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Le monde de l?Itinérance

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Reports of the death of the Mediterranean ? on some accounts from pollution, on others from conceptual redundancy ? have proved exaggerated. Conceptually, at least, ?The Mediterranean? flourishes as never before: an idea more than a sea. It seems ubiquitous on web sites and in book and journal titles as well as on conference posters, not to mention political action plans.

This apparent degree of interest might have astonished as well as delighted Braudel. Seldom since he published the second edition of his great work, in 1966, can Mediterranean history have had more devotees. (1) By contrast, the popularity must be disconcerting to those, mainly social anthropologists, who in the late twentieth century foretold the dissolution of the category ?Mediterranean?, except as a subject of discourse, in the face of deconstructive or postcolonial critique.(2) But is ?the Mediterranean? being used today in any more worthwhile sense, or is it now merely a vague and alluring geographical expression? Ancient historians find it an appealing substitute for ?Greece and Rome?. For medievalists and early modernists, this is the main theatre of the encounter of Christendom and Islam, whether in conflict (never can writing about crusade and jihad have had wider appeal) or coexistence (obviously resonant in an age of globalising and multiculturalism). For anthropologists, ?Mediterranean? is preferable to ?southern Europe?, which is still often what is really under discussion. To pick out, unfairly, one example of such smoke-screening: when you are gathering *Studies on the Sources, Contents and Influences of Islamic Civilization and Arabic Philosophy and Science*, and your table of contents has such sub-headings as ?Diachronic hermeneutics of Arabic texts?, how attractive it must be to relegate the ?Studies? part to the subtitle and call your volume *Words, Texts, and Concepts Cruising the Mediterranean Sea*

.(3)

In all this, ?the Mediterranean? is seldom defined or defended as a geographical or historical unit of study. Its applicability seems taken for granted: anything that has happened in or around this sea counts as Mediterranean and can find its way into suitably titled periodicals, even when what is really being discussed is archaic Greece, or the crusader states, or medieval Spain. Writing Mediterranean history of this kind has become almost too easy. Further serious discussion, historical and conceptual, is surely needed for the name of this ?middle sea? to be more than a ?flag of convenience?.

If ?the Mediterranean? is indeed to mean more than the sum of its parts, if it is to be more than a geographical expression, but a subject unified and distinct enough to make long-range comparisons illuminating, there are roughly three ways of characterising it. The first stresses the commonplaces of geography and climate, Braudel?s ?true Mediterranean?.(4) This notion that circum-Mediterranean lands together constitute a distinctive region might seem to be a product of ancient geography but in fact was a nineteenth-century invention.(5) The second is the most recent, and largely a product of post-colonialism. It stresses cultural interchange, hybridity, or (generalising from the medieval Iberian case) *convivencia* ? not that that term has been uncontested by specialists.(6) The third emphasises what is indispensable to the other two, people and their movements. Obviously enough, neither geography nor culture makes any historical sense without people: without those who have moulded and bound landscapes together into some larger whole (thereby unifying diverse environments), or who have moved (or been moved) and interacted, creating cultural hybrids or occasional zones of toleration. In premodern times ? before steamship, train, and telegraph ? the transmission of goods, cultures, ideas, and information generally was always (occasional use of carrier pigeons apart) dependent on the movement of people. Their mobility must be the primary subject.(7)

No one knew this better than Braudel. ?The Mediterranean,? he wrote, in a chapter originally to have been entitled ?Routes et villes, villes et routes?, ?has no unity but that created by the movements of men, the relationships they imply, and the routes they follow?. Although we may be tempted to linger over the picturesque aspects of the resulting network, he continued, ?the essential task before us is to measure the relationships this network implies, the coherence of its history, the extent to which the movement of boats, pack animals, vehicles and people themselves makes the Mediterranean a unit and gives it a certain uniformity in spite of local resistance. *The whole Mediterranean consists of movement in space*?.(8)

Braudel saw the nodal points of this network as towns and cities. Perhaps we should now take a broader vow of communications, so as to bring into play movements across mountains and deserts, and indeed the whole variety of non-urban Mediterranean landscapes. Braudel?s vision, at least at this stage in his book, was primarily economic. Again, a wider angle might be appropriate, to bring in the movements involved in religion, politics, war, empire-building, and the like. But the essential point remains. The Mediterranean was made by movement. And this point can be put more precisely. If the Mediterranean has any continuing validity as a historical subject, it must be as a zone of net introversion, in which the movements of people in space are denser ? more frequent and intense ? within and across the region, than over its frontiers, however we like to define them.

