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Commerce and Settlement: Rethinking Early New England History

Agnès Delahaye

- 1 John Winthrop, the first governor of the colony of Massachusetts Bay in New England, is known almost exclusively for his *Modell of Christian Charity*, in which he addressed the seven-hundred migrants sailing with him to New England in the spring of 1630, under the protection and the title of the Massachusetts Bay Company. They formed a company of Christians united by their faith and their commission. They had agreed “by mutual consent, through a special overvaluing providence and a more than an ordinary approbation of the Churches of Christ to seek out a place of cohabitation and consorting under a due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical” (Winthrop: 1838, 45). As Christians and the members of a governing corporation, they were bound by “love and affection [...] reciprocal in a most equal and sweet kind of commerce” (43), that alone would safeguard them from shipwreck and the dangers and pitfalls of self-love, a human flaw exacerbated by the difficulties of survival and settlement and denounced in early English promotion as the cause of previous colonial failure.
- 2 The Puritan nature of John Winthrop’s social vision for a “City upon a Hill” in New England (47) is a staple of early American historiography. The metahistory of the vision’s significance in American culture has recently been the object of two significant works of intellectual and literary history that demonstrate how subsequent generations of antiquarians, historians and politicians have mobilized Winthrop’s rhetoric to give longevity and providential clout to their own definitions of America’s purpose (Rodgers: 2018; Van Engen: 2020). Winthrop’s 1630 lay sermon has proved remarkably amenable to interpretations of the nature and chronology of American political culture, in which the meaning of commerce is restricted to social intercourse within American churches and communities, as opposed to the economic imperatives of colonization and colonial trade, on which these communities were built and depended.

- 3 This paper aims to complexify the story of the Puritan migration to New England by unveiling the commercial and entrepreneurial dimension of Winthrop's governance. Trade, investment and labor figure strongly in the *Modell*, where fundamentals of property and privilege are moderated by rules of lending, borrowing and trading aimed at managing the precarious condition of a commercial company in the midst of transferring its charter, its government and the majority of its members from England to America. Even though no account books or ledgers of the Massachusetts Bay Company have survived, the government's commercial and expansionist policy is visible in its minutes, which were preserved and edited by Nathaniel Shurtleff for the Massachusetts Historical Society in the middle of the nineteenth century (Shurtleff: 1853-4). The collection of papers of the Winthrop family also contains many letters, notes and compositions, in which the Company's colonial project was discussed and pursued (Winthrop *et al.*: 1928-1968). Lastly, the governor's momentous *Journal* constitutes an equally major source of early New England development, which has been mobilized and quoted continuously since the founding by the region's historians, and still is a gripping read for any scholar interested in understanding the modes of European appropriation of American land and resources in the early days of settlement (Dunn *et al.*: 1996). Together these sources provide an alternative to the Puritan paradigm, discussed in the first part of this paper, which has structured analyses of early New England economic culture and development around the impact of religious culture on economic behavior in the region. The second moment of my argument consists in a contextualized reading of Winthrop's policy and comments, and demonstrates the importance of expansion, in land and in trade, in shaping early New England societies at their foundation. Because the New England settlers have left so many documents and testimonies of their expansionist policy, it must be accounted for alongside Puritan culture regimenting the intimate lives of the region's clergy and church members. Land and commercial expansion determined the future of *all* the region's inhabitants, and colonial governance extended far beyond the walls and the prerogatives of the colony's churches.

Puritanism as paradigm

- 4 Early New England sources constitute a remarkable body of texts and maps, extolled by the antiquarians who collected and edited them as the region's most precious heritage (Belknap: 1792). They therefore come with a paratext infusing them with an almost sacred character, as the place where the origins of the region's culture can be found, elevating New England to the status of the nation's birthplace (Wright: 2016). Fueled by the thorough research of genealogists and local historians, filiopietism evolved in the nineteenth century into a romantic narrative of Whig progressivism, based on reverence for the discipline and sacrifices of the founding generation, whose difficult beginnings in America for the sake of religious liberty conveyed heroism and determination to the modern, acquisitive societies built in their footsteps (Henneon: 2005). The founders' legacy of piety and public service was celebrated during anniversary years through commemorative publications and events organized by local churches, historical societies, and private clubs. This highly moralized useable past comprised myths, stories, rituals and symbols signifying to new generations their duty to endorse the civic-mindedness of their predecessors, in order to counter the

destructive forces of modernity and capitalism with a good dose of morality and self-control (Kermes: 2008; Benroth: 2015).

