

## **WAS NEW SPAIN REALLY FIRST?: REREADING JUAN PEREZ'S 1774 EXPEDITION TO HAIDA GWAII<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract / Résumé**

In 1774, New Spain set its sights on what lay north of San Francisco. Much was at stake since the British and the Russians were both pioneering exploration of western North America. A general assumption maintains the Spanish were the first Europeans to explore that coastal region. Juan Perez, during his 1774 expedition on the *Santiago*, reveals he thought differently. Perez's version of the encounter and the evidence he provides in his journal, as well as some Haida ethnographic history, suggest that Spain was not first.

En 1774, la Nouvelle-Espagne jette son dévolu sur les territoires situés au nord de San Francisco. Les enjeux sont importants, car les Britanniques et les Russes ont déjà entrepris d'explorer la partie ouest de l'Amérique du Nord. Une hypothèse commune maintient que les Espagnols ont été les premiers Européens à explorer la région de la côte ouest. Au cours de son expédition en 1774 sur le navire *Santiago*, Juan Perez indique qu'il pense différemment. La version de Perez de ses rencontres et les preuves qu'il fournit dans son journal, auxquelles il faut ajouter des éléments d'histoire ethnographique des Haïdas, semblent indiquer que les Espagnols n'ont pas été les premiers à explorer la région.

## **Introduction**

As the eighteenth century sailed into its last quarter, New Spain targeted the Pacific Northwest coast of Canada and Alaska for exploration and possible colonization (Carrasco 1971:13; Shaw 1988: 25; Y Barra y Berge 1945:23).<sup>2</sup> In 1774, Juan Pérez piloted the frigate *Santiago* from Monterrey on a six month commissioned expedition to explore and claim the northern most coastline to the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel for Spain. He ultimately only made it to the 55<sup>th</sup> parallel, to Haida Gwaii (Beals 1989:79; Pérez 1774). His arrival to these islands supposedly marked the first time the Haidas, the original inhabitants of the islands, encountered Europeans (Castellanos 1983:27; Nuffield 1990:62). In accordance with the mandates of his commission, Pérez duly noted the details of geography, and most important to this paper, he described the two encounters with the Haida.

The particular mandate concerning “Yindios,” or Indians, included recording as much information as possible about the people the *Santiago* would encounter, and since the Haida were the first people encountered, not only did Pérez record the events, but four other officers recorded the meetings as well. The descriptions of the Haida prove very useful in refuting the claim that Pérez and his crew were the first Europeans to visit Haida Gwaii, the Haida name for the Queen Charlotte Islands. In this paper I will discuss Pérez’s diary as he encounters the Haida along Haida Gwaii and provide evidence of details and discrepancy in the claim of Spanish pre-eminence along the northwest coast. I will argue, based on the two days of encounters with the Haida and Pérez’s subsequent descriptions of them, that the Spanish were not the first Europeans that visited the archipelago known as “homeland” to the Haida (Gladstone & Borserio 1993:6; Johnson 1987:102; Stearns 1981:4). I also consult the other officers’ accounts to further establish my position.

## **Historical Background**

Briefly, northern expeditions along of the coasts of Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska prior to Pérez were not well documented.<sup>3</sup> Russia (Fisher 1977:2; Marakova 1975:4; Nuffield 1990:60) and Britain (Pilar de San Pío 1992:85) had accounts of venturing along these coasts but their lack of documentation allowed Pérez to privilege the Spanish right for surveying and claiming<sup>4</sup> the Northwest coast. Four other officers kept accounts as well: Pilot Francisco Antonio Mourelle, Esteban José Martínez, the second officer, and the chaplains Friar Tomás de la Peña and Friar Juan Crespi. Though all these officers kept journals, they may have acceded to Pérez’s notes at times for some of their

details (Beals 1989:4). Because of the diaries and letters to the Viceroy Bucareli, it is from this date that the coast from Mexico to Alaska becomes “California” in subsequent Spanish writings (Carrasco 1988:136; Quijano 1967:455).

The commissioned voyage originated on January 24 in San Blas, Mexico. Both the previous viceroy as well as Viceroy Bucareli (de Croix 1960:126) had interest in expediting exploration of the north coast (Itebide 1986:81; Quijano 1967:385) and Bucareli charged Pérez to explore and formally claim any lands suitable for Spanish possession. Bucareli explicitly instructed,

el alférez de fragata graduado D. Juan Pérez, primer piloto de los de número de el Departamento de San Blas, a cuyo cuidado he puesto la expedición de los Descubrimientos siguiendo la costa de Monterrey a el Norte.... (Bucareli, qtd in Pilar de San Pio 1992:123)

the ensign of the frigate grade Don Juan Pérez, first pilot of the number of the Department of San Blas, whom is charged in this expedition to possess land discovered continuing from the coast of Monterrey and northward.

These extremely detailed instructions<sup>5</sup> included a total of thirty-two articles. This first article is perhaps the most interesting because it reveals a disguised sense of concern for the condition of the souls of the Coastal inhabitants. Bucareli’s expresses the sentiment,

...se derrame en ellos la luz del Evangelio con la Conquista Espiritual, que les separe de las tinieblas de la Ydolatía en que viven, y les enseñe el camino de la Salvación eterena. Que son las verdaderas intenciones que en tales empresas animan al piadoso Real corazón de S.M. (Bucareli, in Ybarra y Berge 1945:31)

...to spread among them the light of the Gospel (good news) by the spiritual conquest, which separates them from the darkness of idolatry in their lives, and to teach them the way of eternal salvation. These are the true motives of your pious merciful heart that move His Majesty to undertake the fallen souls. (Servin 1961:239)

Bucareli references the King’s merciful heart as the impetus to begin exploration and claiming possession of the coast in order to provide the light of the gospel to the Coastal inhabitants. To meet this imperative, the two priests, Friar Juan Crespi and Friar Tomás de la Peña, accompanied Pérez as missionaries on the voyage. Their activities included being part of the captain’s required daily reading of the daily events as well as keeping their own records as per Bucareli’s orders.

