

The Eighteenth Century Trade between the Ships of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Hudson Strait Inuit

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ABSTRACT. From an early stage in the history of the Hudson's Bay Company, the captains of the company's ships annually received specific instructions to make contact and trade with the Inuit of southern Baffin Island in the vicinity of the Upper and Middle Savage Islands in Hudson Strait during their annual voyages from London to the posts in Hudson Bay. Documents for a 20 year period in the mid-eighteenth century reveal that a wide range of trade goods, primarily tools and hunting weapons, was provided to each captain for this purpose. A comparison of the volume of trade goods with the probable number of Inuit involved in this trade suggests that the goods were probably thereafter disseminated through inter-group trade throughout a wide area of the Canadian Arctic. Baleen from the bowhead whale (*Balaena mysticetus*) represented an important item being traded by the Inuit in return, at least from 1737 until the end of the century. For the period 1737–1778 the average amount of baleen traded by the Inuit of southern Baffin Island was 1237 lb (559.7 kg), i.e., approximately the amount of baleen produced by an average adult bowhead whale. For this period the baleen from this source represented 78% of all the baleen handled by the Hudson's Bay Company. The records of the Hudson Strait trade thus provide some indication of the minimum numbers of bowheads being taken annually by the Inuit of the north shore of Hudson Strait in the eighteenth century and the amount of hunting effort being devoted to whaling.

Key words: baleen, bowhead whales, Hudson Strait, trade, Inuit

RÉSUMÉ. Depuis le début de l'histoire de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson, les capitaines des navires de la Compagnie, lors des voyages annuels qui les amenaient de Londres aux postes situés dans la baie d'Hudson, recevaient des directives précises afin d'entrer en contact et de commercer avec les Inuit de la partie sud de l'île Baffin située à proximité des îles Sauvages supérieures et moyennes, dans le détroit d'Hudson. Des documents datant du milieu du XVIII^e siècle et couvrant une période de 20 ans révèlent qu'une grande variété de marchandises, en majorité des outils et des armes de chasse, était mise à la disposition de chaque capitaine à cette fin. Une analyse comparant le volume des marchandises ainsi troquées au nombre probable d'Inuit participant à ces échanges suggère que ces marchandises étaient ensuite disséminées dans une grande partie de l'Arctique canadien par le commerce intergroupes. Les fanons de baleine boréale (*Balaena mysticetus*) représentaient un article important échangé par les Inuit, du moins de 1737 jusqu'à la fin du siècle. Entre 1737 et 1778, la quantité moyenne annuelle de fanons échangée par les Inuit de la partie sud de l'île Baffin était de 1237 livres (559,7 kg), soit environ la quantité de fanons provenant d'une baleine boréale adulte de taille moyenne. Durant cette période, les fanons provenant de cette source représentaient 78 p. cent de tous les fanons traités par la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson. Les documents portant sur le commerce effectué dans le détroit d'Hudson fournissent ainsi des indices sur le nombre minimum de baleines boréales capturées au XVIII^e siècle par les Inuit de la côte nord du détroit d'Hudson et sur l'importance des efforts visant la capture d'animaux consacrés à la pêche à la baleine.

Mots clés: fanons, baleines boréales, détroit d'Hudson, commerce, Inuit

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1670 and 1913, a period spanning 244 years, vessels of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), usually numbering between 2 and 4 ships, made supply voyages almost annually from London to the company's posts in Hudson Bay (Fig. 1). They made approximately 660 round trips during this period (Cooke and Holland, 1978), although on a relatively few occasions vessels were forced by ice conditions to winter at posts in the bay, returning to England the following year. Because of a strong westward-setting current flowing along the north shore of Hudson Strait into Hudson Bay, which

tended to result in that part of the Strait becoming ice-free first, and a strong eastward flow, carrying with it large quantities of heavy ice in the middle and southern parts of Hudson Strait (Ross, 1975; Chappell, 1817; Barrow, 1852), the standard route followed by the company's ships into the Bay hugged the Baffin Island coast fairly closely. As a result they commonly passed close to or were brought to a halt by calms, foul winds, or temporary ice obstructions in the vicinity of the Middle or Upper Savage Islands (Fig. 1), near the present community of Lake Harbour. At a relatively early point in this long history, the Inuit of the area started making a habit of coming out from shore in their umiaks and kayaks to trade with the company's ships (Fig. 2).

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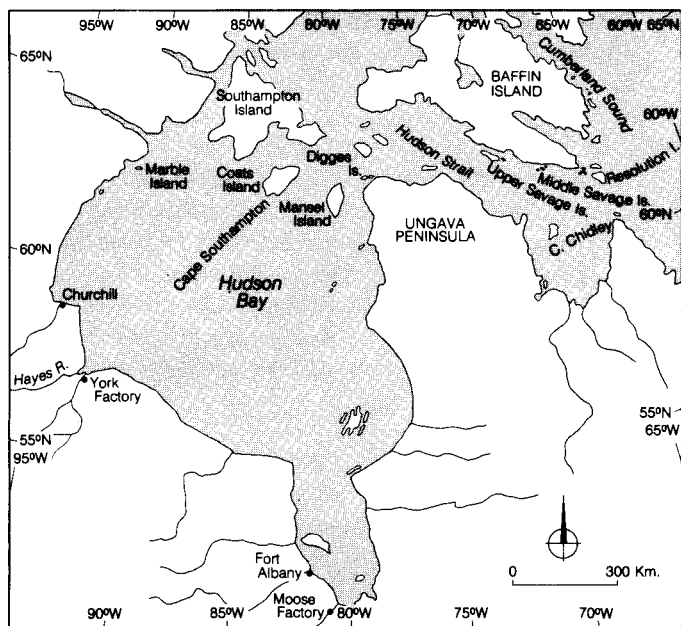


FIG. 1. Map of Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait.

