The question of what artistic images can really tell us about European perceptions of Native Americans is methodologically complex, because, as argued in this paper, what was perceived is not to be taken as being identical with what was represented. White's paintings are so exceptional in their quality and closeness to an observed experience that they can tell us a great deal about this problem. At the same time, however, because of this very exceptionality, it will always be risky to analyze them in isolation from the wider contemporary corpus of texts and images about the New World. Therefore, I will propose a wider perspective informed by earlier materials, followed by a close analysis of the relation between text and image, and of the role of artistic licence, in the creation of the Harriot–White corpus.

Mental images and artistic images: a Renaissance perspective

We can take as a starting point what I call ‘the mental images of Jean de Léry’, the French Huguenot colonist who famously described the Tupinambá of Brazil in a book first published in 1578 (although his personal observations date from 1557):

If you would picture to yourself a savage ... you may imagine in your mind [vostre entendement] a naked man, well formed and proportioned in his limbs, with all the hair on his body plucked out; his hair shaved in the fashion I have described; the lips and cheeks slit, with pointed bones or green stones set in them; his ears pierced, with pendants in the holes; his body painted; his thighs and legs blackened with the dye that they make from the genipap fruit that I mentioned; and with necklaces made up of innumerable little pieces of the big seashell that they call vignol.

The description was accompanied with what was to become one of the most iconic early-modern images of the American savage (Fig. 1).

Thus you will see him as he usually is in his country, and, as far as his natural condition is concerned, such as you will see him portrayed in the following illustration, wearing only his crescent of polished bone on his breast, his stone in the hole in his lip, and, to show his general bearing, his unbent bow and his arrows in his hands. To fill out this plate, we have put near this Tupinamba one of his women, who, in their customary way, is holding her child in a cotton scarf, with the child holding on to her side with both legs.2

Not content with this single image, Léry also described a number of variations, or, as he called them, four additional ‘contemplations’ for the European imagination, in which, like in a game of dressing up dolls, the Tupinambá appeared with a feathered body, traditionally ornamented, half dressed with European clothes (a ludicrous image), or equipped with maracas and araroyes made of feathers for dancing. The latter image was also illustrated in a woodcut (Fig. 2).

Interestingly, Léry assumed responsibility not only for the literary description, but also for the design of the visual representations. He understood that only the combination of image and text, on the basis of a personal experience (what one has seen and heard), may allow the traveller to transmit to his European audience the reality of a New World which was especially admirable because the ancients had never described it.3

Léry is, in terms of lineage, important because he was a precedent to Harriot and White in the Protestant theme and iconography of a savage who was in some ways a ‘good savage’, that is, a natural man whose virtues were uncorrupted by civilization while at the same time an idolater heading for eternal damnation. The interaction between the humanist...
theme of the tragedy of civilization (what we might call ‘Stoic primitivism’) and the Christian theme of the fall into sin (here tinged with the Léry’s Calvinist Augustinianism) reflects the fundamental clash between the ‘languages’ of Christianity and civilization in 16th-century ethnological discourse. Léry is in fact an outstanding example of how subtle and complex the image of the savage – even the cannibal – could be, against the tendency to simply emphasize stereotypes. That the same hospitable and faithful men who were able to live in peace and tranquillity ‘guided solely by their nature (even corrupted as it is)’, putting to shame those hypocritical Christian Europeans ‘who have both divine and human laws’, could also be described in matters of religion as ‘a people accursed and abandoned by God’, provides a model for one of the most striking captions to John White’s illustration of the Algonquians of Virginia fishing, as published by de Bry:

Doubtless it is a pleasant sight to see the people sometimes wading, and sometimes sailing in those rivers, which are shallow and not deep, free from all care of heaping of riches for their posterity, content with their state, and living friendly together of those things which God in his bounty has given unto them, yet without giving him any thanks according to his desserts. So savage is this people, and deprived of the true knowledge of God.¹

That the possible echoes of a Golden Age amongst the savages did not contradict their fallen condition and their sinfulness was one of the key axioms held by European readers of travel literature from as early Columbus’ humanist interpreter Peter Martyr of Anghiera. It remains nevertheless an important question whether and when Jean de Léry’s Voyage was read in England by the circle under Walter Raleigh’s patronage to which belonged Richard Hakluyt as travel collector, Thomas Harriot as a man of applied learning and the artist John White. It is most likely that Hakluyt learnt of the Voyage, first published in French in 1578 and again in 1580 (always in Geneva), some time between 1583 and 1588, since during this period he was in Paris and made contact with the royal cosmographer André Thevet, Léry’s rival and target of criticism.² As a Protestant chaplain, Hakluyt would have been sympathetic to the Calvinist pastor Léry, and the presence of a community of Huguenot refugees in London (including the artist Jacques Le Moyne) must also have facilitated the circulation of his account.³ The first substantial translation of Léry’s narrative into English by Samuel Purchas would only appear in 1625, but of course Purchas had inherited many books and papers from Hakluyt, including, it would seem, his copy of Léry’s Histoire d’un voyage.⁴ De Bry, however, was quick to add Léry’s Latin text (which had been published in 1586) to his series, and John White seems to have copied the five original engravings of the Tupinambá into one of his albums, the so-called Sloane volume, and coloured them.⁵

We may conclude that while it is not entirely clear at which particular moment Léry’s work began to circulate within the Raleigh–Hakluyt circle, the evidence suggests that it was eventually well known. We could add that it is more likely to have been known in 1586–9 (when the de Bry publication was planned) than in 1585–6 (when Harriot and White did their work in North Carolina). That is, Léry’s book may not have been a model for the observation of the Algonquians, but its excellent ethnographic standards, its detailed woodcuts, and its sharp Protestant interpretation of the savage condition, all could have contributed to shape de Bry’s project of 1590.

