



SOVEREIGN CALIFORNIA: THE STATE'S MOST PLAUSIBLE ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO

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Since long before the Gold Rush, California had been considered by many impressionable visitors as one of the most attractive places on earth, as a region of such superb natural endowment as to have the potential to become a second paradise. In recent years more perceptive residents have come to rue the persistence of this excessively favorable reputation, as the continuing influx of ever more people has degraded the very qualities that attracted them. But California in earlier years was undeniably wonderful, harboring some of the most benign and pleasantly habitable areas on this planet.

I would like in this paper to comment on several inter-related themes:

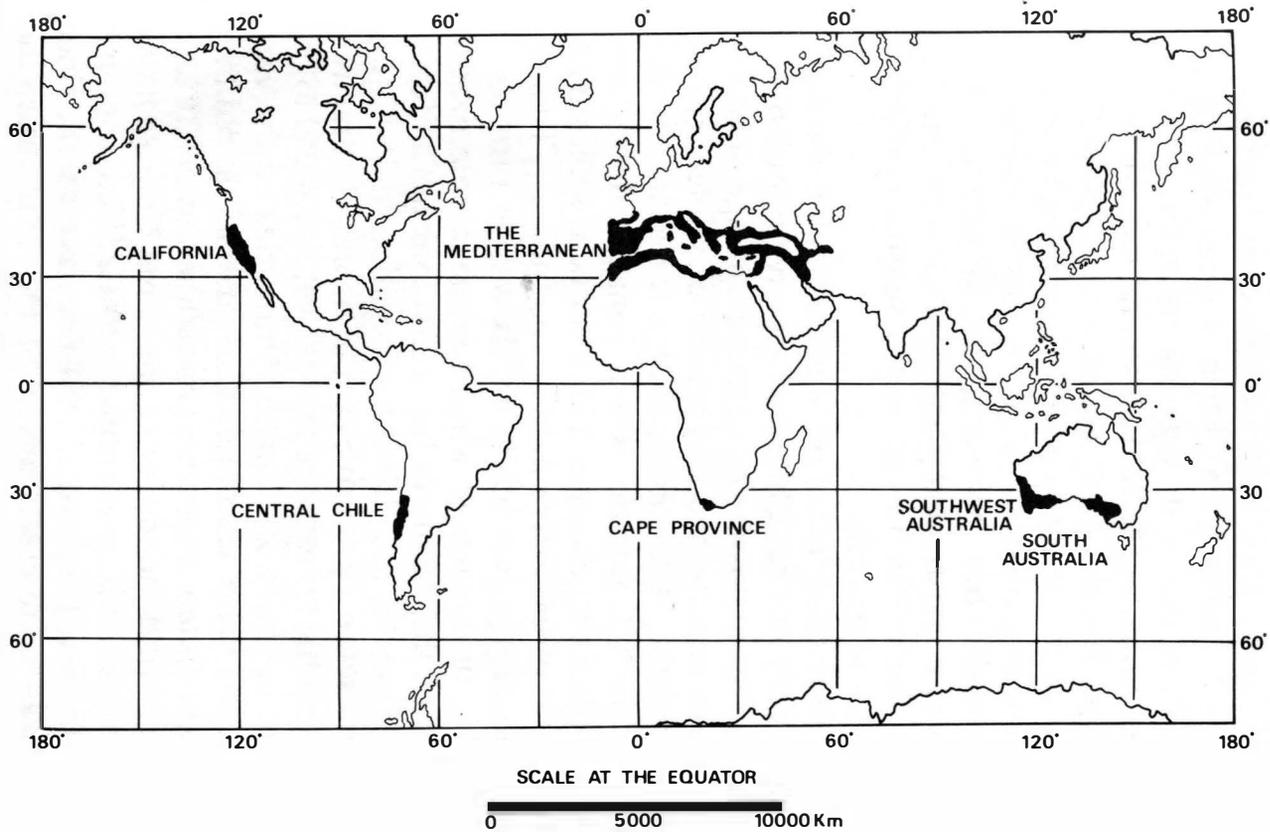
1. The environmental uniqueness of California in North America and the scarcity of similar areas elsewhere;
2. The late settlement of the area as compared to central Chile, the only climatic analogue in the Americas;

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3. The reasons for California's deep sleep, that period of 160 years in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the region, although discovered, lay completely ignored and abandoned by Europeans, to be followed by a period of unprecedented acceleration in the historic process; and finally
4. The identification of a decisive moment when California came to a strategic crossroads, and a speculative scenario of what might have happened had a royal command been obeyed.

There are in the world five areas that have what geographers call a Mediterranean climate, characterized by summer drought, winter rainfall, and generally benign temperatures (Figure 1). The largest of these by far is the classical Mediterranean itself, with the climate found mostly along the fringe areas of the inland sea, but extending into the Atlantic to include Madeira and the Canaries and eastward past the Levant into Iran. The other areas are smaller: the tip of South Africa; two separated regions in southwestern and southern Australia; a small stretch of central Chile; and part of California. In every case the influence of the Mediterranean climate is extended some distance beyond its strict limits into a surrounding fringe of drier steppe country. The climatic characteristics are the consequences of the workings of atmospheric physics within specific latitudinal limits on the western sides of continents and are fairly similar in the five cases. The adaptations of plants and animals in the five areas have many parallels. But indigenous human cultures have displayed enormous differences in content and level of sophistication.

The classical Mediterranean realm is the area in which most of the roots of Western civilization are found. The



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Figure 1. Areas of Mediterranean Climate.

history of agriculture is ancient here, and a great assemblage of plants for food and other uses has been domesticated from the native flora. Most of these native plants are cold starting, that is, they germinate in the winter and early spring, utilizing the cold season rainfall, since summers are dry. But the great age of agriculture in the region has given rise to many adjunct technologies, such as terracing and irrigation, which have greatly widened agricultural possibilities, permitting the introduction from other areas of domesticated plants that are warm starting, adapted to the utilization of warm season rainfall for germination and growth.

Of the four other areas of Mediterranean climate in the world, only central Chile had a native population of farming peoples in possession of an assemblage of domesticated plants accustomed to a regime of winter rain and summer drought. California, except for a narrow strip along the lower Colorado, was a nonagricultural area, and useful plant domesticates had never been selected and improved out of the native flora by the Indians. This absence of locally grown native foods was to turn into a considerable disadvantage when European colonization began.¹ When the Spaniards had a first look at California through the eyes of the Cabrillo expedition in 1542, this was in every sense a primitive area of no initial attractiveness. Geographic knowledge had not yet advanced to the point where the facts of climatic symmetries on the various continents were accurately known.² Little did they realize, in the sixteenth century, that if there was any area in the New World that deserved the name New Spain on geographical and climatic terms, it was California and not Mexico. In fact, they might well not have cared, since their aim was not to create a New Spain but to enrich the old one (Figure 2).

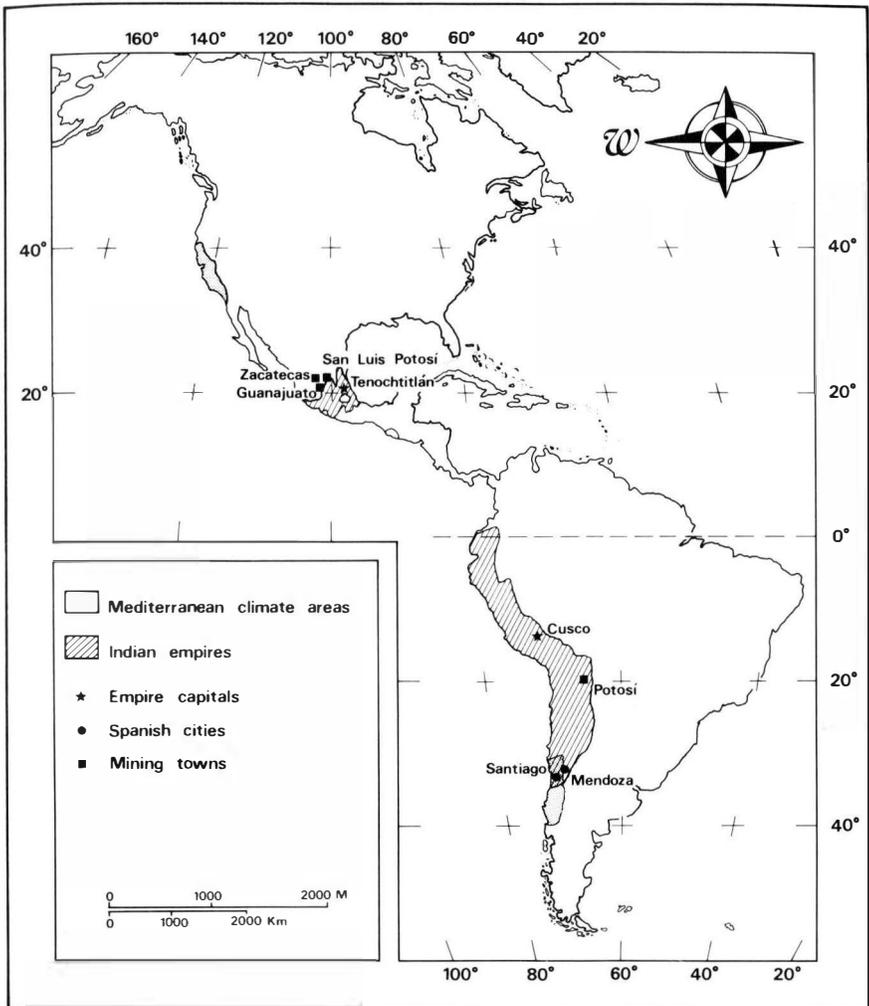


Figure 2. Location map.

