

SOZIALGESCHICHTE DER SCHIFFFAHRT

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Fish and Ships

Towards a Theory of Maritime Culture

The original title of this paper was: *Maritime culture and coastal culture in the past*. The starting point was maritime archaeology. However, it is, I believe, not preposterous rather to call it what it has in fact become, a discussion about cultural theory. My paper is at the same time intended to serve as an attempt at a definition. A theory is close to a definition. But what is *theory*? And what is *culture*? Just *mots d'honneur*? Couldn't culture just be replaced with "identity" or "way of life"? What is *maritime*? Is there anything exclusively maritime? Could we possibly finish up with anything other than a pragmatic *ad hoc* comment? Well, the answer to all of these questions must be an emphatic no.

Besides, the use of concepts like culture, identity, even ways of life seems to imply that individuals can only be identified as carriers of one culture at a time. This is not true. Individuals as well as groups can not only be acquainted with several cultures, they may in fact be part of them in a very real sense. I believe it is obvious that, even if we deal with what we suppose is a single culture, it is in itself at least two, taken as a combination of two or more ways of subsistence. I think this is a good start for a theory.

What, then is the point of defining maritime culture or coastal culture? What are the advantages of having a "theory"? Is it not rather complicated? Do we need it? I do think so myself. The reason is the deeply felt loss of the cultural values associated with the maritime world of the past. We cannot understand them without a profound study of their roots. Why be so modest? Those of us who study maritime culture have always been told by the mainstream that our field is marginal. That is only superficially true. The aim of the definitions is to resurrect the relationship of man with the sea as one of the bases for explaining cultural history in general. This is how essential the sea has been, whether humans have lived in direct contact with it or only had it as a permanent reference point.

The human perspective, after all, always consists of both sea and land. They function contemporaneously and so define each other in the human consciousness. The problem is, therefore, how to define the specifically maritime in relation to what is specifically land-oriented or, if you like, terrestrial. This is not at all self-evident. But those who have an interest in matters maritime tend instinctively to treat subjects which may reveal essential things only in relation to a strictly maritime life. Unfortunately this may mean that their scope is excessively narrow.

I have myself tried to make a survey of what has been produced by international symposia over a long period, so as to get a grasp on this instinct. However, it is apparently not to be found among the specialized series, like the ISBSA, *International Symposia on Boat and Ship Archae-*



Fig. 1 The making of a kokole lele, probably the largest logboat still made in the world, and used for off-shore fishing, is a characteristic feature on the coast of Ghana. (Photo: Morten Sylvester)

ology, which I have attended since 1982. It is true that they are very interesting and very advanced in their highly international but still very narrow field. But a boat reveals very little of the actual life cycle of individual human beings, even if it sheds light on other aspects of maritime culture. The same impression of particularism rapidly emerges when one reads *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, which has supposedly been the flagship of maritime archaeology since 1972.

But in 1982, the same year that I attended my first ISBSA, I founded another series of conferences on maritime history, much more regional in their geographical scope, called *Bottnisk Kontakt*, 'Bothnian Contact,' devoted in an interdisciplinary way to the flow of maritime cultures, human beings and their objects in a given, rather limited, area of northern Europe.¹ In a somewhat haphazard, groping manner, sometimes even below the academic mark, I think that in their content taken as a whole they represent what may be called maritime cultural history. The fundamental difference is, I think, not only that they are interdisciplinary but that they are concerned to a great extent with human beings as a totality and cannot, in the nature of things, deal with the wider economy, the great events, the great ships, nor for example the mainstream in shipbuilding, in the way that conferences with a more specialized focus, like the ISBSA, are able to do. Maritime life up here has been of the everyday subsistence kind, and has never depended on marine resources alone. The archaeology and history of the vessels are still fundamental, of course, but this does not take over completely. The instinctive aim is to put even the vessels in their context, to get some kind of holistic totality.² If this "principle" were to be applied to any other coast, even at the centre of European culture, we would find the same everyday occupations and the same type of land-sea combinations. I believe this is the essence of defining any kind of culture. This is a small-scale version of the Braudelien *Annales* approach. An important element in it is using unconventional sources, since this kind of history, or archaeology, realizes that sources of the conventional kind are very scarce. The application of results



Fig. 2 The maritime world is still a male enclave, especially at the local level, although it is presumably changing more rapidly than before. Fishermen meeting on the water, Ångermanland, Sweden. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)

from a large array of disciplines, even from beyond the scope of the humanities, might perhaps be even more productive. Unfortunately, no such syntheses have yet been made. But the potential of the material exists.

The problem of defining maritime culture is, as always, that any product of the land-sea relationship would presumably be different from others, to a greater or lesser degree. Variations on the common theme would be almost infinite. The aim would accordingly be to find precisely *whether* there is a common theme, and if so *what* it consists of. Although I have given an indication above of what it might be, I do not in any way consider this supposition, or rather suspicion, sufficient. The perspective is supposed to give a generalized view, the *essence*, so to speak. A particular problem is that the theory, or part of it, should be applicable to prehistoric times or to other periods or areas which cannot be covered by conventional historical sources. It is not possible just to get out into the field and ask people ...

Let us not forget even for a moment, when we talk about culture, that the carriers of culture are always human beings. What kind of people am I referring to here? I do not think, in fact, that the answer is self-evident. As an example I will conduct a short enquiry into historical coastal culture in the area where I have been engaged lately, the county of Vest-Agder at the southern tip of Norway. On this coast we can identify several central human spheres that are relevant:

1) In a local sense, fishing, small-scale agriculture and small-scale shipping were the predominant features of everyday life. We find several variations of maritime adaptation, considerably more varieties which are "sociologically" definable than among sailors proper. But the life cycle of an individual male often included shipping. The social divides were not based on the comparatively egalitarian agrarian units but derived from truly maritime roots: "Parts of the coastal society would therefore be stratified more on the basis of the difference between a skip-



Fig. 3 The kind of maritime culture that forms the basis of this study is an everyday, simple life, although it is not uncomplicated. A deserted fisherman/farmer's cottage at Vithall, Lake Vänern, Sweden. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)

per and a seaman than on that between a big farmer and a small farmer.”³ This is an essential aspect, but it will serve only as a reminder.

2) There was also the specific cultural space of the loading wharfs and port cities with their inns, ship's chandlers, longshoremen, transporters of goods, ship brokers, repair shipyards. Among types of harbour we find resting and emergency havens, small loading-places and lastly winter harbours, where groups of fishermen, pilots, or sailors on half-pay act as caretakers for the ships lying at anchor and moored to the rocks for months.

3) What about the space represented by shipyards for new vessels under construction? How are these to be defined in terms of cultural identity? And how are the people to be defined who deliver the timber, the tar, the iron, the sail-cloth and all the components of the rigging?

4) Then there were a sizeable number of pilots, the buoy and sea mark attendants, the salvage people, the lighthouse keepers, their assistants, and as a clear mark of the presence of the state the customs officers and the supervisors of the other groups engaged in pilotage or the maintenance of lighthouses. It must be pointed out that very often the life cycle of a small-scale farmer/fisherman included a period as a sailor in his youth and as a pilot or assistant pilot in his later years. They may also have gone to sea to emigrate for a while, usually to the U.S., in order to save some capital to invest in their homesteads. This may have meant a period abroad of more than ten years.

5) Another maritime sphere of occupation was that of the navy, usually with a recruitment cycle including some time in the merchant marine either before or after the period of enlistment. Many people in this category come from the “small” world of the fishermen/farmers.



Fig. 4 Maritime life could in fact depend on an iron ring, in a double sense. Without it, of course, a ship might be lost. But what is more surprising is that many people, especially widows (and there were many of them) depended on the fee they charged for the use of it. In contemporary 18th and 19th-century estate inventories certain rings – and even shares in them, down to one-seventh – were of great value, in fact far beyond the price of a good boat! The rings are still a characteristic feature of the main routes and harbours along the rocky coasts of Norway and Sweden; they were probably introduced by Hanseatic merchants at the time of the introduction of large ships (carracks) with several masts in the early part of the 16th century. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)

This sphere, although to some degree isolated from others, could for example be a central element in the establishment of mental values in the “exterior” forms of culture.

6) Then there were all those who depend on shipping, who survive on building, owning, buying and selling ships, on trading the wood, iron, foodstuffs, corn, fancy goods, etc. And all the others who lived by transporting goods and supplying these people with what they needed. What was the strength of their (possible) maritime element? A documented attitude among the aristocrats of classical antiquity was utter contempt for sailors or merchants (at that time almost identical) as a fickle, dissolute, multinational and thus dangerous element. This attitude, which was especially prevalent among those aristocrats who actually profited from their trade⁴, does not lack parallels in modern times.

7) The last, but not least, variety is sailors’ culture. It has already been indicated that this was the product of a very stratified society, and accentuates it to the extreme. It showed an elaborate hierarchy. The classes of sailors with watertight compartments separating them are, for instance, skippers, mates, and the ordinary seamen with their inevitable bottom strata, the real proletarians, the unqualified, often very young, sailors (where I would probably have been if I had ever gone to sea). Sometimes the classes in a small vessel are represented by only one individual at each level, reminding us of the fact that the scale of values passes from the big ships to the small ones.



Fig. 5 The first mention of iron mooring rings along the sea route to Bergen in Norway was made by Olaus Magnus in his *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (1555), 2:13. On his *Carta marina*, 1539, they are marked at Stad and in the inner route to Bergen.

To most international sailors, irrespective of rank, who saw the coastline of this *mélange* of maritime culture, it remained a line or a distant rocky feature for several days and nights. If a landfall was made from northwest Europe, it most likely included *the Naze*, the point of Lindesnes, where ships from the North Sea parted company to go either north to Bergen or Archangelsk or to the Kattegat and the Baltic, of which the latter was by far the more common destination. But storms from the west or the south-west were endemic during passages, not only in late autumn, and the currents usually ran the other way and if visibility was poor they brought you, unwittingly, dangerously close to land.

So quite a number of surviving sailors were blown into the many resting and emergency harbours of this coast, where they may have had a fortnight of repairs, mostly spent in the inns, which were always of two kinds or had two sections, one for the captain and his mate (serving wine), another for the common sailors (serving brandy). There may have been a few days of unloading or reloading at another site on the same coast, but otherwise the voyage went on. However, the short stops may have left a few foreign influences in the local maritime culture. Some event remembered in oral tradition, foreign words and phrases and some place-names are cases in point. Others are less obvious, but perhaps significant.

The Hansa sailors were presumably the first major group to fit this pattern, since they established the trading traffic in earnest in the 15th century. Among those heading for a harbour in the region were Dutch and Scottish small-scale skippers satisfying their need for timber. They must have become familiar with their routes in these skerries, since at least six journeys in one year by the same skipper to the same supplier (unusually, a farming family) have been recorded. Another import to Europe were Norwegian sailors who sailed on Dutch and other vessels and brought back foreign influences, especially to present-day Vest-Agder.

From the 16th century the Agder coast in general was the main Norwegian part of the *skudehandel*, the small-scale trading across Skagerrak/Kattegat. Almost all the small vessels used in this traffic were built here, with a clear adaptation to the sandy, shallow shores of Jutland. This is why they were called *sandskuder*. The smaller varieties were indeed designed to be hauled ashore, out of the reach of storms. The intense exchange of complementary goods brought



Fig. 6 The sloop *Ruth* was one of the last ships used in *skudehandelen* between south Norway and north Jutland, Denmark. She was built at Svinør in Vest-Agder, Norway, in 1854. The ship is now owned by the National Museum of Denmark and is kept at the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde. (Photo: Werner Karrasch, The Viking Ship Museum, Roskilde)

together Jutlanders and Egds (that is, people from Agder) in many ways over the course of several hundred years. Some of them emigrated to the opposite coast.

These are all aspects of maritime culture, which vary in their emphasis on cultural contact and the intensity of the maritime element. Particularly during the last great period of sail in the 19th century, this coast was remarkably active even on an international scale, in shipbuilding and ship-owning. Among the maritime enclaves, Arendal and Grimstad in Aust-Agder were supreme, although quite small as townships. For some years, Arendal, with its 500 sailing ships, was probably the greatest sailing ship-owning community in the world. Most of the ships were manned entirely by local people. It seems that this pattern of recruitment meant that the sailors' sense of identity was more rooted in their local Agder origin than in any international sailors' culture. In certain contexts it may have been a Norwegian or even a Nordic identity. On the other hand no common Kattegat or Baltic maritime culture seems to exist⁵, although this may be debatable. In any case, all cultural traits may be bits and pieces of other cultures and other traits. Perhaps a great *mélange* is the ultimate outcome.