A glaring contradiction to the “light of the Gospel” is evident in that Bucareli’s own intentions for expansion begins with the spiritual enlightenment of the Indians as he claims their land for the King of Spain, but in his directives he explicitly orders Pérez to avoid any foreign contact, and if it is not avoidable, to only state the intention and purpose of the ship as being to sail to Monterrey (Servin 1961:240-1). If pressed further, Pérez must state that the reason he is further north is because the weather has taken him off course. The result is that the decreed deception occults the Gospel and only manifests that far from a spiritual motivation, the expeditions are a result of a lesser human quality, that of colonization.

Bucareli’s detailed articles reflect his concern that other nations’ may have already had expeditions to the area (Carrasco 1971:18; Hilton 1981:41). With that in mind, he commissioned Pérez,

From the very moment the he [Pérez] sets sail from San Blas, he will keep an exact logbook of all the navigational details, noting the winds, courses, shoals, landmarks, etc., and determining the position of the sun whenever possible. Thus, nothing should be missing from the logbook that may be instructive or may furnish information and data for the voyage. Every day that he is able to do so, he will read the daily entry which is written to the ranking officers of the packet boat; and at the end of what has been read, a certified statement should be made, attesting to the truth of the events entered. If anyone should make any observations, he is to make note of it and have it signed by everyone, so that the account of the events may be more authentically attested to. (Servin 1961:242)

The last line provides salient insight to the underlying purpose of the voyage, mainly that Spanish presence and rights to the newly “discovered” lands would be “authentically” established by the records kept by Pérez and his crew. It is with this commission that Pérez set sail and copiously notes the daily events throughout the journey.

Bucareli also had very specific details for Pérez to follow concerning any contact with foreign settlements (Beals 1981:26). Bucareli’s own words warrant investigation as he commands, “If any foreign settlements should be discovered, he will sail farther north before disembarking and beginning the ceremony of possession taking...” (Servin 1961:240). Bucareli summarizes the matter as he writes:

Anque las ornes. de la Corte mandaban expresamente que se desalojasen de grado o por fuerza qualesquier extranjeros que se hallasen establec dos en estos parajes, el Virrey previene en su instrucción un partido más prudente

y fué que en el caso de encontrar algún establecimiento su subiese más al N. y se tomara posesión del todo en Latd. más Seten. a fin de poder alegar este derecho cuando conviniese. (Ybarra y Berge 1945:31)

Notwithstanding, the court expressly orders to dispossess willingly or by necessity any foreign establishment found in those two places. The Viceroy prepared in his instruction a very prudent agreement and in case of encountering some establishment, to go farther north and entirely take possession of the latitude farther north in order to secure that right [of possession] when convenient.

Should Pérez have come into contact with any foreign settlements, he was then to proceed north according to the prescribed manner that Bucareli suggested and claim possession of the land. The ceremony would establish the Spanish rights to possession and preclude any other European possession of the area. The act of claiming possession would then secure the land, its resources, and the inhabitants as subject to the ownership and rule of the King of Spain (Pilar de San Pío 1990:126). Any international dispute that might have then occurred would surely have favored Spain according to the right of Pérez's documented voyage (Nuffield 1990:21).

With Spain having more than two centuries of such experiences, Pérez had to be very careful when he came upon any Indian tribes along the coast. Bucareli's charge was very inclusive of details of what to do when he contacted any Indians. He was to give them prearranged gifts, treat them "affectionately," and record their customs characteristics, religion, political organization and any other aspects he deemed important to note. It was important to maintain a friendly demeanor in order to ensure later peaceful returns to the area (Servin 1961:242). As will be revealed later, this charge was not followed as completely as it should have been when he encountered the Haida and their land.

The first port the Santiago harbored at was San Diego and Pérez harbored there from March 11th to April 6th. Departing from San Diego on April 6th, the Santiago arrived in the designated port of Monterrey on May 7th, and harbored there until June 11th. Upon departure from Monterrey, Pérez then begins his new diary,<sup>6</sup>

Continuacion del Diario que formó el Al Férrez graduado de Fragata Don Juan Pérez, Primer Piloto del Departamento de S. Blas, con la titulada Santiago, alias La Nueve Galicia de su mando, que comprehende su salida de Monterrey á explorar la Costa Septentrional, y su regreso á este propio Puerte en 26 de Agosto de este año de 1774. (Juan Pérez 1774)

Continuation of the diary kept by acting ensign, frigate grade, Don Juan Pérez, first pilot of the Department of San Blas, with the so-called *Santiago*, also known as the *New Galacia*, under his command, which covers his departure from Monterrey to explore the North coast, and his return to this original port on August 26, in this year 1774.

