

Arthur Barlowe: The First Voyage Made to the Coasts of America (ca. 1585)

The 27th day of April in the year of our redemption 1584, we departed [from] the West of England, with two barks well furnished with men and victuals, having received our last and perfect directions by your letters, confirming the former instructions and commandments delivered by yourself at our leaving the river of Thames. And I think it a matter both unnecessary for the manifest discovery of the country, as also for tediousness sake, to remember unto you the diurnal of our course, sailing thither and returning: [except] I have presumed to present unto you this brief discourse, by which you may judge how profitable this land is likely to succeed, as well to yourself (by whose direction and charge and by whose servants this our discovery hath been performed) as also to her Highness, and the Commonwealth, in which we hope your wisdom will be satisfied, considering that as much by us hath been brought to light as by those small means and [the small] number of men we had, could any way have been expected or hoped for.

The tenth of May we arrived at the Canaries, and the tenth of June in this present year we were fallen with the islands of the West Indies, keeping a more southeasterly course than was needfull, because we doubted that the current of the Bay of Mexico, disbobbing between the Cape of Florida and Havana, had been of greater force than afterwards we found it to be. At which islands we found the air very unwholesome, and our men grew for the most part ill-disposed, so that having refreshed ourselves with sweet water and fresh victual we departed the twelfth day [after] our arrival there. These islands, with the rest adjoining, are so well known to yourself and to many others [that] I will not trouble you with the remembrance of them.

The second of July we found shoal water, where we smelled so sweet and so strong a smell, as if we had been in the midst of some delicate garden abounding with all kind of odoriferous flowers, by

which we were assured that the land could not be far distant. And keeping good watch and bearing but slack sail, the fourth of the same month we arrived upon the coast, which we supposed to be the continent and firm land, and we sailed along the same a hundred-and-twenty English miles before we could find any entrance or river issuing into the sea. The first that appeared unto us we entered, though not without some difficulty, and cast anchor about three arquebus-shot within the haven's mouth, on the left hand of the same, and after thanks given to God for our safe arrival thither, we manned our boats and went to view the land next adjoining, and "to take possession of the same, in the right of the Queen's most excellent Majesty, as rightful Queen and Princess of the same," and after delivered the same over to your use, according to her Majesty's grant and letters patent, under her Highness's great seal. Which [actions] being performed according to the ceremonies used in such enterprises, we viewed the land about us, being where we first landed very sandy and low towards the waterside, but so full of grapes as the very beating and surge of the sea overflowed them, of which we found such plenty as well there as in all places else, both on the sand and on the green soil on the hills, [and] in the plains as well [as] on every little shrub, as also climbing towards the top of the high cedars, [so] that I think in all the world the like abundance is not to be found, and myself having seen those parts of Europe that most abound, find such difference [here] as were incredible to be written.

We passed from the seaside towards the tops of those hills next adjoining, being but of mean height, and from thence we beheld the sea of both sides, to the north and to the south, finding no end any of both ways. This land lay stretching itself to the west, which afterwards we found to be but an island twenty miles long and not above six miles broad. Under the bank or hill whereon we stood, we beheld the valleys replenished with goodly cedar trees, and having discharged our arquebus-shot, such a flock of cranes (for the most part white) arose under us, with such a cry redoubled by many echoes, as if an army of men had shouted all together.

This island had many goodly woods full of deer, coneys, hares, and fowl, even in the midst of summer in incredible abundance. The woods are not such as you find in Bohemia, Moscovia, or Hercynia,

