Plato thinks that those who want a well-governed city ought to shun the sea as a teacher of vice (ponerodidaskalos).

Strabo, Geography, 7.3.8

Whereat he said firmly: 'When your Excellency writes a book, you will not say: "Here there is a beautiful church and a great castle." The gentry can see that for themselves. But you shall say: "In this village there are no hens." Then they will know from the beginning what sort of country it is.'

Gertrude Bell (1907) The Desert and the Sown, 93
The intolerable melancholy, the dinginess, the corruption of that tainted inland sea overcame him. He felt the breath of centuries of wickedness and disillusion...


The world is a visitation and an abode of transition. Be you then travellers in it and take warning from what remains of the traces of the early ones.

Yaqut ibn Abd ‘Allah al-Hamawi (d. 1229)
*Geographical Onomastics*, ed. Juaidich (1959), 2

When the redoubtable Sir James Frazer was preparing, in his blind old age, the *Aftermath* (1936) to that *summa opus* of Victorian anthropology, *The Golden Bough* (1911–35), his amanuensis read him an account of some rituals of the Borneo Dyaks. The head of a new-born Dyak, Frazer learned, is held by its father in such a position that the mother’s blood drips on it. ‘I never realised’, Frazer said, ‘that blood could be shed at child-birth’ (Downie 1970, 19).

As our project has expanded, at times seeming to threaten rivalling Frazer’s in inclusiveness, we have frequently been conscious of the likelihood that we shall display a comparable ignorance of fundamentals. But such fears inevitably attend an enterprise of comparison that takes both the broad and the long view, and that in traversing several usually distinct disciplines must, on many issues, make what it can of the reports of others.

Not that we have ever thought to produce a measured, synoptic, account either of the whole Mediterranean past or of the scholarly reports that it has generated. The best way to introduce what we do intend – and to explain our title – may be to recount the project’s genesis.

This work originated in a simple observation – that, in his celebrated *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1972a), Fernand Braudel had proclaimed the enduring unity and distinctiveness of his subject; but he had mostly confined his supporting evidence to what he thought of as the facts of geography and to sixteenth-century documents. (Only very recently have we become aware of the existence of Braudel’s substantial study of the prehistoric and ancient Mediterranean, left unpublished at his death; cf. II.3.) Our simple observation concerning *The Mediterranean* induced a simple question. Could such a work have been written taking as its eponymous ruler an imperial potentate from Antiquity or the Middle Ages? If the Mediterranean had indeed, as Braudel suggested, constituted a distinct unity in earlier centuries than the sixteenth, it ought to be possible to demonstrate the fact. It ought also to be possible to discover how that unity subsisted, and what kinds of continuity were involved in the process.

The answer to our simple question was (we imagined) simply sought. We embarked on a seminar, at each meeting of which one or other of us discussed a theme such as those reflected in our chapter headings here. Given that our brief was to assess the unity of the Mediterranean in periods earlier than Braudel’s,
and given that our was a collaboration between a medievalist and an ancient historian, it was natural for us to conceive our period as Antiquity and the Middle Ages. We searched for evidence from any part of that long stretch, and from anywhere within the region. We were looking for material that would, at the very least, display the Mediterranean as an area which could yield novel and fruitful comparisons across extremes of time and space - an area within which established distinctions such as those between Antiquity and the Middle Ages or East and West were ripe for reconsideration. Yet we also, of course, intended to establish how far, and in what respects, this area had indeed possessed unity and distinctiveness in ages earlier than that of Philip II. Our original scope, chronologically speaking - and the title of our seminar - was 'Before Braudel'. The result of those meetings was certainly no imitation of Braudel's method (of which Chapter II.2 supplies a reminder). But it did take the first part of The Mediterranean, on the 'constants' of human geography, as a frequent point of reference. Our theme was the relationship of 'man and environment' and the subtitle of the publication that we hoped would eventuate from the seminar should, we thought, probably include both that phrase and 'Antiquity and the Middle Ages'.

The papers written for that original seminar have slowly been transformed into chapters. And the chapters have so grown in size and number that it has been expedient to publish our findings in two separate installments. Not surprisingly, moreover, the scope of the project has significantly evolved. Under the sign of the microeconomists, we have tried (starting in Part Two) to elaborate a conception of how Mediterranean unity has actually worked - of what has, for so much of its past, made the region a discriminable whole. This conception differs markedly from the first part of Braudel's work, and it cannot depend on such dichotomies as those implied by 'man and environment', nor rest content with the standard definitions of human geography. In keeping with this different approach, we have instead been prompted to start from a distinction of subject matter between, on one hand, history in the region, contingently Mediterranean or best conceived under some other heading, and, on the other hand, history of it - history either of the whole Mediterranean or of an aspect of it to which the whole is an indispensable framework. Part of what happens in the Mediterranean is, in this very particular sense, not Mediterranean and is not of a kind which is adduced to an understanding of the rest, knowledge of microeconomies and their interrelations is, we argue, essential. That 'in or of' distinction affects our presentation of evidence. All kinds of history - political, social, economic, religious - come to be included in our microeconomological investigations ('history of'). There is, however, no chapter on Mediterranean political, social, economic, or religious history per se - such as might reasonably be expected of a broad survey - because we see all that as belonging to 'history in'. This omission should not be taken as implying a judgement about the relative importance of such topics. While certainly linked in a multiplicity of important ways to its microeconomical setting, 'history in' is not deterministically to be thought of as a mere by-product of that setting. We are far from wanting to claim that microeconomies explain everything.

Putting it that way applies the distinction between 'history of' and 'history in' synchronically. We propose that it be applied diachronically too. As work has proceeded we have found it essential to move well beyond the bounds of Antiquity and the Middle Ages: back into later prehistory, most notably in Chapter V and throughout Part Three; forward into the early modern period, especially in Chapter IV, and even to the later twentieth century in Part Five, which considers the contribution of social anthropology. To a minor extent, this expansion of scope reflects shortages of appropriate and accessible evidence from classical Antiquity or the Middle Ages - shortages that have forced us to look elsewhere, usually to later periods. The main reason for expansion, however, has been our growing belief that the kinds of unity and continuity described in the following chapters extend well beyond our initial termini. One way to capture our rationale for the still vaster period that we have thus embraced would be to liken our discussions to those of archaeologists, who often seek to illuminate their results by drawing comparisons with historical and ethnographic works. The comparisons are effective because the comparanda all derive from 'traditional' or 'pre-modern' cultures. In what follows, we often move in a similar way between prehistory, history and ethnography, and we dedicate the last two chapters of this volume to exploring just how far ethnography helps us understand the durability and unity of Mediterranean microeconomies. It was tempting, therefore, to indicate our revised chronological scope by somehow including 'traditional' (or 'pre-modern') in the subtitle of this book as a substitute for 'Antiquity and the Middle Ages'. To do so would, however, have been to leave the choice of comparative material unexplained: why should the comparisons chiefly be intra-Mediterranean rather than involve evidence from other parts of the world? It would also, more importantly, have been to rest far too much weight on a category which has proved notoriously hard to define, and which, although we inevitably use it now and then as an established and convenient shorthand, we would be loath to turn into a conceptual cornerstone.

Instead, we prefer to think that the range of evidence on which we draw, its particular dispersal in time and space, relates not only to the continuity of Mediterranean history but also to its twentieth-century attenuation. The writing of Mediterranean historiography may, so we argue in Chapter II, be seen as having reached a pause with Braudel's work (in that respect we are 'after Braudel', not before him). Historiography of the Mediterranean - the type of which Braudel was the greatest exponent - has mostly vanished from the scene. During the twentieth century, the Mediterranean region itself has also come to a considerable extent been disintegrated, and the network of its microeconomies radically reconfigured as the development of its economic and political alliances, technologies and communications networks of the North and West or the Far East. That is perhaps one, but only one, ingredient in the complex process often called modernization. For us, though, it means something slightly different: the gradual transmutation of our subject matter into something requiring a very different book from this one, and thus a suitable - if very approximate - end-point for our enquiry. We naturally hope that our approach may continue to be useful to the study of Mediterranean lands into the third millennium. But the Mediterranean region as a distinct whole is not, we think, the indispensable framework within which to conceptualize the very recent history and likely future of its peoples. That is why our subtitle is simply and provocatively A Study of Mediterranean History. We allude, of course, to Toynbee's now little-read and largely-discredited A Study of History (12 vols. 1934-61) - a work even larger in scope than Frazer's, and perhaps a more dangerous predecessor. But the following chapters, we hope, betray nothing at all
in common with Toynbee’s vision of the past in terms of the growth and decline of civilizations. We rather wish to imply that what we study is Mediterranean history as a whole, the history of the region. In every usual sense, of course, history ‘keeps on happening’: reports of its death are exaggerated. Yet in our very special sense (cf. Fukuyama 1993), Mediterranean history, as exemplified in the sorts of evidence we use below – prehistoric, ancient, medieval, early modern – can be deemed to have reached a close. What we catch in the ethnographies to which Part Five draws attention – ethnographies that were in several cases already historical documents by the time of their publication – can perhaps be regarded as a vestige of it. There seemed no need, then, to include dates in our subtitle. About the prehistory that came before the earliest evidence cited, there is too little that can usefully be said; while the very ‘modern’ periods and topics not fully represented here belong not in a history of the Mediterranean but in some other analysis.

For all these changes of theme and scope, the work that we now present follows the pattern of our original seminar in one major respect: what we have written remains in many ways essay-like. On none of the topics selected for discussion can we claim to have come anywhere near to completeness, although we have certainly not avoided detail. Even some of the more recherché matters touched on – fishing, peak-sanctuaries, earthquakes, cognitive geography – let alone areas of debate such as deforestation, shame, or pastoralism, have generated copious scholarly discussion. Those more expert in such areas are asked to forgive the superficiality that arises from brevity of treatment as we try to engage all these subjects with a larger whole. On the other hand, many of the topics that we find important fall into the gaps between disciplines and have attracted very little attention. We have therefore mostly eschewed the even-handed ‘literature survey’ in favour of hypotheses and arguments of our own. Rather than attempt uniformly full documentation at every stage – often an impossibility – we have incorporated only essential references into the text, and have kept lists and appraisals of our sources to the Bibliographical Essays. But even these Bibliographical Essays – which should be read in conjunction with their respective chapters – are intended to complement our discussions rather than to note everything pertinent. We make no apology for omission or Tendence. On the other hand, we have felt it important where possible to provide support for our frequently heterodox arguments by generous citation of discussions that seemed to echo our way of thinking. Our bibliography is long but not, we believe, redundant.

Now that the work has grown to two volumes, the caveat about completeness of treatment must extend to the scope of this, the first of them. Several central topics have been reserved for Volume 2: climate, disease, demography and, underlying all these, the relations between the Mediterranean and other major areas of the globe. One way to capture the difference of emphasis between the two volumes would be to say that Volume 1 moves from inside the Mediterranean to outside, beginning with the smallest constituents and their interaction and touching only occasionally on more far-flung links; while Volume 2 will proceed in the reverse direction, from outside in, looking predominantly at those larger systems within which the Mediterranean has been situated and at their effects on its microecologies. A second instalment will also allow us an opportunity to respond to criticisms of the first, in the interests of the debate that we should like to promote.

In this volume, then, we offer only a part of the whole, and only provisional conclusions. Here in Volume 1, by way of preamble to our own foray, we first discuss the nature of Mediterranean history as others have perceived it. Part One begins to outline our own view of Mediterranean historical geography. The emerging themes are developed in Part Two, where we have set out the rudiments of our own overall interpretation. The distinctiveness of Mediterranean history results (we propose) from the paradoxical coexistence of a milieu of relatively easy seaborne communications with a quite unusually fragmented topography of microregions in the sea’s coastlands and islands. It was a commonplace among Greek and Roman writers that the effects of this easy interaction by sea were profoundly damaging to good social order; hence this volume’s title. In Part Three some of the implications of the microregional landscape and its ready connectivity are explored, especially the conditions in which the resources of the environment and human labour combine to produce and distribute the means of survival. Against interpretations that emphasize radical change and violent discontinuity in the Mediterranean past, our approach sustains the hope that valuable comparisons can be drawn, and certain continuities inferred, across extremes of time. In Parts Four and Five, finally, we move from the environmental to the social, though the complex interaction of the two remains a prominent theme. Both the religious aspect of the environment and the controversial conclusions of ethnography are used as touchstones for more general issues.

