

Introduction

But surely even you must know of Colnett; everybody knows of Colnett.

– Patrick O’Brian, *The Far Side of the World*

The conclusion of the American War of Independence in 1783 signalled a substantial restructuring of trade and politics in the Atlantic world. Nowhere were the realignments more necessary than Britain, where military defeat and loss of empire were compounded by the emergence of the United States as a new economic and geopolitical competitor. In this uncertain conjuncture imperial and commercial eyes turned to Asia and the Pacific with renewed interest. Here, Captain James Cook’s third voyage (1776-80) had delineated a variety of promising trading opportunities.¹ Among the possibilities was a three-cornered trade, linking the Atlantic world with China via the medium of resources on the Northwest Coast of America. Sea otter pelts provided the initial impetus, but the Northwest Coast also offered, according to one enthusiastic account, the possibility “of establishing an important fishery, of supplying the China and India markets with masts, yards, timber, and most kinds of naval stores.”² Such views, in the decade and a half following Cook’s visit of 1778, helped make the Northwest Coast, although remote and poorly understood in European nations and the United States, the focus of considerable geopolitical competition.

The earliest responses to Cook’s third voyage came from Spain and Russia, the two countries with prior territorial claims on the Northeast Coast of the Pacific. Spain, which had made two previous sorties to the region, sent two vessels northwards from San Blas in 1779. The *Favorita* and *Princessa* reached as far as the Prince William Sound area but detected no signs of any “foreign encroachment.” Thus, with a false sense of security, Spain suspended northern expeditions for nearly a decade.³ Meanwhile, Russian fur traders, who had been pushing eastwards from Kamchatka since Bering’s voyage (1741-42), established a permanent post on Kodiak Island in 1784.⁴ This provided a base from which further expansion onto the Alaskan mainland would be launched. Elsewhere, as warfare concluded and more reliable information on Cook’s voyage spread, interest in the commercial possibilities of the Northwest Coast increased. By 1785, plans for expeditions had been made in Austria, France, Great Britain, Spain, Russia, India, and Canton.⁵ Not all these proposals came to fruition, but among them lay the origins of the “Voyage” (1786-89) undertaken by James Colnett, whose journal is here presented. It is accompanied by extracts from a second journal of the voyage, written by Andrew Bracey Taylor.⁶

James Colnett

James Colnett was born in Devon, at Stoke Damerel (Devonport), in 1753. The location, a major naval dockyard, suggests that the family probably had some naval connections.⁷ No records have been located to confirm this, but his parents were married at Portsmouth, another naval centre, in 1748, and his mother was a resident of the town in 1790.⁸ Whatever the cause of the family's presence in Devon in 1753, the absence of any other records of Colnett births, marriages, or deaths at Stoke Damerel suggests that their stay was of short duration. Moreover, the Colnett family had connections with east London, Stepney in particular. It was here that Colnett's two elder sisters, Sarah and Martha, were christened in 1749 and 1752; it may also have been the birthplace of his father, James Sr.; finally, it was in the neighbouring district of Mile End that James Jr. would be buried.⁹ Little more is known of the family or Colnett's upbringing, save that he was probably the eldest son and had at least one brother, Richard, who also embarked on a nautical career.¹⁰

The first definite information about James Colnett's career comes from 1770, when he joined the Royal Navy as an able-bodied seaman on HMS *Hazard*. At this stage, Colnett identified himself as being eighteen years of age and born in London. In later naval records this was corrected to reflect his birth in "Plymouth," but the initial slip is suggestive. Moreover, Colnett joined the *Hazard* not in Devon but at the Kentish port of Sheerness.¹¹ It seems probable that James, if not other members of the family, had returned to the London area, but the timing of the move cannot be determined. Seventeen or eighteen was a relatively late age to begin naval service, raising the question of possible prior seagoing experience. His brother Richard is known to have gone to sea as a "boy," in the West Indies trade, at the age of about thirteen c. 1767.¹² Notwithstanding this late start, and an entry into naval service as an able-bodied seaman, James Colnett was almost certainly a "gentleman" and intent on becoming an officer.¹³ A crucial step in confirming this career path came in 1771, when he secured a posting as midshipman on HMS *Scorpion* under James Cook.¹⁴ Within a month, Cook had moved on, to prepare for his second round-the-world expedition, but Colnett was not forgotten. By the end of the year, he had rejoined Cook, as a midshipman on the *Resolution*. Such an appointment, by contemporary opinion, was "quite a great feather, in a young Man's Cap" and required "much Intrest," or patronage to secure.¹⁵ The source of Colnett's support is not clear, but it may have been a "kinsman, Mr Binmer," who rose to be "first assistant surveyor" of the navy in the 1790s. It is possible that Colnett had had some prior contact with Cook. The latter, since 1763, had been a resident, albeit an intermittent one, of Stepney, just off the Mile End Road. If Colnett had returned to the family parish, as suggested earlier, the two would have been in fairly close proximity; there is also Colnett's observation that Cook had been his "first commander and patron."¹⁶

Whatever the origin of Colnett's "interest," the result was that he spent three and a half years under the tutelage of Cook on "arguably the greatest, most

perfect, of all seaborne voyages of exploration.” At the end of the voyage, Colnett had graduated from the “most demanding of training schools,” thereby joining the fraternity of British Pacific navigators.¹⁷ Indeed, it is striking how Colnett’s subsequent activities intertwined with other alumni and backers of Cook’s voyages. These activities would make Colnett an active participant in the widening encounter between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of the Pacific.

On returning to England in 1775, Colnett continued his naval career in the context of the Seven Years War. After rising from a position of gunner to master, he obtained a lieutenant’s certificate in 1779 and served at that rank on HMS *Bienfaisant* until the end of hostilities.¹⁸ There followed a brief period on half-pay and a three-year tour of harbour duty on HMS *Pégase*.¹⁹ Although promoted to first lieutenant, such sedentary duty for an ambitious officer must have become tedious, not to say frustrating. At any rate, in the summer of 1786, Colnett began negotiating for an appointment with a “private” expedition. In July, he reached an agreement with the principals, conditional upon his obtaining “leave” from the Admiralty.²⁰ The latter was largely a formality, and Colnett signed on with Richard Cadman Etches & Co. as captain of the *Prince of Wales* and commander of a two-vessel commercial venture. Late in September, the *Prince of Wales* and *Princess Royal* embarked from London for the Northwest Coast of America and Canton. It would be six years before Colnett returned to England.²¹

The expedition, described in more detail below, reached Nootka Sound, Vancouver Island, in July 1787 and spent the remainder of the season on the Northwest Coast. The intervening winter was passed at the Hawaiian Islands before the ships returned to the Northwest Coast for the 1788 season. With the close of trading, Colnett headed for China to dispose of the furs, arriving at Macao on 11 November and Canton on 24 November.²² At this stage, Colnett intended to complete the voyage to England on the *Prince of Wales* but, during the sojourn at Canton, circumstances changed.²³ Supercargo John Etches, brother of Richard, had negotiated an agreement with some local British merchants for an expedition from China to the Northwest Coast and Colnett was persuaded to assume command.²⁴ The story of his voyage on the *Argonaut* is well known and requires only the briefest commentary.

Sailing from Macao on 26 April 1789, Colnett reached Nootka Sound in July. There he found a Spanish settlement, established in furtherance of that nation’s claim to sovereignty on the Northwest Coast. Esteban Martinez, the Spanish commander, promptly arrested Colnett and seized the *Argonaut*: the Anglo-Spanish “Nootka Crisis” had begun.²⁵ Thanks to diplomatic negotiations, a peaceful resolution was secured, but it was not until May 1790 that Colnett was released by the Spaniards and July before he was able to sail from San Blas in the *Argonaut*. Thereupon he headed north to resume trading on the Northwest Coast, wintering at Clayoquot. Early in 1791 Colnett paid a final visit to Nootka and, after completing some repairs, sailed for China. An

embargo on the import of furs to Canton prompted a visit to Japan and Chusan, where some of the cargo was sold. By November Colnett was back in Canton and succeeded, a month later, in securing a passage on the *General Coote*, an East India Company (EIC) vessel. He reached England the following April.²⁶

Later in 1792 Colnett was approached about another expedition to the Pacific, on behalf of the Admiralty and private whaling interests.²⁷ The voyage on the *Rattler*, seeking harbours where whalers could find “refreshment and the security to refit,” occupied 1793 and 1794.²⁸ It prompted the whalers to concentrate for some years in the vicinity of the Galapagos Islands. When Colnett returned to England, however, war with France was underway and he resumed naval service. This encompassed periods of surveying work on the coast of East Anglia, a shipwreck, and imprisonment in France. Although acquitted by the mandatory court martial, it would be another five years before Colnett received a new command.²⁹ His activities during this period are uncertain, but he spent some time in London advocating to the Admiralty a variety of rather grandiose Pacific projects, such as a surprise attack on Spanish settlements in “N. & S. America by way of China” or New South Wales. These schemes reflected Colnett’s personal experiences on the *Argonaut* expedition and long-standing British geopolitical objectives of encouraging the disintegration of the Spanish empire in the Americas.³⁰

Then, in 1802, Colnett embarked on what would be his final Pacific voyage. Commanding HMS *Glatton*, he was charged with conveying 400 convicts and a number of free settlers to Australia. He returned to England in September 1803, with a variety of colonial produce and botanical specimens, some of the latter destined to become additions to Banks’ collecting empire.³¹ Thereafter, while retaining command of HMS *Glatton*, Colnett was assigned to duties concerned primarily with organizing convoys to the Baltic. In March 1805, he retired on half-pay for the final time but survived for only eighteen months. Colnett died at his “lodgings” in Great Ormond Street, London, in the first half of September 1806; his passing was recorded, briefly, in the periodical literature of the day. Although he was unmarried, Colnett left the bulk of his estate to his daughter, Elizabeth.³²

Colnett’s career, two Australian historians have suggested, exemplified the growing British interest in the Pacific – one strand of Harlow’s “swing to the east.” Although the broader economic significance of this reorientation has been questioned by some, there can be no doubt of the importance of the Pacific to Colnett’s career.³³ In all, he made five voyages to, from, and across the Pacific. These voyages consumed approximately thirteen years – more than one-third of his documented working life. Moreover, Colnett’s Pacific voyages, and their diverse objectives, clearly illustrate the intimate connections between commerce, politics, and the acquisition of geographical knowledge in late-eighteenth-century Britain. These activities also made Colnett a participant in, and recorder of, the early stages of the contact process in several regions of the Pacific.

Andrew Bracey Taylor

Taylor was born into a junior branch of a prominent Great Yarmouth family, probably between 1760 and 1765.³⁴ Not surprisingly, he also had significant seafaring connections – both his father and grandfather had been “officers in the navy.” Little more is known of Taylor’s early years, but he entered the Royal Navy about 1776, spending time on North American duty. The first definite information comes from the siege of Gibraltar (1781–83), when Taylor received his first commission, as lieutenant.³⁵ To begin with, he commanded the gun-boat *Vanguard*, charged with preventing “Enemy’s Gun Boats and Mortar Boats from annoying the Garrison and Shipping.”³⁶ This brought several episodes of hostile action before the *Vanguard* was scuttled for defensive purposes. Taylor transferred to HMS *Brilliant*, but this vessel suffered a similar fate shortly before the “Grand Attack” of 13 September 1782.³⁷ Five weeks later, Taylor was assigned to HMS *San Miguel*, where he served, retaining the rank of lieutenant, until the ceasefire of March 1783. The *San Miguel* returned to England shortly thereafter, arriving in April 1783.³⁸ The company was paid off in the middle of May but within a week Taylor had secured a commission on the *Latona*. This took him to the West Indies, where he was discharged, perhaps because of ill health, in April 1784.³⁹ After returning to England that summer, Taylor’s activities over the next eighteen months are uncertain. However, late in 1785, while remaining on the Royal Navy half-pay list, he secured a year’s leave to engage in “Merchant Service” to Hamburg.⁴⁰

Then, in the summer of 1786, after securing further leave from the Navy Board, he signed up for the Etches expedition. Taylor was appointed as third mate on the *Prince of Wales*, a surprisingly modest rank, given that he was the only member of the expedition, apart from Colnett, who held a commission in the Royal Navy.⁴¹ No information is available to explain this discrepancy, but it seems to have coloured his perception of the voyage. Be this as it may, Taylor was promoted to second mate for the final leg to London, as part of the changes made at Canton. Once the voyage was completed, Taylor proceeded to his hometown, Great Yarmouth, where he was married on 22 September 1789.⁴² The rapidity of this development and comments in Taylor’s journal suggest that some arrangements had been made prior to the voyage.

In May 1790, Taylor resumed his naval career. He served initially as fourth lieutenant on HMS *Barfleur*, followed by stints on two other vessels, the *Brunswick* and the *Sandwich*, and promotion to second lieutenant. This period, extending over four years, was spent at a number of stations in the English Channel and on patrol in adjacent waters.⁴³ Then, at the end of 1794, having obtained Admiralty permission, Taylor assumed “Command of the Courier packet Boat, stationed between Harwich & the Coast of Holland.”⁴⁴ How long he remained at this position is unclear, but it cannot have been more than a year or so. Between 1796 and 1800, he performed a similar role on the *Carteret*, carrying the mail and a few passengers between Falmouth and the West Indies.⁴⁵ At a time of war, this was no sinecure and, in March 1799, Taylor

was captured by a French privateer; but he was quickly released and rejoined the *Carteret* at St. Kitts in May. After returning to England in June, he embarked on a final journey on the *Carteret* in July. The last entry in the log for this voyage is dated 8 September at Tortola Roads in the Leeward Islands.⁴⁶ What happened next is unclear, but on 13 January 1800, he was at Port Royal, Jamaica, making out his will. Little more than a week later, Taylor was dead, leaving a wife and at least two children.⁴⁷

Origins of Colnett's Expedition

The genesis of Colnett's voyage on the *Prince of Wales* lay in the revelation that prime sea otter pelts, purchased for "trifles" at Nootka, had sold for astonishing prices in Canton, with rumours of even higher prices in Japan. Some information on this trade was available with the publication of unofficial accounts of Cook's voyage in the early 1780s.⁴⁸ By 1783, James Matra, a veteran of Cook's first voyage, had made a proposal to the British government that linked the establishment of a settlement at New South Wales with the development of the China trade through furs procured in the Aleutian Islands. Prepared with the assistance of Joseph Banks, it was, by one account, in "more or less open circulation." However, the publication of the official edition of Cook's third voyage, late in 1784, was of much greater consequence.⁴⁹ It provided not only a vast array of more reliable and more detailed information but, lest anyone should doubt the potential of the sea otter trade on the Northwest Coast, James King sketched an outline for its development. King argued that "the advantages that might be derived from a voyage to that part of the American coast undertaken with commercial views, appear to me of a degree of importance sufficient to call the attention of the public."⁵⁰ Among those prepared to seize this opportunity was Richard Cadman Etches (1744-1817), of Brooks & Etches, London tea and wine merchants.⁵¹

The precise origins of Etches' plans have not been recorded, but his background indicates a familiarity with shipping and the evaluation of commercial intelligence. Family connections brought access to modest amounts of capital and credit – sufficient, at least, to make a response to King's outline a feasible proposition. According to Etches, the United Company of Merchants Trading to King George's Sound had a nominal capital of £200,000, with shares of £100, but it seems likely that, at most, only a quarter of this amount was ever subscribed.⁵² Financial issues aside, the news and rumour of an impending French expedition under La Pérouse may have provided further stimulus for Etches' actions; it likely improved the reception of his ideas in official quarters.⁵³ Preliminary plans, which included the possibility of opening trade with Japan, had been made by 13 March 1785, when Etches took the crucial step of consulting Joseph Banks about the proposed venture.⁵⁴ Positioned at the interface of the highest levels of scientific, political, and commercial activity in England, Banks was a key figure whose support would be invaluable. This was forthcoming, at least to the extent of "offers of assistance," advice, and the promise of further information about Japan. Banks also may have brought Etches

into contact with George Dixon, a veteran of Cook's third voyage; he certainly suggested that Etches needed a more substantial capital investment, a prescient observation.⁵⁵

Although encouraged by Banks' response, Etches still faced the problem common to independent merchants wishing to pursue overseas trade in late-eighteenth-century Britain: the panoply of entrenched privileges retained by long-established chartered trading companies.⁵⁶ For Etches and his associates, this meant dealing with the East India Company (EIC) and the South Sea Company. The former, economically powerful, politically well connected, and protective of its chartered interests, was the key; the latter largely a coupon clipping operation. Etches, no doubt familiar with the EIC's operations through his involvement in the tea trade, began by approaching the government with a set of proposals calling for a charter of exclusive trade on the coast of America north of latitude 43°6'N, a settlement at Nootka Sound, a visit to the Sandwich Islands, the development of whaling, and trade with Japan. No charter was forthcoming, but the government did support the general objectives of the undertaking, subject to the approval of the EIC. Thus, in April 1785, Etches forwarded the proposals to the EIC and sought a licence to trade furs, obtained on the Northwest Coast, in China.⁵⁷ Early in May, the EIC responded by outlining its terms, and agreement was reached shortly thereafter.⁵⁸ However, the licence was not issued until the EIC had checked with the British government. Approval of the plans, confirming the expedition's quasi-official status, was communicated to Etches at the end of August.⁵⁹ By that time, he had secured a licence, for a period of five years, to trade within the "territory" of the South Sea Company.⁶⁰

Although now fully sanctioned, the Etches expedition had little information about its principal destination. Some information about Bering's voyage was available and Coxe had provided an updated survey of Russian discoveries – but only as far as the Aleutian Islands. A brief account of the two Spanish expeditions of 1774 and 1775 had been published as an appendix to a pamphlet on the Northwest Passage; more important, Barrington had issued Mourelle's journal of the latter voyage, which had reached the Washington coast and Bucarelli Bay in Alaska.⁶¹ Even the principal sources, the various books and charts produced by Cook and the members of his third expedition, were highly circumscribed, both geographically and ethnographically.⁶² Cook had spent a month at Nootka Sound before proceeding north to Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet; of the intervening coast he saw little. The insularity of Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands, for example, remained unknown to Europeans. However, Cook's voyage had established the strategic importance of the Hawaiian Islands as a potential wintering location.

In this context of geographical ambiguity, belief in the existence of the Northwest Passage remained widespread. Not surprisingly, Alexander Dalrymple, hydrographer with the EIC and a well-informed, if speculative, interpreter of overseas geographies, was both a believer and a persuasive advocate.⁶³ Richard Etches, in his 1785 proposal to the EIC, shrewdly incorporated a version of the

case: “There are a number of inlets in Prince William’s Sound, and Cook’s River, that time would not permit Captain Cook to explore – it is very probable ... that some very essential discoveries may be made and perhaps a communication carried on to Hudson’s Bay ... And likewise to make a further attempt to discover a North West Passage.”⁶⁴

Etches secured two vessels, the *King George* and the *Queen Charlotte*; the former was named by George Rose, the secretary of the Treasury, and the latter by Joseph Banks. Command of the expedition was given to Nathaniel Portlock, and George Dixon was appointed as captain of the *Queen Charlotte*.⁶⁵ Portlock was known to Etches from a previous venture but, more importantly, both he and Dixon, as veterans of Cook’s third voyage, possessed personal experience of the Northwest Coast, the Hawaiian Islands, Canton, and the traffic in sea otter pelts.⁶⁶ The optimism surrounding the departure of the expedition from Deptford (London), on 29 August 1785, was aptly symbolized by the United Company’s colours flying at the mastheads; they contained “the figure of Hope, leaning on an Anchor in an oval, in the center of the Ensign.” A contemporary journal commented that there was “every probability the present enterprize will ... open a new source of commercial wealth of the first consequence to this nation.”⁶⁷ Portlock and Dixon spent two summers, 1786 and 1787, trading on the Northwest Coast and the intervening winter at the Hawaiian Islands. They arrived at Macao, in November 1787, with a substantial collection of furs to sell, although prices were disappointing.⁶⁸

But before Etches knew anything about the fate of Portlock and Dixon, he had begun organizing a second expedition.⁶⁹ Early plans called for a nearly new vessel, a cutter of 250 to 300 tons, to sail at the beginning of August 1786. Application was made to the EIC on 30 June and permission granted on 13 July.⁷⁰ During this interval, James Colnett was approached to take command of the expedition and, partly on his advice, Etches’ plans were revised. A “small Sloop as a tender to the Ship, for the benefit of Trafficking and Navigating the large Rivers” of the Northwest Coast was added. But, presumably as an economy measure, the principal vessel was reduced to an older, smaller, chartered ship: the *Prince of Wales*.⁷¹ The reasons for the selection of Colnett are unknown, but it was partly a function of his “connections.” At a later date, Colnett stated that he was introduced to Etches by “one of the most eminent merchants of the City of London.”⁷² Whatever the case, Colnett’s participation required that he secure his discharge from HMS *Pégase* and a leave of absence from the Admiralty. These formalities were completed by the beginning of September.⁷³

Meanwhile, Etches had added another dimension to the expedition: a sealing party of fifteen men to be landed at Isla de los Estados (Staten Island), off Tierra del Fuego. Information on this addition is sparse, but sealing – for skins and oil – was emerging as an adjunct to the new “Southern Whale Fishery.”⁷⁴ Equally, the move may have been a way of addressing funding problems, raising additional capital, and spreading the risk of the voyage. Whatever the motivation, Colnett had visited Isla de los Estados with Cook and likely played a

role in selecting this location for the undertaking.⁷⁵ These changes, together with repairs to the ship, delayed the expedition's departure from Deptford until 23 September.