One of the extraordinary contrasts between California and Chile lies in the sequence of their historic development by the Spaniards, even though their first stages were oddly similar. They were discovered about the same time, in the early 1540's, as mopping-up or supplementary operations after the conquest of the Aztecs and the Incas.³ But the Cabrillo expedition came back having

found little of interest to the Spaniards, whereas Valdivia and his successors immediately began to establish permanent settlements. Thus we have this extraordinary gap between the dates of founding of the first Spanish towns: Santiago, Chile, 1541; San Diego, California, 1769; and to pick two others in the drier country farther from the coast: Mendoza, Argentina, 1561; Riverside, California, 1870. Such a great discrepancy is really extraordinary,⁴ given the similar environmental attractions of the two areas, and it deserves an explanation.

As I see it, there are basically two explanations, and they reinforce each other. The first is rooted in the obvious fact that the initial requirement from the Spanish point of view was to eliminate the independent functioning of the native states and the power of the indigenous military forces. The Incas, with their capital at Cusco in 8° S latitude, had extended their sway along the Cordillera of the Andes and along the coast north to the equator and south into central Chile. They had expanded as far south as the Río Maule, near 36° S latitude, even beyond the heart of the region of Mediterranean climate, where they encountered the belligerent Araucanians, with whom they had not yet achieved a stable relationship when the Spaniards came. The Spaniards thus faced an unstable southern realm, *La Frontera*, just south of the Mediterranean area, and were forced to devote some attention to this region for the sake of security.

In the case of the Aztecs the area dominated was smaller, more compact, and covered a lesser latitudinal spread. Whereas the Inca Empire extended over more than 4,000 kilometers north and south, the Aztecs managed barely a fourth of that. Tenochtitlán at 18° N latitude was close to the northern boundary of the empire in a rather exposed march or border site in spite of its lake,

and the Aztecs had not yet been able even to take over the Tarascan state, located not far to the west of their own capital, let alone extend their control northwest along the Gulf of California or the Pacific Coast. The conquest of the Aztec state did not lead the Spaniards anywhere near California, which lay far beyond the limits of higher culture. The discovery of the "island" of (Baja) California by the men of Cortés was not so much the result of a military advance (as was the thrust into Chile by Valdivia) as it was a simple exploratory penetration into the unknown. In any event, southern Baja California is climatically more analogous to the Atacama than to California itself. This difference, then, between Chile and California in the extent of the important native states and the complementary military and governmental response of the Spaniards is one of the great reasons for the disparity in time of development between the two New World areas with a Mediterranean climate.

A second reason emerges in the early colonial period. The neutralization of native military strength was followed by the confiscation of native treasure and the organization of subjugated peoples to produce and pay tribute. Next came the search for the sources of native treasure and the identification of the great silver lodes, Potosí in Peru, and Zacatecas, Guanajuato, and San Luis Potosí in Mexico. Problems of providing the new mines with labor, food, work animals, and charcoal had then to be solved. In the case of Peru the main difficulties were environmental: extreme elevation, extreme aridity, and the lack of all needed supplies in the vicinity of Potosí. Supply regions were organized mainly to the south, beyond the subtropical desert, in Mediterranean Chile and east of the Andes in what is now northwestern Argentina. Thus these southern hemisphere regions of climatic at-

tractiveness and impressive economic potential were integrated almost at once into the main economic activity of colonial Peru, the mining, processing, and transportation of silver.

In Mexico the problem was not so much environmental as cultural. The elevations of the mines were much lower than in Peru, and climatic conditions much less rigorous. Unfortunately, the mines were located mostly north of the native agricultural frontier; in lands of nomadic, nonfarming Indians. Out of necessity supply areas for the mines were established by the Spaniards in the old agricultural areas farther south. As for the area of Mediterranean climate comparable to that of central Chile, it lay in southern California, 3,000 kilometers to the northwest, unknown, not identified as the true "New Spain" from the climatic point of view, and never integrated into the mainstream of Mexican colonial activity.

The English

Let us now turn briefly to the Elizabethan interlude. Drake had come into the Pacific through the Strait of Magellan, being buffeted eastward afterwards near the southern tip of South America. The Spaniards at first refused to credit this, preferring to believe that he must have found the Northwest Passage. After sailing far to the north on an unsuccessful quest of this mythical strait, he turned south once more to find a place to careen and caulk his ship. This he may have found in the lee of Point Reyes, a promontory probably seen by Cabrillo but still effectively beyond the Spanish realm (Figures 3, 4, 5).

For much of our information about Drake's circumnavigation we depend on his chaplain Francis Fletcher. Fletcher's description of the winds, fog, and cold that Drake and his crew encountered along the California

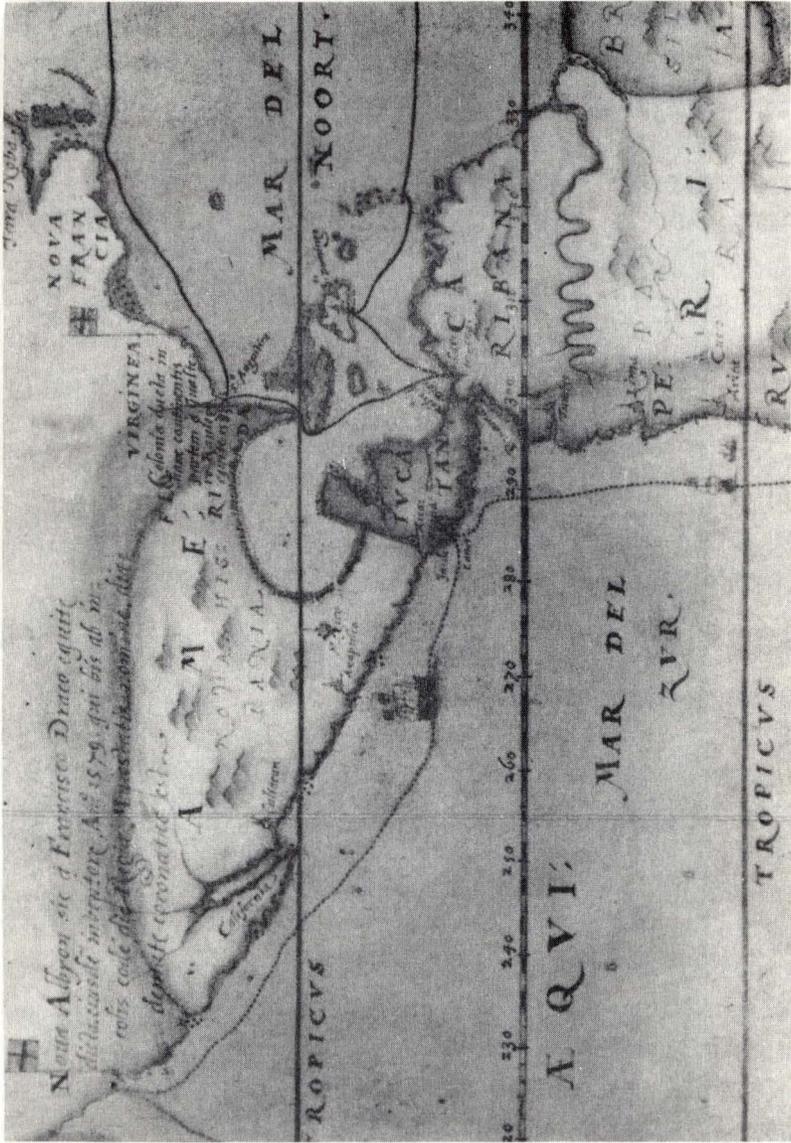


Figure 4. Drake-Mellon map, detail, showing Drake's anchorage in California and the extent of the claim of Nova Albion.



