

Doc. 2: Francis Drake on the Pacific Coast of America, 1579

Francis Drake was—and still is—a national hero in England, but a mere pirate in Spain. On many occasions he plundered Spanish ships and towns in the West Indies and Pacific coast of America. Was he a pirate or a privateer, a hero or villain? In his attacks on the Spaniards, was he motivated by patriotism, religious zeal, or simply greed? The following two selections come from individuals who had been abducted by Drake. The first is testimony taken from Nuño da Silva, a Portuguese pilot and captain who had been seized by Drake in January 1578 off the west coast of Africa near Cape Verde. Da Silva recounts Drake's pillaging the west coast of Spanish America between February and April, 1579. The second selection is from the testimony of Don Francisco de Zarate, who had been abducted by Drake off the coast of Guatemala in April 1579. He gives a vivid description of Drake's ship, the Golden Hind, and of Drake as an autocratic commander.

1. Testimony of Nuño da Silva:

On the 7th of said month [February, 1579] he [Drake] started for the coast and on the 9th went to a port in which he seized another ship which had, however, been unloaded but two hours previously and had carried 800 bars of gold belonging to His Majesty [the king of Spain]; which was great luck. He immediately left that port and went along the coast, leaving behind him all the ships he had taken and coasting with only his vessel and the launch. On the 13th he reached Callao de Lima [Peru] where 19 vessels were lying at anchor. He searched them all and, not finding any silver, cut their cables and the masts of the large vessels. He set sail in pursuit of a ship that had reached the port from Panama, laden with merchandise, and whose crew had gone ashore in a boat. He seized the ship, laden as she was, and took the silks he found in her. Everything else he cast into the sea and he set the ship adrift because two large ships had come out from Lima after her. Taking flight the Englishmen escaped and let her drive.

On the 20th he took a small ship on her way to Lima laden with native products, all of which he threw into the sea, taking from each ship her pilot and releasing the ship. Running along the coast,

he reached Arequipa where he found and seized a ship laden with a cargo of Castilian goods. He left this and only took her pilot, being in a hurry to look out for vessels laden with silver.

On * * * the 26th of February, he took another ship bound for Lima from Panama and laden with Castilian wearing apparel. He only took a negro from this ship and let her drive.

He continued his voyage, and on the 27th of February, at night, took another ship bound for Panama and laden with provisions for the King's vessels, with two thousand bags and other things and with 40 bars of silver and gold. And because a sailor secretly took a bar of gold and did not declare it, he hanged him and let the ship go.¹

Continuing his voyage along the coast, on the night of March 1st he took a ship, in which he found 1300 bars of assayed silver; much silver in small pieces, and much gold, of which there were 300 bars belonging to the King, and 14 chests of reals.² He left the ship and did not dare to enter the port of Panama after having captured so good a prize, nor to delay, for fear of the two vessels that had pursued his ship from Lima. He took good care not to enter the town of Panama.

On March 20th, whilst lying at anchor in an isolated port, of which deponent does not know the name nor more than that it was on the coast of Nicaragua, the Englishman took a frigate laden with maize and other native products. On this were two pilots who had been sent by His Excellency from New Spain to Panama. He took one of these pilots and left the other and brought the frigate with him, which is the same one with which he entered this port. On account of contrary weather he was not able to make the port of Realejo, where he intended to anchor.

He continued his voyage and passed by Acajutilla but did not enter the port, because he saw that there was no vessel therein.

¹ This incident actually refers to Francisco Jacome, a ship's clerk, who was "hanged" by Drake to extract information about where treasures were hidden aboard the ship. Although the ordeal was undoubtedly traumatic, Jacome lived to testify to the Spanish authorities. His deposition stated: "As deponent had not hidden anything whatsoever and was unable to reveal anything to them [Drake and his men], they hanged him by the neck with a cord as though to hang him outright, and let him drop from high into the sea, from which they fetched him out with the launch and took him back to the ship on which he had come" (*New Light on Drake* . . . , trans. and ed. Zelia Nuttall [London, 1914], p. 151).