Vessels and Personnel

The *Prince of Wales* was a "River built Ship," launched about 1752, but newly sheathed for the forthcoming voyage.⁷⁶ According to Colnett, she displaced 171 tons, carried fourteen guns, and had a complement of thirty-five hands, including officers.⁷⁷ In addition, John Etches, the brother of Richard and a partner in the company, served as supercargo.⁷⁸ A full listing of the crew is not available but it included, in addition to Colnett and Etches, a chief mate, second, third, fourth, and probably fifth mates, surgeon, boatswain, gunner, carpenters, sailmakers, armourers, quartermaster, cook, captain's servant, and seamen.⁷⁹ The *Princess Royal*, the tender, was little more than one-third the size of the *Prince of Wales*. Colnett described her as being 65 tons burthen, rigged as a sloop, with four guns, and a complement of fifteen hands; he later added that she was "a very bad sailor."⁸⁰

There is a variety of evidence suggesting that the second Etches expedition was organized in the face of financial constraints. In addition to the late incorporation of the sealing party, Etches also considered, in September 1786, a "handsome offer" from a gentleman for a passage to Tahiti. Nothing came of this plan, but it does suggest concerns other than the efficiency of the voyage. Moreover, some unexpected repairs before the expedition left England caused Andrew Taylor to comment that they had "in some measure shook their [the owners] Credit in Town."⁸¹ Finally, Charles Duncan, who was appointed captain of the *Princess Royal*, complained about the "many deficiencies even of common necessities" of his vessel after returning to England. In part, this statement was a product of a dispute with Etches about payments for his services. Etches defended himself against such criticism, but a similar dispute with George Dixon, beginning in 1788, confirms that the financial problems persisted.⁸²

Whatever the deficiencies of funding and equipment, the personnel on the vessels were well qualified. Duncan, like Colnett, Portlock, and Dixon, had prior naval experience, receiving his first warrant as "acting master" on HMS *Conqueror* in 1779.⁸³ A permanent appointment followed in 1781, and Duncan served on a series of naval vessels during the War of American Independence. Included was a voyage to Norway under James Burney, a veteran of Cook's second and third expeditions. Whether this encounter influenced Duncan's appointment is unknown, but the link is suggestive, and there is some evidence of contact between the two men after Duncan returned to England in 1789.⁸⁴ Irrespective of such connections, the navigational, surveying, and general professional and nautical skills required of an experienced ship's master were an obvious recommendation for the intended voyage with Colnett. And they were put to good use, as Duncan's surviving charts testify.⁸⁵ However, the

voyage took its toll on Duncan. Because of ill health, he relinquished command of the *Princess Royal* at Canton and returned to England on the *Prince of Wales*.⁸⁶

Although information on other personnel is incomplete, the expedition included men of considerable ability and further naval connections. The “inferior Officers,” according to Andrew Bracey Taylor, “were all Men who had been generally employed in His Majesty’s Service.”⁸⁷ Taylor, as noted above, was exemplar as well as author of this remark, but the most notable of the other “inferior Officers” was Archibald Menzies (1754-1842). His appointment as surgeon on the *Prince of Wales*, thanks to Banks’ intercession, brought skills that were unusual on a commercial voyage. A Scot, Menzies had some university training in medicine, surgery, and botany, in addition to naval experience – most recently as surgeon’s mate on HMS *Assistance*.⁸⁸ Moreover, he had been in communication with Joseph Banks about seed collecting since 1784.⁸⁹ Menzies was “mightily pleased” about the proposed route for the forthcoming voyage, thinking that the Northwest Coast would present “a new & an extensive field for Botanical research as well as other branches of natural history” and promised Banks that he would lose “no opportunity in collecting whatever is new, or rare, or useful, in my branch of natural history.”⁹⁰ By way of preparation, Menzies spent some time in Banks’ herbarium examining specimens collected at “Oonalaska” and Nootka during Cook’s third expedition.⁹¹ Menzies’ scientific efforts on the Colnett voyage were rewarded. Two years after returning to England, he sailed on Vancouver’s expedition (1791-95) to the Northwest Coast, this time as botanist.⁹²

Joining Menzies on the *Prince of Wales* was a former naval colleague, James Johnstone (b. 1759). Johnstone’s naval career had begun in 1779, as a “Clerk & Steward” and, after serving at various ranks, he joined Menzies on HMS *Assistance*. The two were shipmates between 1783 and 1786, with Johnstone being appointed master in 1785.⁹³ Discharged in August 1786, Johnstone received his examination ticket as master in September and was appointed chief mate of the *Prince of Wales* at almost the same time. When Colnett decided to remain at Macao in 1789, Johnstone assumed command of the *Prince of Wales* for the return to England. Subsequently, Johnstone joined Menzies on Vancouver’s expedition to the Northwest Coast.⁹⁴

The “second mate” on the *Prince of Wales* was Thomas Hudson, possibly a former naval colleague of Colnett’s.⁹⁵ Hudson returned to the Northwest Coast on Colnett’s ill-fated expedition of 1789, as master of the *Princess Royal*, only to drown near Hesquiat in 1790.⁹⁶ Thomas Temple, another victim of the same accident, had also served on the *Prince of Wales* in an unspecified capacity, probably a junior officer; he likely had some naval experience and was probably a family friend of Colnett’s.⁹⁷ Alex Steward or Stewart, also from a naval family, acted as a mate on the *Princess Royal* before transferring to the *Prince of Wales*, as third officer, for the leg of the journey from Canton to London.⁹⁸ He returned to the Northwest Coast as master of the *Jackall*, a British fur-trading

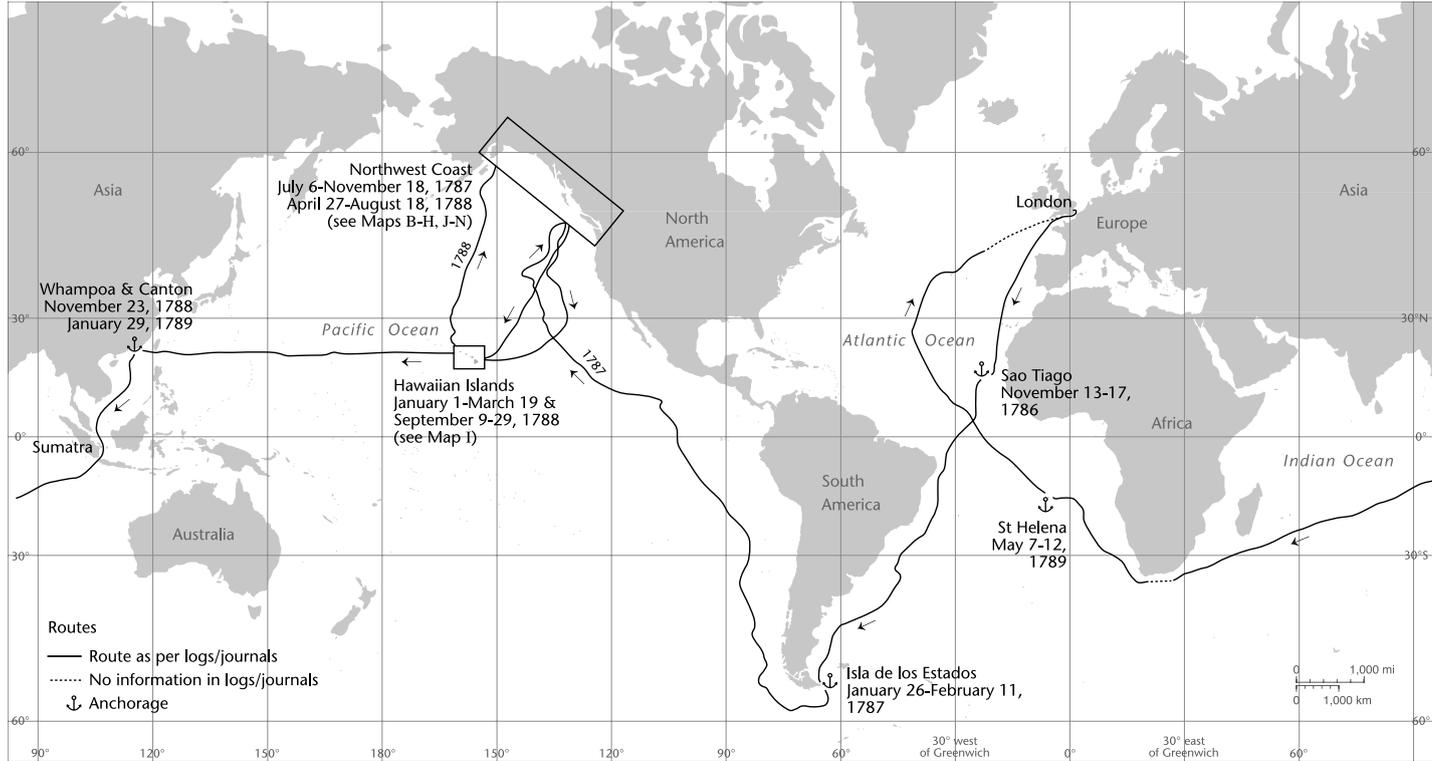
vessel, in 1792-93, then resided on Hawai'i for a period before undertaking a third voyage to the Northwest Coast on the *Dove*, another British trader.⁹⁹

The detailed instructions for Colnett's voyage have not survived, but they can not have differed much from those issued to Nathaniel Portlock the previous year, save that Archibald Menzies was to be given "ample latitude in his pursuits."¹⁰⁰ Little new information was available to Etches, except perhaps an account of Hanna's voyage of 1785, and Colnett was clearly intended to build on foundations established by Portlock and Dixon.¹⁰¹ Their instructions, with respect to the Northwest Coast, had been suitably vague. After reaching the coast at 45°N, they were to proceed northwards, "entering all the bays, harbours, sounds, creeks, and rivers you shall deem of benefit, and consistent with the true intent of a commercial voyage." About the only specific requirements were to visit Nootka Sound and to "purchase of the natives" land for the establishment of at least one "factory." The location of the latter was not specified but, another legacy of Cook's voyage, the expectation was that the choice would fall on Nootka Sound, "it being central [and] ... in every respect consistent with the intent of forming such establishment."¹⁰²

Voyage of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Princess Royal*

After a lengthy fitting-out at Deptford, the *Prince of Wales* and *Princess Royal* sailed on 23 September 1786. The original intention was to proceed to Cowes, where arrangements had been made to take on some additional supplies. On this leg, however, a severe gale damaged the vessels and the ensuing repairs took nearly two weeks to complete. It was not until 16 October, a month later than Portlock's expedition, that the vessels renewed their journey down the English Channel and headed for the Cape Verde Islands. After a brief stop at Sao Tiago (see MAP A, p. 12),¹⁰³ to replenish water and provisions, Colnett continued across the South Atlantic to Isla de los Estados, arriving on 23 January 1787.¹⁰⁴ A site for the sealing "Factory" was quickly selected in New Years Harbour and construction begun.¹⁰⁵ As soon as a house was erected, the sealing party, fifteen men under Samuel Marshall, and their supplies were landed.¹⁰⁶ But it was not until 12 February 1787, after a stay of three weeks, that the *Prince of Wales* and *Princess Royal* bid farewell to this "dreary spot" and shaped to "oppose the fury" of the stormy Cape Horn. The vessels reached a latitude of 58°30'S before turning north and entering the Pacific.¹⁰⁷

The journey north was long and tedious. Difficulties with the weather were compounded by damage to the vessels, most serious to the *Princess Royal's* mast. This detracted further from the sailing qualities of the sloop and slowed the progress of both vessels. Nonetheless, when they crossed the equator on 26 April, the crews were still "healthy," prompting Colnett to forego the intended visit to the Hawaiian Islands.¹⁰⁸ Probably influenced by the various delays the expedition had encountered, Colnett's decision to head directly for Nootka hastened his arrival at the trading grounds but lengthened the sea journey and brought on the scurvy. Some indications were visible among the seamen in



MAP A Route of the *Prince of Wales*, 1786-89

April and had become significant on the *Prince of Wales* in the middle of June, with the vessels only at 29°5'N. By the time Vancouver Island was sighted on 5 July, at a latitude of approximately 49°19'N, the crew was in a "sickly condition." Few seamen were capable of going aloft, due to "the baneful influence of the Scurvy," obliging the officers, the captain's servant, and the surgeon to assist.¹⁰⁹ Under these circumstances, twenty-one weeks after leaving Isla de los Estados, Nootka Sound was, indeed, a "pleasing sight."¹¹⁰ (See MAP B, p. 99.)

The Northwest Coast, 1787 Season

The following day, 6 July, two Nuu-chah-nulth chiefs visited the vessels, bringing the unwelcome news that a ship was anchored in the sound. This proved to be the *Imperial Eagle*, a British vessel from Ostend, commanded by Charles Barkley and identified in the texts under the name *Loudon*.¹¹¹ Barkley had been at Friendly Cove for twenty-three days and had secured a large portion of the available furs. Equally disappointing was the absence of Portlock and Dixon, or any sign of the factory they had been ordered to establish. These circumstances obliged Colnett to adjust his plans and contemplate a more extensive navigation of the coast, but for the moment he had little choice but to enter Nootka Sound.¹¹² The crews required time on shore to restore their health, and the vessels were in need of repairs. However, rather than anchor alongside Barkley in Friendly Cove, Colnett sailed up Zuciarte Channel. His precise anchorage is difficult to identify, but it was probably at Cheesish, although Mooyah Bay is another possibility (see MAP C, p. 102). Here the *Prince of Wales* and the *Princess Royal* remained for three weeks. Once the crews had recuperated, they were busy completing the repairs, trading, and examining the adjacent territory. The *Princess Royal* and the ships' boats were employed in the last of these tasks, a pattern followed at subsequent anchorages.¹¹³

Colnett, while disappointed at being preceded and selecting a separate anchorage, was on cordial terms with Barkley. However, shortly before the latter's departure, on 24 July, Colnett thought it prudent to challenge Barkley's right to trade in the territory of the South Sea Company without a licence. Colnett received no immediate satisfaction, but his action would be vindicated by subsequent developments. When the *Imperial Eagle* reached Canton, her owners "found they were not warranted in trading to China and the North West Coast, even under the Austrian flag." As a result, they were obliged to sell the vessel.¹¹⁴

By the end of July, with repairs completed and trade exhausted in the vicinity of Zuciarte Channel, Colnett prepared for departure. Both vessels crossed over to Friendly Cove, then, on 5 August, headed to sea, bound for Prince William Sound.¹¹⁵ Fog and variable winds hampered progress for the next three days, when Colnett's luck suddenly changed. On 8 August he encountered George Dixon and the *Queen Charlotte*. Dixon, completing his second trading season, was just about to head for the Hawaiian Islands and Canton. He possessed vital new information about the geography of the coast and sources of sea otter pelts. Specifically, Dixon recommended that Colnett visit the Queen Charlotte Islands and some sounds on the opposite, mainland coast; he also

provided information about the Hawaiian Islands and allowed Colnett to copy some sketches of harbours on the Alaskan coast.¹¹⁶ This encounter revived Colnett's "lost hopes of making a profitable voyage" and the information shaped his actions in the remainder of the 1787 season and, to some extent, in 1788.¹¹⁷

After parting with Dixon, Colnett made a brief visit to Nasparti Inlet (Port Brooks), where a few skins were procured. The *Prince of Wales* and *Princess Royal* then sailed north for the Queen Charlotte Islands (see MAP E, p. 120).¹¹⁸ Cape St. James was sighted on 18 August, and three days later the vessels anchored in Rose Harbour, Houston Stewart Channel. Colnett was now in the territory of the Kunghit Haida. Although Dixon had traded off this coast, he had not landed, and these were unfamiliar waters for Europeans. Using Rose Harbour as a base, Colnett sent the ships' boats on a "trafficking expedition" to the north, probably as far as the east coast of Lyell Island (see MAP F, p. 126).¹¹⁹ The *Princess Royal*, meanwhile, headed across Hecate Strait to examine the "mainland." She reached the vicinity of Aristazabal Island but, due to bad weather, procured only the most rudimentary information.¹²⁰ Nonetheless, Colnett decided to follow Dixon's recommendation about the potential of the area. On 31 August, both vessels left Rose Harbour, sailing east.

A week later, they anchored in a small bay at the south end of Banks Island, named Port Ball by Colnett but, more aptly, Calamity Harbour by the seamen.¹²¹ Thanks to a series of misadventures in carrying out repairs to the vessels, this would be their base for the next eleven weeks. What were misfortunes for Colnett became occasions for a fascinating series of encounters with some of the Gitkx̄aala Tsimshian. It was, by far, the most extended interaction the expedition had with any of the Native peoples on the coast. What makes the accounts by Colnett and Taylor even more valuable is that they, and the crews, were the first Europeans to meet the Tsimshian. The substance of these encounters is discussed below (pp. 45-59).

As at other harbours, Colnett used Port Ball as a base for examining the surrounding territory. The boats went on a series of journeys through the complex of waterways extending from Nepean Sound: to the northwest, up Principe Channel, northeast to Douglas Channel, and southeast towards Laredo Sound. From the information they secured, Colnett and Duncan produced the first significant cartographic representations of this part of the coast. Meanwhile, work continued on the vessels. Progress was slow, compounded by new damage to the *Prince of Wales* incurred when relaunching. It was not until 19 November, with the "Country half cover'd from the summits of its hills to the water's Edge with snow," that the *Prince of Wales* and *Princess Royal* sailed for winter quarters in the Hawaiian Islands.¹²²

The Hawaiian Islands: Winter, 1787-88

About a third of the way into the passage, due to bad weather, the vessels separated and did not meet up again until early in February 1788.¹²³ Colnett sighted Hawai'i on 1 January and spent the next few days coasting between Hawai'i and Maui before heading west (see MAP I, p. 170). He sailed north of Maui and

Moloka'i and anchored off the western point of the latter on 10 January. During a stay of five days, supplies of fresh meat, fruit, and vegetables were purchased, before the *Prince of Wales* moved west to the south coast of O'ahu.¹²⁴ After a brief visit to Waikiki, which coincided with the Makahiki festivities, Colnett proceeded to Kaua'i, anchoring at Waimea Bay on 30 January. Here, he was rejoined a week later by Duncan and the *Princess Royal*.¹²⁵ The sloop had reached Hawai'i on 25 December and had spent the interval cruising "among the Isles," reaching Kaua'i on 7 February.¹²⁶ Reunited, the vessels spent the next four weeks in the vicinity of Kaua'i and Ni'ihau, acquiring a further stock of fresh provisions and giving the crews opportunities to enjoy sexual relationships with local women.¹²⁷

However, the stay at Waimea Bay was marred by a violent confrontation following the theft of an anchor and an apprehended assault on the ship. Unable to recover his own anchor, Colnett sought to make good his loss by purchasing an anchor, visible on the beach, that had been cut from the *King George* the previous winter. Ironically, just before landing at Waimea, Colnett had received a letter left by Nathaniel Portlock the previous fall. It contained a warning about the need for precautions in the area but made no reference to a lost anchor.¹²⁸ Eventually, Colnett's negotiations were successful: the anchor was purchased for various metal goods, some firearms, and ammunition. The demand for the latter led Colnett to conclude, correctly, that the incident was linked to a pattern of inter-island hostilities.¹²⁹ Finally, with transactions completed, the vessels left Waimea Bay on 13 March to spend a couple more days trading in the area of Ni'ihau. By this time, a number of islanders, two of whom would eventually reach England, had joined the expedition.¹³⁰ Then, on 18 March, the vessels headed for the Northwest Coast, shortly thereafter passing the previously unrecorded and uninhabited island of Nihoa.¹³¹

The *Prince of Wales*, 1788 Season: The Northwest Coast

In contrast to the previous season, the *Prince of Wales* and *Princess Royal* operated separately in 1788. After arranging a series of rendezvous points, the vessels parted company about a third of the way into the voyage from Ni'ihau. The *Princess Royal* headed to Nootka and the *Prince of Wales* to the Alaskan Coast.¹³² Colnett, presumably following advice from Portlock, decided to avoid Cook Inlet and, after a passage of five weeks, reached the vicinity of Prince William Sound (see MAPS J and K, p. 207 and p. 209).¹³³ Here, Colnett was in relatively well-known waters. Cook's chart and journal described the region with tolerable accuracy and several traders, including Portlock and Dixon in 1787, had visited. Moreover, within days of Colnett's departure, separate Russian and Spanish expeditions would traverse the area.¹³⁴

Sailing west and north of Montague Island, Colnett anchored in Port Etches, Hinchinbrook Island, on 2 May. Continuing the pattern of 1787, he traded with the local population – in this instance the Chugach, a Pacific Yupik people – and used the harbour as a base from which to examine the surrounding territory.¹³⁵ On 22 May, with minor repairs completed and trade exhausted, the *Prince*

of *Wales* rounded Cape Hinchinbrook and sailed southeastwards some distance off shore. Near Kayak Island, the long boat was dispatched to undertake a closer examination of the coast to the eastwards, rejoining company on 4 June off Yakutat Bay. The next four days were spent in that vicinity, mostly at anchorage in Port Mulgrave. Here Colnett recognized that he had entered the territory of a “different Nation from those residg. to the North.”¹³⁶ In fact, he had returned to the Northwest Coast culture area and was in Tlingit territory. Few skins were collected, however, and Colnett resumed cruising south, stopping occasionally to trade with visiting canoes and dispatch the ship’s boats to examine sections of the coast. Four days were spent at Sitka Sound, where the trade again disappointed Colnett’s “expectations,” although he was favourably impressed by the people.

Departing from Sitka Sound on 21 June, the *Prince of Wales* reached Haida territory two days later, this time in the Alaskan Archipelago. The next four days were spent coasting as far as Dall Island, by which time Taylor had become highly critical of this method of proceeding. In his journal, if not publicly, he advocated that a more extended stop should be made at some location. Meanwhile, Colnett, presumably with the agreement of John Etches, headed for the west coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands, hoping to duplicate Dixon’s success in that area (see MAP L, p. 236).¹³⁷ This tactic brought only further disappointment as Colnett clearly misconstrued information received from Dixon. Rather than heading to Cloak Bay (Langara Island), the location of Dixon’s greatest trading encounter, Colnett proceeded to the vicinity of Hippa Island. Skins were no more abundant here than farther north but, on 8 July, Colnett received the first news of the activities of the *Princess Royal*. As a result, he headed round Cape St. James in search of his consort at the first of the prearranged rendezvous points.¹³⁸ Returning to familiar waters, the *Prince of Wales* anchored in Houston Stewart Channel on 17 July. Here, courtesy of the local chiefs, Colnett received a letter left by Duncan. It contained news of the arrival of a rival vessel on the southern coast and Duncan’s decision to head south in response to this development. This, in turn, induced Colnett and Etches to modify their plans and “return back to the Northward” for the remainder of the season (see MAP M, p. 245).¹³⁹

The *Prince of Wales* sailed along the eastern coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands, putting into Juan Perez Sound on 20 July. Three days were spent at anchor, but adverse winds frustrated the attempt to continue northwards, prompting Colnett to change plans again. He decided to return south, round Cape St. James, and head north off the western coast of the Queen Charlottes. But this manoeuvre only produced further frustration. After spending a week trying to “beat round the Cape,” and with scurvy threatening on board, Colnett decided to “seek a port” on the eastern shore. This turned out to be Kildit Sound, where the *Prince of Wales* anchored on 4 August. Located a little to the south of the areas examined by the boats from Calamity Harbour in 1787, Colnett was again in unfamiliar territory. Over the next two weeks, some visitors were received, and one boat expedition dispatched. Neither produced much

in the way of trade. Colnett's primary objective during this period was to prepare the ship for departure from the coast. On August 18, with the requisite tasks completed, Colnett took his leave from the Northwest Coast.

The *Princess Royal*, 1788 Season: The Northwest Coast

No journal recording the activities of the *Princess Royal* in 1788 has survived, but the outlines of her itinerary are known (see MAPS N [a] and N [b], p. 262 and p. 264).¹⁴⁰ After arriving at Nootka on 19 April and carrying out the usual repairs, Duncan headed for the Queen Charlotte Islands on 10 May. His first port of call was Luxaena Bay, a little south of Houston Stewart Channel. Leaving on 19 May, the *Princess Royal* continued north, trading along the eastern coast, to the vicinity of Skidegate, before heading across Hecate Strait on 31 May. The next three weeks were spent in the waters of Principe Channel and Douglas Channel – areas visited from Calamity Harbour in 1787 (see MAP G, p. 140). Departing via the north end of Principe Channel, Duncan returned to the Queen Charlottes, arriving at “Trollops River,” probably Skidegate Inlet, on 23 June. Following a brief but successful trade, he headed south, to an anticipated rendezvous with the *Prince of Wales*. Failing to find Colnett in the vicinity of Juan Perez Sound, Duncan left letters with at least two Haida chiefs and then, on 6 July, sailed across Hecate Strait once more. This time he went farther south than on previous crossings, anchoring in uncharted territory at Milbanke Sound on 14 July. A few days were spent trading with the Heiltsuk, then the *Princess Royal* continued southwards, passed through Hakai Passage, and anchored in Safety Cove. After a brief stay, Duncan crossed Queen Charlotte Sound to the western coast of Vancouver Island and Nootka, another potential rendezvous point with Colnett.¹⁴¹

While off Nootka, Duncan had a brief encounter with John Meares on the *Felice Adventurer*. Meares' published description of this meeting and his pamphlet controversy with George Dixon prompted Duncan to write in support of the latter. Duncan's letter, incorporated into Dixon's second pamphlet, is our principal source on the *Princess Royal*'s movements in 1788.¹⁴² Of more immediate significance to Duncan was the news he received that Colnett had not arrived at Nootka. Therefore, Duncan continued south, trading in the vicinity of Clayoquot Sound and the entrance of the Straits of Juan de Fuca.¹⁴³ On 17 August, having secured the available skins, the *Princess Royal* departed from the Northwest Coast, heading for the Hawaiian Islands and the final rendezvous with Colnett. According to Taylor, the *Princess Royal* “had been more successful on the Coast of America” in 1788 than had the *Prince of Wales*.¹⁴⁴

The Hawaiian Islands, Canton, and the Return to England, 1788-89

The *Prince of Wales*, after a voyage of twenty-three days, reached the coast of Hawai'i on 9 September.¹⁴⁵ She spent the next three weeks among the islands, with the route replicating that undertaken on the first visit. From Hawai'i the *Prince of Wales* sailed north of Maui and anchored off the western end of Moloka'i on 12 September. Here they found the *Princess Royal*, which had

Table 1

Furs traded at Canton: Prince of Wales and Princess Royal, 1789

No. of furs	Type of furs	Est. value each (\$)*	Total value (\$)*
780	Prime sea otter	65	50,700
[815]	Good	25	20,375
84	Old	12	1,008
270	Young	5	1,350
24	Prime otter cloaks	150	3,600
[31]	Good	80	2,480
10	Indifferent	20	200
Total			79,713

* Spanish dollars. Harlow states that the “dollar or ‘real of eight” became the standard of international exchange in China and remained so until 1857. R.C. Etches placed the exchange rate at “five shilling and four pence sterling,” although the EIC, after 1619, “invoiced it at 5s, the difference being the cost of laying down the coin” (Harlow 1964: 529n; PRO, Chancery Pleadings, Statement of R.C. Etches, C 12/621/20). Etches’ exchange rate gives a gross return of £21,256/16/-.

Source: Etches and Colnett to Browne, 5 Jan. 1789 (BL, EIC, CFR, Canton Consultations, G/12/94), 60-1.

reached the islands about 5 September. The two vessels visited the south side of O’ahu, but their principal anchoring points were off Kaua’i and Ni’ihau, where the time was spent purchasing provisions and generally preparing for the journey to China. They sailed from Ni’ihau on 30 September, arriving at Macao on 12 November; the *Prince of Wales* continued to Canton on 26 November.¹⁴⁶ The combined cargo, after two seasons trading on the Northwest Coast, amounted to “fifteen Cases and nineteen Casks of Furs.” John Meares, not an entirely reliable source on such matters, thought that they were “in the best condition of any brought to the Canton market.”¹⁴⁷ A more precise accounting, together with Colnett’s estimates of the value of his cargo, is shown in Table 1.

