

## Beothuk-European Contact in the 16th Century: A Re-evaluation of the Documentary Evidence

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Article abstract

*It is generally believed that hostility between Newfoundland's Beothuk people and Europeans had its origin in the protohistoric period. This article re-evaluates the documentary evidence from the 16th century in order to assess this notion. Although the sources are fragmentary and often difficult to interpret, the evidence indicates that early Beothuk-European relations were not characterized by hostility and that the well-documented instances of hostility between the Beothuk and Newfoundland settlers during the late 18th and early 19th centuries have been wrongly assumed to indicate a state of perpetual conflict that extended back to the contact period.*

# Beothuk-European Contact in the 16th Century: A Re-evaluation of the Documentary Evidence

WILLIAM GILBERT

*On croit généralement que l'origine de l'hostilité entre le peuple béothuk de Terre-Neuve et les Européens datait de la période protohistorique. Le présent article réexamine les preuves documentaires du 16e siècle afin d'évaluer cette notion. Même si les sources sont fragmentaires et souvent difficiles à interpréter, les preuves indiquent que les premières relations entre Béothuks et Européens n'étaient pas caractérisées par l'hostilité, et qu'on a supposé à tort que les cas bien documentés d'hostilité entre les Béothuks et les colons de Terre-Neuve au cours du 18e siècle et au début du 19e siècle étaient une indication d'un état de conflit perpétuel qui remontait jusqu'à l'époque des premiers contacts.*

*It is generally believed that hostility between Newfoundland's Beothuk people and Europeans had its origin in the protohistoric period. This article re-evaluates the documentary evidence from the 16th century in order to assess this notion. Although the sources are fragmentary and often difficult to interpret, the evidence indicates that early Beothuk-European relations were not characterized by hostility and that the well-documented instances of hostility between the Beothuk and Newfoundland settlers during the late 18th and early 19th centuries have been wrongly assumed to indicate a state of perpetual conflict that extended back to the contact period.*

The relationship between whites and Beothuks passed through three well-defined stages. The first lasted from 1500 to 1612 and was marked by occasional kidnapping, casual trade, sporadic pillage and mutual retaliation.<sup>1</sup>

THIS STATEMENT BY L.F.S. UPTON is typical of the view held by many historians and members of the general public on the nature of Beothuk-European relations during the first century or so after contact. Ingeborg Marshall states, for example, that "relations between the Indians, European fishing crews, and English settlers had not always been hostile"; but he also goes on to say that "nevertheless, the records suggest that the Beothuk were captured or otherwise wronged, that the Indians, on their part, indulged in pilfering gear and tools, and that relations were precarious."<sup>2</sup> Yet how much do we really know about Beothuk-European relations

1 L.F.S Upton, "The Extermination of the Beothuks of Newfoundland," *Canadian Historical Review* LVIII, no. 2 (June 1977): 134-5. This paper is dedicated to the late Ralph T. Pastore, a good friend and a great teacher. The first draft of this paper was written for him as part of a graduate course he was teaching in 1994 and it was he who encouraged me to submit it to *Acadiensis* for publication.

2 Ingeborg C.L. Marshall, *Reports and Letters by George Christopher Pulling Relating to the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland* (St. John's, NF: Breakwater Books, 1989), 12.

William Gilbert, "Beothuk-European Contact in the 16th Century: A Re-evaluation of the Documentary Evidence," *Acadiensis* XXXX, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2011): 24-44.

during this early period? More cautious scholars have concluded that the geographic and ethnographic detail in many of the earliest accounts is so vague that little or nothing conclusive can be said about the Beothuk based on these texts.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, much that has been written about this period seems to be little more than speculation often based on false assumptions and the misreading of the few early documents that have survived. In this article I will re-evaluate the standard documentary sources in an attempt to determine – primarily through a re-examination of standard documentary sources, with some additions based on archaeological research – what, if anything, can actually be said about the nature of Beothuk-European relations in the first century after contact.<sup>4</sup>

### **Captives**

The question of captives is one that inevitably arises in any discussion of this period. If one were to believe all the claims put forward, then roughly 70 Beothuk must have been forcibly removed from the island between 1500 and 1509. While there can be no question that a number of captives were taken to Europe from somewhere in the northeast during the first decade of the 16th century, both the actual numbers and where they were taken from are open to question. In all, there are three documented cases of Native Americans being taken to Europe from the northeast during this time; the earliest pertains to the voyages of Portuguese explorer Gaspar Corte Real.

Corte Real made two voyages to the northeast, one in 1500 and another in 1501. The belief that he returned to Lisbon in 1500 or 1501 with either 50 or 57 captives abducted from Newfoundland has become so firmly entrenched that many historians now assume it to be fact.<sup>5</sup> Yet there are a number of problems with this assumption. The first problem is with the year given by many historians. The number 57 is taken from one of only three contemporary documents that mention the captives: a letter written by Pietro Pasqualigo, Venetian ambassador at Lisbon, to the Signory of Venice and dated 19 October 1501. Despite its date, James P. Howley, in his landmark work *The Beothuks or Red Indians: The Aboriginal Inhabitants of Newfoundland*, made the erroneous assumption that the letter referred not to the 1501 voyage but to the voyage of 1500.<sup>6</sup> Numerous writers have since repeated this mistake. The other two primary documents relating to the event are another letter written by Pasqualigo on 18 October 1501 and a letter written by Alberto Cantino to Hercules d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, dated 17 October 1501. All three clearly refer to the second voyage and indicate that the captives arrived at Lisbon in October of 1501.<sup>7</sup>

3 Ralph T. Pastore, *Shanawdithit's People: The Archaeology of the Beothuks* (St. John's, NF: Atlantic Archaeology Ltd., 1992), 49.

4 Wherever possible I have consulted transcriptions of the original documents on which much of the writing on the subject has been based. In so doing, I have been limited primarily to published transcripts and documents that were either originally written in, or have subsequently been translated into, English.

5 Upton, "Extirmination of the Beothuks," 136; Ingeborg Marshall, *A History and Ethnography of the Beothuk* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 15.

6 James P. Howley, *The Beothuks or Red Indians: The Aboriginal Inhabitants of Newfoundland* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 4-5.

7 Transcriptions of all three letters can be found in David B. Quinn, ed., with Alison M. Quinn and Susan Hillier, *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612, Volume 1:*

This might seem a trivial point were it not for another, and from our perspective more important, problem: it is not entirely clear how many vessels took part in Corte Real's second voyage. Most contemporary documents state that there were two vessels. However, the patent issued by Manuel I to Miguel Corte Real, Gaspar's brother, and dated 15 January 1502, states that there were three. This is an important point since the vessel captained by Gaspar Corte Real was lost. Bernard Hoffman tried to explain this discrepancy by suggesting that Cantino and Pasqualigo were each reporting the arrival of a different vessel and that Corte Real's vessel was the third.<sup>8</sup> This, however, does not bear close scrutiny. While Cantino and Pasqualigo differ as to the date the caravel arrived – the former says 11 October and the latter 8 October in his first letter and 9 October in his second – both agree that it was the first of only two ships commanded by Corte Real. In both the 18 October and 19 October letters, Pasqualigo makes reference to and describes “seven natives, men, women and children” brought back by this first vessel. In the 19 October letter he also says that “in the other caravel, which is expected from hour to hour, are coming fifty others.” In his first letter, written a day earlier, he also states that the second caravel is expected soon but makes no mention of any other captives. If only two vessels took part in the expedition, then the second vessel, the one captained by Corte Real and supposedly carrying 50 other Natives, never arrived. A problem arises, however, when we turn to the Cantino letter. This letter is dated 17 October 1501, one day before Pasqualigo's first letter, and in it he informs d'Este that one of Corte Real's “two well-equipped ships . . . has arrived safe and sound with some booty.” The other, he adds, has “decided to make her way far enough along the coast [of North America] to be able to learn whether it is an island or yet mainland.” He then states that Corte Real's crew had “forcibly kidnapped about fifty men and women of this country and have brought them to the king.” He adds that he has “seen, touched and examined these people” and goes on to describe them.<sup>9</sup>

How does one account for the discrepancy in these two letters? Since the Pasqualigo letter that mentions the 50 captives was written two days after Cantino's, one would assume that if 50 captives had arrived he would have known about it. Instead, he makes it quite clear that the vessel carrying the 50 is “expected from hour to hour.” Perhaps the story that Corte Real would soon return with another 50 captives was a rumour circulating around Lisbon at the time: a rumour repeated by Pasqualigo. There is no reason to doubt that Cantino had examined a number of captives brought back from the New World; clearly, Pasqualigo had as well. When Cantino informs d'Este, however, that there are “about fifty” captives, he may have simply been repeating this rumour – a rumour that he would have had every reason to believe to be correct.

