

## SOME PROBLEMS IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH RELATIVE TO THE PÉREZ-HEZETA-BODEGA EXPEDITIONS OF 1774 AND 1775

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The limits of the 1774 and 1775 Pérez-Hezeta-Bodega voyages of discovery, the two maritime expeditions by which Spain laid claim to sovereignty over the North-west Pacific coast of North America, are identified and traced. The principal source materials available for historical research relative to these voyages are noted along with some selected secondary works. Specific problems involving proper chronology of events, personnel of the expeditions, and significant omissions are discussed as illustrative of those which attend historical research on these two explorations.

In the mid-1770's, while the fuse sputtered and the powder keg of rebellion exploded in the thirteen British Colonies of North America, a program of discovery and exploration was being pushed along the North-west coast of our continent. There, in 1774, Spain began her last flurry of defensive expansion to protect her vast holdings along the Pacific coast from foreign intruders. The Spanish feared the grasping designs of other Europeans, e.g., the British and the Russians. Spurred by reports of increased Muscovite activity in Alaska, where the Russian Bear, wrapped in the rich furs of the frozen North, had slumbered fitfully since the 1740's, and alarmed by fears of British expansion westward from Canada, the Spanish renewed their interest in the Pacific Northwest.

Consequently, in 1774, the Viceroy of New Spain, Antonio Maria Bucareli, sent an expedition in the new frigate *Santiago*, under the command of acting Ensign Juan Pérez, northward from the port of San Blas in the present state of Nayarit, Mexico. Pérez was ordered to proceed to 60° North latitude and from that point to reconnoiter the coastline southward to Monterey, the northern outpost of Spanish settlement at the time. The expedition was to seek out any foreign settlements along the coast, to explore the coastal area, to learn something of the aborigines there, and to take formal possession of the region in the name of Charles III of Spain. The Pérez expedition of 1774 reached the Dixon Entrance at approximately 55° N. latitude where the same current of Alaska's Inside Passage

divides the islands of the Queen Charlotte Group from the Prince of Wales Islands, the southern appendages of present Alaska. Although Pérez's command did not uncover any European intruders, neither did they go ashore to take formal possession of the land for their sovereign. Clearly, another expedition was needed to fulfill the directions and purposes of the Spanish viceroy.

A second expedition consisting of two vessels, the frigate *Santiago* and the small schooner *Sonora*, staffed by a contingent of naval officers newly arrived from Spain, was sent north from San Blas in 1775. This voyage was under the command of Bruno de Hezeta aboard the *Santiago*, while the little *Sonora* was in the charge of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, a young Peruvian with undoubted ability and ambition. Hezeta was ordered by Viceroy Bucareli to navigate to 65° N. latitude and from there to explore the coastline southward to Monterey, to disembark at appropriate points and take formal possession of the land for the Spanish Crown. Separated from the *Santiago*, perhaps by accident but probably by design, the tiny *Sonora* managed to reach a latitude of approximately 58° N., off Kruzof Island, before turning southward to reconnoiter the coastline to Monterey. Hezeta, in the *Santiago*, got only as far as the west coast of Vancouver Island before the ravages of scurvy and petitions of his subordinate officers induced him to sail southward along the coast. Neither vessel found any settlement of European interlopers.

These maritime expeditions of 1774 and

1775 were the bases of Spanish claims to sovereignty over the Northwest coast of North America. Pérez discovered the islands now known as the Queen Charlotte Group, the Dixon Entrance, and Vancouver Island. The Hezeta-Bodega expedition discovered additional islands and the mouth of the Columbia River and, by landing at several points, perfected, as far as Spanish jurisprudence was concerned, Spanish title to the vast area. Spain's subsequent attempts to enforce her claims to sovereignty led to her unsuccessful confrontation of Great Britain in what is known as the Nootka Sound controversy. The dim and indistinct echoes of these expeditions were heard even as late as the 1840's, when the United States, as the successor to Spain north of the 42° parallel, asserted its own claims to the Oregon Country against Great Britain.

As important as these two voyages were, no full history of them has been published to date. Every undertaking in historical research is attended by problems which are both general and specific. A discussion of some of the research problems encountered in preparing a history of the Spanish maritime expeditions of 1774 and 1775 may be of some benefit to scholars who embrace a similar study at a later time. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss some of the sources and some of the problems encountered in research relative to these voyages.

Four journals are available relative to the Pérez expedition of 1774. These are the accounts of Juan Pérez, Estéban José Martínez (Pérez's second officer), Fray Juan Crespi and Fray Tomas de la Peña. Fathers Crespi and Peña were assigned to the *Santiago* on order of Viceroy Bucareli by Fray Junipero Serra, the Father-President of the Franciscan missions of Alta California, to serve as royal chaplains and to keep true and accurate accounts of events during the voyage. The Pérez and Martínez journals are available in Spanish script on microfilm (1) while the narratives of the clerics have been translated and published in English (2). The letters of Father Serra to religious and civil officials in New Spain, which have been collected, translated and published in English

(3), are valuable for certain aspects of both expeditions.

