

At Home on the Waves: Human Habitation of the Sea from the Mesolithic to Today. Edited by Tanya J. King and Gary Robinson. 2019. Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford. 392 pp.

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Received July 3, 2021

Accepted November 1, 2021

Published April 27, 2022

OPEN ACCESS

DOI 10.14237/ebl.13.1.2022.1781

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Becoming a diver is not only dependent on learning how to calculate proper diving times or how to correctly perform safety stops to avoid decompression. To become a diver, one must master the social production of diving ecosystems. The former is done by signifying and representing a four-dimensional reality where sandy sea floors, rocky bottoms, and coral walls help make underwater environments relatively intelligible and familiar for novice and expert divers alike. The diver's immersion creates a bilateral interaction between the diver and the liquid medium that results in the creation of both an underwater world and a diver.

The livelihoods and identities of divers and other coastal peoples, e.g., fishers, tourists, surfers, and mollusk gatherers, are shaped by a marine world that they construct daily. The logical premise that the sea is not a harsh and uninhabited frontier, but a dynamic playground that is malleable through human interaction and keeps evolving within a changing environment while contained by pulsating and permeable boundaries, lays at the very heart of the edited volume *At Home on the Waves*.

Through 15 chapters and 392 pages, the book brings together a total of 27 authors who rely on historical, archaeological, and anthropological tools and approaches that align with Tim Ingol's (2011, inter alia) idea of life as wayfaring. The authors flesh out three main points in the book: 1) the prevailing state of environmental emergency present in the world's oceans has attracted social scientists' attention

towards building a narrative of ocean crisis, which has outcasted the imminently anthropological endeavor of understanding at depth those human-environmental interactions emerging in coastal, marine, and oceanic environments, 2) coastal communities result from continuous processes occurring in dynamic places lived in and created by people, and finally, 3) peoples and places emerge through interaction, movement, and activities (which, when combined, create local ecological knowledge) rather than by occupying an external and passive medium, either on land or at sea.

Five chapters deal with archaeological research; the remaining ten are more aligned to cultural anthropology and discuss a variety of topics that include community dynamics, tasks, movement and skill of fishing, and coastal livelihoods. The chapters hold detailed and substantial work which, supported by more than 50 figures, manage to give the reader a more intimate sensation of spatiality and movement.

Among those chapters dealing with archaeological research, I personally enjoyed Cristián Simonetti's chapter "Drawing Gestures: Body Movement in Perceiving and Communicating Submerged Landscapes". What makes this chapter special is the subject of study, which is not the submerged landscape studied by underwater archaeologists, but the underwater archaeologists themselves. More specifically, the ways in which archaeologists appropriate an underwater landscape by means of relying on silent underwater communications to convey meaning to what they can visually experience underwater. These observations challenge mainstream

research on gestures to affirm that absent properties of the landscape are not conveyed by mental, self-contained representations, but concurring with Ingold, by performing open movements and gestures contingent to the flow of their own thoughts.

In a different vein, but with a similar feeling, Penny McCall Howard explores the outcomes of task making and movement in chapter 2 “Working Grounds, Producing Places, and Becoming at Home at Sea”. Howard presents the reader with a comprehensive description on the production of Scottish underwater places. These places, despite not being related to any point of land, have been named as a result of deep subjective connections and sociable work practices performed by the very fishermen that, by working on these grounds and forming strong bonds with these places, have created them. There are many aspects of this chapter that, in my view, make a major contribution and excellent teaching material.

The chapter I found to be the most impressive was by McCall Howard. She set the bar high in exemplifying what a true immersion in participant observation should look like. The many ways in which the author has engaged with fishers, not only by interviewing them or having a colloquial conversation at the pub, but also by becoming a trawler who had also decided to establish her home on the waves in six different harbors. Such a committed way of participating, that also resonates with Ingold’s (2017) ideas of participant observation as an educational experience, give the author profound and intimate insights into why Scottish fishers build significant relationships through their interactions with underwater places.

All papers within the volume show a sensitivity to ongoing problems of the malleability of the physical boundaries where coastal people (*sensu lato*) and the

potential dangers arising from describing coastal livelihoods and (especially) places as unproductive.

Final confessions: Initially trained in the field of earth sciences, I have always been relatively skeptical about phenomenological anthropology. However, in reading many of these chapters, I have found that the view of phenomenological anthropology that Tim Ingold has inspired is not removing experience from cognition. Instead, it is summing up both experience and cognition in a pragmatical way to move throughout the world. This became clear to me when I realized that nearly all my friends and colleagues in the fields of oceanography and biology were capable of extracting the meaning from those hand gestures reproduced by Sophie Cécilie Elixhauser in chapter 5 “Moving Along: Wayfinding, Following, and Nonverbal Communication across the Frozen Seascape of East Greenland” and used by Inuit hunters to identify specific animals. Nearly all those colleagues easily recognized a buoyant seal when presented with a closed fist pointing upwards. There is something in reading about these simple gestures that makes them part of the environment with which people engage, whether we love the existence and use of hypotheses driven research or not. *At Home on the Waves* is a valuable resource for anyone interested in coastal livelihoods, environmental knowledge, and community engagement.

References Cited

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