Basque whaling in pictures, 16th-18th century

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INTRODUCTION: THE STUDY OF WHALING IMAGES

The popular imagery of historic pictorial media such as prints and drawings has long been neglected by mainstream historians. Doubting their source value, they tended to leave the study of these works of art to art historians. Only the art commissioned by sovereigns and rulers for explicit purposes of pictorial documentation of important political or social events (e.g. battles, festivities) or technological achievements (esp. for warfare) was deemed to have sufficient source value to merit study. Maritime historians tended to do likewise.

It seems that two developments had to coincide to change this. On the one hand, a quantitative increase in the history of collecting needed to include a larger segment of society. In antiquity, potentates and temple priests had amassed treasuries and menageries. Medieval feudal lords followed in that tradition. In the Age of Discovery, sovereigns strove to “hold the world in their hands” by assembling in their private chambers of curiosities intricate models of the ever-widening cosmos, or—more commonly—individual objects originating from it. *Macrocosmos in microcosmo* was the motto. With the emancipation of bourgeois classes, wealthy merchants imitated the collecting fad of Renaissance nobility and built their own Wunderkammern. These are the origin of our museums1. In modern times, collecting spread to ever more strata of society, and the fields of collecting became less exclusive. Some people built collections of maritime prints.

The second development was advances in printing technology, which allowed for less costly reproductions of images. There were now so many fellow collectors and other people interested in the study of maritime prints collections, that illustrated catalogues found a ready market. This happened in the 1920s. And it happened in countries whose navies had played a certain role in winning the First World War, viz Great Britain and the USA. Here, there was a wide popular support for things naval and maritime, both current and historic2.

Coincidently, the first substantial catalogue of whaling prints was also published in this decade: George Francis Dow’s *Whale ships and whaling. A pictorial history of whaling during three centuries*, which appeared in 1925, the year the last US-American sailing whalership returned from sea with a cargo of whale oil. With its 207 illustrations, it marks the beginning of the comprehensive study of historic whaling images3.

Over the ensuing decades, the study of whaling images was characterized only by small publications such as exhibition or sale lists. It seems that individual collectors such as Gerrit Jan Honig (1864-1955), Allan Forbes (1874-1955), and Henry P. Kendall (1878-1959) were the driving forces behind these pamphlets. A turning point was marked by the publication of Marion V. and Dorothy Brewington’s two fully illustrated catalogues of fine art in the Kendall Whaling Museum collection: *Kendall Whaling Museum Paintings*, 1965, and *Kendall Whaling Museum Prints*, 1969, the latter with almost 600 superbly reproduced prints.

It is, however, a 30-page German article published in 1968, which can be regarded as the commencement of the scholarly study of iconographic interrelationships in whaling prints, paintings and applied arts: Joachim Münzing’s paper on European Arctic whaling in 17th and 18th-century prints,
which was followed by four books on the subject. In the footsteps of Münzing (1936-2000) and the Brewingtons (M.VB. 1902-1974; D.B. 1904-1989), a number of monographs and catalogues have dealt with historic whaling images, some as elaborately annotated inventories of substantial collections, such as the Francis B. Lothrop (1898-1986) Whaling Collection, masterfully presented by Elisabeth Ingalls in 1987, some with a narrower thematic focus, such as the whaling prints known to the author of Moby-Dick, or images of stranded whales, or early modern illustrated broadsides and pamphlets on cetaceans.

All these works have focused on the printed art of whaling nations like the Netherlands, Great Britain, Germany, France and the USA. During different phases of world whaling history, they were important. During the same phases, they also had well-developed printing industries serving markets where whaling prints were in a certain demand. In fact, in some of them, such as the Netherlands and Germany, the seaports from which the whaling ships hailed, were the nation’s economic hubs, which also attracted artists and print shops.

**BA SVQ E WHALING IN PICTURES**

Though there was printing in the Basque country in the 1500s, it appears that – for reasons which are beyond the scope of this paper – the demand for prints showing the vernacular/domestic whale fishery was not as pronounced as in other whaling nations. Pictorial representations of Basque whaling are thus fairly uncommon.

Notable exceptions, to be discussed in a future paper, are the heraldic depictions with stylized whaling motifs featured in the medieval and Renaissance coats-of-arms and town seals of the Basque ports of Bermeo, Lequeitio, Ondarroa, Motrico, Guetaria, Fuenterrabia and Biarritz, and the façade or lintel stones with ships and big fish / whales in Zarauz, Ondarroa and Rentería.

Notable too are the illustrated broadsides after Laureano Gorondón and Monedero of a juvenile right whale (Eubalaena glacialis) captured off the Basque coast in 1854, but these will not be discussed here either.

The small quantity of two dozen pictorial representations of Basque whaling discussed in this article is the result of almost 40 years of studying whaling art during which an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 images were encountered, about two thirds of which were documented in some form or other in this author’s files. The list is limited to images from the 16th to the 18th century. Most of them are – if not downright fanciful – derivative, i.e. their whale and whaling motifs are taken from earlier pictures. Prototypes and precursor images are discussed in the pertaining entries. In view of centuries of Basque whaling activity it is amazing that the first authentic pictorial representation of it, which was based on an artist's actual autopsy, was not made until the very end of the fishery: it is a German etching of the capture of a cow-calf pair off Castro Urdiales – 10 km west of the Basque border – in 1739. It is hoped that this article may stimulate the search for and publication of more pictorial representations of Basque whaling operations.

**Caveat**

Modern viewers of historic images must bear in mind that artists are not necessarily eyewitnesses of the scenes they draw. More commonly, they translate a “textual” description they hear or read into a “visual notion”, an image. And a lot of “imagination” goes into this creative process. Therefore, historic depictions cannot be regarded as being as documentary in character as photographs.

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6. Michael M. Barkham, pers. comm.
8. CIRIUQAIN GAIZTARRO, 1961, p. 70; AZPIAZU, 2000, p. 88. Also see RUSPOLI, 1972, p. 15, for the outline drawing of the tombstone of harpooner Martín de Mendicabal, 1660, with a stylized harpoon.
10. UNSAIN, 1995, p. 54; GARAT, 1998, p. 25. Most scholars favour the interpretation of the “fish” beneath the nao on the Rentería lintel stone as cod, though.
11. GRAELLES, 1889, lámina I, Fig. 2; VALDES HANSEN, 2008.
Before the mid- or late 1700s, we know of no professionally trained artist who witnessed any whaling operations. Artists normally did not understand the description of the tools of whaling, nor the special activities involved in killing and processing a whale. Harpoons thus are often depicted as arrow-like darts. Even when an artist has seen a whaleboat in port, and depicts it roughly correctly, he may put too many or too few people in it, they may be seated wrongly, and the harpooning action may be represented in an incorrect way. Not to mention the whale! Hardly a professional artist before the 1700s had ever seen a living whale at sea. Invariably, they all gave a very personal interpretation of a Great Fish, often with monstrous features. After all, big, monstrous beasts have to have big mouths with appropriately big teeth, don’t they? There are a few examples, where we can safely say that the artist obviously had seen right whale baleen, which since the Middle Ages was a trade commodity of the Basque whale fishery. In two of the images presented below, we recognize baleen-shaped features anatomically associated with the mouth of the Great Fish, either suggesting a moustache or a pair of tusks.

Great caution is therefore advised in interpreting historic depictions as documentary evidence per se. In a careful, critical analysis, any insights derived from a historic whaling image must be corroborated by other sources!