The problem has long been that, with the exception of modern labour migration, mobility is the least studied of the demographic variables. It is at least as hard to document from pre-modern times as fertility, nuptiality and mortality. Its study is frustrated by the presupposition that most people hardly moved from their place of birth (which would of course have rendered unnecessary the dislocation associated with ancient censuses, notably as described in Luke?s gospel).(9) And now it comes up against a novel kind of evidence, that of archaeogenetics (essentially back projections from contemporary gene frequencies) which seems to show that all the really significant movement in Europe and the Mediterranean was over by the Bronze Age.(10)

Despite the implication of genetic history that the play is over even before the curtain rises, major projects are now starting to explore pre-modern Mediterranean mobility in the detail that the topic requires. Of greatest value and significance is the French research programme, planned to spread across no fewer than

eight conferences, ?La mobilité des personnes en Méditerranée de l?antiquité à l?époque moderne: procédures de contrôle et documents d?identification?, of which the leading light is Claudia Moatti, one of the editors of the volume under review and the sole editor of the first publication of the programme. This initial statement was a collection with a title identical to that of the overall programme, re-presenting conference papers delivered at the first two gatherings, in 2002.(11) The editorial introduction to this volume defined the project?s scope as the Mediterranean basin up to the eighteenth century, when (it is implied) nation states started to make those ?procedures of control? rather more systematic and effective. We are told reassuringly that ?if the history of the Mediterranean presents an undeniable unity, it owes it in large part to the movement of people?, and this movement is in turn related to the uneven distribution of resources both human and material (p. 2). There then follows a highly intelligent and quite extensive prefatory discussion (21 pages) of the various kinds and causes of mobility, the inevitable flexibility of attempts at its management, the ways in which migrants have proved their identity, and the ramifications of it all for conceptions of sovereignty, public order, territoriality, and ?international? relations. The 25 subsequent contributions have a consistent Mediterranean focus apart from some forays into the Near East and one to the north, into Carolingian Francia. There is an ethnic and geographical index and synopses of all the papers are gathered at the end.

That 2002 volume was only the beginning. In 2007, under the editorship of Claudia Moatti again but now joined by Wolfgang Kaiser, there followed a similar collection, *Gens de passage en Méditerranée de l?antiquité à l?époque moderne* (12), published in Paris under the auspices of the ?Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l?homme?, and focusing again on the identification and policing of migrants, but this time especially upon their arrival in towns and cities.

I wish I had been able to review either of those two volumes, and for preference the first. With the present collection, *Le monde de l?itinérance*, we are joining the project when it has been under way for some years. The leading participants know exactly what they are doing ? but may have forgotten the need to explain it to their readers or to re-examine their own initial assumptions.

This time only a very short introduction sets the agenda, showing how the present volume follows on from its predecessors. We are reminded that discussions of human mobility from Georg Simmel onwards, whether historical or social scientific, have usually privileged immigration ? the new arrival, the context into which he or she is trying to find a place. The volume under review is intended to focus on the other parts of the business of movement: departure and transit. It reflects communications read at two conferences, one on the control of emigration (Madrid 2004), the other on the world of the itinerant (Istanbul 2005). The leading questions follow on from those that the two earlier volumes raised. What were the specific conditions of mobility in pre-modern societies and how much freedom of movement was there; how and where was mobility directed or constrained; and how were those involved identified? What was the effect of mobility on the societies that witnessed it and how did they perceive the whole phenomenon? The mobility in question need not have been over a long distance to qualify for scrutiny here. The volume operates with ?un continuum migratoire? that can embrace expulsion, or emigration to America, at one extreme, to highly localised circulation at the other. These are some of the points made crisply and developed, but over only a dozen pages, by Claudia Moatti and Wolfgang Kaiser in their general prologue. Without asserting any specious continuities across the whole pre-modern past that they are taking as their purview, they examine, in the most general terms, the modalities of departure, the purposes of expulsion, the policing of movement, the character of exile, and the varieties of nomadism. They quote, so as to controvert, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari who, in a book of 1980, *Milles plateaux*, called for a ?nomadology, the opposite of a history? (p. 18). Movement is, has been, history. But of what sort, and where? After the brief introduction we, the readers, are left largely to fend for ourselves in terms of turning the 29 individual contributions in this volume into larger blocks of material able to give substance to the few generalities that preface them.

To put it another way: this book is un-reviewable. No one scholar could command the expertise to offer proper critical appreciation of each of its constituent articles. Yet nor is the reader given enough help by the editors in seizing the overall thrust of the whole so that conclusions emerge which could sensibly be discussed by a non-specialist reviewer.

The 29 main contributions, which vary in length from around 10 to around 40 pages, are presented under three main headings. First come ?lives in movement?, subdivided into groups on nomads, itinerant labourers, and wanderers and marginals; then a section on the control of free emigration, again subdivided into ?the place of the absent in ancient law? and ?colonisations?; finally a section on exile and asylum, which breaks down into ?expulsions and deportations?, ?exile and proscription?, and ?fugitives and the right of asylum?.