barren and fruitless, but the highest and reddest cedars of the world, far bettering the cedars of the Azores, of the Indies, or Lebanon, [and] pines, cypress, sassafras, the lentisk, or the tree that bears the rind of black cinnamon, of which Master Winter brought [some] from the straits of Magellan, and many other [trees] of excellent smell and quality. We remained by the side of this island two whole days before we espied one small boat rowing towards us, having in it three persons. This boat came to the island side, four arquebus-shot from our ships, and there two of the people remaining, the third came along the shore towards us, and we being then all [on board], he walked up and down upon the point of land next to us. Then the master and pilot of the admiral, Simon Ferdinando, and the captain Philip Amadas, myself, and others rowed to the land, whose coming this fellow attended [to], never making any show of fear or doubt. And after he had spoken of many things not understood by us, we brought him, [to] his own good liking, aboard the ships, and gave him a shirt, a hat, and some other things, and made him taste of our wine, and our meat, which he liked very well. And after having viewed both barks, he departed, and went to his own boat again, which he had left in a little cove or creek adjoining. As soon as he was two bow-shots into the water, he fell to fishing, and in less than half an hour he had loaded his boat as deep as it could swim, [after] which he came again to the point of the land, and there he divided his fish into two parts, pointing one part to the ship and the other to the pinnace. [With] which, after he had (as much as he might) requited the former benefits received [from us], he departed out of our sight.

The next day there came unto us divers boats, and in one of them the King's brother, accompanied with forty or fifty men, very handsome and goodly people, and in their behavior as mannerly and civil as any of Europe. His name was Granganimeo, and the King is called Wingina, the country Wingandacoa, and now by her Majesty, "Virginia." The manner of his coming was in this sort: he left his boats altogether as the first man did, a little from the ships by the shore, and came along to the place over against the ships, followed [by] forty men. When he came to the place, his servants spread a long mat upon the ground, on which he sat down, and at the other end of the mat four others of his company did the like, the rest of his men stood

round about him, somewhat far off. When we came to the shore to him with our weapons, he never moved from his place, nor [did] any of the other four, nor ever mistrusted any harm to be offered from us, but sitting still he beckoned us to come and sit by him, which we performed. And being set, he made all signs of joy and welcome, striking on his head and his breast and afterwards on ours, to show we were all one, smiling and making show the best he could of all love, and familiarity. After he had made a long speech unto us, we presented him with divers things, which he received very joyfully, and thankfully. None of the company dared to speak one word all the time, [except that] the four who were at the other end spoke one in the other's ear very softly.

The King is greatly obeyed, and his brothers and children revered. The King himself in person was, at our being there, sore wounded in a fight which he had with the King of the next country. [He is] called Wingina, and was shot in two places in the body, and once clean through the thigh, but he recovered. By reason [of these wounds] and [because] he lay at the chief town of the country, being six days journey off, we saw him not at all.

After we had presented this his brother with such things as we thought he liked, we likewise gave somewhat to the others that sat with him on the mat, but presently he arose and took all from them and put it into his own basket, making signs and tokens, that all things ought to be delivered unto him, and the rest were but his servants, and followers. A day or two after this, we fell to trading with them, exchanging some things that we had for chamois, buff, and deer skins. When we showed him all our packets of merchandise, of all [the] things that he saw, a bright tin dish most pleased him, which he presently took up and clapped it before his breast, and after made a hole in the brim thereof and hung it about his neck, making signs that it would defend him against his enemies' arrows, for those people maintain a deadly and terrible war with the people and King adjoining. We exchanged our tin dish for twenty skins, worth twenty crowns, or twenty nobles and a copper kettle for fifty skins worth fifty crowns. They offered us good exchange for our hatchets, and axes, and for knives, and would have given anything for swords, but we would not part with any. After two or three days the King's brother came aboard

the ships, and drank wine, and ate of our meat and of our bread, and liked exceedingly [these things], and after a few days passed he brought his wife with him to the ships, his daughter and two or three children. His wife was very well favored, of mean stature, and very bashful. She had on her back a long cloak of leather, with the fur side next to her body, and before her a piece of the same. About her forehead she had a band of white coral, and so had her husband many times. In her ears she had bracelets of pearls, hanging down to her middle (whereof we delivered your Worship a little bracelet) and those were of the bigness of good peas. The rest of her women of the better sort had pendants of copper hanging in either ear, and some of the children of the King's brother and other noblemen have five or six in either ear. He himself had upon his head a broad plate of gold, or copper, for being unpolished we knew not what metal it should be, neither would he by any means suffer us to take it off his head, but feeling it, it would bow very easily. His apparel was [like] his wife's, only the women wear their hair long on both sides, and the men but on one. They are of color yellowish, and their hair black for the most part, and yet we saw children that had very fine auburn and chestnut colored hair.