Figure 5. Map by Virginia Farrar, ca. 1670, showing the Virginia Colony in relation to Drake's *Nova Albion*.

coast is both graphic and extensive, spreading over five pages of the printed account.⁵ He speaks of “extreame and nipping cold,” of “pinching cold that did benumme them,” of “. . . many extreme gusts and flaws that beat vpon vs, which if they ceased and were still at any time, immediately upon their intermission there followed most uile, thicke, and stinking fogges, against which the sea preuailed nothing, till the gusts of wind againe removed them. . . .” He also guesses at the causes of the low temperatures, postulating that Asia and America spread out over large areas some distance to the north, so that they nearly or quite touch. From their high and snow-covered mountains cold north and northwest winds blow out,

“. . . (the constant visitants of those coasts) . . . to the infecting the whole aire with this insufferable sharpnesse: not permitting the Sunne, no, not in the pride of his heate, to dissolve that congealed matter and snow, which they haue breathed out so nigh the Sunne. . . .”⁶ He even relates that the hills overlooking the coast around latitude 38° were covered with snow—in June! Now it is true that the coast north of San Francisco is commonly cold and windy in the spring and early summer. Temperatures in the low fifties and high forties occur, reflecting the low temperatures of the California Current. But snow on the hills in June is difficult to credit, and one wonders what to make of this statement. And this is not all. He further says: “Besides, how vnhandsome and deformed appeared the face of the earth it selfe! shewing trees without leaues, and the ground without greenes in those moneths of *June* and *July*. The poore birds and foules not daring (as we had great experience to obserue it), not daring so much as once to arise from their nests after the first egge layed, till it, with all the rest, be hatched and brought to some strength of nature, able to help itselfe. Onely this recompence hath nature affoorded them, that the heate of their owne bodies being exceeding great, it perfecteth the creature with greater expedition, and in shorter time than is to be found in many places.”

It is true that in the section where he records Drake's brief foray into the interior to see the Indian settlements and “to be the better acquainted with the nature and commodities of the country,” he paints a more attractive picture: “The inland we found to be farre different from the shoare, a goodly country, and fruitfull soyle, stored with many blessings fit for the vse of man. . . .” But the statement is short and does little to undo the pronounced negative picture he has presented before. One thing is

certain: The overall effect of his description was not one to make Nova Albion an attractive goal for future Elizabethan enterprise, even if other circumstances had permitted it. Only if there had been clear evidence of the availability of precious metals or other treasure would the virtues of New Albion (as it came to be known later) have assumed a more desirable aspect in Elizabethan minds. But there were none; the gold of the Mother Lode did not reveal itself to Drake.⁷ And thus, because the qualities of New Albion were mediocre as reported, because no convenient access by way of a Northwest Passage around northern North America had been found, and because New Albion by way of southernmost South America was as far from England as any place on earth, no serious attempt was made to follow up on Drake's discovery until the coming of another age, some two centuries later, in the days of Captain James Cooke and Captain George Vancouver. Instead, English efforts in the New World came to be focused on the Atlantic Coast of North America, on Virginia⁸ and on the area to the north that came to be called New England, an echo of the earlier name New Albion.

Spain and the Manila Galleon

One consequence of the Magellan-Elcano circumnavigation of the world (1519-1522) was Spain's claim to possession of the Philippine Islands. Because of prior agreements with Portugal over spheres of influence, contact with these islands could be maintained only by way of America and the Pacific. By 1570 a quasi-permanent maritime communication schedule was in operation, with Acapulco and Manila as the termini (Figure 6). This traffic, which the Spaniards called "La Nao de la China," and which we have come to know as the "Manila Galleon,"

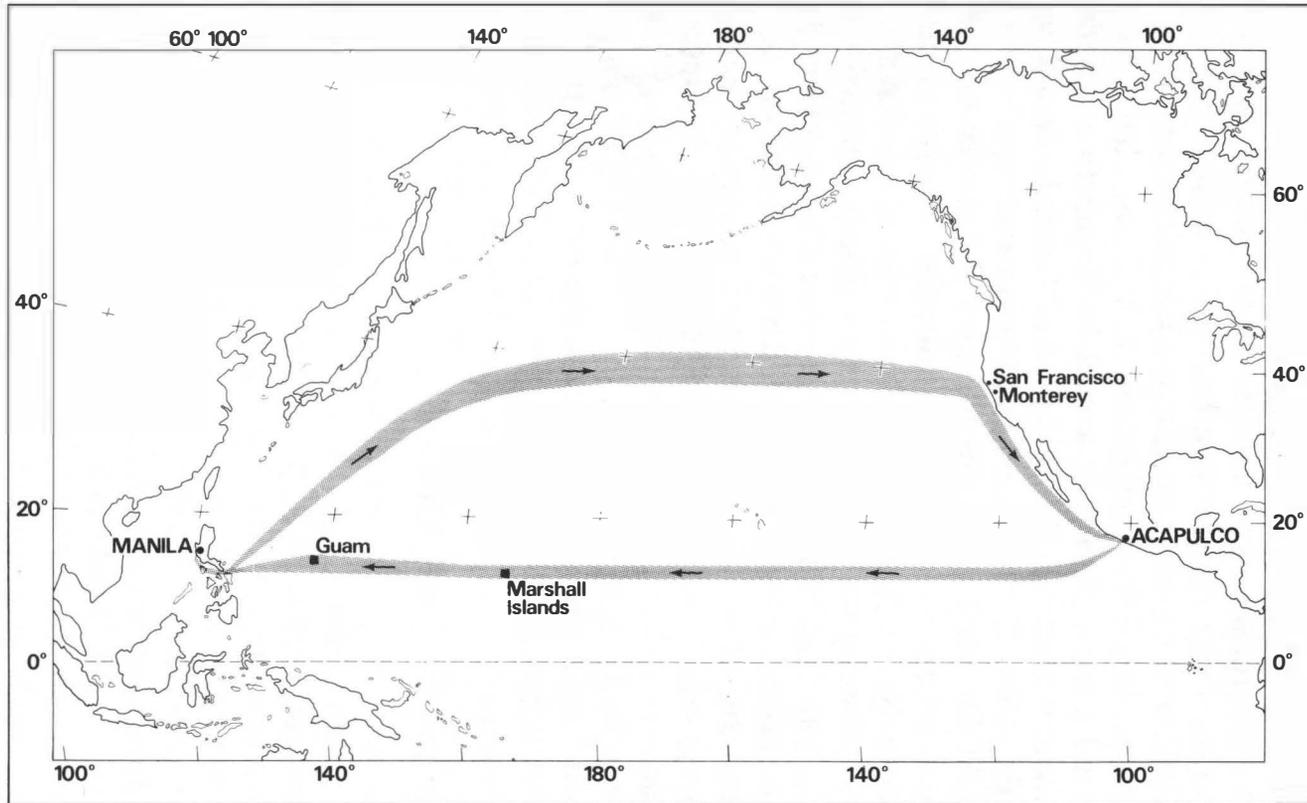


Figure 6. Generalized tracks of the Manila Galleon.

continued to function, mostly on an annual basis, until the War of Independence in Mexico in the early nineteenth century.

The Manila Galleon was mainly a far-ranging commercial enterprise, profitable for some, exchanging Mexican silver for silk, porcelain, and tea from the Far East. Overall it operated at a loss, but it continued to be subsidized by the Spanish Crown, as it was also a vehicle for the maintenance of governmental, military, and ecclesiastical affairs in the Philippines. A troublesome problem stemmed from the great length of the voyage, normally two or two and one-half months with the NE trades from Acapulco to Manila, but often four to six months and sometimes seven or eight months by the changeable westerlies on the return. The eastward voyage was commonly so arduous that by the time the first land along the California coast was sighted provisions of all kinds were near exhaustion and the health levels of both officers and crew were dangerously undermined.⁹

The common seamen were mostly Filipinos, especially on the return voyage to Acapulco, and conditions on the galleon were so miserable that large numbers of them jumped ship and refused to make another trip across the Pacific. For example, the galleon *Espíritu Santo* arrived in Acapulco in 1618 with seventy-five Filipino seamen. Only five of them made the return voyage.¹⁰ Before the end of the sixteenth century it became evident that a reprovisioning post somewhere along the California coast, preferably near the first landfall between 42° and 37° N latitude, would be a great help to the galleon trade and a boon to the beleaguered crews. A fortified base for defense of the treasure-laden galleons against intruders in the tradition of Drake and Cavendish was also desirable, especially since it appeared to the Spaniards that the

Elizabethans must have discovered the Northwest Passage and could thus prey upon north Pacific shipping at will (Figure 7).

