

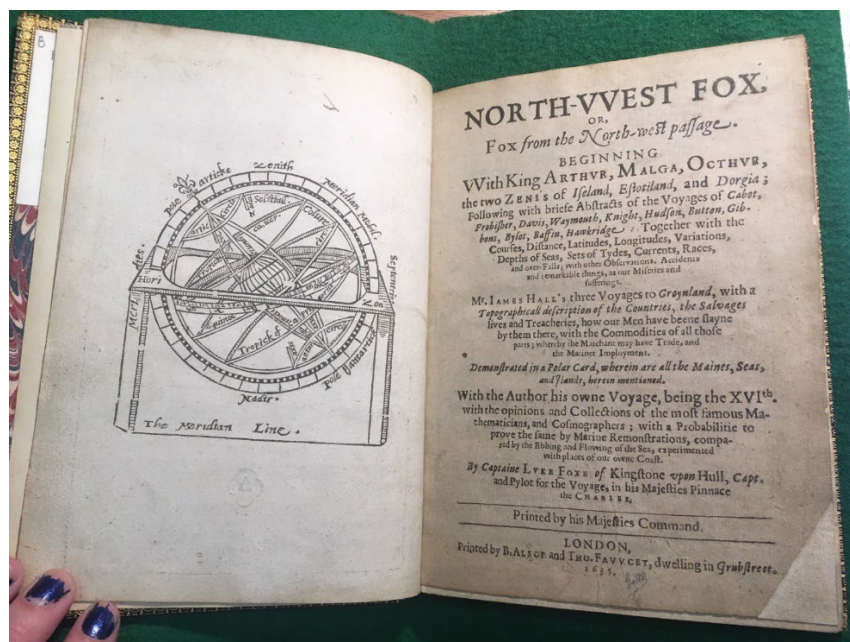
North-West Fox Descriptive & Analytical Bibliography

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INFO689: Rare Books & Special Collections

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North-VVest Fox, Or, Fox from the North-west passage. Beginning With King Arthvr ... the two Zeni's of Iseland ... following with briefe Abstracts of the Voyages of Cabot, Frobisher, Davis, Waymouth, Knight, Hudson, Button, Gibbons, Bylot, Baffin, Hawkridge: Together with the Courses, Distance, Latitudes ... Mr. Iames Hall's three Voyages to Groynland, with a Topographicall description of the Countries, the Salvages lives and Treacheries ... Demonstrated in a Polar Card, wherein are all the ... Seas, and Jlands, herein mentioned. With the Author his owne Voyage ... with the opinions ... of the most famous Mathematicians, and Cosmographers ... By Captaine Lvke Foxe ... Printed by his Majesties Command.



Title page and woodcut frontispiece, *North-West Fox*.

1. Imprint Information

Luke Foxe was an English navigator and explorer, born October 20, 1586, in Kingston-Upon-Hull, Yorkshire. Remembered for his 1631 Arctic expedition in search of the Northwest Passage across America to Asia, Foxe was the son of a mariner, Richard Foxe, and grew up acquiring lived knowledge of seamanship. At the age of 20, he became obsessed with the search for the Northwest passage and after being rejected multiple times due to his young age, resolved to lead his own voyage one day. His formal education was limited but he was well read in navigation and spent his twenties and thirties sailing throughout European

waters acquiring practical ability. He gained the patronage of mathematician Henry Briggs and Sir John Brooke and in 1629 he petitioned King Charles for assistance in a Northwest Passage voyage and was successful. His voyage was further funded and supported by a group of London merchants and adventurers including Sir Thomas Roe. His ship the HMS Charles sailed from London on April 28, 1631, with a crew of twenty men, two or three boys, and eighteen months provisions. (Morley 1979)

