

**TOWARDS TERRA NOVA: THE NORTH ATLANTIC FISHERIES AND THE ATLANTIC  
WORLD, 1490-1600**

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In the first years of the sixteenth century mariners from across the European seaboard created a flourishing commercial cod fishery in the northwest Atlantic. Today known as the Newfoundland fishery, it represents one of the oldest ways in which Europeans interacted with and transformed the Atlantic Ocean. Yet the earliest years of this process, the crucial century in which the first fisheries were organized and expanded, remain poorly understood and marginalized in the wider literature on European expansion into the Atlantic basin. This dissertation aims to provide a new history of the Newfoundland fishery in the sixteenth century, one which approaches the subject from a broad perspective rather than the narrow national or economic frameworks which have dominated the scholarship on the fisheries.

In reconstructing the lives and behavior of European fishermen at Newfoundland in the sixteenth century, this study approaches the northwest Atlantic from the perspective of the multinational groups of fishermen and the communities in which they were embedded. It reconstructs the ways in which mariners worked at and thought about the fishery, including their articulation of a maritime space called *Terra Nova* as an alternative to Newfoundland. In so doing, it argues that historians have consistently under-valued the importance of Newfoundland fishery as a branch of transoceanic commerce. By the mid-sixteenth century the scale of the fishery rivaled trade to the Americas, and fish from Newfoundland provided a crucial source of protein for Europe during times of food insecurity. Yet despite its scale, the social, economic, environmental and legal structures of the fishery diverged significantly from the rest of the sixteenth century Atlantic. In a watery world without colonies or imperial claims, and marked by sharp environmental constraints, mariners at Newfoundland effectively operated as an extension of late medieval Europe. In

short, the Newfoundland fishery was outside of the Atlantic while being at the center of European maritime activity. In exploring these themes and the unusual structures at the heart of the fishery, this dissertation suggests that the Newfoundland fishery provides an important conceptual problem for how we study early European expansion into the Atlantic.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADC- Archives départementales Calvados

ADCA- Archives départementales Cotes-d'armor

ADCM- Archives départementales Charente-Maritime

ADG- Archives départementales Gironde

ADLA- Archives départementales Loire-Atlantique

ADIV- Archives départementales Ile-et-Vilaine

ADSM- Archives départementales Seine-Maritime

ADPA- Archives départementales Pyrénées-Atlantiques

AM- Archives municipales

HCA- High Court of the Admiralty (England)

CSP- Calendar of State Papers (England)

BnF- Bibliotheque nationale de France

BL- British Library

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 1996 the regional journal *Patrimoine Normand* (Norman Heritage) ran an article about the last cod fishermen from the small port of Fécamp.<sup>1</sup> Emblazoned with photographs of ice-covered ships and piles of fresh-caught cod, it noted that the last boats had made the round trip to the fisheries off Newfoundland in the 1980s. The article mourned the demise of an industry that stretched back centuries, a way of life that had sustained mariners from this small Norman port each summer since at least 1527, some 464 years.<sup>2</sup> So intimately tied to the fishery were communities in Normandy, Brittany and Biscay that in the eighteenth century a new term passed into the French language: *Terre-Neuvas*, those who went fishing at *Terre-Neuve*.<sup>3</sup> The article was both a poignant eulogy to a way of life being lost and a testament to the strength of fishing as an institution in Norman society.<sup>4</sup>

The longevity of the ocean fishery in the northwest Atlantic is truly breathtaking. For over half a millennium fishing boats have departed ports in western Europe and made their way to the Grand Banks,

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<sup>1</sup> "Le Grand Métier- La Peche À Terre-Neuve, Un Patrimoine Disparu," *Patrimoine Normand* No 8 (1996). "Fécamp a, pendant des siècles, envoyé des bateaux pecher la morue, la peche à terre-neuve a fait sa fortune. Mais il n'y a pas plus de terre-neuvas à Fécamp." p.51

<sup>2</sup> The earliest recorded voyage of a fishing boat from Fécamp visiting the fishing banks of Newfoundland dates to 1527. See: Jacques Levesque de Ponthaurouart, "Les Fécampoïses à Terre-Neuve En 1527," *Annales du Patrimoine de Fécamp* 5 (1998).

<sup>3</sup> See for instance: Eric Rondel, *Terre-Neuvas Et Islandais: [La Mer Et Les Marins]* (Sables d'or les Pins (France): Editions Astoure, 2005). The term *Terre-Neuvas* does not appear in sixteenth century documents, but rather seems to date to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. A second term, *morutier*, is reserved to describe a ship used to fish for cod.

<sup>4</sup> A similar piece, from the québécois perspective, can be found in: André Lepage, "La Pêche Au Québec: Une Tradition, Une Industrie," *Continuité*, no. 24 (s1984).

Gulf of St. Lawrence, and Scotian Shelf to harvest and process codfish.<sup>5</sup> Until the present day the fishery has remained strictly seasonal, and has drawn mariners from the same regions every summer since its inception. The techniques used to catch and process fish in the early sixteenth century remained relatively unchanged until the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> There is a timelessness and air of tradition about the transatlantic fishery that has worked its way into popular memory in both Europe and the northeast of North America. For this reason, France insists on retaining the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, while the official museum of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador is named The Rooms, a reference to the fishing booths used for centuries by local and itinerant fishermen.<sup>7</sup> Yet the persistent idea of the fishery as an enduring and timeless institution can obscure the complex and dynamic origins of European experiences in the northwest Atlantic.

## 1.1 TOWARDS TERRA NOVA

The earliest years of the fishery, its first century from inception to the foundation of colonies in Newfoundland and the surrounding regions, remains the most poorly understood part of this story. In part this reflects the sources, which are limited and difficult to work with until the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For long-term overviews of the transatlantic fishery see: W. Jeffrey Bolster, *The Mortal Sea : Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail* (2014); Mark Kurlansky, *Cod : A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World* (New York: Walker and Co., 1997). Harold Adams Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy* (New Haven; Toronto: Yale University Press; Ryerson Press; for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of Economics and History, 1940).

<sup>6</sup> On fishing techniques see: D. H. Cushing, *The Provident Sea* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Michel Mollat, *Histoire Des Peches Maritimes En France* (Toulouse: Privat, 1987). Both argue for long-term consistence in practice and do little to distinguish the sixteenth century from what came later.

<sup>7</sup>See: <https://www.therooms.ca> for information on the museum and how it portrays the place of fishing in Newfoundland's history.

<sup>8</sup> Two works of particular importance are the efforts by H.P. Biggar and David Quinn to collect all the relevant documents related to the early history of Terra Nova. Biggar, a Canadian archivist, gathered together every archival record available in the early twentieth century that covered the 1490s to the 1530s. His book offers transcripts in the original language and some English translations of these texts. Quinn edited a multi-volume collection, *New American Worlds*, which provides translations of documents related to all the major colonial efforts in the Americas and some analysis. Volume IV is focused on the history of Newfoundland, while Volume I includes most of the records related

There have also been few studies that focus extensively on the sixteenth century, and most histories of Newfoundland include a single chapter on the subject in larger studies.<sup>9</sup> To complicate matters further, what has been written on the sixteenth century proper consistently approaches the fisheries from narrow national frameworks. Thus Laurier Turgeon's excellent work on 'French' fisheries in the sixteenth century, or Selma and Michael Barkham's groundbreaking work on the Basques, each illuminate only part of the larger story of the early cod fisheries.<sup>10</sup> Older works which offered overviews of the sixteenth century fisheries have yet to be updated with comprehensive research on par with the work being done on the fisheries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>11</sup> This is despite the recent studies which have done much to illuminate particular national, regional and thematic contexts of the sixteenth century experience at Newfoundland.<sup>12</sup> Remarkably, no monograph has been written which approaches Newfoundland in the

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to the voyages of exploration in the northwest Atlantic around the turn of the sixteenth century. Quinn includes most of the same documents as Biggar, but had access to considerably more material (including documents discovered after Biggar's time) and covers a longer period of time. This study uses both works extensively as a source of records related to the early fishery. Citations of Biggar or Quinn refer to transcripts and translations of original source material, not commentary or analysis. Henry Percival Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1911). David B. Quinn, Alison M. Quinn, and Susan Hillier, eds., *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America*, 4 vols., vol. 1, *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612* (1979).

<sup>9</sup> Typical of this are Bolster's work on the north Atlantic fisheries, which devotes just chapter one to the sixteenth century, and de la Morandiere's major two-volume work on the French fisheries which devotes an entire volume to the eighteenth century and a chapter to the sixteenth. Bolster, *The Mortal Sea: Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail*. Charles De la Morandière, *Histoire De La Pêche Française De La Morue Dans L'Amérique Septentrionale Des Origines à 1789* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962).

<sup>10</sup> Laurier Turgeon, "Pour Redécouvrir Notre 16e Siècle: Les Pêches À Terre-Neuve D'après Les Archives Notariales De Bordeaux," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 39, no. 4 (1986); "Codfish, Consumption and Colonization: The Creation of the French Atlantic World During the Sixteenth Century," in *Bridging the Early Modern Atlantic World: People, Products, and Practices on the Move*, ed. C.A. Williams (Taylor & Francis, 2016); Selma Huxley Barkham, ed. *Los Vascos En El Marco Atlántico Norte: Siglos Xvi Y Xvii*, Itsasoia: El Mar De Euzkalerria. La Naturaleza, El Hombre Y Su Historia (San Sebastian [Spain]: Etor, 1987); Michael Barkham Huxley, "La Industria Pesquera En El País Vasco Peninsular Al Principio De La Edad Moderna: Una Edad De Oro," *Itas Memoria. Revista de estudios marítimos del País Vasco* 3 (2000).

<sup>11</sup> Two of the major, dated studies which offer a partially transnational overview include: Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*; D. W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records with Numerous Illustrations and Maps* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1896). On the seventeenth century see: Peter E Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century* (UNC Press Books, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> For some examples of more recent work see: Darlene Abreu-Ferreira, "Terra Nova through the Iberian Looking Glass: The Portuguese-Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Sixteenth Century," *The Canadian historical review*, 79, no. 1 (1998); Germaine Warkentin and Carolyn Podruchny, *Decentering the Renaissance Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective, 1500-1700* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Caroline Ménard,

sixteenth century from a multi-national perspective. There is a need to re-examine both what we know about Newfoundland in the sixteenth century and the fishery's significance for how we understand the motives and methods of early European interactions with the regions around the Atlantic basin.

This study will suggest that in focusing on the first century of the Newfoundland fisheries, from roughly the 1490s to the 1590s, it is possible to answer deeper questions about the ways in which Europeans expanded into and interacted with the peoples and places around the Atlantic basin. The problems with discussing the 'Atlantic' in the sixteenth century will be outlined below, but in general this study stresses comparison and identification of socio-economic patterns as a way to understand integration between different parts of the Atlantic basin. The sixteenth century was the period of formation of most of the major branches of transatlantic commerce which came to define what historians consider variously as the Atlantic world, the Atlantic economy or the Atlantic experience.<sup>13</sup> Building on the fifteenth century experience in northwest Africa and the Atlantic islands (the Canaries, Azores, Madeira and Cape Verde islands), after 1500 transoceanic links were forged between the Euro-Mediterranean world and much of West Africa, the Caribbean, Brazil, Mesoamerica, the Andes and parts of North America. The creation of these oceanic networks was matched with, in most cases, the foundation of permanent European colonies or trade posts, and the creation of new imperial structures to control them. The creation and growth of commercial fisheries around Newfoundland took place parallel to the formation of these commercial-colonial networks. Indeed, the fisheries were established as a major commercial operation before most colonies in the Americas had ever been founded. The question is whether the fisheries also took place in concert with them, so as to

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*La Pesca Gallega En Terranova, Siglos Xvi-Xviii* (Sevilla; Madrid; Sevilla: Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla ; Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas ; Diputacion de Sevilla, Area de Cultura e Identidad, 2008); Peter E Pope and Shannon Lewis-Simpson, *Exploring Atlantic Transitions: Archaeologies of Transience and Permanence in New Found Lands* (2013). Poul Holm, Tim Denis Smith, and David John Starkey, *The Exploited Seas: New Directions for Marine Environmental History* (International Maritime Economic History Association, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> For overviews of Atlantic history see: David Armitage and M. J. Braddick, *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, *Atlantic History : A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

constitute one of the several new branches of transoceanic commerce and empire which marked the sixteenth century Atlantic.

By reconstructing the history of the fisheries, and in particular how they formed and initially grew this study will demonstrate that in the sixteenth century the Newfoundland fisheries represented one of the most significant, and by mid-century one of the largest, systems of maritime commerce in the Atlantic basin. It was also one of the most stable and long-lasting systems of transoceanic commerce which Europeans established during their initial expansion.<sup>14</sup> This represents a challenge to an Atlantic historiography which has marginalized the place of the fisheries in the sixteenth century and which gives preference to maritime activity to the Americas, Caribbean and West Africa. No studies have yet been done to systematically compare the operations around Newfoundland with Iberian commerce in the south Atlantic. The recent *Princeton Companion to Atlantic History*, an excellent summary of our current knowledge of Atlantic history, does not mention the fisheries a single time in its chapter on the sixteenth century, nor include it in its map of sixteenth century commerce.<sup>15</sup> By contrast trade with West Africa, the Atlantic islands and Brazil are afforded space, despite being several orders of magnitude smaller in scale than fishing operations. Even studies such as John Richard's work on environmental history which accord significant attention to the fisheries frame them as a small subset of the larger push into the Atlantic, and focus on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>16</sup>

Newfoundland's early history continues to be treated as either inconsequential or something outside the core Atlantic experience. Typical is the way in which a chapter on "Atlantic Trade and Commodities" in the *Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World* completely excises the sixteenth century Newfoundland

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<sup>14</sup> The durability of the fisheries is a central argument to both Kurlansky, *Cod : A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World*. And Brian M. Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting, and the Discovery of the New World* (New York: Basic Books, 2006). See also the New England perspective in Bolster, *The Mortal Sea : Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail*.

<sup>15</sup> Vincent Brown and Joseph Calder Miller, *The Princeton Companion to Atlantic History* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University press, 2015). Pp.13-25.

<sup>16</sup> Richards John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley [u.a.]: Univ. of Calif. Press, 2006).



fishery in favour of the Iberian Atlantic economies, while it is similarly absent from the long chapters on the Spanish, Portuguese and French Atlantic.<sup>17</sup> The Newfoundland fishery is instead given a single paragraph in a separate essay on “The Northern European Atlantic World,” thus treating Newfoundland as a specialist fringe rather than a central part of the Atlantic story.<sup>18</sup> David Armitage and Michael Braddick’s much-cited history of the British Atlantic World does not include a single description of the sixteenth century fishery, while J.H. Elliott’s seminal history of Atlantic empires devotes an entire three sentences to describing the fishery, without mentioning the Iberian presence at all.<sup>19</sup> Ralph Davis’ major study of the Atlantic economy devotes a single paragraph to the fisheries, while Alfred Crosby’s transformative history of biology in the Atlantic offer no mention of the fishery (which itself represented the largest extraction of marine biology on the planet).<sup>20</sup> It is striking that the overview of Atlantic history published in 2009 by Jack Greene and Philip Morgan encouragingly notes that “A third proposition is that key sectors- leading edges- of the Atlantic world deserve singular and sustained attention. The Newfoundland cod fishery is just one. As early as 1580, Pope notes, about 500 ships returned annually from Atlantic Canada to Europe with a catch of about 200,000 metric tons- a level of commercial activity that exceeded, in volume and value, European trade with the Gulf of Mexico, usually considered the American center of gravity of early transatlantic commerce. The cod fishery is just part of the most obvious leading edge of the Atlantic world:

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<sup>17</sup> Nicholas P. Canny and Philip D. Morgan, *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, C.1450-C.1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.324-340. The chapter is by David Hancock.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pp.165-180. The chapter is by Wim Klooster.

<sup>19</sup> Armitage and Braddick, *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*. The word Newfoundland is used several times as a geographic reference point, and the fishery is briefly mentioned in a late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century context, but never the early operations. J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). At page 29: “Far to the north, Basque or English fishermen attracted from the fifteenth century by the rich fishing grounds off Newfoundland, would be faced by a bleak and inhospitable coastal landscape.” At page 111, about the English Atlantic: “The first routes were navigated high up in northern waters as English, French and Basque fishermen arrived to exploit the international fishing grounds off the Newfoundland coast. The English Atlantic was at its narrowest between the British Isles and Newfoundland, but the inhospitable nature of the country was not conducive to extensive settlement, while the nature of the trade-conducted from English outports in the most perishable of commodities- hardly lent itself to close regulation.” These descriptions are largely untrue, as this study will make clear, and based on old and outdated research.

<sup>20</sup> The paragraph on pages 82-83 seems to cover both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Davis makes clear that he sees the fisheries as marginal to the larger Atlantic economy. Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973); Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange : Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972).

the maritime sector itself.”<sup>21</sup> It is remarkable then that not only did their own volume not contain a single substantive reference to Newfoundland’s fisheries, but since then most major histories of the Atlantic continue to relegate the fisheries to at most a paragraph or two.<sup>22</sup> Even Lauren Benton’s magisterial work on maritime space and imperial sovereignty in the Atlantic, two topics which this study will make clear are at the heart of the early Newfoundland fisheries, does not touch the northwest Atlantic- Newfoundland does not appear once in the index.<sup>23</sup>

This reticence to engage with the history of the northwest Atlantic reflects a deeper conceptual issue. When historians focus on the early- and mid-sixteenth century, it becomes clear that the formation of commercial fisheries at Newfoundland pose a conceptual double-problem for the history of the early Atlantic. Even as they were emerging as a major branch of maritime commerce, the Newfoundland fisheries were structured very differently from other emerging economic and social systems in the Atlantic. These deviations include the lack of permanent settlements or imperial structures, the open legal and economic status of the fishery as a common resource, the organization of fishing operations from the bottom-up by mariners across Europe, and ecological similarities between Newfoundland and northwest Europe. Nearly every socio-economic or political structure which historians use to identify new Atlantic systems elsewhere was missing from the fisheries. Until 1580 the fisheries were also isolated from other branches of Atlantic commerce. Because Newfoundland functioned so differently from other Atlantic systems historians of both the fishery and the early Atlantic have been hesitant to grant it more than quasi-Atlantic status as a minor branch of commerce, despite its scale. We are therefore faced with a question: how can a maritime system which is, at face value, both transatlantic and successful also diverge so drastically from the experience of Europeans elsewhere in the Atlantic?

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<sup>21</sup> Greene and Morgan, *Atlantic History : A Critical Appraisal*. p.12. Note that the fisheries are brought up again on page 198, but only to introduce the North America fur trade.

<sup>22</sup> Typical is Daniel Richter’s history of early American colonization, which gives the fishery a full two paragraphs before moving on. Daniel K. Richter, *Before the Revolution: America's Ancient Pasts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011). p.129.

<sup>23</sup> Lauren A. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty : Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400--1900* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Revising our understanding of the early history of the northwest Atlantic fisheries, through carefully reconstructing how and why they developed, will allow us to address the reasons why sixteenth-century Newfoundland is often marginalized by historians of Atlantic empires, and why historians of the fishery (who themselves are few in number) itself have been slow to engage with the wider Atlantic context.<sup>24</sup> In light of the paradoxical way in which the fishery formed, this study will argue that from its period of formation in the first decade of the sixteenth century until the 1580s the Newfoundland fisheries should not be treated as one of the systems of maritime commerce which emerged through European expansion into the Atlantic basin. Rather, the fishery which formed at Newfoundland in the early sixteenth century was deeply embedded in the social, political and economic conditions of medieval coastal Europe. In many ways it functioned as an extension of medieval Atlantic Europe (the coast of northwest Europe from roughly northern Portugal to Holland) and followed a separate trajectory from the rest of the Atlantic. This means both that the fisheries were built upon social, economic and legal structures which had been developed in late medieval European communities, and that changes in the fishery were driven by changes (in demand, in political conflict, in demography) in those same European communities rather than the Atlantic economy as a whole. This is a distinction which disassociates the activities of mariners at Newfoundland from their counterparts in the south Atlantic. Only around the year 1580s, as this study will argue, did this situation change and parts of the fishery diverged to become integrated with other Atlantic systems. Framing the Newfoundland fisheries as an extension of Europe rather than part of the Atlantic allows us to understand the confusing contradiction of growth without embracing the Atlantic experience. The twin issues of scale and structure speak to the heart of why we should study the early fishery. It was an immense operation which brought codfish to thousands of hungry Europeans.

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<sup>24</sup> On non-specialists dealing with the Newfoundland fisheries, see the discussion of the northwest Atlantic in D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). Vol. I.; Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*. and the narrow consideration of the French role in Gilles Havard and Cécile Vidal, *Histoire De L'amérique Française* ([Paris]: Flammarion, 2003). See also the overviews of Atlantic commerce provided in: Brown and Miller, *The Princeton Companion to Atlantic History*. Canny and Morgan, *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, C.1450-C.1850*. And Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies*.

There is an implied sense that if early Newfoundland was so different from the rest of the Atlantic, it must not have been important. Yet sixteenth century mariners, merchants and writers seem to have recognized the significance of the northwest Atlantic as a site of transatlantic commerce, and committed themselves to visiting it *en masse*. If more ships, tonnage and men were committed to the fishery than trade with the Americas, we must ask why. The difficulty of studying Newfoundland and the diffuse impact of the fisheries on European commerce should not dissuade historians from putting them at the center of the sixteenth century Atlantic world. It was, evidence would suggest, too big to ignore.

This study will ultimately suggest that the case of Newfoundland should encourage historians to revise our narrative of the sixteenth century Atlantic. Mariners at Newfoundland rejected the processes which we identify as the core of the Atlantic experience: colonial settlement, the creation of maritime empires, creolization and interactions with indigenous populations, the adoption of networked financial instruments. Yet they also established one of the most durable transoceanic systems of commerce in the Atlantic based on the extension of medieval European techniques. This study therefore points to how early Newfoundland demonstrates the hybrid nature and multi-polar origins of the Atlantic world.

## 1.2 THE MEANING OF THE ATLANTIC

Merely suggesting that there could be a relationship between the Newfoundland fisheries and the ‘Atlantic’ is a fraught proposal, for it assumes the very idea of an Atlantic World. Several decades after Atlantic studies has matured as a field of historical study no consensus exists on how to describe or even label what happened in the Atlantic.<sup>25</sup> In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries increasing numbers of

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<sup>25</sup> I follow Braudel in using the term world as both an economic and a social unit. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). Like many Atlantic historians I do not mean that the Atlantic world consisted merely of the land touched by the Atlantic Ocean, but that it was a distinct historical system which connected different people though shared experiences

mariners from Europe and the Mediterranean used the Atlantic Ocean to visit, conquer and settle in places which had previously been isolated from Europe and each other (though almost all were themselves already inhabited).<sup>26</sup> In the process of doing so they developed and implemented socio-economic, cultural and legal systems which were either invented in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, or were expansions of systems that had existed beforehand. This expansion was also accompanied by a few major upheavals, including biological exchange, mass migrations (free and unfree) and mass mortality in the Americas.<sup>27</sup> The result was that by the seventeenth century no society around the Atlantic basin functioned in the same way it had two centuries before. Such might be a brief summary of why historians focus on the Atlantic as a framework, but what we should call this is disputed. It could be variously labelled the Atlantic world, the Atlantic worlds, an Atlantic system, Atlantic economies, the Atlantic experience.<sup>28</sup> The scholarly idea of an Atlantic World, a socio-economic system that bound together both sides of the Atlantic basin, belongs to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>29</sup> It is in this chronological period that the most conclusive evidence for a unique Atlantic system belongs, and in which the bulk of work has been done.<sup>30</sup>

To read this relative coherence back into the sixteenth century is an anachronism which obscures the degree to which this earlier period was a time of formation and contestation. The sixteenth century poses a more complex problem for understanding the idea of an Atlantic World because it was a period of rapid

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(often traumatic and disruptive) and cultural change. Greene and Morgan, *Atlantic History : A Critical Appraisal*. See also Peter A Coclanis, "Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2006).

<sup>26</sup> Wilcomb E Washburn, "The Meaning of" Discovery" in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *The American Historical Review* 68, no. 1 (1962); *ibid.* Jean-Pierre Sanchez, "Dans Le Sillage De Colomb : L'europe Du Ponant Et La Découverte Du Nouveau Monde, 1450-1650 : Actes Du Colloque International, Université Rennes 2 : 5, 6 Et 7 Mai 1992" (Rennes, 1995 1995); David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange : Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*; Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*; Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire : How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> See David Armitage's essay "Three Concepts of Atlantic History" on differing definitions of the Atlantic in: Armitage and Braddick, *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*.

<sup>29</sup> Though even this is disputed: Pierre Gervais, "Neither Imperial, nor Atlantic: A Merchant Perspective on International Trade in the Eighteenth Century," *History of European Ideas* 34, no. 4 (2008).

<sup>30</sup> See for instance the evidence from the Dutch context in: Johannes Postma and V. Enthoven, *Riches from Atlantic Commerce : Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2003). This is representative of the kinds of economic and political studies focused on a single national/imperial system which dominate Atlantic history.

development and formation, an emergent series of poorly related and shifting economic, political and social networks. Any Atlantic system which could be used as a point of comparison to Newfoundland was itself being formed in the sixteenth century, and we are therefore faced with the prospect of comparing moving targets. The great achievement of recent scholarship on the early Atlantic has been to stress the complexity and diversity of experiences, actors and structures in the sixteenth century. The Iberian Atlantic in particular has been subjected to a thorough dissection which reveals the plurality of actors and the difficulty of implementing centralized authority over the emerging system.<sup>31</sup> If anything there were multiple Atlantic worlds in the sixteenth century, different maritime networks connecting emerging colonial regimes in the Atlantic basin.<sup>32</sup> In short, there was no clearly defined and bounded Atlantic World with which the Newfoundland fisheries might be compared, but there were various maritime systems which themselves were in a dynamic process of formation and change.

Despite this, historians have identified certain important social, economic, political and cultural patterns which stand out in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>33</sup> If the sixteenth century lacked the networks and socio-political structures which bound together Atlantic systems in the seventeenth century, it nonetheless was marked by the emergence of modes of thought and action which were new and centered on communities around the Atlantic basin. Among these historians have emphasized: colonialism<sup>34</sup>; the

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<sup>31</sup> For different perspectives on this problem see: David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570-1640* (2016); Molly A Warsh, "A Political Ecology in the Early Spanish Caribbean," *William & Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2014); Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation Upon the Ocean Sea Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492-1640* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> For an example of this, an overview of the Dutch Atlantic networks and their intersection with those of France can be found in the essays in: Piet Emmer, Henk Den Heijer, and Louis Sicking, eds., *Atlantisch Avontuur. De Lage Landen, Frankrijk En De Expansie Naar Het Westen, 1500-1800* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers 2010).

<sup>33</sup> These are given an overview in the introduction to Greene and Morgan, *Atlantic History : A Critical Appraisal*. John Thornton's recent work on cultural history in the Atlantic also makes a case for broad patterns of experience, cultural transformation and migration as giving coherence to an Atlantic realm. John K. Thornton, *A Cultural History of the Atlantic World, 1250-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*. David Armitage, *Theories of Empire, 1450-1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Havard and Vidal, *Histoire De L'amérique Française*.

formation of imperial structures <sup>35</sup>; high-value agricultural and mineral production <sup>36</sup>; the creation of sustained European maritime networks<sup>37</sup>; biological exchange<sup>38</sup> ; creolization and the formation of new identity groups<sup>39</sup>; and the development of coercive labour systems.<sup>40</sup> These were widespread patterns of socio-economic and cultural change which prompted a series of transformations amongst the populations living around the Atlantic basin. In time these patterns of change manifested as the underlying structure which encouraged the integration of different Atlantic communities into a more coherent Atlantic system in later centuries.

Together these different patterns and structures form the core of an Atlantic experience in the sixteenth century. These patterns of social and economic change were responses to the changing conditions on the ground in lands and waters of the sixteenth century Atlantic and were distinct from what came before.

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<sup>35</sup> Carla Rahn Phillips, *Six Galleons for the King of Spain : Imperial Defense in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty : Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400--1900*. Warsh, "A Political Ecology in the Early Spanish Caribbean."; Lauren Benton, "The Legal Regime of the South Atlantic World, 1400-1750: Jurisdictional Complexity as Institutional Order," *Journal of World History* 11, no. 1 (2000). Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires : American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy, *Negotiated Empires : Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500-1820* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>36</sup> Stuart B. Schwartz, *Tropical Babels : Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Marcy Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures : A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010); Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, N.Y.: Viking, 1985); Earl J. Hamilton, *American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain, 1501-1650* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965); Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War : Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins university press, 2003).

<sup>37</sup> Kenneth J. Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713-1763* (Montréal McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 2006); Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty : Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400--1900*. Alejandro de la Fuente García, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: Univ Of North Carolina Pr, 2011); Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange : Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*; Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*; Anderson, *Creatures of Empire : How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America*; Elinor G. K. Melville and Cambridge University of, *A Plague of Sheep : Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994).

<sup>39</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone : The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2003); Stuart B. Schwartz, *Implicit Understandings : Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1994); *All Can Be Saved : Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale Univ. Press, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery : From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London [u.a.]: Verso, 2010).

Identifying where, why and when these patterns developed is in many ways the essence of Atlantic history. These patterns can be used to identify the emergence of several competing and intertwined maritime systems around the same time that the Newfoundland fisheries were developing. These were systems of circulation which comprised new commercial, migratory and legal networks, shaped by the markers of Atlantic experience outlined above. The most significant was an Ibero-American network stretching from the western Mediterranean to the Caribbean, Brazil and New Spain.<sup>41</sup> A second was the mixed Iberian and northwest European trade down the coast of West Africa.<sup>42</sup> A third were the Atlantic island groups themselves, shifting from early colonial outposts to crucial nodes in maritime traffic.<sup>43</sup> The Ibero-American system was the most extreme, and is often used as the representative of the new Atlantic worlds. Over the course of the sixteenth century these separate Atlantic worlds became increasingly interlinked. West African slaves fueled the growth of a sugar economy in the Caribbean that was dependent on Atlantic Islands for supplies. Mesoamerica and the Andes were only settled due to the experience in the Caribbean, which itself was derived from experiences in the Atlantic islands.<sup>44</sup> One crucial feature of this experience was interconnectivity: the degree to which, increasingly as the century wore on, people in one part of the Atlantic were affected by and affecting people in another. The Atlantic world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was based on the continued integration of these different maritime systems into a coherent whole and the fusion of Atlantic patterns into a unified experience.

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<sup>41</sup> Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation Upon the Ocean Sea Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492-1640*; Stein and Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War : Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe*.

<sup>42</sup> John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, "African Islands and the Formation of the Dutch Atlantic Economy: Arguin, Gorée, Cape Verde and São Tomé, 1590–1670," *International Journal of Maritime History* 26, no. 3 (2014); Carlos-Alberto Campos, "The Atlantic Islands and the Development of Southern Castile at the Turn of the Fifteenth Century," *The International History Review* 9, no. 2 (1987).

<sup>44</sup> William D Phillips Jr, "Africa and the Atlantic Islands Meet the Garden of Eden: Christopher Columbus's View of America," *Journal of World History* (1992).



### 1.3 STUDYING THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY FISHERY

If much of Atlantic history has focused on explaining why the new societies and systems which evolved in the Atlantic were different from Europe, early Newfoundland suggests that we cannot de-center continental Europe from this process. The fishery which formed around Newfoundland in the early sixteenth century functioned as an extension of medieval Atlantic Europe rather than as an emerging Atlantic network. It was different from the Iberian or Atlantic island systems which appeared at the same time, and did not exhibit the same patterns of the Atlantic experience. This is an inherently Euro-centric construction, but only because mariners at Newfoundland themselves resisted integration with the wider world.

To explain why this is the case, and how the paradox which underlay Newfoundland developed, this study will focus on the earliest years of the Newfoundland fishery. Because there are so few studies of the sixteenth century fishery many historians tend to read the experience of the seventeenth and eighteenth century backwards, giving preference to the activity of explorers, colonists and English fishermen.<sup>45</sup>As Chapter One will note, Newfoundland was not the only oceanic commercial fishery Europeans built in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, but it rapidly became one of the largest. This study is most interested in how the Newfoundland fisheries were made, and treats them as something that had to be actively created by Europeans in the early sixteenth century. This means that the present study offers a new reconstruction of the sixteenth century fisheries around Newfoundland, one which rejects nationalist narratives and narrow focuses to describe the full breadth and scale of operations after 1500. Unlike most historians of the fishery, who have treated the logic of a commercial fishery in the northwest Atlantic as self-evident, this study suggests it was created in contingent circumstances. In the process fishermen adopted a series of systemic

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<sup>45</sup> In this most have followed the lead of Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). Even Peter Pope has largely focused on the plantation-fishery of the seventeenth century, rather than the transient fishery. Pete E Pope, "Outport Economics: Culture and Agriculture in Later Seventeenth-Century Newfoundland," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005); Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*.

approaches to the fishery, such as a cyclical migratory system, as well as new mental constructions, such as the idea of *Terra Nova*, which were essential to the success of the venture. Most of these structural and mental innovations of the early sixteenth century lasted as foundations of fishing operations at Newfoundland until the end of the eighteenth century.

It is only possible to fully grapple with these related problems of paradox and structure if historians change the methodologies used to study the early Newfoundland fisheries. Where work has been done it has been conducted within strict national frameworks, so that while much has been written on the English, Portuguese or 'French' at Newfoundland we know little about the fisheries as a whole. This is despite the fact that the openness and transcommunal nature of the fisheries were the defining characteristics of the sixteenth century. To avoid this problem this study uses material from across the coast of Europe and the Mediterranean, and treats mariner-fishermen as belonging to discrete coastal communities (Brittany, Basque Country, Galicia) rather than particular states or nations.

This is also a maritime history, one which focuses on the role of water and shipboard labour as center of the far north Atlantic.<sup>46</sup> As the following chapters will suggest, one of the unusual feature of European interaction with the fisheries was the centrality of water to their actions and to their thoughts, so it is essential to put maritime history at the center of any study of the sixteenth century fishery. Understanding how mariners thought and worked is crucial to understanding how the fishery was created in the early sixteenth century. The behavior of mariners must also be put into dialogue with an understanding of the climate and ecology of the far north Atlantic, informed by more recent work on environmental history across the globe.<sup>47</sup> This study combines as much as possible an understanding of the environmental

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<sup>46</sup> Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Markus PM Vink, "Indian Ocean Studies and the 'New Thalassology'," *Journal of Global History* 2, no. 01 (2007). Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). Edward Peters, "Quid Nobis Cum Pelago? The New Thalassology and the Economic History of Europe," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>47</sup> Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*; John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

conditions on the far north Atlantic with an attempt to reconstruct the actions of largely anonymous mariners.

To properly reconstruct the creation of a fishery around Newfoundland, this study will stress the agency of mariners as the drivers of change on the far north Atlantic. In the sixteenth century it was largely anonymous mariners and merchants from across Atlantic Europe which drove change, both growth and contraction, in the fisheries. Although their voices are often left out of the sources, we can still resurrect how they generated and shared knowledge of the northwest Atlantic, and how their behavior changed over time. No story of the sixteenth century Atlantic could be complete without trying to reconstruct the lives of the fishermen-mariners who spent so much of their time living and working on the waves of the fishery. Focusing on how the fishery was created and grew allows us to emphasize the deep connections between the activities of mariners at Newfoundland and their home communities along the Atlantic coast of Europe.

As this study will repeatedly stress, operations at Newfoundland were directly influenced by short-term changes within Europe. These changes might include socio-economic issues such as rapid urbanization or changing diets after 1500, but very often it was cycles of violent warfare which had the largest impact on operations at Newfoundland. This requires us to focus on the local, on how voyages were organized within small ports, towns and coastal regions.<sup>48</sup> As this study will argue, one of the crucial and unusual structures of the Newfoundland fishery was how decentralized and localized it was. This study puts mariners at the center of the story of the northwest Atlantic, and in so doing views the behavior of mariners as essential to understanding the question of why Newfoundland diverged so sharply from the Atlantic experience.

Because of the localized nature of the fishery, this study draws heavily on one particular source of information: municipal notarial records. From the 1540s more information, both in terms of volume and

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<sup>48</sup> In this the present study follows previous studies of fishing and coastal communities such as: Robert J. Antony, *Like Froth Floating on the Sea : The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late Imperial South China* (Berkeley, Calif.: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2003). Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail*; Annette de Wit, *Leven, Werken En Geloven in Zeevarende Gemeenschappen: Schiedam, Maassluis En Ter Heijde in De Zeventiende Eeuw* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008).

precision, about the Terra Nova fisheries can be drawn from business contracts, in particular loan contracts, recorded in the notarial registers of major port cities.<sup>49</sup> Our best source for individual voyages are contracts either for debts (*obligations* in France) or for the purchase of supplies and equipment (*avitaillement* in France). If studied comprehensively they can give us useful data about north Atlantic commerce as a whole, while individual contracts provide a window on individual voyages and mariners.<sup>50</sup> Much of the information used in this study for the decades after 1540 is derived from loan and insurance contracts, following the practice of earlier historians.<sup>51</sup> Laurier Turgeon has used the notarial records of Bordeaux to reconstruct the city's importance to the sixteenth century cod and whaling industries.<sup>52</sup> Selma Barkham was able to use the notarial records of Guipuzcoa to uncover evidence for sustained Basque involvement in whaling during the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>53</sup> When used in conjunction with other types of evidence, the volume and content of notarial sources provides a large and detailed record of commerce in the Atlantic.<sup>54</sup> They provide our only consistent source of information for individuals involved with transatlantic fishing, and it is often possible to use loan contracts to trace a single merchant or ship across many years.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> On notaries see: Sylvie Desachy, Tarn, and départementales Archives, *De La Ligurie Au Languedoc Le Notaire À L'étude* (Albi: Un autre Reg'art, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> While in the sixteenth century notaries were a municipal office, today notarial records are stored in provincial archives in most western European states. This study relies on notarial records from the following archives: Archives départementales de Charente-Maritime (La Rochelle), AD Seine-Maritime (Rouen, Le Havre, Jumièges, Fécamp, Dieppe), AD Calvados (Honfleur), AD Loire-Atlantique (Le Croisic), AD Gironde, (Bordeaux), Stadsarchief van Amsterdam, Westvries Archief (Hoorn, Enkhuizen).

<sup>51</sup> We should note that similar records are rare for the Iceland trade or non-fishing commerce in the far north Atlantic, and thus the Terra Nova fishery is somewhat over-represented in the source material.

<sup>52</sup> Laurier Turgeon. "Pour redécouvrir notre 16e siècle: les peches a terre-neuve d'après les archives notariales de Bordeaux." In *Revue d'histoire de l'amerique française*. Vol.39, no.4, Spring 1986.

<sup>53</sup> Selma Huxley Barkham, "The Basque Whaling Establishments in Labrador 1536-1632 - a Summary," *ARCTIC* 37, no. 4 (1984); "Building Materials for Canada in 1566," *Bulletin of the Association for Preservation Technology* (1973); *Los Vascos En El Marco Atlántico Norte: Siglos Xvi Y Xvii*.

<sup>54</sup> Insurance records are not well represented, and most of the insurance policies discussed below were drawn up in Burgos, where they are one of our best tools for understanding the Basque fishing and whaling industries. See for instance the statistical work done by Hilario Casado Alonso on the loan contracts for Terra Nova trips in the late sixteenth century. Hilario Casado Alonso. "La peche a Terre-Neuve et le commerce international: deux activités complémentaires au XVIe siècle" in *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest*. Vol.120 no. 2, June 2013.

<sup>55</sup> See for instance below Chap. 5, which uses the Rouen notarial records to track the ship of the de Conihout and Boutard families from Jumièges across several generations.

For all their utility, notarial archives are a fickle source. As Donna Merwick has shown, albeit in a later context, the work of notaries was bound up in the complex social, legal and imperial contexts in which they worked.<sup>56</sup> The notaries who recorded voyages to Terra Nova were often familiar, even friendly, with the merchants involved and lived in bustling port cities on the margins of major European states. Some notaries handled dozens of contracts related to Terra Nova in a single day, and it is no surprise that loan contracts were often hastily written in a shorthand that suggests their low importance. Notaries were prone to simplifying, altering or inventing data. As Jacques Bernard has pointed out in the context of Bordeaux, a ship which was evaluated as 200 *tonneaux* in one port might easily be recorded as 250 in another, leaving us unable to tell which was the true size.<sup>57</sup> While loan contracts may give us information about the intended outcome of a voyage, they do not tell us what actually happened in practice. Some, but far from all, notarial entries include records of the result of the voyage in a marginal note. The most significant issue raised by the notarial archives is that of representation. Historians can only use what notarial records have survived to the present day, which greatly inhibits our ability to accurately assess the scope and functioning of the Terra Nova fisheries. Many contracts were likely never recorded in the first place, and countless registers have been lost over the centuries to natural and manmade disasters. Because the French crown established guidelines for notaries early on, the records from Normandy, Brittany and French parts of Biscay tend to be better than Castilian, English or Dutch sources. For this reason, the present study, like those before it, must lean heavily on La Rochelle, Bordeaux and Rouen. By contrast it can say little with specificity about St. Malo or Bayonne, two of the most important ports for commerce on the far north Atlantic, neither of whose registers survive before the seventeenth century.<sup>58</sup> Loan contracts are so useful because they afford modern historians data about the fishery, something we would otherwise be totally without. This study, like

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<sup>56</sup> Donna Merwick, *Death of a Notary : Conquest and Change in Colonial New York* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>57</sup> Bernard. *Navires et gens de mer*. Vol. I. Pp. 3-14, 219-241.

<sup>58</sup> The notarial records for St. Jean-de-Luz, held in the Archives départementales de Pyrénées-Atlantique, begin in the year 1606 (ADPA, 3E 9744). Those for Saint-Malo, held in the Archives départementales de Ile-et-Vilaine, begin in the year 1644 (ADIEV 4E 2030).

others before it, would be impossible without the survival of loan records. Yet this data can be misleading. Although many merchants outfitted their fishing voyages using loans, not all did. To consider one example, while we know that the Basque mariner Robert Lefant outfitted his ship in La Rochelle in the summer of 1542 (it is mentioned in a Castilian interrogation records), he does not appear in the notarial records of the city for that year.<sup>59</sup> How many merchants did *not* end up leaving a paper trail is impossible to determine, because without loans they left no trace in the archives. Caution must therefore guide the use of notarial contracts, yet we cannot outright abandon them as a source. Notarial records remain our only consistent source of data and information on individual mariners, merchants and ships. This study tries to combine notarial records, wherever possible, with other sources to give a comprehensive picture of the north Atlantic.

But even if we must be careful in reading too much into notarial records, one of the contentions of this study is that modern historians can know more about the sixteenth century fishery than is often recognized. It is possible to reconstruct not just broad trends but short-term changes and even individual experiences in the fishery, but only when we abandon a national framework. When we examine Newfoundland from a broad perspective, combining many different kinds of sources and regional archives, a much clearer picture emerges. A number of judicial records, observational testimonies, interrogations of fishermen, personal correspondence and port records from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries survive from across coastal Europe which can deepen our understanding of the experience of mariners at Newfoundland. These can be put into dialogue with the writings and debates amongst state officials, navigators and cartographers. The fisheries of the sixteenth century were big business, and Europeans were interested in understanding them. Numerous maps, geographical texts, sailing guides, military records, scientific texts and treatises on settlement survive which can illuminate how Europeans understood the northwest Atlantic and the fishery. Instead of avoiding the sixteenth century for its perceived difficulty as a subject, we should embrace what it has to offer the modern historian.

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<sup>59</sup> Henry Percival Biggar, *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur De Roberval* (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1930). Doc. CCXII. Compare to records in Georges Musset, *Les Rochelais À Terre-Neuve, 1500-1789* (Ottawa: Institut canadien de microreproductions historiques, 1981).

## 1.4 NEWFOUNDLAND AS A EUROPEAN SPACE

In reconstructing the history of how the fisheries around Newfoundland were created and grew, we must increasingly confront the ways in which Newfoundland resembled fifteenth century Iceland or the Irish Sea rather than the Caribbean and West Africa. The mariners who worked the waters of Newfoundland drew heavily on their experiences along Europe's coast and the structures which shaped the early fishery closely match those of medieval Atlantic European communities. Describing the Newfoundland fisheries as an extension of medieval Atlantic Europe is a shorthand for expressing a series of quite particular arguments about how the fishery functioned. The use of the term *medieval* is meant to indicate that the fishery was marked by certain social, legal and commercial structures which had their roots in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>60</sup> This means that mariners relied on tools and techniques which already existed, rather than pioneering new techniques.<sup>61</sup> The use of the term 'medieval' should not imply backwardness, nor should it imply the kind of static simplicity which has sometimes been ascribed to the fishery. One of the things which will become clear through this study is that the tools used by mariners, originating the late medieval period, were exceptionally well suited to Newfoundland and highly successful.

To say that the fishery was European seems self-evident, as the mariners who worked the waves all came from what is today western Europe. But in the context of the sixteenth century fishery the use of the term European implies several important things. One of the argument of this study is that short-term changes in the fishery were closely correlated to changes in political and economic conditions in Atlantic Europe. The tempo of events in Europe, not the wider Atlantic, dictated the pace and scale of fishing at

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<sup>60</sup>On the idea of 'medieval' see: Chris Wickham, *Medieval Europe* (New Haven Yale University Press, 2016). Randolph Starn, "The Early Modern Muddle," *Journal of Early Modern History* 6, no. 3 (2002); John Hudson, Sally Crumplin, and Robert Bartlett, *"The Making of Europe": Essays in Honour of Robert Bartlett* (2016).

<sup>61</sup> Richard W. Unger, *Shipping and Economic Growth, 1350-1850* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011); Robin Ward, *The World of the Medieval Shipmaster : Law, Business and the Sea C.1350-C.1450* (Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2009); Henri Touchard, "Le Commerce Maritime Breton À La Fin Du Moyen-Âge" (Impr. S. Chiffolleau, 1967). Saskia Sassen, "Territory, Authority, Rights from Medieval to Global Assemblages," <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=457903>. António de Almeida Mendes, "Les Réseaux De La Traite Ibérique Dans L'atlantique Nord (1440-1640)" (paper presented at the Annales. Histoire, sciences sociales, 2008).

Newfoundland. The fisheries were largely immune to fluctuations in the wider Atlantic economy in the sixteenth century. To call the fishery European is to reject that argument that the fisheries were Atlantic, and therefore shared features with other emerging Atlantic systems or participated in a shared Atlantic experience. It is worth emphasizing that the development of the fisheries was not a pan-European phenomenon, but one which was rooted in the coastal communities of Atlantic Europe. Many of these communities were geographically and economically isolated, and often were marked by distinct linguistic and cultural identities.<sup>62</sup> This study will give particular emphasis to the communities around the Bay of Biscay as the center of the sixteenth century fishery. It would be wrong to say that the fisheries were developed by poor and isolated coastal communities, as most of the regions involved were already active, and sometimes prosperous, maritime communities, but the fisheries did draw on labour and capital from an unusually wide range of small villages, ports and regional urban centers which were disconnected from the emerging economic centers in southern Iberia, the Low Countries or northern France. Finally, to argue that the fishery was an extension of Europe means that we should view Newfoundland as part of the internal Atlantic European economy, rather than part of the emerging Atlantic economy. As will be made clear throughout this study, most fish produced at Newfoundland was consumed in northwest Europe and did not circulate widely. At the same time, short- and medium-term fluctuations in the fishery were often driven by events and pressures originating in places like Upper Normandy, Biscayan France and Galicia rather than the wider Atlantic world. This is a history of an Atlantic commercial venture which suggests, first and foremost, that Newfoundland can only be understood through the lens of sixteenth century Europe.

There is also an emerging idea of a Medieval Atlantic, a recognition that European experience in transoceanic voyages originated long before even the fifteenth century- as Benjamin Hudson has put it, an attempt to come to terms with “the ‘elephant in the room’ of medieval history.”<sup>63</sup> Most of this work has

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<sup>62</sup> I am largely addressing the coastal communities which Barry Cunliffe explored in his work Barry W. Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean: The Atlantic and Its Peoples, 8000 Bc-Ad 1500* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). I follow him in thinking of coastal Atlantic communities as being distinct from other European societies and possessing a shared history. On coasts in general see Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History*.

<sup>63</sup> Benjamin T. Hudson, "Studies in the Medieval Atlantic," (2013). p.xiii.



focused on the Norse experience in the far north Atlantic, though some study has been done of Iberian activity in northwest Africa in the fourteenth century.<sup>64</sup> A growing body of excellent scholarship is now focused on the development of maritime commerce and settlement in the fringes of the North Sea, including at Iceland and the islands chains north of Scotland.<sup>65</sup> There is also growing interest in the medieval, maritime antecedents of the new Atlantic systems.<sup>66</sup> The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw a revolution in the maritime infrastructure of coastal Europe and the western Mediterranean.<sup>67</sup> By and large this is still a fledgling field, but this study is a way to push for the expansion of the idea of a medieval Atlantic and to suggest that it extended well into the sixteenth century.

What this study will suggest is that this medieval Atlantic is best understood as a kind of inner Atlantic which included sixteenth century Newfoundland.<sup>68</sup> In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Europeans created a vibrant maritime economy on the open waters of the eastern Atlantic, from Iceland to Rio de Ouro. This study draws attention to the connections between the development of a fishery at Newfoundland and other late medieval institutions. These include the numerous commercial fisheries developed by coastal communities stretching from Norway to northwest Africa.<sup>69</sup> The growth of the fishery at Newfoundland was closely tied to the earlier expansion of fishery at Iceland, on the Irish Sea, in the North Sea and at the Rio de Ouro. Parallel to the rise of fishing at Newfoundland was the accelerated growth of the North Sea

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<sup>64</sup> Vicki Ellen Szabo, *Monstrous Fishes and the Mead-Dark Sea Whaling in the Medieval North Atlantic* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008). Kirsten A. Seaver, *The Frozen Echo: Greenland and the Exploration of North America, Ca. A.D. 1000-1500* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> Richard D. Oram, *The Lordship of the Isles* (2014).

<sup>66</sup> André Wink, "From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean: Medieval History in Geographic Perspective," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 3 (2002). Nicolas Wey Gomez, *The Tropics of Empire : Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008).

<sup>67</sup> maritime Séminaire d'histoire économique et et al., "Ports Et Littoraux De L'europe Atlantique : Transformations Naturelles Et Aménagements Humains, Xive-Xvie Siècles : Actes Du Séminaire D'histoire Économique Et Maritime, Tenu À L'université De La Rochelle Le 24 Juin 2005" (Rennes, 2007 2008).

<sup>68</sup> Patrick Bailey, "Faroe, Orkney, Gran Canaria: Case Studies in the Geography of Marginal Europe," *Geography: Journal of the Geographical Association* 83, no. 4 (1998).

<sup>69</sup> These are summarized in Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting, and the Discovery of the New World*; A. R. Michell, "The European Fisheries in Early Modern Europe " in *The Economic Organization of Early Modern Europe*, The Cambridge Economic History of Europe. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

as a commercial, political and cultural zone.<sup>70</sup> Fishermen at Newfoundland also drew on late medieval concepts of community, consumption and the role of credit which were essential to this medieval Atlantic world. The Newfoundland fisheries were built upon and within this context, pushing the older medieval Atlantic fisheries outward across the sea.

The degree to which historians of the sixteenth century fishery have advanced or accepted the idea that the Newfoundland fisheries were an extension of medieval Europe varies significantly between national literatures. Historians from modern France largely take for granted that the fishery was part of Atlantic commerce. In the major studies from La Rochelle, Rouen and Bordeaux, for instance, *la Terre-Neuve* is analyzed alongside trade with New Spain, Brazil, the Azores and West Africa.<sup>71</sup> The growing literature on Basque fishermen, in particular those from Guipuzcoa, vacillate between stressing the late medieval and Biscayan roots of Basque whaling and situating the fisheries in part of a wider narrative of Basque engagement with the Iberian Atlantic.<sup>72</sup> In the English-language literature most historians have treated Newfoundland as something distinctly Atlantic, especially since the island itself eventually becomes an Atlantic colony. Peter Pope's study of the seventeenth century fishery is the strongest representation of this as it explores the commercial and cultural connections between fishing in Newfoundland and consumption in the wider Atlantic world.<sup>73</sup> Only recently have some Anglo-historians started to accept that the early fisheries were more European than Atlantic. Jeffrey Bolster has argued that "Pressured by commercial capitalism and cornucopian fantasies, the northwest Atlantic's coastal ocean rapidly became an extension of Europe's diminished seas."<sup>74</sup> Brian Fagan's work on fishing has situated the Newfoundland fisheries in

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<sup>70</sup> Justyna Wubs-Mrozewicz and Stuart Jenks, *The Hanse in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012); Eileen Power and M. M. Postan, *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century* (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1933).

<sup>71</sup> Havard and Vidal, *Histoire De L'amérique Française*; Etienne Trocmé and Marcel Delafosse, *Le Commerce Rochelais De La Fin Du Xve Siècle Au Début Du Xviie* (Paris: A. Colin, 1952).

<sup>72</sup> Huxley, "La Industria Pesquera En El País Vasco Peninsular Al Principio De La Edad Moderna: Una Edad De Oro."  
<sup>73</sup> Pope and Lewis-Simpson, *Exploring Atlantic Transitions: Archaeologies of Transience and Permanence in New Found Lands*; Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*.

<sup>74</sup> Bolster, *The Mortal Sea : Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail*.P.48

the contact of European fish production, not Atlantic history.<sup>75</sup> Most historians of the Newfoundland fisheries, including Bolster and Fagan, acknowledge some relationship between the sixteenth century operations and earlier experiences at Iceland, though this latter is usually portrayed as a precursor at most. Both also imply that Newfoundland stopped being medieval at some point, likely the seventeenth century, and started functioning as part of the Atlantic economy.

But even if some scholars have recently come around to the idea that the Newfoundland fisheries in the sixteenth century were an extension of Europe, two important points must be borne in mind. First, although some historians have recently suggested that the fisheries were European and medieval, the majority have not and there is therefore a need to further explore this line of argumentation. Bolster and Fagan represent an outlier position within the English literature, and doubly so in the broader work on the Newfoundland fisheries. It is, in short, a debatable hypothesis to suggest that they represented an extension of medieval Europe. More so, no thorough attempt has been made to define the parameters within which we can call the Newfoundland fisheries European rather than Atlantic. It is one of the contentions of this dissertation, explored in Chapter Six, that the character of the fisheries would change abruptly around 1580 and would increasingly become Atlantic. Exploring how, when and where the fisheries began to shift towards Atlantic integration and away from a late medieval system is something which historians have largely ignored. Second, although some scholars have acknowledged the need to describe the early fisheries as European and medieval, they have failed to explore the implications of that framework. Following both the practical and theoretical implications of this framework is one of the main tasks of this study. How mariners were able to recreate the socio-economic systems of the inner, medieval Atlantic in the waters off Newfoundland is a process which needs to be reconstructed. This would have been a very different process from how Europeans created linkages to the Atlantic islands and Caribbean, and these differences need to be explored. Further, if the Newfoundland fisheries were an extension of Europe, then that poses a

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<sup>75</sup> Brian M. Fagan, *Fishing : How the Sea Fed Civilization* (2017); *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting, and the Discovery of the New World*.

significant challenge to our understanding of how the Atlantic system developed. It means that a transoceanic commercial system could exist in the Atlantic basin without being, in a sense, Atlantic.

Accepting that for most of the sixteenth century the Newfoundland fisheries were an extension of medieval Atlantic Europe helps us resolve the basic paradox of Newfoundland in the early Atlantic. It also helps explain the success and growth of the early fishery. As this study will stress, the kinds of medieval tools and techniques used at Newfoundland encouraged an open and vibrant fishery. As this study will suggest, the medieval and European nature of the Newfoundland fisheries appears to have been extremely appealing to many mariners. It was familiar, stable and profitable.

What the rise of the Newfoundland fisheries suggests is that in the sixteenth century the European experience on the Atlantic was more varied and multipolar than previously thought. That one of the largest branches of commerce on the Atlantic Ocean could reach such heights without engaging with any of the core patterns of the Atlantic experience should prompt us to question the basis upon which the field of Atlantic history rests. This study is meant in part to complicate our view of early European expansion into the Atlantic basin by showing how divergent approaches to expansion could be successful. But it also strives to show how, having drawn our attention to the importance of engaging with these problems head-on, seeming paradoxes can be explained and satisfactorily incorporated into our story.

This study hopes, finally, to also contribute to our broader understanding of mariners, fishing and empire in the sixteenth century world. It provides an argument about the relationship between Europe and the Atlantic Ocean, one which stresses the need to focus on marginal communities along the coast and regional differences rather than states and 'national' units. Throughout this history an emphasis is placed on the autonomy of mariners and their consistent ability to learn, adapt and create. At Newfoundland largely anonymous and transcommunal mariners forged, against the intentions of many navigators and states, a new commercial system which lasted well over a century. The need to find bulk marine protein, not high-value luxury commodities, drove their behavior. Acting outside of empire they established a permanent European presence in the northwest Atlantic. This should prompt historians to look at the role of fishermen

outside of the Newfoundland context as agents of change in the transformative period of European expansion into the globe.

## 1.5 CHAPTER OUTLINE

To explore this argument, the study will proceed as follows:

Chapter One will outline the problem of Newfoundland and the Atlantic. It will first argue for a revised understand of the scale and significance of the fishery in the sixteenth century. It will then explore the numerous ways in which the Newfoundland fishery diverged from the formation of maritime systems elsewhere in the early Atlantic.

Chapter Two will examine how mariners conceptualized the geography of the fisheries. It will argue that creation of an open, transnational fishery occurred because of the failure of European states to consciously replicate a south Atlantic model of colonization due to the environmental conditions in the northwest Atlantic. Thereafter mariners consistently used the term Terra Nova to describe the region, evidence of geographic formation from below. Terra Nova was used to denote a space that was primarily maritime, ecologically homogenous with northwest Europe, and physically distinct from the rest of the Atlantic or North America.

Chapter Three will look at how the Newfoundland fishery was formed in the first decade of the sixteenth century. It argues that Breton mariners would replicate successful late medieval commercial fishing systems in the open commons of Newfoundland. Thereafter the growth and maturation of the fishery was dictated overwhelmingly by socio-economic conditions in coastal Europe.

Chapter Four will outline the growth and short-term fluctuations of the Newfoundland fishery in from roughly 1540 to 1580. This will stress the scale, diversification and isolation of the fishery during this time.

Chapter Five will examine how credit and labour functioned in the Newfoundland fishery. It will argue that merchants consistently and successfully relied on late medieval financial instruments and social relations which were different from elsewhere in the Atlantic economy. Consequently, the sixteenth century fishery, built on simple financial and labour mechanisms, could marshal large amounts of capital without engaging with the development of capitalism in the Atlantic basin.

Chapter Six will outline the major changes to the northwest Atlantic fishery and argue that this marked a turning point which effectively ended the isolated, European fishery. The development of new markets outside northwest Europe, the rise of violence at Newfoundland and major demographic changes in the fishery caused a split in the Newfoundland fisher. Many ships continued normal sixteenth century practice, while others shifted towards an export-market orientation, undermining the coherence of Terra Nova. This would lead to increased integration with other Atlantic systems and a new chapter in the history of Newfoundland.

## 2.0 THE PROBLEM OF NEWFOUNDLAND IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

The islands off the north coast of the Maritime Peninsula in eastern Canada have been called Cape Breton for just shy of five hundred years, and for as long as Europeans have known of this rocky shore it has borne no other name. A series of rocky islets which jut into the Atlantic Ocean, helping to seal off the Gulf of St. Lawrence, it has long been a landmark for mariners and fishermen working the waters of the northwest Atlantic (See Figure 1). Though Cape Breton is today outside of the borders of the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador, it is central to the story of what historians call the Newfoundland fisheries. It first appears in 1519 on a map as “The land discovered by the Bretons,” a name it bore for much of the century. By 1555 one Italian mapmaker didn’t even include the island of Newfoundland on a map of the northwest Atlantic, but did make sure to show a giant *C. de Brettones* extending into the Atlantic (See Figure 2).<sup>76</sup> In 1520 a group of Portuguese colonists settled on the island, the first colony to survive multiple years in North America, only to suffer an unknown but apparently violent fate.<sup>77</sup> The waters of Cape Breton were home to a vibrant cod fishing operation throughout the sixteenth century, prosecuted by both Bretons and Basques, before being transformed into a colonial outpost in the seventeenth century.

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<sup>76</sup> “*Terra a foy descubrir par bretomes*” W.F. Ganong. “Introduction”. *Crucial Maps in the early Cartography and Place-nomenclature of the Atlantic Coast of Canada, I*. The Royal Society of Canada, 1964. p.35-38. Ganong in fact attempts to argue that “Cape Breton” meant “Cape Britons,” and therefore refers to English fishermen. This reading is based on tenuous evidence and logic at best, and has not gained acceptance. For the Italian map see: Map of the Western Hemisphere by Michele Tremezzino. 1554. John Carter Brown Library. File 31959.

<sup>77</sup> See discussion below, Chap. 2. Richard Goertz, “João Alvares Fagundes, Capitão De Terra Nova,{1521},” *Canadian Ethnic Studies= Etudes Ethniques au Canada* 23, no. 2 (1991).



**Figure 1. Cape Breton Island.**

Cape Breton Island in Vincenzo Coronelli's 1689 map of the northwest Atlantic. Detail Partie orientale du Canada ou de la Nouvelle France où sont les provinces ou pays de Saguenay, Canada, Acadie etc. les peuples ou nations des Etechemins, Iroquois, Attiquameches etc., avec la Nouvelle Angleterre, la Nouvelle Ecosse, la Nouvelle Yorck et la Virginie, les isles de Terre Neuve, de cap Breton etc., le Grand Banc etc. BnF. Département Cartes et plans, GE DD-2987.



**Figure 2. Cape of the Bretons/"C. dos bretonnes."**

Detail of Cape Breton from 1554 map by Michele Tremezzino. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.



The advent of Cape Breton as a geographic fixture of the sixteenth century fishery was both very typical of the European experience around early Newfoundland and very untypical of their experience elsewhere in the Atlantic basin. The name Cape Breton is a reminder of the early and powerful role played by maritime actors who are often invisible to historians but whose decisions were crucial to the creation of a European presence on the far north Atlantic Ocean. In place of colonies and empire a wide conglomeration of European mariners created an open space centered on the ocean and dedicated to the seasonal exploitation of valuable marine ecosystems. Cape Breton, one part of this world, was a name which had to be earned by fishermen rather than bestowed by explorers, while the failure of Portuguese colonists to establish a settlement at Cape Breton in 1520 is further representative of the broader problem of colonization and control in the northwest Atlantic. In the sixteenth century it was the water, not the land, which drew Europeans to the northwest Atlantic. The shore and hinterland would be left untouched, and Cape Breton was useful only as a landmark for sailors to orient themselves in search of cod. The European presence would be temporary, seasonal and cyclical, a state which complicates an historical narrative which continues to give preference to the creation of terrestrial colonies and European interactions with the Americas.

Cape Breton is therefore one place to begin an inquiry into the unusual ways in which a major commercial cod fishery was created by sixteenth century Europeans, and how this relates to processes of maritime activity elsewhere in the Atlantic. These themes- the activity of multinational and anonymous mariners, the failure of empire, the centrality of water- were all features which contributed to the rapid success of the fisheries. This success is often overlooked, especially by historians of the sixteenth century Atlantic and its empires. But these same structures caused the European experience in the northwest Atlantic to diverge significantly from other parts of the Atlantic. This chapter will outline the two major problems with the study of the sixteenth century Newfoundland fishery. First, in reconstructing how the sixteenth century fishery developed it becomes clear that certain basic features of the fishery do not conform with a conception of the sixteenth century Atlantic basin as the site of major economic, demographic,

biological and political transformations. There were no permanent settlements in the northwest Atlantic until 1610, and without them no process of cultural fusion or creolization.<sup>78</sup> The types of biological changes which we call the Columbian exchange was noticeably absent from the far north Atlantic, as were widespread epidemics.<sup>79</sup> The fisheries operated for a century without recourse to sophisticated financial techniques, coerced labour or any overarching imperial system. The second problem is that historians, in particular non-fisheries Atlantic historians, have tended to underestimate the scale and impact of the sixteenth century fishery in light of the above issues. Only recently have historians such as Laurier Turgeon, Peter Pope, Selma and Michael Barkham and George Rose suggested that the size of the fishery was on the scale of several hundred ships each year.<sup>80</sup> This chapter will outline what we know about the scale of the fishery, its value to the European economy and the ways in which Europeans interacted with the northwest Atlantic. Newfoundland and its environs form a puzzle, one which historians have been reluctant to face when describing the early Atlantic, and one whose major features as an Atlantic system will be considered in the following chapters.

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<sup>78</sup> Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*; "Transformation of the Maritime Cultural Landscape of Atlantic Canada by Migratory European Fishermen, 1500–1800," *Beyond the Catch: Fisheries of the North Atlantic, the North Sea and the Baltic, 900-1850* 41 (2009).

<sup>79</sup> On settlements, biological exchange and epidemics see: John L. Allen, "From Cabot to Cartier: The Early Exploration of Eastern North America, 1497–1543," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, no. 3 (1992); Gillian T. Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969); William Gilbert, "Beothuk-European Contact in the 16th Century: A Re-Evaluation of the Documentary Evidence," *Acadiensis* 40, no. 1 (2011); Denys Delâge, *Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in Northeastern North America, 1600-64* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993).

<sup>80</sup> Peter E. Pope, "Modernization on Hold: The Traditional Character of the Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Seventeenth Century," *International Journal of Maritime History* 15, no. 2 (2003); *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*; Laurier Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (1998); Selma Huxley Barkham, "A Note on the Strait of Belle Isle During the Period of Basque Contact with Indians and Inuit," *Études/Inuit/Studies* 4, no. 1/2 (1980); *Los Vascos En El Marco Atlántico Norte: Siglos Xvi Y Xvii*; Huxley, "La Industria Pesquera En El País Vasco Peninsular Al Principio De La Edad Moderna: Una Edad De Oro." George A. Rose, *Cod : The Ecological History of the North Atlantic Fisheries* (St. John's, NL: Breakwater Books, 2007).

## 2.1 DIVERGENCE AND STRUCTURE

The question which historians must confront is whether the experience of Europeans in the northwest Atlantic, and in particular on the Newfoundland fisheries, was marked by the wider patterns and structures which shaped an emerging Atlantic experience in the sixteenth century. Of considerable importance were the legal, environmental, social and economic parameters within which the fishery operated, the structures which shaped its form and growth. Most of this study will explore why and how these structures formed, but what this section will outline the broad patterns which defined the sixteenth century experience at Newfoundland. A careful reconstruction of the first century of the fisheries strongly suggests that on several levels the experience of Europeans here sharply diverged from their experience elsewhere in the Atlantic. In many ways the only thing which made sixteenth century Newfoundland “transatlantic” was the fact that technically Newfoundland island was across the ocean from Europe.

The ways in which information about the fishery was recorded can tell us much about how the fishery was organized and structured. A persistent problem which runs through the history of early Newfoundland is the difficulty of finding reliable sources for the ways in which the fishery developed. Mariners enter the historical record only where and when they were forced to register their activities for legal reasons- in loan contracts, judicial disputes or the occasional correspondence.<sup>81</sup> Tellingly, almost all the records pertaining to the fishery before 1600 can today be found in regional and municipal archives.<sup>82</sup> Very little material is today held in national-level depositories, and records related to the fishery which were generated by the monarchies themselves (the closest sixteenth century equivalent of a ‘national’ level) are exceedingly sparse in France, Spain, Portugal and England. This is an indication that much of the way in which the fishery

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<sup>81</sup> This will be addressed more thoroughly in Chapters 4-5 below, but for a some discussions of this problem see: Turgeon, "Pour Redécouvrir Notre 16e Siècle: Les Pêches À Terre-Neuve D’après Les Archives Notariales De Bordeaux."; Barkham, "Building Materials for Canada in 1566."; Darlene Abreu-Ferreira, "The Cod Trade in Early-Modern Portugal: Deregulation, English Domination, and the Decline of Female Cod Merchants" (1995); Selma Huxley Barkham, "The Spanish Province of Terranova," *The Canadian Archivist* 2, no. 5 (1974).

<sup>82</sup> This can be seen in the guide: Canada Public Archives of, *Guide Des Sources D’archives Sur Le Canada Francais, Au Canada* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1975).

developed was regionally organized, based on custom and verbal agreements, and existed off-the-books. Newfoundland was certainly not the only part of the Atlantic visited by shadowy and extra-legal groups of mariners in the sixteenth century, and much of the history of trade in West Africa or the Caribbean cannot be known for similar reasons.<sup>83</sup> But the Newfoundland fisheries were unique in having no legal, centralized bureaucratic organization of any sort (either state-organized or in the form of a guild or monopoly company) from any state which attempted to record information about the actions of fishermen.<sup>84</sup> Where many other Atlantic trades were at least partially centered on a particular city and institution, such as Seville's central role in the Iberian Atlantic, dozens of small ports and urban centers competed to control fishing operations at Newfoundland. Such a system ought to have been chaotic, but throughout the sixteenth century mariners operating from dozens of disparate bases proved capable of working together to manage the fishery. The sparse and regionalized source base is a testament to the persistence of this diffuse structure.

Just as striking is the repeated inability of European states, geographers, cartographers and navigators to gather a clear picture of the fishery in the sixteenth century. Officials and organizations which were actively trying to understand and control places like the Caribbean, mainland Americas and West Africa often found themselves uncertain as to what was taking place off the coast of North America. In 1511 the King of Castile and Aragon was compelled to dispatch a mariner to Newfoundland to find out what the place looked like and had to offer.<sup>85</sup> In 1542 Castilian authorities resorted to kidnapping returning fishermen to find out what was happening on the ground (or rather the water).<sup>86</sup> To present a picture of Newfoundland for his 1555 collection on world navigation, the Italian author Giovanni Ramusio had to turn to an

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<sup>83</sup> da Silva, "African Islands and the Formation of the Dutch Atlantic Economy: Arguin, Gorée, Cape Verde and São Tomé, 1590–1670."

<sup>84</sup> In general I follow James C. Scott in understanding the ability of a state, even in the sixteenth century, to extract and record information on its citizens/subjects. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); *The Art of Not Being Governed an Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>85</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada*. Doc. XXXII. "Warrant of Queen Joanna to Juan de Agramonte Covering an Agreement with King Ferdinand for a voyage to Newfoundland." Pp.102-107.

<sup>86</sup> *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur De Roberval*. Doc. CCXII.

anonymous Norman mariner who had spent time on the fishery in the 1530s.<sup>87</sup> The voyages and letters of Anthony Parkhurst in the 1570s marked an attempt by an English mercantile and literary elite to learn about the nature of the fishery.<sup>88</sup> As Chapter Two will explain at length, throughout the sixteenth century these groups used an entirely different vocabulary from mariners to describe the northwest Atlantic. Whereas mariners had a deep familiarity with the northwest Atlantic but kept it out of the record, other actors in the sixteenth century Atlantic found the fisheries to be opaque and impenetrable.

The reason that the northwest Atlantic appeared so inscrutable in the sixteenth century is that the fishery at Newfoundland was structured in such a way that it resisted the gaze of statesmen, geographers, elite merchants, navigators and cartographers. These were the groups which were, for much of the sixteenth century, the drivers of early imperial formation and colonization.<sup>89</sup> Yet they would play no part in developing and growing the fishery in the northwest Atlantic. In the sixteenth century European monarchs, merchants and would-be settlers abdicated either a *de jure* or *de facto* permanent presence in the northwest Atlantic, despite the growing significance of the fishery. On and around Newfoundland island there were no permanent European colonies, nor even a year-round presence, and no consistent way to collect information until the early seventeenth century. Throughout the sixteenth century, from roughly October to April not a single European lived in the northwest Atlantic. Despite a flurry of assertions by monarchs in the 1490s for most of the sixteenth century no European state attempted to enforce a territorial claim to the fisheries, leaving them to transcommunal groups of fishermen. Both the English and Portuguese crowns, for instance, did not pursue their initial claims of discovery to assert authority over fishermen visiting the Newfoundland region. This basic tenant of European expansion into the Atlantic basin, the extension of legal claims to new terrestrial and maritime spaces, was abandoned at Newfoundland.

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<sup>87</sup> See *Discorso d'un gran capitano* in Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni E Viaggi* (1555).

<sup>88</sup> See below pg. 44

<sup>89</sup> Heather Dalton, *Merchants and Explorers : Roger Barlow, Sebastian Cabot, and Networks of Atlantic Exchange 1500-1560* (2016); Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

The absence of permanent European settlements had deep and far-reaching consequences for how the Newfoundland fisheries would diverge from the rest of the Atlantic experience. Repeated attempts to plant a settlement in the region failed throughout the century, succumbing both to the harsh climate and the insensible economic logic of planting settlers in a region whose resources could only be harvested for half the year.<sup>90</sup> Without settlements there could be no colonies (as a legally recognized social and economic entity within a larger imperial system), and without colonies no ability for European states or quasi-state actors to control the fishery. Indeed, without colonies there was no military presence, on land or at sea, in the northwest Atlantic. Without forts or a flotilla to enforce control and claims to territory, no group of fishermen could be excluded from the fishery, creating an open and competitive oceanic fishery. Without colonies and territorial claims there could be no centralized body to regulate and record information about the fishery.<sup>91</sup> In a sense, empires had no eyes in the northwest Atlantic. So long as European activity at Newfoundland took place at sea and precluded the necessity of permanent settlements on the islands and continent, models of colonization and imperial formation from the fifteenth century Atlantic could not be replicated in the region.

This indicates the core point of divergence between the northwest Atlantic and the behavior of European actors (state, mercantile, settler-colonial) elsewhere in the sixteenth century. In the Atlantic Islands, the Caribbean and the Americas the overriding goal had been to seize, develop and exploit terrestrial, often island, spaces.<sup>92</sup> But at its core, the open Newfoundland fishery emphasized the water over land. It was the water which provided the marine resources which attracted European visitors, and which sustained Amerindian communities. Indeed, we know that from very early in the sixteenth century mariners consistently spoke of *Terra Nova*, a broad space which was meant to encompass all the waters of what is

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<sup>90</sup> Some discussion of these early colonial attempts, and their environmental context, can be found in Sam White, *A Cold Welcome : The Little Ice Age and Europe's Encounter with North America* (2017).

<sup>91</sup> For a discussion of the role of Seville as a center of the Castilian Atlantic system see: Pablo Emilio Perez-Mallaina Bueno and Carla Rahn Phillips, *Spain's Men of the Sea : Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Huguette Chaunu, Pierre Chaunu, and Guy Arbellot, *Séville Et L'atlantique, 1504-1650*, 8 vols. (Paris: A. Colin, 1955).

<sup>92</sup> Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus*.

today maritime Canada, rather than Newfoundland.<sup>93</sup> This was a conception of geography which put water at the center of their world, an inversion of European experience elsewhere in the Atlantic. From the Caribbean to the Canaries to the North Sea it was more common for Europeans to treat water as a means of conveyance between points of land, be it islands or continents, which were the proper site of economic production of cash crops and mineral wealth. As Lauren Benton has argued, sixteenth century empires functioned as “Networks of sea-lanes connecting dispersed settlements or trading posts.”<sup>94</sup> But in the northwest Atlantic the opposite was true.

Even when faced with similar problems which defined the Atlantic experience elsewhere, in and around Newfoundland mariners came to different solutions. The problem of labour, which shaped so much of the Atlantic world, was no less an issue on the fishery than in the Caribbean or Mesoamerica. But whereas most emerging Atlantic colonies turned to coerced labour as the principle solution to this problem, in the northwest Atlantic maritime workers remained free and voluntary.<sup>95</sup> Rather, mariners adapted their own social system to create a cyclical migratory system which could move labour between Newfoundland and home on a regular basis. Because of the absence of permanent settlements and the cyclical systems of migration which brought both Amerindians and Europeans to the northwest Atlantic each summer, crucial processes of cultural transformation which shaped the rest of the Atlantic world could not take place. Exchange between Amerindians and fishermen, be it of commodities, language or custom, was highly circumscribed.<sup>96</sup> With such a light footprint on the ground Europeans do not seem to have touched off an ecological transformation akin to what they were inadvertently causing elsewhere in the Americas. Without permanent contact between different communities on the fishery, be they European or Algonkian-speaking communities, there was no space for the processes of creolization and cultural fusion which were creating

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<sup>93</sup> See below chapter 2.

<sup>94</sup> Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty : Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400--1900*. P.2. As she stresses, these settlements and trading posts were enclaves loosely connected by water rather than serious territorial entities.

<sup>95</sup> On coerced labour and slavery in the Atlantic see: Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery : From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*.

<sup>96</sup> See: Gilbert, "Beothuk-European Contact in the 16th Century: A Re-Evaluation of the Documentary Evidence."; Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology."

new societies in the Caribbean and elsewhere. European communities in the northwest never lost touch with their homes and remained relatively static, such that the transcommunal nature of the fishery encouraged a plethora of interworking but separate groups of fishermen.

In failing to establish permanent settlements in the northwest Atlantic, and subsequently adopting a long-distance seasonal fishery, Europeans were conforming to a climatological and ecological reality in the northwest Atlantic that restricted the ability of human actors to act freely. Faced with environmental hazards in the Caribbean, Americas and elsewhere Europeans would adapt and transform the land. In the Caribbean and Brazil tropical climate and ecology were overcome, albeit slowly and fitfully, and by the 1540s Europeans were settling in the highlands of the Andes and the swamps of Florida.<sup>97</sup> But in Newfoundland they were unable to overcome the sub-arctic extremes. Instead they themselves adapted, limited themselves to seasonal visits and an offshore fishery. In so doing fishermen were engaging with the process which Ken Coates and William Morrison have identified as central to the story of modern Canada and the history of the Arctic: coming to terms with winter.<sup>98</sup> As they point out, "Since the earliest days of human habitation in the North, the dark and cold months of winter have influenced social and economic life, shaped the response of outsiders to the region, and have forced newcomers to adapt to the realities of Arctic and sub-Arctic living." Ships moved fishermen to the waters of the northwest Atlantic in the warm summer months, returning them home to Europe in the winter. It was a temporary presence but one which was cyclical and continuous. In the northwest Atlantic for much of the sixteenth century nature dictated the course of European interaction.

Such broad patterns diverged from the kinds of patterns which were emerging elsewhere in the Atlantic basin by the early sixteenth century. In the Caribbean, Atlantic islands and Americas, Europeans could find an ever-increasing number of permanent settlements, and in West Africa a rising number of

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<sup>97</sup> Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*; Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*.

<sup>98</sup> Ken Coates and William Morrison, "Winter and the Shaping of Northern History: Reflections from the Canadian North," *Northern Visions: New Perspectives on the North in Canadian History* (2001).



*feitoria* outposts. Many of these colonies were steadily being organized together into new imperial systems, such as New Spain and Brazil, which sought to regulate, control and expand the influence of specific states. In the Americas Europeans introduced a biological disruption which reverberates to this day, while in West Africa the rising importance of the slave trade accelerated the largest forced population transfer in history. As more Europeans poured into the Atlantic basin they engendered the creation of new communities and cultural transformations. Only at Newfoundland were these patterns staunchly resisted, and mariners continued to operate throughout the century according to a self-organized system of cyclical migration and open commercial operations.

## 2.2 ENCOUNTERS WITHOUT CONTACT

One way to understand the divergence between the Newfoundland fisheries and the rest of the Atlantic is to consider the problem of contact and exchange between indigenous societies and European visitors. From the very earliest days of the commercial fishery at Newfoundland came the prospect of encounters and exchange between visiting Europeans and the local Amerindian population. The earliest European visitors confirmed the presence in large numbers of what would soon be called the “*gens sauvages et estranges*,” or “strange and savage folk,” who lived around the waters of the northwest Atlantic.<sup>99</sup> But as much as we may wish to glorify the discoveries of explorers such as Zuan Caboto, Gaspar Corte-Real and Jacques Cartier, there was no decisive point of contact between European and Amerindian communities.<sup>100</sup> Caboto encountered no Amerindians, and never reached the Gulf, while Cartier was certainly not the first

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<sup>99</sup> Biggar, *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur De Roberval*. Doc. CXII.

<sup>100</sup> This study tends to downplay the significance of Jacques Cartier for the history of the fishery, as well as the limited role of Caboto and Corte-Real discussed below. In this it follows Alan Gordon and his observation that “Jacques Cartier is really a nineteenth century figure.” Alan Gordon, “Heroes, History, and Two Nationalisms: Jacques Cartier,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association/Revue de la Société historique du Canada* 10, no. 1 (1999). See also: Heather Pringle, “Cabot, Cod and the Colonists,” *Canadian Geographic* 31, no. 30 (1997); Allen, “From Cabot to Cartier: The Early Exploration of Eastern North America, 1497–1543.”; Francesco Guidi-Bruscoli, “John Cabot and His Italian Financiers\*,” *Historical Research* 85, no. 229 (2012).

European to enter its waters. The early records are inconsistent and it is difficult to know where exactly early navigators visited in the northwest Atlantic. To complicate this problem further, the intrusion of European mariners into the northwest Atlantic was not the first iteration of this process. From the tenth to the eleventh centuries Norse mariners from Greenland likely visited Newfoundland and its environs.<sup>101</sup> Not until the mid-fifteenth century did the Greenland colony collapse, and it is likely that some intrepid Norse continued to visit the region long after the abandonment of the settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows. During these early visits we know that Norse encountered *skraelings*, a catch-all term which likely included some mix of proto-Beothuk, Mi'kmaq and both Dorset and Thule societies. The arrival of fishermen in the early sixteenth century was therefore not the first point of contact between the Amerindians around Newfoundland and Europeans. Whether this legacy of interaction shaped Amerindian attitudes toward the later arrival of fishermen is impossible to say.

The arrival of large numbers of European fishermen had the potential to trigger a large-scale demographic collapse seen elsewhere in the early Atlantic, through the introduction of diseases and violent competition. But the arrival of European fishermen did not trigger a biological revolution in line with transformations elsewhere in the sixteenth century Atlantic. In part this is because the flora and fauna of the northwest Atlantic are remarkably similar to that of northwest Europe, the origin point for most fishermen.<sup>102</sup> In the absence of permanent settlements no major crops or domesticated animals were brought to Newfoundland and there were fewer Europeans to serve as a vector for disease. Only at the beginning of

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<sup>101</sup> On the Norse presence in Terra Nova see: William W. Fitzhugh, Elisabeth I. Ward, and History National Museum of Natural, *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, in association with the National Museum of Natural History, 2000); Andrew J Dugmore, Christian Keller, and Thomas H McGovern, "Norse Greenland Settlement: Reflections on Climate Change, Trade, and the Contrasting Fates of Human Settlements in the North Atlantic Islands," *Arctic anthropology* 44, no. 1 (2007); David B. Quinn, *North America from Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); Seaver, *The Frozen Echo: Greenland and the Exploration of North America, Ca. A.D. 1000-1500*; Kevin McAleese, Newfoundland, and Museum Newfoundland, *Full Circle, First Contact : Vikings and Skraelings in Newfoundland and Labrador = Le Grand Cercle, Premier Contact : Les Vikings Et Les Skraelings À Terre-Neuve Et Au Labrador* (St. John's: Newfoundland Museum, 2000).

<sup>102</sup> Stuart R. Jenkins et al., "Comparative Ecology of North Atlantic Shores: Do Differences in Players Matter for Process?," *Ecology* 89, no. 11 (2008); Harry Thurston and Wayne Barrett, *The Atlantic Coast: A Natural History* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2012).

the seventeenth centuries are there the first indications that Europeans had introduced deadly pathogens to Newfoundland and mainland North America. During his sojourn with the Mi'kmaq, the Jesuit Father Biard reported that "They are astonished and often complain that, since the French mingle with and carry on trade with them, they are dying fast, and the population is thinning out. For they assert that, before this association and intercourse, all their countries were very populous, and they tell how one by one the different coasts, according as they have begun to traffic with us, have been more reduced by disease." For much of the sixteenth century, however, there is no evidence for the introduction of epidemic diseases into the societies of the northwest Atlantic.

Between the first voyages of Caboto and Corte-Real and the entry of Cartier into the Newfoundland region were countless meetings, exchanges, and clashes between different communities of Amerindians and fishermen. Most of these moments are lost, victims of archival degradation and the inherent obscurity that surrounds the early efforts of fishermen. We do know that explorers and possibly even fishermen occasionally captured Amerindians and brought them back to Europe.<sup>103</sup> Which communities these unlucky captives came from is unknown, as is their fate in many cases. The practice of captivity was haphazard and produced little lasting impact. There is no evidence of intermarriage or the development of dedicated translators. By the mid-sixteenth century there was little need to forge a close bond between Europeans and Amerindians in the absence of permanent European settlements or imperial interests in the region. Instead the developing relationships between visiting mariners and Amerindians was steady, diffuse and localized to a few maritime points of contact.

But this haphazard process of contact is of considerable importance. In the sixteenth century Newfoundland fishery there would be no destabilizing shock, no demographic collapse or biological exchange/invasions to alter local ecology.<sup>104</sup> The points of contact were consistent but circumscribed.

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<sup>103</sup> Éric Taladoire, *D'amérique En Europe Quand Les Indiens Découvraient L'ancien Monde (1493-1892)* (Paris: CNRS éd., 2014).

<sup>104</sup> Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange : Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*; Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*.

Where contact between Amerindians and fishermen took place, it appears to have been in small groups and in general occurred on the water. Encounter took place where both sides were arranged in similar-sized groups and where both were on the familiar ground of beach or boat. The mobile, maritime peoples of the northwest Atlantic had little difficulty in avoiding fishing boats and their crew. Innu and Mi'kmaq communities met with fishermen when it was beneficial to do so, and Beothuk communities often outright avoided any contact whatsoever. There would be no sudden breakthrough in the sixteenth century, but instead a slow acculturation that brought benefits to both sides.

### 2.3 THE FISHERY AND EUROPE

In a very basic sense sixteenth century Newfoundland simply did not look like the rest of the Atlantic of the early- and mid-sixteenth century. Rather, for sixteenth century mariners Newfoundland was as close to home as one could get in the Atlantic basin. The northwest Atlantic Ocean was, for most residents of coastal Europe and the Mediterranean, the most familiar and immediate part of the new worlds which emerged in the European consciousness during the sixteenth century.<sup>105</sup> This might be taken literally, for Newfoundland island is one of the closest parts of the Americas to Europe. Only 3,000 kms separate Newfoundland from western Ireland, less than half the distance to the Caribbean and the Americas. But more so it was with the waters of the northwest Atlantic that Europeans were most likely to interact in the sixteenth century. The waters of the northwest Atlantic were open to any visitor, unencumbered by imperial structures or developing colonies. The fisheries attracted thousands of mariners from across the European littoral each summer. They were a diverse group: grizzled old captains from the cities of Basque Country,

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<sup>105</sup> On European views of the Atlantic, Americas and Indian Ocean world in the sixteenth century see: Warkentin and Podruchny, *Decentring the Renaissance Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective, 1500-1700*; J. H. Parry, *The Discovery of the Sea* (New York: Dial Press, 1974); J. R. Hale, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008).

young men from the islands of north Brittany, families of mariners from rural Normandy and the occasional child sent as a *grumette* to learn a new trade. When they returned home they spread stories and displayed the money to be made at Newfoundland, inspiring new generations of fishermen. Many communities which were otherwise unengaged with transoceanic commerce, often deliberately shut out of trade to the Americas, found opportunities in visiting the Newfoundland fisheries.<sup>106</sup>

The products of the northwest Atlantic, the salted and dried cod with which Newfoundland is identified to this day, were a tangible way for Europeans to interact with the Atlantic Ocean. Each ship which returned from the fisheries carried large volumes of cod for sale in urban markets, often in excess of 50,000 codfish on a single ship.<sup>107</sup> As will be discussed later, although the distribution and consumption of Newfoundland codfish was limited to northwest Europe (mainly coastal villages and urban centers) and a few Mediterranean ports in the sixteenth century, within this zone codfish was widely consumed. Codfish was not, as some historians have suggested, food for the poor.<sup>108</sup> But it was nonetheless widely available in urban markets and many small ports from Holland to Porto to Rome. The appeal of dried cod for military rations, for instance, ensured that many an infantryman or sailor in the sixteenth century spent each Fish Day eating saltcod from Newfoundland.<sup>109</sup> Unlike many luxury goods which were produced in the early Atlantic, dried cod was within reach of most middle-class families and many small fishing communities. As a result, more Europeans, across a wider geographic and social spectrum, likely ate codfish from

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<sup>106</sup> For the Norman perspective see: Charles Bréard, Paul Bréard, and Normandie Société de l'histoire de, *Documents Relatifs À La Marine Normande Et À Ses Armements Aux Xvie Et Xviiè Siècles Pour Le Canada, L'afrique, Les Antilles, Le Brésil Et Les Indes* (Rouen: A. Lestringant, 1889); Philippe Manneville avec le concours de Jean Le Guen, *Les Normands Et Les Amériques*, ed. maritime Rencontres d'histoire, et al. (Le Havre: Centre havrais de recherche historique, 1993).

<sup>107</sup> For an example of the number of codfish see: In 1548 a Basque ship offloaded 60,000 preserved cod in the city of Bordeaux, in what would have been a fairly typical transaction. ADG 3E 9829 fol. 219. Jacques Bernard, *Navires Et Gens De Mer À Bordeaux (Vers 1400-Vers 1550)* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1968).p.815 By the turn of the century the number could exceed 100,000.

<sup>108</sup> The notion that codfish was consumed widely can be seen in: Turgeon, "Codfish, Consumption and Colonization: The Creation of the French Atlantic World During the Sixteenth Century." This is given a more nuanced treatment in: Abreu-Ferreira, "The Cod Trade in Early-Modern Portugal: Deregulation, English Domination, and the Decline of Female Cod Merchants."

