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Samuel Hearne and Indian–Inuit hostility

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In the introduction to 'Samuel Hearne and the massacre at Bloody Falls' (*Polar Record* 28 (166): 229–232), Michael J. Brand stated that the note 'provides background information and discusses why he [Hearne] was not effective in preventing the massacre' (page 229). Mr Brand later concluded with the comment that 'one cannot blame Hearne' (page 231), one of the primary reasons for the massacre being that 'conflict between the northern Indians and the Inuit was traditional' (page 231). Such a moral vindication of Hearne, however, is not only of questionable historical importance, it also hides questions of a totally different order of significance, including (1) did the massacre take place exactly as one can read it in the published accounts of Hearne's travels, and (2) was it really only one of numerous other such tragedies, another illustration of the commonly accepted opinion that Indian–Inuit hostility was the rule.

A look at the references cited by Mr Brand uncovers the fact that much recent literature that could have helped him answer these questions has been ignored. Only two publications more recent than 1975 are quoted, and few would classify *Company of adventurers* (Newman 1986) as having serious academic ambitions. Mr Brand failed to cite I.S. MacLaren's 'Samuel Hearne's accounts of the massacre at Bloody Fall' (1991), an article that, although it was written in a literary rather than an ethnographic perspective, covers the same field with much greater background research and analytic acuteness. One is surprised that an author writing a paper on the subject would not have read the Stowe MS and is not aware of another

unpublished version of the Bloody Fall massacre quoted by Professor MacLaren. Professor MacLaren's work is convincing in the doubt he casts on the faithfulness of the account attributed to Hearne, in particular the massacre. And Professor MacLaren also discusses the subject of Hearne's reaction to what he saw.

Mr Brand started from the standardized error of 'hostility between the northern Indians and the Inuit was traditional and common' (page 230) to explain the massacre. The first time he made this statement, he cited an outdated source (Speck 1963), and the second time he did not cite any source, as if the statement were indisputable truth, which indicates to me that the comments about Indian–Inuit relations are expressed only to justify Hearne. In doing so, Mr Brand ignored the most significant contributions to the description and analysis of relations between Athapaskans and Inuit in the central Canadian Arctic and sub-Arctic (for example, Janes 1973; Smith and Burch 1979; Smith 1981). My own contribution to the subject (Csonka 1992) is yet to be published.

It is true that, as stated by Mr Brand, six Chipewyan were reported to have been killed by Inuit in 1715, but Smith and Burch (1979: 78) have indicated that the murderers could also have been Cree Indians. As to the 1756 massacre of Inuit by Athapaskans on the west coast of Hudson Bay, Smith and Burch (1979: 81–82, 94–95) discussed at length the different versions of the story extant in the historical sources. The same authors have explained why a simple accumulation of testimonies of hostility and massacres (such as is the case in Mr Brand's note) is methodologically unsound. No one denies that conflicts did occur, but to restrict the analysis of relations between Indians and Inuit to these events distorts reality.

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