

Exploration and Evangelization of the Great Canadian North: Vikings, Coureurs des Bois, and Missionaries

GUY MARY-ROUSSELIÈRE, O.M.I.*

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt today that the first Europeans to discover the North American continent were the Vikings, five centuries before Christopher Columbus. The more recent history of the exploration of the Canadian Arctic is largely bound up with the predominantly British expeditions sent to discover the Northwest Passage, a quest which met with success only in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was only then, in effect, that the general outline of the Arctic coast of Canada became known and it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that the Northwest Passage was traversed from end to end by Amundsen.

Parallel to this outside exploration was the generally less spectacular, but persistent, penetration of the northwest which started out from the colonized areas of New France. From the end of the eighteenth century, these exploratory searches included the two expeditions of Alexander Mackenzie and later those of Franklin, Back, Richardson, Simpson, and Rae.

Throughout these exploratory activities, the part played by the Church, with its religious motives, could appear secondary when set against European cupidity for gold and furs. Yet, during what could be called the Christian centuries, evangelization almost always went hand in hand with exploration. Like Jacques Cartier at Gaspé before him, one of the first things Frobisher did on his second voyage was to erect a cross on the land he had discovered. Besides, the missionaries were never far behind the explorers; in fact, they often went with them and sometimes even preceded them.

While it is true that the evangelization of the great Canadian North and the missionary expansion really only date from the last century, their history would be incomplete if no mention were made of the precursors who prepared the ground for later missionaries.

After a preliminary discussion of the possibility of a pre-Columbian evangelization of the Canadian Arctic, the aim of this paper is to describe the main thrusts, first to the northeast and later to the northwest, particularly those which originated in New France. It will also show the predominant part played by the coureurs des bois and their successors, the "voyageurs", or French-Canadian boatmen or bushmen, in the exploration of northwest Canada and in influencing the conversion of the indigenous people to Christianity.

A VIKING PRIEST ON BAFFIN ISLAND?

The question of the presence of Vikings, and particularly of a Viking Priest, in the Canadian Arctic before the official discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus could still be regarded as pure conjecture but for a recent discovery which argues in its favour.

In the summer of 1977, a small wooden statuette (Fig. 1; Sabo and Sabo, 1978) of unusual aspect was found in a Thule hut on the archaeological site of Okivilialuk (Fig. 2), near Lake Harbour on the south coast of Baffin Island. Like most Thule figurines, this one has very short arms and the face has no detail. But the person represented is wearing a hooded garment falling almost to the feet, with a long slit in front accentuated by a sort of border. The important detail is that beneath a horizontal dash which could indicate a mail covering, there is a cross on the chest engraved with two simple lines.

Archaeologists generally agree that this figure represents a European and moreover a Viking. The two lines forming a cross on the chest have led some to believe that it represents a priest. Two questions arise. First, was the figurine carved in the region in which it was discovered, or did it come from Greenland whence it made its way somehow to Okivilialuk? It is obviously impossible to answer the first with certainty, but in the absence of evidence to the contrary the presumption is in favour of a local origin. If one accepts a local origin, the second question arises: does the carving really represent a Viking, and more precisely a Viking priest? If so, is it possible that a Viking priest came to Baffin Island in the Middle Ages?

It is almost certain that Baffin Island was discovered when the colonization of Greenland began. Most historians identify Baffin Island with the "Helluland" (see Fig. 2) seen as early as 986 A.D. by Bjarni Herjolfson and rediscovered in 1002 by Leif Erikson and his companions on their way south towards Markland and Vinland. The sagas do not tell of a meeting with native inhabitants on this occasion, but if the "Skraelings" who clashed with Thorfinn Karlsefni's expedition between 1007 and 1009 in Vinland were definitely not Thule people, it is not impossible that they were of the Dorset culture.

Although the first attempts to colonize Vinland at the beginning of the eleventh century were not followed up, contact with the continent was not broken. It is known that until at least 1347 expeditions were sent to Markland (Labrador) to



FIG. 1. Carved wooden figurine from Okivilialuk.

collect wood, lacking in Greenland, for construction. It must have happened more than once that the drakkars were blown off course by a storm. Given such circumstances, what is more likely than that they would look for refuge in a creek sheltered from wind and ice? If there were any Eskimos in the vicinity — the Thule first arrived probably towards the end of the eleventh century — the new arrivals would certainly not have escaped notice, as Frobisher's crew learned later. The first contacts would not necessarily have been hostile — and the keenly observant Eskimos would not have failed to notice the characteristic dress of the Vikings and to reproduce this in wood or ivory figurines.

The Vikings continued their westward forays nearly every summer until the middle of the fourteenth century, when the temperature dropped markedly and clashes with the Eskimos migrating southwards increased. In addition, hunting expeditions to the north were organized from the two colonies on the southwest coast. They brought back polar bear and seal skins and walrus and narwhal ivory which they used to barter for merchandise from Europe, to pay their taxes to the King of Norway, or for tithes to the Holy See.

There is little detail available about these expeditions to what was called *Nordrsetur*, but it is known that some of them

went beyond 72°N. In 1824 a runic stone was discovered at Kingitorssuaq (see Fig. 2), north of Upernavik. The inscription informs us that three men built a cairn there the Saturday before Rogation Week — a date which implies that they wintered there — probably towards the end of the thirteenth century.

There is no definite proof that these incursions went much further north or even that they crossed westward the northern part of Baffin Bay as did the Scottish whalers who much later sailed along the west coast of Greenland. All that can be said is that such an undertaking would generally have been easier, particularly before the end of the fourteenth century, than in the nineteenth century. At least the conclusion can be drawn that contact between the Vikings and the Eskimos of what later became Canada was possible.

