CHAPTER - 1
INTRODUCTION

Part I

Among the countries of the western world, few are as diverse as Canada in terms of ethnic, religious and linguistic identities. This diversity inherent in Canada as we know it today stands witness to its long and eventful history which has made it a nation-state with at least four distinct cultural groups: the native Indian population, French-Canadians, English-Canadians and lastly, the more recent immigrants from around the world, especially from India and China.

This thesis deals with the French-Canadian dimension of the historical evolution of Canada in a holistic perspective, and tries to grapple with the entire range of experiences shared by the French colonists in North America in the formative stages of the colony. This approach is dictated by the conviction that it was the unique evolutionary trajectory of French-Canadian community that accounts for its extraordinary tenacity as well as distinctiveness in North America that is frequently, though not so accurately, described as an Anglo-Saxon continent. The thesis covers roughly the period from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the closing decades of the eighteenth. The focus, however, is on seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, since it was during this period that the handful of Frenchmen who came to settle in Canada gradually turned into what they themselves described as les canadiens. The sixteenth century holds a lot of importance in the discovery and exploration of North America by France, but it does not herald the beginnings of an actual French colony in North America. The foundation of Port Royal in Acadia (1604) and of Québec (1608) represent the real beginnings of a French colonial
presence in North America. The present research has focused on the evolution of Canada as a colony centered around Quebec.

It is not without a good deal of deliberation- and, hopefully, ample justification that the thesis seeks to cover the totality of the life of French colonists as reflected in the social, economic, religious, political and military structures and institutions that came to develop in Canada during a period of nearly two hundred years, for it is largely through such an endeavour that one can hope to develop adequate understanding of the historical complexities involved in the evolution and consolidation of the French-Canadian community.

The French in Canada encountered a set of circumstances widely different from those prevailing in France. The French cultural and institutional transplantation in Canada was, therefore, bound to undergo appropriate transformations to become viable in what has been so graphically described as North American wilderness¹. As compared to France or even Europe as a whole, North America is immensely vast. The ever present frontier in this 'new world' provided an opportunity to the French colonists to live a life largely free from the constraints of physical space. Unlike in France, land was abundant in Canada, and the average colonist could easily settle on a farm of hundred arpents, which would be nearly four times larger than the average peasant landholding in seventeenth century

¹ North American wilderness is often regarded as a fundamental influence on the way Europeans came to perceive North America. This is true of Daniel G Payne who asserts: "The defining aspect of the North American continent was its wilderness, and this was reflected in nearly everything that was written for at least the first hundred years of the colonial period. The early writers described the land, indigenous plant and animal life, native inhabitants, the weather and other natural phenomena in minute detail, leaving abundant documentary evidence of their reactions to the wilderness they confronted. Shaped by European preconceptions (and misconceptions) about nature and the American wilderness, the opinions of European writers about their new surroundings ranged from wastelands to paradise, but one impression stands out as nearly universal - the land needed to be radically transformed in order to make it fit for the European settlement." Daniel G Payne, Voices in the Wilderness, Hanover, 1996, p. 1. Also see Jack P Greene, Construction of America: Exceptionally and Identity from 1492 to 1800, University of North Carolina Press, 1997, pp.1-34.
France, while the more enterprising among them could sometimes own as much as two-hundred arpents. This increased access to the most important means of production in a pre-industrial society went a long way in creating a more egalitarian society in Canada. There were no restrictions on hunting and fishing in the colony, and these two activities significantly added to the material well being of the nascent community. Fur trade was open to anyone with a small amount of capital and a spirit of adventure, and evidence shows that a large number of habitants benefited from it. The habitant was thus more of a farmer-proprietor than a peasant of the seventeenth or eighteenth century France.

As we shall see later, the seigneurial class in Canada was nothing more than a shadow of the original French aristocracy, which, even in the twilight of its existence, had retained its most important privileges and maintained its central position in French society. In Canada, the seigneur was far more subservient to the Crown and its representatives in the colony, and the power he wielded over the community of habitants was also relatively limited. This was partly due to deliberate efforts on the part of the Crown, which did not want to reproduce the burdensome French system in the colony. Aristocracy was an integral part of the French scheme of things, but the state, especially under Louis XIV, followed a general policy of curtailing the power of all centres of authority other than itself. The other most important reason for the curtailment in the power of colonial aristocracy was the sheer difference in the social, economic and political conditions in Canada during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The abundance of land meant that no seigneur could threaten to expel a censitaire from his land. Indeed, most seigneuries even in the eighteenth century had significant portions of unsettled land,
which they were keen on granting to anyone who took the pain of placing a demand for a concession.

Demography played a very important role in the evolution of the Canadiens as a community. It is a remarkable fact of Canadian history that during the entire course of French regime in Canada for nearly two-hundred years, no more than 10,000 Frenchmen permanently settled in the colony. At the time of the conquest of Canada by the British in 1763, Canada had approximately a population of 70,000, which was one-tenth of the population of English colonies at the time. Compared to English colonies, therefore, Canada was certainly underpopulated. This demographic squeeze had two important consequences for the way the Canadiens came to evolve as a community. Firstly, it made them a community with exceptionally high levels of cohesiveness, since the very survival of the people was contingent on their ability to act in unison. This had the obvious effect of hastening the process of identity formation. Secondly, demography was among the most important factors that brought the French closer to the Amerindians than either the Dutch or the English. The French-Indian alliance took shape in a context of small-scale French migration that precluded any displacement of the natives and was facilitated by the fact of French rivalry with other European powers mentioned above. One of the the important consequences of the French proximity to the Amerindians was

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2 As mentioned elsewhere, displacement of Amerindians was not a part of the French colonial expansion in North America. The French developed a sophisticated policy to create a colony in North America in cooperation with the allied Amerindian tribes. Cornelius Jaenen has thus commented upon this notable feature of French colonialism: "The valleys of the St. Lawrence and the Annapolis where they (French) started settlements in the early seventeenth century were not at that time inhabited. The presumed annihilation or adoption and assimilation following conquest, of the Iroquoian peoples who had met with Cartier and Roberval's expeditions in the 1530s and 1540s, and the shunning by the Algonkian Micmac bands of the salty marshlands along the Bay of Fundy which attracted de Monts and Champlain, gave initial French colonization a unique and important characteristic. In these restricted areas, the French, not unlike the Amerindians who had migrated from Asia to North America, were able to move into terra nullius from another continent. The immediate consequence of this rather unique situation was that from the outset there was no question of displacement of aboriginal residents or of concern about legitimate title to lands appropriated"
that they learnt a good deal from the latter. For example, the French pioneers learnt the use of tobacco, the techniques of forced germination of seeds and of transportation of wood on snow from the natives.\(^3\)

The Catholic Church evolved in Canada as part of the larger community and, in turn, significantly influenced the process of community formation. However, it was not as powerful as in France, since it evolved in a frontier society of independent *habitants* who took their religion as a matter of social habit and were not prepared to accept the more puritanical interpretations of their ancestral faith. The power of the church was also limited by the fact that the Crown followed a policy of checks and balances in the colony, though it recognized the crucial role of the church in the development of the colony. Despite the constraints mentioned above, however, the Catholic Church remained a key institution in Canada. As the Huguenots were squeezed out of the colony, there was no sectarian challenge to the authority of the Catholic Church—a fact that provided it a higher sense of unity and purpose and made it representative of the entire population of the colony.

As mentioned earlier, the evolution of the *Canadiens* as a community took place in the course of a long period extending from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the closing decades of the eighteenth. It is possible to discern some well-defined stages in this process, and we shall discuss them here one by one.

The accession of Louis XIV to the throne in 1661 brought the early period of French implantation to a close and opened the way for the introduction of royal government and

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colonial development. Up to this time, all settlement had been conducted via a series of commercial associations of merchants holding a fur trade monopoly or the Company of New France and its dependencies, a creation of Cardinal Richelieu, which tied colonisation and immigration to the exploitation of the fur trade. Champlain seemed to emerge as a national hero by virtue of his continuing presence under successive monopoly holders and viceroys. But he was always in the employ of commercial interests and never able to inaugurate significant immigration.

