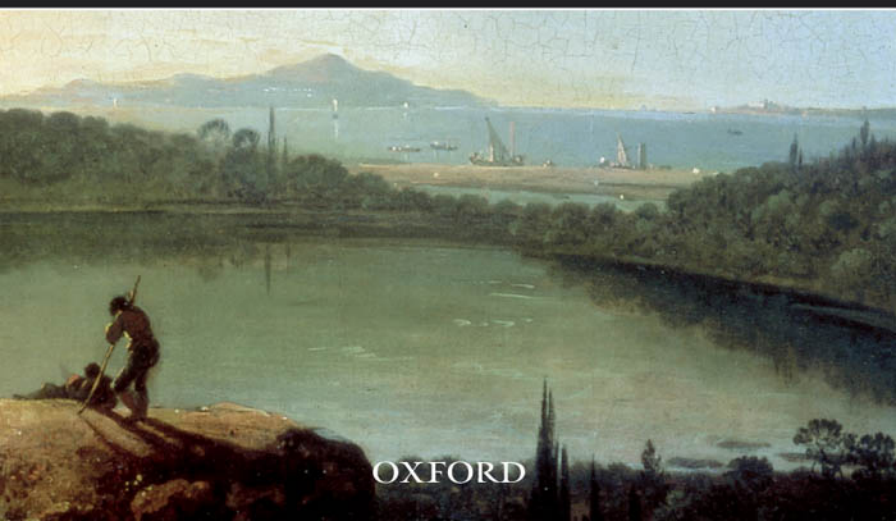




Rethinking the Mediterranean

Edited by W. V. HARRIS



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RETHINKING THE MEDITERRANEAN

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W. V. HARRIS

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PREFACE

How useful is the Mediterranean Sea as an intellectual construct? And how should it be studied? Nearly sixty years after the publication of Fernand Braudel's first great book, and some forty years after the Mediterranean became a major category in anthropology, these questions continue to trouble and intrigue us. For those of us who study the ancient world or the Middle Ages, the questions are particularly pressing. In consequence, they have in recent times figured quite often in the merry-go-round of academic conferences. One such conference was organized by the Center for the Ancient Mediterranean at Columbia University on 21 and 22 September 2001.

The book you have before you consists for the most part of the proceedings of that meeting. All of the orally delivered papers have been revised, in some cases substantially. Three others are additions: I was fortunate enough to find David Abulafia, whose work I have long admired, willing to contribute a paper, even though he had not been among the attendees in New York (the cast consisted mostly of *antichisti*); Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell have written an extra essay in response to the reviewers of their recent book *The Corrupting Sea* (2000). Finally, I have taken the opportunity provided by the period of revision to crystallize my thoughts on this subject and put them together as an introduction; I thank Susan E. Alcock in particular for helping me to do this.

In the interests of preventing further delays, matters have been so organized that none of the contributors saw either my introduction or Horden and Purcell's response to critics before they finished their own contributions. Horden and Purcell did not read my essay, and I have not altered it since I read theirs. So there will no doubt be plenty of material for later responses. But we have already been compelled by various circumstances to wait quite long enough. And it was never of course our intention to produce an agreed body of doctrine. If there are unresolved conflicts between some parts of the book and

others—and there certainly are—there is not the least reason to apologize for them.

The immediate occasion for the organization of our conference was the establishment of Columbia University's Center for the Ancient Mediterranean, which we devised in 1999 and brought into being in 2000 with the intention of fostering exchange between the exponents and students of a number of different disciplines which our university, like all or virtually all others, tends to separate. No sooner had we done this, however, with no thought much deeper than that the ancient Mediterranean would serve as a useful practical focus (cf. the title of Michael Herzfeld's paper), than some of us found ourselves thinking more systematically about the intellectual, as distinct from institutional and pedagogic, advantages and disadvantages of concentrating on the Mediterranean. As is well known, sharply divergent views have been expressed—and the debate goes on, in these pages and elsewhere.

The contributors were generally told nothing more specific than that they could put forward any Mediterranean thoughts or research that might be of interest to other scholars with Mediterranean interests, history being the broad umbrella. They rode off, as will be seen, in three general directions, which, I think, complement each other nicely, and reflect some of the current thinking on the subject very well. Some chose to present particular pieces of research in ancient or mediaeval history, attempting to evaluate the nature and importance of the Mediterranean context (Chaniotis, Horden, Purcell). Others have written about perceptions of the Mediterranean world in antiquity (Bowersock), or about its creation, in scientific, literary or fantastic minds, in post-antique times (Armstrong, Herzfeld, Marshall, Said). Still others have mainly attempted to describe and evaluate the current state of the ancient history of the Mediterranean (Alcock, Bagnall, Bresson, Harris, Horden and Purcell together, Van De Mieroop) or to contextualize Mediterranean history by reference to other Mediterraneans (Abulafia). Yet every one of these papers branches out far beyond these categories—and of course there is constant reference, often admiring, sometimes critical, to *The Corrupting Sea*.

I am sharply aware of what has been left out. The plan was to engender some reflection about the field and its intellectual tropes by scholars with a historical mentality (even though some of them do not see themselves primarily as historians). All the present authors are, I think, alert to what is going on in contiguous fields, particularly archaeology, but Susan Alcock is, I suppose, the only contributor who can claim the actual title of archaeologist. There is no geographer here. These and other gaps I most sincerely regret: one does what one can with the resources available at a particular moment.

Finally, some pleasurable expression of gratitude. All of the distinguished contributors are busy people, and I should like to thank them for making the journey to New York, for sending in their revised papers in good time, and in general for effective cooperation.

