BERNHARD FAERØYVIK'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DOCUMENTATION OF NORWEGIAN INSHORE CRAFT

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Those who carry out research on 'ethnographic material' often come from decidedly different backgrounds from their subjects, and not infrequently publish their results in journals (and indeed languages) quite inaccessible to their informants. One can not but have sympathy with those who have recently taken exception to this (e.g. Tokumaru, 1980).

Such criticisms could not have been levelled against the late Bernhard Faerøyvik however. He was born in 1886, to a family of farmers and fishers in Solund at the mouth of Sognefjord. Before turning to science and school teaching, as a lad he worked at the winter herring fishing under sail and oars. This background gave him an insight, at a level elusive to academic outsiders, into the aims and attitudes of the boatbuilders and fishermen of the coastal communities. This clearly enriched what he could gather from them, but he could not be accused of being a one-way road for information. The bibliography of his published work, set out in the Bergens Sjøfartsmuseumsårbok for 1950, the year of his death, records not only over twenty years of academic publication but around fifty newspaper articles. All his output was written in New Norwegian, and as his eldest son Øystein Faerøyvik has put it (1979, p. 8) he "regarded his work as part of the broader movement to investigate popular and rural culture in Norway, searching for the origin of the national heritage".

Roger Finch began a recent book on the working sailing craft of Britian with the rather sad words that now they "have gone, we realise we have lost something precious" (1976, p. 9). Bernhard Faerøyvik was earlier than most not merely in foreseeing the impact of motor power and the changing social and economic milieu on traditional boat types, but in taking positive steps to forestall such losses. Feeling that material already in archives and libraries was at least secure, he concentrated on

fieldwork to record what he could of Norway's working boats and the ways they were built and used.

He collected boatbuilders tools, and secured some of the boats themselves for Norwegian museums, large and small. He made photographic records and comprehensive measured drawings, and besides gathering a great deal of oral material on traditional techniques, he annotated his drawings with the local names for the various parts of boats and rigging. He considered that this philological material would eventually help towards disentangling the inter-relationships between influences reflected in different regional boat types.

He started working systematically in the early 1920s, most of a decade ahead of similar efforts made elsewhere in Scandinavia (e.g. by Hasslöf in Sweden or Nielsen in Denmark), in America (e.g. Chapelle and Davis) or in Britain, where in the 1930s P.J. Oke achieved much along a road later to be followed by others including E.J. March, and latterly Adrian Osler of our own Society.

Faerøyvik worked mainly in spare time from his career as schoolmaster. He received some limited help through travel grants in the 1920s and 30s, though it was not until 1939 that the Norwegian parliament granted him regular support from their culture budget. In 1947 he ceased teaching and was appointed to a special curatorship in boatbuilding history by the Norwegian Museums Association. When he died three years later he left an impressive amount of first-hand archive material, a great deal of which would not have been recorded at all but for his assiduous fieldwork. His wife Aletta, who had worked with him throughout, did much to organise this mass of material for deposition in Bergens Sjøfartsmuseum, where it is now available for study.

One of his sons, Øystein, has prepared his papers for publication, and the Norges Almenvitenskapelige Forskningsråd (Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities), conscious of the interest to many outside Norway, has supported

the production of a shorter English language book. This has been edited with both sympathy and skill by Arne Emil Christensen, and published by Conway Maritime Press of Greenwich (1979, 143pp, £12.50). As the Norwegians intended, it goes far to fill the rather surprising gap of works in English on these craft, which provide so interesting comparisons with local boat types in Britain, and with archaeological finds here as well as in Scandinavia.

The reader can investigate parallels and contrasts that intrigue him, in specific terms because the format of the book is generous (210 by 300mm) and good use is made of this to reproduce Faerøyvik's plans of some fifty boat types. These plans are kept to single pages, and although this sometimes entails degrees of reduction that cause some of the finer lines to fade, they remain readable and the disruption caused by crossing the gutter of a double spread is avoided. This will be particularly appreciated by model makers, who will find the book a source of many attractive subjects (the Bergen Museum also holds negatives of most of the collection, and copies may be obtained).

One man's efforts, however dedicated, could not cover the whole of Norway's seaboard and inland waters in equal detail, and there is an understandable concentration on the areas of the west most accessible to him, between Møre and Hordaland. His material however ranges from southernmost Norway to the sewn boats of the arctic frontier with Russia, and offers a rich and enlightening picture of the sheer range and variability of traditional boat types.

