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The Crowning of Sir Francis Drake and Others According to Early Engravers

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BEFORE the advent of photography in the nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for leaders of European or American expeditions to any part of the world to employ artists, either as cartographers or perhaps even as general graphic illustrators, of reports which sometimes were published after the return of the voyagers. Unfortunately, great gaps between the original artist's rendition and the final printing process seemed to have worked against the accuracy of the published version. To begin with, it is hard to believe that many of the illustrators of the times could have been much concerned with their own artistic integrity or at least accuracy of depiction. Engravers were required to prepare original drawings for printing, and these skilled persons, sometimes artists themselves, could also serve as embellishers or editors of the original fieldwork.

From at least the end of the sixteenth century, we find published engravings with no signature whatever on them, though there might be some passing mention of the artist's name in the text of the volume in which they appeared. Others contain the name of the artist, often followed by the abbreviated legend *Del* or *Delt* (Latin *Delineavit*: "he [or she] drew [it]"). In some cases, engravers dispensed entirely with the name of the original artist, showing only the name of the engraver or his

firm, perhaps with the legend *Sc* (Latin *Sculpsit*: "he [or she] engraved [it]") following. If neither *Del* nor *Sc* followed a name or names on an engraving or its caption, it would indeed be difficult to determine who was initially or finally responsible for the work, unless the artist or engraver already had a well-established reputation.

Apart from the problem of mere identification of the author, an even more insidious force appears often to have operated against final accuracy of the print. This lay in the possibility of the combination of the impressions of several persons or the indulgence of pure fantasy in an engraving. Thus artists, copyists, or engravers who had never been abroad might work from amateurish sketches or even verbal descriptions by the original eyewitness. In addition, these secondary producers could add ideas of their own, perhaps stimulated by modish drawings from some travel account unrelated to the one with which they were immediately concerned. It may be suggested therefore that published illustrations at any given period of time, during any particular century, for example, followed a similar kind of convention or tradition, no matter which event or which part of the world was being depicted.

This argument is given substance by consideration of seven drawings (Figs. 1-7



Fig. 1. Indians welcome Francis Drake to California in 1579—an engraving from a book by Théodor deBry (*Historia Americae*), published in Frankfurt in 1599. This was the first published picture of California Indians. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library.

herein), five of them essentially from the seventeenth century and two from the mid-nineteenth century. The following comments on each of the drawings indicate the difficulties of establishing what may have happened to the drawing between the time of the actual event depicted and its later appearance in a printed publication. Even the late sixteenth-century artist or engraver of the first of the Francis Drake series presented here (earliest drawing dated 1599, 19 years after the world-encompassing voyage) may be accused of eclecticism or compositeness. While the later illustrations of crowning episodes in the voyages of Schouten and Lemaire, published

in 1671, or of Sir Walter Raleigh, printed in 1655, contain certain specific features identifying other parts of the world, by and large there are several important generic similarities between them and the Drake illustrations. These point to influences from an “accepted” period style rather than to a concern for accuracy of depiction.

Figure 1. In this earliest known drawing of California Indians (1599), the feathered headdresses are probably accurately shown, judging from later ethnographic parallels. However, the scepter or “mace” with the small European-like crowns has not been recorded by modern ethnographers. Probably in the



Fig. 2. Engraving from J. L. Gottfried (*Neue Welt und amerikanische Historien*), Frankfurt, 1655, showing Sir Walter Raleigh being crowned in Guiana, Orinoco River region, South America, 1595. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library.

same category are the conically-shaped houses; such dwellings have been only verbally documented by later Coast Miwok Indians, the original occupants of the region where Drake most likely careened his ship (cf. Heizer 1974:28). The faulty perspective of the ships and boats is acceptable, esthetically, but tells us practically nothing about the true design of Drake's ship, the *Golden Hinde*, or of a small, previously captured pinnace which allegedly was accompanying him for part of the time when he was sailing along the Pacific Coast.