<sup>109</sup> Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting, and the Discovery of the New World*. For an example see: Acts of the Privy Council. Vol. 23. P.109-10. "A note of the charges and diet in the Fleet: 1592." It includes a note for "Fish daies, this is the porporcion for viij or ix at a table of Gentlemen or Yeoman."

Newfoundland than consumed tobacco, chocolate, potatoes or sugar in the sixteenth century. In so doing European consumers found their diets shaped by the Atlantic Ocean. Each bite of *bacalao* bound together European consumers to the sites of production across the icy waters of the far north Atlantic. What is so odd then is that historians of the Atlantic have shied away from engaging with the history of this fishery. There have been invaluable studies of how European consumption of sugar, tobacco, chocolate, silver, pearls and other luxury products were shaped by the rise of Atlantic commerce.<sup>110</sup> But for the often-mundane food products which mattered so much, which kept people alive and provided steady work, are far less understood.

One reason that the northwest Atlantic was so close to northwest Europe was that both shared an underlying ecological and geological uniformity. The Atlantic Ocean demonstrates strong east-west environmental patterns, latitudinal bands of ecological coherence.<sup>111</sup> The geology of the far north Atlantic was shaped by the same glaciers and at one point far in the past Newfoundland and northwest Europe were a single, connected unit. For people on both sides of the ocean, the strong North Atlantic Current and the North Atlantic Oscillations (NAO) provide a unifying weather system that binds both sides of the far north Atlantic. The major distinction lies in that the northwest Atlantic is, on average, significantly colder at the same latitude than the northeast Atlantic. This means that places like Newfoundland are more akin to northern European regions like Scandinavia than places like France and Italy, with which it shares a line of latitude. Most significantly for sixteenth century mariners, the same fish and marine mammals live on both sides of the far north Atlantic. As Bolster has succinctly put it, “For the most part, however, neither the novelty nor the magical qualities of marine organisms from the northwest Atlantic captivated European mariners so much as their familiarity and sheer abundance.”<sup>112</sup> Codfish, herring, salmon, whales, seabirds,

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<sup>110</sup> Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures : A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World*; Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*; Schwartz, *Tropical Babels : Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680*.

<sup>111</sup> Ralf Lindau, *Climate Atlas of the Atlantic Ocean : Derived from the Comprehensive Ocean Atmosphere Data Set (Coads) : With 2 Tables* (Berlin [u.a.]: Springer, 2001).

<sup>112</sup> Bolster, *The Mortal Sea : Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail*. P.39.

seals and many kinds of sea plants are all found in Brittany and Cape Breton, Galicia and Newfoundland. The far north Atlantic might well be defined as the arc within which *gadus morhua* and *clupea harengus*, the cod and the herring respectively, live.<sup>113</sup> On land similar species of trees, above all evergreens, and animals are found. Europeans found bear, deer, beavers, wolves, martins, falcons, songbirds and more in the northwest Atlantic much as they would have at home. One reason few words from Algonkian passed into European languages via the northwest Atlantic is that so few new animals and plants needed names.

This attitude deeply shaped the early fishery. The underlying ecological similarities would make it easy to adapt fishing techniques from Europe to the northwest Atlantic, making for an almost seamless transition. The area around Newfoundland was familiar and comfortable to most mariners, and seemed almost an extension of Europe. Jean Alfonse, who visited in the 1540s, wrote wistfully of its “good land, and there are good rivers, trees, just like in Spain, and the land is about the same height.”<sup>114</sup> Basque visitors bestowed names drawn from the ports of their homeland on every harbour they found, linking and ultimately replicating the coast of Labrador or Newfoundland to the coast of Basque Country.<sup>115</sup> This encouraged the conceptualization of what mariners called Terra Nova as a distinct space, a process described in Chapter Two. The presence of the same trees, plants, fish, fowl, birds and animals made the Newfoundland fishery deeply familiar to mariners who visited the region in the sixteenth century. It seemed almost to be a part of Europe, a little piece of Ireland or Brittany relocated across the sea. Because of the underlying environmental similarities, and the lack of permanent colonies, there were no meaningful biological exchanges between the two sides of the far north Atlantic in the sixteenth century. The kind of ecological imperialism which would mark the European arrival in the Caribbean and Americas would not

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<sup>113</sup> See: Rose, *Cod : The Ecological History of the North Atlantic Fisheries*.

<sup>114</sup> “*Ceste isle est bonne terre, et y ha de bonnes rivieres, des arbes, comme en Hespagne, la terre est quasi a mesme hauteur.*” Jean Alfonse, “Les Voyages Auantureux Dv Capitaine Ian Alfonse, Sainctongeois Auec Priuilege Du Roy,” ed. Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Poitou1555). *BnF*. P.28.

<sup>115</sup> Miren Egaña Goya, “Los Puertos Vascos Del Golfo De Bizkaia. Reutilización De Sus Nombres En Las Pesquerías Del Atlántico Norte. S. Xvi Y Xvii,” *Oihenart* 18 (2000). See also: Selma Huxley Barkham, *The Basque Coast of Newfoundland* ([Plum Point, Nfld.]: Great Northern Peninsula Development Corporation, 1989).

work in a space where maritime extraction of familiar resources was the norm.<sup>116</sup> There would be no need for a neo-Europe to be created in what was, for sixteenth century mariners, old Europe across the sea.

Most importantly, this underlying similarity set the Newfoundland fisheries apart from the rest of the emerging Atlantic experience. As Nicolas Gomez has cogently argued, some European thought at the turn of the sixteenth century stressed the ways in which latitude shaped climate and human societies.<sup>117</sup> As generations of navigators, settlers and merchants moved south they encountered increasingly novel ecological, climatological and geological regions. But the opposite could be true, that heading directly west from Europe on the same latitude would yield safe and familiar spaces. In the northwest Atlantic Europeans found a place which felt more at home and familiar than the Caribbean, Atlantic islands or American mainland. The fisheries could never fully be part of the Atlantic world so long as they were so fundamentally like Europe.

The sixteenth century fisheries in the northwest Atlantic resembled an uneasy marriage of two mercantile systems, those of the North Sea and Iberia.<sup>118</sup> The cultural practices that shaped fishermen at sea in the early sixteenth century were the product of the fifteenth century. Fishing communities rely on the free circulation of knowledge between generations and the maintenance deeply ingrained traditions to maintain fishing grounds over time. Information on the best places to find fish, the best time of year to visit or the proper technique all exist thanks to the institutional memory of small fishing towns. Following Peter Pope's work on seventeenth century Newfoundland, historians now understand the Newfoundland fishery as a vernacular industry.<sup>119</sup> A vernacular industry is one which relies on the localized organization of

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<sup>116</sup> On European ideas of nature in Canada in general see: Ramsay Cook, *1492 and All That: Making a Garden out of a Wilderness* (Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies, 1993).

<sup>117</sup> See the discuss of late medieval thought about latitude in: Wey Gomez, *The Tropics of Empire : Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies*. See also: White, *A Cold Welcome : The Little Ice Age and Europe's Encounter with North America*.

<sup>118</sup> On the north sea as a social system see Michael Pye, *The Edge of the World : A Cultural History of the North Sea and the Transformation of Europe* (2016).

<sup>119</sup> Pope, "Modernization on Hold: The Traditional Character of the Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Seventeenth Century." Peter Edward Pope, *Fish Into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century* (UNC Press Books, 2004).



production and the transmission of practical knowledge between workers and different generations through participation. As Pope has put it, “The transatlantic fishery was, to be sure, an international economy, in the sense that markets were often distant from the ports mounting fishing voyages. On the other hand, these markets had specific local preferences regarding the cure and preferred source of the fish they imported. Ship, crew, and victuals might be marshaled in different ports; yet these three elements of the fishing voyage were each the product of the collective experience of a geographically bounded local community.”<sup>120</sup> The localism which underwrote this system, predicated on the circulation of knowledge through informal means, grew out of the experience of commercial fishing in the fifteenth century. It was on the Irish, North, and Moroccan seas that European mariners learned to work together as large crews to harvest and industrially process vast quantities of fish.<sup>121</sup> By the 1520s Basques and West Country fishermen, for instance, had begun to combine their brisk operations on the Irish Sea with the new cod banks of Newfoundland.<sup>122</sup> The coastal communities which participated in the growth of commercial fisheries in the fifteenth century would send their young men to Newfoundland in the sixteenth, and in doing so transferred their vernacular knowledge from one side of the Atlantic to the other.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p.30.

<sup>121</sup> This interpretation draws on the essays and introduction in: Louis Sicking and Darlene Abreu-Ferreira, *Beyond the Catch Fisheries of the North Atlantic, the North Sea and the Baltic, 900-1850* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009). The various studies of North Sea, Norwegian and south Atlantic fisheries show considerable continuity across time and space.

<sup>122</sup> Keith Matthews, "A History of the West of England-Newfoundland Fishery" (1968). Huxley, "La Industria Pesquera En El País Vasco Peninsular Al Principio De La Edad Moderna: Una Edad De Oro."

<sup>123</sup> The most easily traceable case is Bristol, which shifted from being a center of the Icelandic fishery to an early proponent of exploration and fishing at Newfoundland. See: Evan T. Jones, "The Matthew of Bristol and the Financiers of John Cabot's 1497 Voyage to North America," *The English Historical Review* 121, no. 492 (2006); Evan T. Jones et al., "England's Icelandic Fishery in the Early Modern Period (Eprint)" (paper presented at the Chatham, 2000 2000); David H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450 - 1700* (Berkeley [u. a.]: Univ. of California Press, 1991).

## 2.4 THE MEDIEVAL FISHING CONTEXT

Buried in the provincial archives in the Breton port town of St. Brieuc, a document from December 1514 relates to a dispute between the abbey of Beauport and the “residents of the Isle of Bréhat” over the payment of tithes by fishermen.<sup>124</sup> Lying off the north coast of Brittany, Bréhat was (and is) a tiny island with a small port which was ruled by ecclesiastical authorities in the early sixteenth century. The angry text from the monks of Beauport opens with a declaration that:

“Proposing to the aforesaid residents in the aforesaid island of Bréhat, that all and each of the wicked men from the said island who exceed the age of eighteen years and who fish on the ocean using rods, nets or other methods to take fish, whatever sort of fish they can, such as conger eels, cod, hake as well as other fish, in whatever places they can, such as the coast of Brittany, Terra Nova (*la Terre-Neuffve*) and Iceland, amongst others....”<sup>125</sup>

At the heart of the complaint was the practice of Bréhat fishermen sailing to distant waters to catch fish, including what we would today call Newfoundland but what in the sixteenth century was referred to as Terra Nova. Since its recovery at the end of the nineteenth century this record has been held up as one of the first references to Breton mariners visiting North America.<sup>126</sup> What has been overlooked, however, is the context in which the text introduces Terra Nova as a site of Breton fishing. The monks are angry that the fishermen are visiting so many different places, from the coastal fisheries of Brittany to the Americas, from Iceland to unnamed waters (*que ailleurs*). The implication is that the men of Brehat ranged widely in

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<sup>124</sup> ADCA H 69. A transcript can be found in: Biggar, *Precursors Biggar, The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada.* pp.118-123; Translation in: Quinn. *New American Worlds. Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America.* . Vol. IV. P.87. In this case the tax in question was 18 *deniers*, a relatively small sum.

<sup>125</sup> “*proposer a l’ancontre desdicts habittans en ladicte ysle de Behat, que touz et chacun les homes malles de ladicte ysle qui eusset excedez l’asgre de dix ouyet ans et qui peschassent en la mer o rays, ayns ou aultres engins a prandre poesson, de quelque sorte de poesson que ce fuet, tant congres, morues, merlux que aultre poessons, en quelque part que ce soipt, tant en la coste de Bretaigne, la Terre-Neuffve, Islandre, que ailleurs*”

<sup>126</sup> This is indeed what caught the attention of the first historians to find the document in the archives of Cotes-du-Nord: it was first published in 1894 under the title “Bretons in America before Christopher Columbus (*Les Bretons en Amerique avant Christophe Colombe*).” *Annales de Bretagne* IX, No.2, 176-182. Rennes, Janvier, 1894.

pursuit of their catch, far outside the bounds of state or church authorities to monitor them, exploiting multiple far-flung fisheries simultaneously.<sup>127</sup> It captures a rare insight into a moment in time when the need for new sources of marine protein were driving mariners further afield, pushing the boundaries of maritime expansion in pursuit of fish.<sup>128</sup>

The social and economic patterns which shaped European exploitation of the northwest Atlantic fisheries may have diverged from the rest of the Atlantic experience, but they nonetheless drew heavily on late medieval norms from coastal Europe. The centrality of water, the lack of territorial claims, the prevalence of free labour were all hallmarks of the fifteenth century fisheries on the Irish Sea, North Sea and in the Bay of Biscay. Codfish from Newfoundland was produced according to preservation techniques which dated to the 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and were sold in European urban ports according to mercantile practices developed in the late medieval period.<sup>129</sup> These practices will be explored in more detail in the following chapters, but it must be stressed that many of the aspects of European interaction with the northwest Atlantic which look so different are often understood as binding fishermen to a late medieval fishing economy.

The rapid and sustained growth of operations in the northwest Atlantic is a testament to the place of maritime food production as a motivator for European maritime expansion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. What is more remarkable is that operations at Newfoundland only represented one part, and indeed not the largest part, of a much broader push to develop and grow new oceanic fisheries which began in the mid-fifteenth century. Even as thousands of mariners were sailing to Newfoundland every summer,

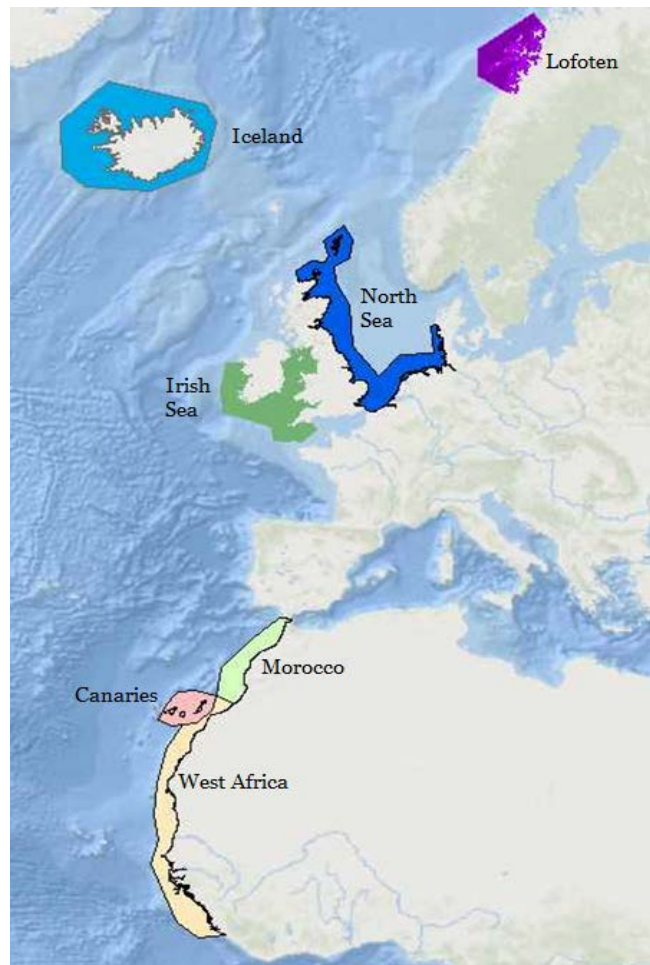
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<sup>127</sup> In many parts of Brittany and Normandy the church was the state at the local level. The Abbey de Beauport acted as both an ecclesiastical and secular authority in its corner of the Breton coast, and collected rents accordingly. Similarly, the port of Fécamp in Normandy was controlled by an abbey during the early sixteenth century. In both cases church records provide details of the economic activities of the ports. See for instance the files ADSM 7H294, which cover the port records of the town of Fécamp, levied through the abbey.

<sup>128</sup> For modern parallels in the South China Sea, see: Alan Dupont and Christopher G Baker, "East Asia's Maritime Disputes: Fishing in Troubled Waters," *The Washington Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2014). Tabitha Grace Mallory, "China's Distant Water Fishing Industry: Evolving Policies and Implications," *Marine Policy* 38 (2013).

<sup>129</sup> On late medieval techniques see: Richard W. Unger, "The Netherlands Herring Fishery in the Late Middle Ages: The False Legend of Willem Beukels of Biervliet " *Viator* 9 (1979); "Dutch Herring, Technology, and International Trade in the Seventeenth Century," *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 02 (1980); Maryanne Kowaleski, "The Expansion of the South-Western Fisheries in Late Medieval England," *The Economic History Review* 53, no. 3 (2000).

thousands more were traveling to Iceland, the Irish Sea, Morocco and the west coast of Africa (See Figure 3). This indicates that the rise of a commercial fishery at Newfoundland in the very early sixteenth century should not be viewed in isolation or as the product of the “discovery” of the Atlantic Ocean. This casts further doubt upon the degree to which Newfoundland was part of an emerging Atlantic experience, despite its size, while providing a clearer context for understanding its early history.



**Figure 3. Major commercial, ocean fisheries in the eastern Atlantic, 15th-16th centuries. Map by author.**

The growth of commercial fisheries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the continuation of a slow process of changing European consumption and mercantile patterns which had begun a half-

millennium earlier.<sup>130</sup> As northwest Europe experienced a period of demographic growth from the tenth to the fourteenth century, and again after the mid-fifteenth century, fish moved from being part of the subsistence economy and became a profitable item to be produced, traded and invested in. There is indirect evidence that demand for ocean fish was rising during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.<sup>131</sup> The mid-fifteenth century would see a turn towards deep-water commercial fisheries as a way to meet new and widespread demand for marine protein and as an alternative to older freshwater and coastal fisheries. They were worked by large boats or small ships, manned by multiple crewmembers who worked in concert, using a combination of net, handline and traps to maximize output.<sup>132</sup> Fisheries organized commercially were exploited explicitly to produce marketable fish for export. The few commercial fisheries of the eleventh through fourteenth centuries (mainly at Lofoten in Norway and Scania in the Baltic) had been intentionally

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<sup>130</sup> The best summary of long-term changes in European fish consumption, from Rome to the present, can be found in: Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting, and the Discovery of the New World*. Despite the central role of fish to most modern European cuisine, the organization of commercial, off-shore fisheries only dates to the eleventh century when northwestern European communities passed what has been called the “fish event horizon.” This term was first used in Alison Locker and Callum Roberts James Barrett, ““Dark Age Economics” Revisited: The English Fish-Bone Evidence, 600-1600,” in *Beyond the Catch: Fisheries of the North Atlantic, the North Sea and the Baltic, 900-1850*, ed. Louis Sicking and Darlene Abreu-Ferreira (Leiden: Brill, 2004). It is in response to: Richard Hodges, *Dark Age Economics: The Origins of Towns and Trade A.D. 600-1000* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982). See also: Sophia Perdikaris et al., “Across the Fish Event Horizon: A Comparative Approach,” *The role of fish in ancient time, Verlag Marie Leidorf, Rahden Westphalia* (2007). James H. Barrett, Alison M. Locker, and Callum M. Roberts, “The Origins of Intensive Marine Fishing in Medieval Europe: The English Evidence,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences* 271, no. 1556 (2004). This was a crucial moment in the history of trade and food when oceanic fish supplanted freshwater to become a regular part of the diet of many urban and coastal communities around the North Sea basin. Prior to this point the consumption of ocean fish, fresh or preserved, had been limited to the Mediterranean and played little part in the exchange networks of the North Sea or Baltic.

<sup>131</sup> In a major study of fish remains in the city of London, a group of scholars were able to estimate long-term codfish consumption for this growing urban center. Their work showed growth from the thirteenth century and a sharp decline in the fourteenth, followed by increased growth during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. David C Orton et al., “Fish for the City: Meta-Analysis of Archaeological Cod Remains and the Growth of London's Northern Trade,” *Antiquity* 88, no. 340 (2014). The Norwegian historian Arnvred Nedkvitne has calculated the purchasing power of fish across the North Sea basin from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries. His data suggests that the price of stockfish reflects the growing demand for stockfish during the fifteenth century, and by the mid-sixteenth century the increasing production of European and Atlantic fisheries would begin to drive down the price. reflects the growing demand for stockfish during the fifteenth century, and by the mid-sixteenth century the increasing production of European and Atlantic fisheries would begin to drive down the price. Arnvred Nedkvitne, “*Mens Bønderne Seilte Og Jægterne For*”: *Nordnorsk Og Vestnorsk Kystøkonomi 1500-1730* (Universitetsforl, 1988). Parts of the data can be found in: Poul Holm, “The Decline in Fishery and Fish Trade from West Jutland, C. 1550–1860,” *Facing the North Sea: West Jutland and the world. Fiskeri-og Søfartsmuseets Forlag, Esbjerg* (1993).

<sup>132</sup> Cushing, *The Provident Sea*; Mollat, *Histoire Des Peches Maritimes En France*; MARIE-CHRISTINE Cormier-Salem, “Pêcheurs Migrants Et Paysans-Pêcheurs: Deux Modèles De Gestion De L'espace Irréductibles,” *Durand J.-R., Lemoalle J. et Weber J* (1991).

closed to competition.<sup>133</sup> The emergent fisheries of the fifteenth century were, by contrast, remarkably open and accessible. The Irish Sea fishery, for instance, was exploited by West Country, Irish, Breton, Basque and Biscayan fishermen. The famous herring grounds of the North Sea were home to competition between various Hollander, Zeeland, Flemish, Norman, English and Scottish fishermen. The new fisheries were to be common resources for all fishermen, with primacy determined through competition. Fishing voyages were now organized by merchants and backed by increasingly sophisticated financial and legal arrangements. The Atlantic is home to many rich fishing grounds, some near Europe and some at a substantial distance. Modern marine biologists have coined the term Large Marine Ecosystems (LME) to categorize maritime spaces that have unusually high biodiversity and productivity.<sup>134</sup> At least seven LMEs lie in the northeast Atlantic, within a less than a month's sailing time from most major sixteenth century European ports. These include the Celtic-Biscayan Shelf, the North Sea, the Iberian Coastal and the Canary Current ecosystems, each of which would be brought under more intense exploitation by European fishermen after roughly 1450. The five fishing grounds which generated the most growth in fish production were the Irish Sea, North Sea, Iceland, Morocco and northwest Africa.<sup>135</sup>

From the mid-fifteenth century pre-existing offshore fishing grounds near the European coast were more intensively exploited and increasingly commercialized.<sup>136</sup> The waters between Ireland, the West

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<sup>133</sup> Pal Christensen and Alf Ragnar Nielssen, "Norwegian Fisheries 1100–1970: Main Developments," *The North Atlantic Fisheries* (1996); Sophia Perdikaris, "From Chiefly Provisioning to Commercial Fishery: Long-Term Economic Change in Arctic Norway," *World Archaeology* 30, no. 3 (1999).

<sup>134</sup> Kenneth Sherman, "The Large Marine Ecosystem Concept: Research and Management Strategy for Living Marine Resources," *Ecological Applications* 1, no. 4 (1991): 350–60, doi:10.2307/1941896; Kenneth Sherman and Hein Rune Skjoldal, *Large Marine Ecosystems of the North Atlantic: Changing States and Sustainability* (Amsterdam; Boston: Elsevier, 2002); K. H Mann and J. R. N Lazier, *Dynamics of Marine Ecosystems: Biological-Physical Interactions in the Oceans* (Boston: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1991); D Pauly and J. L Maclean, *In a Perfect Ocean the State of Fisheries and Ecosystems in the North Atlantic Ocean* (Washington: Island Press, 2003), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10064676>.

<sup>135</sup> While both the Irish Sea and the North Sea fisheries had existed since at least the fourteenth century, it was in the fifteenth century that the scale and commercial sophistication of their operations increased.

<sup>136</sup> This was a factor of changes to both the scale of fishing and new technological and organizational innovations. The boats used were smaller and required small crews, and tended to stay within a day or two's sailing time from a European port. Olaus Magnus notes that Norwegian fishermen in the Norwegian Sea sailed at most two days' sail away from the coast, and brought enough provisions for twenty days. Magnus. *History of the Northern Peoples*. Book XXI. Alf Ragnar Nielssen, "Indigenous and Early Fisheries in North-Norway," *Luc François and Ann Katherine Isaacs eds., The sea in European history* (2001). Small, oily fish such as herring and sardines were caught with nets

Country and western Brittany formed a maritime space rich in fish and close to good ports.<sup>137</sup> English vessels from Bristol and the West Country joined a flotilla of small craft from the Irish ports to catch small fish for the domestic market.<sup>138</sup> English fishermen often sailed as far as western Ireland in pursuit of fish, using techniques to salt their catch similar to the methods employed Newfoundland and Iceland.<sup>139</sup> This was an open fishery, drawing fishermen from almost as wide a range of port towns as Newfoundland would at its height, and seems to have been particularly important to Basque and Breton fishermen.

The North Sea fishery was the single most important fishery for sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. Herring was the fish of choice for the communities around the North Sea, and one of the most influential maritime resources in history.<sup>140</sup> At its height the North Sea grounds were ruthlessly exploited by the specialized herring boats (*heringbuizen*) from Holland, Zeeland and Friesland which dominated production. They were joined by flotillas of small craft from eastern England and northern Normandy.<sup>141</sup> By the 1560s the North Sea fleet may have numbered 700 ships, well over double the size of the

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instead of hand lines they were pickled and packed in barrels for rapid transport to nearby urban centers. Most strikingly, unlike the strict summer season in Terra Nova and Iceland many of the offshore fisheries operated in the fall, winter and spring. Wit, *Leven, Werken En Geloven in Zeevarende Gemeenschappen: Schiedam, Maassluis En Ter Heijde in De Zeventiende Eeuw*.

<sup>137</sup> The region is today classified as part of the Celtic Shelf LME. In addition to the Irish Sea Fishery, there was an excellent sardine fishery on the northern coast of Brittany. The types of fish found here varied from herring to cod to salmon, many of which could be caught and preserved in salt. The Irish Sea fishery also benefitted from its close proximity to the major salt production centers in southern Brittany and the Bay of Biscay. These same regions would be the main source of salt for the Terra Nova fishery in the sixteenth century.

<sup>138</sup> Maryanne Kowaleski. "The Expansion of the South-Western Fisheries in Late Medieval England." *The Economic History Review*. Vol.53. no.3 (aug. 2000) pp.429-454. Work on the Irish Sea fishery remains very limited, in particular for the sixteenth century. Much of our knowledge remains limited to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and only from the English perspective.

<sup>139</sup> Pope. *Fish into Wine*. p. 12; Kowaleski. "The Expansion of the South-West Fisheries." Maryanne Kowaleski, "The Seasonality of Fishing in Medieval Britain " in *Ecologies and Economies in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Studies in Environmental History for Richard C. Hoffmann* ed. Scott G. Bruce (Boston: Brill, 2010).

<sup>140</sup> *Clupea harengus* is a very different fish from cod. Herring are small and operate in schools, while their seasonal migrations and spawning take place later in the year than cod. Because of its high fat and oil content herring is far quicker to spoil than *gadids*. It therefore can only be pickled or smoked, and not dried like cod and other *gadids*.

<sup>141</sup> Michel Mollat du Jourdin, *La Peche À Dieppe Au Xve Siècle* (Rouen1939). In the early sixteenth century the port of Dunkirk alone may have maintained 4-500 small herring boats annually. Henri Durin, *Historique De La Pêche Dunkerquoise À La Morue: Sur Les Côtes D'islande Sur Le Grand Banc De Terre-Neuve Et Dans Les Mers Du Nord. Tome I Tome I* (Dunkerque: Impr. du Nord maritime, 1936).pp. 8-9.

Newfoundland fleet.<sup>142</sup> This was in the future, but in the early decades of the sixteenth century the North Sea fishery was still a vast undertaking and critical source of marine protein for northern Europe.

The fishery which underwent the most rapid change, and which most closely paralleled the northwest Atlantic, was the cod fishery at Iceland. The oldest permanent European colony in the Atlantic, settled by the Norse during their ninth century expansion, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century the island was still home to a small community of about 50,000 farmer-fishermen.<sup>143</sup> Under pressure from foreign fishermen and given the precarious position of the island in the middle of the north Atlantic the Danish crown fought a losing battle to preserve exclusive right to control access to Iceland's codfish-rich waters and preserve the old system. In this way merchants involved with Iceland succumbed to the pressure to either find new sources of fish or more intensively exploit those that already were known.<sup>144</sup> In 1490 the crowns of England and Denmark reached an agreement which permitted English vessels to sail to Iceland directly to fish, so long as they had a license.<sup>145</sup> The evolution of the licensing regime in England produced two important consequences for the Icelandic fishery. First, the number of ships which regularly sailed northwards increased dramatically. By the early 1520s English sources make reference to an "Iceland fleet" which returned each year.<sup>146</sup> In 1528 a count of merchant ships in England was undertaken by the crown, which provides detailed information about the size of the Icelandic fleet. In this year the English possessed 150 ships dedicated to the Icelandic trade, almost all of which were concentrated in eastern England.<sup>147</sup> As Wendy Childs has demonstrated, between 1436 and 1484 only 124 vessels are known to have traded at Iceland. This means that the yearly Icelandic fleet in the late 1520s outnumbered all the ships which had

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<sup>142</sup> A.R. Mitchell. "The European Fisheries in Early Modern Europe." *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*. P.148

<sup>143</sup> Fitzhugh, Ward, and National Museum of Natural History (U.S.), *Vikings*.

<sup>144</sup> Power and Postan, *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century*.

<sup>145</sup> Jones et al., "England's Icelandic Fishery in the Early Modern Period (Eprint)." P. 3

<sup>146</sup> For instance: On June 2, 1523 a letter between two English royal officials noted that "Hears that the Scots are going to set forth six or seven ships to the Islands, to intercept the Iceland fleet on their way home." Letter Papers Henry VIII. 3071.

<sup>147</sup> Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII. Vol. IV, no 5101. "Shipping"



made the voyage the previous century.<sup>148</sup> Second, to increase the output of marine protein from Iceland, foreign merchants shifted to more efficient techniques that had been developed on the North Sea and Irish Sea fisheries. English mariners introduced the wet-cod salting techniques that were proving so successful in Newfoundland, the Irish Sea and elsewhere.<sup>149</sup> The growth of the Icelandic fishery was ultimately fueled by the switch to cheaper, faster and more easily controlled methods of production. The concessions made to the English in 1490 encouraged the Hanse towns to send their own ships directly to Iceland as well.<sup>150</sup> At some point in the sixteenth century they would be joined by Flemish, Dutch and Scottish fishermen. The description by Olaus Magnus in Book XXI (“Monstrous Fishes”) of his *History of the Northern Peoples* offers one of the most engaging descriptions of the international mid-sixteenth century Iceland fishery:

“Countless numbers of fish, of a different variety and nature, are caught in Icelandic waters by the inhabitants of that island...The highly-prized fish caught there and known as *marlucz*<sup>151</sup> by Italians and Spaniards is transported by the Spaniards and Portuguese even as far as Rome. The season for taking them falls in February, March and April. When these fish are caught they are dried out by the cold winds and in due course arranged in the open fields like piles of firewood. Measured by length in long ells or, as they do in Italy, rods, they are sold in their thousands to German merchants or exchanged for corn, beer, cloth and similar commodities...Its [Iceland’s] economy is based on butter and dried fish, an equivalent of richer treasures.”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Wendy R. Childs, “England’s Icelandic Trade in the Fifteenth Century: The Role of the Port of Hull,” *Northern Seas Yearbook*, 1995, 11–31.

<sup>149</sup> Jones et al., “England’s Icelandic Fishery in the Early Modern Period (Eprint).”; Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records with Numerous Illustrations and Maps*. Olaf U Janzen, “The Logic of English Saltcod: An Historiographical Revision” (paper presented at the 6th IMEHA Conference, Ghent, Belgium, 2012). Fishermen caught their cod by hand, salting and packing it in barrels where it was pickled over a short period of time. This allowed visiting ships to rapidly produce large quantities of green cod without having to interact with Icelandic residents. The fish produced through such techniques were far less durable, tasty or nutritious than stockfish, but could reach markets faster and could be produced in far larger quantities. While requiring more salt and labour to produce, wet cod allowed English and Hanse merchants to bypass the costs of trading with Icelandic or Norwegian middlemen. The ships visiting the island seem to have been smaller, likely two-thirds or less the size of vessels going to Terra Nova, and were often referred to as ‘boats’ or ‘barks’ rather than ships. A ship count of the Iceland fishery in 1533 noted that several ships were as small as 30 tons burthen, half the size of most vessels which sailed to Terra Nova. No ships were larger than 100 tons burthen, which was regularly exceeded in Terra Nova. Letters and Papers Henry VIII, no1380. “List of the ships returned from Iceland this year”

<sup>150</sup> In this effort they were likely encouraged by the collapse of the Skanian fishery and the rapid growth of Dutch and Flemish operations on the North Sea. Poul Holm, “Catches and Manpower in the Danish Fisheries C. 1200-1995,” *Holm, P et al. The North Atlantic Fisheries* (1996).

<sup>151</sup> “*Merluzzo*” is the formal Italian name for cod and hake, though *baccala* is more common for dried salt-cod. It is related to Occitan and possibly older Iberian terms for cod. By the 1550s *bacalao* had become the standard Spanish word for cod from Terra Nova, and Magnus may be indicating that the root *merluz* was reserved for stockfish.

<sup>152</sup> Olaus et al., *Olaus Magnus: Description of the Northern Peoples, Rome 1555*. (London: Hakluyt Society., 1998). Vol. III. Book XXI, Chap. 24-25. The edition by the Hakluyt society offers a useful introduction which outlines the background to the work, in particular its connection to the 1539 map by the same author.

The evidence suggests, therefore, that an open and multi-national fishery appeared at Iceland shortly after similar operations had become intensified on the Irish and North Seas.

The increased exploitation of commercial fisheries in European waters was accompanied by the development of long-distance fisheries in the Atlantic beginning in the fifteenth century. The Canary Islands, coastal Morocco, Rio de Ouro (modern Western Sahara), Arguim and even the Guinea Coast were all noted for their access to fish.<sup>153</sup> Early Castilian settlements in the Caribbean and Portuguese settlements in Brazil relied on indigenous fisheries (through trade or, often, coercion) for fresh protein.<sup>154</sup> With the resurgence of overseas expansion in the fifteenth century, the Portuguese and Castilians would establish vibrant fisheries at nearly every outpost they established.<sup>155</sup> Since at least the late fourteenth century the Portuguese had exercised a vigorous fishery off the coast of Morocco.<sup>156</sup> The Moroccan sardine fishery also dovetailed nicely with the aggressive foreign policy of the crown which repeatedly intervened in Morocco.<sup>157</sup> During the sixteenth century the bulk of Portuguese fish imports, and likely those for Andalusia as well, came from the Moroccan fishery.<sup>158</sup> The settlement of the Atlantic islands, the establishment of trade posts in West Africa, the increased southbound trade out of the Tagus-Guadalquivir deltas and

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<sup>153</sup> José Mattoso, *História de Portugal* (Lisboa: Ed. Estampa, 1993). Vol. III, pp. 288-289. Gives a brief summary of Portuguese overseas fisheries.

<sup>154</sup> Castile: Kathleen A Deagan, José María Cruxent, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Columbus's Outpost among the Taínos: Spain and America at La Isabela, 1493-1498* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002). Pp.36, 68, 133. For the Portuguese experience see: Gisele Cristina da Conceição Christian Fausto Moraes dos Santos, "Lagostas, Baiacus E Sernambis: A Fauna Marinha Da América Portuguesa E O Cotidiano Colonizatório No Século XVI - Lobsters, Pufferfish and Sernambis: Marine Fauna of America and the Portuguese Colonization Quotidian in the Sixteenth Century," *Portuguese Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (2014): 173–92.

<sup>155</sup> The best summary of the Portuguese fisheries off of Morocco and later in Africa and the eastern Atlantic is found in: Godinho, *Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial*. Vol. IV. Pp. 127-134. For a detailed summary of the Castilian fisheries, see: "Las Pesquerías Españolas En La Costa de África (siglos XV-XVI) :: Anuario de Estudios Atlánticos," accessed March 28, 2016, <http://mdc.ulpgc.es/cdm/ref/collection/aea/id/1216>. And: Germán Santana Pérez, "Las Pesquerías En Berbería a Mediados Del Siglo Xvii," *Tebeto: Anuario del Archivo Histórico Insular de Fuerteventura*, no. 8 (1995). None of these studies have been updated, and work in English remains scarce.

<sup>156</sup> Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, *Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial* (Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 1981); A. R. Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: From Beginnings to 1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); António Henrique R. de Oliveira Marques, *A expansão quatrocentista* (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1998).

<sup>157</sup> M. D. D. Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400-1668* (London: New York : Routledge, 2005); José Mattoso, *História De Portugal* (Lisboa: Ed. Estampa, 1993).

<sup>158</sup> On local Portuguese fisheries, see: Ines Amorim. "The Evolution of Portuguese Fisheries in the Medieval and Early Modern Period: A Fiscal Approach." In Sicking and Abreu-Ferreira, *Beyond the Catch Fisheries of the North Atlantic, the North Sea and the Baltic, 900-1850*.

ultimately the dispatching of ships to the Caribbean all required fish to fuel mariners. The barrel of sardines-*barrica de sardinas*- was a mainstay of ship registries and colonial provision records during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.<sup>159</sup> If herring fueled urban growth in the north, sardines fueled maritime expansion in the south.

The most obscure of the early transatlantic fisheries are the fifteenth-century Portuguese operations on the Saharan coast of west Africa.<sup>160</sup> The early fifteenth-century Portuguese presence on the west coast of Africa centered on two points: Rio de Ouro and Arguim. The Rio de Ouro (today in the southern part of Spanish-controlled Western Sahara) empties into the Atlantic Ocean 1,700 kilometers south of Lisbon (about half the distance of Lisbon to Newfoundland). The coasts here teemed with fish, including small fare such as sardines and bream and larger tuna which were suitable for preservation and could have been shipped to Iberia.<sup>161</sup> In 1462, for instance, a Portuguese ship under Guomcallo Fernamdez encountered what was likely the Azores islands while it was “coming from the fisheries of the Rio de Ouro in the direction north-west of the Canary Islands and the island of Madeira.”<sup>162</sup> In the 1550s an English traveler stated that “Seuen or eight leagues off from the riuer del Oro or Cape de las Barbas, there vse many Spaniardes and Portugals to trade for fishing, during the moneth of Nouember.”<sup>163</sup> Near Cabo Branco another found “The third day of December we fell with the Ile of Palma, and the 9 we were thwart of Cape Blanke, and found

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<sup>159</sup> Various examples can be found in Kathleen A. Deagan, José María Cruxent, and Collection Mazal Holocaust, *Columbus's Outpost among the Taínos: Spain and America at La Isabela, 1493-1498* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002); Perez-Mallaina Bueno and Phillips, *Spain's Men of the Sea : Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century*. Maria del Carmen Mena Garcia, *Sevilla Y Las Flotas De Indias : La Gran Armada De Castilla Del Oro (1513-1514)* (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1998).

<sup>160</sup> Marques, *A expansão quatrocentista*. Pp.67-82. Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*.

<sup>161</sup> In addition, seals, prized for their skin and oil, gathered in great flocks on the rocks near Arguim. Portuguese merchants gladly paid for leather made from seals skin and the fatty oils derived from seal and sea lion blubber. The first Atlantic seal hunting operations may have been formed by the Portuguese at the Canaries and Arguim.

<sup>162</sup> Quinn. *New American Worlds*. Vol. I. p. 79. Fernamdez was from Tavira in the Algarve, and was likely sailing with fish to market in Lisbon.

<sup>163</sup> Richard Hakluyt and Edmund Goldsmid, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (Edinburgh: E. & G. Goldsmid, 1885). Vol XI: Africa. “The second voyage to Guinea set out by Sir George Barne, Sir Iohn Yorke, Thomas Lok, Anthonie Hickman and Edward Castelin, in the yere 1554. The Captaine whereof was M. Iohn Lok.”

there certaine Carauels fishing for Pargoes.”<sup>164</sup> Such descriptions suggest a long-distance fishery akin to Newfoundland or Iceland, with Portuguese vessels sailing as far south as modern Mauritania to catch or purchase fish that could be brought back to market.<sup>165</sup> In 1555, sailing south along the coast of the Sahara just above Rio de Ouro, an English captain noted:

“there immediatly we began to fish, and found great store of a kinde of fish which the Portugals commonly fish for vpon that coast, which they cal Pergosses, the Frenchmen call them Saders, and our men salt-water breames... but about twelue a clocke wee espied a Caruell of 60. tunne which was fishing, and we sent our Skiffe to him with fiue men... So wee tooke of them 3. Tapnets of figges, two small pots of oyle, two pipes of water, foure hogsheads of saltfish which they had taken vpon the coast, and certaine fresh fish which they did not esteeme, because there is such store vpon that coast, that in an houre and sometime lesse, a man may take as much fish as will serue twentie men a day.”<sup>166</sup>

By the turn of the seventeenth century nearly identical reports would be coming out of the northwest Atlantic. All of this is to point to an important conclusion: the fisheries at Newfoundland in the sixteenth century were not merely different from the rest of the Atlantic, they were themselves developed in the context of a more general fishing boom which lasted throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Zuan Caboto’s fateful voyage in 1497, which seems to have legitimately discovered the island of Newfoundland, was not a sudden lightning bolt that illuminated the potential for exploiting the icy waters of the north. Fishermen at Newfoundland were drawing deeply on practices developed in Europe in the mid-fifteenth century, and largely responding to pan-European changes in market demand and demography. The very

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid. The second voyage made by Maister William Towrson to the coast of Guinea, and the Castle of Mina, in the yeere 1556. with the Tiger of London, a ship of 120 tunnes, the Hart of London of 60 tunnes, and a Pinnesse of sixteene tunnes.

<sup>165</sup> Along the coast of upper Guinea the Portuguese and Castilians may have developed a fishery, or at least used local waters as a provisioning station for their expeditions. The Canaries certainly had a flourishing fishery by the end of the century. Rather than just a local affair, we know that the Canaries were attracting merchants and mariners from Andalusia, Galicia and Portugal. Traders from Normandy and Biscay were visiting the islands as well, and may have purchased or sought marine resources. By the early sixteenth century settlers on the Azores would be vigorously exploiting local waters for fish. These were often sold to vessels returning from the Americas, much as vessels outbound for the Caribbean bought their saltfish at the Canaries. In April 1580, for instance, a Castilian navigator returning to Seville from the Americas noted that on the coast of Sierra Leone “Hay por aqui mucha pesqueria.” Científicas Consejo Superior de Investigaciones, Marina Instituto Histórico de, and Martín Fernández de Navarrete, *Colección De Diarios Y Relaciones Para La Historia De Los Viajes Y Descubrimientos*, vol. 1-4 (Madrid: Instituto histórico de marina, 1943). Vol. III, Sarmiento de Camboa (1579-80) p. 111

<sup>166</sup> Hakluyt and Goldsmid, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation*. Vol. XI: Africa. “The first voyage made by Master William Towrson Marchant of London, to the coast of Guinea, with two Ships, in the yeere 1555.

idea of a deep-water fishery open to mariners from all nations, unaffected by territorial claims, was born in the waters of the Irish and North Sea in the fifteenth century.<sup>167</sup> This was not a stand in favour of a free ocean, *pace* Grotius, but a reflection of the lived reality in a late medieval world where enforcing legal control over ocean spaces was fantastically expensive and difficult while the demand for marine protein cut across all communities. The descendants of these pioneering mariners would later make their way across the Atlantic to create what they would call Terra Nova. This is not to trivialize the role or consequences of the Newfoundland and Icelandic fisheries in the sixteenth century. While not inherently unique, they represented a much more sophisticated and expansive example of the new push for marine resources. Only the North Sea fishery would exceed the scale of the transatlantic operations, and by the early seventeenth century the northwest Atlantic would outstrip all competitors save the herring industry. The organizational difficulty of the transatlantic fisheries was immense and the success of Newfoundland certainly sets it apart from rivals. But these were differences in degrees, not kind.

## 2.5 THE PROBLEM OF SCALE

Beyond the notion of how the fishery shaped European society, there is the question of how much European merchants and mariners invested in its success: How many ships, men, tons of cargo were sent to Newfoundland each summer? How much money did it cost to make this possible? And how much value did the fishery generate? Each of these could be answered with data, and thus directly compared to other parts of the Atlantic experience. But more importantly, the answers to these questions represent the inverse problem to the issues of structure and divergence. If the Newfoundland fisheries were distinct but unimportant to the wider story of the early Atlantic that would be one thing. Yet the evidence suggests that

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<sup>167</sup> At least one scholar has argued that, in the long-run at Iceland, this prompted the creation of modern maritime limits and exclusive zones: Heinz Sigfrid Koplowitz Kent, "The Historical Origins of the Three-Mile Limit," *American Journal of International Law* 48, no. 4 (1954).

for much of the sixteenth century the significance, in terms of the scale and value of operations in the northwest Atlantic, has been seriously underestimated by Atlantic historians.

In 1519 the English merchant John Rastell published *A new interlude and a mery of the nature of the iiiij. elements* in London, shortly after returning from a failed voyage to the fisheries around Newfoundland.<sup>168</sup> In describing the northwest Atlantic, Rastell notes that that “By brynnynge thereof only/ Fyshe they have so great plente/ That in havyns take and slayne they be/ with stavys withouten fayle.” Crucially, the text indicates that: “Nowe Frenchemen & other have founde the trade/ That yerely of fyshe there they lades/ above an .C. sayle.” Before 1520, then, “Frenchmen” and others were known to be leading participants in the early fishery. The reference to “.C. sayle” indicates that Rastell believed more than one hundred ships were sailing each year. This is our earliest assessment of the size of the Newfoundland fishery, and at the extremely early date of 1519 suggests that there already existed a large commercial operation.

Almost sixty years after Jon Rastell had reported that a hundred ‘French’ ships sailed to Newfoundland each year, in 1578 a different English mariner, Anthony Parkhurst, penned his own account of the fisheries to promote investment in more voyages.<sup>169</sup> After spending time in the northwest Atlantic he famously summed up the state of the fishery thus:

“I am informed that there are above 100. saile of Spaniards that come to take Cod (who make all wet, and do drie it when they come home) besides 20. or 30. more that come from Biskaie to kill Whale for traine...But of Portugals there are not lightly above 50 saile, and they make all wet in like sorte, whose tunnage may amount to three thousand tuns, and not upwarde. Of the French nation and Britons, are about one hundred and fiftie sailes, the most of their shipping is very small...Their shipping is from all parts of France and Britaine, and the Spaniards from most parts of Spaine, the Portugals from Aveiro and Viana,

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<sup>168</sup> In 1517 Rastell had attempted to found a colony in Terra Nova, but his crew mutinied off the coast of Ireland and he was compelled to abandon the enterprise. Although *A new interlude* covers a wide range of topics, Rastell used it to argue for continued attempts to explore and settle the New Found islands. Quinn. *New American World*. Vol. I. no.133, p.168-171. Quinn offers a fairly lengthy transcription of the parts of Rastell’s text which deal with Terra Nova. Rastell was writing an argumentative text in support of a colonization scheme, and had limited experience on the fishery, so he may have over-estimated the size of the fishery.

<sup>169</sup> A full transcript of Parkhurst’s letter can be found in: David B. Quinn, Alison M. Quinn, and Susan Hillier, eds., *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches.*, 5 vols., vol. IV, *New American World : A Documentary History of North America to 1612* (1979).. Pp.7-10. “A letter written to M. Richard Hakluyt of the middle Temple, containing a report of the true state and commodities of Newfoundland, by M. Anthonie Parkhurst Gentleman, 1578.”

and from 2. or 3. ports more. The trade that our nation hath to Island maketh, that the English are not there in such numbers as other nations.”

The total was some 350 vessels. Parkhurst was personally pleased to see that the pace of English participation was growing, noting that “since my first travell being but 4. yeeres, [the number of English ships] are increased from 30. sayle to 50.” Between Rastell and Parkhurst much had changed in the fishery at Newfoundland. Not only had it grown, from an estimated one hundred vessels annually to at least three hundred, but it had grown much more diverse. Whereas Rastell was concerned only with ‘French’ fishermen, Parkhurst noted the way in which codfish drew mariners from across western Europe’s many ports. This hodgepodge of mariners did not just catch and dry fish, but produced various forms of preserved cod for different markets and even hunted whales. In sixty years the waters of Newfoundland had transformed from the limited commercial operation built by mariners in the first decades of the century into a massive, multinational, and dynamic maritime system.

The large scale of operations at Newfoundland has always been implicitly recognized by historians of the fishery. This was the assumption which underlay the efforts of Prowse, Innis, Mollat and de la Morandière in their early efforts to reconstruct the history of the fishery.<sup>170</sup> Only recently has an attempt been made to articulate this in terms of precise numbers, primarily thanks to the efforts of Laurier Turgeon and his work in French archives.<sup>171</sup> There is, despite the best efforts of researchers, insufficient existing evidence to give a precise measure of the scale of the commercial fishery in the northwest Atlantic during the sixteenth century.<sup>172</sup> Notarial records are too scattered and incomplete to fully reconstruct even a single

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<sup>170</sup> Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records with Numerous Illustrations and Maps*; Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*; De la Morandière, *Histoire De La Pêche Francaise De La Morue Dans L'amerique Septentrinale Des Origines a 1789*; Mollat, *Histoire Des Peches Maritimes En France*.

<sup>171</sup> Turgeon has provided two sets of ship-counts, based on surveys of the notarial archives in Bordeaux, La Rochelle and Rouen. The first is in: Turgeon, "Pour Redécouvrir Notre 16e Siècle: Les Pêches À Terre-Neuve D'après Les Archives Notariales De Bordeaux." The second, updated, is in: "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology."

<sup>172</sup> We are lacking usable notarial records for the Portuguese ports, the West Country and Brittany. See: Abreu-Ferreira, "Terra Nova through the Iberian Looking Glass: The Portuguese-Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Sixteenth Century."; Matthews, "A History of the West of England-Newfoundland Fishery."

year with detail.<sup>173</sup> For this reason many historians have relied either exclusively on the limited observational data or shied away from evaluating the scale of the fishery.<sup>174</sup> Nonetheless, it is possible to estimate the size of the fishing fleet at different points in the mid-sixteenth century. By counting the number of ships from individual ports, and estimating their likely number where records are insufficient, we can build a more complete picture. To do so we must combine surviving notarial records, observational data and ship counts. Where data is insufficient, this study makes estimates based on the relative size of port towns. While we lack records for the port of Bayonne, for instance, we know that it was similar in size and played a similar role as the port of Saint Malo, for which we have observational counts of the number of ships.<sup>175</sup> The methods used to estimate the scale of the fishery are explained in more detail in Appendix B. The best data survives for the years 1537-1565, though tentative conclusions can be drawn for the decades before and after. They can be summed up in the following chart:

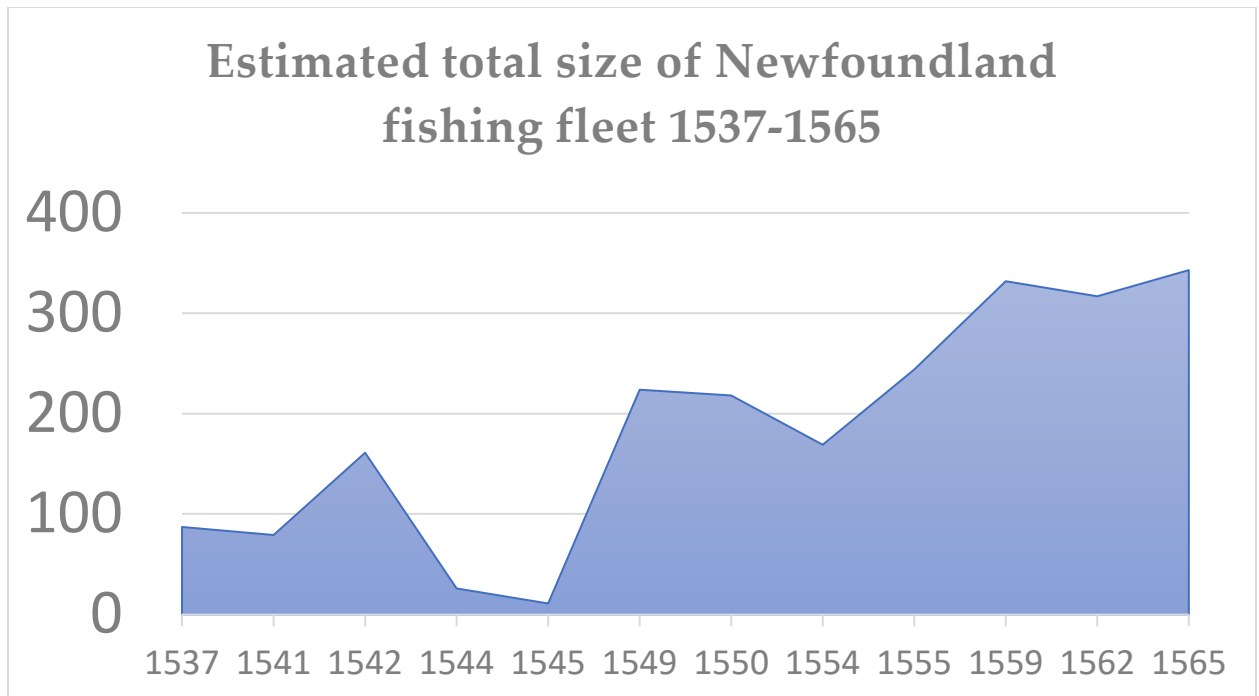
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<sup>173</sup> The closest candidate is the year 1565, for which notarial records exist for Rouen, La Rochelle and Bordeaux. There are also secondary observations made by English visitors in Saint Malo around this year, and notarial counts in Guipuzcoa.

<sup>174</sup> Jacqueline Hersart de La Villemarqué, *La Pêche Morutière Française De 1500 À 1950: Statistiques, Climat Et Société* (Plouzané: IFREMER, 1995). This study attempts to estimate the size of the fishery based on old and outdated studies and the limited notarial evidence. It appears to be highly inaccurate in its early estimates, despite the effort to apply quantitative methods to the study of the fishery.

<sup>175</sup> Saint Malo observation: CSP Eliz Vol 3 1560 no.120. Size of port cities taken in part from: Philip Benedict, *Cities and Social Change in Early Modern France*, trans. Sian Reynolds (London: Routledge, 1992).





**Figure 4. Graph showing estimate of yearly European fishing fleet at Newfoundland. Based on estimates and surviving notarial evidence, as found in Appendix B.**

The surviving evidence points towards two important conclusions. The first, which will be explored throughout this study, is that the scale of the fishery fluctuated over time. The surviving records before 1540 (See Appendix A, Table A3) suggest a small fleet, likely under fifty ships per year. Operations grew rapidly after 1540 and reach a peak in the 1550s-60s with many sudden contractions en route to this height. These fluctuations were often in response to the outbreak of war within Europe, or wide changes in the demand for preserved fish. This means that European interaction with the fishery was contingent and could be shaped by short-term forces, and should discourage historians from treating the sixteenth century fishery as something which was static.

Second, and more controversially, the scale of the fishery points to its overlooked significance in the history of the early Atlantic. What the estimates given in Appendix B suggest is that the mid-century Newfoundland fishery had reached over 200 ships per year by 1549, rising to over 300 per year a decade

later. This seems to confirm the ship-counts made by observers in the 1570s. The overall picture is of a consistently large commercial fishery during the mid-sixteenth century, yet even these estimates of the size of the fishery may be understated. In 1565, the year for which the best evidence has survived, just over 300 ships likely sailed to Newfoundland.<sup>176</sup> Given the amount of indirect evidence for strong growth in the fishery during this decade, and the severe lack of surviving records, it is very likely that the true numbers are under-represented in the source base. A more liberal estimate would suggest that around 400 vessels may have participated in the fishery in 1565, but that is only a guess which assumes that major ports such as Le Havre, Cherbourg, Dieppe, Bayonne and Le Croisic/Nantes were more active than the earlier estimates allowed.<sup>177</sup> The fact that major ports such as Saint-Malo, Cherbourg, Granville, Bayonne and most of the West Country lack reliable records when we know that these were major centers for the Newfoundland fishery would suggest that modern historians are missing much of the full picture. The numbers of ships sent to Newfoundland rivaled the number devoted to other branches of Atlantic commerce. This would suggest that at its peak the Newfoundland fisheries exceeded the legal trade to the Americas, and likely rivaled the illegal trades as well. The estimates provided in this study are one way for us to better understand the potential size of the northwest Atlantic fishery and its significance in the emerging Atlantic world.

Yet the number of vessels is not in and of itself an indicator of the relative value and complexity of transatlantic fishing operations. The size of ships used in the 1560s varied widely, from the small 60-ton boats of Normandy to the massive 200-ton whaling ships of Guipuzcoa.<sup>178</sup> Notarial records suggest that the

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<sup>176</sup> This is less than the total size of the fishery estimated by Parkhurst in 1578, which took place well after the mid-1560s peak. It is also based on deliberately and conservatively estimating the number of ships which departed Brittany, Normandy (beyond Rouen) and Porto-Galicia.

<sup>177</sup> In this revised estimate I assume that Le Havre, Dieppe, Cherbourg and Bayonne each outfitted closer to 20 ships each. Nantes may have functioned more like Rouen or La Rochelle as an outfitting port, in which case it may have been responsible for outfitting 20 or more vessels as well.

<sup>178</sup> Charles de La Morandière, *La Pêche Française De La Morue À Terre-Neuve Du Xvie Siècle À Nos Jours; Son Importance Économique, Sociale Et Politique* (Paris: École pratique des hautes études -Sorbonne, sixième section: sciences économiques et sociales, 1967). Barkham, *Los Vascos En El Marco Atlántico Norte: Siglos Xvi Y Xvii*.

majority of ships were between 80- and 120-tons burthen, averaging around 100 tons.<sup>179</sup> This means that the fishery constituted around 30,000 tons burthen of shipping. If we take thirty mariners to be an average crew, then a fishery of 300 vessels would carry around 9,000 mariners.<sup>180</sup> Using the estimates provided by Unger and Lucassen for European shipping in the sixteenth century, this would comprise around 5% of the European merchant marine.<sup>181</sup>

The scale and value of the Newfoundland fishery was recognized by observers in the sixteenth century. As West Country fishermen became interested in Newfoundland at the end of the 1570s, the English adventurer Sir Humphrey Gilbert submitted a plan to Queen Elizabeth which outlined a grand design to “Annoy the King of Spayne.”<sup>182</sup> In it he argued that the best way to disrupt Spanish commerce was to dispatch a fleet carrying 6,000 armed men to Newfoundland to raid the fishermen there. Rather than targeting the Caribbean, or northwest Africa, or the Iberian trade in the Mediterranean, it was the fishery which Gilbert selected as his target. As he admitted, “It may be sayd that a fewe shippes cannot possibilie distress so many,” but nonetheless Gilbert suggested that despite the small size of the force they could avoid being overwhelmed if they attacked fishermen when they were isolated in different harbours. This is a remarkable statement, given that a military force of 6,000 was quite large for the mid-sixteenth century. It was, for instance, larger than the force the English crown was using to subdue the entirety of Ireland at the same time, and larger than most field armies in the French Wars of Religion. Yet Gilbert worried that even this expedition would seem paltry next to the number of mariners he assumed were working on the northwest Atlantic each summer. That he nonetheless suggested risking an assault is an indication of how

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<sup>179</sup> See estimates given in Musset, *Les Rochelais À Terre-Neuve, 1500-1789*. Also based on a reading of the Rouen contracts of the 1540s and 1560s.

<sup>180</sup> Several of the contracts found in Quinn, *New American Worlds*. Vol. IV give the number of crew on each ship. In the sixteenth century most cargo ship maintained a ratio of one crewmember for every 4 tons burthen of cargo space. A ratio of 1 mariner for every 4 tons of cargo suggest that a 100-ton vessel carried 25 sailors. To this must be added the grummetes and specialists such as surgeons, carpenters and coopers. See Jan Lucassen and Richard W Unger, “Labour Productivity in Ocean Shipping, 1450–1875,” *International Journal of Maritime History* 12, no. 2 (2000).

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> Humphrey Gilbert and David B. Quinn, *The Voyages and Colonialising Enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert* (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1967).

valuable, and thus how worthwhile a target for plunder, English observers thought the Newfoundland fisheries could be in the 1570s.

## 2.6 THE VALUE OF NEWFOUNDLAND

If the scale of the Newfoundland fisheries can be seen as unappreciated by modern historians, as Gilbert's grand design suggests, then the question of its value is more complex. As a business enterprise it certainly generated ample returns for investors. Throughout the sixteenth century in fish-scarce continental Europe the large cargoes of preserved protein could command large returns once sold. In 1576 a Norman merchant estimated the whole of his fully-laden fishing vessel to be 20,000 *livres*, a princely sum.<sup>183</sup> Even a few tens of thousands of fish could bring in considerable revenue. In 1571 a merchant sold 16,500 salted cod in La Rochelle for the incredible sum of 5,400 *livres*.<sup>184</sup> Two years later when an English merchant lost 18,000 codfish through a shipping accident, he claimed the value to be £260, or roughly 2,062 *livres*.<sup>185</sup> A hundred-count of preserved codfish was worth roughly as much as beef in much of Portugal.<sup>186</sup> Records from the 1560s-70s indicate that vessels, even small ones, now regularly carried tens and even hundreds of thousands of whole dried cod.<sup>187</sup> If an average catch was perhaps 30,000 codfish, then each autumn the European fishing fleet may have provided some nine million preserved cod for the market in Europe.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> CSP. Eliz. For. Vol. 11. 1575-1577. No. 963. M. de Mauvissiere to Walsingham. Oct. 15, 1576. "Recommends the suits of Pierre Chambellan, who demands restitution of four ships laden with salt, and of Jacques Pinchon, charged by certain Rouen merchants to seek restitution of a ship named 'La Loyse,' laden with 'Newland fish' of the value of upwards of 20,000 livres Tournois."

<sup>184</sup> Musset, *Les Rochelais À Terre-Neuve, 1500-1789*.P.58.

<sup>185</sup> HCA File 45, No.301. Using data from Innis, I estimate that in the early 1570s 1 pound sterling equaled 7.93 *livres tournois*.

<sup>186</sup> Abreu-Ferreira, "The Cod Trade in Early-Modern Portugal: Deregulation, English Domination, and the Decline of Female Cod Merchants."

<sup>187</sup> In 1573 the *John* of Lympton in Devon carried 70,000 fish out of the waters of Newfoundland, of which 18,000 were lost in accident when it returned to England. HCA. File 45, no. 301.

<sup>188</sup> Though the value of a ton burthen of shipping might vary considerably across time and space, it is possible to estimate the value of a ton burthen of cargo space on the Newfoundland fishery. In 1580 the English writer Robert Hitchcock estimated that a 70-ton vessel could easily generate £500 worth of fish (30,000 fish total) on a single voyage.

Even so, the value of dried codfish, kilo for kilo, was far lower than the value of other goods produced in the sixteenth century Atlantic.<sup>189</sup> It was a bulk food commodity and could not compare with the money to be made in sugar, tobacco, gold, silver or slaves. Thus while the size of the fishery in terms of manpower and tonnage was high, its value likely lagged behind trade to the Americas or West Africa. A key reason for this was that the economic impact of the fisheries was more diffuse and spread-out than other forms of Atlantic commerce. The considerable burden of financing and outfitting the yearly fishery was distributed over a number of major cities such as Rouen, La Rochelle, San Sebastian and Porto, as well as many smaller ports and villages. Although nine million codfish may have arrived in Europe each fall, each part of the coast only received a small part of this total. Both the cost of outfitting and the economic impact of trade with the Americas and elsewhere in the Atlantic tended to be concentrated in the Seville-Lisbon area, and to an extent in Antwerp, making it easier to see and study in the records.<sup>190</sup> For this reasons historians have tended to marginalize its significance.

But if codfish was less valuable, kilo for kilo, than comparable goods being generated elsewhere in the Atlantic world, we must understand the different ways in which Europeans valued the products of the northwest Atlantic. While its overall impact on the European economy was limited, the Newfoundland fisheries could have outsized localized impacts. The fishery could have a disproportionately large effect on many ports like Saint Malo in Brittany or Saint Jean-de-Luz in Basque Country which saw Newfoundland as their main source of livelihood. In a few impoverished ports, and even regions, the fisheries became an economic staple which sustained local growth. Parts of Basque Country and, later, the West Country in England were dependent on the Newfoundland trade. In 1573 the “citizens, mariners and residents of Saint Malo” prepared a petition to the crown of France asking for assistance in defending the city’s crucial

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This implies around £7 per ton, or around 56 *livres*, could be had on a fishing voyage. If we multiply this by the estimated 30,000 tons burthen of the mid-century fishery, then the total value of tonnage committed to the fishery may have been nearly 1.7 million *livres*, or £210,000.

<sup>189</sup> See for instance the price series in the Appendices of Hamilton, *American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain, 1501-1650*.

<sup>190</sup> Here I follow Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, trans. Sian Reynolds, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row 1982).

harbour against the English and other foes.<sup>191</sup> The town was unable to provide for its own safety, the text explained, because “The better part of our ships, men and munitions are now at sea some to Terra Nova and others to Spain...”<sup>192</sup> Oceanic commerce had called the men of Saint Malo away in large numbers from their home city, which now was fatally vulnerable. Places like Saint Malo had become true fishing towns, their economic, social and now military destinies bound to Newfoundland.

But historians have also underestimated the secondary consequences of the north Atlantic fisheries. To sustain operations on such a large scale required the development of complementary industries to feed and equip hundreds of ships each year, and to distribute their catch each fall. The need to provision a vast yearly fishing fleet provided jobs and profits for many farmers, bakers, moneylenders, dockworkers and others in coastal Europe. Moving 30,000 tons of wooden cargo space across the Atlantic Ocean and back each summer was a technically and financially demanding enterprise. Each mariner needed bread, meat, and alcohol enough to sustain themselves for an estimated five months at sea.<sup>193</sup> Each sailor required around 300 pieces of hardtack for a complete voyage, so that each vessel had to carry perhaps 9,000 pieces of biscuit, in addition to barrels of wine or cider and plenty of salt pork. The fishery as a whole may have needed 2.7 million pieces of hardtack to sustain itself over the summer, all baked ahead of time and ready

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<sup>191</sup> AM St. Malo. BB4. Undated, 1573. “Les bourgeois, mariniers et habitans du ville de Saint Malo.”

<sup>192</sup> “...le meilleure partie de leurs vaisseaux hommes et munitions sont en voies sur mer les uns a la terre neufve autres en espagne...”

<sup>193</sup> For example, in 1552 the fishing ship *Le Saint-Esprit* departed Bordeaux for Newfoundland carrying 40 men. To feed them the outfitters purchased 120 quintals of ship’s biscuit, approximately 12,000 pieces of hardtack. This granted each sailor 300 pieces of biscuit, or two pieces per day, for a five-month voyage. The ship also carried in its provisions 20 tuns of wine and 10 quintals of salt pork, more than enough for such a long voyage. Archives départementales de Gironde, Notaires série E, Registre Bigot, 22 April, 1552. A transcript is found in Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America.* . Vol. IV, p.94. Several contracts and admiralty reports have survived which note ship provisions in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. One of the earliest records, from 1521 in Bayonne, involves a request from a Basque ship to take on several tuns of cider for a voyage to Newfoundland. Archives municipales de Bayonne, deliberations communales, BB 6. The best is a record from La Rochelle which gives a list of all the food and equipment purchased for an expedition to Newfoundland in 1633. Archives départementales de Charente-Maritime, B5654, fol. 54. In 1542 the crown of Castile attempted to send a caravel to chase down Jacques Cartier in Newfoundland and Canada, and equipped it for a five-month voyage. The detailed records of provisions have survived and are found in: Biggar, *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur De Roberval*. In 1613 one English source gave recommendations for the necessary provisions required on a successful Newfoundland expedition. It suggested five thousand pieces of biscuit for twenty men, supplemented by fifty hogsheads of beer and 240 pieces (of three pounds each) of beef. Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America.* . Vol. IV, p.127.

for loading on outbound fishing vessels.<sup>194</sup> During the months of February through April merchants descended upon major ports such as La Rochelle and Rouen to buy up all the food they had. Fortunes were made in supplying salt and wine to fishermen, as well as the cash on credit many shipowners needed to make last-minute purchases for their crew. The French historians Trocmé and Delafosse have suggested on average it required 10 *livres* in loans to outfit each ton burthen for a fishing ship, and they estimate around 20,000 *livres* were loaned each year in La Rochelle alone.<sup>195</sup> This was big business, technically and financially demanding, which drained the resources of many port cities in the crucial late winter/early spring when food stocks were low.

But perhaps more than anything, the economic value of the Newfoundland fisheries was of secondary importance to its social value. Codfish sustained Europeans during the sixteenth century in a way that sugar, silver or tobacco could not. Preserved fish kept people alive, alleviating hunger and warding off famine in many cities during times of war and food scarcity.<sup>196</sup> For towns lacking access to the North Sea or local fisheries, dried *bacalao* from the northwest Atlantic could be relied on as a long-lasting source of crucial nutrients. The train oil which ships brought back provided a reliable source of energy, fueling demographic and economic growth indirectly. In small towns like Saint Jean-de-Luz, Jumièges and Pontevedra the fisheries became the mainstay of the community, supporting successive generations with reliable and regular work. And throughout the calendar year, on the religiously mandated fish days, millions of Europeans turned to dry fish from across the sea to fulfill their spiritual obligations.<sup>197</sup> It would be for these reasons that so many mariners visited Newfoundland every summer.

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<sup>194</sup> These estimates are based on a 300-ship fishing fleet and the provision requirements found in: *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches*.p. 127. In 1613 one English source gave recommendations for the necessary provisions required on a successful Newfoundland expedition. It suggested five thousand pieces of biscuit for twenty men, supplemented by fifty hogsheads of beer and 240 pieces (of three pounds each) of beef.

<sup>195</sup> Trocmé and Delafosse, *Le Commerce Rochelais De La Fin Du Xve Siècle Au Début Du Xviie*. P.97.

<sup>196</sup> To understand food scarcity and famine in the sixteenth century see: John Walter and Roger S. Schofield, *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge; New York; New Rochelle: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>197</sup> Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting, and the Discovery of the New World*.

## 2.7 NEWFOUNDLAND AND THE ATLANTIC

To return to Cape Breton as a location imbued with historical significance by the mariners who visited the northwest Atlantic, this chapter has tried to outline how complex its place in the narrative of Atlantic history could be. The island of Cape Breton was in the center of a body of water whose abundance drew the attention of thousands of mariners from across the seaboard of coastal Europe. Places like Cape Breton were governed by an environmental regime which was familiar to these fishermen and they soon found themselves operating according to older principles of commercial, oceanic fishing. By the mid-sixteenth century it is likely that several hundred ships were gathered within a few day's sail of the island. There they produced a commodity which kept people in northwest Europe alive and provided a tangible connection with the Atlantic Ocean. But this is the limit of the role played by Cape Breton. For though it was physically at the center of the new fishery it was itself devoid of consequence. No permanent settlement stood on its shores, no European turned to the island for resources, and indeed it was only significant as a reference point for those sailing past. Cape Breton would have to wait to be integrated into an Atlantic colonial regime until the late seventeenth century. Until then it would be, like the rest of what mariners called Terra Nova, both a center and periphery to the Atlantic experience.

In the sixteenth century the fisheries at Newfoundland drew thousands of mariners across the waters of the Atlantic Ocean on lengthy voyages. In doing so it brought them into repeated, if brief, contact with the continent of North America and exposed the European population to a bountiful source of marine protein which could be systematically exploited using known methods. This enterprise was important enough to sixteenth century Europeans to attract an extremely high portion of its maritime resources and infrastructure. But all of this occurred without invention, integration or transformation. Unlike in the Caribbean, the Atlantic Islands, West Africa or the Americas at Newfoundland mariners would find a way to adapt existing techniques without the need to confront change. The details of this process will be explored in the following chapters.



All of this points to a central paradox that lies at the heart of the sixteenth century European experience at Newfoundland: the fishery was both one of the largest and most valuable branches of transatlantic commerce without sharing in the wider patterns and experiences which shaped the Atlantic world. This paradox should not, as this chapter has suggested, encourage us to marginalize the Newfoundland fisheries. Rather, it is clear that in the sixteenth century they constituted a major attraction for European mariners and merchants. Preserved fish from the northwest Atlantic was in high demand and served a clear social good as a source of valuable protein during an age of starvation. This would indicate that there is value in studying the fisheries as a place where European mariners were able to extend their control over and exploit a maritime resource without engaging with the kinds of new experiences taking place elsewhere. Yet if one of the largest branches of transatlantic commerce in the sixteenth century was not, as this suggests, *actually* part of the Atlantic at all then we need to seriously reconsider notions about how the Atlantic experience and world developed. As this study moves forward it will continue to call attention to both how and why mariners would create a fishery with such distinct characteristics in the northwest Atlantic, and how this can give us a more nuanced picture of the sixteenth century world.

### 3.0 FROM MADEIRA TO TERRA NOVA: THE MENTAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND FISHERY IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

In 1511 the celebrated Genoese cartographer Visconte Maggiolo drafted one of his most famous maps, a portolan atlas that encompassed the entire globe.<sup>198</sup> Centered on the North Pole, the map covered both the old and new worlds, incorporating the latest information about the south Atlantic and the Americas. In the northwest corner of the Atlantic Maggiolo included the lands which had been visited just over a decade prior by a series of English and Portuguese navigators. (See Figure 5) The Genoese cartographer did not assign any single name to this large region, which he portrayed as an eastern extension of Asia, instead carefully labelling four peninsulas in red ink. From north to south, Maggiolo drew his viewer's attention to the "Land of the English," the "Land of Labrador of the King of Portugal," the "Land of Fishing" and the "Land of Corte Real of the King of Portugal."<sup>199</sup> These four spaces together represent what would today be the Canadian provinces of Labrador, Newfoundland, and Nova Scotia. While the "Land of the English" is likely a nod to the pioneering navigator Zuan Caboto, pride of place is given to Portuguese exploration: Gaspar and Miguel Corte Real's voyages from 1499-1501 have earned the King of Portugal two promontories in the new world.<sup>200</sup> The most striking of the four labels used in the Maggiolo map is the shortest: *Terra de Pescaria*. This is the only part of the Americas not assigned to a European state but

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<sup>198</sup>A copy of this map is held by the John Carter Brown Library. See: <http://jcb.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/JCBMAPS~1~1~1083~102180001:-Map-of-the-world->

<sup>199</sup> From north to south: "*Terra de los Ingresy*" "*Terra de lavoradore de rey de portugall*" "*terra de pescaria*" and "*Terra de corte reale de rey de portugall*"

<sup>200</sup> Regarding "The Land of the English" its northern position suggests that it may be a reference to the voyage by Bristol and Azorean mariners which visited Labrador and Greenland, or may even be meant to represent Iceland. For English identification with early Newfoundland on maps see: Derek Hayes, "America Discovered: A Historical Atlas of North American Exploration," (Vancouver; Berkeley: Douglas & McIntyre ; Distributed in the U.S. by Publishers Group West, 2004). Peter E Pope, *The Many Landfalls of John Cabot* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto press, 1997); Evan T. Jones, "Alwyn Ruddock: 'John Cabot and the Discovery of America'\*, " *Historical Research* 81, no. 212 (2008); Pringle, "Cabot, Cod and the Colonists."

instead described as the site of commercial activity, foreshadowing the later use of the term *Bacalao* (saltcod) by Italian cartographers. It is an indication that as early as 1511 the northwest Atlantic had gained a reputation as the center of a major fishery and that this knowledge had begun to circulate in the Mediterranean. Northern Italy was the center for cartography and printing in the early sixteenth century, and Maggiolo's map represented the forefront of geographic knowledge.<sup>201</sup> The labels used by Maggiolo were typical of how Mediterranean, German, Iberian and French mapmakers identified land in the northwest Atlantic in the sixteenth century: a combination of labels derived from exploration, royal territorial claims and commodity production.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> See: Massimo Quaini, "34• Cartographic Activities in the Republic of Genoa, Corsica, and Sardinia in the Renaissance," in *Cartography in the European Renaissance* ed. David Woodward (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 2007). In David Woodward, *Cartography in the European Renaissance* (Chicago [Ill., etc.]: University of Chicago Press, 2007). See also: Gregory C MacIntosh, *The Johannes Ruysch and Martin Waldseemüller World Maps: The Interplay and Merging of Early Sixteenth Century New World Cartographies* (Plus Ultra, 2012).

<sup>202</sup> For a useful overview of the cartography of early Newfoundland and Canada, with several detailed examples, see the recent collection: Chet Van Duzer and Lauren Beck, *Canada before Confederation : Maps at the Exhibition* (2017).



**Figure 5. An early cartographic view of the northwest Atlantic.**

Detail of 1511 map by Visconte Maggiolo, showing region of Terra Nova. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

At the same time as Maggiolo was completing his map in Genoa, a legal case was slowly working its way through a court in the Breton city of Nantes.<sup>203</sup> In 1510 the vessel *La Jacquette* was sailing down the Seine river in Normandy, though the ship was operated out of the harbour of Dahouët, a small port on the north coast of Brittany. We know this because a petition was subsequently submitted to a court in Nantes in 1513 to defend a man, Guillaume Dobel, who had pushed a second hapless mariner into the river, and in it the petitioners reveal that they were in Normandy: “coming from the city of Rouen, where the aforesaid

<sup>203</sup> Transcript: Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada*.pp.116-18. Original: Archives Départementales de Loire-Atlantique. B21 fol.15-16. The crewmember in question died when he was pushed overboard during an altercation.

named [the ship owners] had sold the fish which they had carried and fished in the region of *La Terre-Neusfve*.”<sup>204</sup> The choice of words is crucial. The mariners declared that they had gone fishing in a place called *The New Land (La Terre-Neusfve)*. This was not the Land of the English or the King of Portugal, but a new region where mariners could visit at will in search of fish. The crew of the *Jacquette* may have contributed to the idea of a *Terra de Pescaria* through their fishing, but they themselves spoke before the court of merely a New Land somewhere to the west.

Both Maggiolo and Dobel’s companions were describing the same place, the waters of the recently-explored northwest Atlantic, but in very different terms. Maggiolo was representative of the emerging and confused cartographic understanding of the northwest Atlantic, combining different voyages and legal claims to label points of land. Dobel and his compatriots, who had more personal experience at the fishery, were using a local adaptation of the Portuguese term *Terra Nova*, New Land, to describe the space which they visited in search of codfish. This dispute in 1511 represents an early example of how the European understanding of space, both on land and at sea, had to be created for the northwest Atlantic. It was not self-evident in the sixteenth century that Newfoundland island would be the central point to describe the fishery, while the reports of explorers had to compete with the experience of mariners to assign names to the region. This points to the overlooked role played by the mariners who visited the yearly fishery in this process. Maggiolo and Dobel offered competing visions, and in the end the concept of *Terra Nova*, used by the largely unknown fisherman Dobel but not by the famous cartographer Maggiolo, would be the most consistent way Europeans described the fishery until the early seventeenth century.

As this chapter will show, in the first decades of the sixteenth century European mariners, originating in port towns across the Atlantic littoral, created a new geographic space at whose core was the commercial

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<sup>204</sup> “*venans de la ville de Rouan, ou lesdits nommez avoint vendu du poysson qu’ilz avoint este querir et pescher es parties de la Terre-Neusfve*” The ship’s master was Bertram Menyer, with Guillaume Dobel as assistant master (neither are noted as the ship’s owner, but Dobel was apparently in charge of daily management). Dobel is noted to be “*filz Jehan Dobel*,” and had several witnesses petition on his behalf, possibly indicating he was a locally powerful figure in northern Brittany.

cod fishery.<sup>205</sup> This was a predominantly maritime world whose boundaries were intentionally left nebulous. Although most modern historians have described this as the ‘Newfoundland Fishery,’ this is an anachronism which obscures the geographic understanding of European mariners who visited the fisheries in the sixteenth century.<sup>206</sup> This chapter will argue instead that across the sixteenth century European mariners consistently articulated a concept of the northwest Atlantic which they described as ‘Terra Nova.’<sup>207</sup> It is distinct from the conception of space generated through state-backed exploratory missions and the conception of the northwest Atlantic transmitted by cartographers. Terra Nova was used to describe both a geographic distinction, between different regions in the northwest Atlantic, and a conceptual one between land and sea. As this chapter will demonstrate, understanding the meaning of Terra Nova in the early sixteenth century can help historians better appreciate the ways in which distinctive structures formed in the early fishery, and how Newfoundland can fit into the wider Atlantic world.

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<sup>205</sup> One European concepts of discovery, geography and naming in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century see: Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus*; Washburn, "The Meaning of" Discovery" in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries."; Martin W. Lewis, "Dividing the Ocean Sea," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999); Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean*. Warkentin and Podruchny, *Decentering the Renaissance Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective, 1500-1700*.

<sup>206</sup> The excellent web resources Newfoundland Heritage (Run by Memorial University Newfoundland) studiously avoids the term ‘Newfoundland Fishery,’ instead featuring an article on the sixteenth century ‘International Fishery.’ Though the present study stresses the transnational and transregional nature of the fishery, it avoids the term Transnational Fishery in favour of Terra Nova. This is meant to better reflect the language used by mariners in the sixteenth century, and to de-emphasize the role of the nation and national identity in the early Atlantic. See: "The International Fishery of the Sixteenth Century," <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/exploration/16th-century-fishery.php>.

<sup>207</sup> On the creation and labelling of maritime spaces by Europeans, see: Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean*; Lewis, "Dividing the Ocean Sea." This discussion on Terra Nova draws indirectly on Paul Carter’s famous work on geography and history. Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay : An Exploration of Landscape and History* (New York: Knopf, 1988).

### 3.1 THE EXPLORERS' MOMENT

On June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1497, the Genoese pilot Zuan Caboto<sup>208</sup> and the crew of a small ship from Bristol made landfall somewhere between what is today Cape Breton and Labrador.<sup>209</sup> The debate surrounding this event has been masterfully summed up in Peter Pope's *The Many Landfalls of John Cabot*, but suffice to say we do not know, and likely never will know, where he set foot on North American soil.<sup>210</sup> In large part this is because Caboto himself did not know where he had landed. Having been chosen by a consortium of Bristol merchants to pioneer new trade routes, Caboto may have believed that the small stretch of bleak and rocky shore he briefly set foot upon was the eastern tip of Cathay. Much as Columbus' voyage so often determines the start date of Atlantic history, the story of the far north Atlantic generally begins with Caboto.<sup>211</sup> In

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<sup>208</sup> Caboto was born in Genoa but lived for much of his life in Venice. The name of this explorer was anglicized in the sixteenth century by some writers to John Cabot. It is by this name that he is generally known in the English language literature. I have chosen to revert to his original name of Zuan Caboto, for two reasons. First, most of the contemporary documents related to his voyages refer to him as a variant of Zuan Caboto. Zuan is the Venetian form Giovanni, and appears in Italian, Spanish and English documents. Caboto was likely born in Genova, which may have also used Zuan as a variant of Giovanni. Second, my hope in doing so is to emphasize the fact that he was indeed a Genoan by birth and a Mediterranean sailor by training. The name John Cabot is sufficiently English to obscure this background, and in turn to downplay the importance of his southern origin in shaping his exploration. On Cabot in general see: Pringle, "Cabot, Cod and the Colonists."; Morison, *The European Discovery of America*.

<sup>209</sup> On the background to the *Matthew* and its connections to the merchant community of Bristol, see: Jones, "The Matthew of Bristol and the Financiers of John Cabot's 1497 Voyage to North America."

<sup>210</sup> Pope, *The Many Landfalls of John Cabot*. Our understanding of Caboto's voyage may be set to improve substantially thanks to the effort of the John Cabot Project at the University of Bristol. This aims to build off the research conducted, and then destroyed, by Alwyn Ruddock on the Caboto expeditions. See Jones, "Alwyn Ruddock: 'John Cabot and the Discovery of America'." The English role in generating information about Terra nova was considerably complicated by Zuan Caboto's son Sebastian, who served the crown of both England and Castile at different points in his life. See Morison, *The European Discovery of America*; Pope, *The Many Landfalls of John Cabot*.

<sup>211</sup> Every region which later became an important force in the far north Atlantic has laid a claim to predating Caboto's discovery of Terra Nova. Historians and amateur writers from Basque country, Brittany, Normandy, England and Portugal have all argued passionately that their countrymen were fishing for cod off Newfoundland in the early 1490s, the 1480s, even the 1470s. Representative of this are the assertions made by Antonio Oliveira Marques in his detailed history of fifteenth century Portuguese expansion. At various points he claims that the Portuguese reached Terra Nova as early as 1452 (p.86) and that a fishery "on the banks of Terra Nova (*nos bancos da Terra Nova*)" was well established by the 1570s (p.103). Marques, *A expansão quatrocentista*. In her study of Greenland Kirsten Seaver suggests that the Terra Nova cod fisheries were connected to European trade networks by the mid-to-late-fifteenth century. She identifies English merchants, particularly from Bristol, as the main agents in this commerce. In doing so Seaver is largely following the ideas floated by Quinn in his earlier work and provides no substantial new evidence to back up these claims. See: Seaver, *The Frozen Echo: Greenland and the Exploration of North America, Ca. A.D. 1000-1500*. David Quinn has made the argument that Bristol fishermen regularly visited the Terra Nova banks before Caboto. He argued that the 1496-7 expeditions were designed to rediscover their old fishing grounds. This argument has since been rejected by most Bristol scholars. See David Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America*. London,

reality his voyages were soon surpassed by the efforts of competing navigators, who themselves were ultimately eclipsed by the efforts of anonymous fishermen within the space of just a decade.

Substantially more important than Caboto for the emerging European understanding of the northwest Atlantic were a series of voyages undertaken by the Portuguese pilots Gaspar and Miguel Corte-Real on behalf of the crown.<sup>212</sup> After a tentative first voyage in 1499, in 1500 Gaspar and his brother Miguel seem to have reached southern Greenland, Labrador and several parts of Newfoundland. Unlike Caboto the Portuguese navigators explored both the land and shore at length, and even brought back captive Amerindians to Lisbon. Most importantly, the Corte-Real expeditions brought back information about what they ultimately called Terra Nova to what was, at the turn of the sixteenth century, one of the hubs of geographic and cartographic knowledge in the west.<sup>213</sup> The information about the Portuguese voyages were soon transmitted to Italian, German and Dutch mapmakers, and likely spread news of these discoveries through Iberia, France and the Mediterranean. Thus Maggiolo labeled two of the four peninsulas in the northwest Atlantic as Portuguese possessions in 1511. By the mid-sixteenth century, most maps and geographic treatises claimed that it was Corte-Real, and not Caboto, who discovered Terra Nova. The role of the Bristol expeditions was largely forgotten, and has only been recently and painstakingly pieced together by historians.

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1974. If one were to accept their numerous claims, we would have to believe that around 1492 the waters off Newfoundland were filled bow-to-stern with fishing vessels from across Europe. The truth is that there is no hard evidence that European mariners had visited Terra Nova before 1497, and certainly no evidence for sustained commerce. There is in fact reason to suggest the opposite, that the efforts by the Bristol merchants and shortly thereafter the Portuguese Corte-Real brothers genuinely inaugurated a new world for European mariners. Jacques Bernard. "Les debuts de la peche a Terre-Neuve, vus de Bordeaux. 1517-1550: Bilan et perspectives." In *L'Atlantique et ses rivages, 1500-1800*. Bordeaux, 1984. Bernard sums up the evidence from French sources and points to the lack of evidence before 1508 for any voyages to Terra Nova. More importantly, this obsession with primacy is beside the point. If mariners reached Terra Nova before 1497 they failed to transmit their knowledge to others, and certainly failed to develop a commerce of any significant scale.

<sup>212</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). There are in fact very few studies of Corte-Real, and none which aren't also paired to Caboto or Columbus. The collection of documents in Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* includes everything we know about Gaspar Corte-Real and his voyages.

<sup>213</sup> Maria Fernanda Alegria et al., "38• Portuguese Cartography in the Renaissance," (2007). In Woodward, *Cartography in the European Renaissance*.



In the two decades after Caboto and Corte-Real brought back news of the northwest Atlantic there existed a moment where the history of Newfoundland almost went in a very different direction. Between 1497 and 1505 there existed a brief period of small-scale but sustained exploration of the northwest Atlantic by merchants from Bristol and the Azores Islands.<sup>214</sup> (See Appendix A, Table A2) The surviving evidence suggests that yearly voyages to Newfoundland were organized, though their exact purpose and outcome is rarely recorded.<sup>215</sup> Around 1500 the Azorean planter (*lavrador*) and mariner Joao Fernandez entered history when he sighted a rocky coast which became known as Terra de Labrador, technically discovered on a Bristol voyage but forever associated with the Portuguese.<sup>216</sup> Around 1508 the fabulously wealthy Jean Ango, merchant of the Norman port of Dieppe, dispatched a ship to the northwest Atlantic to assess its value as a future investment.<sup>217</sup> It seems that these voyages, from the Azores and from Dieppe, were primarily concerned with the potential of the region as a site of trading, hunting and settlement rather than

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<sup>214</sup> A useful, if now slightly dated, summary can be found in: Kenneth R. Andrews. *Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime enterprise and the genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630*. Cambridge University Press: New York, 1984. Pp. 41-57. It is unfortunately not the purpose of this project to engage in a detailed discussion of these early voyages of exploration. The literature is extensive, the debates are intense, and a proper analysis of the Bristol-Azorean years deserves its own volume. For the best surveys of the early period of exploration at Terra Nova, see: Morison, *The European Discovery of America*; Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630*; Allen, "From Cabot to Cartier: The Early Exploration of Eastern North America, 1497-1543."; Quinn, *North America from Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612*.

