Introducing the New Coastal History: Cultural and Environmental Perspectives from Scotland and Beyond

Highlighting the New Coastal History¹

In Scotland, saltwater is never more than fifty miles away, the country providing an apt location from which to examine the past from a littoral perspective. Given that, it is puzzling that, neither here nor anywhere else, has a full-length volume on this theme appeared to this point.² A crucial starting point for understanding the slow emergence of the New Coastal History (the term, as shall become clear, is Isaac Land’s) is to recognise that scholars are skeptical of new labels. Indeed, any attempt to pinpoint a recent, sharp ‘turn’ and a sudden, noisy rush to the present would be misguided. Some anglophones born in the mid- to late-twentieth century might speculate on the impact of the ‘silent spring’ regarding which Rachel Carson warned humankind in 1962, or of French conservationist Jacques Cousteau’s telesvisual evocations of the technicolour marine and tidal world around us. Television has, more recently, become the domain, at least in the UK, of popular visual feasts in which cameras zoom in on coastal landscapes, homes and heritage sites and accentuate their more ‘wholesome’ qualities. In terms of academic works though, it is striking that, in the last decade, what was previously a feature of individual historical scholarship has gathered momentum. What were once swirls and eddies - independent verdicts that, across the globe, littoral peoples had shared historical experience - are beginning to channel themselves. Implicit in this is the realisation that coastal communities can often be distinguished both from landlocked peoples to their interior and, indeed, from those whose pasts have been lived within a more exclusively maritime setting.
A summary might point to three historians as key. In 2006, Michael Pearson presented a case for there being common attributes among those whose lives had taken place within this space. In his article on ‘littoral society’, published in *The Journal of World History*, Pearson stated that:

Location on the shore transcends differing influences from an inland that is very diverse, both in geographic and cultural terms, so that the shore folk have more in common with other shore folk thousands of kilometres away on some other shore of the ocean than they do with those in their immediate hinterland.

Besides Pearson, there are two other scholars, in terms of English-language writing, who have been to the fore in examining the qualities of the historical ‘coastscape’, and, from there, sharpening the focus on a new, conceptual perspective. Both Isaac Land and John Gillis have highlighted how ‘shore folk’ and other coastal dwellers have engaged with the sea not only by ‘facing the ocean’ - as Barry Cunliffe asserted in his exploration of the Atlantic - but by, just as frequently, orienting themselves away from the open water. In Land’s 2007 energetic, first exposition of the New Coastal History in the *Journal of Social History*, he scoped out an approach, which would, instead, shift our view away from both the ocean and the interior and bring attention to the engineered, littoral spaces that had featured so prominently in our collective histories but so rarely been written about. Land highlighted, in brilliant detail, evidence of an anthropogenic, anthropocentric coast across the *longue durée*. For him:

In their diversity, and in their ever-changing nature, coasts parallel the diverse experiences of human beings in their confrontation with water, and each other.
Some people are knocked over, or borne away on powerful currents. Others just leave footprints in the sand. The coastal continuum admits many fine gradations and strata of experience that ‘oceanic’ history threatens to wash away.⁷

From this perspective, neither the utopian nor the dystopian coast should be identified solely with the modern condition but as part of a littoral experience having cogency over several centuries and perhaps millennia. No one variety of historian would have especial oversight on the coast, and so, instead of fearing becoming trapped in the quicksand, curious scholars should be encouraged to bring with them a range of tools and ideas provided by, for instance, political, cultural, urban, environmental, tourism and leisure history. As Land foresaw it (and develops considerably in his chapter in this volume) this would position them to lead future research on population movement towards the littoral, the sailortown, ‘coastal exceptionalism’, coastal squeeze, as well as the effects on property development and urban sprawl of environmental factors, among them, storm surges, erosion, sea level rise, tsunamis, pollution and desalination.⁸ Simultaneous with Land’s call to the coast, John Gillis had been working on what would become his 2012 book, The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History, a survey of those who have had ‘one boot in the boat, the other in the field’, ranging across every continent and several hundred thousand years.⁹ Gillis’s book put greater emphasis than Land’s work on the modern period as marking a shift towards littoral despoliation. For Gillis, essential elements of the coast have been lost in recent times, with the shore having taken on ‘enormous symbolic potency’ as a result, as modernity’s ‘primary place of dreams’ as well as of its ‘nightmares’.¹⁰ Books and journal articles aside, a growing academic and public history audience has been drawn to the Coastal History theme, also through the efforts of Land in terms of his collaboration, since 2013, via the University of Portsmouth’s ‘Port Towns and
Urban Cultures’ project, on *The Coastal History Blog*. This forum has led to upwards of forty widely-read and cited blog posts, and interconnects with some dynamic and innovative scholarly social networking.\(^{11}\)

