

themes, verbal and adverbial modes, and atmospheres or settings. And it is this critical work of inventory that provides us with a recognizable narrative constellation derived from the collection of tales. In comparison with this rather stable generic constellation, the individual shipwreck tales appear as so many contributing variants. Only, I might add, at this generic level can we successfully arrange the recurring and exemplary features of the circumstantially unique tales into an ideal sequence of master-words that embody the genre's central structural and semantic moments: EXPOSITION → SHIPWRECK → DELIVERANCE. Often acting as a framing strategy, the narrative moment of EXPOSITION sets forth the who, what, where, when, and how of the tale (thus, information about the pilot and the passengers, the ship and its cargo, the sea and the designated sea route, the time); the moment of SHIPWRECK furnishes us with the central defining event of the genre and includes scenes of wild weather, the breaking apart of the ship, an acute drama of suffering, being-toward-death, and an often collective crying out; finally, the nucleus of DELIVERANCE articulates the moment of miraculous survival and rescue, often (but not always) encoded as a religious experience of divine mercy and salvation.

As this sequence of master-words suggests, we move symbolically from the surface realism of everyday accountability to the vertical depths and heights of the extreme, the marvelous, and the sublime, and then back to the "ordinary" world of early modern sea travel. At the very dramatic center of the genre, therefore, is the often prolonged moment of human exposure to the power of the ocean, extreme hunger and thirst, and then, just when death by water is about to be consummated, some miraculous stroke of good luck or divine intervention. Still, it is the subliminal experience of the untamed ocean that the reader hungers after and remembers best, and the shipwreck tale's insistent repetition of it leads us to the overwhelming conclusion that the new Oceanic Order and the emergence of modernity are equally responsible for the rise of this new text type. But the naufragium and the utopia genres appeared on the scene together, and neither should be considered separately as we seek to account for the ocean-spanning ambitions of the nascent European states.—WILLIAM BOELHOWER, *Louisiana State University*

MONSTROUS FISHES AND THE MEAD–DARK SEA: Whaling in the Medieval North Atlantic. By VICKI ELLEN SZABO. xx and 326 pp.; maps, ill., bibliog., index. Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 2008. \$144.00 (cloth), ISBN 9789004163980.

In the introduction to her work on the value of whales and whaling to medieval societies in the North Atlantic, the historian Vicki Szabo acknowledges that whales were neither "a mainstay of medieval diets" nor "central within medieval thought. . . . Rather," she continues, whales "were secondary resources, but resources nonetheless" (pp. 4–5). A similar measure of importance could be applied to the place of whales and whaling as subjects of scholarly investigation within academic geogra-

phy. Geographers have indeed studied whales and the peoples who pursue them, although, to borrow Szabo's phraseology, the topics have hardly been central within geographical thought. However, geographers have long been concerned with the broad subject most central to the study of whaling: interactions between human societies and the natural environment. A reader of Szabo's book may come away believing that whaling is the ultimate case study in the analysis of historical human-environment interactions.

This historical treatise, informed by a half-dozen or more research strategies, is an example of the interdisciplinary approach at its best. Szabo synthesizes findings made through studies of ecology, ethnography, archaeology, literature (including a chapter devoted to the Sagas), legal documents, art history, and archival sources. This interdisciplinarity is pleasing to the reader who may be more familiar with some methods than with others. For example, a literary specialist need not worry when the discussion turns, say, to the osometric and morphological analysis of cetacean bones from a comparative anatomy collection; only a few pages later Szabo presents a chapter-length discussion of whales and whaling within medieval literature. Such diversity of framework continues through the book, ensuring that there will indeed be something for everyone. However, this is not simply a side-by-side collection of discrete approaches. The thread woven through these eight interdisciplinary chapters is an examination of the value of whales—both for the provision of resources and the shaping of cultures—throughout medieval northern Europe. Not only does it provide an easy introduction for someone unfamiliar with the subject, its inclusive bibliography (to the late twentieth century) gives the specialist a start on many trails of literature and primary sources.