<sup>215</sup> All the relevant, surviving documents have been collected and can be found in Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada*. And Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America*. . Vol. I. The Bristolians were pursuing a western trade as one of many commercial opportunities to replace the decline of their older routes to Bordeaux and Iceland, while the settler communities on the Azores were at the forefront of Portuguese Atlantic expansion and keen on pursuing possible opportunities in the newly discovered region of Terra Nova. Mariners and merchants who had cut their teeth plying the south Atlantic and pioneering new settlements and models of expansion now turned their attention to the north. A. R. Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: From Beginnings to 1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Pp.92-97.

<sup>216</sup> Morison, *The European Discovery of America*; Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630*. Both texts give good overviews of these early voyages, though they are increasingly being supplanted by the new discoveries made by the John Cabot Project at the University of Bristol.

<sup>217</sup> Ango's voyages, about which we know little, are treated in : Morison, *The European Discovery of America*. What documents that exist which relate to Ango are found in: Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America*. .Vol. I.

its maritime potential. Despite bringing back various birds, furs and even human beings these expeditions failed to arouse interest in most merchants.<sup>218</sup>

The repeated voyages from Bristol, the Azores, Dieppe and elsewhere generated much geographic knowledge but in economic terms amounted to little. Nonetheless they have captured the imagination of many historians to the present day who cling to a preference in seeing the far north Atlantic from the perspective of the European metropole, moving from one legally sanctioned expedition or settlement to the next.<sup>219</sup> Typical is the history of the French Atlantic by Gilles Havard and Cécile Vidal, which explores the early sixteenth century by tracing repeated exploratory expeditions and colonial attempts in the northwest Atlantic while only briefly touching upon the presence of Breton, Norman and Biscayan fishermen.<sup>220</sup> In part this reflects the sources, which are far easier to work with from this perspective. But it also reflects the opinions of many writers, cartographers, court officials and explorers in the sixteenth century, in particular the long reach of Richard Hakluyt.<sup>221</sup> As a result there is a tendency when historians write about the early history of the northwest Atlantic to frame the narrative around either a sovereign English (following Caboto) or Portuguese (following Corte Real) claim to the region which is subsequently challenged and unraveled by a series of rivals. Fishermen appear as interlopers, followed by Castilian and French explorers, all of whom undermine and finally dismantle the pre-existing system. Although such a viewpoint has been largely rejected by historians of the fishery itself, it remains potent amongst those who study the history of discovery, colonization and cartography in Terra Nova.<sup>222</sup> On the one hand were the navigators, the

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<sup>218</sup> *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America.* .Vol. I. No. 78, 80, 87. Pp.110-119. The items brought back includes hawks, an eagle, “wyldc cattes & popyngays” and three Amerindian men taken to London in 1502.

<sup>219</sup> See for instance: Morison, *The European Discovery of America*; Allen, "From Cabot to Cartier: The Early Exploration of Eastern North America, 1497–1543."; Pringle, "Cabot, Cod and the Colonists."; *marinha Academia de* and Bernardino Cadete, *As Navegacoes Portuguesas No Atlantico E O Descobrimento Da América* (Lisboa: [S.e.], 1994).

<sup>220</sup> Havard and Vidal, *Histoire De L'Amérique Française*.pp.31-55 is devoted to explorers and colonists from Caboto to Cartier. The fishery is discussed briefly pp. 56-58 before the text turns to the fur trade.

<sup>221</sup> Hakluyt and Goldsmid, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation.*

<sup>222</sup> On a challenge to this see: Jacques Bernard. “Les debuts de la peche a Terre-Neuve, vus de Bordeaux. 1517-1550: Bilan et perspectives.” In *L'Atlantique et ses rivages, 1500-1800*. Bordeaux, 1984. Warkentin and Podruchny, *Decentring the Renaissance Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective, 1500-1700*.

collaboration of elite merchants, hired explorers and state officials who sought to establish oceanic routes that could be exploited for commercial and military purposes. On the other were the largely anonymous mariners-turned-fishermen who crossed the Atlantic only to catch and sell codfish. They would produce two very different models for exploiting the northwest Atlantic, but also two different ways of describing it.

This tension between navigators and mariners is also part of the broader problem of how the early Atlantic economy formed. The early sixteenth century was marked by the expansion of pre-existing and extremely complex merchant networks from the Mediterranean and, to an extent, northwest Europe into the Atlantic.<sup>223</sup> From the early fifteenth century onward the groups of mobile and transregional traders which already bound together Mediterranean and Atlantic port cities of Europe began to sink their capital into outfitting vessels for transatlantic commerce, or into new agricultural settlements in the Atlantic islands and Caribbean.<sup>224</sup> These elite merchants represented the only true link between Atlantic littoral, Mediterranean and the new Atlantic exchange systems. The kind of network forged by these merchants were exclusive, politically powerful and lucrative. This process has recently been explored in depth by Heather Dalton, who shows how Bristol merchants began expanding their operations outside of Iberia and Bordeaux to include

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<sup>223</sup> On the early expansion into the Atlantic see: Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus*; Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630*; Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II; Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*; Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, *Os Descobrimentos E a Economia Mundial* (Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 1981); Susanne Lachenicht, *Europeans Engaging the Atlantic : Knowledge and Trade, 1500-1800* (2014); António Henrique R. de Oliveira Marques, *A Expansão Quatrocentista* (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1998); D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America : A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Parry, *The Discovery of the Sea*; M. J. Seymour, *The Transformation of the North Atlantic World, 1492-1763: An Introduction* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Merchant Networks in the Early Modern World* (Aldershot, Great Britain; Brookfield, Vt., USA: Variorum, 1996).

<sup>224</sup> For perspectives on the role of merchant elites in the formation of the Atlantic economy see: Dalton, *Merchants and Explorers : Roger Barlow, Sebastian Cabot, and Networks of Atlantic Exchange 1500-1560*. Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The Canary Islands after the Conquest: The Making of a Colonial Society in the Early Sixteenth Century* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1982); Sacks, *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450 - 1700*. Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation Upon the Ocean Sea Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492-1640*. Campos, "The Atlantic Islands and the Development of Southern Castile at the Turn of the Fifteenth Century."

trade with the new Atlantic settlements.<sup>225</sup> English merchants living in Seville helped facilitate a fifteenth-century wine-wool trade, but in the sixteenth century also began to acquire property and trading rights in Castilian possessions such as the Canaries. On the ground such transregional merchants were increasingly aided by emerging groups of warrior-aristocrats who did much of the actual conquest, colonization and governing. The Corte-Real family were a product of this system, aristocratic settlers of the Azores who later turned to mercantile pursuits. In some cases, such as in much of west Africa, trade posts were more efficient than outright settlement. But where agricultural settlements were practicable it was the matching of merchant capital to the skills and social role of aristocrats that produced permanent colonies in much of the Atlantic.

At the turn of the sixteenth century merchants in western Europe were operating within the framework of monarchies whose ambitions vastly exceeded their capabilities. The crowns of France, England, Scotland, Castile, Aragon and Portugal were all handicapped by the limited abilities of their bureaucracies to raise money and the devolution of political powers to regional and urban centers during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>226</sup> Despite this all six dynastic states aimed to expand both within and without western Europe and the western Mediterranean.<sup>227</sup> In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century the commercial interests of merchants involved in high-level commercial networks overlapped significantly with the interests of several European monarchies.

The expansion of European merchants, settlers and legal claims into the Atlantic, first southward to the islands and West Africa, later west to the Caribbean and the Americas, was made possible by merging

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<sup>225</sup> Dalton, *Merchants and Explorers : Roger Barlow, Sebastian Cabot, and Networks of Atlantic Exchange 1500-1560*.

<sup>226</sup> On sixteenth century states see: Richard Bonney, *The European Dynastic States, 1494-1660* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); J. H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964); Regina Grafe, "Polycentric States: The Spanish Reigns and the 'Failures' of Mercantilism " in *Mercantilism Reimagined : Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and Its Empire*, ed. Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Janice E. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns State-Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>227</sup> Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*.

these different forces. Elite merchants organized and underwrote most of the actual acts of exploration, conquest and settlement that brought Europeans first to the Atlantic islands, then to the Caribbean and beyond. Only they had the capital on hand to make such projects a reality, and the direct financial incentive to see them through. The place of the state in these operations was generally that of granting legal coverage and extensive monopolistic privileges to merchants who organized such expeditions. In the case of the early voyages to Newfoundland, the English and Portuguese crowns provided limited funding for the navigators like Caboto and Corte-Real, while the navigators themselves were given grants and annuities directly from the crown in exchange for their services.<sup>228</sup> By the end of the fifteenth century this model had allowed for the successful colonization of the Atlantic islands and Caribbean, and the creation of permanent trade with West Africa. There was little reason to believe it wouldn't work at Newfoundland.

### 3.2 MADEIRA NOVA?

Although we now think only of New-found-land, the earliest reports to come out of the voyages of Caboto, Corte-Real and the Azoreans spoke of islands rather than land (See Appendix A, Table A1). The very earliest English record related to Caboto in 1497 referred to “the new Isle,” while that same year reports sent to Venice and Milan spoke of “*ixole nova*” and “*insula nova*” respectively.<sup>229</sup> Most of the early English texts refer to the “New found ilondes,” and the Portuguese crown gave extensive powers to anyone who found new islands in what would become Terra Nova. Corte-Real was initially tasked with finding “various islands and mainland (*algumas ilhas e terra firme*)” that lay to the northwest.<sup>230</sup> As John Gilis has

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<sup>228</sup> See texts in: Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America*. Volume I. Much of the new work by the Cabot Project has also illuminated the financing of the early years of exploration. See: Guidi-Bruscoli, "John Cabot and His Italian Financiers\*."; Jones, "The Matthew of Bristol and the Financiers of John Cabot's 1497 Voyage to North America."

<sup>229</sup> Documents from Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* Doc. VI-VII p.12-13

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. Doc. XVII p.32

pointed out, islands held a particularly strong hold on the late fifteenth century imagination of many Europeans, and islands were seen as crucial to the early development of the Atlantic world.<sup>231</sup> Across Europe there was a late medieval obsession with insular spaces amongst European geographers, cartographers and writers. For many European explorers, geographers, merchants and kings the idea that the northwest Atlantic contained islands was of the utmost significance (See Figure 6).



**Figure 6. Detail, 1502 Cantino Atlas.** Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

At the top center is the *Terra del Rey de Portugall*, Land of the King of Portugal. This is an early depiction of the east coast of Newfoundland island. The mapmaker has chosen to represent Newfoundland as an island in the

<sup>231</sup> John R. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind : How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). See also: T. Bentley Duncan, *Atlantic Islands; Madeira, the Azores, and the Cape Verdes in Seventeenth-Century Commerce and Navigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Phillips Jr, "Africa and the Atlantic Islands Meet the Garden of Eden: Christopher Columbus's View of America."; Stephen A Royle, "A Human Geography of Islands," *Geography* (1989).

middle of the north Atlantic, stressing the opportunities afforded by this insular space. This map reflects the early enthusiasm for the presence of islands in the northwest Atlantic.

With the discovery of the *New-found-islands* and the *novas ilhas* to the west it appeared that yet another profitable and insular site of colonization had been discovered. The initial response of European states, merchants, explorers and geographers was to fit the discoveries into a worldview shaped by the Portuguese and Castilian experience in the south Atlantic. As of 1501, the year of the last Corte-Real voyages and the start of the Bristol-Azorean explorations, Europeans had at least a century of experience of navigation, colonization and commerce in the Atlantic basin. Much of this experience had taken place on islands, a fact which would have outsized consequences for the discovery of Newfoundland. In the north, the North Sea islands like the Faroes, Shetland, Iceland and Orkneys had proved their worth as centers of fish, wool and grain production.<sup>232</sup> The most successful overseas colonies as of 1500 had been on the mid-Atlantic Islands, the various archipelagos from the Azores south to Cape Verde.<sup>233</sup> Around 1500 to this could be added the experience of Castile in the Caribbean, which only confirmed the viability of islands as a site of colonization. Newfoundland was to be fashioned into another Madeira, a colony on the south Atlantic model. Only when these efforts failed, and when many Europeans failed to adjust their world-view accordingly, was space opened up for an open commercial fishery.

For merchants and state officials in Portugal, England and Spain in 1500 it seemed as if the successful model of expansion that was proving so successful in the south Atlantic might be used to settle and exploit the islands which had appeared in the northwest Atlantic. As a result, where records have survived, the early attempts to explore and settle in Terra Nova look remarkably like earlier efforts in the south Atlantic. The second Caboto expedition of 1498 was given legal authority by King Henry VII under the terms that

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<sup>232</sup> Bailey, "Faroe, Orkney, Gran Canaria: Case Studies in the Geography of Marginal Europe."; Thomas H McGovern et al., "Northern Islands, Human Error, and Environmental Degradation: A View of Social and Ecological Change in the Medieval North Atlantic," *Human Ecology* 16, no. 3 (1988).

<sup>233</sup> For a discussion of the 15-16<sup>th</sup> century islands in a global Portuguese context see the essays in: Avelino de Freitas de Meneses et al., *O Reino, as Ilhas E O Mar Oceano : Estudos Em Homenagem a Artur Teodoro De Matos* (Lisboa: Centro de História de Além-Mar, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2007).

Caboto was granted “sufficiente auctorite and power” by the crown to take ships to the islands he had discovered so long as Caboto was responsible for “paying for them and every of them as and if we shuld in or for our owen cause paye and noon otherwise.”<sup>234</sup> As had been the case in the Canaries and elsewhere, north Italian money underwrote part of the expedition.<sup>235</sup> This framework reflects the Portuguese and Castilian efforts in the Azores and Canaries, which had relied on encouraging non-state actors to assume the expense of exploration and conquest. Evidence suggests that the Bristol-Azorean voyages were chartered under similar circumstances, and that King Henry expected the consortium to subsume the cost of exploration in exchange for monopoly rights.<sup>236</sup> The Corte-Real family, again from the Azores, was promised similar rights over anything they discovered in service to the crown.<sup>237</sup> For the first decade after Caboto encountered the northwest Atlantic this legal and state-centric paradigm prevailed.

The Iberian crowns explicitly connected their experience in the south Atlantic to the potential exploitation of islands in the northwest. In the year 1499 the King of Portugal granted a series of letters patent to Joao Fernandez, who would go on to discover Labrador. In it the crown rewarded Fernandez for his “effort to seek out and discover at his own expense some islands lying in our territory” by granting him “the governorship of any island or islands, either inhabited or uninhabited, which he may discover and find anew, and this with the same revenues, honours, profits and advantages we have granted to the governors of our islands of Madeira and the others.”<sup>238</sup> In the eyes of the Portuguese crown, Newfoundland was to become the Madeira of the north. When Corte-Real returned from his voyage in 1501, he reported that “he

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<sup>234</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* Doc. XI p.23. Letters Patent to John Cabot. 3 Feb 1498.

<sup>235</sup> Guidi-Bruscoli, "John Cabot and His Italian Financiers\*."

<sup>236</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* Doc. XXV. Pp.70-781. “Letters Patent to Hugh Eliot, Thomas Ashurst of Bristol and John Gonzales and Francis Fernandez of the Azores. 1502.”

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*. Doc. XXVII. Pp.92-98 “Grant and Confirmation to Vasco Annes Corte Real of the Letters Patent to Gaspar Corte Real. 1506.”

<sup>238</sup> Biggar. Pp.31-32. Letters Patent from King Emmanuel to Joao Fernandez, 28 Oct. 1499. “*Sse queira trabalhar de hyr biscar e descobrir algumas ilhas de nossa conquista aa sua custa...a nos praz e lhe prometemos por esta de lhe darmos como de facto daremos a capitania de quallquer Ilha ou Ilhas, asy povoadas como despovoadas, que elle decobrill e achar novamente, e esto com aquellas remdas, homrras, proveitos e imtaresses com que temos dadas as capitanyas das nossas Ilhas da Madeira e das outras...*”



will be able to secure without difficulty and in a short time a very large quantity of timber for making masts and ships' yards, and plenty of men-slaves, fit for every kind of labour, inasmuch as they say that this land is very well populated and full of pines and other excellent woods."<sup>239</sup> What attracted Corte-Real's attention was the presence of terrestrial resources, in this case hardwood trees, and the prospect of slaves. This represents an attempt to fit Newfoundland into the southern Atlantic model of conquest and exploitation which emphasized the exploitation of land, especially on islands. In 1511, when King Ferdinand of Aragon dispatched Juan de Agramonte to explore the northwest Atlantic, his goal was even more explicit: Agramonte would be made governor of the region if "having discovered Terra Nova, a colony should be sent there in our name, as has been done in the said island of Hispaniola."<sup>240</sup> What these different records suggest is that during the first two decades after the discovery of Newfoundland a conscious effort was made by navigators to replicate the successful model of island-based expansion that had been pioneered in the south Atlantic.

The attempts to model the far north Atlantic on the emerging Iberian Atlantic nonetheless swiftly proved untenable. Though several attempts were made to settle the northwest Atlantic, in all cases the region was found to be unsuitable for permanent settlement for environmental reasons.<sup>241</sup> Navigators found the temperatures too cold, the soil too barren and the region too sparsely populated to make settlement practicable. Newfoundland island sits in the midst of a watery world whose climate is predominantly sub-

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<sup>239</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada*. P. 67. Copy of a letter written in Portugal on 18 October 1501, from Pietro Pasqualigo to the Signiory of Venice.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.. P.,109. Warrant of Queen Joanna to Juan de Agramonte covering and agreement with King Ferdinand for a voyage to Newfoundland. "Ytem: *Que descubierta la dicha Tierra Nova, e haziendose en ella poblacion en nuestro nombre, segund se ha hecho en la dicha yslla Espanola, por la presente vos prometo de hos hazer merced, e sy necesario es, desde agora hos la hago, del alguasyladgo mayor de la dicha Tierra Nova para vos e para vuestros herederos e subcesores.*" It is unclear what the *dicha* refers to, as Hispaniola is not mentioned anywhere else in the text.

<sup>241</sup>In the first two decades after Caboto's expedition, it is likely that at least two major efforts were made to settle in the northwest Atlantic, though others may have been attempted. The first may have been part of Caboto's last expedition. The second was the ill-fated voyage by John Rastell in 1517 which ended before it began. Further efforts would take place in the 1520s, 1530s and 1540s. Morison, *The European Discovery of America*; Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630*. Quinn, *North America from Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612*. Jones, "Alwyn Ruddock: 'John Cabot and the Discovery of America'".

arctic, with extreme swings in temperature between seasons and short summers.<sup>242</sup> European colonists throughout the sixteenth century had difficulty overcoming these barriers, and indeed seem to have been deeply confused as to why a region which was on the same latitude as southern France experienced such dreadful winters.<sup>243</sup> Newfoundland was not Madeira, and certainly not Hispanola, Europeans quickly discovered.

More importantly, once settled there was little which colonists could actually produce. This proved to be the fundamental problem which undermined the larger program of integrating Newfoundland into an imperial Atlantic system. There were no resources besides codfish of sufficient value to justify the high cost of establishing colonies in the harsh climate. Fishing did not require fixed settlements, and trade with Amerindians was too intermittent to require permanent trade posts. Without fixed habitations there was in turn no way for states or monopolists to enforce control. Fishermen could not be excluded from the region and the various monopolies granted to Bristolians, Azoreans, the Corte-Real family and others do not seem to have been taken seriously by either the states that granted them or rival merchants. The initial push to incorporate the far north Atlantic into the wider patterns of emerging Atlantic empires failed within two decades.

The most overt attempt to carry over the experience of the south Atlantic to Newfoundland, and its subsequent failure, was amongst the last of the Iberian attempts to acquire the region. According to surviving royal letters and later writers, in 1520 an expedition was organized by “certain noble men” of the city of Viana in far northern Portugal to settle in the northwest Atlantic.<sup>244</sup> Most scholars believe it was in

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<sup>242</sup> White, *A Cold Welcome : The Little Ice Age and Europe's Encounter with North America*. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*; Astrid EJ Ogilvie, "Fisheries, Climate and Sea Ice in Iceland: An Historical Perspective," *Marine resources and human societies in the North Atlantic since 1500* (1997). Wolfgang Behringer, *A Cultural History of Climate* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

<sup>243</sup> On European conceptions of climate and latitude see: Wey Gomez, *The Tropics of Empire : Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies*.

<sup>244</sup> *certos homens fidalgos* A description of the colony can be found in the 1570 text *Tratado das Ilhas Novas e descobrimento dellas outras couzas*. Written by the Portuguese author Francisco de Souza, it offered descriptions of the lands discovered across the Atlantic, including descriptions of Terra Nova and Labrador. Viana do Castelo was one of the major cod-fishing ports in the Kingdom of Portugal during the subsequent century, and its merchant community seems to have had an active interest in Terra Nova from an early date.

fact organized by Joao Alvarez Fagundez, a *cavaleiro* of Viana.<sup>245</sup> The King of Portugal granted extensive letters patent to Fagundez authorizing him to explore and lay claim to whatever islands and lands he could find, and the text of the letters indicates that Fagundez had already sailed in the region.<sup>246</sup> Fagundez was the archetype of those wealthy noblemen and merchants who were to be granted powerful legal powers “in view of his services and of how at his own expense and cost he discovered the said lands and islands and spent therein much of his wealth.”<sup>247</sup> Most importantly, the royal letters patent specify the terms by which Fagundez could exercise power: “which lands and islands we give and grant him [Fagundes] the governorship in the same form and manner that we have granted the governorship of our islands of Madeira and the rest.”<sup>248</sup> As had been the case with Fernandez, 1521 the Portuguese crown was explicitly trying to recreate their success in the south Atlantic islands in the far north.

It appears that Fagundez promptly acted on his grant and tried to establish a settlement in the areas he claimed to have discovered.<sup>249</sup> According to the author of the late-sixteenth century *Tratado das Ilhas Novas* the settlement was founded near Cape Breton.<sup>250</sup> The purpose of the colony is not clear from the existing evidence. The desire to emulate the Atlantic islands would suggest a long-term interest in

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I have used the excerpts and translation printed in Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* Pp.195-197.

<sup>245</sup> Goertz, "João Alvares Fagundes, Capitão De Terra Nova,{ 1521 }."Morrison. *The European Discovery of America.* Pp.228-233.

<sup>246</sup>“Islands and lands...[but] this should not include the first land of Brazil, running from north to south, but instead towards the north (*ilhas e terras...nem sse entendesse esta mercee da primeira terra do Brasill, da banda do norte des contra o sull, sse nam pera o norte*)” Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* pp.127-131.

<sup>247</sup> “*por que asy he nosa mercee, a vendo rrespeyto a sseus sservicos, E como a ssua propria custa e despesa elle descobrio as ditas terras e ilhas, e ffez nisso muto gasto e despesa.*” If *ssua propria custa* included backing by merchants from Viana who would profit from his discoveries, in the Bristol manner, is not clear.

<sup>248</sup> “*asy e pella maneira que teemos dadas as capitancias da nosa ilha da madeira e das outras ilhas*”

<sup>249</sup> The size and composition of the body of settlers is, and likely will remain, unknown. The *Tratado das Ilhas* states that the outbound vessels picked up settlers from the Azores: “And also in this company [Fagundez’s expedition] went several families, from the Islands of the Azores, whom they took with them on their way out, as it known (*e assy nesta companhia forao alguns cazaes, das Ilhas dos Assores, que de caminho tomarao como he notorio*).” Translation amended from Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* P. 197.

<sup>250</sup> “*e isto he no cabo do Britao*”. Although the *Tratado* was written in the 1570s, it does seem that the name Cape Breton was in use by the time of the Portuguese colonial effort, as will be discussed below. The vessels from Viana, in short, chose to land in what was likely the main fishing ground for Bretons in the 1520s.

agriculture, trade and an export-oriented economy, but some scholars have speculated that it was meant as a base for fishing.<sup>251</sup> The fate of the Portuguese settlement is not known, but all evidence suggests that it did not last long. De Souza states that in the years after its founding the settlement was only heard of via contact with the Basques.<sup>252</sup> The *Tratado das Ilhas Novas* is surprisingly silent about what happened, though it gives vague allusion to periodic reports via the Basques and thus the colony's survival. Some clues may come instead from sources in French. In his important sailing rutter called the *Voyage aventureux*, the saintongais mariner Jean Alfonse, writing in the 1540s, remarks: "At one point the Portuguese had wished to settle the lowest part of the land, but the men of the region caused them to fail in their enterprise, and killed all those who came there."<sup>253</sup> The poem by Jean Mallart, based on Alfonse, is even more to the point:

*“Les portugays l’ont quelque foys peuplée*                      The Portuguese tried to settle there  
*Mais        ceulx de l’isle ont ceste gent tuée*                      But those of the island killed them”

The settlement at Cape Breton likely marked the last attempt by the Portuguese crown and merchants to claim a major stake in the developing fishing trade. The failed Portuguese settlement is also indicative of a significant change in north Atlantic commerce. Previous experience in the Azores and Madeira, then in Africa, Brazil and India, had suggested to the Portuguese mercantile and ruling classes that permanent outposts, either trading posts or colonies, were crucial to developing economic interests. In the northwest Atlantic they learned that this was not the case. The Bretons and Basques certainly did not need settlements to out-compete the Portuguese fishermen. Controlling a harbour could be beneficial to fishermen, but was

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<sup>251</sup>This certainly makes sense, given the excellent fishing to be had near Cape Breton. It also is suggested by the choice of settlement on a good harbour. In his study of the north Atlantic, S.E. Morrison claims to have used his mariner's intuition to locate the precise harbour where Fagundez must have settled. Later historians have not evinced the same certainty. Morrison. *The European Discovery of America*. pp.229-230.

<sup>252</sup> These fishermen are described as “The Basques who continue to visit this coast to find and gather the many things which this coast has to offer (*Dos Biscainhos que continuo a dita Costa a biscoar e a resgatar muitas cousas que na dita Costa ha*).” This is evidence that Basques were trading, and perhaps fishing, around Cape Breton in the 1520s and later.

<sup>253</sup> “*Autrefois les Portugalois ont voulu peupler la terre qui est la plus basse, mais les gens du pays les feirent faillir d’entreprise, et tuerent tous ceux qui y estoient venuz.*” Jean Alfonse. *Les Voyages aventureux du capitain Jan Alfonse, Sainctongeois*. Fol.28. BnF. The phrase *gens du pays* likely means the indigenous inhabitants, and Alfonse elsewhere uses the word *gens* rather than *sauvages* to describe indigenous populations. Even so, the ambiguity of *gens du pays* and *ceulx de l’isle* does not entirely rule out the Bretons. After all, Alfonse refers to the region as *la terre des Bretons*.

far from necessary for the successful exploitation of cod grounds. Temporary stations on the shoreline, or even the processing of catch on-board a ship, were efficient options that did not require permanent infrastructure. The Portuguese also found that commerce in the far north Atlantic was becoming too diversified and competitive to be controlled by a few ships or a small settlement. Competitors could simply bypass a Portuguese outpost and fish elsewhere in the ever-widening Terra Nova. Commerce in the far north was becoming something new, which challenged the Iberian experience elsewhere in the Atlantic.

By 1520 the moment when the northwest Atlantic could have fused with the rest of the emerging Atlantic experience had passed. But if Fagundez and his fellow-navigators had found the northwest Atlantic singularly unsuited to their land-centric approaches, the anonymous fishermen who lurked in the background of this story were not dissuaded from visiting the region. Rather, with the collapse of dreams to create an island-based colony a political vacuum was created in the fishery. Into this poured mariners from across the European coast, who soon developed a close bond to the region. In so doing they would develop not merely an alternative economic-political framework for exploiting the northwest Atlantic, but an alternative conceptualization of space and geography which challenged the idea of Newfoundland.

### 3.3 TERRA NOVA

In the sixteenth century records which relate to the fishery direct references to the island of Newfoundland are rare, while descriptions of a wider maritime space abound. The label most often used for this region in the sixteenth century was a variation on the Portuguese phrase for New Land, '*Terra Nova*.'<sup>254</sup> Scholars of the early fishery, in particular those studying Iberian communities, have increasingly

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<sup>254</sup> There is no study on the phrase 'Terra Nova' that considers its origins and role in European maritime history. For a discussion of the term in a French context see: Turgeon, "Codfish, Consumption and Colonization: The Creation of the French Atlantic World During the Sixteenth Century."

come to use the term ‘Terra Nova’ as a substitute for Newfoundland.<sup>255</sup> But we ought to take this one step further. Terra Nova should be understood as something distinct from Newfoundland and its consistent use in the sixteenth century indicates that it was conceived of as a unique geographic space. French *terre-neuve* (often spelled *terre-neufve*), Spanish *tierra nueva* or more commonly *terranova*, Gascon *terre nabe*, and Italian *terranova* were local variants of this term, many of which are still in use.<sup>256</sup> Although Laurier Turgeon has argued that it was the ‘French’ who created the term Terra Nova, the phrase seems to have been used simultaneously in Iberia, the coastal provinces of the Kingdom of France and parts of the western Mediterranean during the first two decades of the sixteenth century.<sup>257</sup> English sources often replaced the familiar “New-found-land” with “Newland,” a direct translation of Terra Nova, and preserved cod was widely known as “Newland Fish” in sixteenth century England.<sup>258</sup>

Understanding the genesis and lineage of Terra Nova is an important step towards recognizing its distinct meaning and usage in the sixteenth century. Because modern romance languages use variants of Terra Nova to denote the island of Newfoundland, and because ‘New Land’ sounds so much like ‘New-found-land,’ most historians have treated Terra Nova as synonymous with Newfoundland. This is to misrepresent how the term was used in the sixteenth century, and to ignore the separate origin of the phrase Terra Nova from the phrase Newfoundland. The use of the phrase Terra Nova originated in Portugal, and the term itself is Portuguese rather than Latin, just after the turn of the sixteenth century. In 1502 the crown

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<sup>255</sup> Barkham, "The Spanish Province of Terranova." Abreu-Ferreira, "Terra Nova through the Iberian Looking Glass: The Portuguese-Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Sixteenth Century."

<sup>256</sup> There was considerable variation in spelling across time and space, but these samples represent the most common spellings used in sixteenth century documents. As will be noted later in this study, when they began sending ships to the transatlantic fishery Dutch merchants either used *Terra Nova* or adapted the French *terre-neufve* for their own records. It was also common before mid-century to pluralize Terra Nova. French documents often referred to *les terres-neufves*. It is difficult to see a clear pattern, however, in when, where and why the plural or the singular was used.

<sup>257</sup> Turgeon, "Codfish, Consumption and Colonization: The Creation of the French Atlantic World During the Sixteenth Century."

<sup>258</sup> In 1582, for instance, an admiralty court case revolved around the shipping of fish by an English merchant in a Norman vessel. The cargo was described as “piscium vocatorum Newland fishe” i.e. “Fish called Newland fish.” HCA File 52, no.120.

of Portugal confirmed the discoveries made by Gaspar Corte-Real, describing them as ‘Terra Nova.’<sup>259</sup> In 1506 a well-known royal decree relates to the taxation of fish brought back from “The fisheries of Terra Nova/*Das pescarias da Terra Nova*” to northern Portugal.<sup>260</sup> By contrast, English sources in the 1490s and 1500s used variants of the term New-found-islands and more rarely New-found-lands to describe the regions visited by Bristol-Azorean voyages. A similar formulation, “the foretold land/*da terra anumciada*,” appears only once in Portuguese sources in 1500 before disappearing.<sup>261</sup> What was originally meant to denote the coast explored by Corte-Real became, by 1506, the standard Portuguese label for the northwest Atlantic.

Thereafter the term Terra Nova spread outward from Portugal. By 1508 a court record in Rouen employed the phrase Terra Nova (*la terre-neufve*), which then appears in Cologne and Rome the same year (*Terra Nova*), Aragon by 1511 (*la dicha Tierra Nova*), Nantes by 1513 (*La Terre-Neusfve*), northern Brittany by 1514 (*la Terre-Neuffve*) and Galicia (*la Tierra Nueva*) by 1517.<sup>262</sup> We can use these records to trace the spread of the term Terra Nova from Portugal through the western Mediterranean and into northern France, before arriving in the ports of the Bay of Biscay (See Figures 7-8). Significantly, mariners from Brittany were likely the main vector for spreading the idea of Terra Nova in northwest Europe. Breton fishermen were involved with the records from 1508 in Rouen, 1511 in Aragon, 1513 and 1514 in Brittany, and 1517 in Bordeaux. Terra Nova seemed to follow Bretons, who were the most active community in developing a commercial cod fishery in the northwest Atlantic. They may have learned the phrase from Portuguese mariners and then adopted it in the first decade of the sixteenth century.<sup>263</sup> From the 1520s it

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<sup>259</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada*. No.XXIV. p.67-70. “Royal Confirmation to Michael Corte Real of the Lands Granted to him by his Brother Gaspar. 1502.”

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.. No.XXVIII. pp.96-97 “A Tax Laid on Newfoundland Cod in Portugal. 1506.”

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.. Doc. XVIII. pp.37-38. “Grant by King Emmanuel to John Martins of Terceira. 1501.”

<sup>262</sup> Rouen, 1508: AD SM. 1B 324. Oct. 21, 1508; de la Morandiere. *Histoire de la Peche Francaise*. Vol. I. p.245; Rome, 1508: See the Ruysch Map; Aragon 1511: *ibid.*. P.,109.; Nantes 1513: AD Loire-Atlantique. B21 fol.15-16.; Galicia 1517: Ménard, *La Pesca Gallega En Terranova, Siglos Xvi-Xviii*. P.417. Bordeaux 1517: Bernard, *Navires Et Gens De Mer À Bordeaux (Vers 1400-Vers 1550)*.

<sup>263</sup> On Breton-Portuguese connections see Touchard, “Le Commerce Maritime Breton À La Fin Du Moyen-Âge.”

was the most common way to describe the northwest Atlantic in all the surviving records. The earliest record directly attesting to a fishing voyage, a 1508 court case from Normandy involving a ship from Brittany, uses a form of the phrase rendered as “*pour ung voyage a la terre neufve.*”<sup>264</sup> This is virtually indistinguishable from how the term was used nearly a century later by notaries in La Rochelle, “*voyage a la terre neufve*”, and Honfleur, “*voiage de la terre neufve.*”<sup>265</sup> Once it became adopted by mariners Terra Nova was used consistently throughout the first century of the fishery.



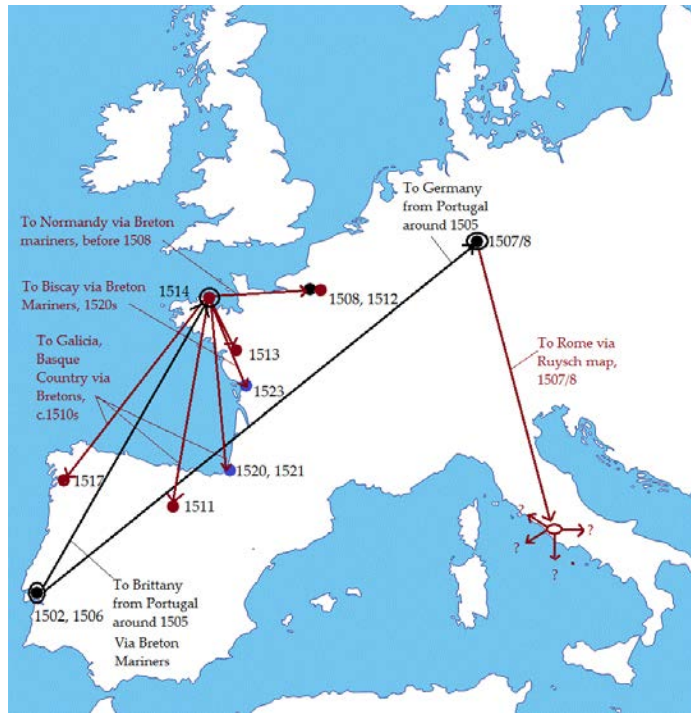
**Figure 7. Spread of Term Terra Nova in early sixteenth century.**

Each date denotes when a record using the term Terra Nova appears in a particular place. See Appendix A, Table A1 for more details. Map by author.

<sup>264</sup> ADSM 1B Parlement de Normandie No. 324. 21 Oct. 1508

<sup>265</sup> ADCM 3E203 notaire Bibeard, 1592; ADCalvados 8E6510 notaires Barne et Robinet, 1598.





**Figure 8. Probable routes by which the term Terra Nova spread in early sixteenth century.**

One line of transmission is from Lisbon to Cologne, where by 1507/8 Johannes Ruysch was using the term Terra Nova on a map which would later be reprinted in Rome. A second line of transmission was likely from Lisbon to northern Brittany via Breton mariners, who then spread the term to northern France, Biscay and northern Iberia.  
Map by author.

By contrast with the popularity of Terra Nova, the use of Newfoundland island as a marker to describe the fisheries was unknown outside of some English writings. Newfoundland island proper did not become significant to commercial activity until the early seventeenth century. Only with the establishment of settlements in Canada and Acadia by the French crown made the English control of island of Newfoundland an important geographical and political counterpoint.<sup>266</sup> Nor was the island always known as Newfoundland. Geographers, cartographers and others made frequent references to the Island of Cod, Island of Bacalaos and even the mysterious Island of Demons well into the later parts of the century.<sup>267</sup> For

<sup>266</sup> Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*; Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660*. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*.

<sup>267</sup> For some examples see: Hayes, "America Discovered: A Historical Atlas of North American Exploration."; Allen, "From Cabot to Cartier: The Early Exploration of Eastern North America, 1497–1543."; Roger Schlesinger and Arthur Stabler, *André Thevet's North America: A Sixteenth-Century View* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014). The earliest reference to the Island of Bacalaos comes from a Castilian document in 1512. Biggar, *The Precursors of*

much of the sixteenth century Europeans weren't certain if Newfoundland was a single island or an archipelago.<sup>268</sup> The idea that the waters of the northwest Atlantic fishery were anchored around a central, large island only became clear in the seventeenth century.

The term Terra Nova appeared most regularly in what might be termed bureaucratic writings, which includes notarial records, port registers, court cases, municipal council records, government interrogations and royal edicts. These texts reflect official statements made by merchants and mariners regarding their operations on the Atlantic. The consistent presence of the name Terra Nova in notarial entries, court proceedings, city council debates, port records and personal writings across the sixteenth century strongly indicates that this was the term used on a daily basis by mariners who visited the region. This was the term used, for instance, in the testimony of Basque mariners during an official inquiry made in Guipuzcoa in 1542, and a second in 1554.<sup>269</sup> In 1542 the mariner Robert Lefant could confidently tell a scribe that he had been hired to “to go to Terra Nova to fish for cod/*yban para Terra Noba a pescar bacallaos.*” In 1559 an anonymous Breton merchant jotted down in a small notebook reserved for his accounts: “The names of the mariners for my ship for Terra Nova/*les noms des mariniers por mon navire pour terre neuffve.*”<sup>270</sup> The record was meant for his own use, and it is a rare case when we can hear the voice of someone directly

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*Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada.* P. 115 “...*sobra la navegacion de las Indias e Isla de los Bacallaos*”

<sup>268</sup> See for instance the 1556 map by of the northwest Atlantic, Map 6 below. See also the map of ‘Terra Nova’ made to accompany André Thevet’s description of the Americas in the *Grand Insulaire*, which included a wide variety of islands. Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*.p. xlix. Map 4.

<sup>269</sup> The 1542 document is based on the transcripts, published in both Spanish and English, found in Biggar, *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur De Roberval.* No.212. pp. 447-467. For the 1554 raid the testimonies of the participant Guipuzcoans which were recorded by local officials, and which have survived intact. One copy can be found in the collection Vargas Ponce at the Madrid Naval Museum (Co. Vargas-Ponce, Book 1, no.18). The original can be found in the Archivo Provincial de Guipuzcoa, JD IM/2/12/11. For this project I have used two transcripts. The first is a transcript made by the French historians Edouard Ducéré in his work *Les Corsaires sous l'Ancien Régime*. (Appendice No.1, pp.333-344). The second is the more complete and updated transcript by J. Ignacio Tellechea Idigoras in his *Corsarios Guipuzcoanos en Terranova, 1552-1555*. This latter includes both the entire testimony and a brief introduction explaining the document’s origins. A partial English translation is found in Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches.*

<sup>270</sup> Abreu-Ferreira, "Terra Nova through the Iberian Looking Glass: The Portuguese-Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Sixteenth Century."; "C'est Les Noms Des Marins De Mon Naffvire Pour Terre-Neuve Pour Lan 1559," (Plouer: Archives départementales de Cotes-Darmor, 1559).

connected to the fishery at its height. This unusual personal note has fortunately survived, and indicates that the merchant thought of himself as sending ships to a place called Terra Nova.

Various sixteenth century writers observed that the term Terra Nova was used most extensively by the mariners who actively worked at Terra Nova. In the 1550s the geographer André Thevet described “the country which is vulgarly known as Terra Nova, which from the time of its discovery until today has borne and still bears this name.”<sup>271</sup> Thevet frequently insisted that his own writing was based on interviews with mariners, especially Bretons.<sup>272</sup> In the 1570s Anthony Parkhurst described the fishery at Newfoundland in a famous letter to Richard Hakluyt, carefully noting that it was also called Terra Nova.<sup>273</sup> His text described “the sundry navies that come to Newfoundland, or Terra nova, for fish,” implying that while geographers such as Hakluyt might know it as Newfoundland, most English mariners would be familiar with Terra Nova. In practical terms mariners understood themselves as regularly visiting neither Canada nor Newfoundland, but Terra Nova.

The way in which Terra Nova entered Dutch at the end of the sixteenth century can tell us much about how it was used and how it spread. By the end of the sixteenth century extensive knowledge of the northwest Atlantic had come to the Low Countries through geographic writings and maps, introducing the geo-cartographic concept of space.<sup>274</sup> Dutch cartographers such as Mercator followed Mediterranean practice in labelling the region as *Bacalaos*, and using various labels such as New France, derived from early voyages of exploration. Yet when Dutch merchants and mariners became involved with the fishery themselves, they used either the Portuguese Terra Nova or the French term *Terre-Neuve* (or even a

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<sup>271</sup> Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*.P.54

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. Introduction.

<sup>273</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America*. . Vol.IV, p.7.

<sup>274</sup> See: J. Braat, "Dutch Activities in the North and the Arctic During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Arctic* 37, no. 4 (1984); Jaap Jacobs, "Early Dutch Explorations in North America," *Journal of Early American History* 3, no. 1 (2013); Emmer, Den Heijer, and Sicking, *Atlantisch Avontuur. De Lage Landen, Frankrijk En De Expansie Naar Het Westen, 1500-1800*.

combination of the two) in their documents.<sup>275</sup> The reason is that when merchants from Holland began outfitting vessels for the fishery in the 1590s, they drew heavily on the experience of mariners from other parts of the European littoral. Dutch merchants purchased fish directly from West Country and Norman fishermen, and hired Basque whalers by the early seventeenth century.<sup>276</sup> Dutch merchants and notaries seem to have copied the vocabulary of the mariners with whom they worked directly, rather than that of writers and cartographers in the Low Countries. That this process resulted in the adoption of Terra Nova by the Dutch language indicates that it was the most common way non-Dutch mariners described the northwest Atlantic, and gives an idea of how the term may have spread earlier in the century. We know, for instance, that in 1618 the Dutch mariner David de Vries began a lifetime of voyages and adventures by piloting his first ship across the Atlantic. In the future de Vries would find himself sailing to the Levant, New Netherland, Guyana and even the East Indies. But for the first voyage the young David de Vries chose to sail to “Terra Nova,” there to purchase codfish which could be resold in the Mediterranean.<sup>277</sup> In so doing he was following the same route as the *Jacquette* a full century before, and made landfall off of what Maggiolo had labeled *Terra de Pescaria*. His choice of Terra Nova to describe his destination reflects the fact that de Vries was raised in La Rochelle and had spent time in western England, both centers of the fishery. Once again the language and ideas of largely anonymous mariners found themselves in print, replacing alternative labels for the northwest Atlantic.

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<sup>275</sup> See the notarial archives in the Stadsarchief Amsterdam. Most of these are available as part of the Simon Hart collection, and several are discussed in Simon Hart, *The Prehistory of the New Netherland Company: Amsterdam Notarial Records of the First Dutch Voyages to the Hudson* (City of Amsterdam Press, 1959). On Oct. 10, 1596 for instance the ship *De Zeeridder* departed Amsterdam for a voyage to ‘Terra Neuf.’ Stadsarchief Amsterdam. Notarial Archief. 75/99-101.

<sup>276</sup> On Dutch interaction with the fishery see: Maarten Heerlien, "Van Holland Naar Cupidos Koe: Hollandse Newfoundlandhandel in De Context Van De Internationale Kabeljauwvisserij Bij Newfoundland in De Zestiende En De Zeventiende Eeuw" (2005); Braat, "Dutch Activities in the North and the Arctic During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries."; Dicky Glerum-Laurentius, "A History of Dutch Activity in the Newfoundland Fish Trade from About 1590 Till About 1680" (1960); Cornelis de Jong, *Geschiedenis Van De Oude Nederlandse Walvisvaart : Deel 1-3* (Pretoria 1972).

<sup>277</sup> David de Vries, ed. *Korte Historiae Ende Journaels Aenteyckeninge Van Verscheyden Voyagiens in De Vier Deelen Des Wereldts-Ronde, Als Europa, Africa, Asia Ende Amerika Gedaen Door D.D.P. De Vries ... Uitgegeven Door Dr. H.T. Colenbrander. Met Portret, 2 Kaarten En 18 Platen* (Pp. xlv. 302. 1911: 1655).

### 3.4 TERRA NOVA AS A GEOGRAPHICAL DISTINCTION

In the sixteenth century the phrase Terra Nova was used by mariners to describe and divide space in the northwest Atlantic. It served as the label for what mariners understood to be a specific region, a specific place. This is in contrast to more nebulous markers of space in the early Atlantic such as Florida, Norumbega or Peru which had shifting meanings and scopes across the sixteenth century. As such Terra Nova was treated as the equivalent to Brazil, Peru, New Spain or the Barbary Coast as a single geographic unit with political overtones. This was made explicitly clear in 1539 by an anonymous mariner from Dieppe, who wrote an account of voyages “to Terra Nova from the West Indies, called New France...to the arctic pole and to the land of Brazil, Guinea, Isle of San Lorenzo and that of Sumatra.”<sup>278</sup> For this mariner at least Terra Nova was thought of as a discrete destination alongside the West Indies, Brazil, Guinea or Sumatra. The term was typically written without any geographic modifiers: French documents stated that ships could make a voyage *a la terre-neufve*, Spanish documents *a la terranova*. It was not therefore described as ‘the land (*pays, pais, pars*) of Terra Nova,’ or ‘Terra Nova part of Canada/America.’

The identity of Terra Nova as a distinct geographic space was complicated by the environmental conditions of the far north Atlantic. The fishery developed in some of the harshest climates and geography in the Atlantic basin, one defined by violent swings in temperature. Fishing operations were constrained by seasonal changes in temperature, sea ice and the movement of fish. A cold summer season might mean a smaller Terra Nova, as ice and shrinking fish stocks constrained fishing boats, and vice versa. Over the sixteenth century major shifts occurred. By the late sixteenth century whalers were hunting in the waters of the St. Lawrence River, whereas in the 1540s they had been concentrated off the south coast of Labrador. By the turn of the seventeenth century more and more ships were operating on the Grand Banks, which

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<sup>278</sup> “*alla Terra Nuova dell’Indie occidental, chiamata la Nuova Francia, da Gradi 40 fino a gradi 47 sotto il polo artico, e sopra la terra del Brasil, Guinea, isola di San Lorenzo e quella di Summatra.*” Found in: Giovanni Battista Ramusio, R. A. Skelton, and George Bruner Parks, *Navigazioni Et Viaggi* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1967).

became a new center of gravity in Terra Nova. As local sources of fresh water, timber, game and seabirds were depleted by mariners, fishing operations might shift to harbours that had more resources. Terra Nova was therefore a specific geographic region, but one with highly fluid boundaries which could expand or contract according to the season or a given mariner's perspective.

Although we can identify markers used to delineate parts of Terra Nova in the minds of mariners, the exact boundaries of Terra Nova were intentionally nebulous and ill-defined. In a broad sense, Terra Nova seems to have encompassed what is today the Grand Banks, the coast of the island of Newfoundland, southern Labrador, and the Gulf of St. Lawrence.<sup>279</sup> There were no major physical features to separate the waters of Terra Nova from the rest of the northwest Atlantic, so the outline of Terra Nova remained a fluid one. If the core area of the Grand Banks, Gulf of St. Lawrence and Scotian Shelf were consistent in the sixteenth century, the outer fringes were never described by mariners. (See Figure 9)

The shape and outline of Terra Nova existed in the minds of mariners, and they were loath to commit their thoughts to paper. This was likely the deliberate consequence of a sociological feature of fishing communities, the 'secrecy' of fishermen.<sup>280</sup> Fishing can often be a zero-sum game, given the finite amount of marine biomass present on a given fishing ground, and this can produce intense competition between different groups trying to exploit the same resources. The result is a long history amongst global fishermen of attempting to hide information about fishing grounds, or to intentionally deceive competitors, so as to gain advantage. To this might be added the tendency of coastal populations in most sixteenth-century

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<sup>279</sup> This geographic range has been determined from comparing the use of Terra Nova in notarial records, court cases and city council records across the sixteenth century. This study relies for much of its information on notarial records from the following archives: Archives départementales de Charente-Maritime (La Rochelle), AD Seine-Maritime (Rouen, Le Havre, Jumièges, Fécamp, Dieppe), AD Calvados (Honfleur), AD Loire-Atlantique (Le Croisic), AD Gironde, (Bordeaux), Stadsarchief van Amsterdam, Westvries Archief (Hoorn, Enkhuizen). It further uses material from the: Archives municipales de Saint-Malo, Rouen, Le Havre, La Rochelle, Bayonne, Ciboure, Saint Jean-de-Luz and Biarritz; the British Library; and the National Archief of the Netherlands.

<sup>280</sup> Bror Olsen and Trond Thuen, "Secret Places: On the Management of Knowledge and Information About Landscape and Yields in Northern Norway," *Human ecology* 41, no. 2 (2013); Trevor A Branch et al., "Fleet Dynamics and Fishermen Behavior: Lessons for Fisheries Managers," *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* 63, no. 7 (2006); James M Acheson, "Anthropology of Fishing," *Annual review of anthropology* (1981).

European monarchies to evade state inquiry and deliberately hide their business.<sup>281</sup> Almost all of the early records related to Terra Nova involve attempts by fishermen to avoid paying taxes or report their voyages.<sup>282</sup> An important caveat should be noted, however: Fishermen are typically protective of very specific sites, rather than a fishery in general. Where fishermen kept knowledge from one another it tended to be highly localized, focusing on particular harbours or banks. Fishermen were willing to admit to port officials and notaries that they were bound to Terra Nova, but were loath to give more specific information that might allow their behavior to be tracked or which could be exploited by competitors. Thus we know that Terra Nova existed, but cannot always see its precise dimensions in the written records.

If they did not clearly delineate its limits, mariners did leave records about where in Terra nova they visited. Terra Nova certainly included the whaling grounds of southern Labrador in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, known to Basques as *La Gran Baya*.<sup>283</sup> This was one of the most active places for fishing and whaling in the mid-sixteenth century. By the late sixteenth century Basque whalers going to Terra Nova may have ventured into the St. Lawrence River.<sup>284</sup> Beginning in the late sixteenth century some notaries in Biscay and Normandy clarified where their fishermen were headed with an important emendation: “Terra

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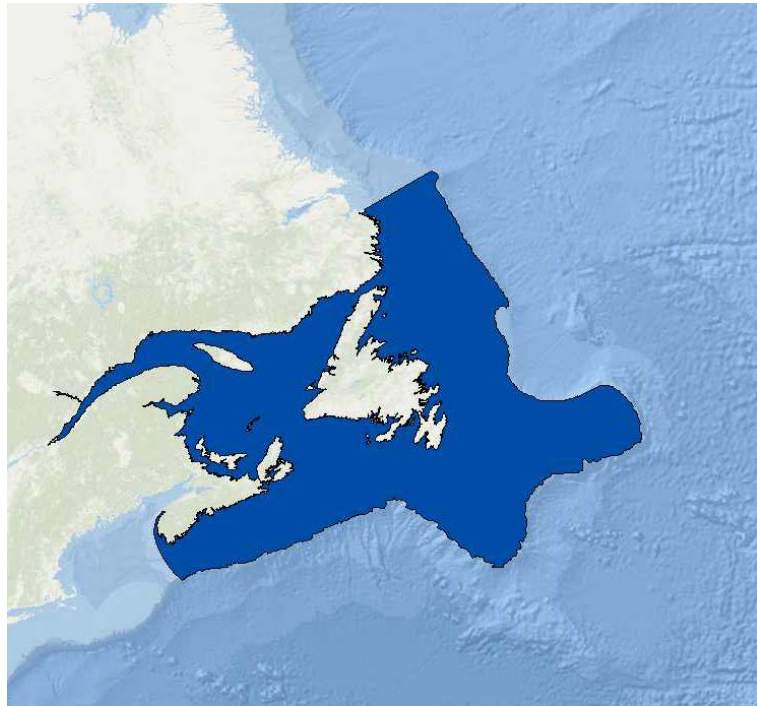
<sup>281</sup> For a some aspects of this problem see: Mark G Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740* (UNC Press Books, 2015); Maria Fusaro et al., *Law, Labour, and Empire : Comparative Perspectives on Seafarers, C. 1500-1800* (2015); Marcus Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail* (2014); Grafe, "Polycentric States: The Spanish Reigns and the 'Failures' of Mercantilism ". This also draws on examples from East and Southeast Asia, such as: Antony, *Like Froth Floating on the Sea : The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late Imperial South China*; Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed an Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*.

<sup>282</sup> For instance, one of the earliest records from 1514 involves an abbey complaining about the local fishermen who were visiting “*la Terre-Neuffve*” without paying their taxes. ADCA H 69. A transcript can be found in: *Precursors Biggar, The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada.* pp.118-123; Translation in: Quinn. *New American Worlds. Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America.* . Vol. IV. P.87. In this case the tax in question was 18 *deniers*, a relatively small sum. Another case from 1524 in the Norman town of St.-Waast involved a debate about whether or not fishermen at Terra Nova had to pay the normal rate for the tithe on codfish. ADSM 1B Parlement de Normandie, no. 388. Dec 23, 1524.

<sup>283</sup> For *La Gran Baya* see: Barkham, "A Note on the Strait of Belle Isle During the Period of Basque Contact with Indians and Inuit."; James A. Tuck and Robert Grenier, *Red Bay, Labrador: World Whaling Capital A.D. 1550-1600* (St. John's, Nfld.: Atlantic Archaeology, 1989).

<sup>284</sup> Barkham, "The Basque Whaling Establishments in Labrador 1536-1632 - a Summary."; Denis Laborde and Laurier Turgeon, "Le Parc De L'aventure Basque En Amérique," *Ethnologie française* (1999).

Nova on the Bank (*terre neufve sur le banc*).<sup>285</sup> The text indicates that the space of Terra Nova included the vast offshore fishing grounds which we would today call the Grand Banks. In the early seventeenth century some contracts went even farther, specifying “On the Bank, Banquereau or Sable Island (*sur le banc, banquereau ou lisle de sable*).”<sup>286</sup> Sable Island is a small, sandy islet a hundred miles east of what is today Nova Scotia and the Banquereau is an offshore coastal shelf near Cape Breton.<sup>287</sup> This implies then that the concept of Terra Nova eventually stretched far south and southeast to include much of the modern maritime provinces of Canada. But beyond these specific sites of fish production, for the most part mariners were content to state merely that they went to a large, watery place called Terra Nova each year.



**Figure 9. An approximate reconstruction of Terra Nova in the early sixteenth century. Map by author.**

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<sup>285</sup> See for example: In March 1592 the vessel *La Marie*, based in La Tremblade in Saintonge, departed La Rochelle for Terra Nova. It was to “*faicte un voyage a la Terre Neufve a la pesche des moulués sur le banc*/make a voyage to Terra Nova to fish for cod on the bank.” ADCM 3E 203 Notaire Bibearde. Fol.89r. The ship returned to port the that September.

<sup>286</sup> See for instance ADCM 3E221 notaire Cousseau. Fol. 66v. On April 18, 1620 the two ships *Marie* and *Jacques* from La Rochelle left for a voyage “*de terre-neufve sur le banc banquereau ou lisle de sable*.”

<sup>287</sup> Marq De Villiers and Sheila Hirtle, *Sable Island: The Strange Origins and Curious History of a Dune Adrift in the Atlantic* (New York: Walker & Co., 2004).



Despite the intentional vagueness of Terra Nova, in written records many mariners seem to have had a consistent conception of what Terra Nova was and was not. Mariners did not consider Terra Nova to be part of the continent of North America, and it was not the *Terre Firma* which was so important to sixteenth century colonial ventures. The New Land was, in a sense, not part of the New World. The clearest distinction in surviving records was that between Terra Nova and Canada, a division that emerged in mid-century and hardens as the sixteenth century progressed. The term Canada, often modified as *pays du Canada*, was generally reserved for records related to trading voyages and settlements to lands lying along the St. Lawrence River.<sup>288</sup> This distinction between Terra Nova and Canada is found in the few surviving accounts by mariners who worked the fishery at Newfoundland. In the notarial archives of La Rochelle and Rouen, but the late sixteenth century records refer separately to voyages to Terra Nova and those to Canada.<sup>289</sup> The same is true of the city council records of Saint Malo, which refer to Canada when discussing the fur trade and Terra Nova when discussing the fishery.<sup>290</sup> The fish-filled waters of Terra Nova were in opposition to the fertile river valley of Canada, which the poet Jean Mallart described lyrically as “*Rivieres, portz et terres biens fertiles/et en ce lieu est mesme bonnes villes* (Rivers, ports and very fertile lands/and in this realm are also fine towns).”<sup>291</sup> Terra Nova was never described in such favourable terms. A similar distinction was made between Terra Nova and what was variously called Acadia or Norumbega. Jean Alfonse, the mariners who later wrote a major navigational treatise on the north Atlantic, carefully

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<sup>288</sup> An exception is a letter from England in 1562 which refers to Norman ships “being put in readiness for a voyage to Canada, where yearly the French fish.” CSP. Eliz. For. Vol. 4 1561-2. No. 833. Throckmorton to the Queen. Jan 24, 1562. The first references in French records to fishing in ‘Canada’ come from Honfleur, but all date to the early seventeenth century.

<sup>289</sup> See the examples in Robert Le Blant and Marcel Delafosse, “Les Rochelais Dans La Vallée Du Saint-Laurent (1599-1618),” *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 10, no. 3 (1956). See a discussion in E. Gosselin and Charles de Beaurepaire, *Documents Authentiques Et Inédits Pour Servir É L'histoire De La Marine Normande Et Du Commerce Rouennais Pendant Les Xvie Et Xviiè Siècles* (Rouen: Impr. de H. Boissel, 1876); Musset, *Les Rochelais À Terre-Neuve, 1500-1789*.

<sup>290</sup> See: Archives municipales de Saint Malo. BB11. There are several entries for the early seventeenth century which discuss matters in ‘Canada,’ primarily in regard to the fur trade. See for instance fol45, Nov. 24, 1608, “*pour Canada*,” a report on a trip to Canada. These are treated as separate from the problem of a war with the ‘*sauvages*’ in Terra Nova attacking fishermen. The city council records of La Rochelle make a similar distinction.

<sup>291</sup> Jehan Mallart, “Description De Tous Les Portz De Mer De L’univers,” (Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1550s). Fol. 41 r-v.

distinguished between the two.<sup>292</sup> André Thevet wrote separately about Canada on the one hand and Terra Nova on the other in his many essays, even as he acknowledged their close proximity.<sup>293</sup> Labrador, considered a separate realm entirely by cartographers, was a core part of Terra Nova. Basque mariners worked along the south coast of Labrador for decades, and recorded that they were still in Terra Nova.<sup>294</sup>

The most difficult distinction to evaluate was that between Terra Nova and Newfoundland island. Part of this is that for much of the sixteenth century it was unclear to Europeans if Newfoundland was a single island or an archipelago. A chain of islands fit better with the maritime construction of Terra Nova, and only slowly did cartographers and mariners come around to the idea that a single large island sat in the middle of the northwest Atlantic. The concept of Terra Nova certainly encompassed the coastline and harbours of Newfoundland island, which were crucial to the fishery. We know that mariners had a detailed and intimate knowledge of the coastline and that many modern place-names in Newfoundland derive from the ways in which fishermen described what they found.<sup>295</sup> But mariners had little interaction with Newfoundland beyond the shoreline, and most of the interior of the island remained *terra incognita* until the nineteenth century. Only with the foundation of an English colony in 1610 did the island itself begin to play a significant role in the commercial history of Terra Nova. Terra Nova ended at the beaches of Newfoundland, but the island itself was external to the fishery and thus the idea of Terra Nova.

This implicit geographic distinction and barrier between Terra Nova and the continent underlay a distinction in the European experience in North America. The interior was for permanent settlements, agriculture and trade- both for Europeans and Amerindians. Only in the long-run would this produce the permanent settlements of Acadia, Newfoundland, New France and New England. With them came new

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<sup>292</sup> Alfonse, "Les Voyages Auantureux Dv Capitaine Ian Alfonse, Sainctongois Auec Priuilege Du Roy."

<sup>293</sup> See the collection of three separate works in Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*.

<sup>294</sup> Canada Parks et al., *The Underwater Archaeology of Red Bay: Basque Shipbuilding and Whaling in the 16th Century* ([Ottawa]: Parks Canada, 2007); Tuck and Grenier, *Red Bay, Labrador: World Whaling Capital A.D. 1550-1600*.

<sup>295</sup> Barkham, *The Basque Coast of Newfoundland*; Michael M Barkham, "New Documents Concerning the French Basque Pilot, Martin De Hoyarsabal, Author of the First Detailed Rutter for the" New Found Land"(1579)," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005).

systems of political control, in the form of territorial claims and efforts to exclude interlopers. Terra Nova by contrast was intermittent, fluid and open to all. It was also, during the summer, home to far more Europeans and Amerindians, and produced far more value, than did the interior. Although separated from the continent of North America, Terra Nova was the most significant space for European interaction with the northwest Atlantic. The waters of Terra Nova attracted more visitors and generated far more wealth than any other part of North America in the sixteenth century. Well into the sixteenth century the geography and ecology of mainland North America were poorly understood by cartographer and mariners alike, whereas every year more was learned about Terra Nova by visiting fishermen. Only in the 1520s had voyages by Verrazano, Gomez and Rut given shape to the long coast of north America.<sup>296</sup> Yet most European experiences stopped at the shoreline of North America, and few ventured inland after Cartier. Terra Nova was the most well-understood part of the northwest Atlantic, and this abundance of knowledge reinforced the geographic distinctiveness of the region.

The use of Terra Nova by mariners in the sixteenth century was ultimately an exercise in exclusion. On the one hand, it denied the territorial claims of various European monarchies in the northwest Atlantic. The failure of Nova Madeira and the inability of European states and explorers to adapt to the environmental reality of the northwest Atlantic inadvertently gave rise to the creation of Terra Nova. Mariners and small merchants pursued a more flexible and suitable system of seasonal fishing which brought with it a new conception of space. The sixteenth century cod fisheries at Terra Nova would be the long-term consequence of this initial period of uncertainty and competition. The imprecise vision of Terra Nova propagated by fishermen defied attempts to impose boundaries and was a fundamentally open space. There could be no Land of the King of Portugal in Terra Nova, no New France, and here the language of mariners proved more powerful than the proclamations of kings. On the other hand, the use of Terra Nova also denied the existence of pre-existing indigenous concepts of space in the region. The geographic knowledge and territorial claims of the Beothuk, Mi'kmaq, Innu and Inuit were all erased through the imposition of Terra

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<sup>296</sup> Morison, *The European Discovery of America*.

Nova. It is telling that today we know very little about how indigenous populations defined the space in which they lived, so thorough was the triumph of the idea of Terra Nova. In the sixteenth century European mariners were able to impose their will on how space was defined in the northwest Atlantic.

It is important for modern historians to read the sixteenth century sources through the lens of Terra Nova, rather than using the geographic terminology of either the colonial period or the modern world. It is possible today to map the ecological divisions within Terra Nova, both on land and under the sea, and to draw biological distinctions between the waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the Grand Banks and the Scotian Shelf.<sup>297</sup> It is also well understood that there are certain geological and biological connections between Terra Nova and other parts of the far north Atlantic, in particular Greenland, Iceland and the North Sea. None of these would have been clear to sixteenth century mariners, who seem to have drawn no distinctions between different parts of Terra Nova. Modern Terra Nova is divided between four Canadian provinces and one French territory, and touches upon three major international boundaries (Canada-US, Canada-Greenland, Canada-France).<sup>298</sup> These political boundaries reinforce geographic divisions in a way that would not have been clear in the sixteenth century (for instance the distinction between southern Labrador and Newfoundland, until recently parts of two separate countries, does not seem to have been made by fishermen). Sixteenth century mariners tended to frame Terra Nova as a homogenous space rather than one marked by internal divisions.

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<sup>297</sup> Kenneth Sherman, "The Large Marine Ecosystem Concept: Research and Management Strategy for Living Marine Resources," *Ecological Applications* 1, no. 4 (1991); Kenneth Sherman and Hein Rune Skjoldal, *Large Marine Ecosystems of the North Atlantic: Changing States and Sustainability* (Amsterdam; Boston: Elsevier, 2002).

<sup>298</sup> Until 1949 this would have been four boundaries, as Newfoundland was still a colony of the United Kingdom. The French presence is Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, which is a French overseas territory.

### 3.5 TERRA NOVA AS A MARITIME/TERRESTRIAL DISTINCTION

The distinction between Terra Nova and North America was significant not just as a geographic but as a conceptual one. Terra Nova described the waters around a *Terra Firma*, the continent of North America proper. There was no clear physical reason why Terra Nova should include all the waters around Acadia and Newfoundland, but not necessarily the land. Nor was it clear why Terra Nova was separate from Canada when the two were so closely linked by the St. Lawrence River and Gulf of St. Lawrence. Rather, Terra Nova was defined by the economic and social features of the region, which encouraged mariners to see the fish-producing waters around Newfoundland island as something unique. Spatial identity was shaped by ecological and economic reality. For mariners, the use of Terra Nova by mariners in the sixteenth century was not meant merely to enforce a spatial distinction between different parts of North America. It was also used to articulate a conceptual distinction between Land and Sea. Terra Nova, as used by mariners, referred to a distinctly maritime space and was associated only with the exploitation of marine resources.

The core of the maritime identity of Terra Nova was the overriding allure of fish and whales, and the disinterest by Europeans in anything else. Most bureaucratic texts from the sixteenth century pair the phrase Terra Nova with a maritime action. The most usual formulation in notarial records from Biscay, Brittany and Normandy was ‘to travel to Terra Nova to fish (*voyage de terre neufve a la pesche*),’ ‘to Terra Nova in the fishery (*aux terres neufves en la pescherie*) or some variant therein.<sup>299</sup> As early as 1506 Portuguese records were referring to ‘the fisheries of Terra Nova/*das pesquerias da Terra Nova.*’ An English map from the late 1530s boldly labelled the entire coast of Terra Nova ‘The New fonde londe quhar [where] men goeth a fisching.’<sup>300</sup> Every record which uses the term Terra Nova during the formative period 1505-1530

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<sup>299</sup> AM Bayonne AA 3 fol.33 This phrase was ubiquitous in the *obligation, avittaillement* and *congé* contracts which form the bulk of records in the notarial and city council registers. Many contracts specified *a la pesche de mollue/morue*, and even the method of preservation. See: Turgeon, "Pour Redécouvrir Notre 16e Siècle: Les Pêches À Terre-Neuve D’après Les Archives Notariales De Bordeaux."; Bernard, *Navires Et Gens De Mer À Bordeaux (Vers 1400-Vers 1550)*.

<sup>300</sup> British Library. Royal MS 20 E IX. Map by Jean Rotz.

is directly connected to the fishery. The term Terra Nova was therefore functionally inseparable from the act of fishing, and as a consequence became defined by the water which made this economic activity a possibility. Harvestable marine resources- codfish, whales, seabirds, etc.- were the main draw for European visitors.<sup>301</sup> As Terra Nova was valued primarily for its maritime commodities, Europeans thought of it in primarily maritime terms. This meant that the region was both functionally and conceptually centered on salt-water. Terra Nova became a place fit only for boats and useful only as a source of marine protein for the European masses.

The significance of water in Terra Nova was not lost on observers. In his description of the north Atlantic, based on voyages during the 1540s, Jean Alfonse wrote little about Terra nova that wasn't directly connected to the ocean and shore, reserving praise for its harbours and shore, not its potential as a terrestrial colony.<sup>302</sup> In the 1580s André Thevet described Terra Nova as “very northern and maritime/*fort Septentrionale et maritime*.”<sup>303</sup> Earlier he described the region as “completely maritime.”<sup>304</sup>

Few regions in the sixteenth century Atlantic world were so thoroughly defined by water and marine life, while still attracting European commercial interests, as Terra Nova. As significant as water was for communications in the Caribbean, for instance, it was still the islands themselves which generated value for merchants and states. The commercial fisheries in Morocco and northwest Africa, active since the fifteenth century, were only one part of a wider system of colonies, trade outposts posts and slaving networks that marked the European presence in Atlantic Africa. All subsequent efforts to colonize and exploit northeast North America- the settlements in New France, Acadia, Newfoundland island and New England- were organized around control of land and terrestrial resources. Terra Nova was further unusual in its intermittent nature: few other parts of the Atlantic world effectively disappeared for half the year.

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<sup>301</sup> Peter E Pope, "Early Migratory Fishermen and Newfoundland's Seabird Colonies," *Journal of the North Atlantic* 1, no. sp1 (2009); J. J. Heymans and T. J. Pitcher, "A Picasso-Esque View of the Marine Ecosystem of Newfoundland and Southern Labrador: Models for the Time Periods 1450 and 1900," *Ecosystem models of Newfoundland for the time periods* 1985 (1995).

<sup>302</sup> Alfonse, "Les Voyages Auantureux Dv Capitaine Ian Alfonse, Saintongeois Auec Priuilege Du Roy."

<sup>303</sup> Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*. p.228.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.* p. 54

There were no permanent settlements, either for European or First Nations, in Newfoundland or its surrounding coasts. As it functioned in the sixteenth century Terra Nova may have been the only truly maritime part of the emerging Atlantic world.

The great irony of the term Terra Nova was that it described a place which was neither Land nor New. It was in fact deliberately reserved for a maritime space which most closely resembled Europe rather than the rest of the Atlantic world. The waters of Terra Nova and the innumerable harbours, shoals, banks and beaches they created were familiar to mariners who came from the coasts of northwest Europe. As Chapter One has noted, the ecology, climate and geology of Terra Nova was extremely similar to northwest and northern Europe, making it the part of North America most akin to the home ports of European fishermen.<sup>305</sup> Underlying the far north Atlantic, from Norway to Labrador, was an ecological and climatological uniformity that defined the maritime, commercial and social possibilities of those who sought to sail on it.<sup>306</sup> The earliest reports from the northwest Atlantic spoke of codfish, pine trees, and hawks, flora and fauna would have been instantly recognizable to most European mariners. The waters around Terra Nova, Iceland, Greenland and later Spitsbergen all share certain fundamental features. Cold water lies on broad continental shelves which promotes biodiversity locally but homogeneity across the Ocean. The same species of codfish, *gadus morhua*, swam in Terra Nova, Icelandic waters, Norway and even the English Channel and Baltic Sea.<sup>307</sup> Fish which were well known to European consumers, such as herring, hake and salmon, can be found on both sides of the Atlantic, along with the whales which would attract Basques after 1540. It would be possible to do a complete circuit in the sixteenth century, starting in the Irish Sea, and then moving counter-clockwise across the North Sea, Iceland, Greenland and finally to Terra Nova, without encountering any new marine species. Rocky coasts marked by thousands of small inlets, harbours and hills were the norm. In short, the waters of the far north Atlantic experienced a level of

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<sup>305</sup> Bolster, *The Mortal Sea : Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail*.

<sup>306</sup> Sherman and Skjoldal, *Large Marine Ecosystems of the North Atlantic: Changing States and Sustainability*; Jenkins et al., "Comparative Ecology of North Atlantic Shores: Do Differences in Players Matter for Process?."

<sup>307</sup> Rose, *Cod : The Ecological History of the North Atlantic Fisheries*; Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting, and the Discovery of the New World*.

ecological and biological uniformity in the early sixteenth century that was unusual for the Atlantic world and which contributed to the sense that mariners were working on familiar ground. They in turn referred to those parts of the Atlantic which most looked and felt like home as Terra Nova, enforcing its distinctiveness from the rest of North America.

This familiarity was heightened by the connections mariners could form with Terra Nova. Mariners could develop intimately detailed knowledge of the maritime spaces they worked in, and the customs they developed helped regulate their ability to exploit them. We know that in the sixteenth century most fishermen served at Terra Nova for multiple seasons, and families and entire port towns could become tied to the seasonal fishery. Fikret Berkes has argued that the kind of localized, detailed knowledge of the landscape which comes from spending so much time working a landscape like Terra Nova forms a ‘sacred ecology’ that allows groups like fishermen to more effectively manage natural resources.<sup>308</sup> Thus in 1521 merchants in London wrote of mariners who “having experience, and exercised in and about the forsaide Land, aswele in knowlege of the land, the due courses of the see, thiderward & homeward, as in knowlege of the havenes, roodes, poortes, crekes, dayngers & sholdes there uppon that coste and there abowtes being.”<sup>309</sup> The choice by the French crown in the 1530s to employ Jacques Cartier, who hailed from the fishing port of Saint Malo, reflects an attempt to harness the valuable knowledge of ecology and geology possessed by mariners who visited Terra Nova. The waters of Terra Nova became familiar, safe and well-defined to those who worked there. Once again water could be better understood than land.

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<sup>308</sup> Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology : Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management* (Philadelphia, PA: Taylor & Francis, 1999).

<sup>309</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* p.136.



### 3.6 BETWEEN MARINERS AND CARTOGRAPHERS

The triumph of Terra Nova as a concept used to define space in the sixteenth century indicates how fishermen (and only men sailed to Terra Nova in the sixteenth century) succeeded where navigators, geographers and monarchs had failed. Mariners were able to find practical ways to exploit the region's resources and adapt to its restrictive environmental conditions.<sup>310</sup> Because the approach of the fishermen was ultimately more stable, lucrative, and practical, it looks with hindsight as though they were able to subvert the legitimate English or Portuguese territorial claims and thwart the attempts of various European states to effectively exploit Terra Nova. In reality the legal authority of states and monopoly-holders was tenuous at best, and the success of fishermen was less about deviousness and more a result of their flexibility. The ability of fishing communities to transfer techniques developed in Europe to Terra Nova, to institutionalize knowledge within their communities and to limit exposure to hazardous environments through seasonal work won out within a few years of Caboto's discovery. In the struggle to create either Newfoundland or Terra Nova, the latter won out and gave rise to the sixteenth century fishery.

The study of Terra Nova can serve a larger purpose for historians interested in both the study of the environment and of the mentality of mariners in the early Atlantic world. Modern work by anthropologists have shed light on the unique social and knowledge dynamics within communities of fishermen, and how important the production and transmission of knowledge is within these groups.<sup>311</sup> How mariners in the sixteenth century understood their actions and behaved is less clear. We are often at a loss when attempting to reconstruct the *mentalité* of those who worked the ships and fisheries of the early Atlantic, for their voices

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<sup>310</sup> On adaptation to northern climates see: Donald H. Holly Jr, *History in the Making : The Archaeology of the Eastern Subarctic* (Lanham [etc.]: AltaMira Press, 2013). Louwrens Hacquebord and Dag Avango, "Settlements in an Arctic Resource Frontier Region," *Arctic Anthropology* 46, no. 1/2 (2009); Peter C. Mancall, "The Raw and the Cold: Five English Sailors in Sixteenth-Century Nunavut," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (2013); Richard Vaughan, *The Arctic : A History* (Phoenix Mill; Dover, NH: A. Sutton, 1994).

<sup>311</sup> Acheson, "Anthropology of Fishing."; Richard B Pollnac, "Investigating Tenitorial Use Rights among Fishermen," (1984); Rob van Ginkel, "A Texel Fishing Lineage: The Social Dynamic and Economic Logic of Family Firms," *Maritime Studies* 13, no. 1 (2014); Olsen and Thuen, "Secret Places: On the Management of Knowledge and Information About Landscape and Yields in Northern Norway." Fagan, *Fishing : How the Sea Fed Civilization*.

rarely come through clearly in the surviving sources.<sup>312</sup> This is an important question inasmuch as it was anonymous mariners who played such a crucial role in developing a commercial fishery in the northwest Atlantic. The idea of Terra Nova, and its persistent use, allows us a glimpse into how mariners thought about and used certain important ideas. It is, as this piece has suggested, an insight into how mariners understood space and the environment. Above all it shows that mariners had distinct ideas about geography which challenged the prevailing assumptions of cartographers and explorers. Mariners were fully capable of a kind of geography-from-below.

While bureaucrats recorded the consistent use of Terra Nova by mariners, sixteenth century cartographers did not employ the concept of Terra Nova in their maps. In so doing they rejected both the label Terra Nova and the conceptualization of an open, maritime space. Cartographers and geographers in the sixteenth century generally organized and labeled the northwest Atlantic in one of two ways. The first was to label different parts of the region with titles bestowed by officially-sanctioned navigators, in particular labels of possession. Thus Jacques Cartier's voyages gave rise to New France, while the efforts of Verrazano created the realm of Norumbega.<sup>313</sup> Over time such labels shifted, and varied depending on the origin on the Cartographer. The earliest maps of what is today Newfoundland label it variously as the Land Discovered by the English, Land of the King of Portugal, or the Land of Labrador.<sup>314</sup> A second approach, increasingly common as the century wore on, was to simply label the entirety of the northwest Atlantic according to its chief export, codfish. Most popular was the word *Bacalaos*, the Iberian term for dry salt-cod, still used today, which could be extended to cover the whole of the northwest Atlantic. This

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<sup>312</sup> On attempts to understand the behavior of mariners in the early Atlantic, see: Perez-Mallaina Bueno and Phillips, *Spain's Men of the Sea : Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century*. Irving A Leonard, "Spanish Ship-Board Reading in the Sixteenth Century," *Hispania* 32, no. 1 (1949); Jacques Bernard, "Vocabulaire Maritime Termes Nautiques De L'ancien Gascon (Xiii-Xvi Siècle)," *Ethnologie française* 9, no. 2 (1979). For later studies see: Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail*; Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail*.

<sup>313</sup> Kirsten A Seaver, "Norumbega and Harmonia Mundi in Sixteenth-Century Cartography," *Imago Mundi* 50, no. 1 (1998).

<sup>314</sup> Morison, *The European Discovery of America*; Hayes, "America Discovered: A Historical Atlas of North American Exploration."

was particularly common in Italian maps, made in regions who only interacted with Terra Nova from the perspective of fish consumers. Naming a large region of the Atlantic for a single commodity was unusual, and may find parallel only in Brazil, named after the dyewood. For many Europeans and Mediterranean consumers codfish came from, quite literally, a place called *Saltcod* on their maps. Such terms do not appear in written accounts related to mariners, and it seems that no fishermen thought of himself as catching cod in *Bacalaos*.

This division in nomenclature is a reflection of divergent source materials used to develop concepts of space in the northwest Atlantic. Cartographers, especially those in the Mediterranean, were largely dependent on published accounts or direct testimonies by early explorers.<sup>315</sup> Their maps tended to reflect officially sanctioned voyages and state claims. Such works reflected a narrow interaction with space and were influenced by political considerations. Jacques Cartier, for instance, only encountered a small part of the whole of Terra Nova, and assigned value to places in accordance with the goal of expanding French royal power in the region.<sup>316</sup> Mariners were interpreting the northwest Atlantic based on their own lived experience, and cartographers rarely had opportunities to talk to them. Geographers and writers of navigational works tended to fall in between the two. Many acknowledged or even used the term Terra Nova, but fit it into the geographical understanding proposed by official navigators.<sup>317</sup> But none of these groups articulated the same vision of space as mariners, and therefore highlight the distinct ways in which sailors and fishermen developed and transmitted information in the sixteenth century.

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<sup>315</sup> Woodward, *Cartography in the European Renaissance*; Alegria et al., "38• Portuguese Cartography in the Renaissance."; William Francis Ganong and Theodore E. Layng, *Crucial Maps in the Early Cartography and Place-Nomenclature of the Atlantic Coast of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press in co-operation with the Royal Society of Canada, 1964).

<sup>316</sup> Morison, *The European Discovery of America*; Allen, "From Cabot to Cartier: The Early Exploration of Eastern North America, 1497–1543."; Jacques Cartier, *Relation Originale Du Voyage De Jacques Cartier Au Canada En 1534* (The Echo Library 1534).

<sup>317</sup> Only occasionally do these two worlds collide. The writings of the geographer Andre Thevet reflect a mish-mash of published accounts and interviews with mariners. His descriptions of the northwest Atlantic include both specific, named places- Canada, Norumbega, various islands- and allusions to the concept of Terra Nova. His texts describe Terra Nova as a place apart from Canada, a maritime realm, but then also describes a series of islands in a manner which mimics the earliest accounts by Caboto, Corte-Real and others. Thevet's writings are extremely difficult to work with, as they reflect a mish-mash of sources, invention and experiences. See the discussion in the intro to Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*.

For historians of the fishery, using Terra Nova rather than Newfoundland as an analytical category can reveal a more accurate perspective on the sixteenth century fishery. The use of the term Terra Nova captures the impermanent, open and watery world where fishermen worked. Practically, understanding the use of the term ‘Terra Nova’ helps to clarify the physical boundaries within which mariners operated in the sixteenth century. The sixteenth century fishery was a vast enterprise, encompassing most of the northwest Atlantic from the Gulf of Maine to the Labrador Straits. Terra Nova highlights the expansive sense of place which mariners possessed in the northwest Atlantic, in a way the narrow Newfoundland cannot. Ultimately, it gives credit to the capabilities of mariners in the sixteenth century to define their own world and to challenge the assumptions of cartographers and explorers in defining the geography of the Atlantic and of North America.

Terra Nova as a concept highlights the centrality of water for Europeans who visited the northwest Atlantic. Terra Nova was an Atlantic anomaly, a world defined entirely by water and attractive to Europeans only for its maritime resources. It was perhaps the only purely maritime space with which Europeans interacted in the sixteenth century Atlantic, and would prove to be one of the most successful and durable Atlantic systems. The far north Atlantic was certainly a dangerous, and even frightening place, marked by icebergs, fierce storms and monstrous fish. Although much has been written about the innate fear and confusing which oceanic space evoked in the minds of many Europeans, at Terra Nova they nonetheless chose to put that space at the center of their mental world.<sup>318</sup> Mariners at Terra Nova were comfortable enough with the familiar cold waters of the north Atlantic that they could use it to define space and geography, to quite literally mark the limits of their known world. That they did so is a testament to their understanding of fish and the ecology of marine systems, which allowed them to operate in a space like Terra Nova which encompassed so many fertile fishing grounds.

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<sup>318</sup> Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty : Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400--1900*; Szabo, *Monstrous Fishes and the Mead-Dark Sea Whaling in the Medieval North Atlantic*; Kevin C. Robbins, *City on the Ocean Sea, La Rochelle, 1530-1650: Urban Society, Religion, and Politics on the French Atlantic Frontier* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1997).

But the idea of Terra Nova is particularly important as a way to study how information was gathered and moved amongst maritime communities in the sixteenth century. It is a testament to Peter Pope's idea of the fishery as a *vernacular industry*, a loosely structured operation in which knowledge was developed and transmitted within closely knit communities of fishermen.<sup>319</sup> Practical information about work at sea, from how to sail a ship to how to bait a line for cod, was transferred between generations through word-of-mouth. This was the same way that knowledge of particular fishing grounds was kept within communities, or within a single crew. But bigger ideas about maritime space and the shape of the Atlantic could also move between generations and between groups of mariners in a way that was essential for the development of the early cod fisheries. Early Portuguese understandings of the northwest Atlantic were adopted by Bretons, who carried it across the Atlantic littoral. The idea of Terra Nova was taught to new generations of mariners, who then went out and experienced it for themselves. Many mariners likely learned of Terra Nova from foreign fishermen or sailors before they themselves had ever crossed the Atlantic. The widespread use of Terra Nova therefore indicates that these vernacular industries had an essential trans-communal, or transnational, dimension as well.

The triumph of Terra Nova, rather than Madeira Nova, finally speaks to the contingent nature of the fishery and the role played by mariners in subverting European expectations about how to exploit the Atlantic Ocean. In the northwest Atlantic Europeans had encountered a space which challenged their conception of the economic and geographic role of islands. The environmental conditions on the water and on the ground had proved insurmountable for those wishing to establish permanent colonies. Nor did Europeans find a space which fit their conception of value and economic productivity: here in Newfoundland it was the water, not the land, which produced value. In a century in which there was no shortage of opportunities for enterprising merchants, settlers and state actors, the difficulty of establishing a permanent settlement in a place where the water could be harvested for free seemed unappealing. The space was opened to unfettered exploitation by various groups of mariners who established one of the most

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<sup>319</sup> Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*. Pp.21-32.

durable European institutions in the Atlantic world. Their watery *Terra Nova* proved to be a much more effective adaptation to the north Atlantic than Madeira or Hispanola, but one which had to be built upon the failures of earlier settlers and explorers. Such an understanding of the earliest years of the fishery helps us better understand the difficulties which fishermen faced and the degree to which their actions were the unintended consequences of European conceptions of geography, climate and island spaces in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As these conceptions about how land and water in the Atlantic Ocean fell apart at the start of the sixteenth century, the conditions were created which would allow the development of a new way for Europeans to control and exploit the northwest Atlantic.

The development of a fishery in the northwest Atlantic was not a foregone conclusion, nor was the appeal of a decentralized and open space centered on Newfoundland immediately obvious to Europeans. Rather, *Terra Nova* was something that had to be created, and its existence was contingent. At the end of the 1490s and the beginning of the 1500s there was a brief moment of sustained interest in exploring and colonizing the northwest Atlantic. It is from this period, with its focus on discovering and acquiring land, that we inherit the idea of Newfoundland. Only after it failed did the idea of *Terra Nova* emerge as a challenge from below. The fishery which developed from around 1505 was very different from the kinds of Atlantic spaces Europeans were developing elsewhere. The cod fishery was commercialized, open to all communities and treated as a commons in the legal and economic sense. It was created by mariners, not explorers or states, and its growth was fueled by the diffuse port communities of Europe's Atlantic littoral. Initially the Bretons forged the first commercial fishery around Newfoundland, but they were soon joined by mariners from across the continent. By 1520 mariners had created something new and better suited to the environmental and economic conditions of the far north Atlantic.

#### 4.0 BUILDING A FISHERY 1505-1540

On October 22, 1521, the city council of Rouen passed a lengthy decree which was copied out onto several pages in the official register of deliberations.<sup>320</sup> In it, they called upon the “the salted fish merchants of this city” to “buy cod, herring and other goods” for the town.<sup>321</sup> It appears that the supplies of preserved fish in Rouen were inadequate to provision the large population, and the council was compelled to intervene. To achieve this goal, the merchants were authorized to go out and “visit the ports and harbours of this land of Normandy” to find and purchase fish.<sup>322</sup> The council likewise alluded to merchants from Orléans, Paris and “other cities in the kingdom” which were competing for the same provisions, suggesting a widespread problem in northern France. We also know, though it is not explicitly mentioned in the text, that in 1521 Normandy was suffering from an extended war with England and the Habsburg crown. The naval conflict, which was an appendage of the more well-known combat in northern Italy, took the form of a mutual *guerre-de-course* between English and Burgundian Habsburg rovers on the one side, and Franco-Scottish raiders on the other.<sup>323</sup> During times of war the coastal waters of Normandy were prowled by corsairs which preyed on fishermen, and it was becoming difficult to supply an urban center like Rouen with locally sourced marine protein. A month before the October decree French officials had negotiated free passage for fishermen, knowing that it “will be profitable to those living on the coast of Normandy and Picardy, and without it they will not be able to pay their taxes.”<sup>324</sup> The Flemish herring fishery had already been ravaged

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<sup>320</sup> ADSM. Fonds Communales Rouen. A12. 1521, Oct. 22.

<sup>321</sup> “*marchans de poissons saluez de cest dict ville... acheter morues, harencs et aultres marchandises*”

<sup>322</sup> “*par icelle estre permys et auctorisez... aller par les pors et havres de ce pays de normandye*”

<sup>323</sup> For general descriptions of the wars at sea see: N. A. M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660-1649* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998); Jan Glete, *Warfare at Sea, 1500-1650: Maritime Conflicts and the Transformation of Europe* (Routledge, 2002).

<sup>324</sup> Let. Pap. Henry VIII. Vol. III: 1519-1523. No.1535. DU PRAT, DE SELVE and GEDOYN to FRANCIS I. 1 Sept. 1521. “The Cardinal proposed four points: safe-conduct for the fishery; the French and Spanish subjects to take no prizes in English dominions; surety against the French soldiers for those who brought provisions to Calais; and

by pirates and with the autumn fishing season fast approaching, Rouen merchants seem to have been scrambling to find a way to cope with the prospect of a serious shortfall.<sup>325</sup> This was a problem that would repeatedly return to Norman cities as the century dragged on and dynastic wars became more intense. It was likely this pressing issue of violence at sea which brought about the actions of the Rouen city council.