Certainly, seven captives “men, women and children” would make more sense given the low population density of northeastern hunter-gatherers and the difficulties involved in transporting captives on a long and arduous transatlantic voyage aboard

*America from Conception to Discovery: Early Exploration of North America* (New York: Arno Press and Hector Bye Inc., 1979), 148-9.

8 Bernard G. Hoffman, *Cabot to Cartier: Sources for a Historical Ethnography of Northeastern North America, 1497-1550* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 27-8.

9 Quinn, *New American World, Volume 1: America from Conception to Discovery*, 150, 148-9.

an early 16th-century caravel. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how a vessel that probably had a crew of less than 30 could have accommodated 50 extra people. No evidence exists to indicate that a second vessel carrying more captives ever arrived at Lisbon. Even if three vessels were involved in the voyage and a second did arrive at some later date, it is unlikely that it could have transported 50 captives and, unless it were expressly designed for the purpose, it is hard to imagine why this human cargo would have been so unevenly distributed. Sometime during the following year Cantino sent a map to d'Este that incorporated the discoveries made by the Portuguese over the previous two years. The Cantino map contains an inscription describing the discoveries made in 1501. This inscription, almost certainly composed by Cantino, makes it quite clear that there were only two vessels involved in the 1501 voyage and is far less specific about the number of captives than was Cantino's letter of the previous year. It reads as follows:

This land was discovered by authority of the most high and excellent prince Dom Manuel, King of Portugal, which discovery was made by Gaspar de Corte Real, a gentleman of the king's household. He sent thence a ship with certain men and women which lived in this land, and remained with his other ship and has not since returned. It is believed he perished. Here there are plenty of masts.<sup>10</sup>

In any case, whether there were 7, 50 or 57 captives, there is no way of knowing if they were Beothuk. Bernard Hoffman believed that Corte Real's "Terra Verde" was Newfoundland and that the captives were Beothuk.<sup>11</sup> Howley, on the other hand, was doubtful and thought that the captives may have been "Eskimo [Inuit]."<sup>12</sup> H.P. Biggar gave a detailed description of what he considered to have been Corte Real's route based largely on some imaginative reading of early 16th-century maps. He followed Corte Real from Cape Farewell and down the coasts of Labrador and northeastern Newfoundland as far as the western side of Placentia Bay. Yet he came to the conclusion that the captives were taken from somewhere around Hamilton Inlet and were "Nasquapee [i.e. Innu-Montagnais]."<sup>13</sup> David Beers Quinn, using the same documents, traced a route for Corte Real beginning in Greenland, crossing the Davis Strait to "Labrador and coasting south by way of Labrador, Newfoundland, the Maritimes and possibly Maine." Quinn, however, believed that the captives came from either the Maritimes or Maine.<sup>14</sup> Certainly there is nothing in the surviving descriptions of these people that would allow us to identify their place of origin. That they had dark complexions, wore fur clothing, and made their tools from stone rather

10 Quinn, *New American World, Volume 1: America from Conception to Discovery*, 149.

11 Quinn, *New American World, Volume 1: America from Conception to Discovery*, 28.

12 Howley, *Beothucks or Red Indians*, 5.

13 H.P. Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534: A Collection of Documents Related to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa, ON: Government Printing Bureau, 1911), xvi-xvii.

14 David Beers Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America, 1481-1620, From the Bristol Voyages of the Fifteenth Century to the Pilgrim Settlement at Plymouth: The Exploration, Exploitation, and Trial-and-Error Colonization of North America by the English* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 115.

than iron may have been a revelation to Europeans in 1501, but it tells us nothing that could not be said of any Native group living on the eastern seaboard of North America at the time. Pasqualigo does say that one of the men carried a piece of a “broken gilt sword,” probably made in Italy, and one of the boys was wearing two silver rings in his ears. While this indicates that these people had some former contact with Europeans, there is little else that can be made of it. Indeed, it is possible that these items were acquired the previous year – during Corte Real’s first voyage.

The second documented case of Native Americans being taken to Europe from the northeast during this time dates from sometime between 1501 and 1503, when “three men taken in the New found Island” were brought to the court of Henry VII. Richard Hakluyt refers to these individuals in his work *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, published in 1589. The statement is brief and says simply that they were dressed in skins, ate raw meat, spoke an unintelligible language, and were “in their demeanor like to brute beasts.” Two of them apparently survived for some time and were seen two years later at Westminster Palace “apparelled after the maner of Englishmen.” Hakluyt claims that these three men arrived in England in the 14th year of the reign of Henry VII (between 15 September 1499 and 14 September 1500), and that they had been brought there by Sebastian Cabot.<sup>15</sup>

He appears, however, to have been mistaken. Two earlier documents place the incident somewhere between September 1501 and September 1503 and make no reference to Cabot. The first is *The Great Chronical of London*. It contains almost the same text published by Hakluyt, although written in a more archaic style, and places the incident between September 1501 and September 1502.<sup>16</sup> The second, and apparently the earliest, source is the *Cronicon Regum Anglie*, compiled by an anonymous writer around 1509. Referring to the 17th year of Henry VII’s reign (15 September 1502 to 14 September 1503), it states that “this yere three men were brought out of an ilande founde by merchauntes of Bristow forre beyonde Irelande, the which were cloth in beestes synnes and ete raw fflessh, and rude in their demeasure as Beastes.”<sup>17</sup> No reference is made to the incident at Westminster Palace in this passage, although a link to the royal court is suggested by a reference in the daybook of Henry VII’s treasurer, dated 15-20 September 1503, to a payment made to Sir Walter Herbert’s servant for bringing a “brasell bowe” and two red arrows from “the New Found Isle” to King Henry.<sup>18</sup>

Despite Hakluyt’s reference to Sebastian Cabot, it is unlikely that he played a role in the capture of these men. Contrary to the writings of some earlier historians, documentary evidence suggests that the earliest voyage to the New World in which Cabot played a major role was in 1504. The customs rolls for Bristol record that the

15 Richard Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation: A Facsimile of the Edition of 1589 with an Introduction by D.B. Quinn and R.A. Skelton and with an Index by Alison Quinn* (Cambridge, UK: The Hakluyt Society, 1965), 511.

