

## University of Groningen

### Het topje van de ijsberg

Boschman, Nienke; Hacquebord, Louwrens; Veluwenkamp, Jan Willem

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*

2005

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Boschman, N., Hacquebord, L., & Veluwenkamp, J. W. (editors) (2005). *Het topje van de ijsberg: 35 jaar Arctisch centrum (1970-2005)*. (Volume 2 redactie) Barkhuis Publishing.

**Copyright**

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

**Take-down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

*Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.*

## **Twenty five years of multi-disciplinary research into the 17th century whaling settlements in Spitsbergen**

L. Hacquebord

### INTRODUCTION

It all began about twenty-five years ago with a three weeks' stay on a remote, wet and snowy Arctic island on 79° North. After twelve long days and the solution of many logistic problems, the expedition team finally landed on Amsterdam Island in the north-west corner of the Spitsbergen archipelago. The team members put up their tents and started to work. One year earlier, in 1978, the Arctic Centre at the University of Groningen had started its first research project: the Smeerenburg project. Bas Kist of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam traveled at the request of the board of the Arctic Centre to Spitsbergen to explore the possibilities of an archaeological excavation on Amsterdam Island. After his positive report and the appointment of a project leader the Smeerenburg project was able to start. The goal of this multi-disciplinary project was to study the remains of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch whaling settlement on the island in order to get more insight into the living and working conditions of the Dutch whalers in Spitsbergen. After three weeks of archaeological work the expedition team returned home with an unforgettable experience, much information and many archaeological objects.

In cooperation with institutes from other universities in the Netherlands and Norway altogether three summer expeditions to Spitsbergen were organized in order to carry out archaeological field research. In the winter time, archive and laboratory research was done in the Netherlands. After the logistic difficulties the first expedition had experienced, a pilot-boat was bought from the Dutch National Pilot Service in IJmuiden. The next two expeditions to the west coast of Spitsbergen were undertaken with this boat, the MS Plancius, so that the logistic problems were over and done.

### THE PREPARATIONS

It was Professor H. Christiansson from Sweden who, in 1974 at an Arctic Centre Symposium, suggested possible ways of carrying out an archaeological investigation on Amsterdam Island, for it was here that the famous Dutch whaling settlement of Smeerenburg had been situated in the past (Christiansson,

1974). Consultations were held in 1975 and in the following years with Professor P. Simonsen of the Tromsømuseum in Tromsø (Norway). It was these talks that provided the impetus for a planned approach to the study (Hacquebord, 1984). Funds were made available for exploratory talks by the Norwegian-Dutch Cultural Agreement. Apart from these talks, there were contacts between Amy van Marken and Nellejet Zorgdrager of the Arctic Centre and representatives of the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Environment, the Norwegian Polar Institute and the Norwegian Research Council. Finally, the Tromsø Museum in cooperation with the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment and the Norwegian Polar Institute represented the Norwegian side in this study. Although the set-up made it a Norwegian-Dutch activity, the project was open from the outset to participation by researchers from other countries (Hacquebord, 1981).

#### THE PARTICIPANTS

The Dutch participants in the project were as follows: the Arctic Centre acted as the coordinating body and was responsible for the archaeological, historical and geographical research. The Institute of Pre- and Protohistory at the University of Amsterdam did the archaeo-zoological and archaeo-botanical research and participated in the archaeological research. The Laboratory of Palaeobotany and Palynology at the University of Utrecht handled the palynological and botanical research. The Anatomical Embryological Laboratory and the Historical Institute of the University of Leiden participated in the physical-anthropological and historical research respectively.

The field research was made possible by financial and material assistance from Carl Denig BV in Amsterdam and various other companies. The Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Cultural affairs, Recreation and Social Work helped to finance the expeditions to Spitsbergen. The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research provided financial support to the archive and laboratory research in the Netherlands (Hacquebord, 1984).

#### THE CONTENTS

The fieldwork of the project which had begun in 1978 was completed in 1981. The objects collected over the three years have been preserved and the field data were processed in the following years. In addition, much archive and literature research was done in the second part of the project. Hitherto, studies

into the history of the Spitsbergen whaling trade had been confined to a study of written or printed sources available in archives and libraries. Moreover, until this moment there had been but little archaeological research in the Netherlands into material remains from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Smeerenburg project did not only deal with this material culture but also compared data from excavations and other fieldwork with historical sources so as to obtain the fullest possible picture of the time spent by the 17<sup>th</sup> century whalers in the far north. It is this combination of investigative methods more than anything else that has turned the Smeerenburg project into a unique project. By comparing data obtained from research in several disciplines it was possible to check the reliability of the source material and the interpretation of the archaeological field data as well as to reconstruct the historic events. Naturally, the whaling industry itself as the link between the medieval trade and the modern industrial operations also came in for discussion (Hacquebord, 1984).

Another unique aspect of the project was the fact that the central issue of the project lay in the field of ecology. In Spitsbergen for the first time a project was carried out with an ecological archaeological approach. The interaction of the whalers and their environment was a subject of investigation. What impact did the whalers have on the Arctic ecosystem and in what ways did the whalers adapt to the alien environment in order to stay alive? In this way it was possible to complete the picture of how the whalers lived and worked at a high latitude.

