

José António Brandão. *"Your fyre shall burn no more": Iroquois Policy toward New France and Its Native Allies to 1701*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997, xviii + 375 pp., index, ISBN 0-8032-1274-7.

Review by J.R. Miller, Department of History, University of Saskatchewan.

The way history, including the history of Aboriginal groups and of their interactions with European newcomers, is usually written, interpretations of major events go through at least three phases. At the outset, some brave soul emerges from the archives to launch a sweeping account that includes a number of grand generalizations. Over time, a number of more tightly focused analyses of these aspects reveal that the pioneering interpreter exaggerated, was too sweeping, or just got it wrong. Thereupon, another generation of scholars appears to provide a new synthesis based on the first big interpretation as revised by the more finely grained revisions, or perhaps on the latter alone. In Canada, a good example of the process can be found in what is often termed the first scholarly study of Native history, George Stanley's *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (1936). Among the many generalizations that Stanley included in this account of treaty-making, Euro-Canadian settlement and Native resistance were that Plains First Nations and horticulture were incompatible, and that the Aboriginal forces who took up arms against Canada in the spring of 1885 constituted an Aboriginal alliance, a united front of Plains Indians and Métis.

Although Stanley's ambitious interpretation went unchallenged for a long time, in the 1980s researchers began to examine some of the details of the 1936 portrait, in the process casting doubt on the soundness of the master's generalizations about Plains culture and horticulture, and about the alignment of forces in 1885. First Noel Dyck and then, in greater detail, Sarah Carter showed that Plains peoples, far from being incapable of taking up crop-growing, were anxious to learn these skills because they saw the demise of the bison looming. Next, John L. Tobias, Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser pointed out that there was no Aboriginal alliance in the Saskatchewan country in the spring of 1885, that First Nations were little involved in the insurrection, and that Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont led a Métis rebellion. A number of recently published general accounts indicate that the corrections suggested by the work of Dyck, Carter, Tobias, Stonechild, and Waiser now dominate the scholarly interpretation, although Stanley's sweeping work remains in print and in use.

What scholars such as Carter, Stonechild and Tobias have done to reinterpret Stanley's *Birth of Western Canada* has a parallel in a recent work on the history of Iroquois diplomacy and warfare in New France. José Brandão, who teaches American Indian history at Western Michigan University, subjects what he calls the "the Beaver Wars interpretation" of Iroquois motivation in their lengthy, intermittent warfare with New France to careful scrutiny in his revised dissertation, "*Your fyre shall burn no more.*" The title's quotation is an Iroquois way of saying "You will no longer exist in this place" (p. 121). First, Brandão explains that "the Beaver Wars interpretation" attributes the Five Nations' lengthy military campaigns to a desire to dominate the trade in furs, tracing the lineage of this viewpoint from Francis Parkman, the late-19th-century Boston historian who had little love for Indians in general and the Iroquois in particular, to the 1940 volume by George T. Hunt, *The Wars of the Iroquois*, and to more recent purveyors of the same viewpoint. That interpretation is primarily a materialist one, ascribing to the Iroquois motives based on a desire to dominate and enrich themselves from the fur trade that European powers did so much to expand throughout the 17th century. At its most simple-minded, says Brandão, following his mentor, the late William Eccles, the Five Nations end up being depicted as "capitalist entrepreneurs in moccasins" (p. 10).

The problem with this interpretation, says the author, is that it "rests on little or no evidence and on assumptions of a type of culture and behavior that is at odds with what the documentary record reveals about the way Iroquois culture functioned" (p. 3). Relying on massive tables listing all the incidents of Iroquois warfare to 1701 (pp. 178-277), Brandão shows that acquiring furs or preventing other First Nations from doing the same was not an Iroquois aim. In only 20 of the 354 "hostile encounters" that the Iroquois initiated did Five Nations raiders take goods (pp. 31, 53). Moreover, they were not "dependent" on European technology (pp. 50-52), and they would not have been capable of maintaining a role as "middleman" in the trade if they had achieved it. The Five Nations were a confederacy in which local autonomy made formulation and execution of grand designs, mercantile or otherwise, impossible to achieve.

