



Iron axe head, Auburn, ca. 1700. Iron goods discovered with other Native American artifacts provide evidence of cross-cultural trading and exchange. Collections of the Maine Historical Society.

ROSARIES, DISEASE, AND STOREHOUSE KEYS: JESUIT CONVERSION EFFORTS IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ACADIA

BY HEATHER SANFORD

Throughout the seventeenth century, contests over medicinal orthodoxy between American Indians and Jesuit missionaries revealed the limits of compromise and communicated the values that determined the extent of their cooperation. When French Jesuits arrived in Acadia in 1611, they became witnesses to an epidemic that eventually eliminated an overwhelming majority of the Native population. Publicly proclaiming their desire to save souls, the priests converted disease into an evangelical tool. They began to use healing to persuade Wabanakis of the grace, power, and superiority of the Christian god. This article focuses on the convergence of spirituality and healing in Wabanaki and Jesuit remedial culture from the missionaries' arrival in 1611 through their capitulation to the British in 1710. It specifically explores how Jesuit missionaries attempted to use healing as a conversion strategy to overcome the communicative and material barriers that inhibited their proselytical progress among the indigenous population of Acadia. Heather Sanford is a PhD student at Brown University. She is interested in early American history, knowledge production, and exchange, and the history of medicine in the Atlantic world.

FROM THE deck of their ship, a group of Frenchmen descried smoke billows in the distance. Jesuit missionary, Pierre Biard, recognized the predetermined signal, which indicated, “that we can go and find [the Penobscots] if we need them.” Moments later, Biard disembarked from the vessel to ask about the location of Kadesquit, a potential Jesuit settlement site. Learning the reason for Biard’s visit, the Indian greeters “began to sing the praises of their home,” detailing the “healthy and agreeable” conditions of their environs. Unmoved by these flattering descriptions, Biard credited his indifference to the Natives’ in-

clination to “praise their own wares.” However, the next Penobscot tactic of persuasion led Biard to profess that these Natives “knew well how to use their machinations against him.”¹

Sensing Biard’s passivity, the Penobscots introduced a moral imperative that compelled the missionary to visit their settlement. The Natives explained that their revered leader, Asticou, was on the verge of death. They further burdened Biard’s conscience when they warned, “if thou dost not come he will die without baptism, and will not go to heaven. Thou wilt be the cause of it, for he himself wishes very much to be baptized.” Thus, the Jesuit priest soon found himself amongst a company of strangers; hurriedly paddling towards a foreign destination. The voyage to Asticou’s bedside proved to be the most climactic part of the afternoon. When Biard arrived at the settlement, he found the sagamore “truly sick, but not unto death, for it was only a cold that troubled him.” Suddenly uninterested in Asticou’s health, Biard passed the remainder of his day surveying the surrounding land for eventual encampment.²

The tactful strategy that the observant Penobscots employed upon seeing a French ship off of the coast was hardly unique. Fellow members of the Wabanaki Confederacy in Acadia, including the Micmacs of Nova Scotia and Abenakis from Maine, exploited Jesuit baptism and spiritual healing as a means to increase their access to European commercial wares and to cope with economic and physical challenges.³ For their part, the Jesuits used healing to circumvent the communicative and material impediments that hindered their evangelical efforts in Acadia. Such a relationship was mutually beneficial, and served as the surest means of success for each group. For the Natives, this meant the diplomatic protection and material prosperity that resulted from a healthy trade relationship with Europeans, while for the Jesuits, success was measured by the number of Indian converts who could “answer for [themselves]” and demonstrate a genuine understanding of the Christian faith.⁴

The publication of the *Jesuit Relations* dramatically spurred interest in the encounters between members of the Society of Jesus and the Native-American bands that inhabited New France.⁵ Nineteenth-century historian Francis Parkman penned the most famous early exegesis of the letters, which were annual progress reports addressed to Jesuit superiors in France.⁶ Though entertaining and theatrical in its prose, the racial prejudice that riddled the pages of Parkman’s, *Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century*, prevented him from recognizing the ways that Native-American medicinal and spiritual culture allowed the Jesuits to

replicate the “upheaving, like an earthquake” spiritual enlightenment of the Jesuit order’s founder, Ignatius Loyola.⁷

Although few secondary sources focus exclusively on Jesuit activity in Acadia, both general histories and case studies provide invaluable information pertaining to conversion efforts in this region. Unlike Parkman, modern scholars dismiss antiquated notions of Indian simplicity and often highlight similarities between the Jesuits and the individuals that they hoped to convert.⁸ However, few historians have examined the strategies employed by the Jesuits to gain converts. A holistic analysis of the existential, spiritual, and communicative challenges that encumbered both the Wabanakis and Jesuits reveals that healing encounters provided a potential cure for all three ailments.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, and the diseases that they imported from their respective countries, the Native population of Acadia remained fairly stable by the standards of the period. However, Wabanaki inhabitants of the region noted the correlation between contact with Europeans and the outbreak of epidemics.⁹ Over one hundred years of experience buttressed the assessment of these Natives, some of whom belonged to groups that had been in contact with Basque, Norman, and Portuguese traders since the late fifteenth century.¹⁰ Bartering with the region’s indigenous inhabitants for wares that included furs, hides, and sealskins, European traders could very well have added a host of diseases to their registers of commodities.¹¹ As the seventeenth century continued, outbreaks of maladies such as influenza, cholera, and smallpox ravaged the Wabanaki people.¹² When Father Pierre Biard and confrere Ennemond Massé arrived at Port Royal in 1611, the two priests became witnesses to an epidemic that eliminated up to ninety percent of the original Wabanaki population within just a few decades.¹³

