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ORIGINS OF THE STRUGGLE OF THE GREAT POWERS FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA (TO THE PROBLEM STATEMENT)

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Abstract. *Introduction*. The article examines the origins of the struggle for territories in northwestern America – British Columbia – now part of Canada. For a long time, this territory was the arena of the struggle of the great powers. To understand how British Columbia was developed, it is pivotal to consider the origins of this process. Historiography provides different assessments of the history of British Columbia. In Russian historiography, this issue has received relatively limited scholarly attention, though several notable studies do exist and provide valuable insights. *Methods and materials*. The article is based methodologically on achievements in modern historical scholarship, including foreign and domestic studies. During examination of literary sources and research materials, the study itself used systematic and comparative analyses. *Analysis.* The history of British Columbia comprises six periods. This article focuses on its first period. The paper shows that interest in the territory under study arose immediately with the formation of Spain's colonial policy, which declared its rights to almost the entire coast of northwestern America. Soon after the Spanish conquistadors and other explorers reached the Pacific Ocean and its shores in Central and North America, the news about these important discoveries became known in Europe. Spain's rivals, such as England, attempted to find so-called "Northwest Passage" (the legendary "Strait of Anian") between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. It was thought that its discovery would reduce the sailing time of the vessel between Europe and Eastern countries. The article also pays attention to such factors and reasons as European colonization of the New World and early discoveries of the Pacific coast of North America, such as change of climate, fashion tendencies, environmental resources, religious differences, etc. The importance of the fur trade in the process of colonization of British Columbia is shown. *Results.* Based on the analysis conducted, it is concluded that it is reasonable to consider the history of British Columbia through the prism of frontier history, and not only continental but also maritime frontier history, taking into account the regional characteristics of the civilizational model of British colonialism and international relations. The origins of British Columbia could be seen in the intensification of Spain's policy and its claims to the entire Pacific coast, even when Madrid had no settlements there, and the attitude of the British towards this. The search for a mythical northern route from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean contributed to the formation of the future territory of British Columbia. Important geographical discoveries were made during this process. The article is part of a series of articles by authors devoted to the history of the struggle for territory in Northwest America until the early 1870s. *Authors' contribution.* A.Yu. Petrov researched new archival data and studied existing literature; developed the research methodology; prepared a summary report; and analyzed important factors that shed light on early stages of colonization and geographical discoveries on the Pacific coast of North America for future colonial settlement. L.M. Troitskaia analyzed materials related to the history of British Columbia and issues of the interaction between countries in the northern part of the Pacific Ocean and studied the website of the University of British Columbia

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Key words: British Columbia, Spain, Great Britain, North American history, colonization, Pacific Ocean, "Northwest Passage".

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ИСТОКИ БОРЬБЫ ВЕЛИКИХ ДЕРЖАВ ЗА БРИТАНСКУЮ КОЛУМБИЮ (К ПОСТАНОВКЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ)