I also wish to thank those who have cared for the Center for the Ancient Mediterranean in its infancy, and those who helped the conference to take place. Among the former I should single out in particular my colleagues Roger Bagnall, Clemente Marconi, and Suzanne Said. How sad it is that we can no longer thank John H. D'Arms, at the time of his death President of the American Council of Learned Societies, who was a member of the original steering committee of the Center: it was shortly before our conference that he was struck by what proved to be a fatal illness. I extend sincere thanks too to crucial figures in the university administration at that time, Jonathan Cole, Provost, and David Harris Cohen, Vice-President for Arts and Sciences: without their imaginative understanding the Center could never have come into being at all. I believe that the nearly simultaneous publication of this book and of *Greek Vases: Images, Contexts and Controversies*, edited by Clemente Marconi, the proceedings of another conference of Center for the Ancient Mediterranean, will demonstrate the Center's vitality.

W.V.H.

New York
December 2003

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Braudel, <i>MMW</i>	F. Braudel, <i>The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II</i> , 2 vols. (trans. S. Reynolds, London and New York, 1972–3) (original edn.: <i>La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II</i> , Paris 1949; second edn., Paris, 1966)
<i>CMG</i>	<i>Corpus Medicorum Graecorum</i>
<i>FGrH</i>	<i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> , ed. F. Jacoby
Horden and Purcell, <i>CS</i>	P. Horden and N. Purcell, <i>The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History</i> (Oxford, 2000)
<i>I. Cret.</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Creticae</i>
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>
<i>IGRRP</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes</i>
<i>IGSK</i>	<i>Die Inschriften der griechischen Städte Kleinasiens</i>
<i>ILS</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
<i>OGIS</i>	<i>Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae</i>
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
<i>SIG³</i>	<i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> (3rd edn.)
<i>SGDI</i>	<i>Sammlung der griechischen Dialekt-Inschriften</i> , ed. H. Collitz et al.
<i>TAM</i>	<i>Tituli Asiae Minoris</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

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MARC VAN DE MIEROOP is a Professor in the Departments of Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures and of History at Columbia University. His most recent book is *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323 BC.* (2004).



Map 1. The eastern Mediterranean in Early Antiquity





Map 3. The Mediterranean in Greek, Roman, and medieval times

The Mediterranean and Ancient History

W. V. Harris

1. INTRODUCTION

Historians, and probably anthropologists too, are destined to write a great deal more about both the Mediterranean and Mediterraneanism—the doctrine that there are distinctive characteristics which the cultures of the Mediterranean have, or have had, in common. And whatever the importance of the Mediterranean may be for earlier or later history, those of us who study the history of the Greeks and Romans have a particular need, for obvious reasons, to get the subject straight.

With practised one-upmanship, one of those most responsible for opening up the debate about Mediterraneanism, my friend Michael Herzfeld, has implied (in his contribution to this volume) that it is now *vieux jeu*, an unexciting leftover (if not hangover) from the 1980s and 1990s.¹ In other words, concen-

¹ According to the anthropologists V. A. Goddard, J. R. Llobera, and C. Shore, 'Introduction: The Anthropology of Europe', in Goddard, Llobera, and Shore (eds.), *The Anthropology of Europe* (Oxford and Providence, RI: 1994), 1–40: 4, 'the Mediterranean' was invented in 1959, and had already outrun its usefulness in the 1980s (pp. 20–3). But there was a touch of wishful thinking when J. De Pina-Cabral wrote in an important article in 1989 that there was 'an increasing awareness that something is wrong with the notion of the Mediterranean as a culture area' ('The Mediterranean as a Category of Regional Comparison: A Critical View', *Current Anthropology* 30 (1989), 399–406: 399). In reality, the Mediterranean is a concept with a long and somewhat shady modern history; see, for example, G. Sergi, *La decadenza delle nazioni latine* (Turin, 1900). For a balanced assessment of 'culture areas' in general see R. Lederman, 'Globalization and the Future of Culture Areas', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998), 427–49. This introduction aims to set out a positive programme, and to criticize certain general intellectual trends. Criticism of CS is incidental. It may in any case not be very opportune, since Horden and Purcell promise a second volume in which they will consider

trating on the Mediterranean may not only be a romantic delusion or a piece of Eurocentric cultural imperialism—thoughts which we have grown rather accustomed to—it may, worse still, be a recipe for boredom. The other side of that coin is presented by Susan Alcock in her revealing survey of ‘Mediterranean’ periodicals: there are more and more players. Thousands, no doubt, receive the electronic information service H-Mediterranean. Something of an illusion is involved, however, for while there has been a wave of important new work on the ancient Mediterranean environment in recent years—and a lot of thought about what the term ‘Mediterranean’ denotes—it has scarcely been a wave of tidal proportions, and much of what is being published in ‘Mediterranean’ journals is in fact old-fashioned local history, archaeology, or antiquarianism of little general significance.² And ‘Mediterranean’ has often been a synonym for ‘Greek and Roman, plus such other ancient cultures as I may happen to pay attention to’. Yet as far as ancient historians are concerned, there are still important Mediterranean questions to answer—some of them arguably quite crucial for the understanding of the ancient world.

There is admittedly something a little old-fashioned about almost all recent writing about the ancient Mediterranean. The modern scholar gazes upon that world with scientific detachment, all the more self-confident because he/she is often borrowing from the notoriously objective natural sciences. This volume breaks away from that tradition to some extent, and subjects the observer to some observation from time to time.

What I mainly plan to discuss in this chapter are two very difficult questions that can be framed quite simply. How should the history of the ancient Mediterranean be written—if it should be written at all? And is Mediterraneanism of much use to ancient historians, or is it alternatively something of a danger (and in effect a cousin of Orientalism)?

climate, disease, demography, and relations with the outside world (p. 4). Debate must continue, however.

² The new journal *Ancient West and East* (2002) might be thought to point in the opposite direction, since it wishes to reinstate the periphery—but that implicitly keeps the Mediterranean at the centre.