16 Quinn, *New American World, Volume 1: America from Conception to Discovery*, 110.

17 Biggar, *Precursors*, 99-100. The complete title of this work is *Cronicon Regum Anglie et Series Maiorum et Vicecomitum Civitatis London ab Anno Primo Henrici Tertii ad Annum Primum Henrici Octavi, etc.*

18 Quinn, *New American World, Volume 1: America from Conception to Discovery*, 116.

two ships involved in this voyage returned sometime between 29 September (Michaelmas) and 12 December in 1504 with “20 lasts of salted fish and 7 tons [and] one pipe [of] fish livers,” but the rolls make no reference to Native Americans.<sup>19</sup> The only evidence that Sebastian Cabot may have had some contact with the Beothuk is a brief statement contained in the *Historia del l’Indie Occidentali* published in Venice in 1534 and believed to be the work of Ramusio. It states simply that Cabot “had little intercourse with those inhabitants whom he found to be fairly intelligent and who covered their whole body with the skins of different animals.”<sup>20</sup> James Axtell ascribed the capture of these individuals to John Amayne, master of the *Gabriell* of Bristol, who returned from Newfoundland with a load of salt cod in 1502, and this seems likely.<sup>21</sup> Both Amayne’s voyage and the 1504 voyage in which Cabot was involved were part of a series undertaken by a consortium of Bristol and Portuguese merchants, who in 1501 were granted a ten-year monopoly by Henry VII to explore and exploit “the newe founde launde.” Voyages were undertaken each year between 1501 and 1506, and the *Gabriell*, which had been purchased in Dieppe in 1501 by Bristol merchants Robert and William Thorne and Hugh Eliot with financial assistance from Henry VII, was one of the two vessels involved in the 1504 voyage.<sup>22</sup>

When we turn our attention to the question of where these men were taken from, we find ourselves in much the same dilemma as with the case of Corte Real. The term “newe founde launde,” as used in 1502, obviously referred to a much wider area than it does today and could have included much of Labrador, Newfoundland, the Maritimes, and perhaps even northern New England. It appears that at least one of the voyages of the Bristol-Portuguese consortium – the 1505 voyage – made its way as far south as southern Maine. Thus, the individuals in question might have come from any one of these places.<sup>23</sup>

The third documented incident of Native Americans being taken to Europe from the northeast during this time is that of “seven savage men” who were brought from “Terre-Neuve” to Rouen in 1509. Unlike the other two, this last group may be somewhat easier to identify. There are three documents that relate to this incident: the *Chronicon* of Eusebius of Caesarea, published in 1512; the *Discorso d’vn gran capitano di mare francese del louco di Dieppa*, first published in Ramusio’s *Navigazioni et viaggi* in 1556 and generally believed to have been written by captain Pierre Crignon in 1539; and the *Della istoria viniziana* of Pietro Bembo, published at Venice in 1551.<sup>24</sup>

Taking a statement contained in the *Chronicon* that the arrows of these people were “tipped with stone or fishbone,” Ruth Holmes Whitehead has suggested that the men

19 Alwyn A. Ruddock, “The Reputation of Sebastian Cabot,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, XLVII (1974): 97-8.

20 Bernard G. Hoffman, “Account of a Voyage Conducted to the New World, Africa, Madagascar, and Sumatra, Translated from the Italian with Notes and Comments,” *Ethnohistory* X, No. 1 (1963): 44.

21 James Axtell, *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 149-50; Quinn, *New American World, Volume 1: America from Conception to Discovery*, 110.

22 Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America*, 117-18; Ruddock, “Sebastian Cabot,” 98.

23 Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America*, 117-18.

24 Quinn, *New American World, Volume 1: America from Conception to Discovery*, 157; Hoffman, *Cabot to Cartier*, 169-70.

may have been taken from either Maine or Nova Scotia.<sup>25</sup> Information contained in the *Discorso d'vn gran capitano*, however, does not support this. The author of the *Discorso* appears to have had some first-hand knowledge of the “New Land” he describes, and if he were Pierre Crignon this would likely have been the case. *The Discorso* contains a passage describing three different parts of the “New Land,” and the people that discovered each. The first is the area around Cape Breton [“Capo de Brettoni”], which was discovered, according to the *Discorso*, by Bretons and Normans in 1504; the second is between Cape Race [“Capo di Raz”] and Cape Bonavista [“Capo di Buona Vista”], which was discovered by the Portuguese; and the third is from Cape Bonavista up to the Bay of Castles [the Strait of Belle Isle] and beyond, which was discovered by Bretons and Normans in 1506. Referring to the third part (between Cape Bonavista and the Strait of Belle Isle), the *Discorso* states: “In the year 1508 a ship from Dieppe, named *Pensee*, sent out by Jean Ango, father of the master captain and viscount of Dieppe also visited these parts. The master or owner of the said ship was Master Thomas Aubert, and he was the first to bring people here from the said country.”<sup>26</sup> If, as seems likely, these are the same people brought to Rouen in 1509, then it is fair to assume that they were taken from either northern Newfoundland or the Strait of Belle Isle. Both the *Chronicon* and the *Della Istoria Viniziana* contain descriptions of these people and while there is little to be found in these descriptions other than standard references to them wearing furs and speaking an incomprehensible language, both describe their vessel, which apparently was also taken to France, as being made from the bark of trees.<sup>27</sup> They are, therefore, unlikely to have been Inuit and may well have been either Beothuk or a related Algonkian (Little Passage/Point Revenge) group living on the Labrador side of the Strait of Belle Isle.<sup>28</sup>

### Jacques Cartier

There is a 25-year gap between the events at Rouen and Jacques Cartier’s first recorded voyage to the northeast in 1534. Cartier’s first port of call, on 11 May 1534, was Catalina on the north side of Trinity Bay. From there he sailed northwest to the Funk Islands, where his crew collected a supply of sea birds; he then proceeded north and on 27 May arrived at Quirpon, where he remained for 14 days.<sup>29</sup> James P. Howley maintained that at Quirpon Cartier “appears to have first met the aborigines, with whom he traded, as well as along the back of the Island [i.e. the west coast], which he explored as he sailed up the Gulf of St. Lawrence.”<sup>30</sup> A number of historians, including Upton, have taken Howley’s statement as fact.<sup>31</sup> Yet there is no evidence to

25 Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *Nova Scotia: The Protohistoric Period, 1500-1630* (Halifax, NS: Nova Scotia Museum, Curatorial Report No. 75, February, 1993), 11.

26 Hoffman, “Voyage Conducted to the New World,” 14-15.

27 Quinn, *New American World, Volume 1: America from Conception to Discovery*, 157.

28 For a discussion of the possible relationship between Point Revenge, Little Passage, and Beothuk peoples, see Ralph T. Pastore, “The Collapse of the Beothuk World,” *Acadiensis* XIX, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 59-64.

29 Ramsey Cook, ed., *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier with an Introduction by Ramsey Cook* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 3-5.

30 Howley, *Beothucks or Red Indians*, 9-10.

31 Upton, “Extirmination of the Beothucks,” 137.



indicate that Cartier had any direct dealings with Native people in Newfoundland. Jacques Cartier's account is the only first-hand description of this voyage. In it Cartier states that he spent 14 days (27 May-9 June) at Quirpon ("Karpont") waiting for the weather to clear, but he makes no reference to Native or Aboriginal people. Nor is there any mention of Aboriginal people in the account of his trip along the west coast of Newfoundland from Point Rich to Cape Anguille between 15 June and 25 June.<sup>32</sup> Cartier was equipped for trade and gave detailed descriptions of his encounters with Aboriginal people in the Maritimes and on his later trips up the St. Lawrence. Had he traded with Beothuk, he almost certainly would have left some account of the encounter.