- 5 Religion became more central to the historiography of New England in the second half of the twentieth century, through the work of Harvard intellectual historian Perry Miller, whose *New England Mind* in two volumes established the Biblicism inherent in the colonists' outlook. Miller depicted the founders as a caste of reformist ministers, whose aim was to build and maintain a series of covenanted churches and communities in the New World, in order to bring the Reformation forward, beyond the confines of the Elizabethan compromise (Miller: 1939-1953). He insisted on the religious nature of the founding archive, analyzing the sermons and journals of the region's ministers, as opposed to the minutes of the Company and the correspondence of the colony's government. He made faith and conscience the engines of New England history, told as the pursuit of religious goals that distinguished the region from other areas of European overseas expansion, where materialism dominated (Miller: 1953, 5). Miller successfully located the birth of the "innermost propulsion" of the United States in the Puritan culture of the New England founders (Miller: 1956, viii), triggering a historiographic tradition that understood colonization in New England in literary, cultural and emotional terms, as opposed to the more mercantile motivations at work elsewhere in the Atlantic world.
- 6 The impact of Miller's interpretative framework on subsequent historiography cannot be overstated. By focusing almost exclusively on the textual production of ministers, elders and practitioners within each church, the intellectual history of Puritanism in America has established a series of historical assumptions that have structured other fields of New England history. The first of these structural constructs is generally referred to as declension (Peterson: 1995). As read in the jeremiads of the region's learned ministers, it points to the lamentations of the clergy in the face of the degeneracy of the founding ideal of a covenanted society, in which all members contributed together to the sanctity of the whole. In Miller's work, the founding generation had left Europe in search of the conditions to reconstruct the primitive churches of ancient Christians and bring the Reformation to its utmost conclusion, frustrated as it was in England by the reluctance of the monarch to do away with the bishops, the surplice and the established liturgy. Yet the expectations were too high and the wilderness not conducive to the realization of these ambitions. According to Miller's chronology, the second generation of colonists was forced to turn inward by the upheavals of the Civil War in England, and dedicated their tremendous spiritual energy to the success of their own colonial projects.
- 7 Declension provided a dynamic model of colonial development that pitted the covenanted ideals of the founders against the material consequences of migration, expansion and trade, which, according to Miller, were an unfortunate consequence of the Puritans' godly goals. Applied to the particular case of arch-Puritan John Winthrop, this tension between religion and colonization became the Puritan dilemma, or the Christian's lifelong struggle "to live in the world without being of it" (Morgan: 1999, 5). New England historians in the 1950s depicted "the founders as heroic men – of the towering stature of Bradford, Winthrop, and Thomas Hooker – who braved the ocean and the wilderness, who conquered both, and left their children a goodly heritage," yet who lamented the inevitable disappearance of their religious purpose (Miller: 1956, 2-3). The New England colonists had focused on the exigencies of their faith and the

detachment from the world that sanctification required, which set them apart from the many colonial investors, traders and settlers attempting colonization elsewhere in North America. Their motives were best understood in biblical and ideological terms and their success accounted for through the power of their ideals.