The entry provides insight to the nature of the voyage and reveals Pérez's adherence to Bucareli's charge to keep copious accounts of the journey. The fact that Bucareli charged Pérez to keep strict accounts is immediately evident in the first clause as Pérez conforms to keeping a diary of the journey. Pérez's adherence to the totality of the charge is succinctly summarized in the fact that the diary entries include the departure from and return to Monterrey rather than San Blas, Mexico. Literally everything from the departure from Monterrey to the return to the designated port should have been in the diary, all in accordance to Bucareli's charge. Though Pérez mentions Monterrey as his original port and destination of return, he ultimately returned to San Blas on November 5 from whence he began the voyage (Hilton 1992:159).

### **Departure From Monterrey**

The background to the voyage of the *Santiago* reveals the expansion of the Spanish colony as the ultimate motive for its departure from Monterrey, its designated port (Hilton 1981:41; Nuffield 1990:60; Pilar de San Pío 1990:50). The need to secure the Spanish presence in the northern coastal waters and to claim possession of the territory becomes strongly motivated by reports and fear of encroaching exploration by the Russians and the English. Thus, Pérez's departure, complete with mandates and details, begins an important historical account of navigation to the Northwest coast.

Of the Viceroy's orders to Pérez, according to article XXV, Pérez had to keep accurate measurements of the voyage. Perhaps one of the more mundane measures, though important, is the daily observed latitude which allowed a recording of the ship's position. The sun provided the information of degrees and minutes of latitude determined by the sun's noon position (Beals 1989:139). Since the observed latitude requires good weather, on days that it was raining or cloudy, a plot of the distance and direction sailed determined the latitude and minutes of the *Santiago*. At times Pérez implemented this procedure, known as dead reckoning, as well as observed latitude recordings in order to keep more accurate records and to verify the correctness of the calculations.

After the *Santiago* departed from Monterrey on June 11, the first day that it was possible to do an observed latitude reading was June 18.

The recorded daily positions then continue until July 18, when they sighted Ha'ada Gwaii. There was a gap of the ship's positioning from July 18-22. For the next two days, July 23-24, the positioning is resumed, but then there was another recording gap of seven days. Pérez resumed the records again on July 31 until August 5. There would be no more records of observed latitude or dead reckoning for the rest of the expedition. Pérez and the other officers offer no explanation for the gaps. The records reveal selective adherence to reckoning the ships position on a daily basis, and though the records reveal some problems,<sup>7</sup> Pérez and his officers maintained a very spurious log of the ship's position.

Interestingly, and for unknown reasons, Pérez was selective in the articles of instruction he followed and even the ones he did follow, he seemingly followed to his own pleasure or discretion as I will discuss further in the next section.

## **Describing the Haida**

### **The First Encounter**

After thirty-four days of voyaging west-northwest, the Santiago's fresh water supply began to dwindle. For a couple of days the course changed directly north. On July 15th Pérez called a meeting with the pilot and the ship's officers to discuss the water supply problem. The next day, in light of the water supply problem, he ordered the course to northeast in order "fall in with the coast." As the Santiago approached the coast, poor weather limited his observation of the horizons. On the 17th, Pérez noted signs of land in the water and mentioned the Chinese name for the kelp, "porras," that he saw, noting that this kind of growth happens approximately 80-100 leagues from the coast (Beals 1989:74; Cutter 1969:153). The next day, the Santiago sailed into view of Ha'ada Gwaii and Pérez calmly recorded "At 11 we saw the coast, nothing more new." A very small note, considering it had been 38 days since the ship's crew had seen land. On the Tuesday, the 19th, the Santiago sailed within three leagues of the coast, but the weather, overcast and foggy, suffered Pérez to order and maintain a distance of ten leagues from shore.

It was Wednesday, July 20, when Pérez mentioned sight of a smoke and later on in the afternoon, the first contact with the Haida. Pérez's account of these two days, filled with descriptions of the land and the people he encountered, were lengthy. Concerning the first day's encounter he wrote:

*Day 19 to Wednesday 20 of July 1774<sup>8</sup>*

We proceeded with four jib sails and the main top stay-sail with one reefing, turning to a course ENE the wind fresh out of the SE endeavoring to a point surrounded by the sea.

It jutted out from an extended hill, was about 3 leagues of length, appeared divided from the coast and appeared like an island. I gave it the name Santa Margarita. From the so-called hill and coast came much smoke. At 3:00 in the afternoon we descried 3 canoes coming towards us. At 4:30 they arrived along side. In the interim, we took the occasion to experiment, test the quality of the people and things. First, the men were of good stature of body, well formed and smiling expressions, beautiful eyes, and good looking; the hair tied, and compared to fashion of a wig with a tail. Some wore it tied in the back and had beards and moustaches in the fashion of the Chinese people. The first action they did when they approached within a gunshot of the ship was to begin to sing their motet in unison and cast feathers in the water, as the Indians do at the Santa Barbara Channel, but these use a particular signal that is not used by the others of the Channel, nor those under our rule. Their arms were open making a cross, and put their arms on the other's bosom in the same manner, an appropriate sign of their peacefulness. From what has been experienced with them, they are very enlivened to trade and to sell according to the acuity of their dealings with us, because before they would give any trifles, they had to hold in their hands the items of their dealings, considering and satisfying their likes with a look, and if pleased, to ask for more, making it understood that if we did not give more, they would not pay. Noticing this, one could believe that they have had frequent commerce amongst them. The canoes are very well made. They are of one piece, but for a farca on the gunwale. They are very swift. The Indians row with a polished oar or paddle one and a half varas<sup>9</sup> long. All their trade is reduced to giving pelts of animals such as sea wolf, otter, and bears. They also have a special white wool and I don't know the species of animal that produces the wool they extract. They weave beautiful blankets and I collected four. They are not large, but are well woven and wrought. Of the three canoes I referred to, the largest carried 9 men, and would measure 24 codos<sup>10</sup> of length, and 4 of width. The others carried 7 men; I did not note any weapons. They invited us by signs to go ashore, and we communicated by signs that the next day we would go there. With this they retired at 5 in the afternoon to the shore.