Though Father Biard and Father Massé were the first Jesuits to establish a camp in Acadia, they were not the first Christians to assume evangelical responsibility in the region. In 1603, French King Henry IV awarded exclusive fishing rights to two noblemen, Jean de Biencourt and Pierre du Gua. The generous grant was not without its contingencies. The monarch stipulated that the recipients were responsible for evangelization efforts among the Natives of the region.¹⁴ In conformity with this royal mandate, secular priest Jessé Fléché packed his belongings in preparation to make Christians of the Micmac people of Acadia. Fléché baptized approximately eighty individuals, but the need for financial assistance convinced the noblemen to increase the religious presence in their new settlement. A wealthy religious order with holdings in India

and China, the Society of Jesus was the leading candidate to ease the fiscal burden of the enterprising patricians.¹⁵

The Jesuits, under the leadership of Biard, were more meticulous in their conversion methodology than Fléché. The recently arrived Biard contended that his predecessor inappropriately performed the supreme baptismal sacrament without properly instructing its recipients.¹⁶ Biard lamented that these “converts” could not “make the sign of the Cross,” were not familiar “with any prayers, nor articles of faith, and gave no evidence of any change from the past, always retaining the same old sorceries.” He added that most of the baptized Natives did not regularly attend mass, and that their occasional attendance was prompted by simple curiosity or a desire for socializing.¹⁷

Biard criticized Fléché’s apparent prioritization of statistics over the genuine salvation of souls, but he relented that his predecessor could not “instruct [the Natives] as he would have wished because he did not know the language, and had nothing with which to support them.”¹⁸ The Jesuits believed that rigorous religious instruction was necessary so that a baptized Native could “answer for himself” and validate their apparent comprehension of the faith that they entered.¹⁹ Each Wabanaki band spoke a variant of the Algonquian language, so the Jesuits turned their attention to this particular tongue.²⁰ Thus, Biard resolved to conquer linguistic impediments to an authentic understanding of Christianity, and informed his superiors that he would refrain from conferring sacraments until he and his confreres were “able to instruct [Wabanakis] in their own language, and when they will know how to answer us.”²¹ He estimated that sufficient education of Natives in the doctrines of the Catholic Church would require two years of patience, and he anticipated that the Jesuits would be “slandered” for their meager baptismal statistics that would be published in Parisian newspapers.²² Still, the Jesuits disregarded potential criticism and refused to baptize insufficiently catechized Wabanakis unless the recipient was a baby or an adult on the verge of death without salvation.²³

Despite his initial determination, Biard perceived a fundamental flaw in his original plans to relay the Gospel in Algonquian languages. He complained that Algonquian “words, the messengers and dispensers of thought and speech, remain[ed] totally rude, poor and confused,” and added that these supposed lingual infirmities hindered the opportunity for Indian minds to become “refined, rich, and disciplined” through contact with European Christianity. Further, Biard believed that these faults were representative of a shallow Wabanaki intellect. The mission-

ary reduced the Wabanakis' conceptual ability to the immediate "sensible and material things," and suggested that they were incapable of a sense of the "abstract, internal, spiritual, or distinct" that was a necessary prerequisite for a Christian believer.²⁴

The Jesuits were ultimately unable to catechize in Algonquian tongues, and, like Fléché, they struggled to materially provide for novitiates. They claimed that the nomadic lifestyle of Natives, perceived as an endless search for provisions, was the reason for their spiritual inferiority. Biard argued that such hunts monopolized every hour of Indian life and therefore "stifle[d] the spirit" and created a deficiency in the arts, including medicine.²⁵ On the basis of this analysis, the Jesuits posited that the introduction of a sedentary, agricultural lifestyle would greatly facilitate their efforts in catechizing the Natives.²⁶

The Jesuits welcomed Wabanaki Indians into French settlements in the interest of catechizing the Natives through maximum exposure to Christian ideas, but the success of such a plan relied entirely on the stock of provisions within the missionaries' stores at any given time. Even Biard acknowledged that, "he who would minister to [Indian] souls, must at the same time resolve to nourish their bodies."²⁷ On multiple occasions, Biard bemoaned the emptiness of the "Storehouse" that prevented the Jesuits from providing the amount of food necessary for Wabanakis to "eat during the four or five days in which they would have to be Catechized."²⁸ At least once, the Jesuits waited to catechize a group of Natives until ships from France replenished their stock of supplies. When the ship was late in its arrival, the eagerness that the Natives originally felt regarding baptism diminished, and "the opportunity for this good deed was lost."²⁹ Given these lingual and provisional limitations, the Jesuits sought an alternate way to effectively communicate Christian spirituality through sensory means. Healing encounters were far more reliant upon actions than words, and afforded the Jesuits an opportunity to circumnavigate challenges posed by their limited knowledge of Algonquian languages. Instead, restorative "performances" offered an opportunity for Christian tenets to be "demonstrated to the senses," and thus serve as a remedy for the supposed struggle of Natives to understand dogmas that Jesuits identified as "abstract and universal." These included the concepts of sin, virtue, and justice.³⁰ Additionally, successful spectacles amazed Indian audiences while preserving the Jesuits' stock of provisions. Instead of boarding candidates for baptism, the Jesuits traveled to surrounding Wabanaki settlements "to pray and to lay hands on the sick."³¹ These encounters were brief, and did not necessitate a long-term

commitment from the missionaries.³² The priests could plan visits around their schedules, and did not have to base their evangelical efforts on the erratic arrivals of French ships laden with supplies. Thus, healing offered the Jesuits an economical, more convenient, method to catechize those Natives who were willing to welcome Christian ideas.