This book, *North-West Fox*, is the result of this 1631 Northwest Passage expedition, chronicling the route, conditions, experiences, discoveries, and locations he named over the course of the trip. Foxe also collects accounts from numerous Northwest Passage voyages prior to his, lending important context and historical precedent to his account. On the expedition, Foxe circumnavigated the Western shore of the Hudson Bay, sailed North beyond Foxe Channel, into Foxe Basin, and along Foxe Peninsula. Along the way, he encountered British explorer Thomas James and his crew, who were on a separate expedition with the same goal. Foxe's journey, planned to last up to 18 months, concluded 5 months in when scurvy broke out. Luckily, the speedy reversal home allowed for a return of the entire crew with no casualties. (Christy 1894) This voyage and resulting account are significant because Foxe proved that the Hudson Bay did not lead to the Northwest Passage, leading to the once enthusiastic search for the passage to fall out of favor without renewed interest until the Victorian period. Due to the failure of Foxe's expedition, upon returning to England he lived in poverty, "...having received neither salary, wages, or reward." (Morley 1979) He may have benefited monetarily and socially from the publication of this book, but he died just a few months after its publication.

North-West Fox was printed in London in 1635, four years after Foxe's return home from his expedition, by Bernard Alsop and Thomas Fawcett. (ESTC) Alsop ran his printshop on Grub

Street, a location known for its low-end publishers and tabloid journalism, Alsop himself often operating on the fringes of the law. He began his printing career by apprenticing for Humphrey Lympeny in 1601, and in 1603 transferred to study under William White. (Plomer 1907) In 1616, Alsop began a partnership with Thomas Creed, who either retired or died the following year, leaving Alsop to inherit Creed's press, type, and ornaments, which he continued to use well into the 1640's. Creed had already been using the equipment for years prior, so by the time Alsop was producing the bulk of his work his type and equipment were noticeably worn and in need of repairs and replacements. This is in fact a trademark of Alsop's work, often identified by his constant reuse of a small number of ornaments and worn type. (Poyntz 2010)

Alsop partnered with Thomas Fawcett in 1626, and together they published many dramatic and literary works by playwrights Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, poet and playwright Thomas Decker, writer Robert Greene, and others. Alsop was one of the twenty master printers working in England allowed by the Act of 1637, but Fawcett was not mentioned. Alsop's output shifted in the 1640's, when he went on to print satirical and controversial news-sheets, pamphlets, and broadsheets. He encountered some troubles with the King and was summoned before Parliament on several occasions for printing scandalous texts. It is believed that Alsop's specifically sloppy workmanship may have made it easier for authorities to identify his anonymous works. He was ultimately committed to Fleet Prison for printing an unauthorized pamphlet in 1643 but was released some months later. Nothing is known about the date or circumstances of Alsop's death, but his widow Elizabeth took over his printing business in 1653 after he had passed. (Plomer 1907)

Alsop's lackadaisical attitude towards his craft accounts for the incredible number of errors in pagination found in this copy of *North-West Fox*. This copy is the first and only printing

and displays in many instances the old and worn type Alsop used, with many sections poorly printed and more difficult to read. As far as I can determine, this first edition was the only edition printed until it was reprinted in a volume by the Hakluyt Society in 1894 combining *North-West Fox* with Thomas James' *The strange and dangerous voyage...* Plomer categorizes Alsop's output as "hack work", and notes in his introduction that the entire art of printing in London sunk to its lowest point during the period in which he worked due to the high demand for quickly printed newssheets and pamphlets, with the general standards and craftsmanship lower across the board. (Plomer 1907) Alsop most likely took the job of printing Luke Foxe's *North-West Fox* due to Foxe's financial troubles resulting from the negative outcome of his voyage.

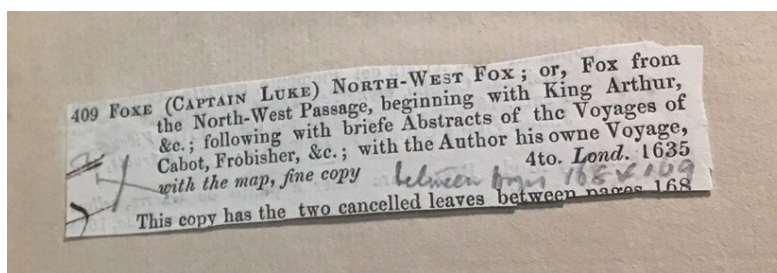
2. Descriptive and Analytical Bibliography

