1481-1495) immediately cited various papal bulls (or decrees) issued by popes beginning in the 1450s that protected Portuguese discoveries along the coast of Africa. According to João II, this most recent discovery also fell under the umbrella of Portuguese sovereignty. In response, Spain’s Ferdinand and Isabella appealed to Pope Alexander VI, himself a Spaniard, to confirm their rights to lands discovered by Spanish navigators.

In 1493 the Pope issued a series of bulls that undermined Portugal’s privileges and granted the Crown of Spain almost unlimited rights to the new lands on one condition. The Spanish had to agree to actively convert heathen peoples to the Catholic faith. The bull known as “Inter Caetera,” issued on May 4, 1493, declared,

we ... do by tenor of these presents ... give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs and successors, kings of Castile and Leon, forever, together with all their dominions,

24 Columbus reported that at the harbor entrance of Hispaniola a great wooden cross was set up “as an indication that your Highnesses possess the country, and principally for a token of Jesus Christ Our
cities, camps, places, and villages, and all rights, jurisdictions, and appurtenances, all islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered towards the west and south ...  

In order to prevent future conflicts between the Catholic powers, Pope Alexander VI drew a line from the Arctic to the Antarctic pole one hundred leagues (or about 345 miles) west of the Cape Verde Islands. To the west of this line was to be a Spanish sphere of influence; to the east, a Portuguese, thereby allowing King João II's explorers access to the African cape and India and Spanish access to Columbus's "Indies." This magnificent act of hubris did not, however, satisfy the Portuguese king, who feared that his interests in the South Atlantic would be compromised. Yielding to Portuguese pressure, Ferdinand and Isabella signed the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, pushing the line of the so-called Alexandrine Donation 270 leagues (or 930 miles) farther to the west. In the centuries to come, Spanish explorers frequently referred to these agreements -- one divinely ordained, the other secular -- when performing symbolic acts of possession in distant lands.

As Columbus and his fellow Spaniards searched in vain for the kingdom of the Great Khan and became increasingly impatient with efforts to find gold in island streams, the Spanish view of the Caribbean Natives as children of nature and potential converts quickly eroded. Before long, Columbus's earthly paradise was soaked in blood, undermining the basis of Alexander VI's papal bulls. As the atrocities mounted, Dominican friars in Hispaniola, including the famed Bartolomé de las Casas, used fiery sermons to challenge the legitimacy of the Crown's territorial claims. By 1512 Ferdinand and Isabella sought the advice of the eminent Spanish legal scholar Juan López Rubíos on how best to establish Spanish authority in the New World while avoiding censure by the Catholic Lord, and the honor of Christianity." Keller et al., Rights of Sovereignty, 33.

Church. A portion of the response submitted by Rubios was later adopted as an official statement dubbed the *Requerimiento*, or Requirement. Muttered into thick Spanish beards at the forest’s edge or simply shouted from the deck of a ship, the document took the form of a declaration of war to be read aloud to indigenous peoples who might be tempted to resist Spanish authority [see Appendix B].

Written in a bastardized prose its authors thought suitable for a savage audience, the document delivered a brief lesson in Biblical history, including God’s designation of the Pope as an “Admirable Great Father” and a cursory explanation of the 1493 Alexandrine Donation. The document then “required” that indigenous peoples accept the religious authority of the Pope and of the Spanish king while also allowing Catholic priests into their midst. By accepting this ultimatum, Native peoples were promised that they would not be taken in bondage or forcefully converted. Refusal, on the other hand, carried lethal consequences. “If you do not do this” warned the *Requerimiento*, “I certify to you that … we shall forcibly enter into your country and shall make war against you … [and] we shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them.”26 Adding insult to injury, the authors of the *Requerimiento* placed the blame for any bloodshed firmly upon the shoulders of the uncomprehending Natives by insisting that “the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their Highnesses, or ours, nor these cavaliers who come with us.”27 Though much derided by Spain’s enemies and often neglected by over-eager conquistadors, the *Requerimiento* was nonetheless an integral part of the Spanish claiming ceremony in the New World.

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27 Ibid.
While the speech act of the *Requerimiento* allowed the Spanish to establish their authority over New World peoples, control of the land was achieved with a battery of physical acts designed to demonstrate power over the inanimate world. The origins of these physical acts are unknown and their use appears to modern eyes arcane, leading at least one historian to dismiss them as “a theater of improvisation.” However, an examination of the early period of Spanish claiming in the Americas does reveal patterns that hint at their origins. Columbus’s captain Vicente Pinzón, for example, reported that while taking possession of the northern coast of South America in 1500, he cut down trees and slashed tree boughs and drank water from a nearby stream, all before the expedition’s notaries. In the same year, the Spanish explorer Diego de Lepe took possession along the same coast by cutting down several trees and carving his name on the trunk of a tree he left standing. Later explorers described their claiming ceremonies in more detail, revealing that the crude practices of early Spanish explorers were refined as the Spanish Empire grew.

The chronicles of conquistador Bernal Díaz reveal that the use of physical acts of possession was not reserved for unpeopled wilderness; indeed, populated areas and even towns were seen as appropriate sites for ritual claiming. Díaz described an episode in 1519 along the Yucatán Peninsula when Commander Hernán Cortés prepared himself for battle with the inhabitants of a sizable village in Tabasco. After reading aloud a version of the *Requerimiento* and vanquishing the village’s residents, Cortés performed a markedly bellicose and decidedly secular version of the Spanish claiming ceremony in the town’s central courtyard. “Cortés took possession of that land for the King, performing the act in His Majesty’s name,” explained Díaz,

He did it in this way: he drew his sword, and, as a sign of possession, made three cuts in a large silk-cotton tree which stood in that great courtyard, and cried that if

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29 Keller et al., *Rights of Sovereignty*, 34.
any person should raise an objection he would defend the King’s right with his sword and his shield, which he held in his other hand.\textsuperscript{30}

Responding to their leader’s bold demonstration, the soldiers witnessing the event cried back that Cortés was right to claim the land in this manner and that they would aid him in defending it against any challenger. Later explorers added their own variations to the battery of gestures Cortés called \textit{actas de posesión} by digging holes, slashing at grasses, striding back and forth across beaches, tossing handfuls of sand, moving heavy rocks from place to place, or scooping water from the sea to hurl upon the land. While the origins of these symbolic acts remain obscure, it appears they were meant to represent the actions of settlers in a new land -- clearing fields of stones and trees, digging wells, irrigating land, and harvesting crops.

As evidenced by Bodega’s arrival at Kruzof Island, later Spanish claiming ceremonies invariably included a religious rite which, if time allowed, included the observance of Mass, a chorus of certain hymns, and a procession delivering a freshly hewn cross to a hill or promontory. The cross served both as the focus of pious adoration and as a monument to alert future arrivals, be they friend or foe, of Spain’s territorial claim to sovereignty. Crosses bearing inscriptions were the most popular form of marking claimed land, though notices were also carved on rocks or into tree trunks, and in some cases the branches of a tree were trimmed to create a living cross. When indigenous peoples were present to observe the ceremony, an attempt was always made to secure a promise from them not to remove or destroy crosses.\textsuperscript{31} The safety of a cross was made all the more important when, as is noted here in Bodega’s orders, the foot of the cross also served as a time capsule protecting a written record of the possession-taking ceremony: “All places where possession is taken will be marked with a large wooden cross, making its pedestal

from rocks and concealing in it a bottle or glass flask in which he [Bodega] will place a copy of the testimony of possession signed by him, the chaplain and the two pilots."

In the eyes of the Spanish, a completed testimony of possession, enumerating the prescribed acts (religious and secular, physical and oratory), signed by witnesses, copied for the royal library, and finally buried at the foot of a cross, established a claim lasting in perpetuity, a claim not to be invalidated by neglect or negated by a counter-claim. It is interesting to note that while acts of possession were seen as absolute, the extent of the territory covered by a single act was not. Rarely, if ever, did the Spanish (or other European claimants) specify the geographical limits of a particular claim with precision. In 1513 Vasco Núñez de Balboa tested the seemingly infinite range of symbolic acts when he took possession of the Pacific Ocean and all the lands touching its shore for the Spanish Crown. As it turned out, there were limits to the power of symbolic acts. While Balboa’s discovery was celebrated, his claiming ceremony was rarely cited as support for Spain’s claims along the Pacific Rim.

Despite the attempts of Balboa and his ilk to claim the world with a word, the practice of claiming by symbolic act evolved as an incremental process, with explorers repeating their ceremonies from island to island and from cove to peninsula. While at times rival European nations challenged the effective range of a given claim, they rarely questioned the premise that control of *terra nullius* began with the performance of symbolic acts of possession. Therefore, when concern over advancing Russian traders and a desire to secure the Strait of Anian at last convinced Viceroy Bucareli to send ships into the unexplored North, the Spanish tradition of claiming by symbolic act was adopted in total,

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but for one notable exception: in the North, Spain’s representatives would act as emissaries of an enlightened age rather than conquistadors with a mandate to conquer and convert.

Although the Spanish government had long been concerned with defending its vast Pacific empire, little action was taken until the early 1770s when Spain’s minister to Russia, the Conde de Lacy, produced the first of a series of alarming (and largely erroneous) reports. According to Lacy, a Russian naval officer named Aleksei Chirikov had been sent to explore the ocean between Kamchatka and America in 1769 and returned to Asia in 1771 with his ship in good condition and without losing a single man of his crew.\(^{35}\) The minister then traced the origins of the Russian fur trade before drifting into speculation about gold and silver mines and a valuable pearl fishery presumably in the Aleutian Islands. Lacy also recounted to his superiors rumors that Chirikov had collected coins of European mintage while exploring the American coast and that Hudson’s Bay Company traders were extending their posts westward to meet the Russians in a conspiracy to undermine Spanish claims. Lacy took these exaggerations as proof that a northwest passage existed and that Spain’s imperial rivals were closing in.\(^{36}\)

By 1773, Lacy’s dispatches to Madrid adopted an even more urgent tone, describing Russian plans to storm the Great Wall of China and to invade the Japanese islands. The Spanish minister also wrote of one Leonard Euler of the Russian Academy of Science who, he said, had formulated plans for a Russian naval squadron to sail around Africa to establish a naval base at Kamchatka for the purpose of carrying out new conquests. According to

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\(^{34}\) One exception to this rule was the British Crown whose long-standing feud with the Spanish government led to a blanket rejection of Spanish claims to North America and elsewhere. This is discussed at greater length in Chapter IV.


Euler’s theories of human migration, America belonged to Russia by ancient right because it was originally populated by Siberian peoples. This mixture of half-truths and intriguing fiction greatly worried Spain’s king and prompted Spain’s secretary of state, the Marqués de Grimaldi, to suggest that a new campaign of claiming ceremonies might be necessary.

“[A] matter I consider very important,” wrote Grimaldi, “[is] not to establish costly defended posts, but to give signs that the land is ours, seeing as we live in a century in which furor reigns in other powers to go searching for unknown lands in those parts of the world.” As a result, the Spanish government ordered Viceroy Bucareli to begin drawing up plans to claim the northern coast of North America before either the Russians or the increasingly worrisome British could do the same.

Although Bucareli had doubts about the magnitude of the Russian threat and about his ability to support a major northern campaign, he sent a request to the newly established San Blas naval station for capable navigators. By June 1774 the frigate Santiago was equipped for a lengthy voyage and Bucareli chose one of the only navigators in New Spain with experience on the California coast, Ensign Juan Pérez, to lead the expedition. As second pilot the viceroy chose Esteban José Martínez, a hot-blooded officer who would later become a controversial figure in Spain’s final battle to maintain sovereignty along northern shores. Once the Santiago was out of sight of Monterey harbor, beyond the prying eyes of foreign spies, Pérez opened a bundle of instructions prepared by Bucareli himself and began to read the orders which would be carried with little alteration on all Spanish expeditions into the North Pacific.

Bucareli’s instructions directed Commander Pérez to proceed to a point at 60 degrees latitude before turning south to begin a careful survey of the coast. Pérez was ordered not to attempt settlement but to conspicuously mark and take possession of suitable

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37 Archer, “Pacific Ocean Empire,” 24.
38 As quoted in Archer, “Pacific Ocean Empire,” 25.
sites in case later Spanish expeditions might chose to occupy them. In the event that the Spanish vessel should encounter a foreign outpost, Pérez was to observe the settlement from a distance, avoiding all contact with foreigners and taking care to sail farther north before attempting any possession-taking ceremonies. If confronted by a superior force and ordered to divulge his mission, Pérez was supposed to claim that the *Santiago* was a supply ship for the ports of San Diego and Monterey thrown off course by foul weather. The Spanish commander was also instructed to interrogate any Native peoples he might encounter about their contact with European vessels, asking specifically if European ship captains had promised to return and if the Natives still possessed any gifts or tokens from these foreign visitors. "[I]n all of these he will become thoroughly informed," directed Bucareli, "by means of sign language or as best he can, recognizing the very great importance of this knowledge and information."39

The mission outlined above appears to be limited to reconnaissance and preemptory claiming, but a surprising number of Bucareli’s orders concern the treatment of Native peoples. In fact, Bucareli’s obvious concern for their welfare suggests that Natives were to play a much greater role in the Spanish campaign than as mere informants. The viceroy began by declaring that the mission was one of “spiritual conquest,” the standard rationale for Spanish exploration, but subsequent orders reflect more practical concerns. The first of these addresses a first-contact situation: “If settlements of Indians are found on the locations where he [Pérez] lands, after he has treated them affectionately and given them some of the articles which he carried for this purpose, he will endeavor to learn about their customs, characteristics, their mode of life and their neighbors …"40 The articles stowed aboard the *Santiago* for this occasion were four boxes containing nearly five hundred individual bundles of beads. Bucareli’s next concern was the possibility that callous

40 Ibid.
treatment or abuses perpetrated by the Spanish sailors might spoil the accord between the two groups:

He [Pérez] will not take anything from the Indians against their will, but only in barter or given by them through friendship. All must be treated with kindness and gentleness, which is the most efficacious means of gaining and firmly establishing their esteem....

He must maintain good order among the crew, looking after them both when sailing and when a landing must be made, in order to prevent lack of obedience or of good treatment of the Indians -- against whom force will never be used except when it is necessary for self-defense.41

This last order -- a ban on the use of violence -- marks a dramatic departure from the Spanish approach in California where military presidios were built around missions to enforce the dictates of Church and Crown. Because New Spain lacked the resources to support such a system of mission-presidios, the king and his viceroy were trying a different tack. This change in policy reflects the tenuous nature of Spain's northern claims and the efficacy of claiming by symbolic act when military defenders and would-be settlers were in short supply. With these difficulties in mind, Bucareli urged caution when attempting to perform symbolic acts of possession in lands already occupied by Native peoples:

Under no circumstances should he antagonize the Indians or forcibly take possession of land. If he should encounter difficulties in some location, he can perform it in its adjacent regions, realizing that his principal concern is limited to exploration of the coast as far north as he can sail.42

Although the Spanish would in time encounter considerable difficulty performing symbolic acts of possession near Native settlements, Spanish commanders consistently maintained this policy of friendly engagement and non-violence whenever they set foot on northern shores.

41 Ibid., 242.
42 Ibid., 243.
It seems clear that Spanish goals in the North included neither conquest nor conversion. Indeed, when Pérez requested additional veteran soldiers for his crew, Bucareli chided him, pointing out that the purpose of the mission was to discover (and claim) new lands, not to fight Indians. Instead of more soldiers, Bucareli attached an additional Franciscan friar to the Santiago’s complement. The fact that gentle persuasion had replaced conquest by the sword and the cross offers strong evidence that Carlos III saw the viceroy’s northern expeditions as an opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to scientific inquiry and to an Indian policy worthy of the Age of Enlightenment. Conscious that the eyes of the civilized world would be watching, the king was determined that the leyenda negra would not be perpetuated on North Pacific shores. In addition, Bucareli’s orders suggest that this novel Indian policy would have a secondary purpose: to woo northern Natives into supporting Spanish territorial claims to the region and to secure the aid of Native chiefs should future Spanish expeditions arrive to settle the area.

Whatever the viceroy’s intentions, Commander Pérez had little opportunity to put these new policies to the test. After nearly five months of difficult sailing along a storm-bound coast, Pérez and his crew passed through Dixon Entrance before circling back toward the northern-most end of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Pérez soon found the frigate too large for effective reconnaissance, and without a consort vessel, he feared dense fogs and treacherous currents would wreck the Santiago, rendering the expedition a complete loss. The vagaries of weather and tide did not, however, deter Haida villagers, who paddled out to greet the Santiago in impressive cedar canoes. Juan Crespi, one of two Franciscan friars with the expedition, wrote of the first canoe that “seven of them were

43 Archer, “Spanish Indian Policy,” 46.
44 Ibid., 45.
paddling; the other, who was advanced in years, was upright and making dancing movements.” The paddlers stroked in cadence to a chant and halted some distance away, singing and dancing to the rhythm of drums and rattles. In time the Haida elder at the prow of the largest canoe sprinkled feathers upon the water and extended his arms in gesture of welcome that would become familiar to the Spanish during later expeditions.

A flurry of trade ensued when the Haida offered sea otter skins, dried fish, carvings, and elaborately woven Chilkat-style blankets, receiving in return Spanish beads, old clothing, and knives. Crespi reported that the Haida were keenly interested in the larger swords and wood-knives, though the Spanish were hesitant to turn over edged weapons to potential enemies. Although on one occasion two sailors were invited to descend to the canoes, and several Haida later boarded the Santiago, Pérez remained concerned that a landing party would expose his men to Haida arrows. After several days, and several encounters with enthusiastic trading parties, the Spanish headed south, still dogged by difficult weather.

Along the outer coast of Vancouver Island, the Santiago paused in a protected harbor and the Spanish briefly engaged in trade with the local Natives before storms forced the expedition back to sea, dashing Pérez’ last hope to perform a claiming ceremony in the North. This temporary refuge, later dubbed Nootka Sound, would become the focus of Spanish claims in the North and a diplomatic battleground where Spaniards, Britons, and Nootka Indians negotiated claims to sovereignty. Before long, Pérez and his crew approached the Spanish port at Monterey, having suffered only indirectly from their encounters with the Haida and Nootka Indians. “Some of the sailors who bought cloaks passed a bad night,” reported Crespi, “for, having put them on, they found themselves

obliged to take to scratching, on account of the bites they suffered from the little animals these pagans breed in their clothing."

The Spaniards' fleeting interaction with the Natives of Nootka Sound would in the decades to come take on an importance beyond anything Pérez might have imagined at the time. In 1789, Viceroy Bucareli's successor, Antonio Flórez, looked to accounts of the Pérez expedition amid renewed fears that Russian traders were moving south and that English and American ships would dispute the legitimacy of Spanish claims to the region. Flórez knew from reading Cook's journal that in 1778 the Englishman had purchased two silver spoons hanging from the neck of a Nootka Indian, spoons which Cook identified as Spanish-made. These spoons, combined with details of the Santiago's brief pause in the area, soon became the foundation of the viceroy's case for Spanish sovereignty at Nootka. However, a claim based on a set of spoons was tenuous and needed to be bolstered by symbolic acts of possession and an occupational force of Spanish soldiers. As the so-called Nootka Sound Controversy unfolded during the 1790s, the conflict over the sound (and the loyalty of its Native inhabitants) led to a struggle that nearly sparked a war between England and Spain.

Though Pérez had proved a timid commander, failing in both charting and claiming the northern coastline, the expedition did provide detailed descriptions of the Native inhabitants and evidence that they were willing traders and able craftsmen. In fact, in Madrid, when the Minister of the Indies displayed two Haida cloaks and assorted artifacts before the royal court and assembled foreign diplomats, the display caused a sensation. "If these cloaks are woven by Indians of the country," wrote the minister to Bucareli, "that

48 Crespi, "Diary of Fray Juan Crespi," 194.
nation is more cultivated and civilized than all others discovered until now in America."49

This show of enthusiasm was enough to inspire an expedition the following year, this time with Pérez reduced in rank to pilot.

The second Spanish expedition to the North was comprised of two ships, the Santiago under the command of Bruno de Hezeta and the Sonora as a consort under the captaincy of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra. Sailing north from San Blas in March 1775, the expedition proceeded up the coast, claiming territory and trading with Natives who received the Spanish with obvious suspicion [see Appendix C]. Pausing near Point Grenville on the outer coast of the Olympic Peninsula, the crews of both ships engaged a large group of Quinault Indians in trade, even taking a chief and his wife aboard and exchanging beads and bits of metal for fish and whale meat. Benito de la Sierra, a Franciscan friar with the expedition, reported that the Native visitors invited the Spanish ashore to eat and dance, though the offer was declined.50

The following day Captain Bodega, in need of water, firewood, and a new topmast for the Sonora, sent the ship's only longboat ashore with a crew of seven. Though the Spanish were confident that a spirit of friendship prevailed, the men were well armed.51 As the Spanish sailors approached the shore, a high surf swamped the longboat, and as the men struggled to guide their craft to dry land, some 300 Native warriors leaped from the nearby tree-line and fell upon the Spaniards, slaughtering them before the horrified eyes of their comrades aboard the Sonora. Shots fired from the Sonora's guns were entirely ineffective, and the Santiago was too far away to notice Captain Bodega's frantic distress signals. The


smoke from one rifle was seen along the beach, but this shot likely misfired as no report
was heard. "After satiating their sanguinary instincts by murdering our men," Sierra
wrote, "the savages set to work to smash up the boat, carrying off with them every piece of
iron it contained." Within a short time all trace of the sailors and the longboat had
disappeared.