- 8 This exceptionalist interpretation of the founding of New England has obscured the institutional origins of the Massachusetts Bay Company and led to the assumption that power in New England served religious and social ambitions, as opposed to commercial and corporate goals. In his seminal *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century*, Bernard Bailyn proposed that the Company had changed ownership during the winter of 1629 in preparation for the Puritan Migration the following spring. Religious radicals of the middling sort had taken it over and its leadership had been placed “securely in the hands of men whose main occupation was not trade” (Bailyn: 1955, 19). This reading of the negotiations that preceded the migration implied that the Company’s purpose had shifted from the financing and organization of a colonial venture comparable to those of other commercial companies of early modern English expansion, like the Virginia Company. It was now dedicated to the transportation of communities of English men and their families, for whom emigration and settlement overseas represented the necessary backdrop to a religious and societal project, not a commercial one. The corporate commercial structure of the Massachusetts Bay Company was emptied of its functions and its government absolved of its financial and commercial responsibilities. The ruling elite became better known for its concern for religious conformity and social control than for its colonial policy, or the manner in which it succeeded in appropriating the institutional foundations of its corporate body for its members’ benefit.
- 9 The exceptionalism embedded in the structuring power of Miller’s Puritan paradigm and its religious orthodoxy has led succeeding generations of social, religious and cultural historians to look for other sources and other perspectives through which they could recover the colonial experiences of the migrant population. The community and town studies of the 1960s and 1970s focused on the structuring effect of the communal ideal of the migrants on their social, religious and family lives within individual settlements, away from the direct control of the orthodoxy, and where they enjoyed more opportunities to pursue their own professional and commercial goals (Nobles: 1985). Not only were New England settlements economically and socially diverse, they owed their differences to their English regional origins, uncovered in the 1980s and 1990s in a series of monographs on an Atlantic scale, that openly challenged the exceptionalist nature of the New England Puritan experiment (Fischer: 1989; Foster: 1991). Religious historians have also enlarged their understanding of Puritanism to reveal the extent of diversity and conflict at the very heart of the orthodoxy (Winship: 2012). Puritanism is now plural and plurivocal, and religion in New England is understood as the sum of multiple and diverse religious experiences at the individual, local and congregational levels, as opposed to the enforcement of consensus by a unified ministerial elite. New England culture remains predominantly religious, albeit in much larger, more complex and more inclusive terms (Cohen: 1997). There has been a recent “political turn” in New England studies, calling on scholars to return to the institutional founding of the region’s colonies (Peterson: 2013), but the New England form of republicanism remains firmly anchored in the colonists’ heritage of resistance to religious and political centralization in their English communities of origin (Hall: 2011). The exercise of colonial governance has rarely been considered at the

institutional level, as the series of actions taken by the Company to fulfil its colonial commission—to settle, expand, and create the political and economic conditions of its sustainability and profitability.

- 10 Indeed, in the wake of Bailyn's 1955 study of the New England merchants, economic and cultural historians have tended to divide power in the colony between two categories of men with diverging attitudes towards trade and economic development. The colony's political ruling elite, alternatively the Court of magistrates or the religious orthodoxy of the ministers and government, "knew the value of trade but [...] believed it served the community best when subordinated to the goals of religion" (Bailyn: 1955, 103). It forced the other agents of economic change, the merchants, to invest and prosper on the margins or in spite of the Court's decisions. Consequently, the role of New England in the growth of imperial trade in the first half of the seventeenth century was considered negligible, because its elite was perceived as hostile to lending and debt, and as having failed to produce a staple that would have allowed for the region's integration in transatlantic markets (McCusker and Menard: 1985, 19-32). Since the beginning of the 1980s, many scholars have sought to go beyond these limitations to account for the considerable success of the Massachusetts Bay colony, that grew in its first fifty years from a small, precarious religious experiment to become the trading and processing center of North America and the seedbed of the industrial revolution. They have looked for signs of the emergence of market capitalism in New England in the territories away from the center of power in Boston (Innes: 1983), or as the gradual transformation of the colonists from Puritans into Yankees, following a chronology mirroring declension (Newell: 1998). The emergence of positive attitudes towards trade and investment in New England has thus often been described as the product of historical change, not persistence (Kulikoff: 1989), the region having integrated the modern transatlantic system after the Calvinistic dreams of the founders had crumbled, under the gradual, adaptive economic success of their grateful descendants (Valery: 2010). This chronological divide is exemplified for instance by the opposition between the two John Winthrops, father and son, the former embodying the conservatism and detachment from the world of pre-modern Englishmen, and the latter the creative, entrepreneurial and scientific outlook of modern Americans (Dunn: 1962; Woodward: 2010, 132-135).
- 11 Cultural studies of economic attitudes in early New England have also been published, in which religion is described as the engine of economic success, as opposed to an hindrance to belated commercial development. Martin's *Profits in the Wilderness* argued that land appropriation had turned the early colonists into entrepreneurs from the onset of settlement, but this is an exception (Martin: 1991). Most analyses of colonial economic culture in New England have attributed the colony's evolution towards modernity and market capitalism to its religious, communal origins, either because they found proof of the colonists' commitment to the Puritan ideal of community throughout the seventeenth century (Heyrman, 1984), or because they perceived local and communal ties as a form of economic advantage (McWilliams, 2007). Weberian interpretations of colonial economic behavior have also equated the colonists' culture with moral capitalism, combining professional pursuits inscribed in one's calling with a religious imperative of social restraint and moderation in both wealth acquisition and consumption that protected colonial society from the most destructive effects of the market (Innes: 1995; Peterson: 1997).