Probably at an equally early stage, the potential of this trade was recognized by the Committee in London, and steps were taken to strengthen and regularize this trade. Thus the Committee's instructions to Captain George Spurrell, in command of *Seahorse*, dated 18 May 1738 (the first year for which such instructions have survived in the HBC archives) contain the following section:

If in your passage through the Straights you should meet with any Eskquemais you are to treat them civilly & Encourage them to trade Whalebone or any other Commodity with you which is to for & on account of the Company, for which Purpose wee have provided the following Goods Viz.: 12 Hatchets, 9 Files, 12 Knives, 18 Combs, 36 Jews Harps, 12 doz. Mettall Buttons, 2 doz. Tabacco Tongs, 18 files, 1 doz. Fire Steels, 6 doz. Old Knives, 2 pounds Beads, 1 doz. Steel hand saws, 1 doz. Helved Hatchets, 1 doz. Sorted Chisells, 1 doz. Files, 4 doz. Sorted Gimblets, 1 doz. Sorted Claw Hammers, which with some Old Iron Hoops, Wee Judge will be sufficient for that Trade. You are to Enter in a book herewith delivered you, daily an exact account of such Trade, mentioning therein the particular Quantity of each sort of Goods barter'd with the Eskquemais, and if any of the above English Goods are not traded you are to bring them back again to England, and for your Encouragement. In being Industrious to promote the Comp.'s Interest in such Trade, Wee do agree to allow you Twenty five p.Cent Commission on the Nett produce & ballance of such Trade, To be divided between the three Commanders, Share and Share alike. You are not to go on shore with them nor send your Boat on any pretence whatsoever, and be sure you keep Yourself upon your guard with your Guns and small Arms loaded that you be not Surpriz'd... (HBC A.6/6. fo. 24d)

These instructions are repeated, with very little change, in the sailing orders to the captains for the remainder of the century. A striking feature is that Inuit were clearly seen as being potentially dangerous, and the section of the orders as to precautions against being surprised is a standard feature of the orders every year. One can only surmise that this conspicuous fear of Inuit aggression was provoked by the belief that Inuit had murdered the members of James Knight's expedition that sailed into Hudson Bay in search of the Northwest Passage in 1719 and wintered at Marble Island. Having visited Marble Island in 1722 in the sloop *Whalebone*, John Scroggs returned to Churchill with the information "that Every Man was Killed by the Eskemoes" as recorded in the Churchill Journal for 25 July 1722 (HBC B.42/a/2. fo. 51d). Recent archaeological work on Marble Island tends to refute this conclusion, however, in that there are practically no European skeletal remains on the island (Geiger and Beattie, 1993).

Despite their fear of the Inuit, it is clear that the Committee saw this as being a potentially valuable trade, as indicated by the fact that they encouraged it by guaranteeing the captains a 25% commission, and by the inclusion of the above instructions (with minor differences in wording and in the lists of goods provided for the trade) in the instructions to every ship's captain bound for Hudson Bay until the end of the eighteenth century and probably even later.

By 1748 a slight change had appeared in orders as to the treatment of Inuit, namely:

... you are to treat them civilly but not to force them to come on board your Ships by Hoisting out your boats to tow them on board but to let them go to which of the Ships they please and encourage them to trade Whalebone or any other Commodity with you... (HBC A.6/7)

This gives the impression that there had been some fairly aggressive competition between the ships' captains for the trade of individual Inuit or umiaks. By 1748 a further minor change had appeared in the instructions as to the types of goods which should be sought from the Inuit:

... and encourage them to Trade whole Skins of any sort but no pieces, whole Sea Horse Teeth or Unicorns Horns, Seal or Whale Oil, Whalebone or any other Commodity with you. (HBC A.6/8)

There was even a deliberate attempt at facilitating this trade by recruiting an interpreter. A young Inuk from the east shore of Hudson Bay, captured by a party of James Bay Cree Indians in 1736, was "bought" by the HBC at Fort Albany and shortly afterwards placed in Captain Christopher Middleton's care. Given the name Charles, he was sent to England in 1738, Middleton saying "how serviceable he will be in informing them relating to the trade in the Straits relating to the whalebone..." (Davies and Johnson, 1965:273). Charles probably acted as an interpreter on board Middleton's ships during the following two seasons and was certainly on board George Spurrell's ship in 1741; Spurrell was instructed by the Committee to "cause the

Indian [Inuit] Ladd to tell them [the Inuit] they must Endeavour to get what Whalebone, Oil and Furs they can against the next year.” (HBC A.6/6).