An outbreak of scurvy aboard the *Santiago* and fear of additional clashes with the
Natives convinced Commander Hezeta to abandon the expedition’s goals and turn south,
while Bodega, aboard the much smaller *Sonora*, remained resolute. It appears that when the
two ships were separated in a storm, Captain Bodega, unwilling to abandon his mission,
pushed northward, while the *Santiago* retreated to Monterey. During the *Sonora*’s landfall
on Kruzof Island (and claiming ceremony, described earlier), the Spanish came face to face
with Tlingit Indians for the first time. Driven by the need to replenish the *Sonora*’s
supplies, Bodega led a crew of six sailors to a nearby river to begin filling water casks. The
captain reported that soon a group of twenty warriors emerged from the nearby plankhouse,
unarmed but for a pole tipped with a white feather. “Drawing near the bank opposite to
where I was,” Bodega wrote, “they spoke at length, but nothing could be understood.
When they had finished their harangue … they remained in silence, waiting (as it seemed)
for our reply.”

Understanding nothing of local languages, Bodega endeavored to assure the Tlingits
that he would not harm them, that he desired their friendship, and that his men merely
desired to fill some water casks. Apparently comprehending the essence of Bodega’s
message, the leader among the warriors produced a small cup woven of grass, as if inviting

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52 Ibid.
53 Sierra, “Hezeta Expedition,” 228.
the Spanish commander to drink his fill. In return, Bodega offered some bugles and handkerchiefs. The exchange was a curious affair, illustrating the mutual distrust between the two parties. "All this was carried out," Bodega wrote, "by sending to the middle of the river one Indian alone, and one of our men."55

While these tokens of goodwill were exchanged, the Natives remained calm, but, Bodega observed, "when they saw that they [the sailors] were bringing the casks to me, they demanded that we should pay them for the water which we had taken, giving us to understand that it belongs to them."56 In an attempt to appease, Bodega turned over the remaining trinkets that the landing party had brought, but when more substantial gifts were not forthcoming, the warriors suddenly rushed off to their plankhouse. "They came out all armed," reported Bodega, "with excessively long spears with flint points, and ranged themselves to attack, making warlike gestures."57 Unwilling to be intimidated, Bodega swiftly ordered his men to raise their weapons, and he himself stepped forward: "Taking my gun and approaching the bank of the river, I gave them to understand that if they took one step more I would have to fire on them; and that they should drop their weapons and I would withdraw mine if they wished to be friends."58 This show of force apparently had the desired effect, for as soon as Bodega had finished delivering this ultimatum, the warriors retreated. After gathering firewood, water, and a new topmast, the Spanish expedition departed the area, heading south.

On the seaward side of Prince of Wales Island, the Sonora paused for a time because the crew remained weak with scurvy and storms had battered the ship. Bodega was also ill, and instead of proceeding to land, he sent his pilot to perform a claiming ceremony

55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 166.
while riflemen stood by to protect the gathering of sailors on shore.\textsuperscript{59} The commander named the area in which they found shelter Bucareli Bay in honor of New Spain’s viceroy and noted that armed escort seemed unnecessary as “not a single Indian was seen, only some traces that they are accustomed to come for hunting and fishing.”\textsuperscript{60} Apparently lacking a priest, Bodega decided to forego the celebration of Mass, leaving the ceremony incomplete and making it necessary for a third expedition to visit the site some years later. During this later expedition, the Native hunters and fishermen who were so conspicuously absent in 1775 were on hand to put the Spanish Indian policy of non-violence and gentility to the test.

Bodega’s claiming ceremony on Kruzof Island offers a clear example of Spanish colonial ambition at odds with Native sovereignty, with the hijacking of the Spanish cross by local Tlingits providing a dramatic illustration of Native response. According to anthropologists, the arrival of Bodega and his crew coincided with the season for salmon harvesting and processing in that area.\textsuperscript{61} The structure described by Bodega was likely a temporary summer shelter built with lumber brought along for that purpose, and the log fortifications Bodega observed from a distance were more likely racks for drying fish and skins.\textsuperscript{62} Whatever the case, the Spanish were clearly trespassing on land claimed by the Tlingits. In examining Tlingit concepts of property, anthropologist Kalervo Oberg points out that in addition to hunting grounds, berry patches, sealing rocks, and house sites in villages, the Tlingit made a practice of claiming salmon streams as clan property.\textsuperscript{63} Unlike Tlingit groups dwelling along the mainland who had access to moose, deer, and mountain

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 168.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 17.
goat, the Tlingit of the outer coast (where the Sonora landed) relied heavily on salmon for year-round subsistence. When Bodega’s men landed to refill water casks, they were not simply tapping a source of fresh water but tampering with the Tlingits’ property and their livelihood.

Even so, it appears that the Tlingit were not denying the Spanish access so much as demanding just payment. The pole tipped with white feathers is well established in the anthropological record as a symbol of peace and a call for negotiation, though it seems this offer was contingent upon the Spanish providing sufficient compensation for the water and wood they needed.64 Bodega, however, did not give the impression that he was interested in yielding anything more than “trifles” to the resident Natives. The offer of a grass cup by the Tlingit leader also seems a gesture of reconciliation, which Bodega did not appear to have acknowledged. Although Bodega’s terse journal entries lack much of the depth of later accounts, this encounter appears to underscore strong Tlingit principles of property and territorial rights, offering clear evidence that the Spanish were venturing into a land already claimed.

Because no Russian interlopers had been discovered during either the Pérez or Hezeta-Bodega expeditions and because Carlos III was distracted by conflicts in Europe, Viceroy Bucareli’s plans to continue exploring the North were delayed for several years. In the end, it was Captain Cook’s third Pacific expedition, not Russian advances, that compelled the Spanish Crown to send naval lieutenant Ignacio de Arteaga, with Bodega as his second, northward aboard the frigates Princesa and Favorita. The two ships sailed from San Blas harbor on February 11, 1779 with orders to explore Bucareli Bay and to

complete Bodega's 1775 claiming ceremony at Bucareli Bay before continuing northward in a survey of Prince William Sound and the Kenai Peninsula.

After surviving a perilous journey through several North Pacific tempests, the ships arrived in Bucareli Bay and were immediately greeted by canoes full of Natives with their arms outstretched, singing in unison. Arteaga reported that "one of them, carrying a dead bird in his hand, was Pulling out the small Feathers, tossing them into the air and then sprinkling them on his head and on the heads of the others; which demonstrations we knew meant that they Desired Peace, and to be our friends." After nearly two weeks of peaceful interactions with the Bucareli Natives, Captain Arteaga and his officers prepared a launch to carry a statuette of the Virgin of the Rosary to the beach where she was placed with great reverence upon an altar protected by a large tent. There the crews of both ships celebrated Mass and listened to a sermon prepared by the expedition's chaplains.

Arteaga noted that nine Native canoes carrying sixty passengers, including women and children, arrived in time to participate in the Mass. "[I]t seemed that they showed great Devotion," observed the Spanish commander, "but in Reality they were only wondering at the ornaments [and] also at the Ceremonies of the Priests ..." Arteaga was pleased to note that the Natives had caused no disturbance when they rose in mid-Mass and returned to their canoes. Before the ceremony began, the commander had arranged that a large cross be constructed from two tree trunks, and when the Mass and sermon ended, the captains and their officers carried the cross on their shoulders to a location within plain sight of the ships at anchor. Sailors on shore and aboard the ships fired several salvos into the air to commemorate the occasion. The ceremony, Arteaga pointed out, was intended only to raise the cross and celebrate Mass, thus completing the claiming ceremony Bodega began in 1775.

The Spaniards’ arrival in Bucareli Bay in early May coincided with the arrival of Tlingit groups in the area for spring food gathering, including fishing for halibut and salmon, gathering seaweed, hunting seals, and collecting the eggs of sea birds. In the days that followed, the Spanish sailors traded beads and small pieces of barrel hoops for dried fish and other products. Later trading parties brought to the ships seal and sea otter pelts and the skins of bear and deer. This lively trade also included a young girl given over to the Spanish for a coat of homespun cloth and two barrel hoops. The Spanish continued for some time to trade for children because they suspected the Tlingits of cannibalism and because they hoped to educate the youths as translators and emissaries.

After taking aboard ballast rocks and water, Arteaga decided to send longboats from both ships on what would become a month-long reconnaissance of Bucareli Bay. The departure of the longboats marked the beginning of escalating tensions between Spaniards and Tlingits. Arteaga reported that on June 3, twenty-seven canoes approached the Spanish ships, and because the Tlingits carried bows and spears, all hands took battle stations. To Arteaga’s relief, these canoes appeared to be simply passing by. Trouble, however, had come to stay. Two days later, a Tlingit man managed to approach the Favorita and wrench a reinforcing bar from the side of the ship. Out of concern for the Spanish surveyors wandering the bay, Arteaga was hesitant to act against any such violation. Within three days, a small group of Tlingits, invited aboard the Favorita to trade, made off with two chisels from the carpenter’s cache. By the time the theft was discovered, the fleet-fingered fellows were already en route to the beach.

66 Ibid., 49-50.
Commander Arteaga, wanting to make an example of the thieves, ordered boats launched in pursuit, but the miscreants abandoned their canoes on the shore and fled into the woods. Unwilling to enter the shadowy realm of the trees, the Spanish seized the beached canoes, demanding in loud voices that the stolen items be brought to the shore. When at last the chisels were returned, the Spanish attempted to soothe tensions by distributing beads, canvas, and woolen cloth, but ultimately this gesture of goodwill had an undesired and unforeseen effect. “This reciprocal trade,” wrote Bodega, “caused them to forget the conditions and limits which maintain the peace and tranquillity of peoples, for yielding to their inclination to thievery, they began to steal without fear anything they happened to see which they thought they could carry off.”

The following day, an additional forty canoes were spotted in the area, and the oldest of three Tlingit children aboard the Favorita began to warn of an impending attack. As Arteaga noted in his journal, “one of the Indian boys … made us to understand as best he could that their intention was to see if during the night catching us Asleep, they could attack us and seize the Frigate.” The commander, aware of the 1775 surprise attack launched against Bodega by Quinault Indians at Point Grenville, readied both ships for battle and began an hourly fusillade of musket fire. Arteaga’s journal entry on the morning of June 10th illustrated the rising tensions between the Spaniards and Bucareli Tlingits. “In full view of both frigates,” he protested, “they had the impudence to pull down the Holy Cross, to steal the Nails with which it was held together.” The captain swiftly ordered a longboat launched to fetch the broken cross and fired a cannon loaded with shot to disperse the vandals on shore.

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71 Ibid.
Soon after the reconnaissance team had returned to the Spanish ships, there occurred once final confrontation between the Spanish and Bucareli Tlingits. On this occasion, it was the journal of Captain Bodega not Commander Arteaga that revealed details of the action. According to Bodega, two men were discovered missing from a work detail he had sent to shore hours earlier. After searching the beach thoroughly, Bodega concluded that the men had been captured and ordered his crew to pursue a Tlingit man who, it seemed, was in league with the kidnappers who had since fled to the trees. Before the Spanish forced their prisoner aboard the Favorita, he called into the woods to alert his fellows of the Spanish demands. The following day, when several canoes approached the Spanish ships, it became clear that the Tlingits were unwilling to make an exchange. When Captain Bodega shouted his increasingly angry demands at the warriors floating just out of range of Spanish guns, he was greeting with derisive laughter, suggesting perhaps that the Spanish had taken hostage a Haida and the assembled Tlingits cared nothing for his return.

Furious at the treatment of his men, Bodega tried to lure additional Tlingits aboard to serve as hostages. The plan took an unexpected turn when warriors alongside to the Favorita restrained a Spanish sailor who was supposed to leap back onto the ship at the last moment. In response, Bodega ordered a barrage of mortar fire, which frightened the Tlingit paddlers so badly that several canoes capsized. Seizing the opportunity, the Spanish plucked nineteen Tlingits from the water, and, as Bodega noted, only one of the paddlers was killed, probably by an errant musket ball. With this large number of hostages in hand, Bodega ordered one of his officers to take a well-armed crew ashore to exchange them for the Spanish sailors. When the Spanish longboats reached the beach, they were greeted by an impressive display of Tlingit strength.

"As soon as he arrived there," wrote Bodega, "the beach was covered with people armed, with breastplates, gorgets, crested helmets, and large handsome skin coats which covered them from top to toe, with heavy spears in their hands, discharging many arrows,
though uselessly."72 Even with arrows falling around them, the Spanish arranged the longboats in a defensive pattern along the waterline, the Tlingit hostages were released, and the two frightened Spanish seamen were reunited with their countrymen. Bodega was surprised and delighted that not only was bloodshed avoided during this tense standoff but that the Tlingits still appeared willing to be friends. "The longboats returned to the ships," reported Bodega, "saying farewell to all those who had been rescued from the sea with notable friendliness; and much more so to the one who had spent the night on my ship, who from the land gave signs of the gratitude which he felt, giving his hand to everyone with particular pleasure …"73

Not long after, as the two sailors were interrogated about their ordeal, a startling truth was revealed. After receiving several lashes over a cannon, the men confessed that they had attempted to desert to the Tlingit village and upon realizing the folly of their plan, the sailors insisted, it was too late. The sailors reported spending a night of "extraordinary discomfort" surrounded by Tlingit warriors who kept them awake with continuous dancing and singing.74 Before the ships departed Bucareli Bay, the deserters were given an additional hundred lashes and were slapped in irons for their transgression. Resuming their northward course, Arteaga and his men performed claiming ceremonies at Hinchinbrook Island in Prince William Sound and later at the tip of the Kenai Peninsula [see Appendix D]. The expedition eventually reached Afognak Island, near Kodiak, but before encountering any Russians, heavy rains and several fatal cases of scurvy persuaded Commander Arteaga to return to Monterey.

Unlike the 1774 Pérez expedition and Bodega’s brief visit to Kruzof Island in 1775, this Spanish landfall represented a serious and prolonged threat to Tlingit territorial claims and subsistence activities in Bucareli Bay. Although the Tlingits there greeted the Princesa

73 Ibid.
and Favorita with traditional overtures of peace, the establishment of Spanish camps (including tents for sick sailors) and the wanderings of the survey crew throughout Bucareli Bay soon alarmed Tlingit warriors who were accustomed to exclusive territorial rights in the area. It appears that as the Spanish longboats wound their way through the labyrinth of islands in the bay, Tlingit canoes followed, gathering information about the intruders. The Tlingits first expressed their displeasure with the Spanish presence by stealing the sail of a longboat when the vessel was left momentarily unattended. The officer in charge of the survey responded by capturing the perpetrator and subjecting him to a lashing with a rod, an action that might have been taken as an insult demanding reprisal by the Tlingits.75

Bodega and Arteaga’s bitter complaints that the Tlingits were persistent and unrepentant thieves reflected a profound misunderstanding regarding protocols of exchange and social relations. The tendency to steal was seen by the Spanish as a moral failing among primitive peoples which demanded patience and the occasional show of force. The Tlingits evidently viewed their own actions as a sort of aggressive diplomacy by which one party attempts to outsmart the other and thereby gain prestige.76 Although the Spanish did make a practice of offering gifts to visiting Native dignitaries, Spanish efforts did not satisfy the Tlingits’ desire for gifts and compensation for natural resources taken by the visitors. In addition to taking wood and water wherever they landed, the Spanish survey crew also took samples of rocks thought to contain valuable ores of copper or silver. According to anthropologist Stephen Langdon, the Tlingit likely regarded these mineral investigations as uncompensated takings. Evidently asserting their own territorial claims, the Tlingits on one

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76 Frederica de Laguna, Under Mount St. Elias: The History and Culture of the Yakutat Tlingit (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972), 355.
occasion outmaneuvered the survey’s longboats to erect temporary shelters where the Spanish were attempting to land.77

Furthermore, trade among the Tlingit was rarely a matter of necessity as the natural abundance of the coast satisfied the immediate needs of the population. Instead, trade was primarily a ceremonial exchange among equals, not only on the grand occasions of potlatching, but during visits with relatives and trade partners. In dealing with one’s equals, one did not seek economic profit. Rather, individuals who desired to prove their wealth gave lavishly, in the hope that it would be recognized by an equivalent lavishness in return.78

Because the Spanish drove hard bargains and appeared to have so much while giving so little, the Tlingits soon grew scornful. “The lack of proper behavior on the part of the ignorant Whites,” writes Laguna, “may have branded them as boors … and therefore fair game for cheating or theft.”79 In many ways trade along the North Pacific coast can be seen as a form of diplomacy which allowed each party to establish its status and reputation. Because among the Tlingit hard dealing and exorbitant profit-taking was only appropriate when trading with peoples of lesser status, Spanish parsimony was likely seen as not only an insult but also as an act of aggression.80

During armed confrontations, the Spanish often interpreted Tlingit actions as naked hostility when, in some cases, the opposite may have been true. In the case of the two Spanish sailors held against their will and subjected to a night of “horrible dancing,” evidence suggests that the sailors were being treated as “deer hostages” in a traditional peace ceremony.81 In 1791, the ship’s artist Tomás de Surúa entered Yakutat Bay as part of the Malaspina expedition, where he was soon captured by agitated Tlingits. “They formed

78 Laguna, Under Mount St. Elias, 357.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
a circle around me,” he wrote in his journal, “and danced around me with knives in hand singing a frightful song, which seemed like the bellowing of bulls.” According to Oberg and Laguna, would-be combatants employed this ceremony when each side desired a lasting peace. During this ritual peace-making, hostages were seized during a mock fight and then ceremonially transformed into a deer or another harmless animal like a robin or hummingbird. By imitating the Tlingit songs and joining in the dances, Surúa allowed himself to become a cleansed intermediary to facilitate a peaceful exchange between cultures. In Bucareli Bay, Tlingits had on several occasions attempted to snatch Spanish sailors from Bodega’s landing parties without launching an all-out attack. If indeed these were attempts to produce a lasting peace and to establish the Tlingits as equals in trade, the Spanish were unaware, reacting instead to what they perceived was Tlingit aggression.

As the Princesa and Favorita prepared to depart Bucareli Bay, Bodega reported “signs of gratitude” and “notable friendliness” among the Tlingits bidding the Spanish farewell, offering strong evidence that the Tlingits did not want to lose the Spanish as trading partners or as allies. What the Spanish understood as harassment and overt hostility may have been efforts by a proud people to negotiate relations with strange and powerful visitors. Clearly the protocols of ownership and exchange were mutually unintelligible, allowing misunderstanding to prevail. During this and future expeditions, the Spanish departed the region believing correctly that the Natives were capable warriors unwilling to relinquish their control of territory. The Spanish were incorrect however in assuming that the Natives were a barbaric people, unaware of the value of trade, ritual, and defensive alliances with erstwhile enemies. While the Spanish showed remarkable restraint in maintaining an official policy of non-violence and managed to avoid perpetuating the

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82 As quoted in Emmons, Tlingit Indians, 353.
83 Oberg, Social Economy, 132, and Laguna, Under Mount St. Elias, 150.
*leyenda negra*, the policy’s secondary purpose was undermined. The Native peoples of the coast would not be so easily seduced into relinquishing their sovereignty to foreign invaders.
CHAPTER II: A FRENCH CRITIQUE OF THE CLAIMING TRADITION

Though Viceroy Bucareli was encouraged to find that his navigators had discovered no evidence of Russian activity on the coast north of California, he was painfully aware that New Spain lacked the ships and supplies to adequately support even the Spanish settlements of San Diego and Monterey. These first three northern expeditions had strained his coffers while yielding little more than stories of fierce Native resistance. As a result, the Spanish campaign in the North was allowed to lapse for nearly a decade. During this period of self-imposed isolation, Spain’s rivals, however, were far from idle. Russians merchants like Gregorii Shelikhov and his partners were struggling to establish a permanent settlement on Kodiak Island while requesting support from Catherine II for their expanding commercial enterprise. Captain Cook reached North Pacific shores in 1778 during the last of three voyages into the Pacific and was soon followed by a string British fur traders. During the 1780s the French were also preparing to send ships into the vast Pacific realm on a trajectory that would allow their commander to snatch for France a tiny piece of northern terra nullius.

The Pacific Ocean offered the French an opportunity to join other maritime nations in scientific exploration and, perhaps, to rejoin the lucrative fur trade, a particularly attractive prospect after the loss of France’s Canadian colony in 1763. Emboldened by France’s successful intervention in the American War of Independence, French ministers of maritime affairs were eager to extend their country’s influence overseas. King Louis XVI, himself a student of hydrography and the geography of discoveries, took a personal interest in the project. As early as 1782, the king had obtained an unauthorized account of Cook’s Third
commander’s Pacific survey would not be limited to intellectual concerns. “It appears,”
the instructions read, “that Spain has had the intention of extending her title of possession
as far as Port de los Remedios [claimed by Bodega on Kruzof Island] … but nothing
indicates that when this was visited in 1775 she caused any establishments to be made there,
or any at Port Bucareli …”87 This lack of “establishments” suggested to the king a
shortage of resolve on the part of the Spanish. Although France and Spain were at the time
allies, Louis XVI ordered La Pérouse to assess the condition and defensive structures of
Spain’s Californian ports and “to assure himself if they are the only ones that Spain has
formed on this coast.”88 Similar instructions referred to gathering information about
Russian and British activities in the region.