- 12 Overall, the Puritan paradigm has until recently determined the questions and the methods of historians motivated by research into the economic development of colonial New England. Religion has remained the defining trait of the region's unique culture, with little attention paid to the wider context of its growth, land appropriation, indigenous dispossession, labor management and the development of trade and infrastructure, with which all colonial companies and governments across the Atlantic world had to contend. Although widely moderated and critiqued since Miller's publications in the postwar years, the exceptionalism contained in his paradigm has shielded New England from issues of colonial violence and domination which are at the heart of colonization and imperial trade in other regions of English colonial occupation.

New England without exceptionalism

- 13 Thanks to the decentering of American religion and the development of comparative, Atlantic approaches to European expansion in the last twenty years, however, early New England now seems less exceptional and less religious than previously (Brekus: 2018). Demographic studies have shown that labor and economic opportunity figured as much as religious liberty in motivating migration to New England, and that, although more family-oriented, the New England migrants were part of the multidirectional movement of English men and women around the Atlantic (Cressy: 1987; Games: 1999; Moore, 2007). New England towns have also become more socially and ethnically diverse. They are no longer defined by their exclusive religious communities but by their hybridity typical of colonized spaces, that included indigenous peoples and migrants from other Atlantic areas, including Africa (Warren: 2016; Newell: 2015). The notion that Puritan communities transported and recreated their English villages in America has also been challenged by environmental and landscape historians. Joseph Conforti, for instance, summed up this research and exposed the white steeple and the churchgoing tightknit community of the New England town as a historical construct (Conforti: 2011). By turning their attention to the context of colonization and including in their studies many more stakeholders to colonial development than the church community, historians of early New England have revised the exceptionalist narrative of the religious formation of colonial society and addressed the issues of property, precariousness and violence from an expansionist and imperial perspective (Grandjean: 2011).
- 14 One major consequence of the challenge to the cohesiveness of the Puritan paradigm has been a renewed focus on how successful New Englanders were in appropriating the land and building sustainable settlements. New England farmers have been shown to have adapted their mixed agriculture to the varieties of the landscape, in order to improve the land's value and output and to take their share of local and intercolonial trade (McWilliams: 2007). Environmental historians have highlighted the wasteful, destructive approach to land use, which they found comparable to other less religious colonial spaces (Cronon: 1983), but more recent studies of agricultural practice and land distribution have stressed the skillful and adaptive character of the settlers' strategy of improvement and expansion, reflecting both planning and market knowledge (Donahue: 2008). Economic historians now recognize that, although initially localized, New England markets became quickly and durably diversified and integrated

at regional, intercolonial and transatlantic level, giving New England colonists more agency than previously in the Atlantic trade (Matson: 2006, 27-28).

