

Sir Francis Drake in the New World

1577-1580



Sir Francis Drake (c. 1542-96) Source: John Hampden, ed.

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Eighty six years after Spain had claimed the New World for themselves an English Privateer by the name of Francis Drake was becoming a thorn in their side. Called *El Draque* by the Spaniards, they hated to see him in their ports. His enthusiasm for damaging Spain overseas may have arisen from a hatred by Protestants of Catholics in Elizabethan England, or from his voyage to Nombre de Dios in 1572 where he lost two brothers, John and Joseph¹. After years of terrorizing the Spanish in the Caribbean, in 1577 Drake left England for the South Sea, now known as the Pacific Ocean. It is unclear as to the exact reason for the voyage. Drake was one in a line of many Englishmen who had raided Spanish ports in the New World trying to take some of the rich resources for themselves. He inspired many more sailors, merchantmen, and explorers to go beyond what was already known, to carve out a place in the New World for England, hoping to get as rich as the Spaniards.

His circumnavigation is shrouded in mystery, only uncovered enough to perk the interest of historians about his anchorage point in California. Drake may have landed near San Francisco Bay, or as far north as Vancouver Island. The discovery of a brass plate engraved with his name and the date of his stay has thrust the debate over his anchorage to the forefront of English colonization, and claims in North America. If Drake was instructed by Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) to find a colony, or the Northwest Passage no Authenticated evidence for that exists, and is pure speculation. If he was supposed to find a colony, then it would substantiate a legend of Drake leaving men at the fabled anchorage point, and would be in keeping with what would become English ways of claiming territory in the New World. It is without a doubt that Drake not only inspired his contemporaries with his spirit for exploration but also lived on in the legends of England to become “the Robin Hood of the sea”².

Life and Early Career

Francis Drake was born in 1542-1543, the exact date is not known. He was the eldest son, of Edmund Drake of Tavistock Abbey in the county of Devonshire, England. Edmund Drake was a tenant farmer/sheep shearer and a sailor with William Hawkins in 1543-45 during the war with France. The Drake family was somehow related to the Hawkins family, but it is unclear as to what the exact relationship was, most historians call them cousins, which may explain why Drake and John Hawkins enjoyed a long career together. The Drake family seems

¹ George Malcolm Thomson, *Sir Francis Drake* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), 79.

² David J. Weber. *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (Castletown, New York: Hamilton Printing Company, 1992), 266.

to have found a home near the Royal Naval Shipyards in Kent, on the River Medway, after leaving Tavistock Abbey. Edmund Drake moved his family to escape Catholic Persecution, as they were Protestant. In Kent he became a minister to the sailors³. Francis Drake's initial fascination for the sea might have been inspired by the stories from sailors who may have visited with his father. However it happened, it not only impacted his life but that of English exploration in the New World.

It appears that Drake's first sea-faring job was on a trading bark, this term was commonly used to describe ships that did not follow any other classification, which traveled between England, Scotland, and Ireland. He later served in many expeditions with John Hawkins to the Caribbean, during which he was able to view the South Sea. After viewing it he knew that he would sail on the South Sea⁴, something that no Englishman had done before. The Spanish had been using the South Sea to bring over treasure from the Orient. Drake may have also wanted to disrupt the trade of Spain, making it more difficult for Spain to gain treasure. Often Spain would use the treasure from the New World in order to hurt England, an example of which is the extreme cost of the Spanish Armada, so any interruption in the shipping could be to England's benefit. Spain had viewed themselves as the champions of the Catholic Church against the evil Protestant faith.

Pre-Voyage Preparations

While Drake's circumnavigation would become legend it was not the first one. The circumnavigation of the World had been done by Magellan and his crew in 1521, 56 years before Drake started his voyage. Unlike Magellan, Drake was English, and he survived the entire trip⁵. The planning for Drake's voyage was detailed, extensive and shrouded in mystery. The official document of Drake's voyage was received by Sir Francis Walsingham; at this point he was the Principal Secretary of State, something akin to the Prime Minister. This document seems to have informed Queen Elizabeth of an idea for a South Sea Expedition, but to keep the reason secret from those that may have been opposed to the voyage; the true reason is never expressly mentioned. This is evidenced by the wording; "made privy to the truth of the voyage", referring to Queen Elizabeth, and the reason given to the public for this larger group of ships and men

³ Samuel Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage of Sir Francis Drake 1577-1580* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 19.

⁴ John Hampden, ed., *Francis Drake Privateer: Contemporary Narratives and Documents Selective and edited by John Hampden* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1972), 15.

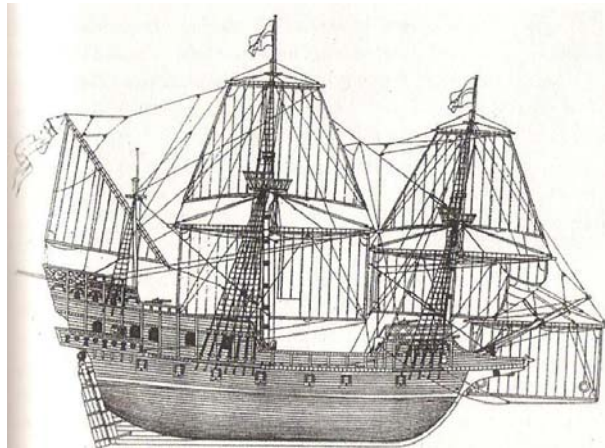
⁵ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 41.

would be that they were bound “for Alexandria” in North Africa for trading⁶, something that was easy to believe. The secrecy here seems to be in response to the practice of having spies at the court of other nations, those that supported the voyage would not want any foreign Prince to know about the true reason, especially Spain, if the reason was to hurt them. Drake may have been chosen for this voyage, especially if one of the reasons was to damage Spain’s finances, because of his success in the Caribbean, Walsingham was also reported to have said Drake was “readier to lend himself to devious practices”⁷.



Sir Francis Walsingham (c. 1532-1590) Source: Samuel Bawlf, 189.

Drake seems to have had the Pelican, which was renamed the Golden Hinde after passing through the Strait of Magellan, specifically for this voyage. Except for having a double-planked hull, a large cargo hold; large enough to hold 4 pre-built, deconstructed pinannces⁸, and a relatively little displacement in water, fully loaded, the Pelican looked like any other 3-masted merchant ship⁹.



Drawing of replica Golden Hinde 1974

Source: Samuel Bawlf, 69.

