

# Ostend Whalers in Spitsbergen and the Davis Strait: The History of the Ostend Whaling Company, 1727–1734

JAN PARMENTIER

**D**uring much of the seventeenth century, merchants of the Southern Netherlands — now Belgium — showed no interest in whaling. In 1664, however, eight entrepreneurs from Bruges formed a partnership to send one or two flutes to Greenland every year. They called themselves the *Groenlandtsche Compaignie*. To augment the chances of success, the association asked the Rotterdam merchant Coster for assistance. With Coster's efforts, they were able to obtain experienced Dutch captains and harpooners, as well as the vessels, from Holland. The first expedition in 1665 showed a promising outcome; the two whalers brought home six small whales. The best catches of two ships were booked in 1669 with thirteen and eleven whales.

The Company continued its activities until 1675, but during the next year, four more Greenlandmen left the Port of Ostend and requested the Ostend convoy fleet to escort them as far as Dogger Bank to avoid French privateers.<sup>1</sup>

The reason why whaling was rarely practiced in the Southern Netherlands during the seventeenth century, while the Dutch neighbors sent more than two hundred whalers annually to Spitsbergen, lies in the difficult political and economic circumstances during this period and in the lack of maritime development along the Flemish coast. The Southern Netherlands, also called the Spanish Netherlands at that time, were

situated amidst the seafaring nations of England, France, and the Dutch Republic. With its strategic position, it became the battlefield of Western Europe. The aggressive French policy to remove their borders up to the Rhine threatened the fragile equilibrium among the main European powers that was reached in 1648 with the Treaty of Munster. Under these conditions, shipping from the Southern Netherlands was restricted to coastal navigation and to the Iberian peninsula. The merchant fleet seldom counted more than thirty bottoms during the seventeenth century, and these ships were often mobilized for privateering during wartime. Blubber and whalebone arrived occasionally in Ostend. In August 1705, a Saint-Malo privateer captured the Sleswig whaler *Salvador Mundi* off Föhr Island. The Breton captain brought this prize to the port of Ostend; a few months later, her cargo of train oil and baleen was sold at public auction.<sup>2</sup> On the whole, merchant shipping was rare in this region, causing Flemish merchants to rely on foreign vessels for their overseas trade.

During the first decade of the eighteenth century, this situation changed for the benefit of enterprising businessmen in the Southern Netherlands. The death of Charles II of Spain in 1702 caused a new war when Louis XIV of France demanded Flanders and Brabant as part of his grandson's Spanish inheritance. The Spanish

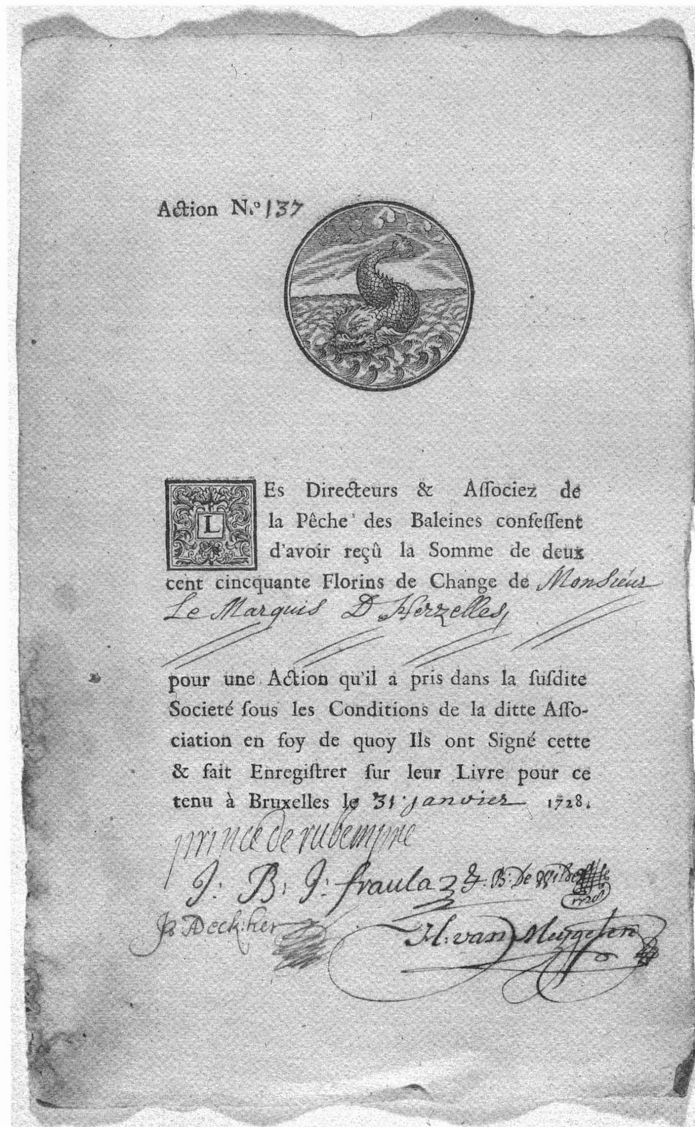
Succession War again devastated the country. In 1713, the Southern Netherlands were incorporated by the Austrian Empire. This annexation seemed a disaster for the economy, for the traffic of most Antwerp, Ghent, and Ostend merchant houses took place before the Spanish Succession War concentrated on the Iberian market and colonies. Flemish textiles found their way to the south of Spain (Cádiz and Seville), and from there were often shipped to Mexico and Panama. Due to the new political arrangement, Flemish and Brabant firms lost this privileged position, obliging traders to look for new markets. From 1715 on, they organized a modest direct trade with the East Indies. Until 1722, nearly forty vessels, all financed with private capital, sailed from Ostend to China, India, Bengal, and Mocha. To avoid the increasing mutual competition, the major entrepreneurs decided to found a stock company in 1723, the "General Imperial Indian Company" (GIC), which became very successful in the Bengal and China trade.<sup>3</sup>

This East India traffic gave a positive boost to the regional economy, chiefly to Ostend. At that time, the Southern Netherlands, with a

coastline of only 67 km, counted two seaports — Nieuwpoort, which focused mainly on coast fishing, Iceland fishery, and Ostend. This second harbor expanded as the substitute for Antwerp, for since the Treaty of Munster, the Dutch supervised the Schelde River estuary and made free navigation impossible. Ostend was considered the sole harbor for merchant service during the eighteenth century. Thanks to the GIC, the infrastructure for seagoing ships improved enormously, and all kinds of shipping-related industries — such as new wharves, sail lofts, and ropewalks — were introduced. Even the population of Ostend — approximately 5000 inhabitants — increased by 20 percent.<sup>4</sup>

The success of the Ostend East India Company inspired Baron Adam-Joseph de Sotelet, a high ranking civil servant and a member of the lower gentry, to ask the government in Vienna for a charter to start a whaling company in 1727.<sup>5</sup> With the brilliant results of the GIC as an example, he hoped he would not encounter

any difficulty in attracting investors. Moreover, there existed an international trend in this period to stimulate new initiatives in different maritime sectors. These enterprises became very popular,



Share of the Ostend Whaling Company, belonging to Marquis Guillaume François de Herzelles, one of the directors, 31 January 1728. Courtesy of Algemeen Rijksarchief, Brussels.

especially in the Dutch Republic and England, but quite often were not well structured. They were set up solely to realize great profits in a short time for the organizers, while most of the small financiers were swindled. These practices were called *Windhandel* in Holland.<sup>6</sup> London merchants also had to cope with a financial setback in 1720 due to the overestimation of the shares of the South Sea Company.<sup>7</sup>

In this atmosphere — with a certain dose of caution — Baron de Sotelet developed a carefully considered plan for a whaling company. He knew very well that it was a rather risky business, and positive results were far from guaranteed. He also kept in mind that there was a lack of knowhow in the Southern Netherlands. From the start, he asked Vienna for permission to engage foreigners as seafaring personnel.

To construct a solid financial base, Sotelet created a joint stock company. He first attracted several wealthy people from his own circle, high ranking civil servants and noblemen, to invest large sums in this enterprise. He promised these investors a voice in the Company's management. Actually, the eight major financiers who formed the Board of Directors, knew nothing about whaling. Just the prospect of receiving high dividends proved to be sufficient to snare them. In this manner, Sotelet successfully gathered 138,000 guilders in capital in a few weeks time.<sup>8</sup>

At the first general board meeting of 6 September 1727, the initial eight participants agreed that the Company would exist for a period of at least fifteen years, or as long as their mutual association would last. They chose Brussels as the seat and decided that every participant had one vote. Sotelet got the decisive vote to avoid a possible deadlock. Upon arrival of one of the whalers in Ostend, the Board would assemble. Jan-Baptist Jozef de Fraula was named Chairman. He seemed to be the most influential person of the Company. Fraula, like Sotelet, was a high ranking civil servant, who had negotiated several international conferences on the economic future of the Southern Netherlands. He was also an important participant of the GIC with thirty-nine shares, and was the best choice to make the whaling company more respectable and trustworthy. De Fraula maintained excellent contacts

with the *beau monde* of Antwerp, which still was the financial heart of the Southern Netherlands.