Howley also claimed that Cartier's first description of Native people "is beyond question the first really reliable account of the Beothucks in existence."<sup>33</sup> It is clear from Cartier's narrative, however, that the passage quoted by Howley is actually a description of Native people in the vicinity of Blanc Sablon on the Labrador side of the Strait of Belle Isle. The caption at the beginning of the section containing the description reads: "Of the Harbour Called St. Anthony's Harbour [probably Rocky Harbour on the Quebec-Labrador border], of Port St. Servan, Port Jacques Cartier, of the River Called St. James River; of the Costumes and Clothing of the Inhabitants on the Island of Blanc Sablon."<sup>34</sup> Apparently, these people were engaged in hunting seals when Cartier encountered them. The "Island of Blanc Sablon" may be a reference to Ile au Bois at the entrance to Blanc Sablon Harbour. These people were clearly not Inuit. Cartier mentions their "canoes made of birch bark in which they go about and from which they catch many seals." It is possible that they were St. Lawrence Iroquoians who are known to have sometimes ventured as far north as the Strait of Belle Isle, and this notion gains some support from what Cartier states in his narrative: "Since seeing them, I have been informed that their home is not at this place but that they come from warmer countries to catch these seals and to get other food for their sustenance." However, Cartier seems to have had no problem distinguishing between Iroquoian and Algonkian peoples. Later, on the same voyage, he met a group of St. Lawrence Iroquoians at Gaspé Bay and was immediately struck by the difference between them and the other groups he had encountered. "They are," he said, "not at all of the same race or language as the first we met." One of the main distinctions between the two groups was the way they wore their hair. The people around Blanc Sablon, he noted, "wear their hair tied up on the top of their heads like a handful of twisted hay with a nail or something of the sort passed through the middle, and into it they weave a few bird's feathers." The St. Lawrence Iroquoians, on the other hand, "have their heads shaved all around in circles, except for a tuft on the top like a horse's tail. This they do up upon their heads and tie in a knot with leather thongs."<sup>35</sup> Most likely the people at Blanc Sablon were Algonkians living in the area and, if so, were

32 Cook, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 5-13.

33 Howley, *Beothucks or Red Indians*, 9-10.

34 Cook, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 9-10. In this passage Cartier is describing the coast along the south coast of Labrador and the lower north shore of Quebec between Chateau Bay and Bonne Esperance Harbour. Cook identifies St. Anthony's Harbour as Rocky Harbour and places it on that section of coast between Dog Islands and Lobster Bay.

35 Cook, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 24, 10, 25.

probably part of a larger Algonkian group that also included Newfoundland's Beothuk people.<sup>36</sup> The reference to them coming from other countries may simply be a misunderstanding caused by their withdrawal from the coast towards the end of the fishing season. Another, although perhaps less likely, possibility is that they were Beothuk visiting the coast of Labrador to hunt seals and sea birds.

While there is no evidence that Cartier traded with the Beothuk in 1534, there is some evidence to suggest that Cartier or members of his crew had some knowledge of them. Ruth Holmes Whitehead has suggested that Cartier knew the Beothuk word for great auk, which he gives as "Apponath."<sup>37</sup> If this is a Beothuk word, then at least some Breton and Norman fishermen must have had contact with the Beothuk during this early period.

### **Richard Hore's voyage**

According to L.F.S. Upton, in his article "The Extermination of the Beothuks of Newfoundland," two years after Cartier's voyage of 1534 "came the first report of the natives [i.e. Beothuk] fleeing at the site [*sic*] of white men." This is a reference to Richard Hore's 1536 voyage to Newfoundland. Upton believed that relations between the Beothuk and Europeans must have begun to break down sometime between Cartier's first voyage and Hore's voyage two years later. "Fighting must have taken place," he writes, and "it would seem that the cycle of Indian provocation and white revenge began early."<sup>38</sup> Upton quoted Howley as his source for these statements. There are, however, a number of problems with Upton's thesis. The first, and most obvious, is that Upton, following Howley's lead, had assumed that Cartier traded with the Beothuk in 1534. Yet, as we have seen, there is no evidence to support this. Moreover, many of the details surrounding Hore's voyage are unclear and Upton's interpretation of the events is open to question.

Hore's company set sail from Gravesend in two vessels about the end of April in 1536. The voyage was long and they first sighted land off Cape Breton around the end of June. From there they sailed northeast to Newfoundland and arrived, as Cartier had two years earlier, at the Funks where they collected birds and birds eggs. Sometime after their arrival in Newfoundland the two vessels parted company. One spent the rest of the summer fishing off the southeast coast of Newfoundland, at "the Ile of Spere [Tors Cove]," and arrived back in England sometime in September. The other sailed farther north and encountered many difficulties before reaching St. Ives in Cornwall about the end of October.<sup>39</sup>

It was the crew of the latter vessel who had the encounter to which Upton referred. Master Oliver Dawbeny related the incident to Richard Hakluyt about 50 years after it took place, and Dawbeny's statement was published by Hakluyt in the latter's 1589 edition of the *Principall Navigations*. Howley gives a second version of the encounter, but this appears to be a 19th-century paraphrase of Dawbeny's account and

36 Pastore, "Collapse of the Beothuk World," 59.

37 Ruth Holmes Whitehead, "'I Have Lived Here Since the World Began': Atlantic Coast Artistic Traditions," in *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, ed. Cameron Duncan and Julia D. Harrison (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 31.

38 Upton, "Extermination of the Beothuks," 137.

39 Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America*, 182-91.

has no value as an alternate source.<sup>40</sup> According to Dawbeny, who was on board the vessel at the time of the encounter, they had been in Newfoundland for “certaine dayes at [anchor]” without seeing any Natives when one day, while walking on the ship’s hatches, he “spied a boate with Savages of these parts, rowing downe the baye towarde them, to gaze upon the shippe and our people.” Upon seeing this, Dawbeny alerted the rest of the crew who “manned out a shipboate to meete them and to take them. But they [the Natives] spying our shipboate making towards them, returned with maine force & fled into an Island that laye by in the bay or river there, and our men pursued them into the Island, and the sauages fledde and escaped.”<sup>41</sup>

David Beers Quinn believed that the Natives described in this encounter were not Beothuk but Inuit, and that many of the events of the voyage took place along the coast of Labrador rather than in Newfoundland. He based this assumption on two pieces of evidence. The first is that Hore’s party reported finding a leather boot with elaborate stitching and “a certain great warme mitten” on the island to which they pursued the Natives. This, Quinn said, was “clearly Eskimo gear.” The second piece of evidence is that later in the voyage Hore’s crew ran out of food, and they were in such desperate straits that some of his party resorted to cannibalism. Quinn believed this to be evidence that Hore’s crew had strayed north to the Labrador coast since, if they were off the northeast coast of Newfoundland, they could have sailed south to meet the English fishing fleet and acquired sufficient food to make the journey home.<sup>42</sup>

This argument is not totally convincing. The discovery of decorative stitching on a boot and a “great warm mitten” is hardly sufficient evidence to determine the ethnicity of the people encountered. Nor is the shortage of food necessarily evidence that they had strayed to the Labrador coast. Given that the party arrived in Cornwall around the end of October, it is likely that they began their homeward voyage around the end of September. This would be well over a month after the majority of the fishing fleet had set sail for home. Dawbeny also states that on the island to which the Natives withdrew were “store of firre and pine trees.” This is unlikely to be a description of an island off the coast of southern Labrador, a coastline that Cartier described two years before as being “composed of stones and horrible rugged rocks . . . [covered with] nothing but moss and short stunted shrub.”<sup>43</sup> In any case, whether these people were Beothuk, Inuit, or some other group their initial behaviour suggests neither fear nor hostility. The fact that they approached the vessel as they did instead implies curiosity, while Dawbeny’s statement that the English “manned out a shipboate to meete them and to take them” indicates that they probably had good reason to flee.

