BALBOA CITY, BALBOA PARK, BALBOA LAUNDRY AND VASCO NUNEZ DE BALBOA

by Richard W. Amero

On First Looking into Chapman's Homer

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold
  And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
  Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
  That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne:
  Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
  When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
  He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
  Silent upon a peak in Darien.

John Keats

For many years Vasco Nunez de Balboa was looked upon as an icon of heroism. This view was promoted by the English poet John Keats, who did so without realizing what he was doing, when he included the phrase "silent upon a peak in Darien" in his sonnet "On Looking Into Chapman's Homer." Ironically, Keats was so far off the mark that he substituted Cortez for Balboa, not knowing that Cortez had nothing to do with "Darien" or with the first sighting of the Pacific Ocean from the Western Hemisphere by a European.

Washington Irving carried the glorification of Balboa to higher levels than did Keats. At least Irving knew the identity of the European adventurer who first saw the Pacific Ocean from its eastern shores. As with so much of what Irving wrote, his sugar-coated view of Balboa was the view that casual people found hard to relinquish. Unlike Cortez, Alvarado, Nuno de Guzman and the Pizarro brothers, Balboa, as seen by Irving, emerges as a paragon of compassion and far-sightedness, like a spotless Sir Galahad in the conniving court of King Arthur.

Because Balboa was long considered the man about whom nothing evil could be said, because he had achieved fame by being lucky enough to see the Pacific Ocean from its Central American side before other Europeans, and because his last name was short and euphonious, Balboa's name achieved a spurious kind of immortality. In the teens and twenties of the 20th century it became popular for promoters and developers to use the name for cities, parks, and businesses. San Diego began the trend when in November 1910 backers of the Panama-California Exposition decided to name their in-town City Park after the explorer. After that, many cities and

businesses picked up the name. In these cases, the knowledge people had of the historic Vasco Nunez de Balboa or of the Spanish conquest of the New World, which he represented, was taken from the starry-eyed pages of Washington Irving and those of less-talented but no less infatuated writers who followed, of whom Charles L. G. Anderson was a quintessential example. Anderson's eulogy in praise of his hero piled compliment on top of compliment:

> It was Vasco Nunez de Balboa who determined the settlement at Antigua; and it was he who first established the Spaniards in the Isthmus, as well as on the mainland of America. By his ability, tact, and firmness he controlled and amalgamated the disorderly elements of his colony; and first subdued and then conciliated the hostile natives about him. He looked after the welfare of his soldiers, was just to everybody, and impartial in the division of spoils. Even Oviedo, who was not friendly to Balboa, says: "No chieftain who ever went to the Indies equaled him in these respects." Vasco Nunez at this time was about thirty-five years of age, and was tall, muscular, and comely in every part. He had a winning manner, and bore himself in a manly way, as became an honest man and a master of the sword.
>
> (Anderson, *Old Panama*, p. 160)

To be able to portray the external appearance of Balboa with such telling detail showed an unusual degree of clairvoyance or the presence of a crystal ball.

According to the inspirational version, the Spanish conquistadores brought Christianity and civilization to the New World. Everything they did was good for themselves and for people who were on the land before they arrived. They wore beautiful clothes, had gleaming armor and polished shields, were sensitive to beauty and poetry, fought those who were of the devil's party, personified the virtues of loyalty and chivalry, and brought morality and refinement to the New World.

In 1991 a proposal to erect a statue of the explorer in San Diego's Balboa Park elicited a different view of Balboa and of the Spanish conquest, of which he, Christopher Columbus, Hernando Cortez, Francisco Pizarro and Gonzalo Jimenez de Quevada are primary exemplars. As with glorifiers of Balboa in the early years of the 20th century, opponents of the mythic view knew little about the historic Balboa. They knew however, that the white man's treatment of the indigenous inhabitants of the New World was deplorable. It did not matter where these white men came from, whether they were from Northern or Southern Europe, whether they were Protestant or Catholic. They came to the New World with every intent of seizing it and of exterminating its inhabitants. In this clash of the customary view of Balboa as a benefactor and the revisionist view as a sadist and thief, the latter view won out. The plan for a statue was jettisoned. (*San Diego Union*, November 2, 1991, Letters; *San Diego Reporter*, Summer 1993) The name "Balboa Park" stays, though one cannot say that this will always be so.

Sweeping aside, myths, what can be said about Vasco Nunez de Balboa that is closer to the truth than previous versions? No one can hope to give an accurate version as past records are colored by the prejudices of those who wrote them; are based on hearsay or inadequate notes; and are the self-serving testaments of people with ulterior motives. (Romoli, p. 1X.)

Vasco Nunez de Balboa was a remarkable man, who rose from poor beginnings in the town of Jerez de los Caballeros, Estremadura, Castile, where he was born in about 1475, to become a for-a-time successful leader of an *entrada* to Darien in Central America and the first *caudillo* (strong man) in the New World. His purpose was to promote himself, to gain wealth, and to become a *hidalgo* (gentleman). It was the same purpose that motivated all adventurers who came to Spanish-held or about-to-be held lands in the Western Hemisphere. They came from all parts of the Hapsburg Empire; therefore, they were not necessarily Spanish, though the most successful were. They were colonists, evangelists and agents of the crown only when it was advantageous for them to be so.

As the master of an *encomienda* and a raiser of pigs in *Hispaniola* (Santo Domingo), Balboa was not a success. He had incurred debts from gambling and was in danger of being imprisoned. His first foray into the shores of the mainland took place in 1501 as part of the crew of Rodrigo de Bastidas, assisted by Juan de la Cosa, a cartographer who had sailed with Christopher Columbus in 1493. The expeditionaries obtained gold, pearls and *naborias* (slaves) through barter and fighting; but watched as their ships drowned off the coast of Hispaniola. (Romoli, p. 25) In his fourth and last voyage in 1502, Columbus traversed the Atlantic litoral from (to use the modern names) Honduras to the Isthmus of Panama where he reached a point that had been touched by Bastidas the previous year. (Kirkpatrick, p. 37) His attempt to set up a settlement at Santa Maria de Belen on the Isthmus was foiled by Indian attacks. (Sauer, Figure 17). La Cosa made a second expedition to the coast of Uraba in 1504, which resulted in the capture of slaves, the acquisition of gold, pearls and brazilwood and the loss of ships, except for two brigantines and a number of boats, and 150 men, out of an original total of 200. (Oviedo quoted in Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, pp. 7-9)

Through his voyage in 1501, Balboa knew something about the nature of *Tierra Firme*, where the harbors and rivers were, and what could be expected of the natives. His second foray took place in 1509 when, to escape his creditors, he stowed away, along with Leoncico, his mastiff, in a barrel on a ship owned by Martin Fernandez de Enciso (also known as Anciso). The episode earned him the derisive sobriquet *"el hombre del casco"* (the man of the cask). (Bancroft, p. 324)

Enciso, a lawyer, was an investor in and (so he asserted) deputy commander of an expedition to the Spanish Main; Alonso de Ojeda (also known as Hojeda), a nobleman, explorer and favorite of Bishop Juan de Fonseca, president of the Council of the Indies, and Diego de Nicuesa, a planter and operator of gold mines in Hispaniola, were the leaders. Ojeda had obtained a patent for land on what is today the north coast of Colombia, also called Nueva Andalucia (New Grenada since 1536, Colombia since 1819) and Nicuesa had received a patent to land which encompassed what is today Panama, Costa Rica and Nicaragua, also referred to as Veragua. The governors were to receive profits from trade and barter and from proceeds from the mines during the four-year lifetime of their patents after the King's share (referred to as the Royal Fifth) had been deleted. (Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, pp. 9-12) As it turned out, Balboa was fortunate because he knew more about native conditions than other expeditionaries, because he had leadership abilities, and because Ojeda, Nicuesa and Enciso made mistakes. (Parry, John H., p. 52)

Ojeda's first mistake was his foolhardy assault on the Indian village of Turbaco, 12 miles inland from Cartagena, that resulted in the death of the irreplaceable La Cosa. His second—no less

catastrophic—blunder was his attempt to settle at San Sebastian on the Gulf of Uraba (so named because it was thought the saint would protect the invaders from the poisoned arrows of the natives), where the climate was hot and humid, the land swampy, the natives bellicose. Receiving a poisoned arrow in his thigh, Ojeda cured himself by applying hot plates of iron to his wound. Hoping to save his starving company, he left for Hispaniola on a ship, a risky business as Bernardino de Talavera, the captain of the ship, was a pirate. The ship ran aground on the shores of Cuba. Thirty-five survivors made their way through swamps, jungles and grasslands where they were attacked by hostile natives and by slaves who had escaped from Hispaniola. Fortunately, a kindly chief gave succor to the Spaniards who were still alive. With the aid of this chief and other hospitable Indians, Ojeda and his party sailed by canoe to a newly-established Spanish settlement in Jamaica. Here the commander and former rival of Ojeda, Juan de Esquivel, allowed him to leave aboard a ship for Hispaniola. Ruined in health and in reputation, Ojeda died in poverty a year or so later.