This diversity is something that those contemplating generalisations based on the incomplete evidence that survives from former periods would do well to keep in mind. Bernhard Faerøyvik's work underlines the numerous ways that variations have been worked within what some might regard as a single Norwegian tradition of boatbuilding. His collection demonstrates variations both from place to place, and within individual areas. Many of these clearly reflect different functions, and

regional or seasonal differences in operating conditions (some examples are extreme: e.g. specialist ice-boats or tide-rip boats; others exhibit more subtle adaptations to operational aims and environments). Some variations in boat form or constructional detail seem however to be less strictly functional, and appear rather to reflect fashions prevalent at different localities or periods in choosing between seemingly equally viable alternatives.

With this mixture of function and fashion producing simultaneous variations in practice of the kind recorded by Faerøyvik in the recent past, attempts at typological dating of remains of earlier boats must clearly be viewed with caution, not least by us here in Scotland. For instance, to class the stem pieces found on Eigg (now in the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh) as "Viking" without radiocarbon or dendrochronological confirmation, on grounds that one is fashioned with rabbets not unlike those of the Skuldelev ships, would seem injudicious. Faerøyvik shows that while many recent boatbuilders in Norway have used un-rabbeted stems (i.e., ones not cut with facets for the individual plank ends), others have used the rebate technique well into the 20th century. This would suggest that we should not lightly discount indications such as the galley carved on the 16th century tomb of Alexander MacLeod at Rodel in Harris that this form of construction may have remained in use in the Hebrides long after the Viking period with which it has tended to become associated.

This is but one example of the kind of specific point that Faerøyvik's work can raise in the minds of British readers. There are plenty of others. However, his conspectus of the world of Norwegian smallcraft also bears on more general topics. Its relevance extends beyond 'boats as a particular class of artifacts' to the wider problems of the relationships between group and individual, in the interplay between continuity and innovation. It is rather a fortunate coincidence of timing that just when the 'Year of the Viking' is in full swing, and museums and media-men are making so much of the striking similarities between certain Norwegian boats a millenium apart in date, the

English edition of Faerøyvik should appear with its reminders of the diversity that can exist within a strong framework of tradition, and of the complexity of the processes of change that may be compatible with extreme conservatism in certain attitudes.

His examples (explaining for instance why the Nordfjord boatbuilders outstripped the competition from Sunnfjord when the importance of offshore fishing increased after 1860) succinctly bring out the subtle interaction between seamanly, economic and social factors that can underlie developments in a boat type. He is authoritative in this because of his direct contact with those involved, or with their immediate descendants. Those of us further removed from the areas and periods whose boats interest us are sometimes in danger from an affliction shared by some early antiquaries and some New Wave archaeologists:— that of merely playing an abstract 3—D chess game (typological—chronological—spatial) with artifacts. Although the plans, photographs and accompanying data make the book a highly specific source of reference material on the boats, the presentation never lets the reader forget that these 'artifacts' are not separable from their human context. They are to be viewed in terms of the people who developed them to cope with a land where not only fisher, farmer and trader but midwife, bishop and beggar alike used to find a boat a necessity.

Thus although as Christensen puts it, reducing the original text for English publication was a "stringent surgical operation", it is consistent with the agreeable overall flavour of the book that he has contrived space to include some of the anecdotes Faerøyvik collected while measuring his boats. On studying the fine lines of a church-boat from Hardanger, it is thus pleasant to learn that she had had her less sedate moments. She belonged to farmers at Alsåker, who claimed that their lasses could even row better than the sons of their neighbours and rivals at Lote. But in 1853 when there was a wedding at Alsåker the lads of Lote dressed up as girls, hijacked the church-boat and rowed circles round the bride-boat (which

should always be the swiftest) skirling and skreeching to such good effect that that church-boat was still known as "tausa-båten", the girls' boat, when Bernhard Faerøyvik recorded her for us threequarters of a century later.

Faerøyvik, B., 1979 — *Inshore Craft of Norway from a Manuscript by Bernhard and Øystein Faerøyvik,* translated and edited by Arne Emil Christensen. Conway Maritime Press, Greenwich. 143pp.

Finch, R., 1976 — *Sailing Craft of the British Isles.* London, 160pp.

Tokumaru, Y., 1980 — *Fieldback continued.* Internat. Folk Music Council UK Newsletter, No. 23, July 1980.