Mapping the Mediterranean

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By the time it appeared in 2000, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell had been eagerly awaited. (The compilers of Blackwell's catalog had jumped the gun by what turned out to be several years, and its authors already had formidable reputations in medieval and ancient history respectively.) The book did not disappoint, blazing a trail through a wide range of fields and disciplines, not least medieval studies. Its early modern purchase, however, has been less direct, though engaged at many levels with Fernand Braudel's *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. Whereas Braudel's magnum opus is concerned principally with the second half of the sixteenth century, *The Corrupting Sea* spans no less than the three millennia from roughly 1500 B.C.E. to 1500 C.E. Its authors are particularly concerned with the relation of the Mediterranean whole to its constituent parts, which they identify as microregions, defined by the distinctively fragmented nature of the Mediterranean coast. The principal themes of the book are *connectivity* (low-level interaction between microregions over the *longue durée*) and *ecology*, the specific environmental conditions that both demand and facilitate that connectivity. In *The Corrupting Sea*, scholars of premodernity now have their own Braudel, adapted to a capacious time-span and a variety of sources, and conditioned by several intervening decades of historical, environmental, and geographic studies.[1]

The intention behind this special issue of *JMEMS* has been not so much to offer critique of *The Corrupting Sea*, which has already been done, but to follow Horden and Purcell's lead in exploring some aspects of the Mediterranean with methodological sophistication.[2] One such aspect is the dynamics of connectivity, with many different facets. It would be fair to say that *The Corrupting Sea* opens up rather than closes debate about the nature of Mediterranean space in the premodern period, and in this sense the work

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constitutes a real challenge. For one thing, Horden and Purcell's resolutely social scientific approach precludes any narrative. (It is therefore all the more fitting that some of the essays here pursue literary analysis to examine some of its themes.) Nor are Horden and Purcell unique in following a new agenda. For hard on their heels came Michael McCormick's *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300–900.*[3] Whether the key term is Horden and Purcell's *connectivity* or McCormick's *communications*, it is no accident that such studies are products of the present juncture, of our own digital age. From a contemporary point of view, it is tempting to look back on the preindustrial Mediterranean as a privileged forerunner of the connections that so define the globalized twenty-first century.

With such issues in mind, Valeria Finucci issued the following invitation to readers of *JMEMS*:

> This issue's aim is to use cross-cultural, interdisciplinary approaches to Mediterranean histories in order to puncture Romantic visions and Orientalist grand narratives. Following Fernand Braudel and Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, essays should challenge narrow, event-based histories and trace particular moments of exchange within the Mediterranean in all their variety and complexity during the medieval and early modern period. Essays should focus on cultural, political, and economic exchange among Mediterranean peoples, their goods, and ideas. The following types of questions might be addressed: What is the nature of Mediterranean travel and what are the power dynamics involved? What kinds of experience define the limits of the Mediterranean? In what ways are representations of Mediterranean experience entangled with ideas about the Mediterranean? We are interested in work that investigates varied forms, visual or verbal, such as maps, geographical descriptions, travel narratives, utopian reveries, artistic images. Emphasizing the connectedness of the region's landscapes, attention should be given to the structures of everyday life and to the ongoing, dynamic relation of humans and their environments.

Two medieval geographers together provide a framework for this issue of *JMEMS*, and for all their obvious differences it is worthwhile to compare them briefly. Paulus Orosius (ca. 390 to ca. 418 C.E.) is well known as the writer of a world history that condensed vast amounts of classical

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learning into a summary that would become familiar in the western Middle Ages. A native Spaniard, he traveled eastward at the time of the Vandal invasions, coming under the tutelage first of Augustine in north Africa in 414 and then, at Augustine's urging, of Jerome in Palestine in 415. His *History against the Pagans*, so widely read that it survives in some two hundred manuscripts, is frequently dismissed as superficial even though it exercised huge influence on medieval cartography.[4] The first of his seven books contains a substantial geographical introduction (1.2): this, he says, locates the disasters (*clades*) that characterize human history since the Fall (1.1.14–17). In providing such an excursus, Orosius is in part following Sallust, a known source for the work just as it had been for Augustine's *City of God*.[5] His ostensible purpose in composing the work is to make sense of the recent sack of Rome (410) in terms of divine providence.

