The Mythical Mediterranean Sea

The Mythical Mediterranean Sea:

Crossroads of Cultures, People, and Civilizations

Edited by

Nick Ceramella and Umberto Gori

Introduction by

Nick Ceramella

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This volume brings together a selection of essays from the 7th Annual Conference co-organised by Florence University of the Arts and Stony Brook University (SUNY), and supported also by UNIMED, the Mediterranean Universities Union. The conference – "De Re Mediterranea" – was held at Palazzo Bombicci Guicciardini Strozzi in Florence on 4-5 December 2015. As is always the case with our Conferences at FUA, the speakers came from different nations, including Australia, Canada, France, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, and the USA.

On the first day, the plenary session was held at Palazzo Strozzi before the President of Regional Council of Tuscany, Eugenio Giani, the President of the Fifth Commission of the Florence City Council, Maria Federica Giuliani, the President of FUA Gabriella Ganugi, the former FUA Provost James Lynch, and Professor Mario Mignone Stony Brook University Conference Coordinator. The keynote speaker was Robert A. Saunders of Farmingdale State College who gave a brilliant speech, "Mapping the Mediterranean: Imagining Mare Nostrum from the Papyrian Past to the Geovisual Present," providing an extremely interesting overview of the evolution of maps and mapping technologies associated with the Mediterranean Basin from antiquity through the contemporary era.

I would like to thank all the above and everyone at Florence University of the Arts, without whose help this event would not have taken place, and express my appreciation to Nick Ceramella for his inexhaustible believe in this project and for offering his expertise in shaping up this book and co-editing the volume. My deepest gratitude goes to FUA President Gabriella Ganugi and Professor Mario Mignone for their continued support to our yearly conference.

Ultimately, given the high number of papers presented at the conference, it goes without saying that not all of them could be included in this volume. It can be said, however, that all the participants' contributions have been most valued and that this conference too has continued to build upon the success on the earlier ones and has proved to be equally stimulating.

Firenze 18 January 2019
FUA Conference Coordinator
Umberto Gori

INTRODUCTION

NICK CERAMELLA

Fig. 1: Rhodes Island (Greece).

The essays making up this collection

This volume is the outcome of a selection of papers presented by a gathering of international scholars, who explored the many connections that define the Mediterranean Sea as a symbol of tradition and modernity, and examined it as a region capable of congregating, synergizing and transforming cultures. Their writings focus on the relationship between the cultural, social, and historical environment of Mare Nostrum to pinpoint the elements defining its identity. Therefore, particular emphasis is placed on the role and

relevance of the Mediterranean as the first beacon of multi-ethnicity which may be seen as a symbol of diversity and unity as well as a model that holds clues to understanding the global merging of cultures. All the more reason it is a real shame to see that the general interest in this unique area, known worldwide for its culture, climate, healthy food, and tolerance, has arisen not only thanks to such highly positive features but also because, as Pope Francis says, the Mediterranean has become an open-air cemetery where thousands of people keep drowning.[1]

The essays in this book deal with most of the above and have been divided into four sections, covering the following thematic areas: Literature, History, Culture, and Identity.

1. Literature

As a field of research, Mediterranean literature has traditionally had less success than history and art history. This is the main reason why we have decided to open this volume with a section on literature and show that the Mediterranean has been a most inspiring area to some of the greatest European writers, giving them the opportunity to reflect their spiritual and material lives. Most relevantly, it must be emphasized that literature historically developed along with language. Indeed, with trade and conquests, each population, living in such a vast Basin, evolved its language and an adequate alphabet whose need was felt to record transactions that would have otherwise been manipulated or even forgotten. So, a particular variety of language gradually emerged, while writing was more and more used not only to communicate for state affairs and common people's needs, not to metion to express one's inner feelings. This paved the way to literary language and literature. It goes without saying that in this respect, the first writer one thinks of is Homer with his *Odyssey*, where he tells about Ulysses' adventures in the then unexplored Mediterranean Sea, which has ever since been an inexhaustible source of inspiration for authors and artists at large. Incidentally, it is unfortunate that none of the authors, who have contributed to this volume, dealt with the emerging literary works written by those immigrants coming to Europe from the coastal areas around the Mediterranean. They often describe their experiences, in the language of their country of choice, to explore their identities as immigrants away from home. However, here follows the presentation of the essays, comprising the first section of this volume, dedicated to the influence the Mediterranean had on the literatures of some European countries.