2. TOWARDS A HISTORY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN 3500 BC–AD 1000

We are in one sense only at the beginning. Until AD 2000 no one ever published a book about the ancient history *of* the Mediterranean as distinct from history *in* the Mediterranean (to borrow a distinction from Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell which, as we shall see, is not without problems).³ In other words no one had written a book in which the sea and its coastlands had been the central object of enquiry, as distinct from the human activities that took place there in ancient times. What *might* have turned out to be such a book was published in 1998, Braudel's *Les Mémoires de la Méditerranée*,⁴ a book about antiquity written some thirty years earlier. Braudel had died in 1985, and a questionable kind of piety towards the dead decided to publish what the author himself did not, apparently, consider ready for the press. Braudel had written that his own research covered (at the time of writing) only the period 1450–1600, and although he indicates that the Mediterranean Sea is the book's subject⁵ that body of water receives rather casual attention in what is in essence a conventional, albeit certainly intelligent, summary of ancient history from the palaeolithic down to Constantine. If one had thought that the author regarded this book as an original work of scholarly research, one would have been seriously disappointed. It was in any case Braudel's first book, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, that provided the challenge for Horden and Purcell.

The response, ambitious in both scale and tone, was *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*. Their sub-

³ I have not been able to trace this distinction beyond J. Beckett's comment in *Current Anthropology* 20 (1979), 85. Shortly after *CS* there appeared A. T. Grove and O. Rackham, *The Nature of Mediterranean Europe: An Ecological History* (New Haven and London, 2001).

⁴ *Les Mémoires de la Méditerranée: Préhistoire et antiquité* (Paris, 1998), trans. by S. Reynolds as *The Mediterranean in the Ancient World* (London, 2001). The book was apparently written (quite quickly) in 1968–9, thus before the work which many historians regard as Braudel's greatest, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme* (*Civilization and Capitalism*).

⁵ All this: *Les Mémoires* 17. Not that one should doubt the depth of Braudel's knowledge of ancient history (at the Sorbonne his teachers had included Maurice Holleaux: Braudel, *MMW*, i. 22 n. 1).

ject is the 'human history of the Mediterranean Sea and its coastlands' during roughly three millennia, to AD 1000.⁶ Thus the period is vastly longer, although as we shall see, the subject-matter is more circumscribed; in particular, it is important to notice that most of the central questions of economic history are *not* being addressed. Fair enough. But a perilous element of vagueness in the authors' programme is summed up in the word 'coastlands', and indeed *The Corrupting Sea* does not concern itself only with what can easily be called coastlands. Hinterlands and inland mountains are often, understandably, in the foreground. So we immediately recognize that there is a problem of delimitation, a problem accentuated by the fact that the human history of the Mediterranean in these 3,000 years was often intimately linked to power centres far away from the coastlands, in Mesopotamia, for example, or up the Nile.

Horden and Purcell declare their intention of establishing the 'unity and distinctiveness' of the ancient-medieval Mediterranean world. On a cultural plane, this is a hard question indeed, to which we shall return (Sections 3 and 6), offering in the end some limited assent but of a possibly unwelcome kind. On the ecological plane, matters seem rather simpler. The Mediterranean is, obviously, a construct, but it is a construct with something of a natural basis. The region is the historic home of *vitis vinifera* and *olea europaea*, and the exploitation of the vine and the olive-tree seems to provide both unity and distinctiveness. There is a unified climactic zone, and in addition relatively easy navigability: the famous obsidian of Melos was already being fetched to the mainland in the palaeolithic (eleventh millennium BC?), so it is believed;⁷ deep-hulled sailing ships from Egypt sailed up the Levantine coast in the mid-third millennium,⁸ and in the second millennium such ships began to cross the open sea, where the mariner could not see land—hence spasmodically increasing medium-distance and eventually

⁶ CS 9.

⁷ C. Broodbank, *An Island Archaeology of the Early Cyclades* (Cambridge, 2000), 110–11. For sea-borne carriage of obsidian in the Italian Mediterranean in the Neolithic see G. Camps and A. d'Anna, 'Recherches sur les navigations préhistoriques en Méditerranée occidentale', in *Navigation et gens de mer en Méditerranée de la préhistoire à nos jours* (Paris, 1980), 1–16: 5.

⁸ Broodbank, 96 (the whole chapter is important).

long-distance exchange of commodities (and of course the exchange of cultural influences). The very uneven distribution of resources, especially metal resources, greatly encouraged a system of long-distance exchange. Much later, in the era of the Arab conquests, when to a superficial gaze the Mediterranean became more of a frontier than a unity and new non-maritime capitals became important, the natural basis at least remained much the same.

Quite how strong an ecological construction this is we shall consider in Section 3. And whether the Mediterranean world can really be said to have had a natural barrier to its east during antiquity is an awkward question. Given the quantity of interaction with Mesopotamia, with Arabia and with the Indian Ocean over the millennia, the answer may well be more 'no' than 'yes'. Horden and Purcell meanwhile maintain that there were 'intrinsically Mediterranean factors in the history of primary production';⁹ we shall want to identify them and evaluate them.

Bloch once warned: 'l'unité de lieu n'est que désordre. Seul l'unité de problème fait centre'.¹⁰ For a historian, the unity of the place can only be a preliminary. All sorts of interesting books have been written more or less about the Mediterranean and its coastlands as a place, but how often have they been history books? What we can imagine—and what it would have been difficult to imagine, say, seventy years ago—is a history of the Mediterranean world which would essentially be a history of the interaction of that environment and the human beings within it. Here we can return to the scholastic-sounding distinction between history *of* and history *in*. Horden and Purcell distinguish between their own subject and what is put forward in part 1 of the *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World* ('The Role of the Environment') by proclaiming their allegiance to 'microecologies' (due for some further definition), though they agree that this will bring in, in a subordinate way, 'political, social, economic, religious' history, which according to them is history *in*.¹¹

⁹ CS 176.

¹⁰ In a review, *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* 6 (1934), 81–5: 81.

¹¹ CS 2.