The length of the hill that I mentioned runs north-south,



for at 6:30 in the afternoon, it bore from me 5 leagues of distance.

At nightfall the horizons were extremely overcast; and it was raining. I ordered to take a second reefing, and in this condition we followed on course of SW 1/4W. At 10:00 it was calm. At 11:00 the wind raised fresh out of the SE such that at 12:00, I ordered to furl the topsails. At dawn it was calm somewhat, which gave opportunity to use the topsails, and to turn the course to the shore. At 11:30 we arrived near the Point of Santa Margarita in order to anchor, if we encountered a convenient place. And being beyond the referred to point, we encountered a furious current, which, if we were not cautious, would have athwarted the ship. It had so much force that even moving with the topsails and foresail with a strong wind, we were hardly able to keep the sails stiff because of the greater flow of the current.

And thus concludes this day. Without more novelty thanks to God.

The first day of encountering the Haidas begins with the routine entry “We proceeded...” and Pérez then continues to supply important details concerning the manner of sailing, “with four jibsails and the main topsail with one reefing.” At this point Pérez seems to adhere to Bucareli’s charge “to keep an exact logbook” as he encounters Haida Gwaii. Perhaps one the most important factor of the first day’s meeting with the Haida concerns the naming of the landmarks and islands that they have described. Pérez immediately sets out to name the point that they are slowly nearing as Punta de Santa Margarita. He provides the first recorded European name for any of the over 160 different islands in the chain of the Haida homeland since part of the “claim” procedures would of course include giving appropriate names to the newly claimed lands. He suggests the point appears as an island and he is right, but he then erroneously suggests it was part of the larger Graham Island that ultimately continues and forms a point. Due to the weather conditions, it may have been too foggy to correctly distinguish the fact that it was indeed an island and not just a point of the mainland. With the newly given Spanish name, Pérez prepares to establish the rights of Spain to the islands.

Pérez then begins to record a series of observations of and about the Haida. The physical description of the Haida begins with the sighting of the three canoes, most likely from Kuista-“Where-the-trail-ends-town” (Swanton 1905:281), which ventured to meet with the Santiago

and its crew. In describing the Haida men, Pérez notes that they “were of good stature, well formed, a smiling face, beautiful eyes and good looking.” In noticing their hair, it reminded him of a wig, the length of which was tied back. In a piquant observation, he noted men who had beards and moustaches similar to the Chinese. Importantly, he does not record the eye color (though he mentions they have beautiful eyes) or skin pigmentation (but he does note they are good looking) though they will be important observations for the next day.

Pérez carefully observed Haida mannerisms and described them as they began to sing as soon as they came within a musket shot of the ship. It was most likely a welcome song. As they came closer, they cast feathers on the water similar to the Santa Barbara Channel Indians. The feathers were probably bald eagle feathers/eagle down and goose down, but most definitely eagle feathers/down since eagles are one of the more esteemed bird feathers among the Haida (Collison 1981:90). The Haida then opened their arms and formed a cross shaped sign with their opened hands on the chest of the person next to them. Pérez interpreted this sign as an indication of their peacefulness since he could see they had no weapons. As the Haida began to trade, he suggested that they had had much experience with others due the brisk manner in which the Haida dealt with the crew. As an example of their adeptness in trade, the Haida men would not exchange anything until they had what they desired in their hands, and if they liked what they received, they would not give in return until they were given more. Using pelts of otters, seals, and bears, the Haida engaged in trade. Pérez also noted they had very well made small blankets of which he acquired four. He also noted a white wool and could not discern what animal produced it.

Pérez’s keen sailor’s eye observed the Haida canoes and he noted their structure and the paddles that the men used. He commented on the length, width, its construction and the fact that the Haida men were very adept at handling the canoes. He specifically stated that the canoes were swift and accounted for the number of men in each canoe. He calmly reported seeing no weapons noted among the Haida, a very important note since as part of his mandates, Pérez was to be extremely cautious in dealings with the Indians he encountered. He mentioned that the Haida used signs to invite the crew ashore and he informed the Haida that the crew would go ashore the next day, but the weather would prevent any further contact with this group as the Santiago would then continue its journey south. Since no one spoke on board the Santiago spoke Haida, and no Haidas spoke Spanish, the record of their interaction offers little information about how they understood one another. Though Haida used signs and gestures, Pérez does not indicate if the

Spanish do the same. Nor does he explain how he could understand the signs the Haida used to communicate their desire for welcoming the visitors ashore. The Haida, according to Pérez's entry, after having their hospitality refused, then withdrew back to the shore after only 30 minutes of contact.

Pérez ends the day's observation by describing the weather, adding specific sailing details that were necessary because of the weather. He provides a detailed comment on a powerful current that almost turned the ship around perhaps as justification for not going ashore. This explanation would have to suffice since it was this reason they did not go ashore and claim the land as was the mandate. The last entry of the day can be misconstrued to suggest that nothing new happened at all as he ends with "And thus concludes this day. Without more novelty thanks to God," but the context would be better understood that in light of all that he has already recorded for that day, nothing more than what he has written has occurred. After thirty-four days on the ocean, the comment seemed to have welcomed such lively interaction with other humans.