Although as many as seven thousand French may have passed over to the colony between 1608 and 1662, there were little more than 3000 settlers living permanently in the infant colony in 1662. The problem resided, in part, in the absence of an immigration network, a well-travelled and established grid between the metropolis and the colony. The Crown was satisfied with patronizing colonization schemes, while not financing them, regulating its trade and controlling its religious character. But there was no concerted move or policy to populate an agricultural colony that could duplicate what already existed in the homeland. Canada was still in fact a commercial outpost with a minimal subsistence agricultural base. In the absence of rich mines or abundant exotic products such as brazilwood or spices, the French had to be content with bartering their manufactured goods for furs and animal pelts. Hence, there was no compelling ‘pull factor’ encouraging French settlement in Canada. Nor were there powerful ‘push factors’ such as overpopulation, agricultural deficiencies or widespread natural disaster to stimulate the exodus of people from France. As already stated, there was no established migration chain. Recruiting had been left to merchant associations and the Company of New France, which did not conceive immigration as essential to the success of their enterprise. Only a few of the early seigneurs and Jesuits found it advantageous to populate their
estates or seigneuries, so that they would enjoy a steady income from their censitaires, once the concessions had been put into production.

The first stage in the evolution of a French Canadian community had been achieved. France had successfully acquired a generous share of the North American continent without displacing any of the original Amerindian inhabitants. It had avoided any need for a war of conquest or any serious confrontation up to this point with its English rival. It had begun some settlement and embarked on a policy of trading alliances, military pacts and Catholic evangelisation with the First Nations. The next stage would require immigration, implantation of traditional institutions, hinterland exploitation and the homogenisation of its Norman, Breton and Parisian population, each having its own traditional customs, laws, social and commercial practices. A new colonial French identity would be forged.

The long reign of Louis XIV proved to be critical for the development of the colony, since it was during this period that the bulk of the migration from France took place and the institutional framework was put in place. This era also witnessed remarkable development in terms of agriculture, industry, etc. and firmly put the colonists on the path to a self-sufficient existence. The demise of Louis XIV in 1713 thus brought to an end a long era of enlightened state support for the development of the colony. Even though in the latter half of his reign, he was preoccupied with wars in Europe, Louis XIV had, by the time of his departure from the scene, done enough to lift Canada from the state of despondency in which he had inherited it in 1661. Under his paternalistic administration, the colony had moved from one strength to another, though the process of the formation of a new society and community was by no means complete at the death of Louis XIV.
Above all, the colony was now poised to achieve an all round development on the basis of the foundations laid during the preceding period.

Between 1713 and 1763, Canada made remarkable progress in economic development related to trade and agriculture, in the evolution of political, social and religious institutions, including the church. Above all, the people, by the end of the period, would definitely evolve into a cohesive community with its own identity encapsulated in the widely used term, *les canadiens*. Whereas the processes that led to this outcome had started in the seventeenth century, it was during this final phase of the French regime in North America that the people who described themselves as *les canadiens* coalesced into a distinct community with French foundations and Canadian superstructure. As we would see in the course of this thesis, there was no inherent clash between the French past and the Canadian present, as the two could live harmoniously in a world defined by a cooperative relationship with each other.

The conquest of Canada by the British in 1663 brought to an abrupt end the evolution of the *Canadiens* as a community under the benevolent rule of France. As will be seen in the course of this thesis, the Conquest proved to be a highly disruptive development in the history of the French-Canadian community, in as much as it put them in a position of subservience vis a vis the British. The subsequent domination of Canada by the people of British origin would, however, fail to extinguish the separate identity of the French-Canadians, since they already had evolved as a community with national sentiments and a culturally autonomous existence vis a vis France.
Part II

Antecedents, Exploration and Initial Contacts (Circa 1000-1600):

The development of Canada as a French colony took place between the beginning of the seventeenth century to the end of the French regime in 1663. However, the background to this process was created by a long tradition of discovery and exploration both on the part of France and Europe. The legend that the Atlantic was a narrow sea across which lay India and the rest of Asia had been popular among some western scholars, including Aristotle, since Antiquity.

However, the earliest evidence of European contacts with what is now America goes back only to the last quarter of the ninth century. These contacts were occasioned by the Scandinavian attacks on the lower parts of Europe. Towards the middle of the eighth century some Irishmen, their land occupied by the northern invaders described by the ‘civilized’ parts of Europe as ‘pagans’ and ‘barbarians’, set sail on the western sea to seek refuge in the hitherto unknown lands. As chance would have it, they reached Iceland, which then replaced Ireland as the western limit of European inhabitation. Here they lived in relative calm and isolation for about a

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4 Giovanni de Verrazano, one of the earliest French discoverers to have reached North America in 1524, specifically mentions this belief and discusses its merits in his letter to Francis I, the King of France: ‘My intention on this voyage was to reach Cathay and the extreme eastern coast of Asia, but I did not expect to find such an obstacle of new land as I have found; and if for some reason I did expect to find it, I estimated there would be some strait to get through to the Eastern Ocean. This was the opinion of all the ancients, who certainly believed that our Western Ocean was joined to the Eastern Ocean of India without any land in between. Aristotle supports this theory by arguments of various analogies, but this opinion is quite contrary to that of the moderns, and has been proven false by experience. Nevertheless, land has been found by modern man which was unknown to the ancients, another world with respect to the one they knew, which appears to be larger than our Europe, than Africa, and almost larger than Asia, if we estimate its size correctly; I shall give Your Majesty a concise account of it.’

Also see Mythes et Réalités dans l’histoire du Québec, Marcel Trudel, Montréal, 1917, pp. 11-12. Trudel quotes Aristotle: ‘C’est une petite mer qui sépare l’extrémité occidentale de l’Espagne et la partie orientale de l’Inde.’

century, until there were fresh attacks on them by a branch of Norwegians. This second invasion provoked these Irish-Icelanders to migrate further west to some vaguely known territories, putatively around Greenland. Swept off their way by the ocean waves, they reached what are now known as the coast of Labrador and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and settled on an island near the coast. The exact location of this island has not been established beyond doubt. Yet, in all probability, it was around the future Cape Breton or some other territory in the vicinity. In the eleventh century the Vikings reached Newfoundland, and they discovered the traces of Irish inhabitation in the area. The existence of this overseas Irish community has been mentioned in the Scandinavian sagas where it has been described as huitemannaland, the Country of the White Men, or Irel hit Mikla, Ireland the Great (Iceland today).

Neither these settlers nor others who had known of their existence seem to have given much thought to the wider implications of this inadvertent entry into the new lands. Nor does it seem to have been followed by other, more systematic, expeditions to those lands, though there is evidence that Iceland and Ireland maintained some contacts, if tenuous perhaps, with these self-exiled people. Left to fend for themselves, with only the most sporadic linkages with the old continent that they had abandoned, and faced with a moribund demographic scenario leading to a dwindling population, these early Viking migrants seem to have survived only until the thirteenth century. To all intents and

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6 Ibid. This invasion took place in 874 under the command of two Norwegian chiefs, Ingolf and Hjorlaf, who were they driven out of Ireland by other Vikings. Ibid.
7 Eugène Beauvois, La Découverte du Nouveau Monde par les Irlandais et les premières traces du christianisme en Amérique avant 1000, Nancy 1875, pp. 71-72. Also see The Discovery and Colonization of North America, John Fiske, 1905.
8 Karlsefni, a Scandinavian chieftain, has recorded the testimony of two Eskimos regarding the existence of an Irish community on the continent. They are reported to have said that there dwelled men who walked clad in white, bearing before them as they sang in loud voice, long poles to which were attached strips of stuffs. Lt. - Col. Langlois, Saga de Thorfin Karlsefni, Paris 1924, op. cit., p. 103. See Voyages of the Northmen to America, Carl Christian Rafn, 1877.
purposes, therefore, the new continent was still not settled by Europe. That discovery had
to wait for several centuries.