In contrast with several other whaling and fishing companies abroad, the Directors decided that their fleet could be used only for whaling, not for coastal navigation in winter. This carrying trade made the whaling business more lucrative when the ships encountered a bad season near Spitsbergen and the Davis Strait.<sup>9</sup> The Nieuwpoort *Compagnie van Vischvaeert* used such a system, and gained greater profit with freight traffic than cod fishery.

From the start, the Directors intended to send six vessels to Greenland and Spitsbergen or to Davis Strait and Hudson Bay. They would decide if it was necessary to enlarge the fleet and to attract more funds after the first whalers returned home. To cover the costs of the next voyages, the Company would go public. It would be possible for potential subscribers to buy newly issued shares at the stock exchange of Antwerp.

The Board appointed one of the directors, Hendrik Van Meygelen, as administrative bookkeeper. A local merchant from Brussels, Van Meygelen received the handsome annuity of 18,000 guilders for his new duties, an amount which also included his traveling expenses between Brussels and Ostend on behalf of the Company. The Directors engaged Jan de Schonamille as Company agent in Ostend to organize the maritime side of the expeditions and the public auctions of oil and baleen. His commission was 1¼% of the global outfitting expenses. De Schonamille had won his spurs during the Spanish Succession War as Master Attendant of the convoy fleet, which sailed every year to Cádiz. These convoy ships were heavily armed; they also functioned as privateers.<sup>10</sup> In 1719, Jan de Schonamille started a part ownership for trading with West Africa in association with a few merchants from Zeeland. He showed no interest in the slave trade, preferring to trade textiles and ammunition for gold, ivory, and malaguet pepper at the Coast of Guinea. Unfortunately, this initiative was crippled by the Dutch West India Company, who considered them



Dutch flutes hunting whales in the packed ice near Spitsbergen. Painted by Abraham Stork (1635–1710), ca. 1680. Courtesy of Maritiem Museum Prin's Hendrik, Rotterdam.

interlopers and subsequently confiscated two of de Schonamille's Guineamen. In 1725, de Schonamille proved his qualities as a diplomat. He traveled to Algiers on an imperial mission to negotiate the ransom of the crew of the Ostend Mochaman *St. Elisabeth*. In 1724, Barbary pirates had captured this East India ship near the coast of Brittany. In 1727, the unfortunate seamen finally were released.

None of the Directors considered this whaling company as their major source of income. Besides de Sotelet and de Fraula, two of the other financiers, Philippe François, Prince of Rubempré, and Ambrosius, Marquis of Herzelles, belonged to the circle of important national civil servants. The Prince of Rubempré was also an investor in other fishery concerns,

such as the *Compagnie van Vischvaert*.<sup>11</sup> Another director was Guillaume Philippe de Herzelles, the brother of Ambrosius. He became abbot of the Saint-Gertrude Abbey near Louvain in 1721. He, too, invested some capital in the GIC. In 1742, he was appointed as bishop of Antwerp. The last two major participants Jean-Baptiste-Aurèle à Walhors and Jean-Baptiste De Wilde, were members of the Brussels city council.<sup>12</sup> Only bookkeeper Henry Van Meygelen had some commercial experience. This meant that he, together with the Ostend agent, would play a crucial role in the management of the Company. The other Directors were important only in raising necessary additional funds.

Several months before the Austrian government granted the charter, Baron de Sotelet con-

tacted Amsterdam merchant Arnold Joseph Du Bois to look for suitable whaling vessels. It was no surprise that Sotelet chose to go abroad for ordering these ships, because the traditional flutes and boatships were seldom constructed in the small yards of Ostend and Bruges. To control costs, Sotelet advised his Dutch agent to buy secondhand ships. On 30 November 1726, Du Bois purchased from Westzaamdham shipwright Cornelis Dirksz Ouwejan three flutes named *Maria Catharina* (435 tons), *Jonge Hildegonda* (445 tons), and *Nieuwe Hoop* (338 tons). Ouwejan received 29,750 guilders for these three whalers.<sup>13</sup>

The region north of Amsterdam was renowned for its whaling activities, so it seemed logical that Du Bois bought the vessels in Zaandam, a town which functioned as a center of the Dutch shipbuilding. To cope with the competition from Amsterdam, the Zaandam carpenters erected a big *overtoom*, a means to carry vessels across a dyke. With this remarkable hydraulic construction, the Zaandam wharfs could transport large ships to open water, thus enabling them to answer the demand for ships with more capacity.<sup>14</sup> It is very likely that the flutes bought by Sotelet and his friends were built in these yards.

Du Bois showed particular interests in buying flutes, for this type of ship was very popular with Dutch whalers after the seventeenth century. The distinguishing mark of this three-masted merchantman was the high, pear shaped stern. With its rounded hull, the flute was highly suitable for bulk transportation. Initially, the deck was narrow, but by the end of the seventeenth century — for the benefit of the whaling fishery — the upper deck was enlarged, thus improving labor space. The flutes painted by Abraham Storck (circa 1690) are accurate reproductions of vessels purchased by the Ostend Whaling Company. These solid ships could easily stay in service for thirty to forty years.

In December 1726, Du Bois managed to buy the frigate *Sint Joseph* (374 tons) from the Amsterdam merchant Adriaan Wittert for 8,600 guilders. The Ostend fleet was completed with

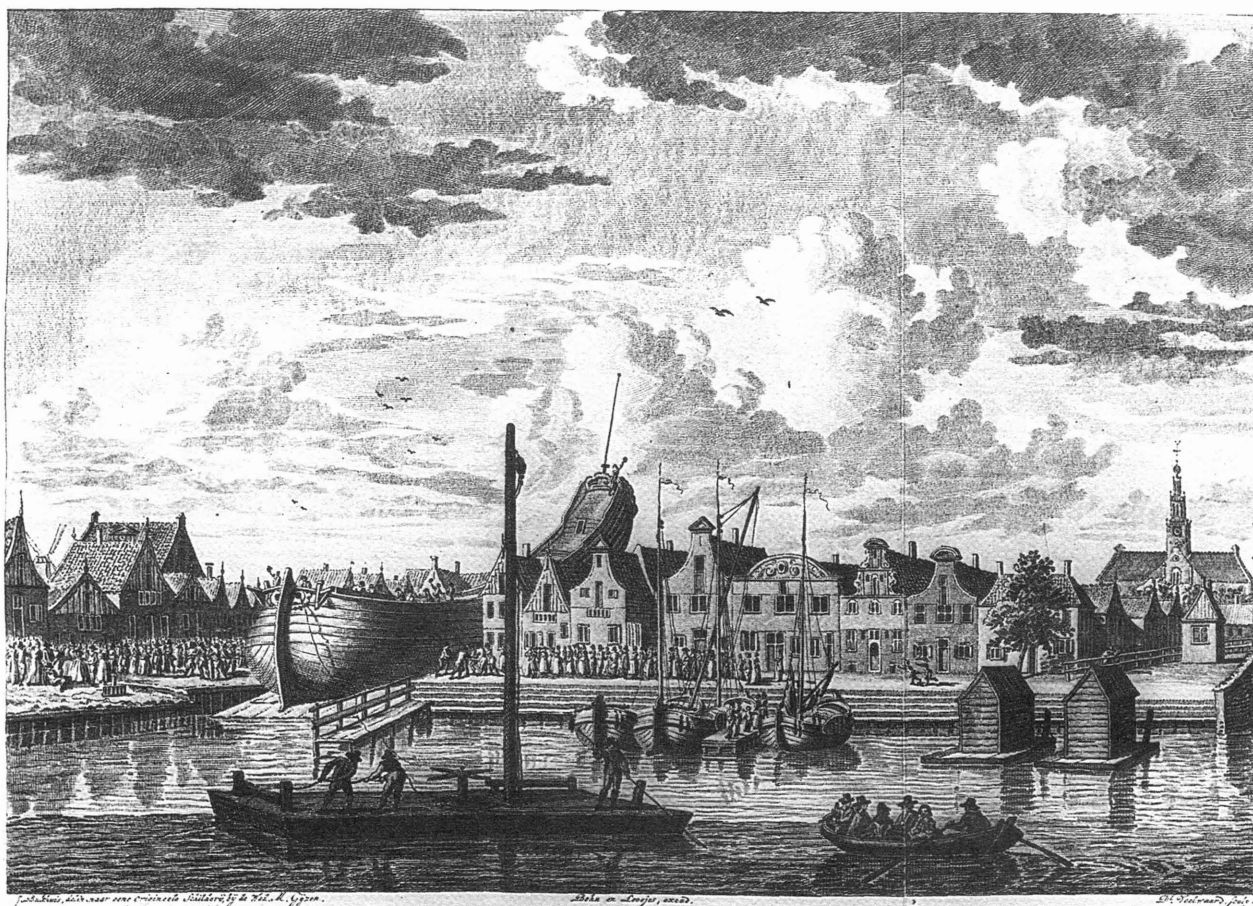
another flute in February 1727. Du Bois spent 8,500 guilders to attract the *Perel* (435 tons).<sup>15</sup> A sixth ship, as initially stipulated at the first board meeting, was never bought. The Directors of the Company gave no explanation for this change of policy, but it is likely that the lack of funds and the fact that Sotelet already had spent much of the starting capital contributed to the decision.

