

Chapter 4

The Mediterranean

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As powerful topoi of geographical imagination, seas have seldom been simply a watery surface. Whether as the center or the fringe of the world in classical antiquity, the “great abyss” of the Bible or the epitome of leisure and holiday recreation in modern times, a domain for exercising inventiveness and freedom or a realm of fear, the sea has always been a rich pool of meanings, images, and metaphors.

Associated geographically with the emergence of two fundamental components of the hegemonic Western cultural paradigm, the Greco-Roman classical ideal and the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Mediterranean enjoys a conceptual preeminence among the world’s seas as the birthplace of European civilization. Moreover, it constitutes an exceptional case of a sea that serves at once as attributive of a hinterland, a climate, a vegetation, a landscape, a diet, a body type, a temperament, and a morality, while serving as a point of reference for, or lending its name to, other seas. The description of the Baltic-North Sea complex as the “Northern Mediterranean” has been in use since the 1970s among economic historians of late medieval Europe (Lopez 1976, 95), while recently new Mediterraneans have been added to the map of the world’s seas: the Mediterranean Atlantic, the Pacific Mediterranean, the Caribbean Mediterranean, the Japanese Mediterranean, or the East Asian Mediterranean (Abulafia 2005; Shottenhammer 2008).

The effectiveness of a sea to rhetorically and conceptually colonize the hinterland, the peoples, manners, and other seas is what renders the Mediterranean a historiographical problem (Horden and Purcell 2006, 725). Or, as Predrag Matvejević (1990, cited in Bouchard and Ferme 2013, 13) put it, “The Mediterranean is suffering from an excess of discursiveness bordering on verbosity.” This chapter does not intend to solve the historiographical problem of the Mediterranean, but rather to actualize it, or even to accentuate

it, showing the ways and the discourses through which the Mediterranean was transformed from a sea basin to an interpretative *passe-partout* of societies and cultures.

A Sea with Multiple Names

The idea of the Mediterranean as a region with a distinctive geophysical setting that produces a particular way of life and culture is less old than we may imagine. It was the result of scientific and cultural classifications originating in the age of European geopolitical expansion in the area, beginning at the end of the eighteenth century. While the birthday of the modern idea of the Mediterranean enjoys a consensus among scholars, its conceptual history prior to this point is quite controversial. The question of whether any regional conceptualization of the Mediterranean existed in antiquity and the Middle Ages cannot be definitely answered.

If the existence of a collective name is indicative of a sense of collectivity or even unity, then the onomatology of the Mediterranean complicates rather than clarifies the picture. While terms suggesting a basic conception of the sea as a whole appeared in ancient Semitic languages (“the great sea”) and in Greek (*he megale thalassa*/“the great sea,” *he hemetera thalassa*/“our sea,” *he kath’hemas thalassa*/“the sea in our part of the world”), these coexisted with terms implying a fragmented view of the sea beginning in the tenth and the sixth century BC respectively, and multiplied throughout antiquity (*mare internum*, *mare insentinum*, *mare nostrum*, *mare mediterraneum*) (Burr 1952) and the Middle Ages (*Bahr al-Rūm*/“the sea of the Greeks,” *Bahr al-Shām*/“the sea of Syria,” *Bahr al-Maghrib*/“the sea of the West” for the Arabs) (Dunlop 2013). Herodotus, for instance, used the names of individual seas instead of a collective term for the Mediterranean (Burr 1952; xxx), and the same holds true for Byzantine (Kazdahn 2012) and Arab scholars (Matar 2013).

The multiplicity of names for the sea from antiquity to the modern period indicates a variety of conceptualizations and a lack of a coherent view of the Mediterranean as a unified entity. It is characteristic that although the term “Mediterranean Sea” (*mare mediterraneum*) was introduced as early as the mid-third century BC and attested in the sixth century, it would not be imposed as a universal designative term before the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, members of the London Trinity House, the authority responsible for providing navigational information and shipping aid, had not designated a common name for the Mediterranean (Matar 2013), while in the second half of the eighteenth century, Comte de Buffon in his *Natural History* used the term “mediterranean” in adjective form to enumerate “toutes les mers méditerranées” (Ruel 1991, 7).

Ancient geographers seem to support the argument of those scholars who insist on the absence of any regional conceptualization of the Mediterranean in antiquity. In the ancient cosmologic perception of the world that promoted the division of the earth into *climata*, the Mediterranean was not considered a distinct region, but was intersected by different zones. This perception traverses the Middle Ages and is apparent in the fourteenth century, in Ibn Khaldūn's famous classification of the universe along latitudinal climatic zones (Shavit 1988, 99).