Drake's original logs and other accounts, probably including drawings similar to those

under consideration, have been missing for almost four centuries: the 1599 illustration therefore is a secondary source. It is possible that details of certain features shown, like the mace or the house design, were fairly accurately observed and depicted, but had been modified before later travelers or ethnographers could properly describe or illustrate them. Whatever the case, such written descriptions of the customs of the Indians of 1579 as are available to us do not, in several respects, confirm the accuracy of the drawings.

Figure 2. This is a rendition of the event of



Fig. 3. Another engraving from J. L. Gottfried (*Neue Welt...*), 1655, showing crowning of Francis Drake in California. Note similarity of house types to those shown in deBry (1599) engraving (see Fig. 1), and possible depiction of "Drake's Plate" on post. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library.

Sir Walter Raleigh's "crowning" in Guiana in 1595. Note the native chief's feather headdress, like those shown for California (cf. Fig. 3, taken from the same volume, i.e., Gottfried 1655). One of Raleigh's officers, presumably, is shown smoking what appears to be a cigar; the fruit offerings by the natives certainly could represent tropical species. However, the coastline depiction is not strikingly reminiscent of the tropical forest land near the mouth of the Orinoco River, but happens to

pictorially resemble the shoreline of some such place as San Francisco Bay about seventy years ago.

Figure 3. Here Gottfried's (1655) illustrator is ostensibly showing the northern California shoreline (but with palm trees resembling some near-equatorial beach), in a later depiction of the crowning of Francis Drake. The doubtful house design (cf. Fig. 1; deBry 1599) was evidently copied from the earlier drawing, but there is added a possible



Fig. 4. Francis Drake being crowned by California Indians, from A. Montanus (*De Nieuwe en Onbekonde Weereld . . .*), Amsterdam, 1671. The right side of the banner has been identified as presenting the coat of arms of the city of Plymouth, England, the port from which Drake set sail in 1577 and to which he returned three years later, after having circumnavigated the globe. Note that the presumed figure of Drake is shown here without a beard. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library.

representation of the "Drake's Plate," mounted on a post. Its great size compared to the metal plate usually referred to as the original one, now in the Bancroft Library of the University of California, may be explained in this drawing as artistic necessity. One of the glaring inconsistencies of the picture is that there are shown four apparently good-sized ships, some under heavy sail, in the bay, with the wind apparently coming from two directions. It has already been mentioned (see comments for Fig. 1) that Drake had, at most, *two* ships during this part of his voyage.

Figure 4. This drawing from Montanus (1671) has several contradictions, but, it should be remarked, was published almost a century after Francis Drake's California landing. The ship is shown under full sail, undoubtedly a contemporary artistic device seen also in Fig. 3. Drake (?), the central figure, is shown without a pointed beard, and is probably wearing seventeenth rather than sixteenth century clothing. The Indians at left are seen carrying spears or pikes, not a characteristic north coastal California weapon in later ethnographic times (Heizer 1974:27).