Léry is not only important for understanding the context for the publication of the Harriot–White folio volume by de Bry, but also for establishing a methodological point: here is someone who was writing his final text with the engraved image in front of him, and who understood the image as being much more than an echo of the text, that is, he understood it as an element that offered information autonomously, and that was in fact necessary to cover the distance between the marvellous and the culturally comprehensible. Léry set this model of authentic observation in opposition to his Catholic rival Thevet, who (he alleged) often wrote from hearsay rather than experience, and who amplified and invented – and indeed, lied – driven by vanity or by religious sectarism, rather than by honest learning.⁶ It was not enough to ‘have been there’ to claim authority. In pursuit of true learning, one also needed to offer an artistic complement to the text (however imperfect text and image still were), in order to produce as faithful a representation as was feasible.

The engravings for Léry’s Voyage were created under the author’s direction but were obviously conditioned by culturally specific artistic conventions, some quite similar to those we later encounter with de Bry. Figures are presented as general types rather than individuals. For economic reasons – because cutting engravings was expensive – the artist filled his images with additional visual information, like the pineapple and the hammock behind the Tupinambá family. Most decisive, the general composition, and the human figures in particular, were somewhat rigid according to a widespread classicizing tendency. The more detailed the woodcut or the engraving, the more powerful these conventions became. Consider the two versions of the dramatic illustrations that accompanied the equally famous narrative of Hans Staden’s captivity amongst the Tupinambá; the original woodcuts of the German edition (1557), crude but ethnographically rich, which were meant to offer an exemplary narrative, and Theodor de Bry’s copper engravings of the same scenes for the third volume of his American series of Grandes Voyages (which included the accounts by Staden and Léry), published in 1593. Under de Bry the bodies became more handsome and the composition more harmonious, obviously with the intention of making the images more attractive, rather than more accurate (Figs 3–4).

Thus the complex relationship between text and image, so central to interpreting the work by Thomas Harriot and John White (including de Bry’s subsequent intervention as publisher and engraver), invites a broader reflection about the way artistic images with ethnographic subjects can be used as historical evidence. Modern historiography about European images (literary and visual) of non-European peoples has tended to emphasize the importance of these rhetorical distortions. From this perspective, two types of explanations have been proposed. The first would suggest that these distortions were driven by ideology. In particular, they were the result of the desire to either denigrate ‘the other’ according to colonial ideologies or, alternatively, to idealize non-European cultures, sometimes (albeit not often) to support an anti-colonial stance. Hence Columbus’ theme of the Caribs as cannibals who preyed on the more peaceful and innocent peoples of Hispaniola and Cuba can be seen as initially expressing a desire to confirm the proximity of Marco Polo’s Asia, but has also been interpreted as offering support for the
selective practice of enslavement in a rapidly growing colonial system, helping circumvent the paternalistic rhetoric of the Crown of Castile by which the natives were to be turned gently into Christian subjects. At its most extreme, some historians would argue that native cannibalism was no more than a European fiction.

From the opposite perspective, the notorious writings by Bartolomé de Las Casas, which were meant to influence the Crown’s policies towards natives but which also helped inspire the Spanish Black Legend (a theme also exploited by de Bry), offer a clear example of the rhetorical elaboration of a positive image of the American Indians, in this case presented as fully capable of self-rule and innocent victims of European rapacity. The anti-colonial theme developed by the International Protestant community that in the 1570s and 1580s produced the plethora of works by Jean de Léry, Renée Laudonnière, Girolamo Benzoni (as edited by Urban Chauveton), and of course Richard Hakluyt, culminating in some of the most emblematic volumes produced by Theodor de Bry, was specifically anti-Spanish. However, it offered an interpretation of Native American humanity that Harriot could not have ignored even as he sought to propose an alternative model for English colonization. Clearly, his depiction of the Carolina Algonquians in A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia as men whose technology is inferior to ours but who are capable of civilization is driven by a promotional colonial agenda.

By opportunistic and imperialist uses of images of the American Indian certainly existed, including Harriot’s A briefe and true report, the problem with these explanations is that they fail to account for the complexity of perceptions that most primary ethnographies bear witness to, and the many uses to which they were put. For example, those who have argued that Native American cannibalism was little more than a European fantasy often underestimate the extent to which the literary elaboration of travel narratives such as those by Staden and Léry (often rewritten in Europe in the light of fresh ideological concerns) does not necessarily or entirely contradict their ethnographic value. Similarly, while a polemical narrative like the Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies by Las Casas can be read as offering a very simplistic image of the Indian (in this case as victim), other writers that were being read at the time – not only Spanish historians of the conquest like Francisco López de Gómara, but also French Protestant authors like Laudonnière, who sought to develop a less imperialistic approach to colonization – depict complex relationships in which European colonizers had to come to terms with a wide range of possible interactions with resourceful natives. In fact the same author could adopt a very different tone in different contexts. We therefore need to consider that Harriot wrote the captions for The True Pictures with a slightly different emphasis from that apparent in A briefe and true report; one not driven by immediate colonial aims. He may have left other recorded observations for future publication, especially if (as it seems likely) he had collected materials towards a wide-ranging natural history of ‘Virginia’.

A second type of explanation has emphasized that Europeans were unable to assimilate radical cultural differences, and inevitably sought to ‘domesticate’ such differences according to pre-established cultural patterns. Hence Cortés described ‘Mosques’ in Mexico, and André Thevet described Amazons in Brazil, mixing hearsay with classical learning. Analogies with the Old World, especially with antiquity, were used and abused. Some authors have interpreted this as manifesting a problem of attitude: Europeans only saw what they expected to see, projecting their dreams onto the open spaces they sought to dominate, even refusing to accept cultural differences by simply assuming the universality of their own. To paraphrase David Beers Quinn, for example, Europeans ‘saw in the new the old, altered but not fundamentally changed… novelty was interpreted as an extension of the old rather than as novelty itself.’ But to what extent was there such a rejection of novelty?

A careful reading of the evidence would in fact suggest that many Europeans sought to come to terms with the empirical reality and (to some extent also) the legitimacy of cultural
differences, provided customs were not contrary to natural law; analogies with ancient parallels (for example Greek and Roman gentilism) often shaped interpretations of native culture and religion, but did not imply a total identification between the old and the new.