After these women had been there, there came down from all parts great store of people, bringing with them leather, coral, divers kinds of dyes (very excellent), and exchanged with us. But when Granganimeo the King's brother was present, none dared to trade but himself, except such as wear red pieces of copper on their heads like himself, for that is the difference between the noblemen and the governors of countries and the meaner sort. And we both noted here, and you have understood since by these men whom we brought home, that no people in the world carry more respect to their King, Nobility, and Governors, than these do. The King's brother's wife, when she came to us (as she did many times) was followed [by] forty or fifty women always, and when she came into the ship, she left them all on land, saving her two daughters, her nurse, and one or two more. The King's brother always kept this order: as many boats as he would come with to the ships, so many fires would he make on the shore afar off, to the end [that] we might understand with what strength and company he approached. Their boats are made of one tree, either of pine or of pitch trees, a wood not commonly known to our people, nor found

growing in England. They have no edge tools to make them with, [or] if they have any they are very few, and those it seems they had [acquired] twenty years since, which, as [Wanchese and Manteo] declared, were out of a wreck which happened upon their coast, of some Christian ship being beaten that way by some storm and outrageous weather, whereof none of the people was saved, but only the ship, or some part of her, being cast upon the sand, out of whose sides they drew the nails and the spikes and with those they made their best instruments. The manner of making their boats is thus: they burn down some great tree, or take such as are wind-fallen, and putting gum and rosin upon one side thereof they set fire into it, and when [the fire] hath burnt it hollow, they cut out the coals with their shells, and wherever they would burn it deeper or wider they lay on gums, which burn away the timber, and by this means they fashion very fine boats and such as will transport twenty men. Their oars are like scoops, and many times they set with long poles, as the depth serves.

The King's brother had great liking of our armor, a sword, and divers other things which we had, and offered to lay a great box of pearl in gage for them, but we refused it for this time, because we would not make them know, that we esteemed thereof until we had understood in what places of the country the pearl grew, which now your Worship doth very well understand.

He was very just of his promise, for many times we delivered [to] him merchandise upon his word, but ever he came within the day and performed his promise. He sent us every day a brace or two of fat bucks, coney, hares, fish, the best of the world. He sent us divers roots, and fruits very excellent good, and of their country corn, which is very white, fair and well-tasted, and grows three times in five months: in May they sow, in July they reap; in June they sow, in August they reap; in July they sow, in September they reap. Only they cast the corn into the ground, breaking a little of the soft turf with a wooden mattock or pickaxe. [We] ourselves proved the soil, and put some of our peas in the ground, and in ten days they were of fourteen inches [height]. They have also beans very fair, of divers colors and wonderful plenty, some growing naturally and some in their gardens, and so have they both wheat and oats.

The soil is the most plentiful, sweet, fruitful and wholesome of all the world. There are above fourteen several sweet-smelling timber trees, and the most part of their underwoods are bays and such like. They have those oaks that we have, but far greater and better. After they had been divers times aboard our ships, myself with seven more went twenty miles into the river, that runs toward the city of Skicoak, which river they call Occam, and the evening following we came to an island which they call Roanoke, distant from the harbor by which we entered, seven leagues, and at the north end thereof was a village of nine houses, built of cedar, and fortified round about with sharp trees, to keep out their enemies, and the entrance into it made like a turn pike, very artificially. When we came towards it, standing near unto the waterside, the wife of Granganimeo the King's brother came running out to meet us very cheerfully and friendly. Her husband was not then in the village. Some of her people she commanded to draw our boat on shore [because of] the beating of the billows; others she appointed to carry us on their backs to the dry ground, and others to bring our oars into the house for fear of stealing. When we were come into the utter room, [there being] five rooms in her house, she caused us to sit down by a great fire, and afterward took off our clothes and washed them, and dried them again. Some of the women plucked off our stockings and washed them, some washed our feet in warm water, and she herself took great pains to see all things ordered in the best manner she could, making great haste to dress some meat for us to eat.