## THE RESULTS

The first stage of the Smeerenburg project was completed in 1984 with the successful defense of the thesis of the project leader L. Hacquebord at the University of Amsterdam. In 1981 and 1983 results of the Smeerenburg project were presented at two international symposia specially organized in Groningen by the Arctic Centre. In 1981 to inform the general public a series of four documentaries entitled *Spitsbergen 79° NB* was broadcast on television by the National Dutch Broadcasting Company (NOS) and a covering book with the same title was published (Hacquebord and De Bok, 1981). In the same year an exhibition with the title *Smeerenburg Holland op z'n koudst* was organized in the Noordelijk Scheepvaart Museum in Groningen (Naayer, 1983).

In the years after 1984 many results of the project were published in more than fifty articles in international scientific journals by the researchers participating in the project.

In 1988 many objects excavated in Smeerenburg were exhibited in a large final exhibition *Walvisvaart in de Gouden Eeuw. Opgravingen op Spitsbergen* in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam which attracted 65,000 visitors in a period of just two months (Hacquebord and Vroom 1988). In this way much new information about the living and working conditions of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch whalers in Spitsbergen and the ecological consequences was communicated to a general public in the Netherlands.

In 1989 a second scientific milestone was achieved when the results of the palynological and palaeobotanical research of W.O. van der Knaap were published in a thesis defended at the University of Utrecht (Van der Knaap, 1989). A third dissertation came into being when J.R. Leinenga finished his historical research about whaling in Davis Strait (Leinenga, 1995). He defended his thesis with success at the University of Groningen in 1995. Finally a dissertation on the textiles of Smeerenburg by S. Comis is in the pipeline and will be ready soon.

#### THE CONTINUATION

Soon after the publication of the Smeerenburg report new initiatives were taken to set up a new expedition. To complete the picture of the whaling settlements Hacquebord went to Labrador to participate in an archaeological excavation by the Memorial University of Newfoundland in Red Bay in 1985 (Tuck, 1981). He spent three weeks on Saddle Island to study the remains of Basque whaling stations there, which dated from the period preceding the Spitsbergen whaling trade.

In 1983 and 1987 several places on Jan Mayen were visited and surveyed. At three places on the island remains of 17<sup>th</sup> century whaling stations were found. The remains in Kvalrossbukta were best preserved. Many yellow bricks, pieces of wooden planks and lower jaws of Greenland right whales were sticking out of the brink on the beach of this bay. A small hill with a wooden cross probably indicated the place where the seven winterers who died on Jan Mayen in 1633–1634 were buried. In the courtyard of the radio station two 17<sup>th</sup> century canons and a grapnel were exposed that once belonged to the Dutch whalers. More whaling remains were found on the Maria Mush Bukta and the Titelt Bukta (Hacquebord, 1998).

In 1986 during a trip on the south coast of Edge Island two whaling stations were discovered: one on Delitsch Island and one on Ziegler Island. The two stations were very well preserved and had hardly been used (Hacquebord,

1988). The finding of these stations has raised the idea of going to other places on Spitsbergen to look for comparison possibilities.

In the meantime continuation of the research took place on the other side of the world in Antarctica. In 1990 on a volcanic island with the encouraging name of Deception Island, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian whaling station in Whalers Bay was studied and mapped in order to get more information about developments in whaling technology and the organization in the station. On this site the impact on the environment of the cooking process was studied as well, so that an ecological approach was also used here to get more information about the impact of whaling on the other animals and the polar environment in general (Hacquebord, 1992).

In 1998, 1999 and 2004 sights were pointed at Spitsbergen again. Expeditions were organized to Laegerneset, Midterhuken and Gåshamna respectively. In this way the geography of Smeerenburg was able to be compared with the structure of 17<sup>th</sup> century English whaling stations in Bellsound and Hornsound, in order to get more insight into the organization of the whaling industry of England and the Netherlands. Again archive and museum research was done to compare the archaeological information with historical information (Hacquebord, Steenhuisen and Waterbolk, 2003).

Beside the organization of the whaling industry, the impact of the whaling trade on the whole ecosystem was studied by collecting bird bones in the culture layer. The 17<sup>th</sup> century avifauna was reconstructed with the help of the determination of the bird bones found in the culture layers and by comparing the outcome with the composition of the modern bird populations on the cliffs in the region (Hacquebord, 1999; Weslawski et al., 2000; Hacquebord, 2001).

Now, after twenty-five years, the whaling research of the Arctic Centre that started with the Smeerenburg project is entering a final stage. One or two small future excavations might produce the missing information about the impact of whaling on the avifauna on Spitsbergen. It might finally be possible to prove that the presence on the west coast of Spitsbergen of so many Little Auks is in fact a consequence of human intervention in the natural environment of this Arctic archipelago.