Our wish to subordinate particular topics to the investigation of large overarching questions has entailed returning to certain important topics and areas in several different places. Pages on exchange or pastoralism, to give only two examples, will be found dispersed in various chapters. This, to repeat, seemed preferable to a division of subject matter textbook-style. Such a division would have lent an illusory appearance of comprehensiveness to an essentially serendipitous enterprise and would also, more significantly, have suggested a very different conceptualization of our subject from the one actually espoused. Recourse to the index, in which major subjects are carefully distinguished, is consequently indispensable. As for times and places, we hope that we have been catholic in including most parts of the Mediterranean and most epochs of our chosen span in at least some discussion. But it is obvious that there will often be many possible illustrations of our contentions from different regions and periods, and that we have been able to include only a few. We can say with Ephraim of the discoveries which our insignificant intelligence... has been able to make come from the times and opportunities available; we in no way promise information about everything in the world’ (Panarion [Medicine Chest], preface II, trans. Amidon 1990, 21). Evidence is chosen to exemplify a theme rather than to complete a dossier. We have attempted to avoid, if possible, already familiar instances, in order to remind the reader that Mediterranean history as we understand it should above all concern itself with the numerous small localities rather than the few famous ones. The dazzle of classical Athens, imperial Rome, metropolitan Constantinople, cosmopolitan Venice is responsible to a large extent for the relative obscurity in which our ecological subject matter has for so long been wrapped. By choosing rather to discuss Cefalú, Melos or Cagliari, the Bija and the Albufera, we hope that, if nothing else, some compensation can be made.
We inhabit a small portion of the earth . . . living round the sea like ants and frogs round a pond.

Socrates, in Plato, *Plato*, 109B

Most of all it is the sea that delineates precisely the layout of the land, creating gulfs, sea-basins, traversable narrows and, in the same way, isthmuses, peninsulas and capes; in this the rivers and mountains also play their part.

Strabo, *Geography*, 2.5.17

When God created the Mediterranean he addressed it, saying, ‘I have created thee and shall send thee my servants. When these will ask for some favour of me, they will say “Glory to God!” and “God is Holy!” and “God is Great!” and “There is no God but God!” How wilt thou then treat these?’ ‘Well, Lord’, replied the Mediterranean – ‘I shall drown them.’ ‘Away with thee – I curse thee – I shall impoverish thy appearance and render thee less fishy!’


The continuum is magnificent. The peoples around the Mediterranean and over to the Gulf of Persia are really one animate being.

Jakob Burckhardt (1959) *Judgements on History and Historians*, 23

Today in 1972, six years after the second French edition, I think I can say that two major truths have remained unchallenged. The first is the unity and coherence of the Mediterranean region. I retain the firm conviction that the Turkish Mediterranean lived and breathed with the same rhythms as the Christian, that the whole sea shared a common destiny . . . And the second is the greatness of the Mediterranean, which lasted well after the age of Columbus and Vasco da Gama.

The subject of this work is the human history of the Mediterranean Sea and its coastlands over some three millennia. Its immediate contention is that this history can profitably be treated as material for a unified and distinct discipline. Its purpose is to discover, first, how far the region so treated has displayed over this long period any unity and distinctiveness of its own, and second, what kinds of continuity could have been involved: these two questions form the backbone of our work.

In the Introduction we have drawn a distinction that embraces both senses of the word history – the past and the historian's record of it. There is history in the Mediterranean, and there is (or can be) history of the Mediterranean. The first need not comprise a large area, time-span, or topic, and is related only contingently or indirectly to its geographical setting. By contrast, history of the region presupposes an understanding of the whole environment. And the environment in question is the product of a complex interaction of human and physical factors, not simply a material backdrop or a set of immutable constraints. It is this history of the Mediterranean that concerns us.

The ambitious chronological scale on which we therefore operate is hard to delimit exactly. The Introduction, again, indicates in general terms how we have come to conceive our period. But the extent of the enquiry must vary from topic to topic and respond to various characteristics of the appropriate evidence. Instead of relating our coverage to established chronological categories, however, we prefer to see our chosen time-span whole. This time-span cannot, at least for our purposes, adequately be described in terms of different ages – prehistoric, classical, early medieval, and so on – with clear divisions between them. Thus, if we consider material remains, the basis of archaeology, our main period is the Iron Age – that is, from the weakening of the predominance of bronze technologies to the arrival of widespread alternatives to metal in our own century (cf. Chapter IX). If, by contrast, we think in terms of the history of political culture, our range extends from the polity formation of the second millennium B.C. to the origins of nation-states in the later Middle Ages and their subsequent superimposition on the political geography of the Mediterranean. If, more specifically, we look to the history of colonies (VII.6), then attention could range from the Hyksos and the neo-Assyrians to nineteenth-century British and French Mediterranean involvement. If, again, we take the Homeric poems and the records of
the Mycenaean and Phoenician worlds as precursors, then the phenomenon of the text, in the broadest sense, defines the beginning of the enterprise; and, in the same terms, our investigation may be said to end with the enormous increase in the production of bureaucratic documents in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, and the contemporary ideological creation of a 'Romantic Mediterranean' (cf. III.1). The more recent of these termini mark, in their different ways, a transition to something different in Mediterranean history - a new phase that seems to us so unlike its predecessors that the broad distinction between it and them is not one whose usefulness we propose to question: a phase for which history of the region becomes inappropriate and quite different explanatory frameworks need to be devised.

The chronology, inclusive and flexible as it is, may need less justification than the area that we have chosen. What makes the region of the Mediterranean Sea a promising subject for so broadly based an enquiry?

1. What is the Mediterranean?

Obviously no single brief answer can be given to that question; in a sense, the whole of this book is a response to it. But we can, at this preliminary stage, introduce two essential topics to which we shall have to return frequently, though not in the form in which we set them out here. The first of them is the long history of how the Mediterranean Sea has been envisaged, beginning with the earliest traceable origins of the notion that its waters constitute a single entity. The second, which we would not separate too sharply from the first but instead interpret as its modern sequel, is the 'scientific' definition of the Mediterranean's physical geography: the established answer to the question of what makes it a region as well as a sea.

These related topics allow us also to introduce the two principal ways in which Mediterranean unity has been characterized: by reference either to ease of communications, which we may conveniently label the interactionist approach, or to common physical features, the ecologizing approach. An interactionist theory is likely to emphasize the sea; an ecologizing one is likely to offer generalized description of Mediterranean hinterlands. The two approaches are, of course, by no means mutually exclusive, and indeed Parts Two and Three below will set out our own particular way of combining them, under the signs of the microworld and connectivity.

First, then, perceptions of the sea. We should not take its unity as an uncontroversial geographical datum. Before the development of satellites, the Mediterranean as a whole was invisible: its component waters were each more naturally experienced as independent. Thus, although the Mediterranean has been a geographical expression for many centuries, the expression originates at a learned, somewhat abstract, level. By the beginning of the first millennium B.C., in the Semitic languages of the Levant, the term 'Great Sea' is quite widely diffused, and it is probably from this tradition that it reached the Greeks. Not surprisingly, it is in the fragments of the pioneer of geography, the philosopher Hecataeus of Miletus, that the phrase is first attested in Greek, around 500 B.C. - in a milieu closely linked to the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean. A Greek comic poet called Ephippus mocks the obscurity and pretension of such abstract thinking in a scene of a fourth-century Athenian play; here the coast-dwellers of the Mediterranean help the monster Geryon to make use of the whole sea as a great cauldron for boiling a fish the size of the island of Crete (Athenaeus, The Philosopher at the Dinner Table, 8.340–7). In the ancient geographical tradition the sea shapes the land, not the other way about - a fundamental notion made explicit in the passage from the Augustan geographer Strabo that serves as an epigraph above.

This logical priority of the sea was not, however, solely the creation of abstract thought. It resulted principally from the centrality of the sea to communications. Despite the obvious dangers, sea transport so far surpassed land communications in ease as to make of the Mediterranean a milieu of interlocking routes onto which the coastlands and harbours faced. In a continuum of experience through which the thought of the Levantine and Greek worlds mingled, the practice of navigation brought into existence another representation of the unity of these waters - an alternative geography, less imaginative and more pragmatic than that of the philosophers. A specialized terminology of land- (or sea-) forms was elaborated, a Mediterranean topographical expertise that has displayed striking continuity over the centuries. The circumstances of navigation are, for instance, closely registered in the early development of that influential expression of geographical coherence, the coastwise voyage or periegesis: the space of the sea is conceived as a linear route defined by a sequence of harbours or natural features. The Mediterranean came indeed to be regarded as like a great river. And so it appears on a late Roman map, the Peutinger Table, where the sea is grossly elongated. Gulf, river and sea are imaged as varying extensions of the same medium, not conceptually divided as they are in modern geomorphology.

Most importantly, the requirements of navigation generated the sophisticated direction-finding art based on segmenting the discernible horizon according to the names of prevailing winds. In the creation in archaic and classical Greece of such a systematic practice - a wind-rose - we can again begin to see something of the cognitive response to the business of navigation, the building up of a framework of reference akin to that found in other seafaring societies. The abstraction found in Hecataeus and his successor Herodotus, who had a clear idea of the place occupied by the Great Sea in the whole pattern of the cosmos, was only one end of a spectrum of approaches to the problem of understanding so large a body of water and how to sail across it.

It was natural, however, to elaborate at the same time much more relativistic concepts of the Mediterranean. The sea was local to many ancient cultures, and the two most vocal of these called it their own. From the time of Plato and Aristotle, the Greeks referred to the Mediterranean as the 'Sea over by Us'; the Romans more simply came to regard it as Mare Notum, 'Our Sea'. 'We' of course has many different meanings. The divisions of the Mediterranean reflected in the relativism of the fourth-century B.C. Greek phrase, like some of their modern successors discussed in Section 2 below, serve to make statements about the comparative importance of different parts of the world. Certainly it is possible to trace a whole complex of ideas from Homer to the Hellenistic age that conceptualize the Western Mediterranean as a kind of Near and Far West; and indeed this all-too-familiar enshrining of geographical relativism in official designations is an onomastic trait that originates in Antiquity.
effect of the sea, the recurring structural and petrological patterns of the coastlands, or the distinctive natural vegetation that reflects soil as well as climate, can all be advanced to complement it. Thus the natural distribution of the olive or certain isotherms have often been used to delineate the boundaries of the Mediterranean (Map 1). Physical peculiarities of this kind have been taken as diagnostic of something harder to summarize: an habitual, though certainly not inevitable, relationship of man to environment, in the extraction of either subsistence or surplus from the land; a set of seasonal variations, affecting movement across and around the sea. From this angle – of a history 'close to the soil' – it becomes possible to envisage what Fernand Braudel was thinking of when he wrote that, in the heyday of Ottoman power, the Turkish Mediterranean 'lived and breathed with the same rhythms as the Christian' (1972a, 14).

This will not be our approach, though. Rather than treat physical characteristics one by one at greater length, or tease out common rhythms of history, we shall emphasize pronounced local irregularity: the minutely subdivided topography, for instance, which fractions the sweep of a mountain range or river basin, and the effects of interannual variation in temperature and rainfall, which make next to useless the average annual figures for any small topographical unit (Table 1).

A definition of the Mediterranean in terms of the unpredictable, the variable and, above all, the local will indeed be explored throughout this book. It is in that context, we propose, that Plato’s simile of the pond, with its connotations of habitat or ecological niche, offers such an appropriate image (VIII.5).

The descriptions and conclusions of modern physical geographers, on which any such analysis must to some extent depend, can no more be taken as uncontroversial data than are the concepts of ancient navigators. Both ancient and modern perceptions should, in the first instance, be seen as belonging equally to the history of ideas; before we test their applicability, that is, we should interrogate their sources. The chief among these sources are the province of the next chapter. Here, though, we must address the perhaps disturbing fact that, outside the long and various traditions of geographical thought which we have begun to introduce, the Mediterranean has not obviously suggested itself as a

Table 1 Interannual variability of rainfall
single area of investigation. Only archaeologists of the Bronze Age and historians or archaeologists of Greece and Rome customarily treat the area as a whole; and their respective disciplines have suffered by being insulated both from each other and from the study of later periods. The sea, its islands, and the countries that surround it, communicate across it, and share its climate, still seem to many historians to be far less worth studying as a collectivity than is Europe or the Middle East, Christendom or Islam. These, not the Mediterranean, form the major units of enquiry and determine the characteristic orientation of more specialized research – with damaging consequences for intra-Mediterranean comparisons. For all the frequency with which it is referred to (or simply invoked on title pages), Mediterranean history is a division of the subject of history as a whole that has yet to achieve full articulacy and recognition.

