

sealers lost their lives in 1914, or 'storm' stand out. Many interview partners refer to these, signifying the harsh conditions under which the seal hunt was, and still is, conducted. But also other keywords, such as 'berth', a prerequisite and much aspired part for a sealer to participate in the seal hunt, or 'food' make Ryan's interview compilation an important tool to further engage in ethnographic studies of the seal hunt. This is in particular relevant for a comparative angle on the issue, especially when it comes, for example, to conflict and resolution thereof or competition. Interestingly, Ryan's interview partners show that this was a serious issue in the large-scale seal hunts of the early 20th century. However, 100 years later, it is rather the notion of sharing than competition which shapes the interaction between sealers (Sellheim in press). This points to significant differences in the characteristics of the hunt: while Ryan unveils the inherent business-nature of the sealing industry, contemporary hunts are rather to be located within a 'making-a-living' narrative as procured by Gillett (2015) and others in Newfoundland.

The first 40 or so pages of *The last of the ice hunters* are a brief summary of Ryan's treatise *The ice hunters* (Ryan 1994). Here, the reader is provided with core information on the history of the Newfoundland seal hunt that enable him/her to understand the presented interviews and data in a much better way. Indeed, without such introduction and without prior knowledge about the history of the hunt and the industry the reader would be lost. However, it seems as if Ryan or the publisher do expect the reader to have at least some knowledge on the hunt and Newfoundland culture anyway. For example, reference is made to the 'Front' (for example on page 40) on several occasions in the book, however without explanation. The 'Front' refers to the waters northeast of Newfoundland as an historical distinction to the 'back', the Gulf of St Lawrence. Or, Ryan refers to

'brewis' (page 34), a specific type of hard bread, that the reader may not be familiar with. While certainly nothing major, the structure and content of the book in combination with these minor editorial issues do not make *The last of the ice hunters* a stand-alone work. Yet, this does not seem to be the intention in the first place. After all, in the *Conclusion* Ryan notes that he has tried to do 'justice to their [the sealers] careers and lives in the sealing industry [...] by publishing *The ice hunters* (1994) and now by inviting them to speak for themselves' (page 427). In other words, the present volume is best understood when read in conjunction with Ryan's earlier work.

However, the historical value of this work cannot be underestimated. While more of general interest to the readers of *Polar Record*, *The last of the ice hunters* sheds light on the socio-cultural value of the seal hunt for the island of Newfoundland. It is therefore an important contribution to the ethnographic study of this controversial hunt whose political dimension has direct effects on (sub-)Arctic livelihoods. But in order to gain more general information on the hunt, especially in its contemporary form, this reviewer would suggest to turn elsewhere. But for historians, anthropologists and other social scientists this book is certainly truly interesting (Nikolas Sellheim, Faculty of Law, University of Lapland, PO Box 122, 96101 Rovaniemi, Finland (nikolas.sellheim@ulapland.fi)).

References

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THE TRAVELS OF THE OOSTENDE WHALE SKELETON. Nicholas Redman. 2015. Redman Publishing. 119p, illustrated, hardcover. ISBN 978-83-64313-74-5. £17.50.

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The blue whale, a living mammal and the largest of all living creatures, is accustomed to cover many thousands of miles across the world's oceans. The skeleton of an example of this species which now resides in the Russian Academy of Science in St. Petersburg has certainly travelled more miles by land, sea and waterway than any other cetacean remains.

From the moment it cast ashore in Ostend harbour in November 1827, the creature became a celebrity and attracted great crowds. The fishermen who had towed it from the North Sea were allowed to display it for a few days to raise money, after which the stench must have been hard to bear. After that, the carcass was bought by a local philanthropist Herman Kessels and a Dr. Dubar who superintended the dissecting out of the skeleton while the public gathered again to watch this procedure. The latter published a book with detailed drawings of the bones. A contemporary print shows this work at an advanced stage and depicts couples dancing a quadrille within the space made by the lower jaws laid on the ground, the skull being raised by a set of sheer legs. It became part of the festival to celebrate the birthday of Queen Wilhelmina on 18 November,

and the whale was nominally presented to King Willem I of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.

It was the intention to take the skeleton on tour and charge visitors for the privilege of seeing this monster of the deep which was a full 95 feet in length. A prefabricated wooden pavilion, pierced by windows to admit daylight, was built and used for the first time on the quayside in Ostend in April 1828 before proceeding to Ghent, Brussels, and Amsterdam, then Den Haag, Rotterdam, Dordrecht and Antwerp in its first year of peregrination. At Ghent a concert was held with the orchestra seated inside the rib cage, a performance which became a regular feature of its display. At other times the suspended platform was used as a lounge where visitors could sit at tables and browse through scientific books and albums of ephemera relating to the whale and its movements across Europe.

After exhibition in the Place de la Concorde in Paris, the skeleton was taken by sea to Bordeaux before arriving in England where the pavilion was set up in the Kings Mews, Charing Cross, in July 1831. Here the advertising literature incorrectly refers to it as a Greenland whale. Probably this was because the Right Whale was the type most familiar in Britain, thanks to the extensive Arctic whaling trade, but this was another kind of baleen whale, of the type described as rorquals.