**THE WHALING SCENE ON DESCELIERS’S WORLD MAP OF 1546**

The earliest depiction of commercial whaling hitherto known is the cartographic vignette on Pierre Desceliers’s manuscript world map of 1546, positioned near the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador (illus 1). It was formerly known as the “Dauphin map”, because King François I had it made for the Dauphin, later King Henri II of France. There are discrepant biographical data for the cartographer, Pierre Desceliers of Arques near Dieppe, viz. 1487-1553 in older sources and ca. 1500-1558? in more recent ones, based on the date of 1558 on a map exhibited in 1875 but now lost. His world map of 1546 measures 126 x 256 cm and is preserved in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester. Between 1842 and 1862 the French company Jomard produced a lithographic facsimile. However, the lithographer took significant liberty “enhancing” the map in areas where the original is faded and unclear. Unfortunately, this is the case with the whaling vignette too. Martijn & al. have pointed out that the “embellishing” retouches here led to changes which have induced researchers to misinterpret the scene as one showing native whaling operations. In all, four ethnic groups have been discussed as being represented in this vignette. The fact that Basque whaling technology, boat building and clothing are not represented in a coherently realistic way either is not conclusive of this not having been the artist’s intention. The fanciful rendering of the whalers’ prey gives a clue to the creative processes involved in producing artwork of subjects the artist has not seen and does not properly understand. The artist “knew” the following: the whale is a big “fish” that often swims at the surface, where people in boats may harpoon it. He also “knew” that an important commodity yielded by whales is their “beard”.

In most languages, such as Old Norse, Japanese, Russian, and several Germanic vernaculars, the word for “baleen” is etymologically related to the word for “beard”. The very similar keratinous quality of baleen slabs and bristles as they are found on the market and (beard) hair as well as the “knowledge” that both grow somewhere near the jaws may be assumed to play a role in giving baleen its name. Barbas or barbes is recorded in 18th century Spanish or French, respectively.

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12. BARTHELMESS, 2007, pp. 2-3. There were a few skilled, amateur artists, such as Hamburg shipboard surgeon Friedrich Martens, who went whaling in 1671 and produced highly documentary images; see MARTENS, 1675.

13. A few had seen stranded whales. And even they made mistakes representing certain physical features without understanding their anatomical function. As Gombrich has shown in his seminal book on Art and illusion (1978, p. 101f), the famous Dutch artist Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617) represented the flipper of a sperm whale stranded on the coast near Scheveningen in 1598 as an external ear; BARTHELMESS & MUNZING, 1991, p. 38.

14. Since 1110, Guigue IV, Count of Albon in the Viennois held the by-name Delphinus, and the heraldic dolphin motif featured in the family’s coat-of-arms since the 12th century. When in 1349 Count Imbert II ceded his hereditary territory of the Dauphiné to the hereditary King Philippe IV of Valois, it was under the condition that the French successor to the throne carry the title of the Dauphin du Viennois. From then on until 1844 the successor to the French throne had the by-name daphin. FRASER, 1977.


16. VALMONT DE BOMARE, 1764; SANÉZ REGUARD, 1792. The Romance etymological origin of “baleen” is related to the Greek and Latin words for “whale” (phalaina, balena); eg balor in a French-language document of 1284 in England, baleynen in Dutch sources since 1614, but also as synonyms in 18th-century Spanish and French (balenac, baleines) in the same sources that mention barbas and barbes; see BARTHELMESS, 2006.
Accordingly, Desceliers presented a giant “fish” with an elongated, snake-like body in the iconographic tradition of antique “sea dragons” 17. The fish sports a huge moustache roughly in the shape of two horizontal right whale baleen slabs. The artist may have known the looks of baleen slabs from the baleen trade. The big moustached fish is swimming on the surface of the sea where a five-man crew in a boat propelled by oars and steered by a helmsman sitting in the stern, handling a long steering oar, attacks it. The second man in the boat is standing, facing the whale and poised a large projectile in the shape of a stylized arrow. A slack line passes through the left hand of the man and appears to be attached to the end of the projectile. Two “arrows” with “feathers” on their ends—about the same size as the projectile in the harpooner’s right hand—are already stuck in the whale’s back, with thin lines trailing from the ends to the boat’s bow. The fourth man in the boat is equally standing and facing the Great Fish. He is holding what appears to be a longbow. As we have no source as to the use of bow and arrow in Basque whaling 18, this has been a puzzling factor in interpreting the scene. But since the quintessential head of the harpoon is usually described as “barbed or shaped like an arrow”, artists “translating” textual descriptions of this technically little understood projectile into a “visual notion”, have often interpreted the harpoon “coherently” with arrow-like “feathers” at the rear end 19. Therefore, from an art historian’s point of view, the technically wrong depiction of bow and arrow as whaling weapons is not a disturbing inconsistency.

Together with a three-masted ship riding at anchor, the scene was located by the cartographer off the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador, where Basque shore whaling activities have been documented since the 1530s 20.

THE INK SKETCHES IN THE ZUMARRAGA BAPTISMAL REGISTER, CA. MID-16TH CENTURY

Of unknown date are two ink sketches jotted on separate pages of the baptismal register kept in the town of Zumarraga (diocese of San Sebastián) since 1526. The pictures are certainly not contemporary with the first entry made in that year and are roughly dated to the 16th or mid-16th century 21. The first one of the very sketchy ink drawings (illus 2) shows a stylized, very “fishy” whale with a “beak” and two “fin”-like extensions on the back and belly, which may possibly be breast flippers “twisted” by the artist by 90° to show that the whale has more than merely a tail “fin”. A schematic harpoon is laid over its silhouette, and a line passes from the harpoon to a boat in the wake of the whale. It is an open, double-ended boat with high stems and a crew of seven. Oars are not visible. It appears that the harpoon line passes from the bow by all seven crewmembers and ends in a box-or tub-like structure near the stern stem, but this detail is very unclear. Caution is advised against interpreting this detail as indicative of a line conduct known from 19th-century pelagic “South Sea” or “Moby-Dick-style” whaling, where the harpoon line ran from “chocks” in the bow stem over all thwarts to a loggerhead in the stern of the whaleboat 22. By this ingenious arrangement the whaleboat was rather “pushed” than “pulled” when under tow of the harpooned prey, and hauling in the line by the entire crew, to bring the boat close to the exhausted whale, was also greatly facilitated. There is no source as to this line conduct being practised in the European Arctic whale fishery from the 17th to the 19th centuries, which was influenced by Basque technology. In European Arctic whaling, the harpoon line was normally belayed with two turns around the high bow stem of the whaleboat 23.

The other one of the two sketches—doubtlessly by the same hand—shows a whale, slightly different in shape, to which two boats are fast by harpoons and lines (illus 3). In neither of the boats oars are visible. Here, too, it seems as if the harpoon lines pass from the bow stem to some structure

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18. Crossbow whaling is only known from other whaling cultures, and some of the sources may even be apocryphal; see CREDLAND, 1978/1979, and in preparation.
19. See eg, Bol and Galle’s etching discussed below.
23. LABURU, 1983; DE JONG, 1982, pp. 11-12; VAN BEYLEN, 1986, pp 102-108; VAN BEYLEN, 1988, p. 46; BEYERMAN, 1999, p. 3; BAR-THELMESS, 2003, p. 71. In 19th-century British Arctic whaling, the harpoon line was often belayed on a loggerhead in the bow of the whaleboat, see SCORESBY, 1820, vol. 2., p. 245. Norwegian and British bottlenose whaleboats of the late 19th also often had a loggerhead in the bow, see the Peterhead bottlenose whaleboat in the Musée OceanoGraphique, Monaco.
in the stern. Above the whaling scene, there is an artist's finger exercise of some flowing ink strokes roughly in the shape of a similar whale.

The crude Zumarraga ink jottings are the only authentic folk-art depictions of Basque whaling operations hitherto known.