Early in 1593 the viceroy was ordered by the Crown to institute explorations of the California coast to seek the desired haven for returning galleons. The first response was the unfortunate voyage of Sebastián Rodríguez Cermeño, which resulted in the shipwreck of the fully laden returning galleon *San Agustín* in Drakes Bay in 1595. To the Indians it may have seemed like an extraordinary sequel to the Drake visit sixteen years earlier, although Cermeño does not mention this, but to the viceroy it was a bitter disappointment and a lesson that coastal exploration is not best carried out by crews tired at the



Figure 7. Map of Tartary by Abraham Ortelius, 1584, showing a narrow North Pacific Ocean and California firmly attached to the mainland.

end of lengthy and exhausting voyages. Accordingly, a new approach was tried, with an expedition sent out direct from Mexico with the sole assignment to reconnoiter the outer coast of California and to find the needed harbor. Assigned to command the expedition was Sebastián Vizcaíno.

The story of Vizcaíno and the California harbor for the galleons is lengthy and tortuous, and at times reads somewhat like a comedy of errors.¹¹ Two suitable bays were identified by Vizcaíno along the California coast in 1602, San Diego and Monterey. Monterey, first written Monterrey, and named in honor of the viceroy, Gaspar de Zúñiga y Acevedo, Conde de Monterrey, was preferred over San Diego because it lay closer to the first landfall of the galleons in the eastern Pacific. Like other navigators before and long after him, he did not discover the Golden Gate and San Francisco Bay. Through the efforts of Vizcaíno and the viceroy, who no doubt was pleased by the choice of name, assent was obtained from all appropriate authorities, and in 1606 a Royal Order was sent to Mexico spelling out in detail how the Monterey settlement was to be founded under Vizcaíno's command with supplies and settlers to be brought from the Philippines by the next galleon. Unfortunately, another viceroy was in charge in New Spain by this time, Juan de Mendoza y Luna, Marqués de Montesclaros, who was not in agreement with the plans for Monterey. Whether the fact that it was to be named after his predecessor influenced his position is not clear. Because of the great lapse of time, owing to the slowness of dispatches, it was not necessary for him to oppose the king's command directly. He merely pointed out that the ship for Manila had left a month before the Royal Order was received and that Vizcaíno had returned to Spain some months before. He further recommended

that plans for developing Monterey be abandoned, and that a reprovisioning point for the galleons be established farther west, at the (mythical) islands of Rica de Oro and Rica de Plata, since by the time the ships reached California they were only twenty-five or thirty days from Acapulco. He was supported in his position by Fray Antonio de la Ascensión, who had been with Vizcaíno in California waters, and who wrote the king that Monterey Bay was insecure and that the whole plan was a scheme by Vizcaíno to gain personal wealth. Accordingly, a Royal Order in 1608 suspended the Order of 1606 and ordered a search for Rica de Oro and Rica de Plata, but Monterey was to be settled in case they could not be located. The two islands were of course never found, but Monterey was not settled for over 160 years. Ascensión himself advocated the settlement of Monterey in a letter to the king in 1620, but without result. Bureaucratic proceedings relative to the possible settlement of Monterey continued in the 1620's and 1630's, but came to an indecisive end. Thus, by default, Spain passed by her chance to neutralize English claims to New Albion and to settle California as a counterpoise to English settlements in Virginia and New England.¹²

And so the deep sleep began. The galleons continued to sail across the Pacific, bringing their cargoes of oriental goods, manned by scurvy-ridden, sick and dying crews. The longer the time of the voyage, the greater the cost in morbidity and mortality. Already in Vizcaíno's lifetime the efficacy of both citrus juice and palm wine as antidotes to scurvy had been published,¹³ but the information was not widely disseminated and the galleon crews continued to suffer. After the establishment of Jesuit missions in Baja California the galleons, beginning in the 1740's, would sometimes stop near Cape San Lucas for

succor and provisions, even though they were by then on the last leg to Acapulco.

The end of the deep sleep did not finally come until 1769, when Fray Junípero Serra and his Franciscan friars established the first of the Alta California missions at San Diego. Since the time of Vizcaíno there had been little Spanish activity in the far northwest of New Spain, except for the gradual advance of the Jesuits beginning in the 1590's in Sinaloa and ending at the time of the expulsion in 1767-1768 with a net of missions extending into Arizona and covering the entire peninsula of Baja California. Other nationalities had very little contact with California, and the danger of pirates in east Pacific waters had largely disappeared by the beginning of the eighteenth century (Figures 8, 9, 10).

But then the situation changed drastically. From its long period of neglect California, and with it the entire Pacific Northwest, emerged into international prominence, and Spain was suddenly aroused out of her complacency and forced into countermoves to protect her interests. The major new political or quasi-political threats beginning about 1750 and continuing well into the nineteenth century included:

1. Russia's activity in Alaska and her gradual expansion toward the southwest as far as Fort Ross and Bodega Bay.
2. The scientific exploring expeditions of England, France, and Russia in the northeast Pacific.
3. The territorial claims of England from central California northward, based on New Albion, the westward expansion of the Hudson's Bay Company, and the discoveries of Captain James Cook.



Figure 8. Map of North America by Nicholas Sanson, 1700, showing California as an island, based on Fray Antonia de la Ascension's false conjectures.

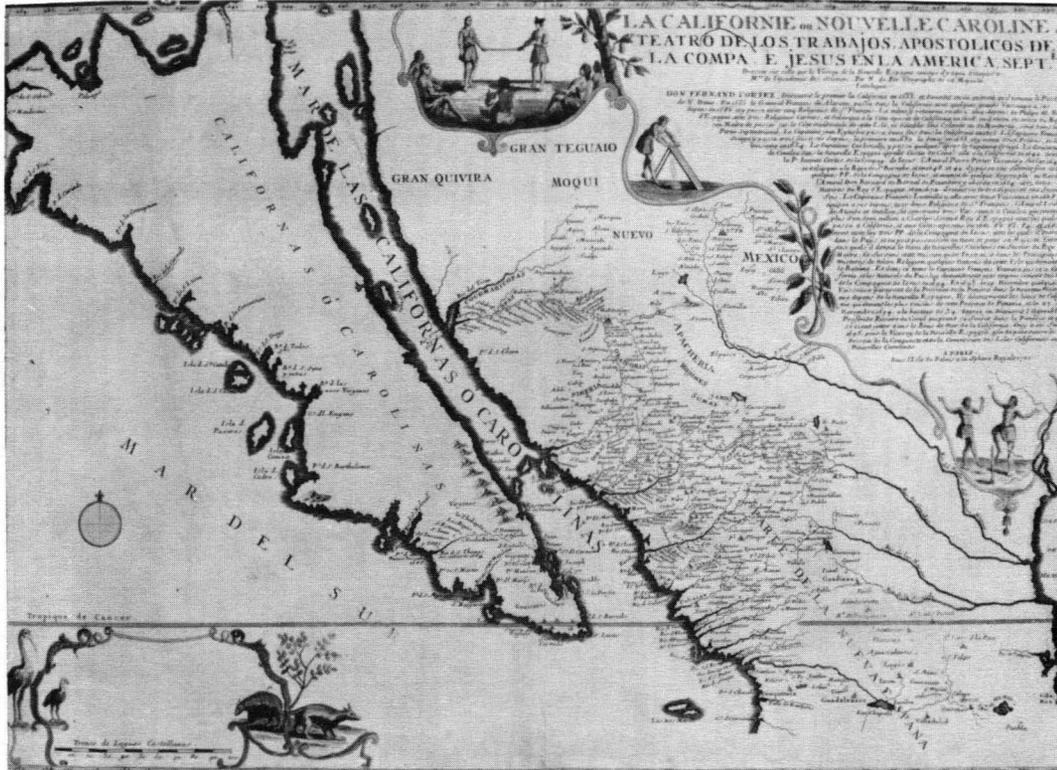


Figure 9. Map by Nicholas de Fer, 1703, with California shown noncommittally as either an island or attached to the mainland.



Figure 10. Map in Miguel Venegas, *Noticia de la California* (Madrid, 1757), based on father Kirio's explorations of 1697 to 1699 as depicted on the map of father Consag, showing Baja California as a peninsula.

4. The expansive activities of the newly independent United States, including the explorations of Lewis and Clark to the mouth of the Columbia River and the settlement of Fort Astoria to promote the hunting of sea otters.

To counteract the serious foreign threats to her interests, Spain initiated three parallel programs of her own:

1. The scientific exploration of the Northwest Coast.
2. The missionization and military occupation of Alta California.
3. The exploration by land from Sonora for the support of the new settlements in California.