⁶ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 51.

⁷ Thomson, *Sir Francis Drake*, 100.

⁸ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 67.

⁹ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 67.

The entire company of 5 ships-the Pelican, captained by Drake, the Elizabeth, the Marigold, the Swanne, and the Christopher¹⁰, was very well armed with a total of about 40 cannons on the Pelican and Elizabeth as well as small arms on all the ships¹¹. Drake served as the admiral of the fleet, the captain's captain. The armament of the ships as well as the number suggests that trading was not their purpose as was the common belief, but that the fleet had orders for a long voyage where they might encounter hostilities. Before they left however Queen Elizabeth I told Drake that Lord Burghley, Sir William Cecil (1520-1598), her treasurer and someone who wanted peace with Spain, "should not know it.", perhaps because he would persuade her to cancel the voyage and did not want to risk open war with Spain¹². Lord Burghley was the Queen's biggest advocated for a peace with King Phillip II of Spain (1556-1558).

At the time of preparations for Drake's voyage, the English were not the only ones causing trouble for Spain. The Dutch were chaffing against the Spanish Catholic influence, and France was willing to form an alliance with England through marriage¹³. The draft of Drake's voyage that has survived was damaged in a fire but may contain information about the motives for the voyage: to pass through the Straits of Magellan and travel north to a predetermined degree of latitude¹⁴; another reason for the voyage seemed to be to find a colony that would relieve some of the population constraints in England¹⁵. Drake's group left for the first time on November 15, 1577. They returned to Plymouth shortly after leaving because the Pelican and the Marigold had received damage from storms. The second and final time they left England was on December 13, 1577¹⁶.

Before Drake left England he was instructed in the latest theories on Navigation and with the latest instruments. Sailing during this time period required new instruments and new, more accurate ways to determine longitude and latitude, so that explorers could accurately place their

¹⁰ Sir Francis Drake, Francis Fletcher, *The World Encompassed by Sir Francis Drake* (Nicholas Bourne, 1628), 6-7; Henry R. Wagner, *Sir Francis Drake's Voyage Around the World: Its aims and achievements* (Berkeley: J. J. Gillick & Co., 1926) 128; Bawlf *The Secret Voyage*, 68.

¹¹ Zelia Nuttall, *New Light on Drake: A Collection of Documents relating to His Voyage of Circumnavigation 1577-1580* (Hakluyt Society, Germany, 1967), 24, 35; Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 67-68.

¹² Wagner, *Sir Francis Drake's Voyage*, 114-115; Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 55.

¹³ Wagner, *Sir Francis Drake's Voyage*, 107.

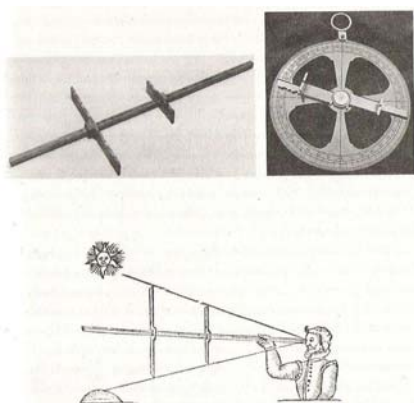
¹⁴ Hampden, *Francis Drake Privateer*, 115.

¹⁵ Nuttall, *New Light*, 10.

¹⁶ Warren L. Hanna, *Lost Harbor: The Controversy over Drake's California Anchorage* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1979), 15; Wagner *Sir Francis Drake's Voyage*, 118, 129; Fletcher, *World Encompassed*, 7; Hampden, *Francis Drake Privateer*, 129.

discoveries. One such instrument that Drake would have used was the three foot long cross-staff. This instrument allowed a sailor to know his latitude by taking the height of a midday sun. Any sailor traveling on long sea voyages needed to know how to use the resources at hand to keep from getting lost¹⁷. He also needed to know how to use an Astrolobe.

Common instruments that Drake had with him were a magnetic compass, and a book called a "rout-book" or "rutter" that would have the depths and reference points for the voyage along coastal waters. The aforementioned cross-staff was used by placing the butt of the instrument against the cheek, moving the cross-beam until the bottom touched the horizon, and the top reached the middle of the sun, as demonstrated in the figure below. The Astrolobe was used by sighting along it, suspended from the thumb, until it reached the sun. The degrees taken from either method would then be compared with a table of where the sun was in relation to the equator, in angulations. Drake would then subtract ninety degrees from the table's number, each degree equaled 60 miles. Using this mathematical relation, the supposed anchorage point for Drake at 38°, would be 2,280 miles from the equator. San Francisco Bay is 2,220 miles from the equator. There was as yet no way to accurately determine the Longitude from a ship¹⁸.



Cross-staff and Astrolobe, also pictured is the way in which the Cross-staff was used. Source: Samuel Bawlf, 71.

Previous English Explorations

The first Englishman to propose an expedition to the area of the South Sea was Richard Greenville. Richard Greenville was a contemporary of Francis Drake¹⁹. He proposed an expedition to settle the area south of the Spanish claim in the Rio de la Plata, in modern day

¹⁷ Hampden, *Francis Drake Privateer*, 16; Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 70.

¹⁸ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 70-71.

¹⁹ Henry S. Burrage, *Original Narratives of Early American History: Early English and French Voyages Chiefly from Hakluyt 1534-1608* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1959) 245.

Argentina, and on the Pacific Coast²⁰. Queen Elizabeth I had approved the voyage in March 1574 but had withdrawn it two months later. Samuel Bawlf theorized that her change of mind was influenced by Lord Burghley. He constantly counseled the Queen to use caution with regards to Spain through the 1590's²¹.