Measurements of the Ostend flutes, which applied only to length, width, and depth, conformed largely with standard dimensions of Dutch whalers launched in the decades before 1700.<sup>16</sup> These vessels were no longer than 31 meters (109 Amsterdam feet). The width or breadth, which was measured on the outside beam, *i.e.*, “inside the skin,” was on average one quarter of the length, and the depth never exceeded twelve feet.<sup>17</sup>

The size of Dutch whalers increased during the first half of the eighteenth century. The two vessels (also built in Zaandam) commissioned by the Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie (MCC) in 1734 to sail to Davis Strait measured 115 and 112¼ Amsterdam feet.<sup>18</sup> The flutes used by the Ostenders were perhaps older and smaller than most Dutch whalers put into service at the time.

At the beginning of March 1727, four of the five Dutch ships arrived in the port of Ostend — the frigate *St. Joseph* left for San Sebastian. Like the first Dutch and English whaling expeditions, the Ostenders asked experienced Basques to teach them the techniques — a peculiar decision, as the Basques seemed to have disappeared from the international whaling scene by that time. Although hardly anything is known about Basque activities near Spitsbergen and Davis Strait in the eighteenth century, William Scoresby mentioned a list for 1721 with twenty Basque whalers on it. Other evidence of Biscayan hunters during this period is rather fragmentary. Lubbock asserted that there were at least twenty Basque ships present near Greenland in the years 1721–1736. The whaling activities of the Basques were modest compared to those of the Dutch, but their excellent reputation inspired an opportunist like Sotelet to engage Martin De Zavaletta of San Sebastian as his agent. De Zavaletta’s assignment was to prepare the *St. Joseph*





### DE OVERTOOM TE WESTZAANDAM, in 1717.

The *Overtoom* in Westzaandam, 1717. The Ostend whalers were probably built on this wharf. Courtesy of The Kendall Whaling Museum, Sharon, MA.

for a voyage to Spitsbergen, and to muster a Basque crew, but this frigate had to sail under Flemish colors, and the produce of the expedition was to be sold in the Southern Netherlands.<sup>19</sup>

Jan de Schonamille's preparations in Ostend took about two months. The flutes' hulls were reinforced with double planking, and were fully nailed to cope with the extreme weather conditions in the Arctic. The bow of every vessel was sheathed with copper. This procedure was remarkable, for copper sheathing was not common before 1760. Several sources mention that the British Navy was the first to experiment with copper sheathing as late as 1761. The East India Company in Ostend provided its ships with copper plates from 1725 on.<sup>20</sup>

After an inspection, several sloops were found in a bad condition, so three Ostend ship-

wrights were hired to construct fourteen new whaleboats. It was decided that every flute have on board five or six sloops. There are no representations of the actual vessels, but it can be assumed that the Ostend carpenters used the Zaandam whaleboats as models, and the work was checked and approved by three Dutch captains with a great deal of whaling experience. According to a study by J. Van Beylen, Dutch whale boats measured approximately twenty-five Amsterdam feet and were, as opposed to traditional fishing sloops, rather narrow. Furthermore, the keel was more conical to increase speed. The use of elm instead of oak to construct the inside of the whaleboats made them lighter.<sup>21</sup>

De Schonamille had to verify the quality of the lines. He preferred to order new ones instead of using the old Dutch lines, the manufacture of

which was entrusted to a few local ropemakers. The Ostend ropewalk made ninety-three lines, approximately twenty-three per ship, for this occasion. Other indispensable tools for the whale hunt were bought mainly in Bruges and Amsterdam. The inventory of the flute *Faem van Vlaenderen* mentioned forty-three harpoons, twenty-two walrus lances, and a large assortment of knives to transform the whales into blubber and baleens. Every ship was fitted with traditional cooking utensils in pewter or iron, and each received a big copper kettle to render the blubber. Special double sails were made of Bruges canvas, a town internationally known for the quality of its sailcloth. The rigging of the four ships was still in good shape; only minor repairs had to be undertaken.

Jan de Schonamille found it necessary to arm the flutes with ordnance and a wide variety of handguns, the number of which per ship was not specified. Better information is found in the Basque outfitting bill of the frigate *St. Joseph*, which could defend itself with six three-pounders, six flintlocks, six pistols, and eight broadswords.<sup>22</sup> This seems to be an insufficient arsenal to make a bold stand against privateers.

The outward cargo of the whalers consisted mainly of empty casks to hold blubber. De Schonamille had to contact several merchants in Dunkirk, Rotterdam, Flushing, Ghent, and Bruges to buy more than 2,000 casks.

These outfittings had a positive impact on the local economy. Only very specific items (canvas, harpoons) or large amounts (casks) were ordered in the neighboring centers.

A similar procedure was followed in purchasing food supplies. Each ship stowed about 1,655 pounds of stockfish, 7.5 *razieren* young peas (1,875 pounds), 7,666 pounds of biscuits, 600 pounds of butter, and a large quantity of pork.<sup>23</sup> The provisions consisted further of groats, bread, oats, onions, sugar, garlic, vinegar, some spices, and a live pig. Beer, water, and Geneva (Holland gin) were the main beverages for the crew, while French and Rhine wine were served at the Captain's table. The sailors received three different kinds of cheese: *zoetemelks* (sweet milk) of Gouda, Edam and Cumin cheese, which originated from Leiden. This diet

was typical of Dutch whalers around 1630. A century later, four pounds of roasted coffee and some bottles of Canary wine for the officers would be added.<sup>24</sup>

Jan de Schonamille spent 67,281 guilders to ready these four flutes. When the Basque outfitting of the *St. Joseph*, wages, and the purchase of the ships were taken into account, Van Meyghelen's bookkeeping records revealed the total investment for 1727 amounted to 168,789 guilders — exceeding the starting capital.<sup>25</sup> The continued existence of the Company relied heavily on the results of the first Spitsbergen expeditions.

Success of the voyages depended on the capability of the Dutch and Basque captains Sotelet and De Zavaletta engaged. Three of the flutes were commanded by skippers from the region of North Holland.

Jacob Hendriksz Stap, who became captain of the *Walvis*, sailed with the *St. Willebrordus* from Amsterdam to Greenland in 1725. He brought home one whale and sixty barrels of train oil.

The most experienced commander Sotelet engaged was Symoen Jansz Tel. In the annual published list for 1719 of Dutch, German, and Davis Strait voyages he was listed as master of the Amsterdam ship *Hoop*, bound that season to Davis Strait with one whale caught. A similar result was noted the next year. In 1721, Captain Tel moved to Zaandam and was hired by Jan Rogge to lead a new expedition to Davis Strait with the flute *Mercurius*. The poor output — Tel could not catch a fish — convinced the shipowner to dispatch the *Mercurius* to Spitsbergen in the coming season. This change was no surprise; in 1721, Dutch Spitsbergenmen realized profits with four whales caught on the average.<sup>26</sup> In 1722, Tel obtained 5½ whales and 180 barrels of oil, above the Dutch average of 4.6 whales. The success of the Dutch Spitsbergen voyages lasted only two years. Symoen Jansz Tel's voyages for Rogge with the *Mercurius* (1723) and the *Groene Viskorf* (1724) to the Greenland waters recorded no catches.<sup>27</sup>

Information on the third Dutch captain,

Gerrit Henry van Geldrop, is scarce. Jan de Schonamille mentioned only that he was experienced in commanding a whaler. Geldrop signed a contract in Ostend as captain of the *Faem van Vlaenderen*.<sup>28</sup>

To learn the art of whaling, Daniel Lindersen was chosen as master of the frigate *Perel*. His responsibility was limited, as he had to follow the instructions of his Dutch commanders during the voyage. The young Ostender was related to the successful privateer Joannes Lindersen, who captured more than thirty enemy vessels during the War of the Spanish Succession. Daniel Lindersen later moved to Zeeland and sailed in 1736 as master of the frigate *Stad Zierikzee* between Bilbao and Middelburg with a cargo of chestnuts for Bruges merchant Ferdinand Vanden Schrieck. He returned to Ostend in the 1740s, and played a significant role in 1744–45 as one of the few local captains who hunted French and Prussian merchantmen around the North Sea during the War of the Austrian Succession (1739–1748).<sup>29</sup>

Other than the *St. Joseph*, which had a Basque crew, the vessels of the first expedition were manned with Dutch, Dunkirk, and Ostend mariners. Although exact information on the origin of the crews is lacking, highly qualified seamen, such as harpooners and blubber cutters, were recruited mainly in Holland. De Schonamille left the Dutch commanders a free hand in engaging capable fellow countrymen.<sup>30</sup> The presence of Dunkirk seamen on Ostend vessels is significant, for this port was not a whaling center.<sup>31</sup>

From the late seventeenth century on, Dunkirk and Ostend can be considered twin ports — hardly 40 km apart — with a large maritime community, members of which often had family ties on both sides of the border. A migration of able seamen occurred whenever the economy boomed in one port or the other.<sup>32</sup> Ostend and Dunkirk merchants and shipowners regularly entered into partnerships.

