

## For whom the Mediterranean Sea is "Our Sea"?

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*In the book II of his Geography, Strabo made clear the purpose of this discipline: "to describe the inhabited world in its known parts" (Strabo, II, 5, 5). The geographer had first to learn from astronomy, physics (Strabo, II, 5, 1) and geometry (Strabo, II, 5, 4) in order to achieve such a result. He might then tackle with his specific task: "to define the inhabited world" (Strabo, II, 5, 4). In order to do it, he represented it through a map (Strabo, II, 5, 13). This one showed how the inhabited space was built: "It is first the sea that describes the land" (Strabo, II, 5, 17). Several gulfs indented the inhabited space - more particularly: "The one we call the Inner Sea or "our sea" (Strabo, II, 5, 18). "From all these points of view [...] our sea owns a great superiority and thus it is from there that we have to start our World tour" (Strabo, II, 5, 18). Strabo presented the approach of the geographer in a perfectly objective way: he was a man of science. His tone changed abruptly when dealing with the inner sea: he appropriated it when saying: "our" sea. We would reflect here over the use of this possessive, which supposes a global knowledge of the Mediterranean World by people who consider it their home – a situation that seldom predominated.*

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### Antiquity and After

#### *The Inner Sea: Achilles' Shield and Ionian Map*

The first image of the world left by the Greeks is that of Achilles' shield in the oldest literary work they retained: the *Iliad's*.

It was to the demand of Tethys, whose son would participate in the battle under the walls of Troy, that Hephaestus forged his weapons. Only Achilles's shield was described at length. In order to do it, "he threw into the fire stiff bronze, tin, precious gold, silver..." metals, incrustation of which gave a kind of damascening, pertaining to a technology disappeared, people said, with the fall of the Mycenaean kingdoms. Homer could in this way describe an already old thing in his time.

This "multiple scenery" was given as "the fruit of thoughts" of the smith-god, a somewhat magician god. It was a way to say that it had a deep meaning. It was, however, nothing less than a representation of the World: a circular – and flat – image of a microcosm completely surrounded by the waters of the Ocean (*Okeanos*) River, the River that found in itself its end or, preferably, its source (Figure 1).

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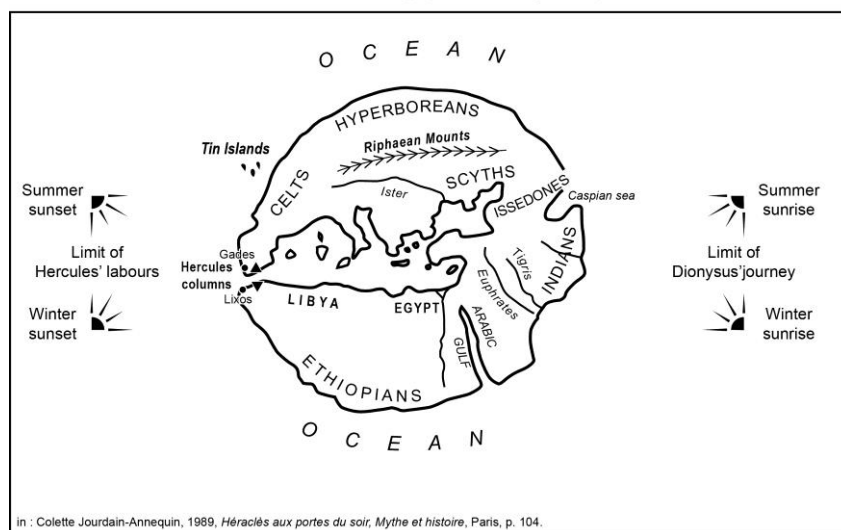


*thalassa*" and, in an older period, *asori thalassa*, in both cases: the sea in the middle, an image that was that of many Mediterranean people: among Berberians, "the sea between the lands", among Hebrews, "the sea in the middle". At the centre of this inner sea, Greece, and everyone could precise that "the navel of the World" was Delphi; the "*omphalos*" was there to prove it and to remind the stone that two eagles, sent by Zeus, had let it drop just in order to determine its centre.

The Mediterranean Sea was thus the inner sea, a sea to the centre of which lay Greece. One would be tempted to think that Greeks considered it their Sea. A passage in the *Phaedo* of Plato was, on this subject, much more interesting than the shortened quotation normally given of it. Concerning the destiny of souls – his real subject – Socrates passed down a part of his experience:

"Earth is a very great thing, where we, living in the region which starts from the Phae and goes to the Columns of Heracles, occupy a small part, living around the sea as ants or frogs do around a pond; elsewhere, there are a great number of other men, living in other regions".

**Figure 2.** *The Ionian Map*



There was thus an elsewhere, and the Mediterranean basin from the bottom of the Black Sea to Gibraltar. There were Greeks and other peoples... neighbouring peoples and those who the Ionian map designated and the Ephorus enumerated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B. C.: "Celts to the West of the inhabited World, Scythians to the North, Indians to the East and Aethiopiains to the South..." (I, 2, 28). It was true that colonization from archaism, was prolonged in some areas during the classical period, located Greeks, in a way admittedly discontinuous, but persistent, all around the Mediterranean, which became their space, their world (Jourdain-Annequin 1989).