There was even a suggestion that the Hudson Strait trade might merit sending a vessel specifically for that purpose. In his *Observations on Hudson’s Bay* based on almost 20 years of experience in the Bay, Andrew Graham wrote in the late 1760s:

Another branch of trade might be increased with the Esquimaux by a vessel being solely fitted out for that purpose to trade with them oil, whale-bone and fox skins in and about Hudson’s Straits, and return again to England in the fall; our ships passing by them yearly deals with them not inconsiderably in the aforesaid commodities . . . (Williams, 1969:260)

Graham also reveals that there was something of an ulterior motive in thus “cultivating” the Inuit along the coasts of the dangerous access route to the Bay, which the company’s ships travelled annually:

... And we are very kind to them giving them many presents, which conduct is not only commendable in the Company, but has so ingratiated us into their good opinion, that I am fully

persuaded were any misfortune to befall our vessels (which God forbid) they would act towards us in quite a different manner than they did to the unfortunate Captain Barlow and his crew, Anno Domini 1724. ... (Williams, 1969:237)

The reference to Captain Barlow is again to the company’s belief that the entire Knight expedition (Barlow being one of Knight’s captains) had been annihilated by Inuit on Marble Island. Thus not only the active policy of trade with the Hudson Strait Inuit, but also that of fairly generous gifts, was a deliberate attempt by the HBC to try to ensure that in the event of a shipwreck their ships’ crews would be hospitably received by the Inuit.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE TRADE

One of the earliest descriptions of these encounters is that of Joseph Robson, traveling to York Factory and Churchill on board *Prince Rupert* (Captain George Spurrell) in 1744. He reported that large numbers of Inuit came out to the ship near the Savage Islands and traded “whalebone, sea-horse teeth, seal-skins, furs, and even the apparel they had on” (Robson, 1752:19).

Although they were not HBC vessels, the ships of William Moor’s expedition, *California* and *Dobb’s Galley* bound into



FIG. 2. Inuit of the Savage Islands area coming out by kayak and umiak to trade with passing ships. After Parry, 1824.

Hudson Bay in search of the Northwest Passage in 1746 encountered Inuit in this area and engaged in trade with them. Both Moor and Captain Francis Smith, captain of *California*, were former employees of the HBC. The published accounts of this encounter represent the most detailed eighteenth-century accounts of this trade. Henry Ellis, Arthur Dobbs' agent on board *Dobb's Galley* described their encounter as follows:

At these Islands [the Upper Savage Islands], there came on board us three large and twenty-six small Canoes, full of Eskimaux Indians, whose Business was to trade. The Commodities they brought, were Whale-bone and Seal Skins, in exchange for which we gave them Hatchets, Saws, Gimblets, etc. Their Stock was not great, but we made a considerable Profit by our Dealings with them. On the other hand, they thought themselves so well used, that they were desirous of continuing their Traffick as long as possible; in order to which, when they had disposed of all their Goods, both Men and Women were very eager in stripping themselves almost naked, that they might sell their Clothes, which they did for Knives, Pieces of Iron, and such like. (Ellis, 1748: 131–2)

The limited amount of goods that the Inuit had to trade on this occasion may well be because they had previously traded with the HBC ships.

Drage (1748), who describes himself as the clerk on board *California*, has written an even more detailed account of this same encounter. He reports that some 23 kayaks and a number of umiaks came out from shore and traded a small amount of baleen, fox skins, model bows, arrows, kayaks, and skin clothing for hatchets, saws, files, knives, needles, beads and pieces of iron barrel hoops. The journal of Captain Francis Smith gives a much more succinct description of this same encounter: his entry for 12 July records 19 kayaks and three umiaks coming off, and that they traded some baleen (Smith, 1746).

Eight years later (in 1754), a similar encounter at almost the same location between the local Inuit and the company's ships, namely *Prince Rupert*, *Sea Horse* and *Hudson's Bay* is recorded in typical fashion in *Prince Rupert's* log for 13 August as follows:

At 4 PM two Usquemay Cornews [canoes] came aboard us & 8 aboard the other two Ships and a Lugage Boat [umiak] with whome we traded Whale Bone and some Sea horse Teeth. Longd. in at Noon is 71° 18' W. (HBC A C.1/872)

These encounters continued well into the nineteenth century, involving not only the company's ships, but also various Royal Navy vessels engaged in exploring expeditions or on escort duty. They included H.M.S. *Rosamond* in 1814, H.M.S. *Fury* and *Hecla* (Captains William Edward Parry and George Lyon) in 1821, and *Griper* (Captain George Lyon) in 1824. Published accounts from these naval voyages, or from exploring expeditions traveling on board the company's ships, such as John Franklin's expedition in 1819, tend to provide much more detail of these encounters than is available from the logs of the HBC vessels,

and there seems little doubt that the conduct of the trade had changed (Chappell, 1817; Franklin, 1823; Parry, 1824; Lyon, 1824, 1825). Although Parry (1824) reports that in 1821 the Inuit had brought seal and whale blubber, whalebone, sealskins, caribou hides, bear, fox and dog pelts, as well as spears and lances to trade, Chappell (1817) was of the view that this trade was really insignificant noting that the HBC ships "do not procure much oil or whalebone from the Esquimaux" (Chappell, 1817:69). Ross (1975:27) has analyzed the trade involved in 16 encounters between HBC ships and the Inuit of the Savage Islands area from 1850 to 1870; he reports that 3 such encounters resulted in no trade, 2 in only a small amount, 9 in an indefinite amount, and only 2 in meaningful quantities of Inuit products, e.g., fox pelts and walrus tusks. It is clear from this that there had been a significant decline in this trade since the eighteenth century.

THE GOODS TRADED

Several of the descriptions cited provide, in a general way, some idea of the range of goods traded to the Inuit. Andrew Graham has also provided quite a specific list of commodities traded, namely whale oil, furs (fox, wolf and bear), and baleen, in return for wrought iron work such as harpoons and lances, "cutlery ware", beads, looking-glasses, etc. (Williams, 1969).

Fortunately, for a 20-year period (1738 to 1757) the Hudson's Bay Archives contain, in the "Sailing Orders and Instructions" given to every captain each year, a detailed list of the goods put aboard his ship, in the degree of detail found in the instructions to Captain Spurrell cited earlier. Unfortunately, the books in which Spurrell and his fellow captains were instructed to keep a detailed record of all the transactions have not survived. After 1757 the items put aboard each ship are no longer listed in the "Sailing Orders and Instructions" but only in appended invoices, none of which has survived.