Nick Ceramella begins with his essay – "The Mediterranean Sea: Inexhaustible Source of Inspiration for British Literature and Culture" – in which he outlines the reasons why British writers and poets became attracted to the Mediterranean, drawing particular attention to the Italian peninsula, a widely acknowledged trade and financial center as well as the lighthouse of Mediterranean culture, art and literature. He remarks that from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance, following the Reformation and the Enlightenment, the Mediterranean gradually lost its driving role to northern Europe, mainly to the cities of London, Paris, and Amsterdam. Except that in Victorian and then, Edwardian Britain, thanks to the technological innovations and a consequent travelling craze towards the Mediterranean, especially towards Italy, the upper class searched for culture, health, pleasure, and artistic and spiritual inspiration in that area. Moreover, Ceramella argues that travel writing and setting stories in 'exotic' places, like Italy and Greece, became a reaction against the values of contemporary life. Among others, he says that two cases in point are the world-renowned writer D. H. Lawrence, who identified the south and its sun as the way to regain the primeval link human beings used to have with nature and among themselves, and John Arthur Strutt, a London painter, who, on venturing all the way down to Sicily, came across the Arbëresh communities (i.e. Albanians) in Calabria as early as the 1840s. Then, Ceramella, on pointing out that a recurrent theme in literature and art, from the 1750s to the 1960s, was the mythological representation of the Mediterranean as a dream world, a place where there were no sexual taboos, he uses as examples Lord Byron's poetry, E. M. Forster's stories, and the works of Norman Douglas who spent much of his life around the Mediterranean. Finally, he refers to some contemporary novelists as Lawrence Durrell, Iris Murdoch, and Louis de Bernière, who focus on typically modern existential problems, and concludes with Paul Fussell's very telling words: "to sketch the history of the British imaginative intercourse with the Mediterranean in modern times is virtually to present a survey of modern British literature."

Stefano Muneroni maintains that, as Italy's far-right politicians continue to argue for an absolute and unbridgeable difference between Italian nationals and foreign migrants based on culture, religion, and language, the theatre has been countering divisive approaches to the complex phenomenon of mass migration while pursuing a more open and dialogic position in order to negotiate cultural diversity and move past the notion of national borders as primary markers of cultural identity. In "Gianni Clementi's *Finis Terrae*: Shaping Transnational Subjectivities in the Mediterranean," Muneroni provides a close analysis of Clementi's 2014

play *Finis Terrae*. In this play, Clementi explores the reasons for migration to Italy and the perilous journey across the Mediterranean where thousands of migrants lose their lives, but more importantly it illustrates how the differences that supposedly separate Italians and migrants are construed by bias and prejudiced rhetoric. Drawing on staging and textual frames, Clementi demystifies the alterity with which immigrants are often charged in Italy's media and public discourses, and focuses instead on the notion of "Mare Nostrum" as a spatial and epistemological site where individuals of different races and ethnicities negotiate their respective differences. The Mediterranean Sea is constructed as a hybrid space that defies any attempt to be qualified in an ideological or nationalist fashion. Clementi humanizes migrants by highlighting numerous literary, religious and cultural similarities they share with Italians. He situates his story in an inescapable space, literally the end of the land and the beginning of the sea, where all groups must confront what makes them alike and find out how to live together peacefully. Muneroni, finally, remarks that the play, which ends with the words of Pier Paolo Pasolini's "The Prophesy," presents no last word on the phenomenon of mass immigration yet provides a critical frame to reflect on meaningful scenarios of intercultural communication and serene cohabitation.

Amanda Skamagka, in "Cultural aspects of 'Mare Nostrum': Italy Seen Through the Eyes of the Greek Poet Yannis Ritsos," introduces one of the most famous modern Greek poets of the so-called 'Generation of the 1930s,' who was acclaimed worldwide for his left-wing ideology poems, and also for his sweet or mythical ones, though he is hardly known for his travel lyrical pieces. Ritsos travelled to Italy at least seven times from 1976 to the years before he died in 1990, and visited more than 20 places there. During his trips, either he wrote down notes, as if he kept a diary with his impressions, or he composed relevant verses on the spot. That experience resulted in the so-called Italian Triptych, three collections of poems: *Transfusion*, *The world is one*, and *The statue in the rain*. Ritsos admired the Mediterranean Sea and its natural beauty, and in his Italian-themed lines, he praised the cultural and urban landscape as well, but unlike other travel poets he mainly focused his attention on everyday life scenes. He enjoyed observing Italians busy with their daily activities, though he thought they might have been Greeks, or even complete strangers. This made him remark that, on visiting Italy, he saw the world as one and detected the transfusion of the Greek civilization into the Italian one. Moreover, he wondered whether that was because there were evident similarities between his homeland and Italy, or because he was fully aware of the common historical and cultural heritage of the two countries. Alternatively, he asked himself if that was because both Italy and Greece are surrounded by the Mediterranean,

the sea which both unites and divides countries, cultures, and peoples. He concluded that the Greek and Italian civilisations and cultures intersect, interact and, in some places, intermingle. In short, Skamagka says that Ritsos seems aware of this identity which is neither local nor national, neither Italian nor Greek, is simply the Mediterranean.