Jesuit healing practices were consistent with Ignatius Loyola's command to work "towards benefits for the body through the practice of mercy and charity."³³ Like the majority of their contemporaries, they practiced phlebotomies to eradicate most diseases.³⁴ By bleeding their patients, Jesuit practitioners sought to "restore equilibrium," a notion consistent with their adherence to humorism.³⁵ More importantly, their antidotes also appealed to Wabanaki emphases on tangibility and performance in remedial treatment. Wabanaki bands prized select body parts of local animals for their restorative functions. Eighteenth-century Jesuit historian Joseph Jouvency noted the curative capabilities, or "marvelous and manifold virtue," credited to the marrow found in the left rear hoof of a moose. Jouvency explained that healers applied the substance to an afflicted area, held the compound in a fist, or "placed [the marrow] in the bezel of a ring, which is worn upon the finger next to the little finger of the left hand."³⁶ Similarly, Wabanakis who resided on Mount Desert Island treated eel skins like amulets, wrapping the integuments around the sites of headaches and other cramps.³⁷

Attempting to offer an alternative to indigenous healing aids, the Jesuits frequently presented ill Wabanakis with tangible items associated with Christianity.³⁸ An example of this kind of substitution occurred when Actodin, the son of the revered Micmac sagamore Membertou, fell gravely ill. The Jesuits desperately utilized an unspecified bone of Saint Lawrence, a relic that they had received as an assurance of protection during their voyage across the Atlantic Ocean.³⁹ The Jesuits "placed some of these holy relics upon the sick man, at the same time offering our vows for him," and he soon made a complete recovery.⁴⁰ Biard claimed that the event "opened the eyes" of the Micmacs "to the great glory of Our Savior," and served to "greatly discredit th[o]se baleful Magicians [Micmac healers]."⁴¹ Doubtless, the striking similarity that existed between the efficacy of Saint Lawrence's bone to heal Actodin and the medicinal value that Natives frequently attributed to animal parts augmented the favorable reaction of the Micmac audience.

In order to further delegitimize and supplant the role of Indian spiritual leaders, the Jesuits reproduced and revised the performance aspect of traditional Wabanaki healing. In an account entitled, "On the Medi-

cine of the Savages,” Biard described what he presented to be a typical interaction between a shaman, an afflicted person, and the surrounding Wabanaki community.⁴² Natives joined the shaman near the ailing individual in a public ritual aimed at eradicating an evil spirit. After “various chants, dances, and howls” over a nearby hole where the spirit had supposedly taken refuge, the practice reached its climax in a communal effort to pull the spirit out of hiding.⁴³

The shaman alone possessed the power to fatally extinguish the spirit. Biard categorized participants as “poor dupes” for failing to recognize that the “imposter” shaman had fastened the cord into the ground with a stick covered in “decayed and mouldy bones, pieces of skin covered with dung.” Following the removal of the stick and the attached cord from the hole, the whole group was “overjoyed,” for they believed that “wicked Lucifer ha[d] been killed.”⁴⁴ Finally, the shaman waited upon a dream in order to determine whether the spirit had delivered the patient a “deathblow” before its defeat.⁴⁵

According to Biard, if a doomed individual did not perish within the span of time that the shaman predicted, the healer killed the patient in order fulfill the original prophecy. The shaman would fetch cold water, which he poured “over [the patient’s] navel, and thus extinguish[ed] all vital heat.”⁴⁶ Though readers must remain cognizant of Jesuit biases in reports of Native practices, it is likely that shamans acted to maintain their authority against Jesuit threats to their power. By effectuating their predictions, shamans could guard the credibility that the Jesuits tried to destroy.⁴⁷ Still, the missionaries embraced every chance to prove the superiority of their god, and attempted to demonstrate their spiritual authority by prolonging a patient’s life.⁴⁸

The Jesuits invited communal participation in healing, but their main focus remained the establishment of an association between Christianity and recuperation. These missionaries were familiar with theatrical demonstrations of religious and moral propriety. The *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599, a document that outlined the instructional course for an aspiring Jesuit, required that members of the order perform only those plays that contained a “spiritual and edifying theme.”⁴⁹ The Jesuits seemed to adapt these moralistic performances for their Acadian setting and indigenous audience. Sometimes these displays blatantly discredited shamans, such as when Jesuits publicly ordered the Indian spiritual leaders to destroy drums, amulets, and other objects that they used in communal rituals.⁵⁰

More frequently, Jesuits simply practiced Christian sacraments and

rituals in the presence of many Wabanaki witnesses. As Biard, a French nobleman, and an Indian interpreter surveyed the land of Saint Sauveur in 1613, the travelers encountered a Wabanaki community overcome with illness and grief. Among a group of sympathetic band members, a father held his subdued, sick child. When the father “began to groan” in anguish, the whole gathering joined the man in his cries. The nobleman took the child into his arms and baptized him. Biard, anticipating that the Natives “expected great results,” recited prayers in hopes that “God might be pleased to enlighten these poor Heathen.” Following these divine entreaties, the missionary took the child and handed him to his mother. The baby immediately began to drink milk from her breast, a sign of regained health. The Wabanaki spectators were amazed at the remarkable recovery and “remained there, fixed and immovable, without saying a word, and as if Frozen.”⁵¹

Biard claimed that these bewildered Natives, “strongly touched by God,” regarded him as “more than man.”⁵² This view of the Jesuits would ultimately undermine the Natives’ trust in them. The understanding of a healer as “more than man” resembled the Wabanaki conception of shamans more than the Jesuits’ intended role as emissaries of the Christian god. The Jesuits maintained that they “interceded” on behalf of their deity, implying that their hands were merely the instruments with which their god hoped to heal and welcome Natives into the Christian fold.⁵³ Conversely, Wabanakis believed that their communal healers exercised “*personal* supernatural power,” which they could use to the benefit or detriment of tribal members.⁵⁴ Father Jouvency recorded that the Natives of Acadia attributed illness to one of two causes; the first source was “the mind of the patient himself, which desires something, and will vex the body of the sick man until it possesses the thing required”; the second believed origin was the “hidden arts and the charms of sorcerers.”⁵⁵ Thus, though Wabanakis recognized the restorative role that shamans assumed at public gatherings, they also believed that these spiritual leaders could necessitate such meetings. When Natives equated Jesuit healing with the supernatural curative abilities of their shamans, they effectively destroyed Jesuit immunity to the indigenous understanding that such individuals also possessed the ability to inflict illness.

