

THE NORDENSKIÖLD COLLECTION OF ESKIMO MATERIAL CULTURE FROM PORT CLARENCE, ALASKA.

By JAMES W. VANSTONE. *Fieldiana Anthropology New Series*, No. 14. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1990. 56 p., 30 illus. (including maps), bib. Softbound. US\$16.00.

The foundations for the study of Alaskan Eskimo material culture were laid by two Smithsonian publications a century ago: J. Murdoch's *Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition* (1892) and Nelson's *The Eskimo about Bering Strait* (1899). While these were preceded by several European publications describing, usually incidentally, Alaskan material culture, everything since then rests on these seminal works. For the next 60 or 70 years specialists concentrated on the archaeological record rather than the ethnographic present. In the 1960s and 1970s interest in historic collections was rekindled from two directions: ethno-historians, such as D.J. Ray, working in part with externally derived aesthetic criteria, and archaeologists, such as J.R. Bockstoce and W.W. Fitzhugh, bringing forward and reworking 19th-century collections. One of VanStone's great contributions to northern material culture in the 1970s and 1980s has been to produce a half dozen or so catalogues of northern collections, mostly in the Field Museum. No curator has done more to make the material culture in his or her custodianship better known.

A.E. Nordenskiöld made a collection of 246 artefacts from Port Clarence, Alaska, shortly after completing the first navigation of the Northeast Passage around Siberia. He spent four days in July 1879 turning his

riches to account by making visits like a pedlar in the tent villages with sacks full of felt hats, thick clothes, stockings, ammunition, etc., for which I received a choice collection of ethnographical articles.

None of this material was further documented as to the person from whom it had been collected or the specific source or detailed use of the object. While most of the collection was obtained in Port Clarence, the travelling and trading activities of Eskimos meant that the original source of artefacts may have been quite widespread.

VanStone's account of the collection is concise. He introduces the history of native-white relations and provides a detailed background to Nordenskiöld and his work, particularly on the *Vega* from 1879 to 1880. Appropriate excerpts from the navigator's published account of the trip (1881) are used to contextualize the few days of hectic collecting activity. The collection is introduced briefly, with comments on the relatively good condition of the collection and on the numbering system as used in its resting place, the Folkens Museum Etnografiska, Stockholm. The catalogue itself consists of two parts: an account divided by activity — sea and land hunting, fishing, clothing, household equipment, and so on — and a list in the form of an appendix. The accounts of activities are precise, with detailed descriptions of important artefacts, references to significant comparative material, and sufficient ethnography for the text to be informative. There is no attempt to provide the kind of exhaustive scholarship that too often has the effect of disinforming by building up great constructs of repetitive details. For example, in the section "Tools and Manufactures" adze blades are described, with the source and trade routes of the jadeite employed, its attributes, and the methods for hafting the blade. Perhaps the most significant artefact in the collection is the full-size kayak. This was purchased for a hat and 500 cartridges. The description is technical, with measurements, details of the sewing techniques, materials, and references to the rather few sources in the literature. The paper ends with a section of conclusions, which compares this collection to others and analyzes Western imports and changes to Eskimo material culture.

This publication will be of great use to specialists. It provides a great volume of information in an easily accessible form. However, only about one-third of the collection is illustrated. Most of the important artefacts, apart from the kayak, are included. Kayaks are notoriously difficult to photograph and are usually illustrated with drawings. Perhaps many of the most remarkable things should

have been illustrated with more than one figure; this would include all bow drills (Figs. 14, 20, 21), with their engraved hunting scenes, rather than just one, and the superb boathook (Fig. 25c).

It is rather difficult to find other criticisms. However, the word "gorget" (1880.4.1155) is used misleadingly. In correct use it refers to military decorations worn below the throat as pectoral ornaments (as defined in *Webster's*). In North American material culture it is used for the circular shell and later silver decorations worn in the same manner in the Eastern Woodlands and southern United States. "Gorge" (as also defined in *Webster's*) is a more general term for sharp instruments covered with meat left for animals to wolf down in such a way that the instrument kills them in the throat or stomach. Finally, perhaps some reference should have been made to the most significant European publication about Alaskan material culture before the Smithsonian publications emerged. This is the second volume of A. Bastian's *Amerika's Nordwest-küste* (Berlin: A. Asher and Co., 1883-84), which superbly illustrates and describes Bering Strait material of the same date as that from the *Vega* voyage.