At the opposite pole of cosmologic geographical thought, however, a practical topographical knowledge of the Mediterranean was developed as result of the centuries-long practice of long-distance trade and shipping (Horden and Purcell 2000, 29–30). This found its expression in the literary genre of *periplous* (circumnavigation)—a listing of ports and other landmarks that a ship could expect during the navigation of the coast (Johnson 2012, 1–3)—which in the Middle Ages developed into the cartographic genre of *portolan* that remained in use until the end of the seventeenth century (Campbell 1987; Tolias 1999). Mapping the space as a sequence of places, *periploi*, and, especially, portolan charts promoted the view of a Mediterranean connectivity (della Dora 2010, 4–9). As Corradino Astengo (2007, 175) argued, portolan charts depicted the Mediterranean as “more than a simple unified physical site with a common climate,” portraying it rather as “a common locus of human activity, a unit held together by a fine weave of sea routes.” The portrayal of the Mediterranean as a succession of itineraries is also to be found in the Arabic geographic tradition. Nevertheless, late medieval and early modern Arabic cartography do not seem to sustain the rather harmonic view of the Mediterranean attributed to the portolan charts. On the contrary, while perceptions of the Mediterranean as a whole are not absent, the latter is mainly presented as a set of fragments, often marked by fear and conflict (Brummett 2007, 16, 24). According to Karen C. Pinto (2004, 233–34), “this Muslim vision of the Mediterranean is not a simple representation of placid harmony, but rather one of frightening and ever-shifting conflict. This reading of the image of the Mediterranean fits with the negative passages of the sea that are sometimes boldly asserted, and at other times vaguely hinted at in some of the geographical texts.” After all—and contrary to Pirenne's thesis—the late medieval and early modern Mediterranean was for the Muslims a *Bahr al-Rūm*, namely, a Christian sea (Pinto 2004, 235; Matar 2013).

The last remark reminds us that spatial conceptualizations involve not only geography, but also power relations. Despite the multiple geographical definitions of the Mediterranean prior to the nineteenth century, the sea “has endured a long tradition of totalizing imaginings, visions, and hegemonic projects, of which geographical mappings and rigid cartographies are but one

obvious expression” (Bouchard and Ferme 2013, 213). Among the hegemonic projects affecting the Mediterranean in the period under consideration, the Roman *mare nostrum* was the most successful and rhetorically evocative, although the Greek *hemetera thalassa* (our sea) also implied a claim to the sea (Purcell 2003, 13). In the third century AD, the split of the Roman Empire into an eastern and a western part laid the ground for the consolidation of the East–West axis as the organizing principle of the division of the Mediterranean into different political and cultural spheres.¹ The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople deepened this partition, by replacing the division between Byzantium and Rome with that between Islam and Christendom. Between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries, the divided Mediterranean was transformed into a unified economic space—an international market—under the scepter of Venice. The shift in the focus of world trade toward northwestern Europe beginning in the seventeenth century gave weight to the North–South axis as the new spatial gradient of economic and cultural affiliation. Although divisions associated with the East–West axis did not cease to exist, the Mediterranean would be more and more perceived in terms of the North–South axis as a fringe of Europe (northern shores), or as a space of European colonization (Bouchard and Ferme 2013, 3, 21). It was exactly in this frame where the modern idea of the Mediterranean began to take shape.

Discovering the Mediterranean: The Grand Tour and the Voyage Philosophique

Long before the Mediterranean found its scientific validation as a region, it already had a history as an object of exploration and as a site of discursive practices. By the early modern rediscovery of the Mediterranean it was the educational travels of the young English nobles that set the tone, producing a rich pool of images and conventions. In this early phase of the Grand Tour, Italy incarnated the ideal of the classical Mediterranean (Pemble 1987; Black 1992; Wilton and Bignamani 1996; Chaney 1998).

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the increasing involvement of the middle classes in travel coincided with the emergence of a new intellectual taste that privileged the Greek over the Roman classical past (Turner 1989). The introduction of Greek in the curricula of public schools, the translations of classic Greek texts, the collection of Greek antiquities and the adoption of Hellenic themes in art, architecture, and literature were expressions of a new cultural canon connected with the emergence of the European bourgeois society (Crook 1995). The shift of scholarly interest from Roman to Greek antiquity redirected the itineraries of the Grand Tour toward Greece. Visiting

the Greek lands and studying the ruins became an obligation for the educated European classes (Eisner 1993).