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Аннотация. *Введение.* В статье рассматриваются истоки борьбы за территории на Северо-Западе Америки – в Британской Колумбии, которая сейчас входит в состав Канады. Долгое время эта территория была ареной борьбы великих держав. Для того чтобы понять, как развивалась Британская Колумбия, необходимо рассмотреть истоки этого процесса. Историография дает разные оценки истории Британской Колумбии. В российской историографии этот вопрос в целом изучен слабо. *Методы и материалы*. Статья методологически основана на достижениях современной исторической науки, включая зарубежные и отечественные исследования. При изучении литературных источников и исследовательских материалов использовался системный и сравнительный анализ. *Анализ.* История Британской Колумбии состоит из шести периодов. Эта статья посвящена первому периоду. В ней показано, что интерес к исследуемой территории возник сразу же с формированием колониальной политики Испании, которая заявила о своих правах практически на все побережье Северо-Западной Америки. Вскоре после того, как испанские конкистадоры и другие исследователи достигли Тихого океана и его берегов в Центральной и Северной Америке, а новости об этих важных открытиях стали известны в Европе, соперники Испании, такие как Англия, попытались найти так называемый «Северо-Западный проход» (легендарный «Анианский пролив») между Атлантикой и Тихим океаном. Считалось, что его открытие сократит время плавания судна между Европой и странами Востока, особенно Китаем. В статье также уделяется внимание таким факторам и причинам европейской колонизации Нового Света и ранних открытий тихоокеанского побережья Северной Америки, как изменение климата, тенденции моды, экологические ресурсы, религиозные различия и т. д. Показано значение торговли мехами для процесса колонизации Британской Колумбии. *Результаты*. На основе проведенного анализа делается вывод о том, что правомерно историю Британской Колумбии рассматривать сквозь призму истории фронтира, причем не только континентального, но и морского, с учетом региональных особенностей цивилизационной модели британского колониализма и международных отношений. Истоки Британской Колумбии, думается, можно усмотреть в активизации политики Испании и ее претензиях на все тихоокеанское побережье даже в том случае, когда у Мадрида не было там поселений, и отношении к этому англичан. Формированию будущей территории Британской Колумбии способствовали поиски мифического северного маршрута из Атлантического океана в Тихий. В ходе этого процесса были сделаны важные географические открытия. Эта статья является частью серии статей авторов, посвященных истории борьбы за территорию на Северо-Западе Америки до начала 1870-х годов. *Вклад авторов*. А.Ю. Петров – поиск новых архивных данных, изучение существующей литературы; разработка методологии исследования; подготовка краткого отчета; анализ важных факторов, проливающих свет на ранние этапы колонизации и географических открытий на тихоокеанском побережье Северной Америки при создании колоний в будущем. Л.М. Троицкая – анализ всех материалов, связанных с историей Британской Колумбии и вопросов взаимодействия стран в северной части Тихого

океана; изучение коллекции разнообразных материалов на веб-сайте библиотечного фонда Университета Британской Колумбии (BCU Library Collection). *Финансирование.* Исследование выполнено за счет гранта Российского научного фонда № 22-18-00043-П, https://rscf.ru/project/22-18-00043/ в Институте всеобщей истории РАН.

Ключевые слова: Британская Колумбия, Испания, Великобритания, история Северной Америки, колонизация, Тихий океан, «Северо-Западный проход».

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Introduction. In this study, the term "British Columbia" is deployed not as an administrative-territorial designation but rather as a historical and geographical reference marking the region that would only later (beginning in 1858) acquire this formal appellation. This terminological choice is methodologically sound within historiographical analysis of territorial formation, as it serves three key purposes: It delineates the spatial parameters of the inquiry in ways that align with contemporary cartographic conventions; it circumvents the cumbersome phrasing of "Northwest Coast of North America," which encompasses a significantly broader expanse, including areas peripheral to the study's focus; it maintains terminological continuity with prior scholarship examining the evolution of British presence along this particular segment of the Pacific littoral. The text explicitly frames its chronological scope (sixteenth through eighteenth centuries) and clarifies that it examines the antecedents to the colony's eventual establishment. This deliberate framing prevents any conflation of the term's historical-geographical and administrative-legal meanings. As Fernand Braudel, the eminent French historian and Annales school proponent, demonstrated, history could be analyzed through the interplay of multiple temporal scales, particularly the longue durée: those enduring structures (geographical milieu, mentalités, and socioeconomic formations) that shape the fundamental contours of human experience across centuries. Braudel's framework calls for interpreting regions as dynamic spatial entities wherein geographical conditions exert profound influence on social processes [8]. Although Braudel did not employ the term "British Columbia," his methodology provides a robust rationale for deploying historical geographical reference points that transcend formal administrative boundaries. In Russian historiography, scholarly attention has consistently focused on the evolution of territorial configurations, administrative frameworks, and regional colonization processes. For instance, M.K. Lyubavsky's "Historical Geography of Russia in Connection with Colonization" systematically examines how spatial boundaries and governance structures transformed over time, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between settlement patterns, resource exploitation, and state formation. This approach underscores that historical regions often function as analytical units distinct from their later administrative incarnations, a perspective fully compatible with Braudel's emphasis on long-term spatial and structural continuities. By adopting this framework, the present study situates the pre-1858 Pacific coast within broader patterns of cross-cultural interaction and environmental adaptation, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of retrojecting colonial nomenclature onto earlier historical realities. Reference [26] demonstrates the analysis of geographical data within the context of historical sources.