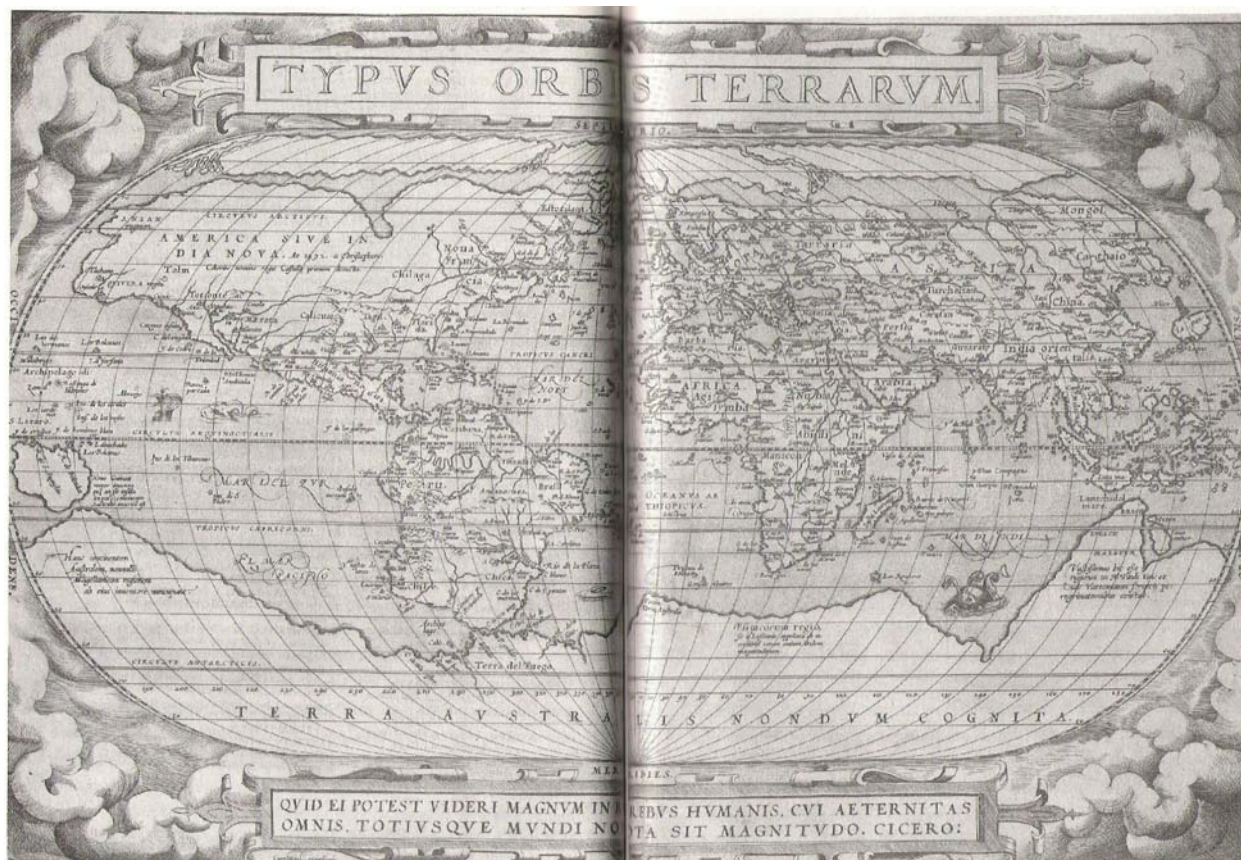
Once the exploration bug hit Elizabethan England there were numerous other adventurers who tried to copy the Spanish success in the New World. Among them were Walter Raleigh, the future founder of the first Virginia Colony, and Martin Frobisher²². Frobisher was convinced that he could find the eastern entrance for the Northwest Passage. He sailed from England in 1576, in July of that year he believed he had made it to the islands of modern day Canada. He sailed 100 miles into what he believed was the entrance; but was, in reality, an inlet on Baffin Island. After encountering some natives on the coast he was left to undermanned to continue the voyage, and so he turned back to England. The English obsession with the Northwest Passage would be a reason for Drake to travel north of the equator in his circumnavigation²³.

²⁰ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 51.

²¹ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 51-52; Nuttall, *The Secret Voyage*, 11.

²² Thomson, *Sir Francis Drake*, 100.

²³ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 56.



Map of the World drawn by Abraham Ortelius in 1570. Source: Samuel Bawlf, 58-59.

Voyage before Anchorage

After sailing along the eastern coast of South America and going through the Straits of Magellan, Drake was reduced to a single ship, the Golden Hinde. The others had either been burned for fuel, or had been separated from Drake in the various storms they encountered near the straits. During the voyage along the western coast of South America, Drake raided ports, took ships, and relieved Spaniards of the gold or other cargos they were carrying²⁴. As Drake traveled north he lost men, during encounters with the Spanish and the natives. There is one story of the crew going ashore to get provisions; where they were ambushed by Spaniards and natives. The Spaniards killed one sailor beheaded him, and cut off his right hand. The Spaniards took the body parts with them, but the natives also took the heart with them when they left, after shooting it full of arrows. Drake also took many ships, most of which were in the ports that Drake entered. This shows how daring Drake was in his encounters with Spain, to raid ships in their own ports without the ability to return to a safe English port. When the Golden Hinde captured the Cacafuego, just outside Panama City, Drake ordered his men to assemble the last of

²⁴ Fletcher, *World Encompassed*, 55.

several pinnances that was stored in the Golden Hinde. It is not clear what happened with the pinnance between this time and when they left their anchorage point.

After taking the Cacafuego, Drake sailed to Guatulco, where they gained more treasure and supplies to last them for a long sea voyage²⁵. From there, Francis Fletcher, the Anglican Priest who was travelling with them on Drake's ship, says that they traveled north by Northwest for 1400 leagues, 500 leagues was sailed straight out to sea, about 1,500 miles, then sailed North for 900 leagues, about 2,700 miles. Using this mileage he would have been somewhere between Los Angeles and San Francisco. He says that when they turned again towards the east they were at 42°N, and experienced severe weather as they traveled further North. As they traveled North, along the coast, they stayed in a "bad harbour" for sometime. At 48°N, just south of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, they were forced to turn South because of the weather, and Francis Fletcher claims they put into port at 38°30`N to repair the leaking Golden Hinde²⁶.

Anchorage Point

Francis Fletcher, was the author of *The World Encompassed*, this account was published in 1628 and is the most often quoted account, that gives us a brief description of the "fit harbour": snow-capped mountains in spite of it being summer, a constant fog hindering the accurate placement of stars and the sun, and land that was relatively flat. This harbor was located in the area of 38°30` N²⁷, which is around present day San Francisco. He also provides a detailed account of the interactions between the English Crew and the Natives, the theorized Coast Miwok Indians²⁸. The first native they encountered was a male who came out to greet them with long speeches, which happened for three days. The last day the native came out making speeches as before but also brought gifts of a headdress, and basket of a local herb called Tobâh²⁹, which may be something akin to Tobacco³⁰. Four days later, on June 21, 1579, they beached the Golden Hinde to repair it. At this point, the natives who had gathered to hear the speeches, approached the Englishmen with an apparent intent to worship them³¹, in the English's

²⁵ Hampden, *Francis Drake Privateer*, 172.

