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David Abulafia (a cura di), The Mediterranean in History, Thames & Hudson, London 2003, 320 pp., ill.

W.V. Harris (a cura di), Rethinking the Mediterranean, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005, xxii+414 pp., ill.

In the last five years there has been a reawakening of interest in the legacy of Fernand Braudel (1902-1985), the great French historian who established the field of Mediterranean studies with his book *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris 1949)[1]. The most monumental demonstration of this revival is the large and impressive volume produced by Nicholas Purcell and Peregrine Horden, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford 2000), only the first of a promised two volumes. While its complexity and ambition defy easy summary, in basic terms the book aims to provide a critical counterpoint to Braudel's vision by focusing on local ecologies, and specifically on human interaction with the natural environment in the diverse areas of the Mediterranean. Although the authors' point of departure is a critical assessment of Braudel, in many ways – such as their decision to take on three thousand years of history and thousands of miles of geography – their debt to him is undeniable. The book has already been widely reviewed, and it is not my intention to do so here, however both of the books to which I will now turn, David Abulafia (ed.), *The Mediterranean in History* (London 2003) and W.V. Harris (ed.), *Rethinking the Mediterranean* (Oxford 2005), respond not only to the Braudel tradition but also to this more recent, and equally ambitious enterprise[2]. These books, in their lack of interest in questions of material culture, challenge the historian of art or architecture to consider how to engage with this vibrant intellectual discourse.

Both books begin with a question. Abulafia's introduction, "What is the Mediterranean?", is itself a question; he writes, "The question does not admit of a straightforward answer" (p. 11). For Harris, it is, "How useful is the Mediterranean Sea as an intellectual construct? And how should it be studied?" (p. v). The distinct aims and audiences of the two edited books determine how these questions are differently addressed. In Abulafia's book, an international team of seven historians and one geographer provide answers by means of historical narrative, telling the tale of the Mediterranean with broad strokes ranging from prehistory to the present. The approach is well suited to the broad audience being addressed, for whom the details of the historiographical debate surrounding the region are less important than the outlines of its historical developments. The book makes an implicit claim for Mediterranean unity, in the division of chapters by chronology rather than by region. The only division acknowledged by the book's organization is between the Christian and Islamic worlds, which merit distinct chapters. Harris's book, which grew out of a conference organized in response to *The Corrupting Sea*, is addressed to a specialized audience already familiar with the current debates and recent literature. The authors do not answer questions but pose new ones, in many case provoked by a critical response to claims made by Horden and Purcell.

David Abulafia is a preeminent and prolific scholar, the first professor of Mediterranean Studies at Cambridge University, and the author of numerous books on aspects of Mediterranean trade, religion, politics and history. In *The Mediterranean in History* he has compiled essays by eight international scholars into a volume that aims to define the physical, geographical, political, economical, and historical aspects of the Mediterranean for a non-specialist reader. Unlike Horden and Purcell, whose five parts, and twelve chapters are not chronological or regional but thematic, Abulafia neatly divides his book into nine chronological sections, from prehistory to the present. The essays have in common an accessible, lively tone and clear prose. Such a multi-authored, chronological approach has the advantage of illustrating the significance of the *longue durée* without requiring that any single scholar be in command of so much history and geography at once. It confirms Braudel's conviction that if there is one region that must be studied in all of its history to be understood in any single moment, it is this one.

In homage to Braudel and perhaps to Horden and Purcell, the book begins with geography. "The Physical Setting" by Oliver Rackham provides a thorough account of the land, weather, and agriculture; however the disconnection of the account from its historical consequences seems at odds with the concerns in the rest of the book. Other chapters belong more precisely within the chronological framework. Inevitably, however, such broad chapters as Michel Balard's "A Christian Mediterranean: 1000-1500" cannot do justice to the diverse circumstances in, for example, Granada before 1492 or Istanbul after 1453. Here one sees how the decision to divide by chronology rather than geography, while making the case for unity, provokes the specialist reader to search for counter-examples and exceptions to any broad claims. Molly Greene's chapter on "Resurgent Islam: 1500-1700" helps to correct for the volume's overwhelming focus on Northern, Christian parts of the Mediterranean. Yet the chapter begins with various Arab military incursions, rather than, for example, medical or scientific advances. On the whole however Greene's essay presents a well balanced account of developments in the eastern and western parts of the Muslim Mediterranean from Andalusia to the Ottoman Empire. The last chapter, by Abulafia, boldly takes the story into the twenty-first century. While insightful and admirably wide-ranging, given the pertinence of this region's history to contemporary geo-politics, I could not help wishing there were more focus on issues such as immigration, identity politics, and the definition and boundaries of Europe, and less on tourism.