The behavior of the citizen of Rouen rests on the assumption that cod, which is explicitly mentioned, could be procured in the ‘ports and harbours of this land of Normandy.’<sup>326</sup> In issuing their decree of 1521, the city council of Rouen presumed the existence of a commercial fishery in the northwest Atlantic which could be used as an alternative source of preserved protein during times of war. Why this was the case, and how a fishery did indeed develop in the first decades of the sixteenth century, is a question which needs to be revisited. In examining how mariners created a transoceanic fishery this chapter will stress the role of the local. Local problems of food insecurity, rising population, warfare and economic underdevelopment in coastal Europe could prompt communities to engage with the fishery at particular moments in time. For Rouen, one of the major cities of the Kingdom of France and a commercial center alongside Lyon and Bordeaux, that moment came in 1521.<sup>327</sup> The decision by the council to order local merchants to find new

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safeconduct for all the ambassadors, French and Imperial; for the former as far as Montreuil, for the latter as far as Nieuport. Agreed to the last three, but said they had written about the fishery. The Cardinal asked them not to delay. Finally agreed to it, to conciliate him, considering it can be revoked at pleasure, and will be profitable to those living on the coast of Normandy and Picardy, and without it they will not be able to pay their taxes.” The articles of safeconduct were subsequently debated and not ratified for another month.

<sup>325</sup> Debating the prospect of safe conduct, Flemish ambassadors noted that: “The town of Nieuport has sent to ask if the articles are concluded; for their season for fishing is nearly past, and that of the French commences in October, so that they have been prevented from fishing, while the French will fish freely. Is much perplexed, but would prefer to have the fleet kept up, which, as he hears, the Emperor has ordered the Admiral to disband. If it be still entire, he would have it maintained, and damage the enemy as much as possible. This would be the best way to protect the dykes, which must be defended by troops if there is no fleet. Advises him to write to the Cardinal, and say that he consented to the articles that his subjects might enjoy the fishery, but matters have been delayed till the season is past, and the articles would now be prejudicial; asking him to be content not to have the ratification, and lay the blame on the dilatoriness of the French.” Let. Pap. Henry VIII. Vol. III 1519-1523. No. 1606. GATTINARA to CHARLES V. Sept. 24, 1521.

<sup>326</sup> Because we have no evidence of Norman fishing in Iceland for this period, and given that the merchants were not to go to England, the *morue* would likely come from Terra Nova. Indeed, the fact that this edict comes from October would suggest that the council intended for the merchants to buy from the recently returned Terra Nova fleet.

<sup>327</sup> See the data and discussin of sixteenth century French cities presented in: Benedict, *Cities and Social Change in Early Modern France.*; Fernand Braudel and Ernest Labrousse, *Histoire Économique Et Sociale De La France* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970).



sources of fish suggests that there was a heightened demand in the city for fish (and therefore for protein in general) that was driven by its growing population, and that the existing system for procuring and distributing fish in Normandy was insufficient to meet demand in the early 1520s. But the sudden call also suggests that the expansion of fishing could respond to more immediate concerns such as violence at sea and fluctuations in the regional market for salted fish. It was as a result of these latter problems of localized disruption that many coastal communities in Europe chose to engage with the waters of the northwest Atlantic. All of the surviving records related to vessels leaving Normandy for Terra Nova, in particular from Rouen, date to after this decree. Within a few years of the collapse of a native fishing industry in 1521 more and more mariners would be sailing across the Atlantic for codfish, with most of them returning to Rouen. But before that could happen a commercial fishery had to be created and sustained, a process which began a decade earlier.

#### **4.1 THE BIRTH OF A COMMERCIAL FISHERY AT TERRA NOVA: 1505-1515**

While the initial attempt to recreate Madeira in Terra Nova was falling apart, the European presence in the northwest Atlantic was not limited to the officially sanctioned voyages of navigators like Caboto and Corte-Real. By the end of the first decade of the sixteenth century ships were appearing in Terra Nova for the express purpose of harvesting the bounty of the sea. The fishery which formed in the first decade of the sixteenth century at Terra Nova marks the inception of the great transatlantic cod trade. By the 1510s a permanent link between Europe and coast of North America was formed, and salted cod was entering the European marketplace from the northwest Atlantic. As we have seen, maps began to note the fishery after the first decade of the sixteenth century, and by 1512 the son of Zuan Caboto, Sebastian, was being

consulted in Castile about the “Island of the *Bacallaos*.”<sup>328</sup> This was a tentative, formative time for the northwest Atlantic fishery. Only a few communities therefore engaged with the northwest Atlantic immediately after the exploratory voyages, an indication that the benefits of the fishery were not entirely self-evident beyond a handful of Breton, English and Portuguese mariners.<sup>329</sup> Although the production of fish was small and intermittent, this first decade laid the groundwork for the more substantive expansion of operations in the 1520s, and later in the 1540s.

The community of mariners which contributed the most to the early development of the Terra Nova fisheries, and with it the core of far north Atlantic commerce, were those from northern Brittany.<sup>330</sup> They were likely not alone, and Portuguese, English and Normans may have also been present, but the Bretons loom large in the surviving evidence as the drivers of change. With three exceptions, the Bretons are the only group to consistently appear as fishermen in Terra Nova in documents before 1517.<sup>331</sup> They are the

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<sup>328</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada*. P. 115 “...sobra la navegacion de las Indias e Isla de los Bacallaos”

<sup>329</sup> The vast majority of these can be found in Biggar and Quinn’s collections of documents related to the early history of North America. Biggar includes transcriptions of the original texts, while Quinn only offers English translations. *Ibid.*; Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America*. Volume I, Volume IV. In addition, as part of this study I have searched for records predating 1520 in the provincial archives of Seine-Maritime, Charente-Maritime, Calvados, Cotes-darmor and Ile-et-Vilaine in France. In addition, I have searched the municipal archives of Rouen, La Rochelle, Bayonne, St. Jean-de-Luz and St. Malo. Only a single previously unnoticed reference to the cod trade in Rouen in 1515, cited below, was found during this research.

<sup>330</sup> The early voyages by the Bretons have often been considered the birth of the ‘French’ fishery in Terra Nova. See, for instance: Harold Innis. *The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy*. 1940. Chapter 1 is entitled “The French Fishery.” This is misleading, inasmuch as the Bretons constituted a maritime community distinct from their neighbors in the Kingdom of France, and certainly from the imprecise label ‘French.’ In the early sixteenth century many of the fishermen from northern Brittany likely still spoke Breton rather than one of the northern French dialects. The Duchy of Brittany was not formally incorporated into the kingdom until 1532, and was only bound to the French crown through marriage from 1491, such that the earliest Breton mariners to fish at Terra Nova were not, therefore, technically subjects of the French crown. Contemporary sources clearly and consistently distinguished the Bretons from other communities. In the 1480s residents of Bayonne referred to a Breton ship as a “*foreign ship from the land of Brittany (nabieu estrange deu pays bretagne)*.” By 1521 the label ‘foreign’ had been dropped, but the records still specified that the port Quimper was ‘*en Bretagne*.’ AM Bayonne. (BB 4. fol.413; AM Bayonne. BB 6. fol. 191-92.) A letter to the King of Portugal in late 1541 from Nantes, which gives a report of Jacques Cartier’s third expedition, repeatedly refers to Cartier and his crew as Bretons, and stresses the excitement of the ‘Bretons’ at the discovery, playing down the role of the French crown. (Quinn. *New American Worlds*. Vol. I. pp.334-335). As late as 1572 the English mariner Anthony Parkhurst wrote of ‘Frenchmen and Bretons’ sending up to 150 ships to Terra Nova, reinforcing the distinction in the English mind. *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America*. pp.7-8.

<sup>331</sup> There are two references to English fishing before 1508, and one reference to Portuguese fishermen in 1506. It is also possible that one of the ships in Caboto’s second expedition fished off the island, and the Bristol-Azoreans tried their hand at fishing. One Bristol record points to fishing for cod in the voyage of 1502, and a second ship offloaded

first to appear only as fishermen rather than explorers or settlers. A Norman captain writing in 1539 thought that “*li Brettoni e Normandi*” had visited Terra Nova as early as 1504, and so gave their name to Cape Breton.<sup>332</sup> Popular tradition from the early sixteenth century therefore remembered the Bretons as the first to operate in southern Terra Nova, a reputation that was widely acknowledged. In 1511 the King of Aragon and Castile ordered an expedition “to go and learn the secret of Terra Nova.”<sup>333</sup> This may mean geographical knowledge, but the wording and the timing suggest that they may have been interested in the developing fishery. In so doing the expedition’s leader, the Catalan Juan de Agramonte, had an important provision to follow: the crew were supposed to be residents of the kingdom of Castile, except for “two pilots who can be Bretons, or from another nation which has been there [Terra Nova].”<sup>334</sup> The same document later states that “you [Agramonte, the commander] have to go to Brittany for the pilots who are to accompany you on the said voyage.”<sup>335</sup> It was clear that the King believed that pilots- those who regularly guided ships to Terra Nova rather than explorers or cartographers- knew the region best. The preference given to Bretons

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fish in 1504, but this does not give evidence of an English fishery per se so much as isolated attempts to test the feasibility of commercial fishing. Most Bristolian merchants did not show any interest in fishing or trading in the ‘New Founde Lands’ after the initial burst of exploration ended in 1505, even though they had indeed located a valuable commercial opportunity. One record may point to fishing for cod in the voyage of 1502, and a second ship offloaded fish in 1504, but this does not give evidence of an English fishery per se so much as isolated attempts to test the feasibility of commercial fishing. Ibid.. p. 110 (no.75), p.117-118 (no.84). Only the second example, from 1504, explicitly states that the fish is from Newfoundland. For Bristol merchants’ tepid reaction to the Terra Nova trade, see David H. Sacks. *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991. Pp.34-36, 48-52. In his major study of the French cod fishery, Charles de la Morandière claims to have found a document in the northern Basque port of Capbreton which indicates a voyage to Terra Nova in 1512. In the text, however, he improperly cites the evidence by giving only the name of the archive (archives municipales de capbreton) without the reference number. He likewise cites the same document appearing in a nineteenth century text, again without a page number. Given these improper citations I have been unable to verify the Capbreton document, and therefore treat it as an unconfirmed claim. The first Basque voyage therefore dates to 1520, not 1512. Charles de la Morandière. *Histoire de la Peche Francaise de la Morue dans l’Amerique Septentrionale*. Vol. I. pp. 227,252.

<sup>332</sup> Ramusio, *Navigazione et Viaggi*, Vol. VI, p.2626. Ibid.pp. 156-157 gives a translation. Far too much emphasis has been placed on this text by historians. The document comes from an anonymous Dieppois author, purportedly written in 1539 (according to Ramusio, the editor of the collection). The author is writing a generation after the discovery he describes. Most importantly, the phrase “was discovered...by the Bretons and Normans” is all the information provided and is incredibly vague. I prefer to downplay the significance of this *potential* 1504 ‘discovery’ and focus on the first contemporary document, dated to 1508.

<sup>333</sup> “*para ir a saber el secreto de la Tierra Nueva .*” Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* pp.102-111. For this purpose, two Portuguese vessels were to be commanded by Juan de Agramonte, a Catalan from Lerida.

<sup>334</sup> “*cebto que does pilotos que llevardes sean Bretones, o de otra nacion que alla ayan estado*”

<sup>335</sup> “*Que por quanto vos aveis de yr por los pilotos, que con vos han de yr al dicho viaje, a Bretana*”

indicates that as early as 1511 the Bretons were being identified with Terra Nova to the exclusion of other ‘*naciones*.’ Neither the Portuguese nor the English, the two groups which had already sent a half-dozen exploratory missions to Terra nova, were deemed to have sufficient knowledge. This strongly suggests that Breton primacy in the Terra Nova fishery was established in the first decade of the sixteenth century.<sup>336</sup> This association of Bretons with Terra Nova would continue for decades, and during the 1530s Breton mariners appear to have taken on the role of masters and pilots on ships bound for Terra Nova. In La Rochelle, for instance, of the ten ships outfitted by rochelais merchants for Terra Nova in the 1530s, four were captained by Bretons.<sup>337</sup> We know of English merchants hiring Breton pilots in 1536 to guide them to the fishing grounds.<sup>338</sup> An observer on the fisheries in 1542 makes reference to what appears to have been a Breton pilot hired by the merchants of Llanes, in northern Castile, to guide their ship to Terra Nova.<sup>339</sup> The choice of Jacques Cartier, a *malouin* pilot, to guide the exploratory voyages to Terra Nova after 1534 likewise testifies to the Breton reputation as pilots-for-hire. Even if they were not alone, Bretons had a reputation as the community most familiar with the waters of Terra Nova. This indicates the formative role

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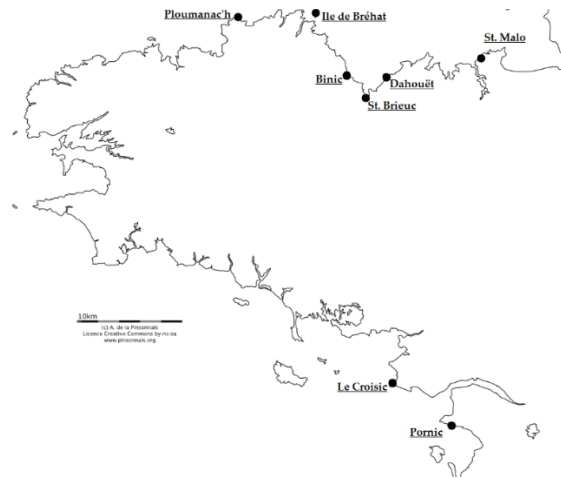
<sup>336</sup> Interestingly, by the 1540s the Spanish would have to find Portuguese pilots to take them to Terra Nova. The caravel hired in Galicia to track down Cartier included provisions for a Portuguese pilot. Biggar, *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur De Roberval*.Pp.361. “*A la persona que fue a buscar el piloto al reino de Portugal para ir en la carabela, dos ducados.*”

<sup>337</sup> Musset. *Les rochelais a terre-neuve*.

<sup>338</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America.* ., pp.209-214

<sup>339</sup> Biggar, *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur De Roberval*.Roberval. No.212. pp. 447-467. At one point in his testimony to a Castilian notary the fisherman Robert Lefant, while being interrogated about his voyage to Terra Nova that year, makes extensive reference to a “Breton master”: “This witness [Lefant] heard from a Breton master of a ship which was fishing in a port with this witness [Lefant] for the men of Llanes (*Este testigo oyo dezir a un Breton maestro de un nabio que en uno puerto con este testigo fue pescando por los de Llanes*)... Asked the whereabouts of this Breton who told him this: said that this witness [Lefant] was ill on the road, and the Breton went on to France (*que paso adelante para Francia*). Asked when he left: said that as far as he remembered, more than eight days ago. Asked whether he knows the direction he followed: said that all he can say is that he believes he passed through this town of Fuenterrabia or by the Behobia Pass (*no sabe mas de quanto cree que paso por esta villa dee Fuenterrabia o por el paso de Beobia*).” The phrase “*fue pescando por los de Llanes*” suggests that the Breton master was either commanding a boat owned by merchants in the Asturian town of Llanes, or had been contracted to ship his cargo there after he was done. Since the Breton master was later found heading overland to France, passing near Fuenterrabia, this suggests to me that he was indeed master of an Asturian ship, and had to leave his boat in Llanes after the voyage was over. If so, this is an early and clear example of Breton pilots being hired by Castilian merchants.

played by merchants from northern Brittany in pushing beyond the limits of Caboto, Corte-Real and others in an effort to pioneer a new approach to Terra Nova.<sup>340</sup>



**Figure 10. Map showing Breton ports sending ships to Terra Nova, 1500-1540. Map by author.**

<sup>340</sup> The one community with the strongest claim to challenge the Bretons for developing a commercial fishery are the Portuguese. A handful of northern ports, above all Porto, Viana and Aveiro, (as well as Galicians from the nearby port of Pontevedra, whose mariners had close ties to northern Portugal) would become involved in fishing at Terra Nova throughout the sixteenth century. Perhaps more than any other region, historians of Portugal have made claims to supremacy in Terra Nova that seems at odds with the evidentiary base. In 1506 a single document from Portugal indicates that there was a debate over the taxation of codfish imported from Terra Nova. Although concerned primarily with legal right to tithe collection, the language implies that the importation of cod fish was enough to necessitate a regularization of taxation. (Biggar. *Precursors*. pp.96-98. The original text, from the customs register of Porto, reads: “*Nos soubemos agora como nos portos do mar dessa comarqua dantre Douro & Minho, on em algus dellas dada a posse das dizimas do pescado que vem das pescarias da Terra Nova, aquelas que tem de nos as dizimas dos pescados...E por que esta cousa releva muyto a nosso service, & na ha de passar assi livremente, Vos mandamus, que logo que esta pos for dada, saybaees os logares em que assi he dada a dita posse, e aquellos que achardes que a tem, na leixees della usar, & a day a posse a nossos officiaes pera nos arrecadare dizimas...*” Several authors, starting with Morrison, have interpreted this to mean that a new tax was being levelled on the imported cod. In reality the *dizimas* is a very old form of taxation that was found across Catholic Europe.) Darlene Abreu-Ferreira has argued passionately and persuasively that Portuguese records indicate that the long-distance fisheries were of an extremely small scale and marginal to the economy as a whole. The records from Portuguese archives are simply too scarce to suggest regularly large fishing fleets, especially compared to the evidence generated in other regions. Although a small number of ships from Porto, Viana and Aveiro regularly sailed to Terra Nova, the primary significance of the Portuguese, as is discussed elsewhere in this project, was to generate knowledge about the far North Atlantic and to pioneer the first attempts at settlement. See: Godinho, *Os Descobrimentos E a Economia Mundial*. Pp.134-135 sums up much of the hard evidence about the Portuguese fishery. Abreu-Ferreira. “The Cod Trade in Early Modern Portugal.” Abreu-Ferreira, “The Cod Trade in Early-Modern Portugal: Deregulation, English Domination, and the Decline of Female Cod Merchants.” Pp.57-70; Darlene Abreu-Ferreira. “Terra Nova through the Iberian Looking Glass: The Portuguese-Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Sixteenth Century.” *The Canadian Historical Review*. Vol. 79, No. 1. “Terra Nova through the Iberian Looking Glass: The Portuguese-Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Sixteenth Century.” For Portuguese maritime commercial interests, see: John R. Wood. *The Portuguese Empire 1415-1808: A World on the Move*. JHUPress, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 1998; F. Bethencourt and D. Curto. *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800*. Cambridge University Press, 2007. Though neither of these pieces directly address the Terra Nova fisheries, they do provide a useful context to understand the varied opportunities for Portuguese merchants in the early sixteenth century.

The earliest surviving record directly attesting to a Breton ship fishing in Terra Nova dates to 1508. This is also the first individual voyage from any port we can identify as an explicitly fishing expedition, with no reference to trade, exploration or settlement. In October of that year the *Parlement de Normandie* in Rouen heard a case involving a Breton ship chartered by a Norman merchant.<sup>341</sup> The *Bonnaventure* hailed from island of Bréhat and had made a voyage to “*la terre neufve* [Terra Nova].” The Ile de Bréhat is a tiny island on the north coast of Brittany, west of St. Brieuc. With its small population, position on the north coast of the peninsula and emphasis on locally organized commercial voyages it is representative of the wider Breton experience in the first years of the fishery. A contract dispute revolved around the decision by the *Bonnaventure*'s captain, Jehan de Ruffesse, to return to the Ile de Bréhat rather than the port of Honfleur in Normandy. The ship had been outfitted with money provided by a Norman merchant who wished to claim a part of the catch, and who sued when the captain never returned. The court ordered that Ruffesse had to pay the sum of 352 *livres tournois* in compensation. As of 1508, then, we know that Breton merchants were sending ships to Terra Nova for the sole purpose of fishing and were working with Norman merchants, and it is from this date that we can definitively mark the existence of the commercial cod fishery in Terra Nova.

English and Portuguese expeditions predated the Bretons by perhaps a decade, and brought back the first catches of cod. Even the Normans may have shown an early interest in Terra Nova: The language of the 1539 *Discorso d'un gran capitano* suggests an exploratory voyage in Terra Nova set sail from Honfleur in 1506, with a second one leaving Dieppe in 1508.<sup>342</sup> If so the Bretons were not necessarily the first ‘French’ visitors to Terra Nova, though the language of this text is too vague to preclude that possibility.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> AD SM. 1B 324. Oct. 21, 1508; de la Morandiere. *Histoire de la Peche Francaise*. Vol. I. p.245

<sup>342</sup> Ramusio. *Navigazoni et Viaggi.*; Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America*. . p.156-157.

<sup>343</sup> Immediately before describing the 1506 and 1508 Norman voyages, the text states that the region between Bonavista and Bay of Castles was “discovered by Bretons and Normans.” This is followed by “Some thirty-three years have passed since these parts were first visited by a ship from Honfleur...” This suggests that the author means that

What sets the records pertaining to the northern Bretons apart from the earliest references to fishing is that these mariners seem to have been interested in the *commercial* exploitation of the Terra Nova fisheries. They did not just bring their catches home for direct consumption but instead sold them at larger ports, pioneering a new fish trade. In the 1510 case of the *Jacquette*, described in Chapter Two, northern Breton fishermen were actively selling their catch in the Norman city of Rouen. In the city deliberations of Rouen an entry for December 24, 1515 notes a ship from Le Croisic in south Brittany carrying grain from Rouen to La Rochelle.<sup>344</sup> In addition, the ship is to be “loaded with cod.”<sup>345</sup> We know that in 1517 the *Marie du Croisic*, from a small Breton port nears Nantes, was offloading *morue verte* (pickled cod) in Bordeaux. As Jacques Bernard has pointed out, this same ship may have earlier (in 1510) been part of the coastal wine trade between Croisic and Bordeaux, suggesting that the Bretons adapted pre-existing trade routes to export the preserved fish which was suddenly being imported from Terra Nova.<sup>346</sup> They made the crucial step to actively and consistently adapt fifteenth century experiences on the European fisheries, especially the Irish Sea, to the northwest Atlantic. This was the great significance of the Bretons in the history of the far north Atlantic.

In driving the development of a commercial fishermen in the northwest Atlantic, the Bretons demonstrated the significance of small-scale coastal intra-European trade and fishing in encouraging the exploitation of Terra Nova. Unlike the Portuguese and Castilians who sailed to West Africa, or the English who regularly visited Iceland, the Bretons do not seem to have ventured far afield before the sixteenth century. It is certainly true that the many small ports of the peninsula were home to a maritime community steeped in a millennia-old tradition of seafaring.<sup>347</sup> Fishermen from Brittany were active in the Irish Sea

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‘Bretons and Normans’ visited northern Newfoundland Island before 1506. Once again, however, too much emphasis has been placed on this vague and second-hand account.

<sup>344</sup> AD SM Fonds Communales de Rouen, A10. Dec. 24, 1515. The entry is part of a grant of permission from the city council to carry goods out of the city of Rouen.

<sup>345</sup> “*estre chargé de moruez*” This is my own reading of the text, which has not been described by any other historians of the fisheries.

<sup>346</sup> Bernard. *Navires et gens de Mer*. Vol. II. P. 806-807

<sup>347</sup> Barry W Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean: The Atlantic and Its Peoples, 8000 BC-AD 1500* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

fishery and regularly gathered sardines along their own coast. Geography favoured Breton merchants: the peninsula was positioned centrally between southern England, Normandy and the many ports of Biscay which gave them access to salt. The mercantile communities of towns such as St. Malo, Quimper and St. Brieuc regularly sent vessels to ports in England, Normandy, Biscay and the Low Countries.<sup>348</sup> Even so, Brittany lacked major cities to serve as centers of consumption and financing. In a 1538 survey of cities in the Kingdom of France, the north coast of Brittany was found to have a great many mid-sized towns but no cities over 5-6,000 residents.<sup>349</sup> Merchants would eventually circumvent this problem by outfitting their ships and selling their catch in larger foreign ports such as Rouen or La Rochelle. That they were able to shift operations to the northwest Atlantic so quickly is an indication of the degree to which the underlying ecological and environmental similarities between Europe and Terra Nova allowed for a seamless transition of fishing techniques.

#### 4.2 MARINERS IN THE EARLY FISHERY

The creation of a permanent European presence in the northwest Atlantic came not from rival states or merchants but from largely anonymous mariners who crossed the Atlantic as fishermen in the first decades of the sixteenth century. The mariners who sailed to Terra Nova in the first decade of the sixteenth century in search of codfish were operating in a legal and economic grey area.<sup>350</sup> Unlike navigators such as Corte-Real they did not possess grants from their respective monarchies, nor did they claim to act on behalf of any state. When we can see them, the mariners and merchants who appear in the records as organizing

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<sup>348</sup> Touchard, "Le Commerce Maritime Breton À La Fin Du Moyen-Âge."

<sup>349</sup> The 1538 survey was meant to assess the number of soldiers each city in the kingdom was required to raise in times of war. It is a good proxy for the relative size and wealth of urban centers at the time. A summary is found in: Philip Benedict, *Cities and Social Change in Early Modern France* (London: Routledge, 1992). P.9, Table 1.1.

<sup>350</sup> On illegal activity, trade and grey areas in the early Atlantic see: Grafe, "Polycentric States: The Spanish Reigns and the 'Failures' of Mercantilism "; Evan T. Jones, "Illicit Business: Accounting for Smuggling in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Bristol," *The Economic History Review* 54, no. 1 (2001); Renate Bridenthal, "The Hidden History of Crime, Corruption, and States," (2013).



the earliest fishing voyages to Terra Nova do not fit into the wider Atlantic experience of the sixteenth century.<sup>351</sup> What are we to do with the crew of the *Jacquette* and their misadventures in 1510, cited at the start of Chapter Two? The defendant in the court case, and the man in charge of daily operations on the ship, was Guillaume Dobel. He is described as “a young man of under thirty-two years, one of the good mariners of this land and duchy, and a man who serves the public weal, serving during wartime or otherwise...”<sup>352</sup> Those who sailed on the early voyages to Terra Nova may not have had experience at transatlantic crossings but they were well-versed in naval combat and the rigours of life at sea. The text gives the name of everyone on board the *Jacquette* as it came back from selling its codfish in Rouen, the only crew list from the early sixteenth century fishery:

“Guillaume Dejehan, Bertrand Menier, Mathelin Picart, N. Dobel, Rolland le Roux, Gilles Regnault, Allain Hercouet, Lorans Balaine, Antoine Thomas and one named Pierre Rious otherwise called Ricaffan, Guillaunme the bastard of Allain Helliguen sieur de Mauny, Guillaume Garoche and the aforesaid Guillaume Dobel.”

These are politically insignificant subjects of the Duke of Brittany, none of whom appear to be merchants or nobility (save for a *Sieur's* bastard son). Their names pale alongside the venerable Corte Real, Ango or Caboto dynasties yet they accomplished far more in creating a permanent presence of European mariners in the northwest Atlantic. In an angry letter from 1514 the Monks of Beauport, a small port on the north coast of Brittany, chastised the mariners who were regularly sailing to Terra Nova as “the wicked men from the said island who exceed the age of eighteen years and who fish on the ocean.”<sup>353</sup> They are presented as a faceless mass, the rank and file of the local community. Perhaps most noteworthy is the remark that those who sailed abroad for fishing were “wicked men (*homes malles*)” for their failure to report their activities to the abbey. The monks stress that participants were all men and all over the age of

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<sup>351</sup> Dalton, *Merchants and Explorers : Roger Barlow, Sebastian Cabot, and Networks of Atlantic Exchange 1500-1560*; Fusaro et al., *Law, Labour, and Empire : Comparative Perspectives on Seafarers, C. 1500-1800*.

<sup>352</sup> “*ledit Guillaume Dobel est jeune homme soubz l’eaisge de trente-deux ans, l’un des bons mariniers de ce pays et duché, et homme pour server a la chose publique, tant ou faict de la guerre que autrement, de bon rest et honneste gouvernement...*” Transcript in Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada*. p.118.

<sup>353</sup> “*les homes malles de ladicte ysle qui eussent excede de dix ouyet ans et qui peschassent en la mer*” ADCA H 69. A transcript can be found in *ibid.* pp.118-123; Translation in: Quinn, *New American Worlds. Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America. . Vol. IV. P.87.*

eighteen, implying that fishing was a job only for experienced adults.<sup>354</sup> Living within sight of the sea they turned to transatlantic fishing as a way to feed their home towns and to make reliable profits.

These mariners who went to Terra Nova were certainly not acting in conjunction with the state, either a central monarchy or regional. Nor were these early fishermen, or more importantly the merchants who paid for their services and fish, part of the elite mercantile networks that were shaping the early Atlantic elsewhere. It is telling that the merchant Jean Ango failed to invest significantly in the Newfoundland fishery after his early attempts at exploration. Ango was an immensely powerful and influential citizen of Dieppe who would be involved with trade from the Mediterranean to the West Indies, the type of elite merchant who elsewhere was so crucial in forging new Atlantic networks. But after his early expeditions Ango would lose interest in Terra Nova, leaving it to the smaller merchants of Rouen or Honfleur. He would be replaced by merchants such as Jacques de Ruffesse of the Ile de Bréhat, an otherwise unknown merchant from a backwater port who in 1508 outfitted the *Bonnaventure* for a successful fishing voyage to Terra Nova.<sup>355</sup>

The study of the early mariners who visited Terra Nova is made more complicated by the cultural practices of commercial fishermen, in particular the ‘secrecy’ of fishermen.<sup>356</sup> Fishing can often be a zero-sum game, given the finite amount of marine biomass present on a given fishing ground, and this can produce intense competition between different groups trying to exploit the same source. To this might be added the tendency of coastal populations in most European monarchies to evade state inquiry and deliberately hide their business. This has led some scholars, in particular David Quinn and his followers, to use the secrecy of fishermen as an argument in favour of a pre-Caboto discovery of Terra Nova.<sup>357</sup> In reality,

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<sup>354</sup> By contrast, a report on a fishing vessel at Iceland in 1542 notes that a boy called “a Shafté” who was only 9 years old was apprenticed in the profession. Letters and Papers, Henry VIII, no.265. 22 April 1542.

<sup>355</sup> ADSM 1B Parlement de Rouen no.324. Oct 21, 1508.

<sup>356</sup> Olsen and Thuen, "Secret Places: On the Management of Knowledge and Information About Landscape and Yields in Northern Norway."; Branch et al., "Fleet Dynamics and Fishermen Behavior: Lessons for Fisheries Managers."; Acheson, "Anthropology of Fishing."

<sup>357</sup> Quinn has argued that Caboto was attempting to discover fishing grounds which had been known to Bristol fishermen but subsequently lost. Quinn, *North America from Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612*; Seaver, *The Frozen Echo: Greenland and the Exploration of North America, Ca. A.D. 1000-1500*.

the secrecy of fishermen seems to have been less significant than their willingness to work together and to share information. The fishery at Terra Nova simply could not exist without the circulation of important information amongst mariners. Reported by Caboto in 1497, the existence of islands and fish in Terra Nova was known in Portugal by 1500, Brittany by 1508 at the latest (and 1504 at the earliest), Normandy shortly thereafter, Galicia in 1517 and by 1524 fishermen from Viana to Dieppe were fishing off of Newfoundland.<sup>358</sup> All evidence from the first half of the sixteenth century strongly suggests that mariners from different regions fraternized and worked closely together at Terra Nova. Where fishermen kept knowledge from one another it tended to be highly localized, focusing on particular harbours or banks. For this reason we know the broad outlines of the early fishery, but few details about where and when fishermen worked.

The significance of the secrecy issue is that it tells us something about how knowledge worked in European maritime communities. Fishing crews were close-knit teams that often originated from the same port town.<sup>359</sup> It was not uncommon for family members to work together on a voyage to Terra Nova. Such crews were able to discover and retain detailed knowledge of very specific sites for fishing, keeping it from others. This allowed fishing voyages to successfully visit the same sites year after years. But at the same time the rapid spread of knowledge about Terra Nova across western European coastal communities suggests that information about broader topics circulated swiftly and widely. This might include navigational routes, information on weather and seasons, general ideas about where to fish or best techniques. Such knowledge moved between communities not merely within the same region, such as different ports of northern Brittany or Portugal, but across cultural and political boundaries. This wide circulation of knowledge formed a crucial element in the long-term success of the transatlantic fisheries, contributing to the general adaptiveness and resiliency of mariners who sailed to Terra Nova.

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<sup>358</sup> Likewise, when whales were located at Spitsbergen in 1607 it took less than a decade for Dutch, English and Basque whale-hunters to find their way there. Jong, *Geschiedenis Van De Oude Nederlandse Walvisvaart : Deel 1-3*.

<sup>359</sup> For modern studies of fishing communities see: Acheson, "Anthropology of Fishing."; van Ginkel, "A Texel Fishing Lineage: The Social Dynamic and Economic Logic of Family Firms."; John Cordell, *A Sea of Small Boats* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cultural Survival, 1989).

In practice the fishery that formed in the early sixteenth century operated as a commons.<sup>360</sup> The failure of settlement in early Terra Nova and the unwillingness of Portugal or England to enforce their theoretical claim to the region created a political and legal vacuum. In the absence of any political or legal framework which might shape patterns of commerce it fell to the mariners and merchants who sailed to Terra Nova to determine for themselves the way in which the fisheries would function.<sup>361</sup> The resource of codfish, clustered in various grounds at Terra Nova, could be harvested at will by visiting mariners, as well as by the indigenous community. No one group, be it a state or community of fishermen, was able to exclude others from access to Terra Nova during the sixteenth century. When this shift to a commons happened is difficult to say. Bristol and Azorean merchants seem to have abdicated their claims to monopolize trade in Terra Nova by 1505. While regularly granting licenses to the Corte-Real family throughout the sixteenth century, the Portuguese crown appears to have abandoned the pretense of authority over Terra Nova by 1511 at the latest. Although Breton mariners seem to have pioneered the commercial fishery, there is no evidence that they attempted to exclude competitors. Ample evidence exists from at least the 1520s onward that mariners from different regions coexisted and worked side-by-side on the transatlantic fisheries. This openness came to be one of the defining features of the early commercial fishery at Terra Nova, and one of its greatest strengths.

The openness of the cod fishery caused mariners to develop systems to manage access to the waters of Terra Nova. The overriding and unavoidable principle that governed the fisheries for centuries was that early arrival led to better access, for whoever arrived at a particular fishing spot first could exploit it before anyone else, and could restrict others' access. In 1521 a merchant from Bayonne worried that if he did not

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<sup>360</sup> Derek Wall and Ebscohost, *The Commons in History: Culture, Conflict, and Ecology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2014). Fikret Berkes et al., "The Benefits of the Commons," *Nature* 340, no. 6229 (1989).

<sup>361</sup> On self-organization by mariners, see: Andreas Hess, "'Working the Waves': The Plebeian Culture and Moral Economy of Traditional Basque Fishing Brotherhoods," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, no. 4 (2010); Fusaro et al., *Law, Labour, and Empire : Comparative Perspectives on Seafarers, C. 1500-1800*. Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*; *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail*.

leave for Terra Nova as early as March he might be too late and miss the entire season.<sup>362</sup> In time this was enshrined in the famous Admiralty system.<sup>363</sup> Under the Admiralty system the first crew to arrive at a fishing ground acted as legal authority over that spot for the duration of the season. Though codified in English and French law by the turn of the seventeenth century, this system seems to have evolved organically in the fishery much earlier. The Basques developed their own, unique system. During whale-hunts, and to an extent during cod fishing seasons, crews from different Basque towns cooperated to take down common prey and divided the spoils.<sup>364</sup> This would later be supplemented by the development of fishing fraternities which organized and protected transatlantic fishermen.<sup>365</sup> Ocean fisheries are extremely difficult to control and regulate. They therefore tend to gravitate towards functioning as a commons.<sup>366</sup> Even after the establishment of colonies at Newfoundland, Acadia and Canada the Terra Nova fisheries were treated as a common resource by settlers.<sup>367</sup>

In light of the collapse of many oceanic fish stocks in the twentieth century, commercial fisheries are often held up as the quintessential example of a Tragedy of the Commons. Yet in the sixteenth century the capacity of fishermen to over-exploit cod stocks was extremely limited. Working with handlines, catching cod one at a time in small boats, there was nothing approaching the industrial and mechanized fishing of the twentieth century. While localized groups of codfish might be intensively harvested, there is no evidence that large-scale participation threatened the integrity of Terra Nova fish stocks.<sup>368</sup> The same was not true of

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<sup>362</sup> AMBayonne. BB4. Also found in Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada.* p.132-133.

<sup>363</sup> Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*; "Transformation of the Maritime Cultural Landscape of Atlantic Canada by Migratory European Fishermen, 1500–1800."

<sup>364</sup> Tuck and Grenier, *Red Bay, Labrador: World Whaling Capital A.D. 1550-1600*; Parks et al., *The Underwater Archaeology of Red Bay: Basque Shipbuilding and Whaling in the 16th Century.*

<sup>365</sup> Hess, "'Working the Waves': The Plebeian Culture and Moral Economy of Traditional Basque Fishing Brotherhoods."

<sup>366</sup> Wall and Ebscohost, *The Commons in History: Culture, Conflict, and Ecology*; Bonnie J. McCay and James M. Acheson, *The Question of the Commons : The Culture and Ecology of Communal Resources* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987).

<sup>367</sup> Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*; Sean Cadigan, "The Moral Economy of the Commons: Ecology and Equity in the Newfoundland Cod Fishery, 1815-1855," *Labour / Le Travail* 43 (1999).

<sup>368</sup> Note that in his study of the transatlantic fishery Bolster highlights the extremely localized nature of fisheries collapse in the sixteenth century. Bolster, *The Mortal Sea : Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail.*Chapter 1. For the

other resources in Terra Nova. The whale stocks of Terra Nova were sensitive to overhunting and ecological change.<sup>369</sup> The fur trade would, from the seventeenth century on, severely affect animal populations across the northeast.<sup>370</sup> Most famously, seasonal fishermen and later colonists would utterly devastate the native seabird population of Terra Nova, wiping out many prosperous breeding grounds and even entire species.<sup>371</sup> The fish of Terra Nova, however, withstood the introduction of European fishermen across the sixteenth century. This is because the technical capacity of sixteenth century fishermen was so limited, especially in relation to the unprecedented scale of the biomass in the northwest Atlantic, as to preclude over-fishing. Even where local stocks might be depleted, there was always another bank or harbour to be found in the vastness of Terra Nova.

In part the openness of Terra Nova is due to the broad and nebulous scope of Terra Nova itself. It would have been exceedingly difficult, in the first decades of the sixteenth century for any one group to enforce control over the region.<sup>372</sup> In practical terms the way that fishing functioned in Terra Nova was more complex. Terra Nova, as we have seen, encompassed a vast stretch of water and coastline. While the fish within this space were treated as a common resource, particular fishing grounds could be monopolized by a communal group at any given time. In the 1550s-1570s, for instance, *La Grand Baya* seems to have been dominated by Guipuzcoan and Labourdian mariners.<sup>373</sup> The northeast coast of Newfoundland island was particularly attractive to Breton fishermen. Individual harbours, and the best beaches for drying cod, were hotly contested and could be controlled by force. Mariners could develop intimately detailed knowledge of the maritime spaces they worked in, and the customs they developed helped regulate their

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ecology of the fisheries as a whole see: Heymans and Pitcher, "A Picasso-Esque View of the Marine Ecosystem of Newfoundland and Southern Labrador: Models for the Time Periods 1450 and 1900."

<sup>369</sup> Ogilvie, "Fisheries, Climate and Sea Ice in Iceland: An Historical Perspective."

<sup>370</sup> Del age, *Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in Northeastern North America, 1600-64*.

<sup>371</sup> Pope, "Early Migratory Fishermen and Newfoundland's Seabird Colonies."

<sup>372</sup> On the general problem of controlling space and maritime access in the Atlantic see: Christopher Ebert, "European Competition and Cooperation in Pre-Modern Globalization: Portuguese West and Central Africa, 1500-1600," *African Economic History* 36, no. 1 (2008). Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire : Piracy in the Americas, 1500-1750* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998). PLUS PLUS PLUS

<sup>373</sup> Barkham, "The Spanish Province of Terranova."; "The Basque Whaling Establishments in Labrador 1536-1632 - a Summary."

ability to exploit them. Fikret Berkes has argued that the kind of localized, detailed knowledge of the landscape which comes from spending so much time working a landscape like Terra Nova forms a ‘sacred ecology’ that allows groups like fishermen to more effectively manage natural resources.<sup>374</sup> Thus in 1521 merchants in London wrote of mariners who “having experience, and exercised in and about the forsaide Land, aswele in knowlege of the land, the due courses of the see, thiderward & homeward, as in knowlege of the havenes, roodes, poortes, crekes, dayngers & sholdes there uppon that coste and there abowtes being.”<sup>375</sup> The choice by the French crown in the 1530s to employ Jacques Cartier, who hailed from the fishing port of Saint Malo, reflects an attempt to harness the valuable knowledge of ecology and maritime geography possessed by mariners who visited Terra Nova.

The successful organization of a commons at Terra Nova reflects the particular ways in which mariners behaved and worked in the sixteenth century. Experience in the Irish Sea and North Sea fisheries likely had a direct impact on the way in which mariners approached Terra Nova during the first decades of the sixteenth century. By the 1530s a similar process had taken place at Iceland, where an English mariner boldly declared in 1547 that “was and is a place entirely free and public, and that the right of fishing there was and is common to all men.”<sup>376</sup> We also know that early voyages to Terra Nova were governed by old customs such as the division of the catch into shares.<sup>377</sup> In 1523 a Breton crew bound from La Rochelle was promised by their master “their third part of the fish, oils, wages and profits which they will gain by their voyage to Terra Nova.”<sup>378</sup> Modern research on fishermen has given us a better understanding of the role of customs, taboos and inter-generational transfers of knowledge in regulating the long-term functioning of a

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<sup>374</sup> Berkes, *Sacred Ecology : Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management*.

<sup>375</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* p.136.

<sup>376</sup> H.C.A. File 16 no.97. “*partibus Izelandie constitutum locum omnino liberum publicumque ac jus piscandi ibidem omnibus commune fuisse.*”

<sup>377</sup> Bernard Allaire, "Between Oléron and Colbert: The Evolution of French Maritime Law until the Seventeenth Century," in *Law, Labour, and Empire : Comparative Perspectives on Seafarers, C. 1500-1800*, ed. Maria Fusaro, et al. (2015).

<sup>378</sup> ADCM Notaire Hémon, fol. 118. 22 Oct. 1523.

common resource.<sup>379</sup> The precedent set in the first decades after Caboto's voyages would also have considerable consequences across the sixteenth century. Mariners who fished at Terra Nova were fiercely resistant to attempts by outside actors to curtail open access to the cod fisheries. The fishing voyages which took place in the first decade of the sixteenth century laid the essential groundwork for what would come after.

A key part of the creation of the sixteenth century fishery was the adoption of a migratory model of maritime labour. The environmental constraints inherent to the far north Atlantic produced a labour problem which came to define Terra Nova throughout the sixteenth century. The harvesting and production of codfish required semi-skilled labour, and the more could be brought to bear the larger the amount of fish that could be produced.<sup>380</sup> But after the failure of the initial explorers there were no permanent settlements from which to draw workers in the summer. Nor was there a sedentary Amerindian population capable of supplying labour (freely or otherwise) to the fishery.<sup>381</sup> Relative to the number of fish, there was no indigenous workforce capable of working the fishery. The first visitors to Terra Nova therefore implicitly described an acute labour shortage with one important caveat. Thousands of mariners were needed to work the waves of Terra Nova, but only from about April through August. Any fishing workforce would be useless in the frigid winter, a problem that vexed the early seventeenth century colonists on Newfoundland. The labour shortage was acute, it was temporary and it was cyclical.

The solution, pioneered by the Bretons in the early decades of the century, was to transport mariners to Terra Nova in the spring and to bring them back to Europe in the autumn. The fishery thus functioned as a kind of vast, transoceanic engine to move manpower between ports in Europe and the waters of Newfoundland on a temporary but cyclical basis. Such a solution was most akin to seasonal agricultural

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<sup>379</sup> Acheson, "Anthropology of Fishing."; Rob van Ginkel, "Tussen Wal En Schip: Taboes En Territoriale Overgangsruten in Noordatlantische Vissersgemeenschappen," *Etnofoor*, no. 2 (1988); "A Texel Fishing Lineage: The Social Dynamic and Economic Logic of Family Firms."

<sup>380</sup> La Morandière, *La Pêche Française De La Morue À Terre-Neuve Du Xvie Siècle À Nos Jours; Son Importance Économique, Sociale Et Politique*.

<sup>381</sup> See below, this chapter and chapter six.



labour, for like farm work fishing for cod was an act of harvesting. This cyclical system of labour movement has long been recognized by historians of the fishery, and indeed was apparent to most sixteenth century observers, but most studies of the fishery have hesitated to describe it as more than an extended form of long-distance fishing, or a kind of transhumance.<sup>382</sup> Yet the process was too vast and too consistent to treat as less than a form of migration. Mariners spent months living in Terra Nova, working and surviving on the coasts and waves of the northwest Atlantic. Mariners like Robert Lefant of Bayonne, who in 1542 reported that he had gone to Terra Nova five summers in a row, treated the fishery as a place to be regularly visited as part of their yearly rhythm of work.<sup>383</sup>

To make this cyclical migratory system possible, shipowners had to mobilize maritime labour to work as both the producers of codfish and as mariners on the open sea. Mariners who worked the fishery at Terra Nova therefore served a peculiar double-duty as labourers. Over the course of their migratory cycle the crew had to work the ship as deep-sea sailors. The sixteenth century sailing ship was, as historians have long admitted, the most complex machine of its age.<sup>384</sup> Even the relatively simple and well-known voyage to and from Terra Nova required tremendous resources and skill on behalf of the crew. These were not small fishing boats like the barks, skiffs, buses and “dogger-boats” which served the North Sea and Iceland.<sup>385</sup> The waters of Terra Nova were served by fully-rigged, multi-masted sailing ships of the kind which plied the Atlantic from Norway to Brazil.<sup>386</sup> Masters had to choose crewmen who could manage the month-long outbound voyage. Such a combination of skills was not in and of itself new, for the combination of manual labour and sailing work was part and parcel of a fishery.

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<sup>382</sup> This is discussed in Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*, pp.248-255

<sup>383</sup> Biggar, *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur De Roberval*. Doc. CCXII.

<sup>384</sup> Carlo M. Cipolla, *Guns, Sails and Empires; Technological Innovation and the Early Phases of European Expansion, 1400-1700* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966); Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*; Parry, *The Discovery of the Sea*.

<sup>385</sup> Richard W. Unger, *The Ship in the Medieval Economy, 600-1600* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

<sup>386</sup> French sources quite consistently use the generic terms *navire/nef* to describe these vessels. Spanish and Portuguese sources generally use *nau/nao*. Specific types of vessels (caravel, barke/barque, galley, etc.) are rarely used in bureaucratic records, and where they appear they have been noted in this study. For the use of terms by notaries see: Bernard, "Vocabulaire Maritime Termes Nautiques De L'ancien Gascon (Xiii-Xvi Siècle)."



**Figure 11. Detail from Gastaldi map of Newfoundland, 1556.**

The image shows a fishing vessel at top, and two kinds of smaller fishing boats below it. The fishermen in the middle boat are using hand-lines for cod, those at the bottom using nets for herring or sardines. Courtesy Newfoundland Heritage.

Once on the fishery itself the site of production shifted away from the sailing ship which had carried the crew across the ocean. Visitors to Terra Nova in the sixteenth century described harbours and shorelines as the sites of production, and stressed that little fishing took place onboard the high-sided and cumbersome ships themselves. For making salt-cod mariners established small camps on shore where they could build drying racks and salting stations. Green cod might be barrled on the ship itself, but more often likely took place on shore. In both cases most fishermen used small boats to actually catch the cod, rowing away from their shore stations or sailing vessels to catch the fish one at a time.<sup>387</sup> (See Figure 11) At Terra Nova all mariners were expected to act like their brethren on the commercial fisheries of the Irish Sea, North Sea or elsewhere. During the day they caught codfish on the open waves, working out of small boats. In the evening the crew dressed, salted and dried the fish, forming a kind of assembly line. This work went on for

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<sup>387</sup> For instance in 1541 a Basque vessel (a caravel) called *Salvador* was outfitted with a charter-party contract. This included the note that the ship was to carry “three fishing boates,” which is how David Quinn has translated *galiones*. *Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches*. Doc. 580. Pp.91-93. What exactly these looked like or their size is unknown, and must have varied considerably from place to place.

months, only occasionally broken up by the need to load the ship with dried or barreled codfish, until the hold was full and the crew returned home. The next year the entire process began again.

The cyclical migratory cycle which underlay the sixteenth century fishery at Terra Nova ultimately came to resemble the social structure of Amerindian populations in the same region. This strongly suggests that the environmental pressures in the northwest Atlantic produced convergent social adaptation among both native inhabitants and migratory visitors. Several decades of efforts by historians of the Americas and the Atlantic World to revise our understanding of Amerindian populations before, during, and after contact, have produced a much clearer and more nuanced picture of the lived conditions on the ground in the late fifteenth century. As archaeologists have demonstrated, at the dawn of the sixteenth century, indigenous peoples had already inhabited what would become Terra Nova for at least 10,000 years.<sup>388</sup> When the first European fishermen arrived around 1500, there were three major Amerindian societies living permanently in the region.<sup>389</sup> All three spoke closely-related Algonkian languages, and had migrated to the northeast by the early first millennium. On Newfoundland island were the enigmatic Beothuk, a collection of small communities concentrated in the northeast who strictly limited their activity to the island itself.<sup>390</sup> Along the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence lived the Innu, known to Europeans/the French in the sixteenth century as the Montaignais. The mobile Innu peoples stretched from the headwaters of the St. Lawrence River to the Strait of Belle-Isle, their seasonal movements covering a vast swathe of territory. Along the south shores of the Gulf, concentrated at Cape Breton and the north coast of the Maritime peninsula, were the Mi'kmaq.<sup>391</sup> By the early sixteenth century Mi'kmaq communities had settled on the islands of the south

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<sup>388</sup> James A. Tuck, *Maritime Provinces Prehistory* (Ottawa: Archaeological Survey of Canada, National Museum of Man, National Museums of Canada, 1984); McAleese, Newfoundland, and Newfoundland, *Full Circle, First Contact : Vikings and Skraelings in Newfoundland and Labrador = Le Grand Cercle, Premier Contact : Les Vikings Et Les Skraelings À Terre-Neuve Et Au Labrador*.

<sup>389</sup> A variety of useful articles on these three societies, as well as the Inuit, can be found at the website Newfoundland Heritage ([www.heritage.nf.ca](http://www.heritage.nf.ca))

<sup>390</sup> Ingeborg Marshall, *A History and Ethnography of the Beothuk* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014); "Beothuk and Micmac: Re-Examining Relationships," *Acadiensis* 17, no. 2 (1988); Ralph Pastore, "The Collapse of the Beothuk World," *ibid.* 19, no. 1 (1989).

<sup>391</sup> For a collection of documents related to the Mi'kmaq see: Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us : Excerpts from Mi'kmaw History, 1500-1950* (2015).

coast of Gulf of St. Lawrence and likely the south coast of Newfoundland.<sup>392</sup> The bulk of European interaction with Amerindians in the sixteenth century would be between these three groups; that is, until the southward migration of Inuit communities brought this fourth group into more consistent contact with Europeans at the end of the century

The Innu, Beothuk and Mi'kmaq shared several broad patterns of social, political and economic behavior.<sup>393</sup> All three societies were centered around small, mobile bands that operated independently of one another. Life was organized around seasonal migrations, between water and land. During the cold months communities moved through the forests, hills and river valleys of the interior in pursuit of game such as caribou, deer, and beaver. These were lean times but nonetheless the Mi'kmaq, Innu and Beothuk sustained themselves through the long winter with hunting and foraging. The Jesuit missionary Pierre Biard observed of the Mi'kmaq around 1610 that, "Likewise in the month of February and until the middle of March, is the great hunt for Beavers, otters, moose, bears (which are very good), and for the caribou, an animal half ass and half deer. If the weather then is favorable, they live in great abundance, and are as haughty as Princes and Kings; but if it is against them, they are greatly to be pitied, and often die of starvation."<sup>394</sup> But with the late spring and the warmer weather came the opportunity to harvest the fish, birds and mammals of Terra Nova. Mi'kmaq, Beothuk and Innu communities all migrated to the coast where they would remain until the autumn. During this time they gathered and consumed a bewildering variety of animals: codfish, herring, salmon, smelts, sturgeon, ducks, cormorants, bird eggs, mussels, clams, oysters, and even the occasional whale.<sup>395</sup> It seems to have been common practice to consume marine protein directly, rather than preserve it for the winter. As the weather turned cool these same communities

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<sup>392</sup> Charles A Martijn, "Early Mikmaq Presence in Southern Newfoundland: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, C. 1500-1763," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005).

<sup>393</sup> These reconstructions are based on: Tuck, *Maritime Provinces Prehistory*; Marshall, *A History and Ethnography of the Beothuk*; William W. Fitzhugh, *Prehistoric Maritime Adaptations of the Circumpolar Zone*, World Anthropology (Berlin/Boston, DE: De Gruyter Mouton, 1975).

<sup>394</sup> Biard. Jesuit Relations. Vol. III. P.77

<sup>395</sup> Johanna J Heymans, "First Nations Impact on the Newfoundland Ecosystem During Pre-Contact Times," *Ecosystem models of Newfoundland and Southeastern Labrador: additional information and analysis for 'Back to the Future'*. Edited by JJ Heymans, *Fisheries Centre Research Reports* 11, no. 5 (2003).

would leave the shore for the woods once again and repeat the cycle. It was therefore the biological abundance of Terra Nova itself that sustained Algonkian societies. The summer bounty of marine life provided the raw nutrients to keep mobile communities healthy and prosperous. Biard's description of the summer months contrasted with his bleak account of winter: "From the month of May up to the middle of September, they are free from all anxiety about their food; for the cod are upon the coast, and all kinds of fish and shellfish."<sup>396</sup> This was the same biological affluence that drew mariners from northwest Europe in the early sixteenth century.

Yet this abundance only occurred in the context of a strict seasonal cycle which set the northwest Atlantic apart from much of North America. Though sub-Polar, the ecological conditions of Terra Nova in many ways reflected the same terrestrial/maritime bifurcation which defined Inuit and later European life in the Arctic. The Arctic historian Adrian Howkins has noted the importance of the nutrient-rich polar regions: "The seas and oceans of Antarctica and some parts of the Arctic are sites of high biological abundance; polar lands are often areas of biological scarcity...In some parts of the Arctic and in nearly all of Antarctica, so stark is this contrast that much terrestrial life is dependent in one way or another on the productivity of nearby seas and Oceans."<sup>397</sup> Like the Arctic, the people of Terra Nova had to adapt all aspects of their lives to live in this land-poor but water-rich region. The northwest Atlantic had much in common with the ecological cycles of other places in the far north Atlantic such as Iceland, Greenland and Scandinavia. The seasonal cycles imparted a fixed rhythm to life, and in the sixteenth century determined when and how contact between Amerindians and fishermen evolved.

This boom-and-bust ecological cycle shaped the social structures of the Amerindian societies which lived in Terra Nova. Communities need to be mobile, able to quickly shift between sites of food production.<sup>398</sup> Such mobility limited the material culture to what could be carried by the group or left

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<sup>396</sup> Jesuit Relations. Vol. III. p. 79.

<sup>397</sup> Adrian Howkins, *The Polar Regions : An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).p. 44

<sup>398</sup> Tuck, *Maritime Provinces Prehistory*; Marcel Moussette, "A Universe under Strain: Amerindian Nations in North-Eastern North America in the 16th Century," *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 43, no. 1 (2009); Holly Jr, *History in the Making : The Archaeology of the Eastern Subarctic*.

behind for the next season. The Innu and Mi'kmaq favoured light wigwams, made of birchbark and wood, over permanent structures. European visitors took note of the absence of towns or permanent agricultural villages around Terra Nova, and indeed the Algonkian societies preferred temporary settlements that might last several years but which could be abandoned as needed. A 1539 description by an anonymous Norman mariner remarked that "The inhabitants [of Terra Nova] live in small huts and houses which are covered with tree bark, which they build to live in during the fishing season, which begins in the spring and lasts all summer."<sup>399</sup> As a result communities tended to be small, and a fundamental rule seems to have been the extremely low population size relative to space in the northwest Atlantic. Estimates for the size of different communities varies widely, but scholars estimate that the Mi'kmaq may have numbered upwards of 5,000, and the Innu somewhat less than this.<sup>400</sup> The Beothuk population may have been as low as 500 in the sixteenth century, although some estimates number them up to a thousand.<sup>401</sup> The result was a very low population density in relation to the maritime and terrestrial space in and around Terra Nova. The yearly arrival of European fishermen represented a significant and sudden increase in the number of humans living in the northwest Atlantic.

Both Amerindians and Europeans therefore followed a similar system of cyclical, seasonal migration from the early sixteenth century onward. Framing the sixteenth century fishery as a system of cyclical, seasonal migration complicates our understanding of how migration functioned during the age of European maritime expansion. The majority of scholarly work to date has focused on one-way migrations, both coerced and voluntary.<sup>402</sup> The history of the sixteenth century Atlantic is largely one of migration from one

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<sup>399</sup> This is taken from a piece by an anonymous mariner from Dieppe entitiled "Discorso d'un gran capitano." Originally published in Ramusio, *Navigazioni E Viaggi*. 1559. Translation in Gilbert, "Beothuk-European Contact in the 16th Century: A Re-Evaluation of the Documentary Evidence." P. 36

<sup>400</sup> Newfoundland Heritage.

<sup>401</sup> Marshall, *A History and Ethnography of the Beothuk*; Pastore, "The Collapse of the Beothuk World."; Peter Rowley-Conwy, "Settlement Patterns of the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland: A View from Away," *Canadian Journal of Archaeology/Journal Canadien d'Archéologie* (1990).

<sup>402</sup> Representative of this is: Palmer, Stanley. "The Power of Numbers: Settler and Native in Ireland, America, and South Africa, 1600-1900." Steven G. Reinhardt, Dennis Reinhartz, and William Hardy McNeill, *Transatlantic History* (College Station: Published for the University of Texas at Arlington by Texas A & M University Press, 2006). See also: Armitage and Braddick, *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*; Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History* (London: Routledge, 2013); Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone : The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*.

side of the Atlantic to the other. What the experience of Terra Nova suggests is that from the earliest years of the sixteenth century Europeans embraced bi-directional, cyclical migration. It provides further evidence for framing Terra Nova as an extension of Europe rather than the emerging Atlantic. So long as mariners were moving back and forth between their home ports and Terra Nova on a regular schedule they could never engage with the processes of migration, creolization and colonialism which were prevalent elsewhere in the early Atlantic. In the absence of uni-directional migration and the long-term sustainability of cyclical migration, Terra Nova always remained connected on a fundamental level to Europe. Understanding the fishery as a cyclical migratory system affirms the importance of ecological and climatological conditions in shaping human interactions with the far north Atlantic. The adoption by mariners, first Bretons and then those who followed, of a cyclical migratory system was not prompted by mercantile considerations. Rather, it was forced upon Europeans by the reality of seasonal cycles in the northwest Atlantic.

Between 1505 and 1520 these European fishermen succeeded where navigators had failed. They were able to find practical ways to exploit the region's resources and adapt to its restrictive environmental conditions. Because the approach of the fishermen was ultimately more stable, lucrative, and practical, it looks with hindsight as though they were able to overthrow the established legal order and thwart the attempts of various European states to effectively exploit Terra Nova. In reality the legal authority of states and monopoly-holders was tenuous at best, and the success of fishermen was less about deviousness and more a result of their flexibility. The ability of fishing communities to transfer techniques developed in Europe to Terra Nova, to institutionalize knowledge within their communities and to limit exposure to hazardous environments through seasonal work won out within a few years of Caboto's discovery. Natural selection might be a better metaphor- in the peculiar environmental and economic conditions of Terra Nova a decentralized, commercially-focused fishery was better suited than permanent settlements or trade organized within a single state. In the struggle to create either Newfoundland or Terra Nova, the latter won out. The awkward relationship between mariners and elite merchants/state actors which defined the first decades of the sixteenth century never totally faded away. Different monarchs would periodically dispatch

new navigators to Terra Nova to revive the early dream of exploration, conquest and settlement. At the turn of the seventeenth century this process came back with a vengeance and inaugurated a new era in the history of Terra Nova.

### 4.3 THE FISHERY MATURES, 1520S-1530S

The 1520s would be the decade when the Terra Nova fishery came into its own. During this time participation widened beyond Breton mariners, and the scale of commercial operations increased, though the exact dates and levels of participation cannot be precisely known. Ships from Normandy, Biscay or the West Country may well have started to sail for Terra Nova in the second half of the 1510s, but our only clear evidence dates from around the year 1520. In 1517 a contract in the Galician port of Pontevedra the merchant Fernando de la Torre hired Juan de Betanços (Betanzos, a small town near A Coruna) to serve on his ship to bring *bacalao* from *la Tierra Nueva*.<sup>403</sup> This is the first non-Breton record which refers to a fishing ship explicitly. Why Galicia, a region which did not play a particularly significant role in the Terra Nova fisheries, was involved so early on is not clear. It does show, however, that knowledge about the commercial potential had reached northern Castile, and that merchants were seeking a way to replace Breton dominance of the carrying trade. In 1520 the ship *Senct Pe* petitioned to leave the city of Bayonne for *Terre Nave*, marking the Basque entrance into north Atlantic commerce.<sup>404</sup> Although they would ultimately play a leading role in north Atlantic commerce, in these early years Basque participation seems to have been tentative. During the 1520s many of the smaller towns of Normandy began to send individual ships to Terra

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<sup>403</sup> Caroline Ménard. *La pesca gallega en Terra Nova, siglos XVI-XVIII*. PhD Thesis. Universidad de Santiago de Compostela. 2006. P.77 "venga de los bacallaos... navio del dicho ofiçio el dicho tiempo fafta la venyda a la Tierra Nueva." Pp.417. According to Ménard, the next evidence from Galicia for a Terra Nova voyage is not until 1526 when the ships *Santa Maria* and *Bon Jhesu* sailed for the fisheries.

<sup>404</sup> AM Bayonne. BB6. Fol. 95. The *nabiu* was owned by Pe de le Land, and was being outfitted in the small port of Capbreton north of Bayonne. The following March the *seinhors* Miqueu de Segure and Mathieu de Biran of Bayonne sent a ship to *Terre Nave*, specifying its purpose as *a le pesque*, to fish. AM Bayonne. BB6. Fol. 189



Nova.<sup>405</sup> An English prize list from 1524 includes the first of what would become common place as the sixteenth century wore on, the prizes taken from a captured Norman fishing vessel.<sup>406</sup> Capt. Christopher Coo of London put forth a claim for: “taken in the Cost of Normandy a shipp of Rouen wt xi men laden wt new fownd londe fysche, containing ix thousand, delyvered to William couston prised at 120lb.”<sup>407</sup> The rouenais ship’s cargo of 9,000 fish was very small by the standards of the later fishery, but in the 1520s was in fact quite ample. All of this evidence suggests that within a few years, during the 1520s, Norman fishermen became widely and actively interested in the Terra Nova route. Two English documents from the 1520s suggests that more English merchants were slowly becoming involved in the Terra Nova fisheries. In March of 1521, when the Wardens of Drapers of London were discussing outfitting an expedition for “the Newefound Iland,” their report noted that “maisters & mariners” in the kingdom “having experience, and excercised in and abowt the forsaied Iland, aswele in knowledge of the land” could be used to command the fleet.<sup>408</sup> Later in 1521, in letters to Cardinal Wolsey and the King, Vice Admiral Fitzwilliam referred to “the comyng home of the new fownd isle landes flete.”<sup>409</sup> 1523 marks the first record of cod, both *morue seches* and *morue verte* being offloaded by a ship from La Rochelle.<sup>410</sup> That same year *rochelais* merchants helped outfit five Breton vessels bound for Terra Nova. When placed in conjunction with the records from Galicia and Bayonne, it is clear that by 1527 Biscay had developed an independent commerce with Terra Nova.

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<sup>405</sup> Fécamp may have begun around 1520, and Yport in 1522 (de la Morandiere. *La Peche Francaise*. Pp.234-235). By 1527 reports of *morue sallee* appear in Honfleur (Ibid. Pp.238). In 1526 three ships, all of them between 45 and 60 tonneaux, registered in Rouen (Ibid.. Pp. 236-7). The harbours of Port-Bail and Agon, both on the west coast of the Contentin peninsula, outfitted one ship each in 1532 (Ibid. P.239).

<sup>406</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* P.162-163.

<sup>407</sup> It appears that the capture cost Coo fifteen casualties, as he put in a claim for damages related to “the helynge and keypyng of xvi men hort at the wynnyng of the new fownde londe men.” The crew of eleven men suggests a very small ship. The casualties also suggest that these fishing vessels knew how to fight back against predatory vessels.

<sup>408</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* P.136

<sup>409</sup> Ibid. . P.142-143. Writing on August 21<sup>st</sup>, he stated that the fleet “now surely commeth home.”

<sup>410</sup> AD CM 3E 3. Notaire Hémon. Fol. 85. The record is a contract between a merchant of La Rochelle and another of Bordeaux. Where the fish originally came from is not mentioned, and we can only assume that it was originally from Terra Nova.

One of the most significant structural features of the early fishery is the role of small ports.<sup>411</sup> Many of our earliest records for fishing pertain to ships sailing from very small coastal towns and villages. More so, the early records provide little indication that mariners from these small ports were relying on financing or supplies from larger urban centers, as would be the case from the 1540s on. Two cases are illustrative of this broader issue. At Saint-Waast in Normandy fishermen were bringing codfish back from Terra Nova by 1524.<sup>412</sup> Saint-Waast is even today a difficult village to find on the map, far from major Norman ports such as Cherbourg or Honfleur, with a likely population in the early sixteenth century of a few hundred. As the case brought before the *Parlement de Normandie* indicates, fishermen were bringing codfish back to their home port for consumption and thereby triggering a crisis about taxation. This means that mariners from Saint-Waast were trying to supply their homes with marine protein, suggesting that local sources of fish had collapsed around 1524 and that fishermen were less concerned with engaging with urban markets. We might also look to the case of Pontevedra in Galicia, which saw ships outfitted for Terra Nova in 1517 and 1527. Although a major port in the northwest of Iberia, Pontevedra was a small town of only around 1,600 souls by the 1520s.<sup>413</sup> Many of the merchants who outfitted fishing vessels were in fact from smaller, local towns.<sup>414</sup> Because so much attention has focused on the English, Norman and Breton fisheries we know little about the particular conditions in Galicia that would prompt mariners to engage with transatlantic fishing during this time period, but it seems that Galician merchants were interested in developing their own fishing industry independent of Portuguese, Basque or Castilian interests.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> On the role of ports in the early Atlantic economy see: Séminaire d'histoire économique et et al., "Ports Et Littoraux De L'europe Atlantique : Transformations Naturelles Et Aménagements Humains, Xive-Xvie Siècles : Actes Du Séminaire D'histoire Économique Et Maritime, Tenu À L'université De La Rochelle Le 24 Juin 2005."; Eric Guerber and Gérard Le Bouédec, *Gens De Mer Ports Et Cités Aux Époques Ancienne, Médiévale Et Moderne : [Colloque Organisé À L' Université De Bretagne-Sud Les 15 Et 16 Juin 2009]* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2013).

<sup>412</sup> ADSM 1B388. This case is briefly discussed in De la Morandière, *Histoire De La Pêche Francaise De La Morue Dans L'amerique Septentrinale Des Origines a 1789*.

<sup>413</sup> Sanchez, "Dans Le Sillage De Colomb : L'europe Du Ponant Et La Découverte Du Nouveau Monde, 1450-1650 : Actes Du Colloque International, Université Rennes 2 : 5, 6 Et 7 Mai 1992."

<sup>414</sup> Ménard, *La Pesca Gallega En Terranova, Siglos Xvi-Xviii*.p.417. In 1517 a ship was outfitted by a resident of the town of Betancos, a small village near Pontevedra.

<sup>415</sup> Xosé Manuel Pereira Fernández, "Los Mareantes Pontevedreses Y La Pesca De Altura En El Siglo Xvi," *Cuadernos de Estudios Gallegos* 52, no. 118 (2005); Michael Barkham Huxley, "El Comercio Marítimo Vizcaíno Y Guipuzcoano

In sum, by the mid-1520's all the regions which would contribute to the mature fishery of the mid-sixteenth century had begun to send voyages to Terra Nova. It should be stressed that this does not mean that they were sending large fishing fleets. The scattered records strongly suggest that ports were sending individual ships at irregular intervals. The overall number of ships fishing in Terra Nova was probably quite low even in 1530, perhaps 50-60 ships in total. What is important is that the multi-communal character of north Atlantic commerce had been established by the mid-1520s. Breton, Norman, Basque, Castilian, Portuguese, Biscayan and English fishermen appear to have all sailed westwards during the 1520's. They were also continuous interactions, with regular visits to the northwest Atlantic as each community in turn adopted the same cyclical, seasonal cycles of the Bretons. Each of these regional groups would sustain a presence in the Terra Nova fisheries until the end of the century.

In his celebrated letter of 1527 to the King of England, the explorer John Rut gave a glimpse of the early fishing fleet in Terra Nova. On August 3<sup>rd</sup> of that year the expedition entered St. Johns harbour, the natural cove which today remains the central feature of the capital city of Newfoundland. He reported "there we found eleven saile of Normans, and one of Brittain [Brittany], and two Portugal Barkes, and all a fishing."<sup>416</sup> St. John's harbour is not especially big, and the fifteen ships from three different regions (and likely many more ports of origin) all seem to be working side-by-side. The predominance of Normans is self-evident, alongside the two early comers to Terra Nova. Returning via the Caribbean, the expedition stopped in ports owned by the Castilian crown whose officials took great interest in the English ships. A report from the island of Mona which reached Madrid in March of 1528 noted that the English vessel encountered troublesome waters in the far north Atlantic while searching for a northwest passage.<sup>417</sup> Faced

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Con El Atlántico Peninsular (Asturias, Galicia, Portugal Y Andalucía) Y Con Los Archipiélagos De Canarias Y Madeira Al Principio De La Edad Moderna," (2003).

<sup>416</sup> H.P. Biggar. "An English expedition to America in 1527." 1913. p.486. Rut was serving on an exploratory mission to discover a potential northwest passage, which appears to have visited northern Labrador before being turned south by the cold conditions.

<sup>417</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada.* Pp.165-168. "se bolvieron e vinyeron a Reconoscer a los Vacallaos, donde hallaron bien cinquenta naos, castellanas y francesas e portuguesas, pescando." The account confirms the diversity of the earlier letter by Rut, though *castellanas* and *francesas* are vague enough to include various combinations of Basques,

with this, the ship “turned about and came to reconnoiter the *Baccalaos* [Terra Nova], wherein they found around fifty ships, Castillians and French and Portuguese, fishing.” This report, admittedly second hand, would suggest that in 1526-7 some fifty fishing vessels operated around Terra Nova. Both texts pointing to a thriving multi-communal fishery in the northwest Atlantic.

During the 1530s the Bretons temporarily regained the initiative as the most active and knowledgeable community on the fishery. Repeated observations attest to the dominance of Bretons in the 1530s, over and above even the Normans. The dieppoise author of the *Discorso d’un gran capitano* in 1539 went so far as to state that “These fish [the cod from Terra Nova] are caught by the French and Bretons only”.<sup>418</sup> We know that in 1534 Jacques Cartier was obliged to ask the city of Saint Malo to prevent ships from leaving for Terra Nova while the explorer found suitable crew for his ship.<sup>419</sup> The problem was that “Many shipowners and merchants from the aforesaid city [Saint Malo] work to lead and conduct many ships from the said city to the said parts of Terra Nova for their own profit.” So many, apparently, that it was difficult for Cartier to find what he needed. In 1541 the English writer Roger Barlowe remarked that Terra nova “was first discovered by marchantes of Brystowe where now the Bretons do trat thider everie yere a fishing, and is called the Bacaliaus [Baccalao].”<sup>420</sup> During this same decade Breton ships regularly appear in the records of La Rochelle.<sup>421</sup> This would be the norm until around the year 1540.

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Gallicians, Biscayans and Normans. The use of the name *Baccalaos* to describe Terra Nova also suggests that by 1528 the region was already closely associated with codfish.

<sup>418</sup> “*li quali pesci si pigliano per Francesi e Brettoni solamente*” Ramusio. *Navigazioni e viaggi*. Pp.2626. Ramusio then suggests that local inhabitants do not catch cod alongside the Bretons and French.

<sup>419</sup> Biggar. *Cartier and Roberval*. No. 50, p.

<sup>420</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America.* ; *ibid.* p.215

<sup>421</sup> AD CM Notaire Bonriot. Fol.371v. Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada.* pp181-82. In late 1533, for instance, the ship *Xristofle*, owned by the merchant Yvon Raymond, was outfitted using a 30 *livres* loan from merchants in La Rochelle. The ship was registered in the town of Ploumanac’h, a minor port on the north coast of Brittany near St. Briec, but contractually obligated to return to Biscay with its catch.

#### 4.4 DRIVERS OF GROWTH

In 1505, when the last Bristol-Azorean voyagers returned from Terra Nova, there was no fishery in the northwest Atlantic. A decade later there was. Three decades later, when Jacques Cartier tried to recruit mariners in the port of Saint Malo, the fisheries were so popular that he could not find enough willing men to fill out his ships.<sup>422</sup> Although the present state of research on the Terra Nova fisheries allows us to better understand the patterns of trade in the early, formative period, it is far more difficult to explain why a commercial cod fishery was established at Terra Nova in the first decades of the sixteenth century. The operating assumption of most historians of the fishery has been that the abundance of marine protein in the northwest Atlantic prompted that rapid growth of fishing operations. There has long been an assumption in the literature that the commercial fisheries around Newfoundland were all but inevitable, a natural response to the bounty of the northwest Atlantic.<sup>423</sup> This view is best summed up by Brian Fagan's recent remark that "When news of the new cod fishery reached Europe, experienced fishermen flocked across the Atlantic. The teeming waters of Newfoundland and adjacent coasts, thick with nearly the same fish they had always known, must have seemed like a Promised Land compared to their depleted home seas."<sup>424</sup> This assumes that supply drove demand, that fishermen reacted without hesitation to the discovery of cod stocks in the northwest Atlantic. Yet in reality the formation of commercial fisheries was far more contingent than historians have recognized. The benefits of crossing the Atlantic Ocean in search of codfish were not self-evident to sixteenth century mariners. As the previous chapter has outlined, the initial impetuosity of most Europeans was to integrate the northwest Atlantic into a wider model of colonization along the lines of Madeira and Hispaniola. Only after this program fell apart did a fishery emerge. When mariners did turn to

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<sup>422</sup> Archives municipales de Saint-Malo, HH1 no.2. Reprinted in: Biggar. *Cartier and Roberval*. No. 50. Quoted above.

<sup>423</sup> Note for instance that Innis, in his pioneering work on the fishery, never addresses the question of motivation or drivers of the fishery in the introduction nor Chapters 1-2 which deal with the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*.

<sup>424</sup> Fagan, *Fishing : How the Sea Fed Civilization*. P.270.

Terra Nova for fish it was hesitant at first, only gathering momentum in the 1520s before emerging as a powerful commercial system in the 1540s.

To paint the fisheries with such a broad brush is to ignore the problems of timing and participation. Although a tentative commercial fishery had been established by the Bretons at the end of the first decade of the sixteenth century, the maturation of Terra Nova as a site of multi-communal fishing only took pace beginning around 1520. Within this scope there is evidence for ebb and flow in the pace of operations: intensification around 1510 and 1525, a slacking in the 1530s. Likewise, many coastal communities chose not to participate in transatlantic fishing during its formative period and growth after 1540. The English and Portuguese, those who had the strongest legal claim to the northwest Atlantic, were minor figures throughout the 1520s-30s. The Spanish Basques, for instance, were largely absent until later in the sixteenth century. Both these problems suggest that the appeal of the fishery at Terra Nova was not self-evident, and that mariners must have been responding to sudden changes and pressures.

This section takes as a starting point Ralph Davis' approach to the long-term history of the Atlantic economies. His study *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies* tried "to show that the main influences on European economic development arose within the countries of Europe themselves, though Europe was powerfully affected both by Spanish America in the sixteenth century and English America in the eighteenth."<sup>425</sup> In the narrow case of the transatlantic fisheries this was particularly true, for fishermen were most concerned with the immediate concerns of their home ports in the early sixteenth century.<sup>426</sup> The fishery at Terra Nova was particularly bound to economic and social changes in Europe, as mariners spent only part of the year abroad and returned to home ports each autumn.

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<sup>425</sup> Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies*. P. xi.

<sup>426</sup> This approach also follows a French tradition that has approached Terra Nova through the study of individual port cities. While this has produced problematic studies which largely ignore the wider context of the fishery, it has allowed some historians to carefully reconstruct the ways in which conditions in a single town shaped the interest of mariners in transatlantic fishing. See: Trocmé and Delafosse, *Le Commerce Rochelais De La Fin Du Xve Siècle Au Début Du Xviie*; Musset, *Les Rochelais À Terre-Neuve, 1500-1789*; Bernard, *Navires Et Gens De Mer À Bordeaux (Vers 1400-Vers 1550)*; Gosselin and Beaurepaire, *Documents Authentiques Et Inédits Pour Servir É L'histoire De La Marine Normande Et Du Commerce Rouennais Pendant Les Xvie Et Xviie Siècles*.

By the 1520s there were deep, long-term forces that encouraged the expansion of transatlantic fishing. Growing populations across northwest Europe and Iberia created a powerful incentive to find more fish. These were changes which encouraged the growth of fifteenth century fisheries, as outlined in Chapter One. As Sam White has recently put it, “By the 1500s, the general trend of population growth and urbanization, the poor harvests and inflation of the Little Ice Age, and religious strictures on meat during holidays and Lent all drove a new mass demand for seafood, mostly in the form of dried or salted fish.”<sup>427</sup> European fish consumption, and its growth after 1400, was driven by several convergent pressures, but the primary cause for the expansion of fishing was demographic: after reaching a post-plague nadir, rural and urban populations were increasing from the early fifteenth century onward.<sup>428</sup> By the late fifteenth century this demographic pressure was becoming acute, in particular in the urbanized Low Countries and the southern parts of Iberia. Freshwater fishing had reached its limits, and was nearly impossible to expand in scale.<sup>429</sup> Agriculture and coastal fisheries came under increased pressure to supply the rising population with food. As we have seen in Chapter One, by the mid-fifteenth century many European communities turned to an aggressive expansion of offshore commercial fisheries to meet this growing demand. Terra Nova’s creation was part of this larger shift to preserved ocean fish.

In addition to the demand from urban residents for more protein, preserved fish came to play an increasingly important role in the military and imperial projects of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Dried, salted or pickled fish made for an excellent source of provisions for military forces on land or at

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<sup>427</sup> White, *A Cold Welcome : The Little Ice Age and Europe's Encounter with North America*.p. 202

<sup>428</sup> On population growth in Europe see: Bonney, *The European Dynastic States, 1494-1660*; Braudel and Labrousse, *Histoire Économique Et Sociale De La France*; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Peasants of Languedoc* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974); Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*; Liek Mulder, Gert Gritter, and Marion Zijlema, *Atlas Van De Nederlandse Geschiedenis* (Holten: Walvaboek, 2003). Le Roy Ladurie, *The Peasants of Languedoc*.

<sup>429</sup> Richard C. Hoffmann, "Economic Development and Aquatic Ecosystems in Medieval Europe," *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 3 (1996).

sea.<sup>430</sup> Fish met the requirements of Catholic meatless days, was long-lasting and nutritious.<sup>431</sup> The late fifteenth and early sixteenth century were marked by a series of lengthy, costly wars across western Europe and the Mediterranean. Armies were increasingly provisioned by military contractors using state funds.<sup>432</sup> Preserved fish were doubly useful as a source of protein for oceanic voyages. Pickled fish could be kept in barrels on board and would last for months. From the mid-fifteenth century onward maritime traffic originating in western European ports increased significantly. As first West Africa and the Atlantic islands, and later the Americas, became open to commerce the need to reliably provision vessels on the high seas increased. Early settlements in the Americas, for instance, required regular supply ships from Iberia that carried salted fish as well as wheat, wine and meat. High in protein and easier to store than live animals, casks of saltfish fueled settlers who frequently depended on supplies from the metropole during the early years of colonization.<sup>433</sup> No ship left Europe for a transatlantic voyage in the fifteenth or sixteenth century without preserved fish on board.<sup>434</sup> As the coastal European fisheries were already dedicated to supplying a growing urban population, new overseas sources of marine protein had to be found and exploited by the fifteenth century. There was therefore a major strategic and commercial interest in finding and exploiting Atlantic fisheries from the earliest days of European expansion. Fueling the wars and overseas expansion of European states proved to be one of the major incentives for fishermen.

Yet these pressures cannot fully explain the growth of the fishery at Terra Nova. The economic constraints on merchants during the early sixteenth century should have argued against a robust early fishery. Transatlantic voyages were inherently risky, and never more so than in the first decades of the

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<sup>430</sup> During the early sixteenth century wars, for instance, the English crown paid over £5,000 just on provisioning its fleet with herring and saltfish. CSP, Edward VI Domestic, No.721. Sept. 1, 1552. Charges under Henry VIII and Edward VI, collected from accounts, for military and naval affairs. Section 4: Sea charges during the wars.

<sup>431</sup> See for instance the records of the town of Saint Malo, which included receipts for the purchase of fish on fish days for the city garrison: AM Saint Malo, BB4, entry 1569.

<sup>432</sup> Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution : Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Glete, *Warfare at Sea, 1500-1650: Maritime Conflicts and the Transformation of Europe*.

<sup>433</sup> *Columbus' Oupost among the Taino*. pp.135-137

<sup>434</sup> For example see: Juan Pérez de Tudela, "Colección Documental Del Descubrimiento (1470-1506)," *Real Academia de la Historia, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Fundación MAFRE América* (1994). Vol II. No.204 pp.631. As ship in 1494 carrying V *toneles* of dried and salted fish, bound for the Caribbean.



sixteenth century. Sailing small ships across the wide and poorly settled North Atlantic, a space filled with icebergs and notorious storms, there would be no ports in which the crew might stop to take on provisions or repair the ship. The volume of shipping available to Atlantic European ports in the very early sixteenth century was finite, and substantially smaller than it would be later in the century. Jan Luiten van Zanden has estimated the total size of the European merchant fleet as 225,000 tons in 1500.<sup>435</sup> By 1520 this would have been around 310,000 tons. Sending fifty to one hundred ships to Terra Nova, and likely another 150-200 to Iceland, therefore represented a considerable part of the mercantile resources of the continent: around 5-8% of the total.<sup>436</sup> The actual impact was likely much higher, as merchants organizing commerce on the far north Atlantic were therefore more likely to draw on shipping resources normally devoted to coastal trade, European fisheries and the Baltic/Mediterranean trades rather than the large, bulkier craft which plied most long-distance routes. This is corroborated by records which indicate that the ships used for Terra Nova were frequently used in subsequent seasons for intra-European trade.<sup>437</sup> These intra-European trade routes were safe, short and profitable. Many middling merchants were therefore faced with the choice between devoting their meagre shipping resources to reliable coastal trades and fisheries or to crossing the broad Atlantic.

Despite this, the evidence suggests that transatlantic cod-fishing offered European merchants a number of advantages over alternative commercial ventures. In general the complexity and risk of a long-distance voyage was offset by the reliable returns made by selling large volume of cod, the relatively low costs and

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<sup>435</sup> Jan Luiten Van Zanden and Milja Van Tielhof, "Roots of Growth and Productivity Change in Dutch Shipping Industry, 1500–1800," *Explorations in Economic History* 46, no. 4 (2009). Unger, *Shipping and Economic Growth, 1350-1850*; Lucassen and Unger, "Labour Productivity in Ocean Shipping, 1450–1875."; Unger does not give an estimate for 1500, though his total tonnage for 1600 is considerably larger than that offered by van Zanden. Backdating Unger's numbers (using his 50% growth rate estimate) would suggest around 500,000 tons of shipping in 1500 for the European merchant marine.

<sup>436</sup> Fifty ships represents the number offered by John Rut, and one hundred the count given by Rast. The 1528 English ship count indicates 150 ships bound for Iceland, to which must be added at least 25 more from the Hanse towns and likely several more from Scotland, Flanders and Denmark. I have chosen 80 tons burthern as an average size of ships in the 1520s. A low of 200 ships on the far north Atlantic therefore would mean 16,000 tons of shipping; a high of 300 would mean 24,000 tons.

<sup>437</sup> See the testimony of Richard Hoare in the 1530s in Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America.* .

the freedom of action afforded by this industry. This was a type of commerce that most closely resembled the bulk trades, in such goods as cereals, salt, wine or timber, which was still largely confined to the North Sea, Baltic and Mediterranean.<sup>438</sup> For many mariners from northwest European ports it was a familiar and safe form of trade that could now be extended westward across the Atlantic. Fishing for cod further offered multiple sources of profit as the by-products produced by fishing for cod in Terra Nova were themselves of considerable value. Although a ship sent to Terra Nova was usually committed for the entire warm season, this meant that the vessel was free for the fall and winter. Many merchants could therefore get two or even three voyages in a single year out of their Terra Nova ships. A ship-owner could decide to outfit a fishing voyage in early January, earn a profit by September or October and move on to other investments before the year was out. In addition to its preserved flesh, cod livers could be rendered to produce a liquid known as train oil.<sup>439</sup> Much as early Portuguese merchants had sought seals for their oil in West Africa alongside the fisheries, in the far north Atlantic ships would return each fall laden with not just dry cod but barrels of train oil. Importantly this oil could be produced without any additional inputs except a large barrel and time. While serving on the fishery at Terra Nova the first mariners may have traded with Amerindians or trapped wildlife to produce fur, allowing them to bring home valuable pelts. The value of preserved codfish was therefore compounded by the secondary products generated by the voyage.

To the benefit of small towns like St. Waast and Pontevedra, outfitting fishing voyages in the first decades of the sixteenth century was simple. Ships tended to be small, with small crews, and fishing equipment was relatively cheap.<sup>440</sup> The absence of loan records related to transatlantic fishing before 1540 strongly suggests that very few merchants had to resort to credit in order to outfit their fishing vessels.

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<sup>438</sup> On northern bulk trades see: The discussion of the rise of Amsterdam in Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*. Vol. III. Pye, *The Edge of the World : A Cultural History of the North Sea and the Transformation of Europe*; Wubs-Mrozewicz and Jenks, *The Hanse in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*.

<sup>439</sup> As fish were caught and processed their livers were packed into barrels so that liquids would be pressed out. This high-fat oil was used in a variety of household and industrial purposes during the sixteenth century. Parks et al., *The Underwater Archaeology of Red Bay: Basque Shipbuilding and Whaling in the 16th Century*; La Morandière, *La Pêche Française De La Morue À Terre-Neuve Du Xvie Siècle À Nos Jours; Son Importance Économique, Sociale Et Politique*.

<sup>440</sup> For examples see: Musset, *Les Rochelais À Terre-Neuve, 1500-1789*. Part I.

Voyages were organized by individual merchants or small groups, and (as the crew of the *Jacquette* in 1510 has indicated) outfitted with local mariners. The low barrier to entry in the Terra Nova trade allowed merchants to operate independently and to avoid getting wrapped up in urban financial markets. What resulted was a system of commercial production that required minimal capital investment. This provided considerable flexibility to transatlantic fishing and likely heightened its appeal to many small-port merchants and mariners. Only after 1540 would this change dramatically, with a process of centralization on major outfitting ports replacing this early, diffuse system.

The flexibility and low cost of entry was made more appealing because the price of salted cod from Terra Nova was, as the evidence suggests, high in the very early sixteenth century. The size of the catches brought back from Terra Nova in the early sixteenth century were small relative to the markets they were serving. A ship carrying 10,000-20,000 whole cod would make a minor impact on the 40,000 residents of Rouen. In the 1520s, if 60 ships returned each carrying 20,000 fish each then the entire European fleet would provide only 1,200,000 fish to the European market. As a result, prices likely remained high across Europe, though they fell somewhat in the 1520s. According to Earl Hamilton's price series from southern Castile, dried cod commanded a higher cost by weight than other fish.<sup>441</sup> In the early 1520s, a single *livre tournois* in Normandy or Biscay might buy a merchant between 3 and 15 whole codfish.<sup>442</sup> In 1537 in La Rochelle a merchant would have to pay around 13 *livres tournois* for a single *tonneaux* (ton burthen) of fish.<sup>443</sup> In 1548, by contrast, in Bordeaux a *livre tournois* could get a merchant over 90 whole codfish.<sup>444</sup> By the late 1560s less than single *livre tournois* could buy a half-ton (one *pippe* or butt) of cod.<sup>445</sup> In England in the early 1580s codfish cost less than a shilling.<sup>446</sup> In short, it seems that the price of codfish was significantly higher in the early sixteenth century than at the end.

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<sup>441</sup> Hamilton, *American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain, 1501-1650*. See Appendix III.

<sup>442</sup> ADSM 2E1/375; ADCM 3E3 fol.8

<sup>443</sup> Musset p.56' Estimate by Musset for value of catch of Christophe; Assumed 70thx of codfish.

<sup>444</sup> ADG3E9829 fol. 219

<sup>445</sup> ADCM 3E145 2 Mars. A merchant paid 16 *solz tournois* per *pippe* of codfish.

<sup>446</sup> HCA File 52, no.129. In 1582 a catch was valued at around 26s. the hundred.

