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DOING DECENTERED HISTORY

4.

## Mediterranean History as Global History

DAVID ABULAFIA

ABSTRACT

Mediterranean history, and the history of other closed seas, is seen here as the experience of those who traversed the sea and arrived as decentered aliens on the other side. Mainly these have been men, with merchants generally as pioneers who introduced the goods, ideas, and religion of one region to another. From antiquity onwards, port cities such as Carthage, Alexandria, Smyrna, and Livorno acted as links among the three continents facing the Mediterranean, and visitors from other lands were sometimes free to roam, sometimes ghettoized.

*Keywords:* Mediterranean, Braudel, merchants, slaves, Jews

There exists a fundamental problem in the writing of the history not just of the Mediterranean but of Mediterranean-like spaces—seas such as the Baltic, larger maritime spaces such as the Atlantic, dry open spaces such as the Sahara desert.<sup>1</sup> Put briefly, the problem is how to write a history of the sea without writing a compendium of the history of the lands surrounding it, something that will inevitably have fuzzy edges, especially compared to the sharply defined edges of a sea. Is the subject of study the Mediterranean Sea or the Mediterranean region—and *pari passu* for the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and so on? Looking at journals such as the *Mediterranean Historical Review* and *Mediterranean Studies* we encounter any number of excellent articles on the Mediterranean region, many of the most memorable of which do not actually mention the sea. The history of the Mediterranean, however defined, has become something of an industry in

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<sup>1</sup>. David Abulafia, “Mediterraneans,” in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. William V. Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64-93; cf. Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

the last few years, as seminars on Mediterranean history have proliferated in universities and institutes not just around the Mediterranean but across the English-speaking world and in areas remote from the Mediterranean such as Finland and Japan. Yet this remains an ill-defined field of study, and the concepts of decentered history and the global in the local will help us give a sharper definition to the history of the Mediterranean and of other Mediterraneans. This discussion will draw on my most recently completed book, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*, which begins with a Neanderthal woman who lived on Gibraltar about 24,000 years ago, and ends not with extinct humans but with nearly extinct fish, the bluefin tuna that the Doha conference in 2010 failed to save.<sup>2</sup> I shall therefore be citing examples from Palaeolithic times to the present day, in the hope of showing that the Mediterranean was a space in which not just goods but identities were traded, processed, and repackaged. This discussion will also concentrate on what might be called the “classic Mediterranean,” leaving largely implicit the suggestion that the Baltic, the Caribbean, the Sahara, and so on can be approached in similar ways.

My Mediterranean is resolutely the sea itself, its shores and its islands, particularly the port cities that provided the main departure and arrival points for those crossing its surface. This is a narrower definition than that of Braudel, which at times encompassed places beyond the Mediterranean such as Madeira and Cracow, for cogent enough reasons; but the Mediterranean of Braudel and most of those who have followed in his wake was a land mass stretching far beyond the shoreline, as well as a basin filled with water, and there is still a tendency to define the Mediterranean in relation to the cultivation of the olive or the river valleys that feed into it.<sup>3</sup> This means one must examine the often sedentary, traditional societies in those valleys that produced the foodstuffs and raw materials that were the staples of trans-Mediterranean commerce, which also means taking on board true landlubbers who never went near the sea. But an alternative approach would concentrate on those who dipped their toes into it and, best of all, took journeys across it, participating directly, in some cases, in cross-cultural trade, in the movement of religious and other ideas, or, no less significantly, in naval conflicts for mastery over the sea routes. The question then becomes the way human beings directly experienced the sea. How far this includes fishermen is a moot point, since, within the Mediterranean, most fishing expeditions set out for fishing grounds and return from them without necessarily touching land; they are not, then, an automatic way of making contact across the waters, though there are important exceptions such as the longstanding Genoese colony at Tabarka, off the coast of Tunisia. More important to those interested in contact is the way their catch travels between communities, whether as Roman fish

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<sup>2</sup>. David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (London: Penguin; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup>. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, transl. S. Reynolds, 2 vols. (London: Collins, 1972–73); P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 36.

sauce or in the form of the sardines consumed in staggering quantities by the citizens of fifteenth-century Barcelona, especially during Lent.<sup>4</sup>