The volume's connecting threads are provided by the editor, in brief *intermezzi* positioned between the chapters, which outline the major themes and suggest the broad direction of the narrative. These concise and graceful essays are an unusual and effective alternative to the typical synopses of the forthcoming chapters typically found in the introduction. The book is much enriched by the illustrations, presented in high quality color, and adorning almost every page. For a historian of art or architecture, of course, the inclusion of illustrations principally for the purpose of adornment is itself a problem, and one inadequately resolved through the use of lengthy captions. Particularly frustrating from this viewpoint is that the captions, although often informative, rarely identify the image directly (a list is found at the end of the book, however). Also confounding the specialist is the absence of footnotes, which are replaced by "suggestions for further reading" at the back of the book. Despite these quibbles, both the general and specialized reader will be continuously thankful for the lavish quality of the book's production, which accompany its commercial aims.

For the reader keen for a deeper account of Abulafia's own research, it is accessible in compressed form through a collection of his essays, *Mediterranean Encounters, Economic, Religious, Political, 1100-1550* (Aldershot 2000). In contrast to his edited volume, these essays present a specialized and nuanced account of individual moments across the Mediterranean. Abulafia's characterization in the preface is illuminating; of his primary concern with human interaction he writes, "It has seemed to me vitally important to set side by side studies of the treatment of religious minorities and studies of trade and high politics. It is not just that they took place within the same chronological span, and within much the same geographical area. It is also the case that politics, religion and the economy in the medieval Mediterranean formed a continuum. Historians have to keep reminding themselves of what is obvious, but too often ignored: that their own compartmentalisation of the past was not matched in the minds of those they are examining". This volume offers an excellent complement to Abulafia's edited book, demonstrating how the trends described in the general essays manifest themselves in particular historical and geographical circumstances.

W.V. Harris, a professor of History at Columbia University and specialist in the ancient world, takes a different approach to editing *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, seeking not unity but diversity in the essays he includes. His own essay, "The Mediterranean and Ancient History", suggests that he is far more interested in questioning the intellectual construct of the Mediterranean than in confirming its relevance. He raises a number of crucial questions, in the form of a critique of *The Corrupting Sea*. How was the region regarded by its inhabitants? To what extent has a cultural unity ever existed?

Other authors also challenge claims made by Horden and Purcell, and the premises on which their claims depend. Michael Herzfeld, a sociologist, takes the most detached view of the field in "Practical Mediterraneanism: Excuses for Everything, from Epistemology to Eating", considering why it exists at all and by whom it has been constituted. As he recognizes, at stake is no less than the definition of the Western tradition; he writes with reference to assumptions about the Mediterranean or what he calls "ontological truisms", "They serve as a point of entry into a politics of knowledge that includes in its purview the constitution of what we are pleased to call 'the West'" (p. 47). David Abulafia brings into question the uniqueness of the Mediterranean in his essay "Mediterraneans", by considering the possibility that other seas such as the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean may be analyzed according to Braudel's method. Another essay, "The East-West Orientation of Mediterranean Studies and the Meaning of North and South in Antiquity", by G.W. Bowersock, considers the various geographical divisions used by historians and their motivations. He begins with the observation that while historians have persistently employed East and West as divisions (which as he notes correspond to the Arabic terms "Maghrib" and "Mashriq"), the more meaningful ones for travelers have always been North and South. He cites a handwritten note in Edward Gibbon's personal copy of the *De-*

cline and Fall of the Roman Empire, now at the British Museum, in which he wrote, "The distinction of North and South is real and intelligible; and our pursuit is terminated on either side by the poles of the Earth. But the difference of East and West is arbitrary, and shifts round the globe" (pp. 168-169). However, as Bowersock observes, the ancients had no knowledge of the North and South Poles, and thus their own divisions between East and West formed the basis for our own.

