

WHALES' BONES OF THE NORDIC COUNTRIES, CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE.

Nicholas Redman. 2013. Teddington: Redman Publishing. xxv + 319 p, illustrated, hardcover. ISBN 978-095458005-4. Available only from the author. Enquiries to nick.redman@hotmail.com. £40.

This is the fourth volume (fifth including a supplement) of a world survey of whalebone arches and related cetacean remains to be completed with two further publications, *France, Southern Europe, Middle East and North Africa* in 2014 and *The Americas, Africa, Asia and Oceania* in 2015.

The latest tome has a new, smaller format, but is enriched by colour illustrations. A wealth of historical information and folk-lore has been gathered by the author with a comprehensive listing of sources for each entry, and quotations from particularly important foreign language documents. Organised as an alphabetical gazetteer, country by country, with location maps, there are some thirty pages of works and sources cited, followed by indexes of categories of remains, museums and institutions, people, and an outline chronology.

In regions where trees are scarce or absent large bones become a substitute for timber. They were used to help roof the Neolithic houses of Skara Brae (Orkney) and they were certainly employed by the Inuit for roofing their summer dwellings down to modern times. The illustrations to Olaus Magnus (1555) account of the northern regions showing jawbones (or ribs) used in the construction of habitations are familiar. There is a long history of whalebone furniture, either a vertebra as a ready-made stool or combined with ribs to make a chair. An amusing modern example is a vertebra used, since the 1930s, at the Akureyri (Iceland) school as a 'naughty seat' where a pupil was placed while being admonished for his wrongdoings. So famous did it become that a bronze replica has now been placed outside as a sculptural feature. Other practical uses for whale bones, still to be seen in the Faroe Islands and Greenland, include rollers for hauling boats across the beach, in and out of the sea. A classic whalebone arch was erected at Sisimiut (Greenland) in 1906–1907 outside the factor's house, now a museum, and is still a prominent landmark. Another arch was erected in 1987 at Ilulissat (Greenland) outside the Knud Rasmussen birthplace museum.

Surviving only in the photographic record, the skulls of the numerous pilot whales killed in the Faroe whale drives

were stacked to make garden walls and small bones were used as a fuel store and stacked like logs. Tables and chairs of whales bones were once to be seen at Copenhagen Zoo and a chair at the Herning Museum (Denmark) constructed from two cervical vertebrae and ribs resembles a comical cartoon character. Jawbone fences were once a feature of the Danish countryside.

The author has estimated that Sweden, along with Italy, has the greatest number of churches with whales' bones. They are usually reckoned to be the bones of giants, or occasionally a dragon, but many of these ecclesiastical examples are from either fossil or subfossil cetaceans. A large vertebra still to be found in Edebo church recovered from a stranded whale over 500 years ago in 1489 has always been described as a whale bone.

Whale bones were sought after as curiosities and are often much travelled. The skull of a sperm whale was sent in 1575 from Denmark as a gift by Prince John of Schleswig to Saxony for the royal *Wunderkammer* in Dresden. Poland has a Baltic coastline but whale remains are to be found many miles from the sea. A cluster of bones suspended by a chain outside the west door of Krakow cathedral was first recorded in the eighteenth century, and remarkably is comprised of a whale jawbone, a rhinoceros skull and a mammoth bone!

The author also gives us details of important cetacean collections in museums and academic institutions including those in the Russian Federation, which is the last resting place of the Ostend whale. Recovered from the North Sea in 1827 it was toured around Europe for some twenty years before reaching Russia in 1843 where it was apparently exhibited across the country before reaching its final home in the Zoological Institute Museum, in St. Petersburg. The coverage of this volume also includes Hungary, Romania, Ukraine and Georgia.

The reviewer's notes give the briefest of glimpses into the rich history of whales' bones which continue to fascinate us. They often impress us with their size but they also have a mythic and totemic quality which remains powerful even in the 21st century.

Nicholas Redman, the *Pevsner of whales' bones*, has provided a rich resource for historians, folklorists and scientists as well as for anyone who has been excited by the sight of a whale either living or dead. The book is available directly from the author: nick.redman@hotmail.com (Arthur G. Credland, 10 The Greenaway, Anlaby Park, Hull HU4 6XH).