**THE WHALING DRAWING AND TAPESTRIES OF THE BAYONNE WATER FESTIVAL OF 1565**

Basque shore whaling also was highlighted in the famous Bayonne water festival of 24 June 1565. The festival was master-minded by Catherine de’ Medici (1519-1589), queen consort of Valois King Henri II of France (coincidentally, the dedicatee of Desceliers’s “Dauphin map”) and –following his death in 1559– queen mother or regent, respectively, of her short-lived sons, Kings François II, Charles IX, and Henri III. Her daughter Elisabeth was married to King Felipe II of Spain. In 1565, a Spanish-French alliance, drafted but never realized, was to be celebrated between the royal houses of Valois and Habsburg. The families royal met at the mutual border on the Bidassoa river by the sea in the Basque country, 30 km southwest of Bayonne. Florence-born queen mother Catherine designed the pertaining festivities after the pattern of the sumptuous Medici and French festivals. To realize the pompous event, she went to incredible expenses, taking up a credit of 700,000 Ecus from a Florence bank. For a festive banquet on the île d’Aguinéau in the Bidassoa river the royal guests boarded splendidly decorated barges. En route, they passed floating “chariots” featuring motifs from antique ocean mythology, such as Arion riding dolphins, Neptune in a scallop shell drawn by hippocamps, or tritons recoiling on the carapace of a giant sea turtle. Doubtlessly inspired by the Basque whale fishery practised in the area, there also was a floating whale model being attacked by heroically costumed crews throwing harpoons or darts from three fanciful boats. Pierre de Bourdeille, seigneur de Brantôme (1540-1614), an eyewitness, states that the model whale suitably spouted red wine from two blowholes. Needless to say, this imitated the blood spray exhaled from the pierced lungs of a lanced right whale.

Catherine de Medici’s mock whaling scene is represented in a drawing by her valet and court painter Antoine Caron (1521-1599; illus 4). Art historians date it around 1573, some eight years after the event. It is one of six drawings of several festivities presumed to have been commissioned by Catherine as patterns for tapestries.

In fact, around 1580/81, Caron’s drawings were re-interpreted by Ghent artist Lucas van Heere (1534-1584) for eight tapestries manufactured in Antwerp. Lucas changed Caron’s composition and added royal figures dominating the foreground. One of the eight tapestries, preserved at the Uffizi in Florence, features Catherine de’ Medici’s 1565 mock whaling scene from the Bidassoa river.

Another tapestry, roughly dated to the second half of the 16th century, and perhaps produced in Brussels, displays a similar scene (illus 5). Surrounded by an elaborate border and background field of floral, architectural, mythological, grotesque and exotic (an elephant) motifs, a central, hexafoil escutcheon contains a riverine seascape or harbour scene. The foreground is made up of a grassy bank with theatrically clad men and women. The background shows a hilly shoreline with Mediterranean-looking architecture, i.a. the colonnade of a palazzo-type building, and a river mouth or port entrance. A big fish in the iconographic tradition of Renaissance dolphins dominates the centre. With raised tail flukes, it lies in the shallow tidal zone of the shore in the foreground. Tiny men on its back are busy chopping it up with hatch knives. From the shore, people are leaning a ladder upon its back. There are several boats on the water, most theatrically fanciful, some with mast and sail. From the bows of three of them in the foreground, lines pass to the great fish or are being made fast to it.

This is clearly a whale-flensing scene. Unclear it is, whether it is to represent shore-whaling operations in an imaginative iconography, or if it is to commemorate a water festival, mock whale-flensing scene as in the tapestry after Caron’s sketch. It is also possible that it shows a later stage of Catherine’s pompous celebration on Aguineau Island in 1565. Regrettably, we have no full record of the culinary details of the festival as far as the whale model is concerned. But if Brantôme already

25. PROVIDENCE, 1979, pp. 62-64, No. 31.
notes red wine being pumped from the spout holes, one should not be surprised if Catherine’s directing skills designed the whale model also to “act” as a serving “tray” for tastily prepared meat in a theatrical “flensing” scene after a dramatic “hunt”. If so, the food might perhaps even have been delicious whale meat, or rather whale tongue, for which there was an old culinary tradition in the Basque country. Further research on this remarkable tapestry in the collection of Roland de la Poype, Marineland, Antibes, is thus desirable.

Between the Bayonne water festival of 1565 and the creation of the Valois tapestries around 1580/81, another image claiming to depict Basque shore whaling operations was published.

PARÉ’S WHALE-FLENSING SCENE, 1573

In 1564 Ambroise Paré (1509/10-1590), surgeon to the French royal court, was sent by 15-year-old King Charles IX from Bayonne to Biarritz to attend Charles de Bourbon, Prince de la Roche-sur-Yon (1515-1565), who had fallen sick in that little town. No later than 1351, Biarritz displayed a whaling scene in its town seal, testifying to the antiquity and economic importance of its shore whaling activities. At the time of Paré’s visit, the town was still prepared for the occasional right whale frequen
ting its inshore waters. Paré describes whaling logistics and operations, apparently not from autopsy, but rather from hearsay and from Rondelet (1554, 1558). Whaling infrastructure and equipment such as the atalaya or vigie, ie the lookout turret on the Biarritz promontory, the boats, harpoons and lines, however, were actually seen by Paré and probably also products of the whale fishery, such as the salted whale tongue, blubber, baleen, and bones. As for baleen, he states that skirt hoops, corset stays, knife handle grips and other commodities are made from it. Concerning the huge skeletal bones, Paré notes that country people make fences from them (probably from the big jawbones, perhaps also from the ribs) and steps, stools and chairs from the vertebrae. He even obtained one of those whale vertebrae chairs for his own home.

In the first and second editions of his collected works, Paré’s Paris publishers André Wechel, 1573, and Gabriel Buon, 1575, respectively, used a woodblock illustration showing the cutting-up of a harpooned whale lying half ashore. It is a copy rather than an original illustration and is based on earlier prototypes of non-Basque whaling, which the woodcut carver modified for Paré’s purposes (illus. 6). The fanciful whale-flensing scene had by then already developed an iconographic tradition originating in 1539. The immediate prototype copied was the woodcut by Franz Oberrieter in Konrad Gesner’s Nomenclator of 1560. But Paré’s woodblock cutter made two remarkable changes from the iconographic tradition. One of them is that an anchor, which in the pictorial tradition is shown to secure the whale ashore, with its anchor flukes piercing the creature’s blubber, is replaced by two harpoons toggling the whale’s skin like a cloak pin a fold of garment.

Though the depiction of the harpoons themselves is unrealistic, they are understandable visualisations of textual descriptions of harpoons. Since Albertus Magnus’ explanation of the main whaling weapon in his manuscript De animalibus of ca. 1258/60, the harpoon is described as a piercing weapon with a triangular, barbed, arrow-shaped head, a shank, and with a foramen at the end. The Latin word foramen is usually translated as “hole”, “opening” or “cavity”, and presumably was intended to describe the socket at the end of the iron harpoon shank, into which the wooden harpoon pole was inserted. The standard way of attaching the harpoon line securely to the harpoon iron in later centuries was by laying two turns of line around the shank above the socket and splicing the loose end into the long one. The spliced turns form a double “eye” or “rope ring”, which firmly “grabs” the conical socket, when strain is put on the line. The wooden harpoon pole is just a handle for the harpooner and is discardable once the harpoon is planted in the whale blubber. Be it that

32. BARTHELMESS & CLAUDE, in preparation.
33. GESNER, 1560, p. 176.
34. STADLER, vol. 2, 1920, p. 1524. This invaluable manuscript has survived the collapse of the historical archive of Cologne on 3 March 2009 in only slightly damaged condition.
“foramen” either meant the iron harpoon socket or the rope “ring” passed around the shank, the artist of the Paré woodcut translating the textual description into a “visual notion” depicted a chainlink-shaped “ring” at the end of the harpoon shaft. As in Albertus’s description, he shows the harpoon line attached to this ring. This first “technical”, though unrealistic pictorial representation of a Basque whaling harpoon had been published in Guillaume Rondelet’s fish books of 1554 (Latin edition)36 and of 1558 (French edition)37, and was copied by Paré’s woodcut artist.