North-West Fox is a quarto in fours, apart from the first gathering in sixes and last gathering in twos, as well as an additional gathering in twos added into the middle of the V gathering in fours. I determined this by counting the leaves in each gathering, the signatures follow the rule of half plus one, in each gathering of fours the first three leaves are signed. It is of note that the first signature in each gathering is never signed with a "1", the letter is used alone, for example, the leaf B1 is signed simply "B", B2 and B3 are signed as such, and B4 is left unsigned. While the signatures are uniform with a few exceptions, the pagination has many errors, so much so that I had trouble determining the page and leaf count. The collation formula, signing statement, and pagination statement is as follows:

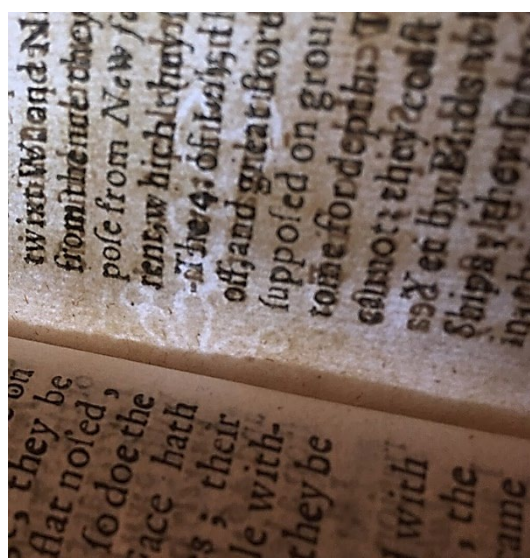
4^o: A⁶B-T⁴V⁴(+u²)X-2I⁴2K² [\$3 (-A2, A4, 2I3) signed, missing A2-6, u2 and u3] 134 leaves.
pp. [12], 1-26, 19, 28-79, 100-139, 145, 141-145, 149, 146-147, 149-159, 260, 291, 162-163, 294, 165, 266-267, 168, 172, 170-171, [1], 169-190, 191, [1], 196, 194, 195, 193, 197-204, 225-232, 213-235, 226, 237, 239, 238, 240-251, 452, 253-255, 266, 257, 458, 259-269, [3]

As demonstrated above, there are many errors in pagination. Page numbers are repeated, out of order, and generally erratic. I could not discern any kind of pattern in pagination mistakes and attempting to find some answers in catalog records was not fruitful, as this copy and others are simply noted to have “errors in pagination”. (ESTC) There are twelve unnumbered pages at the front of the book, and three at the end. This copy also includes three distinct illustrations, with smaller woodcuts used throughout on title pages to mark the various accounts of voyages. There is a large fold-out intaglio map inserted between pages 16 and 17, a woodcut frontispiece illustration of an armillary sphere on the verso of leaf A1, and a full-page woodcut map on leaf 2F depicting a shoreline observed on the expedition.

Gathering A in sixes is irregular and includes mis-signings and unsigned leaves. It is signed A, [A2], A2, [A4], A, a2. It is unclear how or why this happened, or if it is a gathering in fours and a gathering in twos. I decided to define it as a gathering in sixes because the signatures are irregular throughout all six leaves, and it is the first gathering in the book. Leaf 2I3 is unsigned, but not irregular in any other aspect. The V gathering is of note, with a secondary gathering “u” inserted in the center. The leaves are signed V, V2, u3, u2, V3, V4. The u leaves are signed out of order, another strange occurrence. A sale catalog record is pasted to a blank leaf at the beginning of the book, in which the cataloger notes the gathering as a cancellation. I am not sure I agree with this assessment since there is no clear evidence of tipping in, but the paper in the u gathering is cut shorter on the bottom edge. Below is an image of the catalog record present in this copy.



