

Editorial Introduction

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Over the last two decades, more and more anthropologists, ethnologists, and other scholars have studied maritime communities and occupations. Some call their research the 'anthropology of fishing,' and examine the techniques and strategies of fishing, as well as shipboard life. Others work at 'maritime anthropology' or 'maritime ethnology,' doing fieldwork in fishing villages, and examining the complex interrelations between the villagers' exploitation of the maritime environment and their sociopolitical structure and culture. MAST, however, does not make this subtle distinction, but uses 'maritime anthropology' in a broad sense to cover both subfields.

This research in maritime anthropology has produced many publications, including monographs, edited volumes, and special issues of scholarly journals. But most articles on maritime societies and cultures remain scattered in a variety of publication sources, so social scientists interested in fishing, fishermen, and maritime communities face both the problem of retrieving this material and of finding a suitable outlet for their work.

In setting up MAST (*Maritime Anthropological Studies*), the editors aim to provide an international platform for those involved and interested in maritime anthropological research. Though MAST will be mainly an anthropological journal, it welcomes the work of sociologists, historians, folklorists, geographers, ecologists, and biologists who address problems of anthropological concern. And though the core of the journal will be studies of fishing and fishing communities, MAST also welcomes work on other maritime occupational categories, such as seamen, oil-rig crews, dredgers, divers, and bargemen. To encourage debate over theoretical and methodological pitfalls in maritime studies, MAST will invite commentaries on articles that have appeared in its pages, as well as publish reviews of recent literature.

So far, MAST has met with enthusiasm. But its future depends on the support of compatriots in the field of maritime studies. Institutional and individual subscriptions, as well as submission of contributions, therefore, are especially welcome.

This first issue of MAST looks at the strategies, social relationships, world views, and rituals of modern fishermen on the North Atlantic fringe. Reginald Byron points out that status differences among Shetland fishing crews are mitigated by the notion of 'luck,' embodied in the skipper, who plays a key role in decision-making. Luck means gamesmanship, not chance, however, as it does among the Newfoundland seine-netting crews he refers to for compari-

son. This Shetland folk model helps maintain an egalitarian façade, which serves social purposes.

In his study of Icelandic skippers, Gisli Pálsson shows that their folk model also explains differential success. They say successful skippers get into 'fishing moods,' and follow hunches and dreams. Pálsson says the reason for this mode of explanation is social as well, though the Icelandic folk model does not mitigate status differences (as in the Shetland case), but minimizes personal responsibility, misleads competitors, and emphasizes individual qualities.

M. Estellie Smith enumerates the economic, ecological, and political risks to which Massachusetts and other American fishermen are now exposed. Her central question is how fishermen perceive and cope with problems of environmental degradation, legislative restriction, and market forces. Taking sides with the fishermen, she criticizes fisheries managers for protecting stocks but neglecting people.

James Acheson takes up the issue of gear switching in the Maine fishing industry. Fishermen seldom specialize on one species throughout their careers, and this has important implications for fisheries management. Acheson shows which patterns of gear switching are apt to occur, given certain incentives and constraints. Managers should take these patterns into account when they propose conservation measures, which usually concentrate on a single species.

In their joint paper, lastly, John Poggie and Richard Pollnac consider the personal and economic risks faced by New England fishermen, arguing that personal risks explain why these fishermen observe rituals of avoidance: rituals serve to reduce anxiety. The authors also establish a correlation between the duration of fishing voyages and the number of taboos.

Luck and Leadership

The Management of Decisions in Shetland Fishing Crews

Reginald Byron

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Burra Isle, Shetland, is a community of about 800 people. Before the oil economy came to Shetland in the mid-1970s, fishing was the chief source of livelihood of 85% of Burra's adult male residents. Although, as a result of oil, the local economy has now expanded and is more diversified, fishing is still the most important native industry in the island. The boats, of 20 to 25 metres in length, are used to fish the waters just offshore for haddock and whiting with seine nets. The boats are owned in joint partnerships by their crews of four to six men who hold equal shares. Perhaps a little unusually, in comparison with other fishing communities elsewhere, the skipper does not normally own a larger share in the boat than his crewmen. The skipper, then, is not able to claim authority by virtue of his proprietorship of the boat, but rather must seek to validate his position through social means: by negotiation and maintenance of his reputation as a skilful fisherman, and by his ability to manage effectively the processes of decision-making. Yet the smallness of scale of Burra society and the complexity of interdependencies between fishermen militate against open assertions of social hierarchy. This paper describes how the idea of 'luck' may be used as a diplomatic way of expressing distinctions between individuals and groups; how 'luck' plays a pivotal role in the legitimation of leadership, and how it serves as a criterion – and an explanation – of differences in the success of fishing crews.

Leadership and Decisions in the Fishing Crew

Every morning, before the boats go to sea, their crews assemble at the head of the pier in separate groups to discuss the day's prospects. If the weather is unsettled, as it often is, the BBC forecast is always the first matter of speculation. If wind and sea are judged not likely to be bad enough to make fishing unsafe, then the other main item of discussion is where to fish. The decision about where to fish may be influenced by the weather. If it is rough or worsening, the crew may choose to take the boat in close to the shelter of the land; if it is improving or fair, more distant and exposed grounds can be worked. Each crew takes these decisions independently, but a certain amount of information about the intentions of other crews is usually available. Other crews, for example, can be seen to have put to sea already, or be seen to be making preparations for doing so. If another crew passes within conversational distance, a vague indication of where they are going may be given; if not, deductions can be made about their probable intentions by a knowledge of where they fished the previous day and