While Ojeda was experiencing his travails, Enciso arrived at Cartagena to take his place. Failing to make good their retreat to Hispaniola from San Sebastian, the remnant of Ojeda's colony, under the leadership of Francisco Pizarro, sailed into the bay at Cartagena in their surviving brigantine. Here they joined forces with Enciso's company. After Enciso's ship sunk on a rock while attempting to enter the harbor of San Sebastian, the desperate company chose Balboa as their leader and sailed to Darien on the west side of the Gulf of Uraba, in Nicuesa's territory. Conditions on this side of the Gulf were more favorable for settlement as Indians there did not poison arrows. Here Balboa helped found and was chosen co-Alcalde, with Martin Zamudio, of Santa Maria de la Antigua, also called Darien, after the name of a nearby river. The adventurers had demoted lawyer Enciso because he issued regulations forbidding the retention of gold by private individuals.

Nicuesa and 60 sick and starving members of his original company of 780 arrived at Santa Maria where they attempted to disembark. They had come from a flimsy shelter at Nombre de Dios, about 200 miles to the north.. Suspecting that Nicuesa would assert his authority and expropriate the gold the colonists were extorting from the natives, the Alcaldes sent him and 17 members of his crew to Hispaniola, March 5, 1511, in a rotting brigantine that never reached its destination. Citing Las Casas as a source, Irving claimed Balboa defended Nicuesa and Zamudio ordered his expulsion. (Irving, pp. 426-27) Having read Irving, Bancroft repeated the same story. (Bancroft, p. 335)

To strengthen their authority, the Alcaldes allowed Enciso to return to Hispaniola on a better ship than Nicuesa's. On his trip, Enciso stopped in the village of Macaca, Cuba, whose chief called "Commendador" had earlier befriended the hapless Ojeda. Not enduring the same hardships, Enciso was regaled with stories of how an image of the Virgin that Ojeda had given the chief had enabled him to overcome his enemies. Before Enciso left, two priests from his party baptized 80 to a 100 Indians a day. (Martyr, pp. 240-45; Romoli, p. 81). Encisco went to Spain tell his story of betrayal to King Ferdinand V. Zamudio left for Hispaniola on the same caravel with Enciso. He too went to Spain in the same fleet, but presumably not on the same ship as Enciso, to explain the reasons for the oustings of Nicuesa and Enciso and to plead Balboa's cause. (Romoli, p. 80)

Like Shakespeare in King Henry VI . . . "the first thing we do, let's kill all lawyers," Balboa, remembering lawyer Enciso's vexatious regulations, wrote to the King:

It is for your royal highness to issue an order that no bachiller of laws, or of anything unless it be of medicine, shall come to these parts of Tierra Firme, under a heavy penalty that your highness shall fix; because no bachiller ever comes hither who is not a devil, and they all live like devils, and not, only are they themselves bad, but they make others bad, having always contrivances to bring about litigations and villainies. This is very important to your highness' service in this a new country.

(Letter to King Ferdinand, January 20, 1513, in Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 35 and in Bancroft, p. 329)

As head of an expedition without formal approval, Balboa led sorties into new territories in search of plunder, slaves and food.. His age at the time was about 35. Except for changes necessitated by the
geographic conditions of the Isthmus, where rivers flowed through swamps and tropical forests and were without distinguishing landmarks, his tactics followed those of other Spanish conquistadores. They terrorized, killed and enslaved the Indians. The natives were unprepared for Spanish conquerors, who had perfected techniques of pillage in wars against non-Christian moors, who when they rode horses seemed to be both men and beasts, who came on ships with fluttering white wings, who had destructive cross-bows, fire arms and cannons, and who were accompanied by dogs that mutilated on command.

The most dramatic of Balboa's excursions was a river-boat *entrada* on the Rio Atrato and its tributaries in 1512. This was a hot and wet land of swamps, bayous, morasses, lagoons, and lakes. It was during this expedition that Balboa heard of a valuable country beyond the fiefdom of Dabaibe (also spelled Davaive). Dabaibe was a wealthy chief who traded wrought gold for the products of the coasts, for young boys to eat, and for young girls to eat and to serve the Indians' wives . He had a temple in his village, whose walls were lined with gold, within which he sacrificed human beings to the gods. Of these bloodthirsty acts, Anderson wittily observed, "The Spaniards did not mind Dabaiba [sic] offering up his slaves and captives, but it was not right to let him keep all that gold." He got his gold by barter from mines in the highlands of today's Colombia. While, through stealth, robbery and murder, the explorers obtained small amounts of gold from frightened chiefs along the rivers, they did not venture into Dabaibe's territory and they lost most of their loot after Indians attacked and sank their canoes. Like a strange and enchanted will-o'-the-wisp, the supposed existence of remote and rich gold mines in highlands that continued to recede tantalized the
Spaniards. (Anderson, *Old Panama*, pp. 164-66)

It did not take long for Indians living along the banks of Rios Atrato and Negro to realize what was in store for them.

Abraibes spoke in the following words to Abibaiba: "What is this that is happening, O unfortunate Abibaiba? What race is this that allows us unfortunates that we are no peace? And for how long shall we endure their cruelty? Is it not better to die than to submit to such abuse as

you have endured from them? And not only you, but our neighbours, Abenamacheios, Zemaco, Careca, Poncha, and all the other caciques, our friends? They carry off our wives and sons into captivity before our very eyes, and they seize everything we possess as though it were their booty. Shall we endure this?

(Martyr D'Anghera, pp. 231-32)

Martyr was improvising. Still the gist of what he wrote was relevant to Indian circumstances. Abraibes' eloquence yielded him nothing for the Indian attack on the Spanish camp at Abanumaque was repulsed. (Romoli, p. 129) However, the tropical diseases that afflicted the Spanish and the frequency of Indian attacks were such that Balboa and his lieutenant, Bartolome Hurtado, were forced to cancel the *entrada* and to make a run for the safety of Darien.

Balboa had a three-fold problem. He had to avoid starvation, to conquer the natives and to obtain sanction for his position. Relief supplies from Hispaniola were so long in coming that in a letter to King Ferdinand January 20, 1513, he wrote, "But until now we have valued the eatables more than gold, for we have more gold than health, and often I have searched in various directions, desiring more to find a sack of corn than a bag of gold." (quoted in Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 29). He gained respite from persecution when Admiral Don Diego de Colon, son of Christopher Columbus and Governor and Captain-General of Hispaniola appointed him Governor and Captain-General of Darien pending a decision from King Ferdinand. His position was partially secured when he received orders, dated December 23, 1511, that King Ferdinand had confirmed his appointment '"until such time as I order otherwise and appoint someone else, which will be done." (Romoli, p. 91)

Problems with natives were the smallest part of his worries. Through diplomacy and deceit he obtained allies among the Indians in their feuds with others and enough gold and slaves to show that he was doing well and to mollify his factious followers. He accepted as his concubine a daughter of Careta (Chima according to Romoli), an Indian chief who, along with Comogre, another chief had been baptized. His obstacles were administrators in Hispaniola and their bosses in Spain, up to and including King Ferdinand.