As the seventeenth century progressed and deadly diseases proliferated, Wabanakis generally regarded healers with indifference or distrust. This “great dying” largely stripped shamans of the credibility that they traditionally held within their communities.⁵⁶ If Wabanakis doubted the spiritual sources of shamanic healing practices, they surely lacked confidence in Jesuit “miracles,” as well. Eventually, the Natives of Acadia

viewed the Jesuits' European background as a kind of congenital disorder in itself. Wabanakis lamented that "their countries were very populous" prior to contact and extensive trade relations with the French. The Natives attributed the constant "thinning out" of their population to the diseases introduced by these visitors from across the Atlantic Ocean. Some Wabanakis even believed that behind a veil of benevolence, French practitioners concealed a desire to kill their ailing Indian acquaintances. A puzzled Father Biard wrote that Natives suspected that the "French poison[ed] them," a claim that he blatantly refuted.⁵⁷

The apparent unreliability of the spiritual healing performed by Jesuits and shamans convinced Natives to largely rely upon herbalists within their own communities to treat maladies.⁵⁸ The Jesuits' inability to harness the benefits of indigenous plants greatly damaged their chances of using genuine healing as a conversion method. Like many Christian missionaries who evangelized among the indigenous populations of present-day Maine and Canada, the Jesuits rashly dismissed valid Indian assessments of the efficacy of particular herbal remedies.⁵⁹ In addition, the Jesuits frequently crafted their accounts of indigenous cures in ways that ignored or delegitimized the spiritual aspects of the practices. This disregard for the spiritual context in which Indian practitioners used plants and herbs drastically limited the European's "descriptive enterprise" detailing the application of particular flora.⁶⁰ The information that the writer chose to record largely depended upon the Native who used the herb, and their role in society. Given that the Jesuits often believed that shamans derived their power from diabolical sources, they tended to detail only those practices performed by lay members of the community who appeared to have "made their botanical discoveries naturally."⁶¹ As a result of the restrictions that Jesuits placed on documentation, they overlooked the curative properties of many plants and herbs that could have significantly strengthened their medical arsenal.⁶²

Though each Indian death diminished general confidence in Jesuit boasts of spiritual superiority, a number of Wabanakis remained loyal to Jesuit teachings and healing practices. Many scholars erroneously assume that this fidelity resulted from a generous assessment of Jesuit political agency.⁶³ In reality, Jesuit alliances often proved detrimental to the stability of Native communities. Affiliations with the Jesuits, for example, ensnared Wabanakis in French conflicts with the English and incited wrath from adversarial Indian bands.⁶⁴ However, continuing participation in Jesuit healing allowed indigent Wabanakis to gain access material resources that they desired.

During the seventeenth century, the Acadian landscape became the

backdrop for an intensified continental rivalry. French boundaries to Acadia “overlapped” with English territorial claims in New England and Scotland’s stakes in New Scotland.⁶⁵ As early as 1613, the English led raids that resulted in the destruction of the settlements at Port Royal and Saint Sauveur.⁶⁶ Captain Samuel Argall declared the Jesuits pirates, and took Father Biard and a confrere as prisoners to Jamestown, Virginia. Eventually, French diplomacy saved these missionaries from captivity, and they returned home to France. This climactic drama was the end of Father Biard’s tenure in Acadia.⁶⁷ Approximately forty years after this ordeal, Major General Robert Sedgwick invaded Port Royal. The Englishman informed the Jesuits that they could stay in Acadia, but required them to abandon their settlement.⁶⁸ Five years later, an anonymous Jesuit noted that the English possessed much of Acadia, leaving only northern settlements, such as Cape Breton, to the French.⁶⁹ France eventually repossessed Acadia in 1670, but the English formally gained lasting control of the region with the ratification of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.⁷⁰ In addition to military and political fears, Protestant ministers threatened Jesuit security as they rendered the region an evangelical battleground.⁷¹ Fellow Catholic religious orders challenged Jesuit conversion efforts, as well. A dispute with the Capuchins resulted in the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Kennebec region in 1647.⁷² A decrease in Jesuit personnel accompanied these territorial losses. Between 1659 and 1662, only three Jesuits remained in northern Acadia.⁷³

Hoping to combat escalating political, military, and religious threats, the Jesuits assumed diplomatic duties. French officials understood the strategic importance of potential Jesuit settlements, and accordingly commissioned missionaries to nurture relationships with neutral Natives. When Abenaki representatives traveled to Québec requesting a missionary in 1646, French agents recognized the strategic proximity of the Kennebec River Valley to the English colonies in New England and immediately sent Father Gabriel Druillettes to minister in the region.⁷⁴ Druillettes acted as a joint representative of the Abenakis and the French government at Québec. He traveled to New England to attain assurance of English aid in the event that French settlers and their Indian allies suffered an attack from the Mohawk people.⁷⁵

Though Druillettes clearly played an important political role for both the French and the Abenakis, material motivations remained the primary reason why Natives remained engaged with Jesuit healing and teachings. In particular, the priest’s charity in times of suffering gained the appreciation of many Abenakis. The Jesuit chronicle of 1647 docu-

mented that Druillettes tended to stricken Natives, “winning their souls through the care that he gave their bodies.” The missionary offered food to the converts, who “were sure” that “if some good morsel were given [to Druillettes],” he would pass it on to them.⁷⁶ Rather than political prowess or Christian catechesis, the nourishment that Druillettes provided to these ill patients seemed to be the true source of their zeal.

