

Primary Source: Amadas and Barlowe Explore the Outer Banks ^[1]

On April 27, 1584, Captains Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe left the west coast of England in two ships to explore the North American coast for Sir Walter Raleigh. The party of explorers landed on July 13, 1584, on the North Carolina coast just north of Roanoke Island, and claimed the land in the name of Queen Elizabeth. Captain Barlowe's report describes the land and the people he encountered.

The second of July we found [shole water](#) ^[2], wher we smelt so sweet, and so strong a smel, as if we had bene in the midst of some delicate garden abounding with all kinde of [odoriferous](#) ^[3] flowers, by which we were assured, that the land could not be farre distant: and keeping good watch, and [bearing but slacke saile](#), the fourth of the same moneth we arrived upon the coast, which we supposed to be a continent and firme lande, and we sayled along the same a hundred and twentie English miles before we could finde any entrance, or river issuing into the Sea. The first that appeared unto us, we entred, though not without some difficultie, & cast anker about three [harquebuz](#) ^[4] shot within the havens mouth on the left hand of the same: and after thanks given to God for our safe arrivall thither, we manned our boats, and went to view the land next adjoining, and [to take possession of the same, in the right of the Queenes most excellent Majestie](#)

How much land they thought they were claiming is uncertain — probably they themselves had no good idea. And it doesn't seem to have concerned them when, a few days later, they met the brother of the king who already ruled the land they had just claimed. Since he was not a Christian monarch, his claim to the land was irrelevant to them., and rightfull Queene, and Princesse of the same, and after [delivered the same over to your use, according to her Majesties grant, and letters patents, under her Highnesse great seale](#). Which being performed, according to the ceremonies used in such enterprises, we viewed the land about us, being, whereas we first landed, very sandie and low towards the waters side, but so full of grapes, as the very beating and surge of the Sea overflowed them, of which we found such plentie, as well there as in all places else, both on the sand and on the greene soile on the hils, as in the plaines, as well on every little shrubbe, as also climing towards the tops of high Cedars, that I thinke in all the world the like abundance is not to be found: and my selfe having seene those parts of Europe that most abound, find such difference as were incredible to be written.

[We passed from the Sea side towards the toppes of those hilles next adjoining, being but of meane highth, and from thence wee behelde the Sea on both sides to the North, and to the South, finding no ende any of both wayes.](#) This lande laye stretching it selfe to the West, which after wee found to bee but an Island of twentie miles long, and not above sixe miles broade. Under the banke or hill whereon we stooode, we behelde the vallyes replenished with goodly Cedar trees, and having discharged our harquebuz-shot, such a flocke of Cranes (the most part white), arose under us, with such a cry redoubled by many ecchoes, as if an armie of men had showted all together.

This Island had many goodly woodes full of Deere, Conies, Hares, and Fowle, even in the midst of Summer in incredible abundance.... We remained by the side of this Island two whole dayes before we saw any people of the Countrey: the third day we [espied](#) ^[5] one small boate rowing towards us having in it three persons: this boate came to the Island side, foure harquebuzshot from our shippes, and there two of the people remaining, the third came along the shoreside towards us, and wee being then all within boord, he walked up and downe upon the point of the land next unto us: then the Master and the Pilot of the Admirall, Simon Ferdinando, and the Captaine Philip Amadas, my selfe, and others rowed to the land, whose comming this fellow attended, never making any shewe of feare or doubt. And after he had spoken of many things not understood by us, [we brought him with his owne good liking, aboard the ships](#) and gave him a shirt, a hat & some other things, and made him taste of our wine, and our meat, which he liked very wel: and after having viewed both barks, he departed, and went to his owne boat againe, which hee had left in a little Cove or Creeke adjoining: assoone as hee was two bow shoot into the water, hee fell to fishing, and in lesse then halfe an houre, he had laden his boate as deepe as it could swimme, with which hee came againe to the point of the lande, and there he divided his fish into two parts, pointing one part to the ship, and the other to the [pinnesse](#) ^[6]: which, after he had, as much as he might, [requited](#) ^[7] the former benefites received, departed out of our sight.