Acting in the treacherous role later assigned to La Malinche, the Indian woman who guided Hernando Cortez during his conquest of Tenochtitlan in 1521, Balboa's Indian mistress warned him of an attack planned by five Indian chiefs which Balboa and his men were able to foil, hanging in the process the leaders of the conspiracy. (Martyr, pp. 234-36}

As long as Balboa was able to obtain gold and slaves from the Indians through barter, conquest and torture, his position was relatively secure. Settlers on the Antilles needed the slaves as servants and to work the sugar fields and gold was a source of power and prestige. To avoid runaway slaves, Balboa suggested that slaves from the Antilles be sent to Darien as they were unlikely to run away from land they did not know. While this was an early stage of Spanish conquest, Indians on the Caribbean islands were rapidly being decimated and the export of black slaves from Africa to replace them was accelerating. (Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 33; Schurz, p. 161)

After a heavy storm carried away corn from the fields, Balboa sent the colonist's procurador, Juan de Valdivia to Hispaniola, January 13, 1512, to obtain supplies and food. Valdivia carried the King's and the colonists' gold. His ship was wrecked off the coast of Jamaica. A boat carrying the survivors drifted for 13 days before landing on a beach in Yucatan, opposite the island of Cozumel. Here Mayan Indians slit open the chests and tore out the hearts of three of the Spaniards, including Valdivia before eating their remains. Seven of the Spaniards escaped; of which number only two, Fray Geronimo de Aguilar, a Franciscan monk, and Gonzalo Guerrero, survived by becoming slaves to chiefs.

When the much-anticipated treasure ship failed to arrive in Spain, Balboa's cause before the Royal Court ricocheted down. Martyr mistakenly claimed that Cubans had massacred Valdivia and his companeros. (Martyr, p 239) The mystery of what happened to them was cleared up in February of 1519 when Hernando Cortez stopped at Yucatan, on his way to Mexico. Here he rescued Fray Geronimo but Guerrero, who had become a war captain, refused to be leave his Mayan wife and children. Having learned the Mayan language, Fray Geronimo became an interpreter for Cortez. (Parkes, p. 42)

Though Balboa wanted the Indians to be tractable, he also wanted them to conform to Spanish customs. This meant that they would have to abjure cannibalism and homosexuality. Punishments for both were extreme, probably more so than they would have been in Spain because miscreants were torn on the spot by dogs rather than being stretched on the rack and burnt at the stake..

Those Indians who eat men, and others at the bottom of the Gulf of Uraba and in the extensive flooded parts, have no workshops nor do they support themselves on anything but fish, which they exchange for maize. These are worthless people; and when canoes of Christians have gone on the great river of San Juan, they have come against them and have killed some of our people. The country where the Indians eat men is bad and useless and can never at any time be turned to account. Those Indians of Caribana have richly deserved death a thousand times over; for they are an evil race and killed many of our Christians when we lost the ship.

(Letter to King Ferdinand V, January 20, 1513, in Blacker, p. 51.)

The Spaniards proceeded to Torecha's village and took possession of it on September 23, 1513. Here occurred an incident of ruthless and misguided dogging that has left a dark stain on the record of an otherwise relatively exemplary conquistador. In one of the Indian habitations the Spaniards found forty or fifty male patricians attired as females. Their leader was Torecha's brother, who from infancy had worn women's apparel, ornamenting himself with bracelets and necklaces, and anointing his smooth skin with fine pomades. In the prince's house were found clay models depicting acts of sodomy, and other such proof of the open practice of the *pecado nefando y sucio*,
"the nefarious and dirty sin," which was to be seen throughout the province. Outraged, Balboa had Torecha's brother and his companions thrown to his eagerly awaiting hounds, who swiftly tore them to pieces.

(Varner, p. 41.)

Martyr's version was shorter, less colorful and probably more accurate:

Vasco discovered that the village of Quarequa was stained by the foulest vice. The king's brother and a number of other courtiers were dressed as women, and according to the accounts of neighbours {sic} shared the same passion. Vasco ordered forty of them to be torn to pieces by dogs.

(Martyr, p. 285)

A story told by Martyr goes that Balboa first learned of a great sea on the other side of the Isthmus while he was receiving a gift of gold at the house of Comogre. Ponquiaco (also known as Panciaco), the eldest son of the chief, informed him there was a land near this sea that was rich in gold. (While Francisco Pizarro would later prove this story to be true, it is not clear exactly which land the chief's son had in mind . Colombia, Peru, or the non-existent El Dorado.)

If your thirst of gold is such that in order to satisfy it you disturb peaceable people and bring misfortune and calamity among them, if you exile yourselves from your country in search of gold, I will show you a country where it abounds and where you can satisfy the thirst that torments you.

(Martyr, p. 220)

Balboa knew that if he were to claim the new sea and the lands abutting for Spain, his precarious position in Darien would be stabilized. Accordingly, he went north by ship to what he thought would be the narrowest part of the Isthmus at Acla, seat of Careta, his Indian ally, about 80 miles up the Caribbean coast from Darien. From there he set out with Indian guides and 190 Spaniards to cross the Isthmus. The way, about 50 miles, was obstructed by swamps, rivers, lakes and tropical forests teeming with mosquitoes, reptiles and wild beasts and blocked by hostile Indians. During the day the temperature often reached 120 degrees. (Strawn, p. 126) In contrast to other commentators, Parry & Keith described "much of the area" as "populous and cultivated." (Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 6) With his talent for diplomacy, use of threats, and admonitory killings, including the massacre of the transvestites previously mentioned, Balboa placated or intimidated the Indians. (Howarth, p. 29)

Finally on what may have been September 25 or September 27, 1513, on a summit in Quarequa, Balboa saw an ocean before him he called the *Mar del Sur* (South Sea). (The exact date is uncertain.) Sauer claimed that the summit was in "the land of Porque," rather than Quarequa as it "was the nearest and most accessible place for him to see the open sea." (Sauer, p. 233) If the lord of Quarequa was Porque, who had resisted Balboa's advance and was slain, as Bancroft maintained, the difficulty disappears. (Bancroft, pp. 363-64) In any case, in Bancroft's overblown words: "In that first illimitable glance time stood back, the mists lifted, and eternity was there." (Bancroft, p. 367)

Balboa erected a cross at the crest and carved the name of his King on trees. Andres de Vera, a priest, sang "Te Deum laudamus: Te Deum confitemur." Two days later Balboa reached the shore of the Gulf of San Miguel, so named in honor of the saint whose day it was. According to

an account related by Peter Martyr, Representative of the Pope and Counselor to the Indies at the Castilian Court, Balboa waded into the salt water, raised the banner of Castile and took possession of the sea and the lands adjacent for the sovereigns of Spain. (Kirkpatrick,, p. 54; Boorstin, p. 258..)

While Keats' version of the occasion put "stout Cortez" " on a peak in Darien," it is Balboa's wading into the water that was the most important act in his life and the act that artists and sculptors would subsequently depict in his memory. Gonzalo Hernandez de Oviedo's account of the incident has Balboa marching back and forth along the beach while making his claim. The discrepancy is due to the fact that when Balboa arrived the tide was out and he had to wait for it to come in. Oviedo arrived in Darien in 1514. He knew and praised Balboa, but, like Martyr, he was not present when the event took place. (Oviedo's version in Blacker, pp. 56-57.) Sadly for Balboa's reputation, Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas claimed in his *Historia general* (1601) (Bancroft, p. 370) that the first European to reach the ocean was Alonso Martin de Don Benito, who a day before Balboa reached the Pacific Ocean leaped into a canoe and paddled into the water. (Irving, p. 460; Morison, p. 203.).