Colnett’s estimates proved to be overly optimistic. The furs realized only 56,000 dollars, although he also disposed of a small quantity of “Tails, Martin Skins, Pieces of Otter &c, &c for 9520 Dollars” to defray expenses incurred while anchored at Canton.¹⁴⁸ The problem, as Dalrymple noted, was the sudden influx of furs to Canton over the previous eighteen months, which had made prices “uncertain.” Nonetheless, Colnett was more successful than any of his predecessors had been. Although Portlock and Dixon collected more skins, they sold for only 50,000 dollars – the largest return of any expedition to that date.¹⁴⁹

On 25 January 1789, after nearly two months taken up by negotiations with EIC officials, completing minor repairs, and loading a cargo of China wares and teas, the *Prince of Wales* left Canton and rejoined the *Princess Royal* at Macao.¹⁵⁰ By this time, John Etches had reached an agreement with Messrs. Cox, Beale & Co., a company of independent merchants at Canton, about another venture to the Northwest Coast. Etches’ previous plans had called for the *Princess Royal* to return to the Northwest Coast and, probably, a visit to Japan.

But now the two companies decided to join forces, thereby minimizing competition, maximizing use of their resources, and avoiding legal complications.¹⁵¹ Utilizing the licences obtained by Etches & Co., the *Princess Royal* and three other vessels – the *Argonaut*, *Iphigenia Nubiana*, and *North West America* – would be sent to the coast for the forthcoming 1789 season.¹⁵² Colnett was offered command of the *Argonaut* and general supervision of the other vessels. He accepted, and a number of other crew members joined the expedition, although Duncan, for health reasons, gave up command of the *Princess Royal* and joined the *Prince of Wales* as a passenger. Command of the *Prince of Wales* was delivered to James Johnstone on 31 January and, the following day, the ship sailed for England.¹⁵³ The only landings on this journey were at Sumatra, in mid-February, and some five days spent at St. Helena early in May. Supplies of wood and water were replenished at both locations and some fresh provisions acquired at the latter. The *Prince of Wales* arrived in London about 17 July 1789. Remarkably, after a round-the-world voyage lasting three years, only one crew member had been lost, and even then, he died on the final leg, after Colnett had left the vessel.¹⁵⁴

The Contact Process: The Northwest Coast and Hawaiian Islands

Some two centuries after their inscription, it is the accounts of meetings with indigenous peoples that make Colnett's and Taylor's journals both valuable and interesting. In this section I begin an examination of these encounters with a discussion of the intellectual context of trade and exploration on the Northwest Coast. This is to establish, in general terms, the ideas and attitudes that Colnett and his party brought with them; ideas and attitudes that shaped what they observed and what they recorded. This leads into a discussion of the parameters of early contact encounters. These encounters, I believe, have to be understood within the context of Native geopolitical landscapes. I explore this claim through a discussion of three specific examples: Colnett's encounters at Nootka Sound in 1787, along the southeast coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1787 and 1788, and in the vicinity of Banks Island in 1787. These locations were the site of Colnett's principal sojourns on the Northwest Coast; moreover, at the last two, Colnett was at the opening of the contact process. I add some brief comments on other encounters on the coast.

The Intellectual Context

Any attempt to discuss the intellectual formation of Colnett and Taylor is confounded by the paucity of information available about their early education and training. It is necessary to turn, therefore, to the general context of Enlightenment ideas and writings about journeys to exotic locations. An obvious starting point is that Europeans had developed a general *modus operandi* for visiting "unknown" or poorly known regions. By the late eighteenth century, European nations had the accumulated experience of some 300 years of overseas expansion. Empire provided, indeed required, a pragmatic understanding of what to expect in encounters with indigenous peoples of the Americas and

the Pacific: what tactics were effective and what should be avoided. Some of the accumulated information was incorporated in the orders and instructions issued to ships' captains, some was transmitted orally among the maritime fraternity, and some was incorporated into the burgeoning "exploration" literature. Such knowledge also provided the data for more elaborate intellectual constructions and expressions of Europeans' sense of their own superiority, such as theories of social evolution. Exploration, Hobsbawm has observed, meant not only to "know, but to develop, to bring the unknown and therefore by definition backward and barbarous into the light of civilization and progress." The description of "savagery" demonstrated the civility of civilization.¹⁵⁵

Modes of Recording

With the publication of William Dampier's works, beginning at the close of the seventeenth century, accounts of ocean "voyages" became a popular literary genre in England. Dampier's narratives, with their "description of natural phenomena, whether plants, beasts, tides, winds or the ways of strange tribes and peoples," heralded a new interest in, and new ways of describing, the Pacific.¹⁵⁶ It was, however, the three voyages of James Cook that brought public interest in such accounts to new heights, and publication, as Hawkesworth's example so spectacularly demonstrated, could be a profitable exercise.¹⁵⁷ Cook's voyages, and their literary products, became both a model and an incentive for those who sailed in his wake. Especially for those traversing the Pacific, Cook's experiences helped shape their actions and provided a format for what should be recorded.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, the followers' accounts partake, to some extent, in an ongoing dialogue with Cook and his achievements.

Of course, the dialogue was complicated by the uneven availability of what Cook actually wrote, and much has been made of the role of editors in presenting, and distorting, Cook's journals. However, in terms of a literary model, Cook was largely refining an established one rather than reconstituting it. The basic form was navigational: a chronological account, derived from the ship's log with its daily entries recording significant events and including a good deal of information about weather and sailing conditions. This was supplemented by summary descriptions of locations where extended sojourns were made.¹⁵⁹ At Nootka Sound in 1778, for example, Cook's account embraced navigation, topography, climate, flora, fauna, geology, inhabitants – including physical characteristics, aspects of their economy, settlements, material culture – and concluded with a word list.¹⁶⁰ Topics varied with location and were not systematic, but the results were essays in the human geography of the nodal points.

In part, these geographies reflected Cook's instructions and the avowedly scientific intent of his voyages. For the second and third voyages, his instructions called for careful observation of the "soil & produce thereof," together with a list of other features to be examined and recorded, including the "Genius, Temper, Disposition and Number of the Natives."¹⁶¹ Probably the most concise summary of the objectives of such "scientific" voyages came near the

end of the period. Joseph Banks, exemplar of the English Enlightenment, instructed Archibald Menzies, of the Vancouver expedition (1791-95), to make “an investigation of the whole of Natural History of the Countries you are to visit; as well as an enquiry into the present state and comparative degree of civilization of the inhabitants you meet with.”¹⁶² In other words, an inventory of the human and natural resources of the localities visited.

In rendering their experiences into publishable form, “voyagers” encountered a further set of pressures. According to Edwards, there was an increasing tension between authors and publishers about the quotients of information and entertainment in the manuscripts. Publishers and editors usually were more concerned with the entertainment component and the attendant commercial prospects. Sailors, however, tended to be more interested in conveying practical data; certainly Colnett made few concessions towards entertainment in his journal, although Taylor was more flexible.¹⁶³ Emphasis on the practical was reflected in the style of writing. It had become something of a commonplace, well before Cook, for sailors to describe their literary efforts as plain and unadorned.¹⁶⁴ Bernard Smith, in discussing Cook’s journals, suggests a broader context for this plain mode of presentation. He links Cook’s style to an empiricism, in which close observation and minimal speculation reflect “the ideals of a new kind of rhetoric, that of plain speaking” advocated by the Royal Society – of which Cook was made a member in 1776. This required “a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions, clear sense; a native easiness, bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can; and preferring the language of Artisans, Countrymen and Merchants before that of wits and scholars.”¹⁶⁵

It would be helpful in evaluating the journals of Colnett and Taylor to know what books, if any, were on board the *Prince of Wales* and what intellectual preparations were made for the voyage. Unfortunately, such information is sparse. About all that can be said for certain is that both Colnett and Taylor were familiar with some of the exploration literature – Dampier and Anson, as well as Cook. Both make occasional reference to incidents described by Cook and to the charts published in Cook’s third “Voyage”; it seems likely that copies of the latter were on board, if not the four volumes of the “Voyage.”¹⁶⁶ Such uncertainties may be compared to Colnett’s preparations for his expedition on the *Rattler* in 1793, when he “purchased the various voyages of former navigators, and such books on the subjects of natural history, as might assist me in my pursuits, and enable me to furnish instruction in those branches of science connected with my own; and which remote navigation might tend to advance.” Whether this was a lesson learned from omissions on his first voyage remains unclear, although Menzies did record having “but little assistance from Books” in his botanical endeavours.¹⁶⁷

Even if there are doubts about Colnett’s literary preparations in 1786, he had the benefit of personal experience of Cook – as a graduate of the second expedition. Writing of this voyage, Beaglehole has suggested that it is difficult

to imagine “a better education for a young seaman than three years in the *Resolution*.”¹⁶⁸ One of the midshipmen, John Elliot, recorded some comments on the training he received. Young gentlemen learned the basics required to become “good Sailors, as well as good Officers” – the essential naval skills of command and navigation, including observing, surveying, and drawing. At a time when the instruction of midshipmen was informal and practical, the quality of the commander was crucial; Cook’s abilities in this regard were widely recognized.¹⁶⁹ The *Resolution* also carried a number of scientific supernumeraries – the Forsters and Sparrman – who were practitioners of the Enlightenment agenda of empirical engagement with natural and human history. How much they interacted with midshipmen is unclear, but the orders of astronomer William Wales required that he provide instruction to “such of the Officers” as desired it. Finally, there was the exotic geography and the off-duty experiences – “little parties to go shooting, hunting, fishing” and Native people “coming on board in numbers.”¹⁷⁰

Colnett’s own expedition was not “scientific” and does not bear comparison to Cook’s in scale, execution, or description. Nonetheless, Colnett’s journal clearly reflects his mentor’s template. The form is navigational, including a good deal of technical sailing information, with some summary accounts of locations where sojourns were made. Stylistically, too, Colnett embraced the tradition of plain-speaking naval officers. In his introduction to the *Rattler*’s voyage, he eschewed any “claim to literary quality” and aspired, instead, to manifest “some portion of professional utility.”¹⁷¹ It seems likely that Colnett’s adherence to such “plain rhetoric” contributed to the relative absence of pejorative terminology in his descriptions of Native peoples of the Northwest Coast. The only “savage” recorded was a dog at Nootka, although the labret did produce a “horrid aspect” among Native women.¹⁷²

Taylor’s journal reflects much the same intellectual universe as Colnett’s. He was familiar with accounts of Cook’s voyages and an admirer of the man, describing him as a “Hero of Circumnavigation.” Nonetheless, Taylor’s journals have a different tone than Colnett’s “official” version and constitute a valuable counterpoint.¹⁷³ Although it seems likely that they were written with an eye towards publication, the surviving documents have a more personal and literary quality – even breaking into verse on occasion.¹⁷⁴ Taylor was also more aware of, or paid more attention to, the world of the seamen. Although shaped by the paternalism of command, and embodying the distinctions of class, his comments were closer to empathy than condescension.¹⁷⁵ Finally, Taylor was frequently critical of the way Colnett and, to a lesser extent, Duncan conducted their vessels and the voyage in general – perhaps a reflection of being over-qualified for his position on the *Prince of Wales*.

The divergences between the two journals, empiricism and plain rhetoric notwithstanding, serve as a reminder that both are subjective and selective accounts. Such sources, as Edwards reminds us, provide “access to people and events ... through a mist arising from the energy of partisan re-creation.” These

fragmentary narratives can neither be completed nor rendered impartial; they need to be viewed in their context of “imperial expansion and the collision of cultures.”¹⁷⁶

Enlightened Encounters?

Enlightenment attitudes towards indigenous peoples were complex, shifting, and in some respects contradictory. For a time, optimism and the desire for knowledge meant that exotic societies could be viewed sympathetically, as sources of information and even moral lessons. Indigenous cultures could be seen “as alternative modes of living,” as particular manifestations of “the natural laws which could be discerned in all human societies.”¹⁷⁷ One of the clearest statements of this view was made by J.R. Foster in his account of Cook’s second voyage. Mankind, he thought,

ought to be considered as the members of one great family; therefore let us not despise any of them, though they be our inferiors in regard to many improvements and points of civilization; none of them is so dispicable that he should not, in some point or other, know more than the wisest man of the most polished nation. This knowledge may be easily obtained from them by friendliness, kindness, and gentleness; and if so bought it is cheaply obtained.¹⁷⁸

There is some evidence that Colnett, although not much given to philosophical speculation, was influenced by such views. In his published account of the *Rattler*, Colnett reflected on his previous voyages and what he had learned about treating seamen’s diseases such as scurvy. He claimed that he “paid particular attention to the practice of different Indian nations, when an opportunity was afforded me.” Indian, in this context, referred to peoples of the Pacific as well as of the Northwest Coast.¹⁷⁹

If Native societies could be sources of useful information, they could also be used to comment critically on European behaviour. There is no evidence of Colnett making such a leap, but Taylor does. At Kaua’i, he fulminated that if Colnett had “visited ye Shore He might have learn’d politeness from ye very People He ill treated, what a pity men of more refin’d & expanded Ideas were not ye only people employed on such Voyages to shew ye Natives some few well timed examples, which might seem to improve their manners & not by impolitical rude carriage, improperly timed endeavours to prove ourselves greater savages than ye Natives we Traffic wth.”¹⁸⁰ If this has a Rousseauesque tinge, it was also a product of the time Taylor spent in more informal spaces, away from the vessels and ashore. Colnett, in contrast, rarely left the *Prince of Wales*.¹⁸¹

Of course, such criticism did not imply any sense of equality between civil society in Europe and the peoples encountered on the periphery. Europeans brought civilization and, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, sought to impart

its benefits. Colnett, for example, concluded that the Kunghit Haida had been “much civiliz’d by our visits.” Taylor, too, thought that Northwest Coast societies were capable of improvement. Writing of the same visit, he described two Kunghit Haida chiefs: “Euhah, a stout well made man with the most pleasant open countenance, I saw on ye whole Coast of America and If I may be allowed the expression in this part of ye world He was the Handsomest Man, Yookah excepted whose features must be allowed to surpass all we had seen and even in England if decently clad wou’d be considered both of them on an equality with those the Ladies are pleased to call fine likely fellows.”¹⁸² Differences between Europeans and indigenous peoples were a matter of culture, not biology – an innovation of a subsequent era.

The Northwest Coast and its population were also inserted into a comparative context that embraced the emerging hierarchy of Pacific peoples. Here, the extremes were marked by Polynesian societies, viewed most favourably, and the peoples of Tierra del Fuego and Australia. Sometimes the comparison was explicit, as when Beresford noted that the Hawaiian Islanders were “kind, friendly and humane, and they undoubtedly approach many degrees nearer to civilization than the poor wretches we met with on the inhospitable coast of America.”¹⁸³ More often the context was unacknowledged, but it contributed to unfavourable evaluations of the Northwest Coast and its peoples. Criteria such as climate, topography, and cleanliness played a role, but the lack of cultivation was probably the crucial factor. Cultivation had practical implications, in terms of procuring provisions, but it was also diagnostic of the broader question of the progress made towards civilization. At Nootka, Colnett sought to explain the lack of cultivation through the “too frequent wars & from the same cause may arise their having such miserable dwellings.” Later, when he and Taylor did encounter evidence of cultivation on the Northwest Coast, they concluded that it must be the work of Europeans.¹⁸⁴ The interpretative circle of expectation, observation, and conclusion was completed.

Such views may be compared with the comments Archibald Menzies recorded during Vancouver’s voyage about some patches of cultivation he saw at Angoon:¹⁸⁵

the first Dawns of Agriculture excited amongst these savages, not in rearing any article of real utility either to their comfort or support, as might naturally be expected, but in cultivating a mere drug [tobacco] to satisfy the cravings of a fanciful appetite that can be no ways necessary to their existance; hence we perceive how readily man even in a state of nature improves or increases his original wants & thereby gradually advances to luxury & refinement. & from this perhaps a good lesson might be derivd for the tedious process of civilizing these inhabitants, which is first to give them a relish for those articles of luxury the most like to succeed in their climate and soil, & by thus creating artificial wants a spirit of industry & emulation favourable to civilization would not fail to be excited.¹⁸⁶

Trade and the market, in such views, would serve as cultural solvents and evolutionary agents – and a moral justification for imperial endeavours.

On Kaua'i, by way of contrast, both Menzies and Taylor were impressed not only by the agriculture already in place but with the capacity of the Hawaiians to adopt new crops: clearly an index of their ability to progress. Taylor thought that they had long been familiar with the cultivation of taro, taking “great pains ... to have their runs of water surround all the Fields.” He also visited “a spot where some English Savoyes were arrived at Maturity ... [and they] expressed great pleasure in shewing them to us, Saying they were Britannia.”¹⁸⁷ When Menzies returned to Kaua'i in 1792, he observed that the Hawaiians had “added to their former stock of vegetables, greens, musk and water melons, which they rear to such perfection and plenty that we had a daily supply of each.”¹⁸⁸

If European perceptions of indigenous peoples were varied and contradictory, so were their ideas about how to behave towards such people on the Pacific frontier. As Europeans became convinced of their own progress and enlightenment, they looked for its reflections in their treatment of Native peoples. Nowhere is this better articulated than in the “Hints” provided by Lord Morton, the president of the Royal Society, for Cook's first voyage. In addition to embodying the optimism and tolerance of the Enlightenment, the document reflected the principles expressed in the Royal Proclamation of 1763. Native peoples, Morton wrote, “are the natural, and in the strictest sense of the word, the legal possessors of the several regions they occupy. No European Nation has a right to occupy any part of their country, or settle among them without their voluntary consent.”¹⁸⁹ Distance (and the comforts of Europe) enhanced expectations about the behaviour of Europeans overseas and instructions issued to subsequent expedition commanders often invoked “fair and considerate treatment” of Native peoples. Portlock, for example, was to “establish friendly relations,” admittedly for the purpose of trade rather than science. Moreover, ships' officers, as gentlemen and authors, might also aspire to humanitarian sentiments – at least for the reading public “at home.”¹⁹⁰

Among navigators, naval and otherwise, Cook represented the epitome of an enlightened approach towards Native peoples. John Elliott, a midshipman on the second voyage, recalled that Cook would “land alone unarmed, or lay aside his Arms, and sit down when they threatened with theirs, throwing them Beads, Knives, and other little presents, then by degrees advancing nearer, till by patience and forbearance, he gained their friendship and an intercourse with them, which to people in our situation was of the utmost importance.”¹⁹¹

But this is a retrospective account that embodies an ideal and forgets much of the harsher side of encounters on the periphery. On the same voyage, Cook recorded some rather different reflections on the requirements for “good” relations with the Maori of Queen Charlotte Sound. The best method, he thought, was “first to shew them the use of fire arms and to convince them of the Superiority they give you over them and to be always on your guard; when once they are sensible of these things, a regard for their own safety will deter

them from disturbing you or being unanimous in forming any plan to attack you, and Strict honesty and gentle treatment on your part will make it their interest not to do it.”¹⁹² Later he ruminated on the asymmetry of such encounters: “We enter their Ports without their daring to make opposition, we attempt to land in a peaceable manner, if this succeeds its well, if not we land nevertheless and maintain the footing we thus got by the Superiority of our fire arms, in what other light can they than at first look upon us but as invaders of their Country.”¹⁹³

The point here is not to castigate Cook – his progress through the Pacific was a model of restraint compared with predecessors such as Quiros – but to recognize that recourse to violence remained an integral part of the paradigm that Europeans brought to the contact process. Moreover, Cook, like a number of others, had given expression to doubts about the benefits accruing to Native societies. On his second visit to Queen Charlotte Sound, Cook articulated this pessimism: “To our Shame [as] civilized Christians, we debauch their Morals already too prone to vice and we interduce among them wants and perhaps diseases which they never before knew and which serves only to disturb that happy tranquillity they and their fore Fathers had enjoy’d. If any one denies the truth of this assertion let him tell me what the Natives of the whole extent of America have gained by the commerce they have had with Europeans.”¹⁹⁴ Even for the “humane” Cook, the display of deadly technology was a necessary component; gentle treatment and the threat of coercion were intertwined and the move from a display of firearms to their use in earnest was all too easy. It was a journey that Cook made, albeit infrequently, on the second voyage, and more often on the third. The manner of his death, at Kealakekua Bay, served as an awful reminder of the dangers to be countered.

In these distant imperial ventures, Europeans saw their technological superiority as an essential safeguard. The eighteenth-century ocean-going sailing vessel was a significant manifestation and symbol of this power and ideology. A triumph of technology and technique, it facilitated the global outreach and embodied the hierarchical and coercive values of the society that produced it. Europeans in the eighteenth century remained, as Greenblatt has written of sixteenth-century visitors to America, immensely confident of their own centrality and possessed of “a political organization based on practices of command and submission ... [and] a willingness to use coercive violence on both strangers and fellow countrymen.”¹⁹⁵ Enlightenment sages might demure, but violence was built into the decision to send expeditions to exotic parts.

Early encounters on the Northwest Coast and Hawaiian Islands reflect these European attitudes. Cook left the Nuu-chah-nulth aware of the power of firearms, and the maritime fur trade was inaugurated with a violent confrontation at Nootka in 1785; farther north, Russian traders at Kodiak Island employed the “tactics of terror.”¹⁹⁶ A little later, a French fur trader, Etienne Marchand, made the point in a slightly different manner. In commenting on the dangers of trading muskets to the Haida and the Tlingit, he stated that “the terror which our arms had inspired, should have been maintained: terror constitutes the

strength and the security of the small number amongst the multitude.”¹⁹⁷ And Colnett, too, used technology to dispense disciplinary lessons – mostly to discourage thefts, an issue explored more fully below. At Banks Island, following a series of encounters with the Tsimshian that ended in violence, Taylor concluded: “They now believed our fire arms to be mischievous kinds of things for ’twas evident, not an Indian thought himself safe along side the ship.”¹⁹⁸ While he had no doubt as to the necessity of such demonstrations, Taylor was prepared to ascribe at least part of the blame for the problems Europeans encountered to their own behaviour. He thought that punishment of Natives should “never exceed the bounds of reason but ... be guided by the nature of the Crime” and protested, to his journal, about excesses.¹⁹⁹

Some of the tensions and ambiguities of encounters on the periphery are evident in a passage Colnett wrote in 1790, reflecting on his voyage on the *Prince of Wales*. During a stop at Clayoquot, he contemplated taking some hostages and pondered his earlier interactions with Native people. He rationalized the measure by “desperate” circumstances that would “for once plead for me in a breach of Friendship with the Indians.” Hostile action was also justified by earlier encounters with other tribes in which he had endured repeated and unprovoked “Insults and Injuries.” These had gone “unpunished and without the smallest molestation.”²⁰⁰ Parts of this, at best, indicate a considerable capacity for amnesia concerning his first voyage. But the forgetting is selective, revealing a behavioural ideal that reflected current literary fashions and contributed to subsequent “settler” historiography: the heroic explorer who confronted the hard realities of the Northwest Coast.²⁰¹

Preludes to Appropriation

The plain style that Colnett and, to a lesser extent, Taylor, embraced and practised was hardly neutral. Articulated with and supported by a powerful scientific and technological apparatus, it was shaped by the imperatives of dominion and trade. Knowledge was power, and any civilized society failing to pursue such information could “expect to hold an inferior and derivative role in global affairs.” For Banks, exploration and discovery were “particularly enlightened activities” as they produced new knowledge and “further avenues for British commerce.” Hence, as Smith has argued, the congruence in rhetoric between science and commerce.²⁰² A reviewer of John Meares’ book put the matter nicely in 1790. After “ample praise” for naval navigators in adding to “territorial and commercial dominion,” the writer continued: “Some share of attention is due to those men who, engaged in maritime service of private commerce, have omitted no opportunity of promoting, in their professional career, the public advantage.”²⁰³ Colnett was fully aware of this relationship and his role in promoting it. His most explicit comment is in the introduction to his voyage on the *Rattler*: “Though my former voyages were principally undertaken with the views of Commercial advantage, I was never inattentive to the advancement of nautical science: my observation was always awake to every object which might instruct myself and enable me to instruct others; and I

constantly committed my thoughts to paper as they arose in my mind of the appearance of things around me or the circumstances, whatever they might be, in which I happened to be involved.²⁰⁴

To some extent, this represented further massaging of his own image, but the difference between the “scientific” voyages of Cook or Vancouver and the hybrid “commercial” expeditions of Colnett or Portlock was a matter of degree rather than kind. Cook was no more free from commercial concerns than Colnett was monopolized by them, as the interest of Banks, the presence of Menzies, and government approval of his voyage attest. Indeed, many of the early voyages to the Northwest Coast embraced some combination of commercial, scientific, and geopolitical objectives. Only when voyages to the region became more routine did commercial considerations monopolize.²⁰⁵

Within the commercial-scientific ideology articulated by Cook, Colnett, and others, the Northwest Coast was not the centre of anything. Instead, the region and its peoples were displaced – spatially, economically, and culturally – and reconstructed as a periphery for contesting imperialisms.²⁰⁶ Rituals proclaiming sovereignty were a basic and transparent dimension of this imperial jousting; indigenous peoples may have been spectators but the real audience lived half a world away.²⁰⁷ Colnett makes no reference to such ceremonies but supercargo John Etches does. In a flourish of imperial omniscience, he described the area between latitudes 48°N and 57°N as “an extensive cluster of unexplored islands, inhabited by numerous tribes of Friendly Indians, with whom a regular connexion was formed, and a multitude of these valuable islands were taken possession of with the usual forms and ceremonies of original discoveries; particularly Queen Charlotte’s and Princess Royal’s Islands, amounting from fifty to one hundred in number; and many of the chiefs of them were presented with light-horsemen’s caps and medals, on which were your Majesty’s arms.”²⁰⁸

The symbolic repertoire of displacement and subordination also included toponomy and cartography.²⁰⁹ Dalrymple’s recommendation that “native names should always be used when they were available” was less surprising than it may appear. It was a pragmatic response to the confusion resulting from the duplication of names and was largely ignored.²¹⁰ More pertinent were Cook’s procedures and instructions, like those issued to Portlock, which included requirements to “draft or sketch ... any place you may discover ... and in naming such parts you must particularly recollect our kind patrons.”²¹¹ As a result, the Northwest Coast became littered with the names of assorted, mostly British, politicians and naval officers. Colnett and Duncan, like their predecessors, participated fully in this game of geographical honorifics. It represented, in part, the currency of the patronage that lubricated their careers. But such naming carried multiple messages. It was also an act of symbolic appropriation and ideological peripheralization; it served to domesticate the “wilderness” and dismiss the indigenous population. Nor was naming limited to features of the landscape. Pratt argues that the compilation and organization of data on “natu-

ral history,” the Linnaean project, equally served to efface local knowledge. Menzies’ presence on a “commercial” voyage was no whim.²¹²

European toponomy was usually incorporated within a cartographic framework that served to articulate a graphic “language of power.”²¹³ Certainly publication of the results, in charts or journals, could prove valuable in asserting and legitimizing geopolitical claims against imperial rivals – failure to do so undoubtedly weakened the Spanish case in the Nootka crisis of 1790.²¹⁴ But practical as well as symbolic issues were involved. “Useful exploration,” in Beaglehole’s phrase, rested upon the navigator knowing “where he was ... well enough to report reliably on it when he reached home – so that he or a successor could find the place again.” Hence, in the second half of the eighteenth century, the emphasis on, and the resources devoted to, the accurate calculation of longitude and the construction of accurate maps.²¹⁵ These were vital tools in facilitating the repetition of visitations necessary for moving from symbolic to physical appropriation. However, in making this latter step, as Spanish experience on the Northwest Coast would demonstrate, geopolitical power was the real arbiter. The comprehensiveness of Vancouver’s expedition and British maritime supremacy largely effaced earlier cartography and toponomy.

