

## Reviews

### WHALEBONE ALLEY

[Review by Terence Armstrong\* of S. A. Arutyunov and others, '*Kitovaya alleya*'. *Drevnosti ostrovov proлива Senyavina* ['Whalebone alley'. *Antiquities of the islands in Prolio Senyavina*], Moscow, Nauka, 1982, 176 p, illus, map.]

A large archaeological artefact has been discovered on the Soviet shore of Bering Strait. It is an alignment of whale skulls and jawbones, planted in the ground at the back of a beach on Ostrov Yttygran, an island near the settlement and port of Provideniya. Although some of the bones are displaced or have fallen over, the monument remains large and impressive, covering some hundreds of metres. The site was brought to the attention of scholars only in 1976, when a group of ethnographers led by M. A. Chlenov of the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences [Institut Etnografii AN SSSR] lit upon it. It was revisited in 1977, 1979, and 1981 by groups which included specialists in history, social anthropology, ancient Eskimo culture, ecology, and linguistics. The result is a booklet describing the site and the present state of its study. Other remains in the vicinity are also described, and the relationship between 'whalebone alley' and both current and ancient Eskimo society is examined. The authors conclude that this remarkable site was a holy place of the Asiatic Eskimo in the late Punuk period (13th to 14th centuries).

\* Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.

### POLAR MANUSCRIPTS

[Review by H. G. R. King\* of *Manuscripts in the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, England: a catalogue*, edited by Clive Holland. New York and London, Garland Press, Garland Publishing Inc, 1982, 815 p, US\$100.00]

In 1920, the year of its foundation, the Scott Polar Research Institute received from the Captain Scott Memorial Polar Research Trust sets of papers relating to the organization of the *Discovery* and *Terra Nova* expeditions. These documents, now the cornerstone of one of the world's most comprehensive polar archives, have been added to at regular intervals since that time. Additions have come occasionally by selective purchases at public auctions, more often by substantial bequests, such as the historical papers of the historian Hugh Robert Mill, or the Lefroy bequest with its wealth of material relating to Sir John and Lady Franklin. The collection now numbers over 1 400 accessions, although this figure can be misleading; some accessions represent a single letter or a diary, while others may include an entire expedition archive. For example the papers of the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1957–58, consisting of many hundreds of separate documents, are through sheer necessity entered in the catalogue as 'ten filing drawers . . . not yet sorted or indexed'. Without resort to such expediences this catalogue might never have seen the light of day, and Clive Holland, the Institute's Curator of Manuscripts, is to be congratulated on the mammoth task of virtually rewriting many of the entries in the former sheaf catalogue, systematizing the form of entry throughout, and updating a great backlog of cataloguing.

The organization of the catalogue has been devised to meet the special needs of historians. Manuscripts are listed alphabetically by author, each author sequence being in itself a biographical index. Thus under 'SCOTT, Robert Falcon' appear not only his journals and correspondence but also letters addressed to him. Collections of papers relating to expeditions are found under the official name of each expedition, and there are entries under the names of ships for ships' logs and plans. Unpublished theses held by the Institute are also listed. The catalogue contains numerous entries, prefaced by an asterisk, for material found in outside collections. A listing of especial value to historians

\* Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.

is the index of expeditions and voyages, referencing in brief all relevant material in the collection under chronological lists of Arctic and Antarctic expeditions. Considering the importance of the Scott Polar Research Institute's manuscript collection to historical scholarship, \$100 does not seem too high a price to pay for this indispensable key to its contents.

### GREENLAND WHALING

[Review by W. Gillies Ross\* of William Scoresby jr's *The 1806 log book concerning the Arctic voyage of Captain William Scoresby*. Whitby, Caedmon, 1981, 41 p, £12.50; and William Scoresby jr's *Journal of a voyage to the northern whale-fishery; including researches and discoveries on the eastern coast of West Greenland, made in the summer of 1822, in the ship Baffin of Liverpool*, Whitby, Caedmon, 1980, 472 p, illus, maps, £13.95.]

The first of these books is a facsimile edition of the ship's logbook kept in 1806 by William Scoresby, junior, then only 16 years old but already holding the responsible position of chief mate on the Arctic whaler, *Resolution*, under his father's command. The voyage was an unusual one in which Captain Scoresby, supplementing whaling by bold exploration, pressed his vessel northwards to 80°30'N, the highest latitude ever attained up to that time. As the official record of the ship, the logbook includes observations on course and position, wind direction and velocity, atmospheric pressure, state of sea and ice, sail changes, work carried out by the men, sightings and kills of Greenland whales, and the processes of flensing and making off.

Having read a few hundred whaling logbooks I knew that occurrences of great excitement of interest were generally reported in a terse, impersonal line or two, and I assumed that Scoresby's logbook would make dull reading. Having myself struggled with stained, faded pages and illegible handwriting in manuscripts of this sort, I supposed that this facsimile logbook would present problems of comprehension. Unhappily, I was correct on both counts. Although the handwriting is for the most part firm and clear, the faded condition of the original logbook, and its reproduction on soft, cream-coloured paper, have combined to produce many illegible passages. Despite the historical interest of this record-setting voyage, the publication is therefore unlikely to appeal to general readers. On the other hand, the precise information on the ship, whales, sea ice, and the atmospheric and marine environments from day to day, may be useful to specialists in oceanography, biology, climatology, or history.

This publication was inspired by a much earlier venture undertaken by the Explorers Club of New York, which in 1916 published seven logbooks by William Scoresby, senior, describing 14 voyages to the Greenland whaling grounds. While the Caedmon book adds significantly to the small number of Arctic whaling logbooks published in facsimile, and provides the only logbook by Scoresby junior published in its original form, the quality of its reproduction is somewhat inferior to that of the elegant, limited edition by the Explorers Club.

The second book, a facsimile of one originally published in 1823 by Archibald Constable of Edinburgh, is of much greater readability and interest: a more mature Scoresby described a voyage 16 years later on *Baffin*, under his own command. It is far more than a mere catalogue of events during the voyage, for he skilfully weaves into the narrative a number of fascinating anecdotes and details about Arctic whaling, the geography and human occupation of the region, and natural phenomena such as optical effects, icebergs and tides.

Like the voyage of 1806 this was an extraordinary one. Success in whaling was capped by achievement in exploration, for Scoresby sailed *Baffin* to a latitude nearly as high as that attained in his father's ship on the earlier occasion. More importantly, he made several hundred careful astronomical and trigonometrical observations along approximately 645 km of Greenland's east coast north of 69°N, and from these compiled an improved chart (which is included in this volume) of largely inaccessible and unknown land. On his chart the coastline from 72°N to 75°N was set down more than 320 km west of its erroneous position on the existing charts customarily used by whalers. This valuable contribution to geographic knowledge was undertaken on Scoresby's own initiative, and somehow combined with the demanding task of filling his ship with whale blubber. Ironically, the Admiralty had

\* Department of Geography, Bishop's University, Lennoxville, Quebec, Canada J1M 1Z7.