The history of the Canadian province of British Columbia, the total area of which is 944,735 square kilometers, is currently attracting increasing attention. This province is located on the Pacific coast of North America, and, taking into account numerous coastal islands, the length of its coastline is 7 thousand kilometers. In the south, British Columbia borders such US states as Montana, Idaho, and Washington, and in the northwest, the state of Alaska. The province has large and diverse natural resources, and its economy ranks fourth, contributing 12.6% of Canada's GDP. 5.7 million people live in British Columbia, of whom 24.8% were immigrants from Asian countries: Chinese, Indians, Vietnamese, Filipinos, and Japanese [21, pp. 117-118].

The local indigenous population of British Columbia consists of such Indian tribes as the Cree, Athabascan, Dene, Dakota, Salish,

Tsimshian, and others. In total, 170 thousand American Indians from 193 tribes live in the province, and there are 1,625 reservations, or three-quarters of all reservations in Canada [21, p. 118]. The ancestors of other American Indian tribes living south of the edge of the glacial area as it melted gradually settled northward in the valleys and along the coast 1 to 2 thousand years earlier [3, p. 2]. However, some modern archaeological research suggests that people have lived along the southern coast of what is now British Columbia for at least 10,000 years, migrating south from the Beringia region during the early Holocene [32].

Methods and materials. The methodology used in this article is based on modern achievements in historical scholarship. Both domestic and foreign historiography were also used. Traditional methods of historical research and methods of geography and philology were used to analyze sources and literary materials. Thus, in the process of studying literary sources and analyzing the entire volume of collected materials, systemic and comparative approaches were used. The struggle for British Columbia was considered in different periods in the context of the development of interaction between Spain, Great Britain, and, since the late 18th century, the United States. In order to strengthen their British Columbian positions, Great Britain and the United States used various methods, including in the political arena. The strengthening of this activity occurred in parallel with the development of relations with the Russian-American Company (RAC).

The history of British Columbia can be divided into six periods that reflect its key developmental stages. Prior to the late 18th century, the region was inhabited by Indigenous peoples, including the Salish, Nuuchahnulth, Kwakwaka'wakw, and others, who sustained their economies through fishing and cedar processing without any European interference. From the late 18th to the mid-19th centuries, exploration and the fur trade began: British and Russian mariners (such as Captain James Cook and George Vancouver) arrived, the Hudson's Bay Company established trading posts, and the first permanent settlement, Fort Victoria, was founded in 1843 [39]. In 1858, the Fraser River gold rush began, the Colony of British Columbia was established, the population grew rapidly, and infrastructure development accelerated; in 1866, it merged with the Colony of Vancouver Island. In 1871, the colony joined the Canadian Confederation on the condition that a railway be built; the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway to Port Moody in 1885 ensured economic integration. From 1885 to 1945, industrial growth took place: ports expanded (including Vancouver), logging, mining, and fishing industries developed, a transportation network took shape, and borders stabilized following the Alaska boundary dispute of 1903. Since 1945, the modern period has begun: the economy has diversified (including tourism and technology), the government's role in resource management has strengthened, immigration has increased, and provincial autonomy within the Canadian federation has grown.

When studying the history of British Columbia, it is essential for researchers to have access to a wide range of materials, including photos, books, newspapers, maps, videos, theses, etc. In this regard, the University of British Columbia (UBC) Library's Open Collections play a positive role by storing the digital resources created and maintained by UBC [44].

It seems that since the end of the 19th century, the study of the history of the colonization of the Americas, including its features in relation to the territories adjacent to the Pacific coast of North America, has been carried out and continues to be studied, not only by historians, but also by geographers and economists in the USA, Canada, and Great Britain. These works have generated a considerable amount of scholarly literature [25, pp. 38-40]. In the classic work of the American historian H.H. Bancroft [40, pp. 1-2], the six stages above mentioned were proposed in considering the history of the Canadian province of British Columbia.

In the late 19th century, the American historian F.J. Turner, the founder of the famous frontier theory and its significance in the history of the United States, came to the conclusion that the rifle and the ax were the symbols of the backwoods pioneer [43, p. 269]. This is generally true, not only for the United States but also for Canada. It seems that in addition to these two most important tools of continental and maritime expansionism in North America, we can include such items as the furs of wild land animals, primarily beavers and later bison, as well as the skins of sea animals – sea otters and seals [18], plus walruses and other mammals.