After we had thus dried ourselves, she brought us into the inner room, where she set on the board standing [all] along the house some wheat-like frumenty; sodden venison, and roasted; fish sodden, boiled, and roasted; melons raw, and sodden; roots of divers kinds, and divers fruits. Their drink is commonly water, but while the grape lasts they drink wine, and for want of casks to keep it, all the year after they drink water, but it is sodden with ginger in it, and black cinnamon, and sometimes sassafras, and divers other wholesome and medicinal herbs and trees. We were entertained with all love and kindness, and with as much bounty (after their manner) as they could possibly devise. We found the people most gentle, loving, and faithful, void of all guile and treason, and such as live after the manner of the golden age. The people only care how to defend themselves from the cold in their short

winter, and to feed themselves with such meat as the soil affords. Their meat is very well sodden and they make broth very sweet and savory. Their vessels are earthen pots, very large, white, and sweet, [and] their dishes are wooden platters of sweet timber. Within the place where they feed was their lodging, and within that, their Idol, which they worship, of whom they speak incredible things. While we were at meat, there came in at the gates two or three men with their bows and arrows from hunting, whom when we espied, we began to look one towards another, and offered to reach our weapons, but as soon as she espied our mistrust she was very much moved, and caused some of her men to run out and take away their bows and arrows and break them, and withall beat the poor fellows out of the gate again. When we departed in the evening and would not tarry all night, she was very sorry, and gave us into our boat our supper half dressed, pots and all, and brought us to our boat's side, [on board] which we lay all night, removing the same a pretty distance from the shore. She, perceiving our jealousy, was much grieved, and sent divers men and thirty women to sit all night on the bank side by us, and sent us into our boats five mats to cover us from the rain, using very many words to entreat us to rest in their houses, but because we were very few men and if we had miscarried the voyage had been in very great danger, we dared not to adventure anything, though there was no cause for doubt, for a more kind and loving people there cannot be found in the world, as far as we have hitherto had trial.

Beyond this island there is the mainland, and over against this island falls into this spacious water the great river called Occam by the inhabitants, on which stands a town called Pomeiock, and six days' journey from the same is situated their greatest city, called Skicoak, which this people affirm to be very great, [although] the savages were never at it, [they only] speak of it by the report of their fathers and other men, whom they have heard affirm it to be above one hour's journey about.

Into this river falls another great river, called Cipo, in which there is found great store of mussels in which there are pearls. Likewise there descends into this Occam another river, called Nomopana, on the one side whereof stands a great town called Chawanoak, and the Lord of that town and country is called Pooneno. This Pooneno is not

subject to the King of Wingandacoa, but is a free Lord. Beyond this country there [is] another King, whom they call Menatonon, and these three Kings are in league with each other. Towards the southwest, four days' journey, is situated a town called Secotan, which is the southernmost town of Wingandacoa, near unto which six and twenty years past there was a ship cast away, whereof some of the people were saved, and those were white people, whom the country people preserved.