Perhaps the most persuasive advantage to many merchants coming from smaller ports considering investment in the far north Atlantic was the extremely limited oversight on the transatlantic fishing trades. During the early sixteenth century ships could visit Terra Nova without fear of encountering friendly or foreign naval vessels, settlements or government officials. Before the early seventeenth century there was a marked absence of trade companies or monopolies chartered to control commerce in Terra Nova. By contrast raveling to Iceland was riskier, given Danish claims, and Olaus Magnus suggests that regular cavalry patrols tried to trap rogue English and Hanse merchants who were illegally fishing.<sup>447</sup> The prospects for vessels returning to port to sell their catch were even better. A number of the earliest references to Terra Nova involve tax disputes and efforts by merchants to evade paying the tithe.<sup>448</sup> This suggests that many fishermen and merchants initially brought their catches home duty-free. The Breton monks who were so upset with the *malles hommes* of Bréhat were mostly concerned with the payment of tithes. We have already seen the Portuguese dispute in 1506 over the right to impose tithes on cod. Both texts use the phrase “the tenth,” a common way of denoting the tithe which would constitute a tenth of the imported article’s value. Though in some cases this may have been rendered in cash, it was most often paid as a portion of the goods

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<sup>447</sup> Olaus et al., *Olaus Magnus: Description of the Northern Peoples, Rome 1555* (London: Hakluyt Society., 1998).

<sup>448</sup> Two examples from Normandy further indicate the importance of taxation to the fisheries, and the attempts to fit Terra Nova into an existing framework. The ecclesiastic records of the Norman port of Fécamp over the sixteenth century show a constant effort by church authorities to extract taxes from fishermen. (AD SM 7H 294 Cellerier. – “Vicomte de la mer et port de Fécamp : comptes et états des coutumes de la vicomte appartenant à l’office de cellerier”) The registres of the office de celleriere of the abbaye de Fécamp show the duties imposed on imports in 1520, 1550 and 1560. By the latter two decades, *morue* shows up regularly and is subject to an import duty. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, 1550, for instance, Jehan Susemaique was charged two *sols* for unloading three hundred *morue*. (AD SM 7H294. Registre 1550.) More explicitly, a judgement from July 24, 1565 explicitly states a tax of “*quatre derniers par cent de morue*,” or four *derniers* per one hundred *morue*, to be paid to the Cellerier of the abbey. (AD SM 7H 295. Juillet 24, 1565.) Since a hundred-count of cod could sell for several *livres tournois*, the four-*dernier* tax would have made but a small dent in the merchant’s profit margin. In this small town local church officials had determined that cod was to be subject to normal import taxes, and at a surprisingly low rate. An even more interesting incident occurred early in the expansion of the fisheries, in 1524. The small port of St. Waast in Normandy lies on the eastern coast of the Cotentin peninsula. On December 23<sup>rd</sup> the *Parlement de Normandie* passed judgement on a dispute between the fishermen and church officials in the village. The church had claimed it was due “a tenth of the cod which the aforesaid parties [fishermen] can fish at the new lands or other foreign lands (*la dixieme des morues que lesdits appellans pouvienent pescher es terres neufves ou autre pays estrange*).” The fishermen brought suit against them, but lost their claim. The *Parlement de Normandie* would ensure that fish from Terra Nova were subject to the tithe in ports such as St. Waast. That this case comes from such an early date suggests that it was of immediate interest to church officials to fit the Terra Nova trade into the existing system of tithe extractions. The prompt response of the *Parlement de Normandie* meant that a precedent which favoured church officials over fishermen was established at the outset of the commercial fishery in Normandy.

themselves. In the Portuguese case the argument was not about whether a tithe could be imposed, but rather who was authorized to collect it.<sup>449</sup> The crown wished to make it clear that this right could not be assigned locally, but had to be granted through a royal office or court. After a spate of court cases merchants in the Kingdoms of France, Portugal and England were subject to a tithe which was paid to local officials. Beyond this there is little evidence to suggest that fish from Terra Nova was reliably or heavily taxed. Port records from Fécamp in Normandy, for instance, suggest that cod was taxed at a lower rate than herring.<sup>450</sup> Fish from Iceland was more rigorously taxed in England at a rate which tended to fluctuate over the course of the sixteenth century. The result of this bureaucratic indifference to the Terra Nova trade was that the early fishery operated in a very loose legal environment. It was certainly not free trade by any means, as imported cod was subject to tithes from church officials and local duties, which could vary considerably. But because Terra Nova fish were not treated separately from other types of fish across regions or states, merchants did not face the exceptional regulation or tax burdens that marked other Atlantic imports.

Although these general incentives, including low tax rates and rising demand, may account for the steady rise in fishing operations at Terra Nova they cannot account for short-term fluctuations. To understand this we must turn to politics. The most significant, but underappreciated, pressure on fishermen was that of violence. In the first half of the sixteenth century conflict in western Europe and the Mediterranean centered around the repeated clashes between the Habsburg dominions and the Kingdom of France, typically grouped together as the Habsburg-Valois wars.<sup>451</sup> (See Appendix A, Table A5) The periodic Habsburg-Valois wars stretched from the 1508 until 1559, and they continuously exerted an influence over commerce on the far north Atlantic during this time period. Although the most noteworthy combat took place in northern Italy and later in the low countries, all these wars had significant naval

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<sup>449</sup> Abreu-Ferreira. "The Cod Trade in Early Modern Portugal." Pp.102-104.

<sup>450</sup> ADSM 7H249

<sup>451</sup> James D. Tracy, "Herring Wars: The Habsburg Netherlands and the Struggle for Control of the North Sea, Ca. 1520-1560," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 24, no. 2 (1993); Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660-1649*; Steve Murdoch, *The Terror of the Seas?: Scottish Maritime Warfare 1513-1713* (BRILL, 2010); Glete, *Warfare at Sea, 1500-1650: Maritime Conflicts and the Transformation of Europe*.

components.<sup>452</sup> The Habsburg-Valois struggles further tended to merge with repeated conflicts between the Kingdom of England on the one hand, and the crowns of France, Scotland and at times Denmark on the other. Thus while land combat was centered on Italy and Flanders naval combat concentrated in the Bay of Biscay and the waters between England and France. States such as the Kingdom of France or Castile lacked the resources to maintain professional navies capable of enforcing even local control of the seas. Rather the outbreak of hostilities between two sea powers tended to unleash a wave of privateers and low-intensity commerce raiding.<sup>453</sup> The *guerre de course* was the primary tool available to sixteenth century states to pursue violence at sea. What naval resources a state did maintain were used for one-off raids or landings at strategic coastal towns. In the mid-1510s, for instance, the English crown focused its meager naval assets on attacking ports along the northern Breton coastline, supplemented by a general *guerre-de-course* in the English Channel, North Sea and Irish Sea.<sup>454</sup> The result was that during a war year one or two focal points might be threatened by substantial navies while the seas in general became infested with privateers.

What is striking with hindsight is the degree to which the short-term changes in commerce at Terra Nova correspond chronologically to periods of major naval conflict between European states. There are, for instance, a cluster of records which point to Norman and Biscayan towns becoming involved in the Terra Nova fishery during the years 1520-1526. This took place in the middle of one of the sharpest periods of war between the Habsburg and Valois. Even the earliest Breton records, around the year 1510, correspond to a period when English ships were raiding their coastline.<sup>455</sup> (For the earliest records see Appendix A, Table A3) The increase in direct references to fishing voyages in the first six years of the

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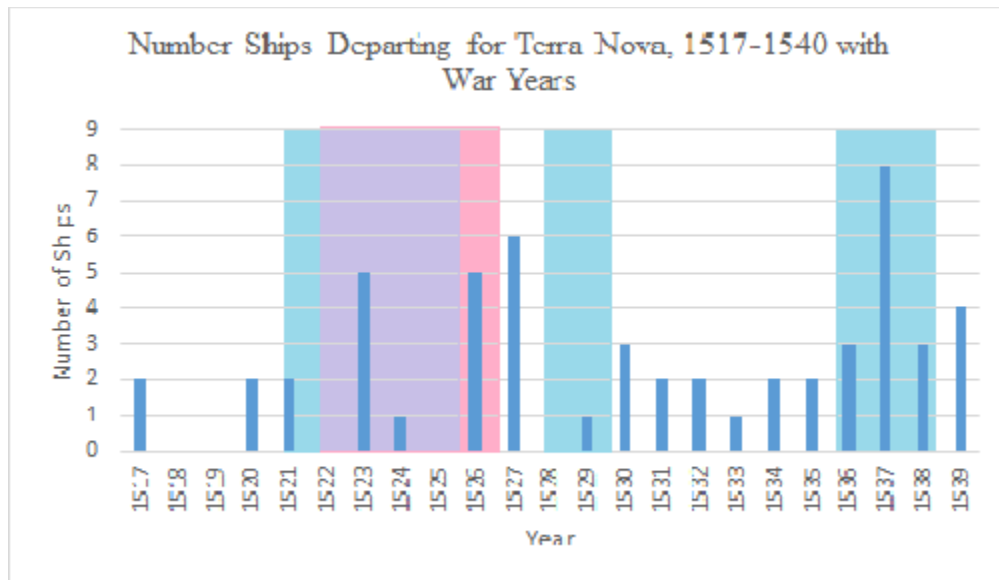
<sup>452</sup> Michel Vergé-Franceschi, *Chronique Maritime De La France D'ancien Régime: 1492-1792* (Paris: SEDES, 1998). E. Ducéré, *Histoire Maritime De Bayonne. Les Corsaires Sous L'Ancien Régime* (Bayonne: E. Hourquet, 1895).

<sup>453</sup> Alejandro Colas and Bryan Mabee, *Mercenaries, Pirates, Bandits and Empires : Private Violence in Historical Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Frederic C Lane, "Economic Consequences of Organized Violence," *The Journal of Economic History* 18, no. 04 (1958); Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns State-Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe*.

<sup>454</sup> On the Anglo-French war see: Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660-1649*.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

1520s overlaps with the height of fighting, as can be seen in the following chart (See also Appendix A, Table A5):



**Figure 12. Chart showing number of known ships leaving for Terra Nova 1517-1540 against violent conflict in early sixteenth century.**

Blue bar denotes Habsburg-Valois conflict, red denotes Anglo-French conflict, purple denotes overlap.

As the graph suggests, records tended to peak at the tail-end and just after wars. The latter issue, that the year after a war saw growth in fishing, is likely explained through the unevenness of communications in the early sixteenth century. Although these few records only represent a small part of the number of ships which actually departed for Terra Nova, the patterns of surviving records seem consistent. Similar relationships between war and growth would be seen in the 1540s, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

The correspondence between war and short-term increases in the scale of the fishery has been overlooked by historians, but likely offers at least a partial explanation for the sudden growth around 1520. Conflict drove up prices for preserved fish. Saltcod and herring were sought out by state contractors to use as provisions for both naval crews and armies, and by merchants in urban centers which might be cut off

from normal supplies of food fresh supplies of saltfish were welcome. We know, for instance, that in 1542 desperate norman merchants in the port of Dieppe had to turn to Dutch herring to alleviate the serious food shortages during wartime. The man who engineered the deal which brought fish from the north was Jean Ango, a member of the family which earlier in the century had turned away from Terra Nova.<sup>456</sup> War increased demand and profit margins merchants invested in the fish trade, swiftly accelerating demand.

One of the most significant markets for preserved fish were military forces, the garrisons, warship crews and expeditionary armies which prowled Europe in the early sixteenth century. Preserved fish was an extremely useful source of calories for mobile armed forces or even small garrisons. Dried or pickled cod could be purchased in bulk at the start of a campaign or voyage and parceled out to soldiers or sailors at regular intervals. In the wars of Henry VIII and Edward VI the English crown paid 2,607lb. for 116,378 saltfish. 2,800lb. were paid for 700tuns of red and white herring.<sup>457</sup> In the Catholic kingdoms of France, Castile and pre-reform England soldiers and sailors were expected to observe several fish days each week, mandating the availability of preserved fish. Over the course of the many wars which marked the early sixteenth century fledgling European states consumed massive amounts of fish in the pursuit of their military goals. For merchants invested in the fishing industry the military market represented a windfall. Several surviving regulations called for an entire codfish per man per day while on campaign, or four herring. This rapidly added up to thousands of fish purchased in a single contract. Often under pressure to procure supplies quickly before the start of a campaign, military contractors were likely vulnerable to inflated prices and gouging from merchants. The military market was likely significantly more important to the Iceland trade than to Terra Nova. Stockfish was more expensive than dry-salted or wet cod and was therefore in less demand in urban markets. Armies and navies preferred stockfish to dried cod as it was

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<sup>456</sup> Zeeuws Archief. 243 Admiraliteit te Veere, 1460-1562. No. 7. "Akte van commissie uitgegeven door de koning van Frankrijk aan Johan Augo, kapitein van Dieppe, om te onderhandelen met de gevolmachtigde der Nederlanden over de vrije haringvaart gedurende de oorlog, 1542. Notarieel afschrift, 1542." 1 charter.

<sup>457</sup> CSP, Edward VI Domestic, No.721. Sept. 1, 1552. Charges under Henry VIII and Edward VI, collected from accounts, for military and naval affairs. Section 4: Sea charges during the wars.



extremely long-lasting and durable.<sup>458</sup> The end of fighting between the Habsburg and Valois at the end of the 1550s likely contributed significantly to the decline in Icelandic commerce.

A significant cause of the correlation between warfare and fishing were the ways in which the outbreak of naval conflict would have encouraged many mariners to try their luck in Terra Nova as a safety measure. The fisheries near Europe were most vulnerable during times of war. It is likely that during the summer and early fall, at the height of the fighting, many important fisheries collapsed entirely. As Louis Sicking has charted, during the Habsburg-Valois conflicts fighting in the North Sea drove merchants to increasingly organize the fisheries for self-defense.<sup>459</sup> This drove up costs across the board and was only partially successful in the face of pirates and privateers. English operations at Iceland faced the threat of Scottish pirates during wartime, who forced fishermen to run the gauntlet on their homeward voyages and were seen as an existential threat to the stockfish trade.<sup>460</sup> When the Icelandic fishery faced the greatest disruption, the fishery at Terra Nova grew. Terra Nova was beyond the reach of corsairs or state navies in the early sixteenth century. Whereas the Bay of Biscay and the English Channel became plagued with corsairs each summer, a five-month voyage to Terra Nova was remarkably peaceful. As the case of the Breton pilot Moyne, discussed earlier in this chapter, indicates, fishermen from different ships might spend their time making merry together. Had Moyne been home in Brittany during the summer of 1536 he would have faced the threat of English corsairs and roving Basque pirates.<sup>461</sup> Mariners and merchant ship-owners also faced the threat of impressment into service by ship-strapped states. Departing in the late winter and

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<sup>458</sup> William F. Hutchinson et al., "The Globalization of Naval Provisioning: Ancient DNA and Stable Isotope Analyses of Stored Cod from the Wreck of the *Mary Rose*, Ad 1545," *Royal Society Open Science* 2, no. 9 (2015). When the *Mary Rose* went to the bottom in the 1540s it was carrying Icelandic and Norwegian stockfish, not cod from Terra Nova.

<sup>459</sup> Louis Sicking, *Neptune and the Netherlands State, Economy, and War at Sea in the Renaissance* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004). See also: Tracy, "Herring Wars: The Habsburg Netherlands and the Struggle for Control of the North Sea, Ca. 1520-1560."

<sup>460</sup> Murdoch, *The Terror of the Seas?: Scottish Maritime Warfare 1513-1713*.

<sup>461</sup> Glete, *Warfare at Sea, 1500-1650: Maritime Conflicts and the Transformation of Europe*; José Antonio Azpiazu, "Guerra Y Supervivencia. Un Episodio Del Corso Guipuzcoano De Mediados Del Siglo Xvi," *Itsas memoria: revista de estudios marítimos del País Vasco*, no. 5 (2006).

returning in the early fall, ships and crews sent to Terra Nova could avoid the worst of the fighting, as well as the attempts to seize their ships for service, and arrive home to high prices for their catch.

The various incentives and pressures outlined above all coalesced during the first decades of the sixteenth century. For many small port merchants and mariners, the high price of codfish around 1520 was alluring and justified the risk of a transatlantic voyage. This became all the more appealing as periodic wars sent states and cities clamoring for new sources of protein. Faced with corsairs and warship prowling off their coasts, fishermen from Saint-Waast, Pontevedra, northern Brittany and elsewhere found good reason in the early 1520s to sail as far from Europe as possible during the long summer season. What this ultimately suggests is that the rise of the cod fishery at Terra Nova was highly contingent. Had market demand and conflict not converged so neatly around 1520 there would have been little incentive to develop transatlantic operations.

By the end of the 1530s a commercial, open fishery existed in the northwest Atlantic. Even if its year-to-year scale fluctuated significantly with the wars which ravaged continental Europe it was now a permanent fixture of the European economy. As this chapter has suggested the creation of a fishery at Terra Nova was made possible through the convergence of rising demand for fish, cycles of warfare and the lax legal regime which prevailed in the northwest Atlantic. These were causes which were felt primarily in the coastal communities of Atlantic Europe, places which had long experience with local commercial fisheries and a medieval tradition of vernacular industry. The twin pillars of a commonly-held open fishery and seasonal, cyclical migration were the essential ingredients in creating a permanent Terra Nova. Both of these also rejected a permanent, imperial presence in the northwest Atlantic and diverged from patterns of colonization and economic exploitation in the Caribbean and Americas during the same decades.

Into the legal opening left by failed explorers and settlers poured first the Bretons, soon joined by more and more communities from across the European littoral. These largely anonymous fishermen proved far better able to adapt their techniques, and indeed their way of life, to the environmental conditions in the northwest Atlantic. In so doing they left a mark on history far greater than any of the explorers and would-

be settlers on the far north Atlantic, laying the groundwork for the rapid growth of European activity at Terra Nova that by mid-century would make it a center for oceanic commerce and food production. What this chapter has suggested is that even if we cannot always see the individual mariners who accomplished these feats in the first decades of the sixteenth century, this should not discourage us from understanding their motivations and trying to reconstruct their stories.

## 5.0 THE FISHERY AT ITS HEIGHT: GROWTH AND CHANGING FORTUNES 1540-1580

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of December, 1557 the *Parlement de Bordeaux*, the chief law court for the entire southwest of the Kingdom of France, entered in its official registers a royal edict confirming a series of privileges for an obscure town in Basque Country.<sup>462</sup> To “our dear and fine friends the mariners and habitants of Saint Jean-de-Luz,” King Henri II granted a series of privileges which included beneficial tax exemptions.<sup>463</sup> In an age when legal exemption was commonly given to communities in exchange for rendering certain services to the crown, such a declaration was hardly unique. But the record does make an important note about the community which had earned such a grant. The liberties were to reward them for the “fishing for various kinds of merchandise and trade which they do like Codfish Whales and their oils which they go to take and fish in Terra Nova.”<sup>464</sup> This was a recognition that Saint Jean-de-Luz, a tiny outpost of a few thousand souls, was emerging as one of the most powerful fishing ports in Europe. The date of the record, from 1557, points to a larger context for this decision: by the mid-sixteenth century the cod fishing operations at Terra Nova had grown to become a major economic and social force in northwest Europe. St. Jean-de-Luz, as a port on the Bay of Biscay, was at the center of this process of expansion which moved the northwest Atlantic from the periphery to the center of the maritime world for many Europeans.

The decades from 1540-1580 marked the apogee of the sixteenth century fishery in the northwest Atlantic. The scale and tempo of operations grew very rapidly around the year 1540s and continued to climb until the 1560s. Each summer more and more mariners crossed the sea to catch and process codfish, and

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<sup>462</sup> ADG 1B Parlement de Bordeaux No.8. fol. 29-30v.

<sup>463</sup> *nos cher et bien amis les marins et habitans de saint Jehan de luz,*

<sup>464</sup> *La pesche aux quelques pieces de marchandises et traite quilz font Comme des morues ballaynes et huilles dicelles quilz vont prendre et pesches Jusques es terres neufves*

increasingly whales as well, for consumption in Europe. As a consequence, in the mid-sixteenth century Terra Nova became a major center of maritime activity on the Atlantic Ocean. At a time when the strands of transatlantic commerce were solidifying into a series of distinct trade networks, the fisheries attracted more and more maritime resources each year. Why this never translated into deeper integration with the wider Atlantic experience is the operative question.

This chapter will outline the history of the Newfoundland fisheries in the mid-sixteenth century, from 1540-1580. This would be the period in which the scale of the fishery reached its highest point and Terra Nova became a major fixture of transoceanic commerce. In so doing it will explore the different ways in which the structures and contours of the fishery changed over these decades. These include the rising importance of short-term loans as a way to finance the fishery; the centralization of outfitting in a few major ports; the development of alternatives to cod fishing in Terra Nova; and the rising importance of the Bay of Biscay as a center of the fishery. It will conclude by considering how, at a time when transatlantic commerce elsewhere was becoming more integrated, fishermen continued to turn away from the wider Atlantic context of Terra Nova to preserve an isolated fishery. In studying these different patterns this chapter will try and address the main concerns of this study by showing how in the mid-century Terra Nova was larger than historians have credited it, developed unique socio-economic structures, and was separate from the rest of the Atlantic world.

## **5.1 GROWTH AND SOPHISTICATION**

Around the year 1540 the transatlantic fisheries began a phase of sustained expansion, lasting into the 1570s.<sup>465</sup> Though the 1520s had seen an initial period of expansion for the fishery, relative to previous

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<sup>465</sup> As with the previous chapter, for simplicity's sake this study refers to 'around 1540' as a start date, although the first years of growth in the second phase may have started around 1537. This chapter often uses '1540's' as a shorthand for the years 1537-1554.

decades, the scale of growth starting in the 1540s was considerably larger and more consistent. Between the 1530s and the 1540s the size of the seasonal fishery at Terra Nova may have doubled or even trebled, ensuring at least 100 vessels sailed every year. For this reason many historians have attributed the origins of a commercial fishery in Terra Nova to the 1540s, rather than an earlier date.<sup>466</sup> Evidence suggests that around the year 1540 the size of average fishing fleets increased from 60-80 annually to between 80 and 150 vessels each summer.<sup>467</sup> The years 1542 and 1549 seem to have been especially prosperous years for the Terra Nova fishery, but in general operations in the northwest Atlantic were sustained at a more vigorous tempo than they had in the first few decades of the century. Indeed, there are no years after 1540 for which some sort of reference to fishing at Terra Nova has not survived, and most years have left written accounts of fishing operations from multiple regions within Europe. Mariners from Normandy, Brittany, the West Country, Biscay, Basque Country, Galicia and Portugal all seem to have been consistently active from the 1540s onward, albeit at considerably different rates. This marks the start of a long boom in commercial fishing in the northwest Atlantic, a period of expansion which would take the fisheries to their height.

Although the general trend of the mid-sixteenth century was steady expansion, the scale of operations could fluctuate significantly on a year-to-year basis. Within an overall increase were a series of peaks and troughs: a burst of activity around 1537, a surge in 1542 and again in 1549, and a brief but sharp decline in the mid-1540s. The years 1559-1567 probably saw the most sustained and vibrant operations, before tempering in the 1570s. Whereas during the early sixteenth century naval conflict drove growth and participation in the fishery, the relationship was becoming more complex by the 1540s. The spike in

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<sup>466</sup> See: Turgeon, "Codfish, Consumption and Colonization: The Creation of the French Atlantic World During the Sixteenth Century." "The International Fishery of the Sixteenth Century"; Kurlansky, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World*. Havard and Vidal, *Histoire De L'amérique Française*.ot

<sup>467</sup> This based on a survey of the surviving notarial documents from La Rochelle, Bordeaux and Rouen, as well as city council records in Rouen and Saint Malo and observations made by Robert Lefant and others in the 1540s. These are compared with several studies of the sixteenth century fishery: Musset, *Les Rochelais À Terre-Neuve, 1500-1789*; Turgeon, "Pour Redécouvrir Notre 16e Siècle: Les Pêches À Terre-Neuve D'après Les Archives Notariales De Bordeaux."; Bréard, Bréard, and Société de l'histoire de, *Documents Relatifs À La Marine Normande Et À Ses Armements Aux Xvie Et Xviie Siècles Pour Le Canada, L'afrique, Les Antilles, Le Brésil Et Les Indes*; Barkham, *Los Vascos En El Marco Atlántico Norte: Siglos Xvi Y Xvii*.

voyages around 1537 and 1542 were likely linked to warfare and rising demand for fish.<sup>468</sup> Yet privateers and pirates seem to have been more effective at disrupting outbound and returning voyages by the mid-1540s, causing merchants to scale back operations. In the years 1544-1545, for instance, the intensity of the English *geurre de course* severely disrupted the ability of merchants in Norman, Breton and Biscayan ports to freely return from Terra Nova and sell their catch.<sup>469</sup> In 1545 the King of France attempted to stay the entire fishing fleet in Normandy, in preparation for a naval expedition against England.<sup>470</sup> In the early 1550s many Basques in Guipuzcoa ( a province in Spanish Basque Country) switched from fishing to privateering, spurred by Charles V's call to arms.<sup>471</sup> But in most cases fluctuations were localized. In the years 1553-1554, for instance, the French Basque fishing industry collapsed in the face of a sustained, organized assault by Spanish Basque warships and privateers.<sup>472</sup> During this same period Norman fleets were unaffected, and indeed had one of its strongest seasons.<sup>473</sup> The overall trend was that transatlantic fishing contracted sharply in the middle of conflicts, while remaining robust at the beginning and end.

As the scale of the fishery at Terra Nova grew, communities in Atlantic Europe became more invested in and bound to the fishery. Some coastal regions began to shift towards local economies dependent on access to Terra Nova, setting the template for places like Basque Country and the West Country which relied heavily on this trade. The 1540s would also see the emergence of true fishing ports. If we look at the

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<sup>468</sup> On the wars of the 1540s see: Vergé-Franceschi, *Chronique Maritime De La France D'ancien Régime: 1492-1792*; Glebe, *Warfare at Sea, 1500-1650: Maritime Conflicts and the Transformation of Europe*; Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660-1649*.

<sup>469</sup> Acts Privy Council. P. 28. 512. In 1542 "A letter was sent to the Mayour and Aldermen of Bristow for to discharge a certeyne Frenche shippe, which being laden wyth fische owt off the Newfownde Ilande was arrested for certeyne considerations in the sayde Porte." In 1546: John Frances of Roan, whose shippe was spoiled of a greate quantitie of Newland fische, had general letters of apprehencion of the pirates and restitution of the spoile."

<sup>470</sup> Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records with Numerous Illustrations and Maps*.

<sup>471</sup> José Ignacio Tellechea Idígoras and Kutxa Fundación, *Corsarios Guipuzcoanos En Terranova, 1552-1555* (Donostia-San Sebastián: Fundación Kutxa, 2000); Azpiazu, "Guerra Y Supervivencia. Un Episodio Del Corso Guipuzcoano De Mediados Del Siglo Xvi."

<sup>472</sup> Tellechea Idígoras and Fundación, *Corsarios Guipuzcoanos En Terranova, 1552-1555*.

<sup>473</sup> See the survey of sources in: Bréard, Bréard, and Société de l'histoire de, *Documents Relatifs À La Marine Normande Et À Ses Armements Aux Xvie Et Xviie Siècles Pour Le Canada, L'afrique, Les Antilles, Le Brésil Et Les Indes*; Gosselin and Beaurepaire, *Documents Authentiques Et Inédits Pour Servir É L'histoire De La Marine Normande Et Du Commerce Rouennais Pendant Les Xvie Et Xviie Siècles*.

port of La Rochelle we can see that Terra Nova trade as a proportion of the city's total maritime commerce was quite large, despite the low overall numbers. Using the survey of Etienne Trocmé and Marcel Delafosse we can compare the number of ships sent to Terra Nova against those sent to other parts of Europe or the wider Atlantic.<sup>474</sup> (See Appendix A, Table A6). For the period between 1540 and 1558 the percentage of ships departing La Rochelle for Terra Nova rarely dropped below 20% of the total volume of merchant shipping. Of the 228 vessels fitted out in La Rochelle during these eighteen years, 71 were bound for Terra Nova, about a third of rochelais commerce over that time period. This seems to have been the case in other port cities which engaged with Terra Nova. An isolated record from 1543 indicates that the city council of Plymouth, in the West Country, paid a man that autumn to light a beacon upon sighting the return of the Terra Nova fishing fleet.<sup>475</sup> This was apparently a matter of some municipal importance to the people of Plymouth and suggests that quite a few ships from the city were at the fishery. In the city of Opporto in northern Portugal more ships were sent to Terra Nova during 1558-59 than to any other destination, comprising around a third of all ships outfitted.<sup>476</sup> As the fishery became more embedded in the economic fabric of port towns, their populations became more invested and intertwined in the yearly functioning of the Terra Nova fleets.

This increased role for the Terra Nova fishery in the commercial life of ports such as Rouen and La Rochelle is a manifestation of the changing structures of the fishery, which would in turn alter the social and economic life of many cities. Around 1540 merchants participating in the Terra Nova fishery reorganized their operations in a way that created a number of significant underlying structures for the way that the fishery functioned. These included changes to financing, labour, regional organization and

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<sup>474</sup> Trocme and Delafosse, *Le Commerce Rochelais*, Table V, p.70. This table is based on a close reading of the notarial records for the city, and includes all vessels which departed the harbor. In addition to Terra Nova, merchants outfitted voyages to Zeeland, Northern France, the British Isles, Spain, Portugal, Africa, America, the Mediterranean and the Baltic. Privateering was also a favourite investment, especially in the war years of the 1550s.

<sup>475</sup> This is based off of the research notes of Keith Matthews held at Memorial University Newfoundland. Maritime History Archives, MUN, Keith Matthews Series 4, Research Notes, 4.22.023. Original reference is J.H. Bickerlegge. *Plymouth Muniments and Newfoundland*. P.3.

<sup>476</sup> Amândio Jorge Morais Barros, "Porto: A Construção De Um Espaço Marítimo Nos Alvores Dos Tempos Modernos," (2004). P. 619, Grafico 17.



consumption which had profound long-term consequences for the stability and growth of the fishery. By the early 1540s the ad hoc system of locally organized and outfitted voyages which had marked the first decades of engagement with Terra Nova was yielding to one which was increasingly focused on a handful of major port cities.<sup>477</sup> Rouen was the first and, for some time, the greatest of these outfitting ports. The concentrated resources of urban ports allowed mariners to outfit their vessels more efficiently. They also served as the main market for codfish from Terra Nova. In a port such as Rouen, La Rochelle or San Sebastian fishermen could find provisions, fishing equipment, ship stores and the crucial salt they needed all in one place. Cities also, most importantly, had the credit markets that could offer mariners the loans they needed to purchase these supplies.<sup>478</sup> The details of how this worked are described in depth in Chapter Five, but we can trace their origins to the 1540s. This reliance on minor merchants from a handful of urban centers marked a departure from maritime commerce elsewhere in the Atlantic basin. It tended to empower small creditors and gave the system as a whole considerable flexibility, while preserving the dominance of small port towns as the main participants in the fishery.

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<sup>477</sup> This phenomenon has been noted by several historians of the fishery, but rarely are the 1540s identified as the important time period. The rise of major port cities has influenced French historiography on the fisheries by encouraging concentration on a handful of ports and their records. See: De la Morandière, *Histoire De La Pêche Française De La Morue Dans L'amerique Septentrinale Des Origines a 1789*; Mollat, *Histoire Des Peches Maritimes En France*; Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*.

<sup>478</sup> On the economics of port cities in the sixteenth century and the early Atlantic, see: Patrick O'Flanagan, *Port Cities of Atlantic Iberia, C. 1500-1900* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008); Séminaire d'histoire économique et et al., "Ports Et Littoraux De L'europe Atlantique : Transformations Naturelles Et Aménagements Humains, Xive-Xvie Siècles : Actes Du Séminaire D'histoire Économique Et Maritime, Tenu À L'université De La Rochelle Le 24 Juin 2005."; Guerber and Le Bouédec, *Gens De Mer Ports Et Cités Aux Époques Ancienne, Médiévale Et Moderne : [Colloque Organisé À L' Université De Bretagne-Sud Les 15 Et 16 Juin 2009]*. Amélia Polónia, "Seaports as Centres of Economic Growth: The Portuguese Case, 1500–1800," in *Shipping and Economic Growth 1350-1850* (Brill, 2011).



**Figure 13. Major outfitting cities, mid-sixteenth century.**

Each of these ports served as a credit-market, source of provisions, and often doubled as a major market for codfish. Map by author.

The rise of outfitting ports would come to define fishing operations across the remainder of the sixteenth century. From the 1540s onward most fishing vessels did not sail directly to Terra Nova from their home port, but instead they visited a major center to take on supplies before crossing the Atlantic. This produced a process of regional centralization which had been absent earlier in the sixteenth century, but one which provided greater resources and flexibility to small ports. Communities on the coast of Normandy, Brittany and Basque Country which otherwise lacked access to provisions and capital financing now increasingly turned to urban centers like Rouen or La Rochelle to provide these. Much as Atlantic history as a whole has recently turned to the importance of ports as a crucial part of the infrastructure which made the Atlantic experience possible, so too is the history of the sixteenth century fishery inextricable from the

rise of these hubs of provisioning and financing.<sup>479</sup> If anything explains why the scale of the fishery grew starting around 1540, it is the steady coalescing of outfitting in the cities of northwestern Europe.

As outfitting ports became the center of fishing operations, the volume of notarial records which relate to Terra Nova increases substantially in the surviving archives. The sudden increase in notarial contracts, relative to other sources of information, around the year 1540 is itself an important indication of structural changes in the fishery. It is a sign that as more merchants and shipowners from small ports were coming to major cities to outfit their ships there was a need to keep track of and preserve evidence for business deals. Whereas in the 1520s merchants from the same town may have arranged for a voyage to Terra Nova between themselves with a verbal agreement, by the 1540s the relationships between creditor, debtor and the outfitter were more complex. Rouenais financiers wanted paper records when they lent money or sold supplies to ship owners from Jumièges, Honfleur or Fécamp, including written proof that the ship would return to Rouen at the end of the season. Though the notarial records do not account for all the voyages to Terra Nova during the mid-sixteenth century, they are evidence that transatlantic fishing was becoming more systematized and hierarchical.

Much of the growth after 1540 was driven by what have collectively been called the “French” ports, and as such the mid-sixteenth century is often described as the height of the ‘French’ fishery.<sup>480</sup> This obscures the regional nature of commercial growth. Around 1537 the ports of Labourd (French Basque Country), and Biscay (Bordeaux, Saintonge, La Rochelle) became increasingly and regularly involved in the fishery.<sup>481</sup> This was a significant development which would lay the groundwork for the surge in

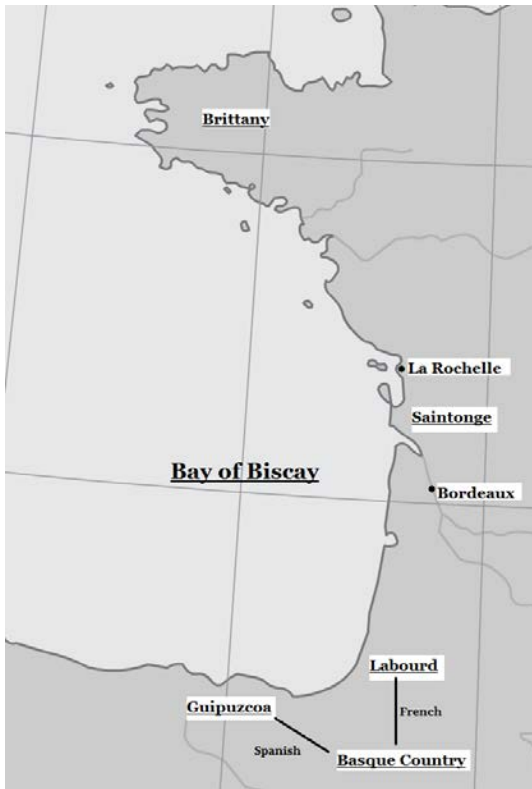
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<sup>479</sup> On ports in the Atlantic world see: O’Flanagan, *Port Cities of Atlantic Iberia, C. 1500-1900*; Séminaire d’histoire économique et et al., “Ports Et Littoraux De L’europe Atlantique : Transformations Naturelles Et Aménagements Humains, Xive-Xvie Siècles : Actes Du Séminaire D’histoire Économique Et Maritime, Tenu À L’université De La Rochelle Le 24 Juin 2005.”; Jesús Angel Solórzano Telechea, “Medieval Seaports of the Atlantic Coast of Spain,” *International journal of maritime history* 21, no. 1 (2009); Polónia, “Seaports as Centres of Economic Growth: The Portuguese Case, 1500–1800.”; Guerber and Le Bouédec, *Gens De Mer Ports Et Cités Aux Époques Ancienne, Médiévale Et Moderne : [Colloque Organisé À L’ Université De Bretagne-Sud Les 15 Et 16 Juin 2009]*.

<sup>480</sup> Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*.

<sup>481</sup> Turgeon, “Pour Redécouvrir Notre 16e Siècle: Les Pêches À Terre-Neuve D’après Les Archives Notariales De Bordeaux.” Biggar, *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur De Roberval*.

expeditions from the Bay of Biscay in later decades. Brittany remained extremely active but there is no indication that they significantly increased the size of the Breton fishing fleet.<sup>482</sup>



**Figure 14. Regions around the Bay of Biscay referenced in text. Map by author.**

It was Normandy, centered on the city of Rouen but including a large number of smaller ports, that experienced the most radical growth in the volume of shipping sent to Terra Nova. Rouen was the pre-eminent port for commerce with Terra Nova in the 1540s and early 1550s, and remained a major outfitting center until the early seventeenth century. The 1540s therefore represent less the growth of a “French” fishery than that of a Norman one, supplemented by expansion in various Biscayan ports. It is very likely that during the 1540s and early 1550s Norman merchants dominated commerce at Terra Nova to a degree not seen before or after in the sixteenth century. During the growth of the 1520s the Norman experience had mirrored that of the Bretons, in which participation tended to be broad, with many small ports each

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<sup>482</sup> De la Morandière, *Histoire De La Pêche Francaise De La Morue Dans L'amerique Septentrinale Des Origines a 1789*.

sending a few ships each year.<sup>483</sup> It is hard to determine precisely when the Normans overtook the Bretons, but by 1542 the Norman fishing fleet was at least 60 vessels and Rouen had emerged as a major market. Indeed, by that time many Breton merchants were shipping their fish to Rouen, which served as a clearing house for cod.<sup>484</sup> The maritime community of Normandy was far better suited to sustaining large-scale transatlantic commerce than their Breton counterparts. In the first half of the sixteenth century Normandy was, as it has always been, one of the most prosperous and distinctive regions in the Kingdom of France. The coastal region combined extensive and verdant agricultural land with a large number of ports. Then, as now, there was a distinction between Upper Normandy, lying north of the Seine, and Lower Normandy, from the Cotentin Peninsula to the Seine.<sup>485</sup> Lying halfway between the sea and Paris on the right bank of the river Seine, the city of Rouen was the political and economic heart of Normandy in the sixteenth century. Although eclipsed by Lyon and Antwerp, Rouen's large mercantile community formed an important financial center for the Kingdom of France. Rouen was also a major center for commerce with South America and the Caribbean, England, the Low Countries, Iberia and many other parts of Europe. For this reason Terra Nova therefore only formed one small part of the merchant community's wider interests, and

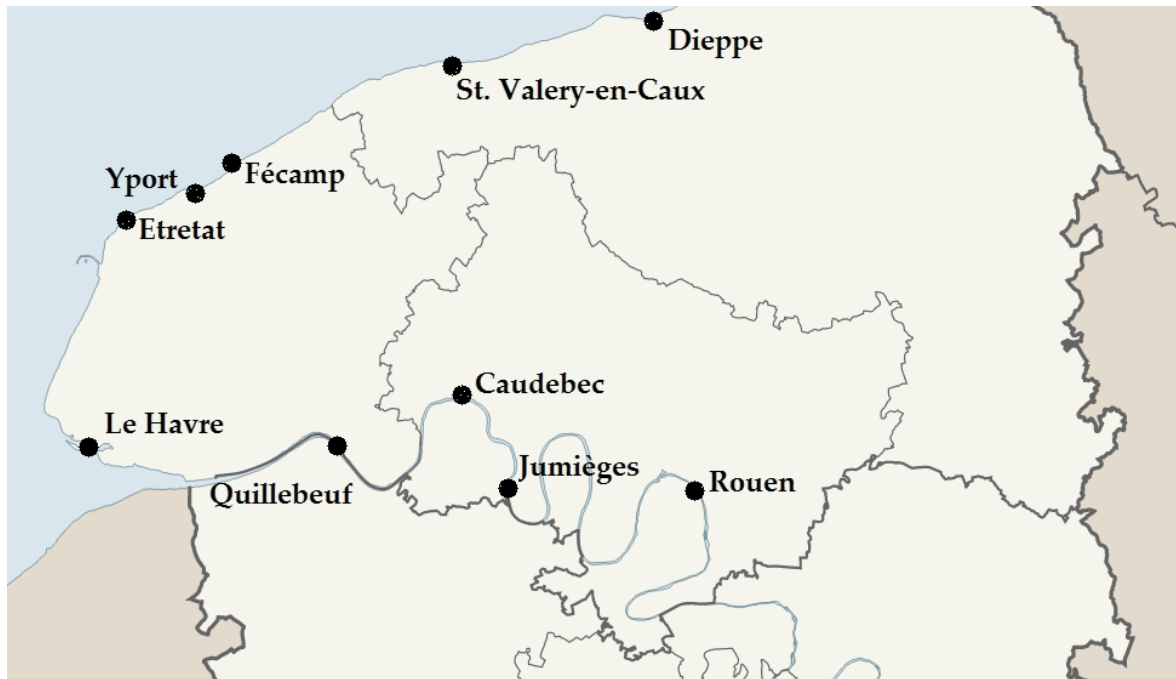
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<sup>483</sup> Unlike many other regions which participated in the north Atlantic commerce, Normandy was marked by a large number of mid-sized ports. Although they could not rival Rouen in terms of size or capital, these harbours each were able to pursue independent commerce, both locally and long-distance. The five primary ports were Dieppe, Honfleur, Cherbourg, Granville and, after its foundation in 1515, Le Havre. Many were noteworthy to contemporaries for their histories of adventurous commerce. Dieppe, for instance, was well known as both a major herring fishing port and as a center for navigation and cartography, while Honfleur would be the port of choice for later explorers of the north Atlantic to outfit their ships. All five of these ports would actively participate in the Terra Nova cod fisheries. Normandy was unusual for this high concentration of commercial ports.

<sup>484</sup> Archives communales de Rouen. Délibérations de la ville. B1.

<sup>485</sup> This general overview of the Norman background to north Atlantic commerce must be paired with a caveat. It is unfortunately the case that our knowledge about Lower Normandy is severely hampered by the lack of source material, not unlike Brittany. Many of the important archives, in particular in the Cotentin, did not survive the Second World War. Details about Cherbourg and Granville, which we know were important ports for Terra Nova, are almost completely lost, and only the notarial archives of Honfleur have survived partially intact. What we do know is thanks to the efforts of local historians who worked before 1940, and the efforts of Charles de la Morandière in the 1950's-60's. By and large we are dependent on sources outside Lower Normandy which record the presence of ships from Cherbourg, Granville, etc.. In light of this, the present study must necessarily rely much more on evidence from Upper Normandy, and when I use the term 'Norman' I often mean Upper Normandy exclusively.

has therefore attracted less attention from historians.<sup>486</sup> The waterfront of Rouen was routinely lined with ships, some carrying goods to and from the Channel, others shipping goods eastwards to Paris. In the 1540s fishing at Terra Nova would become bound up with this vibrant and commercially diverse part of the European coast.



**Figure 15. Important ports of Upper Normandy (Haute-Normandie) which outfitted ships for Terra Nova in the sixteenth century.** Map by author.

The rise of Normandy was part of the structural shift in how the fisheries operated. In the 1540s Rouen became the major source of capital and supplies for outbound voyages originating in Normandy and Brittany. The city, already the political and financial center of Normandy, was well-located near both major markets like Paris and Orléans and smaller ports with eager fishermen. As a result many merchants from other Norman towns outfitted their ships in Rouen, which became a hub for the yearly fishing fleets. Ship-owners from these small ports took out loans in the late winter, usually January and February, and left

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<sup>486</sup> Gayle Brunelle. *The New World Merchants of Rouen, 1559-1630*. Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1991. Brunelle pays far more attention to commerce with the Caribbean, South America and even Canada than with Terra Nova in her reconstruction of the city's merchant community.

between February and early April. Timing often depended on the origin of the ship- those coming from far off tended to outfit later in the season, taking out loans immediately before departing. When we look at the origin of ships, it is clear that the many ports of Upper Normandy were driving this expansion. The town of Jumièges outfitted one vessel for Terra Nova in Rouen before 1540. Between 1540 and 1550, it outfitted eighteen.<sup>487</sup> We can imagine that during February and March the river front of Rouen was filled with small ships loading supplies for their transatlantic voyage. In September and October merchant wharfs were piled high with the thousands of preserved cod now ready for the marketplace. Merchants from Paris, Orleans and even Poitou converged on the city to buy the catch for their own cities. The records of the city council of Rouen show that in the 1540s the city was the major distribution center for Terra Nova products in northern France. A number of *congés*, acts of permission granted by the city council, relate to the sale and transport of *morue* (particularly *morue verte*) in Rouen.<sup>488</sup> As these records show, in 1542 and 1547 vessels from St. Brieuc could be found unloading their catches in Rouen, while between 1545 and 1547 merchants from Orléans were buying fish in Rouen. In 1546 a merchant from Poitou, a city near the fishing port of La Rochelle, chose to purchase his saltcod in Rouen. This principal port in Normandy, then, had captured the Terra Nova trade at both ends.

The total number of ships outfitted at Rouen could be quite large. In 1542 at least 60 ships were outfitted in the first two months alone.<sup>489</sup> That same September a letter to Henry VIII from Spain reports that thirteen Spanish warships ambushed “a French fleet returning from Newfoundland” on the coast of Holland.<sup>490</sup> This was likely the inbound Norman fleet, which is stated to have consisted of “eighty or one hundred small fishing craft,” which would again suggest a very large flotilla. In 1549 73 separate ships show up in the notarial records of Rouen. By 1555 as many as 91 vessels departed from Rouen for Terra

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<sup>487</sup> See the data in: Jacques Laveque du Pontharouant. *Navires et marins de Jumièges pendant la première moitié du XVIème siècle*. Self-published. Avril 1997 et Juin 1998.

<sup>488</sup> These are preserved in the archives communales de Rouen, B1.

<sup>489</sup> Eduard Gosselin. *Document authentiques et inédits pour servir à l'histoire de la Marine Normande et du commerce rouennais pendant les XVIe et XVIIe siècles*. Rouen, 1876.

<sup>490</sup> CSP, Foreign, Spanish, vol. VI, Part II, p.138. no.63. Also Biggar, *Cartier*, 467. This is one of our only references to the fishing fleet going around the British Isles and returning via the Holland/Flemish coast.

Nova. This may indeed be the record for most ships outfitted in a single year in a single port. It must have been an awesome sight to behold- nearly a hundred ships departing the city all within a few months, filling the Seine as they sailed for Terra Nova.

## 5.2 THE AGE OF BISCAYAN DOMINANCE

The Norman dominance of the fishery would not last more than a decade or so, for by the mid-1550s noticeable changes were taking place within the transatlantic fishing operations at Terra Nova. The outbreak of the final Habsburg-Valois conflict, in 1553, brought on an unusually intense wave of attacks on shipping in the Bay of Biscay. But as violence relented around 1555 the fisheries began a long period of expansion, between roughly 1555 and 1580, during which the cod fisheries at Terra Nova reached their peak. The changes during this long phase of growth were those of scale and breadth. Not only did the size of the fishery reach a sixteenth century peak, but the number of ports participating likely did as well. In addition, during this period new forms of maritime commerce, including the advent of whaling, were introduced by mariners at Terra Nova. In the mid-sixteenth century the fisheries at Terra Nova effectively became the westernmost edge of the Bay of Biscay.

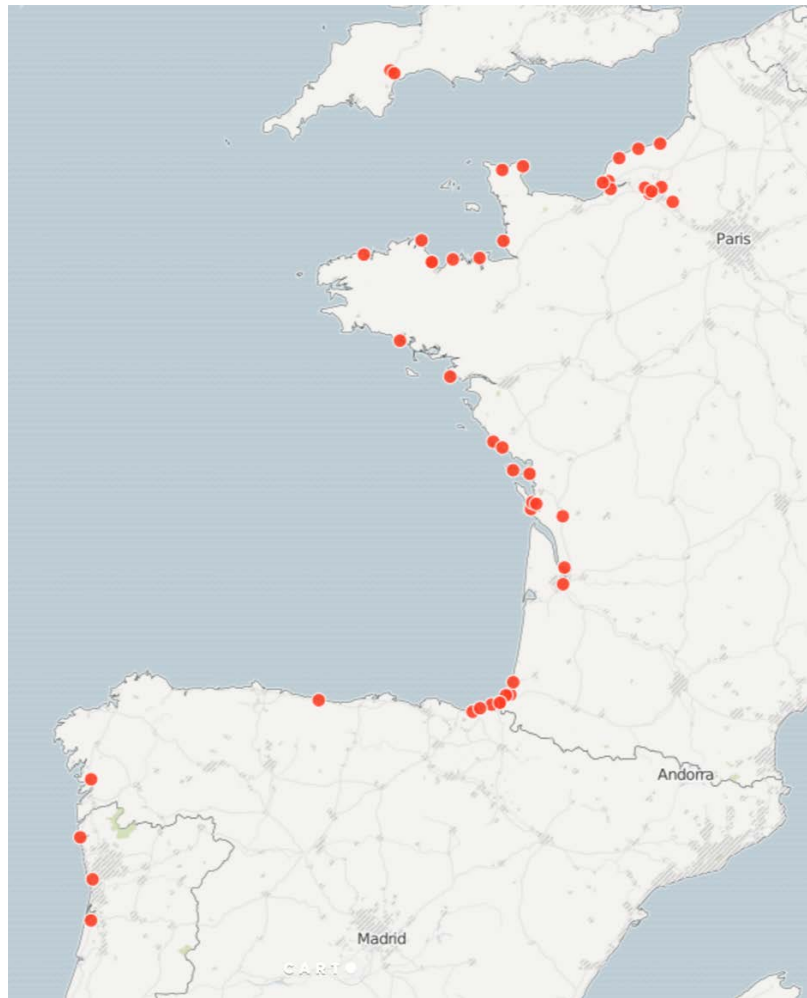
Throughout the mid-sixteenth century, the growth in the scale and tempo of operations in the northwest Atlantic was dependent on the salt produced in the Bay of Biscay. Access to southern Portuguese salt was limited to Porto-Galician and some Basque mariners, whereas the many towns of Biscay were open to ships from across northwest Europe.<sup>491</sup> The long coast of the Bay of Biscay did not have natural salt deposits like Setubal in Portugal, but its many marshes were rigorously exploited by local residents to produce sun-dried marsh salt throughout the year. Mariners from Normandy, England, Brittany and

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<sup>491</sup> Isabelle Richefort and Burghart Schmidt, *Les Relations Entre La France Et Les Villes Hanséatiques De Hambourg, Brême Et Lübeck: Moyen Âge - Xixe Siècle*, ed. Isabelle Richefort, et al. (Paris; Bruxelles; Bern; Berlin [etc.]: Direction des Archives, Ministère des affaires étrangères ; PIE-Peter Lang, 2006).



northern Iberia all relied on access to the marsh salts of the bay to provide the crucial ingredient in saltcod production. By mid-century the city of Rouen organized regular December-January runs to La Rochelle and Brouage to procure enough salt for the spring fishing fleet.<sup>492</sup> A large number of Norman ships left their ports early to ensure that they had time to visit “La Baye, La Rochelle or Brouage to take salt” before sailing direct for Terra Nova.<sup>493</sup> The records are rare before the 1550s, but become increasingly common through to the end of the century. Biscayan salt would fuel the growth of the sixteenth century fishery.



**Figure 16. Locations of ports known to have sent ships to Terra Nova, 1540-1580.**

<sup>492</sup> Archives municipales de Rouen. A 19, Jul. 18 1575. See also: ADC 8E 6198. Fol. 469. For an example of a salt run from Honfleur in the 1570s.

<sup>493</sup> See for an example: ADSM 2E1 notaires de Rouen. No. 440. Feb. 17, 1564. The *Marye* of Caudebec departed Rouen for Terra Nova, planning to stop at La Baye or Brouage for salt before heading to Terra Nova to fish for cod.

Note 1.) The large number of ports and their wide geographic distribution; 2.) The clear clustering of fishing ports into regional groups. Map by author.

As the fishery became more centralized around outfitting ports from the 1540s onward, a large number of these would be centered on the Bay of Biscay. Although Rouen remained the center of codfish production and sale until into the 1560s, Biscayan cities such as Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Nantes and San Sebastian emerged as rivals. By the 1570s they may have eclipsed Rouen entirely.<sup>494</sup> Saintonge, the marshy backcountry between La Rochelle and Bordeaux, mixed the local salt industry with an increased interest in fishing at Terra Nova.<sup>495</sup> At the core of Biscayan expansion was the outsized role played by the Basque communities. Much as Norman communities dominated commerce in the 1540s, so too did Basque speakers dominate commerce during the peak of 1555-1580.

Until recently the role of Basques was understated in many histories of the far north Atlantic, due to the difficulty of Basque source material, nationalist conflicts and the nebulous political and cultural place of Basques in the sixteenth century. The role of Basque communities in the fishery has received widespread attention following the pioneering efforts of Selma Huxley Barkham in the 1970s and 1980s, which demonstrated the widespread evidence pointing to Basque predominance in Terra Nova.<sup>496</sup> This was popularized by Mark Kurlansky, and no doubt reflected a general resurgence in Basque nationalism following the fall of Franco in Spain.<sup>497</sup> Unfortunately the pendulum has now swung in the other direction and Basques have increasingly been associated with playing the leading role in the fisheries across the whole of the sixteenth century, and are often credited as the 'true' founders of a fishery at Terra Nova.<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> See the data in Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology." "Pêches Basques Du Labourd En Atlantique Nord (Xvi-Xviii Siècle): Ports, Routes Et Trafics," *Itsas Memoria* 3 (2000).

<sup>495</sup> Jean Glénisson, *Histoire De L'ainis Et De La Saintonge* (La Crèche: Geste, 2005).

<sup>496</sup> Barkham, "Building Materials for Canada in 1566."; "The Spanish Province of Terranova."; *Los Vascos En El Marco Atlántico Norte: Siglos Xvi Y Xvii*. Nicolas Landry, "Les Basques Dans Le Golfe Du Saint-Laurent Se Racontent," *Acadiensis* 37, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>497</sup> Mark Kurlansky, *The Basque History of the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

<sup>498</sup> Typical is Simon Winchester's description of the Newfoundland fisheries which attributes to the Basques not merely the discovery and development of the fishery but also the discovery of salting-cod in the first place- an almost certainly incorrect assertion. He views Breton, Portuguese and English fishermen as interlopers in a Basque world, when the opposite is true. Simon Winchester, *Atlantic : Great Sea Battles, Heroic Discoveries, Titanic Storms, and a*

In reality Basque predominance took place in a relatively narrow time frame, from the mid-1550s onward to the 1580s. In 1561 an English observer in the region remarked that "...they [the Basques] have found a trade unto the 'New found land' for fish, which they did not previously occupy so much."<sup>499</sup> Nor did Basque dominance push out competing communities. Basques worked alongside French Biscayans, Bretons, Normans and Port-Galicians in relatively equal proportions, for Basque dominance was never as complete as that of the Normans in previous decades. The significance of the Basques was that their outsized participation coincided with and partially drove the peak of expansion in the sixteenth century fisheries at Terra Nova.<sup>500</sup>

In a more direct sense Terra Nova began to take on a Biscayan flavor after 1555. Driving the changes from the 1550s onward were the rise of ports along the Bay of Biscay as a major force in the fishery. The rise of Biscayan ports as a challenger to Norman dominance could only take place after the mid-1550s. As the last of the Habsburg-Valois wars broke out in mainland Europe, the major sea routes, in particular in the Bay of Biscay, became hunting grounds for merchants-turned-pirates. Unlike the fighting in the 1540s, participation by merchants in privateering was more widespread in Biscay and ships returning from Terra Nova seem to have been a favourite target. In 1555 the residents of Pasajes claimed that they had seized forty-two ships from French ports bound for Terra Nova.<sup>501</sup> For merchants in the Biscayan commercial zone, especially Guipuzcoa, the *guerre de course* represented an alluring alternative to commerce in the north Atlantic. Only as the need for privateers faded around 1555 would more merchants switch over to fishing.

The connection between privateering and fishing may have run deeper than historians have acknowledged, and helps explain the burst of growth that began in the mid-sixteenth century. An isolated

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*Vast Ocean of a Million Stories* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011).pp.184-186. See also:J. M. Bumsted, *The Peoples of Canada : A Post-Confederation History* (2014).

<sup>499</sup> CSP. Eliz. For. Vol. 4. 1561-2. No. 541. Sir T Chamberlain to the Queen. Sept. 27, 1561.

<sup>500</sup> A good summary of Basque activity in the Gulf of St. Lawrence from the archaeological perspective can be found in: Brad Loewen and Vincent Delmas, "Les Occupations Basques Dans Le Golfe Du Saint-Laurent, 1530–1760. Périodisation, Répartition Géographique Et Culture Matérielle," *Archéologiques* 24 (2011).

<sup>501</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches*.P. 96

document from 1554 preserved in the municipal archives of St. Jean-de-Luz references a raid made even before hostilities broke out.<sup>502</sup> The text outlines a royal pardon for ship owners from St. Jean-de-Luz who had raided the northern coast of Iberia and later Castilian possessions in the Caribbean. The pardon names the merchant-captains and their ships, and makes one point clear: all of these merchants had previously been involved in the Terra Nova fisheries. Commerce in the far north Atlantic was therefore deeply tied up with maritime violence. The capital raised through such privateering raids likely fueled the growth of fishing operations. But the relationship could be more direct, as was the case when the entrance of the Spanish Basques as a major player in the Terra Nova fisheries began, quite literally, with a bang. In 1554 a group of merchants from Guipuzcoa had organized a mass raid on fishermen at Terra Nova.<sup>503</sup> In particular they seem to have targeted French Basque and Breton crews, the very mariners many Spanish Basques had worked alongside for decades. One participant, the pilot Martin Perez de Hoa, gave a description of an attack on a Breton fishing fleet at Terra Nova. He claimed that his vessel put into a harbour on the north coast of the island of Newfoundland where it found eight vessels loaded with cod, including an armed escort from St. Malo. These ships were described as being in “war formation,” which he later indicates meant that they were tied together to form a line of battle. More remarkably, de Hoa states that the harbour entrance was defended by “fort and bastions...with much artillery fixed and placed there .” The Guipuzcoans were ultimately victorious: The captain Juan de Erauso landed a force of men at night and assaulted the fortifications. Advancing like soldiers “with their flag, in formation, in squadron” the mariner task force overwhelmed the defenders. When dawn came Erauso turned the Bretons’ cannon on the eight fishing ships

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<sup>502</sup> AM St. Jean-de-Luz, 3EE 1 no.1 “Pardon et abolition accordées par Henri II au capitain de vaisseaux de St. Jean-de-Luz...des pris de vaisseaux ennemis et de merchandise...”

<sup>503</sup> This section is based on the testimonies of the participant Guipuzcoans which were recorded by local officials, and which have survived intact. One copy can be found in the collection Vargas Ponce at the Madrid Naval Museum (Col.Vargas-Ponce, Book 1, no.18). The original can be found in the Archivo Provincial de Guipuzcoa, JD IM/2/12/11. For this project I have used two transcripts. The first is a transcript made by the French historians Edouard Ducéré in his work *Les Corsaires sous l’Ancien Régime*. (Appendice No.1, pp.333-344). The second is the more complete and updated transcript by J. Ignacio Tellechea Idigoras in his *Corsarios Guipuzcoanos en Terranova, 1552-1555*. This latter includes both the entire testimony and a brief introduction explaining the document’s origins. A partial English translation is found in Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches..*

and forced them to surrender. Nine Guipuzcoans and seventy-two Bretons died in a battle which feels out of place in early Terra Nova. Altogether the Guipuzcoans claim to have killed thousands of fishermen and captured or burned dozens of ships, though within a few years conditions would return to normal.

This incident raises the question of why violence was so uncommon in the mid-century fishery, and why Guipuzcoans turned to force in this instance. The raid of 1554 may have represented a way for Spanish Basques to neutralize the French Basques and open up space for themselves in the fisheries. Spanish Basques had been serving on French Basque and Breton ships for decades, and were familiar with conditions on the ground in the fishery. With many of the best fishing spots in northern Terra Nova already occupied by Breton and Labourdian crews, some merchants from San Sebastian apparently decided to claim these sites by force. The outbreak of war in 1554 gave them an excuse to use force. It was apparently successful, because from this date forward Guipuzcoan mariners would increasingly be amongst the most active fishermen and whale-hunters in Terra Nova. The rise of Biscayan dominance, as this violent episode suggests, was a sudden change in an established fishing order. It would be wrong to see this as a turn towards the piracy and colonial rivalries which were already taking place in the Caribbean, but rather as a local Basque reaction to the growing demand for fish from Terra Nova.

One of the most striking changes by the 1560s at Terra Nova was that maritime operations became more diverse. Fishermen could no longer expect to be the only mariners operation in Terra Nova. From the 1560s we can find early references to a nascent fur trade in Terra Nova, one separate from the low-scale exchange for furs which was already part of the fishery. By the late 1570s merchants in Saint Malo were known in Paris for their access to a wide array of furs from Terra Nova.<sup>504</sup> As more and more fishermen visited Terra Nova each summer the various animals of the region were increasingly exploited for sustenance and commercial gain. Seabirds were consumed in large quantities, along with the occasional

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<sup>504</sup> “In Paris I have seen in one mans house called Perosse the value of five thousand crowns worth of fures, as sables, bevers, otters and other sortes which he bought in August laste of the men of St. Malo, and the yeare before, he tolde me, he bestowed four thousand crowns with thein the like commodities. He gave me further to understand that he sawe great quantities of buff hides which they brought home and sent into the Lower Country to sell.”

deer hunted for meat. Fish like salmon, mackerel or herring were caught alongside cod and shipped in barrels to Europe, though never in the same quantities.

Most importantly, by the 1550s cod fishing was joined by a new whaling industry in Terra Nova. It was during the 1560s-70s that southern Labrador would become, as one historians has put it, the “whaling capital of the world.”<sup>505</sup> This was primarily the work of Basque mariners from Guipuzcoa (and to a lesser extent Labourd), and their efforts cemented their reputation as the finest whalers in Europe. During the fifteenth and early sixteenth century many Basque towns had maintained a yearly whale hunt in the waters of the Bay of Biscay, and possibly off of Iceland.<sup>506</sup> Yet by mid-century the number of whales in Biscay was declining while new reports from Terra Nova suggested that a vast untapped resource existed in *La Gran Baya*.<sup>507</sup> As would later be the case at Spitsbergen in the seventeenth and Greenland in the nineteenth centuries, whaling in Terra Nova was an immensely lucrative and deeply risky venture.<sup>508</sup>

The hunting of whales differed significantly from cod fishing in several crucial ways.<sup>509</sup> Fishermen did not require specialized training, used simple and widely available tools, and processing fish required few inputs besides salt and time. By contrast, hunting and processing whales required skilled crews, specialized equipment and the tools to render oil from the flesh of the dead whale. To operate effectively in Terra Nova, whaling fishing vessels were often larger than their cod fishing counterparts. A single Basque

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<sup>505</sup> Tuck and Grenier, *Red Bay, Labrador: World Whaling Capital A.D. 1550-1600*.

<sup>506</sup> Parks et al., *The Underwater Archaeology of Red Bay: Basque Shipbuilding and Whaling in the 16th Century*; Szabo, *Monstrous Fishes and the Mead-Dark Sea Whaling in the Medieval North Atlantic*; Tuck and Grenier, *Red Bay, Labrador: World Whaling Capital A.D. 1550-1600*.

<sup>507</sup> From a commercial perspective, whales were sought primarily for the oil that they provided. Once rendered from a whale's blubber, this could be used in cooking and had a variety of industrial applications. Whale meat was also, under Catholic law, treated as fish and therefore permitted on fish days as a substitute for flesh, while whale bone and baleen could be used for tools, carvings and luxury crafts. A single whale, then, could be processed into several marketable commodities which commanded high prices in European ports.

<sup>508</sup> An excellent overview of Basque whaling practices can be found in: Parks et al., *The Underwater Archaeology of Red Bay: Basque Shipbuilding and Whaling in the 16th Century*. See also: Jong, *Geschiedenis Van De Oude Nederlandse Walvisvaart : Deel 1-3*. Gordon Jackson, *The British Whaling Trade* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>509</sup> The descriptions of Basque hunting practices are taken from the above source, the preface to the archeological report at Red Bay. See also: Barkham, *Los Vascos En El Marco Atlántico Norte: Siglos Xvi Y Xvii*; Huxley, "El Comercio Marítimo Vizcaíno Y Guipuzcoano Con El Atlántico Peninsular (Asturias, Galicia, Portugal Y Andalucía) Y Con Los Archipiélagos De Canarias Y Madeira Al Principio De La Edad Moderna."; Barkham, "Building Materials for Canada in 1566."; Louwrens Hacquebord, *De Noordse Compagnie (1614-1642): Opkomst, Bloei En Ondergang* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2014).

ship carried several *chalupas*, specialized whale-hunting boats, and their crews, as well as the equipment to build and maintain ovens on shore.<sup>510</sup> These larger vessels were costlier to build, outfit and maintain. Although the ships used by Basque merchants were not specialized, the *chalupas* in which whales were actually hunted had to be brought with them.<sup>511</sup> Combining a single sail for coasting with multiple banks of oars to chase the whale at speed, these craft required teamwork to use safely and successfully. Basque mariners had used *chalupas* on the Bay of Biscay for centuries and were comfortable operating them on open water for lengthy periods of time. The harpoon, by which the *chalupa* would be locked fast to the catch, required training and experience to handle properly while standing upright in a speeding *chalupa*. Once the whale was harpooned and the exhausted whale had succumbed to its injuries or a lance to the head, work then shifted towards operations on land. An experienced blubber-cutter used sharp knives to slice away the fat from the animal's flesh while other crew members boiled the blubber in large cauldrons and packaged the resulting oil. Each step in the whaling process required experienced, skilled labour that accordingly earned whalers high wages and privileges. By the early seventeenth century Basque whalers were given a special bonus to their payment, the *pot-de-vin* (*potwijn* in later Dutch records).<sup>512</sup> Whaling therefore represents a divergent development in north Atlantic commerce, moving away from the relatively egalitarian cod fisheries.

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<sup>510</sup> Many of these have been uncovered thanks to the archaeological work at Red Bay. Parks et al., *The Underwater Archaeology of Red Bay: Basque Shipbuilding and Whaling in the 16th Century*.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> Jong, *Geschiedenis Van De Oude Nederlandse Walvisvaart : Deel 1-3*. By the seventeenth century Dutch merchants were offering exorbitant *potwijn* to any skilled whaler willing to work at Spitsbergen.



**Figure 17. Three Basque chalupas chase a whale in Spitsbergen, 1613.**

This drawing, by the Englishman Robert Fotherby, is one of the clearest early representation of Basque whaling techniques. Note the harpooner standing upright in the bow, and the fact that all three chalupa crews are collaborating on the same whale.

Only the Basques, with their long tradition of whaling and institutionalized knowledge, hunted whales on a large scale at Terra Nova. Writing of the dangers of whale hunting, André Thevet noted that “those of Bayonne and the Spaniards know well. They experience this often and take them [whales] professionally with certain instruments and machines.... Then God knows how many people are employed to cut them to pieces and fill their vessels with them. Then they sell the meat and blubber to foreigners.”<sup>513</sup> Indeed, Basques likely taught the basic principles of whaling to other maritime communities. For this reason whaling in Terra Nova was never a multi-communal affair like the cod fisheries. In addition to the differences in inputs, whaling voyages followed a different schedule than cod fishing. Whale appeared in Terra Nova later in the year than the cod, so that whaling stations operated until the early winter, at times as late as December. Crews could find themselves iced in their harbours as winter set in, or lashed by late autumn storms.<sup>514</sup> The famous shipwreck at Red Bay, Labrador was the result of a return voyage which was caught in a sudden squall. The diversification of industry in Terra Nova ultimately extended the time

<sup>513</sup> Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*.p.56.

<sup>514</sup> The famous shipwreck at Red Bay, Labrador was the result of a return voyage which was caught in a sudden squall. Parks et al., *The Underwater Archaeology of Red Bay: Basque Shipbuilding and Whaling in the 16th Century*; Tuck and Grenier, *Red Bay, Labrador: World Whaling Capital A.D. 1550-1600*.



in which Europeans were present in the region. It also left a more significant footprint on the landscape, as the shore stations used in processing whales were made of durable and expensive materials, the same station being used for multiple seasons.

Even within the cod fishery subtle diversification was taking place during the period when Biscayan communities dominated the fishery. By the 1550s records increasingly indicate that different types of preserved codfish were being produced at Terra Nova. A distinction was made in French- and English-language documents between an offshore 'green' fishery (*morue verte*) and an onshore 'dry' fishery (*morue sallée* or *morue séchée*).<sup>515</sup> In the former, cod was quickly salted and packed in barrels to pickle. Such fish could be consumed in this pickled state, or dried out to make *baccalao* at a later time. English observers note that mariners who practiced this green-cod technique often left earlier in the season than their counterparts and might even make multiple fishing voyages over the course of a single season.<sup>516</sup> Dry-fishing, by contrast, required that mariners set up racks on land to slowly salt and dry their catch. By the 1570s fishing operations were becoming divided between merchants who wished to make a fast profit by quickly producing barrels of green cod, and those who invested in longer but more valuable dry saltcod. Ships were now coming and going from Terra Nova at different rates, carrying different types of codfish. European markets therefore began receiving codfish at a steady rate from summer to late autumn, in different forms, rather than all at once. There does not seem to have been a clear regional distinction between the two types of fishery. Whereas in the early seventeenth century we see a gulf between the offshore Norman green-cod fishery and an onshore English and Breton fishery, in the mid-sixteenth century the choice to practice one or the other seems to have been largely up to individual merchants and mariners.

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<sup>515</sup> Janzen, "The Logic of English Saltcod: An Historiographical Revision."; La Morandière, *La Pêche Française De La Morue À Terre-Neuve Du Xvie Siècle À Nos Jours; Son Importance Économique, Sociale Et Politique*.

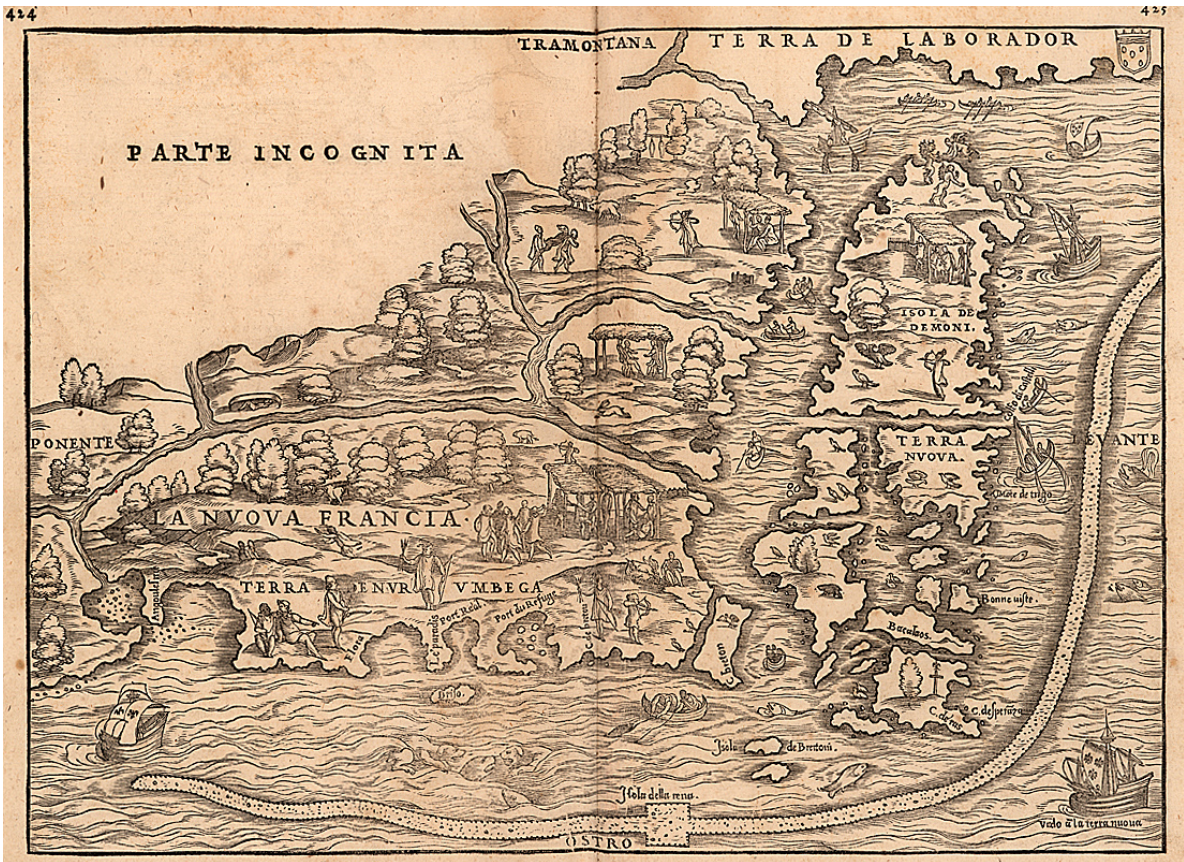
<sup>516</sup> Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*; Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*.

The state of the fishery during its mid-century height, when operations reached their apogee, remains the enduring image of early Newfoundland.<sup>517</sup> All evidence suggests that cod fishing still overwhelmingly dominated operations at Terra Nova. Whereas in the 1560s three hundred or more cod fishing vessels worked at Terra Nova, the number of whaling vessels was likely around twenty to thirty. Many of our earliest and best visual representations of the sixteenth century fishery only appear from the 1550s onward. In 1565, at the height of the Terra Nova fishery, one of the most famous maps depicting the northwest Atlantic was published in Italy. The image accompanied the *Discorso d'un gran capitano* in a new edition of Ramusio's collection of navigational guides.<sup>518</sup> Originally drafted in 1556 and updated for the new edition, the map by Giacomo Gastaldi showed *La Nuova Francia*, including all of what was then Terra Nova.

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<sup>517</sup> In part this may reflect a source bias in English, for it was during the 1570s that the first written commentaries on the fishery appear in English writings. The Parkhurst letter and the early writings of Hakluyt were both shaped by English intervention during the 1570s-80s.

<sup>518</sup> Ramusio, *Navigazioni E Viaggi*.



**Figure 18. Gastaldi's view of Terra Nova at its height. Map accompanying 1565 edition of *Discorso d'un gran capitano*. Courtesy Newfoundland Heritage.**

This map is remarkable for how Terra Nova is visualized. The waters around the series of islands labeled Terra Nuova are filled with images of Europeans fishing. Some are using handlines in small boats, others nets draped over the side of large ships. On the south coast of the Terra de Laborador, in the *Gran Baya*, what might be two small Basque chalupas are shown. There is no attempt to mark ships, mariners or regions in Terra Nova according to political or cultural identities. The ocean itself is portrayed as a place where fish eagerly appear above the waves, alongside whales, as though asking to be caught. Fishermen are shown working every part of Terra Nova, from the Straits of Belle Isle to the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the waters of Cape Breton. Gastaldi has chosen to emphasize the activity of fishermen in Terra Nova, and provides one of the few true snapshots of what the region looked like during its mid-century peak. This image would later influence many of the writings of Terra Nova, from André Thevet's many works to the

early reports of English promoters.<sup>519</sup> The vision of the prosperous, international fishery remains today enshrined in the website Newfoundland Heritage and other official works of Canadian and Newfoundland history.<sup>520</sup>

The growth after 1540 was the ultimate triumph of the system pioneered by mariners in the first decades of the sixteenth century. The Biscayans who drove growth after 1555 were building on the foundations laid by Bretons, Normans and others in the two previous cycles of growth. The phenomenal growth of the mid-sixteenth century took place without any central direction or official organization. Mariners from as far south as Portugal and as far north as England acted independently of one another but converged on the same approaches to transatlantic fishing. It would only be after 1580 that a number of significant changes would take place that sharply altered the basic structures of fishing at Terra Nova in a way that would erase the world which Gastaldi had shown in his map.

### 5.3 AMERINDIANS AND FISHERMEN AT TERRA NOVA

“The people trade in marten skins and other skins, and those who go there take all kinds of ironware. And that the Indians understand any language, French, English, and Gascon, and their own tongue.”<sup>521</sup> So said the Basque mariner Robert Lefant in 1542, when interrogated by Castilian officials about relations

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<sup>519</sup> Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*; Quinn, *North America from Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612*.

<sup>520</sup> "The International Fishery of the Sixteenth Century"; R. D. Francis and R. D. Francis, *Origins : Canadian History to Confederation* (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2013).

<sup>521</sup> Biggar, *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur De Roberval*. “y que tienen mucho ganado é abes de todo genero y pellejas é que su trato dellos es esto de pellejas de martas y otras pellejas y que los que van lleban toda cosa de hierro; y que los yndios entienden toda lengua, francesa y ynglesa y gascona é la lengua que ellos hablan.” Robert Lefant was a resident of the city of Bayonne on the French side of the border, and therefore technically a subject of the French Crown. He nonetheless had been serving on a ship which returned from Newfoundland to Fuenterrabia in Guipuzcoa, and the Castilians interrogated Lefant along with several Spanish Basques.

with Amerindians<sup>522</sup> along the north coast of what is today Terra Nova. The authorities were questioning Lefant, a fisherman with five years' experience at Newfoundland, about activity in Terra Nova and the recent visit by Jacques Cartier and the Sieur du Roberval.<sup>523</sup> Although Basque, Galician and Asturian fishing boats sailed yearly to the fisheries in great numbers, the Castilian crown was ignorant about conditions at what they called Terra Nova, and hoped that Lefant might have firsthand knowledge about the region's indigenous population. Of particular concern was whether or not these 'Indians' were friendly and could offer help to Spanish ships (or, more ominously, to Roberval's colonists).

The testimony made clear that many fishermen were already taking advantage of good relations with the Innu people of southern Labrador, one of three major communities living in Terra Nova.<sup>524</sup> Lefant took it for granted that he and his fellow fishermen could trade freely for furs with groups like the Innu, so long as they brought enough metal. Lefant described a place where "there are no houses but only huts made of the bark of trees," but along the coast there was "an abundance of cattle and birds of all kinds, and skins" which mariners could procure from the Innu. The description of linguistic flexibility was an offhand remark, but it indicates that interactions between Amerindian communities and fishermen were so close and continuous that language barriers had broken down by the 1540s. Even Gascon, a language which was dying in southwestern France, was thriving in the northwest Atlantic.

After the 1520s the developing fishery in the northwest Atlantic becomes clearer for historians, but Amerindians are still rare in the written records. William Gilbert has summed up the available evidence for European-Beothuk interactions across the sixteenth century, which amounts to barely a dozen recorded

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<sup>522</sup> In this text I prefer to use the term Amerindian rather than 'indigenous' or 'First Nation(s)'. Indigenous is too generic a category, whereas Amerindian conveys a specificity about indigenous societies of the Americas. Many of the communities discussed in this text had long histories of migration and social evolution which may be obscured by the static term 'indigenous'. It also allows for a clearer contrast between the Algonkian and Iroquois-speaking societies and the Inuit. Likewise First Nation(s) implies a political and cultural coherence (the nation) which does not do justice to how societies were organized in the sixteenth century. It also ties Amerindian societies teleologically to the development of Canada.

<sup>523</sup> On Roberval see: Biggar, *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur De Roberval*; Morison, *The European Discovery of America*.

<sup>524</sup> On Innu and Inuit in southern Labrador during later periods see: Selma Barkham. "The Mentality of the men Behind the Sixteenth Century Spanish Voyages to Terranova." in Warkentin and Podruchny, *Decentering the Renaissance Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective, 1500-1700*.

instances of possible contact.<sup>525</sup> To further complicate matters, archaeologists have difficulty distinguishing sixteenth century sites of Amerindian habitation from earlier periods, and have thus had trouble ascertaining how the arrival of fishermen may have affected material culture.<sup>526</sup> Yet on the ground fishermen and Amerindians were working together, as the precious few accounts by mariners who worked the fishery in the sixteenth century indicate. The most significant of these might be a trio of testimonies recorded in 1542 in the province of Guipuzcoa in Spanish Basque country, of which Robert Lefant (quoted at the start of this chapter) was one.<sup>527</sup> By 1542 the cod fisheries in Terra Nova had been in operation for nearly four decades, and were beginning a period of expansion that would last through the 1580s.<sup>528</sup> The testimony of Basque fishermen offers two crucial remarks about Amerindians. All three mariners had worked in what was called *La Gran Baya*, the south coast of Labrador in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and most likely described interactions with the Innu. As noted at the start of this chapter, Robert Lefant thought that the Innu were versed in at least three European languages and traded fur for metalwork. A Spanish Basque mariner, Clemente de Odelica, stated even more remarkably that:

“Asked who are the inhabitants of this land of Grand Bay [*La Gran Baya*], and farther up the river : said that many Indians came to his ship in Grand Bay, and they ate and drank together, and were very friendly, and the Indians gave them deer and wolf skins in exchange for axes and knives and other trifles; and for Indians dressed in skins they are men of skill, and he believes that farther up the river the inhabitants are much the same, for they gave them to understand that one of their number was Chief in Canada. And that they killed more than thirty-five of Jacques’ men, and their arms are bows and arrows and pinewood shields; and they have many boats.”<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>525</sup> Gilbert, "Beothuk-European Contact in the 16th Century: A Re-Evaluation of the Documentary Evidence."

<sup>526</sup> Holly Jr, *History in the Making : The Archaeology of the Eastern Subarctic*.

<sup>527</sup> This introduction uses the transcripts, published in both Spanish and English, found in Biggar. *Documents... Cartier and Roberval*. No.212. pp. 447-467. Fuenterrabia is today the town of Hendaye on the Spanish-French border. The mariners were brought before Don Sancho Martines de Leybra, *capitan general* of Guipuzcoa, and duly recorded by the *escribano publico* Antonio de Ubilla. Biggar prepared the transcripts from an unpublished documents found in: Archivo de Indias, est. 2, caj. 5, leg. 1/22, No. 16.

<sup>528</sup> Barkham, *Los Vascos En El Marco Atlántico Norte: Siglos Xvi Y Xvii*; Huxley, "La Industria Pesquera En El País Vasco Peninsular Al Principio De La Edad Moderna: Una Edad De Oro."; Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology."; Parks et al., *The Underwater Archaeology of Red Bay: Basque Shipbuilding and Whaling in the 16th Century*.

<sup>529</sup> “*dixo que en Gran Baya venian á su nabio muchos yndios y con ellos comian y bebian y se trataban muy bien y les daban pieles de benados y de lobos a trueque de achas y cuchillos y otras cosillas y que son onbres de buena arte para yndios bestidos de pellejas*”

Odelica's testimony expands on the major points of Lefant's observations. He stresses the friendly and casual relationship between Basque fishermen and the Innu, and practice of exchange between the two. The testimony confirms the essentially maritime character of communities around Terra Nova, for "they have many boats" and are comfortable spending time on European ships. Odelica suggests that communities along the St. Lawrence River were linked to the Innu, socially and politically, even if they were less friendly to Cartier. Above all, the description provided by Odelica suggests that Amerindian communities sought out fishing boats for exchange, and by the 1540s Basque fishermen working on the south coast of Labrador felt comfortable hosting the Innu as guests. When paired with Lefant's observations about trade and language, it indicates that Basque fishermen expected the Innu to participate in the yearly fishing expeditions as trade partners who could be met as equal parties with mutually beneficial interests.

Almost all of these interactions would take place on the water. The land still looms large in the historiography of North American Amerindians (in Quebecois French they are literally *autochtones* - those who sprang from the earth). Much of this reflects centuries of dispossession and exclusion from the land, and the significance of forest and fauna to the cosmography of many Amerindian communities. But to focus on the land, especially when discussing sixteenth century Terra Nova, is to ignore the degree to which many Amerindian societies were fundamentally maritime communities, peoples of the sea. For Amerindian communities in Terra Nova and elsewhere Atlantic history did not begin with the arrival of the first European boats. The water itself was more highway than barrier, and observers from Jacques Cartier onward reported that Innu and Mi'kmaq greeted fishermen in boats, and exchanged goods on the water. Like the fishermen who would cross the Atlantic from Europe, Amerindians in the northeast were drawn to the waters of Terra Nova for its rich marine resources and developed techniques to harness the waters and their valuable resources. Recent studies such as Andrew Lipman's *The Saltwater Frontier*, Jace Weaver's *The Red Atlantic*, and Nancy Shoemaker's *Indian Whalers and the World* have finally begun to

explore the intersection of maritime and indigenous histories.<sup>530</sup> This chapter follows their pathbreaking work and begins from the premise that when mariners like Robert Lefant encountered Innu communities, it was a meeting between two peoples of the sea on mutually shared ground rather than an intrusion of seaborne Europeans into a land-bound world.

There is consistent evidence from the sixteenth century onward for the use of seagoing vessels by Amerindians in Terra Nova. The birchbark canoe favoured in the northwest Atlantic was rugged, adaptable and capable of travel over open ocean. As early as 1509 reports came out of Normandy that visitors to Newfoundland had captured a group of Amerindians sailing in a “boat...made from the bark of a tree.”<sup>531</sup> One variation on this report even suggested that the boat “constructed of a wicker frame covered with the stout bark of trees, in which were seven men” had been captured off the coast of England.<sup>532</sup> As Charles Martijn and others have argued, Algonkian canoes and dugouts were capable of travel between islands in Terra Nova.<sup>533</sup> The Mi’kmaq in particular regularly crossed between islands to settle the south coast of Newfoundland, and by the turn of the seventeenth century had adopted European boat designs. By 1600 the French writer Nicolas Denys states that the Mi’kmaq “use canoes only for the rivers, and all have boats for the sea.”<sup>534</sup> But the use of water for transport was only one aspect of the maritime identity of Amerindian communities. Algonkian peoples around Terra Nova were seafood-eaters first and foremost, consuming vast quantities of cod, salmon, seal, seabirds, clams, shad and anything else they could catch. The waters of Terra Nova were the origins of human life in this sub-arctic corner of the Atlantic, the prerequisite for permanent habitation. In turn the waters of the northwest Atlantic shaped the worldview of many of the

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<sup>530</sup> Andrew Lipman, *The Saltwater Frontier : Indians and the Contest for the American Coast* (2015). Jace Weaver, *The Red Atlantic : American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000-1927* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Nancy Shoemaker, *Native American Whalers and the World : Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race* ([S.l.]: UNIV OF NORTH CAROLINA PR, 2017).

<sup>531</sup> The incident occurred some time around 1509 and is referenced in two records from around Rouen. Cited in Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America. . Vol I. p.--*

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid. p.----

<sup>533</sup> Martijn, "Early Mikmaq Presence in Southern Newfoundland: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, C. 1500-1763."

<sup>534</sup> Cited in Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us : Excerpts from Mi'kmaq History, 1500-1950.* p.20



communities around its rim. With yearly rhythms defined by a scarcity/abundance cycle, water was associated with prosperity and ease, land with dearth and starvation. Beothuk iconography revolved around seabirds, and they went so far as to bury their dead on islands with seabird colonies.<sup>535</sup> After the first missionaries arrived Mi'kmaq communities absorbed and adapted the tale of the Great Flood from the bible to fit their own theology, as befitted a peoples living astride such a vast watery basin.<sup>536</sup> It is not surprising that in the 1550s the French geographer André Thevet referred to the inhabitants of Terra Nova as "*ce people maritime*."<sup>537</sup>

Evidence beyond the 1542 testimonies indicates that the Basque experience of low-level trading with Amerindian on the water was the norm for many fishermen. Archaeologists have found plenty of European goods at sixteenth century Amerindian sites. Marcel Moussette has summed up much of this work, demonstrating the significance of the Basques for shaping the new material culture of the northeast.<sup>538</sup> Pottery, clothing and metalwork from northwest Europe steadily filtered through the migratory bands of Terra Nova, replacing older indigenous tools and visual culture. When the Rouennais merchant Etienne Bellenger visited the region in the 1580s, "he had traffique with them in divers places and for trifles, as knyves, belles, glasses and suche like small merchaundize which cost hym but Fortie lieveres (*livres*)."<sup>539</sup> When Richard Strong and the crew of the *Marigold* landed near Cape Breton in 1593 and encountered the Mi'kmaq, the first reaction of the latter was to call out and signal the Englishmen with friendly gestures, likely with intention to trade.<sup>540</sup> Nicolas Denys reported at the turn of the seventeenth century that Amerindians "sometimes buy from the Captains who are about to leave after having completed their fishery."<sup>541</sup> There is therefore both archaeological and anecdotal evidence to suggest that fishermen

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<sup>535</sup> Todd J Kristensen and Donald H Holly, "Birds, Burials and Sacred Cosmology of the Indigenous Beothuk of Newfoundland, Canada," *Cambridge archaeological journal* 23, no. 01 (2013).

<sup>536</sup> Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us : Excerpts from Mi'kmaw History, 1500-1950*.

