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Shipwrecking Probability in Mediterranean Territorial Waters

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Propositions

Accompanying the PhD thesis "Shipwrecking probability in Mediterranean territorial waters. A cultural approach to archaeological predictive modelling"

Manuela Ritondale, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen & IMT Lucca, 2022

1. Maritime archaeological predictive modelling has both practical and scientific potential: it optimises heritage management and spatial planning while contributing to fostering our knowledge about former human behaviour by formalising and testing historical hypotheses

2. The biggest challenge of archaeological predictive modelling is finding the right balance between simplification and specificity

3. Since maritime archaeological predictive models are inevitably approximate, they are underdeveloped, particularly in the Mediterranean basin; this is precisely the reason why we need them

4. Predictions based on data-driven methods, i.e. on the available archaeological evidence, should be discouraged in the maritime underwater domain because they are too susceptible to data biases and tautological argumentation

5. Models that cannot be tested are useless

6. Across the centuries and up to the present, the Mediterranean has witnessed millions of unsuccessful journeys ending in shipwrecks, thus becoming "a vast archive, and enormous grave" (Matvejević, 2008, p. 39); the human dimension of seafaring is too often overlooked in maritime archaeological predictive modelling

7. Quoting Ezra B. W. Zubrow -though less resolute than posited by him- it is possible that "people had preferences independent of economic necessity. Furthermore, some decisions are independent of utility" (Zubrow, 1994, p. 108). This research emphasises the need to systematically investigate the impact of cultural and cognitive factors shaping past seaborne movement

8. Fear is subjective and not necessarily harmful; however, it does affect our behaviour: taking into account the difference between actual and perceived nautical hazards is crucial for identifying the highest shipwrecking probability

9. Once at sea, one has to handle uncertainty and adapt to changing conditions. Maritime models should do the same

10. This research is inspired by and aligned with the statement that models are -like art- a lie that helps us realise the truth (after Picasso); in other words, all models are essentially wrong, but some are useful (after George Box).

11. Perfection is overrated (and illusionary); an explicit and honest assessment of the limitations of one's work is the real driver for continuous improvement. Particularly -but not only- in predictive models