The Corrupting Sea differentiates itself from *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World* in several other ways too. The authors accuse their predecessor of 'a strong leaning towards environmental determinism'—as others had done before—,¹² but whether the defendant should be convicted is not wholly clear, as I think Horden and Purcell recognize. Braudel pleaded his innocence,¹³ and the great synthesis, *Civilization and Capitalism*, lends him support. Like many economic and political historians before and since, Braudel struggled to establish the right causal balance between physical environment and human decision-making. He did not succeed, but at least his three rhythms of time are an exceptionally imaginative attempt to counter the problem. We can hardly blame *Annales* historians for seeking the long-term determinants of action, and it was they after all who gave *mentalités* an important role in history. Adopting the standard contemporary view that human beings and the environment act upon each other, Horden and Purcell claim to allow more room for the agency of humans,¹⁴ but it is hard to see that there is much difference. When they discuss their four chosen microregions, they do not seem to diverge greatly from Braudel in this respect.¹⁵

¹² CS 36. And see 41–2. This is a little like accusing Aquinas of not knowing Latin.

¹³ See for instance *MMW*, i. 267; but see also ii. 1244.

¹⁴ See for instance A. Ruiz Rodríguez, M. Molines, and M. Castro López, 'Settlement and Continuity in the Territory of the Guadalquivir Valley (6th Century B.C.—1st Century A. D.)', in G. Barker and J. Lloyd (eds.), *Roman Landscapes: Archaeological Survey in the Mediterranean Region* (London, 1991), 29–36: 29.

¹⁵ In the case of the Biqa valley, we have a brief reference to the settlement of Roman veterans (CS 58); in the case of southern Etruria, the absence of the human actors is still more marked because here at least Etruscans and Romans made a serious difference to the carrying capacity of the land by constructing and maintaining the drainage *cuniculi* (duly mentioned later, CS 247); Cyrenaica is handled a little differently, for we are told something about silphium production and about the invasion of the Hilali nomads in the eleventh century (pp. 65, 74); Melos, finally, presents especially difficult problems to an ancient environmental or economic historian, in spite of the ground-breaking study *An Island Polity* (C. Renfrew and J. M. Wagstaff (eds.), Cambridge, 1982), and though Horden and Purcell make as much as they can out of that book we do not see in CS much of the human influence on the island's ecology. The concept 'microregion' is plainly central to CS, but its meaning is not defined: is every inhabited Greek island a microregion, every river valley?

The line between human intervention (admissible, according to *The Corrupting Sea* as part of history *of*) and history *in* (inadmissible) is next-to-impossible to maintain. Think of a concrete example of a humanly generated ecological change—say Roman hydraulic engineering in the plain of the Po—and it seems obvious that the phenomenon cannot be discussed intelligently in isolation from its economic and its social and probably its political history. It is an important achievement of Horden and Purcell to have put the physical environment at the centre of their analysis, but we assume that it is not their ambition to be geologists or oceanographers.¹⁶

Would it, incidentally, be possible to write a satisfying history of pre-modern man's interaction with the environment in other more-or-less self-contained seas within the Mediterranean or nearby? Why not? There is certainly no shortage of environmentally interesting facts and theories about, say, the Aegean or the Tyrrhenian Seas. And now that a more strictly environmental history has come into being, there is no reason not to write about the history *of* any number of smaller stretches of water. Indeed, there is a terrific advantage: you can be thorough. The suspicion returns that the Mediterranean as a whole has a more powerful attraction as a subject partly for a reason that is only remotely related to environmental history: it has simply been the scene of several of the principal power conflicts of Western history, Greeks against Persians, Romans against Carthaginians (and everyone else), Christians against Muslims. Even Braudel found the contingent hard to resist, and in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World* he of course provided a part 3 on events ('Events, Politics and People'), including a fifty-page chapter on the Battle of Lepanto (mainly about diplomacy, presumably reflecting the earliest phase of his research).

¹⁶ Horden and Purcell write (464–5) that they have tried to show how their 'microecological approach can be brought into relation with the "textbook" ingredients of political, social, religious and economic narrative [sic]', but few readers, one suspects, will have noticed this. It can be assumed that they do not think that 'all analyses of culture and social relations dissolve into an all-embracing ecology' (R. Ellen's way of describing an error which environmental anthropology should avoid, *Environment, Subsistence and System: The Ecology of Small-scale Formations* (Cambridge, 1982), p. xi).

For years now scholars have been discovering Mediterraneans in other parts of the world. Later in this volume David Abulafia's paper, a notable tour de force, surveys this literature. It should warn us that fragmentation and diversity are to be expected in a region of such a size, whether it is the South China Sea or the Caribbean. The real Mediterranean region is not surprisingly rather variegated in some respects, but that should hardly earn it special historiographical respect ('La Toscana è...una regione fondata sulle diversità', says my guide-book, not blushing at the cliché). Connectedness—'connectivity' in the electronic patois of *The Corrupting Sea*—is a very different matter, and the factors that have brought it into being, or inhibited it, in any particular case, are a fascinating, we might say urgent, question.

Another thing the environmental historian cannot skimp on is time. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World* constantly struggles to express the relationship between the author's three levels of time, in particular between those that have the clearest identity, the *longue durée* and the time of contingent events. *The Corrupting Sea* bravely assumes responsibility for a good long period—though in the end the Bronze Age is much neglected.¹⁷ It requires quite unusual scholars to manage even two thousand years, let alone three or four.¹⁸ Unfortunately it is hardly possible to argue about pre-modern ecology with any more restricted horizon.¹⁹ By 2000 BC the vine and the olive-tree had already been domesticated. (From a prehistoric archaeologist's point of view, the proposed time-limits will still not seem very impressive: 20,000 years is a normal horizon, and the earliest firmly dated human settlement in Europe, Isernia La Pineta, used to be located *circa* 750,000 BP,²⁰ when rhinoceroses

¹⁷ Even the Minoans and Mycenaeans receive much less attention than might have been expected, not to mention the other (majority) inhabitants of the coastal Mediterranean in the second millennium BC.

¹⁸ My dream is that one day doctoral candidates in American history will be required to take an exam on the *longue durée*.