*The Mediterranean, World-space of Greeks*

Of this world-space that the Mediterranean Sea was, Greeks got conscious very early - Hesiod (late 7<sup>th</sup>, early 8<sup>th</sup> century B. C.) for instance, he knew the existence of its oriental shores since his father came from the Asia Minor (Aeolia precisely) to settle in Ascra, in Boeotia. He knew as surely that this sea, on which it was possible to sail (very cautiously, indeed), ended up, faraway to the West, "where began the inaccessible sea, the Ocean".

"There", Hesiod said, "the end of everything"

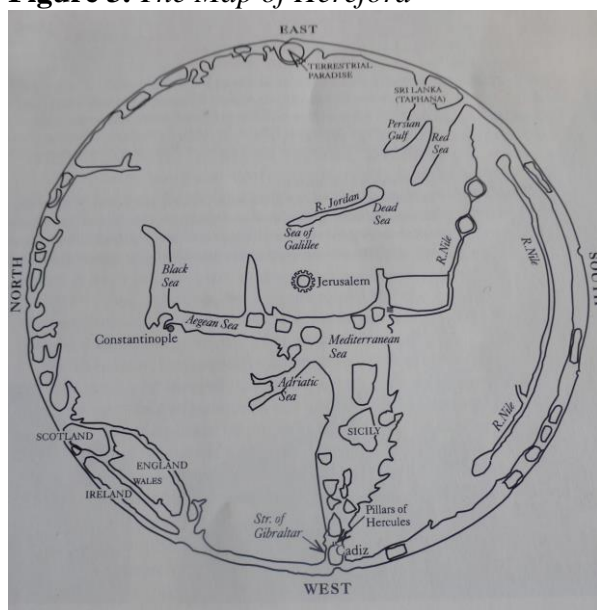
"There the frightening residence of infernal Night, wrapped in dark clouds, towered up."

"There live the children of dark Night: Sleep and Death" (758-759).

"There, finally, stands up the noisy residence of the God of Hell, the powerful Hades and of fearsome Persephone" (767-68).

Beyond this reassuring World of the Mediterranean was, in fact, the *Zophos*, a word used by Pindar in order to say what was beyond Gadès. With a heavy meaning, this term connoted at the same time darkness and Hell, but also West (*Nemean IV*: 68-69) and summed up the three great fears of man: night, the unknown and death.

**Figure 3.** *The Map of Hereford*



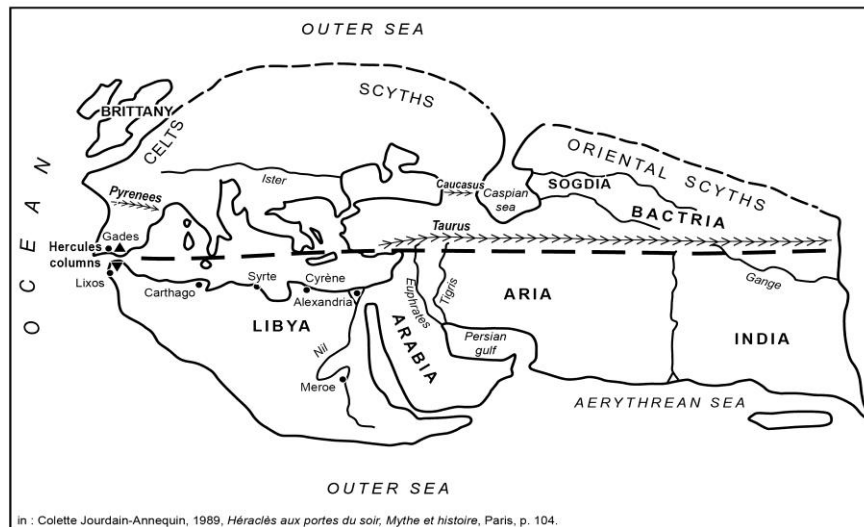
Source: Harvey, 1996: 1.

These heroes are, for instance, those of the *Nostoi* (i.e. e. returns) of all those who, coming back from the War of Troy, ran aground the Mediterranean shores before reaching their homeland. As Ulysses, who found again the civilized World of "bread eaters" and more precisely his island of Ithaca only after ten years of wanderings to the lands of Lotophagi,

Cyclops or Laestrygonians, in the Island of Circe, in that of the Sun (Trinacria, Sicily and its three headlands) or the Ortygia of Calypso... an mythic anthropology more than a geography even if people tried to locate these different calls...