There are, of course, other researchers penning, in English and other languages, what might be labelled ‘Coastal History’, yet who have not to this point noticed that they are doing so! Amongst historians alone, river, port, rural, urban, naval, maritime and environmental history, shelter such scholars.\(^{12}\) Environmental history perhaps deserves special attention since, despite some remarkably powerful and relevant contributions, to echo Gillis’s recent words, it has remained, generally, a ‘strangely landlocked discipline’.\(^{13}\) The comments of Imperial historian, John M. MacKenzie, provide an illustration of the pressing need for a New Coastal History which will identify and make accessible, not just the marine world, but the soggy, stony or sandy spaces that lie between land and sea. In a 2013 chapter, MacKenzie lamented how: ‘As editor of the journal *Environment and History* from 2000 to 2005, one of my complaints was that we never seemed to receive sufficient articles on riverine, lacustrine and oceanic subjects, never enough on fisheries; yet they have been so central to so many peoples’ wellbeing across the world, and also so significant in so many imperial/indigenous conflicts’.\(^{14}\) In tracking river to sea, MacKenzie’s incisive point, will soon, it must be hoped, have lessened relevance, assuming that the New Coastal History finds the cross-disciplinary ‘terraqueous’ space in which its research, public engagement and teaching can flourish.\(^{15}\)

Yet, this metanarrative also highlights that coastal identities have been of enormous variety, not just temporally but spatially, and this is where a Scottish perspective can offer a crucial early contribution to the field. Pearson sought, without contradiction, to balance his point about the universal features of ‘shore folk’ with his keenness to convey the ‘separate or distinctive littoral society around the Indian coast’.\(^{16}\) Scotland’s contribution to the New Coastal History will surely bring greater comparison of these two interacting features of
littoral identities. Such work could balance reflection on the ways in which coastal peoples have shared attributes, alongside exploration of the means by which littoral narratives need to be situated in specific and even micro-historical situations.

This introduction now moves towards the latter theme. It proceeds on the basis that seacoasts rarely run in straight lines and coastal people have, where they can, tended not to inhabit exposed, long, horizontal stretches of ocean-facing beach. There have sometimes been alternatives to living everyday lives in constant, physical confrontation with an expansive, daunting and, in environmental terms, threatening, *mare liberum* (open sea). Often, communities have huddled and coalesced and, from there, viewed, or been compelled to view, the marine from the perspective of their own, contested *mare clausum* (closed sea), in modern terms, ‘enclosed sea’, ‘semi-enclosed sea’ or ‘inland sea’. In brief, there is a need to interrogate the case that local, coastal topography has strengthened correspondence and neighbourly, bilateral interaction around coasts or whether a relative lack of opportunity to show agency over broader oceanic spaces has created competition over resources and militated against coastal adjacency. How have communities engaged with the more introspective coastal environments carved out and encouraged by geological, glacial, fluvial, tidal and other physical factors?

This book will flag some ways ahead, in a twenty-first century world for which the littoral has become a locus for the deadly effects of climate change and refugee crises. There is the chance to contribute to our understanding of what has been, until now, an elemental yet enigmatic past, applicable over the longer term and enacted across most parts of the globe. Clearly, the scholarly reach of the New Coastal History will benefit from being global, inclusive, collaborative and cross-disciplinary. Some of this is emerging through events like the Atlantic Archipelagos Research Consortium/ECLIPSE June 2016 symposium, ‘Land’s End: Imagination, Culture, and Society at Coastal Edges’, an exploration of the ‘spatial
dynamics’ of the coast which started from Cornwall but moved outwards from there. The 2017 CHAM (Portuguese Centre for Global History) conference theme of ‘Oceans and Shores: Heritage, People and Environment’ in Lisbon bodes well too. At the time of writing, ‘Sea, Land, and Spirit: Coastal Environment in the West of Ireland’ in Dingle, is another upcoming conference of relevance and will showcase work emanating from University College Cork’s transdisciplinary ‘Deep Maps: West Cork Coastal Cultures’ project. The potential for cultural and social angles on our theme can be seen, moreover, in three far-reaching 2016 Palgrave books, the first written by Graeme J. Milne, as well as two edited volumes, one by Charlotte Mathieson and the other by Brad Beaven, Karl Bell and Rob James. Assuming such approaches can be sustained and enhanced, momentum will build and the pasts of coastal communities will begin to be uncovered and examined in a more rigorous, comparative manner.

This is the background from which the first ever Coastal History conference emerged in the spring of 2016. The ‘Firths and Fjords’ event took place at the Dornoch campus of the University of the Highlands and Islands, a coastal location within the ‘firthlands’ of the northern Scottish mainland. It was community-focused, and the largest ever such event to have taken place within the country’s North Highland region. The conference confirmed that the appeal and accessibility of Coastal History is, potentially, huge. While academic historians provided the majority of speakers, archaeologists, cultural geographers, and oceanographers all contributed. Not only this, but many from outside academia added to the gathering, this highlighting the saliency of the theme to local communities, in distinguishing their pasts from what, several participants reflected, was a less immediate link with both the ocean and the interior. Comments received included the following: ‘I thought the variety of subjects dealt with at the conference showed very clearly that there is a multitude of themes and disciplines affected by coastal management’, also that ‘the concepts of coastal history
and the themes of the diverse papers have given me new perspectives’, while a further respondent stated that they would ‘use the discussion about coastal history in the theoretical framework of my dissertation.’ In examining the space between the maritime and the terrestrial, in bridging the ‘scientific’ and the ‘literary’, in learning from those working in marine environmental, riverine, port, maritime, naval, urban and rural history, as well as from outside academia, it illuminated how a Scottish perspective could assist with the New Coastal History’s amphibious move towards the mainstream.