The last essay in this section by **Sara Moran,** "Sensuousness and Silence: Ungaretti and Camus. Comparing Two Mediterranean Authors," investigates the themes of sensuality and carnal love in the works of Giuseppe Ungaretti (1880-1970) and Albert Camus (1913-1960), two major authors of the Western Canon who were born in Egypt and Algeria respectively. Moran, as an introductory step, highlights the key role played by the Mediterranean landscape in the creative process of both of them. The main elements of sun, sea, and flourishing nature are then explored through the two categories of "experienced and represented territory." Thereafter, the analysis of what could be defined a sensuousness of nature is followed by the examination of a similar common concept of love, traceable in the erotic poems of Ungaretti's "Il Porto Sepolto" and in the pages dedicated to Don Juan in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* by Camus. The paradigm of love as a feeling of lack, a passion "in absentia," typical of the Western tradition, is rejected in favor of a fully embraced physical joy, which is free from any sense of guilt (cf. the Christian mortification of sexual pleasure), or transgression (cf. the libertine philosophy of which De Sade is the major representative). If, as Ungaretti declares in various autobiographical texts, this attitude is directly attributed to the Islamic religion and the Koranic precepts on erotic matters, in Camus's works is above all related to the influence of Nietzsche's philosophy of "oui à la vie," considered by Jean Grenier as one of the main issues of his philosophy. Moran concludes her essay by referring to the concepts of "location" and "in-between," representing a positive model of integration and cultural pluralism as elaborated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an Indian literary theorist and a very influential postcolonial scholar.

2. History

The following citation from the novel *Balthazar* (1958), written by the British novelist Lawrence Durrell, lends itself so naturally to introduce this section in only a few words, "the Mediterranean is an absurdly small sea; the length and greatness of its history makes us dream it larger than it is."[2] Nonetheless, it is a microcosm of today's world where global perspectives continuously merge, clash, and question one another from a cross-cultural point of view. The Mediterranean Sea is, indeed, the theatre of an unprecedented

exodus of millions of hopeless people who are prepared to even lose their lives, as it often happens, on trying to cross over to Italy and Northern Europe in search of a better life. Even so, this is a picture of the Mediterranean which does not pay justice to its traditional and most welcoming allure as the crossroads of deeply varied civilizations and cultures, going from the Arab to the Norman, the Greek to the North African of which Sicily represents the best possible living synthesis.

William Boelhower's essay "Writing Mediterranean History: from Geohistory to Floating Signifiers" opens up a window primarily on the Mediterranean as a historiographical topic. He begins by wondering about the following key issues: how has the Mediterranean been written up, and what perspectives have historians adopted in order to write about this cultural-political-economic object in recent years? And can we still talk about narrative history in describing the Mediterranean world, or must we also recognize the structural validity of the Braudelian metaphor of this world's perennial 'Brownian motion'? Ultimately, Boelhower wonders how we can capture, represent, and account for the current flows of refugees across and around the Mediterranean. He reckons that they are often little more than 'floating signifiers,' who bear within themselves dreams which have invariably led to that perennial 'creolized' culture that we continue to label the Mediterranean world.

Stefano Luconi, in his essay "Mediterranean Democracy and the United States During the Cold War: Italy's 1976 Elections and the Citizens' Alliance for Mediterranean Freedom," states that the Cold War encouraged the United States to define a transatlantic community based on shared democratic values with Western Europe. However, within its own bloc, Washington paid particular attention to the Mediterranean basin because this vast area was both a key strategic region and the cradle of western-style democracy. Most importantly, President Harry S. Truman elaborated the so-called Truman Doctrine which he announced to Congress in 1947. Its purpose was to oppose Soviet geopolitical expansion, especially in the Mediterranean where he feared Greece and Turkey were particularly exposed to Soviet threats. Nevertheless, it did not take long before Italy became the top priority on the American agenda in the area. After preventing the Communist-dominated Popular Democratic Front from winning Italy's 1948 elections, Washington was afraid again of a Communist victory at the polls twenty-eight years later. Then, in 1976, a Socialist-inspired government faced a more radical rebellion in the armed forces in Portugal, a unified Left was on the apparent verge of coming to power in France, and political uncertainties loomed over Spain after the death of Francisco Franco and the end of his dictatorship in 1975. Left-wing

forces seemed to be making inroads into Mediterranean countries and Italy's 1976 elections posed as great a concern for the U.S. government as their counterpart in 1948.

This essay examines the U.S. intervention in Italy's 1976 election campaign. More specifically, it focuses on the efforts of the Citizens Alliance for Mediterranean Freedom to mobilize Italian voters against the Communist Party. It also analyses the stand of Italian immigrants' offspring in the United States. It concludes that, while Italian Americans cooperated with the U.S. government in 1948 by urging relatives and friends in the ancestral country not to vote for the Popular Democratic Front, they did not make a significant contribution to the 1976 anti-Communist campaign.