The disappointing results of the first expeditions influenced the makeup of the crews for the second Ostend whaling fleet. Three vessels kept

the same commanders, but the backgrounds of the harpooners and blubber cutters shifted to Flemish and Dunkirk mariners.<sup>33</sup> Sotelet and his friends seemed convinced of the competencies of the Basque whalers. In 1728, they decided to equip two ships in San Sebastian. The flute *Faem van Vlaenderen* was renamed *Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Bijstand*, a Christian name more appropriate to the Spanish tradition. This vessel was manned solely by Basque sailors hired by De Zavaletta, who engaged Joseph de la Varta of San Sebastian as new master.

The expedition was ordered to try whaling near Davis Strait that season, a change which proved to be a good option for the Basque-run ships, but not for the two whalers under the command of the Dutch captains.<sup>34</sup> The disastrous voyage of the *Vergulde Arent* could be attributed directly to Master Symoen Jansz Tel's inappropriate behavior. One of his harpooners, Jacobus Clarisse, made several complaints about Tel's conduct. His testimony, affirmed by most of the other crew members, sketched an interesting picture of the abuses on board and described vividly the contacts with the Inuits<sup>35</sup>. Clarisse declared to the Company Directors that Captain Tel was drunk every two days, and under these conditions he was incapable of coming on deck. Arriving at Davis Strait, Tel robbed a few *wilden* (natives) of a small boat, which he brought with him to Ostend. Near Disco Island (West Greenland), the drunken captain ordered Daniel Stuyvaert and François Lassé to throw one of the natives into the water. Luckily for this unfortunate man, he was rescued in time by another Inuit. Tel's bad behavior ruined the atmosphere and made it impossible to trade a dead whale, lying near the shore, with the Greenlanders. Shortly after this missed opportunity, the *Vergulde Arent* anchored at the Western Islands (Disco Bay), where Captain Tel threatened to open fire on the natives with a rifle. He also worked as harpooner on this voyage. In that capacity, he failed to kill a whale because he was too intoxicated, and dropped his harpoon into the water.<sup>36</sup> Another problem occurred in the navigation to and from Davis Strait; Jacobus Clarisse



stated that Tel was too blind to see that the ship was off course several times, in spite of the warnings voiced by Mate Laurens Hendrycxen Pulinck. To cover the nautical mistakes, Tel replaced a few pages of the original ship's journal. Due to the lengthening of the voyage, the *Vergulde Arent* ran out of supplies and had to call at the river Elbe (North Germany) to provision.

As a consequence of this bad experience, the Company decided to equip all the vessels of the third expedition (1729) in Basque Country. Martin De Zavaletta was prominent during the preparation phase. He engaged three new commanders: Benito De Arona for the *St. Pieter* (ex *Perel*), Antonio Sagarna for the *St. Michel* (ex *Vergulde Arent*), and Bartholomeo De Gorostiago for the *St. Joseph*. The fourth Basque captain, Joseph De la Varta, remained on the *Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Bijstand*, and the rest of the crew was predominantly Basque.

Operating again in Davis Strait, the Basque fleet, flying Flemish colors, registered the best results ever, which encouraged the Ostend Whaling Company to continue outfitting the ships in San Sebastian. In February 1730, unfortunately, the Spanish government, probably under pressure from the Dutch and the English, forbade the Ostenders to make further use of the Basque facilities. The main reason was Spanish efforts to start a whaling company. In 1728, the *Real Compania Mercantil de Ballenas* was founded, operating in San Sebastian. This enterprise, however, never succeeded in outfitting a whaler.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, in 1732 a new joint stock company, also based in Basque Country and supported by the Spanish Crown, was created with some marginal success in the years 1733–1737.<sup>38</sup>

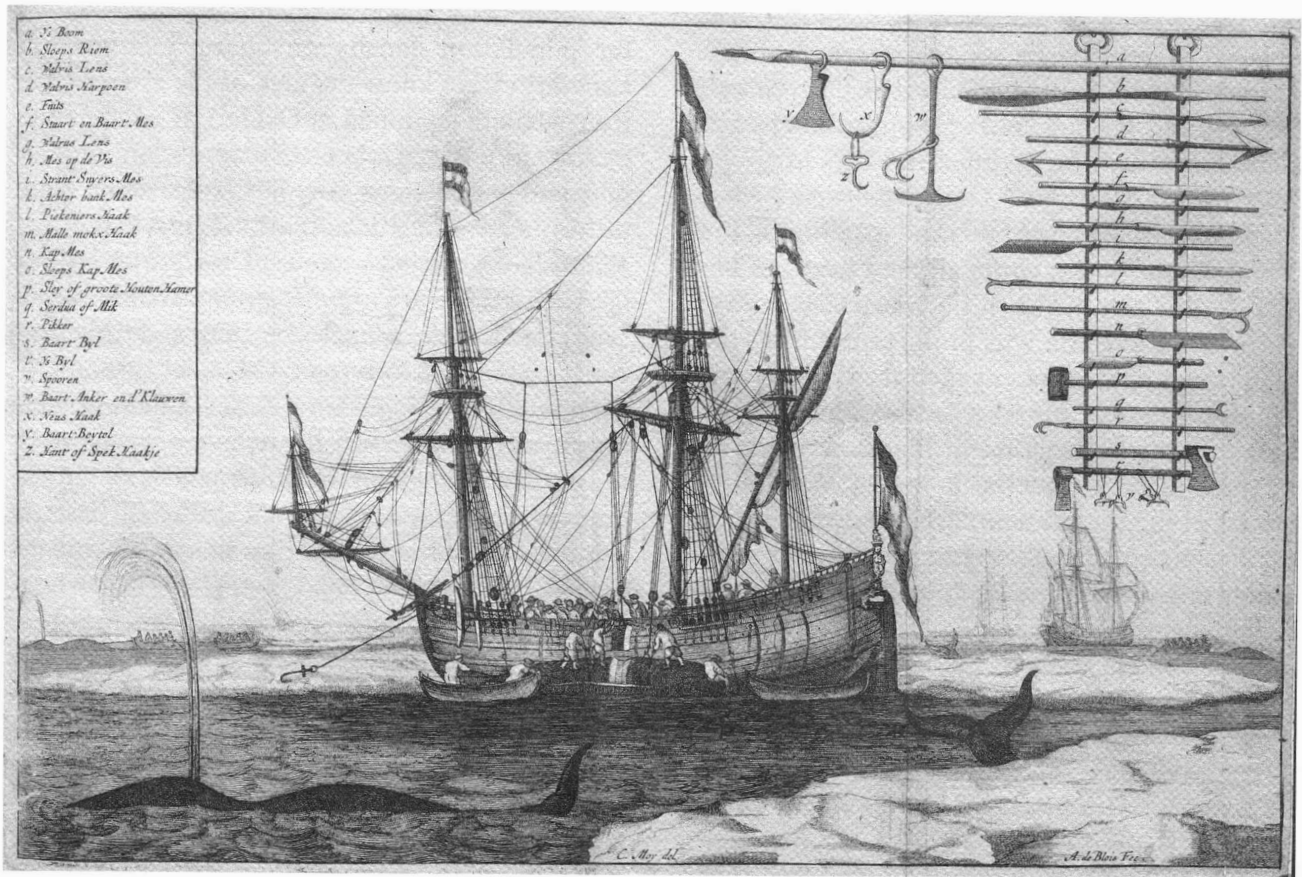
The Directors decided quickly, together with all the shareholders, to end operations. They thought it would not be profitable to continue whaling in Ostend, partly due to the lack of experienced local mariners.<sup>39</sup> The great dissatisfaction of the investors, who lost a great deal of money in this enterprise, and the desperate need for fresh capital to start new expeditions made

the Directors realize it was impossible for the Company to turn a profit.

The known crew size of the four whalers equipped in Ostend makes it possible to calculate the population density on board. Of the first expedition, we know the size of the crew of the four whalers equipped in Ostend. It gave us the opportunity to calculate the population density on board per 100 tons. The *Walvis* carried a crew of forty-one with a density of 9.4; the *Faem van Vlaanderen* carried a crew of forty-one with a density of 9.1; the *Vergulde Arent* carried a crew of thirty-six with a density of 10.6; and the *Perel* carried a crew of forty-one with a density of 9.4. Compared to the Ostend East Indiamen, the density of seamen on the whalers was much lower.<sup>40</sup> The voyages to Greenland and Spitsbergen were shorter, and the mortality rates seldom outnumbered the figures of the vessels bound for Asia. An added factor was that whalers did not need extra sailors to man the ordnance.