### ***Discorso d’un gran capitano***

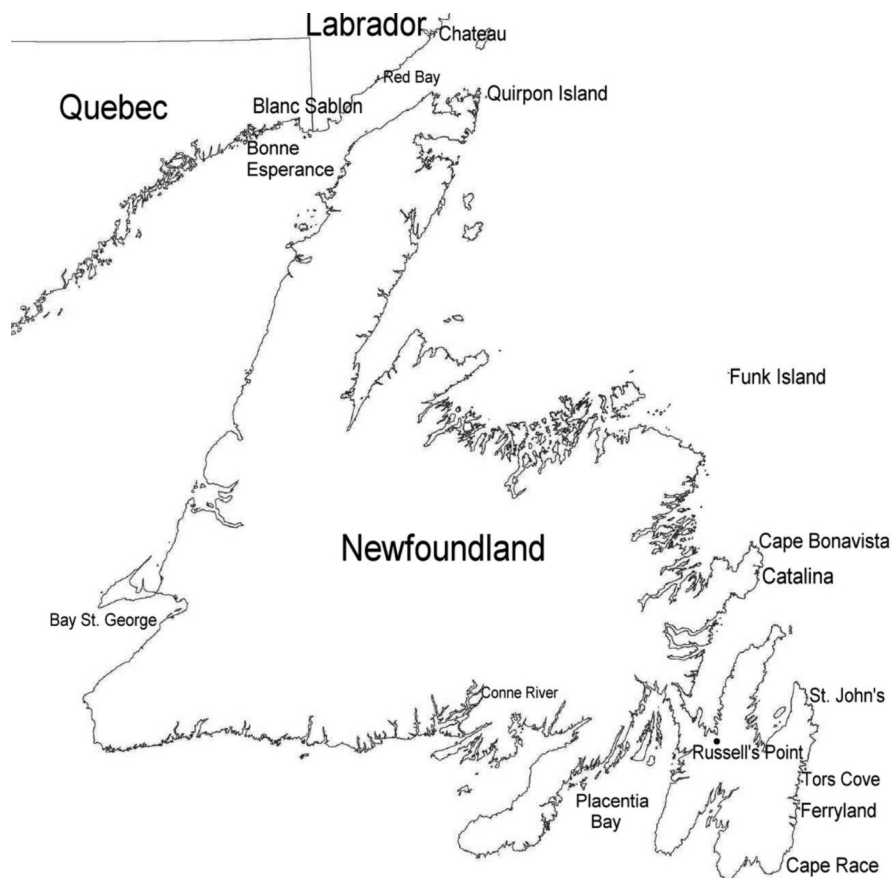
The *Discorso d’un gran capitano di mare francese del louco di Dieppa*, as noted above in the discussion of the captives taken to Rouen in 1509, is generally believed to have been written by Pierre Crignon in 1539 (three years after Hore’s voyage). This

40 Howley, *Beothucks or Red Indians*, 10.

41 Hakluyt, *Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 518.

42 Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America*, 185-6.

43 Cook, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 10.



Source: Outline Map, Provincial Archeology Office, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador; toponyms added by author.

work also appears to contain the first truly reliable description of the Beothuk and is the first, and perhaps the only, document to cast some light on the nature of Beothuk-European relations in the first half of the 16th century. The *Discorso* provides us with descriptions of two distinct groups who inhabited the “New Land.” The first is said to have lived on the coast running east and west between “Capo di Ras [Cape Race] and Capo de Brettoni [Cape Breton]”; the second to have lived along “the coast running north and south above Capo di Ras – as far as the entrance to the Golfo de Castelli [the Strait of Belle Isle].”<sup>44</sup>

44 Hoffman, “Voyage Conducted to the New World,” 13-14.

There has been some debate as to the identity of these two groups. Either or both could be said to be Beothuk depending on how one chooses to interpret the *Discorso*. Since the first is said to be “cruel and austere [and] . . . impossible to deal or converse [with],” while the second is described as “more humane, and friendlier than the others,” Beothuk-European relations, from the perspective of the Europeans, could be said to be either extremely bad or fairly good at this time depending on which of the two groups was Beothuk. Bernard Hoffman believed that the first group was Beothuk and that the second group may have been “Eskimo,” although his only reason for the latter seems to be the statement that they are “smaller, more humane, and friendlier” than the other group. Charles Martijn argued that the members of the first group were Cape Breton Mi’kmaq involved in seasonal resource exploitation on the south coast of Newfoundland.<sup>45</sup> Quinn suggested that the first were Mi’kmaq and “possibly Beothuk, though it is unlikely,” and that the second were Beothuk.<sup>46</sup> This is almost certainly correct.

Understandably, some historians have assumed that the first group – those said to live between “Capo di Ras and Capo de Brettoni” – was Beothuk and that this is a reference to the south coast of Newfoundland. However, there are certain problems with this. Like many of the early place names along the east coast of North America, the term Cape Breton was originally somewhat vague and ill-defined. While at one point in the text “Capo de Brettoni” is said to be a specific point on a map – it lies, the *Discorso* informs us, “in 47 degrees West Longitude and 46 degrees North Latitude” – the term is also used to describe a larger region. A little farther on we are told that “The said land – that part which runs east and west – was discovered 35 years ago [1504] by the Bretons and Normans, for which reason it is called Capo de Brettoni.” The whole of the “New Land” is said to stretch “towards the North Pole from 40 degrees to 60 degrees [latitude]” and is divided into three regions: “Capo de Brettoni,” the coast from “Capo di Ras to Capo di Buona Vista,” and the coast from Capo di Buona Vista “up to the Golfo delli Castelli and beyond.” Southwest of Cape Breton and “contiguous with the said cape,” the *Discorso* places the “Land of Norumbega” – a term generally thought to refer to present-day New England.<sup>47</sup> However, in the *Discorso* this term applies to the entire eastern seaboard stretching “some 500 leagues up to the land of Florida.” As in the case of “the newe founde launde,” the term “Capo de Brettoni” seems to have applied to a much wider area than it does today and may have included the entire south shore of Nova Scotia. If this is the case, the first group described in the *Discorso* may well have lived in present-day Cape Breton or even mainland Nova Scotia. And, as Martijn has pointed out, evidence contained in Jean Alphonse’s *Cosmographie*, written in 1544, indicates that Cape Breton Mi’kmaq were making at least occasional forays to Newfoundland in the first half of the 16th century and these sometimes led to conflict with the Beothuk.<sup>48</sup>

45 Charles A. Martijn, “Early Mi’kmaq Presence in Southern Newfoundland: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, Circa 1500-1763,” *Newfoundland Studies*, 17, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 57-61.

46 David B. Quinn, *Sources for the Ethnography of Northeastern North America to 1611* (Ottawa, ON: National Museum of Man Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service, Paper No. 76, 1981), 17.

47 Emerson W. Baker et al., *American Beginnings: Exploration, Culture, and Cartography in the Land of Norumbega* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

48 Martijn, “Early Mi’kmaq Presence in Southern Newfoundland,” 60-1.

On the other hand, the coast “running north and south above” Cape Race to the Strait of Belle Isle undoubtedly refers to the eastern and northern Avalon and the northeast coast of Newfoundland. Despite Hoffman’s suggestion, there is no evidence to indicate any Inuit presence in this area in the early 16th century; the statement in the *Discorso* that these people lived in “small huts and houses covered with tree bark,” and that their boats are “made of the bark of certain trees called birch,” clearly indicates that they were not Inuit.<sup>49</sup> Charles Martijn has suggested that the latter may be a description of Native people living in the Strait of Belle Isle. This, however, stems from confusion over the meaning of the term “Golfo de Castelli” or Bay of Castles. Martijn believed that the term could apply to “either the eastern entrance of the Strait, or Chateau Bay itself.”<sup>50</sup> Jacques Cartier’s account of his 1534 voyage, however, makes it quite clear that the Bay of Castles, or “La Baye des Chateaulx,” is the Strait of Belle Isle. According to Cartier, the entrance to the Bay of Castles is Point Degrat on Quirpon Island off the northern tip of the Great Northern Peninsula. Schooner Island, located roughly 25 kilometres to the west in Pistolet Bay, is on the south side of this bay while Chateau Harbour [Le Hable des Chateaulx] is located “on the north shore of the said bay.”<sup>51</sup>

Thus, in the *Discorso* it appears that we have our first authentic description of the Beothuk. The passage reads as follows:

On the coast running north and south above Capo di Ras – as far as the entrance to the [Golfo de] Castelli – there are great gulfs, large rivers, and numerous large islands. This land is more sparsely inhabited than the before-mentioned coast [Cape Breton] and the inhabitants are smaller, more humane and friendlier than the others. There is much fishing for cod, as on the other coast. No one has ever seen any houses, villas or castles here, except for a large wooden enclosure which was seen in the Golfo de Castelli. The inhabitants live in small huts and houses which are covered with tree bark, which they build to live in during the fishing season, which begins in the spring and lasts all summer.