If this is feasible in terms of the Vikings, is it also feasible for the clergy? In other words, did representatives of the Church participate in these expeditions? Sufficient information exists on the origin of Christianity in Greenland. It is known, for example, that even before Leif Erikson's conversion and the arrival of the first resident priest in 1000 A.D., at least one Hebridean Christian was in the group that followed Eric the Red in 986. Other priests followed later from Norway and Iceland and it is possible that storms pushed one or another of them further west. Even before the arrival in 1126 of Arnald, the first resident bishop, this had happened to another bishop called Eirik, of whom little is known except that he touched at Vinland before arriving in Greenland.

Later, the clergy themselves organized expeditions to the north. Apart from the inscription at Kingitorssuaq, there are other signs of the Church far to the north of the two principal colonies. A ruin on the Nûgssuaq peninsula has been identified by some archaeologists as that of a church or chapel. There is also a report that mentions an expedition, organized by the clergy, which left Nûgssuaq to go much further north than previous parties before returning to the bishopric of Gardar. The arrival of a member of the Viking clergy on the coast of Baffin Island should not, therefore, be considered impossible.

Does this mean that one should accept that the Lake Harbour statuette represents a priest? An examination of the piece itself does not necessarily lead to this conclusion. The length of the garment alone is not a convincing reason, for in the Middle Ages and particularly from the thirteenth century to the early part of the fourteenth century, many of the laity wore long garments, a fashion which continued much longer in Greenland perhaps because of the climate. The clothes which have been found almost intact in a cemetery at Herjolfsness are precisely like these, long monastic-type hooded robes.

According to Scandinavian medievalists, between the years 1000 and 1300, Scandinavian Christians sometimes wore a cross on their chests. On the other hand, a perusal of medieval pictures of religious or ecclesiastical costumes in western Europe shows that they rarely included a cross. There is, however, one exception: that of the religious and military orders. For example, the Templars wore a white habit to which Pope Eugenius III added a red cross in 1146. The St. John's Hospitallers of Jerusalem had a cross on their habits. The campaign

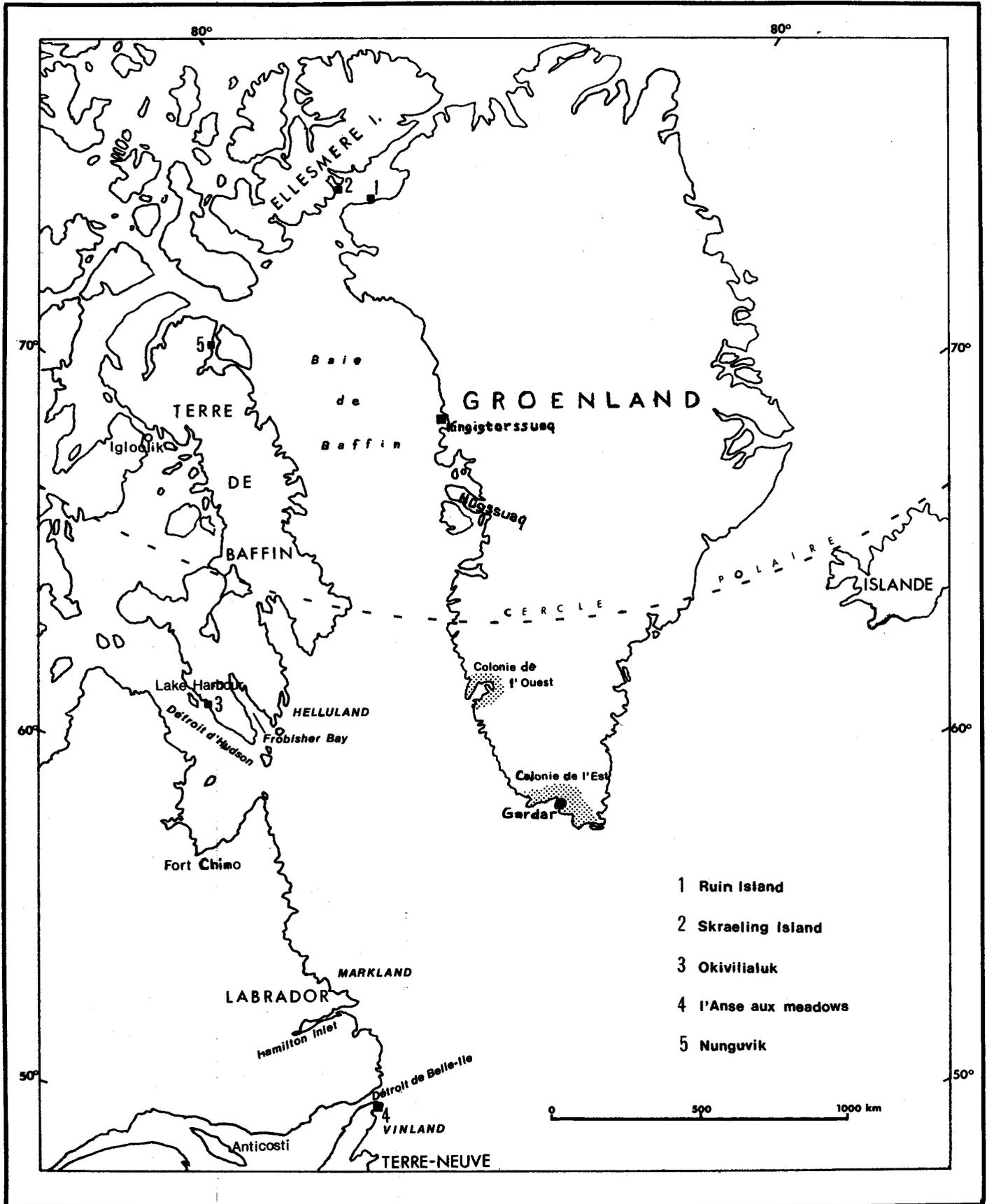


FIG. 2. Map showing archaeological sites in Greenland and the eastern Canadian Arctic.

apparel of the Knights Templars included a "coat of mail with a coif" (Dailliez, 1972), which compares well with the Thule figurine.

