PILOT WHALING IN THE FAROE ISLANDS

To the memory of my father
Peter Ole Joensen 1907-1957.

Jóan Pauli Joensen

Pilot Whaling
in the Faroe Islands

History - Ethnography - Symbol

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S. Joensen-Mikines Grindedrab 1959, oil painting, 37 x 46 cm.
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Pilot whales in open sea Faroe Islands
Photo Bjarni Mikkelsen,Tórshavn.

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Preface

The origins of this book lie back in 1969, when I wrote a major paper on pilot whaling in the Faroe Islands in connection with a subsidiary subject in Ethnography at the University of Aarhus. Since then I have occasionally returned to this subject and published several papers on pilot whaling, some of which have been presented at seminars and conferences.

During the early 1990s I was involved in two projects one entitled *North Atlantic Fishing and Whaling Culture – a Project about Marginality and Identity*, from which this is the first publication, and another entitled *Hunting and Marine Mammals: Cultural Aspects of Resource Management in the Circumpolar Regions*, from which I drew great benefit (Kalland and Sejersen 2005).

My work on pilot whaling then remained untouched for a few years, before resuming again in 1998 as part of a project entitled *The Faroe Islands: Tradition and Modernity. A Holistic Analysis of Socio-cultural Development on the Faroe Islands*. This research project was funded by the Danish Research Council for the Humanities, and takes the form of a collaboration between the National Museum of the Faroe Islands and the Faculty of History and Social Sciences at the University of the Faroe Islands.

Among other things, this project also provided the impetus to resume my research into pilot whaling on the Faroe Islands, which has been conducted in piecemeal fashion over a period of more than 30 years and is now finally complete and in print. This task should have been completed many

years ago, so it is a liberating feeling now at last to see this book in print. It is the irony of the fate that this happens at the same time as the medical authorities in The Faroe Islands recommend pilot whale no longer be used for human consumption because of the pollution of the sea. I would like to thank the sponsors and everyone who has helped me in one way or another during these years. I would like in particular to thank those who have assisted me in translating and revising a manuscript comprising a number of different languages to create a coherent English text from it.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my father, whom I lost when I was 11 years old. He could have taught me much about folk culture, including pilot whaling, if only he had lived longer.

Jóan Pauli Joensen

Butchering the whale. Miðvágur about 1955.

Chapter 1:

Food, Sources and Research

The daily bread: food

One day about 15 years ago, a not insignificant blow was dealt to the author's self esteem when he was admonished by his wife for not doing enough to bring whale meat into the house. "You never go to the *grind*," sounded like more than a light admonishment. Backed into a corner, the author tried to refute this attack, mentioning the times when he had actu-

Queue of people waiting for their share of the whale catch in Tórshavn 2007.

ally been to the *grind*. "That was years ago," replied his wife sharply. The two daughters of the house, overhearing the conversation, agreed with their mother. From their time perspective they could not recall their father ever having been to the *grind* at all.

It should be added that the family in question lives in Tórshavn, capital of the Faroe Islands, where the population has for many years now been too large for any distribution of whale meat and blubber to be feasible. At that time in Tórshavn only those who were directly involved in a whale hunt were entitled to a share of the catch. The situation was different out in the villages, where the traditional distribution system remained intact. A new feature is that the municipal authorities in Tórshavn have now decided to offer anyone who wishes it the opportunity to sign up to a pilot whale roll. They are now entitled to a share of any pilot whales that are allocated to Tórshavn, in order of priority.

What the episode of family life described above explains is the fact that the whale hunt continues to be an integral part of Faroese daily life, where whale meat is a part of the diet along with many other food items, and also that modern Faroese society contains remnants of the hunter mentality, which places demands on the man of the house to behave in a particular way. He is expected to continuously obtain supplies for the home, to possess the skills required to leap into action as soon as he gets a scent of the hunt and to display the necessary interest in the situation in question. This can be illustrated by another episode.

Late one evening, also some 15 years ago, the author's wife was phoned by a friend who lives in Tórshavn, but who that evening was visiting her home village. On that particular evening a large volume of pollock had been caught in the village. If she was interested in buying some large, good-quality pollock from a local fisherman, she and her husband could bring them back to Tórshavn. The lure of the catch was enough. More than 100 large pollock were bought and arrived in Tórshavn a few hours later in two tubs. They were transported in a large estate car. There were other tubs in the car. There was a general impression that the friend's husband somehow felt that he was causing me a not inconsiderable inconvenience with all of these pollock. He works with spiritual, artistic matters; very much a man of the town, albeit one who down the years, through his contact with his wife's home village, has acquired an insight into and an understanding of the demands placed on a Faroese man in such a situation. "It's my wife, she always gets so worked up whenever anything's caught," he said, distancing himself slightly from it all, as we carried the tubs into the garage. It was af-

ter midnight, and I had sat up waiting for the delivery. Nothing more happened that evening, but I took the following morning off so that I could take care of the pollock and get it into the freezer and the storehouse.

Mayor Heðin Mortensen distributes "grind" to the people. Tórshavn 2007.

The primary purpose of all hunting, fishing and agriculture is to obtain food and supplies. I would therefore like to start with the basic concept of the pilot whale as a part of the daily bread on the Faroe Islands. But before we go any further, a few linguistic terms should be explained.

The expression "ein grind" in Faroese means a school of pilot or "grind" whales, and the plural form, "grindir", means several schools of pilot whales. "At fara í grind" (lit. go to the *grind*) means to set out for a pilot whale hunt. "Í grind" (lit: in *grind*) means hunting pilot whales. "Grind" is also the name of a meal of "tvøst og spik", i. e. the lean pilot whale meat and the blubber, but it is also used for the lean meat alone as a synonym to "tvøst" (Jacobsen and Matras 1963, Young and Clewer 1985)[1]. So you can see a *grind* in the sea, you can look at a *grindadráp* (pilot whale kill), you can assess *grind*, you can distribute *grind*, you can have *grind* for dinner and you can order a *grindabúff* (*grind* steak) in some restaurants.

According to various calculations, pilot whale meat and blubber make

1 A discussion on the derivation of Faroese *grind* is in Sanderson 1992:107 and in Sanderson 1995. Rasmussen 2004, 39.

Whale meat hanging out to dry outside a home.

up about half of domestic Faroese meat production and 20-30% of the country's total meat consumption. As well as providing a valuable, per se healthy nutrition, which is essential to the Faroese, the meat and blubber is also of major economic importance to the country[2]. So it was until 1977 when investigations into pilot whale meat and blubber revealed that the pilot whale contains heavy metals and other toxins, which meant that the Faroese Food and Environmental Institute recommended limited consumption of whale meat and blubber.

The hunt mentality and the interest in procuring supplies also means that in their homes people have facilities for storing larger amounts of food that are acquired through self-sufficiency. Most houses have an outdoor store known as a *hjallur*. The outside of the store is fitted with slats, enabling the wind to blow into the room, which is therefore cool and airy (Stoklund 1963 and 1996)[3]. In modern building design the *hjallur* can be built as an integral part of the home. Often with direct access from the pantry.

Here foodstuffs such as meat, fish and pilot whale meat can be left to undergo the maturation process that creates flavour, which down the centuries people have become used to and have learnt to value. Anything that has to mature and dry is hung up, while some is now stored while fresh in the freezer down in the cellar. It was not until the late 1950s that some households had the facility to freeze items. This opportunity became avail-

2 Joensen 1982: 153 In 1850 every inhabitant of the Faroe Islands could eat around 56 kg of blubber and whale meat a year, equivalent to the volume of meat provided by 3-4 sheep or lambs. The availability of pilot whale meat varied, so the figure was less in some years – in 1921 by 11. 3 kg for the year. See also Jákupsson 1986, 2.

3 See also Bloch and Hanusardóttir 1993.

able with the expansion of electricity supplies on the Faroe Islands in the years 1953-62[4]. At least one freezer is now standard in Faroese homes.

Freezers gave the population a modern storage facility to supplement the traditional *hjallur* or drying house. The norm of self-sufficiency still prevails to a very large extent. This holds true in particular outside the capital. Perhaps it is this same old norm, adapted to urban society, that becomes evident when supermarkets have special offers. Here too the scent of the hunt comes into play. It is not only on the Faroe Islands that they have bought freezers in order to be ready to take advantage of a good offer, whether it be half a pig, elk meat or something else. Perhaps many of our other Nordic neighbours have not moved so far away from the self-sufficiency economy. See whether they have freezers! It is partly against this background that we must understand the importance of pilot whaling on the Faroe Islands.

In practice there have not been any major, fundamental changes to the way in which whale meat and blubber are prepared. Now as then, some of the meat and blubber is eaten when fresh, but now as then most is preserved. Even if electricity has made it possible for every family to invest in a large freezer, the methods of preservation used remain by and large the old, traditional methods of drying in the air and salting. Both methods have long been used, although a shortage of salt in older times meant that people could only afford to salt limited amounts. The description provided by the priest Lucas Debes in 1673 explains that as a rule they only salted the blubber:

> "Some people salted using black salt… They prepared this black salt with seaweed, which they dried and burned to create ash. This ash was then used to salt the meat, which keeps well when hung out to dry and has the black appearance of smoked pork, but before then is as pale as normal pork, so that if you did not know what it was you could not tell it apart from other pork. . ." (Debes 1673, 160)

Debes was writing for a Danish readership, who were familiar with pork.

4 The first private facilities for freezing food started outside the home. In most of the larger villages there were fish merchants who had built premises for freezing. They hired out some of their overcapacity to the population, had boxes of various sizes made out of wood and steel netting, and these could be hired to the local population at various prices. Each individual box could be fitted with a padlock to prevent others from gaining access to it. The refrigerated warehouse was almost always located by the harbour. These boxes were used to store frozen lamb, whale meat, fish and other foods. After a few years this arrangement was replaced by the use of freezers in private homes. See also Joensen 2006.

He also explains that "They also use some of it as fat or grease, which they usually add to food…" Debes goes on to explain: "The meat, when fresh, is cooked and eaten, and when freshly cooked it looks and smells like beef. " Describing methods of preservation, he states that they hang the meat "outside in long strips, hanging it up to dry in the air, and then eat it like any other cured meat." (Debes (1673, 161).

Just over one hundred years later Svabo, a Faroese scholar with an interest in natural and cultural history, explains that

> "In the same way as you cut or divide a sheep into 20 and a halibut into 20 pieces, a pilot whale is divided into sixteen. The blubber is used to make whale-oil; some of this is salted and eaten with fish and bread. Some of the meat is eaten fresh, some is cut into strips and dried. Its flavour resembles that of beef. The blubbery gristle on the tail is known as *sigg* and is eaten with relish by the inhabitants. . . They also eat the heart and the kidney." (Svabo 1779, 51).

But this same Svabo, who also mentions a kind of soup to which Debes also refers above – *sniksúpan* – mentions in 1781 that this is "now used rarely or never", which we would not find difficult to understand nowadays, as most Faroese people would now find the oily flavour unpleasant (Svabo 1959, 118).

In the 17th century they also displayed a certain degree of creativity in the use of whale meat: "Foreigners came along and pickled some of the tail, which tastes just like pickled ox feet," says Debes (1673, 161). The creativity still displayed by many food-lovers today in the use of such items as the pilot whale's tongue, liver and heart has historical origins.

These are the words of the American traveller Elisabeth Taylor, who was on the Faroe Islands around the year 1900, when she was weary of whales, which were boiled, fried, and minced. She also had the liver, heart, brains, and kidneys of young whale for dinner; "and best of all, head fin boiled, cut in thin slices when cold, and eaten with thin slices of bread. It has a firm white substance and a pleasant nutty flavour. " (Taylor 1997, 182)

Despite some culinary experimentation, both old and modern, the preparation of meat and blubber continues to be largely the same as we see in the preparation of traditional home cooking.

Preservation of food today takes place in the same way as described by Lucas Debes (1673): by hanging it out to dry, usually after first having soaked it in water with added salt. During drying the meat undergoes cer-

Brine-salted blubber.

tain enzymatic processes, which affect the flavour. The same holds true for fish and lamb. In organoleptic terms the stages leading to the production of air-dried meat can be broken down into the following phases: *fekst*, *visnað*, *ræst* and *turt* [fresh, well hung, fermented and dried]. Only in the final, dried stage can the meat be eaten uncooked. Meat that is preserved by salting is always eaten cooked, after first having been soaked in water. Freezers now make it possible to preserve meat at the flavour and stage of maturation that you prefer. On the island of Suðuroy they achieve a very high standard in the quality of dried pilot whale meat. What they produce is of excellent quality. There is thus a clear link between the fact that on Suðuroy they traditionally have avoided stabbing the whales in the actual body during the hunt and their desire for high quality in their whale meat and blubber.

Blubber, which is not particularly suited to being frozen for longer periods of time, is only preserved by salting. There are two salting methods in use. The first is dry salting, i. e. the pieces of blubber are laid in layers with salt between each layer, after which the whole batch is covered with salt. The second method involves the use of brine. This method requires watertight barrels or containers of an equivalent quality. In both cases the flavour is salty, although dry-salted blubber achieves a drier consistency than it does when salted in brine. The blubber can be cooked, but many prefer to eat it straight out of the barrel. One option is *dry blubber* – salted

blubber that is packaged in a strong paper parcel and then hung up to dry indoors. This assumes a more glazed character when it is cut up.

Pilot whale meat and blubber are traditional everyday food that is eaten cooked, accompanied by cooked blubber and potatoes. Dried whale meat can be eaten for dinner with potatoes, and may also be eaten at other meals, often with cold potatoes. When the fishing boats could not put to sea due to the weather "we could eat whale meat for dinner every day for days on end, not because we liked it, and I thought it was awful to serve up the same thing day after day. Whale meat was often what we had most of," says a housewife of the situation in the 1950s. (Joensen 1982, 160)

Whale meat used to be even more important as a food. In 1928 the county medical officer said that "it cannot be emphasised enough how important this is for the population, for whom this meat, be it fresh, dried or salted, is virtually their only source of meat." (Joensen 1985, 142).

A teacher from the village of Tvøroyri recounts the situation in the 1930s, when the sudden abundance of food after a whale hunt could have a euphoric effect on the children, because "When. . . the children had eaten whale meat and blubber for lunch they had healthy, red cheeks, and they would slump down and fall asleep when they came back to school after lunch, because they'd really eaten their fill." (Joensen 1985, 179).

As already described by Lucas Debes (1673, 161, 243 ff), blubber was used in combination with other food, e. g. as an accompaniment to dried or cooked "*ræst*" fish or on its own with a piece of bread. The consumption and serving of food follow more or less the same principles that we can find in a language, where there are specific rules that define how the various elements in the language may be combined (Andersson 1980).

People on the Faroe Islands have always differentiated between everyday food and Sunday food. Pilot whale meat and blubber were not eaten on Sundays or special occasions, unless they were prepared for dishes in which the whale meat was used as a substitute for something else. Now as before, it is thus possible to grill whale meat like a steak and serve it with gravy, to mince it and use it to make rissoles or to roast a large piece of meat in the oven. In the past, before the advent of freezers, salted whale meat that had been soaked in water could be served with gravy as a Sunday meal in the absence of anything better. A brown gravy turned the whale meat into a Sunday meal.

There are chefs on the Faroe Islands who are able to use pilot whale meat in more advanced cuisine, in which whale meat is served together with other traditional food, e. g. seabirds, to produce less traditional, crea-

Grindabúffur

4 fólk

1 kg av tvøsti
1 tesk. av salti
½ tesk. av pipari
2 leykir
margarin
bótarmolar

Orkuinnihald við sós		7.102 Kj
E. 62%	F. 24%	K. 14%

Set tvøstið á blot í 1 l av vatni og 2 dl av ediki kvøldið fyri. Síðani verður tað turkað og skorið í flísar, bankað og lagt á pannuna at brúnka í margarini.

Salt og pipar verður stroytt niðuryvir.

Tá ið tvøstið er brúnkað, verður leykurin flustur, skorin í flísar og brúnkaður á pannuni.

Síðani verður alt koyrt í eina grýtu í so mikið av vatni, at tað stendur undir, at kóka í 45-60 min.

Tá ið kókað er, verður smakkað til við bótarmolum og javningur av hveitimjøli, sí bls. 132, gjørdur útá, til sósin er passaliga tjúkk; lita hana við soyu.

Hav kókað epli og reyðkál afturvið.

Steikt grindatvøst

4 fólk

2 dl av ediki
1 l av vatni
1 kg av tvøsti
2 leykir
2 tesk. av salti
1 tesk. av pipari
50 g av margarini
½-1 l av kókaðum vatni
bótarmolar

Orkuinnihald við sós		7.102 Kj
E. 62%	F. 24%	K. 14%

Eitt stykki av góðum tvøsti, uml. 1 kg, verður sett á vatn og edik kvøldið fyri, sum tað skal brúkast.

Eitt eldfast fat ella skuffa verður smurt við matolju ella margarini.

Turka tvøstið væl við einum reinum viskustykki.

Stroy síðani saltið og piparið á tvøstið og legg tað í fatið ella skuffuna.

Hita ovnin til 180° og set tvøstið niðarlaga í ovninum at steikja í 1½ tíma.

Leykurin verður flustur og skorin í flísar, margarinið verður koyrt á pannuna, og tá ið tað er heitt, verður leykurin brúnkaður í feittinum, men ikki ov nógv.

Tá ið tvøstið hevur staðið ½ tíma í ovninum, verður helvtin av leykinum stoyttur niðuryvir.

Koyr eisini ½-1 l av kókaðum vatni í skuffuna.

Undir steikingini tekur tú av og á við eini súpiskeið av soðnum í skuffuni og stoytir út yvir tvøstið.

Tá ið tað er steikt, verður tvøstið skorið í flísar og tað, ið eftir er av leykinum, stroyt oman yvir tær.

Sós

Síla vætuna í eina grýtu, og er tað ov lítið, verður kókað vatn koyrt afturat.

Smakka soðið til við bótarmolum, salti og pipari, og gr ein javning av hveitimjøli, sí bls. 132, útá, til sósin er passaliga tjúkk.

Lita við soyu.

Hav epli og súltutoy aftur við.

Kókað fesk grind

4 fólk

1 kg av tvøsti
3 súpisk. av grovum salti
200 g av spiki
1 kg av eplum

Orkuinnihald við eplum og spiki		12.957 K
E. 36%	F. 42%	K. 22%

Tvøstið verður skorið í passalig stykki og koyrt í eina grýtu í so mikið av køldum vatni, at tvøstið stendur undir.

Tá ið kókar, verður løgurin stoyttur av og nýtt kalt vatn koyrt í.

Síðan verður aftur sett at kóka, og tá ið kókar, verður móðað omanav og saltið koyrt í.

Sker spikið í smá stykki og vaska eplini væl.

Tá ið tvøstið hevur kókað í 1½ tíma, verða spikið og eplini koyrd í grýtuna at kóka saman við tvøstinum í 30 min.

Whale meat, boiled potatoes boiled blubber, mustard. Variations of whale steaks with sauce and mashed potatoes. Recipes in Faroese from the Cookery Book "Góðaráð" 2005.

Blubber, dried fish and potatoes. From the buffet, Hotel Føroyar.

tive dishes. Whale steak can often be found in various guises on the menu in several restaurants in Tórshavn during the summer, and whale meat has also found its way into recent Faroese cookery books. These contain detailed guidelines on both how to handle and prepare whale meat and blubber using the traditional methods of preservation and how to prepare dishes in traditional and modern ways. They also contain information on how the liver, kidneys and heart can be used in food preparation, e. g. the liver can be used to make liver pâté. Other recipes include casseroles, roasts, steaks, rissoles, etc. , using whale meat as the ingredient. [5]

Being able to serve good dried "tvøst" – dried whale meat – brings with it a degree of prestige The meat should be cut to the right thickness, about the same as a grown man's arm. The length should be approx. 40 cm and the surface must be smooth. The meat must be treated by means of the pieces being "milked" at regular intervals, by being held from above and squeezed with the hands until it ultimately becomes completely smooth. Once it is in this state it can be left to dry in peace. The smoothness of the meat also makes it impossible for flies to lay their eggs in the meat.

The general practice of serving dried whale meat and blubber as snacks

5 Skaale and Johannesen 1976, 80, Henriksen 1987, 76, Thomsen et al 2001, 22, 142.

Dried whale meat, dried fish and blubber. Hanging: dried mutton or "skerpikjøt". From the buffet, Hotel Føroyar.

or in connection with buffets, in which dried whale meat, dried fish and dried or salted blubber, boiled sheep's heads, air-dried mutton, etc. are served alongside more international dishes, has in recent times become very common at the major hotels in Tórshavn[6].

The Snake in the Grass

However, in 1977 a snake appeared in the grass of this special Faroese culinary paradise. Due to their position at the top of the marine food chain, pilot whales have been shown to accumulate high levels of contaminants and since the late 1970s the Faroese Food and Environmental Agency has advised against the consumption of pilot whale liver and kidney due to high mercury concentrations in these organs. In 1998 revised dietary recommendations for maximum levels of consumption of meat and blubber were issued, based on more recent research into the health effects of pilot whale meat and blubber in the diet. [7]

On 26. November 2008 the Chief Medical Officer of the Faroes issued dramatic public Recommendation on the discontinuation of the use of pilot whale meat for human consumption, which will perhaps mark the beginning of the end of the pilot whaling in the Faroes.

6 In his Master's thesis in Ethnography Bent Pedersen (1994, 27) quantified the use of whale meat and blubber as food. His quantitative data confirms what is described here on the basis of a long-standing familiarity with Faroese food culture.

7 Weihe 2007, 61ff. http://www. whaling. fo/whalesthemarine. htm: The seas around the Faroes are among the cleanest in the world. The pollutants in pilot whales are transported over long distances and accumulate up through the marine food chain to toothed whales such as pilot whales. These contaminants derive mainly from heavy industry and industrialised agricultural processes in large urbanised countries far from the waters around the Faroes. This is a matter of considerable concern to the Faroese, who are so dependent on the sea and its resources for their livelihood.

The elimination of these pollutants at their source should be the real focus of concerted action today by governments, industries and serious environmental organisations everywhere.

"The Faroese people have killed pilot whales for centuries, and the pilot whale as in many ways been an important element of Faroese life, both as food and as a cultural icon.

There have been many accounts of the significance of the pilot whale for those of us who live here on the Faroes. In the years when no pilot whales were killed this was reflected in the household, and there was great joy when this gift from God once more appeared from the sea. There is no doubt that this source of food, which is nourishing in many ways, has contributed towards good health and kept hunger at bay.

As recently as in the 1970s school doctors wrote in prescriptions sent home to parents that they should give their children blubber to eat in the morning.

But in 1977 the first research was conducted into pilot whale meat, blubber, liver and kidneys. This research was conducted to find out whether the mercury content in pilot whales was high, because these whales are high in the marine food chain, and because other research had shown that mercury increased in marine species up through the food chain, in which the toothed whales are at the highest level. The results of this research were alarming. The research revealed that the mercury content in the actual meat was high, and was about 100 times higher in the liver in and kidney than in the meat.

As a consequence of this the health authorities decided to recommend that people only consume pilot whale meat and blubber once a week and should not eat the liver and kidneys at all.

These recommendations have since been tightened as a result of new knowledge about adverse health effects in humans, and the latest recommendation, from 1998, is as follows:

Blubber. A high content of PCBs in the blubber leads us to recommend that adults eat pilot whale meat and blubber as part of their meal no more than once or twice a month.

However, the best way to protect foetuses against the harmful effects of PCBs is for girls and women to refrain from eating any blubber until they have given birth.

Whale meat. The mercury content of pilot whale meat is high and is one of our main sources of mercury. We therefore recommend that adults eat no more than one or two such meals a month.

Women who intend to become pregnant within three months, pregnant

women and women who are nursing an infant should abstain from eating pilot whale meat.

Offal. Pilot whale liver and kidneys should not be eaten at all.

It was added that if new information emerged that leads to a change in our current knowledge, consideration would then be given to the extent to which these recommendations should be adjusted.

In the last ten years there have been several scientific studies that have revealed an even gloomier picture of the adverse health effects caused by contaminants in pilot whale meat and blubber.

The results so far have shown that:

1. Mercury from pilot whale meat has an adverse effect on the foetal development of the nervous system
2. The mercury effect still persists during adolescence
3. Mercury from the maternal diet affects the blood pressure of children
4. The contaminants in the blubber have an adverse effect on the immune system such that children respond poorly to immunisation

The latest studies show that

1. Contaminants in pilot whales appear to increase the risk of developing Parkinson's disease in those who often eat pilot whale
2. The risk of hypertension and arteriosclerosis of the carotid arteries is increased in people who have increased exposure to mercury

Studies are currently under way to examine the fertility of the population, as there is some suspicion that reproductive functions may be decreased because of contaminants in pilot whale meat and blubber.

These observations should be considered in a global perspective."

After a technical description of the concentration of mercury, PCBs and other environmental toxicants the Chief Medical Officer concludes:

"It can therefore be concluded that pilot whales today contain contaminants to such a degree that neither meat nor blubber would comply with current limits for acceptable concentrations of toxic contaminants.

The Faroese body burden of pollutants is also high seen in an international perspective. However, the most recent studies have shown that pregnant women are eating much less pilot whale meat and blubber than in the past. This change has resulted in a decrease in the mercury concentration in the blood of pregnant women, although the level of PCBs remains unchanged, probably because PCBs degrade only slowly.

We in the Faroes bear little responsibility with regard to marine pollution, which has been inflicted upon us from outside. That research in the Faroes has contributed to the current focus on contamination is a bitter irony. But these results have already led to tightened restrictions on pollution worldwide. We must therefore also acknowledge the consequences here in the Faroes.

In recent years the growing body of scientific documentation has given rise to anticipation that the time was approaching when it would be appropriate to recommend against any human consumption of pilot whale meat and blubber.

From the latest research results, the undersigned consider that the conclusion from a human health perspective must now be as follows: **It is recommended that pilot whale no longer be used for human consumption**."

The Chief Medical Officer ends his recommendation with the following words:

"It is with great regret that this recommendation is issued. The pilot whale has served the Faroese well for many hundreds of years, and it is likely that it has kept many Faroese people alive down through the centuries. But the times and the environment are changing, and we therefore believe that this recommendation is necessary from a human health perspective."[8]

The daily bread: non-food.

In the past the blubber that was not used for food was used to produce whale-oil. The blubber from the whale's head was cut away in pieces and melted down in an oil pot to produce whale-oil. The oil used to be used in oil lamps. The production of oil could take on a makeshift character, as revealed in a description from the village of Miðvágur from the end of the 19th century, telling how they used small boats known as "fýramannafar" – four-man

Old woman melting down pilot whale blubber to make whale oil. Miðvágur about 1920.

8 Landslæknin. Journal bulletin 26 Nov. 2008. See enclosed document.

boats – and put the blubber into them. The raw oil could then be tapped through the boat's plug tap. The actual melting process could take place in barns or corn drying houses outside the home (Rasmussen 1985, 192). The oil used to be of great financial importance to landowners, as long as they received a relatively large share of the catch, but in recent times oil has not been produced from pilot whales. Other forms of energy have taken over, although during the First World War whale-oil once more became important as fuel in special oil lamps (Joensen 1982, 192). [9]

The main significance of the whales is as a source of food and oil, although parts of the pilot whale could also be used as tools and rope, as described by Svabo in 1779:

> "Strips are cut from the edge of the dorsal fin and the sides of the tail, as thick as a finger, and these are used as cord to secure the oar to the tholepin." (Svabo 1779, 51).

You could also use the skin from the whale's front flipper as grummets, which were used to secure the oar to the tholepin (Svabo 1959, 80). In 1567 Absalon Pedersøn Beyer recounts that on the Faroe Islands they used the outer black layer of skin from pilot whales, "hvølja", as "bjargalínur", i. e. strong ropes to secure themselves when climbing down the bird cliffs (Svabo 1959, 93). There are also many examples of the pilot whale's shoulder blade being used as a shovel, for such purposes as clearing away cow dung. [10]

The strong sinews were ideal as sewing thread, as Svabo (1959, 80) says, "The sinews from the tail are used to stitch shoes and hides." But it was not until much later that people started to use pilot whale teeth in jewellery. Children also used parts of the pilot whale as toys, as mentioned in a poem about children's toys in the old days on the Faroe Islands: "Whale backbones were horses, discs from the whale's backbone were spinners" (Johannesen 1979, 126). Children pretended that the vertebrae were horses, and they used the discs from the whale's vertebra to make spinning toys.

Svabo (1959, 80) recounts in 1781 that "The bone from the head is

9 There was a similar situation with catches of porpoises at Middelfart in Denmark: "For a short period during the war, when there was a shortage of fuel oils, porpoises were once more caught in Middelfart, although there was no cause to continue with this activity when conditions had returned to normal." (Strubberg 1936, 426)

10 There are some pilot whale shovels at the National Museum of the Faroe Islands.

Pilot whale skulls used as the foundation beneath a fence. About 1900.

used as fencing". Old photographs also reveal that later on whale skulls were stacked up instead of stones to create barriers.

In 1781 Svabo (1959, 17) also recounts that people used to use the whale's oesophagus to make shoes. The whale's stomach was also inflated, dried and used to store whale-oil. From the mid-19th century, when long-line fishing started in the waters around the Faroe Islands, whale stomachs that had been dried and preserved in tar were used as floats or buoys. A tarred whale stomach with a wooden dowel at the entrance to the stomach was known as a *kíkur*. When long-line fishing was at its height, whale stomachs were much in demand. In the absence of anything else, people also used cats, calves or even dogs as floats. The animal would be "flett í bjólg", i. e. the animal's hide would be removed in its entirety and turned inside out[11]. These home-made buoys and floats were later replaced by industrially manufactured alternatives.

11 In his memoirs, Sámal Johansen (1970) provides a very detailed description of how a *kíkur* was made: "Making a kíkur was not a particularly pleasant job. First of all they were laid out to ferment, and then they were cleaned on the outside, scrubbed and rubbed with hay. The intestine was attached to the *kíkur*, but before turning it inside out they trimmed the intestine so that only a hand span was left in the *kíkur*. The *kíkur* was then turned inside out, and the part that was now facing outwards was cleaned. They then placed four pins, some used two, through the stump of the intestine that was inserted into the *kíkur*, but usually they inserted a temporary straw to inflate the *kíkur*. The person who inflated the *kíkur* should not have a weak heart. The *kíkur* was hung until it was dry, the straw was removed and tar was poured into it. They took great care to ensure that the tar covered everywhere inside the *kíkur*. Once this had been done the straw was inserted once more. They nailed it to the float and wound strong cord around it. A hole was drilled through the straw, through which the *kíkur* was inflated. The person who inflated a large pilot whale *kíkur* had to have strong lungs. When the man blew into the *kíkur,* he placed his tongue into the hole every time he inhaled, and when the *kíkur* was hard enough a wooden tap was inserted. Some air would almost always escape from the *kíkur,* so it had to be inflated every time it was used."

The observations of the British anthropologist Annandale (1905, 44) in 1905 provide an excellent summary of the way the pilot whale was used:

> that even if the call to the whale hunt could ring out "again and again", it was nevertheless "not more often than is its due; for the whale not only supplies the Faroeman, his dog, and even his cow, with a large proportion of their winter food, but it also provides him with fuel, with oil for his lamp, with floats for his nets, with toys for his children, with string (the sinews), and with other useful articles. More than this, *whaling is the national sport of the islands.* "

Whether or not it was sport in the currently accepted sense of the word we will not deal with at this point, but it is beyond any doubt that the whale hunt provided not only food, but also excitement, drama and the opportunity for people to gather in an otherwise humdrum existence.

Objective, research and sources

As recently as in 1970 and in 1976 it was legitimate to perceive the pilot whale hunt as an exotic feature of Faroese folk culture, with no hint of the hot potato that the whale hunt was subsequently to become from a global perspective (Bradford 1970, 412pp, Joensen 1976). While authors of travel journals and journalists visiting the Faroe Islands might have found whale hunting extremely fascinating in the past, there was not any real confrontation between differing perceptions of nature and the environment until around 25-35 years ago. It was in 1977 that a major media event featuring Brigitte Bardot and a seal pup, photographed in a studio, grabbed the world's attention (Lynge 1990, 21). On that occasion all the eyes of the world were directed at the seal, but soon after that it was the whale's turn, in this case the pilot whale's turn. [12]

By putting the focus on such a special phenomenon as whale hunting in the Faroe Islands we can put the spotlight on a range of issues. The first is to highlight the whale hunt as an element of the traditional Faroese economy, as one aspect of a traditional economy of self-sufficiency. We will deal with the history, the organisational and technical aspects of the hunt and the uses to which the Faroese put the pilot whale itself. We will try to shed light on the development of the pilot whale hunt into a social and cultural institution. We could also call this an investigation into the development of

12 "Unveiling the Whale: Discourses on Whales and Whaling" is the title of a new book where several aspects of opinions about whales and whaling are thoroughly discussed. (Kalland 2009, in print).

"Kíkar". Floats or buoys made of whale stomack Føroya Fornminnissavn.

the institution[13] of Faroese pilot whaling. We will investigate this institution's development and integration into Faroese daily culture, Faroese traditional society[14] and how it develops an element of the everyday identity of the Faroese people.

The next problem is to investigate how the pilot whale and the pilot whale hunt came to be an instrument or a symbol in the creation of a greater, national cultural, Faroese identity from around the mid-19th century and during the course of the 20th century. Once they had become a part of the Faroese public profile, pilot whales and motifs from the pilot whale hunt were launched as something very particularly Faroese. I investigated this question in a piece of work in 1991 (Joensen 1991). The Danish

13 An institution consists of a relatively permanent cluster of social conventions. It is a more or less composite, ordered pattern of behaviour which serves to strengthen the social control and to satisfy important social needs (Gjessing 1963, 53).

14 In addition to the oldest topographical literature - Tarnovius, Debes, Svabo, and Landt - there is also some information of a more episodic nature in the Faroese local histories: Poulsen 1947, Rasmussen 1949, Petersen 1963, á Ryggi 1965, Petersen 1963, Johansen 1970 among others. We also find mentions of the whale hunt in the following travel accounts: Graba 1830, Holm 1856, Geyr-Schweppenburg 1900, Baumgartner 1902, Åkesson 1911, Lehmann 1913, Bruun 1929, and even some more recent accounts, for example, Jacobsen 1927, Jacobsen & Stove 1944, Kielberg 1946, Williamsson 1948, Bradford 1970 in National Geographic, Isaksson & Hallgren 1976, Schei & Moberg 1991.

ethnographer Tom Nauerby also looked into the same issues against the background of research available in 1996 into whale hunting and identity and the subsequent conflict with environmental movements (Nauerby 1996, 143). This also constitutes the core of the third main issue, namely to highlight how during the 1980s pilot whaling came into collision with green wave, which is a perception of nature and the environment created in a modern world with a different, urban and, in the view of Norbert Elias (1978, 1989), civilised tendency than the one found in more peripheral regions.

For environmental organisations and for many people, pilot whales and the great whales living in the oceans of the world have taken on a quite different, symbolic value than that found among people in the North Atlantic. Some areas of life in the North Atlantic are being marginalised in relation to a central, urbanised level of civilisation, where the symbolic significance of wild animals stands in stark contrast to local awareness and perception of the same animals. This is a problem that has also been the subject of research by anthropologists[15]

In the modernisation process there is a transfer of the natural phenomenon from hunting scenarios to the centre, where they become symbols in a modern perception of the environment – a condensed culture.

From having been hunted objects and symbols of financial security for hunters, creatures of the sea have become symbols of environmental protection in the modern world. Whales and seals have taken on a new, almost fictitious life based on, among other things, the symbolic value of the superwhale (Kalland 2009, 1998), to which I will return later.

Another perspective, which is related to what I have just described, is "the development of pilot whaling as an international issue, an issue upon which certain animal welfare groups continue to focus a great deal of attention". This is a problem that Kate Sanderson (1990) also has dealt with in several papers.

The problem here is the disparity in the Faroese people's use of the pilot whale as a cultural symbol in their self-image. Environmental organisations and the Faroese each speak their own language based on their own culture, and it is difficult to bring the two together. The pilot whale is in absolutely no danger of becoming extinct. Nowadays it is effectively only the Faroese who make full use of this small whale. But I do not intend to

15 Kalland 2009, 1993A, 1993B 1998, Kalland and Sejersen 2005, van Ginkel 2005.

deal with the issue of resources and the question of sustainability in this book. Other people have already done this.

Pilot whaling has aroused great interest throughout history, as expressed in most topographical papers about the Faroe Islands, in travel accounts and in other literature about the Faroe Islands. Legal historian E. A. Bjørk (1963) has used extracts to compile some of this material in his lectures about Faroese local law. Heini Madsen's (1992) popular, well-received description of pilot whaling aimed at a wider audience also deserves a mention in this context.

The source material on which this book is based comprises primarily older topographical literature, whaling regulations, oral traditions and personal observations. There is a substantial amount of archive material on pilot whales in the National Archive of The Faroe Islands, which has also been used in this book. It should also be noted that local sheriffs have comprehensive statistical records of pilot whale catches in more recent times. I have also made use of the oral tradition, i. e. stories about the whale hunt, and of my own observations from ongoing fieldwork on the subject of Faroese society.

As regards the international source material that has been generated in connection with the activities of environmental organisations, this is vast, and most of it is archived by the Faroese government, where there are thousands of protest letters, etc. This material is on such a scale that it could form the basis of a completely new study in its own right, although that will have to wait for the time being. But general interest has faded over the past ten years or more.

During the past 20 years tremendous interest in the pilot whale has also been evident among biologists[16] and cultural researchers[17]. Major research projects have also been undertaken into sustainable resources and catches of mammals. In this work I will restrict myself to historical cultural anthropological research into the pilot whale.

16 In this context I would like to mention the project entitled "The international project to investigate the ecology and status of the pilot whale in Faroese waters." The intention has been to investigate the size, distribution and bearing capacity of the pilot whale stock, as well as the pilot whale's biology, environmental toxin content and nutritional value and, in the form of a secondary project, the possible impact on the health of the Faroese population. This project has produced a number of major academic papers, dissertations and articles. The project has been led by Dr. Dorete Bloch, the Faroese Museum of National History. .

17 In January 1990 the Center for North Atlantic Studies organised a conference on *Whaling Communities in the North Atlantic*. The report from this conference provides a good overview of research into whale hunting, and also provides another point of access to literature on this subject. It covers both biological and socio-cultural aspects. The proceedings of the conference are published in North Atlantic Studies: Whaling Communities. Vol. 2. Nos. 1+2, Aarhus 1990, ed. by Elisabeth Vestergaard.

For my part, I published my first article about pilot whaling in 1976 (Joensen 1976) and in a smaller, but very significant paper in 1981 Jonathan Wylie (1981) investigated and analysed pilot whaling as a cultural text. Kate Sanderson has written a meticulous textual history of whaling traditions in the Faroe Islands to 1900[18], in which she reviews virtually all texts about whaling in connection with the Faroe Islands up to the beginning of the 20th century. In the introduction to her dissertation she presents a more anthropological view, which she expands upon in later articles (Sanderson 1990, 1994, 1995). Pilot whaling has also been the subject of special papers and other student papers[19]. Significant research is also under way into people and the environment in the Arctic region, based on very different perspectives. [20] Finally, a large amount of biological research into the pilot whale has been published as part of a major international project (Bloch 1994).

*

Let us for a moment leave behind culinary, practical and social perspectives, and instead look at the dramatic aspects of the whale hunt and get an impression of how it is perceived by visitors and tourists in an age when the spotlight of the discourses of the environmental movements and animal protection organisations had not yet reached the Faroes. This anthological presentation is a more or less thick ethnograpical descriptin which in chapter 3, 4 and 5 will be followed by a traditional ethnological description (Ehn & Klein 1989).

18 Kate Sanderson: Grindadráp. A textual history of whaling traditions in the Faroes to 1900. Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy. Department of English. University of Sydney. August 1992. The dissertation is in the process of publication.

19 See, for example, Bent Pedersen 1995: *Grind*. An analysis of the Faroese exchange system. Institute of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen, 1994 – unpublished master's thesis (anthropology), Jenny Súsanna Holm 2005: Grindestriden. Færøsk fangst af grindehvaler fra 1981-1993 (The Pilot Whale conflict. Faroese Pilot Whale hunting from 1981-1993). University of Copenhagen – unpublished master's thesis (History of Ideas).

20 Several projects and networks have been set up in connection with this research, e. g. North Atlantic Fishing and Hunting Culture and Hunting of Marine Mammals. Cultural Aspects of Resource Management in the Circumpolar Regions. This piece of work has links with both of these projects.

Pilot whaling in Sandur about 1900.

Chapter 2

The Drama of Whaling and the Guest's Eye

> "Curiously enough, then, the *grindadráp*, traditionally a part of the internal subsistence economy, has come to provide a common ground between Faroese and foreigners. . . When an actual *grind* is sighted, Faroese hurrying to watch the *grindadráp* are joined by tourists lucky enough to be around. On the literary level, writings about the slaughter, and especially its aftermath, provide a kind of *grindadansur*[21] in which both foreigners and Faroese may find a "cultural text" for discovering both their own and this society's temper at the same time." (Wylie & Margolin 1981, 130).

This is what the American anthropologist Jonathan Wylie has to say about the whale kill in about 1980. The number of spectators has naturally grown, as traffic connections between the Faroes and abroad have improved. Also, statistically speaking, most whale hunts take place in the summer months when tourists and foreigners visit the Faroe Islands. There are therefore always a lot of people watching a whale hunt. But regardless of whether the number of foreign spectators is far higher today than in the past, the whale hunt has always moved the spectators. The whale hunt is not a phenomenon that was discovered by environmental activists. Almost everyone who has written about the Faroes also mentions the dramatic

21 Grindadansur - the pilot whale dance – will be discussed in chapter 7.

Pilot whale kill in Miðvágur. Th. Kloss 1852.

whale hunt. This is evident from all of the topographical literature on the Faroes and from travelogues, many of which have literary qualities. In the following section I will permit myself to refer to and to reproduce some of these anthropological accounts and observations, which by way of a side benefit provide a topical authenticity to the depiction.

The clergyman

One of the first people to provide a detailed description of the more dramatic aspects of the whale hunt was the Danish-born priest in Tórshavn, Lucas Debes. He published a book in Danish in 1673. Only three years later this book was translated into English and published by The Royal Society in London, providing it with a wider readership than the Danish edition alone. The following extract is taken from the English edition from 1676:

> " whereon they drive the Whales with great crying, noise, and casting of Stones, driving them as fast as they can upon the Sands; than if it is necessary the Boats divide themselves into two companies, the one lying below in the form of a half Moon, to meet the Whale if it would flee away during the slaughter,

> the other advancing into the midth of the Whale-Flock, trushing their Whale Spears into their bodies; In the mean time some of the people lye in ambush on the Land, till the Whales are come on ground, and wade to them as deep as they can, and then kill them chiefly with their Weapons, with such fury on both sides, that the water becometh as red as blood, whereby the Whale is also blinded, so that it cannot see to run away; it is a strange thing, to see that these strong creatures make no resistance, but only plunge as well as they can before the boats and people, till death cometh upon them, and then they strike terribly about with their tayls, so that they beat sometimes the boats to pieces, and the men come in danger. . . ." (Debes 1676, 173-174).

Debes was the first person to provide such a detailed description of the whale kill; several texts were to follow later. What all these texts have in common is that they are written by people from a background in a culture other than the Faroese, in what we would usually refer to as a middle class culture. The texts also reveal a meeting of two cultures, which are at different levels in terms of their social history. Social historians have described how the new bourgeoisie in Europe became more disciplined, controlled, cultivated or civilised, if you prefer. This applies to people as a whole, both as private individuals and members of society (Elias 1939/1978, Frykman and Löfgren 1979). The Faroes have long been at the periphery of European civilisation (Stoklund 1992), still retaining old eating habits and tastes in food – ancient flavours that had largely disappeared in other places (Olsson 1954).

On the Faroes people say that "the guest's eye is all-seeing". The outsider can see what those in the local culture do not due to cultural blindness. Behaviour is also an element of the culture. The behaviour of the Faroese when a school of pilot whales is sighted has always made a great impression on visitors, whose reaction in the 19th century was not very different from that in our own day. Let me illustrate with a couple of examples. These examples tend towards the factual description, so that the reader has to become engrossed in what is happening, while at the same time also viewing the reality from the writer's cultural perspective. This kind of description is similar to what is known in the field of anthropology as a *thick description* (Geertz 1973).

The German lawyer

In 1828 the 30 year-old German lawyer Carl Julian Graba, who had an interest in natural history, was on the Faroes. He wrote an excellent di-

The Danish Crown-prince looking at pilot whales on his way into Miðvágur. Th. Kloss 1847.

ary containing ornithological notes, but he also experienced a whale kill in Tórshavn on 2 July 1828. Graba reports factually on the pilot whale, equipment, taxation and distribution, although I will not refer to that here as it does not add anything new, but he does have a sense of the drama:

> "Within a few moments the whole of Tórshavn sprang to life, the joyful call of *grindaboð* was shouted from all corners, and general jubilation reflected the hope of soon receiving a piece of pilot whale meat," says Graba, who goes on to describe the whole hectic event in detail. "The people ran through the narrow streets as though they were being invaded by pirates, here was a man with a whaling knife, there was a women giving her husband a piece of *Skiaerpekiöd*[22] so that he would not go hungry, children were pushed out of the way. One man was so eager that he fell out of a boat and into the sea. Within ten minutes 11 eight-man boats had pushed off from the shore, jackets were taken off and the men started rowing, propelling the vessels like arrows. We joined the Governor, whose boats and people were standing ready." They do not get into the boat at once, but review the situation from a look-out position, where they see the two boats "…that had signalled the *grindaboð*; now a high pillar of smoke rose from Argir[23] and then one from the field by the village of

22 Dried lamb or mutton.

23 Argir is a village close to Tórshavn.

Nólsoy, signals were rising up everywhere". They see the large number of boats rowing to the whales and decide to set off in the Governor's yacht, which is a large vessel. The Governor is clearly aware of his role as senior public official: "Where there was confusion, where a few boats had moved too far forwards or were making mistakes, the Governor was rowed over there, which happened so quickly that it was almost as if a galloping horse had joined the hunt. The Governor sets Graba ashore, from where he continued to follow the progress of the hunt. The whales had by now been driven into the harbour, "…and they became increasingly restless, made their way into a harbour in close formation and no longer paid as much attention to the stones being cast and the beating of the water with the oars. The circle of boats drew closer together around the unfortunate victims," but suddenly they try to resist and attempt to turn away once more and "…no longer want to be driven like a flock of sheep, and try to turn around. The decisive moment was now at hand. Concern, care, hope, blood lust all appeared in the faces of all of the Faroese. Wild shouting broke out; all of the boats charged into the mass and used their broad spears to stab the whales that were not so close to the boat that the thrashing of their tail could have smashed it, had it struck it." Graba provides a detailed description of the bloody drama and the way in which the whales are killed. "Just as a soldier loses all human feeling in the heat of battle and becomes a furious animal, the bloody work inflamed the Faroese to a state of fury and courage. Within the space of a few square metres were 30 boats, 300 people and 80 dead or dying whales. Shouting and tumult everywhere; clothes, faces and hands covered in blood, the normally good-natured Faroese resembled cannibals from a South Sea island, showing no trace of pity in the midst of the terrible bloodbath. But when a man was laid out by a blow from the tail of a dying whale and a boat was smashed to pieces, the final act of this tragedy was played out with more caution." (Graba 1830, 225f.).

Miss Taylor

The American travelling botanist and author Elizabeth Taylor first came to the Faroes in 1895. She lived there for a total of ten years. It was mainly botany that interested her, but she also experienced the whale hunt in the village of Miðvágur, where she was staying with the farmer Hans Kristoffer Joensen, who held a central position in the village[24].

It is the month of August, the best month for whaling. The entire vil-

24 In 1979 James Taylor Dunn, a relative of Elizabeth Taylor, collated her writings in an unpublished manuscript, which is held at the Faroese National Library, registered as Elizabeth Taylor: Elizabeth and the Far Islands. Ten Years on the Faroes, 1979. This manuscript was subsequently published in book form (Taylor 1997).

The tide is going out. The whales have beached themselves, been killed and lie on the beach. Miðvágur about 1955.

lage is on the alert for the possibility of a pilot whale hunt. The women are also dominated by this interest in the whale hunt.

> "Not half an hour ago Frú Jóhanna Katrina, leaving her task of cooking for twelve hungry people, came hurrying from the cottage. Her eyes were bright, her breaths came quickly and before she reached the men workers she called out "I believe, I do believe I see out there, off Koltur, the flash of sunshine on spouting whales!" Rash Jóhanna Katrina! Even I could have told her what her reception would be. A burst of laughter reached my ears and scornful words. "A *grindaflok*! A flock of whales indeed! And did she think that menfolk needed her, a mere woman, to tell them when whales were in sight?" And then followed, in old Norse, the equivalent of our homely saying, "Go teach your grandmother to suck eggs!" (Taylor 1997, 174).

Nevertheless this prompted someone to start singing the whaling ballad and others to explain to the American lady about the system of transporting the *grindaboð* between the islands, and old Jógvan says that

> "There's a man in the Northern Isles who always knows when the whales are coming. Perhaps for months he has not thought of them, but when he begins to think of whales, dream of whales, when he can not put them out of his

> mind, than he knows that the *grindaboð* will come within two or three days. It never fails. I'd like to have that man here today." (Taylor 1997, 174).

Then it happens, eventually whales are sighted.

> "Suddenly came a loud shout, close by: "G*rindaboð*!" An old man on the beach was pointing toward the Streymoy coast, where a column of smoke rose high in the quiet air. "G*rindaboð*!" again, and as if by magic, a peaceful village became pandemonium. A great wave of sound swept around the bay. Men's deep voices shouted the message. Women and children cried it shrilly, babies screamed with fright. Ducks, chickens, and dogs added to the tumult. Three minutes had not passed when a group of young men raced by, whaling knives in hand, their eyes blazing with excitement. The younger Jógvan was among them. Close behind elder Jógvan followed his first born, and both went in the same boat. In eight minutes nine men living in cottage here and there around the bay had met at the boathouse, launched the boat, and put to sea with full whale outfit onboard. In fifteen minutes nine boats had started, Miðvágur's quota to the drive. They passed at full speed out of the way, turned under high cliffs to the open sea, and were lost to sight.
> Boys of fifteen and sixteen years were not allowed to go, for some of the drives make a terrible strain on heart and lungs; but while lamenting their hard lot, they had hope that at the last they might take some part in the slaughter." (Taylor 1997, 175).

The description here is provided by a woman with an very good ethnographic eye of the Victorian age, which is of course one of the reasons why she is also interested in the women's reactions to the *grindaboð* and their role in the course of events:

> "What next?" I asked Jóhanna Katrina. She made no reply. Her head was held high, her lips compressed, her blue eyes wide open, but unseeing. So might some leader have looked when rallying his forces for a coming fray. Then her lips parted and she murmured, "Put salt sausage and mutton to soak, brown coffee, make rye bread, sweep, bring in dried meat, send to the shop for tea, sugar, spices, white flour, raisins, prunes, rice, and sago." Then she became aware that I stood near. "And perhaps Frøkun will dust a little and bring in fresh flowers? The *grind* may escape, of course, but it is not the custom to make bread or put sweet soups on to cook until the whales have been driven past that far-off point that we call 'The Pastor's Point' " (Taylor 1997, 176).