The paper is laid, with horizontal chain lines, leading me to determine that the book is a quarto. The type used is a Roman font, with italics deployed frequently throughout for introductory sections or emphasis. I attempted to determine the font used through my research into Bernard Alsop's printshop, but no mention was made of the font – just the type's condition. A watermark is present in the center gutter, possibly a foolscap, although it is difficult to determine exactly what it depicts – it appears to be three prongs with a crescent moon. Another watermark of a coat of arms is plainly visible in the upper corner on the fold-out map. I attempted to investigate these watermarks on the Gravell Watermark Archive online database, but nothing remotely similar turned up. The watermarks are pictured below.



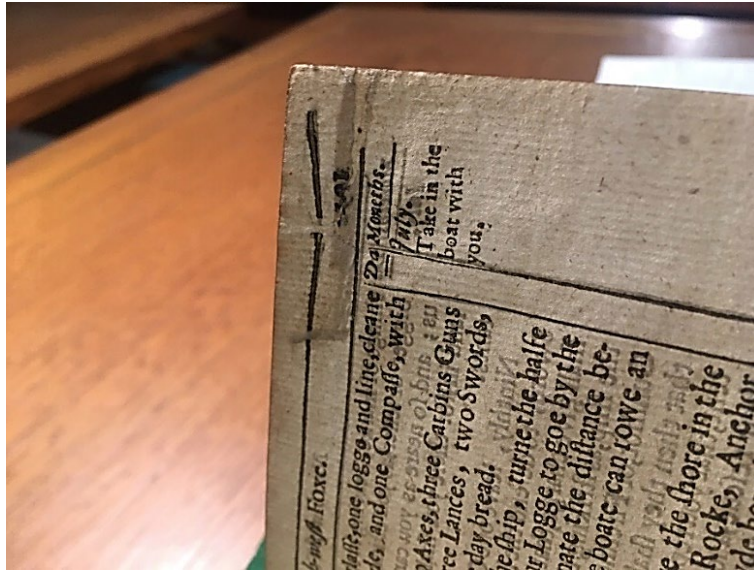


This copy was bound by Francis Bedford in dark blue morocco with gilt edges and gilt tooling to spine and boards, with Bedford's signature printed on the front free endpaper. The binding is not dated but was most likely completed 1830-1851 from examining Bedford's career and this copy's provenance. Bedford (1799-1883) began his career working for Charles Lewis, one of the finest bookbinders of the day. After Lewis' death, Bedford managed the business for Lewis' widow for five years. In 1841, Bedford left Lewis' shop and opened an operation in partnership with John Clarke in Soho, which operate until 1850. From 1851 onward, Bedford established his own bindery in the West End of London, steadily producing work until his death in 1883. (Fletcher 1901)



Bedford's reputation was extraordinary, he was considered among the best English bookbinders of his time. His attention to detail and bibliographical knowledge set his craftsmanship apart from contemporaries. His output was prolific, and although all his work was high quality, some of his bindings are more intricate and impressive than others, typically with elaborate gilt decoration. The binding on this copy of *North-West Fox* has a delicate gilt tooling flower pattern on the spine and gilt flower stamping on the inside of the boards, as well as gilt on all edges of the text block, but the boards feature a simple gilt outline. This copy also includes marbled paper in a red, blue, and yellow French curl on a wide comb pattern on the pastedowns and end sheets. I identified the type of marbled paper by referring to the University of Washington Libraries Marbled Paper Patterns Digital Collections.

According to Fletcher, "Bedford appreciated tall copies, and a book never came from his hands shorn of its margins. He was also a very skillful mender of damaged leaves. The number of volumes bound by him is very large, and for many years a continuous stream of beautiful bindings issued from his workshops, the great majority of which are now to be found on the shelves of the finest libraries of England and America." (Fletcher 1901). His reputation for mending leaves struck me since I noticed the mending of a mutilated leaf in this copy of *North-West Fox* as well as a repaired tear on the fold-out map. It is unclear if these repairs were completed by Bedford, but if the leaves were damaged prior to when Bedford was rebinding the book, he most likely completed this work. Below is an image of the mutilated and repaired corner of a leaf in this copy of *North-West Fox*.