<sup>537</sup> Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*.P.22

<sup>538</sup> Moussette, "A Universe under Strain: Amerindian Nations in North-Eastern North America in the 16th Century." Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us : Excerpts from Mi'kmaw History, 1500-1950*. p.16

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid* p.17-18

<sup>541</sup> Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us : Excerpts from Mi'kmaw History, 1500-1950*.p.20

consistently engaged in the kind of trade which Lefant described in the 1540s. Some of the strongest evidence for sustained trade in the sixteenth century northwest Atlantic comes from language. The linguist Peter Bakker has compellingly argued for the existence of a series of trading pidgins in use by Algonkian speakers during the early seventeenth century.<sup>542</sup> These pidgins were based on the incorporation of European words, overwhelmingly Basque, into Algonkian languages. This may have spread to Inuit communities by the late seventeenth century.<sup>543</sup> The prevalence of Basque words suggests that fishermen were the main drivers of change, as Basque mariners were much more likely to serve as cod fishermen and whalers rather than traders. Bakker's work corroborates the observation by Robert Lefant that French, Gascon and English were widely spoken in *La Gran Baya*. Such linguistic exchange could only be formed through sustained, peaceful interactions between mariners and Amerindians across the sixteenth century.

Drawing conclusions based on these scattered references is nonetheless difficult. As Donald Holly, Christopher Wolff and John Erwin have noted, the experience of interaction could vary wildly between time and place by the early seventeenth century.<sup>544</sup> A single encounter gone awry could turn one community against fishermen for decades. Yet for much of the sixteenth century it seems that the core of the fisherman-Amerindian relationship was the exchange of European metal tools for furs, and by the 1530s Jacques Cartier knew to carry hatchets, knives and other small goods with him to Terra Nova.<sup>545</sup> For both Amerindian and European societies the act of exchange retained both a commercial and a social significance, and we should shy away from labelling this as 'trade.' As Clemente de Odélica suggests, the act of exchanging metal for furs was coupled with feasting and drinking. André Thevet related that when

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<sup>542</sup> Peter Bakker, "'The Language of the Coast Tribes Is Half Basque': A Basque-American Indian Pidgin in Use between Europeans and Native Americans in North America, Ca. 1540-Ca. 1640," *Anthropological Linguistics* 31, no. 3/4 (1989); "Two Basque Loanwords in Micmac," *International Journal of American Linguistics* (1989); "Language Contact and Pidginization in Davis Strait, Hudson Strait, and the Gulf of Saint Lawrence (Northeast Canada)," *TRENDS IN LINGUISTICS STUDIES AND MONOGRAPHS* 88 (1996).

<sup>543</sup> Charles A Martijn and Louis-Jacques Dorais, "Eighteenth-Century Innu (Montagnais) and Inuit Toponyms in the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 17, no. 2 (2001).

<sup>544</sup> Donald H Holly Jr, Christopher Wolff, and John Erwin, "The Ties That Bind and Divide: Encounters with the Beothuk in Southeastern Newfoundland," *Journal of the North Atlantic* 3 (2010).

<sup>545</sup> Cartier, *Relation Originale Du Voyage De Jacques Cartier Au Canada En 1534*.

Cartier encountered communities along the south coast of Terra Nova “Then they traded in several neighboring localities, that is, our men giving axes, knives, fishhooks and other implements for pelts of deer, otter and other fur-bearing animals which they have in abundance. The barbarians of this country gave them a good welcome, showing good will to them, and happy at their coming and acquaintanceship. A mutual friendship was conceived and practiced between them.”<sup>546</sup> In this way mariners procured valuable pelts, while the Innu and others gained access to metal, which could either be used immediately or traded to the interior. There is little evidence that Amerindians consistently traded for goods besides metalware and some pottery. Exchange was limited to portable goods that could be carried during migration, and items of high value. This was true in both directions, as fishermen only wanted portable, valuable furs that could be carried across the sea without taking up too much space and that supplemented the lower price of bulk fish. Exchange was determined, in the sixteenth century, by the ways in which environmental conditions limited the accumulation of material culture of both Amerindians and fishermen in Terra Nova.

Exchange formed an ancillary component of fishing and seems to have been conducted by the mariners themselves. Much of this occurred off-the-record, and only brief remarks such as that by Clemente de Odelica clearly illuminate the practice of exchanging European goods for pelts. Very few of the loan contracts that form the bulk of our sources for the sixteenth-century fishery mention trade, and only a few observers mention it.<sup>547</sup> Exchange was likewise a secondary concern for most Amerindians, for the harvesting of marine products was the main reason to migrate to the coast. We should not over-emphasize the land-based prospect of trade against the continuing importance of the maritime activity of fishing and harvesting sea life in Algonkian societies. Well into the end of the sixteenth century Terra Nova was

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<sup>546</sup> Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*.P.

<sup>547</sup> Turgeon, "Pour Redécouvrir Notre 16e Siècle: Les Pêches À Terre-Neuve D'après Les Archives Notariales De Bordeaux."; "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology."; Trocmé and Delafosse, *Le Commerce Rochelais De La Fin Du Xve Siècle Au Début Du Xviie*; Gosselin and Beaurepaire, *Documents Authentiques Et Inédits Pour Servir É L'histoire De La Marine Normande Et Du Commerce Rouennais Pendant Les Xvie Et Xviie Siècles*; Michael M. Barkham, "French Basque" New Found Land" Entrepreneurs and the Import of Codfish and Whale Oil to Northern Spain, C. 1580 to C. 1620: The Case of Adam De Chibau, Burgess of Saint-Jean-De-Luz and" Sieur De St. Julien", *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 10, no. 1 (1994).

identified overwhelmingly with fishing rather than with the fur trade. For much of the sixteenth century the fur trade was directed eastwards towards Russia, which was able to satisfy western European demand into the early seventeenth century. Business contracts which link Newfoundland to the fur trade are exceedingly rare until the end of the century. By the early 1580s English observers noted that merchants in Saint Malo were selling large volumes of furs from North America. Whether or not they gathered these furs themselves or purchased them from Amerindians is unknown. Merchants from La Rochelle, Saint Malo, Basque Country and parts of England began to organize fur trading voyages by the last decades of the sixteenth century, but many of these headed for 'Canada' rather than Newfoundland or the Gulf of St. Lawrence region.<sup>548</sup>

The evidence for sustained contact and trade should encourage historians of the early fishery to revise the narrative of how these fisheries grew and functioned. Exchange with Amerindians seems to have been a part of the fishery from its earliest days, and only grew more significant with time. Trade for pelts provided mariners with a new source of income, and a hedge against a poor catch. The friendly relations with Innu (note de Odelica's remarks about drinking and eating) must have helped relieve the tedious monotony of the fishery. The question is how far this exchange may have gone towards influencing the behavior of mariners in Terra Nova. Long-distance, long-term maritime operations in the sixteenth century often required access to coastal sources of fresh food and water. The Iberian Atlantic was made possible only through the establishment of a series of crucial waystations where mariners could procure food and water: the Canaries, Azores, Cartagena, Havana. In other pre-modern, long-distance fisheries a symbiotic relationship between visiting fishermen and indigenous communities helped sustain commercial operations.

<sup>549</sup> In the fifteenth and sixteenth century Icelandic fisheries, English and Hanse mariners traded with

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<sup>548</sup> For examples from La Rochelle see: Trocmé and Delafosse, *Le Commerce Rochelais De La Fin Du Xve Siècle Au Début Du Xviie*; Musset, *Les Rochelais À Terre-Neuve, 1500-1789*.

<sup>549</sup> Fuente García, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century*; Duncan, *Atlantic Islands; Madeira, the Azores, and the Cape Verdes in Seventeenth-Century Commerce and Navigation*.

Icelandic farmers for fish, food and cloth during the summer.<sup>550</sup> Most notable was the nineteenth-century American whaling industry in the Pacific, which dependent significantly upon various northwest Amerindian peoples for food and supplies.<sup>551</sup> Without access to these communities and their provisions long-distance fishing would have been impossible. The existence of multiple Algonkian societies around Terra Nova, most of which regularly engaged in trade with fishermen, should have made it possible for European mariners to procure supplies locally.

Yet it is very difficult to tell from the surviving sources whether or not access to Amerindian resources helped outright sustain the fishery. No surviving records from the sixteenth century mention fishing vessels procuring food from Amerindians. Neither Lefant nor Odelica reference this in their testimonies. None of the extensive English promotional literature from the end of the century discusses the potential of procuring supplies from Amerindian communities. Most fishing ships carried large stores of food, enough to last five months, and do not seem to have factored in trade as a source of provisions. The communities that lived around Terra Nova did not practice agriculture, and may not have had the food surplus to be traded. Exchange between Amerindians and fishermen was therefore a beneficial ancillary to the functioning of the fisheries, but not a crucial component. Europeans did not rely on Amerindians for food or marketable fish. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, for instance, Norman fishermen largely shifted operations to the Grand Banks, severing ties with Amerindians completely. Bretons likewise increasingly focused on the northeast coast of Newfoundland, where only the recalcitrant Beothuk lived. These shifts make sense only if we accept that fishing operations now existed independently of trade. As central as the exchange between fishermen and Amerindians was to the experience of mariners in Terra Nova, it was not essentially to their core business of producing preserved codfish.

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<sup>550</sup> Mark Gardiner and Natascha Mehler, "English and Hanseatic Trading and Fishing Sites in Medieval Iceland: Report on Initial Fieldwork," *Germania* 85, no. 2 (2007); J. Jönsson, "Fisheries Off Iceland, 1600-1900," (1994); Jóhannesson Guðni Th, *The History of Iceland* (2013).

<sup>551</sup> Shoemaker, *Native American Whalers and the World : Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race*.

A further question revolves around how Amerindian societies may have informed and aided European understanding of the ecology and geography of the northwest Atlantic. A famous incident from Jacques Cartier's expedition of exploratory voyage of 1535-6 is illustrative of this problem. During an overwintering in Canada the Breton navigator and his crew began to exhibit symptoms of scurvy, which after three months had seriously debilitated nearly the entire party. As men began to die, Cartier learned from the local Stadacona Amerindian population that the boiled bark and needles of a local evergreen tree would reverse the illness. After finding and consuming the suggested leaves, from what was called the *Annedda* tree, Cartier's entire crew was rapidly restored to health and survived the winter.<sup>552</sup> The remedy they suggested for Cartier and his men was simple and quick-acting. The most significant thing that this incident tells us is that Cartier and his fellow Bretons were not aware of the potential use of indigenous evergreens to prevent scurvy. Either they had never themselves sampled local flora, nor had they learned from Amerindians. By the mid-1530s Breton fishermen had been regularly sailing to Newfoundland for three decades and Cartier recruited in a town filled with fishermen. This strongly suggests that, at least as late as the 1530s, fishermen at Newfoundland were unaware of the potential use of evergreens to prevent scurvy. The initial refusal of many of Cartier's crew to sample the plant-based cure may indicate that European mariners were hesitant to consume unknown plants or learn from Amerindian experience in the northeast. It is striking, for instance, how few words passed from indigenous languages into European vernaculars. Looking at place names used by mariners in the sixteenth century, all are taken from European languages rather than Algonkian, Inuit or Iroquois. Despite continued contact, the European mariners who worked the Terra Nova fisheries seem to have generated their own ideas about the northwest Atlantic, rather than learning from Algonkian societies. We therefore have little reason to believe that contact with Amerindians extended beyond exchange to include significant transfer of knowledge or material assistance to fishermen.

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<sup>552</sup> A good summary of this incident and a transcript is found in Kenneth J. Carpenter, *The History of Scurvy and Vitamin C* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). pp. 8-10.

## 5.4 THE TURN AWAY FROM THE ATLANTIC

By the 1540s the contours of maritime commerce on the Atlantic and European imperial expansion were changing rapidly. The evidence from the mid-sixteenth century more clearly points to multiple points of contact between different parts of the Atlantic that manifested as a web of overlapping exchange networks which spread commodities, people and ideas across the Atlantic with incredible speed. Sixteenth century merchants, from across Europe, tended to see discrete commodity chains or regional investments rather than a web of commerce.<sup>553</sup> The route from Seville, *Tierra Firme* and Mexico, via the canaries and outer Caribbean islands, was just one of these paths. The Canaries themselves were bound into several different trade routes: a direct exchange with Iberia centered on sugar, fish and other commodities; as a link in the West African trades, including the growing slave trades; as a node in transatlantic commerce with the Americas; and as a source of provisions for other Atlantic islands and the Caribbean.<sup>554</sup> By the mid-sixteenth century such distinct but overlapping sub-systems of maritime commerce had formed across the Atlantic basin.

It was in the mid-sixteenth century that the imperial structures which would dominate Atlantic history for the next century coalesced. The Castilian conquest of Mesoamerica and the Andes was consolidated during the 1540s, resulting in the emergence of a major draw for migration and commercial activity.<sup>555</sup> Portuguese settlement in Brazil was intensified, including the first steps to establish ports and agricultural settlements in Pernambuco.<sup>556</sup> From the 1540s onward the first efforts to systematically extract

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<sup>553</sup> Gervais, "Neither Imperial, nor Atlantic: A Merchant Perspective on International Trade in the Eighteenth Century." John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, UK; New York; Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>554</sup> da Silva, "African Islands and the Formation of the Dutch Atlantic Economy: Arguin, Gorée, Cape Verde and São Tomé, 1590–1670."; Campos, "The Atlantic Islands and the Development of Southern Castile at the Turn of the Fifteenth Century."; Duncan, *Atlantic Islands; Madeira, the Azores, and the Cape Verdes in Seventeenth-Century Commerce and Navigation*; Schwartz, *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680*.

<sup>555</sup> Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716*; Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies*; John R. Fisher, *The Economic Aspects of Spanish Imperialism in America, 1492-1810* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997).

<sup>556</sup> Harold Benjamin Johnson, "The Donatary Captaincy in Perspective: Portuguese Backgrounds to the Settlement of Brazil," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 52, no. 2 (1972); Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: From Beginnings to 1807*; Godinho, *Os Descobrimentos E a Economia Mundial*; "Portugal and the Making

silver from American sources began the long transfer of precious metals from one side of the Atlantic to the other.<sup>557</sup> Sugar production in Brazil and parts of the Caribbean began its upward climb from the 1530s onward, while it already dominated many of the Atlantic islands.<sup>558</sup> As Pierre Chaunu's study of the records in Seville make clear the number of ships sailing to the Americas increased across the 1530s-40s and may have peaked in 1550.<sup>559</sup> Notarial records from Rouen, La Rochelle and Bordeaux show that more vessels were being outfitted for trade in the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Islands.<sup>560</sup> With the entrenchment of settlements in the Caribbean and Brazil, and the introduction of sugar mills, the transatlantic slave trade began to increase in volume and tempo during the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>561</sup> The mid-Atlantic islands and Cuba began their shift from sites of production to crucial nodes in transatlantic commerce, providing supplies and protection to merchant vessels and warships.<sup>562</sup> As the volume of traffic grew in the 1540s, maritime commerce became both a more worthwhile investment and a target of opportunity. It was during this decade that we see the first sustained effort by corsairs to operate outside of the Atlantic Triangle.<sup>563</sup> In response, a long-term project of imperial defense of the Caribbean was initiated by the Castilian crown.<sup>564</sup>

As the tempo of transatlantic commerce increased there was the emergence of a new financial network that connected Seville to Antwerp which became the new backbone of European capital flow.<sup>565</sup>

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of the Atlantic World: Sugar Fleets and Gold Fleets, the Seventeenth to the Eighteenth Centuries," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* (2005).

<sup>557</sup> Hamilton, *American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain, 1501-1650*; Stein and Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War : Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe*.

<sup>558</sup> Schwartz, *Tropical Babylons : Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680*.

<sup>559</sup> Chaunu, Chaunu, and Arbellot, *Séville Et L'atlantique, 1504-1650*.

<sup>560</sup> Gosselin and Beaurepaire, *Documents Authentiques Et Inédits Pour Servir É L'histoire De La Marine Normande Et Du Commerce Rouennais Pendant Les Xvie Et Xviie Siècles*; Gayle K. Brunelle, *The New World Merchants of Rouen* (Kirksville: (Mo.) : Sixteenth century journal publishers, 1991); Trocmé and Delafosse, *Le Commerce Rochelais De La Fin Du Xve Siècle Au Début Du Xviie*; Bernard, *Navires Et Gens De Mer À Bordeaux (Vers 1400-Vers 1550)*.

<sup>561</sup> Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery : From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*.

<sup>562</sup> Duncan, *Atlantic Islands; Madeira, the Azores, and the Cape Verdes in Seventeenth-Century Commerce and Navigation*; Otte Enrique, "Canarias: Plaza Bancaria Europea En El Siglo Xvi," *Coloquios de Historia Canaria Americana* 4, no. 4 (1980). Fuente García, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century*.

<sup>563</sup> Lane, *Pillaging the Empire : Piracy in the Americas, 1500-1750*.

<sup>564</sup> Paul E. Hoffman, *The Spanish Crown and the Defense of the Caribbean : 1535-1585 : Precedent, Patrimonialism, and Royal Parsimony* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).

<sup>565</sup> Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*; Maarten Roy Prak, *Early Modern Capitalism : Economic and Social Change in Europe 1400-1800* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001); Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic*



Specie from the Americas (or what percentage of species had not already been siphoned off or exported to East Asia) flowed to Antwerp, which emerged as the new financial hub of northwest Europe. This competed with the older network which tied northern Italy to Lyons and the south German cities. The result was more fluid capital markets and access to financing for most western European merchants. This in turn would be caught up in the general price revolution of the sixteenth century, a long period of inflation whose connection to American silver is still hotly debated.<sup>566</sup> A further effect of this reorientation of financial markets was both a general increase in investment caused by falling interest rates and a series of fiscal crises within states. The further consequence of an expanding Atlantic world would be the increased familiarity and engagement with the products of Atlantic expansion.<sup>567</sup> By 1540 an entire generation of Europeans had grown up with the knowledge of the Americas. Transatlantic commerce was bringing more commodities to European markets more consistently. By the 1560s potatoes were cultivated in the Canaries and consumed in several parts of Europe, and maize had found its way to the Mediterranean. As Marcy Norton's study of tobacco and chocolate have shown, throughout the mid-sixteenth century European colonists were engaging with and trying to understand American commodities in new ways. Their experiences and interpretations of Atlantic plants, animals and precious minerals were soon transferred to the metropole. Tobacco first appears in European texts in the 1530s, and by the 1570s was being shipped to Europe in ever-increasing quantities.<sup>568</sup> Even if we do not endorse a full-fledged Atlantic system, then the broad experiences which mark a distinctly Atlantic world were spreading and solidifying in many parts of the Atlantic basin from mid-century onward.

The timing of the rapid expansion of the scale of fishing at Terra Nova which began in 1540 closely correlates to the general expansion of transatlantic commerce in the early 1540s. Both trade with Terra Nova and the Americans experienced a contraction in the mid-1540s, followed by a renewed surge between

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*Economies*; Peter Earle and Society Economic History, *Essays in European Economic History, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974); Braudel and Labrousse, *Histoire Économique Et Sociale De La France*.

<sup>566</sup> Stein and Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War : Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe*.

<sup>567</sup> For some aspects of this see: Lachenicht, *Europeans Engaging the Atlantic : Knowledge and Trade, 1500-1800*.

<sup>568</sup> Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures : A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World*.

1548 and 1552. Like Terra Nova, mercantile interest in the Americas seems to have been briefly disrupted by the outbreak of war before rapidly growing in the late 1550s and early 1560s. As studies of merchants in Rouen have shown, interest in Terra Nova grew in concert with increased investment in transatlantic trade, and similar patterns can be seen in Porto and La Rochelle.<sup>569</sup> The rise of Basque participation at Terra Nova seems to have occurred at the same time that an increasing number of Basques were settling in the Americas and serving on Iberian voyages across the world. As Juan Pescador Canton has explored in his study of Basque rural life, it was in the mid-sixteenth century that the first great out-migrations of Basques took place from Guipuzcoa.<sup>570</sup> While some communities committed themselves to seasonal fishing and whaling in the northwest Atlantic, others were supplying the manpower for settlement across the Atlantic basin. Therefore, while the structural features of European interaction with Terra Nova do not fit with wider patterns of the emerging Atlantic system, at face value they do seem to have moved in parallel with wider changes in Atlantic circulation.

But this is misleading. During the mid-sixteenth century the merchants and mariners who drove the Terra Nova fisheries continued to diverge significantly from the convergent growth taking place elsewhere in the Atlantic basin. Much as the Bretons around 1505 rejected the idea of Madeira in the northwest Atlantic, so too did the Basques and others in the 1550s-60s rejected the American-Carribea-Atlantic island-African approach to integration. Despite the growth of the mid-sixteenth century, mariners and merchants who operated the Terra Nova fisheries never integrated their operations with the wider Atlantic economy. The fishery remained physically and economically isolated. At a moment when the Iberian Atlantic systems and their surrounding regions were becoming more densely interconnected, the mariners at Terra Nova chose to look the other way.

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<sup>569</sup> Brunelle, *The New World Merchants of Rouen*; Barros, "Porto: A Construção De Um Espaço Marítimo Nos Alvores Dos Tempos Modernos."; Trocmé and Delafosse, *Le Commerce Rochelais De La Fin Du Xve Siècle Au Début Du Xviiie*.

<sup>570</sup> Juan Javier Pescador Cantón, *The New World inside a Basque Village : The Oiartzun Valley and Its Atlantic Exchanges, 1550-1800* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2005); Jean-Philippe Priotti, "Guerre Et Expansion Commerciale: Le Rôle Des Basques Dans L'empire Espagnol Au Xvie Siècle," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, no. 2 (2001).

There are several ways to measure the idea of integration in the sixteenth century Atlantic context. The degree to which fishermen were carrying fish to either colonies in the Atlantic basin or to major Atlantic ports within Europe; the degree to which codfish from Terra Nova was used as a provision on ships (both mercantile and military) plying the new Atlantic routes; the degree to which mariners who worked at Newfoundland also worked on voyages to other parts of the Atlantic; and the degree to which merchants who organized and invested in the fishery also invested in and organized voyages to other parts of the Atlantic. In each of these cases the surviving evidence points to a negative relationship which is to say that during the height of the sixteenth century fisheries Terra Nova and those who worked there were not also connecting to other emergent branches of commerce. The notarial records from major ports like La Rochelle, Bordeaux, Rouen and elsewhere do not indicate that fishermen were carrying their cargoes outside of northwest Europe.<sup>571</sup> Indeed, most mariners were obligated to return to these same ports, rather than to sell their catch in the Caribbean or Atlantic islands (See Chapter Five, below).

The most fundamental way to measure the integration of the fisheries with the wider Atlantic basin would be to trace the flow of codfish, the primary commodity produced in the northwest Atlantic, to other parts of the Atlantic. Yet the surviving evidence strongly suggests that until the end of the sixteenth century fishermen did not carry codfish to the Caribbean or Americas, nor to the Atlantic islands. This appears to have been a trade which emerged only around the turn of the seventeenth century.<sup>572</sup> Most of the catch was

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<sup>571</sup> Based on a survey of the surviving notarial records which have been used throughout this study. Most loan and outfitting contracts give a description of the ship's intended itinerary, and many include marginal notes which describe the outcome. See also descriptions of voyages in: Gosselin and Beurepaire, *Documents Authentiques Et Inédits Pour Servir É L'histoire De La Marine Normande Et Du Commerce Rouennais Pendant Les Xvie Et Xviiè Siècles*; Bréard, Bréard, and Société de l'histoire de, *Documents Relatifs À La Marine Normande Et À Ses Armements Aux Xvie Et Xviiè Siècles Pour Le Canada, L'Afrique, Les Antilles, Le Brésil Et Les Indes*; Abreu-Ferreira, "The Cod Trade in Early-Modern Portugal: Deregulation, English Domination, and the Decline of Female Cod Merchants."; Barros, "Porto: A Construção De Um Espaço Marítimo Nos Alvores Dos Tempos Modernos."; Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology."

<sup>572</sup> Writing home from the nascent English colony in Newfoundland in October of 1610, the gentleman John Guy remarked that when the settlers first arrived "we found the fishinge shippes not departed, havinge ended there fishinge and expecting a faire wind, kept in by easterlie windes." When at last they were able to depart, Guy made note of a sole exception: "a fisherman lefte with us by one Master Alexander Sanford of Lime that was bound to the Ilands, that had the disease of the scurvy confirmed in him, to be sent home in the flemminge, is by our Surgeon very well amended." In this case 'The Islands' appears to be a reference to the Caribbean, and this is the earliest seventeenth

carried to northwest Europe, for reasons explored in the following chapter, where they were consumed by urban and coastal communities. One particular way in which codfish may have interacted with other Atlantic circuits was through ship provisioning. Ships which left Iberia for the Americas, Atlantic islands and west Africa carried sardines and other fish from the southern Atlantic rather than codfish.<sup>573</sup> If cod was carried it was more likely to be from the Irish Sea, an enterprise which continued to attract Basques and other fishermen throughout the sixteenth century.<sup>574</sup> In the 1540s the English warship the *Mary Rose* was carrying codfish overwhelmingly from Norway and Iceland rather than Terra Nova, despite the ship's home base near the West Country.<sup>575</sup>

There were certainly markets for preserved codfish across the Atlantic basin in the mid-sixteenth century. Colonies in the Caribbean and Brazil needed access to preserved protein, along with the many Atlantic island outposts. Major Atlantic ports like Seville and Lisbon faced rapidly growing populations and need for food security.<sup>576</sup> The fact that merchants in coastal northwest Europe turned away from this opportunity suggests that commercial fisheries elsewhere in the eastern Atlantic, such as those at Morocco, Iceland, the Irish Sea and Rio de Ouro, were all capable of satisfying the demands of transatlantic shipping for much of the century. The sardine fisheries of the south Atlantic in particular were able to fuel much of the Iberian transoceanic expansion. In 1513, during the formative period at Terra Nova, Castilian ships sailing to the new world preferred to buy "Irish Fish (*Pesca de Irlanda*)" despite its higher price.<sup>577</sup> Merchants from the West Country in England devoted most of their fishing resources to the Irish Sea until the 1580s at the earliest, and never totally abandoned the lucrative grounds right next door. As several

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century text to directly refer to this trade. Gillian T. Cell, *Newfoundland Discovered: English Attempts at Colonisation, 1610-1630* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1982). p. 62.

<sup>573</sup> Perez-Mallaina Bueno and Phillips, *Spain's Men of the Sea : Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century*; Pérez, "Las Pesquerías En Berbería a Medios Del Siglo Xvii."; Antonio Rumeo de Armas, "Las Pesquerías Españolas En La Costa De África (Siglos Xv-Xvi) " *Anuario de Estudios Atlánticos*, no. 23 (1977).

<sup>574</sup> For a discussion of this in the Basque context see Huxley, "La Industria Pesquera En El País Vasco Peninsular Al Principio De La Edad Moderna: Una Edad De Oro."

<sup>575</sup> Hutchinson et al., "The Globalization of Naval Provisioning: Ancient DNA and Stable Isotope Analyses of Stored Cod from the Wreck of the *Mary Rose*, Ad 1545."

<sup>576</sup> Polónia, "Seaports as Centres of Economic Growth: The Portuguese Case, 1500–1800."; Telechea, "Medieval Seaports of the Atlantic Coast of Spain."

<sup>577</sup> Garcia, *Sevilla Y Las Flotas De Indias : La Gran Armada De Castilla Del Oro (1513-1514)*.

scholars of Basque Country have noted, even after the discovery of Terra Nova the Basques were sending a large number of ships yearly to fish not just for herring and sardines but even some cod in the Irish Sea.<sup>578</sup> Bordeaux relied considerably on preserved fish imported from Ireland for its urban population.<sup>579</sup> Port records across Biscay indicate that the trade in Irish Sea fish remained brisk, even in the face of Terra Nova cod. Throughout the sixteenth century herring from the North Sea competed with cod in the marketplaces of European ports and cities. In 1521 ships from far-off Dieppe were offloading cargo of ‘*hareng rouge* (smoked herring)’ in Bayonne even as local merchants were outfitting ships for Terra Nova.<sup>580</sup> Port records from the Norman port of Fécamp, stretching from 1520 to 1550, show that herring catches far outnumbered cod imports and brought in substantially more revenue to tax collectors.<sup>581</sup> Herring was cheaper than cod and found its way into the diet of even the urban poor, a crucial source of protein for many labourers. Importantly, herring was such a fixture of trade and cuisine in the Low Countries and north Germany that cod was largely excluded from these markets during the sixteenth century. The real battleground was Normandy and England, where the markets for cod and herring overlapped.

Only slowly did cod from Iceland and Terra Nova make inroads into these regions, and never fully supplanted herring in the largest cities. The Iberian interest in fishing off of west Africa and the Atlantic islands continued throughout the sixteenth century. In 1523, for instance, a group of merchants from Pontevedra, in Galicia, sought to sail to the Canaries for the fishery.<sup>582</sup> The pinnace was to depart on the first of January and its crew were to “catch all the fish which God is pleased to give us” at Gran Canaria.<sup>583</sup> This record comes within three years of two records which show that merchants from Pontevedra were actively outfitting their first voyages to Terra Nova. During the 1550s, as the tempo of fishing at Terra Nova

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<sup>578</sup> Jose Antonio Azpiazu. “Los balleneros vascos en Cantabria, Asturias y Galicia.” *Itsas Memoria*. No.3. p. 79

<sup>579</sup> Jacques Bernard, *Navires et gens de mer à Bordeaux (vers 1400-vers 1550)*. (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1968).

<sup>580</sup> AM Bayonne. BB6. Fol. 194-195.

<sup>581</sup> AD SM 7H 294.

<sup>582</sup> A summary and transcript of this voyage is found in: Xosé Manuel Pereira Fernández, “Los Mareantes Pontevedreses Y La Pesca de Altura En El Siglo XVI,” *Cuadernos de Estudios Gallegos* 52, no. 118 (December 30, 2005): 289–301.

<sup>583</sup> “yremos en una pinanca bordada a la gran canaria a pescar toda la pescaria que dios nos diere.”

was reaching its height, the mariner Jean Alfonse was describing the coast of Africa around Rio de Ouro and Cabo Branco as “a large fishery with all sorts of fish. And here come ships out of Portugal and Andalusia to fish.”<sup>584</sup> In short, the first push to find new fishing grounds beyond Europe, directed to the south, had been a grand success. A half-century before Terra Nova was even discovered the south Atlantic had been turned into a site of maritime exploitation that proved the viability of venturing far abroad for marine protein. It is also an indication of the degree to which, for much of the sixteenth century, the fisheries at Terra Nova were a decidedly northwest European phenomenon. Although *bacalao* was consumed in the western Mediterranean, the majority of people eating saltcod lived in the very regions which produced it. Most communities living around the Atlantic basin, not merely within Europe and the Mediterranean, were living without access to fish from Terra Nova.

If codfish from Newfoundland did not circulate around the Atlantic basin before the end of the sixteenth century, then neither did the men who harvested it. In the loan contracts and judicial records of the sixteenth century few ships which sailed to Terra Nova are also listed as having sailed to West Africa, the Caribbean, the Atlantic Islands or elsewhere. It was much more common for ships and crews which served at Terra Nova to work the intra-European trades, or to operate as corsairs. Though this will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, in the mid-sixteenth century merchants who invested in the fishery tended to be disconnected from other branches of Atlantic commerce.

A further pattern which marked the mid-century growth of the fishery was the lack of seaborne violence at Terra Nova. The raid by Basques in 1553, noted above, was remarkable largely because it was so unusual. Most pirates who threatened the fishery attacked fishing vessels within European waters, off the coast of Galicia or Flanders.<sup>585</sup> At the same time maritime violence was spreading across the Atlantic

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<sup>584</sup> “*Et toute ceste coste est terre basse, sableuse, et y a en elle grand pescherye de toutes sortes de poissons. Et icy viennent les navires d’Andélosie et de Portugal a la pescherie.*” Jean Alfonse, *La Cosmographie Avec L’espère et Régime Du Soleil et Du Nord / Par Jean Fonteneau, Dit Alfonse, de Saintonge, Capitaine-Pilote de François Ier ; Publ. et Annot. Par Georges Musset,...*, 1904, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6535486p.p.327>.

<sup>585</sup> See the descriptions in Ducéré, *Histoire Maritime De Bayonne. Les Corsaires Sous L’Ancien Régime*; Azpiazu, “*Guerra Y Supervivencia. Un Episodio Del Corso Guipuzcoano De Medios Del Siglo Xvi.*”

to the Atlantic islands and the Caribbean. Violent raids by privateers-cum-pirates began in the 1530s in the Caribbean, accelerating in the 1540s-50s before becoming a full crisis by the 1560s-70s.<sup>586</sup> While the Caribbean and the Atlantic Islands were emerging as sites of deliberate violence for privateers and corsairs, Terra Nova remained isolated from these new threats until the end of the century.

If the fishery at Terra Nova was separated from the wider changes taking place in the Atlantic basin, its growth could be attributed to more localized and internal factors in coastal Europe. This chapter has already highlighted the increasingly complex relationship between warfare and the fishery in the 1540s. New cycles of dynastic violence seems to have encouraged rapid growth around 1542 and 1549 which cemented the place of Rouen and Normandy as centers for the Terra Nova trade. When peace between the Habsburg and Valois crowns came in 1559 the economic potential of the communities around the Bay of Biscay were unleashed, at which point the scale of the fishery reached its peak. This latter change seems to have been unique to Terra Nova and a consequence of shifts in the coastal population of Biscay.

A key factor which drove growth in the mid-sixteenth century was the increasingly deep ties between certain coastal communities and the fishery. By the late 1550s certain towns and populations had become so involved in the trade to Terra Nova, having invested in it during the cycles of violence in the previous decades, that they became dependent on access to the northwest Atlantic. As a consequence the remarkable scale of fishery in the 1560s seems to have been a reflection of these communities investing ever more heavily into what was increasingly a crucial trade and way of life. The archetype of this problem was Saint Jean-de-Luz in Basque Country.<sup>587</sup> With a small population of perhaps less than 10,000, the town emerged in the 1550s-60s as the most significant fishing port in Europe relative to its size. Each year its residents outfitted dozens of codfishing and whaling vessels. As they did so the luzians fed into the growth of the

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<sup>586</sup> Hoffman, *The Spanish Crown and the Defense of the Caribbean : 1535-1585 : Precedent, Patrimonialism, and Royal Parsimony.*

<sup>587</sup> Though no single study on St. Jean-de-Luz as a fishing port has been written, descriptions of its importance can be found in: Barkham, "French Basque" New Found Land" Entrepreneurs and the Import of Codfish and Whale Oil to Northern Spain, C. 1580 to C. 1620: The Case of Adam De Chibau, Burgess of Saint-Jean-De-Luz and" Sieur De St. Julien"."; Tuck and Grenier, *Red Bay, Labrador: World Whaling Capital A.D. 1550-1600*; Turgeon, "Pêches Basques Du Labourd En Atlantique Nord (Xvi-Xviii Siècle): Ports, Routes Et Trafics."

fishery as a whole, but also became dependent on access to Terra Nova. Hence the tax document with which this chapter began, indicating the ways in which residents of small towns leveraged their reliance on the fishery into privileges to protect their fragile economy.

What all this suggests is that during the mid-sixteenth century the fisheries at Terra Nova faced the potential to integrate with the rest of the emerging Atlantic experience. Instead fishermen continued to sail between Terra Nova and their home ports in northwest Europe without engaging with these opportunities. To return to the central problem which has animated this study, the mid-century fishery at Terra Nova presents a considerable paradox. The 1540s-80s represented an unprecedented growth in the number of ships which crossed the ocean to visit Newfoundland, and increasingly saw a diversification in the kinds of activities which took place in the northwest Atlantic. Yet these operations were strangely isolated and disconnected. As a consequence, even during their period of maturation and growth operations at Newfoundland continued to be driven by changing conditions within Europe rather than by general shifts in Atlantic commerce. This means that fishermen were disconnected from one of the key elements of an emerging Atlantic experience, the increased economic interdependence of the Atlantic basin outside of Europe.

The middle of the sixteenth century, from 1540 to 1580, saw multiple layers of change coalesce to drive rapid growth in the scale and diversity of European interactions with the northwest Atlantic. Even if mariners continued to isolate this growth from the rest of the Atlantic world, they would turn Terra Nova into one of the major destinations for ships sailing westward from Europe. What this suggests is that even as populations in the Caribbean, Americas, Atlantic islands and West Africa were increasingly finding their destinies bound together in some corners of the ocean life and work proceeded unaffected by these broader patterns of change. This points to how complex and varied the development of the Atlantic experience and, ultimately the Atlantic economy could be in the mid-sixteenth century. Substantially different approaches to maritime commerce were producing similar moments of growth, while Terra Nova continued to be excluded from processes of imperial settlement. This situation would not last beyond the end of the century,



and as Chapter Six will show after 1580 the fishery at Terra Nova began to split and change dramatically. But for four decades shifting communities of mariners steadily participated in a stable and burgeoning fishery that came to define how historians remember early Newfoundland.

## 6.0 LABOUR AND CREDIT IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY FISHERY

### 6.1 THE MARGUERITTE: CREDIT AND LABOUR IN A SMALL NORMAN TOWN

On the twenty-third day of February 1544 (or 1543 according to the sixteenth-century calendar) Clemente de Conihout, called Huppé, stood before a notary in the city of Rouen to finalize a contract.<sup>588</sup> A ship of which he was part-owner for an eighth share (literally *ung demy-quart*, a ‘half-quarter’ in notarial jargon), the *Margueritte*, was waiting at the quay to leave for Terra Nova. Earlier in February the ship’s master (the captain in charge of daily operations) Guillaume Boutard had already taken out a loan of 120 *livres* from two different merchants in the city to outfit the vessel. But now a further forty *livres* was required to finish preparations, so De Conihout had come from his home in the small village of Jumièges down the river to negotiate the second loan on behalf of his fellow-investors.<sup>589</sup> Michel de la Rue, an “honourable man...a citizen living in Rouen,” agreed to lend the sum to de Conihout so long as the latter agreed to return to the same city with his catch at the end of the season.<sup>590</sup> The loan was committed to paper in the notarial registry because Clement de Conihout was not a resident of Rouen and thus a risk to his creditor, for otherwise the deal could have been sealed by oral agreement.

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<sup>588</sup> ADSM 2E1 Tabellionage de Rouen. No. 2799 Feb. 1544, Supplement. Entry for 23 Febr 1544. Entries in this particular register are not numbered by folio.

<sup>589</sup> The contract does not name the other ship-owners, only listing Clement de Conihout as an owner for a percentage. This seems to have been common practice amongst French notaries, in both Biscay and Normandy, though it makes it very difficult to reconstruct who owned which ships. The other ship-owners were likely from Jumièges.

<sup>590</sup> “*honourable homme... bourgeois demeurent a Rouen*” This is a common formula, and *honourable homme* was used throughout Normandy and Biscay to denote well-respected city residents. In the sixteenth century *bourgeois* denoted a legal resident of the city, though the term also served double-duty as a way to describe ship-owners.

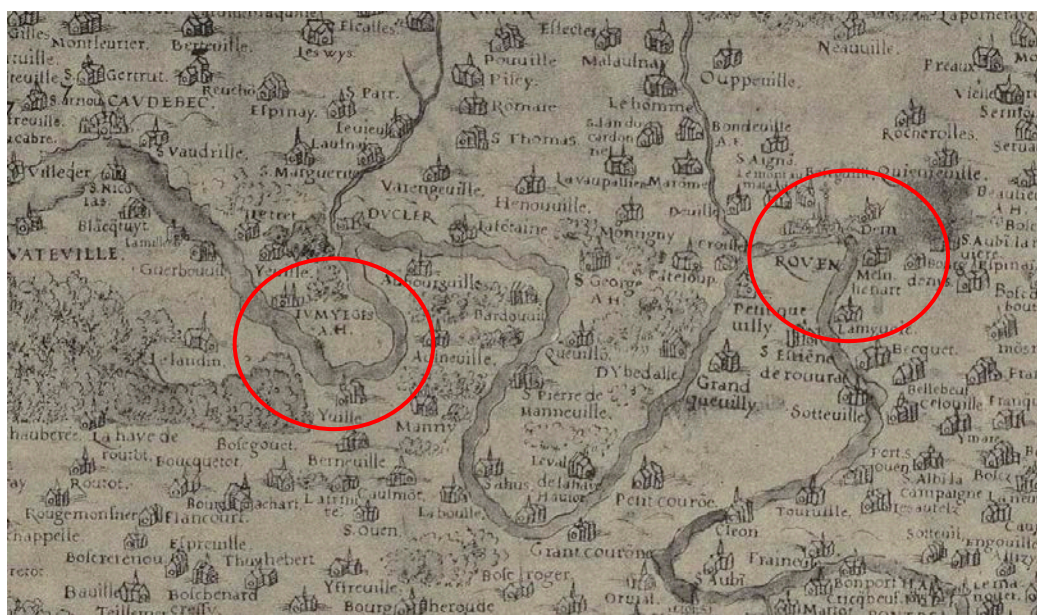
Clement de Conihout was both merchant and mariner, deeply involved in the fishery at Terra Nova.<sup>591</sup> Clement was born into a family from the small Norman port of Jumièges (See Figure 18) which had been outfitting and sailing ships to Terra Nova for a decade, and in 1544 alone three members of the Conihout clan served on or invested in five separate ships.<sup>592</sup> On the same day in February in which Clement de Conihout took out a loan for the *Margueritte*, he negotiated a second line of credit with the same Michel de la Rue. It turned out that Clement de Conihout served as master on a different ship from Jumièges, the 80-tun *Saulveur*, even as he owned part of the *Margueritte*.<sup>593</sup> De Conihout was willing to negotiate as the master of one vessel even as he invested in its competitors, because come autumn he could claim both a share (up to a third) of the *Saulveur*'s catch and an eighth of the *Margueritte*'s. Terra Nova was a family and communal business in small towns like Jumièges, and Clement de Conihout was following normal procedures when he took out overlapping loans for competing ships in the late winter of 1544.

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<sup>591</sup> On the de Conihout family and its business dealing with Terra Nova, see: Jacques Laveque du Pontharouant. *Navires et marins de Jumièges pendant la première moitié du XVIème siècle*. Self-published. Avril 1997 et Juin 1998. Pontharouant has collected all the voyages to Terra Nova made by mariners from Jumièges before 1550.

<sup>592</sup> These were: Jean de Conihout, part-owner of the *Marie* and part-owner of the *Martine*; Guillaume de Conihout, master of the *Marie*; and Clement de Conihout described here. Jean de Conihout had invested in and worked on several vessels since 1535. In previous years Claude de Conihout (1543), Pierre de Conihout (1542), Jacques de Conihout dit Raoul (1542) and Robert de Conihout (1542) also appear in connection with Terra Nova. All the Conihout family resided in Jumièges, in what is referred to in one text as the *hameau de Conihout*. Pontharouant. *Navires et marins de Jumièges pendant la première moitié du XVIème siècle*. The same was true of the master on the *Margueritte*, Guillaume Boutard, who came from a family residing near Jumièges that often provided masters for ships owned by the Conihouts.

<sup>593</sup> ADSM 2E1 Tabellionage de Rouen. No. 2799 Fev. 1543, Supplement. 23 Febr. 1544. In total Clement owed de la Rue 180ft, though he was only personally liable for around 5lt. for his share of the *Margueritte*.



**Figure 19. The world of the Conihout family.**

1545 map which shows location of Jumièges (left, red circle) and the city of Rouen (right, red circle) on the River Seine. The ships owned by Clement de Conihout sailed from Jumièges to Rouen, upriver and around several bends, to be outfitted in the 1540s. Detail from *La carte générale du pays de Normandie* by Jan Jolivet. Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Cartes et plans, GE D-8476 (1897,390-391).

Although many parties were involved (de Conihout, his anonymous fellow investors, Boutard the master, Michel de la Rue the creditor) the contract is phrased by the notary as a simple promise between Clement and Michel. Michel de la Rue, the man who was owed money for two different ships, was typical of the kinds of creditors who made the sixteenth century fishery possible. Though respected and a legal citizen of the city (*bourgeois*), de la Rue was not granted any titles by the notary which marked him as a powerful resident: merchant (*marchand*), lord (*sieur*), peer (*pair*).<sup>594</sup> In a separate contract Michel de la Rue is listed as a resident of the *St. Estienne des tonneliers* parish of Rouen.<sup>595</sup> Right along the riverside and quay, it was at the heart of the mercantile and maritime world of Rouen. Although he gave money to de Conihout in 1544, Michel de la Rue does not appear to have invested in any other fishing voyages that year or in subsequent seasons. Although hailing from a major outfitting port for fishermen, merchants like

<sup>594</sup> The de la Rue family does not appear in Gayle Brunelle's study of merchants in Rouen, and indication that his was not one of the leading families engaged with the American trades. Brunelle, *The New World Merchants of Rouen*.

<sup>595</sup> Pontharouant. *Navires et marins de Jumièges pendant la première moitié du XVIème siècle*. p.6. Pontharouant reads the name as Delamar, but I interpret the name as Michel De la Rue.

Michel de la Rue did not systematically invest in the Terra Nova fishery, nor were their businesses oriented towards supporting transatlantic commerce. He was a man of wealth who could be counted upon for a small loan, but not a major financier or merchant in his own right. Yet there were enough men like Michel de la Rue in the port cities of northwest Europe to make the fishery sustainable.

The case of Clement de Conihout and his ships offers a glimpse into the intersection between business and social relationships in the sixteenth century fishery. The loans discussed above are also a simple illustration of how labour and credit worked on a daily basis for ship-owners and their crews. It is therefore a useful starting point to consider how labour and credit shaped experiences at Terra Nova, and how these relate to larger questions about the commercial structure of the sixteenth century fishery. This chapter will use the case of the *Margueritte*, and how the voyage combined maritime labour and short-term credit, as a starting point for this discussion.

Because of how records for the Newfoundland fishery were preserved, the business organization of voyages is the most thoroughly studied and best understood aspect of sixteenth century Terra Nova.<sup>596</sup> As a result, most studies of the Newfoundland fishery have focused on the twin problems of labour and capital, though generally within a very narrow geographic or temporal scope.<sup>597</sup> This chapter will not try to repeat these studies, but instead aims to frame the issue in the context of larger debates about maritime labour, the uses of credit and the development of capitalism in the early Atlantic.<sup>598</sup> It is meant to answer many of the questions first posed by Peter Pope in his study *Fish Into Wine*, but applies them to the sixteenth century and more broadly beyond just the English context.<sup>599</sup> In so doing this chapter will emphasize that the way in which labour and credit functioned in the sixteenth century fishery set it apart from emerging patterns

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<sup>596</sup> See for instance: Musset, *Les Rochelais À Terre-Neuve, 1500-1789*. Trocmé and Delafosse, *Le Commerce Rochelais De La Fin Du Xve Siècle Au Début Du Xviie*. Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*.

<sup>597</sup> For good summaries see: La Morandière, *La Pêche Française De La Morue À Terre-Neuve Du Xvie Siècle À Nos Jours; Son Importance Économique, Sociale Et Politique*.

<sup>598</sup> On capitalism and maritime history in the Atlantic in general, see: Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail; Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*.

<sup>599</sup> Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*.

elsewhere in the Atlantic. The functioning of the fishery was guided by the principles of social bonds, small-credit markets and pre-capitalist conventions of commerce and food production which are outlined at the end of this chapter. Ship-owners avoided the use of emerging financial centers and credit markets, instead relying on a haphazard collection of smaller merchants in Atlantic European cities. Ship-crews were drawn from small communities based on family bonds and deeply ingrained customary laws which regulated the use of wages and share-payments. There was no floating fishing labour pool, but instead a diffuse system of localized recruitment. Voyages were organized according to strict principles of risk-aversion which kept profits low, while restricting consumption of codfish to northwest Europe rather than more lucrative markets in the Mediterranean. All of these trends were built into the structure of the sixteenth century fishery at Terra Nova and ensured its long-term stability, but nonetheless set it apart from the emerging mercantile networks of the wider Atlantic.

## **6.2 LABOUR: GENDER, RACE, COERCION**

To sustain a viable long-distance fishery there had to be mariners willing and able to travel to Terra Nova and back every summer. As previous chapters have suggested in a single summer ten thousand or more sailor-fishermen might make the trip to the fishery, though the number fluctuated from year to year. These mariners doubled as sailors, guiding the ship on its transatlantic voyage, and workers who caught and processed codfish. Each mariner was embedded in a crew which worked together as a team for months at a time. The cod fisheries were a triumph of organizing and moving labour, but one which was predicated on drawing on a narrow slice of Atlantic demography. This study has noted several times that all fishermen in the sixteenth century were adult men from the coastal communities of Atlantic Europe. It is worth briefly considering why this was the case, and who was excluded from visiting Terra Nova.

In the sixteenth century fishing was considered by most Europeans to be man's work, and Terra Nova followed the pattern of the North Sea and Irish Sea in using exclusively male labour.<sup>600</sup> In northwest Europe, as in many parts of the world, the act of harvesting and processing fish was identified with masculine ideals of strength and bulk food production, forming a maritime analogue to farmwork. A 1597 etching of the city of Cadiz illustrates the gender division in the fishery.<sup>601</sup> Teams of young men on the beach catch fish using nets, while in the foreground groups of women clean and cook the fish which the men have brought ashore (See Figure 19 below). In Basque country special male-only fraternities even formed to coordinate fishing and whaling work.<sup>602</sup> No loan contract or court case survives which indicates the presence of women onboard ships bound to Terra Nova.<sup>603</sup> Documents in French frequently describe ship crews simply as *hommes*, the men, rather than using more neutral or technical terms. If women worked on fishing boats, or if they were brought across the sea, they were consistently excluded from records.

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<sup>600</sup> Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting, and the Discovery of the New World; Fishing : How the Sea Fed Civilization; Wit, Leven, Werken En Geloven in Zeevarende Gemeenschappen: Schiedam, Maassluis En Ter Heijde in De Zeventiende Eeuw.*

<sup>601</sup> "La muy noble y muy leal cedas de Cadiz." Map by Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg. c.1600. Digitized version accessed via University of South Carolina Irvin Dept. of Rare Books and Special Collections, The John and Mary Osman Braun and Hogenberg Collection. <http://digital.tcl.sc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/braunhogen/id/315/rec/26>.

<sup>602</sup> Hess, "'Working the Waves': The Plebeian Culture and Moral Economy of Traditional Basque Fishing Brotherhoods."

<sup>603</sup> This is based on a survey of records in Rouen and La Rochelle. Nor is there evidence from the major studies of various French, Spanish and Portuguese archives in: Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology."; Barkham, *Los Vascos En El Marco Atlántico Norte: Siglos Xvi Y Xvii*; Ménard, *La Pesca Gallega En Terranova, Siglos Xvi-Xviii*; Abreu-Ferreira, "Terra Nova through the Iberian Looking Glass: The Portuguese-Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Sixteenth Century." Nor are women mentioned in studies by Prowse, Innis or Pope on the English fishery. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records with Numerous Illustrations and Maps*; Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*; Pope, "Transformation of the Maritime Cultural Landscape of Atlantic Canada by Migratory European Fishermen, 1500–1800."



**Figure 20. The gendered division of labour in fish production.**

Outside of Cadiz teams of men gather fish in nets and preserve some of the catch with smoke and salt, while women cook the fish for immediate consumption.

Fishing was also considered a grown man's work. Because of the number of surviving court records and official testimonies we know that most mariners were between 25 and 45 years of age. Few fishermen were young, though some ships carried *grumettes*, ship's boys, as part of the crew.<sup>604</sup> As early as 1514 it was noted by a community in northern Brittany that all the fishermen bound for Terra Nova were all over 18 years of age.<sup>605</sup> In 1542 the testimonies of four Basque mariners from northern Spain, all of whom served as fishermen rather than masters, records their ages: thirty, twenty-eight, forty and thirty.<sup>606</sup> Robert Lefant, who commanded a vessel that same year, was fifty.<sup>607</sup> Given their age many were likely married men, though not enough legal records survive to establish this with certainty.<sup>608</sup> What this suggests is that the

<sup>604</sup> In 1542 Robert Lefant of Bayonne, cited elsewhere, sailed with fourteen men and four *grumettes* on board his ship for Terra Nova. "*que hera catorze y quatro grumetes*" Biggar. *Roberval*.

<sup>605</sup> ADCA H 69. "*chacun les homes malles de ladicte ysle qui eusset excedez l'asgre de dix ouyet ans et qui peschassent en la mer*"

<sup>606</sup> Biggar. *Documents related...Roberval*. Doc. CCXII. "*El dicho Miguel de Liçarça morador en el pasaje de Fuenterrabia de hedad de treynta años poco más ó menos...El dicho Juant de Arsu vezino del pasaje de Fuenterrabia de hedad de veynte é ocho años poco mas ó menos...El dicho Martin de Sant Vicente vezino del lugar del pasaje de Fuenterrabia de hedad de quarenta años poco mas ó menos...El dicho Juans de Vrnieta vezino de Vrnieta de hedad de treynta años poco más ó menos...*"

<sup>607</sup> Ibid. "*El dicho Rubert Lefant vezino de la çibdad de Bayona de hedad de cinquenta años poco mas o menos.*"

<sup>608</sup> A record from Le Havre in the mid-seventeenth century, which records the death of mariners at Terra Nova, notes that the majority of them were survived by wives and families. It is likely that this was true for the sixteenth century,



fishery at Terra Nova relied on experienced mariners, those who could bring knowledge and skills to transatlantic voyages and operations, which tended to skew towards older adults in their prime.<sup>609</sup>

The consequences of having all-male crews on fishing voyages could be profound for many communities. In a small village the departure of a ship carrying 25-30 adult males in March might deprive dozens of families of their heads of household and primary breadwinners for half the year. Though the ultimate return would be worth it come autumn and the sale of the catch, in ports deeply involved in the fishery, such as Saint Malo or Saint Jean-de-Luz, the yearly absence of hundreds of able adult males could cause a cyclical labour crisis. This was accentuated in times of war when men were needed to defend the town.<sup>610</sup> Insufficient work has been done to trace the results of these cyclical shortages, in part because records for places like Saint Jean-de-Luz are so sparse. But we know that in Dutch ports, which saw large portions of the male populace absent on the seasonal fisheries, women assumed new places in local labour systems.<sup>611</sup> As Annette de Wit has noted “Due to the low and irregular incomes of their husbands, women had to work in order to survive. Fishermen’s wives, generally speaking, had a different legal position to other married women in the Dutch republic...The maritime household functioned as a cornerstone of seafaring society. Men and women depended on each other; not only in an economic but also in a social and cultural sense.”<sup>612</sup> It is likely that similar processes took place in many port towns connected to the Terra Nova fishery, but understanding how exactly this worked requires a careful and detailed study of the

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but no comparable records survive. ADSM 216 BP amiraute du Havre. no.150. A survey for this study of the records available in the judicial archives at Rouen, Bordeaux and Rennes did not turn up any judicial proceedings from the sixteenth century directly involving mariners and their families.

<sup>609</sup> For early seventeenth century records which confirm that this was the case see: ADSM 216 BP amirauté du Havre no. 28, no.300.

<sup>610</sup> This complaint was levelled by the citizens of Saint Malo in 1573, when they declared that so many of their men were at sea in places like Terra Nova that they could not defend the port. Archives municipales de Saint Malo. BB4.

<sup>611</sup> Annette De Wit, "Women in Dutch Fishing Communities the Cases of Ter Heijde and Maassluis, C. 1600–1700," in *Beyond the Catch* (Brill, 2008).

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.* Pp.382-383

notarial and judicial records a single major fishing town. Such a study is absent from the historiography, and is unfortunately outside the scope of this study.<sup>613</sup>

If evidence suggests women did not actively work on the sixteenth century fishery, they were nonetheless important to its functioning. In much of Atlantic Europe women served as the retailers of fish and effectively dominated the retail of fish in small market towns.<sup>614</sup> Documents from the early seventeenth century in La Rochelle attest to the role of women in controlling the fish market in the city.<sup>615</sup> Sixteenth and seventeenth century paintings of fish markets, an increasingly popular subject, consistently show adult women as fishmongers. Consumption was thus controlled at the local level by women. There is also evidence that as the century wore on many women became involved in financing and organizing fishing voyages (see image below). As Darlene Abreu-Ferreira has shown women often served as ship-owners and investors in sixteenth century Portugal.<sup>616</sup> This is corroborated by notarial documents from Biscay and Normandy. In 1590 a mother even hired her own son to guide her ship on a fishing voyage to Terra Nova: that year Johannes de Balda, a Basque, served as master of *La Marie*, a ship owned by “*Marie de Sugarette sa mere*.”<sup>617</sup> More often wealthy women acted as creditors, lending money to male fishermen.<sup>618</sup> In both Rouen and La Rochelle it was not uncommon for an *honette femme* to float several loans in a single season. If the act of fishing itself was a male-only domain, the north Atlantic fisheries as a whole offered opportunities for women to act independently as financiers and retailers of fish.

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<sup>613</sup> The closest is the work by Darlene Abreu-Ferreira, but no comparable effort has been made to look at the port towns of Brittany, Basque Country or Normandy. Abreu-Ferreira, "Terra Nova through the Iberian Looking Glass: The Portuguese-Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Sixteenth Century."

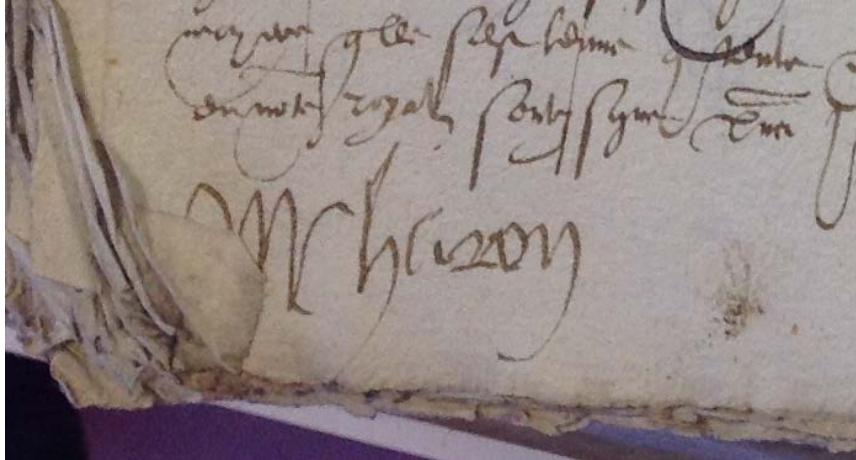
<sup>614</sup> B. Blondé et al., *Buyers & Sellers: Retail Circuits and Practices in Mediaeval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

<sup>615</sup> Archives municipales de La Rochelle. HH 14. 328 Corporations no.107. A series of legal cases revolving around the women of *la halle* in La Rochelle.

<sup>616</sup> Abreu-Ferreira, "The Cod Trade in Early-Modern Portugal: Deregulation, English Domination, and the Decline of Female Cod Merchants."

<sup>617</sup> ADCM. 3E202. Fol.49v.

<sup>618</sup> See for instance: In March of 1565 the *honourable femme* Francoise Chemeur of La Rochelle loaned 100 *livres tournois* to a Basque mariner, Johanne de Gaberne. The interest rate of 30% was unusually high for the time, but the loan was repaid the following February. ADCM 3E149 fol.7



**Figure 20: Signature of Marie Charon, *honeste femme* and resident of La Rochelle, who acted as creditor for several voyages in the early 1560s. ADCM 3E1 2147. Notaire Naudin. 17 Feb., 1562.**

If we can speak in general terms about the sex and age of mariners who worked at Terra Nova, we may also address the assumptions about labour relations in which they worked. A basic feature of the sixteenth century fishery was that it did not make use of coerced labour.<sup>619</sup> Mariners were paid, either in cash or in shares of the catch for their labour. There is no evidence for the use of slaves on the northwest Atlantic fisheries in the sixteenth century. Nor indeed is there consistent evidence for debt-relationships guiding labour. Although by the seventeenth century records in Normandy and England make clear that some mariners worked at Terra Nova to pay off debts to merchant-shipowners, evidence for this pernicious practice is lacking from the sixteenth century.<sup>620</sup> Sixteenth century court records and testimonials are silent on the matter. Only one document in 1559, noted below, gives an indication that some mariners were in debt to shipowners, but it is ambiguous on the nature of the debt and obligation. Most mariners served voluntarily for wages (though some ship's boys acted as apprentices), and often returned to Terra Nova year after year.

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<sup>619</sup> A curious document of 1606 from the city council of Bayonne makes reference to raising funds to send "*huict garçons mendiantz*" on a ship to Terra Nova. It is not clear from the text if the "*mendiantz*" refers to member of a religious order (the Mendicant orders) or to beggars (*mendiants*). If it is the latter, this is an isolated case where a town council appeared willing to round up and send vagrants to work the Newfoundland fishery. Archives municipales de Bayonne. CC305. Fol.121. This does not, however, seem to have been a typical practice in the sixteenth century.

<sup>620</sup> For a late-seventeenth century example see: ADSM 216 BP amiraute de Hongleur no. 343. "Comptes particuliers des hommes qui ont fait voyages avec Abraham Bellager les années 1680-81" The account records list several sailors who were under debt obligations to M. Bellager to work on his fishing ships.

If fishermen at Terra Nova were free, they were also from a narrow range of ethnic communities in Europe. Fishing crews were exclusively recruited from communities in northwest and Atlantic Europe and did not include mariners from the Mediterranean, north or Sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas or elsewhere. These were unlikely to be the motley crews of the seventeenth and eighteenth century north Atlantic.<sup>621</sup> In the sixteenth century there were certainly non-European sources of labour upon which merchants could have drawn, in particular through the integration of Amerindian communities with fishing crews. All the indigenous communities which lived in Terra Nova, especially the Innu and Mi'kmaq, had deep pools of experienced fishermen upon which Europeans might have been able to draw. But there is no evidence from the sixteenth century fishery which indicates that Amerindians were used as workers on the fishery. Although Andre Thevet observes that some Mi'kmaq sold fish to the Europeans, he does not describe them as working on fishing ships.<sup>622</sup> Only at the turn of the seventeenth century do observers suggest that the Innu may have become involved in the *Gran Baya* whaling and fishing operations.<sup>623</sup> Instead the localized recruitment of crews encouraged ethnically homogenous ships which avoided drawing on the extended labour resources of the far north Atlantic.

These two features, the consistent use of free labour and the exclusion of multiethnic crews, set Terra Nova significantly apart from other Atlantic systems. In many ways the sixteenth century Atlantic experience was defined by the expansion of unfree labour regimes and the forced transplantation of African labourers to every corner of the Ocean.<sup>624</sup> At the core of the Atlantic experience of the sixteenth century was the creation of an Atlantic world defined by unfree labour, unfree migration and new race relations.<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>621</sup> On later Atlantic crews see: Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*; *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail*.

<sup>622</sup> Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*.P.72

<sup>623</sup> For a discussion of this see: Charles A Martijn, Selma Barkham, and Michael M Barkham, "Basques? Beothuk? Innu? Inuit? Or St. Lawrence Iroquoians? The Whalers on the 1546 Desceliers Map, Seen through the Eyes of Different Beholders," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 19, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>624</sup> Consider the discussion of this in the Iberian context in: Alex Borucki, David Eltis, and David Wheat, "Atlantic History and the Slave Trade to Spanish America," *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 2 (2015).

<sup>625</sup> John Donoghue and Evelyn P. Jennings, *Building the Atlantic Empires : Unfree Labor and Imperial States in the Political Economy of Capitalism, Ca. 1500-1914* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016); Blackburn, *The Making of New World*

Fishing and whaling operations elsewhere in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Atlantic, such as the Brazil whaling industry and pearl fisheries of the Caribbean, certainly made use of coerced labour and multiethnic and multracial crews.<sup>626</sup> Terra Nova was entirely outside this process, and instead labour patterns were much closer to those of fifteenth century coastal Europe than the Caribbean, West Africa and the Atlantic islands. Ship-owners interested in the northwest Atlantic relied on a model of voluntary male labour which sustained the European fisheries such as Iceland and the North Sea. This points to an understanding of the Terra Nova fisheries as an extension of late medieval Atlantic Europe rather than a novel Atlantic system.

### 6.3 LABOUR: RECRUITING AND PAYMENT

The thousands of white, male, middle-aged mariners who worked the Terra Nova fisheries traveled across the ocean expecting that they would derive personal benefit from doing so. In an age of growing maritime commerce the Terra Nova fisheries needed to appear as a safe, reliable source of work and income for mariners who might otherwise be employed in local fisheries or the intra-European trade. The men of Jumièges, for instance, might have taken ships to the Caribbean, Atlantic islands or Mediterranean instead of Terra Nova.<sup>627</sup> Ship-masters and owners spent the late winter searching for men that could be convinced

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*Slavery : From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone : The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*.

<sup>626</sup> On Brazil see: Cristina Brito et al., "Digging into Our Whaling Past: Addressing the Portuguese Influence in the Early Modern Exploitation of Whales in the Atlantic," in *Environmental History in the Making: Volume II: Acting*, ed. Cristina Joanaz de Melo, Estelita Vaz, and Lígia M. Costa Pinto (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017). On pearls, see: Warsh, "A Political Ecology in the Early Spanish Caribbean."; Brito et al., "Digging into Our Whaling Past: Addressing the Portuguese Influence in the Early Modern Exploitation of Whales in the Atlantic."

<sup>627</sup> See references to Atlantic voyages in: Bréard, Bréard, and Société de l'histoire de, *Documents Relatifs À La Marine Normande Et À Ses Armements Aux Xvie Et Xviiè Siècles Pour Le Canada, L'Afrique, Les Antilles, Le Brésil Et Les Indes*.

to work the fishery. The ways in which they were recruited and paid can tell us much about how the fishery operated, and how it managed to function as a giant cyclical migratory system.<sup>628</sup>

In 1559 an anonymous ship-owner from northern Brittany recorded a small, personal note regarding an upcoming voyage to Newfoundland.<sup>629</sup> The ship was based in Plouer, a small port near Saint-Malo. Comprising a single page in a notebook otherwise devoted to parish accounts, the text records “the names of my mariners for my ship for Terra Nova” and how much they were to be paid. This is the best surviving record related to labour in the sixteenth century fishery, and can tell us much about recruitment and payment. The brief note is worth citing in full, and it is one of the only surviving sixteenth century records written by a mariner for personal reasons:

**TABLE 6.1: Transcription of 1559 record for voyage to Terra Nova**

(Transcribed, translated and reformatted) <i>These are the names of my mariners for my ship for Terra Nova in the year 1559:</i>	
Name	Payment
First, Pierres André, master after god	Must have 40 <i>livres tournois</i> , half before the departure and have after the return of the ship
Jacques Briend	7 <i>escus sol</i> <sup>630</sup>
Rolland Guihommatz	18 <i>livres tournois</i>
Pierre Rozé Ville-Agan	8 <i>livres 10 sols</i>
Amaury Eon	3 <i>pistoles</i>
Jacques Jullien	4 <i>livres</i>
Jehan Guérin	60 <i>sols</i> and he will be given a <i>mynne</i> of wheat as payment upon return at whatever price it is at that time
Jacques Balethon	2 <i>pistoles</i>
Roulet Hulaut	3 <i>livres 10 sols</i>
Geffroy Briend	3 <i>livres 10 sols</i>
Pierre le Déan	30 <i>sols</i>
Jehan Pépin de Saint-Briac [St. Briec]	110 <i>sols</i>
Francois Le Couainte	6 <i>livres tournois</i>
Pierre Fleury, Francois Fleury, Jacques Boys,	Nothing
Thomas Rozé, Jehan Rouault le Jeune	
Samson Bertre	Must pay me 10 <i>livres</i>
Mathurin de Lechat	Owes me 13 <i>livres 10 sols</i>

<sup>628</sup> For a study of this problem in a later century see: Grancher Romain, "Fishermen's Taverns: Public Houses and Maritime Labour in an Early Modern French Fishing Community," *International Journal of Maritime History* 28, no. 4 (2016).

<sup>629</sup> AD Cotes-d'Armor. 1E 2783.

<sup>630</sup> The *escus* (*écus*) was a gold coin worth roughly three *livres*.

Using the record from 1559, along with judicial and notarial evidence such as the experience of Clement de Conihout and others, we can begin to answer the fundamental question of who worked the Terra Nova Fisheries. Several trends are suggested by the surviving evidence, including the above text. In the sixteenth century mariners were paid in a combination of wages and shares for their labour, though shares were more common. This pattern was identified by historians of the fishery long ago, though the degree to which the share system broke down over time remains hotly debated.<sup>631</sup> As Peter Pope has noted, the transition from share- to wage-payments was not completed even in the English fishery until the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>632</sup> What is striking in the 1559 document is the mixed forms of payment accorded to different mariners. Most were paid with the *livres tournois*, the standard unit of account in the sixteenth century. Whether or not these sums denote cash payment or shares (i.e. each wage represents the value of the share of the catch) is unknown but seems likely given the use of the *livres* instead of *specie*. Others are slated to be paid in hard cash such as the gold *escus sol* or the *pistole*. The mariner Jehan Guérin is even owed a portion of wheat, a form of payment in kind. The last two names offer the most enigmatic form of payment: both are recorded as owing the shipowner several *livres* apiece. Whether this was money owed for a previous voyage, or share-wages advanced to these crew members, is unknown.

As the case of the *Margueritte* and the 1559 text suggest, crew recruitment took place locally rather than drawing on a floating maritime workforce. Ships and sailors typically hailed from the same port or coastal community. Two mariners are identified with geographic markers. Pierre Rozé hails from Agon, a Norman fishing port, and Jehan Pépin comes from the major Breton port of Saint Briec. Both Agon and Saint Briec lay within a day's sail from the home port of Plouer. This tells us that shipowners primarily recruited in their immediate locale but might draw on regional labour if needed. In 1542 the Basque mariner

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<sup>631</sup> Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records with Numerous Illustrations and Maps*; Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*; Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*.

<sup>632</sup> *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*.p.163-167.

Clemente de Odelica was hired to sail on a ship to Newfoundland.<sup>633</sup> Though he hailed from the small Spanish town of Fuenterrabia, de Odelica was tasked to serve on a ship from the French port of Saint Jean-de-Luz, just across the border. In 1537 a Breton pilot, hired by an English merchant, was criticized in a court case for spending most of his time off-ship fraternizing with his countrymen who worked the fishery.<sup>634</sup> Mariners expected to spend their time in Terra Nova in familiar company, and as a consequence maritime communities in the northwest Atlantic remained relatively separate and isolated from one another. Further, mariners were often recruited as part of kinship groups to serve onboard ships. In 1559 three pairs of mariners (Pierre and Thomas Rozé, Jacques and Geoffroy Briend, Pierre and Francois Fleury) share the same last name, indicating family bonds. This suggests that the family bonds which existed at the top of the labour pyramid, as with the masters from the de Conihout family, extended down into the fishermen themselves. As a consequence, recruitment was limited to particular ethnic communities. Basques hired Basques, Bretons hired Bretons, and so on. The only exception was the pilot, who might come from a separate community. This tended to reinforce the ethnic homogeneity noted in the previous section.

The two crew members to whom special status was typically accorded were the master of the ship and the pilot, who at times might be the same individual. *Maistre après Dieu*, Master after God, the master was in charge of managing the voyage and the production of fish. For the *Margueritte* of Jumieges, although Clement de Conihout owned the ship it was Pierre Boutard who would command the vessel for five months. To guide the fishermen to and from the northwest Atlantic, and to help them find the best fishing grounds in Terra Nova, many merchants hired a professional pilot for their ships. A pilot who knew the fastest routes to and from Newfoundland was a valuable asset, and could command a high price. Breton pilots in particular were well-regarded and could be hired as far-off as Basque Country or Asturias. Both master and pilot were expected to receive a larger share of the catch than their fellow-crewmen. In 1559 the master Pierres Andre

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<sup>633</sup> Biggar. *Roberval*. “El dicho Clemente de Odelica vezino de la villa de Fuenterrabia... Fué preguntado quanto tiempo ha que fué para Terra Noba dixo que des del lugar de San Juan de Lus partieron á los ocho de Mayo deste año con un nabio de San Juan de Lus en compañía de los del dicho lugar de San Juan de Lus.”

<sup>634</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America*. . p.209-214.



was paid over twice the amount owed to the next-highest earner. In addition, both master and pilot might expect some sort of cash payment as well as payment in valuable goods such as fish oil, cod tongues or furs. This is attested to in early seventeenth century documents from Normandy, and was likely common practice in the sixteenth century.<sup>635</sup>

As a consequence, there is no evidence to indicate that the sixteenth century fishery drew on a floating maritime labour pool.<sup>636</sup> By the mid-sixteenth century such a maritime force certainly existed, for there is abundant evidence that Iberian trade to and from the Americas recruited mariners from across Iberia, the western Mediterranean and northwest Europe.<sup>637</sup> In examples such as the 1559 document from Brittany we can see strong parallels to Daniel Vickers' pioneering study of eighteenth century mariners from Salem, Massachusetts.<sup>638</sup> Though separated by two centuries, merchants from both Salem and Plouer were shaped by familial relationships and local bonds in their efforts find crews. The difference lies in that Salem ships and mariners were operating within and profiting from a diverse range of maritime enterprises in the Atlantic. They carried food to the plantations of the West Indies, to growing ports like New York, or even to the Indian Ocean. They operated within a framework of Atlantic capitalism, even if Salem itself was on the margins. In the sixteenth century communities like Plouer, Jumièges and Saint Briec were disconnected from these Atlantic systems, and operated in a smaller world.

Labour at Terra Nova operated according to well-ingrained custom rather than any overt law. In the absence of state oversight, basic rules about how to divide the catch, pay workers, punish misconduct and the like were developed by mariners themselves. This custom likely had several points of origin, including

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<sup>635</sup> ADSM 216 BP Amiraute de Honfleur. No. 28. This was a court case involving the contested wages of a ship-mater from Honfleur, who claimed to be owed a certain amount of processed cod, oil and cod-tongues.

<sup>636</sup> For examples of how a floating maritime labour pool functioned see: Lewis R Fischer, *The Market for Seamen in the Age of Sail*, vol. 7 (Oxford University Press, 1994). Paul C van Royen, Jaap Bruijn, and Jan Lucassen, "Those Emblems of Hell: European Sailors and the Maritime Labour Market in the Early Modern Period, St," *John's, Newfoundland* (1997).

<sup>637</sup> Perez-Mallaina Bueno and Phillips, *Spain's Men of the Sea : Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century*. See also examples of ship crews in: Miguel Angel Ladero Quesada, *El Primer Oro De América : Los Comienzos De La Casa De La Contratación De Las Yndias, 1503-1511* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2002); Garcia, *Sevilla Y Las Flotas De Indias : La Gran Armada De Castilla Del Oro (1513-1514)*.

<sup>638</sup> Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail*.

the legacy of the Laws of Oléron, English experience at Iceland, customs developed on the Irish Sea, and regional traditions.<sup>639</sup> Once again the Newfoundland fishery was drawing upon a long history of successful fishing and maritime commerce, applying established customs to a transoceanic space. A major feature of the sixteenth century fishery was the retention of the share-system to pay mariners for their labour. In most communities which participated in the sixteenth century each crewmember who participated in a fishing voyage was accorded a share of the total catch. In some cases this is explicitly stated in loan, outfitting or charter party contracts. For instance, in 1523 the Breton ship *Marguerite* returned from Terra Nova to La Rochelle. In a contract filed in that city, the master Jehan Tredian accepted a third of the catch on behalf of himself and the remainder of the crew.<sup>640</sup> In other cases it was assumed as part of the general custom. The most common practice was to accord the crew as a whole one-third of the total catch as payment, with each mariners taking a proportional share. In 1562 an English ship stipulated that “her lading [catch] shall be equally divided into three parts, between the owners, victuallers and master and company.”<sup>641</sup> A crew of twenty-five men who caught and prepared 50,000 fish in a summer, for instance, would see each crew member receiving around 660 fish. The persistent use of a share-system ensured that fishermen were invested in the outcome of the voyage and a say in its management. Shares were based on trust, and bound mariners to their master and merchant-owners. The share-system as an historical phenomenon is most common where crews were regularly recruited from a small community.

This is perhaps the most perplexing aspect of the transatlantic fisheries. Despite the scale and longevity of the sixteenth century fishery, it was built on an extremely narrow foundation of family ties and

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<sup>639</sup> Richard Blakemore, "The Legal World of English Sailors, C.1575-1729," in *Law, Labour, and Empire : Comparative Perspectives on Seafarers, C. 1500-1800*, ed. Maria Fusaro, et al. (2015); Bernard Allaire, "Between Oléron and Colbert: The Evolution of French Maritime Law until the Seventeenth Century," *ibid*.

<sup>640</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534, a Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada..* p.162. Original ADCM notaire Hémon. Fol.118v. “*Establiz Jehan Tredian, maistre empress Dieu de La Marguerite de Saint Brieux, lequel a promis a Yvon Bonsoul, Estienne Lauret et Gilles Galvan, compaignons et mariniers dudit navire, stippulans et acceptans pour elux et leurs compaignons absens, de leur garder et rendre leur tierce partie de la pesche, huilles, gaings et prouffietz qu’ilz ont fait en leur voiage de la Terre Neufve.*”

<sup>641</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches..* P.99. Charter-Party for the *Jesus* of Tenby. Original in HCA 24 no.289.

personal networks. Ship-owners had no recourse to emerging sources of labour which were fueling maritime and colonial growth elsewhere in the Atlantic. Although the fishery attracted mariners from across the Atlantic coast of Europe, there was no transregional fishing community. Mariners who worked at Terra Nova did so in the context of the social bonds of their home towns and in the context of the customary laws which ensured that they had a share in the voyage. In such a diffuse system it would be difficult for the new capitalist orientation of transatlantic commerce to take root before the end of the century.

#### 6.4 CREDIT: THE LOAN

We only know of ships like the *Marguerite*, and men like Clement de Conihout, because of the prevalence of loan-contracts in sixteenth century Europe. As this study has suggested several times, short-term loans emerged as the backbone of the fishery in the 1540s. They became central to the yearly fishery as part of a general concentration of outfitting efforts in a handful of urban ports which allowed for the subsequent growth of the fishery as a whole. Until well into the seventeenth century the extensive use of small-scale credit was a crucial part of the smooth functioning of the Terra Nova fishery.<sup>642</sup> Studying individual loans and the contracts which they generated can tell us a great deal about how money moved through the fishery, and how merchants and mariners conceptualized what they were doing.

Credit served a crucial purpose in the broader project of organizing a seasonal fishery. In most fishing voyages the major costs, that of the ship and the crew, were provided by the voyage organizers and were paid for out of the voyage profits. Merchants used whatever vessel was at hand, usually a jointly-owned trading ship, for the voyage. By pooling multiple investors the cost of procuring a ship to the individual merchant was small. There were no custom-built fishing vessels at Terra Nova, and the repurposing of

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<sup>642</sup> See Chapter Two of : Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*.

trading ships kept costs low and allowed quick outfitting.<sup>643</sup> Crew were paid at the end of the voyage, either in cash from the sale of fish or through a share-system. The difficulty was in finding the provisions necessary for a five-month voyage to Terra Nova: durable foodstuffs for the crew, salt for the fish, barrels, small boats, fishing equipment. Credit provided the means to procure these things, by allowing ship-masters to take out a loan and purchase provisions in a large port at the same time. As Chapter Four noted the increased availability of credit was a boon to merchants from small villages and outports, while at the same time encouraging the concentration of outfitting in a few urban ports.

These advantages to the individual merchant-shipowner translated into scale. As credit became a basis for the fishery it encouraged more and more participants to join in, increasing the volume of cash which flowed into the system each year. In 1565 historians have used notarial loan contracts to identify 156 ships departing just the three ports of Rouen, La Rochelle and Bordeaux.<sup>644</sup> Each ship was funded through a short-term loan, and many of these ships took out multiple loans in the same season. In many notarial registers the months of February and March are filled with page upon page of fishing-related contracts, often two or three from the same day. More loans were taken out in places where archives have not survived, such as Saint Malo and Exeter. A given year could therefore generate several hundred short-term loans across Europe, all of which were to be repaid at the end of the fishing season. For historians this has provided a wealth of records related to the sixteenth century fishery. It is also an indication that as the fishery grew in scale and importance the capital requirements grew accordingly, so that by mid-century the annual Terra Nova fleet required several hundred thousand *livres* worth of financing to function.<sup>645</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> On fishing ships see: Barkham, *Los Vascos En El Marco Atlántico Norte: Siglos Xvi Y Xvii*; Barkham, "French Basque" New Found Land" Entrepreneurs and the Import of Codfish and Whale Oil to Northern Spain, C. 1580 to C. 1620: The Case of Adam De Chibau, Burgess of Saint-Jean-De-Luz and" Sieur De St. Julien".

<sup>644</sup> Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology."

<sup>645</sup> In the case noted below, the 200-ton *Catherine* required 4,500lt., or 22.5lt. per tun burthen. This is unusually high, as most records from La Rochelle in the 1560s suggest that shipowners required 1-2lt. per tun burthen. If around 300 ships, each averaging 100 tons burthen sailed in the 1560s, then the total tonnage was around 300,000 tons burthen. Using 2lt as the base rate for financing a ton burthen of a fishing boat, this would suggest around 600,000 *livres*. This is similar to what is estimated by the rochelais historians Trocmé and Delafosse. Trocmé and Delafosse, *Le Commerce Rochelais De La Fin Du Xve Siècle Au Début Du Xviie*.

Within this mass of records there is remarkable consistency in how credit functioned. Loans tended to be for relatively small sums, have high interest rates and were short-term.<sup>646</sup> In Normandy and Biscay most loans were for 50-100 *livres*, through they could be as small as 20 *livres* or as large as 300*livres*. Loans were often taken out right before a ship departed, and many records note that the vessels was in the port waiting to sail for Terra Nova. Ships were often financed through multiple small loans rather than one big one. Where multiple loans were required ship-owners often took out loans from multiple parties rather from the same creditor. Most loans stipulated when and where the loan was to be repaid, making clear that fishermen were to return to the same port. These patterns emerged in the 1540s and remained the norm through the end of the sixteenth century.

An example of how loans could finance a voyage can be illustrative: On March 4, 1567, the captain Jehan Dubers stood before the notary Tharazon in the city of La Rochelle.<sup>647</sup> Dubers' ship, the *Catherine* out of the small Basque port of Capbreton, was preparing to leave for Newfoundland but had to procure enough supplies for the long voyage. The ship was large, some 200 tons burthen, making for a costly but potentially lucrative fishing expedition.<sup>648</sup> Dubers needed cash to finish outfitting the *Catherine*, and had negotiated a series of loans from local merchants. As both ship-owner and the master Jehan Dubers appeared in person to sign his name (in a rough but readable hand) to each contract in the notary's book. Jehan Dubers took out three loans on March 4<sup>th</sup>, each from a different merchant or groups of merchants. They are written on consecutive pages, so it is likely that Dubers had arranged all three loans beforehand and the group arrived at the notary on the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup>. The total amount was for 4,500*livres*, with a combined interest owed of 900*livres* These were unusually large sums for the mid-sixteenth century fishery,

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<sup>646</sup> See a discussion in: Musset, *Les Rochelais À Terre-Neuve, 1500-1789*.

<sup>647</sup> ADCM 3E 145(2). Tharazon, 1567. Fols. This particular register is badly damaged but has been restored by the Archives départementales de Charente-Maritime. As a result parts of the contracts are often missing, but enough survives to reconstruct the relevant information.

<sup>648</sup> It seems that Basque ships were generally larger than their competitors, even discounting the very large whaling ships they used. Most Basque ships were 100-200 tons burthern.

some of the largest recorded in any surviving documents, and more remarkable because the entire amount was raised in a single day. The individual loans were nonetheless manageable and were arranged as follows:

- From Sr. [First name lost] Gembarts, merchant and bourgeois of La Rochelle: 500 *livres* at 20% interest
- From Sr. [First name lost] Gibert, merchant, pair and bourgeois of La Rochelle: 400 *livres* at 20% interest
- From the *honourable hommes* Jehan Marguelle and Aubert Gibert of La Rochelle, 1350 *livres* at unknown rate of interest (but likely 20%)

The actions of Jehan Dubers and the voyage of the *Catherine* in 1567 are broadly representative of how credit worked in the mid-sixteenth century fishery. The *Catherine* arrived in La Rochelle in need of crucial supplies- salt, wine, food, cables. For a vessel as large as the *Catherine* this would cost a substantial amount, and most merchants would not have carried the large sum of bullion necessary to make such purchases. It was more efficient to procure a loan in the city of La Rochelle and use that credit to make the necessary purchases. Of the creditors who provided the cash for Jehan Dubers and the *Catherine*, all were residents and civic members of La Rochelle. Most are listed as *Sieur*, and one (Giber) is a peer (*pair*) of the city. The terms of the loan contracts bound Jehan Dubers to the merchants in La Rochelle for the 1567 fishing season. He was required to return to the city after a successful voyage to La Rochelle, and loans had to be repaid within a few days of his arrival at the port. Some might have, presumably, been paid in the form of fish. Four merchants<sup>649</sup> each agreed to work with Dubers, and all four arrived in front of the notary at the same time. Each agreed to loan a similar amount of credit (Jehan Marguelle and Aubert Gibert each gave half of the 1350lt.), and for a similar interest rate. All four merchants are marked by titles such as *honourable homme, pair, bourgeois* and each is described as a *marchant*. The credit system used by the Basque Jehan Dubers in 1567 is not at all different from the actions of the Norman Clement de Conihout in 1544, noted at the start of the chapter, except that the scale of the loans is much larger. The basic patterns seen here in Biscayan and Norman documents were the norm across the Atlantic littoral in the sixteenth century. Indeed, a description from England at the end of the sixteenth century could apply to any port from Portugal to Holland:

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<sup>649</sup> The first name of Gibert is obscured in one document, so it may be the same Aubert Gibert in the third loan.

“In Englande in the West countrey...the fishermen conferres with the money man, who furnissheth them with money to provide victuells, salte and all other needefull thinges to be paied twentie five pounde at the shippes returne, upon the hundreth pounde in money lent. And some of the same money men doth borrowe money upon ten pounde in the hundreth and puts it for the in this order to the fishermen, and for to be assured of the money ventured, they will have it assured gevyng five pounde for the asuring of every hundreth pounde to hym that abides the venture of the shippes returne.”<sup>650</sup>

This is significant inasmuch as it is evidence that business practices were standardized across time and space. No one region or outfitting center operated differently or held an advantage over its competitors. This widespread uniformity in the practice of credit contributed to the long-term stability of the fishery and is what allowed mariners from one region to outfit their ships in another.

The growth of the Terra Nova fisheries took place in an age when new, powerful financial centers were emerging in Atlantic Europe which competed successfully with the older Italy-Champagne-Flanders commercial axis.<sup>651</sup> In major new Atlantic ports like Lisbon and Seville Italian capital, and increasingly capital from Antwerp, fueled the growth of oceanic voyages and overseas trade. But the Terra Nova fisheries, despite their growing scale by mid-century, did not draw on these new financial resources. Sixteenth century loan contracts often give information on the creditors who financed the fishery, and several patterns stand out in the records of La Rochelle, Rouen and Bordeaux. Most creditors were urban merchants, though few held honorific positions in the city. Many lived near the docks and most were themselves involved in small-scale trading ventures. Not a few creditors also invested directly in fishing voyages. Most importantly, there do not seem to have been any merchants who specialized in financing the fishery.

To emphasize this point it is worth considering the abundant notarial evidence from the city of La Rochelle, especially in the 1560s when the port emerged as one of the centers of the fishery. The table included at the end of this chapter shows some of the debts contracted in 1565-1567 in the city by mariners bound to Terra Nova. The contracts indicate the number of creditors who might be involved in a single season, and the tendency of one ship to take out loans from multiple parties.

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<sup>650</sup> From Innis. *The Cod Fisheries*. P.34. Citing: Robert Hitchcock. *A Politique Platt for the Honour of the Prince*. London, 1580.

<sup>651</sup> Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*.

On occasion one or two merchants might appear in a given year to have dominated the credit market for the fishery. In 1566, for instance Sr. Denis Despellette of La Rochelle contracted five loans totaling 535 *livres* to five different Basque mariners.<sup>652</sup> The following year Yves Terterly offered seven loans, totaling 1,350 *livres*, and was part-lender for three more loans jointly with his son, wife and business partner.<sup>653</sup> Both are instances of a single resident of La Rochelle investing substantially in the yearly fishing fleet. Yet in both cases these appear to have been one-off moments of high investment rather than indications of long-term investment in the fishery. Yves Terterly, who dominated rochelais lending in 1567, only contracted one loan the previous year and none in 1565. At times the same merchants might appear as creditors for multiple years in a row, at others names appear for a single season and then vanish. The evidence suggests that mariners were more likely to participate in the fishery over multiple seasons than financiers would be.

In 1565 we have good records for thirteen creditors who lent out money for fishermen.<sup>654</sup> They are represented on the left-hand side of the following image, grouped together according to their titles: *sieur* lord), *maistre* (master), *Hon. Femme* (Honourable Woman) or no title. Most of the creditors possessed some kind of honourific title, though in La Rochelle this was often a reflection of civic influence rather than legal power.<sup>655</sup> On the right are the mariners to whom they loaned funds, grouped by region of origin. It is clear that most mariners came from Basque ports, though some made the trip all the way from Normandy in search of Biscayan salt.