Although the Spaniards recognized the increasing danger to the security of their northwestern outposts in Alta California and beyond, they showed a curious residual complacency verging on blindness with respect to their colonization policy. Since the late sixteenth century the Jesuit, Dominican, and Franciscan missionaries had tried in vain to keep secular settlers away from the neighborhood of the missions because of their disruptive influence on the lives of Indian converts. This policy was later extended to the presidios and continued to be enforced by law to the very end of Spanish sovereignty in the nineteenth century, even though the greatest need for strategic security was a more massive Spanish presence on the land. Alexander von Humboldt quotes with approval from the diary of Dionisio Galiano:

It is really distressing that military men, who have a hard and difficult life, cannot settle down in the country in their old age and devote themselves to farming. This regulation against building [private] houses near the presidio is against all the dictates of common sense. If whites were allowed to engage in the tillage of the soil and the raising of livestock, if military

men, by settling their wives and children on individual farms, could prepare a haven for themselves against the need to which they are only too often subject in their old age, New California would in a short time become a flourishing colony, a port of infinite usefulness to Spanish seamen who trade with Peru, Mexico, and the Philippine Islands.

He adds his own comment:

If the obstacles we have just mentioned were removed . . . the shores of San Francisco and Monterey would be settled by a large number of whites. But what a striking contrast [there is] between the colonization policies observed by the Spaniards and those through which Great Britain has in a few years created villages on the east coast of New Holland [Australia].¹⁴

The Russian Challenge

The only foreign penetration of California in Spanish times that threatened to carve out a permanent fief for a foreign state was that of the Russian American Company. It was a brief but intense challenge that was limited mainly by the aftereffects of the Napoleonic wars and the low reproduction rate of the sea otter.

By 1750 the Russians had discovered the riches in otter skins that could be obtained in the Aleutian Islands with the help of Aleut natives. Initially it was a plentiful resource with a ready market in the internal Russian trade as well as in China. A limiting factor gradually became evident in the slow rate of reproduction of the sea otter, a pair rarely producing more than one pup a year. The rapidly growing market for the attractive skins brought about a decimation of the otters in the Aleutians between 1770 and 1780 and a need to shift the main hunting grounds farther east and south along the Gulf of Alaska. Founded in 1799, New Archangel (Sitka) became in 1808 the headquarters of Russian activity, and Aleuts were brought to the new frontier because of the unsuitability of

the local Indians. Here too a prompt decline in the otter occurred, and even further advances down the coast became necessary,

The need for a supplementary food supply led first to a contact with the San Francisco Presidio in 1805, whence wheat supplies were obtained on an increasingly reliable basis well into the Mexican period, and second to the founding of Russian California at Fort Ross and Bodega Bay on lands claimed but not settled by Spain. The contrast between the rigors of Alaska and the benign plenty of California made a profound impression on the Russians, as did the evident weakness of the Spanish hold on the area. Numerous were the recommendations to the Tsar that at least part of California be acquired for Russia. It was thought of mainly as a food supply base for the northern otter hunting grounds, but in at least one case the suggestion was made that families of peasants be introduced from European Russia¹⁵ (Figure 11).

The most serious efforts came in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, when Spain's hold on her American empire was crumbling. The wars of Latin American Independence were under way, and the Monroe Doctrine had not yet been pronounced. A temporary dispatch in the *Neue Geographische Ephemeriden* from a Washington correspondent, here retranslated, gives an insight into the rumored negotiations.

Concerning the Cession of California to Russia

Washington, November 18 (1819). Our newspapers recently reported that the Russians would acquire land in California. They limited themselves to reporting the news and to expressing their amazement, no doubt because they did not know the background. Although the affair is still covered with a thick veil of secrecy, it is not really so secret that one could not see through it. In the confidential circles of our statesmen the following rumor is making the rounds. At the Congress of

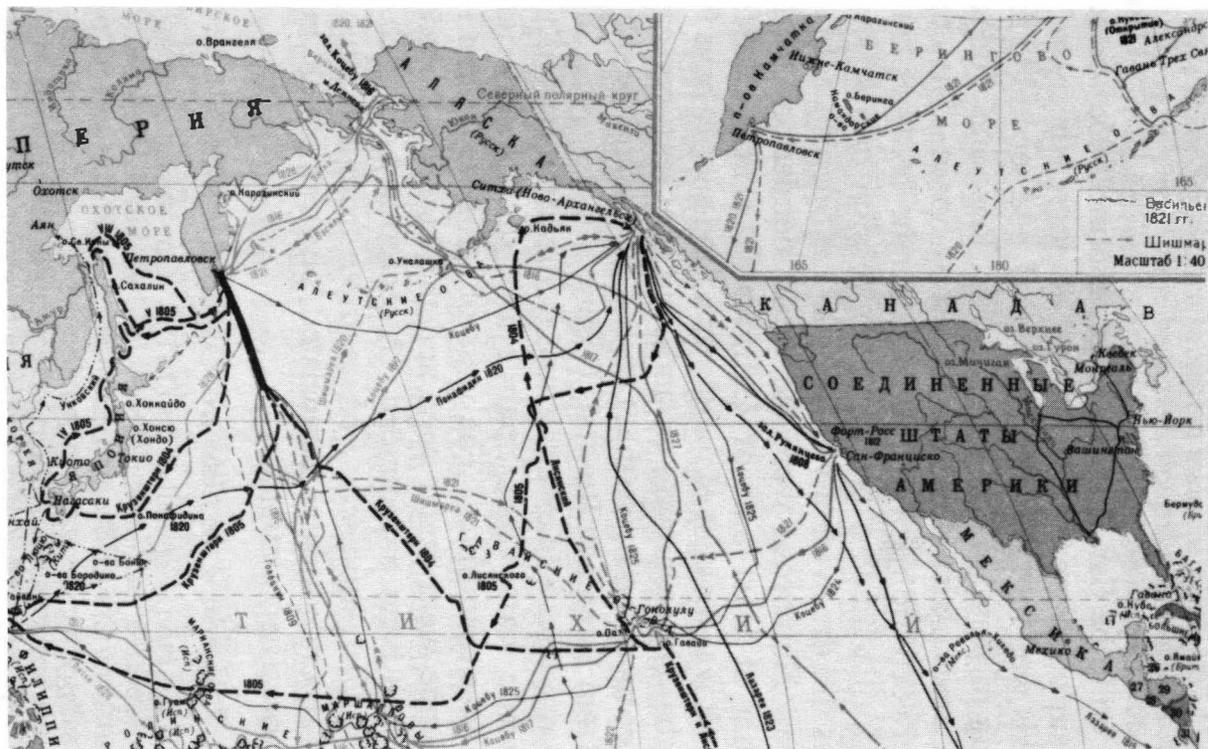


Figure 11. Portion of a map from *Atlas istorii geograficheskikh otkrytii i issledovanii*, ed. K. B. Martova (Moscow, 1959), p. 54, showing tracks of Russian explorers and trade routes and the location of Sitka, Fort Ross, and San Francisco on the coast of North America.

Vienna the former Spanish Minister Pizarro had several private meetings with Tsar Alexander, in which the California question was decided in secret. The reason for not sharing the news of this agreement with the Congress [of Vienna] was mainly the fear that the English Ministers would express their opposition. Nevertheless, the latter suspected soon enough that a secret understanding had been reached between Russia and Spain. But these were only suspicions which were not transformed into certainties until the Russian fleet set sail for Cadiz. The British Cabinet repeatedly and with emphasis demanded an explanation from the Spanish Government, which was finally compelled to admit that an agreement had been reached whereby Spain would cede a considerable portion of California to Russia. The English government protested vigorously and declared that a consummation of the agreement would be considered a hostile act. This threat caused the dismissal of Minister Pizarro. From this point on there was disagreement between the Ministers of England and Russia in Madrid. It appears that Spain, in addition to dismissing Pizarro, has promised the English Minister that the offensive agreement would be canceled. Since then, as far as can be seen, there has been no more talk of it. If, however, the facts mentioned in the papers are true, as is largely believed, one must assume either that Spain and Russia would honor the agreement, even against England, or that the latter had finally consented, since everything indicates that England, instead of following her threat to begin hostilities against Spain, will instead support her in the fight which she will probably have to face with us [the United States] in respect to the Floridas.¹⁶

Such a cession of all or part of Alta California to Russia in exchange for goods or military assistance could have seemed attractive to Spain as a means of salvaging at least something from an otherwise hopeless situation, but it did not materialize. In 1822 the rumor was still current, this time in the form that Tsar Alexander I would help Ferdinand VII to regain his lost American colonies in exchange for California.

The establishment of Mexican sovereignty in 1822 brought profound changes to California. Large-scale

clandestine trade, which had been carried on for a generation, was now legalized, and the ports were opened to foreign shipping. Foreigners were permitted to settle down and buy land. The role of the missionaries was reduced. In 1833 the missions and all their lands were taken over by the Mexican government and were largely secularized and in part sold to private individuals by 1840. The near extinction of the sea otter and the continuing inadequacy of Russian California as a base of supplies finally persuaded the Russians to relinquish their California holdings (1841)¹⁷ and retreat to Alaska, where they were to stay for another generation before quitting America for good (1867). As more foreigners came into California, especially Yankees from the Eastern Seaboard, a quickening of economic and political life occurred and events from other parts of the continent began to exert increasing influence. When, in 1846, the war between Mexico and the United States began, California quickly became a focus of prime importance.