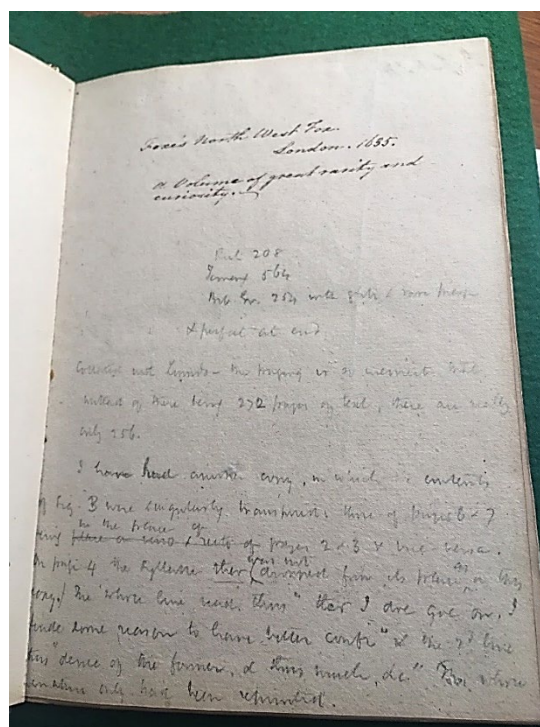
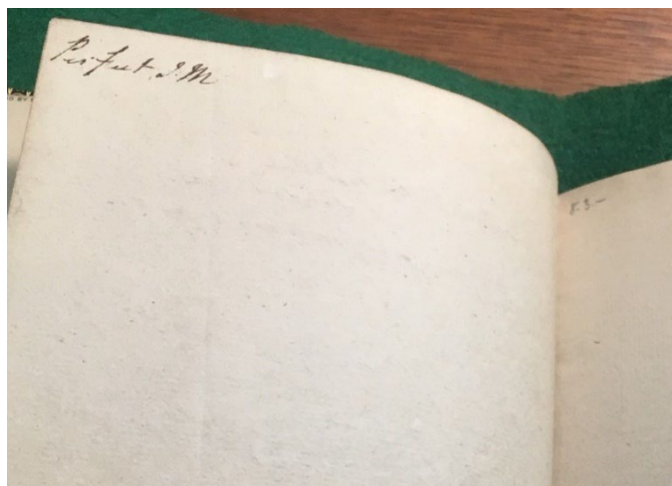
This copy of *North-West Fox* came into the New York Public Library's collection through being a part of the Lenox Library collection, purchased in 1852 by Henry Stevens and sold to James Lenox in 1853 for his personal book collection prior to the formation of the Lenox Library. (Stevens 1951) I knew the book was a part of the Lenox collection because it has a bookplate on the front pastedown. Therefore, I began my provenance research investigating the holdings of James Lenox. I uncovered information on how the book made its way into James Lenox's collection through a passage from collector Henry Steven's memoir *Recollections of James Lenox and the Formation of His Library*, originally published in 1886, in which personal anecdotes trace the collecting trips, auctions, sales, plans, and intrigue involved in amassing Lenox's library. Below is an image of the marbled endpapers and the Lenox Library bookplate.



Stevens recounts that he was tipped off about the sale of Lord Mountnorris's Library through auctioneers Messrs. Farebrother & Co. by his bookseller friend William Pickering in 1852. Stevens travelled to Arley Castle to inspect the books and manuscripts on offer, discovering there were many items that James Lenox would be interested in. After some dubious planning about bidding strategies with Stevens, Pickering attended the auction and purchased a large quantity of materials for Stevens at a commission of ten percent. Stevens offered these materials to Lenox some months later in May and June 1853. Stevens states, "Though the two very desirable 'original log-books' of Capt. Luke Foxe's voyage were passed by...Mr. Lenox did acquire at £8, 3s. the printed nugget: *North-west Fox*... It has the folded map showing 'Part of America', and a frontispiece on the verso of sig. A of an armillary sphere; two cancelled leaves between p. 168-169, with erratic pagination and signature marks. Bound by F. Bedford in dark blue morocco, gilt." (Stevens 1951) I found it intriguing that Lenox chose not to purchase Foxe's

original manuscripts and logbooks but chose to purchase this “printed nugget” instead. Steven’s physical description of the copy matches the one at hand, confirming that the binding was completed prior to 1852 and that the book’s condition has not changed significantly since.