Maritime culture, whatever it is, will leave traces. But it will also show its former importance when it is gone. It can leave a psychological void when it disappears. Shipping in its heyday implied openness, bravery and adaptability. Stagnation and finally a total decline in the active traditions triggered a shift in attitudes on this coast. Already by the end of the 19th century the people of "the coastal area now (became) more inward-looking and conservative than before."⁶

At one time the male section of the population had adapted to and learnt much from the temporary socio-cultural space aboard international shipping. During the ocean voyages there emerged a very characteristic, distinctive and truly international seamen's culture, analyzed as a sociological system by Knut Weibust in his *Deep Sea Sailors*.⁷ Sailors might remain on their ships for years. Many others, perhaps most, only made shorter voyages, for instance between the North Sea and the Baltic, where ethnic and geographical origin meant more and the period



Fig. 7 The dangerous rounding of capes, especially those with strong and unpredictable currents, often leads to the development of rest and emergency out-harbours with settlements. At the famous rocks of point Lindesnes in south Norway there were two such maritime cultural centres, one on each side, west and east. This is the inlet, seen from the land, of the western harbour, called Sellør and known from the Viking Age onwards. Lindesnes is the promontory in the background. The other harbour, to the east, is Svinør (mentioned in the caption to the preceding fig.). (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)

of isolation at sea was much shorter.⁸ If we so wish, we can thus distinguish at least four socio-logically identifiable classes. There is also the possibility of a further sub-classification into origin and identity, of which the first is tangible but the second is founded on individual cognition and context. This makes such a categorization or classification meaningless.



Fig. 8 Small-scale salt extraction must have been possible at many places along the Atlantic seaboard, without any actual salines. Olaus Magnus (*Historia*, 13:43) mentions the procedures used in Norway and illustrates the pouring of sea water into vessels, possibly for evaporation, along with the boiling of water in large vats.

However, in making a survey of the lack of theoretical foundations of maritime archaeology, Joe Flatman maintains that this sailors' culture and its manifestations should be at the core.⁹ He simply ignores the shore-bound coastal culture. The heart of the matter is what has hitherto captured most of the attention of archaeologists in this field, namely wrecks of the great ocean-going ships. It would be meaningless, too, to deny that sailors' culture has influenced and been influenced by local coastal culture. But is it actually a part of this coastal culture? That is very doubtful indeed. As Brynjulv Gjerdåker puts it, culture is always "a field of tension between individual and collective, between what is universally human and what is group-specific." Apart from this, the concept of culture is in itself "hyper-complex, it contains components which, seen in isolation, are contradictory or mutually incompatible, but at the same time it has a consistency and an inner coherence."¹⁰

As an empirical background, I myself can draw on my knowledge of conditions on the Norrland coast of Sweden. I surveyed this region in 1975-1982. The conference project mentioned above, *Bottnisk Kontakt*, has shown me new aspects, largely from the Finnish side of the Baltic. During the ten years of my research and lecturing at the University of Copenhagen and the research centre of the National Museum of Denmark in Roskilde, the scope of my work began to include Denmark. With my present few years of research in Norway I am trying to extend my Nordic orbit. This may depend on chance, but it is not by chance that the Nordic countries as a whole are singularly suitable as a basis for reflexions on coastal culture and maritime culture. However you define these terms, they offer exceptionally strong and well-documented applications for them.

On the need for definitions

I have been reflecting on these themes for some time. The reason is partly that coastal culture, *kystkultur*, *kustkultur*, has nowadays become a politically correct and much-used concept, without any other foundation, e.g. in a definition. This makes it particularly important to examine closely what it stands for. In my case, I have considered both concepts, maritime culture and coastal culture, with reference to a number of empirical issues in related questions of cultural history. Recently I presented an answer to the question of whether the Swedish Lake Vänern could be considered to be or to have been a repository of maritime culture.¹¹ Unfortunately, I usually veer off into more or less well-motivated digressions. This is a difficult issue.

What does coastal culture mean? This is unclear. The culture in question ought, by definition, to be practised by people who live on the coast. But what culture is it? Presumably this question could be answered very simply by asking: why do they live there? It is their occupations – which to a large extent define their culture – that should capture our attention, and not *where* they live physically, even though there will surely be a certain correlation between the two. Living in an ecological niche leads to an adaptation precisely to that niche. But would it not be better to use a term that directly told us what they were doing? Basically this is the same problem as in the old bone of contention, whether to replace *marine* or *underwater archaeology* with *maritime archaeology* as a worthy name for a humanistic pursuit.¹² The latter term is much broader than the first, which concentrates on the location of the finds under water, rather than recognizing the reasons for having a definition linking this subject to the humanities and to cultural history. It would be enough to point to its logical and close relationship with what has long been called *maritime* history and *maritime* ethnology. Consider, by contrast, *marine* biology – not *maritime* biology. Unfortunately the unsuitable term has become too widely accepted to be replaced entirely. Its only advantage is that it is two or three letters shorter than the other.



Fig. 9 A salient feature of many maritime communities is their religiosity and its social expression in various features in the adornment of the church. Votive ships were donated by both sailors and fishermen, in this case from the town of Gävle, in the chapel at the fishing harbour of Ulvöhamn in Ångermanland, Sweden. In this instance a real contemporary ship may be referred to in the name on the stern, which reads (*Anno Gustaf från Gefle 1776 or 1770*, but the model is hardly a recreation of it. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)

I think that coastal culture has the same relationship to maritime culture. The former term is too vague and does not satisfy our requirement for a word suited to an academic field of study. But it is not tactically opportune to insist that politicians replace it and – as a possible consequence – their focus. For such reasons I cannot not argue for any real changes. But I want to keep the two words, in order to be able to define them more precisely.

To me, marine archaeology is the same as underwater archaeology. It is a part of the wider subject of maritime archaeology. The latter is the study of maritime culture using archaeological means and methods. Coastal culture gives the local, ever-changing, picture of any particular coast, but *maritime culture is what is common to all, perhaps even diachronically*.

Nothing is more sterile, not to say meaningless, than bickering about definitions instead of really doing something positive. If Karl Popper did not say it, was it possibly the French *encyclopédistes* who likened the love of your own homestead to a horse's love of its own stable? This quotation (if it is one) appears to be in the style of both. But the interesting thing is not its origin, nor the wording, but the essence. Johan Kloster argues "that the central question is not what coastal culture is, but what we choose to make it, by means of conservation, research and mediation to the public."¹³ For this reason I will not repeat what I said before. The terms denote different things and they may be necessary, all of them, but for varying reasons.

Poul Holm mentions in the introduction to his comprehensive dissertation *Kystfolk*, 'Coastal people'¹⁴, his expectation of finding a common coastal culture along the Kattegat/Skagerrak coast, but concludes that "the concept is very wide and in reality presupposes a result that only an analysis can give. A broad concept like 'coastal culture' is simply too elastic to be used in research." It may be that Holm means that the concept is too elastic just in this context. But I think that the validity of his judgment could be extended. He continues: "This is why the main emphasis of the book is on the study of recorded contacts in connection with broad international movements and also by considering unilateral political intervention" (by the states involved). This research strategy could perhaps be an effective means of deconstructing both concepts, coastal culture and maritime culture.

In this text I have chosen a different approach. In a specifically history-oriented study it would certainly be necessary to interpret every stage in each separate coastal culture in its own context. This is a particularist and a pluralist interpretation of culture: every culture taken separately, and they are many of them! "Cultures (in the plural) are a system of relationships which become identified by what separates them."¹⁵

Whether or not we speak of maritime or coastal culture in the singular, they would both be widely applicable concepts. They risk becoming "too elastic." Poul Holm has shown that what others may consider to be largely a common culture in fact consists of many very different adaptations to conditions in the maritime settlements of the Kattegat/Skagerrak region. Would it then be more appropriate to use the concepts in the plural, maritime cultures or coastal cultures? Is there really any common feature at all, apart from the intimate connection with the sea in people's daily occupations?

It is seldom emphasized that general conditions of culture in the past can be the permanent result of maritime activities. One striking fact in northern Europe is the unity of Nordic culture over the course of a thousand years. Its linguistic and practical consequences cover an enormous area, ranging intermittently from Greenland to the eastern Baltic. In a north-south direction the

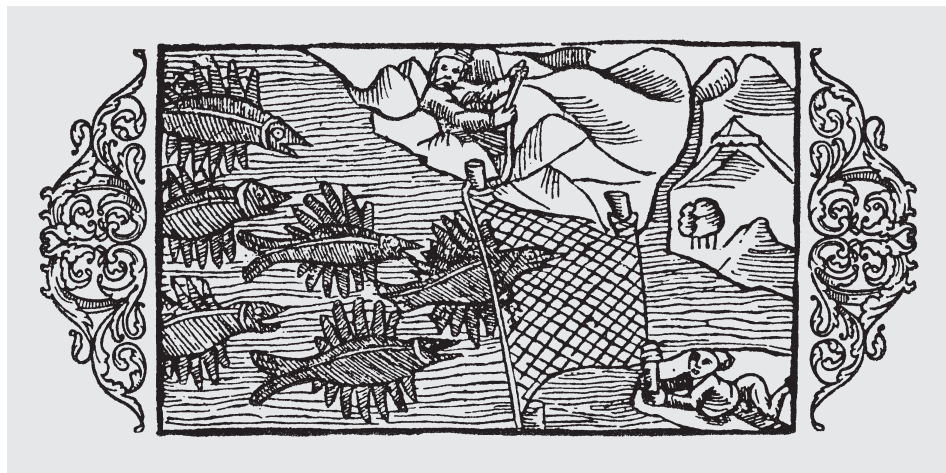


Fig. 10 Bird hunting with nets, from Olaus Magnus (*Historia*, 19:46), who places this scene in the White Sea on his *Carta marina* of 1539. The widespread use of nets in the Eurasian area has been analyzed by Nils Storrå in a unique work (1968). Large quantities of eider duck bones in the Viking Age town of Birka in Lake Mälaren are clear evidence of the use of hunting nets from the late Iron Age onwards. A considerable addition to maritime cultural assets, this method was used up to the First World War in the large archipelago of south Finland.



Fig. 11 Among the outer wind-swept skerries of Stockholm archipelago only the booths and cottages of long-range fishermen – and possibly an occasional wooden boat – can still be seen. Gilllöga. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)

traditional span is that from the former boundary river *Eider* in the south (now in Germany) to the Old Norse name *Ægistafr* for the somewhat imprecise border point at the Kola peninsula. It is a remarkable fact that, seen from a European perspective, the Nordic languages are but dialects of the same language. How has this unity been maintained? It is inconceivable that this should be ascribed only to power and coercion. And for speakers of other adjacent languages it has apparently served as something of a *lingua franca*.

On the other hand, the tangible heritage in terms of the material culture of historical times in maritime western Europe is spurious. For fairly recent times it is possible to refer to the work of Sigurd Erixon.¹⁶ The same impression is unfortunately given by the vast archaeological panorama presented by Barry Cunliffe.¹⁷

Probably another factor has to be taken into account, although its significance is hard to gauge, the extent of common values. Divergent views do exist. In the maritime field they are perhaps best illustrated by the diametrically opposed laws on fishing rights between Denmark/Norway and Sweden/Finland. Generally speaking, in the west fishing is free, in the east it belongs to the owner of the land. The simplest way of explaining this would perhaps be to refer to the enormous land uplift in the east, where the newly exposed land has to have an owner, and owner-

ship will logically enough fall to the individual who already owns the dry land further inland. The waters of the potential new land will follow the same trend with regard to legislation. The effects of the uplift of the land are striking, particularly on the shallow coasts of western Finland. The cultural geographer Michael Jones aptly calls this region "the daughter of the sea."¹⁸

But the common historical culture of the Nordic orbit must inevitably be ascribed to a system of maritime connections (whatever its content, and whether power is involved or not) that has existed continuously since at least the Bronze Age. This is a strong case for the existence of a basically maritime culture.

However, this demonstration does not exclude an even wider perspective. As to common maritime culture I would refer to the following criteria for a much larger group than the Nordic peoples. I cannot at the present stage demonstrate it to the same degree as in the Nordic orbit. But I will argue that at least the western seaboard of Europe and the Mediterranean are included.

My (very) tentative criteria are:

- the particular habitus of the maritime sphere,
- its outward identity,
- its international character,
- its archetypes,
- its cultural landscape,
- not least its cognitive landscape
- including its ritual negotiation of the antagonistic relationship between sea and land, its cosmology,
- its particular economic and social world.

All these appear as debatable, insubstantial and imprecise categories. On the other hand cosmology and archetypes are presumably more easily discovered and delimited.