A move back to a cartographic representation is enough to show the weight of this Greek imagination. This map, however, is a medieval one. Preserved in the Hereford Cathedral, it dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 3). It is a circular one, while the Greeks, from the 4<sup>th</sup> century B. C., had got conscious, with Democritus, that the Earth had an elongated shape and that oblong maps (that of Eudoxus, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., was twice as long as wide and that of the Alexandrians, of Eratosthenes for instance, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., was even longer) (Figure 4). One notes also that, in the Hereford map, the Eastern lands have taken more room. The change in orientation is even more remarkable. It was no more the North which was at the top of the map, but the East, connoted with the Earthly paradise. In fact, it was a total change of perspective. The map remained ethno-centred, but its centre was no longer Greece: it was Jerusalem. And yet! The vignettes, which gave information and livened up the map, struck. If it was normal that fish continued to represent the sea – the swordfish (*miles maris*) with its long sword all along its body, other features are more amazing:

1. In the cartouche MARE MEDITERANEA (sic): the expression is thus known much earlier than said by geographers.
2. Two great Mediterranean islands are draught: Sicily, with Etna, and Crete with Mount Ida, place where Zeus lived as a child and above all, an enormous labyrinth, reference to the mythology and to the people of Greek heroes: Minos, who is said to have reigned over the sea, Daedalus and his travels to Sicily, Theseus the Athenian and his victory over the Minotaur, Icarus, who, for having flown too close to the Sun, fell in the Mediterranean.
3. Even the limits of Mediterranean are seen, too, in reference with Greek myths : the Golden Fleece in Colchis, land of Phaeacia, at the bottom of the Black Sea - the Euxine Sea of Greeks - evoked this great Mediterranean epic that was the expedition of Argonauts, the adventure of a generation of heroes (that which preceded the War of Troy), who, on the nave Argo and around Jason, undertook to make a fabulous travel in order to bring back to Iolcos, in Thessalia, the marvellous fleece of the winged ram that Zeus had send on Earth in order to save two children (Phrixos and Helle) that had to be sacrificed. Their way back from Colchis, where they had grabbed the Golden Fleece thanks to Medea, was a true journey all around the World known by the Greeks: they moved up the Istros (Danube) until the Adriatic Sea, then the Eridan (Po River) – and by the Rhône, came back to the Mediterranean.

**Figure 4.** Eratosthenes' Map

To the West, the columns of Heracles prove, too, up to what point was preserved until the 13<sup>th</sup> century the idea of a Mediterranean marked by Greek imagination. They served as a reminder that the hero had, once, to conquer the marvellous oxen of Geryon in the distant Erythia and to pick up the golden apples looked after by the Hesperides, daughters of Night, equally situated at the limits of the known World. These two columns, erected at the ends of Libya and Europe in order to leave "an immortal memory of his expedition", marked, for the Greeks the Western limits of the "oicouménè", gave a boundary to the space claimed by civilization (a civilization which, quite evidently, was that of the city)... a space to conquer also. The myth, indeed, legitimized and justified colonization. What Hercules had done, Greeks used it as a reason to do it again "for the greatest profit of humankind, as said by Diodorus" (V, 1, 2). Greeks, and after them, Romans, since it was Rome that, at the time of Diodorus (that of Cesar) from now on pacified and, to the barbarian anarchy, substituted the reign of justice and law, it was Rome that will, really, make the Mediterranean *mare nostrum*.

#### *Mare Nostrum: Rome and the Mediterranean*

I base my analysis of the ancient Mediterranean on geographers' works, but paradoxically, I shall introduce this last part by the reflections of Polybius, an historian of the second century B.C. (210-145). Since he pertained to an important family of Megalopolis, he was one of the hostages that Greece had to hand over to Rome after its victory. He lived there for 40 years, frequenting the noblest Romans (the Scipios). In his *History*, he told how Rome had conquered the World. Polybius, like later Diodorus, Strabo and many Greek intellectuals, not only accepted the Roman domination, but considering Rome as a full member of the civilized community that the Greek World formed, he fought for the cause of its enterprises.

"This history, told him, will differ from that of its precursors". He had the feeling to live in a time of disruption. He was in fact convinced to be born "at the right time":

"In the previous periods, the World events were, in some way, dispersed since the diverse ventures of conquest, and their realization, as well as the theatre of operations, stood apart, [but with the Roman conquest] history comes to form an organic whole, the events of Italia and Africa are intertwined with those of Asia and Greece and the whole tends towards a unique and same aim" (*History*, I, 3, 3-4).

In this way, the dispersed *pragamata* took shape and transformed them into a *historia*, a universal history uniting in itself all the particular histories into a coherent whole, composed of linked elements... (Zangara 2007).

One may in this way "see from above", the Greek historian said, "Like a cartographer" (I, 4, 6).

It is, it appears, very interesting to see an ancient historian getting conscious of the epistemological break that the event introduced, a break that concerned also the way to see the world, the Mediterranean certainly. It was about Rome and its conquests, Rome and its project (we are still far from the Empire) that united the "islets" until then isolated and that, through its presence from now on continuous, made of the Mediterranean the *hemas thalassan of Greeks*, the *mare nostrum* of Romans.

The Mediterranean was, indeed, at the heart of the *Geography* of Strabo.

"It is mainly the sea that describes the land and gives it its appearance, shaping gulfs... isthmuses; peninsulas, headlands; rivers and mountains have to be added. Such are the elements, which allow, indeed, to distinguish the continents, peoples, the sites favourable for cities and all the characteristics a regional map is full from" (II, 5, 17).