² A real was a Spanish coin worth one-eighth of a piece of eight.

On the 4th of April he seized a frigate on which Don Francisco de Zarate was travelling. He brought the frigate with him for two days, at the end of which he took from her twenty-eight half loads of clothing (most of which belonged to two passengers who were travelling in her) and a negress³ belonging to Don Francisco. Afterwards he released the frigate and her occupants.

2. Testimony of Don Francisco de Zarate:

This general of the Englishmen is a nephew of John Hawkins, and is the same who, about five years ago, took the port of Nombre de Dios. He is called Francisco Drac, and is a man about 35 years of age, low of stature, with a fair beard, and is one of the greatest mariners that sails the seas, both as a navigator and as a commander. His vessel is a galleon of nearly four hundred tons, and is a perfect sailer. She is manned with a hundred men, all of service, and of an age for warfare, and all are as practised therein as old soldiers from Italy could be. Each one takes particular pains to keep his arquebuse⁴ clean. He treats them with affection; and they treat him with respect. He carries with him nine or ten cavaliers, cadets of English noblemen. These form a part of his council which he calls together for even the most trivial matter, although he takes advice from no one. But he enjoys hearing what they say and afterwards issues his orders. He has no favourite.

The aforesaid gentlemen sit at his table, as well as a Portuguese pilot, whom he brought from England, who spoke not a word during all the time I was on board.⁵ He is served on silver dishes with gold borders and gilded garlands, in which are his arms. He carries all possible dainties and perfumed waters. He said that many of these had been given him by the Queen.

None of these gentlemen took a seat or covered his head before him, until he repeatedly urged him to do so. This galleon of his

³ This female slave, named Maria, became pregnant—some say by Drake—during the long voyage and was later marooned with several other male slaves with some rice, seeds, and the “means for making a fire” on an uninhabited island south of the Celebes.

⁴ The arquebuse was a matchlock gun invented in the mid-fifteenth century. The earliest versions were so heavy that they had to be fired using a support. By the end of the next century, they were superseded by the musket.

⁵ Zarate is here referring to Nuño da Silva, who had been seized off West Africa, not England.

carries about thirty heavy pieces of artillery and a great quantity of firearms with the requisite ammunition and lead. He dines and sups to the music of viols. He carries trained carpenters and artisans, so as to be able to careen the ship at any time. Beside being new, the ship has a double lining. I understood that all the men he carries with him receive wages, because, when our ship was sacked no man dared take anything without his orders. He shows them great favour, but punishes the least fault. He also carries painters who paint for him pictures of the coast in its exact colours. This I was most grieved to see, for each thing is so naturally depicted that no one who guides himself according to these paintings can possibly go astray. I understood from him that he had sailed from his country with five vessels, four sloops (of the long kind) and that half of the armada belonged to the Queen.

New Light on Drake: A Collection of Documents Relating to His Voyage of Circumnavigation 1577-1580. Translated and edited by Zelia Nuttall. London: Hakluyt Society, 1914, pp. 206-208, 248-252.

Doc. 3: *The Manner of the Buccaneers*

The buccaneers of the Caribbean, who called themselves the Brethren of the Coast, lived a free and rugged life on the island fringes of the Spanish Empire. Living in pairs, according to a custom called metelotage, which implied a sort of same-sex marriage, they spent part of the year hunting wild cattle and pig, and the rest of the year marauding. They gained a reputation as bloodthirsty pirates, but among themselves they lived simple democratic and egalitarian lives. The following selection, taken from the first-hand account of Alexandre Exquemelin, depicts the manner of the early buccaneers, with their concern about procuring meat and sharing out booty in a fair and equitable manner. A number of their habits, including written articles and insuring compensation to wounded comrades, were followed by later pirates (see Doc. 9).

Before the Pirates go out to sea, they give notice unto every one that goes upon the voyage, of the day on which they ought precisely to embark, intimating also to them their obligation of bringing each man in particular so many pounds of powder and bullets as they