Texas had broken away from Mexico by Yankee activity a decade earlier, and it set a pattern for what was to happen in California. One of the problems was how to lay claim to the Rocky Mountains and to the "Great American Desert" that lay between the Great Plains of the Louisiana Territory and the sought-after Pacific Coast. Here, from the Mexican point of view, the ingenuity and ruthlessness of the Yankee reached great heights by reducing the whole problem to one of perceptions and nomenclature. At the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 the American party produced a map of Mexico which had been made in Philadelphia in the previous year (Figure 12) in which the name Alta California was spread over all of northwestern Mexico, over precisely the lands the United States wished to annex.¹⁸ Never before had California, as perceived by

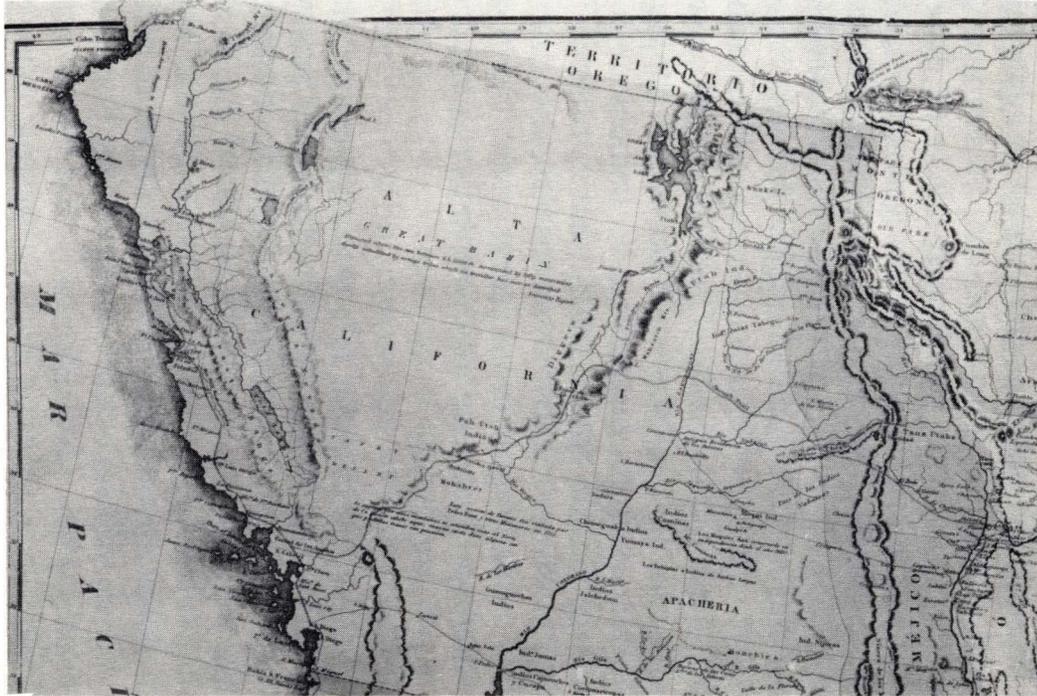


Figure 12. Map by John Disturnell, 1847, setting forth claims of the United States at the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Note the American claim that Alta California extends eastwards to the Rocky Mountains (see note 18). This extravagant claim is reminiscent of that of the English for Nova Albion on the Drake-Mellon map (Fig. 4), where the claim extends all the way across the continent to Florida.

Mexico, included parts of New Mexico, or the lands later to be made into Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and Arizona. But the much younger Mexican nation was defeated and disheartened by the all too evident military superiority of the United States, and thus manifest destiny was served. In one stroke Mexico gave up nearly half her territory, finally admitting that Texas was lost, and signing over all the northwestern interior as well as the crown jewel, California. In retrospect, Spain had done very little with California in her more than two and a half centuries of possession, and Mexico had had neither the time nor opportunity to do much in her twenty-five years of control. The greatest irony of all was that California's gold, except for minor placers, lay undiscovered throughout the Spanish and Mexican periods, and then, in the same year as the treaty with the United States, 1848, there occurred that famous find at Sutter's Mill. As a result California became one of the most glamorous places in the world, and the rest is history. Statehood followed in two years.

The Scenario

I would now like to point to a crucial juncture in the history of California, when a small change in policy, a different perception of opportunity, might have made an extraordinary difference in future events. I realize that with the benefit of hindsight one could easily enumerate dozens, or hundreds, of possible modifications of history that would have had important consequences, but there is a really dramatic one in California's past that deserves another look.¹⁹ I will leave out any speculations about alternative scenarios where the geographic or historic facts make them obviously untenable. There were, for example, no Golden Cities of Cibola for Cabrillo to discover on the California coast, and so the possibility of an

early major thrust by the Spanish to conquer another rich empire was never a real one. Similarly, alas, geographic reality vetoed the early role of England in New Albion. A usable Northwest Passage did not exist, and continued access by sea in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not really feasible for England in either direction around the earth. Nor did the early hope materialize that New Albion might be just a few days march west of Virginia (Figure 5). The size of the earth, the disposition of the lands and the seas, and the location of New Albion with respect to England were all factors that, in combination with historical circumstances, directed a delay of two centuries before England could again play a role along the Northwest Coast.

But what of Vizcaíno and his plans for a harbor in California to aid the returning Manila Galleon? Vizcaíno's proposal was accepted by the Audiencia de Mexico, the viceroy, the Council of the Indies, and the king, and the Royal Order came that the plan be carried out. Only the glacial slowness of dispatches, the replacement of the viceroy by another less well disposed to the plan, and the reassignment of Vizcaíno before the Royal Order arrived kept it from being carried out in 1608. It was a near miss. What if it had been implemented? How might the future course of California events have been altered? I am inclined to believe that the probability at the time of the successful establishment of Spanish settlement at Monterey was greater than the probability that it would not happen. Its not happening was a direct contravention of the royal command. Funds for the settlement were made available in the decree, supplies were to be provided in the Philippines to be transported to Monterey Bay on the returning galleon, and Vizcaíno was to have full authority over the choice of settlers and over the details of site. As

a reprovisioning depot for returning Manila ships, Monterey would have been called upon to furnish mainly fresh water, animals for slaughter on board, and a new supply of staples such as corn, wheat, and dried beans. Fresh fruits, olive oil, and wine would have been highly prized. Other ship's stores might be required for vessels damaged en route and limited repair facilities might be desirable, but always the need was to get the merchandise as rapidly as possible to its destination in Acapulco and Puebla. Limited ranching and animal husbandry were required, and a certain amount of farming was essential. The California Indians knew nothing of raising crops. Depending on how quickly they could be pacified, their first usefulness would probably be more in helping with the animals than in working the soil. Filipinos would be mainly employed, with a leavening of Spaniards to teach irrigation agriculture in the Mediterranean manner.

What is most intriguing is what might have happened next, and what would certainly have happened after a little more familiarity with the area had been acquired: the discovery of San Francisco Bay. From the site of Monterey the nearest hilltop from which the southern end of San Francisco Bay can be seen is only fifty miles away, and from the northern end of Monterey Bay to the same place is only twenty miles. Knowing what we know about how rapidly the Spaniards were reconnoitering in Nueva Vizcaya at this time, it is not credible to delay the probable discovery of San Francisco Bay for more than a few years after the founding of Monterey in 1608, the year of Vizcaíno's scheduled return from the Philippines with a party of settlers.

A settlement would then have been put on San Francisco Bay which would in a short time have become the main Spanish strong point in California, undoubtedly re-

placing Monterey as the California way station of the galleon traffic. No doubt it would have been raided by foreign ships, but in classical military terms San Francisco Bay is one of the strongest natural sites in the world, and cross fire across the Golden Gate would have been effective even in the early seventeenth century. No doubt Spanish forts would have been placed on both sides of the narrows, as well as on Alcatraz Island.

Had this scenario materialized Spain would have had a head start in California by 160 years. The settlement would have been made in the full flower of Spanish vigor and wealth. In possession of perhaps the finest natural harbor in the world, Spain would have strengthened it and populated its shores. The main thrust would have been secular, with some establishment of missions in peripheral areas. Permanent contact by land with the rest of New Spain would have had to wait a century or more. It would have been an isolated settlement, supported by sea, and more from the Philippines than from Mexico.