While this account of sale was enlightening, I unfortunately could not find any previous ownership information prior to the 1852 auction for this copy. It is also of note that this copy includes an unidentified signature and ms title written in the same hand in ink on the printer’s blanks. The handwritten text reads, “Foxe’s North West Fox. London 1635. A Volume of great rarity and curiosity”, While I was unable to determine the name of the signature, it does not seem to match any of the identified owners or sellers such as Lenox, Stevens, or the previous private collection. It was most likely written by a previous undocumented owner. I also noticed “8.3” written in pencil in the gutter of the page after the signature, which could possibly be a record of the sale price to Lenox. There are also extensive notes in pencil below the title in ink, but I had trouble deciphering them. Below are images of these unidentified annotations.



3. Research Value

North-West Fox is historically significant in many ways, most notably that second to Captain Thomas James' account (published 1633), it is the earliest published English account of a Northwest Passage expedition, as previous voyagers did not publish their own books documenting their journeys, rather publishing shorter accounts in journals and serials, or not publishing at all. (Christy, 1894). *North-West Fox* is significant when compared to James' *The strange and dangerous voyage of Captaine Thomas James...* because it is a less dramatized and narrativized text, although possibly more difficult to read, its evidentiary value as historical documentation is higher, especially due to the inclusion of details from previous voyages. Comparing these two expeditions and the ways in which their captains documented their journeys would be a rich inclusion in an exhibition examining British trade routes, the history of Arctic exploration, and expansion of empire.

Not only is Foxe's account of his own journey significant, but the entire volume is unique in its archival value. The first half of *North-West Fox* documents accounts of earlier Northwest Passage expeditions lead by Button, Baffin, Bylot, Hudson, and many other explorers. Adriana Craciun notes, "North-West Fox had incorporated circumscribed conversations, inscriptions, and maps of these earlier occluded voyagers, archiving some of these submerged tributaries of Arctic knowledge. But because Foxe's book lacked the authority and aesthetic appeal that set James' apart, its manifold significance was not incorporated into the monumental histories that followed" (Craciun 2016). This devaluation of Foxe's uneducated and more practical approach to exploration also situates this book as an outlier in the dominant narrative of British exploration focused on colonial expansion as a noble pursuit serving scientific discovery.

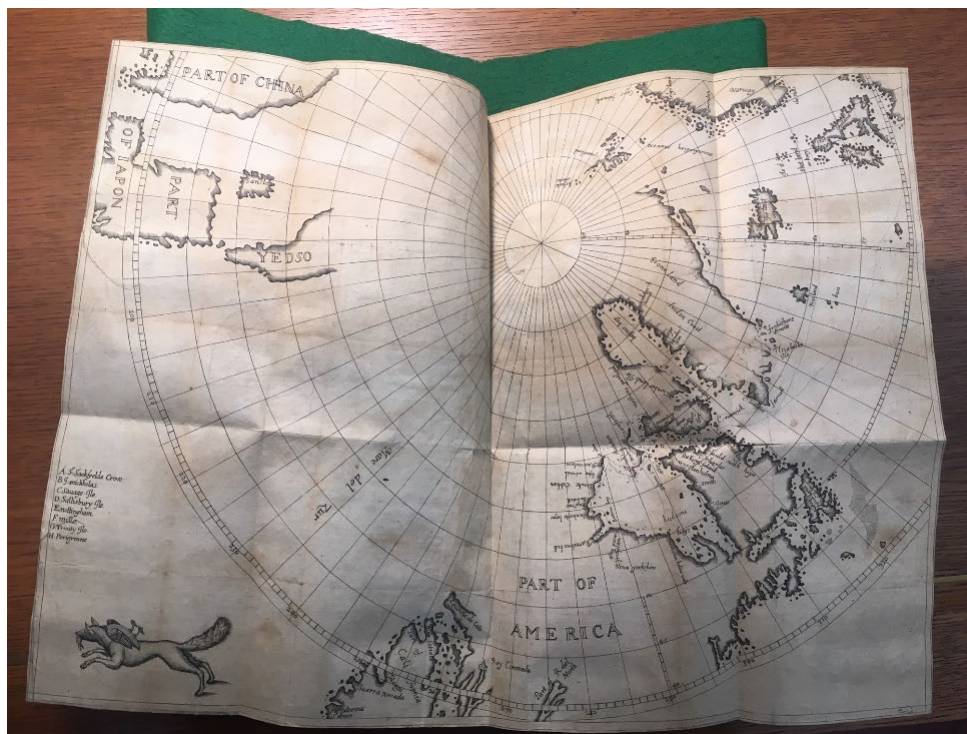
North-West Fox's research value also lies in the narrative that Foxe's journey was a failure and added to England's collective anxiety to find a Northwest passage. The search for a Northwest passage was a fixation for England for centuries, however, once a Northwest passage was discovered in 1851, it was determined that it served no practical or commercial value as a trade route to Asia and was never utilized. (Morley 1979) Therefore Foxe's journey was a failed historical footnote in a centuries-long obsession with expansion of British trade and influence in Asia, which was ultimately futile. Although Foxe died penniless in obscurity shortly after his first and last state-sponsored voyage, British colonialism nevertheless marched on. There are many historical and material aspects researchers, curators, and librarians could use as entry points into this text, and I believe it would be a worthwhile inclusion in a wide variety of exhibitions.

