

EXPLOITING THE BERING SEA FUR SEALS

THE BERING SEA FUR SEAL DISPUTE 1885–1911: A MONOGRAPH ON THE MARITIME HISTORY OF ALASKA. Williams, G. O. 1984. Eugene, Alaska Maritime Publications. 85 p, illustrated, hard cover. US\$9.95.

In broad outline the story of the exploitation of the northern fur seal (*Callorhinus ursinus*) herd of the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, its decline under the pressure of excessive hunting, especially of pelagic sealing at sea in the 1880s and 1890s, and its later recovery under a regime of controlled sealing on land, is well known as a classic example of resource management. There are, however, many facets to the story and this book deals in detail with the conflict between the American and Canadian pelagic sealers and the vessels of the United States Revenue Marine Service (forerunner of the US Coast Guard), working in conjunction with ships of the United States and British Naval Squadrons in the North Pacific. This conflict lasted from 1886 to 1894 and revived in 1907/08 against Japanese sealing vessels and those of freebooters operating under the Japanese flag. Pelagic sealing in the North Pacific, except by native hunters, was finally prohibited under the North Pacific Fur Seal Convention of 1911, agreed by the governments of Great Britain (acting on behalf of Canada), Japan, Russia and the United States.

The Bering Sea fur seal dispute, of which the activities described in this book were a part, involved questions of the rights of maritime nations under international law, and the 'Freedom of the Seas'. Although the author concentrates on the annual maritime activities of the protagonists in the pelagic sealing conflict, he sets these against the background of the considerable diplomatic activity between the United States and Great Britain throughout the whole period of the dispute, which at times threatened to develop into a serious international incident.

The book is illustrated with archival photographs of the vessels and personalities involved, together with a map of the region, and the text is well supported by notes and references to sources. This is a valuable contribution to the maritime history of Alaska and an absorbing account of events in the era of pelagic sealing for the northern fur seal. (S. G. Brown, Sea Mammals Research Unit, Natural Environment Research Council, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0ET.)

SEALING IN CANADIAN WATERS

SONS AND SEALS: A VOYAGE TO THE ICE. Wright, G. D. 1984. St John's, Memorial University of Newfoundland. (Newfoundland Special and Economic Studies 29.) 129p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-919666-45-0.

The collapse of the European trade in fur products, mainly as a result of the conservationists' lobbies and particularly because of the EEC ban on the import of Canadian seal products, has taken much of the heat from the harp seal controversy. In fact, it has totally altered the nature of the spring hunt for seals in the ice bound waters of the western Atlantic. There is now a much smaller hunt for older, moulted pups (beaters). The younger white pups which probably stimulate most of the emotional response to the hunt are no longer required. Much of what we know of the harp seal hunt has been gained from media coverage of the sometimes spectacular gambits of the hunt protestors. The clumsy attempts of the Canadian government to justify its often bizarre responses to the protest movement have not received a good press. The controversies within the scientific community over population estimates, and consequent acceptable quotas for the hunt, have received very little publicity.