It remains to be proven that members of the military orders lived in Greenland. It could be that the figurine simply represents a knight who had taken part in a Crusade. The garment with its slit front and hood is very similar to the hauberks of the knights depicted in some miniatures of the Middle Ages.

Though a coat of mail may seem somewhat incongruous in the Arctic, they were certainly used by the Greenland Vikings, for fragments of them have been found as far as 79°N both in Canada and Greenland (Holtved, 1944; Schledermann, 1980). During the last 10 years, numerous other traces of the Vikings, such as pieces of clothing and iron, copper, and bronze objects (Figs. 3, 4) have been found in the Canadian high Arctic. (At Nunguvik, in the north of Baffin Island, fragments of wood with traces of nail holes dating from 1280 A.D. have been found.) It cannot be affirmed *a priori* that all these objects

were introduced by Eskimos coming from the southwest coast of Greenland.

A connection between Greenland and the Crusaders of the Near East may seem far-fetched, but it is known that at least on one occasion this link was made. An Icelander called Bjorn Einarsson Vatnsdal arrived in Greenland on his return from Jerusalem shortly after 1378, and adopted two Eskimo orphans (Gad, 1971).

All this information provides no conclusive evidence of an early evangelization of the Canadian Inuit. Suffice to say that some of their number probably met some Christians and perhaps encountered the cross, but with no possibility of understanding its significance. For that they had to wait several centuries.

FROBISHER AND HIS CHAPLAIN

Before leaving France in 1534, Jacques Cartier (Fig. 5) received from Francis I the commission to "work for the spread of the holy and sacred name of God and for our holy Mother the Catholic Church". Likewise, Martin Frobisher, when he left Queen Elizabeth's England in 1576 on his first voyage of discovery, was enjoined to work for "the enlarging of Christian faith which those naked [*sic*] barbarous people are most apte to receive", to which was added a commentary on the papacy which is a reminder that in that epoch the word "ecumenism" did not even exist.

Frobisher seems to have taken these responsibilities seriously, for the first article of the rules that he imposed on the members of his third expedition ordered them "to banish swearing, dice and card-playing and filthy communication and to serve God twice a day, with the ordinarie service usuall in the churches of England."

Frobisher did not take a chaplain on his first two voyages, but when he set off in 1578 with a flotilla of 15 ships an Anglican priest, "Mayster Wolfall", accompanied the expedition. The latter had even volunteered to remain behind with three ships which, according to the early plan, were to winter over in order to exploit a supposed gold mine. On 30 August he celebrated a communion service on land (the 400th anniversary of which was recently celebrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury). Oswald (1979) observes that Wolfall was the first missionary to the Eskimos "but he was not able to 'reform these infidels', for he did not meet any". The native inhabitants, once bitten by unfortunate contacts over the previous two years, were twice shy and kept a prudent distance. Two and a half centuries later another Anglican minister accompanied Parry's expedition as an astronomer, but it is not known whether he tried to convert the Eskimos of Winter Island and Igloolik.

It was only in 1894, with the arrival of the Reverend Edmund Peck at Blacklead Island (Fig. 6), that the first Christian mission was established on Baffin Island. Its beginnings were not easy because of the hostility of the whalers. In 1909 the future Bishop Fleming founded another Anglican mission at Lake Harbour (see Fig. 2).

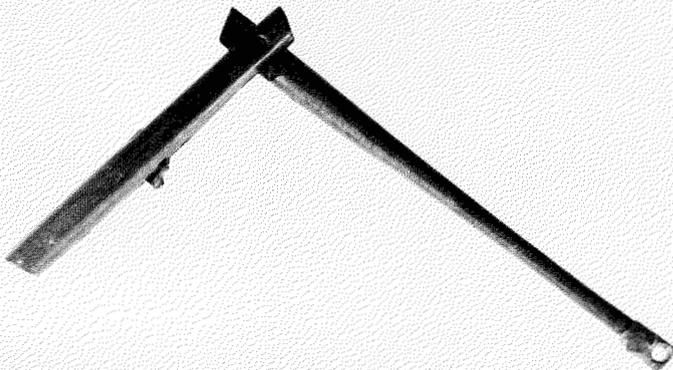


FIG. 3. Fragment of bronze balance of Viking origin, found on the west coast of Ellesmere Island (photo: R. McGhee).



FIG. 4. Bronze bowl fragment found on Cornwallis Island by R. McGhee (photo: R. McGhee).



FIG. 5. Jacques Cartier planting the cross on Canadian soil (*The Standard*, Montreal, 25 July 1908). Public Archives of Canada, C-3278.

MISSIONARY VOYAGES TO THE COAST OF LABRADOR AND HUDSON BAY

From the beginning of the sixteenth century there were numerous seafarers sailing the North American waters. In addition to the Basque whalers there were Cabot, the two Cortereals, Jean Denys, and in 1517 many French, Spanish, and Portuguese fishermen. There does not seem to have been lasting contact between them and the Eskimos of Labrador, and neither Jacques Cartier nor Samuel de Champlain had occasion to encounter the native inhabitants.