It is tempting to try to reduce the history of the Mediterranean to a few common features, to attempt to define a “Mediterranean identity” or phenomenon of “Mediterraneanism,” and to insist that certain physical features of the region have molded human experience there (as Braudel in particular emphasized). Yet this search for a fundamental unity starts from a misunderstanding of what the Mediterranean has meant for the peoples who have inhabited its shores and islands or have crossed its surface. Rather than searching for unity, we should note diversity: at the human level, this ethnic, linguistic, religious, and political diversity was constantly subject to external influences from across the sea, and therefore in a constant state of flux, while movements from the interior toward the sea (“barbarian invasions” and the like) introduced the cultures, languages, and political traditions of areas close and remote in the hinterland of Europe, western Asia, and North Africa. From the first Paleolithic settlers in Sicily to the ribbon developments along the Spanish *costas*, the edges and islands of the Mediterranean Sea have provided meeting points for peoples of the most varied backgrounds who have exploited its resources and learned, in some cases, to make a living by transferring its products from better-endowed to ill-endowed regions. These “connectivities,” as Peregrine Horden and Nicolas Purcell have termed such links, have brought not just commodities such as grain, oil, and wine but individual migrants and merchants, missionaries and mercenaries, mystics and pilgrims, conquerors and slaves, from one shore to another, sometimes merging into an apparently dominant culture, but often transforming it by their presence, not to mention more transient modern visitors such as tourists who have also altered the Mediterranean by their demand for certain goods, facilities, and services. Those individuals who transformed this space were sometimes visionaries, such as Alexander the Great or St. Paul, to cite two very different cases; but I want to look at some overlapping groups, mostly very large ones.

My first group is enormous: men. My second, for reasons I shall explain, seems much tinier, and is women. How male is the Mediterranean I am describing? Sedentary merchants might be women, as the evidence from the plentiful letters left by the Jews of eleventh-century Egypt (the Cairo Genizah documents), and as the evidence from twelfth- and thirteenth-century Genoa also indicates.<sup>5</sup> In that era, at least, wives did not accompany their husbands on trading expeditions, let alone travel for trade in their own right, though attitudes to participation in business varied among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. A few European women could be found in the well-documented Genoese trading colo-

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<sup>4</sup>. R. Salicrù i Lluç, *El tràfic de mercaderies a Barcelona segons els comptes de la Lleuda de Mediona (febrer de 1434)* (Anuario de estudios medievales, annex no. 30, Barcelona: CSIC, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>. S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, vol. 1, *Economic Foundations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Steven A. Epstein, *Wills and Wealth in Medieval Genoa, 1150–1250* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

ny in late thirteenth-century Tunis, but most of those we know about appear to have offered sexual services to the Christian trading community.<sup>6</sup> Female participation in naval warfare is apparently a twenty-first century phenomenon that has not been tested within the Mediterranean. But among migrants, whether the Alans and Vandals invading Africa at the time of St. Augustine, or the Sephardim expelled from Spain in 1492, there was often, though not invariably, a large female component—even the armies of the early crusades were accompanied by both noblewomen and bands of prostitutes. It is less clear whether the Bronze Age raiders known as the Sea Peoples came accompanied to the lands in Syria, Palestine, and elsewhere that they settled; indeed, a likely explanation for the rapid abandonment of their Aegean culture by the early Philistines is that they intermarried with the Canaanites, adopted their gods, and learned their language.<sup>7</sup> Much the same applies to the Normans who took control of southern Italy in the eleventh century CE. Yet one group of women has a particular importance for the history of the Mediterranean: female slaves, whose fortune varied enormously, from the extraordinary power it might be possible to exercise within an Ottoman harem to the sad exploitation and debasement of those used for sexual purposes or assigned lowly work in the villas of prosperous Romans.<sup>8</sup> During the Middle Ages, many of these slaves, both male and female, were brought out of the Black Sea, but those who inhabited the shores of the Mediterranean in the age of the Barbary corsairs (and at many other periods) also knew the horror of raiding parties that picked people off the shore—Christians off the coasts of Italy, France, and Spain, Muslims off the coasts of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. When King Francis I of France permitted the Turks to visit Marseilles and occupy Toulon in 1543, they kidnapped the nuns of Antibes, among other victims.<sup>9</sup> Still, the relative maleness of the traversed Mediterranean is something to ponder—the Italians seem to be right to say *il mare*, as opposed to the French *la mer* or indeed the neutral Latin *mare*.