Early Encounters on the Northwest Coast and Hawaiian Islands

If Colnett and his men had the benefit of considerable personal and secondary experience of encounters with indigenous peoples, the converse did not hold for Northwest Coast peoples. For them, initial contact was largely adventitious. Each group, to a considerable extent, had to work out for itself the parameters and procedures of the encounter with Europeans. Once begun, however, information, rumour, artifacts, and diseases spread ahead of physical encounters. In 1786, the contact process was well underway among some Nuu-chah-nulth and Tlingit; for others, such as the Tsimshian, direct encounters lay in the future.

Whatever Natives and non-Natives brought to their meetings, the contact process was no simple two-sided encounter. Rather, it involved a complex intersection of class, status, gender, and ethnicity – mostly with impoverished means of communications. Much of this diversity is beyond recovery, but it is worth noting how limited and particular the perspectives of surviving records are. Colnett provides the view from the quarter deck, written with an eye towards publication and his patron. Much happened that Colnett was either unaware of or chose not to record. Taylor provides supplementary information and a valuable, if partial, corrective. But the perspective of the seamen, responsible for most of the encounters with Northwest Coast Natives, is largely absent.

Even more problematic is the Native view. Ethnographic sources provide a substantial body of information on Northwest Coast societies, but they contain – for reasons discussed below – their own interpretative dilemmas. Of particular interest here is a small segment of the ethnographic literature, the

first contact narratives. Some, collected from Gitkx̱aala (Kitkatla) Tsimshian informants, have been taken to refer to Colnett's visit to the Banks Island area.²¹⁶ Such narratives are important historical documents, but they call for careful analysis as they operate differently than do standard European accounts. The texts, derived from oral performances in the Tsimshian language, are twice translated, with all the limitations such procedures imply. There are, too, emphases and omissions; the narratives are concerned primarily with the actions of chiefs and are silent, for example, about the encounters with Native women. Nonetheless, they represent an invaluable "window on ways the past is culturally constituted and discussed" in Tsimshian culture.²¹⁷ Moreover, when viewed together, the narratives and journals inform each other and offer the possibility of a fuller and richer account of early encounters on the Northwest Coast.

Nor should it be forgotten that early exchanges took place without a *lingua franca*, making communication largely nonverbal and the space for misunderstanding considerable.²¹⁸ Thus, first encounters, in particular, contained an irreducible component of tension and uncertainty, even for Europeans with their accumulated experience. Beresford, off the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1787, thought that the Haida were probably harmless, but "their attempt to persuade us to go on shore, is an additional proof in favour of our suspicion; they certainly wanted to decoy us to the hippah, and there no doubt, we should have been instantly butchered."²¹⁹ For Native peoples, the initial anxiety was likely greater. European technology was certainly deployed to entice, amaze, and intimidate.²²⁰ In these circumstances, where both sides were often puzzled and perplexed, frustration was common and "sometimes fatal."²²¹

Northwest Coast Peoples

Before attempting to interpret Colnett's encounters with the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast, a brief outline of their cultural parameters is necessary. This is by no means an unproblematic undertaking. Although the literature on Northwest Coast cultures is vast, the principal sources remain the ethnographies, long assumed to be descriptions of "pristine" or precontact conditions. However, the data were collected in the late nineteenth century (or more recently), when personal memories of informants extended back only as far as the early years of the century. By that time, the cultures already had experienced a good deal of change, and it is a moot point how far the "memory" ethnographies reflect precontact conditions. Reassessment of these sources is an ongoing process and far from complete, introducing a further layer of uncertainty to current interpretations of early contact situations.²²² Here my concern is with a restricted range of topics that relate to the ways in which Northwest Coast peoples intersected with Europeans: language, subsistence, settlements, and social structure, and for these topics, I offer only the barest outline.

The Northwest Coast was a single culture area, but there were important internal variations, the most basic being linguistic.²²³ Speakers of six different language families lived on the coast north of the Straits of Juan de Fuca. Colnett encountered representatives of five: Wakashan, Haida, Tsimshian, Tlingit, and

Eyak-Athapaskan.²²⁴ Farther north, in the Prince William Sound area, beyond the Northwest Coast culture area, were the Pacific Yupik-speaking Chugach. Not surprisingly, this diversity added to the puzzlement of early visitors and compounded the difficulties of communication. Pidgins would develop to fill this void, but only a few word lists, for a few locations, were available to the early followers of Cook.

In terms of basic subsistence, the Northwest Coast was a rich but uneven environment.²²⁵ The availability of salmon, concentrating energy from a vast area of the North Pacific Ocean, permitted what was probably the densest population of non-agricultural peoples anywhere in the world. Locally, however, the accessibility of salmon runs varied with environmental conditions and, from one year to another, with reproductive cycles. Thus, a considerable array of other marine and land resources was utilized. In some parts of the outer coast, halibut and whales rivalled salmon in importance; elsewhere, oolichan and sturgeon were significant, while shellfish and berries were widely distributed. Harvesting of these resources required considerable mobility. Patterns varied from one region to another but people moved through their territory from a permanent base, usually a winter village, to a sequence of resource sites. These annual rounds reflected seasonal availability and, in most cases, villages were occupied for only part of the year. To some extent, the perceptions of early European visitors were shaped by the timing of their visits – spring to fall – when indigenous populations, in most cases, were widely dispersed.

Resource sites, with a few exceptions, were not common property but were owned by specific social groups. Indeed, as Cook had sensed at Nootka Sound in 1778, there were well-developed concepts of ownership and control that governed access to land and resources operating throughout the coast. In most cases, ownership resided at the level of the house group or lineage or even local group. Terminology is inconsistent, but each comprised a set of people linked by blood and marriage who, minimally, occupied a single physical house in a village site. Kenyon, writing of the Nuu-chah-nulth geopolitical landscape, described the local group as “an idealized family, expanded over time, which owned a distinct territory and shared common ceremonial and ritual property. Members of this family were ranked on the basis of primogeniture and it was the highest ranking member who was regarded as the owner of most of the group’s property.”²²⁶ Rosman and Rubel, in describing the broadly similar organization of Haida and Tlingit lineages, specify what was owned in more detail. The lineage, they write, “has rights to territories for hunting and fishing, cemetery areas, house sites, and trade routes ... [and] is the unit with corporate legal functions which conducts warfare and participates in feuds, and which makes alliances through marriages.” Trade, like other prerogatives, operated through this proprietary structure and, as in communities farther south, was exercised by the chief on behalf of the membership.²²⁷

The composition of a typical Tlingit house group is described by Olson as consisting of “the house chief, his wife, unmarried daughters, sons below eight or ten years of age, and one or more sisters’ sons above that age; several brothers

of the house chief, their wives, unmarried daughters, small sons, and nephews; aged persons belonging to that house; slaves.”²²⁸ Another way of describing the house group/lineage is that it consisted of a set of ranked names (or titles). Names were permanent; individuals were temporary holders of the names. In theory, then, the “names” recorded by traders such as Colnett should be traceable in the ethnographic literature.

In some areas, the ranking system extended between house groups and even embraced larger political units. While the house group/lineage was the maximal political unit in some parts of the coast, the pattern was not uniform. Among the Tsimshian, for example, there were tribes – usually the population of a single winter village. More controversially, among the Nuu-chah-nulth, there were confederacies that coordinated several tribes within a coherent structure.²²⁹ Nonetheless, even where such larger entities existed, there was a significant degree of local autonomy. This dispersal, or localization, of power, a basic characteristic of Northwest Coast political structures, was easily misinterpreted by early European visitors.

There were other important regional variations in social organization. Among northern peoples (Haida, Tsimshian, and Tlingit), where Colnett spent most of his time, there was no primogeniture and descent was through the maternal line. These same northern peoples were also distinguished by another order of social relationships that crosscut the geographic hierarchy described above. The terminology used varies – clans, phratries, and moieties – but these were matrilineal, exogamous groups, with common origins, that were widely but unevenly distributed. Apart from helping to define marriage patterns, clan membership offered a set of links beyond local communities. There were four such clans among the northern peoples – Killer Whale, Wolf, Raven, and Eagle – but the correspondence between the clans in different language groups was not straightforward.²³⁰

Northwest Coast Encounters

Nootka Sound

The ethnographic literature, following Drucker, indicates that the local groups in Nootka Sound were arranged into three larger geographical “entities”: the Yuquot/Tahsis confederacy, the Tlupana local groups, and the Muchalaht local groups. A little farther south, occupying the southern portion of the Hesquiat peninsula, were the Hesquiaht local groups (MAP D, p. 103). The role of these last three “entities” is far from clear. They possessed geographical propinquity and, perhaps, some common historical elements, but had little functional significance; the component local groups remained essentially autonomous. The Yuquot/Tahsis confederacy was different. While local groups still existed, they were arranged, for ceremonial and therefore economic activities, in a rank order. Marshall argues that this additional level of political organization made the confederacy the dominant political force in the area prior to contact. Thus the chiefs of the Yuquot/Tahsis confederacy, notably Maquinna, were the dominant political figures in Nootka Sound. This primacy, in turn, was based on a

more diverse economic base, consisting of territory on the inner sounds and the outer coast.²³¹ Utilization of these distinct regions required seasonal movements to diverse resource sites, with Yuquot, in Friendly Cove at the entrance to Nootka Sound, serving as the “summer” village for the entire confederacy. Among the local groups of the Tlupana, Muchalaht, and Hesquiaht, there were also seasonal movements between resource and village sites, but the geographical compass was much more restricted. The Tlupana and Muchalaht local groups, according to Marshall, were confined to the regions of the inner waterways. The structure of the Hesquiaht local groups, prior to contact, seems to have been much the same, although at least one was located on the outer coast.²³²

When Colnett arrived at Nootka Sound in July 1787, he was repeating the itinerary of Cook and entering a region with a history of Native/European encounters. Since 1778, five vessels had spent time at Nootka; one, the *Imperial Eagle*, was anchored at Friendly Cove when Colnett arrived.²³³ Happenstance made Nootka the datum point and trading centre for early European visitors, and some of the local population were quick to respond. Europeans, identified as important new sources of wealth, were promptly incorporated into the pre-existing geopolitical landscape. Like other territorial rights, such as salvage, access to Europeans was restricted.²³⁴ By 1787, Maquinna and his family had assumed this prerogative and Yuquot, the summer village of the confederacy, had become the primary locus of trade. This did not mean that nobody else could trade with Europeans, nor that Europeans either understood, or fully conformed with, Nuu-chah-nulth norms. It did mean that Maquinna largely controlled the terms and timing of access to Europeans. This power, there is reason to believe, was resented by some of the other political actors in the region.²³⁵ Colnett’s sojourn at Nootka Sound, although he was only dimly aware of it, was clearly shaped by indigenous geopolitical structures and the prior geography of contact.

The initial anchorage of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Princess Royal* was off Hesquiaht territory, where some canoes of fishers were encountered. Shortly thereafter, the vessels were visited by Maquinna and another chief, probably his brother.²³⁶ They may have been fishing also, but it is more likely that their arrival reflected the regional political hierarchy noted above, especially the prerogative of trading with Europeans. Maquinna, according to these precepts, would have expected Colnett to proceed to Yuquot. If so, he would be disappointed. The reason for Colnett’s refusal was the news, brought by Maquinna, that another vessel, the *Imperial Eagle*, was anchored at Friendly Cove. Colnett’s response to this unwelcome competition was to seek an alternative anchorage up Zuciarte Channel. There is some uncertainty about the location selected, but it was adjacent to the village of one of two Muchalaht local groups: Cheesish (Tcecis) or Mooya (Mō’ya), probably the former. The leading chief of the village was Oughomeize.²³⁷

The welcome at Oughomeize’s village was not particularly warm. Duncan, who arrived first in the *Princess Royal*, almost became embroiled in a conflict. Shortly thereafter, when the *Prince of Wales* arrived, the ship was surrounded

by canoes, one of which contained “several troublesome elderly Men.” One in particular, whom Taylor “took for a Chief, a sourly fellow stood up and harangued the Natives along side for near an hour without ceasing.” While admitting his ignorance as to the purpose of this performance, Taylor thought it represented an expression of discontent. As to the cause of the discontent, he suggested that the vessels were anchored too far from the village or too close to the salmon stream. Matters were made worse, he believed, by the use of boarding netting to limit access to the vessel. There may have been some validity to Taylor’s explanations, but it was hardly the full story. Two other factors need to be considered. First, the prior history of European contact with the Muchalaht local groups; second, that Europeans had been incorporated into the politics of the region – as trading partners, hence “allies,” of Maquinna.

In 1778, Cook’s principal anchorage, at Resolution Cove, was just inside Muchalaht territory. However, people from Yuquot had established contact with the vessels as they entered Nootka Sound and, territorial rights notwithstanding, had appropriated control over access to the visitors.²³⁸ These developments may have accounted for the unfriendly reception Cook received at an unnamed village – probably Cheesish – during a trip round Bligh Island.²³⁹ Nearly a decade later, Alexander Walker’s reception, probably at the same village, was similar. “Upon our Landing,” Walker wrote, “several of the Men armed themselves, and never quitted their spears all the time we stayed. Some of them followed us wherever we went, narrowly watched all our Motions, and treated us with great insolence, prescribing limits to our walks and thrusting us forcibly out of their Houses.”²⁴⁰

Later, in 1786, James Hanna, perhaps responding to similar conditions, exacerbated the problems for subsequent visitors. According to Esteban Martinez, Hanna “went among the villages situated along the NE arm of the Inlet [Zuciarte Channel], where he killed more than fifty Indians.”²⁴¹ It would be surprising if these incidents did not affect responses to subsequent European visitors.

Nonetheless, initial tensions notwithstanding, Colnett’s relationships with the people at Oughomeize’s village soon became more tranquil. The chief, presumably recognizing the opportunity that chance had brought, sought to control access to the vessels; indeed, it is possible that the “harangue,” described by Taylor, was an assertion of precisely that “privilege.” Colnett, while acknowledging that the restricted means of communication produced uncertainty, soon recognized that visiting Natives had limited access to the Europeans. They made “us entirely their guests,” Colnett observed, “not suffering an Indian from any other part of the sound to trade with us but thro’ them.”²⁴² Significantly, when a group of “strangers” appeared off the village a few days later, Colnett met them, not on the *Prince of Wales* but at the house of Oughomeize. According to Taylor, a procession of canoes “advanced with great order singing, and accompanying their Voices with the musick of their Paddles on the sides of the Canoes with some degree of Harmony.” He concluded that they were “a tribe on friendship with our Neighbours, and were received with distinguished Ceremony”: this was no casual visit.²⁴³

The identity and objectives of the visitors are unclear, but their approach from the south is suggestive. They may have been one of the Tlupana local groups, which had sites south of Zuciarte Channel, or perhaps the Homisaht. According to Drucker, the Homisaht, off whose territory Colnett had anchored on 6 July, were “originally connected with the Muchalat Arm groups, or those of Tlupana Arm.”²⁴⁴ Were the strangers, presumably allies of Oughomeize, seeking to circumvent Maquinna’s usual control of trade with Europeans? Some support for this view is provided by the invitation Colnett received, shortly after the arrival of the strangers, to go “onshore to trade for skins ... [they] had brought.” John Etches, the supercargo, after detaining a hostage, accepted the offer.²⁴⁵ On landing, “he was steer’d into the Chief of the Village’s House thro’ a double rank of arm’d men, their knives held in a posture to strike, & introduced to the stranger, to whom he presented a Grenadier’s Cap & several other articles.” Not seeing any skins and fearful of a trap, Etches abruptly left. Such anxieties, shaped by images of savagery, were part of the ideological baggage that encumbered Europeans, and Colnett, on a second expedition to the village, responded in a like manner. According to Taylor, “several good skins” were traded from these visitors and the local chiefs, but it is unlikely that trade was the principal purpose of the visit.²⁴⁶

These European accounts may be compared with a first contact narrative for Muchalaht territory, given to Drucker in 1935 by Muchalaht Peter. Of interest here is that the encounter with Europeans overlapped with the arrival of a party of Nuu-chah-nulth visitors from the south. After visiting the European vessel, the local people

returned to [their] village, & assembled in chief’s house. While they were still wondering what kind of tcexa²⁴⁷ this [European ship] was, a big fleet of canoes came in, from the manuisatxa.²⁴⁸ They also passed the island and were wondering what it could be. They had come down because a manuisatxa girl was going to be mar[r]ied to tcecis,²⁴⁹ and they came for a feast. They began to dance, and got another surprise, for 2 boatloads of whites came ashore and stood looking in the doorway. The capt. gave a hat to the chief of the manuisatxa (who were dancing). But the tcecisatxa became jealous, and said the gift had been meant for them. The manuisatxa surrendered it. Then the whites returned to their ship. When the tcecis people gave a feast, they showed the white-man dance – wrapped legs a la pants, & held burning sticks in mouths. They were sorry hadnt bot the pants to use.²⁵⁰

Calibrated with European records, this should be a description of events associated with Cook’s visit in 1778, but there are doubts. Accounts from Cook’s expedition of this particular encounter are too brief to permit a firm conclusion – positive or negative. On the other hand, the similarities with Colnett’s visit are striking.²⁵¹ In a discussion of Colnett’s account, anthropologist Turrall Moore, unaware of Muchalaht Peter’s narrative, noted the breach of Native

etiquette by Etches in making a present to the visitors “without an equally substantial gift to the native host.”²⁵² Perhaps Cook’s party behaved in a similar fashion; perhaps the Muchalaht narrative, as Catherine McClellan has suggested of comparable Tlingit accounts, is a kind of composite of separate encounters. I return to this topic in a discussion of Tsimshian narratives, noting here only that the Muchalaht narrative indicates another potential identity for Oughomeize’s visitors and a purpose for their visit; it also identifies his village as Cheesish.²⁵³

For Colnett, of course, the crucial point that emerged from the encounter was commercial: the fur trade at Oughomeize’s village was unsatisfactory. He attributed this situation in large measure to the prior arrival of Captain Barkley and his success in purchasing all the available furs in the region. Therefore, once the crews had recovered from the effects of scurvy, Colnett responded by searching beyond Oughomeize’s territory. The *Princess Royal* and one of the ship’s boats examined Tlupana Arm and Muchalat Inlet in a largely unsuccessful quest for furs. Such actions, a logical step from the European perspective, represented a violation of Oughomeize’s attempt to establish a trading privilege. Misunderstanding such indigenous protocols, Colnett violated them; his interests, in this respect, were diametrically opposed to those of his host.

Colnett’s sojourn at the entrance to Muchalat Inlet involved much more than the fur trade. Access to supplies of foodstuffs and timber for repair work was equally important. Foodstuffs, including fish, meat, berries, and “greens,” were largely procured by trade. Although the Europeans also helped themselves to these resources, and to lumber, with no thought of payment, these exchanges represented a significant realm of what Spate has called “amiable intercourse.”²⁵⁴ In the early stages of Colnett’s stay, when sickness made the crew vulnerable and when European fears and uncertainties were most evident, this must have been particularly welcome. Taylor commented on specific examples of friendly actions: “I was Eye witness to the humanity of one of the Natives in assisting the sick over the Rocks into our Boat. He was an Elderly man and Father of a Family who had his house and occupied a small spot close to the Ship, his business was to attend the weakest of the Seamen one after the other, with great care and fellow feeling using all the tenderness and concern of a Brother or a Father to such as were able to walk without Aid.”²⁵⁵

Taylor also describes attempts by the crew to entertain their hosts with musical instruments – organ, pipes, fife, and drum. Responses varied, but Taylor observed that “we always found” the people “willing to barter friendly and upon all occasions, when we were on Shore among them, they treated us hospitably, and on many occasions behaved with particular attention and humanity.”²⁵⁶ Archibald Menzies, surgeon on the *Prince of Wales*, also attested to the “friendship ... civility & kindness” of those he encountered during his stay.²⁵⁷ How far sexual relationships with Native women contributed to these views is unclear. Colnett, like Cook and many others writing for publication, was reticent on the topic, commenting only that the “women have a great share of Modesty, nor had we but two instances of their deviating from it.”²⁵⁸ However,

unpublished accounts of Cook's visit to Nootka indicate a situation in which the purchase of sexual favours – from slave women – were commonplace. A more nuanced commentary on what was clearly a complex and shifting set of relationships was offered by Walker, following his visit to Nootka Sound in 1786:

On our arrival, when the men were absent, which frequently happened, the Women shut us out of their houses, and barricaded the doors with Chests and Planks. This was said to be the effect of the Mens jealousy, although it appeared to me more natural to suppose it to be procured from the fears of the Women, who took this method of freeing themselves from our coarse importunities. After they became better acquainted with us, whether the Men were absent or present, they never shut us out. That the Men watched us suspiciously, I believe, but it never appeared to me, that the liberty of the Women was on that account abridged.²⁵⁹

But “amiable intercourse,” sexual or otherwise, was no guarantee of mutual understanding, or of continued goodwill.