The woman of the house knew what the whale hunt meant for her, namely that she would be receiving a large number of guests who would want food and somewhere to sleep. Miss Taylor herself is gripped by the situation, as can be discerned from her extremely authentic description:

> "I ate my dinner standing or walking to and fro between the window and the table. At last I saw, far away, in the shining belt of water, boats, like tiny, black specks, in three shallow crescents, one behind the other; and now and then, a flash of silver where a whale was spouting. "They seem uneasy," said Johanna Katrina. "They may yet break away." And the men of Sørvágur and of Bøur rose to their feet and watched in anxious silence. Six boats then left the others and made their way cautiously along the rocks of the other bay. "They have come to get more small stones to use in the drive," explained Jóhanna Katrina. "It won't be long now before it begins." And I hurried away to the opposite side of the bay, where the whales must pass. Here and there I could see a round black head bobbing above the surface. "They seem very few to me," I said to an old man who stood above me. "Oh, where you see one head," he explained, "there will be twenty down below."
>
> All was quiet, no sound from the drive, no woman on the beach - women are "unlucky" creatures, especially pregnant ones. Through the day the flock hand been herded in from far out to sea. Now and then, the whales have seen a little way from them, on one side, a light splash on the water and bubbles

Pilot whale kill in Miðvágur about 1935.

rising, as a small stone fastened to a fishing line was thrown from a boat. The leader was not alarmed, but it looked strange and he didn't care for it, so he led the flock more to the other side as they slowly swam forward. Then came a splash and bubbles there, also, and again the whales turned from them. So, gently guided while yet they had no knowledge of that guidance, the whales approached the entrance to the bay. The water was still deep, the leader not yet afraid; but at any moment he might take alarm, dive, turn seaward, and the whole flock escape. Then, as they drew near to the shallow water, the foreman gave a signal, and one boat dashed forward, a man with a harpoon wounded a whale in the sensitive spot above the tail, and, as the creature mad with pain and fright rushed into the middle of the flock, the boats charged ahead with loud shouts, the clanging of metal on metal, and blows on the gunwales. Alarmed, bewildered by the sudden uproar and the charge of the wounded whale, the whales were seized with a panic and swept at full speed up the bay. A large band of eider ducks, generally so fearless, became frightened and made for the shore, turning their heads from side to side, reluctant, even in flight, to leave the water. From the sea came sounds like an Indian powwow, the hoarse staccato cries of weary men, *"Ah ha! ha! ha! ha! A hoy! hoy! hoy!"* There was a gathering roar from the sea. The whales were hidden by the storm of white water that preceded them. Six great rollers came crashing along the coast. I heard the old man above me crying, "Come up higher Frøkun, you're in danger there!" The whales tried to turn seaward and were met by the boats; they rushed to the other side and, unable to stop, struck the rocks with a shock that made them tremble. One big whale, upheaved by its fellows, was thrown clear from the water and fell where I had been standing. The first row of boats closed in and the slaughter began.

With long lances and knives the men fought, using hooks attached to lines to draw the boats within striking distance; and as the blood flowed freely from the wounded whales, their comrades would not leave them. Even if they reached clear water, they turned again, "seeking the blood." The large whales seemed to be trying to protect the small ones. Some of the whales, maddened by lance wounds, rushed forward and were stranded in the shallows, where they were met by the men of Sørvágur and of Bøur, who, breast deep in blood and water, struck again and again with their grind-knives to sever the spinal cord. One large whale, made fast to a boat, dragged it close to high rocks, hemmed it in, and threw such quantities of water over the men that they were helpless. It was like a great red fountain through which I saw dimly the men, blinded, afraid to strike less they should injure one another. The boat was being shattered to pieces and other boats had to come to the rescue. The whales

Pilot whale kill in Miðvágur. The whales are being pulled up onto the beach, about 1940.

made little active resistance, but in their dying flurry they were dangerous. I saw one boat crushed like an eggshell between two whales, and as it sank, the men flew from it, like rubber balls, to other boats nearby. I saw little boys of six and seven years running into the shallows and jabbing at stranded whales with their little knives until seen by irate great-grandfathers, who sprang in, seized them by the scruffs of their necks, threw them up on the shore, and then ran back to do a little killing on their own.

At last it was over. Not one whale escaped. A hot, heavy odour filled the air; two hundred eighty-six whales lay dead and dying on Miðvágur's beach, and high above the lessening clamour rose the voice of the Sheriff, summoning all hands to aid in dragging the whales as near the shore as possible, there to be stranded by outgoing tide.

That night the sun went down in a fiery glory, turning the sky above to flame and copper hues, making the bare cliffs glow as through with inner fires. Lambent flames played along the basalt ledges and gleamed from the bare rock-beds of little watercourses, but of a deeper red then the sky's angry hue was the bay from shore to shore, not tinged with red, but red as flowing blood, while on the beach the surf beat in a long, crimson line. Rank on rank lay the whales in pools of blood, their smooth dark skins reflected the sky colours. Their broad thick lips curved backward in a grotesque smile, disclosing the small white teeth clenched fast. There lay the leader of the flock, and there – oh the pity of it! – were poor little baby whales lying by their mothers, born in the agony of panic and of death.

There was no sleep for Miðvágur's housemothers that night. Four hundred

men must have food, rest, and shelter. Hans Kristoffer's cottage was the centre of activities. Within the guarded "best room" the Sheriff and four assistants were to work during the night, apportioning the *grind*. When I returned to the cottage, I found them there, neat and trim in changed clothing, eating sweet soup and other good things. The family living room was full to overflowing with men from the drive. They were having hot coffee and some simple food, then quickly giving place to others. Later, all would have a heartier meal. In the *roykstova*, or outer kitchen, Hans Kristoffer had spread a thick layer of hay on the earth floor, leaving only narrow passageways between the fire, peat box, doors, and water buckets. Here twenty-six weary men found grateful warmth and sleep. Their faces were haggard, their clothes drenched with blood and water, their faces and hair plastered with caked blood. Too exhausted to eat, they drank a little hot coffee, took a bit of bread, dropped down on the hay, and slept at once. In closely packed rows they lay, the steam rising from their bodies in the warm air. After a few hours sleep they could have more food and go out to give place to others in like need.

That night, for the first time, I paid full homage to Johanna Katrina. I saw her as housemother and hostess, cheerful, capable, attending these tired men as a mother might do and bearing herself with such gentle, smiling dignity as befitted the wife of a "king's peasant". . .

The Sheriff and his helpers showed much thoughtfulness for the "guest lady" in the little room close by. Not once did their voices rise above a deep rumble, and the many men who came and went on mysterious business, trod softly with moccasined feet.

It was dusk at midnight in late August, and through the interlacing branches of the little garden trees I could see the glimmer of lanterns on the beach. There, sober and watchful, four men guarded the grind. From three houses I heard the sound of singing and the tread of dancing feet. Tired though the men were, it was better to dance, in their wet clothes, while awaiting their turn to sleep. I could distinguish from the confusion of sound many of the ballads. The Whale Ballad, of course, a song of Charlemagne, one from Nibelungenlied, an old Danish war song, the story of Sigmund Brestisson of Skúvoy, the Faroe hero, as told in the Faroe Saga, and then, more soberly - gently - sounded the ballad of the death of Queen Dagmar, with a pensive lilt in the refrain "In Ringsted rests Queen Dagmar."

The brief dusk had passed. There seemed to be much activity on the shore. Without waiting for early tea, I went down through the garden and opened the gate near the sea. Scores of men were cutting up the *grind*. The heavy smell of flesh was in the air. From side to side of the bay, the beach was a shambles.

Compared with the larger whales – the blue, the humpback, and the finner – the grind-whale is small. The sight of the great piles of meat, bones, blubber, the incredible mass of refuse, were too much for nerves made shaky by a sleepless night and all that had gone before. I retreated in disorder, was met by Jóhanna Katrina at the cottage door, hauled into the vacated best room, put in a chair, and told to swallow at once a piping hot cup of coffee." (Taylor 1997, 176 pp).

She then discovers that she too has been given a ticket for a share of the catch.

"I went in search of Hans Kristoffer and showed him the paper." Yes," he said placidly, "just show that to one of the men in charge of the *grind* and you will be given your portion." (Taylor 1997, 181).

Everyone who had come to the village was entitled to a share of the catch.

"A little later, I went down again to the beach and found that many boats had come from distant islands. . . Boat after boat put to sea in the twilight and as the men reached the outer bay and settled down to their work at the oars, many began to sing the thanksgiving Psalm[25].

It is two days since the grind and the waters of the bay are still thick and red. We long for strong winds and tides to bring in fresh seas and purify us again. People are still busy salting meat, cutting it in strips to dry in the salt-laden air, making oar straps from the hide of the back fins, tanning and blowing up stomachs to use as buoys for the fishing nets, and boiling whale heads to extract the prized oil they contain. Moreover, there is the refuse to be carried out to sea, for a wise law requires all to be removed within seventy-two hours." (Taylor 1997, 181).

The soldiers

During the Second World War the Faroes were occupied by the British, and many British soldiers came to the Faroes. Kenneth Williamson, a field naturalist and student of folk culture, who was a soldier on the Faroes dur-

25 We can compare this with what Rasmus Rasmussen wrote in his memoirs from the end of the 19th century (1985, 59): "If the weather was good, there was a certain atmosphere on a morning like this. The fjord was smooth as a mirror, because of the whale-oil glittering on the surface of the sea. The heavily laden boats glided carefully out, one after the other, while all of the men sitting by the oars sang well-known seamen's psalms to the old tunes, which have only recently been written down and published as resonant pieces of valuable Faroese heritage. A part of Faroese folklore is protected in these hymns. Men sang heartily and thanked God for his gift, *Gifts from God* as they called them, for providing food for his people. There was such devoutness, Christianity was much more a part of daily life than it is now. The men thanked the Lord in song and they knew for certain that he, who had given them this catch, heard and received their thanks.

ing the Second World War, wrote a very full description of the whale hunt as a whole, including an eye-witness account of a whale hunt in Tórshavn.

> "The afternoon of September 19th, 1941, three days after my arrival in the islands, was a phenomenon in Faroe weather – a clear, warm, sunny day as good as any Indian summer day you would get at home. I was walking in the countryside near Hoyvík, between the froth-rimmed coast and the boulder-strewn hills. Around me, on the hard-won greenth of land which generations of Faroemen had found profitable to till, men and women were busy spreading grass to catch the drying sun heat, or were tying bundles of it to upright wooden posts to grow fit for garnering.
> The scene was one of slow, peaceful, pastoral activity – until a solitary figure appeared in silhouette on the skyline, and the magic cry "*Grindaboð*!" swept like a sudden breeze across the fields. Its effect was electric. Instantly the farming ceased, and the men and women shielded their eyes against the sun's glare and looked out to sea. Then they hurriedly gathered up their implements and, whilst one of their number ran to the top of the next rise to pass on the call to other workers down below, they separated to their respective homes.
> The green land was deserted, the farming forgotten. That cry, which burns it way like wildfire through the town and the spacious countryside, driving along the fiords and the valleys and up over the stony hills, had set the life-blood of south Streymoy tingling with the promise of another harvest, borne to the people unexpectedly by the sea.
> As I made my way quickly towards Tórshavn I watched the distant cluster of small boats working together as a team out in the fiord, and the white-streaked wakes of other craft speeding out from the harbour to join them. The faint pulse of the motors was carried to me on the breeze, and alongside the slower moving boats wet oar-blades glistened in the sunlight. Hoyvík was not far behind me when I heard the engine of the boat in its landing place throb eagerly into life. Soon afterwards I had to step off the road to let a pony-cart pass by, with four erstwhile farmers urging their small beasts onwards to the town. A Faroeman I met a little later beamed upon me in his excitement and said, "There is whale in the fiord – plenty whale; it will give us a little pleasure if we can kill him!" I was to recall that remark later – as a classic understatement of the truth!
> In the town scores of people were going down to the quay. The children, released from school, ran pell-mell, dodging in and out among their hurrying elders. Soldiers, grateful for this welcome new diversion and eager to lend

British soldiers. Ceremony when the new airport in Sørvágur was finished and ready for use.

their Faroe friends a helping hand, moved along at a more military pace than usual. Men in blue and brown jerseys, sea-boots and skin shoes, peaked cloth caps and the striped red hat worn in the islands passed along the crowded thoroughfare on cycles or afoot, carrying long spears on their shoulders, and wearing their sharp knives in leather scabbards at their waists.

The quayside was crowded. Adjacent offices and houses, the roof of sheds and boat-houses, and even the backs of stationary lorries whose drivers had gone to the hunt had been occupied by the early comers who wanted grand-stand views. When the *grind* came into the harbour with the shepherding craft behind, at the people saw the sleek black bodies curving rhythmically under and out of the waves in a scurrying of white foam, they raised a full-throated, happy cheer. It was like some thrilling phase of a first-class sporting event at home in the good old days, only one felt that cheering had seldom reached such a peak of spontaneous joy.

Now there were men standing in the boats, and they hand drawn the wooden sheaths from the keen-edged whale-weapons. Those on the edge of the quay stood ready with lances poised, and when the school was still some fifty yards from the harbour-head, some men, fully clothed and armed like Viking warriors wading ashore on some strange coast, leapt off the quay into three feet of water to close grips with the *grind*.

The stupid whales came on, raising cockatoos' crests of foam on the little waves. They swam unfalteringly, with the surge and bodies, thrusting forwards

British soldiers around a pilot whale. Miðvágur during the Second World War.

as through the safety of the seven seas in the shallows at the harbour-head, that the captain chose his victim and the slaughter of the whales, the *grindadráp*, began.

The whales were in dire trouble. In water too shallow for swimming they rocked and rolled without control. Their great tail-flukes reared many feet into the air as some of them caught their heads among the rocks. The water roared and seethed, and was churned to an apple-green ribbed and veined and crested with white foam.

The long whale-weapons did terrible work, and soon the water and the foam were gashed with crimson veins. Running rivulets and sordid pools of blood welled up from hidden bodies and trailed and spread over the surface of the sea. The backs of swimming whales broke the surface and their blood leapt in a steaming, crimson spout more than a foot into the air; blood oozed and flowed in the wake of whales as they ploughed madly through the waves. They squealed in their agony beneath the reddening water, their cries – like plaintive, pathetic whimpers – only just audible to those watching from the quay.

More men waded out from the harbour-head, lunging and thrusting with their lances as the stricken whales sheared by. Men and beasts seemed inextricably confused in the bloody, quaking turmoil of the sea. The spear-thrusts sank deep, viciously biting into blubber and flesh. Within a few minutes of the

start of the kill the harbour was a scene of gory madness and carnage, and the strong smell of blood filled the air.

As soon as the whale was out of the water the hauling ceased for a few moments whilst one of its captors took the gleaming knife from the sheath at his belt, cut a gaping wound in the blubber and the flesh behind the whale's head, and severed the spinal cord. The convulsive shudder of the beast as the knife sank to the hilt was the last real movement it made, and the hauling of the carcase then began anew. I saw blood was in the air.

The whaling-men on the quayside worked with as much skill and energy as those in the boats, or wading waist-deep in the water. Most of them had taken up stations at the slipways where the small craft are run down to the sea, and each time a weakened whale came near to the slip they hacked at its head with the sharp iron hook, *sóknarongul*, often jumping into the water by the side of the threshing beast to make fast the hook in the big square head. When the hook was fixed the rope was paid out quickly to eagerly awaiting hands in the crowd, and to the accompaniment of a great deal of shouting and rhythmic heaving on the line the whale was brought on to the quay. One reckless man actually left his boat to sit astride a dying whale and administer his *coup-de-grace*.

All along the quay the hauling went on accompanied by the lusty shouts of the men, and often of the women and children too, whilst at many points the regular "Heave! Heave!" of British soldiers and sailors was the operative cry which punctuated the death-ride of whales to the growing morgue on the roadway. Sometimes a rope snapped, and the shouts died in a gale of laughter as the ardent pullers tumbled backwards upon one another, or rolled over the quiescent bodies of beasts that had already been laid in position. There was plenty of fun for watcher and worker alike, and excitement ran like a fever in everyone's veins. Often, whilst the whale was being drawn, somebody would cut up the belly open, and after a short exploration with the knife extract the kidneys and liver from behind the steaming viscera. These delicacies are highly prized, and by ancient tradition are the property of any one who cares to take them.

So this gruesome business continued, the crowd surging in sections to the help of some man who had hooked a dying whale, and joining with might and main in the tug-of-war to bring it on to the quay. The roadway ran with streams of blood, and the streams grew and merged together until quayside was carpeted with a slippery crimson, and the blood oozed around the soles of one's boots.

An hour after the beginning of the *grindadráp* there were whales still swimming strongly in the red sea around the boats, but half-an-hour later the killing was virtually at an end. Nearly a hundred and fifty whales, cut and bleeding and all of them steaming and dead, lay side by side in well-ordered rows along the quay, so closely packed together that in some places you had to walk on their bodies to pass along the road. Only one craft had been sunk, a surprisingly small loss; it had been smashed to pieces by the tail-flukes of a desperate bull, and luckily its occupants had got off with nothing more serious than a good ducking and a few moments of apprehension whilst they swam to other boats. . .

The day was a holiday for all Tórshavn, but especially for the boys and girls. The children helped to pull on the ropes, and two small girls had managed to get their hands red to the wrists with blood, so that they seemed to be wearing scarlet gloves. Some of the children stole pick-a-back rides on the whales that were being dragged, stood by phlegmatically and watched the slaughter of their steeds, and pounced on the heart, liver or kidneys when these were removed. At the head of the harbour boys not yet in their teens swam in great glee in the red water when the killing was at an end, seeking and hooking whales that in dying had sunk to the harbour bed, and bringing the ropes to those on shore. They had tremendous fun, and their enthusiasm gave a great deal of amusement and called for no small admiration from the English folk.

The water in the harbour seemed to reflect the roseate glory of a vivid sunset sky as the crowd thinned away, and people went home to change their wet and blood-bespattered clothes, carrying their weapons and their spoils. Some routine work, such as dragging up the carcases that had sunk, drawing up the craft to the boat-houses, and swilling down the quay to clear it of the blood continued until well into the evening.

The excitement was not all at an end. In the deepening dusk the people flocked down to sea front once more, many this time resplendent in their national dress, and full of carnival spirits. In an ever-widening ring they danced at the harbour-head, the dead whales lying round about them in the gloom, and they sang verse after verse of monotonous and seemingly tuneless ballads, until their voices were hoarse. For hours the dancing and singing continued: those who grew tired (and despite the labours of the afternoon they did not tire easily) fell out, but always there were others to take their places.

This was their celebration of a harvest home, and as I watched I fell to wondering if the man who had spoken to me outside the town that afternoon was having his little pleasure here in the midst of the joyous throng." (Williamson 1970, 96ff).

In 1943 another British soldier, Sidney Norgate, wrote the small volume "Kanska" or "The Land of Maybe", whose opening lines are often quoted[26]. There was, however, one situation where there was no talk of maybe: when the *grindaboð* was sounded:

> "The presence of a herd of whales near the islands sends a vibrant thrill of excitement from one village to the next. Fires are lit on the hugest peaks and the cry of "*Grindaboð, Grindaboð*" is taken up – it reverberates through the fjords and echoes in the chasms. The women chatter excitedly – the children dance and the men push out their boats. . . Now your patient, childlike, peace loving Faroese becomes a veritable monster. The *grindmaster* with red, white and blue girdle singles out the whale to be killed first. It is killed as it is making for the shore – no maybe about this – a sure thrust from a long spear and in its death agony it plunges toward the beach. The whole herd follows and the huge wave thus formed washes the lot on to the beach. Then the slaughter begins – knives flash, blood gushes – women and children sing and dance. Then when all is over the men join in the dancing a wild sort of dance-music is supplied by the people's singing. . . Seeing the whale slaughter – the utter abandonment to the lust of killing and the swilling of blood it is impossible to believe that 27, 000 people live such law abiding lives that most villages have neither police-man nor magistrate and that murder has never been known on the islands. A whale killing is the only thing which will persuade the Faroese to raise their hands on Sundays." (Norgate 1943, 4f.). [27]

There are comprehensive accounts of the various aspects of the whale hunt, and it is as though the storyteller's enthusiasm takes over when they come to the more dramatic aspects of the whale hunt, to which I will return later. It is characteristic of many of these older accounts that the focus is on the

26 Norgate 1943, 3. "Kanska" is the Faroese word for "maybe" – it is the most used world on the islands. They are ruled under a despotism – the not so benevolent despotism of the weather. Five times as much rain as the wettest part of the British Isles – five hundred times as much wind as the windiest part. Maybe we'll go fishing tomorrow - maybe we'll try to do a bit of haymaking - maybe we'll get married. Each and every one of these things is conditional – you see maybe it will be too wet to bother with the hay and a rough sea makes it alike impossible to go fishing or to get married – if the boat can't get in the priest won't be here so we'll get married another day. . .

27 In this context it is interesting to note that many Faroese were surprised that British soldiers, who came straight from the front to a recreational stay in the Faroes, were so affected by the whale kill. On the other hand, the nearest thing to a rebellion against the British was caused by the way in which the British slaughtered pigs. The Faroese regarded the method, which was accompanied by the pigs' screaming, as quite disgusting. The method was that normally used in Britain, Denmark and other countries. Pigs were not common in the Faroes.

people and not on the whales. You could add more French, German and other examples, but let this suffice for now. Only later in the descriptions of the pilot whale kill does the focus fall on the whales. This happened after the new discourses in which whales and whaling were described after the emergence of new environmental organisations, and presented a different perception of whales and people's relationships with these large creatures that quickly also came to characterise many international organisations, but I will return to this matter later, as the rest of this book falls into two main sections. The first section is a more or less positivistic historical cultural or ethnographical description of the whale hunt on the Faroes in a longer historical context. Perspectives in chapters 7 and 8 represent a more hermeneutic interpretation.

"Grinda-dráp" in Bøur 2004. Tind-hólmur in the back-ground.

Miðvágur about 1950.

Chapter 3:

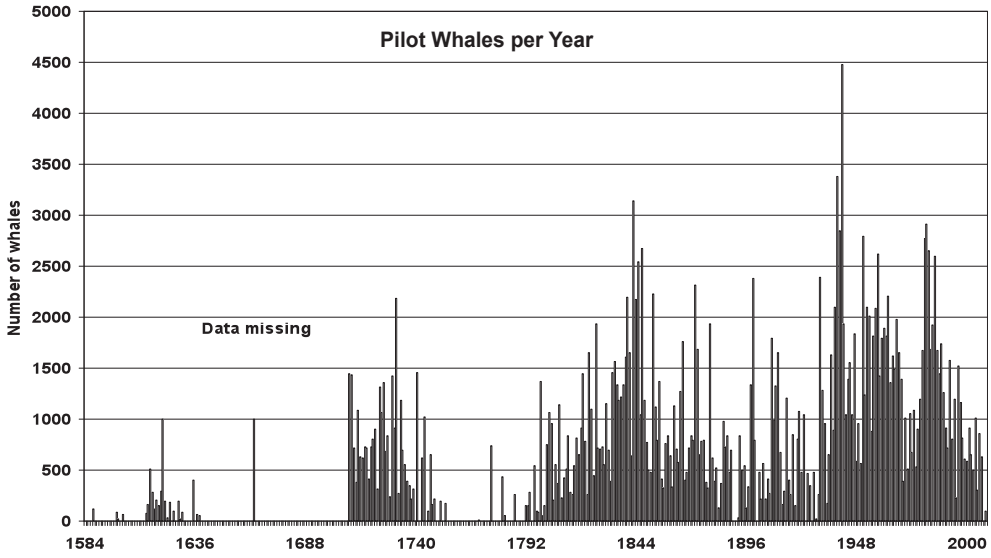
Pilot Whaling in Space and History

Biology and statistics

There are two species of pilot whale, commonly known as the long-finned and the short-finned pilot whale. The pilot whales found in the North Atlantic are of the long-finned species (*Globicephala melas*), and are known to the Faroese as *grindahvalur*. They occur widely and in great numbers in temperate, sub-Arctic waters in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. Long-finned pilot whales migrate in schools, or pods, numbering anything from just a few to up to a thousand or more. The males can reach a maximum weight of 2. 5 tonnes and a maximum length of 6. 5 metres, while the females can reach maximums of 1. 5 tonnes and 5. 5 metres respectively. The pilot whale stock in the eastern and central North Atlantic is estimated to number 778, 000 (Buckland et al 1993).[28]

The pilot or caaing whale (as it is often called on Shetland) is a toothed

28 www. whaling. fo. A comprehensive assessment of the status of pilot whales in the North Atlantic was requested through NAMMCO (the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission) in 1992. The study was carried out by a special Study Group established by ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea), comprising most of the leading scientific experts on this species. The final report of the Study Group from April 1996, as well as new information from the NASS-95 cetacean survey, provided the basis for the conclusion of the NAMMCO Scientific Committee in 1997 that the annual catch of pilot whales in the Faroe Islands has not had a noticeable effect on stocks. The average annual catch over the past ten years (1990-1999) has been 950 animals, representing less than 0. 1% of stock. Based on this advice, the Management Committee of NAMMCO concluded at its 1997 annual meeting that the drive hunt of pilot whales in the Faroes is sustainable.



Graphical illustration of pilot whale catches over the centuries.

whale that feeds primarily on cuttlefish and pelagic fish. The pilot whale is dark grey, nearly black but has a light grey belly colour. It is highly gregarious and is found in schools of only a few individuals up to many hundred individuals[29]. In former days the Faroese distinguished between two kinds of pilot whales. One type was classed by means of a high, pointed dorsal fin while the other had a broader, shorter dorsal. The high-finned whale was thinner and more difficult to drive by the boats than the calm, shorter-finned whale. Both sorts could be found in the same school (á Ryggi 1935, 115). Bloch et al (1993) could not, when investigating morphometric variations in dorsal fins, find any proof to support this statement.

Schools of pilot whales come to Faroese waters throughout the year, but most frequently during the summer months of July and August (Joensen 1962, 38, Degerbøl 1935-42, 119 f.). Schools that appear in the winter have the fattest whales, while whales caught during the summer are thinner (á Ryggi 1935, 115).

Statistics have been kept of the number of pilot whales caught in the Faroes since 1584, with the exception of the years 1641-1708, for which no statistics are available (Bjørk 1963, 184 ff.). These statistics show clear fluctuations in the occurrence of pilot whales over long time periods, as shown in graphic illustration.

29 The most recent research is contained in Bloch 1994. See also Niclassen 1945, 145, á Ryggi 1935, 110, Degerbøl 1935-42, 119.

The reason for this may be long-term climatological variations or variations in the oceanographic conditions around the Faroe Islands, as revealed in various studies. "One conclusion of these studies is a clear correlation between occurrences of the pray squid, the long-finned pilot whale and the periodically long-term differences in the water temperature around the Faroe Islands" (Bloch et al. 1990, 45).

As can be seen in the figure, in the period 1750-1795 only 13 schools of pilot whales died, comprising a total of 2, 459 whales, representing an annual average of around 50 whales.

Comprehensive statistics are available on the pilot whale catch in the Faroes, and these are updated continuously by the Zoological Department of the Faroese Museum of Natural History. These statistics have also formed basis of various analyses revealing the fluctuating nature of the occurrence of pilot whales around the Faroes (Hoydal and Lastein 1993, Zachariassen 1993). In the year 2008 no pilot whale was killed in the Faroe Islands.

For many years now, it has been the local sheriff's official duty to submit both a report and a statement on every single whale hunt. [30]

30 Report on pilot whale hunt to the Office of the Faroese Government. The information that the report must contain is:

- Location of pilot whale hunt
  - ° Date of pilot whale hunt
- Discovery of the pilot whale school
  - ° Discovery position ° Time of discovery
- How the pilot whale school was sighted
  - ° From land ° From a boat
- Time taken
  - ° Time when whale drive started ° Time when whale slaughter started
  - ° Time when whale slaughter was completed
- Participating boats and people
  - ° Number of participating boats ° Number of participating people
- Procedure
  - ° Was permission given to hook from the boat? Yes No
  - ° Did anyone hook from the boat? Yes No
  - ° Were whale lances used? Yes No
  - ° What proportion of the pilot whale school beached themselves?
  - ° What proportion was hooked and pulled onto dry land?

Comments: To hook, as mentioned in items 6 a, b and e, means to use a traditional whaling hook or *sóknarongul* (see chapter 3, Whaling Equipment). Beaching as mentioned in 6 e means what proportion of the pilot whale school swam so far up the beach that they remained on dry land. In addition to this information, every single whale is identified by means of a number, evaluation size (*skinn*), gender and length, together with any additional information such as, for example, illness, special conditions, etc.

Hoswick whale caa. Shetland. On the Faroes the heads are turned landward, not the tails. 1888.

The Age of Pilot Whaling

We cannot say for certain how old the pilot whale hunt is in the Faroe Islands, but it probably dates back to the beginning of the Norse settlement of the Faroes (Thorsteinsson 1986). Recent excavations in the village of Sandur reveal that the Vikings relied on hunting more than on agriculture (Arge 2006). Rules about the ownership of whales found at sea or ashore date back to the *Seyðabrævið*, a special enactment for the Faroe Islands from 1298, but the fact is that the text cannot be considered to refer specifically to *grindadráp*[31]. But regardless of whether or not it is pilot whales that are involved, it is evident (Sanderson 1992, 28) that in the Faroes, as in other costal communities around the North Atlantic, whales were exploited whenever possible for their rich meat and blubber. In former times pilot whaling took place in some places in Norway, where the whales were also driven ashore[32]. Even though pilot whales were known to strand themselves in Iceland and were subsequently flensed and used, no special form of organised driving of pilot whales evolved, as was the case in the Faroe Islands (Joensen 2002, 26-81).

Pilot whaling was practised on the Shetland Isles until 1888 (Nicolson

31 Seyðabrævið. Ed. Jóhan Hendrik W. Poulsen and Ulf Zachariassen. Føroya Fróðskaparfelag, Tórshavn 1971. p. 58.

32 Information provided by Professor Brynjulf Alver, Bergen. Hauan & Matthisen 1993, Stolz 1957, Østberg 1934. Bruncholst 1889.

Pilot whales in Klaksvík. The tails are turned seaward about 1930.

1978, 119, Williamson 1970, 116). In contrast to the Faroe Islands they did not eat the meat, but were only interested in the blubber, which they melted to obtain whale-oil. "The flesh was not eaten, and the carcasses were left to rot until the scavenging seagulls had picked them clean" (Nicolson 1978, 1920). Brian Smith (2003), states that

> "Shetlanders only ever used the whales that they caaed for oil and, later, for manure. I suspect they would have found it impossible to dispose of large amounts of whale blubber and bone in medieval times, and that leads me to think that, in Shetland at least, systematic caaing was a relatively modern innovation."

They also used to have special distribution principles, although these, in contrast to the Faroe Islands, were not reorganised, but were discontinued over time together with pilot whaling on Shetland. Pilot whaling has also occurred on the Orkneys and the Hebrides (Fenton 1978), but was not practised as seriously, "nor had it anything like the same sociological significance" (Williamsson 1970, 117) as on the Faroes.

> While "the Faroese look upon the flesh as a luxury, their Shetland cousins cannot face it, though during a famine in Northmaven in 1740 they are said to have been compelled by necessity to overcome their repugnance" (Tudor 1883).

On the Shetland Isles they never had the same kind of regulations or organisational structure as were developed on the Faroes. Brian Smith (2003) observes:

> "I can describe the Shetland situation best by quoting from an account of a caa that took place in the 1830s, at Hoswick in the South Mainland of Shetland. It was written forty years later by one of the participants. His reminiscence beautifully sums up the atmosphere of the Shetland operation.
> '[T]o see the people running in all directions to the various places on the seashore, where boats could be obtained,' he says, 'was a most amusing and stirring sight. Some of the boats sent afloat on the occasion had been lying on the beach unoccupied under a hot burning sun for a long time, and in consequence their boards were so much rented, that it was dangerous to go in them. In this respect much risk of life was run, and to provide for emergencies in the circumstances, caps, buckets, pots, pans, jars, old hats, and, indeed, any thing at hand which could bail out water were hurriedly thrown into these boats, as also quantities of small white stones from the beach, to throw overboard to seaward of the whales, in order to frighten them to the shore. Every available old sword, pistol, harpoon, lance, yes, even forks used for manure, were taken on board to be used as lances whenever there was a chance to molest these monsters of the deep, and especially when they showed the least inclination to turn their heads from the land. In order to make all the noise possible, every boat was furnished with as many *looder* horns or bulls' horns, bored in the small end to blow through, pans, white iron besoms, and in fact anything hollow or noisy that could be got, and pieces of wood, all for the purpose of striking upon each other and upon the gunwales of the boats.'
>
> The contrast with the Faroese operation could not be greater. Instead of split-second timing we have confusion; instead of dedicated equipment we have all the old detritus of a Shetland croft; instead of carefully modulated noise we have cacophony."

Pilot whaling on Shetland has thus been well and truly discontinued, while on the Faroes they have continuously updated rules, requirements and the whole organisation relating to the institution known as the *grind*.
Pilot whales or "pothead whales" have recently been caught in Newfoundland, including a drive into Trinity Bay, where they were used commercially, although "the Newfoundland pilot whale hunt lacked the more elaborate organisation documented for the comparable hunt in the Faroes" (Andersen 1990, 156). However, they did observe certain rules

in connection with the mass catch of pothead whales (Andersen 1990, 155).

As a matter of curiosity it can be noted that in the region of Middelfart in Denmark they have caught porpoises, which are smaller than the pilot whale, as recently as the 1940s. They were driven into a shallow bay and caught using a kind of pound net (Jensen 1946, 618). In the past, porpoise catches were organised according to a special hunting law, which dates back to the 17th century or earlier. Harbour porpoises have also been caught in Sweden in the past (Svanberg 2005).

> "Originally the blubber also had a value as food, but as tastes changed the extraction of oil became the main objective… The hunt involved frightening the porpoises as they moved northwards in schools through Little Belt and forcing them into Gamborg Fjord. Here they were driven into a bay by Svinø, were trapped by nets, dragged ashore with a special net and killed" (Strubberg 1936, 425).

Porpoises were caught once more during the First World War, when there was a shortage of fuel. This may also have been the reason for catches during the Second World War.

The first information we have about a slaughtered *grind* is from the year 1600 (Bjørk 1963, 184, 222). However, a sheriff's book of accounts for 1584 records that four small whales were found ashore on Lítla Dímun (Bjørk 1963, 182). In that instance it was a case of stranded whales rather than whales that had been driven ashore. Pilot whale hunting is mentioned, however, in 1592 by P. Claussøn Friis[33], who uses the word "hualsgrind" or pilot whale school. Lucas Debes (1673, 155) also used this word.

But opinions are divided about the antiquity of the hunt. Guttorm Gjessing (1955, 56) has no doubts at all that "the Faroese pilot whale hunt goes all the way back to *landnamstida*", i. e. the time of the first settlements in the ninth and tenth centuries. However, Høst (1875, 315) considers the pilot whale hunt to be a far more recent institution. He supports this view by noting that two Venetian noblemen, Nicolo and Antonio Zeno, are said to have stayed on the Faroes during two periods, 1390-95 and 1391-1405 respectively, without relating one word about the pilot whale hunt. The two may well have been on the Faroe Islands, but there can be many reasons why they did not mention any whale hunts. Hunts occur periodically

33 Claussøn Friis (1632) has used notes taken by a Faroese student, Jacob Oudensøn, as a source for his account. Cf. Tarnovius 1950, 17.

and so it is possible that the Venetians did not have any opportunity to witness one; however, no more can be said about these accounts here[34]. The fact that the Zeno brothers did not mention the whale hunt is, therefore, not proof that the institution of the hunt did not exist at that time in the Faroes.

Whale hunting in various forms has been a common phenomenon for a very long time, and it is a fact that pilot whaling is also known to have existed in the Hebrides, the Shetland Isles and the Orkneys and Iceland (Gjessing 1955, 30 ff. , Einarsson 1987). In the latter three island groups there have also been regular catches of pilot whales. There could be some connection here with the Scandinavian expansion of the ninth and tenth centuries. Brøgger (1937, 61) also considers the pilot whale hunt to be a very old institution. Even if we do not have any source material that goes back any further than about 1600, we must accept that "*Grindadráp* is not a peculiarly Faroese phenomenon, it wasn't invented in the Faroes; rather it is part of the common Norse culture which the first settlers brought with them to the Faroes" (Thorsteinsson 1986, 66).

One can, however, easily imagine that the hunt has developed some parts of its *special organisation* as a result of necessity. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were periods of decline on the Faroes. Previously the islanders themselves had managed their own external trading relations, but in the 13th century the responsibility for these relations was taken over by the Norwegian crown (Stoklund 1992). The King was responsible for maintaining trading ties with the Faroes, but his representatives did not always live up to their obligations. What is more, the climate became colder. It now came to pass that "around 1550 the Faroe Islands declined to the status of a local community without expansive possibilities. The population now consisted almost exclusively of landowning peasant farmers and a landless proletariat who were preoccupied with local matters" (Høgnesen 1968, 48).

Foreign absentee landlords owned most of the land. The pilot whale could have assumed great importance in these times of crisis. It is conceivable that at about this time they began to create an organisation around the hunting of pilot whales so that they could fully utilise an economic resource of which they were surely aware but had not needed to any real

34 The Zeno brothers' travel accounts are translated into Danish in Grønlands Historiske Mindesmærker (1845, 529 ff.), in which the account is also subjected to a critical analysis of its sources.

extent. This can be compared with Brian Smith's (2003) observation on Shetland:

> "We should keep in mind, too, that both groups of islands had small populations in the Middle Ages, and that even the Faroese, who were willing to eat whales, didn't need enormous amounts of them. What I am suggesting is that whale-caaing, and the customs that surrounded it, isn't something that islanders do automatically. It is a tradition in the Faroes, and it was a tradition in Shetland; but it was a tradition that came into existence rather late in the day, like many traditions do."

In traditional Faroese society the pilot whale has, at least since the Middle Ages, been a very important part of the Faroese subsistence economy.

A quite different matter is that from around 1750 *the absence of pilot whales* for a long period caused a disintegration of the whole system relating to pilot whaling, a system that was more or less heading for dissolution, which the scholar Svabo wanted to put a stop to as early as 1779:

> "As long as you do not effect a weakening in nature with regard to these whales, as well as the propagation of other fish; as long as they are not destroyed by more significant catches in other places; and as long as we do not know more with certainty about their migration than that it fluctuates. As long as you can indulge in the hope that the old whale times in the Faroes might return. Should you then not wish for the abuses that creep into this kill to be rectified. Making the catch itself or the hunt more ordered through a law that was observed, would be more or less the same as giving the country and the State many of these considerable schools of whales that they were currently not receiving, whether or not they were involved in the hunt. Instead the same number of commanders at the hunt as there are boats, of whom many did not know the whale bay to which the hunt should be driven, but who still consider that they contribute much to the hunt; when they only row or make a noise, would it not be better to give one or two of the most responsible men from each whale bay this official position, in return for a specific share of the catch. Any insubordination towards him should be punished. The whole catch should be managed by him alone, and if the catch were to be lost due to his obvious negligence, he must be punished; in his district he should make sure that every fishing boat was provided with the number of people and the adequate weapons prescribed by law, with a punishment of double the fish tithes, or another punishment, if this were not the case. He should decide when the

slaughter may start. The law should limit whale theft and encourage the use of harpoons, both for other whales, and for these in certain instances, etc." (Svabo 1779, 51).

Grind and officials

It was to be some time before centrally sanctioned rules for pilot whaling were to come into force, although at the beginning of the 19th century there was already a central initiative in place to draw up fixed rules for pilot whaling in the Faroes (Bjørk 1963, 187).

The old Faroese *Løgting*[35] was abolished in 1816 and not reconstituted until 1852[36]. During the interim period there was no national Faroese local authority on the Faroes, instead there was only a "kind of patriarchal bureaucracy based on a faith in authority that was so strong that it was largely responsible for restricting subsequent developments in the direction of political freedom," as described by the historian Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen (1927, 12); but at the same time many of these officials were driven by a desire for progress and development in many areas. The brothers C. L. Tillisch (Governor 1825-30) and F. F. Tillisch (Governor 1830-37) were both very interested in pilot whale catches on the Faroes and in resuming the reorganisation of the catch.

The German Graba (1830, 230) mentions in 1828 that C. L. Tillisch took personal charge of whale hunting in Tórshavn, and his brother F. F. Tillisch was the man behind the pilot whale regulation in 1832. While in the office of County Sheriff (1830-37), C. Pløyen (who was to be Governor 1837-48) wrote the ballad of the pilot whale, to which we will return later. The history of pilot whaling can thus be divided into two main periods, with 1832 marking the boundary.

Before 1832 a whale hunt was largely a local matter based on custom and local village laws, which were later codified and integrated into a larger, political context. Climatological and marine biological factors have meant that occurrences of pilot whales have varied significantly over time. Over one period of almost 50 years there were particularly few pilot whale hunts on the Faroes. This period lasted from 1745 to 1795, when there were virtually no pilot whale catches on the Faroes, with the exception of 1776.

The fact that a number of generations did not have the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills to slaughter pilot whales almost brought about

35 The Løgting is a very old institution, just like the Icelandic *alting*.

36 The Løgting was reconstituted as a county council with the Danish governor as chairman. Since 1948 the Løgting has been the parliament of the Faroe Islands.

Whale hunt in Tórshavn in the late 19th century.

the end of pilot whaling. Mikkjal D. á Ryggi mentions in his local history of the whale hunt in Miðvágur in 1776 that "The young men didn't know how to kill the whales, so the old ones had to teach them that they had to 'cut the whale from the head, don't touch the tail fins'." (á Ryggi 1940, 116). In 1779 Svabo describes the same, fabled whale hunt, in what can almost be considered an eyewitness report:

> "For 22 years they had not managed to catch any pilot whales, although occasionally they had tried, between the years of 1754 and 1776, when they caught a school of 707 whales, not counting those that were harpooned or stolen when the opportunity arose. They were sighted at ten in the morning to the west of the island of Vágar. The slaughter lasted from one in the afternoon until nine in the evening, and was thus longer than usual, as the whales would not go ashore and the hunters had to kill almost all of the whales by stabbing them.
>
> The fact that the hunt was successful on this occasion is justly ascribed to a local farmer by the name of Heine, who had died a few years previously. He was a blacksmith, a house builder and a boat builder, an industrious citizen and an inventive artist to such a degree that you can imagine a man of his

> status having taught himself everything. He had long realised that if a school of whales were to arrive it could easily be lost due to a lack of weapons, as the few that still remained were largely broken, rusted and unusable; but he tried in vain to encourage his fellow countrymen to acquire new weapons, as it had been so long since the last whale catch that the cost was not considered to be worthwhile. He therefore forged six or more weapons and asked that they should not be touched after his death until the whales came to Vágar, when they should be handed out to anyone who was able or willing to use them. His predictions proved true, and by all accounts they were accurate to the extent that they would have missed this catch had they not used these weapons. He distinguished himself in his circle, and his memory deserves honour." (Svabo 1779, 50).

The period 1813-1859, however, was extremely fruitful. It is in this very period that there was a particular interest from central government to put the situation on the Faroes in order. In 1828 a library was opened, and in 1832, the same year as the first pilot whale regulation came into force, a savings bank was established on the Faroes. A small middle class was becoming established, first of all in Tórshavn and subsequently also in other places on the Faroes (Joensen 1987, 39). The *grind* had become a part of general Faroese public life and not simply a local matter.

Custom and central direction

Pilot whaling in the Faroes is undoubtedly part of the cultural baggage that the first settlers brought with them to the Faroes, because they also used to catch whales in Norway, and whaling has taken place in one form or another in areas to which Norsemen or Vikings travelled. We have documented whaling throughout the whole Norse region, where the conditions for whaling existed, as well as in Normandy. People have, of course, built upon the whaling traditions that they brought with them from Norway, in time regulating and adapting it to suit Faroese conditions. For as far back as we have sources, landowners have had legal rights to the lion's share of any whales killed on their shore, with the rest being distributed according to custom, which may in practice have differed from one location to another. The forum for such decisions was *grannastevna* – the regional meeting for udal landowners, which "has been used since the old days," even though regional meetings did not gain a legal framework until 1891. Village meetings are also found in Denmark and elsewhere in Europe (Bjørk 1956/57, 19, 20, West 1975).

The regional meetings were chaired by the sheriff. The office of sheriff as known on the Faroes right up to the 1980s can be traced back to the 15th century (Debes 1995B, 43). The minutes of the Faroese *Løgting* reveal that any problems that could not be resolved locally were brought before the council, which had the authority to pass judgement[37].

Until 1832 there was no central power with the task of administering rules and regulations on pilot whaling, even though some Danish Government officers in Tórshavn had been given a central role in the implementation of the hunt and distribution, as is described in Grabas' (1830, 230) travel account from 1828. The poor whaling years in the second half of the 18th century, when it was not possible to maintain the whaling tradition and the skills required to conduct a whale hunt correctly, meant that correct hunting practice was lost for a number of generations. All in all this meant that the Faroese village society was not able within its own forums to find a solution to the problems that arose in connection with pilot whaling around 1800. This required a central initiative. The first attempts to solve problems relating to pilot whaling were characterised by suggestions of tough penalties for those who broke the rules.

On 4 June 1807 Governor Løbner and County Sheriff Hammershaimb sent a draft version of the whaling regulations to the Office of the Exchequer in Copenhagen. These draft regulations stipulate extremely harsh punishments for those who break the regulations. For example, anyone who acquires his portion of the catch through violence or coercion was to be punished with four years' labour in a house of correction, and anyone who used a harpoon during a whale drive was to be given a similar sentence (Bjørk 1963, 188). Løbner and Hammershaimb were fully aware that this was a stringent code, but they considered the measures necessary.

A subsequent version of the whaling regulations, which was sent to the Office of the Exchequer in 1807, shows how chaotic the situation appeared to the authorities:

> "Those severe punishments here and there among the accompanying regulations could perhaps under other circumstances appear too harsh, but if evil is to be driven out with the root, then it certainly is to be done here in the Faroes where there is no other solution than with strong and exemplary measures, which are to be applied to the utmost on each and everyone who transgresses

37 Jens Christian Svabo (1959) often refers to the minutes of the representative council in his accounts from 1781-82.

Boats in "Grind" in Vestmanna about 1935.

them, to crush the disorder so prevalent in the past; a public example will according to our knowledge of the Faroese character effect more than fines which they with such ease even agree to take from the common funds." (Bjørk 1963, 188).

These stringent punishments were never put into force. However, in the following years a number of drafts were debated and finally, in 1832, Governor Tillisch was given the responsibility of ensuring that the first Faroese whaling regulations were adopted. Since then, every detail of the hunt has been carefully defined in the regulations, which have been changed and adjusted to new situations by new legislation. These regulations have by and large seen the institutionalisation of old customs and the addition of new ordinances when customs have proved insufficient.

The whale hunt originated as a part of Faroese folk culture, but at the end of the 18th century conditions had become so complicated that problems could not be solved at a local level, as people were to a certain extent forgetting the old traditions and old custom or practice. However, pilot whaling came to be considered so important for the Faroes by central government that legislated regulation was considered necessary to keep this economic sector intact.

The institution of the pilot whale hunt, which used to be based largely on tradition and custom, was now integrated into society's legal structure with a central administration. The effect of this was that the whaling institution now became fully integrated into Faroese national social culture and, as we have attempted to indicate in this presentation, this process of integration continues as whaling continues to be a living part of Faroese local culture.

The institution of the pilot whale hunt is characterised by stability and continuity, despite the disorder in the system that occurred on occasions due to natural and biological circumstances that prevailed for a period of time. The whole institution has been reorganised at regular intervals, and the whale hunt remained a part of Faroese public life with a high degree of symmetry between self and society, between subjectively experienced and institutionally assigned identity.

After the first pilot whaling directive in 1832 came into force, pilot whaling remained a part of popular public life on the Faroes[38], in which everyone in the local community took part in one way or another, albeit in different roles. In practice the pilot whaling regulation from 1832, with subsequent changes, gave the whole institution an extra element of collectivity, as everyone in the district now had an equal right to a share of the catch, and there were sanctions against people who took the law into their own hands or created disorder. There was a smooth transition from a popular public life towards a civic public life in respect of the whale hunt.

It is not unreasonable to ascribe a degree of significance to the romanticism, which followed the age of enlightenment, in public life that now took place in connection with the whale hunt, and drew attention to the dramatic, heroic aspects of the whale hunt as a whole, as in its first popular text that appeared in Danish:

> "The very popular Governor Pløyen, who held office on the Faroes in the middle of the last century, wrote a formidable ballad about the whale hunt. Its refrain was as follows: "Hardy lads, whales to kill, that's our desire!" This whaling ballad is also sung with great enthusiasm at every whaling dance." (Jacobsen 1953, 74).

It is here that we find the first reflective origin of the national epic poem

38 Andreassen 1992, 117. In 1992 the Faroese folklorist Eyðun Andreassen coined the term *popular public* to describe a more circulatory form of public life, in which the same people are senders and receivers.

Detailed illustration (Born 1793) showing most elements of the whale hunt.

about the pilot whale hunt, which could now be recounted, communicated and fed back into the population, and later analysed as an element of special, national, Faroese folk culture. But before this is the subject of closer investigation, we will set this aside for a while.

In the following sections I will describe the different parts of this institution, and how it was reorganised in the 19th century.

Miðvágur about 1920.

Chapter 4:

Grindaboð. Message and Communication

The "grind" was regarded as a gift, often spoken of as "Grind from the Lord" or "the gift of God". "The "grind" had to be caught as soon as it came, nothing could stand in the way. Even the sacred tranquillity of the church was broken when there was "grindaboð" " (Rasmussen 1949, 64).

According to the traditional Faroese way of thinking, it would be regarded not only as laziness, but also as a sin not to make every effort to accept the gift. The principle of pilot whaling is not that you actively seek out the whales, but that you catch them when they arrive and you discover them.