- 15 The region is now understood to have been more modern, less detached from the world and more engaged in imperial expansion and commerce than previously. Labor historians have insisted on the social mobility New England society afforded its laborers and yeomen, showing that church membership was not the only engine of social and economic improvement in the region (Vickers: 1990; Tomlins: 2010, 246-258). Most importantly, continental history has turned the light on the actual work of colonization, on the margins of the periphery and center model of imperial history, and revealed the complexity and fluctuance of the processes of “property formation” on a wider, continental scale, from the onset of settlement in the early modern era and into the long eighteenth century (Greer: 2018, 2). In this comparative, hemispheric and postcolonial context, early New England loses its exceptional character and becomes another area of European imperial expansion, where commercial and entrepreneurial attitudes and values can be studied, not as culture, but as action—the appropriation of indigenous land and the formation of distinct racial and social orders shaped by the act of conquest.
- 16 Indeed, if one reads the New England archive in these dynamic contexts, and not through the prism of religious culture and identity, the commercial dimension of the founding of Massachusetts becomes more visible. John Winthrop’s *Modell* took stock of the inequalities between the richer and the poorer sorts of migrants of the governor’s fleet and elaborated a series of values and rules based on the principles of justice and mercy, meant to sustain collaboration during the first difficult years of effective settlement. Precariousness and scarcity had been the lot of all colonists since the beginnings of European ventures in the New World and were blamed in promotional literature as the cause of colonial failure. Hunger, disease and deprivation were said to bring the worst out of the best men, encouraging self-interest to the detriment of the sharing of resources and labor necessary to prevent the dislocation of burgeoning settlements. According to Winthrop, transactions and exchanges between equals should follow the principles of justice, but mercy mattered even more, because it guaranteed that rich and poor continued to work in harmony. It enjoined laborers to obey their masters even if the latter could not momentarily pay or provide for them, and it commanded the rich to share their resources and accept the levelling power of colonial enterprise. The migrants were not just Christians leaving Europe to enjoy the religious freedom they craved, but “a community of perils” crossing the vast sea “to possess” the “good land” they were entitled to through their charter, “provide” for their families and “improve their talents” (Winthrop: 1938, 48, 36). The biblical references and the Puritan language pervading the *Modell* should not obscure the political intent behind the message of love and unity: the members of the Winthrop fleet formed a colonial company on its way to appropriating land and achieving the business success eluding other English companies on the North American continent.
- 17 This was also not the first speech the governor had delivered to the fellowship. The Massachusetts Bay Company was a small, private joint-stock company with little political clout, but it had learned many lessons from the failure of the Virginia Company to sustain its corporate model, from the losses and dissolution of many ventures under the royal charter of the Council for New England in the 1610s and 1620s, and from the success of Plymouth Plantation in creating its own corporate form.

It had secured its own royal charter surpassing the Council's title and adopted a financial and corporate structure that included settlers as well as metropolitan investors. It had chosen to make settlement, or the installation of a permanent labor force in New England, the solution to the problems of provisioning, safety, labor and survival that had led to colonial failure in the preceding decades. In November 1629, shortly after his election to the post of governor, Winthrop explained to the General Court, or the freemen of the Company assembled, that the decision had been made by the government to split the joint stock between the members who stayed in England and those who were leaving for America, where the Charter and the Company's government were also to be transferred. The stock was divided between ten undertakers, five for the London adventurers and five for the planters, but Winthrop assured all the members that love and reciprocity would tie these men in spite of the distance and separation that their settlement model required (Shurtleff: 1953, II: 175-6). Interdependence was central to coping with the precariousness and the dangers of colonial enterprise, especially during the first two winters of installation and settlement. The planters depended on the metropolitan members for supply and markets for their produce, while the investors who did not choose to go to New England depended on the planters' labor for a return on their investment.

- 18 Settlement in fact changed the meaning of the word adventurer in the colonial context. An adventure was originally a share in a merchant trade association based generally in one of the port cities of the metropole, where corporate status conferred to members the obligation to comply with rules of fair trading and quality controls, in exchange for the grouping of investment that diminished risk by multiplying opportunities for shared ownership among stakeholders (Scott: 1912). Corporations were civic as well as commercial, and a common English practice of association to empower local magistrates and professionals (Whittington: 2007). Professional guilds already abided by such codes, but the demise of the Merchant Adventurers in the late sixteenth century led to the creation of the merchant stock companies of the early seventeenth, reflecting the growth of English trade in southern Europe and, from there, into the Atlantic (Andrews: 1991). Joint stock companies were the perfect tool to finance trade expeditions that risked losing cargo to a privateer, losing their way through unchartered seas, or coming back empty from unprofitable lands. Adventurers acquired a number of shares at a usually moderate set price, with returns conditioned on the success of each expedition. They began with limited effective capital and much debt, for subscribers to the stock often failed to follow up on their shares.
- 19 Hence the role of promotion in galvanizing public interest in colonial companies, by invoking nationalist arguments in favor of English religious exceptionalism and the necessity to counter Spanish maritime and commercial domination over the Atlantic. Preaching to the Virginia Company in November 1622, John Donne acknowledged the role of print in inviting stakeholders into English colonizing projects: "By your favors I had some place amongst you before: but now I am an Adventurer, if not in Virginia; yet for Virginia; for, every man, that prints, adventures" (Donne: 1622). Both foundational texts of Puritan studies, John Winthrop's *Journal* and William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* have been read as Puritan texts telling the story of God's people in America, but they can be included in the wider genre of colonial promotional writing. They were written as explanations and justifications for the political and managerial choices of two corporate governments faced with the precariousness inherent in the beginnings of settlement, aggravated by lack of support from their metropolitan associates. Both