²⁶ Fletcher, *World Encompassed*, 62-64.

²⁷ Fletcher, *World Encompassed*, 64.

²⁸ Hanna, *Lost Harbor*, 34.

²⁹ Hanna, *Lost Harbor*, 27; Fletcher, *World Encompassed*, 67.

³⁰ Robert Heizer, "Francis Drake and the California Indians, 1579," *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 42, no. 3 (1947): 261.

³¹ Fletcher, *World Encompassed*, 68.

eyes. The latter attempted to dispel this belief, to convince they natives that they were not Gods, the English made a show of taking in food to show the natives they needed it to continue living. According to Fletcher this did not work, as the natives continued to bring gifts of feathers, arrows, and animal skins to the “Gods”³². This was a common belief held by all European explorers to the New World. Since the Europeans were so cultured, and the natives apparently so savage, then they must view these superior beings as Gods.

Despite such show of awe and reverence by the natives, Drake evidently did not wish to take any chances and so he ordered his men to build fortifications of stone, which would have left some evidence, against the natives³³. Some time later, a group of men came down with more gifts of Tobâh and had a meeting with the English inside the fort. On June 26, 1579, the Chief of the Natives, called Hiõh came down with a group of his men and a medicine man. They exchanged gifts, the English received the Tobâh, Petáh, a substance which the natives used to make meal, much like corn in South America³⁴. After more speeches, the natives who had gathered on the hills surrounding Drake came down to the fort singing and dancing. At this point, the English believed the natives had made Drake the King of the area³⁵. In reality this was probably the natives acknowledging Drake as the leader of his men.



The crowning of Drake by natives and the setting up of the Brass

Plate. Source: Samuel Bawlf, 57.

When the natives walked among the English, after the ceremony, Fletcher describes some of the natives wailing and offering presents to the young Englishmen without beards.³⁶ This action may have been an expression of their belief that their deceased relatives had come back. Fletcher describes Drake placing a plate of brass to mark the area that he claimed for Queen Elizabeth. In Fletcher’s description, Drake called the area Nova Albion because it had white

³² Fletcher, *World Encompassed*, 69

³³ Fletcher, *World Encompassed*, 70-71.

³⁴ Hanna, *Lost Harbor*, 29; Fletcher, *World Encompassed*, 72-73.

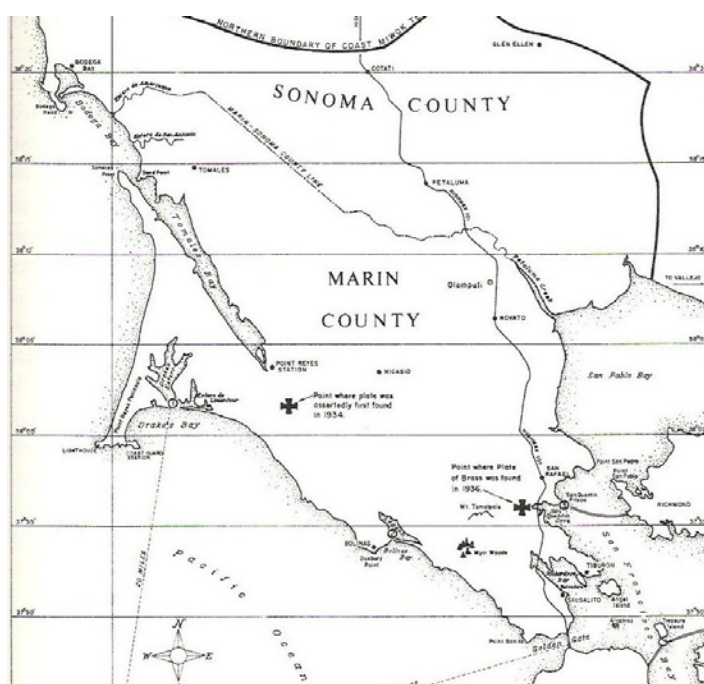
³⁵ Hanna, *Lost Harbor*, 29; Fletcher, *World Encompassed*, 76-77.

³⁶ Fletcher, *Lost Harbor*, 77-78.

cliffs like those of Dover in England³⁷. They left this fit harbor on July 23, 1579. Within one day of leaving, they encountered with some islands they called the islands Saint James. This was their last stop before continuing across the Pacific.

Possible Bays

This brings us to the current debate about the location of Drake's anchorage point. According to Fletcher, the "fit harbour" was located at 38°30'N. At or near this latitude, there are a number of bays, including the San Francisco Bay area; this is an area of about 67 miles. A few candidates include, from North to South, Bodega Bay, Drake's Bay, Bolinas Bay, and within San Francisco, San Quentin Cove.



Coast of California near San Francisco Bay. Source: Warren L. Hanna, 35

Bodega Bay, lies at approximately 38°30'N, and in the 19th century was big enough to hold several dozen ships at one time³⁸. Drake's Bay is the best contender for anchorage in California for many reasons. Its shape is close to that seen on the Hondonius Broadside, it sits directly on 38°30'N, and finally it contains white cliffs that are supposedly why Drake named the area Nova Albion³⁹. There is, however, one problem that this bay has which makes it difficult for this author to believe that it is the anchorage point: it contains some islands, called

³⁷ Fletcher, *World Encompassed*, 80.

³⁸ Hanna, *Lost Harbor*, 37.