From 1738 to 1757, however, we have a detailed list of the goods put on board each ship each year specifically for the Hudson Strait trade with the Inuit. The details are presented in Table 1.

Clearly the quantities traded may have been somewhat less than those shipped; for example, in some years one or more ships may not have made contact with Inuit, or in some years the Inuit may not have had enough to trade (in the view of the captains) to equal the value of all the trade goods which had been provided by the company. However, it seems probable that the bulk of the goods listed as having been provided for this trade would, in fact, have been traded. A captain would be unlikely to take a large quantity of a particular item which had not "sold well" the previous year, in part because of concern for his 25% commission, and in part from a concern about storage space on board; at the same time, he would not have taken a smaller quantity of an item that had "sold well" the previous year.

The goods traded were predominantly hardware, either tools (needles, hatchets, fish-hooks), hunting weapons (lances and harpoons and shafts for them), or weapons (bayonets and sword blades) and pieces of iron (old hoops) which could be hammered into tools and hunting equipment. For the Inuit women the 8194

TABLE 1. Goods carried for Inuit trade by Hudson's Bay Company ships 1738-1757¹

YEAR	1738	1739	1740	1741	1742	1743	1744	1745	1746	1747	1748	1749	1750	1751	1752	1753	1754	1755	1756	1757	TOTAL
No. of SHIPS	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	67
Awl Blades	0	72	72	260	59	53	48	66	90	79	89	56	38	30	30	25	25	26	50	38	1206
Bayonets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	0	18	18	25	28	28	135
Beads (lb)	6	18	22	19	15	23	23	32.5	42.5	38	32.25	24	25	28	28	27.75	27.5	25.75	26	26.75	510
Buttons, metal	288	144	288	236	212	123	111	122	122	92	81	84	155	123	123	120	143	131	94	94	2886
horn	288	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	288
Chisels,	36	36	24	18	15	18	18	24	30	25	21	15	61	77	77	71	68	68	69	77	848
ice	0	0	0	16	1	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	124
Combs, horn	42	34	42	38	24	19	7	22	28	19	18	7	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	326
Combs, ivory	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	68
Files	105	78	78	55	39	48	42	53	65	53	37	39	113	101	101	88	80	72	87	93	1427
Fish hooks	0	0	100	136	136	130	130	204	276	308	274	181	338	437	437	325	377	377	377	373	4916
Fork blades	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
Formers ²	0	0	0	0	0	12	6	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
Gimblets	156	96	168	145	91	117	86	100	148	131	126	88	134	128	131	122	117	117	114	111	2426
Hammers	36	24	24	24	17	12	6	7	7	7	6	6	30	26	26	31	30	28	27	26	400
Hatchets	63	69	78	72	56	67	52	31	73	59	50	32	122	113	113	112	101	98	95	91	1547
Hats	0	12	12	8	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	36
Harpoons	0	12	36	33	29	28	25	26	32	37	31	20	84	85	85	82	75	74	69	65	928
Hoops, iron ³																					
Jews harps	108	36	36	36	36	12	12	15	15	43	12	0	0	6	6	6	6	2	2	2	391
Kettles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40
Knives,	228	84	104	0	0	0	157	193	249	157	108	0	192	196	196	180	162	139	127	111	2583
clasp	0	72	72	72	72	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	288
Dutch	18	72	112	178	254	247	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	881
Lances, whaling	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	48	41	34	72	76	84	76	64	60	79	72	706
Looking glasses	0	32	36	34	33	32	21	45	63	55	49	37	22	24	29	33	32	32	31	31	671
Needles, gloves'	0	600	475	375	465	449	436	331	431	382	308	210	512	537	537	400	480	465	405	396	8194
Pots, pint tin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	36	34	37	96	81	81	57	57	48	46	57	630
Rasps	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Razors	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Rings,	84	144	144	144	143	143	143	118	154	145	136	60	76	56	56	0	0	0	0	0	1746
brass																					
Bath metal ⁴																					
stone	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	12	15	15	12	12	12	12	12	115
small	36	36	42	42	29	84	55	75	99	93	76	55	88	90	95	91	82	72	64	67	1371
large	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Spoons, alchemy ⁵	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Scissors (pr)	12	48	48	48	46	33	24	27	25	26	18	14	42	23	23	26	26	31	20	20	1646
Staves (handles)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	63	70	55	150	170	170	153	124	87	78	68	1188
Steels, fire	12	12	12	12	6	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	59
Sword blades	0	0	0	90	73	78	64	55	55	25	30	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	496
Tobacco, tongues	36	24	24	22	18	0	0	0	5	5	5	5	0	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	174
Tools, old	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

¹ Source: HBC A.6/6-9² A type of chisel³ Old barrel hoops: unspecified numbers traded every year, 1738-1752⁴ Alloy rings⁵ Alloy spoons

glovers' needles (i.e., three-sided needles, J. Bockstoce, pers. comm. 1993) listed must have been enormously useful for sewing skin clothing, tents, kayak and umiak covers. There are a few categories that may be described as ornamental, namely looking glasses, beads, buttons, and possibly rings (although it is not clear if these were finger rings, or something more practical). Perhaps the most intriguing items brought from England (exclusively by Captain George Spurrell) were 391 Jews' harps; as perhaps the most conveniently portable and most easily mastered musical instrument they were ideally suited to the Inuit way of life.

