

***A History and Ethnography of the Beothuk.* By Ingeborg Marshall. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. Pp. xxiv + 640, illustrations, index, references, bibliography, selective chronology, biographies, \$45.00, ISBN 0-7735-1390-6.)**

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This ambitious work is essentially an encyclopedia of the Beothuk, the Native people of the island of Newfoundland. Among the first American peoples to come into contact with Europeans, they remain mysterious. About 1620, after a century of intermittent trade with migratory fishermen, they withdrew from contact to a refugium in the protected waters of Newfoundland's northeast coast, flourishing for another century and a half, as their technology evolved to make use of iron scavenged from seasonally-abandoned fishing stations. Since the Beothuk depended on coastal resources, the spread of English settlements threatened their subsistence. As Ralph Pastore has pointed out, because the Beothuk were not involved in a fur trade or even with missionaries or Indian agents, few Europeans had a serious interest in their survival (Pastore 1987). By 1829 the last known Beothuk, Shanawdithit, died at St. John's, under the protection of the Beothick Institution, an organization founded to protect her people and to foster inter-cultural contact. Marshall devotes considerable attention to the assignment of blame for their demise and puts much weight on the "ruthlessness and brutality of the English" (p. 445).

These 645 pages have all the virtues and some of the faults of an encyclopedia. The book is synoptic and collates every scrap of surviving evidence about this people. It treats material culture in a serious way, illustrating and cataloguing artifacts and working, meticulously, to place them within the documented framework of Beothuk life. Alternative interpretations are offered, sometimes at exhaustive length. On the other hand, analytic summaries are sometimes superficial. There is, alas, an unpleasant subtext here, for the author seems to believe in an academic conspiracy. She somehow convinced her publishers to take the reprehensible step of asking journals to avoid two acknowledged experts in reviews of her work. This encourages, of course, discussion by people like the present reviewer, less qualified to comment on interpretation of Beothuk culture. Coincidentally, or not, the most important contributor to recent ethnohistorical discussion of the Beothuk, Pastore, is under-referenced in Marshall's work (e.g. p. 291, 295, 356, 442) while she ignores the single article most relevant to her general theme (Pastore 1993). When she does consider Pastore, she misinterprets him in the caricature argument: "the Beothuk did not trade because no fur traders came to Newfoundland" (p. 73).

William Gilbert is likewise barely acknowledged, even when Marshall has borrowed documentary evidence (Gilbert 1990 and 1992). It is not obvious why Marshall took this approach, as her work will certainly stand on its own considerable merits and there was no need to slight the work of others who have made recent contributions to Beothuk studies.

Like any encyclopedia, Marshall's *Beothuk* is somewhat repetitive, for certain topics are discussed both as "History" and as "Ethnography" (e.g. the capture of Demasduit). Marshall is meticulous on Beothuk terminology but occasionally pedantic, e.g. on "mamateeks". The standard of research is high, but not irreproachable; a miscellany of errors cropping up as the author wades into unfamiliar waters. In roughly chronological order: L'Anse aux Meadows was not Vinland (p. 263), Ferryland is not a pre-historic site (p. 265), carbon 14 analysis yields date ranges not absolute dates (passim), the use of the term "discovery" for Cabot's exploration needs explanation (passim), "Corte Real" does not take an accent (passim), the estimate of fifty ships at Newfoundland in the sixteenth century under-reports effort by an order of magnitude (p. 22), the English did not participate seriously in the Newfoundland fishery before 1570 (p. 25), and there is serious debate about whether the Beothuk normally hot-worked iron (p. 314). As for references, the fisheries historian is Innis not "Innes", the impressive bibliography omits Steve Cumbaa's 1984 article and, most important, the references to documents collected by James Howley would be more useful if they consistently gave original author and title (Howley 1915).

Marshall adopts a magisterial style, in which phrases like "It is suggested..." cloak the author's interpretative slant with the anonymous expertise of an encyclopedia. If she records exhaustively the data we have about the Beothuk, she does not invariably offer persuasive ethnohistorical analysis, but sometimes projects analytic assumptions on the evidence. A minor example is emblematic. Marshall publishes Lady Hamilton's charming miniature of Demasduit (1819). She also publishes William Gosse's copy of this portrait (1841) and, by exaggerating minor differences in the images, makes a magazine's misidentification of the Gosse portrait as Shanawdithit into a scholar's possibility, which turns into a salesperson's probability when the Gosse version becomes her frontispiece — as an image of the later, more celebrated, captive. This parallels a key aspect of Marshall's interpretation of Beothuk isolationism. She pulls a slender thread of evidence from a magazine article of 1839, which describes "an invariable religious principle" among the Beothuk to slay those who interacted with Europeans or Mi'kmaq. As the basis for this religious

determinism she cites “Sketches of Savage Life” repeatedly, but it was, after all, just one anonymous source. Nor does her scolding tone in some passages further analytic clarity. Marshall claims, for example, that William Cormack, who protected Shanawdithit in St John’s, did not see the Beothuk “as humans”, although Cormack’s *Times* obituary of his Native protégé ranked the now-extinct Beothuk “as a portion of the human race” (p. 216-20). On the face of it Cormack’s attitude would seem to require a deeper analysis. This could be said too for the book’s overstated, if politically correct, anti-European conclusion, which speaks of “total disregard of the humanity of the native population”, despite the numerous examples, well documented here, of intermittent English concern for the situation of the Beothuk, conflicted as it may have been.

For most readers, Marshall’s substantial contribution to the ethnohistory of Newfoundland will replace Howley’s book. In fact the two are similar, attempting as they do to present a total history incorporating all the extant documents and the relevant material culture. As with Howley, Marshall’s analysis reflects the prejudices of the moment and may not stand for long, although the rich mine of data she has assembled will be used gratefully for decades or even generations.

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