

# Bequia Whaling Revisited

—To the Memory of the Late Mr. Athneal Ollivierre—

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## Abstract

In July 2000, Athneal Ollivierre, a great harpooner in Bequia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, passed away at the age of 79. He had led the whaling in the island for over forty years. When the century turned from the 20th to 21st, the generations involved in the whaling in Bequia also changed.

To the memory of the late Mr. Athneal Ollivierre, some aspects on the whaling in Bequia are recollected and reconsidered in this paper. Firstly, the history of whaling in the island through the Ollivierres is summarized and the catch record of humpback whales is shown. Secondly, the present situation of whaling is described and a particular attention is paid to the work and role of the whalers. Then a “share system” of the whale meat and blubber is analyzed. Thirdly, the relations between the whaling in Bequia and the International Whaling Commission are discussed. Finally, at the age of the Internet, the importance of reporting on the accurate information about whaling is emphasized.

## 要 約

2000年7月、セント・ヴィンセントおよびグレナディーン諸島国ベクウェイ島の捕鯨を40年以上に渡って率いてきた偉大なる銛手アスニール・オリヴィエールさんが逝去された。20世紀から21世紀への時代の移り目にベクウェイ島の捕鯨においても世代交替となった。

本稿においては、故アスニール・オリヴィエールさんに哀悼の意を込めて、ベクウェイ島の捕鯨のいくつかの側面が回顧、再考される。まず、オリヴィエール一族の歴史を通してベクウェイ島の捕鯨史が要約され、ザトウクジラの捕獲数記録が提示される。次に、捕鯨の現況が描写され、特に鯨捕りの仕事と役割に注意が払われる。また、鯨肉と脂皮の慣習的な分配法である「シェア・システム」が分析される。さらに、ベクウェイ

イ島の捕鯨と国際捕鯨委員会との関係が論じられる。最後に、インターネットの時代を迎えて、捕鯨に関する正確な情報を伝達することの重要性が強調される。

## 1. Introduction

In July 2000, Athneal Ollivierre, a great harpooner who had led the whaling in Bequia for more than forty years, passed away at the age of 79. It was a pity that he died just before the 21st century began (Figure 1).

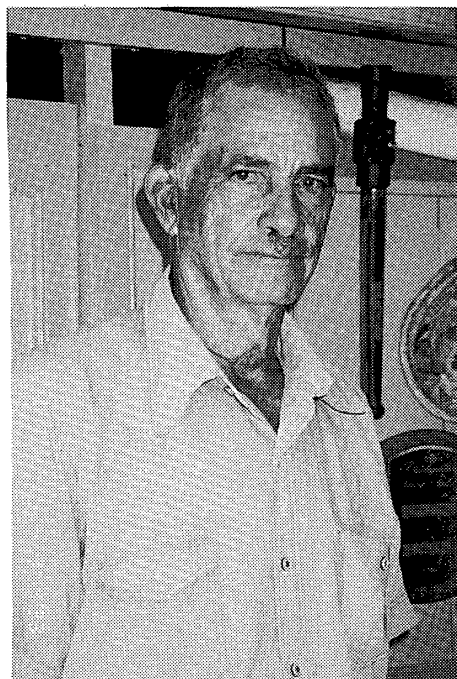
Bequia, a small island in the Caribbean Sea, lies on the latitude 13 degrees north and the longitude 61 degrees 15 minutes west (Figure 2). It has a total area of 18.1 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 4,874 (1991), and is a part of the independent nation, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

A number of Bequia islanders learned the skill of whaling from American whaling ships and some of them started whaling circa 1875. At the time of foundation, whaling was carried out using hand

harpoons and hand lances in the whaleboat that was powered by sail and oars, and almost the same means are still used nowadays in the year 2000.

I have conducted a total of six field researches in Bequia between 1991 and 2000<sup>1)</sup> and made an effort to understand the whaling culture in the island. I received a great deal of support from the late Mr. Athneal Ollivierre. When the century turned from the 20th to the 21st, the generations involved in the whaling in Bequia also changed.

The aim of this paper is to recollect and reconsider the whaling and surrounding conditions in Bequia mainly during the ten-year period between 1991 and 2000. The best consolation for his soul would be to write this paper.