Yet contact between the French and the Eskimos seems to have occurred quite early, and it appears that relations were not particularly cordial. In 1611 the Jesuit "Relations" stated: "Some peoples like the Excomminguois, from the northern coast of the St. Lawrence Gulf wage implacable war against us and they do us great harm".

In 1640 the Eskimos were still being described as "barbarous people of great enmity towards the Europeans". In the same year the Indians, armed by the French, had beaten their enemies at Pointe-aux-Esquimaux opposite the Ile d'Anticosti, after which the Eskimos hardly ever ventured past the Straits of Belle Isle. In the spring of 1657 Jean Bourdon, accompanied by a secular priest, Father de Saint Sauveur, led an expedition northwards along the coast of Labrador towards Hudson's Bay. He reached latitude 55°N where the ice forced him to retreat, but not before two Indian guides had been killed and one Frenchman wounded by the Eskimos.

The "Relations" of 1659 mention an Eskimo girl who was a prisoner of the Indians but ransomed by the French, given instruction, and baptized with the name Marguerite. Perhaps this Marguerite was the first person of her race to become a Christian. The absence of racism in the early days of New France should be noted in this regard. On the advice of Champlain, Richelieu had acknowledged the civil and legal equality of the baptized native inhabitants, who were considered the equal of all the King's subjects, even those in France.

Many missionaries at this time were familiar with Indian dialects. One, Father Albanel, was chosen by the intendant Talon to lead an expedition to James Bay in 1671. Neither this arduous journey nor a second one in 1674 appear to have given the missionary the chance to add Eskimo to the seven Indian languages which he already spoke.

Several other Jesuits later followed the same path to James Bay and Hudson's Bay. In 1679, Father Silvy accompanied Louis Jolliet to James Bay. In 1684 he participated with Bermen de la Martinière in a sea expedition towards Hudson's Bay, in the course of which he noted that he met some Eskimos at 56°03'N, i.e., north of Hamilton Inlet. On his return from Port Nelson the following year, he found more Eskimos near the Straits of Belle Isle (de Rochemonteix, 1904). A year later he set off again for James Bay, this time with the Sieur de Troyes, and he stayed at Fort Albany until 1693. In that year it was Father Dalmas who accompanied de Troyes. Renowned for his exploration of the Mississippi with Father Marquette,

was to stop the Indians warring with them, and a Jesuit missionary should be sent out to that end. The advice was not taken and hostilities continued sporadically.

The Moravian Brethren were the first to succeed in establishing a permanent mission on the Labrador coast in 1764. (An earlier group had tried to settle near Hopedale in 1752 but the majority had been massacred by the Eskimos and the remainder had had to retreat.) In 1765 Jens Haven, one of the missionaries, succeeded in persuading the Indians and the Eskimos to make peace. In 1769 the Governor gave the Brethren a concession of 100 000 acres at the Baie des Esquimaux to install a mission and trade with the indigenes. After this several Moravian missions sprang up along the Labrador coast, self-financed by their local trade.

Until 1782 the regulations of the English governor, Palliser, were highly unfavourable to the Catholics. However, after the transfer of jurisdiction to the Governor of Québec, Catholic missionaries left from the north coast of the Gulf of St. Lawrence on evangelical missions to the Montagnais and Nascopie (Naskapi) tribes of the interior.

It was only around 1866 that efforts to reach the coast of Labrador by sea and land were redoubled. Three pioneers who did not spare themselves the hardships of these voyages should be mentioned — Fathers Babel, Arnaud, and Lacasse — all three oblates of Mary Immaculate. They succeeded in visiting Northwest River and Fort Chimo several times, and Father Lacasse even managed to compose an Eskimo dictionary when he wintered on the coast in 1875-76, but the difficulty of access and the lack of personnel obliged them to give up these visits, even though at least a dozen Eskimos had been baptized. In 1884 the Reverend Peck, coming from Great Whale River, crossed the Ungava to reach Chimo where an Anglican mission was founded in 1899.

THE COUREURS DES BOIS AND THE EXPLORATION OF THE WEST

The Apostolate of the Jesuits in New France was concerned above all with the Indians in the immediate vicinity, particularly the Hurons, but from the seventeenth century on the Fathers Albanel, Dablon, Druillette, and Buteux had pushed north and Father Marquette to the west. The Franciscan Hennepin also went west, while the Sulpicians Dollier and Galinée explored Lake Huron, and another Jesuit, Father Allouez, pushed as far as Lake Nipigon.

The missionaries were often accompanied during these expeditions by Canadians, avid for adventure, called "coureurs des bois" (Fig. 7). This group comprised mainly fur traders, who without a commercial permit went to fetch pelts from the Indians, but also included explorers, young men attracted by the life of the wild or anxious to be free of all restrictions. Nearly all had courage and a spirit of adventure.

From the founding of the colony on, many exceptional men went to live in Indian territory. In 1610 Etienne Brûlé was entrusted by Champlain to the care of the Algonquin. The 20-year-old Jean Nicolet, who arrived in 1618, left immediately to live with the Algonquins and was a coureur des bois for 25 years until his death from drowning. Others worthy of



HEMING.
COUREUR DE BOIS.

FIG. 7. Woodcut by Heming of a coureur des bois. Public Archives of Canada, C-5746.

note include: Nicolas Perrot, for his remarkable pacifying influence on the Indians west of the Mississippi; Jean Fafard, one of the best interpreters of Indian dialects, who made the Du Lhut expedition possible; the great explorers such as Jolliet, the Sieur de la Salle, and la Vérendrye; and finally, Pierre Radisson, who was kidnapped by the Iroquois when he was 16, took a liking to the wild life, and with his brother-in-law, des Groseillers, later made possible the founding of the Hudson's Bay Company.

