

# Whaling in the South Atlantic: Hunting Whales along the Brazilian Coast (1760–1850)

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.1028>

**Published online:** 18 May 2022

## Summary

From the first half of the 18th century to 1850, whaling ships, coming from different New England ports, hunted whales in the South Atlantic, focusing their attentions on certain areas along the Brazilian coast, the *loci* of constant seasonal migration by these mammals for procreation. According to data about whaling voyages obtained from the Mystic Sea Port Museum, between 1700 and 1920, 16,379 expeditions left the Northeast of New England. At the heart of this temporal demarcation, between 1761 and 1844, around 650 whaling expeditions were carried out along the Brazilian coast, representing approximately 3.97% of the total excursions of the period. In other words, in 83 years an average of 7.83 expeditions were made each year to various regions of the Brazilian coast, specifically Bahia, Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Santa Catarina. From these areas, a huge amount of two whale species were caught: humpback whales and the southern right whale. In this period, the most desired prey was the sperm whale. However, these did not come close to the coast, so they were rarely killed in Brazilian waters. Whalers thus balanced hunting sperm whales in deep waters with the catching of the other types in Brazilian coastal waters. The results of these incursions were measured by the quantity of oil, extracted from animal fat, bones deposited on the decks of boats, and spermaceti, taken from the cranium of the sperm whale, brought to New England ports. The aim of this article is to trace the trajectory of the North American whaling incursions, from their port of origin to the places of whale hunting on the Brazilian coast. In addition, the text focuses on the typology of vessels, the duration of expeditions, experiences of crews, and the results of voyages, materialized in the production unloaded in U.S. ports.

**Keywords:** whaling, New England, whale oil, sperm whale, Brazil, South Atlantic

**Subjects:** History of Latin America and the Oceanic World, 1492–1824, International History, Colonialism and Imperialism

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date: 29 April 2025

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