1

New World Exotics

> [An Inuit captive] was such a wonder onto the whole city [of London] and to the rest of the realm that heard of yt as seemed never to have happened . . . to any man's knowledge.
>
> (Michael Lok, 1576[1])

Londoners gaped in October 1576 at the man brought home by Captain Martin Frobisher from Baffin Island in northeastern Canada. The first New World native to reach England in more than forty years – probably the fifth overall – survived for barely a fortnight and never left London, yet to English people far and wide "this strange Infidel, whose like was never seen, red, nor harde of before, and whose language was neyther knowne nor understoode" was, according to the imperial promoter Michael Lok, the talk of the realm. The wondrous stranger inspired Frobisher in 1577 to abduct three more Americans – a man, a woman, and a child – on his second trip to Baffin Island.[2]

Frobisher had no intention of capturing American natives when he launched his first expedition in 1576, aiming to bypass North America for the riches of Asia. His employer, the newly formed Cathay Company, provided ships and supplies; Michael Lok and others invested money; the mathematician and reputed "wizard," John Dee, contributed important geographic and navigational information. Frobisher contributed experience. He had explored West Africa, fought in Ireland, been imprisoned in Portugal, plundered French and Spanish ships – even, at least once, an English ship, which earned him a brief incarceration in Marshalsea prison.[3] Though Frobisher's mission in 1576 was to find the elusive Northwest Passage, this fearless, sometimes reckless, often insensitive

swashbuckler had no qualms about wresting natives from their homelands along the way.

Frobisher's venture started promisingly, with Queen Elizabeth "shaking her hand at us out of the window," but overall it was disastrous. One of his three ships went down at sea, another returned prematurely to England, while the storm-damaged flagship *Gabriel* pushed on to Baffin Island. At that frozen territory in the North Atlantic's "Meta Incognita" (roughly, "far distant land"), Frobisher mistook a bay – later named in his honor – for a passage to China. He also alienated the "Countrey people." These hardy hunters and fishers, clad in sealskin garments and paddling kayaks through the icy northern waters, had probably encountered Europeans already. Experience made them wary.[4]

Through brief exchanges of hostages, Frobisher gradually persuaded Inuits of Baffin Island to board his ship and barter seal and polar bear skins for English "toyes." Distrusting the natives as thoroughly as they distrusted him, Frobisher kept his ship ready for attack and ordered his crew of twenty men and five boys never to go ashore without heavy guard. Five men who ignored that warning disappeared on an offshore island and were never seen by Englishmen again. Frobisher, assuming they had been captured and perhaps killed, sought some "evidens or token . . . to certify the world where he had byn" before heading home. The best evidence would be an inhabitant of the distant land.[5]

Despite the Inuits' wariness, Frobisher lured several men in kayaks to the *Gabriel*'s side to accept a small bell. George Best, the principal chronicler of Frobisher's voyages of 1576–1578, described the stratagem:

> of purpose he threw [the bell] short, that it might fal into the sea and be lost. And to make them more greedie of the matter, he rang a lowder bell, so that in the ende one of them came neare the ship side, to receive the bell, which when he thought to take at the Captaines hand, he was therby taken himself. For the Captain . . . let the bel fal, & cought the man fast, & plucked him with maine force, boat and al into his bark.

Frobisher's expectation that his victim would be a useful informant quickly vanished. As soon as the Inuit "founde himselfe in captivitie, for very choller & disdain he bit his tong in twayne within his mouth."[6]

By early October 1576, Frobisher was back in London, where his "newe pray [prey]," Best observed, served as "a sufficiente witnesse of the Captaines farre and tedious travell towardes the unknowne partes of the worlde." Opportunities to view this anonymous Inuit ended about two weeks later when he died from his self-inflicted wound or, as George

Best insisted, from "colde which he had taken at Sea" – presumably pneumonia. During most of the captive's brief life in London, he must have been bedridden; the Cathay Company's fiscal records include payments for "folke highered to tende him," "beddinge for him he spoyled in his siknes," and "mr. crowe the surgyon." After the Inuit died, the company paid for embalming the body (it was initially to have been returned to Baffin Island), for a coffin, and for burial in the churchyard of St. Olave's in Hart Street, London, although the parish records show no such interment.[7]

