



The Mediterranean incarnate: region formation between Sicily and Tunisia since World War II

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To cite this article: Matei Candea (2019) The Mediterranean incarnate: region formation between Sicily and Tunisia since World War II, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 34:2, 234-238

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518967.2019.1671008>



Published online: 15 Nov 2019.



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- XVIIth Century,” *Journal of European Economic History* 33 (2004): 59–70; Lucia Frattarelli Fisher, “Livorno 1676: la città e il porto franco,” in *La Toscana nell’età di Cosimo III*, edited by Franco Angiolini, Vieri Becagli and Marcello Verga, 45–66 (Florence: Edifir, 1996); Andrea Addobbati, *Commercio, rischio, guerra: il mercato delle assicurazioni marittime di Livorno (1694–1795)* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007); Renato Ghezzi, *Livorno e il mondo islamico nel XVII secolo: naviglio e commercio di importazione* (Bari: Cacucci, 2007); idem., *Livorno e l’Atlantico: i commerci olandesi nel Mediterraneo del Seicento* (Bari: Cacucci, 2012); idem., “North Italian Ports and the Levant in the 16th and 17th Centuries,” in *Maritime Networks as a Factor in European Integration* 50 (Florence: Florence University Press, 2019), 485–505.
2. Filippini, “L’attività del porto di Livorno,” 133–70.
 3. Frattarelli Fischer, “Livorno 1676,” 45–66.
 4. Fernand Braudel and Ruggiero Romano, *Navires et marchandises à l’entrée du port de Livourne (1547–1611)* (Paris: A. Colin, 1951); Ghezzi, *Livorno e il mondo islamico*; idem, *Livorno e l’Atlantico*; Jean-Pierre Filippini, *Il porto di Livorno e la Toscana (1676–1814)*. 3 vols. (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1998).

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518967.2019.1671007>



The Mediterranean incarnate: region formation between Sicily and Tunisia since World War II, by Naor Ben-Yehoyada, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2017, 288 pp., 21 half-tones, US\$32.50 (paperback), ISBN 9780226451022

There was once a place called the Mediterranean. It formed a stable unit of both anthropological and historical analysis.¹ Then, the anthropologists broke ranks, denouncing the homogenizing and essentialist implications of “mediterraneanism”² – the place, it turned out, had been just an idea, and a politically suspicious one at that. It seemed to fall to historians to recapture the old project of Mediterranean studies from the jaws of this anthropological deconstruction.³ In Naor Ben Yehoyada’s book, this feud between disciplinary cross-cousins has ended in a cross-cousin marriage – to borrow a metaphor from the book itself. *The Mediterranean Incarnate* is a vibrant, smart and thoroughly engaging demonstration, by a historically minded anthropologist, that the study of the Mediterranean has a glorious future before it, as well as a glorious past.

The book interweaves three essential strands: a gripping tale of a sea voyage, which offers deep ethnographic insight into the life-worlds of Tunisian and Sicilian fishermen; a rich political-economic history of the Channel of Sicily since the Second World War; and a deft reconsideration of classic and more recent anthropological writings on the Mediterranean, which lovingly transfigures old analytical tools in order to chart a new theoretical course. Each of these strands in and of itself makes the book worth reading for any anthropologist or historian with an interest in the Mediterranean, in the craft of fishing and navigation, in the anthropology of labour, Italian politics or transnationalism. Particularly impressive, however, is the way the author weaves these three strands together into a sophisticated account of the conceptual and material scaling devices of region formation.