There were clearly all kinds of men among the *coureurs des bois*. Besides the deeply religious and honest men such as Perrot and Jolliet, there were individuals with almost no scruples. The Jesuits, moreover, aroused hostility by asking the traffickers not to give alcohol to the Indians — nor was their viewpoint supported by Governor Frontenac or by the intendant Talon, for whom the financial gain was paramount. As early as 1681 there were at least 500 *coureurs des bois* (Morton, 1963). A few years later there were, if the intendant Duchesneau can be believed, 800 out of a population of 10 000, or nearly two-fifths of the adult male population.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century the French Canadians “tackled the rivers which gave access to the western plains” (Giraud, 1945). In 1688 Jacques de Noyon reached the Assiniboine and the Sioux in the north. Iroquois hostility slowed up this westward movement for a while, but it was renewed after the peace in 1701.

Soon after opening its first trading posts the Hudson's Bay Company had to contend with the *coureurs des bois*, who intercepted the furs the Indians were bringing to the Company. The policy of the Company, in effect, was to wait in the coastal forts for the pelts to be brought in to them. There were a few exceptions, the best known being the operations of Kelsey and Hearne, but in general this method hardly changed throughout the eighteenth century.

When la Vérendrye left Kaministikwia in 1731 with 50 men, his official aim was to discover the “sea in the west” but commercial motives were not far behind as the expedition had to be financed. Although backed by insufficient funds and caught up in the web of intertribal enmities, la Vérendrye accomplished an extraordinary feat of exploration and pacification. It did, however, cost him the life of one of his sons, who was assassinated together with Father Aulneau at Lac des Bois (Fig. 8).

It has been said that “with La Vérendrye the French were no longer strangers in the North-West. . . . From now on there was a continuous stream along the route to Lake Superior which was in no way dammed by the British occupation of Lower Canada” (Giraud, 1945).

In fact, la Vérendrye and his men knew how to parley with the Indians. The *coureurs des bois* quickly felt at home in the native environment, and many of them took wives from among them according to the “custom of the country”. La Vérendrye had two of his sons adopted by the Cree; both grew up worthy of their father. Other names should also be mentioned: Le Gardeur de St. Pierre, Luc de la Corne, and Boucher de Niverville who established Fort La Jonquière within view of the Rocky Mountains.

Cut off from its clientèle in the south, the Hudson's Bay Company reacted in 1754 by sending an agent, Henday, to the Indians of the Prairies. Henday wrote: “It is extraordinary to see the influence the French have over the Indians. . . . the French speak several languages perfectly. They have the advantage over us all along the line and would take all our trade if they had Brazilian tobacco.”

Then, when the trade struggle seemed all but won by the French, the war between France and England recalled some of

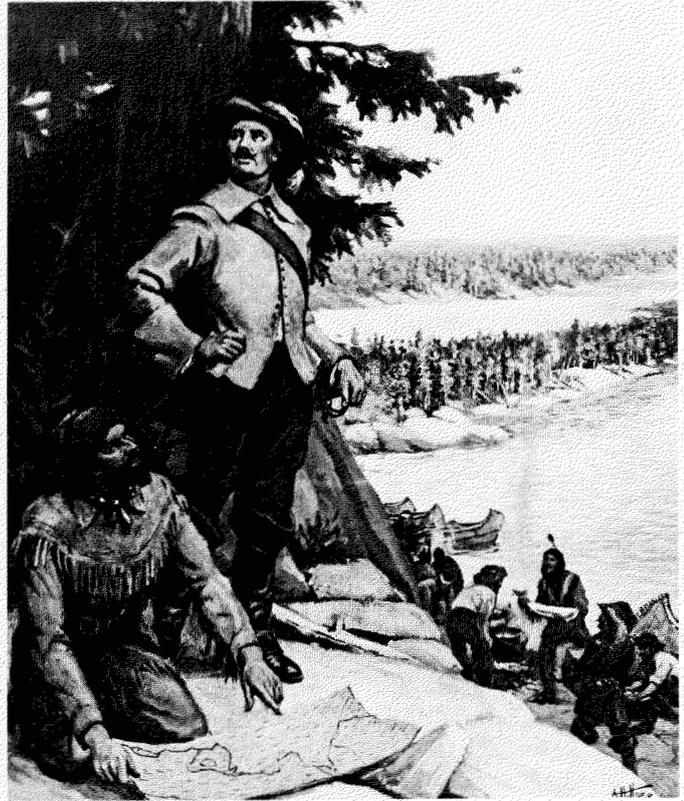


FIG. 8. La Vérendrye at Lake of the Woods (Lac des Bois), by A.H. Hider. Public Archives of Canada, C-6896.

the traders towards the east again, and the French had to cede their colony to England after the French defeat at the Plains of Abraham. The trader *coureurs des bois* were then succeeded by the Métis or “*bois-brûlés*” and the “*voyageurs*”.

THE MÉTIS AND “VOYAGEURS”

After the surrender of Canada to England the Canadians returned in great number to the west. They were followed by New England adventurers such as Alexander Henry and Peter Pond, who had quickly understood the advantages of the French methods of fur-trading and now saw the way free before them. They were not alone. From the beginning of British rule, keen and canny Scots had swept into Montréal, determined to take over French commerce. Since they knew nothing about the west they called on the French Canadians who had come from there for help; from this period on the latter were known as “*voyageurs*” (Fig. 9).