When Mediterranean history is undertaken, moreover, it is often narrowly conceived – as history in rather than of the region, piecemeal or abstracted from its locale; as a southerly emphasis within the usual limits of European history; or as fundamentally inter-disciplinary in character, an admirable yet still slightly awkward straddling of some seemingly obtrusive boundary. There remains only one significant exception to that generalization, now far from recent, Fernand Braudel’s classic account of the Mediterranean region in the age of Philip II, the first edition of which appeared in 1949. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World* is irradiated throughout by its author’s conviction of the essential unity of his subject, whatever the divisive claims of other historians of the sixteenth century, and nothing that Braudel subsequently wrote about the region (e.g. 1977a; or his unpublished monograph) surpassed that early *chef d’œuvre* in subtlety and conviction.

Braudel’s method is not, however, to be followed uncritically (Chapter II). Nor does his rare achievement single-handedly justify the adoption by other historians of a Mediterranean perspective. The unity that we have outlined – a unity ultimately deriving from very ancient geographical ideas – remains precarious. Any further exploration of perceptions of the Mediterranean past must next address the two historical traditions that implicitly deny the value – even the possibility – of a genuinely pan-Mediterranean approach. We confront those traditions with two simple questions. Why ‘European’ history? Why that of the Middle East?

2. COLLECTIVITIES AND SUBDIVISIONS I: THE CHALLENGE OF THE CONTINENTS

‘Anyone who speaks of Europe is wrong – it is nothing but a geographical expression.’ Bismarck’s assertion (an adaptation of Metternich’s description of Italy) scribbled on the back of a telegram in 1876 is that designations such as ‘Europe’ are empty and arbitrary. Historians have frequently quoted Bismarck’s dictum. Moreover they have, increasingly, endorsed it. After all, since the Germanic migrations which brought about the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, the map of Europe has always been complex in the extreme. Only twice has a substantial part of it been politically unified – by Charlemagne in the eighth century and Charles V in the sixteenth – and even then the unity derived from the person of the ruler rather than from any single governmental structure.
I. A GEOGRAPHICAL EXPRESSION

The Bismarckian dismissal of Europe does not seem likely to embody much respect for the Mediterranean unity that we have begun to outline, for that too must seem a mere geographical expression. Yet Bismarck’s scorn can at least be redirected—against a persistent opinion that is even more damaging to the notion of a unitary Mediterranean. Bismarck was criticizing those who, in accordance with a notion of the continents that predates Herodotus, have been inclined to believe in a transcendent European identity, such as would make nonsense of the idea of Mediterranean history. Students of the European past have preserved the integrity of their subject, in the face of the almost unrelenting complexity of the political map, by emphasizing the overarching cultural unity of Europe, exemplified historically in the idea of Christendom.

From the end of classical Antiquity, on this single continent, there have after all been peoples mostly of the same religion and sharing a culture and a notion of law more or less indebted to that of Rome; their languages have, with a few obvious exceptions, belonged to a single family, they have been fundamentally quite similar for most of their history in economy, technology, and social and political structures; and all this because they have been perpetually in close contact with one another, if not always peaceably. They have thus (it is argued) formed an area within which comparisons are particularly illuminating and about which generalizations are both possible and desirable. The local variations which threaten to defeat such generalizing can even be transformed into a virtue. According to a tradition in European thought that may have roots deep in the Middle Ages, that was developed by the Romanists, and that perhaps finds a modern exemplar in scholarly discussion of ‘the European miracle’, the very diversity of Europe is a sign of its collective superiority, its extraordinary inventive genius.

None the less, Bismarck is not readily gainsaid. There are serious weaknesses in all attempts at defining European integrity. The chief of them is to take the cultural delimitation as relatively uncontroversial: the continent’s peculiarities are often held to be quite readily detectable through a simple survey of the historical landscape. The extent to which the idea of Europe has a history of its own—often convoluted, nearly always politically charged, highly various in the supporting ‘facts’ adduced—is, for the most part, conveniently ignored. Yet this history—the changing product of imperial and papal ideologues, of predators, crusaders, conquerors from Charlemagne to Napoleon, of federalist imaginaries from (say) Voltaire to Delors—shows just how flimsy are all claims to objective definition. Another weakness, arising from the first, is that the European entity as most often construed fails to embrace the whole continent. Europe has never been an unambiguously bounded geographical expression, and its modern historiographies reflect the area. Between the age of the Vikings and that of Gustavus Adolphus the Scandinavian world was perhaps of relatively little consequence for other European states. Synoptic histories of Europe can almost be forgiven for dealing with it only briefly and circumspectly. A further and more reprehensible narrowing of focus is represented by the long-established, but now more than ever obsolete, tendency to treat eastern European history as a world apart, essentially peripheral. This is more than a matter of being hesitant about whether or not Russia should be seen as part of Europe. It often involves virtually ignoring Slavic history altogether. For nineteenth-century writers on history as opposed in method and philosophy as Hegel and Ranke, for twentieth century ones as different as Arnold Toynbee and Marc Bloch, European history has meant the history of Roman and Germanic cultures.

... the Romano-Germanic world was itself by no means homogeneous. Differences arising from their different backgrounds had deeply marked the various societies of which it was composed. Yet, however pronounced these differences may have been, how can we fail to recognize, over and above them, the predominant quality of a common civilization—that of the West? If in the following pages [of Feudal Society] where the phrase ‘Western and Central Europe’ might have been expected, we say simply ‘Europe’, this is not merely to avoid the repetition of cumbersome adjectives. (Bloch 1962, xx)

Yet if historians of Europe may neglect Greece, if only because in the established schema of ‘European history’ it holds an inalienable place as the fountainhead of European culture. If they sometimes emphasize too much the isolation from the rest of Europe of the Iberian peninsula (whether under Christian or under Islamic rule) they could hardly be accused of ignoring Italy. Together with southern France, the three great peninsulas (as Braudel calls them) are seen as an inseparable part of a greater whole extending northwards far beyond anything that might be called Mediterranean. It is not, however, entirely obvious why the Mediterranean south should be regarded as more a part of Europe than the Baltic north or the Slavic east. Intensity of Mediterranean political and economic contacts might be part of a justification. One has only to think of Franco-German involvement in Italy from Carolingian times onward. But have east-west contacts been so much less? In any case, it is clear that historians of Europe would not lightly delegate the writing of ‘southern’ history to some neighbouring discipline such as ‘Mediterranean studies’ whose practitioners might also—impartially—embrace North Africa and the rest of the Middle East.

Here, within these areas on the other side of the Mediterranean seemingly so remote from Europe, is the material for a geographical expression of a rather different order, and another collectivity whose links with its neighbours have often been vigorously stressed at the expense of its participation in the Mediterranean world: tracts of precarious habitation in a mosaic of more or less fertile zones between sea and Sahara or Syrian desert stretching from Morocco to Turkey. This geographical expression is the domain of scholarly traditions with which the historiography of Europe has, largely for linguistic reasons, had little genuine contact. They are, though, traditions to which the Mediterranean region sets no agreed limits. Their representatives may focus on Mediterranean coastslands to the general exclusion of the remainder of Africa, largely because the Sahara is so often—though misleadingly—put forward as a resilient cultural and economic frontier. But they may, on the other hand, have as much to do with central Asia and the Arabian peninsula as with the Levant. And this is of course mainly due to the overriding significance of the expansion of Islam for every level of their enquiry, an expansion that has imparted a greater homogeneity—of a kind—to the politically fragmented Middle East than Christianity has ever managed to give to Christian Europe.

Adequate historical definition of this large area extending south and east from the Mediterranean remains hard nevertheless. Identifying it with the area politically unified under Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs or Ottoman sultans requires that
no account be taken of the remainder of Islamic history, both later medieval and
century, when rather different maps apply. Recognizing the modern
gography of Islam yields an area extending to equatorial Africa and Indonesia
that, even on the scale adopted in the present work, seems far too large to be
considered as a single whole. Nor is ‘the Middle East’ — the term most
commonly used by historians, geographers and anthropologists — particularly
satisfactory. Coined in 1902 by the American naval historian Alfred Thayer
it derived from the strategic thinking of nineteenth-century Europe,
as alongside the ‘Far’ and ‘Near Easts’, and was usually taken to mean Persia and
its surrounding territories. Its gradual extension westwards, and the consequent
redundancy of the term ‘Near East’ by the end of the Second World War, have
not made its proper application any clearer. And it is also undoubtedly redolent
of ‘orientalism’, as classically if intertemporally denounced by Edward Said (1978)
— that European tendency (part of Europe’s slow self-definition) to imagine a wide
range of ‘exotic’ cultures as an undifferentiated single ‘other’. Some have therefore
sought a neutral alternative (SWANA — south-west Asia and North Africa —
for example). Yet it is far from clear what such a substitution would really achieve
even if it gained widespread acceptance, or what the scope of any new term
should be. There is, perhaps, a ‘core area consisting of northern Arabia, Syria
and northern Iraq’ (Wagstaff 1985, 5) — the Middle Eastern equivalent of the
western core of Europe — to which Iran and Egypt are natural adjacents.
But the decision on whether Afghanistan and formerly Soviet Asia at one extreme
and the Maghreb at the other ought also to be included apparently remains a
matter for individual scholarly preference. Meanwhile, the cultural and environ-
mental criteria for inclusion that have been proposed — criteria such as ‘semi-aridity’,
‘all-pervasive religiosity’, or ‘competitive individualism’ (Kedè 1973; Parai 1952;
Lindholm 1996; Eickelman 1998) — are either too vague or too hard to localize
for definition to seem any less arbitrary.

On closer inspection, the characterizations of Europe and the Middle East
that have usually been offered come to seem disconcertingly imprecise. Few
arguments in favour of the categories seem powerful enough to forbid their
dissolution, or at least their temporary abandonment; and this is not least because
advocates are seldom clear about quite how the general features proposed con-
tribute to unity ‘on the ground’, in any given locality. None the less the cat-
egories continue to be used. And when they come up for scrutiny, it is, as we
have seen, generally only one aspect that is scrutinized: the east-west extension.
Bismarck, we may feel, did indeed have a point. It will be our task to discover
whether, at both the general and the local level, there are more convincing
arguments to be advanced in defence of Mediterranean unity than his opponents
were able to marshal on behalf of Europe or their congeners on behalf of the
Middle East.

3. Collectivities and Subdivisions II: The Mediterranean
Disintegrated

‘The distinction of North and South is real and intelligible ... But the difference
of East and West is arbitrary and shifts round the globe.’ Thus Edward Gibbon,
annotating the second (1782) edition of The Decline and Fall of the Roman

Empire (1896, vxxvi). Discussion focuses, as we have seen, on longitudinal
divisions; the one boundary most commonly accepted is that separating North
and South. And this boundary seems to fall somewhere across the Mediterran-

Whatever doubts may arise about the integrity of Europe or the Middle
East, it remains inescapable that between the sea’s northern and southern shores
there has long been a major cultural dissonance. Even when the challenge of the
continents has been faced, this additional challenge presents itself.

Its earliest manifestation derives from a strand in ancient geographical thought
to which we have not so far referred: the ‘cosmological’ tradition of reflecting
on the earth as a whole and on its place in the universe (as distinct from what
should properly be called the ‘chorographic’ tradition that confines description
to particular areas of the globe’s surface). The ancient cosmological conception
of the latitudinal klima (or step) gives us the word climate and lies behind
the modern theory of the climatic zone. In Antiquity none of the recognized klimata
into which the surface of the world was divided could be mapped easily onto the
notion of ‘Our Sea’ (Nicolle 1988, ch. 3). And the same could be said of their
medieval successors. In that great thirteenth-century Muslim polymath Ibn
Khaldun’s division of the world into zones, for instance, the Mediterranean is
not identified with the ‘Middle Zone’, rather, the sea straddles three of them
(Rose 1967, 128–53).

The geographical divisions imposed by cosmology did not, however, initially
undermine the ancient conception, described at the beginning of this chapter,
of the Mediterranean as a unified topographical phenomenon. Nor did sub-
sequent refinements of the distinctions between zones pose difficulties for the
‘scientific’ tradition — the current of nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought
according to which the Mediterranean could be defined by the common phys-
ical characteristics of its coasts and islands. And yet the notion that the region is lati-
itudinally divided, rather than a unity in itself, seems ultimately to have triumphed
among geographers. A tradition whose origins can be discerned in the writings
of nineteenth-century human geographers such as Ratzel seems to have petered
out in the later twentieth century — during the lifetime of Braudel.