Returning to Ostend, the skeleton was taken through Germany and Austria and further on to Prague where it is said to have been seen by more than 80,000 individuals, some

two thirds of the city's population, and then on through Germany again. After that, the skeleton disappeared from view 1840–1842 until it arrived in Riga in July 1842. In Saint Petersburg, lighting was installed so that it could be viewed also in the evening. Then, surprisingly for such a celebrated specimen, the skeleton was unrecorded from 1844–53, though it may have been in the Crimea in 1852–1853. Later it was definitely in Kazan in 1856 where it was sold for 500 roubles and then sent to the Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, which lacked the space for displaying it so the bones were put in store. The skeleton was erected in the local zoo in 1867 where it languished in increasing neglect before going back in store in 1889. However, having been seen by many thousands over a period of more than sixty years, including many of the crowned heads of Europe, it was soon to regain its prestige. Articulated once again, it was hung in a new museum where Tsar Nicholas II, the court, ministers and members of the Academy took part in the opening ceremony in 1901, and its massive presence still dominates the hall.

The author of the book has previously published a series of volumes recording whalebones from around the world and his researches demonstrate the amazing hold that the remains

of the great whales have on the imagination of the human population. Sometimes in the past considered the relicts of dragons or giants, cetacean bones made an impression on people everywhere from humble peasants to great princes. Even now when a whalebone arch or other cetacean structure is threatened with decay or clearance, there is generally a major effort by the local community to preserve it. To apply an overused word, whale remains are truly iconic and not only impress with their size and longevity but are embedded in our ancient history and the dim recesses of our folk memory.

The Ostend whale is an exemplar of such remains and despite the author's extensive travels and deep research it has still not revealed all its secrets, and we learn from a postscript that it went from London to Dublin before returning to the continent. There are suggestions it was sent to the USA during its 'mystery period' but no corroboration has yet been found. This volume is a fascinating guide to its travels, comprehensively referenced and of interest to cetologists, museologists, historians of popular entertainments, and anthropologists, and to anyone who has been excited by the sight of one of the great whales whether alive or dead (Arthur G. Credland, 10 The Greenway, Anlaby Park, Hull HU4 6XH, UK (bracer@bracer.karoo.co.uk)).

La pugna Antártica: el conflicto por el sexto continente 1939–1959 [The Antarctic struggle: the conflict for the sixth continent 1939–1959]. Fontana Fontana. 2014. Buenos Aires: Guazuvira Ediciones. 323p, illustrated, softcover. ISBN 978-987-33-5970-5. ARS\$ 195. doi:[10.1017/S0032247415000650](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247415000650)

This book covers a substantially longer period than indicated in its title for it begins with accounts of early activities in the Antarctic, many of which are associated with the development of territorial claims which eventually went into abeyance when the Antarctic Treaty came into force in 1961 and ends in recent times. However, the introduction indicates that the two decades, from 1939 to 1959, will be principal subjects of the book.

The author is specifically concerned with *Antártida Argentina* and, in consequence, claims by Britain and, to a lesser extent, Chile are involved, as these overlap on the Antarctic Peninsula and South Shetland Islands. The cover illustrates much of the theme by showing portraits of President Juan Domingo Perón of Argentina in the centre with President Franklin Roosevelt and President Augusto Pinochet to his left and Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Chancellor Adolf Hitler to his right. One wonders why the president of Chile from 1973 to 1990 is included among the others who were in office during the events described in the book; Gabriel González Videla, President from 1946 to 1952, who has an Antarctic station named after him, would have been more relevant. Concepts of the Antarctic have a degree of variation and this book takes a broad view: the portion south of Argentina, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands are included in the early chapters, although the majority of the book refers to the region south of 60° under the aegis of the Antarctic Treaty, particularly the region where Argentine, British, and Chilean claims overlap. Events involving the Falkland Islands occur sporadically throughout the book.

The first chapter, *Argentina y la Belle Époque Austral* [Argentina and the good time south], begins with a terse summary of Antarctic history with involvement of the precursors of the Argentine Republic which also concern Tierra del Fuego and the Falkland Islands. Emphasis is placed on José María Sobral, an Argentine who wintered with Otto Nordenskjöld's Swedish expedition and the rescue by the Argentine naval vessel *Uruguay*. The transfer of the South Orkney Islands meteorological observatory, founded in 1903, to Argentina in 1904, which continues to function and now has the longest data set from the Antarctic, is noted. The beginning of Southern Ocean whaling, from South Georgia, by a company registered in Buenos Aires is described, although none of the several other whaling companies are mentioned. Consequences of the 'heroic era' then the First World War follow with later events particularly on Laurie Island using José Manuel Moneta's fascinating account of four winters there.

Preludio a la Contentienda [Beginning of the dispute], chapter two, makes much of the whaling industry and the German expedition aboard *Schwabenland* during which territorial claims were made on behalf of Hitler's government. Eighteen pages describe this expedition although it was in Antarctic waters for about three weeks; it returned to Germany in 1939 the date in the book's sub-title. *Reacción en Cadena* [Chain reaction], is chapter three, which notes Norwegian and United States reactions to the German expedition. Both these countries had been previously been active in continental exploration. The chapter concludes with a *Triangulo de Fuego* [Triangle of fire] where the three claims to overlapping territory and the Second World War all became involved. Chapter four, *Un Conflicto Global* [A global conflict] describes effects of the war spreading to many Southern Ocean regions, notably to remote islands, and the capture of the Norwegian whaling fleet by German commerce raiders. In this time Argentine Antarctic activities beyond the South Orkney Islands began to increase and are recounted in detail with several illustrations. The British reaction with 'Operation Tabarin' concludes the chapter.