In addition to conducting some polite espionage along the coast, La Pérouse was
charged with assessing the potential for profit in harvesting sea otter pelts and the
possibility of establishing a trading post, or factory, “in case this new trade might offer the
French merchant sufficient advantages.”89 Aware that it was easier to trade with Natives
for furs than for Frenchmen to hunt the agile otter themselves, the king ordered La Pérouse
to ascertain the quality of Native-caught furs and the merchandise the French would need to
trade with the locals. In addition to assessing the potential of the fur trade, the commander
was supposed to search for the legendary Strait of Anian, a short-cut which would make the
new French enterprise all the more profitable. La Pérouse gave this last order little time
because he had, years earlier, met with the Canadian explorer Samuel Hearne following a
battle during which La Pérouse captured England’s Fort York in Hudson Bay. The two

86 Robin Inglis, “Lapérouse 1786: A French Naval Visit to Alaska,” in Enlightenment and
Exploration in the North Pacific, 1741-1805, ed. Stephen Haycox et al. (Seattle: University of
87 As quoted in George Verne Blue, “French Interest in Pacific America in the Eighteenth
88 Ibid., 259.
89 As quoted in Inglis, “Effect of Lapérouse,” 47.
Voyage, translated into French a full two years before Cook’s *Journals* were published.\(^8^5\) A French voyage into the Pacific, the king hoped, would allow France to bask in the honor and glory of the Enlightenment, just as England had when news of Cook’s adventures reached the world. Such an important mission, the king concluded, could not be left to private traders: the ships would be naval vessels commanded by the best of France’s officer corps.

In 1785 the French government outfitted the naval vessels *Bousolle* and *Astrolabe* and named Jean François Galoup, the Count of La Pérouse, commander of the expedition. La Pérouse was a naval officer renown for his success in aiding George Washington’s revolutionary efforts and for capturing British forts in Hudson Bay. The commander was also an educated man whose humanitarianism and unorthodox opinions would set the tone for this ambitious voyage. For the French *academies*, this was a rare opportunity to put scientists in the field, and La Pérouse had no shortage of volunteers. Prominent scholars in the fields of astronomy, geology, botany, and engineering joined the expedition’s scientific complement. La Pérouse was particularly pleased that the engineer Paul Monneron brought with him a set of dipping needle compasses Cook had earlier carried into the Pacific.\(^8^6\) To assist this distinguished assemblage of scientific minds, an onboard library of over one hundred volumes included accounts of Pacific voyages, treatises on astronomy and navigation, and works of natural history.

Although the La Pérouse expedition was advertised to the world as a “literary voyage,” one devoted to the accumulation of knowledge, the French king had other, less public plans. In a set of secret instructions to La Pérouse, the king ensured that the

men evidently struck a friendship, and Hearne assured his captor that no lake or river penetrated the continent so far that it might offer access to the Pacific. As a result, La Pérouse dismissed this popular myth as a mere chimera.90

With great fanfare, the Bousolle and Astrolabe left the port of Brest on August 1, 1785, en route to Cape Horn. But, even before departing, the ships and their mission were under scrutiny by foreign agents. Ambassador Thomas Jefferson, then living in Paris, suspected the French government’s covert motives after an informant described La Pérouse’s dock-side preparations. In a missive to the American Secretary of State, Jefferson wrote,

They give out that the object is merely for the improvement of our knowledge of the geography of that part of the world. Their loading however … appeared to me to indicate some other design, perhaps that of colonizing on the western coast of America … We are interested to know whether they are perfectly weaned from the desire to possess continental colonies in America.91

Spanish officials too were concerned about the covert aims of the French expedition, but because France and Spain were on friendly terms, La Pérouse carried with him a letter of introduction from Madrid, ensuring his safe passage through Spanish territory. Before the Bousolle and Astrolabe arrived in Spanish America, colonial authorities had been informed of the expedition’s intended route, and at Concepción, the inhabitants of that sleepy Chilean outpost received La Pérouse and the expedition scientists with enthusiasm. An impressive cycle of banquets and balls helped the crews to recover from the grueling passage around the Horn. Although La Pérouse had nothing but praise for his Spanish hosts, officials in Madrid were becoming increasingly wary.

While news of his passing was rippling through Spanish America, La Pérouse departed Concepción and, diverging from his instructions, headed northward rather than

90 Ibid.
91 As quoted in Inglis, “Lapérouse 1786,” 54.
west toward Tahiti and Australia. Upon reaching the island of Maui in the Hawaiian Islands, La Pérouse refused to perform a claiming ceremony, even though he believed the French were the first Europeans to set foot there. His harsh criticism of the practice of claiming *terra nullius* offers a dramatic contrast to the Spanish perspective and to the policies of his home government. In his journal, La Pérouse wrote,

> This European practice is too utterly ridiculous, and philosophers must reflect with some sadness that, because one has muskets and canons, one looks upon 60,000 inhabitants as worth nothing, ignoring their rights over a land where for centuries their ancestors have been buried, which they have watered with their sweat, and whose fruits they pick to bring them as offerings to the so-called new landlords.\(^9^2\)

After heaping scorn upon this fellow Europeans for ignoring the rights of indigenous peoples, La Pérouse suggested that the role of the modern navigator was simply to complete the story of mankind while also disseminating the benefits of enlightened thought. "Their navigation must round off our knowledge of the globe," wrote La Pérouse, "and the enlightenment which they try to spread has no other aim than to increase the happiness of the islanders they meet …"\(^9^3\) This naive view was tempered somewhat by his experiences on North Pacific shores, where commercial potential for France was more evident and La Pérouse’s idealism regarding indigenous Americans would be repeatedly challenged.

Despite his low opinion of European claiming, La Pérouse departed the Hawaiian Islands on a route carefully calculated to deliver his ships into a gap between Spanish claims to the south and Russian and British claims to the northwest. After spotting the summit of Mount St. Elias through the clouds and sailing for a time along the forbidding coast of the Gulf of Alaska, La Pérouse was relieved to discover a harbor he promptly dubbed Port des Français, today known as Lituya Bay. The commander pointed out in his journal that this

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\(^9^3\) La Pérouse, *Journal*, 88.
previously undiscovered port was located thirty-three leagues from Bodega’s 1775 claim on Kruzof Island, 224 leagues from Nootka Sound where Pérez visited in 1774, and 100 leagues from Prince William Sound, considered a Russian stronghold claimed also by the Cook. Therefore, concluded La Pérouse, “Should the French government therefore entertain any design of establishing a factory on this part of the American coast, other nations cannot claim the smallest right of opposition.”\textsuperscript{94} Having assured himself of its status as \textit{terra nullius}, La Pérouse guided his ships toward the entrance of the bay and ordered six guns to be brought from the hold of one of the ships in case the bay concealed pirates. The commander would soon find that these fears were not unfounded.

Tlingit oral tradition relates that when the French ships arrived in Lituya Bay, the Tlingits there thought they were witnessing the return of \textit{Yehlh}, or Raven, Creator-of-the-World. After fleeing to the protection of the forest, the Tlingits peered at the ships through the rolled leaves of skunk cabbage to avoid being turned to stone for looking directly at the fearsome deity. Observing the sailors scrambling through the ships’ rigging, the frightened Tlingits concluded that they were messenger-crows living in Raven’s great white wings. Eventually an aging warrior had his slaves prepare a canoe, and he paddled to one of the ships to ask Raven if he intended to kill the Tlingit people for their transgressions. After receiving food and gifts, he returned to inform his people that the ships were not Raven incarnate, nor were the sailors in the rigging messenger-crows, but instead he had spoken with ordinary human beings. Before long, the French and the Tlingits were carrying on a brisk trade exchanging bits of iron and beads for sea otter skins and salmon.\textsuperscript{95}


Although this trade began amicably enough, La Pérouse was troubled to hear several reports of petty theft by the Tlingits. As a precaution, the commander suggested that the expedition’s scientists establish their observatory on a small island in the center of the bay, far from the Natives whose villages were on the mainland shore. “Though we had already found the Indians were great thieves,” La Pérouse wrote, “we did not suppose them capable of executing long and difficult projects with perseverance and activity.” The commander soon found he was in error. The observatory was under constant surveillance by Tlingit spies, and during the night stealthy warriors made off with several guns and even the clothing rolls tucked under the heads of the French guards. Rather than seeking retribution against the Natives, La Pérouse implemented what he described as a Spartan law, punishing those among his crew unwary enough to be robbed. When these measures failed, the French were compelled to dismantle their observatory and retreat to their ships, but not before some Tlingits made off with the notebooks containing the scientists’ astronomical observations. La Pérouse later noted in his journal the profound frustration resulting from these encounters with the Tlingit: “I will readily admit that society cannot possibly exist without some virtues, but I must confess I had not the sagacity to discover them here.”

On the morning following this strategic retreat, a Tlingit chief who had earlier visited the French ships returned to the Bousolle elaborately dressed and in the company of an expanded retinue. La Pérouse noted with obvious irritation that, after singing several songs of introduction, the chief “offered to sell me the island where our observatory was fixed, reserving, no doubt, for himself … the right to rob us there.” The French commander observed that the Tlingit people appeared to hold property in common, and that therefore, he had no means to verify the chief’s ownership of the island or the man’s status as a true representative of his people. Despite these doubts, La Pérouse accepted the Tlingit’s offer

96 La Pérouse, “Alaskan Adventures,” 120.
97 Ibid., 134.
and presented the man with rolls of red cloth, some hatchets, iron bars and some nails. Soon after this exchange was complete, the commander performed a claiming ceremony. "Having thus concluded and settled the deal," wrote La Pérouse, "I took possession of the island with the usual formalities -- I had a bottle buried under a rock, in which was an advice that possession was taken, and I placed nearby one of the bronze medals struck before our departure from France."99

La Pérouse had earlier stated that by purchasing the island, he hoped to prevent Tlingit thieves from disrupting the expedition's scientists. However, this brief symbolic act of possession would have more far-reaching implications. Although at no time did the French commander suggest that his territorial claim extended beyond Lituya Bay, or indeed, beyond the islet itself, he could not have been oblivious to the commercial advantages of obtaining a toe-hold in the region. Before even entering Lituya Bay, La Pérouse noted that rafts of sea otter dotted the coast and that the potential harvest would be quite rich. "There is, I think, no country where the sea-otter is as common as in this part of America," he wrote, "and I should not be surprised if a factory, extending only about 40 or 50 leagues along the coast, should collect annually 10,000 skins of that animal."100 No doubt he performed the ceremony with this potential gold mine in mind.

The degree to which this -- the only known example of French claiming along the North Pacific coast -- is representative of the French tradition of possession-taking is difficult to determine. Unlike instances of Spanish claiming, which left behind written testimonies describing ceremonies in detail, La Pérouse's "usual formalities" remain a mystery. Patricia Seed's description of 17th century French claiming at the mouth of the Amazon River includes elaborate religious and secular rituals reminiscent of medieval coronation rites and courtly plays. Apparently these early French explorers also considered

98 Ibid., 121.
99 Ibid.
the participation of Native peoples (in this case Tupi tribesmen) in these rituals essential to their success, and at times three or more ceremonies were spread out over a period of months. Seed concludes from this that “to omit ceremony -- or to lack it -- would mean to abandon the political rules.”

Keller et al. examine 16th and 17th century examples of French claiming that suggest that such elaborate ceremonies were by no means the norm. For example, a claiming ceremony performed by Jacques Cartier in Newfoundland in 1534 appears remarkably simple. According to Cartier, in the presence of a group of Indians his men erected a large cross. Under the cross bar they fixed a shield with three royal fleurs-de-lis in relief, and above it a wooden board, engraved in Gothic letters “Long Live the King of France.” Seventeenth century expeditions repeated Cartier’s formula, at times employing a stone pillar etched with the royal arms in place of a cross. As the French claiming tradition entered the 18th century, it seems much of the pageantry, evident earlier, had been abandoned. When Astrolabe and Bousolle entered the Pacific, it appears that a cross or other monument, a prayer, and a hearty “Vive le Roy!” were all that was needed to secure French sovereignty.

While La Pérouse appeared to follow this trend toward simplicity, the commander’s ceremony shared none of the hallmarks of French claiming: a religious ceremony (and cross-raising), the use of a lead plate with inscription, or salutes to the health of the king. Instead his men buried a bottle containing “an advice that possession was taken” and placed a bronze medallion of some sort nearby. At first glance it appears that the use of a bottle (to preserve evidence of a claim) could have been borrowed from the Spanish, who routinely sealed such a bottle with pitch and buried it at the foot of a cross, as noted in

100 Ibid., 119.
101 Seed, Ceremonies of Possession, 55.
102 Keller et al., Rights of Sovereignty, 105-106.
Chapter I. Although French authorities had managed to obtain the journals of Antonio Mourelle from the 1775 Bodega expedition and perhaps that of Bodega’s 1779 voyage, the Spanish maintained a policy of secrecy regarding testimonies of possession buried on location. Therefore, while references to buried bottles appeared in Spanish orders, they were omitted from the expedition accounts available to La Pérouse. It seems more likely that in this case La Pérouse mimicked James Cook, who described in detail the contents of his claiming documents and freely admitted to leaving them in bottles, both buried and exposed at the base of trees (see Chapter IV).

As for the bronze medal La Pérouse used to mark the location of his buried bottle, only one other example exists of a Frenchman using a medal in a claiming ceremony. In 1764, while claiming the Falkland Islands, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville buried some coins and a medal under a monument his men erected to mark the location of the claiming ceremony.104 It is possible that La Pérouse might have adopted this 18th century innovation as well. Although this element of La Pérouse’s ceremony resembled a Russian plan to mark the location of claiming plates with imperial crests, the similarity is mere coincidence as the planning for the French expedition preceded the Russian scheme by at least three years (see Chapter III). Whatever inspired La Pérouse’s unorthodox claiming ceremony, it should be noted that the foundation of ritual claiming is tradition and that any deviation from an established formula would seem to weaken or perhaps invalidate such a claim. That La Pérouse might have tinkered with French claiming protocols seems less surprising when one considers that the ceremony was performed by a man who, before his time, recognized the inherent right of indigenous peoples to sovereignty in their homeland while also declaring ritual claiming to be “too utterly ridiculous.”

103 Ibid., 130-131. See also Servin, “Religious Aspects,” 266.
Although La Pérouse did not find it necessary to erect a monument during his claiming ceremony, the commander did, in time, erect a stone cairn on what the French were calling Observatory Island. Instead of memorializing French claims to new territory, this monument served to mourn the loss of French lives. The tragedy occurred midway through the French stay in Lituya Bay, when a reconnaissance team of three longboats was dragged onto partially submerged rocks during the changing of the tide. Fifteen sailors and six officers in two of the longboats drowned in the turbulent waters, while the sailors in the third boat survived to tell the tale of woe. With some help from the Tlingits, La Pérouse and his men searched for bodies and finding none, they turned once again to their mission. Before departing Lituya Bay, La Pérouse renamed their temporary home L’Isle du Cenotaphe, and in the ground below the cairn he placed a bottle containing a lengthy epitaph which began, “At the entrance to this port, twenty-one brave sailors perished. Whoever you may be, mingle your tears with ours.”

After departing Lituya Bay, the Bousolle and Astrolabe traveled south, skirting the coast until reaching the vicinity of the Spanish port of Monterey in September 1786. Two years earlier, when the La Pérouse expedition arrived in Concepción, the French commander had shared with his Chilean hosts maps indicating the locations of four Russian settlements, including one at Nootka Sound. Although these maps clearly misrepresented information about Russian activities in the region during the 1770s, Spanish officials received this erroneous information with great alarm. As might be expected, La Pérouse’s arrival once again in a Spanish port was received with a combination of concern and eager anticipation.

Because the entrance to the port of Monterey was obscured by dense fog, Esteban José Martínez, a veteran of the 1774 Pérez expedition, sent pilots out to the French ships to guide them into the harbor. Once the ships were safely anchored, Martínez seized this rare

105 La Pérouse, Journal, 121.
opportunity to gather first-hand accounts of events in the North. "The Count assured me," Martínez later wrote, "that the Russian commerce with the Indians involves iron objects for sea otter skins. In addition, he made it clear that, in their possessions, the Russians required the Indians to pay tribute of Sea otter skins and that those who did not pay were killed."\(^{106}\)

After sailing for twelve years on the supply route between San Blas and Spain's California missions, Martínez was eager for an opportunity to venture once again northward to advance the cause of Spanish imperialism. Even though La Pérouse was likely only passing on rumors that he had picked up during his travels, Martínez interpreted La Pérouse's information as evidence of a new Russian threat. Though the French commander would provide few details, Martínez convinced himself that not only were the Russians firmly entrenched at Unalaska but that they had also established a fort at Nootka Sound.\(^{107}\)

This information, which Martínez promptly passed on to his superiors, was enough to prompt Spanish officials to authorize a fourth Spanish expedition into the North. When intelligence gathered from La Pérouse reached Bucareli's successor, Antonio Flórez, the viceroy ordered Martínez to command the frigate *Princesa* and the packetboat *San Carlos* on a voyage deep into Russian territory. Unbeknownst to Martínez or his second in command, Gonzalo López de Haro, they would soon encounter not only Russian fur traders and thriving trading posts but evidence of an Indian policy dramatically different from the one developed by Viceroy Bucareli.

For La Pérouse and his men, the time spent among the Spanish at Monterey was a welcome hiatus before the French ships traversed the Pacific for the Asian ports of Manila and Macao. From there, they skirted the Chinese coast and entered the Sea of Japan. At the tiny Russian outpost of Petropavlovsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula, La Pérouse entrusted his journals to Barthelemy de Lesseps, the expedition's Russian-speaking interpreter, who

\(^{106}\) As quoted in Inglis, "Effect of Lapérouse," 50.

\(^{107}\) Ibid.
faced the perils of travel in Siberia to deliver the important documents -- a year later -- into the hands of Louis XVI. The *Bousolle* and *Astrolabe* did not fare so well. After sailing into the South Pacific from Kamchatka, a watering party lost twelve men in an attack by Samoan islanders who then smashed the party’s longboats to retrieve the iron oarlocks and nails. The expedition arrived on the coast of Australia at Botany Bay just six days after the British First Fleet had arrived to claim the region for the British Empire. On March 10, 1788, after spending six weeks with their British hosts, La Pérouse and his combined crew of more than 200 men departed the protection of Botany Bay and were never heard from again.

Although France’s Louis XVI had aspired to occupy the North Pacific coast by establishing a string of factories for the fur trade, the disaster that befell the La Pérouse expedition and the turmoil in France after 1789 dashed those dreams forever. With revolution sweeping the country, French naval authorities had few resources even to launch a search party. Instead, they resorted to asking other European ships in French ports if they had seen or heard of La Pérouse. In 1793 two French ships did enter the Pacific in search of clues. One of them, the *Recherche*, even sailed around the island of Vanikoro east of the Solomon Islands, unaware that the wreckage of *Bousolle* and *Astrolabe* could be found there beneath the waves. Although many Frenchmen soon forgot about the expedition, the project’s chief promoter had trouble abandoning the hope that French glory was at hand. It was rumored that in 1792, before the guillotine finally claimed him, Louis XVI’s last words were “Is there any word of La Pérouse?”

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109 Ibid.
CHAPTER III: THE RUSSIANS, FUR TRIBUTE TO CLAIMING PLATES

Eager to encounter the Russians, Martínez and Haro departed San Blas in March 1788 and sailed past the familiar Bucareli Bay (on Prince of Wales Island) to reach Prince William Sound hundreds of miles to the north. Once in the protection of the sound, the Spaniards began to find evidence of Cook’s visit to the area. One group of Natives even shouted “All hands ahoy” upon hearing the Spanish boatswain’s whistle. Here the Spanish ships paused briefly to perform the first of a string of claiming ceremonies [see Appendix E]. It was also here that Captain Haro began to clash with Martínez, whose drinking bouts and violent mood swings undermined morale aboard the ships. On one occasion Martínez, in a drunken rage, slapped one of the junior officers aboard the Princesa, arrested him, and banished the man to the San Carlos for the duration of the journey. Unable to reach a peaceful accord, Martínez and Haro eventually parted ways with plans to rendezvous in Russian territory.

Sailing westward from Prince William Sound, Martínez arrived at Trinity Island near Kodiak where Koniag Natives, apparently confused about his nationality, presented the Spanish captain with receipts demonstrating that they had paid their annual tribute tax to the Russian Empress. Martínez managed to obtain a few of these chits, giving the Koniags in return new papers announcing the arrival of a Spanish expedition in the area.110 During this exchange, the Native men communicated to Martínez that the Russians whipped them if they did not produce a certain quota of pelts. Meanwhile, as the San Carlos arrived at the Russian settlement of Three Saints Bay on Kodiak Island, Captain Haro was introduced to

110 The document Commander Martínez gave to the Koniag hunters read, “This individual has presented me with a slip of paper dated 1786. The Spanish expedition belongs to His Catholic Majesty, the King of Spain, Don Carlos III, God keep him, that anchored on this island on June 27th of the year 1788. The commander is Esteban José Martínez.” As quoted in Archer, “Seduction before Sovereignty,” 137.
the Russian commander Eurtrate Ivanovich Delarov. Wasting no time, Haro plied his Russian host with gifts of wine, chocolate, and other delicacies while inquiring about Russia’s American possessions and plans for future expansion.

