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978-1-108-01059-7 - Narrative of the Proceedings of Pedrarias Davila in the Provinces of Tierra Firme, or Castilla del Oro

Pascual de Andagoia

Excerpt

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N A R R A T I V E  
OF  
PASCUAL DE ANDAGOIA.

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In the year 1514 Pedrarias de Avila, who had been appointed governor of the mainland called Castilla del Oro,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pedrarias was among the candidates for the appointment of governor of Darien, and received it through the favour of the bishop of Burgos. "He was an elderly man, of rank and high connections, of much repute in war, having served with honour in Africa. From his feats in the tournament he had acquired the name of *justador* (the jousting).” He was a suspicious, fiery, arbitrary old man. *Helps*, i, p. 374.

Vasco Nuñez, in a letter to the king, dated October 16th, 1515, thus describes Pedrarias. "With respect to the governor, although an honourable person, your highness must know that he is very old for this country, and that he is very ill of a serious disease, insomuch that he has not been well for a single day since he arrived. He is excessively impatient, and is a man that would not care much if half his followers were lost. He has never punished the evil deeds and murders that have been committed both on caciques and Indians by those who have invaded the country. He is a man who is much pleased to see discord between one and another, and when it does not exist, he causes it by speaking evil to one man of another. He gives little credit to what any one says, except to such an one as he believes to have an interest in speaking the truth. He takes little heed of the interest of your Majesty, and is a man in whom reigns all the envy and avarice in the world. He is very miserable if he sees that there is friendship between respectable people, and is pleased to hear gossip amongst his followers. He is a man who more easily believes evil things than good, or those that may be profitable. He is a person without any judgment, and without any genius for government.” Vasco Nuñez was writing under a strong feeling of disgust at the wretched misrule which this old incapable had produced: yet the acts of Pedrarias

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by the Catholic king of glorious memory, embarked at Seville, with nineteen ships and fifteen hundred men—the most distinguished company that had yet set out from Spain.<sup>1</sup> The first land of the Indies at which he arrived was the island of Dominica. This island has a very large and beautiful harbour.<sup>2</sup> The land is for the most part hilly and wooded. Here he disembarked with his troops, and desired to find out whether there were any inhabitants. Some of the Spaniards, entering the woods, met with Indians armed with poisoned arrows, who were wandering about in the forests which surrounded the camp, watching for an opportunity to kill a stray Spaniard. These Indians

show that the character thus sketched by an enemy was but slightly exaggerated. *Navarrete Coll.*, p. 384.

<sup>1</sup> Pedrarias was accompanied by a bishop of the new colony named Juan de Quevedo, Gaspar de Espinosa as *alcalde mayor*, the *Bachiller Enciso* as *alguazil mayor* (an old enemy of Vasco Nuñez), and Gonzalvo Hernandez de Oviedo, the famous historian, as *veedor* or inspector of gold foundries. Oviedo afterwards resided with his wife and family in Hispaniola, paying occasional visits to Spain. In 1526 he published his *Sumario*, and in 1535 his *Historia General de las Indias*, which contains a detailed account of the Darien expedition of Pedrarias. The first part is published in the collection of Ramusio.

<sup>2</sup> Dominica was discovered by Columbus during his second voyage, in 1493. Dr. Chanca, the physician to the fleet of Columbus, in his letter to the chapter of Seville, says :—“ On Sunday, the 3rd of November, we saw lying before us an island, and soon on the right hand another appeared: the first was high and mountainous on the side nearest to us; the other flat and very thickly wooded. As soon as it became lighter, other islands began to appear on both sides, so that on that day there were six islands to be seen lying in different directions, and most of them of considerable size. We directed our course towards that which we had first seen” (Dominica, so called from having been discovered on a Sunday), “and reaching the coast, we proceeded more than a league in search of a port where we might anchor, but without finding one. All that part of the island which we could observe, appeared mountainous, very beautiful, and green even up to the water, which was delightful to see, for at that season there is scarcely anything green in our own country. One vessel remained all that day seeking for a harbour, and at length found a good one, where they saw both people and dwellings.”