#### Concerning the Fishing Done by the Savages

They fish for seals, porpoises, and certain sea birds, called gannets [Margaux], which they take on the islands [to dry]. They make oil out of the fat of these fish. When the fishing season ends with the approach of winter, they return with their catch in boats made of the bark of certain trees called birch [Buil], and go to warmer countries, but we know not where.<sup>52</sup>

49 James A. Tuck, *Newfoundland and Labrador Prehistory* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1976), 109-118.

50 Charles A. Martijn, “An Eastern Micmac Domain of Islands,” in *Actes du Vingtieme Congress des Algonquistes* (Ottawa, ON: Carleton Univeristy, 1989), 213.

51 H.P. Bigger, *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier: Published from the Originals with Translations, Notes, and Appendices* (Ottawa, ON: F.A. Acland, 1924), 9-15.

52 Hoffman, “Voyage Conducted to the New World,” 14.

What conclusions can be reached about the Beothuk and the nature of Beothuk-European relations in the first half of the 16th century from this passage? It is, admittedly, brief. Yet it does provide us with some insight. The observation that the land is more sparsely inhabited than *Capo de Brettoni* corresponds with what can be surmised about population density for the two areas during the 16th century.<sup>53</sup> The term “fishing” in the passage is, of course, the old usage and refers to the taking of any creature that spends most of its time in the water. The *Discorso* is not implying that the Natives engaged in the cod fishery. Indeed, in the section on Cape Breton it is specifically stated “these fish [are] caught only by the French and Bretons since the natives do not fish for them.”<sup>54</sup> The types of “fishing” ascribed to the Beothuk are just the sorts of activities that one would expect them to be engaged in during the summer months and correspond well with later descriptions. The reference to their taking birds on the islands “to dry” is beyond doubt the earliest reference to the Beothuk drying food for winter storage.

That these activities are described in such a matter-of-fact way suggests that it was not uncommon to see Native people thus engaged during the fishing season. The description of their houses and canoes, although brief, indicates that these as well were not uncommon sights along the coast at this time. Indeed, the statement that they are “more humane, and friendlier than the others” suggests that relations between the Beothuk and the migratory fishermen were fairly cordial. It certainly points to a very different situation from that postulated by many writers and is a far cry from the “cycle of Indian provocation and white revenge” suggested by Upton.<sup>55</sup> That they were said to build their houses “to live in during the fishing season, which begins in the spring and lasts all summer” suggests that there was a time, early in the spring, when they were not seen on the coast. The statement that they “go to warmer countries” when winter begins to set in echoes that made by Cartier and, as in that case, is probably a reference to the Native people moving inland in the fall of the year.

### **Jean Alphonse de Saintonge**

The next apparent reference to the Beothuk is contained in Jean Alphonse de Saintonge’s *Les voyages aventureux dv capitaine Jan Alfonse*. Alphonse was a French sea captain operating out of the port of La Rochelle, who sailed to Canada in 1542 as Roberval’s navigator and pilot. While his text was not published until 1559, most of the information it contains appears to be drawn from his experiences with Roberval.<sup>56</sup> Howley quoted a passage from Alphonse [“Johan Alphonse”], which he claimed was a description of the Beothuk.<sup>57</sup> After a careful analysis of the text, however,

53 Estimates for the Aboriginal populations of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland at contact vary, but Martijn suggests somewhere between 6000 and 15,000 for Nova Scotia and archaeologists have estimated roughly 500-1000 for Newfoundland. See Martijn, “Early Mi’kmaq Presence in Southern Newfoundland,” 49, as well as Marshall, *History and Ethnography of the Beothuk*, 283. While the estimate for Newfoundland may be rather conservative, it seems clear that population density was much lower on the island.

54 Hoffman, “Voyage Conducted to the New World,” 12.

55 Upton, “Extermination of the Beothucks,” 135.

56 Hoffman, *Cabot to Cartier*, 168.

57 Howley, *Beothucks or Red Indians*, 11. “Jean” is the way the name is usually spelled, but in the title of *Les voyages* it is spelled “Jan.” Howley, for his part, spelled it as “Johan.”

D.B. Quinn came to the conclusion that this is actually a description of either the Montagnais or St. Lawrence Iroquois in the area around Quebec.<sup>58</sup>

But Alphonse's work does contain a brief description that seems to refer to the Beothuk. Like the author of the *Discorso*, he appears to have been describing the southern and eastern coasts of Newfoundland when he says that the coast of "La Terra-neufve . . . runs North and South to Cap de Ras"; however, his statement that "the people . . . have no more God than beasts & are evil folk" contrasts sharply with the *Discorso*.<sup>59</sup> How do we account for this contradiction? Sailing as he did from La Rochelle, Alphonse would have been well removed from the main centres of the Newfoundland trade – Brittany and Normandy to the north and the Basque Country to the south – and is likely to have been less familiar with the area than was the author of the *Discorso*. Certainly, of the two documents, the *Discorso* would appear to be the more reliable. The coast north of St. John's as far as the Strait of Belle Isle appears to have been largely the domain of Breton and Norman fisherman during the first half of the 16th century, and these people probably would have had considerably more knowledge of the area than Alphonse.<sup>60</sup> Also, given the attitudes of the time, Alphonse may well have viewed any group of people who were not Christian, or indeed not Catholic, as being "evil folk." Martijn has suggested that Alphonse might have received his information either from fishermen he encountered during a sojourn in St. John's on his way to Quebec or from Cartier and his crew whom he met there at that time on their way back to France. However, he thought that Alphonse was probably describing Mi'kmaq frequenting the south coast of the island."<sup>61</sup>

Another brief description of the inhabitants of *Terra Nova*, which was included on a map published in Venice by Pietro Andrea Mattioli in 1547-48, was reproduced by Howley. However, it is basically a combination of information and misinformation drawn from various sources dealing more generally with Native people of the northeast and has nothing specific to say about the Beothuk.<sup>62</sup>

### André Thevet

Among the sources that refer to the Native people of Newfoundland during this period, none are more frustrating than the works of André Thevet. This French scholar and cleric held many positions during his life, including royal cosmographer to four French kings, abbot of Notre Dame de Masdion in Saintonge, and overseer of the Royal Collection of Curiosities at Fontainebleu. He apparently had some first-hand knowledge of the New World and claimed to have interviewed, among others, Sebastian Cabot, Cartier, and Donnacona. He wrote three works that purport to contain information about Newfoundland and its Aboriginal inhabitants: *Les singularitez de la France Antarctique*, published in 1557; *La cosmographie universelle d'André Thevet, cosmographe du roy*, published in 1575; and *Le grand*

58 Quinn, *Sources for the Ethnography of Northeastern North America*, 27.

59 Hoffman, *Cabot to Cartier*, 168.

60 D.B. Quinn, "Newfoundland in the Consciousness of Europe in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries," in *Early European Settlement and Exploitation in Atlantic Canada*, ed. G.M. Story (St. John's, NF: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1981), 14.

61 Martijn, "Early Mi'kmaq Presence in Southern Newfoundland," 60-1.

62 Howley, *Beothucks or Red Indians*, 11.



*insulaire et pilotage d'André Thevet angoumoisain*, which was completed in 1586 but never published.<sup>63</sup>

Despite these impressive titles, there appears to be little that is reliable in Thevet's descriptions of the Native people of *Terre Neuve*. His tendency to confuse sources, to mix ethnographic information from different regions, and, in some cases, to simply fabricate information brings into question almost any statement he makes. Also, as with many early sources, it is not clear exactly what he means by the "New Land." While he does perceive it as lying to the east of "Canada," his statement that it extends "north for at least 350 leagues" between 48 and 60 degrees of latitude indicates that his "New Land" covers a much wider area than does Newfoundland today. In the *Singularitez*, Thevet provides an elaborate description of the way in which the Native people of the New Land make war (accompanied by an illustration).<sup>64</sup> Despite Bernard Hoffman's comment that this passage "implies considerable contact and familiarity between the Natives and Europeans," it seems to be largely a creation of Thevet's imagination.<sup>65</sup> In the *Cosmographie* he describes a disease suffered by the Native people of the New Land that was transmitted by them to a group of Frenchmen. However, his description of the disease, how it was contracted by the French after some of the Native people "came into their fort," and how it was cured when the French learned the Native people's remedy (which involved drinking a liquid made of the leaves and bark of a certain tree), leave little doubt that this is based on Cartier's account of the scurvy suffered by his men during their stay in Quebec over the winter of 1535-36.<sup>66</sup> Thevet is especially frustrating since one gets the impression that he had access to a considerable amount of information that could have been extremely useful had it been recorded and presented in a less fanciful manner. William F. Ganong was less critical of Thevet, asserting that his work contained "some items of real information which should be taken into account by future students of the Cartier voyages and of Canadian aboriginal customs."<sup>67</sup> Be that as it may, there is little in Thevet that relates directly to the Beothuk.