Let us consider some scattered observations on remains in the mind and remnants on the shore. I think that both are characterized by a *preoccupation with directions, and combinations of time, direction and distance*. They may seem to be just a product of professional involvement with navigation, but I believe they have generally been passed on in the upbringing of children. These archetypes stand out as discrete but at the same time concrete symbols and ritual patterns, revealed in *behaviour at sea, the building of labyrinths/stone mazes, compass cards, the transit lines of oral tradition*. Apart from these, one can discern a *preoccupation with the natural landscapes, including the sea itself and its obvious combination with and extension to the underwater landscape, and also* (perhaps this is self-evident, but I will mention it nevertheless) *the wealth of linguistic and mental concepts relating to boats, winds and the weather in general*. There is an exceptionally highly-trained kind of perception involving all the senses.

Among archetypes, certain types of migratory tales connected with, for instance, shipyards come to mind. The maritime cultural landscape is more concrete and tangible¹⁹, but at the present stage I am more interested in exploring its cognitive aspect and with it the ritual landscape.²⁰ Obviously, most of this is relational and depends on the combination of elements. Several of the constituent parts need to be experienced individually and therefore tend to be hard to define.

The two main parts, the archetypes and the experience of the landscape are, at any rate, something that I would consider common to any maritime culture. These criteria can then be tested as the social heritage of practitioners of maritime culture wherever they may be found. If indeed they are part of one common culture and accordingly the singular *culture* can be used, rather than the plural. "With this as a background it is more natural to speak of a border-crossing maritime culture than of coastal culture."²¹

As mentioned in addition to this more coastally oriented maritime culture we encounter the international sailors' culture, which has been studied by authors like Weibust (1958, 1969/1976) and Flatman (2003), the latter in connection with archaeology.

The term maritime may produce semantic problems. In reality these problems are always a question of content. The Latin word *mare* undoubtedly refers to the sea, and so do the adjectives derived from it, *maritimus* and *marinus*. But this is just a formal way of looking at it. The *cultural* significance should be emphasized above all other considerations. This is why I have argued that the conditions by a large lake like Vänern may very well be so similar to those by the sea that we are entitled to consider them maritime. To demonstrate this correspondence was one of the aims of my study of this lake.²² Of course such "maritime" lakes must be of a certain minimum size. But their physical size is secondary to population, economic potential, everything that is conducive to active shipping, and last but not least biological production, the output of fish. Another prerequisite for a well-founded opinion would be observations of the *longue durée*, in Fernand Braudel's sense.²³ Such an analysis would prove that the development of traits of maritime culture is not just a temporary phenomenon.

In a broader cultural sense we could perhaps speak of maritime civilizations, such as that of the Greeks and of Hellenism or that of Southeast Asia.

The gender perspective

How are we to formulate the gender perspective, the relationship between the roles of men and women in an everyday maritime culture? A sailor's life is without doubt always dominated by



Fig. 12 One of the author's most valuable informants, Helga Hillberg on the island of Limön near Gävle, Gästrikland, Sweden. There were not many women among these thousands of informants but, as I point out in this text, they were among the most reliable. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl, 1977)

males. It can be judged a male preserve. The sea woman, the woman who lives and works on ships, appears only to do so in traditional female roles, as a cook or a cleaner. Anything else is an exception to the general rule. At sea, women are thus absent and appear to the sailor as land-lubbers and distant objects of desire. In the ritual landscape they are often taboo. Their ordinary role in everyday professional shipping or fishing is that of the waiting wives. As such, they often play an important role in the different brands of religious feeling and practice, upholding its normative values on land and handing them on to the children.²⁴

But in the past the typical kind of everyday culture was filled with doubtfully defined or variable occupations. In the fisherman/peasant variety in which I am particularly interested, the women are as active as the men. In North Norway this variation is characterized as a "peasant culture with strong maritime adaptations."²⁵ Fishing farmers or farming fishermen? It may be difficult to place the stress on either one of these occupations; they belong to different seasons, and moreover they are often supplemented by other part-time pursuits, such as boat-building, hunting, etc.

Certainly the role of the woman is mostly agrarian or tied to the land in other ways. She may use the boat to collect eggs or down. She does not only wait for her husband or for her sons. But she may be even more heavily involved. In my survey area she was an important and indeed essential maritime partner in pair-fishing or in fishing with stationary bow-nets close to the shore. In exceptional cases she could be a huntress, an inn-keeper or even a boat-builder. It is clear that her role could vary considerably, but it is also obvious that her experiences and her knowledge of coastal culture are as accurate and reliable as those of the man, in many cases more so. This was definitely my experience from a large number of interviews.

The versatile working woman is actually the decisive factor for the survival of an everyday maritime life mode. The gender perspective provides one of many signs of a variable cultural pattern, rather than a permanently fixed relationship. The variability is a product of adaptation to changes in that culture's agrarian elements and in local society as a whole. But the woman was not in a dominant position in this patriarchal world and could not make her own choices: "In this scenario the women were the pivot, their area of action was expanded or restricted according to the degree to which the man was absent."²⁶



Fig. 13 Thousands of nesting boxes were set up by coastal people as a source of eggs. These made a valuable contribution to the household economy and were sometimes even offered for sale. It hardly ever happened that too many eggs were taken, according to the account given by Andersson 1945 with reference to the Åland islands. Olaus Magnus, *Historia* (1555), 19:8.

But there are variations aplenty. The extreme dichotomy of male and female roles was particularly apparent in the maritime enclave of the Danish island of Læsø in the Kattegat.²⁷ In this case one can really speak of two different worlds.

Maritime culture: The role of the boat

My alternative to the more restricted concept of *coastal culture*, which tends to reflect local and more variable conditions, is thus *maritime culture*, applied in the sense of a wider and more generalized definition. Maritime culture is, like coastal culture, bound to a human ecological zone, the dependence on and exploitation of a large body of water. Life faces the sea. In coastal culture it seems to me by definition to be possible to live with one's back to that sea. It may just mean that you have your home and employment there, without entering into any direct relationship with the sea.

The Dutch social anthropologist A.H.J. Prins is one of the few who have made a genuine attempt to define maritime culture: "Since this book deals with maritime culture, it is legitimate to ask how we know whether a culture (operationally defined as 'patterned set of recurrent events') is, or is to be considered maritime. A first answer to this is to refer to significant pointers: nautical similes in the colloquial language, preferably also amongst those whose calling is not that of a sailor – if such people can be found. If it is technically difficult to systematically treat spoken language with this in mind, one can turn to the work of the poet in Lamu culture, poetry being more highly developed than prose as a store of systematized thinking brought into form."²⁸

Another criterion would be that other groups consider a certain area or a certain group as more maritime than others. Prins continues: "Other pointers are: the occurrence of maritime proverbs and their frequent (or frequency of) use; children playing with toy-boats; men building ship's models in their leisure hours; the integration of sea and ship into the make-up of functionally non-maritime institutions (votive offerings, initiation, mortuary ritual etc.); the (degree of) elaboration of myths concerning the sea; the occurrence of maritime patron-saints (like our St. Nicholas); the spending of leisure hours near the waterfront, crowds gathering at launchings, arrivals and departures of ships; the attitude toward fish, and so on, and so forth. As some of these (and similar) pointers lend themselves to quantification, we can even speak (at least with regard to some properties) of the *degree* to which a culture is maritime ..."²⁹

To me some of these criteria are rather doubtful. They seem too general. In Scandinavia there are – and were – very few people, if any, who do not use maritime similes and very few small boys who do not build bark boats and very few older boys who do not build model boats (plastic), etc. These elements are part of the general culture and have functioned in this way for centuries without any direct connection to a living maritime culture. In this respect, then, not only the Nordic countries but most of Western Europe and North America would constitute one single (living) maritime culture. I can certainly imagine that they have a background in an ancient maritime culture, once dominant as the creator of values in society. But it is different today. And even if these criteria may indicate a living or a past maritime culture, they would be difficult or impossible to use for the study of historical or prehistoric remains without recourse to any written sources or to oral tradition. To be able to generalize the concept, I always consider such consequences of proposed definitions.

Still, the pointers suggested by Prins deserve attention and should be remembered: not only his view that cultural specificity could be graded (as above, "the degree to which ...", etc), but especially his remark about "the integration of sea and ship into the make-up of functionally



Fig. 14 Booths and net stands at Pajuperä fishing camp on the large island of Hailuoto (Sw, Karlö) near Oulu (Uleåborg) on the Finnish side of the inner Bothnian Bay. Sea booths of this kind were once a common sight along both sides of the Bothnian. They were “satellites” to the farms and thus mostly belonged to them. The coast here was very shallow and sandy, so during the summer the fishing boats mostly rode out the surf at anchor. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)

non-maritime institutions”, which is extremely relevant to the discussion about the significance of the ship since the late Neolithic and the Bronze Age (in fact, apparently even earlier) in mortuary rituals and symbolism in the European North. However, his phrase “functionally non-maritime” makes me somewhat uneasy. I smell a rat here. Functionalism is definitely not the most relevant basis for studying cognitive structures. But I concede that I may be haunted by imaginary terrors.

The first really important criterion is rather that “people who practise a maritime culture” (well, what is the proper *nomen agentis*?) are aware of doing it, or feel separate in some way from others, and that those who do not practise it recognize that the others do. This is all fine, apart from the fact that none of them would really use the concept “maritime culture”. But, still, one cannot apply this criterion to prehistoric societies.

What is characteristic of an everyday maritime culture in the present, and also rather typical of most coastal culture as I know it, is that it exploits a number of niches both in society and nature by the sea. It is basically, as mentioned before, a form of adaptation or rather a combination of such adaptations. A common feature is the personal maritime handling of a boat and the experience of whatever may be encountered in or with a boat on a coastal stretch: flooding or normal tides, ice, being frozen in, winter harbours, bad or exceedingly good catches, storms, leaks, salvage at sea or along the shores, either rescuing people or salvaging vessels and their equipment, on the beach, on a rocky coast or out at sea, and finally the break-up of the wreck and the secondary use of the ship’s parts in new ships or houses. It is a living relationship with nature. It is vital to be able to determine your position by means of transit lines and the direction of the seabirds’ flight, to know the pits in the seabed and the signs that warn of a change



Fig. 15 Sewing a boat, from Olaus Magnus's *Historia* (1555), 4:10. On his *Carta marina* (1539) the scene has been located in the Finnish inland.

in the weather, and to be familiar with the shallows where perch breed, if you want to fish successfully and avoid the dangers inherent in approaching them.

The boat is the essential tool, as an extension of the human body; it has been created by maritime man, and it assumes a significance to maritime man which has few, if any, counterparts in terrestrial culture. It is interesting, however, to note the close relationship of agrarian people to the horse, admittedly not created by them, but bred and domesticated. Similarly, the roles of ships and horses do combine in certain rock art motifs, e.g. the horses' heads on the stems.³⁰ The Nordic similes and poetic metaphors, the kennings, make this combination abundantly clear. However I think that this is not the only interesting parallel, and I have proposed other, cosmological, reasons for this combination. In any case, the cognitive archetypes of the maritime

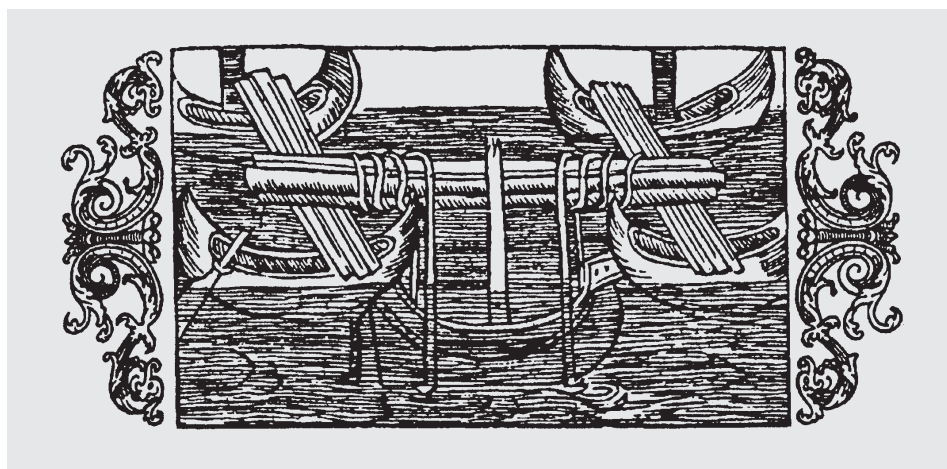


Fig. 16 Dramatic sea accidents were and are very much a part of maritime life. Ambitious local people could turn them to advantage by salvaging vessels, selling or recycling the hull or selling the cargo. The method of salvage illustrated here is basically the same as the one still in use. Olaus Magnus, *Historia* (1555), 12:16.

sphere most often and quite naturally concern boats, the handling of them and the building of them.³¹

The handling of boats and ships is a central theme of all maritime culture. We have still to realize fully that to a very great extent the total dependence on the boat as the means of transport for all heavy and bulky goods was reduced only by the introduction of railways, and later by roads. This could mean as late as around AD 1900 in most of the Nordic countries, and not only on the coasts. The turning-point may have come even later in certain districts with extremely difficult topography, including the province of Agder in South Norway. Transport history up to this time is thus the history of the use of water, in summer and winter alike. But the history of the boat and of maritime culture is not only transport history, it is just as much the history of movement in general in maritime space. And in both these respects there is an equivalent dependence on the boat in inland regions along rivers and by the side of lakes.