³⁹ Hanna, *Lost Harbor*, 39-41.

the Farrow islands about 30 miles away, that do not appear on the broadside. The area just to the north is fairly flat with hills in the distance, all of which can be seen in the series of pictures below, taken in March 2008



Source: Author, Spring 2008

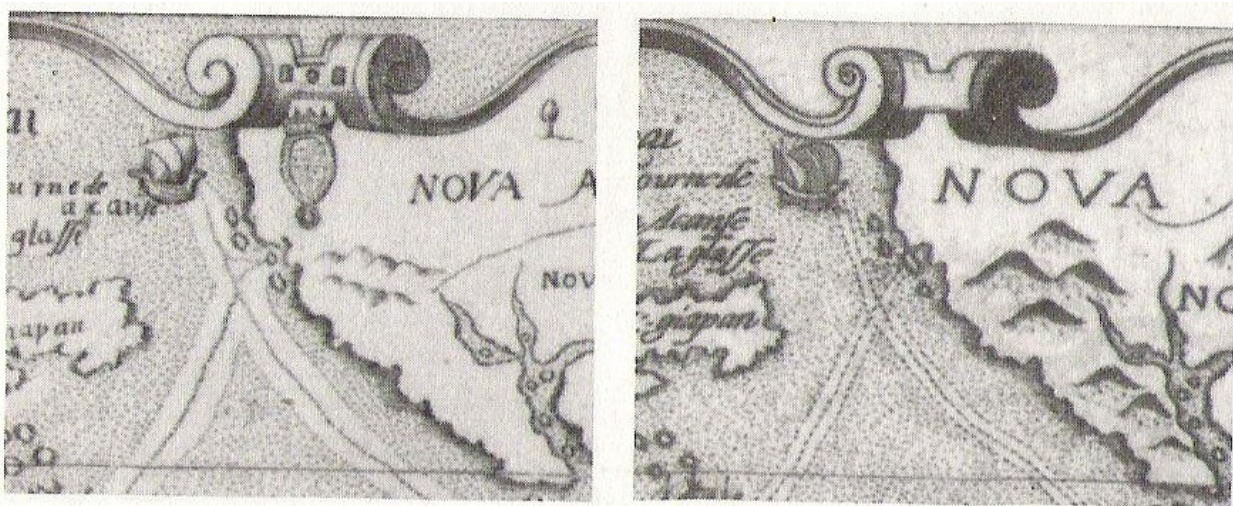
Further South, the cove of San Quentin, which lies just North of San Francisco, within the larger San Francisco Bay, is a contender because, while it does not fit any description of the “fit harbour”, except that it is between 38°N and 38°30`N, and it is the location where a brass plate was found in 1936. This plate may have actually been discovered in Drake’s Bay and transported to San Quentin Cove in 1934⁴⁰.

One major proponent of Drake anchoring in California at all is geographer Samuel Bawlf, he believes that Drake actually made it as far North as Vancouver Island based on the testimony given by John Drake, Drake’s Cousin, while imprisoned in Santa Fe, Chile, and the hand drawn maps Drake gave to friends upon his return in 1580. John Drake served as Drake’s page during the original voyage. Much like the ones seen below that Bawlf uses in his book, the first one shows that he traveled as far north as 57°, the second one shows that his anchorage point was a series of islands off the coast of Northwest America.

⁴⁰ Heizer, “California Indians”, 254.



hand drawing by Drake on a copy of Ortelius' Map. Source: Samuel Bawlf, 211.



Depiction of Drake's anchorage on both French and Dutch copy of map sent to Henry Navarene both shaving Islands as anchorage point. Source: Samuel Bawlf, 224.

John Drake's testimony says that they passed islands between 46° and 48° N and the land in this area was called Nova Albion, and the "fit harbour" was actually at 48° N. The part of his testimony dealing with Drake's anchorage said, "When the wind changed he went to the California's, where he discovered land in forty-eight degrees. The climate is temperate more cold than hot."⁴¹ Bawlf uses this first-hand testimony as proof of the anchorage at Vancouver Island, and believes that this is where Drake wished to establish a colony labeling the area as a "bay of small ships" which is now Courtenay of the east coast of Vancouver Island⁴². The idea of Drake anchoring as far North as Vancouver Island without any surviving official documentation is hard to believe, and especially, with all most all accounts, *The World*

⁴¹ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 206.

⁴² Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 297

Encompassed, The Famous Voyage, and The Anonymous Voyage, having Drake anchored at 38°N. Bawlf claims that this discrepancy between his anchorage point and those in the commonly held anchorage point was because of an official decree from Queen Elizabeth to keep Spain from interfering in other voyages to this anchorage, in order to set up a colony. In his theory, Drake believed he was getting close to the entrance of the Northwest Passage when he saw the snow-capped mountains at 50°N. The land was also supposed to have cliffs and mountains, this account conflicts with Fletcher's account that the land around the fit harbor was generally flat⁴³.

In an attempt to make his point, Bawlf uses a legend of the *Nuu-chah-nulth* tribe of British Columbia. In this legend, they claim to give the first gift of their potlatches, or celebrations, to the “great chief” of the bearded men [Drake] who visited them in his ‘floating house’ long before Cook and the Spaniards came”⁴⁴. After staying for many days, they left and traveled further north until they reached what is now Chatham Strait, the point at which they would have thought they reached the entrance to the Northwest Passage, going no further because of icebergs blocking their way further North, at 56°N⁴⁵. Chatham Strait is 1,513 miles north of Portland by car, and about 30-40 miles from Sitka, Alaska. There are problems with this theory such as the difference in descriptions of a “fit harbour”, the interactions with natives, and the idea that, perhaps, John Drake named a higher latitude to keep the Spanish Inquisition from knowing about any English landing within the Spanish domain.

The Brass Plate

One piece of evidence that may corroborate the claim that Drake anchored on the coast of California is a brass plate, supposedly discovered in 1936 in San Quentine Cove, by a Mr. Shinn. This brass plate is called Drake's plate of brass because the inscription bears his name and fits the description given by Fletcher⁴⁶. Six months following the discovery it Mr. Shinn gave it to a Professor Herbert E. Bolton of the University of California, to have it authenticated. Prof. Bolton had claimed through the years that if there was any proof of Drake's stay in California it would be confirmed by the brass plate that was surely still out there. He was also a noted

⁴³ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 206

⁴⁴ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 278.

⁴⁵ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 288.

⁴⁶ Robert F. Heizer. *Elizabethan California* (Ramona, California: Ballena Press, 1974), 19.

authority on Spanish frontiers in North America⁴⁷. Bolton claimed that this plate was the real plate based on the engraving, resemblance to other Elizabethan brass, and beyond that, if it were a hoax, it would have been found in Drake's bay, not San Quentin Cove. Various testing done by scientists at Columbia University, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to authenticate the plate, done between 1937 and 1939, confirmed the plate was indeed the one described in *The World Encompassed*⁴⁸.