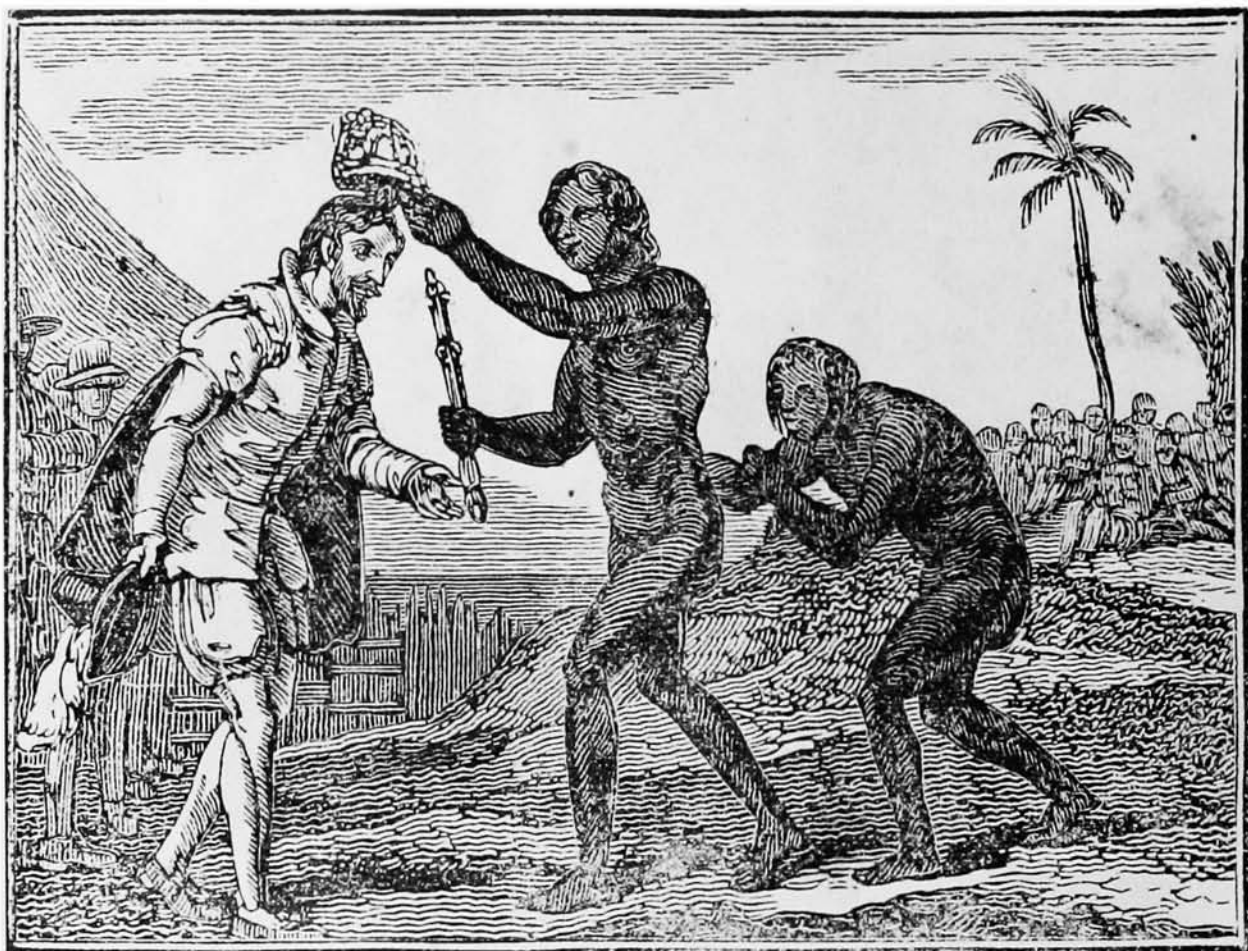
Fig. 5. Two leaders of a Dutch expedition in the Pacific Ocean, W. Schouten and J. Lemaire, are shown being crowned on Hoorn (Futuna) Island, in western Polynesia, ca. 1616 (Montanus 1671). Note resemblance of feather headdresses to those of California. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library.

The group of houses here may be parts of a fort, mentioned in the earlier accounts, but where is the surrounding wall? It is also unlikely that these houses were completed so soon after the arrival of the ship in the bay; surely the nature of the scene itself implies landing only a few days or even hours before the ceremony. On the other hand, the houses almost certainly cannot be interpreted as Indian structures.

Figure 5. In the same volume (Montanus 1671) from which Fig. 4 was taken, this engraving appeared with the title *Amerikens Entdecker*, i.e., "America's discovery or discoverer."

Rare prints are sometimes cut from books in antique markets for more profitable sales; if the present engraving were first seen as such a detached print, it could, without much stretching of the imagination, be interpreted as a picture also referring to America and perhaps even to the crowning of Drake in northern California.