Problems of categories, divisions and exclusion make up a common bond between two essays on different subjects: Susan E. Alcock's "Alphabet Soup in the Mediterranean Basin: The Emergence of the Mediterranean Serial", and Roger S. Bagnall's "Egypt and the Concept of the Mediterranean". Alcock employs numerical data to analyze the boom that has taken place over the past twenty years in journals devoted to the Mediterranean[3]. Most marked among the characteristics of these diverse journals seems to be their inability to include articles and authors of the range and diversity their titles promise. Particularly troubling is the near absence in these journals of contributions by authors from Islamic areas of the Mediterranean, or articles about those regions. Arabic summaries were included in the short-lived "Mediterranean Studies", and the "Journal of Mediterranean Studies" plans to include them, but there has been no sustained presence of Arabic contributions or abstracts in any of these journals. In the words of the editors of the "Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology": "[…] we have so far published nothing (since nothing has been submitted to us) from the African shores of the Mediterranean, other than Egypt […] We would gladly welcome the opportunity to include more articles dealing with the Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, Ottoman, Medieval and Early Modern archaeology of the Mediterranean world" (p. 330). The result, writes Alcock, is an "anxiety about the politics of representation". Just within the field of archaeology, Alcock notes that no single periodical has succeeded in attracting all of the subfields that the Mediterranean category might imply: for example, "Classical", "Egyptian", "European prehistoric", "North African", "Biblical", "Near Eastern" (p. 334).

The specific problem of Egypt is taken up by Bagnall, who begins by considering the exclusion of Egypt from *The Corrupting Sea* in light of the politics both of academia and of the contemporary world. It is an exclusion typical of the field of Classical studies itself, but also corresponds, as Bagnall observes, to Egypt's "own self-representation" as "neither African, nor Asian, nor Mediterranean". In post-independence Egypt, Bagnall notes, claims of Mediterranean identity serve as a counter to pan-Arabism, whereby "Mediterranean" becomes a substitute for "European" (pp. 345-346).

The final section of the book provides an unusual opportunity for Horden and Purcell to reply to the foregoing criticism, not defensively but with reflection. They observe that their reviews have come from scholars in fields that "already 'have' a Mediterranean as a unit of study", and thus worry that "we have preached to the converted" (p. 349). While they engage a number of criticisms, they have no adequate reply to the one most pertinent from the discipline of architectural history: B.D. Shaw's characterization of their approach as "so fluid and so dynamic" that it cannot settle on "fixed systems and structures" such as "the city, the state, the army, and the church and mosque" (p. 447). Their own self-criticism is that they were unable to take account of the Ottoman Mediterranean (p. 361).

Despite the range and diversity of the essays included in these two volumes, there are a number of substantial exclusions, both disciplinary and geographic. In Abulafia's volume, the absence of any discussion of the many illustrations within the text itself makes obvious that none of the contributors have even a slight art historical orientation. While Harris does include an archaeologist, Susan Alcock, in his volume, she has written not about archaeology but about scholarship. This lack of interest in material culture – in the physical traces of the commercial, political, and ecological networks described – may be in keeping with Braudel's example. However if the authors are sincere in their desire to demonstrate the persuasiveness of the Mediterranean model to new disciplines, they must at the very least be ready to welcome into their midst scholars concerned with parallel relationships as revealed by art objects and buildings. Similarly, the often repeated interest in correcting the bias towards the northern, Christian shores of the Mediterranean should be accompanied by the inclusion of scholars writing from different traditions.