To put it summarily, and in ancient terms, cosmology has finally prevailed
over chorography. The distinction of North and South remains what it was for
Gibbon: ‘real and intelligible’. For neither human nor physical geography, as
practised around the turn of the millennium, has much use for the Mediter-
anean area as a distinctive unit in its own right. Until fairly recently, surveys of the
region appeared with some regularity. Nowadays, in contrast, the textbooks, the more
ambitious synopses of ‘the natural regions of the globe’, and the newer explora-
tions of cognitive geography have little to say about it. Their typical briefs are
either Europe or the Middle East: an old division of labour continues to be
observed.

Much the same could be said of the conception of the sea evinced by a
number of other disciplines. The social anthropology of its borderslands is intense
and lively (cf. Part Five). Ethnographic studies of communities around the
Mediterranean proliferate (ethnography ‘in’, to echo our earlier distinction). Yet
comparison both within and across the accepted boundaries of the region —
ethnography ‘of’ — remains rare and controversial. Many anthropologists hold
that the region does not really delimit a coherent field of study — that it is, if
anything, ‘in the first place, a concept of heuristic convenience not a culture
area” in the sense given this phrase by American cultural anthropology’ (Peri-Rivers 1977, viii). Some indeed, most notably Herzfeld (especially 1987b), have argued that it is not even that (cf. Chapter XII). Rather, according to this view, the Mediterranean is a category foisted upon a variety of distinct cultures by the more advanced industrial (and colonial) powers of Europe. Far from being a convenient geographical designation, the term ‘Mediterranean’ is, in Herzfeld’s view, a none too subtle political weapon: a means of distinguishing ‘us’ – northern European, advanced, diverse – from ‘them’ – southern, backward, uniform. (Herzfeld might have adduced the geographer Theobald Fischer’s Mittelmeerbilder (Mediterranean Images) in which the justification for the work is explicitly sought in its potential for enhancing German power: Mediterranean countries are seen as undeveloped, easily able to come to the future aid of their great near neighbour to the north (1913, iv).) Alongside ‘orientalism’, in other words, can be set the comparable ideology of ‘Mediterraneanism’. But North and South within the region actually have little in common beyond their essentially subordinate status. In this account, the challenge for anthropology is to resist the allure of the sea and to devise a politically responsible rationale for the ethnography of Europe (Goddard et al. 1994).

Most political scientists would not, it seems, challenge that judgement. When they concern themselves with ‘the Mediterranean’, they usually take the term to mean something much narrower in focus or more restricted in character than the region as a whole. Still less do they consider it a unity – largely because of the variety of its political regimes. The Mediterranean remains NATO’s southern flank, though its place in global strategy is now unclear. It is certainly not a single ‘theatre of strategic military action’. In the new era of international relations that has succeeded the Cold War, attention is rather concentrated on the potential ‘flashpoints’ of the eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans, rather than the sea as a whole. The Mediterranean coastlands have of course also been the world’s main arena for international terrorism. But overall the region apparently continues to be reducible to numerous ‘tension zones’ to which no ‘common parameter of political and strategic analysis can be applied’ (Cremaschi 1984, 207).

Something similar might, finally, be said by economists. The Mediterranean can again be characterized in terms of major routes. But these, unlike the ‘routes’ of pre-modern economic history (cf. Chapter V), are genuinely isolated channels of movement – as with the great gas pipeline connecting Algeria with the Po valley. It is no longer a question of the complex chains of interaction of (mainly) shore-hugging voyagers. Here, then, the Mediterranean is no more than a collection of conduits, a few straight lines on the map. Alternatively, it may be firmly divided into two regions, as by development economists. The relatively newly industrialized – and ‘democratized’ – nations of southern Europe are taken to constitute a sensible unit of study. North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean constitute other such units. There is, however, little thought given to the possible rewards of transmarine comparison, let alone of treating the Mediterranean as a single unit; and this despite the legacy of colonial ties between North and South, and despite the ‘global Mediterranean policy’ developed by the European Community in the 1970s, a policy that has led to a network of trade agreements and the like between EC members and other littoral states.

Small encouragement, then, for Mediterranean historiography from the social sciences – those disciplines that have recently done much to alter traditional modes of historiographical perception. From whatever theoretical vantage point we view the region it apparently remains ineluctably divided. Indeed, within the whole field of current academic thinking and social policy the only context in which the Mediterranean has been treated as a single entity appears to be that of environmental concern. The Mediterranean Action Plan, implemented in 1975 and theoretically involving (among others) all Mediterranean states, had as its goals a wide-ranging protection of the sea against pollution and the promotion of ‘environmentally sound development’ on its littoral. It is worth noting, however, that the environmental problems in question and their anthropogenic sources are exceedingly diverse. The unity that Mediterranean environmentalists have claimed for their subject matter derives far less from peculiarities of the discipline than from some very old clichés of Mediterranean description, such as blue waters and clear skies (on which see Chapter II).

Need all this deter? We have conceded in the Introduction and at the beginning of the present chapter that history of the Mediterranean is not the appropriate way of conceptualizing the region in the ‘modern’ or ‘post-modern’ periods – however modernity is to be defined. To that extent the reluctance of the disciplines just passed in review to take the region as their frame of reference should neither surprise nor concern us. History, whether ‘modern’ or ‘pre-modern’ is – or ought to be – a seamless garment, heuristically divisible in numerous different ways. At one extreme the traditional territories of research could be vastly expanded – through attention to the Atlantic seaborne empires of the western European powers in the later Middle Ages; to the medieval trans-Saharan trade and the penetration of Islam into sub-Saharan Africa; to Rome’s contacts with India and China; to Dark Age trade between the Caliphate and Baltic countries via Russia; to the connections between settled Europe and the Asian steppe from the age of the Huns to that of the Mongols. (Something of this order will be attempted with respect to the furthest reaches of the Mediterranean in Volume 2.) At the other extreme we could take advantage of inherent weaknesses in existing conceptions of Europe and the Middle East and wholly redraw the boundaries of investigation to produce units that might at the very least prove refreshing. The Baltic could be taken as a unitary region, with the sea perhaps sustaining a unity in diversity comparable to that of the Mediterranean (cf. Malowist 1972). More to our purpose, southern Europe – Spain, Mediterranean France, Italy and the Balkan peninsula – could also be explicitly ‘detached’ from the rest of the continent.

The boundary between North and South, the boundary that Gibbon thought real and intelligible, would in this account fall across Europe, not across the Mediterranean. There would thus be no further need to consider southern Europe’s littoral as a natural or cultural frontier. Southern Europe might indeed be seen as an enlargement of Auden’s Spain (as in the poem ‘Spain 1937’), ‘nipped off from hot Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe’. (Compare the popular Torinese saying that Garibaldi did not unite Italy, he divided Africa.) The Sahara rather than the sea would then constitute a second latitudinal frontier. Moreover, if we no longer respected the always doubtful integrity of Europe and redrew the line between North and South in this way, we might approach the ‘Middle East’ with comparable irreverence (XII.7). The boundary between East and West – which was for Gibbon arbitrary and shifting – might be taken as
separating the Mediterranean part of the Arab world from the rest: there would be as much justification for that division as for, say, one which separated Egypt from North Africa or Iran from Soviet Asia.

To take advantage of the vulnerability of existing geographies is not, of course, to establish the validity of our own: we have merely opened up a possibility. Clearly, a good deal of theoretical revision remains to be done.

4. Collectivities and Subdivisions III: Intimations of Unity

An account of 1483 illuminates the supposed North-South boundary, and points towards a more satisfying conception of the Mediterranean. Friar Felix Faber, journeying to the Holy Land from Ulm, comes with his noble companions to the south side of the Alps. He describes the moment of arrival in vivid terms:

while dinner was being prepared I went across with my lords into the court of the house and looking out said, 'Look, if anyone stood on the summit of that mountain, he would be able to see the Great Sea.' When my lords heard this they said, 'Let us go up and behold the sea which perhaps is destined to be our tomb.' And at once my three masters, two of their retinue and I climbed the mountain, which was a good deal higher than it had looked. Casting our eyes out across the region which lay so stormward, we looked from the mountains into the Italian plain, and beyond the plain saw the Mediterranean Sea; at the sight of which my lords, being young and sensitive, were appalled and stood still, contemplating the sea and their future dangers. And in fact I too was struck by some qualms at that sight, for all that I had tasted its bitterness thoroughly [on his previous voyage]. For the view from the mountain did have a sufficiently wild appearance. What was near could be seen clearly and the evening sun displayed all the forward part — but all the rest, whose bounds no one could detect, seemed to be towering clouds, thick, gloomy and darkening in atmosphere and colour... (Voyage to the Holy Land [Evagrorum Terrae Sanctae...], 7:75).

The sight of the water constitutes the moment when northern Europe and the mountains are left behind and a new region is approached. The decisive point on Felix Faber's journey towards Venice, and thence across the Mediterranean, is this vision of the new world that he and his companions have entered. It is a world characterized by its communications (terribly as the prospect of them may be), by its climate, and above all by the spectacle of the sea itself — the same sea that washes the shores of his destination, the Holy Land. This sea does indeed form a barrier between Friar Felix's native world and the world of his pilgrimage. But the barrier is here seen to be a zone of transition defined by its potential communications, and not an abrupt discontinuity.

Felix Faber's perception can be pressed into service as we confront a major difficulty inevitably attendant upon history of the Mediterranean: the region's political past. The most sharply defined boundaries, and the ones that have customarily been taken to fracture any concept of the wholeness of the Mediterranean basin, are in every sense political.

There are several long-standing reasons for this emphasis on politics. The first of them is a perhaps undue respect for the usual lines on the political map. Such respect derives from the ideology of the nation-state and its concern with 'natural frontiers' and ethnic inclusiveness, both of which, if achieved, would lend its boundaries a far greater significance than that arising from mere political or military force. The second reason underlies the first. It is that the earliest texts on which Mediterranean narrative history depends — Herodotus, Thucydides, and their precursors — are explicitly concerned with the settling of political demarcation disputes through warfare. The delineation of sharp political boundaries is the subject of historical, and hence of general, learned discussion in Mediterranean lands from the archaic Greek period on (cf. Momigliano 1991, ch. 2).

The third reason arises from the long history of profound religious division between Christendom and Islam, which has promoted the division between North and South in the realm of scholarship that we have already considered. Polities like Muslim Spain or the Crusader states in the Levant, or the brief Norman foothold in North Africa (Abulafia 1985a), seem anomalous. They represent a crossing of the sharp politico-religious frontier.

In this context the most disturbing feature of the Mediterranean past must be the infrequency with which even a significant part of the sea and its hinterlands have constituted anything remotely like a political entity. The empires whose sphere of control or influence has embraced some Mediterranean shores have nearly all had centres of gravity well beyond the region. That is certainly true of the earliest hegemonies of the Middle East (as we must continue to call it) from the third millennium B.C., most of which (Hittite and Egyptian apart) were centred on, or attracted towards, the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia. It would also apply to the Persian Empire in more than one period of its turbulent history; to the empire of Alexander the Great and to the Hellenistic kingdom of the Seleucid dynasty, which succeeded to the Mesopotamian and Syrian part of Alexander’s empire after his death; to the Abbasid caliphate, the Islamic empire centred on Baghdad in the eighth and ninth centuries; and to the empire of the Ottoman Turks from the fourteenth century onwards. The single conspicuous example of the pan-Mediterranean empire is that of Rome.

From the end of the third century B.C. until the fall of her western empire nearly seven centuries later, Rome dominated the Mediterranean region and gradually extended her power well beyond its boundaries — notably to Britain, Gaul and the Danube basin. Yet not even the celebrated Pax Romana could hope to eradicate the immense diversity of provincial loyalties and cultures. There is indeed a strong sense in which the Roman Empire was not Roman (and, even in the West, in which the succeeding Byzantine Empire was not Greek) or at least was only patchily, thinly so. Rome’s was an empire in which the precarious unity of Greek and Roman language and culture and an economy of exchange and coinage were totally dependent on communications; and for all the fame of the Roman road, the most basic and the most vital lines of communication lay across the sea.

At this point we may revert to Bismarck’s antithesis of the geographical expression and the political reality. In the case of Europe, the geographical expression served to denote an ideal, a formula of unity in diversity that has long been potent in political ideology. The political reality, on the other hand, must clearly be envisaged in more subtle terms than those required for the demarcation of modern states, which have at their disposal cartographic, legal and military facilities of a precision and power unimaginable to earlier epochs. An adequate political map of, say, later medieval Europe — that included all minor authorities and jurisdictions — would present an extremely complex image. And at no point...
would its character have been determined simply by the physical environment. There may be cultural, ethnic or linguistic frontiers; but there are no natural ones. There are only those frontiers that have arisen out of the interaction between political centres and their peripheries. Frontiers are created slowly, not given; they are very often better conceived as fluid zones of transition between jurisdictions than as clear-cut lines on landscape or map. And even where they remain geographically fixed for a considerable time, the entities that they separate may be in constant evolution. In this sense frontiers are nearly always far less permanent than they may seem. The political map is therefore, above all, a map of the horizon of communications.