On his return to Darien on what turned out to be a longer and more dangerous route, Balboa threw Pacra (also known as Poncra) an Indian chief and three sub-chiefs to the dogs, seized the wives, daughters, and female slaves of Indian chiefs along the way, and held Tubanama, an Indian chief, for ransom. Such actions horrified Oviedo, who for the most part supported Balboa. (Sauer, p. 235) As Cortez was to do in his conquest of the Aztec empire, Balboa by siding with some caciques in their interminable wars with others was able to secure allies, gold, slaves, provisions and care for his sick and wounded. (Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 43)

Balboa's vindictive sentence of Pacra was too much for the hero-worshipping Irving who called it "a foul and cruel blot on the character of Vasco Nunez." (Irving, p. 417) Bancroft in a keen stroke of irony wrote: "And very prettily Balboa commemorates his outrage by calling the place Todos Los Santos." (Bancroft, p. 380)

Writing from Spain, where he was comfortably removed from the mayhem, Martyr justified Balboa's action because Pacra was "a brute beast, savage and monstrous" with morals "on a par with his bearing and physiognomy." The immoral act specified was that "he had carried off the daughters of four neighboring caciques to satisfy his brutal passions." "Brutal" apparently in Pacra but not so when Spanish companeros and other caciques did the same. (Martyr, p. 301) Using Oviedo as his source, Sauer asserted the reason for Pacra's death was more pragmatic than moral for "he could not reveal where their non-existent gold mines lay." (Sauer, p. 236)

Irving's panegyric of Balboa at the conclusion of his trek to the South Sea reaches heights of adulation:

Thus ended one of the most remarkable expeditions of the early discoverers. The intrepidity of Vasco Nunez in penetrating with a handful of men far into the interior of a wild and mountainous country, peopled by warlike tribes; his skill in managing his band of rough adventurers, their obedience, and attaching their affections, show him to have possessed great qualities as a

general. We are told that he was always foremost in peril and the last to quit the field. He shared the toils and dangers of the meanest of his followers, treating them with frank affability; watching, fighting, fasting, and laboring with them; visiting and consoling such as were sick and infirm, and dividing all his gains with fairness and liberality. He was chargeable at times with acts of bloodshed and injustice, but it is probable that these were often called for as measures of safety and precaution; he certainly offended less against humanity than most of the early discoverers; and the unbounded sanity and confidence reposed in him by the natives when they became intimately acquainted with his character, speak strongly in favor of his kind treatment of them.

(Irving, pp. 475-476.)

Wanting to see for himself just how difficult was Balboa's trek through the jungle, David Howarth had himself lowered by helicopter into the middle of the jungle so he could walk out. His descriptions of the dense and damp terrain are vivid and his conclusion supports the claim of unparalleled hardship:

It must have been one of the hardest marches in history. It was certainly one of the slowest. The distance was negligible, in open terrain, a healthy man could have walked it in a day. But time and distance have other meanings in the jungle. Balboa's rate of advance was just over a mile a day. Some days were spent in fighting or diplomacy, or in waiting for the sick and exhausted men to catch up, but his best days' marches put only another three or four miles behind him.

(Howarth, p. 40)

To which, Anderson's comment, "I doubt if today a company of one hundred and ninety white men, with modern hygienic precautions, could wander over the Isthmus for four and a half months without a single fatality," provides an apt counterpoint.

(Anderson, *Old Panama*, p. 180)

Reflecting the jubilation occasioned by Balboa' s sighting of the Pacific Ocean (whose presence the
Portuguese explorer Magellan confirmed in 1520) and the prospect of inexhaustible riches, Martyr wrote to Pope Leo X:

Spain need no longer plough up the ground to the depth of the infernal regions or open great roads or pierce mountains at the cost of labour and the risk of a thousand dangers, in order to draw wealth from the earth. She will find riches on the surface in shallow diggings; she will find them in the sun-dried banks of rivers; it will suffice to merely sift the earth.

(Martyr, p. 314)

Such optimism may have found corroboration in the gold and silver mines of Mexico, Peru and Colombia. Panama, however, was another matter for much of what it had was "the accumulation

of generations." (Sauer, p. 246) Relatively little gold could be obtained by mining and washing on the Isthmus and, such as there was, was soon depleted.

Upon arriving at Darien, on January 19, 1514, after a five month's absence, Balboa sent Pedro de Arbolancha to the King bearing gifts of gold and pearls and a letter dated March 4 describing his discovery of a great sea to the west, thus supporting the belief advanced by Amerigo Vespucci in 1503 that a *Mundus Novus* (New World) existed between Europe and Asia. (Bancroft, pp. 384-85; Iglesia, pp. 251-52) While perhaps not a matter of great import, Martyr gave the date of Balboa's return to Darien as February 14, 1514. (Martyr, p. 314)

Aware of the sharp contrast between the power of the Spaniards and the weakness of the Indians, Arthur Helps pungently observed:

In his letter to the King, Vasco Nunez mentioned that he had not lost a man in these battles with the Indians. But, indeed, why should he have done so; for what was there in their simple weapons and innocent mode of warfare that could, unless by accident, destroy a well-armed man?

(Helps, p. 372

Unfortunately for Balboa, the exiled Enciso had arrived at the Spanish court and had given the King an account of Balboa's seizure of authority. Acting on the advice of Juan de Fonseca, Bishop of Burgos, the King appointed Pedro Arias de Avila (also known as Pedrarias Davila) Governor of Darien; thus making Darien (renamed Castilla del Oro) a crown colony tenuously independent of officials in Hispaniola. Realizing, however, that results are more important than methods, the King appointed Balboa to be *Adelantado* (Captain) of the South Sea and Governor of Panama bordering the sea and of Coiba, an undefined territory extending from the south to the north side of the Isthmus. (Strawn, p. 192) The newly-appointed governor Pedrarias scoffed at the appointment, claiming "Panama" was a word meaning "fishermen" and Coiba meant "far away" even as he sent his captains Juan de Ayora and Gaspar de Morales to occupy the land. (Sauer, pp. 255-56) Unwittingly, the King laid the groundwork for conflict between Pedrarias and Balboa.

In a story illustrative of Balboa's unassuming qualities, when the armada bearing the 70-year old Governor Pedrarias and 1500 gold seekers and cavaliers arrived in state at Darien in 1514, an officer from the ship found Balboa in common clothes helping his Indian slaves thatch his house. The effete newcomers believed enormous quantities of gold could be obtained simply by fishing for it with nets. An estimated 700 of them died of starvation and sickness after the rations they brought with them ran out. (Las Casas, Book 3, p. 197-99) Others, including Bernal Diaz, chronicler of Cortez' expedition to Mexico, went to Cuba to enlist under the standard of Diego Velazquez, who was then colonizing that island. (Irving, p. 490) These were the men King Ferdinand had sent to cross the Isthmus in search of the South Sea from which the King hoped to procure the riches of the Spice Islands, China and Japan. Pedrarias hid his fury in finding that the discovery of the South Sea had already been made in an exquisite exchange of compliments. Among those who accompanied Pedrarias to Darien were Dona Isabel de Bobadilla, his wife, Gonzalo Hernandez de Oviedo, inspector of gold mines, Gaspar de Espinosa, Alcalde Mayor,

Alonso de la Puente, treasurer, and Martin Fernandez de Enciso, the lawyer whom Balboa had deported three years before.