Six journals are available in reference to the Hezeta-Bodega voyages of 1775. These are the accounts of Bruno de Hezeta, Juan Pérez, Fray Miguel de la Campa Cos, Fray Benito de la Sierra, Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra and Francisco Antonio Mourelle. Pérez accompanied the 1775 expedition as chief pilot of the *Santiago* under Hezeta's command. Fray Campa and Fray Sierra, who accompanied the frigate *Santiago*, were assigned by the Franciscan Apostolic College of San Fernando (in Mexico), at the behest of the viceroy, to serve as royal chaplains and recorders of the expedition. Bodega and Mourelle, the second officer aboard the *Sonora*, kept journals of the remarkable voyage of the little schooner. The narratives of Hezeta and Pérez are available in Spanish script on microfilm (4). All of the other accounts have been translated and published in English (5) except Bodega's log which has been published in Spanish (6).

Other bibliographical items of interest and value are the instructions issued by Viceroy Bucareli to Pérez prior to the 1774 voyage and Bucareli's Formularies to be utilized in formal possession-taking ceremonies. Both of these historical nuggets have been translated and published in English (7). Bucareli's instructions to Hezeta, very similar to those given Pérez, are available in Spanish script on microfilm (8). A number of books and articles, including a few biographies, contain valuable information about various phases of the two voyages (9).

Only a few problems relative to research on these two notable voyages can be mentioned here. Three categories of problems must suffice to demonstrate the nature of many, i.e., problems relative to chronology, to personnel, and to important omissions.

Commanders of the respective expeditions, Pérez and Hezeta, were often careless about dates. Pérez kept his journal as a vessel's captain would keep a sailing log in the 18th century, from noon of one day to noon of the following day. His entries were recorded, for example, under headings such as "24th to Tuesday, 25th of January,

1774." However, Pérez frequently would run his narrative over into the following time segment without clarification. Furthermore, Pérez was usually a day or two behind in the narration of events and the vessel's position. Once he even made two separate entries under the same date. With a flash of the resourcefulness which enabled him to rise to a position of preferment and privilege, however, the old pilot would conclude his journal in conformity with the date of debarkation given by the other journalists by the simple device of an entry which blurred the events of several days together. Hezeta, too, sometimes treated dates cavalierly in his official chronicle. These journals, then, have to be compared carefully with the other narratives to obtain an accurate chronology of events.

A number of minor but interesting discrepancies exist relative to the personnel of the respective expeditions. Two examples may be of interest. Bancroft has written that Don José Dávila was the physician who accompanied the exploration of 1774 (10). Indeed, Dávila was given that assignment and did sail, with his wife and family, to San Diego aboard the *Santiago*. The viceroy had intended and had ordered that Dávila would go north with the frigate while the *Santiago's* own surgeon, Don Pedro Castan, remained at Monterey, Dávila's permanently assigned post, until the frigate's return from northern climes. The journals of the 1774 expedition disclose no reason for the change but clearly prove that Pedro Castan, not Dávila, served as physician on the 1774 exploration. The cause of the unauthorized change of assignment was explained by Father Serra. In a letter to Viceroy Bucareli, dated June 21, 1774, and written at Monterey, Serra informed the distant viceroy that Dávila possessed such a fear of the sea that he absolutely refused to set foot aboard the *Santiago* after its arrival in San Diego from San Blas (11). Bancroft, in another work, declared that the surgeon Dávalos, probably a corruption of Dávila, served on the 1775 voyage (12). This was an obvious mistake since the Bodega journal clearly identified the expedition's physician as Don Juan Gonzales (13).

All accounts must be closely consulted and carefully compared since no single journal recounts the full narrative of either expedition. Each journal contains some glaring omissions which add interest to the quest for full knowledge of the voyages. Some omissions may divulge insights into the character of their authors. Again, only a few examples are permitted here.

On the 1774 voyage from San Blas to San Diego, neither Pérez nor Martínez confided to his journal that he was ill. Fathers Crespi and Peña did not join the expedition until the *Santiago* arrived in Monterey. Father Serra, who was a passenger aboard the frigate as far north as San Diego, however, subsequently disclosed in a letter to Father Antonio Zamudio in Mexico that both Pérez and Martínez had been quite ill for several days. Perhaps the Spanish code of conduct then in vogue motivated each officer to mitigate or omit all references to weakness or infirmity.

Hezeta, curiously, omitted from his journal any references at all to the death and burial at sea of old Juan Pérez after the *Santiago* and the *Sonora* departed Monterey bound for San Blas on the homeward leg of the 1775 expedition. The clerics, Fathers Campa and Sierra, however, took pains to record the passing and the funeral of the venerable pilot (14). It is rather apparent from this omission and revelations elsewhere that Bruno de Hezeta and Juan Pérez were not boon comrades.

From the foregoing, it should be clear that much documentation exists by which the interested scholar can rescue a splendid chapter in American history from the obscurity in which it has too long languished.

#### REFERENCES AND NOTES

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