It might be possible to find borders, in a geographical sense, between different variations of the cultural pattern. Thus, if we are to understand plurality and variety it could be of some benefit to speak of *maritime cultural areas* rather than of individual maritime cultures. In any particular case the various factors of deviation would be found in economic and social structure, linguistic variation, boat types, technology, implements, folklore, mental representations, etc. Only the fact that such special traits are obvious is an indication of a flourishing and specifically maritime culture in the area.

I have maintained that *maritime cultural areas* could have (and may be expected to have) other borders than those which were drawn with regard to terrestrial aspects, for instance territorial and administrative borderlines. On the other hand Ulf Lundström has proposed for Norrland in Sweden that the inland boat types rather reflect local identity in the same way as dia-



Fig. 17 The sites of wrecks were (for practical reasons) well known to coastal people, especially to fishermen. Maritime archaeologists can use this knowledge today to their own advantage and for the benefit of science. (Photo: Department of Maritime Civilizations, University of Haifa, Israel)

lects do.³² If maritime culture on the coast is the dominant factor in creating identity in an area, the borders of its differing varieties will perhaps be the borders for several cultural traits inland. And borders based on culture could on the other hand perhaps be at the root of administrative and political delimitation.

Culture and life mode

What about the concept of culture? The problems surrounding this concept are indeed staggering. There are possibly as many definitions as there are scholars of the humanities. This is in fact how it should be, because it demonstrates with admirable clarity that the most important concepts stimulate the liveliest forms of discussion. In one classic paper 164 different definitions are mentioned.³³ The concept in question is in any case an umbrella concept, perhaps used only as a loose term for precisely that kind of narrow scope on which the researcher is forced to concentrate. It would, anyway, be dishonest not to declare what it means here, even if in a very wide perspective. In principle it would be defensible to use whatever abstraction or theory we like, provided that we support it with other concepts and sufficiently unambiguous explanations. This would also mean that we can use a definition which is fruitful and easily manageable. In this case I find it particularly valuable if it can be used when elements of the past have to be discerned in the maritime cultural landscape.

The boundaries of culture do not have to coincide with any delimitations of ethnicity or (national) identity or other related ways of defining one's own individuality or that of one's group on the basis of a common origin. There is something suspect about that. A strong and persistent need for borders and classification should be seen rather as a sign of psychological insecurity than as a self-evident obligation. As wise men have expressed it even in the past, history does not know of any origin of any people. Such origins have only been created by historians and other writers, trying to prove the truth of their own ideas of glory or, most likely, those of their masters. This approach to a definition of culture has been profoundly discredited.

Archaeological and other "cultures" of a hypothetical order have also been used to vindicate the superiority of a group in relation to others. As we have indicated, it must be emphasized that there are no "pure" and "exclusive" cultures in this or any other sense. On the contrary, whatever you call culture is always a mixture, a *mélange*, of other "cultures." A *creolization*, if you like. But it is a unique combination of these cultural elements. Being such a mixture, every culture must be considered "unique." That may appear paradoxical, but we just have to face it.

Probably this means that every definition will be more or less a definition *ad hoc*, i.e. it will be made for the context, and cannot be repeated for all eternity. A point has to be made, quite simply. My inclination would be to stress the cognitive aspects. Any phenomenon worthy of the name of a culture should display a particular cognition, different from others. From this follow internal cohesion and a sense of being somewhat different from others – though not necessarily better than others.

Thus, I believe it is in this context that we should speak of maritime culture. Like any other culture it is eminently a mixture, a creolization, of others. It is based on the subsistence gained from the seas and the water, and consists of all the thought patterns, cosmologies, customs, objects, phenomena and patterns of action connected with a life by the sea. It is, in other words, adapted to ecology and pursuits in this context. This is by no means all that you can say about it. It may be that everyday maritime culture is more a *life mode* than a bunch of superficial characteristics. The *life mode* concept was formulated by my former colleague at the University of Copenhagen, the ethnologist Thomas Højrup.³⁴

What we would call "subsidiary" occupations or means of livelihood are the rule in this life

Fig. 18 Wreckage was always put to some use. Ship's knees in the interior of a traditional cottage on the island of Læsø, Denmark. The shallow sandy coasts of Læsø were notoriously dangerous for shipping. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)



mode. They seem to have been a persistent pattern. The survey by William Fitzhugh of circum-polar prehistory demonstrated that there are extremely few archaeological “cultures” – indeed, perhaps only one, the Aleutian variety – that appear to be entirely dependent on maritime resources, according to the criteria used.³⁵ But how the people of these cultures thought of themselves we have no idea. They may, for all we know, have imagined themselves to be the maritime group *par préférence* in contrast to surrounding landlubbers. But their cognition could never be adduced as any kind of support. For prehistory we can only rely on material remains.



Fig. 19 Large-scale whaling was once an important long-range maritime industry. But the stranding of a single whale on the Atlantic coast might be of significant benefit to a local community. Such events were also not unknown in the Baltic. Olaus Magnus, *Historia* (1555), 21:11, 21:15.

There may not even be a permanently “primary” trade, maritime or not, in such a life mode. Among all the “subsidiary” pursuits, or *niches*, in history we find fishing of various types, hunting birds and mammals both at sea and inland, the gathering of berries, nuts, down and eggs, boat-building, ferrying, shipping at several levels from skipper to ordinary seaman, pilotage, upkeep of sea marks and lighthouses. A small garden-plot next to the house and some sheep, perhaps a cow, might be the only agrarian element. Fairly often, however, this element is stronger. Among border cases, in more than one meaning, we find wreck-plundering, piracy and smuggling. Material traces of these later pursuits may be more common than we think, e.g. the peculiar localization of certain harbours in the Ægean from the Early Iron Age onwards.

Maritime culture in the sense of a life mode is tough. If any of the subsidiary pursuits is impossible or threatened, the main emphasis will perhaps be shifted to another niche. But there are also, at least in later times, truly professional maritime trades, such as that of the international sailor. This is the social system described by Weibust.³⁶ On the other hand this sailor may, however qualified as a seaman, continue to possess a part of this small world of many coastal trades, to which he may return in his old age.

The archaeology of the maritime cultural landscape

A short definition of the maritime cultural landscape would be *the whole network of sailing routes, with ports, havens and harbours along the coast, and its related constructions and other remains of human activity, underwater as well as terrestrial.*



Fig. 20 Chapels were erected in numerous harbours all along the archipelagoes and coasts of the North, some built as early as the Late Middle Ages. Hundreds are still standing. This foundation on Drakön island, outside Hudiksvall, Hälsingland, Sweden, probably dates from the late 15th century. Its tiny churchyard was used to bury drowned sailors right up into the 19th century. The chapels were and still are a source of local pride, to some extent even outshining the local parish church. Normally they formed part of a harbour milieu, marking a maritime cultural centre of some standing. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)

A broader perspective also includes shipping, shipbuilding and fishing and their respective hinterlands, with nodal points of coastal towns and land roads, fords, ferries and inland waterways. Material remains are already focused on by archaeology, but cognitive aspects, including the mental map with its toponymous landscape (place names) are also necessary to an understanding of the *Landscape in Man*. One could express it this way: physical landscape + cognitive landscape = cultural landscape.

This is a concept with a meaningful relationship to coastal culture. This landscape is rich in relics, as varied as the occupations pursued. The material remains consist of settlements, wrecks of ships, pole barriers, slipways and smithies of shipyards, traces of stationary fish weirs, landing places, harbour roads and loading places. We find cultural layers, with pottery, animal bones, anchors, chapels and other cultic sites, sea marks such as cairns and beacons, rock carvings from historical times, stone mazes, compass cards, either laid out with stones or carved into the rock.

In recent historical times (16th-19th centuries) the elements of the maritime cultural landscape could be summarized as follows³⁷:

- 1) *Principal destinations for shipping*. This means all possible varieties of central places and areas.
- 2) *Sea routes*. The only material traces, other than canals, would be pole and stone barriers to obstruct or slow down shipping, which are clearly a proof of actual use.
- 3) *Beacon sites* (with a secondary use as sea marks).
- 4) *Sea marks proper* (this category ranges from natural features to actual constructions).
- 5) *Lighthouses* (often at a site of a primary sea mark).
- 6) *Pilot sites* (pilots are the single most knowledgeable group on shipping lanes and the dangers surrounding them).
- 7) *Harbours and havens, loading sites*, including urban conglomerations and fortifications.
- 8) *Ballast places* (if separate from the harbour site proper).
- 9) *Fishing harbours* (seasonal or permanent).
- 10) *Shipyards, boat-building sites* (including their resource landscape, both in a material and a human or social sense).³⁸
- 11) *Place names of maritime significance*. An immense number, especially if one reflects on their "maritime significance." This will mean the entire scope of maritime culture, not only shipping and fishing.
- 12) *Foundering sites* (historical sources).
- 13) *Wreck sites* (archaeological sources).

There is also the further chronological stratification to be taken account of. For the study of the Middle Ages, in this case of Northern Europe, a slightly different picture of the relevant elements would emerge:

- 1) *Parish churches and chapels*. Their maritime significance means that they are situated within a reasonably close distance from the shore.
- 2) *Market sites* in the countryside with the same relationship to the shore as other central places, e.g. churches and chapels.
- 3) *Fortifications*, e.g. pilings, fortresses (see below on place names).
- 4) *Markings*, such as sea marks, which can be dated (lichenometry, surface abrasion processes).
- 5) *Reconstruction of medieval sea & water routes, even inland*. This includes sea marks. Tracing these routes will often be a complicated business, even given knowledge of shipwrecks, land sinking, land-upheaval, erosion, sedimentation.
- 6) *Beacon sites*, which can be dated. By beacons I mean warning systems.³⁹
- 7) *Medieval harbours*, surveyed by way of historical sources, with a strong dependency on road systems, power and landowning. They include the towns⁴⁰, fishing harbours, ballast sites and shipyards.

- 8) *Place names* and also names of medieval ship types. In the North four main name elements can be dated to the Middle Ages: Snäck-, Buss-, Knarr- and Kugg- ('cog'), alongside other word elements describing various topographical features of the coast or the beach, inlets, creeks, coves, etc. Some are of a distinctly military origin.⁴¹
- 9) *Other obviously or seemingly medieval place name types*, e.g. indicating pilings or other intentional obstacles in the water⁴², and names of maritime saints (in northern Europe a sure sign of Catholic times, circa AD 1000-1500).⁴³
- 10) *Other medieval finds of a distinctly maritime character*, e.g. shipwrecks, depots or closed finds, isolated finds without context, which may give valuable information on cultural contacts across the sea.



Fig. 21 Seal hunters of the inner Bothnian, as illustrated by Olaus Magnus, *Carta marina* (1539) and *Historia* (1555), 20:4. The hunters are shown using only spears, or rather harpoons. In this period firearms were introduced, which would ultimately lead to an upsurge of large-scale hunting expeditions on the ice of the Bothnian during the following centuries.

If we go further back into prehistory, important observations have been made on the local material of the Danish island of Fyn (Funen).⁴⁴ But a systematic study presumably remains to be done.

These elements and many others are being rediscovered all the time and offer great potential for analysis, as yet only applied site by site but seldom all together as phenomena.⁴⁵ Moreover, these supposedly maritime elements have never up to now been considered *in relation to the agrarian remains near the coast*, which would be truly consistent with a holistic research strategy.