.For 60 days after the arrival of Pedrarias, Balboa had to submit to a *residencia* or inquiry into his activities as interim Governor and Captain-General, so ordered directly by King Ferdinand. (Sauer, p. 230) At the conclusion of the inquiry "the guilty" were to be put in chains and sent to Spain "in order that they might be proceeded against with all the rigor of justice." (Strawn, p. 158) Luckily, Balboa was acquitted of the death of Nicuesa and his crimes against the Indians went unnoticed because, in the words of Las Casas, "to kill and rob Indians was never considered a crime in the Indies." (Las Casas, Book 3, p. 198) The inquiry was "suspended" rather than terminated after Balboa paid fines and damages to Enciso and others "more then he had in the world" (Romoli, p. 266, p. 402) and letters arrived from the King, March 1515, countermanding his previous orders and directing Pedrarias to "treat him [Balboa] and favor him and look after him as someone who has always served us." (Blacker, p. 60)

Pedrarias and Balboa kept up a show of temperate/intemperate relations for five years, Pedrarias at one time placing Balboa in a cage in his house for requesting assistance from Cuba for an expedition across the Isthmus, and then, following the intercession of Juan de Quevado, the first bishop of Darien, offering him his daughter in Spain in marriage by proxy. The Bishop's alliance with Balboa may be explained from the fact that he had become Balboa's partner in farming enterprises and that he shared ownership of slaves and Indians with him. (Oviedo quoted in Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 64) For his part, Balboa was chagrined that he had been superseded and was forbidden to leave Darien. He wrote the King, October 16, 1515, protesting the shady practices of the new Governor

He is a man in whom reign all the envy and covetousness in the world; he is wretched when he sees that there is friendship between any persons of worth; it delights him to hear fables and chatter from one and the other; he is a man who very lightly gives credit to evil counsels rather than to those of good; he is a person without any discretion and without any dexterity or talent for the affairs of government.

(Navarrete, Martin Fernandez de, *Coleccion de viajes*, Madrid, 1825-37, quoted in Helps, p. 428)

Historians agree with Balboa that Pedrarias and his underlings were a gold -seeking scourge on the land (*Furor Domini*). Pedrarias may not have been the greatest tyrant in history, but he qualified as one of the worse. Since the contrast was in Balboa's favor, this is one of the reasons why he fared so well in accounts by his contemporaries and by later historians. The contrast, however, does not make Balboa a Solomon. It would be more apt to call him a wise and crafty, but sometimes gullible opportunist.

Describing the *monteria infernal* ("hellish hunting") of friendly Indians at Comogre, Pocorosa and
Tubanama by Juan de Ayora, a captain in Pedrarias' company, Alonso Zuazo, *Juez de residencia* in the Caribbean islands, warned the 18-year old King Charles V in a letter to his tutor Monsieur de Xevres:

. . .all the land has become so aroused and alarmed by the grave indignities, killings, brutal robbery, and the burning of settlements that all the Castilians maintain themselves only like birds of prey and all the land is lost and desolate.

(Sauer, p. 250)

Having enriched himself with gold seized from Indians under threat of death and without registering it or paying the Royal Fifth, Ayora retreated hastily to Castile in what Las Casas reported to be a stolen ship to avoid an inquiry into his deeds. Pedrarias, his commander, was apparently aware of his subordinate's dereliction of duty (his mission was to establish settlements on the north side of the Isthmus which would serve to connect with the South Sea and not to gather plunder), but chose to say nothing because he was a close friend of Ayora's brother, Gonzalo de Ayora. (Las Casas, Book 3, p. 203)

Martyr, who at first was disposed to favor Ayora as "a noble young gentleman of Cordova," wrote to Pope Leo X:

In all the turmoils and tragic affairs of the Ocean, nothing have so much displeased me as the covetousness of this man.

(Martyr quoted by Strawn, p. 190)

Bartolome Hurtado showed companeros how they could evade inquiry and keep their share of the gold and slaves extorted from Indians by sharing it with the Governor, the bishop, the alcalde mayor, the treasurer and other people of power. (Anderson, *Old Panama*, p. 190)

Allowing that Zuazo was an agent of the humane Hieronymite administration in Hispaniola, his praise of Balboa—since it was contemporary praise—carries more weight than the mawkish effusions of later-day sentimentalists:

Vasco Nunez labored with very good skill to make peace with many caciques and principal rulers of the Indians, by which he kept the peace among thirty or more chiefs with all their people. He did this by moderating his demands on them, accepting only gifts freely offered, and mediating the disputes among them. He was so popular with them that he could travel in perfect safety over a hundred leagues of Tierra Firme.

(Martyr, Vol. 1, pp. 204-217)

In an *entrada* to the Gulf of San Miguel, Francisco de Becerra showed he was cut from a different cloth than his rapacious commander Juan de Ayora as he treated the Indians with courtesy. The result was that he was allowed to pass through the country unmolested, was given several thousand pesos of gold, and was told about black men living in the jungle, presumably escaped slaves from Hispaniola, and of a rich land called Biru, or Peru, many miles to the south. This was the name the Spaniards would later give to the Inca Empire. Romoli claimed the Indians used the term "black" to mean evil and, therefore, the dark-skinned people were Indians. (Romoli, p. 253) Martyr's explanation that "negro pirates of Ethiopia established themselves

after the wreck of their ships in these mountains" was indicative of his childish belief in absurdities, such as his attribution of Spanish victories to the intervention of the Virgin Mary. (Martyr, p. 286-87) Irving claimed that an Indian chief on one of the Pearl Islands informed Gaspar de Morales and Francisco Pizarro of the existence of the kingdom of Peru. (Irving, p. 500)

Becerra was not as lucky in a punitive and less courteous expedition to look for gold mines on the east side of the Gulf of Uraba. Here the Indians, who were skilled in ambush, destroyed Becerra's entire party, with the exception of an Indian boy servant, who carried news of the disaster to Darien. (Anderson, *Old Panama*, p. 190)

Inflamed by their treatment at the hands of Pedrarias' soldiers, Indian tribes accomplished what before then would have been an impossible feat of uniting under the leadership of Pocorosa. They captured Santa Cruz, a settlement founded by Juan de Ayora in May 1515 to replace Acla as the north coast terminus for a new and shorter route to the South Sea. They destroyed the settlement, cut off the limbs of Spaniards with sharp stones, and poured gold down their throats, crying, "Eat! Eat gold, Christian, take your fill of gold." (Bancroft, p. 403; Varner, p. 49) (Story, in all probability apocryphal, first appeared in *La historia del mondo nuevo* [1565] by Girolamo Berzoni per Milbrath, p. 196)

Cabalgadas (pillaging expeditions) to the South Seas ordered by Pedrarias were marked by monstrous acts of cruelty. These were led by Gaspar de Morales, Francisco Pizarro, Gonzalo de Badajoz, and Gaspar de Espinosa. Payment consisted of plunder with the Royal Fifth being set aside first and shares given to the governor, his officials, those who supplied money, food and slaves, down to the captains and their companeros, including owners of horses. (Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 71-72) There were so many abductions, enslavements, killings, mutilations, rapes, robberies, and tortures, it would be tedious to recite them all

Attempting to stop a rebellion at the Gulf of San Miguel, Morales threw 19 chiefs to his dogs and massacred about 700 of their followers. (Romoli, p. 272) He took up the practice of beheading his captives and leaving their heads at intervals along the trail, hoping that the frightening spectacle would delay pursuing Indians. (Anderson, *Old Panama*, p. 194) (Pizarro was picking up pointers he would use in his conquest of Peru.)