¹⁹ Criticism of *The Corrupting Sea*, on a variety of grounds, for not embracing a longer period: L. Nixon, *Journal of Roman Studies* 92 (2002), 196.

²⁰ G. Barker, with R. Hodges and G. Clark, *A Mediterranean Valley: Landscape Archaeology and Annales History in the Biferno Valley* (Leicester, 1995), 85–7. I have been told that there is now a still earlier site.

and elephants roamed in Molise). Not that the matter is at all simple, since it was only in Mycenaean times that the western Mediterranean, or part of it, began to have contacts with the east, and well into the first millennium BC there were plenty of western areas which, like the Biferno Valley, seem to have been untouched by people or cultigens from further east.

It is admittedly a reasonable strategy for any historian of pre-industrial times to argue that little if anything changed from one century to the next, all the more so if the focus is on demography, subsistence agriculture, pastoralism, the environment—rather less so, fairly obviously, if the focus is on, say, exchange, migration, acculturation, *mentalités*, or power. But the case for immobility has to be argued—and the changes that did occur need to be measured. Immobility can be so relative. The changes in the Mediterranean economy and in Mediterranean navigation between 400 BC and 100 BC were slow if compared to those that have taken place in the last 300 years, but rapid indeed by the overall standards of the millennia we are now considering.

The sheer length of the time which a historian of the Mediterranean is more or less constrained to consider will probably be an enduring obstacle. Van De Mieroop's chapter in this book is particularly welcome because it makes us think about the kinds of people who inhabited the eastern shores of the Mediterranean c.1500 BC. His paper may also help to inoculate us against historical generalizations about this region based on Italy and Greece, two fragments of a vastly larger whole.

The question about immobility and change in antiquity is, once the terms have been defined, fundamentally one of degree. But that puts us in a difficult, not to say desperate position, because almost nothing to do with the environmental history of the ancient Mediterranean world can be measured. 'All is mutability', say Horden and Purcell.²¹ Fair enough; but they do not offer us any ways of measuring or evaluating ecological or economic change. Here is one of the frontiers of our subject: shall we ever, for example, be able to measure the pace of that controversial but probably crucial process, deforestation, in the

²¹ CS 464.

ancient Mediterranean?²² It was certainly not a process that advanced at an even steady speed in all periods.

Then there is the question of immobilism between the end of antiquity, or alternatively the Middle Ages, and the ethnographic present. The temptation to identify the past and the (pseudo-)present, or rather to find the former in the latter, has often proved irresistible. It is enshrined in at least one of the great works of twentieth-century literature—*Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*. There he (or she) is—*homo Mediterraneus*, patient, tough, fantastically superstitious, clannish, full of hatred for his/her neighbours, unchanging. Is it a true portrait, or merely a convincing one? Of course Carlo Levi never pretended, unlike some of those who have quoted him, that the ecology or economy of ‘Gagliano’ was really untouched by the outside world: indeed one of the chief sufferings of the Gagliano peasants consisted of a stupid new tax on goats thought up far way in Rome. And the most important social fact about Lucania at that time was quite massive male emigration to other continents.²³

We shall return later (Section 6) to the more general question how ancient historians should use ethnographic evidence. *The Corrupting Sea* attempts to reach a balanced assessment of what should be done with Mediterranean ethnography: its authors raise the hope that ‘a judicious combination of anthropology and nineteenth-century history might take us back to just before the unexampled tumult of “modernization” began’.²⁴ They appear to hope that by getting back to say AD 1800, they will virtually have arrived at their ancient/medieval period, a

²² We shall return to this question later, but I must say at once that I lack the scientific knowledge needed to reach an independent conclusion.

²³ What is really extraordinary is to see this immobilism embraced by Braudel, *MMW*, ii. 1239, 1242–43—largely on the basis of Lawrence Durrell and a careless reading of Carlo Levi. For a much better reading of the latter see CS 468–70. R. S. Bagnall, *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History* (London, 1995), 70–1, comments well on the importance of resisting the temptation to see the contemporary Egyptian countryside as timeless and unchanging. M. Fotiadis, ‘Modernity and the Past-still-present: Politics of Time in the Birth of Regional Archaeological Projects in Greece’, *American Journal of Archaeology* 99 (1995), 59–78, is essential reading here, but his paper would have benefited from more attention to, precisely, politics.

²⁴ CS 466–74; the passage quoted: 471.

view they rightly qualify as 'optimistic'.²⁵ They quote with approval the following from Bloch:²⁶

But in the film which he [the historian] is examining, only the last picture remains quite clear. In order to reconstruct the faded features of the others, it behoves him first to unwind the spool in the opposite direction from that in which the pictures were taken.

But to be blunt, this has almost nothing to do with what historians did in Bloch's time or do now, certainly not ancient historians. And it does not represent Bloch's own method, though it stems from his much more limited belief that a French historian could learn a vast amount from the French landscape.²⁷

What then are the essential elements in a history of the Mediterranean (to accept, for the sake of discussion, the validity of the *off/in* distinction)? The following could not properly be omitted, I suggest:

- *Some delimitation of the area in question.* While no canonical definition is possible, there really do have to be some boundaries, for each period; otherwise we shall seem neurotic (there will be no great difficulty, however, in treating peripheral zones as intermediate or transitional). Plato saw, as other Greeks had doubtless seen for many generations before him, that there was a single sea that stretched 'from the River Phasis [i.e. the land at the far eastern end of the Black Sea] to the Pillars of Heracles' (*Phaedo* 109ab), which admittedly leaves a great deal indeterminate. The question of delimitation can become in part a question about river valleys or basins, Danube, Rhine, Baetis, Mesopotamia—not to mention the great rivers that actually flow into the Mediterranean—but also about uplands. Where are the places substantially untouched by man's

²⁵ CS 474.

²⁶ *The Historian's Craft*, trans. P. Putnam (New York, 1953); original edn.: *Apologie pour l'histoire, ou Métier d'historien* (Paris, 1949), 46, quoted CS 461 and approved 484.