In the book II (II, 5, 18), he described the Ocean (or the outer sea) and the four great gulfs that resulted from it: the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Arabic Gulf and the fourth that much prevailed over the previous ones: the inner sea, or "our sea":

"It begins to the West by the straight of the columns, stretches out until the oriental basin with variable breadths then, tearing itself, ends in two gulfs of open sea, one on the left we call the Euxine Sea, the other formed by the sum of the seas of Egypt, Pamphylia, Issos".

As for the land that hemmed in "our sea", it was divided in three parts:

"Among them, it is Europe that got the more varied forms; for Libya, it is the opposite; Asia is almost between".

Who cut up the World in this way? It was a question already asked by Herodotus, heir of an already built up knowledge: he criticized the first maps and this Earth "very round as drawn with a pair of compasses", and where, he said, Asia would be equal to Europe (Histories IV: 36), memory certainly of an ancient conception that made of Africa a simple extension of Asia. Herodotus knew also the tripartite division and, if for Hecataeus, it was the Tanais (the Don River) that separated Europe and Asia, for Herodotus it was the Phasis.

Things have already changed with Ptolemy, a geographer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. (about 100 – about 180).

His geographic round-the-world trip no more took the sea as its central point. It was made in 30 regions and these regions, divided into continents [Europe (books I – II – III), Libya (IV), Asia (V à VII)] were no more described in relation to the Mediterranean. His approach was almost inverse to Strabo's one: the seas were included into our inhabited World and if the Mediterranean, with the "gulfs" consisted of (Adriatic Sea, Aegean Sea, Propontis, Euxine Sea) and with the "straight of Heracles", this narrow channel that opened in the Ocean, ceased to be the heart of his *Geography*, it was still called "our sea". It will remain so: it will be such for the Arabs, the "sea of Rum", the sea of Rome.

### **The Idea that the Mediterranean Sea is "our sea" Disappeared with the Division of the Roman Empire then Islam**

#### *Cultural Divisions that Added Up*

The idea that the Mediterranean was "our sea" weakened after the transfer to Constantinople of the centre of the Roman Empire: the Black Sea weighted from then on as much as the inner sea itself, instead of being only its appendix. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Justinian tried to re-conquer the Western half of the Roman Empire, but contended with a part of North Africa and Italia and showed no interest for the Tyrrhenian Sea, Spain and what was becoming France.

With the Muslim conquest, the division of the Mediterranean area went further, to the East-West break that the diverging paths of Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christianity adds up a North-South division. Land roads structured the Muslim World much more than maritime ones (Lombard 1971), it developed its maritime activities to the South and East of Arabia much more than in the Mediterranean. The maps then drawn by Muslim cartographers stressed this choice (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** *The Map of Al-Idrisi, Mid 15<sup>th</sup> Century*

Source: Bodleian Library, ms. Pococke 375, ff. 3v-4r.

Did the feeling of a deep community shared by all the lands bathed by the inner sea disappear? This question arose, but there were few elements for answering it.

*In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Travels Stressed More the Diversity than the Unity of the Mediterranean World*

The dominant perception at the beginning of modern times was that of a whole culturally and strategically important, but deeply divided – an area of exchange and confrontation much more than a tightly bound whole. Cultural unity did not exist: the opposition between a Christian West and a Muslim East dominated, to which added up that between Roman Catholicism (or Protestantism) and Orthodoxy.

Italy was one of the major centres of civilization and fine arts. The Grand Tour of young English aristocrats drove them to Venice, Florence, Rome and Naples in order to observe and absorb Roman Antiquity and the masterpieces of the Renaissance. Until the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the only known monuments of ancient Greece were those of Great Greece and Sicily – but except for Naples, these areas were not included into the Grand Tour.

Travelling in the Ottoman Empire became easier, safer and more frequent during the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Athens, the Acropolis and the other ancient sites of Greece and the Greek islands were then discovered. Travellers also visited Istanbul, the shores of the Asian Minor, Lebanon and the Holy Land. They came back with a more precise idea of the Orient, perceived at the same time as the cradle of all civilization, with its innumerable Egyptian, Levantine, Hellenistic and Roman ruins, and as a World that Islam severed from the West. Orientalism took in this way its modern outlook (Said 1978).

### **The Idea that the Mediterranean is "Our Sea" Reappeared from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

The idea that the Mediterranean is "our sea" reappeared from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Science stressed then the unity of the Mediterranean environment. Artists became enthusiastic with its light. Through taking the control of the whole Mediterranean World, the Western imperialism unified and took over it.

#### *Natural Sciences Revealed the Similarity of Mediterranean Environments*

Many travellers were from then on natural scientists. They were sensitive to the geology, the topography, the vegetation and the skies of the Mediterranean. As soon as 1781, Jean-Louis Giraud-Soulavie distinguished in Southern France the existence of climates laid on tiers, the warmer going from the inner sea to the limit of olive tree – the Mediterranean climate, we should say, but he ignored the expression: the adjective Mediterranean, in the modern sense, that which designates the natural or social realities owing their characteristics to the proximity of the inner sea, only appeared in 1805, in a publication of the Swiss botanist Augustin de Candolle.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the naturalistic approach progressed rapidly. In France, it benefited by the scientific missions successively organized in Egypt, Morée (Peloponnese) and Algeria (Bourguet et al. 1998), they provided the elements necessary to build the new scientific domain constituted by the Mediterranean world and environments.