### **The Second Encounter**

The Santiago is now ready to encounter the second Haida group as it journeys south. His journal entry for that second encounter has a full narrative of the event, including two notes<sup>11</sup> after the daily entry. Pérez records the next day's account with a different beginning, that is, with less focus on the details of maritime jargon. He writes:

*Day 20 to Thursday 21 of July 1774*

Considering that we could not win anything against the swiftness of the current we tried to remove ourselves somewhat, and being at a moderate distance (from shore) the wind died. Some canoes of Indians came into view, and seeing that we were not making any headway, they drew near to us. They began negotiating trade with our crew, but first they sang and they danced and they threw feathers in the air. All the rest of the afternoon 21 canoes came of different sizes. In the greatest of them came an old man appearing to be a King or Captain. It was from 25 to 30 codos of length, and 10 codos wide. It carried 24 to 30 Indians, and in the others some had 9, others 15, and others 7. All the people were stocky, good-looking as well, and white skinned in their features; most of them have blue eyes. Their hair is tied like the Spanish, and some wear a shoulder strap like soldiers, likewise those who wear moustaches and have beards. The aforementioned King or Captain carried his tambourine and

sonata but first they began dancing and singing. Then they began to trade with otter, wolf, and bear skins which the crew gathered a sufficient number for some old clothes. They also exchanged some blankets, beautifully woven and fabricated, according to what I saw, on a loom. I gathered some as well. I noticed some things of iron in the canoes, like instruments of cutting as well as a half a bayonet, and a fragment of a sword. Knives do not satisfy them, and by signs they want large swords or machetes in exchange for some pelts. But at last, they settled for some knives that the people gave. They carried some small wooden boxes for keeping things. I uttered a thousand questions, but they did not understand me or my signs. Some of our crew leaped in their canoes, and two then came aboard to whom gifts were given of bread and cheese as well as some trinkets to make them content. Meanwhile, I had hope that the weather would allow me to go ashore. Those who went aboard the canoes were hugged and kissed as a sign of friendship. They invited them to eat and to sleep on shore, saying they had much to eat and to drink.

Among the 21 canoes, we saw two full of woman with some children on their bosom, and other older children. They were all good looking, white, and blonde, many of them wore bracelets of iron and copper and some headbands of the same. They wear clothes of pelts tailor fit to their body. The lower lip in the middle has a hole, and in it they put a colored shell that strikes on the nose when they speak, but they have regular movement. Those that wore it are apparently married, because some of the young girls were not wearing it. They are of a good build, like the men. Finally, they furnished evidence indicating their docility and good disposition because it was manifested in their actions. It was afternoon and everyone was pleased, I less so because I wanted to anchor but I could not get help from the wind. I was ill-humored and more so because the without wind, I was separated from the coast because of the furious current flow. I had thought about anchoring in a small cove formed by the coast sheltered from all the winds, but since the current and the winds prohibited me, I had to yield to the will of God. The aforementioned cove is sheltered from the winds of the south, SW, W and NW because the entrance and outlet are NE, SW.

The afternoon's conclusion retired the canoes with a great clamor, they were contented having trading with us, and we were unhappy to see that the current failed us. Though I couldn't go ashore, I had the pleasure of seeing the land closely and will be reviewing it as described in the following.

The second day of contact with the Haida begins with Pérez's comment concerning the inability to accomplish anything against the current they were in. He then notes that a number of canoes came into view from the island known as Langara on most current maps (Pilar de San Pío 127), but referred to as *K' áys Gwáay*, translated as North Island, by the Haidas (Cogo & Cogo 1983:35; Collison 1981:248; Swanton 1905:87). As the Haida saw the Santiago not making any headway, they ventured to approach the ship. There are definite similarities in the two meetings. Not only do the Haidas sing and cast feathers on the water like the Haidas in the first encounter, this group also dances. Pérez does not mention the seeing sign that the first group made (hands spread out across the others' chest), but he adds that 21 canoes approached the Santiago that afternoon. An important missing element is the exact time of when the events took place, a detail that should have been noted as part of the mandates and at the very least, as part of the ship's log. Pérez does mention that interaction and trading transpired at some point in the afternoon and continued until the "close of evening." It cannot be clear if this "close of evening" refers to when it began getting dark, or if it is simply an hourly tradition that after 6:00 p.m., it is considered evening. The "close of evening" is ambiguous because there are at least three different interpretations for the phrase which would affect the amount of trade and contact time from as little as two hours to as many as six.<sup>12</sup>

In a similar fashion to the first encounter, Pérez describes the people in the canoes. He notices an old man and suggests must be the king or the captain, but spends more time describing the length, width, and capacity of the canoe he is in. He notes the number of Haidas in the various canoes, with special attention to the fact that the old man's canoe carries the most of all, 20-24 people. The rest, he remarks, carry 7, 9, or 15 Haidas. He then describes the Haida men as "stocky, and good-looking as well, white in appearance as well as in their features; most of them have blue eyes, their hair is tied like the Spanish, and some wear a shoulder strap like soldiers, likewise those who wear moustaches and have beards." While it is curious that the Haidas have blue eyes, it may simply be a matter of poor color recognition on Perez's part since brown is the dominant eye color among Haidas at this time. The moustaches

and beards do not present much problem since coastal Indians at that time sported goatees, and that would account for the observation of men with beards.