Miners were very active already in the mountains of north-central Mexico, and some of the more enterprising might have been tempted to try their luck in the new land to the north. Exploration by ship would have been relatively easy up San Pablo Bay, Carquinez Strait, Suisun Bay, and the Sacramento River, just as it was two hundred years later.²⁰ A major gold strike could conceivably have been made. The Mother Lode itself might have been turned up before the end of the seventeenth century. We know it was there, and we know the miners would have looked. Had it been found, such a strike in the seventeenth century would not have set off a vast international gold rush as it actually did in the mid-nineteenth. It would have been perceived as another of the great Spanish bonanzas in the tradition of Potosí and Zacatecas, but gold

this time, not silver.²¹ Thousands of people from Spain, New Spain, and the Philippines would have been attracted to the mines, and a Spanish-Mestizo-Filipino combination would have created a new and distinctive racial type in California. Cities would have grown in time around the mines and around the harbor, and a separate Audiencia de California would have had to be established.

Of course, the deeper we look into the crystal ball, the dimmer the image gets, and I am conscious of the old adage that fools step in where angels fear to tread. I don't know how to appraise what the Russians might have done around Bodega and Fort Ross with such a powerful Spanish presence on the Bay. Most likely they would not have hunted otter on the Bay, and they probably would not have put in semi-permanent installations. Nor do I know how to appraise the larger and better-defended Spanish colony with respect to independence, local autonomy, American penetrations, or a Mexican war.

The actual population of California shortly after the time of independence from Spain was not much more than 20,000.²² Some thousands of these were Indians; less than a hundred were priests or monks. Even by the 1840's the effective civilian population consisted of no more than a thousand or fifteen hundred families, of which only a few dozen were big land owners. Such a sparse group, dependent on their own limited military strength except for a handful of undermanned presidios, and already containing some dozens of Yankee sons-in-law, were no match for the military forces of the United States.

I am postulating in my scenario, given 160 years longer and much greater local production of wealth, a population in California of 300,000 to 500,000 at the time of independence from Spain, among whom would be

15,000 to 20,000 *Californio* families widely distributed over the central and southern part of the area of the present state. They would have been fully capable of raising their own armies and perhaps of providing them with locally manufactured arms and munitions. They could, in fact, have acted as a considerable counterpoise to English and American strength along the Atlantic Coast. One is entitled to wonder whether the ambitious young sons-in-law or the forces of the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century would have been able to take over; whether, in fact, a take-over attempt would have been made. The crystal ball gets dark, but I think there is the likelihood that California today would be an independent Latin American republic and that the lands of the contiguous United States on the Pacific would be confined largely to the former Oregon Territory.

Perhaps the moral of all this is that we should leave history well enough alone. If my scenario had materialized, we today in this spot would be in another country.



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NOTES

1. Even today, when California has become the leading agicultural state in the United States, not a single crop native to the area plays a significant role in commercial production, either in California or anywhere else. Of course, timber trees, such as Douglas fir, which are grown on tree "farms" are excluded.

2. The formulation of a rational climatic classification and the delineation of generalized climatic distributions on an idealized continent had to wait until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first explicit mention, to my knowledge, of the climatic similarities among California, central Chile, and southern France, and of analogous agricultural potential, was made by the great French explorer Lapérouse, who spent part of September 1786 in the Monterey area. His insight into the geographic relationships was given a material dimension when he gave the mission fathers at Carmel some potatoes he had brought from Chile. He felt they would do well in the light, rich soils around Monterey, and that this was perhaps not the least significant present he left behind. (Jean-François de Galup de Lapérouse, *Voyage de Lapérouse autour du monde pendant les années 1785, 1786, 1787, et 1788* [Paris: Club des libraires de France, 1965], pp. 161-163, 176.)
3. I am confining my considerations to Alta or Nueva California. The conquest of Central Chile was assigned to Pedro de Valdivia, one of the lieutenants of Francisco Pizarro. It was an operation to secure the southernmost outpost of the Inca Empire and to contain Araucanians. The reconnaissance of the California coast had originally been planned by Pedro de Alvarado, one of the lieutenants of Hernando Cortés, in the hope of finding fame and treasure in Cíbola or Quivira. When Alvarado, already in his mid-fifties died in the Mixton War in 1541, his ships were entrusted to his younger lieutenant Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo (a navigator of Portuguese birth then working for Spain) by the viceroy Mendoza, to be used for an exploring expedition up the California coast.
4. Only one other case of delayed development of a Mediterranean area comes to mind, that of south Australia, first seen by Europeans in the early seventeenth century and not settled until toward the end of the eighteenth. But the delay in this case was only about half as long, and discovery and ultimate settlement were carried on by different maritime powers.
5. W. S. W. Vaux, ed., *The World Encompassed by Sir Francis Drake*, The Hakluyt Society, 1st ser., no. 16 (London, 1854).
6. His idea that Asia and America came close together farther north was a felicitous guess, since no European had yet seen

the Bering Strait. There is also at least partial understanding that large land areas in high latitudes tend to be colder than adjacent water areas. The theory that lowlands near snow-covered uplands and mountains would be colder than other lowlands because of their proximity to the snow and ice held on well into the nineteenth century.

7. There is mention of treasure in the famous statement where Drake takes possession of the land in the name of the queen: "Wherefore, in the name and to the vse of her most excellent maiesty, he tooke the sceptor, crowne, and dignity of the sayd countrie into his hand; wishing nothing more than it had layen so fitly for her maiesty to enjoy, as it was now her proper owne, and that the riches and treasures thereof (wherewith in the vpland countries it abounds) might with as great conueniency be transported, to the enriching of her kingdome here at home, as it is in plenty to be attained there. . . ." A variant account printed by Hakluyt even interpolates this sentence: "There is no part of earth here to bee taken up, wherein there is not some speciall likelihood of gold or silver. . . ." But there is nothing in the accounts to lead us to believe that Drake saw substantial "riches and treasures" among the Coast Miwok, or any evidence of the presence of gold or silver. The statements must be considered window dressing or wishful extensions to New Albion of mineral wealth known to exist many degrees farther south in Spanish realms. It must be admitted that California had not disclosed many of its potential attractions to Drake. The benign Mediterranean climate of which we have made much was not manifest in the "most uile, thicke, and stinking fogges" and the frigid winds that belabored Drake and his crew. The low coastal growth and wind-sheared shrubs around Point Reyes gave little promise of fertile tree-covered valleys in the interior. It is doubtful if Drake or any of his men ever saw a sequoia. And the Indians encountered were not impressive. They looked like savages, and that is precisely what they were from the point of view of the Elizabethans. They had no wealth that was recognizable as such in European eyes—no gold, no pearls, no precious stones. Had gold been a trade item between the Coast Miwok and the inhabitants of the future Mother Lode, Drake's and England's appraisal of New Albion would have been more enthusiastic and efforts to

maintain contact and possession might well have been more emphatic even in the absence of a Northwest Passage.

8. "*Virginia-Britania*, is a country in America; that lyeth betweene the degrees of 30. and 44. of the north latitude: . . . as for the West thereof the Limitts are vnknowne, only yt is supposed there be found the Discent into the South-Sea . . . and sure much about the height of our Bay, *Sir Francis Drake* his *Noua Albion* . . . is well conceyved to be, on the west-syde of vs, within that supposed South-Sea. . . .
 "It is a spacious and ample Tract of Land, from North to South, vpon a right lyne, yt may be 700. miles: from East to West in the narrowest place, supposed some 300. myles, and in other places 1000. . . ." (William Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612) , ed. Louis B. Wright and Virginia Freund, The Hakluyt Society, 2d ser., no. 103 [London, 1953], pp. 31-32.)
9. For a further discussion see Henry J. Bruman, "Early Coconut Culture in Western Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1945), pp. 212-223.
10. To escape punishment they frequently went to remote areas in Mexico and sometimes joined Indian tribes. It was by escaped Filipino sailors that the manufacture of distilled liquors was introduced into Huichol culture and that the use of palm wine was brought to the Colima coast. (Cf. Henry J. Bruman, "The Asiatic Origin of the Huichol Still," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 34, No. 3 [1944], pp. 418-427.)
11. The tale is developed at length, utilizing the relevant documents, in W. Michael Mathes, *Vizcaíno and Spanish Expansion in the Pacific Ocean, 1580-1630* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1968).
12. Alexander von Humboldt, whose relationship to British scholarship was at times rather cool, and who in his diplomatic duties for the king of Prussia sometimes saw cause to distrust British political motives, takes the position that Drake and England had at best only a weak claim to New Albion between 38° and 43° N, since that coast had been discovered by Cabrillo and Ferrelo for Spain more than a generation earlier. The most England could claim by right of discovery based on Drake's voyage was the strip from 43° to 48° N. "D'après des données historiques certaines, la dénomination de