Thanks to the landscapes of the Mediterranean forests, scrub or moors, scientists became conscious of the unity of the inner sea environments. The delimitation of areas of vegetation was, however, a tricky one: it involved the moving from cartography of the different vegetal species to that of vegetal formations. In his *Reasoned Botanical Geography* (1855), Alphonse de Candolle stressed the difficulties of such an approach and renounced to develop it.

Geographers were bolder (Morhange and Ruel-Drossos 2014). In 1873 Vidal de la Blache noted:

"Vine, olive trees, fig trees still compose, in spite of the ravages of deforestation, the characteristic finery of Mediterranean shores. This likeness of vegetation expresses the unity of the theatre where the historic life of ancient peoples developed"

As much as Vidal de la Blache Elisée Reclus was struck by the climatic singularity of the Mediterranean World. As stressed by Anne Ruel (1993), he saw in the Mediterranean Sea "this great mediating agent that moderates the climates of all the countries along it and facilitates in this way their accessibility" (Reclus 1976: 33).

Two ways to conceive the Mediterranean world took then shape among geographers.

Vidal de la Blache explored the climatic path and its incidence on human activity. Theobald Fischer (1877, 1878-1879) had just stressed an essential fact, the unity of the Mediterranean vegetation resulted from the dry summers of the Mediterranean area – even if the length of dryness was not the same on its Northern and Southern shores. Sunshine and the purity of the sky gave the feeling of an environment where life was easy. The long dry period explained the avarice of nature, the difficulties of farming and cattle or sheep rearing, and the originality of the ways of life which allowed to overcome them. From one end of the Mediterranean area to the other, people had learnt to grow wheat (and barley), olive tree and vine (Vidal de la Blache 1886). They associated the cultivation of plains, high plains and terraces cut along slopes with an often transhumant or nomadic cattle or sheep rearing. These ways of life showed how the climatic constraints unified and diversified the Mediterranean world at the same time:

"The physical nature, in the Mediterranean region, went along with the ways of life the influence of which on population is very diverse: the cultivation of cereals such as barley or wheat, that of small trees, originally vine, fig tree, olive tree and pastoral rearing, mainly goats and sheep" (Vidal de la Blache 1918,1922: 81).

Since none of these ways of life was able to provide human beings with all they needed, exchange developed between the different Mediterranean environments and explained the building of complex forms of regional organization.

It was thus, at the more modest level, that of the ways of life, which exploited the environments, that the deep diversity and unity of the Mediterranean world might be read: they resulted from patterns of behaviour that slowly evolved: ways of life. Vidal de la Blache opened the way to the long duration history – and drew attention on the Mediterranean ethnography.

The path followed by Elisée Reclus was different. As the author of touristic guides on Côte-d'Azur, he was sensitive to the power of attraction of the Mediterranean: this explained the early development of tourism; this had overall made the inner sea a great centre of civilization. Robert Ilbert and Anne Ruel stress this contribution:

"The Mediterranean remained, however, until the 19th century a space of navigation, a maritime reality. It was still not our 'mother' Méditerranée, at the same time space, cultural and even political value. People had to wait Elisée Reclus and his *Géographie Universelle* in order to see it defined, in 1876 as a 'liquid continent' and designates 'the dry' lands that man inhabits." (Ilbert and Ruel 1994: 283)

In this way Reclus gave back to the Mediterranean the weight it has lost since a long time.

*The New Geopolitical Stakes of the Inner Sea*

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the interest that the educated classes expressed for the Mediterranean was mainly historical, cultural and artistic – the three elements being closely linked. Europeans knew that they were the inheritors of ancient Greece and Rome. Christianity tied them to the Holy Land. The idea that the first source of civilization was located in Egypt or Mesopotamia was diffused by orientalism. Economically, the Mediterranean had been dethroned par the Atlantic Ocean and trade with India and the Far East followed the Cape of Good Hope or the Cape Horn roads.

Attitudes changed rapidly. The Ottoman Empire declined, but it offered good commercial opportunities. There was a new interest for the Black Sea since Russia controlled a part of its shores and had got the freedom of passage for its commercial ships through the Straits by the treaty of 1784. Levant appeared again as a stage on the road to India.

In the *Système de la Méditerranée* he published in 1832, Michel Chevalier started with the idea that the Occident and Orient were at war since always, but the emergence of elites opened to progress in countries like Egypt let hope that this antagonism would soon disappear, resulting in the development of maritime roads extended by railways. Complementarities should be developed and prosperity should appear.

What happened was different. The Ottoman Empire was declining: it lost successively Egypt, Algeria, Cyprus, Tunisia and Libya. The Western powers no more tolerated the actions of pirates based in Tripoli, Algiers or El Harrach. The United States intervened in Libya in 1812, and France took Algiers in 1830 and conquered the whole country.