Information on mariners' wages paid by the Ostend Whaling Company is scarce, but it provides an interesting picture of the crew composition. A list made up by Martin De Zavaletta in March 1729 for Captain Joseph De la Varta shows monthly wages linked to the different functions on board the *Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Bijstand*. These salaries can be compared to the average Dutch wages for the same period.<sup>41</sup>

Martin de Zavaletta did not mention how many harpooners and spectioneers (blubber cutters) were contracted per ship. Taking into consideration that the *Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Bijstand* was equipped with six sloops, the Basque agent would have engaged six harpooners at the very most. Three to four harpooners on board seem more likely for two reasons: these specialists were highly paid, so one could hardly afford to enlist many of them, and the manning of the shallops was limited by crew size. If every sloop had to be manned with four rowers, a mate, and at least one harpooner, a maximum of four shallops could be brought into action at the same time. The number of spectioneers was limited to two or three men. They had to stand on the whale in the open sea, which was attached to the ship for flensing. This risky occupation was rewarded



Flensing a whale in open sea. The flute was anchored on a icefield to have some stability. Engraving in *Kort en Opregt Verhaal van het Droevig en avontuurlijk wedervaren van Abraham Janz. van Gelen...* (1683), A. de Blois. Courtesy of Universiteitsbibliotheek, Ghent.

with additional *visgeld* (fish money).

Compared to the Dutch, the Basque practice of paying monthly wages to the officers was rather uncommon. Normally, most officers sailed *voor hun part* (to receive a percentage of the catch). Under this system, commanders, harpooners, and spectioners received their money in advance, called the “dead horse.” In addition, there were bonuses on every whale caught and on each *quardeel* (64 English gallons) of train oil brought home. Sometimes, a premium was distributed per baleen.<sup>42</sup>

If the ship returned from Spitsbergen or Davis Strait clean (empty), the officers had to be

satisfied with only the dead horse for a whole season. The introduction of a fixed salary for everybody on board, as in San Sebastian, provided a secure income. The Dutch habit of paying bounties, which was also fashionable for the expeditions prepared in Ostend, was an opportunity for the officers to earn double or triple the income of their Basque counterparts.

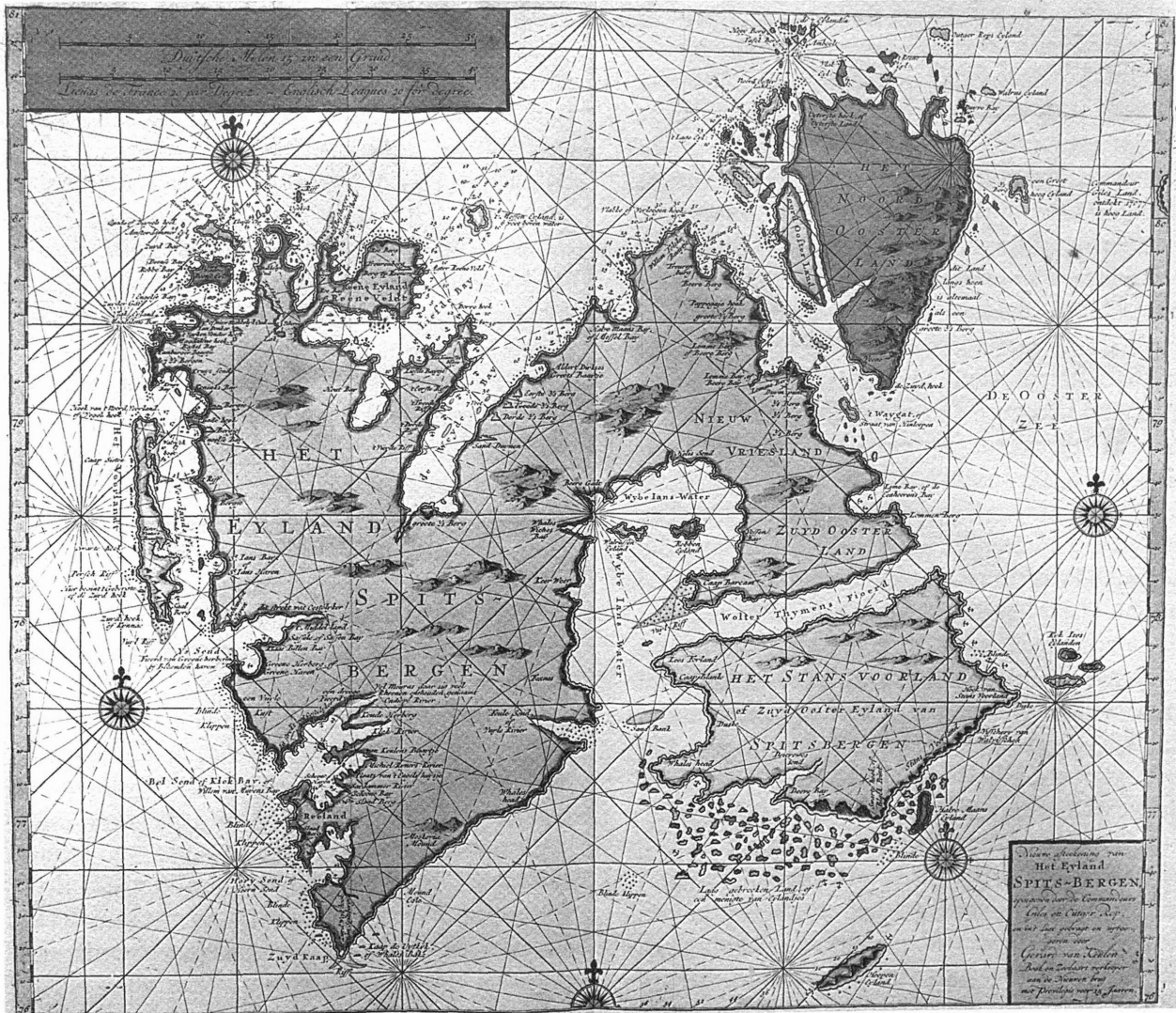
It is uncertain if the prospect for better payment in Ostend was the formula to attract experienced Dutch masters and harpooners who started up the Flemish whaling industry, but other crew members, such as carpenters, coopers, and sailors, earned more on whalers than in

other branches of merchant shipping. Carpenters' salaries reached the level of those on the Ostend East Indiamen, but far surpassed the wages these craftsmen could expect to receive in the European traffic. Boatswains, stewards, and surgeons on the whalers also received exceptionally high earnings, as did the sailors. Under normal conditions, they signed up for twelve to fifteen guilders. Zorgdrager explained that occasional acute shortages of able seamen forced whaleboat owners to promise high wages, comparable to those of Ostend or San Sebastian.<sup>43</sup>

Of the three campaigns organized by the Ostend Whaling Company, only the *Vergulde Arent's* journal for the first voyage to Spits-

bergen has survived. To reconstruct the routes of the Davis Strait whalers, use was made of the only known log of a Dutch whaler from this period bound for West Greenland, the Middelburg ship *Vergulde Walvis* (1735). Additional information on the navigation to the Arctic during the first decade of the eighteenth century was found in the journal of the Amsterdam flute *De Twee Goe Vrinden*, which sailed to the whaling grounds near Jan Mayen Island and Spitsbergen in 1715.<sup>44</sup>

On 2 May 1727, the first four whalers left the Port of Ostend. Timing was crucial for such ventures to ensure a successful hunt. Leaving Flanders in May was already late, for most Dutch



*Nieuwe afteekening van het Eyland Spits-Bergen...*, Gerard van Keulen, ca. 1707–1714. The hunting grounds of the first Ostend expedition was situated in Northwest Spitsbergen. Courtesy of Maritiem Museum Prins Hendrik, Rotterdam.

Greenlandmen set sail around mid-April. The small fleet set a northeast course along the Dutch Coast. From the start, Captain Tel of the *Vergulde Arent* encountered serious problems in catching up with the other three flutes. The master complained of having to command a bad sailer, so the *Walvis* or the *Perel* took this ship under tow whenever possible.

A first landfall at Jan Mayen Island was made after eighteen days, from which all four vessels headed northwest. According to C. de Jong, these waters were frequented by *Noordkapers* (Northern Right whales), but the Ostenders did not spot any of these mammals. Weather conditions worsened quickly — snow and dense fog — and the first ice was noticed. The Ostend fleet tried to keep together, but ice floes made it too dangerous to drag the *Vergulde Arent* during the night. Soon afterwards, they had a friendly meeting with a buss from Altona (North Germany), carrying 120 barrels of seal oil. In the meantime, difficulties continued for Tel's vessel, which hit several floes. In an attempt to improve the steering of the *Vergulde Arent*, its rudder was replaced by two ordinary planks. This makeshift rudder improved the ship's sailing abilities.

Arriving at the latitude of 78°32' on 1 June, the Ostenders started the hunt. On the last pages of his log, Captain Tel calculated that they had covered 475 miles in thirty days to reach the packed ice, approximately the average duration of a Dutch outward voyage to Spitsbergen. The flutes were anchored on a small icefield near the open sea, with one or two sloops setting up a watch. These shallows were fully manned and equipped to react as soon as a whale appeared on the surface. This technique was repeated several days without seeing a "fish." Surprisingly, Master Tel spotted twelve whales in an eight hour period on 6 June, *maar konde niet vast raecken* (but they were not able to hit a whale). The *Vergulde Arent* spotted no whales the following week, perhaps because close attention was needed to avoid getting stuck in the ice. Finally, on 15 June, they caught sight of a whale. Three sloops came into action, but again these efforts were in vain. The lack of results was certainly not caused by the hunting methods the Ostenders used. Dutch and English narratives of

the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries confirmed that the best places to outwit a Greenland whale (*Balaena mysticetus*) were related to the pack ice.