Of perhaps even greater significance were the items that were not traded. Firearms and ammunition are glaringly conspicuous by their absence. The HBC had been trading guns to the Indians almost from the start of its history; thus by 1682 they were already among the "stock goods" in the Indian trade (Rich, 1958:101). By contrast, over 50 years later the HBC was still *not* trading guns to Inuit. One must assume that this is again a result of the company's interpretation of what had happened to the Knight expedition.

Given the very considerable volume of trade goods, e.g., 4826 fish hooks, 8194 needles, 2426 gimlets, over 3500 knives of various kinds, 1343 hatchets, bartered to the Inuit over a 20-year period, it seems improbable that all of these goods were being utilized solely by the relatively small group of Inuit that gathered in the Lake Harbour area each summer, in order to trade with the HBC ships. From Ellis's (1748) description of 3 umiaks and 26 kayaks coming off to trade, we might estimate the number of Inuit which came out to the ships on that occasion as not exceeding 80 to 90 people. The inevitable conclusion, then, is that these Inuit were acting as middlemen, and that goods of the types listed in Table 1 were being spread from this source by trade probably throughout Baffin Island and much of the Central Arctic, as well as south to Ungava.

THE TRADE IN BALEEN

Generally speaking, since the captain's record-books of the details of all their transactions have not survived, for most categories of goods obtained from the Inuit we have not even a vague idea of the quantities of goods involved. One exception is baleen. The Fur Sales Records, surviving examples of which cover the eighteenth century from 1737 onwards (HBC A.481/1-7), enumerate the amounts of baleen sold at auction in London, year by year. A minor potential source of confusion is that baleen is invariably recorded as "whale-fins", the common designation for baleen from at least the time of William Baffin's voyages in the early seventeenth century (Markham, 1881). In the context of Hudson Strait and Bay, this almost automatically meant baleen from the bowhead, or Greenland, whale (*Balaena mysticetus*).

A particularly useful aspect of the fur sales records is that almost invariably the post at which the furs, etc. had been traded by Indians or Inuit, is identified by a standard set of initials such as CR (Churchill) or YF (York Factory). In the case of the eighteenth-century baleen sales several other sets of initials also appear, referring not so much to a specific post, as to the type of

operation during which the baleen was traded (almost exclusively by Inuit) or otherwise acquired. They include the initials NE, that refer to the "northern expeditions" dispatched north along the coast by sloop from Churchill, usually to the area of Marble Island and especially between 1749 and 1777. The initials BWF signify "black whale fishery", namely the attempt at commercial whaling mounted by the HBC in the vicinity of Marble Island between 1765 and 1772 (Ross, 1973). The final set of initials regularly appearing against lots of baleen sold at auction is ET, meaning "Eskimo trade". It is significant that it is differentiated from the sloop voyages (NE) and it does not represent the trade at any of the posts; in fact, it represents the Hudson Strait trade with the Inuit of Southern Baffin Island.

The amount of baleen obtained by trade with the Inuit of Hudson Strait is listed, by year, in Table 2 and is presented graphically in Fig. 3. For comparison, both the Table and Figure also present the amounts of baleen traded directly to Churchill, the amounts acquired from the Inuit during the northern expeditions (the sloop voyages north to Marble Island), and the amounts obtained by the company's own "black whale fishery" at Marble Island. Table 2 and Figure 3 reveal that, over the 42-year period (1737 to 1778) during which this component of the trade was regularly distinguished from the other trading activities of the HBC, the company's ships purchased 52 160 lbs (23 709 kg or 23.7 tonnes) of baleen from the Inuit of Hudson Strait, out of a total harvested by the HBC of 66 849.5 lbs (30 386 kg or 30.3 tonnes). It thus represented 78% of the baleen harvested by the HBC during this period. By comparison, the company's own Marble Island fishery yielded only 5 small whales (Ross, 1973) producing (along with some baleen traded from the Inuit) a total of less than 2 tonnes of baleen. The fur sales records would suggest that only 1465 lbs (665.9 kg) of this derived directly from the Marble Island whale fishery.

Contemporary confirmation of the amounts of baleen traded are available from the proceedings of the May 1749 Parliamentary Enquiry into the affairs and activities of the Hudson's Bay Company (Rich, 1958). The HBC produced a table (reproduced in Umfreville, 1790) showing all the goods (including baleen) imported to England by the HBC for the decade 1738 to 1748. A commentary on the figures for the baleen trade in this table and on the importance of the Hudson Strait trade to the company's overall baleen trade appears in the writings of Joseph Robson (1752). The figures for the amount of baleen traded by the HBC as presented in this table correspond very closely with those presented in Table 2 for six of the years in question, are significantly higher in one year (1746) and somewhat lower in three years. One can only guess as to the source of the discrepancies. As in most of his treatise, Robson has an axe to grind, i.e., the company's negligence or incompetence, and makes the accusation, rather unfairly, "our ships give them [the Inuit] little encouragement; nor is it the design of the Company, that the fisheries should be improved" (Robson, 1752:64). Later, he noted that the trade was executed "cursorily as the ships pass into the Bay" (Robson, 1752:65) and suggested that the trade could be greatly increased with a little effort.