And after ten days remaining [on] an outer island [which was] uninhabited, called Wococon, they with the help of some of the dwellers of Secotan fastened two boats of the country together and made masts [for] them and sails [from] their shirts. And having taken into them such victuals as the country yielded, they departed after they had remained [on] this outer island three weeks, but shortly after, it seems, they were cast away, for the boats were found upon the coast, cast [ashore on] another island adjoining. Other than these, there were never any people apparelled, or white of color, either seen or heard of amongst these people, and these aforesaid were seen only [by] the inhabitants of Secotan, which appeared to be very true, for they wondered marvelously when we were amongst them at the whiteness of our skins, ever coveting to touch our breasts, and to view the same. Besides, they had our ships in marvelous admiration, and all things else were so strange unto them [that] it appeared that none of them had ever seen the like. When we discharged any piece, were it but an arquebus, they would tremble thereat for very fear, and for the strangeness of the same, for the weapons which [they] themselves use are bows and arrows, [and] the arrows are but [made from] small canes, headed with a sharp shell or tooth of a fish, [though] sufficient enough to kill a naked man. Their swords [are] of wood, hardened; likewise they use wooden breast-plates for their defense. They have besides a kind of club, on the end whereof they fasten the sharp horns of a stag or other beast. When they go to wars they carry about with them their Idol, of whom they ask counsel, as the Romans were wont [to do] of the Oracle of Apollo. They sing songs as they march towards the battle instead of [using] drums and trumpets; their wars are very cruel and bloody, by reason whereof [as well as the] civil dissensions which have

happened of late years amongst them, the people are marvelously wasted, and in some places the country left desolate.

Adjoining to this country aforesaid called Secotan begins a country called Pomovik, belonging to another King whom they call Piemacum, and this King is in league with the next King adjoining towards the setting of the sun, and the country Newsiok, situated upon the goodly river called Neuse. These Kings have mortal war with Wingina, King of Wingandacoa, but about two years past there was a peace made between the King Piemacum, and the Lord of Secotan, as these men whom we have brought with us to England, have given us to understand. But there remains a mortal malice in the Secotans, for many injuries and slaughters done upon them by this Piemacum. They invited divers men and thirty women of the best of his country to their town to a feast, and when they were altogether merry and praying before their Idol (which is nothing else but a mere illusion of the devil) the captain or Lord of the town suddenly came upon them, and slew them every one, reserving the women and children. And [Manteo and Wanchese] have oftentimes since persuaded us to surprise [Piemacum's] town, having promised and assured us, that there will be found in it great store of commodities, but whether their persuasion be to the end [that] they may be revenged [on] their enemies, or for the love they bear to us, we leave that to the trial hereafter.

Beyond this island called Roanoke are many islands very plentiful of fruits and other natural increases, together with many towns and villages along the side of the continent, some bounding upon the islands and some stretching into the land.

When we first had sight of this country, some thought the first land we saw to be the continent, but after we entered into the haven, we saw before us another mighty long sea, for there lie along the coast a trace of islands, two hundred miles in length, adjoining to the Ocean sea, and between the islands, two or three entrances. When you are entered between them (these islands being very narrow for the most part, [that is,] in most places six miles broad, in some places less, in [a] few more), then there appears another great sea, containing in breadth in some places forty, and in some fifty, in some twenty miles over, before you come unto the continent. And in this enclosed sea there are above a hundred islands of divers bignesses, whereof one is sixteen

miles long, at which we were, finding it a most pleasant and fertile ground replenished with goodly cedars and divers other sweet woods, full of currants, of flax, and many other notable commodities, which we at that time had no leisure to view. Besides this island there are many, as I have said, some of two or three, of four, or five miles, some more, some less, most beautiful and pleasant to behold, replenished with deer, coneys, hares, and divers beasts, and about them the goodliest and best fish in the world, and in great abundance.

Thus, Sir, we have acquainted you with the particulars of our discovery, made this present voyage, as far forth as the shortness of the time we there continued would afford us [to] take view thereof. And so, contenting ourselves with this service at this time, which we hope hereafter to enlarge as occasion and assistance shall be given, we resolved to leave the country and to apply ourselves to return for England, which we did accordingly, and arrived safely in the West of England about the [middle] of September [1584].

We brought home also two of the savages, being lusty men, whose names were Wanchese and Manteo.