Trouble increased for the Ostend whalers with the loss of the *Walvis*. On 17 June, this vessel, caught in a blizzard, was punctured, probably after hitting several floes. The stern was shattered, and three shallows disappeared in the ice. The crew tried to save the ship by cutting the masts, but finally escaped in the nick of time with the three intact sloops. One group of *Walvis* seamen were picked up immediately by a Dutch whaler. After a search of two days, Captain van Geldrop of the *Faem van Vlaenderen* welcomed the crew of the second sloop on board. The others had to wait four days in miserable conditions before an English vessel rescued them. In the meantime, two sailors passed away and several men suffered frozen limbs which had to be amputated.

The other two Ostend whalers tried, during the second half of June, to reach the *Zeven Ijsbergen* (Seven Icebergs) on the Northwest coast of Spitsbergen because they ran out of drinking water. They moored on 29 June in the *Kruis Baey* (Cross Bay), where Master Tel heard the news of the *Walvis*. One sloop was sent southward to *Konings Baey* (King's Bay) to look for Captain van Geldrop's ship. The next day, thirty casks filled with sweet water, a lot of *salaade*(greens), and some fowl were stowed in the *Vergulde Arent*. The greens, better known as scurvy grass, formed an important part of the mariners' diet to prevent scurvy.<sup>45</sup>

The two Ostend flutes sailed after one week in *Kruis Baey*, by request of Captain Lindersen, to a few small islands south of the *Voorland* (Foreland or Charles' Island) near the west coast of Spitsbergen, to gather bird eggs. Navigating southwards along the coast, they landed at the *Groene Herbergh* (Green Haven), where Tel found to his amazement four crew members of the wrecked *Walvis*. Two sloops were sent ashore to hunt *rheenen* (reindeer). This expedition also proved to be a failure, although that part of the island was famous for its reindeer herds.

The search for the *Faem van Vlaenderen* carried on, now more north near Magdalena Bay, until 21 July, when they found at last the third Ostend vessel. The crews missed an excellent opportunity in this region to take a bowhead of, according to Master Tel, 60 *quardelen* (13,980 liters of train oil).<sup>46</sup> The animal was trapped in the ice, close to the coast. The officers of the *Vergulde Arent*, on the other hand, gave priority to the safety of the ship and refused to raise anchor, arguing that the waters near the unfortunate whale were too shallow.

**D**uring the last days of July, the Ostenders began to prepare for the return voyage. In King's Bay, a large amount of stones were placed in the hold of the flutes as ballast. They decided to navigate northwards one more time to look for whales before sailing home. Every ship equipped two shallops to *Beschaeyer* (Biscayers Hook). Three times, this small company saw a "blow," but were not certain if they had spotted Greenland or fin whales. During the following week, two more attempts were undertaken with five sloops to capture a "fish," and on 5 August, three shallops tried to surround a *kasielot* (cachalot or sperm whale), which proved to be too fast.

After a month and a half of disappointing hunting, the Ostend fleet left Spitsbergen on 14 August. Again problems occurred with the rudder of the *Vergulde Arent*, making the return slower. At the latitude of 62°42', they made a landfall at the Faroes. Near these islands, van Geldrop and Lindersen decided, being one month under way, to go ahead, for food shortages were recorded. Master Tel was not happy at the prospect of being left alone. According to his journal, the victuals on board of his ship were also scarce: meat for one day only, butter for three days, and 3½ hogsheads of beer. For this reason, he changed course and tried to call at Stadlandet, in the middle of Norway, on 18 September. Bad weather kept the *Vergulde Arent* in open sea, and forced the Ostend flute to look further south for a safer anchorage. Navigation became more and more problematic. Hardly any progress was made during the following two weeks, while the

ship drifted westward until they saw the Shetlands.

A few days later, sailing southeast, Foula and Faire Isle came in sight. The officers' council advised Master Tel to change from the set route with the hope of provisioning in South Norway. On 20 October, the *Vergulde Arent* arrived in Flekkerøy. Captain Tel, accompanied by the chief carpenter, went to the nearby town of Kristiansand to buy supplies and to contact a blacksmith for making a new rudder. The repairs took longer than expected, so the Ostend flute was obliged to stay a fortnight in Flekkerøy.

The last stage of the return along Yarmouth to Flanders was completed in seven days. The *Vergulde Arent* entered the Port of Ostend on 12 November, but one of her companions, the *Perel*, had got stuck on a sandbank two weeks earlier, just before the dock area. The ship got afloat again the next day, but not without new damage. In the same period, the *St. Joseph*, with a Basque crew, also returned "on ballast" to Ostend.

**T**he Directors of the Company reviewed the first expedition and wrongfully blamed Jan de Schonamille for the bad results. The Ostend commissioner resigned in December 1727 because he often had to pay Company debts from his own pocket. He mentioned that the Company's precarious financial situation was not good for his own reputation as a trustworthy entrepreneur. Sotelet engaged his brother-in-law, Balthazar Vignaulx, to replace him. Vignaulx, an experienced merchant and shipowner, was little acquainted with the maritime side of organizing whaling ventures. On the other hand, he was able to present remarkable credentials of his commercial activities, a quality which proved important for managing the auctions of oil and baleen in the future.

The year 1727 resulted in a deficit of 30,000 guilders above the initial capital. In contrast to English and Scottish whalers, the Ostenders were not subsidized by the government.<sup>47</sup> To continue its activities, the Company resolved to release 850 new shares of 250 guilders each. Every Director agreed to purchase twenty-four shares for his own account. This financial operation looked more like a fiasco, for one month later,



31 January 1728, only 536 shares were taken out, including those of the Directors. Only 134,000 guilders in new liquid capital was available for the preparation of the next voyages.<sup>48</sup>

For the coming season, Spitsbergen was chosen over Davis Strait as a potentially more favorable hunting area. A second ship would be equipped in San Sebastian. Sufficient financial means for replacing the lost *Walvis* were lacking. A smaller fleet of four ships, two from Ostend and two Basque, sailed to West Greenland in March 1728. Only Jacobus Clarisse's testimony indicated the course. The chosen hunting ground was Disco Bay, which seemed similar to the Dutch catching area.

In August 1728, three of the four whalers returned to Ostend with the good news that the two Basque ships had caught four whales, among them sperm whales.<sup>49</sup> This was no surprise; the Basques had a long tradition in hunting *cachalots* and humpbacks.

The profits of the 1728 auction did not cover all the expenses of the expedition.<sup>50</sup> New funds had to be found to keep the Ostend Whaling Company alive. In January 1728, Chairman de Fraula was able to convince a number of prosperous Antwerp men to invest in this dubious enterprise. De Fraula predicted that the 1729

catches would yield 100,000 guilders at least, a promise that resulted in the sale of 495 shares (123,750 guilders) to about twenty-five new participants. The Antwerp financiers received de Fraula's assurance that he, personally, would make up the difference if the 1729 revenues were less.

The Ostenders implicitly trusted the skills of the Basque whalers during 1729. In September, the four Davis Strait men arrived in Ostend with 5 *poissons de grande baye vivant, et un mort outre deux plus petits*.<sup>51</sup> It is probable Ostend whalers mainly caught humpbacks; the Greenland whale was called *baleine franche* in French during the eighteenth century.

In December 1729, Balthazar Vignaulx noted that the entire proceeds of this venture amounted to 30,992 guilders — certainly not enough to pay dividends to the shareholders or to cover the equipment costs for the ships. These bad results initially did not stop the Directors from making plans for new expeditions. The stern message from Spain to eliminate the Basque facilities, on the other hand, crippled all further aspirations. At the general meeting in Antwerp on 25 February 1730, it was decided that Martin de Zavaletta would try to sell the four flutes as soon as possible. The liquidation of all Company

**VERCOOP-CONDITIEN**

**V**An d'onderstaende Goederen, die de Geïntereffeerde in de Viſſcherye van de Walviſch-Vangſt Publickelyck ſullen Veylen in de Venditie binnen de Stadt van OOSTENDE op den 29. December 1729. ende de volgende daghen, op de maniere als volgt, alles te betaelen in Vlaems Wiſſelgeldt.

I.

**D**En Traen ſal connen geſien worden vier daghen voor den Vercoopdagh, ende den ſelven ſal Verkocht worden by den Stoop, Vlaemſche ofte Geuſche Mate, maekende de 95 ſloopen een Quartel van 12 ſtecken Amſterdamsche Mate, ende dat volgees de Riſſinghe, gelyck dien Traen door de gefworen Pegelaers deſer Stadt van Ooſtende nu is gepegelt, ende die Riſſinghe daer op geteeckent ſtaet.

II.

**D**E ſelve Gepegelde Vaten ſullen vier daghen naer de Vercoopinghe vol-gemaect worden naer gewoonte, ende alſdan blyven ligghen ten peryckel, ende Riſico van den Cooper.

III.

**D**En Breyn, zynde Sperma Cete, wordt Vercocht by het Oxhoofd, in den ſelven ſtaet gelyck hy tegenwoordigh leydt.

IV.