Mark T. Abate is the author of "Coexistence and Clash: *Convivencia* and Pragmatic Pluralism in the Medieval Mediterranean" where he uses the Latin term "convivencia" saying that no word in scholarship on the Medieval Mediterranean has been quite so loaded. "Convivencia" literally means "living-togetherness," but intellectually and polemically means so much more. The term was coined by the Spanish literary historian and philologist Americo Castro in 1948 to describe the ethnogenesis of the "Spaniard" through the contact, conflict, and cultural cross-fertilization among Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Iberia over some three centuries (approximately from the late eleventh to the late fourteenth). Castro was primarily interested in how Spaniards came to be "different" from "other" Europeans, and how Christians, Muslims and Jews interacted to create a hybrid culture called "Spanishness." This began "The Polemic of Spanish History," a national intellectual struggle to define the soul of Spanish culture and to articulate the historical genealogy of "Homo Hispanus." In the 1970s, the ideological focus of the debate was transformed: Franco died, his Kulturkampf ended, and non-Spanish historians, with no vested political interest in the national polemic, produced an increasing number of innovative studies on relations between Christians, Muslims, and Jews. The emergence and spread of "multi-culturalism" as an ideology in future decades, as well as an increasing interest in writing histories of European tolerance to combat the old narrative of European intolerance, gave the concept of Spanish "living-togetherness" a new importance. If medieval peoples of different and conflicting cultures could find a way to live in a state of "togetherness" then surely, we, in the modern liberal world, should have much hope for success in embracing diversity and ending bigotry. "Convivencia" became in the process an emblem for modern multi-culturalism that Americo Castro himself would scarcely recognize.

Abate, through this essay, returns to the original conceptualisation of "convivencia" as envisioned by Americo Castro and considers its strengths,

weaknesses and applicability for examining cross-cultural contacts in the Mediterranean basin as a whole. The primary areas examined are Spain, Sicily, the Venetian Empire, and the Crusader States of the Eastern Mediterranean. The central thesis of this essay is that, although medieval peoples of the Mediterranean had no conception of what today is meant by multi-culturalism (and if they did they would utterly reject it), they created pluralistic societies that were based upon self-interest and enlightened exploitation. They rarely embraced neighbours across the religious divide, but they did make space for each other and produced cultural mechanisms to govern inter-faith contacts. These cultural mechanisms—be they laws, institutions, or customs—regulated contacts to facilitate selective cultural borrowings while limiting what seemed to be possible cultural "pollution." They were designed to maintain cultural purity while making it possible for one culture to capitalize on the benefits and strengths of another. Periodically, this "modus vivendi" collapsed beneath the weight of religious fervour or promises of substantial material gain, and these failures must be given as much attention as successes to paint a sufficiently complex historical portrait of "living-togetherness" in the Medieval Mediterranean. Besides, this essay offers some speculation on the relevance of Castro's model for international relations today and compare it with the (in)famous paradigm constructed by Samuel Huntington in his controversial classic *The Clash of Civilizations*.

Joseph F. Stanley in his essay, "Negotiating Trade: Merchant Manuals and Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Medieval Mediterranean," deals with the Italian preponderance in Mediterranean commerce during the late Middle Ages. On a critical note, regarding the Mediterranean Sea as the route for transport, trade and wealth, he says that without that the European, African and Middle Eastern civilisations would have never developed. Then, he adds that "a corpus of material that constitutes a valuable documentary record of the Italian merchant's education and understanding of Islamic culture remains untouched: "pratiche della mercatura," or "manuals of commercial practice." Taking these manuals as its documentary focus, this essay reveals the porous boundaries of the medieval Mediterranean whilst highlighting how cultural integration was instrumental for the Italian merchant in negotiating a trade with the so-called 'Saracens.'

3. Culture

Despite there widely varying religious, political, and socio-economic features, Israel, Egypt, Greece, and Italy, just to mention some of the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Basin, are weaven by a common

historical and cultural heritage deriving from Greco-Roman roots. Its shores have been inhabited through many centuries, giving the rise to unprecetented civilizations, three major monotheistic religions, and powerful empires such as the Roman. The Mediterranean culture had an enormous impact on the historical vicissitudes of the whole area, leaving still visible traces in art and people's features. In fact, what is really remarkable is the contribution that the Mediterranean Sea, a true cradle of world civilization, made on the development of the history, philosophy, religion, music, art, technology and science. It will suffice to recall that the largest and most significant library of the ancient world was established in Alexandria in Egypt as early as 300 BC.[3] Little wonder that the first intellectual developments emerged in the eastern Mediterranean and offered people innumerable opportunities to meet and intermingle with other cultures.

Emanuela Sesti, in "The Photograph of the Nineteenth Century in the Mediterranean Between Reality and Imagination", deals with a particular aspect of the "Mare Nostrum" which is hardly known to the vast majority of people who are unfamiliar with photography in general. However, we learn that from the beginning of this art, the Mediterranean has been the favourite place with photographers who took pictures of the countries bordering that sea. Sesti argues that thanks to photography, we have been able to examine the Mediterranean as a whole, from Seville to Constantinople, from the straits of Gibraltar to the Isthmus of Suez. On concluding, she says that as we can see in *Excursions Daguérriennes* by Noël Marie Lerebours (1841), the most important photographers – English, French, German, Italian, Greek, Armenian, Turkish, Russian – worked in the Mediterranean area and created a Mediterranean identity through their photographs.