The social interaction leaves non-material traces that are directly related to the material remains. This must particularly include place names as part of a much wider oral tradition. These traces are every bit as important, perhaps more important, in indicating mental corridors for Mobile Man. After all, this is eminently a landscape of incessant human movement, from land to sea, from sea to land and back again. Most traces reflect the choice of routes to central places of various kinds, what I have called a *tradition of usage*. An interesting observation would be that the frequency of cognitive expressions, such as place names, folklore and the very subjects of tales surrounding certain central sites, such as important harbours, could possibly be used to grade these according to their significance. For example the *process of diffusion and the combination of oral or ritual elements* at such a place may be recorded in myths, customs and even what has become literature at a later stage.⁴⁶



Fig. 22 Hut foundations (Swed. *tomtning*) at Bjuröklubb, Västerbotten, Sweden. In this very area similar foundations have been excavated and dated to the Age of Migration 400-550 (AD 400-550), a period when we still know of no actual settlement remains inland on this side of the Bothnian Bay. (Photo: Christer Wester Dahl)

Aspects or facets of the maritime cultural landscape

Among the aspects illustrated by these elements I have particularly pointed out the following. The division is intended both to contrast the maritime and the terrestrial aspects and to combine them:

- a) *Topographical landscape*. The eternal but not unchangeable pre-requisite. It determines the human approach to the coast in a literal sense, and is an important factor, sometimes the most important factor in the localization of harbours (e.g. Ilves 2004).
- b) *Economic/subsistence landscape (esp. for fishing)*. I may be wrong, but I think there is a lack of a general overview of this aspect, in particular when it comes to its small-scale, everyday face.⁴⁷ In later times the concept is applicable to the industrial landscape.
- c) *Transport/communicative landscape*, including the land roads and their relationship to the sea routes.⁴⁸
- d) *Power/resistance (internal), territorial (external) landscapes (aggression/warfare & defence)*.⁴⁹
- e) *Outer resource landscape* (e.g. for shipyards).⁵⁰
- f) *Inner resource landscape (esp. for the upkeep of shipping)*. This is a landscape of agricultural surplus; definitely an aspect which the researcher must be able to treat from the various perspectives of power, wealth, land and sea. I do not think that this combination has yet been achieved.
- g) *Cognitive landscape (toponymic, "the mental map")*.⁵¹
- h) *Ritual/cultic landscape*.⁵²



Fig. 23 Site of a ruined sailor's inn, first half of the 19th century, at Hökön island, Lake Vänern, Sweden. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)

- i) *Social (demographic) landscape*. One example could be the recruitment for a ship or a shipyard.⁵³
- j) *Urban harbour landscape*. I have never been presented a thorough treatment of this aspect, but a good account is given in *Maritime Topography and the Medieval Town*.⁵⁴
- k) *Leisure landscape (pseudo-maritime?)*. The most recent stage.⁵⁵

The ritual landscape and its cosmology

In the past there was a ritual landscape at sea based on a coherent system of faith, a cosmology. This has interested me particularly in recent years. I have tried to reconstruct it from many variations in fairly recent times. Among these variations are, for example, the tendency to narrow down the subjects involved to recent prejudice, often of Christian origin, and the trend to apply maritime taboos even on land and to non-maritime conditions.

The basis is, according to this reconstruction, a strict *dichotomy of opposition* between sea and land. The land forms its own particular world, and the sea its absolute contrast. In every animal and in almost every human category, in sex or occupation alike, either sea or land characteristics are found. The first rule consists of the following principles:

The basis of the rules is the opposition/contrast between sea and land. This contrast leads to great dangers when one is at sea. What is taboo at sea is what is visible or what can be taken or named in a certain way on land, or from the land. It should not be visible, be taken, used or named in the same way on board a vessel or at sea (possibly, however, the rule ceases to be valid if you leave the boat and go ashore on an island out at sea). Instead the tabooed element should be replaced by something else, preferably its opposite pole (whatever that is thought to be), e.g. a *noa* name. The spectrum of taboos is surprisingly wide. For example a colour could be taboo at sea.

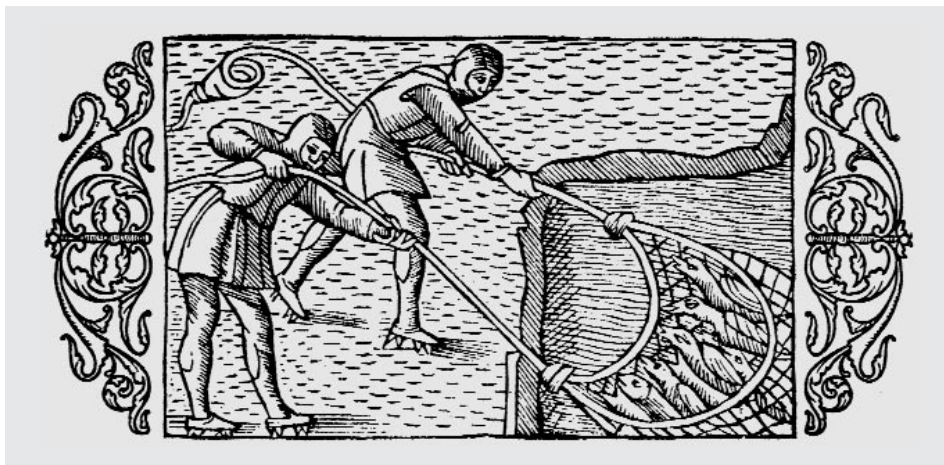


Fig. 24 Winter net fishing under the ice as illustrated by Olaus Magnus in his *Historia* (1555), 20:21. Normally there was a lull in fishing activities in the Baltic during the winter period. However, sealing might be carried on, along with shipbuilding on land. But particularly when food resources gathered before the winter were almost spent, catches from ice fishing were an important and sometimes indispensable addition.

This rule can be demonstrated by the *noa* names so prolifically found among the place names of the maritime cultural landscape. Of course they can be found on land as well, but much more sparsely. They replace the land names which are taboo at sea.⁵⁶ J.R. Hunter⁵⁷ observed the pattern on Fair Isle that “the island enjoyed two sets of place names, one set land-based and one set sea-based. The two are quite discrete, superstition guaranteeing their separation, those place names used from the sea never being used from the land.” This is in fact a “mental” or “cognitive” illustration of the same mechanism that Robert McGhee found in archaeological material in the maritime Arctic, implements made of the sea-derived ivory, associated with the sea woman, never being used inland and others made from reindeer or moose antlers, associated with males, never at sea.⁵⁸ There is also a gender taxonomy strictly separating women or female animals, or even concepts with names that are grammatically feminine, from the sea. I myself once tentatively presented a related set of possible oppositions in connection with prehistoric maritime life.⁵⁹

Any naming is different from land. Thus you need other names at sea for women, the parson or priest, and land-living mammals, especially clawed animals such as cats, wolves, etc. But the cognitive dialectic also involves some of the important fish species, your knife, and the place names of the land marks round about. In Shetland such words were labelled *lucky-words* or *haf-words* (sea words). This contrast almost created another language, a sea dialect.

However, you can break this rule at sea and create the strongest magic possible. Thus the contrasts can be productive. The Master of the Sea is a being from land, either a female or a male. A seal, a whale and a ship are good on land, an elk and a horse are good at sea. They are what I call *liminal agents*. Magic uses pictures, words and names as well as the real things for the transfer from one element to the other. Women or people from certain inland groups, such as the Finns or the Saamis, were supposed to be wizards and sorcerers at sea, for good or for evil. You could combine gender and ethnicity. The strongest magician at sea, its liminal agent number one, would thus be a Finnish woman.

The additional rule of ritual could thus be formulated as follows: *With a clearly stated intention you (well, perhaps not anyone) could consciously break the taboo and create particularly*



Fig. 25 The great nodes of long-range maritime life were the port cities. Innumerable relics of the past still stud the quays and piers of cities like those of Malta. An 18th-century iron gun used as a bollard. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)

strong magic. This means that you transfer tabooed or forbidden persons, animals, things, pictures of or names or words for these from land to sea or vice versa. These transferred elements I call liminal agents. The transfer is an active act, i.e. a ritual or cultic act, which must be considered extremely dangerous to the person who performs the act or rite.

The dualistic rule extends to your own life cycle, but in an apparently perverse dialectic: *A person who works and lives at sea should neither use nor eat things that are produced in or live in the sea.*

This rule is quite impractical, so it went out of use before the others. Nonetheless, traces may be found in stories about the abhorrence of some skippers for fish.

Similar ritual rules could be clearly observed in the maritime fisher folklore in Scandinavia and in the Arctic and Subarctic in general. Approximately the same representations are found in Texas and the Malay peninsula, and as early as the 18th century among Indian tribes in Guayana, South America. They are thus international rules.⁶⁰ On the other hand, the interpretation of archaeological features or early literary traces may possess even greater potential.

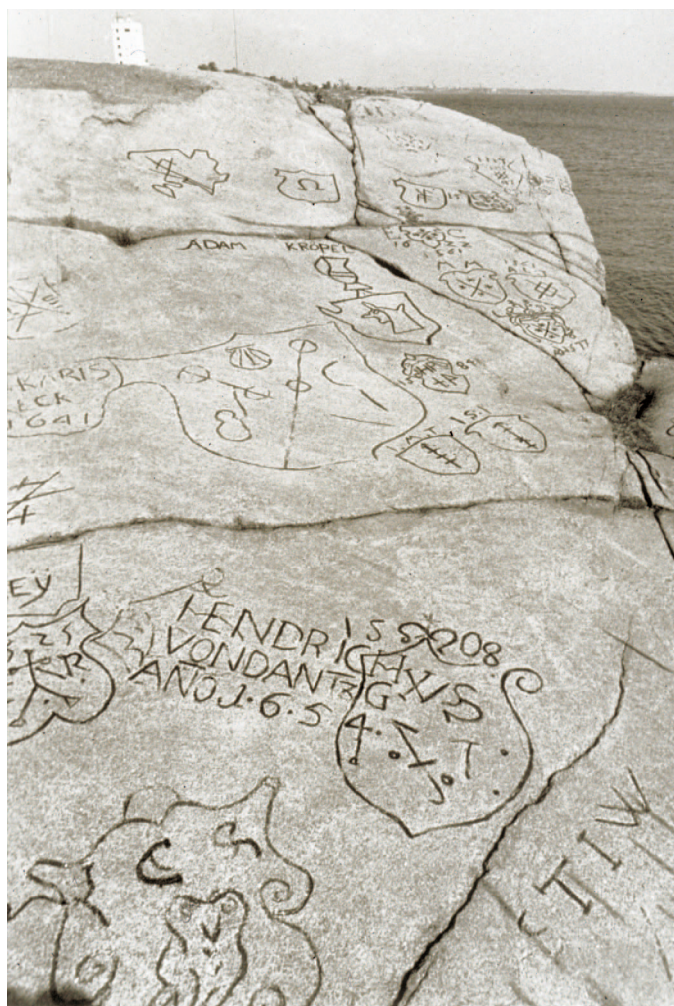
The structure of the human landscape

Centres of maritime culture

These centres appear as concentrations in survey material of archaeological remains and other proofs of many-sided maritime activities/economies. This term particularly applies to installations on smaller islands, peninsulas and suitable promontories at the coast. They appear to be inhabited seasonally rather than to be permanent settlements. There is, however, no self-evident connection with the maritime enclaves (below), which indicate much more large-scale (permanent) settlement units, often semi-agrarian in character. The centres are those of the network of sea routes.

I once defined the bases of maritime cultural centres in a rather functionalist way, which appears somewhat old-fashioned today. But I think that what I said is still valid, subject to some – generally minor – reservations. The most important reservation is of course that almost all such centres seem to be combinations of different bases⁶¹:

Fig. 26 A recurrent feature of the rocky north were rock carvings (aristocratic coats of arms, dates, ship and port names, compass cards, etc.) at important natural havens and small harbours. Hundreds of sites have been documented, some associated more with fishing and seal hunting than with shipping. The richest and thus justly the most famous is Kalhamn or Gäddtarmen (Finn. Hauen-soli; monograph by Boström 1968) in South Finland. The oldest dated inscriptions that we still have today are from the late 16th century, but Olaus Magnus indicates a large number which already existed in 1555, in his *Historia* (2:25). The earliest dated heraldic carving in east Sweden is dated AD 1463 (Hallström 1954). (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)



- a) *Topographical basis* (referring to the tradition of usage, to the natural landscape and the landscape of subsistence/economic landscape): straits, estuaries/river mouths, sheltered lagoon harbours, lee havens, approaches to larger closed waters inland.
- b) *Communicative basis* (referring to the transport landscape): entrances to rivers and other waterways, crossroads at sea, road ends on land, starting points for crossings to islands, transition areas and to other coastal features.
- c) *Functional/cultural basis* (referring to the transport and economical landscape): loading places for local industries/local natural resources (ore, timber, etc.), emergency harbours, meeting places, trading sites, out-harbours for towns, anchoring sites, fishing/hunting harbours.
- d) *Administrative basis* (referring to the power landscape): levy fleet and naval harbours, harbours for the collection of customs, pilot stations, stage harbours for intermittent transportation, chapel harbours. This basis follows a certain hierarchical pattern.

Most centres may remain at a certain stage and never go further, be abandoned completely or, in fact, with the support of a sizeable permanent settlement, develop into an urban pattern.

Maritime enclaves/niches

This is a concept that falls within coastal culture. The term applies to areas with permanent settlements where a large majority of the inhabitants are engaged in maritime activities and where maritime cultural experience and tradition has been accumulated from generation to generation. Their character is clearly indicated by comparisons with other neighbouring areas which display a quite different socioeconomic structure. Very probably their full development presupposes urban interests, i.e. they come into existence in the north mainly during the High Middle Ages. Thus the time when these enclaves enjoyed exclusive significance seems limited. During later periods their ship-owners and captains are often absorbed by great port cities. There is no self-evident connection to centres of maritime culture (above). Often the enclaves are found in barren lands with a weak supporting capacity from an agrarian point of view. In a traditional transport zone one or several enclaves appear more or less to monopolize maritime activities.