Researchers particularly emphasize the value of beaver pelts, which were the raw material for the manufacture of felt "for high-fashion hats." At first, only wealthy people could afford to wear them, but with the development of mass production in the 17th century and technology in the early 18th century, "hats with a lower beaver content became available to those with more modest incomes" [11, p. 3]. Felt could be made from sheepskin, but the production of velour (felting from the undercoat of river beaver fur) was a complex technology, and in the 16th century only the Moscovites had mastered it, but step by step, the Western Europeans also became its manufacturers. The beaver pelts from North America were divided into two types: those that "were bought from Indians – coat beaver," called by the French "*castor gras*", and "parchment beaver, or *castor sec*" [10, p. 63].

We take into account such specific factors as the history of everyday life, the development of fashion, technology, and the expansion of scientific knowledge against the background of material progress in Europe. F. Braudel drew attention to the costume factor, which includes various problems, such as raw materials, manufacturing processes, cost, price, the sustainability of cultures, fashion, and social hierarchy. Costume, he argued, "stubbornly testified to social opposites everywhere. […] the kingdom of fashion was hardly established in all its rigor before 1700… French fashion, which had prevailed since the 17th century, became truly dominant only in the 18th century" [9, pp. 279, 284, 286].

In the anthology "Travel Narratives from the Age of Discovery: An Anthology," its editor, P.C. Mancall, compiled key travel accounts from the era of the Great Geographical Discoveries of the 15th and 16th centuries. The collection features testimonies by authors from Spain, France, Italy, England, China, and North Africa, documenting voyages to Brazil, Canada, China, Virginia, Angola, Vietnam, and other regions [42].

Alongside well-known reports by Christopher Columbus, the volume presents texts by lesser-known writers such as the Huguenot missionary Jean de Léry. Of particular significance are the non-European sources: Emperor Babur's notes on India, the Chinese chronicler Ma Huan's account of his travels to the Middle East, and Leo Africanus's work on Africa.

In addition to the texts, the publication includes rare 16th-century illustrations from contemporary books (depicting Brazil, Roanoke, Guiana, and India), which help illuminate how both travellers and their readers envisioned distant worlds.

Our publication develops and specifies a number of provisions that have found reflection in the pages of foreign and domestic journals, as well as in the framework of scientific conferences, such as the conference at the Volgograd State University, "Transformation of Modern US Policy in the Western Hemisphere," and the conference at the Center for North American Studies of the Institute of World History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, "USA and Russia. Relationships. Mutual Perception. Study" [37].

Analysis. The province of British Columbia, which was part of the Canadian Confederation for more than 150 years, had a long history of discovery, exploration, and colonization of this vast, remote region of North America.

The history of the process of systematic colonization of the New World by the great European powers from the Atlantic Ocean began, as is known, during the Age of Discovery with the voyages of Christopher Columbus in 1492, which marked the commencement of the Spanish conquests in America. Asking the question of why Europe succeeded in this field, the American sociologist and political scientist J. Goldstone declared that "trade and conquest" go hand in hand in world history. In his opinion, "Trade often followed successful conquests that opened up new routes and strengthened peace on the borders and outskirts. Conquests were often necessary to conduct trade, persuade intractable rulers to open their ports to foreign merchants or gain access to valuable materials. […] the conquests of Europe in the New World enriched it [Europe] with silver, which allowed it to expand its Asian trade. Later, the growth of European colonies in the Americas created the conditions for a new Atlantic trade that linked Africa, Europe and the Americas from Canada to Brazil. Thus, the desire for trade led to conquest, and conquest led to trade" [19, pp. 102-103].

Contemporary studies of the colonization of the Americas draw on a range of conceptual models that help systematize the multifaceted process of European expansion. Both domestic (Russian) and international historiography identify

several key approaches. In Russian scholarship, a prominent framework is the concept of the "three directions" of colonization, which distinguishes the Atlantic (Spanish-Portuguese) vector focused on Central and South America, the North Atlantic (English-French) vector centered on North America, and the Pacific (primarily Spanish) vector associated with the exploration of the American West coast and Oceania. This approach underscores the regional specificity of colonization processes and highlights variations in territorial governance models. In Russia's Canadian studies, priority has long been given to studying the early stages of the history of the regions adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean and the Great Lakes [2].