companies recorded many examples of executive decision-making aimed at improving their workers' output and the trading conditions of the settlements, such as the enclosing of tilled land, the grouping of tools and magazines, and the commitment of husbandmen to grow corn for the merchants and fishermen responsible for raising provisions and commodities to furnish the settlements and pay their debts in England.

- 20 For the men and their families who travelled permanently to New England, adventure was more than a minimal financial stake in the Company's stock. They sold land and property to finance their migration, and engaged their capital and their persons in the corporation—shares in the stock could be bought or negotiated in exchange of the promise to improve an allocated piece of land. The New England settlements were peopled by men of unequal financial and economic means, but who all shared actively in the corporate project and took their oath of allegiance to the Company's government: freemen swore "in equity" to cast their vote to "best conduce and tend to the public weal of the body," while servants and residents swore in "duty" "to advance the peace and welfare of this body politic" during the term of their engagement (Shurtleff: 1953, I: 115, 117). The actions of moving to and appropriating New England land were the preconditions to the enjoyment of civic and corporate rights, both economic and political, guaranteed by the electoral system established by the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Company and the Plymouth title. To adventure in a settlement was to risk life, limb, family and property, in order to enjoy unprecedented mobility and competency. Many men sought a more pious existence in New England, but all migrants and residents evolved in an environment shaped by the imperatives of expansion and commercial development.
- 21 The minutes of the Massachusetts Bay Company are edited and widely available. They reveal the managerial nature of the government's functions and how attuned it was to the frailty and versatility of transatlantic markets. The magistrates seized opportunities for the creation of many corporate structures to generate income, through the use of the land, its resources and the hybrid labor force of the settlements. They only momentarily controlled prices and wages to retain workers and capture the bulk of commodities to balance their accounts in the metropole, and they continuously sponsored investment and proto-industries, through tax-exemption and commercial monopolies, often taking up private shares in the ventures. They built a small fleet generating enough trade for the settlement to sustain its expansion. The merchants and the government jointly diversified their interests and were careful not to transgress fragile intercolonial cooperation with their English, Dutch and French competitors in the Greater Northeast. Landed investment stimulated expansion along with migration, creating a visibly dynamic land market as early as the 1640s. The land was improvable capital and the richer colonists made intense and uninterrupted collective efforts to increase their agricultural and commercial output (timber, fishing, clothing and tools), and to develop markets far beyond the borders of their settlements. The stability of their government and the improvement of their living conditions demonstrate that they achieved modest, but unprecedented, business success.
- 22 At the center of the colonial government even before migration began, John Winthrop invested personally in many Atlantic shipping ventures, possessed many farmed properties, and enabled three of his sons to engage in their own successful commercial careers, including sugar planting and slaveholding in the West Indies (Gragg: 1993). His support for captains and merchants was unwavering, including Robert Keayne, who

was brought before the Boston church and the General Court for having practiced excessive prices and interest rates. In his *Journal*, Winthrop noted in 1639 that Keyne was not a covetous person, but had simply made a mistake in overcharging his customers. “Besides,” Winthrop added, “he is otherwise liberal, as in his hospitality, and in church communion, etc.” (Dunn *et al.*: 1996, 309). Keyne was a prominent and generous merchant of Boston trading over many Atlantic routes, whose house could accommodate visitors. The “people” were therefore wrong to reproach him for his wealth to the detriment of his accomplishments.