Fig. 27 The use of the plummet is mentioned by Olaus Magnus in the *Historia* (1555), 2:12 in connection with the excessive depth of the Norwegian fjords, and is also illustrated in that area on his *Carta marina* (1539).

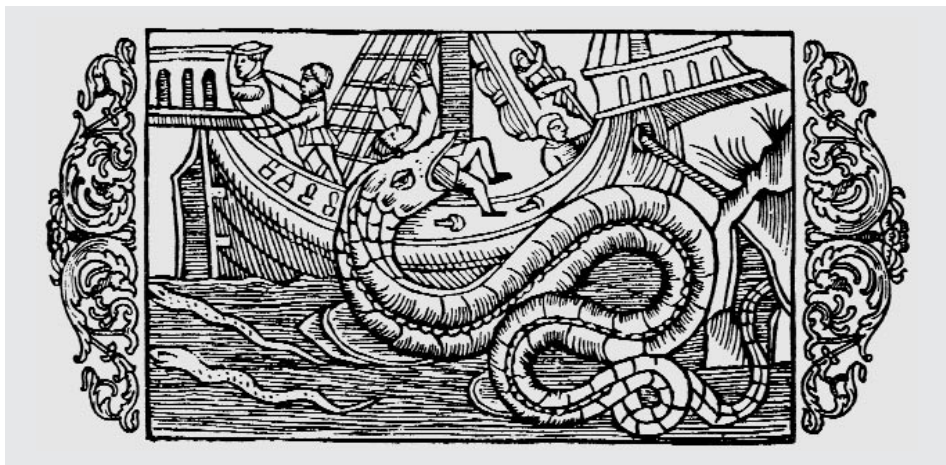


Fig. 28 The folklore of the sea features a colourful fauna of monsters and snakes. At the end of the Middle Ages Olaus Magnus provides a good example of this, as here in his *Historia* (1555), 21:43. His *Carta marina* (1539) fills the North Atlantic with such creatures, but none are illustrated in the Baltic. The richest international material is still probably that provided by Bassett (1885) and Sébillot (1886, 1901).

This tendency appears particularly common around inland waterways. In many cases these niches have been secondarily “created” from very modest beginnings in places where local people had some maritime experience: this was done by the deliberate intervention of the authorities, by means of internal canal building and sometimes the granting of privileges. However, I tend to see their rise rather as the product of a slow build-up of internal socioeconomic conditions – based on the interplay of regional development factors. In coastal zones their role is often taken by harbour cities, with which they have a certain structural affinity, although in a “dispersed” sense. Since I am primarily dealing with an area without formal urban centres, I am perfectly content to refer the reader to Wolfgang Rudolph⁶² on the harbour cities. But of course I have to admit that in many coastal towns one of the fundamental pillars of the local economy was fishing. Even in my own field work area the urban dependence on fishermen has been demonstrated by the ethnologist John Granlund with reference to 17th-century Norrland towns.⁶³ The phenomenon is well known from other parts of Europe besides Scandinavia, for instance England and Poland. On this basis maritime experience – including the art of navigation – was built up, in a manner reminiscent of the concentrated maritime enclaves.

Needless to say, the archipelago worlds of the north have constituted maritime enclaves in themselves, often with further concentrations at certain central points. A concept of “archipelago archaeology” (Swed. *skärgårdsarkeologi*) has been discussed in relation to the most extensive archipelago, that between the islands of Åland and the south-western Finnish mainland. Tapani Tuovinen also gives a brief history of the elements of ideology and national consciousness involved over the course of recent centuries.⁶⁴

Some maritime enclaves in later times were pointed out by Aled Eames together with their *conjectures*: “Here I should like to draw attention to the interesting parallels between the development of the maritime history of North West Wales in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and that of the Åland Islands, as recounted in Georg Kåhre’s classic *The Last Tall Ships* (1978). Both communities witnessed a dramatic transformation from a simple agricultural-fishing economy to one where ship-building flourished enormously up to 1880, both of them saw this come to a virtual standstill (apart, in the case of Gwynedd, from Porthmadog and

Amlwch) and the seafaring population, fostered by the golden years of local ship-building, turning to deep-water sailing in large vessels built in other parts of the world."⁶⁵

Traditional zones of transport geography

During the field work for the Norrland survey it was established that certain coastal areas were characterized by peculiarities in boat-building and maritime terms or place names. These traits could sometimes be connected to the former existence of small, once self-contained settlement "islands" surrounded by extensive forests that made access difficult. The maintenance of their "independent maritimity" is a product of local communications and local contacts. They can accordingly be looked upon as traditional transport zones in miniature.⁶⁶ I call them *maritime cultural areas*.

Transport zones mostly appear as *close-knit socio-cultural maritime space*. The theory of transport zones falls into two component parts, which can be considered separately:

- 1) In a long perspective, *la longue durée* of Fernand Braudel, it appears that heavy transport, *on land as well as on water*, is primarily concentrated in certain zones or corridors extended in a recognizable direction.⁶⁷ The concept of zones or corridors does not signify the same as individual (sea) routes or (land) road systems. The zones consist rather of several routes and road systems and should be described as corridors of movement and contact. The borders of these zones or corridors are overstepped only in exceptional cases. The traditional zones are distinguished by differing transport techniques, adapted to climate, particularly to the seasonal changes between summer and winter, and other natural conditions, the degree of built-up road systems on land, but also other technical, social, economic and cultural variables.
- 2) The means of transport, i.e. the construction of ships and other vessels/vehicles and their techniques of propulsion, are generally adapted to the natural geography of the zone in question, the precise nature of roads, coasts, routes, and harbours (e.g. steepness, shallow banks), and the directions of prevailing currents and winds within the zone. In addition, they are adapted to intended cargoes or cargo loading commissions. Ship types are influenced heavily by hull form, cargo hold and rigging. However, this is by no means to be seen as comparable to a natural law: similar natural prerequisites do not necessarily lead to the same result or the same adaptation, in this case the same boat type. In this respect cultural and hence also ethnic factors may be of seminal importance.

At the transition to another zone there are often natural obstacles of various kinds (river mouth banks, other sediments on sea routes, mountain ranges, rapids or cataracts) with corresponding portages, hauling or carrying sites, dangerous points, promontories and shallows/banks. These obstacles necessitate the reloading of cargo and a change of means of transport at a well-defined site (*transit/ion point, transit/ion pivot*), to a complementary form of water or land transport, so that transportation, whether by water or land, can continue in the new zone. The pivots involve more than two zones and include the English Channel, with the area of Bruges in Belgium, the Danish islands with the Sound and the Belts, and the Peloponnese of Greece.

Basically they consist of seven different types or categories:

- 1) Trans-isthmian land transport zones.⁶⁸
- 2) Zones based on river valleys or other continuous water courses.
- 3) "Ferry" corridors or routes of regular transportation across extensive waters. Some of the most characteristic corridors go by way of archipelagos between mainlands.
- 4) Coastal transport zones, involving a kind of navigation which hugs the coasts (Ital. *costeggiare*).

- 5) *Haff*, bank-enclosed or estuary zones with closed traffic for reloading between river- and sea-going vessels.
- 6) Zones of the open sea. Some of the first classic examples took advantage of predominant seasonal wind directions, e.g. the monsoon and the khamsin.
- 7) Lake zones. A special case, where shipping is enclosed within the confines of the lake, with concomitant adaptations to harbour topography, cargo, wind, etc.⁶⁹

The older traditional transport zones are later overlaid with new dynamic zones determined by changing economic processes, but nonetheless survive in small-scale shipping for a long time. This change affects shipbuilding in the relevant zones to a considerable degree. Mixtures of shipbuilding traditions appear to be normal. If two zones become one, the amalgamation produces a new ship type adapted to conditions in the extended zone but with traits taken from both preceding zones.

A classic instance would be the Gallo-Roman river vessels of the Rhine which gradually extend their operations to the English Channel from the first centuries AD. They then spread to the Low Countries, and from there they make the transition, in the form of the large-scale proto-cog, from the Waddenzee on the North Sea coast to the southern part of the Baltic, around AD 1200. We may regard as the end product of this process the standardized vessels of the Bremen type, which have traits from the North Sea and from the Baltic, but also still retain some ancestral details revealing their origin on the river shores of the Rhine. There are also more local, smaller zones with relatively distinctive boats, even boat *types*, on the coast as well as in larger river systems. On the coast they would conform to my *maritime cultural areas* (above).

These reflections on transport zones support the analytical connection between patterns in sea and land transport. They also offer an alternative to the prevalent model of explanation of variation in boat building. That model presupposes that fundamentally *repetitive* traditions of boat construction provide the overall explanation, and that innovations from differing centres of diffusion are the main cause of change. However, I do not totally deny the value of such approaches.

The interpretation I am proposing offers an alternative view of the ship types. According to this view, the ship type is not just another archaeological "implement." The function of such a complicated combination of technological compounds cannot be reduced to simple archaeological "types." It should rather be defined by analyzing the process of changing vessel function from river to sea, from closed transport zones to the open sea. The ship "type" concept thus appears inextricably bound up with the development of the transport zones.

In this interpretation the active and rational adaptation is seen as the primary factor, but cultural and in a certain sense "irrational" – or "dynamic" – factors are still involved. Thus adaptation could be intentional or unintentional – or even illusory. The differences in for example river boats need not appear as independent types, rather as *variations of details*.⁷⁰

Technical details are only indications. I am anxious not to make these transport zones an issue of technical matters. They are to be understood above all as lines of socio-cultural space. Their consequences are often cognitive and non-material. A possible outcome of the zonal pattern is that of linguistic similarities – similarities between words, dialects, perhaps even languages. The spread of the Nordic languages encompasses several zones. The recent trading languages of the *linguae francae*, such as pidgin English and Creole, are perhaps more relevant here, that is to say, they are more transitory phenomena. Miniature examples are the Raumo town dialect of west Finland, the "russe-norsk" pidgin of the Pomors (Russians in N. Norway) and the somewhat more doubtful tradition of what was described as a "pidgin Germanic" used in Harkmark in Agder, South Norway. Another outcome is the spread of customs and folklore which embody elaborate combinations of motifs. It is my belief that the transport zones, their enclaves or niches and their centres of maritime culture are indications of a vital and vigorous maritime culture.



Fig. 29 The remains of the maritime cultural landscape can take many forms. This tanning container made of concrete was built during the last period of net-tanning, probably in the late 1940s before plastic nets came into use. The island of Hille, Vest-Agder, Norway. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)

Societal functions

This will be a slight exercise in the “philosophy” of maritime culture. The aim is to understand the significance of maritime culture in society as a whole.

The first reflection would be that the quantitative role of maritime culture, in terms of people involved or employed, must necessarily be vastly disproportionate to its societal role, although this is in any case hard to measure.

Maritime cultures often appear as a *reserve* and a kind of *safety valve* for land-bound societies, in more ways than one. They offer a contrast to the solid agrarian adherence to a place inland, where movement within the economy is less significant. The maritime life mode

reminds us of its ultimate origins in a hunting, gathering and fishing culture before the Neolithic. Cognitively it represents a certain “freedom,” which is to some extent illusory but which is highly valued by those who practise it.

In a material sense marine resources have always been an indispensable reserve for subsistence in a country or region, even though the direct exploiters may be only a tiny fraction of the entire population of the society. One example of the almost ever-present need of such a reserve would be England around AD 1500-1660. Production in agriculture doubled, but this meant little since the increase of the population in the countryside was even larger. The yield was highly variable. One harvest in six was a total failure. The years of famine often coincided with epidemic diseases.⁷¹ In Scandinavia at the same period such crises are supposed to have occurred even more frequently than in England, which in the European context was a very highly developed country. The tangible marine reserves consisted of fish and the resources of freight carried by sea. The role of non-material factors affecting people’s mentality – such as new ideas from abroad, an awareness of the possibility of escape through emigration and, perhaps, a consequently greater determination to survive – is impossible to judge, but it becomes infinitely more important during the following centuries.