Despite the Inuit's fatal sickness, his portrait was drawn several times. The Cathay Company twice hired Cornelius Ketel, a talented Flemish artist living in London, who also painted Frobisher and Lok, to make "great pictures" at five pounds apiece of the Inuit's whole figure. One of the paintings was for Queen Elizabeth; unidentified artists drew or painted three other full-length portraits. In one, the man wears "Englishe ap[par]ell"; in the remaining four large pictures he wears native garments. Three "small pictures" were rendered of his head and shoulders only. William Cure, a Dutchman, cast the Inuit's head in wax – presumably a death mask.[8]

Although Ketel's many portraits and Cure's wax mask are known only from the company's accounts, two surviving illustrations, probably derivative, suggest the captive's appearance. A watercolor by Lucas de Heere of Ghent, who was in London during the Inuit's short time in England, may be from life but was more likely adapted from Ketel. De Heere's painting is labeled (in French) "Wild man brought from the northern lands by M. Frobisher the year 1576" and shows the Inuit holding a paddle, bow, and arrow; in the distant background are an Inuit in a kayak and a European ship. An ink drawing by Adriaen Coenen from 1577 (a year after the captive's death) shows a heftier man but with the same artifacts and a similar costume; the background depicts him beside the *Gabriel* at the moment of his capture (fig. 1.1). The pictures by de Heere and Coenen supplement Michael Lok's written description of a strongly built man with (in Lok's estimation) disproportionately short legs, a broad face, black hair and beard, small eyes, dark and sallow skin "much like to the tawny Mores," by which Lok probably meant light or medium brown. He judged the Inuit's "countenance sullen or churlish and sharp withall" – unsurprising for a fatally ill captive a thousand miles from home.[9] Despite the disappearance of Ketel's paintings and the probability that the two surviving portraits circulated only in continental Europe, the many likenesses known to have been made from life and the many derivative drawings and paintings attest to the Inuit's remarkable

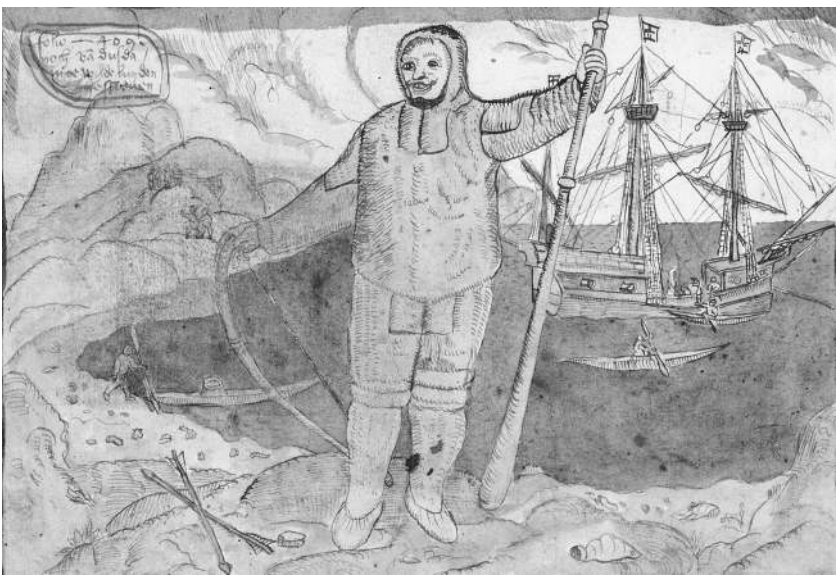

FIGURE 1.1. The anonymous Inuit taken to England in 1576 by Capt. Martin Frobisher; drawn in London by the Dutch artist Adrian Coenen, perhaps from life but more likely from another artist's original. The background imagines the scene of the Inuit's capture, based on contemporary accounts of Frobisher seizing him alongside the English ship near Baffin Island. From the Vischboeck of Adrian Coenen, Courtesy of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, KB 78 E fol. 48v.

notoriety in the waning weeks of his life and perhaps for many years after. The pictorial record reinforces Michael Lok's claim that the Inuit was "a wonder onto the whole city and to the rest of the realm that heard of yt."[10]