The saint-simonian dream inspired Ferdinand de Lesseps in his determination to open a channel through the Suez isthmus: it was inaugurated in 1869. The Mediterranean ceased to be a cul-de-sac. This allowed a rapid growth of trade between Europe, India and the Far East. Vidal de la Blache stressed the geopolitical consequences of the opening of this new road as soon as 1873. Elisée Reclus also perceived the significance of this new itinerary.

The interest that the West expressed for the Mediterranean was thenceforth closely linked to its new place in the geostrategic World scene. The European powers with a Mediterranean shore – France, Spain, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Ottoman Empire - struggle for developing their influence. The United Kingdom dominated it through the control of Egypt and its channel, Gibraltar, Malta and Cyprus. All these countries had an interest in the status of the Holy Land.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Eastern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea were parts of the Ottoman Empire and Morocco. At the eve of World War One, Algeria, Cyprus, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco Libya and Crete had been colonized by Western countries: this expansion favoured the perception of the Mediterranean as a fundamental cultural unit.

*In the Artistic Field: From Exoticism to the Worship of Sun*

New ways of perceiving the Mediterranean developed during the nineteenth century. At the time of Chateaubriand, travellers were both sensitive to the charm of the ruins of Rome and Greece and the exoticism of the Orient. Later on, they began to stress the quality of the Mediterranean light. Théophile Gautier discovered it when moving through Sierra Morena to Andalucia:

"Light streamed in this ocean of mountains like liquid gold and silver, throwing of phosphorescent foam of glittering spangles." (Gautier 1840: 60)

Twenty years later, the reaction of Hippolyte Taine when discovering the gulf of Marseilles was even stronger:

"An immense lake, which towards the right had no end, radiant, peaceful, the shining colour of which owns the delicacy of the most charming violet or blooming periwinkle. Scratched mountains seemed covered with an angelic glory since so much light inhabited them, and this light, imprisoned by air and distance, seemed to be their garment [...]. And regarding this Sun that blazed up, and from its immobile torch poured a river of gold on the sea, nothing in the World could give an idea nor provide an image of it." (Taine 1862/1897:107)

The evolution of painting was similar. In the first half of the nineteenth century, some painters, like Corot, went to Rome in order to discover classical ruins and landscapes, and others, like Eugène Fromentin and Eugène Delacroix travelled to Algeria, Delacroix to Morocco and others to Egypt in order to paint more colourful civilizations. They paralleled the interest of William Hunt, David Roberts or David Wilkie in orientalism.

The attitudes changed with the new interest of scholars, especially German ones, for the deep originality of Ancient Greece, with its emphasis on movement, sport and the role of nature in its religious beliefs. Classical civilizations owed a part of their characteristics to their environment.

Instead of being a kind of basket offering different forms of civilization, the Mediterranean began to be conceived as a unified area offering a wonderful light everywhere and a long hot and dry season. As long as realist or impressionist French painters had been mainly sensitive to the play of sun and shadow, they had, however, preferred to work in the temperate atmosphere of Western and Northern France (Rewald 1955, Varii Auctores 1985, Varii Auctores 2000).

*The Mediterranean Tropism of Artists*

The artistic movements that appeared after impressionism from the mid 1880s gave more emphasis to the brightness of light and the intensity of colours. The landscapes of Mediterranean France became to attract painters at that time: Paul Cézanne, Claude Monnet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

The turning point occurred in 1886-1888. New curiosities were emerging, as shown by the pointillism of Seurat and Signac. Vincent van Gogh was staying in Arles since 1887. Gauguin, who was developing a new conception of painting in Pont-Aven, in Brittany, joined him in 1888. Sun and colour became central to the new artistic sensibility, as shown by the dazzling sun over a wheat field that Vincent painted at that time. As a consequence, the Mediterranean conceived as a unified environment attracted more artists.

*The Mediterranean Ports: Complex and Up to a Point Similar Societies*

In spite of its divisions, the Mediterranean world presented, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of 20<sup>th</sup>, some shared features as exemplified by its great ports, Marseille, Algiers, Livorno, Venice, Alexandria, Thessalonica or Istanbul (Carpentier and Lebrun 1998). Their populations were very diverse: Istanbul was a Turkish, Greek and Armenian city, with groups of Muslims of the Balkans, Circassians and Western residents. Thessalonica was Greek, Albanian, Macedonian, and Turkish but mainly peopled by Sephardic Jews. Alexandria was mainly Egyptian – Muslim, Copt or Jewish – with important colonies of Greek, Italian, French and British people. Livorno was mainly Italian, but a part of these Italians were Jews of Sephardic ancestry. Marseille was Provençal, but with many other Frenchmen from Southern or Northern France, Corsicans, Jews, Italians and Greeks. It would be easy to extend such an enumeration...

In these harbours, groups were diverse and often struggled one against the other, but their coexistence brought all these urban societies together. All their components vied in their efforts to integrate what modernity offered. Beyond the plasticity and the aptitude to live together that the populations of the great ports of the inner sea owed to their diversity, they were united by their race toward a better-enlightened future. For many people, it was the proof that a new Mediterranean man was coming to life.