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are a warlike people. They eat human flesh, and both men and women go about stark naked. This island has not been occupied, because the conquest would be very dangerous, and of little value.<sup>1</sup>

Thence, continuing his way to the mainland, Pedrarias arrived at the province of Santa Martha, where he landed all his men. He wished to learn the secrets of the land, and a company of his troops came to a village deserted by its inhabitants, where they captured some spoil, and found a certain quantity of gold in a tomb. The people of this land are almost the same as those of Dominica, they are armed with arrows, and the arrows are poisoned.<sup>2</sup> Here they found certain cloths and the seats on which the devil sat. He was figured on them in the form in which he appeared to the people, and although they did not worship him, as being a thing which appeared to and conversed with them, they noted his form, and represented it on their cloths. Thence Pedrarias sailed for Tierra Firme, without stopping anywhere except at Isla Fuerte, which is in front of Cartagena. The Indians get their salt from this island, and a great number of bags of salt were found. Continuing his voyage, he arrived at a province called Darien, which is at the end of the gulf of the same name. Here he found a certain quantity of Spaniards, who had Vasco Nuñez de Balboa for their captain and alcalde mayor.<sup>3</sup> Their settlement was

<sup>1</sup> The possession of the island was long disputed between Spaniards, French, and English; but in 1759 it finally became an English colony.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter vii of my translation of *Cieza de Leon*, which treats of "how the barb is made so poisonous with which the Indians of Santa Martha have killed so many Spaniards." Castellanos says that these Indians were called Caribs (or Cannibals), not because they ate human flesh, but because they defended their houses well.

"No porque alli comiesen carne humana  
Mas porque defendian bien su casa."

*Elegias*, pt. ii, canto 3.

<sup>3</sup> When Pedrarias arrived in the gulf of Urabia, he sent a messenger

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on the banks of a river, a league and a half from the sea. A year before these people arrived at that province, the captains Diego de Nicuesa and Alonzo de Ojeda departed from San Domingo, each one with his fleet. Ojeda went to the coasts of Paria and Santa Martha, where most of his people perished in the wars with the Indians or from disease. The survivors took Francisco Pizarro, who was afterwards governor of Peru, as their captain or leader, and followed the coast until they reached Darien, where they established themselves, and sent a ship to San Domingo, with the news of what had happened. The judges who were there, appointed the said Vasco Nuñez as *alcalde mayor*. Diego de Nicuesa went with his fleet to the coast of Veragua, where he was lost.<sup>1</sup> Leaving the remainder of his people on a hill

to inform Vasco Nuñez of his arrival, who found the great discoverer in a cotton shirt, loose drawers, and sandals, helping some Indians to thatch a house. Vasco Nuñez sent back to say that the colonists were ready to receive the new governor. The colony consisted of 450 soldiers, while Pedrarias had a force of nearly 1500 men. On June 30th, 1514, Pedrarias landed at Darien, and, as Herrera tells us (*dec. i, lib. ix, cap. 3*), treated Vasco Nuñez in a most malicious manner, appointing his old enemy Enciso to hold his *Residencia*, fining him several thousand *castellanos*, and for some time keeping him in confinement.

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the proceedings of Ojeda and Nicuesa see my translation of Cieza de Leon (*note* at p. 34).

In a letter to the king, dated from Darien January 20th, 1513, Vasco Nuñez says:—"We have lost three hundred men of those I commanded, of those under Alonzo de Ojeda, and of those under Diego de Nicuesa. With much labour I have united all these parties together. I sent to order that all the people who were in the settlement of Diego de Nicuesa should be brought to this town, and I treated them with all the attention that was possible. If I had not helped them they would have been lost, five or six dying every day, and the survivors being thinned by the Indians. Now all the men who were left behind by Diego de Nicuesa are in this town. From the first day of their arrival here they have been as well treated as if they had been sent by order of your most Royal Highness; for there has been no difference made with them, any more than if they had come here on the first day. As soon as they arrived here they were given their pieces of land for building and planting, in good situations, close to those occupied by the men who came with me

