

BOOK REVIEW*

AB'SABER, Aziz Nacib - Litoral do Brasil/Brazilian coast; research and text Aziz Nacib Ab'Saber; English version Charles Holmquist. São Paulo, Metalivros, 2001. 286p. ilus. ISBN 85-85371-35-8.

Brazil possess the longest inter and subtropical coastline in the world, extending for around 8,000 kilometers. This long and narrow shoreline is home to both very well preserved and bio-diverse localities, such as the Jurubatiba Sandbar National Park, in northern Rio de Janeiro; Picinguaba, Juréia Massif and Cardoso Island, in the state of São Paulo; the Taim Ecological Station, in Rio Grande do Sul; as well as super populated areas such as Salvador; Bahia; Vitória Bay, Espírito Santo; the famous and abused Guanabara Bay, in Rio de Janeiro; and the Baixada Santista (Santos Lowlands), in São Paulo, among others.

The variety of geomorphic scenarios and landscapes which occur along the Brazilian coast increases the challenge of producing an adequate publication. How is one to resume and analyze such large dimensions and diversities in the scant physical space of one book, without compromising the objective of offering an initial glimpse of the more noteworthy stretches of the Brazilian coast, in accord with its geographic reality and scenic beauty? Seeking to solve this difficult question we decided on a mixed editorial approach which would combine three fundamental ingredients: short texts on different areas of the coast extending between Oiapoque (AP) to Chuí (RS), scientific essays on six of the more exceptional features of the coast, and 240 images, of which approximately 193 are panoramic photographs and 60 of them satellite images from the Landsat series. If the first furnishes a more artistic character to the book, leaving it slightly one-sided, the satellite images completes our intent and illustrate the scientific aspect of this publication, making it both an art and a reference book.

The book is organized in two parts. The first, introductory, raises general considerations, within the book's objectives, in a brief resume of our theme. The second part, in chapters, is where we propose an original macro-sectoring of the Brazilian coast, in such a way as to lead the reader on a novel trip along this curvilinear coastline with its globally unique characteristics. We hope, with this, to attain to the general objective of this publication: bring to the public an ample panorama of the main features of the Brazilian coast, focusing on, above all else, its geomorphologic aspects and scenic beauty.

We have deliberately avoided entering into a series of issues which are a part of the reality of the Brazilian coast, among which we can mention:

- mismanagement by public agencies of coastal land, resulting in the aesthetic degradation of the seaboard and high density urban populations formed by tourist centers all along the coast;
- saturation of urbanized coastal waters with organic sewage;
- domestic refuse which overflowing rivers carry to the coast, made up in part by non-biodegradable material, which is ultimately deposited on the sea bottom or beaches;
- liquid and solid industrial waste without adequate treatment which contaminates the water flowing to the coast;
- frequent oil spills in coastal waters;
- urban garbage which finds its way to the beaches around urban centers. The low living standards of lower income populations which live along the inner perimeters of islands and lowlands;
- lack of financial funding and political determination in managing the coast;
- lack of biological control of industrial fishing along the coast, threatening some species;
- progressive destruction of coastal ecosystems through strangulation resulting from subdivisions for tourist leisure areas;
- predatory tourism in remaining natural environments;
- lack of human resources for correct and permanent management.

The list can be extended without end. Despite our emphasizing the importance of dealing with these issues they are not part of this book's interests.

Another aspect of the coast which will not be included in this publication is the extensive analytic, documentary, and iconographic material pertaining to

historical facts of 500 years of occupation along the Brazilian coast, without mentioning pre-Cabral archeological remnants.

Also not included is the economical and human geography to be found along the Brazilian coast, a subject which appears only in brief visual and written references throughout the book. Once again we emphasize that our focus is on geomorphology both scenic and aesthetic, endeavoring to identify and culturally valorize the coast's natural resources. Our major objective is to generate enthusiasm and curiosity which will hopefully lead to more discussions on the different ways to deal with the progressive anthropological pressure on this vast area. We would like to see many other books and scientific studies carried out, divulging more and more the wonders that the theme has to offer.

We hope to also reach out to the young people and children, provoking in them, more than in adults, reactions of growing fondness for the Brazilian coast, instilling in them notions on the necessity of protecting nature and avoiding the environmental pollution of beaches, waters and estuaries, as well as the dense vegetation growing on the hills where the small rivers and streams which run to the sea are born. To translate, for their curious minds, what exactly is a coastline and how it was formed, what is an island, how the waxing and waning of the tides affect the beaches and river mouths and estuaries; types of continental islands, channels and straits which exist behind islands, the sandbars and tombolos, marine terraces, the mangrove swamps and the alluvial plains, mountain spurs and the coastal and insular masses, the estuaries and pools, the dunes and dune-fields and the sandbars.

The universities have much to research and increase global scientific knowledge on the physical and ecological aspects of seashores. More research has to be done on the more noteworthy features of coastal terrain and on the dynamics of ocean water in abrasion and sedimentation processes; the importance of maintaining bio-diverse forests on the escarpments and mountain spurs, as well as the coastal masses and deltas. Hopefully we will one day be able to study, in the universities, the total area of tropical or subtropical humid lowlands. And, then, to have the knowledge necessary to delve into the quarterly variations of the sea level, paleo-climes and paleo-ecology which preceded present day conditions; the importance of modifications occurring in marine currents; the extension and volume of cold water in relation to hot water in the aforementioned currents.

There is without a doubt an immense conceptual paraphernalia to apprehend in relation to the seashore. It is a part of planet Earth where the contact between land and sea is processed and where the land exposed to the marine swells varies widely as to the nature of the rocks, height of the relief and compartments of topography, while the dynamics of coastal waters continues its never ending abrasion and sedimentation work, within differentiated behaviors, from the Poles to the tropics and at the mouths of large rivers. Without mentioning that these contacts are also felt by the atmosphere along the coast, by the different winds and breezes which alternate day and night, from the sea to land and from the land to sea.

Those who dedicate themselves to the study of the Brazilian coast are eventually faced with many different types of treatments given to the relations between man and sea, and on the radical changes in the use of coastal regions from the middle of the last century up until today. When dealing with the theme of tropical and subtropical coastlines there is always a pre-historical or historical mystery to be unveiled.

(Copy of the introduction)

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*This book is available at the Library of the Instituto de Medicina Tropical de São Paulo