Harry Kashdan, in "'Una faccia, una pancia?' Mediterranean Culinary Encounters in Contemporary Film," presents food as a most important, though lightly considered element of Mediterranean culture. He underlines that, even if the attitude towards food has been changing in the past few decades, doctors and people alike have begun to recommend and appreciate the healthy Mediterranean diet based on the foods and recipes of countries such as Italy, Greece, and Spain. Kashdan approaches the Mediterranean culinary world from the point of view of the cinema. In Gabriele Salvatores' film *Mediterraneo* (1991), we can hear the words, 'una faccia, una pancia' ('same face, same belly'), which is a Greek Orthodox priest's jovial gloss on the popular proverb 'una faccia, una razza,' ('same face, same race'), mainly used by Greeks to highlight their common roots, culture, and status as Mediterranean countries, paradoxically recalls also the infamous logic of Italian colonialism in the Greek islands during World War II. This essay addresses the juxtaposition of "race" and "stomach," exploring how intra-

Mediterranean encounters are figured through food in contemporary films. Against the backdrop of an idyllic vision of a Mediterranean harmony, Kashdan sets readings of Abdellatif Kechiche's story of Tunisian immigrants in France, *Le grain et le mulet* (2007); Tassos Boulmetis' film about the repatriation of Istanbulite Greeks to Turkey, *Politiki kouzina* (2003); and Luca Guadagnino's family drama, *Io sono amore* (2009). Kechiche's and Boulmetis' films both focus on intra-Mediterranean displacement, while Guadagnino's adds the perspective of a Russian *émigrée* who marries into an Italian family. Kashdan argues that the spectre of the "Mediterranean diet" engineers an expectation of inter-cultural familiarity across the Mediterranean space. When this familiarity fails, food becomes the site of romantic and cultural seductions and the agent of processes of identification. Food equally travels with emigrants and acts upon immigrants, making the culinary a signpost for processes of assimilation and acculturation. This essay asks how immigrant communities use food to present cultural difference, and how immigrants may also turn to food to claim cultural sameness. In the process, Kashdan explores the advantage of the idea of a shared "Mediterranean diet" and examines how cultures congregate and transform in the Mediterranean space.

Jeffrey Gaab, in this most interesting essay "'De Re Mediterranea' in Germany? Ludwig I and the Classical Reinvention of Munich, 1825 – 1848," shows how the Mediterranean region influenced and transformed cultures across Europe. This work focuses on the influence that the architecture of ancient Rome and Renaissance Florence had on Germany, specifically Munich, in the nineteenth century. Gaab points out that Ludwig I, King of Bavaria (1825–1848) wanted to rebuild Munich so that "no one would be able to say that anyone had seen Germany, without having seen Munich." To accomplish that, he imposed a Mediterranean identity on the city by sending his ministers to Rome and his architects to Florence. In practice, Ludwig established various museums to share with the public the artefacts he brought back from his numerous trips to Italy and Greece. Later, he had a grand boulevard built and ordered that the entire government quarter, including his palace, be rebuilt in elegant Renaissance Italian style. The result is that Munich is a Mediterranean-style city, despite it is north of the Alps. Thus, one really cannot experience Munich without understanding this heavy Mediterranean and classical influence. Not surprisingly, this essay compares and contrasts the original Italian buildings and art with the Munich copies, which confirms how the Mediterranean style was indeed cross-cultural.

Sandra Nannini and **Elena Radicchi**, in their co-authored essay "Changing lifestyles in Mediterranean countries: towards homogenization

of habits, values and cultures?", consider how recent socio-demographic projections, focused on countries within the Mediterranean area, show profound changes, regarding ageing composition, social status, physical activity, health conditions, and food habits. They say there is no doubt that globalisation, the integration of markets and the evolution of new media technologies, enable people to reach around the world farther, faster and cheaper. But they also highlight that, especially among specific segments as teenagers and seniors, individuals tend to share almost the same interests and are likely to exhibit similar behaviours. Most important, this lifestyle standardisation and an increased consumption of products may lead to a lack of sensitivity to one's own culture. Based on this premise, this essay aims to shed light on the changes in the way of living taking place in the Mediterranean countries, while analysing and discussing if in this part of the world they are converging towards the same values and routines as in the rest of the western world. Nannini and Radicchi to carry out their research have applied a quantitative methodology, and have developed a secondary research activity through a "meta-analysis" of several information about people's lifestyles, which has been collected in scientific journals and international online reports (Eurostat, FAO, OECD, United Nations, etc.). On concluding their work, they put these questions: Does local culture still matter? If so, to whom? How important is it to preserve cultural heritage and to promote local production and consumption?