#### SAMENVATTING

Na een lange voorbereiding startte het Arctisch Centrum in 1979 met de uitvoering van het Smeerenburgproject. In de zomers van 1979, 1980 en 1981 ondernam het Arctisch Centrum samen met onderzoeksinstituten in Nederland

en Noorwegen een drietal expedities naar Spitsbergen om daar op Amsterdam eiland en Ytre Norsk eiland opgravingen te doen. Na drie succesvolle veldcampagnes werd het onderzoek voortgezet met twee jaar archief- en bibliotheekonderzoek. In 1984 werd het project afgesloten met de verdediging van de dissertatie van L. Hacquebord. De jaren erna leverden nog twee proefschriften en veel wetenschappelijke artikelen op. Ook kwamen ten behoeve van het grote publiek enkele tentoonstellingen tot stand, werd een documentaire op TV uitgezonden en werden enkele boeken gepubliceerd.

Het onderzoek van de walvisvangststations werd voortgezet in Labrador, Canada, Jan Mayen en Deceptioneiland in Antarctica. De ontdekking van twee heel goed geconserveerde walvisvangststations ten zuiden van Edge-eiland, in het oosten van Spitsbergen, deed de gedachte ontstaan om op verschillende plaatsen op Spitsbergen kleine opgravingen te doen om meer inzicht te krijgen in de organisatie van de Engelse en Nederlandse walvisvangst. Deze onderzoeken werden in Lægerneset en Midterhukun in de Bellsund en in Gåshamna in de Hornsund gedaan. Naast de organisatie van de walvisvangst was ook de invloed van de walvisvangst op het ecosysteem onderwerp van onderzoek. Inmiddels heeft ook dit onderzoek enkele internationale publicaties opgeleverd.

#### REFERENCES

- Christiansson, H. 1974. Ausgrabungen auf Spitzbergen. In: Kylstra, A.D. (Ed). *Netherlands –Swedish Symposium on Developments in Scandinavian Arctic Culture*. Symposium of the Arctic Centre, Groningen. 59–62.
- Hacquebord, L. en Bok, R. de. 1981. *Spitsbergen 79 N.B. Nederlandse expeditie in het spoor van Willem Barentsz*. Amsterdam.
- Hacquebord, L. 1981. The Smeerenburg project – a study into the 17th century Dutch whaling settlement in Spitsbergen from the ecological angle. *Nuffic Bulletin* 25(3–4):19–31.
- Hacquebord, L. 1984. *Smeerenburg. Het verblijf van Nederlandse walvisvaarders op de westkust van Spitsbergen in de zeventiende eeuw*. Dissertatie Amsterdam/Groningen.
- Hacquebord, L. 1988. 17th Century Whaling Stations in Southeastern Svalbard: An Archaeological Missing Link. *Polar Record* XXIV(149):125–128.
- Hacquebord, L. en Vroom, W. de, red. 1988. *Walvisvaart in de Gouden Eeuw. Opgravingen op Spitsbergen*. Amsterdam.
- Hacquebord, L. 1992. Hektorstation on Deception Island (South Shetland Islands Antarctica), an environmental assessment study of a whalingstation. In:

- Bennekom, S. van, Gremmen, N.J.M., Hacquebord, L., Schorno, R.M.L. and Stel, J.H., eds. *Antarctica; Research and nature conservation, future prospects*. *Circumpolar Journal* 7(1/2):72–97.
- Hacquebord, L. 1998. Jan Mayen. Volcanic Island in the North Atlantic Ocean. *Circumpolar Journal* 13(2). Groningen.
- Hacquebord, L. 1999. The hunting of the Greenland right whale in Svalbard, its interaction with climate and its impact on the marine ecosystem. *Polar Research* 18(2):375–382.
- Hacquebord, L. 2001. Three Centuries of Whaling and Walrus Hunting in Svalbard and its Impact on the Arctic Ecosystem. *Environment and History* 7:169–185.
- Hacquebord, L., Steenhuisen, F. and Waterbolk, H. 2003. English and Dutch Whaling Trade and Whaling Stations in Spitsbergen (Svalbard) before 1660. *International Journal of Maritime History*, XV(2):117–134.
- Knaap, W.O. van der, 1989. *Palytological and palaeobotanical investigations of peat deposits and soils from Spitsbergen and Jan Mayen*. Dissertatie Utrecht.
- Leinenga, J.R. 1995. *Arctische walvisvangst in de achttiende eeuw. De betekenis van straat Davis als vangstgebied*. Dissertatie Groningen.
- Naayer, E. 1983. *Smeerenburg: Holland op z'n koudst*. Groningen.
- Tuck, J.A. 1981. Basque Whalers in Southern Labrador, Canada. In: Holk, A.G.F. van, 's Jacob, H.K. and Temmingh, A.A.H.J., eds. *Early European Exploitation of the Northern Atlantic 800–1700*. Groningen. 69–77.
- Weslawski, J.M., Hacquebord, L., Stempniewicz, L. and Malinga, M.. 2000. Greenland whales and walruses in the Svalbard food web before and after exploitation. *Oceanologia* 42(1):37–56.



Mutsen van walvisvaarders. Foto: Fotodienst Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.