The Russian commander provided Haro with exaggerated information about Russian plans to expand operations to the mainland between Shelikof Strait and Cook Inlet and informed the Spaniard that two Russian frigates were expected the following year to establish a settlement at Nootka Sound. During a tour of the settlement, Haro observed productive gardens, a school (for training Native and mixed-race students), huts for Aleut hunters, and the elegantly furnished homes of the wives of Russian traders. Nearby were facilities for rendering whale oil and drying halibut for food during the winter months. Haro noted also that the Russians had grounded two ships on the beach, one serving as a temporary chapel, the other as storage for sea otter furs. Another warehouse in the vicinity was packed to the roof with pelts. Despite the obvious wealth of the Russian settlement, Haro feigned indifference when Delarov held up a prime fur for examination. “I looked at it with slight interest,” wrote Haro, “telling him that in Spain it wouldn’t be worth anything.”

During his tour, Haro noticed that the Russians were always armed with a rifle, a pistol and sidearm. Haro soon learned the reason for this policy when he questioned Delarov. “The Captain told me that he did not trust the Indians of the coast …” wrote Haro, “since they had had a great affray with them; and this I knew to be true because I saw many Russians who had been wounded with arrows.” Haro also noted that the Aleuts and Koniag Natives living and working with the Russians seemed remarkably obedient and would come running if any of the Russians issued an order. He observed also that these

Native hunters were forced to pay an annual tax of three rubles (Haro says pesos) as well as a ten percent tax on trade.

Later, in the Russian settlement on Unalaska Island, the Spanish found evidence that the Russians had begun to create a loyal Native work force to supplement the handful of Russian employees in the region. “Among the Indians of the Island,” wrote Haro, “one was noticed who is very civilized, and the Russians respect him because he has been to St. Petersburg and the Empress has honored him with various privileges and the title of Judge of all the Indians …” According to Haro, this Native bureaucrat governed the Unalaska settlement during the winter months when the Russians retreated to Three Saints Bay to escape the worst cold and storms.

Even though Martínez and Haro concluded that “the Russians make use of them [Natives] and treat them rather harshly” and expressed alarm at the state of almost constant warfare, it is difficult to imagine that they could dismiss entirely a system that had accomplished so much. Not only were the Russians harvesting the natural wealth of the seas and harnessing the energies of the indigenous inhabitants, but they were converting, educating, and settling in ways the Spanish had not even attempted. It must have been evident to Martínez and Haro that by occupying the land and engaging in trade and fur hunting, the Russians possessed the land more conclusively than the Spanish could by symbolic act alone.

Nonetheless, Martínez and Haro responded predictably, performing a rapid series of claiming ceremonies wherever they touched land. At Unalaska, Martínez chose to take possession just outside the Russian settlement, in dangerous proximity to his host of several weeks, Potap Zaikov. To accomplish this bold maneuver, Martínez, his officers, the chaplain, and a group of crewmen went ashore as unobtrusively as possible and performed

\[112\] Ibid., 19.
\[113\] Ibid., 29.
an abbreviated ceremony, omitting the litany, Mass, and cross-raising "so that those of this Nation would not comprehend anything about our designs."\textsuperscript{115} Apparently the Russians were unaware of this surreptitious claiming, and after ten more days of cordial relations, the Spanish ships departed the region.

The brazen disregard that Martínez showed for Russian territorial claims at Kodiak and Unalaska reflects a deeply ingrained belief in the power of symbolic acts in securing lands, even lands obviously occupied by a foreign power. Among the Russians, territorial acquisition was also practiced according to a centuries-old tradition. However, Russian possession-taking relied not upon symbolic acts but rather on the principle of exacting tribute on behalf of the Tsar. During centuries of Russian eastward expansion from the Urals to the wild Siberian expanses and the frigid waters of coastal Kamchatka, tsarist sovereignty was based upon the ability of the freelance fur hunters and traders called \textit{promyshleniki} to collect taxes, usually in the form of sable furs, from a region's indigenous inhabitants.

In the eyes of the Russian court, a fur trader's successful demand for \textit{iasak}, or tribute in fur, was tantamount to sovereignty, as it signaled the Native peoples' submission to Russian rule. These instructions for a Russian trader dated 1623 capture the tone of this policy of territorial acquisition by tribute while addressing plans to subjugate the Bratsk people in the vicinity of Lake Baikal:

When you reach the land of the Bratsk you are to gather the princes and leaders, and when you have assembled them, you are to tell these princes and leaders that they and all their people are to serve and obey the great Sovereign Tsar ... that they are to

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 29-30.
pay iasak to the great Sovereign and be under his mighty Tsarist hand, and that they
may come to Eniseisk ostrog [fort] to receive the Sovereign’s favor without fear.¹¹⁶

Not surprisingly, such brash attempts to assert Russian sovereignty met with fierce
resistance and, in the case of the Bratsk, this set of instructions was followed by several
urgent requests for more weapons and soldiers.

Few examples exist of Russian attempts to claim land by means other than by the
collection of iasak. The Englishman William Coxe, while chronicling Russian voyages,
wrote that in 1697 Volodimir Ataloff penetrated the Kamchatka Peninsula and took
possession of the Kamchatka River “by erecting a cross upon its banks.”¹¹⁷ In his study
of symbolic acts of possession, Manuel Servin acknowledges that the Russians may have
used crosses as a symbol of possession, but he distinguishes between a monument (like a
cross) and a full-blown claiming ceremony, noting finally “the general omission of acts of
sovereignty in their explorations and colonization.”¹¹⁸ Keller et al. cite the instance of
Ataloff’s cross-raising as evidence that the Russians, when approaching regions claimed by
other Europeans, adopted the possession-taking practices of their rivals. This seems slim
evidence indeed. The huts Ataloff built nearby (and the fort that followed) were more
certain signs of Russian possession, as Ataloff and his fellows addressed the urgent
business of establishing trade and collecting iasak.

In the early 1720s, when Russia’s Peter I (1682-1725) ordered the Danish navigator
Vitus Bering to sail eastward to discover the bolshaya zemlya, or great land, thought to be
just beyond the horizon, the Tsar’s instructions said nothing of possession-taking. Instead,
Bering was ordered to seek out a European settlement, request information about the coast,

¹¹⁶ Basil Dmytryshyn, E.A.P. Crownhart-Vaughan and Thomas Vaughan, trans. and eds.,
Russia’s Conquest of Siberia, 1558-1700: A Documentary Record (Portland: Oregon Historical Society
Press, 1985), 118.
¹¹⁷ William Coxe, The Russian Discoveries Between Asia and America ... (Ann Arbor:
create a map of his discoveries, and return before risking capture by hostile foreigners.\textsuperscript{119} When encountering Native peoples, Bering was to treat them kindly, distributing gifts and requesting information about the region’s resources. “They are to be invited to become our subjects and to pay tribute,” the instructions read, “[but if] they are unwilling to do so, they are to be let alone; and no time should be wasted in arguing with them.”\textsuperscript{120} After years of delays and one aborted attempt to reach the American coast, Bering’s orders were modified to reflect new concerns about ability of the Spanish to defend their territory. In 1733 this new set of instructions read, “It is considered neither important nor necessary to reach [the] European possessions … there is danger that they [Bering and his men] might encounter strong hostility from local officials … because they are under Spanish protection.”\textsuperscript{121}

When Bering and his lieutenant, Aleksei Chirikov, at last departed Kamchatka in June 1741, their two ships, the \textit{St. Peter} and \textit{St. Paul}, were soon separated. After wandering for some time in the North Pacific, Chirikov guided the \textit{St. Paul} to land at what is believed to have been Prince of Wales Island in the Alexander Archipelago. There Chirikov sent one of his launches to shore with a detail of ten men to seek Native informants, test the local rocks for valuable ores, and fill casks with fresh water. When this party failed to return after five days, the Russian commander sent a second boat to search, only to have it disappear also. With his crew suffering from scurvy and lacking the launches with which carry out his investigations, Chirikov turned westward for Russian shores.

Meanwhile, the \textit{St. Peter} struck land at Kayak Island near the Copper River delta. After only ten hours, Bering decided to return to Kamchatka rather than risk further deaths

\textsuperscript{120} As quoted in F.A. Golder, \textit{Bering’s Voyages: An Account of the Efforts of the Russians to Determine the Relation of Asia and America}, vol. 2 (New York: American Geographical Society, 1922), 29.
\textsuperscript{121} Dmytryshyn et al., \textit{Russian Penetration}, 130.
from scurvy. He later died of the disease ravaging his crew when the *St. Peter* wrecked on one of the Commander Islands, not far from Kamchatka Peninsula. Although neither ship was able to carry out its mission to map and collect information from local Natives, Russian officials would later argue that Bering and Chirikov had established Russian claims to the American mainland by right of first discovery. In the early 19th century, these claims would form the basis of Alaska's borders in negotiations with the British government.

When Catherine II ascended the throne in 1762, she faced a complex and difficult situation in Russian America. The *promyshlenniki* who had followed in Bering's wake were pursuing the sea otter with all the feverish enthusiasm with which they had the Siberian sable. In the inexorable search for the sea otter, they found it convenient to exploit the hunting skills of the Aleuts by demanding women and children as hostages while bullying the Aleut men into hunting for furs. This system led to bloody clashes and decades of hostility between Russians and Aleuts. Influenced by Enlightenment thought, Catherine attempted by imperial decree, or *ukaz*, to end the practice of taking hostages, but the fur traders, either unaware of her decree or unwilling to obey, continued unabated. She also attempted to end the warfare that was resulting in the death of her subjects, both Russian and Aleut. An *ukaz* issued August 13, 1787, read in part: "All seagoing promyshlenniks and servitors who are sent out to collect iasak are to be given absolutely firm instructions not to perpetrate any cruelty against the native inhabitants of these regions, neither are they to pillage or inflict burdens on them, under the threat of immediate punishment."[122]

Such warnings did not necessarily reflect Catherine II's concern for the role of *iasak* in establishing imperial sovereignty. During the 1780s, the Tsarina was more concerned with potential conflicts with the Ottoman Turks and with Sweden than with claiming distant lands, and the prospect of provoking Russia's Spanish and British rivals in the Pacific made her doubly cautious. "There is no concrete benefit to be derived from
extending our domains widely in the Pacific Ocean,” she declared, “to trade is one thing, to take possession is another.”123 This attitude, however, was soon to change. Despite her reluctance to support an overseas colony, Catherine II did request information through the College of Commerce about ways to consolidate Russian territorial claims in North America. The commerce ministers’ response described the fundamentals of the European concept of claiming and pointed out the vulnerability of Russia’s American discoveries.

“According to the generally accepted rule,” began the ministers,

the first nation to discover an unknown land had the right to claim it. This has been true in earlier ages, and has been the general practice since the discovery of America. Thus when a European country discovered a previously unknown land, they claimed it. Indeed the popes of Rome, on behalf of Roman Catholic rulers, would issue papal bulls to reaffirm such a discovery and thereby finalize the right of possession....

The acquisition of all these previously unknown islands to Your Majesty’s Empire is founded on the right of first discovery by the Russians. This was accomplished with great effort on the part of the government and also on the part of Your Majesty’s individual subjects ... However, these acquisitions have not yet been officially claimed by the government.124

The ministers of the College of Commerce obviously recognized that Russia had yet to establish any territorial claims recognized by its imperial rivals even though Russian fur traders had operated in the region for over four decades. However, the centuries-long Russian eastward expansion had progressed overland and therefore was unopposed by Europe’s maritime powers. As a result, the Russian government had found little need for a complex system of ritual claiming -- until now. With obvious alarm, the ministers noted that Captain Cook had invaded Russian waters, laying claim at Cook Inlet with the use of

122 Ibid., 336.
124 Dmytryshyn et al., Russian Penetration, 321, 323.
speeches, a flag-raising, and buried bottles containing English coins. Without pausing to comment on the mechanics of British claiming, the ministers cited the 1741 landfalls of Bering and Chirikov, which, they insisted, would invalidate any British claims.

The course of action the ministers finally offered to their empress suggests that the Russians did not yet understand the role of symbolic acts of possession in claiming land too distant to be immediately settled or defended militarily. Instead of proposing a system of ritual claiming recognizable to other Europeans, the ministers treated the issue as little more than a diplomatic formality. “Thus in our view,” they wrote, “it is necessary that Your Majesty issue an Imperial decree, through Russian ministers accredited to the courts of all European seafaring nations, announcing that these lands which Russians have discovered must form an integral part of Russia as part of our Empire.”

Despite the ministers’ apparent myopia with regards to possession-taking, they did recognize that yet another ukaz seemed a feeble defense against the British (and Spanish) ships which arrived in Russian water in increasing numbers. For this reason, their memorandum makes one final suggestion:

[S]ince such a declaration will be inadequate without considerable support, and might in some ways even undermine the dignity of the court, we, the undersigned, humbly submit to Your Imperial Majesty that it would be most beneficial if Your Majesty would decree that several naval vessels be sent into these regions belonging to Your Empire.\(^{126}\)

In response, Catherine II ordered a fleet of four vessels under Captain Grigorii Ivanovich Mulovskii to be outfitted for a circumnavigation of the globe. After passing through the Indian Ocean and around Australia, the fleet was to split into two forces. The first was to explore the Kurile Island chain and the mouth of the Amur River, while the second, commanded by Mulovskii, would make for Nootka Sound.

\(^{125}\) Ibid., 323.
\(^{126}\) Ibid.
After reaching the sound, the Russian commander was ordered to “take that coast from the harbour of Nootka to the point where Chirikov’s discovery begins as possession of the Russian State if no other State is occupying it.”127 As evidence of this annexation, Mulovskii planned to leave behind examples of Russia’s coat-of-arms cast in iron and marked with the year 1789, 1790, or 1791.128 Should the Russian expedition discover any foreign settlement or signs of other European powers, Mulovskii was to assure that they were “pulled down, levelled, and destroyed.”129 Likewise, if the Russian force were to encounter foreign vessels offering resistance, Mulovskii was to use force to oust the intruders. However, before this elaborate (and dangerous) plan could be set in motion, the mission was postponed and then canceled and the squadron diverted to serve in naval conflicts with the Ottoman Turks in the Mediterranean Sea.

Meanwhile, in Russia’s fledgling American colony, the ambitious merchant Grigorii Shelikhov voiced his concerns about Russian authority overseas. In a letter to Ivan Iakobii, the governor-general of Irkutsk, dated April 1787, Shelikhov listed his successes in Kodiak and his desire to explore the mainland coast “to bring more [Natives] under the protection and authority of Her Imperial Majesty.”130 He described pitched battles in which many Russian lives were lost, scurvy and starvation in the settlements he had helped found, and gradual success establishing peaceful relations with uncivilized peoples. Interestingly, Shelikhov admitted that in dealing with new Native groups he often avoided mentioning the

128 Glynn Barratt, Russia in Pacific Waters, 1715-1825: A Survey of the Origins of Russia’s Naval Presence in the North and South Pacific (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981), 93. Note: The imperial crests used in Russia’s later claiming program were not dated. If the crests designed for the Mulovskii expedition survive, they are not known to historians.
129 Makarova, Russians on the Pacific, 156.
130 Dmytryshyn et al., Russian Penetration, 326.
payment of *iasak* at first so as not to arouse what he called "their ancient deeply rooted animal instincts and obstinacy."\(^{131}\)

In order to advance his cause, Shelikhov pleaded for permission to send a single ship to the mainland to reinforce his company’s forts and to continue his quest to make docile trading partners of fierce Native tribes. Now that foreign ships were plying North Pacific waters, Shelikhov argued, his work as a trader took on a new urgency. Shelikhov even described what amounted to a one-man claiming campaign at least a year before the Russian government implemented an official system of claiming. “Above all,” Shelikhov wrote, “I sought to move as far south as possible along the American coast to establish Russian settlements and to leave our marks on the land in order to forestall other nations who might have designs on this region, and to ensure that we were the first to claim these places.”\(^{132}\) Concluding his appeal, Shelikhov described the success British ships were having in obtaining prime furs in Russian America and urged that foreign ships be prohibited from approaching the American coast to trade or hunt.\(^{133}\)

Evidently Shelikhov’s petitions were heard, for by June 1787 a packet of secret instructions arrived from Iakobii for Shelikhov and his fellow company officers describing a system of claiming never before attempted in the Russian Empire. Soon after the instructions arrived, the frigate *Three Saints* was equipped to sail, and Shelikhov selected the navigators Gerasim Izmailov and Dmitrii Bocharov to carry out the mission. The plan involved a series of numbered metal plates and an equal number of crests of Russia’s imperial coat-of-arms, the double-headed eagle.\(^{134}\) Used in tandem, these symbols of

\(^{131}\) Ibid., 330.

\(^{132}\) Ibid., 331.

\(^{133}\) Ibid., 333.

\(^{134}\) The Russian claiming plates were made of iron and measured roughly 9x9 inches. The plates were decorated with a cross, a number, and a strip of Cyrillic lettering declaring the area Russian territory, all in bronze. The double-headed eagle crests were cast of either bronze or brass and measured roughly 9 1/2 inches high. The heads of both eagles were crowned and in each taloned foot were the symbols of Russian power, the orb (representing the divine right of kings) and the scepter (representing royal power). For a
Russian sovereignty were intended to establish Russia’s rights to its American colony. The instructions began,

When you receive the packet which contains fifteen insignia of the Russian Empire and ten iron plates, on which are a bronze cross and bronze letters proclaiming “This land belongs to the Russian Empire,” immediately try to emplace these on land in that part of western America known as Alaska…

The instructions indicated that wherever Russian explorers buried a claiming plate they should also display an imperial crest a few paces from the site. Explorers were required to record the plate’s location, its position in relation to the crest, and its depth beneath the surface. The instructions were also specific about the need for absolute secrecy:

Try to bury the plates in such a manner that not only will they not be seen by the natives, but so they are hidden from all of our Russian workmen. This secret is to be preserved and the fact that the plates have been buried is to be erased from the memory of the natives.

The need to keep the location of claiming plates secret even from the Russian crewmen likely reflects fears that the poorly paid men would later unearth the plates and sell them to local Natives who would pay handsomely for such a sizable chunk of iron. One of the last of these secret instructions addressed the possibility that Russian explorers would encounter foreign ships performing their own claiming ceremonies in the region. On such an occasion, the Russians were instructed to “declare that the land and the commercial rights belong to the Russian Empire and that the land was first discovered by Russian seafarers.

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135 Dmytryshyn et al., Russian Penetration, 334.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
At first glance, the claiming plates and imperial crests might be considered nothing more than monuments like a cross or a pile of stones, warning later arrivals of Russia's claim. However, when one considers the secrecy with which the plates were to be buried, it seems obvious that neither the underground plates nor the exposed crests were meant to be glimpsed by foreign mariners. Though the imperial crests were to be placed above ground, chances are remote a passerby would spot them along a wooded coast, and no provisions were made for advertising their locations. Izmailov and Bocharov received orders to prepare maps, indicating the location of plates with a system of code, and upon returning to Kodiak, these maps were to become state secrets. Clearly the plates served as symbolic place-holders for tsarist sovereignty until settlements and a military defense could be established. As the Izmailov-Bocharov expedition advanced, the role of the double-headed eagle crests would also change as the Russians presented the crests to Native chiefs in hope that they would become living symbols of Russian authority.

On April 28, 1788, Izmailov and Bocharov sailed the *Three Saints* from Kodiak to the mainland coast with orders to discover new islands and affirm the acquisition of these new discoveries by “marking the land with signs appropriate and natural to the Might and Name of Russia.”138 The frigate carried forty Russian company workers, two Aleutian islanders, four Koniags, and five numbered claiming plates with their accompanying double-headed eagle crests. By May 10 the ship sought anchorage in a small cove in Latouche Passage in Prince William Sound, and there the Russians traded blue glass beads with Chugach Natives for sea otter and land otter pelts. The Native hunters informed the Russians that a three-masted vessel (most likely the *Princesa* under Martínez) had recently anchored at nearby Hinchinbrook Island. That same day, on an islet in Latouche Passage,

the Russians buried their first claiming plate. Izmailov and Bocharov described the occasion in their report:

we buried one of the ... copper plates with a cross and an inscription reading “Russian Territory,” marked No. 7, on the south side of the strait ... This plate was placed between specially made bricks and because of the hardness of the soil the top brick is buried about 5 vershok [roughly nine inches] under the turf.139

After taking possession, the Russians spent several days in the vicinity, on one occasion encountering Native hunters who spoke of a second foreign vessel that had departed only two days before the arrival of the Russians. Ten days later, on Hinchinbrook Island, Izmailov and Bocharov buried plate No. 8, no doubt to preempt any claim by the unidentified ships.

Due to contrary winds, the Russians were forced to remain in a bay on the southwestern end of the island, where the brother of a local toion, or chief, and a collection of local hunters met the Russian ship. After one of the Native hunters managed to wrench iron nails from the side of the Three Saints, Izmailov and Bocharov expressed concern that the Native lust for metal would undermine the Russian plan to place imperial crests near claiming plates. “These islanders,” the commanders explained, “would have dared to remove the crest from the spot where it was placed and, as is their custom, would have made meaningless articles from the metal or used it for arrow heads.”140 Instead of taking this risk, the Russians praised the toion’s brother for his trustworthiness and entrusted one of the double-headed eagle crests to him. Izmailov and Bocharov endeavored to communicate to the man that he was to deliver the crest to his brother who was unable to travel from a nearby village because of illness. The toion, the Russians urged, should not conceal this

139 Ibid., 84-85. Note: It is not known why the claiming plates provided to Izmailov and Bocharov began with No. 7. Russian records indicate that plate No. 1 was not placed until 1808 near Trinidad, California. See Richard A. Pierce and Alexander Doll, “Alaskan Treasure: Our Search for the Russian Plates,” Alaska Journal 1 (Winter 1971): 5.
140 Shelikhov, Voyage to America, 87.
symbol of Russian sovereignty but rather wear it proudly outside his clothing, displaying it before other Natives and the crews of passing foreign ships. This, the Russians promised, would protect the toion and his people from insult by foreigners. Unfamiliar with Tlingit customs and unable to understand the local language, the Russians were inordinately optimistic about their success in recruiting the Native chief to the Russian cause, concluding in their report that “It was obvious that the receiver of the crest listened to these instructions attentively, accepted it with pleasure and promised in his own way to see that the instructions were carried out.”