Wabanakis, sometimes selectively, chose opportune moments to display their newly acquired faith. A few years after Father Biard’s encounter with the Penobscot followers of Asticou, he joined the *Sieur de Biencourt*, a French nobleman, on a visit to Pentegoët. While Biard searched the settlement for sick Natives, he encountered a man “who was not expected to live, having been sick for three months.” The Jesuit gave the man a cross, which he instructed the convalescent to kiss and place around his neck. Next, a congregation of Natives listened as Biard “announced as well as he could the good tidings of the salvation acquired” through the patient’s adoration of and adornment in the cross. Satisfied with his evangelical efforts, Biard left the group. The following day, the man confidently entered the barque in which the *Sieur de Boutrincourt* and a group of Natives were trading. Still wearing the cross that Biard had given him earlier, the newcomer commenced “great demonstrations of joy” and “expressed his gratitude to Father Biard before them all.”⁷⁷ The correlation between the timing of the man’s rejuvenation and the commencement of the trade exchange seemed beyond the bounds of mere coincidence. Such a timely, gracious display of Christian piety doubtless inspired charity in the industrious French nobleman.

News from distant Jesuit settlements signaled the dangers of Catholic devotion by Native Americans—regardless of the sincerity behind their piety. English settlements were not the only source of peril. In their camps, Indian aggressors sought to punish those Natives involved with the Jesuits. To the West, Iroquois raids on Hurons who were under the tutelage of the Jesuits indicated that Christianity was more of a liability than a diplomatic asset. Father Jérôme Lalemant, the superior of the Huron missions, penned chronicles of Iroquois attacks between 1658 and 1659. These documents portrayed the Hurons’ social landscape as agreeable to Jesuit catechizing efforts, particularly because of the plentitude of sick Natives in the missions. Lalemant reveled in the availability of these promising candidates for baptism, but remarked that the Iroquois were just as numerous. He lamented their apparent omnipresence, and bemoaned how these “obtrusive phantom[s]” killed every Christian

that they could find.⁷⁸ These circumstances provided the Jesuits, and their Wabanaki acquaintances in Acadia, proof that the sign of the cross served as a bull's-eye for Indian assailants.

Even as political and religious affiliations with Jesuits endangered Wabanaki constituents, Natives continued to welcome Jesuits to their region. Forty years after Father Druillettes departed the Kennebec River Valley, the Jesuits sent Father Sébastien Râle to offer stability and spiritual leadership to the Abenakis of the region. The missionary endeavored to counter the potential spread of Protestantism that flourished in expanding English colonies in New England.⁷⁹ Moreover, Râle hoped that his presence in the settlement of Nanrantsouak would provide a refuge for Natives from the ongoing King William's War. Since the commencement of the conflict in 1690, many Wabanakis had been caught in the crossfire of both the English and French guns and the hailing arrows of each party's respective Indian allies.⁸⁰

One year into his tenure, Father Râle began to create an Algonquian and French dictionary.⁸¹ The selection of entries reveal that the Jesuits resolutely continued to use healing to gain Indian allegiance, even as their spiritual and political credibility diminished. The contents of the dictionary suggest that Father Râle continued the Jesuit tradition of replacing Indian objects with "Christian amulets," and provide conclusive evidence that a certain extent of cultural exchange occurred at Nanrantsouak.⁸² Under the translation for "rosary," Râle includes the phrase "I carry them on my belt."⁸³ This example conjures the image of Natives toting the beads as they prayed and hunted, able to easily clutch this Christian token of reassurance lest they encounter peril. Râle also apparently used sickness and healing to communicate the guardianship of the Christian god in a more explicit manner. His entry for the verb "despair" reveals that illness was the most common source of feelings of hopelessness. Râle begins his translation of "despair" with documentation of the utterance "I despair from sickness." This implicit commonality of the phrase suggests that illness provided the most common context for the use of "despair." Interestingly, his translation of "do not despair" points to the Christian deity as the cure for Native ailing; the example sentence reads, "I do not despair, v.g. out of the mercy of God."⁸⁴

Râle's entries, which frequently reified the relationship between God and the alleviation of suffering, impaired the missionary's "descriptive enterprise" and caused him to overlook potentially effective Indian natural remedies.⁸⁵ Râle's dictionary included entries for ointments and roots, as well as references to purgatives and the "refreshment" provided



Father Sébastien Rasles' strongbox ca. 1720. This strongbox held important letters and documents during the Jesuit priest's tenure in Maine. It may even have housed his Algonquian and French dictionary. Collections of the Maine Historical Society.

by particular roots, but he did not acknowledge the work of shamans or herbalists.⁸⁶ On many occasions, Râle also mentioned oils and greases derived from animal carcasses. He catalogued various animals from which Natives collected oils, including bears and seals, and translated recommendations to soak oneself in these substances.⁸⁷ These practices were not only consistent with the increasing Wabanaki reliance on herbalists, but also represented traditional Indian cures that did not require the guidance of a spiritual leader.⁸⁸ Indeed, Wabanakis often used these greases as both a curative and preventative lubricant.⁸⁹ They believed that after application, “the limbs [were] thus strengthened” against disease.⁹⁰ Though Râle included the question “where is the grease?” in his list of animal body parts, the missionary apparently failed to recognize the entry’s implicit confirmation that indigenous “salves” and “healing balms” ultimately superseded the spiritual element of Jesuit cures.⁹¹