The author's main character is the North Atlantic Ocean itself—called "Mead-Dark" in the manner of Homer's "Wine-Dark Sea." If wine epitomizes the Mediterranean, then what better way to characterize the North Atlantic—primal, mysterious, unpredictable, dark, and thick—than through mead? Strongly associated with the Vikings, and placed by Claude Lévi-Strauss at the transition from nature to culture, mead is the stuff of legends. Likewise, the North Atlantic in the Middle Ages—especially with respect to the myriad frightening and poorly understood sea creatures within—was a place of both allure and fear to coastal peoples of northern Europe. For a visual sampling of the complex medieval attitudes toward whales, one need only turn to the illustrations in the middle of the book: reproductions of wood carvings showing horned, toothed, and clawed whales spouting water and smashing ships, but also being carved up and hauled away by onshore butchers and bone workers. Whales were both feared and valued, as was the ocean from which they came. The centrality of the ocean, the place itself, within this book's narrative does more than simply orient the historical analysis geographically; it identifies *Monstrous Fishes and the Mead-Dark Sea* as a geographical text in its own right. Perhaps, like many other studies before and since, Szabo's work can feel at home on either shelf—one filled with books on history or geography.

One major impetus for Szabo's research is to understand the extent to which medieval Europeans actively hunted whales, as opposed to scavenging them when found serendipitously dead on shore. This question, along with an interest in identifying the cetacean species referred to in taxonomically vague medieval texts, crops up often throughout the book, although it resists final quantification. The author gives extra attention to the species question in the book's appendix, which comprises a list of cetaceans currently and historically found in the Norse North Atlantic (defined as the region from 50°N to 70°N). This list, though a useful addition to the text, would have benefited from the inclusion of some of the various colorful local names for certain cetacean species—common throughout the North Atlantic—especially considering that so many of the cited primary sources refer to these whales only by their local names.

As a modern analogue to medieval whaling, Szabo often cites examples of the *grindadráp*, or whale drive, of the Faeroe Islands. Not having had an opportunity to conduct fieldwork in the Faeroes, which is understandable given their remoteness, Szabo turns to published descriptions of the *grindadráp* for her information. However, she relies most heavily here on out of date sources; and, in a case of unfortunate timing, *Monstrous Fishes* preceded by just one year the release of the Faeroese ethnographer Jóan Pauli Joensen's 2009 *Pilot Whaling in the Faroe Islands: History, Ethnography, Symbol*. Joensen's work is the best and most up-to-date description of the *grindadráp* in English, especially in light of the significant changes that the whale drive has undergone during recent decades, and Szabo would certainly have benefited from being able to reference it. Perhaps she will in a second edition of this book.

After the introductory essay and eight topical chapters, each showcasing a different research framework, Szabo concludes the volume with a tandem of narrative accounts. The first, an imaginary thirteenth-century Orcadian landscape, rife with examples of whale-product use, plots two methods of acquisition of these products—a coordinated and opportunistic pilot whale drive and the finding of a large, stranded baleen whale washed up dead on the shore of a local farmstead. Both were seen as windfalls, and the whales were butchered with haste and thanksgiving. The second account, much more recent and not at all hypothetical, refers to the 2006 case of the Northern Bottlenose whale that, owing perhaps to illness or injury, famously swam up the Thames into downtown London. Twenty-first-century Londoners viewed this whale with the same wonder and excitement as did their thirteenth-century northern counterparts, but the story concludes much differently. The 2006 whale died in the process of being rescued, and its bones were put on public display one year later. As Szabo makes clear, this whale in the Thames contributed to the spirit of the times in twenty-first-century England in a way that was different—certainly in form, though not necessarily degree—from that of the presence of whales in the North Atlantic a thousand years ago.—RUSSELL FIELDING, *University of Denver*