In fact, the engraving is described in the publication. It is clear from the text of the book that the central figures are intended to be Wilhelm Schouten and Jakob Lemaire, on a Dutch expedition in the Pacific Ocean in 1616. The locale is west of Samoa, on Hoorn (also called Futuna) Island, which was probably



Drake made Sovereign of California.

Fig. 6. *Drake made Sovereign of California*, unsigned, from Galt (*All the Voyages Round the World*), London, 1820. Note especially the palm trees and form of scepter wielded by the Indian in the act of crowning Drake.

occupied originally by people from Samoa.

Shortcomings, so far as a putative portrayal of California is concerned, would be mainly the evidently tropical birds held by the natives, the lightly outlined (coconut palm) trees, the bizarre native spear points, and the form of the kiosk or pavilion. All of these could be explained away as artistic conventions—the kiosk with its *square-hewn* posts and the mats underfoot are too generalized to be placed specifically among these Polynesian people, who were reported to have been unaware of Europeans before 1516. The feather head-dresses are probably not characteristically

Polynesian, but again resemble those known for California Indians. A large “kava bowl” in the foreground, most indistinct in its features, could pass as well for a California Indian basket. Note the lack of beards on the principal Europeans, and compare with the person supposedly representing Drake in Fig. 4.

Figure 6. While the English possibly did not relinquish any tenuous claim to California which may have been based upon the visit of Drake, it would seem that pictorial illustrations of Drake’s landing were extremely rare during the entire eighteenth century. In 1820, however, John Galt (under the pseudonym of



Sir Francis Drake and the California Indians.

Fig. 7. Illustration signed by Howell, engraved by J. W. Orr, from a book titled *The Annals of San Francisco Bay*, New York, 1855. The drawing style is characteristic of nineteenth century illustrations, with presumably inaccurate details, however, of the same order as those appearing in the sixteenth or seventeenth century drawings representing Francis Drake's landing in California. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library.

"Samuel Prior") presented secondary accounts of many voyages around the world, with "engravings chiefly from the original works." Unfortunately Galt/Prior gives neither the artist's name nor the source of the relatively ancient-looking engraving reproduced here.

This picture may be one of the earliest

"revivals," bringing to mind Drake's visit to California after a lapse of about 150 years; certainly the engraving does not look like even an early nineteenth-century drawing. Note the totally unclad natives, the unmistakable form of the tropical tree (cf. Fig. 3), possibly the crude attempt at showing the stockade of

Drake's fort, and the truncated nature of the scepter, probably inspired by the mace seen in Fig. 1. The structure or materials of the "crown" cannot easily be compared with those of crowns in other known pictures.

Figure 7. A distinct later tradition in drawing is shown here, from a book published in 1855 (*The Annals of San Francisco*). Note the differences in dress of the Englishmen from that illustrated earlier (about two centuries before). Here the long feather headdress down the back of the head of one of the Indians, the robe of the same Indian, and what appears to be a tobacco "peace pipe" held also by the feather-crown bearer, are all closer to Plains Indian customs than to those of native California during Drake's time or later. Almost certainly this drawing was not based even on secondary historical documents. It freely depicts an event with hardly any correspondences in detail to much earlier engravings portraying that event, yet its emotional impact is about the same as the earlier work.

It seems clear from these observations that persons dealing with old book engravings may be on shaky ground if they attempt to interpret specific historical episodes from loosely documented illustrations, parts of which may be products of sheer imagination rather than first-hand observations. There is often no way of telling whether such illustrations were conceived as supplementary descriptive devices or merely as decorative suggestions of exotic places.

The well-reported custom of "crowning" the Europeans exemplified here may have further overtones in suggesting that the simple natives were thus symbolically giving away their lands to the god-like invaders. Counter to this is the possibility that they were merely being shrewd, knowing that they would soon

be overcome by the explosives-bearing foreigners if they did not offer some kind of obeisance. The first of these alternatives would be most attractive to the competitive European backers of the various overseas expeditions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and perhaps to their descendants as well.

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