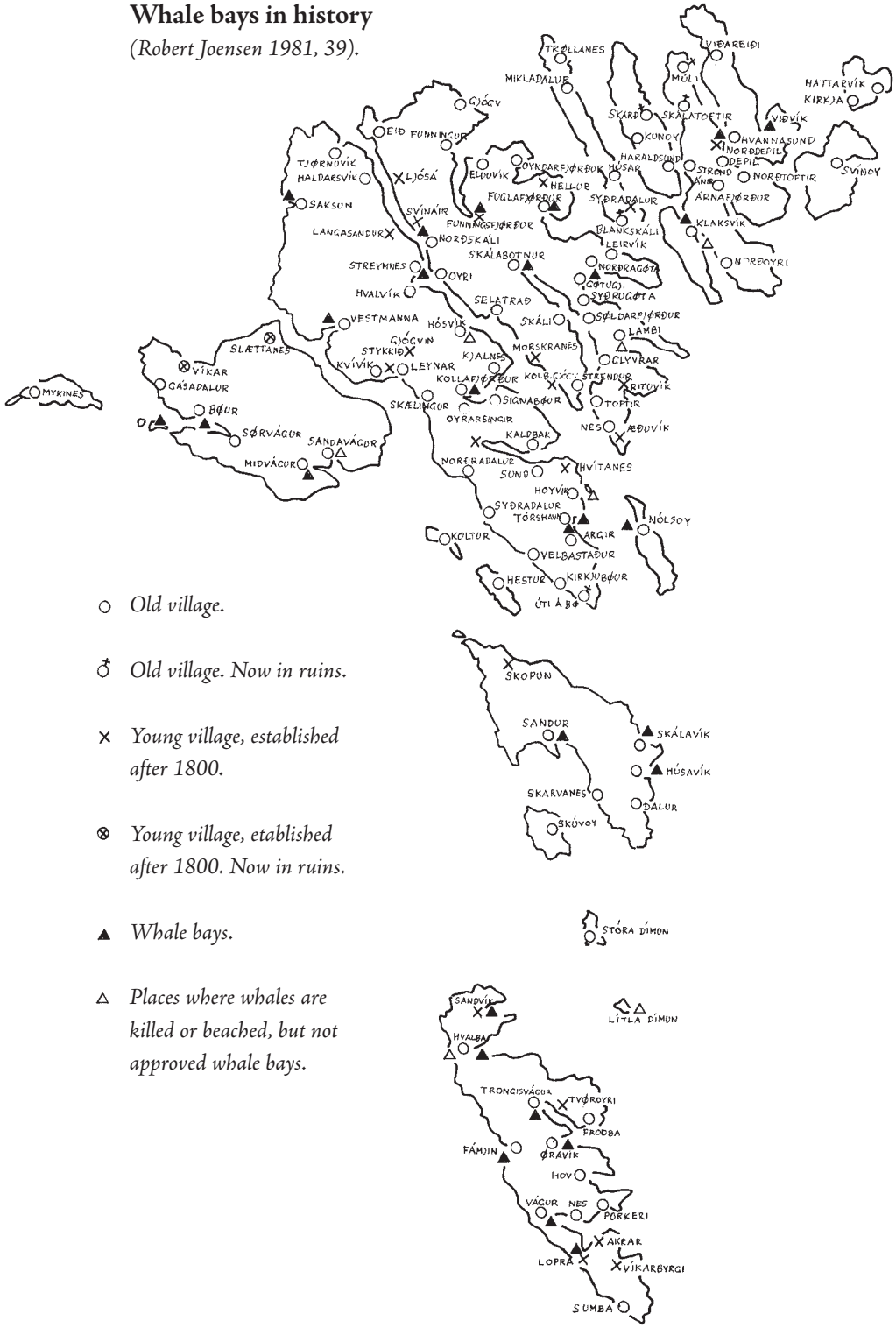
The institution of the pilot whale hunt has a well-developed, traditional system of communication that enables people to spread the news of a "grind" out at sea as quickly as possible. The oldest description of this communication system, called "grindaboð" or news of a school of whales, is found in Tarnovius' description from 1669:

> "And when the inhabitants sight them, they all go out with boats, after first building a bonfire at a height which those who live out on the outer islands can see and immediately recognise, so that they come and join the hunt. " (Tarnovius 1669, 60).

The next mention we find in Lucas Debes (1673, 156):

Whale bays in history

(Robert Joensen 1981, 39).



○ *Old village.*

⦰ *Old village. Now in ruins.*

× *Young village, established after 1800.*

⊗ *Young village, etablished after 1800. Now in ruins.*

▲ *Whale bays.*

△ *Places where whales are killed or beached, but not approved whale bays.*

The "Measles Grind" in Gøtu in 1935.

> "When the inhabitants are out fishing and sight a school of whales, then those who first sight it shout and wave to the other nearby boats which, deserting their fishing, come quickly together and give themselves after the whales and chase them in towards the shore."

Elsewhere, Debes relates that

> "As they approach the shore, they send one or two men ahead as messengers to spread the news in all directions, and that messenger, who must travel quickly day or night, is called the 'Grinde-Bud[39]' (pilot whale messenger), who informs those on land, who in turn immediately light a bonfire at a certain point in order that those on the next island, to which the messenger has not come, can also learn the news, which is understood because of the site from which the fire and smoke appear." (Debes 1673, 156).

A Commission Report from 1709-10 does not mention the *grindaboð*[40]. Svabo (1779, 44), though, does touch on the *grindaboð* in his paper on the pilot whale hunt from 1779. He says, among other things, "as soon as one sees a school of whales it is reported immediately. If a boat sights it at sea, a signal is set up on the mast" (Svabo 1959, 250, 278). He also mentions

39 Grinde-Bud is in Danish. In Faroese it is *grindaboð*.

40 Commission Report 1709-10.

Because it had been so many years since the last whale kill, lots of people gather, 1935.

that they signalled by means of bonfires made of hay and using bed sheets spread out on the shore.

Svabo (1959, 250) also refers to the Faroese *Løgting* minutes for the year 1690, in which the residents on the islands of Svínoy and Fugloy complain that they did not receive any *grindir* due to a fault on the part of the *grindaboð*. It was therefore decided in *the Løgting* that men from the community of Hvannasund should "be charged to serve them as 'Grindebud' in return for a proper recompense." On the same page Svabo notes that at the *Løgting* meeting in 1734 it was decided "that 'Grindebud' must be sent out in all haste"[41]. Jørgen Landt (1965, 224), who wrote his topographical description in 1800, is the next to mention "the signal on the mast", and he also gives a very complete account of *grindaboð*.

Summarising these oldest sources, we find that the system of communication is already fully developed at the time of Lucas Debes, i. e. about 1670. The only detail on which Debes does not comment is "the signal on the mast": perhaps they did not hang a seaman's sweater up on the mast as a signal to other boats and those ashore, or perhaps Debes did not understand this symbol, or maybe he simply forgets it. The *grindaboð* is one of the oldest elements of the institution of the pilot whale hunt, since quite

41 A review of various archives reveals that complaints were regularly received by the authorities about the absence of a *grindaboð* or problems relating to the dispatch of a *grindaboð*; these only stopped when reliable telephone connections had been installed in all parts of the Faroes.

a large number of boats and people were needed to drive in and kill the whales.

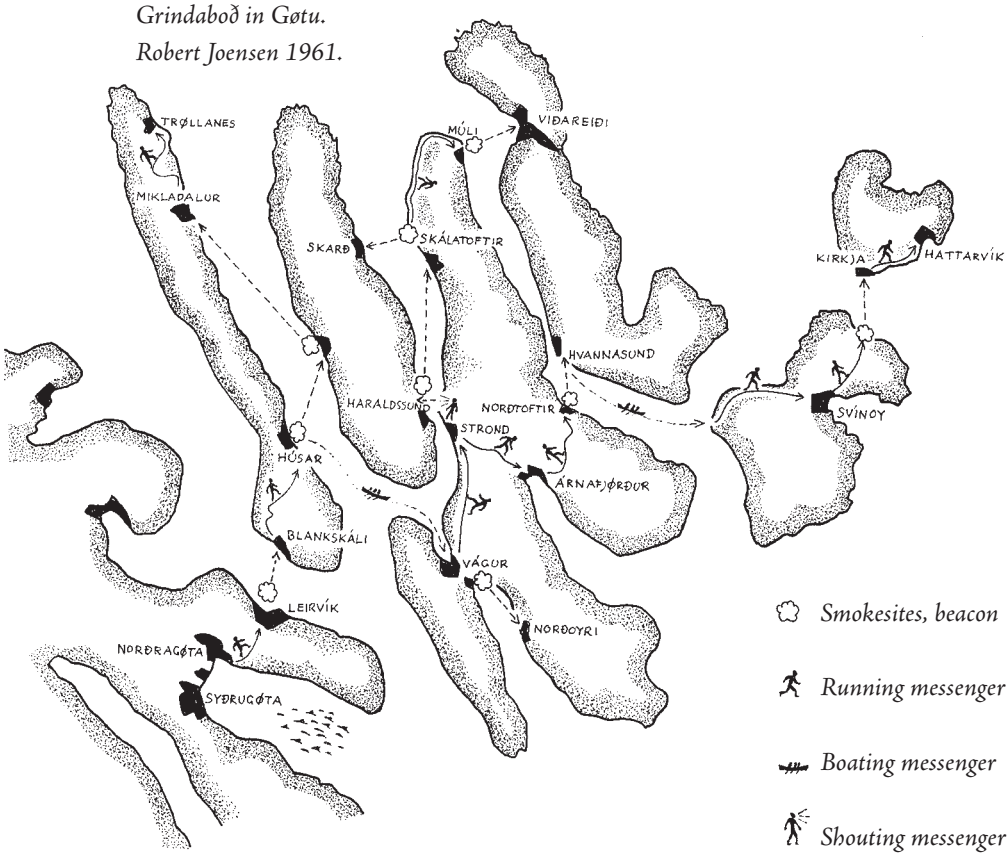
All the communicative symbols that have been touched on in the preceding discussion were recorded and confirmed by law in the "Grindareglugerðin" or pilot whaling regulations, which were first issued in 1832 and, with some changes, have remained in force ever since. If you sight what you believe to be a school of whales from up on land, you must first be absolutely certain that it is a school before you shout "Grindaboð" and set in motion the whole system of communication.

The Faroese ethnologist Robert Joensen (1981) has dealt with the *grindaboð* communication network, and he relates that in some places, besides using smoke or bed sheets, on certain occasions they also dug out sods of earth and turned the underside up to signal the approach of a school of whales. All of these methods of communicating – smoke, bed sheets, or sod turning – had to be executed on specifically prescribed sites, often called "roykstaðir" (smoke sites). They were located so that they could be seen clearly from the surrounding area. As soon as a neighbouring settlement had received the message, it passed it on in the same manner by means of an agreed signal.

> "And so the message leaped from village to village in the form of festive columns of smoke. The beacons were usually lit by the women. The menfolk, from the 80 year-old to the three year-old, had other things to worry about, and lacked the patience required to set fire to a tuft of hay." (Jacobsen 1953, 71).

It was, though, not always possible to pass on the message using the same method by which it has been received, so people also had to run with the *grindaboð*. In most areas in the past a fixed order determined who was to run next as the *grindaboð*. The messenger was not to run any further than necessary: if he met someone outside the settlement, he relayed the message on the spot to that person, who in turn had to relay the message so that the original messenger could run back to the school of whales.

In some areas there were fixed geographical points that were part of the *grindaboð* communications. The settlement of Gásadalur is situated in a deep valley, and the path down to the village descends through a long, difficult ravine. At the top of this descent three points have been marked, one to the right, one in the middle, and one to the left of the entrance to the



Grindaboð in Gøtu.
Robert Joensen 1961.

ravine. If the man with the *grindaboð* stood and called from the left-hand side the school was in Miðvágur; if he stood in the middle the school was in Sørvágur; and if he shouted from the right-hand side the School was in Vestmanna. If, however, there was fog and poor visibility, the messenger had to go all the way down to the village to deliver his *grindaboð*.

The *grindaboð* only had to be passed on to those settlements that were entitled to whole or half shares in the distribution of the catch, but in practice most settlements did receive notice of the school of whales. This would often be the result of private agreements between the residents of two settlements, often in return for some kind of compensation (Joensen 1962, 8, Petersen 1953, 105).

This ancient form of communication, which occurred in conjunction with *grindaboð*, was linked to other communications in the Faroe Islands, such as when a civil servant was "skjúts" (to be transported from one island to another), when people were assembled for legislative sessions or when

there were pirates in the vicinity (Joensen 1961, 11). This system of conveyance as a duty is also an element of Nordic cultural heritage. [42]

Since the arrival of telephones on the Faroes, the procedure is that you must alert the telephone switchboard as quickly as possible, while at the same time being responsible for passing the message on to other settlements, and to the "grindaformenn" (whaling foremen) and the "sýslumaður" (the legislative representative for the district, or sheriff), as well as various others so that "Grindaboð" is shouted in the streets. In 1976 I wrote that at that time *grindaboð* was almost always announced on Faroese radio, which often interrupts a broadcast to report the *grindaboð*, but this is not the case now, 30 years later (Joensen 1976). Since the late 1980s the Faroese radio station has fallen silent as far as reporting the *grindaboð* is concerned.

The effectiveness of electronic communications has caused the old forms of communication, such as lighting bonfires and running from one village to the other, to be discontinued. The cry of "Grindaboð" does not ring nearly as loudly in the villages now as it did some years ago, but does still ring, and the boat that finds a school of whales still raises a seaman's sweater or something similar up on the mast as indication that it has sighted a school. The sweater, though, is now nothing more than a symbol, as virtually all the boats have radio telephones or VHF radios, and many also have walkie-talkies on board[43]. Modern mobile phones have also become widely used in connection with whale hunting, as they make communication easier between the boats and in general.

As soon as the call of *grindaboð* had been received in a village, the men had to get moving as quickly as humanly possible. There is a special word, "grindaróður", which is used mainly in the context of the strenuous rowing required in order to reach a school of pilot whales before it escapes, but also means rowing out at full speed to join a pilot whale hunt (Young and Clewer 1985).

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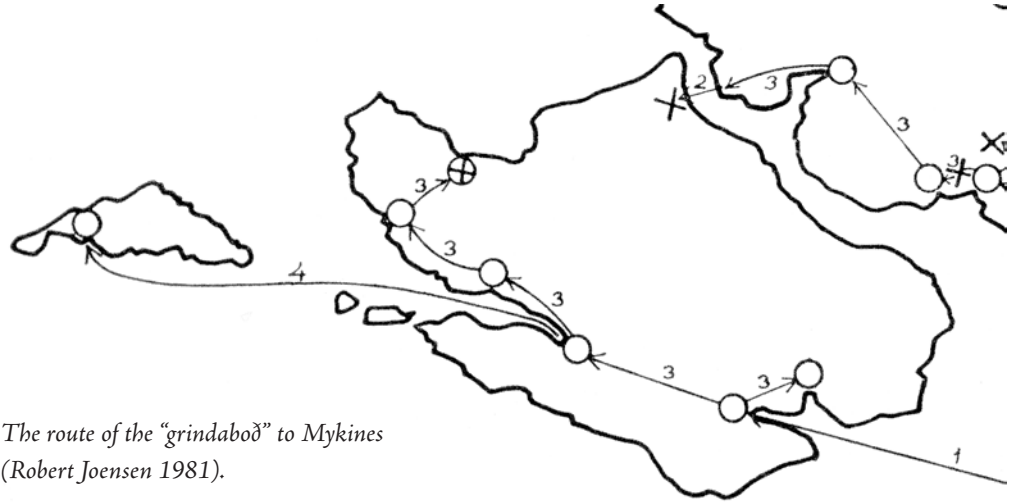
42 The nature of such conveyance has been investigated by Norwegian ethnologist Bjarne Rogan (1998) See also Williamsson's (1970, 103) description of the Nordic "Fiery Cross", which was known in the old areas with Nordic influences such as Shetland, the Hebrides, parts of Scotland and the Isle of Man: In Norse times there have been few more important public offices than this, and the laws contained minute instructions regarding the proper mode of delivery: if there was no one in the house, for instance, the symbol must be laid in the master's great chair by the fireside – no other place would do. The penalties for failing to pass the totem on, or for concealing or mutilating it, were considerable." See also KLNM 15:591.

43 Walkie-talkies were used extensively some years ago, and are still in use the Faroes. They are used by bird hunters, among others when they climb down the bird cliffs. On the island of Mykines I have observed women talking to their husbands using walkie-talkies while the men are out fishing at sea near the island. But in recent years mobile phones have become more common.

The whales beach themselves in Miðvágur about 1955.

Miðvágur on the island of Vágar has always been one of the best whale bays on the Faroes, and here the general practice was that men from the villages of Miðvágur and Sandavágur took to the boats, while the men from Sørvágur took up their positions on the beach. In the past the only way to reach Miðvágur was on foot. In Sørvágur they recount that in the olden days there was tremendous competition to be the first to reach the whale hunt in Miðvágur. Everyone wanted to be the first to arrive, which resulted in the saying that if a person was walking quickly, he was said to be walking as though he had to get to a Miðvágur whale hunt. The men from Sørvágur knew that they were waiting for them in Miðvágur (Jacobsen 1996, 504). In modern times, of course, it is much easier to get there by car.

At the end of the 19th century and in the first years of the following century major changes took place in Faroese society. These also had an effect on attitudes to the traditional communication system, and I will now consider this in greater detail. The telephone first arrived on the Faroes in 1905, when a private telephone line was installed between Vestmanna and Tórshavn. In 1906 this line was taken over by the *Løgting*, which continued to extend the telephone system on the Faroes. As early as 1911 certain rules were drawn up, defining how *grindaboð* should be communicated in connection with this new communication channel. At this time there were still some outlying areas with no telephone connections. This, combined with new patterns of business and new attitudes in general, resulted in many people perceiving the obligation to provide transport as unjust, and



The route of the "grindaboð" to Mykines (Robert Joensen 1981).

they attempted to avoid it in its traditional form. In particular, villages situated by an outlying island to which *grindaboð* was communicated in the tradition way felt that this was an unreasonable burden. I could describe many examples of this, but prefer to illustrate the problem by means of a single, detailed example in the nature of the relationship between Sørvágur and Mykines.

The heavy burden: Grindaboð to Mykines. [44]

Mykines is the most westerly island on the Faroes. It was the obligation of the villages of Sørvágur and Bøur to send the *grindaboð* to Mykines. The only way to pass on the *grindaboð* was to row the distance of 34 km in a rowing boat. The arrangement was that on every fourth occasion someone would row from Bøur to Mykines with the *grindaboð*, and the other three times from Sørvágur. Because of the island's remote location, the actual population of Mykines had no obligation to pass on the *grindaboð* (Joensen 1981, 37).

The local council appointed a person whose job it was to delegate men from Sørvágur to row out to Mykines with the *grindaboð*. Mykines did not get a wireless radiotelephone connection until 1928, so until that time the island received the *grindaboð* in the traditional way. Rowing the 34 km to Mykines, a journey involving rowing through extremely difficult currents,

44 The source material for this section may be found in the National Archive of the Faroe Islands, the local archive and the sheriff's archives. Atli Eiriksson MA (Political Science) has been extremely helpful in locating this material.

The village of Mykines about 1920.

was considered to be a very onerous task, which people would rather avoid. Not just because it was a tough journey, but also because everyone had their own interests to consider when there was a whale hunt.

In a letter dated 31 August 1908 the parish commission on Mykines submitted a complaint to the County Council, in which they complained about not having received the *grindaboð*:

> "…and now things have gone completely wrong with the two whale hunts this year. We heard of the one in Vestmanna quite by chance because a man from Mykines happened to be in Sørvágur when the *grindaboð* arrived, and when he realised that the whales had been driven into Vestmanna he tried to send the *grindaboð* to Mykines, but no one wanted to go, so he travelled out to Mykines of his own accord with the message of the whale hunt. But we were completely unaware of the whale hunt in Miðvágur until we came to Sørvágur one week later, by which time it was all over. Losing our share of the whale kill is a tremendous loss to us, and we would ask the council whether we could be compensated because of the way this has happened with the *grindaboð*. We do not believe that we can allow such indifference or neglect to pass any longer without complaint, as the weather was favourable for reaching the island…"

The sheriff produced a statement on the matter. This stated that the per-

son authorised to send the *grindaboð* had in the one instance not considered it necessary to send the *grindaboð* to Mykines, as a man from the island who had been to see the doctor in Vestmanna with his son was going back there anyway. However, this person from Mykines had personally asked the sender of the *grindaboð* to arrange communication of the message, but this person did not consider it necessary.

In the second instance the person responsible had appointed five men to row to Mykines with the *grindaboð*, but two of these men had refused to do so, and three men could not row the boat on their own.

In a letter dated 30 October 1908 the Governor declared that he was willing to drop the charge in the matter of a breach of section 7 of the Pilot Whale Regulations in respect of the omission to send the *grindaboð* to Mykines about the pilot whale hunt in Vestmanna, on the condition that the person responsible for sending the *grindaboð* paid a fine of 5 kroner to the local poor relief fund and paid compensation for the amount that the man from Mykines had to pay to rent a motorboat, namely 7 kroner and 73 øre. As far as the two others who refused to perform the task were concerned,

> "For failure to bring the *grindaboð* to Mykines about the pilot whale hunt in Miðvágur, they must each pay a fine of 3 kroner to the local poor relief fund. "

As regards compensation for the share of the catch that the residents of Mykines did not receive, the Governor requests further information in order to reach a decision on this matter.

However, the three people refused to pay their fines, as a result of all three were charged by the police for a breach of section 7 of which the Pilot Whale Regulations:

> "During the case it was stated that when the pilot whale hunts took place in Vestmanna and Miðvágur in August (1908), freeholder Johannes Olsen of Sørvágur was appointed by the council to ensure that the *grindaboð* was sent from Sørvágur to Mykines. During the case Johannes Olsen of Sørvágur has admitted that he did not send a message to Mykines about the pilot whale hunt that took place in Vestmanna on 20 August 1908. The reason for this is stated as being that the accused assumed that one of the members of the parish commission for Mykines, Hans Pauli Hansen, who had just arrived in Sørvágur from Vestmanna, where he had been visiting the doctor with his son, would take the news of the pilot whale hunt to Mykines, as he would be

The whale kill "á Pollinum" on Tindhólm, Vágar, about 1935.

travelling there anyway. The accused therefore believed that in this instance it would be superfluous to send a *grindaboð* to Mykines.

It is not considered that the accused was entitled to fail to send a *grindaboð* to Mykines simply because a person from Mykines who happened to be in Sørvágur was on his way back to Mykines. Such an omission may only be defended if the person in question had declared to the accused that he was prepared to take the news of the whale hunt to Mykines. No such declaration had been made in this instance. Quite the reverse, the person in question from Mykines had informed the accused that he would hold him responsible for failing to send the *grindaboð*.

The accused must therefore be considered to be guilty of a breach of section 7 of the Pilot Whale Regulation on the Faroes dated 5 February 1872 by virtue of the fact that on this occasion he failed to send a *grindaboð* to Mykines. However, it is not considered warranted to oblige the accused to compensate Hans Pauli Hansen for the travel costs incurred by him of 7 kroner and 73 øre, as he was not entitled to free travel from Sørvágur to Mykines. Nor is there any question of compensating residents of Mykines for the whale catch in Vestmanna, and they did not experience any loss due to the fact that Hans Pauli Hansen brought them the *grindaboð* in time, enabling them to collect the proportion of the reported whale catch that was due to them and allocated to them.

As regards the whale hunt that took place in Miðvágur on 24 August 1908,

it was stated that Johannes Olsen appointed six men from Sørvágur to send news of the whale hunt to Mykines. These six men included the accused, fishermen Joen Pauli Joensen and Peter Andreas Samuelsen.

The accused Joen Pauli Joensen did not actually refuse to take the *grindaboð* to Mykines, but he did omit to do so. He admitted that on the evening of the day on which the pilot whales appeared in Miðvágur he was appointed by Johannes Olsen to arrange to take the *grindaboð* to Mykines. He stated that the reason that he omitted to do this was that next morning no one came to him to inform him when they would leave, and as the favourable current to Mykines had passed, he believed that it was too late to set off for Mykines, and for this reason …

The accused Peter Andreas Samuelsen refused to take the *grindaboð* to Mykines as soon as he was instructed to do so, as he believed that he was not well enough due to lameness in his right foot. During the case he produced a doctor's certificate, which stated that the doctor considered him entirely unable to be used for public conveyance.

However, at the accused man's own admission it was stated that he, aged 24, has participated in fishing in rowing boats, decked vessels and motorboats since he was confirmed. He had therefore participated in all work involved in sea transport, and could therefore not be exempted from such transport, as section 2 of the Transportation Act expressly states that he should attend the whale hunt in Miðvágur. He also submitted as an excuse that Johannes Olsen had not appointed anyone as foreman, and that in previous years he had regularly been ordered to take the *grindaboð* to Mykines.

It had not been the custom that the person appointed by the council to dispatch the *grindaboð* had himself appointed a foreman in the instances where one had been used. Such a person is usually designated by members of the crew themselves from those assigned.

The fact that on the morning after the accused had been instructed to take the *grindaboð* to Mykines no one came to inform him when they would be leaving cannot exempt the accused from the obligation to take care of the *grindaboð*, as it is nevertheless his duty and the duty of the other men assigned to meet at the place of departure at the right time, and the accused failed to do this. He must therefore be considered to have failed to provide the *grindaboð* for Mykines, to have been in breach of section 7 of the Pilot Whale Regulation, which states that every man between the ages of 15 and 50 who in the course of his work is used to such work is obliged to provide transportation. Therefore, by failing to ensure the delivery of the grindaboð to Mykines, he is in breach of section 7 of the Pilot Whale Regulation."

The verdict was that all three were in breach of section 7 of the Pilot Whale Regulation and were ordered to pay fines to the poor relief fund. The residents of Mykines also claimed compensation for not having received any pilot whale meat – this was sold at auction for 111 kroner and 46 øre. The share was a little below the normal value, so the sheriff calculated that they had suffered a loss to the order of 83 kroner and 59 øre, of which Joen Pauli Joensen and Peter Andreas Samuelsen each had to pay half to the village of Mykines.

The reluctance to row the long distance to Mykines with the *grindaboð* is clearly described in a letter sent by a number of men from Sørvágur to the *Løgting* in August 1909, in which they state

> "For many years the *grindaboð* has been transported from Sørvágur to Mykines by rowing boat, which must be considered a very great burden for this village, as the men who have to perform this task firstly must do it without remuneration and secondly often suffer a major, direct loss by virtue of the fact that they are prevented from reaching the site of the kill, and are therefore unable to ensure that they do not lose their share, nor are they able to go to the *grinda* (dance?) (not visible in document).
>
> In recent times there has been a change in activities at sea in this area, as fishing now takes place using motorboats, and open rowing boats are no longer used. So if the *grindaboð* has to be sent to Mykines nowadays, it is done by motorboat, which raises this major issue: who is to meet the costs for the boat, which amount to at least 10 kroner? If the person whose duty it is to pass on the *grindaboð* has to bear this cost, in addition to their other losses, the duty of forwarding the message becomes a burden that can no longer be borne, and for this reason we would suggest that the *grindaboð* from Sørvágur be communicated, as in most other places, by means of signalling.
>
> As people will soon be living on Mykines Holm, they will thus be able to see signals from Sørvágur or Bøur. We would therefore suggest that the message is sent from here to Bøur, e. g. by phone, and from there a signal is sent to Mykines Holm, from where the message is relayed by phone to the village of Mykines."

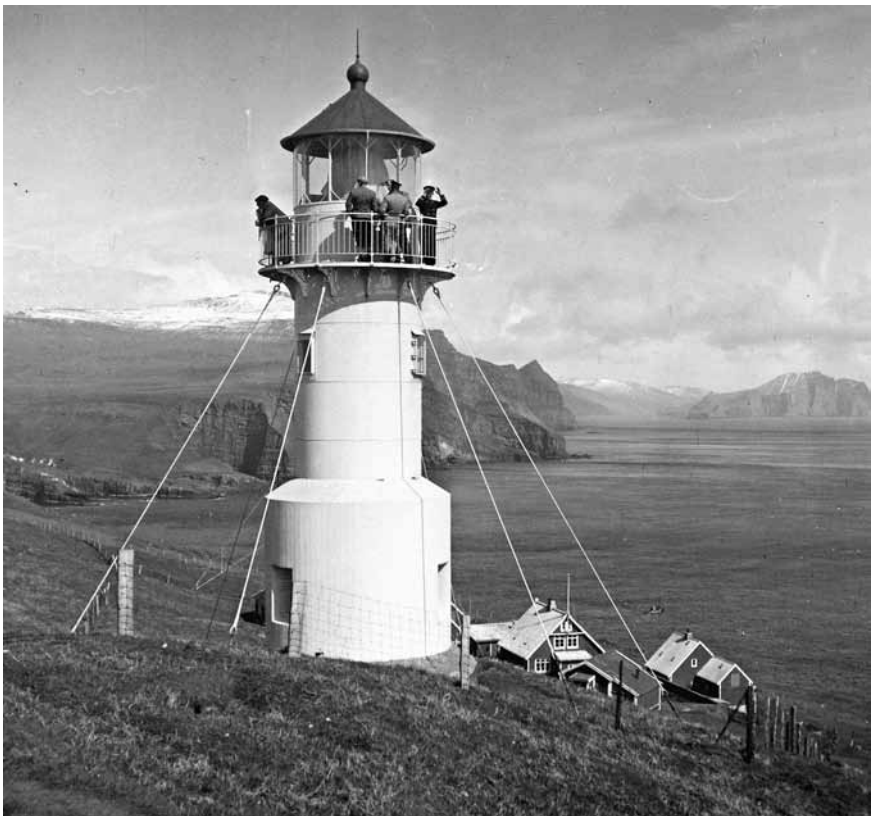
The case was dealt with by the *Løgting* on 29 August 1910, where they voiced their understanding of the problems, while at the same time confirming that it was not the responsibility of the *Løgting*, but of the Governor to make a decision on the case. The actual reason why people now believed it would be possible to send a signal to Mykines Holm was that

in 1909 a lighthouse had been built there. Homes had been built next to the lighthouse for the lighthouse keeper and his assistants. The lighthouse and homes were located in such a way that it would be possible to receive signals from Bøur or Sørvágur. The sheriff therefore made enquiries with the lighthouse keeper about the signalling opportunities. The lighthouse keeper states in a letter dated 15 October 1910:

> "…that we here at the lighthouse do not feel able to adopt such a signalling system, as it would almost never work satisfactorily, partly because the distance between Bøur and the Mykines lighthouse is too great, and partly because the two places are at such an awkward angle to one another that such a signalling system might become a source of dispute between sender and receiver.
> By way of illustrating this we can state that on 20 and 21 August, when there was a school of whales close to us, we tried for a long time to alert Bøur by means of signalling, but the signals were not observed. We lit two powerful beacons, and on both days the weather was perfectly clear."

As they attempt to find a solution to the signalling problem, the complaints from Mykines about neglect and the absence of *grindaboð* continue. In a letter to the *Løgting* dated 10 May 1912 the sheriff says, among other things

> "…that as a rule it will be virtually impossible for Mykines men to receive news of a whale hunt in Miðvágur the same day that it is being killed, for the following reasons:
> 1) As a rule the whales are only killed in the afternoon, even if they are discovered in the morning, as some time is always required to drive them into the whale bay and kill them. 2) Mykines men only want to receive the *grindaboð* after the whales have been killed, so that they do not row the long distance in vain. 3) As a rule all people from Sørvágur who have a duty to provide transport take part in a whale hunt in Miðvágur; it would be very hard for these people if they, having arrived in Sørvágur in the evening after a whale hunt in Miðvágur, exhausted and soaking wet, then had to immediately set off in the evening or at night to Mykines with the *grindaboð*. 4) Furthermore, as a rule in summer there are only a few men at home, so the burden of sending the *grindaboð* to Mykines will often rest with the same people, who are then prevented from looking after their own interests in the whale hunt when they have to take the *grindaboð* to Mykines.



The lighthouse on Mykines Holm established in 1909. Radio-navigation established in 1928.

The sheriff has by now become tired of the Mykines men's complaints about the lack of *grindaboð*, and ends his letter by saying:

> "It almost seems as if there are Mykines men who want to make the burden of sending the *grindaboð* from Sørvágur to Mykines as burdensome as possible for the men of Sørvágur, while the opposite ought to be the case."

The captain of the inspection ship "Beskytteren" also became involved, without this producing a better method of signalling. The case was brought a couple more times before the *Løgting*, which suggested, among other things, that the transportation costs in connection with the *grindaboð* be met by the residents of the village. However, the municipality did not want to meet these extra costs. The case dragged on. On 10 July 1918 the Governor, who was new in the job, reminded the sheriff of the case, as the problem had clearly not been resolved.

In his response dated 29 July 1918 the sheriff, who was also new to the

job, stated that he did not know very much about the case, but had located it in the archive. He said:

> "It has been explained to me that from time immemorial the *grindaboð* to Mykines had been sent from Sørvágur and Bøur by rowing boat. Due to the difficult waters, large rowing boats (8-man boats) had always been used. The *grindaboð* was sent three times in succession from Sørvágur and then once from Bøur, and so on. The message was conveyed without any payment. As motorboats were acquired, the use of large rowing boats gradually ceased, and the *grindaboð* was usually conveyed by motorboats. I have been unable to ascertain at whose expense."

The sheriff enclosed with his response a letter from the committee of Sørvágur Parish Council dated 13 July 1918, in which reference was made to a decision passed by the committee on that date:

> "A unanimous resolution was passed to recommend to the council that they submit to the Representative Council that the in future the *grindaboð* be sent from Sørvágur to Mykines by means of beacons, to be signalled at a specific place, "úti á Túgvu" by the village of Bøur, and that the council or the Representative Council appoint a man in Bøur to arrange the lighting of the

The village of Bøur, from where they had to row with the grindaboð to Mykines about 1920.

> beacon, and to assign the lighthouse staff on Mykines Holm to check and send a response by means of a beacon. In the event that a beacon cannot be lit and the *grindaboð* is conveyed by motorboat due to fog or poor visibility, the costs should be paid from the Financial Fund, as the parish council is not inclined to agree to these costs being met by the municipality.
> It is noted that the parish council has arranged for a test beacon, which proved to produce the desired result on Mykines Holm."

The sheriff approved of the idea of signalling from "úti á Túgvu":

> "In clear weather I believe that it is feasible, and as there must always be someone on day watch at the lighthouse, the lighthouse staff can as appropriate be appointed to receive and respond to the smoke signals. If the whales are in Sørvágur you could use one beacon, two if they are in Miðvágur. There is a phone at the lighthouse, which is connected to the village of Mykines. If the smoke signals from úti á Túgvu are not acknowledged, the message must be sent as before by boat.
> This is a rather heavy burden that has been placed on Sørvágur and Bøur in this context, and if it can be arranged for the Financial Fund to pay for transportation of the *grindaboð* by boat from Vágar to Mykines, then I believe that this should be done."

The sheriff mentioned the same difficulties described above, and concluded his letter to the council with a concrete suggestion:

> "With reference to the population numbers, Sørvágur should convey the *grindaboð* ten times in succession and Bøur once, then Sørvágur ten times more and Bøur once, and so on – Sørvágur has approx. 630 inhabitants and Bøur 60."

The reason that I provide such a detailed description of this case is in the first instance to show how integral a part of Faroese society the whale hunt was, as conflicts relating to it were discussed at the highest levels in order to be resolved. At the same time, the case also illustrates the problems that arose as the entire commercial basis of the Faroes shifted from an agrarian society, in which the individuals were under the sway of a collective system, to a new, more capitalist-oriented system in which commercial fishing gradually became all-important, and relics of the old society could occasionally feel like a millstone around the neck.

The problems relating to the delivery of the *grindaboð* resolved them-

selves in due course as radio navigation was established at the lighthouse in Mykineshólmur in 1928. At the same time a radiotelephone connection was established between the lighthouse and Tórshavn. A simple magneto-telephone connection was established between the lighthouse on Mykineshólmur and the village of Mykines. The lighthouse now took on official status as one of several telephone stations in the Faroes. This development had also been requested by the fishery guard and the lighthouse authority, which wanted to be able to act quickly to report, among other things, foreign trawlers involved in illegal fishing. [45] Only now, in 1928, could Mykines receive the *grindaboð* by phone, as could all other villages in the Faroes, and the men from Bøur and Sørvágur were relieved of their heavy burden.

45 Thomsen 1981, 116, Jensen 1993, 43, 78. Extensive material exists, in particular about complaints in connection with the *grindaboð*, distribution, etc. Atli Mortensen, MA (Political Science) has been of assistance in helping me to locate extensive material about whale hunting, which can be used in various contexts.

Tórshavn 2007.

Chapter 5:

The Drive and the Kill

Pilot whaling was not an occupation or a profession; it was a collective effort in the community and so it remains. Supervision of pilot whale schools and the whale hunt is now under the auspices of the Faroese government, which must ensure that the Pilot Whaling Regulations are respected and must in general assume responsibility for preparations and take the necessary precautions to protect this economic sector, as specified in the regulations. A further supplement was added to the regulations in 1986, stating that "The Faroese Government and the Fishing Committee of the Representative Council can announce quick bans on whale hunting in certain whale bays." The latest regulations are from 1998.

Before the Faroese achieved home rule in 1948, supervision was the responsibility of the Danish Governor. During one period, from the time when the first whaling regulations came into effect in 1832 until 1909, the Governor, accompanied by the County Sheriff, who is the chief police authority on the Faroes, had to take part in the whale hunt at all "hvalvágir" (whale bays) on the Faroes "when weather or other unavoidable circumstances did not hinder him, so that he himself was present on the occasions of pilot whale catches" (Bjørk 1963, 208). The Governor's days as whaling supervisor were numbered when the requirement for his participation was abolished in 1909.

In practice and by law it is now the "sýslumaður" – the local sheriff or local legislative representative – who holds the highest command at the hunts, and this was probably the case in the past. Svabo (1959, 256) men-

The whales are driven into Klaksvík.

tions that the sheriff directed the distribution of the catch, and it is implicit in Svabo's account that the sheriff also played an important role in 1781. The sheriff has supervised and directed the distribution as far back as sources for our research go, but his role in driving the whales ashore is unclear; here he has only had a consultative role with the "grindaformenn" (whaling foremen, who are the elected leaders of the hunts). What the relationship was earlier I have not been able to ascertain, but Bjørk asserts that in the early versions of the whaling regulations, which were first formulated in 1807, the sheriff's role was to tax and distribute the school of whales after they had been killed (Bjørk 1963, 201). He did not have any special role to play in terms of driving the whales ashore, although he was given this in the regulations of 1832.

However, if we study the preparations for the whale drive prior to the introduction of the regulations, it becomes clear that the leadership of the drive had been very diffuse. In this context we have to remind ourselves of the virtually whale-free years in the period 1745-1795. It seems that some disorganisation had developed, and that the rights of the strongest prevailed. It must also be surmised that at that time there were among the

Faroese peasantry people who, because of their prestige and power in the local society, also had the decisive word when the whales were driven in. With the introduction of the whaling regulations, it became the whaling foremen and the sheriff who led the drive, together with the crew on the boat that had sighted the school.

The whaling foremen are elected for five-year terms, under the regulations of 1955 at "grannastevna", i. e. village meetings called by the sheriff. Anyone with the right to take part in the whale hunt is allowed to vote, which means in practice all men over the age of 15, although by the time of the 1986 regulations they were appointed by the sheriff at the recommendation of the village or town council[46]. But it is still permitted for whaling foremen to be elected in the traditional way if there is a local agreement to do so. Each whale bay has four whaling foremen and two deputies.

Until 1857 whaling foremen were appointed by the Governor at the suggestion of the sheriff. It became obvious, however, that it was not always the persons' qualifications as accomplished whale hunters that were decisive, but other considerations came into play. It was therefore decided that it would be preferable that the local whale hunters themselves elected their own whaling foremen, as the foremen ought then to be chosen on the basis of purely practical qualifications, and not according to status or prestige in the community (Bjørk 1963, 202).

As mentioned in The Executive Order from 1998: the sheriff appoints whaling foremen subject to proposals from the local (town) council for five years. If there is agreement among the whalers in one place, it is permitted to choose whaling foremen who have usually held this position, and the sheriff then appoints these people. The sheriff also has the authority to send for, or in an emergency appoint, other whaling foremen if he considers this necessary. The sheriff can also decide that the appointed whaling foremen should be whaling foremen for temporarily designated whale bays.

A whaling foreman must denote his position by flying a small flag on a staff at the stern of his boat so that he is easily recognised. Each other boat taking part in the hunt must also have a "formann" (a boat foreman).

When taxing and distributing the slaughtered school, the sheriff has

46 The first town councils and parish councils were set up in 1872 as a new, more modern administrative unit, based on democratic elections, while the village meetings date back to the old, traditional society, when it was the amount of land owned by an individual that determined the extent to which he had a say. Land ownership was thus important not only from a production perspective, but also because land ownership provided power and prestige in society. (See also West 1975).

a large number of assistants, whom we will discuss as their roles become more important to this presentation.

"Hvalvágir" or whale bays

Not all fjords and beaches in the Faroes are suitable for whale kills. Svabo (Svabo 1959, 250) classifies in 1781-82 whale bays as best, average and worst. A good whale bay should have a sandy shoreline inclining evenly upwards, but not all fulfil these requirements. Today there are a fixed number of authorised whale bays. Authorisation has varied somewhat since the first whaling regulations of 1832. Those bays authorised under the regulations of 1955 and 1986 are shown in the maps. In the latest authorisation from 2001 the following places are are approved as whale bays:

Norðoyar: Klaksvík, Viðvík and Hvannasund.
Eysturoy: Fuglafjørður, Syðragøta, Norðragøta and Norðskála.
Streymoy: Tórshavn (Sandágerði), Leynar, Vestmanna and Hvalvík.
Vágoy: Miðvágur and Bøur.
Sandoy: Sandur and Húsavík.
Suðuroy: Øravík, Trongisvágur, Hvalba, Vágur and Fámjin. [47]

Authorisation could also be withdrawn from a bay or a fjord if it became clear that it was no longer suitable. On 27 November 1935 there was a whale hunt at Gøtuvík on the island of Eysturoy. It was the co-called *measles grind*. Measles, which had not appeared on the Faroes for many years, were causing havoc at that time but had not reached the village of Gøta. The sudden gathering of people in connection with the whale hunt caused many to catch measles, and several people died. What is significant in this context is not the outbreak of measles, but the fact that there had not been a pilot whale hunt in Gøta for many years and they were afraid of losing their authorisation. This was why it was so important

> "…for this whale kill to go as smoothly as possible, no risks were permitted. There were plenty of boats and plenty of people. All seamen were at home. People came from far and wide. The boats were instructed to have plenty of stones to use in the drive. When the boats passed Ennið with the whales, the view was perfect. On land, all the people hid on the beach, not a living soul

47 Executive Order no. 107 dated 21 November 1989 on the approval of whale bays, most recently changed by Executive Order no. 94 dated 31 May 2001.

Photo from the "Measles Grind" in Gøtu, 27. November 1935.

could be seen, and it was as quiet as a churchyard as the whales approached. The whale hunt went well. The whales were driven by about 50 boats, and when the whales were stabbed they were brought smoothly ashore, with only one whale being wounded. As the whales beached themselves a call went up, and within a few seconds everything changed. It was a strange sight, as all the people rose out of the ground, from behind the slopes, out of their houses, people of all ages, mainly men, tall and short, wearing all kinds of clothes, most rushing towards the sea, some jumping into the sea. Some came slowly to the top of the beach and started to pull the whales up the beach. The kill went well. After about ten minutes 170 whales lay dead on the beach. There were no longer any doubts about Gøtu as a whale bay." (Joensen 1995).

The whale drive

When you drive whales, the principle is the same as is used when driving sheep into the fold on the Faroes. The only difference is that when you drive sheep you use people, whereas when you drive pilot whales you use boats. The terminology used is in many instances the same, "at reka seyð" (to drive sheep), "at reka grind" (to drive a school of whales). The flock is surrounded and driven towards a specific place, where it is ultimately

The whales are driven into Vestmanna. Here they used a special made whale net. About 1935.

caught. A similar method was also used on the bird cliffs, where there were ledges on which guillemots where driven into special traps known as *kvíggj* or *lomvigakvíggj*, where they could be caught in large numbers. Incidentally, this form of capture was banned, as it had too much of an impact on guillemot stocks (Nørrevang 1977).

In the whaling regulations there are rules stating how the school of whales is to be driven ashore. The regulations of 1955 stipulate that during the whale drive one must consider the direction that the school itself chooses, as long as the course runs towards a recognised whale bay. When this is not possible, one ought to take into consideration what direction the wind and current are moving, as well as to what extent the school is skittish and erratic. Whenever possible, one ought to choose an acknowledged, high-quality whale bay ahead of a poor one, unless the poorer one is closer. All the boats ought to take into account these considerations.

Self-aggrandisement and irregularities are punished according to law. Such violations are described in the whaling regulations in order to avoid conflicts that occurred in connection with earlier drives, a matter to which we will return a little later. Certainly the rules help somewhat, but as recently as 1950 there were still many possible interpretations, and often

the assessment of a situation is characterised by a good deal of subjectivity (Dam 1951, 75).

Disagreements during the whale drive can still occur from time to time, when the participating hunters doubt the competence of the whaling foremen and therefore act as they themselves see fit. These situations are perhaps able to happen because of the reduced authority of the whaling foremen nowadays[48]. Also, punishments are seldom imposed for breaching the rules prescribed by the whaling regulations, which does not encourage respect for the whaling foremen's decisions.

In the past there were usually disagreements because there were always a great number of persons who wanted to receive shares of "jarðarhvalur", i. e. whales that were allocated to the shore-owners. In Svabo's time such whales comprised half of the total catch. It could happen that entire schools were lost as a result of these disagreements. Svabo relates that in order to avoid these conflicts, attempts were made to hold the shoreline in common ownership so that landowners had a mutual right to a whale that was brought ashore on their land (Svabo 1959, 254). We shall, however, return to this point later in this discussion.

Let us first see how the whale drive unfolded. The oldest full description was written by Svabo in 1779:

> "The proper time to land whales is the summer; however, a school has often been caught and sighted in early spring or even in late autumn. The school loses itself among these islands while chasing prey, in particular cuttlefish, and the fog, which is so prevalent here in the summer, can and does play a part here. The first boat to arrive positions itself outside the school and awaits the arrival of more boats, which gradually surround the school from the side farthest out to sea. If the current opposes driving them into a whale bay, they keep the school enclosed or, as they put it, "hide it in a small cove", while they await the flow tide. Four to six boats can drive in a small school, but if it is large they do not dare make a move until more boats appear; they then chase the school into a whale bay by making a commotion, shouting, beating with the oars, casting stones (if they have had time to take them along) and beating the gunwales with the oars. Sometimes the school goes calmly and willingly, sometimes some of the whales break off and move away from the rest, in which case some of the boats immediately row with all their strength to move outside and drive them back to the school. As long as the school does not begin to dive, the prospects are good, but if it dives too often, it is much too wild to hunt

48 Information in a letter from the late sheriff of Tvøroyri, K. Djurhuus 1969.

> and is seldom caught. Once the school has come a little way inside the whale bay, it seldom escapes capture, even if it panics, since most such bays appear to be cut off on the side facing the sea, either by a protruding piece of land or by another island. However, it can happen that a school will not enter the bay when it sights land; they must then try to trick the school by setting up heavily smoking bonfires at the back of the bay, so that the whales think that this may indicate a way out to the open water. The proper time to begin to attack and drive them up onto the shore is when the sea begins to ebb or the tide is on the turn; the whales that pass over the sand thus lie high and dry when at full ebb, and they swim even more strongly while they still see water, however little there may be. They are therefore driven into the bay with care in order that they are at the right place for the kill at the right time." (Svabo 1779, 44).

Modern motorboats are much more mobile than rowing boats, and when small ships occasionally take part in the drive, they are as a rule positioned in the outermost ranks of the boats that surround the whales. The echo sounder has proved most helpful in driving the whales, as they are frightened by the sound waves, which are sent towards the bottom. There is an instance of one single boat with an echo sounder having driven an entire school of whales towards the shore[49].

Svabo mentions too that the hunters wait for a favourable moment for the kill. While doing so, they *hide the school* or *"goyma grindina"* as expressed in Faroese. This must take place a reasonable distance from the eventual location of the kill, so that the school does not feel trapped, as this can complicate the kill (Dam 1951, 75). While the hunters are able to hide the school, it lies completely still. While the whales take turns coming up for air and going down again, the normal saying is that only 10% of the school can be seen at a time. The whales thus lie grouped together and rub up against one another in all tranquillity, and a flute-like whining or hooting can be heard from the school. To lie in this way is called "at grindast" in Faroese. While the school "grindast", the hunters prepare for the kill. Boats sail back and forth to collect whaling equipment and stones to throw into the sea. We will use the waiting period to take a look at the hunting equipment used at a whale kill.

49 Information provided by fishing graduate Jens Helgi Toftum, Tórshavn, whose grandfather once did this.

Whaling equipment

"Kópakleppur" seal-gaff from about 1820.

At a pilot whale kill the following equipment comes into play, presented here in the order in which it is used: stones [kast], loose stones [leysakast] and stones tied to ropes [fastakast], whaling spears [hvalvákn], whaling hooks [sóknarongul], knives [knívur] and hand-held harpoons [skutil]. That the boat is a prerequisite for the kill should go without saying. All boats were used and still are.

In the village of Vágur in Suðuroy they still have some old rowing boats with long traditions as whaling boats – *grindabátur* (Poulsen 1992). The Faroese term *grindabátur* was documented for the first time in the Pilot Whaling Regulations from 1882, where it is defined as a large, eight-man boat, "which upon receiving the *grindaboð* makes its way to the whale hunt". Authorised whaling boats had to be fitted with the necessary equipment required for a whale hunt, which was not the case for other boats. Authorised whaling boats thus had to be of a specified minimum size and carry the necessary equipment (Mortensen 2000, 196).

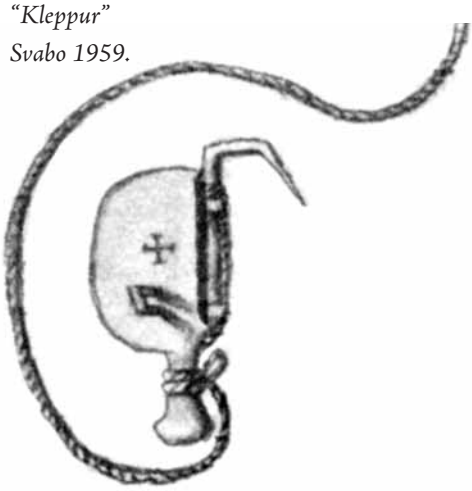
As Svabo says (1779, 44, 459), stones are cast into the sea to frighten the whales into swimming in the desired direction. In the language of pilot whaling, these stones are referred to as "kast". There is differentiation between "leysakast" and "fastakast". *Leysakast* are ordinary stones taken along to throw overboard at the school, while *fastakast* are stones tied to a rope so that the stones can be pulled back up and cast again as many times as is necessary. A *fastakast* is generally a round stone, often painted white, with a leather strap stuffed into a hole bored in the stone and fastened to the stone by means of a wooden wedge. A line is tied into the loop formed by the strap. In the past people also used the *"vaðsteinur"*, i. e. the stone or sinker that was bound to the handline when traditional fishery was practised in the Faroes, as discussed by Landt (1965, 224) in 1800.

"Hvalvákn" is a spear used to stab the whales. It consists of a steel blade, approximately 45 centimetres in length, fastened to a wooden shaft about two metres long. The *hvalvákn* is attached to a line so that it can be retrieved each time it has been used to stab a whale. There are older and newer types of *hvalvákn*. The older type was broader near the shaft and was firmly bound to the shaft, while the more recent version has a blade that is not nearly as wide and is fastened to the shaft by means of one or more iron rings. The shape of the whaling spear seems to have varied a great deal,

but I have not yet been able to make any comparisons. A wooden sheath (*"kellingar-kjaftur"*) is placed over the blade of the *hvalvákn* when it is not in use.