He writes of the women that they “were all good looking, white, and blonde.” He notes some of the women having nursing infants at their breast. He describes the labrets that adorned some of the women and notes that though the colored shells are seemingly large and hits their nose as they talk, it does not impede their speech. Since some of the younger women do not have any labrets, he suggests that only the married women adorn themselves with the devices. He also notices they wear pelts tailored to their bodies. Pérez concludes with the physical characteristics of the women by saying they are “They are of a good build, like the men.”

In relation to the trading, this second village had a similar methodology to the first, using pelts of sea otters, wolves, and bears as barter. The crew gave their old clothes in exchange for “plenty of pelts.” Apparently knives were not to pleasing to these Haida, and though they evidently desired swords or machetés, they settled for knives. The Haida also traded with blankets Pérez thought were made on a loom. The final aspect of trade revealed two Haidas that went aboard the Santiago and received gifts of cheese, bread, and glass beads. The Haidas departed with great clamor and the trading session ended.

Pérez mentions that some of his crew jumped into the canoes whom the Haida hugged and kissed as a sign of friendship, and then invited ashore to eat and sleep. The Haidas somehow communicated that they had plenty of food and drink on shore, but other than the two who jumped on into the Haida canoes, the crew did not venture off the ship. The interaction made everyone seemingly jovial as Pérez notes that everyone was cheerful, though he was not so pleased due to the fact that he could not anchor the ship.

Pérez made keener observations of this group, even though there were much more of them than the first encounter. He noticed the old man, whom Pérez thought to be a king or captain, holding a tambourine and jingling it as they sang and danced. He recorded that the women wore iron and copper bracelets and rings. He saw some small wooden boxes used for storage. And finally, he saw iron instruments, one that resembled a half a bayonet and another that was piece of a sword. It would be the last time Pérez would see the Haida, and though he would be on another voyage the following year for the same reason, he would not make it back to Haida Gwaii.

The conclusion of this daily entry provides details of the geography and the weather that prevented the ship from anchoring and the men

from going ashore. He laments the fact that he could not or did not go ashore, but finds consolation in viewing and describing the coast at close range in the first note of the day's observation. In the day's final note, Pérez provided pertinent information for his actions which he would have to account for to Bucareli. He explains:

As I pondered the inconsistencies and confusion of the weather, as well as the uncertainty of an encounter of a place more North where we could anchor and get water, then on the day of cutting the ration, I hastened to stick to returning, I determined not to pass further, and from this latitude to follow the coast back to Monterrey accomplishing the commands to see if I encounter a place where I could harbor, to practice that which was ordered of me by Your Excellency supposing weather and wind permit because it is impossible to be able to explain all that befell us with the bad weather. God give me good weather.

In perhaps the longest sentence of his journal, Pérez uses the second and final note of the daily entry to account for his actions. Since he did not make it to 60<sup>th</sup> parallel, Pérez must now provide very convincing reasons for his actions. Since his commission not only included reaching the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel, but claiming the land for God and Spain, he must have some very good reasons for not landing. The first reason reflects the impact of the weather which was very poor and caused confusion as he tried to find a suitable location to anchor and get more water. The water supply plays a role again in the next reason as he discusses the low water supply which, even if the daily rations were cut, would not be enough to return to Monterrey. Pérez, mindful of Bucareli's orders, acknowledges that his turning back to Monterrey included following the coast and claiming the land for Spain, but he adds that all his actions are weather permitting. His penultimate comment suggests that the all that has happened to the Santiago due to the weather is not possible to put into words and he ends the daily account with a petition that "God grant me good weather."

The Santiago's second and final contact with the Haida is now over. Though the Santiago would sail south along Haida Gwaii's east coast for another week, Pérez would not anchor or go ashore seemingly for reasons of weather. On July 23 he sights a mountain chain and records beautiful weather and calm seas, yet does not venture ashore for water or an act of possession. An apprentice seaman dies the next day and has burial at sea the following morning. Pérez's final observations of Haida Gwaii describes the poor weather and its effect on the Santiago's safety. In a note for the final entry concerning Haida Gwaii, July 29, Pérez

corrects his latitude, provides the length of distance traveled from the last dead reckoning and continues his journey southward to Monterrey.

### **Evidence, Discussion, and Comments**

As mentioned in my introduction, the common assumption is that the Spanish were the first Europeans to encounter the Haida and Haida Gwaii. I turn now to Pérez's own observations to address the historical fact. On the first day of contact, Pérez notes<sup>13</sup> that the Haidas willingly approach the Santiago and Beals (1989:241) suggests that they are from a village on *K'áys Gwaay*, North Island. Pérez observes their approach and notices that the Haida cast feathers on the water as they close in nearer to the ship, similar to the Santa Barbara Channel Indians except that the Haida open their arms and place them onto the chest of the person next to them, forming a cross. He then physically describes them as having "good stature, well formed, smiling faces, beautiful eyes, and good looking," but he does not comment on their skin color, though the Friar accounts do (Bolton 1929:324).<sup>14</sup> He does notice that they had long hair tied in the back and that they adorned beards and moustaches as the Chinese. Pérez records seeing no weapons aboard the canoes, an important feature to record.

As they approach within a musket shot, he observes them sing loudly and with their smiling faces, they begin trading with the crew. Pérez's own comment on their vivacity for trading suggests that they have had much experience with such vessels because they deal very briskly with the crew as they trade. The Haida exchanged seal, sea otter, and bear skins, as well as blankets in return for what Pérez vaguely refers to as "trifles." The Haida held what they wanted in order to be satisfied with it before giving anything in return. Pérez comments on this characteristic and states his contention that "one could believe that they have had frequent commerce amongst them."