The rediscovery of Greece was accompanied by the invention of a new quality of the Mediterranean that emphasized its climatic idiosyncrasy. In this case, the inclination of the Enlightenment thought toward environmental causation found its expression in the writings of the German antiquarian and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68). Attributing Greek classical culture to the specific climatic and geographic conditions of the Greek peninsula, Winckelmann in his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764) initiated a literary convention that would dominate both scholarly and popular discourse on the Mediterranean for the next century (Lepénies 1986; Potts 1994; Hachmeister 2002, 13–28; Jakobs 2006). In turn, romantic travel literature endowed this convention with plentiful landscape descriptions along with rich iconographic material (Tsigakou 1981). The increasing appeal of marine picturesqueness beginning in the last quarter of the eighteenth century—as a byproduct of the increasing attractiveness of the shore²—with its emphasis on delimitation and smoothness, contributed essentially to the creation of the image of the Mediterranean landscape (Gaschke 2006).

The aestheticization of the Mediterranean nature was closely associated with the aestheticization of the Mediterranean body. Beginning with Winckelmann, who recognized the archetype of male beauty in the classical Greek statue, a whole homosexual aesthetic arose around the Mediterranean. As Robert Aldrich (1993, x) notices, “the image of a homoerotic Mediterranean, both classical and modern, is the major motif in the writings and art of homosexual European men from the time of the Enlightenment until the 1950s.”

The aestheticization of Mediterranean nature and the naturalization of Mediterranean culture developed in tandem with a declensionist approach to the region’s present. Although apparently contradictory, both narratives ascertained the peripheral condition of the Mediterranean. Conscious of their cultural superiority, European travelers often contrasted the glorious classical past of the Mediterranean lands to their gloomy present. Environmental degradation, political corruption, backwardness, and poverty, as well as vulgarity, sentimentalism, or lack of depth, were highlighted as inherent characteristics of a marginal area of the civilized European world. At the same time, this distance of the Mediterranean from the central places of European modernity was what rendered it a romantic refuge against the dramatic changes brought about modernization and industrialization (Mendelson 2002, 28).

On the other hand, the growing significance of the Mediterranean for European trade gave impetus to the systematic exploration of the region. Scientific research in the Mediterranean was originally a French enterprise. In order to encourage and protect its maritime trade, France, which was the domi-

nant mercantile power in the Mediterranean during the eighteenth century, developed an active cartographic activity in the area. The outcome was “an unparalleled system for the coordination of geographic information that transformed representations of the world and the practice of cartography, nowhere more dramatically than in the Mediterranean” (Armstrong 2005, 242). Alongside maritime geography, the flora and fauna as well as the subsoil of the region became objects of systematic observation and classification according to the spirit of the Enlightenment. The botanist Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1656–1708), with his detailed description of the natural setting of the Greek islands and the Black Sea in his *Relation d'un voyage du Levant* (1717), is a prominent example in a series of state-sponsored explorative missions in the Mediterranean that would reach its peak in the French expedition in Egypt (1798–1801), followed by the expeditions in Morea (1829–31) and Algeria (1839–42) (Bourguet et al. 1998; Gillispie 2004, 557–600).

While in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travelogues and other literary works it was Italy and Greece that determined the image, both positive and negative, of the Mediterranean world, in scientific literature the focus was on the Eastern Mediterranean, and specifically on the territories of the Ottoman Empire.³ Although geographically adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea, these territories were not considered to belong to the Mediterranean schema, but to the geographically vague “Levant.” Used since the late Middle Ages in the maritime trade vocabulary to denote, in general, the Oriental coast of the Mediterranean, the term “Levant” entered into the discursive arsenal of imperialism to denote imperial fantasies of the Ottoman Empire both in pejorative and nostalgic or romantic terms (Carlino 2006, 2–3; Nocke 2009, 180–84; Stanivuković 2007, 11). There were also Christian lands that were not considered parts of the Mediterranean environmental and cultural schema. Yaakov Shavit (1988, 100) highlights the example of H. T. Buckle’s *Introduction to the History of Civilization* (1857–61), where “Spain and Greece are presented as two contradictory types of environment and, hence, of human culture. Spain resembles tropical lands such as India, and its climatic conditions (heat and dryness) are considered a fertile breeding ground for superstition and ignorance. Greece, on the other hand, is considered by him the ‘natural soil’ for the propagation of arts, sciences and liberalism.” Even as a rhetorical term, “Mediterranean” appeared sporadically, and almost always in narrowly localized Italian and Greek contexts.