The *hvalvákn* is used on board the boats. There are definite rules defining how to stand when striking the whales. On board a boat with eight oarsmen you should use three spears: two men, each with a spear, stand in the bow of the boat, and one man stands in the aft. A boat with ten oarsmen could have four spears, two on each side. Boats with six or four oarsmen were permitted two spears, one at each end. These stipulations date from the oldest whaling regulations. The whaling regulations of 1955, however, do not specify how many spears or how much other equipment is allowed in a boat, as nowadays there is always enough to go round. The reason for specifying a given number of spears must be that a *hvalvákn* was a major investment that was not an easy one to make. According to the 1986 regulations, only the sheriff and the whaling foremen are allowed to carry *hvalvákn* in their boats, for all others it is forbidden. For the same reason that the first whaling regulations included fixed rules for the *hvalvákn*, it was also stipulated how many "sóknaronglar" there should be in a boat.

A *sóknarongul* in Suðuroy called "grindakrókur" is a heavy iron hook or gaff about 45 centimetres long, to which approximately 20 metres of sturdy line is fastened. The whaling hook is a relatively new phenomenon in the context of pilot whaling. It is not mentioned in the oldest literary sources. In his report from 1781-82, Svabo (1959, 98) mentions a "sóknarjarn", which is a large iron hook that is used to secure very large fish so that they are not lost. *Sóknarjarn*, *sóknarongul* and *sóknnarkrókur* may be considered synonyms in Faroese (Poulsen 1998), but the term used most commonly in connection with pilot whaling is *sóknarongul*.

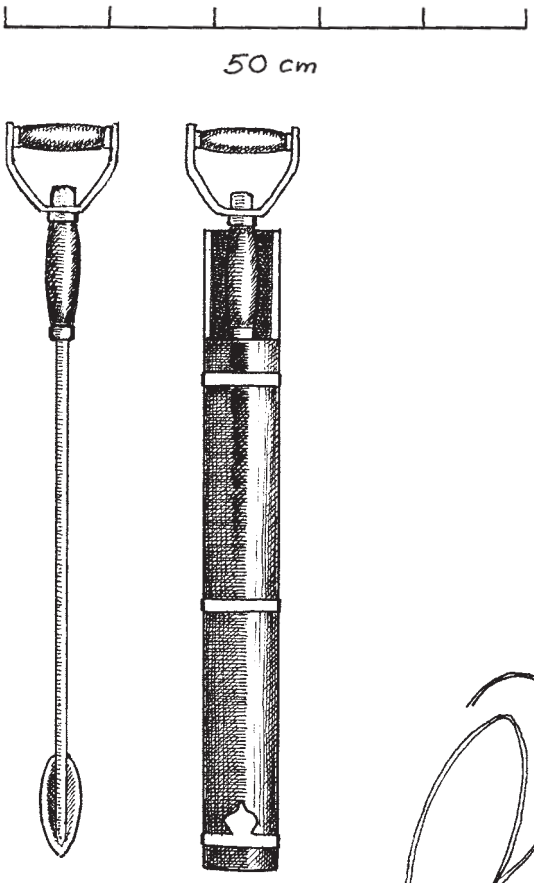


"Kleppur"
Svabo 1959.

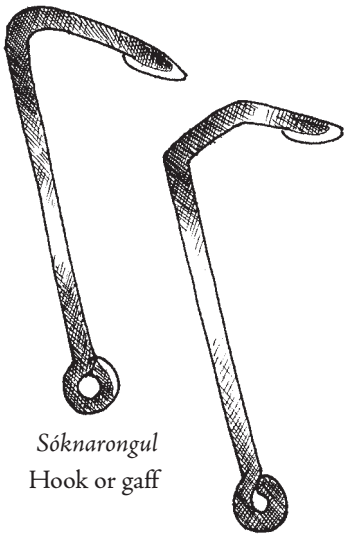
There are also good reasons to believe that the term *sóknarongul* was not used in connection with pilot whaling until after 1800, as Svabo (1959, 252) explains that the whales were pulled ashore "by sticking the hand into the blowhole, although they must not touch the eye, as they would become very agitated and easily harm those who were pulling them. " There were men who were particularly skilled at pulling in whales in this way. In a drawing, page 37 and in a painting, (page 111) from 1844 a "kleppur" (iron gaff fastend

Equipment used in the pilot whale hunt

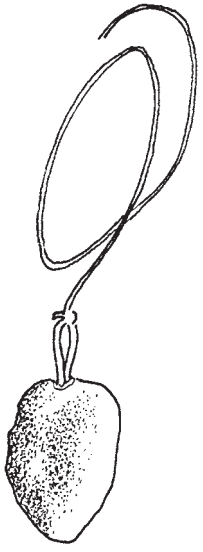
Bárður Jákupsson



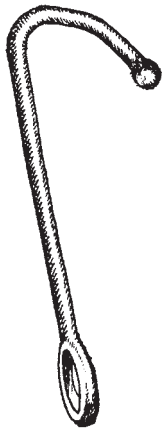
Mønustingari
The new spinal cord knife



Sóknarongul
Hook or gaff

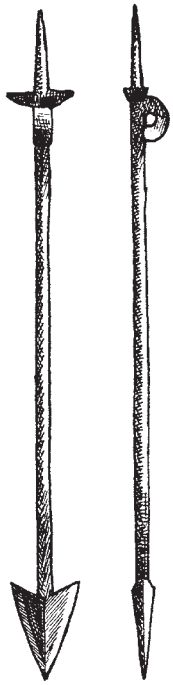


Fastakast
Stone tied to a rope to be cast and pulled back again

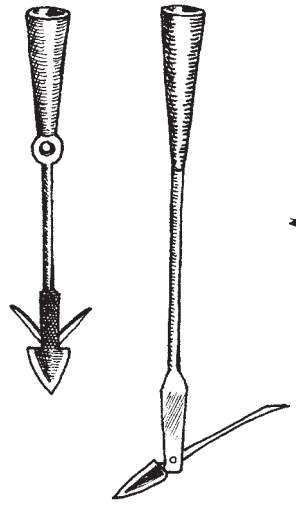


Blástrarongul
Blowhole hook

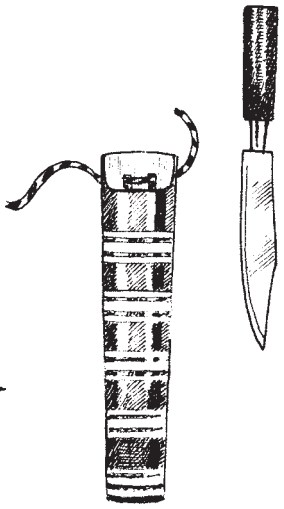
Skutil
Harpoon, old type



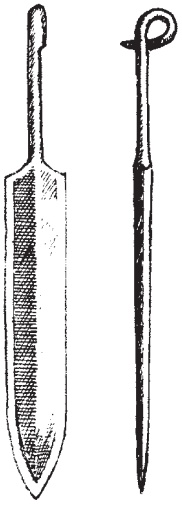
Skutil
Harpoon, modern type



Grindaknívur
Pilot whale knife, old type



Steel blade
of whale spear,
old type



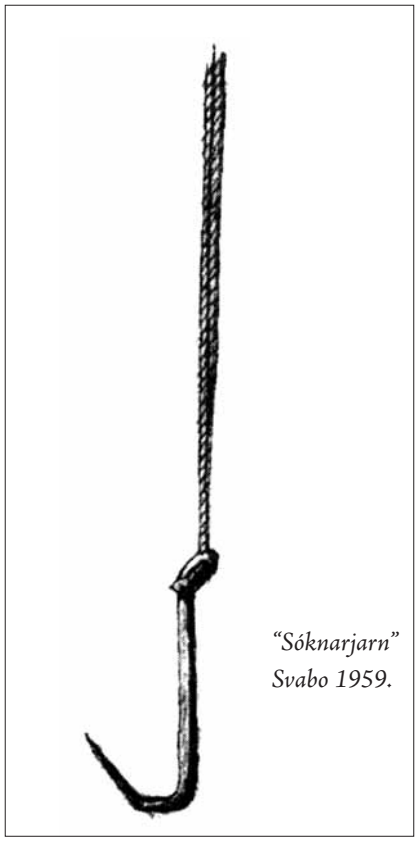
Steel blade
of whale spear,
modern type

Hvalavákn
Whale spear, old type,
with sheath or
"kellingarkjaftur"

Hvalavákn
Whale spear,
modern type

Hvalvákn
Whale spear,
modern type
in full

Skutil
Harpoon,
modern type in
full



"Sóknarjarn"
Svabo 1959.

One man is cutting the neck. while the other has struck a "kleppur" in the head of the whale. Th. Kloss about 1850.

to a handle of wood) normaly used for big fishes, to struck in the head of the whales, much like a seal-gaff (page 106).

Sóknarjarn, which Svabo (1959, 79, fig. 8) writes about compares closely with *sóknarongul*, but is smaller and not as heavy. It is therefore very probable that *sóknarongul*, which is known from the first half of the 19th century, is a new tool, invented by adapting the old *sóknarjarn* to make it big enough to use on pilot whales.

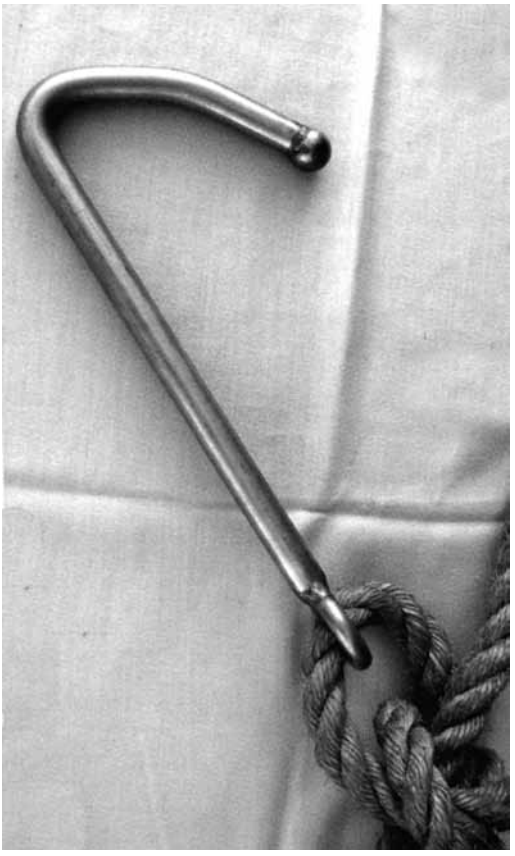
Sóknarongul may thus be an invention that was taken into use, in combination with the high degree of interest in reorganising the entire organisation relating to the pilot whale hunt on the Faroes. For the same reason, the very first pilot whaling regulations stipulate how many "sóknaronglar" there should be in a boat. [50]

The hook is struck into the heads of the whales so that they can be pulled towards the hunter in a boat or onto the shore. It is thus used both on board and ashore. Ashore it is used when you "sker á háls", i. e. when you slice across the spinal cord of a whale, after having waded far out into the water and struck a hook in the head of a whale to pull it up on shore to be killed. When the hook is used on board a boat, the boat is brought up close

50 Hans Andria Sølvará also discusses the same problem in his local history book about Klaksvík (Sølvará 2008, 362 f).

enough to the whale to enable a crewman to drive the hook into the whale, draw it up to the gunwale and give it a deep cut in the neck so that it dies. The 1986 regulations incorporate this option into the rules, so that the foremen "are also permitted to sever the spinal cord from the boat," although this is only permitted "if it is considered that every single whale dealt with in this way can be killed quickly and painlessly."

There has been much criticism of the traditional whaling hook, and attempts have been made to develop alternatives to it so that the whale does not suffer unnecessary pain.



Blowhole hook (Blástrarkrókur).

"All ideas tested in recent years have come from the whalers themselves. The first initiative in this area was in 1989, and was based on information from New Zealand, where inner tubes were used as straps or belts placed behind the fin and under the flippers to gently pull stranded whales out to sea again. This method cannot be used in the Faroese hunt, as it is very difficult to get any kind of rope or strap over the fin and under the flippers of a swimming whale. A further development of this idea was to use a steel wire with a locking mechanism to slip over the front end of the whale, something like a lasso, but this did not function satisfactorily. A third alternative was the development of a special clamp to set down over the whale from above in front of the fin, but this did not prove practical either.

In 1993 attention was drawn to yet another invention that a whaler had himself created: a so-called blunt hook or blowhole hook (in Faroese *blásturongul*), designed to be inserted into the air sacs of the blowhole. The idea

Spinal-cord knife (Mønu-stingari).

of this hook is to provide equipment with which whales can be secured for slaughtering without wounding the animal.

The blowhole hook has now been tested for some years. 20 hooks were originally produced and distributed to certain whaling locations so that as many as possible would have the opportunity to try it out in practice. Reactions were positive. Since then, another 100 hooks have been produced and these have been distributed all around the islands. The intention is to produce them in much larger numbers so that this hook can eventually replace the traditional iron whaling hook (Olsen 1999).

With the latest amendments to the whaling regulations as adopted in Executive Order no. 46 from 8 April 1998, the blowhole hook has now been formally recognised as a part of the standard whaling equipment.

"Grindaknívur", or the pilot whale knife, is the pilot whale hunt's most distinguished piece of equipment, and it is also considered one of the foremost Faroese contributions to Nordic artistic craftsmanship. Pilot whale knives, which are made by skilful smiths and creative craftsmen, are as a rule completely handmade. But this does not always hold true nowadays, when you can often see whale knives with prefabricated, foreign blades. Each cutler has his own mark, which he stamps into the blade. The value of a knife often depends on who made it, and anyone would consider it a great honour to own a knife made by a renowned cutler (Jacobsen 1974).

The haft and sheath are usually made of high-quality wood, with an inlay of brass and silver. The motifs in the inlay depict pilot whales and whaling equipment. The knife is carried at the waist on a colourful woollen band woven from 12 threads and called "tólvtráðaband" or "tólvtáttaband".

The whaling knife is used both to cut across the whales' spines and to butcher the dead whales. You put a whale to death with the whaling knife by making a deep cut one hand's breadth from the blow-hole down towards the spinal marrow, which is sliced through. The whale thrashes so mightily as a result that it severs its own spinal cord. As mentioned above, this is referred to as "at skera á háls". The 1986 pilot whaling regulations also state that "When cutting through the spinal marrow, deep cuts must be made in both sides of the head and then in the spine."

There is more prestige associated with having a beautiful, traditional pilot whale knife, although regular knives with a reasonably large blade can also be used to kill and butcher a pilot whale.

In recent years a totally new kind of whaling knife has been developed – an arrow-like weapon, almost a small spear – but the use of this knife "mønustingari" or spinal cord knife is still only at an experimental stage.

Modern boats in the whale hunt of today.

The final piece of equipment we will deal with here is the "skutil" or harpoon. Svabo (1959, 254) cites the use of the harpoon in 1619 in connection with an irregular school that they had given up trying to kill. The *skutil* was not used during the whale kill proper unless the "grindin er givin upp fyri skutil", i. e. the whaling foremen and the sheriff had officially abandoned the kill. After this point, anyone may hunt the school as he sees fit and keep whatever he catches. Using a harpoon, it was only possible to catch the whales one by one. There are many kinds of harpoons. In practice the harpoon is no longer used in connection with pilot whale hunting, as a school of pilot whales is no longer "abandoned to the harpoon".

From the very outset, a paragraph was included in the whaling regulations making the sheriff responsible for ensuring that there were enough whaling boats and other necessary equipment in a settlement. This provision has disappeared from the present whaling regulations, and for all practical purposes it has not been enforced since the end of the nineteenth century (Bjørk 1963, 198). When the regulations were formulated in the past, such a paragraph seemed necessary. More than 200 years ago Svabo (1959, 252) clearly suggests that this measure was motivated by the severe shortage of whaling equipment due to the islanders' reluctance to invest in such tools. On one occasion, when a school appeared at Suðuroy, no one had any whaling weapons. The school went out to sea again. The most outrageous fact, says Svabo, is that the iron in these tools was soon reworked to make fishing hooks. Svabo calls for a regulation requiring the citizenry to own a certain number of whaling tools, and also stipulates that these must be of a particular quality. Landt (1965, 227), around 1800, also laments the shortage of whaling equipment. In this context it should be noted that during the Second World War, when the Faroes were occupied by the British, special permission was granted to import steel for pilot whaling tools from Britain.

The kill

The time has now come "at grindin kann verða hildin til", i. e. to slaughter the school of whales. The sheriff and the whaling foremen are gathered before the school and the boats lie nearby. On board each boat the foreman responsible for the boat should have been chosen. Slowly they begin to drive the school further into the bay. Loose stones and stones on the end of ropes are thrown into the water, and from the boats comes a cacophony of shouting and yelling. In the 1986 regulations it is stated that "As far as possible efforts must be made to ensure that the smallest boats are at the

front, with larger boats and ships furthest out, blocking the way and otherwise acting as instructed by the sheriff or the whaling foremen." Here once more the most appropriate traditional practice has been codified, as a smaller boat is more easily manoeuvrable than a large boat during the actual kill, and any damage to boats is also easier to identify.

Let us allow Svabo to describe how the whole affair unfolded 200 years ago; in principle nothing has changed, except that innumerable cars, which are parked everywhere, have been added to the scene; tourists click away with cameras and a crowd pushes together, disrespectful of the old rules, which declared that the whales were not to be frightened. Svabo (1779, 46) writes:

> "Just before the first one in the crowd beat the water in which they have set up markers on both sides of the bay, they begin, with cries and shouts and banging, to wound and hunt from the shore. Initially they only strike those whales that head in towards the sand; they then run in the same direction, and often some of the wounded, followed by those as yet unwounded, run with such force and, as the saying goes, 'carry the sea with them', that they are stranded high up on the shore when the tide goes out. When some have been killed and the sea is as a result bloody and foul, it does not matter if some whales strike

Pilot whale hunt in Sandur, Sandoy about 1950.

Pilot whales in Tórshavn. The marks of the whale spear are visible. The use of the spear has been prohibited since 1986.

out to sea again, for it is generally known that they will return to the place of the kill and, as the saying goes, 'run back to the blood'.

Svabo does not mention that which today is considered general practice, namely that the first signal to begin the whale kill itself is when one of the whaling foremen thrusts his *hvalvákn* into one of the hindmost whales. The blow should land behind the dorsal fin so that the whale will swim to the side and thereby take the whole school off course, since it will turn out to sea at the slightest provocation and would thus be lost. If the man misses his thrust, he can expect stiff sanctions afterwards.

No one may strike any whale until one of the whaling foremen has given the signal. At Miðvágur it was general practice that at about the same time the school "tekur sjógv á bak", i. e. takes a veritable tidal wave with it as it makes for the shore, every whale hunter heads down towards the shore to "skera á háls". In Miðvágur the villagers from the settlements of Sørvágur and Bøur are customarily on shore. "And the men of Sørvágur and of Bøur rose to their feet and watched in anxious silence," as Elisabeth Taylor (1997) also noted. If the whales cause such a large wave that when it

Whaling boat. Traditional type. About 1935.

recedes they lie high and dry, it is referred to as "at gera landgongd" or that the whales beached themselves.

When the school beaches, the kill is usually finished quickly since the whales cannot swim around but are stranded and easily put to death. We have already discussed in a previous section what happens when the spinal cord is severed. When the whales do not make beach themselves, in the past they used to be struck down with *hvalvákn* or cut "á háls" by hauling them with a hook to the boats' gunwales and killing them. There are, however, major differences in the killing methods used; in the village of Vágur on the island of Suðuroy they traditionally only have used the *hvalvákn* if absolutely necessary, instead using hooks to pull the whales towards them and then severing the spinal cord:

> "I recall a man from the north, who got into a boat for a whale hunt in Vágur. He noticed that there was only one *hvalvákn* in the boat, and asked the crew if this was the only spear they had, because he was used to using a lot of spears where he came from.
> The answer came that this was really just a spear for use in defence, but

> they had lots of whaling hooks. He thought to himself: how can these men from Suðuroy kill the whales, and he was soon to see how they did it.
> After the whale hunt in Vágur you could walk across the beach and look at the whales that had been killed, and it was difficult to find one with spear wounds." (Poulsen 1992, 80).

The fewer wounds there were in the whale, the better the quality of both blubber and meat. There are whalers who maintain that you can sink the whaling hook into the whale's head, because there is so much blubber there that the whale does not feel it. There are those who maintain that the whale does not seem to sense pain in some areas of the head.

During the kill there is much shouting and splashing. The kill is not without danger for the participating hunters. Wounded whales in their agony can smash the boats to pieces with their tails, so whalers must be careful when stabbing because, to cite Svabo (1779, 46) once more,

> ". . . then they go after whomever they can reach, although never the nearest, but rather another boat, and since the wounded whale with a blow from his powerful tail is easily able to damage a boat and the men, you certainly strike the whale wherever you can, but preferably under the dorsal fin, where a wound dispatches them most quickly."

It does happen that men are hurt at the whale kill, but seldom seriously. However, in 1915 there was a great disaster in connection with a kill at Sandvík on Suðuroy, a disaster in which 14 men died when lost in the bad weather[51]. This whale kill has since been given the name "The Calamity Grind". [52]

How long a whale kill lasts varies, depending on the circumstances. If the whales beach themselves, the kill could be over in half an hour or less, but if the school had to be struck down with *hvalvákn* it could take four

51 Johs. Andr Næs (2004, 3-18 and 2005) has given a full description of all the circumstances surrounding this tragic day.

52 Other whale drives have also been given names for various special reasons. Dorete Bloch (2007, 56) mentions the following examples: Enormous Grind, Vágur, July, 1741: 1, 025 whales. Great Grind, Miðvágur, August 1776: 715 whales. Mýru-Sofie's Grind (named after a woman), October 1879: 900 whales. Lise's Grind (named after a woman), Sandur, August 1904: 233 whales. Jacob's Grind, (named after a man), Sandur, August 1908: 336 whales. Quarrel Grind, Sandur, August 1910. Calamity Grind, Sandvík, February 1915: 210 whales. Storm Grind, Hvalva, November 1916: 127 whales. Measles Grind, Norðagøta, November 1935: 170 whales. Typhoid Grind, Klaksvík, June 1938: 208 whales. Confirmation Grind, Sandur, October 1940: 1, 200 whales.

Whaling boat and on-lookers Tórshavn 2007.

hours, although naturally there were exceptions (Høst 1875, 32). In the settlement of Vestmanna, a whale kill could at one time last several days because of the peculiar nature of the fjord. In 1843 someone hit upon the idea of closing off the fjord of Vestmanna with a large net, preventing the school from swimming out again. Vestmanna, which earlier had been a poor whale bay, now became one of the best (Müller 1884, 30)

In a recent biological study it is reported that of 40 whale hunts over a two-year period, the shortest kill took place on the sandy beach of Leynar and lasted eight minutes for 136 whales, while the longest was the one in Vestmanna, when 118 whales were killed in two hours and thirty minutes. The average killing time for the 40 whale hunts was 27. 7 minutes (Bloch et al. 1990, 40).

In the past everything used to fall silent immediately before the actual kill, but nowadays large numbers of spectators always turn up, and the whale bays are usually lined with cars whose passengers sit and watch. Tourists also arrive in great numbers. The pilot whale kill appears both dramatic and impressive to the onlookers. The methods employed certainly do seem bloodthirsty and murderous. People ask whether the pilot

whales could be put to death more humanely by other means. Guttorm Gjessing (1955, 38) writes that

> "People have never had weapons that kill the whale instantaneously. Even when shot with an explosive harpoon, the whale dies by bleeding to death (I am not considering the very latest whaling equipment). The issue, then, has been to find hunting and trapping methods in which weapons play the smallest possible role."

The most essential feature of the whale kill is not the technology, but rather the social organisation that lies behind the kill and without which it would have been impossible to establish the institution of the pilot whale hunt. When all things are considered, the slaughter takes place remarkably quickly. Although the pilot whale is a small whale, it is nevertheless a large animal, which loses a lot of blood. This turns the water red. From a workshop in 1983 on how to deal with stranded whales it is clear that it is very difficult to find an effective way of killing a whale. The workshop recommends huge doses of anaesthetic or shooting, but it is clear from the report that there is more concern for the reaction of onlookers than for the creatures themselves. Stranded whales almost always attract an audience. Several gruesome and ridiculous attempts at killing are reported, e. g. putting three sticks of dynamite in the blow hole. [53]

In the Faroes too, people in the past have experimented with other methods: rifles and explosives have been tried out, but these proved highly dangerous for the participating hunters and unnecessarily painful for the whales, and were instantly forbidden. It has, therefore, long been forbidden to use other weapons than the traditional ones. In recent years several people have tried to invent various technical devices to make the killing of pilot whales more humane. Many devices have been tried, and tremendous ingenuity has been displayed, but the inventions have been quickly rejected. The conclusion is that the traditional Faroese method of killing must be the most humane and by far the most effective; provided that it is done by skilled people.

53 Cf. Report of Stranded Whale Workshop. A practical and humanitarian approach. Held on 17-20 October 1987. Chairman: Lord Cranbrook. Report produced by: Jonathan Barzdo. Secretary: Paul Vodden. R. S. P. C. A. 1985. (stencil).

Tórshavn 2007. The whale is measured, assessed and marked.

Chapter 6:

Assessment, Division and Distribution

We have already discussed the local sheriff's authority and responsibility at the whale kill. It is apparent from the earliest sources that once the school was dead, the sheriff assumed leadership of the operation. He immediately appoints people to stand guard over the catch, and it is he who decides how many guard boats should be used and how many men are needed to gather in and drag ashore the dead whales.

The gathering

When the killing is over, all boats not involved are pulled ashore or anchored in the harbour. According to the whaling regulations, boats that arrive after the kill is over should be put in a special place. The guard boats and a few other boats now begin the task of bringing the whales up onto the shore. First of all, the whales lying in deep water must be fished up. This is done using either long poles with a hook in one end or hooks fastened into a piece of lead or iron, which are dragged along the bottom.

The whaling regulations require that as the whales are placed along the shore, the heads (in Faroese "kúla") should rest free of the water at high tide so that marking and assessing can be accomplished without any obstructions. This provision was included in the regulations because of the great inconvenience caused to those whose job it was to determine the size

Pilot whale being assessed, Miðvágur 1974.

of the whales when, as happened earlier, the whales were left in deep water instead of being dragged up on land (Bjørk 1963, 238).

The regulations also require that the whales' bellies must be opened and the entrails removed as soon as possible so that the whales do not begin to spoil. It is also a custom that people take out the whales' kidneys, which they can keep for themselves, since these spoil quickly too.

As soon as the whales lie along the shore, the sheriff begins the task of marking, i. e. he starts to number each whale with both a consecutive number and an assessment figure. The sheriff is assisted by two, sometimes more, assessors who are expected to be trustworthy and impartial. The oldest reference to these assessors is found in the Commission Report for 1709-10: ". . . then they are all assessed, small and large, by men who have been appointed by the sheriff, and each fish [is marked with] its number and value."[54]

The whales are now valued by means of the logaritmic assessing pole, which was invented in the 1830s, and also according to their stoutness and general condition[55]. A whale measuring 3. 15 metres or 5 "alin" as mentioned above is valued at "ein gyllin" (a florin), which equals 20 *skinn*.

54 Commission Report for 1709-10 p. 79.

55 Whaling Regulations, 1955. Dalsgaard 1957, 151).

The whale is "skorin á háls" with "grinda-kníví" Tórshavn 2007.

The assessors use the assessing pole to measure the whale from the eye to the anal opening. Today the method of assessment differs from the rules in two places, Hvalba on Suðuroy and Hvalvík on Streymoy. There the measurements are taken from the killing cut in the neck instead of from the eye (Bloch and Zachariassen 1989, 39 ff.). The measures mørk, gyllin and skinn belong to the old, traditional Faroese society[56]. Pilot whales are rarely so large that they are assessed at more than a gyllin. A pilot whale measured at one gyllin is about 575 cm long and the total weight is two tonnes, of which about 1, 100 kg comprises food [57]

A *skinn* in the context of pilot whales is usually considered to weigh 75 kilograms. Of this, 25 kilograms are blubber and the remainder meat (Joensen 1976, 20). As a matter of fact a new, closer, biological examination of a large amount of material on whales shows that the average amount obtained per *skinn* was 38 kg meat and 34 kg blubber. The same examination shows that there are quite significant differences between both the weight of a skinn and the assessing poles in various villages [58]

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56 The measures **mørk**, **gyllin** and **skinn** are used in several and different ways in traditional Faroese Society. They are used to measure the size of land, to measure the weight of tallow in sheep, even the weight of wool, and the weight of a baby. In this case a mørk is = 250 g. When used as a measure for the size of pilot whale, it includes both the size and the weight. A mørk is 16 gyllin and a gyllin is 20 skinn. Very often the word Florin which was also used for currency. Gyllin and Florin are synonymous. (See also Bloch 1992)

57 Joensen 1962, 38, Bloch & Zachariassen 1989, 39, Bloch 1992, Joensen 2007.

58 Bloch and Zachariassen 1989, 39, Bloch 1992 and 1994. ,

Pilot whale being assessed using the assessment pole, Tórshavn 2007.

The number of *skinn* at which a whale has been valued is marked with a Roman numeral on its belly fin, and a consecutive number is carved with an Arabic numeral into the head. In Vágur on Suðuroy they use a special tool known as a *grindajarn* (pilot whale iron) to mark the whales. This is

> "…round at the end with an eye, where the blubber comes through when the number is cut. Some were better than others at using this tool. The irons had to be extremely sharp to make cutting easy, and those in Vágur always had 3-4 irons, because they quickly became blunt." (Poulsen 1992, 96).

Special skills were required to be able to sharpen these irons, so this was done by the blacksmith.

The sheriff records the number and value of each whale until the whole school of pilot whales has been numbered and assessed. Once this has been completed the rest is deskwork, which the sheriff does in his temporary office, as observed by the American lady Elisabeth Taylor (1997) in chapter 2. In older times the whale hunt gave the otherwise isolated population a chance to meet:

> "When the weather permitted, many skilled people came long distances to take part in such a whale hunt. Before the catch was divided according to the number of the population, first of all a certain amount of whale meat was allotted to the houses of the village so that there was plenty of meat and blubber on the boil in every house. . . If the weather was not good enough for the

visitors to leave, they had to stay overnight, and according to the old rules this was in particular houses, mainly the homes of the farmers." (Rasmussen 1985, 58).

Pilot whale iron (Grindajarn) – marking tool from Vágur, Suðuroy.

Elizabeth Taylor (1997), already quoted in chapter 2, also gives a lively description of local hospitality. When so many people gathered, Faroese hospitality came into its own. Food and drink were served, and at times a few people became drunk.

"When evening came the dance went on all night. This was always in the home of Harald Jákup við Kirkjar, and there was no lack of people to lead the dance on such a night. When the tickets from the district officer allotting each their share in the catch were ready, this could be at dawn, all the men went to get their ticket and to find their share, cut it up and get it aboard. They had to get away while the weather was good enough." (Rasmussen 1949, 62).

The above account is from the village of Miðvágur at the end of the 19th century. While the district officer and his assistants allotted the catch, the others passed the time renewing old acquaintanceships or making new ones and "dansa seg heitan" – dancing themselves warm in one of the houses. Many of the men were wet after being in the water during the kill, and", it was better to dance, in their wet clothes, while awaiting their turn to sleep." (Taylor 1997, 57). To take part in the whale hunt was part of the Faroese system of reciprocity, in the same way as weddings, funerals and other events, which people came long distances to attend. With improved communications nowadays there is no practical need for this, as people can now return to their home towns after the hunt to wait for the allocations.

The distribution in a historical context

Lucas Debes is the first to mention (1673) the distribution of the whale school:

"When all the whales are thus drawn up on the beach and are numbered, the first tenth is set aside as the sighting-whale ("Findings-Hval") for the one who first sighted the school; the remainder is divided into two shares, the one part for the people, the other for the one who owns the land, whether that may be the king, a nobleman, or a commoner." (Debes 1673, 159).

We find a more detailed presentation in the Commission Report for 1709-10:

> ". . . whereupon in the previously described manner the largest whale is separated from the group, which has been killed, as the sighting-whale ("Findingshval") for the one or ones who first sighted the whales out at sea or in the fjord; then they are all assessed, small and large, by men who have been appointed by the sheriff, and each fish is marked with its number and value. A tenth of the total assessment is set aside; thereafter are set aside five ordinary presentation-whales ("Foræringshval") for those who are confined to hospital, for the pastor, the judge, the sheriff, and the Governor; thereafter whatever damage has been done to the boats during the kill is paid for as well as whatever injuries have happened to persons who have been crushed or hit during the kill, although not always, which according to our most humble and modest opinions nevertheless would only be just; hereafter the whales are divided into two shares, the one part for the land on which the whales were killed and the other for all who drove in and killed the whales (which is otherwise known as the enrolled men's share), and thus has been the practice since time immemorial; the inhabitants are of this opinion and the law, page 850, article 6, most graciously agrees. The share which is set aside for the land is divided between Your Royal Majesty and the commoners of that place, of which there are some, "efter advenant af Marketallene" (i. e. according to the possession), although at other places Your Royal Majesty retains the whole half-share. The other half-share is divided among the enrolled men, namely each adult man who participates receives for himself and his weapons two shares, each hired man ("Dreng") who can row out to fish one share, and minors who nonetheless can row with an oar two or three to a share, and each boat one share"[59].

We shall return to this quotation later, but let us first see what another meticulous informer, namely Svabo, has to say – in a part of his article from 1779:

> "When the school of whales has been killed, distribution is undertaken by the sheriff with two assistants. He then distributes 1) the sighting-whale, which is the biggest whale, and the presentation-whales for the most distinguished officials in the country, and one large whale for the poor, if the school is big enough. 2) The whole school is assessed in terms of florins and *skinn* (a) An

59 Commission Report, 1709-10:79.

assessment price is set for each individual whale. The highest value of a whale is 3 florins, and then it must measure 9 "alin" from head to a few joints from the anus; it is then called a Nýðingur[60]. The mediocre ones account for ½, 1 or 2 florins. The young ones that are always included in the school are only worth a few *skinn*, according to their size, but none are smaller than 1 *skinn*. The small ones that do not yet have teeth are given to the poor. A one-florin whale is expected to produce one barrel of oil, a three-florin whale around three barrels, etc. A one-florin whale can therefore be bought on site for 5 to 6 florins in cash, unless the school is a large one, and everyone can get sufficient, and also if there is a lack of hands, space or institutions you may exercise this right; or if the weather may prevent it being taken from the place of the kill, and the meat is then spoiled. 4) The rest is divided into two equal parts, one of which is given to those who own the land by the whale bay, divided according to their properties. The other part is used first of all to compensate for any damage or injury caused during the hunt to crews, boats or tools. The rest is divided into parts, or lots, of which each man who was involved in the kill receives two, each boat two, and those considered by the sheriff to be of men of distinction from six to 20 lots or more. However, those who arrived just after the kill, together with widows and males, young and old, not only at the site of the kill, but in villages from where a boat or even one single man was present, each receive only one lot. The part that falls due to the King, if he owns land at the site, is sold by the sheriff at the valuation price; those who arrive long after the whales have been killed will usually receive a part of this." (Svabo 1779, 48).

In the reports from 1781 Svabo refers to the sighting-whale, to a whale that is given to the poor, and to a number of presentation-whales: "Whales presented to the foremost officials in the country". The number of presentation-whales is for all practical purposes the same as that mentioned in the Commission Report for 1709-10, but attempts have been made to limit the number as much as possible. Svabo (1959, 257) cites a whaling statistic from 1747, which took this form:

1.) a tenth part set aside (tithe)
2.) to the injured 5 *skinn*
3.) the poor 10 *skinn*
4.) the assessors 1 florin 5 *skinn*

60 Nýðingur is a very large pilot whale. Svabo writes that *nýðingur* is said to be 9 *alin* and has the value of 3 florins, which is 60 *skinn*. Normally a whale measuring 5 *alin* or 3. 15 metres is valued at one *gyllin* or one florin, and the assessment poles do not measure more then 20 *skinn* = 1 *gyllin* or florin.

5.) for the report to the sheriff 6 *skinn*
6.) the watch of 10 men 12 *skinn*
7.) boat damages 2 florins 7 *skinn*
8.) the land ½ and the hunters ½.

In his paper about the pilot whale hunt from 1779, Svabo (1779, 52) says

> "The unreasonable distribution of pilot whales should be changed. Half is given to the landowners at the site of the kill; small wonder that everyone wants to drive the school of whales to the bay where he owns land and lives. They argue and complain loudly about this, instead of paying attention to the hunt, and they certainly do not always follow the best advice. This distribution system is probably based on the ancient Norwegian laws… But the disposition of this law seems as unnatural as it is outdated. What a fishermen usually acquires, remains his own; but because in this case he uses someone else's bay to drive in his whales, he must hand over more than half in rent, as compensation for damages is taken solely from his share."

Svabo (1779, 50) refers to various sources on this subject, and believes that it is totally unreasonable that those who take part in the hunt receive such a small share of it.

> "If you really wanted to give the landowner a share of the kill for the sake of timeworn justice, in my opinion ¼ or ⅙ would be too much rather than not enough.
> The other elements of distribution are based on the regulations. The sighting-whale and the head of the biggest whale are far too little as a reward for watchfulness. Compensation is cheap; as are the shares given to widows, old men and the poor; but the young men seem to me to have no reason for their share when they cannot attend. Instead of the presentation-whale and the often large shares to which others lay claim, I would prefer to see a fund in the country, from where financial improvements could be funded."

Later we will consider all of these different allocations systematically; however, let us first examine the share that is given "to the land". The landowners' rights to the whale catch date back to old Norwegian law and were confirmed in Christian V's Norwegian Law (Svabo 1959, 52). In an earlier Faroese code, "Seyðabrævið", from 1298, the shore-owner has a right to 3/4 of the entire catch, while the rest went to those who had caught or

found the whale. [61] The shore-owner thus received a particularly large proportion of the catch.

So, who was entitled to the "jarðarhvalur" – the land-whale? The shore-owner could be "the King, a nobleman or a commoner". Real property on the Faroes was partly privately owned land or commoners' land and partly land owned by foreigners. The Rosenkrands and Benkestok families from Denmark owned much property on the Faroes (Andersen 1895, 330). At the end of the 17th century these holdings were sold. The crown lands were held by "the King's tenant farmers". Land that crown officials held ex officio also carried full rights to the land-whale, while there were other rules for crown lands.

The crown tenant did not actually have an immediate right to use the land-whale allocated to the crown land. Svabo (1959, 257) says:

> "The crown officials make use of that whale which was set aside for their land, but that which was allocated to the leased crown land, the crown kept for itself; which circumstance seems to be based on nothing more than tradition and the old-fashioned nature of the Faroese."

It was not only the scarcity of resources, but also ideology that led to Svabo, who was strongly influenced by the age of enlightenment, viewing the land-whale as an extremely inappropriate custom.

> "The disposition of this law appears as unnatural as it is old-fashioned. What a fishermen usually acquires, remains his own; but because in this case he uses someone else's bay to drive in his whales, he must hand over more than half in rent, as compensation for damages is taken solely from his share." (Svabo 1779, 52).

In this context Svabo refers to similar conditions in France regarding coastal law[62]. Svabo (1779, 53) was influenced by general opinions of the time when he said that "If you really wanted to give the landowner a share of the kill for the sake of timeworn justice, in my opinion ¼ or ⅙ would be too

61 Seyðabrævið 1971.

62 Svabo also says (1779, 53): "Doctor Tipaigne deplores the abuse on the western coast of France. He comments that you might consider it self-evident that these fish belonged entirely to those who had taken such trouble to catch them? But scarcely have they brought them ashore than those who have had the pleasure of viewing the laborious catch from the shore arrive to take their share, citing beach rights or salvage rights (Droit de Varech) to claim half, not according to law. The fisherman is so angered that he almost abandons the catch."

much rather than not enough." In his earlier article about pilot whaling, Svabo (1779, 49) comments: "That share that is allotted to the king when he owns the land at that place is sold by the sheriff for the assessed price."

According to the first whaling regulations of 1832 by which the land-whale was to comprise only ¼ of the catch, the "crown-whale" was to be sold for ⅓ of a pot of whale oil per *skinn*, and in addition, part of the crown-whale was to be distributed by the Governor among the crown officials in Tórshavn, and also among the widows and the poor of the same town (Petersen 1968, 44, 81).

We have already heard Svabo condemn the unjust distribution of the school of whales. Several other voices join in with the call for the landowners' rights be abolished. Sheriff Hammershaimb expresses this view in a document drafted in connection with the whaling regulations of 1807:

> "It is truly severe that often those, who with night-long, lengthy journeys in the most inclement weather, dank and damp, not infrequently do not receive very much in exchange to take home to their tables while he who stands on shore and watches, not to mention that distant absentee landowner, gather in the riches, even though they only own that bit of land and have not the least to do with the hunt." (Bjørk 1963, 246).

The years that followed saw a campaign to abolish the land-whale. It was debated in the Faroese legislature and in the Danish national legislative body. As a result of this, the land-whale was not abolished immediately, but was reduced to ¼ of the pilot whale catch. The other half share was taken from the landowners without compensation, but when it was finally rescinded in 1934, the landowners received recompense for the expropriation of their prerogative. This is clearly defined in an act dated 11 May 1935, which defined rules for compensation for the loss of rights to the land-whale. A commission was appointed to calculate this:

> "The task of this commission is to calculate for each bay during the period from 1 January 1884 until 31 December 1933 how many pilot whale *skinn* were allocated to landowners on average each year, and what the average price per *skinn* was at the public pilot whale auctions on the Faroes during the period in question. The commission shall be entitled to demand the necessary information from the public authorities, including the regional councils.
>
> The average annual value of the land-whale for each bay is obtained by

> multiplying the aforementioned average number of *skinn* by the average annual price per *skinn*.
>
> The amount of compensation for each bay is then calculated as a sum corresponding to the average annual value of the land-whale for the bay times 25."[63]

This act initiated major investigative work in order to ascertain how much should be paid to landowners at the various locations, and this is reflected in the extensive archive material. [64]

The intention was that landowners, i. e. those who owned private land, should be paid in accordance with this act. The share due to the King's land or the tenants' land passed to the Faroese Land Registry Fund and the future Faroese land fund. However, this was enacted in such a way that tenant farmers received some compensation for a period of time. [65] The act also contained rules defining who should receive the share due to endowed land and the land belonging to the crown officials. [66]

Bjørk, who has studied the legal circumstances surrounding the land-whale, comes to the conclusion that the right to the whale was legally justified (Bjørk 1963, 258). It was thus not on legal, but on political and social grounds that the landowners' prerogatives were overruled. In truth, the reasons for abolishment are two sides of the same coin. One reason we have already described, namely that many landowners wanted to drive the whales into the bay where they owned property. The other was that a new social outlook had developed among citizens and crown officials, questioning the landowners' privileges. Bjørk (1963) offers several examples of this in his legal historical investigation.

What were the reasons for these revised viewpoints? Unfortunately we do not have any source material of consequence that gives us information about why Svabo and others began to challenge the legitimacy of the land-whale, but the roots probably lie in the fact that following the French Revolution people were now questioning special privileges enjoyed by those such as landowners.

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63 Section 2 of the Act on compensation for landowners' rights in connection with pilot whale catches on the Faroes. 11 May 1935.

64 This archive material is stored at the Faroese National Archives and is so extensive that a separate investigation is required to analyse it.

65 Or as the act states: "Tenants at the time of compensation and their widows receive a 4% reduction annually of the amount due for the land during the tenancy as long as they are in possession."

66 The text of the act is as follows: "The shares belonging to endowed land are paid against receipt by the Faroese Council and deanery in accordance with the prevailing rules for the sale of endowed land. The shares due to land allocated as official land to crown officials are paid into the Faroese Land Registry Fund.

One might wonder whether conflicts have always existed during the whale drive – like so much else, in a way an integral part of the institution of the whale hunt – or if the conflicts only started in Svabo's time. He relates that they tried to avoid conflicts by holding the shoreline in common ownership, meaning the landowners in a given area jointly owned a whole stretch of coastline (Svabo 1959, 54). This was an attempt to improve the existing order. However, if we consider the social structure at that time, we discover that the power of landowners in society was gradually beginning to decline. A new social group of fishermen-farmers, and even pure fishermen, was beginning to emerge at the end of the 1700s. It was inevitable that this group would eventually also play an important role in society.

Furthermore, at the same time as the price of agricultural products fell, the price of fish rose. We can also point to the new breed of crown officials that emerged during the first half of the 19th century, who tried to act as catalysts for social and economic progress on the Faroes. There is clearly a correlation here between changed circumstances and new values, which included a new view of society[67]. This tendency continued, and when the land-whale was abolished completely in 1934, there was no opposition of any consequence in the Faroese legislature (Bjørk 1963, 258).

So far we have only dealt with the conflicts that arose during the whale drive and that were connected with the institution of the land-whale. There were, however, also disruptive tendencies in other aspects of the hunt. The impression gained is that around 1800 the situation on the Faroes was similar to that in Shetland that Edmonston described in 1856: "…private rights seem for a time to be merged in 'first come, first served'" (Williamson 1970, 118).

The Faroese apparently viewed a school of pilot whales as a common quarry, of which one should assure oneself a part before someone else came and took it (Poulsen 1947, 123).

> "Thievery, stealing, and disorder rule here, and the sheriffs are always too weak to maintain order as they wish. This disorder became entrenched too long ago for it to be possible to change, for it is not considered thievery but rather pluck or manliness to steal whales." (Svabo 1959, 256).

In 1800 Jørgen Landt (1965, 226) points above all to the great arguments at the distribution of the catch, of which he says that

67 Joensen 1975, 1982, 1985, 1987

> "The distribution notwithstanding, a great deal of thievery, dishonesty and wilfulness is practised, so that some seize and take away twice as much as they deserve and others on the other hand go away with little or nothing. Also, another old abuse allows everybody to cut from the whales' fins the customary oar-bands for the boats, so that some are able to appropriate this advantage, but most receive nothing, although some of these in turn do not want to be deprived of their rights completely and so slash further into the whales and thus mishandle them at the expense of those to whose lot they fall. It is, therefore, highly desirable that a better system be established for this distribution; any man who comes up with the best proposal will do the country a great service."

Svabo (1959, 257) concludes that "This fishery . . . cries out for a whaling law which ought to control everything having to do with this fishery." This criticism was not without foundation. The minutes of the Representative Council from 31 July 1804 record that Dean Djurhuus had submitted a set of draft whaling regulations. In 1805 the exchequer instructed the district officer and the commandant to produce a set of draft regulations. After local information had been obtained, the first proposal appeared in 1807, but because of the war in which Denmark was involved in 1807-14 the proposal was not considered by the Danish authorities, and the matter was not dealt with again until 1819, only to be left in a drawer until Tillisch became Governor in 1830. This time, however, it did not take as long: it arrived in 1832 (Bjørk 1963, 187).

At around the same time that the first whaling regulations were introduced, the whales were numbered consecutively so that people, in contrast to former times, knew in which whale they had received a share. In the 1830s a pastor on Vágar, helped by local people, also worked out a system of measurement and invented the logaritmic assessment pole by which the whales' size could be assessed in "*skinn*". Both of these factors helped to prevent a great deal of conflict (Dalsgaard 1957, 151).

A systematic look at the distribution process

Let us now consider systematically the distribution of the catch. In brief, the distribution process consists of first deducting a series of fixed costs and then dividing the remainder among the residents of the whaling district, if the school of whales is over a certain size; otherwise half of the catch is divided among those who have taken part in the hunt and the remainder is sold, with the proceeds deposited in the islands' public treasury.

This latter course of action, however, occurs only when the school is so small that it does not pay to distribute it.

We have already dealt with the land-whale, abolished in 1934. In the past another, tenth part was also deducted. This *tithe*, which was discontinued in 1907 and which was allocated to the church, the pastor and the King, was a tax levied on the catch.

We have also mentioned the large number of presentation-whales given to certain prominent persons, as well as to widows and the poor. After the asylum was closed in 1767 it was proposed that the presentation-whale be used to establish a poor fund (Bjørk 1963, 241). This was also proposed in several drafts of the whaling regulations. In the final version of the whaling regulations it was established that the poor fund and the public education system were each to receive 1% of the catch. After the whaling regulations of 1832 the crown officials did not receive a share of the total catch, but rather a share of that which fell due to the crown lands. When the regulations were revised in 1857 the crown officials' privileges were removed completely, but the poor fund and the education system were each allocated 1% until 1939, when this arrangement was also abolished (Bjørk 1963, 242).

Today a constant number of deductions are in force. Of these, we must first mention the sighting-whale, i. e. , the whale allocated to the person who discovers the school of whales. Debes (1673, 159) is the first to speak of a "Findings-Hval" - sighting-whale. The Commission Report for 1709-10 also mentions that "the one who first sights the whale at sea or in the fjord" receives a sighting-whale[68]. Svabo (1959, 256) refers to " 'Findings-Fisken' (sighting-whale), which is the largest whale, the body of which belongs to the first boat and the head to the first man to sight the school." It has thus always been the practice that the first people to sight the school receive the sighting-whale. In the whaling regulations detailed rules suggest how the right to the sighting-whale ought to be decided in disputed situations[69]. Those who have found the school choose for themselves either the largest whale or the whale they consider best. They may also choose smaller whales that together represent the same *skinn* value as the biggest one.

The second deduction is the "matarhvalur" (food-whale). This whale, or whales, was distributed at once to the district's inhabitants so that they

68 Commission Report 1709-10, 78.

69 The archives actually contain a number of cases involving disagreements in connection with who is entitled to receive the sighting-whale. This is because it was, naturally, quite possible for several people to sight a school of whales at the same time, or for two or more boats to reach the school at the same time

could make immediate use of it and the whale hunters would be able to have whale to eat. We hear about the food-whale for the first time in a draft of the whaling regulations from 1807. We do not know if this practice is older than that (Bjørk 1963, 247). It was up to the sheriff to decide how much was to be allocated as the food-whale. If a school was too small, none of it can be distributed. The archive material contains many complaints about the failure to distribute a food-whale. The distribution of food-whale was abolished in 1982. [70] The infrastructure on the Faroes is now so good that people can travel back and forth very quickly, so people do not need the food-whale.

Another deduction is made up of the "skaðahvalur", i. e. portions of the catch sold to provide compensation for material damage and personal injury that occurred during the whale kill. *Skaðahvalur* is first mentioned in the Commission Report for 1709-10 and then by Svabo and Landt. Svabo (1959, 257) notes the following on deductions for damages:

> "a) damage that may have been caused to boats and oars. One oar can be compensated for by 3 or 5 *skinn*.
> b) injury to persons and crews. It has been known for a broken bone to be compensated for or to be given a settlement of 1 ½ to 2 florins
> . . . No compensation was given for whaling weapons or lances if they were damaged the hunt, as these should be maintained for the hunt as a matter of duty."

According to Svabo compensation was paid out in kind, but the whaling regulations of 1857 state expressly that the compensation should be issued in cash and not in kind (Bjørk 1963, 250). This has been the practice ever since.

In order to qualify for compensation, the damage must have been done during the whale hunt proper and not afterwards, for example during the *grindadansur* (whaling dance), and the damage must not be covered by any other insurance policy. To assess the extent of the damage, the sheriff appoints two inspectors, one of whom must have knowledge of boat building. As a rule local ordinances are also applicable to the whale hunt, so that personal injuries can be dealt with.