If that can be true of Europe, how much more should it apply to a region such as the Mediterranean. The paradox of the Mediterranean is that the all-too-apparent fragmentation can potentially unite the sea and its coasts in a way far exceeding anything predictable of a continent. The Mediterranean is, in Trump’s apt phrase (1980, 3), ‘a peninsula in reverse’, but one whose possible cohesion and sense of identity exceed anything normally associated with real peninsulas. The minuscule subdivided topography bound by a vastly ramified complex of seaways constitutes a geographical expression. And, huge as it is, this geographical expression can be at least conceived as a political entity in the same way as can any of the smaller units whose political domain is defined by their horizon of communications. So the Mediterranean is something that the imperialist would willingly bid for or lay claim to, however hard that claim may be to realize. The Roman Empire of course provides the conspicuously successful example; but Saladin’s dream of retaking the Syrian coast and then crossing the sea to carry the Holy War to the ‘islands of the Franks’ implies comparable aspirations (Cameron Lyons and Jackson 1982, 372-3). So too does the visionary programme urged on the count-kings of Barcelona by Arnald of Vilanova around 1300: conquest of Jerusalem, expropriation of Islam, unification with Byzantium – and the foundation of a universal Christian empire with its capital in Sicily (Fernández-Armesto 1991, 67).

There is therefore some truth to the assertion that the Mediterranean was for many centuries a unity by virtue of being successively a Roman, a Muslim, a Christian and a Turkish lake (cf. Trevor-Roper 1972; A. R. Lewis 1981), even if the actual degree of control exercised by the dominant powers was nearly always uneven or limited (II.2; V.2, 4). But the idea is of more general significance. The Greek historians of the fifth century B.C. had already conceived of the past as a sequence of ‘sea-powers’ or thalassocracies, with the secret of imperial success residing in control of the connecting medium. The prime example was Athens in the fifth century, binding together many dozens of scattered settlements across the Aegean Archipelago and on the inaccessible coasts of that sea, by virtue of being, as a contemporary put it, ‘the Power that rules the Sea’ ([Xenophon] Constitution of the Athenians]. What was ruled was, as we have stressed, a network of communications. But it was also the network along which staples were moved to counteract in part the accidents of glut and dearth that the combination of climate and topography made inevitable (cf. Chapters V, VI, IX). This was, in another prominent ancient tradition, the corrupting sea of our title.

Such control of the movement of resources has always been an essential aspect of Mediterranean power at every period. Prehistorians have interpreted seaborne redistribution as the crucial element in the formation of early states and civilizations, and even in the development of agriculture. These tempting theories help remind us that the history of naval supremacy in the Mediterranean – a complex interaction of fleets, pirates, mercenary captains and privateers – is not a simple matter of political confrontation. Nothing short of control of the integrating medium across whole tracts of the sea is at stake, and the prize is one that transcends local interests. Seen in this light, then, Rome’s success may appear spectacular only in its completeness and duration. Carthaginians, Ptolemies, Caliphs, Byzantine Greeks, Aragonese, Venetians, and various colonial powers of north-western Europe have all attempted to dominate the mechanics of interaction between the multitude of particular places in the coasts and islands of this sea. The geography of their respective empires of course differed; in means and intentions they were perhaps quite similar.

The states of the modern Mediterranean, all now independent of empire, are as divided from each other as they have ever been. Yet even the twentieth century, during the course of which the Mediterranean has ceased to possess (in our special sense) a history of its own, has seen various examples of pan-Mediterraneanism, when these separate polities bid for at least an ideological prominence in the wider unity of the whole sea. And this wider unity is conceived in terms that derive from the ancient traditions outlined above. Northern powers have advanced the claims of the heirs of classical civilization; those to the south and east have found indigenous precedents for their location of themselves in a Mediterranean-wide frame. Paradoxically, by virtue of their common aspiration, the separatist states have contributed to the perpetuation of an ancient idea of thalassocracy – and thus to the maintenance of at least a residual sense of Mediterranean unity. It is not, therefore, the obvious limitations of the history of nation-states – the arbitrariness of their frontiers with regard to social, economic or geographical phenomena – that enable us to claim the coasts of the Mediterranean as a political unit at least as intelligible as ‘Europe’ or the ‘Middle East’. Rather than being a problem whose relevance we should contest, the political and ethnic unfixedness of the Mediterranean could turn out to be inspiring. Dense fragmentation complemented by a striving towards control of communications may be an apt summary of the Mediterranean past.
1. The Imaginary Sea

The 'classical world'

The all-embracing hegemony of Rome, and its imposition of the values and ideology of a Graeco-Roman elite, has given rise to perhaps the most resonant of Mediterranean images – that of the region as the homeland of classical culture. We have already seen how, through its geographical beliefs, Hellenic and Roman society in various ways appropriated the Mediterranean. For the Greeks and Romans themselves, the Mediterranean was indeed in a strong sense home territory. And it remained so whatever more localized allegiances they might also have owned to. The famous exultant shout of Xenophon’s soldiers as they caught sight of open water after a long march back through the mountains of eastern Anatolia – ‘thalatta, thalatta’ – ‘the sea, the sea’ (Xenophon, Anabasis of Cyrus, 4.7.24) – was actually a recognition of the Black Sea; but it can stand as a symbol of the attachment of many ancient peoples to a determinate Mediterranean world.

This home territory was unified by Rome. Writing of the end of the third century B.C., when Rome had survived the threat of Hannibal’s invasion, the Greek historian Polybius describes the beginnings of that process of unification – the creation, in effect, of a Mediterranean world (History, 1.3.3–4):

Previously the dominos of the world [oikoumenē] had been, as one might say, dispersed... but as a result of these events [Rome’s conquests] it is as if history has come to acquire an organic unity [organon] and the dominos of Italy and Libya [i.e. Africa] are woven together with those of Asia and Greece, and the outcome of them all tends toward one end.

At the centre of this oikoumenē, of course, lay Italy:

A land which is at once the foster-child and parent of all other lands, chosen by divine providence to make heaven itself more renowned, to unite scattered empires, to tame savage customs, to draw the discordant and barbarous tongues of numerous peoples together into the conversation of a single language, to give mankind civilization, in short to become the single fatherland of all the races of the earth.

Thus the elder Pliny (Natural History, 3.5.39), writing in the first century A.D. when the Roman Empire was approaching the height of its power, in accordance with a theory of the determinants of political success that goes back to the Ionian philosophers and Herodotus, Roman supremacy was often held to derive from environmental advantage (VIII.1).

To some extent since the Renaissance, and certainly since the early nineteenth century, scholarly attempts to grasp the history of the ancient world have very often involved a willingness to deal with evidence from every province of the Roman Empire, to shift attention from Italy to Africa, from Spain to Cyrenaica,
their environments as well as their human deposits—to a degree that few students of later periods would contemplate. That there was a homogeneous Mediterranean culture under the Romans is an assumption which (as we noted in 1.4) ancient historians have only comparatively recently begun to challenge—faced as they nearly always have been with a material culture which hardly seems to have varied from one end of the Mediterranean to the other.

The Romantic Mediterranean

Partly thanks to the educational dominance exercised by ‘the classics’ from the Renaissance until the middle of the twentieth century, the scholarly propensity to envisage the Mediterranean region as a distinctive unity has had a ‘lay’ counterpart. In describing this lay vision we must be careful not to fabricate a single tradition out of an enormous diversity of German writings. Some of them specifically concern Greece or Rome, others Southern Europe (held to be distinct from the ‘oriental’ world of North Africa and the Levant), and a few explicitly describe the Mediterranean as a whole. None the less, despite their differences of scope they radiate the common conviction that the Mediterranean region is a world set apart from that of northern Europe, whence most of their authors originated.

These literary traditions about the Mediterranean further suggest that the inhabitants of this world exhibit a certain distinctively Mediterranean character; that this character derives substantially from the nature of the Mediterranean environment, the climate especially; and also that it has not changed very much since Antiquity. This claim is typically accompanied by more or less explicit allusion to a wide repertoire of images and commonplace about life in the Mediterranean—always positive, sometimes near-idolatrous—which may be labelled the Romantic tradition about the region.

The origins of this northern sense of the particular quality of the South might perhaps be traced to the sundering of Catholic Europe by the Protestant reformers (Jenkyns 1980, 41). But it is not until the eighteenth century that such views first reveal themselves clearly. The eighteenth century was, of course, the century of the Enlightenment, and of the development of a line of thought about the determining powers of the environment of which Montesquieu’s The Spirit of the Laws is a major representative. An eloquent later instance of it is the passage in The Stones of Venice (2.6.7) where Ruskin surveys the Mediterranean and the northern worlds as if from a great height, contrasting first their climate and fauna, then their flora, and finally their architecture (1851–3, 2.185–8).

The vocabulary with which Ruskin sets forth his Mediterranean geography (‘for the most part a great peacefulness...’) in Syria and Greece, Italy and Spain, laid like pieces of a golden pavement into the sea-blue... belongs in a tradition that also flourished in the eighteenth century, the era of the Grand Tour. The famous opening of Goethe’s Mignon (‘Do you know the land where the lemon trees blossom...’) is the blameless forerunner not only of several of the best-known Mediterranean images in Byron and Lawrence Durrell, but also of innumerable tourist- or reader-enticing clichés. Such imagery can also beget academic theory. For the first noteworthy historian of climate, Ellsworth Huntington, the starting point for an investigation into the causes of the burial of ancient Olympia beneath river sediments could even be the fact that Attica was not beautiful enough: it disappointed the Romantic traveller (cf. Chapter VIII). That failure could only be explained in terms of environmental catastrophe (Huntington 1910).

The eighteenth century has other traditions of ‘Mediterraneanism’ to offer. Traceable back to Winckelmann’s magisterial writings on Greek art (e.g. 1755), and to the beginnings of impassioned Hellenism, is the notion that the Greeks, and by extension the Mediterranean neighbours, are a peculiarly natural people—lovers of the open air, happy, hospitable, unreflective, their society simple and harmonious. It is this cluster of qualities that has been held to mark out the ‘Mediterranean type’. Acknowledgement of some version of the idea can be discerned in a line of European intellectuals: Goethe again, Schiller, Schlegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and (as an epigraph to this Part of the book hints) Burke. Harriot’s influence is also detectable in those nineteenth-century geographers, such as Friedrich Ratzel, who first systematically—and albeit for political ends—treated the Mediterranean as a distinct region of the globe (Peet 1985). And it becomes a commonplace in the less formal writings of contemporary travellers, who found Mediterranean people to be refreshingly classless, unreflective, passionate, open, free of corruption and addiction, light-hearted and pious—all the still familiar stereotypes.

Another major theme of Romantic Mediterraneanism is continuity. At the climax of their Grand Tour, travellers from the North came upon a world hardly industrialized in comparison with their own, and therefore perhaps inevitably more redolent of an earlier age. They had travelled in deliberate search of the distant past; they sought out the topography of the New Testament, the pseudo-classical landscapes that they had already admired in the paintings of Poussin and Claude, the ruins of whom they had read in classical texts. Yet again, early signs of the tendency may be sought in the writings of Goethe, who never visited Greece but did find on his celebrated Italian journey that the South preserved much of its ancient character.

‘It is astonishing what a good guide old Herodotus still is in that land’, observes a character in a Disraeli novel (Lothair, ch. 48), ‘that land’ being Egypt. ‘On the Mediterranean shores... the same occupations have been carried on for centuries with little interruption. The same fields are being ploughed, the same vineyards tilled, the same olive-gardens planted, as those in which Theocritus played as a child’. So John Addington Symonds wrote, discussing the permanence of ‘rustic manners’ in the Mediterranean world (1877, 330). The similarities between rustic manners today and those of Antiquity, beginning with the way in which they struck Braudel, will be one of our concerns in Chapters XI–XII. For the moment it is enough to suggest how a conception of the Mediterranean world as a distinctive unity has often been derived from observing aspects of it, thanks to supposedly unmitigated economic stagnation, seem not to have changed since classical times.