It is also a cracking good read. As we shall see in a moment, the book packs a considerable theoretical punch and yet it is something of a page-turner, an engrossing account of a reflexive search for the Mediterranean, written with flashes of evocation and touches of wry humour. In the introduction and Chapter 2, our ethnographer is kicking his heels, somewhat frustrated, in the port of Mazara del Vallo, a Sicilian fishing town long past its former glory. His early questions about the deep history of Mediterranean connections glance off his first interlocutors, an endearing cast of characters who in response offer jokes and talk of other matters. Through conflicting accounts of a planned strike whose ascribed motivations and actors keep shifting, Chapter 2 introduces the town's fishing industry and begins to outline its history and entanglements with broader regional and national politics. Then in Chapter 3 our ethnographer finally sets out on a fishing voyage on board the *Naumachos*, whose meanderings in the channel of Sicily occupy the remainder of the book. Life onboard is evoked in vivid detail: the back-breaking labour, pungent smells and swollen hands; the silent captain, cramped cabins and piles of wriggling, muddy shrimp; the taciturnity, the jibes and the occasional theological conversation. Ben Yehoyada deploys ethnographic detail for illumination as well as evocation: the strange overconsumption of olive oil (half a cup per person per day!) reveals the material way in which an owner's care for the crew is demonstrated and demanded (130–1). The proprieties of cigarettes – how many should a deck-hand receive, and when might he actually smoke them, or how should one thank someone else for lighting it? – point to tensions over the value of labour and the brittleness of masculinity. While some ethnographies burnish glittering vignettes to distract the reader from a rather thin knowledge of other particulars, this is emphatically not the case here. The narrative combines evocative descriptions with seriously thorough mid-level political and economic information, the work of an ethnographer who has traced kinship links and party affiliations, who has counted the crates of fish and the cartons of cigarettes. Slowly, out of this vivid and detailed picture of the tense and tentative cohabitation of eight Tunisian and Italian men on a Sicilian trawler, emerges a glimpse of something greater. By the time he returns to land in the conclusion, our ethnographer has discovered what he had been looking for, and so have we: the material, visceral and fluid reality of the Mediterranean as a place.

As noted earlier, just as impressive as the ethnographic work is the sophisticated and unexpected way in which this narrative is made to speak to the two other core strands identified above: history and theory. The history is not left to play some flaccid “background” role to the ethnography, nor does the sea voyage merely provide a vivid illustration of large-scale historical processes. As for anthropological theorizations of patronage, honour, kinship, labour or cosmopolitanism, these are not just wheeled in to “explain” the material, but rather form a part of the object of study. Indeed, Ben Yehoyada's deft treatment of classic “Mediterranean theory” provides the lever through which ethnography and history are articulated. To the casual eye, the combination of a focus on the Mediterranean with a string traditional anthropological themes – class (Chap. 3), patronage (Chap. 4), kinship (Chap. 5), honour (Chap. 6) and cosmopolitanism (Chap. 7) – might presage a rather classic, not to say old-fashioned or out-dated, approach. Nothing could be further from the truth. Ben Yehoyada invokes these structural analytics not as culturalist explanations of the behaviour of “Mediterranean people”, but rather as discursive and political frames through which individuals themselves make claims on each other and provide contesting accounts of particular situations. Is the relationship between fishermen and the owner of the fleet an instance of patronage, an

approximation of kinship, or a matter of class and labour? Rather than seek to answer such questions in his own terms, Ben Yehoyada shows us in vivid detail the ways in which each of these frames can be deployed by the actors themselves to make different kinds of claims on one another and to constitute their ethical worlds in contrasting ways.

Crucially the author notes that all these frames share a particular property: they can apply on different scales, both spatial and temporal. Scale is the device which allows Ben Yehoyada to link history and ethnography. This too is an observation which the author borrows from the (more recent) archives of the anthropology of the Mediterranean, where it had been developed particularly in relation to hospitality.⁴ By applying it systematically across a range of themes, however, Ben Yehoyada gives the observation a much broader reach. Contests of masculine honour (Chap. 6) may involve the lowly deckhands and the more uppity mechanics pointedly urinating on the part of the deck which the other group uses, or Sicilians and Tunisians casting aspersions on the sexuality of one another's countrymen and women – but the same formal patterns can provide frames for making sense of transnational trespass of Sicilian trawlers in Tunisian waters in the latter half of the twentieth century, or the Italian state's management of Tunisian reprisals. The question of honour – as Ben Yehoyada adroitly reveals – can be a hugely productive analytical device, as long as one stops treating it as a matter of cultural propensity, an atavistic “value system” which drives Mediterraneans and explains their actions, and sees it instead as a language of positional claims which constitutes subjects and groups, from the interpersonal to the international.⁵ Similarly, idioms of family and kinship can be deployed when owners make “fatherly” claims on workers, but also through the contrasting rhetorics of universal brotherhood and international cousinage – Ben Yehoyada's sophisticated discussion of the latter gives lie to the claims that classic anthropological kinship analytics have run out of steam. Class too can be scaled up to make sense of relations across the Mediterranean as fundamentally extractive and exploitative – although this point could have been more substantively elaborated.