In the pattern of relations established at Muchalat Inlet, Oughomeize was clearly a key figure, and some discussion of his position and role is required before proceeding further. Colnett described him as “a free Booter & great Warrior his neighbours standing in great dread of him.”²⁶⁰ In less flamboyant terms, Taylor also recognized Oughomeize's importance, as “a Man of some Consequence, and authority, among his own Villagers.” One expression of this was Oughomeize's ability to extract a tribute from people fishing in the vicinity. Some of the canoes, Taylor continued, “endeavoured to get from him, but his canoe having the superiority in Paddling, this endeavours were fruitless [60a] and those who strove to shun him appeared to come worst off. One and all were submissive, though when discoursing with them along side, they seemed to disapprove of his conduct, but I should imagine his claims were very just, or such a body of Men would not suffer it.”²⁶¹ Taylor also saw the limitations of Oughomeize's power, concluding that he was no more than “Chief of a Fishing tribe, for I never knew him during our stay bring a single Skin for sale, nor do I believe that any of his Tribe are allowed to interfere in Commerce. on the Contrary I suspect his Village is kept under great subjection by the Neighbouring tribes, who will not permit them to have many Skins in their Possession, but confine them chiefly to their Fishery.”²⁶² Maquinna subsequently confirmed some of this to Colnett, but he refused to trade skins until the *Prince of Wales* had anchored at Yuquot. In other words, Maquinna recognized that Oughomeize, while not of the highest rank, was an independent chief whose territorial rights extended to European visitors anchored near his village.²⁶³

Another glimpse of Oughomeize's position was recorded by Archibald Menzies, when he returned to Nootka in 1792. During a ceremonial visit to Maquinna's winter village of Tahsis, Menzies “instantly recognized the Wife of Maquinna's Brother an old acquaintance the daughter of an elderly Chief who

had a numerous family & lived in the North East Corner of the Sound & to whose friendship I owed much civility & kindness when I was here about five years ago.”²⁶⁴ Oughomeize, by this account, had established a marriage alliance with Maquinna’s family, but not with the senior line. As befits a family of lesser status, Oughomeize’s alliance was with a younger branch of the family. A couple of other early visitors to Nootka Sound mention Oughomeize, but little more.²⁶⁵ This silence is suggestive: Oughomeize, as Taylor perceived, was not a major player on the unfolding geopolitical landscape of Nootka Sound. The fur trade at Oughomeize’s village was poor, not simply because of the prior arrival of Barkley but because Oughomeize and his people had little, if any, access to sea otter grounds.

While the available evidence indicates that early contact had done little for Oughomeize and other chiefs in comparable positions, the same was not true for Maquinna. Already the ranking chief, he had further enhanced his position, both within the confederacy and without. The control and redistribution of wealth emanating from the new European trading partners had added to his status. Taylor noted that Maquinna had developed a trade “with distant tribes for Skins” and spared “no pains in getting them.”²⁶⁶ Moreover, firearms had already entered the trade at Yuquot and apparently were put to use in indigenous disputes. A group of Maquinna’s people, after procuring “a brace of Pistolls & a few charges” from Colnett, set out on a revenge sortie. They took “the fire arms collected from us & other traders to punish the Murder.” The identity of the opponents is not given, but the destination was not “far off as they were soon back the result of this expedition we could not learn.”²⁶⁷ This pattern of raiding was elaborated upon the following year when Robert Haswell, an American trader, learned of a “war” between some of the Yuquot/Tahsis confederacy and “people of the opposite side of the sound” – presumably a reference to one or more of the Muchalaht groups.²⁶⁸

Indigenous geopolitics and the way that Europeans were incorporated were not the only source of misunderstandings and tensions. What Europeans regarded as theft soon became a cause of conflicts at Oughomeize’s village. On 24 July 1787, according to Colnett, “the Natives began to be very daring in their thefts & their too frequent success gave them confidence. my situation being so sickly prevented my punishing them before, but I now determin’d to chastise the first Offender.”²⁶⁹ Several muskets were fired without doing any damage, but the “natives were all much frighten’d and became shy of the Ship for a while.”²⁷⁰ Taylor, who provided the latter observation, also commented on the frequent “petty thefts” but suggested that Captain Barkley’s trading methods had contributed to the situation. This consisted of “laying his Boats in such direction as to intercept any Canoes with good Skins. they then seized the whole and gave the natives what they thought proper, the same along side their Ship when proper opportunity offered, so that the natives were not at liberty to Barter their own way. this was showing them examples for thieving in a very extensive way.”²⁷¹

In fact, theft was a persistent problem for Europeans: not just for Colnett, and not just at Nootka. I address the topic more fully below, but for the moment it will suffice to say that Taylor's observations indicate behaviour that violated Nuu-chah-nulth trading protocols. Such violations undoubtedly contributed to the violence that erupted between Europeans and the peoples of Nootka Sound in the early contact era.²⁷² On this topic, some observations made by Colnett when he returned to the area in 1791, after his release by the Spaniards, are relevant; they also offer a postscript on developments since his first visit. While coloured by his antipathy towards the Spanish, Colnett noted that Oughomeize, like some of Maquinna's "under Chiefs," had been involved in conflicts with the Spanish. One, he believed, took place at Oughomeize's village, where the chief: "drove them [the Spanish] to their launches when they came to unroof the Houses of his Village for the Plank, and only lost one man. Next day they return'd with 2 Four Pounders when the Indians fled to the Mountains, and carried their Plank with them, but left at the Landing Place the Indian they had murdered hanging on a Cross, that their pretended religion, and wanton Cruelty might stare at them in the Face."

Others have questioned Colnett's identification of location and participants, but not the actions.²⁷³

Colnett and the Haida

Colnett's expedition traversed much of Haida territory, but I will limit this discussion to his sojourns on the southeastern portion of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Although not the first Europeans to meet the people of this area (Dixon, and perhaps Hanna, preceded them), Colnett and Taylor offer the first significant description of the Kunghit Haida people.²⁷⁴ In 1787 and 1788, the *Prince of Wales*, the *Princess Royal*, and their boats traversed much of the east coast of the archipelago between Cape St. James and Skidegate Inlet. The journals describe three principal encounters involving groups of Kunghit Haida. Two were at Rose Harbour, in Houston Stewart Channel – in August 1787, and again in July 1788. The third meeting took place at Juan Perez Sound in July 1788.

Local autonomy, so prevalent among Northwest Coast societies, was particularly clear among the Haida, where "small-scale units (villages and small village groups, or even subsets of one village community) strove against each other."²⁷⁵ Such geopolitical striving among Haida chiefs is clearly visible in the Colnett and Taylor documents, although a good many details remain ambiguous or obscure: the identity of one Haida chief is uncertain, and ethnographic information about the territories controlled by different lineages is limited and was collected only after a period of substantial population decline and culture change.²⁷⁶ Nonetheless, one important feature is clear: the arrival of Europeans intersected with, and likely exacerbated, indigenous patterns of tension and conflict.

At Rose Harbour in 1787 two distinct groups of Haida were present. One, consisting primarily of people who lived in that vicinity, took up residence

close to the vessels. These people were headed by three chiefs who visited daily: Coyah, regarded as the most important, Skelkinance, and Yuka. All three were on good terms with one another, and probably interrelated. Skelkinance, an old man, was described as the father (or father-in-law) of Yuka; Coyah, Taylor believed, “was a relation of the other,” presumably Skelkinance. The second group came from a “Northern district” and their chief was Sanjaskulah. He visited the vessels shortly after their arrival at Rose Harbour but soon withdrew, only to reappear about a week later “with a large party.” On the latter occasion there was clearly tension between Sanjaskulah and the “local” chiefs.²⁷⁷ Skelkinance, Yuka, and Coyah approached the *Prince of Wales* in formal dress “with the emblem of peace in the bow of the canoe.” This ceremonial greeting, after a week of interaction, may well have been to establish an alliance with Colnett and preempt any such move by Sanjaskulah. Taylor provides evidence to support this contention when he notes that Colnett and Skelkinance exchanged names “agreeable to their custom, in token of friendship.”²⁷⁸ Such an alliance would explain the response of the “local” chiefs when they went onboard the *Prince of Wales*. According to Taylor, when they “came on Deck they appeared greatly surprised to find so large a party with Sanjaskelah. it was easy to discover they were enemies occasionally.”²⁷⁹

Before proceeding further it is necessary to discuss the identity of these Haida chiefs. Coyah is clearly Xō’ya, chief of the Qai’dju qē’gawa-i Raven lineage (R 2a).²⁸⁰ His principal residence was at or near Anthony Island and his territory encompassed all of Kunghit Island. Xō’ya “was the acknowledged chief of Houston Stewart Channel and adjacent sound.” He is also mentioned by a number of other early maritime fur traders.²⁸¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that he was quick to visit Colnett’s expedition when it arrived at Rose Harbour in August 1787.

Acheson identifies Yuka as Wadā’, of the Xā’gi lā’nas Raven lineage (R 1). His territory was in Skincuttle Inlet, shown as Port Uga on Colnett’s chart.²⁸² The ethnographic record links him to a settlement, Xā’gi Inagā’-i, on the Bolkus Islands.²⁸³ Like Xō’ya, “Yuka” appears in the accounts of a number of early traders. The best information comes from Joseph Ingraham, of the American brigantine *Hope*, who visited Yuka’s village in 1791. Ingraham located it on the south shore of Skincuttle Inlet, in Jedway Bay, facing the Bolkus Islands.²⁸⁴

Sanjaskulah came from “a Northern district,” and his tense relationship with the “Southern” chiefs, evident at Rose Harbour in 1787, became even clearer at Juan Perez Sound in August 1788. Here, in an encounter described below, Taylor referred to Sanjaskulah as “a Chief from the Northd where our Boat had collected Skins last year.” As Colnett’s maps show, this indicated somewhere in the vicinity of Lyell Island. From these pieces of information, and Taylor’s rendition of the name, the most likely candidate is Gina’skilas. He was a chief of the “Town of Djigua People,” an Eagle lineage (E 4), with a town on the north shore of Lyell Island.²⁸⁵

More problematic is the identity of Skelkinance. Gunther, in a rather confused discussion of Colnett’s voyage, suggests that Skelkinance may have been the

“Kanskeeni” met by Joseph Ingraham at Juan Perez Sound in 1791 and 1792. However, there is good reason to question this identification. Indeed, Ingraham’s journal makes clear that these were two different people by recording encounters with both chiefs. Ingraham’s “Kans’keini,” or “Kanskeeni,” is clearly a rendering of Kiā’nskina-i of the Tā’dji lā’nas Raven lineage (R 2); his “Kill’ki’nant’s,” or “Sculkinantz,” is a version of the name given by Taylor and Colnett.²⁸⁶ Moreover, Ingraham, who had a good ear for Haida names, refers to “Kanskeeni” on 15 July 1792 and “Sculkinantz” on 16 July, making slippage an improbable explanation.²⁸⁷

According to Swanton’s informants, the original village of Kiā’nskina-i’s lineage, the Tā’dji lā’nas Raven, was Atā’na Inagā’-i on House Island, near the northern boundary of Kunghit territory; the name was later taken to Ga’idi on Harriet Harbour, and Qai’dju, a town on Benjamin Point.²⁸⁸ At the time of contact, however, Kiā’nskina-i seems to have lived in the vicinity of Juan Perez Sound, which Ingraham named Kanskeeni’s Sound. On visiting the area in 1792, he learned that “Old Kanskeeni with most of his tribe ... was up one of the branches of the sound some distance from the sea.”²⁸⁹ “Kanskeeni,” of course, is not named in the accounts of Colnett or Taylor. While this does not mean that he was not present or involved in the actions they describe, there is no reason to believe he was the Skelkinance they do identify.

Who then was “Skelkinance”? One candidate is Xi’liñas, identified by Swanton as the chief of Tc!u’uga Inagā’-i, a settlement beyond the west end of Houston Stewart Channel, and probably of the GA’nxet qē’gawa-i Eagle lineage (E 2).²⁹⁰ The village was located only a short distance from Coyah’s home. Moreover, during the 1788 visit to Rose Harbour, Taylor noted that “a Canoe came from inland with a letter to Capt. Colnett from Capt. Duncan and left in the care of Silkyrance.” The circumstances of this meeting are discussed below but, for the moment, Taylor’s observation makes a simple geographical point. The letter came from the west, presumably brought by some member of Skelkinance’s tribe from a summer residence. Taylor also noted the close relationship between Xō’ya and Skelkinance, as did a number of other early visitors. John Kendrick, during his visit to the western end of Houston Stewart Channel in 1791, captured “the two Chiefs Coyah and Schulkinanse” as a reprisal for some thefts.²⁹¹ Later that same year, Joseph Ingraham, at Skincuttle Inlet (Port Yuca), learned that “Koyah and Kilkinants had joined forces and gone to attack Skulkiss [Skidegate].”²⁹²

But the identification of Skelkinance as Xi’liñas leaves a number of questions unresolved. First, Acheson’s test excavation at Tc!u’uga Inagā’-i did not produce any “historical” artifacts.²⁹³ More important than such negative evidence is information that “Skelkinance” had some connection or involvement with the area of Carpenter Bay. Colnett’s map places “Skelkinance” in that vicinity. Moreover, Sigismund Bacstrom, who visited the area on a British vessel in 1793, drew a map that shows “Skulkanan’s or Skulkananish village and Sound” in what appears to be Carpenter Bay. Another fur trader, François Peron, met “Skil-Ka-Nance” in this area in 1796 and stated his village was on the north shore.²⁹⁴ Newcombe, probably the best source on Haida settlements, has no

site at this location, the nearest being Qai'dju, controlled by Kanskeeni but apparently not utilized at the beginning of contact.²⁹⁵ This omission raises the possibility that Skelkinance's name has not survived in the ethnographic record. I have found no documentary reference to Skelkinance after Peron's visit in 1796, and the volatility in the geopolitical order at the western end of Houston Stewart Channel during the early years of contact seems well established.²⁹⁶ Be this as it may, Skelkinance's involvement with Carpenter Bay in the early contact era seems equally clear. The location, just south of Yuka's territory in Skincuttle Inlet, may have had something to do with the relationship between the two men – with Skelkinance, according to Taylor, either father (1787) or father-in-law (1788) of Yuka. But this is only speculation.

To sum up: of the four chiefs encountered at Rose Harbour in 1787, three can be located in the ethnographic record with reasonable assurance. The identity of Skelkinance remains uncertain. It is clear, moreover, that there was an alliance of the chiefs (and their lineages) who occupied territory from the western end of Houston Stewart Channel to Skincuttle Inlet. Some dispute or tension had developed between them and Sanjaskulah, a chief from farther north. The picture became clearer in 1788 when these four chiefs were encountered again, together with a new and important figure.

In July 1788, when the *Prince of Wales* returned to the eastern end of Houston Stewart Channel, both Xō'ya and Skelkinance were on hand. They had only recently returned from a visit to the vicinity of Juan Perez Sound. There they had met Charles Duncan, on the *Princess Royal*, and been involved in a conflict with some people from farther north. Taylor "heard a confus'd account of a dust with *some* Strangers who came to trade, and that Capt. Duncan had taken a part in favour of Silkynance who was wounded in ye fray with a Stab in his thigh & Cap D kill'd ye Chief who gave him the wound and took Silkynance under his care on board ye Sloop." A letter from Duncan to Colnett, subsequently received via Skelkinance, confirmed the main outlines of the events. The letter has not survived, but Taylor noted that "some Strangers came as describ'd whom Silkynance and Cooyah had fought and Capt Duncan took the Old Chiefs part."²⁹⁷ The reason for Xō'ya's and Skelkinance's presence in Juan Perez Sound and their conflict with people from farther north can be only speculated at, but it may have been the continuation of a preexisting dispute, hinted at during the encounters of 1787. By 1788, however, as Taylor's comments indicate, European traders, and access to them, had become integrated into the conflict.

The nature of the contending parties was further clarified when the *Prince of Wales* anchored in Juan Perez Sound a few days later. At first only Yuka and his people were in the vicinity. The following day a party under Sanjaskulah arrived from the north. They had no skins to trade and, according to Taylor, Sanjaskulah and Yuka were "on friendly terms" and all was "good harmony." The situation changed markedly later that day when a party under Skelkinance arrived from the south. This produced "a general alarm on Deck and we expected nothing less than a Battle to commence shortly. All the natives took

to their Canoes flourishing their Spears and handling their Bows and Arrows. The women were all put into a Canoe by themselves while all parties were employed equipping themselves with their leather jackets, war stays, Caps &c.”²⁹⁸ Significantly, an attempt was made to seek the assistance of the Europeans. Both chiefs, according to Colnett, “solicited our assistance against his Enemy,” although Taylor mentions only Yuka requesting “ye Captain to fire on Sangaskilah party.” Colnett remained neutral but thought “the Northern Indians shewd most fear, keeping their spears in an erect posture.” However, no hostile actions were committed and, as darkness approached, “each party paddled different ways for their Home.”

Skelkinance offered an explanation of these developments to Taylor: he, Yuka, and Xō’ya “were still friends and were all combin’d against their general enemy the Chief of ye Rock.” This chief was later identified by Taylor as “Eeyagh,” whose “home” was “about 5 Leagues to ye NW” of the anchorage in Juan Perez Sound.²⁹⁹ This would give a location at or near the northeast side of Lyell Island. There were a number of settlement sites in this area belonging to one of two closely related Eagle lineages headed by Chief Xe-ū’. This chief became well known to early fur traders as Clew (Clue, Kloo, and other variants) and his name appears under that guise on Colnett’s charts. When Swanton collected information at the beginning of the twentieth century, GinA’skilas was described as a brother of Xe-ū’.³⁰⁰

On 25 July, Eeyagh (Xe-ū’) arrived at Colnett’s anchorage near Scudder Point with a small but well-armed party. The reasons for his visit are unclear, but trade was a minor consideration as he brought only a single skin. Information about Colnett’s presence may have been received from Sanjaskulah, but the previous conflict, in which Duncan had participated, likely played some role. While there is nothing to indicate that Eeyagh had been involved personally, it would be surprising if he was unaware of the events. Moreover, Taylor observed that Skelkinance and Eeyagh were “inveterate against each other” and the latter’s approach to the *Prince of Wales* was cautious.³⁰¹ It is also worth noting that Colnett identifies his anchorage near Scudder Point, on the southern side of Juan Perez Sound, as “marking the Boundary of the Northern and Southern tribe.” This suggestion places the boundary of the “Southern” or Kunghit people some way south of that given by Acheson. Had the Juan Perez Sound area become an area of contention between Xe-ū’ and Skelkinance? Was Xe-ū’ endeavouring to expand southwards, or Skelkinance northwards? The Colnett/Taylor documents on these points are suggestive but no more. Nonetheless, the pattern of contention is consistent with other information about the geopolitical situation of the region. Acheson, for example, has noted that the people of Tanu, including Xe-ū’, were the “nearest neighbour and greatest enemy” of the Kunghit Haida; this continued well into the contact-era.³⁰²

If Skelkinance and Eeyagh were clearly antagonistic, Yuka’s relationships were more ambiguous. Taylor reported “a great coolness” between Eeyagh and Yuka but later modified his opinion, noting that Yuka, while a member of Skelkinance’s party, acted as something of an intermediary. This pattern was

repeated between Yuka and Sanjaskulah. They were “on friendly terms” until the arrival of Skelkinance. “Yookah may be said to be of Seelky’s party,” Taylor concluded, “yet he continues to act rather neutral in this difference entertaining a friendly intercourse with Eeyughs party, tho He appears to gave no great veneration for their principal Chief.”³⁰³ Yuka’s ambiguity may reflect his geographical position, located near the boundary between two regional configurations of power. It is possible that the marriage patterns of his house/lineage were superimposed on this spatial dichotomy.³⁰⁴ In one of Taylor’s accounts, it will be recalled, Yuka was the son-in-law of Skelkinance.

Tensions and hostilities were not new in this part of Haida territory. The logic of conflict existed within Haida society, as Colnett suspected, and as Haida narratives and the number of fortified places make clear.³⁰⁵ Traders such as Colnett and Duncan, whether they realized it or not, became objects of contention between segments of indigenous societies. Sea otter grounds off the Queen Charlotte Islands were owned and such “proprietary rights,” Acheson observes, “were extended to include access to trading vessels as well, although such claims were invariably challenged by rival lineage groups.”³⁰⁶ This was a variant of the pattern described at Nootka Sound, although the balance of power between indigenous groups was probably more equitable and, as yet, less influenced by trade with Europeans.

Equally clearly, trade was a means to other ends. When Ingraham visited Skincuttle Inlet in August 1791 this was even more obvious:

Ucah said if I would wait he would go and fight for skins which he would bring and sell us but his success was too precarious to trust to. If the visits of civilized nations among these people has rendered them happier by supplying them with useful implements and necessaries of life, it is no doubt likewise the occasion of great dissension and frequent quarrels among them so that the weaker tribes have probably occasion to lament seeing a people who brought among them the temptations to induce their neighbours to rob and oppress them.

Later that month, Ingraham saw Skelkinance and Xō’ya heading even farther north, to Skidegate, on a war expedition.³⁰⁷ Moreover, Swanton collected a narrative describing a complicated conflict of the early contact era between the “Ninstints” (Kunghit) people and those of “Kloo”; the events may well have been some kind of a sequel to those described by Taylor and Colnett.³⁰⁸ This lay in the future, but the foundations were being laid during Colnett’s visits. As at Nootka, indigenous and European objectives only partially coincided, leaving abundant scope on both sides for misunderstanding and conflict.

Issues other than indigenous geopolitics also complicated relations between Colnett’s people and the Haida. At Rose Harbour, in 1787, the ubiquitous problem of “thefts” was prominent, culminating in the flogging of one Haida and a display of the power of firearms. More unusual, although perhaps simply left

unrecorded elsewhere, sexual relationships between the ships' crews and Haida women contributed to tensions. For young men, cooped onboard ship for weeks on end, the prospect of "amorous Connections" was one of the compensations for the hardships of Pacific voyages. Yet the possibilities for misunderstandings, about who were appropriate partners and under what terms, were considerable.³⁰⁹ In a discussion of Cook's visit to Tolaga Bay, New Zealand, Salmond offers some comments which, in general terms, are probably applicable to the Northwest Coast:

Although these accounts of the sexual behaviour of local women appear to be contradictory, each may in fact be true. High-born women and married women were sexually inaccessible, although a very important guest might be offered an aristocratic sleeping-partner as a gesture of hospitality and honour. Captive women might be made quite freely available to visitors, and young women were generally at liberty to sleep with whomever they pleased, and at this first meeting there was no way of anticipating the dangers of venereal infection from European men.³¹⁰

Interestingly, it was at Rose Harbour that Colnett produced his only "portrait" of a Northwest Coast resident – a Haida woman. Intended to illustrate the use of the labret, the sketch displays little artistic merit. But, as Smith has suggested, drawings of living people presupposed "cultivating amicable relationships in order to execute accurate visual records."³¹¹

Tsimshian Encounters: The Journals of Colnett and Taylor

Colnett and Duncan sailed from Rose Harbour on 31 August 1787, heading eastwards across Hecate Strait. On the eastern shore, the outer islands, from Porcher Island to the Estevan Group, were the territory of the Gitk_xaała Tsimshian; the mainland around Douglas Channel and adjacent islands belonged to the closely related Gitk'á'ata Tsimshian. Farther south, around Princess Royal and Swindle Islands, lived a third Tsimshian tribe, the Gidestsu (Kitasoo). The Tsimshian language was quite different from that of the Haida but otherwise the cultures had much in common (see MAP H, p. 141).³¹²

The vessels reached the west coast of Banks Island at about 53°17'N although foggy weather made navigation difficult and locations uncertain. It was not until 5 September that a suitable harbour was located at Port Ball, at the extreme southern end of the island. No contact had yet been made; however, signs of former Native occupation were found upon landing. From this base, Colnett immediately began the process of sending the ships' boats to examine the surrounding territory. In all, three boats were available: the whale boat and long boat, of the *Prince of Wales*, and an unspecified boat belonging to the *Princess Royal*. Information in the journals about the boat trips is limited, but Colnett's maps show a series of boat routes – unfortunately without indicating the sequence or timing.

The first efforts were made on 6 September, when the *Princess Royal's* boat travelled about ten or eleven miles to the northwest and succeeded in locating a salmon stream – either at Kitwalaoo or Keecha (see MAP G, p. 140).³¹³ The next morning, all three boats were dispatched: the long boat and the *Princess Royal's* boat to the east side of the large opening and the whale boat to the southwest side. The former, after travelling along the south side of Pitt Island, returned to Port Ball on 8 September with news that a “village” had been found, about twenty-five miles from Port Ball, and some fifty skins traded.³¹⁴

The long boat and the *Princess Royal's* boat were sent out again the same day. This time they went farther afield, being absent for six and five days respectively, and returned with a further quantity of skins. Neither Colnett or Taylor say much about these trips, but one may have examined the west side of Pitt Island, perhaps as far north as the entrance to Petrel Channel, the other may have returned to the south end of Pitt Island. The boats were dispatched for a third time on 16 September, with orders to take new routes – to the southeast and the northeast. At this stage there is an important divergence between the accounts of Colnett and Taylor. I begin with the former.