Having learned from the Juan de Ayora's example, after returning to Darien, Morales pleaded "illness" and was given permission to sail to Spain with the profits of his bloody excursions safety secured (Strawn, p. 209)

Alcalde Espinosa may have ridden a donkey (accounts differ) while the men in his company rode horses. The sight of both terrified the Indians. The dean of the padres at Darien accompanied Espinosa's expedition. Both men were indifferent to the restraints of their callings. When the occasion arose, the priest was as greedy for gold and slaves as were his companeros. (Bancroft, pp. 420-21)

As an Alcalde, Espinosa was supposed to know about the Laws of the Indies that dictated humane treatment of Indians and required that the Indians be asked to submit to the rule of the

King of Spain before they could be enslaved. When the *requerimiento* was observed, it was read to Indians in Spanish, a language they did not understand; more often it was ignored. Seeking to recover a fortune in gold abandoned by Gonzalo de Badajoz, Espinosa's troops killed an estimated 40,000 Indians. (Romoli, pp. 308-12) With his usual perspicacity, Anderson remarked, "Gaspar de Espinosa was more successful as a looter than as a lawyer, though some may claim a relationship between the terms." (Anderson, *Old Panama*, p. 212)

Anderson wrote that Espinosa invented "a new terror for the Indians." This was to tie them to trees and blow them to pieces with missiles fired from field artillery. (Anderson*, Life & Letters*, p. 286) To spare himself from such a prospect, chief Cutatara instructed two Indians to "betray" the location where the loot had been stashed. Espinosa and Badajoz before him met their match in the chief Parizao Pariba, also known as Paris, who eluded capture and caused panic among the Spaniards.. (Bancroft, pp. 424-25; Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, pp. 61-62)

As supervisor of gold smelting, Oviedo was in charge of converting Indian ornaments brought to him by the soldiers into raw gold. What he saw while doing this confirmed his low opinion of the Indians (Iglesia, pp. 227-28) and contributed to his disagreement with Las Casas over how they should be treated:

Thus, what I have said of the people on this island and its neighbors is very well known, and applies also to the mainland,, where many of these Indian men and women were sodomites, and it is known that many of them are [still]. Observe the degree to which they take pride in this sin: just as other people are accustomed to wearing jewels or precious stones around their necks, in some parts of these Indies they wear a jewel made of gold, representing one man on top of another in that base and diabolical act of Sodom. I saw one of these jewels of the devil that weighed twenty pesos of gold, cast in a mold and hollow inside, which was acquired on the coast of the mainland in the year 1514, when the Armada that the Catholic King sent to Castilla del Oro, with
his Captain General Pedrarias touched there, and they subsequently brought it to be smelted before me as a royal officer and overseer of gold smelting. I broke it with a hammer and pounded it up with my own hands on an anvil in the smelting house in the city of Darien.

(Oviedo, *Historia general*, quoted in Lunenfeld, p.238)

Andagoya, who like Oviedo, was a witness to events at Castilla del Oro during the governorship of
Pedrarias, formed a diametrically different impression of the Indians. His descriptions have an objective quality that an anthropologist would appreciate:

They have no ceremony or worship in this land, but they live by the laws of nature, keeping the laws not to kill, not to steal, and not to take another's wife. They know not what evidence is, but they hold it to be a very evil thing to lie. They also refrain from taking their father's principal wives, their sisters, or daughters for wives, because they hold it to be wrong.

(Andagoya quoted in Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 57)

During the hypocritical thaw between Balboa and Pedrarias, Pedrarias, fearing the King's displeasure should he hear of his ill treatment of him, gave Balboa permission to attempt a second *entrada* into the Atrato basin, with the goal of reaching the fabled land of Dabaibe. Begun in July 1515, under the joint command of Balboa and Luis Carillo, the expedition lasted less than a month. This time Balboa reached Dabaibe's camp only to find it deserted with all treasure gone. Fearing starvation because locusts had ravaged the land, he was forced to retreat with grissly consequences, for Indians attacked his canoes, killed three and wounded 30 of his men, including Balboa who received a gash on his head, and Carillo, who died a few days later of a wound to his chest. (Strawn, p, 212).

Pedrarias and his allies lost no time in belittling Balboa for the failure of the expedition. As Las Casas put it: "They rejoiced because it wouild water Balboa's reputation for having accomplished great things, and now, if they should fail, no one would wonder at it." (Las Casa quoted by Strawn, p. 213)

His decision forced by an injunction from Bishop Quevado and his subordinate officials, which he
submitted to on June 9, 1517, Pedrarias gave Balboa and a force of over 200 men grudging approval to go to the *gobernacion* of the coast of the South Sea that King Ferdinand had granted him two and a half years before. (Balboa was after all his future son-in-law.) First, Balboa would have to rebuild the fort at Acla that the cacique Careta, Balboa's former ally, had destroyed. (Strawn, p. 254) To obtain money to buy supplies Balboa formed "The South Sea Company" and sent materials on the backs of Indians and Negroes from Acla to the South Sea for construction of four brigantines.

Foxy as always, Pedrarias gave Balboa approximately seven months to build the ships (extended later to 11 months), found a settlement on the coasts of the South Sea, and to make voyages of discovery. (Strawn, p. 266) Parry & Keith maintained that the order to cut and shape the timbers at Acla and to carry them more than 30 miles to the Rio Balsas before they were assembled and floated down to the Gulf of San Miquel came from Pedrarias, who was trying to hamstrung the operation. (Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 50) This seemingingly fantastic accusation (to those who do not know Pedrarias) cannot be reconciled with Oviedo's statement that the Governor lent Balboa "some money for this fleet from the King's treasury." (Oviedo quoted in Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 69)

Balboa may have intended to sail on the brigantines to wealthy lands with beasts of burden (llamas) that the Indian chief Tumaco had told him were to the south. (Irving, p. 466) The shipbuilding was worthless as, by the time the timbers arrived, they were worm-eaten. Balboa apparently believed that the wood of trees near Acla was so bitter that worms would not attack it. (Strawn, p. 268) Using lumber available on the south coast, Balboa launched and sailed two brigantines, the "San Cristobal" and the "Santa Maria de la Buena Esperanza", to the *Archipielago de las Perlas* (Pearl Islands) off the coast from the Gulf of San Miquel, a shorter trip than would have been a perilous journey to *terra incognita* near the equator. As usual, Irving was awed by his hero's doings:

We know few instances . . . more striking than this piecemeal transportation across the mountains of Darien of the first European ships that plowed the waves of the Pacific; and we can readily excuse the boast of the old Castilian writers when they exclaim "That none but Spaniards could ever have conceived or persisted in such an undertaking, and no commander in the New World but Vasco Nunez could have conducted it to a successful issue."

(Irving, p. 511)

Balboa's use of Indians, some of whom he seized on the way, for the work of portage over hills and
mountains, lakes and streams, led to an inflated accusation that he was responsible for the death of between 500 (Oviedo) and 2,000 natives (Las Casas). Interestingly, not one Negro nor Spaniard died in the work. (Anderson, *Old Panama*, p. 202) Balboa's efforts were forestalled when Francisco Pizarro arrived at the South Sea coast to arrest him on a charge of treason. Pedrarias may not have known of Balboa's complaining letters to the King, but he saw him as a rival who had to be removed, particularly after he had received word a new Governor was to be appointed and he, as Balboa had already done, would have to submit to a *residencia*.

Acting under Pedrarias' orders, Alcalde Espinosa condemned Balboa, Pedrarias' presumptive son-in-law, and four others to death by beheading. The excuse was that Balboa had disobeyed a command by sending spies to his residence in Acla to find out if the rumor of a new governor was true. Balboa was afraid that a replacement governor would revoke his license to build and use ships for exploration. Ironically, Andres Garabito, a spy who went into town to find out what was going on, betrayed Balboa to Pedrarias because he coveted the young girl whom the Indian chief Careta had given to Balboa as a mistress. (Varner p. 53.) While not necessarily contradicting the story of the fatal attractions of a young Indian woman, Oviedo reported that Garabito turned State's evidence to save his own life. (*Historia general* by Oviedo, libro 29, capitulo 12, in Helps, p. 433; Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 70)

Since the records of Balboa's trial were, perhaps deliberately, lost, opinions about his ultimate plan, or if indeed there was a plan, are surmises. Though the mere sending of a messenger in secret to find out information does not appear to merit such a grave consequence as beheading, Pedrarias and his Council made out of it the charge that Balboa planned to lead an expedition into the South Sea where he would be far from the Governor's and the King's orders. His move would thus be similar to Hernando Cortez' who invaded Mexico against the wishes of Diego Velazquez, his commander, in Cuba. (Innes, p. 201) Unfortunately for Balboa, Bishop Quevado, his protector, had left for Spain shortly after he had arranged Balboa's marriage to Pedrarias' daughter and was not on hand to resist the machinations of Balboa's enemies. (Oviedo quoted in Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 68)