The damages are reported to the sheriff and assessed by the two inspec-

70 Personal information from several people on Vágar in connection with a discussion about the distribution of pilot whales in Bøur on 25 May 2005.

tors immediately after the kill. It is important that the extent of the damage is known as soon as possible, so that the sheriff can decide how much of the catch must be sold to cover this.

On Suðuroy they have long had an ordinance making the local communities on the island, "*kommunur*", responsible for compensating for any damage, and consequently the *skaðahvalur* are included as a part of *partahvalur*, i. e. the part of the catch that is divided among the inhabitants of a pilot whaling district. This ordinance was also written into the whaling regulations in 1970. These state that it is the sheriff's task to negotiate an agreement with the local communities concerned in the whaling district: the communities agree to pay for injury to men, damage to material and for maintenance of the whale bays, in exchange for which the *skaðahvalur* are distributed together with the *partahvalur* among the residents of the communities that have accepted such an arrangement. This is practised in several places in the Faroes.

This has been codified in the 1986 pilot whaling regulations, where it states in section 19, subsection 2 that the local communities in the relevant pilot whaling district must jointly meet the costs of accident insurance for damage and injury caused by pilot whaling. However, the assessors who evaluate the damage and injuries still receive their payment in kind in the form of a number of *skinn*.

There are a few more deductions stipulated by the whaling regulations. Several of them are rooted in practice older than the regulations themselves. Svabo (1959, 257) mentions a distribution in 1747 in which a watch of ten men received 12 *skinn*. The guards were given a certain amount of whale as remuneration. The whaling regulations of 1955 stipulated that the guards should receive ½ *skinn* per day and one *skinn* per night that they stand guard. The boats are each given one *skinn* as their share.

The assessors who have helped to evaluate the size of the whales receive two *skinn* for every 100 whales that are distributed. They split their share among themselves.

The inspectors of damages are also compensated for their work, even if it is now the local councils that are responsible for compensation for damages. The sheriff judges how much they should get, according to the extent of the work.

Finally, the sheriff and the four whaling foremen also are paid for their part in the whale hunt and for their responsibilities afterwards. Their share has altered somewhat in the course of time. The sheriff's share was initially ½% of the catch, then rose to 1%, and following the amendment of the

whaling regulations in 1970 it now stands at 2% of the catch. The whaling foremen originally received ¼% of each catch, then ½% and since 1970 1%. [71]

As already mentioned, some whales used to be set aside to cover the cost of maintaining the whale bays and the *skaðahvalur* were sold to cover damages. A proportion of the catch was also sold when the kill took place on crown lands before the land-whale was abolished. Otherwise a school is only sold when there is less than one *skinn* to a "boat" (50 units of distribution)[72], which means in practice that the catch is too small for it to be worth distributing. The pilot whale auction will be dealt with in a separate section.

"Partahvalur", "killing- share" and whaling districts

Since the whaling regulations came into force in 1832, the Faroes have formally been divided into several whaling districts. *Partahvalur* is the share of a slaughtered school of pilot whales that is divided among the inhabitants of the district, also known as *heimapartur* (home share), as opposed to *drápspartur* (killers' share).

We cannot say with any certainty if these divisions in whaling districts are much older than the first regulations. In his article from 1779 Svabo mentions that after the various deductions have been made, the following takes place:

> "The rest is divided into two equal parts, one of which is given to those who own the land by the whale bay, divided according to their properties. The other part is used first of all to compensate for any damage or injury caused during the hunt to crews, boats or tools. The rest is divided into parts, or lots, of which each man who was involved in the kill receives two, each boat two, and those considered by the sheriff to be of distinction from six to 20 lots or more. However, those who arrived just after the kill, *together with widows and males, young and old, not only at the site of the kill, but in villages from where a boat or only one single man was present, each receive only one lot*. (Svabo 1779, 48).

The last part of this text, here in italics, may indicate some broader distribution, but not on the same scale as in the 1832 regulations. The term *partahvalur* did not exist in Svabo's text from 1779, but his reports from

71 Pilot Whaling Regulations, May 1970.

72 As a *skinn* is equivalent to approx. 75 kg, one *skinn* would correspond to approx. 1. 5 kg per person.

1781 and 1782 contain the term "Parte-Hval", as he refers to a complaint from 1725:

> "In 1725 the inhabitants of Suðuroy made a complaint against men from Hvalba, who had refused to let the other inhabitants take a share of the *partahvalur* from the hunters, even though it had always been the local custom that at the very least the local authority where the whales were killed was entitled to a share of the *partahvalur*. They were ordered by law to adhere to the custom." (Svabo 1959, 257).

Carl Julian Graba, a German lawyer with an interest in natural history who visited the Faroes in 1828, was also present at a whale hunt in Tórshavn, of which he provides a detailed description. He was staying with the local sheriff in Tórshavn, so he was given his information from the very source. He gives a detailed account of the distribution process. Whatever is left after all the deductions have been made

> "…divided into two even parts, of which the so-called 'driving men', i. e. the sheriff's men from the place where the catch took place, receive one and the land receives the other. Each village has a certain number of boats and certain people belong to each boat, so the catch is distributed not to individual people, but to each boat. The second share is allocated to the landowner." (Graba 1830, 229).

What Faroese people in everyday Faroese now refer to as *rakstrarmenn* (lit. driving men) are normally understood to be the men who take part in hunting or driving a school of whales. But this reference by Graba could indicate that the term *rakstrarmenn* refers to a larger social group, which also includes people other than those who personally took part in the whale hunt. This is the nearest we come to resolving this.

This is very similar to the system we recognise for distribution after 1832. It is also clear from Graba's observations that the Governor was deeply involved in the distribution process:

> "The Governor is ideally present at the distribution whenever possible, because the sheriff is not held in sufficiently high regard to be able to keep the excitable spirits under control. Our host, sheriff Müller in Tórshavn, trembled from head to toe when he heard the fateful *grindaboð*, as he was in fear of the distribution process. Everyone presses to receive his share as soon as possible

> so that he can row back home; at the same time others cut oar ropes from the skin of the creatures, to the detriment of those who would be receiving these. Very soon disorder and confusion prevail, which could easily be avoided by a change in the method of distribution." (Graba 1830, 230).

There are thus indications that the phenomenon that came to form the basis of the *partahvalur* existed previously in some places, but that this only became common practice after 1800, and with the influence of officials has become a generally accepted principle of law. It is apparent from Svabo (1959, 255) that the islands were once divided into some kind of whaling districts, but that these had no fixed form (Bjørk 1963, 275).

It is also clear from the dialogue surrounding the preparation of the pilot whaling regulations from 1832 that the whole problem of demarcation of the pilot whaling districts was extremely vague, as Governor Tillisch comments in 1832: "I have therefore considered it appropriate that this matter of extreme important with regard to the whale hunt be put on a firm, permanent foundation." (Bjørk 1963, 273).

As far as he existence of the *partahvalur* phenomenon is concerned, we do not really get any closer to the heart of the matter. It is possible that the *partahvalur* that we know more recently has been allocated and used locally[73], and may have been practised long before the 1832 pilot whaling regulations came into force, but as a general rule it was defined for the first time in the 1832 pilot whaling regulations."[74]

The principle used to define the districts after the whaling regulations of 1955 (Map 2) is that each of the whale bays belongs to certain communities, which have rights to any schools killed in that whale bay. Some

73 In this context it should be noted that even before fishing came along there could be special local forms of distribution, to quote once more from Svabo's (1959, 100) report from 1781-82, where he explains that the general rule is that the catch is distributed between the crew of the individual boat, "although in a few places on the Northern Islands *Samvaja* is used: if a village has two or three boats that go fishing, the catch from these boats is shared, no matter how unevenly it may have been taken, evenly between these boats and the fishermen. The old men at certain places, who are no longer strong enough to go fishing, even though many of them may have households, also receive a share."

74 Bjørk 1963, 273. Svabo (1959, 259) cites, with reference to some Representative Council minutes from 1731, that it is "…recommended that those who exploit the *rakstrarmenn's* shares immediately submit their list of each village's shares." It is not quite clear what this means. It is my personal view that there is a connection between the *rakstrarmenn* and the number of boats that form the basis of the allocation to the individual village. *Rakstrarmenn* thus presumably means something other than those who actually drive in the whales. *Rakstrarmenn* must be connected in some way to the allocation term *bátur* (boat), or as Andras Mortensen (2000, 198) puts it: "Some of these whaling boats did not really exist – they were just imaginary to get them a share – while others actually existed."

Whales being distributed to households, 1974.

communities receive whole shares while others, which are more distant, receive half shares. Following a change in the whaling regulations of 1966, the half shares were discontinued.

The whaling districts form the basis of distribution of *partahvalur* as long as there is at least "1 skinn til bátin", i. e. 1 *skinn* to each 50 units of distribution. Formerly a "bátur" consisted of 2 units of distribution, as it was assumed that the crew of an eight-man boat together with their families comprised 25 persons (Høst 1875, 339, Jacobsen 1936, 106). The *partahvalur* is distributed so that all the residents in the whaling district are given an equal proportion of the catch, irrespective of whether or not they took part in the hunt.

Furthermore, people from other whaling districts may also receive a share of the catch. The 1955 whaling regulations state that a man over 14 years of age who comes to the whale bay before the watch is appointed receives a full share, while those who come later but participate in the assessment of the whales are entitled to a half share. It follows that guests and tourists who are present at the whale bay also have the right to a share of the catch if they register themselves with the sheriff. This paragraph has occasioned a number of difficulties, to which we will return later.

According to the whaling regulations, those who take part in the hunt and all the other inhabitants within the whaling district are entitled to equal shares. The situation is different when the school is so small that there is less than 1 *skinn* per *bátur*. If this is the case, half of the catch is

sold for the benefit of the public treasury and the rest is divided among the enrolled men, the *rakstrarmenn*[75] according to the following formula: a 4-man boat receives 1 share, a 6-man boat 2 shares, an 8-man boat 3 shares and a 10-man boat 4 shares; finally, each person who has taken part in the hunt receives 1 share. Nowadays several modern boats also take part, and these are quite different from the traditional Faroese boat. In this case the sheriff has to use his judgement and make a reasonable assessment.

Thus, with the exception of catches smaller than 1 *skinn* per *bátur*, the catch is distributed equally among all the residents of a whaling district. In principle, a new-born child receives the same amount of a catch as the seasoned whaler who has been engaged in the hunt on land for several hours.

This equal distribution is regularly practised, although you will often read comments in Faroese newspapers that point to the whaling regulations as outdated. As an example, I can mention an instance several years ago when a school was driven into Fuglafjørður. The situation became chaotic. The whaling foremen were very unhappy with the distribution, since those who came to the whale bay in cars received a share of the catch. They came before the watch was appointed, and could claim that they were entitled to a share. Hundreds of cars came, and their passengers were all entitled to a share, while those who had driven in the school received little or nothing. This caused comment in the Faroese newspapers. Readers' letters called attention to the injustice of the men participating in the hunt receiving nothing for their efforts while those who stood and took photographs in their Sunday best drove home with a full tub in the boot of their cars. This is nothing new, as in the early 20th century it was mentioned that the fact there were now larger vessels to sail between the islands was causing a problem. On occasions these vessels could be hired out so that people could get to a whale hunt. The question was whether vessels, crew and passengers were entitled to a share of the catch.

In 1972 a new element emerged in the distribution process. Former sheriff Marni av Kák stated that at a meeting in 1972 people from the village of Sørvágur maintained that it was unreasonable that people who expended time, fuel and boats did not receive any more of a share than everyone else in the whaling district. This led to the sheriff starting to im-

75 Here solely in the literal sense of the word: those men who take part in hunting or driving a school of whales.

The whale kill is just about over. Miðvágur about 1935.

plement the allocation of "*drápspartar*". [76] Together with all the other deductions, he from now also set aside a portion of the catch as *drápspartar*, i. e. killers' shares for those who have taken part in the kill. He said that he set aside as killers' shares "as much as the school can bear". This meant that those who had participated could, because they have actually taken part, take home ¼ to ½ *skinn* over and above the share to which they are entitled as members of the whaling district. The killers' share was a totally new phenomenon that had not been known before. This practice of distributing killers' shares had actually no sanction in the whaling regulations, but the sheriff said in 1974 that he had reported it to the authorities, who had not protested and he therefore considered his innovation to be accepted. The sheriff claimed that this method of distribution was the fairest. He also claimed to have had no trouble with the distribution, since the residents in his whaling district accepted that those who drive in and kill the school should receive something for their efforts. In return the sheriff drew

76 Information from the former sheriff of Sørvágur, Marni av Kák. 1974. This was further confirmed in a conversation on 25 May 2005.

up a more liberal definition of the right provided in section 20 of the whaling regulations, namely that anyone who comes to the whale bay before the watch is appointed is entitled to a share, and so forth. He usually keeps some whale in reserve to cover this allocation.

The sheriff also revealed in the interview that he never distributes all of the whales, but is careful to keep some pieces in reserve. It can happen that a whale cannot be used because it was sick or is stolen.

The practice of killing shares was codified in the 1986 pilot whaling regulations (section 18 h), to the effect that those who take part in the drive receive their share in accordance with very specific rules. [77]

The pilot whaling regulations, however, also allow for the opportunity to follow old local custom and practice in distribution and allocation, and to deviate from the pilot whaling regulations if so desired in the whaling district. But the government must be notified of this special practice in the district. On Suðuroy they have chosen not to observe the new changes in the pilot whaling regulations, but have continued with traditional local practice, in which there is no killers' share. Here they still distribute the whales as *partahvalur* solely to the whole island, so that those who actively take part in the kill receive the same share as everyone else. [78]

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77 § 18 h): In which those who have actually taken part in the drive and/or the kill – in a boat or on land – are entitled to a killers' share.

The killers' share is the compensation for their work as mentioned above. This work involves: a. driving/killing from the boat/on land, b. collecting and dragging, etc. just after the kill until the whaling foremen give the word, c. pulling the whales on land.

In return for providing a boat compensation is made of one boat-share, which is equal to one killers' share. The boat-share is the same regardless of the size of the boat. As well as this, a share is then given to each man in the boat, with maximum allocations as described below: to an 8-man boat or larger 9 kill/boat-shares (8+1), decked boats of more than 20 grt 10 kill/boat-shares (8+2), a 6-man boat 7 killers' shares (6 + 1), a 4-man boat 6 kill/boat-shares (5 + 1), smaller boats than these 4 killers' shares (3 + 1).

Boats and crews from other districts have no entitlement to kill/boat-shares unless the sheriff or a whaling foreman invited them to attend.

A person must be 14 years of age to receive a killers' share. A whaler can only claim one share, even if he has driven the whales from one boat and killed from another.

Subject to consultation the sheriff may, if the drive has been particularly difficult and long, permit an extra share to be given to the *rakstrarmenn*.

In the event that the school of whales has been held at sea, boats that were not involved in the drive, but only in the kill, are entitled to a killers' share if the sheriff or one of the whaling foremen has asked them to assist. The sheriff defines the size of the kill/boat-share.

78 Information provided by former sheriff Ejler Djurhuus, Tvøroyri, in a telephone conversation on 25 May 2005. Ejler Djurhuus explained that in connection with the proposed updating of the pilot whaling regulations in 1986 meetings had been held about whether killers' shares should be used on Suðuroy. He had warned against this in the strongest possible terms. The result is that they still distribute the whales according to the old custom on Suðuroy.

The same practice has also until recently been the usual practice on Sandoy, but here the killers' share is now gradually being accepted, albeit only to a limited extent. Here it has become the practice that the people who are in the boats receive a killers' share, but not those who operate on the beach from dry land. [79]

Distribution of the whales is thus currently practised in different ways. But at present there are no indications that they will be changing their practice on Suðuroy.

According to the latest pilot whaling regulations, boats and people from other whaling districts only receive a share of the catch if the sheriff or one of the whaling foremen has asked them to assist. A school of whales can be so big that there is good reason to let as many people take a share as possible. There is thus a continual process of integration. New situations and changes in society and public opinion generate new practices, which are eventually adopted as provisions in the whaling regulations.

It should be noted that on Sandoy and Suðuroy they do not have the same problems of traffic and many people from outside as on the more northerly islands, as these islands are more isolated than the others. However, the extension of the road network, bridges and tunnels in the more central part of the Faroes has meant that it is easy to drive from one place to another.

Whale auction

In the past the whale auction was a permanent feature in connection with a whale hunt. In a novel by the Faroese author Heðin Brú (1940) we find one of the best-known descriptions of a whale hunt on the Faroes, where an old man and his son take part in a hunt, which in the novel takes place in Tindhólmur on Vágar. The recurring theme of the novel is the fact that the old man, under the influence of alcohol, has bought a whale for an excessive price at the whale auction in Tindhólmur. He is worried about payment of this bill for the whale throughout the whole novel, which ends with him selling his only cow.

Below is an extract that describes the actual auction. The sheriff is standing on a platform, auctioning the whales. During the auction the old man meets an old friend, who pulls him to one side:

"Lias Berint gave him some spirits. When they returned, they had their arms

79 Information from J. B. Mohr, the Sheriff's Office, Sandur, on 25 May 2005.

round each others' shoulders, and they were beginning to laugh and sing. "Yes, yes, age is beginning to tell on both of us now, but in the old days – then we showed them a thing or two, eh?" And they strutted and danced around. "Now we must go and do some bidding," said Ketil. "We aren't so worn out that we can't buy a whale or two." They pushed forward to where the District Sheriff was conducting the auction.

"Number 183 – 3 *skinn*" called out the District Sheriff. "Any bid for that?"

"Seven krónur – seven and a half, eight krónur, several bids of eight krónur. Then a jump to 11 krónur…" It was finally knocked down for 18 krónur. [80]

"Number 184 – 18 skinn. Any bid for that?"

The bidding paused at 9 kroner. Ketil bid 11, and was overbid at 13. "I'm going to get this whale," he resolved. He made a further bid of 15 kronor. This got him the whale. The District Sheriff turned around to see who it was, wrote down the name and gave Ketil his ticket. The old man now pushed his way out of the crowd, proud of himself, and holding his head high. But when he came up to the stretch of grass where his son was, he blanched to see how staggered Kalv was. "Father," said Kalv, "an 18 skinn whale at 15 kronor – doesn't it come to a frightful lot of money all told?"

"Yes, yes, it does…" The old man's head fell to his chest. He lacked the strength to reckon up just how much it was. Kalv began to weep, and held his hands in front of his face so that folk would not see. Ketil was completely sobered up by the enormity of what he had done. "Lord preserve us, I could lie down and die," he sighed. "Never in all our born days have we ever run ourselves into such a big debt. But what's done is done, and we must face our fate. I can't go back and cancel it – that would bring down shame on me." They did indeed look a pair of tragic figures when they went down to look for their whale." (Brú 1970, 26)[81]

The total amount that the old man had to pay for his big whale was 270 krónur, which was a lot of money in the inter-war years. At the whale hunt on 14 August 1936 there was no bid higher than 11 krónur per *skinn*. After this fictional, but very realistic auction, we will now return to the actual historical material.

Before 1832 only the smaller half of a catch was used for distribution. The larger half was used for deductions and the land-whale. The King's

80 A 3-*skinn* whale is of best quality, as the meat is soft and tender, while the meat of a 18-*skinn* whale can be coarse and tough.

81 In the English translation John F. West changed the terms for *skinn* and the amounts, but I have written them as they appear in the original Faroese version.

farmers or hands were allocated some of the land-whale, but most was sold off for the benefit of various funds. In most whale hunts it is not possible to bring all the dead whales ashore before the deductions and distribution have been completed on paper. Any whales found at a late stage in the proceedings were sold, pursuant to section 29 of the whaling regulations, at auction for the benefit of the Financial Fund. [82] Money from the Financial Fund for the Faroese Council was used for such purposes as infrastructure and the maintenance of roads, bridges, to build schools and various kinds of support. [83]

The items sold at auction have essentially been the same throughout the period described[84]:

- The tithe
- The share for the poor relief fund
- The share for the school system (observed more recently)
- *Skaðahvalur*, i. e. a share to be sold to cover damages.
- The share of the land-whale that was due to the public treasury.

As a concrete example, I will take a whale hunt in Miðvágur on 14 August 1936. The school comprised a total of 154 whales, and was assessed at 51 florins and 9 *skinn*. The record of the auction contains detailed information about which whales were sold, to whom and the price that was bid. The bid per *skinn* was between 1 *króna* and 11 *krónur*. The lowest bid was for unclaimed *partahval* belonging to the most remote parts of the whaling district. These whales were sold at the very end.

It should be noted that times were hard on the Faroes around 1936, so it could be expected that prices were low. The auction for this particular whale catch resulted in a total net financial income of 1, 638. 47 *krónur*.

82 This section is as follows:
"Any whales that appear or are caught in the whale bay after the sheriff has started his calculation, but before the distribution has been completed, are distributed, after any usual deductions and with due reference to the regulations described above, together with anything that remains from the *partahvalur* after everyone has received his share, among any boats that arrive after the sheriff has started his calculation. But any surplus that still remains is sold off by the sheriff to the highest bidder, and the money raised is deposited in a Financial Fund for the Faroese Council. The same applies in the event of any whales appearing or being caught in the first two days after the kill in the whale bay in question, after deduction of a modest compensation for the finder."

83 This material was made available to me by Chief Engineer of the Faroes Øyvindur Brimnes.

84 This can also be seen in a whaling account from Klaksvík dated 4 September 1848.

This can be seen in the context of the annual income of a Faroese sea fisherman in 1936 of 475 *krónur* (Joensen 1975, 31).

This catch saw the following items being sold at auction. The first figure is the gross price, and next various costs and the final figure is the balance.

- 10% was used to balance the land-whale rights.
  - Assessment value: 5 florins and 3 *skinn*
  - Monetary value: 625. 20 kr. – 88. 90 kr. = 536. 30 kr.
- Whales allocated to the Faroese Council's Poor Relief Fund
  - Assessment value: 10 *skinn*
  - Monetary value: 74. 00 kr. – 11. 73 kr. = 62. 27 kr.
- Whales allocated to the Faroese Council's School Fund
  - Assessment value: 10½ *skinn*
  - Monetary value: 68. 75 kr. – 11. 00 kr. = 57. 75 kr.
- Whales allocated to those suffering damage/injury (*Skaðahvalur*)
  - Assessment value: 6 florins and 10½ *skinn*
  - Monetary value: 759. 50 kr. – 107. 70 kr. = 651. 80 kr.
- Whales allocated to the Financial Fund
  - Assessment value: 1 florin 3 *skinn*
  - Monetary value: 85. 50 kr. – 13. 34 kr. = 72. 16 kr.
- Whales allocated to the priest's home in Miðvágur
  - Assessment value: 1 florin 16 *skinn*
  - Monetary value: 199. 50 kr. – 27. 20 kr. = 172. 30 kr.
- Unclaimed *partehval*
  - Assessment value: 5 florins 5 *skinn*
  - Monetary value: 103. 05 kr. – 17. 16 kr. = 85. 89 kr.

Since 1970 only a few whales have been sold, and almost all the catches have been distributed instead if they were big enough. But as a rule the sheriff will put some whales on one side, to be used as compensation, e. g. if someone receives a sick whale, if a whale disappears for any reason or if a mistake is made. This is also codified in the 1998 pilot whaling regulations, where it states that "It is necessary to make provisions for sick and lost whales. If everything is not taken, the sheriff shall sell the rest in the most appropriate way."

If there are any whales left over, the sheriff can thus sell them by auction or in another way considered most appropriate. This can also apply to unclaimed whales. The amount raised at such an auction can be used to clean

up the area or similar tasks. Exactly how the sheriff organises this can vary from one place to another.

Until approximately ten years ago there was a maximum price per *skinn* of 25 Danish crowns. But this has now been abolished. There is no longer a maximum price per *skinn* at pilot whale auctions.

It used to be the case that if a school of whales was so small that after registration and assessment it became clear that there would be less than one *skinn* per "boat" (50 units of distribution), i. e. less than 1. 5 kg per person, the share that would otherwise have been allocated to the district was sold at auction. This was changed during the 1970s, to the effect that instead of auctioning off the whales they were allocated to the new phenomenon of the killers' share. This means that they are shared among those who personally took part in the whale kill, and this has been codified in the 1998 regulations.

Pilot whale hunts in Miðvágur in 1936 and 1974

In this section we will look at two actual sets of pilot whaling accounts from Miðvágur in 1936 and 1974. Pilot whaling accounts deal with the assessment and distribution of a school of pilot whales. I have chosen to take an example from 1936. At that time the whaling district including special boat shares comprised 370 7/8 boat shares. The whaling district was far bigger in 1936 than it was in 1974.

In 1936 it included Vágar, Mykines, Streymoy, Nólsoy, Hestur, Koltur and the western side of Eysturoy including all of the villages in Skálafjørður (see map). The most remote only received half shares. Even if the land-whale had in principle been abolished, during a transitional period 10% of the catch was set aside to cover the land-whale rights. It is also interesting to note that in 1936 a total of 8 florins and 4 *skinn* were set aside as food-whales, intended to be eaten immediately. This corresponds to around 12, 000 kg. By way of comparison, from a catch of 201 whales assessed at 57 florins and 8 ⅛ *skinn* in Klaksvík on 4 September 1848, 3 florins and 2 *skinn* were set aside as food-whales.

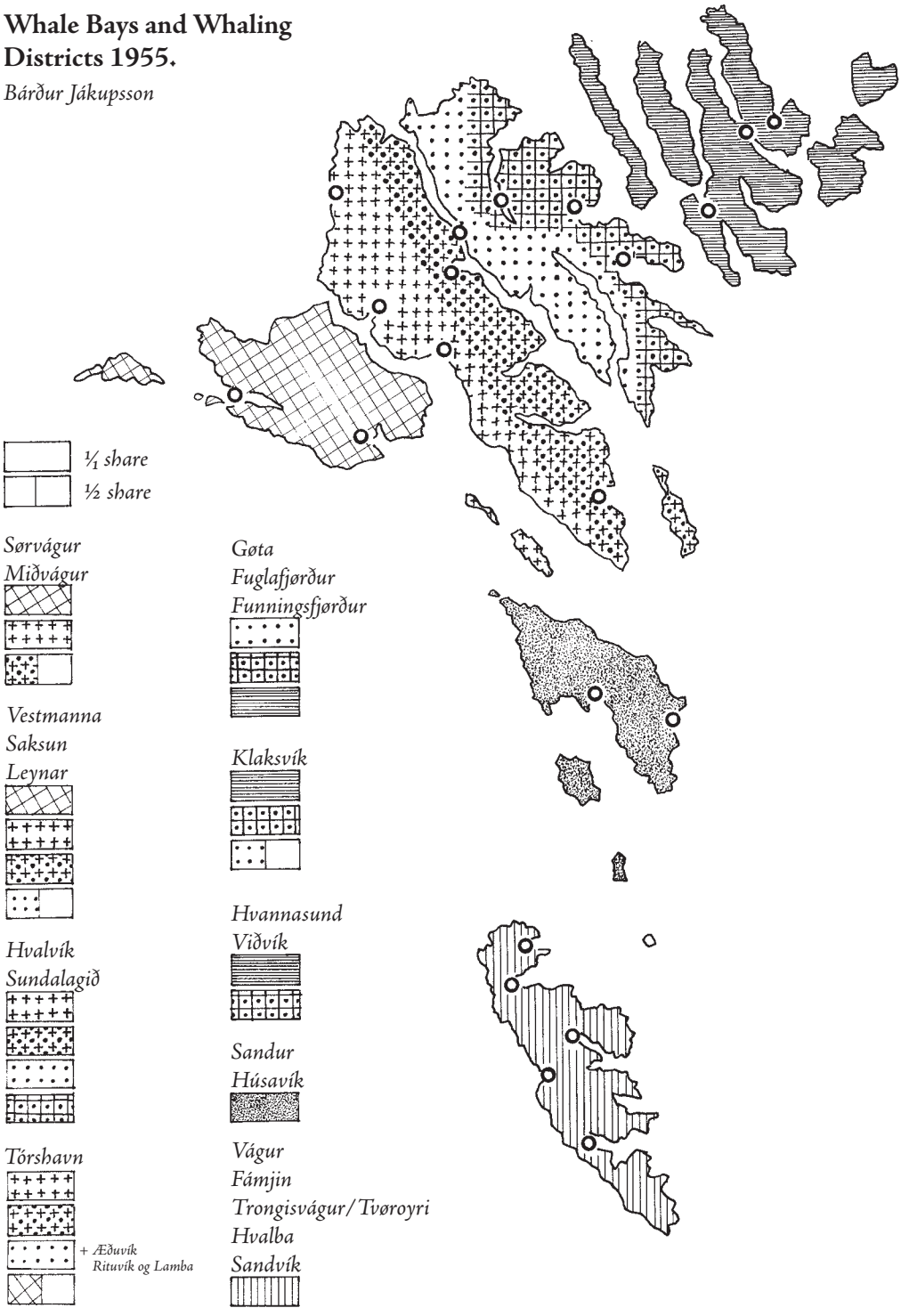
It can be imagined that the sheriff, taking into account the hard times around 1936, made a generous allocation of food-whales. In 1936 the tax base on the Faroes was still weak, which meant that provisions for the poor relief fund and the financial fund were relatively important.

If we consider the summary of the individual whales, it becomes clear that the sheriff and his assistants have tried to the best of their ability to

distribute the whales so that they more or less match the number of boats in the district, but this was not always successful. As an example, let us take a look at what was allocated to the poor relief fund and the school fund. The poor relief fund is allocated whale number 102, of 2 *skinn*, and whale number 108, of 8 *skinn*, making a total of 10 *skinn*. The school fund is allocated whale number 28, of 2½ *skinn*, and whale number 101, of 8 *skinn*, making a total of 10½ *skinn*. This is because the process takes whole whales as a starting point, meaning that distribution is in approximate *skinn* values. The same also applies for the villages. Mykines is allocated whale number 137, of 7 *skinn*, which is ½ *skinn* more than the village really should have. Whale number 120, of 6 *skinn*, is allocated to the areas of Jansagerði and Kirkjar in Miðvágur, even though they should have received 6 ⅜ *skinn*. In this context we should bear in mind that the unit of *bátur* is often more to do with tradition than numerical logic.

Whale Bays and Whaling Districts 1955.

Bárður Jákupsson



Accounts for the Whale Hunt in Miðvágur on 14 August 1936.

	Numbers	Value		
			Fl.	Sk.
	154		51	9
Deductions:				
	Fl.	Sk.	Fl.	Sk.
a. In compensation for land-whale rights		5	3	
b. Sighting-whale			16	
c. Food-whale			8	4
d. Poor relief fund 1%			10	
e. Faroese Council School Fund 1%		10 ½		
f. *Skaðahvalur*				
Damage 6 fl. 10½ sk.				
Damage assessment 2 sk	6	12½		
	Fl.	Sk.	Fl.	Sk.
g. Watch team				
120 men 20 boats 1 day				
1. fl. 15 sk.	1	15		
116 men 20 boats 1 night	3	8		
h. Assessors	4			
i. Sheriff		5		
j. 4 whaling foremen in total ½ sk.		5		
Total deductions			27	13
For distribution			23	16
Of which ¼ to the landowners	5	19		
Partahvalur ¾	23	16		
Of the State's land-whale				
Deductions:				
King's yeomen in Miðvágur		4		
8 *merkur* of ½ *skinn* per *merkur*	15 5/6			

Partahvalur	17	17
After the land-whale to add to the *partahvalur*		15 5/8
Total for distribution	**18**	**12 5/8**

To be distributed among 370 7/8 "boats", meaning that a boat's share was 1 *skinn*.

14 August 1936.

Assessment and distribution of the catch in Miðvágur, 14 August 1936

No.	Fl.	sk.	Allocated to:
1		3	Food-whale
2		4	Food-whale
3		3	Food-whale
4		3	*Partahvalur*, sold on behalf of the Financial Fund.
5		3	Tórshavn nos. 5 & 4
6		14	Food-whale
7		7	10%
8		4	Land-whale
9		3	10%
10		8	10%
11		6	10%
12		7	10%
13		8	Food-whale
14		5	Whaling foremen
15		7	10%
16		8	Watch
17		8	Food-whale
18		1½	Dalarnir
19		1½	Vatnsoyrar
20		8	Land-whale
21		3	Hoyvík & Sanatorium
22		3	Tórshavn no. 5

No.	Fl.	sk.	Allocated to:
23		3	10%
24		½	10%
25		½	10%
26		½	10%
27		½	10%
28		2½	School Fund
29		3	Food-whale
30		3	10%
31		4	Food-whale
32		3	Tórshavn no. 4
33		4	Hestur
34		7	Jupiter, Brynjálvur (boats), Dalur.
35		2	Nesið and Válur
36		2	Food-whale
37		4	Kvívík 1, 2, 3.
38		4	Fossá and Oyrabakki
39		7	Gørðum, Vestmanna
40		9	Watch
41		6	10%
42		7	Toftum, Skálum, Vestmanna
43		7	Land-whale
44		6	Rógvi, Vestmanna
45		5	Skæling, Leynar and Stykkið
46		4	Deild, Vestmanna
47		2	Thor (boat), Tvøroyri
48		2	Sheriff
49		4	Sildin, Grøni (boats), Sandur
50		6	10%
51		7	10%
52		9	Watch
53		7	10%
54		9	Watch
55		7	10%
56		4	Kaldbak, Sund and Hvítanes
57		5	Kirkjubøur and Velbastaður
58		7	Tórshavn 6 + 7
59		7	Watch
60		7	10%

No.	Fl.	sk.	Allocated to:
61		15	Land-whale, Priest
62		7	10%
63		15	Annexgarður (The priest's annex)
64		7	10%
65		6	Land-whale, Priest
66		1	10%
68		8	Nólsoy, Borðan
69		9	Tórshavn nos. 1, 2, 3
70		8	Koltur 1 sk. Watch 7 sk.
71		8	Watch, Hestur
72		10	Heygar, Heyganes – Vestmanna
73		7	Watch
74		9	10%
75		15	Food-whale
76		3	*Partahvalur*, sold on behalf of the Financial Fund
77		9	Watch
78		6	Slættanes + Food-whale
79		15	Damage
80		7	Watch
81		8	Tórshavn no. 8
82		3	Assessors, 2 sk. Smiril (ship) 1 sk.
83		3	Land-whale
84		7	Land-whale
85		6	Nes – Gøtueiði
86		6	Damage
87		13	Food-whale
88		9	Tórshavn nos. 9 and 10
89		6	Damage
90		1	Land-whale
91		7	Watch
92		8	Watch
93		5	Sandavágur 1
94		1	Damage
95		10	Saksun, Tjørnuvík, Vík & Nybo
96		8	Watch
97		6	Sandavágur no. 2

No.	Fl.	sk.	Allocated to:
98		8	Land-whale
99		2	Damage assessors
100		5	Sandavágur nos. 3, 4
101		8	School Fund
102		2	Council Poor Relief Fund
103		8	Council Poor Relief Fund
104		7	Hvalvík, Streymnes & Hósvík
105		6	Damage
106		7	Sandavágur nos. 3, 4
107		9	Kollafjørður
108		8	Damage
109		9	Sørvágur no. 6 4 sk. Food-whale 5 sk.
110		13	Sørvágur no. 4 6 sk. Food-whale 7 sk.
111		8	Land-whale
112		7	Land-whale
113		15	Sørvágur no. 5 7sk. Food-whale 8 sk.
114		7	Land-whale
115		16	Skálabotn – Strendur
116		2	Assessors
117		8	Tórshavn no. 18
118		6	Hús no. 2, Miðvágur
119		7	Tórshavn nos. 15, 16
120		6	Kirkjar, Miðvágur
121		5	Hús no. 2, Miðvágur
122		8	Ryggur & Eirikstoftir, Miðvágur
123		12	Eiði
124		8	Land-whale
125		5	Damage
126		5	Damage
127		5	Damage
128		10	Tórshavn nos. 11, 12
129		9	Bøur-Gásadalur 4 sk, Food-whale 5 sk.
130		9	Morskranes – Ljósá
131		9	Sørvágur nos. 1, 2
132		10	Food-whale
133		9	Damage
134		7	Damage

No.	Fl.	sk.	Allocated to:
135		12	Food-whale
136		1½	Damage
137		7	Mykines
138		8	Sighting-whale
139		8	Sighting-whale
140		9	Sørvágur no. 1 Food-whale
141		9	Damage
142		9	Damage
143		16	Nes, Skipanes and Gøtueiði
144		9	Food-whale
145		9	Food-whale
146		15	Food-whale
147		11	Tórshavn 13, 14, 17
148		11	Tórshavn 19, 30 and Argir
149		8	Damage
150		7	Damage
151		3	Sheriff
152		1	Damage
153		8	Damage
154		7	Damage
Total		**51**	**9**
			Whales caught and reported immediately before the tickets were issued:
155		3	Financial Fund
156		2	Financial Fund
			Whales caught and reported after the tickets were issued: ⅓ allocated to the finder and ⅔ to the Financial Fund.
157		4	Financial Fund
158		8	Financial Fund
Total		**52**	**6**

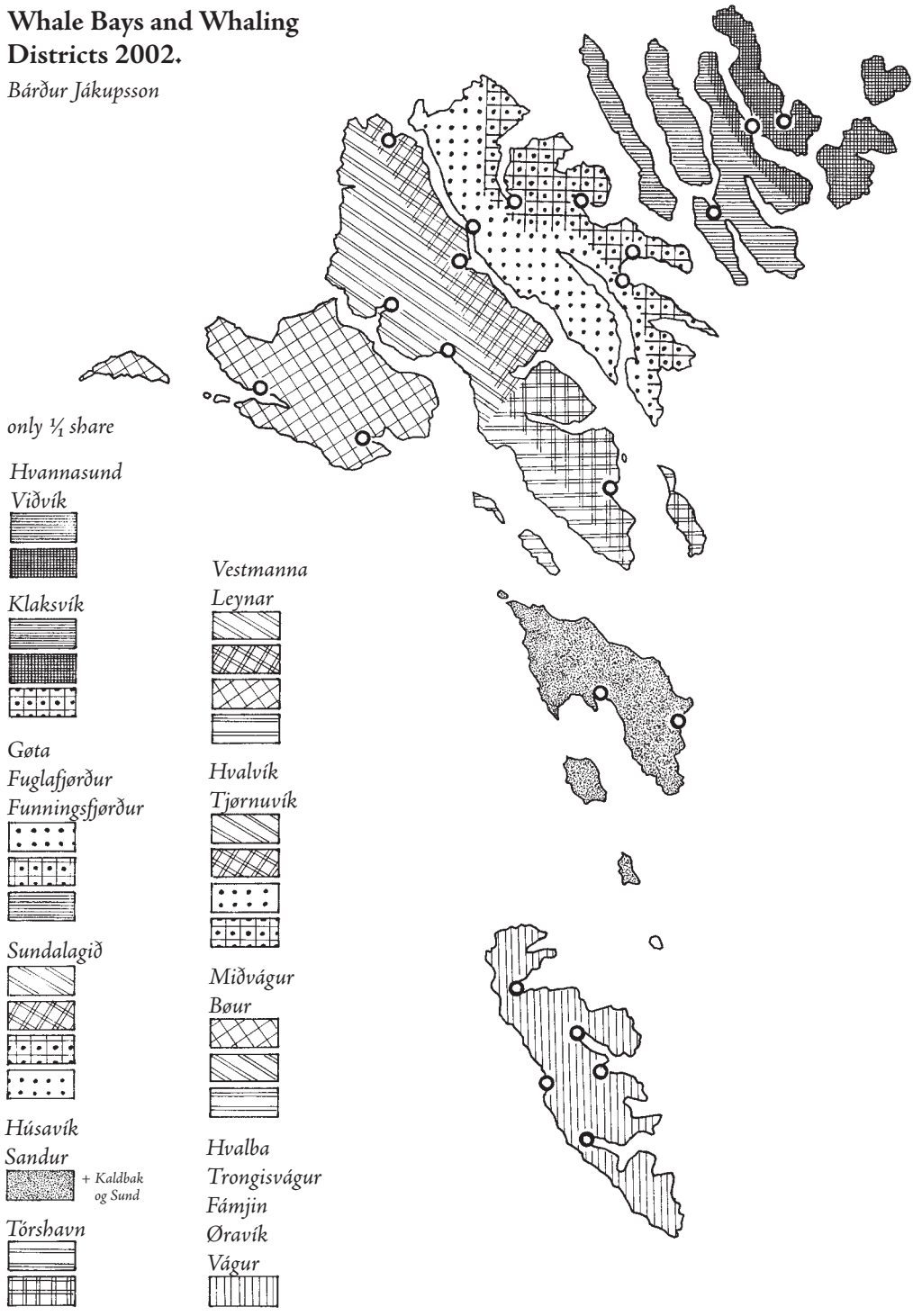
Miðvágur, 14 August 1936.

This summary lists all of the numbered whales from the whale hunt in Miðvágur on 14 August 1936. It should be noted that the whales that were only brought ashore after the sheriff had finished work were not included in the distribution process, but were sold at auction. The finder received one quarter of the whales that were brought ashore after the tickets had been issued. The rest were sold.

Anyone interested to do so can compare this summary with the actual whale hunt accounts and the distribution to the district. The summary describes quite clearly which whales were deducted for specified purposes and which were distributed among the district's inhabitants. In many places in the summary the entry simply says "10%". This means the 10% as specified in the *Act on compensation for landowners' rights in connection with pilot whale catches on the Faroes, 11 May 1935*. The land-whale is the compensation given to the King's farmers during a transitional period after the land-whale was abolished in 1934. The land-whale was also allocated to the priest's home and the annexe to the priest's home (Annexgården).

Whale Bays and Whaling Districts 2002.

Bárður Jákupsson



The Miðvágur whaling district 1936

The actual distribution to the communities in the Whaling District on 14 August 1936

Communities	**Boats**	**Share**	
		Fl.	Sk.
Streymoy			
Kirkjubø	1½		
Velbastaður	⅜		5
Hestur	4½		4
Koltur	1 ⅛		1
Dalarnir	1¾		1 ½
Skælingur and Leynar	4		
Stykkið	1½		5
Kvívík no. 1	4		
Kvívík no. 2	4¾		
Kvívík no. 3	3¾		12
Nesið and Válur	2		2
Vestmanna:			
Heygar and Heyganes	10		10
Fossá and Oyrabakki	4		4
Gørðum	7		7
Toftini and Skálum	6¾		7
Deild	4½		4
Rógvi	6 ⅜		7
Saksun	2		
Tjørnuvík	2½		
Haldórsvík no. 1	2½		
Haldórsvík no. 2	2½		
Nybo	1		10
Streymnes	2½		
Hvalvík	3		
Hósvík	3¼		7
Kollafjørður:			
Sjógv and Hamri	4		
Todnes and Miðgerði	1¾		

Communities	**Boats**	**Share**	
		Fl.	Sk.
Kjalnes	¾		
Innanfjørðs	1¾		9
Kaldbak			
Sund	¼		
Hvítanes	1¼		4
Hoyvík + Sanatorium	2½		3
Nólsoy			
Nólsoy no. 1	2		
Nólsoy no. 2	4		
Nólsoy no. 3	4		
Borðan	¼		8
Tórshavn:			
Tórshavn no. 1	3		
Tórshavn no. 2	3		
Tórshavn no. 3	3		9
Tórshavn no. 4	3		
Tórshavn no. 5	6		9
Tórshavn no. 6	4		
Tórshavn no. 7	3		7
Tórshavn no. 8	8		8
Tórshavn no. 9	5		
Tórshavn no. 10	4		9
Tórshavn no. 11	4		
Tórshavn no. 12	6		10
Tórshavn no. 13	4		
Tórshavn no. 14	4		
Tórshavn no. 17	3		11
Tórshavn no. 15	4		
Tórshavn no. 16	3		7
Tórshavn no. 18	8		8
Tórshavn no. 19	4		
Tórshavn no. 20	4		
Argir	3		11

Communities	**Boats**	**Share**	
		Fl.	Sk.
Vágar:			
Miðvágur:			
Jansagerðið and Kirkjar	6 ⅜		6
Ryggur and Kálvalíð	4½		
Eirikstoftir and Skúlin	3½	8	
Hús no. 1	6¼	6	
Hús no. 2	5 ⅛	5	
Vatnsoyrar + shares	1	1½	
Slættanes	2 ¾	3	
Sørvágur:			
Sørvágur no. 1	4		
Sørvágur no. 2	5½	9	
Sørvágur no. 3	4 ½	5	
Sørvágur no. 4	7	7	
Sørvágur no. 6	3½	4	
Bøur	2		
Gásadalur	2½	4	
Mykines	6½	7	
The western side of Eysturoy:			
Nes	2¾		
Toftir	7¾		
Saltnes	1		
Saltangará	2 ⅝		
Lambareiði	¼		
Glyvrar	3¼		
Søldarfjørður	¼		
Skipanes and Gøtueiði	¼	1	2
Skálabotnur	⅛		
Skála	¼		
Strendur:			
Sjógv	3 ⅝		
Selvindi	1 ⅛		
Heyggi	3 ⅛		
Gerðum	3	16	
Morskranes	1		

Communities	**Boats**	**Share**	
		Fl.	Sk.
Selatra	2		
Oyri	3		
Norðskála	2 ¼		
Svínáir	⅜		
Ljósá	⅝		
Eiði 1	2 ⅝		
Eiði 2	3		
Eiði 3	3½		
Eiði 4	3	12	
Boats' shares:			
Sildin, Sandoy	1		
Norðbingur, Sandoy	1¼		
Trøllið, Sandoy	1 ⅛		
Grøni	1	4	
Jupiter, Skopun	1 ⅜		
Borðoyanes, Skopun	3		
Nátin, Skopun	½		
Eirikur, Skálavík	⅔		
Fílin, Skálavík	½		
Olgar, Dalur	½		
Brynjálvur, Dalur	⅓		7
Thor, Tvøroyri	1¾		2
Smiril	½		1
Total	**370 ⅜**	**18**	**6**

In the next example we will see the distribution from a whale kill in the village of Miðvágur in 1974. The whaling district now has a total of 95 boats, far fewer than in 1936. In contrast to 1936, there is now nothing left of the land-whale. This has disappeared from the accounts. However, one new item has appeared: the killers' share, which we will discuss later. In modern times there is also a need for projectors, so that people can work at night, which explains a new deduction for lighting. As time has passed more such items have been added, as we will see later.

Accounts for the whale hunt in Miðvágur, 4 October 1974.

185 whales were valued at	777	*skinn*
Deductions:		
1. Sighting-whale	26	sk.
2. Lighting	1	sk.
3. *Drápspartar.* Whale killers' share	406	sk.
4. Damage assessors	2	sk.
5. Guards:		
8 men and 2 boats		
½ sk. per day, 1 sk. per night,		
each for 1 day and 1 night + towing	28	sk.
6. Assessors	12	sk.
7. Sheriff 2%	16	sk.
8. 4 whaling foremen.		
1% each, in all	32	sk.
9. Distribution assistance	4	sk.
Total	526	sk.
For distribution: 777-526		
	251	sk.
Partahvalur (portion divided among		
the members of the whaling district):		
Size of the whaling district 94 *bátar*		
(1 *bátur* = a portion for 50 persons)		
per *bátur* 251/94 = 2. 5 sk. x 94	235	sk.
Remainder		
	15	sk.
Total		
	251	sk.

Comment:
The "lighting" mentioned under deductions covers the hire of projectors to enable people to work during the evening and at night.
Source: Local police office, Sørvágur.

Distribution of the catch at Miðvágur in 1974

The whaling district had by now been reduced considerably, with a total of 95¼ *bátur*, corresponding to around 4, 760 people. The whaling district now includes Mykines, Vágar, only the villages on the western side of Streymoy and the islands of Hestur and Koltur. Tórshavn is thus no longer a part of this district, as can be seen in the summary below.

The Miðvágur Whaling District 1974

Sørvágur	19	*bátar*
Miðvágur	17	*bátar*
Sandavágur	14½	*bátar*
Vatnsoyrar	1	*bátur*
Mykines	1	*bátur*
Bøur	1	*bátur*
Gásadalur	1	*bátur*
Streymoy, Hestur and Koltur:		
Vestmanna	26½	*bátar*
Kvívík	½	*bátar*
Saksun	3/4	*bátur*
Norðadalur and Sy˙radalur	3/4	*bátur*
Kirkjubøur and Velbastaður	1½	*bátur*
Hestur	1½	*bátur*
Koltur	¼	*bátur*
Total	95 ¼	*bátur*

Source: Local police office, Sørvágur.

The local distribution units are as they were in 1974. The difference between the three villages is that in Sørvágur and Sandavágur they only use numbers in connection with distribution of the home share, while in Miðvágur they use local place names. Skúlin (the school) is a place name here, not the actual school institution, whereas the home for the aged does refer to an institution, as there is a residential and nursing home for the aged in Miðvágur.

The local units in three villages on Vágar

Sørvágur

Unit of Distribution	Share	
no. 1	2½	*bátar*
no. 2	2	*bátar*
no. 3	2	*bátar*
no. 4	2½	*bátar*
no. 5	2	*bátar*
no. 6	2	*bátar*
no. 7	2	*bátar*
no. 8	2	*bátar*
no. 9	2	*bátar*

Miðvágur

Unit of Distribution	Share	
Hús no. 1	3	*bátar*
Hús no. 2	3½	*bátar*
Eirikstoft and Skúlin	2	*bátar*
Ryggur and Kálvalíð	4	*bátar*
Kirkjar no. 1	1½	*bátur*
Kirkjar no. 2	2	*bátar*
The home for aged	1	*bátur*

Sandavágur

Unit of Distribution	Share	
no. 1	4	*bátar*
no. 2	3	*bátar*
no. 3	2½	*bátar*
no. 4	2½	*bátar*
no. 5	2½	*bátar*

Source: Local police office, Sørvágur.

I myself was present at a pilot whale hunt at Miðvágur during the autumn on 4 October 1974, and in the next section I will illustrate the successful

method of distribution there. The account is also based on an interview with the sheriff of the district.

As soon as the school is dead, all those who have participated in the hunt register themselves with the sheriff, who sets up his base himself in the local government office. People queue up to enrol. The whaling foremen give their names, the names of their boats and the number of people in their crews. Those who have taken part in the hunt from the shore give their names, and so it continues until everyone has registered.

Work can then start on the distribution process. At Miðvágur in 1974 this took most of the night. Everyone asked one another if anyone knew anything about when the tickets would be issued. The reference here is to the tickets that show the number of the whale of which you have been allocated a share and how big a share it is. By posting a notice on the local government office, the sheriff had announced that the tickets should be ready by 8 o'clock that morning. As the hour approached, a crowd of men gathered outside the door of the office and stood there, waiting. Then the door was unlocked and the sheriff stepped out. He asked the people to stand aside and make way for those who would come forward and collect their tickets. After that he announced how many whales had been

The sheriff issues the tickets following a whale kill in Miðvágur in 1974.

killed, how many *skinn* at which the school had been valued, and finally how many *skinn* there were per *bátin*. Then he began to call out the names of the boats that had participated in the hunt, and the foremen went forward to collect their tickets. This continued until all the tickets had been claimed. However, all the tickets must be collected within a certain time or the whales are sold to somebody else. Andras Mortensen's (2005) description of the issuing of the tickets in Tórshavn about 30 years later reveals almost the same circumstances as in Miðvágur in 1975.