The other change from the established iconographic tradition is two single slabs of long baleen protruding in a tusk-like curve from the angles of the whale’s mouth. It would appear that someone who had seen dried right whale baleen fronds, had given the artist a description, so that this trade commodity could at least be shown in its approximate verisimilitude and in an anatomical position that is at least associated with the mouth cavity and not with the “moustache”.

THEVET’S WHALE-FLENSING SCENE, 1575

In the same year that Paré’s second edition came off the press, in 1575, the French cosmographer André Thevet published his description of the world. To illustrate French and Spanish Basque whaling, his woodcut artists produced a lively whale-processing scene (illus 7). Whale morphology and flensing operations are as in Gesner’s prototype, including the anchor, the teats of the whale, boat, barrels, bagpiper and ladder. The scenic foreground and background are elaborately detailed. This lively picture presumably appealed more to contemporary tastes, so from the third, 1579, edition on, Paré’s publishers copy Thevet’s whaling scene38.

BOL AND GALLE’S ENGRAVED WHALING SCENE, 1582

The first print to show organized, systematic whale hunting activity at sea is based on a drawing by Flemish artist Jos Bol (1534-1593) (illus 8). It was first published in a series of hunting scenes by the Antwerp publishing house of Filip Galle (1537-1612) in 158239. Various editions of the print series, between 48 and 54 plates, were issued in bound volumes under the title Venationes, piscationes et aucupii typi40, but without any typographic descriptive texts, besides the etched captions. Thus, we do not know which contemporary text source, if any, inspired the Flemish artist to draw this fanciful image41. His source might have been verbal: prior to the 1580s, some Basque whaling ships are recorded as having sailed directly from Labrador to Antwerp to sell their cargoes of whale oil42, and Bol may have been inspired by verbal account received directly or indirectly from these Basque whalemens.

The Latin caption of the print gives no clue as to the whaling operations illustrated here either. It translates as: “When the whales frolic and raise their immense bodies to the sea surface, they are being killed by many little missiles”, and is thus very generic. There were printed travelogues and works on natural history, which could have supplied Bol with descriptions of indigenous whaling or commercial Basque whaling. There are indications for both possibilities. Most whales are naked, which conforms to European artistic traditions of depicting the “savage”, “uncivilized” native. And

36. page 475. Rondelet claims to have received his information about whaling in part from Paré’s predecessor, surgeon to the French King Henri II; p. 480. Here follows the Latin text: In singulis igitur cymbis dení collocantur robusti remiges, alíj multa tela, longa cuspidé hamata, quorum figuram sub belue figurá expressim us, in belueon concíncuent, quibus infíxus & altiús inherentibus fugues longissímos teles relaxánt, voque dum vitam cum sanguine fuderint, tuíc in vacum fundibus balænam in lítus retrahunt adúti manis vrndis, prædám partíuntur, cuíus pars vnicuique cedit pro telorum coniectorum cópia, quæ propriís notis & insculptís internoscuntur. RONDELET, 1554, pp. 480-481.
37. page 351. Here follows the French text about the harpoon: ... les mariners é pescheurs ... ont plusieurs nasselles, en chacune dix homes forts pour bien namer, plusieurs autres dedans avec darts tels que nous avons fait pouroir pour [notre illustration de] la Balene, lequelz de toute leur force ils iettent sur la Balene, é laschent les chordes attachées aux dits dards, iusques à ce qu’elles aient perdu le sang é la vie. Iours diz tint la Balene en terre, é à la partissent, chacun aiant sa part selon la quantité de dards qu’il aura ietté, qu’le reconnoissent à leurs merques. RONDELET, 1558, p. 353.
39. BARTHELMESS & MÜNZING, 1991, pp. 30-32, 88-81. It was long maintained that the series of etchings was engraved by Filipps Galle himself, but the New Holstein, Philips Galle (vol. IV, p. 250, R 20) only attributes the prints to Galle’s workshop.
40. “Hunting, fishing and types of bird-catching”, ANTWERP, 1582.
41. BARTHELMESS, 1982, No. 69a.
42. Michael M. Barkham, pers. comm.
though there are several details visually referring to European “civilisation”, such as clothing worn by some other of the men, or Spanish morion helmets, a navigational beacon, barrels, European-style ships and a city in the background, these do not unambiguously point to European whaling. (For comparison, consider 16th-century Flemish paintings of biblical stories, which are set in European landscapes, occidental architecture, and show people wearing clothes in western fashion). Nor do the feathered arrows darted at the whales suggest that native whaling can be surmised. Here too, it is reasonable to assume that the artist tried to translate the written description of an “arrow-shaped” harpoon (head) into the “visual notion” of an entire arrow43.

As far as the whales are concerned, Barthelmess and Münzing have shown that their depiction is derived from illustrated broadsides commemorating the stranding of three sperm whales in the Schelde estuary on 2 July 157744. These broadsides were produced for sale by a travelling exhibition company, which put the dried head and flukes of one of these sperm whales on show in the Low Countries and Germany until at least 157845.

Whatever the geographical background for the whaling operations depicted by Bol and Galle’s workshop in 1582, when the image was re-engraved ten or twelve years later for the cartographic cartridge of Petrus Plancius’s map of the North Atlantic, the Latin caption clearly related the activity to the coasts of Atlantic Canada: “Along the coasts of New France (Eastern Canada), many whales come upon (or to) the dry land”46.

THE WATERCOLOURS IN ROBERT FOTHERBY’S WHALING JOURNAL OF 1613

European whaling in Arctic waters started in 1611 with two English vessels operating off Spitzbergen (Svalbard). In 1612 Dutch and Spanish Basque whalships entered the competition47. In 1613, seven armed ships under charter of the London-based “Muscovy Company” sailed to Spitzbergen to protect what they perceived as their whaling monopoly there. Several of the English ships had a total of 24 Basque whaling experts on board to teach the British, who were novices in this trade48. On board one of the vessels, the MATTHEW, one Robert Fotherby sailed in the capacity of a “factor” of the “Muscovy Company”. It was his task to compile a journal or handbook on all practical aspects pertaining to whaling and whale processing. This manuscript, titled A Short Discourse of a Voyage made in the Yeare of Our Lord 1613 to the Late Discovered Countrie of Greenland; and a Breife Discription of the same Countrie, and the Com[m]odities ther raised to the Adventurers, numbers 21 leaves of ca. 31 x 20 cm. Evidently finishing touches were made in late summer 1614. It is embellished with eleven watercolour drawings, showing the process of whaling and processing whales in great detail. Crude outline re-drawings of these watercolours were published in 186049. All eleven of them were published in colour for the first time by Barthelmess in 1987, with a detailed discussion of their iconographic influence on later prints of whaling50. Subsequently, Barkham and Barthelmess republished nine of them in 200851. Here, two are reproduced again because of their documentary value for the use of the “Biska shallop” in operation (illus 9). It is clear that when the British hired Basque whaling experts to train them, they also acquired Basque whaleboats. Given Fotherby’s introductory remark about the “24 Basks, who are men best experienced in that facultie, [viz.] the killing of the whale”52, it is reasonable to assume that not only their skills as harpooners and coopers were required, but also their expertise in trying out whale oil. So the drawings and the description of whale processing in the Fotherby journal probably reflect the entire state-of-the-art of Basque whaling in the early 17th century.