**D**E Walviſch Baerden worden Vercocht by Ponden, weghende yderen Coop 400 ponden ghewicht van Ooſtende ſalvo juſto, maekende 106 pondt van Ooſtende, in't Amſterdams gewicht 100 ponden, ſonder het een pondt ten hondert goetd gewicht der Waghe, t'welck den Cooper ſal genieten buyten den tarra voor de Coorden ofte Banden; t'welcke op den dagh van Venditie ſal gereguleert worden.

V.

**D**E bovenschreven Goederen worden Vercocht vry van Incommende ende uytgaende Rechten

VI.

**D**E Coopers ſullen verplicht ſijn hier hunnen Commiſſionaris te nomineren, den welcken het emport van hunne gekochte Goederen ſal moeten verantwoorden op heereijke ende parate executie.

VII.

**D**E volle beralinge ſal moeten gheſchieden in Comptant ghelt, ofte goede Wiſſelbrieven binnen Bruſſel, in handen van d' Hr. HEND. VAN MEYGELEN tot ſijnen contentemente, aler de ſelve Goederen ſullen worden ghelevert, den welcken alſdan ſal geven ſijne Receptiſſe, waer op den Commiſſionaris tot Ooſtende de gekochte Coopmanſchappen ſal laeten volgen.

VIII.

**M**En ſal aende Coopers ofte hunne Commiſſionariſſen, laeten rabatteren voor eerdere ofte prompter betaelinghe als van dry Maenden, een half ten hondert par Maendt à rate van die ſomme, die ſy voor de dry Maenden ſullen hebben voldaan.

IX.

**D**E Coopers ofte hunne Commiſſionariſſen ſullen gehouden zyn hunne gekochte Goederen te ontfanghen, ofte te doen ontfanghen tot Ooſtende ter plaetſe ghe-naemt de Schorre ende inde Stadt, in den ſtaet ſoo als die genombrert liggen, ſonder eenighe de minſte refactie te connen pretenderen, op wat pretext het loude moghen welen, ende oock t'hunnen coſte ende peryckel te doen wegh-haelen

X.

**E**Nde die hunne gekochte Goederen niet en connen ontfanghen binnen den tyd van twee Maenden naer de Vercoopinghe, ſoo ſal men die Goederen andermal vercoopen op volle renchere, ende de courtrefſe ſal verhaelt worden op den Cooper ende ſijnen Commiſſionaris, ſonder te moeten obſerveren de Order, de excuſie, ofte de diviſie tot het volbrenghen, ende betaelen vanden prijs van het ghene den Coop compt te bedraghen, by prompte ende parate executie, ſonder voorgaende ſommatie

XI.

**S**Onder prejuditie ende diminutie van de principale Coopſomme, ſullen de Coopers gehouden zyn te betaelen à rate van eenen Gulden par duſcent van het Montant van hunne gekochte Goederen, ten profijte van den Armen deſer Stede.

*Verkoopconditien* (terms and conditions of sale) of the auction of the Whaling Company, held in Ostend on 29 December 1729. Courtesy of Algemeen Rijksarchief, Brussels.

assets would be necessary to pay off the huge unsettled debts.<sup>52</sup>

The public sale of the last expedition took place on 29 December. Shortly after the arrival of the whalers, the blubber, baleen, and spermaceti were transported to the *Groote Kreek* in the Ostend dock area, where the Company had built a tryworks in 1727. After boiling the blubber and processing the baleens, everything was stored in a warehouse named the *Schorre*, which was especially constructed by the Company.<sup>53</sup>

The auction was announced in the local newspapers a few weeks in advance, and posted on public places in the major Flemish towns. The next procedure was the official control by the sworn *pegelaars* (inspectors of weights and measures) of the City of Ostend, who calibrated all the casks of train oil. Four days before the actual sale, interested merchants were able to inspect the products. The oil and the spermaceti were sold per hogshead, and the whalebones per pound. In 1729, 325 hogsheads (74,265.75 liters) of train oil, and only eleven hogsheads of spermaceti were put on sale. Eleven merchants were interested in the 13,557 pounds of baleen. All buyers could get a discount of one half percent per month if they paid in full within three months after the auction. Merchants who failed to collect their goods in two months time lost their claim. These products were resold by the Company, but the first buyer had rights of usage. Finally, every purchaser had to hand over one promille of the price to the poor of Ostend.

The liquidation of the Ostend Whaling Company was finalized in May 1734. The last settling of accounts showed a deficit of 25,076 guilders.<sup>54</sup> Compared to other small companies abroad, such a loss was not abnormal, but this enterprise could not ask the government for financial assistance. De Fraula and his partners from Brussels had made a bargain in 1734 that all shareholders should contribute proportionally to cover debts. The Antwerp participants did not accept this proposal and went to court. The whole affair lasted until 1752, when the Antwerp financiers were absolved of paying any of the losses.

Sotelet's initiative hardly proved to be viable, because most of the participants — de

Fraula was the exception — wanted only to earn easy money. From the start, the lack of starting capital doomed the enterprise. Nevertheless very capable men such as Jan de Schonamille, Dutch and Basque commanders, and skilled harpooners were engaged in this effort. The changing economic climate and the problems of the Ostend East India Company paralyzed any future whaling ventures.

Flanders had to wait until 1771 before a whaler set sail again. Bruges merchant Nicolas Donche tried to revive this trade. His frigate *Maria en Alida* was able to catch 2½ whales during her second season near Greenland. When his third venture proved to be a failure, Donche did not want to spend any more capital in this enterprise.<sup>55</sup>

The last whaling activities in Ostend happened during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1781–1783), when the neutrality of the Austrian Netherlands made whaling possible only for a few years. As soon as peace returned in Europe, Flemish participation ended.



*Jan Parmentier is an assistant professor at the University of Ghent, Belgium, in the Department of Maritime and Overseas History. He is a member of the Board of Linschoten Society of Amsterdam and Chairman of the society for Maritime Archaeology in Bruges. He has been published in such journals as The Mariner's Mirror and The International Journal of Maritime History, and is the author of De Holle Compagnie: Smokkel in legale Handel onder Zuidenederlandse vlag in Bengalen, ca. 1720–1744 (Hilversum, The Netherlands, 1992), De Avonturen van een VOC Soldaat: Het Dagboek van Carolus Van der Haeghe, 1699–1705 [with R. Laarhoven] (Zutphen, The Netherlands, 1994), and Tea Time in Flanders: The Maritime Trade between the Southern Netherlands and China in the Eighteenth Century (Ghent, 1996).*

## Tables

Size of the Ostend whalers (in Amsterdam feet)				
Name	Length	Width	Depth	Deck height
<i>Walvis</i>	109'	26'	11.8'	6.5'
<i>Faem van Vlaenderen</i>	106'	27'	12'	6.5'
<i>Vergulde Arent</i>	94.5'	24.5'	11.25'	5.5'
<i>Perel</i>	106.75'	26'	12'	6.2'
<i>St. Joseph</i>	95'	27'	11.25'	4.25'

Function	Monthly Wages in Ostend (in guilders)	Dutch Wages (in guilders)
Captain	81 g.	—
Mate	54 g.	—
Boatswain	54 g.	27–28 g.
Steward	40.5 g.	27–28 g.
First Carpenter	54 g.	36–40 g.
Second Carpenter	49.5 g.	21 g.
Third Carpenter	45 g.	19 g.
Fourth Carpenter	40.5 g.	19 g.
First Cooper	40.5 g.	27–28 g.
Second Cooper	36 g.	22 g.
Other Coopers (4)	33 g.	19–21 g.
Harpooner (3–4)	40.5 g.	—
Spectioneer (2–3)	36 g.	—
Surgeon	54 g.	25–28 g.
Sailors (20)	27 g.	18 g.