The scholarly Mediterranean

The special place of the Mediterranean in the educational sophistication of northern Europe could have been nourished just on libraries of the classics,
2. Four Men in a Boat

The most influential figures in the twentieth-century historiography of the Mediterranean, and the cardinal reference points for any further discussion of the region as a whole, all accept the centrality of redistribution to the understanding of its history. Their interest is primarily in the ‘interactionist’ approach. They could, in the sense that we have used the expression, be said to have enlarged the concept of the ‘Romantic Mediterranean’, giving new life to much of its central imagery.

Rostovtzeff

The first of the four figures with whom the historiography of the ancient and medieval Mediterranean inevitably engages is that of Mikhail Rostovtzeff. His two major works, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (1957, but first published 1926) and *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (1941), have exercised an extraordinary influence on the economic history of the ancient world. Rostovtzeff was a Russian liberal who had taught in the University of St Petersburg until 1918, and who had gone into exile in the West when the Bolsheviks seized power. Before he left Russia his work had involved, among many other topics, the history of nomadism in south Russia, as well as agrarian history. The pre-revolutionary Russian economy had largely escaped urbanization. What attracted Rostovtzeff in the classical Mediterranean world was what has attracted so many others from the North: the enduring vitality of Mediterranean cities. And what a Russian liberal found so compelling in those cities during an exile first, briefly, at Oxford and then from 1925 to Yale was the cultural and economic achievements of their bourgeoisie. The originality of the two *Histories* lies in their account, both chronological and analytical, of the economic activities of this urban middle class, and of its achievement in unifying the respective empires of Alexander the Great and of Rome.

It may none the less seem strange to regard Rostovtzeff as a Mediterranean historian. His economic history is certainly, in our terms, history ‘in’ rather than ‘of’ the region. Braudel tellingly said of him in his last published interview: ‘Rostovtzeff n’avait pas la formation suffisante. Il fait une histoire économique événementielle’ (1986, 17). Mediterranean trade was, for him, strongly affected by major political changes, whether the creation of the Greek colonies (1941, 92) or the increasing dominance of Italy (1941, 778; cf. 1241); it did not possess a vigour of its own. Nor did he relate it very much to its geographic setting. Also, it extended far beyond the Mediterranean: his analysis of the workings of the Hellenistic economy embraced much of Asia. In his discussion of Rome, meanwhile, the Mediterranean world is only specifically evoked in a pessimistic passage dealing with the allegedly inevitable decline of the ancient economy (1957, 470). Seaborne trade is certainly primary and unites the Mediterranean on a focus such as Rhodes or Delos (1941, 1239, 1265–8); in his account of great Mediterranean ports Rostovtzeff is not so far from the position of Semple quoted above. Yet interaction as he interprets it is very much a cultural process largely independent of the accidents of the physical environment. Paradoxically, the Mediterranean as a unitary concept is brought out more clearly in the

Traders were the apostles of civilization in the Mediterranean Basin. Every commercial center in greater or less degree disseminated elements of civilization or higher culture. Familiarity with life in Athens and Piraeus reveals these two cities as centers of thought and progress. The same was true of Massilia. The Rhone valley people brought raw materials to market there, but they took back with them various elements of Hellenic culture. The great universities, poets, philosophers and artists of the ancient world were found in commercial cities like Athens, Corinth, Rhodes, Miletos, Tarsus, Alexandria and Massilia, for here the currents of thought flowed full and fast. (Semple 1932, 686)
powerful — and strongly anti-Romantic — attack on Rostovtzeff delivered by Moses Finley (1985a, 33, 191–6). For Finley, the constraints of a prominent Mediterranean ecology act as one check on the classical historian’s tendency to exaggerate the volume and importance of ancient trade. The ecologizing tendency is set against the interactionist. One traditional image is counterposed to another — the primitive and unchanging countryman; the restless Philebas (IX.1).

In the late 1890s Rostovtzeff had been an indefatigable traveller, inspecting antiquities in almost every part of the Mediterranean. And if he did not confine his gaze to the region, and is not quite (on our definition) a Mediterranean historian, in one sense a Romantic Mediterraneanism was fundamental to his vision of the past. The archaeological emphasis in his writings reflects a perception of Antiquity as a field of ruins — a perception closely akin to that of a Grand Tourist. In 1937 Rostovtzeff wrote in a letter of his first visit to India: ‘what struck me above all… is the life of that what [sic] I have studied all my life as a destroyed ruined past. The life of the pagan religion and cult…’ (Wes 1990, 80).

Rostovtzeff’s vision of the structure of ancient society is now obsolete. His bourgeoisie was a chimera. But his careful combination of literary, epigraphic and archaeological data — with the archaeology presented in the illustrative panels that he insisted on as integral parts of his text (1937, xvi) — in fact represents the only way forward in this field. It is, however (as we shall see in Chapter V and Part Three below), better deployed to illustrate the perennial features of an interaction that is not a matter of great trade routes plied by bourgeois merchants, but something much more closely bound up in the environment and topography of the Mediterranean.

The grandly interactionist conception of Rostovtzeff — of the Mediterranean as a network of ‘channels of trade’ — was shared by the still more influential figure of Henri Pirenne.

Pirenne
Pirenne was another Northerner, born in 1862 in Belgium. Whereas Rostovtzeff did his greatest work in exile, Pirenne first conceived what is now destined always to be referred to as ‘the Pirenne thesis’ in a German concentration camp during World War I. Since Gibbon’s Decline and Fall, if not since the Renaissance, it had been habitual to assume that the end of the Roman Empire in the West must have been cataclysmic, that the Dark Ages began in effect in 476 when the last ruling emperor (actually a usurper) was deposed by the barbarian invaders. However thoroughly Romanized some of the Mediterranean barbarians became, the unity of the region achieved under the Roman Empire was supposed to have given way to a sharp division between East and West — a division that was as much social and economic as political. And out of that arose the lasting configuration of medieval Europe. Meditated under a German occupation, the Pirenne thesis unexpectedly asserts that the ‘occupation’ of the Western empire by the Germanic barbarians in the fifth century A.D. had far less to do with ‘the making of the Middle Ages’ than had the Arab conquests of North Africa and the Middle East during the seventh and eighth centuries. It was the rise of Islam as naval dominance in the Mediterranean that, indirectly, shaped the northern economy of Charlemagne’s empire, and hence the whole of subsequent medieval society. The title of the book which summarizes Pirenne’s thought (a rather more slender work than any of the others assessed in this section), and left only in draft on his death in 1935, is thus Mohammed and Charlemagne (1939).

It argues that in preserving as much as they could of classical culture, the Western barbarians also preserved the classical trading connections between their part of the Mediterranean and the surviving Byzantine empire in the East. The world pictured by Rostovtzeff is thus interpreted as being the world of the early Middle Ages also. For Rostovtzeff, decline was already evident in the third century. For Pirenne, in contrast, the unity of the Mediterranean world survived into the seventh century. It was then destroyed by the sea-captains of Islam, to whom Rome and Byzantium had to yield mastery of the Mediterranean, thereby allowing themselves to be economically cut off from one another.

The rise of the Carolingians, Pirenne went on to propose, was facilitated by the fact that their economic base, the source of their wealth, lay in northwestern Europe and consisted in land rather than in gold coinage from the East. Unlike their Merovingian predecessors therefore, whose centre of power lay further south, they were unaffected by Mediterranean economic disruption. Their success finally led the Pope to seek an alliance with the Carolingians; that diplomatic initiative bore fruit on Christmas Day 800 when the Pope crowned Charlemagne emperor. ‘It is therefore strictly correct to say’, Pirenne wrote in a now famous passage,

that without Mohammed Charlemagne would have been inconceivable. In the seventh century the ancient Roman Empire had actually become an Empire of the East; the Empire of Charles [Charlemagne] was an Empire of the West… The Carolingian Empire… was the scaffolding of the Middle Ages. (1939, 234)

Like that of Rostovtzeff, Pirenne’s insight is both invigorating and mistaken. He explains too much in terms of towns and long-distance trade, too little in terms of production and aggregate demand. For the caesura in Mediterranean economic history asserted by those who underestimated the destructive inclinations of the Germanic barbarians, he substitutes another — a later, but equally emphatic, break. He envisions Mediterranean history in terms of a sequence of thalassocracies — reasonably enough — but he confuses aspiration and achievement (1.4; V.4).

*Mohammed and Charlemagne* may, however, still be immensely valued for its assertion of continuity in Mediterranean history from the ancient into the early medieval world, and hence for its partial emancipation of the subject from established chronological categories. As Peter Brown has written, in a passage reminiscent of our epigraph from Braudel:

whatever the weaknesses of Pirenne’s thesis from the point of view of the commercial and maritime history of the Mediterranean, his intuition of the basic homogeneity of Mediterranean civilization deep into the early Middle Ages still holds good. The history of the Christian Church is a history of *Romania à la Pirene* It is the history of a religion which identified itself almost from its origins with a Mediterranean-wide style of urban civilization that penetrated the sprawling countryside of Western Europe along trade routes that linked it to the boom towns of Asia Minor. It fed its imagination on Palestine and Syria; its intellectual power-
house in the Latin world was North Africa, and in this Africa, Carthage, ‘Rome in Africa’, remained, like Rome, a great Mediterranean town, moving to rhythms strangely similar to those of Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople. Any divergence along the East-West spectrum of the Mediterranean was always dwarfed by the immensity of the gulf which separated the Mediterranean itself from the alien societies which flanked it. (1982a, 168–9)

To an extent still largely unrecognized, that judgement concerning the ‘horizontal unity’ of the Mediterranean might also be applied to the commercial and cultural history of the Mediterranean in the central Middle Ages – from the late tenth to the thirteenth century.

Goitein

The work of Shlomo Dov Goitein has shown how the discovery of new evidence can transform our image of a period of which at least part was seemingly barren. And it alerts us to the possibility that our ideas about other centuries might be as mistaken as they were about Goitein’s period before he began his work. More than any other student of the central Middle Ages in the Mediterranean, Goitein has brought to life again the thoughts and activities of one sector of a prosperous, wide-ranging mercantile ‘middle’ class which might almost have stepped from the pages of Rostovtzeff.

The archive that made possible Goitein’s feat of imaginative recreation is that of the Geniza of old Cairo. A Geniza is a storeroom commonly attached to synagogues in the Middle East, as well as to Christian and Muslim sanctuaries. Writings that might include the name of God, or that use the Hebrew alphabet, are deposited in it to preserve them from desecration. The Geniza in one of the synagogues at Cairo was found to contain documents of all kinds, sacred and secular, from copies of the Bible to bills of sale and personal correspondence, dating from the eleventh century until virtually the 1890s, when the storeroom was emptied and the old synagogue demolished. The archive is unique for two reasons; first because the storeroom was exceptionally large and can hardly have been intended for any other purpose than as a repository of documents, so that it never needed the periodic spring-cleaning common in more humble establishments; secondly because, like the papyri accumulated in the rubbish dumps of Roman Egypt, its contents have been preserved rather than destroyed by the environment. Nowhere else have circumstances been so propitious for the survival of a large number of medieval ephemera.

The man whose multi-volume survey, A Mediterranean Society (1967–88), has made the contents of the Cairo Geniza generally accessible was born in 1900 in Bavaria, in a small village that at the time still had a stagecoach service for travel into the nearby mountains. His academic career took him to Frankfurt and Berlin during and after World War I, then in 1923 to the new state of Palestine, and finally, in 1957, to the American academic world, within which he remained until his death in 1985.

Goitein’s fields of interest before he became involved with the publication of the Geniza archive had been mainly ethnographic and philological. He had produced a first-hand account of the strictly isolated Yemenite immigrants to Palestine, ‘those most Jewish and most Arab of all Jews’ (1967–88, 2.viii). And while still in Jerusalem he had directed the critical edition of a major medieval Arab writer, al-Baladhuri. Although it too required an exacting combination of ethnographic and philological expertise, Goitein’s work on the Geniza contrasted with his previous scholarly undertakings. Here was an opportunity to use texts that opened up a world of vast dimensions and incessant movement. Goitein began his investigation with the study of documents concerning the medieval trade of the Indian Ocean. He then realized that understanding of these presupposed a knowledge of the Mediterranean origins of the merchants who largely sustained the Indian trade, and he enlarged his brief to ‘a survey of the documentary Geniza in toto’ (1967–88, 1.vii). Goitein’s Mediterranean world brings together what seem to have been his three abiding concerns: his Jewish heritage, the history and culture of the Islamic Middle East, and the values of liberal humanism. An autobiographical essay of 1975 evinced a marked optimism about the future of mankind; and that optimism may, at least to some extent, have been fuelled by the traces that Goitein discovered in the Geniza of what he calls a medieval free-trade community (1,61) and democracy (2,vi). The Jews living among Arabs who people A Mediterranean Society enjoyed a mobility that was often Mediterranean-wide, and that did not by any means exclude contact with European traders, even during periods of open hostility between Christendom and Islam. Goitein declined to venture any judgement about the absolute value of free enterprise (2.viii–ix). Yet it is hard not to sense in his work a humane appreciation of the power of commerce to dissolve, if only for a time, the deepest political or religious divisions.