43. See n. 13. Lindquist’s speculation (1994, pp. 744-747) that the arrows in this engraving may be representations of the “darts” or “shots” used in old Norse whaling, can be refuted with reference to art historical conventions, which he failed to consider, and to the fact that there is no detailed, published account of that type of Norse whaling known, which could have served as an inspiration to the Flemish artist.
44. BARTHELMESS & MÜNZING, 1991, ibidem.
45. BARTHELMESS, 1998.
47. CONWAY, 1906, pp. 47-50.
49. HAVEN, 1860, pp. 284, 304-313.
52. HAVEN, 1860, p. 285.
HUMBELOT’S BROADSIDE OF 1658

In 1658, Paris engraver Jean-Baptiste Humbelot (1601/15-1678) produced a remarkable etching for an illustrated broadside (illus 10). It was commissioned by the unidentified owner of a whale show. The typeset text claims that this man had asked an agent to travel to Northern Norway and to acquire a large whale for exhibition purposes. Presumably the agent went north with French whale ships. He was successful. In its bottom part Humbelot’s bi-partite etching shows an articulated whale skeleton. The shape of the skull facilitates the taxonomic identification as a balaenid whale (*Balaena* sp.). The measurements given in the text, 16-17 feet for the skull, plus 45 feet for the vertebral column, as well as 300 slabs of baleen, each frond being up to 9 feet long, also correspond to the zoological genus *Balaena*, as does the whaling ground, where right whales were the whalers’ target. The text furthermore identifies the whale as a female. The image is the second-oldest depiction of a mounted whale skeleton known so far, and the earliest of a skeleton of this species.

The whaling scene – which was not witnessed by Humbelot – probably is meant to show French Basque whalers, who made many voyages to Northern Norway in those years. For example, at least one of the ten documented French whaling voyages of 1658, that of the NOTRE DAME DE VIGOGENE from Bayonne in the French Basque country, under Pierre Haraneder, master, was directed to Northern Norway. Unlike the skeleton which Humbelot actually saw, the scene betrays more artistic license. But at least the whaling method, showing a line connecting the harpoon with the boat, and the location of the whaling ground near the coast, are essentially correct, though not realistic in detail.

Broadside s are the precursors of our newspapers. Printed in runs of between a few hundred and ca. 2,000 copies, they were sold for a price of approximately half a day’s income of an average craftsman to an often illiterate audience. After a while, when the gossip was well spread, many broadsides suffered a fate similar to our newspapers: they were discarded. Therefore, all broadsides are immensely rare today. This one is the only copy known to exist so far.

MALLET’S WHALING SCENE OFF ICELAND, 1683

Humbelot’s broadside, unique as it is today, nevertheless had its influence. Its whale motif was copied by the anonymous engraver of plate 109 in Alain Manesson Mallet’s *Description de l’Univers*, Paris, 1683. The plate shows the smoking volcano Hecla in Iceland, an imaginative coastal plain with a tryworks base in the middle ground and a whaling scene in the foreground. Although the whale motif is quite small and relatively crude, its body contour, shape of the head and mouth betray the influence of Humbelot’s image (illus 11).

Does the engraving show Basque whaling? In the seventeenth century, several European nations despatched whaling ships to exploit the whale-rich waters of Iceland, usually without the consent of the Danish-Norwegian government, whose colony Iceland was. Spanish Basque whale ships may have been in Icelandic waters by 1608, possibly as early as 1604. In October 1615 Icelanders in several locations of the Icelandic West fjords massacred over 30 survivors of a shipwrecked Basque whaling crew under Martín de Villafranca of San Sebastián. There are three Basque-Icelandic glossaries of the 17th century, and in the 1670s and 1680s the odd French whaling ship continues to sail for Icelandic waters. So, with Manesson Mallet and his editor being French, it is quite probable that they had Basque whaling in mind when this etching was commissioned.

But other whaling nations cannot be ruled out. The tryworks base excavated since 2005 at Strákatangi, Steingrímsfjörður, Northwest Iceland, was originally thought to be Basque, but after some finds typical of Dutch whaling bases, such as clay pipes and certain types of brickwork, it is now more carefully labelled as “foreign” whaling station. Louwrens Hacquebord of the Rijksuni-
versiteit Groningen has reason to believe that crews of Rotterdam whaleships fitted out by Jacob Sebastian Koel or Hendrick Meeuwsen Coel in the 1630s may have operated this tryworks base\textsuperscript{60}.

Of this anonymous etching in Mallet's 1683 Paris edition, a mirrored version was produced for the Frankfurt 1685 edition by German engraver Johann Jacob Vogel\textsuperscript{61}.

**DE HOOGHE’S WHALING VIEW ON MORTIER’S MAP OF THE MEDITERRANEAN, 1694**

*The Carte nouvelle de la mer Méditerranée* by Pierre Mortier (1661-1711), first published in his Amsterdam Atlas Maritime of 1694, is a large map with 38 small topographic views of Atlantic and Mediterranean ports\textsuperscript{62}. These views were etched by Amsterdam engraver Romein de Hoogh (1645-1708). One of them, on the top edge of the map, shows St. Sebastian\textsuperscript{63}. It represents a fairly realistic view of the bay of San Sebastián (illus 12). And it features a tiny whaling scene underneath the spectacular, castle-crowned Urgull Hill. The minute scene is very sketchy, but besides the unrealistic Great Fish riding the waves in the fashion of other cartographic vignettes, the artist shows two rowboats attacking the whale. They are each manned with a harpooner standing in the bow, a number of oarsmen, and a helmsman in the stern. By the time De Hoogh executed this decorative detail, the whaling journal by German shipboard surgeon Friedrich Martens († after 1675) had been published in Hamburg in 1675 and Amsterdam in 1685, with several important and very realistic whaling scenes engraved after excellent drawings prepared by the author. But it is doubtful that he used these as a pattern. For, unlike Marten's, De Hoogh's whale is unrealistic, and so is his representation of the harpooner thrusting his weapon single-handed. At any rate, the little detail in his topographical view of San Sebastián illustrates the historic economic importance of the inshore whale fishery there and the city's identity as a whaling port.

**A NUREMBERG ETCHING OF FOREIGN (BAQUES?) WHALING OFF NORTHERN NORWAY, 1701**

"Customs, habits, interaction, and ways of life among the Lapps (Saami)"\textsuperscript{64} in Northern Norway are illustrated in a very “crowded”, baroque etching engraved by Joseph de Montalegre after a drawing by Johannes Degler (illus 13). It was published in Heinrich Scherer’s *Atlas Novus* in Nuremberg by Homann Heirs in 1701\textsuperscript{65}. Almost hidden by a lively foreground scene featuring fur-clad Saami and a Dutch trading vessel is a coastal whaling scene. The Latin text banner with this scene translates as “When the whales are exhausted by attached barbed hooks, the fishermen catch them”\textsuperscript{66}. It is the Basque whaling method as it was copied by all European Arctic whaling nations.