By the latter half of the fifteenth century, Europe had already unleashed the forces that
would lead to the discovery of the new continent and its eventual colonisation. Whereas
the preceding centuries had witnessed a significant spurt in trade relations between
Europe, on the one hand, and Asian countries like India and China, on the other, the
maritime enterprises undertaken by the European countries had also witnessed a similar
upward trend. The fall of Constantinople in 1458 put Europe in an unenviable position, as
far as trade with Asia was concerned. Though it would be an exaggeration to argue that
the Ottomans had prohibited all trade relations between the two continents, the hostility
between the European powers and the Ottoman Empire did give a serious setback to
European trade with countries like India and China through the Mediterranean. Pushed to
the corner, the principal maritime powers of Europe were led to finding out some new
sea-route to the Asian countries.

It was at this juncture that the old legend of India, China and other Asian countries
being located across the Atlantic assumed significance. Christopher Columbus was only
one among a series of adventurous sailors, but he was different from most others in that
he seriously believed that one could reach India by travelling to the west. The sequence
of events that led eventually to the discovery of a new continent is too well-known to be

9 J. B. Brebner, The Explorers of North America, New York, 1933, pp. 20-25. According to some scholars,
however, the discovery of America by Europe was more or less inevitable. According to this approach,
Columbus was simply an instrument of the discovery which would have happened anyway. As Lower puts
it: 'The wider horizons of the spirit could not fail to evoke their counterparts in the physical world:
consequently it may be said that the discovery of America lay in the logic of things. When the new
civilization had grown to a certain point it burst its containing envelope, old Europe, and began to disperse
itself throughout the world. If Columbus had not been the lucky man, someone else soon would have been.
America had to be discovered.' Colony to Nation, A. R. M. Lower, Toronto 1946, p. 2.
repeated here. What is to be taken note of, however, is the fact that at this time, in 1492, to be more precise, France does not seem to have taken much official interest in these enterprises. Several reasons may be said to have contributed to this indifference on the part of France. In comparison with Spain and Portugal, France was still a second-rate maritime power. It is important to bear in mind that neither the bull *Romanus Pontifex* issued by Pope Nicholas V in 1455 nor the treaty of Tordesillas signed in 1494 involved France. Commenting on this absence of French involvement in the early phase of developments regarding the new continent, Marcel Trudel writes:

"Elle (France) arrive bien tard dans cette rivalité internationale. Il faut se rappeler qu'au XVe siècle, la France n'est pas une puissance maritime, elle ne dispose pas de moyens navals d'envergure, comme l'Angleterre, l'Espagne et le Portugal. Du reste, sa politique extérieure demeure centrée sur la Méditerranée."

The first recorded French voyage to North America was that of Thomas Aubert to Newfoundland in 1508. France was therefore the third major European country to stake its claim in the new world. However, it should not be thought that if the French state was slow in venturing into America, so were French merchants and fisherman. Along with their Portuguese, English and Spanish counterparts, the French fishermen were already frequenting the Atlantic coast of North America in the late fifteenth century, probably before Columbus' reputed 'discovery'. In fact, fishery had acquired the kind of volume

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10 *Mythes et réalités dans l'histoire du Québec*, Marcel Trudel, Montréal, 1971, p. 16.
that would soon invite taxes and tithes on it\textsuperscript{12}. In the meanwhile, Spain and Portugal had maintained their lead in the realm of maritime activities in the new world. They were getting entrenched in South America, while at the same time extending their activities to the North American coastline, where they were the first to set up a small colony between 1520 and 1525.

The year 1522 was witness to two important events that brought about a sea change in the hitherto lackadaisical attitude displayed by the French monarchy of the day towards the new discoveries. It was in this year that the Portuguese sailor Magellan, heading a Spanish fleet, succeeded in circumnavigating the planet\textsuperscript{13}. This was a momentous discovery that had established beyond doubt that Asia could indeed be reached by sailing to the west. While Magellan himself had died in Philippines, and four out of the five ships with which the expedition had embarked upon the sea were lost, the voyage had still been a huge success from the commercial point of view, which we must remember was the chief motivating force behind the European expansionism\textsuperscript{14}.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. Cod was the main fish caught along the coast of Labrador and Newfoundland. There were two types of cod-fishery: the green fishery and the dry fishery. The first referred to the fish that were caught on the ship and stored without drying. The second referred to fish that were caught along the coast, salted and dried thoroughly before being ready for the market. Samuel Eliot Morison, \textit{The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages, 1971, pp. 473-77}. The author is full of praise for the French fishermen: “Incredible as it may seem, the fishermen of Brittany, Normandy, and Saintonge often sailed from Rouen, Dieppe, Saint-Malo, or La Rochelle as early as January or February, braving the winter westerlies; they brought home a full fare of fish in April or May, and after landing them to be cured on shore, sailed again to the Grand Bank with a fresh load of salt, returning not later than October. It was not only a tough voyage to reach the Grand Bank; it was a bad place to spend your time at any season.” Ibid. Also, \textit{The Description and Natural History of the Coasts of North America (Acadia)} translated and edited by W. F. Ganong, 2 volumes, Toronto, Volume I p. 257. France had access to plenty of salt. Therefore, the Normans or Bretons practiced wet or green fishery, transporting fresh salted fish to European markets.

\textsuperscript{13} Born in 1480, his original name was Fernão de Magalhães. For further biographical information on Magellan, see \textit{Over the Edge of the World: Magellan’s Terrifying Circumnavigation of the Globe}, HarperCollins Publishers, 2003 by Laurence Bergreen. Also see \textit{The First Ships around the World}, Lerner Publications Co., Minneapolis, 1977.

\textsuperscript{14} For an intimate account of Magellan’s voyages, see \textit{Voyage of Magellan: Exploration through the Ages}, Richard Humble, Franklin Watts Publishers, 1989.
The venture had proved to be economically viable despite the long route followed by Magellan. With a shorter route, profits would shoot up, so ran the expectation. Thus apart from establishing beyond doubt that one could indeed reach the Asian continent by travelling to the west, this development opened up a new vista of possibilities, in that it encouraged many European sailors and their patrons to try to find a shorter route to Asia in a more northerly direction. The imagination of Francis I, the French monarch, was fired by the idea of finding this shorter route to India, China and other spice rich countries of Asia, and thus provide an effective counterbalance to the Spanish power that was on the rise. The opening of hostilities between the two countries in 1521 had already queered the pitch for a bitter rivalry.

In 1522, there occurred another incident that spurred France into action. We have referred to the hostile relations prevailing between France and Spain around this time. In the course of the ongoing war, a French commander, Jean Fleury of Honfleur, succeeded in seizing three Spanish galleons which were carrying to Spain vast amounts of gold and silver obtained from Mexico. This development gave rise to wild hopes of finding precious metals on the northern parts of the newly discovered territories. By the turn of the year, the monarchy in France was preparing itself to make its presence felt in America.

In this context, the voyage of Giovanni da Verrazzano assumes a lot of significance. He was an Italian sailor from Florence interested in finding out the route to Asia. The enterprise that the planned got the blessings of the French monarch who was probably instrumental in securing a part of the finances needed for the purpose. Thus the expedition was financed by the merchants and financiers of both French and Italian origin hailing from the southern French province of Lyon bordering northern Italy. As
mentioned earlier, France was still preoccupied with the Mediterranean world, where Lyon played a very significant role. This is testified to by Jeannin. As he puts it:

<<Pour la royaume de France, Lyon est la principal port ouverte sur l'Italie et l'Orient et la place continentale la plus proche de la haute Allemagne, rendez des affaires entre celle-ci et l'Espagne méditerranéen... Le rayonnement de Lyon s'étend à toute la France intérieure et océanique aux pays bas et à l'Angleterre.>>

Both the French and Italian merchants provided finances for the venture, though it was the latter who provided the greater part of the required finances. This was perhaps only natural, since Italians were at this time the financial and commercial giants of Europe. That these Italian merchants and financiers concentrated in the region of Lyon had a symbiotic relationship with the French monarchy is also well established. Even though the role played by the French monarchy in the organization of this voyage was plainly indirect, yet it does reflect a new sense of urgency felt by Francis I to secure a place for France in the spoils emanating from the new continent. Interestingly enough, the discoveries of Verrazano were in 1529 attributed by his brother to the 'perordine et comandomato del christianisme Ri di francia'. What adds even more significance to the whole affair is the fact that Verrazano projected himself as under the aegis of Francis I.