With tickets in hand, a group of men made its way down to the seashore, each man looking for his whale. Usually the numbering of the whales begins at one end of the shore and continues over to the other, so it is not too difficult to get your bearings using the whales' consecutive numbering. The atmosphere here tends to be very hectic. Lorries and towing vehicles drive back and forth along the shore, and motorboats tow the whales out to the harbour where they are hoisted up on the quayside to be butchered. Those who transport the catch home to the village usually receive ⅓ of the load as payment, provided the trip must be made by boat or over a longer distance (Johansen 1970, 103).

Let us, however, leave the shore and look at the distribution as it appears in the sheriff's whaling records. We have already seen that a *bátur* is a unit of distribution based on 50 persons. In the account books, the size of the Miðvágur district is set at 94 *bátar*. This number can be amended as the structure of the population alters. Since there is emigration from the smaller communities to the larger ones, distribution according to *bátar* is also revised at certain intervals. In the more heavily populated settlements there are even smaller units of distribution than the *bátur*, as demonstrated, for example, by the three communities of Sørvágur, Miðvágur, and Sandavágur. In the areas of Sørvágur and Sandavágur, the units are designated exclusively by numbers, while in Miðvágur they are named after areas of the town, which are in turn divided up into numbered units.

All of the households in a community are entitled to be enrolled on the so-called pilot whale roll, which is to be found in the sheriff's office, and is revised every year by the sheriff. The list used to be presented at the village meeting, at which point it could be amended; otherwise, it is always available at the sheriff's office where you can check to see whether or not you are on the list. The pilot whale roll is always kept up to date.

For each of the smaller units of distribution in a community, there is a foreman to whom the sheriff provides a list of the members in that distribution unit for which he is responsible. The number of members in any


GRINDIN
9-10-2004
Bátar - Tórshavn XIV

1125	Vørðan	Hans P. Lamhauge	5
753	Taura	Rúni Poulsen	6
1024	Venus	Sámal Lindenskov	5
	Sedna	Anna L. Joensen	5
451	Lundin	Andrass Mortensen	5
476	Max	Kári Svensson	4
782	Dvørgasteinur	Torkil Kamban	4
174	Goggan	Jón Isfeldt	3

Hvalir nr. 165 10 Skeim
Hvalir nr. 169 8 Skeim
Hvalir nr. 170 10 Skeim

A ticket with the numbers of whales.

given unit changes constantly, but the number of *bátar* is adjusted rather less often.

The foremanship of a distribution unit is passed on without any great formality. When an incumbent does not wish to continue in his position, he merely passes on his duties to someone else in the unit, who then becomes the new distribution foreman. The foreman's task is to make sure that the unit's share of the catch is collected and distributed.

Each unit of distribution has its regular butchering site within the settlement, to which the whales nowadays are driven in trucks. A few men from the distribution unit gather to butcher the whales, taking tubs to collect their portions. Within the distribution unit a decision is taken on how to divide the meat and the blubber. There is a choice between distribution by individuals or by households, although in general the actual size of each household is taken into account anyway. Following the distribution process, each household is careful to use its portion of the catch. It is cleaned, salted and dried.

The distribution process is over and the whale is cut up, about 1975.

In principle the distribution process follows the same rules as it has done since 1832, although the rules have been updated and adapted in line with social development. In the pilot whaling regulations from 1998 the following items are listed in connection with deductions and allocations:

1) Sighting-whale.
2) Watch team.
3) Assessors.
4) The sheriff.
5) Whaling foremen.
6) Damage assessors.
7) Distribution assistants.
8) *Killers' share.*
9) Home share/*partahvalur*.
10) *Other/surplus whales.*
11) *When whales are not used for home share.*

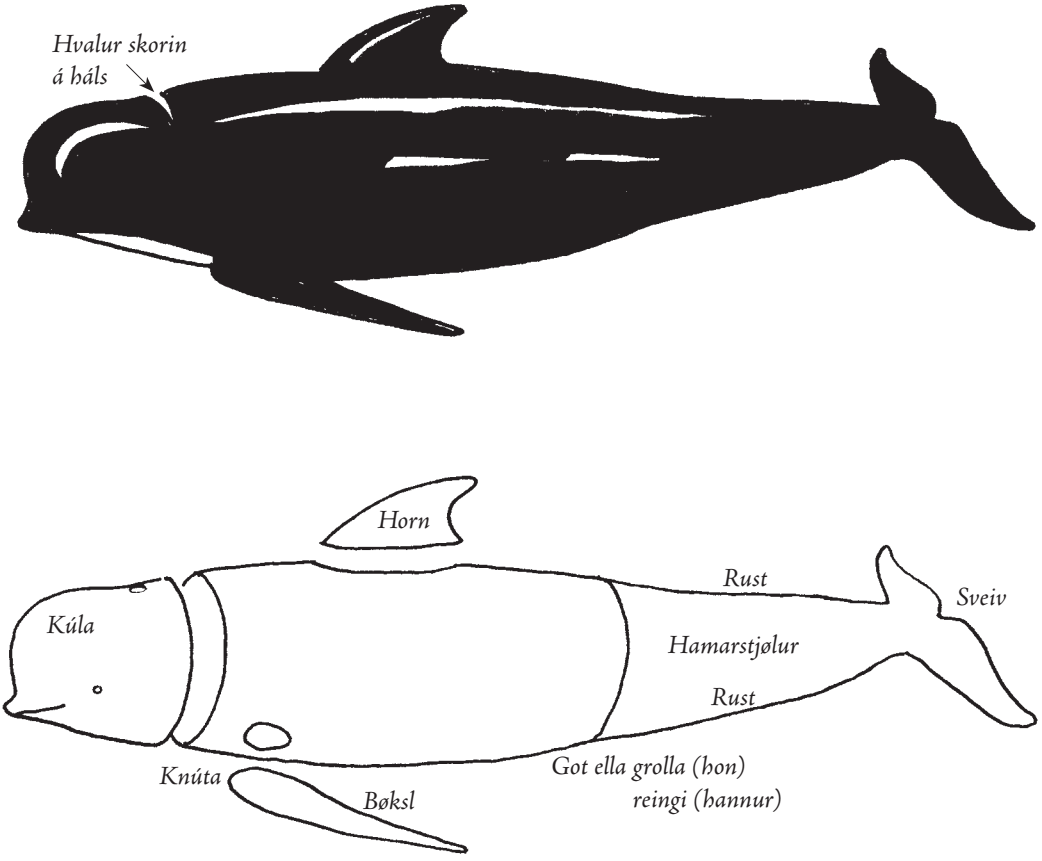
We already familiar with the first seven items. The whale killers' share is now a fixed item in the distribution process. Another fixed item is an allocation of whales that can be used to replace sick or unusable whales (item 10). If this allocation is too large, the sheriff can sell off the whales. I will return to item 11 later.

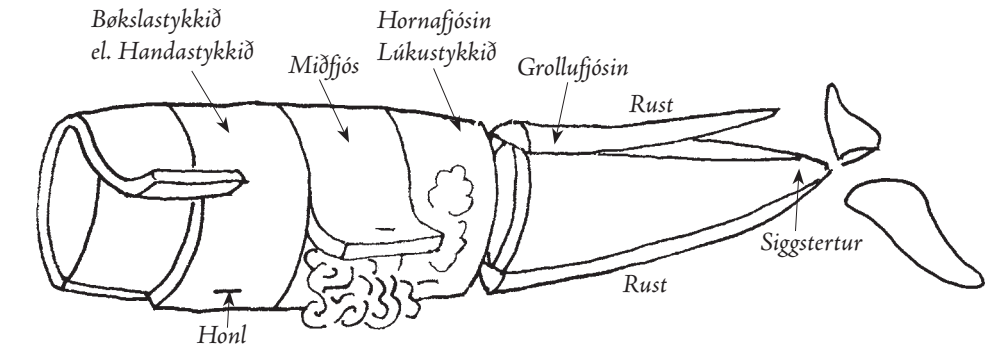
The pilot whaling regulations also provide a facility for distribution of the whales according to the practice that exists locally, as long as the government is notified of this in such instances. This is done in connection with the statutory submission of the pilot whale accounts. The normal practice nowadays is that following deduction of the first seven items, plus any other local deductions, the rest is divided into the killers' share and the

The butchering of a pilot whale.

Bárður Jákupsson

"In the same way as you cut or divide a sheep into 20 and a halibut into 20 pieces, a pilot whale is divided into sixteen."
(Jens Christian Svabo 1779, 51)




Bøkslastykkið
el. Handastykkið
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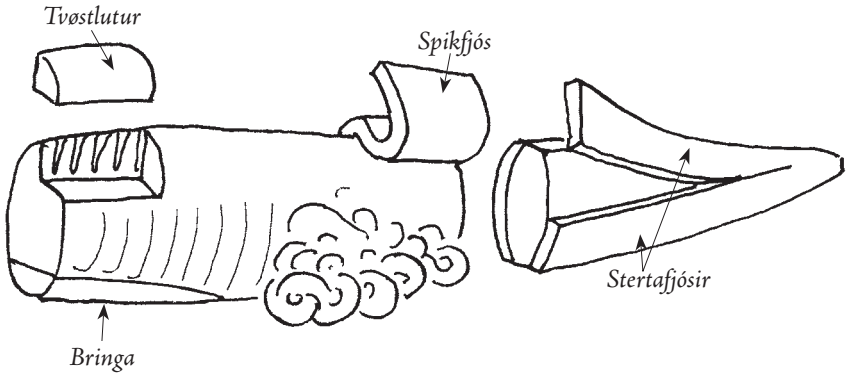
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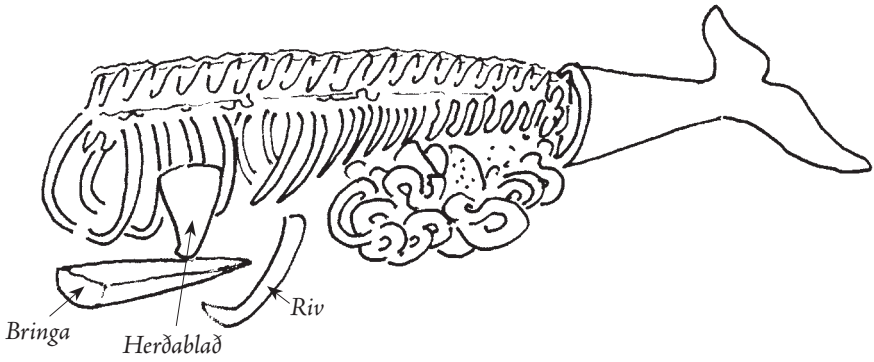
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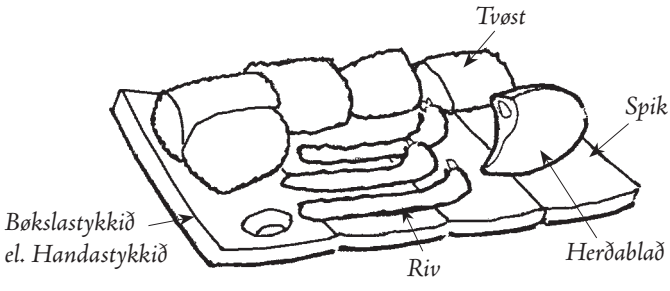
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el. Handastykkið
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Herðablað

Meat and blubber are cut from the whale, and now the clean-up can commence, 2007.

home share. Only those who actually take part in the whale kill are entitled to the killers' share. There are very specific rules for the killers' share[85]

To obtain a killers' share, immediately after the kill has been completed you must register yourself with one of the sheriff's representatives, who resides at a defined place close to the site of the kill. The principle is that the boat receives a specific share and each individual person receives a specific share. The sheriff determines the size of the shares, depending on the size of the school of whales. There is a new provision in the whaling regulations

85 The 1998 pilot whaling regulations, section 18, subsection 8 state:
"In which those who have actually taken part in the drive and/or the kill - in a boat or on land - are entitled to a killers' share. The killers' share is the compensation for their work as mentioned above. This work involves: a) driving/killing from the boat/on land, b) collecting and dragging, etc. just after the kill until the whaling foremen give the word, c) pulling the whales ashore.
A share is then given to each man in the boat, with maximum allocations as described below:
For 8-men boats or larger, usually 8 killers' shares
6-men boats or larger, usually 6 killers' shares
4-men boats or larger, usually 5 killers' shares
smaller boats than these will usually receive 3 killers' shares.
Boats, crews and people from other whaling districts are entitled to killers' shares if they have been involved in the drive and/or the kill, etc. A person must be 14 years of age to receive a killers' share. A whaler can only claim one share, even if he has driven the whales from one boat and killed from another or from the shore. Subject to consultation with the whaling foremen the sheriff may, if the drive has been particularly difficult and long, permit an extra share to be given to the *rakstrarmenn*. In the event that the school of whales has been held at sea, boats that were not involved in the drive, but only in the kill, are entitled to a killers' share if the sheriff or one of the whaling foremen has asked them to assist. The sheriff defines the size of the killers' share.

that changes a former practice. It was formerly the case that if a school of whales was so small that less than one *skinn* per *bátur* would be available for distribution into home shares, it was sold at auction. This is no longer the case; instead, what is covered by item 11 above is divided solely into killers' shares. The killers' share is now always a fixed item, while the home share or *partahvalur* is not. The school of whales has to be of a certain size for there to be a home share.

An interesting feature nowadays is the deductions that are actually made from the overall kill. These can vary considerably from one place to another. The deductions that are effectively no longer made are those for the food-whale and for damages.

The deductions that are fixed are that the person who sights the school of whales receives the value of the biggest whale in *skinn*. [86] Another fixed deduction is the one for the sheriff, who receives 2% of the total value, with each individual whaling foreman receiving 1%. As a rule there are several whaling foremen. One fixed item is for the assessors. Even if whales are no longer sold to cover damages (these are met by the local council), those who assess the scale of the damage are paid in kind from the whale kill. The same is true of various assistants, guards, divers or any other helpers used to pull whales ashore and clean up the area. Help from cranes, trucks, forklifts, ships, tugboats and other vessels, even help from the fire service and the police, is also paid for in kind. In Tórshavn Shell and Statoil receive a share of the catch in return for making their quayside facilities available. A share also goes to hospitals, old people's homes, nursing homes, school camps, etc. These can also be located outside the whaling district. The Faroese Zoological Museum and the Pilot Whalers' organisation now also sometimes receives some whales from the catch for scientific investigations. This is all based on the 1998 pilot whaling regulations.

86 The size of this whale can vary from one school to another. A certain degree of creativity has emerged in this respect. Instead of claiming the sighting-whale at once, it can be spread over two hunts, so that you have some of this value owing when the next school of whales is caught. This can be seen, for example, in the pilot whale accounts for a whale hunt in Hvalba on 11. 08. 2002.

On the basis of 14 random whaling accounts, the deductions are broken down into the following items: 1. Sighting-whale: the *skinn* value of the biggest whale. 2. The sheriff, 2% of the total number of *skinn*, 3. Whaling foremen, 1% each of the total number of *skinn*, 4. Assessors, 5. Damage assessors, 6. Assistant (unspecified), 7. Guards, 8. Divers, 9. Pulling ashore, 10. Clearing up, 11. Cranes, 12. Trucks, 13. Forklifts, 14. Ships and boats, 15. Fire station, 16. Police, 17. Salt merchant, 18. Statoil/Shell, 19. Nursing home and convalescent home, 20. National hospital, 21. "á Nesi" activity centre, 22. School, 23. Pilot whalers' society, 24. Head of the Zoological Museum for Research. , 25. Refund, 26. Refund in connection with previous whale hunt.

One new feature of the 1998 regulations is that outsiders, tourists and guests who arrive before a given time no longer receive a share of the catch, unless they actively participate in the kill and earn their share of the killers' share or if there is a local desire for this old tradition to continue.

Clearing up

After a whale kill a lot of the remains of the whales are left on the beach. In the past this could be a serious problem. As long ago as 1781 Svabo (1959, 259) proposed an ordinance to deal with this:

> "Those carcasses of pilot whales which, skinned, lie on the shore until a tide carries them away ought to be removed immediately under threat of penalty in order to prevent unhealthy air and sickness."

The first pilot whaling regulations did not state that the whales should be removed within a given time, but this was added in later versions. The whaling regulations of 1955 and 1986 state that all the carcasses, entrails, etc. must be removed within 3 x 24 hours after the tickets have been made available. The clean-up nowadays is paid for by the whaling district and, as already mentioned, the sheriff can decide to sell a share of the catch to cover these expenses. The normal procedure otherwise, as stated in the regulations, is that the "Clearing up of the remains in the individual district is undertaken by the relevant town council without affecting the cost of the whale hunt."!

The clean-up is performed very quickly, and a few hours after the kill is over everything has been cleared away. This also applies for the remains of the whales after they have been butchered.

The special conditions in Tórshavn

The pilot whaling regulations have in principle also always applied in Tórshavn, with everyone in the district being entitled to a home-share, but in time the capital has become so large that if everyone in Tórshavn were to be on the pilot whale roll, which now mirrors the national register, realistically no school of whales would be big enough to be distributed in home-shares. For a number of decades the population in Tórshavn has therefore fallen outside the system.

To deal with this, special rules have been drawn up for Tórshavn. Instead of using the national register as the basis for the pilot whale roll, it was decided to leave it up to the individual to express his or her interest by per-

sonally registering himself or herself and the household in the pilot whale roll in Tórshavn. Anyone on the roll thus receives a home-share, allocated in alphabetical order. If a school of whales is not big enough, some will have to wait until next time whales are killed in Tórshavn or in a district where Tórshavn is entitled to a share.

On 9 October 2004 there was a relatively large whale kill in Tórshavn of around 242 pilot whales. It was assessed at 2, 115 *skinn*. 182 boats with crews took part in the kill, and 431 people took part on land. The school of whales was sighted to the south of Nólsoy at 9:20. The drive started straight away, the kill started at 14:40 and was over at 15:45.

A long queue of people waiting for their share of the catch in Tórshavn, 2007.

Accounts for the pilot whale kill in Tórshavn on 9 October 2004

242 whales	**2, 115 sk.**
Sighting-whale	20. 0 sk.
Assessors	9. 0 sk.
Damage assessors	3. 0 sk.
Watch	6. 0 sk.
Whaling foremen	126. 0 sk.
Sheriff	42. 0 sk.
Fire service	15. 0 sk.
Police	11. 0 sk
Assistants	66. 0 sk.
Pressarin and Skúmarin[87]	16. 0 sk.
Forklifts	8. 0 sk.
Cranes	8. 0 sk
Cleaning up	12. 0 sk.
Town council	12. 0 sk.
Waste/not allocated	20. 0 sk.
Fixed shares	**375. 0 sk**
Láargarður (old people's home)	10. 0 sk.
Heilbrigdi (clinic for alcoholics)	19. 0 sk.
Home-share	651. 0 sk.
Balance, allocated to the whalers (killers' share)	**1, 060. 0 sk.**

Source: Ministry of Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, Tórshavn

The accounts thus show that 1, 060 *skinn* were allocated to the killers' share, while 651 *skinn* were allocated to the home-share, i. e. those in the population in Tórshavn who were registered on the pilot whale roll. The final distribution between those persons who receive a killers' share can also be complicated, because each person is entitled to a fair share both in quality

87 2 tugs belonging to Tórshavn Shipyard

and quantity. Andras Mortensen (2005) reveals in a paper that under such circumstances those persons who by chance get the tickets automatically are accepted by the others as the leaders of the final distribution process, regardless of their social status.

For the first time in almost 30 years everyone who wanted to could now receive a share of a whale kill. It was announced on the radio on Sunday 10 October that after 13:00 on Sunday those who were on the pilot whale roll could come and collect their share.

Even before 13:00 the queue stretched for one kilometre. The queue was still there at 16:00 the same afternoon. Representatives of all levels of society in Tórshavn, including members of the government, stood patiently and waited, each with their plastic tub or plastic bucket. Some had brought large plastic bags. One person had brought along a green waste bin, designed for waste paper. Very practical, as it had wheels.

The municipal authorities had set up a temporary office in a little bus, where those who had already registered on the pilot whale roll were issued with a ticket stating the size of the household. This number naturally varied from one upwards, as the town council had, given the circumstances, decided to give people who were not on the pilot whale list the opportunity to register themselves on it. They were directed to a side door on the bus. Having now been registered on the pilot whale list, they could now, albeit slightly late, receive tickets for their home-share.

Anyone who is not on the pilot whale roll can register in the office bus, 2004.

The mayor puts whale meat and blubber into a bag. The recipient is a member of the Faroese Parliament, 2007.

Ticket in hand, they then walked up to one of the many tables set up by the town council. The ticket was handed over and people were issued with the amount of whale meat and blubber to which they were entitled according to the ticket. Each person had been allocated ⅒ *skinn*. After a couple of hours in the queue you could go home with your tub or bucket. The salt warehouse was open on the day, so that people could buy any salt that they needed even though it was a Sunday.

One indication that the ability to receive whale meat and blubber remains very important is the fact that those in charge of the distribution process were all politically elected members of Tórshavn' s town council. Personally, I, the author of this book, received my share from the mayor who, wearing a blue boiler suit and with bloody hands, was cutting meat and blubber into the appropriate sizes. The women on the town council were also there. They also stood there with bloody hands, weighing the meat and blubber for the citizens.

This must be one of the few occasions when elected politicians could literally distribute food to the people. The fact that the municipal elections were not far away is also relevant. [88]

After many years outside the system, Tórshavn has thus rejoined the system, albeit with an amended procedure.

88 The observations in this section are based on my own observations with supplementary information from office manager Jens Marius Poulsen, Tórshavn Town Council.

Other forms of distribution of the whales

The example described above shows what normally happens in a well-organised whaling district, albeit in the special Tórshavn version.

In the past, when people came from other whaling districts before a given time they were also entitled to a share of the catch. It was also common that people from other places bought whale meat from the auction that was virtually always held after a whale kill. In the past what was sold at auction might be partly the *skaðahvalur*, i. e. what was sold to cover the costs of any damage. The sheriff could also sell off any whale meat that had not been claimed. If we take Miðvágur as an example, it could happen that people from Mykines, for example, or other remote places did not come to collect their share. The reason might be poor weather, or in the case of Mykines because the *grindaboð* had not been brought to the island. This whale meat could instead be sold and the owners would be given the money raised by the sale. In the past a large proportion of the catch that was due to the landowner might also be sold at auction.

The number of pilot whale hunts could vary from one district to another. Many years could pass without any whales coming to one village, while others had a surplus. In the 1920s there were several whale hunts in Miðvágur, while there were very few in the sound between Eysturoy and Streymoy. There was also a long period during which no whales came to Tórshavn. In such situations men from the village could take part in the whale kill in another village in order to earn a share of it and, if possible, to buy whale meat as well.

In such cases the whale meat could be distributed upon arrival home according to special rules. We have an example from the village of Haldórsvík on Streymoy:

> "The whole village was together in the distribution. There were then two hundred and forty shares in the village, and the whole *grind*, including the whale which was bought was shared out – it came to only a few pennies to pay for each share of the bought whale. Then men who had been west in Vágar owned a third of the whole *grind* as a workers´ share, and this third was first put aside. Then the other two thirds were shared out to all the village." (Johansen 1970, 10).

Something that also occurred in the past was a form of begging for whale meat and blubber:

"There were three things that all men (rich or poor) could not resist, and they were: sheep, women and whales. When several schools of whales had come to one whale bay and none to another, it could happen that men would come in an 8-man boat to ask for some whale meat, and they were never refused." (Rasmussen 1949, 94).

But such begging was not always well received:

"Once there were some men from Hestur who went north to Sund and asked for whale meat. They went to Oyrar. My grandfather was one of those who went along on this occasion. They went in pairs and divided the houses among themselves to visit. Grandfather decided to go with a man who was fairly bold. At the first house they came to there was only a woman at home. They stated their business, but the woman was extremely angry and refused straight away to give them any, and added that she could get no peace from all this begging. But the man that my grandfather was with also became angry and said that he would not leave until he had got some whale meat from her. The woman gave them something, but when she realised that this was no good, she just threw a whole lot of whale meat and blubber at them and it fell on the ground. She had risen to the bait so well that this was the best yield they came away with from any house." (Poulsen 1947, 125).

Man on his way home with his "home share", Tórshavn.

This kind of begging belonged in the old peasant society, and stopped as people started to earn money in connection with the growth of sea fishing towards the end of the 19th century. (Rasmussen 1949, 94).

The fact that most of the male population were away from home during the summer months meant that many providers could not personally look after their interests in connection with the whale hunt. But as a rule there were enough men at home for private agreements to be reached with the men on the home front who were happy to lend a helping hand. One good turn would always bring another. "Otherwise the men at sea would ask those who were at home to buy some whale meat for them." (Joensen 1982, 159). Several such private agreements were reached, and these worked satisfactorily (Joensen 1982, 159).

In today's society it can happen that small shares of pilot whale meat and blubber can be bought in certain shops in Tórshavn. This cannot be considered to be a form of commercial utilisation, rather a kind of service to people who want to have a meal of whale meat and blubber, but are unable to obtain it in any other way. It has also become common practice for whale meat and blubber to be sold by the harbour at Vágsbotn in Tórshavn directly from a truck or a boat, in the same way as fish and birds are usually sold.

In the Faroes, as in other countries, there are rules and regulations governing the distribution of food products. These apply in principle to all food items that can be sold and distributed. Anyone who sells food products, whether through a shop or a restaurant, must be approved and authorised. But this does not apply to private individuals. How people handle their own food is obviously not regulated by law. Pilot whale meat is basically private property, although the amount of such meat is fairly substantial and the conditions under which it is handled are not always considered safe. The food authorities would therefore like it to be regulated by law, although they realise that this would be a difficult undertaking. The problem is the same concerning other kinds of traditional private food and the private production of food. Take dried mutton as an example: this is produced for home consumption, but is also sold on. But usually the mutton is sold directly from the private producer and the private consumer (Andreassen 1996, 98).

*

In the following two chapters attention will shift from the ethnographical

description of the pilot whale hunt and its history towards a completely different culture analytical issue, in which the significance of the pilot whale and pilot whaling for Faroese identity will be examined, initially within a national framework, before putting pilot whaling into a broader international discourse on whales and whaling in chapter 8. Here there has been a significant polarisation, in which there are on the one side those countries that perceive whales as being a usable, renewable resource that can provide food for people who have long historical traditions of eating whale meat, and then there are non-governmental organisations that in their discourse humanise whales and ultimately want to ban all forms of whaling. [89]

89 All these issues are discussed in Arne Kalland's new book: Unveiling the whale: Discourses in whales and Whaling. Berghan Books Oxford, New York (Kalland 2009 in print).

Tórshavn 2007.


11X

Chapter 7:

National Symbolism and Identity

From the end of the 18th century things started to change on the Faroes. Population numbers, which had remained at between 4-5, 000 for several centuries, now started to increase. Socio-economic opportunities were created that enabled more people to live on the islands.

In due course a more clearly defined national cultural awareness was also created in parts of the population, who started to consider themselves Faroese. This also manifested itself in a sense that people had their own ethnic self-image, which was not simply an ethnic self-image, but a broader cultural perception in which they perceived themselves as a part of a greater European civilisation, as well as the owners of a special, tradition-borne Faroese culture with close links between culture and identity. [90] How people experience their own daily culture is not always immediately obvious:

> "It is not usually experienced as a coherent system of ideas, as in the highly idealised, abstracted, and, therefore, somewhat unreal accounts which anthropologists so often present. Rather, people know their way of doing things; they know a customary mode of thought and performance, They do not necessarily value it simply because it is traditional, because it suits them. It developed, after all, to meet their own requirements and conditions…The sense of belonging, of what it means to belong, is constantly evoked by whatever means

90 Alsmark 1982, Nenola-Kallio 1982.

> come to hand: the use of language, the shared knowledge of genealogy and ecology, joking, the solidarity of sects, the aesthetics of subsistence skill … people recognise their culture as that which distinguishes them from others and, thereby, as the source of their own identities." (Cohen 1982, 5, 6).

From around the middle of the 19th century there were Faroese people who had at least two cultural wardrobes: the traditional, everyday Faroese wardrobe and the new, national romantic Faroese wardrobe, with strong elements of bourgeois culture.

In 1847 a young Danish doctor wrote a famous medical article about hygiene, which took a very close look at hygienic conditions with regard to homes, clothing and food. Among other things, he described that he had observed an entire eight-man boat crew with healthy appetites eat raw whale meat with maggots in it,"even though it was so rotten that the stench of it made me feel ill in an open boat." (Jacobsen 1971, 94). In a presentation of Panum, literary researcher Ole Jacobsen (1971, 68) says that

> "Only among the Faroese themselves did the thesis arouse strong displeasure, which manifested itself in a bitter response due to the outspoken way in which he reported the unfortunate social and hygienic conditions on the islands. This caused him a great deal of awkwardness. Not only did this cause him to be the subject of a literary attack in one of our magazines, but some extremely patriotic Faroese people even threatened the young author with corporal punishment."

There are indications that V. U. Hammershaimb was among these, feeling himself offended by the unflattering way in which the author described traditional Faroese food. In a letter to Panum on 11 April 1847, Governor Pløyen writes that Panum must have made a mistake about the whale meat:

> "It must have been boiled whale meat with maggots, as they are not found in dried whale meat, and whale meat is not eaten raw once it has been cured. The main thing is actually the maggots," (Jacobsen 1971, 86)

says the Governor, adding that

> "When Hammershaimb comes up here and has all his Faroese emotions heat-

> ed up with dried meat and fish, I hope that he allows himself to attack you and Manicus on behalf of Faroese cuisine. It would be extremely enjoyable to see such a culinary battle." (Jacobsen 1972, 85).

The theologian Hammershaimb stands in the cross field between a general, Danish bourgeois culture, traditional Faroese peasant culture and the discovery of the special Faroese culture. Governor Chr. Pløyen, who could speak Faroese and who was also familiar with Faroese culture, understood Hammershaimb's situation. After all, this is the very same Governor who had a few years earlier written the pilot whaling ballad, to which I will return later.

To cut a long story short: what was now happening was that a special awareness developed among Faroese people of their own culture, or ethnicity if you will (Debes 1995). In 1888 this culminated in the nationalist movement seriously coming to the fore at a meeting in Tórshavn – what was to become famous as the Christmas Meeting. While reflecting on their cultural roots, the Faroes and the Faroese were at the same time becoming modern.

This meant that they also came to take on new identities in new situations. Identities created in the cross field between traditional and modern. A new, more conscious identity was that of the pilot whaler. This is a question of a behavioural cultural heritage, which takes on a special role as a part of modern life, in the same way as the seafaring identity came into being after sea fishing had started on the Faroes using sailing ships (Joensen 1987).

Behaviour and identity of a pilot whaler

> "The boys ran around hysterically, shouting *grindaboð, grindaboð!* This was the signal to alert people that whales had been sighted. The men dropped whatever they had been doing, rushed home for their whale spear and launched their boats. If you were sitting in church listening to a service, you put your prayer book down at once and left the priest to his sermon. If you were lying in bed, well, you just picked up your trousers and put them on as you ran down to your boat. The population is gripped by a breathless haste psychosis. It has even happened that people have started their motorboat without thinking to raise the anchor, with the result that the boat has spun around in circles like a mad cow tethered to a peg." (Jacobsen 1953, 71).

In 1944 Jacob Jacobsen, a Faroese man living in Norway and the Norwegian

Men in Sandavágur on their way to a pilot whale hunt about 1950.

Sverre Stove published a book entitled "Færøyane", which also contains a chapter about the whale hunt, which begins:

> "The whale hunt is the Faroese equivalent of the bullfight. However calm, indifferent and reluctant to show their feelings the Faroese may be in everyday life, they become just as violent, determined and driven when possessed by the whale hunt. But in contrast to the drama played out for entertainment in the south, the immediate purpose of the whale hunt is to provide meat and fat for the long winter ahead. (Stove and Jacobsen 1944, 73)

Stove and Jacobsen then continue their account of the pilot whale hunt, which should not in any way be perceived as representing a negative attitude, rather the opposite:

> "Stones splash into the water, the oars create a din, a tumult of screams builds up from the boats as they approach the whales. One or two whales are struck by the whaling weapons, causing pain and cuts, but these are as pinpricks for these massive creatures, which could have smashed the boats into pieces with a single strike of their tail. Instead they turn away from all this noise and move inwards again. This continues until the whales have moved close to the beach, and the ring surrounding them is close and tight, a wall of boats and men. Now the moment has come for the full use of the whaling weapons. With thrashing

> force, they cut through blubber and flesh, blood pumps into the sea. The pain drives the creatures wild and the blood blinds them, they charge away from their tormentors and the noise and head towards the shore. The whole school follows, the sea turning into a waterfall in front of them. A moment later they lie, half-stranded, on the beach.
>
> Now all the people jump to action. From the shore, they leap onto the whales with long knives, slicing into the enormous shoulder with a single cut, forcing the blood out like a fountain, before leaping on to the next whale, cutting and murdering, killing and shrieking in a wild, erratic tempo. Out on the waves the boats do battle with the whales that managed to avoid beaching themselves. This can often be the majority. The massive creatures charge around in blind fear, turning only to face knives and spears, spikes and sticks. Boats capsize or are crushed, people fall into the sea, which is becoming redder and redder. Men and boats are sprayed with blood, on the shore it flows like a river, and the ferocity and brutality of the kill no longer know any boundaries. It reaches unthinkable, improbable heights, the participants strike to left and right, with unparalleled savagery, an atavistic rampage has gripped these calm, peaceful men who only a few hours before would not have dreamt of harming a kitten. Now they seethe, kill and stab in a maelstrom of blood, with an obvious, undisguised enthusiasm. Everyone is possessed by it. Spectators, women and children hurl themselves into the excitement. An outsider might call it cruelty to animals. Yes, undoubtedly, but hardly any worse that what a great whale has to suffer when it drags a whaling ship behind it for hours with a harpoon in its body. And there is no one who claims that whaling should be stopped because of that." (Stove and Jacobsen 1944, 76-77).

Those anthropologists who have described the pilot whale kill have also noticed the psychological preparation that the Faroese historian and author Jørgen Frantz Jacobsen (1936, 99) describes, mainly in fun, as a "haste psychosis" or special "*grind* psychosis". This was "the state of emergency". The Faroese suddenly take on other behavioural norms than the usual:

> "Being violent is not considered good form among the Faroese. Fights are extremely unusual, murder unknown. In daily life one prides oneself on being dignified and matter-of-fact, and the hothead always subjects himself to ridicule. However, there **are** times when it is considered unseemly to be calm and collected and where it is obviously a duty to be wild and brutal. That is when a whale school is reported out at sea." (Jacobsen 1936, 99).

The whale hunt is "…the ultimate shared male activity, with an almost re-

ligious character. It is dangerous and demanding, and provides opportunities to prove yourself as a man. A man must distinguish himself in manly activities: being quick across the mountains, skilled on the bird cliffs, out fishing and in the pilot whale hunt" noted the Danish anthropologist Torben Vestergaard (1981, 77) when describing traditional male deeds on the Faroes. In her ethnological survey of the village of Nólsoy in the 1960s, Nanna Hermansson (1971, 72) reaches this conclusion:

> "The pilot whale is appreciated as food, but the major interest in the hunt is associated with the excitement and shared joy that involves even those who never climb into the boats."

The elements that comprise the pilot whaler's behavioural pattern are haste, violence, a lack of consideration for certain mundane things such as dressing properly, furnishing oneself with food and so forth, all of which are left to the women.

The fact that this in itself is not just a kind of fiction aimed at foreign readers, as author Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen has claimed, is clearly evident from other, independent local historical sources. This behaviour is also highlighted by Stove and Jacobsen in 1944, who give an account of a Danish member of parliament who was addressing a meeting just before the Second World War, and who "noticed that his audience suddenly lost all interest in his words of wisdom, and made for the door in a cacophony of upturned chairs and benches. The member of parliament had no idea what was happening until he was given the explanation: there was a *grindaboð* outside. Even the government's meetings were interrupted, and the government representatives exchanged their government seats for boats.

There was uproar in people's homes. Clothes and oilskins were ripped off the hooks, whaling weapons, long spears with a broad, double-edged knife at the end, were taken out, and off they went to the boathouses. When a large American tourist steamer was staying in Tórshavn before the war, there was a *grindaboð* just as some of the steamer's crew were walking over to take a look at the town. The crew were given the fright of their lives as the Faroese came charging towards them at full speed carrying long spears. This fear was all the more understandable, as the Faroese weapons are very similar to assegais." (Stove and Jacobsen 1944, 74).

An account from the village of Sandavágur on Vágar describes that

> "Men were always agitated at the whale hunt, but this time it was worse than

> ever, because it was such a rare occurrence that pilot whales came close to Sandavágur. As the first boat was taken out of the boathouse a man crushed his hand, and as the boat was pushed out to sea a lot of men were hanging on to it dressed in their Sunday best, and there were 16 men in the boat when it reached the whales." (Petersen 1963, 104).

The next example is from Vágur on the island of Suðuroy, where

> "A school of pilot whales was sighted while people were in church. As the priest stood and preached, a man came into the church and said in a very quiet voice that the *grindaboð* had arrived. The men got up carefully from their seats and went outside, and my grandfather was among them … He was a very quiet, polite man, but if he heard the word '*grindaboð*' he went completely mad. While the men who had been in church went home to change into other clothes, he headed west … to the whaling boat. He was wearing Danish clothes, as they would call them at the time, but here on the beach was a niece of his. . . , who thought that it was not suitable for him to go to the whale hunt wearing his Sunday best. She took off his jacket, waistcoat, tie, collar and collar buttons, and made him take off his black shoes, so he was shoeless as he got into the boat. Unfortunately he had to keep his best Sunday trousers on." (Poulsen 1992, 84).

Let these examples suffice. When I visited the island of Pico in the Azores in the summer of 2008, I visited the whaling museum there. A film was shown of the whale hunt, and this film also captured this special behaviour, including the local barber leaving a customer having only managed to shave half of his face.

Kenneth Williamson (1970, 11) also mentions similar behaviour among the Shetland Islanders when they slaughtered whales, and similar behaviour has also been documented in completely different cultures when a sudden effort is suddenly required by a large number of people, and when such a psychosocial approach is necessary for the whole process to run as far as possible without conflict.

The description by Danish ethnographer Jens Dahl (1990A and 1990B) of a beluga whale catch in the village of Saqqaq in Disco Bay in Greenland has much in common with what we are familiar with from pilot whale hunts on the Faroes:

> "It was one of the last days of October some years ago. It was a day of fair

> weather, slight frost and the sun was in the sky for a few hours in the middle of the day. Suddenly, at 1 p. m. the cry was heard: qilalukkat! One of the hunters had seen whales in the small sound between the island and the settlement. Now everyone rushed down to the skiffs which, in the last couple of days, have been only loosely anchored to the jetty. In next to no time the message was heard all over the settlement: the whales had come! The children were let off school and the teacher went hunting. The trade manager left with one of the labourers. Left behind were only women, men without a boat, old people and children; they rushed to a small promontory, Nuugaarsuk, to follow the hunt. All at once the settlement went through a transformation from quiet steadiness to intense activity and confusion. *People were running*! Everybody was in fast motion, leaving behind what they were doing. Some went for their guns, only a few for warm clothes and most rushed down to the beach." (Dahl 1990B, 166).

The ritual nature of this conduct serves to strengthen and preserve the organisation of the whale hunt, which holds true for the beluga whale hunt in Saqqaq in Disco Bay, Greenland and for pilot whaling on the Faroes, or similar hunts in other places. This behaviour is probably not at all as commonly pronounced today because society has become more and more industrialised and not every activity allows workers and officials to answer the call to go to the whale hunt. This is especially true in Tórshavn, but out in the countryside people still mainly take part in the traditional behaviour connected with the pilot whale hunt.

I myself would interpret this behaviour quite functionally, almost as a Pavlovian response, internalised generation after generation, which has been necessary in order to concentrate all strength on the enormous effort required for a successful whale kill[91], and I fully agree with Jonathan Wylie, who regards the whole thing as:

91 That is why it was necessary for boys to take part in the whale hunt from a relatively early age, in order to learn the craft properly. This behaviour pattern contributes in general to the whale hunt taking precedence over everything else and it helps to preserve and strengthen the social organisation of the whale hunt. There was nothing strange in children seeing a whale kill; they were accustomed to witnessing natural occurrences such as the mating of animals, birth, slaughter, and so on, which could be seen at any time. In this there has been a noticeable change within the past 20 years, in keeping with society's growing industrialization and urban way of life. Cattle-rearing has shifted towards mass production, although sheep-rearing still maintains its traditional form. Modern slaughterhouses are currently being planned, which will in time certainly end slaughtering on a small scale on the farms. Furthermore, because kindergartens are now common, children are removed from the scene of work at an early age, as in neighbouring Scandinavian countries.

> "…an eminently practical business; and as for the blood – well how would you kill whales without shedding a lot of it? None of the whalers I have talked to say that they take any particular joy in the killing; it is hard, dangerous work, and even rather distasteful, something to be done as expeditiously as possible in unavoidably difficult circumstances, a time when you must at all costs keep your wits about you." (Wylie and Margolin 198, 101).

When the texts quoted above include words such as "monster", "lust of killing", "swilling of blood" and "South Sea cannibals", assigning a special libido to the Faroese when they took part in a whale hunt, it can of course not be excluded that they live out parts of their personality through the pilot whale hunt, although this can scarcely hold true for the whole population. The whale kill belonged to the male domain, where women had no part to play. Nor had the clergyman.

> "I wonder about the old story that a whale hunt would be unsuccessful if clergymen and women watched from the shore. Would that not be because the men were embarrassed by those people seeing their behaviour in the whale kill?"

This is the view of V. U. Hammershaimb (1891, 401), the founder of the Faroese written language and an important mediator in the building of Faroese culture. For the whale kill was indeed violent to watch. Even if the pilot whale hunt was originally a practical event, it was moved up to a major, symbolic, natural cultural level in which the practice and drama of the whale kill became an element of how the Faroese saw themselves, and in due course became imbued in them as an element of their cultural identity. As already mentioned, many of the oldest written texts about the whale kill were not aimed at the Faroese but at foreign readers, although this changed in time. But let us first of all consider the situation regarding the Faroese people's emerging sense of national awareness.

After the Christmas Meeting in 1888

At the Christmas Meeting of 1888, which had such an enormous significance for the Faroese cultural and national struggle, people were enjoined to "work together to defend the Faroese language and Faroese customs"[92]

92 Dimmalætting, 22 December 1888.

This was a remarkable thing to say at that time, for as Johannes av Skarði has someone say, "…this Faroeseness was not yet invented."[93]

The resolution taken at the Christmas Meeting in 1888 was based on a cultural policy whose primary objective was to promote the Faroese language in all situations. With the advent of free trade a new time had come, "although what is gone still breathes," as Hans Andrias Djurhuus says. [94] Inshore fishing with oared, open boats had acquired a real economic significance now that firms buying fish were to be found in virtually every village. The first smacks arrived on the scene while open-boat fishing was still at its height. Soon, another coal-black, clattering, stinking[95] kind of fishing appeared as well: motorised boats, which Hans Andreas Djurhuus thought considerably better than did Mikkjal á Ryggi;[96] but it was on the smacks that "the strong young lads earned gold."[97] For a time, a good deal of progress was made in agriculture, but most people lost interest in it when smack fishery reached its peak after the First World War. Men picked up the hand-line and went deep-sea fishing instead of the cultivating spade. Not until the hard times in the 1930s did people begin to till the land again (Joensen 1985, 14 ff.).

Whereas farmers or peasants and the land had previously been intertwined to form Faroese society, merchants now arrived on the scene as well, along with a great number of other occupations that gradually took their place in the new social system (Joensen 1987, 132). Changes took place in Faroese society, but they occurred very slowly. Of course not everyone gave this any thought, least of all those who lived in the midst of it all. But many people did do so, and these were the ones who had been away from the Faroes and saw everything in a different light. This group built up a new culture with concepts drawn from old Faroese society combined with the elements of modern society.

It was during these changing times that what was Faroese was discovered or perhaps invented, and that an attempt was made to retain some-

93 Jóhannes av Skarði, "The 1888 Christmas Meeting, 75th anniversary." Broadcast on Faroese National Radio, 26 December 1963. Published in Varðin, Vol. 36, p. 128.

94 In the last verse of "*Ein gomul kista úr kamfertræ*", Songbók Føroya Fólks (Songbook of the Faroese People), 1976, no. 305.

95 Mikkjal á Ryggi, "*Av øllum teim snekkjum, ið Norðhavið bar*", in Songbók Føroya Fólks (Songbook of the Faroese People), 1976, no. 123.

96 H. A. Djurhuus, "*Svartir í erva við hvítari gron*", in Songbók Føroya Fólks (Songbook of the Faroese People), 1976, no. 124.

97 H. A. Djurhuus, "Teir sigla so væl sín fríða knørr", in Songbók Føroya Fólks (Songbook of the Faroese People), 1976, no 126.

thing of the old ways that still breathed in order that the cultural foundations would not be lost altogether (Gellner 1988). The problem is a question and manifestation of Faroese identity.

There are several levels of identity. The highest is national identity, followed by ethnic identity, which in some cases can coincide with national identity. Most often this is not the case, however, because some nations are populated by several peoples. One may also speak of local identity shared by people who live in a given place. The most important aspect of the concept of identity are: 1. *similarity* – a particular feature or situation signifying that the people are alike in particular aspects, 2. *persistent connection* – a person continues to recognise himself as the same, and 3. *affirmation or acknowledgement* – a people affirms or acknowledges its identity in its life and behaviour (Brück 1984).

The condition exists under which an identity is a particular connection between people or, in certain cases, a particular gathering of people. In this respect the concept of identity resembles the concept of culture. Identity must be established in a context, and it must have a content – a load that can be carried onward. Local identity has mostly developed on its own, as it were. This is an aspect of their culture that people have acquired unthinkingly in their home villages and in the company of those with whom they have grown up. For the most part, this identity lies embedded in workday life, and is recognised naturally and for the most part unconsciously. Identity derives from the daily culture.

In his study of Faroese language, culture and national identity, Nauerby (1996) has discussed the concept of national identity, and the significant point in this context is that he propounds a perspective of Imagined Communities (Anderson 1983), which Danish anthropologist Michael Harbsmaier (1986) has expanded upon:

> "National identities differ from other forms of imagined communities in that they are completely dependent on the other nations' recognition. In that way nations beguile one another into recognising themselves in the images of others. Unlike the classification of earlier days of other peoples as "barbarians", "heathens", "uncivilised", etc. we are dealing with symmetric relations in the mutual constitution of nations, since all nationalities are precisely recognised as belonging to the same category (Nauerby 1996, 17).

We find the origins of this with reference to Nauerby (1996, 18) in the national romanticism that created an ideology surrounding national projects,

first in Europe and then all over the world. The Faroese national identity has manifested since the second part of the 19th century in the struggle to blaze a trail for the Faroese language (Thomassen 1986, Rasmussen 1987) and in a feeling of nationality that gradually became a nationalistic movement (Debes 1982).

Now that the old traditional Faroese culture seemed to be on its last legs, developments in the Faroes resembled developments elsewhere. [98] Quite soon there were thoughts of founding a Faroese Museum as elsewhere in Scandinavia at the same time (Evensen 1902, Thorsteinsson 1975 and Joensen 1994).

V. U. Hammershaimb (1891) published his Faroese Anthology containing Faroese ballads, folktales, proverbs, poems, pictures of folk life – this included the first written narrative account of a pilot whale hunt in Faroese. This is probably the description of a whale kill that has been most widely read by the Faroese, as in the anthology it is written in Faroese. It contains not only a thorough, factual description of the whale kill, but also some critical references to the conduct of the whale hunters.

> "There was an old belief that the whale kill would not be succesful if priests or women were standing on the shore watching the kill; was it not rather the truth that they were reticent to let people see how they behaved during the whale kill?" (Hammershaimb 1891, 401)

At the same time the folklorist and philologist Dr. Jakob Jakobsen travelled around the country collecting legends and folktales. [99] One can closely follow his travels around the country in *Føringatíðindi*. [100] Just like V. U. Hammershaimb, who brought national romanticism to the Faroes, Jakobsen tried to save parts of the old Faroese culture before it was forgotten in the swirl of modernity. We find the same interest in practical as well as spiritual popular culture in other Scandinavian countries (Joensen 2004, 7). The search for an identity in bygone ways simmered up together with artistic novelty in poetry.

But the pilot whale also gradually came to be a national Faroese symbol, which was based on an emerging bourgeois culture that was also interested in its cultural heritage (Joensen 1987, 120, Simonsen 1985). The fact that

98 See the discussion in *Tradisjon: Tidskrift for Folkeminnevitskap* (Tradition: Journal of Folklore Studies), vol. 10, Oslo 1980.

99 Published in 1898-1902 Jakobsen 1898-1902. (New edition, Tórshavn 1961-64).

100 Føringatíðindi 1890-1906. Reprinted in one volume by Emil Thomsen, Tórshavn 1969.

Inge Adriansen (2003) does not mention the pilot whale in her book on national symbols in the Kingdom of Denmark, which also includes Faroese symbols, does not alter this.

Whether the Faroese national movement began in the Faroes or in Copenhagen, the Faroese poets at the end of the nineteenth century are not only among those who were the sources of nationalistic feelings, but they also gave them form and content, making it possible for people to understand and perceive the country differently than they had done before (Rasmussen 1987, 108).

A new way of thinking saw the light of day. Of course, the Faroese were still the infield, outfield, bird-cliff and sea that gave people sustenance; but now they also became another concept, which came to be shared by the people as a whole. The *Songbók Føroya Fólks* (The Songbook of the Faroese People), which appeared in 1913, acquired particular significance as a tool in this connection. People took it with them to "folk-meetings" and other gatherings. Now everyone could sing in the Faroese language about nature, the country and the people, the mother tongue, ideas like freedom and progress, love, the seasons, and much more besides.

The concept of Faroeseness had become more concrete; it became something suitable to discuss. I will not discuss all of the distinctive features and symbols of Faroese identity, but rather concentrate on the issue of the pilot whale hunt and Faroese identity (Joensen 1991). I will start with a presentation of the whaling ballad from 1835. It was through this ballad that the pilot whale hunt first found expression as a part of expressive Faroese culture.

The "Grindavísa" (Whaling Ballad)

The Danish authorities had taken an interest in the whale hunt's significance for household economies, and also in its conceptual significance. It is worth stressing that in 1835 the Danish Governor C. Pløyen composed "A New Ballad about the Pilot Whale Hunt in the Faroe Islands"[101], or the "grindavísa", as it is commonly called, with the refrain:

Raske Drenge, Grind at dræbe	Hardy lads, to kill a *grind* (herd of pilot whales),
det er vor lyst	that's our desire.

Pløyen was one of those Danes "who had lived among the Faroese for so

101 Magnussen and av Skarði 1965, 84 or in Egholm 1997, 167. Also newly published as a textbook to be used in Faroese Schools in 2004, illustrated by the Faroese artist Óli Petersen (Pløyen 2004).