This sophisticated repurposing of classic theoretical devices provides the link, in Chapters 5 to 7, between close ethnographic description of life onboard, and historical accounts of key episodes in the history of the channel of Sicily: the “fish war” with Tunisia, and the construction of the Transmed Pipeline. In these cases, scaling is a matter of metaphorical shifts across segmentary social space. Elsewhere in the book, scaling is evoked in a different and more literal sense, to show how the motorization of the Mazara trawlers post-Second World War materially expanded the reach of the fishing fleet and made trawlers' penetration into Tunisian waters into an option in the first place (Chap. 3). A similar kind of material scaling is evident in the fascinating discussion of how different kinds of fish caught onboard are diverted into channels of gifts to patrons on various scales – from landlords in Mazara, to politicians in Rome (Chap. 4).

A few years ago, Horden and Purcell lamented, “We have no comprehensive historical and ethnographic study of ‘the idea of the Mediterranean’.”⁶ While *The Mediterranean Incarnate* cannot lay claim to that comprehensiveness – it remains a view of the Mediterranean from the channel of Sicily, and a view from the eastern Mediterranean, for instance, would likely look quite different – its deft use of scale outlines a theoretical charter for what such comprehensiveness might look like. And the book demonstrates, into the bargain, that “politically attuned discourse analysis”⁷ about the Mediterranean as an idea, can go hand in hand with careful empirical study of the actual practices, economics and materials that make up the shifting reality of the Mediterranean as a place. Ben Yehoyada's account of “region formation” is ambitious

and engaging precisely because it seeks to straddle those divisions between ideal and real, discourse and practice, metaphor and materiality.

Nevertheless, it might have paid to examine further some of the tensions between these semiotic and material dynamics. The metaphorical scale-shifts (concerns with international honour and kinship) and the material ones (extending networks of power and influence through fish and engines) operate along rather different principles and sometimes to different effects. Drawing these differences out more could perhaps take even further the characterization of “region formation”. In making it possible to articulate such questions, Ben Yehoyada’s book has opened a rich analytical seam, to which future historians and anthropologists of the Mediterranean will surely return for rich findings.

In sum, while bringing the Mediterranean back to anthropology is in many ways a bold move, the way in which this book has done it is bolder still. Indeed, the book is remarkable as one of a few recent works to resuscitate another figure which anthropologists had come to feel uncertain about: form and formalism itself. Anthropologists have long been accustomed to talk of material and semiotic “networks”, assemblages, flows and relations.⁸ It would have been tempting to seek to resurrect the anthropological Mediterranean solely through these somewhat shapeless analytics – the kind an anthropologist has recently described in a different context as producing a “relational-processual haze”.⁹ By mining classic formalist analytics (cross-cousin marriage, patron-client relations, segmentary social formations) for new insight, Ben Yehoyada has pointed towards a distinctive and refreshing way to bringing the Mediterranean back to form, and form back to anthropology.