Orosius's tripartite division of the world (*orbis terrarum*) with which he begins his geographical survey (1.2.1) would prove especially important: this would lead directly to the T-in-O scheme that structures medieval *mappaemundi*. In this scheme, the three continents visibly surround the Mediterranean, with Asia positioned above the cross-bar and balancing Europe and Africa below. The Mediterranean thus constitutes the "T" separating the continents, and this is what we find for example on the Hereford *Mappamundi* of the thirteenth century. The structure of Orosius's work reveals the idea of four successive world empires, which appears to originate in Hellenistic Judaism and particularly in the biblical book of Daniel.[6] What makes Orosius's version distinctive is that Carthage has the status of one of those empires: book 4 covers the years 288–146 B.C.E., culminating in Rome's victory in the Third Punic War. We can assume that this variation of an old theme was one means by which Orosius, himself from Spain, could swing the balance of his history westwards.

Whereas Orosius was, from his own point of view, only a part-time geographer, the work of al-Sharif al-Idrīsī (1100–1166) marked him out as a major compiler of scientific geography. Born in Sabtah, that is to say, Ceuta in today's Morocco, he was educated at Cordoba. As he himself recounts, his travels began at a young age with a visit to Asia Minor and later travels in southern France, Britain, and especially Spain and Morocco, before he settled in Sicily at the behest of the Norman king Roger II (1138). Here he produced a geographical treatise of vast importance and scale, the *Kita Rujar* or *Book of Roger*. This work is based on Ptolemy's *Geography* but incorporates material from Arab geographers and astronomers, not least from Roger's own subjects. The result is a rich compendium of topographic, eth-

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nographic, and political information that would later be a source for Ibn Khaldun, among others. It is only after the death of Roger in 1154 that Idrīsī returned to Ceuta, yet his time there marks the work out as a major collaboration between Islamic and Norman interests.

Whereas Ptolemy had divided the world into seven zones (*klimata*), Idrisi offered a subdivision of ten sections, which add further systematization to his work. Like many Islamic cartographers before him, Idrīsī places Arabia at the center of the world. Thus, the Mediterranean does not have the same structural prominence as it has in Orosius's description; rather, it is the space that separates the Hispanic peninsula from the Arabian center, thereby balancing the Indian Ocean. Despite the universal, scientific frame of the work, there is evidence of local or at least regional loyalty when, for example, Idrisi discusses his native Ceuta.

The publication history of the *Book of Roger* itself makes for a fascinating story about the relation of Mediterranean parts to the whole. An abridged version was printed by the Medici press in 1592, and from here it was translated into Italian by B. Baldi (1600) and into Latin by the Maronites Gabriel Sionita and Joannes Hesronita (1619). Its publication title, *Geographia Nubiensis*, stems from a misreading of a passage concerning Nubia, which was thought to contain the name of the author, otherwise unnamed. Most of the modern scholarly interest in the *Book of Roger* relates to particular sections, and there is at present no complete critical edition.[7]

These comments, however schematic, point to a tension within two major Mediterranean geographers, between the local and the universal, and suggest further that it is important to consider links between their lives and texts. Given the enormous authority both authors attach to particular texts, there can be no assumption that this relation is a matter of simple, visible cause-and-effect. It has been all too easy for scholars to describe their works in terms of "tradition," but this is clearly inadequate if it assumes continuity. For one thing, the joint consideration of lives and works may be taken as an incentive to consider the term *mapping* in both its representational and experiential senses. This is all the more important when recent studies of maps have emphasized the power relations with which they are imbricated, a departure from earlier antiquarian approaches.[8] In other words, it deserves to be asked in what ways the writers' lives might have been entangled with their presentations of Mediterranean space. Such concerns might encourage us to think anew about the concept of experience in relation to literary texts, on lines recently explored by Dominick LaCapra; or they might prompt a

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return to the challenging work in human geography of Henri Lefebvre and others.[9] By such means, the kinds of journeys that *The Corrupting Sea* and *The Origins of the European Economy* have brought to the fore deserve to be seen in relation to those of writers such as Orosius and Idrīsī. The rubric of connectivity is a capacious one.

In what ways, finally, do the essays in this special issue of *JMEMS* respond to the challenge of the new Mediterranean studies? In an essay of considerable breadth, Palmira Brummett canvasses notions of the Mediterranean implicit in medieval and early modern texts and maps, measuring these against the approaches of modern historians, particularly those using some form of world systems theory. She comes down firmly in favor of a fragmented view of the Mediterranean. Herself an Ottoman historian, she is particularly concerned about the place of the Ottoman Empire in Mediterranean history in relation to periods and units.

If it has become something of a cliché to talk of the exchange of persons, goods, and ideas, then slavery combines two of those categories, and this is the focus of the essay by Robert Davis. Particularly notable in such slaving activity is the manipulation of religious difference, which provided moral justification that would not otherwise be available. Malta played an active role in the slave trade, merely one instance of the phenomenon whereby Mediterranean islands often seem to offer microcosms of broader dynamics.