The annual average amount of baleen traded during the 42-year period in Hudson Strait was 1237 lbs (562 kg). Ross (1979)

TABLE 2. Baleen Sales, Hudson's Bay Company (lbs)¹

Year Procured ²	Unknown	ET ³	CR ³	NE ³	BWF ³	Other
1737		179				
1738		207				
1739		490				
1740		460	84	85		
1741		165				
1742		628	55			
1743		663.5		148.5		
1744		302				
1745		428				
1746		278				
1747		604				
1748		1179.5				
1749		1136		1510		
1750		2271		106		42
1751		12		79		
1752		555		69		
1753		1756		185		
1754		224		62		
1755		252		400		
1756		916				
1757		5066				615
1758		588				
1759		791				
1760		1569		75		
1761		1403		100		
1762		438				
1763		487		62		
1764		2718		108		
1765		776		77		
1766		717		25		
1767		1776		82	216	
1768		1019	1169			
1769			596	92		
1770		4141		235		854
1771		385		770	1055	
1772		1217	55	193	194	
1773			77	43		
1774		1406		134		
1775		6515	668			
1776		3836	1128	1129		
1777			850	1262		
1778		4606				
1780	6542					
1781	7042					
1782	443					
1783	2972					
1784	255					
1785	1464					
1787			488			
1788			1888			
1795	4573					
1796	5804					
1798	3995					
1799	2414					
1800	2032					
TOTALS	37 536	52 160	7058	7031.5	1465	1511

¹ Sources: HBC A.48/1-7² For years omitted (1779, 1786, 1789, 1790, 1791, 1792, 1793, 1794, 1797) no records of sales survive in the Archives.³ Unknown = No source indicated; ET = Hudson Strait trade; CR = Churchill; NE = Northern Expeditions; BWF = Black Whale Fishery.

has calculated (on the basis of 70 whales killed between 1847 and 1891) that an average whale killed in Davis Strait yielded 1392 lbs (633 kg) of baleen and that, by contrast (on the basis of 211

whales killed between 1860 and 1912), an average whale killed in Hudson Bay yielded 916 lbs (416 kg) of baleen. Bockstoece (1977) estimated that in the Western Arctic the yield of baleen from an average whale was 1500 lbs (682 kg). If one takes the average of these three figures as being the average yield of baleen from whales killed anywhere in the Canadian Arctic, namely 1270 lbs (577 kg), this means that the average amount of baleen traded annually by Hudson Strait Inuit to the ships of the HBC over a 42-year span in the mid-eighteenth century was equivalent to that of one average bowhead whale.

During the same period (1737 to 1778) a total of 4682 lbs (2128 kg) of baleen was traded directly to Churchill and 7031.5 lbs (3196 kg) to the sloops on their northern coastal voyages. Together these sources of baleen traded amount to 13 713.5 lbs (5990 kg) or the yield of approximately 10 average-sized bowheads. Clearly this is not in the same league as the Hudson Strait fishery, but it still represents some investment of time and effort on the part of the Inuit of the Keewatin coast.

For the period from 1780 until the end of the century, the fur sales records unfortunately cease to identify the origin of the baleen (or of any other products sold). The total quantity of baleen involved (Table 2) was 39 912 lbs (18 144 kg). Assuming that this was divided in the same proportions as for the previous 42 years between the yield of the Keewatin coast and that of Hudson Strait, the latter area must have produced 31 143 lbs (14 156 kg or 14.1 tonnes), i.e., equivalent to the yield of 24.5 average whales. Thus the total amount of baleen traded by the Inuit of southern Baffin Island to the HBC ships over the period 1737-1800 was probably 83 303 lbs (37 865 kg or 37.8 tonnes), i.e., the product of 65 average-sized bowhead whales.

Some general conclusions can be drawn from a comparison with another area of contemporary Inuit whaling activity, but not one with which the Hudson's Bay Company was involved, namely the Labrador coast. Here Taylor's study of Inuit whaling in the eighteenth century based on the diaries of the Moravian missions provides some excellent data on numbers of whales killed and landed, and also numbers of dead "drift" whales salvaged, but unfortunately provides no quantitative data on the amount of baleen traded. Of 63 whales killed and landed over the period 1771 to 1784 at least 24 were reported as having marketable baleen (Taylor, 1988: Table 1), i.e., baleen over 1.8 m in length, while of the 23 drift whales salvaged between 1773 and 1783, six were reported as having marketable baleen (Taylor, 1988: Table 2). Thus over a 15-year period one may assume that the baleen from the equivalent of possibly 47 whales was traded to the Moravian missions, i.e., an annual average in excess of that from 3 whales.

This might at first glance suggest a greater intensity of whaling and trading activity on the Labrador coast, until one considers the fact that the Labrador Inuit were trading their baleen and other products at three separate mission stations, Hopedale, Nain and Okak, spread over a coastline some 280 km in length. The length of coastline along which the whale kills and recoveries were reported is substantially longer, namely, at least 500 km (Taylor, 1988). By contrast, the baleen traded to the HBC ships was all traded in the same general locality, that is, the vicinity of the present settlement of Lake Harbour, and may