Nouvelle-Albion devroit être restreinte à la partie de la côte qui s'étend depuis les 43° aux 48°. . . ." (Alexander von Humboldt, *Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne*, 8^e ed. [Paris; F. Schoell, 1811], 2:437.) The contrary English position is discussed in John T. Juricek, "English Territorial Claims in North America under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts," *Terrae Incognitae*, Vol. 7 (1976), pp. 7-22. Humboldt's point of view is fully supported by the German historian Georg Friederici, whose great work on the discovery and conquest of America has not been fully appreciated by non-German scholars. In fact the latter declares that Spain's accomplishment in discovering and to a degree settling the coasts from Florida around the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, again from south of Brazil to the tip of South America, and on the Pacific with but minor exceptions the entire stretch from farthest south to 55° N represents in its totality the greatest geographical accomplishment in scope, content, and significance for world history that any people can point to. (Georg Friederici, *Der Charakter der Entdeckung und Eroberung Amerikas durch die Europäer*, 3 Vols. [1925-1936; reprint ed., Osnabrück, Otto Zeller, 1969], Vol. 1, pp. 347-356.) He is actually conservative in setting the limit at 55° N. There is evidence in the log of navigation that the schooner *Sonora* under the command of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra reached almost 58° on 22 August 1775, more than a year before Cook on his third expedition reached these and higher latitudes (*Colección de diarios y relaciones para la historia de los viajes y descubrimientos* [Madrid: Instituto Histórico de Marina, 1943], Vol. 2, pp. 102-133+, Table for August 1775 and Lámina 4.)

13. Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, *Conquista de las Islas Malucas* (Madrid, 1609), p. 9: "[Las Malucas] son agradables a la vista, pero no sanas, y menos para los estraños, todos los quales estan sugetos a la enfermedad Berber, comun en aquella tierra. Hinchá los cuerpos, inhabilita los miembros; pero con el clauo y vino de las Filipinas beuido con gingibre, ò con el vso de cierta yerua, conocida de los naturales, se preseruã, y se curã; y los Holãdeses cõ çumo de limones, remedio hallado por el temor, y por la experiencia."
14. Humboldt, *Essai politique*, Vol. 2, pp. 449-450 (my translation). Galiano, a former officer of Malaspina, was captain of the schooner *Sutil* which along with the *Mexicana* explored

- the north Pacific in 1792 and accomplished the first circumnavigation of Vancouver Island.
15. Three of the more useful recent items for a study of the Russian presence in California are: James R. Gibson, *Imperial Russia in Frontier America: The Changing Geography of Russian America, 1784-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Kyrill T. Khlebnikov, *Colonial Russian America: Kyrill T. Khlebnikov's Reports, 1817-1832*, trans. Basil Dmytryshyn and E. A. P. Crownhart-Vaughan (Portland, Oreg.: Oregon Historical Society, 1976); and Gottfried Pfeifer, "Frontera del Norte Kaliforniens, 1800-1846: Russen, Spanier, und Angelsachsen," *Tübinger Geographische Studien*, Heft 34, Sonderband 3 (1970), pp. 255-278.
 16. "Über die Abtretung Californiens an Russland," *Neue Geographische Ephemeriden*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Weimar, 1819), pp. 476-477. I do not wish to make too much of this episode because the degree of reality behind these rumors appears to be uncertain even now. It may be that historians have not yet studied the relevant archival materials. However, in the same year the following prescient comment appears in a book devoted to the new lands along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers: "We think it will not be romantic to predict that the period is not far distant when the United States and the potent empire of Russia will be the two great master nations of the world. If the extensive coast of California be ceded to the latter, we may, perhaps, without being taken for maniacs, hazard an opinion, that the people of this western region will eventually be compelled to defend themselves against the encroachments of that gigantic power. Should this event happen after a disunion, how bitterly would posterity curse those progenitors who effected it! But we will not anticipate so disastrous an event." (Edmund Dana, *Geographical Sketches on the Western Country: Designed for Emigrants and Settlers* [Cincinnati: Looker, Reynolds & Co., 1819], p. 62.)
 17. A last effort was made by Governor Wrangell in the 1830's to acquire lands for the company in the area north of the bay and west of the Sacramento River, but the best lands near the San Rafael and Sonoma missions were being rapidly converted into ranchos and sold by Mexican authorities, in part to forestall Russian designs. When Wrangell failed, the company decided to abandon California.

18. The American claim extending California to the Rockies appears to have been more the result of an innocent cartographic error committed some years earlier in England than a tactical psychological pressure play. In the late 1830's the English cartographer John Arrowsmith prepared a map to accompany the rare first edition of Forbes's *California: A History of Upper and Lower California from Their First Discovery to the Present Time* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1839). This map, entitled "The Coasts of Guatemala and Mexico from Panama to Cape Mendocino with the Principal Harbours of California. 1839," shows Upper or New California extending eastward through the entire drainage basin of the Colorado River to the continental divide, including even some areas south of the Gila River that had been part of Sonora for two hundred years. According to the preface, Alexander Forbes remained in Mexico while his brother John saw the manuscript through the press. Thus the map was undoubtedly prepared and published without revision by the author.

Where did Arrowsmith get his notion about the longitudinal extent of California? There appear to be no precedents for his version, either in Spanish or Jesuit maps or in those of Alexander von Humboldt, many of which would have been available to him at the Royal Geographical Society. The answer may lie in an ambiguity in the Forbes text itself. In part 2, chapter 3, Forbes says:

The part of Upper California at present occupied by the missions and settlers is about five hundred English miles in length, and the breadth from the sea to the first range of hills may be stated at an average of forty miles, which will give an area of twenty thousand square miles and about thirteen millions of English statute acres. This however is but a small part of Upper California, as the whole country extending to the Rio Colorado, and to an undefined limit northward, is included in its territory. . . . The whole extent of Upper California properly so called presents a superficies equal to many of the most extensive and powerful kingdoms of Europe.

Such a statement, in the absence of more specific data, could perhaps be given cartographic expression in the expansive way Arrowsmith adopted, although Forbes does not say that California extends to the Colorado along its entire length, let alone that it includes the whole drainage basin, and it is

clear from the text that he is getting most of his topographic information from the journal of the Garcés expedition of 1775, which traversed the region between Sonora and southern California. When he takes California all the way to the Colorado River, he is referring to southern California only.

But Arrowsmith's published map was to have a strong influence on conceptions of California in the United States in the 1840's. The idea that California began at the Rocky Mountains fitted well into the contemporary geopolitical thrust of the young republic. John C. Fremont accepts the name California for the country west of the continental divide in his *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842, and to Oregon and North California in the Years 1843-'44* (Washington, 1845). Perhaps following his lead, perhaps relying directly on the Arrowsmith map, several United States map makers in the early and mid 1840's adopt this usage. They are listed and discussed in Carl I. Wheat, *Mapping the Transmississippi West, 1540-1861*, 5 Vols. in 6 (San Francisco: Institute of Historical Cartography, 1957-1963), Vol. 2, pp. 179-184, Vol. 3, pp. 35-37, 81-87.

On the fine map of Oregon and Upper California drawn by Charles Preuss to accompany Fremont's *Geographical Memoir upon Upper California, in Illustration of His Map of Oregon and California* (Washington, 1848), California is shown extending eastward almost to the Rio Grande (called Rio del Norte). In the *Memoir* itself Fremont divides California into the Great Basin, the Sierra Nevada, and the "Maritime Region West of the Sierra Nevada," adding the telling remark (p. 12) that the latter is "the only part to which the name applies in the current language of the country."

That comment makes explicit that the extension of the name California to lands east of the Sierra rests on a conceptual error. And yet, the fact that the term was commonly so used in the 1840's by educated Americans exonerates them from potential charges of perfidy in their reliance on the Disturnell map at the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

I thank my friend Neal Harlow for expanding my knowledge of the cartographic literature on California in the 1830's and 1840's. This note is a direct result of his generous suggestion, although responsibility for the conclusions is mine alone.

19. I know many historians frown on this sort of thing as not being scholarly, and they may well be right. But in the hospitable halls of the Clark Library, where Clio, the Muse of History, must share her place on a basis of equality with the other eight, perhaps I can be forgiven.
20. Sailing ships in the seventeenth century should have had no great difficulty traversing the major channels of the delta or penetrating the lower Sacramento, just as they did not in South America when ascending the Paraná to Asunción.
21. The ancient rule of thumb among Spanish miners, coming straight out of astrology, that silver is the metal of the moon and to be found in high, cold places, whereas gold is the metal of the sun, to be found in low, hot places, would have been corroborated once again.
22. I am not including in this estimate the “wild” Indians in the remoter parts of the present state, but I do include the Indian population in the effective part of Spanish/Mexican California, which as Humboldt points out, was essentially a coastal strip from San Diego to San Francisco with a width of about ten leagues.