*The Mediterranean World Became an Object of Desire and Study*

The new interest in the Mediterranean displayed by writers and painters, and the presence of an already international society in its main ports, found a deep echo among the peoples of Central and North-Western Europe. It was a time when many persons were getting tired of the brutality of the new forms of industrialism. They did not like the landscapes it was responsible for. Many people increasingly resented the sexual repression of Victorian ethics. The paintings of Gauguin, now settled in Tahiti and then

the Marquesas, offered images of societies where nudity and sex were enjoyed (Staszak 2003). For the new sensibility, the Mediterranean was a good place for these new experiments. Was not it proved by the Olympic Games that Pierre de Coubertin revived in 1893? Did it not allow, at least during summer time, the practice of nudism? In the Mediterranean, tourism had been mainly a winter activity since the seventeenth century. It became increasingly a summer one, centred on sun- and sea-bathing. The rivieras became increasingly attractive.

San Agaro, North of Barcelona, offers a wonderful example of this transformation. This sea-resort was created in the 1920s by Josep Ensesa. He was inspired by the *noucentist* movement in its Catalan form. The aim was to provide the Catalan bourgeoisie with a place, which would be at the same time faithful to the regional traditions and open to modernity. Its architect, Rafael Maso, conceived it as a truly Mediterranean settlement, with low roofs, terraces and pergolas. It conveyed an atmosphere of genuine *mediterraneity*.

### **The First 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Move Back to the Idea of *Mare Nostrum***

*Archaeology Stressed the Unity of the Roman Mediterranean that Western Countries Had to Recreate*

Archaeology was rediscovering at the same time the breadth of Roman colonization in North Africa and the splendour of Hellenistic and Roman worlds in Egypt and Levant. The ruins of great colonnades, arenas, theatres were not only present in Italy, Spain, France or the Balkans; they were also numerous from Volubilis in Morocco, Timgad in Algeria to Palmyra in Syria. A same power ruled in the past from the West to the East of the Sea and created there the same landscapes, built the same villas, drew the same cities. It was a time when economic prosperity went along with a high civilization.

Sharing the same civilization? Surely. But deeper, the proximity of all the cultures of the Mediterranean area was explored. Geography, ethnology and sociology stressed how much the attitudes and concerns of the rural world and popular classes were – and are – similar all around the Mediterranean. Germaine Tillion, working in the Aurès (Algeria) in the thirties, was struck by the similarities between the Chaouias she was studying and the peasants of the French Mediterranean area she knew when a child (Tillion 2001, 2004).

Had not the colonizers, French above all, but also Italian, Spanish or British, to revive this tradition of greatness and to give back to the Mediterranean its role of centre of civilization and economic prosperity? The French protectorate in Tunisia was-not-it justified by the aptitude of the colonizer to transform Africa (in the limits of the Roman province of this name) into a wheat granary and a great producer of olive oil – as proved, in

this case, by the plantations that covered again, around Sfax, all the space they covered at the time of Rome?

The interest of Frenchmen for the Mediterranean was, in some way, a consequence of the French defeat of 1870 against the Prussians:

"Since the 1870 war, France looked towards the South, trying to find a way to overcome its defeat. An axis between France and Italy was built up: it was the only able to resuscitate the Latin greatness against the announced spectre of decadence" (Ilbert and Ruel 1994: 286).

The First World War hastened this evolution: in order to reinforce the ties with Italy, formerly allied with Germany, France exalted the Latinity it shared with its neighbour. Was not it because of this shared inheritance that the two countries had the responsibility to take charge of the destiny of the whole Mediterranean World? The theme remained alive at the end of the war:

"The return to peace [...] marked the decline of the Germanic danger and led to a more global vision of the Mediterranean reality. It escaped from the France-Germany opposition while remaining based on the France-Italy axis. As a result, it was quite naturally among Italian and French intellectuals that the first clearly 'Mediterranean' events were organized." (Ilbert and Ruel 1994: 287)

For the Frenchmen, the Italians and all the Europeans that the Mediterranean ideal seduced, the Mediterranean became "our sea", *mare nostrum*, again. The fortune of this Mediterranean vision reached its highest point in the thirties (Témime 2002):

"[...] These 1930 years the Mediterranean effectively asserted itself as a new intellectual and political horizon. It was then that the Centre Universitaire Méditerranéen, directed by Paul Valéry, was created. It was at the same time that reviews and newspapers with an explicit reference to the Mediterranean in their title multiplied. [...] From Jean Ballard to Camus, many French intellectuals began to think under the sign of the Mediterranean." (Ilbert and Ruel 1994: 286)

Declarations of Mediterranean principles multiplied. For Gabriel Audisio

"There is no doubt that, for me, the Mediterranean should be a continent, not an inner lake, but a kind of liquid continent with solidified contours. Duhamel already told that it was not a sea, but a land. I am going further, I say: a homeland. And I precise that for the peoples of this sea, there is only one true homeland: the sea itself, the Mediterranean" (Audisio 1935 as cited in Ruel 1991: 11).