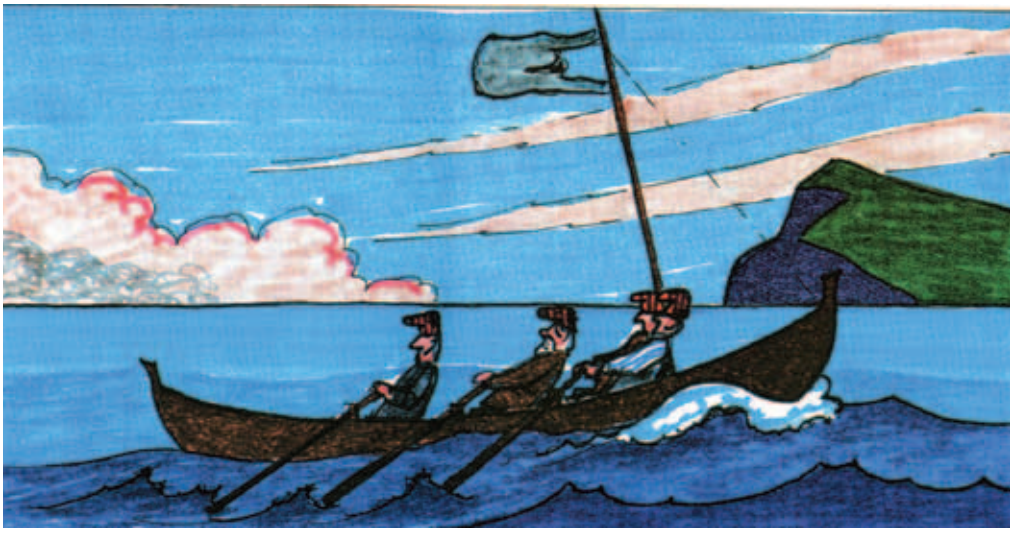
long that he himself had been captured by the enchantment of the whale kill." (Stove and Jacobsen 1944, 80).

It is hard to say what Faroese had previously thought of pilot whales or pilot whaling. Of course, the whale hunt was as exciting then as it is now – but might it not have been whale meat and blubber as food that lay uppermost in people's minds? Thanks to the *Grindavísa*, the whale hunt was also elevated to something other than trying to get food to put in the pot and on the plate.

That it should have been the Danish Governor who composed the *Grindavísa* reveals something about Faroese identity at that time. A Faroese identity was difficult to find as represented in concrete things, but easier to find blended into daily life and the work of an individual.

Let us take a closer look at the content of the *Grindavísa*. The ballad begins with an old man wanting to go fishing in his boat. After a while he manages to find three young men to crew the boat. The first verses have some excellent scene-setting images of the local fishing environment and fishing in rowing boats. The old man's thoughts are dominated by his interest in sighting a school of pilot whales.

	18.	In Danish
The jacket was raised to the top of the mast. Óli Petersen.	The sea is as smooth as polished glass, only the current ripples the water. Jógvan thought: "It never fails, a school of whales is in the area!	Havet var glat som et slebet Spejl, kun Strømmen krusede Vandet. Jógvan tænkte: "Det slaar ej Fejl, Her er en Grind under Landet!"



Then it happens: they sight a school of pilot whales, a *grind*, and this has to be signalled at once, so that they will be entitled to the sighting-whale.

21	In Danish
The jacket was raised to the top of the mast,	Sjóstukan hejstes I højen Mast,
they braced themselves against the foot boards.	mod Fótalunner de spændte;
Rowing so hard the oars nearly broke,	roede, saa Aarene næsten brast,
turning the boat around in the water.	og Baaden på Havet vendte.

The atmosphere is then depicted in the boat, with the crew sending prayers up to God that someone will see them. It happens:

26	In Danish
You can trust the men of Nólsoy,	Nolsinger kan man lide paa,
they don't waste any time.	de Tiden ej monne spilde!
Keeping a lookout on the cliff tops,	Udkig at holde til Fjælds de gaa,
from dawn till dusk.	Og det baade aarle og silde.
27.	In Danish
Mallu-Jógvan stood on the cliff,	Malle-Jógvan paa Fjældet stod
He saw the jacket on the mast;	han saa den Sjøstug i Mast;
he rushed home fleet of foot,	hjem han iled paa letten Fod,
hardly able to talk in his haste.	han næppe kunde tale for hast.

Mallu-Jógvan, the man from Nólsoy, made sure that the *grindaboð* was passed on, and the whole signalling system swung into action:

29	In Danish
The beacons shone and the messages passed on,	Glaverne lyste, og Budene gik,
there was lots of noise in Tórshavn.	i Havn blev der megen larm.
Each man took a swig from a bottle,	Hver Mand i Flasken en Draabe fik
hidden with care in his jacket.	den gemte forsigtigt i barm.
30	In Danish
The *grind* was large and meek as well,	Grinden var stor, der til helt spag;
there were plenty of boats.	af Baade vare der nok!
There never was a better day,	Aldrig der gaves en bedre Dag
to kill such a school of whales.	At dræbe en saadan Flok.

The beacons were lit and the message was passed on. Óli Petersen.

31.	In Danish
The Governor was not the last man,	Amtmanden var ej sidste Mand,
the County Sheriff followed him.	ham fulgte Landfogden efter;
The hunters pushed	Jægerne stødte
"The Red One" from the shore	"den Røde" fra Strand
and rowed with all their strength.	og roede af alle Kræfter.

Then there are more excellent, poetic, atmospheric images, in which the whale hunters discuss how to kill the whales. The pilot whale is also described:

39	In Danish
He is as good-natured as he is strong,	Godmodig er han, som han er stærk,
he does not know his own strength,	han kender ikke sin Vælde,
otherwise his bold actions	ellers maatte sit dristige Værk,
would soon make his pursuers suffer.	Forfølgeren snart undgælde.
40	In Danish
He is driven by small stones,	Han lader sig drive med Stene smaa,
like sheep are driven on the mountains.	som Søjden rekes paa Fjæld,
He moves good-naturedly to his death,	godvilligt han monne i Døden gaa
To the great fortune of the Faroese.	til Færingers største Held.

The whales are driven in through the sound between Streymoy and Eysturoy, to a place between the villages of Hvalvík and Streymnes. The whales realise that they are being caught, but by then the whale hunters from the land are already making their way down to the beach.

46
But their route to freedom,
was no longer open.
With vigour the men attacked them,
with sharp, hardened weapons.

In Danish
Dog for side den Flugten tog,
ej længere Vej var aaben;
lystigt Mændene mod den tog
med skarpe, hærdede Vaaben.

47
Some stabbed with long spears,
others with sharp knives.
Every man did his share with joy,
no one sensed any danger.

In Danish
Nogen stukke med lange Spyd;
og andre med Knive skare;
hver Mand gjorde sin Dont med Fryd,
slet ingen ænsede Fare.

Then follows a depiction of courage, blood, love of fighting and danger.

49
All rush down to the whale hunt with joy,
it occurs to no one
that all that stands between him and death
is a mere piece of wood.

In Danish
Til Grinden iler med Glæde enhver;
det rinder ingen i Tanke,
at mellem Døden og ham der er
ikkun en skrøbelig Planke.

50
There crushes a boat with force,
it fills up with bloody water.
A man receives a powerful blow,
and is carried, lifeless, onto the beach.

In Danish
Hisset knuses en Baad med Brag,
den fyldes med blodigt Vand;
her faar en Mand et vældigt Slag
og bæres som død paa Strand.

51
Everywhere is rumbling, noise and shouting,
confusion reigns over the scene.
Coming together in a tangled mass
of people, whales and boats.

In Danish
Her hersker Bulder og larm og Raab,
Forvirring over al Maade;
Her trænger sig i en broget Hob,
Mennesker, Hvaler og Baade.

On the far side a boat is crushed with force.
Óli Petersen.

52	In Danish
But when every whale lies dead on the shore,	Men naar hver Hval ligger død paa Land,
order is resumed once more.	indtræder Orden igen;
Weary, the whale hunters on the beach	trætte de Ragstermænd paa Sand
lie down beside the whales.	sig strække ved Hvalerne hen.

Then comes a description of deduction and distribution, and Pløyen also mentions the land-whale, which had been significantly reduced in the whaling regulations from 1832, i. e. a few years before the ballad was written.

54	In Danish
The land used to take half of the catch,	Før tog Landet den halve Part,
and half went to the men.	det halve til Mændene gik;
But this division was not fair	dog denne Deling ej havde Art,
The rich received the most.	de rige det meste fik.

After descriptions of a few more scenes, the ballad ends with the following pious words.

58	In Danish
High notes ring out in the midnight hour,	Højt toner I stille Midnatsstund
to the Lord who gave us the whales,	til Herren, som Hvalen gav,
the pious psalms sung from the heart,	de fromme Salmer fra Hjertens grund,
ring out over the calm sea.	henover det rolige Hav.

The odd feature of this ballad, which is otherwise filled with ethnographic descriptions, is that it does not mention any form of whaling dance.

The reason is clearly that no kind of institutionalised whaling dance existed at that time. This was only given life through Chr. Pløyen's very own whaling ballad. Pløyen was one of the first people to identify and invent Faroese culture, even if his ballad was in Danish; this was because the written Faroese language had not yet been invented. Pløyen enjoyed the status of a national hero, as his ballad took on great significance for the self-awareness of the Faroese people and for the subsequent narrative about the pilot whale hunt. It was probably the Pilot Whaling Ballad that helped to create the special phenomenon of the whaling dance.

Dancing their way to an identity

People did not hang whaling equipment on their parlour walls as decora-

tions, as they do nowadays. Instead they found an historical identity in the heroic ballads that they themselves blended into their workaday life. The Pilot Whaling Ballad took on special importance for the Faroese, as Kate Sanderson concludes in her M. Phil. thesis:

> "The real significance of the *Grindavísan* was that it was the first narrative of the hunt to be expressed in a popular genre for a local audience, composed in written (Danish) form but received into an oral repertoire of ballads performed in the context of the traditional Faroese dance. It also succeeded in incorporating various didactic elements concerned with presenting a reformist ideal of an orderly and organised hunt, an ideal which was frequently reinforced through its repetition in the dance. Its composer, Pløyen, was well-known in his capacity as a sympathetic reform-minded Danish official, and this was the feature which remained bound to the later function of *Grindavísan*, not so much as a text in its own right, but rather as a component of subsequent narrative representations of *grindadráp*, and thus as an inevitable stage in the narrative sequence." (Sanderson 1992B, 95).

It was universal in the Faroes to dance the traditional ring dance when people came together (Andreassen 1996, Djurhuus 1958). Besides, this is an excellent way to keep warm or "dansa seg heitan" (dance oneself warm). At many places in the Faroes, for example, in the old days when people went to church where it was ice cold during the winter, they would traditionally dance themselves warm when the church service was over[102]. In former times the whale hunt gave the otherwise isolated population a chance to meet.

102 Information from the late professor Mortan Nolsøe, Fróðskaparsetur Føroya, Tórshavn.

Whaling dance. Vestmanna 1964.

> "When the weather permitted, many skilled people came long distances to take part in such a whale hunt. Before the catch was divided according to the number of the population, first of all a certain amount of whale meat was allotted to the houses of the village so that there was plenty of meat and blubber on the boil in every house. . . If the weather was not good enough for the visitors to leave, they had to stay overnight, and according to the old rules this was in particular houses, mainly the homes of the farmers." (Rasmussen 1949, 62).

When so many people met together, Faroese hospitality came into its own. Food and drink were served, and at times a few people became drunk.

> "When evening came the dance went on all night. This was always in the home of Harald Jákup við Kirkjar, and there was no lack of people to lead the dance on such a night. When the tickets from the district officer allotting each their share in the catch were ready, this could be at dawn, all the men went to get their ticket and to find their share, cut it up and get it aboard. They had to get away while the weather was good enough." (Rasmussen 1949, 62).

The above account is from the village of Miðvágur at the end of the 18th century. While the local sheriff and his assistants allocated the catch, the others passed the time renewing old acquaintances or making new ones and dancing themselves warm in one of the houses. Many of the men were wet after being in the water during the kill as well as being tired, and places to sleep were in short supply: "There, sober and watchful, four men guarded the *grind*. From three houses I heard the sound of singing and the tread of dancing feet. Tired though the men were, it was better to dance, in their wet clothes, while awaiting their turn to sleep." (Taylor 1997, 179). To take part in the whale hunt was part of the Faroese reciprocity system, in the same way as weddings, funerals and other events to which people came long distances (Joensen, 1974).

The word *grindadansur* (whaling dance) is a rather new word in the Faroese language, so it can be one of the several cultural symbols in the creation of a Faroese cultural identity (Joensen 1990). It stretches the imagination to interpret the dance after the whale hunt as a ritual dance following the ecstasy of the kill, as so often cited in recent interpretations. I agree with Kate Sanderson (1992, 96), when she writes:

> "I would suggest that the *grindadansur* was not perceived as a fixed stage of *grind* until *Grindavísan* itself came to be seen as an integral part of the dancing

> associated with the whale drive, thus giving the dance a dramatic and celebratory significance in narrative accounts. The function of both *grindadansur* and *grindavísan* as conventional components in narrative representations of *grindadráp* from the late nineteenth century onwards goes hand in hand with the transformation of the hunt into a symbol of Faroese nationhood."

However, the connotations in the author Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen's interpretation are quite different from those of Elisabeth Taylor quoted before. He starts by describing the distribution of the whales, saying that

> "While this is under way, the whale hunters rest. Not in beds or on sofas, but in a tremendous victory dance. The old songs never have the force that they do on the evening after a whale hunt. Away with eroticism, poetry and nonsense! Now it's the *men* who are dancing. The women are at home, cooking the first meal from the catch." (Jacobsen 1953, 74).

Here it is fiction and a special kind of male romanticism that is being expressed. We find something of the same in the whaling ballad, but it was not only Pløyen who saw Faroese as "hardy lads killing a school of pilot whales". The Faroese philologist and scholar Dr. Jakob Jakobsen and the female author Billa Hansen saw them this way many years later in a grotesque, indeed quite laughable whaling song, set to the tune of "La Marseillaise", that they composed together in 1892. A few verses are quoted here:

	In Faroese
Up to their shoulders they wade into the sea	Upp til herðar í sjónum teir vaða,
Up to the handle their knives run through necks,	knívar renna gjøgnum hálsar upp til skaft,
While mightily the whales' flukes	meðan hvalasveivirnar við kraft
Turn the sea to froth like solid smoke	sjógvin froyða sum harðasta glaða
The fury struck Jákup	:, :Í Jákup øði stakk,
He sprang on the whale's back;	á hvalabak hann sprakk;
He cut hard, heeding neither blow nor fluke;	hart sker hann, ansar ei slag av sveiv;
Bloody foam drove about his ears. . .	blóðskúm um oyrur dreiv. :, :
Red is the bay, looking like gore;	Reyð er vágin sum droyri at síggja;
Keenly the spear is flung from abroad;	vákn so hvassliga ripast frá borðð;
Wounded, as small flock of whales tries to flee,	særdur bólkur ein kann sær at flýggja,
Madness runs shattered among the boats.	:, :óður fer millum bátar við sor. :, :

Red spray spurts up in the air;	Upp í loft reyðir sprænirnir standa;
Whales sink down groaning;	hvalir stynjandi fara undir kav;
Hear the boats' blows crash down	hoyr stavnar bresta niður av
On the whales' backs---up and down they toss	hvalarygg - upp og niður teir danda.
Run, make the gaff fast in a whale	:, : Renn vákn í hvølju fast!
Let every cast count!	lat muna hvørt eitt kast!
The doomed *grind* runs in a ring,	Deyðlúgva grindin melur í kring,
Now it's thinned out with each blow. . .	nú tynnist við hvønn sting. :, :
The bottle passes around, so dear after the fight;	fløskan gongur so kør eftir dyst;
They go to the dance with delight,	til dansin fara teir við lyst,
Heeding not their sopping wet clothes.	ikki ansa teir karmarnar vátar.
Let it resound to the foundations!	:, : Lat gjella hart í grund!
Let the dance thunder at once--	lat dynja dans um stund
Now make a ring and chant merrily!	Nú slái ring og kvøði kátt!
Let the whaling-rhyme ring[103]	lat runga grindatátt!:, :"

An even more recent poem about pilot whaling by Mikkjal á Ryggi (1954, 85) hardly rises to the level of Dr. Jakob Jakobsen's and Billa Hansen's song. I shall quote only one verse here:

	In Faroese
The struggles grow so wild and hard.	Leikirnir gerast so villir og harðir.
Weapons rain on the reddening sea.	Regnar av váknum í rodnandi sjógv.
With a tight grip and long, the quick heroes strike	Handfast og langt stinga garparnir snarir,
Glittering steel into belly and head--	glitrandi stál inn í búk og í bógv
Killing and wounding	drepa og særa,
Sparing none,	einki teir spara,
Wet from the spume,	vátir av sjóroki,
Glad in the blood-storm	kátir í blóðroki
Drawing their blades through	draga teir hvastið við kvikari klógv.
(the whales' necks) in quick fists.	

Pilot whaling had now developed its own expression as a part of the Faroese cultural heritage. The whale hunt acquired a comprehensive meaning in new Faroese self-representation. This can also be seen in other areas.

103 Billa Hansen and Jakob Jakobsen, "*Upp úr svøvni tit, Havnarmenn reystir.*" Included in *Songbók Føroya Fólks* 1st ed. Tórshavn, 1913.

Selection of knives and other cutlery. Føroya Fornminnissavn.

Pilot whale jewellery

In the mid-nineteenth century Jákup Zacharias Andrasson (1819-1868) began to make knives and other handicraft items. The handles and sheaths were made of mahogany, and later also of ebony. He inlaid cut-out figures of copper, brass or, when a knife was supposed to be something special, he used mother-of-pearl in the handles and sheaths. The figures were variously styled and geometrical. He made decorative knives, penknives, sheath knives, jack-knives, paring knives and, of course, whaling knives as well.

> "Parsons, doctors, foreign tourists and skippers of the foreign ships that fished around the Faroes were eager to buy ornamental things from Jákup. Englishmen mostly wanted to have whaling knives." (Arge 1978, 46).

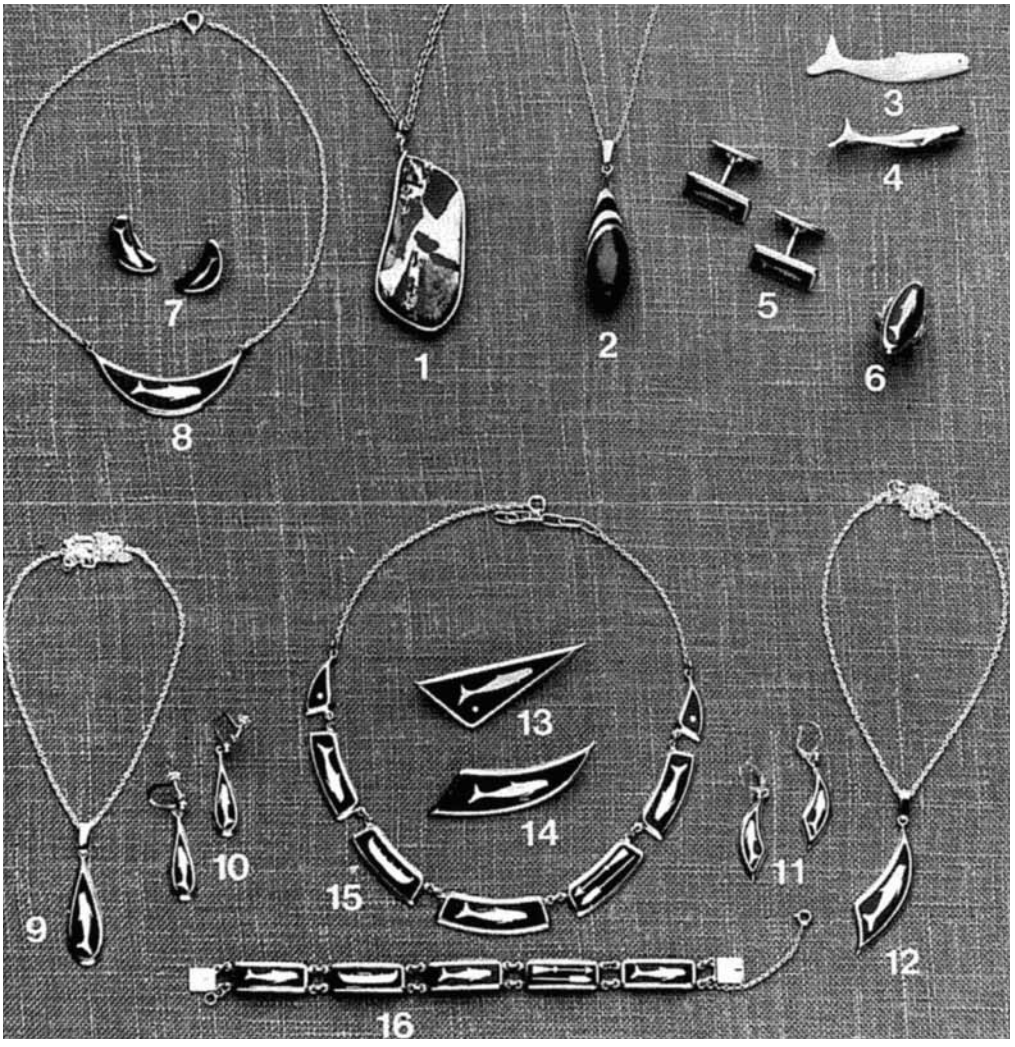
Craftsmanship was passed on down the family, and Jákup Zacharias Andrasson's nephew, the well-known knife-maker Peter Arge (1860-1920), began to put silver figures into his knives. Peter Arge lived his adult life during the period of the nationalist movement. What happened now was that

Cutlery featuring images of the pilot whale hunt. Føroya Fornminnissavn.

the figures on the knives changed so that they only represent, as it were, elements of the whale hunt inlaid in mahogany or ebony: a pilot whale, a boat, a whaling knife, a whaling spear, a harpoon, etc. Peter Arge also made writing sets, paperweights, and other items with the same figures. [104] Much of his production was commissioned by officials or was for gifts to foreigners, just as Jákup Zacharias Andrasson's had been. Most sought-after were the whaling knives, but ornamented table knives and paring knives were equally prominent among his handicrafts (Jacobsen 1974). There were, of course, other good cutlers besides the men from Argir.

For my part, I remember an old cutler, Janus við Gjónna, who worked in Dánjal Tavsen's forge in Sørvágur, forging glowing, red steel to make blades for whaling knives. The steel that he used was recycled from hardened steel car springs. The quality of the steel from the car springs was such that he did not need to add steel to the blade, which was the normal practice when you wanted to achieve a good, sharp blade. Janus við Gjónna had three

104 The Faroese National Museum (Føroya Fornminnissavn) has built up quite a nice collection of knives in the past few years. Virtually all of them were acquired from Denmark, where in the past they were presented to or bought by Danish officials.



Øssur Eysturoy's selection of pilot whale jewellery.

dots on the blade as his trademark. He continued the forging tradition from the farmstead of "frammi við Gjónna" by the inland lake Leynavatn on Streymoy, also famous for its cutlers[105].

105 For many years a man by the name of Ludvig Blåsværd produced very fine work in the same style and tradition. His knives were sold from goldsmiths and silversmiths in Tórshavn, although he did not forge the blades himself. He marked the end of the Arge tradition for a while. There have also been other skilled cutlers on the Faroes. There are also other smiths, but unfortunately their history has not yet been written, although this may yet come as a result of the interest in knives, which are now also becoming established as an element of Faroese domestic industry. Since that time more people have emerged, working with whaling knives to produce handicraft products.

What I want to illustrate with these examples is that in his handicraft work as a whole, and not least with the whaling designs that he inlaid in his knives, Peter Arge created a special Faroese symbolism. They acquire an extra wrapping, an extra dimension, signifying a Faroese identity for both the Faroese and others (Jacobsen 1974). The tradition is still alive. One of the most recent persons to represent the tradition of Peter Arge was Øssur Eysturoy (1920-2002), who in his later years lived in Copenhagen (Eysturoy 2000). It is possible to have a whaling knife made, and they are also for sale in special shops.

Pilot whales and some of the things associated with the whale hunt are also represented in other forms of ornamentation. Goldsmiths and silversmiths make attractive gold and silver rings featuring representations of pilot whales. Earrings and other items of jewellery also feature pilot whales. Miniaturised whaling equipment can be bought and is often to be seen decorating the walls of Faroese homes, and real whaling knifes are also to be seen on parlour walls. I would not be wide of the mark in asserting that the Danish royal house is well equipped to go whaling, if that should prove necessary. Queen Margarethe is not the only one to have received gifts of whaling equipment in connection with visits to the Faroes.

Pilot whales in other symbols

Pilot whale soap and pilot whale toothpaste were also sold in the Faroes, although these were not produced locally. I remember ashtrays in the form of pilot whales when I was a little boy. A few years ago, a savings bank had a cute piggy bank made, also in the shape of a pilot whale, but it was withdrawn in the 1980s. A pilot whale wearing a Faroese hat and holding a ball has been the symbol of the national handball competition on the Faroes. A pilot whale wearing a Faroese hat and blowing a saxophone is still the symbol of the annual Tórshavn jazz festival. Postcards with pilot whales featuring scenes from the whale hunt were available all over the Faroes.

> "Tourists on the Faroes were being offered postcards depicting scenes from the hunt, at the same time as the same motifs used on pre-printed protest

The logo of the Tórshavn Jazz, Folk and Blues Festival, 1984-2004. Saxophone-playing pilot whale wearing the red national Faroese hat.

Tórshavn Jazz, Folk and Blues Festival in the Nordic House, Tórshavn.

postcards were pouring into the Faroes from abroad. A visible consequence of the wave of protest was that these postcards, which had previously been among the most popular, were removed from the shelves." (Nauerby 1996, 158).

The whale hunt has also featured in Faroese art. In 1942 the artist S. J. Mikines started his famous series of paintings featuring the whale hunt.

> "The first time I saw this barbaric drama was in Miðvágur. Since then I have taken part in the drive, although I have never stabbed a whale. For me it was the colourful images in this drama and the movement of the whales as they

SUÐUROYAR SPARIKASSI

Suðuroyar Sparikassi. Logo featuring pilot whale.

> fought desperately for their lives that was important, and at the same time these pieces of art represent the ultimate victory of the darkness of death[106]. I think that with my life's force and colour I have identified a valid picture of what I wanted to depict: this is a vision which is intended to summarise nature in the Faroes and the will of men." (Jákupsson 1990, 223).

The logo of a handball competition in Tórshavn in 1980.

In many respects it is perhaps they, the foreigners, who delineate our distinctive features, to whom we pay too little heed. Tourists also make demands of the country they visit; for they want to experience something primitive and exotic, and they become not a little melancholy if the people they are visiting resemble themselves too closely. For example, a German who was in the Faroes in 1913 was upset about all the new things that were taking over, and he says: "And so this typical breed of people will become just as uninteresting to the anthropologist as the rest of us Europeans." (Lehman 1913).

On the other hand, a deliberate creation of one's own identity is a part of the cultural process. Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen, for example, was quite clear about this when he in 1936 he published *Færøerne. Natur og Folk* (The Faroes: Nature and People), which was primarily intended for travellers interested in the Faroes. Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen himself enjoyed travelling. His friend William Heinesen has said of him: "Introducing things was for him a passion and a necessity. No less than two times did he help to arrange tourist trips to the Faroes, and on these occasions he performed his role as a guide with great success."[107]

106 Before these paintings S. J. Mikines had painted bleak images of burials and death featuring motifs from his home village of Mykines, which in the thirties had been plagued by shipwrecks and tuberculosis.

107 Heinesen 1970 in the introduction to Jacobsen 1970.

Føroya Sparikassi, later known as Eik Banki, also had a piggy bank in the form of a pilot whale.

Suðuroyar Sparikassi. "Oddi" piggy bank.

The logo of Frants Restorff´s bakery in 1948. Føroya Adressubók 1948.

Frants Restorff's bakarí

Jacobsen's description of the whale hunt is extremely lively. Drama and "the Viking spirit" do not retire shyly into the background, and the traveller and the tourist are given the full picture:

> "It is remarkable that the Faroese, who do not know war or murder, love the *grindadráp*. They simply cannot resist this drama. It must be a sort of atavism. The Viking spirit suddenly comes to life again. If you have seen such a slaughter, you will also have gotten an idea of how the battle at Hjørung bay must have taken shape. It is happy, senseless combat. You do not just strike with spears. You also use your mouth in the old Viking way. Classic sentences and well-formed, powerful expressions are called out from boat to boat. Those who are ashore walk as if they were on coals, and can hardly control themselves. What will you think about this steady people, when you see a peaceable man in light summer clothes with a cane and a straw hat suddenly seize a knife between his teeth and leap out into the bloody sea, swim around, and stab right and left?
>
> It is a complete riddle that the *grindadráp* so seldom costs human life. No one heeds the danger, and caution is unknown in such situation. Boats crash together and go to bottom. But their crews simply do not have time to drown. Not at all in such an exalted moment." (Jacobsen 1970, 60).

Faroese culture had now taken on a national identity. It had taken on a form that could also be sold. We can see the same tendencies in the cul-

tural dynamics elsewhere in the Nordic region and Europe (Bårtvedt 1991, Stoklund 1999). However much it was Annandale (1905, 44), who was the first to declare that "whaling is the national sport of the islands", or whether the sport and the battle were already contained in the national romantic depiction of the whale hunt, which started with Pløyen's Whaling Ballad, this national romantic interpretation came to stand in stark contrast to

> "… the Neo-Romantic green wave on which world opinion is at present riding. They are not only carried by the green wave, but do what they can to keep it going due to the fact that they derive their economic existence from it.
> Within the framework of this view of nature underlying the trans-national discourse today, pilot whaling acquired a completely different symbolic significance. The "sporting" interpretation, from Pløyen and J-F. Jacobsen onwards, which has taken root in Faroese as well as international publicity, was completely irreconcilable with the new green paradigm. The tension, which the Faroese themselves had brought to the market in the process of nationalism, and the ruling paradigm behind world opinion became the very locomotive of the organisation's campaign. In spite of knowledge to the contrary, a picture continues to be painted of pilot whaling as a sport or popular amusement, devoid of any economic significance, since this is an easy, handy interpretation for public consumption in the West." (Nauerby 1996, 159).

Neither the Danish Governor Christian Pløyen, Dr, Jakob Jakobsen, Billa Hansen nor Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen, people with a national romantic view and deeply embedded in what we may call a bourgeois culture, could have imagined that by the 1980s the whale hunt should have fallen into such disrepute that the Faroese no longer dared call out that a school of pilot whales has been sighted, lest it be reported upon unfavourably in the world media.

Gøta 1935. It is November 27, and snow.

Chapter 8

Pilot Whaling and the Modern World

Dead pilot whale with tourist ship in the background, Tórshavn 2007.

In his local study of the southernmost village on the Faroes, Sumba, the American anthropologist Dennis Gaffin, who also briefly describes the whale hunt, has this to say:

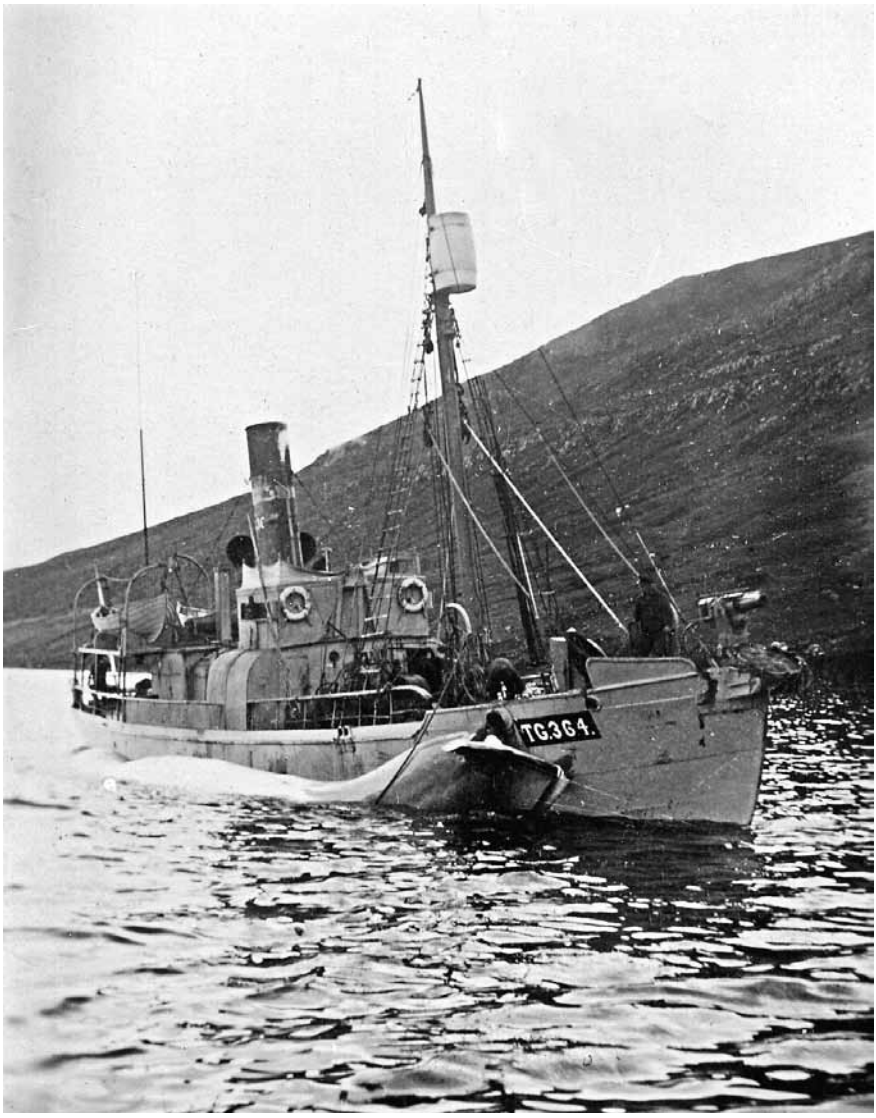
> "To most Scandinavians, particularly the Danes, the Faroes are a relatively known entity. They are known among other things, as the home of one of the five Scandinavian languages and as a peasant-like "primitive" throwback culture, a distant outpost of now mostly disappeared old-time society. Inhabitants of the British Isles know the Faroes from frequent mentioning in North Atlantic weather forecasts on radio and television. To others in the world, including some Americans, the Faroes have recently become known for their whaling practices. In fact, organisations such as Greenpeace have made the Faroese infamous, although those groups' understanding of the economic, logistical, and cultural dimensions of Faroese pilot whaling often lacks depth. " (Gaffin 1996, 38).

Let this quote serve as an introduction to this chapter, in which we will discuss the whale hunt and the modern world, and how the Faroese pilot whale hunt has also become part of the international discourse that has primarily been shaped by non-governmental organisations (NGO)[108].

Commercial whaling and native whaling

Traditional whaling on the Faroes has comprised the killing of pilot whales and not of large whales, even though according to legend and old accounts it did happen on occasions (Jacobsen 2007, 15). But from 1894 the Norwegian whaling skipper Hans Albert Grøn came to the Faroes with the whaling ship Urd. Grøn had already been given permission by the Faroese authorities in 1893 to hunt whales in the waters around the Faroes, and to establish and build the necessary whaling stations for this purpose. The first whaling station was built in Gjánoyri in 1894, and several more followed. The great age of Norwegian whaling in the Faroes lasted until 1912. By 1930 the Norwegians had lost interest in whaling around the Faroes, and from 1933

108 The concept "discourse" may be seen as a set of statements that provide a means of commmunicating about a particular topic at a particular moment in history. It comprises a set of mutually acceptable statements. Each statement – a claim, an argument, a story or practice – comes in packages and is with a high degree of probability accompanied by other statements from the same package. Discourse is central to the protection of knowledge and defines both *what* can meaningfully be said about a subject and how the subject can be meaningsfully discussed. A discourse can therefore be considered an institutionalised way of thinking, it helps people to make sense of the world and provide guidelines for their conduct. In that sense it closely resembles a cultural model. . . . They are not static, but are continuously changing. Unlike cultures, discourses are not associated with bounded social entities, they have no fixed borders, but can best be perceived as nucleated or as fields of gravitation where some statements in the package are more central than others. They may also be embedded in each other and can work at several levels – statements in one discourse will very often be appropriated from other discourses. In the case of whaling, competing pro- and anti-whaling discourses try to appropriate the same statements from external discourses. (Kalland 2009, in print)



Faroese whaling boat from the time before the Second World War.

the two remaining whaling stations – Lopra and við Áir – were taken over by Faroese interests. Operations from the whaling station in Lopra ceased from 1953, while the við Áir whaling station continued until around 1968. In practice this form of whaling had now stopped, although there was some activity until 1986. The last whale was killed in 1986[109], and the við Áir

109 In his book entitled *Hvalurin er mín. Søgan um stórhvalaveiðuna í Føroyum,* the Faroese journalist Helgi Jacobsen has produced an excellent, vivid description of the hunting of great whales on the Faroes from the beginning until it ended (Jacobsen 2007).

whaling station has now been converted into a museum. This Norwegian-inspired form of whaling was part of the commercial whaling activity that contributed towards the decimation of whale stocks at sea. Viewed in an historical perspective, it was ultimately the more civilised part of Europe, with its constantly expanding need for energy, that had been responsible for the massive reduction in stocks of the great whales.

> "This whole development clearly demonstrates the repeated premature exhaustion of commercial whaling. The activities of this trade took the form of an "oil rush" with many outfittings and strong competition in the years after the discovery of a new whaling ground and a rapid decline in the number of ships as soon as the stock of whales was depleted. This was followed by a search for new whaling grounds which, if found, were overexploited again. The industry was wholly based on profit". (Hacquebord 1990, 18).

It should be unnecessary to state that this form of whaling was unacceptable, because "Men killed without thinking about the concept of limiting the catch, for as soon as a whaling ground was depleted one could move to another ground, or if one species became scarce it was possible to switch to another. This made commercial whaling so dangerous for man and animal. It left behind in the hunting areas a totally ruined ecosystem of which the native peoples had formed a part." (Hacquebord 1990, 18). This was also why the International Whaling Commission (IWC) was set up in 1946 under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling. The purpose of the Convention is to provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry. [110] From the outset the Commission has only dealt with the great whales, and the small cetaceans have not fallen within the IWC's area of interest, although the IWC says on its website that

> "the smaller species of whales, dolphins and porpoises (commonly known as 'small cetaceans') are also members of the same zoological order of Cetacea. Member governments hold different views over the legal competence of the IWC to regulate direct and incidental catches of small cetaceans. However, they are working to promote cooperation between the coastal and range states to conserve and manage these species also."[111]

110 http://www. iwcoffice. org/commission/iwcmain. htm

111 http://www. iwcoffice. org/commission/iwcmain. htm

This in itself sounds very tolerant, but in practice it appears that within the IWC there are parties with an interest not only in managing whaling on a sustainable basis, but also in achieving a total ban on whaling, which is why a separate, more moderate forum has been created, NAMMCO[112]. These interests in favour of a total ban are described by Norwegian anthropologist Arne Kalland (1993, 193) as follows:

> "In the IWC the world is divided into two groups, the "like-minded" and the "whaling nations". In the mass media the whalers are described as "Murderers who are willing to exterminate every last whale for profit" (Today 28 May 1991). The "like-minded", on the other hand, are depicted as good people who fight, often putting their life on the line, to save the peaceful whales from the evil men trying to kill them for greedy profit. The world has been divided into "good" and "evil" people, where the "good" people fight on behalf of the whales and the "evil" people fight for money. Whales and money serve as totems in this view of the world."

As already described in depth in the first section of this book, the Faroese pilot whale catches fall outside the normal commercial market and have nothing to do with the commercial, profit-based whaling of the past, but fall under what is described as native whaling:

> "Native whaling did not know competition and was not producing for the market, it was carried out to provide the own people with food and other necessary products. It was an ecologically justified activity which did not lead to the depletion of the whale stocks although it was practised for centuries.
> Therefore it is unfair that the native whalers now have to pay for the irresponsible actions of the commercial whalers in the past, who in their unreasoned desire for profit almost exterminated the giants of the oceans." Hacquebord (1990, 18)

112 NAMMCO - the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission - is an international body for co-operation on the conservation, management and study of marine mammals in the North Atlantic. The NAMMCO Agreement, which was signed in Nuuk, Greenland on 9 April 1992 by Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, focuses on modern approaches to the study of the marine ecosystem as a whole, and to understanding better the role of marine mammals in this system.
NAMMCO provides a mechanism for co-operation on conservation and management for all species of cetaceans (whales and dolphins) and pinnipeds (seals and walruses) in the region, many of which have not before been covered by such an international agreement. The Faroese Pilot Whale Association *Grindamannafelagið* also co-operates with HNA High North Alliance (www. highnorth. no), WCW The World Council of Whalers (www. worldcouncilofwhalers. com) and ICES International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (www. ices. dk)

From the við Áir whaling station before the Second World War.

On the other hand the environmentalists and the animal rights campaigners do not accept that the Faroes are not producing for the market and they condemn the custom or the tradition of pilot whaling as being cruel and inhumane, since their arguments are that the Faroes no longer need the whale meat to survive as they now are a modern and affluent society with high standard of living. There is no "subsistence need" to kill pilot whales and the organisations also say that the drive is no longer traditional, since it involves using motorboats rather than traditional rowing boats and modern means of communication. Against the claim of Faroe Islanders that there is a need to sustain their cultural identity by whaling, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society states that the inhabitants of Orkney and Shetland Islands also had whaling traditions, but that these islanders have have survived the cessation of these practices without detriment to their culture. The argument is that Faroese culture has evolved and the islanders are now firmly embedded in the global economy today, so that there is no need of self sufficency.

Rob van Ginkel has presented two cases concerning living maritime traditions of pilot whaling with the tuna fishery of Favignana in Sicily and especially the concluding ritual of the mattanza, the killing of the tuna. While Faroese pilot whaling has met with considerable resistance and is described as a traditional and anachronistic barbarian act which is in opposition to modernity, tuna fishery in Sicily has not met with any strong opposition,

> "although there are several family resemblances between the grindadráp and the mattanza. Both involve the use of traditional implements, including gaffs and knives, both are rather bloody occasions in which scores of giant sea creatures are killed; both require the close cooperation of men who kill animals at close range and in public view, and both have a ritual character. But whereas the heavily contested grindadráp is aimed at the taking of not-endangered pilot whales for home consumption, the mattanza is commercial and the prey species, blue fin tuna, is under serious treat of depletation. Against this background, it is all the more puzzling why the one tradition should meet with such strong resistance, while the other does not" (van Ginkel 2005, 73)

The answer is of course complicated but a part of the answer is that the tuna is a fish and the "grind" is a whale. The tuna are relegated to a much lower moral status than the cetaceans. They are not ambiguous sea mammals, but belong to the unambiguous category of fish.

> "Tuna cans have images indicating that they have been caught "dolphin friendly". Indicating that killing tuna is not a problem, but killing dolphin is… Whales are believed to be at or near the apex of a symbolic hierarchy in the animal world. The species that are imbued with special rights and moral values nowadays certainly include whales but not tuna. With a variation on George Orwell's Animal Farm: All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others. And, one may add, some animals (tuna) are apparently good to eat whereas others (whales) are good to think" (van Ginkel 2005, 89).

The superwhale

The intention of this chapter is to deal only briefly with phenomena such as animal welfare, animal rights, green movements and how non-governmental organisations have dealt with whales and created a special view of whales that they have managed to communicate to a large number of people. These include the special discourse that connects people in a special way with whales and that has constituted a special perception that brings the good, positive qualities of all whales together in one whale. This is the phenomenon of the superwhale, which the Norwegian anthropologist Arne Kalland has described. [113]

One factor that has been important to the international interest in whales is the fact that nowadays whales have been given a very high position

113 Kalland 1998, 2009.

in the universal classification of animals. [114] The general attitude towards animals has generally changed much during the last 200 years, depending on whether animals are economic resources or whether they can be classified as pets (Löfgren 1985). If this was true of La Pensée Bourgeoisie at the beginning of the 20th century, it is even truer of both the city dweller and of the dweller on the periphery of today. But the city dweller's experience may be quite different from that of people who live on the outskirts of the western world, where a subsistence economy, including hunting and fishing, is still a feature of daily life. Here attitudes to animals are more pragmatic, although not necessarily without feeling. [115] They do not have the same distance from the origin of meat and fish as people in urban environments, where as a rule all they have to relate to is the product in the butchers or the supermarket. A degree of distance has been created from the biological reality. The Greenlandic priest, author and earlier European parliamentarian Finn Lynge confirms that

> "People are a part of the biosphere, or if you like of life on earth – plant life as well as animal life. People have always gathered, harvested and killed for food. And when death calls, people themselves always form the final link and ultimately serve Mother Earth as worm food. People are a part of the circle that is completed again and again…Nowadays a totally new sub-species of Homo Sapiens has emerged. This is a product of the urban and industrial society to the extent that he or she perceives his or her fundamental dependence on the biosphere as something transient, of lesser value, even downright immoral. Nowadays we are told that it is unworthy for a human being to kill wild animals for the purpose of eating them. How on earth has this come about?
> First of all, urban people have become estranged from nature, and these people also fear the unknown. Urban people therefore detest the sight of a predator skinning its prey, and find the smell of bloody entrails abhorrent. Urban man wants to see the meat neatly packaged in film in the supermarket's chiller display or, of course, served appetisingly on his plate. It is bad manners

114 But the whale has not always enjoyed this position. Whales used to be perceived as both mythical and mystical. Alongside the regular whales, in folklore we find supernatural troll whales and enormous whales with an inland lake on their back, which fishermen could get lost in and be frightened out of their wits by when the whale dived. Whales were also described as pure monsters and fiends. Melville's Moby Dick is the best-known example of this.

115 In 2004 people on the Faroes still slaughter sheep and cattle at home. For the simple reason that there are no slaughterhouses. Cattle and sheep are therefore slaughtered at home. During the first weeks of October many Faroese are involved in slaughtering sheep. In this activity the main issues are the slaughter and the weight and quality of the sheep to be killed (Joensen 1999A and 1999B).

> to talk about how that juicy piece of meat actually made its way to the plate." (Lynge 1993, 147).

According to Lynge, consumers of industrialised meat or animal production do not see any immediate connection between the steak on their plate and the living animal. This is also true among the Faroese today. But they are still closer to the biosphere than most Europeans. Many urbanised people nowadays have a more fictive or imaginary attitude to whales. In mass culture the imaginary and the real are confused, and instead of the material reality the picture is substituted. The consumer's life becomes fictive. "It changes the spectator into a phantom, projects his spirit out into fantasy worlds full of images and persuades his soul to dwell in the many ideal images which live in his stead." (Morin 1965, 180). The real animal world was replaced by ideal images: "Animals were something you read about or looked at, rather than things you handled in everyday life. It was love at a distance." (Löfgren 1985, 199).

There are many emotions associated with whales. These creatures, mainly large and warm-blooded, that spend all their time in water are interesting. According to Freudians, dreams that contain water in one context or another are extremely informative as regards dream interpretation (Lynge 1990, 143).

The sensation of water or of being in water belongs to the deepest layers of our subconscious. They mobilise "the ocean feeling", which is connected with the subconscious memory of having laid and gurgled in the amniotic fluid in the womb. Whales and water thus touch upon strong forces in our subconscious, if we can believe the views of certain psychologists (Lynge 1999, 143). Salt and water are also important ingredients in cleaning rituals and as the source of all life, hence the linguistic relationship between the words delphis (dolphin) and delphys (womb).

The whale in the sea has become a symbol of freedom in the same way as the bird in the air. There are around 75 species of whale, and Norwegian anthropologist Arne Kalland, who has devoted particular attention to Japanese whale hunting, has reached the conclusion that in the narration and presentations of environmental organisations the best properties of all whales have been merged to form an imaginary whale known as the *superwhale* (Kalland 1998, 9-13, 2009 in print). It is the biggest creature on earth, it has the biggest brain on earth. The whale is social and friendly, it has its own way of singing and also takes very good care of its offspring. The whale has been humanised to such an extent in this image that it has

Advertisement for whale watching on Pico, Azores, 2008.

all of the virtues that human beings could wish to possess. Emphasis is also given to the fact that whales, which have existed for around 25 million years, are among the original population of the sea and this gives them special rights.

The whale – and this applies of course to the pilot whale – has been humanised to such an extent by certain neo-romantic environmental organisations that it can no longer be considered as a resource to be used from the perspective of an economic catch. The whale has become so human that it is seen as equal to people, and eating it is therefore effectively cannibalism (Nauerby 1996, 167). In economic terms, the whale falls under what is referred to as natural and cultural heritage, with tourism constituting the economic alternative to hunting. The relatively small pilot whale has thus also become a part of the superwhale.

Instead of catching whales, it is expected instead that people should look at them in their own environment. From being a resource, whales should become a means of experiencing nature. Whale-watching as a commercial

activity began in 1955 in North America along the southern California coast. Whale-watching nowadays takes place in the waters of some 90 countries, as well as in Antarctica. All of the large whale species and many dolphins and porpoises can be seen regularly on a wide range of tours, lasting from an hour to two weeks. Whale-watching is a non-consumptive use of whales with economic, recreational, educational and scientific dimensions. The economic benefits occur in areas where whale-watching has quickly become a significant aspect of a local tourism economy. [116]

Whale-watching has now also become an element of tourism in Greenland, Iceland and Norway. I have experienced whale-watching in Godthåb Fjord on Greenland and in the Azores. Seeing the great whales is an experience, but whale-watching has not yet become a tourist activity on the Faroes, although it is a possibility, as is the expanding field of ocean fishing for tourists.

The pilot whale has also become a part of the superwhale, as can be seen from the many letters of protest sent to the Faroese government, especially in the 1980s.

Protests against the pilot whaling

Even if the pilot whale does not fall within the interests of the IWO, several non-governmental environmental organisations have shown a great interest in this native form for whaling. Around 1985 a number of environmental organisations joined forces to fight pilot whaling on the Faroes. They started by launching media campaigns and encouraging several thousand people all over the world to send protest letters to the Faroese government and the Faroese Prime Minister. It is relatively easy to relate the protest letters and the campaigns to one another.

The biggest wave of protest came in the years 1985-1987, when besides hundreds of personal letters, more than 140, 000 postcards were sent to the Faroese government. Following a new campaign in 1993 a large number of protest letters were also received, although not on the same scale as in 1985-87. Since the 1990s there has been a significant drop in the number of protest letters. Emails and letters continue to arrive, either from individuals or letters with a petition undersigned by a number of people that are sent in jointly. Since the year 2000 the number of protest letters has fallen from a few to just over 100 letters a year. In recent years the Danish Embassy in Berlin has received more protest letters than the Faroese gov-

116 Hoyt 2000, See also The Whale Watching web.

ernment. In Norway they have also noticed a significant fall in the number of protest letters. [117]

The significant fall in the number of protests can be connected to the fact that the depiction of the pilot whale kill in the media has been more balanced and competent[118], although the reason might also be that people have become more interested in global problems relating to climate policy and global warming.

Even if there was no pilot whale drive in 2008 a lot of protests were sent to the Faroese authorities because of older items posted on the video and film clip website YouTube. The 2, 346 protest emails were sent in 2008. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that every protest is answered by the ministry.