More than medical assistance, spiritual leadership, or political pro-

tection, Wabanakis at Nanrantsouak relied on the Jesuits to satisfy their material needs. Although some scholars dismiss the claim that Natives forged a relationship with Jesuits in order to gain access to European goods, they fail to recognize the overwhelming extent of the want that Wabanaki bands experienced.⁹² Indicative of the provisional scarcity that the Natives endured, Râle's dictionary includes entries that express sheer desperation. One documentation records the phrase "I cry from hunger." Further, the entry "I'm hungry as a dog" and its implications of animalistic ravenousness demonstrates the substantial poverty with which Wabanakis struggled.⁹³

The notation of the phrase "I have confidence that he will assist me in my need to eat" suggests that Natives felt assured that Jesuits would provide for their nutritional needs.⁹⁴ Though not as numerous as mentions of hunger, Râle includes sayings that indicate a rare bounty of food.⁹⁵ The Jesuits' ability to provide sustenance, even if only in limited quantities, strengthened the affinity that the Wabanakis felt for their European cohabitants, as well as their healing methods. Therefore, while these Natives remained loyal to their black robed companions, their allegiance was primarily contingent upon the Jesuit's resources. If actual healing occurred in the context of material exchange, these recoveries were merely a welcomed byproduct.

Just as the newfound Christianity of the Hurons invoked Iroquois wrath, the settlers at Nanrantsouak fell victim to the burning French-English political rivalry. Like the Iroquois, the English viewed the Jesuits and their Wabanaki allies as accessories to the French cause. Father Râle's dearth of priests and resources prevented him from protecting his Native wards from an English raid in 1724. Sent to eliminate "the Wabanaki threat to their settlements," the English troops killed Râle and many of his Indian companions.⁹⁶ This fatal attack confirmed the Wabanakis worst fears, which they had chosen to ignore in favor of greater access to the goods necessary for survival. More than a century after Father Biard rushed to baptize Asticou at the Penobscot settlement, the Wabanakis who suffered a violent death at Nanrantousak shared the existential concerns of their Penobscot predecessors.

The Jesuits indisputably adopted an increasingly political role as the seventeenth century advanced, but evangelical and economic concerns continued to permeate the relations between the missionaries and Wabanakis. The Jesuits continuously drew upon healing rituals to convince Natives of Christianity's virtues, and Wabanakis successively viewed such practices as a means to increase their access to European supplies.

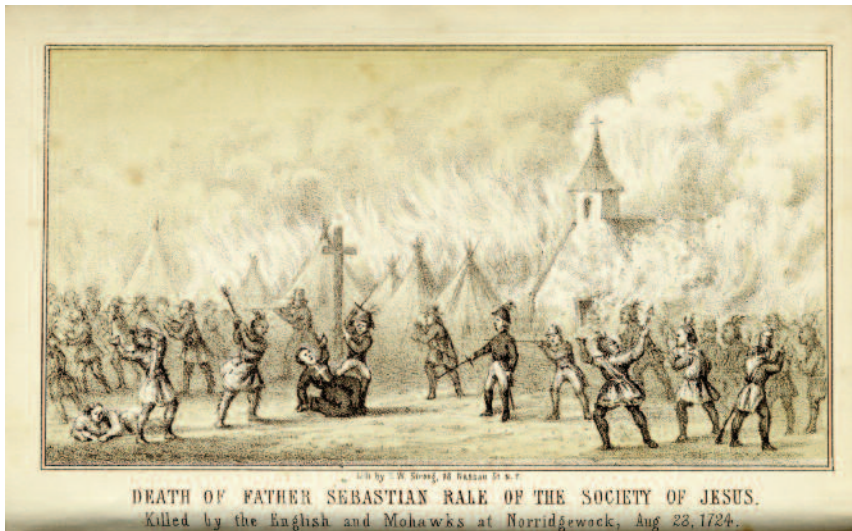


Image depicting the execution of Father Sébastien Râle of the Society of Jesus by British colonial and Mohawk soldiers at Norridgewock on August 23, 1724. Râle, along with many of his Wabanaki companions, was killed during this raid in an effort to eliminate the threat of attack from the northern frontier of Maine. Collections of the Maine Historical Society.

Moreover, Jesuit healing served as the medium through which both parties had the best chance to overcome their respective obstacles and achieve their aims. Though their aspirations for grand scale conversions ultimately failed, visiting and treating the sick enabled the Jesuits to surmount communicative obstacles and preserve their provisional stocks on a large scale. For Wabanakis, receiving medical attention from the Jesuits often preceded and coincided with securing the goods necessary for survival. Genuine conversions certainly occurred, but most Wabanakis primarily interpreted claims of miraculous recoveries to be the solution to their frequent material want. In times of vulnerability, Natives did not feel for the rosary beads that they “carr[ie]d on their belt[s],” but instead reached for the keys to Jesuit storehouses.⁹⁷

NOTES

1. Reuben Gold Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, rev. ed. (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1959), 3: 267-269. Hereafter referred to as “JR.”