However, there were 465 "hostile encounters" involving the Five Nations, three-quarters of them initiated by Iroquois parties down to 1701. If they were not motivated by commerce, what caused them? The answer, says "*Your fyre shall burn no more,*" is the capture of prisoners to replace Iroquois lost to disease or warfare. In contrast to furs and

European goods, which did not bulk large in Iroquois raiding, the taking of humans was a feature of fully one-quarter of the incidents. Moreover, there tended to be a fairly high correlation between years in which the records show loss of Iroquois lives to disease and the onset of another spate of raiding. Highly significant was one 1643 raid in which Iroquois warriors left furs behind to make room in their canoes for captives. Brandão argues effectively that the taking of prisoners, in contrast to the taking of furs or trade goods, was highly compatible with Iroquois cultural norms and collective imperatives.

*"Your fyre shall burn no more"* is revisionist in the best sense of that term. It subjects the grand generalizations that pioneering interpreters often employ to probing analysis with documentary records. While the author is conscious of the limitations of his sources, he makes his calculations and conclusions with great caution and conservatism. At the end of the process it is impossible not to conclude that the interpretation of the Five Nations as a would-be multinational corporation in the Finger Lakes district of New York is one that should be retired forthwith. Brandão is critical of those he revises, saying, for example, that Hunt's interpretation depended on evidence that was "edited or invented" (p. 84), and decrying "speculation" and "speculative" conclusions by his predecessors.

While the work is a useful corrective, it is not without shortcomings of its own. For one thing, Brandão effectively ends his tracing of the "Beaver Wars interpretation" at G.T. Hunt in 1940, leaving to passing comments in text and endnotes his critique of Bruce Trigger (pp. 59-60; p. 320, nn. 46, 47) and Denys Delâge (p. 319, n 41) and their massive contributions to the materialist interpretation of 17th-century Native warfare. Second, for such a harsh critic of "speculation," Brandão often resorts to it himself: "probably led" (p. 29), "probably caused" (p. 64), "it is possible" (p. 66), "might have" and "may have" (p. 105), "one may assume" (p. 109), etc. In fairness, the 17th-century sources often leave only a choice between such "speculation" and no interpretation at all, but the author might have been less censorious of those who went before. Finally, the primary explanation of Iroquois motivation that the work provides is muddled. Although Brandão says at the outset that his explanation for Iroquois warfare is the capture of replacements, by the end of the volume he has come round to arguing that the Iroquois were motivated by incompatibility of their objectives and those of New France: "In the end, then the Iroquois fought against New France because their respective policies conflicted" (p. 128). This is an opaque way of

saying that the Five Nations came to the conclusion that French expansionism, carried out if not necessarily motivated by the fur trade, threatened the existence of the Iroquois. Dr. Brandão's overall interpretation would have been more unified and comprehensive had he reconciled his two viewpoints on Iroquois motivation – for captives and for preservation – into a single thesis.

However, perhaps he realized that construction of a grand, unified interpretation would merely invite critical examinations by future graduate students.

---

David T. McNab (editor). *Earth, Water, Air and Fire: Studies in Canadian Ethnohistory*. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1998, 332 pp.

Review by Neal McLeod, Department of Indian Studies, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College.

*Earth, Water, Air and Fire*, edited by David T. McNabb, emerges from a conference of the same name organized by Nin.D. Waab.Jig [those who are looking around] and Wilfred Laurier University. McNabb notes that the title of the book and the conference reflect the holistic world view of Aboriginal people (p. 2). The seventeen essays contained in the book cover a vast array of topics, including Aboriginal perspectives and historical essays concerning the Mikmaq, Ontario and other regions. A multi-layered discussion of self-government and treaties permeates the book. The strength of the book is that it links present circumstances to past historical events.

In an interdisciplinary manner, the book incorporates Aboriginal perspectives (especially Chapters 1 and 2), and written records in the spirit of ethnohistory to achieve dynamic results. Also, the pieces provide links between contemporary circumstances with past events and, in particular, understanding of treaties. For instance, Rhonda Telford (Chapter 4) notes the existence of Anishinabe subsurface or submarine rights through treaties or other agreements with the Crown (p. 65), which contradicts the widespread notion of treaties as surrenders. Such perspectives offered by Telford, along with descriptions of Aboriginal land use (pieces by David McNabb, Theresa Redmond, Chapter 2) "upstream" other sources. The thorough discussion of treaties throughout the book is especially timely given the recent Delgamuukw decision. Unfortunately, the Aboriginal perspectives found in the book are rather vague such as Dean Jacob's use of the terms *holistic* (p. 17) and *circle of life* (p. 18).

One of perennial issues of Aboriginal history is the intersection of the