In Western European historiography, Mary Louise Pratt's theory of "contact zones" occupies a significant place. It frames colonization as a space of cultural interaction and collision where hybrid identities and practices emerge, shifting the focus from unilateral expansion to multidirectional processes of cultural exchange and resistance.

The "colonial worlds" model directs attention to the networked structures that link metropoles and colonies through trade, migration, and administrative institutions, enabling analysis of colonization as a system of interdependent relationships rather than linear subjugation.

The concept of "internal colonization", developed in the works of A. Etkind and other scholars, applies to the analysis of peripheral territories within European states and their empires. It reveals common mechanisms of power deployed both in overseas colonies and internal "frontier" regions.

The "two spheres doctrine", rooted in Alexander von Humboldt's ideas, differentiates colonization processes into two domains: one of direct political control and administrative governance, and another of economic influence and commercial expansion. This framework helps distinguish various forms of colonial power and their consequences.

Postcolonial theory as articulated in the works of E. Said, G. Spivak, and H. Bhabha focuses on the discursive mechanisms of colonization, examining how European narratives constructed the image of the "Other" and legitimized expansion. It emphasizes the cultural and symbolic dimensions of colonial domination [5; 14; 34; 35; 43].

The papal bull Inter caetera (issued on 4 May 1493 by Pope Alexander VI) and the Treaty of Tordesillas (signed on 7 June 1494) formalized the division of colonial territories between Spain and Portugal. The bull stipulated that lands lying west of a meridian located 100 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands would belong to Spain, while those to the east would be assigned to Portugal. This document emerged in the wake of Columbus's 1492 voyage and aimed to resolve the territorial dispute between the two powers.

However, the bull was marked by legal ambiguity: it remained unclear whether it conferred full sovereignty or merely feudal investiture. The Spanish interpreted it as granting them complete control, yet its true meaning continues to be debated. Moreover, the bull did not apply to territories already under the control of Christian states, which led to conflicts, particularly in light of earlier papal bulls affirming Portuguese rights in Africa. France, England, and the Netherlands also rejected the document, refusing to acknowledge papal jurisdiction over matters of discovery.

The Treaty of Tordesillas shifted the demarcation line to 370 leagues (approximately 1,770 km) west of the Cape Verde Islands (49°32'56"W). It was ratified by Spain on 2 July and by Portugal on 5 September 1494 and later endorsed by Pope Julius II in 1506. Nevertheless, the treaty also suffered from shortcomings: the parties had only a vague grasp of the actual extent of the newly discovered lands. For instance, Cabral's discovery of Brazil in 1500 revealed that Spain had inadvertently ceded part of South America to Portugal. The treaty applied solely to the Atlantic Ocean; a second line of demarcation was not established until 1529 (the Treaty of Zaragoza, following Magellan's expedition). France, England, and the Netherlands likewise refused to recognize it, proceeding to actively colonize new territories. Some scholars argue that King John II of Portugal had prior knowledge of Brazil and had sought to shift the line in Portugal's favor.

In contemporary historiography, these acts are regarded as significant yet deeply contested: they shaped the formation of empires and fueled geopolitical conflicts. They are criticized for disregarding the rights of Indigenous peoples (under the terra nullius doctrine), for using religion

to legitimize exploitation, and for losing their force by the seventeenth century in North America, Asia, and Africa, where other powers came to dominate. Thus, Inter caetera and the Treaty of Tordesillas laid the foundations for the colonial partition of the world, but their limitations ultimately precipitated further conflicts and the eventual renegotiation of legal norms [8; 13; 15; 36].

In the sixteenth century, European mariners' voyages along the western coasts of the Americas, including the areas corresponding to present-day British Columbia, proved crucial in refuting the hypothesis of a strait connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. The pivotal event was Ferdinand Magellan's circumnavigation (1519–1522), during which he discovered the passage between South America and the Tierra del Fuego archipelago (now known as the Strait of Magellan). Although this waterway linked the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, it did not constitute the sought-after "connecting strait" envisioned by early cartographers: the route still required a lengthy westward journey. The expedition confirmed that South America did not extend infinitely to the west but instead had a triangular shape, thereby ruling out the possibility of a direct oceanic connection via the continent's interior waters.