**Coastal Adjacencies**

*Chokepoints?*

What are the relations between physical geography and the New Coastal History, and which littoral ‘ecotones’ need to be our focus of attention? Islands are established locales for academic study. But in his work on the Indian Ocean, Michael Pearson commented on the need to recognise a wider set of ‘littoral boundaries’, pointing out that ‘maritime influences, or perhaps the area we can call the littoral, are of very varying depth inland’. Land has suggested that men and women’s engagement with ‘messy, intermediate places like tidal flats and brackish estuaries’ as well as ‘quiet coves and inlets, connected to the ocean but only gently shaped by it’ are key. His analysis thus extends to those spaces which, in Gillis’s words, offered ‘water routes deep into the interior’ for early modern empires, so often to port cities, but also to a variety of other urban and rural coasts. Land’s monograph began the process of bringing British sailors not just to the gendered strand, seaside or immediate waterfront then, but to the ‘estuarine geography’ and ‘coastal borderland of rivers and ports’ in which they spent most of their time. It asked the question of what scholars would find ‘if we shifted our focus from oceans to bays, sounds, straits and estuaries.’
Pearson, Land and Gillis highlight that the communities situated, and often visible to each other in fine weather, on or around our coastal and estuarine arcs, winds, loops and ribbons, are not anomalies. Indeed, the topography of adjacent and proximate coasts provides an everyday setting for hundreds of millions of people worldwide. It is a world in which what we might term the ‘confrontational coast’ - involving legally-complex interactions between two or more rival communities - has always to be considered alongside the ‘corresponding coast’ characterised by congruent histories spanning two or more saltwater edges.\(^{26}\) Scholars must ask which typifies neighbouring coasts most closely: the clogging of restricted ‘bottlenecks’ or the everyday criss-crossing of open, marine ‘corridors’? Should we define these spaces in terms of geo-political and military rivalry, as zones of ‘amphibious warfare’, or else with respect to social, economic and cultural cohesion?\(^{27}\)

**Straits, Sounds and Channels**

The first type of adjacent coast to be considered is distinguishable by not being geographically contiguous over land. Political and economic history have generally viewed the ‘narrow seas’ comprised by straits, sounds and channels, as congested, constricted arteries for global empires and their victims. Evidently, these ‘keys to the world’ have frequently been the location for conflagration.\(^{28}\) Geo-political disputes give them importance to legal scholars, such as the late Gerard J. Mangone, founder, in 1978, of the multi-volume *International Straits of the World* book series, recently relaunched by Brill.\(^{29}\)

Yet, this underestimates how such places can also sustain and connect mobile peoples on either side, and must, in some contexts, be viewed as having rather porous edges. One might start here with a 2012 issue of the *Journal of Asian History*, which was devoted to the marine straits of that region, containing five articles on the theme. The editorial, by Ralph Kauz and Roderich Ptak, asserted that ‘the function of sea straits within the total context of
maritime Asia’s past has remained somewhat underrepresented in academic research’.

Kauz and Ptak conveyed, instead, how the region’s straits comprised ‘connective elements between individual sea spaces’ for instance, via the ‘Maritime Silk Route’. Manel Ollé, outlined the ‘maritime labyrinth’ of the Philippine Straits, advocating the inclusion of the perspective of Asian, Indian and Chinese sailors in future accounts of this, pointing also to the need to assess indigenous concepts around Melaka (Malacca), the Malay word selat referring to this stretch of sea and coast and the selates its people, that is, those who lived on either side of the strait.

Peter Borschberg introduced further elements to the discussion, accounting for the ‘three or four maritime arteries’ which comprise the Singapore Straits on the basis that ‘their role across the centuries has been one of uniting and providing a commercial backbone for regional maritime powers, and not as a body of water that divides’ and exploring both whether the city derived its name from this topography as well as the possible existence of a former position of ‘Lord of the Strait’ among the selates.

Ironically, Borschberg was among the contributors who, although emphasising the eurocentric connotations of a ‘strait’, found narratives written by Europeans to be rather revealing, in his case, his own translation into English of the words of late sixteenth and early-seventeenth century Flemish gem trader, Jacques de Coutre. Commenting on the ‘people of the strait’, De Coutre stated that:

Many fishermen live along these straits, who are called saletes… …They gave us everything in exchange for rice and old fabrics. They are extremely poor people. They live in sloops that are five or six varas long at most, and are very narrow, made of thin, light planks, and on them they have their houses with wives and children, dogs, cats and even hens with their chicks.
In this, we have a perspective on what appears to have been a strait-spanning social and cultural identity forged out of impoverishment by the ‘floating slum’ dwelling *selates*. Elsewhere, the sources lead to more ambiguous conclusions, with straits appearing as ‘nameless spaces’ (see Stiubhart’s chapter below) until brought into view by imperial administrators. Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521) had passed through Melaka while in Portuguese service. However, as regards his time in South America, Antonio Pigafetta, his chronicler, provides us with another early, European, imperial view on the ‘exotic’ nature of the location that would be named the Strait of Magellan, two miles wide at its narrowest, and more typically today either ignored, due to the development of the Panama Canal, or else viewed solely in the context of the disputes between Chile and Argentina that have taken place over it. On approaching from the east, Pigafetta noted that what lay ahead ‘was not a creek but a strait with land’ noting the potential fruitfulness of both sides, although there is little evidence of significant interactions with indigenous peoples from this initial source and further exploitation of the area would be more gradual. In the very different imperial setting of eastern Canada, Jacques Cartier’s first voyage, a little over a decade later, is revealing upon his arrival at Chaleur Bay, an arm of the Gulf of St Lawrence, of French ‘hopes of discovering here a Strait’ too, and, as with Magellan’s voyage, the subsequent scoping of the shore to either side of it. This was followed, in Cartier’s case, by a more intense and immediate reaction in the form of ‘two fleets of savage canoes that were crossing from one side [of Chaleur Bay] to the other, which numbered in all some forty to fifty canoes’ making ‘signs to us to come on shore, holding to us some skins on sticks’. The indigenous fleet then returned to the beach but their crew subsequently bartered with Cartier’s men, according to his account. Looking at early European imperial-indigenous encounters more widely, was control over straits and their populations, deemed a key initial test in the colonial setting? Clearly, a more detailed analysis would flag up examples of subsequent contestation over
these access points along the ‘saltwater frontier’ in a comparable way to that outlined by Andrew Lipman in relation to early English, Dutch and native American encounters further south along the eastern North American Atlantic seaboard.38