The long boat had not proceeded far when it returned with a visitor: Seax (Seks), the chief “of the tribe our boats had visited.” On his maps, Colnett shows Cape Seax and a village at locations on the southern end of Pitt Island (between McCreight Point and Union Passage).³¹⁵ However, on this occasion, given the promptness of their return, the long boat probably encountered Seks somewhere in Nepean Sound. After accompanying Seks to the vessels, the long boat returned to its task of examining the territory to the southeast.³¹⁶ It is clear from Colnett’s description that Seks’ visit was a planned, ceremonial encounter. Seks “had taken no little pains in dressing himself for this formal visit” and he sang a welcoming song. Colnett invited Seks onboard the *Prince of Wales* and presented some gifts. But, reflecting the uncertainty of the event, none of the women in the party would venture onboard. From this, and Seks’ surprise at the contents of the vessel, Colnett concluded, no doubt correctly, that although these people possessed a variety of European artifacts, “no European had ever been among them.” One such item attracted Colnett’s particular curiosity: “a weapon of Brass exactly resembling the New Zealand Patoo, with ‘Joseph Banks Esq.’ engrav’d on it & a coat of Arms.” This had been left at Nootka in 1778 during Cook’s third voyage and offered clear demonstration of indigenous trade networks extending European artifacts well ahead of direct contact. The encounter on the *Prince of Wales* concluded, after the “usual ceremony,” by the trading of a quantity of skins, though not without some difficulty.³¹⁷

The next significant development took place 21 September, when a “stranger” chief turned up at Port Ball. Colnett was not about to be imposed upon by distributing more presents, but he did welcome the “stranger” on board the *Prince of Wales*. Meanwhile, Seks arrived alongside in two canoes – a development that was unlikely to have been a matter of chance as Seks and some of his party appear to have taken up temporary residence near the vessels. Colnett immediately detected “a great coldness” between the two chiefs, later adding

that although the stranger traded a few skins, he “stood in some fear” of Sek̓s and immediately thereafter departed, heading eastwards.³¹⁸

Taylor’s account of the events between 16 and 21 September is rather sparse. He briefly notes the arrival and reception of the Tsimshian party on 16 September but does not identify the chief. Sek̓s is not mentioned until the encounter of 21 September, when Taylor makes no reference to the “stranger” chief. These discrepancies cannot be resolved with the evidence available, but the journals are in agreement on some basic points regarding the Tsimshian in the vicinity of Port Ball. Sek̓s was the principal chief encountered, and we may assume that he made a formal visit to the *Prince of Wales* – although the timing is uncertain. Colnett’s account is too detailed to presume invention, and it conforms with evidence from comparable situations elsewhere. It is also clear that there was at least one other Tsimshian chief in the vicinity of the vessels. Colnett does not identify the “stranger” chief and Taylor’s account of 21 September is of no assistance. Subsequently, however, Taylor did learn from Sek̓s that “old Armseit another Chief” was responsible for “all the Thefts which had been committed and attempted.” Furthermore, “in Consequence of the behaviour of Armseit,” Sek̓s was now “at War with him.”³¹⁹ If this information is fitted into Colnett’s account, a candidate for the identity of the “stranger” was Hammisit, a Gitk̓xaała chief of the House of Wakas, Ganhada (Raven) clan; his territory, by one account, was at the southern end of Banks Island.³²⁰ Jacinto Caamano, who visited the area in 1792, provides confirmation of some of this. During a month’s sojourn at the southern end of Pitt Island, Caamano had considerable dealings with chief “Jammisit,” (i.e., Hammisit); but his “village” was Citeyats, on Pitt Island, not Banks Island.³²¹ Another possibility, identified in the Gitk̓xaała first contact narratives discussed below, was Ahlawael̓s (ex̓l̓wael̓s). His territory, by one account, was at the southern end of Pitt Island.³²²

If we accept the validity of Colnett’s version of the encounter with Sek̓s at Port Ball, a number of other observations can be made. To begin with, the arrival of Sek̓s, probably from the Union Pass area of Pitt Island, marked a significant advance in the contact process.³²³ Although Colnett seems to have viewed the ceremonial encounter with Sek̓s as nothing more than a trading encounter, his behaviour was not inappropriate. For Sek̓s, however, like other chiefs on the Northwest Coast, trade and politics were inextricably intertwined. We may assume that Sek̓s was formally establishing his trading alliance with these unexpected and wealthy visitors.³²⁴ This became of considerable importance when the “stranger” chief appeared on the scene. It is clear from Colnett’s account that the stranger, whatever his identity, was less powerful than Sek̓s, as well as resentful of the latter’s presence at Port Ball. One reasonable explanation for this resentment is that Sek̓s had moved beyond his own territory in seeking to establish a trading prerogative with the White visitors. The stranger, on the other hand, probably owned the territory where the vessels were anchored, or where the initial encounter had taken place off Pitt Island, and was seeking to assert his rights. Colnett’s response to the “stranger” chief probably

compounded what was already a tense situation and may have contributed to the later difficulties. The refusal to give presents, if viewed by the “stranger” chief as a rejection of gift exchange, would have been not merely rude but overtly hostile and would have shaped the pattern of subsequent interactions.³²⁵ At Port Ball, as elsewhere on the coast, it appears that tension and hostility between Native groups were part of the indigenous geopolitical response to the early contact process. I explore this topic more fully below but in terms of European/Tsimshian relations, one further point needs to be made: Sek’s objective, of controlling access to the vessels, stood at variance to Colnett’s aim to maximize trade. Taylor’s later observation that Sek’s “raised his price” for skins on each subsequent visit to the vessels suggests that his strategy achieved some measure of success.³²⁶

None of this boded well for the trajectory of European/Tsimshian relations at Port Ball. And indeed, if we accept Colnett’s chronology of the tensions between Sek’s and the “stranger” chief, relations between Whites and Natives had already begun to deteriorate. Thereafter, a pattern was established which escalated inexorably over the ensuing weeks and culminated in a series of violent confrontations. From Colnett’s perspective, the cause was a sequence of thefts – whether by Sek’s people or others is unclear. Of course, theft was hardly a new problem for Colnett. Thefts by indigenous peoples were a commonplace of Pacific voyages, including Colnett’s with Cook; moreover, the issue had arisen during stops at Nootka and Rose Harbour.³²⁷ Colnett’s responses to this facet of the contact process at Port Ball are worth exploring in more detail.

I have suggested earlier that Europeans sought to inculcate discipline in contact situations. Nowhere was this more relevant than in dealing with theft, where initial tolerance faded in the face of repeated failures to “learn.” Indulging “insolent behaviour” was imprudent and a line had to be drawn, particularly in locations where Europeans’ stay was likely to be extended. As anthropologist Turrill Moore observed of a violent episode at Nootka in 1778, the issue “was not theft, so much as insubordination.”³²⁸ The term is an apt one, encapsulating the Europeans’ sense of their own superiority. Precautions such as the deployment of boarding netting could diminish temptations but punishment was the logical consequence when inferiors behaved badly; more acceptable behaviour would be inculcated by inducing fear and, hopefully, self-discipline.³²⁹ The impetus for such measures was compounded when Native thefts reached beyond trivial items such as nails and other small metal objects. At Port Ball, Colnett’s loss of an anchor and a long boat was more than an irritation; it was, perhaps, genuinely threatening.

These European attitudes rested, of course, on culturally specific interpretations of property and theft. In the shipboard world of individual property, theft was a serious crime, punishable at mid-eighteenth century with 500 lashes.³³⁰ This, in turn, reflected English society, where individual property rights were buttressed by a mounting array of violent legal sanctions.³³¹ On the other hand, Europeans had little understanding of Native concepts of ownership. In part, this was a measure of the power of ideology – evolutionary models and

the primitivism of nonagricultural societies – to overwhelm empirical reports and direct experience.³³² Moore has suggested that Colnett, during his visit to Nootka, viewed “Muchalat territories as a vacant commons whose resources could be appropriated freely”: such Lockean views were part and parcel of imperial repertoires. Frederica De Laguna also points to the divergence between European and Tlingit perceptions of property. For the latter, “rights to exclusive use extended over many resources that Europeans would consider free: fresh water, driftwood, marine mammals and fish, land game, and wild plants.” The failure of Europeans to offer compensation for use of such resources, she suggests, could produce resentment and direct action.³³³

Some of these contradictions were clearly evident at Port Ball. In fact, Taylor goes so far as to suggest that it was English contravention of Tsimshian property rights that initiated the ensuing “difficulties.” During Seks’ visit to the ship on 21 September, some thefts by members of his party were detected. When challenged, Seks replied that “the *Princess Royals* Boat stole some planks from their Village.”³³⁴ While we may wonder how such information was communicated, given the lack of a common language, Taylor notes that some theft of planks had occurred and that such acts were “improper in the extreme.” He went on to suggest two reasons for this view: “First the injustice of taking the property of any individual, secondly it was impolitick shewing them an example.”³³⁵ Nor was this the only example of European thefts of Tsimshian property. Colnett’s men continued to harvest the resources of the area – berries, mussels, clams, salmon – for their own subsistence, without any recorded payment to the owners of the territory. To compound matters, they even destroyed a fishing weir “out of pity for the sickly fish.”³³⁶

But the issue involved more than simple retaliation to European provocation. Drucker suggests that the Nuu-chah-nulth responded to Europeans as people outside the normal parameters of trading relationships: “The white men were aliens, and their property was not regarded in the same light as that of fellow tribesmen.” Moore extends the argument, adding that nonkinsmen were potential enemies and, in dealing with them, “sharp practice” was the “order of the day.” Exchanges could range “from hard bargains to outright theft.” He also suggests that the Nuu-chah-nulth may have viewed the failure of Europeans to “pay” for resources as establishing a form of reciprocal obligation. Taking European property, by this account, was a matter of operationalizing the obligations Europeans had created but not fulfilled.³³⁷ Taylor seems to have grasped some of the complexities of this issue, commenting that the Nuu-chah-nulth were “strictly honest among themselves in one Village, but If visited by Strangers though they receive them with great attention and Ceremony, yet If a proper opportunity offers, I’ve reason to think they will steal and conceal any useful article.” He also thought they knew “full well, when they were doing what they should not.”³³⁸ De Laguna, writing of the Tlingit, makes a similar argument, but adds another element. Getting the better of European visitors “in sharp trade,” she suggests, “was simply ordinary Tlingit business practice”; and some early visitors were regarded as “suckers.”³³⁹ The latter observation

may be related to Tlingit perceptions of variations in the status of the visitors. Trade with persons of distinction – captains, supercargoes, and officers, demarcated by high-status costumes – was conducted with appropriate formality and ceremony. In dealing with inferiors, however, De Laguna suggests that the “seizure of what was desired seems to have been Tlingit custom.”³⁴⁰ Common sailors, viewed through the lens of Northwest Coast social structure, could have been regarded as slaves and treated accordingly.

At Port Ball thefts began as early as Seks’ visit of 16 September and became worse thereafter. But Colnett’s difficulties were compounded when he decided, on 26 September, to beach the vessels to carry out necessary repairs. This required unloading most of the cargo and supplies, thereby increasing both the visibility and vulnerability of a cornucopia of goods – both utilitarian and capable of invoking status. On the night of 30 September, Colnett’s apprehensions were realized as the kedge anchor was stolen. Vigilance was increased and the first overtly hostile use of firearms soon followed. Matters were made worse a week later when the *Prince of Wales* was damaged in the relaunching process. The situation was unenviable. Another, more substantial, round of repairs was required, including another unloading of cargo and supplies. Not surprisingly, the crews were becoming anxious about their safety.³⁴¹

In this environment, relations with the Tsimshian descended to a new low. On the night of 13-14 October, the long boat and a quantity of provisions were stolen – the former for the iron used in its construction. A successful recovery expedition was mounted, although the long boat had sustained a good deal of damage. Firearms (muskets and pistols) were again used against the Tsimshian and thereafter became a commonplace recourse in encounters – both real and illusory as darkness heightened European imaginations. Inevitably the Tsimshian replied in kind, although their weaponry was limited to bows and arrows. Even so, the threat was sufficient for Taylor to “fortify the Island” where the stores had been unloaded.³⁴² A further escalation occurred on 23 October, when Colnett resorted to using the ship’s cannon. A “load of Pistol & musket Ball” was fired and there was “no doubt,” Colnett thought, “but the gun touch’d some of them.”

The dénouement came three days later. Having spotted the smoke from a Tsimshian campfire, an armed expedition was mounted using the *Princess Royal’s* boat and the long boat. This resulted in the killing of two Tsimshian (one male and one female), the capture of a woman, and the probable wounding of another man. Taylor summed up the mood among the crew in this way: “I conceive ’twas nothing more than proper, and consistent with our own future safety, to convince them when ever they came in future to Steal in the night, that it must be at the risk of their Lives for while they could go on with impunity ’twas better than bartering Skins with us. Yet I have full reason to believe had they not commenced the attack, no man would have suffered.”³⁴³ According to Taylor, the responsibility lay with the Tsimshian.

The final act in Colnett’s account was yet another surprise: the return of Seks. The old chief had not been seen, or at least recorded, since 29 September,

when he arrived at the vessels to trade some skins on 1 November. And this was in spite of being fired at by nervous sailors as he approached.³⁴⁴ Perhaps as a result of the greeting, Sek̓s was reluctant to come onboard – doing so only when reassured by the female prisoner. Colnett then complained to Sek̓s “of the depredations that had been committed,” to which Sek̓s “made but a lame excuse blaming his brother Chiefs.” Taylor adds that the principal offender in these “depredations” was identified as Hammisit. But Colnett remained skeptical of the explanation, an opinion that was shared by Taylor. Both assumed that Sek̓s had received his share of the plunder. Neither had much sense of the fragmented geopolitical structure of the Tsimshian world.

This final meeting with Sek̓s prompted Colnett to offer some observations that reflect the tension and ambiguity through which he viewed these encounters with the Git̓k̓xaala Tsimshian: “I had long experienced Indians were not to be trusted, it still remain’d a doubt whether it might not be a trap for a more favourable opportunity when some greater object might turn up, his [Sek̓s] being so well man’d & arm’d which never happen’d before, had no good appearance.”³⁴⁵

Tsimshian Narratives: European Encounters

I have collected ten written “versions” of the Git̓k̓xaala first contact narrative. Some are fairly direct translations of the information provided by Git̓k̓xaala informants, others are second- or third-hand renditions transmitted by non-Native sources. One or two are brief, others are much fuller; in some cases the informant is known, in others not; some have been published while others remain in manuscript form. The first written account was by missionary William Duncan following a visit to the Git̓k̓xaala winter village in May 1860, a time when it is just possible the informant may have witnessed some of the events; the most recent version dates from 1968 and describes the actions of the informant’s great-grandfather.³⁴⁶ There is a good deal of variation in these narratives but, when viewed as a group, I believe they describe three “sets of events”: Part 1) the first contact, involving Sabaan; Part 2) the intervention of Ts’ibasaa, and the origin of the name of “Hale”; and Part 3) the aftermath of the events described in Part 2. Less obvious is the temporal relationship between these sets of events. Some versions are unproblematic, describing only the events of Part 1; others also include Parts 2 and 3 and, in some cases, appear to treat Parts 1 and 2 as a single continuous sequence.

It is not possible here to discuss all the versions, although Appendix 2 gives a full listing of the sources and brief commentaries. I have decided, instead, to concentrate upon the narrative of George McCauley, which exists in two variants, and make occasional references to other versions as circumstances warrant. McCauley’s variants both provide a very full account and clearly raise the question of the temporal relationship between the events of Parts 1 and 2; however, he makes no reference to Part 3.

George McCauley, a Ganhada (Raven) of the House of Laoi, told his narrative to William Beynon on two occasions.³⁴⁷ The first variant was recorded during

Beynon's fieldwork at Gitkxaala in February 1916, when McCauley was about sixty years old. Information concerning the second variant, however, is sparse; little is known save that it was written down some time between 1916 and 1932.³⁴⁸ I begin with a brief summary of the contents of these variants and then turn to the more difficult question of interpretation.

According to McCauley, the first encounter took place during halibut fishing when the weather was foggy. Other versions specify that the encounter followed the oolichan season, suggesting late spring or early summer. This timing diverges from Colnett's account, although he does note that his men caught some halibut while sailing off the west coast of Banks Island in the fog. Surprisingly, perhaps, there is some variability in the narratives about the location of the first encounter. In 1916, McCauley stated that it took place off the southern end of Pitt Island, where the "people were all living"; in his second variant, he stated that the people were living on Banks Island. Other informants provide further variations, but most place the events in the area of Banks and Pitt Islands.³⁴⁹

McCauley describes the European ship as a large bird or monster with wings; the long boat, which initiated the first encounter, had "many arms" and was thought to be the "child" of the ship. These interpretations were influenced by the fact that the halibut fishing took place at a "sphenarnorh," an "abode of a monster."³⁵⁰ The Gitkxaala fishermen assumed that the supernatural monster had taken a new form, prompting them to flee. Once ashore, they washed themselves in urine, a standard mode of protection against "ghosts and evil spirits."³⁵¹ These precautions were timely as, shortly thereafter, a small group of the "strange beings" landed and indicated their desire for some of the halibut.

The key figure in this first meeting was Sabaan, like McCauley, a Ganhada chief. It is through Sabaan's eyes that the initial Tsimshian reactions to Europeans and their culture are described. Sabaan's surprise and fears about these strange supernatural beings (ghost people) increased when they demonstrated some of their powers. These were aspects of European technology that possessed clear advantages over their indigenous equivalents and, subsequently, would be absorbed into Tsimshian culture: metal knives and containers as against shell knives and wooden boxes; guns, flint, and powder for lighting instead of a firedrill. The demonstrations of these powers, which caused Sabaan to "die" or faint, took place in connection with the preparation of a meal for the ghost people. The meal commenced with the halibut caught by the Gitkxaala but also included European foods – rice, molasses, and ship's biscuits – and further emphasized the distance between the two cultures. These European foodstuffs, all described with a mixture of bemusement and repulsion, would be incorporated into the Tsimshian diet and used in feasts.³⁵²

Following the meal, the Europeans sought information about Sabaan's village. Communicating by signs, Sabaan indicated to the Europeans where the village was located and returned home. In his first variant, McCauley gives no further information about the location of the village but identifies its leading chief as exlewels – the highest-ranking Ganhada chief among the Gitkxaala.

His territory was at the southern end of Pitt Island.³⁵³ In his second variant, and rather surprisingly, McCauley identifies the village as at “laxtxal” – a place name for which Beynon, on other occasions, provided two identifications, Banks Island and Bonilla Island.³⁵⁴

Locations aside, a few days after the first encounter, a group of the “strangers” arrived at Sabaan’s village. On landing they were greeted by chief exłewels and, in accordance with customary Tsimshian hospitality, offered food – although the Europeans were reluctant to consume it. Then, responding to the earlier European demonstration of their powers, exłewels shows his own supernatural or “naxnox” power. In some versions, although not in McCauley’s, this causes the Europeans to “die” or faint. The visit ends with exłewels giving a sea otter to the European commander and other gifts to the rest of the party. However, and the point is significant, McCauley makes no mention of these actions establishing trade prerogatives for exłewels; instead he comments that the events took place before those in which the name “Hale” was acquired.

In his second variant, however, McCauley adopts a different position. He follows the account of the events of Part 1 with the statement that “next day one of the supernatural beings walked up and made motions with his hands pointing out to where the big naxnox [the ship] was floating. The people knew that they were being invited by the supernatural beings and they talked among themselves[;] the wise men cautioned the people not to go and then a member volunteered to go out[;] all Gitxala men who were going to accompany *Tsibasa*, the head chief of the Gitxalas and then they paddled out following the messengers out to where the large monster was” [emphasis added]. Thus the events of Parts 1 and 2, in this variant, follow the one from the other, in an uninterrupted sequence.

McCauley continues by describing a visit to the ship, including further reference to the “fearsome things” seen, echoing and elaborating upon the earlier account of responses to aspects of European technology. But what is of particular significance here is that the Gitkxaala protagonist in the events of Part 2 is no longer Sabaan. He disappears, without explanation, and is replaced, as the quotation indicates, by Ts’ibasaa. Ts’ibasaa was of a different clan (Gispwudwada) than Sabaan and a much more important figure in the Gitkxaala world. Indeed, for much of the postcontact period, Ts’ibasaa was the highest-ranking Gitkxaala chief, with territory on the central section of Pitt Island, in the vicinity of Curtis Inlet.³⁵⁵ Ts’ibasaa’s visit to the ship prompted a reciprocal visit by the Europeans to the Gitkxaala village. On the latter occasion, Ts’ibasaa, like exłewels, demonstrated his supernatural powers and presented some gifts to his visitors. The conclusion of this encounter, and of the narrative, was an exchange of names between the captain of the ship and Ts’ibasaa. Such exchanges were not uncommon in the early days of the maritime fur trade, usually reflecting the establishment of some kind of political alliance or trading prerogative. According to McCauley, and a number of other versions of the narrative collected after the 1920s, this was how the name “Hale” originated among the Gitkxaala.³⁵⁶

George McCauley makes no reference to the events I have called the “aftermath” or Part 3. These events concern the position of Ts’ibasaa in the wider world of the Tsimshian and the role of the Gitkxaala in the early fur trade. James Lewis put the matter in the following terms: “The gitxala people were the first people in the north to have guns and ammunition. They were the first to use it [sic] to hunt the fur seal and sea otters and were much dreaded by all the other tribes.”³⁵⁷ These comments serve to indicate how the Gitkxaala people incorporated the encounter with Europeans into their history. It contributed to their assertion of primary status in the Tsimshian world, itself a rationale for the retelling of the first contact narrative. The retrospective commentary of Part 3 clearly occupies a position that is temporally distinct from the events of Parts 1 and 2.

Even these summary remarks indicate that there are significant discrepancies between the narratives and the records left by Colnett and Taylor. This does not invalidate the narratives as historical accounts, but it does raise questions about the nature of oral narratives and how they should be interpreted. Here the work of anthropologist Viola Garfield provides a useful point of departure. Garfield, who has published the principal ethnographic studies of the Tsimshian, concluded that their narratives contain “actual occurrences but also social ideals, customs, and beliefs concerning the former and present world.” Turning specifically to the Gitkxaala contact narratives, she states they are “an account of the group’s reactions to a new experience and the addition of new crests to the inventory of lineage possessions, cast in familiar literary and ideological form.”³⁵⁸

The Gitkxaala description of Europeans as “ghost people” is an obvious example of this pattern, one which recalls the recent debate between anthropologists Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere about Hawaiians’ perception of Captain Cook. Sahlins has argued that Cook was viewed as supernatural, the god Lono. Obeyesekere rejects this interpretation, arguing that the Hawaiians, through the operation of “practical reason,” regarded Cook as some form of exotic chief.³⁵⁹ Tsimshian contact narratives, and those from elsewhere on the Northwest Coast, clearly support Sahlins’ view. These sources indicate that the initial Native response was to regard Europeans as some kind of visitors from, or manifestations of, the world of spirits. The Squamish, for example, thought their first European visitors were from “the land of the dead”; the Nuu-chah-nulth thought they were the salmon people or supernatural beings.³⁶⁰ Miller, in a brief discussion of one version of the Gitkxaala narrative, has observed that it represents an account of a “nax nox” experience, that is, an encounter with a spirit form that was “immensely alien and powerful.”³⁶¹ Less clear is how long such views persisted. At first sight, it does not seem to have been very long among the Gitkxaala. Following the shock of the initial encounter – the recognition of the “powers” of their visitors – normalcy, or equilibrium, is restored when exl̓ewels/Ts’ibasaa demonstrate their “powers” to the visitors – causing the Europeans to “die.” The first written version, collected by

William Duncan, makes this point particularly clearly: “The Indians turn had now come, to make the white strangers die. They dressed their heads & painted their faces. A nok-nok or wonder-working spirit possessed them. They came slowly & solemnly & seated themselves before the whites: then suddenly lifted off their heads & stared. Their reddened eyes had the desired effect. The whites died.”³⁶²

Probably the most striking feature of the Gitkxaala narratives, when compared to the European documents, is the difference in participants: Sabaan, exlewels, and Ts’ibasaa in the former, Seks and Hammisit in the latter. Given the importance of “names” in Tsimshian culture, this discrepancy calls for some discussion. The absence of Sabaan from the European journals is not surprising, as the first meeting between the sailors and the Gitkxaala took place away from the vessels. Neither Colnett nor Taylor were present at the events of Part 1 and their journals provide only brief comments on the activities of the early boat expeditions: that contact had been made – probably at the southern end of Pitt Island – and some skins purchased. The narratives, then, provide the only detailed information available to us about this first encounter and the nature of the Gitkxaala responses. However, it is worth noting that both Colnett and Taylor, in describing a first contact situation at Kildidit Sound in 1788, give brief descriptions that bear a considerable resemblance to the comparable part of George McCauley’s narrative about the Gitkxaala. At Kildidit Sound, according to Taylor, the men in the *Prince of Wales*’ boat “saw a small Canoe with 4 or 5 Men who took to the woods leaving their Canoe on ye Beach.” Colnett adds that “the Indians not having recover’d from their fright their Canoe remaining on the Beach went with the Boat & put some few articles in her.”³⁶³ George McCauley provides more details, stating that the Gitkxaala “drew up their fishing lines, which were made of kelp (mawrh) and paddled in for the shore. There, they thought they would be safe. The man that was sitting in the stern had the rope of the canoe fastened around his waist. Then they landed, the man in the bow of the canoe ran up into the woods, and the man in the stern got up and tried to follow, but failed to untie the rope from his waist.”³⁶⁴ Flight was a logical response to encounters with powerful spiritual forces.