The comment concerning the trade is seemingly an innocent observation that, when pondered more deeply, reveals a characteristic learned over a period time. The fact that the Haida seem to have frequent commerce among them only points to previous contact with other European ships and that the Haida's were experienced with such contact and trade. Historically, the coastal tribes had an intricate trade route with each other and though the Haida had frequent contact with the neighboring Tshimshian, Tlingit, Nisg'a, Kwakuitl, Bella Bella, and Bella Coola (Cogo & Cogo 1983:40; Collison 99), trade with these groups rarely occurred in Haida territory. The Haida usually canoed into their neighbor's territory when trading (Drucker 1963:143; Swanton 1905:163). When any of these peoples came to Haida Gwaii, it would usually be through invitation to a



potlatch or perhaps in an aggressive attack on a village, but rarely for trade purposes (Cogo & Cogo 1983:41; Collison 1981:89,93). Pérez's comment suggests that they are used to trading with foreign vessels because of their demeanor, willingness, and adeptness in trade.

The first encounter occurs only for approximately thirty minutes, according to Pérez, but the Friar accounts suggest that the canoes came one at a time up until the end of the evening. The Haida invite the crew ashore only to end the trading session with the Captain's assurance that the crew would go ashore the following day. The invitation ashore would have been a festive occasion with welcoming ceremonies and much celebration as soon they would have set foot on Haida Gwaii (Cogo & Cogo 1983:26; Swanton 1905:163).

The second account of contact provides even further evidence of the previous European contact. Pérez describes the Haidas, once again, with much more detail in this second account even though there are 21 canoes instead of just three. These people are from the village of Kuista and the situation is similar in that the Haidas once again must come along side the Santiago. As they approach, they begin to sing and cast feathers on the water, but this time they also dance. Pérez does not mention seeing the sign that the first group made with their open arms. As he describes them physically, he observes that these Haida are "stocky, and good-looking as well, white in appearance as well as in their features; most of them have blue eyes, their hair is tied like the Spanish, and some wear a shoulder strap like soldiers, likewise those who wear moustaches and have beards." While it may be interesting to read that these Haida had blue eyes, as he describes the women, even more fascinating details unfold.

He writes that the women "were all good looking, white, and blonde." Pérez also provides sufficient details concerning the labrets and their attire. It is still rather unbelievable that he is describing the Haidas, but in the beginning of his description, he notes that the largest canoe approaching holds 20-24 "Indians," so it is sure that he is describing the Haida. Subsequent Spanish and British expeditions would also describe the Haida as having white skin (Drew 1982:22; Drucker 1963:23; Kendrick 1985:34), though the blue eyes and blonde hair are missing from their descriptions. It is important to note that the Spanish "rubios," for blonde, has various degrees of shade important to for this context. Anything from light blonde to brown hair meets the standard for "rubios" in Spanish, so the account having reference to blondes may in fact mean that their hair was brown, not blonde (Garza-Appler 1990).

In addressing the trade, Pérez notices that these Haida are more interested in swords or machetes as barter items. He mentions that the

crew gave old clothes for the animal pelts which transgresses the articles XV and XX in which Bucareli stated that the Indians should be given prearranged gifts and treated kindly and affectionately (Servin 1961:241-242). The crew members giving old clothes for the pelts does not constitute kindness nor affection. The crew also would not give the Haidas the swords or machetes they wanted, and instead, the Haidas settle for knives that originally were not pleasing to them.

The similar trade manner once again suggests that there was prior contact because it was not customary for Haidas to go and meet visitors on the water (Deans 1899:17). During potlatches, the visitors would be greeted as they came ashore with a procession of welcome and celebration ceremonies from the shore to the house (Cogo & Cogo 1983:26; Collison 1981:90). Though there is a specific ceremony of welcome once the visitors were ashore (Drew 1982:82; Halpin 1981:12), it is only when the Spanish refuse to come ashore that the Haida greet them on the water and implement the same welcome from their canoes. It must, therefore, be seen as a result of encountering other similar ships surveying the land and their crew not going ashore that the Haida learn to greet the foreign vessels and implement their astute trade mannerisms.

The most convincing evidence of the prior European contact manifests in Pérez's observation of the Haida canoe with iron objects. He suggests that the first items are instruments of cutting, then describes the second item as a half a bayonet, and the last item as a fragment of a sword. These items are not native to the Haida. In the subsequent years of contact, the Haidas ultimately name the Europeans that visited and traded with them *Yaats Ha'day* (Collison 1981:121; Stearns 1981:33). The translation of *Yaats Ha'day*, "the Iron people" (Cogo & Cogo 1983:51), offers more evidence that the presence of iron in this canoe precludes earlier European contact.

At the time Pérez visited Haida Gwaii, copper was the only valuable metal among the coastal peoples. And since copper was enormously valued among the Haida, Tlingit, Nisg'a, Tsimshian, and Kwakwaka'wakw (Halpin 1981:13), during this time, iron would have been that much more valuable (Kendrick 1985:25) and it is unlikely that the iron instruments would have been intertribally or intratribally traded or given away in a potlatch because of its scarcity. Thus, it is safe to assume that older Haida obtained the iron instruments in the canoe first hand and not merely by intertribal/intratribal trade or by a potlatch.