The next day there came unto us [divers](#) ^[8] boates, and in one of them the Kings brother, accompanied with fortie or fiftie men, very handsome and goodly people, and in their behaviour as mannerly and civill as any of Europe. His name was Granganimeo, and the king is called Wingina, the countrey Wingandacoa, and now by her Majestie Virginia. The manner of his comming was in this sort: hee left his boates altogether as the first man did a little from the shippes by the shore, and came along to the place over against the shipes, followed with fortie men. When he came to the place, his servants spread a long matre upon the ground, on which he sate downe, and at the other ende of the matre foure others of his companie did the like, the rest of his men stood round about him, somewhat a farre off: when we came to the shore to him with our weapons, hee never mooved from his place, nor any of the other foure, nor never mistrusted any harme to be offered from us, but sitting still he beckoned us to come and sit by him, which we performed: and being set hee made all signes of joy and welcome, striking on his head and his breast and afterwarde on ours to shew wee were all one, smiling and making shewe the best he could of al love, and familiaritie. After hee had made a long speech unto us, wee presented him with divers things, which hee received very joyfully, and thankfully. None of the company [durst](#) ^[9] speake one worde all the time: only the foure which were at the other ende, spake one in the others eare very softly.

[The King is greatly obeyed, and his brothers and children revered](#) the King himself in person was at our being there, sore wounded in a fight which hee had with the King of the next countrey, called Wingina, and was shot in two places through the body, and once cleane through the thigh, but yet he recovered: by reason whereof and for that hee lay at the chief towne of the countrey, being sixe dayes journey off, we saw him not at all.

After we had presented this his brother with such things as we thought he liked, wee likewise gave somewhat to the other that sat with him on the matre: but presently he arose and tooke all from them and put it into his owne basket, making signes and tokens, that all things ought to bee delivered unto him, and the rest were but his servants, and followers. A day or two after this, we fell to trading with them, exchanging some things that we had, for Chamoys, Buffe, and Deere skines: when we shewed him all our packet of merchandize, of all things that he sawe, a bright tinne dish most pleased him, which hee presently tooke up and clapt it before his breast, and after made a hole in the brimme thereof and hung it about his necke, making signes that it would defende him against his enemies arrowes: for [those people maintaine a deadly and terrible warre, with the people and King adjoining](#). We exchanged our tinne dish for twentie skines, worth twentie Crownes, or twentie Nobles: and a copper kettle for fiftie skins worth fifty Crownes. They offered us good exchange for our hatchets, and axes, and for knives, and would have given any thing for swordes: but wee would not depart with any. After two or three dayes the Kings brother came aboard the shippes, and dranke wine, and eat of our meat and of our bread, and liked exceedingly thereof: and after a few dayes overpassed, he brought his wife with him to the ships, his daughter and two or three children: his wife was very well favoured, of meane stature, and very bashfull: shee had on her backe a long cloake of leather, with the furre side next to her body, and before her a piece of the same: about her forehead shee had a bande of white Corall, and so had her husband many times: in her eares shee had bracelets of pearles hanging downe to her middle, whereof wee delivered your worship a little bracelet, and those were of the bignes of good pease. [The rest of her women of the](#)

[better sort had pendants of copper hanging in either eare, and some of the children of the Kings brother and other noble men, have five or sixe in either eare](#)

Barlowe refers to the people wearing the copper jewelry as people “of the better sort.” In England, people “of the better sort” were of the upper classes — the nobility, which was mostly hereditary. Barlowe, seeing native men and women wearing extra jewelry, assumes that they are “of the better sort” and “noble” as well. We know that the copper jewelry was a mark of status, but does Barlowe’s assumption that they were “noble” seem reasonable to you? Are there other explanations for their special dress? What roles might these men and women have played in native society?: he himselfe had upon his head a broad plate of [golde, or copper, for being unpolished we knew not what mettall it should be](#) neither would he by any means suffer us to take it off his head, but feeling it, it would bow very easily. His apparell was as his wives, onely the women weare their haire long on both sides, and the men but on one. They are of colour yellowish, and their haire black for the most part, and yet we saw children that had very fine aburne and chesnut coloured haire.