A more sophisticated version of this approach, based on an openly relativistic perspective, was provided by Anthony Pagden's argument in the 1990s that the presence of absolute novelty was increasingly impossible to ignore, as more and more reports arrived. The problem persisted, however, understood not as a problem of attitude, but one of cultural capacity: Europeans were simply unable to bridge the incommensurability of what they saw with what they knew. They responded variously, but always through the ‘principle of attachment’, by which the new was made to relate to the old through an arbitrary association or a superficial analogy. In his view, Jean de Léry is an example of that, as his description of the Tupinambá was not a triumph of description, but an example of the impossibility of making commensurable a culture chasm. The European could not become a savage, and the savage could not become a Christian, without losing his nature.¹⁵

The emphasis on the European unwillingness or inability to perceive properly cultural differences has a limited use when explaining the growth and evolution of European ethnography. What is the cultural logic that can best explain European literary and visual ethnographies as a succession of cultural events? To answer this, it is necessary to distinguish sharply between image and perception, or to use Léry’s idiom, between artistic image and mental image. Both need to be contextualized as distinct. Although Léry obviously trusted the power of literary and visual descriptions, the print and the woodcut, he was aware that artistic representations were necessarily limited. As he explained (assuming an Aristotelian understanding of human psychology), his difficulty was not the observation of novelty, because the mind has a universal capacity to represent that which is seen, but how to describe that novelty to those who had never been to Brazil. Having observed things carefully, in his mind he could still see the Tupinambá 20 years later (‘still today it is as if I had them in front of my eyes, and will forever carry in my mind their idea and image’). He could not, however, represent their gestures and their expressions with words and with images, because ‘they are so different from ours’. No representation could fully substitute direct experience. Without that experience, it was difficult to fight against cultural prejudices and against self-interested lies. His problem was not the perception of novelty, but experience, authenticity, and the techniques of representation.

What Jean de Léry understood so well invites us to distinguish clearly the mental images of direct observers like him, or Harriot and White, that is, primary mental images that in turn generated original literary and artistic representations, from those secondary mental images that were produced when Europeans subsequently read and interpreted any published accounts. Between the mental images of the primary observer and those of his readers there stood a text, often illustrated, which could be ideologically very complex. Certainly what Léry offered in his book, by word and picture, went beyond the denigration of the savage as cannibal, or his idealization as a good savage. It does not seem obvious either that Léry is a prophet of incommensurability, proclaiming the absolute alterity of the savage to the ends of time. Léry never denies two principles that most 16th-century educated Europeans would have shared: as a Christian, that Christ died for all mankind, and as a man educated in a humanistic understanding of the history of civilization, that all European nations were once barbarians. However Calvinist (hence a predestinarian), Léry does not argue that the Christianization of savages is impossible, but in fact suggests that their fallen spiritual condition could be reversed if only true Christians (as opposed to Catholics) genuinely worked towards that aim. Any interpretation of Léry based on radical anthropological relativism would appear to be anachronistic.

If we accept that the European observer knew that his words and his pictures could not fully capture the natural and cultural diversity of the New World, any attempt to write a history of perceptions of other peoples cannot use the visual and literary material without considering a number of conditioning factors. In the same way that we have learnt that an ethnographic text does not declare a simple perception of reality, but always works within a set of rhetorical codes, we should approach visual material cautiously.

The first issue to consider is the relation of images to texts. As an artist-observer, White is quite exceptional (as Léry also was). If we consider the wider iconographic corpus of the 16th and 17th centuries, however, what predominated were engravings based on literary descriptions. De Bry himself, or those working under him, relied on interpreting texts when they could not avail themselves of direct artistic impressions – in this respect, an exclusive concentration on the engravings that Theodor de Bry based on John White and Jacques Le Moyne can be misleading of his entire production. The artist working from a text but who had never seen America was of course bound to get many things wrong. As an example, consider the case of those early woodcuts of Brazilian Indians inspired by the letters by Vespucci (Fig. 5).

The 1509 German translation of the Lettera di Amerigo Vespucci delle isole nuovamente trovate in quattro suoi viaggi (Florence, 1505), made from the Latin version by Martin Waldseemüller (1507), contained two images probably prepared by an artist working for the editor Johannes Grüninger in Strassburg. They showed entirely naked men and women cutting human limbs on a flat surface like butchers, urinating in public without any shame, or, as seen here, surrounding a naïve European male who was about to be hit from behind (to be captured and feasted on) while trying to communicate with a group of native women. Although not entirely made up (these were cannibals of the same Tupinambá culture that Léry would eventually describe), this is early-modern sensationalism rather than early-modern ethnography. In particular, the woodcuts of the German edition offered an interpretation by an artist who relied on a text that had been edited and interpolated, for commercial purposes but also to enhance Vespucci’s self-promotion.¹⁶ However, it would be an exaggeration to say that ‘the earliest prints of America conflated Old World images with New World captions’.¹⁷ Rather, the artist who faithfully tried to follow a text in all its details, without the privilege of having travelled to those lands, had to rely on his iconographic prejudices. He was bound to...
make mistakes of interpretation, but no rejection of novelty was necessarily involved.

Artistic images based on more or less edited texts rather than direct drawings made from direct observation must be seen as the usual pattern in the publication of engravings. By contrast, the woodcuts accompanying the narratives by Hans Staden, André Thevet and Jean de Léry represent a new mode, prevalent in the second half of the 16th century, where the writers played a role in the preparation of the images, and that seems to have been primarily linked to representations of the Brazilian Tupinambá. 34 Paradoxically, however, this new mode was accompanied by the adoption of classicizing conventions in some of those engravings (in particular those produced in France and Geneva for the accounts by Thevet and Léry), probably because the artists involved in their production were trained to seek those forms. This evolution of artistic conventions is therefore the second issue to consider, and this must be done in relation to a variety of genres. Towards the end of the 16th century natural history, the costume book and the illustrated travel book, all bore close relations to each other, although they eventually developed in distinct directions.

