

THE VIKINGS AND AMERICA. By ERIK WAHLGREN. Ancient Peoples and Places Series. London: Thames and Hudson. 1986. 192 p., 103 illus., index, notes, partial bib. Hardbound. US\$22.50.

This book covers an area of perennial interest to both northern scholars and the general public: the Scandinavian contact with North America during the Middle Ages. It discusses Viking navigation and the evidence for their discovery of North America, includes sections on the Greenland colony, famous Norse fakes, contacts with native Americans in arctic Canada and elsewhere and some discussion of the Viking age and the process of North Atlantic settlement. The author is a distinguished philologist and translator, with a long history of contribution to Scandinavian studies. Considering Wahlgren's background and the tremendous amount of fresh archaeological and paleoecological research that has been carried out in the North Atlantic region during the past 10-15 years, we might expect a magisterial review and synthesis of recent results and medieval sources.

Unfortunately, this work falls far short of such expectations. Most of the available archaeological and paleoecological work is either ignored or badly misused, and the book contains a regrettable number of glaring errors of fact and interpretation.

Problems with facts begin with the first illustration, which identifies a spectacular *Vendel-Period* helmet as an "Iron Viking helmet from Valsgaarde" (Fig. 2, p. 11), missing traditional periodization of Swedish archaeology by a few hundred years. This misattribution is unfortunately part of a pattern rather than an isolated slip. On pages 82-83 the author puts forward (without citation) a version of Roussell's (1941) long discredited longhouse-passage-house-centralized farm model, but gets it wrong, muddling the last two phases. In the same section he misidentifies the later medieval house at Brattahlid as Eirik the Red's, and he also fails to cite Knud Krogh's two readily available books on Norse Greenland (1965, 1982) summarizing post-World War II research in the Eastern Settlement (which did locate the probable *Landnam* farm). Treatment of subsistence questions is also somewhat dreamlike in light of the work of the last few decades (see citations in McGovern, 1985):

"Big cattle" — and curiously small they were by present-day standards, pygmies in comparison with the huge and friendly creatures of Switzerland — *bos domesticus* [sic] of both genders, had chiefly to be kept inside during cold weather . . . [p. 84].

Climatologists may note that the only work in their field cited dates to 1939, and one suspects that nothing later was consulted from the discussion of climate change in the text. The Parks Canada team now headed by Birgitta Wallace, who have worked so long and well at L'Anse aux Meadows, will also probably find some unexpected interpretations of that site and scant citation of their decade-long research effort.

Even if we ignore the dearth of modern references, this work's bibliography is very weak. The few citations that do appear in the text are not easy to match with entries in the badly organized bibliography, and at least two text references (not in any standard format) could not be located by this reader even after diligent search. What references there are often are incorrect or incomplete and include entries such as the following: "Mathiassen, Therkel. Numerous treatises on Eskimo archaeology in the various issues of *MoG*."

Even in a semi-popular work, readers should expect better citation of sources, especially in a field as controversial as Viking America.

In several places, it is painfully evident that the author has not been in touch with many practicing northern archaeologists: given their hard work and careful scholarship, Patrick Plumet and W.E. Taylor will certainly find the re-opened discussion of the (certainly non-Norse) structures at Pamiok on Ungava a surprise, especially its concluding paragraph:

The present discussion must rest here, with the sincere hope that some scholar or institution interested in the Province of Quebec's early history will undertake further investigation of the Ungava Bay material [p. 137].

More examples of outdated scholarship, slapdash citation and signif-

icant errors of fact could be listed, but there seems little point to such an exercise. The whole work has the air of a first draft badly in need of circulation for comment and revision, and we may wonder why the editorial staff of the *Ancient Peoples and Places* series skipped such embarrassment-reducing steps. This reviewer's own experience has indicated that northern researchers on both sides of the western ocean are remarkably generous with time, unpublished data, and sound editorial advice — one only has to ask. Authors as well as readers should be better served by their editors.

As it stands, this work will baffle or infuriate northern archaeologists, provide a mine of inaccurate references for northern workers in other fields and give a wholly misleading picture of current data and interpretation to the general public. There is simply very little to recommend here.

Readers interested in an up-to-date, engagingly written, and scrupulously researched volume by a senior scholar on these subjects would do far better to purchase Gwyn Jones's second edition (1986) of his classic *Norse Atlantic Saga*; it's also cheaper.