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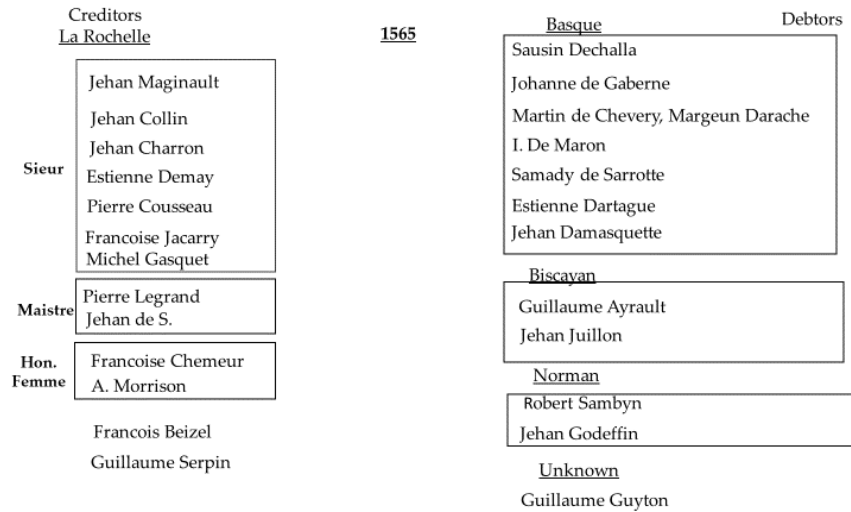
<sup>652</sup> ADCM 3E 145 (1). Notaire Tharazon. Fols. 20, 75, 89, 90, 122

<sup>653</sup> ADCM 3E 145 (2). Notaire Tharazon. The folios for this document are badly damaged and contracts can only be identified by dates. All contracts were made between March 4 and March 7, 1567.

<sup>654</sup> ADCM 3E 2149. Notaire Naudin. Fols. 3v, 6, 6v, 7, 7v, 9, 10, 17; ADCM 3E 176. Notaire Balouet. Fols. 3, 10, 17, 21, 48, 48v.

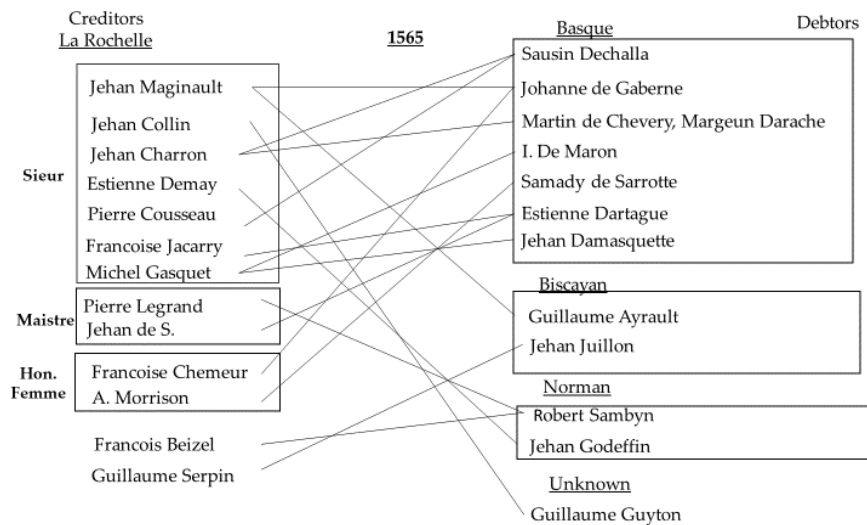
<sup>655</sup> Robbins, *City on the Ocean Sea, La Rochelle, 1530-1650: Urban Society, Religion, and Politics on the French Atlantic Frontier*. And see the several essays on La Rochelle and Bordeaux in the late medieval period in Guerber and Le Bouédec, *Gens De Mer Ports Et Cités Aux Époques Ancienne, Médiévale Et Moderne : [Colloque Organisé À L' Université De Bretagne-Sud Les 15 Et 16 Juin 2009]*.





**Figure 21. Creditors and Debtors, La Rochelle, 1567.**

When we then connect creditors to debtors (lines indicate loan contracts between the two parties) the lack of meaningful patterns becomes clear. Only three creditors floated multiple loans in 1565, to a combination of Basque, Norman and Biscayan parties. There is no obvious breakdown in lending preferences, such as that lords preferred to lend to Basques, or vice versa, or that women were more likely to lend locally than to those from outside Biscayan France. The total amount loaned by these thirteen creditors was somewhat over 1,500 *livres*, less than Jehan Dubers took out for his one ship in 1567. The vast majority of loans were for 100 *livres*, and some were as small as 40 *livres*.



**Figure 22 Creditors and Debtors, La Rochelle, 1567. With lines showing relationships.**

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At the core of the sixteenth-century credit system was an emphasis risk-aversion. Merchants who owned or invested in fishing ships organized voyages to spread risk as much as possible, even at the expense of profit. For this reason loans tended to be small and taken out from multiple parties, rather than one large sum from a single financier. Ships were often owned by multiple investors, with shares as small as a sixteenth being common. Supplies were often procured from an outfitter (*avitailleur* in French sources) who was separate from the creditor, their services secured under a separate contract. By mid-century some shipowners were taking advantage of the growing availability of maritime insurance, though most of this was used primarily for whaling vessels.<sup>656</sup> In lieu of formal insurance contracts most resorted to ensuring multiple and overlapping lines of responsibility and investment.

The result was that a failed voyage, through disaster or low catch rates, would not ruin anyone. When the fishing ship the *John* of Lympston (a town in Devonshire) ran aground at the entrance to the River Exe some time before 1573, the greatest tragedy for its owners was not the damage to the vessel itself but the fact that some of the codfish it was carrying fell overboard, lost forever.<sup>657</sup> The subsequent suit over the *John of Lympston*, preserved in the records of the High Court of the Admiralty, includes details about how much fish the vessel carried, how much it was valued, and how this value was divided between interested parties. The *John* had been chartered by three owners to sail to the Newfoundland fisheries. It returned in the autumn with 70,000 dried, salted fish to the port of Exmouth, the outpost of Exeter and the major clearing-house for fishing vessels in the West Country.<sup>658</sup> To get the *John* into the harbor the ship's owners hired a pilot, a common practice. Through negligence the pilot allowed the *John* to run aground, wrecking the ship and causing part of the catch to fall overboard. A catch of processed codfish was extremely valuable, and worth going to court over. The text of the case states that the 18,000 lost fish were valued at

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<sup>656</sup> Christopher Ebert, "Early Modern Atlantic Trade and the Development of Maritime Insurance to 1630," *Past & Present* 213, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>657</sup> HCA file 45, no. 301.

<sup>658</sup> Walter James Harte, "Some Evidence of Trade between Exeter and Newfoundland up to 1600," in *Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art* (Paignton 1932).

£266. The damage to the ship was only valued at £66, and another £60 worth of fish were damaged, both of which pale in comparison to the lost fortune of 18,000 saltfish. These values are borne out by other contemporary evidence. In 1582 the High Court of the Admiralty ordered a ship-owner to make restitution for the illegal seizure of 15,000 fish.<sup>659</sup> The court ordered the fish valued at 26s. 8d. the hundred. The 15,000 fish therefore were valued at £195, roughly on par with how the fish had been valued in 1573. In 1582 the army in Ireland was paying 20s. per hundred fish. We can use this to get some sense of how valuable a fishing voyage might have been. If the lost fish were valued at £266, then the entire catch of 70,000 fish should have been worth around £1,034. The three owners of the *John of Lympton* were collectively entitled to a third of the catch, over £300 worth of fish. Although the loss of 18,000 codfish was worrisome enough to generate a suit, the damage to the individuals involved was not severe. Typical sixteenth century practice held that the ship-owners were entitled to a third of the catch, so the plaintiffs were responsible for only 6,000 of the lost fish. The rest would have been divided between the crew and the outfitters. Of this third, each of the three investors had title to only 2,000 apiece. An individual ship-owner was thus only set back around £30 by the loss. The cases of the *John of Lympton* gives us an indication of why so much care was taken to minimize risk in fishing voyages. An accident could wreck a five-month voyage by losing hundreds of pounds worth of fish in a moment. But the overlapping system of shares and credit ensured that no single party lost too much. The inverse was, of course, that no individual party stood to make too much money off of the voyage either. Each of the three ship-owners could have expected only £30 of the £266 worth of fish that was lost.

One overlooked indication of how credit and risk were related can be gleaned from how interest rates functioned in the sixteenth century fishery. The abundant loan contracts which have survived typically include the rates of interest which merchants demanded, given either as a percentage or a flat rate. The interest rates were high across the sixteenth century: typically between 20% and 40%. In Biscayan ports

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<sup>659</sup> HCA file 52, no. 129.

20-25% was the average, in Norman ports 30%-35%.<sup>660</sup> These high rates would seem to indicate that fishing voyages were deemed dangerous investments, prone to loss of the ship to weather, pirates or a failed mission. But there are three reasons to believe that the interest rates do not reflect the risk of the voyage itself. The first is that interest rates differ based on the origin of the ship, not its destination.<sup>661</sup> Merchants in La Rochelle charged Basque ships five percent higher rates than they did local ships. Second, interest rates did not change during times of warfare and crisis. If they were based on risk to the ship, we would expect higher interest rates during periods of warfare, and vice versa. Third, there is no corroborating evidence that fishing ships were particularly dangerous. Shipwrecks were infrequent and pirate/corsair attacks were only a problem during periods of war. Indeed, the notarial records suggest that most loans were repaid within a year, as indicated by the table above.

Why then the high interest rates? Because fishing voyages were so safe and beholden to overlapping parties, it was difficult to actually make money off of them. The high rate of return represented the only way for merchants to make a return on their investments. As this chapter stresses, individual loans tended to be for small amounts, and financiers needed a way to maximize their profits. More so, most loans were taken under a state of duress. Timing was important to the sixteenth century fishery, and procuring enough provisions on-time so as to leave for Terra Nova put pressure on shipowners and masters to find loans quickly. With ship-owners at their mercy, merchant-financiers in places like Rouen and La Rochelle could charge 20%-40% interest without fear that the would-be fishermen could turn elsewhere. The high interest

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<sup>660</sup> This is briefly discussed in the rochelais and Norman cases in: Musset, *Les Rochelais À Terre-Neuve, 1500-1789*; Bréard, Bréard, and Société de l'histoire de, *Documents Relatifs À La Marine Normande Et À Ses Armements Aux Xvie Et Xviiè Siècles Pour Le Canada, L'afrique, Les Antilles, Le Brésil Et Les Indes*; Gosselin and Beaurepaire, *Documents Authentiques Et Inédits Pour Servir É L'histoire De La Marine Normande Et Du Commerce Rouennais Pendant Les Xvie Et Xviiè Siècles*.

<sup>661</sup> For example: In 1566 in La Rochelle Pierre Daprandestegny, a Basque of Cibour, took out a loan of 100 lt, at 25% interest from the merchant du Vault. (ADCM 3E145(1) Fol.38v) That same year Guillaume Mener of Blavet, in Brittany took out a loan of 200 lt. at 22.5% interest from a different merchant. (ADCM 3E145(1) fol.91) Finally, that same year Auberys le Royer, a shipowner of La Rochelle, took out a loan of 200 lt. at only 20% interest from Jehan de la Place. (ADCM 3E145(1) fol.77)

rates represent a mild form of extortion, but one which reflects the small amounts of money actually changing hands.

The question of profits is important not because it tells us something about how well the fishery competed with other forms of Atlantic commerce. Fishing voyages seem to have been consistently profitable and reliable. Codfish from Terra Nova was a bulk commodity, of median value in its own right but valuable in mass quantities. This had to be balanced against the up-front costs which went into organizing a voyage. Provisions for five months, small boats for fishing, hired hands, a competent master were all expensive. Most of these were bought on credit with the hopes that a successful voyage might cover expenses. Demand for codfish fluctuated across the sixteenth century but never disappeared. Even with competition from Iceland and other fisheries Terra Nova fishermen could command considerable prices for their catch, especially in wartime.<sup>662</sup> As the case of the *John* of Lympton suggests codfish prices were high enough to fight over. But the return on investment may not have been very high for individual merchant-investors. The organization of a voyage was predicated on minimizing personal risk, through having multiple-investors to taking out multiple loans. A successful voyage might generate considerable revenue, but once it had been parceled out between the multiple investors, outfitters, creditors and crew most parties walked away with a small sum.

One way to understand the low rate of return on fishing voyages is to consider what happened when a successful fishing voyage ended and the time came to sell of the catch and divide the spoils. A contract from 1567, preserved in the notarial archives of northern Spain, gives a rare glimpse of what happened at the end of the voyage.<sup>663</sup> The *Maria*, a Basque ship from Ciboure, returned from Newfoundland to the small port of Castro in Vizcaya. The crew had been successful, bringing back 23,000 baccalao which earned the handsome sum of 3,741 *reales* when sold. To redeem this valuable cargo, the master Juan de Ybayeta

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<sup>662</sup> Daniel Vickers, "The Price of Fish: A Price Index for Cod, 1505-1892," *Acadiensis* 25, no. 2 (1996).

<sup>663</sup> A translation can be found in: Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches.* Pp.99-100. The original is located in: Archivo historico de Protocolos de Guipuzcoa, Onate, Partido de San Sebastian, no. 373, fol 86-86v

(Jehan de Ybayeta, from Ciboure) ordered the fish shipped in two small pinnaces to the nearby city of Bilbao, where it could fetch a high price. Transporting and selling the codfish in Bilbao took nearly three months, during which time the master had to pay for room and board. When all was done Ybayeta had just 2,520 reales left, which he took to Guipuzcoa to buy goods for another voyage. The contract gives a detailed breakdown of what Ybayeta had paid just to finish offloading the ship, including:

- 230 *reales* to hire the two pinnaces to carry the fish
- 8 *reales* to a group of girls to carry the fish from the pinnaces to a storehouse
- 48 *reales* to a group of men to fold and pile the fish for storage
- 12 *reales* for straw to cover the stored fish
- 7 *reales* for a group of girls to carry the fish to be public scales for assessment, plus another 7 *reales* due to the man in charge of the scales
- 260 *reales* to buy coloured cloth for Ybayeta and members of the crew to fashion new clothes

The case of the *Maria* and its master Juan de Ybayeta can tell us both about how complex it was to redeem the value of a successful voyage to Newfoundland, and about how much overhead the investors might face. Of the 3,741 *reales*, a third had been spent just offloading the codfish at market. The remainder still had to be divided between the crew, Juan de Ybayeta and the actual owners of the ship, not to mention repay any loans which had underwritten the voyage. The evidence in the case of the *Maria* points to the ways in which secondary parties could profit from the Newfoundland fishery. A single fishing voyage touched upon the lives and labour of many people beyond just the fishermen and their investors. The 1,221 *reales* which were spent in offloading the codfish went into the pockets of a host of supporting actors in Bilbao. Local boatmen made money carrying the fish to Bilbao; local labourers earned money carrying and storing the fish; money had to be given to the man who owned the storehouse where the fish was kept, to the man who ran the scales, to the tailor who provided new clothes. This point has largely been overlooked by historians of the sixteenth century fishery.

These two points, about the high overhead after a voyage and the many parties which received payment, point to a central conclusion: Many parties profited, directly or indirectly, from a successful voyage but few became truly rich from it. Because of the risk-aversion strategies pursued in setting up a voyage, the returns on a successful fishing trip were spread out far and wide amongst multiple parties. Not just merchant-creditors but whole communities benefited, but the voyage-organizers themselves received

only modest returns. It is hardly surprising then that merchants frequently invested in multiple ships at the same time, or extended credit to several masters at once. Terra Nova was a safe use of a ship and capital, one which might hedge other investments, but only through scale could it provide riches.

## 6.5 CREDIT AND CONSUMPTION

Mariners returning from Terra Nova were not free to sell their catch wherever they wished. Because most loan contracts included stipulations about where, when and how the loan was to be repaid after the voyage, creditors played a large role in determining how fish was consumed.<sup>664</sup> Debtors were obligated to return directly to port at the end of the season to repay their loan, and sometimes were expected to repay the debt in the form of fish. Even if they repaid in cash, most took the opportunity to sell their catch to local merchants in the same cities. As more fishing voyages became dependent on short-term loans in a handful of port cities, these urban centers in turn became the main distribution centers for codfish.

A Basque document from 1559 gives evidence to this change. That year the residents of St. Jean-de-Luz begged their king for legal protection from the merchants of many neighboring cities, stating that they “have need of the voyages which they make to Terra Nova for the fishery returning from this they come into our ports and harbours of Rouen, Bordeaux, La Rochelle and Nantes in which places they wish to sell their catch and other goods.”<sup>665</sup> It is a stark indication that by the 1550s ships were returning from the

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<sup>664</sup> See for instance ADSM 2E1 2799 (Feb.1543 Suppl.). A contract for several voyages made on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1543/4 stipulated that the merchant C. Harmont had to come to Rouen within 15 days of returning from Terra Nova so that he could repay the loan of 200 *livres*.

<sup>665</sup> AM St.Jean-de-Luz. 1 AA 3. No. 33. “*Henry par la grace de dieu Roy de France...Les marans et habitans de Saint Jehande Luz nous ont fait remonstrer que le plus grand moien quilz aient devuire est pour les voyages quilz font au terres neufves en la pescherie revenant de laquelle ilz vont descendre en noz portz et havres de Rouan Bordeaulx, La Rochelle et Nantes ausquelz lieux voullant vendre leur pesche et aultres marchandises. Les marchans et habitans desdictes villes ne veullent souffrir ne permectre que ceulx qui viennent desdictes pescheries vendant en gros poix ou en detail a tous voullans achapter silz ne sont habitans des villes...par le moyen des monopolles et ceu juratiors que les habitans desdictes villes font ensemble a non achapter autrement au grand interest et dommaige desdictz habitans de Saint Jehan de Luz...*”

fishery directly to urban markets. The towns listed, three in the Bay of Biscay and one in Normandy, were all major outfitting centers whose notarial records attest to the number of Basque fishermen who took out loans from local merchants. For many Luzian fishermen being barred from these ports would be a threat to the entire system of credit and distribution which made their operations possible. Even small ports which were fishing centers might rely on these larger distribution centers. In October of 1566 Pierre Fary, master of the *Catherine* out of Binic in Brittany, carried ten *pippes* (half-barrels) of *moullues parres* (dried cod) out of the city of Nantes.<sup>666</sup> For this he paid a duty of 19s.8d. and was duly recorded in the port registry as he left for home. What is odd about the transaction is that Binic, a small port on the north coast of the Breton peninsula, was itself a major fishing port in the sixteenth century. Despite this Fary felt the need to purchase his codfish in the city of Nantes rather than the small ports of Brittany. By the 1560s ports like Nantes had such influence over returning fishing boats that they doubled as distribution centers even for fishing communities in other provinces.

A consequence of this system was the concentration of distribution networks in northwest Europe. The most active centers for credit and outfitting were all along the Atlantic coast of Europe, above all around the Bay of Biscay and the English Channel. In the sixteenth century, as this study has noted before, fish from Terra Nova was largely consumed in this zone of northwest Europe. Codfish was still making its way to the Mediterranean from an early date, but through a slower and constrained process. Italian cartographers and writers were familiar with *Bacalao* from Terra Nova as early as 1511-12.<sup>667</sup> In the late sixteenth century, dried codfish would have been brought to the Mediterranean directly, usually in English or Dutch ships, but there is little evidence for this practice before the 1580s. Saltcod had to make its way to Provence, Italy and southern Iberia through middlemen, arriving months after it had been brought back to Europe.

In tying credit to the sale of codfish the social relationships which allowed for the mobilization of labour and credit at a small scale in turn shaped how the market for preserved cod functioned. This was

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<sup>666</sup> AD Ile-et-Vilaine. C 3624. Port de Nantes.

<sup>667</sup> See the map by Viscotne Maggiolo, 1511. JCBL 08658-1. A second document can be found in: Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America*. no.127. p.157



likely a boon to the success of the fishery. Only urban markets like Rouen, La Rochelle or San Sebastian had the population and wealth which could consume the vast quantities of codfish returning from the northwest Atlantic. Fish from Terra Nova was relatively expensive, and had to remain so to justify the cost of a five-month voyage across the ocean sea.<sup>668</sup> Linking credit and consumption ensured a reliable market for the yearly catches. Not all merchant-mariners took out loans, and many ships returned to Europe unencumbered by contractual obligations. Where their fish was sold is difficult to establish, and we may presume that some of it was consumed in the crew's home-port. But the bulk of codfish produced in a year was brought back to, and distributed out of, the major outfitting and financial urban centers for the fishery.

Once a ship and its crew had unloaded the catch, and repaid any creditors and investors, it would generally return to home port. But the fish itself often was just beginning its journey to the table. For much of the early sixteenth century the city of Rouen served as the main clearing house for codfish coming from Terra Nova, and records from this city can tell us about how codfish was distributed. Once brought back the catch still needed to be sold, and so passed into the hands of urban merchants who could arrange for either its retail sale in the public market or its wholesale distribution. Some would have been sold in the large fish markets that were a staple of most urban centers, sold alongside local fresh catch and barrels of salted herring. Some would have been purchased from the merchant in bulk by religious institutions or military contractors. Still another part of the catch may have been purchased by a foreign merchant to be carried to a different city entirely. There is abundant evidence for codfish from Terra Nova being resold from a merchant in one of the outfitting ports to merchants in the interior.<sup>669</sup> It was transported via riverways wherever possible, though some may have been carried down the coast in boats.<sup>670</sup> In this way codfish found its way from coastal ports like Rouen or Bordeaux to markets in Paris, Poitiers or Burgos. We may therefore view the consumption of codfish as radiating outward from a series of coastal, urban ports.

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<sup>668</sup> For long-term prices change see: Vickers, "The Price of Fish: A Price Index for Cod, 1505-1892."

<sup>669</sup> See for instance the records held in the Archives communales de Rouen. BB 1 and BB2. These city council records include a large number of *congé* contracts for the reselling of codfish.

<sup>670</sup> See for example: Archives nationales de France. Minutes et répertoires du notaire Michel de Felin étude III. Fol. 37. 15 Jan. 1550. A contract for the transport of codfish from Rouen to the Paris region.

Transport networks connected these ports to a few interior cities in northwest Europe, and only a few went so far as to reach the western Mediterranean.

## 6.6 CAPITAL WITHOUT CAPITALISM

The ways in which labour and credit functioned in the sixteenth century raise important questions for how we understand the relationship between the early fishery and the development of commercial capitalism in the Atlantic. The rise of Atlantic history as a field of study and as a methodological framework is inextricably bound to the study of capitalism as an historical phenomenon.<sup>671</sup> From the sixteenth century onward patterns emerged in societies around the Atlantic rim which point towards a more capitalist economy: The growing pace of commodity circulation; the increased scale and sophistication of financial centers like Antwerp, Amsterdam and London; the growing economic and political power of merchants in Atlantic port cities; the rise of plantation economies to produce high-value goods; the increased importance and supply of money in the Atlantic; new theories about merchant behavior and economics.<sup>672</sup> By the turn of the seventeenth century these new modes of production and circulation were driving the growth of commerce and colonial expansion in the Atlantic basin. This transformation was so profound that some scholars, most noticeably Jason Moore, have argued it marks the beginning of an entirely new geological age in our planet's history.<sup>673</sup> Both Immanuel Wallerstein and Fernand Braudel centered the formation of early commercial capitalism on the sixteenth century Atlantic, and though the historiography has moved

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<sup>671</sup> Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (University of California Press, 2011). Two major works of Dutch history show this focus on commercial capitalism: Jonathan I. Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585 - 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); Postma and Enthoven, *Riches from Atlantic Commerce : Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817*.

<sup>672</sup> Joyce Appleby, *The Relentless Revolution : A History of Capitalism* (2011).

<sup>673</sup> Jason W Moore, "The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44, no. 3 (2017).

away from their rigid conceptions it is the Atlantic trades which remain the birthplace of capitalism.<sup>674</sup> Although the sixteenth century may not have seen the capitalist breakthrough which Wallerstein ascribed to it, certain key developments did take place. These transformations were piecemeal and manifested themselves in some places more than others. The rise of colonial plantation economies in the Atlantic basin, and with it the development and growth of a transatlantic slave trade, can be seen as a widespread phenomenon in the Iberian Atlantic networks of the sixteenth century.<sup>675</sup> The sixteenth century saw the rise of new urban centers in coastal Europe and the increased importance of these cities as financial centers.<sup>676</sup> These developments broke the old Mediterranean-centered economy and paved the way for accelerated transatlantic commerce at the end of the sixteenth century. By the mid-sixteenth century transatlantic commerce in the emerging Iberian systems featured the extensive use of transnational credit markets, floating maritime labour pools, coerced labour and the production of high-value commodities.<sup>677</sup> In many ways such new commercial techniques are what made these new maritime systems possible, and are one of the defining features of the sixteenth century Atlantic.

If the sixteenth century saw the beginning, however tentative, of a transformation of capitalist practice in the Atlantic, the question then is whether or not the creation of commercial, transoceanic cod fisheries in the northwest Atlantic was one part of the larger project of developing new modes of finance, production and consumption. By and large the existing literature, from both fisheries historians and Atlantic historians,

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<sup>674</sup> Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*; Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*; Immanuel Wallerstein, Muse Project, and Muse Project, *The Modern World-System II Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750, with a New Prologue* (2014). For a broader global context see: Kevin H O'Rourke and Jeffrey G Williamson, "When Did Globalisation Begin?," *European Review of Economic History* 6, no. 1 (2002); Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, "The World That Trade Created : Society, Culture, and the World Economy, 1400 to the Present," (2015).

<sup>675</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>676</sup> This process is effectively traced out in: Prak, *Early Modern Capitalism : Economic and Social Change in Europe 1400-1800*.

<sup>677</sup> See: Stein and Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War : Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe*; Chaunu, Chaunu, and Arbellot, *Séville Et L'atlantique, 1504-1650*; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*; Fisher, *The Economic Aspects of Spanish Imperialism in America, 1492-1810*; Schwartz, *Tropical Babylons : Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680*. NEED MORE

has been singularly ambivalent on this question. Pope's work on the seventeenth century fishery suggests that, for the English at least, the cod fisheries had become enmeshed in this process by the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>678</sup> But he does not address the question of how early this process started, and whether it was inherent to the creation of transatlantic fishing in the early sixteenth century. The numerous regional and national studies of the sixteenth century fisheries largely avoid the question of capitalism, inasmuch as their narrow perspectives obscure the wider patterns of fishing and commerce in the sixteenth century.<sup>679</sup> Harold Innis famously entitled his study of the cod fisheries *The History of an International Economy*, but his single chapter on the sixteenth century did not directly address the rise of Atlantic capitalism and argued for a narrow, regional fishery at Newfoundland.<sup>680</sup> Studies of sixteenth century Atlantic commerce and the rise of capitalist thought and organization studiously ignore Newfoundland, instead focusing on the plantation economies and the rise of new financial centers in Atlantic Europe.<sup>681</sup>

The interpretation of the cod fisheries as capitalist (or not) is made more complex by the history of other fisheries in Europe. The herring fisheries in the North Sea were one of the more complex and heavily capitalized commercial operations in Europe and rightly deserve to be treated as central to the process of capitalist development.<sup>682</sup> This process was well underway by the mid-sixteenth century, particularly in the Low Countries. It is tempting to draw a connection between the rise of the North Sea fisheries and the

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<sup>678</sup> Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*. See in particular the discussion of the Sack Trade, pp.79-121.

<sup>679</sup> See for instance the relative silence on the subject in de la Morandière's classic study of the French fishery, and the work by the Barkhams on Basque country. De la Morandière, *Histoire De La Pêche Française De La Morue Dans L'Amérique Septentrionale Des Origines à 1789*; Barkham, *Los Vascos En El Marco Atlántico Norte: Siglos XVI Y XVII*; Barkham, "French Basque" New Found Land" Entrepreneurs and the Import of Codfish and Whale Oil to Northern Spain, C. 1580 to C. 1620: The Case of Adam De Chibau, Burgess of Saint-Jean-De-Luz and " Sieur De St. Julien".

<sup>680</sup> Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*.

<sup>681</sup> See the absence of the fisheries in general studies of the Atlantic economy such as: Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson, "The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change, and Economic Growth," *The American Economic Review* 95, no. 3 (2005); Seymour, *The Transformation of the North Atlantic World, 1492-1763: An Introduction*; Brown and Miller, *The Princeton Companion to Atlantic History*; Canny and Morgan, *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, C.1450-C.1850*; Subrahmanyam, *Merchant Networks in the Early Modern World*.

<sup>682</sup> Hendrik Adriaan Henri Boelmans Kranenburg, "De Zeevisscherij Van Holland in Den Tijd Der Republiek" (Paris, 1946); Cushing, *The Provident Sea*. Joyce Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2004); *The Relentless Revolution : A History of Capitalism*.

growth of operations at Newfoundland, but the two diverged in certain significant ways. Operations at Terra Nova never achieved the level of financial sophistication, nor the scale, of the North Sea operations (in ways which will be made clear throughout this chapter). The herring fisheries were also much more concentrated in terms of who participated and benefited, so that the wealth generated on the North Sea had an outsized effect upon the economies of the Low Country and the British Isles.<sup>683</sup> Whereas the herring trade was oriented from an early date towards export to valuable markets outside of northwest Europe, operations at Newfoundland would not move to this model until the end of the sixteenth century. Whereas the North Sea fishery would become a core component of the development of capitalism, Terra Nova would not participate in this same process until much later.

In light of their internal structure and the ways in which they interacted with other Atlantic networks, between their creation in the first decades of the sixteenth century and the very end of the sixteenth century the cod fisheries at Newfoundland did not participate in the development of early capitalism. Until the end of the sixteenth century the production of codfish at Terra Nova fundamentally resembled older commercial fisheries in Europe and did not serve markets outside of northwest Europe. Fishermen were resistant to changing how they organized voyages or where they carried their fish. Fishermen at Newfoundland were not consciously reactionary, but they did adhere to late medieval ideas about the social role of commerce.<sup>684</sup> This produced structures of labour and credit which in turn reinforced a widespread culture of risk-aversion that ensured a stable, but not necessarily profitable, industry. Indeed, the success of the Newfoundland fisheries in the early and mid-sixteenth century was largely predicated on resisting change. The climate and ecology of the northwest Atlantic imposed strict parameters on fishing operations. Adapting methods from the northwest Atlantic, including successful fifteenth-century business models, allowed mariners to operate

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<sup>683</sup> Unger has pointed out, for instance, that because of the concentration of the herring industry in Holland and Zeeland the United Provinces was able to use the fish to open up trade with the Baltic. This became a staple of the Dutch economy in the seventeenth century. Unger, "Dutch Herring, Technology, and International Trade in the Seventeenth Century."

<sup>684</sup> On fishermen's behavior in general, and the question of conservatism, see: Acheson, "Anthropology of Fishing."; Cadigan, "The Moral Economy of the Commons: Ecology and Equity in the Newfoundland Cod Fishery, 1815-1855."; van Ginkel, "A Texel Fishing Lineage: The Social Dynamic and Economic Logic of Family Firms."

in this extreme ecological niche. There could be no year-round fishery, nor a permanently settled labour force. Long-distance voyages to and from Newfoundland, taking months at a time to cross the fickle far North Atlantic, were costly and risky. In such a context the techniques, technology and social organization of medieval fisheries such as the Irish Sea and at Iceland could be easily adapted to the northwest Atlantic. As merchants found, it was harder to scale up these operations and to link them to new commercial opportunities elsewhere in the Atlantic basin.

The question of how the cod fisheries necessarily relates to the development of capitalism is central to the larger question which animates this project, that of how the cod fisheries related to the wider Atlantic world. The development of commercial capitalism in the Atlantic basin touched every facet of the Atlantic experience. It dictated the social and economic structure of colonies, shaped the development of new trade routes, and drove the integration of new parts of the basin with one another. So long as fishermen at Newfoundland resisted these new patterns and the new forms of capitalist commerce which guided them, they would diverge from the Atlantic experience as a whole. The resistance to merging with new commercial capitalist business practices ensured that for most of the sixteenth century the northwest Atlantic was firmly separate from the rest of the Atlantic.

If the sixteenth century fishery was not inherently capitalistic, it was nonetheless a series of complex business operations which required the concentration of considerable financial, human and physical capital. The fishing vessel was a complex machine, manned by dozens of mariners who each required five months' provisions and wages. Once returned, a ship's catch had to be unloaded, sold, distributed and brought to new markets. It was a capital-intense endeavor, which thrived without recourse to modern financial capitalism. The sixteenth century fishery was built on a series of paradoxes, and its business structure was no exception. As this study has argued, by the mid-century the northwest Atlantic fishery was one of the largest branches of Atlantic maritime commerce. In the 1560s-70s surviving evidence suggests several hundred ships performed a circuit of the ocean each year. This was an undertaking requiring vast amounts of capital, for each of these hundreds of ships represented a concentration of machinery, labour, equipment

and valuable commodities.<sup>685</sup> Yet the means by which fishermen and their ships operated was built on a very simple financial system, unlike the sophisticated networks of maritime commerce developing elsewhere in the Atlantic. Short-term loans and occasionally maritime insurance (mainly for whaling voyages) seem to have been the only regularly used financial instruments in the sixteenth century. Most often verbal agreements were used to outfit whatever ships happened to be at hand.

Historians of the fishery must therefore reconcile the scale and sophistication of the Terra Nova fishery with the relatively simplistic tools used to make it possible. The diffuse and simplified financial structures of the fishery were a source of strength which imparted flexibility and allowed for the broad base of participation that made Terra Nova possible. Understanding how such a large maritime system could be built on such diffuse foundations required that we turn our gaze away from the boats and mariners themselves and consider the Medieval Atlantic context of the fisheries. Throughout the sixteenth century fishery operations at Terra Nova were marked by the use of locally-organized labour, small-scale credit systems and the mobilization of localized social relationships. While emphasizing the ways in which mariners adapted older forms of credit and labour to fit the needs of the fishery, this chapter does not mean to suggest that these methods were necessarily primitive or pre-modern. This is a tempting conclusion which has long cast a shadow over the history of the transatlantic fisheries.<sup>686</sup> Rather, the ways in which shipowners were able to organize labour within their home ports, and to take advantage of small loans from minor merchants, proved to be extremely successful.

A new wave of literature has emerged which aims to disassociate late medieval European commerce from the development of capitalism. Martha Howell's *Commerce Before Capitalism* and David Smail's *Legal Plunder* both examine, the former from a broad pan-European perspective and the latter from a

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<sup>685</sup> On the sixteenth century ship and its capital costs see: Cipolla, *Guns, Sails and Empires; Technological Innovation and the Early Phases of European Expansion, 1400-1700*; Unger, *The Ship in the Medieval Economy, 600-1600*; Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*.

<sup>686</sup> For a discussion of technology and change see: Cushing, *The Provident Sea*; Bolster, *The Mortal Sea : Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail*. Mollat, *Histoire Des Peches Maritimes En France*.

narrow urban Mediterranean perspective, the problem of how finance and capitalism functioned in late medieval urban society.<sup>687</sup> Smail's work points to how prevalent and vast credit markets were in fourteenth century cities. Howell's stresses the cultural aspects of commerce to argue against a neat pre-capitalist/capitalist dichotomy. Both attempt to appreciate late medieval society on its own terms. What these recent studies strongly indicate is that by the thirteenth century many urban parts of the Mediterranean and northwest Europe had developed robust commercial institutions without attendant social change.<sup>688</sup> Credit markets within a city like Marseille or Ghent were major fixtures of not just businesses but daily life. But credit still operated within a social and cultural milieu that strongly resisted what we would term a capitalist understanding of money. Howell, in particular, carefully reconstructs how business transactions and consumption were couched in the language and imagery of gift exchange and social obligations. Both Howell and Smail proffer a challenge to the notion that capitalism, as both a social and economic force, followed a clear and rising trajectory in late medieval and early modern Europe.<sup>689</sup>

These studies can help inform our reading of the numerous loan contracts and legal disputes associated with the Terra Nova fishery. The fishery was built on a large volume of small loans between two parties which strongly resembles the type of credit market explored in *Legal Plunder*. This is further substantiated by evidence from the Dutch context in C.J. Zuijderduijn's work on medieval capital markets.<sup>690</sup> Smail's work draws attention to the sheer size of credit markets in late medieval cities, and the ways in which they tended to be comprised of small sums loaned between individuals who knew each other. Localized credit markets have been further studied by economic historians such as Jan van Zanden, who

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<sup>687</sup> Martha C. Howell, *Commerce before Capitalism in Europe : 1300-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Daniel Lord Smail, *Legal Plunder : Households and Debt Collection in Late Medieval Europe* (2016).

<sup>688</sup> See also: Jan Luiten van Zanden, "The Road to the Industrial Revolution: Hypotheses and Conjectures About the Medieval Origins of the 'European Miracle'," *Journal of Global History* 3, no. 3 (2008); Van Bavel et al., "The Jump-Start of the Holland Economy During the Late-Medieval Crisis, C. 1350–C. 1500," *The economic history review* 57, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>689</sup> For the peasant perspective see: Sheilagh Ogilvie, "The Economic World of the Bohemian Serf: Economic Concepts, Preferences, and Constraints on the Estate of Friedland, 1583–1692," *ibid.* 54 (2001).

<sup>690</sup> C Jaco Zuijderduijn, *Medieval Capital Markets: Markets for Renten, State Formation and Private Investment in Holland (1300-1550)*, vol. 2 (Brill, 2009). See especially the useful overview of the literature provided in the introduction.



have demonstrated their overlooked efficiency as sources of financing.<sup>691</sup> Michel de la Rue, the merchant of Rouen, gave small loans to minor shipowners like Clement de Conihout as part of a late medieval system of small, pervasive credit networks.

The recent work on commerce and consumption in the late medieval period helps give a framework to the existing literature on the moral economy of European communities.<sup>692</sup> Such works give us a context for the coastal European communities which developed the fishery at Newfoundland in the early sixteenth century. Trade and consumption were robust without participants embracing a capitalist ethos to guide their choices. Small-scale credit markets were pervasive across Europe and highly efficient. Commercial choices were dictated by social and moral considerations and personal relationships. Fishing voyages were organized within a context of social responsibility and obligation that underpinned late medieval commerce. The production and importation of fish was first and foremost a means of sustaining communities with nourishing protein. There were many ways to make money in the sixteenth century Atlantic, but there were few reliable ways to provide communities with a steady supply of nutritious food. The sixteenth century fishery at Terra Nova was first and foremost a means of providing parts of Europe with a reliable source of preserved protein.<sup>693</sup> The fish itself was valuable only inasmuch as it represented a struggle for life and death in the growing urban and coastal communities of Europe. This is a reality which can be obscured by focusing too much on business records. They were predicated on a moral logic rather than a capitalist one. Fishing voyages were organized, in a way explored below, to maximize risk aversion rather than profit. Clement de Conihout, to return to our initial example, was operating in a commercial world bound by the social restrictions and obligations which Howell explored in *Commerce Before Capitalism*. Clement de Conihout went to Terra Nova because he came from a family that was already involved in fishing, he hired

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<sup>691</sup> Jan Luiten van Zanden, Jaco Zuiderduijn, and Tine De Moor, "Small Is Beautiful: The Efficiency of Credit Markets in the Late Medieval Holland," *European Review of Economic History* 16, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>692</sup> See also: Edward P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: [Studies in Traditional Popular Culture]* (New York: New Press, 1993); Edward P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present*, no. 50 (1971).

<sup>693</sup> Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting, and the Discovery of the New World*.

a master who lived in his home village and was well known, and he invested in a boat with his fellow-residents of Jumièges. To finance his voyages Clement turned to a minor merchant from the nearest big city, and promised to repay him promptly for his help by returning to the same port. At no point did Clement de Conihout have to travel beyond his home region of Upper Normandy to find the resources, from manpower to provisions, he needed for his trip to Terra Nova. Even the salt required could be purchased in Rouen, shipped each year in December and January from the Bay of Biscay by intrepid merchants.<sup>694</sup> His fishing voyage was prepared as part of a web of personal relations solidified through loans and promises of catch shares.

Such interactions and credit markets bore only limited resemblance to the kinds of merchant networks driving economic growth elsewhere in the Atlantic. The English, Castilian and Italian merchants who built early Atlantic trade in Heather Dalton's *Merchants & Explorers* were markedly different in their behavior and resources than those involved with Terra Nova.<sup>695</sup> Building these new Atlantic networks was expensive and required access to ample capital and credit. Atlantic merchants in the sixteenth century often took advantage of the already existing financial centers in Europe and the Mediterranean to raise loans to underwrite voyages. Around the turn of the sixteenth century much of this was supplied from financiers in northern Italy, in particular the Genoese who were entrenched in Seville and Lisbon.<sup>696</sup> Though Genoa and elsewhere profited handsomely through their investments in the American trades, the infusion of money generated by the Atlantic and Asian trades in the early- to mid-sixteenth century created credit markets of their own. By the mid-century Antwerp had emerged as a major center of finance, along with Seville, Lisbon, Paris and Burgos. A further solution to the problem of cost after the mid-sixteenth century was the

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<sup>694</sup> See for instance Archives municipales de Rouen. A 19, Jul. 18 1575. A city council act of this year called for the raising of 10,000 *livres* to outfit several ships to guard the annual salt run to Brouage. A convoy of ships travelling between Rouen and Brouage in the Bay of Biscay in late December/Early January seems to have been common. See also AD Seine-Maritime, 204 BP 80 and 216 BP 355.

<sup>695</sup> Dalton, *Merchants and Explorers : Roger Barlow, Sebastian Cabot, and Networks of Atlantic Exchange 1500-1560*.

<sup>696</sup> Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*; Guidi-Bruscoli, "John Cabot and His Italian Financiers\*."; Fernández-Armesto, *The Canary Islands after the Conquest: The Making of a Colonial Society in the Early Sixteenth Century*.

formation of corporate bodies to consolidate and control oceanic commerce.<sup>697</sup> The Castilian trade with the Americas crystalized in the 1560s with the establishment of armed convoys, though even this utterly failed to control trade with the Americas.<sup>698</sup> The English founded the Muscovy Company to prosecute northern trades in 1555, and as the century went on would turn to more and more such organizations to raise capital. A final approach was to revive the medieval merchant-venturer, but on a grander scale. Under such a system These voyages were intended to be one-off trading or raiding runs, and rarely operated within established trade systems. The merchants who organized voyages to Terra Nova did not follow these same patterns to procure funding, nor were they connected to the kinds of transoceanic, diasporic networks which thrived in the Atlantic.<sup>699</sup> To return to a theme first considered in Chapter Two, the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century saw the emergence of transatlantic trade routes built and expanded by a particular class of European merchant. Although many merchants became invested in the development of agricultural and extractive enterprises in the new Atlantic colonies, a better point of comparison for the fishery is with the merchants who organized the oceanic shipping and trading voyages that made this possible. Most lived in urban port cities. An important marker of the new Atlantic merchants was the formation of transnational networks.

The merchants who financed and organized the Terra Nova fishery did not resembled any of these Atlantic merchants. The absence of corporate bodies or long-term partnerships in the sixteenth century fishery is striking. Connections between merchants, such as that between Clement de Conihout and Michel de la Rue, tended to be temporary and opportunistic. This contrasts with the strong bonds which would later develop in the fur trade in the northwest Atlantic.<sup>700</sup> As this study has stressed, many of the shipowners who contributed to the fishery came from small port towns and were often small merchants or mariners.

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<sup>697</sup> Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy : Lessons from Medieval Trade* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>698</sup> Perez-Mallaina Bueno and Phillips, *Spain's Men of the Sea : Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century*; Phillips, *Six Galleons for the King of Spain : Imperial Defense in the Early Seventeenth Century*.

<sup>699</sup> Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation Upon the Ocean Sea Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492-1640*.

<sup>700</sup> Éric Thierry, *La France De Henri Iv En Amérique Du Nord: De La Création De L'acadie À La Fondation De Québec* (Paris: H. Champion, 2008).

The surviving evidence suggests that when fisheries merchants invested in other forms of commerce, such as using their fishing boat for an off-season trade run, they generally preferred intra-European commerce to transatlantic routes. That is to say, a Norman shipowner was much more likely to send his fishing boat to Spain, Bordeaux or Flanders than to the Caribbean or West Africa. Most importantly, the records suggest that most merchants and shipowners who were involved in the fishery were firmly rooted in one locale and did not form part of larger mercantile networks. The coastal communities of western Europe which most actively participated in the fishery at Terra Nova were often at the fringe of larger economic systems. The central spine of the Euro-Mediterranean economy, from northern Italy up the Rhone valley to the Low Countries, remained the axis of finance until mid-century. Lisbon and Seville were emerging as the centers of a new Atlantic economy, with satellites in Burgos and Antwerp. The Baltic and North Sea were growing zones of economic complexity and influence in the sixteenth century, despite the decline of the Hanse. Yet the fishery drew on urban centers outside of these influential commercial zones. Rouen, for instance, was a major trade port in northern France but was neither one of the leading Atlantic ports or one of the older financial centers. Men like Michel de la Rue or the several merchants of La Rochelle who lent money to fishermen were not themselves connected to emerging European Atlantic ports or to the growing Atlantic trades.

It is within this theoretical framework that we should understand the Newfoundland fisheries of the sixteenth century. If, as this study has suggested, the Terra Nova fisheries were not transatlantic in the sense of forming part of a larger Euro-Atlantic system, then neither were they capitalist. The voyages to and from Terra Nova were certainly capital-intensive and mobilized substantial amounts of maritime labour. But they did so within the context of a late-medieval understanding of commerce that diverged from the emerging ideas of commercial capitalism on the Atlantic. Ship-owners took advantage of the pervasive small-scale credit markets which dominated coastal Europe rather than turning to powerful financial centers or urban merchants. The main features of the sixteenth century fishery- the use of localized recruitment based on family relationships; the prevalence of adult male labour from a narrow range of communities in production;

the persistence of share-payments; the frequency of small but high-interest loans; the lack of consistency in who was investing in the fishery; the low profits- are all reflections of this approach to commerce on the far north Atlantic. Once more on the key question of structural organization Terra Nova had diverged from other emerging Atlantic trades, adhering to a singularly effective model based on medieval European experience rather than embracing new patterns of maritime commerce.

## 7.0 AU FIN DE SIECLE: THE END OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY FISHERY

Richard Whitbourne is forever associated with the foundation of a colony at Newfoundland, thanks to his tireless promotion of English colonization in the northwest Atlantic.<sup>701</sup> Although his 1620 opus *A Discourse and Discovery of Newfoundland* is mainly concerned with bold plans for settlement, the author's claim to authority was based on a long history of fishing the waters of Terra Nova. In a lengthy recounting of his many trips across the Atlantic, Whitbourne claimed that "My first Voyage thither, was about 40. yeeres since [i.e. 1580], in a worthy Ship of the burthen of 300. Tunne, set forth by one Master Cotton of South-hampton; wee were bound to the grand Bay (which lyeth on the North-Side of that Land), purposing there to trade then with the Sauage people, (for whom we carried sundry commodities) and to kill Whales, and to make Trayne oyle, as the Biscaines doe there yeerely in great abundance." Whitbourne's description is that of a typical mid-century voyage to northern Terra Nova, and seems to be a conscious attempt to copy Basque whaling and trading practices. The whaling was a bust, but enough fish were taken that four years later Whitbourne returned in "the command of a worthy Ship of 220. Tun, set forth by one Master Crooke of South-hampton." The *Discourse* notes that during these early voyages Whitbourne repeatedly encountered English privateers and explorers, including the famous Sir Humphrey Gilbert.<sup>702</sup> By 1586 Whitbourne would lead his own ship to Terra Nova, and made repeated voyages throughout the last decade of the sixteenth century. Only in the early seventeenth century did he begin to write about his experiences and thoughts regarding the potential for permanent habitation in the northwest Atlantic.

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<sup>701</sup> A full transcript can be found in: Gillian T. Cell, *Newfoundland Discovered: English Attempts at Colonisation, 1610-1630* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1982).

<sup>702</sup> On Gilbert, for both introduction and relevant original source material, see: Gilbert and Quinn, *The Voyages and Colonialising Enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert*.

That Whitbourne, a man who would play such a crucial role in founding an English colony at Newfoundland, should recall the 1580s as the period for his entry into the fisheries is significant. The initial attempt to pursue the established combination of whaling and small-scale trading failed, but fishing proved profitable. As the decade went on the Englishman became more deeply tied to Terra Nova, even as he encountered important alternative ways to profit from the region: piracy and colonization. Whitbourne was, in many ways, the English experience at Newfoundland personified: a tentative engagement in the early 1580s brought about regular voyages to Terra Nova, eventually leading to an interest in permanent settlement. But in a wider sense Whitbourne represents a new generation of mariners on the far north Atlantic, those who would see Terra Nova fracture into a series of divergent and competing commercial interests. Whitbourne connected both the open, transnational fishery of the mid-sixteenth century to the new export-oriented trades which would culminate in the creation of permanent colonies in the northwest Atlantic.

The decade of the 1580s would mark a turning point in the history of the sixteenth century fishery at Terra Nova. In response to changes in climate, market demand and patterns of maritime violence, a series of structural changes in the way the fishery was organized would cause short-term disruptions to seasonal operations. This in turn would encourage some mariners and merchants to pursue new forms of maritime commerce, and increasingly brought Terra Nova into contact and conflict with other parts of the evolving Atlantic system.<sup>703</sup> The significance of this lies in that the changes which began in the 1580s marked the end of the stable transatlantic fishing system which had developed at the start of the sixteenth century. The 1580s saw the emergence of a new kind of far north Atlantic, one which would be divided between a cyclical fishery and a more complex export-oriented approach that broadened fishermen's engagement with the emerging Atlantic economy.

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<sup>703</sup> On the late-century Atlantic system see: Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies*; Stein and Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War : Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe*. Sacks, *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450 - 1700*.

This is a moment which has been largely overlooked by historians of the fishery, who rarely highlight the 1580s as an important moment in the long-term development of the northwest Atlantic.<sup>704</sup> This is symptomatic of the problem of narrow national perspectives, which obscures the broad shifts in how mariners from across Europe behaved on the far north Atlantic. Rather 1610, which marks the foundation of a permanent colony at Newfoundland, is often used as a convenient turning point.<sup>705</sup> This is a view which gives preference to a colonial, Newfoundland-centric narrative. What this chapter suggests is that it was the changes wrought by mariners, not states and colonists, which had the most long-lasting impact on how the northwest Atlantic developed. The changes after 1580 did not manifest themselves in a crisis, a sudden break with the past, but rather through a series of slow, pervasive shifts in the behavior of mariners instead. What this chapter aims to make clear is that the structural changes in transatlantic fishing slowly but steadily eroded established norms to create a divided fishery that was increasingly dislocated as the center of operations on the north Atlantic.

This chapter will outline the major structural changes to how fishing voyages were conducted individually and as an aggregate fishing system starting in the 1580s. These patterns continued through the 1590s and laid the foundations for the major changes in the early seventeenth century that would see the

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<sup>704</sup> Historians of the English fishery have emphasized the 1580s as a starting point for English control, but have not extended it to other actors. Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660*; Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*; Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records with Numerous Illustrations and Maps*. By contrast Turgeon, the Barkhams and other scholars of French, Spanish and Portuguese communities do not address the 1580s as an important decade. Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology."; Huxley, "La Industria Pesquera En El País Vasco Peninsular Al Principio De La Edad Moderna: Una Edad De Oro."

<sup>705</sup> Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*; Sean T. Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador : A History* (2017). Following them, Wim Klooster has written "The 1580s formed a watershed in the Newfoundland fisheries. The French presence dwindled, due in part to the Wars of Religion, European economic setbacks and the cooler climate. French ships diversified their activities, combining fishing with whaling and fur trading... Crews from Portugal and the Basque country suffered a devastating attack by Englishman Bernard Drake in 1585 and then faced impressment of their vessels into the service of the Spanish Armada. The great beneficiaries were the English, whose maritime power grew along with the scale of the fisheries. Eager to procure cod to exchange for wine in France, they began to establish permanent communities in Newfoundland." Although the sentiment (derived from the above works) is generally accurate, most of the specifics of this argument are untrue: The French fishery did not collapse, the English mostly sold to the Mediterranean rather than France, and Bernard Drake's raid was likely not very important. Canny and Morgan, *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, C.1450-C.1850*. p.169.



establishment of the first permanent colony at Newfoundland.<sup>706</sup> This chapter will focus on three major changes: The formation of new trade routes and markets, the demographic changes in Terra Nova and the increased rates of violence at sea. Each of these disrupted yearly fishing patterns and encouraged the development of new approaches to harvesting resources on the far north Atlantic. The different strands of change which are explored in this chapter were all interconnected in complex ways, reinforcing each other, though they are presented as separately for analytical reasons. More so, the changes to how the fishery was organized is only part of the reason the end of the sixteenth century marked a turning point for mariners. The close of the chapter will consider the more subtle changes to mentality which were brought about by the structural changes at the end of the sixteenth century. It will argue that as the fisheries changed the idea of Terra Nova, an open and maritime space in the northwest Atlantic, steadily eroded and was replaced by the idea of Newfoundland, a region divided along national lines. As this chapter will suggest, the immediate outcome of these developments would be the bifurcation of fishing operations, a split between the traditional sixteenth-century system and a new, export-oriented strain. Such a deep division marks the end of the sixteenth century fishery as one of the major, stable attractions for mariners from across the European seaboard.

## **7.1 THE EVOLVING NORTH ATLANTIC CONTEXT**

The physical, economic and political world in which mariners crossing the north Atlantic operated was rapidly evolving by the late sixteenth century. The new directions in fishing which emerged after 1580 did so in the context of three broad changes: climate changes, increased demand for fish and a renewed wave of intra-European wars. This section will briefly outline their consequences for the transatlantic fisheries.

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<sup>706</sup> Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660*; Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador : A History*.

The late sixteenth century saw the north Atlantic plunged into the depths of what is popularly termed the Little Ice Age, the long-term cooling of the northern hemisphere.<sup>707</sup> Though average temperatures had been declining since at least the fourteenth century, the late sixteenth century marked one of two nadirs in the northern hemisphere (the second would be in the mid-seventeenth century).<sup>708</sup> Although temperatures had begun to decline in the late 1560s, it was in the 1580s that the consequences of several decades of worsening conditions became most acute. In general, Atlantic historians have only recently begun to interrogate the relationship between climate and European expansion. The focus on the relation between climate and the 'crisis of the seventeenth century' may obscure the ways in which maritime communities were affected earlier, as maritime environments were particularly sensitive to temperature fluctuations.<sup>709</sup> At a time when European mariners were in many ways held hostage to nature's rhythms the kind of deep and pervasive changes to climate such as occurred around 1580 would have touched both daily life at sea and the practical functioning of a massive maritime commercial system like the oceanic fisheries.

Drawing a direct line between temperature fluctuations and short-term changes in the fishery is difficult, not least because sixteenth century mariners were themselves unaware that they were living through a deepening climate crisis.<sup>710</sup> The severe disruption to food production on land in Europe very likely contributed to rising demand for fish protein, though insufficient quantitative work has been done to

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<sup>707</sup> On the little Ice Age see: Behringer, *A Cultural History of Climate*. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*; Morgan Kelly and Cormac Ó Gráda, "The Waning of the Little Ice Age: Climate Change in Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 44, no. 3 (2013); G. A. Rose, "Reconciling Overfishing and Climate Change with Stock Dynamics of Atlantic Cod (*Gadus Morhua*) over 500 Years," *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* 61, no. 9 (2004); Ogilvie, "Fisheries, Climate and Sea Ice in Iceland: An Historical Perspective."; Charles H. Greene et al., "Arctic Climate Change and Its Impacts on the Ecology of the North Atlantic," *Ecology* 89, no. 11 (2008).

<sup>708</sup> Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Mind and Method of the Historian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, UNITED STATES: Yale University Press, 2014).

<sup>709</sup> *Global Crisis War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century*. See also the work at: <http://www.climatehistory.net>

<sup>710</sup> See Behringer, *A Cultural History of Climate*. For a discussion of how Europeans understood changing climate conditions.

analyze this hypothesis.<sup>711</sup> But one broad trend can be inferred from the surviving records and is worth emphasizing. The sub-arctic Atlantic, home to at least three of the largest European fisheries (Newfoundland, Iceland and Spitsbergen/Norway), was highly vulnerable to temperature fluctuations.<sup>712</sup> The already low average temperatures, which required specialized adaptations from both animals and humans alike, were embedded in a wider system of converging ocean currents and pressure oscillations that made for a dynamic and dangerous system.<sup>713</sup> When its balance was thrown off ocean storms became fiercer, workdays colder and the sea ice lasted longer.<sup>714</sup> The ability of humans, including Europeans, Inuit and Amerindians, to operate in the far north Atlantic was dependent on there being regular cycles of warm weather and calm sailing conditions, as well as the proper oceanic conditions to sustain a large marine biomass. But around 1580 temperatures dropped and this window of opportunity became smaller. For mariners, this meant that not only did fishing become more hazardous, but that new constraints were placed on production. The harsher weather meant shorter fishing seasons. Colder weather likely drove whales from northern Terra Nova into the Gulf and River St. Lawrence, and opened up Spitsbergen as a competitor.<sup>715</sup> Modern marine biologists remain uncertain as to the direct relationship between water temperature and cod stocks, but codfish generally prefers a cooler water.<sup>716</sup> The result may have been that cod stocks moved southward, towards New England, which encouraged the growth of competing fisheries.<sup>717</sup> It was during

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<sup>711</sup> This will likely be a part of the ongoing *Norfish* investigation, but as yet no major work has been published. On food insecurity and famine see: Walter and Schofield, *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society*.

<sup>712</sup> Greene et al., "Arctic Climate Change and Its Impacts on the Ecology of the North Atlantic."; Vaughan, *The Arctic : A History*; Hacquebord and Avango, "Settlements in an Arctic Resource Frontier Region."

<sup>713</sup> Nils Christian Stenseth, *Marine Ecosystems and Climate Variation : The North Atlantic ; a Comparative Perspective* (Oxford [u.a.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012); Greene et al., "Arctic Climate Change and Its Impacts on the Ecology of the North Atlantic."; Lindau, *Climate Atlas of the Atlantic Ocean : Derived from the Comprehensive Ocean Atmosphere Data Set (Coads) : With 2 Tables*.

<sup>714</sup> Astrid EJ Ogilvie, "Fisheries, Climate and Sea Ice in Iceland: An Historical Perspective," *Marine resources and human societies in the North Atlantic since 1500* (1997)

<sup>715</sup> Laborde and Turgeon, "Le Parc De L'aventure Basque En Amérique."; Tuck and Grenier, *Red Bay, Labrador: World Whaling Capital A.D. 1550-1600*.

<sup>716</sup> Stenseth, *Marine Ecosystems and Climate Variation : The North Atlantic ; a Comparative Perspective*; Rose, "Reconciling Overfishing and Climate Change with Stock Dynamics of Atlantic Cod (*Gadus Morhua*) over 500 Years."; Thurston and Barrett, *The Atlantic Coast: A Natural History*.

<sup>717</sup> On New England see: Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*; Bolster, *The Mortal Sea : Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail*; Christopher P. Magra, "The Fisherman's Cause Atlantic Commerce and Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution," (2012).

this period of increasingly harsh and cooler weather that the changes in transatlantic fishing took place, so that growth and diversification in maritime commerce, and the founding of the earliest permanent colonies in the northwest Atlantic, occurred under unusually disadvantageous conditions.

A second broad change faced by mariners were the shifts in demand for fish within Europe. At the end of the sixteenth century urban centers in both northwest Europe and the Mediterranean increasingly required larger and more steady supplies of preserved fish, and were facing systemic problems procuring herring, cod and sardines.<sup>718</sup> This was partly due to the broader food insecurity brought on by climate change, but mainly it was connected to the convergence of several decades-long trends in demography and economic output. Urban population growth in northwest Europe and the Mediterranean was reaching a peak, while the long-term rise in real prices across the sixteenth century was wreaking havoc with food prices. In the western Mediterranean and Iberia the convergence of population growth, price rises and food disruption was particularly acute.<sup>719</sup> As Jeffrey Bolster and others have argued, by the late sixteenth century many coastal and freshwater fishing in Europe were beginning to collapse.<sup>720</sup> In many cases this was caused not by environmental changes but from overfishing, an indication of the rising demand for fish. There are strong parallels between the end of the sixteenth century and the fifteenth century, but unlike the fifteenth century, this later surge in fishing is better documented.<sup>721</sup> As in the fifteenth century, mariners and merchants responded by more intensively harvesting the Atlantic. It was towards the end of the sixteenth century that the Dutch herring fishery on the North Sea reached its apogee, with over seven hundred vessels per year working the waves. The English fishery at Iceland returned as a mainstay of the

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<sup>718</sup> Floris P Bennema and Adriaan D Rijnsdorp, "Fish Abundance, Fisheries, Fish Trade and Consumption in Sixteenth-Century Netherlands as Described by Adriaen Coenen," *Fisheries research* 161 (2015).

<sup>719</sup> O'Flanagan, *Port Cities of Atlantic Iberia, C. 1500-1900*; Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century; The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*.

<sup>720</sup> Bolster, *The Mortal Sea : Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail*.

<sup>721</sup> This is particularly true of the North Sea region. Extant data for the Dutch fisheries exists from the late sixteenth century onward, and are complemented by sources from England, Flanders and northern France. See: A. P. van Vliet, *Vissers En Kapers: De Zeevisserij Vanuit Hed Maasmondegebied En De Dunkierker Kapers (Ca. 1580-1648)* (s'Gravenshage: Stichting Hollandse Historische Reeks, 1994); Christiaan Van Bochove, "De Hollandse Haringvisserij Tijdens De Vroegmoderne Tijd," *Tijdschrift voor sociale en economische geschiedenis* 1, no. 1 (2004); Boelmans Kranenburg, "De Zeevisscherij Van Holland in Den Tijd Der Republiek."

eastern counties, having declined in mid-century, so that by 1593 forty-five vessels were sailing north just from the eastern counties each year.<sup>722</sup> This is an indication that Iceland, having decline in the face of competition in mid-century, was returning as a source of marine protein for Europeans in the face of increased demand. Extensive observational evidence indicates that the south Atlantic fisheries were still productive, and Norwegian cod still found its way across Europe. As the market changes of the late fifteenth century prompted the creation of a commercial fishery, so too would the late sixteenth century see growth and division to meet a new challenge. In both cases there is widespread evidence for a more intensive exploitation of fishing grounds, rising fish prices and increased competition over maritime resources.<sup>723</sup>

It is against this backdrop that the changes to fishing at Newfoundland should be read. In particular the rise of an export-centered branch of commerce should be seen as a reaction to the increased demand for fish. Access to fish increasingly became a political and not just an economic concern. The quest for food security meant that the English, Spanish and French crowns would all show interest in promoting vibrant fisheries at home and abroad by the late sixteenth century. The United Provinces turned the North Sea fishery into a cornerstone of their economic and geo-political strategy, symbolized by the foundation of the *College van de Groote Visserij* in 1584.<sup>724</sup> The growth of the Dutch economy and its involvement in the Baltic trade diverted herring away from southern Europe and towards the north, opening up space for *bacalao* to dominate the southern markets.<sup>725</sup> English regulation of the fishery, tentatively begun as early as 1563, became more common as the century wore on.<sup>726</sup> In 1583 the French crown revealed a new and novel tool: the “Royal Edict for the creation of offices for the Sellers of Ocean Fish fresh, dry and salted,

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<sup>722</sup> British Library. Add MS 34729. Fol. 63. See also: Jones et al., "England's Icelandic Fishery in the Early Modern Period (Eprint)."

<sup>723</sup> Michell, "The European Fisheries in Early Modern Europe".

<sup>724</sup> Van Bochove, "De Hollandse Haringvisserij Tijdens De Vroegmoderne Tijd."; Unger, "Dutch Herring, Technology, and International Trade in the Seventeenth Century."

<sup>725</sup> Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585 - 1740*; Unger, "Dutch Herring, Technology, and International Trade in the Seventeenth Century."

<sup>726</sup> Discussed in: Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records with Numerous Illustrations and Maps*.

in all the ports, harbours, cities and towns of the kingdom.<sup>727</sup> The purview of the office was quite broad, covering the sale of all ocean fish across the kingdom, representing an interest in regulating and promoting the sale of beneficial fish at a time when they were becoming unreliable. It is an indication that in the 1580s monarchies were taking an interest in regulating the market for preserved fish, possibly in response to uneven quality and the larger volume coming into the kingdom. Such move toward oversight and control would encourage similar intervention in the Newfoundland fisheries.

A third broad contextual change would be the rise of new political conflicts within Europe. As this study has stressed, the rise of the transatlantic fisheries was always bound to the ebb and flow of dynastic conflict in the first half of the sixteenth century. The end of the Habsburg-Valois Wars had unleashed a wave of expansion after 1555 which carried the fisheries to their peak in terms of size and growth. From the 1580s onward a series of new conflicts increasingly affected the communities most closely tied to the transatlantic fisheries. Rather than cycles of coalition warfare, as had been the case earlier in the century, these new conflicts tended to mix pervasive domestic turmoil with near-constant struggles between imperial systems over maritime traffic. The French Civil Wars and the Dutch Revolt led to endemic conflict in the coastal regions from Basque Country to Friesland. Many key fishing ports, such as La Rochelle and Rouen, found themselves caught in the midst of the fighting.<sup>728</sup> A series of wars between England and the unified Iberian crowns would lead to rising violence at sea, discussed at length later in this chapter. The western Mediterranean became a flashpoint for violence between Ibero-Italian navies, the Ottomans and their French allies, and the Dutch and English merchants attempting to break into Mediterranean trades.<sup>729</sup> As in

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<sup>727</sup> *Edict du Roy pour la creation des offices de Vendeurs de Poissons de Mer frais, secs et salez, en tous les Ports, Havres, Villes et Bourgs du Royaume*. A printed copy of the text from the late seventeenth-century has been preserved in the municipal archives of Le Havre. Archives municipales du Havre. BB 116 Vendeurs du Poisson.

<sup>728</sup> On the French Civil Wars see: Mickaël Augeron, Didier Poton, and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, *Les Huguenots Et L'atlantique* (Paris: Indes savantes : Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2009); Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*; Braudel and Labrousse, *Histoire Économique Et Sociale De La France*; Robbins, *City on the Ocean Sea, La Rochelle, 1530-1650: Urban Society, Religion, and Politics on the French Atlantic Frontier*; Brunelle, *The New World Merchants of Rouen*. See also: AM La Rochelle. Série Z archives privée. 8Z2 letters related to religious unrest in La Rochelle.

<sup>729</sup> Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*; Glete, *Warfare at Sea, 1500-1650: Maritime Conflicts and the Transformation of Europe*.

the early sixteenth century these conflicts drove change, but because they were more endemic and violent than the cyclical Habsburg-Valois wars the consequences tended to be more disruptive.

The new wars of the late sixteenth century would have ramifications beyond the coast of Europe, as conflict increasingly took on an Atlantic, imperial dimension. The naval struggles between the kingdoms of England and the united Iberian crowns were fought not merely over dynastic disputes but over control of transatlantic commerce.<sup>730</sup> English privateering efforts were heavily concentrated on the Caribbean and the Atlantic islands in an effort to cripple their foes through indirect methods. The French Civil Wars became caught up in questions about Protestant settlement in the Americas, prompting new attempts at colonization by the end of the century.<sup>731</sup> As the Dutch Revolt heated up in the 1580s the strategic interests of Holland and Zeeland shifted from self-defense to attacking and exploiting Iberian trade in the Atlantic basin. For Terra Nova, this all meant that sea lanes were increasingly being crossed by armed parties intent on using European conflicts as a pretense for commerce raiding. It also raised the question, more loudly as the century came to a close, as to whether or not Terra Nova was itself a valid target for imperial interests. As will be noted later in this chapter, the result would be a dramatic increase in the rates of violence on the fishery.

## 7.2 COMMERCE: THE BIRTH OF A TRIANGLE TRADE

Beginning around 1580 an increasing number of mariners from northwest Europe began to pursue new ways to produce and sell codfish from Terra Nova. At the core of the commercial changes which took place after 1580 was the development of new markets for dried codfish by merchants who aimed to export

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<sup>730</sup> Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660-1649*; Hoffman, *The Spanish Crown and the Defense of the Caribbean : 1535-1585 : Precedent, Patrimonialism, and Royal Parsimony*.

<sup>731</sup> Augeron, Poton, and Van Ruymbeke, *Les Huguenots Et L'atlantique*; David Hackett Fischer, *Champlain's Dream* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008).

*bacalao* beyond older established fishing centers. As this study has argued, a major feature of the mature sixteenth century fishery was that the communities which participated in the fishery tended to also be the main markets for returning vessels. This was a consequence of the rise of a loan-contract regime which required fishing boat owners to repay their loans with a part of the catch. Rouen, Bordeaux, San Sebastian, La Rochelle and Saint Malo all doubled as both outfitting centers and clearing houses for the yearly catch. Some merchants subsequently redistributed *bacalao* from Atlantic ports to the interior of Europe and the Mediterranean, but fishermen returning from Terra Nova brought their catch back to well-known port cities. This was a feature of transatlantic fishing from the earliest decades of the sixteenth century, when the market for codfish was largely restricted to the Atlantic littoral between Portugal and Flanders. Such a system promoted the cyclical stability that has been discussed throughout this study.

As demand for preserved fish grew and became more widespread in the 1580s a growing number of vessels began to carry their catch to cities which were far from the coastal communities which supplied manpower and resources for Terra Nova. Rather than rely on older distribution centers fishermen serviced southern port cities directly. Two new markets were of particular consequence after 1580. The first were the cities of southern Iberia, of which the ports of Malaga, Cadiz, St. Luca and Lisbon became especially lucrative destinations for English and Dutch fishing boats. In 1584 for instance, the *White Hinde* of London was chartered to travel to Newfoundland for fish, and then to carry the fish “from thence to Cales [Cadiz] in Spayne” before returning to its home port in what would become a typical route for English fishermen<sup>732</sup> As Darlene Abreu-Ferreira has argued, around the turn of the seventeenth century the indigenous Portuguese fishing fleet would collapse, allowing West Country merchants to seize control of the codfish trade in Lisbon.<sup>733</sup> The second were the ports of the western Mediterranean, such as Livorno, Marseille and Toulon. *Bacalao* had been known in the western Mediterranean and southern Iberia since the earliest days

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<sup>732</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches.* P.113 Doc.602.

<sup>733</sup> Abreu-Ferreira, "Terra Nova through the Iberian Looking Glass: The Portuguese-Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Sixteenth Century."; "The Cod Trade in Early-Modern Portugal: Deregulation, English Domination, and the Decline of Female Cod Merchants."



of the fishery, but only after 1580 is there clear and consistent evidence that fishing ships returning from Newfoundland were bringing saltcod directly to Italy, Provence and elsewhere. These cities were doubly appealing inasmuch as codfish could be traded for valuable commodities like wine, oil and manufactured goods.<sup>734</sup> It is possible that some English and Dutch merchants even carried codfish to the Caribbean islands in the late sixteenth century. There is evidence that at the start of the seventeenth century this was being done, but whether the intra-American trade began before 1600 is uncertain given the lack of surviving records.<sup>735</sup>

These new trade routes would represent a slow but steady turn by certain groups of mariners towards the wider Atlantic world. In carrying *bacalao* to southern Iberia northern fishermen were integrating the distribution of saltcod with the southern Iberian towns which were the core of the south Atlantic maritime networks. From the 1580s on it is likely that codfish began to replace sardines and anchovies on board Spanish and Portuguese ships bound to the Americas and elsewhere.<sup>736</sup> In pushing past Gibraltar towards Provence and Italy fishermen took part in the great Atlantic intrusion into the Mediterranean which would lead to Anglo-Dutch dominance in the seventeenth century. On a larger scale, the new trade routes and markets would lead to the development of a triangular trade route, one which would come to define the seventeenth century experience of English fishermen at Newfoundland.<sup>737</sup> This triangular system broke the bilateral connection between the northwest and northeast Atlantic which had led to the isolation of the transatlantic fisheries for much of the sixteenth century. Its genesis opened the door for the more aggressive integration of the cod fisheries with the Caribbean, Atlantic Islands, New England and Brazil in the seventeenth century.

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<sup>734</sup> On their role in this capacity in the seventeenth century see: Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*.

<sup>735</sup> Cell, *Newfoundland Discovered: English Attempts at Colonisation, 1610-1630*.

<sup>736</sup> Phillips, *Six Galleons for the King of Spain : Imperial Defense in the Early Seventeenth Century*.

<sup>737</sup> Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*; "Modernization on Hold: The Traditional Character of the Newfoundland Cod Fishery in the Seventeenth Century."

At the same time as vessels were sailing to new markets, groups of mariners began to develop a role as middlemen in what had previously been a more streamlined fishing system. Fishermen and coastal merchants now bought up and distributed codfish themselves, rather than rely on urban merchants from the interior. In this way codfish from Terra Nova was moving between European ports in greater and greater volumes and along more complex routes. By 1599 one West Country master brought a ship laden with merchandise to Bayonne, only to trade it for a load of *bacalao* which were then carried to Portugal.<sup>738</sup> This was a substantial expansion of the network of wholesale fish redistribution which had carried codfish from the coast to the interior in the mid-sixteenth century. Merchants began to purchase fish from foreign communities, to be carried to new markets, rather than relying on local fishermen. Norman merchants were purchasing cod from West Country mariners and reselling it to the south, so that in 1586 a report came from Rouen to London that “A hulk of Dartmouth has brought Newfoundland fish, which being sold, is unloading into French ships to be transported into Spain.”<sup>739</sup> The Dutch in particular specialized in purchasing fish from West Country vessels in Plymouth and Exeter, after which they would travel to Italy or Marseille.<sup>740</sup> This practice became so lucrative that in the early seventeenth century the English crown would attempt to outlaw the selling of fish to merchants from Holland.<sup>741</sup> At times the reselling of codfish was combined with other intra-European carrying trades, in particular the grain trade. In 1600 an English merchant complained of the problems he had selling the codfish he’d brought to St. Jean-de-Luz along with the corn

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<sup>738</sup> Domestic Elizabeth Vol. CCLXX. No. 88. 1599, April 20. Examination of John Billot of Fowey. “On 9 October last, I was shipped as master in a Biscayan of Gregory Holmead’s, of Plymouth, bound for Bayonne with merchandise; 14 days after our arrival, the ship took in a freight of Newfoundland fish for Avero; where, after waiting six weeks for wind, we set sail and arrived in four days.” Later imprisoned in Portugal.

<sup>739</sup> CSP. Elizabeth. Foreign. Vol.20. Sept.1585-May 1586. Advertisements from France, Jan 14 1586.

<sup>740</sup> Glerum-Laurentius, “A History of Dutch Activity in the Newfoundland Fish Trade from About 1590 Till About 1680.”; Heerlien, “Van Holland Naar Cupidos Koe: Hollandse Newfoundlandhandel in De Context Van De Internationale Kabeljauwvisserij Bij Newfoundland in De Zestiende En De Zeventiende Eeuw.”

<sup>741</sup> We know that this was a topic of debate in the 1620s-30s, and that at least one law was passed restricting the use of foreign ships to carry fish. This was later repealed, under pressure from West Country fishermen, in November 1631. W. L. Grant, James Munro, and Almeric W. Fitzroy, “Acts of the Privy Council of England : Colonial Series. Volume 1, Volume 1,” (2005). No. 282, p.170.

which was his principal commodity.<sup>742</sup> The route dried cod took between Terra Nova and the table was becoming longer in the 1580s.

The changes to cod fishing were matched by new directions in the trades and industries which had previously been ancillary to codfish production. As Chapter Four described, during the height of the fishery from the 1550s onward the Basque whaling trade in the northwest Atlantic grew prodigiously. Yet around 1580 the whaling trade in Terra Nova began to enter a crisis. A combination of over-whaling and climate cooling began to drive whales away from *La Gran Baya*, threatening the established Basque whaling stations.<sup>743</sup> As a result some whalers began to move into the heart of the St. Lawrence River in pursuit of their prey, shifting operations to the fringes of Terra Nova. More alarmingly, from the 1590s onward Terra Nova would face competition from whaling grounds around Spitsbergen and Brazil.<sup>744</sup> By the early seventeenth century skilled Basque whalers would begin to shift their yearly hunts away from Terra Nova and towards these new whaling grounds. In the process they would transfer their expertise to Dutch and English competitors, who came to dominate the seventeenth century market. In the short-term, however, the 1580s were marked by a disruption to whaling that contributed to the general problems in the northwest Atlantic.

Of considerable significance for the long-term history of the northwest Atlantic, the 1580s saw the start of the fur trade as a serious and distinct enterprise in Terra Nova. As this study has noted, throughout the sixteenth century the exchange of pelts for metal tools between Amerindians and fishermen was one of the fundamental structures of the fishery. But this was a diffuse, ad hoc and small-scale enterprise conducted largely off-the-record by mariners. Only at the end of the sixteenth century do records consistently point to

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<sup>742</sup> Domestic Elizabeth Vol. CCLXXIV. No. 24. 1600, Jan. 31

<sup>743</sup> Parks et al., *The Underwater Archaeology of Red Bay: Basque Shipbuilding and Whaling in the 16th Century*; Tuck and Grenier, *Red Bay, Labrador: World Whaling Capital A.D. 1550-1600*; Barkham, "French Basque" New Found Land" Entrepreneurs and the Import of Codfish and Whale Oil to Northern Spain, C. 1580 to C. 1620: The Case of Adam De Chibau, Burgess of Saint-Jean-De-Luz and " Sieur De St. Julien".

<sup>744</sup> Jong, *Geschiedenis Van De Oude Nederlandse Walvisvaart : Deel 1-3*; Hacquebord, *De Noordse Compagnie (1614-1642): Opkomst, Bloei En Ondergang*.

merchants organizing voyages expressly to trade for furs in the northwest Atlantic.<sup>745</sup> By this time the supply of pelts from northern Russia was shrinking, prompting merchants to turn to new sources. Unlike the cod fishery, the newly ascendant fur trade would be a largely metropolitan affair, as only a handful of urban centers like Saint Malo, Rouen and La Rochelle had the capital to outfit trading voyages. In the mid-1580s Saint Malo was known as a place to purchase furs from Terra Nova.<sup>746</sup> Unlike whaling, which often complemented cod fishing, the fur trade would emerge as a competitor. Fur trading expeditions diverted ships, manpower and capital away from fishing and compelled Amerindians to turn away from small-scale trade with fishermen towards engaging with fur merchants. The fur trade would further encourage the development of permanent trade posts and colonies, fatally undermining the sixteenth century fishery. Indeed, the first semi-permanent settlement in the St. Lawrence Valley, at Tadoussac, developed as a trade post rather than a fishing base.<sup>747</sup>

By 1580 then the web of maritime commerce on the far north Atlantic was becoming more complex. Fishermen might cross the Atlantic several times in a single year, while large Basque whaling ships sailed right past the fishery and into the St. Lawrence River itself. An increasing number of trading voyages now crossed the Atlantic for Terra Nova, working to divert trade with Amerindians away from the fisheries and towards the metropole. Instead of cyclical voyages to Terra Nova and back, mariners were now forging triangular trade routes that crisscrossed the Atlantic and Mediterranean. To take one example, the *Margaret* of Saltash in Cornwall was outfitted around the turn of the century to sail from Newfoundland to St. Lucas in Spain and then back to Cornwall.<sup>748</sup> The trip would have brought the small ship and its crew over 9,000 kilometers across the ocean and back, almost a third longer in distance and at least a month more than the

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<sup>745</sup> Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology." See also: Gilbert, "Beothuk-European Contact in the 16th Century: A Re-Evaluation of the Documentary Evidence." pp,41-42

<sup>746</sup> Eva Germaine Rimington Taylor, *The Original Writings and Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakluyts*, vol. 1 (Routledge, 2017). Doc. 44 "Letter from Richard Hakluyt to Sir Francis Walsingham 1584" p.205-7

<sup>747</sup> Fischer, *Champlain's Dream*.

<sup>748</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches..* No.621. p.123.

normal seasonal voyage to the fisheries.<sup>749</sup> One consequence of these new fishing methods was to erode the strict seasonality which had defined the sixteenth century Terra Nova fishery. Wholesale merchants in European cities could now expect codfish from summer onward, while middlemen ensured that fish arrived at new markets throughout the year. The report of Dartmouth fish in Rouen, quoted above, dates to January of 1586 and indicates that preserved fish was being distributed across Europe throughout the winter. As merchants pushed to sell their fish in southern ports, the length of fishing voyages increased. A ship departing Newfoundland in August might not arrive home until late autumn, having first sailed to Cadiz and Livorno. As the kinds of voyages changed and became longer, the rhythms which had defined the successful sixteenth century fishery fell apart for many mariners.

### **7.3 THE NORTHMEN COMETH**

After 1580 the human composition of Terra Nova rapidly and decisively changed. New communities, from both Europe and the Arctic, migrated to the northwest Atlantic. At the same time, older established communities began to decline and disappear. Of particular consequence was the arrival of large numbers of mariners from West Country England and later Holland, northerners who previously played a minor part in Terra Nova's history, at the same time that Inuit migrated to northern Terra Nova. These northern incursions would ultimately drive out most of the Iberian fishing fleets from the region, and would be matched by the withdrawal by the Beothuk from trade. In general the center of the fishery was shifting from the Bay of Biscay northward, while in Terra Nova itself there was a reshuffling of the indigenous population.

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<sup>749</sup> 4800 nautical miles. The trip to Newfoundland would normally be about 7,000 kms round trip, or around 4,000 nautical miles. Calculated using Google Earth.

As this study has emphasized, although they are credited with discovering Terra Nova in the 1490s, English participation in the transatlantic fisheries was extremely limited throughout the sixteenth century.<sup>750</sup> English-speaking mariners were always present, and English observers of the fishery constitute one of our best bodies of evidence, but the scale of participation was significantly lower than the other communities considered in this study. Yet this pattern began to change around the year 1580. The number of fishing vessels departing West Country ports for Terra Nova increased rapidly in the late 1570s, and continued to grow in the last two decades of the century. Whereas even at the peak of the transnational fishery in the 1560s around thirty English vessels departed each summer, by the end of the century perhaps one hundred fifty English ships were sailing to the fisheries annually.<sup>751</sup> The vast majority of these came from the ports of the West Country, though ships from Bristol, London and Southampton also joined. In the 1580s the English suddenly began to rival the Basques, Normans and Biscayans as the dominant force in the fishery. By the 1580s André Thevet, who had in earlier texts exclusively described Franco-Spanish activity in Terra Nova, wrote that “these regions [Terra Nova and Canada] are presently frequented by the French and the English.”<sup>752</sup> By 1599 the residents of Plymouth had cause to complain that because so many of “our ships are at Newfoundland,” the town was bereft of defenses and desperately needed a new garrison.<sup>753</sup> Within two decades after 1580 English mariners had become a dominant force in the fishery, a position they would not relinquish for the next two centuries.

Where the English intrusion into the northwest Atlantic is well-documented, the Dutch have largely been written out of the history of the Terra Nova fisheries. Only a handful of studies, largely unpublished, have been devoted to Dutch activity in the northwest Atlantic.<sup>754</sup> Most scholars of the Dutch Atlantic have

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<sup>750</sup> Matthews, "A History of the West of England-Newfoundland Fishery."; Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660*.

<sup>751</sup> *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660*.

<sup>752</sup> Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*.P.104

<sup>753</sup> CSP. Elizabeth. Domestic. Vol. CCLXX. No.97. April 26, 1599.

<sup>754</sup> Jacobs, "Early Dutch Explorations in North America."; Glerum-Laurentius, "A History of Dutch Activity in the Newfoundland Fish Trade from About 1590 Till About 1680."; Hart, *The Prehistory of the New Netherland Company: Amsterdam Notarial Records of the First Dutch Voyages to the Hudson*; Heerlien, "Van Holland Naar Cupidos Koe:

focused their attention on activity in the Caribbean, Brazil, West Africa and at New Netherland.<sup>755</sup> Operations at Newfoundland are overshadowed by Dutch success on the North Sea fishery and whaling at Spitsbergen. Yet this is to ignore the consistent role played by mariners from the United Provinces, above all Holland, in transatlantic fishing. By the turn of the seventeenth century persistent evidence points to an active and sustained role by Dutch merchants at Newfoundland, though this activity likely began at the end of the 1580s.<sup>756</sup> As early as 1593 English sources were complaining that “The Dutchman by his Policy hath gotten Trading with all the World into his hands, yea he is now entring into the Trade of the Fishing of the New-found-lands, which is the stay of the West-Countries.”<sup>757</sup> There seems to have been fear, then, of what was already an established trade in the early 1590s. By 1596 notarial archives in Amsterdam contain records of trading voyages to England and Newfoundland purchase cod for resale.<sup>758</sup> As Maartin Heerlien has demonstrated, using the notarial archives of Amsterdam, by the 1620s around 10-15 Dutch ships left Amsterdam for Terra Nova every year, rising to 20-15 in mid-century.<sup>759</sup> This was a minor branch of commerce in the context of the Dutch economy as a whole, but it meant that Holland was sending roughly as many ships to Terra Nova as Brittany or Basque Country. They ought to be treated as one of the active and equal participants in transatlantic fishing at the turn of the seventeenth century.

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Hollandse Newfoundlandhandel in De Context Van De Internationale Kabeljauwvisserij Bij Newfoundland in De Zestiende En De Zeventiende Eeuw."

<sup>755</sup> Postma and Enthoven, *Riches from Atlantic Commerce : Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817*; Emmer, Den Heijer, and Sicking, *Atlantisch Avontuur. De Lage Landen, Frankrijk En De Expansie Naar Het Westen, 1500-1800*; Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585 - 1740*.

<sup>756</sup> There has yet to be a thorough study of the notarial records outside of Amsterdam, in particular of Enkhuizen, Hoorn and Rotterdam. Until this is done there will be no way to definitively establish the scale of Dutch trade at Newfoundland in the 1580s.

<sup>757</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches..* P.118. Original Sir Simonds D'Ewes. *The journals of all the parliaments during the reign of Queen Elizabeth*. London, 1682. P.509.

<sup>758</sup> The majority of these are contained the Simon Hart collection and finding guide. See also: Hart, *The Prehistory of the New Netherland Company: Amsterdam Notarial Records of the First Dutch Voyages to the Hudson*; Heerlien, "Van Holland Naar Cupidos Koe: Hollandse Newfoundlandhandel in De Context Van De Internationale Kabeljauwvisserij Bij Newfoundland in De Zestiende En De Zeventiende Eeuw."

<sup>759</sup> "Van Holland Naar Cupidos Koe: Hollandse Newfoundlandhandel in De Context Van De Internationale Kabeljauwvisserij Bij Newfoundland in De Zestiende En De Zeventiende Eeuw." In particular see Grafiek 5.1, p.77.

West Country and Dutch mariners followed similar paths of development in the transatlantic fisheries and often worked closely together. Both were attempting to break into an established fishery while simultaneously fighting major wars against the Spanish crown. Indeed, English fears about Dutch activity at Newfoundland were in part a reflection of their own precarious position as the upstart trying to compete with more established Basque, Breton and Norman fisheries at Terra Nova. Through the early seventeenth century Dutch mariners relied heavily on English ports such as Plymouth for outfitting their vessels and for purchasing fish for resale.<sup>760</sup> A flurry of regulations which caused considerable consternation in the 1620s-30s indicates that English fishermen in turn relied on Dutch merchants to carry their fish to markets on the continent. Where they differed was in motivation. Dutch expansion was fueled by the general resurgence of maritime commerce in Holland and Zeeland from the 1590s onward.<sup>761</sup> With a surfeit of cheap cargo vessels, a long tradition of fish-trading and with extensive contacts in the Mediterranean, Dutch merchants were well-positioned to intervene in the *bacalao* carrying trade. The Newfoundland trade supplemented other branches of commerce and never gained the reputation as a source of livelihood in the same way it did for the West Country. In the English case, several convergent factors contributed to the renewed interest in Newfoundland. By the later sixteenth century the West Country economy was struggling and the fisheries offered a safe alternative to trade or farming for many communities.<sup>762</sup> Much as in Basque country the Terra Nova fishery became a staple of the regional economy. West Country pirates and privateers had developed an understanding of the Newfoundland fisheries, both its strengths and weaknesses, which could be exploited by fellow-mariners. The West Country expansion at Newfoundland served wider English goals of competing directly with Spanish, Portuguese and to a lesser extent French maritime commerce as part of ongoing wars.

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<sup>760</sup> Ibid.; Glerum-Laurentius, "A History of Dutch Activity in the Newfoundland Fish Trade from About 1590 Till About 1680."

<sup>761</sup> Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585 - 1740*; Wallerstein, Project, and Project, *The Modern World-System I: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750, with a New Prologue*; Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe*.

<sup>762</sup> Matthews, "A History of the West of England-Newfoundland Fishery."; Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740*.



The sudden increase in the number of West Country and Hollander mariners working at Newfoundland was significant because these groups operated differently than their competitors. These two communities were the main drivers behind the commercial changes outlined in the previous section. By 1585 a “Commission to English subjects trading to the New-Found land for fish” explicitly acknowledged that “our subjects now employed in the fishing at the New-found land intend, after finishing the fishing, to go to Spain to sell their fish.”<sup>763</sup> Both the English and Dutch had competing fishing interests at home: the Dutch on the North Sea, and the English at Iceland.<sup>764</sup> Indeed, surviving evidence indicates that in the 1580s these two European fisheries were entering a period of considerable growth.<sup>765</sup> Because of these successful local fisheries, English and Dutch merchants would lack sizeable domestic markets for codfish from Terra Nova and could not follow the older sixteenth century practice of producing Terra Nova fish for domestic markets. From the 1580s onward, English and Dutch merchants increasingly eschewed this practice and carried their codfish to markets in southern Iberia, the Mediterranean and even the Caribbean. Both groups embraced new roles as middlemen, and the Dutch in particular took over much of the fish carrying trade within Europe. The Northmen were the leading agents of disruption from the 1580s onward.