Other parts of the world could benefit from this approach. In the very different setting of the nineteenth century Suez, Valeska Huber has employed the term ‘channelling mobilities’ to describe the effect of the canal on the region, an approach which may be pertinent towards understanding the early modern, imperial contexts outlined above.39 Moving northwards across the eastern Mediterranean and, by way of the Black Sea, a coastal region can be identified in which a significant part of Imperial Russian and Ottoman history has been played out, as Julia Leikin has shown.40 The history of the Turkish Straits leads us to consider them similarly as both ‘chokepoint’ and ‘hub’. Clearly, the straits are defined more often within English-language historiography in terms of international warfare due to their strategic significance in linking Europe to Asia. In the east, the Bosphorus and - on the edge of the Aegean and indelibly associated with the horrors of the Gallipoli campaign during the First World War - the Dardanelles, command our attention for other reasons though. While affirming the enormous scale of human tragedy that the straits have witnessed, it is clear that the tidal water of the former, lorded over by the Ottomans on both sides until the nineteenth century, and Turkish again today, was once the location for vain, ostentatious pleasure trips, summer houses and promenading.41 Although sultans may not have seen themselves as ‘Lords of the Straits’, Istanbul’s polluted, saltwater ‘streets’ took on significance as an exclusive space for leisure and for waterborne pageants and propagandic festivities of a type to be found also in Renaissance Europe’s coastal or estuarine capitals.42

Moving westwards, there are three other ‘narrow seas’ of especial significance to Europe geo-politically, but, again, with their own histories of social and cultural agency. Albeit the Strait of Gibraltar is viewed as a ‘ubiquitous symbol of the supposed dividing line
between Europe and the Muslim world’, a recent history has highlighted the flaws in this ‘clash of civilisations’ model, emphasising that ‘trans-Strait’ connections once predominated here too, ensuring ‘intertwined political, sociocultural and economic ties between the northern and southern shores of the Strait in the premodern and modern periods’. Moving northwards, Renaud Morieux, while expressing concern that, on occasion, transnational history ‘romanticises circulations and connections’, has asserted that any study of the English Channel must recognise the role of the sea and coast not as a divide but as a more diverse area ensuring, at times, ‘cross-channel solidarity in the face of state politics’, thereby having the power to act as a ‘bridge, barrier or gateway to the world’. For Morieux, ‘it makes sense to focus on the space where the two populations interacted’ rather than viewing La Manche (‘the sleeve’) - a generic early modern term for a sea strait or passage - solely as the location, real and mythical, for defining moments in the history of English/British and French national antagonisms. Regarding the Baltic and North Sea, Kirby and Hinkkanen have reflected on that region’s littoral dwellers having ‘good reason to feel more attached to places they could visit easily and with which they had close contacts than to distant capitals’. They raise intriguing points in relation to the Øresund or ‘Danish Sound’ in particular, where the ‘Sound Tolls’ did not simply constrict east-west traffic but provided it with, to some extent, a gateway to lands to both north and south. In this, a past defined by a mix of contestation and shared experience between Danes and Swedes emerges, to the extent that the sound and its coast on either side evince ‘a deeply rooted common history’.