The role of a safety valve for society is another significant factor. Persecuted individuals or groups or other victims of exclusion from society always had the possibility of escaping to the coast to avoid intolerance and the long arm of the law. An example from northern Europe would be the Pomorians, a Russian group (Russ. *po morye* ‘at the sea’; see above). They were “old believers”, *starovertsy*, who were persecuted during the 15th century by Grand Duke Ivan III of Moscow and his son Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible), in the name of the Orthodox Church. To be able to practise their old ways they settled by the White Sea and on the Kola peninsula. Their new occupations consisted of fishing and hunting seals, whales and walrus. Later they traded with northern Norway, and they were still active in this pursuit up to the First World War.⁷² Some of the *starovertsy* hunters wintered in Grumant, Svalbard (Spitsbergen), where they went in summer in their large sewn vessels, or *lodki*. Other old believers, the *raskolniki*, fled the country and settled in Ottoman Turkey, in present-day Romania, Dobrugea, the Danube delta, or Bulgaria, as *Lipovenes*. We may find other marginal socio-cultural groups forming a maritime version of the tinkers, in Scandinavia called ‘travellers’, *resande* (folk), *tatere*, *fanter*, in northern Sweden coastal Saamis, *kustlappar*, with various levels of sedentariness. But the maritime kind of escape is often of a more individual kind, involving isolated families or other tiny groups. To succeed, these people often but not always make use of some variety of earlier experience of boats or maritime experience. Otherwise they might equally well migrate to a mountainous and sparsely populated area.

The exploiters of the sea have been the most important reserve for military ambitions at sea. Their skills have then suddenly become indispensable. When such ambitions were current among kings and princes, sailors and fishermen were forced to enlist in the navy. But their potential was often limited. The lack of experienced sailors is a recurring theme in the history of the would-be great powers, including Sweden with Finland during the 17th century.⁷³

The Danish crown drew a large part of its maritime potential from Norway. The authorities were dependent on the same group for the upkeep of the sailing routes, sea marks, pilotage etc. Otherwise their occupations were usually despised as representing one of the lowest strata of society, since the amount of revenue to be expected was small and uncertain relative to agrarian taxes. When not urgently needed, the coastal people were treated with indifference. In some respects their normal everyday life was even made more difficult.⁷⁴

A characteristic development of idiosyncratic elements, like vessel types, rigging, fishing implements, maritime folklore, language or dialect, including place names, may in many cases be understood as expressing the strength and activity of a certain maritime cultural area. But it

might equally well indicate isolation. The general characteristics of maritime culture are, however, not isolation, rather the contrary. The operative factors are, as one might expect, people and influences coming from other coasts. Ivar Modeer emphasizes that "communications have often been more lively between the coastal settlements than between the coast on the one hand and the inland settlements on the other." But there is also scope for separate development: "the coast has been a world in its own right."⁷⁵

Furthermore, maritime culture has, throughout its existence, been a crosser of borders to a far higher degree than other cultural patterns. That is to say, a crosser of borders or boundaries of various kinds created by the authorities, including both those shaped by laws defining jurisdiction over an area and those created for the sake of territoriality.

Even the potential for mutual influence does not guarantee a homogeneous culture on both sides of a sea. Rather, it may facilitate a rich variety. Such a variety would presuppose complementary needs in the respective coastal areas, leading to trade and other intercourse.⁷⁶ The lack of certain resources on one side corresponds to its abundance in the other. The forested but agriculturally barren south coast of Norway supplied the treeless peninsula of Jutland with timber and iron. Conversely, the fertile plains of Jutland provided Norway with corn and animal foodstuffs. The same complementarity could be exemplified on a roughly north/south divide all over the Baltic and Scandinavia: timber, other forest products and iron in the north, foodstuffs in the south.

A peculiarity of maritime cultures is their comparative lack of historical source material, even when other segments of society are well covered by such material, so that it seems appropriate to call them *sub-historical*. They thus have a tendency to be *under-communicated*. One of the reasons is certainly that authorities concerned with the control of revenues find it difficult to apply the same methods successfully to maritime culture as to inland conditions. They lack suitable instruments of control. The consequence of the problems involved is on the one hand the indifference already referred to, and on the other hand the professed independence of coastal dwellers. Authorities are not favourably inclined towards maritime occupations and attempt to discourage them, since they draw people from the mother economy where the yield is comparatively secure and measurable. The maritime countryside is looked upon as a *residual area* in comparison with the plains inland. Unfortunately this attitude on the part of the authorities has spilled over on to historians, who depend on the availability of traditional source materials.

The position of fishermen in the north may normally be one of (an uncertain) independence. In spite of this they seldom appear, or think of themselves, as entrepreneurs. To be able to realize the economic potential of shipping as a means of rising in rank is difficult. Becoming a humble sailor is a far less difficult step. The transition to a higher level may require several generations while the risk-taking spirit is built up, starting with very small-scale ventures into trade and ship-owning. The first to try these pursuits would therefore normally be big farmers living near the coast, not fishermen and small-scale skippers, although the latter may possess shipping experience and even the capacity to invest and to build moderate-sized vessels. There is, I think, a fairly characteristic hierarchy in the development of maritime pursuits, to some extent mirrored in the concomitant slow growth of their central places, those which I have called *maritime enclaves* and *maritime cultural centres*.

Fishing comes first, then small-scale shipping, shipping undertaken by farmers or shipping on a collective basis in settlements, recruitment to the merchant navy at different levels, possibly also to the navy, and, alongside these, work in pilotage or as sea mark attendants or lighthouse keepers, or for the customs, etc. The structure is class-bound, and to cross the threshold to higher status requires exceptional energy in a traditional society. Another prerequisite will be an independent and enterprising spirit, which only comes to the fore with any rapidity if the market is on a spectacular upward curve. Otherwise it will be a slow and gradual process over generations.



Fig. 30 A common and almost invisible feature of the maritime cultural landscape are the ballast sites. This island at the mouth of the Ångermanälven river of Sweden consists almost entirely of ballast. It is called *Lilla Norge* ("Little Norway"), thus indicating the origin of most of the ships which transported timber from here in the 19th century. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl)

Identity, habitus, mentality

If a group identity is to be determined today, a reasonable way to do this is simply to ask people what group they consider themselves to belong to. This criterion could also be applied in relation to a maritime culture.

But what would they say in this case? Is there any general word at all – in any language – for people who practise maritime trades? I do not think so, although Hasslöf did coin one (see below). The people we would need to ask would characterize themselves as farmers, fishermen, sailors, etc., but not as practitioners of maritime culture. This means that our identification of them is analytic, not cognitive. On the other hand, their way of distinguishing between "us" and "them" would be more interesting. "Them" would be the landlubbers. In a way this reminds us curiously of the cognitive content of maritime culture, the age-old opposition between sea and land. In other words, identity is relational. "Them" is not "us." The next step is to look at the attitudes of others towards our practice of maritime culture.

Certainly most forms of maritime culture hold a romantic, and thus positive, attraction for outsiders. As usual with romanticism, however, this is based on a lack of adequate knowledge and the admiration of skills not possessed by the observer. But in the past everyday maritime culture has not been seen by the ruling class as a very dignified pursuit. It has been firmly classified as proletarian in the social scale. Besides, the authors of classical antiquity set the tone in another respect. The people of the harbours, the sailors and merchants were considered unreliable, dangerous and detestable elements.⁷⁷

I suggest that we could use pictorial art and *belles-lettres* to follow up the slight variations in these attitudes over the course of the last few centuries. It is symptomatic of the prevailing attitude that, as we shall see, such everyday people and such everyday activities have normally not

been depicted at all. Dutch bourgeois realism during the 16th and 17th centuries represents a unique and comparatively isolated case.

Nor were small-scale shipping, barge traffic and the like considered dignified as a *métier*. At best the sometimes dramatic high seas fishing by professionals in *bussen* may excite some interest among artists painting for the merchant burghers. Except in travel stories about voyages of discovery or the exploits of the East Indiamen, even an occasional mention was of little interest to high society. Even the geographical areas inhabited by poor people using the sea were despised and under-communicated. This is another reason why maritime culture of the everyday kind is largely overlooked in history.

A genuine interest sprang up only with the inception of fashionable sea-bathing and when it became customary for middle-class townspeople to spend their holidays in fishing villages, during the 19th century. While the industrial working class, dressed in drab colours, increased in numbers in the cities, the fishermen and sailors were seen as representing a colourful, primitive, clean and authentic life-style. On the other hand this mainly resulted in a new romanticism, creating stereotypes such as that of the laconic and sly old fisherman, quoted by writers as a picturesque oracle and a speaker of a distinctive dialect.

Knowledge follows class. Maritime culture is not homogeneous. Like all cultures, it is a question of class. The first real scholar to treat maritime culture from the deck and not from the bridge was Olof Hasslöf, son of a fisherman from Bohuslän and a fisherman himself as recently as from the 1940s to the 1970s. At that time even the difference between skeleton building and shell building was not known. "Everybody" seems to have thought that vessels had always been built on the skeleton-first principle, like those of the standard 19th-century shipyards. The



Fig. 31 A common view of the great herring fisheries of the European north was and still is that they were wholly dependent on the sudden arrival of fish shoals. The disappearance of these shoals would also explain their decline after perhaps 300 years. However, it is possible that they were based almost as much on the arrival of people eager to exploit *les conjonctures*, war economies and other crises. In any case, historical fishing traditions largely form a continuum on a modest, day-to-day scale everywhere, except in the deadly climatic fluctuations of the Arctic. Only today is there a real crisis. Olaus Magnus tells us in his *Historia* (1555), 20:28 that the waters of the Falsterbo peninsula of south Skåne (present-day Sweden) were so full of fish that they could be scooped up with a simple hand net. Another factor leading to the establishment of fisheries at the site was its geographical role as a transit point between two basic transport zones, incorporating those of the Sound and the Kattegat and those of the Baltic. This created excellent conditions for a market across the peninsula (Westerdahl 1995, 2003c).

class that dominated thinking was the same which represented the ship-owners and those who owned the yards. The simple reason was that no one so far had bothered actually to observe the boat-builders at their work, nor drawn any well-founded conclusions from archaeological finds. Hasslöf did, and as well as finding out that the small-scale boat-builder still built from the shell, he also found irrefutable evidence that this was the all-pervading principle in prehistoric societies and those of classical antiquity. It is remarkable that this discovery, which is of immeasurable significance in ship archaeology, was published so late.⁷⁸

The terms invented by Hasslöf for maritime culture and those who practise it were the Swedish *sjöbruk* and *sjöbrukare*, literally 'sea use' and 'sea user'. This is perfectly understood in any of the Nordic languages (but a Finnish equivalent to *sjöbruk*, *merenkäyttö*, sounds more brutal, a little like harsh exploitation). But the form of the term carries a very important implication: that it is the opposite of, and equal to, the Swedish *jordbrukare*, literally 'soil user,' i.e. "farmer." Hasslöf thought with some reason, as we have seen, that the role of maritime culture had been under-communicated because of the vested interests of the great land-owners of the past. By creating this term he aimed to create a more rational relationship, to restore the balance. But unfortunately the problems of translation into other and more important languages did not help him. Dutch *zeebouw*, as opposed to *landbouw*, is all right; so are the German words *Seebau* and *Wasserbau*, but its counterpart, *Landwirtschaft*, is formed in a different way; and while English has *agriculture* and *mariculture*, they do not work as a pair in this context because the term *mariculture* has already been appropriated by fish-breeders.

The pejorative term *landlubber* fits well enough into Hasslöf's categorization and world. But, as we have seen, those practitioners of everyday maritime culture whom we have met have had a foot in both "cultures."

The work of Hasslöf draws attention to another important consideration. Maritime culture should always be understood in terms of class and power in society. Take the sailors. There is indeed a proletarian maritime culture. *The Death Ship*, a novel by B. Traven, comes to mind, but so also do the works of Weibust.⁷⁹ Our everyday coastal cultures are a little different: maritime pursuits are carried on semi-professionally and may represent only a part of an individual's life cycle. In the maritime culture the other stratum is that of captains, ship-owners and ship brokers. Hasslöf sets alongside this strict class division the Nordic crew team structure of fishermen and cargo ship crews jointly owning their ships themselves. He was probably dreaming of a classless society modelled along these lines. But he certainly had intimate knowledge of the crew teams of Bohuslän. On a world scale this social structure is rather unusual, and it cannot be stated on the basis of the available evidence that it has had precursors in history. Hasslöf would say that this is because the source material was compiled by those in authority, who did not understand the principles of the team, where any man could be registered as the sole owner and skipper. Yet the existence of such a structure may mean that we ought to talk about maritime cultural patterns rather than just a single maritime culture.

Kjell J. Bråstad mentions other features of coastal societies around the Skagerrak, which may be more widespread than he explicitly says: "a combination of stubborn individualism and unbreakable fellowship." He claims to see the first in "the fight for fishing grounds or in the rivalry for getting pilotage work." The latter is the solidarity "when catastrophes and misfortunes befell a family, as for example when a ship foundered."⁸⁰ I have observed the same combinations of opposites: *pauperistic individualism* for instance in the refusal to join the organizations for the collective sale of fish, and a true "millimetre justice" applied over centuries in the distribution of fishing lots along the coastline.