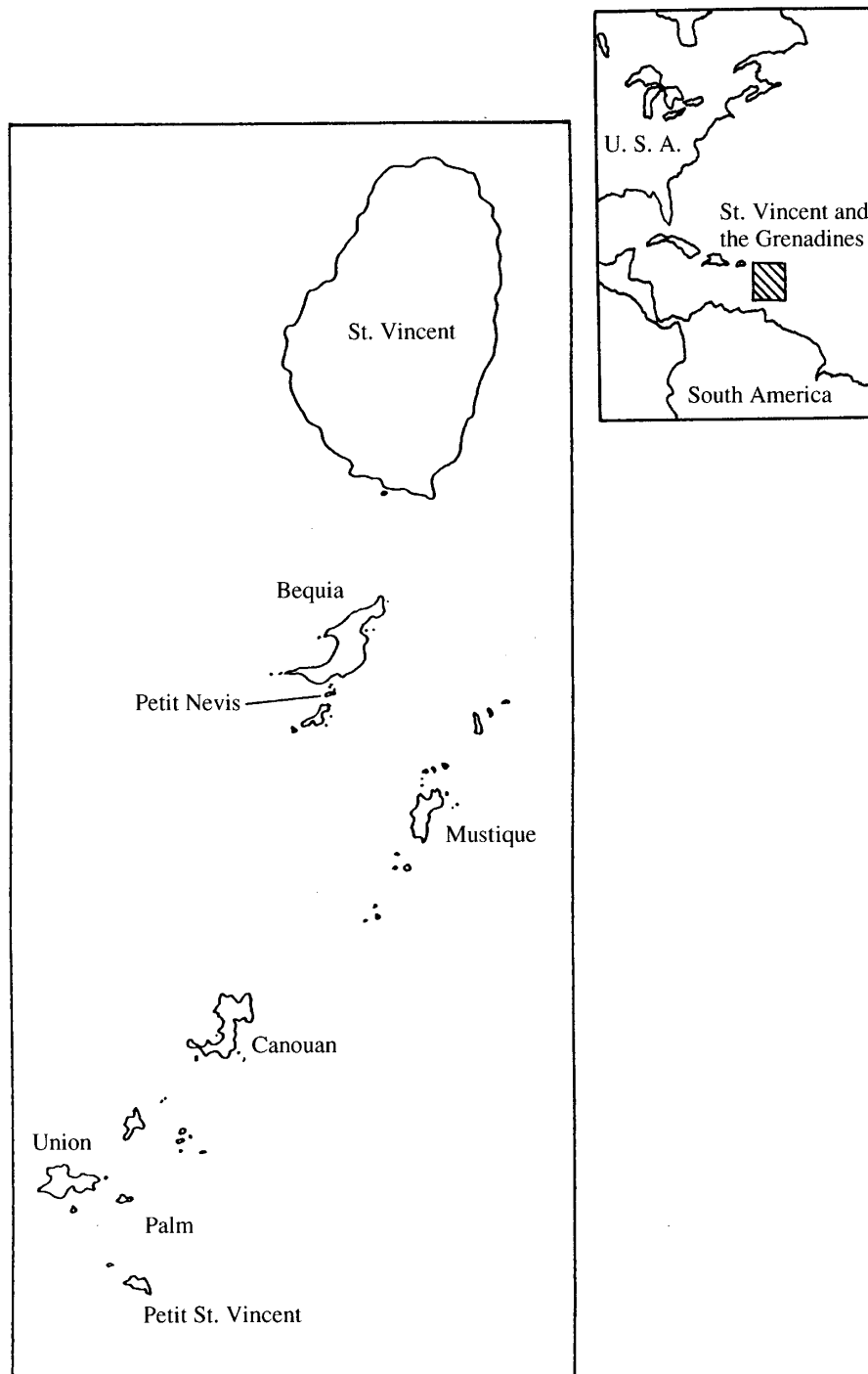


**Figure 1** Athneal Ollivierre in 1993.

## 2. The History of Whaling

### 2. 1. The Ollivierres, a Whaling Family

In the 1860s, William Thomas Wallace, Jr., the son of a wealthy man in Bequia, joined



**Figure 2** Maps of Bequia and Surrounding Areas.

the crew of an American whaling ship. Later, he bought two secondhand whaling boats, constructed the first whaling station at the western side of Friendship Bay on the island and started whaling circa 1875 (Adams 1971: 60, Ward 1995: 3-4).

Following Wallace in the 1880s, Joseph Ollivierre, who was also a rich man from the island, built a shore station at Petit Nevis, an uninhabited island located a little way to the

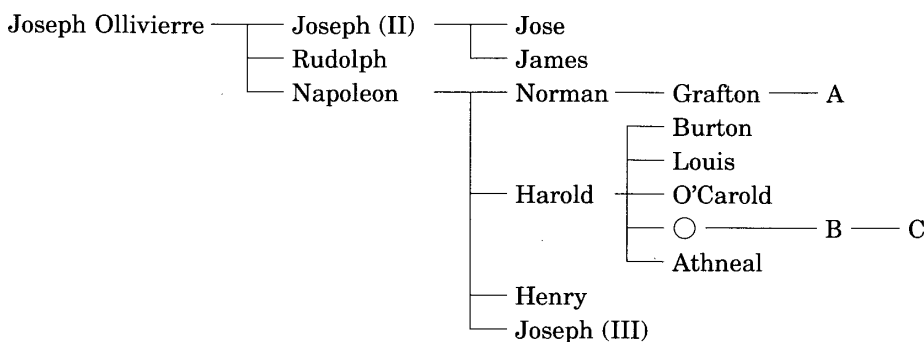
south east of Bequia (Adams 1971: 61, Ward 1995: 5).

The whaling enterprises in Bequia begun by these two were kept and passed down in their families, and is still (in 2000) continued by the Ollivierres. The history of whaling in the island through the Ollivierres is summarized below (Figure 3).