As in Manesson Mallet, it is not clear whether Basque whalers are shown here. It may well be the case, for documentary evidence testifies to substantial French (Basque and Norman) and Dutch whaling activity in Northern Norway. In 1612, three Dutch whaleships under French (presumably Basque) charter intended to visit the North Norwegian right whaling ground in addition to the Spitzbergen bowhead whaling ground, but there is no record whether they really went there\textsuperscript{67}. Such a voyage pattern was followed by another Dutch vessel under Franco-Basque charter in 1613\textsuperscript{68}. The next year, Danish-Norwegian authorities were notified of a Spanish, doubtlessly Basque, whaleship at Kjelvik Bay on the island of Magere, as well as of another one, also no doubt Basque, at Knarvik on the island of Hjelmsøy\textsuperscript{69}. In 1615, a Spanish Basque whaleship from Motrico recorded Northern Norway

\textsuperscript{60} Pers. comm., in e-lit, 1 December 2008.
\textsuperscript{61} Beschreibung des gantzen Welt-Kreysse. Frankfurt, 1685.
\textsuperscript{62} The Mediterranean map was the first map in the *Cartes Marines à l’usage du Roy de la Grande Bretagne* or, in short, *Atlas Maritime*, which was the second part to the *Neptune Français*, an atlas published the year before, in 1693. Whereas the *Neptune Français*—a copy of the French Admiralty’s atlas—was intended for practical nautical use, the *Atlas Maritime* was a representation volume for libraries. In fact, it was the most expensive and most lavishly decorated Dutch atlas until then; KOEMANN, IV, p. 424.
\textsuperscript{63} Thanks to José María Unsain and Michael Barkham for referring me to this image. See also UNSAIN, 2008, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{64} Lapponum mores, habitus, et conversandi ac vivendi ratio.
\textsuperscript{66} *Ita inflixis hamis fatigatas capiunt Balænas Piscatores.*
\textsuperscript{67} GERRITSZ, 1924, S. 96.
\textsuperscript{68} DU PASQUIER, 2000, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{69} DALGÅRD, 1962, p. 46.
as its destination\textsuperscript{70}. French vessels, both from Basque and Norman ports, went to the North Cape in 1615, 1617, 1618 and 1622. French whaling voyages to Norway became more frequent, with numbers reaching a peak in the 1640s-1660s. After this, they became less common, and the last one occurred in 1701\textsuperscript{71}. These foreign whalers set up improvised tryworks stations at a minimum of 17 different locations along the North Norwegian shore\textsuperscript{72}. But after French Basques commenced to try out the whale blubber in on-board tryworks in 1635, offshore whaling at flot became more and more common for French Basque whalers\textsuperscript{73}.

Another indication that Basque whaling operations may have been in the minds of the artists Degler and Montalegre, is provided by the Italian clergyman Francesco Negri (1623-1698), who travelled in Northern Norway in 1664/65, describing his trip in eight letters. In the posthumous edition of his letters, the Viaggio settentrionale of 1700\textsuperscript{74}, Negri gives a detailed description of commercial whaling operations which he was able to witness: whalers hunt their prey from boats manned with six men, harpooning and lancing them until the animal is exhausted. (Especially the reference to “exhaustion” may suggest that Degler and Montalegre in 1701 used the book by Negri of 1700).

Negri continues describing the process of cutting-in the killed whale alongside the sailing ship and boiling the blubber in a huge copper cauldron tryworks on board, which takes up almost all the breadth of the deck, so that there is hardly room to pass by it. The height of the cauldron above the deck reaches a man’s knee, according to Negri\textsuperscript{75}. This unusual construction with the fire chamber under deck, so different from the tryworks on board American whaleships, is illustrated in Duhamel du Monceau’s etchings (see below). The Italian Negri in all probability was invited by the crew of a French whaler, given that his trip coincided with the peak period of French presence in Northern Norway, and as there were very few experiments with tryworks on board the whaleships of European whaling nations other than France\textsuperscript{76}.

**LILIENSKIOLD’S WATERCOLOUR “ON WHALING AND SALMON RIVERS”, CA. 1701-1703**

Concerning the whaling scene, there is a certain compositional similarity between the etching in Scherer and the watercolour in Hans Hansen Lil(lien)skiold’s manuscript Speculum boreale (illus 14). Both whaling scenes with sailing vessels and whaleboats are set in a bay surrounded by rocks and mountains except for an opening at the top right. Lilienksiold (ca. 1650-1703) was a lawman and served as district governor in the North Norwegian province of Finnmark between 1684 and 1701. Between 1693 and 1703 he wrote his monumental manuscript Speculum boreale, in essence a description of Northern Norway. It is embellished with many watercolour drawings by his own hand. One of them heads the chapter “On whaling and salmon rivers”\textsuperscript{77}. It cannot be determined whether Basque whaling operations are shown here, as French whaling in the area ceased in 1701 after a period of continuous decline\textsuperscript{78}.

**GUÉROULT’S ETCHING OF A “BISCAYENNE”, 1710**

A decade later, the French artist and engraver Pierre-Jacob Guérout du Pas (1654-1740) produced a series of 29 etchings showing small marine craft, the Petits bâtiments de l’océan, published in Paris by Giffart in 1710. Number 6 of the plates features a “Bisca y boat, a small shallop belonging to the vessels that embark upon the whale fishery” (illus 15)\textsuperscript{79}. Appropriately, the little, double-ended craft is shown “on the job”, with the harpooner standing in the bow ready to thrust his iron into the blu-

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\textsuperscript{70} BARKHAM, 1990, p. 258

\textsuperscript{71} DU PASCQUIER, 2000, pp. 50-52, 55, 67, 72, 321-399.

\textsuperscript{72} HACQUEBORD, 1988; IORDYSEN, 1994, pp. 67-70; SMITH, BARTHELMESS & REEVES, 2004, Table 2.

\textsuperscript{73} DU PASCQUIER, 2000, pp. 77-81; SMITH, BARTHELMESS & REEVES, 2004, p. 724.

\textsuperscript{74} NEGRI, 1700.

\textsuperscript{75} DAAD, 1887, pp. 149-153. The passage is misinterpreted by GJESSING, 1955, p. 26, as a description of Saami whaling methods.


\textsuperscript{77} Om Hvalfangst og Laxelver, vol. 2, 1701-1703, p. 637. The manuscript is preserved in the Finnmarksbibliotek, Vadsø, Norway. BARTHELMESS, 2003, p. 88.

\textsuperscript{78} SMITH, BARTHELMESS & REEVES, 2006, p. 724.

\textsuperscript{79} Biscayenne, petite Chaloupe des bâtiments qui vont à la Pesche de la Baleine. UNSAIN, 2008, p. 108.
FRANKFURT ETCHING OF THE CASTRO URDIALES RIGHT WHALES OF 27 NOVEMBER 1739

On 27 November 1739, a right whale cow and her calf were captured off the port of Castro Urdiales, 10 km west of the Basque country. This previously unrecorded catch may have been the last take of whales by that seaport, which had long been involved in the whale fishery. So far, only German-language sources about this whale catch have become known. But their detail and the fact that one report is accompanied by an etching, which betrays a hitherto unprecedented degree of realism, leave no doubt about its authenticity.

“Fair-relations” (Messrelationen in German) are an early German form of news magazine preceding regular newspapers. They appeared half-yearly, on the occasion of the spring and autumn fairs at Frankfurt and Leipzig. In the form of an almanac, i.e. a calendar with news digest, they assembled a worldwide range of newsworthy stories of interest to the merchants, traders and customers who congregated to do business at the spring and autumn fairs. A precursor, the Relatio historia, was published in Cologne since 1583. In 1591, a Frankfurt publisher commenced putting out the Relationis Historicae Semestrales Vernalis [or Autumnalis] Continuatio, which appeared twice a year until 1806. In Leipzig, semi-annual fair-relations were published between 1605 and 1730.