The newcomers rapidly took into account that in the race for the fur trade the only way to compete with the Hudson's Bay Company was to employ those who knew the country best. Beginning in 1775 several fur traders joined forces and in 1779 they founded the Company of the North-West or North-West Company. In Montréal several other companies, such as the X Y Company, were established in competition, but most of them did not last long or were absorbed by the North-West Company, which from 1799 was dominated by Simon MacTavish and his nephews. All these companies had one thing in common: they all employed *voyageurs*. For more than 30

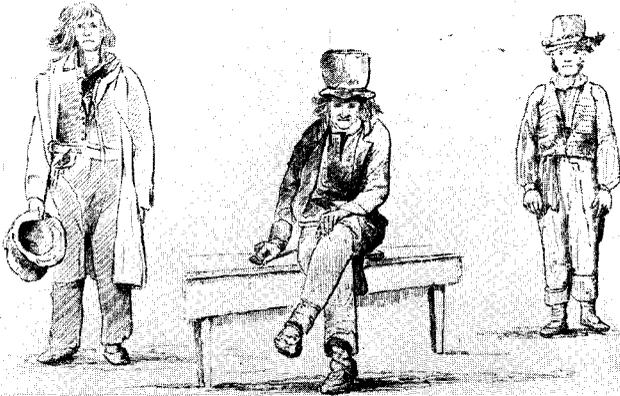


FIG. 9. "Canadian Voyageurs of Cap^{tn}. Franklin's Canoe", by Capt. Basil Hall. (Hall, B., Capt. 1829. Forty etchings from sketches made with the Camera Lucida in North America in 1827 and 1828. London. Pl. XIII.). Public Archives of Canada, C-9461.

years the companies waged a fierce commercial battle against each other and above all against the Hudson's Bay Company, a battle that sometimes broke into open warfare.

Armed with its royal charter, the Hudson's Bay Company claimed sovereign rights over the whole of the basin of Hudson's Bay and of James Bay, to which their rivals of the Company of the North-West replied that HBC could not claim rights over territories which had belonged to another power in 1670. Each side turned a deaf ear to the other and both sides lobbied in London for a decision, but the English Government was never prepared to take sides openly in this matter.

The Scots of Montréal considered themselves the natural successors to the French régime, a feeling enhanced by the fact that most of their employees were French-speaking (although the "bourgeois" or chief traders were rarely francophones) and the fact that some of the most eminent of them, Simon MacTavish and Joseph Frobisher, for example, had French-Canadian wives. Their adversaries often called them the "French" or the "pedlars".

It is often forgotten that for more than 50 years under British rule, French was the language of communication in the whole of the northwest and even in a part of the American west. This was true to such an extent that the Scottish "bourgeois" were obliged to speak French, and that a McDonald could say to an Englishman that he could not possibly become a trader as he had never been able to learn French! French was also the language of the people of mixed blood, so that Métis of English origin such as Cuthbert Grant, one of the best known of them, were progressively assimilated by the majority of French origin.

The early history of the "Bois-brûlés" (trail-blazers) is obscure, as is their number and the extent of the territory they covered, but it is known that they reached and even crossed the Rocky Mountains early on. When traders arrived at Slave River in 1778, they found a family of mixed blood called Beaulieu already installed there. "From 1775 the Indians of western Canada found the métis superior to themselves in war and hunting which suggests that their race was old enough to have proved itself" (Morice, 1910). Alexander Henry heard the same said by an Indian chief.

The Métis, combining the attributes and sometimes the defects of two races, were particularly skilled at hunting bison from horseback — they managed to recharge their guns by spitting the bullets into the barrels while at full gallop in pursuit of their prey! For a long period, they were the suppliers of bison meat, the source of pemmican, the staple diet of the voyageurs and the northern explorers.

There is a great deal of information about the voyageurs in accounts of journeys made in the northwest from the end of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, because nearly all of them wrote about their travel experiences. Their birchbark canoes (Fig. 10), sewn together with tamarack roots and caulked with resin, could be as long as 40 feet ("canots de Maître"); they required a crew of 14 men. Most canoes measured 25-30 feet and had a crew of 8-10.

The voyageurs generally left their villages bordering the St. Lawrence from above the Rapides de Lachine, usually in May, travelling in "brigades" of as many as 30 canoes. After a halt by the church of Saint-Anne de Bellevue to pray briefly or leave an offering, they continued west upstream, paddling across the lakes to the rhythm of folksongs, and portaging the canoes to avoid falls and dangerous rapids. It was an extremely hard life. They rose at 2:00 or 3:00 A.M. and left without eating, stopped for half an hour at 7:00 to eat, and rested a little longer at midday. They did not stop again until dark, which came late in these high latitudes. The merchandise was packed into bales of 80-90 pounds. During portages most of the voyageurs considered it a matter of honour to carry at least two loads, with which they jogged along to the end of the portage. Men who carried as many as five loads are cited. MacKenney recorded that during a journey in 1826 he asked his voyageurs at 7:00 P.M. if they would like to stop and camp, since they had been going since 3:00 A.M. They replied that they were not tired and continued to paddle until 9:30 P.M. They had made 79 miles that day, and the witness calculated that they had made 57 600 strokes with the paddle! He remarked: "There is no human being apart from a French Canadian who could stand this pace". It was said that John Jacob Astor, the king of the American fur merchants, rated one voyageur higher than three of his compatriots.

The Hudson's Bay Company, which originally employed subordinates mainly from the Orkneys, also lost no time in seeking the services of the voyageurs. The Governor, George Simpson, appreciated them most of all. Wishing to visit the greatest number of outposts possible in the short summer season, he badgered them often by saying "faster, faster!" The story is told of a voyageur who was so irritated by this one day that he seized the tiny Governor by the shoulders and pushed him into the water before depositing him into the canoe.