Had the captive of 1576 lived – and if his bitten tongue permitted – he would surely have been trained as an interpreter for Frobisher's second voyage to Meta Incognita. As soon as the expedition of 1577 reached Baffin Island, Frobisher tried to take two native men, one to translate, the other to carry English goods to his people as signs of friendship and incentives to trade. Both Inuits escaped Frobisher's clutches, and when one shot the retreating captain in the buttocks with an arrow, they appeared to have routed the English intruders. Yet among the crewmen who rushed to Frobisher's rescue was Nicholas Conger, "a Cornishman, and a good wrastler," who "shewed [the Inuit] suche a Cornishe tricke, that he made his sides ake . . . for a moneth after."[11] Frobisher now had a wounded but useful guide to the area and, if he survived the trip back to England and Conger's "Cornishe tricke," a replacement for the captive of 1576.

Before leaving Baffin Island, Frobisher again sought the five English sailors who had disappeared during the previous year by taking additional

captives to swap for them. In scattered skirmishes, Frobisher's crew killed several men and wounded others but captured only an "old and ougly" woman and a young woman with an infant child. The old woman, who did not have the cloven feet of a devil or witch, was deemed of no interest and released; "the young woman and the childe, we brought away." The infant boy, whose wounded arm was attended by Frobisher's surgeon, soon recovered, George Best reported, by his mother's "continuall licking with hir owne tongue, not muche unlike our dogges."[12]

Frobisher sought information from his newly captured Inuit man about the missing Englishmen. On seeing "the picture of his Countreyman, which the last yeare was brought into *England*," he was "muche amazed." Assuming the picture to be alive, the captive tried to converse with it "untill at last by feeling and handling, he founde him but a deceiving picture. And then with great noyse and cryes, ceased not wondering, thinking that we coulde make menne live or die at oure pleasure." Whatever the Inuit's misconceptions about the portrait and about Englishmen's supernatural powers, he began to communicate. George Best recalled that "he gave us plainely to understande by signes, that he hadde knowledge of the taking of our five men the last yeare, and . . . when we made him signes, that they were slaine and eaten, he earnestly denied, and made signes to the contrarie."[13] When Frobisher's efforts to swap his three captives for the English sailors all failed, he sailed home with twenty tons of black ore to be tested for precious metals, "an Unicornes horne" to be added to the Queen's collection of natural wonders, and the three unhappy Inuits. Frobisher predicted that the man and woman would be "sufficient for the use of language."[14]

Although the new captives resembled a single family, and they have sometimes been described that way in modern accounts, the man and woman were unrelated and perhaps unacquainted.[15] Their common plight, however, forced such a quick and lasting bond, Best believed, that "the one would hardly have lived, without the comfort of the other." The woman prepared their food, cleaned their cabin, and "spared not to do all necessarie things that apperteyned to a good huswife," except "they never use as man and wife." On that point Best was emphatic, praising their "shamefastnesse and chastitie." Dr. Edward Dodding, who tended to the Inuits in Bristol, agreed: "[A]lthough they used to sleep in one and the same bed, yet nothing had occurred between them apart from conversation, – his embrace having been abhorrent to her."[16]

In October 1577, Frobisher's fleet arrived at the western port of Bristol, where the captives were instant wonders. (Although the several narratives of Frobisher's second expedition give the man, woman, and child no

FIGURE 1.2. Kalicho, the first American native in the British Isles whose name appears in surviving sources. This watercolor portrait, attributed to the English artist and colonizer John White, was rendered during Martin Frobisher's expedition to Baffin Island in 1577 (White's presence on the voyage is uncertain) or after the survivors' arrival at Bristol. © Copyright The Trustees of the British Museum.

names, in England they were called "Kalicho," "Arnaq," and "Nutaaq," respectively, with many variant spellings. The latter two Inuit words probably meant "woman" and "child."[17]) The mayor of Bristol soon entertained the human wonders, and Kalicho, though still injured, displayed his boating and harpooning skills on Bristol's River Avon. According to a contemporaneous chronicler (in modern orthography), "he rowed in a little boat made of skin in the water . . . [and] killed 2 ducks with a dart, and when he had done carried his boat through the marsh upon his back: the like he did at the weir and other places where many beheld him. He would hit a duck a good distance off and not miss."[18] Frobisher surely intended to move his exotic captives to London as soon as Kalicho was healthy enough to travel. In that boisterous city of nearly 200,000, the Inuits would entertain far larger crowds than in Bristol.