The Frankfurt fair-relation of spring 1740 ran the following news story in its section 12 with remarkable and curious news: “Every year whales are caught in the distant northern seas. But it is very uncommon that they venture into waters much warmer than those in the North. Yet, it has happened in November last, that a whale—together with its young one—appeared in the Biscayan Sea near Castro Urdiales. The inhabitants immediately gave chase in their vessels. They threw a harpoon into the body of the small one, thereby playing it in the water. This attracted its mother, which likewise was deeply wounded with three harpoons. The sea was much agitated by the movements of this monster, and tinged with blood a quarter of a mile around. Finally, after having smashed a vessel with twelve men to pieces with its tail, it was killed two miles off the local coast. 130 men busied themselves to bring these fish ashore. The tongue of the large fish is reported to have weighed 4,728 pounds, each of 17 ounces, the beard [baleen] 816 pounds, and the fat [blubber], which was more than half an ell thick, yielded 21,600 pounds of train-oil. The big one was estimated to weigh 150,000 pounds, the young one 18,000 pounds. The eyes of the mother were not larger than the eyes of a cow. The meat looked like dog meat, but tasted like beef, and was mostly pickled in salt brine by the common people.” In the autumn of the same year, the Hinkender Bote published in the Swiss town of Basle ran more or less the same story, but gave a more precise date, viz the 27 November 1739. The textual transmission alone suggests that there probably was a detailed report, perhaps an illustrated broadside, which was prepared by an eyewitness of the events described and was perused by several “media” of the time.

The Frankfurt fair-relation of spring 1740 also reproduced a most remarkable etching of the event (illus 16). Unfortunately, it is unsigned. As far as the whales are concerned, the realism of the wha-

80. OJEDA, 2006.
81. The first daily newspaper was published in Strasbour in 1605.
82. Relationis Historiae Semestrales Vernalis Continuatio, ... Frankfurth am Mayn, Bey den Engelschiden Erben, und auf dem grossen Messrelationen in German) are a early German form of news magazine preceding regular newspapers. They appeared half-yearly, on the occasion of the spring and autumn fairs at Frankfurt and Leipzig. In the form of an almanac, i.e. a calendar with news digest, they assembled a worldwide range of newsworthy stories of interest to the merchants, traders and customers who congregated to do business at the spring and autumn fairs. A precursor, the Relatio historia, was published in Cologne since 1583. In 1591, a Frankfurt publisher commenced putting out the Relationis Historicae Semestrales Vernalis [or Autumnalis] Continuatio, which appeared twice a year until 1806. In Leipzig, semi-annual fair-relations were published between 1605 and 1730.

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ling scene leaves little to be desired. The two whales have the right size in proportion to the boats. The animals have the proper “draught” with just some 10% of their body mass showing above the surface of the water. The contour of the visible portion with the arching head, distinct neck and curved, finless back is absolutely realistic for the species, as is the position of the paired blow of the large whale. Beyond any doubt, this pictorial representation was made by an eyewitness of the event. The German inscription on a banner draped in the sky reads: “Lucky whale fishery on the Biscayan coast in Spain”.

There are two inset images showing portraits of the two captured animals. They are the oldest realistic representations of right whales in print. Slight contortions of flippers and flukes can be explained by the artist trying to draw these appendages without properly understanding their anatomical function. The only detail thoroughly puzzling a modern viewer is the “dorsal fin” on both whales. Of course, right whales don’t have dorsal fins. Given, however, the overall realism of the depictions, it is possible that these appendages may in reality have been shreds of blubber partially peeled off and misunderstood by the anonymous artist.

**THE RE-USED BASLE WOODCUT ILLUSTRATING THE CASTRO URDIALES WHALES**

The news item of the Castro Urdiales whales of 27 November 1739 was also given in the Basle almanac *Hinkender Bote* for 1741 (published in 1740). The story is illustrated with a woodcut by monogrammist D.R. (David Redinger, 1698-1760; illus 17). It is a re-carved copy of a woodcut, which already appeared in the same almanac for 1722, illustrating a whale or shark caught off Naples, Italy, on 6 July 1721. Needless to say, the woodcut is not realistic at all. Only the size of the Great Fish on the beach – emphasized by a ladder and minute people standing nearby – and the tubular spout holes on its head identify it as a “water-blower”, i.e. a whale.

This woodcut is accompanied by the news version, which supplies the exact date of the catch, the 27 November 1739.

**THE 1753 BERNÉ WOODCUT ILLUSTRATING THE CASTRO URDIALES WHALE CATCH**

With even longer delay than their Basle competitor, the Berne *Hinkender Bote* for the year 1754 published (in 1753) a different woodcut accompanying the story of the whale catch off Castro Urdiales. Signed by monogrammist R. and covering three quarters of the page, it shows the whale after the Basle prototype of 1721, but with its tail fluke raised. Men have climbed on its back, some of them wielding axes. In the middle ground, there is a whaling scene, albeit somewhat blurred. In the top right corner of the woodcut, there is an insert – monogrammed FK – showing a sea monster with fore legs and a fishy tail moving ashore and scaring people.

The location of the catch is given here as “de Urnale”. In addition to these illustrated reports, the Castro Urdiales whales were also mentioned in other German-language “media” of the time.

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84. In hundreds of other etchings, the whales “bob” on the sea surface like polystyrene toys, so that the viewer can actually see something of them.
85. Der glückliche Walfisch- || fang an der Biscaïschen Küste || in Spanien. |||| der große alte Walfisch. |||| der Iunge Fisch.
86. There are three 17th-century drawings of right whales which betray realism to some degree, viz. the somewhat stylized watercolour sketch in the Icelandic manuscript of Jón Guðmundsson’s natural history of whales, ca. 1640-1644 (for a colour reproduction see HUXLEY, 1987, p. 311) and two sketches of the right whale that strayed into the Thames and was killed off Greenwich on 3 June 1658, which are found in the diaries of John Evelyn and Peter Mundy (reproduced in FAUST, BARTHELMESS & STOPP, 2002, p. 145).
87. See footnote 13.
88. pp. 46-47. The title translates as “Representation of the huge whale fish captured together with its young on the Biscayan coast at the end of this past winter month of 1739”. I thank Claudia Wehner Näff for first referring me to this almanac illustration. TSCHUI, 2006, illus. 13.
89. FAUST, BARTHELMESS & STOPP, 2002, pp. 266-267. The 1721 woodcut has a few morphological details “expurgated” for the 1740 version, such as an anus and a penis. In the later version, there also are fewer hatches in the sky and two instead of three sailing vessels on the horizon.
90. pp. 74-75. This print likewise was brought to my attention by Claudia Wehner Näff. TSCHUI, 2006.
91. Viz. the Zurich almanach Jährlicher Hauhalt for 1741, pp. 34-35; the Appenzeller Schreibkalender for 1741. There is also a brief note in the numismatic work by KUNTZMANN, 1742. All references were kindly supplied by Claudia Wehner Näff, of the Zurich research project on Swiss popular calendars.
THE RE-USED WOODCUT OF THE RIGHT WHALE TAKEN OFF FUENTERRABIA IN 1782

On 1 March 1782, a right whale—probably accompanied by a calf—stranded upon the sands off the French Basque seaport of Bidart. Before fishermen from Bidart and St. Jean de Luz were able to procure whaling equipment, the whale was re-floated by the tide and escaped. At the neighbouring Spanish Basque seaport of Fuenterrabia, however, an atalaya (lookout tower) was still manned. Alerted by the lookout, fishermen manned four chalupas and were equipped with harpoons, lines and other gear kept in storage for such occasions. On 2 March 1782, they managed to kill the large whale and tow it to Magdalena beach. The whale measured 60 feet in length and 35 feet in circumference. Its baleen was one and a half Paris ells long; ca. 180 cm. French authorities estimated the value of this whale to amount to 12,000 livres. A government official in Bordeaux, convinced that the whale would have been caught, if the French fishermen had had whaling equipment to hand, was planning to re-stock the marine depots at St. Jean de Luz and Bidart with gear for opportunistic whale hunts as in the old days. This is reported by a news piece from the Basle French-language almanac Nouvelliste François for the year 1783. It refers to information—perhaps conveyed by way of a broadside—received from Bordeaux, some 200 km northeast of Bidart.

