

**Brad Beaven, Karl Bell, Robert James, eds.** *Port Towns and Urban Cultures: International Histories of the Waterfront, c.1700–2000*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 289 pp. \$119.99, cloth, ISBN 978-1-137-48315-7.

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Recently, port cities have attracted increasing interest, especially from global historians. As Lasse Heerten argues in his recent review of literature, port cities allow for a locally based insight into global entanglements and offer a corrective device for the metanarrative of permanent circulation. Lasse Heerten, *Literaturbericht. Ankerpunkte der Verflechtung. Hafenstädte in der neueren Globalgeschichte*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43 (2017), S. 146–175, hier S. 173. Yet, as Heerten as well as Brad Beaven, Karl Bell, and Robert James state in their introduction to the present volume, historians have so far neglected the specific culture of port towns when analysing them as sites of mobility and as nodal points of globalization. Accordingly, the articles zoom into the urban world of port towns and provide detailed accounts of these land-based maritime cultures. Through their narrow focus on “the sailor ashore”, some chapters approximate micro-history. In the first part, the authors engage with the construction of port town cultures, considered as a merging of influences from overseas and from the hinterland. The second part deals with representations of port towns and with the process of identity creation and maintenance. Ranging between contemporary (travel) literature, song texts, newspapers, police and judicial records and oral interviews, this volume offers a variety of perspectives on port town culture.

The book both connects to and distinguishes itself from the burgeoning port cities literature. It stands out in its focus on middle-sized and/or peripheral port towns – with the exception of London – all located within the British Empire or in Northern Europe. The authors look at Portsmouth and Plymouth, both harbours of the British Royal Navy, and at Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Hull, located on the English East coast. Cape Town and Durban represent South Africa, and one article deals with various antipodean port towns such as Melbourne and Auckland. Swedish Gothenburg, the autonomous Åland Islands, and Kotka in Finland represent the Nordic countries. Countering the usual emphasis on port towns’ role in global transfer processes and entanglements, the authors deploy a decisively local focus and insist on the impact that the towns’ liminal situation between land and sea had on urban culture. Paul Gilchrist gives an account of oral traditions in Newcastle-upon-Tyne that reflect the economic and cultural impact of sailing. Hanna Hagmark-Cooper’s study of the 20th-century’s patriarchal society on the Åland Islands analyses the identity formation of sailors’ wives. John Griffith’s text about the (lack of) imperial culture in antipodean port towns shows that, as to their built environment, these cities received more inspiration from the American Pacific than from England, pointing to the weak popular enthu-

siasm for the Empire most obvious during the Boer War.

The book also distinguishes itself by its time-frame. Port city literature often concentrates on the half-century before 1914 when the steamboat technology profoundly transformed these cities' economic and social life. However, the present volume ranges from 18th-century Cape Town to the demise of Hull as a fishing town in the late 20th century, which Jo Byrne analyses using oral history. Yet, the plural in the title ("Urban Cultures") and the emphasis put by several authors on transformation processes – and on resiliencies – make clear that port town cultures are dynamic constructions. Karl Bell shows that in Portsmouth, the maritime superstitious religious culture survived the advent of modern steam shipping that lowered the risk of seafaring. William M. Taylor demonstrates how the construction of enclosed docks in early 19th-century London contributed to the criminalization of former customary rights, for example, spillage of commodities.

The twelve articles are framed by an introduction and a conceptual summary by Isaac Land, who suggests a "coastal studies approach" to integrate urban and maritime history. The first part, "Urban-Maritime Cultures", is dedicated to the "nature and character" of port town culture, while the second part deals with "Representations and Identities" of port town societies.

From both a theoretical and empirical point of view, this division is not entirely convincing. Identity construction and various representations of identity can be considered as integral parts of a dynamic culture. Thus, several articles in the first part address representations of port towns – in travel literature, in folk songs, or by Victorian moral reformers. The two parts are also held together by recurring topics such as (violent) encounters in port towns, masculinity codes, the port towns' 'otherness', and the representation of these spaces as places of moral and religious deviance.

Transcultural encounters are the focus of Tytti Steel's oral history-based account of identity formation in Kotka in the 1950s, as well as of Nigel Worden's article on mid-18th-century Cape Town. Worden retraces the path of sailors of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) who went ashore, some of whom deserted and stayed in Cape Town. He emphasizes the open conflicts between soldiers living ashore and the VOC sailors who brought along a distinct code of honour. Ideals of masculinity are also under scrutiny in Tomas Nilson's micro-perspective on violence provoked by seamen in Gothenburg's sailortown in the 1920s. The recasting of seamen, more precisely of steamers, as members of the proletariat in the late 19th century is addressed in Brad Beaven's contribution about the shifting image of London's Ratcliff Highway. London's city landscape changed with the arrival of the steamboat, as did Victorian commentators' view of the sailortown, which was increasingly perceived as a threat to the social and gender order, not least because women owned notorious public houses. However, apart from this section of Beaven's chapter and the contribution by Hagmark-Cooper, female actors are once again absent from port town history, despite Beaven's assertion that women played a "significant role in sailortown culture" (p. 176).

Robert James deals with another case of a seafaring professional group's shifting image. In Plymouth, in the context of the First World War, Royal Navy sailors were recast, not least by popular culture, as patriotic and respectable people. Yet, the image of the hard-drinking and oversexualised naval soldier survived and continued to give the port town its reputation for 'otherness'. Victorian society was attracted to the 'wonderfully scary sailortowns', and representations of 'exotic otherness', as Vivian Bickford-Smith shows, were used by the Durban Publicity Association in the 1920s to promote the town as a tourist site, specifically drawing attention to the rickshaw pullers.

This volume, a nicely illustrated and handy hardcover book, provides us with a multi-perspective history of collective identity construction within and of narrative formation around port cities, engaging with local self-perceptions and with outside representations. By demonstratively distancing itself from a focus on connections and mobility, the authors situate these processes locally and insist on the impact of the coastal situation on urban culture. Accordingly, almost no attention is paid to the port towns' role as "places of transshipment" where cultural influences were not only received but also transformed and transferred – not least through migration, which is almost entirely absent from the volume. At some points in this highly accessible book, the reader misses an emphasis on port towns' connectedness.

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