In the 1880s, the whaling enterprise was passed from the founder Joseph Ollivierre to his oldest son Joseph(II) and then from Joseph(II) to his younger brother Rudolph (Joseph's second son) and his fourth son James. Almost at the same time, Joseph's sixth son Napoleon and Joseph(II)'s second son Jose built a shore station at Semple Cay, a small reef located between the islands of Bequia and Petit Nevis, in order to start a third whale fishery. Eventually, Jose left Bequia to join the whale fishery at Île de Caille near Grenada. The whale fishery at Semple Cay was later passed down from Napoleon to Napoleon's third son Henry and his seventh son Joseph(III) (Ward 1995: 5-6, 8, 43).

Henry and Joseph(III) are legendary harpooners of whom stories have been passed down from generation to generation among the whalers in Bequia. Athneal Ollivierre, a modern harpooner who is mentioned later, praised Henry and referred to him as the "best harpooner" and to Joseph(III) as a "good harpooner". The harpooner A, who is also mentioned later, praises Henry highly and calls him the "best harpooner ever". Among all the harpooners he knows, he ranks "Henry as the top, Athneal as second and Joseph(III) as third" according to their harpooning abilities.

Until quite recently, Athneal Ollivierre was introduced in various magazines and articles under his real name as the "last harpooner". In Bequia, picture cards with his photos are sold and there is an "Athneal Beach" named after him. Athneal Ollivierre was born to Harold (Napoleon's second son) as the fifth son in 1921 and began to work on a whaling boat from around the end of the 1950s. At that time, Athneal's uncles Henry and Joseph (III) owned the whale fishery and his father Harold was mainly in charge of selling whale



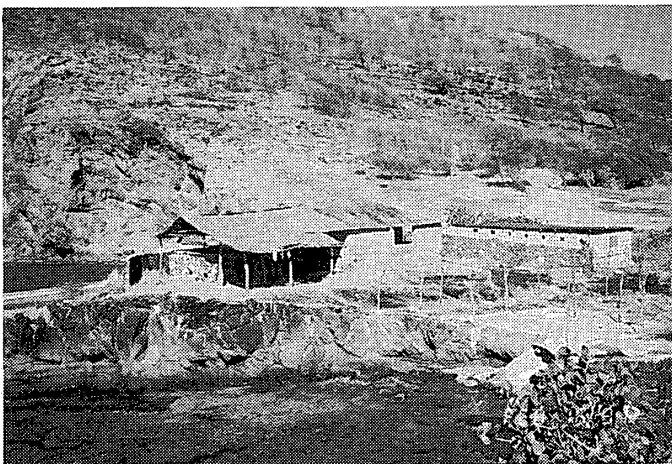
**Figure 3** Genealogy of the Ollivierres.

meat. Athneal learned whaling not from his uncles, who actively worked as harpooners, but from another uncle Norman (Napoleon's oldest son), who was engaged in whaling as an ordinary crewman.

In 1958, two whaling boats, *Dart* and *Trio*, were built and Athneal worked as the captain and then harpooner in *Trio*. When he was captain in *Trio*, the harpooner was the grandson of William Thomas Wallace, Jr. In 1961, Athneal caught his first whale as the harpooner in *Trio* (Ward 1995: 43-44).

In 1961, when the whaling season ended, Athneal and his three elder brothers Burton, Louis and O'Carold (Harold's second, third and fourth sons), invested their own money in the whale fishery and began to work together. In the same year, a new shore station was built at Petit Nevis (Figure 4), therefore the processing site of whales returned from Semple Cay to the land where the first shore station of the Ollivierres was built (Ward 1995: 44).

Eventually, Athneal and his three elder brothers succeeded to the whale fishery. Although Burton and Louis worked as crewmen, O'Carold only invested money in the business and was not directly engaged in whaling. In 1983, a new whaling boat *Why Ask* was built to replace *Trio* and Athneal worked as the harpooner again (Figure 5). At the end of the 1989 whaling season, *Dart* was sold. As a result, *Why Ask* became the only whaling



**Figure 4** The Shore Station at Petit Nevis.



**Figure 5** The Whaling Boat, *Why Ask*.

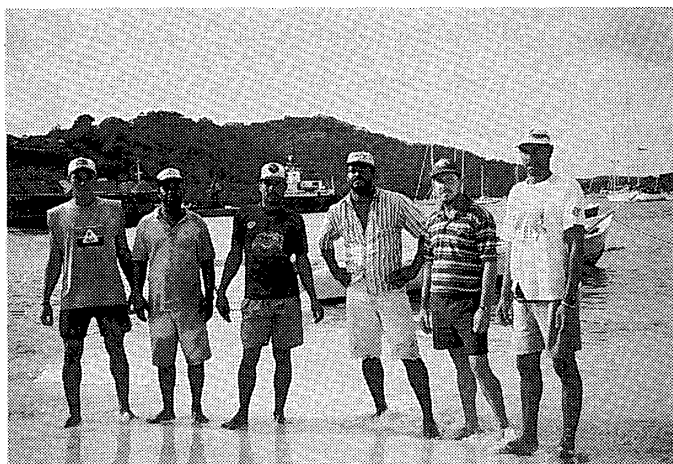
boat in the 1990 whaling season.