4. Identity

It is a fact that identity has become an issue in the 21st century. If on the one hand, there is an established opinion which on the wave of globalization envisages the utopia of a unified one-world identity, on the other hand, there is the so-called Identitarian Movement (i.e. identitarianism), a Pan European far-right, white and nationalist organization whose mission is to defend the Mediterranean from the uncontrolled savings of immigrants. Following that, a legitimate question arises, what can we call Mediterranean? To answer this question, we need to approach the identity issue which implies that we should take into due consideration history, lifestyle, culture, and nature. If we do that, we realise that there is not just one single Mediterranean identity but several. Mediterranean is not about the homogeneity, but the unity coming from differences and consequent mingling and interrelationships. The overall idea deriving from this section is meant to embrace the Mediterranean society as a whole with its millenial varied culture and its unique interconnections. As hinted at in the introduction to the literature section, an extremely important contribution to the cohesion of the

Mediterranean society was made possible by the positive role played by people's psychological availability to learn a common language, though it often implied giving up a bit of one's identity to achieve a conscious international understanding. However, the question that needs to be addressed here is whether despite borders shared by the diverse shores of southern Europe, North Africa, and West Asia, it is possible to speak of a Mediterranean identity.

Boris Vukićević, in "The Mediterranean Identity of Montenegro," brings to the readers' attention the Montenegrin vocation to the Mediterranean Sea. He declares that his country belongs to the group of small Mediterranean nations, like Lebanon and Cyprus, that stand as an example of how Mediterranean countries, however small, are culturally diverse. The identity of Montenegro was shaped by influences of different civilizations and religions, which was favoured in good measure by its geographical position on the Adriatic coast of the Mediterranean. Through history, the Montenegrin territory had been the place where different empires met. Since the line that divided the Roman Empire passed right through what is now Montenegro, the interests of various powers met and confronted on its territory as different civilizations collided and intermingled. The Montenegrin identity is complex and reflects a long historical development of nation-building that includes the Mediterranean at its core, but mirrors also influences of Mitteleuropa, Russia and a specific Balkan complex of features that may or may not be seen as part of a wider Mediterranean cultural and political corpus. Montenegro is an example of the Mediterranean multi-ethnic country, although it did not have a full-scale inter-ethnic or an inter-religious conflict which made be called by some an oasis of multi-culturalism in a region full of violent confrontations. While the Montenegrin society remains politically divided, it is indisputable that its belonging to the Mediterranean had and still has an enormous influence on the country's lifestyle, cuisine, language, and architecture. The fact that the Montenegrin territory is roughly the size of Campania (a southern Italian region), but has a rich mixture of Islamic, Orthodox Christian, Catholic and Jewish presence, makes it a prime example of Mediterranean identity built through diversity that seems to be the only viable way of reshaping national identity after Montenegro regained independence in 2006.

Antonio Pellegrino, in his essay "Vast, Diverse, and Equally Immutable: Sonic Notes on the Mediterranean," introduces a very peculiar dimension of the Mediterranean world: sounds as a different common denominator of cultures and even histories in that vast area. He says that in the poem "Mediterraneo," Eugenio Montale writes that the Mediterranean Sea is "vasto e diverso e insieme fisso" ("vast, diverse and equally

immutable"). It is described as a place that, outside any political and geographical borders, presents an indisputable unity of colours, smells, and sounds. Everywhere on its shores, the mind and the heart of whoever comes in contact with it is captured by this unique combination of sensory experiences. These phenomenological and meta-linguistic commonalities are present throughout the multiplicities of cultures and histories that have developed across its geography. Alongside this line of thought, this essay aims to explore the essential sonic elements that have shaped and designed consciously or not – the auditory memories of Mediterranean populations. Those sonic experiences build a shared interior dimension of the senses which is determined by natural phenomena and sonorities. The synthesis of these sounds shapes the memories that, in turn, create a state of mind familiar to every Mediterranean person. This communality supersedes national identities, resolving the dialectical relation between culture and place in favour of the latter, creating a trans-Mediterranean identity. As a scholar, Pellegrino attempts a descriptive analysis of the Mediterranean's natural sound palette and, as a musician, he transposes this operation on a compositional plan. In fact, alongside the analytical study, he intends to show how these sounds become not an end in itself, but a platform for further musical developments.

Jema Stellato Pledger ends this volume with her fascinating essay, "Identity Concept Within the Mediterranean Framework Operation Mare Nostrum: Creating an Emerging Mediterranean identity." She uses a poetical image to introduce the Mediterranean sitting majestically, like a queen holding court, as the waves lap against the shores of twenty-one countries. She remarks that for centuries this sea has been a significant route for the traveller, warmonger, migrant and refugee whose indelible footprints have made pathways into many lands. With each successive journey, change like a cloth across a table has been laid. In the past, as in contemporary times, food, ideas, arts, politics and religions have been effective to understand the changing landscape when cultures merge. This has not been more evident than in the current humanitarian crisis, with thousands making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean. Pledger's essay discusses the concept of identity within a Mediterranean framework and from a human rights-based approach in the context of "Operation Mare Nostrum." She also deals with the impact of cultural diversity through human movement, particularly around the Mediterranean's shared borders. From this perspective, this mythical Sea is viewed as a model of cultural merging that contributes to create the idea of a hybrid Mediterranean identity.