Gulfs, Bays, Estuaries, Firths and Fjords

The remainder of the ‘introspective’ coastal locations to be considered here are contiguous, in terms of land, albeit cannot be understood without reference to marine communications. Starting with gulfs, as with straits, the sea is often assumed to divide rather than unite the
communities that live around them. Regarding the Persian or Arabian Gulf, Lawrence Potter’s work acknowledges the ‘divisions that have arisen with modern statehood’. Yet, he is insistent that these be considered alongside cross-gulf contacts, via which, he argues, ‘khalijis’ (‘people of the gulf shores’) created a ‘hybrid culture’ and ‘had closer relations with one another than with those living in the interior, which is typical of littoral societies’. Similar in size and shape and with its own strategically key, war-ravaged marine entry point (Otranto) is the Adriatic Sea. Braudel’s claim that it was ‘perhaps the most unified of all the regions of the [Mediterranean] sea’, a ‘homogeneous world’, a location with ‘a unity that was as much cultural and economic as it was political’ has influenced all subsequent scholars of it. Braudel was asserting what was, for him, the strongly ‘Italian’ nature of, for example, what is now the western littoral of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Hercegovina and Montenegro, but was much less clear on what had evidently been, in return, Slavic influence on Venice and other sections of Italy’s east coast. One of his successors, David Abulafia, only puts slightly less emphasis on the unifying elements of the gulf when writing about the city of Dubrovnik (Ragusa), where in the late medieval period, ‘the link across the Adriatic to the towns of southern Italy was of crucial importance’, acting to connect Italy with the Ottoman Empire for the king of Naples, who, in return for this assistance, offered tax exemptions and assistance against piracy. For a modern perspective, and once more limiting our perspective to English-language works alone, Dominique Reill refers to the ‘special phenomenon of intense association’ linking the littoral through physical and social adjacency. Pamela Ballinger’s recent analysis characterises the Adriatic in terms of its transmarine ‘flows of peoples, goods, ideas, and words’, positing the possible existence of a shared ‘cultural lingua franca or cultural grammar. Moving away from the gulfs of the Mediterranean back towards the chillier Baltic, historiography has moved, thankfully, beyond Anton von Etzel’s 1850s claim that the latter
region was ‘essentially a Germanic Mediterranean’ in which other, more ‘passive’ peoples, were held in thrall. In modern historiography, there has been reflection on the gulf environments of the region. In Kirby and Hinkkanen’s assessment, ‘it was far easier to travel from the west coast of Jutland to Hamburg, for example, than to Copenhagen, or from the Ostrobothnian coast to Stockholm or even Tallin, rather than to Helsinki’. Not only that, but there was ‘often a curious mixture of marginality, and maritime cosmopolitanism in many coastal villages, the two aspects interacting upon each other’. Historical archaeologist, Georg Haggren, is a key member of the Settlements and Economies Around the Sea (SEAS) project at the University of Helsinki, which has one eye on the cities of St. Petersburg, Narva and Tallin, situated elsewhere around the Gulf of Finland, the aim being ‘to give western Uusimaa and the Finnish Archipelago Sea an international background’, so as to ‘achieve knowledge of the late prehistory and early history of the maritime landscape of the northern Baltic Sea’. One wonders at the potential for study, across similarly broad chronologies, of the Gulf of Bothnia, and, more narrowly, the Gulfs (or Bays) of Riga or Gdańsk, equally multi-ethnic spaces.

Bays - and related spaces such as fjords, coves and bights - are not always distinguishable from gulfs, although usually shallower and of a smaller scale. Again, we should pause to consider their association with horrifically bloody naval battles before speculating on any, perhaps superficial association with community coherence. Yet with a conference having been held on ‘bayscapes’ in Dublin in 2016, the field seems fruitful. At a hugely ambitious, international level, Sunil S. Amrith highlights the mass migrations, imperial rivalries and environmentally-induced havoc associated with the Bay of Bengal in his recent book. On a less grand, geographical scale, Christopher Pastore has explored New England’s Narragansett Bay during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, considering it and its estuaries to have been an ‘avenue of transportation and trade, a conduit for economic and
cultural exchange’, with early colonial New York too contested ‘in the brackish borderlands of the Hudson River and Long Island Sound estuaries’, an urbanised, insular and coastal element of the early modern ‘saltwater frontier’. Early modern Boston similarly, according to Pastore, depended on a mix of ‘open and closed coast and the constants of its topography encouraging debates over public and private within Massachussets Bay’ where ‘in the muddy, brackish pools left with each outgoing tide, swirled complex English assumptions about land and sea, private ownership and common usage’. A modern Scottish artist has defined estuaries as places ‘where the land and the sea meet, and all life seems to want to join in’. The potential of estuaries aside, however, the Boston dispute over mare clausum was a microcosm of a much broader one pitting Dutch jurist and humanist, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) on one side, against Scottish professor, William Welwood (fl. 1566–1624), on the other. Grotius’s argument was that people and states had no dominion over the seas and seacoasts, while Welwood defended the rights of national legislatures to control and protect their own ‘territorial waters’, claim flotsam and jetsam and other types of marine debris, ideas later developed by John Selden and, in the mid-eighteenth century, Emmerich de Vattel, as well as in early modern Japan, as shall be shown. The principle of the ‘three-mile limit’ and, in most cases, its replacement by the ‘twelve-mile limit’, developed from these arguments. Moving from east to west and suggestive, in Gillis’s terms, of a more complex rendering of that ‘bicoastal’ American identity so frequently referenced today, Matthew Booker’s Down by the Bay tells a ‘set of connected stories’ around the San Francisco conurbation, viewing the bayside as a ‘liminal ribbon where land meets water’. As Grotius and Welwood knew, whether or not one considered them as state territory, bays and estuaries had vast commercial and imperial potential, and in some senses, any focus on their tolerance as urban spaces can distract from the dystopias in which their histories are also entangled.
In considering north-western continental Europe’s river basins, the publications of CORN (Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area) have pointed to the need for further explorations of the ‘rural coast’. While major west European ports such as Amsterdam, Hamburg and Bremen have their own estuarine histories, anglophone scholars might move further to explore, more comparatively, the ‘coastal trade’ which extended to smaller communities.65 This may offer specific evidence of the ‘local agents of a de-centred imperialism’, in Mackenzie’s words, or what Gillis identifies as a ‘protomaritime economy’, one that, albeit regionally significant, did not rely on fishing villages or urban life, but was rural and occurred ‘outside major cities and ports’.66 Gérard Le Bouëdec and others in France are illuminating the ‘pluriactivity’ of the ‘paramaritime’, frequently in reference to communities ‘found in estuaries, rivers, inlets, bays or coves’ arguing that these settlements should be defined as ‘ports’ as much as burghal centres for international trade, part of a ‘coastal civilisation’ that was of international scope, but was as much rural as urban.67