Notes

1. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); John G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1965).
2. Michael Herzfeld, “Honour and Shame: Problems in the Comparative Analysis of Moral Systems,” *Man: New Series* 15, no. 2 (1980): 339–51; Michael Herzfeld, “The Horns of the Mediterraneanist Dilemma,” *American Ethnologist* 11, no. 3 (1984); David Gilmore, *Honour and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1987); Michael Herzfeld, “Practical Mediterraneanism: Excuses for Everything, from Epistemology to Eating,” in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, edited by William V. Harris and Columbia University (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 45–63.
3. Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford [U.K.]; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000); Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, “The Mediterranean and ‘the New Thalassology,’” *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 722–40.
4. Michael Herzfeld, “‘As in Your Own House’: Hospitality, Ethnography, and the Stereotype of Mediterranean Society,” in Gilmore, ed., *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*; A. Shryock, “The New Jordanian Hospitality: House, Host, and Guest in the Culture of Public Display,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 1 (2004): 35–62; A. Shryock, “Thinking about Hospitality, with Derrida, Kant and the Balga Bedouin,” *Anthropos* 103 (2008): 405–21; Matei Candea, “Derrida en Corse? Hospitality as Scale-Free Abstraction,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18 (2012): S34–48.
5. Cf. Paul Dresch, “The Significance of the Course Events Take in Segmentary Systems,” *American Ethnologist* 13, no. 2 (May 1986): 309–24.
6. Horden and Purcell, “The Mediterranean and ‘the New Thalassology,’” 729.
7. *Ibid.*
8. See, for instance, Stephen J. Collier and Aihwa Ong, eds., *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics and Ethics as Anthropological Problems* (London: Blackwell, 2005).

9. C. Humphrey, "Reassembling Individual Subjects: Events and Decisions in Troubled Times," *Anthropological Theory* 8, no. 4 (2008): 357–80.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518967.2019.1671008>



The architecture of the Christian Holy Land: reception from Late Antiquity through the Renaissance, by Kathryn Blair Moore, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2017, 436 pp., 223 b/w illus., 22 colour illus., £78.99 (hardback), ISBN 9781107139084

Natural materials of the Holy Land and the visual translation of place, 500–1500, edited by Renana Bartal, Neta Bodner, and Bianca Kühnel, London, Routledge, 2017, 266 pp., 10 colour illus., 54 b/w illus., £120.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781472451774

The Holy Land seems to be irreplaceable – given that this small piece of ground in the eastern Mediterranean has been fought over for millennia. In truth, precisely because this territory is utterly unique, there have been myriad attempts to tap, transfer, or reproduce it, thereby creating a plurality of Holy Lands. In a seminal article of 1942 art historian Richard Krautheimer analysed the different modes of replicating Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre in medieval buildings in Europe. More recently, recreations and receptions of Jerusalem in Europe have been the subject of major projects such as the ERC-led project "Projections of Jerusalem in Europe" (directed by Bianca Kühnel, 2010–2016), the AHRC-led project "Imagining Jerusalem, 1099 to the Present Day" (directed by Helen Smith, 2013–2016), and the project funded by the Norwegian Research Council on the "Jerusalem Code" (directed by Kristin B. Aavitsland, 2015–2018).

The present book by art historian Kathryn Blair Moore starts out by criticizing what she considers a somewhat one-sided reception within art history of Krautheimer's argument. As unique places, she argues, the Holy Land and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are unsuited as a general model of how architectural symbolism in medieval Christianity worked. Nevertheless, she opts to follow Krautheimer's lead in studying the recreations of the Holy Land through architectural forms.

Moore's bold and eminently readable book covers a timespan of well over a millennium. As she states from the beginning, her subject is how the buildings of the Holy Land collectively entered the European imagination. In doing so, Moore also endeavours "to disregard conceptual boundaries, ... assumptions about period divisions, ... as well also as geographical boundaries" (xvi). Naturally, such a project runs the peril of being at once too general and too specific. Moore's book does not entirely succeed in avoiding those dangers.

Moore's narrative is structured chronologically, dividing the book into four parts, each of which corresponds to a particular era in the history of the Christian Holy Land. While the first and the third parts are characterized as periods of absence and alienation, parts two and four picture eras of real or imagined possession. In the beginning there is a close reading of the account by the seventh-century pilgrim Arculf as recorded by