This is the context in which John White’s drawings and watercolours ‘taken from life’ are best understood. As artist-observers, Jacques Le Moyne and John White made a unique contribution to the European iconography of the American savage, especially as the publication of their pictures by de Bry also marked the introduction of a new technology for the engravings (copper), in the context of a new publishing model (the lavishly illustrated travel book). But perhaps the most fruitful insights have come from the obvious exercise of comparing the original drawings (where we have them) with the published image, a path taken by many others before me. Here the decisive role of artistic conventions is particularly apparent. While White’s albums of watercolours, based on sketches, could be quite free as they sought to capture native features, gestures and movement, what was appropriate for the engraver unaquainted with the Americas – what would soon constitute de Bry’s emblematic style – was obviously conditioned by strong classicizing ideals, similar to those that transformed Léry’s Tupinambá into something akin to classical figures.

The possibilities offered by different artistic mediums were of course highly relevant to how these conventions evolved. Drawings, woodcuts, copper engravings and oils could not only be tied to different genres, but they obviously also had distinct costs and could be subject to peculiar limitations. For example, copper engravings allowed for more detail than woodcuts, but production was laborious, the images had to be printed separately and the plates had a shorter life. They became associated therefore with a luxury product, and in de Bry’s case, with a relatively expensive series of travel books. A higher degree of precision did not however mean more ‘realism’; it was in the new medium of the copper plates that Staden’s sketches (first seen in the cruder woodcuts) became more harmonious and the bodies more beautiful. The new medium quickly became associated with the aesthetic conventions that united a group of artists and their elite audiences. In effect, the casual reader of the different volumes published by de Bry was offered a harmonious aesthetic of the exotic under which co-existed radically different levels of artistic authenticity. Close reproductions of the drawings by John White and Jacques Le Moyne were followed in subsequent volumes by elaborate versions of simpler narrative woodcuts, and eventually by a substantial quantity of invented images produced by artists who often had to rely on simply following information in texts. Engravings and paintings based on combining elements from previous images that had been published or simply collected and exchanged became more common throughout the 17th century. Some of the later volumes issued by the heirs of Theodor de Bry ended up transferring ethnographic elements and human figures from the original context to another that was no longer appropriate.

This of course implies that in assessing the distance between direct observations and published images we must also consider the role of the market, obviously linked to the expectations of the audience, but also to the fact that producing illustrated travel books became a flourishing business. A final issue is the extent to which the aesthetic principles of a series such as de Bry’s might have been associated with a particular ideological agenda – for example, Protestant and anti-Spanish (de Bry having been a religious exile who fled from the Spanish Netherlands). Although the editor’s sympathies are apparent in some of the volumes’ prefaces and iconography, in reality the emphasis varied from volume to volume, as the texts also did (consider for example de Bry’s largely neutral version of Acosta’s Natural and Moral History of the Indies). 35 While the elaboration of an international Protestant mythology that combined the Indian as victim of Spanish cruelty and the dream of an alternative Protestant colonization of the New World was important in the years preceding the publication of the Harriot–White volume, in the long term cosmopolitan
scientific ideals and ecumenical market forces seem to have been more decisive in shaping the iconography of exotic peoples. There was no simple relation between the production of images of the savages and a nationally defined political programme, although by considering the interaction between scientific ideals (as understood within the humanist discipline of natural history), religious perspectives, a variety of local-national identities, and, occasionally, particular colonial projects and circumstances, it may be possible to speak about the emergence of somewhat different visual cultures within the European republic of letters and the arts.

Reconsidering White and Harriot: text and image
From the perspective of the history of ethnography, the pictures by White are unique, both in their iconographic influence (through de Bry) and in the extent to which they worked as an autonomous creation independent from a master text. Whether White decided on his subjects independently, or under Harriot's direction, spontaneously as he visited a number of villages in the summer of 1585, or according to a previous plan, the albums he produced did not illustrate Harriot's text, but on the contrary, Harriot ended up writing captions around the images. The range of White's pictures clearly shows that his interests were broad and were not limited to the immediate needs of a colonial project or the obligations imposed by his employment.

We do not know what would have happened had Harriot not lost many of his papers, or had he completed the more ambitious project he often referred to. It seems that White did have the status and autonomy to let his artistic principles dictate some important choices (in this he is apparently comparable to Jacques Le Moyne).

Most other examples we have of contemporary visual ethnographies, by contrast, suggest that the artist was usually simply doing what he was told by the author of a text who either was responsible for the primary observations and may have even prepared sketches (this is the case for Léry, and possibly also for André Thevet, Hans Staden and Jan Huuygen van Linschoten), or whose superior status allowed him to offer directions to artists working in situ (we could consider those artists who worked for Francisco Hernández in New Spain).

Harriot’s intervention must be judged in relation to a variety of genres; the publication of a report in 1588 obeyed a particular circumstance – it was a response to criticisms in England to Walter Raleigh’s Virginia project – and must be distinguished from the various materials that he might have compiled in the field, but which are now unfortunately lost. I would suggest that the original compilation of materials is best understood as a natural history project, widely conceived according to the humanist tradition, that is as a cartographic and natural historical survey with political and economic aims, often complementing a historical narrative of conquest and colonization. Natural history thus contributed to curious learning, but also to practical science (most notably, to medicinal uses). It certainly included ethnography and antiquarian speculation.

In fact refers to the pictures of animals and plants – those White actually preserved – as part of his project. Harriot's survey of the natural history of Virginia was therefore conceived in coordination with John White’s paintings, probably as instructed by Raleigh, and possibly with Hakluyt’s advice. White’s albums, therefore, with their combined focus on maps, ethnography, flora and fauna, are best understood as also compiled within a shared natural history project, although the ethnographic pictures could be presented to the European public according to the conventions of a ‘book of costumes’.