Andagoya, who was one of Balboa's shipbuilding party in 1517 and who witnessed events leading up to Balboa's death, backed up the official explanation for Balboa's execution when he claimed Balboa was determined "that the new governor might not break up the expedition." (Strawn, p. 329-30) Oviedo concurred with Andagoya that Balboa's aim was to make an expedition to the South Sea with or without approval from his superiors. To do this, he hoped to secure the support of the Hieronymite fathers in Santo Domingo, who exercised a theoretical

jurisdiction over the Indies in a move that Pedrarias regarded as an act of insubordination. (Oviedo quoted in Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 70) Martyr wrote to Pope Leo X that Balboa's destination was to be "the southern coasts of the land supposed to be a continent." (Martyr, Book IX, p. 50)

While she did not contradict, the theory of an expedition to evade authorities, Romoli considered the likely location for Balboa's withdrawal to have been Chepavare an *asiento* 18 miles closer to Acla than Panama. King Charles V on March 20, 1518 had given this province to Diego de Albitez despite the fact that King Ferdinand in 1515 had given the *asiento* to Balboa. If Balboa were on the land before the replacement Governor arrived, he might be able to keep Albitez away. (Romoli, p. 326; map, pp. 244-45) Also, differing from the expedition as escape theory, Sauer held that Balboa intended to found a town on the north end of the Bay of Panama [Chepavare?], on land he regarded as his. (Sauer, p. 264) The Spanish Court was unaware of or blind to the overlapping of Albitez' and Balboa's grants. (Romoli, p. 326)

Perhaps a clue to Balboa's motive in moving to Chepavare—if that was his intention—may be found in the decision of Hernando Cortez to establish the town of Veracruz as the onset of his *entrada* into Mexico. "By establishing a town," the historian Parkes wrote, "the Spaniards assumed certain rights of self-government and passed under the direct control of the Spanish king." (Parkes, p. 44)

Since Balboa's *residencia*, begun five years before, had not been concluded, Pedrarias ordered that it be reopened. A multitude of charges, proven and unproven, were thus piled on to the charges of conspiracy and failure to obey orders. (Oviedo quoted in Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 71) After Alcalde Espinosa declared Balboa and five other defendants guilty of treason, the prisoners appealed to the Council of the Indies and then to the Hieronymite governors in Santo Domingo, as was their right under Spanish law. Realizing that if the appeals were granted, Balboa would be allowed to testify in Spain, Pedrarias ordered Espinosa to sentence Balboa and four other defendants, Andres de Valderrabano, Luis Botello, Hernan Munoz, and Fernando de Arguello, "with all haste and without any delay whatsoever . . . without stay or reprieve . . . to the extreme rigor of the law; and having thus declared sentence . . . that you carry it to due effect and actual execution." (Romoli, pp. 340-41)

Arguello, an investor in the South Sea enterprise, had written to Balboa advising him to set sail without waiting for an extension of time from Pedrarias, whom he suspected wanted to take over command of the expedition. In addition, Arguello promised to write to the Hieronymite fathers in Santo Domingo defending his advice. Having learned of Arguello's intercessions, Pedrarias regarded him as a traitor whose fate was settled. (Strawn, p. 270) Rodrigo Perez, a priest and a member of Balboa's company, was spared execution because of his calling. He was shipped off to Spain in chains, where, as an illustration of how skeptically the Spanish court regarded the judicial system in its colonies, he was promoted to the office of arch-deacon and sent back to Castilla del Oro. (Oviedo cited in Strawn, p. 302)

So, on or about January 12, 1519, in the town of Acla, after he had protested his loyalty to King Charles V, confessed his sins, and taken communion, an executioner cut off the head of Vasco Nunez de Balboa, then in his 42nd year of age.

Pedrarias witnessed the executions by peeping from behind a lattice in a building a few paces away. (Strawn, p. 297)

With his sharp sense of romance, Irving considered Balboa's death to be the tragic ending of a wonderful career:

> Thus perished, in his forty-second year, in the prime and vigor of his days and the full career of his glory, one of the most illustrious and deserving of the Spanish discoverers—a victim to the basest and most perfidious envy. (Irving, p. 533.)

Andagoya explanation of Pedrarias' motive was blunt: "The Governor was angry because Balboa had not sent him any slaves; and he did not like him anyway." (Romoli, p. 333)

His hatred unappeased, Pedrarias ordered Balboa's head to be put on a pole in the plaza, where it remained for many days.

To reward Espinosa for his verdict against Balboa, Pedrarias gave him the two ships Balboa had built with which he sailed west along the South Coast, seizing maize, gold and pearls from the natives. The appointment was conferred on Espinosa before he had handed down his sentence at the instigation of The South Sea Company. (Oviedo quoted by Strawn, p. 305; Andagoya quoted by Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 59; Oviedo quoted by Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 71) Oviedo did not mention that in the same year Balboa was beheaded Pedrarias gave Espinosa an *encomienda* of 234 Indian men and women in the territory of Panama, which Espinosa defended in the double-speak language ("ignorance is strength; freedom is slavery"), that George Orwell satirized so brilliantly in his novel *1984*:

> Item, if they know that the said cacique [Pacora] and his principals and Indians love me so much and get along so well with me, and are so satisfied and happy to be mine, that they would be greatly grieved if I should leave them and they were given in *encomienda* to any other person, so much so that they might be lost and many of them might die or be involved in other disorders from anger if they should cease to belong to me. (Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 113)

(Did the Emperor Charles V believe such tripe or was he too busy to care?)

Ironically, Espinosa finally found the missing gold that the chief Paris had seized from the luckless Gonzalo de Badajoz. This he did by invading the village of Paris at night. The great chief Paris had just died, leaving his son Cutara as his successor. The Spaniards found the coveted gold strewn about the corpse of Paris, then lying in state. One can imagine how happy the discovery made the greedy Espinosa!

Such was the sorry conclusion of the life of a self-made man with many engaging qualities. This has been the verdict of a majority of those who studied his career . . . Charles L. G. Anderson, Hubert Howe Bancroft, Irwin R. Blacker, Daniel J. Boorstin, Washington Irving, F. A. Kirkpatrick, Kathleen Romoli, William Lytle Schurz. (See A. Hyatt Verrill for a dissenting view.) On his way to the top, Balboa did many things that by today's standards—in some

countries—would be considered gross and illegal. His cruelty was mixed with caution; the aim was to teach subordinates and recalcitrant Indians to submit. He was not paranoid as was Pedrarias and, except for his treatment of Enciso and Nicuesa, who stood in his way, he was generous to and trusting of his followers.

Not given to religious fanaticism, Balboa was tolerant of Indian customs, except in those egregious instances when these practices were at odds with European morals . . . the eating of human flesh and sodomy. Because he followed the general methods of conquerors in the first wave of the Spanish *entrada*, he shared in their faults and excesses. Nevertheless, he was several degrees more moderate than such quick-to-react and quick-to-kill soldiers and administrators as Pedro Arias de Avila in Castilla del Oro, Francisco Pizzaro in Peru, Pedro de Alvarado in Guatemala, and Juan Ponce de Leon in Puerto Rico.

While the enslavement of the Indians was the common practice during Balboa's time as Governor, at the urging of the King, Pedrarias and subsequent administrators of Spanish possessions in the New World disregarded the practice, except when the Indians were cannibals or fought the Spaniards. Indeed, it had to be disregarded as so many of natives were dying. The institution of the *ecnomendados* or *repartidos* took its place, where Indians were given as laborers to their Spanish masters "to be changed every few months". (.Helps, p. 378) Sometimes conscripted Indians were treated better than black slaves who continued to be imported to the West Indies and the mainland.