In the meantime, artists rendered likenesses of all three captives, much as they had the unnamed Inuit of the previous year. Again the output in

FIGURE 1.3. Arnaq of Baffin Island and her child Nutaaq, nestled in her hood in this portrait by John White, were captured by Frobisher's men at a different location than was Kalicho in 1577. Kalicho, Arnaq, and Nutaaq were displayed at Bristol, where the two adults soon died. Nutaaq was taken to London, where he too soon died. © Copyright The Trustees of the British Museum.

a very short time is remarkable: Approximately thirty renditions survive, some of Kalicho alone, some of Arnaq and Nutaaq, some of all three, some of a man in a kayak – not necessarily meant to be Kalicho but probably so – and some of a battle between Frobisher's men and several Inuits, again using generic figures, one of which may have represented Kalicho. As in 1576, some of the paintings are by Cornelius Ketel and one by Adriaen Coenen, but others are probably by John White (figs. 1.2, 1.3), soon to be admired for his realistic renderings of Indians on the Carolina coast. Several watercolors of the Inuits suggest that White either accompanied Frobisher in 1577 or, more likely, drew the captives soon after they arrived in England.[19] And as in 1576, the abundance of pictures, including derivative woodcuts and engravings (many are known only in German, French, or Dutch renditions), graphically demonstrate western Europe's fascination with people from across the sea. An English chronicler observed that pictures of the Inuits were seen in England for

many years, and about fifteen years after the Inuits' deaths, a German visitor to Hampton Court saw "life-like portraits of the wild man and woman whom Martin Forbisser, the English captain, took in his voyage to the New World, and brought alive to England." In 1599, a Swiss itinerant added that the artists' subjects "looked like savages, wore skins, and the woman carried a child in Indian dress in a linen cloth upon her shoulder."[20]

The Dutch artist Coenen, with some exaggeration, reported that the Inuits' English was limited to "God geve yo goud marroe [good morrow]" and "farewel." The latter expression was ironically apt, for all soon died. First Kalicho, who lived only about a month after he landed in England. Dr. Edward Dodding examined Kalicho before his symptoms had become excessively debilitating and recommended bloodletting, for "by quenching the fire of the inflammation and reducing the quantity of matter, they might both subside." Kalicho, not surprisingly, objected. "[T]he foolish . . . timidity of this uncivilised man," Dodding complained, "forbade it."[21]

Dodding attended to Kalicho in his final hour. Shortly before death, "his speech was impaired and almost cut off, his appetite faded and pulse non-existent." But in one final moment of clarity and energy, Kalicho "spoke those words of ours which he had learned, the few that he could, and in turn replied quite relevantly to questions," and sang a death song that the Englishmen had heard when they took Kalicho away from Baffin Island. He soon "moved from life to death," Dodding lamented, "forcing out as his last words, given in our language, 'God be with you'." The second Inuit man to reach England died on 7 November 1577, about a year after the first.[22]

Dodding's unusually complete postmortem account, in Latin, is preserved in three modern English translations. The doctor reported that Kalicho's ribs were "badly broken, in sustaining a fall of some force and impact [presumably Conger's "Cornishe tricke"], and were still gaping apart without having knit together . . . and the contusion of the lung had, in the course of time, become putrefied." Contributing to Kalicho's deterioration were the intense cold of northern Canada during the first stage of his injury and a "too liberal" diet since then, urged on Kalicho by his captors' "misguided kindness." Such gluttony produced an "enormous stomach, which, being flooded with liquid and swollen out, seemed much larger than is the case with our people. This was a consequence, I think, of his unhealthy voraciousness." Dodding also noted "[i]nnumerable indications of cerebral injury" (probably also caused by Conger) as well as – the

doctor admitted in a surprising departure from his medical observations – "an 'Anglophobia', which he had from when he first arrived, even though his fairly cheerful features and appearance concealed it." Kalicho, in short, succumbed to an infected lung, a battered brain, and a profound fear of the English.[23]