The significance of this first encounter in the Tsimshian world, and the reason for the survival of Part 1 of the narrative, is that it describes the origin of the name Sabaan. According to McCauley, “‘They [Europeans] gave me the name Sabaen.’ This is what it sounded like to him, but the white man was thought to have said Soap, because that is what he gave them. They kept it for some time before they found out what it was used for. He then assumed the name of Sabaen and referred it to Sabaehlnahlkuhlehl-hagwilaw’rh, ‘The offspring of Hagwilaw’rh [sea monster] runs suddenly.’”³⁶⁵ Other “firsts” of the contact era, as Olson has noted of the Tlingit, entered the crest system, receiving both material and narrative expression.³⁶⁶

Sabaan was a member of the Ganhada clan, thus the subsequent visit of the ship’s boat to the village of exlewels, the leading Ganhada chief of the Gitkxaala,

makes ethnographic sense. Moreover, the location of his “village,” probably a summer resource camp, at the southern end of Pitt Island fits with the geographic information from Colnett and Taylor.³⁶⁷ The role of Hammisit is less clear. Like *exfewels*, he was a Ganhada chief, but he does not feature in the narratives and the information from European accounts is skimpy. Nonetheless, his presence does fit with the pattern of the involvement of Ganhada chiefs in the events of Part 1 of the narrative. Moreover, Hammisit features prominently in Caamano’s account of his visit to the southern end of Pitt Island in 1792.³⁶⁸

The absence of Sekš from the narratives is more significant and more interesting. It links pre- and postcontact histories and illustrates some of the difficulties in interpreting the information contained in the written version of narratives. Two explanations can be put forward to account for the absence of Sekš, with the determining factor being the interpretation given to the temporal relationship between Parts 1 and 2 of the narratives. If the view is accepted that Parts 1 and 2 are a continuous sequence, then the critical question becomes how to explain the substitution of Ts’ibasaa for Sekš. It is possible, I believe, to provide a plausible rationale for this taking place, one that invokes the close and fluctuating relationship between holders of the two names and the difficulties of finding suitable holders in the historic period as the population plummeted; by the 1930s, one man held the names of Ts’ibasaa, Sekš, and Hale.³⁶⁹ However, further reflection, stimulated by the discovery of additional versions of the narrative, suggests a simpler explanation: that Parts 1 and 2 describe two discrete sets of events, probably separated by a number of years. As George McCauley indicated at the end of his first variant, these “Gitrhala are not the same people as Hale met and got his name from, but came before them.” Ts’ibasaa, in this interpretation, was not involved in the first contact encounter and thus there is no discrepancy, between the narratives and journals, to be explained. To sustain this view requires a brief discussion of two issues: the position of Ts’ibasaa in Gitkxaała society, and the circumstances under which some of the narratives were collected.

For much of the contact era, Ts’ibasaa was the leading Gitkxaała chief and a fierce competitor for status with Ligeex, the leading chief of the Tsimshian tribes around Metlakatla. In the context of this rivalry, Ts’ibasaa claimed and, with appropriate ceremony, assumed the name Hale. This title served to reflect Ts’ibasaa’s prerogatives and power in the maritime fur trade. Associated with the name was a narrative, of which Part 2 in McCauley’s second variant is an example.³⁷⁰ Thus the name of Hale, and a rise in Ts’ibasaa’s status (Part 3), originated in the first contact encounter. That said, it must be admitted that two versions of the narrative that include the events of Part 2, Ts’ibasaa’s role, make no mention of Hale. However, all the versions that recount Ts’ibasaa’s involvement deal with the political context and implications of his actions. James Lewis’ comments on the claims of Ts’ibasaa and the Gitkxaała’s rise to primacy in the Tsimshian world have already been noted. Another version states: “From this time on Tsibasha became a great chief, and all the other villages looked up to him. It was many years before the other Indians learned about the

coming of the white men, and the things they brought with them.”³⁷¹ In an unrelated narrative, Joshua Ts’ibasaa made the same point: “And Tsibese had had the Gitxala people dance in front of the trading white men, who gave Tsibese many gifts, and it was he who first possessed a gun and gun powder and shot was the wealth really stored up by Tsibese. And this was why that Tsibasa rose up and he was much wealthier than all fellow chiefs to all hereabouts.”³⁷²

The ambiguous status of these claims is revealed most clearly, perhaps, in William Beynon’s “Ethnical and Geographical” manuscript, drafted for anthropologist Phillip Drucker in 1954. Beynon began his description of the Gitkxala by noting their claim to be the first among the Tsimshian to “come into contact with the white explorers ... [and] to use or have firearms.” This is followed by Beynon’s summary version of the first contact narrative. It encompasses the events of Parts 1 and 2 and includes the origin of the name Hale.³⁷³ The surprising point about this rendition is that Beynon, by this time, was aware of another version of the narrative concerning the origin of the name of Hale, one that cast Ts’ibasaa in a much less favourable light. Indeed, later in the same manuscript, Beynon gave his own account of the unfavourable version, a version that had been given to him on at least two former occasions. Elsewhere, in commenting on the first of these sources, a narrative recorded in 1948-49, Beynon provided some additional information. He noted that there was “another and true version of the origin of this name [Hale], but the Gitrhala were ashamed of it, and would accept the version of the first explorer’s name”; that is the first contact context.³⁷⁴ In the “true” narrative, however, the events took place at a time when the maritime fur trade was well established. But the crucial point was that Ts’ibasaa had been taken captive on a European vessel and had to be ransomed by his tribesmen.

Moreover, there is archival information from maritime fur trade sources that shed further light on this topic. Mary Malloy, in a study of American participation in the trade, discusses the vessels that visited “Sebassa” – the trading location of the Gitkxala. She writes that

the *Volunteer* arrived in 1820 and visited several times. At the end of July the captain of the *Volunteer* “took on board Chibbashah, the principal chief, and detain’d him as a hostage for the recovery of some debts, which were due by Himself & People.” When the *Volunteer* got underway a week later he was still on board and the vessel was “visited by a few of the Natives, who appear anxious to redeem their Chief & willing to pay their debts.” On 9 August the ransom was paid and “Chibbashah their Chief was liberated in consequence and left the ship.”³⁷⁵

Some information about these events reached the Metlakatla Tsimshian fairly quickly, but they were not publicly acknowledged among the Gitkxala until much later.³⁷⁶ It was only in the 1930s, when a dispute arose about the inheritance of the names Seks and Ts’ibasaa, that the “true version” was recorded. By

this time, declining populations had made the transmission of names by the correct matrilineal procedures very difficult and one man held the names Sek̓s, Ts'ibasaa, and Hale; moreover, he intended to pass the names on to his adopted son – who was a Heiltsuk by birth. This aroused opposition among the Git̓k̓xaala elders, who were prepared to let the name Hale be transmitted, as it was not an ancient “name,” but not the names Sek̓s or Ts'ibasaa. Thus the “true” version of the origin of the name Hale, including its timing, was recounted.³⁷⁷ It should be added that the linkage of valuable commercial salmon licences, for drag seines, with the ownership of traditional territories added to the economic significance of holding the Ts'ibasaa and Sek̓s names.³⁷⁸

What then are we to make of this body of Git̓k̓xaala narratives? As historical documents, in the traditional academic sense, they are at once tantalizing, complex, and elusive. If Colnett and Taylor chronicle the contents of an alien world and their travails in passing through it – all for an audience “at home,” the narratives are constructed in quite a different manner. One important objective for their retelling over the years was to demonstrate and validate that the “name” Sabaan originated in the first contact encounter. This concern helps explain the absence of Sek̓s, the principal Git̓k̓xaala actor in the journals, in the narratives. However, some of the first contact events were incorporated by Ts'ibasaa into the competition for rank and status in the broader Tsimshian world. They became both an expression of his prominence in the evolving maritime fur trade and an attempt to obscure some less flattering aspects of his role in that commerce. Moreover, concerns about the maintenance or enhancement of status may also account for the absence of the violence described by Colnett and Taylor. Drucker and Curtis, in collecting narratives of early contact among the Nuu-chah-nulth and Lekwiltok, observed that unpleasant memories were often repressed. At Clayoquot, for example, Drucker noted that traditions “delete” the documented burning of their village in 1792.³⁷⁹

Other narrative objectives included recording the return to normalcy, the assertion of indigenous powers, as well as the characteristics of the visitors that impressed the Tsimshian. Without some such purchase, as Ong has observed of oral cultures, “matters of the past without any sort of present relevance commonly dropped into oblivion.” He also reminds us that the past is not a matter of empirical facts, verifiable or otherwise, but rather “the domain of the ancestors, a resonant source for renewing awareness of present existence.”³⁸⁰

Also important in assessing the narratives is some knowledge of the historical geography of the contact process. This is clearly illustrated in a recent study by Wendy Wickwire of Nilkap'amux first contact narratives. After comparing the narratives with available Euro-American sources, she has concluded that they represent an “important and reliable historical record.”³⁸¹ A key point here is that along the Fraser River there was a distinct temporal gap between the first encounter with Europeans in 1808 and the next, in the 1820s. On the Northwest Coast, however, first encounters were rapidly followed by a flurry of other meetings – of many of which we have no written record. The events of Part 1 of

the Gitkxaala narratives fall into this category: there is nothing in the European accounts to question the validity of the descriptions given in these narratives. Questions arise, instead, from the variability between different versions, particularly on issues such as the location of the events.

One explanation for such variability is suggested by McClellan. Her argument, following an examination of Tlingit contact narratives, rests upon detecting a similarity of “content patterning” – that is, a basic similarity in the content of narratives from different locations. She considers possible explanations but opts for the view that “there would have been ample time for the diffusion of details to take place and for them to become well incorporated into stories about what were basically quite separate occasions.” Although not strictly comparable to the situation at Gitkxaala, where the narratives purport to describe the same set of events, the argument cannot simply be dismissed.³⁸² The Gitkxaala narratives may incorporate information from a series of early encounters rather than solely those involving Colnett. There are a number of other candidates who may have provided the raw material for Part 1: Duncan (1788), Hoskins (1791), Haswell (1792), Caamano (1792), Johnstone (1793), and perhaps Alexander Stewart (1792).³⁸³

Turning to the events involving Ts’ibasaa, the situation is equally complex. I have argued that the descriptions of Ts’ibasaa’s activities refer to a set of events that took place probably more than thirty years after the encounter with Colnett. A good deal remains uncertain, but the acquisition of the name Hale was based on a real historical encounter. As for the retellings of the Gitkxaala first contact narratives, there can be little doubt that the changing geopolitical context has influenced the contents of the versions involving Ts’ibasaa. The result has been a process of temporal compression that only becomes apparent when different versions are compared.

This contrasts with the journals of Colnett and Taylor, which delineate the passage of time with greater clarity and precision. But this does not make the European accounts objective, comprehensive, or superior. Sabaan, for example, is absent, and there are disagreements about important aspects of the interactions with the Gitkxaala and the actions of Seks. Moreover, the journals are written performances undertaken with an audience very much in mind. If we desire to come to terms with the complex unfolding of the contact process, narrative testimony must be given due weight.³⁸⁴ In the present instance, the Gitkxaala narratives provide invaluable information on how they interpreted their early encounters with Europeans – both at the time and subsequently.

Other Encounters

Colnett’s voyage extended beyond the Northwest Coast culture area, into that of the Pacific “Eskimo” people of Prince William Sound. Although the Chugach culture was distinct from that of their southern neighbours, there were important similarities. A recent survey has suggested that both were “characteristically North Pacific.”³⁸⁵ In terms of the pattern of contact, the similarities are evident, including traditions of first encounters that involve confusion over

elements of European culture and shock at the display of guns.³⁸⁶ And theft, once again, was an important irritant for Europeans. At Port Etches, Colnett described the Chugach as being “addicted much to thieving & very artful in their dealing seldom selling their Furs till they had found means to steal something.” A series of nocturnal visits resulted in the use of firearms, but with no record of the impact.³⁸⁷ The same problem arose in Tlingit territory. At Yakutat Bay, following the theft of some fishing line, one of the sailmakers grabbed a musket and “Shot the Man [a Tlingit].” Colnett distances himself from this peremptory response but took no further action beyond recording it in his journal. It was done, he wrote, “with a degree of cruelty, for he fired twice. I was not on deck my self or would have endeavour’d to prevent it, & those whose busyness it was in my absence, look’d on with the greatest unconcern.”³⁸⁸

Another factor that contributed to European tension was uncertainty about trading conditions on the coast, a concern often reduced to the “fickleness” of Native peoples.³⁸⁹ These Native demonstrations of autonomy, and potential preludes to insubordination, were compounded in European eyes by the geographical diversity of conditions on the coast. Archibald Menzies, after his voyage on the *Prince of Wales*, captured the frustration that many traders felt in the early years. In reply to an inquiry from Joseph Banks, he used his experience with Colnett to provide a list of articles that would suit the trade on the Northwest Coast:

At Nootka we found Copper the Article most sought after & in this we were deficient, having little or none aboard. At Prince William’s Sound the Natives preferred [sic] Iron & put very little value on Copper or anything else – they were so over stocked with Beads as to ornament their Dogs with them. At Queen Charlotte’s Isles & Banks Isles, Iron, Cloth, Beads with Brass & Copper trinkets answered best. At Cape Edgecombe, Iron Frying-pans – Tin Kettles – Pewter basons [sic] and beads formed the chief articles of Trade. Ornamental lofty caps with Brass or Copper would be good presents for the Chiefs & Warriors.

Menzies added that it was necessary to take a blacksmith who could shape “Iron, Copper & Brass into such forms as may best suit the fickle disposition of the Natives.”³⁹⁰

Of all the Northwest Coast peoples encountered, both Colnett and Taylor were most favourably impressed by the Tlingit of Sitka Sound, the Citkakwan.³⁹¹ Or, more precisely, their relations with the Citkakwan were more amicable than those experienced elsewhere. The brevity of the visit to Sitka Sound likely contributed to this assessment, but the criteria of judgment were the absence of sources of tension and conformity to European expectations. Colnett thought the Citkakwan Tlingit “shewed the honestest & best disposition of any we had before met with, nor did we miss a single article during our stay among them.”³⁹² Taylor, while employing the category of “savage,” recognized their “civility”

and thought them “by far the most inoffensive Tribe I saw, very civil, nor were they desirous of thieving.”³⁹³

Hawaiian Islands Encounters

Colnett’s passage through the Hawaiian Islands was shaped by the routes and actions of his predecessors – Cook, on his third expedition, Portlock, and Dixon – as well as by his own Polynesian experiences. The lack of good harbours encouraged the use of established locations, although Colnett avoided Kealakekua Bay, the site of Cook’s grisly end. The bulk of the time was spent at Kaua’i, in the vicinity of Waimea, and at Ni’ihau; thus the discussion here concentrates upon the encounters at those islands.³⁹⁴

If Colnett avoided the geography of Cook’s death, he could not escape its consequences. It cast a shadow over the attitudes of early visitors and contributed to the ambiguity of Euro-Americans towards the Hawaiian Islands.³⁹⁵ Like their predecessors, Colnett and Taylor found much about the islands and their inhabitants to appreciate and praise. Climate and culture provided a welcome change from the Northwest Coast. Taylor’s relish for the sensual pleasures of fresh provisions is clear in his first encounter: “This was a glorious transition for all Hands,” he enthused, and admitted that it would “require a far more able pen than mine to describe the happiness of every Man on board on this sudden change, for my own part I am clear to say I never experienced anything so pleasing before.”³⁹⁶ Agricultural production also carried with it an assumption of finding a greater degree of “civility” among the local population.

An integral component of the pleasures of the contact process on the Hawaiian Islands were the encounters with young women. Sexual encounters, stimulated on both sides by prior, although divergent, knowledge, came early and frequently. On 2 January, scarcely after contact was made off Hawai’i, women “were admitted onboard and every Sailor had a Lady in his burth.”³⁹⁷ Such coasting encounters were fleeting and, in terms of the written record, anonymous. Thus, the status of the women and whether they came of their own volition, or at the behest of men, is unclear. Most, if not all, were probably commoners and, it has been suggested that for the earliest such encounters with Cook’s expedition, Hawaiian women acted as they would have done with indigenous leaders – to establish “chiefly connections.” By 1787, however, the pattern of exchanges, involving material returns from sailors, was becoming normalized, providing commoners with an important mode of access to European goods.³⁹⁸ However, during the extended sojourn at Kaua’i, particularly in Taylor’s accounts, some of the women are identified. Menzies’ particular companion, for example, was “Nahoupaio, Sister to Matua.” Such women were important intermediaries between the worlds of ship and shore. None more so than the two young women who provided information about the intended attack on the vessels at Waimea Bay – at some danger to themselves.³⁹⁹ The differential intersection of class and gender across the cultural divide must have compounded the sense of unpredictability.

For two of the men on the *Prince of Wales*, the attractions of Kaua'i were sufficient to induce desertion; in both cases, involvement with a local woman seems to have been a crucial factor. Whether the chiefs played any role in encouraging such actions is unclear, but Colnett's comment that the first such "beachcomber" had "hopes of obtaining the King's daughter a beautiful Young woman for his wife" is suggestive. Moreover, Ka'eo had earlier "frequently solicited some onboard to stay to Assist him." Colnett refused the suggestion, but the actions of the seamen took matters out of his hands. Both of these "beachcombers" found that their enthusiasm for island life soon diminished, but they would have many successors.⁴⁰⁰

As on the Northwest Coast, the issue of theft, at least as perceived by Europeans, brought its quotient of tension and occasional violent episodes. At times both Colnett and Taylor thought that chiefs were implicated in such activities; on occasion they were astonished by sheer bravado of a particular action; mostly though they were perplexed and frustrated and the absence of "thieving" was certainly worthy of note. Nor were Hawaiian attitudes uniform. One chief specifically warned about the need to "be on Guard" against thefts. At Waimea, Taylor records an incident in which two unidentified men warned the chief mate about an impending theft, even going so far as to "shew him in what manner they would perform the theft, placing themselves on one of ye guns and holding his Cloth wrapper over the Hook and cutting the Hook from the Tackle, looking him in the face."⁴⁰¹

In such circumstances, with the memory of Cook's fate in the background, the potential for violence was seldom absent. The *Prince of Wales* had recourse to the use of muskets as early as 6 January and, the following day, "some of them did execution." A few days later it took a mixture of good fortune (a musket misfired) and restraint to avoid a confrontation at O'ahu. The *Princess Royal*, perhaps because of its diminutive size and perceived vulnerability – by both sides – was involved in the most serious confrontations. After using the muskets at Moloka'i, a far worse incident occurred at Waimea Bay. With rumours swirling of an impending attack on the vessels, between five and fourteen islanders were killed and a number of others wounded, although firing from the *Prince of Wales* contributed to this number.⁴⁰²

The advent of European traders also contributed to tensions and, on occasion, violence within Hawaiian society, reflecting the divergent interests and capacities of chiefs and the common people. Chiefs were primarily interested in the goods of "status and politics" which were obtained through exchange of gifts. Ka'eo, for example, was given supplies of "Centre Bits, Bung Borers, Hatchets, Shark Hooks" by Colnett, and Taylor noted that Opunui had obtained "Tools of several Professions. Coopers, Carpenters & others" as well as cutlasses, caps, and cloaks from earlier visitors. Nor were high-ranking women excluded from the gift exchanges; the "Ladies" of Ka'eo's house received "Scissors, Beads and many baubles for ornaments."⁴⁰³

Commoners were restricted to the sale of provisions, with nails the usual currency of exchange, along with beads and small items such as fish hooks.

More important, commoners access to European visitors was frequently controlled by the chiefly class – either by force or the kapu (taboo) system. Colnett encountered the former off Hawai'i on 2 January, but on Kaua'i and Ni'ihau it was the latter that prevailed. The workings of the kapu system, a complex set of prohibitions, privileges, and sanctions, was poorly understood by Europeans, and their descriptions must be viewed with some caution. After one particular incident, Taylor admitted his confusion: "Twas difficult to say," he commented, "how far the Taboo is strictly attended to." For the common people the chiefly use of the kapu system not only limited their access to Europeans but also extracted a tribute from the trade that they did conduct. Nonetheless, as Taylor's comment suggests, some people – men and women – were prepared to risk possible sanctions to embrace direct encounters.⁴⁰⁴

As sources of status and strategic goods, European visitors were drawn inexorably into the nexus of island geopolitics at a time of considerable instability. The principal chiefly concern quickly became securing supplies of firearms and the knowledge of how to use them effectively, although some chiefs, such as Ka'eo, displayed a much more catholic interest in European technology. Such attitudes probably lay behind the apparent welcome, or tolerance, of European "beachcombers."⁴⁰⁵ It is unclear whether Colnett began the trade in firearms on the Hawaiian Islands, but he certainly contributed to its development. Initially, Colnett was reluctant to participate, even disabling a pistol in the possession of Ka'eo.⁴⁰⁶ However, the loss of an anchor at Waimea and the desire to purchase a replacement strengthened Ka'eo's bargaining position. The purchase price of the anchor included two muskets and two pistols, as well as a supply of powder and ball.⁴⁰⁷ Moreover, when the *Prince of Wales* returned to Kaua'i in September, powder, at least, was exchanged with some freedom. So much so that Taylor, by the end of the stay, noted that "they will shortly have a tolerable stock of Musquets Pistols & Powder." He concluded, with some prescience, that "all Ships in future touching here will be obliged to purchase hogs with Powder."⁴⁰⁸

Colnett's involvement in this morally dubious trade probably shaped his account of his relations with Ka'eo. On the one hand, there was Ka'eo's presumed involvement in the attempt to capture the vessels and the cutting off of the *Prince of Wales'* anchor. Although there were uncertainties about these events, neither was calculated to inculcate an amicable view of Ka'eo and his people. Thus, Colnett's comments about Ka'eo after purchasing a replacement anchor are notable:

The desire of having some of our people, arms &c in his possession & plans laid to obtain them, even Stealing the anchor was excusable, if his whole Isle & Inhabitants safety depended upon it, which I really think was the case. the Friendly method of treating Europeans here to what they had met with at other Isles made it [180v] more frequented & obtaining large Quantity of Iron & other articles great Riches in this Country, had drawn on him the envy & hatred of the King's of Wahoo & Owhyee, who were making great preparations, & hourly expected to invade the Isle.⁴⁰⁹

It is tempting to see this as an attempt by Colnett to excuse his own actions in a cloak of tolerance for Ka'eo's. Such skepticism is probably valid, but there was some substance to Colnett's comments about the political instability on Kaua'i at this time.

There were two probable sources of hostility towards Ka'eo. The first proceeded from the manner in which Ka'eo became the effective ruler of Kaua'i. In March 1779, when Clerke and King returned to Kaua'i, the nominal ruler was Keawe, by virtue of the position of his mother Kamakahahei. However, Ka'eo had now married Kamakahahei and, over the succeeding years, he pushed his stepson (still only a boy) and stepson's supporters aside to assume effective control. When Colnett arrived, Ka'eo had installed Kaumuali'i, his own son by Kamakahahei, as the nominal ruler. Significantly, when Taylor met Keawe at O'ahu, in September 1788, he described him as the "Prince who at [the] time had a party fighting for his right to government of Attooi." After the death of Ka'eo in 1794, Keawe would again contest for Kaua'i, only to die shortly after achieving a victory against Kaumuali'i.⁴¹⁰

Another group antagonistic to Ka'eo included Ka'iana, his brother Namakeha, and Nahiolea. They had been involved in Kahekili's conquest of O'ahu in the early 1780s but soon became dissatisfied and moved to Kaua'i.⁴¹¹ Here, as the testimony of John Meares and William Douglas indicates, they were at odds with Ka'eo by 1788. As is well known, Meares, on leaving Kaua'i in the summer of 1787, took Ka'iana on board and carried him to Canton. Meares says little about the reasons for Ka'iana's trip but on his second voyage, in 1788, he is more informative. On visiting Waimea in October, Meares commented on the "tyranny of the present government." He attributed this to the role of Oponui, whom he described as "the deadly foe of Tianna," and added that Namakeha "had fled with his brother's [Ka'iana's] wife to a distant part of the island to escape from the cruel power of Taheo; and that some part of their force was at this time in arms."⁴¹² Further information was provided by William Douglas, who returned Ka'iana, onboard the *Iphigenia Nubiana*, to the Hawaiian Islands, but to Hawai'i, not Kaua'i. Douglas stated that while Kaua'i had been in a "state of peace" when Ka'iana departed, he now had "every reason to fear that he should find it in a state of war; or at least under the government of an usurped power, which he could not for a moment suppose would be friendly to him."⁴¹³

After disembarking Ka'iana and his "treasures" at Hawai'i, Douglas made for Waimea where, after a tense sojourn, he took with him Namakeha, "six of his relations, and four women," together with "Tianna's wife and child to Owhyhee."⁴¹⁴ On arriving at Hawai'i, Douglas had some discussion with Ka'iana and Kamehameha about the political situation on the islands. As reported by Meares, Ka'iana stated that

Taheo, king of Attooi, and Titeree [Kahekili], the sovereign of Mowee, Ranai [Lana'i], Morotoi, and Woahoo, had entered into a compact with Terreemoweeree,⁴¹⁵ the surviving son of Terreeoboo [Kalani'opu'u] ... to

dispossess Tome-homy-haw [Kamehameha] ... That Taheo had been furnished by the Captains Portlock, Dixon, &c with a quantity of arms and ammunition, on an express condition that he would not afford any supplies to Captain Meares and his associates; for the truth of which information, he appealed to the reception which that gentleman [Douglas] had lately found on putting into the island of Atooi, where he could not obtain any refreshment of any kind.

