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The roots of Arctic whaling

- Why whaling? Demand for oil and fats in a growing urban population
- The Basque whaling culture
- Basque whaling at Labrador developed from the 1520s
- Decrease in whale oil imports to Europe in the 1580s. Search for new grounds
- The Arctic expeditions around 1600 revealed new resources



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The prey: Bowhead whale

- The Bowhead or Greenland whale (*B. mysticetus*) is an Arctic species of baleen or right whales
- Grown animals can be 18-20 meters long and weigh up to 100 tons
- An "ideal" prey for the whalers
- Two populations hunted before 1800: North Atlantic and Davis Strait
- Migration in spring from South Greenland to Svalbard; back in autumn
- Only blubber and baleen were exploited commercially, not the whale meat



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The company period

- Walrus hunting on Bjørnøya 1604; whaling at Spitsbergen from 1611
- Restricted whaling: "The Muscovy Company" (UK) and "Noordsche Compagnie" (NL)
- Rivalry and conflicts until 1618; thereafter peaceful coexistence
- The Dutch settled in the northwest, the British on the west coast of Spitsbergen
- Also Spanish, French, Danish, Norwegian and German whalers participated



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Whaling technology

- Basque technology: harpooning from small boats, processing on-shore
- The whale was towed to shore and flensed at the beach
- The blubber was stripped off, cut into small pieces and melted to oil.
- The oil was cooled, cleaned and filled on casks
- Applications of oil: lighting, lubrication, soap making etc.
- No commercial market for whalemeat



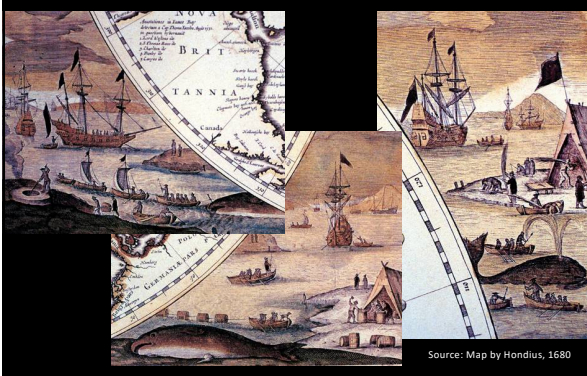
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15 minutes break



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Contemporary illustrations



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From land to open sea

- Expansion in the 1640s; monopolies fell
- Crowded hunting grounds, possibly also ice problems (colder climate)
- "Pelagic" (open sea) hunting and processing methods developed after 1650
- Significant expansion of hunting area; Svalbard became less important
- "Smeerenburg city" – myths and reality



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Sealing at Svalbard and in the West Ice

- Traditional sealing and walrus hunting in Europe
- Seals and walrus in the 17th century Svalbard activity
- The development of large scale Arctic sealing in the 18th century: the West Ice
- Hooded and Harp seals; technology and catching methods
- Whaling and sealing compared
- Development of sealing – long lines



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Summing up: Whaling in perspective


- Economic perspectives
 - Supply and demand: expanding markets
 - Whaling was a "lottery"
 - A capitalist industry?
- Political and cultural implications
 - Jurisdiction, sovereignty, regulation
 - Inclusion of Svalbard into the known world
- Ecological consequences
 - Sustainable harvest before 1640
 - Pressure on stocks around 1700, collapse before 1850
 - Ecological "side effects": implications for the ecosystem?



Balaena mysticetus, a.k.a. Bowhead or Greenland whale

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End of 3rd lecture



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