On June 11 the crew of the Three Saints entered Yakutat Bay where they were greeted by the local Tlingit chief who immediately took an interest in a set of portraits of Russian royal family hanging in the officers’ cabin. The Russian commanders took this opportunity to expound upon the benefits of submission to the Russian Empire. According to the expedition report, the Russians assured their guests that

Out of their great generosity they [Russia’s rulers] pour countless blessings on their faithful subjects which increase their peace and well-being, [while also ensuring] that Russian protection and patronage are so strong and unshakable that no foreigner would dare to cause any harm to a country under such protection.

With that promise, the Russians gave the chief an imperial crest to wear, stressing that the toion should be careful to guard the crest and to show it to any visiting foreigners as demanded by his duty to the Russian state.

The next day, the chief returned to the ship with the crest sewn into his beaver cloak with pieces of red wool he had received earlier in trade with the Russians. After greetings were exchanged, the man asked to be given a certain portrait to which he had taken a liking. As luck would have it, the Russian ship carried two copies of the portrait of the Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich, heir to the Russian throne, and one was prepared with a lengthy inscription

141 Ibid., 88.
in both Russian and German praising the chief and his decision to become a Russian subject [see Appendix F]. In return, the Tlingit toion presented the Russian commanders with several otter furs and ornate carving, which the Russians grossly misinterpreted as tokens of Tlingit subjection to the Russian Empire. Ivan Petroff, while surveying Alaska a century later, found that visitors to Yakutat Bay were told by the Tlingits that “immediately upon the departure of the *Three Saints* the grand duke’s image had been burned with great festivities and rejoicings.”

Clearly oblivious to possible cross-cultural misunderstandings, Izmailov and Bocharov buried plate No. 9 under the roots of a large spruce tree at the mouth of the Yakutat Bay.

Lituya Bay was the *Three Saints*’ next landfall. Here again the Russians were approached by the local toion who expressed interest in the portraits hanging on the walls of the ship’s cabin, and again the Russians took the opportunity to regale the chief with stories of a benevolent Mother Russia. When the Russians were satisfied the chief was convinced of the “might and power of the Ruler of All Russia,” they turned over yet another imperial crest, concluding finally that “[h]is inquisitiveness promised that he would remain steadfast.”

Although at Lituya Bay Izmailov and Bocharov had reason to celebrate the speed with which they had carried out their mission, they soon began to receive information suggesting that they were not the first Europeans to have visited this area.

A young Tlingit boy purchased in Yakutat Bay as a translator informed the Russians that a foreign ship had visited Lituya Bay three summers earlier, losing its anchor in the

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142 Ibid., 97.
144 Citing Izmailov’s unpublished journal, Bancroft asserts that two claiming plates were deposited by the Russians at Yakutat Bay, rather than one as indicated in the official report. If Izmailov and Bocharov did exhaust their supply of plates at Lituya Bay (they had been issued five), this would explain in part why the Russian commanders decided to turn back. See Bancroft, *History of Alaska*, 269.
145 Shelikhov, *Voyage to America*, 102.
The boy indicated that the Tlingits had dragged anchor from the bay at low tide and had hidden it in the woods. Tlingit informants living in the bay for the summer spoke of not one but two large ships anchored near the tiny island in the heart of the bay. The Russian commanders bartered for possession of the anchor, before searching the island for more clues. There they discovered the detritus left after the evacuation of La Pérouse’s observatory staff, including tools and a second anchor, all stamped with the fleur-de-lis of the French royal family.\textsuperscript{146} It seems likely that the Russians also stumbled upon La Pérouse’s cenotaph, though no mention of it was made in the report. On a rocky bar at the mouth of Lituya Bay, the Russians buried plate No. 19, and citing scurvy among the crew and worsening weather conditions, the ship’s commanders called off the expedition and returned to Kodiak.\textsuperscript{147}

In the decades that followed the Izmailov-Bocharov expedition, Russian officials suggested numerous methods of asserting Russian sovereignty. The owners of various fur trading companies were offered rewards for probing undiscovered territories, and Shelikhov advised his agents to reinforce Russian claims with some cartographic slight-of-hand. “We instruct you,” Shelikhov wrote in a 1794 letter to Ivan Popov,

\begin{quote}
upon finding new places, whether they are marked on foreign maps or not, to give them Russian names in honor of our ruling Sovereign … or else in honor of saints as you many see fit. You must order the seafarers to mark these names on charts, and you must also give Russian names to places already known in order to refute the claims of foreigners.\textsuperscript{148}
\end{quote}

Shelikhov went on to chastise Popov for taking into his protection three sick crewmen from a British ship, warning sternly “Generosity is not always useful; sometimes kindness is

\textsuperscript{146} Bancroft, History of Alaska, 270.
\textsuperscript{147} Shelikhov, Voyage to America, 102-103. Note: No explanation is available for the asequential numbering.
And, the admonitions continued, revealing the vulnerability of the Russian companies, understaffed and outgunned by their British competitors: “May we ask how you knew that the vessel was English? It could have been a French one or a criminal one … Should the vessel have been under the English name but of an enemy nation you may have become a victim. The enemy could have taken you away with them and ruined our company …”

Because of the danger of heavily armed foreign ships plying northern waters, Shelikhov warned Popov to avoid all contact with foreigners and to guard details about the location of company forts. If confronted by a foreign ship, Popov was instructed to take the seemingly absurd step of shouting from the bow of his ship at the intruders:

Should it become necessary to meet [a foreign ship], announce in a firm voice, in the name of the Empress, that the land you are indicating … as well as the entire American coast north of Nootka, belongs to Russia, and the natives living there are Russian subjects, as these lands were discovered in the beginning of the century by Russian mariners … and they may not dare to trade on our islands or sail in our waters.

This on-deck declaration is all the more ridiculous when one considers that it would likely be delivered before foreigners in the Russian tongue. While these various tactics met with little success, Russian officials were confident in their new system of claiming with iron claiming plates and imperial crests. In 1790 Alexander Baranov, future governor of the Russian America Company, received a batch of claiming plates (Nos. 6, 10, 11, 12, and 13) and their accompanying crests, along with orders to improve upon the sloppy mapping techniques of Izmailov and Bocharov [see Appendix G].

In the same year, Ivan Pil, Jakobii’s successor as governor-general of Irkutsk, produced a report for the Tsarina regarding the willingness of Native peoples to submit to Russian rule and, in the case of certain chiefs, to become living representatives of Russian

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149 Ibid., 64.
150 Ibid.
sovereignty. Referring to the Tlingit people, Pil wrote, "In spite of everything, they all with one mind ... came not only to understand the grandure [sic] of Your Empire but to give themselves up to complete obedience to it."152 This wildly optimistic outlook, so often echoed in Russian reports, appears to have had little foundation in reality. It seems very unlikely that the Tlingits at Yakutat Bay, Lituya Bay, or in their strongholds to the south had any intention of becoming Russian subjects. According to anthropologist Frederica de Laguna, the Tlingit had no notion of the relationship between rulers and subjects. They were familiar with that between owner and slave, but, Laguna notes, no free man became a slave unless he were captured in war or were forced through starvation to surrender his freedom in return for food.153 Therefore, like the Spanish, the Russians found few willing participants in their scheme to use Native chiefs to reinforce their territorial claims. In fact, as long as Russian traders operated in what became Southeast Alaska, they saw their forts burned and their comrades attacked by the defiant Tlingits.

In the same report, Pil described to Catherine II the success Russians were having placing claiming plates along the coast, emphasizing the role of the plates as guarantors of Russian sovereignty. However, his explanation also hints at the weaknesses of a system relying upon absolute secrecy:

All this [burying plates and distributing crests] ... though it has not aroused a great deal of attention on the part of foreign mariners and holds no threat for them whatsoever, serve in the future, when it will not be difficult for Your Majesty to increase your naval forces there, at least as indisputable evidence of the ownership of those places which should be tributary to Your throne.154

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151 Ibid., 64-65.
153 Laguna, Under Mount St. Elias, 137.
154 Andreyev, Russian Discoveries, 102.
It seems absurd that the Russians, while maintaining a veil of secrecy concerning claiming plates, would expect other Europeans to steer clear of Russian-claimed areas. How indeed would foreigners even know of the existence of such “indisputable evidence”? Apparently the location of claiming plates would be advertised if a serious challenge to Russian sovereignty were leveled by one of Russia’s rivals; however, in lieu of such a challenge, the location and the very existence of the plates would remain strictly confidential. In 1802 the status of this state secret was compromised by the unauthorized publication of the journals of Izmailov and Bocharov. Almost immediately, Russian American Company governor Alexander Baranov was ordered to unearth the original plates and to stealthily plant new ones in new locations.155

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CHAPTER IV: THE BRITISH CHALLENGE TO RITUAL CLAIMING

Spain’s concern about Russian aggression did not end in 1788 when Martínez and Haro returned from Unalaska. Immediately upon arriving at the port of Monterey, Martínez, still driven by a belief that the Russians had reached Nootka Sound, requested permission to occupy the sound and oust the Russian force. Although Viceroy Flórez was reluctant to send the volatile Martínez to once again represent Spanish interests in the North, he felt he had little choice. Despite his flaws, Martínez was the highest-ranking navigator with northern experience, and the information he had gathered during meetings with La Pérouse was alarming enough to convince the viceroy that such a bold maneuver was necessary. Unbeknownst to the Spanish, Nootka Sound had not become home to bands of Russian promyshlenniki but rather a convenient port of call for an international fleet of fur trading ships. Martínez was soon to find that among this fleet were British fur traders willing to stand up to what they viewed as Spain’s overextended and unfounded territorial claims.

When Martínez sailed the Princesa into Nootka Sound on May 5, 1789, followed a week later by Haro and the San Carlos, he carried orders from Viceroy Flórez to inform foreign ships of Spain’s long-standing claims to the region and to prohibit foreign traders from doing business with coastal Natives. The Spanish commander was also ordered to carry out a claiming ceremony using much the same formulary employed by Juan Pérez (1774), Bruno de Hezeta (1775), and Ignacio Arteaga (1779). The only difference between the formulary prepared for Martínez and those of his predecessors was its length. This was to be the most elaborate claiming ceremony yet seen during Spain’s northern excursions [see Appendix H].

Despite the viceroy’s enduring confidence in the power of symbolic acts, Martínez’ instructions also reflected a change in the viceregal mind concerning the acquisition of terra
nullius.\textsuperscript{156} The viceroy urged the Spanish commander to construct a fortified outpost in the sound, explaining that "my preoccupation concerning the construction of that humble establishment is directed essentially to show our Sovereign’s proprietorship to the Port of Nootka and to the shores of the coast."\textsuperscript{157} Letters written by Flórez’ successor, Viceroy Juan Vicente Revillagigedo, later indicated that this establishment was intended to be little more than “a feigned settlement,” a tiny outpost of soldiers and Franciscan clergy passing idle days before returning to Spain’s California ports.\textsuperscript{158} Nonetheless, the decision to bolster Spanish claims with at least a token occupation suggests that Flórez had begun to doubt whether claims based solely upon symbolic acts of possession would hold. In the months and years to come, the question of settlement, or effective occupation, would become pivotal in deciding Spain’s fate in the North. Effective occupation, as opposed to potential or nominal occupation, was a standard the Spanish would be hard-pressed to meet.

Before Martínez could begin construction of his fortified settlement, he was faced with a more daunting task, that of ridding Nootka Sound of foreign vessels. Upon arriving, Martínez discovered three ships cruising the waters of the sound: the American frigate Columbia, its escort sloop Lady Washington, and the Iphigenia Nubiana, flying the Portuguese flag. Though at first the Spanish commander was alarmed by the presence of ships from the United States, his fears were soon allayed as he befriended the American captains. The Iphigenia Nubiana, with its Portuguese captain and British crew, was less easy to dismiss. After brief observation, the Spanish commander recognized that the ship was in fact under British command, masquerading as Portuguese to avoid arrest for trading without a license from the British monopolies with exclusive rights in Pacific waters. Martínez hesitated for a time and then seized the vessel, arresting its crew on the incorrect grounds that they carried instructions in Portuguese to capture weaker foreign vessels. This

\textsuperscript{156} Servin, “Act of Sovereignty,” 157-158.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 158.
ruse was likely designed to buy Martínez some time to consider his position. He later reversed his decision to send the captured ship to the Spanish naval base at San Blas, citing a lack of available men from his garrison to carry out the transport. After hasty preparations, the *Iphigenia Nubiana* departed Nootka Sound.

Before long, a second British ship, the schooner *North-West America*, entered the sound and was seized by an increasingly agitated Martínez. Yet when a third British vessel, the *Princess Royal*, sailed into the sound a short time later Martínez had not yet fixed upon a policy for dealing with foreign ships. Instead of arresting the captain of the *Princess Royal*, he sent the vessel on its way with strict orders not to engage in commerce along the coast claimed by Spain. During this period, Martínez had been keeping the company of the American captain John Kendrick, who most likely portrayed the aspirations of his British fur trading competitors in the worst possible light. When the British frigate *Argonaut* arrived, just one day after the departure of the *Princess Royal*, Martínez had had enough. Just as the ship’s captain, James Colnett, suspicious of Spanish intentions, prepared to leave the sound, Martínez invited the Englishman aboard and demanded to see Colnett’s passport and sailing papers.

The British captain appeared in uniform with a sword at his side and announced to Martínez that he had been instructed by the king of England to take possession of Nootka Sound and to erect a fort under the British flag. To this end, he explained, he had brought with him twenty-nine Chinese tradesmen and materials to build a large frigate and a small schooner to carry out company business along the coast. The discussion between the two men, which began in civil tones, soon degenerated into a shouting match as Martínez began to recognize the magnitude of the threat the British ships presented. “Colnett then asked me,” wrote Martínez of the episode, “if there was anything or anybody to prevent him from carrying out the designs which he had declared to me. I answered him that I would prevent

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him from so doing, since I had taken possession prior to him under orders of and in the name of my sovereign, Don Carlos III." The two men then began to exchange claiming credentials, Colnett insisting that Captain Cook had discovered Nootka Sound in 1778, to which Martínez countered that he himself had discovered and named the sound while sailing with Juan Pérez, three years and eight months before Cook’s landfall. In the days that followed, Martínez repeatedly demanded that Colnett present his passport and papers, but Colnett stalled, on one occasion claiming that his personal chests were in disarray and that the documents could not be located.

After receiving several angry letters from the Spanish commander, Colnett apparently refused outright to cooperate, saying that the documents were for his eyes alone and that he would not part with them. Without warning, Colnett then declared that he was setting sail and that the Spanish commander could open fire if he wished. “He accompanied this talk,” explained Martínez, “by placing his hand two or three times on his sword which he wore at his belt, as if to threaten me in my own cabin. He also added in a loud voice the evil-sounding and insulting words: ‘God damned Spaniard.’” At this, Martínez declared the Englishman a prisoner of war and ordered the Argonaut to lower its flag. To the chagrin of the British, the next day the Spanish crews celebrated the Fourth of July with their American friends by dining, drinking toasts to their respective nations, and firing cannonades to hail the American victory. After the celebrations, Martínez took formal possession of the Argonaut and made preparations to send the ship and its crew to San Blas under Spanish guard. Before the Argonaut could be dispatched, however, the Princess Royal sailed once again into the sound, in obvious violation of Martínez’ earlier edict. After a heated exchange, the captain of the Princess Royal was also arrested and his ship seized.

159 James Colnett, The Journal of Captain James Colnett aboard the Argonaut from April 26, 1789 to Nov. 3, 1791 ..., ed. Frederic W. Howay (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1940), 309 [Appendix III].
160 Ibid., 312.
With the arrest of this fourth British vessel, the famed Nootka Sound Controversy was well underway.

Captain Colnett’s bold rejection of Spanish authority at Nootka Sound reflects not only the aggressive nature of British overseas commerce but also a long-standing enmity between Catholic Spain and Protestant England. This religious schism had prompted British monarchs since Henry VIII (1509-1547) to reject papal authority and with it Spain’s sweeping claims to the Americas. The British legal scholar and patriot John Dee prepared a series of works for Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and her advisors in which Dee argued that possession was not an act of will or intent (as the Spanish viewed it) but of physical occupation and effective control.\textsuperscript{161} This line of reasoning prompted Elizabeth to inform the Spanish ambassador to England that she considered herself entitled to establish colonies in any lands not actually inhabited by the Spanish.\textsuperscript{162}

Richard Hakluyt, in his \textit{Principal Navigations of the English Nation}, bolstered his queen’s assertions by compiling accounts of English mariners and encouraging further exploration. While celebrating the exploits of John Cabot in North America (here confused with his son, Sebastian), Hakluyt articulated the British position:

\begin{quote}
[A] very greate and large part as well of the continent as of the Ilandes was first discovered for the Kinge of England by Sebastian Gabote an Englishe man .. so that the Englishmen have more righte thereunto then the Spaniardes, if to have rights unto a contrie it sufficeth to have firste seene and discovered the same …\textsuperscript{163}
\end{quote}

On the Pacific side of the continent, British claims were based almost entirely upon claiming ceremonies Francis Drake performed during his piratical excursion of 1578-79. Although Drake carried no instructions to claim territory and could scarcely be considered an official

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\textsuperscript{162} James Simsarian, “The Acquisition of Legal Title to Terra Nullius” \textit{Political Science Quarterly} 53 (March 1938): 113.
\textsuperscript{163} As quoted in Simsarian, “Acquisition of Legal Title,” 113.
\end{flushright}
representative of his home government, he did not hesitate to assert his queen’s right of sovereignty as he entered the Pacific Ocean. Along the California coast, the English freebooter reported that he entertained Native dignitaries and erected “a faire great poste” to which he affixed a brass plate with Queen Elizabeth’s name and the date of the ceremony. A silver six-pence bearing a portrait of the queen and England’s royal arms was then inserted into a hole bored in the plate.\(^{164}\)

Two hundred years later, when Captain James Cook sailed the *Resolution* and *Discovery* into the Pacific, he carried specific instructions to claim. Unlike Drake, Cook was not a pirate thumbing his nose at the Spanish Empire. Instead his orders from the Office of the Lord High Admiral demanded that his possession-taking be selective and sensitive to the politics of the day:

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.\(^{165}\)

Cook’s orders specified that he avoid Spain’s colonies and take pains not to offend any Spanish subjects he might encounter.\(^{166}\) Faithful to his orders, Cook did not immediately land after sailing from Hawaii to the North American coast. Instead he skirted the shore

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\(^{164}\) Herbert E. Bolton, “Francis Drake’s Plate of Brass” in *Drake’s Plate of Brass: Evidence of his Visit to California in 1579* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1937): 10-11. Note: A plate discovered in 1936 in Marin County, California is believed by many scholars to be Drake’s. Its inscription reads, “Be it knowne unto all men by these present, June 17, 1579, by the Grace of God and in the name of Herr Majesty Queen Elizabeth of England and herr successor forever I take possession of this kingdom whose king and people freely resigne their right and title in the whole land unto herr known unto all men as Nova Albion. [signed] Drake.”

before pausing briefly at Nootka Sound. There, Cook’s crew traded with the Nootka Natives for cloaks made of sea otter fur to replace their worn-out garments and protect themselves from the increasingly harsh climate. Unaware of the value of these pelts, the men were later offered splendid prices for them at Canton, sparking a global rush for the “soft gold” the Russians had been quietly enjoying for four decades. Not wanting to alarm Spanish authorities, Cook sailed northward before performing any claiming ceremonies.

When the British commander decided to take possession, his ceremonies were brief, secular affairs, lacking in the pageantry of the Spanish tradition. On May 11, 1778, Cook disembarked at Kayak Island and went ashore to scout the coast from the top of a hill. He also took this opportunity to perform a claiming ceremony. “At the foot of a tree on a little eminency not far from the Shore,” Cook wrote in his journal, “I left a bottle in which was an Inscription setting forth the Ships Names, date &c. and two Silver two penny pieces (date 1772) …”167 Because Cook carried copies of Russian maps, it seems likely that the British commander was aware that Vitus Bering had landed on Kayak Island in 1741 and that his claim overlapped the Russian assertion of first discovery. Two weeks later, at Tumagain Arm in Cook Inlet, Cook sent one of his officers and two boats of armed men to the beach where they raised the British flag and buried a bottle in the ground, again with English coins and details of the expedition. Cook named this location Point Possession.168 When the Resolution and Discovery reached Cape Newenham, the tip of a Bering Sea peninsula dividing the Kuskokwim and Bristol Bays, Cook ordered what was to become the northernmost claiming ceremony documented in the North Pacific. On this occasion, one

166 Ibid., ccxxi.
167 Ibid., 341.
168 Ibid., 368.
of Cook’s officers took possession of the land in his majesty’s name, repeating the formula of bottle, coin, and written testimony.169

Cook’s brief journal entries and apparently informal methods have prompted scholars to question whether his ceremonies may be considered true examples of claiming by symbolic act. Cartographer Henry Raup Wagner, when discussing British claims in the North Pacific, writes that “the accounts of the acts of possession taken by the British are so meager and contain so little information that we are at some loss to know just what were their proceedings.”170 Sharing Wagner’s frustration, Keller et al. conclude that the British commander’s bottles were little more than tokens of his passing, securing only quasi-sovereign rights in case the opportunity for a more permanent claim might later reveal itself.171 These conclusions, however, appear flawed. Closer examination suggests that Cook’s ceremonies were not quasi-claimings or mementos as some suggest but full-blown acts of possession meant to preempt further Spanish or Russian claims.