Most English witnesses describe the voyageurs as robust, untiring, honest, generous, lively, happy, and obedient. They rarely grumbled, and when a special effort was required of them, it generally sufficed to appeal to their professional pride or good nature. Unlike the American settlers, the voyageurs accepted and respected the Indians and did not seek to take away their lands, being content with a small garden plot.



FIG. 10. "Canadian Voyageurs. Walking a Canoe up a Rapid". Lithograph published by Currier & Ives. Public Archives of Canada, C-8373.

It has been stated that "practically all the voyages of exploration to the west of Canada after the British conquest used the services of these voyageurs" (Nute, 1955). It was with them that Alexander Mackenzie discovered the lower course of the river that bears his name, and reached the Arctic Ocean in 1789 and the Pacific in 1793. Jonathan Carver, Peter Pond, and Simon Fraser employed them, and when John Franklin left for the mouth of the Coppermine he had 15 of them with him — of which scarcely half returned.

During his expedition of 1833-1835, George Back did not spare his praise for the manner in which the Métis De Charlot, in the prow of the canoe, guided it through the rapids and kept his head in the most difficult circumstances. Back (1836) mentioned, too, another trial: "the combined attack of myriads of gnats and mosquitoes made blood run down our faces," adding that nothing made life more miserable to the traveller than these insects.

In 1777 there were 2431 voyageurs registered in Montréal and Detroit — their real number must have been at least 5000 (Nute, 1955). Obviously there were both good and less good men among them; the conduct of some left something to be desired. Many took wives — sometimes more than one — according to the "custom of the country", but the great majority had a well-rooted faith and sought to regularize their matrimonial state.

In 1786, 25 Canadians handed a petition to Father Payet on

his return from Detroit, asking the Bishop of Québec for some priests, but the conditions were not in their favour: the Society of Jesus had been suppressed in 1773 and many secular priests had returned to France after the Treaty of Paris. They had to wait many years before a bishop could accede to their request and send them missionaries. During the wait it was the voyageurs themselves who laid the foundations for the Church in the northwest. Even if they were not all models of virtue, many of them prayed daily and "they administered baptism to the children and the dying, and those who passed from life to death were always honoured with a burial accompanied by public prayers" (Morice, 1910). Witnesses recounted that they usually offered up a prayer before starting along a new river and when passing a place where one of them had lost his life. Voyageurs generally treated their Indian wives better than did Indian husbands. Above all, they spread round them, not only to their children but to all the local inhabitants, the hope of seeing a minister of religion arrive one day. As Nute (1955) remarked, "it was characteristic of the voyageurs that they kept their respect for the Church and its ministers even when their work took them to regions where its priests were unknown and where they disobeyed nearly every rule of conduct inculcated by it."

THE CHURCH AT RED RIVER

The event which hastened the establishment of the Church in

the northwest was the founding of the Assiniboia colony on the Red River by Lord Selkirk. This philanthropic Scotsman, who held important interests in the Hudson's Bay Company, in 1811 obtained from the Company a concession of 116 000 mi² where he agreed to establish 1000 settlers over 10 years. It should be noted in passing that this generous concession did not cost the Company much because the territory in question was already occupied by the North-West Company and the Métis.

In 1811 the first group of 100 settlers arrived at York Factory. With their arrival at the Red River the following year, the situation became impossible. The North-West Company recognized neither the authority of the Hudson's Bay Company nor that of the Company-appointed Governor, Miles MacDonnell. MacDonnell claimed to have complete authority over the whole region — and particularly over the hunting of bison, which was the primary local food. With the arrival of the third contingent, famine threatened and was only avoided with the help of the North-West Company and the Métis. In 1815 the settlement was broken up and most of the settlers agreed to be transported eastward.

A few of these settlers returned shortly afterwards with Colin Robertson, who sent Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière to carry the news to Lord Selkirk, recently arrived in Montréal. Lagimodière left in mid-October with a sole Indian as companion and made an exceptional journey, arriving in Montréal at the beginning of March. The story goes that when Lord Selkirk asked him what he would like as a reward he replied: "Priests, send us some priests" (Frémont, 1935).

Although Protestant himself, Lord Selkirk had already sent an Irish priest with the first settlers, some of whom were Catholic, but the priest did not stay. After the battle of Seven Oaks (la Grenouillère) between the Métis and a small group of Hudson's Bay Company employees, which left more than 20 dead, the nobleman realized that only the presence of the Church could calm the situation and save the small colony, whose population was mainly Catholic. He therefore insisted that the Bishop of Québec, Monseigneur Plessis, should send him some priests.

Finally on 19 May 1818, Father Provencher and Father Dumoulin, accompanied by a seminarist, set off for the Red River where they arrived in mid-July. On 18 July, Mass was celebrated for the first time in the colony. Three-quarters of a century before, Father Coquart, la Vérendrye's companion, had celebrated Mass not far from there. Twelve secular priests passed through Red River before the arrival of the Oblates in 1845. From the very beginning the missionaries visited the camps in the vicinity and went as far as Fort Qu'appelle, 300 miles to the west. Father Dumoulin, who dealt particularly with the Indians, reached Hudson's Bay in 1820.

On 2 June 1821 the rival companies united under the name of the Hudson's Bay Company, ending a long period of hostility. This helped the work of the missionaries. The following year Father Provencher was promoted to the episcopacy, and the recruits from the east that he enlisted over the years went further and further afield. In succession, Fathers Belcourt, Thibault, and Darveau learned the *Saulteaux* language. In

1844 Father Darveau was assassinated by fanatical Indians, and the same year the Grey Nuns of Montréal arrived to look after the school attached to St. Boniface, the Church at Red River, and to prepare for the founding of a hospital. Later they followed the priests northwards all the way to the Arctic Ocean.