My third group, mainly male as we have seen, is merchants. It hardly needs to be said that there is a massive literature on the transformative role of trade in all societies, even if it sometimes takes the form of a denial that long-distance trade in antiquity and the Middle Ages had a significant effect on economic development (as in the works of Moses Finley or Larry Epstein, both influenced by Marxist theory—in the latter case, the debate about the transition from feudalism

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<sup>6</sup>. *Notai genovesi in oltremare: atti rogati a Tunisi da Pietro Battifoglio (1288–1289)*, ed. G. Pistorino (Genoa: Istituto di Medievistica, 1986).

<sup>7</sup>. A. Yasur-Landau, *The Philistines and Aegean Migration and the End of the Late Bronze Age* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup>. Jacques Heers, *Esclaves et domestiques au Moyen Âge dans le monde méditerranéen* (Paris: Fayard, 1981).

<sup>9</sup>. Jacques Heers, *The Barbary Corsairs: Warfare in the Mediterranean, 1480–1580* (London: Greenhill, 2003).

to capitalism).<sup>10</sup> But I want to concentrate here on the people who traded, not on the goods they carried. Among all those who traversed the Mediterranean, merchants offer the best starting point, for several reasons. One rather positivistic one is that, even before Phoenician merchants spread the art of alphabetic writing across the Mediterranean, merchants have been anxious to record their transactions; we simply know a great deal about them, whether in Roman Puteoli, near Naples, in medieval Genoa and Venice, or modern Smyrna and Livorno. But—and here the issue of decentered history comes to the fore—the merchant pioneer is almost by definition an outsider, someone who crosses cultural and physical boundaries, encountering new gods, hearing different languages, and finding himself (much more rarely, herself) exposed to the sharp criticisms of the inhabitants of the places the merchant visits in search of goods unavailable at home, or seeking to sell what his homeland and lands often far beyond have produced.

The ambiguous image of the merchant as a desirable outsider is there in our earliest sources. Homer was uneasy about merchants. On the one hand, Athena appeared at the start of the *Odyssey* before Odysseus's son Telemachos, posing as a princely trader: "I call myself Mentos, son of the clever Anchioles, and I rule over the Taphians who are fond of rowing, and I have come here now with a ship and comrades, sailing over the sea that sparkles like wine, to foreign men, to Temese, to get bronze: I am bringing flashing iron."<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Homer showed contempt for mere traders of Phoenicia, suggesting that they were deceitful and unheroic, despite glorying, paradoxically, in the trickery of Odysseus; and the somewhat hypocritical sense that trade dirtied one's hands remained strong among patrician readers of Homer in ancient Rome. It was these Phoenicians, however, who ventured as far as southern Spain, establishing colonies side-by-side with but often apart from the native populations of the western Mediterranean—typically, on offshore islands, easy to guard, for one never knew how long relations with neighboring peoples would remain warm.<sup>12</sup> The Phoenicians provide a good example of what is being argued here, and are worth looking at further. In a first phase, around the ninth to seventh centuries, there is a strong sense that these Levantine merchants are foreigners, outsiders, introducing peoples far from their own native land to exotic goods (in return for local silver and copper); but, over time, the goods they brought transformed native cultures, notably in Tuscany, where the Etruscans were hungry for eastern artifacts, and in southern Spain, the home of the remarkable Iberian civilization.

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<sup>10</sup>. Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Moses I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973); Stephan R. Epstein, *An Island for Itself: Economic Development and Social Change in Late Medieval Sicily* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>11</sup>. Homer, *Odyssey*, book 1, 180-185, in *The Odyssey: Translation and Analysis*, transl. Roger Dawe (Lewes, Sussex, UK: Book Guild, 1993), 59.