4. Valuation and Condition

The price of this book is slightly difficult to determine, since the binding, variants in illustrations, collecting trends, and condition all effect the copies that have appeared on the market. ESTC lists 28 copies held by institutions, and according to auction records I believe there are many more held in private collections. Since there is only one edition, *North-West Fox* has been a scarce book for its entire existence. American Book Prices Current displayed six copies sold at auction, the prices of which varied greatly, although the auctions were years apart and the copies seem distinctly different. The NYPL's copy of *North-West Fox* is in very good condition, with rubbing to spine and edges and staining to leaves throughout. The foldout map has two repaired closed tears to the left edge with staining across sheet and wear to creases. I could not locate any current copies on the market through booksellers or aggregated websites

such as Abebooks, so I am basing this valuation strictly on auction records found on ABPC.

Below is a photograph of the map illustrating its condition.



Two copies on ABPC include an inserted portrait of Charles I, which is not present in the NYPL's copy. These variants seem sought after, one of which is listed as the "Frank Streeter copy", and sold at auction at Christie's April 17, 2007, for \$110,000, while the other unnamed copy with portrait inserted was sold by Bloomsbury for \$15,282 on May 3, 1984. This cheaper copy was bound in contemporary calf, which most likely devalued it compared to the Streeter copy which was in 18th century calf gilt. Two additional copies of North-West Foxe went on the market in the 1990s, sold in auctions respectively for \$1,609 at Sotheby's on March 3, 1993, and \$2,961 at Bonhams on June 24, 1997. A copy listed as the "DuPont copy", with a Bedford blue morocco gilt binding with similar errors in pagination and signatures to NYPL's copy and therefore most closely comparable, sold in an auction at Christie's on October 8, 1991, for \$22,000. The last copy, listed as the Penrose-Hitching copy, is also closely comparable to the

one at hand, and was sold most recently, at Sotheby's on September 30, 2014, for \$132,824. (American Book Prices Current).

It is likely that trends, collecting habits, and interest in the subject waned in the mid-1990's, allowing the prices to drop significantly, and more recent auctions are fetching higher prices due to renewed interest, however this was not substantiated during my research. James Lenox purchased this copy of *North-West Fox* in 1853 for 8 pounds, 3 shillings, which roughly calculates to £1,173 in 2021 with inflation, or \$1,559. (Stevens 1951) It appears Lenox made a smart decision at that price, especially for what was a book of great interest at the time and most likely freshly bound by Bedford. If the New York Public Library were to put this copy on the market for any reason, I believe it is likely it would sell for above \$100,000, especially considering its association with James Lenox, one of the most eccentric and prominent bibliophiles of the 19th century. I would value the NYPL's copy of *North-West Fox* at \$125,000-\$150,000 if it were to be included in an auction today. This may be a conservative estimate, if the 2007 and 2014 auction results for similar copies do indeed signal a shift in higher valuation of this book, then a future auction would most likely would see record prices.