A very relevant part of this essay is that dedicated to "Operation Mare Nostrum" which, although unpopular in Europe and in contrast to the Italian

government's "politica dei respingimenti" ("refoulement policy"), had the merit of saving more than 140,000 lives. The Operation spoke volumes and was applauded globally, showing the power of a humanitarian model in countries like Australia whose cruel policies have countered the multicultural/multi-ethnic Australia it once was. Thus, the idea of identity within a Mediterranean framework is emerging even if there are stark differences between the social, cultural and political structures of Mediterranean countries. Pledger concludes that the Mediterranean can be seen as a light with the potential for unity within diversity able to develop a multicultural or multi-ethnic society.

Joppolo, Mediterranean Sea, 19 September 2018
Nick Ceramella

Notes

[1] Eleanor Biles, "Stop the Mediterranean becoming vast migrant cemetery, Pope tells Europe," in *Mail Online Wires* 25 Nov. 2014.
[2] Lawrence Durrell, *Balthazar* (New York: Dutton, 1961), 18.
[3] The idea of reviving the ancient library of Alexandria in modern times was launched was launched by UNESCO in 1974 and accomplished in 2002. Now the "Bibliotheca Alexandrina" functions as a modern library and a cultural centre, preparing highly specialized students to take their post-graduate degrees.

SECTION I

LITERATURE

Fig. 2: Typical Mediterranean vegetation: olives, pines, oranges, tomatoes, chilli peppers. (Joppolo, Calabria).

THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA: INEXHAUSTIBLE SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR BRITISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

NICK CERAMELLA

> *It is lovely on the Mediterranean – so blue and pure. Yesterday for hours our own Etna hovered in the air behind us, like a white witch. I nearly wept, of course, but hardened my heart and said no my lady!*[1]

In the past few decades, several books have been dedicated to an analysis of the impact that the Mediterranean had on British literature and culture during the 19th and 20th centuries. Paul Fussell's *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (1980), considered a precursor to studies on literature and travel, stresses the deeply felt appeal that the Mediterranean had on British writers and people in general:

> To sketch the history of the British imaginative intercourse with the Mediterranean in modern times is virtually to present a survey of modern British literature. […] the Mediterranean is the model for the concept *south*, and it is a rare Briton whose pulses do not race at the mention of that compass direction.[2]

The Mediterranean country that allured British people most is widely acknowledged to be Italy. Indeed, the Italian peninsula, representing the hub of the most important cultural and trade activities in the Mediterranean, has traditionally been the main pole of attraction in the region. Italy emerged as the beacon of the Mediterranean civilization, starting from the Greek settlements in Southern Italy – named Magna Graecia – in the 8th century BC. Then followed the Roman conquest of the entire Mediterranean when Augustus founded the Roman Empire (27 BC), and the Mediterranean Sea began to be called *Mare Nostrum* (Latin "Our Sea"). Although there were ups and downs, Italy continued to play a crucial role in the development of the whole area through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Afterwards, the Reformation first and the Enlightenment in the 18th century caused a shift towards London, Paris, and Amsterdam. However, in the 19th century,

London took the lead thanks to the technological innovations powered by steam and coal first, and electricity later. That was the age of the Industrial Revolution which brought about deep changes of people's lifestyles also outside Great Britain. Ships, railroads, and cars caused a travel craze towards Italy and the Mediterranean, which coaxed the British upper class to begin searching for culture, health, pleasure, artistic and spiritual inspiration. Following this new trend, it was natural that travel writing and setting stories in 'exotic' places like Italy (a tradition going back to the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama) became a reaction against the conservative values of contemporary life. So, the relationship between politics and literature was prominent during that historical phase as shown, for example, by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) and Lord Byron (1788-1824) who distinguished themselves for being two revolutionary poets in their own right. Thanks to artists like them, literature became a strong force for political change which could catalyse its political environment and vice versa. Shelley and Byron found an amazing source of inspiration for their works in the Mediterranean, namely on the wonderful Ligurian coast that allowed them to reveal their true natures and passionate thoughts. In absolute disagreement with them, the father of English Romanticism, William Wordsworth (1770-1835), who loved his Cumbria and the Lake District instead, argued that any English person should be happy to belong to a country of mists, clouds and storms, and should think of Egypt and of the cerulean vacancy of Italy as an unimaginative and even sad spectacle.[3] By contrast, the other two poets were so fascinated by places like the Poet's Gulf (so-called after them) that Shelley even addressed the wind and sea as follows:

> Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
> The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
> Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams […][4]

But that apparently placid sea was in truth such a strong entity that Shelley would eventually surrender to it. He drowned on 8 July 1822 – one month before his thirtieth birthday – when his schooner was caught in a storm while he was sailing from Livorno to Lerici. He was found on a beach near Viareggio and was cremated with Lord Byron in attendance. Byron too loved the sea and was an excellent swimmer. In 1822, he swam for 7.5 km in open water as testified by an epigraph engraved on a marble plaque placed above the archway leading to the Bay of Porto Venere (see the picture below.)[5]

Fig. 3: Lord Byron's Grotta at Porto Venere, Liguria.