²⁷ Note the force of 'first' in the passage quoted. Earlier in the same paragraph Bloch wrote a counterbalancing sentence: 'Not, indeed, that there could be any question of imposing this forever-static picture, just as it is, at each stage of the journey upstream to the headwaters of the past.' But rewinding the film recurs in Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life (Civilization and Capitalism, 1)*, trans. S. Reynolds (London 1979); original edn., *Les Structures du quotidien* (Paris, 1979), 294.

interaction with the Mediterranean environment? And can it really be true that Egypt is ‘outside [the Mediterranean] ecologically’?²⁸ How indeed would we argue the case for that, one way or the other? The southern border of the Mediterranean world can be the line between ‘the desert and the sown’,²⁹ but that leaves the Nile valley inside. And in other directions the flora are not so cooperative: should we really, for instance, hang a great deal upon the northern limits of the cultivation of the olive tree? If we neglect this matter of delimitation, we may end up like a recent writer by denying that there was major deforestation under the Roman Empire (a question I do not claim to answer in this essay) on the grounds that almost all the evidence for it comes from such places as ‘the southern Alps’ and ‘some northern parts of modern Greece’³⁰ which we might very well on other grounds consider to be part of the Mediterranean world (and in any case they were part of the Roman Empire).³¹

- *The natural history, articulated through periods.* It would do no harm to set out, for botanically and biologically ignorant historians such as many of us are, what is known to have been domesticated and growable in the whole area; pests, viruses, and bacteria are also highly relevant.³² We should think not only of foodstuffs but of the three other physical necessities too, fuel, clothing, and shelter. Of course there has been a

²⁸ As claimed by CS 397. Not that the authors are consistent: ancient Alexandria is out, but medieval Cairo is in (the ancient Nile makes a brief appearance, 239; and see Map 21). See R. S. Bagnall’s chapter later in this volume. B. D. Shaw, reviewing CS in *JRA* 14 (2001), observes (p. 444) that Egypt’s ‘whole ecology stands at odds with the authors’ model of the Mediterranean’.

²⁹ Shaw 423.

³⁰ O. Rackham, ‘Ecology and Pseudo-ecology: the Example of Ancient Greece’, in J. Salmon and G. Shipley (eds.), *Human Landscapes in Classical Antiquity* (London, 1996), 16–43: 31. See further below, p. 35.

³¹ Roman imperial history, it may be added, needs a quite different map, covering not the Mediterranean or that familiar area corresponding to the provinces as they were in the reign of Trajan, but a much wider area where the Roman Empire had economic connections, from Poland to Sri Lanka to Zanzibar.

³² Rat studies have now been put on a new footing by M. McCormick, ‘Rats, Communication, and Plague: Toward an Ecological History’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34 (2003–4), 49–61.

tremendous amount of science on most of these subjects,³³ and a recent volume about Pompeii marks an important step forward.³⁴ It would be extraordinarily useful to have Frayn's *Subsistence Farming in Roman Italy* writ larger, on a Mediterranean-wide scale, with all the enrichment provided by modern palaeobotany and palaeozoology. It is so easy for historians to assume that things grew only where they grow now—hence the frequent adaptation of Braudel's map of the northern limits of olive cultivation, in spite of the evidence that, for fairly obvious reasons, it was cultivated further north in antiquity and the Middle Ages.³⁵

Closely related to all this is of course the question of water. One of the most important achievements of *The Corrupting Sea* is to formulate an approach to the history of water management and irrigation (with intriguing information about the Orontes), and together with other recent work, this book now begins to give us a clearer idea of ways in which water dictated the limits of ancient and medieval land use and urbanization.³⁶

³³ Cf. CS 111–12, Grove and Rackham, *The Nature of Mediterranean Europe*, esp. chs. 4, 10, and 11. On the very neglected subject of fuel see S. Pignatti, 'Human Impact in the Vegetation of the Mediterranean Basin', in W. Holzner, M. J. A. Werger, and I. Ikusima (eds.), *Man's Impact on Vegetation* (The Hague, 1983), 151–61; 152–3, H. Forbes, 'The Uses of the Uncultivated Landscape in Modern Greece: A Pointer to the Value of Wilderness in Antiquity?', in Salmon and Shipley, *Human Landscapes*, 68–97: 84–8, W. Smith, 'Fuel for Thought', *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 11 (1998), 191–205. Concerning textiles see especially E. J. W. Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles: The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages* (Princeton, 1991), and CS 352–63.

³⁴ W. F. Jashemski and F. G. Meyer (eds.), *The Natural History of Pompeii* (Cambridge, 2002); note especially Jashemski, Meyer, and M. Ricciardi, 'Plants' (pp. 80–180), and A. King, 'Mammals' (pp. 401–50).

³⁵ The only writer who seems to have noticed the unhistorical nature of Braudel's map is D. J. Mattingly, 'First Fruit? The Olive in the Roman World', in Salmon and Shipley, *Human Landscapes*, 213–53: 215–16, and even he misses the Italian aspect of the matter. For olive cultivation in eighth-century Lombardy see L. Schiaparelli (ed.), *Codice diplomatico longobardo* (Rome, 1929), documents 123, 167, 231, 234, 257 (and possibly others).