A New Geographic Region

In the nineteenth century, it was the science of geography that integrated the whole area into a coherent conceptual and rhetoric frame. Despite the pio-

neering French contribution to the scientific discovery of the Mediterranean, the paternity of the idea of the Mediterranean as a geographic region was German (Stroch and Meiring 2000; Ben-Artzi 2004). The need to reorganize the accumulated geographic knowledge across new taxonomic categories resulted from the disruption of the traditional political boundaries in Europe during the Napoleonic Wars. The quest for boundaries not vulnerable to political or other changes promoted spatial classifications based on the constant factors of geographic division, such as continents, water surfaces, climate, soil morphology, flora, and fauna (Leighly 1938, 241). It was the prominent German geographer Carl Ritter (1779–1859) who first conceived the Mediterranean as a distinct geographic unit. In the first volume of his universal *Erdkunde* (1817, 1042), Ritter detached the North African countries as a *Naturtypus* from the African continent, assigning them to the Mediterranean lands (*Mittelmeerlande*). Ritter introduced new taxonomic criteria in the geographic science and was the founder of regional geography (*regionale Geographie*). The latter combined geographic determinism with anthropogeographic approaches and examined the interaction between the physical and cultural characteristics of a given world region that determined its physiognomy (Blotvogel 2002, 39).

The transition of anthropogeography to the regional level in the second half of the nineteenth century advanced the study of the Mediterranean as a region. Two of the foremost representatives of this tradition were the German geographers Theobald Fischer and Alfred Philippson. In his Mediterranean writings, Fischer (1877; 1879; 1913) spoke about a uniform “zone” or “area” that transcended political boundaries, whereas Philippson, in his *Das Mittelmeergebiet: Seine geographische und kulturelle Eigenart* (1904) almost half a century before Braudel, formulated the thesis that the Mediterranean region is a separate part of the world, with a uniform natural setting and a shared history that created similar social and cultural patterns among its adjoining populations.

On the other side of the Rhine, Elisée Reclus was the first to establish the Mediterranean as a coherent object of study. In his *Nouvelle géographie universelle* (1876), he suggested an economic approach to the Mediterranean as the birthplace of European trade. With Reclus, the Mediterranean was transformed into a value. Starting from the study of its physical characteristics and climate, he composed a historical, economic, and political portrait of the Mediterranean that affirmed its cultural superiority over other seas (Ruel 1991, 9). The tradition inaugurated by Reclus was developed further by Paul Vidal de la Blache and his followers. Vidal began his scholarly engagement with the Mediterranean with an essay on geopolitics and then proceeded, under the influence of Theobald Fischer, to the study of rural landscapes as expressions of a specific Mediterranean *genre de vie* that corresponded to environmental conditions (Nordmann 1998; Claval 2007, 6, 8–11).

The emphasis of nineteenth-century geographical thought on the impact of the physical environment upon human culture was compatible with the positivist scientific paradigm that recognized nature as the determinant of historic development. Yet the transformation of the Mediterranean into a region was mainly the byproduct of a new conceptualization of space intended to rationalize and legitimize geopolitical ambitions in a period of imperialistic rivalry. The eighteenth-century tradition of the *voyage philosophique* was replaced by scientific institutions serving national and imperial policies, while scientific disciplines themselves became sites of antagonism. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the competition between the French and the German schools of archaeology was expressed through two different approaches to the Mediterranean past. Emphasizing the Roman heritage, French archaeology sought to appropriate the Mediterranean by promoting the idea of its Latinity. Germans, on the other hand, saw in the classical Greek *métron* the archetype of the Germanic ethic of simplicity and purity, as opposed to Roman moral decadence (Ruel 2000, 13–14). Paradoxically, as Anne Ruel (2000, 15) has noticed, the very moment when the unity and universality of the Mediterranean were conceived was also the moment when the various European ambitions clashed directly in a logic of national confrontation.