The final evidence of prior contact comes from the journal of a fellow officer, Mourelle, who records an idea that Pérez had concerning the presence of iron. Concerning the iron implements, Mourelle writes:  
que concepto Pérez fuesen de la gente el Capitán

Tochirikoir mandó en su Lancha en este mismo parage y jamás volvió. (Y Barra y Berge 1945:29)

that Pérez thought were from the men whom Captain Tochirikoir had sent ashore in a launch in this same place, and who never returned.

Pérez himself supports the idea that, at the very least, the Russians had been to the islands much earlier than the Spanish. While there is not much evidence of the actual event alluded to, there is a general consensus of previous encounters by Russian explorers. The consequence of Russian presence has somehow escaped the pre-eminence given to Spanish visitation to the northwest coast even though much evidence to the contrary exists.

## **Conclusion**

I have reconsidered the widely accepted assumption that the Spanish were the first Europeans to visit and meet the Haida. My challenge to that assumption, based primarily on Pérez's own diary, provided ample evidence to reconsider the voyage of the *Santiago* as the first European ship in Haida waters. First, the fact that the Haida went to meet the ship both times strongly suggests that the Haida were used to such encounters, especially in light of the fact that such actions did not occur when canoes from neighboring villages or tribes visited Haida waters. Secondly, Pérez observed the manner of trade and commented that the Haida were very adept to the process, which indicates experience not only with the process, but with the foreigners as well. Thirdly, the presence of iron instruments in the older Haida's canoe suggests direct contact with Europeans, and the term used for Europeans, *Yaats Ha'day*, "the Iron people," powerfully points to prior contact as well and confirms the fourth point of evidence. Finally, though Pérez does not include this information in his own diary, Officer Mourelle writes that Pérez thought the instruments may have been from the Russians who visited the area in 1741.

Though the controversy of who the first Europeans were to visit Haida Gwaii may seem unimportant now, it was very important then for reasons concerning colonization. But the vast evidence of Pérez's own observations reinterpreted in the light of Haida history, Haida presence, Haida language, and Haida customs challenges the conclusion that the Spanish were the first Europeans to visit Haida Gwaii.

### Notes

1. I would like to thank Old Massett Village Council for their generous support of this research. In particular, the funds 140695-0076 and 050795-0252 were most helpful. How'a.
2. The Pacific Northwest and Alaska were also being explored by the Russians and the English, and thus, establishing pre-eminence through pioneer exploration was of utmost importance to Spain.
3. Early second hand accounts suggest Spanish presence in the 1590s near Vancouver and possibly the origin of the name of Juan de Fuca Strait. English explorer Francis Drake has purported to have visited as far north as Vancouver, as well as another English voyager Thomas Cavendish, but records are only second hand and ambiguous (See Hilton 1992:22; Nuffield 1990:32).
4. The impact of the Colonial mindset is evident in the blatant disregard for the established inhabitants whose history extends back multiple millenia and whose presence was merely part and parcel of the act of possession. This European trend of claiming and possession continued globally until the middle of the twentieth century.
5. Itebide (1986:5), Villegas (1987:13), and de Solano (1991:117) provide insight to the tradition of "instructions" handed down to each successor in order to adhere to the functions of the office including the details of expected functions. The instructions the virreys received from the King of Spain empowered them to provide their own instructions to anyone commissioned for work.
6. There are various translations of Pérez's diary available, though there is no Spanish/English bilingual edition. I translated the portions in this paper myself consulting Barbudo Duarte's, *Diccionario Marítimo: Inglés-Español y Español-Inglés*, as well as Arturo Cuyos', (Et. al.) *Diccionario Revisado Inglés-Español y Español-Inglés de Appleton. Cuarta Edición*, 1956. Unless otherwise noted, I translated the relevant passages. Those not translated by me are referenced.
7. The problem of accuracy of some of the readings results in the need to correct Pérez's daily recorded latitudes, but which will only be noted here and not addressed in detail. See Beals (1989:141-144) for details.
8. The asterisks indicate the end of the page in the captain's journal.
9. This measurement is similar to a yard in length.
10. The measurement is similar to the cubit, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, approximately 18 inches.
11. Due to the length of the first note, I have included only the second note in the body of this paper because of its pertinent information.

The first note contains details of sailing and land observations that are not critical to the scope of this paper, therefore it does not appear in this essay.

12. If the phrase refers to the end of the evening, i.e. when darkness arrives, the time would be approximately 22:00 because the sun sets very late at this latitude in the summer. This could mean the trade and contact occurs for several hours, but if the phrase means the onset of evening being 18:00, the time for trade is greatly reduced to just a couple of hours.
13. Pérez's recorded his observations of the Haida arrival quite differently from the Friar accounts. Pérez writes that three canoes came to meet them, and from the context, it seems as though they were all present at the same time. Peña writes that the canoes came one at time: one just after spotting bonfires at 3:00, and the second at about 5:00, with whom they had traded, and the last one at 6:00 (Cutter 1969:157,159). Crespi's account is similar to Peña's (Cutter 225,227), but it may be that Crespi's account repeats Peña's because Peña's navigational experience far surpassed Crespi's and he merely succumbed to copying Peña's entries (see Cutter 1969:XIV).
14. The Friars both record that the Haida were white though Peña includes red complexioned. Crespi described them as "Son gente bien dispuesta, blancos, con pelo largo..." "The people are well-built, white, with long hair..." and Peña writes "Estos gentiles son bien corpulentos y gordos, de buen semblante y de color blanco y vermejo" "These people are well built, stocky, of good features-white and red in color" (Cutter 1969:224).

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