Some years later, an issue of *Cahiers du Sud* on the "genius of Occitania and the Mediterranean man" went further:

"Under the ill-assorted decor of religions, languages and races, the diverse populations who live around the Mediterranean share some affinity of behaviours and mores. There is a Mediterranean unity, a unity based on nature, much more real than we move back in the time... For, actually, there is no East, no West but only more or less developed regions, arranged around an inner sea that is a stronger entity than these opposites and realized the synthesis between East and West... The Mediterranean represents an eternal type of humanity." (Varii Auctores 1943)

Robert Ilbert and Anne Ruel stressed how much this fashion was paradoxical:

"Whatever the reasons, the years 1930 were those of the Mediterranean narrative. This one hid diverse realities, from the corporatist interests of businessmen to fascism, but rightly, its success allowed it to cover a great plurality of meanings."

"If the Mediterranean was no more Latin, it was universal. In this period of late splendour for colonialism and of crisis of identities, it apparently became the only scale of analysis for those who tried to avoid to be trapped into the intra-European conflicts." (Ilbert and Ruel 1994: 287)

The best minds were indeed conscious of the part of dream that was incorporated into this passion:

"The myth of the Mediterranean [...] could only appear, as all other myths, through taking some distance from the real Mediterranean, which looks less and less like the idea we had of it [...]. In the past, the Mediterranean signified balance, moderation, and harmony. It is enough to look at a newspaper to note that it now signifies discord [...]. To reflect on the Mediterranean, to analyse this vague and seducing concept, the prestige of which is stronger and its content is shady, it is to question the relations between reality and imagination, between a wished existence and a real one [...]. The Mediterranean is finally only the image we form of it. What is remarkable is that all of us form an image of it, that it still is, for all those who have the chance, one day, to discover it, a point of attraction. There is a secrecy hidden there. It is perhaps not the one evoked by 'the land where the orange-tree blossoms'. It is the secrecy of this image itself, the secrecy of a dream that paradoxically confronts wealth and drought, joy of life and poverty, moderation and immoderation, happiness and tragedy. Who will tell for what reason we need a South? If the Mediterranean did not exist, it had to be invented." (Chiarelli 1935: 44)

## The Renewal of Mediterranean Divisions

### *From the Independences to Islamism*

Albert Camus pertained to the generation that believed that the Mediterranean was once again "our sea": was-not-it the idea seducing for a Frenchman of Algeria, as him? The Post-War period revealed how much reality differed from the myth that has triumphed for a time. The European control of the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea disappeared in two decades: the mandates given to France and the U. K. end up in the Levant. As soon as the late forties, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Jordan and Iraq escaped from London and Paris. The Suez war, in 1955, reminded to these two capital cities that the time was over when Egyptian independence was only a fake one. France renounced to its protectorates over Tunisia and Morocco in 1955. Algeria was torn by the liberation war of the *Front de Libération Nationale* from 1954 and became independent in 1962.

This was an immense drama for men who, like Albert Camus, had dreamed of a Mediterranean where human beings would be fraternal. The conflict between Israel and Arabic countries weighed heavily on the relations between the Arabic world and the West - relations that consequently kept constantly deteriorating. In spite of the abortive burst of energy of the Arabic Spring in 2011, the Orient seems to follow a more and more diverging way from that of Europe.

### *An Intellectual Field the Growth of Which Keeps Going*

The clash between the North and the South, the West and the East of the Mediterranean never was as dramatic as today. It does not prevent the reflection on the unity and diversity of the Mediterranean to progress steadily.

During the first period, it relied on the intellectual tools forged between 1880 and the First World War. The work of Fernand Braudel (1949, 1977, 1998) show it perfectly: a teacher for ten years in Constantine and Algiers, he married a Frenchwoman from Algeria and chose for his doctoral dissertation to analyse the Mediterranean policy of Philip II of Spain. Relying on the tools created by Vidal de la Blache, he was at the same time able to understand its complexities and the links that were woven between its components. Travelling from Archives to Archives, he developed and exceptional knowledge of the Western Mediterranean, its present realities as well as its history. It was, however, only in 1949 that he completed his doctoral dissertation. During the 35 years he had still to live, he worked constantly on the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean ethnology progressed equally very steadily, as proved by the publications of Julian Pitt-Rivers (1983/1977).

*New Perspective on the Mediterranean*

The contemporary evolution challenges the prevailing perception of the specificity of the Mediterranean: there, modernization introduces forms of farming or urban development similar to those observed everywhere in the World. History ceases to be thought along the perspective of Latin countries – France, Italy and Spain essentially. There is a growing interest for the way the Mediterranean was lived at other times and by other cultures (Fabre and Hilbert 2000, Hassani-Idrissi 2013).

At the same time, the largely economic approaches that prevailed in the past are challenged by resurrection of religious identities. People are more conscious of the strength of myths. The Mediterranean has ceased to be *mare nostrum*, but it remains highly seductive.

**Conclusion**

The Mediterranean was "our sea" only for some people and during some periods. It happened when a civilization was able to influence the whole Mediterranean area or rule over it: it was linked to imperialism. Diversity and oppositions are more germane to the Mediterranean than a shared identity. The idea was, however, a fecund one since it stimulated the study of the Mediterranean environment, cultures and civilizations and stressed what they shared.

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