Whatever the nature of the French involvement in the voyage of Verrazano, his first attempt in 1523 to sail across the Atlantic was thwarted by a tumultuous weather. It was not before the next year that Verrazano could actually embark upon his enterprise. On this occasion, he took only one ship instead of four, as he had taken on the earlier...

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Spending two months on the sea, he reached what is now North Carolina in March 1524, from where he first sailed southward up to what is now the coast of Florida, and then, driven by the desire to secure a passage to Asia, he sailed up to the future Pennsylvania, New York, Nova Scotia, ‘land of Corte Real’ and the Cape Race, but realizing that his supplies were falling short he had to make a hasty retreat, without being able to fulfill his mission.

Verrazano’s voyage to North America proved to be significant in a variety of ways. Until now it was believed that the Pacific and the Atlantic probably joined each other to the north of Florida. This hope was dashed now. To the expectant minds of kings and sailors, occasion. Verrazano took a completely new route on this journey, avoiding both the North Atlantic route and the one that led to West Indies. Les Français en Amérique pendant le premier moitié du XVIIe siècle. A. Julien Herval and Beauchesne ed., Paris 1946, pp. 51-76. Verrazano thus described his voyage to Francis I ... ‘Since the storm that we encountered in the northern regions, Most Serene King, I have not written to tell Your Majesty of what happened to the four ships which you sent over the Ocean to explore new lands, as I thought that you had already been informed of everything—how we were forced by the fury of the winds to return in distress to Brittany with only the Normandy and the Dauphine, and that after undergoing repairs there, began our voyage with these two ships, equipped for war, following the coasts of Spain, Your Most Serene Majesty will have heard; and then according to our new plan, we continued the original voyage with only the Dauphine; now on our return from this voyage I will tell Your Majesty of what we found.” The Written Record of the Voyage of 1524 of Giovanni da Verrazano as recorded in a letter to Francis I, King of France, July 8th, 1524.

Verrazano wished to avoid intruding into what the Spaniards claimed as their territory, which was the main reason for his retreat from Florida. Les Français en Amérique pendant le premier moitié du XVIIe siècle pp. 54-55, A. Julien Herval and Beauchesne ed., Paris 1946. Verrazano was an acute observers and has recorded in detail his impressions of the natives he met on the voyage. Describing one of the earliest Amerindian tribes he met, Verrazano writes: ‘They go completely naked except that around their loins they wear skins of small animals like martens, with a narrow belt of grass around the body, to which they tie various tails of other animals which hang down to the knees; the rest of the body is bare, and so is the head. Some of them wear garlands of birds’ feathers. They are dark in color, not unlike the Ethiopians, with thick black hair, not very long, tied back behind the head like a small tail. As for the physique of these men, they are well proportioned, of medium height, a little taller than we are. They have broad chests, strong arms, and the legs and other parts of the body are well composed. There is nothing else, except that they tend to be rather broad in the face: but not all, for we saw many with angular faces. They have big black eyes, and an attentive and open look. They are not very strong, but they have a sharp cunning, and are agile and swift runners. From what we could tell from observation, in the last two respects they resemble the Orientals, particularly those from the farthest Sinarian regions.’ The Written Record of the Voyage of 1524 of Giovanni da Verrazano as recorded in a letter to Francis I, King of France, July 8th, 1524.

In their enthusiasm for finding a route to Asia, Verrazano and his crew mistook Pamilco Sound for the ‘Asian Sea’. As Verrazano reported it: “From the ship we caught sight of the eastern sea toward the northwest. That sea is doubtless the one that washes the shores of India, China and Cathay. We sailed the entire length of this island, in the unyielding hope of finding some strait, or, better still, a promontory terminating this land toward the north, so that we might penetrate to the blessed shores of Cathay.” Ibid. p. 59.
it brought home the fact there was no passage to Asia between Florida and the Newfoundland. It also established for the first time that the lands discovered by the European sailors were neither small nor the eastern extremities of Asia. Staring in the face was the obvious conclusion that this was a veritable new world.

Moreover, the exploration brought France into the thick of things in the new continent. Whether or not he was commissioned by the French monarch, Verrazano did claim the entire coast he had explored in the name of France. In fact, he gave it the name 'Francesca' as a tribute to the French monarch. Shortly afterwards, however, the name was changed to Nova Gallia. This is not to argue that these claims were accepted by other European countries which already had a presence in America, but only to underline the involvement of French state in the new world.

In addition to all this, Verrazano's excursion into the new lands added to the knowledge European sailors and others had on this subject. Verrazano himself was a keen observer of things, and has left us his observations and speculations on the state of things in America. In physical appearance, he judged the native people to be closer to what he believed were the Asian and African races. Thus, describing the native inhabitants of what was later to become North Carolina, Verrazano says:

They go completely naked except that around their loins they wear skins of small animals like martens, with a narrow belt of grass around the body, to which they tie various tails of other animals which hang down to the knees; the rest of the body is bare, and so is the head. Some of them wear garlands of birds' feathers. They are dark in color, not unlike the Ethiopians, with thick black hair, not very long, tied back behind the head like a small tail. As for the physique of these men, they are well proportioned, of medium height, a little taller than we are. They have broad chests, strong arms, and the legs and other parts of the body are well composed. There is nothing else, except that they tend to be rather broad in the face: but not all, for we saw many with angular
faces. They have big black eyes, and an attentive and open look. They are not very strong, but they have a sharp cunning, and are agile and swift runners. From what we could tell from observation, in the last two respects they resemble the Orientals, particularly those from the farthest Sinarian regions.

To the extent, however, that the European geographical discoveries derived their sustenance from motives of mercantile profiteering, Verrazano's voyage to America could claim little success. Not only had the area he had explored failed to provide gold and silver, but it also appeared to be devoid of any other precious resources like spices or Brazil wood. The few samples of gold that he could manage to gather in the course of his voyages in the new continent were hardly the kind of stuff to satisfy the hard-headed Lyonese merchants and financers who had financed the enterprise. It was little wonder that they decided to shelve the whole project and put their money in more profitable ventures. Even though Verrazano did not lose his interest in further explorations, and was indeed killed by the inhabitants of an unspecified island in West Indies on one of these ventures, his later voyages hold little relevance for the purposes of our study.