The Spaniards considered themselves the discoverers. During the Age of Great Geographical Discoveries, an important event occurred on September 29, 1513, when the conquistador Vasco Nunez de Balboa became the first white man to cross the Isthmus of Panama from the Atlantic in a westerly direction and reached the bay (San Miguel Bay), beyond which lay the Pacific Ocean, which he called the South Sea [30, pp. 301-302]. A day "before Balboa, Alonso Martin (a member of V. Nunez de Balboa's expedition. – *A. P., L. T.*) reached the Pacific coast…" [28, p. 111]. According to other sources, A. Martin plunged into the waters of the Pacific Ocean on September 27, 1513 [20]. It is important to emphasize that A. Martin solemnly and officially declared the ownership of "these southern seas, lands, coasts, harbors and islands, with everything that they contain" to the Crown of Castile..., and also stated that now and in the future to "the sovereigns of Castile belong both the power and dominion over these Indies, the islands, both the Northern and Southern continents with their seas from the North Pole to the South, on both sides of the equator, inside and outside the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn..." [28, p. 111]. Thus began Spanish colonial expansion in the New World from the Pacific coast. Spain brought the Catholic faith here and established its dominion for a long time.

Other expeditions further complemented this emerging geographical understanding: notably, the Loaísa-Elcano expedition (1525–1528) demonstrated that the South American coast did not extend in a long western promontory, and crossings of the Pacific Ocean in a northwesterly direction failed to reveal the sought-after passage. Sixteenth-century cartographic efforts such as Juan de la Cosa's map (1500), the Cantino planisphere (1502), and Piri Reis's map (1513) gradually recorded the actual contours of America as a separate continent, contradicting earlier beliefs that the lands discovered by Columbus formed part of Asia. Based on mariners' reports, these maps progressively refined the depiction of the coastline and eliminated hypothetical straits that were thought to connect the oceans [6; 17; 23; 28; 33].

In the 16th – 18th centuries, the Spanish advanced from the shores of the Atlantic into the interior of the North American continent, equipping exploratory expeditions and expanding their colonial possessions. Following Spain, England, France, and Russia, some other European countries joined the race to discover, conquer, and colonize America. They were lured by the dream of enriching themselves at the expense of the diverse natural resources of the new lands, exploiting the local population, the so-called "savages." The passionate desire to sail as quickly as possible from Europe to China and to the East as a whole explained the fact that for several centuries European sailors sought to find the so-called "Northwest Passage" (the legendary "Strait of Anian") between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and from both sides [46].

After the voyages to North America of the Italians J. Cabot and S. Cabot, who were in the English service, attempts to find the desired passage by rounding America from the North Atlantic were undertaken in 1576 and 1577 by the Englishman M. Frobisher. His third voyage took place in 1578. Despite the fact that his goal was not achieved, important geographical

discoveries were made: the exploration of Baffin Land began, and the wide straits later became known as the Davis and Hudson straits/Bay.

Together, these expeditions contributed to the formation of a durable paradigm of British seafaring that combined commercial, exploratory, and geopolitical objectives. While Cabot demonstrated the economic viability of Atlantic fisheries and the potential for securing a foothold on the American coast, Frobisher revealed the limitations of quickly reaching Asian markets via Arctic waters, thereby encouraging later explorers to seek alternative routes, particularly along the continental coast toward the southwest and west. This evolution of strategic priorities ultimately created the conditions for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British expeditions that directly explored the Pacific coast of North America, including areas that would become part of British Columbia.

Although Cabot and Frobisher neither visited nor mentioned the territory of what would later be known as British Columbia, their voyages made significant contributions to the accumulation of geographic, navigational, and political resources that were later leveraged in the exploration and settlement of the continent's western sector. Their expeditions should be understood as early links in a continuous chain of British presence in North America – a legacy whose importance lies not so much in direct geographic connection as in its long-term impact on imperial strategy and maritime practice [16; 31]. Canadian researchers G.P.V. Akkrig and H. Akkrig pointed out that England's colonial interests extended to the Pacific coast of America, already at the end of the 16th century, trying to compete with the Spanish. Almost simultaneously with Frobisher, namely in 1579, the English captain Francis Drake, the "famous corsair," was the first of his compatriots to round South America through the Strait of Magellan and move along the coast northward. Presumably, according to some sources, he reached 48°N in the area of the current Strait of Juan de Fuca or even 50°N and allegedly visited Vancouver Island. Others believed that Drake did not cross 43°N or even 42°N. However, there is no doubt that, turning south, his ship entered a bay located a little north of present-day San Francisco [3, pp. 6-7].