A further consequence would be the decline of Iberian participation in the fishery in the face of English and Dutch competition. Scholars of Portuguese, Galician and Spanish Basque fishermen have long noted the decline, bordering on collapse, of transatlantic fishing around the turn of the seventeenth century.<sup>766</sup> The number of Iberian vessels leaving for Terra Nova each year decreased from the 1580s

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<sup>763</sup> CSP. Eliz. For. 19. June, 1585.

<sup>764</sup> Wim Klooster has argued that “The English presence increased, due in part to a strict new Danish system of licenses that made it hard for the English to maintain their share in the Icelandic fishery.” This is incorrect on two counts: The Iceland fishery did not contract in the 1580s-90s, and the Iceland fishery drew on ports in eastern England rather than the West Country and therefore did not compete with Newfoundland. Canny and Morgan, *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, C.1450-C.1850*.

<sup>765</sup> Jones et al., “England’s Icelandic Fishery in the Early Modern Period (Eprint).”; Jönsson, “Fisheries Off Iceland, 1600-1900.”; Marie Simon Thomas, *Onze Ijslandsvaarders in De 17. En 18. Eeuw : Bijdrage Tot De Geschiedenis Van De Nederlandsche Handel En Visscherij* (Amsterdam 1935).

<sup>766</sup> Barkham, “French Basque” New Found Land” Entrepreneurs and the Import of Codfish and Whale Oil to Northern Spain, C. 1580 to C. 1620: The Case of Adam De Chibau, Burgess of Saint-Jean-De-Luz and” Sieur De St. Julien”.”; Barkham, *Los Vascos En El Marco Atlántico Norte: Siglos Xvi Y Xvii*; Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*; Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*.

onward, and English and Dutch ships would ultimately capture much of this carrying trade. The collapse was so total that other parties soon joined in, and by the end of the century even ships from French Biscay were supplying once-prosperous fishing ports like Porto with their *bacalao*.<sup>767</sup> A major cause of this decline was the increase in naval violence between the combined Iberian crowns and its rivals, which put enormous pressure on northern Iberian mariners and merchants. The need to outfit naval forces for coastal defense, to patrol transatlantic commercial routes and to support ongoing military operations in the Low Countries encouraged the crown to requisition men and ships from northern Iberian communities. The increasing pressure to find resources for naval conflict did not merely hurt domestic fishermen but caused disruptions to ports like San Sebastian/Pasaje which had long served as major outfitting centers. In 1589, in the aftermath of the Great Armada's collapse, the Castilian crown ordered all ships in the crucial port of Pasaje to be stopped and seized before sailing to Terra Nova.<sup>768</sup> Of the seventy ships some sixty were French Basque which had arrived seeking provisions, and arbitrary actions such as this would encourage them to shift their base of operations away from San Sebastian/Pasajes and towards La Rochelle by the mid-1590s. Caught between Anglo-Dutch rivals and state intervention, merchants from Basque Country, Asturias, Portugal and Galicia were forced to abandon the very fishery which they had done so much to create.

As the sixteenth century waned the decades of sustained contact and exchange with visiting fishermen would culminate in significant shifts in the behavior of Amerindian communities and the demography of indigenous societies within Terra Nova. The rising interest in a distinct fur trade after 1580 encouraged the First Nations around Terra Nova to change their migratory patterns in pursuit of more opportunities for exchange. Mi'kmaq and Innu communities began to visit specific harbours precisely because of the possibility for exchange with fishermen. By the end of the century the Innu seem to have been increasingly bound to the seasonal fishery, for an English observer reported that they were "an ingenuous and tractable

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<sup>767</sup> Barros. P.928-929. In 1598 the *Maria* of Olonne carried *bacalhau de pasta*, i.e. *morue verte*, to Porto direct from Terra Nova. In 1599 an unnamed ship from "France" brought *bacalhau* to Porto from Terra Nova.

<sup>768</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches..* P.116. Originally CSP Foreign, Jan-July 1589. Pp.151, 231-232.

people (being well used:) they are ready to assist them with great labour and patience, in the killing, cutting, and boyling of Whales; and making the Traineoyle, without expectation of other reward, then a little bread, or some such small hire."<sup>769</sup> The Mi'kmaq likewise became active participants in exchange towards the end of the century, and expected to meet visiting fishermen on the coast for the express purpose of trade. In 1611 the Jesuit Biard suggested that for the Mi'maq, trade had become a crucial part of their survival strategy. Each summer, as communities began harvesting the abundant fish, so too did they hail "the French ships with which they traffic, and you may be sure they understand how to make themselves courted. They set themselves up for brothers of the King, and it is not expected that they will withdraw in the least from the whole farce. Gifts must be presented and speeches made to them, before they condescend to trade; this done, they must have the Tabagie, i.e. the banquet. Then they will dance, make speeches and sing *Adesquidex*, *Adesquidex*,"<sup>770</sup> That is, that they are good friends, allies, associates, confederates, and comrades of the King and of the French."<sup>771</sup> By the turn of the seventeenth century the Mi'kmaq like the Innu had reoriented their migratory and economic patterns towards trade with Europeans in Terra Nova.

The Innu and Mi'kmaq followed a path of adaptation and reconciliation with the changes fishermen brought to the northwest Atlantic. In the case of the Beothuk of Newfoundland, the opposite process may have taken place by the end of the sixteenth century. By the 1580s English visitors to Newfoundland report that "In the South parts we found no inhabitants, which by all likelihood have abandoned those coastes, the same being so much frequented by Christians: But in the North are savages altogether harmelesse."<sup>772</sup> Wary of visiting Europeans, many Beothuk began to avoid parts of the coast visited by fishermen. By the early

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<sup>769</sup> Richard Whitbourne, "A Discourse and Discouery of Nevv-Found-Land : With Many Reasons to Prooue How Worthy and Beneficiall a Plantation May There Be Made, after a Far Better Manner Than Now It Is : Together with the Laying Open of Certaine Enormities and Abuses Committed by Some That Trade to That Countrey, and the Meanes Laid Downe for Reformation Thereof," (1622).

<sup>770</sup> As Peter Bakker has pointed out, *Adisquidex* is likely a mispronunciation of the Basque word for 'friend.' The French-speaking Biard would not have recognized it. Bakker, "'The Language of the Coast Tribes Is Half Basque': A Basque-American Indian Pidgin in Use between Europeans and Native Americans in North America, Ca. 1540-Ca. 1640."

<sup>771</sup> Biard. Jesuit Relations. Vol. III. P.79.

<sup>772</sup> Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us : Excerpts from Mi'kmaw History, 1500-1950*.

seventeenth century they seem to have largely abandoned southeastern Newfoundland, concentrating in the north of the island. As Ralph Pastore has argued, the Beothuk found it more efficient to strip metal nails and fishhooks from abandoned fishing posts than to trade with mariners.<sup>773</sup> The Beothuk, who were amongst the earliest and friendliest Amerindians encountered by Europeans, would fade into a nearly mythical obscurity during the seventeenth century before facing extinction. In 1620 an English writer dismissed their impact on the new Newfoundland colony, "...there being but few Salvages in the north, and none in the south parts of the Countrie; by whom the planters as yet never suffered damage, against whom (if they should seeke to trouble us) a small fortification will serve being but few in number, and onely Bow men."<sup>774</sup> Fishermen were reshaping the human face of Newfoundland.

As the fishery brought a new economic role to the northwest Atlantic as a source of metal and trade, Inuit communities began to move southward into the waters of Terra Nova.<sup>775</sup> This was a sudden change which caused considerable consternation amongst fishermen. By the last third of the sixteenth century there exists increasing evidence for the presence of Inuit on the south coast of Labrador and the northern coast of Newfoundland island. This represents a major migration of Inuit communities southward, and one which brought them into contact with both the Innu and Beothuk. The growth of the fisheries and the seasonal presence of Basques and Breton in *La Gran Baya* offered a lucrative opportunity for Inuit communities which stimulated this shift toward the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The southward migration of Inuit communities created a crisis for Amerindian and Europeans in northern Terra Nova. The Inuit were willing to resort to violence to resolve issues of competition, and they were alarmingly effective at the use of force. Inuit

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<sup>773</sup> Pastore, "The Collapse of the Beothuk World."

<sup>774</sup> Cell, *Newfoundland Discovered: English Attempts at Colonisation, 1610-1630*; Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*.p.96

<sup>775</sup> Peter E Pope, "Bretons, Basques, and Inuit in Labrador and Northern Newfoundland: The Control of Maritime Resources in the 16th and 17th Centuries," *Études/Inuit/Studies* 39, no. 1 (2015); Selma Huxley Barkham, "A Note on the Strait of Belle Isle During the Period of Basque Contact with Indians and Inuit," *ibid.*4, no. 1/2 (1980); Martijn and Dorais, "Eighteenth-Century Innu (Montagnais) and Inuit Toponyms in the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland."

weaponry had already excluded English vessels from much of the Arctic in the 1570s.<sup>776</sup> Towards the end of the century they likely pushed the Innu into western Labrador and the Beothuk south from the Straits of Belle-Isle. By the first decade of the seventeenth century residents of Saint Malo were describing a “war with the savages” in northern Terra Nova.<sup>777</sup> The Inuit would turn the Straits of Belle-Isle, and with it the entrance to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, into a meeting ground and contested space for Algonkian, Inuit and European peoples.

The new expectation of exchange with visiting fishermen created the possibility for Innu and Mi’kmaq, and later even the Inuit, to orient themselves towards this north Atlantic commerce. In his text *Grand Insulaire*. André Thevet stated in the 1580s, “There was the fish-tank and storehouse where they kept them to sell them to the foreigners who went there to fish, so as to make use of their superfluity of cod, of which they have such an abundance that the barbarians take no account of them but heap them up in great piles and sell and trade them *en masse* to the foreigners.”<sup>778</sup> Thevet’s observations about the selling of fish to Europeans indicates the possibility that certain groups were shifting towards an internal economy that depended on trade with the fishery.

As Amerindians moved to adapt to new trade opportunities, Terra Nova became the center for new regional trade patterns. Archaeologists have demonstrated that the yearly presence of European fishermen altered the material culture of the Amerindian communities surrounding Terra Nova. Fishermen provided a reliable source of metalwork which had previously been absent in the northeast. We know through archaeological work that many of these tools were ultimately traded to regions outside Terra Nova. The Mi’kmaq served as intermediaries between the Europeans in the Gulf and Algonkian people to the south, trading metal down the rivers in to the Gulf of Maine in exchange for furs which could be given to fishermen.<sup>779</sup> Occasional reports from fishermen and navigators suggest that Amerindians also gained

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<sup>776</sup> Morison, *The European Discovery of America*; Mancall, "The Raw and the Cold: Five English Sailors in Sixteenth-Century Nunavut."

<sup>777</sup> Archives municipales de Saint-Malo. BB 11.

<sup>778</sup> Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*.P.72

<sup>779</sup> Moussette, "A Universe under Strain: Amerindian Nations in North-Eastern North America in the 16th Century."

access to European garments, glass and even sailcloth. In a few cases the changes to material culture prompted technological changes. By the late sixteenth century the Mi'kmaq were sailing European-style shallops, and in 1602 Basque-style shallop was being used by Amerindians off the coast of Cape Cod.<sup>780</sup> Until the foundation of colonies at Québec, Acadia and New England it would be the Gulf of St. Lawrence which was the exclusive avenue of European goods to reach the interior of North America.

The changes to the human composition of Terra Nova between 1580 and 1600, and how those people behaved, were swift and decisive. Gone were the Spanish Basques, Galicians, Portuguese and Asturians who had been part of the fishery since its earliest years. Gone were the Beothuk, amongst the first Amerindians encountered by Europeans. Now West Country and Dutch mariners visited Terra Nova in increasing numbers. Not merely content to exchange furs for metal tools on a small scale, these newcomers were encouraging the Innu and Mi'kmaq to reorient themselves towards the export of furs and fish on a large scale. Inuit communities were moving southward in larger numbers, competing with Amerindians and Europeans for control of the trade that flowed through the Strait of Belle-Isle. The English and Dutch were moving the fishery towards engagement with new markets and with their own brutal wars of imperial expansion. The Terra Nova fishery had always known change, including shifts in communal participation and the scale of operations. But the suddenness and depth of the demographic changes after 1580s were such that it would rupture the cohesion and continuity of the sixteenth century fishery and produced a more divided and competitive experience.

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<sup>780</sup> Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us : Excerpts from Mi'kmaw History, 1500-1950*.p.21-22

## 7.4 VIOLENCE AND TERRA NOVA

In August 1584, an assembly of merchants in Rouen drafted a public complaint about the deteriorating condition of maritime commerce.<sup>781</sup> Addressed to the King, the complaint laid out the host of evils which had befallen Norman merchant vessels and which threatened the wellbeing of the populace. The problem revolved around “the interruptions caused by the Spanish to ocean traffic.”<sup>782</sup> Corsairs under the Spanish flag were assailing Norman merchants across the Atlantic and Mediterranean worlds. In enumerating the predations of Spanish corsairs the document is a reflection of the fears that inter-dynastic warfare was threatening the traditional trade routes out of Normandy. But the text complained specifically that the Spanish “interrupt the trade with Barbary and the Terra Nova fishery.”<sup>783</sup> In so doing the complaint connects Newfoundland to both the Barbary trade, a very different branch of Atlantic commerce, and with the growing Atlantic battleground of Franco-Spanish imperial conflict. The rouennais merchants draw attention to the new ways in which fishermen were consistently finding themselves caught up in much larger and increasingly more violent fights over Atlantic trade.

One of the most important changes to affect transatlantic fishing after 1580 involved a revolution in violence. After 1580 fishermen from across the European seaboard increasingly found themselves exposed to violent attack at sea.<sup>784</sup> The main source was the increased activity of pirates against fishermen, but there is also evidence for the use of force between rival fishing vessels. While violence had always been part of the fishery, as previous chapters have discussed at length, after 1580 piracy departed from the norm in two important ways.<sup>785</sup> First, violent attacks increasingly occurred on the fishery itself, in Terra Nova, rather

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<sup>781</sup> AD Seine-Maritime. 201 BP Jurisdiction Consulaire de Rouen. 694 Affaires diverses. “Plaite pour troubles a faites en commerce par les espagnols.”

<sup>782</sup> *les empeschements qui leur estoit donnez par les espagnoles de traffique sur mer*

<sup>783</sup> *empescher le traite de barbarye et la peche des terres neufves*

<sup>784</sup> Olaf Janzen, "The Problem of Piracy in the Newfoundland Fishery in the Aftermath of the War of the Spanish Succession," *Research in Maritime History No. 52: War and Trade in Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland*. (2013).

<sup>785</sup> In Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches*. phrased as ‘piracy becomes endemic.’

than in European waters. Instead of intercepting homebound vessels off the coast of Brittany, Galicia or Holland, raiders were now striking fishing vessels in the middle of the season. Second, the use of violence against fishermen was increasingly bound up in wider political conflicts and at times was even used to further the political goals of imperial powers. A letter to Queen Elizabeth in 1586 aimed to 'remind' her that "by pursuing of his [Philip II] fishing in Newfoundland, and his trade out of Biscay, she will marvelously hinder, stare his country and possess his mariners and shipping, wherein consists his chief strength."<sup>786</sup> Rather than the predatory piracy of the early sixteenth century, fishermen were now exposed to direct and deliberate assault by armed adventurers.

The increase in violence against fishermen did not itself make for a decisive crisis and change. Rather, the increased rates of violence in Terra Nova acted to intensify and accelerate the other structural changes which were taking place. Raids by corsairs and privateers helped to accelerate the demographic shifts which began around 1580, in particular the collapse of the Iberian fishing fleets. As their ancestors had so notoriously done at Iceland, English mariners resorted to violence to suppress competitors and open up space in the sixteenth century fishery. The use of force almost certainly aided the Inuit migrations after 1580. The increased competition between fishing groups may have inspired a turn towards intra-mariner violence. As the threat of violence compelled more vessels to leave for Newfoundland fully armed, merchants were pressured to recoup their costs by selling fish at more lucrative markets in the Mediterranean and elsewhere. One way in which the rising tide of violence would affect the fishery was in the way it dislocated the normal operations of the salt trade which was essential to the existence of Terra Nova. The two main sources of salt in western Europe, the Bay of Biscay and Setubal, were now battle grounds. Inter-imperial conflicts cut off Setubal from English, Dutch and various French mariners. The civil wars in France made it difficult for even Norman or Basque ships to procure marsh salt from La Rochelle and Saintonge. Norman vessels increasingly sailed as armed convoys in early January, a system

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<sup>786</sup> CSP. Elizabeth. Foreign. Vol. 20. Sept.1585-May 1586. "W.H. to the Queen. Points to be 'remembered' to her Majesty." Dec. 20, 1585.



that made salt deliveries more regular but also drove up costs.<sup>787</sup> As Dutch commerce with the Baltic rose, in direct connection to the ongoing Revolt, Dutch merchants extracted an increasingly large percentage of Biscayan sea salt for their own use.<sup>788</sup> This only served to put more pressure on merchants and mariners to recoup their losses by more intensely exploiting fishing grounds, or turning to violence themselves.

As was so often the case in the sixteenth century, no one category can neatly describe the types of captains and mariners who launched violent attacks on the fishery. They were pirates, corsairs, privateers, merchant-venturers and even fishermen all at once.<sup>789</sup> Many English raiders claimed to be privateers, holding letters of marque from Queen Elizabeth, but some of these were fabricated or used as a flimsy cover for wide-ranging predation. Privateers licensed to attack Spanish ships often used this as an excuse to strike the more vulnerable Portuguese fishery, or to get embroiled in fighting French Basques. A ship used one year as a fishing boat might see service the next as a corsair. In spring of 1596 the ship *La Perle* was outfitted in Honfleur to catch cod at Newfoundland, but the very next winter saw it sailing “to the coasts of Spain and thereabouts to make war against the enemies of his Majesty.”<sup>790</sup> In both cases the *Perle* was listed as being owned by Guillaume Timache, a master carpenter of Honfleur whose brother served as captain, who seemed comfortable investing in both fishing voyages and corsair raids. The rise in violence after 1580 therefore was driven by a confusing array of actors whose motives and origins were difficult to determine and who were often themselves closely bound to the fishery.

The rise in violent attacks on fishermen was directly related to the rising presence of the English in Newfoundland. From the 1580s onward a number of English privateers, mainly from the West Country, deliberately targeted the Newfoundland fishery, often with royal approval. Even as they re-oriented the commercial orientation of cod fishing, West Country mariners were destabilizing existing fisheries.

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<sup>787</sup> See for examples: ADSM 216 BP 355; AMRouen., A19, Jul.18 1575 for an early example.

<sup>788</sup> Based on a review of the notarial archives of La Rochelle for the 1590s-early 1600s. See also: Richefort and Schmidt, *Les Relations Entre La France Et Les Villes Hanséatiques De Hambourg, Brême Et Lübeck: Moyen Âge - Xixe Siècle*.

<sup>789</sup> Colas and Mabee, *Mercenaries, Pirates, Bandits and Empires : Private Violence in Historical Context*.

<sup>790</sup> ADCalvados. 8E6508. Fol. 79v. 6 Feb. 1596; 8E6508. Fol.92. 20 Dec 1597.

Throughout the 1580s famous pirates such as Bernard Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh, claiming to be licensed privateers, launched raids to seize Spanish and Portuguese fishing ships.<sup>791</sup> Records indicate that raiders preferred to capture ships and their cargo of codfish intact, rather than destroy them. The English pirate raids of the 1580s acted as a scaled-up version of the Basque raid in 1554, described in Chapter Four. Once again, while the primary goal was the destruction of property the secondary objective was to open up room in the competitive fishery. West Country attacks on Spanish and Portuguese vessels aided their commercial objective of increasing English fish production. The English assault on the fishery was, with the aid of hindsight, remarkably successful. As noted earlier in this chapter, from the 1580s onward the number of Spanish Basque, Castilian, and Porto-Galician ships sent to the fishery declined. By the early seventeenth century West Country ships were in fact carrying much of the codfish to Portugal and southern Spain. Part of this must be attributed to the consequences of increased violence: rising costs, loss of experienced crew, destruction of ships and fishing stages. The arrival of large number of English fishermen and pirates would drive the collapse of the Iberian fishery.

As English raiders demonstrated the potential for using violence against Terra Nova, some Norman and Biscayan pirates joined suit. Honfleur, a major port for Terra Nova, was also a convenient outfitting port for pirates. In 1590 an English corsair, coming back from the Caribbean, was ambushed by seven Norman ships from Honfleur and Le Havre working on the east coast of Newfoundland.<sup>792</sup> These fishermen did not hesitate to attack the English and seize their goods for sale back home. La Rochelle was home to legendarily aggressive Huguenot corsairs, who seem to have been the bane of the Basques.<sup>793</sup> The shifting role of Biscayan, Breton and Norman pirates reflected the ongoing civil wars in France. During the depths of conflict Protestant and Catholic corsairs might turn against their neighbors. From the 1590s Dutch

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<sup>791</sup> Janzen, "The Problem of Piracy in the Newfoundland Fishery in the Aftermath of the War of the Spanish Succession."

<sup>792</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches.* P.53-54. Doc. 549. A Norman Newfoundlander seizes a Spanish prize from English privateers.

<sup>793</sup> See: AM St. Jean-de-Luz. 3EE 1 Piraterie, corsairs. No. 1-5. All involve conflict with rochelais corsairs, early seventeenth century.

activity at Newfoundland was connected to the ongoing Dutch Revolt. The result was that the threat to mariners increasingly came from all quarters, making violence an endemic and diffuse problem from the 1580s onward.

Many of the raids in the 1580s could be quite brutal. In one case in 1584 the English pirate Hugh Jones, claiming to be a privateer returning from the Caribbean, sailed his disease-wracked ship into Plaisance at Newfoundland thinking the Basque fishermen working there would be no threat. Instead Jones found himself ambushed by the Basques who banded together against the corsair, assaulting Jones and making off with all his goods in the kind of incident which points to the confusing overlap between pirate, fisherman, privateer and mariner.<sup>794</sup> In 1582 a pair of West Country pirates, Richard Oughtred and John Perrot, attacked Portuguese fishermen on the east coast of Newfoundland.<sup>795</sup> Though they claimed to be privateers working under commission from the Queen, the complaints brought to the English crown by the victims were so intense that full-blown inquiry was launched the following year which revealed the duo to be rogue corsairs. Testimony from fishermen who witnessed the incident revealed that the English pirates had sailed into a harbour in August which was filled Basque and Portuguese fishermen under the guidance of a French admiral. Three of the Portuguese ships were quickly “with force and violence sett upon, boarded and entered in warlicke sorte” by the well-armed English ships. The attack was so sudden that one witness reported his crew, already busy fishing, had no time to aid the Portuguese, but could only watch as Oughtred and Perrot took control of the vessels and threatened their crew with death. Two of the ships were stripped of their fish and valuables but the third was pressed into service, the whole English flotilla now moving north to a second harbour where they continued their predations. The Portuguese crew were left stranded, the entire season’s catch lost, their ships either abandoned or towed back to England as prizes. The 1582

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<sup>794</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches.* No.539, pp.45-46

<sup>795</sup> All the documents related to this incident, including the initial complaint by the Spanish crown and the testimonies of witnesses, are reproduced in: *ibid.* Pp.13-20.

incident can give some sense of the new threats that mariners at Terra Nova faced. Sudden strikes by pirates, confusing claims to legitimacy, the threat of violent death and abandonment, the seizure of ships and cargo.

Different communities of mariners responded to the problem by adopting survival techniques which had long been in use in northern European fisheries. In the 1580s-90s some Portuguese fishermen carried safe-conduct passports to protect them from English privateers.<sup>796</sup> Spanish Basque ships occasionally sailed in convoys to defend against predators. All these tactics raised costs and delayed voyages, adding more disruption to the fishery. In 1587, faced with increased violence at sea, the Spanish crown took the bold step of issuing a general warning to its fishermen who were preparing to sail for Terra Nova.<sup>797</sup> In the name of Phillip II, the text declared that any fishermen ought to travel in convoy and to carry as many weapons as possible for self-defense. The declaration further ordered authorities in Guipuzcoa to draft a list of all ships travelling to Terra Nova and the safety measures they had taken so that the crown could keep track of the condition of its fishermen. Traveling in groups was, as the text noted, not the normal practice but the threat of English and rochelais corsairs was such that more aggressive measures had to be taken to ensure the security of the fishing fleet. The 1587 decree is an early attempt by a European state to manage security on the fisheries by interfering in the organization of outbound vessels.

The rising tide of violence on the fishery after 1580 put pervasive pressure on fishing operations. The main problems were that violence increased the costs of fishing and encouraged unwelcome state oversight. As violence became endemic fishing vessels increasingly had to sail for Terra Nova well-armed, raising costs and the risk of a failed voyage. Ships now had to procure heavy cannon and small arms before crossing the Atlantic, expensive purchases that also required skilled mariners capable of handling the weapons. Purchasing and loading the weapons took time, and convoys might further delay outbound or returning voyages.<sup>798</sup> To recoup these losses, merchants pressed their crews to catch more fish and to bring it home

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<sup>796</sup> For an example see: *ibid.* Doc. 596. P.109.

<sup>797</sup> *Ibid.* Pp.114-115. Original Archivo General de la Provincia de Guipuzcoa, Tolosa, Sec II, no 12, legajo no 16.

<sup>798</sup> See for instance the account of the Dutch captain David de Vries in 1620, after this practice became the norm. Sailing from Hoorn in the Netherlands, he was forced to stop at Plymouth to take on expensive cannon before sailing to Terra Nova. Vries, *Korte Historiae Ende Journaels Aenteyckeninge Van Verscheyden Voyagiens in De Vier Deelen*

earlier in the season. When the risk to the fishery became too extreme monarchs, such as Philip II, might outright ban or regulate voyages. There was also the ever-present risk that a monarch might seize fishing ships and impress sailors in wartime, putting further pressure on merchants to ensure that their ships were safely away from port as long as possible. These different forms of competitive pressure exacerbated the already significance disruption to the fishery after 1580.

## 7.5 FAREWELL TO TERRA NOVA

As a consequence of the changes to structure in the fishery after the 1580s, a major shift took place in how Europeans thought about the northwest Atlantic. The increased competition between mariners for commercial gain began to devolve into competition between maritime communities. Groups which had once worked alongside one another, or even together, now began to separate. This was a process driven by English and Dutch mariners, who saw themselves as distinct from their competitors, but it soon spread to Normans, Bretons and others.<sup>799</sup> Competition between groups and the changing geo-strategic place of the fisheries in the wider Atlantic produced a realization that Newfoundland was no longer isolated. The result was a steady erosion of the ideas which had underpinned the sixteenth century: openness and common resources, the centrality of water, trans-communalism and the distinctive idea of Terra Nova.

Two extremely significant consequences of this change in behavior would slowly but steadily manifest themselves after the 1580s. The first was the increased importance of communal identity as a marker on the fishery. Such thinking was, as this study has stressed, at odds with conditions on the ground throughout much of the sixteenth century. But throughout the 1580s-90s distinct fisheries, defined by

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*Des Wereldts-Ronde, Als Europa, Africa, Asia Ende Amerika Gedaen Door D.D.P. De Vries ... Uitgegeven Door Dr. H.T. Colenbrander. Met Portret, 2 Kaarten En 18 Platen. P.24.*

<sup>799</sup> A partial discussion of this can be found in: Pope, "Transformation of the Maritime Cultural Landscape of Atlantic Canada by Migratory European Fishermen, 1500–1800." On communal identity in sixteenth century Europe see: Chapter Two of Hale, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance*.

community, emerged the northwest Atlantic.<sup>800</sup> There was the English Shore, the Breton-dominated north coast of Newfoundland island, the Basque *Gran Baya*. Norman fishermen began to concentrate on the Grand Bank, which was increasingly identified with this community throughout the seventeenth century. By and large this seems to have been a self-selective process rather than a conscious attempt by any one power to shape the fishery. By the turn of the seventeenth century it was no longer 'the fisheries,' it was 'our fisheries.'

This was bound to increased consideration in certain circles about how national fishing industries in Newfoundland might further larger mercantile and imperial goals. An important implication of this new way of thinking was that if the development of stronger national fisheries could improve a society's economy, then vice versa attacking a national fishing industry could harm one's foes.<sup>801</sup> It was the English, the latecomers and outsiders in Terra Nova, whose writers would articulate the most thorough conception. From the leading mariners of the West Country there were calls to more intensively fish the northwest Atlantic. This was the argument put forward by Robert Hitchcock and later by Whitbourne.<sup>802</sup> In increasing their share of production the West Country could be enriched but, just as importantly, England's competitors could be driven from the market. As fisheries became tools for mercantile growth they also became weapons of war. As has been noted above, this encouraged the rising rates of maritime violence which plagued the northwest Atlantic. Hakluyt, Gilbert, Frobisher, Drake, Raleigh and other notable figures all argued that Terra Nova could be targeted to further the goals of the crown- and that they should

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<sup>800</sup> This is the idea which underpins the work of Prowse and Innis on the early fishery. I am suggesting that this process took place only at the end of the sixteenth century, rather than being inherent to the fishery as a whole. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records with Numerous Illustrations and Maps*; Innis, *The Cod Fisheries; the History of an International Economy*.

<sup>801</sup> R. C. L. Sgroi, "Piscatorial Politics Revisited: The Language of Economic Debate and the Evolution of Fishing Policy in Elizabethan England," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 35, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>802</sup> From Innis. *The Cod Fisheries*. P.34. Citing: Robert Hitchcock. *A Politique Platt for the Honour of the Prince*. London, 1580.

be the ones to carry out such plans.<sup>803</sup> Such thought was predicated on reframing Terra Nova, not as an open space but as a discreet series of national fisheries that could be separated and targeted.

The second big shift in thinking was the increased importance of land to how Europeans thought about the northwest Atlantic. As distinct fisheries emerged they were often identified to particular parts of the coast, which in turn necessitated the control of the land. Newfoundland island itself now became an important part of the fishery, and mainland Canada increasingly appears in sources. Maps from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century increasingly show Newfoundland as a single island, and consistently put it at the center of the northwest Atlantic.<sup>804</sup> In 1591 the city council of Saint Malo began to make orders regarding operations at “*Canada et terreneuve*,” introducing the idea that the mainland of North America was now factoring into the fishery.<sup>805</sup> By 1613 the *Parlement de Normandie* was drafting a memorial touching upon trade with *Canada, lacadie et la Nouvelle France*- without mentioning Terra Nova at all.<sup>806</sup> With the new focus on land would be a turn back towards the dream of permanently settling the northwest Atlantic.

From the 1580s onward both the English and French crowns took new interest in Terra Nova as a potential site for permanent colonization. In part this formed one branch of a wider second wave of colonization in the sixteenth century Atlantic that was motivated by the spreading imperial conflicts and internal upheaval within Europe.<sup>807</sup> But it also reflected a more specific desire to control access to the fishery and to preserve parts of the coast for a particular community. The English would move first with a series of exploratory voyages which might later be used to justify settlement. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, Martin Frobisher and John Davis all sought to illuminate the darker corners of Terra Nova and assert an English

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<sup>803</sup> See Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660*; Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630*. See for instance a copy of Gilbert’s plan in Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches..* Doc. 540, p.36.

<sup>804</sup> See examples provided in Van Duzer and Beck, *Canada before Confederation : Maps at the Exhibition*.

<sup>805</sup> AM Saint-Malo. BB8. Fol.142.

<sup>806</sup> AD Seine-Maritime. 1B Parlement de Normandie. No. 830. 4 March, 1613.

<sup>807</sup> Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*; Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630*.

presence. The French crown would not dispatch a navigator to Terra Nova until the first decade of the seventeenth century, when Samuel de Champlain conducted a series of voyages in the region.<sup>808</sup> An enterprising Norman merchant, Etienne Bellanger, did however attempt to explore what is today the Maritimes and the Gulf of Maine.<sup>809</sup> In 1598 an attempt was made to settle a small group of Norman convicts on Sable Island.<sup>810</sup> The attempts by the French crown to explore and settle the northwest Atlantic were designed to take place independently of the ongoing fishery. Late-sixteenth century colonizers rarely drew upon the experience and knowledge of fishermen, and rarely tried to coordinate their settlements with existing fisheries. We might contrast Jacques Cartier, who had served on the fishery before his voyages, with his successors like Samuel de Champlain who had not. The plans developed by English adventurers, however far-fetched they might be at times, were crafted to work with ongoing fishing operations.

The colonization attempts of the late sixteenth century proved as ineffective as those by the Portuguese at the start of the century. Sable Island became a graveyard for the poor captives who were deposited on its sandy, barren shore.<sup>811</sup> The only permanent presence to survive the end of the sixteenth century was the obscure trading post at Tadoussac on the St. Lawrence River. In operation by the first decade of the seventeenth century, Tadoussac likely began functioning as a center of trade and fishing in the 1580s or 1590s.<sup>812</sup> Although the successive colonization attempts in the northwest Atlantic failed, this time European monarchies did not give up. Rather, tied to the increased exploitation of the fishery rich citizens of the kingdoms of France and England continued to agitate and plan for settlements. To do so at the end of the sixteenth century the first serious consideration of monopolies were floated by writers and

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<sup>808</sup> Fischer, *Champlain's Dream*.

<sup>809</sup> David B. Quinn, "The Voyage of Etienne Bellenger to the Maritimes in 1583: A New Document," *Canadian Historical Review* 43, no. 4 (1962).

<sup>810</sup> De Villiers and Hirtle, *Sable Island: The Strange Origins and Curious History of a Dune Adrift in the Atlantic*.

<sup>811</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches..* Doc. 388, p.310.

<sup>812</sup> Fischer, *Champlain's Dream*. There has yet to be written a monograph or article on the history of Tadoussac in the seventeenth century, and little archaeological work has been done. Its origins are largely unknown, but may have been connected to Basque whaling on the river.



state officials.<sup>813</sup> Monopoly companies were the most cost-effective way for monarchs to control the fisheries and to fund colonies. In England the Newfoundland Company, and in France the Compagnie de la Nouvelle France, were both formed around the turn of the seventeenth century.<sup>814</sup> They would, in the first decades of that century, establish successful colonies on Newfoundland island, at Québec and in Acadia. The difference between the failures of the early-sixteenth century settlers and those of the end would be that, after the 1590s, state actors did not abandon the idea but continued to invest in colonization schemes.

In the long-term, the potential for permanent settlements threatened to upend the functioning of Terra Nova as a whole. Settlements brought imperial claims and the prospect of violence and exclusion. By the early seventeenth century several states, now permanently invested in the northwest Atlantic, began to regulate the production and shipping of codfish. The result was that the 1580s marked the beginning of the end for the multinational transatlantic fisheries. The entire open, common fishery which had developed in the first decade of the sixteenth century was predicated on the absence of colonies. By the 1620s-30s aggressive conflict between English settlers on Newfoundland island and Breton, Norman and Basque fishermen was becoming common. Settlers would compete with migratory fishermen for the best fishing grounds, and would often violently disrupt fishing stages and seasonal outposts.<sup>815</sup> The rise of Canada and Acadia diverted investment away from the fishery and towards the fur trade, which only encouraged more settlements. After the late sixteenth century the fisheries were actively competing with a new colonial regime on the far north Atlantic.

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<sup>813</sup> Ann M Carlos and Stephen Nicholas, "'Giants of an Earlier Capitalism': The Chartered Trading Companies as Modern Multinationals," *Business history review* 62, no. 3 (1988); Steve RH Jones and Simon P Ville, "Efficient Transactors or Rent-Seeking Monopolists? The Rationale for Early Chartered Trading Companies," *The Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 4 (1996). In the English case see: Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630*; Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660*.

<sup>814</sup> *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660*; Thierry, *La France De Henri Iv En Amérique Du Nord: De La Création De L'acadie À La Fondation De Québec*.

<sup>815</sup> Pope, "Outport Economics: Culture and Agriculture in Later Seventeenth-Century Newfoundland."

In the end, the major changes in the 1580s did not just mark a break in how the fishery operated, but the idea at the center of the sixteenth century maritime experience: Terra Nova. The idea of Terra Nova was predicated on an open, multi-communal and water-centric fishery. It had lasted most of the sixteenth century as the main way in which mariners understood and interacted with the northwest Atlantic. But throughout the 1580s-90s communal identities hardened, settlements became a reality and a common resource was more intensively exploited by competing mariners. By the first decade of the 1600s new alternatives surfaced which could not be ignored: New France, Acadia, Newfoundland. Perhaps most importantly, the land and island spaces returned as a major locus of European activity in the northwest Atlantic. In refocusing the attention of merchants, settlers, states and some fishermen on land these changes undermined the core concept of Terra Nova, its aqueous nature. This process did not happen immediately, and most mariners continued to refer to Terra Nova into the seventeenth century, but after 1580 it is proper to refer to both Terra Nova and Newfoundland as distinct and competing ways of understanding space in the northwest Atlantic.

## 7.6 A DIVIDED FISHERY

In late March of 1592 the 60-ton ship *La Catherine*, from the small Saintonge port of La Tremblade, departed La Rochelle for Terra Nova.<sup>816</sup> Its master and pilot, Abraham Dulac, had just arranged for the provisioning of the vessel by several rochelais merchants. Three thousand pieces of biscuit for a dozen men had been loaded into the cargo hold, and according to the terms of the contract Dulac promised to return to La Rochelle after he had caught enough codfish to repay the investors. A marginal note alongside the contract suggests that the vessel returned in October of that year, and the debt was discharged in full. The contract for the Terra Nova-bound *Catherine*, carefully entered in the annual register by the notary Bion,

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<sup>816</sup> ADCM 3E 193 fol. 157. Notaire Bion.

was one of dozens of similar records made that season in La Rochelle and does not seem dissimilar to countless other voyages considered in this study.<sup>817</sup> But if the voyage of the *Catherine* in 1593 was not radically different from countless other voyages in the previous century, this is only the case through the perspective of the loan contract and the individual voyage, as the economic, political and maritime context in which masters like Abraham Dulac were operating had changed significantly by the 1590s. Saintonge mariners were now competing with those who carried *bacalao* to Spain and beyond: that same year 1592 the *Salomon* of London, which “came from New-found Lande laden with fishe,” could be found bringing its catch direct to Toulon.<sup>818</sup> And Dulac now faced the increasingly dire prospect that he and his crew might be attacked by pirates on the Grand Banks, by other fishermen on the beach, or by privateers as they sailed home. If the individual voyage and the way it was organized, operated and the experience of life and work on the fishery was not significantly different at the end of the century, then the wider patterns of commerce were changing around men like Abraham Dulac.

The *Catherine* and its master Dulac were representative of the deep divisions which emerged in the Terra Nova fishery during the 1580s. The new commercial orientation towards the export of saltcod was not adopted by all, or likely even most, of the fishermen who visited Terra Nova. Surviving notarial and legal evidence indicates that some mariners from Basque Country, Biscay and Brittany would join the English in pursuing new markets. Breton merchants were carrying cod to Marseilles in the 1580s, and French Basques sought to supply markets in northern Spain.<sup>819</sup> But there is abundant evidence from Biscayan and Norman sources that fishing operations, like that of the *Catherine*, continued along the older sixteenth century model. Most of the preserved codfish produced by Norman, Breton and Biscayan vessels was intended for local consumption in established fishing ports. The yearly rhythms of large fleets departing

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<sup>817</sup> Based on my own survey of the 1592 register by Bion there were eighteen records related to Terra Nova that spring. Another thirty were recorded in the 1592 register of the notaire Bibeard.

<sup>818</sup> Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches.* Pp. 116-117. Originally Henry Roberts. *News out of the Levane seas*. London, 1594. B3v.

<sup>819</sup> Gaston Rambert, *Histoire Du Commerce De Marseille* (Paris: Plon, 1966); Barkham, "French Basque" New Found Land" Entrepreneurs and the Import of Codfish and Whale Oil to Northern Spain, C. 1580 to C. 1620: The Case of Adam De Chibau, Burgess of Saint-Jean-De-Luz and" Sieur De St. Julien".

in late spring and returning in early autumn continued unabated. In 1583 an English observer in Rouen remarked that “20 sail of ships of 60 tons apiece are setting forth for Terra Nova for fish,” stressing that they carried “but ordinary provision of ordinance” despite the tempestuous conditions that the English had wrought.<sup>820</sup> That same year the *Archangel* was outfitted in Southampton for a voyage to Newfoundland back, its contract drawn up according to decades-old customs which wouldn’t have been out of place in the 1560s.<sup>821</sup> This took place at the same time when, and out of a port where, many West Country mariners were abandoning such a system to forge new markets to the south. There is thus enough evidence to indicate that the push for a triangular trade took place alongside and in competition with the established sixteenth century fishery.

The continued adherence to older fishing modes followed regional patterns. Whereas the West Country, Normandy and the ports of Saint Malo and La Rochelle moved towards a more cosmopolitan fishery, communities in Brittany, coastal Biscay and Basque Country adhered to older methods. In addition, the reliance on sixteenth century fishing patterns was important for many smaller ports, especially in Biscay and Brittany. St. Jean-de-Luz continued to operate as the pre-eminent fishing and whaling port in Basque Country, despite its small size, even as merchants from nearby Bayonne became important as middlemen in the Iberian codfish trade.<sup>822</sup> Whereas merchants from La Rochelle were increasingly turning towards the fur trade many local ports from Saintonge, the Ile de Ré and Olonne continued to use La Rochelle as a clearing house for their voyages. The regional divisions would contribute to the decline in the shared experience of work on the Newfoundland fishery which had defined the far north Atlantic for most of the sixteenth century.

The major consequences of this shift towards a divided fishery which took place in the 1580s would take some time to manifest themselves. Slowly a rift would emerge between an inshore, export-oriented

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<sup>820</sup> CSP. Elizabeth. Foreign. Vol. 18. July 1583-July 1583. Doc. 211 Edmund Stansfeilde to Stafford. Oct. 31, 1583.

<sup>821</sup> Quin. NAM. Vol IV. P.109. Doc. 597.

<sup>822</sup> Laborde and Turgeon, "Le Parc De L'aventure Basque En Amérique."; Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology."

fishery dominated by the English and Dutch and an offshore fishery dominated by the Normans and Bretons.<sup>823</sup> The idea of a commons, which underpinned the growth and development of Terra Nova, began to erode in the face of intense competition between regional groups. Eventually the new commercialized, closed fisheries which formed in the 1580s would become the dominant force in the seventeenth century. As Peter Pope has argued in his seminal *Fish into Wine*, the seventeenth century fishery was dominated by the triangle-trade system that bound Newfoundland to the Mediterranean and southern Iberia.<sup>824</sup> The export-oriented fishery would contribute to a renewed push for exploration, colonization and imperial control in the northwest Atlantic. The English in particular were highly successful at linking their growing West Country operations to the foundation of new permanent settlements. Promoters of settlement often argued that permanent colonies could aid the production of valuable codfish and could be used to control access to harbours in the increasingly competitive fishery. The growing fur trade out of Saint Malo and Rouen would encourage the French crown to grant monopoly charters to several major fur merchants. This in turn would prompt the foundation of settlements which eventually became Québec and Acadia. As will be explored in the following chapter, as these structural changes began to take shape there was a shift in how mariners and writers began to talk about the northwest Atlantic. National distinctions became more important, as did the idea of land over water. By the early seventeenth century, there was no longer Terra Nova, but Terra Nova and Newfoundland.

None of these transformations were clearly manifesting themselves in the 1580s, but the split in the northwest Atlantic fishery marks an endpoint for the sixteenth century fishery which has been the subject of this study. The changes which would cause a deep split in the economic and social structure of the fishery after 1580 challenged the core structures of the system which had emerged as early as 1508: open commons, cyclical seasonality, a close relation between financing and consumption. The causes of these changes are

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<sup>823</sup> For an example see: ADCM 3E202 notaire Bibear, fol51v. In April of 1590 the *Pucelle* of Dieppe in Normandy to fish for cod “*Sur le banc*”, an indication that Norman fishermen were now concentrating on the offshore, bank fishery.

<sup>824</sup> Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*.

similar to those which drove growth early in the sixteenth century, in particular the significance of warfare and violence, but their consequences were more dire. This chapter therefore represents a capstone to the attempt to reconstruct how the sixteenth century fishery was formed, developed and grew.

But it is also a way to at last answer with some certainty the question which has loomed over this study, that of how the Terra Nova fisheries fit into the wider Atlantic. As the previous chapters have argued, for much of the sixteenth century Terra Nova was both a major branch of Atlantic commerce and also fundamentally distinct in its organization and purpose from the wider Atlantic. Newfoundland was in many ways an extension of Europe, and rarely connected with other emerging maritime networks. In the 1580s, as this chapter has suggested, this changed. Codfish was increasingly carried to new parts of the Atlantic basin, including the south Iberian heart of European Atlantic commerce. By 1600 *bacalao* would be in the Caribbean, and within the decade colonies would appear at Newfoundland and Acadia. Most importantly, mariners at Terra Nova became caught up in wider transatlantic patterns of violence, interstate rivalries and even of climate change. The division of the transatlantic fisheries would ultimately pull a part of the fishery ever closer to the rest of the Atlantic world and its economy, while leaving part of it isolated. A final reason this study ends with the turn of the seventeenth century, then, is that after this date Newfoundland, if not Terra Nova, became bound to the wider history of the Atlantic world and its shared experiences.

## 8.0 CONCLUSIONS: THE VIEW FROM 1604

“On the 12<sup>th</sup> of May we entered into another port, five leagues from Cape la Héve, where we came upon a ship which was in the act of trading furs against the King’s laws. The captain’s name was Rossignol...”<sup>825</sup> So wrote Samuel de Champlain, the famed explorer and founder of Québec, who was charting the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia on behalf of his patron, the Sieur de Mons, when this interaction took place. De Mons had been granted a monopolistic privilege by King Henri IV over all trade in the St. Laurence valley and the coastline of what is now Maritime Canada, including much of what was once Terra Nova. Travelling southwest and entering a small harbour (now Liverpool, Nova Scotia), Champlain came upon a small ship, the *Levrette*, manned by a Norman crew and hailing from Le Havre at the mouth of the Seine River. The captain, a Jean de Rossignol, appeared to be conducting a spirited trade in furs with the local Amerindians. This was deemed by Champlain to be illegal under the terms and privileges accorded to de Mons by the French crown, a fact later confirmed by legal proceedings in France.<sup>826</sup> Rossignol and his ship were seized, the cargo added to de Mons’ assets.<sup>827</sup> To commemorate the incident and the successful prosecution of the Norman vessel, Champlain would later name the harbour *Port au Rossignol* (see Figure 21).

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<sup>825</sup> « *Le 12 de May nous entrasmes dans un autre port, à 5 lieues du cap de la Héve, où nous primes un vaisseau qui faisoit traite de peleterie contre les defences du Roy. Le chef s'appeloit Rossignol...* » Samuel de Champlain, « *Les Voyages du sieur de Champlain Xaintongeois, Capitaine ordinaire pour le Roy.* » édition 1613 in *Œuvres de Champlain : Tome III*. Ed. C.h. Laverdière. Laval : Université de Laval, 1870. Section 9/157. Accessed via Gutenberg Project.

<sup>826</sup> Charles Béard and Paul Béard eds., *Documents relative à la Marine Normande*. Rouen : 1906. p.102. Accessed via archive.org. October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1604: «...requérir et poursuivre l'adjudication et confiscation d'un navire (i), barque, agretz, apparaulx, munitions et marchandises estant dans icelluy navire que ledict sieur de Monts a prins à la coste de l'Acadie, icelluy navire appartenant ou sur lequel commandoit un appelé Rosignol, du Havre de Grâce.. »

<sup>827</sup> This incident is described in David Hackett Fischer, *Champlain’s Dream*. New York: Simon&Schuster, 2008. p. 162.



**Figure 23. Port au Rossignol on Champlain's 1607 map of New France.**

*Detail of Description des costs, pts., rades, illes de la Nouuele France faict selon son vray méridien,*  
Samuel de Champlain, 1607. World Digital Library.

In 1604 Champlain sailed into Port Rossignol with the expectation that he could enforce a legally granted royal monopoly charter to control the waters of the northwest Atlantic. In so doing he reflected a conception of the Atlantic experience which had dominated the European interaction with the basin from the fifteenth through the sixteenth centuries. Those he encountered, by contrast, presumed that maritime commerce in the northwest Atlantic would take place according to the open, commons-based patterns which had prevailed for nearly a century. Two visions of the Atlantic collided on the coast of Nova Scotia, and for the first time the new, imperial model would triumph.

That Champlain could impound and punish Rossignol for fishing in Terra Nova rests on a legal and geographical understanding of the northwest Atlantic which was unthinkable a few decades earlier. On the face of it the very idea that it would be wrong for the fishermen of the *Levrette* to trade with the Mi'kmaq must have seemed farcical to the bemused crew. For most of the sixteenth century, as this study has outlined,



men like Rossignol moved freely through the waters of what they understood to be Terra Nova, catching cod and trading with the indigenous population. There was no expectation that they might encounter an armed ship bearing royal authority or monopoly rights to the region, for colonial and commercial control of the fishery was outside the interests of any European state. Only in the wake of the major changes which took place after the 1580s was such an encounter possible. The case of Champlain and Rossignol is therefore a convenient and instructive place to end this study.

What this study has suggested is that by and large modern historians have hewed to the viewpoint of Champlain and de Mons, rather than captain Rossignol. Despite centuries of efforts to balkanize the study of the Newfoundland fisheries into nationalist slices, it is possible to reconstruct the overall story of how the fishery was formed, grew and matured. In so doing this study has repeatedly observed a number of short- and medium-term fluctuations in the tempo, scale and structure of fishing operations. Recovering the story of the fishermen-mariners who actually built and shaped Terra Nova is difficult, but his study suggests it can be done.

Looking back from 1604 to the previous century of European experience in the northwest Atlantic, several broad trends should be observed. The sixteenth century fishery was something distinct which formed around 1505 and lasted until the 1580s. The creation of the fishery was a process contingent on several changes: the failure of attempts to replicate south Atlantic models of colonization, rising demand for fish across Europe, the advent of repeated conflict on the European coast, and the development of a new conception of space which created Terra Nova. At its mid-century peak there is reason to believe it was one of the largest concentration of European maritime resources on the Atlantic Ocean.

This study has tried to suggest several ways in which fishermen at Terra Nova diverged from practices emerging elsewhere in the European Atlantic and instead remained bound to a late medieval, European socio-economic model. Newfoundland itself emerged as a site of fishing only in the context of a more general push for offshore fisheries at Iceland, the North Sea, Irish Sea, Morocco and North Africa. For mariners Terra Nova was defined by its ecological and climatological similarities to Europe, and the ease

by which their techniques from home could be transferred across the sea. Fishing voyages were governed by concepts of financing, labour recruitment, payment and consumption which were deeply embedded in late medieval western European communities. Even at its height from 1540-1580 mariners resisted directly integrating fishing operations with trade to the Caribbean, Atlantic islands or Mediterranean. When this did take place, after 1580, it produced a divided fishery rather than a wholesale transformation.

To return to a question first posed in Chapter One, what does it mean that the Terra Nova fisheries were both a major branch of transatlantic commerce and distinct from the Atlantic experience? The previous chapters have showed why and how this paradox originated and evolved, and in so doing has pointed to the variation and complexity of European experience in the sixteenth century Atlantic. Three main points can be derived from the prior discussion.

First, this study suggests that the Atlantic experience of the sixteenth century was not universal nor necessary. Basic patterns which marked how Europeans interacted with the Atlantic basin in the sixteenth century, and which have attracted the bulk of recent scholarly attention, had no place in the northwest Atlantic. The processes of slavery, colonial settlement, mass (and mono-directional) migration, ecological transformation and others which have been staples of the literature for decades are hard to find in the story of fishermen at Newfoundland. It was possible for European mariners to conduct maritime commerce on the Atlantic Ocean on a vast and sustainable scale without engaging with changes taking place elsewhere in the Atlantic basin. The simple financial tools and medieval systems of share-payments and localized recruitment which defined the sixteenth century fishery proved to be durable, scalable and well suited to the seasonal exploitation of the northwest Atlantic. Future work on the Atlantic in the sixteenth century, in particular surveys, need to pay attention to these varied experiences and divergent origins of the later Atlantic economy.

Second, even if the Newfoundland fisheries were an extension of the European economy rather than a new Atlantic phenomenon they should not be excluded from the history of the Atlantic world. As the previous chapters have tried to prove, when we carefully reconstruct and contextualize the history of the

Newfoundland fishery in the sixteenth century it becomes clear that until the 1580s they should best be understood as an extension of the late medieval European economy. Yet that framework itself only makes sense if put in dialogue with the parallel rise of an Atlantic experience in the Americas, Atlantic islands and West Africa. The rise of Terra Nova was predicted on rejecting alternatives: the failure to replicate Madeira in the north, the turn away from economic integration, the turn away from commercial capitalism, the retention on medieval labour organization. By and large these rejections can only be understood by examining how the alternatives were embraced elsewhere in the sixteenth century Atlantic. And the reverse is true, for the experience at Newfoundland suggests that the adoption of new systems of labour, commercial production, creolization, ecological exchange and the like in the sixteenth century Atlantic must have been more contingent than we assume. If the Terra Nova fisheries were outside the Atlantic, they cannot be understood without the Atlantic experience.

Finally, studying places like Newfoundland requires us to rethink what is important in the sixteenth century. If the northwest Atlantic fisheries were often different and isolated, this study has repeatedly suggested they were not therefore inconsequential. Despite the ways in which historians of the Atlantic have consigned Newfoundland to the margins of their story, it was at the center of mercantile activity for thousands of mariners and merchants across Europe in the sixteenth century. The creation of a fishery in around Newfoundland generated new ideas about space, the environment and the relationship between land and sea which pervaded mariners' thought in the sixteenth century. In the 1520s and 1540s fish from Terra Nova fed starving urban dwellers in Normandy, and in the 1560s Basque communities came to depend on the fishery for their livelihood. As this study has suggested, if Newfoundland did not generate the riches of other Atlantic experiences it did play a vital role in promoting economic stability and food security in sixteenth century Europe.

But more so, the case of the Newfoundland fisheries asks us to consider what sources and perspectives are important. The scale and influence of Newfoundland is only recognizable if we eschew both the nationalist framework for the northwest Atlantic and the continuing emphasis on land, colonization

and empire. The history of the fishery requires us to focus on the maritime world of Europeans in the sixteenth century, to look to the waters of the northwest Atlantic rather than Newfoundland, Cape Breton and Québec. It means going into the small ports of Jumièges, Saint Jean-de-Luz and Pontevedra rather than the royal halls of Paris or London. When we try and resurrect the perspective of mariners and the communities from which they originated a much more satisfying and instructional image of the sixteenth century emerges. In the end, we do not know exactly what Rossignol had to say about his detention and persecution by Champlain and de Mons in 1604. But we might be sure that his protests reflected the experiences of the thousands of mariners who had come before him, and whose efforts had created Terra Nova and with it one of the most prosperous maritime spaces in the sixteenth century.

## 9.0 APPENDIX A: TABLES

**TABLE A1: TERMS USED TO DESCRIBE NEWFOUNDLAND IN EARLY RECORDS**

Columns denote years in which a document used a particular term for the northwest Atlantic. The first column marks documents which refer to the region as either New-found-islands or just Islands. The second is for the phrase New-found-land(s). The third is for a variation on the phrase Terra Nova. The fourth is for the label

*Bacalao(s)*.

Note the predominance of Island-based descriptors in most of the early documents, and the rapid spread of Terra Nova after 1506. The phrase New-found-land(s) appears only inconsistently after 1498 and almost entirely in metropolitan England.

<u>Place</u>	<u>“Islands” Year</u>	<u>“NFL” Year</u>	<u>“Terra Nova” Year</u>	<u>“Bacalao” Year</u>	<u>Term Used</u>	<u>Document</u>	<u>Map</u>
London	1497				"the new Isle"	Reward for finding the new isle, Daybook of the Treasurer of the Chamber	
Venice	1497				"ixole nove"	Letter from Pasqualigo in London to Venice	
Milan	1497				"insule nove"	Letter from Soncino to Milan	
Milan	1497				"isole incognite"	Letter from Soncino to Milan	
London	1498	1498			"the londe and Isles of late founde"	Second Letters Patent to Zuan Caboto	
Spain	1498				"ciertas insulas o tierra firme"	Letter Pedro de Ayala to Ferdinand and Isabella	
London	1498				"the new Iland"/Isle"	Payments toward the expedition to the new island, Daybook of the Treasurer of the Chamber	
Lisbon	1500				"algumas Ilhas e terra firme"	Letters Patent to Corte Real	
Lisbon		1500			"da terra anunciada"	Grant King Emmanuel to John Martin	
London	1501				"Thisle"	Payment to Bristol men returned	
Lisbon			1502		"terra nova"	Confirmation of lands discovered by Corte-Real	
London		1502			"the New Found Land"	Pensions for F. Fernandes and Joao Gonsalves	
London		1502			"the newe founde launde"	Payment to Bristol men returned, Exchequer	
London	1502				"the Newe Found Ile land"	Report of men brought from the new found isle, Great Chronicle of London	
London		1503			"the newe founde lande"	Pension granted to F. Fernandez and J. Gonsalves	
Opporto			1506		"da Terra Nova"	Dispute on tax on pesca da Terra Nova	
Cologne?			1507-8		"Terra Nova"		Ruysch Map

Rouen		1508	"la terre neufve"	Dispute La Bonnaventure"	
London	1509		"seche an Iland"	An anonymous account of Caboto's voyage	
Burgps		1511	"Tierra Nueva"/"Tierra Nova"	Warrant to hire Juan de Agramonte	
Burgos		1511	"una tierra que se llama Terranova"	Letters Patent to Agramonte	
Genoa		1511	"Terra de pescaria"		Maggiolo Map
London	1512		"the newe founde Ilande"	Hyckescorner, imaginary voyage narrative	
Seville		1512	"Isla de los Bacallaos"	Sebastian Caboto consulted in Spain	
Rouen		1512	"Terre-Neuve"	Eusebius of Casarea, record of Amerindians in Rouen	
Nantes		1513	"la Terre-Neusfve"	Case <i>La Jacquette</i>	
Scotland	1513		"the new fund Yle"	"Of the Waraldis Instabilitie" Scottish poem	
Beauport		1514	"La Terre-Neuffve"	Monks at Brehat	
London		1517	"the newe fonde londe"	"The Ship of Fools" satirical tract	
London		1517	"the newe found land"	Letter about Rastel 1517 voyage	
Pontevedra		1517	"tierra nueva"	Contract for mariner going to the fishery	
Munich		1519	"Bacalnaos"		Anonymo us map
London		1519	"the New Found Land"	Rastell court case about failed voyage	
London		1519	"westward be found new landes"	Rastell's Interlude of the Four Elements	
Bayonne		1520	"Terre Nabe"	Gagé Bayonne	
Bayonne		1521	"Terre Nabe"	Gagé Bayonne	
Lisbon	1521		"Ilhas e terras"	Letters Patent to Fagundez	
Bayonne		1521	"Terre Nabe"	Gagé Bayonne	
London		1521	"the new fownd lande"	London Drapers expedition to NFL	
London	1521		"the new fownd Isle landes"	Letter about return fishing fleet	
London	1521		"the new fownd Isle-land"	Letter about return fishing fleet	
La Rochelle		1523	"la Terre Neufve"	Outfitting LR ship a TN	

**TABLE A2: LIST OF KNOWN EXPLORATORY VOYAGES TO TERRA NOVA, 1497-1550<sup>828</sup>**

Year	Navigator/Explorer	Port of Departure	Royal Sponsor	Merchant Backers	Result
1497	Zuan Caboto	Bristol	K. of England	Bristol merchants	Discovery “New Founde Land”
1499	Zuan Caboto	Bristol	K. of England	Bristol merchants	Outcome unknown <sup>829</sup>
1500	Gaspar Corte Real	Azores	K. of Portugal		Exploration TN
1501	Gaspar Corte Real	Azores	K. of Portugal		Explores TN, Gaspar lost at sea
1501/2	Joao Fernandez	Bristol		Bristol-Azoreans	Discovery Labrador
1502	Miguel Corte Real	Azores	K. of Portugal		Lost at sea
1502/3		Bristol	K. of England	Bristol-Azoreans	Explores TN
1504		Bristol	K. of England	Bristol-Azoreans	
1505		Bristol	K. of England	Bristol-Azoreans	
1508/9	Jean Denys	Dieppe		Jean Ango	
1508?	Sebastian Cabot	Bristol?	K. of England		Possible exploration of NW passage
1511	Juan de Agromonte		K. of Aragon		Planned voyage to TN, unknown if carried out
1520?	Joao Fagundez	Viana	K. of Portugal	Viana merchants	Exploration around Cape Breton
1524-5	Estavan Gomez	A Coruña	K. of Castile		Explores northern New England, possibly Acadia

<sup>828</sup> The information in this table is compiled from: Samuel Elliot Morrison. *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages*. Oxford University Press: New York, 1971; Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume I: America from Concept to Discovery. Early Exploration of North America*. ...; Biggar. *Precursors to Jacques Cartier*.; Pope. *The Many Landfalls of John Cabot*.; *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*. And in general the work of the Cabot Project at University of Bristol.

<sup>829</sup> Our knowledge about Zuan Caboto’s expedition of 1499-1500 is currently in a state of flux. It was previously believed that Caboto and his ships were lost at sea after reaching Terra Nova. New research by the late Alwyn Ruddock suggests that Caboto may have survived the voyage, and may have explored the northeast coast of North America extensively. Unfortunately, after her death Ruddock ordered that all her research be destroyed, setting back the study of Caboto by several decades. The John Cabot Project at the University of Bristol is currently evaluating and trying to reconstruct Ruddock’s work. Within a few years we may in fact know much more about the 1499 voyage that we have in the past several centuries, but at the moment we can only speculate. For a summary of this problem, see: Evan T. Jones. “Alwyn Ruddock: ‘John Cabot and the Discovery of America.’” *Historical Research*. Vol. 81, no.212. May, 2008.

1527-8	John Rut	London	K. of England		Exploration TN
1534	Jacques Cartier	St. Malo	K. of France		Exploration TN, Canada
1535-6	Jacques Cartier	St. Malo	K. of France		Exploration TN, Canada
1541-2	Jacques Cartier	St. Malo	K. of France		Exploration TN, Canada



**TABLE A3: LIST OF KNOWN FISHING VOYAGES TO TERRA NOVA, 1500-1540**

<b>Date (y.m.d)</b>	<b>Port (departure)</b>	<b>Ship Name</b>	<b>Size (tons burthen)</b>	<b>Port (Origin)</b>
1508.10.21		<i>La Bonnaventure</i>		Ile de Bréhat
1510.1.?	Quillebeouf	<i>La Jacquette</i>		Dahouet
1517.9.27	Bordeaux	<i>La Marie</i>		Le Croisic
1517.?	Pontevedra			Pontevedra
1520.2.18	Bayonne	<i>Le Senct Pe</i>		
1520.?	Rouen			Fécamp
1521.3.6	Bayonne			
1521.3.31	Bayonne	<i>Le Marie</i>		
1523.8.21	La Rochelle	<i>La Marie</i>		Croisic
1523.9.15	La Rochelle	<i>La Catherine</i>		Benic
1523.9.15	La Rochelle	<i>La Marguerite</i>		Pornic
1523.10.15	La Rochelle	<i>La Margaritte</i>		Blavet
1523.10.22	La Rochelle	<i>La Marguerite</i>		Saint Brieuç
1524.1.?	Rouen			Rouen
1526.1.23	Rouen	<i>La Francoyse</i>	50	
1526.1.23	Rouen	<i>La Katherine</i>	45	
1526.2.20	Rouen	<i>Le Gabriel</i>	60	Rouen
1526.3.22	Pontevedra			Pontevedra
1526.11.21	Pontevedra	<i>Bon Jhesus</i>		Pontevedra
1527.2.6	Bayonne			Bayonne
1527.3.16	Bordeaux	<i>La Marie</i>		St. Jean-de-Luz
1527.?	Rouen	<i>L'estendu</i>		Vatteville
1527.?	Bordeaux	<i>La Trinité</i>		Bayonne
1527.3.5	Rouen	<i>La Jacquette</i>	80	Vatteville
1527.?	Rouen	<i>La Salamandre</i>	80	Fécamp
1529.9.21	Rouen	<i>La Marie</i>		Jumièges
1530.3.22	Bordeaux	<i>La Catherine</i>		Urtubie
1530.?	Bordeaux	<i>Le Jacques</i>		Bordeaux
1530.?	Bordeaux	<i>La Catherine</i>	70	St. Jean-de-Luz
1531.10.25	Rouen	<i>La Petite Rouenne</i>	70	Rouen
1531.12.2		<i>La Barbara</i>		St. Brieuç
1532.1.13	Rouen	<i>La Jeannette</i>	120	Agon
1532.?	Port-Bail			
1533.12.?	La Rochelle	<i>Le Xristofle</i>		Ploumanach
1534.3.9		<i>San Nicolas</i>		Orio

1534.?	La Rochelle			La Rochelle
1535.2.19	La Rochelle	<i>Marguerite- Antoinette</i>		La Rochelle
1535.4.14	La Rochelle	<i>Christophe</i>	70	La Rochelle
1536.3.10	Rouen	<i>Jacques</i>	65	Caumont
1536.1.24	La Rochelle	<i>L'Esprit</i>	70	La Rochelle
1536.10.11	San Sebastian	<i>San Pyerre</i>		
1537.2.22	La Rochelle	<i>La Marguerite</i>		La Rochelle
1537.4.17	La Rochelle	<i>L'Esprit</i>		La Rochelle
1537.4.18	La Rochelle	<i>Le Christophe</i>		La Rochelle
1537.?	La Rochelle	<i>La Marie</i>	70	La Rochelle
1537.?	La Rochelle	<i>La Marie</i>		St. Jean-de-Luz
1537.?	La Rochelle	<i>La Baptiste</i>	120	St. Jean-de-Luz
1537.?	La Rochelle	<i>La Marie</i>		Ascaing (Labourd)
1537.?	La Rochelle	<i>La Marie</i>		Bayonne
1538.?	La Rochelle	<i>La Louise</i>		La Rochelle
1538.?	La Rochelle	<i>La Catherine</i>		St. Jean-de-Luz
1538.?	La Rochelle	<i>La Marie</i>		Bayonne
1539.?	La Rochelle	<i>L'Esprit</i>		La Rochelle
1539.?	La Rochelle	<i>Le Nicolas</i>		La Rochelle
1539.?	La Rochelle	<i>La Catherine</i>		St. Jean-de-Luz
1539.?	Bordeaux	<i>La Seraine</i>		Bourg

**TABLE A4: NUMBER SHIPS BY PORT AND REGION DEPARTING FOR TERRA NOVA,  
1520-1540**

Region	Port	Number Ships	Total
Brittany	Croisic	2	8
	St Brieuc	2	
	Benic	1	
	Pornic	1	
	Plusmanach	1	
	Blavet	1	
Normandy	Rouen	5	12
	Fécamp	2	
	Vatteville	1	
	Caumont	1	
	Agon	1	
	Jumièges	1	
	Port-Bail	1	
	Biscay	La Rochelle	
	Bordeaux	1	
	Bourg	1	
Basque Country	Bayonne	7	17
	St Jean-de-Luz	6	
	Urtubie	1	
	Orio	1	
	Ascaing	1	
	San Sebastian	1	

**TABLE A5: WARS INVOLVING NAVAL COMBAT ON ATLANTIC LITTORAL, 1508-1560**

<b>Start</b>	<b>End</b>	<b>Habsburg</b>	<b>Valois</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Scottish</b>	<b>Name</b>
1508	1516	x	x			War of the League of Cambrai
1512	1514		x	x	x	Anglo-French War
1521	1525	x	x			Habsburg-Valois War
1522	1526		x	x	x	Anglo-French War
1528	1529	x	x			War of the League of Cognac
1536	1538	x	x			Habsburg-Valois War
1542	1544	x	x			Habsburg-Valois War
1542	1546		x	x	x	Anglo-French War
1549	1550		x	x		Anglo-French War
1551	1556	x	X			Habsburg-Valois War
1557	1559	x	x			Habsburg-Valois War
1557	1559		x	x	x	Anglo-French War

**TABLE A6: SHIPS DEPARTING FOR TERRA NOVA AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL  
NUMBER OF SHIPS OUTFITTED IN LA ROCHELLE, 1540-1558.**

*From Trocme and Delafosse, Le Commerce Rochelais, Table V, p.70*

Year	Total Number of Ships	Number Terra Nova	Number Elsewhere	Percentage Terra Nova
1540	21	1	20	5%
1541	30	13	17	43%
1542	18	4	14	22%
1543	14	7	7	50%
1544	9	2	5	22%
1547	23	7	16	30%
1548	10	3	7	30%
1549	2	2	0	100%
1550	16	3	13	19%
1553	8	3	5	38%
1555	24	3	21	13%
1556	30	8	22	26%
1557	18	11	7	61%
1558	5	4	1	80%
1540-1558	228	71	157	31%

*Note: The category 'Elsewhere' encompasses Zeeland, Northern France, British Isles, Spain, Portugal, Africa, America, Privateering, the Mediterranean and the Baltic.*

**TABLE A7: LOANS RELATED TO TERRA NOVA FISHERY 1565-1567, LA ROCHELLE.**

**LISTED BY CREDITOR.**

Notes: Where personal names are obscured or damaged they have been replaced by “?”. Where place names, loan amount or interest rates are obscured or damaged they have been left blank. “Date discharged” indicates presence of marginal notation relating to discharge of loan.

<b>Name of Creditor</b>	<b>Name of Debtor</b>	<b>Origin of Debtor</b>	<b>Date of Contract</b>	<b>Amount of Loan in livres tournois</b>	<b>Rate of interest in livres tournois p.c. = pour cent</b>	<b>Date repaid</b>	<b>Source</b>
<b>1565</b>	<b>1565</b>	<b>1565</b>	<b>1565</b>	<b>1565</b>	<b>1565</b>	<b>1565</b>	<b>1565</b>
Sr. Jehan Maginault	Guillaume Ayrault	Chateau d'Olleron	28. March	50 l.t.			ADCM 3E149 fol.3v
	Johanne de Gaberne	St. Jehan-de-Luz	28. March	200 l.t.	55 l.t.	April 1566	ADCM 3E149 fol.7
Sr. Jehan Charron	Martin de Chevery, Margeun Darache	St. Jehan-de-Luz	28. March	150 l.t.	25 l.t. p.c.	Settled	ADCM 3E149 fol.3v
	Seusin Dechalla	Biarritz	28. March	150 l.t.	25 l.t. p.c.	1 April 1566	ADCM 3E149 fol.9
Sr. Jehan Collin	Guillaume Guyton		28. March	50 l.t.		18 Oct. 1565	ADCM 3E149 fol.6
Me Jehan deSmenatin?	Estienne Dartague	Ascain	28. March	200 l.t.	50 l.t.	17 March 1566	ADCM 3E149 fol.6
Sr. Estienne Demay	Jehan Godeffin	St. Vallery en Caux	28. March	?			ADCM 3E149 fol.6v
Sr. Pierre Cousseau	Sausin Dechalla	Biarritz	28. March	100 l.t.	25 l.t. p.c.	28 March 1566	ADCM 3E149 fol.6v
Hon.Fem.Francoise Chemeur	Johanne de Gaberne	St. Jehan-de-Luz	28. March	100 l.t.	30 l.t.	1 Feb. 1566	ADCM 3E149 fol.7
Sr. Michel Gasquit/Gasquet	I. deMaron	Biarritz	28. March	100 l.t.	25 l.t.	2 Aug. 1565	ADCM 3E149 fol.7
	Jehan Damasquette	Ciboure	30. March	100 l.t.	25 l.t.		ADCM 3E176 fol.17

Sr. Francois Jaccary	Estienne Dartague	Cibour e	28. March	100 l.t.	25 l.t.		ADCM 3E149 fol.10
Hon. Fem. And? Morisson	Samady de Sarrotte	St. Jehan-de-Luz	26. March	50 l.t.	12.5 l.t.	2 April 1566	ADCM 3E176 fol. 3
Guillaume Serpin	Jehan Juillon	Olonne	3. April	40 l.t.	25 l.t. p.c.	2 Oct. 1565	ADCM 3E176 fol.21
Me Pierre Legrand	Robert Sambyn	Fecamp	20. April	60 l.t.	15 l.t.		ADCM 3E176 fol. 48
Francois Beizel	Robert Sambyn	Fecamp	20. April	46 l.t.			ADCM 3E176 fol.48v
<b>1566</b>	<b>1566</b>	<b>1566</b>	<b>1566</b>	<b>1566</b>	<b>1566</b>	<b>1566</b>	<b>1566</b>
Jehan Jehdeux	Martin de la Randoutte	Bayonne	April	100l.t. 10s.			ADCM 3E145 (1) fol.40v
	Pollan Dartegun	St. Jehan de Luz	13. April	490 l.t.			ADCM 3E145(1) fol.74
Du Vaulx (Pair)	Pierre Dapregesegny	Cibourre?	April	100 l.t.	25 l.t.		ADCM 3E145(1) Fol.38v
Denis Despellette (Sr, h.h.)	L. de Bergarre dict Buffon			25 l.t.			ADCM 3E145(1) fol.20
	Pierre Dapregesegny			50 l.t.	22l.t. 10s. P.c.		ADCM 3E145(1) fol.75
	Johanne Delsauldy	St. Jehan de Luz	18. April	100 l.t.			ADCM 3E145(1) Fol.89
	Sr. Martin Darguibert	St. Jehan de Luz	18. April	100 l.t.	20%		ADCM 3E145(1) fol90
	Marin de Socsarme	Spain	30. April	250 l.t.	60l.t.??		ADCM 3E145(1) fol.122
? Tortelys	L. de Bergarre, ? Stemen,	St. Vincen t?	2. March	150 l.t.			ADCM 3E145 (1) fol.132
? Baranelle, Sr. Samuel? Georges	Martin Dargubert	St. ?	April	300 l.t.	20%		ADCM 3E145(1) fol.67v
?Gibert (pair)	L. deGaberie	St. Jehan de Luz	April	300 l.t.	22l.t.10s. P.c.		ADCM 3E145(1) Fol.68v
Sr. Jehan dela Place	Sr. Auberys le Royer	La Rochelle	13. April	200 l.t.	20 l.t. p.c.		ADCM 3E145(1) fol.77

Sr. R. du Jau	Pierre Royer, Jehan Lucas	Honfle ur	16. April	50 l.t.	22l.t. 10s. P.c.		ADCM 3E145(1) fol. 85
Sr. ? Dromin?	Sr. Guillaume Mener, ? de Bertegne	Blavet	April	200 l.t.	45 l.t.		ADCM 3E145(1) fol.91
	Martin de la Randoutte	Bayonn e	16. April	300 l.t.			ADCM 3E165 fol. 81v
Le Royer	Jehan Lesuring	Binic	17. April				ADCM 3E165 fol. 82
Mathieu Diffanel	Martin de la Randoutte	Biarritz	17. April	55 l.t.	11 l.t.		ADCM 3E165 fol.83
Mathieu Diffanel	Martin desiard	Biarritz	20. April	120 l.t.			ADCM 3E165 fol.87
Francois Esenrier	Aubers Le Royer	La Rochell e	22. April	100 l.t.		29 Nov, 1566	ADCM 3E165 fol.92
<b>1567</b>	<b>1567</b>	<b>1567</b>	<b>1567</b>	<b>1567</b>	<b>1567</b>	<b>1567</b>	
Clement Huer	Johannes de Gallerre	Cibour e	3. March	100 l.t.	22 l.t. 10s.	ADCM 3E1 145 (2)	
Sr. Jehan Gysard	Nycollas Sebien	Tallem ent	3. March	100 l.t.	20 l.t.		ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
Yves Terterly	Johannes de Gallerre	Cibour e	4. March	300 l.t.	60 l.t.		ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
	Estienne Dartague		4. March	400 l.t.	20 l.t.p.c.		ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
	Jehan de Puissolle	Capbre ton	4. March	150 l.t.	30 l.t.		ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
	Estienne ?	Capbre ton	5. March	150 l.t.	22 l.t.p.c		ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
	Jehan ?		5.Mar ch	150 l.t.	22.l.t.p.c.	Septem ber	ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
	Pierre Destibot	Biarritz	7. March	100 l.t.	20l.t.	12 Sept.	ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
	Jehans Deberrumette	Cibour e	March	100 l.t.	25l.t.		ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
Yves Terterly et Noble Homme	J? de Saint Esteban		9. March	200l.t.	20l.t.	29 Sept. 1567	ADCM 3E1 145 (2)



Authine Mage							
Yves Terterly et sa femme Marie Charron	Michel de Jeustis	Fontarrabie (Spain)	7. March	60 l.t.			ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
Yves Terterly and Guillaume Terterly son fils	Jehan Deberrumette	St. Jehan-de-Luz	6. March	100 l.t.	25 l.t.		ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
Pair XXX du Vaulx	Jehans de Terbald	St. Jehan de Luz	4. March	200 l.t.			ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
Sr. Guillaume Raffinet	Estienne Deh?		4. March	100 l.t.	20l.t.		ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
Sr. ? Gembarts	Jehan Dubers	Capbreton	4. March	500 l.t.	20l.t.p.c.		ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
Sr. ? Gibert	Jehan Dubers	Capbreton	4. March	400 l.t.	20 l.t.p.c.	28 Aug. 1567	ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
Jehan Marguelle and Aubert Gibert	Jehan Dubers	Capbreton	4. March	1350 l.t.			ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
Pierre de Jaren	? Dechargeron		6. March	150l.t.	30 l.t.		ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
Jehan Nicollas	Jehan Delessard	Hendaye	10. March	600 l.t.			ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
	Pierre Sallon		March	60l.t.		13. Sept, 1567	ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
Pierre Du Jau	Johannes de Gabery	Ciboure	27. Feb	400 l.t.	85 l.t.		ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
	Sr. Pierre de Boucal	Ciboure	27. Feb.	400 l.t.	20 l.t. p.c.	28. Oct. 1567	ADCM 3E1 145 (2)
Jehan Jeusaneux	Martin dela Ramerch	Biarritz	27. Feb	100 l.t.	25 l.t.	Octobe r	ADCM 3E1 145 (2)

## 10.0 APPENDIX B: ESTIMATES OF NEWFOUNDLAND FISHING FLEET

Although we lack the data to determine the precise scale of the Newfoundland fishery, it is possible for modern historians to estimate its size in the middle of the sixteenth century. There are three main sources: ship-counts provided by sixteenth century observers; notarial records such as loan and provisioning contracts; and randomly surviving records such as legal disputes, correspondence and port records. Together these provide raw information which account for a portion, but not all, of the ships which traveled to Terra Nova and back in the sixteenth century.

Contemporary accounts of the sixteenth century fishery do exist, and can tell us something about how Europeans understood the scale of the fishery, and they are remarkably consistent. Both Anthony Parkhurst and Robert Hitchcock made estimates of the fishery based on observations at the end of the 1570s, and each suggested several hundred fishing vessels.<sup>830</sup> The French writer André Thevet estimated that around 300 ships sailed to Terra Nova on average.<sup>831</sup> Humphrey Gilbert presumed that the fishery in the 1570s must have comprised more than 6,000 mariners, which (assuming a crew size of 30 per vessel) would mean 200 ships.<sup>832</sup> That their estimates are so consistent suggests that it was common knowledge that several hundred ships served the Terra Nova fisheries each summer.

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<sup>830</sup> Parkhurst: Quinn, Quinn, and Hillier, *Volume 4: Newfoundland from Fishery to Colony. Northwest Passage Searches.* Pp.7-10. A transcript of Robert Hitchcock's 1580 work "A *politique platt for the honour of the Prince* can be found at [http://tei.it.ox.ac.uk/tcp/Texts-HTML/free/A03/A03408.html#index.xml-body.1\\_div.1\\_div.2](http://tei.it.ox.ac.uk/tcp/Texts-HTML/free/A03/A03408.html#index.xml-body.1_div.1_div.2)

<sup>831</sup> The ship count for the fishery is found in Thevet's last work, *Le Grand Insulaire et pilotage d'André Thevet.* Unpublished by his death, the text is dated to 1586. It nonetheless seems to be a series of revisions of earlier writings and observations he made about the northwest Atlantic. The ship count likely represents information he gathered from mariners in the 1550s-70s, and writing he gathered in the late 1570s rather than the 1580s. See: Schlesinger and Stabler, *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View.* Pp.xix-xxvi.

<sup>832</sup> Gilbert and Quinn, *The Voyages and Colonialising Enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert.*

**TABLE B1: SHIP COUNTS OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY TERRA NOVA FISHERY**

Year	Source	Count
1519	John Rastell	100 “French” Ships
1527	John Rut	50 ships in Terra Nova
1542	English observer	60-80 ships from ‘France’
1577	Sir Humphrey Gilbert	At least 200 ships
1578	Anthony Parkhurst	350-380 ships total
1580	Robert Hitchcock	500 “French” ships
1586?	André Thevet	300 ships total

The most consistent source of data on the Newfoundland fisheries are the loan contracts, collected in notarial registries across coastal Europe, which give details on individual voyages. These are documents which largely predict voyages, but many also include marginal notes which indicate successful voyages. These can be combined with the judicial, port and literary records to give us hard ship counts. For the year 1549, for instance, notarial records attest to 102 individual ships leaving the three ports of Rouen, La Rochelle and Bordeaux. In 1559 it is 151 ships for which we have direct attestations. This study, following earlier historians of the fishery, uses these notarial numbers to evaluate the size of the fishery.

These sources cannot account for all fishing ships which went to Newfoundland, and in particular there are two large groups for which we lack evidence. The first are ships which were outfitted in regions for which records have not survived. This includes places like northern Brittany, French Basque Country, the West Country, much of Portugal and Lower Normandy. In all these places records are either sporadic or have been destroyed. The more troublesome second group are ships which left for Newfoundland without outfitting in a major port, or which left no record at all. The size of this group cannot be determined for sure, and must be estimated. In both cases, as noted below, estimates are based on comparing similar ports and regions, looking at indirect evidence and comparing with observational data.

Notarial records from the three ports of Rouen, La Rochelle and Bordeaux (all major outfitting centers, as was noted in earlier chapters) are most extant for four years: 1549, 1555, 1559 and 1565. These four years are therefore used as baseline years to make estimates. To supplement them, estimates

have been made for different coastal regions which participated in the fishery but do not have notarial evidence for the four baseline years. These estimates are based on combining contemporary observations, surviving archival references and comparing port sizes. For instance, in the year 1565, the best year for which we have evidence, there are records which directly attest to 156 individual ships sailing from just the ports of La Rochelle, Bordeaux and Rouen. To this can be added the reliable estimate of a Guipuzcoan fishing fleet of 25 ships, provided by Michael Barkham, and an English observation which attests to 25 ships from the port of Saint Malo. There are therefore around 200 vessels for which we have direct testimony in the year 1565. Any estimate for this year must exceed 200 individual vessels. The explanations for choices are in the footnotes on the following table. Estimates have been adjusted where necessary to reflect changes over time, for instance between the 1540s and the 1560s. The following table combines the known notarial evidence with regional estimates to produce total estimates for the four years:

**TABLE B2: ESTIMATES FOR FOUR BASELINE YEARS, NUMBER OF SHIPS OUTFITTED  
FOR TERRA NOVA**

Year	Total Rouen, La Rochelle, Bordeaux <sup>833</sup>	Estimate other Normandy <sup>834</sup>	Estimate Brittany <sup>835</sup>	Estimate Basque Country <sup>836</sup>	Estimate Porto-Galicia <sup>837</sup>	Estimate West Country <sup>838</sup>	Total
1549	102	30	20	20	30	10	222
1555	111	30	20	40	30	20	261
1559	151	30	40	40	40	30	291
1565	156	30	40	40	40	30	336

The estimates made above suggest that for the four years there existed a roughly 1:2.2 ratio of ships recorded in the notarial contracts of Rouen, La Rochelle and Bordeaux to estimated ships from other provinces. In other words, it is likely that the three ports from which we have notarial records accounted

<sup>833</sup> Taken from Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology." Turgeon combines notarial surveys from several older sources with his own studies. The notarial records from La Rochelle and Bordeaux likely include the majority of vessels departing Labourd (French Basque Country) and Saintonge. These two regions are not, therefore, given separate estimates.

<sup>834</sup> Notarial records from Honfleur indicate that the port was independently outfitting around ten voyages each year by the late 1570s. Granville outfitted at least three at the same time. I have assumed Cherbourg, Dieppe and Le Havre, three major ports without surviving records, each outfitted at least five vessels, and Fécamp, St. Vallery-en-Caux and Etretat each outfitted one. Without more data I cannot estimate the size from many of the smaller ports in Normandy. Thirty is therefore a conservative estimate for Norman ports outside of Rouen. Le Havre, for instance, may have outfitted many more vessels, as indicated by frequent English references to fishing ships at what they called "Newhaven." See: De la Morandière, *Histoire De La Pêche Francaise De La Morue Dans L'amerique Septentrinale Des Origines a 1789*. For Honfleur notarial records: AD Calvados, série 8E, no.6198, 6500, 6502.

<sup>835</sup> An English observer in the early 1560s counted thirty vessels from Saint Malo preparing to sail to Terra Nova. I am also assuming that St. Brieuc, Binic, Blavet, Le Croisic and St. Pol-de-Leon each outfitted at least two vessels, as all were well known fishing ports. Given lack of observational data for the 1540s and early 1550s I have chosen to halve the estimate to err on the side of caution.

<sup>836</sup> Both Guipizcoa, Vizcaya and the towns of Labourd like Bayonne not attested to in surviving sources. This is based on Michael Barkham's estimates from the Guipuzcoan notarial records. I have assumed that before the raid in 1554 Spanish Basque participation in the fishery was significantly less than what it was during the heyday. Huxley, "La Industria Pesquera En El País Vasco Peninsular Al Principio De La Edad Moderna: Una Edad De Oro."

<sup>837</sup> Parkhurst's observations suggest that just under 50 'Portuguese' vessels worked at Terra Nova in the late 1570s. Three major Portuguese towns (Viana, Aveiro, Porto) and one major Galician port (Pontevedra) are known to have been active in the fishery. I am assuming ten ships from each city. This is partially reflected in the work of Mandio Barros on Porto, which was able to find at least six voyages for Terra Nova in the winter 1558-59. Barros, "Porto: A Construção De Um Espaço Marítimo Nos Alvares Dos Tempos Modernos."

<sup>838</sup> Based on Parkhurst's observations and working backwards. The lack of reference in English documents to a Newfoundland fishing fleet in the 1540s suggests that operations must have been very small, and most of the growth likely took place in the 1550s-70s. See Matthews, "A History of the West of England-Newfoundland Fishery."

for outfitting just under half of the yearly Terra Nova fleet. Using the four baseline years and the 1:2.2 ratio, estimates can be made for several years across the mid-sixteenth century:

**TABLE B3: ESTIMATES OF YEARLY SIZE OF FISHING FLEET AT TERRA NOVA, 1537-1565<sup>839</sup>**

Year	Total Rouen, La Rochelle, Bordeaux	Estimated Total size of fishing fleet (with 1:2.2 ratio)
1537	38 <sup>840</sup>	87
1541	36 <sup>841</sup>	79
1542	73 <sup>842</sup>	161
1544	12 <sup>843</sup>	26
1545	5 <sup>844</sup>	11
1549	102	224
1550	99 <sup>845</sup>	218
1554	77 <sup>846</sup>	169
1555	111	244
1559	151	332
1562	144 <sup>847</sup>	317
1565	156	343

These estimates have two advantages. First, they correlate closely to the observational ship-counts noted earlier in this Appendix. The 343 ships of 1565 are not far off from Anthony Parkhurst's estimates a decade later. Second, these tallies take into account a conservative understanding of the importance of small ports and regions such as north Brittany and the West Country for which sources are lacking. These

<sup>839</sup> The estimates end in 1565 as this is the last year for which there have been consistent notarial studies in La Rochelle, Bordeaux and Rouen. In the future it may be possible to extend this to the early 1570s. See: Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians During the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology."

<sup>840</sup> Includes eight vessels outfitted at La Rochelle. I am assuming around ten vessels were outfitted at Bordeaux, as 1537 seems to have been a prosperous year for Biscayan fishermen. Without data from Rouen, I am assuming twenty ships. This conservative estimate is 1/3 the number which were outfitted by 1542.

<sup>841</sup> Fourteen ships were outfitted in La Rochelle, and one in Bordeaux. Once again assuming twenty ships outfitted in Rouen.

<sup>842</sup> Rouen: 60; La Rochelle: 5. Assuming 8 vessels outfitted in Bordeaux, which lacks records for this year.

<sup>843</sup> This was in the midst of a war with England which severely disrupted fishing operations. Because the bulk of evidence comes from Biscayan and Norman ports this somewhat skews the data.

<sup>844</sup> In this year the King of France attempted to prevent ships from departing for Terra Nova. Also a bad war year.

<sup>845</sup> Records only survive for Bordeaux, which outfitted 37 vessels this year. I am assuming 2 vessels from La Rochelle, as only 2 were outfitted in 1549 and 3 in 1555. I am conservatively assuming 60 vessels from Rouen, which is less than the 73 outfitted the previous year and the 94 outfitted in 1555.

<sup>846</sup> Same assumptions as above, but with only 15 vessels outfitted in Bordeaux. The main contraction in fishing would take place in La Rochelle and Bordeaux this year due to war, but Rouen was likely unaffected.

<sup>847</sup> Records for 29 vessels outfitted in La Rochelle survive from this year. I am assuming 60 vessels outfitted in Rouen, around the same as were outfitted in 1565. I am also assuming 40 vessels from Bordeaux, slightly less than the 48 outfitted in 1559 and the 53 outfitted in 1565.

estimates can only ever be just that: reasonable estimates and interpretations of the scant surviving data. But they do allow us to have a sense of how the fishery evolved over time and the importance Europeans attached to it in the sixteenth century.

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