BEE IT KNOWNE UNTO ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS
 JUNE 17, 1579
 BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND IN THE NAME OF HERR
 MAIESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH OF ENGLAND AND HERR
 SUCCESSORS FOREVER I TAKE POSSESSION OF THIS
 KINGDOME WHOSE KING AND PEOPLE FREELY RESIGNE
 THEIR RIGHT AND TITLE IN THE
 WHOLE LAND UNTO HERR
 MAIESTIES KEEPEING NOW NAMED BY ME AN TO BEE
 KNOWNE UNTO ALL MEN AS NOVA ALBION
 G. FRANCIS DRAKE
 (Hole for Silver Sixpence)



Top left is a picture of Shinn Plate, top right is a translation from the plate, and bottom is an x-ray of the plate to better see the engraving. Source: Warren L. Hanna, 244-245.

In the late 1970s, interest in the plate of brass was ignited again when Professor Earle R. Caley, of Princeton, claimed that the features which pointed to its authenticity could have been chemically achieved at the time it was discovered. The high percentage of zinc in the brass, is a characteristic of modern brass, not Elizabethan. Caley also stated that the magnesium in the plate was “worthless” because it was found only on the outer layers. The patina that was supposed to have been a point of authenticity could have also been faked by using solutions of various elements. Caley asked Dr. Harlow of Oxford to also look at the plate, he made many of the same arguments, but he also stated that he believed the workmanship of the plate would have

⁴⁷ Earle R. Caley, Lawrence Berkeley, et al. *The Plate of Brass Reexamined* (Berkeley, Bancroft Library: University of California, 1977), 1.

⁴⁸ Caley, *The Plate of Brass*, 5-6.

been better than what was seen because Drake was supposed to have left with very fine brass fixtures and with musicians on his ship⁴⁹.

The fact that Drake was supposed to have sailed with musicians, painters, and other luxuries makes it difficult to believe that the quality of brass would be so poor. The only explanation for this is if he was given only enough to make one plate, which he left in South America after making it through the Strait of Magellan, which has never been found, and the plate for North America had to be made on the spot. The workmanship of the letters would also have to be rather crude, unless he traveled with an engraver, because Drake would not know where he would be landing.

Integral information about the plate comes from the account written by Francis Fletcher, published by Drake's nephew and namesake:

Before we went from thence our general [Drake] caused to be set up a monument of our being there, as also of Her Majesty's and successors' right and title to that kingdom; namely, a plate of brass fast nailed to a great and firm post; whereon is engraven Her Grace's name, and the day and year of our arrival there, and of the free giving up of the province and kingdom, both by the king and people, into Her Majesty's hands; together with Her Highness' picture and arms, in a piece of sixpence current English [money], showing itself by a hole made of purpose through the plate; underneath was likewise engraven the name of our general, etc⁵⁰.

This description sounds like it could be referring to an actual brass plate that was engraved and then attached to a post, or that a post was carved, to which a plate bearing a sixpence was then attached. If one looks for an engraved brass plate, then they may not notice any other smaller plates with holes, because most likely a carved post would have been destroyed by the elements long before any other Europeans made it to California. This may explain why a plate or other item to identify the anchorage point has not yet been authenticated.

Bawlf only mentions the Brass Plate when he claims to have had a discussion with Donald McDonald. McDonald claimed to have found a plate of metal while exploring a cave on

⁴⁹Caley, *The Brass Plate*, 8-9.

⁵⁰Hampden, *Francis Drake Privateer*, 184.

Kuiu Island in Chatham strait, in 1954. In 1956, he called the Smithsonian to have someone look at it; because it was still dirty he sent a rubbing to them instead of a picture as they asked. There had been no further evidence of this plate because it was believed to be a hoax so no further study was done, and it was stolen from McDonald a few years later. The mounting of the plate upon a “great post” may have been an attempt to emulate the totem poles common to the area⁵¹.

Drake’s Colony

There are further legends about Drake’s stay in California including that some of his men stayed in California after Drake left⁵². This legend arose with the discrepancies between the reported number of people that arrived in California and those that left. There is also a legend among the Coastal Miwoks about Drake landing there. This, however, cannot be substantiated by this author at this time, and authorities do not give it as much weight as it would have otherwise. Hanna claims that a reason for this fact missing from the accepted accounts is the fact that the government wanted to protect those men from any Spanish reprisals. In 1772, there was a report by Spanish Father Crespi of “red-headed, bearded and fair complexioned” natives in the San Francisco area⁵³. There is one piece of evidence that seems to prove that there was at least one man left at the anchorage point. Drake’s Spanish pilot made it from the anchorage point to a Spanish settlement within a few months⁵⁴.

The idea of Drake leaving men in California would not be out of place in Elizabethan England. The belief in England was that if an explorer had a letter patent, an official document signed by the Monarch giving them permission to take the land, then they could build on the land and inhabit it establishing a colony. It was commonly held that even if a sign was erected it did not give the monarch possession of the area, to do so they had to inhabit it, to the English “possession is nine-points the law”⁵⁵. The Spanish on the other hand may not have to inhabit an area, but they believed to lay claim to an area, they had to have papal permission, and use ceremonies. In these ceremonies they would plant flags bearing the royal symbols, have men

⁵¹ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 289.

⁵² Hanna, *Lost Harbor*, 54.

⁵³ Hanna, *Lost Harbor*, 54-60.

⁵⁴ Wagner, *Sir Francis Drake’s Voyage*, 148.

⁵⁵ Patricia Seed, *Taking Possession and Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of Overseas Empires*, in *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Developments*, 5ed., ed. Stanley N. Katz, John M. Murrin, and Douglas Greeberg (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2001) 22,26.

from the ship witness their intent to settle⁵⁶. There is no evidence of English explorers having conducted ceremonies to gain possession, except for Drake in California⁵⁷. As the Spanish expanded in the New World, and in their trading in the East, they would claim areas using any marker they could. Other Catholic countries, such as the Portugese, used *padrões*, stone pillars, as markers. These symbols used by Catholic counties to claim land were often ignored by the English⁵⁸. If the English would ignore symbols such as plaques why would Drake make a brass plate to take possession of Nova Albion? Why would he not leave men as was the custom? Drake may have built the stone wall described in Fletcher's account in order to take possession of the area, in the practice of his country, and left men behind to keep the colony alive. The naming of Nova Albion by the use of a plaque was more a Spanish custom. The Spanish believed in the power of words to take possession over the inhabitants, therefore taking possession of the area, the English, on the other hand, would use renaming an area as a navigational guide⁵⁹. If Drake had found the western entrance of the Northwest Passage then he may have named the area where he stayed as a marker to lead the way to the entrance.