Harriot’s A brief and true report, by contrast, is the result of a complex creative process that can be succinctly defined as adapting natural history to propaganda. As his preface to the 1588 publication makes clear, Harriot wrote against those whose reports doubted the viability of the colonial project, instead seeking to prove that the nation in general, and the ‘favourers and adventurers’ in particular, would benefit from the colony patronized by Raleigh in Virginia. He did so with the unique authority that came from his having spent a whole year in Virginia ‘in the discovery and in dealing with the natural inhabitants especially employed’, unlike others (including some who returned after being punished for ill-dealing) whose stays were briefer, or who had not explored beyond Roanoke Island, or cared for anything but gold and the comforts of English city life. Harriot’s deliberative rhetoric has of course many echoes of Hakluyt’s own writings in defence of plantations. His is in fact an economic prospect study, in which ethnography plays a complementary part.

Leaving a more detailed discourse for another occasion, Harriot begins by openly declaring that he is writing only to establish that the naturalis will not trouble ‘our planting and inhabiting’ and ‘are not to be feared’, but instead ‘shall have cause both to fear and love us’, succinctly deploying a Machiavellian language of power relations. What is less clear is whether in a different context, speaking privately to Raleigh or to White for example, Harriot might have said otherwise – that is, whether he would have been more sceptical about the natives’ capacity for civilization, their desire for Christianization, and their military inferiority.

Hence Harriot’s ethnography follows a clear logic within this rhetorical strategy; in fact, the systematic analysis by thematic categories hides what amounts to a rhetorical oration.

The initial emphasis is on the limited demographic power and poor offensive and defensive technology of the savages. Their dress is simple, their tools lack sharpness and their weapons are limited; their towns are few in number and small in size, and they lack political unity, with the most powerful lords commanding at most 800 fighting men. They must, therefore, rely on ambushes and surprise attacks, but do not dare engage in set battles unless protected by trees. The conclusion is inescapable. In any conflict ‘between us and and ordinance; as for the natives, their best defence is flight.

Not content with this, Harriot continues with a general assessment of the relative inferiority of the native civility and economy. Therefore, ‘in respect of us they are a poor people’. European trifles they esteem as things of great value, as they lack both skill and judgement to know better. There is no Adario-like savage critic here to declare that they live more happily with their simple life than the Europeans with their corrupt luxury. However, it is also crucial to Harriot’s argument that this does not by any means imply a lack of intelligence, but simply a lack of arts, crafts and science. Theirs is a relative lack; they are not of inferior natural capacity. The following passage has been often quoted, albeit too often out of its rhetorical context.
context: ‘Notwithstanding in their proper manner, considering the want of such means as we have, they seem very ingenuous’, and indeed ‘in those things they do they show excellency of wit’. As they learn to appreciate European technological and cultural superiority (‘our manner of knowledges and crafts’), they will ‘probably’ desire English friendship and love, and (if the colonial government applies the right policies) ‘in short time be brought to civility, and the embracing of the true religion’. In this optimistic vision, Christianity and Civilization go hand in hand, in a way very reminiscent of the official Spanish rhetoric of empire in the Americas. The capacity of the natives was expected to lead them to European culture.

The argument is completed with a generous account of native religion such as they already have, which (not surprisingly in this context) is duly presented as a preparation for the gospel, ‘far from the truth’ but reformable, in a way that would have appealed to Christian apologists in antiquity, and to Las Casas or Inca Garcilaso in their interpretations of Amerindian religions. Emphasizing a monotheistic core, they believe in one eternal God and a hierarchy of inferior gods, created by the first for the purpose of making the world in its diversity. Mankind was created by making a woman whom the gods impregnated (this departure from Biblical models is explained away as a result of the lack of letters of the natives, who have to rely on oral tradition). The gods they represent as of human shape with images called Kewasowok, which they place in temples where they worship (this could stand as a traditional account of gentile idolatry, except that Harriot for obvious propaganda purposes avoids making the connection explicit in order to minimize the distance from Christianity). They also believe in the immortality of the souls, and on rewards and punishments in the soul’s afterlife (again exaggerating similarities with the Christian moral system). All this is helpful to lords and priests, who can use the fear of the afterlife to make themselves obeyed more readily by the people (a Machiavellian touch).

What Harriot nevertheless wants to emphasize is that this belief system is fragile when confronted with the reasons of the Christians, as he experienced in conversation with their priests. Harriot’s preaching, he claims, was met with hunger for knowledge, and a great desire from the native lords to partake in the effects of the power that the Christian God conferred on the English. Extraordinary droughts and mysterious but devastating new illnesses – which always appeared after the English had visited – were in fact attributed to the power of the Christian God ‘by means of the English’, in a cruel touch. It was above all this religious fear that would make the natives, such as the chief Wingina, obedient to English wishes (Harriot omits to explain that in fact the English eventually executed this chief, not waiting for him to come round).

Wishing to establish this point as the basis for his hope of subjecting the Algonquian Indians to both Christian belief and English dominion, Harriot is very explicit about the resulting fears of the natives, after observing that the English were immune to those illnesses. Some thought that the English themselves were immortal gods (especially as they came without women), others that they had been sent to exterminate the Indians and that more would follow to take their lands (a tragically prophetic vision). What Harriot thought – and many natives agreed – was that God in his mysterious ways made the Indians sick to benefit the Christians, a thoroughly Providentialist view, which he supported with astrological interpretations of eclipses and comets. (This is of course a remarkably similar pattern that one found in the Franciscan accounts of the Mexican interpretation of their collapse – there is nothing uniquely Protestant about it.)