From the middle of the 1980s, A (the grandson of Norman who had taught Athneal whaling) began participating the whaling as a supplementary crewman, thereby filling a vacancy in the whaling boat and became a formal crew member of *Why Ask* in 1991. A's father Grafton (Norman's fourth son) also worked as an ordinary crewman and had more than thirty years' experience. A was living with his father Grafton and learned whaling from his father at home and from Athneal in the boat.

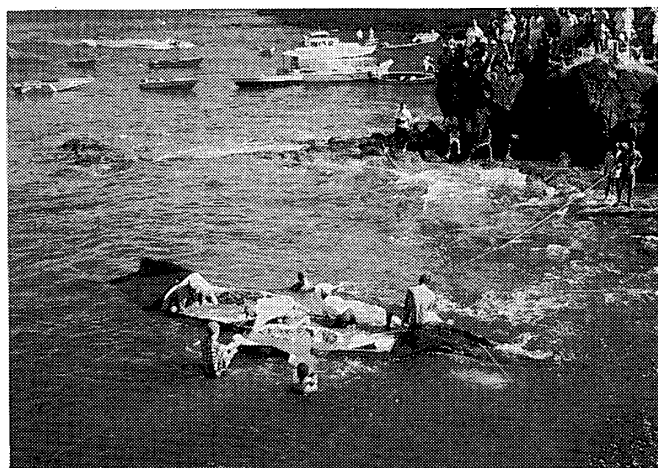
A was trained as a crew member of *Why Ask* for five years. At the beginning of the 1996 whaling season, he constructed his first whaling boat *Rescue* with his father Grafton's cooperation and worked in it as the harpooner from the same year (Figure 6).

*Rescue* led by the harpooner A and *Why Ask* succeeded in catching two humpback whales on February 26, 1998 (Figure 7). This rescued the endangered culture of whaling in Bequia, for no catches had been done for four years between 1994 and 1997. On this day, Athneal was not able to go whaling due to illness and his fill-in worked as a harpooner. In the 1999 whaling season, Athneal in *Why Ask* and A in *Rescue* each caught a whale on March 6.

In the 2000 whaling season, Athneal, due to illness, passed on the position of harpooner for *Why Ask* to C, who began to work in the previous year. Athneal still worked as a backup for C. C is the son of Athneal's nephew B (the son of Athneal's elder sister), who had worked as a lookout for many years. Coincidentally, A and C each caught a humpback whale on March 6, the same day that A and Athneal each caught a humpback whale in the



**Figure 6** The Crew Members of the Whaling Boat *Rescue*, 1997.



**Figure 7** A Humpback Whale in the middle of Processing, February 27, 1998.

previous year.

On July 4, 2000, Athneal Ollivierre died from prostate cancer, believing the culture of whaling in Bequia had been passed on to the fifth and sixth generations after the founder. He was 79 years of age.

## 2. 2. Numbers of Humpback Whales Landed

How many humpback whales have been landed since whaling began in Bequia? No precise statistical data remain; therefore it is extremely difficult to decide on the figures. But it is possible to outline them.

For example, Price tried to estimate the number of catches based on the amounts of whale oil exported. A total of 278,369 gallons of whale oil was exported from St. Vincent during the 41 years between 1898 and 1938 (Price 1985: 418). According to Price, approximately 1,000 gallons of whale oil could be rendered from one adult humpback whale (Price 1985: 418). Based on simple calculations, 279 humpback whales should have been landed during that period<sup>2)</sup>, making the average number of catches 6.8 whales a year.

On the other hand, Adams estimated that about 500,000 gallons of whale oil was exported from St. Vincent during the 36 years between 1890 and 1925 (Adams 1975: 309). If we use the same calculation method, the total number of whales landed during that period would be 500 and the average annual catch would be 13.9. Since most of this period marked the peak of the whaling in Bequia, the average annual catch is naturally higher than that based on Price's estimation, which included the period when the whaling declined.

Price also reported, based on his research, that 44 whales were landed during the 35 years between 1950 and 1984 (Price 1985: 419), which means the average annual catch was one or two.

According to my research, the catch during the 10 years between 1991 and 2000 was 9 (Table 1), which is an average of less than one a year. In the first half of the 1990s, crewmen became older and the number of whaling boats decreased. There was only one boat between 1990 and 1995. It was the most depressed period of whaling in years. For these reasons, the average annual catch is extremely small.

**Table 1** Catch Record of Humpback Whales in Bequia, 1991–2000.

1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
0	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	2	2

However, a new whaling boat was launched in 1996 and the crew members of the new boat, including the harpooner, were much younger. As mentioned before, in the 1998 whaling season the new and old boats succeeded in catching two whales. Without a doubt, this first success in five years renewed the motivation of whalers and activated whaling. After that, two whales each were caught in the 1999 and 2000 whaling seasons.