Historical analysis of the ‘boat and field’ economy of coastal Norway, and of several estuaries within the British Isles, have been shown in English-language writing to have potential for New Coastal History too.68 Again, limiting our scope to writing in English only, anthropologist, Kjell Olsen, has identified the worlds of the northern Norwegian fjords and their ethnically-mixed population, where to be one of the ‘Fjordfolket’ (‘people of the fjords’) ‘might indicate a Sámi identity but you seldom know for sure’, a setting in which to identify one’s identity with local geography is ‘a potential rather than a closing description’.69 Regarding Iceland, Stuart J.L. Morrison has described, using archaeological evidence, the ‘fjord system’ that defined some rural fishing communities in the eighteenth century.70 Moving to the Shannon estuary in Ireland, Aidan O’Sullivan, while stopping short of claiming a common culture or identity linking people on both sides, asserts that ‘local fishing communities, through their practical knowledge and engagement with estuarine landscapes,
actively constituted and negotiated their social identities through their daily work and seasonal practices’. England offers compelling evidence too through Peter Fleming’s exploration of those connections across the outer Severn which ensured ‘how well the Welsh were integrated into Bristol’s society’ as well as the locations assessed by Jim Galloway, spanning the Thames Estuary, which were unified by their exhibiting a more ‘dynamic relationship between humanity and the sea’. The tidal reaches of the Humber or Tyne comprise areas with potential to yield further valuable results. Finally, Scotland, in its littoral coastscape of firths and sea lochs - ‘incomparable places of refuge from the perilous tempests of the ocean’ in the words of fourteenth century chronicler, John of Fordun - offers scope for other views, once again. The firth is uniquely Scottish - rather different, geologically, and historically, from, for example, the Norwegian fjord, Swedish fjärd or Icelandic fjörður - being (the Pentland Firth excepted) generally estuarine and with a gentler gradient on its sides. In Christopher Smout’s recent analysis of the Firth of Forth, Oram’s environmental history of the Forth and Tay, as well as some comparable, complementary works on the Solway and Moray Firths, possibilities are opening for new ways of accounting for saltwater-spanning communities of this type.

Coastal Communications

It must be hoped that the evidence presented above gives strength to the assertion that, historically, there has been a frequent association between coastal adjacency and the creation and development of historical communities. Yet it has offered little on how such communities functioned. Evidently, technology has been key, in the form of bicoastal transport, with, in more recent times, bridges and causeways acting either to connect or disrupt such amphibious networks. Crucially, ferries and other, multi-purpose watercraft have been to the fore in the ‘maritime cultural landscape’. They developed in Europe and North America, in particular,
as part of a communications network which changed and adapted by means of ‘transformation’ rather than being abandoned in one swoop through ‘revolution’ as used to be assumed.\textsuperscript{77} As regards Scotland, there exists a wealth of writing which views such coastal vessels as ‘an integral part’ of communications in coastal spaces.\textsuperscript{78} An historiography can be outlined informing on government policy, proprietors, fares, ferrymen and women, and shoreside inns, although, as with other parts of the world, it has not yet conveyed fully how transport could knit together or unravel broader, littoral society.\textsuperscript{79} Primary sources relating to the coastal bargemen, boatmen and boatwomen to whom so many passengers entrusted their time, faith and capital, will need to be examined further along rural as well as urban coasts, building on work already undertaken as regards early modern Germany, the Netherlands, British North America, India and Japan.\textsuperscript{80}

Given the key part played by coast-hugging watercraft at the gateway to what sometimes became global cities, the most effective of such systems of communications were usually regulated, whether in private or public hands. The actions of the shoguns of Tokugawa Japan provide one example of the management of littoral zones as part of what Welwood and Selden would have understood as a \textit{mare clausum}, and also of efforts to regulate connections with foreign traders, through funnelling transport and creating a rigorous system of passport control at estuarine and bay entry points.\textsuperscript{81} Swedish traveller and 1775 visitor to Japan, Charles Peter Thunberg (1743-1828) outlined the means by which transport determined the nature of travel for a section of the indigenous population alone.\textsuperscript{82} In terms of managing Japanese-Dutch trade, Thunberg pointed out the system in place at the factory on the artificial Dejima Island operated by the Dutch East India Company, the \textit{Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie} (VOC), in the ‘urban offshore’ (in Land’s terms) of Nagasaki Bay. The Japanese authorities insisted there on a rigid system of quarantining vessels offshore and, for the Dutch, a wearying ritual prior to conducting business:
Should an urgent occasion require any of the officers to come on board of the ship, such as the captain or the surgeon, which is signified by the hoisting of a flag, in such case leave must be first obtained from the governor of the town and should this be granted, still the gate towards the sea-shore is not opened, but the person to whom leave is granted is conducted by interpreters and officers through a small part of the town to a little bridge, from which he is taken on board in a boat, after having gone through the strictest searches already mentioned. The banjoses [officers] and interpreters, who accompany him, do not however go on board of the ship, but wait in their boats till he has transacted his business on board, from whence he is conducted back to the factory, after having gone through the same ceremonies.\textsuperscript{83}