Drake called this area "New Albion," and his chaplain, in the presence of the Admiral and his men, took part in the first service in the English tongue and in accordance with rites of the Protestant Church of England ever to take place on the Pacific coast of what is now the United States [45, p. 29]. As a result of these voyages, a false account appeared about the discovery of the "western cape of America" on "Company Land" [7, p. 14]. There is another version of the history of the search for the strait. Thus, the Spanish navigator Ferrer Maldonado reported that he allegedly visited in 1588 the waters of the strait during his voyage to the North Pole. He claimed that the "Strait of Anian" is located at the coordinate of 60°N. Maldonado insisted that on the American shore of the Strait of Anian there is a beautiful port where up to five hundred ships can easily fit. He allegedly stayed there for almost three months and with his own eyes saw a ship with a cargo of Chinese goods, which was heading to Russian port New Arkhangelsk [29, pp. 14-15].

Before leaving this place, Drake, "imitating the Portuguese, erected a pillar on the shore and nailed to it a copper plate on which the name of Queen Elizabeth, the dates of the English arrival in the country, and the 'voluntary submission' of the Indians to the English queen (1579) were carved. Below, the pirate inserted a silver coin with the image of the queen and her coat of arms, and even lower he carved his own name" [27, pp. 123-124]. Drake also mistakenly believed that he could return home through the "Northwest Passage" ("Frobisher Strait"), passing from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic. In reality, he returned to England in 1580 through the Pacific Ocean, the Mariana Islands, Java, the Indian Ocean, and the Cape of Good Hope.

There is some reason to believe that the Strait of Juan de Fuca, off the coast of what would become British Columbia, was actually discovered in 1592 by the Spanish navigator and pilot of Greek origin Ioannis Focas (Apostolos Valerianos, according to other sources) (1536–1602), who, by order of the Viceroy of New Spain, Luis de Velasco, Marquis de Salinas, set out in search of the aforementioned "Strait of Anian" in order to fortify [the area and] himself there, after its discovery, so as to protect it from the penetration of the English. Exploratory expeditions required very large financial and other material costs. However, they were organized not only by European states and their monarchs but also by

private entrepreneurs or trading companies. In the 1560s – 1580s, the initiators of the search for the Northwest Passage were English navigators – the famous privateers of Queen Elizabeth I, M. Frobisher and H. Gilbert. They developed projects for their own expeditions to polar waters, but it turned out that in England the monopoly on the exploration of the Arctic straits of North America belonged only to the English Muscovy Company, which had no intention of sharing it with competitors [24].

Spanish expeditions to the Northwest American coast in the eighteenth century, alongside James Cook's voyages, played a pivotal role in exploring the Pacific region, reinforcing territorial claims, and intensifying international conflicts. These efforts advanced coastal mapping, deepened knowledge of Indigenous peoples and resources, and shaped the geopolitical landscape of the colonial era [38].

Juan José Pérez's 1774 expedition marked Spain's first attempt to explore northern latitudes after a long hiatus. Although Pérez failed to reach the planned 60th parallel due to supply shortages and crew illnesses, his voyage laid the groundwork for subsequent missions. He established contact with the Haida people and reaffirmed Spanish claims to the region.

The 1775 expedition led by Bruno de Heceta and Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra expanded knowledge of the coastline. The team discovered the mouth of the Columbia River and conducted several sovereignty-affirming ceremonies. Bodega y Quadra later emerged as a key figure in negotiations surrounding the Nootka Crisis and left a significant cartographic legacy for the region.

In 1779, Ignacio de Arteaga and Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra led an expedition that reached the northernmost extent of Spanish exploration in Alaska (61st parallel). Objectives included assessing Russian presence, searching for the Northwest Passage, and attempting to capture James Cook (who had already perished in Hawai'i). The expedition thoroughly surveyed Bucareli Bay, Prince William Sound, and other areas, producing detailed maps.