<sup>12</sup>. M. E. Aubert, *The Phoenicians in the West: Politics, Colonies, and Trade*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Then, as the Phoenician colony at Carthage became an economic and political power in its own right, relationships were transformed in a number of ways. Carthage itself became the hub of new networks of communication, a cosmopolitan meeting point between Levantine and north African cultures, a place where divergent cultures fused and a new identity may be said to have emerged, even if the city elite continued to describe themselves as “people of Tyre.” Greek culture too gained a purchase in Carthage, whose citizens identified the Phoenician god Melqart with Herakles. Gods and goddesses as well as merchants criss-crossed the ancient Mediterranean. Additionally, the presence of Phoenicians and Greeks on the shores of Italy, individuals with a distinct cultural identity, acted as a yeast that transformed the villages of rural Etruria into cities whose richer inhabitants possessed an insatiable hunger for the foreign: for Greek vases, Phoenician silver bowls, Sardinian bronze figurines.<sup>13</sup> Alongside merchants who came for the metals of Italy, we can soon detect artisans who traveled west to settle in the lands of the *barbaroi*, knowing that their skills would probably earn them greater esteem than at home, where each was one of many.

There are striking parallels in later centuries. Alien merchants are an obvious feature of the medieval Mediterranean, where we have the intriguing phenomenon of the ghettoized merchant visiting Islamic or Byzantine territory, enclosed in an inn or *fonduk* that also functioned as a warehouse, chapel, bakehouse, and bathhouse, with one for each major “nation”: Genoese, Venetian, Catalan, and so on.<sup>14</sup> Here we are looking at the Mediterranean when Muslims, Greeks, and increasingly self-assured Italians were competing for control of the routes across the sea and the ports along its shores. The sense that the merchant might be a source of religious contamination and political subversion led the rulers of Egypt to lock the doors of these inns at night (the keys being held by Muslims on the outside). Of course, this only enhanced the solidarity and sense of community that held these merchants together, while underlining the differences between the different groups of Italians and Catalans, who coexisted in a rivalry that Muslim emirs proved adept at exploiting. The Byzantines too set the Italian merchants apart in a walled compound during the twelfth century, feeding xenophobia in their capital city, with the ugly consequences of anti-Latin pogroms. The idea of enclosing distinct communities behind walls was not, then, particularly novel when the king of Aragon first segregated the Majorcan Jews around 1300, and I do not doubt that these merchant communities provided a useful model for the ghetto.<sup>15</sup> These enclosed areas, whether of Jews or of European

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<sup>13</sup>. See, for example, Mauro Cristofani, *Gli Etruschi del Mare* (Milan: Longanesi, 1983); Robert Leighton, *Tarquini: An Etruscan City* (London: Duckworth, 2004); David Ridgway, *The First Western Greeks* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Robin Lane Fox, *Travelling Heroes: Greeks and Their Myths in the Epic Age of Homer* (London: Penguin, 2008).

<sup>14</sup>. Olivia Remie Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World: Lodging, Trade, and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup>. David Abulafia, “From Privilege to Persecution: Crown, Church and Synagogue in the City of Majorca, 1229–1343,” in *Church and City, 1000–1500: Studies in Honour of Christopher Brooke*,

merchants, were places where a certain amount of privilege—self-government, freedom to practice one’s religion, tax exemptions—were counterbalanced by constraint—limitations on free movement, reliance on often capricious public authorities for protection, and so on.

To speak of the Jews is to speak of merchants who had an unusual ability to cross the boundaries between cultures, whether in the early days of Islam, during the period of ascendancy of the Genizah Jews from Cairo, with their trans- and ultra-Mediterranean connections, or in the period of Catalan commercial expansion, when they could exploit their family and business ties to their co-religionists and penetrate deep into the Sahara in search of gold, ostrich feathers, and other African products that were beyond the reach of their Christian compatriots still stuck within their trading compounds. The prominence and mobility of a minority group is intriguing. Possibly we are victims of the imbalance in the surviving sources, which in the age of the Genizah are predominantly Jewish documents from Cairo.<sup>16</sup> But there are good grounds for seeing Jewish merchants as pioneers at a time when the Islamic authorities strongly discouraged travel into Christian lands, and, before about 1050, Christian merchants lacked the capital and infrastructure (including merchant fleets) necessary to conduct intensive business in the Islamic Mediterranean, with the exception of Venice and Amalfi. At the same time Jewish law encouraged maritime trade, by placing much lighter restrictions on sea travel during the Sabbath day than applied for those traveling by land, since the wind and the ship did the work, not the traveler. And then these Jewish merchants were able to bring back information about the world beyond the Mediterranean ports that was recorded and disseminated across Mediterranean Europe and beyond in the remarkable portolan charts and world maps produced in late medieval Majorca. As merchants moved around, so did information about the physical world.