To conclude, the ‘oration’ therefore follows a double movement: first, to assure the English readers that the natives cannot seriously derail colonization, and second, to offer a horizon of native incorporation in an inferior status, rather than one of systematic marginalization and continuous warfare. From the assumptions of Hakluyt’s and Raleigh’s colonial ideology, it was of course paramount that Protestant imperialism offered a clear path of integration for the natives, one that could compete with the Spanish model of Catholic imperialism. As an alternative to the increasingly influential narrative of the Spanish Black Legend, well publicized within the Hakluyt circle since the translation of Las Casas’ diatribe into English in 1583, Harriot participated in the creation of an English myth of profitable piety – one that both the Queen and many investors could buy. What happened in practice was of course another matter – the English could always count on their superiority to impose their terms, and as both Harriot and Hakluyt put it to Raleigh, the naked and unarmed savages of North America had no choice but to accept subjection or be destroyed. In the report, Harriot downplayed much of the violence against natives that ensued (after the glorious reconnaissances of the summer of 1585 when the drawings were made), only referring to it obliquely as ‘some of our company towards the end of the year showed themselves too fierce in slaying some of the people in some towns, upon causes that on our part might easily enough have been borne withall’, and in the end justifying this harshness as teaching the natives to fear the English. (He seems to be referring to the treacherous murder of the leading chief of Roanoke Wingina, ordered by Ralph Lane in the midst of a parley as a kind of preemptive strike in the face of growing resistance.) In effect it was scepticism about the ease of colonization and the difficulty of making a profit from it which Harriot, like Hakluyt in 1587, was writing against. It seems likely that if Raleigh’s initial reaction in 1586 was not to publicize Harriot’s material outside selected court circles (obviously his supporters Sidney and Walsingham), either for the sake of secrecy or to avoid dwelling on what went wrong, he had changed his mind throughout 1587 as the difficulties of a new expedition increased, and it became necessary to support White’s stranded colony – with A briefe and true report.

We must therefore distinguish two separate products, the album produced by White for Raleigh, probably for circulation within the court (also involving, perhaps, a limited promotional aim), and the text published by Harriot in 1588, which was more selective in the presentation of the materials because it developed a particular rhetoric for a particular debate about the costs and benefits of colonization in Virginia. By the time Hakluyt and de Bry conceived a third product, the publication of 1590, they re-used preexisting materials, with their slightly different emphases, which means that two different rhetorical strategies, and indeed two titles, co-exist under the same covers – in effect making a composite work. What connected the two sections was of course that both
authors worked together with the publisher and the facilitator. The Christian Protestant theme evident in the iconography of the frontispiece and throughout the various texts (including de Bry's preface to The True Pictures, and the accompanying image of Adam and Eve), provided a sense of unity.

It is tempting to imagine that in late 1588 or early 1589 the four men sat together in London to discuss the project. If that was the case, it remains puzzling that in his prefatory words de Bry made a number of errors that Hakluyt subsequently corrected in the English version of the publication, including the idea that Hakluyt himself had been to Virginia. What seems more certain is that it was through Hakluyt that de Bry met White and obtained Harriot's material. Hakluyt's role is therefore crucial, as he suggested publication to de Bry, helped him acquire a set of pictures from White and translated captions for The True Pictures from Latin into English.

The most mysterious issue concerns the production of the captions to The True Pictures. That they were written in Latin (a language de Bry could read) is implied by the fact that Hakluyt translated them into English. What adds to the confusion is that Harriot's name is not mentioned by de Bry in the prefatory material to The True Pictures, while in his dedication to Raleigh he almost suggests that he has personally added the captions. It is however impossible to imagine that de Bry, or Hakluyt, wrote the captions by simply interpreting the pictures, because many of the descriptions – from the first one concerning the arrival of the Englishmen in Virginia – include a number of first-person statements that make it clear that the writer was one of the travellers. Consider for example plate VIII (concerning the lady of Pomeiooc and her daughter), 'the puppets and babes which I saw and touched', and plate XVI, the image of a couple eating, the writer refers to his own description of maize in A briefe and true report, that is, 'maize sodden in such sorte as I described in the former treatise'. As David Quinn once observed, this is Hakluyt's English version, the Latin actually reads 'eo quo superiore scripismetudo', that is, 'as I wrote above'. So Hakluyt is the one who unambiguously declares Harriot's authorship. Did Harriot possess his own album from as early as 1585, with his own separate notes? It seems likely that Harriot (still under Raleigh's patronage) worked in close contact with John White, not only in Virginia in 1585, but also in London in 1588–9 to prepare the captions, although at some points he relied on his memory. This is suggested by those descriptions that interpret the composite bird's-eye view of the town of Secotan by a system of letters, and also by the inclusion of the images of the ancient Picts and Britons, which de Bry attributed directly to White's research, making Harriot's intervention secondary. (I am not convinced with Paul Hulton that Jacques Le Moyne was the author, and that de Bry made a mistake.) In general, the extended captions describe the images very closely, and thus follow White's thematic logic of a systematic ethnography understood as part of natural history.

When the captions were written, the propaganda constraints were less rigid than in 1587–8, and new themes could emerge. However, a vaguely Protestant religious theme functioned as a kind of ideological glue for the 1590 composite publication. In addition, the crucial theme of the capacity for civilization of the natives remained a common thread between the two parts of the work, although with two distinct emphases.

First, the native capacity for civility in A briefe and true report is part of a Machiavellian discourse of love and fear (they will love us because they fear us), but also of profit through empire (we will dominate this fertile land and this capable but technologically backward people). The True Pictures focuses instead on a minimalist but positive image of social and economic life (the savages have the basics of civilization), with the addition of Stoic primitivism (they are happy and healthy because uncorrupted). The Europeans are absent here, and no references are made to violence.