### **Humphrey Gilbert's voyage**

Another, albeit brief, mention of the Beothuk comes from Humphrey Gilbert's voyage to Newfoundland in 1583. Gilbert's party hoped to encounter and trade with the Native people of the region and for that purpose brought "Morris dancers, Hobby horse, and Maylike conceits" as well as "all petty haberdasherie wares to barter with these simple people."<sup>68</sup> Howley cited Hakluyt in asserting that Gilbert's men did encounter the Beothuk: "The southern parts seem destitute of any inhabitants, a

63 Roger Schlesinger and Arthur P. Stabler, ed. and trans., *André Thevet's North America: A Sixteenth Century View* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986), xxxiii, xxi-xxii.

64 Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America*, 60, 36, 44.

66 To compare Thevet's account with Cartier's, see Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America*, 60, and Cook, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 76-81.

67 William F. Ganong, *Crucial Maps in the Early Cartography and Place-Nomenclature of the Atlantic Coast of Canada with an Introduction, Commentary and Map Notes by Theodore E. Layng* (Toronto: University of Toronto in co-operation with the Royal Society of Canada, 1964), 386.

68 David Beers Quinn, ed., *The Voyages and Colonising Enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert with an Introduction and Notes by David Beer Quinn* (Nendelin, Liechthestein: Kraus Reprint Limited, 1967), 396.

circumstance which was probably owing to the frequent appearance of Europeans, whose presence might have intimidated the natives, and induced them to retire into the interior. Towards the north they met with some of them who approached without dread and appeared to be of gentle disposition.”<sup>69</sup> This is almost certainly, however, a paraphrase of a statement from “Edward Hayes’ Narrative of Sir Humphrey Gilbert’s Last Expedition,” which was published by Hakluyt. Unlike Gilbert, Hayes survived the expedition and composed his account shortly after his return to England in the fall of 1583. The statement reads as follows: “In the South parts we found no inhabitants, which by all likelihood have abandoned those coastes, the same being so much frequented by Christians: But in the North are savages altogether harmelesse.” Whether or not any of Gilbert’s men had direct contact with these people we cannot say for certain, but it seems unlikely. Aside from Hayes’s narrative, the only other primary document to survive from the voyage is a letter written by Stephen Parmenius to Richard Hakluyt from St. John’s in 6 August 1583. It reads in part: “Whether there bee any people in this Countrey I know not, neither haue I seene any to witnesse it. And to say truth who can, when as it is not possible to passe any whither.”<sup>70</sup>

### **The voyage of the *Grace***

After Gilbert, the next account to mention the Beothuk is that of the 1594 voyage of the Bristol ship *Grace* to Newfoundland.<sup>71</sup> During this voyage, the crew of the *Grace* had two encounters with the Beothuk. The first took place on the west coast of the island in Bay St. George. Here they found a Native camp that had been recently, and apparently hastily, abandoned. A number of houses were found along with some caribou meat that was being roasted on spits, several cormorants that had been plucked and prepared for cooking, a container made of bark, and a wooden spoon. From the number of tracks found around the camp, the crewmembers concluded that there were about “fortie or fiftie men women and children” in the party. Ralph Pastore suggested that the Beothuk may have been attracted to this area by the presence of two Basque vessels that had been wrecked there three years before. It could be that these Native people were salvaging nails and other iron from these vessels.<sup>72</sup> The fact that the Beothuk withdrew from their camp at the approach of the *Grace* need not indicate hostility. The practice of retreating at the approach of an unknown vessel was probably the safest course of action given the uncertainties involved in contact at the time, and this type of behaviour was not confined to the Beothuk or to the protohistoric period. When Bishop Michael Fleming sailed into the mouth of Conne River, Newfoundland, in the summer of 1835, the first reaction of the Mi’kmaq, who had a long history of contact with Europeans, was to desert their wigwams and hide in the nearby woods.<sup>73</sup>

69 Howley, *Beothucks or Red Indians*, 12.

70 Hakluyt, *Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 689, 699.

71 David B. Quinn, ed., with Alison M. Quinn and Susan Hillier, *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612, Volume III: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. North West Passage Searches* (New York: Arno Press and Hector Bye Inc., 1979), 64.

72 R.T. Pastore, “Fishermen, Furriers, and Beothuks: The Economy of Extinction,” *Man in the Northeast* 33 (Spring 1987): 3.

73 Doug Jackson, “*On the Country*”: *The Micmac of Newfoundland* (St. John’s, NF: Harry Cuff Publications Ltd., 1993), 112-13.

Leaving St. George's Bay, the *Grace* proceeded to a place called "Pesmarck" [Gallows Harbour Head] on the western side of Placentia Bay where the crew set to fishing.<sup>74</sup> One night, while the crew slept, some Native people cut the moorings of their pinnace and their ship's boat and set them adrift. Fortunately, the crew succeeded in recovering their boats and immediately left for Ferryland.<sup>75</sup> Pastore suggested that this incident may have been inspired by the Beothuks' desire to acquire iron nails, and this may well be the case.<sup>76</sup>

### **Possible evidence for trade, 1580-1600**

Two documents from the last decade of the 16th century hint at the possibility of trade between Europeans and Beothuk. The first dates from March 1595 and is a report by Edward Palmer concerning a Basque Huguenot named Stevan de Bocall, who had been sailing out of Bristol for the previous two years. Palmer says of de Bocall that "he knowes wher the coper bynes [i.e. copper veins] be in Newfoundland/ wherof I have shoue but I never Sawe better in all my Lyffe/ [and] this man hath hade greatte trafycke in the contrye with the Salvages . . . ." The second document was written on 30 December 1597 and concerns a complaint made by Martin Arritsaga, the owner of a French Basque vessel called the *Bonaventure*. While on its way from Newfoundland to St. Jean de Luz in France, the *Bonaventure* was seized by Captain Hubbarde of Southampton on the assumption that it was on its way to Spain. Arritsaga claimed that he was on a combined fishing and trading voyage and that besides fish and train oil he had acquired "of the Savadges in truck for tobacco fifty buckskinnes, forty bever skinnes, twenty martins."<sup>77</sup>

As with many of the documents examined above, the problem with these statements is that it is uncertain what exactly is meant by the term "Newfoundland." Certainly, European knowledge of the northeast had increase tremendously since the first decade of the 16th century, when most of the east coast from New England to Labrador might be referred to as the "New Land" or the "New Found Island." Yet even in the 1590s it is possible that some Basques might refer to the Labrador side of the Strait of Belle Isle as part of "Terra Nova," although by this time the area seems to have been more often referred to as the Grand Bay. Palmer differentiates between Newfoundland and Canada, where de Bocall is also said to have traded. Further on in the same document he says of de Bocall: "I have knowen him brynge owte of the canada in a paltrye barke 3 thowsand pownd worthe in [furs]."<sup>78</sup> Yet the distinctions are still too vague to be certain.