In the age of nationalisms, there were also alternative conceptualizations of the Mediterranean that prioritized a pluralist regionalism instead of an exclusive nationalism (Isabella and Zanou 2015). This was the case with the Adriatic regionalism proposed by intellectuals living in the multinational Habsburg Empire's Northern Adriatic regions, such as Niccolò Tommaseo, Francesco Dall'Ongaro, Stipan Ivičević, Ivan August Kaznačić, Pacifico Vallussi, and Medo Pucić, who sought to integrate Italian and Slavic nationalism into a greater Adriatic maritime regional context. In this new Adriaticism, it was multinational Trieste that formed the unifying center rather than the Venetian metropole (Reill Kirchner 2012). Obviously, the pluralist visions of this post-Napoleonic generation of nationalists were never realized. Nevertheless, as we shall see in the next section, the Mediterranean would not cease to inspire universalistic narratives, even in the turbulent decades of the following century.

A Turbulent Sea

At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the division of the African and Asian shores of the Mediterranean into colonial frontiers and spheres of influence proceeded in parallel with the emergence of imperial ideologies that sought to reconstruct the unity of the region under the scepter of a given power (Chambers 2008, 13–15). The revival of the Roman *Mare*

Nostrum during the liberal *Cinquantennio*, which was central to both Italian foreign policy and national self-fashioning, was the most elaborate and enduring ideological and cultural project on the Mediterranean (Trinchese 2005; Fogu 2010, 6–8). In their turn, organic intellectuals of the French colonial regime in Maghreb promoted the concept of “Latin Africa,” popularizing the idea that the French colonial mission in North Africa was a continuation of the Roman conquest, and that therefore Latin civilization was indigenous in North Africa (Lorcin 1999, 201–13). In Catalonia, the appropriation of the Latin Mediterranean past by the cultural movement of *Noucentisme* was consonant with Catalanian nationalism (West 2013, 392–93). As for Britain, its naval predominance in the Mediterranean since the end of the eighteenth century was seen as the natural destiny of the maritime empire (Holland and Markides 2008; Holland 2012).

The elevation of the Mediterranean to a geopolitical space implied a reorientation of the scientific interest in the region. Regional and human geography gave place to political geography, while political analysts, journalists, and experts in geopolitics and international affairs appeared next to the heretofore traditional scholars of the Mediterranean—the archeologists, art historians, and geographers. The relevant studies were referring more and more to the “Mediterranean problem,” which had “become a major focal point of international relations and international dispute” (Langer 1936–37, 660) and was summarized in the “command of the sea, shared precariously at present by three great powers and a few small states, notably Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey, which the great powers seek to attach to their interests” (Gordon 1938, 97). Their focus was not only on the morphology of the Mediterranean, but also on its history and on the position of its adjoining countries in the geopolitical system of the period. One of the most characteristic samples of the intellectual production of the period is a book by the director of the magazine *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, Hans Hummel, entitled *Der Mittelmeerraum: Zur Geopolitik eines maritimen Grossraumes* (1936). Highlighting the examples of Mussolini’s Italy, Franco’s Spain, and Atatürk’s Turkey, Hummel stated that the Mediterranean peoples had returned to the fore of history as agents of the world’s order and warned Britain that if it attempted to disrupt this historical development it would collide with the strong response of the spirit of the “Mediterranean personality.”

Alongside the imperialistic visions of the Mediterranean, the interwar period witnessed the emergence of an intellectual sensibility that recognized a new humanist essence in the region’s past. In the 1930s, the literary review *Cahiers du Sud*, founded in the 1920s in Marseilles by the writer Jean Ballard, became the forum for a whole generation of French intellectuals to elaborate the idea of a common Mediterranean homeland beyond cultural and national

frontiers. Rejecting the dogma of Latinity, writers such as Paul Valéry, Gabriel Audisio, and Albert Camus, among others, developed the concept of a Mediterranean melting pot with a civilizing power (Fabre 2000, 53–68, 80–87; Foxlee 2010). This Mediterranean universalism, however, was not always without a sponsor. As Gabriel Audisio argued in his *Jeunesse de la Méditerranée* (1935), referring to Mediterranean cosmopolitanism, this “heterogeneous population, made up of people from the Languedoc and Provence, Catalans and Corsicans, Andalusians and Neapolitans, Minorcans and Maltese, Arabs and Berbers . . . , they are a mixture which is now in the making. As Algeria will be: a synthesis of Mediterranean breeds cemented by French culture” (cited in Gastaud n.d.).

In the same period, academic institutions devoted to the study of the Mediterranean began to be established in France. In 1926 the *Académie Méditerranéenne* was founded (in 1935 it would move to Monaco); and 1933 saw the creation of the *Center Universitaire Méditerranéen*, with Paul Valéry as its first administrator. Both institutions promoted the idea of an inclusive Mediterranean culture and humanism. It was in this intellectual context that Braudel’s Mediterranean began to take shape.