Esteban José Martínez and Gonzalo López de Haro's 1788 expedition aimed to investigate Russian activities and continue the search for the Northwest Passage. In 1789, Martínez seized British vessels in Nootka Sound, triggering the Nootka Crisis – an international conflict between Spain and Great Britain [22]. Expedition reports, including descriptions of Russian settlements on Kodiak, became valuable sources of regional intelligence [4].

Salvador Fidalgo's 1790 expedition involved surveying the Alaskan coast and establishing contact with Indigenous peoples and Russian settlers. Fidalgo proclaimed Spanish sovereignty at several locations, including Puerto Córdova and Puerto Valdés. In 1792, he established the settlement of Bahía de Núñez Gaona in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, a move tied to negotiations over the Nootka Conventions.

British Captain James Cook undertook three circumnavigation voyages that substantially advanced geographical knowledge. His expeditions (1768–1771, 1772–1775, 1776–1780) resulted in the discovery and mapping of vast territories, including the east coast of Australia, New Zealand, the Hawaiian Islands, as well as explorations of southern latitudes and attempts to locate the Northwest Passage. Cook established standards for peaceful interaction with Indigenous peoples, distinguishing his expeditions from those of many contemporaries [8; 22; 28; 41].

In the closing years of the 18th century, on the orders of the British Crown, J. Vancouver unsuccessfully attempted to find the Northwest Passage, having explored the Pacific coast of North America in detail during his circumnavigation of the globe in 1790–1795. He wrote that after his voyage and detailed survey of the Northwestern Pacific coast, he reached the significant conclusion that no navigable Northwest Passage existed: "between the north pacific, and the interior of the American continent, within the limits of our researches" [1, pp. 294-295].

Vancouver also admitted that the British did not yet know everything about the northwest coast of North America and its interior territories. He believed that there were allegedly no contacts between the coastal tribes and the inhabitants of the interior regions, stating, "nor were there any articles of the Canadian or Hudson's Bay traders found amongst the people with whom we met on any part of the continent or external sea shores of this extensive country" [1, p. 505].

The demand for furs in Europe increased in the eighteenth century "both because of the cold

weather and because this prestigious consumer item became demanded by a wider circle of Europeans (primarily wealthy city dwellers)" [12, p. 14]. The North American continent abounded with diverse wildlife, most notably beavers, whose valuable pelts could be acquired at relatively low cost. This abundance enabled the mass export of furs to Europe, reaching extraordinary volumes. Consequently, French and English settlers established along the Atlantic coast of North America seized the opportunity to launch an unprecedented fur trade across the Pacific, generating immense profits. The resulting commercial interactions between colonizers and Indigenous peoples unleashed a complex web of interconnected forces – economic, institutional, political, and ecological – that reshaped the continent's trajectory [11, p. 3].

In the eighteenth century, across the expansive Pacific maritime frontier, the primary objects of marine commerce were first and foremost sea otters (Enhydra lutris), followed by seals. Later, various whale species emerged as key commodities, harvested in ever-increasing quantities through numerous whaling expeditions. These operations proliferated across multiple regions of the world's oceans, with particular intensity along the Pacific coast of North America.

Results. Thus, in domestic and foreign historiography, the history of British Columbia was considered through the concept of its being a frontier, civilizing model, and the development of the foreign policy of Western European powers. The origins of British Columbia are seen in the activation of the policy of Spain and its claims to the entire Pacific coast, even in cases when Madrid had no settlements. The English took advantage of this, declaring their claims to the territories under study. The development of British Columbia was facilitated by the search for that mythical northern route from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. During this process, essential geographical discoveries were made. It appears that the struggle to consolidate European powers' positions in the New World, including the coastal territories of what would become British Columbia, could be understood within the broader context of their imperial ambitions. In the second half of the eighteenth century, following the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), Great Britain acquired vast territories in North America formerly held by France. However, this territorial expansion was soon offset by significant shifts: the thirteen American colonies broke away in the War of Independence (1775–1783), ultimately emerging as the independent democratic republican state of the United States of America. This geopolitical transformation prompted Britain to redouble its imperial efforts in western North America, where British Columbia would eventually become a key component of its colonial strategy.

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