Most of Shakespeare's plays have a Mediterranean setting, Daniel Vitkus reminds us, whether ancient or closer to the Elizabethan age. This essay, however, takes as its subject two late-sixteenth-century plays on Thomas Stukeley, an English renegade whose actions and violent death inspired fascination among English audiences. The plays show how the buccaneering spirit of Mediterranean enterprise could run amok, and the plays negotiate the dangers that they present.

Bronwen Wilson, concentrating on Venetian responses to Turkish costume, is interested in the ways in which images tread the uneasy line between the known and the exotic. Travel, in Wilson's attractive framework that perhaps owes something to the Turners' work on pilgrimage, centrally involves the negotiation of identities and hierarchies.

Diskin Clay's article takes us back to one of the earliest Mediterranean travelers known to us by name: Odysseus. Islands are at the center of this essay, particularly the imaginary ones with utopian overtones. We see that the geomorphological phenomenon of the existence of Mediterranean islands has had two related effects: in a practical sense it has been central

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to connectivity from the earliest periods of long-distance communications (witness for example the rich archaeology of Cyprus), and in an imaginative sense it has been the focus of social ideals in the form of utopias. In the early modern period, the tension between the imaginary and the real would gain new importance with Columbus's voyages and the need to make sense of the islands discovered in the Caribbean.

The intersection of gender and travel is central to the final essay by Sharon Kinoshita and Jason Jacobs. Boccaccio's story of the Muslim princess Alatiel receives a thoroughgoing recontextualization in terms of medieval connectivity. Of particular interest are the linguistic barriers that keep her from communicating with her captors and the representation of female agency. Kinoshita and Jacobs are motivated in part by a desire to revivify past voices.

These essays, taken together, give rich evidence of the renewed vigor of Mediterranean studies — motivated in part by the appearance of *The Corrupting Sea*. In their own ways, they show also that it is both possible and desirable to combine the representational and experiential aspects of mapping. The interplay of parts and wholes, of individual subjects and Mediterranean space, is indeed a capacious topic of investigation.

Notes

1 Braudel's posthumous *Memory and the Mediterranean*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Knopf, 2001), a.k.a. *The Mediterranean in the Ancient World* (London: Penguin, 2002), turns out to be something of an embarrassment to his considerable reputation: written in the 1960s for a popular audience but never published, it is out of line with recent scholarly trends. It shows that even the master resorted to the broad brushstrokes of the rise and fall of civilizations, so far from *Annales* history, when writing outside of a scholarly context. Popular and pedagogical contexts present a problem in representing Mediterranean pasts: a lavishly illustrated new book edited by David Abulafia, *The Mediterranean in History* (Los Angeles: Getty Museum, 2003), deploys more up-to-date approaches to narrative, yet its division into periods is somewhat arbitrary. Micronarratives and grand narratives can make uneasy bedfellows.

2 There have been at least two collections of responses to *The Corrupting Sea*, mainly but not entirely by classicists: Irad Malkin, ed., *Mediterranean Paradigms and Classical Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 2005), previously published as *Mediterranean Historical Review* 18.2 (2003); and William V. Harris, ed., *Rethinking the Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). As Horden and Purcell point out in their response (in Harris's collection, with much bibliography, 348–75), some of

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the most substantial critiques have come from outside of classical studies, narrowly defined.

3 Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

4 Orosius, *Histoires: contre les païens*, ed. and trans. Marie-Pierre Arnaud-Lindet, 3 vols. (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1990–1991). Citations are to book, section, and paragraph numbers.

5 Sallust's important excursus is in the *Bellum Iugurthinum* 17–19, though this work has nothing like Orosius's universal framework. Certainly Sallust would be a major source and inspiration for medieval cartography. See Marcel Destombes, *Mappemondes, A.D. 1200–1500* (Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1964), 37–38; and A. H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65. Merrills, 35–99, sets a new standard for scholarship on Orosius.

6 Arnaldo Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 31–57.

7 The bibliography appended to G. Oman's article, "Al-Idrisi," in Martijn Theodor Houtsma, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al., new ed., 7 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1960–), shows an overwhelming preponderance of regional interests; cf. S. Maqbul Ahmad, "Cartography of al-Sharif al-Idrisi," in J. B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., *History of Cartography*, vol. 2.1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 156–74. P. Amédée Jaubert's *Géographie d'Édrisi*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1836–40), remains the only complete version, however inadequate; a new edition is appearing piecemeal from the Istituto universitario orientale di Napoli and Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, under the title *Opus Geographicum: Liber ad eorum delectationem qui terras peragrare studeant* (Napoli: Brill, 1970–).

8 See, notably, J. B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

9 Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

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