A Mediterranean Society offers a detailed, deeply pragmatic account, concerned to pass on the intimate revelations of the enormous Geniza archive rather than to expound a broader conception of Mediterranean history. Goitein described himself as a sociographer (5.xvi), perhaps implying a more descriptive approach than might be required of a historical sociologist. And when he came in the last volume of his work to offer a summing up of the community on which he had been working for over thirty years, he proved disconcertingly reliant on some of the stereotypes of the Romantic tradition: the clarity of the Mediterranean sky, the innate sociability of the ‘natural’ Mediterranean type (5.xx, 7). It is significant that Goitein considered Rostovtzeff a towering figure, took no clear stand in the debate over the Pirenne thesis (to which he could surely have contributed much), and did not properly absorb Brandel’s work on the Mediterranean until the English translation was available in paperback (from 1975) and two volumes of his own project had already been published (vol. 5, epilogue).

Beyond the sphere of medieval Islamic and Judaic studies, Goitein’s presentation of the Mediterranean has not perhaps commanded the attention that its novelty and suggestiveness merit. And this may be because it lacks a geographical setting other than the one incidentally provided by its documents. The restrictions on freedom of movement to which it gives prominence tend to be navigational. Comparable charges could thus be levelled at those of the ‘four men in a boat’ whom we have so far considered. They are all too narrowly interactionist. That is, among possible forms of interaction they give undue prominence to long-distance trade. And they neglect ecology, the indispensable context of interaction. The last of our four men and, in the late twentieth century, the most widely acclaimed, could not be accused of giving too little weight to Mediterranean ecology.
Braudel

‘When I think of the individual’, Fernand Braudel famously wrote in the concluding paragraph of the second edition of The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II,

I am always inclined to see him imprisoned within a destiny in which he himself has little hand, fixed in a landscape in which the infinite perspectives of the long term stretch into the distance both behind him and before. In historical analysis as I see it, rightly or wrongly, the long run always wins in the end. Annihilating innumerable events – all those which cannot be accommodated in the main ongoing current and which are therefore ruthlessly swept to one side – it indubitably limits both the freedom of the individual and even the role of chance. I am by temperament a ‘structuralist’, little tempted by the event, or even by the short-term conjuncture which is after all merely a grouping of events in the same area. But the historian’s ‘structuralism’ does not tend towards the mathematical abstraction of relations expressed as functions, but instead towards the very sources of life in its most concrete, everyday, indestructible and anonymously human expression. (1972a, 1244)

That is a revealing summary of the philosophy behind a work whose presentation merely as a thesis was said to mark ‘an epoch in world historiography’ (Lapierre 1977, 11) – a strong leaning towards environmental determinism, the tautological air of ‘the long run always wins in the end’, the contempt for mere events, and yet, withal, a humane concern with life in its everyday expression.

But the Mediterranean with passion is the work’s unambiguously Romantic opening, over twelve hundred pages earlier than the above quotation. And it has been often remarked that the heroes of Braudel’s magisterial account are abstract terms or intangible things personified: the sea itself, first and foremost; the climate and the surrounding landscape; Space, Time, Man – and ‘the long term’, la longue durée. It is this last concept above all others that informs the entire book, making it into a piece of human geography of vast historical compass.

The Mediterranean is in three parts. The first, that of the longue durée, is a history of man in relationship to his environment, ‘a history in which all change is slow, a history of constant repetition, ever-recurring cycles’ (1972a, 20). Reflecting on the reception of his book since its first edition appeared in 1949, Braudel remained confident in the validity of this first “geohistorical” part, and continued to express his confidence in somewhat Romantic terms.

None of my critics has reproached me for including in this historical work the very extended geographical section which opens it, my homage to those timeless realities whose images recur throughout the whole book, from the first page to the last. The Mediterranean as a unit, with its creative space, the amazing freedom of its sea-routes ... with its many regions, so different yet so alike, its cities born of movement, its temporary populations, its congenital entities, is the unceasing work of human hands; but those hands have had to build with unpromising material, a natural environment far from fertile and often cruel, one that has imposed its own long lasting limitations and obstacles. All civilization can be defined as a struggle, a creative battle against the odds; the civilizations of the Mediterranean basin have wrestled with many different obstacles, using sometimes inadequate human resources, they have fought endlessly and blindly against the continental masses which hold the inland sea in its grip. ... I have therefore sought out, within the framework of a geographical study, those local, permanent, unchanging and much repeated features which are the ‘constants’ of Mediterranean history, the reader will not find here all the spectacular structures and recurrent patterns of life in the past, but the most important of them and those which most affect everyday existence. These provide the reference grid as it were. (1972a, 1239)

They are, to revert to the earlier metaphor, the prisons, the everyday constraints on human initiative in the Mediterranean. To the general emphasis on the unifying effect of shipping lanes characteristic of Rostowzewff, Pirenne and Goitein, Braudel made a notable addition: the physical environment as both defining the contours of the region and as delimiting freedom of movement within it.

Braudel was not, however, content with a simple assertion of the landscape’s ruling influence. The first part of The Mediterranean is intended to furnish the reference grid for the second part, and this in turn should be the reference grid for the last. If the longue durée is time moving at its slowest and least perceptible pulse, the second part presents a medium term of cycles lasting for anything up to around fifty years – conjunctures as Braudel calls them, borrowing a somewhat outmoded term from economics to distinguish them from the structures, or ‘geohistory’, of the longue durée. Conjunctures involve wars and economic systems; secular trends, in short, in every aspect of social history.

And at the end of the book, least original in substance yet most controversial in its positionning, the rapid lapse of time, the history of particular persons and events – Phocion, Bonaventure, Contarin, St. Francis of Assisi, the stuff of traditional political and diplomatic narrative, the realm of individual consciousness in all its blindness. Such history is seductive. It tempts the historian into supposing that he can explain the actions of historical characters by referring only to their motives or to the immediate context, ignoring the underlying structures and conjunctures. It is a dangerous world, but one whose spells and enchantments we shall have exercised by making sure first to chart those underlying currents, often noiseless, whose direction can only be discerned by watching them over long periods of time. Resounding events are often only momentary outbursts, surface manifestations of these larger movements and explicable only in terms of them. (1972a, 21)

Thus does the long term win out in the end.

This bracing vision of Mediterranean history has been frequently appraised. There is no need for us to undertake yet another comprehensive review. Our discussion of the work’s qualities will be related to two questions. First: how did the work come about? And second (the question addressed in the next section): why for all its fame and influence does it seem to have marked an end rather than a beginning in Mediterranean studies?

Rather like Pirenne’s most seminal writing, The Mediterranean was the fruit of incarceration: its espousal of the longue durée may well, as is frequently conjectured, have been a way of averting the pessimism engendered by ‘events’ within a German prisoner-of-war camp. Equally, its preoccupations perhaps reflect Braudel’s upbringing. Although his parents lived in Paris, he was born in a small village in Lorraine and spent his first seven years there, living with his paternal grandmother:
A very old bell used to strike the hour... the village pond drove an old mill wheel; a stone path, as old as the world, plunged down like a stem of the house; the house itself had been rebuilt in 1806, the year of Jena, and hemp used to be retted in the stream at the bottom of the meadows... (Braudel 1981-4, 1.559; cf. P. Braudel 1992)

A lovingly detailed picture of life close to the soil, unchanging or slowly moving: one component in Braudel’s Mediterranean. The other, which will by now be familiar, is the romance of the sea and of seafaring, the ‘amazing freedom’ of Mediterranean shipping lanes – something to which a Northerner may be more susceptible than a native.

To remark that there is a poetic element in Braudel’s scholarly vision, or that he has a novelist’s eye for significant detail, is not merely to comment on his style or the way in which he organizes his material. It is a recognition that there are, perhaps, two inner voices to which Braudel has attended in writing history (compare Carrard 1992). One voice is insistent on the primacy of historical imagination and passionate involvement; it explicitly admits that the division of history into three layers or time-scales is merely a heuristic device, an arbitrary way of dealing with a complex and indivisible subject (1972a, 21); it concedes that the separation of material into the book’s three parts can never be exact; it does not press its determinism too far (‘by stating the narrowness of the limits of time, I am not denying the role of the individual in history’; I think not: 1972b, 1243). The other voice represents the historiographical tradition in which The Mediterranean stands – the tradition associated with the French historical journal Annales. Its aspirations are scientific: there is far less scope for poetry or passion.

Two aspects of Annales history are essential to an understanding of The Mediterranean. One is the concern to integrate geography and history as closely as possible. There is of course (as we hinted in Section 1 above) a long tradition of geographical determinism in historical writing that stretches from Herodotus to Montesquieu and beyond. (In 1915 Eshworth Huntington could still claim, with Herodotus, that the ‘higher’ forms of civilization were necessarily to be found only in the temperate zone.) And in France, more so than elsewhere, a strong link between geography and history has been forged by the structure of the higher educational curriculum – so that regional histories which begin with a chapter on the flora and fauna, functioning as a backdrop to the historical discussion that follows, have long been common.

This explains why two outstanding influences on Braudel’s thought were Paul Vidal de la Blache and Lucien Febvre. To name them is not of course to deny Braudel’s equal indebtedness to Preuvene (among historians) for his demonstration of the need to study both Christian and Muslim Mediterraneans (Daix 1995, 91-3), or to older masters such as Michelet. Nor is it to underestimate the depth of Braudel’s response to the nineteenth-century geographical tradition in Mediterranean scholarship, exemplified for him in the work of Alfred Philipson (Braudel 1972a, 1273). But the writings of Vidal and Febvre seem to have been decisive in shaping Braudel’s historical philosophy. Vidal was the geographer (or, rather, historian turned geographer) who most forcefully and persuasively suggested that the Mediterranean region was a unity with an enduring personality of its own. The section on the Mediterranean in Vidal’s Principles of Human Geography (1926) prefigures Part 1 of Braudel’s work in most of its ahistorical essentials (cf. Braudel 1972a, 1273). Febvre was the historian whose A Geographical Introduction to History (1925) had elaborated a ‘possibilism’ that sought to purge geographical history of its previous deterministic excesses, partly by stressing how often human action had been instrumental in modifying the landscape, partly by suggesting that the environment merely set outer limits to the range of possible forms of exploitation (cf. Chapter VIII).

Febvre was one of the founding fathers of the Annales school. And his work, ranging in subject from landscape to religion, is exemplary of a second strand in Annales thinking that gave shape and substance to The Mediterranean: the desire for histoire totale, total history. In practice that ambition resolved itself into an emphasis on integrating history and the sciences – sociology, anthropology, demography, biology and so on. Its ultimate effect on the Annales historiographical approach was a somewhat dogmatic substitution of analysis for narrative; statistics for impressions; comparativism and methodological self-consciousness for naive positivism; and above all, as befits a broadly sociological approach, a concentration on the anonymous masses instead of conspicuous individuals, and on continuities and regularities instead of rapid changes. In its search for the hidden depths of the historical process, the long-term determinants of action (economic, social, psychological), Annales history has certain obvious affinities with Marxist history. But it is a history without class struggles and without inevitable revolutions – Marxism denatured, static history: ‘histoire immobile’ as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie notoriously labelled one of its manifestations (1978).

This sketch of the genesis of The Mediterranean may show how it can be regarded as a simultaneous recapitulation of the major themes that we have previously identified in the history of Mediterranean studies. To the interactionist vision it adds an ecologizing perspective. To the tradition of Romantic evocation it lends the analytical weight of a social science. And these come together in the ultimately Romantic project of an all-inclusive chef d’oeuvre, in which an entire world is subordinate to its creator-historian.
nineteenth century, Carl Ritter and Friedrich Ratzel. The Romantic current in Mediterranean writing, out of which (we have proposed) the geographical one emerged, may also be taken as having reached its apogee in Braudel’s work. Although it is not without adherents – or victims – today, this Romanticism too has withered to a cluster of lame topoi. The likely cause of this paradigm shift was the appearance of *The Mediterranean*.

Several reasons can be hazarded for such paradoxical influence. The most obvious are the magnitude of Braudel’s achievement and the twenty-five years that it required of him. Neither encourages anything like an attempt at emulation. It may have been recalled that the two Chaunus’ study of just one outreach of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic trade of Seville (1958–9), with its three volumes of text and five more of statistics, contained descriptions only of *conjectures*, not of the *longue durée*; and it was criticized by the master for in any case failing to deal with the entire ocean.