After that these women had bene there, there came downe from all parts great store of people, bringing with them leather, corall, divers kindes of dies, very excellent, and exchanged with us: but when Granganimeo the kings brother was present, none durst trade but himselfe: except such as weare red pieces of copper on their heads like himselfe: for that is the difference betweene the noble men, and the gouvernours of countreys, and the meaner sort. And we both noted there, and you have understood since by these men, which we brought home, that no people in the worlde cary more respect to their King, Nobilitie, and Governours, then these doe. [The Kings brothers wife, when she came to us, as she did many times, was followed with forty or fifty women alwayes: and when she came into the shippe, she left them all on land, saving her two daughters, her nurse and one or two more. The kings brother alwayes kept this order, as many boates as he would come withall to the shippes, so many fires would hee make on the shore a farre off, to the end we might understand with what strength and company he approached.](#)

Their boates are made of one tree, either of Pine or of Pitch trees: a wood not commonly knowen to our people, nor found growing in England. They have no edge-tooles to make them withall: if they have any they are very fewe, and those it seemes they had twentie yeres since, which, as those two men declared, was out of a wrake which happened upon their coast of some Christian ship, being beaten that way by some storme and outrageous weather, whereof none of the people were saved, but only the ship, or some part of her being cast upon the sand, out of whose sides they drew the nayles and the spikes, and with those they made their best instruments. The manner of making their boates is thus: they burne downe some great tree, or take such as are winde fallen, and putting gumme and rosen upon one side thereof, they set fire into it, and when it hath burnt it hollow, they cut out the coale with their shels, and ever where they would burne it deeper or wider they lay on gummies, which burne away the timber, and by this meanes they fashion very fine boates, and such as will transport twentie men. Their oares are like scoopes, and many times they set with long poles, as the depth serveth.

The Kings brother had great liking of our armour, a sword, and divers other things which we had: and offered to lay a great boxe of pearle in gage for them: but we refused it for this time, because [we would not make them knowe, that we esteemed thereof, untill we had understoode in what places of the countrey the pearle grew: which now your Worshippe doeth very well understand.](#)

He was very just of his promise: for many times we delivered him merchandize upon his word, but ever he came within the day and performed his promise. He sent us every day a brase or two of fat Bucks, Conies, Hares, Fish and best of the world. He sent us divers kindes of fruites, Melons, Walnuts, Cucumbers, Gourdes, Pease, and divers rootes, and fruites very excellent good, and of their Countrey [corne, which is very white, faire and well tasted, and groweth three times in five moneths](#): in May they sow, in July they reape, in June they sow, in August they reape: in July they sow, in September they reape: onely they cast the corne into the ground, breaking a little of the soft turfe with a wodden mattock, or pickaxe; our selves [proved](#) the soile, and put some of our Pease in the ground, and in tenne dayes they were of fourteene ynches high: they have also Beanes very faire of divers colours and wonderfull plentie: some growing naturally, and some in their gardens, and so have they both wheat and oates.

The soile is the most plentifull, sweete, fruitfull and wholesome of all the worlde: there are [above fourteene severall sweete smelling timber trees](#), and the most part of their underwoods are Bayes and such like: they have those Okes that we have, but farre greater and better. After they had bene divers times aboard our shippes, my selfe, with seven more went twentie mile into the River, that runneth toward the Citie of Skicoak, which River they call Occam: and the evening following wee came to an Island which they call Roanoak, distant from the harbour by which we entred, seven leagues: and at the North end thereof was a village of nine houses, built of Cedar, and [fortified](#) ^[10] round about with sharpe trees, to keepe out their enemies, and the entrance into it made like a turnepike very artificially; when wee came towards it, standing neere unto the waters side, the wife of Granganimo the Kings brother came running out to meete us very cheerfully and friendly, her husband was not then in the village; some of her people shee commanded to drawe our boate on shore for the beating of the billoe: [others she appointed to cary us on their backes to the dry ground, and others to bring our oares into the house for feare of stealing.](#) When we were come into the utter roome, having five roomes in her house, she caused us to sit downe by a great fire, and after tooke off our clothes and washed them, and dryed them againe: some of the women plucked off our stockings and washed them, some washed our feete in warme water, and she herselfe tooke great paines to see all things ordered in the best maner shee could, making great haste to dresse some meate for us to eate.