The collective geographical scope is vast. It reaches from Mesopotamia and the Crimea to the Indies (as a target for emigration); it includes the whole Mediterranean basin, with some concentration on Spain and Italy (though relatively little specifically on France and almost nothing on Mediterranean Africa).

The period covered is equally ambitious. Much like the first volume in the series, it starts around the 18th century BCE (an interesting discussion of the vocabulary of nomadism as recorded in the palace archives of the Amorites in Babylonia) and it closes more or less with the 18th century CE (a comparative chapter on how the Ottoman empire attempted to control the nomads of the Cilician plain and the casual labourers moving to the capital).

And in between? For the very early period, there are two other papers on the pre-classical Near East (on the juridical status of the ?absent?, whether voluntary or involuntary in Mesopotamian law; and on extradition and asylum, again from Amorite texts). There is a clutch of papers on the Greeks (notably one on itinerant masons), four on the Roman world (most interestingly an account of the law of ?relegation? and return from exile in the first three centuries of the Roman empire and one on forced diasporas of the Jews in the same period), and two on the late antique and Byzantine worlds (on 4th-century legislation sweeping up dangerous *vagi* into the army, and on errant monks). Beyond this, there are two contributions on medieval Italy (seasonal migration in Apulia; compulsory reporting back by political exiles to their home city states), a general discussion of medieval Mediterranean colonisation and how far it resembled modern colonisation, an enquiry into medieval and early modern safe-conducts granted to ?gypsies? from ?little Egypt?, and the deportation of Muslims from Sicily by the Emperor Frederick II (persuasively taking the long view and interpreting its subject in the light of juridical change).

Does a pattern emerge from this vertiginous catalogue? Not really. The volume attains some degree of coherence and collective weight only when it comes to the expulsion and diasporas of Jews, Muslims, and Moriscos from Spain to Africa and the Ottoman world in the 15th and 17th centuries, and to parallel studies of Ottoman rulers? and local administrators? own dealings with exiles, deportees and migrants ? some of them from Spain. A striking clutch of papers on those related topics hints at a Braudellian panorama, showing Mediterranean-wide movement and interaction.

The makings of a few other possible constellations of papers can be glimpsed in the table of contents. It was entirely reasonable of the editors to choose a thematic rather than a chronological or geographical organisation to their volume. And in devoting a section to the legal status of the ?absent? I think they have helped create a theme of considerable originality. None the less, for most of the time the thematic approach produces an effect of staccato irregularity. In that sub-section on expulsions, for example, we start with Judaism in the time of Christ, then jump to Frederick II, and then to Granada around 1500. None of this ?jitteriness? is counteracted by internal cross-referencing: with very few exceptions, the contributors seem to have written and gone to press in mutual ignorance. Nor are the mini-introductions to each section as helpful as they might be in showing the ways different parts of the volume resonate with each other. Nor, in this collection, is there an index of any kind, let alone the type really needed, a thematic one ? to aid the reader in choosing alternative paths through its contents.

None of this is to deny that we can learn a great deal from the book. We learn ? and this is, as scientists say, non-trivial ? quite how much documentation survives to be exploited about those leaving or being forced out, on the move, staying away, communicating back, returning. This documentation is not only prescriptive or administrative; it can be personal as well. Almost every page in the volume is plushly carpeted with footnotes, and one of them sent me to the letters Assyrian wives wrote to their absent merchant husbands giving news and detailing their domestic problems. These are not windows onto souls, but we are at least in tenuous touch with real people on the move, and from almost four thousand years ago (p. 278).(13)

That points to a second positive feature of the collection, or rather of the trio of volumes published so far. It shows abundantly that movement has been a central feature of the social history of the area for a very long time. (The emphasis on identification and control of course forbids extensive use of archaeology, so the authors do not register that people have been making long sea journeys, of up to 200 miles, across open sea in the Mediterranean for at least 130,000 years.(14)) These movements have, in the Holocene, given rise to problems of terminology ? before control, comes classification ? that a number of contributions explore. We are reminded, again, of the thorough interdependence of ?the desert? and ?the sown?: no pure nomads out of touch with the sedentary are evident in any of the volumes. There has been extensive movement despite the exercise of settled ?state? power (as well as because of it). Such themes are vividly developed. It is the more surprising that little attention is given to slavery.