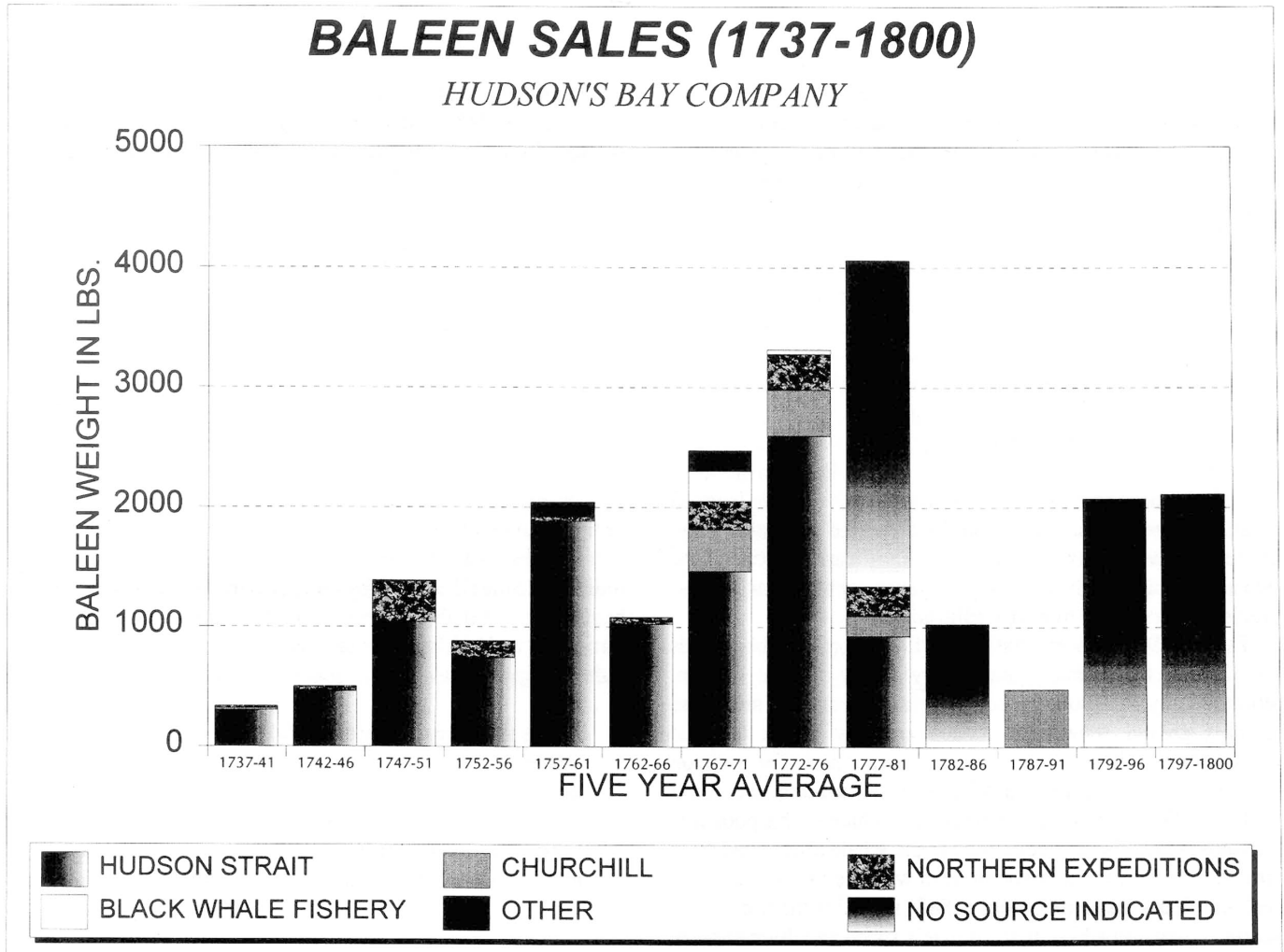


FIG. 3. The Hudson's Bay Company's trade in baleen in the eighteenth century, showing the source of the baleen.

reasonably be presumed to have come from a shorter stretch of coastline than that exploited by the Labrador whale hunters, and to have been produced by a relatively small number of Inuit. When one takes this factor into account, the intensities of activity, both in terms of procurement of baleen, and of trading in baleen, may not be significantly different between the two areas, and indeed the levels of activity in Hudson Strait may even be higher than on the Labrador coast.

To place the Hudson Strait trade in the perspective of the British whaling industry as a whole, at the start of the period, when the British whaling industry was at a very low ebb, the three whaling ships sailing out of London in 1742 (i.e., the entire British arctic whaling fleet) (Jackson, 1978: Appendix 2), produced a total yield of only 1260 lbs (573 kg) of baleen. Thus in that year the output of the Hudson Strait trade (628 lbs or 285 kg) represented almost exactly 50% of the baleen produced by the British arctic whaling fleet. During the period 1750 to 78 (Jackson, 1978: Appendix 3) an average British whaling vessel (from a fleet averaging 57 ships) brought back 1422 lbs (646 kg) of baleen; thus the Hudson Strait output of 4141 lbs (1882 kg) in 1770, or 6515 lbs (2961 kg) in 1775 represented the equivalent of the cargo of approximately 3 and 4 whaling voyages

respectively. With the spectacular expansion of the British whaling industry in the closing years of the century (to over 170 vessels by 1792 (Jackson, 1978: Appendix 3)) the baleen brought back by this large fleet averaged some 4180 lbs (1900 kg) per vessel per year, and the total brought back per year averaged 3192 tonnes. In other words, during this phase of the industry the output of the Hudson Strait trade was completely overwhelmed by baleen from other sources.

PROCUREMENT AND TRANSPORT OF BALEEN

The archaeological record in the Lake Harbour area provides a limited amount of evidence to support the conclusions drawn as to the trade in baleen in that area. Specifically, Maxwell (1979) has noted that baleen and bone recovered from archaeological sites in the area suggest that bowheads were taken in small numbers up until 70 years ago.

Although harpoons, lances and shafts were significant items in the Hudson Strait trade between 1738 and 1757, with the significance of all three items tending to increase over time (Table 1), there is no indication that the captains of the HBC ships

made any attempt beyond this to promote the trade by providing the Inuit with whaleboats or whaling gear, or by entering into agreements for “contract whaling” as became quite commonplace in the interaction between American whaling captains and the Inuit of the Keewatin coast in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Ross, 1975). One must therefore assume that the bowheads were being killed by the Inuit of Hudson Strait using traditional technology.