After we had thus dried ourselves, she brought us into the inner roome, where shee set on the boord standing along the house, some wheate like fumentie, [sodden Venison](#) ^[11], and roasted, fish sodden, boyled and roasted, Melons rawe, and sodden, rootes of divers kindes and divers fruites: their drinke is commonly water, but while the grape lasteth, they drinke wine, and for want of caskes to keepe it, all the yere after they drink water, but it is sodden with Ginger in it and blacke Sinamon, and sometimes Sassaphras, and divers other wholesome, and medicinable hearbes and trees. We were entertained with all love and kindnesse, and with much bountie, after their maner, as they could possibly devise. sassafras We found the people most gentle, loving and faithfull, voide of all guile and treason, and such as [live after the manner of the golden age.](#)

In stories of the Golden Age, as in the story of the Garden of Eden, humans lived in paradise until they tried to know too much and to become like gods — and then were thrown out and forced to work and suffer. In both stories, too, when humans “fell” they took up the trappings of civilization, such as wearing clothes. The similarities between Biblical story and Greek myth meant that the story of the Golden Age fit neatly into Europeans’ understanding of the world.

Here, Barlowe is comparing the native people of the Outer Banks to people of the Golden Age — suggesting that they are completely peaceful and happy and that they have hardly any need to work, since food will grow with so little effort. Compared with Europeans, the Indians wore little clothing, and their nakedness, too, reminded explorers of people of the Golden Age or of Adam and Eve in Eden. The people onely care howe to defend themselves from the cold in their short winter, and to feed themselves with such meat as the soile affordeth: there meat is very well sodden and they make broth very sweet and savorie: their vessels are earthen pots, very large, white and sweete, their dishes are wooden platters of sweet timber: within the place where they feede was their lodging, and within that their Idoll, which they worship, of whome they speake incredible things. While we were at meate, there came in at the gates two or three men with their bowes and arrowes from hunting, whom when wee espied, we beganne to looke one towards another, and offered to reach our weapons: but [as soone as shee espied our mistrust, shee was very much mooved, and caused some of her men to runne out, and take away their bowes and arrowes and](#)

[broke them, and withall beate the poore fellowes out of the gate againe.](#) When we departed in the evening and would not tary all night she was very sorry, and gave us into our boate our supper halfe dressed, pottes and all, and brought us to our boate side, in which wee lay all night, remooving the same a prettie distance from the shoare: shee perceiving our jealousie, was much grieved, and sent divers men and thirtie women, to sit all night on the banke side by us, and sent us into our boates five mattes to cover us from the raine, using very many wordes, to entreate us to rest in their houses: but because wee were fewe men, and if wee had miscaried, the voyage had bene in very great danger, [wee durst not adventure any thing, although there was no cause of doubt: for a more kinde and loving people there can not be found in the worlde, as farre as we have hitherto had triall.](#)

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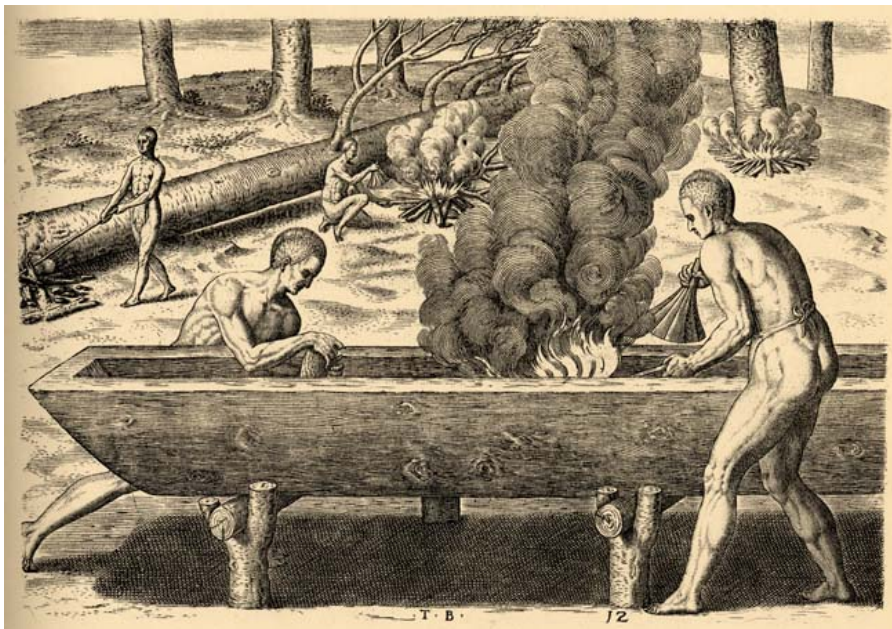
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Engraving of American Indians fishing, based on John White's drawings.



An Indian elder or chief wearing copper ornaments.



[32]

This engraving shows how the Indians of the Outer Banks made dugout canoes.

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