

Preface

It is an honour to introduce this volume, which is the result of a joint project between the University of Urbino Carlo Bo and our Japanese colleagues from the Mediterranean Studies Group, whose main interest as a group of scholars focuses on what is known as the “Mediterranean World” after Fernand Braudel’s ground-breaking studies.

The eminent classical historian Oswyn Murray described Fernand Braudel as the greatest historian of the 20th century. Braudel built his reputation with his book *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949). With the second edition published in 1966 and translated into English in 1973, Braudel became the best-known historian in the world. Braudel’s legacy, in particular his Mediterranean, is still powerful, and his concept appears modern even today. The sheer magnitude of Braudel’s influence is clear to see in two more recent books: Barry Cunliffe’s *Facing the Ocean: the Atlantic and its People*; and Peregrine Hordern and Nicholas Purcell’s *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*.

The latter work, in particular, also proved stimulating to our colleagues in the Mediterranean Studies Group, who organized their workshops in 2014 (in collaboration with the Institut Universitaire de la Recherche Scientifique, Rabat) and in 2016 (with the Department of History at the Ionian University, Corfu) precisely on the topics of micro-ecology and connectivity, which are central to Hordern and Purcell’s study. Indeed, what makes the Mediterranean

so unique is its ability to allow diversity to coexist in a continuous exchange, with an endless list of newcomers who have come to occupy its shores over the centuries. As has been observed by the historian Scipione Guarracino, the history of the Mediterranean will continue for as long as this list remains open.¹ The very idea behind the Mediterranean Studies Group is in fact to organize a platform for interaction and exchange between different cultures, which is perfectly in line with the region's longstanding tradition. It is hardly surprising that the core of their interest is in fact an area, the Mediterranean one, which – as Irad Malkin of the University of Tel Aviv recently argued – “until the rise of Rome in the 2nd century BCE, proved to be a decentralized network, with no-one claiming *mare nostrum*”; and where, in the 8th century BCE, the *longue durée* process began of transforming disparate maritime cultures into a Mediterranean civilization; it was then that Phoenicians, Greeks and Etruscans formed and founded new settlements, creating networks of numerous, independent, political communities.² It is similarly unsurprising that the Mediterranean, which Homer dubbed the “wine-dark sea” in the 9th century BCE, forms the basis of a joint investigation of apparently distant civilizations; for since early antiquity this area has been a place of cultural interaction, hybridization and syncretism between different peoples who, however, share the same geographical space and the same history of travel, trading, exploration and colonization, from the Pillars of Hercules to the eastern shores of the Black Sea. Braudel himself invites us to consider the Mediterranean in its broadest geographical context, including the great civilizations of Iraq and Egypt, the steppes of Russia, the forests of Germany and the Sahara Desert. To him, Mediterranean history is an aspect of world history, with an emphasis on two main themes: the history of technological mastery with the development

¹ Guarracino, S. (2007). *Mediterraneo. Immagini, storie e teorie da Omero a Braudel* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori).

² Malkin, I. (2017). Pompei e il Mediterraneo. In: Osanna, M., Rescigno, C. *Pompei e i Greci* (Milano: Electa) pp. 83-92 (particularly p. 90); on the historic-geographic notion of “Mediterranean” in antiquity cf. the recent contribution by Prontera, F. (2014-2015). *Sul Mediterraneo come categoria storico-geografica*. *Geographia Antiqua* 2014-2015;XXIII-XXIV: pp. 17-23, with extensive bibliography.

of the skills so fundamental to ancient civilizations (such as fire and water technology, pottery, weaving, metalworking, seafaring and writing); and the history of exchange, especially long-distance. “Our sea”, he wrote, “was from the very dawn of its proto-history a witness to those imbalances productive of change which would set the rhythm of its entire life”. It is imbalance, in fact, which creates exchange and therefore leads to progress. For centuries and to this day, as we know, the Mediterranean has been a dynamic scenario for cultural conflicts and fusion; and – one might say – for opportunities for human knowledge and “humanity” to progress; because, to quote Fernand Braudel again, “having been is a condition to be”.

All these issues are covered in the fifteen papers that were presented over the course of our workshop. They offer a sample of the heritage of artisanal, political-philosophical and artistic knowledge that has developed over time in this area, and of commercial and diplomatic exchanges. They also highlight the powerful ideological influence the area has exerted beyond its own borders over a long period of time, from the 6th century BCE to the present.

It is an honour for the Mediterranean world that an ancient culture as rich in tradition as that of Japan might turn its attention to the Mediterranean world itself; moreover, this in some way corroborates the geo-political centrality of this area, its being somehow paradigmatic in the history of peoples and civilizations.

I am delighted by the precious opportunity of this collective volume, and would like to express my gratitude to the contributors for having shared their work with us, in the hope that this might be the beginning of a lasting collaboration between our university and our colleagues in the Japanese academic community.

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