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21 The Written Record of the Voyage of 1524 of Giovanni da Verrazano as recorded in a letter to Francis I, King of France, July 8th, 1524 Adapted from a translation by Susan Tarrow of the Cellere Codex, in Lawrence C. Wroth, ed. The Voyages of Giovanni de Verrazzano,1524-1528 (Yale, 1970), pp. 133-143. Describing the Amerindians of the Newport in lower Narragansett Bay, Verrazano presents a rather different picture: 'Their women are just as shapely and beautiful; very gracious, of attractive manner and pleasant appearance; their customs and behavior follow womanly custom as far as befits human nature; they go nude except for stag skin embroidered like the men's, and some wear rich lynx skins on their arms; their bare heads are decorated with various ornaments made of braids of their own hair which hang down over their breasts on either side. Some have other hair arrangements such as the women of Egypt and Syria wear and these women are older and have been joined in wedlock. Both men and women have various trinkets hanging from their ears as the Orientals do; and we saw that they had many sheets of worked copper which they prize more than gold. They do not value gold because of its color; they think it the most worthless of all, and rate blue and red above all other colors. The things we gave them that they prized the most were little bells, blue crystals, and other trinkets to put in the ear or around the neck. They did not appreciate cloth of silk and gold, nor even of any other kind, nor did they care to have them; the same was true for metals like steel and iron, for many times when we showed them some of our arms, they did not admire them, nor ask for them, but merely examined the workmanship. They did the same with mirrors; they would look at them quickly, and then refuse them, laughing.' Ibid.
On the strength of what we have explored so far, it would be obvious that the conditions in what came to be called North America were at this time completely in a state of flux. It was a state of affairs where claims and counterclaims were constantly being made by several European countries, with none of them having either the knowledge or the resources to make any decisive moves in the new continent. What comes out further is the fact that France, at this particular juncture in the history of its expansion in North America at least, had a relatively precarious existence. We earlier referred to the establishment of a Portuguese colony in Cape Breton between 1520-1525. Henry VII, the king of England, had already sent two missions to North America, the first one being that of John Cabot, a Venetian sailor, in 1497, followed by that of Joao Fernandez, a Portuguese navigator, in 150122. The chief motivating force behind these missions, as in the case of most others, had been to secure a passage to Asia23. The same motive impelled Henry VIII, the new king of England, to sponsor another expedition to America in the wake of Verrazano’s discoveries. This one was headed by John Rut, who scaled up

23 The Charter granted by Henry VII to John Cabot, however, says nothing on finding a passage to Asia. The charter merely authorized him 'to find, discover and investigate whatsoever islands, countries, regions or provinces of heathens and infidels, in whatsoever part of the world placed, which before this time were unknown to all Christians.' Ibid. 7–10. That Cabot's voyages were regarded as important by many of his contemporaries in Europe is beyond doubt. For example, Lorenzo Pasqualigo, who was a Venetian merchant living in London, in a letter , dated August 23, 1497, to his brothers in Venice, thus commented on Cabot's voyage: "That Venetian of ours who went with a small ship from Bristol to find new islands has come back and says he has discovered mainland 700 leagues away, which is the country of the Grand Khan, and that he coasted it for 300 leagues and landed and did not see any person; but he has brought here to the king [Henry VII] certain snares which were spread to take game and a needle for making nets, and he found certain notched [or felled] trees so that by this he judges that there are inhabitants. Being in doubt he returned to his ship; and he has been three months on the voyage; and this is certain. And on the way back he saw two islands, but was unwilling to land, in order not to lose time, as he was in want of provisions. The king here is much pleased at this; and he [Cabot] says that the tides are slack and do not run as they do here. The king has promised him for the spring ten armed ships as he [Cabot] desires, and has given him all the prisoners to be sent away, that they may go with him, as he has requested; and has given him money that he may have a good time until then, and he is with his Venetian wife and his sons at Bristol."Ibid.p. 14.
the Atlantic coast of America from Newfoundland to Virginia. However, the deeply entrenched Spanish position in the region led him to develop cold feet, and he came back to England without having accomplished much.

Between the fall of the curtain on Verrazano, and its rise once again with the advent of Jacques Cartier, a decade would pass. It was not before 1534 that the French monarchy was able to put its act together once again and organise another expedition to America. By this time, the French had already scored a victory over their rivals in the new world in bringing into focus a new- and more practical from the European point of view - a theory of colonialism. While the Spanish and Portuguese power in the newly discovered lands was based in practice on nothing but the exercise of military force they could conjure up into action, in theory, it was supposedly derived from the series of bulls they were able to coax out of successive Popes culminating in the treaty of Tordesillas signed in 1494. On the strength of these pontifical commands, they sought to shut the gates on newcomers like France and England, denying them, even in theory, any access to the newly- discovered lands, which, they believed, devolved on them and on them alone. Chagrined by these claims, French monarchy was the first to call into question the idea of dividing the whole new world between Spain and Portugal on the merit of papal degrees. The French concept of colonialism put more emphasis on the actual discovery and occupation of the new lands, before any tenable claims could be made regarding those places. While this had always been so in practice, the French monarchy under Francis I was successful in setting it up on a higher pedestal of legal and theoretical rights in the

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25 Ibid.
new lands, when Pope Clement VII, in 1533, though without going to the unthinkable extent for him of repealing any of the bulls issued by his predecessors, showed himself accommodative enough in declaring that the bull Inter Catera of Pope Alexander VI, dividing the world between Spain and Portugal dealt only with the hitherto known lands. Future discoveries were outside the scope of papal decrees. There is a good deal of controversy surrounding the voyages of Jacques Cartier. Whereas for the majority of the Franco-Canadian historians he has traditionally symbolized the beginnings of New France, English Canadian historians have generally been far less charitable in their evaluation of his work in North America. It is obvious, however, that whatever the scope and ramification of his itinerary in what was later described as new France, he did play a significant role in the French colonial venture in North America.

When Jacques Cartier got the letters patent from the French monarch in 1533, he was

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27 Ibid. The papal decrees had significantly complicated the task of dividing the 'new world' among the European powers. In 1481, a papal decree assigned lands south of Canary Islands to Portugal. The Bull Inter Catera (1493) of Pope Alexander VI, who was from Spain, decreed that all lands east of Cape Verde Islands would belong to Portugal and those west of the islands would belong to Spain. Portugal's unhappiness with the decree prompted it to enter into the Treaty of Tordesillas with Spain in 1494. Later on, Pope Julius II implicitly recognized the treaty in a bull issued in 1506. The Bull issued by Pope Clement VII in favour of France was thus part of an ongoing process.

28 For a very early French-Canadian account of Cartier's voyages, one can refer to Francois Xavier Garneau's voluminous History of Canada, published in 1860, in the wake of the assertion made by Lord Durham that the French-Canadians had no history whatsoever. In this nationalist account, Cartier is described as a 'hardy mariner and skillful navigator' who was 'the first to scan carefully the arid and desolate sea margin of coast of Labrador' and discovered the St. Lawrence. History of Canada from the Time of Its Discovery to the Union Year (1840-41), Francois Xavier Garneau, Publisher J Lovel, 1860.

29 There is evidence to show that Jacques Cartier's voyages were being closely monitored by the European rivals of France, which would testify to the great importance attached to them by his contemporaries. Spain had, in fact, set spies upon him to report every minute detail of the said voyages. The secret report prepared by a Spanish spy on the preparations of one of the later voyages of Cartier makes an interesting reading: 'The vessels for this navigation are ten in number, all of them at the cost and charge of the King, who has not been willing that any private individual whatsoever outfits ships with him. Among those vessels is a port galleon of seventy tons; two ships, one of six score, the other of one hundred and ten tons, and these three belong to the king. There are two ships belonging to Jacques Cartier, each of ninety tons, and one belonging to another merchant of Saint - Malo of four score tons. For the complement of the ten ships mentioned above, four more ships are required, which Roberval is bringing from Rouen and Honfleur, carrying three hundred soldiers and were to arrive on the VIIIth of the present month of April. The said ships each are of ninety to a hundred tons burden. And those ten vessels have been completely refitted in the last two years.' The Voyages of Jacques Cartier by Jacques Cartier Preface by H. P. Biggar, Toronto 1993, pp. 152-153.
already a man with a lot of experience in maritime traffic between Europe and the American continent. A resident of the French port of Saint Malo, he is considered by some historians to have been one of the principal companions and advisors of Verrazano on his voyages to the new lands. In fact, it is even argued that it was on his advice that Verrazano had abandoned his first expedition undertaken in 1523. Despite the doubts raised regarding his participation in Verrazano’s expeditions, there can be no denying that he was one of the most well-experienced sailors in France, as far as the trans-Atlantic routes were considered.