Nagasaki Bay comprised a regulated ‘aquapelago’, where watercraft were lynchpins of communication and commerce.\textsuperscript{84} In North America, when slavery entered the equation, coastal vessels took on even more political power, ferrymen being given considerable control, albeit in South Carolina the reaction of the enslaved Afro-American population resulted in a degree of subversive agency as regards littoral transport systems.\textsuperscript{85} Amongst the elite within the Ottoman Empire, meanwhile, sultans employed their head gardener and sometime-executioner and customs officer, the bostancibaşi, to travel by boat patrolling the water and shores of the Golden Horn.\textsuperscript{86} As seventeenth-century English traveller, Paul Rycaut (1628-1700) wrote, regarding his experience of waiting aboard ship there for a diplomatic audience involving the Stuart ambassador:
At this time, a Bostangee, one belonging to the Grand Signior’s Garden, came aboard, sent by the Bostangee-bashee or Head of the Gardeners, to discover, and know what Ship it was of such Equipage, and greatness; advising us also, that the Grand Signior was seated in a Chiosk [kiosk] or Summerhouse on the corner Wall of the Seraglio.\textsuperscript{87}

Nautical bravado, boat ownership and wharf access were each signs of status and ethnicity in Istanbul society.\textsuperscript{88}

The watermen and lighters of the tidal parts of the Thames spring to mind as a possible comparison, for which we have Pepys’s simultaneous descriptions, as well as other sources.\textsuperscript{89} Social and cultural capital was invested in coastal India’s ‘ephemeral watercraft’ also, as is clear from Guite’s recent study of Madras.\textsuperscript{90} Further west, on the Melakar Coast, Thomas Bowrey’s late seventeenth century account reveals his opinions of the locals, ‘a very briske, ingeniuous folke but too Bloody minded to all Nations whatever they can Overpowre’ in particular the ‘massoolas’ or masalas which were their watercraft. According to Bowrey, these boats were used for loading and unloading larger vessels but ‘Sleight having noe Timbers in them, save thafts [thwarts] to hold their Sides together’ although he gave a more positive assessment of their catamarans which ‘will boldly adventure out of Sight of the Shore’ whether being used for fishing or transportation.\textsuperscript{91} While comparative research is at an early stage, one can be certain that the multifunctional nature of these coastal vessels was not exceptional. Coastal transport connects strongly with littoral identities.

\textbf{Contributors}

Greater analysis of coastal communications is one of several possible directions for the New Coastal History to take, as will be revealed by the chapters that follow. In looking to Scotland
while seeking to highlight the broader historiographical routes that are leading scholars towards the theme, this book explores the kinds of community presented in accounts already mentioned of, for example, the strait-spanning ‘selates’ of early modern Melaka, the ‘khalijis’ of the Persian Gulf, and the ‘fjordfolket’ of Norway, in terms of human convergence around the coastal arcs, winds, loops and ribbons of our littorals. An exclusively historical or environmental approach may not always include comprehensive coverage of these transcoastal settings, however, and urban, leisure and cultural perspectives provide essential, complementary approaches, while maritime and terrestrial history, archaeology, historical geography, anthropology and ethnohistory are further important contexts.

The book is divided into four sections. The first of these, ‘Concepts in Coastal History from Scotland and Beyond’, includes contributions by Isaac Land and Christopher Smout. These essays present concepts and reflection - urban and environmental respectively - written by leading authorities. Land sets out the case for an applied approach to the urban littoral, focusing on the ‘urban offshore’, the ‘urban foreshore’ and the ‘urban estuary’, each of which exhibits the contemporary, often troubling dynamism of our coasts, following this with an account of climate change, sea level rise and ‘coastal squeeze’. Smout’s chapter discusses the long genesis of his 2012 book on the Firth of Forth within the context of modern environmental history studies, and so, in relation to scholarship on anthropogenic change.

Section Two, ‘Coasts Beyond Scotland: Transcending Local and Global Perspectives’ indicates how fruitful comparative approaches can be to understanding coastal microcosms. Thayer’s chapter comprises an exploration of New York City’s sailortown, which has, as its primary focus, the nineteenth century, a pivotal site and period in contestations over the shape of local masculinity. Korhonen uncovers ‘post-glacial rebound’ as a defining element in this environment of the northern Baltic area, in its alteration of both the coastscape and the living and working conditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century populations there. Griffin
and Robertson’s chapter turns the attention to the historical geography of south-west England, to look at moral ecologies and conflict on the nineteenth-century Severn estuary, through the history of the nineteenth century management of elvers.

Sections Three and Four sharpen the focus on Scotland. Section Three focuses on ‘Coastscales of the Highlands and Islands’, by means of chapters from Jennings, Stiubhart, Pearce, Riddell, Rae and McDowell on the country’s north and west. Jennings explores Norse place-names on the littoral of Argyll, assessing how terms coined in the fjords of Norway were transplanted to the coasts of their new acquisitions. Domhnall Uilleam’s chapter also deals with language and hydronymy, moving forward to the early modern period to reassess the variously defined ‘Minch’ in the Hebrides, thereby proposing a new approach to the imperial entanglements that affected those ‘island mainland kindreds’ whose Gaelic patrimony extended to both sides of that sea basin (‘cuan’). Pearce explores an 1840s incident relating to the part of the Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners Benevolent Society, this leading her to wider, insightful conclusions about the development of British coastal philanthropy. Riddell’s contribution again emphasises perceptions of coastal and insular geography, exploring how these impacted on experience and commemoration of the two World Wars in Shetland. Fundamental to this was use and adaptation of the littoral for air transport, an area explored in Rae’s chapter in terms of both impact and legacy. McDowell looks at the beaches of northern Scotland from a very different, sport and leisure history perspective, that of the first European surfing championships to be held in the country, seeing Thurso and the Pentland Firth as a coastscape conveyed worldwide within surfing subculture ever since.