Despite the many ways in which the history of art and architecture has always been intertwined with the field of history, the idea of the Mediterranean has never taken hold, and historians of art and architecture remain closely tied to national boundaries. It is worth considering how appropriate or useful the Mediterranean might be as a unit of study for these disciplines. Can an approach aiming to shift attention from princes to peasants be extended to include costly artifacts? Is the anti-elitism of Braudel's approach incompatible with a consideration of objects and buildings made by and for the elite?

In lieu of a synthetic vision of the Mediterranean, art and architectural historians have begun to consider particular instances of cross cultural exchange. Two books are distinguished by their geographical and chronological breadth: Deborah Howard's *Venice and the East* (New Haven-London 2000) and Rosamond Mack's *Bazaar to Piazza, Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600* (Berkeley-London 2003)[4]. In addition, Gülru Neçipoğlu's *The Age of Sinan* (London 2005) includes substantial considerations of parallels and relations between the Ottoman Empire and Italy[5]. Much more typical than these efforts, however, are the essays in the volume edited by Anna Contadini and Charles Burnett, *Islam and the Italian Renaissance* (London 1999). While extremely learned and valuable, the essays in this volume present a mosaic of the Mediterranean rather than a coherent picture. Museums have been quicker than scholars to respond to current political circumstances by presenting exhibits that challenge the presentation of the Middle East and Islam by the popular media. Ambitious recent shows include "The Art of the First Cities" (The Metropolitan Museum in New York, 2001), "Turks: A thousand Years of Ottoman History" (The Royal Academy in London, 2005), "Persia: The Forgotten Empire," (The British Museum in London, 2005-2006) and, inspired by Deborah Howard's book, "Bellini and the East" (The National Gallery in London and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, 2005-2006).

Although a number of questions are left unresolved in the volumes edited by Abulafia and Harris, not to mention Horden and Purcell, their ambition is extraordinary and their implications broad. In this regard, the challenge they pose to historians of art and architecture – not only by example, but also by exclusion – is one worth answering. The books have their greatest value to scholars in these fields, perhaps, as both a provocation and an invitation.

1. There is an excellent account of Braudel's career and the developments in his thinking in the preface by Oswyn Murray to the English edition of Braudel's *Mémoires de la Meditérranée* (*The Mediterranean in the Ancient World*, London 2001).

2. The reviews of *The Corrupting Sea* include David Abulafia, in "Times Literary Supplement", 14 April 2000, pp. 9-10; Elizabeth Fentress and James Fentress, *The Hole in the Doughnut*, in "Past and Present", 173, 2001, pp. 203-219; Thomas Glick, in "Speculum", 77, 2002, pp. 555-557; Anthony Molho, in "Journal of World History", 13, 2002, pp. 486-492; and B.D. Shaw, *Challenging Braudel: A New Vision of the Mediterranean*, in "Journal of Roman Archaeology", 14, 2001, pp. 419-453; and Paolo Squatriti, *Mohammed, the Early Medieval Mediterranean, and Charlemagne*, in "Early Medieval Europe", 11, 2002, pp. 263-279. A full list is provided by Horden and Purcell in W.V. Harris, *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, Oxford 2005, pp. 348-349, n. 1.

3. These journals include the "Journal of Mediterranean Anthropology and Archaeology"; "Mediterranean Studies: The Journal of the Mediterranean Studies Association"; "Mediterranean Archaoelogy and Archaeometry"; the "Journal of Mediterranean Studies: History, Culture and Society in the Mediterranean World"; "Mediterraneo Antico. Economie, Società, Culture"; and "Mediterranean Historical Review", to name a few examples.

4. Howard's book was widely reviewed, for example by Silvia Foschi in this journal (13, 2001, pp. 204-206); by Patricia Fortini Brown in the "Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians", 60, 2001, pp. 357-359; and by Oleg Grabar together with Mack's book and others by Jeremy Brotton, Lisa Jardine, and Maria Georgopoulou in "The Art Bulletin ", 85, 2003, pp. 189-192.

5. In the early 1990s, Neçipoğlu taught jointly with Howard Burns a lecture and a seminar on "The Architecture of the Mediterranean World", which sparked my own interest in the subject.