It is more important for our purposes, however, to look into the nature of his mission, the motives that guided it and the repercussions it had in terms of the French colonial enterprise in North America in an atmosphere of intense rivalry, and occasional antagonism, with other European countries. A look at the charter issued by the French authorities tells us that the apparent motives, as far as French state was considered, was to “descouvrir certaines ysles ou l’on dit qu’il sedroibt trouver de l’or et autre riches choses”. This might suggest that the French monarchy had finally given up all hopes of finding a passage to Asia across the new world. Cartier himself was, however convinced that a passage to what was described as Cathay could be found, which fact gives some credence to Lanctot’s claim that “en réalité, son objectif primordial et secret restait le recherché d’une voie inter-océanique aux pays des épices”. As is obvious from the available evidence, the first expedition of Cartier at least was not visualized in terms of a

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30 Cartier was brought to the service of the King by Bishop Jean Le Veneur who wielded a lot of influence at the court. It was he who recommended Cartier, and promised ‘if the king would consent to entrust this mission to Jacques Cartier, to provide chaplains and contribute to the task of these voyages of discovery from his own resources’. Extrait de la généalogie de la maison Le Veneur, par le président Hénauld, Nova Francia VI, 1931, pp. 340 – 43.


32 Order from the King, 18 March 1534, Collection of Documents, p. 42.
colonizing mission to America, but was simply a venture to secure material gains for the French monarchy that had been in a state of intermittent conflict with its domineering neighbour, Spain. There is nothing to show that either the French state or Cartier himself considered religious motives to be the chief motivating force behind the mission. Whereas Cartier, in his first Relations, did speculate on the possibilities of converting the native population to Christianity, this cannot be taken as a serious expression of his ideas regarding the object of his enterprise. In the course of his interactions with natives, Cartier observed a number of things, and mentioned the possibility of converting them only in a most perfunctory way. Here is the passage:

<< Les aulstres femmes, qui estoint passées de l'autre costé où nous estions vindrent franchement à nous, et nous frotoint les bratz avec leur mains, et puis levoint les mains joingtes au ciel, en fessant plusieurs signes de jouaye; et tellement se assurerent avecques nous, que en fin marchandames, main à main, avecques culx, de tout ce qu'Ilz abvoint, (de sorte qu'il ne leur restoit autre chose que les nus corps, pource qu'ilz nous donnerèrent tout ce qu'ilz abvoint) qui est chose de peu de valleur. Nous congneumes que ce sont gens qui seroint fassalles à convertir, qui vont de lieu en aulstre, vivant, et prenant du poisson, au temps de pescherie, pour vivre. >>

The impression that this passage conveys is that Cartier was probably struck by the scant material resources at the disposal of the natives, and on the strength of the erroneous notion that material backwardness causes people to be less attached to the religious traditions inherited from their ancestors, concluded that it would be easy enough to convert the 'savages', as they were described by Cartier and other European observers. It is, of course, another matter that the French experience with native Indians would later demonstrate to their hitherto unsuspecting minds how difficult it was to convert the later

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33 The Voyages of Jacques Cartier, edited by H.P. Biggar, Ottawa 1924, p. 56. Also see A General History and Collection of Voyages and Travels, edited by Robert Kerr, Publisher W. Blackwood, 1811.
to Christianity, and having converted them, keeping them away from falling back to their ‘savage’, ‘pagan’ lives.

The second statement where Cartier talks about the possibility of converting the natives occurs immediately after the first one cited above. In the midst of a description of the native flora and fauna, Cartier again asserts ‘je estime mielx que aultrement que les gens seroient faciles à convertir à notre saincte foy’\(^\text{34}\). Here again, it is not more than an afterthought. This is not to deny the fact that there was a close relationship between European expansion, on the one hand, and the spread of Christianity, on the other. That would be understandable enough in the natural scheme of things. There can be no watertight compartments, as far as the various aspects of any human civilization are concerned. It would be impossible to determine where the material interest comes to an end and the evangelical motives enter into the picture. Like all good Christians of his age, and of the later times as well, Cartier was naturally enthused by the possibility of spreading ‘notre saincte foy’, as he put it.

Furthermore, what needs to be kept in mind is the fact that Cartier’s was the first expedition to North America that could be described as a French enterprise in a strict sense. Not only was it undertaken as an enterprise of the French state, but it was also led by a French mariner. This perhaps can be taken as a measure of the growing interest and confidence on the part of the French monarchy, vis a vis its ventures in America.

During his first voyage, Cartier touched the area around the Strait of Belle Isle and Anticosti Island\(^\text{35}\). He did come across what was later called the Gulf of Saint Lawrence,
but found it impossible to sail it because of violent currents. Even though he carried out barter with the natives in which the latter ended up losing all their clothing made of various kinds of furs, Cartier failed to secure 'gold and other rich things'. At the end of the day, he returned to France with his small barter and two natives whom he had coerced into accompanying the crew back to his country. In the eyes of the French monarch, Francis I, however, the voyage did seem to have accomplished the best part of its mission. More than anything else, it appeared to be remarkable in the sense that it greatly enhanced the available pool of knowledge with regard to the coastal sea between Newfoundland and the continental mainland. There was the possibility that across the bay Cartier had discovered might lay the wealth of Asia. The friendly relations that were established with the Indians also excited the hopes of more successful missions in future. Given this state of affairs, therefore, it is little wonder that the French monarchy easily acquiesced into granting the permission for another expedition to North America the very next year, 1534, to be more precise, under the leadership of the redoubtable Cartier. It is obvious that this second mission to North America was significantly more ambitious in nature and scope. Given the vast preparations required for the expedition, and the intervening winter months, it was not before May 1535, however, that Cartier could embark upon his second venture into the new lands. Domagaya and Taignoagny, the two natives he had brought to France on his earlier visit, themselves belonged to a land

36 Whereas Cartier had traveled with only two ships on the earlier occasion, he had three relatively large ships at his disposal during his second voyage. These ships, the Grande Hermine, the Petite Hermine and the Emerillion had 110 men on board, and were supplied with rations for one and a half year. Les Français en Amérique pendant le première moitie du XVIe siècle Ch. A. Julien, Herval and Beauchesne, ed. Paris 1946, p. 119.

37 Cartier had returned to France in September, and the next month itself he received orders from the king to prepare for another campaign. This is clear evidence of the determination of the state to go ahead with its enterprises in the new world. Commission of 30 October 1534 and Order of the King, 30 March 1535, Collection of Documents relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur de Roberval, H.P. Biggar, ed. Ottawa 1930, pp. 44-45 and 53.
they called the country of Canada. Cartier thus sailed up what the natives called Hochelega River, the later day Saint Lawrence, and reached the vicinity of the native village of Stadacona, where the Amerindians were rejoined by their compatriots. It was here that he met the famous chief, Donnacona, who warmly welcomed the French party. However, the natives of Stadacona (Quebec) were not in favour of allowing the French to go any farther along the river, as that would cause them to come in touch with other native communities, and would thus neutralize the benefit that they themselves could derive from trade with these newcomers\(^{38}\). Despite their protestations, however, Cartier continued sailing up the river with only the smallest ship at his disposal, and eventually reached the Indian town of Hochelega, the latter-day Montreal. Here again, Cartier's arrival was welcomed by the natives who expected significant material gains through barter with these people\(^{39}\). Little did the natives suspect what the future had in store for them.

Cartier’s progress was stopped at Hochelega, beyond which the rapids in the river did not allow him to sail upstream. Thus, hopes of finding a passage to Asia across the North American continent were frustrated. However, Cartier was given some pieces of gold by the natives, and was also provided some information on the place where it was found. This in itself was sufficient to boost the morale of the explorer whose imagination was fired with the hope of finding another Peru. Eventually, Cartier came back to Stadacona where he was joined by the rest of the crew\(^{40}\). In the meantime, however, problems had cropped up between the natives of the town and the French crew. Even though there was

\(^{38}\) The natives tried to frighten Cartier by telling them about the difficulties involved in sailing further up the river. *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, H. P. Biggar, Ottawa 1924, pp. 20-23.

\(^{39}\) Ibid. 46-47.