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called the hill of Nicuesa, where Nombre de Dios stands, he took a brigantine with some of his men, not knowing where to go, the whole coast being marshy, covered with forest, unhealthy, and thinly peopled. He sailed along the coast in search of the people left by Ojeda, and to discover some country where he might settle, for the coast of Veragua as far as Darien was under his jurisdiction. Ojeda had received the other coast of Santa Martha and Cartagena. Having arrived at Darien, he found Vasco Nuñez and his followers, who received him as a stranger, and would neither give him provisions, nor receive him as their governor. Not desiring to let him remain with them, they made him embark in a boat with some sailors, and it is even said that this boat was caulked with a blunt tool only. I heard this from the caulker himself who did the work.<sup>1</sup> Thus the said

to this town; for the land was not yet divided, and they arrived in time to receive some of the best pieces. I have to inform your most royal highness that both the governors, as well Diego de Nicuesa as Alonzo de Ojeda, performed their duties very ill, and that they were the causes of their own perdition, because they knew not how to act, and because, after they arrived in these parts, they took such presumptuous fancies into their heads that they appeared to be lords of the land. They imagined that they could rule the land and do all that was necessary from their beds, and they acted thus, believing they had nothing further to do. But the nature of the land is such that, if he, who has charge of the government, sleeps, he cannot awake when he wishes; for it is a land that obliges him who governs to be very watchful. For this reason the people desired to be rid of men who did not care whether things went well or ill, like Diego de Nicuesa. This was the cause of the ruin both of the one governor and of the other. These governors believed that they could treat the people as slaves, and they never gave an account of the gold they took, nor of anything else; for which reason all became so careless that, even when they saw gold, they did not care to take it, knowing that they would themselves receive a very small share of it." *Navarrete Coll.*, tom. iii, Num. iv, p. 358.

<sup>1</sup> Spanish carpenters and caulkers call their tools *fierros* or *herramientas*. In caulking seams the *estopa* or oakum is first driven well in with a thin edged caulking iron, and then *remachado* or secured with a blunt one or *ferro grueso*. When Andogoya says that the vessel of Nicuesa was caulked with a blunt tool (*calafuteado con ferro grosso*), he implies that

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Nicuesa was lost, and it was never known what became of him.<sup>1</sup> When the people, whom he had left in Nombre de Dios, found that their captain did not return, obliged by necessity, they followed him, and, arriving at Darien, submitted to the authority of the others.

The Admiral Colon discovered these coasts, both the one and the other.<sup>2</sup>

Pedrarias arrived at Darien in the end of July of the said year 1514, where he was received by the people who were there, and where he landed all his troops. The settlement was small, and there were few resources in the land. The provisions which were on board the ships were disembarked, and divided amongst all the people. The flour and other stores were injured by the sea, and this, added to the evil nature of the land, which is woody, covered with swamps, and very thinly inhabited, brought on so much sickness among the people, that they could not be cured, and in one month seven hundred men died of sickness and hunger. Our arrival weighed so much on those who were already settled at Darien, that they would do no act of charity for any one. As in united enterprises, until experience has shown the way, the correct method of acting is very seldom adopted, so now Pedrarias was appointed jointly with the previous operation of driving the oakum well in with a sharp one had been neglected, and that therefore the seams were easily forced open afterwards.

<sup>1</sup> Oviedo says that the last words he was heard to utter as he left the shore were—*Ostende faciem tuam et salvi erimus* ("Show thy face, O Lord, and we shall be saved"). Quoted by *Helps*, i, p. 133.

He set sail on March 1st, 1511, with seventeen faithful companions.

<sup>2</sup> This was in his memorable fourth voyage in 1502. Columbus first sighted the coast a few leagues to the east of the gulf of Honduras, and on September 14th rounded the Cape, which he called *Gracias a Dios*, in search of a strait. He sailed along the coasts of the Mosquito, Costa Rica, and Veragua, and reached a harbour in November, which he called Porto Bello. He went on for eight leagues to the point since named Nombre de Dios, and returned thence to Veragua. He thus discovered the whole coast from the gulf of Honduras nearly to that of Darien.