The story is illustrated with a version of a woodcut, with which we are already familiar (illus 18). It is monogrammed D.R. and is a re-carved copy of the woodcut which already appeared in the Basle Hinkender Bote for 1722 and for 174192. It is interesting to note the differences between these woodcut versions. The 1721 version shows the whale with an anus opening, a penis and circles around the eye. In the 1782 version these details are carved out of the woodcut printing block. The proportional measurements of both woodblocks are also different94.

THE ETCHINGS IN DUHAMEL DU MONCEAU’S TRAÎTÉ, 1782

Between 1769 and 1782, the French scholar Henri-Louis Duhamel du Monceau (1700-1782) published the most substantial halieutic (fisheries-related) encyclopaedia of the age of enlightenment, the Traité général des pesches, in five volumes. Its last volume (1782) contains a 66-page chapter on “cetaceous fishes and amphibians”95 and 15 pertaining plates with 70 figures, etched by Marie-Cathérine and Elisabeth Haussard and Charles Milsan. The figures pertaining to whaling illustrate Basque, Dutch and perhaps colonial American whaling operations, but with few exceptions, the figures are not explicit as to showing either one. Plate III presents both Dutch and Basque whalers in their 18th-century attire. Plate VII, Figure 3 is a broadside view of a ship with an open section of the starboard hull side. It shows the upper deck, tween decks and hold. Set between fore and main mast, resting on the tween decks and rising slightly above the upper deck is the brick construction of a tryworks oven (illus 19). We know that the practise of trying-out whale blubber in tryworks on board ships was introduced by French Basque whalers in 163596 and practised still in the 18th century97. Dutch whalers from Rotterdam possibly experimented with on-board tryworks in 165898, but this was not widely adopted by the European Arctic whalers except the Basques. Although Duhamel does not explicitly say so, it is therefore safe to argue that this figure represents a Basque whalship. A few other whaling scenes in this important encyclopaedia may as well illustrate Basque whaling.

Between 1791 and 1795, the five-volume Diccionario histórico de los artes de la pesca nacional was published in Madrid in the print shop of Joaquin Ibarra’s widow. Its author was Antonio Sañez Reguart (dates unknown), a naval commissioner, promoter of Spanish fisheries, and a whaling entrepreneur himself.

Under the encyclopaedic entry “harpon” in volume III (1792), pages 330-453, Sañez provides some information on Spanish whaling activities, especially of the Real Compañía Marítima, of which Sañez was a founding member and shareholder99. This company was set up in 1789 and despatched
whaling ships until 1797. Until 1805, it also conducted shore whaling on the Isla Gorriti and fur sealing on the Isla de Lobos off the estuary of the Río de la Plata100. Pages 359-453 of the “harpon” entry, however, are a translation from Duhamel du Monceau, properly credited.

26 etched plates (Nos. 50-75) with 63 figures pertain to the whaling entry in the Diccionario. The artwork is unsigned, but the preparatory drawings were made by Madrid artist Juan Bautista Bru (1740-1799)101. The first six plates present technical motifs hitherto not recorded, but plates 56 to 75 are copies of figures in Duhamel du Monceau’s Traité. As Sañez Reguart’s plates are reproduced in several works on northern Spanish whaling102, and may thus easily be mistaken for being original pictorial documents of the Spanish whale fishery, which Duhamel certainly did not have in mind, a concordance of plates and figures in both works is supplied in the Table below.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

About one third of the two dozen images of Basque whaling catalogued here were produced at a period when this enterprise was already past its prime. The last prints illustrate what were some of the last catches of the once great Basque whale fishery. Nine of the early ones were created by French and Flemish artists and only two—the Zumarraga sketches—by a Spanish artist. The remainder are foreign depictions of Basque whaling. There are two reasons to assume that in the future more vernacular depictions of Basque whaling will come to light. One is the extensive heraldry of whaling in the French and Spanish Basque country (which was not discussed here). It seems unreasonable that a trade, which was important enough to be featured on the official seal of a municipality, was not also highlighted in other forms of decorative and applied arts. The second reason is the coverage of 18th-century Basque whaling in illustrated, ephemeral media abroad. More often than not, foreign media coverage was based on domestic coverage, usually a broadside or pamphlet produced locally. As these ephemeral prints, precursors of our newspapers, were often treated as newspapers are after use, ie being thrown away, they are exceedingly scarce today. But they were there, and the odd copy may have survived. It is hoped that this article as a first systematic catalogue of Basque whaling depictions may stimulate the search for more.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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**Concordance of Illustrations in Duhamel du Monceau, 1782, and Sañez Reguart, 1792**

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Note: In both works, the plates (planchas, láminas) have Roman numerals and the figures Arabic numerals. They are converted here into Arabic ones: 8-1 means plate VIII, figure 1.

100. DIAZ DE GUERRA, 2003.
102. CIRIQUIAN GAZTARRO, 1961; GONZALEZ ECHEGARAY, 1978; AZPIAZU, 2000. Sañez Reguart’s illustrations of Spanish fur sealing operations in Uruguay (vol. IV, 1793, plates 20-25), however, are of a substantially documentary and seemingly original character. They include the oldest depiction of a hakapik, the efficient sealing hook of North Atlantic sealers, pre-dating the images reproduced in BARTHELMES, 2003, p. 65. Amazingly, Sañez Reguart’s person, his role in the founding of the Real Compañía Marítima, his Diccionario and its remarkable sealing etchings have gone unnoticed in the book by DIAZ DE GUERRA, 2003.

Escena de caza de ballena cerca de Terranova y Labrador. Detalle del mapamundi manuscrito de Pierre Desceliers, 1546. Facsímil francés de mediados del siglo XIX. Archivo Nacional de Canadá.

2. Whaling scene, anonymous ink sketch in the margin of the baptismal register of the parish of Zumarraga, 1526. Archivo Diocesano de San Sebastián.

Escena de caza de ballena. Dibujo anónimo a tinta en el margen del libro de bautizados de Zumarraga del año 1526. Archivo Diocesano de San Sebastián.

3. Another whaling scene, anonymous ink sketch on a page of the baptismal register of the parish of Zumarraga, 1526. Archivo Diocesano de San Sebastián.

Escena de caza de ballena. Dibujo anónimo a tinta en una página del libro de bautizados de Zumarraga del año 1526. Archivo Diocesano de San Sebastián.

4. Antoine Caron, ink drawing, ca. 1573, of the mock whaling scene staged during the water festival of Bayonne in 1565. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

Antoine Caron, dibujo a tinta, c. 1573. Escena de caza de ballena simulada, presentada durante el festival del agua de Bayona en 1565. Biblioteca Pierpont Morgan, Nueva York.

5. Brussels (?) tapestry, second half 16th century, presumably showing a whale-flensing scene from the 1565 Bayonne water festival (detail). Marineland Antibes, Collection Roland de la Poype.

Tapiz de Bruselas (?), segunda mitad del siglo XVI. Escena de despiece de ballena relacionada presumiblemente con las representaciones del festival del agua de Bayona de 1565 (detalle). Marineland Antibes, Colección Roland de la Poype.
6. Despiece de una ballena. Xilográfía anónima de las ediciones de Paré publicadas en París, por André W echel en 1573 y por Gabriel Buon en 1575.


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