The Mediterranean and the Social Sciences: Braudel and Beyond

When in 1949 Fernand Braudel published the first edition of his *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*, the Mediterranean was far from being only a sea. As a product of an intellectual quest that lasted for almost two and a half decades, *La Méditerranée* bears the traces both of the intellectual climate of its time and the personal experiences of the historian. Braudel’s ten-year stay in colonial Algeria and his personal involvement in the project of “Latin Africa,” his brief acquaintance with Sao Paulo (which was crucial for the embedding of the global perspective), the Parisian circle of the *Annales* and his reflections on history, the captivity in Mainz, and his acquaintance with the world of German geography—all of these composed the intellectual frame within which the Braudelian *La Méditerranée* came into existence (Paris 1999).

Although the Mediterranean already existed as a historical subject (Horden and Purcell 2000: 31–35), Braudel promoted it to a historical agent. The Braudelian Mediterranean constituted a milestone in twentieth-century historiography and a reference point for Mediterranean history. It has also received much criticism, which was focused mainly on the banishment of the perspective of time and on its use of an immobile geography as a prism for reading society (Dosse 1987, ch. 4). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, what

deserves our attention is the critical note made by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell in their *Corrupting Sea* (2000, 39–43)—a work that claims to offer a new paradigm for Mediterranean history⁴—that instead of a starting point, *La Méditerranée* signaled the end of Mediterranean studies. Braudel had said everything, and major synoptic works were rare (Horden and Purcell 2006, 729). Despite its wide reception, Braudel’s paradigm did not dominate subsequent historiographies, which continued to deal mainly with histories *in* and not *of* the Mediterranean, to use the pointed distinction proposed by Horden and Purcell. Braudel has been also criticized for having confined the study of the Mediterranean world to the end of the sixteenth century, when the political unification of the region under Philip II fell apart and the world economy shifted toward the Atlantic (Fogu 2010, 2). Whatever Braudel’s responsibility might be, the fact is that Mediterranean historiography has traditionally been practiced by historians of antiquity and the Middle Ages. Shlomo Goitein’s monumental *A Mediterranean Society* (1967–88) deals with medieval Jewish trade communities, while *Corrupting Sea*’s time scope spans from antiquity to the Middle Ages. The last two decades have witnessed a blossoming of early modern Mediterranean history (Green 2000 and 2010; Dursteler 2006; Fleming 2007; Fusaro, Heywood and Omri 2010), but the modern Mediterranean still remains underconsidered.⁵ Faruk Tabak’s *The Waning of the Mediterranean* (2008) signaled a first and successful attempt at a history *of* the Mediterranean that focuses on the “twilight” period of the region (seventeenth to nineteenth centuries) and discusses from a geohistorical point of view its integration in the mid-nineteenth-century world economy.

While the modern Mediterranean was absent from historiographic discussions on modernity, it was British and American anthropology that, from the mid-1960s on, set the tone for academic discourse on the area. The promotion of the Mediterranean to an ethnographic field marked a break with the tradition of colonial anthropology occupying itself with the study of so-called primitive peoples (Davis 1977). The anthropology of the Mediterranean became the scene of a remarkable discrepancy between British social anthropologists on the one hand, and mostly American cultural anthropologists on the other. The former were uneasy with, or even outright rejected, the notion of a “culture area,” privileging instead a more plural approach and using terms such as the “Mediterranean world” and “Mediterranean peoples” (Boissevain et al. 1979; Pina-Cabral 1989, 400). A telling example is the pioneering study of John Davis’s *People of the Mediterranean* (1977), in which the author emphasizes the notion of “cultural contact,” that gives the area its “unity,” negating the existence of cultural homogeneity. This Mediterranean unity, however, was precisely at the heart of American cultural anthropological studies (Gilmore 1982; Pina-Cabral 1989, 401). The professed discovery

of the Mediterranean as an ethnographic field by American anthropologists was not irrelevant to the emergence in the US universities during the postwar period of the so-called area studies programs, which promoted interdisciplinary research on wide non-European regions. The Mediterranean has never been systematically integrated in the program of area studies, apparently for the same reason that Mediterranean societies and cultures could not fit easily into the typical ethnographic categories. In other words, they were neither exotic nor familiar enough. As the American anthropologist Michael Herzfeld (1987, 11) has noted, “the extension of ethnography to the circum-Mediterranean has created a need for exoticizing devices to justify research in what is otherwise a familiar cultural backyard. One of these devices is the complex literature that presents honor and shame as the moral values of the Mediterranean society.”