### 3. The Present Situation of Whaling

The whaling season begins early February when humpback whales go southward to their breeding grounds between the islands of Bequia and Mustique (Figure 2). On one Sunday at the beginning of February, an Anglican priest blesses the whaling boats, prays for the safety of the crew members and the success of whaling, and then the boats sail out. The whaling season lasts until early May when the humpback whales go northward through the same waters.

However, whaling is finished when the catch quota of two is fulfilled. Since two whales were caught at the end of February in the 1998 whaling season, the whaling ended after only two weeks. In the 1999 and 2000 whaling seasons, the whaling also ended after three weeks.

#### 3. 1. The Whaling Boats and Implements

At present, the whaling boats used in Bequia are *Why Ask* and *Rescue*. Both are said to be 27 feet (8.2 m) long and 7 feet (2.1 m) wide. However, looking at them on the beach, *Rescue* looks slightly larger on the whole. The actual measurements for *Rescue* are 8.25 m long, 2.17 m wide and 1.04 m deep. According to the owner, it cost about EC\$30,000 (US \$11,236)<sup>3)</sup> to build *Rescue*.

The Nantucket-type whaling boat is the prototype for the Bequia whaling boats and is 28–30 feet (8.5–9.1 m) long. When Wallace started whaling, the first boat built in Bequia was only 25–26 feet (7.6–7.9 m) long (Adams 1971: 63). The current boats are slightly larger than that boat.

Athneal Ollivierre had been engaged in whaling for more than forty years since the end of the 1950s and was the owner and harpooner of *Why Ask*. According to him, several times in the last few decades, he had been dragged under the water with his boat by the struck whale or his boat had been lifted up and flipped over by the whale's back. Based on such experiences, whaling boats had been improved and were built slightly larger and



stronger than the first boat.

*Why Ask* is equipped with four harpoons (3 m), three lances (3.8 m) and two shoulder guns (94 cm) (Figure 8). *Rescue* is equipped with four harpoons, three lances and one darting gun (2.47 m) (Figure 9). Both boats are also equipped with a mainsail, a jib, five oars, one steering oar, four paddles and a rudder.

The basic technique to catch a whale is to weaken it by hurling hand harpoons into its body, and then to kill it by stabbing it with hand lances. Sometimes, a shoulder gun or a darting gun is used to shoot a bomb lance (Figure 10). Since a bomb lance costs EC\$400 (US\$150), which is expensive, whalers decide carefully whether or not they should use it by taking into account the loss they would incur if they should miss the whale.

The darting gun was originally developed to catch bowhead whales in the Arctic. On the iron shank of the harpoon, a bomb lance discharging pipe is attached. When the iron shank penetrates the whale, a slender trigger rod is pressed against the whale's flank, shooting a bomb lance into the whale (Adams 1971: 66).

The implements just mentioned are not the relics of a past life at all. Even today, Bequia whalers use those implements with pride.

### 3. 2. The Work and Role of Whalers

The daily work of whalers is as follows. Whalers get together on the beach at Friend-

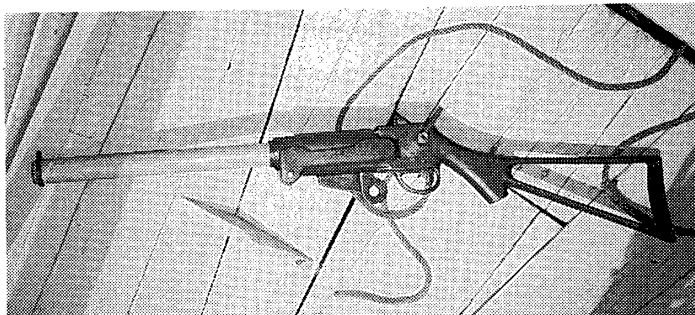


Figure 8 A Shoulder Gun.

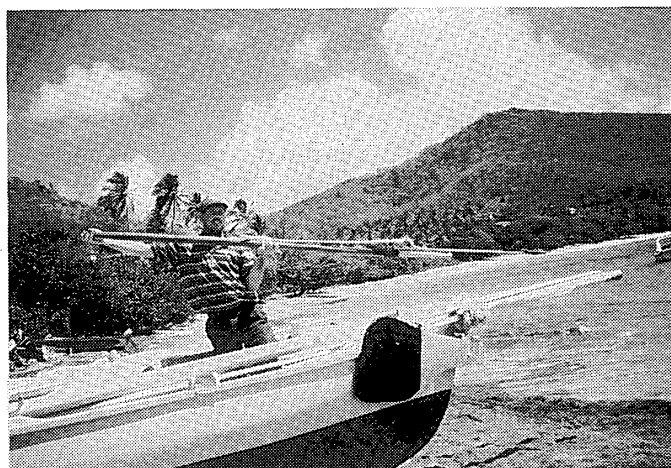


Figure 9 A Darting Gun.