Ellis (1748) has provided some details of the technology of Inuit whaling, based on contemporary observation and interview, and Boas (1888) was able to gather a fairly accurate picture of pre-contact Inuit whaling from interviews with older Inuit of Cumberland Sound in 1883-84. The most detailed description in the literature of the techniques and equipment used by Inuit for hunting bowheads in the eighteenth century has been abstracted by Taylor (1979, 1988) from the diaries of the Moravian missions on the Labrador coast. Given the proximity of this area to Hudson Strait, one feels reasonably confident that the technology and procedures would not have differed significantly between the two areas, particularly since Taylor generally confirms the less precise observations made by Ellis and Boas.

Taylor (1979) reports that on the Labrador coast bowheads were hunted from umiaks manned by a crew of 11 to 15 men, although kayaks usually accompanied an umiak, since the kayak’s greater speed and maneuverability meant that the occupant could lance a whale already harpooned. The harpoon used was a special large, heavy harpoon (*sakurpang*, according to Boas, 1888), with a detachable head to which the harpoon line was attached and which remained in the whale after it had been struck. Attached to the harpoon head was one or more inflated sealskin floats (*avautak*); Boas (1888) specifies the use of five sealskin floats. In addition, the whale’s speed and diving ability was further constrained by the use of a drag-anchor (*niutak*) shaped like a shallow bucket and consisting of a circular hoop of baleen with a sealskin bottom; it measured 55 cm in diameter with a depth of 17.5 cm (Taylor, 1979).

It seems likely that the bulk of the baleen traded by the Inuit of Hudson Strait came from whales hunted and killed by those same Inuit. In his study of Inuit whaling on the Labrador coast Taylor (1988) reported that, while the Moravian mission diaries recorded 46 bowhead whales killed and landed by Inuit during the period 1773 to 1783, a further 23 “drift whales”, i.e., dead animals probably harpooned and seriously wounded some distance away, were also salvaged during this same 11-year period. The Inuit of Hudson Strait may also have been recovering some “drift whales” in the eighteenth century, possibly including animals harpooned but lost by European whalers in the Davis Strait area, where the Dutch, in particular, were already very active (Vaughan, 1986; Ross, 1979). Some of these animals might conceivably have drifted west into Hudson Strait with the current which sets westwards along the north side of the strait.

However, Taylor also emphasizes that the baleen of the “drift whales” recovered on the Labrador coast had often fallen out by the time they were salvaged. According to John Bockstoe (pers. comm., 1993) the carcass of a dead bowhead decomposes so rapidly after death that the baleen drops out within a period of two weeks at the longest. This is confirmed by Captain Christopher

Middleton, one of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s senior captains, who in 1743 noted “that in 10 or 12 Days, after a Whale is dead, the Bone drops off itself from its Mouth” (Middleton, 1743:16). Henry Ellis (1748) describes finding just such a “drift whale”, in this case killed by Inuit, to the west of Mansel Island, but lacking much of its baleen:

... we found a dead whale floating, in which was an Eskimaux Barb, with a Thong of Sea-Horse-Hide fast to it; it had been killed some time by those People, and was a good deal decayed, Part of the Bone was fallen off ... (Ellis, 1748:144)

Given the tendency for the baleen to drop out quite soon after death, it seems unlikely that any significant amount of the baleen traded by the Inuit of Hudson Strait had come from salvaged “drift whales.”

Compared to hunting whales with harpoons from an umiak, or trying to extract the baleen from a very “ripe” decomposing carcass, the task of transporting the baleen in the amounts indicated to the HBC ships by umiak (as the bulk of it was) would have been a relatively simple matter. Some, however, was ferried out to the ships in kayaks, and this, inevitably, led to some rather complex transshipping manoeuvres, as Drage has described:

And as they carry mostly their Whalebone within side their Canoes, ... but as to get there the *Indian* must quit his Seat, kneel upon the Top of the Canoe, and take them out by the Hole he sat in, which he cannot do without another Canoe lying alongside to steady his, any one of the *Indians* will readily do this Office for him. (Drage, 1748:29)

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from the data presented that the trade between the Inuit of Southern Baffin Island and the ships of the HBC on their annual voyages into the Bay throughout the eighteenth century involved much more than occasional chance encounters; both sides in this trading relationship were highly motivated to make contact and trade. The resultant episodes of trading were quite remarkable for their regularity and for the long period over which they recurred. The detailed information as to the range and volume of goods supplied by the HBC for this purpose over a 20-year period in mid-century reveals that a range of manufactured goods, generally of a practical nature, was reaching the Inuit of Southern Baffin Island in a steady flow a century before the first wintering by whalers on Baffin Island (a party from the American whaling ship *McLellan* in Cumberland Sound in 1851-52 (Hall, 1864)) initiated an even more regular contact with Europeans. From the numbers of specific items recorded it is clear that the Inuit of the Lake Harbour were acting as middlemen, and that this represented the point of entry for a supply of European manufactured goods, which thereafter was probably disseminated by inter-group trade throughout Baffin Island and possibly even farther afield. Baleen from the bowhead whale represented an important component of the movement of commodities in the other direction, and was the only category of such commodities

that was specifically traceable to this source in the company's records. The records reveal that the Inuit were engaged in hunting bowhead whales at a steady, if fairly low, level of intensity throughout the century. Baleen from this source represented the bulk of the baleen handled by the HBC and for at least a short period in mid-century a significant component of the British baleen trade.

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