Whether as an area of cultural unity or an area of cultural diversity, the Mediterranean has been thematized in the context of anthropological inquiry as a zone of cultural distinctiveness. Shame and honor, together with patronage, were seen as indicatives of archaism, providing keys for interpreting modern social and political phenomena in the region (Pitt-Rivers 1963; Peristiany 1965; Schneider 1971; Gilmore 1987). Recent anthropology looks critically at the use of universalistic categories, and has even questioned the validity of the Mediterranean as an ethnographic category (Herzfeld 1980 and 2005; Albera and Blok 2001). To the question “Are there any common denominators as implied in the term “Mediterranean?” the reply by the anthropologist Henk Driessen (2002, 11) is more than indicative: “After more than fifty years of ethnographic fieldwork in countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, this question still is a haunting as well an embarrassing one, even in view of the common anthropological knowledge that no single let alone definite answer can be given to such questions.”

One Sea for all Purposes

If Mediterraneanism—namely, the substantiation and essentialization of the geographic, environmental, historical, and cultural characteristics of the region—was a product of academic discourse, the integration of the Mediterranean in the world tourist market has transformed academic Mediterraneanism into a commodity for mass consumption. The creation and promotion of Club Med villages as shelters against urban hurry and the North European industrialized way of life, as well as the publication of Elisabeth David’s *A Book of Mediterranean Food* (1950), which contrasted “honest” Mediterranean cooking to “sham Grand Cuisine,” were key moments in the commodification process of the region (Gordon 2003, 216–17). Since the 1960s, the most

diffused and powerful image of the Mediterranean both inside and outside of the basin has been that of summer holidays by the sea (Urbain 2003). In the fictitious world of Club Med, the Braudelian immobility was replaced by a sense of “out of time temporality.” As Antonis Liakos (2011) has argued, “we usually think that the construction of regions is the work of high politics and academic agendas. The case of the Mediterranean illustrates how academic concepts are related with popular culture, and how the market contributes also to the transformation of space and time into meaningful regional concepts and experiences.”

The appropriation of Mediterraneanism by the countries and the peoples of the Mediterranean coastline served the needs of their promotion in the tourist market, while also functioning as a pool of positive self-representations. Manliness, temperament, pride, hospitality, warm sociability, and sun were what Mediterranean people had and northern Europeans lacked. Nevertheless, the use of the Mediterranean label within the Mediterranean varies in space and time. Ethnographic fieldwork has shown that nationality, locality, and religion are much stronger categories of self-identification and that when a Mediterranean identity is invoked, this happens in various ways and for multiple purposes (Driessen 2002, 13). Greeks, for instance, are more attached to their “Mediterraneanness” as an attractive alternative to being Balkan, while Italians “may attribute Mediterranean characteristics to themselves; but they do so, not as Italians, but as Romans” (Herzfeld 2005, 58). Catalans, on the other side, tend to accentuate their cosmopolitan Mediterranean identity opposing themselves to the Castilian agrarian conservatism (Driessen 1999, 55).

Since the 1990s, the popularity of the Mediterranean has been increasing both in the academic milieu and in identity politics. Scholarly reflection on the validity of the traditional categories of center and periphery and the search for nonrigid analytic frameworks have made Mediterranean paradigms attractive “because of their ‘exchange’ systems, their decentralized points of observation, and their fluctuating categories, in which ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ keep changing places and roles” (Malkin 2005, 2). The last two decades have witnessed a striking rise in the number of academic journals dealing with the history of the Mediterranean (Alcock 2005). The Mediterranean perspective appears more and more in research projects and as the focus of conferences, promising to offer an alternative framework of study to those of the “classical world,” the “empire” and the “nation” (Morris 2003, 30–32).