Often able to speak a number of languages, and communicating by letter across great swaths of the Mediterranean and beyond, these Jewish merchants perhaps deserve the label “cosmopolitan.” But we also need to consider the port cities that, as it were, made a profession of cosmopolitanism: port cities of very varied political loyalties in which merchants and settlers from all over the sea and far beyond gathered and interacted.<sup>17</sup> One port city that features again and again across the centuries is Alexandria, which from the very start possessed a mixed identity, combining Greeks, Jews, and Egyptians, and which only lost that identity in the second half of the twentieth century, as rising nationalism destroyed the cosmopolitan communities of the Mediterranean.<sup>18</sup> These port

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ed. D. Abulafia, M. Rubin, and M. Franklin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 111-126.

<sup>16</sup>. On which see Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, vol. 1.

<sup>17</sup>. *Jews and Port Cities 1590–1990: Commerce, Community and Cosmopolitanism*, ed. David Cesarani and G. Romain (London: Frank Cass, 2006).

<sup>18</sup>. *Alexandria Real and Imagined*, ed. A. Hirst and M. Silk, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cairo: American University

cities acted as vectors for the transmission of ideas, including religious ideas, bringing Greek gods and ideas about how to represent them physically to Etruscan harbors, or bringing the worship of Egyptian gods such as Isis and Serapis (himself an extraordinary state-initiated fusion of Osiris, Herakles, Hades, and sundry other deities) to Roman Ostia. They became focal points for the spread of proselytizing Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, each of which left an extraordinarily powerful imprint on the societies of the lands around the Mediterranean, including, again, Ostia, where the remains of an ancient synagogue that functioned for several hundred years have been excavated.

The concept of the Mediterranean as a “faithful sea,” to cite the title of a recent collection of essays, needs to take into account its role as a surface across which not merely poor and anonymous pilgrims moved but also charismatic missionaries such as Ramon Llull, who died in 1316 after writing hundreds of books and pamphlets on how to convert Muslims, Jews, and Greeks to the true faith, without, it must be said, ever converting anyone.<sup>19</sup> Yet Llull’s career is a reminder that religious friction and confrontation is only part of the picture. He imitated Sufi verses and hobnobbed with kabbalists; he was at once a keen missionary and an exponent of old-fashioned Iberian *convivencia*, recognizing the God of the three Abrahamic religions as the same single God.<sup>20</sup> A different sort of *convivencia* existed in the minds of members of the religious communities that were expelled or forced to convert as Spain asserted its Catholic identity in 1492 and afterwards: the Marranos and Moriscos, Jews and Muslims who might or might not adhere to their ancestral religion in private, while being expected to practice the Catholic faith in public. The ascendancy of the Sephardic merchants in the early modern Mediterranean is astonishing in any number of ways: their ability to acquire and shed different identities, as “Portuguese” able to enter Iberia and as Jews resident in Livorno or Ancona—an ability to cross cultural, religious, and political boundaries reminiscent of their forebears in the Cairo Geniza six centuries earlier. A sideways glance at the oceans makes one notice the role of these Sephardim in the trade of the Atlantic world and the Indian Ocean as well.<sup>21</sup> These multiple identities, profitably studied in a recent book by Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within*, are an extreme case of a wider Mediterranean phenomenon: there were places where cultures met and mixed, but here were individuals within whom identities met and mixed, often uneasily.<sup>22</sup> This

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of Cairo Press, 2006).

<sup>19</sup>. A. Husain and K. Fleming, *A Faithful Sea: The Religious Cultures of the Mediterranean, 1200–1700* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007).

<sup>20</sup>. Harvey Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Dominique Urvoay, *Penser l’Islam: les présupposés islamiques de l’art de Lull* (Paris: Vrin, 1980).