#### REFERENCES

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 KROGH, KNUD J. 1965. *Viking Greenland*. Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet.  
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#### Response from the author:

In the matter of reviewers and reviews I have invariably been content to allow nature to take its course. When, as in the present instance, a book of mine is depicted as a work without a single redeeming feature, the temptation is unusually strong to let the critique stand, its effulgence undiminished, its creed unassailed. This time, an invitation from the editor reminds me nevertheless that the readership, too, has a stake in the matter. Let us be brief.

Bluntly put, I have no urge to condone error, least of all my own. As an occasional reviewer I take pleasure in seeking out merit, holding the perception that not all errors are equally felonious. An author is of course ultimately responsible for defects, however generated, that show up in the published product. That a caption describing the photograph of a *pre-Viking* helmet — not part of the author's own list of proposed illustrations — escaped full scrutiny and thus slipped through the system with a syllable missing, is ineffably more annoying to author and publisher than it ever could be to bystanders. The loss of a kingdom for want of a horse-shoe nail scarcely grieved rival claimants to the throne. The unhandy topical arrangement of my restricted Bibliography was not author-mandated; the straight alphabetical system found in my previous publications is far easier on writer and reader. As to the "dreamlike" context in which the size of ancient Greenland cattle is contrasted with that of modern exemplars: is such comparison improper? Works published in 1985, however useful by now, could not have been utilized for a book submitted to a distant publisher in March of that year (Preface in May).

A philologist yields regularly to archaeologists as respects analysis of artifacts and sites. That the already dubious material from Ungava Bay was pronounced non-Viking by Plumet, Taylor, Wallace and others was crucial to my own expression of opinion. Consequently denounced by followers of the late Dr. Tom Lee for having "sold out" to his opponents, I now learn from Dr. McGovern that from Ungava there is nothing more to learn, *basta*. Many aspects

of my book, prominently including the quest for *Vinland*, do not engage McGovern's attention. Nor need such literary themes as may be tangential to the arctic and sub-arctic experience seriously detain archaeology buffs. I heartily agree with McGovern on the excellence (it contains translated saga texts) and usefulness of the newly revised *Norse Atlantic Saga*, a comprehensive book by Professor Gwyn Jones (this despite the latter's seeming adherence to a shopworn interpretation of Erik the Red's land-take). That book, furthermore, is "engagingly written."

A major purpose of a work on controversial subjects should be, not to "infuriate," but to stimulate further discovery and discussion. Surely, the ambitions of archaeologists aspiring to produce books incomparably superior to mine — the "magisterial" tomes of Dr. McGovern's asserted expectation — have not been truncated. *Crescat scientia.*

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BRITISH OCEANOGRAPHIC VESSELS 1800-1950. By A.L. RICE.  
The Ray Society, c/o British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BL. 1986. 200 p. £18.

*Alert, Alexander, Blossom, Discovery, Enterprise and Erebus* were some of the vessels employed in arctic discovery in the 19th century. Besides that, they were engaged in varying degrees on oceanographic work. The names are well known, but it is not always easy to find details of the ships and their voyages.

Tony Rice, Curator of Crustacea at the Natural History Museum and now benthic scientist at the Institute of Oceanographic Sciences, found the same difficulty in his work. He started an index that grew into this book, and it is impressive. In 200 pages he has listed over 100 ships that contributed to hydrography and oceanography. Likewise well known are some of the names of men who were in the Arctic, Aldrich, Beechey, Belcher and so on to Scoresby and Allen Young. Dr. Rice lists quite 250 men and gives a bibliography with 300 references. There is also a general index.

With the support of the Ray Society, he has been able to include nearly 100 photographs, sketches and maps, all well presented. He has now been told of two errors in official information he was given. The picture of the *Shearwater* is of a ship of 1901. The photograph of the *Egeria* is of another ship. The text includes a "biography" of each ship in a detailed, reliable and readable way — a book to dip into as well as for reference.

It will be a blessing to many engaged in the history of hydrography and exploration, to those who want elusive information in a few moments. This is a work that has long been lacking. It is well produced.

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WHALING LOGBOOKS AND JOURNALS, 1613-1927: AN INVENTORY OF MANUSCRIPT RECORDS IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS. Originally compiled by STUART C. SHERMAN; revised and edited by JUDITH M. DOWNEY and VIRGINIA M. ADAMS. N.Y. and London: Garland Publishing Co., 1986. xiv + 496 p., indexes, bib. US\$80.00.