- 23 The accusations against Keyne provided Winthrop with the opportunity to set down the colonists’ “rules of trading,” establishing that commodities were to be exchanged at “the current price, i.e. such a price as is usual in the time and place, and as another (who knows the worth of the commodity) would give for it, if he had occasion to use it” (Dunn *et al.*: 1996: 308). Agreement between knowledgeable parties was enough to enable settlers to exchange the commodities they produced. One should not expect to lay the burden of all financial loss upon others, “for so a man should seem to provide against all providences, etc. that he should never lose,” “but where there is a scarcity of the commodity, there men may raise their price; for now it is a hand of God upon the commodity, and not the person” (308). It was perfectly legitimate to adjust practices to finance business, and the traders’ knowledge and understanding of the complexity of intercolonial pricing and networks justified their actions.
- 24 The wider financial policy of the Company shows it actively supported the development of trade. Scarcity of species was the main financial hurdle to commercial growth, therefore the magistrates encouraged modesty in dress and consumption to balance trade, and encouraged people to reinvest their income, as opposed to spending it. In its laws of 1641, the Court established the legality of interest rates at the English rate of 8%, but repealed that limit two years later (“Laws and Liberties”: 1900, 263; Coquillette: 1994, 200-1). The Company followed a dynamic and diversified expansionist policy over land and sea, a far cry from the pre-modern and isolated ways associated with its Puritan culture. It pushed settlement to the North and the West along navigable rivers by sponsoring a series of exploratory expeditions, and in their wake, a number of commercial and mining ventures, appropriating tribal land through war and the dispossession of many resisting indigenous communities (De Lucia: 2017).
- 25 The archive of the founding of the New England settlement abounds with measures, comments and debates about the meaning of appropriation and settlement in the history of English expansion in the New World. If one follows colonial policy in distinguishing the moral authority of the clergy from the political and managerial role of the magistrates, it becomes clear that corporate settlement led to the creation of economic and political structures that conditioned sociability and political power at local and regional level on public service to the commonwealth, above and beyond the walls and workings of the churches. For the colony’s richest men, public service comprised administrative functions of colonial governance, leadership in the militia for local and regional defense, and the promotion of the Company’s interests through commercial monopolies, tax-free participation in shipping and the fisheries, in tool, shoe and textile production, and in mining. At the lowest level, entry into the Company’s membership required the improvement of a tenanted piece of land with the prospect of purchasing it and passing it on to one’s children, along with a series of administrative and managerial functions at local level. In the colonial context,

therefore, the covenant was far from principally religious or cultural. It defined corporate existence at various levels of the fellowship, with particular privileges and opportunities, under the protection of the law and the elected government.

- 26 Expansion, precariousness, and intercolonial competition gradually invested the meaning of adventure and commerce with an emotional charge pertaining to the colonists' status and existence, an attachment to the land and the corporation transforming it that, in the Company's promotion at least, superseded previous forms of social and political allegiance. Winthrop wrote about the meaning of adventure at the end of the military expeditions of 1637 into the Long Island Sound. Investors in England, he wrote, "get large circuits of lands, etc., in this country, and are very ready to grant them out to such as will become their tenants, and to encourage them, do procure commissions, protections, etc., which cost them nothing." But experienced settlers knew "any right way of plantation [...] should be by coming themselves, or sending some of their children." These Englishmen "adventure[d] little, so they [were] sure to lose nothing but their vain hope." (Dunn *et al.*: 1996, 224-225). Winthrop was criticizing Henry Vane for his belief that martyrdom in New England was God's purpose for him, and Robert Rich, the Earl of Warwick, to whom he owed the founding charter, for claiming inheritance rights and political privileges in the Company. Metropolitan elites did not come themselves and did not labor, therefore they were not entitled to hold political power in the corporation. In their legal code of 1648, the Massachusetts settlers outlawed all feudal forms of tenure and inscribed perpetual ownership of their land in the law, effectively delineating a space in which power and sovereignty were divorced from metropolitan custom and authority.
- 27 In Winthrop's view, settlement entailed the appropriation of land and the absolute commitment of each settler to the success of the whole. Christian charity, first mobilized as a tool of social cohesion at the onset of settlement, gradually grew into a moral and existential imperative shared by the settlers in all circumstances, inscribing the success of the commonality (company, fellowship and commonwealth) in communal risk-taking bordering on sacrifice. It is shown most clearly in Winthrop's denunciation of the desertion of John Humfrey, a founding member of the Company, who left New England for Virginia and the Caribbean in 1642. "For such as come together into a wilderness, where are nothing but wild beasts and beastlike men," Winthrop wrote, "and there confederate together in civil and church estate, whereby they do, implicitly at least, bind themselves to support each other, and all of them that society, whether civil or sacred, whereof they are members, how they can break from this without free consent, is hard to find, so as may satisfy a tender or good conscience in time of trial" (Dunn *et al.*: 1996, 416). The settlers formed a new society delimited spatially by the "wilderness" of racial alienation, and conditioned on cooperation, consent and solidarity beyond the confines of the churches. Each member of this multi-layered settler locale was to "ask thy conscience if thou wouldst have plucked up thy stakes, and brought thy family 3000 miles, if thou hast expected that all, or most, would have forsaken thee there." The enterprise itself, through the corporation and its policies, bound the settlers together in their common future.