## Acknowledgment

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## Notes

1. A. van Zuylen van Nyevelt, "La pêche à la baleine et les brugeois au XVIIe siècle," *Annales de la Société d'Émulation de Bruges*, 58:1 (1924), 47, 53; C. de Jong, *Geschiedenis van de Oude Nederlandse Walvisvaart*, (Johannesburg: 1978), dl. 2, 384; Private Collection L. Danhieux, Drongen: Journal of the Ostend convoy ship *St. François* (1676), footnotes 2–3.
2. Walter Debrock, "Het Vlaamse kaperschip der 17 de eeuw: de Snauw," *Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Marine Academie van België*, 11 (1958–1959), 17–33; Rijksarchief Brugge (RAB), Notariaat Oostende, Depot 1940, 12, 21 September 1705.
3. Jan Parmentier, "The Private East India Ventures from Ostend: The Maritime and Commercial Aspects, 1715–1722," *International Journal of Maritime History*, 5:2 (December 1993), 75–102.
4. Jules Filliaerts, *De Compagnie van Vischvaart te Nieuwpoort, 1727–1737*, (Nieuwpoort: 1939); Daniël Farasijn, *Belgische steden in reliëf: Oostende* (Brussels, 1965), 147.
5. Until now, whaling literature mentions that Sotelet started his company in Nieuwpoort (see, C. de Jong, 385). This is a misconception for Sotelet worked only in Ostend. The *Compagnie van Vischvaart* began its activities also in 1727 and was situated in Nieuwpoort, and specialized in cod and herring fishery. Baron de Sotelet was a major tax farmer who had excellent relations with the banking world of Brussels and Antwerp. V. Janssens, *Het Geldwezen der Oostenrijkse Nederlanden* (Brussels: 1957), 31.
6. C. H. Slechte, "Een noodlottig jaar voor veel zotte en wijze." *De Rotterdamse windhandel van 1720* (Den Haag: 1982).
7. John Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble* (London: 1960).
8. Algemeen Rijksarchief Brussels (ARB), Diverse Manuscripten (DM) 381, ARB, Hof van Beroep (HB) 2119.
9. J. R. Leinenga, *Arctische walvisvangst in de achttiende eeuw. De betekenis van Straat Davis als vangstgebied* (Amsterdam: 1995); G. Jackson, *Hull in the Eighteenth Century. A Study in Economic and Social History*, (London, New York, Toronto: 1972), 165–169.
10. ARB, HB 2126; Admiraliteit 645.
11. Jan Parmentier, "The Ostend Guinea-Trade (1718–1720)," *International Journal of Maritime History*, 2:1 (June 1990), 175–206; Michel Huisman, *La Belgique commerciale sous l'empereur Charles VI. La Compagnie d'Ostende. Étude historique de politique commerciale et coloniale* (Bruxelles: 1902), 308–338.
12. Karel Degrijse, *De Antwerpse fortuinen — Kapitaalaccumulatie, — investering en — rendement te Antwerpen in de 18 de eeuw, unpublished doctoral thesis* (Ghent: 1985), appendix XIV, 32; ARB, HB 2117.
13. ARB, DM 3819.
14. J. Van Beylen, *Schepen van de Nederlanden. Van de late middeleeuwen tot het einde van de 17 de eeuw* (Amsterdam: 1970), 101–109.
15. This flute sailed before under the name *Johanna Bernard* and was originally owned by master shipwright Jacob Gerredse Buys (ARB, DM 3819).
16. C.G. Zorgdrager, *Bloeyende Opkomst der Aloude en Heden daagsche Groenlandsche Visschery... Uitgebreid met een korte Historische Beschryving der noordere Gewesten, voornamentlyk Groenlandt, Yslandt, Spitsbergen, Nova Zembla, Jan Mayen Eilandt, de Straat Davis...* (2e druk, Amsterdam: 1728), 330.
17. 1 Amsterdam feet = 283 mm.
18. Rijksarchief Zeeland, Middelburg (RAZ), Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie (MCC), 16 Minutes of the Board, 1 October and 22 October 1734.
19. William Scoresby, Jr., *An Account of the Arctic Regions, with a History and Description of the Northern Whale-Fishery*, (Edinburgh/London: 1820), 2:65, 75; B. Lubbock, *The Arctic Whalers* (Glasgow: 1937), 81–82; RAB, HB 2121.
20. G. Rees, "Copper sheathing. An example of technological diffusion in the English merchant fleet." *Journal of Transport History*, N.S. 1, 1971/2, 85–94; J. R. Harris, "Copper and shipping in the eighteenth century." *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 19 (1966): 550–68; Universiteitsbibliotheek Ghent (U.B.G.), Fonds Hye-Hoys, MS 1997 Letterbook of L. Bernaert, 26 August 1725.
21. Nine sloops were built by the Ostend brothers Leonard and Jan De Cocker. The other four whale boats were constructed at their fellow townsman Pieter Moentack's wharf (ARB, HB 2122); J. Van Beylen, "Portret van de Nederlandse walvisvloep in de 17 de en 18 de eeuw," *Tijdschrift voor Zeegeschiedenis*, 5, 2 (1986): 81–145.
22. ARD, MD 3819, Inventory of the *Faem van Vlaenderen* and of the *St. Joseph* (1728).
23. 1 razier = ca. 250 pounds.
24. L. H. van Wijngaarden-Bakker and J. P. Pals, "De voeding van de walvisvaarders," L. Hacquebord and W. Vroom (eds.) *Walvisvaart in de Gouden Eeuw* (Amsterdam: 1988), 119–123.
25. ARB, HB 2119–2120.
26. Gemeentearchief Amsterdam (GAA), 24/D/7, *Lijst der Groenlandsvaarders van Holland, Hamburg en Bree-men, Als meede de Straat Davidsvaarders in der jaere 1719–1722*; Leinenga, *Arctische walvisvangst in de achttiende eeuw*, 201.
27. GAA, 24/D/7, *Lijst...1723–1724*. The results of the

- Dutch Spitsbergen voyages decreased to 0.8 and 1 on average in the years 1723 and 1724 (Leinenga, *Arc-tische walvisvangst*, 201).
28. ARB, HB 2126.
  29. Privateering between 1702–1706, Joannes Lindersen collected twenty-two prizes and twelve “ransomed” ships. Walter Debrock, “Oostende en de maritieme oorlog tussen 1702 en 1706,” *Neptunus* (February 1983), 33–43; RAB, Notariaat Oostende, Depot 1940, 31, 4 September 1736; Jan Parmentier, “Guillielmo de Brouwer (1693–1767). En skitse af en kaptajn, handelsmand og rederi i det 18 arhundrede,” *Maritim Kontakt* 14 (Copenhagen: 1990), 78.
  30. ARB, HB 2126. Those officers received a bonus for recruiting seamen in Holland and Dunkirk.
  31. Only one Dunkirk whaling voyage is mentioned during the first half of the eighteenth century. Christian Pfister-Langanay, *Ports, navires et négociants à Dunkerque* (1662–1792), (Dunkirk: 1985), 267.
  32. A. Cabantous, “Migrations frontalières; les courants migratoires et les villes littorales des Pays-Bas flamands au XVIIIe siècle.” *101e congrès des Sociétés Savantes*, (Lille, 1976), 19–37.
  33. Captain van Geldrop was dismissed in 1727, possibly because of his lack of assistance to Commander Stap, who lost the *Walvis* near Spitsbergen. The inexperienced Daniel Lindersen was not contracted for a next voyage (ARB, DM, 3819).
  34. According to the *Gazette van Ghendt* (23 August 1728), the Biscayan vessels caught four whales.
  35. RAB, Notariaat Oostende, Depot 1940, 16 October 1728.
  36. This episode was confirmed by Pieter Berteloot, Joannes Parmentier, and Philippe Terrein, all members of families living in Ostend and Dunkirk.
  37. R. Gonzalez Echegaray, *Balleneros Cantabros*, (Santander: 1978), 201.
  38. I would like to thank the French historian Thierry Du Pasquier for this information.
  39. ARB, HB 2121. This general meeting was held 25 February 1730.
  40. The average ratio on the Ostend East Indiamen was approximately twenty-one men per 100 tons. K. Degryse and J. Parmentier, “Maritime aspects of the Ostend trade to Mocha, India and China (1715–1732), J. R. Bruijn and F. S. Gaastra (ed.), *Ships, Sailors and Spices. East India Companies and Their Shipping in the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries*,” NEHA Series 3 (Amsterdam: 1993), 143–144.
  41. ARB, HB 2121; C. de Jong, *Geschiedenis van de Oude Nederlandse Walvisvaart*, dl. 1 (Pretoria: 1972), bijlage I, 287–313.
  42. C. de Jong, *Geschiedenis van de Oude Nederlandse Walvisvaart*, dl. I, 91; R. Ellis, *Men and Whales* (London: 1992), 64.
  43. Zorgdrager, *Bloeyende Opkomst der Aloude en Heden daagsche Groenlandsche Visschery...*, 341–342.
  44. ARB, MD 3206, Journal of the *Vergulde Arent* (1727); RAZ, MCC 1111, Journal of the *Vergulde Walvis* (1735); Kendall Whaling Museum, Sharon, Massachusetts, 558, Journal of the *De Twee Goe Vrinden* (1715).
  45. Van Wijngaarden-Bakker and Pals, “De voeding van de walvisvaarders,” 119–120.
  46. Besides investing some capital in Ostend privateering during the Spanish Succession War, Balthazar Vignaulx developed a profitable trade with Nantes (salt and wine), Norway (wood), and Spain (fruit and wine). (Stadsarchief Ghent, *Familiefonds Handboeken* 490–492, 494.
  47. G. F. Wynants (1708–1736); RAB, Notariaat Oostende, Depot 1940, 12–26 (1705–1726)).
  48. ARD, DM 3819, resolution of 20/12/1727; HB 2118, 2127.
  49. Balthazar Vignaulx bought five barrels of *spermaceti* at the 1728 auction on behalf of the Company (ARB, HB 2120, 2122).
  50. A shortage of 61,829 guilders appeared in the Company’s bookkeeping records (ARB, DM 3819).
  51. Stadsarchief Antwerp, Insolvente Boedelkamer 1677, Correspondence of J. De Pret, 5 September 1729.
  52. The last bills were finally settled in 1734 (ARB, HB 2121).
  53. ARB, DM 3819.
  54. ARB, HB 2119, 2120.
  55. Jan Parmentier, “Brugge en Scandinavië,” V. Vermeersch (ed.), *Brugge en Europa*, (Antwerp: 1992), 157.