\(^{40}\) Ibid. p. 173.
nothing like an open show of hostilities between the two parties, tension prevailed at the subterranean level. As a precaution, therefore, the crew had erected a wooden structure around the ships, in order to provide more security in the not unlikely event of a fight with the Indians. Yet, cool as the relations were, they did not degenerate into an open fight. In fact, some time after the return of Cartier to Stadacona, they were more or less restored to harmony and peaceful coexistence.\footnote{Soon after his return to Stadacona, Cartier hosted a feast for Donnacona and his men as a mark of the normalization of relations between the two parties. Account of Cartier's first voyage in 	extit{Les Français en Amérique pendant la première moitié du XVIe siècle}, Ch. A. Julien, Herval and Beauchesne, ed. Paris 1946. pp. 154-56, 160-62.}

One of the most important achievements of Cartier's second expedition to the new lands was the passing of the long winter at Stadacona. Cartier had experienced the winter in England, which was the coldest place for him. In any case, he was misled by the latitude of the place, located, as it was, two degrees south of Paris and the hot summer, which had preceded the winter. Whereas his native allies sought to put him on guard against the severity of the coming winter and told him that their god had predicted there would be two meters of snow, Cartier, unaware as he was of what 'Canadian winter' had in store for him, simply scoffed at their suggestion. In the event, however, the French crew suffered its worst disaster as yet. Not only did the snow extend to a depth of about two meters, but also the length of the winter, from November to May, proved to be overwhelming for Cartier's men. Weakened by the severity of the winter, which was a completely new experience for them, these men fell victim to scurvy. By the time winter had come to a close, at least twenty-five men out of a hundred and ten were already dead. This weakening of the French position aroused the fear of Indian hostility, should the latter come to know of it. Cartier, therefore, forbade the Indians coming close to the
ships, lest they discover death and destruction caused by the winter. He tricked Domagaya into telling him that *anneda* or the white cedar was an effective medicine for scurvy, and benefited by this knowledge, the French crew staged a remarkable recovery.

The second voyage of Cartier's had been a major success in a variety of ways. He had succeeded in gaining entry into North America up to the present day Montreal, something that no other explorer had done before him. Thus, he had in a way discovered what later came to be described as the St. Lawrence highway into the heart of the continent. The trade relations he had entered into with the natives and the intimate knowledge of the latter's social and economic affairs also went a long way in helping the French enterprise in North America. Finally, Cartier and his men had become the first Europeans after the Vikings to winter in the region. More than anything else, this second expedition had succeeded in convincing the French monarch to undertake a much more ambitious enterprise in the new lands.

Whereas the French monarchy was now determined in principle to pursue a policy in North America that could more fittingly be described as a colonial policy, the resumption of war with Spain did not permit it to try to immediately put that policy into practice. It was not before 1540, after peace had been established with Spain, that Francis I could turn his attention to North America. Determined to secure a foothold in the new world, he now made a most elaborate arrangement for the next expedition. Donnaconna, the Indian chief mentioned earlier, and other Indians abducted by Cartier and taken to France testified to the presence of vast treasures of gold and silver. The French intention was to create a permanent base in the Laurentian valley, which alone would permit the long-term

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42 *A Collection of Documents relating to Cartier and Roberval*, H. P. Biggar, Ottawa 1930, pp. 66-67, 75-81. Donnacona was personally interviewed by the King, and had told him about these precious resources. Ibid.
exploitation of the said gold mines and other precious resources\textsuperscript{43}. Apart from this, it must be remembered that Cartier himself had never lost sight of his larger ambition to find a passage to Asia through the North American landmass. Accordingly, Cartier was given the high-sounding titles of Captain-General and the master pilot\textsuperscript{44}. The orders given to Cartier mentioned the state’s intention to send an expedition to the ‘countries of Canada and Hochelega right into the domain of Saguenay ... comprising an end of Asia\textsuperscript{45}'. Whereas the real intention of the French was to get hold of the gold and silver supposed to be abundant in the Saguenay valley, it was never mentioned by those concerned with the project. In fact, it was here for the first time that conversion of native people was mentioned as the motive behind the expedition. Not only that, it was given out to be the only motive behind the most ambitious French enterprise in North America so far. All this points out to the fact that the evangelical motives were cited by the monarch to conceal the real motives of the expedition and to keep the Pope in good humour. The Pope would obviously find it difficult to raise any objection to any avowed mission to spread Christianity. This declaration would also have the effect of blunting the edge of Spanish and Portuguese opposition to the French endeavour. This is not to deny that the French monarchy would not have been glad to convert the native to Christianity—in fact Donnaconna and other kidnapped natives had already been converted in France where they died a few years later—but only to point to the fact that that endeavour was guided by the mundane considerations of material aggrandizement. As the intention this

\textsuperscript{43} Francis I cleared the outstanding dues to Cartier of some 3, 500 livres to motivate him for the task ahead. Orders of the King, 14 and 22 September 1538. Collection of Documents, pp. 69-71.


\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. The Commission further instructed Cartier to ‘enter deeper into these lands, to converse with the people found there and to live among them, if need be’. Ibid.
time was to create a settlement of a more or less permanent nature, the king thought it necessary to appoint a French nobleman, Jean Francois de la Roque de Robervall, as the lieutenant — general of the new country. The appointment of Roberval over and above Cartier only emphasizes the fact that in the hierarchical society of the ancien regime only a noble man could be appointed to high positions of the state, such as the deputyship of a country or province. It may also have had something to do with the king’s desire to avoid investing money in the new project from the royal sources. Since most of the high state offices in the French political system at that time were venal - that is, they were sold by the state to persons of noble lineage and vast financial resources for pecuniary considerations there was nothing unusual in the appointment of Roberval in a similar fashion. The involvement of a powerful nobleman in a fledgling overseas project could have the effect of boosting its chances of survival.

The scale on which this expedition was organized was certainly big enough in the context of those days. In all, five ships with 400 men, many of them drawn from the ranks of prisoners, would travel to the new lands in the summer of 1541. The supplies taken along with the expedition would be sufficient for three years. The expenditure incurred on the project was also huge by the standards of those days. The royal treasury alone had spent money to the tune of 45,000 livres, besides the considerable expenditure incurred

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46 Roberval was a Protestant, and had to leave France in 1535 for the fear of persecution. However, he was soon allowed by Francis I to return from his self-imposed exile. See Robert de Roquebrune, ‘Roberval, sa généalogie,’ R.H.A.F., IX, 2 September 1955, pp. 157-75.

47 The powers accorded by the King to Roberval were indeed far-reaching. He was to be the master of the crew, had the authority to build forts, conquer new lands and enter into treaties on behalf of the Crown. All those accompanying him were asked to ‘swear upon oath to serve as well and loyally and with obedience to the order of our said Lieutenant — General’. Commission of 15 January, Collection of documents relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur de Roberval, H.P. Biggar, ed. Ottawa 1930, pp. 270-80.

48 A Collection of Documents relating to Jacques Cartier and Roberval, edited by H.P. Biggar, Ottawa 1930, p. 206 and 270-78. Out of the 400 men who accompanied Cartier, there were twenty carpenters, twenty master pilots and twenty workingmen, and the ships had supplies for three years as against only one and a half year on the earlier occasion. Ibid.
by Roberval out of his personal resources, which were again considerable\textsuperscript{49}. It was not before 1541 that Cartier could actually embark upon his third and last voyage. Roberval was supposed to follow him in a short while. Upon reaching Stadaconna, Cartier was urgently called upon to settle his men in a suitable place, which he found a few miles upstream from the native town, and named it Charlesbourg, while he himself hurried to Hochelega to explore the possibility of sailing beyond the rapids, which was important both for the purposes of finding the much sought-after gold-mines and also securing a passage to Asia, a goal that Cartier had never lost sight of. However, as on the earlier occasion, he could not succeed in sailing the river beyond the rapids at Lachine, and had to return to Charlesbourg, where the rest of the crew was residing, and where the relations with the natives had already deteriorated. There are conflicting accounts of what exactly happened or what led to it, but there is near unanimity in the sources that there was some kind of struggle between the French and the natives, which rendered the French presence in the region even more precarious than it would have been in the best of the circumstances\textsuperscript{50}. Cartier himself mentions it in his Relations as one of the reasons that led to the French retreat in 1542 when he says ‘qu’il n’avait pu avec sa petite bande, resister aux sauvages qui redoient journellement et l’ incommodoient fort\textsuperscript{51}’. It was near Charlesbourg itself that the French expedition succeeded in realizing one of its greatest ambitions. Gold and diamonds were supposedly found in vast quantities

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{50} It appears that there was some sort of conspiracy hatched by the natives against the French party. Agona, the new chief of Stadacona, had meetings with some other chiefs for this purpose. Cartier mentions that the natives had assembled in large numbers at the village, but fails to provide the details. \textit{Voyages of Cartier}, H.P. Biggar, Ottawa 1924, pp. 256-59.