<sup>21</sup>. D. Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea: Portugal’s Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire 1492–1640* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>22</sup>. Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within. The Marranos: Split Identity and Emerging Modernity*

was not a novelty. If we want to find earlier examples, we could point to Maimonides, whether or not we believe that he was for a time a forced convert to Islam, for the imprint of Islamic philosophy on his thought was profound whatever his personal history; intriguingly, Sarah Stroumsa has subtitled her new study of his career *Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker*, but disconcertingly admits to puzzlement about what this might signify.<sup>23</sup> Or there is the extraordinary Anselmo Turmeda, a friar who discovered Islam in a convent in Bologna and subsequently became a noted early fifteenth-century Muslim scholar under the name of ‘Abdallah at-Tarjuman.<sup>24</sup> One of the most interesting cases is that of al-Hasan al-Wazzan, Yuhanna al-Asad, Leo Africanus, so delightfully expounded by Natalie Zemon Davis in her book *Trickster Travels*: here we have someone who could also convey to Western audiences the physical realities of the Islamic world way beyond the Mediterranean, and who switched back and forth from Islam to Christianity and back to Islam.<sup>25</sup>

The advantages of creating centers where merchants of all nations and beliefs were made welcome were not lost on early modern princes, whether in western Europe or the Ottoman lands. Livorno, with its extraordinary privileges positively encouraging settlement by Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and (though less explicitly) Dutch and English Protestants, provided a model for later port cities such as Trieste under Maria Theresa.<sup>26</sup> Within the Ottoman world, Smyrna, or Izmir, enjoyed close ties to Livorno, and its rulers extended an equally generous welcome to all nations. A French visitor observed in 1700: “The Turks are seldom seen in the Franks’ Street, which is the whole length of the city. When we are in this street, we seem to be in Christendom; they speak nothing but Italian, French, English or Dutch there. Everybody takes off his hat when he pays his respects to another.”<sup>27</sup> The Christians were free to operate their own churches and taverns, but they did so rather tactlessly, leaving the taverns open all day and all night, and irritating the Turks by singing too boisterously in church. Toleration also produced tensions when communities exceeded the tacit limits of tolerance.

There is an understandable tendency to romanticize these meeting places, and

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(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>23</sup>. Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>24</sup>. Mikel de Epalza, *Fray Anselm Turmeda (‘Abdallāh al-Tarjūmān) y su polémica islamo-cristiana: edición, traducción y estudio de la Tuhfa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Madrid: Hiperión, 1994).

<sup>25</sup>. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-century Muslim between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

<sup>26</sup>. Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>27</sup>. D. Goffman, *Izmir and the Levantine World, 1550–1650* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 137.

the darker reality of trans-Mediterranean contact in (say) the early modern period also needs to be borne in mind: the ascendancy, between the fifteenth and the early nineteenth century of the Barbary corsairs, and the close intersection between piracy and trade, reminding one of Marx's dismissive view that the early successes of the medieval Italian traders were really based on naked piracy—which may well be fairly accurate. Before the final suppression of the Barbary corsairs (partly by the newly founded United States Navy), the Mediterranean had only ever really been free of a serious threat from piracy under Roman imperial rule, as a result of Rome's political control of more or less all its shores and islands. But piracy reveals some of the most extraordinary cases of mixed identity: corsairs from as far away as Scotland and England who, outwardly at least, accepted Islam and preyed on the shipping of the nation from which they came. This darker side of Mediterranean history also encompasses the history of those already mentioned whom the pirates carried back and forth: male and female slaves and captives, though they too, like the historian Polybios or Leo Africanus, could play a notable role in cultural contact between the opposing shores of the Mediterranean.

The unity of Mediterranean history thus lies, paradoxically, in its swirling changeability, in the diasporas of merchants and exiles, in the people hurrying to cross its surface as quickly as possible, not seeking to linger at sea, especially in winter, when travel becomes dangerous. Its opposing shores are close enough to permit easy contact, but far enough apart to allow societies to develop distinctively under the influence of their hinterland as well as of one another. Those who cross its surface are often hardly typical of the societies from which they come (if the word "typical" has any meaning anyway). If they are not outsiders, in some sense decentered, when they set out, they are likely to become so when they enter different societies across the water, whether as traders, slaves, or pilgrims. But their presence can have a transforming effect on these different societies, introducing something of the culture of one continent into the outer edges, at least, of another.

*Gonville and Caius College,  
Cambridge, UK*