In 1845 the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, newly arrived in Canada, agreed with Bishop Provencher to provide the needed clergy and began by sending him Father Aubert and Father Tâché, the future archbishop of St. Boniface. In the same year, Father Thibault had met at Portage La Loche some Indians who had come from the north and who had been asking for 20 years for missionaries to be sent to them. With them was an old Métis called Beaulieu, the son of Mackenzie's companion. "Old Beaulieu" put his considerable influence at the service of the Church until he died at nearly 100 years of age.

In 1846 a mission was founded by Father Lafleche and Father Tâché at l'Ile-à-la-Crosse, where a typhoid epidemic broke out shortly afterwards. The following year Father Tâché reached Caribou Lake, then Lake Athabaska where he found an Indian population remarkably well prepared for religion by voyageurs and Métis.

In 1820 the Missionary Society of the Church of England sent the Reverend John West as chaplain to the Hudson's Bay Company. He arrived in the same year at Red River and established a school. He was succeeded by the Reverends David Jones and William Cockran. One of the best known Protestant missionaries was a Methodist, the Reverend James Evans, who began as a schoolmaster in 1823 and was sent as the pastor to Norway House in 1840. He invented the syllabic alphabet which, with a few modifications, has been used to write a great number of the Indian and Eskimo languages. In 1849 the first Anglican diocese was formed in Rupert's Land.

Among the Catholic missionaries, to mention a few names, there were Father Faraut, who established a mission at Fort Chipewyan in 1849; Fathers Grollier and Lacombe who arrived in 1852; and Father Grandin, who arrived in 1855 and became a bishop five years later. Catholic and Protestant missionaries rivalled each other in their zeal to convert the Indians. The "race to the sea" between the two confessions began in 1858 when Archdeacon Hunter left Red River to go north, and over the following months visited the main posts spread along the Mackenzie. The Reverend Kirby, his successor, went up the Peel River as far as Fort Yukon in 1862. The Reverend Bompas, who became a bishop seven years later, started to serve the whole Mackenzie region in 1865.

In 1860 Father Grollier met some Eskimos from the delta and extracted a promise that they would live in peace with the Indians. Between 1865 and 1867 Father Petitot made three visits to the Tchiglit of the Arctic coast. A new but unsuccessful attempt to evangelize the Eskimos was made in 1890 by Bishop Grouard and Father Lefèbvre. It was only in 1911 that Bishop Breynat was able to send Fathers Rouvière and Le Roux further east to the Eskimos on Coronation Gulf, where they were murdered two years later. Nearer Hudson's Bay, Father Gasté undertook a seven-month voyage in 1868, to visit the Ahiamut in the region of Lake Ennadai. Father Turquetil

was to meet the Ahlarmiut again in 1901, before founding the Chesterfield mission in 1912.

The Anglicans were working equally hard to convert the Eskimos in the west. In 1870, the Reverend Bompas visited two camps in the Mackenzie Delta, and in 1872 he made another visit to the Arctic coast west of the delta. From 1893 onwards, the Reverend Stringer had a little more success during his stays with the Eskimos on Herschel Island, which was a wintering place for the whalers.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing indicates the extent of the influence of the coureurs des bois and their successors, the voyageurs and Métis, on the development of the missionary apostolate. The influence of the Hudson's Bay Company also deserves consideration. Where the sympathies of the Company lay was not in doubt, for the majority of its members were Protestants. Governor Simpson could write to his agent James Anderson in Athabaska: "Roman Catholic influence is already greater than is desirable and the Company is prepared to put more support behind the Protestant missionaries" (Carrière, 1966). In spite of this, as Father Carrière (1966) remarked, the Company was almost always guided by commercial considerations in its relationship with the Church, trying, above all, to avoid installing two rival missions in the same place. It was well aware of the important work of the Catholic missionaries and even helped them at times when the Company knew that the local populations wanted the Church there, and where the missionaries could help to maintain order and peace. In doing this, the Company sometimes came into conflict with its own agents, who were nearly all opposed to Catholicism.

Thus the chief traders of the Mackenzie region signed a petition, protesting against the right, given to Father Grollier by the Governor, to travel on Company barges and to lodge at Fort Good Hope. The petition held that these privileges allowed him "to establish a Papist mission in the district and at Fort Good Hope in particular" (Archives of the C.M.S., in Carrière, 1966).

If, despite the generally hostile attitude of Company employees, the great majority of Indians in the Mackenzie area became Catholic, it was mainly due to the influence of the voyageurs and Métis. As Father Duchaussois (1921) noted, the tribes which had had the longest contact with the Canadian coureurs des bois and the Métis were those whose members converted most rapidly. In this sense it can be said that the coureurs des bois, voyageurs, and Métis were the founders of the Catholic Church in the far north. On the other hand, those native peoples who had had little contact with the voyageurs and who were dominated almost exclusively by the Hudson's Bay Company, as was the case especially for the Eskimos, were strongly under the Protestant influence.

To give a detailed account of the missionary work of all denominations in the Canadian Arctic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries goes beyond the bounds of this paper. Suffice to say that until the end of the 1950s the material conditions of apostolic work had hardly changed from the previous century: widely dispersed populations which necessitated long journeys by dog team, where people such as the Anglican

Canon Turner made their names. For their part, the Oblates paid a heavy price: two priests were murdered at Coppermine, another was killed at Aklavik, and three others disappeared without trace at Hudson's Bay. After a period of sometimes bitter rivalry, an ecumenical spirit has pervaded the Arctic: Anglicans and Catholics, in particular, now work together among the Inuit populations in a spirit of charity and mutual respect.

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