# How Water Makes Us Human

# Materialities in Anthropology and Archaeology Series

# How Water Makes Us Human

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**Preface**

This book is one of a series that contributes to what is broadly termed the new material turn in the social sciences. The underpinning intention that coheres the numerous interdisciplinary moves that participate and feed into this flourishing body of literature is to challenge anthropocentricism (Connolly 2013). This series dethrones the human by drawing in materials. Positioned under the broad umbrella heading of the New Materialisms or New Materialities the series aims to draw in the non-human as agent with a view to both recognize and advocate for the other than human entities that prevail and engage in our lives.

In recognition that these terms are somewhat slippery to grasp we have outlined the following distinctions to put clear water between the terms and demonstrate how we are using them.

**Distinctions between materiality and matter**:

The term ‘materiality’ describes the quality or character of the material a thing is made out of. Its material-ness, if you like. On the other hand, the term ‘matter’ is used to describe physical items that occupy space (mass). Traditional theories of materiality explore how the objects (made of matter (different materials)) shape the lives of people. New Materialities attends to the materials (matter) that objects are made out of and how those materials influence human behaviour.

Materiality and material culture studies have tended to focus their attention on *things* or *objects* (cf. Banerjee and Miller 2008; Miller and Woodward 2010), especially the things that people make. Scholarship has been less concerned with how materials behave in favour of looking at how people use materials. Materiality studies, therefore, demonstrate a connection between humanity and the things they make and use. In other words, it explores how items reflect their makers and owners and therefore embody meanings.

The New Materialities turn moves away from objects and attends to the materials that the objects are fashioned out of. Turning attention to the materials allows a new dimension to open up whereby the substance a thing is made out of becomes significant. Bringing materials to the foreground not only shows that materials are instrumental in providing the character and meaning of an item but also that the materials themselves are determining – even actively responsible – for the final shape and manner by which the finished article can manifest. Thus, how a material behaves predicates how it can be used (see Drazin and Kuchler 2015) and in turn how we understand it. This perspective, following Latour (1993), gives materials a type of agency both inherently and whilst in relationship with other materials (see Barad’s concept inter-relationality, 2007). Indeed, using this perspective, it is how materials interact or engage that becomes the place of relationship, creativity and attention. Therefore, the NM draws the materials things are made of into focus and by attending to the behaviours and characteristics of those substances, asks the question ‘How do the materials (read: substances) that we make things out of, shape our lives?’