Moving to Scotland, more broadly, Section Four is entitled ‘Firths and Other Scottish Coasts’ and contains chapters by Cowan, Henderson, Todman, Jane and Jones. Cowan provides a deep impression of Scotland’s (and England’s) ‘forgotten frontier littoral’, the
Solway, as a ‘highway to the world’, indicating new inter-tidal paths (waths) for historians in this area. Henderson, meanwhile, explores the social and cultural context to witch persecution, assessing whether there was anything particular or special about Scottish witch belief in coastal communities. Todman continues with the early modern period, exploring the nuances of allegory in engraved views of the birds of the Bass, a now uninhabited island, just off the south-eastern Scottish seaboard. Janes’s chapter looks at the tea trade at the southern limits of the Firth of Forth, using eighteenth century evidence from the port of Eyemouth to throw light on the synergy between coast-hugging smugglers and international companies. Jones takes a broad sweep, exploring ‘narratives of change’ by comparing the fisheries of Scotland’s ‘great firths’ in the nineteenth century.

However radically the twenty-first century coast and its engineered landscape continue to alter, and be altered, due to the effects of changing climate and the political, refugee and migration crises that blight our age, it will continue to have a history. Scotland comprises a starting point from which to highlight the clusters of scholarship that are gathering and to signpost routes forward. The book was inspired by a convergence in one dynamic Scottish coastscape: the Dornoch Firth. It sets out, from there, to encourage and inform the next steps for the New Coastal History, the exploration of both unity and diversity in our littoral pasts.

1 I would like to thank Isaac Land and John MacKenzie for commenting on early versions of this chapter. The term is Isaac Land’s. See Land’s ‘Tidal Waves: The New Coastal History’, Journal of Social History, 40(3), (2007), pp. 731-43
2 While the history of islands as, for example, prisons, resorts, utopias or free trade zones, is attracting the welcome attention of scholars through the field of Island Studies, the pasts of other coasts remain something of a mystery. See John Gillis, Islands of The Mind: How the Human Imagination Created The Atlantic World, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). Island Studies Journal is a peer reviewed, open access, cross-disciplinary journal that has been published twice annually since 2006. The University of the Highlands and Islands’ Centre for Nordic Studies offers an established, innovative masters-level qualification on the theme. For a suggestion of current research directions and a focus on ‘bridging seascapes’, the ‘Insularities Connected’ conference at the Institute for Mediterranean Studies on Crete in June 2016 was a fine example: http://medins.ims.forth.gr/conference.php (accessed 28 May 2016).


10 Ibid., pp. 158, 183


12 A survey of port and riverine history literature is beyond the scope of this chapter. For a very recent exploration of where land meets sea in imperial and naval history, exploring coasts, islands and ships, see Alison Bashford, ‘Terraqueous Histories’, *The Historical Journal*, (2017), pp. 1-20. doi:10.1017/S0018246X16000431.


15 Bashford, ‘Terraqueous Histories’. The University of the Highlands and Islands launched a cross-disciplinary masters degree (MLitt) in Coastal and Maritime Societies and Cultures in 2017, which is available globally.


23 Gillis, The Human Shore, p. 85. The ‘rural coasts’ concept is discussed in David Worthington, ‘Ferries in the Firthlands: Communications, Society and Culture Along a Northern Scottish Rural Coast (c.1600-1809)’, Rural History, 27(2), (2016), pp. 129-48. In a very different setting, it is being explored currently by Sara Spike, a doctoral student at Carleton University in Canada.


31 Ibid.


35 Borschberg, The Singapore and Melaka Straits, p.77.


38 Andrew Lipman, The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 54-84.


54 Ibid., p.59.

55 Ibid.


64 Matthew Booker, *Down by the Bay: San Francisco’s History between the Tides* (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 3-5.

65 For recent studies of the early modern ‘coastal trade’, see John Armstrong, ed., *Coastal and Short Sea Shipping* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996); James F. Shepherd and Samuel H. Williamson, ‘The Coastal Trade of the


70 Stuart J.M. Morrison, ‘Fishing Communities in Eighteenth Century Iceland – An Interdisciplinary Case Study from Vestfirðir’ in Gilliss and Torma eds., *Fluid Frontiers*, pp. 89-104.


79 Worthington, ‘Ferries in the Firthlands’.


84 Hayward, ‘The Aquapelago and the Estuarine City’.
85 Cecelski, *The Waterman's Song*; Harris, *Patroons and Periaguas*.
87 *The Turkish history from the original of that nation, to the growth of the Ottoman empire with the lives and conquests of their princes and emperours / by Richard Knolles ... ; with a continuation to this present year MDCLXXXVII ; whereunto is added, The present state of the Ottoman empire, by Sir Paul Rycaut* (London; ?, 1687), p. 102.
90 Guite ‘From Fishermen to Boatmen’.
92 David Gange has recognised the potential of Scotland as a starting point for meditations on Coastal History. See http://mountaincoastriver.blogspot.co.uk/2016/06/the-frayed-atlantic-edge-learning-life.html (accessed 7 June 2016).