5. Interesting elements

The most interesting element of this book is the fold-out map of the territory covered by Foxe on his journey. After researching Bernard Alsop's printshop and parsing through the confusing pagination, it was surprising to me that a striking intaglio map was included as a part of this book. Specifically, the most intriguing aspect of the map to me was not the map itself even though there is much to be said about it, but the fox cartouche located in the lower left corner of the map, created by an unidentified illustrator. The image of a fox as a visual signature struck me as playful and unique. Luke Foxe seemed to enjoy wordplay involving his last name,

as suggested by the title of this book. The fox depicted bounding forward, goose in mouth, displays Foxe's humor and acts as a visual reminder placed alongside a map of the territory covered on his voyage, clueing readers in that this was Foxe's journey, without being more traditionally labeled as such. Below is a high-res scan of the fox from Brown University's map collection.



After further investigation I discovered that Foxe's fox did not only make an impact on me but has been documented as an important aspect of this text connected with the larger drama of Northwest Passage exploration, specifically the relationship between Fox and Thomas James, the captain of the simultaneous 1631 Northwest Passage voyage. In "Writing Arctic Disaster", Adriana Craciun (2016) explains,

The cartouche of Foxe's map shows a leaping fox with a goose slung over its back, a playful gesture chiming with the book's title, North-West Fox. It evokes the popular medieval legend of Reynard the fox as trickster, perhaps to mock the self-portrait and Latin motto that James chose for his map cartouche. The emblem of the leaping fox with goose or cock on its back circulated widely in Renaissance cathedral art, including throughout Foxe's Yorkshire, so that Reynard's outsmarting of the foolish goose or pompous cock' appears a visual pun reinforcing Foxe's deflation of James' pomp. The unschooled Foxe showed a real flair for whimsical toponyms as well as visual jests. (p. 187)

This contextualization of the fox symbol within the rivalry and exchanges conducted in real life and through print between Thomas James and Luke Foxe is not simply an interesting element of this text, but also adds to the research value of this book. Situating Foxe's narrative in conversation and opposition with James' narrative is important in understanding their respective contributions to the culture and legacy of English navigation and exploration. Foxe was largely self-taught, and his narrative reflects this, coming across rougher around the edges in many ways. This reading of Foxe's visual signature implies that Foxe was aware of his reputation and this dynamic, allowing for his account to be more satirical and self-aware than his counterparts'. Foxe's prioritization of the wellbeing of his crew, as opposed to James' focus on the outcome of his voyage resulting in his decision to spend the winter in the Hudson Bay with disastrous results, further illustrates the differences in perspective and station between the two captains. (Department of Rare Books and Special Collections...2004)

6. Experience

My experience completing this project in the reading room was positive. Due to work and scheduling constraints, I was unable to visit the reading room until late in the semester. Nevertheless, I was able to spend enough time with my book to take note of and explore its many materials and historical characteristics, as well as go through each page of the book noting pagination and signatures twice, respectively. I visited the reading room on two occasions to conduct research and referenced my notes and photos taken during my visits frequently afterward. The staff were kind and helpful and allowed for my first foray into reading room research appointments to be productive and anxiety-free.

I was initially having a hard time with *North-West Fox* due to its complicated and erroneous pagination, but once I had resolved to allow the mystery of Alsop's printing press be

what it is, I enjoyed the historical component and learned many new things about British exploration and the history of the Lenox Library and New York Public Library. Apart from interacting with the book at hand, the entirety of my research was conducted online through digitized copies of reference texts, online databases, and digital special collections. I fell into a couple of rabbit holes and had some difficulty in determining when to lay one aspect of the book to rest and move on to another one, as there were so many distinct elements to examine. Overall, I appreciated the technical and detail-oriented frame of mind it took to approach this task and have gained many new skills I will apply in my future endeavors.

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