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WHALING COMMUNITIES. Edited by ELISABETH VESTERGAARD.

North Atlantic Studies, Vol. 2, No. 1-2. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press (DK-8000 Aarhus C, Denmark), 1990. 220 p., figs., maps, black and white photos. Softbound. 240 DKK.

Perhaps the brief, uninformative title of this publication was intended to shield its potential audience from any preconceived notions they might have about its subject, whaling. Or maybe its scope defied an all-embracing title. However, I suspect that most readers would like a more informative title than "Whaling Communities"; I would suggest something like: "The Science and Politics of Whale Conservation and Its Impact on North Atlantic Whaling Communities," subtitled "The Proceedings of a Conference."

This conference, held at Aarhus University, Denmark, in January 1990, was organized by the Society for North Atlantic Studies "on the basis of their interdisciplinary research interests," which, according to the editor, "are regionally and not nationally defined and independent of organisations or governments in favour of or against whaling." An examination of the list of conference sponsors (Danish, Greenlandic, Icelandic and Faroese institutions) and speakers makes a mockery of this claim and the pretense of academic neutrality. (Although it is not a whaling nation, Denmark represents its dependencies, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, in the International Whaling Commission [IWC].) In fact, the proceedings clearly have a pro-whaling message. Furthermore, it is probably no coincidence that the conference was scheduled to occur before the 1990 meeting of the IWC, a meeting in which the 1986 whaling moratorium was to be reconsidered. Since the moratorium, Japan and the Nordic whaling nations have lobbied the IWC to recognize a new category of whaling — "small-type coastal whaling" — and to evaluate proposals for higher quotas under "research whaling." Despite this detracting background, it would be unfair to dismiss the conference as only a political prelude to the IWC meetings. There is much more to it.

When the IWC officially recognized aboriginal subsistence whaling, it gave legitimacy to cultural arguments for the continuation of whaling on a localized scale. The Aarhus conference takes up this argument with the stated aim of bringing socio-cultural perspectives on whaling together with the science of whale conservation, which, according to the editor, has dominated public discussions about whaling. Accordingly, a mixture of biologists, anthropologists and politicians were brought together to create a more "holistic" forum for discussion of whaling and whaling societies in the North Atlantic.

Thirty papers were presented, of which over half relate to Faroese and Greenlandic whaling. The volume begins with a brief history of whaling, which claims to portray the two competing kinds of whaling: commercial whaling, driven by avarice, and "limited, ecologically-justified" subsistence whaling. Although the latter category is never properly addressed, we are informed that the commercial whalers left a "totally ruined ecosystem" and now it is unfair that native whalers have to pay for these "irresponsible actions." Hardly a credible preface to the conference!

The proceedings are organized into three sections: "Biological Studies," "Policy and Regulations," and "Socio-Cultural Aspects." Although the "Biological Studies" section constitutes nearly 40% of the proceedings, not much new or interesting information is presented. If anything, this section reveals the large uncertainties inherent in stock assessments of whales, the nebulous data that conservative environmentalists have exploited in bringing about a blanket moratorium on whaling. Survey data were presented by Norwegian and Icelandic biologists, but both found the costs of obtaining accurate data on pelagic whale species to be prohibitive and unlikely to detect anything but very gross trends. Some of the biological data presented was obtained under the controversial label of "research whaling." Such data, obtained from the Icelandic catch of fin whales, was presented as evidence that changes in several growth and reproductive parameters had occurred over the past few decades, apparently as a result of changes in population densities and resource competition. It was argued that such density-dependent responses of the population to whaling could only be detected through long-term monitoring (i.e., through dissection of dead whales) and that there was a need to look at whales in a broader perspective in connection with the management of other marine resources.