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bishop and officers (without whom he could do nothing). These, seeing how the people were dying, began to send out captains in various directions, not to make settlements, but to bring as many Indians as possible to Darien.<sup>1</sup> They seldom succeeded, but lost many of their people in fights with the Indians, some returning defeated, and others with prisoners. As there were so many voices in every measure, each one given from motives of interest or wilfulness, neither was good order preserved, nor was any evil doer punished.<sup>2</sup>

It was but a short time since Vasco Nuñez had reached a point near the South Sea, whence he had seen it. The captains and troops who went forth in that direction, where the country is healthier and more thickly peopled, brought back great troops of captive natives in chains, and all the gold they could lay their hands on. This state of things continued for nearly three years. The captains divided the captive Indians amongst the soldiers, and brought the gold to Darien. They gave each man his share. To the bishop,

<sup>1</sup> The first expedition sent out by Pedrarias was commanded by Juan de Ayora, who was ordered to build fortresses on the territories of the caciques Comogre, Pocosora, and Tubanamá. He obtained gold by torturing and burning the Indians, and then sailed away with it, and was never heard of again in Darien. One Bartolomé Hurtado was despatched in search of Ayora, and brought back a hundred Indians as slaves, many of whom he gave away as bribes to the principal officials in Darien.

<sup>2</sup> Vasco Nuñez wrote a letter to the king, dated October 16th, 1515, in which he begged that some one might be sent to examine into the state of the colony. He declared that he who would bring it back into the condition it once was in, must neither sleep nor be careless. He said that the Indians, who were formerly like sheep, had become as fierce lions. That while once they used to come out in the roads with presents for the Christians, they now go forth to kill them. He explained that this change had been caused by the evil treatment they had received from the captains who had invaded their territories, killed many chiefs and Indians without any reason, and stolen their women and children. The crimes of these captains had remained unpunished, while there is not a single friendly tribe left, except the cacique of Careta, who remained neutral, because of his proximity to Darien.

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the officers who had a vote in the government, and the governor, they gave a share of the Indians ; and, as they were appointed as captains by the favour of those who governed, from among their relations and friends, although they had committed many evil deeds, none were punished. In this manner the land suffered for a distance of more than a hundred leagues from Darien. All the people who were brought there, and there was a great multitude, were immediately sent to the gold mines, for they were rich in that land ; and as they came from a great distance, and were worn out and broken down by the great burdens they had to carry, and as the climate was different from their own, and unhealthy, they all died. In these transactions the captains never attempted to make treaties of peace, nor to form settlements, but merely to bring Indians and gold to Darien, and waste them there.

About thirty leagues from Darien there was a province called Careta,<sup>1</sup> and another, at a distance of five leagues

<sup>1</sup> "To the westward of Darien is a province called Careta, which is about twenty leagues distant. There are certain rivers in it which contain gold, according to Indian men and women who are in this town." *Letter of Vasco Nuñez.*

It would appear that Careta was the name of the cacique, and that the province was called Coiba. Careta had hospitably entertained two Spanish fugitives from Nicuesa's party, who fled to Darien, and basely proposed to Vasco Nuñez the invasion of their benefactor's territory. Accordingly Vasco Nuñez marched to Coiba with 130 armed men, and was received most hospitably. He feigned to return to Darien, but in the dead of night he suddenly attacked the village, and took Careta and his family prisoners, seizing provisions enough to load two brigantines. Careta, when brought to Darien, offered his daughter to Vasco Nuñez as a pledge of his friendship if he was set at liberty, and the invader allowed him to depart. Vasco Nuñez fell in love with Careta's daughter, and retained an unswerving attachment for her to the day of his death. He kept his word with her father, and invaded the country of his enemy the cacique of Ponca. When Vasco Nuñez set out, on September 1st, 1513, to discover the South Sea, he sailed from Darien to Coiba, the territory of his lady love's father, the cacique Careta, who furnished him with guides and warriors. Careta always remained a firm ally of his *quasi* son-in-law.