Another feature that could perhaps be called a more stable part of its habitus, as a pervasive mental trait of everyday maritime culture, is *fatalism* in the face of the vicissitudes of life. A moving expression of this fatalism from the world of the theatre can be found in the one-act

play by J.M. Synge, *Riders to the Sea* of 1904. It is one of the principal works of the Gaelic Renaissance of Ireland. Its environment is the poor Gaelic-speaking west coast (the Aran Islands). An old woman has lost five of her sons at sea. Now the sea robs her of her last son. But in spite of its context in an explicitly literary nationalism, the drama has universal significance.

The losses at sea were appalling in former times. In Norway the cultural historian and pioneering sociologist Eilert Sundt attempted to reverse the trend by publishing statistics of drowning accidents in Norway from 1846 to 1860.⁸¹ The number of widows in coastal communities was striking. It is not surprising that the situation made these communities a hotbed of new religious movements at the time. Perhaps a kind of fatalism is the main background to the religiosity so characteristic of fishing villages around the North Sea. The many varieties include the dark and strict orthodoxy of Bohuslän, the possibly slightly less oppressive version in Thy and Vendsyssel and the Limfjord of Jutland – the theme of a great novel, *Fiskerne* ('The Fishermen,' 1928) by Hans Kirk – and, perhaps a little more cheerful still, the variety found in Sørlandet, the Agder province, in South Norway. It is not surprising that the main support for this movement came from the women.⁸² Among the men Håvard Dahl Bratrein observed rather "a belief in fate, a fatalism, which the clergy termed religious indifference or the like."⁸³ There may be many varieties of fatalism.

What significance the sea and the water had in prehistoric times is perhaps a not entirely different question. A possible notion is that the sea was experienced as a kind of chaos, the "unordered," the "non-human", in the cognitive systems of people living near the sea. It may have had multiple meanings as a threat and a challenge, a blessed provider of subsistence, source of news and means of rapid movement. The cognitive role of the boat is another issue. Precisely what really makes it different from land conditions? And so on. I have already published a few ideas on these subjects⁸⁴, and I will, hopefully, continue to do so.

What do we make of maritime culture?

There obviously seems to be a whole range of approaches in this field. As a catalyst for various such approaches I think the term *maritime culture* certainly deserves far more attention than it has hitherto been accorded. Would it not be a good idea to see this as an umbrella concept under which various forms of multidisciplinary education and research could be brought together so as to achieve a synthesis, rather than chopping up the work into only archaeology or only history?

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Notes:

- 1 Westerdahl 1998.
- 2 The best illustration of this holistic approach is perhaps Molaug 1989 (1985) on Norway.
- 3 Bråstad 1992: 239.
- 4 E.g. Meijer/van Nijf 1992.
- 5 Hinkkanen 2003.

- 6 Bråstad op. cit.: 242.
- 7 Weibust 1976 (1969); cf. also Weibust 1958.
- 8 Cf. Kirby/Hinkkanen 2000.
- 9 Flatman 2003.
- 10 Gjerdåker 1992: 210.
- 11 Westerdahl 2003a.
- 12 E.g. Jasinski 1993a, 1993b.
- 13 Kloster 1996: 70.
- 14 Holm 1991.
- 15 Gjerdåker 1992, loc. cit.
- 16 Erixon 1938.
- 17 Cunliffe 2001.
- 18 Jones 1977.
- 19 For a critical appraisal see Parker 2001.
- 20 Westerdahl 1999, 2002b, 2002d, 2004, 2005, 2006.
- 21 Kloster 1996: 73.
- 22 Westerdahl 2003a, 2003b.
- 23 Braudel 1986 (1949), 1988 (1985), 1989 (1986).
- 24 Also recorded by Holm 1991.
- 25 Bratrein 1992: 217.
- 26 Bråstad 1992: 239.
- 27 Stoklund 1985.
- 28 Prins 1965, preface X.
- 29 Ibid. (my italics).
- 30 Cf. Østmo 1998.
- 31 E.g. the ship yard tales, mentioned above, Westerdahl 2000.
- 32 Lundström 1998.
- 33 Kroeber/Kluckhohn 1952.
- 34 Højrup 1995.
- 35 Fitzhugh 1975.
- 36 Weibust 1958, 1976 (1969).
- 37 Westerdahl 1986, 1996b.
- 38 E.g. Westerdahl 1987a.
- 39 Cf. Westerdahl 2002c.
- 40 Cf. Bill/Clausen (eds.) 1999.
- 41 Cf. Westerdahl 2002c.
- 42 Bødtker Petersen 1994, Crumlin-Pedersen 1985, Nørgård Jørgensen 2002, Svanberg 1995.
- 43 Westerdahl 1997.
- 44 Crumlin-Pedersen et al. (eds.) 1996.
- 45 Westerdahl 1986, 1987, 1989, Norman 1995.
- 46 E.g. Stylegar 2004, Westerdahl 2004, both on the Lindesnes area, South Norway.
- 47 For a study on medieval fishing in the North consult Norman 1993.
- 48 Cf. Westerdahl 2002e.
- 49 Cf. Nørgård Jørgensen et al. (eds.) 2002 with e.g. Westerdahl 2002c.
- 50 Cf. Westerdahl 1987a.
- 51 Especially Westerdahl 1989.
- 52 Westerdahl 1999, 2002b, 2002d, 2003a, 2004, 2005, 2006. Further below.
- 53 Cf. e.g. Westerdahl 1987a, 1989 with source material as appendix.
- 54 Bill/Clausen (eds.) 1999.
- 55 This aspect of a bathing resort at the Baltic is illustrated by e.g. Schumacher-Gorny 1997.
- 56 For this part Westerdahl 2002b, 2002d, 2003a, 2004, 2005, 2006 with references.
- 57 Hunter 1994.
- 58 McGhee 1977.
- 59 Westerdahl 1993.
- 60 Westerdahl op. cit.
- 61 Also in Westerdahl 1982; cf. Westerdahl 1986.
- 62 Rudolph 1980.
- 63 Granlund 1956, 1978.
- 64 Tuovinen 2005; and in general edition no. 65 of Nordenskiöldssamfundets tidskrift, Helsinki 2005.
- 65 Eames 1981: 9.
- 66 But cf. Lundström 1998, as above.
- 67 On land or along river valleys they can be replaced parallel to their general axis; e.g. Sherratt 1996.
- 68 Sherratt 1996.

- 69 For Swedish examples see Westerdahl 2002a, 2003b.
 70 Beaudoin 1985, Litwin 1995.
 71 E.g. Thomas 1971.
 72 E.g. Kraft 1968.
 73 Villstrand 1989.
 74 Cf. Holm 1991 on obstacles imposed by the Swedish crown.
 75 Mod  r 1945 (transl.)
 76 Holm op. cit.
 77 As above Meijer/van Nijf 1992.
 78 Hassl  f 1958.
 79 As above 1958, Hassl  f (et al.) 1972.
 80 Br  stad 2002: 239.
 81 Sundt 1976; on North Norway cf. Bratrein 1992: 218.
 82 Cf. Holm 1991: 243ff.
 83 Bratrein 1992: 224.
 84 Westerdahl 1993, 2005. The changing roles of the sea to land relationship must have been noted in very early times. In some areas the land rose perceptibly, in others the land sank into the sea, perhaps slowly, perhaps very dramatically, through the action of tectonic forces. How did these changes influence human thought?

Fish and Ships. Zur Entwicklung einer Theorie der maritimen Kultur

Zusammenfassung

Ausgehend von einem arch  ologischen Standpunkt, f  hrt der Autor aus, warum »K  stenskultur« als Begriff f  r die Anpassung der Menschen an bestimmte   rtliche Umgebungen verwendet werden sollte, w  hrend sich »maritime Kultur« als allgemeiner Terminus f  r das eignet, was diese Anpassungen gemein hatten und haben, einschlie  lich der verschiedenen gesellschaftlichen Schichten der Seefahrer im   berseehandel. Maritime Kultur w  re demnach der allgemeinere Begriff.

Einige der in ihr enthaltenen wichtigen Merkmale sind der Habitus der maritimen Welt, seine Urbilder, seine kulturelle Landschaft und nicht zuletzt seine kognitive und rituelle Landschaft, die auf dem Gegensatz zwischen See und Festland basiert und charakteristischerweise in der Verwendung von Tabu- und Noa-Namen bzw. W  rtern sowie in anderem Verhalten Ausdruck findet. Andere Eigenschaften jenes Habitus sind die Rolle des Bootes als Verl  ngerung des menschlichen K  rpers, der in der Religion – aber auch in einer Gleichg  ltigkeit gegen  ber der Religion – verk  rperte Fatalismus sowie ein klarer Sinn f  r gemeinsame Identit  t und Zusammengeh  rigkeit, besonders gegen  ber »Landratten«. Zu seinen sozialen Funktionen geh  ren die vielschichtige, Grenzen   berschreitende Rolle, die Rolle als »Sicherheitsventil« der Gesellschaft im Sinne des Besch  tzens verfolgter oder ge  chteter Einzelner bzw. Personengruppen sowie die Tatsache, dass er als Reserve f  r materielle G  ter fungierte, ohne die die Binnenlandgesellschaft nicht   berlebt h  tte. Er war zudem der einzige Lieferant f  r seem  nnischen Nachwuchs und fungierte als »Kanonenfutter« einer expansionistischen Marinepolitik. Da sich maritime Kultur   ber die wirkungsvolle Kontrolle und Besteuerung durch die Beh  rden hin-

weggesetzt, wurde sie ansonsten vergessen und entwickelte sich in gewissem Sinne zu einem untervermittelten Subthema der Geschichte, die höchstens als randständiges Element einer auf die Landwirtschaft konzentrierten Gesellschaft Beachtung fand.

Jedoch waren ausschließlich maritim-kulturelle Muster in der Vergangenheit sehr selten. Sie standen immer mit einem Fuß an Land. Die Beziehung zu landwirtschaftlichen Elementen war so unterschiedlich wie die Rolle der Frau. Weitere zentrale Themen sind maritime Kosmologie, die Überreste und verschiedene Aspekte der maritim-kulturellen Landschaft sowie die Zonen der Verkehrsgeographie, d.h. der soziokulturelle Raum der Bewegung auf Schifffahrtswegen, maritimer Enklaven und der Zentren maritimer Kultur. Es stellt sich die Frage, ob die Erforschung der maritimen Kultur nicht das Dach eines neuen, disziplinübergreifenden wissenschaftlichen Fachgebietes bilden könnte.

Fish and Ships. Du développement d'une théorie de la culture maritime

Résumé

En prenant l'archéologie comme point de départ, l'auteur considère que le terme de «culture côtière» devrait être utilisé pour faire référence à l'adaptation humaine à des environnements locaux particuliers, tandis que celui de «culture maritime» devrait l'être en tant que terme général pour ce qui était commun à ces adaptations et l'est toujours, y compris les différentes classes sociales de marins dans le commerce d'outre-mer. Culture maritime serait en conséquence le terme le plus générique.

Quelques-uns des importants traits communs qui la composent sont l'habitat de la sphère maritime, ses archétypes, son paysage culturel, et notamment son paysage cognitif et rituel, qui se base sur le contraste entre mer et terre ferme, et qui s'exprime de manière très caractéristique par l'emploi de noms ou de mots tabous et noa, ainsi qu'au travers d'autres comportements. D'autres caractéristiques de cet habitat incluent le rôle du bateau en tant que prolongement du corps humain, le fatalisme personnalisé dans la religion, mais également dans l'indifférence vis-à-vis de la religion formelle, ainsi qu'un sens prononcé de l'identité et de l'appartenance communes, tout spécialement par rapport aux «terriens». Les fonctions sociales incluent le rôle frontalier aux multiples facettes, et son rôle de soupape de sécurité de la société dans le sens qu'il protège des individus ou des groupes de personnes persécutés ou tenus à l'écart, ainsi que le fait qu'il servait de réserve pour des biens matériels sans lesquels la société terrienne n'aurait pas survécu. Il s'avérerait de surcroît être le seul fournisseur de marins et de chair à canon, tels que les nécessitaient les politiques maritimes expansionnistes. Puisque la culture maritime ne pouvait être contrôlée efficacement ou fiscalisée par l'administration, elle fut oubliée autrement et dans un certain sens, se développa jusqu'à devenir un sous-thème de l'histoire peu communiqué, et considéré simplement comme un élément périphérique au courant dominant de l'agriculture.

Toutefois, des modèles exclusivement maritimes et culturels étaient très rares dans le passé. Ils avaient toujours un pied à terre. La relation avec des éléments de la chose agraire était aussi variable que l'était le rôle de la femme. D'autres thèmes centraux sont la cosmologie maritime, les vestiges et les différents aspects du paysage maritime culturel, ainsi que les zones de la géographie des transports, ce qui signifie l'espace socio-culturel des déplacements sur les voies de navigation, des enclaves maritimes et des centres culturels. La recherche portant sur la culture maritime ne serait-elle pas en passe de figurer à la tête d'une nouvelle pluridiscipline scientifique?