This conceptual positioning of the Mediterranean between the national and the global renders it a pool of alternative identities. In Israel, for instance, the reemergence in the academic and public discourse of an old idea of Mediterraneanism (*Yam Tikhoniut*) that goes back to Zionism constitutes an effort to redefine both Israeli cultural identity and Israel’s place in international

politics by relating them to a more expansive cultural and geopolitical space (Shavit 1988; Nocke 2009). The success of Israeli Mediterraneanism lies exactly “within its power to join existing models of identity without either threatening their legitimacy or replacing them” (Nocke 2009, 29). In Turkey, the Mediterranean provides the middle classes of Istanbul and of the western coast with an alternative identity that distances them from the Central Asian epicenter of Turkic tradition (Örs 1998, cited in Driessen 1999, 55, 62; O’Connell 2005), while Croatia’s Mediterraneanism detaches the country from its Balkan context and serves as a link to the European Union.⁶ In this perspective, the maritime Republic of Dubrovnik of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, as opposed to its Slavic hinterland, is highlighted as a crossroads and a melting pot of Western/Latin and Eastern/Slavic cultures (Zrnić 1999, 151). In a different vein, Italian intellectuals have argued for a reevaluation of Camus’s Mediterranean humanism, considering the Mediterranean as a source of critique against colonialism, cultural imperialism, and economic domination (Chambers 2008; Casano 2012).

In the age of globalization, the Mediterranean has acquired new, though contradictory, meanings and roles. In its idealized version as the sea of civilizations, intercultural communication, and exchange, it has been celebrated as the forerunner of capitalist globalization. This instrumentalization of the Mediterranean past is evident in projects such as the *Euro-Mediterranean Partnership* (1995) and its successor, the *Union for the Mediterranean* (2008), a brainchild of French President Sarkozy that aimed at the creation both of a free-trade zone between the EU and the non-EU Mediterranean states, and of a platform through which Europe would conduct its relations with Turkey and the Arab world. On the other side of the coin is the role the European Union’s borders policy has attributed to the Mediterranean: that of the frontier against the so-called invasion of Europe by immigrants, of the centuries-old border between the “civilized North” and the “wild South” (Ribas-Mateos 2005). This role has been boosted by the ongoing refugee crisis.

Since the onset of the economic crisis in late 2009, the admittedly positive and optimistic resonance of the Mediterranean has lost much of its force. Once the “cradle of European civilization,” the Mediterranean is regarded increasingly as an “anomaly” in the European economy, even as a deviation from the European socioeconomic ethos. The derogatory acronym PIGS, referring to the vulnerable economies of Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain, has become a popular entry in finance jargon, while environmental interpretations have been set in motion anew to explain the failure of people in the Mediterranean to adapt successfully to European economic and social norms.

Within a century and a half, the Mediterranean has become a geographic region, a climatic zone, a geopolitical space, a historical agent, a cultural area, and recently a reservoir of identities and a successful historical example of globalization. Is a new life of the Mediterranean currently under construction?

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Notes

1. The East–West axis was also dominant in the perception of the *oikoumene* in Antiquity. According to G. W. Bowesock (2008, 170), “In general the east–west orientation of the *oikoumenê* seems clearly determined by the possibility of travel across the wide expanse of sea. . . . It seems to have been rare for an ancient author to describe the civilized world by longitude, in a straight north–south direction.”
2. The shift of the European attitude toward the sea and the seaside after the middle of the eighteenth century is discussed in depth by Alain Corbin (1994).
3. The Eastern Mediterranean, specifically the Ottoman Empire, was a popular theme in the early modern literature (Stanivuković 2007). But this popularity was mainly inscribed in the broader fascination for the “Orient.”
4. The publication of the *Corrupting Sea* has provoked lively discussion among scholars of Mediterranean history. Unlike Braudel, Horden and Purcell (2005) emphasize the micro-level, and instead of the unity they insist on the fragmentation and connectedness of the region.
5. David Abulafia includes the modern and contemporary Mediterranean (“The Fifth Mediterranean, 1830–2010”) in his synthetic work, *The Great Sea* (2011).
6. This view has been clearly expressed by Croatia’s President Franjo Tuđman in an interview in New York in 1992: “Croats belong to a different culture—a different civilization from the Serbs. Croats are part of Western Europe, part of the Mediterranean tradition. Long before Shakespeare and Molière, our writers were translated into European languages. The Serbs belong to the East. They are Eastern peoples like the Turks and Albanians. They belong to the Byzantine culture . . . despite similarities in language we cannot be together” (cited in Bellamy 2003, 68). However, the idea that Croatian culture is distinctive among the other Slavic cultures due to its connection with the Mediterranean is older. Long before Pre-

drag Matvejević wrote about the Mediterranean region, the émigré historian and writer Bogdan Radica, in his *Sredozemni povratak* (1971), formulated the idea of a supranational Mediterranean identity that is transposed to specific national idioms (Zrnić 1999, 151), inscribing Croatian identity within the classical humanist canon, away from Yugoslavism.

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