2. JR 3: 269, 271.

3. Frank G. Speck, "The Eastern Algonkian Wabanaki Confederacy," *American Anthropologist* 17, no. 3 (July-September 1915): 492. As charted by John G. Reid, Maurice Basque, Elizabeth Mancke, Barry Moody, Geoffrey Plank, and William Wicken in *The "Conquest" of Acadia, 1710: Imperial, Colonial, and Aboriginal Constructions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), ix, Acadia was the region of New France that included "the later dimensions of Canada's Maritime provinces," the Gaspé Peninsula, and "a piece of the state of Maine that extending southward to the Penobscot River." Its Native population primarily consisted of four native bands that comprised the Wabanaki Confederacy: the Penobscots, Passamaquoddy, Micmacs, and Abenakis.
4. Biard wrote at length about his expectations for baptismal candidates in *JR* 3: 151.
5. Allan Greer, ed., *The Jesuit Relations: Natives and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), v.
6. Greer, *The Jesuit Relations*, 1.
7. Francis Parkman, *The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century*, vol. 2, *France and England in North America*, rev. ed. (Williamstown, MA: Corner House Publishing, 1970), 97. Loyola's condition prior to his religious awakening paralleled the circumstances that affected Native life. Like the Wabanakis, he lacked the extensive literary knowledge prized by European educators. Instead, Loyola received military training and became a soldier for the Spanish army. Loyola's dramatic transformation from soldier to pious founder of a religious order occurred after he sustained injuries during the Battle of Pamplona in 1521. As he lay wounded and immobile, Loyola read the only books readily available to him: works on the life of Jesus and the saints. Nineteenth-century historian Francis Parkman described how "in the solitude of his sick-room," "a change came over him, upheaving like an earthquake." Suddenly, Loyola felt a deep connection to the Christian God, and at that moment, "the soldier gave himself to a new warfare," 95–96. In sickness and disease, the Jesuits found an evangelical tool with which they could work to inspire dramatic conversions in the hearts of Natives.
8. James Axtell's *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) and Allan Greer's "The Exchange of Medical Knowledge between Natives and Jesuits in New France" in *El saber de los jesuitas, historias naturales y el Nuevo Mundo*, edited by Luis Millones Figueroa and Domingo Ledezma, 135–146 (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2005), are two examples of works that acknowledge cultural similarities and at least entertain the possible strategic uses of Jesuit healing. In *Death in the New World: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1491–1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), Erik Seeman expands on these claims, and argues that the success of the Jesuits depended upon their ability to adjust their evangelization efforts according to Indian custom and belief. Tracy Neale Leavelle's *The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) similarly employs an ethnographic approach to assess Jesuit missionary activity and strategies of exchange used by Catholic priests and their Algonquian Illinois and Ottawa acquaintances.
9. *JR* 3: 105.
10. Seeman, 107–108.
11. Harald E.L. Prins and Bunny McBride, *Asticou's Domain: Wabanaki Peoples at Mount Desert Island 1500–2000*, rev. ed., in *Acadia National Park: Ethnographic Overview and*

Assessment (Boston: National Park Service, 2007), 1:54. Europeans and Wabanakis did not have significant contact in the Gulf of Maine before 1600, but intertribal trade exposed Wabanakis to European goods and illnesses prior to their own encounters with the newcomers. As Prins and McBride suggest, Wabanakis frequently travelled between the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Bay of Fundy. During these excursions, Wabanakis doubtless bartered with local Nova Scotian Souriquois and Etchemins from the Bay of Fundy, whose populations were ravaged by European epidemiological exports in the late sixteenth century (1: 54).

12. Harald E.L. Prins and Bunny McBride, *Asticou's Domain: Wabanaki Peoples at Mount Desert Island 1500-2000*, rev. ed., in *Acadia National Park: Ethnographic Overview and Assessment* (Boston: National Park Service, 2007), 2: 440.

13. Prins and McBride, 2: 440.

14. Matteo Binasco, "Few, Uncooperative, and Endangered: The Troubled Activity of the Roman Catholic missionaries in Acadia (1610-1710)," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 8, no. 3 (2006), 325.

15. Binasco, 325-326.

16. Binasco, 325-326; Reuben Gold Thwaites, "Introduction," *JR* 1: 4.

17. *JR* 3: 147.

18. *JR* 1: 161.

19. *JR* 3: 151.

20. Speck, 492.

21. *JR* 3: 151.

22. *JR* 3: 141, 3: 149.

23. *JR* 3: 151, 153.

24. *JR* 2: 11.

25. *JR* 3: 115.

26. Axtell, 38.

27. *JR* 1: 161, 163.

28. *JR* 2: 241, 3: 253.

29. *JR* 3: 253.

30. *JR* 3: 195.

31. *JR* 2: 99.

32. In *JR* 2:99, Biard explained that he and his colleagues performed healings even in areas where native inhabitants were unfamiliar with Christianity and "had never before seen a Priest or the rites of [the] Religion."

33. Ignatius Loyola, *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. George E. Ganss (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), 275, quoted in Seeman, 115.

34. Toby Gelfand, "Medicine in New France," in *Medicine in the New World*, ed. Ronald Numbers (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 69.

35. Gelfand, 72-73.

36. *JR* 1: 247. Among "six hundred other diseases," Jouveny explained that the marrow supposedly aided in the treatment of pleurisy, epilepsy, and dizziness (1: 249).