Post Voyage and other South Sea projects

The Golden Hinde put into Plymouth on September 26, 1580 with a hold full of Spanish Gold and a trade treaty with the Sultan of Barber for his spices⁶⁰. When Drake first met with the Queen and her Privy Council, he handed over a log and a chart of his voyage. They discussed the items for six hours, before it was decided that anyone who revealed anything about the voyage they could be punished with death and Drake claimed that the entire voyage could be done in one year⁶¹. This substantial cut in time would substantiate the idea that Drake found the western entrance to the Northwest Passage, because instead of having to travel around the tips of South America or Africa, he could pass right by them. In April 1581 Queen Elizabeth knighted Drake on the deck of the Golden Hinde⁶², which was relocated to Greenwich. Following Drake's meeting with Elizabeth and her council the Spanish Ambassador to England Bernardo de Mendoza wrote a letter to King Phillip II (1556-58) about the meeting with the Queen and

⁵⁶ Seed, *Taking Possession*, 22.

⁵⁷ Seed, *Taking Possession*, 27.

⁵⁸ Seed, *Taking Possession*, 31

⁵⁹ Seed, *Taking Possession*, 35.

⁶⁰ Wagner, *Sir Francis Drake's Voyage*, 144.

⁶¹ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 4.

⁶² A. L. Rowse. *Drake's Voyage*. (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Company, 1966). 12; Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 4, 195.

Drake's claim to a voyage in one year. This of course, must have meant to King Phillip II that the English had discovered the Northwest Passage⁶³.

Just two months after Drake's return, Walsingham had drafted a plan for another South Sea voyage. In this proposal, Drake was to lead it and become governor of the venture for his entire life receiving 10% of all profits. The Queen, in return for her support, would receive 20% of all profits from this venture. However, after signing off on the venture with Drake, Queen Elizabeth decided that he would be of most use at home, in case England and Spain went to war. This reason was given again, in 1584, when another voyage was proposed⁶⁴ and declined. In the 1582 proposed voyage, Edward Fenton took Drake's command with instructions to "better [discover] the Northwest Passage" and to colonize the anchorage point of Drake with as many of his men as he felt comfortable with. Fenton did not make it through the Straits of Magellan because King Phillip II had learned about the voyage and sent a naval force to block the Straits⁶⁵.

Earlier, in 1581, Martin Frobisher, the man who supposedly had found the eastern entrance of the Northwest Passage, was put in charge of another return voyage that included men from Drake's voyage. One of these men was John Drake, who captained the second vessel, the Francis. Frobisher's instructions for this voyage were not only to leave men at an undisclosed position but also to discover China and Cathay so England could establish direct trade with them⁶⁶. He was also not supposed to travel into the waters of King Phillip's domain while on the Pacific Ocean; instead he was to make for the Moluccas in order to discover the Northwest Passage. Bawlf maintains that the use of Moluccas was code for the islands that Drake had discovered. This would only make sense if it was something that could be confirmed. If there was a code name for the supposed islands, why would the Moluccas be used? Why not something else? The name was well known amongst voyagers and their use in finding the Northwest Passage would make it clear to anyone reading those instructions that the government that sponsored it was trying to hide something. Since the English had already mentioned finding the Northwest Passage it does not make sense for them to keep the location of the anchorage point secret⁶⁷.

⁶³ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 188.

⁶⁴ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 194-196, 215.

⁶⁵ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 4-5.

⁶⁶ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 198-199.

⁶⁷ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 199.

While preparing for this journey, Frobisher, was replaced, for some unknown reason, by his second in command, Edward Fenton. This new voyage made it to the coast of Brazil before they learned of the force waiting for them in the Straits of Magellan. The reasons Fenton gave his captains for calling off the voyage while in Brazil was that he wanted to get more provisions, and later, that they were no match for the Spanish fleet. John Drake appears to have disagreed with this assessment because he took his ship and continued south. When John Drake took his men up the Rio de la Platá they were attacked by the natives and then captured by the Spanish. This action allowed the Spanish to question John Drake and include his account as evidence of the argument that Drake had stayed on the west coast of North America⁶⁸.

According to Bawlf, Drake was supposed to have drawn out many maps and given them to important friends, despite the Queen's threat of death. Most of these maps located his most northern latitude at 57°N, on the coast of what is now Southern Alaska. On the first version of the Hondius Broadside the latitude was lowered but the islands remained reaching 500 miles along the mainland⁶⁹. On the Broadside, the coast that Abraham Ortelius had created of the world, there were place names all up the coast to the entrance of the Northwest passage.