In relation to this 'Stoic primitivism', let me clarify that Harriot and White participate in a humanist paradigm that was generally influential across the European republic of letters (from as early as the generation of Peter Martyr and Polydore Vergil), and which of course included the contemporary work on Roman Britain by the antiquarian William Camden. It is also reflected in the essays of Montaigne. This paradigm made the juxtaposition of the ancient primitive and the exotic savage, so powerfully illustrated by Theodor de Bry's volumes, almost inevitable. It consisted of not simply assuming the superiority of civilized Europe, but also of expressing a nostalgia for the virtues of simplicity, austerity, courage, freedom and lack of greed of a less corrupt, healthier, more natural lifestyle. This tragic vision was clearly modelled on those Roman sources, from Ovid to Seneca and Tacitus, that expressed nostalgia for the virtues of a primitive condition, and which inspired humanist writers. At its most extreme, the paradigm referred to the myth of the golden age, when the lack of private property made justice reign without the need for laws and rulers. What is crucial is that this nostalgia did not imply a rejection of civilization, but was almost invariably accompanied with a positive celebration of the process of civilization, with the growth of cities, roads, laws, trade and learning (to which, in
the European context, true religion was only the corollary). Rather, what this paradigm highlighted was that the transition from barbarism to civilization (and the static dichotomy barbarian-civilized was here effectively replaced by a historical perspective) was not one of absolute gains, but instead one of tragic loss in the context of obvious gains; that is, the gains were quite impossible to renounce, however tainted by moral decline. There was no turning back. Encounters with native Americans – very clearly in the case of Jean de Léry – brought alive this sense of the virtues of the savage, not simply reflecting an Old World theme, but dynamically intersecting with a fresh antiquarian approach to Europe's own barbarian past.

In contrast with this relatively positive interpretation of the healthy lifestyle of the Indians, in the extended captions the religious theme is present in particularly negative terms, almost as a necessary counterpoint to the idealization of the natural life. The emphasis on devils and idols (the conjurer who speaks with devils in plate XI, also the observation in plate XXI that they have no other knowledge of God than their idols) is all less accommodating than the Deistic emphasis of A briefe and true report, which Christianized native beliefs about a supreme God and immortal human souls, and which had described the image of Kiwasa more neutrally, without using the term 'idolatry' (particularly abhorred by Calvinists). In effect, the captions increased the religious distance between the English and the Algonquian Indians.

These are however subtle differences, and must not be interpreted as a contradiction. As de Bry's preface suggests, the Stoic theme of natural primitivism did not seek to question the fallen condition of mankind into idolatry. Even if different texts by Harriot displayed different rhetorical emphases, they all concentrated on the key conclusions that the English needed to reach in their dealings with the natives, namely that they were not to be feared, and that there existed a sufficient basis for bringing them to Civilization and Christianization. The heart of the difference was that A briefe and true report was more limited in scope and concentrated on the key conclusions that the English needed to reach in their dealings with the natives, namely that they were not to be feared, and that there existed a sufficient basis for bringing them to Civilization and Christianization. The natural-scientific mode of The True Pictures by contrast was more positive towards the virtues and happiness of a primitive, austere and uncorrupted life, while (almost as a necessary balance) possibly more emphatic about the distance between native idolatry and true religion. While A briefe and true report's language was at heart Machiavellian, The True Pictures was more clearly imbued with a combination of Stoic and Protestant-Augustinian themes.

If in the White-Harriot corpus the relation between texts and images reveals a complex interaction, with various stages of production before publication, when considering the transition from picture to engraving the key point is surely the extent to which de Bry was faithful to both the images he had been given, and to the text that it was meant to illustrate. The changes he introduced have often been commented on, for example the classicizing influence, which led to the rigid, statuesque muscularity of the engraved images, or their more conventional gestures. The dance scene, for example, reveals de Bry's attempts to reproduce White's wild gestures, but also his failure to interpret the status of the three young women in the centre (Figs 6–7).

Consider also the mother with girl holding a European doll, where the scene loses a great deal of naturality and gracefulness as the girl is pictured too big and too muscular, and is placed farther away from her mother, while the mother herself (the wife of the werowance of Pomeiooc) slightly changes the position of her legs, and adopts an indirect and vacuous gaze (Figs 8–9). One further change is the substitution of the girl's gesture of showing her (supposedly European) necklace to her mother with her right hand, for one of her holding an additional European toy with it, an alteration possibly caused by de Bry's seeking a more clear visual message. Here the key theme seems to be that the natives can become civilized, symbolized by the child's adoption of European toys, in particular a fully dressed doll – a possible future for the chief's daughter. All these changes can be judged to be relatively minor, although they are not to be dismissed. It was inevitable that some information would be lost, since de Bry had not seen the Algonquian peoples portrayed by the artist – he lacked John White's mental images – and therefore could not judge the relative accuracy of the native facial features and gestures that White had attempted to capture. He might not have even been in a position to appreciate the importance of those details.
Many of his alterations, however, respond to other factors, in particular to the conventions of how to represent human figures in the new medium of copper engravings, which explains their classicizing proportions, and perhaps to stricter rules of decorum when offering naked backs. (White’s aprons seem to leave the back uncovered, unless we believe that in the version of the album that he gave to de Bry, the aprons also covered the back, as suggested in the variants of the Sloane manuscript.)

We can also detect de Bry’s desire to offer additional information and possibly a fuller sense of a pictorial representation by adding details (often taken from White’s other studies) in the background, creating synthetic scenes, inevitably idealized, of the natural landscape of Virginia, where White probably only had figures of people or animals. I do not think that White prepared the backgrounds himself, as his albums clearly differentiate a few general views (the native villages of Pomeiooc and Secotan, and a fishing scene) from the more abundant figures of decontextualized individuals or small groups engaged in particular activities. De Bry, probably driven by commercial considerations, thus innovated in the direction of the pictorial tradition, perhaps influenced by the famous series of ‘Theatres of the Cities of the World’ by Braun and Hogenberg (Civitates Orbis Terrarum, 1572). However, White’s figures are not free from artistic conventions; for example, they seem inspired by the then emerging genre of ‘Books of Habits and Customs’ often linked to travellers’ ethnographies, as represented by Abraham de Bruyn’s Omnium Pene Europae, Asiæ, Africæ atque Americae gentium habitus (Antwerp, 1581), or previously by Nicolas de Nicolay’s Navigations et Peregrinations Orientales (Lyon, 1567).