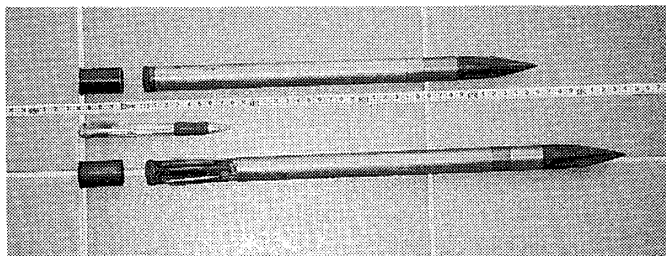


Figure 10 Bomb Lances for the Darting Gun (above, 36 cm) and for the Shoulder Gun (below, 44 cm).

ship Bay in Bequia around 6:00 a.m. every day except Sundays, public holidays and the days when the weather is unsuitable during the whaling season from early February to early May. They meet to decide whether they should go whaling depending on the weather and sea conditions.

When they go out, the whalers head for Mustique, situated about 13 km southeast from the bay at around 6:30 a.m. At around 8:00 a.m., they arrive at the island. After mooring the boats on the beach, the crewmen climb up a hill and wait there. While waiting, they take turns to watch for whales through binoculars, and they also cook up soup with fish they caught on the way over to have for breakfast along with bread they brought with them.

On the other hand, a lookout and his helpers stay up on a hill in Bequia to watch for whales through binoculars. If they find a whale, they inform the crewmen of the whale using a marine transceiver and the whaling boats start to track the whale. If they successfully catch a whale, they tow the whale to the shore station at Petit Nevis, using a boat with an engine and process it there. Such daily work continues through the three-month whaling season.

Six men work in a whaling boat. From the bow to the stern, they are: 1) harpooner, 2) bow oarsman, 3) midship man, 4) tub oarsman, 5) leading oarsman and 6) captain.

When rowing, the crew members 1), 3) and 5) sit to port and the crew members 2) and 4) sit to starboard. The crew member 6) handles a steering oar at the stern. Accordingly, there are three oars on the starboard side and two on the port side. When sailing, the crew members 1) to 5) sit (or stand) on one side and the crew member 6) steers at the stern, according to the direction in which the boat is heading.

The harpooner has an absolute authority over the whaling. When the whaling boat gets near the whale about 10 feet (3 m) behind, the harpooner hurls the first harpoon into it. And then he hurls the second and third harpoons and so on. After a Nantucket sleigh-ride on the sea, the harpooner shoots a bomb lance to the weakened whale, if necessary. Finally, he jumps onto the back of the whale and gives a finishing stab into it.

The bow oarsman has the role of accurately telling the captain of what the harpooner has said. Just after the harpooner has hurled the first harpoon into the whale, the bow oarsman lowers a sprit. Then he ties ropes on the second and third harpoons and hands over harpoons, lances and a shoulder gun to the harpooner. Keeping the ropes untangled when the harpooner hurls a harpoon is also an important role of the bow oarsman. After the whale has been caught, the bow oarsman dives into the sea and sews up the whale's

mouth so that it does not swallow seawater and sink.

The midship man operates the jib according to the wind direction while sailing. He also furls the jib tightly to let it fall down just after the harpooner has hurled the first harpoon into the whale. After the whale has been caught, the midship man also dives into the sea with the bow oarsman and sews up the whale's mouth.

The tub oarsman removes the cover of the tub containing a rope to let the rope drawn out just after the harpooner has hurled the first harpoon into the whale. He also puts seawater on the rope wound around the loggerhead in order to reduce the frictional heat generated when the whale hauls the whaling boat.

The leading oarsman removes the mainsheet from the mainsail, tightly furls the mainsail to let it fall down just after the harpooner has hurled the first harpoon into the whale. He also takes out the ropes, shoulder gun, bomb lances and so forth from the stern and hands them to the bow oarsman according to his requests. Moreover, the leading oarsman carefully moves the ballast according to the captain's instructions and bails out water from the boat when necessary.

The captain steers the boat at the stern, adjusts the mainsail and takes all responsibility for the sailing of the boat. Just after the harpooner has hurled the first harpoon into the whale, the captain quickly winds the rope around the loggerhead. He also keeps a certain distance between the whale and the boat so that it is easier for the harpooner to hurl the second harpoon and the other subsequent harpoons. In the past, the captain changed places with the harpooner after the harpooner had hurled harpoons and the captain killed the whale with a hand lance or a bomb lance. Nowadays, however, the harpooner kills the whale.

The harpooner and captain need to have a high level of skill in harpooning and steering the boat. However, it seems that the crewmen, such as 2), 3), 4) and 5), can also do enough work with only on-the-job training if they are capable fishermen. Generally, an apprentice crewman goes on board a whaling boat as a leading oarsman and is promoted step by step, from tub oarsman to midship man and then to bow oarsman. A bow oarsman is equivalent to an apprentice harpooner and he learns harpooning skills behind the harpooner.

A, the harpooner in *Rescue*, as mentioned earlier, joined the crew of Athneal Ollivierre's whaling boat *Why Ask* as a tub oarsman in 1991. He worked as a bow oarsman from 1992 to 1995 and then became an independent harpooner after building his own whaling boat *Rescue* in 1996. D (born in 1936), the captain in *Rescue*, was an expert who used

to work as captain in *Dart* and his steering technique was trusted completely.