The environmental organisations have been very good at using the media and the press to get individuals to respond:

> "… the focus on the pilot whale hunt as an international protest issue has put the Faroe Islands on the map for many people outside Scandinavia. A variety of environmentalist and animal welfare groups, mainly in Europe and the United States, but also further afield in Australia and even South Africa, have made the details of the Faroese pilot whale hunt known to as wide an audience as possible through their own campaign material, supported by a widespread and persistent use of popular newspapers and television coverage, and even in one case with a cinema commercial. Such well-organised and far-reaching attention to the matter has resulted in many thousands of protest letters and postcards to the Faroese government since the autumn of 1985." (Sanderson 1990, 19).

The aim of the environmental organisations was to convince the Faroese "that the hunt is a thing of the past; that it is time to transform their cultural attachment to the whales into a positive celebration instead of something the rest of the world sees as barbaric and repugnant." The environmental organisations focused on the whale kill and on the pilot whale. A whale is not just any creature.

> "The whale has not only become for many a potent symbol of the need to preserve the ecological balance. In the words of Orwell, it can also be said about the whale that "some animals are more equal than others". For many the whale

117 Information provided by Professor Arne Kalland, July 2008.

118 Information provided by the Ministry of Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, 24 January 2008.

> is an enigma, and seems as such to carry with it a kind of religious aura. No justification for killing these animals is therefore acceptable, and no distinction between endangered or non-endangered species is relevant" (Sanderson 1990, 199).

At about the same time as they were creating a broad international wave of protest, the environmental organisations themselves were ready and also stepped into the arena (Holm 2005, 12). Let us look at a small selection of the protests sent to the Faroese government about 1985[119], starting with a non-violent Englishman, who sends the following message to the Faroese government:

> "I have just seen on television your murderous killing of the whales. I and all my workmates agree that you're just shit. I am a grown man and I cried to see your inhuman acts. I would love to stick one of those hooks in your head and hear you scream the way the whales did. I hope you and your family die by drowning and when you meet god he sends you back as a pilot whale so you can feel the pain the whale does and die in agony. If the atomic bomb is dropped I hope it is on the Faroe Islands, the rest of the civilised world won't miss you. The worst of health may you all die soon. (signed) A normally quiet non violent Englishman."[120]

Aboriginal subsistence whaling (ASW) is normally accepted to a certain extent, and as long as the Faroese were regarded as being untouched by civilisation or innocent natives, then the western world almost accepted the "blood ecstasy" and their native whale kill. But today the Faroese resemble too closely other Western Europeans, and their behaviour in the whale kill is regarded as incompatible with the cultural or civilised behaviour of industrialised Western European society, as is mentioned in a protest letter from the archive: "This is 1986 - the killers are wearing *modern* day clothes and wearing *watches*. These topics express connection to a civilised life style - why then is their behaviour uncivilized."

This is not an uninteresting protest, which corresponds to a general perception that whale hunting is less unacceptable if it is performed by people from another ethnic culture as aboriginal subsistence whaling, which is quite different from native subsistence whaling.

Here the hunt is viewed as an element in a greater process of civili-

119 All of these letters are kept in the archives of the Faroese Local Government.

120 This letter is also published in Sanderson 1990, 196.

sation, where whale hunting belongs to an aboriginal society, while modern, civilised societies do not hunt whales. Showing concern for whales is a sign of personal and social maturity. You cannot criticise people who caught whales to survive several thousand years ago, but whale hunting is not something that belongs in a civilised nation. Whale hunting, opera and other modern forms of cultural expression do not belong together (Kalland 1993, 193, Sørensen 1993, 185).

Nor do modern clothes – branded clothes and watches – belong in a whale hunt. Therefore the Faroese, with their involvement in the pilot whale hunt, are considered an anomaly in the modern world.

> "There is a kind of imperialism in this reasoning. Ancient civilisations that do not yet have opera are allowed to hunt whales as a part of their natural subsistence. The conclusion is that ancient civilisations can continue whaling as long as they remain "noble savages", well screened from commercial activities. This means that we who live in the industrialised world have a living museum, against which we can measure our development, and at the same time we have a means of exercising political and economic control over these ancient civilisations." (Kalland 1993, 193).

Many of the protesters, as the already quoted normally quiet non violent Englishman. do not have the same sensitive or civilised attitude to their Faroese fellow creatures of the species Homo Sapiens as to the pilot whales:

> "As things stand, you and your children are the sick dogs of civilization, fit only to be flushed deep down the toilet. Proclaim this widely, as the view of modern Europeans who care for life, to all the moral midgets that inhabit the Faroes. You are a disgrace to the great ocean that surrounds your isles."

…writes a well educated Master of Arts from Cambridge and a Mrs. Humphrey from London in their letters of protest, and others too not particularly kind in the way they address the Honourable Faroese Prime Minister:

> "How I pity you! Fancy having to govern such a pig-headed, stupid, brutalised and ignorant people. I take it, you don't believe in God. Still living in the Stone Age are you? Might it be possible, do you suppose, to get it into the heads of your pathetic inhabitants that to hack to death some of the world's most mira-

> culous creatures is deeply offensive to God? You who have plenty to eat and are prosperous enough already. I curse you for what you have done and you can be sure that one of these days you will be repaid for your crimes. You deserve no mercy and no understanding."

Mr. Murphy from Ohio also pulls no punches when he gives expression to his views:

> "This is a letter of protest against the mammal nightmare in the Faroe Islands. Your slaughter of pilot whales is a savage, ghastly, sadistic, sickening, needless, hideous sport. The economic need of food no longer justifies the cruelty of the festive spirit of the "grind". . . A humane solution to the bloody hunt is imperative."

Nor does another unnamed English person:

> "…to express my horror and disgust at the slaughter of pilot whales by the people of the Faroe Islands. The appalling cruelty and apparent blood hunt involved in these acts cannot be considered civilised even by the very lowest standards: the hacking to death of around 2, 500 of these intelligent, feeling animals every years is clearly pointless and therefore intolerable."

For many, whale hunting in the industrialised world represents a threat to a civilised view of the world, and they feel that they must do their best to fight against and distance themselves from the barbaric whale hunt. The leader of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) states deliberately that it is the duty of all civilised people to protect the whales "from sadists" (Kalland 1993, 193).

The people who wrote the letters of protest had, of course, obtained their information about pilot whaling on the Faroes from carefully produced inserts in the press and electronic media, as is clear from the following letter:

> "After seeing an article in the Sunday Times magazine, about the pilot whales, I felt ill. I think you must be ignorant of the present, dwindling population of one of the most intelligent and beautiful animals on this earth. While the rest of the world is campaigning to "Save the Whales" you are killing them in their thousands. And to what avail? You do not use or indeed need their carcasses,

> only for luxury purposes, which is no reason for such massacre. What a waste of life.
>
> I could barely believe my eyes when I saw your children, many with knives in their hands, many splashed with whale blood, "playing" with the dead and dying whales and getting excited at having a "mini" one freshly ripped from its mother's belly[121]. Do they not see the blood? I know as a child, I would not have tolerated such barbaric scenes. Is it simply because that's what they've been brought up with it? Is this sort of slaughter the norm for them? What happens when they play with a pet or even a friend?
>
> Sometimes I think there must be something seriously wrong with the mentality of people. Something sick inside their heads that drives them to such blood thirsty "carnivals". Who are they to think the whales are a gift to them from God. God would not wish this on his most insignificant creatures.
>
> What pleasure do you get? As far as I can see it's totally unnecessary and you have no argument to support this evil ritual. Or have you?"

The dramatic and bloody slaughter of the pilot whales has been good copy for newspapers and particularly for television. Through this the pilot whale and the Faroes entered the world stage and evoked emotions and unveiled the complexity of man's attitudes to whales and Homo Sapiens. The Times Magazine, writing about the I. W. C. meeting[122] in Bournemouth in 1985, says that "some delegates were reduced to tears when a Danish TV film showed hundreds of inexperienced hunters repeatedly stabbing and hacking at a herd of struggling whales. Yet so far, the Faroese themselves remain unmoved."

In this special case it is perhaps more a question of emotion, culture or perhaps policy than of environment, as an adviser on Faroe Island affairs puts it: "because it provides such easy access to dramatic pictures and footage which can be exploited in fund-raising campaigns and partly because

121 A photo of a boy holding a little whale embryo covered in blood was a scoop for many foreign newspapers that wrote about the whale hunt.

122 I. W. C. = The International Whaling Commission. Between 1985-1990 many representatives from several environmental organisations came to the Faroes, where they witnessed a number of whale hunts, not all of which were well conducted, even by Faroese standards. Several films for television were also made of the whale hunts, and these were distributed to TV and other interested parties. One of these was made by Danish TV reporter Preben Heide, showing a poorly conducted whale hunt in Tórshavn in May 1984, filmed by Faroese television – Sjónvarp Føroya. This coverage was screened on Danish television in 1985. In the same year parts of this television coverage were shown at the IWC meeting in Bournemouth, and were then distributed to other media (Sanderson 1990, 198).

the tiny Faroese community is seen as a vulnerable target, and therefore an easy addition to the "trophy collection" of the campaign organizers."[123]

While in the past it was only a few travellers who saw the whale hunt and wrote of it in the accounts of their visit. Journalists, TV reporters and environmental activists have in the mean time changed the pilot whale hunt into a drama and shocking entertainment in the media, which is depicted in stark contrast to European civilisation in general. Here we find a discourse that has much in common with the phenomenon of *Orientalism*, which was created by Edward Said (1993) to describe Western Europeans' perception of the Orient in 1978. To some extent this is also highlighted by the American anthropologist Jonathan Wylie, who is often able to view Faroese culture without the restricted perspective of native Faroese people. This is what he says about the Faroese:

> "Articulating their place in the world has always been a critical matter for the Faroese, and is now becoming a more complex one. Founded on a common West Scandinavian repertoire of habits of action and thoughts, the Faroes' culture has been cast and recast to fit the exigencies of life on these small islands. The Faroes, distant though they seem to outsiders, have never been cut off from the outside world with which, indeed, the Faroese not only have cultural ties, but also have had for survival's sake to maintain regular relationships. Faroese self-recognition has thus always been complicated. On the one hand, it is of an immediate, unreflecting sort: how do we know our homeland, and how do we know each other? But it has also depended on recognising others – principally the Faroese world. Thus to be Faroese has entailed a reflected sort of self-recognition – a trick of seeing oneself in outsiders' eyes, or through outsiders' institutions. And most recently it has entailed the self-conscious domestication of outsiders' institutions and the establishment of local ones to provide a formally indigenous official culture to give meaning to everyday life." (Wylie & Margolin 1981, 131).

This text was published in 1981, just a few years after I had written in an article that "The pilot whale hunt is a distinctive cultural characteristic for The Faroe islands" (Joensen 1976, 1) and before the Faroes became a major issue for the world at large due to the whale hunt. And I fully agree with Wylie, when he says that in the whale hunt both foreigners and Faroese

123 Account of the Pilot Whale Hunt in the Faroe Islands, By Árni Olafsson. Adviser on Faroe Islands Affairs in the Danish Foreign Ministry, Copenhagen, 24 June 1988.

may find a "cultural text" for discovering both their own and the society's temper at the same time." (Wylie & Margolin 1981, 130).

I shall in no way diminish the great contribution made by all these non-governmental environmental organisations in many fields, but they, like many journalists, present an interpretation of the pilot whale kill which can only arouse indignation, in which the violent, the bloody and primitive are stressed. In their general keenness to protect the whales, the ends justify the means. Often misunderstandings or downright lies are published, such as the fact that the pilot whale kill is an annual festival in which the Faroese, in a bloody ecstasy, uninhibited and uncontrolled, stab the whales and then take part in a ritual dance. The whale hunt is described as a sadistic blood sport, satanic, and with other words from the same register. That the pilot whale hunt is no longer of economic importance but is only kept up as a tradition is repeatedly maintained, e. g. in the Sunday Times Magazine in 1986.

> "There has been a popular misconception that the killing of pilot whales is a kind of subsistence hunting on which the Faroese depend for their livelihood," says Alan Thornton, director of the London-based Environmental Investigation Agency which has been spearheading opposition to the hunt. "We have shown this is simply not true. Today the hunt is just an excuse for a day's "sport" and an opportunity to pick up free food."

Alan Thornton has no understanding of the Faroese way of life, in which pilot whale meat is a gift from God, which falls outside the usual commercial system, and where sharing of the catch is very important as in almost every whaling society in the world (Kalland 2009, in print).

Sanderson refers to a cinema advertisement produced in the UK by the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, with the narration provided by British actor Anthony Hopkins. [124] This contains not only factual errors and misinformation, but also the refined use of sound technology in order to play on the viewer's emotions (Sanderson 1990, 200).

Paul Watson, founder of Sea Shepherd Conservation Society writes in 2000:

> "(T)o any civilized observer from the outside, the Grind is one of the bloodi-

124 Sanderson 1990, 200. Transcript of animated cinema advertisement created for the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (UK) by Charlie Paul, Ian Single Film Company, UK, 1988.

> est, most cruel, and most savage traditions in the world…the Grind is practically a religion. It is ritualized brutality and traditional torture, punctuated by public drunkenness. The victim is the defenseless pilot whale, whose migrations throughout the year, especially during the summer months, bring the pods into the waters near the Faroes, where they are herded into bays, stabbed, speared, pelted with stones, slashed with outboard motor blades, and slowly and joyfully slaugthered. They die amidst the laughter of children and the drunken bellows of their hooligan fathers.
>
> Each year, between 1, 500 and 3, 500 pilot whales die in the scarlet agony of the beaches of the Faroe Islands. Children rip the fetuses from the pregnant mothers and hold them up like trophies. Men hack through the necks of the struggling whales to sever the spinal cords, a process that can take ten minutes or more. The bays turn blood red, and the whale carcasses litter the shore, their purple-black guts spilling onto the sand.
>
> Although the Faroese do eat whale meat, the kill provides much more meat than can be consumed. Traditionally the whalers provided subsistence to a people far removed from the rest of the world, before imports and the emergence of their lucrative export market. Today, with no practical need to kill whales, the slaughter has intensified. This is because the Faroese now enjoy a high standard of living and thus more leisure time – today they have more time to hunt for pleasure. Today it is a sport, big-game hunt, and an orgy of blood, providing entertainment and an outlet for aggression, an excuse to get together, drink, and indulge in a community festival."

Paul Watson has also compared the pilot whaling in the Faroes to the Roman gladiator games, "for which there is no place in the modern world." [125]

Ethical aspects are of course also involved in the actual whale hunt and the way in which it is conducted, although ethical aspects also play a role in the way in which certain environmental organisations have chosen to depict the hunt (Sandøe 1993, 15).

On the other hand, it is quite understandable that normal people react to the pilot whale hunt. The whale hunt has been described and presented in the international press and TV in a way that must have awakened a mixture of indignation, the desire to protect the whales, and aggression in readers and TV viewers in a large part of the world.

125 The quotations of Paul Watson are in van Ginkel 2005, 84. .

The pilot whale hunt is not entertainment to enjoy on a cosy evening in front of the TV. It is very bloody and cannot be otherwise. Something that makes a deep impression is the close contact between men and whales, the red sea, blood-spattered hands and clothes. It is an intimacy between men and animals that is difficult to understand. [126]

Once in a while there are letters expressing a certain amount of understanding. But mostly the letters are marked by sensitivity and strong feelings for the whales, and in one letter of protest the whale hunt is compared to the Nazis' attempts to exterminate the Jews in the Second World War. Some correspondents are totally opposed to the eating of meat at all and urge the Faroese to become vegetarians.

Whales are described as intelligent, feeling and innocent, and are ascribed many human qualities. They ought therefore to be left to swim freely in the ocean for the pleasure of tourists and others who want to see them. Many perceive the whales in a pastoral scene, almost like grazing sheep. They are not seen as an economic resource, but as animals, "pets", that should live in freedom for the recreational enjoyment of human beings.

Many see the whale kill as the expression of a particular libido – a desire to kill and see blood, or more conciliatorily, as a kind of enjoyable sport, a blood sport, separated from its ecological and economic context. What is seen becomes mixed up with patterns in the observer's own culture. These patterns are projected onto what is seen so that the total experience acquires a fictive quality in which imagination and reality combine.

The Faroese reaction

There have always been persons in The Faroes, who are against the *grindadráp*. The dramatic, expressive international protests against the pilot whale hunt were also widely reported as news in the Faroese press, and this was something new for the Faroese audience. The presentation of the pilot whale hunt in the international press and the perceptions that emerge from the protest letters, although only some of these have been published, have naturally affected and hurt most normal Faroese people deeply, particularly

126 About 25 years ago a restaurant owner in Lund, Sweden, decided to advertise his excellent steaks by letting a bull graze outside his restaurant. This was not a good idea. Confronted with the reality of the situation, customers lost their appetite for steak. The restaurant owner suffered a considerable economic loss on account of his unfortunate advertisement. The confrontation with reality was too powerful.

those for whom pilot whale meat and blubber are of real economic importance in their everyday lives.

This is a collision between two widely differing cognitive systems or discourses. The neo-romantic, green perception represented by many environmental movements (Holm 2005) and the traditional Faroese one with old, national romantic undertones, leading to a stronger form of nationalism. The large volume of protests has led to many on the Faroes perceiving a greater value in the pilot whale then they perhaps did before, and at the same time they see a threat to their identity. A defence is therefore built up against cultural imperialism from the Western metropolises. The Faroese reaction is no different from what we see in Norway, Iceland, Greenland and Japan. [127]

On the Faroes there has also been a local debate about the whale hunt and the whales' suffering. [128] In a public debate, many people have adopted a very critical attitude towards the whale hunt. However, the local debate took on a different tone after the environmental organisations had attacked the Faroese people in terms of their personality, their level of civilisation and their mental state:

> "In a Faroese newspaper today, similar accounts would more likely be reprints of an animal welfare organisation's newsletter from abroad, often translated into Faroese, rather than locally written diatribes against the hunt. International protests have caused the media and the general public to adopt a very defensive position regarding the pilot whaling. There is a general awakening of the need to prevent access to potential negative publicity about the hunt, and even the radio no longer broadcasts the news that pilot whales have been sighted, as it used to do. Now it simply reports after the event how many whales were killed and where." (Sanderson 1990, 201)

It does not take too much empathy to understand that all of the negative attacks on the pilot whale hunt were perceived by most Faroese people as a "serious interference in Faroese national culture" (Andreassen 1996, 101). This also came to affect political opinion on the role of the Faroes in a broader European context.

Many Faroese perceive the fact that the retention of the pilot whale hunt, which dates back to the Middle Ages, as an element of living, ma-

127 See Brydon 1990, Kalland 1993, Matthisen 1996, Kalland & Moeran 1992, 193 and ISG 1992.

128 Grindatjakið 1985. Egholm 1966. Heinesen 1962, 1976.

terial culture in the 21st century in much the same way as they perceive the retention of the ring dance from the Middle Ages with associated ballads as an element of living, material culture in the 21st century. Both are perceived as a living element of the cultural heritage that has been passed down. But these cultural elements are perceived differently outside the Faroes.

The Faroese view themselves as Europeans with rich traditions and as a people that has retained large parts of European cultural heritage. The problem, however, is unfortunately that continental Europe

> "is reticent in its acceptance of periphery culture as genuine European culture. Unknown and unusual expressions, behaviour and attitudes of the periphery are not part of the conditional European self-recognition.
> The periphery is characterised with terms such as bizarre and picturesque, maybe interesting and sometimes even primitive and barbarian. The people of the periphery do not want to be integrated – that is, absorbed – by continental Europe, but they want to absorb European culture into their own. They want to make their own decisions, and they want to pursue their own conceptions of modernity and of themselves." (Andreassen 1996, 101).

This is the eternal question of centre versus periphery, or urban versus rural, where it is considered that culture and civilisation emanate from the centre. [129]

> "When certain foreign individuals and organisations try to tell the Faroese that they do not "need" the pilot whale meat and blubber, they regard such attempts to dictate to the Faroese their diet, or the balance between traditional and modern elements in their contemporary way of life, as "cultural imperialism". They find that this attitude reflects a regrettable lack of effort to understand a people who live in different surroundings, and a tendency to force upon them a living pattern more appropriate in the metropolises of the world."[130]

The average Faroese citizen, like the Faroese authorities, has had less access to the press and the media than the environmental organisations, but they have as far as possible tried to send personal replies to all letters of protest.

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129 See also Matthisen 1996.

130 Account of the Pilot Whale Hunt in the Faroe Islands. By Árni Olafsson, Adviser on Faroese Islands Affairs in the Danish Foreign Ministry. Copenhagen 24 June 1988, p. 13.

The following, which also presents the official Faroese positions, forms a general part of these replies:

> "Unfortunately this tiny, vulnerable nation of 45, 000 people has become the easy target for much opportunistic campaigning and threats of boycotts from international conservation organizations. Many, including the international media, have exploited what is a necessary part of the hunt, i. e. the fact that the killing takes place in the open. Equally bloody pictures could be taken inside the average abattoir anywhere in the world. I can only urge you to try to distinguish between issues of real importance such as the pollution and dumping of waste in our oceans, (the real danger to the pilot whales and all marine life) and one which, as in the case of the pilot whale hunt, seems only to be an "issue" due to distorted facts, misunderstandings, and in many instances an opportunistic use of coloured photos. . . Although Faroese society is modern and prosperous, we also retain a lifestyle with strong natural surroundings, especially the sea. The pilot whale hunt is a part of this lifestyle, and with a little more cultural awareness, both here and overseas, we see no reason why it should not remain as such."

This was written in 1988, but 20 years later we know that the real danger to pilot whales and all marine life is the pollution and dumping of waste in our oceans, and as it is stated in the recommendation not to eat pilot whales any longer: "We in the Faroes bear little responsibility with regard to marine pollution, which has been inflicted upon us from outside. That research in the Faroes has contributed to the current focus on contamination is a bitter irony. But these results have already led to tightened restrictions on pollution worldwide. We must therefore also acknowledge the consequences here in the Faroes."

Trongisvágur about 1935.

Chapter 9

To sum up

"How is it that other people's creations can be so utterly their own and so deeply part of us?" (Geertz 1983, 54)

In this book I have attempted to provide a documented depiction of the pilot whale hunt on the Faroes in a broad perspective. This covers the whole institution and the organisation surrounding the whale hunt, the fact that it has continuously been corrected and recorded so that it matches perceptions in modern society. This happened in connection with Faroese society shifting gradually from the beginning of the 19th century, little by little developing into a modern society. It is no coincidence that 1832 saw the appearance of a library, a savings bank and the first carefully prepared whaling regulations on the Faroes. The pilot whale hunt and its carefully prepared regulations, which were revised most recently in 1998, and which the central authorities were responsible for ensuring were observed, formed a part of modern society.

In traditional society decisions were largely made at a local level. In due course this came to apply not only to the social, but also the technical aspects of the institution of the pilot whale hunt.

Even if the tools used to kill the whales remain largely the same as they were several hundred years ago, the killing methods have become more humane and efficient. The tools that were considered inappropriate from an animal welfare perspective have been replaced, improved or banned.

Tórshavn 2007.

Then there is the overall cultural aspect. From being an essential part of the Faroese subsistence economy, the absence of which could cause famine and hardship, the pilot whale developed in the 19th century to become also a symbol in the establishment of Faroese identity as a representation of Faroese culture. It gave the Faroese an invented exotic quality, with a psycho-cultural contradiction, in which the normally peaceful, kind people became violent and uncontrolled.

Until a few years ago the exotic quality of the whale kill as a Faroese symbol was regarded as a cultural asset for the Faroes. For a long time this essentially good-natured perception of the whale hunt was a product of the age. This, together with the special, national romantic representation of the uniquely Faroese nature of the whale hunt, came to leave its mark on the Faroes. It was also something that the Faroese could communicate externally, as a part of their culture.

The Faroese whale hunt, geographically limited as it is, is a concrete objective on which a concentrated attack can be made in the mass media with a good chance of winning. This is true not only for the environmental organisations but also for the individual, who by a possible boycott of Faroese goods in the supermarket also has the feeling of making a con-

tribution, in an otherwise hopelessly chaotic world, towards the improvement of the environment and the protection of whales.

Paradoxically, in this case the target is a very well-organised, controlled kind of hunt with traditional roots, which can in no way be related to commercial over-exploitation of the world's resources. Pilot whaling is still not a part of the market economy, but a part of internal Faroese subsistence economy and an element of the Faroese diet.

The Faroes nowadays are in most areas a modern fishing society, where still the main income comes from the sea. Fishing has become increasingly industrialised, with the result that the fishing fleet is one of the most modern in the world, while at the same time Faroese society has retained some relics of an old subsistence economy. This is true not only for the pilot whale hunt, but to a large extent also for bird catching and sheep farming, which still take place today in the same way as in the Middle Ages.

The paradox is that there is so much tradition in modern society, which is now a part of modern people's lives. While Faroese fishing is now dominated by economic capital, elements of the traditional economy may be viewed as cultural capital, which is a part of the identity in which you have contact with your traditional, cultural roots, at the same time as it is an economy of experience. Interest in the pilot whale as a source of meat has actually grown in the last years, for where else in the world in the year 2004 could you see the whole town council, headed by the mayor, spending a Sunday afternoon wearing work clothes, knife in hand, weighing meat and blubber for a queue of people standing patiently with their plastic buckets awaiting their turn?

As far as the Faroese themselves are concerned, there is of course the possibility that the mentality, lifestyle and taste of the younger generation will change, but so far I can see it this will not happen as long as the majority of the Faroese see the pilot whale as something that is "good to eat".

There was no pilot whale drive in 2008. What apparently may cause people to refrain from eating whale meat and blubber is all of the new information about toxins and heavy metals that are contained in meat and blubber, making it harmful to eat. From a human health perspective, the current recommendation is to eat no pilot whale meat or blubber at all, and most young people will probably follow this recommendation, or only eat pilot whale dishes on special occasions. The debate on whether or not pilot whaling should be forbidden by law is a hot topic in the Faroes, but in 2008 most members of the Faroese parliament were against a ban on pilot whaling.

In the global perspective it is not the serving of contaminated food that makes people react, but the images shown of the pilot whale hunt. What causes people to react, among other things, is witnessing the closeness of the animals and human beings at the kill. There are no distancing or mitigating barriers in the whale kill. You cannot deny the blood and the death. Many urban residents also group pilot whales along with flowers and songbirds, as pets loved at a distance. Pilot whales are beautiful animals, and even if they are no longer "good to eat" because of pollution, contamination and the dumping of waste in our oceans, from a whale health perspective they, just like the rest of the biosphere, deserve a good, healthy life in a clean environment of their own. To quote a young girl in my neighbourhood: "When the pilot whales are so badly contaminated and polluted, don't they feel sick or ill?"

Miðvágur about 1900.

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Appendices:

Executive Order on Pilot Whaling

By authority of § 3 of the Faroese Representative Council Act no. 57 dated 5 June 1984 on whaling and subsequent changes and § 17 of the Faroese Representative Council Act no. 9 dated 14 March 1985 on animal welfare and subsequent changes the following is prescribed:

I. On the control of pilot whaling.

§ 1. The Faroese Government is the higest authority in all matters pertaining to pilot whaling.

Subs. 2. The Government can issue en executive order to institute an emergency ban on pilot whaling in certain whaling districts.

Subs. 3. A ban as described in subsection 2 will not be implemented unless another whaling district has had the opportunity to put forward a request to change the pilot whale hunt from the whaling district in question, cf. § 18, no. 9.

§ 2. The Sheriff is responsible for the whale hunt and for ensuring that the drive and the kill are conducted in accordance with the rules, and in conjunction with the whaling foreman he must make sure that everyone performs their duties properly. Subs. 2. Every year the Sheriff issues a pilot whale roll, which is a summary of the population in the whaling district, and how the whales are to be divided between boats or other organisations. The Sheriff can decide in consultation with every single council how the pilot whale roll shall be determined, including whether the list of people in the council should be used or another method applied. The pilot whale role must be available to the public.

Subs. 3. An organisation, whether in boats or in other ways, cannot have fewer members than 50, if the settlement in question is of such a size.

§ 3. The boat owner or someone in his place is the foreman of the boat, and the Sheriff/whaling foremen must at all times be able to demand information about who the foreman is.
Subs. 2. The foreman of the boat is responsible for ensuring that all crewmen perform their duties properly.
Subs. 3. A boat that is joining a pilot whale hunt must display the identity of its home port.
§ 4. In each whale bay four men are designated as whaling foremen and two as deputies.
Subs. 2. These men are responsible for the whales if the Sheriff is not present, and they must perform all of the duties for which the Sheriff is otherwise responsible under the executive order.
Subs. 3. The Sheriff appoints whaling foremen subject to proposals from the local (town) council for five years. If there is agreement among the whalers in a place, it is permitted to choose whaling foremen who have usually held this position, and the Sheriff then appoints these people. The Sheriff also has the authority to send for or in an emergency appoint other whaling foremen, if he considers this necessary. The Sheriff can also decide that the appointed whaling foremen should be whaling foremen for temporarily designated whale bays.
Subs. 4. No one under the age of 60 can refuse the position of whaling foreman.

II. On the *grindaboð* and equipment that a whaling boat must possess.
§ 5. When a boat sees a school of pilot whales it must, according to custom, raise a signal on the mast and if possible inform the Sheriff, who passes on the message, while at the same time he shall notify of any possible ban on killing pilot whales as described in § 1, subs. 2.
Subs. 2. If a school of pilot whales is sighted from land, the procedure is the same.
§ 6. The foreman in any boat that joins a whale hunt is responsible for ensuring that the standard items of whaling equipment are on board.
Subs. 2. The standard items of whaling equipment are stones attached to ropes, loose stones, iron whaling hook/blow-hole hook on a line (sisal and/or manila), whetstone and whaling knife.
Subs. 3. It is forbidden to use any equipment other than that specified in subsection 2. However, subject to a special act passed by the Government in each individual case, experiments may be conducted with equipment, the purpose of which is to improve the killing process. This must be approved by the Government.
§ 7. When they join the whale hunt, the Sheriff and the whaling foremen must display the Faroese national flag or another distinguishing symbol approved by the Government on a short pole located at the stern of the boat. The foreman's boat may carry a megaphone.

Subs. 2. On land the Sheriff, whaling foremen and watch team must have an ID card or means of identification comparable with subsection 1, which proves their authority.

III. On the whale drive and the kill.

§ 8. The Sheriffs and/or whaling foremen from a different whale bay join in after having consulted with the sighting boat to determine in which direction the whales shall be driven. The whales must be driven to an approved whale bay, cf. § 9. The whaling foremen are obliged to follow the order given by the Sheriffs in accordance with this section. The most appropriate whale bay must be chosen based on the size of the school, the weather and the currents. It is not permitted to drive a school of whales without the supervision of the Sheriff and/or the whaling foreman.

Subs. 2. Anyone who holds a supervisory position when there is a whale hunt must, immediately on arrival at the whale hunt, make sure that the rules on driving a school of pilot whales are observed.

Subs. 3. Participants are obliged to follow instructions and observe any bans on which the Sheriff and/or the whaling foreman decide in the prevailing circumstances.

§ 9. The Government announces the names of approved whale bays in a special notice.

§ 10. When the school of whales has reached an approved whale bay, the Sheriff and/or the whaling foremen for this whale bay must decide when and where the whales must be held and how the kill is going to take place.

Subs. 2. The Sheriff and/or the whaling foremen must make sure that there are enough people on land to take care of the kill. They must also make sure that the area around the whale bay is free of unauthorised people, so that the whalers can work without being disturbed.

Subs. 3. As far as possible efforts must be made to ensure that the smallest boats are at the front and the larger boats and ships at the back forming a block, and that in general - all of the boats and the people on shore – do whatever the Sheriff and/or the whaling foremen ask them to do.

Subs. 4. Once the whales have been driven ashore or are so close to the shore that they are beached, the Sheriff and/or the whaling foremen give the signal that the whales can now be killed. Whales that have not been beached can be hooked from the land and dragged ashore. Whales may not be hooked or killed from the boats unless the Sheriff and/or the whaling foreman has given special permission for this.

Subs. 5. When the whales are killed, deep cuts must be made in both sides and the veins of the neck must be cut. Then the spinal cord must be severed.

§ 11. If a school of whales being held at sea is bigger than there is room for in the whale bay, the Sheriff can call off the kill. It is determined that whatever is left of the school of whales is driven out to sea again.

Subs. 2. In the event that several unsuccessful attempts are made to drive the whales into

the designated whale bay, and the whales can neither be forced ashore nor hooked, the Sheriff in consultation with the whaling foreman shall give the command to drive the whales back out to sea. The same applies for small groups of whales that are left behind.
Subs. 3. All boats and people on land must follow the instructions of the Sheriff and/or the whaling foremen.

IV. On the watch team, retrieving whales and assessment.
§ 12. As soon as the whales are dead, the Sheriff and/or the whaling foreman appoints a watch at sea and on land and gives the men of the watch any necessary instructions, including keeping the whales intact, except for opening pursuant to § 15, marking pursuant to § 17 and possible training in killing skills.
§ 13. By order of the Sheriff/whaling foremen, the whales must be moved to another place (e. g. quayside, etc.), pulled up and left there.
Subs. 2. If this is not feasible, the whales must be pulled up and laid side by side so that the heads are out of the water at high tide.
Subs. 3. The work described in subsections 1 and 2 must be performed by all whalers and whaling boats, as soon as the whales are all dead.
Subs. 4. Once all the necessary work has been done, the whaling foremen send the boats and people ashore, and a list is now made of who took part in the drive and the kill. This registration must take place no later than one hour after the necessary work has been completed.
Subs. 5. No one may pull a whale out of the water without the permission of the Sheriff or the whaling foreman. All other boats must keep their distance.
§ 14. If there is disagreement on who was involved in the drive pursuant to §§ 12 and 13, the Sheriff makes a decision after consultation with the whaling foremen.
Subs. 2. No one may ignore the instructions issued by the Sheriff and/or the whaling foremen.
§ 15. The men of the watch open all of the whales so that they do not rot, and they also make sure that no unauthorised person comes near to the whales.
Subs. 2. No one may ignore the instructions issued by the men of the watch.
§ 16. The Sheriff then takes two or, if necessary, more well-known, independent, reasonable people to assess the whales, according to tradition, using approved measures such that a whale measuring 3. 14 m = 5 *alin* in length from eye to genital opening is equal to one *gyllin* (florin), and they the others are measured accordingly and also according to quality.
Subs. 2. White beaked dolphins and bottlenose dolphins are assessed separately in each kill. The Sheriff issues instructions on how assessment shall take place.
§ 17. Assessment must take place as soon as possible once the Sheriff and the assessors have reached agreements.

Subs. 2. The assessors cut Roman numerals into the whales' skin and number the whales using ordinary numbers, which are registered together with the gender of the whale and the length in cm from the tip of the head to the web of the tail fin.

V. On allocating and distributing the whales.

§ 18. Once the whales have been marked, the Sheriff allocates and distributes the whales as follows:

1) Sighting-whale.
2) Watch team.
3) Assessors.
4) The Sheriff.
5) Whaling foremen.
6) Damage assessors.
7) Distribution assistants.
8) Killers' share.
9) Home share/*partahvalur*.
10) Other/surplus whales.
11) When whales are not used for home share.

Subs. 2. If agreement is reached between the Sheriff, whaling foremen and whalers, the distribution can proceed according to customer, including allocation of some compensation for damage and clearing up. The Government must be informed if this is done.

1) **Sighting-whale:** A boat that sights a school of whales and stays with it until the *grindaboð* has been passed on and until other boats arrive at the school of whales receives the sighting-whale. If a school of whales is sighted from land or from a boat that does not stay with the school of whales until other boats arrive, half of the sighting-whale is given to the boat that raised the *grindaboð* and half to the boat that arrives first at the school of whales. The same procedure applies if the *grindaboð* is passed from one village to the next and a boat from the latter village arrives first at the school of whales. Those who own the sighting-whale pick out the biggest whale or smaller whales with a combined *skinn* value that is the same as the biggest whale. If several boats sight the school of whales at the same time, the sighting-whale is divided between them.

2) **Watch team:** In the daytime ½ *skinn* to each boat that is used, and ½ *skinn* to each man, and at night time 1 *skinn* to each.

3) **The Assessors** receive 2 *skinn* from every hundred whales and otherwise according to the Sheriff's assessment.

4) **The Sheriff** receives 2% of the total number of *skinn*.

5) **The whaling foremen** each receive 1% of the total number of *skinn*.

6) **The damage assessors** receive at least 1 *skinn* as a share in compensation and otherwise according to the Sheriff's assessment.

7) **Distribution assistants, etc.** The Sheriff decides on compensation according to work undertaken and responsibility.
8) **Killers' share:** Everyone who has actually taken part in the drive and/or the kill – in a boat or on land – is entitled to a killers' share. The killers' share is the compensation for their work as mentioned above. This work involves:
a) driving/killing from the boat/on land,
b) collecting and dragging, etc. just after the kill until the whaling foremen give the word,
c) pulling the whales ashore.
A share is then given to each man in the boat, with maximum allocations as described below:
For 8-men boats or larger, usually 8 killers' shares
6-men boats or larger, usually 6 killers' shares
4-men boats or larger, usually 5 killers' shares
smaller boats than these will usually receive 3 killers' shares.
Boats, crews and people from other whaling districts are entitled to killers' shares if they have been involved in the drive and/or the kill, etc. A person must be 14 years of age to receive a killers' share. A whaler can only claim one share, even if he has driven the whales from one boat and killed from another or from the shore. Subject to consultation with the whaling foremen the Sheriff may, if the drive has been particularly difficult and long, permit an extra share to be given to the *rakstrarmenn*. In the event that the school of whales has been held at sea, boats that were not involved in the drive, but only in the kill, are entitled to a share if the Sheriff or one of the whaling foremen has asked them to assist. The Sheriff defines the size of the killers' share.
9) **Home share/*partahvalur*:** This share is allocated to councils or other organisations that arrange their own distribution in the district. The home share is distributed according to the pilot whale roll. If there is difficulty in distributing a school of whales in a whaling district, the Sheriff has the right to allocate the whales to one or more designated councils, including councils outside the whaling district.
10) **Other/surplus whales:** It is necessary to make provisions for sick and lost whales. If everything is not taken, the Sheriff shall sell the rest in the most appropriate way.
11) **When whales are not used for home share:**
If a home share as described in accordance with items 2-8 of this section, is not at least 1 *skinn* per *bátin* (50 people), whatever is left over is allocated to the whalers.
Subs. 3. The Sheriff takes care of the distribution of white beaked dolphins and bottlenose dolphins if any are killed.
§ 19. Costs of damage to property and of clearing up and disposal of whale skeletons, etc. on the beach or shoreline and at the quayside or on land where the whales were moved and butchered, are reimbursed according to the number of *skinn* distributed

from the school of whales, including the killers' share and the boat shares. If whales are sold pursuant to § 18, no. 10 or § 23, subs. 2, the money earned must be used to compensate for damage, clearing up and disposal. Money can also be used for the benefit of whaling. If the sale generates a surplus, the sum must be put into a fund for the same purpose at a subsequent whale hunt in the district. The removal of whale remains in a given council is performed by the council in question without any costs.

Subs. 2. All councils in the whaling district jointly arrange accident insurance for personal injury resulting from the pilot whaling. Payment is made according to a statement for which the Sheriff is responsible.

Subs. 3. The Sheriff has the authority to enter into an agreement with councils in the whaling district to define in advance the compensation for whaling damage, lost equipment and clearing up.

Subs. 4. Whaling damage is:

1) Damage to boats, including damage to propellers and shafts, oars and rudders.

2) Broken or lost equipment.

3) Broken or lost false teeth and spectacles.

4) Personal injury.

§ 20. Each whale bay comprises the following districts, each of which receives a full share:

I. Norðoya district:

1) To Hvannasund and Viðvík:

Norðoya district.

2) To Klaksvík:

Norðoya district and the eastern side of Eysturoynni

(Æðuvík-Gjógv).

II. Eysturoyar district:

1) To Gøtu, Fuglafjørð and Funningsfjørð:

Eysturoyar district and Norðoyar to the west of Múla.

2) To Sundini between Streymoy and Eysturoy:

Norðstreym, Eysturoyar district, Kaldbak and

Sund.

III. Streymoyar district:

1) To Tórshavn:

Suðurstreym, Nólsoy, Hest and Koltur.

2) To Hvalvík and Tjørnuvík:

As Sundini (cf. II b).

3) To Vestmanna and Leynar:

Norðstreym, Vága district, the western side of Suðurstreym, Hest and Koltur.

IV. Vága district:
To both whale bays:
Vága district, the western side of Streymoynni, Hest and Koltur.
V. Sandoyar district:
To both whale bays:
Sandoyar district.
VI. Suðuroyar district:
To all whale bays:
Suðuroyar district.
§ 21. If a school of whales is killed at a place other than the whale bays mentioned above, it is allocated to the whaling district to which it belongs as described in § 20.
§ 22. As soon as allocation and distribution is complete, the Sheriff informs those present of the size of the kill, the number of shares at which it has been assessed and how much there is for the boat; he then issues tickets that state the number of the whale in which the holder has a share.
§ 23. Whales that float up or are fished out after the Sheriff has started the allocation but before distribution is complete are included in the allocation.
Subs. 2. If a whale floats up two hours after the tickets have been issued, half goes to the finder and the other half is sold for the benefit of the whale hunt. If a whale floats up later, all of the whale goes to the finders.
§ 24. Pursuant to § 18, no. 9, the local council or other organisation is responsible for ensuring that tickets for the home share are collected within one hour of the tickets being issued, and that the whales are distributed to people in the council/organisation as quickly as possible.
Subs. 2. The whalers collect their share within one hour of the tickets being issued.
Subs. 3. If the Sheriff is notified and there is good reason, the times mentioned in subsections 1 and 2 may be extended to up to three hours.
Subs. 4. Any whales that are not collected or removed within the prescribed time may be allocated to others.
Subs. 5. Skeletons and intestines of whales must be removed within 24 hours of the tickets being issued.
§ 25. If there are special circumstances, including the school of whales being so big that there is a risk of the whales being spoilt, or that the rules on the watch teams, fishing out and assessment pursuant to §§ 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and l7 and/or the rules on allocation and distribution pursuant to §§ 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24 being observed, the Sheriff may make exceptions to the rule in question. Exceptions to the rules must be made according to the circumstances of the kill in question, and the main principle must be that all whales are used and that nothing is left to spoil.

§ 26. The Sheriff must submit the pilot whaling accounts to the Faroese Government with a brief report on the kill, including where and when it took place, comparing the drive with the records of the Faroese Pilot. Mention must also be made of any breach of the provisions of this executive order. The Sheriff must state whether an instruction was given to let the whales escape or to stop the kill in the district. The Sheriff must also state whether there was any deviation pursuant to § 25 and clearly state the reasons for this.

§ 27. Any breach of the rules in §§ 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 15 in this executive order and the bans issued by the authority in the aforementioned section, will result in a fine, unless more severe punishment is justified according to another law.

§ 28. This Executive Order comes into force the day after it has been issued. At the same time Executive Order no. 55 dated 16 May 1995 ceases to be valid.

Ministry of Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, 8 April 1998

John Petersen (sign.)

Minister

Kaj P Mortensen (sign.)

Executive Order on Whale Bays

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 107 DATED 21 NOVEMBER 1989 ON THE APPROVAL OF WHALE BAYS, MOST RECENTLY CHANGED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 94 DATED 31 MAY 2001.

By authority of Faroese Representative Council Act no. 57 dated 5 May 1984, § 3, on whaling and subsequent changes and with reference to executive order no. 50 dated 12 May 1986 on pilot whaling, § 1, subs. 2, the Government and the Fishing Committee of the Representative Council declare:

§ 1. The following places are approved as whale bays:

Norðoyar:

Klaksvík, only between Víkarnar and Heimaru kei.

Viðvík, the beach.

Hvannasund.

Eysturoy:

Fuglafjørður, the beach between Gjógvará and the marina.

Syðrugøta.

Norðragøta, on the western side below the churchyard.

Norðskála, in Møðstøðukrókinum between Stórá and Garðsenda and below the church.

Streymoy:

Tórshavn, Sandagerð.

Leynar, the beach.

Vestmanna, Fitjarnar, the beach to the west of the pier.

Hvalvík, by Oyrarnar close to Streymneslandinum.

Vágoy:

Miðvágur, the beach.

Bøur, the beach.

Sandoy:
Sandur, the beach.
Húsavík, the beach.
Suðuroy:
Øravík, the beach.
Trongisvágur, the beach.
Hvalba, Lítlabergssandur, í Nesi and Hvalbiarsandur.
Vágur.
Fámjin.
§ 2. This executive order comes into force the day after it has been issued.

Comments:
Change to Executive Order no. 64 dated 11. 05. 1992 and executive order no. 127 dated 27. 08. 1992.
Change to Executive Order no. 94 dated 31 May 2001. § 2 of this Executive Order is as follows: "This Executive Order comes into force the day after it has been issued, and ceases to be valid after 31 December 2001.
Change to Executive Order no. 141 dated 23. 06. 1993.
Change to Executive Order no. 34 dated 24. 03. 1994. § 2 of this Executive Order is as follows: "This Executive Order comes into force the day after it has been issued. Subs. 2. At the same time Executive Order no. 141 dated 23 June 1993 on a change in the Executive Order on the approval of whale bays ceases to be valid."

Landslæknin

Journal bulletin

Case no. 9-30-2/1
HDJ/lpj
26 November 2008

Recommendation on the discontinuation of the use of pilot whale meat for human consumption.

The Faroese people have killed pilot whales for centuries, and the pilot whale has in many ways been an important element of Faroese life, both as food and as a cultural icon.

There have been many accounts of the significance of the pilot whale for those of us who live here on the Faroes. In the years when no pilot whales were killed this was reflected in the household, and there was great joy when this gift from God once more appeared from the sea. There is no doubt that this source of food, which is nourishing in many ways, has contributed towards good health and kept hunger at bay.

As recently as in the 1970s school doctors wrote in prescriptions sent home to parents that they should give their children blubber to eat in the morning.

But in 1977 the first research was conducted into pilot whale meat, blubber, liver and kidneys. This research was conducted to find out whether the mercury content in pilot whales was high, because these whales are high in the marine food chain, and because other research had shown that mercury increased in marine species up through the food chain, in which the toothed whales are at the highest level. The results of this research were alarming. The research revealed that the mercury content in the actual meat was high, and was about 100 times higher in the liver in and kidney than in the meat.

As a consequence of this the health authorities decided to recommend that people only consume pilot whale meat and blubber once a week and should not eat the liver and kidneys at all.

These recommendations have since been tightened as a result of new knowledge about adverse health effects in humans, and the latest recommendation, from 1998, is as follows:

Blubber
A high content of PCBs in the blubber leads us to recommend that adults eat pilot whale meat and blubber as part of their meal no more than once or twice a month.

However, the best way to protect foetuses against the harmful effects of PCBs is for girls and women to refrain from eating any blubber until they have given birth.

Whale meat
The mercury content of pilot whale meat is high and is one of our main sources of mercury. We therefore recommend that adults eat no more than one or two such meals a month.

Women who intend to become pregnant within three months, pregnant women and women who are nursing an infant should abstain from eating pilot whale meat.

Offal
Pilot whale liver and kidneys should not be eaten at all.
It was added that if new information emerged that leads to a change in our current knowledge, consideration would then be given to the extent to which these recommendations should be adjusted.

In the last ten years there have been several scientific studies that have revealed an even gloomier picture of the adverse health effects caused by contaminants in pilot whale meat and blubber.

The results so far have shown that:

5. Mercury from pilot whale meat has an adverse effect on the foetal development of the nervous system
6. The mercury effect still persists during adolescence
7. Mercury from the maternal diet affects the blood pressure of children
8. The contaminants in the blubber have an adverse effect on the immune system such that children respond poorly to immunisation

The latest studies show that

3. Contaminants in pilot whales appear to increase the risk of developing Parkinson's disease in those who often eat pilot whale
4. The risk of hypertension and arteriosclerosis of the carotid arteries is increased in people who have increased exposure to mercury

Studies are currently under way to examine the fertility of the population, as there is some suspicion that reproductive functions may be decreased because of contaminants in pilot whale meat and blubber.

These observations should be considered in a global perspective. The amount of mercury in the world's oceans has increased, and the concentration of mercury in polar bear's hair and skin, for example, is ten times higher than used to be the case. PCBs arrived as a new environmental toxicant in the second half of the 20th century, but following bans around 1980 there has not been much of a decrease in the concentrations in pilot whales. DDE is a new environmental chemical, and DDT is still used in other regions of the world. Furthermore, now compounds such as the organic fluorine compounds used for textile impregnation and other purposes are now found in increased concentrations in the blood in children who eat pilot whale.

The latest analyses show that the concentration of mercury in pilot whale meat remains high, with an average of around 2 micrograms per gram. In the EU, the highest limit of 1 microgram per gram applies only to the most highly contaminated species of fish. This limit is exceeded by most pilot whales. If we rely on the US Environmental Protection Agency's limit

for the total dietary intake at 0. 1 microgram mercury per kilogram body weight (which is based on research conducted in the Faroes), an adult person weighing 70 kg can only consume 3. 5 grams of pilot whale meat per day to reach this value.

Blubber still contains high levels of several persistent organic compounds, such as PCBs and DDE (which is a breakdown product of the insecticide DDT). The average concentrations of both PCBs and DDE are more than 10 micrograms per gram of blubber. Most limit values as far as PCBs are concerned are less than 1 microgram per gram.

It can therefore be concluded that pilot whales today contain contaminants to such a degree that neither meat nor blubber would comply with current limits for acceptable concentrations of toxic contaminants.

The Faroese body burden of pollutants is also high seen in an international perspective. However, the most recent studies have shown that pregnant women are eating much less pilot whale meat and blubber than in the past. This change has resulted in a decrease in the mercury concentration in the blood of pregnant women, although the level of PCBs remains unchanged, probably because PCBs degrade only slowly.

We in the Faroes bear little responsibility with regard to marine pollution, which has been inflicted upon us from outside. That research in the Faroes has contributed to the current focus on contamination is a bitter irony. But these results have already led to tightened restrictions on pollution worldwide. We must therefore also acknowledge the consequences here in the Faroes.

In recent years the growing body of scientific documentation has given rise to anticipation that the time was approaching when it would be appropriate to recommend against any human consumption of pilot whale meat and blubber.

From the latest research results, the undersigned consider that the conclusion from a human health perspective must now be as follows:

It is recommended that pilot whale no longer be used for human consumption.
It is with great regret that this recommendation is issued. The pilot whale has served the Faroese well for many hundreds of years, and it is likely that it has kept many Faroese people alive down the centuries. But the times and the environment are changing, and we therefore believe that this recommendation is necessary from a human health perspective.

We also refer to the attached reference material.

Pál Weihe
Chief Physician

Høgni Debes Joensen
Chief Medical Officer

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Landslæknin, Chief Medical Officer - Sigmundargøta 5, Postsmoga 9, FO-110 Tórshavn, Faroe Islands
Email: foe@sst. dk - Website: www. landslaeknin. fo - Phone +298 311832 - Fax +298 317660

Tórshavn 2007.

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290	Photo Rógvi Mouritsen, Tórshavn. Private photo archive.

End paper front. Photo Louisa Lamhauge, Tórshavn.
End paper back: Photo Rógvi Mouritsen, Tórshavn.

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Jóan Pauli Joensen