Science and the International Whaling Commission received a bashing in the second section of the proceedings, "Policy and Regulations." In a long diatribe, anthropologist Milton Freeman dismissed the recent history of the IWC as being one based on politics and sentimentality — the end of an era of attempted scientific rationality — and he argued that the resulting management decisions have caused serious and pervasive damage to a number of human communities. Greenlandic politician Finn Lynge stated that science was simply a costume that one put over the attitudes one already had, and he asked the audience to "try to imagine what would happen if the various national delegations at the International Whaling Commission were encouraged to formulate their policies on philosophical and emotional principles, without trying to cloak them in statistics or other scientific garb." (I tried to imagine but quickly returned to the comfort of my biologist's costume.) Norwegian political scientist Alf Hoel presented a concise history of the IWC and the role of the United States in using trade sanctions "primarily for the sake of demonstration of some action [to environmental activists]" to force the end of Norwegian whaling. (Norway holds a unique position in the IWC in that its objection to the 1986 moratorium is still in force and it is not bound by the vote.) Hoel stated that the blanket moratorium on whaling represented a major setback for rational resource management and that Norwegian whaling could not be viewed in isolation from its fishing policies. Unfortunately, the recent collapse of Norway's fish stocks is not especially exemplary of rational management.

In the final section, "Socio-Cultural Aspects," several anthropologists examined the international political development of the anti-whaling campaign and its socio-cultural impact on coastal communities in the North Atlantic. The whale-hunting culture of the Faroe Islands figures prominently in this arena, much like Newfoundland did during the anti-sealing campaign. Anthropologist Raoul Anderson, drawing on his experience with the Newfoundland harp seal hunt, paints a picture of a beleaguered salt-of-the-earth folk in battle with the urban environmentalist (however well intentioned) who doesn't know which end of the animal his porkchop comes from. He claimed that international resource politics, especially environmentalism, threatened the subsistence, independence

and self-esteem of coastal communities. On the other hand, as another anthropologist pointed out, foreign criticism has served to rally the whaling societies, to entrench cultural identity and to ensure that whaling will endure. As anthropologist Anne Brydon noted, Iceland has responded to the anti-whaling campaign with its own propaganda, which portrays the anti-whaling stance as a morality that can only flourish in those societies where the majority have lost touch with the realities of food production. The Icelanders argue that it is the very wealth of these non-whaling nations that permits such a morality to exist, a wealth that is built upon a far more destructive use of nature.

Considering the swiftness with which the proceedings were published, and the fact that English is not the first language of most of the participants, the publication is remarkably well produced. However, there are some glaring editorial errors that may be attributed to the haste. The subject material is poorly organized; for example, at least three papers in the biology section have little or nothing to do with the subject. Some papers should have been edited for brevity; for example, in a rambling paper by Anderson, an entire section of over three pages was repeated but with minor editorial variation. It appears that most of the papers were carefully proofread but a couple are full of typographical errors. Presumably, as with many symposium publications, the papers did not benefit from peer review, which may account for their uneven quality. The proceedings are followed by a table with the heading "Whales — IWC's Nomenclature," which includes several scientific names that are not officially recognized by IWC.

Despite the problems with this publication, it is an important contribution to the continuing dialogue on whaling. It represents the inevitable swing in the pendulum away from the extreme environmental politics of the '70s and '80s towards (I hope) a more rational discussion on the use of marine resources. It is a useful reference for biologists, anthropologists and students of international resource politics. Now that the whales are on the way to being saved, we may have to think about managing them as an integral part of our coastal marine ecosystems. And like it or not, in the convener's words: "Basically, people, politics, and cultures are also parts of the global ecosystem."

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FIELD GUIDE TO THE PEAT MOSSES OF BOREAL NORTH AMERICA. By CYRUS B. McQUEEN. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1990. 138 p., 1 map, 32 figs., 30 colour photos, identification keys, index, bib., glossary. Softbound. US\$22.95.

The author has attempted to provide a simple but effective means of identifying common peat mosses (*Sphagnum*) in the field that is useful to both amateur naturalists and professional botanists. His user-friendly style and personal anecdotes make this book relatively easy to read. The use of normally mind-boggling terminology is reduced to the necessary minimum, and where technical terms are used, they are clearly defined both in the text and in the glossary. Where appropriate, the author has included line drawings to explain some of the more confusing terms. The author also describes common peat moss habitats and major environmental gradients (shade, depth to the water table, and surface water chemistry) that affect *Sphagnum* distribution. Both of these ecological descriptions are often necessary for accurate identification of *Sphagnum*. Species descriptions are for the most part accurate, and critical distinguishing characteristics are clearly illustrated with line drawings. Some photographs are difficult to interpret because several species are shown together and it is hard to distinguish one from another. However, this is not critical, since photographs are not used for identification purposes but are merely illustrative.