During Cook’s voyages, officers and members of his scientific corps often kept their own journals of the expedition’s progress. Such was the case when the astronomer William Bayly recorded his observations of Cook’s 1778 possession-taking at Turnagain Arm. Bayly’s journal entry contains details omitted by Cook that provide important clues to the status of Cook’s North Pacific claims. Bayly wrote that “we ... hoisted English colours on a pole & took possession by turning a turf &c -- left a bottle with a paper in it whereon was wrote the Ships names, & that of the Capt. & the time of our being here as is usual on these occasions & each drank a bumper of Porter to his Majesties health.”172 While the toast to King George III’s health is a colorful tradition Cook neglected to

169 Ibid., 399-400.
171 Keller et al., Rights of Sovereignty, 97-98. See also Servin, “Rights of Sovereignty,” 143, 149.
172 Cook, Journals, 368.
mention, it is the reference to “turning a turf” that begins to shed light upon the scope and validity of Cook’s claiming ceremonies. This curious phrase has its origins in the so-called turf and twig ceremony, a medieval holdover referring to the protocols of land transfer between a lord and vassal.  

According to Old English common-law, a lord transferred a fief, or plot of land, to his vassal by handing the latter a clod of earth and a branch from a tree on the land in question. This sample of real estate served as a symbol of the recipient’s ownership, or seisin. In the 16th century, British explorers adopted this practice for claiming distant lands in the name of Crown and commerce. References to the handling of turf and twig appear often enough in the annals of British exploration to suggests that the ceremony formed the basis of the British claiming tradition. Sir Francis Drake, for example, after rounding Cape Horn in search of Spanish gold, announced that he had performed a ceremony of possession at Tierra del Fuego and demanded that it be advertised “that formall possession was then and there taken of the said Straits and Territories, with Turfe and Twigge, after the English manner…” Four years later, Sir Humphrey Gilbert erected a tent on the coast of Newfoundland, and after reading his commission from Elizabeth I, he “had delivered unto him (after the custom of England) a rod and a turf of the same soil, entering possession also for him, his heirs and assigns forever …” In 1605 Captain John Cunningham, an English mariner in the service of Denmark’s Christian IV (1588-1648), tried to take possession of a Greenlandic fjord but found no trees in that

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173 The Oxford English Dictionary makes reference to this obscure ceremony in its definition of turf: “A sod cut from the turf of an estate, etc., as a token or symbol of possession. Also in the phrase turf and twig.” [italics in original]

174 Keller et al., Rights of Sovereignty, 57.

175 As quoted in Keller et al., Rights of Sovereignty, 56-57.

frozen land to supply the twig. The practical explorer substituted stones for twigs and proceeded with the ceremony.\textsuperscript{177}

Robert Fotherbye’s description of a turf and twig ceremony in 1614 provides a rare glimpse of a ritual that received only passing mention from most British mariners. After erecting a cross on the rocky coast of Spitsbergen in the Arctic Ocean, Fotherbye reported that he cut from the ground a piece of earth,

\begin{quote}
which afterward I carried aboard our ship, I tooke it into my hand and said, in the hearing of the men there present, to this effect: I take this piece of earth as a signe of lawful possession … taken on the behalfe of the Companie of Merchants, commonly called the Merchants of New Trades and Discoveries, for the use of our Soveraigne Lord James by the Grace of God, king of Great Britaine, France, and Ireland, whose Royall Armes are here set up, to the end that all people who shall here arrive take notice of His Majesties Right and Title to this Country, and every part thereof.\textsuperscript{178}
\end{quote}

Although Cook evidently took the turf and twig ceremony for granted (thereby omitting mention of it from his journal), Bayly’s eyewitness account suggests that the medieval ritual was still employed during the 18th century. In fact, later accounts of claiming by Vancouver and several fur traders operating in the region indicate that the practice was alive and well. It appears that, like the Spanish practice of slashing trees or digging holes, the turf and twig ceremony has its origins in agricultural symbolism. However, if “turning a turf” was meant to suggest an intent to settle down and work the land, there could be no less likely candidates than the fur traders who followed in the wake of Cook’s expedition.

When British commercial interests in London and Canton began to hear rumors of the success Cook’s men had selling sea otter furs to the Chinese, it did not take long for British ships to begin arriving along North Pacific shores. These British fur traders wanted nothing more than to get rich providing Chinese aristocrats with fur ruffs for their gowns,

\textsuperscript{177} Keller et al., \textit{Rights of Sovereignty}, 57.
and to do this, the ships needed to reach the coast quickly and trade for as many furs as possible before racing back to Asian markets. Because this system relied upon Native traders and not upon control of the land on which they lived, the British traders had little interest in the issue of claiming. However, in the pursuit of profit, certain trading companies and individual merchants did perform claiming ceremonies in the hopes that such a claim might later promote their business interests. Although many British fur traders were clearly scoundrels and opportunists, the Spanish policy of secrecy gave them just cause, at least in the early years, to believe that they were the first Europeans to reach those shores.

Among the first British trading ships to reach Vancouver Island was the *Experiment* under the command of Captain James Strange. Though Strange was a private citizen and carried no orders to claim land, he reported having taken possession on the north end of Vancouver Island on August 1, 1786. “Having landed on a very fine Sandy Beach,” Strange later wrote, “the first Object of my attention was to take possession of the Country & Bay in the Name of His Brittannic Majesty, which I accordingly did with the usual Ceremonies, of hoisting the Colours & turning a turf.”179 The following year, Nathaniel Portlock and James Dixon arrived, representing the newly formed King George’s Sound Company, which as early as 1785 proposed to claim territory and erect factories to facilitate the collection of furs. Although Portlock and Dixon failed to carry out their mission, their fellow companymen, James Colnett and Charles Duncan, announced the following year that they had claimed the Princess Royal and Queen Charlotte Islands “with the usual forms

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178 As quoted in Keller et al., *Rights of Sovereignty*, 80.
and ceremonies of original discoveries."\(^{180}\) The journal entries describing these early examples of claiming by British fur traders lack the level of detail typical of any earnest attempt to document a claiming ceremony. As will be illustrated later, an alleged act of possession could be as useful as an actual one in securing future advantage in the fur trade.

By far the most threatening to Spanish interests were the claims of John Meares, a fur trader and notorious huckster who arrived on North Pacific shores in 1788 aboard the *Iphigenia Nubiana*. Meares had plans to monopolize fur trading in Nootka Sound by building an alliance with the principal Native chief, known as Maquinna, purchasing the rights to land in the sound, and building a trading factory. Meares intended to establish his headquarters at Nootka Sound while ranging as far north as Dixon Entrance and as far south as the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where Meares suspected the Spanish had already established forts.\(^{181}\) According to Meares, immediately upon arriving at Nootka, he purchased a plot of land from Maquinna for eight or ten sheets of copper, built a fortified house defended by a small cannon, and hoisted the British flag to establish an official claim to the place.

To hear Meares tell it, Chief Maquinna was delighted to learn of the Englishman’s plans and responded by promising the visitors many sea otter furs. Meares even claimed that Maquinna declared then and there “to do obedience to us as his lords and sovereigns.”\(^{182}\) Meanwhile, Chinese workers from Meares’ ship assembled the schooner *North-West America* on the beach, the first European vessel to be built in that part of the world. Some time later, one of Meares’ men also declared that he had taken possession of


the Strait of Juan de Fuca after purchasing the rights to it from a chief in that region. Soon after establishing this toe-hold on the continent, Meares left his men at Nootka Sound and returned to Macao to continue attempts undermine his competitors and gain exclusive access to the China market.

As was noted earlier, the *Iphigenia Nubiana* was the first ship seized by Martínez when he returned to Nootka Sound in 1789, and both the Spanish commander and Meares’ fellow British traders noted that the *Iphigenia Nubiana* was registered as Portuguese, owned (ostensibly) by a Portuguese captain, and flying the Portuguese flag. Therefore, his critics argued, any symbolic acts performed for the purposes of taking possession in the name of England’s king would be rendered illegitimate. Though there is no doubt that Meares constructed a temporary barracks for the men as they built the *North-West America*, contemporary witnesses insisted that the Portuguese flag flew over the diminutive compound and that the building was disassembled when Meares departed. Meares later claimed that he had merely adopted the Portuguese flag in order to avoid exorbitant fees charged by Chinese port authorities at Canton, but this too was part of a web of lies, as it was all too obvious that Meares was really attempting to escape punishment for operating in the Pacific without a license from the South Sea Company. Even Chief Maquinna denied having sold Meares permanent rights to Nootkan lands, calling the Englishman Aita-Aita Meares, or “Liar Meares.”

Yet despite Meares’ propensity for exaggeration and fabrication, the Englishman’s testimony was pivotal in convincing the British government to seek compensation from the Spanish once news of Martínez’ actions reached London. The diplomatic conflict between

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185 Ibid.
England and Spain formally began on February 10, 1790, when the Spanish government informed the English ambassador of what it considered a serious violation of Spanish sovereignty. By this date, however, rumors of the incident were still filtering through Boston, Montreal, and Halifax, causing some confusion in the British court about the sequence of events. It was not until May 13, when Meares arrived in London to present his case, that the conflict began to gather steam. In an inflammatory document known as the *Memorial*, Meares described the arrests in some detail before protesting the treatment of British captains and the confiscation of ships and their cargoes. It was in the *Memorial* that Meares also sought to establish his own territorial claims to Nootka Sound and along the coast to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Meares greatly exaggerated the value of goods Martínez confiscated from British ships and sought the assistance of the British government in seeking compensation.

The diplomatic standoff that resulted as England's stance hardened and Spain grew equally belligerent was in essence a debate concerning the protocols of claiming and the validity of symbolic acts of possession. The British, in protesting the seizure of their vessels, made no claim to British sovereignty over the disputed region, nor did they acknowledge Spanish claims. Instead they sought to secure the right of British subjects to "the enjoyment of a free and uninterrupted navigation, commerce and fishery, and to the possession of such establishments as they should form, with the consent of the natives of the country, not previously occupied by any of the European nations."187 While the British asserted the right to freedom of the seas in their pursuit of commercial opportunity, the "establishments" mentioned above were pivotal to the British position. Regarding

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187 As quoted in Simsarian, "Acquisition of Legal Title," 121.
permanent claims, the British asserted that “any territorial claim [must be] declared inadmissible, unless founded on actual occupation and established possession ...”\footnote{As quoted in Servin, “Act of Sovereignty,” 165.}

The British position regarding occupation in the 1790s recalled the days when Elizabeth I (and John Dee) asserted England’s right to settle North American shores not yet occupied by Spanish colonists. This should have presented a dilemma for British officials and jurists, however, because British explorers had since employed symbolic acts of possession around the globe. If England denied Spain’s claims because they were based upon symbolic acts, then Meares’ dubious claims would be rendered equally invalid. And if effective occupation were the true measure of ownership, the British should have recognized even the token occupation of Nootka Sound by Martínez and the series of Spanish commissioners sent by the viceroy to maintain the nascent colony.\footnote{Ibid., 168.} The Spanish settlement had, after all, grown to include a battery of ten cannons, a house for the Master Gunner and his tools, three barracks for workers, a blacksmith’s forge, and a bakery.\footnote{Haro, “Spaniards and Russians,” 3.}

Understandably, the British government was none too eager to engage in abstract discussion of possession-taking or to submit the dispute to the arbitration of other European heads of state as the Spanish Crown repeatedly suggested.\footnote{Servin, “Act of Sovereignty,” 166.} Instead the British position hardened as members of the House of Parliament condemned Spain’s “unfounded and exorbitant” claims and called for “immediate and vigorous armament.”\footnote{Haro, “Spaniards and Russians,” 3.} A court reporter during these debates captured the words of the parliamentarian Charles Fox who argued that symbolic acts of possession and papal donations were relics of the past soon to be replaced by a new standard:

In the present enlightened age, he said, the obsolete claim to territory by grant of a Pope was done away, as was the right of territory by discovery without absolute settlement: the taking possession by fixing up a cross, &c. &c. was by the good sense of the present times not admitted, and the only ground of right was absolute occupancy.  

Meanwhile, the injured parties engaged in a propaganda war against the Spanish. John Etches, part owner of *Princess Royal* and the *Argonaut*, clambered for restitution (and retribution) in a pamphlet he submitted to the king. “The supporters of the insulted Flag of Britain demand no other favour,” wrote Etches, “than the unbridled exertion of their own nervous and powerful arm.” While lambasting the Spanish Empire for its arrogance and abuse of Native peoples, Etches also referred to occupation as the standard of possession:

> They [the Spaniards] have the arrogance to assume an exclusive right to the gates, locks, and keys of the whole Pacific, to the exclusive monopoly of an ocean, and its numerous islands, which embrace to their extent one half the globe. On what patent, charter, or right can they found claims so monstrous and absurd, I know not, nor can I guess at; certainly not discovery or occupancy.

Though the British traders and the officials of their home government were clearly speaking out of both sides of their mouths, promoting occupation while performing symbolic acts, the newly emerging doctrine of effective occupation remained the foundation of the British argument throughout the Nootka Sound Controversy.

The Spanish, as might be expected, asserted from the beginning that Spain had acquired Nootka Sound and a great swath of coastline to the north and south of that harbor by employing symbolic acts in the time-honored tradition. Although later, as Spain lost ground in the conflict, Spanish officials sought to bolster their position by advancing supplementary support for their claims, they never abandoned their fundamental belief in

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193 Ibid., 74.
195 Ibid., 24.
first discovery and first possession-taking. In a 1790 statement delivered to all the courts of Europe, Carlos III chastised the British traders at Nootka as “usurpers and the violators of treaties” while reasserted his country’s “immemorial, regular, and established possession” of the region. On the subject of occupation, he insisted, “Although Spain may not have establishments or colonies planted upon the coasts or in the ports in dispute, it does not follow that such coast or port does not belong to her.” The mysterious power of the symbolic act of possession, it seems, was the Spanish Crown’s last refuge as her imperial strength began to wane.

As tensions between Spain and England increased and both nations prepared for war, Spain’s position in Europe was feeble. While England could count on military support from the Netherlands and Prussia, Spain had only France, by then thoroughly debilitated by revolution. Unable to afford a war, Spain was gradually forced to capitulate to increasingly stringent British demands. As part of the 1790 Nootka Sound Convention, the Spanish agreed to make reparations and restitution for the ships and material seized by Martínez. More importantly, the two parties agreed that “wherever the subjects of either of the two powers shall have made settlements since the month of April, 1789, or shall hereafter make any, the subjects of the other shall have free access and shall carry on their commerce without disturbance or molestation.” This compromise avoided any serious examination of the validity of symbolic acts of possession (or effective occupation) and instead opened Nootka Sound and the surrounding coast to joint occupation by both England and Spain. The Spanish, for their part, had gained by performing symbolic acts the right to settle but not control the coast along with a guarantee that their California settlements would not be molested. The British meanwhile confirmed their right to continue trading and even settling

196 Marshall, Pacific Voyages, 76, 77.
197 Ibid., 77. See also Simsarian, “Acquisition of Legal Title,” 122.
without establishing sweeping claims to sovereignty. In both cases, symbolic acts of possession had lost ground as the exclusive means by which to acquire *terra nullius*.

Although this settlement cooled tensions in London and Madrid, it had little effect on the pace of ritual claiming in the North Pacific. Inexplicably, both sides continued to act as if symbolic acts of possession were still the best means of laying claim to new lands. Between June and July 1790 the Spanish explorer Salvador Fidalgo performed at least four acts of possession in Prince William Sound in the name of the newly coronated Carlos IV (1788-1808). Fidalgo was followed closely by Manuel Quimper who performed four more ceremonies between Vancouver Island and the state of Washington.  

An important Spanish scientific expedition under Alejandro Malaspina was also diverted to the region to monitor the situation at Nootka Sound and to search for the legendary Strait of Maldonado. In July 1791, the Malaspina expedition paused for several weeks at Yakutat Bay where the commander experimented with a claiming ceremony apparently based upon Cook’s model. According to the expedition’s artist, Tomás de Suría, Malaspina prepared a document announcing his discoveries at Yakutat Bay and sealed it in a bottle. His sailors then “made a deep hole and buried the bottle under a hard stone, surrounding it with rocks and soil.”

Another observer reported that Malaspina placed a coin beneath the bottle before the men heaped a pyramid of stones on the site. Following on Malaspina’s heels, in 1792 Jacinto Caamaño performed a claiming ceremony on Graham Island in the Queen Charlotte Islands and a second in the vicinity of Nepean Sound, south of present-day Prince William Sound.  

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Rupert.\textsuperscript{202} In light of the 1790 Nootka Convention, these acts conferred no actual rights to the Spanish claimants.

The Spanish were not, however, the only ones establishing baseless claims in the vicinity. The British naval officer George Vancouver appeared on the coast in 1792 with instructions to complete a hydrographic survey and to enforce the provisions of the 1790 Convention. Ignoring the Spanish symbolic acts of possession from Unalaska to San Francisco, and apparently oblivious to the implications of the agreement he was sent to enforce, Vancouver took possession along the coast of Washington state on King George III’s birthday, June 4, 1792. On that day, Vancouver went ashore with his officers and, after hoisting the British flag, he “took possession of the Country with the usual forms in his Majesty’s name ...”\textsuperscript{203} After the ceremony, the British ships fired a royal salute in celebration of the king’s birth.

Vancouver’s lieutenant, William Broughton, later performed a ceremony on Chatham Island, declaring, “we displayed the Union flag, turned a turf, and took possession of the island ... in the name of His Majesty King George the Third; under the presumption of our being the first discoverers.”\textsuperscript{204} After drinking a toast to the king’s health, Broughton nailed a piece of lead plate inscribed with his name, the name of his ship, and the date to a tree near the beach. A bottle containing the same information in Latin was then secreted under the tree. Six months later, Broughton also claimed the Columbia River, again asserting that he had reason to believe “that the subjects of no other civilized nation or state had ever entered this river.”\textsuperscript{205} It seems unlikely that Vancouver and his officers attempted

\textsuperscript{203} Archibald Menzies, \textit{Menzies’ Journal of Vancouver’s Voyage, April to October 1792} ... (Victoria, B.C.: W.H. Cullin, 1923), 45.
\textsuperscript{204} George Vancouver, \textit{Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Round the World} (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), 86.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., 66.
to conceal their knowledge of Spanish claims in light of the Nootka crisis and the availability of certain Spanish journals. Their willingness to perform ceremonies and claim the right of first discovery more likely reflects the degree to which *terra nullius* in the North Pacific was fragmented by each successive (and at times, overlapping) claim. It appears that Vancouver was operating under the assumption that any cape or islet that had not already been seen a symbolic act was available for the taking.

While these latecomers performed ceremonies, the Spanish continued to defend Nootka Sound with a fort perched upon an island bluff. The fort's battery of ten cannons monitored the entrance to the sound while nearby a garrison of roughly thirty soldiers and a handful of Franciscan friars were largely confined to their barracks to prevent incidents that might provoke Chief Maquinna and his band. The monotony of daily life, the incessant rain and fog, and periodic tensions with the Nootka Natives made a tour of duty at Nootka Sound a dismal hardship posting. The string of commissioners, sent to manage the Spanish outpost between 1790 and 1794, found they had to pester authorities in New Spain to supply even the most basic needs of the garrison. The commissioners could obtain food and wood for building from the Nootkans, but by 1794 only thirty copper sheets were sent north to cover both gifts and commerce.\(^{206}\) Clearly Spanish officials were losing interest in their farthest-north outpost. As early as 1791 Viceroy Revillagigedo had expressed more interest in Nootka Sound as a line of demarcation between Spanish and British territories than in controlling the entire coast, but soon even this prospect seemed dim.\(^{207}\) Nootka Sound had become an unacceptable drain on the Spanish treasury, and Spanish colonial

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\(^{207}\) Ibid., 22.
officials were convinced that the lengthy negotiations were little more than a front for the British to gather intelligence on the military status of New Spain.\(^\text{208}\)

By the mid-1790s, British officials had also begun to tire of the stalemate. By this time the cream of the sea otter trade had been skimmed away, and the British public’s interest in the coast had grown tepid. After exchanging a series of declarations and counter-declarations in January 1794, both sides arrived at a remarkable solution to this lingering problem. The resulting document described in some detail an exchange by which the Spanish would relinquish title to the (nonexistent) buildings and lands claimed by John Meares. The document then indicated that “the British official shall unfurl the British flag over the land so restored in a sign of possession. And that after these formalities the officials of the two Crowns shall withdraw, respectively, their people from the said port of Nootka.”\(^\text{209}\) By this agreement, Nootka Sound was to be open to both countries should either desire to return for trade or to construct temporary buildings. Permanent settlements were prohibited, and if a third nation attempted to establish itself, both Spain and England could cooperate to defend their shared sovereignty.\(^\text{210}\) Once this curious compromise was struck and the commander at Nootka Sound heard the news, Spanish soldiers set about (one would think, gleefully) destroying their own compound.