³⁶ See CS 237–57, 585–8 (but for their view of the role of the state see below, p. 37). For some striking recent contributions see J. P. Oleson, 'Water-lifting Devices at Herculaneum and Pompeii in the Context of Roman Technology', in N. de Haan and G. C. M. Jansen (eds.), *Cura aquarum in Campania (Bulletin Antieke Beschaving, Suppl. 4)* (Leiden, 1996),

• *What population burdens could this region carry*—in all the circumstances relevant at particular times, such as degrees of afforestation and marshiness, available crops and methods of land management, likely animal populations, availability of meat and fish, known methods of food distribution, food storage and food preparation? This too is an extremely complex question, and one of the most pressing tasks awaiting the environmental historian of the ancient Mediterranean. It has proved difficult to establish prehistoric population sizes on the basis of carrying capacity, and such attempts need to take account of the ‘welfare’ standards of the population in question.³⁷ Horden and Purcell tell us that estimates of carrying capacity ‘are clearly impossible’,³⁸ but their own Chapter VI helps to lay some of the foundation for an answer.³⁹

The underlying questions concern Malthus’s positive checks, and how ancient populations reacted to them, and further whether there were ‘preventive’ checks, and beyond that again whether there was any possibility in antiquity of sustained economic growth. A merely environmental history cannot be expected to answer such questions in full, but it can be expected

67–77, P. Kessener, ‘The Aqueduct at Aspendos and its Inverted Siphon’, *JRA* 13 (2000), 104–32, D. Amit, J. Patrich, and Y. Hirschfeld (eds.), *The Aqueducts of Israel* (*JRA*, Suppl. 46) (Portsmouth, RI, 2002). Once again we need long-term chronology: the Bronze Age can be seen as the time when large-scale water management began in the Mediterranean region—see G. Argoud L. I. Marangou, V. Panagiotopoulos, and C. Villain-Gandossi (eds.), *L’Eau et les hommes en Méditerranée et en Mer Noire dans l’antiquité* (Athens, 1992).

³⁷ T. Bayliss-Smith, ‘Prehistoric Agriculture in the New Guinea Highlands: Problems in Defining the Altitudinal Limits to Growth’, in J. L. Bintliff, D. A. Davidson, and E. G. Grant (eds.), *Conceptual Issues in Environmental Archaeology* (Edinburgh, 1988), 153–60: 153.

³⁸ CS 47. But on the carrying capacity of islands cf. CS 381. Renfrew and Wagstaff (eds.), *Island Polity*, 145, credibly set the maximum population of Melos in classical times at about 5,000, ‘a ceiling some 40–60% above the levels likely to have been attained in practice’. On the difficulties of calculating carrying capacity see Ellen, *Environment*, 41–6, R. Sallares, *The Ecology of the Ancient Greek World* (London, 1991), 73–7, Grove and Rackham, *The Nature of Mediterranean Europe*, 70–1.

³⁹ It is difficult to see how they will be able to avoid conclusions of some sort, however tentative, when in volume 2 they finally reach the subject of demography.

to link itself to such other areas of enquiry as the history of migration and colonization—these to be seen not in the classic fashion as the filling of empty spaces but as the *occupation* of space.

• *What did the inhabitants of the ancient Mediterranean region think was the identity of the part of the world in which they lived?* If human intervention is to have a role in our history of the Mediterranean, we need to know how the coastland inhabitants (at least) regarded it. How they imagined its size, shape and other characteristics, and even how they named it, is of significance.⁴⁰ To say that in the Semitic languages the Mediterranean was ‘quite widely’ called ‘the Great Sea’ by 1000 BC, and to imply that this was later the standard Greek term⁴¹ is scarcely to say enough. Some Akkadian documents use such an expression,⁴² but it is not likely that they refer to the whole Mediterranean. It is hard to imagine that when the Phoenicians and Greeks were travelling the length of the Mediterranean in the ninth and eighth centuries BC they did not invent names for it. Hecataeus, as it happens, is the first Greek known to have called it ‘the great sea’ (*FGrH* 1 F26), and he meant something like the whole of it. More interesting, perhaps, is the expression ‘our sea’, *he hemetera thalassa* (Hecataeus F302c), and the variant *he kath’hemas thalassa*, ‘the sea in our part of the world’ (Hecataeus F18b).⁴³ Whatever it was called, it was the sea around which ‘we’ (an undefined ‘we’) live, like ants or frogs around a pond, according to the Platonic Socrates (*Phaedo* 109b). Had all Greeks domesticated the Mediterranean Sea to this extent? As for the Mediterranean *world*, however, neither Greek nor Latin had a special expression for

⁴⁰ The article of O. A. W. Dilke, ‘Graeco-Roman Perception of the Mediterranean’, in M. Galley and L. Ladjimi Sebai (eds.), *L’Homme méditerranéen et la mer* (Tunis, 1985), 53–9, does not live up to its title. On the other hand V. Burr, *Nostrum Mare. Ursprung und Geschichte der Namen des Mittelmeeres und seiner Teilmeere im Altertum* (Stuttgart, 1932), is still very useful. He reviewed the ancient names for no fewer than 27 component parts of the Mediterranean as well as for the sea itself.

⁴¹ *CS* 10–11.

⁴² Burr, *Nostrum Mare*, 89 n. 50.

⁴³ There is no need to discuss here whether these expressions were really as old as Hecataeus. ‘Mediterraneum Mare’ first appears as a name of the sea in Isid. *Etym.* 13. 16. 1.

it: Greeks could call it the *oikoumene* but they also used that word for the entire world, which of course they knew to be much larger.⁴⁴

● *Did those who lived around the ancient Mediterranean regard it—or their own part of it—as a potential link or a barrier or both at once?* What kinds of people were so drawn to the sea that they overcame the fear of pirates and lived by the shore? Who knew the risks and opportunities? Was there a small-islander *mentalité*? (The questions quickly proliferate). And let our answers not be too Greek; ancient near-eastern texts would need to be constantly in our hands. And what did the illiterate ship-hand think, or the peasant who might or might not migrate, or that favourite of Braudel, also of Horden and Purcell, the coastal trader, the *caboteur*? These are not wholly impossible questions: after all, we know that Phoenicians and Greeks emigrated in considerable numbers, while others did not, and it is not likely to have been simply a matter of who possessed the necessary maritime technology.

For many Greeks, plainly, the sea was at the centre and proximity to the sea was an essential condition of economic life and of civilized life: you knew that you had reached a different world when on your travels you met ‘men who do not know the sea, and do not eat salt with their food’ (*Od.* 11.122–3). Hesiod turns naturally, though diffidently, from the land to the sea (*Works and Days* 618–94). But how much these attitudes were representative, or duplicated by other Mediterranean populations, is still a subject for investigation.

