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# *BOOK REVIEW*

*Port Towns and Urban Cultures. International Histories of the Waterfront, c.1700—2000*. Edited by Brad Beaven, Karl Bell and Robert James (London: Palgrave Macmillan/ Springer Nature, 2016. 289 pp.).

This book is the outcome of a conference held at Portsmouth in 2013 and according to its acknowledgements, includes the publication "... of the strongest themes in the conference." We are not informed if all the conference papers are in this published volume. The overall scene is set by the reproduction of an extremely attractive portrayal of an active harbor at Portsmouth perhaps dateable to sometime in late nineteenth century England.

The publication comprises of some thirteen essays of varying length, theme and locale. A slight majority of the essays are set in English port centers; an international dimension is provided by those located in Australia—New Zealand, Finland, Sweden, and South Africa. The vast majority of contributors are practicing academic historians, however architecture and geography are also represented amongst the authors.

The book is divided into two sections and their rationale is stated in detail in the introduction; the division is by no means watertight. There is little effort to theorize relationships that nurtured distinctive urban cultures and connect recent advances in history to more conceptually advanced disciplines influenced by innovations in critical thinking such as anthropology, geography and sociology. This reviewer was not clear about some of the assertions made by the editors in their introduction; for instance on page 4 we are informed that the book argues that port towns need to be understood as "cultural entities." While the volume consists of a collection of discrete articles, no central shared thesis is evident, though a series of connected and related themes are diligently explored.

What then of the contents? The first section is entitled "Urban maritime cultures." What impressed this reviewer were the enormous diversity of sources mined by the authors and what results emerged from their efforts; they endow the book with much richness and flavor. Sources range from official Cape Town Council of Justice records during the mid-18$^{th}$ century to the poems and songs of sailmaker Gilchrist written and sung in 19$^{th}$ century English Tyneside. Examining further oral sources and published accounts, editor Bell delineates, in an incisive account, the roles of different types of religiosity in Victorian Portsmouth in England. An examination of official police archives in Swedish

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Gothenberg charts different aspects of how violence, amongst "other" behaviors, represented forms of resistance towards "authority" in the 1920s.

The Americanization of Antipodean port cities is examined through an understanding of architectural styles in an attempt to confirm that their impacts were differentially experienced by different classes there. It is convincingly argued that the process of Americanization helped to solidify and consolidate class consciousness and dilute attachments to British imperial geographical attachments. Trawling through a series of interviews conducted in some Finnish port cities during the 1950s, Steel extols the value of oral sources as a means of understanding and recognizing what he titles as "encounters on the waterfront" by a selection of professions whose lifeworld was there, as well as through a survey of visiting sailors in 1956, all of whom constructed their particular versions of "sailortowns."

A further seven articles make up the final section of this work entitled, "Representations and Identities." Taylor leads here with a masterful characterization of London's docklands from the 1790s onwards focusing upon a range of themes evident in its sailortown at Ratcliffe Highway as the setting for material cultures involving dockland expansion and varying forms of criminality. Changes in its character are narrated by quarrying through the works of some social commentators who wrote about the district.

The under-researched human content of the British navy at Plymouth, ". . .as a social institution and social force. . ." in the period .c.1850—1928 forms the substance of Robert James's valuable chapter. The role of the British navy's popular image as an element in nation-building is stressed as is the role of portside geographic location and the nature of formal leisure pursuits.

Colonial and post-colonial Durban in South Africa forms the setting for an exploration of how ". . .distinctive city identities are promoted through the media and by word of mouth" (201). This study is delivered by analyzing several literary and visual productions designed to popularize the image of this port city paying especial attention to local "color." These features in such multinational contexts helped to distinguish this type of port city from others.

Hanna Hagmark-Cooper's article breaks a male-centered series of narratives by introducing the ideals and images of seafarer's wives on Sweden's Aland Islands and also by providing an introduction to a vast, if hitherto unmentioned, literature on women and the sea. Her work is based on oral narratives of some 75 women.

Finally, two chapters address different aspects of port centers: one employs specific conceptual tools and another suggests a working framework for the analysis of urban history in a coastal zone. Byrne's challenging article deploys the notion of "taskscape" as a means of understanding the port of Hull's recent exegesis in the aftermath of World War II and its abrupt demise very shortly afterwards. This valuable analysis is successfully conducted sifting through the oral memories of former and present residents.

This collection of essays is finally rounded off by a short piece by Land who proposes a novel approach for "doing" urban history in certain types of unspecified port-centered cultural contexts. His approach is sustained by citing a tripartite structure for the coastal zone and his arguments are buttressed by citing many different examples including several mentioned by contributors to this volume.

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In a comprehensive and thoughtful introduction, the editors of this volume carefully describe, explain and justify the manner in which the work is organized. The presentation of the essays and their editing are a credit to its main editors and publisher. One major exception is evident: the reproduction of maps, four in all, is not always adequate. What I found most wanting, as a geographer and reviewer, is the almost total absence of maps. Nearly all the essays cry out for a clear visualization of exactly where and what is under scrutiny: they all resonate place. In fact, in the final essay, for instance, Isaac Land attempts to set out a rationale for a spatial examination of port society and coastal zone structure screams for a series of clear diagrams and maps. In addition, there are no references to the copious literature in historical and physical geography relating to bays, estuaries, ports, and harbors.

Living as I do in a major outport and former leading naval base at Cobh (formerly, Queenstown) at Cork Harbour in Ireland, I was struck by the book's rather restricted vision of what urban cultures were and might have been. Sailortowns were certainly amongst the most distinctive and populous sections of many port towns and cities. Yet at the same time, many were often the most spatially restricted and crowded areas. Their built, social fabric and nature depended on what kinds of port cities they were and where they were located: whether they were entrepots, colonial centers or merely redistribution centers. Merchants of varying wealth and importance as well as their living-in or out retinues of skilled and unskilled assistants often cut out their own exclusive and extensive residential (and work) districts. So also did the state servants; those working in the customs, in immigration, in quarantine activities and in translation roles, for instance. The artisans and all those involved in servicing the ships, the ware-housing and transportation also lived often in discrete port districts, sometimes in mixed districts often not, as did the poor and the infirm.

Readers might have appreciated the fact that the principal concerns of the volume are "sailortowns" as distinct from other port-related residential zones. But where were sailortowns located in relation to some of the other "social areas" in different types of ports; for instance in colonial or monopoly ports? When did they emerge and what kinds of architecture and morphology characterized them.

This is a rich collection of essays that deserves to be consulted by a wide public. Many new questions have been posed by the authors and many new lines of inquiry have been suggested.

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