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- 28 The settler history of New England as it is told in the original documents provided shared benchmarks of acceptable business and economic behavior, extolling the technological, entrepreneurial and democratic power of corporate ownership since the onset of colonization, and the collective necessity to combine individual pursuits with that of the common good. To view settlement as adventure and enterprise, as opposed to the founding of a religious society, is to uncover the continuity of this entrepreneurial outlook throughout the region's history. The founders invoked their precariousness and the risks of colonial failure in defense of their corporate privileges in their 1638 Massachusetts Petition to the Lords Commissioners for Foreign Plantations (Hazard, 1792: I: 435-436). At the end of the century, their descendants argued that the collective sacrifice of their labor and blood justified the preservation of their corporate rights against the arrival of Edmund Andros to govern the province (Moody: 1988, 46-46). When settlement as action is taken into account, there is neither declension, nor paradox, only a continuity of expansionist and entrepreneurial practices that valued individual exertion for the benefit of the settler collective.

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RÉSUMÉS

Cet article interroge l'emprise longue et structurante du paradigme puritain sur l'histoire et l'historiographie de la Nouvelle-Angleterre. Il met d'une part en évidence la manière dont le modèle religieux a eu pour conséquence d'obscurcir et de marginaliser la portée entrepreneuriale et commerciale du projet expansionniste de la Compagnie de la Baie du Massachusetts. Il démontre ensuite que le *settlement*, ou l'appropriation territoriale et la transformation des terres autochtones pour le bénéfice de la corporation, offre une perspective contextuelle salutaire pour comprendre le rôle du commerce et de l'expansion dans la formation des sociétés coloniales à leur fondation. Les minutes et les écrits promotionnels de la compagnie montrent que John Winthrop et ses pairs au gouvernement colonial ont adhéré pleinement aux impératifs économiques de l'appropriation territoriale et du développement commercial de la colonie, en gérant l'expansion et la main d'œuvre dans le but explicite de réussir leur projet colonial et financier à l'échelle du commerce atlantique. Leur politique expansionniste et leur souci de préserver les titres et les privilèges de l'ensemble des membres de la Compagnie ont transformé celle-ci en un proto-État défini par sa précieuse souveraineté.

This paper addresses the long and structuring impact of the Puritan paradigm on early New England history and historiography. It highlights the tendency of the religious model to obscure or marginalize the entrepreneurial and commercial impulse inherent in the colonizing project of the Massachusetts Bay Company. It argues that settlement, or the action of appropriating and transforming indigenous land for the benefit of the corporation, provides a salutary, contextual

perspective on the role of commerce and expansion in shaping New England societies at their founding. The original documents and the promotion of the corporation show that John Winthrop and his colonial government embraced the economic implications of land appropriation and commercial development, managing labor and trade with a view toward colonial and financial success on an Atlantic scale. Their expansionist policies and their concern for the protection and preservation of the property and the privileges of the entire corporate body transformed the Company into a proto-state defined by and attached to its sovereignty.

INDEX

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Mots-clés : Nouvelle-Angleterre, colonisation, commerce, gouvernance coloniale, appropriation

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