On the other hand, *E*, the bow oarsman in *Rescue*, worked as a tub oarsman in *Why Ask* from 1992 to 1995, became tub oarsman in *Rescue* in 1996 and was promoted to bow oarsman in 1998. *F*, the midship man in *Rescue*, also worked in a whaling boat for the first time as a leading oarsman in *Rescue* in 1996. He was promoted to midship man in 1998. *E* and *F* were born in 1970 and 1974, respectively, and they are the youngest generation among the crew.

With a harpooner in his 40s whose skill was still improving, an experienced captain in his 60s and physically strong crew members in their 20s, *Rescue* had the ideal crew for whaling and succeeded admirably in catching a humpback whale in the spring of 1998.

### 3. 3. The Distribution of Whale Products

In the Bequia whale fishery, a "share system" has been used instead of wages being paid. A whale caught is processed at the shore station in Petit Nevis, and then the whale meat and blubber are placed separately and distributed to all the persons concerned with the whaling. A distribution in 1998 is described below.

Whale meat was divided into 18 shares. The boat owners (2 persons) received two shares each. All the crew members (12 persons), the lookout and the owner of the shore station received one share each.

On the other hand, the blubber was divided into three shares. The boat owners (2 persons) received one share between them, the harpooners (2 persons) and captains (2 persons), who were called officers, received one share among them, and the other crew members (8 persons), the lookout and the owner of the shore station received one share among them.

While the harpooner and captain received the same share of whale meat as the other crew members, they received more share of blubber than the other crew members. This reflects the fact that whale oil used to be rendered from blubber and exported, and the sale of whale oil accounted for the major part of the whaling industry.

Each man's share, except for the portion given to his own family and gifts to relatives and friends, was sold to Bequians on the spot. The selling price of both whale meat and blubber was EC\$4 (US\$1.5) per pound in 1998. The unsold whale meat was corned, sun-dried and shipped to the market in Kingstown, St. Vincent at the price of EC\$5 (US\$1.9) per pound. These selling prices had not changed since 1993.

The distribution of whale products by the share system and their redistribution by the

gifts and cash sales play a significant role in maintaining the whaling culture and allows it to be passed down in Bequia. The people in Bequia realize again that they are residents of a whaling island by eating the whale meat at least once every few years.

At the end of February 1998, the inhabitants in the island of St. Vincent heard that humpback whales had been caught in Bequia. They visited the island to get raw whale meat but most could not get any. Even though whale meat was sold for cash, this did not mean that anybody could buy it.

If people do not have some connection with Bequians or share the whaling culture with them to some extent, they can not get raw whale meat. Although a cash income is important for whalers, it is not everything. Only when whalers sell whale products to the people who really need it, can they feel a sense of spiritual fulfillment.

Let us return to the share system. According to Adams, who conducted field research in Bequia in 1966, the share system then was as follows.

In the case of the blubber, one-third share was given to the owner of the whale fishery, another one-third share was allocated to the officers, namely the harpooners and captains, and the remaining one-third share was divided equally among all the other crew members (Adams 1971: 69-70). As for the whale meat, one-quarter share was given to the owner of the whale fishery and the remaining three-quarters share was divided equally among all the crew members (Adams 1971: 70).

A few remarks should be made concerning the differences between my research findings and those of Adams. They are similar in that all the blubber is divided into three shares. But the recipients of the shared blubber are somewhat different. In the past, the whale fishery owned a shore station and several whaling boats, and paid all the costs of maintaining the whaling activities. However, some aspects have changed.

These days, two boat owners pay the expenses of construction and repair of the whaling boats and almost all the expenses for whaling implements, such as harpoons and lances. Only the cost of the cartridges for the bomb lance is paid by all the crew members.

On the other hand, the shore station has not been renovated since it was built in 1961 and incurs few costs for maintenance. Therefore, the whaling enterprise is virtually operated by the boat owners and it is considered that the share for the whale fishery should be given to the boat owners. In compensation, the owner of the shore station receives part of one-third share as a fee for the use of the shore station.

There is no sufficient material to make a further examination of one-quarter share of whale meat for the owner of the whale fishery and three-quarters share for all the crew

members. Currently, the boat owners receive four–eighteenths, therefore their share (approximately 22%) is almost the same as the share for the whale fishery in the past (25%).

The social conditions surrounding whaling have changed remarkably for over thirty years and it is impossible to export whale oil now. Consequently, the economic importance of blubber and whale meat has reversed and whale meat has gained more value. However, the share system itself has not changed much from the initial conditions where more importance was placed on blubber.

#### 4. International Relations over Whaling

At the 34th annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission held in 1982, a “moratorium on commercial whaling” was adopted due to the political maneuvers by anti-whaling countries and anti-whaling environmental protection organizations. As a result, contracting governments of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling are currently given no catch quota for restricted whale species, except in the case of “aboriginal subsistence whaling”.

Aboriginal subsistence whaling means “whaling for purposes of local aboriginal consumption carried out by or on behalf of aboriginal, indigenous or native peoples who share strong community, familial, social and cultural ties related to a continuing traditional dependence on whaling and on the use of whales” (Freeman *et al.* 1988: 79). In this case, the importance of the regional consumption of whale meat by aboriginal, indigenous or native peoples is recognized.