The actual exchange took place on the morning of March 28, 1795, when Spain’s Brigadier Manuel de Alava and England’s Lieutenant Thomas Pearce met at a location in the sound known as Bay of the Dead because it had served as the Spanish garrison’s cemetery. The site also happened to be the location where John Meares had built his temporary hut and, therefore, the epicenter of British territorial claims in the region. British sailors had earlier erected a flagstaff there, and when both party’s representatives --


\(^{209}\) As quoted in Manning, *Nootka Sound Controversy*, 470.
commanders, officers, chaplains and a few soldiers and sailors — arrived, the Union Jack was hoisted aloft in recognition of British possession. After the Declaration and Counter-Declaration of 1794 was read aloud, Pearce asked that his nation's flag be lowered. With the ceremony thus concluded, Alava ordered the flagstaff dismantled and both parties returned to their vessels so that the ships would be ready to sail with the first favorable wind.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Archer, "Retreat from the North," 31.
²¹¹ Ibid., 34.
CONCLUSION

The historian Frederic Howay describes the Anglo-Spanish retreat from Nootka Sound as a markedly unpretentious event followed shortly by an orgy of looting as the Nootkan Indians ransacked the Spanish settlement, even exhuming coffins in the search for nails to make into fish hooks.212 Christon Archer challenges this imaginative account, noting that the settlement’s buildings had already been dismantled by the Spanish garrison soldiers. Instead of a howling mob, Archer suggests that Chief Maquinna lamented the passing of what he saw as a golden age, when Nootka was a bustling port and the Natives were made rich through trade.213 In the years that European ships had plied the waters of the sound, the Nootkans were wooed, first by the Spanish, next by the British, and had grown wealthy in the process. Violence had marred relations between Nootkan Natives and Europeans only twice: first, when the British fur trader James Hanna allowed his men to light a pile of gunpowder under Chief Maquinna’s chair during trade negotiations; and second, when one of Martínez’ crewmen killed a lesser Nootka chieftain who had recently taken the side of the British and was mocking the Spanish to their faces.214 Despite these isolated acts of brutality, the Nootkans appeared to have benefited greatly from their association with the Europeans. Whether pleased or not to see the strangers go, the Nootkans witnessed European rights to the region fall into abeyance and Native sovereignty in Nootka Sound restored.

Elsewhere along the North Pacific coast, Spanish efforts to enlist the support of Native peoples had come to nothing. When Alejandro Malaspina’s expedition paused in Yakutat Bay in 1791, the crew faced serious threats from Tlingits who robbed the ships and

213 Archer, “Retreat from the North,” 36.
menaced the Spanish with spears tipped with iron gained in trade with Russian and British ships. When Jacinto Caamaño entered Bucareli Bay in 1792 to reassess the bay’s potential as a Spanish redoubt, he found that the Tlingits there had not lost any of their bellicose nature since Arteaga’s 1779 visit. To the west, the Russians had subdued the Aleut and Koniag peoples and continued to exploit their labor while Russian Orthodox clergy attempted to save indigenous souls. The Russians relied heavily upon Natives and Creoles (the children of Russian and Native unions) while building the Russian American Company into a regional power after 1799. The Company’s efforts to expand operations into Tlingit territory, however, met with fierce resistance.

In 1795, Alexander Baranov paid the Tlingits of Baranof Island in the Alexander Archipelago for land on which to build a fort, but when he returned four years later with one hundred Russians and one thousand Aleut and Koniag hunters, the Tlingits began to reconsider the wisdom of their offer. By 1802 a combined navy of Tlingit and Haida warriors attacked the Russian fort Baranov called St. Michael, six miles from present-day Sitka. Three years after the destruction of Fort St. Michael, Tlingit warriors attacked an outpost at Yakutat Bay called New Russia where the Russians had imported serfs from Siberia to begin an agricultural settlement. The slaughter of the Russian colonists was so thorough that no detailed account ever appeared.215 Although the Russians continued to distribute imperial crests to enlist the aid of Native chiefs, their dreams of making loyal subjects of the Tlingit were never realized.

The relationship between the British fur traders and Native groups along the coast had long been a turbulent one, frequently marred by mistrust and punctuated with violence. Nonetheless, the fur trade was far from a mere looting of the coast as some writers have characterized it. Instead, British traders and Native hunters attained a sometimes delicate

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balance of power. The anthropologist Robin Fisher points out that despite the apparent superiority of British arms, Native hunter-traders often held the advantage when dealing with the British, demanding ever higher prices for their furs and refusing to trade if the British were not accommodating. If any conclusion can be drawn from these exchanges about Native concepts of sovereignty or cultural authority, it would be that, in addition to being shrewd traders and fierce warriors, coastal peoples had their own highly developed (and highly ritualized) culture which they did not abandon upon first glimpse of pale skinned foreigners.

Keller et al. sum up the European view of Native sovereignty (or lack thereof) this way: "It may be said that no European nation considered the natives of any territory in the New World as having the capacity to possess or to transfer any dominion in the international-law sense." While this may have been true for the Europeans, Native groups were swiftly disabused of the notion that the visitors were divine or invincible, and they treated aggressive Europeans as they would any alien group invading their territory. James Hanna, James Dixon, John Meares and many other fur traders recorded in their journals attempts by Native groups to capture European ships and either kill or enslave their crews. Perhaps the most famous of these was the case of John Jewitt, an American captured in 1803 by Chief Maquinna when his ship was seized by Maquinna’s warriors. After witnessing the massacre of the other twenty-five members of their crew, Jewitt and the ship’s blacksmith, John Thompson, spent several years as slaves in Maquinna’s household. Jewitt’s account of life as one of the chief’s fifty slaves reveals Maquinna as a reigning

217 Keller et al., Rights of Sovereignty, 6.
monarch, unshaken in his status as sovereign after decades of contact with European culture.\textsuperscript{219}

To the Spanish, the diplomatic defeat (and subsequent retreat) at Nootka Sound must have come as some relief. The rash actions of Martínez had not come to war, and the government of New Spain would no longer be obliged to support a far-flung outpost when the California missions were in such desperate need of supply and defense. Spanish attempts to create and maintain claims to the North Pacific coast had largely backfired. Spain's British rivals viewed Alexander VI's papal donation and the Treaty of Tordesillas as antiquated and irrelevant, while Russian traders continued their inexorable course toward New Spain's northern ports. It appears that, far from deterring competitors, Spain's policy of secrecy had actually lured the curious to the region while Cook's published journals led many to believe that England's explorers held legitimate claims as first discoverers and possessors. And, while the Russians, British and Americans profited handsomely from the sea otter trade, the Spanish government continued to prohibit private business dealings in its colonies, stifling any efforts to engage in this lucrative enterprise.\textsuperscript{220} Even Spain's enlightened Indian policy, designed by Viceroy Bucareli and Carlos III to win proxy support for Spanish claims and convince the world of Spain's benevolence, yielded little. Although Spanish explorers should be commended for their ability to avoid violence in tense situations, their efforts went unnoticed by their fellow Europeans while the Native recipients of Spanish kindness scorned them for their weakness.

Although Spain's northern campaign came to an end with the retreat from Nootka Sound, the problem of claiming territory caught the attention of Alejandro Malaspina,


\textsuperscript{220} For an examination of Spain's hesitant attempts to reap profits in the fur trade, see Adele Ogden, "The Californias in Spain's Pacific Otter Trade, 1775-1795," \textit{Pacific Historical Review} (1932): 444-469.
Spain’s greatest 18th century navigator and scientific explorer. Malaspina recommended that Spain’s tradition of colorful claiming ceremonies be scuttled in favor of a less ambiguous and more universally accepted method of taking possession. Borrowing ideas from Cook and Vancouver, Malaspina argued that instead of erecting a cross or holding a religious ceremony, Spanish mariners should determine the exact location of a claim with hydrographic measurements, bury a bottle with coins and a paper citing the location, and make a practice of purchasing territories from the indigenous inhabitants.221 Malaspina’s ideas were never tested, for upon returning to Spain after nearly five years at sea, Malaspina found himself caught up in a petty court intrigue. In 1795 he was jailed by Carlos IV and ultimately banished from Spain to his native Italy, his accounts forgotten and his ideas discredited.222 As fortune would have it, the 1792 claiming ceremonies performed by Malaspina and Caamaño in the North Pacific were last attempts by Spanish navigators to claim terra nullius by symbolic act.

While the disappearance of the La Pérouse expedition and the ravages of the French Revolution effectively put an end to France’s imperial ambitions outside of Europe, the country’s commercial interests were not fully extinguished. In 1790 a French trading company in China, lured by La Pérouse’s exuberant assessment of fur trade potential, sent the Solide under Captain Etienne Marchand into North Pacific waters. Two years later, Caamaño noted that the French frigate La Favie paused in Nootka Sound and later at Bucareli Bay, trading for furs and questioning the Natives about the location of La Pérouse and his ships.223 Meanwhile, as the War of the First Coalition (1792-1802) raged in Europe between France and her enemies, Russian fears that revolutionary ideas might spread prompted Shelikhov to warn one of his company managers “at present the French

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are enemies to everyone and often sail under other flags in order to deceive.... Treat the French as criminals if it is within your power.”

Given that French ships had all but disappeared from the Pacific in the 1790s, it seems that the real French threat was La Pérouse and his ideas rather than any risk of regicidal violence.

La Pérouse’s stern condemnation of the European claiming tradition had no doubt alarmed his royal sponsors while raising eyebrows in imperial courts throughout Europe. His assertion that the moldering bones of one’s ancestors and the sweat of one’s brow were sufficient to bestow sovereign rights upon indigenous peoples was an idea far ahead of its time, an idea later embraced not only by the Native Hawaiians (to whom he was referring) but by indigenous groups around the globe. In many ways, La Pérouse’s perspectives on Native peoples identify the Frenchman as a man in between. On the one hand, he was a representative of Louis XVI’s court and a naval officer defending the interests of the ancien régime, and on the other, a humanitarian whose bold critique of European colonial practices identified him as a radical thinker. At a time when Jean Jacques Rousseau and his fellow philosophes painted Native peoples as noble savages, La Pérouse chose instead to treat the various Pacific peoples as individuals to be celebrated or condemned by their own merits.

In his journal, La Pérouse never missed an opportunity to point out the folly of such ‘fireside philosophies’ while at the same time proving a reluctant representative of France’s imperial interests.

Under the energetic leadership of Alexander Baranov, Russia’s commercial and imperial interests continued to expand after the Nootka Sound Controversy was at an end. Undaunted by the destruction of the New Russia and St. Michael outposts, Baranov returned to the Tlingit village at Sitka by 1804 and, with support from the Russian naval

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vessel Neva, bombarded the rebellious Tlingits, banished them from Baranof Island, and transformed the former Tlingit village into the capital of Russian America. By 1808 Baranov sent one of his agents, Ivan Kuskov, to find a suitable site for a Russian outpost along the California coast. Kuskov reported that during his search he presented certain Natives who had proven themselves useful with silver medals inscribed with the words "The Allied Russia" to be worn around the neck on a ribbon.226 Despite the protests of Spanish colonial officials, Kuskov returned in 1812, paid the local Natives for rights to the land, and built Fort Ross near San Francisco Bay. Russian interests extended to the Hawaiian Islands in 1814 when Georg Anton Schäffer, an agent of the Russian American Company, managed to win the confidence of Chief Kaumualii. Within a short time, Schäffer secured a monopoly trade in sandalwood, a pledge of allegiance from Kaumualii to the Russian Emperor Alexander I (1801-1825), and permission to build factories on Kauai Island. Until British and American traders forced the Russians out of Hawaii in 1816, Schäffer claimed all of Kauai as Russian territory while flying the Russian flag over a lava-block stronghold he dubbed Fort Elizabeth.227

Although the British introduced the notion of effective occupation in the race to control the North Pacific coast, the Russians were the ones determined enough to make occupation a reality. Unlike the Spanish or the British in the North Pacific, the Russians showed remarkable tenacity as colonizers and entrepreneurs by subduing Native peoples, cultivating the land, establishing Russian Orthodoxy, and scratching a profit from their surroundings. Although the practice of burying claiming plates continued, the Russian

approach to territorial acquisition had more to do with occupation than symbolic acts. The following stanzas of a song written by Baranov himself reflect this deeply held belief in settlement as the principal means of imperial expansion:

God the Almighty is helping us here,
Supporting Russian courage everywhere,
As soon as we discovered the land, we quickly settled it,
A very important strip of the mainland.

To erect buildings in parts of the New World;
The Russian is moving, Nootka is his goal,
Savage peoples, of barbarous natures,
Have now become our friends.

Honor and glory brought us here,
Brotherly friendship unites us,
Let us build and expand,
This so useful for Russia American land.²²⁸

The Russians sang Baranov's song at the founding of Sitka (New Archangel) in 1804, and the song soon became the unofficial anthem of Russian America [see Appendix I]. In the years that followed, Baranov frequently sang it at banquets to rally his men to further heroism in the face of considerable adversity.

Although the Russian presence in the North Pacific had more to do with conquest and colonization than symbolic acts of possession, wherever Russians went in the North Pacific, claiming plates and double-headed eagle crests followed. Two examples of Russian imperial crests have survived the ravages of time. The first Baranov evidently presented as a peace offering to a Tlingit chief following the 1804 Battle of Sitka. The crest was then

passed along as an heirloom in a prominent Tlingit family before it was donated to the Alaska State Museum. The second, owned by the Smithsonian Institution, was discovered in the grave of an 18th century Klickitat Indian, on an island in the Columbia River, 150 miles from the coast. The only surviving example of a Russian claiming plate is No. 12 excavated from the site of Fort St. Michael, where Baranov likely placed it while selecting a suitable location for the fort in 1795. The plate is on display at the National Park Service’s Russian Bishop’s House in Sitka. Russian documents indicate that between 1808 and 1810, Russian American Company employees deposited three more plates (Nos. 1, 14, and 18) between British Columbia and California. Perhaps the last time the Russians buried a claiming plate was in 1811 when an unnumbered plate stamped with Russia’s coat-of-arms was deposited near San Francisco Bay.229

After the conflict at Nootka Sound, British fur traders competed with American ships for a diminishing share of the sea otter fur trade. To defend their commercial interests in the North Pacific, British officials continued to insist upon freedom of the seas and free access to the coast; but in negotiations with the Russians over control of the region, the British maintained their stance that occupation was the only legitimate standard of possession. Pushing aside the turf and twig ceremony, the British diplomat Lord Stowell articulated this new doctrine in 1821 in the face of increasing Russian pressure:

I think that it has not been generally held, and cannot be maintained that the mere discovery of a coast gives a right to the exclusive possession of a whole extensive continent to which it belongs…. An undisputed exercise of sovereignty over a large tract of such a continent and for a long tract of time would be requisite for such purposes.230

In the years that followed, diplomatic correspondence between these rival claimants resulted in the Russians yielding to the British contention that “use and occupation constitute the

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229 Pierce and Doll, “Alaskan Treasure,” 5.
230 As quoted as Simsarian, “Acquisition of Legal Title,” 123-124.
best titles by which a state can lay claim to rights of sovereignty over any part of the continent. By the 1880’s the doctrine of effective occupation, pioneered by the British at Nootka, had become so entwined with concepts of possession that at it was written into the 1885 Berlin Act during the so-called “Great Scramble” to subdivide Africa. The thirteen signatories of the act -- including England, Spain, France, and Russia -- agreed to recognize an obligation “to insure the establishment of authority in the regions occupied by them on the coasts of the African Continent.” This “establishment of authority” meant that symbolic acts of possession would no longer suffice to secure sovereignty for the colonizing nations of Europe. And with this, a practice that endured for three hundred years, reaching a feverish pitch in the struggle for terra nullius in the North Pacific, faded into obscurity.

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231 Ibid., 124.
232 Fred L. Israel, ed., *Major Peace Treaties of Modern History, 1648-1967* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 1098. Note: The 1884-85 Berlin Conference was attended by representatives of Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Russia, Portugal, Denmark, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway, Belgium, the Ottoman Empire, and the United States. The United States was the only world power at the conference that refused to ratify the 1885 Berlin Act.
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**Dissertation**

APPENDIX A

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF SPANISH CLAIMING CEREMONY
PREPARED FOR PÉREZ EXPEDITION,
DECEMBER 24, 1773

In the name of the most holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons and a single true God, who is the Beginning, Maker, and Creator of all things, without whom nothing good can be made, begun, or preserved.

And because the good beginning of anything whatsoever must be in God and for God, and because it is fitting to begin it in his name and honor, in his most holy name let it be known to all those who may see the present testimony, instrument, and letter of possession that on this day, which is ________, the ________, day of the month of ________, of the year 1774, on the arrival of the frigate named the Santiago (otherwise called the Nueva Galicia), belonging to the Very Mighty, Very Illustrious and Catholic Lord, Don Carlos III (King of Castile, of León, of Aragon, of the two Sicilies, of Jerusalem, of Navarre, of Granada, of Toledo, of Valencia, of Galicia, of Majorca, of Seville, of Sardinia, of Cordova, of Corsica, of Murcia, of Jaén, of the Algarve, of Algeciras, of Gibraltar, of the Canary Islands, of the East and West Indies, of the islands and mainland of the Ocean Sea; Archduke of Austria; Duke of Burgundy, of Brabant, and of Milan; Count of Hapsburg, of Flanders, of Tyrol, and of Barcelona; Lord of Biscay and of Molina, etc.) which by order of the Most Excellent Lord, Bailío Frey Don Antonio Bucareli y Ursúa Henestrosa Laso de la Vega Villacís y Córdoba (Knight of the Gran Cruz and Knight Commander of the Bóveda de Toro in the Order of His Majesty with the privilege of entrance; Lieutenant General of the Royal Army; Viceroy Governor, and Captain General of this New Spain; President of its Royal Audiencia; Superintendent General of the Royal
Treasury; President of the Board of Tobacco, Judge Conservator of this Branch; and Subdelegate General of the Postal Revenues of this same Kingdom) sailed from the port of San Blas, one of those of the Southern Sea in the territory of the same viceroyalty, on ________, of the present year for the purpose of discovery along the coast from Monterey to the north, and which was under the command of Don Juan Pérez, Acting Ensign in the Royal Armada; and while it [the Santiago] was anchored in this ________, now newly renamed ________, the aforesaid captain (having landed with the greater part of the frigate’s sailors and troops, and with Fray ________, a religious of our Father Saint Francis of the Apostolic College of San Fernando of Mexico) took a cross on shore and with all of the complement devoutly adored it on his knees. The religious sang the canticle “Te Deum Laudamus.” In a loud voice he [the captain] said that in the name of His Majesty the King, Don Carlos III, Our Sovereign (whom may God Our Lord keep for many years with an increase of greater states and kingdoms for the service of God and the well-being and prosperity of his vassals and of the very powerful lords and monarchs, his heirs and successors in the future) in the royal name were given to him by the aforesaid Most Excellent Viceroy of New Spain, was taking and took possession, was seizing and seized possession, of this land where he has at present disembarked, which he has discovered forever and ever in the said name of the Royal Crown of Castile and León (as stated above) as its own property, which it is and which really belongs to it [the Crown] by reason of the Donation and Bull of the Very Holy Father Alexander VI, Supreme Pontif of Rome (which he issued motu proprio, giving one half of the world to the Very High and Catholic Lords Fernando V and Isabel his wife, of glorious memory, and to their successors and heirs), given at Rome on May 4 of the year 1493. By virtue of this, these lands belong to the said Crown of Castile and León, and as such he takes and took the aforesaid possession of these lands and their adjoining districts, seas, rivers, coves, ports, bays, gulfs, archipelagos, and this said ________ where this frigate is presently anchored; and he was placing and did
place them under the power, possession, and dominion of the said Royal Crown of Castile and León (as stated above) as its own property, which it is. As a sign of possession, *vel quasi*, drawing out his sword which hung at his side, he cut trees and branches and plants, and he moved stones, and he walked back and forth on the fields and beaches without encountering opposition, asking those present to be witnesses of it and me ________, being the notary appointed by the captain of this expedition, to draw the deposition of witnesses in public form. Then immediately taking a large cross on their shoulders, the men of the frigate, having disposed in battle order with muskets and other arms, carried the cross in procession while the religious, _______, chanted a litany with everyone answering the responses. The said procession having ended, the aforesaid captain planted the cross and placed a pile of stones at its foot as a monument and sign of possession of all these discovered lands, seas, and their limits, continuous and contiguous; and he named this ________ (as stated above). As soon as the cross had been planted, they adored it a second time and all of them prayed, asking and beseeching Our Lord Jesus Christ to be pleased, for this would be for his holy service, for the exaltation and increase of our holy Catholic faith, and for sowing the seed of the holy Gospel among these barbarous nations (which up till now have been deprived of the true knowledge and doctrine) in order to guard and to free them from the devices and dangers of the devil and from the blindness in which they live, that their souls may be saved. Then the religious sang the hymn “Vexilla Regis”; and immediately afterwards, on an altar which had been built, the aforesaid religious celebrated Mass, which was the first to be said in this territory for the glory and honor of Our Almighty Lord and for the extirpation of the devil and all idolatry. ________ confessed and received Communion; and the same religious gave the sermon. After the services had ended, the captain as a more lasting sign and monument of possession, had a tree stripped which he ordered made into a cross on which was engraved the Most Holy Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ with the four initials I.N.R.I.; and at the foot of the cross he put “Carolus
tertius Rex Hispaniarum.” In order that this should thus be recorded, it was signed by the captain and by the witnesses _______. And, I, the notary appointed by the said captain, attest and certify that it happened as has been related.