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from it, called Acla. In these two provinces there were two lords who were brothers, and, one of them desiring to possess all, there were great wars, so that a battle was fought in a place called Acla, where Pedrarias afterwards established a town of Christians. Before the battle this place had another name; for Acla, in the language of that land, means “*the bones of men*,” and the province retained that name because of the quantity of bones strewn on the battle field.<sup>1</sup> After this war there was so small a number of Indians, that when we arrived they made no resistance. These people were more civilised than those of the coast of Santa Martha; for the women were very well dressed, in embroidered cotton mantles which extended from the waist downwards, and they slept on beds of the same material. These dresses of the women reached down so as to cover the feet, but the arms and bosom were uncovered. The men went about with their private parts covered with a bright coloured sea shell very well carved, which was secured round the loins by cords. In this way they were able to run and walk with great freedom.<sup>2</sup> These shells were used as articles of barter with the inner lands, for they were not found any where except on the sea coast. The land is covered with forest, like that of Darien, though it is more healthy, and there are gold mines in many parts of it.

At this time a captain named Gaspar de Morales set out to discover the South Sea, and he went out on it as far as the islands of Pearls, where the lord was friendly, and gave him rich pearls. He was the first man who visited them.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Don Alonzo Enriquez de Guzman says: “I sailed from the island of Hispaniola on my way to Peru, and arrived at the port of Nombre de Dios, in the province of Castilla del Oro. The native name of the place means *Bones*, and it was so called on account of the number of people who have died there. See my *Translation*, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Sin que por ninguna via se les pareciese cosa alguna de su natura, salvo los genetivos, que estos no cabian en el caracol.*

<sup>3</sup> Morales was sent to the South Sea in search of pearls, with eighty

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The first province to the westward of Acla is Comogre,<sup>1</sup> where the country begins to be flat and open. From this

Spaniards, He was received in a friendly manner, and was given many valuable pearls. On his return he murdered the Indians, stole their women, and caused twenty chiefs to be torn to pieces by his dogs. Vasco Nuñez says :—“ He committed greater cruelties than have ever been heard of among Arabs, Christians, or any other people. He killed a hundred women and young lads, and all this, most puissant Lord, has passed without any punishment. On the island he burnt the houses and the stores of corn, but, nevertheless, the cacique gave him 15 or 16 marcs of pearls, and 4,000 *pesos de oro*. He afterwards seized many Indian men and women on this rich island, and sold them as slaves at Darien, without any conscience.” He adds that Morales brought a pearl from the rich island which weighed ten *tomines*, very perfect and without a flaw, and of so beautiful a lustre and shape as to be fit for the King’s use.” *Navarrete Coll.*, p. 379. Morales seems to have been hard pressed during his retreat, by the outraged Indians, whose women and children he was taking away, to sell at Darien. He murdered these captives one by one, and left their bodies in the road, in the hope of thus checking the pursuit of the Indians.

Francisco Pizarro served as second in command, in this infamous expedition of Morales. The invaders entered the territory of the Cacique Biru, whose name supplied the Spaniards with an erroneous designation for the great Empire of the Yncas. It was here, possibly, that Pizarro first heard faint rumours respecting the scene of his future conquest, and here Andagoya afterwards collected fuller information on the same subject.

<sup>1</sup>“Forty leagues down the coast, from the city of Darien, and twelve leagues inland, there is a cacique named Comogre, and another named Pocosora, who are at equal distances from the sea. They have many wars with each other. They each have a town inland, and another on the sea coast, by which the interior is supplied with fish. The Indians assured me that there were very rich rivers of gold near the houses of these caciques. At the distance of a day’s journey from the cacique Pocosora’s house there are the most beautiful mountains. They are clear of forest, except some groves of trees along the banks of the streams. In these mountains there are certain caciques who have great quantities of gold in their houses. It is said that these caciques store their gold in *barbacoas*, like maize, because it is so abundant that they do not care to keep it in baskets. Their method of collecting the gold is by going into the water and gathering it in their baskets. They also scrape it up in the beds of streams when they are dry : and that your Royal Highness may be more completely informed concerning these parts, I send an