There are almost all the materials here for a full, genuinely comparative history of geographical mobility across a wide space and over the long-term, with some attempt to show which periods and areas were more mobile than others. And yet ? that potential is realised only intermittently in the present collection because of a degree of insularity in its contributors. They do not always seem to be in touch with developments in scholarship. Presumably the papers as published (in 2009) closely reflect those delivered at the original conferences in 2004 and 2005. So perhaps it is unfair to expect authors whose subject is the Roman Empire to show awareness of Roger Batty?s monograph of 2007.(15) It would also be asking a lot to expect more than a few token references to Horden and Purcell?s *The Corrupting Sea*, even though geographical mobility in the Mediterranean is one of its big themes and it considers nomads, seasonal migrants, itinerant workers, and forced population transfers. But one might have hoped for more debate with Braudel and some fuller consideration of the precise ways in which the area covered by the volume might, through its geography and ecology and modes of transport and communication, have promoted mobility.

The collection under review is a volume on the Mediterranean and the Middle (or Near) East which at no point defines or defends its geographical scope. One contribution, the last one, ventures into northern Europe because its subject is the refugees of the Catholic League of late 16th-century France in the Low Countries and the Mediterranean, and it sets the stage for an interesting comparison between Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean. But that approach remains undeveloped, and is tried nowhere else in the volume. The Mediterranean remains a limp geographical expression. Its value as an analytical tool is never debated.

In the UK, this volume would not only be un-reviewable, it would be un-publishable. The requirements of a UK publisher would be a mixed blessing. Everything would have to be translated into English. The volume would be a third of its size. Here, instead, we have over 700 pages in Spanish, Italian and English, as well as French. But a UK publisher would at least have insisted on a clearly articulated rationale, a careful definition and justification of geographical scope, a long synoptic introduction with a literature review ? and an index. They do not always order these things better in France.

Notes

1. Fernand Braudel, The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II (La Méditerrannée et le monde méditerranéen à l?époque de Philippe II, 1st edn. 1949, 2nd revised edn. 1966), English trans. (2 vols., London and New York, 1972?3).Back to (1)
2. Michael Herzfeld, ?Practical Mediterraneanism: excuses for everything from epistemology to eating?,

in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. W. V. Harris (Oxford, 2005), pp. 45?63. See also Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2000), p. 486.Back to (2)

3. *Words, Texts, and Concepts Cruising the Mediterranean Sea: Studies on the Sources, Contents and Influences of Islamic Civilization and Arabic Philosophy and Science*, ed. Gerhard Endress, Rüdiger Arnzen and Jörn Thielman (Leuven, 2004).Back to (3)
4. Braudel, *Mediterranean*, p. 276.Back to (4)
5. Peregrine Horden, ?Mediterranean excuses: historical writing on the Mediterranean since Braudel?, *History and Anthropology*, 16 (2005), 25?30, esp. p. 27.Back to (5)
6. See, for example, Maya Soifer, ?Beyond *convivencia*: critical reflections on the historiography of interfaith relations in Christian Spain?, *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 1 (2009), 19?35.Back to (6)
7. In what follows I draw at times on the introduction to *Freedom of Movement in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the Twentieth (2003) Harlaxton Medieval Symposium*, ed. Peregrine Horden (Donington, 2007).Back to (7)
8. Braudel, *Mediterranean*, pp. 276?7, italics added.Back to (8)
9. Luke 2: 1?3, with Roger Bagnall and Bruce W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 14?15.Back to (9)
10. The classic work remains L. Luca Cavalli-Sforza, Paolo Menozzi, and Alberto Piazza, *The History and Geography of Human Genes* (Princeton, NJ, 1994). For the latest biological/archaeological technique that bears on the history of mobility, isotopic analysis of tooth enamel to compare location of childhood upbringing with location of burial, see Piers D. Mitchell and Andrew R. Millard, ?Migration to the medieval Middle East with the Crusades?, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 140 (2009), 518?25.Back to (10)
11. *La mobilité des personnes en Méditerranée de l?antiquité à l?époque moderne: procédures de contrôle et documents d?identification*, ed. Claudia Moatti (Rome, 2004).Back to (11)
12. *Gens de passage en Méditerranée de l?antiquité à l?époque modern*, ed. Claudia Moatti and Wolfgang Kaiser (Paris, 2007).Back to (12)
13. Cécile Michel, *Correspondance des marchands de Kanish au début du IIe millénaire avant J.-C.* (Paris, 2001).Back to (13)
14. Thomas Strasser et al. ?Stone Age seafaring in the Mediterranean: evidence from the Plakias Region for Lower Palaeolithic and Mesolithic habitation of Crete?, *Hesperia*, 79 (2010), 145?90 [2].Back to (14)
15. Roger Batty, *Rome and the Nomads: The Pontic-Danubian Realm in Antiquity* (Oxford, 2007).Back to (15)

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