\textsuperscript{51} Even though Cartier himself does not mention any loss of life due to conflict with the natives, the French fishermen of Newfoundland are reported to have mentioned the killing of carpenters at work at the hands of the natives. It is even mentioned that some natives bragged to them of having killed 35 members of Cartier’s crew. Ibid. p. 264.
buried inside the earth. Cartier ordered his men to collect as much of it as possible, and, soon after, ordered a return to France. In the meanwhile, Roberval had finished his preparations and was heading towards America with three ships and in all more than 330 men, including the crew. The two men, Roberval and Cartier, met each other at Newfoundland, and Roberval ordered the 'master pilot' to accompany him back to the interior of the continent. Anxious to take the credit for what he rightfully regarded as his own discovery of gold and diamonds, however, Cartier slipped away for France. However, Cartier was out of luck by now. The gold and diamonds that he had collected in the Laurentian valley, and which he thought would finally prove to the Francis I the great success his mission had achieved, proved to be nothing more than iron pyrite and quartz crystals. This brought to an abrupt end, for a long time at least, the French colonial enterprise in North America, for none of the principal objectives of the third expedition had been realized. To the great disappointment of the French explorers and colonizers, the new world was finally proven to be without any precious resource, which could justify any expensive undertakings on the part of the already overtaxed royal treasury. Not only was there no gold or silver or spices, there was no hope now left of finding a passage to Asia also. There was little justification for the continued involvement of France in America. The next year, the king ordered the liquidation of the French settlement there and the return of Roberval.

As mentioned earlier, the French expeditions to North America under Cartier continue to remain a contentious issue in the history of North America. While most Franco-Canadian historians tend to extol their achievements, much of the Anglo-Canadian historical writing considers the whole affair, as one minor episode in the history of what later
became Canada. What was the outcome of the French enterprise by the time Cartier finished his three voyages of the new world? In other words, where did France stand, vis-à-vis other countries, at the end of 1532? And what was the personal contribution of Cartier to the unfolding of France in America? These are the questions that assume importance in the given context.

Colonization of America by the European countries should obviously be seen more as a process than an event. From a state of almost complete ignorance even with regard to the very existence of the new continent, they gradually emerged as the dominant force in America. The first century of contact between Europe and North America was in the main a period of exploration. Thus, by the end of the sixteenth century, America could still not be described as a continent inhabited by the Europeans to any significant extent. Throughout this period, it was the native presence that remained predominant in the region. The European enterprises in America during this period were either not aimed at a permanent settlement of the continent, or where they were guided by such motives, simply lacked the resources and the zeal required for the task. It is in this light that the early French enterprises in North America must be seen. Thus viewed, there is nothing unusual in the French expeditions of this period. As mentioned earlier, France was a relative newcomer in North America in comparison to Spain, Portugal and England. The impetus for these enterprises was, as in the case of other European countries, predominantly material in nature. The so-called failure of the French enterprise in North America headed by Cartier should not be seen as a failure in a very strict sense. To the extent that the colonization of America at the hands of Europe was a long drawn out process, it was inevitably interspersed with temporary setbacks, which should not
surprise us. To wonder too much about why France or any other European power for that matter did not succeed in setting itself up in North America would probably be a reading of the present in the past. In the prevailing situation in the sixteenth century, European enterprises in the newly discovered continent were necessarily tentative.

Seen in this perspective, Cartier’s expeditions cannot but appear to have made a significant contribution to the French expansion in the newly-discovered continent. By the end of his ventures, France had secured a lot of valuable experience in this part of the world. North America was no longer a completely unknown world. There was some awareness of its geographical features, climate, flora and fauna, etc. This knowledge would prove useful later on when the French would make a more decisive effort to colonize what they officially described New France even at this early date. Cartier’s achievement from the French point of view was, therefore, enormous. Even from the larger perspective of the eventual European occupation of America, it should not be considered insignificant, for Cartier was certainly one of the pioneers of exploration in North America and vastly added to the available knowledge about the continent by writing a careful account of his voyages. The question as to whether the English or the French were the first to set their foot in North America is irrelevant at the best and preposterous at the worst. Thus the whole debate between many Franco-Canadian scholars on the one hand and the Anglo-Canadian scholars on the other regarding who should be considered the real founder of Canada seems to be misplaced. Whereas the

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52 H. P. Biggar, in his Preface to the Voyages of Jacques Cartier, thus describes the latter’s contribution to the growth of European knowledge of North America: ‘The voyages, for over 450 years, have provided almost the only documentation of the beginning for the beginning of the European contact with this region. They reveal a man with both the virtues of an honest observer and the assumptions and preoccupations of a shrewd Breton navigator. Since he interpreted what he saw, he “never presents things just as they are” and, especially in his discussions of his relations with the people who lived along the St. Lawrence, he “could twist and disguise (facts) to conform to (his) point of view.” Like all historical documents, Cartier Voyages can be both informative and misleading.’ The Voyages of Jacques Cartier by Jacques Cartier, Preface by H. P. Biggar, Toronto 1993, p. X.
English claims to what is today Canada go back to the voyage in 1497 of John Cabot to Newfoundland, an Italian navigator hired by the king of England, The French claims to the continent itself extend back to the voyages of Aubert, Verrazano and Jacques Cartier. The purpose here is not to establish as to who was the founder of Canada. As far as the French presence in Canada is concerned, Cartier remains one of the pioneers. Marcel Trudel has made the following comment on the significance of the work done by Jacques Cartier:

<<Prolongeant l'oeuvre de Verrazano, celle de Cartier est un sommet dans les découvertes françaises en Amérique du nord au XVIe siècle. Pour le dépasser, il faudra attendre, 75 ans plus tard, les découverts de Champlain sur les Grands Lacs et, dans le dernier quart du XVIIe siècle, les voyages de joliet et de Cavalier de Lasalle.>>

It has been mentioned earlier how fisherman from different countries of Europe like Portugal, England, France and Spain had started frequenting the North American shores from the close of the fifteenth century. In fact, the fishery occupied such an important place in the European enterprise in the newly-discovered continent that the greater part of the trans-Atlantic traffic could not but be devoted to the fishing expeditions. Fish was of course important for its sheer economic value. But it was rendered even more so for another reason, if we take into account the fact that in those days, meat-eating was prohibited for the devout Christians more than 150 days a year. However, conveniently enough, fish was not regarded as meat, which had the effect of creating a significant seasonal spurt in its consumption. The North American fishing grounds along the coast were much more profitable as compared to European ones, for even though the American natives had been practising fishery in the area for thousand of years, their exploitation of the coastal fishery could not have been anything but minor, given their relatively small

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53 Mythes et réalités dans l'histoire du Québec, Marcel Trudel, Montréal 1999 p. 36.
54 H.P. Biggar, The Early Trading Companies of New France, Toronto, 1901, pp. 120 - 23.
population and what we might consider rather primitive fishing techniques. The advent of the European fishing expedition expeditions to North America was, therefore, nothing short of a revolution in terms of the economic relations between the two continents. Thus, fishery constituted what is regarded as the first staple of trans-Atlantic trade.