Directly related to this is some data discovered by Laurier Turgeon. During his research in the archives of Bordeaux, Turgeon found references to fifteen trading ventures undertaken by Basque ships between 1580 and 1600. All of these vessels were from the French Basque ports of Saint Jean de Luz and Cibourne, and all but one

74 William J. Kirwin, "Added Early French Names on the Western Shore of Placentia Bay," *Regional Language Studies . . . Newfoundland*, no. 21 (15 April 2009): 11. The name is probably derived from Penmarc'h near Brest in Brittany.

75 Quinn, *New American World, Volume III: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony*, 65.

76 Pastore, "Fishermen, Furriers, and Beothuks," 3.

77 Quinn, *New American World, Volume III: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony*, 65, 120.

78 Quinn, *New American World, Volume III: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony*, 65.

were designated as going on joint fishing (or whaling) and trading ventures. The one exception was concerned exclusively with trade. Of these fifteen, nine listed “Canada” as their destination, three listed “Gaspé,” one the “Grand Bay,” and two “New-found-land.”<sup>79</sup>

### Conclusions

The preceding provides a summary of the primary documents currently available in print that relate to Beothuk-European relations during the 16th century. The sources are extremely fragmentary, and it has to be admitted that there is little that can be said with any certainty. Yet the little that can be gleaned from these sources does not support the commonly held view of this period. Certainly there is little evidence for the scenario of “occasional kidnapping, casual trade, sporadic pillage and mutual retaliation” suggested by Upton.<sup>80</sup> There can be no doubt that some captives were taken from the northeast during the first decade of the 16th century. The numbers, however, at least in the case of the Portuguese voyages, have probably been greatly exaggerated, and only a handful of these are likely to have come from Newfoundland. Speculation by some writers that the removal of large numbers of captives from Newfoundland during the early 16th century led to an early and irreparable breakdown of relations between Beothuk and Europeans would therefore seem to have little basis in fact.

Nor does the breakdown of Beothuk-European relations postulated by Upton for the 1530s bear up under close scrutiny. Dawbeny’s account of a group of Native people, probably Beothuk, fleeing from a party of Englishmen in 1536 looks more like a reasonable response to a potentially dangerous situation – the Englishmen’s attempt “to meete them and to take them” – than an indication of growing hostility.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the only document from the first half of the 16th century to definitely describe the Beothuk, the *Discorso d’vn gran capitano di mare francese del louco di Dieppa*, suggests that relations between Beothuk living on the northeast coast of the island and the Breton and Norman fishermen who visited that coast every summer were fairly amicable. This is supported by circumstantial evidence contained in Jacques Cartier’s account of his first voyage that suggests that some members of his Breton crew may have known a few Beothuk words.

Aside from the experience of the *Grace* on the western side of Placentia Bay, there is no evidence in any of the documents to indicate hostility between Beothuk and Europeans at any time during the 16th century. With the exception of the questionable speculations of André Thevet, a brief statement by Jean Alphonse de Saintonge, and an inscription on the Mattioli map of 1547-48, the only reference of any kind to the Beothuk during the 55 years between the writing of the *Discorso* in 1539 and the voyage of the *Grace* in 1594 is Hayes’s statement from 1583 that they are “altogether harmelesse.” While one might argue that this is simply a result of a lack of sufficient data, the fact remains that a lack of data is just that and can no more be used to support

79 Laurier Turgeon, “Basque-Amerindian Trade in the Saint Lawrence During the Sixteenth Century: New Documents, New Perspectives,” *Man in the Northeast*, no. 40 (1990): 83.

80 Upton, “Extirmination of the Beothucks,” 135.

81 Hakluyt, *Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 518.

speculations about hostility, pillage, and reprisal than it can be used to support speculations about anything else.

While there is little evidence of hostility, there is some evidence to suggest that a certain amount of trade may have been taking place during the last two decades of the 16th century – even though uncertainties about late 16th-century nomenclature make it difficult to reach a definite conclusion. As is the case elsewhere in the northeast, the number of written sources increases dramatically with the establishment of the first European colonies. Efforts by settlers at the Cupids colony, established in Conception Bay in 1610, to contact the Beothuk in Trinity Bay during the second decade of the 17th century have provided us with some invaluable ethnographic information. An analysis of these documents is beyond the scope of this article, but it should be noted that they may shed some light on earlier events. That being said, it is also important to be cautious when using them to interpret events in the previous century.<sup>82</sup> Still, the reports written by John Guy, Henry Crout, and other early Newfoundland colonists clearly show that by the second decade of the 17th century the Beothuk were already familiar with many of the nuances of the fur trade.<sup>83</sup>

While it is possible that other significant documents will be discovered, perhaps our best hope of learning more about Beothuk-European contact in the 16th century lies with archaeology. Bruce Trigger's statement that the 16th century "remains the stepchild of both history and archaeology" is as relevant for Newfoundland as for the rest of eastern North America.<sup>84</sup> Considerable progress has already been made in this area. Works on both the island and in Labrador have revealed that the Beothuk were part of a larger Algonkian cultural group whose range during the late prehistoric and proto-historic periods extended over the island and much of southern Labrador.<sup>85</sup> Native hearths found at the 16th-century Basque whaling station at Red Bay, Labrador, provide evidence that these Algonkian people were visiting that station to acquire European goods, most likely during the late winter and early spring after the whalers had returned to Europe.<sup>86</sup> Native hearths uncovered at Ferryland on the east coast of Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula confirm a Beothuk presence there in the 16th century. These visits probably began early in the 16th century and there is some evidence to suggest a certain amount of trade.<sup>87</sup> Russell's Point, located about 73 km northwest of Ferryland, was a camp site used by the Beothuk and their ancestors from roughly AD 1000 to AD 1650. Excavations conducted between 1994 and 1997 have

82 See Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), 11; see also Peter E. Pope, "Scavengers and Caretakers: Beothuk/European Settlement Dynamics in 17th-Century Newfoundland," *Newfoundland Studies* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 279-93.

83 For an analysis of these documents, see William Gilbert, "'Divers Places': The Beothuk Indians and John Guy's Voyage into Trinity Bay in 1612," *Newfoundland Studies* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 147-67, and Gilbert, "'great good Done': Beothuk/European Relations in Trinity Bay, 1612 to 1622," *Newfoundland Quarterly* LXXXVII, no. 3 (Summer/Fall 1992): 2-10.

84 Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*, 111. See also Pope, "Scavengers and Caretakers."

85 Pastore, "The Collapse of the Beothuk World."

86 James A. Tuck, "Excavations at Red Bay, Labrador," in *Archaeology in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1986* (Annual Report No. 7, 1989): 217-18.

87 Rick Gaulton, "An Early Historic Beothuk Occupation at Ferryland, Newfoundland," *Avalon Chronicles* 6 (2001): 49-51.

confirmed that the people living there during the 16th and early 17th century had access to a certain amount of European material and that some of it was probably acquired through trade.<sup>88</sup>

In his analysis of Newfoundland history prior to the 1970s, Keith Matthews criticized historians for treating “Newfoundland’s history as timeless” and stated: “Although groups changed in characteristics and importance, historians nevertheless perceived eternal and unchanging conflict raging for more than 200 years.”<sup>89</sup> It seems clear that a similar approach underlies much of what has been written about the Beothuk. Despite the fact that the majority of the documented hostile encounters between Europeans and Beothuk took place in Notre Dame Bay and along the Exploits River during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, many historians have assumed that a state of perpetual hostility must have existed since the time of first contact.<sup>90</sup> It was only in the 1980s that this approach to Beothuk historiography began to change, and the older view still has a firm grip on the public imagination.<sup>91</sup>

88 William Gilbert, “Russell’s Point: A Little Passage/Beothuk Site at the Bottom of Trinity Bay” (MA thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2002).

89 Keith Matthews, “Historical Fence Building: A Critique of the Historiography of Newfoundland,” *Newfoundland Studies* 17, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 156.

90 Howley, *Beothuks or Red Indians*, 25-231.

91 For a more up-to-date approach, see Pastore, “Fishermen, Furriers, and Beothuks,” and Pastore, “The Collapse of the Beothuk World.”