The taking of humpback whales in Bequia was approved as a form of aboriginal subsistence whaling at the 39th annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission held in 1987, and a quota of three humpback whales per year was permitted for the 1987/88 to 1989/90 whaling seasons. This catch quota was reduced to two per year from the 1993/94 season and has been renewed at the same level every three years since then.

In May 1999, the 51st annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission was held in Grenada (Figure 11), a neighboring country of St. Vincent and the Grenadines<sup>4)</sup>. The year 1999 was the final year of the three–year catch quota period. The government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines requested a renewal of its quota of two humpback whales per year. However, anti-whaling governments, such as Australia, New Zealand, the U. K. and the U. S., regarded the take in 1998 as an infraction and the meeting became complicated over the issue.

Two humpback whales were caught at the same time in 1998. Anti-whaling governments regarded these two whales as “a cow and calf” and criticized St. Vincent and the Grenadines for acting in violation of the Paragraph 14 of the Schedule of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling. This paragraph says, “it is forbidden to take or kill suckling calves or female whales accompanied by calves” (IWC 2000: 14).



**Figure 11** The 51st Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission held in Grenada, May 1999. (Photo: Japan Whaling Association).

On the other hand, the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines emphasized that it “did not believe that the takes constituted an infraction” (IWC 2000: 14) and “since it had been reported that the smaller animal had no milk in its stomach it was not suckling” (IWC 2000: 15).

Japan and Norway interpreted the paragraph as follows. “Paragraph 14 is part of the provisions established for commercial baleen whale catches and does not apply to the aboriginal subsistence whaling by St. Vincent and the Grenadines” (IWC 2000: 14). However, the interpretation done by Australia, New Zealand, the U. K. and the U. S. was “Paragraph 14 applied to all whaling operations for baleen whales, including aboriginal subsistence whaling” (IWC 2000: 15).

The government of Japan argued against Australia, New Zealand, the U. K. and the U. S. from the viewpoints of resources and culture. Its assertion was as follows. “The proposed catch of two was from a population now estimated at more than 10,000 animals” (IWC 2000: 15) and “this non-issue [i.e. eating of a whale calf] had taken too long, since people commonly eat small chicken, lamb and veal” (IWC 2000: 15). However, the anti-whaling governments, which deified whales, did not accept this argument.

In the end, after the dispute, the request of St. Vincent and the Grenadines was approved unanimously, but severe conditions were imposed on its whaling.

Two days of argument over a modest request for two whales was nothing but the bullying of a small whaling country by anti-whaling countries. Although the Bequia whaling will survive for at least three years, it will be under much harder attack after that. Its request is for only two whales but still it is a significant issue.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

In 1994, an anti-whaling environmental protection organization proposed a "tourism boycott" against four Caribbean states (Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent) that supported Japan's whaling policies (Wilson 1996: 84). This agitation might have been effective but it seems it was not too effective. As of 2000, there are six Caribbean states in the International Whaling Commission that support Japan's whaling policies. Compared with six years ago, the number has increased by two (Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis). Each Caribbean state depends on tourism to a greater or lesser degree. If the tourism boycott had significantly damaged these countries, the number of countries supporting Japan's whaling policies would not have increased.

As mentioned earlier, the whaling skills have been passed down from the fourth generation after the founder to the fifth and sixth generations in Bequia. Accordingly, the whaling culture has survived the crisis of extinction in the island.

However, the information age has arrived along with the spread of the Internet, and this has raised a new issue for the whaling in Bequia.

In the 1999 whaling season, a whaling scene from Bequia was broadcast on the Internet<sup>5)</sup>. Fragmentary images separated from the social and cultural conditions of the region caused misunderstandings of culture. Of course, the one who broadcast the images was aiming for that effect, and in fact, letters of protest were delivered to the monthly newspaper published in Bequia<sup>6)</sup>.

Fortunately, the influence was temporary. However, quicker reactions will be needed in the future. While whalers in Bequia are as yet unaware, incorrect information is being distributed and they are not being given an opportunity to respond to it. As a person who knows the region, I have an obligation to report on the true situation.

For the people in Bequia, whaling is a way of life that makes it worth living.

### Notes

- 1) Field research was carried out in February 1991, March 1993, May 1994, March 1997, March 1998 and August 2000, including a total of two months.
- 2) In this paper, the number of whales that were struck but lost is excluded. The reason is that only the landed whales are valuable for the Bequia whalers. The number of whales killed increases to 509 from 279 if we take the lost whales into consideration (see Price 1985: 418).
- 3) 1 US\$ was equivalent to 2.67 EC\$ during the research period.



- 4) I attended the meeting as a member of the Japan delegation. Athneal Ollivierre also attended the meeting as a member of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines delegation.
- 5) See URL [http://abcnews.go.com/sections/science/DailyNews/iwc\\_990525.html](http://abcnews.go.com/sections/science/DailyNews/iwc_990525.html).
- 6) See "Letter to the Editor", *Caribbean Compass*, June 1999.

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