Byron lived in Italy for seven years but travelled also to Albania and Greece where he went to fight the Turks. He died in a fit of fever, aged only 36, at Missolonghi in 1824. His entire production, starting from his first professional collection of poems *Hours of Idleness* (1807) through the long narrative poem *Child Harold* (1812-18), and the tragedy *Manfred* (1816), is imbued with the Mediterranean relaxed atmosphere characterised by an improvisatory nonchalant style and an ironical-erotic vein reflecting a Mediterranean poetics of passion and spontaneity. Byron, a truly flamboyant and eccentric young man confirms all that in his satirical poem *Don Juan* (1818-24), in which he shows he is the front-line breaker when it comes to the opposite moral attitudes between the south and the north of Europe. He says that there was no problem in a country like Spain if a beautiful young woman like Donna Julia married a rich old man at an early age: "What men call gallantry, and gods adultery, / Is much more common where the climate's sultry."[6] Similarly, nothing could prevent her from having an affair with Don Juan. It is not surprising then that a recurrent representation of the Mediterranean is that of a place without sexual taboos. For example, one theme in the European literature and art, from the 1750s onwards, was the mythological representation of what tickled the British mentality most, homoeroticism, which the poet and literary critic John Addington Symmonds (1840-1893), a homosexual himself, called *l'amour de l'impossible* ("the love of the impossible"). In 1883, he published *A Problem of Greek Ethics*, the first book on this hot topic that ever appeared in Britain. It seems that sex was some sort of obsession, as confirmed by Byron who, on thinking about his affairs with many Florentine and Venetian youngsters whom he had met during his numerous visits to Italy, said that 'Italy devoured both his body and soul.' Similarly, William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) described Spain as his healing country in his travelogue, *The Land of the Blessed Virgin* whose protagonist, a young Londoner (perhaps himself), finds happiness in Andalusia in Southern Spain. But British authors grew an interest in a variety of other aspects other than sex. There were those who, on venturing into the remotest areas of Southern Italy, right in the middle of the Mediterranean, were intrigued by the composite social structure they came across. Henry Swinburne (1743-1803) was a pioneer in this sense, with his *Travels in the Two Sicilies* (1783) where he presents the customs and habits of the locals, including the Arbëresh (Italo-Albanians) whose vast majority settled in Calabria. Likewise, Keppel Richard Craven (1779-1851) wrote another travel book, A *Tour Through the Southern Provinces of the Kingdom of Naples* (1821) where he too refers to the same minority group. Only a few years later, a London painter, John Arthur Strutt (1790-1864), had the first close contact with the Arbëresh. Strutt's

fascinating experience is presented in *A Pedestrian Tour in Calabria and Sicily* (1842), an epistolary book, consisting of letters written to inform his mother about his daily happenings. He tells her about his encounter with the Arbëresh whom he first met at Spezzano Albanese in northern Calabria. He says that not long after his arrival there, a woman unexpectedly invited him to a party in her house where he soon found himself "employed in the mysterious maze of the Tarantella"[7] which everybody danced to the morning after. Strutt was particularly charmed by the women's natural beauty and their splendid gala costumes that he from then onwrards took every opportunity to describe and paint during his whole trip. (See Nick Ceramella, Further readings). Besides, he and his travel mate, the painter William Jackson, were intrigued to hear their hosts speaking Arbërisht, their mother tongue, some sort of ancient Albanian. So, they learnt that "Many villages are to be found in Calabria, inhabited entirely by these *Albanesi* and, at one called Santa Sophia, after the name of their patroness, scarcely a man can speak Italian."[8]

Among the other British writers, who showed a long-life interest in southern Italy, there is Norman Douglas (1868-1952). He was particularly enthralled by Calabria to which he dedicated *Old Calabria* (1915), a book focused on local food, habits, culture, social problems like mass immigration to the States, and brigands. He shared with Strutt his appreciation of the Arbëresh women's costumes, their music, religion, and language, but he turned that into a truly intellectual interest. Douglas ventured from Spezzano up to the hills towards Shën Sophia (Santa Sofia) and visited, among other villages, Shën Mitëri (San Demetrio), boasting the Italo-Albanian College, a real cultural stronghold of the Italo-Albanian community. This school is also famous for the contribution that its students and teachers alike gave to the Italian Independence, as acknowledged by a Decree issued by Garibaldi himself who granted 12,000 ducats for their invaluable support to the Calabrian Revolts of 1844. For the purposes of this essay, it is most interesting to highlight that the presence of the Arbëresh developed through six migratory waves from the mid-fifteenth century to the end of the eighteenth. Though it was not all plain sailing, the way the situation developed still represents a unique case of mass immigration to Italy across the Mediterranean, and a most successful example of integration. This seems unbelievable if we consider that they were virtually invited to cross over the Ionian Sea as mercenary soldiers or land workers then, while today's Albanians escape from extreme despair as shown by those 24,000 people who arrived on a cargo in Bari on 8th August 1991.