Like Colnett, Douglas used this as a rationale for engaging in the sale of firearms, this time at Hawai'i.⁴¹⁶

To sum up: Colnett's progress through a significant part of the Northwest Coast illustrates much that was common in early European encounters with Native peoples. But there were some notable variations in his experiences, involving as much geography as history. The contact process unfolded at different rates, in somewhat different fashions, in different locations. At Nootka, some basic parameters concerning the way in which Europeans were incorporated into the indigenous political landscape had been established by 1787. Precontact political inequalities in the area seem to have played an important role in shaping outcomes. Colnett's failure to conform to these established patterns, by not going to Yuquot until the end of his sojourn, probably contributed to his difficulties in the area.

Farther north, where the contact process was just beginning, the situation was more fluid and the political organization more localized. Haida and Tsimshian chiefs quickly sought to control access to, and establish alliances with, the new source of wealth and power; but outcomes were far from clear. The Gitksana narratives, a fascinating counterpoint to the accounts of Colnett and Taylor, give invaluable glimpses of Native perceptions, priorities, and actions. While confirming some repercussions of inserting Europeans into the fragmented world of the Northwest Coast geopolitics, the narratives do not explain the process.

Colnett's account, with its plain rhetoric, reflects the ambiguity of many early visitors to the coast. Eurocentrism and a sense of superiority were in danger of being subverted by uncertainty about Native intentions and an unfamiliar and potentially hazardous environment. Insubordination, in the form of Native thefts, highlighted this sensibility and called for disciplinary responses. All this in contexts where difficulties of communication shaped both what was reported and what was done. Misunderstandings must have been considerable and contributed to the violence the journals record. On the other hand, Colnett's encounters were not unremittingly antagonistic; amicable episodes and friendly relations were not mere ideology. Trade opened a space for peaceful interactions. Here, Taylor's more informal account is valuable, particularly as he spent more time ashore than Colnett.

Nonetheless, the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast were now entangled in the mechanisms of colonialism and there was an irredeemably adventitious dimension to the initial encounters. With hindsight we may see this as an early expression of an imbalance of power that would grow: what was

adventitious to inhabitants of the coast increasingly became part of rational calculations oceans away. Profit became the measuring rod and when it disappeared so did the vessels: there was no consideration of the impact of this abandonment on Native traders. This asymmetry was fundamental: the difference between homeland and trading location.

Colnett viewed the Hawaiian Islands rather differently than he did the Northwest Coast. Left behind were the economic imperatives of the fur trade and the navigational complexity of the latter. In their place lay the prospect of an attractive environment, a more “civil” population, and a refreshing sojourn of comparative ease. But encounters with the Hawaiians contained many of the same elements found on the Northwest Coast; outcomes were different in degree rather than in kind. Sexual encounters probably assumed a greater significance, but theft and misunderstandings still threatened to undermine peaceful relations, more so in some areas than others; trade, in provisions rather than for furs, was conducted with respect for indigenous protocols. European visitors, as potential sources of strategic goods, were incorporated into the local dynastic struggles, and the contrasting perceptions of Colnett and Meares reflect the differential geography of their incorporation (Ka’eo and Kaua’i versus Kamehameha and Hawai’i). Through the trade in firearms and the beginning of the beachcomber tradition, Colnett’s voyage contributed to the way these struggles would unfold.

Aftermath and Evaluation

The first news of Colnett’s expedition reached England in the summer of 1788 with the arrival of Portlock and Dixon. At this stage all seemed to bid fair, and Richard Etches had given some preliminary thought to another voyage to the Northwest Coast; the South Sea Company licence ran until 1791 and Meares and Colnett, half a world away, certainly thought another voyage probable.⁴¹⁷ But Etches’ plans had taken a more expansive turn. Even before receiving news from Portlock and Dixon, Etches had approached Banks with a proposal to establish a penal settlement on the Northwest Coast. It would, Etches argued, “secure the complete discovery of that extensive and unexplor’d part of the World, but would open, and secure a source of commerce of the most extensive magnitude to this Country.” Nothing came of this proposal, although it resurfaced briefly, in a modified form, during the Nootka Crisis of 1790.⁴¹⁸ Undeterred, Etches turned his attention to the Russian government and even more grandiose projects, but he was still considering another voyage to the Northwest Coast as late as 1793.⁴¹⁹

Meanwhile, Alexander Dalrymple, his belief in the Northwest Passage reinforced by information from the Etches vessels, had adopted another plan to locate it. He persuaded the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) on the merits of a land and water expedition from the east. George Dixon was to lead the land segment and Charles Duncan the water-borne approach, via Hudson’s Bay.⁴²⁰ The latter had demonstrated his seamanship on the *Princess Royal* and, in the process, became a believer in the existence of the Northwest Passage. Dixon’s

expedition was cancelled but Duncan made two voyages in HBC vessels with the “Privity and Approbation of Government”: the first in 1790, the second a year later. Neither voyage was successful, and Duncan finally changed his mind about the existence of the passage. However, the power and persistence of this speculative geography is attested to by another veteran of Colnett’s voyage. Alexander Stewart, back on the Northwest Coast in 1792 in command of the *Jackall*, expressed “little doubt of meeting Duncan on this side of the continent.” Geography, of course, dictated otherwise.⁴²¹

As Duncan was preparing to depart on his first voyage for the HBC, the European geopolitical context altered dramatically with news of Colnett’s arrest at Nootka and the ensuing Anglo-Spanish “Nootka Crisis” of 1790.⁴²² Among the early responses considered by the British government was a plan to establish a British colony on the Northwest Coast.⁴²³ This option was quickly abandoned and after a good deal of bluster the crisis was resolved peacefully with the signing of the Nootka Convention at the end of October.⁴²⁴ As a result, an official British presence was required at Nootka Sound; moreover, the British government “was anxious to know much more about the area to which it had gained free access.” At this stage, plans for a two-vessel expedition to the South Atlantic, initiated in 1789, were adjusted to address these new requirements and to resolve, finally, the question of the Northwest Passage.⁴²⁵ Command was given to George Vancouver, and the *Discovery* and *Chatham* sailed early in 1791. Vancouver returned to England four and a half years later and the results of his expedition, when published in 1798, transformed European understanding of the geography of the Northwest Coast.⁴²⁶

The knowledge and experience derived from Colnett’s first voyage contributed to Vancouver’s remarkable success in surveying the enormous complexity of the coast. James Johnstone, as he had done with Colnett, commanded many of the boat expeditions that did a good portion of the survey work.⁴²⁷ Lamb also notes that “Vancouver was provided with copies of all the journals and charts that might prove useful to him.” These included the maps of individual harbours, by Johnstone and Duncan, that Alexander Dalrymple had published. Colnett’s charts, of course, were not available when the expedition sailed. Nonetheless, we can reasonably assume that Johnstone possessed his own versions, with much of the data contained therein.⁴²⁸ Johnstone may also have been the ultimate source of “a chart ... of the coast” that Archibald Menzies had “made” by the time he arrived in England in 1789; an anonymous map, bearing a close resemblance to that described by Menzies, has survived.⁴²⁹ Menzies also brought first-hand experience and a different kind of expertise to Vancouver’s expedition. As botanist-surgeon, Menzies was in a position to expand the work on the “natural history” of the Northwest Coast begun during Colnett’s voyage. Finally, Duncan’s log and a log of the *Prince of Wales* were also available when Vancouver’s expedition was organized, but it is not known if any use was made of them.⁴³⁰

Ironically, the very success of the Vancouver expedition overshadowed and obscured the contributions of many of his immediate forebears. George Hewett,

a surgeon on Vancouver's expedition, thought that Vancouver deliberately ignored the contribution of his "commercial" precursors. Commenting on the published account, Hewett wrote:

Why this attempt to depreciate the Merits of the Several Commanders of Trading Vessels that have been on this Coast when even an Observer with only Common Sense must see that altho those Commanders were not so well provided with instruments &c and came upon the Coast merely to attend to their Commercial Concerns yet with all those disadvantages their Charts are far more accurate than those of Capt. Cooks of the N. West Coast which he went to Survey and even than those of Capt. V. would have been had not he fortunately met with some merchantmen who pointed out even Columbia River which he had passed without seeing ... it should be understood by the Reader that it is impossible a Capt. of Merchantmen can do anything so well as a Capt. in the Navy.⁴³¹

In the case of Colnett and the 1786-89 expedition, obscurity was further encouraged by the subsequent inaccessibility of his journal, log, charts, and related documentation. One small measure of this historical elision is that only a handful of the place names given by Colnett and his men have survived.⁴³² When compounded by the concentration of scholarly attention on Colnett's arrest in 1789 and his role in the subsequent "crisis," the result is an unbalanced picture. Little consideration has been given to Colnett's earlier activities and he has been evaluated, generally unfavourably, in the light of his actions in 1789 and 1790. Howay's decision to publish Colnett's second journal, covering these events, both reflected and reinforced this evaluation.⁴³³ Publication of Caamano's journal, with its criticism of Colnett, offered further confirmation.⁴³⁴

Although overshadowed by Vancouver's accomplishments, Colnett's expedition produced a valuable cartographic legacy. Reference has been made above to charts of individual harbours; these were published by Dalrymple as part of a larger series. In all, Dalrymple produced eleven such charts based on surveys by Charles Duncan and James Johnstone from Colnett's first voyage.⁴³⁵ Two anonymous maps are also of considerable interest. The first, probably the work of Johnstone or Menzies, has already been noted; the second was likely produced by Charles Duncan, who is known to have prepared a "Chart of his Discoveries." This map, covering part of the Northwest Coast and the Hawaiian Islands, shows the tracks of both the *Prince of Wales* and the *Princess Royal* for 1787, but only the course of the latter for 1788. These routes, together with some place names derived from the voyage, appear on John Arrowsmith's world chart of 1790.⁴³⁶ Some of this information also appeared on Meares' chart published later in 1790.⁴³⁷ Colnett's cartographic efforts were largely confined to his journal, but he also produced three manuscript charts of the Northwest Coast. Some place names which appear only on these charts are included in a map of the North Pacific and adjacent coasts published by W. Faden in 1794. Faden also shows the "North West Georgia of Captain Colnet 1793."⁴³⁸

Caamano's voyage in 1792 to the coast of British Columbia, in the vicinity of Banks Island, was also stimulated by information derived from Colnett's first expedition. During his return to Nootka, on the *Argonaut* in January 1791, Colnett allowed the Spanish commandant, Francisco de Eliza, to copy a map showing his movements on the coast during the voyage of 1787-88. The map, likely a version of Colnett MAP 1 (see p. 285), covered the coast from 49°N to 58°N. If so, it showed several "incomplete" inlets in latitude 53°N, the area where De Fonte was supposed to have found his strait or river, as well as Colnett's speculations on the topic.⁴³⁹ Eliza sent a copy of Colnett's map to the viceroy in Mexico, who promptly decided to have that area explored: the "result was the Caamano expedition of 1792."⁴⁴⁰

Colnett's voyage, through the involvement of Alexander Stewart, also contributed to a private British expedition. The so-called *Butterworth* squadron, commanded by William Brown, sailed from London in 1791. It consisted of three vessels – the *Butterworth*, the *Prince Lee Boo*, and the *Jackall* – with Stewart as master of the third. Information on this expedition is sketchy, but it seems to have been based on the model established by Etches.⁴⁴¹ Its objectives included establishing a seal fishery at Isla de los Estados (Staten Island) and one or more factories on the Northwest Coast.⁴⁴² The squadron operated on the coast for three seasons, ranging from Clayoquot as far north as Yakutat Bay, and became involved in a number of violent episodes.⁴⁴³ Stewart, however, left the expedition at Macao at the end of 1793.⁴⁴⁴ After moving to the Hawaiian Islands, he made two further trips to the Northwest Coast, on the *Dove* in 1799, and on the *Alexander* in 1800.⁴⁴⁵

Finally, thanks to Menzies' part-time activities, there was a botanical and, much more modest, ethnographic legacy. Eric Groves has estimated that Menzies brought back about "one hundred dried specimens." Of these, the largest portion went to Joseph Banks (ending up in the British Museum), others went to Sir J.E. Smith (ending up in the Linnean Society of London), some Menzies kept himself (ending up at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh), and some eventually ended up at Oxford. The specimens, together with seeds and some sketches, came from the Isla de los Estados, the Northwest Coast, the Hawaiian Islands, and Sumatra.⁴⁴⁶ J.C.H. King has suggested that six or seven artifacts from the Northwest Coast and the Hawaiian Islands were given to the British Museum, although the vagaries of time and labelling preclude certainty.⁴⁴⁷

For the most part, Colnett has been evaluated for his role in the founding "narrative" of settler society on the Northwest Coast – legitimating the British colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia. Now, as interest in the contact process increases, Colnett's first expedition and the documents assembled here take on renewed historical significance. Colnett's journal offers accounts of the initial or very early stages of direct contact with groups of Tsimshian, Heiltsuk, Haida, Tlingit, and Eyak, as well comments on the Nuuchah-nulth and Chugach. Of the early European visitors, Colnett met the greatest variety of indigenous peoples and, by the standards of the day, he was a

fairly acute observer. Frederica De Laguna, in one of the great twentieth-century ethnographies, was favourably impressed by Colnett's descriptions of people and places in Prince William Sound and thought his observations about the Yakutat people were "shrewd and illuminating."⁴⁴⁸ This assessment can readily be extended. At Kildidit Sound, for example, Colnett recognized he was on the boundary between southern and northern cultural realms. And at Rose Harbour on the Queen Charlotte Islands, he described and sketched a "copper"; the first European visitor to observe one of the major symbols of wealth and status on the Northwest Coast.⁴⁴⁹ Taylor, too, provides valuable descriptions and additional information. In the Rose Harbour area, he provides the names of several of the chiefs, and describes Haida greeting ceremonies and the musical instruments used therein. In short, the journals of Colnett and Taylor, together with collateral documents, provide a considerable body of ethnohistoric data that has been overlooked for too long. They are important sources for the ongoing reassessment of the geography as well as the history of the early stages of the contact process.⁴⁵⁰

A contemporary of Colnett's, in a review of the voyage of the *Rattler*, offered an assessment that bears repeating: "We recommend this Voyage to the perusal of our readers, as a professional work fraught with information, and executed with the greatest accuracy. It forms a most valuable addition to the labours of Cook, and Vancouver; and is in fact, in many respects, connected with, and explanatory of the latter. In point of nautical acquirements, by long and perilous experience, the name of Colnett should not be far removed from these great lamented circumnavigators."⁴⁵¹

The Documents

Colnett wrote three manuscript journals for presentation purposes and with an eye towards publication. They covered his voyages on the *Prince of Wales*, the *Argonaut*, and the *Rattler*. Of these only the third was published during Colnett's lifetime.⁴⁵² Significantly, it was dedicated to Sir Philip Stephens, Secretary of the Admiralty, who also received the manuscript copies of all three journals.⁴⁵³ The *Rattler* manuscript bears the date 20 August 1795 and contains information that the two earlier manuscript journals had already been presented to Stephens. In outlining his activities prior to the *Rattler* voyage, Colnett states that on returning to England from Canton in 1792, "the whole of the history alluded to, with charts, drawings &c &c I left in the possession of Philip Stephens Esqr. secretary to the Right honorable Board of Admiralty, the only mark of gratitude I had the power of shewing him for the services he wished to render me."⁴⁵⁴ It was this step that assured the preservation and eventual resting place of the journals in the Public Record Office, although not, strictly speaking, government documents.

With the exception of an extract from the *Prince of Wales* journal published in 1849, dealing with the visit to Vancouver Island, Colnett's manuscripts disappeared from view.⁴⁵⁵ It was only in 1934 that Donald Angus, who was primarily interested in Hawaiian history, located the journals and brought them to

scholarly attention. Angus approached the British Columbian historian F.W. Howay, who had written extensively on the maritime fur trade, for his assistance in attempting to publish the journals of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Argonaut*. Howay responded enthusiastically and Angus undertook supplementary research. After an approach to Ryerson Press came to naught, Howay turned to W.S. Wallace and the Champlain Society.⁴⁵⁶ At this stage, Howay had hopes of publishing both journals and had done some editorial work on the first, describing it as filling “a big gap in our history.” Wallace, however, saw things differently. He was “taken” by the *Argonaut* journal, which he thought to be of “wider interest” than the first, about which he had “doubts.” This view prevailed and Howay publicly announced the project in a paper delivered to the Royal Society of Canada in May 1939.⁴⁵⁷ A year later, a scholarly edition of the *Argonaut* journal was published while the *Prince of Wales* journal remained largely unknown and inaccessible.⁴⁵⁸

The manuscript of the *Prince of Wales* voyage may be described as an unfinished “presentation copy.” In addition to the text, it contains simplified segments of a log and a variety of charts and illustrations; some in watercolour, or ink and wash, most in pencil. The journal ends with the departure from the coast of America, although the log entries continue until 7 November 1788, when the vessel was approximately halfway between the Hawaiian Islands and Canton. However, it is clear that Colnett intended to complete the journal as far as the stay at Canton. Pencil notations on blank folios indicate Colnett’s intentions: “Remarks from America to Sandwich Isles & while among them”; “Remarks from Sandwich Isles to China”; “remarks while at China [remainder illegible].”⁴⁵⁹ The text also bears signs of some reworking and information on a number of latitudes, longitudes, distances, and bearings is lacking. Moreover, many of the charts and illustrations are unfinished; some of the former are not even begun, while some of the latter contain instructions for the colours to be applied. The folio for one intended illustration contains the notation: “The Drawing Stole by the Spaniards.”⁴⁶⁰ It seems probable that Colnett was preparing his “presentation copy” from a rough journal (or log) and a sketchbook, when interrupted by press of circumstances – presumably the *Rattler* voyage, if his remarks in that manuscript are to be believed.⁴⁶¹ Whatever the merit of these speculations, we can only regret the circumstances that prevented Colnett from completing his objective, the more so as the manuscript of the *Rattler* voyage, preserved in the British Library, illustrates just how handsome a completed volume would have been.

The *Prince of Wales* logbook covers the period from the departure from England until the departure from Canton, when Colnett left the vessel. One of the interesting features about this document is that it differs from the log entries contained in Colnett’s journal – for example, there are small, but frequent, differences in the observations of latitude and longitude. It would appear that the *Prince of Wales* logbook travelled to London with the ship in 1789 and, in accordance with the requirements of the licence from the EIC, was forwarded to the company offices in London.⁴⁶² The EIC log also contains information

absent from the journal which, together with the aforementioned discrepancies, suggests that Colnett did not have the log to hand when writing up his journal. The *Prince of Wales* logbook is now located in the India Office of the British Library.

The Taylor journal, or journals, consists of eight books, seemingly written in at least two different hands. There is some duplication in books three, four, and five, describing the first visit to the Hawaiian Islands, but taken together the journals cover most of the voyage of the *Prince of Wales*. The exceptions are the final section of the first visit to the Hawaiian Islands and early parts of the second season on the Northwest Coast.⁴⁶³ On the other hand, the Taylor journals provide a much more extensive account of the visits to the Hawaiian Islands. Ignoring the duplication and including the account of the second visit in September 1788, Taylor's version is more than four times the length of Colnett's account. Moreover, Taylor takes the voyage beyond the Hawaiian Islands to Canton and the return to England.

The first three books of Taylor's journals appear to be a revised or rewritten copy; the remainder may be rough originals, or perhaps "portions of different copies." Book seven and book eight, a log from China to London, are likely originals; they use nautical time, whereas the earlier volumes use the civil day. One of Taylor's descendants took the journals to Australia, where they were purchased by D.S. Mitchell and subsequently deposited in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.

Charles Duncan also brought a logbook and journal from the *Princess Royal* to London in 1789. Two years later, during Dixon's dispute with John Meares, they were in the possession of Alexander Dalrymple, then hydrographer to the EIC.⁴⁶⁴ Unfortunately, these documents have subsequently disappeared, leaving Duncan's brief published account as the principal source for the independent voyage of the *Princess Royal* in 1788.⁴⁶⁵ In addition to the documents generated directly by the voyage itself, there is a considerable array of materials produced by collateral and subsequent events that bear on the Colnett expedition. The documents produced by the "Nootka Crisis" and the Vancouver expedition, for example, contain retrospective commentary on earlier events and contextual information.⁴⁶⁶

Colnett's journal includes a series of charts, mostly of particular harbours, which supplement those published by Dalrymple. Taylor also drew a rough sketch of Port Etches. More important are three large manuscript maps of the Northwest Coast drawn by Colnett: two extend from the Straits of Juan de Fuca to Cape Edgecombe, the third is limited to a somewhat smaller area. They show the routes followed by the *Prince of Wales* (1787 and 1789), the *Argonaut* (1789), and the *Princess Royal* (1787 and 1788). Even more valuable are the outlines of some of the trips made by the ships' boats in 1787 and 1788 and a series of annotations which provide supplementary comments on some of the areas visited (Appendix 3).⁴⁶⁷ In his account of the *Rattler*, Colnett noted he had "left behind" in England a manuscript chart of the seas north of San Blas; perhaps these maps were similarly located. Currently they are on deposit in the archives of the Hydrographic Office of the Admiralty in Taunton. How they

reached this repository is not recorded, but Map 3 bears the date stamp “Jany 7, 1865.” Nonetheless, it would be surprising if Dalrymple, the first hydrographer to the navy, did not play some role.⁴⁶⁸

A Note on the Editing

Colnett’s journal extends only as far as the departure of the *Prince of Wales* from the Northwest Coast in August 1788, although there are intermittent log entries extending to 7 November 1788. The latter portions of the voyage from the Northwest Coast to Hawai’i, Canton, and England are covered in the EIC log of the *Prince of Wales* and in Taylor’s journals; neither have been included here. Extracts from Taylor’s journals have been incorporated where they provide a valuable supplement or an alternative interpretation of events described by Colnett. They are intercalated at the appropriate locations within the Colnett text and printed in sans serif. I have retained the subdivisions in the text and the titles of the sections given by Colnett.

Colnett’s journal uses civil time, except where he specifies “pr Log”; that is the nautical time according to the log. Nautical time, used in the logs and Book 7 of Taylor’s journal, runs from noon to noon. Hence an entry for 5 May commences with information from PM 4 May and continues with AM for 5 May.⁴⁶⁹ I have corrected all dates to civil time, placing the corrections in brackets { }. The log sections of Colnett’s journal have been omitted in the present edition; where the log entries contains supplementary information, this has been incorporated into endnotes. These notes are identified as taken from “Colnett’s log,” to distinguish them from information taken from the EIC log of the *Prince of Wales* on deposit at the British Library. Where latitudes, longitudes, and bearings are missing from the journal, but available in the logs, they have been added to the text in square brackets [].⁴⁷⁰

As with many eighteenth-century journals, the punctuation used by Colnett and Taylor is inconsistent. I have retained their usage, although it is often difficult to determine the difference between commas and full stops. However, I have modified the paragraph arrangement in some instances, using a new paragraph for the beginning of a new day’s entry. I have retained the original capitalization and abbreviations.

Colnett’s journal contains numerous illustrations: charts, maps, and drawings – the latter mostly of topography, artifacts, fauna, and flora. Some of the drawings are watercolours, but many are unfinished pencil sketches. The charts and maps, in ink and pencil, are also often incomplete; in two cases, only the title exists. A full listing of Colnett’s journal illustrations – along with an indication as to which of these have been included in the present edition – is presented in Appendix 5. All of the maps appearing in the journal have been included here, as well as a representative sample of his drawings and sketches. Taylor’s journals contain only one unfinished sketch map – of the Port Etches area, Prince William Sound.