This book owes its existence to the long-standing dream of Stuart Sherman. Perhaps Sherman's interest in whaling was generated by a lifetime of summers on Martha's Vineyard; certainly it was nourished by the gift, in 1956, of the valuable Nicholson collection of whaling journals and logbooks to the Providence, Rhode Island, public library. It was Sherman's task as librarian to catalog and index that gift in a

careful work published in 1965, *The Voice of the Whaleman, with an Account of the Nicholson Whaling Collection*. Sherman moved on to Brown University, but from that time until his death in 1983 he devoted his energies to the grander scheme: a union catalog of all known surviving whaling logs and journals. With the publication of *Whaling Logbooks and Journals, 1613-1927*, the dream comes as close to realization as is practically possible.

The heart of the volume is 5018 entries, of which the following is a typical sample:

2701. *Junius (Bark)*. New Bedford, Mass.  
January 21, 1848 — November 14, 1849. Master: Chester F. Smith. Keeper: John Winslow. Ground: S. Pacific. Repository: RP

That more than 5000 logs and journals survive is perhaps the most amazing statistic to come from this book. Sherman in 1965 calculated a total of 13 927 known American whaling voyages, for which he estimated that some 3200 logs survived. That in fact closer to one out of three of those voyages left a permanent record is an interesting bit of data in its own right, and one strikingly different from the British and French whaling experiences from which very few logbooks survive, as shown by the scarcity of non-American entries in this volume, though many foreign libraries were searched. It will come as no surprise, however, that the vast majority of logs listed date from the 19th century (three are from the 17th, 62 from the 18th, and 190 from our own 20th). It should be noted, as well, that while *Whaling Logbooks and Journals* is a considerable accomplishment, it lists only records in public collections; it is hardly possible to locate every logbook held by private collectors or whaleman's descendants. Similarly, it should be stressed that considerably fewer than 5000 vessels made the 5018 voyages. To take an extreme case, the long-lived *Charles W. Morgan* survives in 41 logs and journals (nos. 954-62 as a ship, and 963-95 riggered as a bark).

Nevertheless, with all due credit to Sherman and to his successors, Judith Downey and Virginia Adams of the New Bedford Whaling Museum, one may still ask — as with other large-scale dreams — what, ultimately, is the value of the accomplishment? From the standpoint of the volume itself, a simple list of logs would be of use only to the researcher in search of a particular vessel or its voyage. For that reason, the five indexes that organize the entries are as important as the entries themselves. In these, voyages are organized by home port, master and logkeeper, year of voyage, grounds visited and repository (there is also a useful guide to repositories, which provides information on most of the 82 institutions surveyed). By the standards of comprehensiveness and ease of information retrieval, *Logbooks and Journals* should be given high marks, with one caveat only. The "Index by Ground" lists only 12 entries: Antarctic, Davis Strait, Greenland, Hudson Bay, Indian, North Atlantic, North Pacific, Okhotsk, South Atlantic, South Pacific, Spitsbergen and Western Arctic. While this arrangement is helpful for Spitsbergen, from which ground only nine records survive, it is of little help for the South Pacific, for example, with thousands of entries. Many voyages, as might be expected of whalers, visited several grounds, so this index contains many more than 5000 entries. Fortunately, in the particularly difficult case of the South Pacific, researchers may consult Robert Langdon's *Where the Whalers Went: An Index to the Pacific Ports and Islands Visited by American Whalers* (Canberra, 1984), which gives precise data on Pacific landfalls based on the microfilm logbook collection of the Australian National University's Pacific Manuscript Bureau and catalogued in Langdon, *American Whalers and Traders in the Pacific: A Guide to Records on Microfilm* (Canberra, 1978). PAMBU's collection, alas, is by no means as comprehensive as Sherman's list; even worse, however, the interested scholar is likely to find no similar list at all for other grounds.

Still, the question remains of the overall value of Sherman's work. To this, students of the impact of whaling will be quick to respond, for the logs and journals have been essential to the preparation of recent studies, such as John Bockstoe's *Whales, Ice, and Men* (Seattle, 1985) on the Western Arctic or W. Gillies Ross on *Whaling and Eskimos: Hudson Bay, 1860-1915* (Ottawa, 1975). Without these records, and a means to locate them, many of the social, economic and