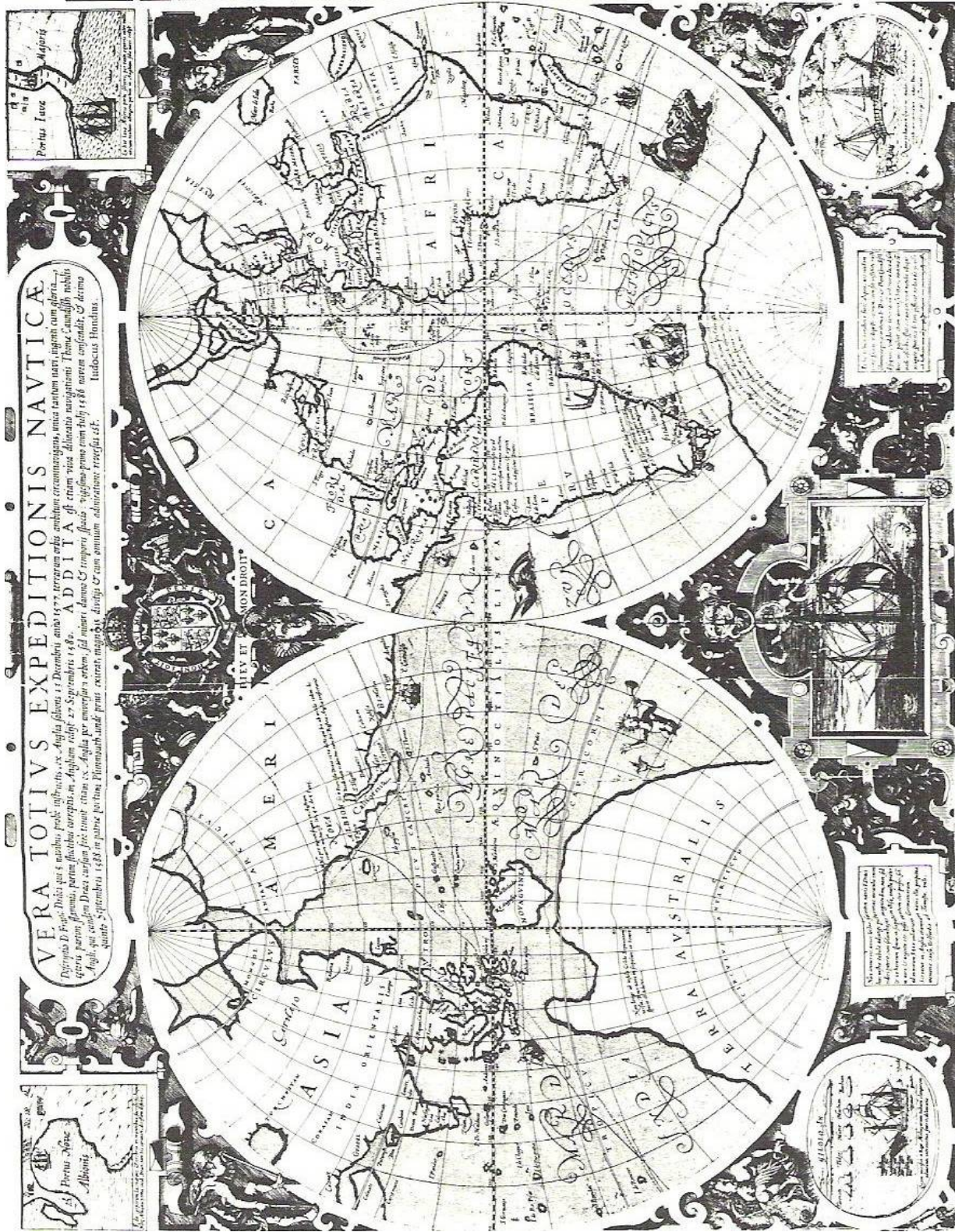


Original document and the changes

revealed by exposure to different lights. Source: Samuel Bawlf, 217.

⁶⁸ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 204.

⁶⁹ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 5.



Hondius Broadside depicting Drake's Voyage. Source: Warren L. Hanna, 122.



Place names on Oretellius Map on Northwest Coast of

America. Source: Bawlf, 227.

The second illustration above is the evidence that Bawlf uses to explain why there would be place names all the way to the Northwest Passage at 50°N on the map of Ortellius, pictured above in greater detail. The original document was subjected to “various light conditions” to see if it had been changed. What appeared was that it was in fact changed at least twice moving the location of Drake’s good port southward from 50°N to 48°N⁷⁰. Maps of this nature were used to gain the support of Protestant Princes against the Spanish empire, two such recipients were Henry of Navarre, and William of Hesse. They were also given copies of the Queen’s approved account of events from the voyage⁷¹. In 1588 Thomas Cavendish returned to England from his own circumnavigation with the news that Tierra del Fuego was not a series of islands, and if this was true, and Drake lied, he may have also lied about finding the Northwest Passage⁷².

To make Drake’s voyage important, again, there was a flurry of activity, including a publication of Drake’s voyage. Besides the *World Encompassed*, the *Anonymous Narrative* published by Richard Hakluyt, who published volumes covering nautical voyages, was published in 1600. *The Anonymous Narritive* was included in one of his volumes as a loose-leaf insert⁷³. On a map included in a 1582 volume Hakluyt included a large “inland sea” with a ship, and

⁷⁰ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 217.

⁷¹ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 217.

⁷² Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 231-232.

⁷³ J. W. Thrower ed., *Sir Francis Drake and the Famous Voyage, 1577-1580: Essays commemorating the Quadrecentennial of Drake’s Circumnavigation of the Earth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 34.

inscription “Angelorum 1580” as a possible reference to Drake’s discovery of the western entrance to the Northwest Passage⁷⁴.

Spanish reaction to Drake in the South Sea

Spurred on by English explorations, the Spanish also sent explorers to California. In 1595, an exploration led by Cermeño was shipwrecked in Drake’s Bay; they reported seeing no evidence of anybody having been there at all. This seems strange if Drake had his men build a stone wall, as in Fletcher’s account, as there would have been some evidence⁷⁵. Their explorations continued until 1776 when the order was rescinded⁷⁶. After returning to England, Drake had restored the country’s confidence on the water, and helped to make it a naval power. In his book, Hampden states that Drake “was the poor boy who made good; the Jack the Giant Killer who defied and humiliated the greatest monarch in the European world: the Robin Hood of the sea”⁷⁷. Before Drake made his circumnavigation, the Spanish were content to stay in South America and Mexico, but after Drake, they felt the need to expand their claims in order to keep England away from their colonies. They could not allow a Protestant Monarch to gain hold in the resource rich New World.

Drake’s purpose on the South Sea is still unclear but taking into account England’s push to hurt Spain financially, the search for a Northwest Passage would make sense. The English would wish to find a way to hurt the Spanish in the South Sea as they were also hurting the Spanish in the Caribbean, but make it home safely as well. Having a colony on the west coast of America would afford a base out of which to operate privateering activities and store any treasure until the passage opened up during the summer allowing year-round persecution of the Spanish. While the argument for this exploration and colonization is valid, there is no evidence that Drake accomplished this. Until an un-debatable piece of evidence is found and authenticated, his anchorage in America will always be in question. Sir Francis Drake died in January 1596 or dysentery off of Panama, without making it back into the South Sea⁷⁸. Despite the debates that have swirled around Drake since his circumnavigation. The man who was

⁷⁴ Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage*, 202.

⁷⁵ Wagner, *Sir Francis Drake’s Voyage*, 168.

⁷⁶ Weber. *The Spanish Frontier*, 266.

⁷⁷ Hampden, *Francis Drake Privateer*, 14.

⁷⁸ George Sanderlin, *The Sea Dragon: Journals of Francis Drake’s Voyage Around the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969) 231.

known as “El Draque”, the Dragon, by the Spanish, would live on in poems and songs like those written by poet Thomas Greepe:

Uslysses with his navy great
In ten years' time great valor won;
Yet all his time did no such feat
As Drake within one year hathdone.
Both Turk and Pope and all our foes
Do dread this Drake wher'er he goes⁷⁹

It was this spirit of Drake that stood by the English in times of great distress.

⁷⁹ Wade D. Dudley, *Drake: For God, Queen, and Plunder* (Washington D.C.: Bassey's Inc., 2003) 85.

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