Kalicho's remains were buried the next day at St. Stephen's Church, Bristol. Dodding insisted that the reluctant Arnaq witness the interment ceremony and showed her "human bones which had been dug up, and made her understand that we were all to be buried in the same way," lest she think that the English ate the dead. While dispelling Arnaq's suspicion of English cannibalism, Dodding seems to have misunderstood her reaction to Kalicho's death and her resulting isolation in a strange land with an infant to nurse. After observing Kalicho's body, he wrote, she broke out with a dense covering of spots or boils (probably measles), but because she did not act effusively at the burial, Dodding concluded that "she was not in any way disturbed" by Kalicho's death, "and, as far as we gathered from her expression, it did not distress her." The doctor surmised that Arnaq "either excelled all our people in decorum and stoicism or else was far outstripped in human sensitivity by the wild animals themselves." To the modern eye, it seems more probable that Arnaq was profoundly moved by Kalicho's death, which may have hastened her own demise only four days later. She was buried on November 12, also at St. Stephen's. Her entry in the church register, like Kalicho's, noted that she was "a heathen."[24]

Nutaaq did not long outlast his mother. Frobisher hired a nurse for the child and sent them to London – the final opportunity to show off one of his captives in the bustling city. Child and nurse lodged at the "Three Swans," where surgeon John Gymblet treated Nutaaq's unspecified illness; like his mother, he probably had measles. One of the Londoners most anxious for the child's recovery and for a sight of him up close – surely in a private viewing, most likely at Whitehall Palace – was Queen Elizabeth. Dr. Dodding had lamented Kalicho's demise "not so much by the death of the man himself as because the great hope of seeing him which our most gracious Queen had entertained had now slipped through her fingers, as it were, for a second time." Elizabeth had not seen Frobisher's captive in 1576, nor Kalicho or Arnaq in 1577, and she was to be disappointed again, for Nutaaq died about eight days after his arrival in London. The Cathay Company paid to have him buried in St. Olave's Church on Hart Street, but, as with the Inuit captive of 1576, the parish records have no entry.[25]

Preliminary analysis of the ore Frobisher brought from Baffin Island encouraged still another, far larger, expedition in 1578. There was enough black ore on a single off-shore island, George Best predicted, to "suffise all the golde gluttons of the worlde." A secondary goal was to build a garrison for 100 men as a way-station to further searches for the Northwest Passage and a base for trading and proselytizing the Inuits. Once again, Frobisher would also seek captives to take home.[26]

He canceled the intended colony soon after his fleet arrived at Baffin Island, and he captured no Inuits. The prefabricated building with which Frobisher hoped to jump-start the settlement did not survive the voyage – part of it sank on a foundered vessel and other parts were appropriated for ship repairs. Frobisher instead had his men construct a stone building in which they left "dyvers of oure countrie toyes, as belles, and knives, wherein they specially delight. . . . Also pictures of men & women in lead [engravings], men a horsebacke, lookinglasses, whistles, and pipes." The Englishmen made an oven, with "breade lefte baked therein, for them to see and taste,"[27] hoping that on a fourth voyage to Meta Incognita, Frobisher would encounter happier, more trusting natives, with whom the English could trade and eventually cohabit. But "the people are nowe become so warye, and so circumspecte, by reason of their former losses," Best concluded, "that by no means we can apprehend any of them, althoughe we attempted often in this laste voyage." Besides, the main task was digging and loading ore.[28] If the Baffin Islanders were aware of Frobisher's priorities, they must have been grateful for his myopic focus on useless dirt. It probably saved many Inuit lives: immediately in the clashes between Englishmen and Inuits that would otherwise have occurred in eastern Canada, and eventually in the one or more Inuits who almost surely would have been seized and carried to England. There was no fourth voyage.

Although Frobisher's Inuit captives of 1576–1577 were the first American natives in Britain whose brief careers abroad are extensively documented, at least four other Americans preceded them. Perhaps still others left no paper trail or artifacts to prove their eastward ventures, and it is not inconceivable that inhabitants of the western hemisphere reached England before 1493. The largest American dugouts were nearly 100 feet long and carried scores of passengers; some were as seaworthy as European vessels that plied the Atlantic, such as the Vikings' knerrir and Columbus's caravels.[29] In recent decades, well-publicized ocean crossings by rafts and other small craft demonstrate that pre-Columbian voyagers could have traversed the Atlantic from west to east by accident or design.