37. Prins and McBride, 2: 442.
38. Axtell, 112.
39. *JR* 2: 19; Seeman, 113. Erik Seeman offers a detailed retelling and comprehensive interpretation of this encounter in "Holy Bones and Beautiful Deaths in New France," the fourth chapter of *Death in the New World*.
40. *JR* 2: 19.
41. *JR* 3: 125.
42. Biard often employed the term "autmoin" for Indian healers. Anthropologist William S. Lyon notes the specific Micmac roots and use of this word, and suggests that "shaman" is a synonymous alternative. Lyon expands on this term and provides details on its use by Jesuit Pierre François de Charlevoix in *Encyclopedia of Native American Healing* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), 20.
43. *JR* 3: 117, 121.
44. *JR* 3: 121. As Allan Greer aptly describes, Jesuit witnesses often assigned diabolical connotations to Native American beliefs that they perceived to be contrary to Catholic dogma. For example, the Jesuits dismissed the Indian concept of *manitou*, the spiritual aspect of an object, whether animate or inanimate, that gave it "the power to influence human affairs." Despite its faults, Biard's account of a shaman's duties provides useful information on native ritual and healing practice. See Greer, ed. *The Jesuit Relations*, vi.
45. *JR* 3: 121.
46. *JR* 3: 123.
47. Nicholas Smith, "The Development of Wabanaki Herb Medicines," *Maine Archaeological Society* (1966), 2, quoted in Prins and McBride 2: 437.
48. The Jesuits embraced the ancient notion of humorism and its insistence on the balance of phlegm, blood, black bile, and yellow bile. This theory's emphasis on counteracting disproportions to regain health proved that Jesuit medicinal practice aimed at amelioration of physical ailments. See Michael Boylan, "Method," paragraphs 1 and 4, in *Galen, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/galen/#H3>.
49. *Jesuit Ratio Studiorum of 1599*, trans. Allen P. Farrell, S.J. (translation presented at the Conference of Major Superiors of Jesuits, Washington, DC, 1970), 17.
50. Axtell, 99.
51. *JR* 4: 95, 97.
52. *JR* 4: 97.
53. Axtell, 78.
54. Axtell, 17.
55. *JR* 1: 259, 261.
56. Prins and McBride, 2: 440.
57. *JR* 3: 103.
58. Prins and McBride, 2: 440.
59. Chris Parsons, "Medical Encounters and Exchange in Early Canadian Missions," *Canadian Journal of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine* 31, no. 1-2 (2008): 56.

60. Parsons, 51.

61. Parsons, 65.

62. Parsons, 51.

63. Matteo Binasco argues that from 1687 to the British seizure of Port Royal in 1710, the Jesuits acted as political mediators on behalf of the French. He claims that the missionaries attempted to discourage Indian alliances with the encroaching Protestant Englishmen of New England (342, 339). William Clark's case study, entitled "The Church at Nan-rantsouak: Sébastien Râle, S.J., and the Wabanaki of Maine's Kennebec River," *Catholic Historical Review* 92, no. 3 (July 2006): 225-251, suggests that increased friction between England and France might have been the cause for the growth of Wabanaki distrust of the Jesuits that began around 1645. However, Clark also emphasized the need to reorient the focus of research on Acadia from political matters to Native agency and cultural experiences.

64. Native-European alliances not only complicated continental conflicts, but also created and exacerbated intertribal tension. Father Sébastien Râle's settlement at Nan-rantsouak originally provided a refuge for the Wabanakis of the Kennebec River Valley who had been caught in the crossfire of English guns and Wampanoag bows during King Philip's War from 1675 to 1678 (Clark, 226). Turning their attention to the West, where the Iroquois had nearly decimated the Hurons, Wabanakis and Jesuits feared future attacks from this powerful tribe (*JR* 45: 189). See Volume 45 of *JR* to read Father Jérôme Lalemant's accounts of Iroquois attacks on Christian Natives.

65. Elizabeth Mancke and John G. Reid, "Elites, States, and the Imperial Contest for Acadia," in *The "Conquest" of Acadia, 1710: Imperial, Colonial, and Aboriginal Constructions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 25. According to Mancke and Reid, "over few places in the seventeenth-century Americas did Europeans contest their claims so repeatedly and inconclusively as those to Acadia." Indeed, control of the region was often transferred through treaties between the French, English, and Scots.

66. Binasco, 328.

67. W. Austin Squires, "ARGALL, SIR SAMUEL," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 1 (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/argall_samuel_1E.html (accessed October 22, 2013).

68. Binasco, 331.

69. *JR* 45: 59.

70. Mancke and Reid, 40.

71. Clark, 231.

72. Binasco, 330.

73. Binasco, 333.

74. Parkman, 419.

75. Parkman, 422.

76. *JR* 31: 187.

77. *JR* 4: 91.

78. *JR* 45: 189.

79. Clark, 230.

80. Clark, 226.
81. Clark, 231.
82. Axtell, 112.
83. R  le 1: 408.
84. R  le 1: 432. R  le often preceded such example sentences with the letters “v.g.” Editor John Pickering remarks that “v.g.” notated the Latin phrase “verbi gratia,” which roughly translates to “for example.” Refer to page 376 of the volume to view Pickering’s explanations for abbreviations that R  le commonly employed.
85. R  le 1: 479; Parsons, 51.
86. R  le 1: 485, 517.
87. R  le 1: 463, 1: 433.
88. Prins and McBride, 2: 440.
89. Prins and McBride 2: 441 - 442.
90. *JR* 1: 281.
91. R  le 1: 383; Prins and McBride 2: 441 - 442.
92. Axtell downplays the importance of goods and asserts “the novelty of European artifacts and techniques was not enough to secure the natives’ long-range allegiance.” Rather than material motivations, Axtell attributes amicable relationships between Indians and European newcomers to the “religious and moral ethos” of Native individuals and communities (12); *JR* 3: 115 details the “great poverty” from which Wabanaki bands suffered. This particular Jesuit chronicle explains that Wabanakis “live[d] only from hand to mouth, and hence [were] always subject to the fear of hunger, first and strongest of all wants.”
93. R  le, 1: 452.
94. R  le, 1: 416-417.
95. For the entry that records the phrase “I am always eating,” see R  le, 1: 452.
96. Clark, 227.
97. R  le 1: 408.