In his usual sardonic manner, Helps quoted a quatrain from Juan de Castellanos, a soldier and poet, defining cannibals as those who defended themselves well.

> Mas al fin fueron a provincia llana
> Que llamaron Caribes, tierra rasa,
> No porque alli comiesen carne humana,
> Mas porque defendian bien su casa.
>
> *Elegias*, parte 2, canto 3.
>
> (Helps, p. 384)

In 1519, Pedrarias founded the town of Panama to the west of the Gulf of San Miguel, where Balboa had entered the South Sea; thereby giving the coup de grace to Santa Maria del Antigua which by the year 1524 had reverted to a jungle. As Romoli put it, repeating Oviedo: "The destruction of the settlement was an obsession with the Governor because it was, in a sense, a memorial to Balboa." (Romoli, p. 350,) Romoli's and Oviedo's explanation for the move is too pat. Andagoya suggested the change was necessary because the supply of Indian slaves (and of gold loot) had dried up near Santa Maria. A more plausible explanation is that Pedrarias moved the capital to the South Sea for the same reason Balboa wanted to locate there. The climate was better and it was to become the port-of-entry for the spice trade from the Moluccas and for the cross-shipment of treasure along El Camino Real (the Royal Road) from as yet unfound lands in South America to the small settlement of Nombre de Dios on the north coast, reestablished by Diego Albitez in the same year as Panama.

Andagoya noted dryly that the Spanish had carried so many Indians off from the Isthmus that "in a short time neither chiefs nor Indians were to be found in all the land." (Andagoya quoted in Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 59)

The Spanish court named two Governors to succeed Pedrarias. One, Lope de Sosa, died before he could assume office; the second, Pedro de los Rios, took over in July 1526, six months after Pedrarias had made himself de facto Governor of Nicaragua, in the process cutting off the head of a rival claimant: Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba, who founded the cities of Leon and Granada. After Pedro de los Rios attempted to become lord of Nicaragua, he was driven out of the country by forces loyal to Diego Lopez de Salcedo, who had been appointed governor of Honduras (whose boundaries were thought to include Nicaragua) by the Royal Audencia in Santo Domingo. Meanwhile Pedrarias secured an appointment from the Spanish Crown as governor of Nicaragua in 1527.

Romoli attributed Pedrarias' political survival, despite continual allegations of misconduct, to the intercession of his wife Dona Isabel, a friend of the Emperor's young wife. She did not get all she asked for, however, as her request for a fiefdom of 1700 square miles of Nicaragua was reduced to 488 square miles. (Romoli, pp. 346-47) King Charles' methods of appointing governors and changing boundaries in the New World were superficial. He made his decisions in ignorance of the facts and on the basis of who at the time was a royal favorite. The amount of gold that swelled the Royal Treasury was also a powerful inducement to keep or get rid of administrators.

In an amazing act of clemency, Padrarias allowed Salcedo to return to Honduras, but not before he had endured an imprisonment of seven months and had paid an exorbitant fine. (Andagoya quoted by Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 89; Oviedo quoted by Parry & Keith, Vol. 3, p. 100)

Having exhausted the Indian population of Panama, Pedrarias found a new source of slaves to sell in Nicaragua. Martin Estete, one of Pedrarias' captains and a contender for the old man's job,, discovered he could save time by cutting off the heads of Indians chained together as carriers when they fell from exhaustion. (Las Casas, A Short Account, p. 38; Anderson, *Old Panama*, p. 230) The dead dropped, the living kept moving. To relieve his boredom, Pedrarias watched fierce dogs devour the flesh of Indian captives in gladiatorial contests. (Varner, p. 54) To Pedrarias in his 80's gold had ceased to be a primary motive. His enjoyment of cruelty had taken its place and had become the whole person. Small wonder then that Indian women refused to give birth and suicides in both sexes escalated.

"In America," Bartolome de Las Casas wrote in a letter to Prince Philip, son of Charles V, "it was the Europeans, 'anaesthetized to human suffering by their own greed and ambition,' who were the savages, and the Indians, whose culture was poor, whose technology was non-existent and who had very few, if any, of the arts and sciences which for all Europeans marked the inevitable stages ,towards true civility, who were 'civilized'."

(Anthony Pagden, introduction to *A Short Account* by Las Casas, p. xl)

Pedrarias died on March 6, 1531 at about 90 years of age, 12 years after he had manipulated the beheading of Balboa. At the time of his death the Indian populations of Panama and Nicaragua were nearly extinct. (Anderson, *Old Panama*, p. 233)

Summarizing the misdeeds committed by Pedrarias during his years as Governor in *Tierra Firme*, Martyr wrote a fitting epitaph:

> Brevibus adsolvam, quia horrida omnia, suavia nulla. Ex quo nostrae decades desierunt, nil aliud actum est, nisi perimere ac perimi, trucidare ac trucidari.
>
> *De Insulis Nuper inventis*, p. 306.
>
> I will give his transactions in a few words, because they were all horrid, nothing pleasant in any of them. (My translation, rwa)
>
> (Anderson, *Old Panama*, p. 211; Helps, p. 436)

One can find instances where the Spanish took wholesale vengeance on Indians, either as a means of telling them what they could expect if they did not obey or as a punishment for offenses; more systematic, however, was their torture and killing of Indians to squeeze from them all they could get.. It is too late in the assessment of the past to condemn all Spaniards—Pedrarias Davila, Nuno de Guzman, Pedro de Alvarado, Francisco Pizarro, Juan Ponce de Leon, and Juan de Ayora excepted—or to wish they had acted otherwise. It is also too late to fabricate sweet stories, such as those told by Irving and by the writers of children's books, merely because they make exciting reading and leave readers feeling smug because of the splendid things white, Christian, Anglo Saxon or Spanish people have done in the past.

Since residents of Southern California have acknowledged a debt to the Spanish civilization that preceded them in their architecture, fiestas, clothes and food, it is well to see that the Indian civilization that preceded the Spanish also had much to commend it. And this wherever Indians happened to be in the Western Hemisphere. The food we eat today is as much Indian as it is European in origin . . . avocados, cocoa, corn, okra, papayas, Pinto, Lima and string beans, peanuts, potatoes, sweet potatoes, squash and tomatoes. If we cannot undo the brutalities of the past, people today should admit that they occurred and try not to commit similar atrocities against abused and victimized persons. If for no other reason than redress, people today should not forget those millions of Indians who were raped, tortured and massacred by Spanish, English and French colonists when there was no moral, political or religious force in the land powerful enough to stop them. Through their insistence that Indians were rational human beings and not mere beasts of burden, the Dominican priests Bartolome de Las Casas and Francisco de Vitoria kept the Spanish crown's consciousness of wrongdoing alive, but they could not stop the cruel and unlawful exploitation of the natives. (Las Casas, *A Short Account;* p. xvii; Guerra, pp. 59-63, 67-76)

It has been maintained, with justification, that the French and Spanish have a better record of reciprocal relations with Native Americans than English and other European Americans, mostly

because it was in the interest of the former to keep the Indians alive as trading partners and laborers rather than to kill them. (Berkhofer, pp. 127-34; Kirkpatrick, pp. 345-47; Schurz, pp. 61-62) Nevertheless, when Indians on the pampas of Argentina and the plateaus of Colombia stood in the way of white man's plans, they were exterminated with the same efficiency as were Native Americans in the English colonies and the United States. Forced removals, depredations and mass killings of Indians in the United States in the nineteenth century are the stuff of documentaries. Perhaps, we have come so far that at the beginning of the 21st century we can say it is in the interest of everyone to keep Native Americans alive because they embody the same spirit that exists in all people. However, historian William Lytle Schurz' pessimistic assessment leaves us with little room for hope:

> The Spaniard could not have done the job more thoroughly than we [the United States] had done it. And today members of the ruling classes in the Latin American republics that are still predominantly Indian sometimes express their envy of the finality with which we settled our Indian problem.
>
> (Shurz, p. 62)

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