Voyage with the Labrador Eskimos, 1880-1881

Original manuscript by Johan Adrian Jacobsen
English translation by Hartmut Lutz
86 pages, 14 illustrations/photographs
6" X 9" (15.5 cm X 23 cm)

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The story of Abraham Ulrikab is one of the saddest and most moving stories in Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Inuit and Canadian history.

In August 1880, Norwegian Johan Adrian Jacobsen arrives in Labrador on the Eisbär. He’s hoping to recruit ‘Eskimos’ willing to follow him to Europe to become the latest attraction in the ethnographic shows organized by Carl Hagenbeck, a menagerie owner and pioneer of ‘human zoos.’

Two families accept Jacobsen’s offer. The eight individuals, aged from 13 months to 50 years old, are exhibited in Hamburg, Berlin, Prague, Frankfurt, Darmstadt, Krefeld and Paris. But, soon after their arrival in Europe they realize their decision had been the wrong one. From that point on, their dearest wish is to return home to Labrador. Unfortunately, Jacobsen and Hagenbeck having forgotten to vaccinate them, a mandatory measure by German law, within four months the group no longer exists, all eight individuals having been killed by smallpox. The first three victims died in Germany. The remaining five, including Abraham, died in Paris.

Abraham kept a personal diary. So did Johan Adrian Jacobsen. Jacobsen’s diary being an essential source for understanding the events that occurred over 133 years ago, we are presenting, in this book, Professor Hartmut Lutz’s English translation of the diary.

Discover the moods, thoughts and qualms of this 23 year old man; from his unsuccessful attempt to recruit ‘Eskimos’ in Greenland, his despair to see that Moravian missionaries in Labrador also
oppose his project, his jubilation when Abraham agrees to accompany him with his family, his astonishedness to witness Terraniak and Paingo using their shamanic powers to calm a storm during the Atlantic crossing, to his shock of facing the first two deaths only minutes after doctors had told him there was no reason to be alarmed, the heartbreaking moment when Abraham has to hand over his three year old daughter to a hospital in Germany and finally, the horror of being admitted to the smallpox unit of a Paris hospital where the 'Eskimos' as well as Europeans suffer and die around him.

"When I saw to Ulrike shortly after midnight, I noticed that she too would end her struggle soon. I tried to comfort her, but she waved me off with her hand, as if she did not want to see me at all. That was no surprise, because she knew that all the others had gone before her. I felt guilty to a certain degree for the death of these unfortunate people, even if unintentionally. Had I not come to Labrador, they would still be alive like all their relatives".

Johan Adrian Jacobsen, January 16, 1881

Voyage with the Labrador Eskimos, 1880-1881 is published within the context of the research project In the Footsteps of Abraham Ulrikab (abrahamulrikab.com). Beginning in 2010, this project has been dedicated to unraveling the mysteries surrounding the European stay and the death of the eight Labrador Inuit. The publication of Jacobsen's diary represents a first step in revealing the findings of this research.

For more than 20 years, Hartmut Lutz has been dedicating time and efforts to make Abraham Ulrikab's story known. As a professor of American and Canadian studies at the University of Greifswald, he worked with his students to translate Abraham’s diary, and related texts, from German to English. Their efforts resulted in the publication of the book The Diary of Abraham Ulrikab : Text and Context (University of Ottawa Press, 2005). Almost ten years later, Professor Lutz’s commitment is now enabling the English-speaking world to read the diary of Johan Adrian Jacobsen, the man who recruited Abraham and seven other individuals and, involuntarily, took them to their death.

Also available in French (paperback & PDF).

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