A phenomenon of the ancient world which expanded and contracted was the long-distance transport of basic commodities such as the Mediterranean triad and metal ores. All concerned had come to regard the practical problems of long-distance commodity transport as manageable ones. We seem to lack any systematic account of how this came about.

● *Exploiting the natural environment versus making sensible use of it.* Facing the question whether the classical Greeks ‘had

⁴⁴ Even the clear-headed Polybius is inconsistent: in i. 1–4, ii. 37, iii. 3, etc, the term means something like the Mediterranean world, but in iii. 1, iii. 58, viii. 2, etc., it refers to the wider world, and in iii. 37 and elsewhere the Mediterranean world is *he kath’hemas oikoumene*. For the view that civilization centres around the Mediterranean see Strabo ii. 122.

an attitude' towards ecology, Rackham understandably replied 'I do not know',⁴⁵ and proceeded to point out the methodological difficulties. For the Roman period, there is at least a competent study by P. Fedeli of ancient notions of what damaged nature.⁴⁶ But the main question to start from, I suppose, is how people treated the natural world when the available technology provided them with choices, or seemed to do so. It is hardly surprising that the inhabitants of the Roman Empire cut down immense numbers of trees (the effects are hotly disputed), but it *is* surprising to a certain degree that the government of Tiberius once planned to make the River Chiana flow northwards into the Arno instead of southwards into the Tiber, in order to lessen flooding in the capital (Tac. *Ann.* i. 79, etc.). Ambitious hydraulic engineering, often in the service of a city, is a constant theme.

• *Which elements in the natural environment brought into being systems of plunder and exchange over distance?* And what happened when such systems weakened, when piracy was reduced (if it ever really was for any extended period),⁴⁷ and when long-distance trade slowed down? Bronze-Age trade in the Mediterranean has been very carefully studied in recent decades,⁴⁸ but we may need some more theorizing about its diachronic development. What led Greek mainlanders to Melos and its obsidian in the first place? We may suppose that Bronze-Age men initiated efforts to obtain specific materials such as copper, tin, and obsidian from relatively far-off. Later on, pirates and merchants, largely indistinguishable from each other, began to gather merchandise, including human beings, for opportunistic exchange.⁴⁹ Later still, cities began to seek

⁴⁵ Rackham, 'Ecology', 33.

⁴⁶ P. Fedeli, *La natura violata: ecologia e mondo romano* (Palermo, 1990).

⁴⁷ D. C. Braund, 'Piracy under the Principate and the Ideology of Imperial Eradication', in J. Rich and G. Shipley (eds.), *War and Society in the Roman World* (London, 1993), 195–212, argues cogently that even under the Roman emperors piracy went on largely unabated.

⁴⁸ See for instance N. H. Gale (ed.), *Bronze Age Trade in the Mediterranean* (Jonsered, 1991), E. H. Cline, *Sailing the Wine-dark Sea: International Trade and the Late Bronze Age Aegean* (Oxford, 1994).

⁴⁹ Except that, it now appears, they sometimes covered long distances to obtain materials that were available close to home, such as iron in Euboea (the

more systematically for agricultural surpluses which they might import—thus we need to divide the Mediterranean environment into places capable and incapable of producing such surpluses, and once again we come back to demography. The places from which such agricultural surpluses might be obtained would normally not be very distant,⁵⁰ which underlines the extraordinary nature of the Roman power which could import grain in huge quantities from Egypt to the capital. Innumerable facts underline the importance of water-borne transport: in Bronze-Age Italy, for instance, that was how metals made their journeys, by river or along the coast.⁵¹ Since we still do not have a first-rate map of the Mediterranean mineral resources that were exploitable in antiquity,⁵² we have quite a way to go before we understand the effects of their distribution.

That of course leaves us with some fifteen hundred years of ancient history still to go, including the high period of Mediterranean exchange dating from the second century BC to the

‘coals to Newcastle’ problem): see D. W. Tandy, *Warriors into Traders: The Power of the Market in Early Greece* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997), esp. p. 64, and D. Ridgway, ‘Final Remarks: Italy and Cyprus’, in L. Bonfante and V. Karagheorgis (eds.), *Italy and Cyprus in Antiquity: 1500–450 B. C.* (Nicosia, 2001), 379–93: 380.

⁵⁰ Cf. the map in M. E. Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West*, 2nd edn., (Cambridge, 2001), 124, showing the ‘Main products of exchange in Tyrian trade in Ezekiel’.

⁵¹ Barker, *Mediterranean Valley*, 152.

⁵² The best one I know of even now is provided by M. Lombard, *Les Métaux dans l’ancien monde du V^e au XI^e siècle* (Paris and The Hague, 1974), 10–11 (with other useful maps too). Cf. also R. Shepherd, *Ancient Mining* (London and New York, 1993). The kind of work we need more of is represented by N. H. Gale, Z. A. Stos-Gale, and T. R. Gilmore, ‘Alloy Types and Copper Sources of Anatolian Copper Alloy Artifacts’, *Anatolian Studies* 35 (1985), 143–73; Z. A. Stos-Gale and N. H. Gale, ‘New Light on the Provenience of the Copper Oxide Ingots Found on Sardinia’, in *Sardinia in the Mediterranean: Studies in Sardinian Archaeology Presented to Miriam S. Balmuth* (Sheffield, 1992), 317–37, etc. (the full bibliography is too long to give here). For a useful overview see A. B. Knapp, ‘Ethnicity, Entrepreneurship, and Exchange: Mediterranean Inter-island Relations in the Late Bronze Age’, *Annual of the British School at Athens* 85 (1990), 115–53: 129–41. For sources of tin see C. F. E. Pare, ‘Bronze and the Bronze Age’, in Pare (ed.), *Metals Make the World Go Round* (Oxford, 2000), 1–38: 25.