Note: That an identical instrument to that made of the possession-taking must be placed in a glass bottle or flask, which will be well-sealed with pitch, so that in accordance with Article XI of the instructions it may be left hidden as a perpetual testimony among the stones of the pile or mound which must be made next to the cross.

APPENDIX B

THE REQUERIMIENTO

On the part of the King, don Fernando, and of doña Juana, his daughter, Queen of Castille and Leon, subduers of the barbarous nations, we their servants notify and make known to you, as best we can, that the Lord our God, Living and Eternal, created the Heaven and the Earth, and one man and one woman, of whom you and I, and all the men of the world, were and are descendants, and all those who come after us. But, on account of the multitude which has sprung from this man and woman in the five thousand years since the world was created, it was necessary that some men should go one way and some another, and that they should be divided into many kingdoms and provinces, for in one alone they could not be sustained.

Of all these nations God our Lord gave charge to one man, called St. Peter, that he should be Lord and Superior of all the men in the world, that all should obey him, and that he should be head of the whole human race, wherever men should live, and under whatever law, sect, or belief they should be; and he gave him the world for his kingdom and jurisdiction.

And he commanded him to place his seat in Rome, as the spot most fitting to rule the world from; but also he permitted him to have his seat in any other part of the world, and to judge and govern all Christians, Moors, Jews, Gentiles, and all other sects. This man was called Pope, as if to say, Admirable Great Father and Governor of men. The men who lived in that time obeyed that St. Peter, and took him for Lord, King and Superior of the universe; so also have they regarded the others who after him have been elected to the Pontificate, and so it has been continued even until now, and will continue until the end of the world.
One of these Pontiffs, who succeeded that St. Peter as Lord of the world, in the
dignity and seat which I have before mentioned, made donation of these isles and Terra-
firmé to the aforesaid King and Queen and to their successors, our lords, with all that there
are in these territories, as is contained in certain writings which passed upon the subject as
aforesaid, which you can see if you wish.

So their Highnesses are kings and lords of these islands and land of Terra-firme by
virtue of this donation; and some islands, and indeed almost all those to whom this has be
notified, have received and served their Highnesses, as lords and kings, in the way that
subjects ought to do, with good will, without any resistance, immediately, without delay,
when they were informed of the aforesaid facts. And also they received and obeyed the
priests whom their Highnesses sent to preach to them and to teach them our Holy Faith; and
all these, of their own free will, without any reward or condition, have become Christians,
and are so, and their Highnesses have joyfully and benignantly received them, and also have
commanded them to be treated as their subjects and vassals; and you too are held and
obliged to do the same. Wherefore as best we can, we ask and require you that you
consider what we have said to you, and that you take the time that shall be necessary to
understand and deliberate upon it, and that you acknowledge the Church as the Ruler and
Superior of the whole world and the high priest called Pope, and in his name the King and
Queen doña Juana our lords, in his place, as superiors and lords and kings of these islands
and this Terra-firme by virtue of the said donation, and that you consent and give place that
there religious fathers should declare and preach to you the aforesaid.

If you do so, you will do well, and that which you are obliged to do to their
Highnesses, and we in their name shall receive you in all love and charity, and shall leave
you your wives, and your children, and your lands, free without servitude, that you may do
with them and with yourselves freely that which you like and think best, and they shall not
compel you to turn Christians, unless you yourselves, when informed of the truth, should
wish to be converted to our Holy Catholic Faith, as almost all the inhabitants of the rest of the islands have done. And besides this, their Highnesses award you many privileges and exceptions and will grant you many benefits.

But if you do not do this, and wickedly and intentionally delay to do so, I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall forcibly enter into your country and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject your to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of their Highnesses; we shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses may command; and we shall take away your goods, and shall do all the harm and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey, and refuse to receive their lord, and resist and contradict him; and we protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their Highnesses, or ours, nor of these cavaliers who come with us. And that we have said this to you and made the Requirement, we request the notary here present to give us his testimony in writing, and we ask the rest who are present that they should be witnesses of this Requirement.

SPANISH CLAIMING CEREMONY ON THE CALIFORNIA COAST,
BRUNO DE HEZETA, JUNE 11, 1775

On the 11th, on which this year our Holy Mother Church celebrates the ineffable Mystery of the Blessed Trinity, the Commandant Don Bruno de Hezeta determined to take possession of this land in the name of our Catholic King, and to make the necessary arrangements at break of day sent the pilot Don Cristobal Revilla with some armed men, who at the top of the hill which serves as a shelter to the port made an arbour which they adorned as suitably as possible for performing the holy sacrifice of the mass. On their advising that all was ready we went on shore with all the officers and the greater part of the men of the Frigate and the Schooner, and on the beach worshipped the Holy Cross which had been constructed for the purpose of being placed in position on the top of the hill. My companion and I chanted the Te Deum Laudamus, after which, the men being marshalled [sic] in good order, we made our way to the summit, not without difficulty as the path was rough and steep and in places even dangerous. On reaching the top the Holy Cross was duly set up and the Commandant took formal possession of the territory, in accordance with the instructions of his Excellency the Viceroy Don Antonio María Bucareli. This being concluded, Fray Campa said mass and preached a sermon with great tranquillity as the Indians contented themselves with observing from their settlement what we were doing. The day being the feast of the Santisima Trinidad caused us to give that name to the port. From the top of the hill we saw a river, not visible from the port, to the east of which it emptied into the sea, to which was given the name of “Rio de las Tortolas.”

On descending, near the beach we were met by four Indians, one of whom, the one whom the afternoon before we had considered the most intelligent of our visitors, was asked
by the captain of the Schooner to repeat "Long live Charles III!" This he did very cheerfully in unison with our men at the salute with the guns, not being perturbed by the roar of the guns on board which were discharged when our men on shore fired volleys with their guns. The Indians of the settlement did not receive it with so much equanimity because the noise of the cannon and the echoes which resounded in the mountains caused them to tremble with fear, as they told us when in the afternoon we went to visit them and explained by signs what it all signified and that they were our friends. We pointed out the cross to them, charging them not to remove it; whereupon their chief harangued them and they promised not to tear it down.

SPANISH CLAIMING CEREMONY ON KENAI PENINSULA,
IGNACIO ARTEAGA, 1779

Up to here there is nothing worth noting except the method employed in taking possession of those islands, the same practically as that which Cristóbal Colón employed more than three centuries before. Two friars of San Fernando, the chaplains of the ships, Fray Juan Riboo [Rióbo] and Fray Matias Noriega, went ashore with the commander. The latter took a cross which when on land was adored by all. They intoned a *Te Deum* and he declared that he took possession of that land for the King of Spain as his very own and to whom it belonged ... [In his words] by reason of the donation and Bull of the Pope Alexander VI, in sign of possession he drew his sword and acting like a crazy man he cut trees, drew lines on the ground, threw stones about, and asked Antonio Dávila y Samudo, corporal who was acting as scribe, to take a testimony of all those tricks he was performing. When this was done he took up a large cross on his shoulders and all the crew, forming a procession, the friars intoned a litany and the commander planted the cross and prayed to God to extract the people about from their idolatry. Then the fathers intoned the hymn, *Vexilla Regis*. At the foot of the cross they placed the words *Carolus tertius*.

SPANISH CLAIMING CEREMONY IN PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND,
ESTEBAN JOSE MARTÍNEZ, JUNE 1, 1788

Morning broke with sky and horizon covered with Thick Clouds, and squally. At 8 when it had become a little lighter, I went with the Chaplain and other officers in my Launch, with the Garrison Armed, to join the Commander's party which was waiting for me in his ship, and from it we embarked for the land, and having arrived, we paraded along the whole Beach; a large Holy Cross was set up which was already on shore for this purpose, and an altar dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, and when the procession was finished, the Chaplain, Father Jose Maria Diaz, said Mass, being the first ever said on These Coasts between 50 and 60 degrees. Assisting at it were the Chaplains of Both Ships and other Officers, as also all the Troops and some of the Sailors. When the Mass was concluded the Holy Cross was carried in procession to the Place which had been chosen, which was near a stream of Water which runs into the Sea, where a Tall Green Pine was selected on which, on the side which faces the Interior of the Island, was fastened (with 3 iron spikes separated with strips of Wood) the Holy Cross; and on the Long part was carved this Inscription -- Carolus Tertius Hispaniarium et Indiarum Rex; and on the head this: INRI, and on the Arms, Year of 1788.

During the Ceremonies of Procession, Mass, and Possession, the Troops made several discharges of Musketry, and at each one of them the two Ships replied with 4 cannon shots each. Nine Indians in 5 Canoes were present at our departure from on board; but as soon as they heard the Noise which the Artillery made, they went away terrified; and when the ceremony was concluded we returned on Board, after having marched along all the
Beach, not being able to Penetrate into the interior of the Island because of the deep Snow which there was beyond the edge of the Beach.

APPENDIX F

INSCRIPTION ADDED TO A PORTRAIT
PRESENTED TO A TLINGIT CHIEF,
YAKUTAT BAY, JUNE 11, 1786

1788, in June in the bay called Yakutat by the natives, the seafarers Navigators Gerasim Izmailov and Dmitrii Bocharov of the Golikov and Shelikhov Company called here together with 40 men on board the galiot Three Saints. Thanks to the kindness and friendliness of toion Ilkhaku and his Koliuzh subjects they traded here and before leaving persuaded them to come under the protection and patronage of the Imperial Russian Throne, as a token they left the above mentioned toion a copper Russian crest and this portrait of the Heir to the Russian Crown, His Imperial Highness. It is affirmed that everyone coming here on Russian or foreign vessels should treat this toion kindly and with good will, taking only the essential precautions for safety. The above mentioned navigators stayed here with their galiot from June 11th to 21st, did not note any bad actions on the part of the toion or his people and safely went out to sea.

[Below this inscription was written]
The Lord the Tsarevich and Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich, Heir to the Russian Throne, and Owner of the Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein

SECRET INSTRUCTIONS FOR ALEXANDER BARANOV
CONCERNING RUSSIAN CLAIMING PLATES,
AUGUST 14, 1790

In the year 1787, His High Excellency the Governor-General of Irkutsk and Kolyvan, Ivan Varfolomeevich Iakobii, entrusted the Greek Evstrat Delarov, the Manager of the [Golikov-Shelikhov] company, with crests of the Russian Empire and plates. The former were to be displayed in conspicuous bays and harbors on the mainland and on the distant Aleutian Islands. A special instruction was given by His Excellency to the above-mentioned Greek. Last year, 1789, a report was received here, forwarded to the company on September 1, 1788. It was written by skippers Bacharov and Izmailov who were sent from Kadiak Island along the American coast for a survey. It is evident from this report that the places chosen for the crests and the plates were not described precisely enough. The following omissions were made: 1) The degree of longitude and latitude; 2) the distance from Kadiak Island to the places on the American mainland where the crests and plates are located; 3) the general description of the places where the crests and plates are should be more clear. Taking all this into consideration, His High Excellency Ivan Alferевич [Pil] Governor-General of Irkutsk and Kolyvan, has ordered me to entrust the placing of the crests and plates to the most reliable men. Russian rights on the most remote islands in Russian possessions should be strengthened at once. Obeying orders, I am forwarding to you five crests and the same number of plates, Nos. 6, 10, 11, 12, and 13. I recommend that you:
1. Display the crests in convenient places on cape close to bays or harbors, or on remote islands in case new ones will be found.

2. Wherever the crests are displayed, bury the enclosed plates in the ground a few paces away. Each of them must be put between two bricks or rocks. A precise description of the place must be made, including the direction and distance from the crest to the place where the plate is buried, the depth and the number.

3. To preserve our political rights, it is necessary that all the places where the crests are going to be displayed be thoroughly described, that maps be made which will give the distance from well-known places, and the degrees of longitude and latitude.

4. The plates should be buried so that not only the American and Island natives do not know the location, but even men taking part in this work, people on board the ship, and the company's workers will not know all the details. By keeping it a secret, we will avoid supposition that they have been put out recently. For this purpose, see that these signs are kept locked and sealed until used.

5. If subjects of other countries come to the localities where the crests which I am forwarding to you are to be displayed, to trade, explore, or to seeks new islands, you may say sternly that the land, the islands, and all the trade belong to the Russian Empire, adding that it was first discovered by our seafarers. You can state a date, too, but not a very definite one, and not more recent than 1741....

7. In conclusion, I must advise you that on all occasions, even through others of our companies, it shall be your first duty to inform the commandant at Okhotsk as to
how the above instructions have been carried out, to describe what you have done, or
what was impossible and why.... I hope that you will regard it as your sacred duty
to do everything that you can to extend the glory and benefits of the Empire and the
welfare of her subjects in the most remote regions now and in the future.

[Signed] Collegiate Assessor, Ivan Kokh

This translation appears in Petr Aleksandrovich Tikhmenev, *A History of the
Russian-American Company*, trans. Dmitri Krenov and eds. Richard Pierce and Alton
WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF SPANISH CLAIMING CEREMONY
AT NOOTKA SOUND, ESTEBAN JOSE MARTÍNEZ,
JUNE 24, 1789

In the Name of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and the Holy Ghost, One True God in three Distinct Persons, who is the creative principle and creator of all things, without whom nothing good can be instituted, achieved or preserved -- and Whereas the principle of everything good must be in God -- for the glory and honour of HIS MOST HOLY NAME.

Therefore Know All Men To Whom these presents and the present Chart of Possession shall come that: Today being Wednesday the 24th day of June 1789 on the arrival of the Frigate named “Nuestra Señora del Rosario” (Alias “La Princessa”), together with the packet boat “San Carlos el Filipino” both belonging to His Most Mighty Illustrious and Catholic Majesty Carlos the Third, King of Castile, of Leon, of Aragon ... The said frigate and packet-boat, by Command of His Excellency Don Manuel Antonio Florez Maldonado Martinez de Angul y Bodquin, Knight of the Order of Calatrava, Commander of Nolino and Laguna Rota, Lieutenant General of the Royal Armada, Viceroy and Captain General of New-Spain, President of the Royal Audiencia, and Sub-Delegate General of Corres in the said Kingdom, Having sailed from the port of San Blas, on the Southern Sea, in the Government of the Viceroy, aforesaid, on the 17th day of February in the same year, for the purpose of discovery along the coast from Monterey northwards. This expedition being under the command-in-chief of Don Estevan Jose Martinez, Ensign of Marine, in the Royal Armada; and said expedition being anchored in the port of Santa Cruz, one of the numerous harbors contained in the Bay of San Lorenzo de Nuca, with the aforesaid frigate of his command and the packet-boat of his following. Said Commander-
in-Chief having disembarked with the officers of both ships, with the troops, and a number of the sailors, together with the Fathers Chaplains Don José Lopez de Nava, and Don José Maria Diaz and the four Missionaries of the Order of San Francis of the Apostolic College of San Fernando de Mexico, Brother Severo Patero, (President) Brother Lorenzo Lacies, Brother José Espi, and Brother Francisco Sanchez -- The said Commander drew out a cross, which he worshipped devoutly on his knees, together with all those who accompanied him: -- then the Chaplains and Friars sang "Te Deum Laudamus" -- and the canticle having been concluded the Commander said in a loud voice: "In the name of His Majesty the King Don Carlos the IIId -- Our Sovereign whom may God keep many years, with an increase of our Dominions, and Kingdoms, -- for the service of God, and for the good and prosperity of his vassals, and for the interests of the mighty lords and kings, his heirs and successors in the future as his commander of these ships, and by virtue of the orders and instructions which were given to me in his royal name, by the aforesaid His Excellency the Viceroy of New-Spain, I take, and I have taken, I seize, and I have seized possession of this soil, where I have at present disembarked which had been formerly discovered by us, in the year 1774 -- and once more, on the present day, -- for all time to come, in the said Royal Name, and in the name of the Royal Crown of Castile and Leon, as aforesaid -- As if it was my own thing, which it is, and shall be and, which really belongs to the King aforesaid, by reason of the donation and the bull "Expedio Motu Proprio" of our Most Holy Father Alexander VI, Pontiff of Rome, by which he donated to Most High and Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand V and Isabel his spouse, Kings of Castile and Leon, of illustrious memory, and to their successors, and heirs -- one-half the world -- by virtue of which these present lands belong to the said Royal Crown of Castile and Leon, and as such I take, and I have taken possession of these lands aforesaid, and the adjoining districts, seas, rivers, ports, bays, gulfs, archipelagos, and this Port of Santa Cruz, in the island named by Martinez -- among the many which are enclosed in the Bay of San Lorenzo de Nuca, -- which bay is situated in
latitude North 49° 33' and longitude 20° 18' -- West of the meridian of San Blas where I am at present anchored with the said frigate and packet-boat of my command, and I place them, and they shall be placed under the dominion, and power of the said Royal Crown of Castile and Leon, as aforesaid, and as if it was my own property, which it is.” -- And as a sign of such possession he drew his sword which had hung by his side, and with it he counted the trees, the branches, and the lands, he disturbed the stones on the beach and in the fields without encountering any opposition, asking those present to be witnesses of these facts, and to me Rafaël de Canizares, who am the Notary appointed to this expedition by the Commander-in-Chief he ordered me to relate the facts in due form, as a public testimony thereof. -- Then taking a large cross on his shoulders, and the crews of both ships having been formed in marching column, armed with guns and other weapons, the procession marched out, the Chaplains and Friars chanting the Litany of “Rogation” -- the whole troop responding -- and the procession having halted, the Commander planted the cross in the ground, and made a heap of stones at the foot thereof -- as a sign and in memory of the taking of possession in the name of His Catholic Majesty Carlos III, King of all Spain (whom God keep) -- of all these lands and neighbouring districts discovered, continuous and contiguous -- and gave the name of “Santa Cruz” to this port, as has been said -- And when the cross was planted, they worshipped it once more, and all prayed, demanding in supplication from our Lord, Jesus Christ, that He should accept their offering, because everything had been done for the glory and honour of his Holy Name, and in order to exalt, and enrich our holy catholic faith -- and to introduce the word of the holy Gospel among these savage nations, which until the present time had been kept in ignorance of the true knowledge and doctrine, -- which will guard them and deliver them from the snares and perils of the Demon and from the blindness in which they have lived, -- for the salvation of the souls. -- after which the chaplains and friars began chanting the Hymn “Vexilla Regis.” -- Following this, a solemn high mass was celebrated on an altar which the Commander had
caused to be erected, by the Rev. Chaplain of our frigate, Don José Lopez de Nava, assisted by the chaplain of the packet-boat, Don José Maria Diaz, and the four friars aforesaid -- this being the first mass which was said in this land in honour of our Lord God Almighty, -- and for the extirpation of the Devil and of all idolatry. -- The sermon was given by the Very Rev. Father President -- Severo Patero, Apostolic Missionary of the order of San Francis and of the Royal College of San Ferdinand of Propaganda of the Faith-- of the City of Mexico. --

This function being concluded, the aforesaid Commander as a further sign and testimony of the taking of possession, caused a tree to be cut, which he had made into a cross, into which he engraved the Holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, with four capital letters I.N.R.I -- and wrote at the foot of the cross: Carolus tertius, Rex Hispaniorum. --

In Witness Whereof these present were signed by the Commander, and witnessed by the Captain of the Packet-boat, “San Carlos,” Don Gonzalez Lopez de Haro; the first pilot of the Armada, Don José Tovar, the chaplains aforesaid Don Jose Lopez de Nava, Don José Maria Diaz, and the four friars of the College of San Ferdinand -- And I the Notary appointed by the said Commander, authenticate these presents as a true testimony of what took place -- as it has been related herewith. -- Signed: Estevan José Martinez -- Gonzales Lopez de Haro, -- José Tovar y Taniariz -- Dr. José Alexandro Lopes de Nava -- Fray Lorenzo Lacies-- Fray José Espi -- Fray Francisco Miguel Sanchez --

Before me Rafaël Cañizares --

Russian wit plunged in adventure,
Has scattered free men across the seas,
To seek new lands, for trade and profits,
For the good of the fatherland, for the honor of the Tsar. (Repeat)

God the Almighty is helping us here,
Supporting Russian courage everywhere,
As soon as we discovered the land, we quickly settled it,
A very important strip of the mainland.

Forming society and companies,
We don't need the muse of the Greeks,
We need but learn the simple rules of nature,
And to follow its laws.

To erect buildings in parts of the New World;
The Russian is moving, Nootka is his goal,
Savage peoples, of barbarous natures,
have now become our friends.

Peter the Great! If you could only awake,
You would see, that you made no mistake,
Suspecting land nearby, knowing great advantage,
Your offspring found it, and settled there.
The Argonauts were drawn by glitter,
The Golden Fleece they tried to find;
It have [sic] been to their fatherland's advantage,
Had they only known about this land.

Here exists no Golden Fleece,
But precious gold is flowing to us.
Were it not for intruders -- out European friends --
We would be richly rewarded for our risks.

The Tower of Sukharev beautifies Moscow,
The Bell and Tsar's Cannon astonish all;
There are wonders aplenty, as the bell tower of Ivan the Great,
But they could be no use to us.

Honor and glory brought us here,
Brotherly friendship unites us,
Let us build and expand,
This so useful for Russia American land.

Here though there is the wildest nature,
Bloodthirsty customs of the natives,
But the advantages important, and needed by the country
Make labor and loneliness bearable.

In the New World, in the lands of midnight,
We stand among mightly [sic] people.
The tribes make peace, respecting bravery,
Take heart, friends -- we are Russians.

Neither rank nor riches are important to us,

All we need is harmonious friendship,

All that we have created, all of our efforts,

Will be valued by patriots in times to come.