Therefore, the opposition of the naturalistic White to the classicizing de Bry needs to be relativized in the sense that White also followed some artistic conventions, and that de Bry shared White’s desire for an accurate portrayal of savages in their natural state. As far as he was concerned, he was being very faithful to the drawings. As far as White was concerned, his drawings were very faithful to the native realities he sought to portray. Despite the fact that early-modern representations often stereotyped and manipulated the complex reality of native peoples, or offered highly selective views, it remains important to recognize the commitment to empirical truth that lies behind emblematic productions of exceptional travel writers like Jean de Léry, or exceptional artists like John White.

Notes

1 A more extended discussion of the issues discussed in the first half of this article has appeared in Spanish as ‘Imagen mental e imagen artística en la representación de pueblos no europeos. Salvajes y civilizados, 1500–1650’, La Historia imaginada. Construcciones visuales del pasado en la Edad Moderna, J.L. Palos, and D. Carrió-invernizzi, eds, Madrid, 2008, 327–57.


3 Léry’s attitude is revealed by the note in the first edition of 1578 (Histoire, 93), where for the following editions he promised more illustrations not only of natives and their customs, but also of flora and fauna, all for the sake of making familiar what was unique or different in the New World. This iconographic programme places Léry close to a natural historian comparable to the Spanish Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo. In 1580, however, he noted sadly that the Geneva printer (Antoine Chapin) was not willing to incur the additional cost of making new woodcuts – in fact, this second edition included instead three additional scenes of little value pirated from Thevet’s Singularitez de la France Antarctique (1557).


5 Léry, supra n. 2, History, 158.

6 Léry, supra n. 2.

7 The True Pictures and Fashions, 1590, Plate XIII, ‘Their manner of fishing in Virginia’. I have modernized the spellings of this and other quotations from Hakluyt’s English translations of the captions, and from Harriot’s report.

8 By contrast, Léry was not included in Hakluyt’s list of travellers and cosmographers composed in 1582. See E.G.R. Taylor, The Original Writings & Correspondence of the two Richard Hakluyts, London, 1913, 171–2.

9 Although at some point Hakluyt acquired a copy of the narrative, and he must have been interested, there is a striking lack of references to Léry’s Histoire d’un voyage or to Brazil more generally in his extant writings, in contrast to, for example, the powerful presence of Giovanni Battista Ramusio as a model for his travel collection, or the immediate attention that he paid to the account of the French colony in Florida by Renée Laudomière. For a recent discussion of Hakluyt’s various interests see P. Mancall, Hakluyt’s Promise: An Elizabethan’s Obsession for an English America, New Haven and London, 2007, noting for example (p. 80) his plan to colonize the island of Saint Vincent off Brazil c. 1579. Page 121 discusses Hakluyt’s shifting relationship to Thevet.

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24 See Michael Gaudio's paper in this collection.

25 See papers by Stephen Clucas and Ernst van den Boogaart in this collection.

26 That is, we should not read Harriot's account as a cold, detached assessment of the probilities of the Algonquian Indians, however much he actually had learnt about them, but as a piece of propaganda, one that may or may not have agreed with his private beliefs. As the confusion about his own religious views testifies, what Harriot said in private and what he publicised when working for a patron could be quite different. When considering A briefe and true report as evidence we must therefore keep in mind that a public tract, and in particular a promotional tract, could not fail to be orthodox in its basic theology. His vision of the religion of Roanoke cannot therefore be taken as a "window into his religious sensibility" as proposed by Scott Mandelbrote, and in particular not as an image of 'the pristine faith and practice of a prelapsarian world' ('The Religion of Thomas Harriot,' in Fox, supra n. 20, 271). Harriot's natives were clearly people who had fallen into idolatry, according to a Protestant theology of salvation. The evidence suggests that Harriot was a man interested in heterodox religious views, and who subjected faith to rational scrutiny (through scepticism) in the 1590s, but not necessarily an atheist.


28 In the aftermath of the failure of the 1585–6 expedition, Hakluyt reassessed his arguments for the colonization of Virginia in his Harriot preface to a fresh edition of Peter Martyr's decades, dated February 1587 and dedicated to Raleigh, and later the same year in the preface to the English translation of Laudonnière. See Taylor, supra n. 8, 39–41.

29 At the end of the dedicatory epistle prefacing Laudonnière's account of Florida, published in 1587, Hakluyt suggests that he had been urging Raleigh to 'suffer' Harriot to publish his account of Virginia. Towards the end of A briefe and true report, as subsequently published, Harriot referred to the fact that his detailed chronicle of the first colony should be publicized 'when time shall be thought convenient'. Alas, that time never came.

30 It has always been assumed that these images were based on drawings by Le Moyne (recorded in 1564) that White saw in London. Comparisons in the captions (for example, on the length of women's nails, or the quality of the fortifications) might have been based on a close study of those drawings in the late 1580s, when Hakluyt and then de Bry had access to both sets. However, the engravings that de Bry eventually printed based on Le Moyne's paintings are sufficiently different on a number of details from John White's two watercolours (consider the tattoos), to raise the question of whether an independent act of observation could have taken place, possibly as the "Tyger" sailed north from the Bahamas in May and June 1585. (White's map of the journey records many locations in Florida, mostly in French but also giving native names.) The recurrence of comparisons with the Florida Indians in the captions is certainly striking.

31 Elsewhere in plate XIII (on their manner of fishing), but less decisively, a reference is also made to the earlier discussion of the savages' 'limited knowledge of God, implying that the writer of the captions had A briefe and true report in mind. There are also some intriguing differences between Harriot's extended captions and those found in the BM album, presumably by White. Hence, Harriot's conjurer is called 'The flyer' in White's album; more puzzling, the young woman described as 'one of the wyves of Wyngyno' by the artist, becomes 'a younge gentill woeman doughter of Secota' in de Bry (who shows the image in reverse and with a back section), with a decorous caption that talks about the "captions is certainly striking.


33 See Sam Smiles' paper in this collection.

34 In addition, de Bry seems to have over-interpreted the gesture of the mother pointing down with her finger.