The second possible reason is that Braudel seems once and for all to have done the job of asserting Mediterranean unity and characterizing it in human geographical terms. A work ostensibly devoted to the reign of Philip II also embodies a substantial amount of “timeless” environmental description, lastingly useful to historians and geographers alike. Considered in isolation, the geographical opening part of *The Mediterranean* is in many respects the least controversial. It is its “gravitational pull” on the other two parts of the book that provokes significant disagreement. The broad picture has therefore apparently been filled in; it may appear to need only minor, piecemeal revision.

So, at least, Braudel himself perhaps felt. During the late 1960s or early 1970s (to judge by internal evidence) he brought to near-completion a substantial monograph entitled *‘La Méditerranée: la longue marche d’une civilisation’*. It was actually a narration of several civilizations of the prehistoric and ancient Mediterranean, beginning, remarkably, with the Lower Palaeolithic age and working its way, culture by culture, through to Greece and Rome. More emphasis is placed on technological change than on war and conquest; and, as we should expect, the text begins with, and seldom moves far away from, consideration of the physical environment. But, by comparison with Part 1 of the earlier *Mediterranean*, this is unsurprising stuff. The work’s chief claim to originality lies rather in its refusal to equate ancient history with that of the Greeks and Romans, and in the sheer amount of space allowed to prehistory. In his last published interview, Braudel stated indeed that the transition from prehistory to Antiquity, particularly in Gaul, interested him far more than that from Antiquity to the Middle Ages (Braudel et al. 1986, 7), an interest also demonstrated in print in the first volume of *The Identity of France* (1988–90). In the unpublished monograph, however, beyond showing how long the *longue durée* can be, Braudel had little to add to his earlier environmental history of the region – one reason, perhaps, why the work remained unpublished during his lifetime.

It is not only to its author that *The Mediterranean* has seemed the last word. When an eminent economic historian of Antiquity wishes to sum up the Mediterranean environment whom else should he cite but Socrates – and Braudel (Finley 1985a, 30–1)? Whom else, again, when archaeologists seek justification for concerted survey projects in the region and intellectual frameworks within which to locate their discussion of evolving settlement patterns (Cherry 1983; Bintliff 1991; Barker et al. 1995)? The few historical studies of parts of the Mediterranean world that could, as Braudel realized (1972a, 1240), be said to extend his ideas about the historical geography of the region do not do so by taking *The Mediterranean* as an exemplar. Bachelard on Provence (1961), Le Roy Ladurie on Languedoc (1966), Delumeau on Rome (1957–9), Vilas on Sicily (1986) – to name only a few of those over whose Mediterranean’s shadow looms are regional studies cast in a much more restricted mould, and each rather different in method and organization. Only Braudel himself, in his unpublished prehistory of the Mediterranean and then in *Civilization and Capitalism* (1981–4), effectively continued discussing the area as a whole – and he did that, in the first instance, by repeating himself and, in the second, by incorporating his discussion of the area into a global economic analysis.

Concomitant with this neglect of Braudel’s subject matter, a more general lack of interest in all embracing geographical history became evident. For example, Georges Duby and Jacques Le Goff among medievalists pursued “ruralization,” the shift of emphasis from town to countryside in economic, social and cultural history, and thereby pioneered new forms of history ‘close to the soil’. But they, like many others, also preferred to study one or other medieval heretici, Montaillou (1975), can stand here as a symbol of a trend that it helped originate. Among theorists of history meanwhile, Michel Foucault (1972) took the lead in directing interest to abrupt discontinuities in the history of systems of thought or structures of power. In succeeding periods of philosophical fashion, so far as it is possible to generalize about them, historiography was dominated by post-modern or ‘new historicist’ attention to the minutiae of texts (Veever 1989). In an intellectual climate ruled by poetics, the duller rhythms of the geographical *longue durée* command relatively little attention.

The shift of emphasis away from Braudel’s subject matter has been inextricable from an avoidance of his method. And so the third reason why *The Mediterranean* marks an end rather than a beginning is that subject and method have become confused with one another. The method has attracted considerable criticism: the subject has perhaps suffered from association with it.

For our purposes, the most significant criticism has been focused on the degree to which Braudel endorses environmental determinism. His contempt for ‘mere’ events and ‘mere’ individuals like Philip II, whose personal history is relegated to *The Mediterranean’s* closing pages, has been frequently attacked on conceptual grounds – not only for its determinism but also for its confusion of ‘dryads’ facts, the (sometimes) dispensable stuff of traditional history, with the ‘events’ that any form of history has to find space for. Moreover as one critic (cited by Hexter 1979, 137–8) has pointed out, Braudel’s taxonomic linking of the *longue durée* with geography and of events with politics and diplomacy is arbitrary and easily contradicted: a political structure such as monarchy could have a *durée* of millennia; a geographical event like an earthquake could last only a few minutes and produce no long-term effects. There have also been empirical attempts to refute Braudel’s theory about the minimal role of the individual in history and the primacy of economics over politics. Taking issue with Braudel on a subject very close to that of *The Mediterranean*, Jonathan Israel (1982) for
example set out to show how economic considerations were determined by political decisions during the war between the Spanish and the Dutch in the earlier seventeenth century. Finally, the charge has been brought that, because Braudel’s human geography (unlike Fevre’s) admits causation in only one direction, there is little scope for considering the effects of man on the environment. The first geohistorical section of the work is thus, for all its usefulness, too nearly static.

A further major criticism concerns the way in which Braudel deploys his evidence. Those who would accept his vision of historical man as imprisoned by the structures of the environmental longue durée may still reasonably doubt whether he has entirely succeeded in translating that vision into historiography. Because he has chosen histoire totale which must be set out schematically topic by topic, Braudel has denied himself the opportunity to address particular problems (histoire problème) of the sort that could thematically bind together the book’s many short sections. The Mediterranean can after all quite easily be approached as a series of discrete essays – and with the essays taken in no particular order. Braudel does not quite succeed in creating the cumulative effect he hoped for. Reading the last section of the book on the events in which Philip II was embroiled, we are only occasionally reminded by the author of the vast environmental limitations on human action described over a thousand pages previously. This also means, importantly, that the ecologizing and the interactionist perspectives cannot satisfactorily be integrated; for although interaction is evidenced in all three parts of the book, the ecological material is largely confined to Part 1. The Mediterranean is thus best seen as a historical panorama, a massive picture full of engaging detail. Its author’s achievement is less to have advanced specific hypotheses – about the economic history of the sixteenth century, about Philip II’s foreign policy – than to have enriched our imaginary tableau of the period. When Braudel was taxed in an interview with a failure consistently to link his exposition to the solution of particular problems, he replied that the problem throughout had been to demonstrate the different durées of his three levels of history. He thus implicitly admitted that his problem was methodological rather than substantive, and that the solution to it was virtually predetermined in the book’s very layout.

Recognition that The Mediterranean is more panoramic than problem-solving encourages a further, related criticism. It may seem hard to complain that a work in two volumes of over twelve hundred pages has left vital topics out and misplaced its emphasis. But the complaint is a powerful one, and must be registered. If the structures that delimit the sphere of human initiative are to be fully described (as histoire problème suggests) must they not include psychological as well as geographical ones (as histoire totale surely requires)? In an article written during the long period when The Mediterranean was being revised for its second edition, Braudel was clear, if only as an afterthought, that he should: ‘mental frameworks too can form prisons of the longue durée’ (1980, 31). Yet mental frameworks – mentalités – are precisely what The Mediterranean to a quite remarkable extent neglects. It is material life – especially towns, ships, and long distance trade – that mainly captures Braudel’s imagination as it did those of Rostovtzeff, Pirenne and Goitein. Perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and symbols; the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, the Baroque; the clash of Islam and Christianity: all these are reduced to a relatively few pages.

4. Mediterranean History

The Mediterranean is, then, widely held to be a major yet flawed achievement. And the most famous piece of modern historical writing has, for the most part, borne fruit outside the field of Mediterranean studies.

4. Mediterranean History

We have now several times drawn a distinction between history in the Mediterranean – contingently so, not Mediterranean-wide, perhaps better seen as part of the larger history of either Christendom or Islam – and history of the Mediterranean – for the understanding of which a firm sense of place and a search for Mediterranean-wide comparisons are both vital. We have suggested that, during the twentieth century, the Mediterranean has in many ways ceased to be an intelligible unity. As far as the ‘contemporary historian’ is concerned, history in it seems more a proprio than history of it. Indeed, a certain tradition in the historical scholarship of the Mediterranean may plausibly be seen as having come to an end, or at least as having reached a low point, in the period following the publication of Braudel’s book. We have raised the further possibility that The Mediterranean may, for reasons that are not hard to envisage, also have brought about the decline of other traditions of writing about the region, notably among geographers. None of this of course means what the title of the preceding section mischievously suggests: the end of ‘Mediterranean studies’. For their burgeoning is undeniable. It does mean that, as we have already put it, in its own particular field The Mediterranean has been more an end than a beginning. Work that has been done since its appearance is, in the main, fragmented. Some of it takes the unity and geographical framework of its subject matter for granted (perhaps on the assumption that Braudel has done what needed to be done); some of it implicitly denies that such unity has ever existed; some of it ignores such large topics altogether.

Our exploration of the principal ways in which the Mediterranean has been conceived, which began with the early first millennium B.C., can now therefore suitably close with a consideration of a publication of 1966. But that is not the end of the matter. The history of ideas about the Mediterranean is hardly a subject that, once tackled, can be entirely set aside like a preliminary ‘literature survey’. Its complexities are not a mist through which we can feel our way to emerge on the far side in a clear – let alone a Mediterranean – light that will enable us simply to perceive the region’s history for ourselves. The ideas that we have reviewed are an inescapable and essential part of our inheritance. Inescapable, because there can be no unconditioned vision of a historical topic of this size and kind, no entirely independent return to the evidence. Essential, because many of the ideas discussed are far more than historiographical. They must be reckoned a part of the primary object of our enquiry: they have not only reflected but also influenced the beliefs and behaviour of Mediterranean people in the past. In this sense, we might assert, the Odyssey has been the creator of the Mediterranean. There is, then, no detached vantage point from which the ideas earlier reviewed can be simplistically interpreted as just temporarily arising between us and our subject in some cognitive no man’s land. We cannot get away from them; we can only attempt to remain highly self-questioning in our responses – always aware of their tenacious hold on our thinking, sidestepping
their more blatantly misleading imagery or generalizations. That we cannot hope to achieve complete independence of approach certainly does not entail our conceptual passivity.

To specify at this early stage the forms that our efforts to outwit tradition will take would be to offer something in the nature of a detailed programme or methodology. And that we prefer to avoid: there have already been too many in the history of Mediterranean studies. We stated at the outset that our choice of period would have to respond to the changing characteristics of the appropriate evidence. Flexibility must also be the watchword in our approach to subject matter.

First, the lesson to be learned from the discussion elicited by Braudel’s work is that histoire probléme must be preferred to histoire totale. Histoire totale on a Braudellian scale, but explicitly embracing more than twenty centuries rather than Braudel’s two or three, would be unfeasible, unrewarding, and unpublishable. There can, as we have already stressed in the Introduction, be no question of completeness or evenness of coverage, geographical or chronological. We need to be able to address specific questions, and therefore to gather evidence selectively - from a limited range of periods and places. Nor must we shuffle ourselves in advance with some grand vision of the significance of our work for the entire ‘historical process’ in the Mediterranean. If, in what follows, attention is concentrated on ‘constants’ of Mediterranean history, Braudelian or otherwise, this is not because we too hold that the longue durée wins out in the end, or indeed that it necessarily wins out at all. What is lasting in human affairs is not inevitably decisive.

In an essay on Braudel, W. H. McNeill has criticized ‘an approach to history that systematically denigrates conscious behaviour’ as being ‘as deficient in its way as were the dry-as-dust narratives of conscious policy-making against which Braudel and his mentors rebelled so successfully half a century ago’ (1986, 224). This criticism is not entirely appropriate to a work that paid considerable attention to Spanish wars of aggression in the Maghreb and elsewhere had even more to say about conscious responses to environmental stimuli. But the overall point is well made; and it might be applied to our endeavour in this book, for we deal much of the time with unintended patterns of behaviour. We can only anticipate criticism similar to McNeill’s by emphasizing that we never seek formally to exclude other forms of history from involvement with the topics or approaches discussed here. Rather what we outline are intended to be the general ecological principles with which the more usual kinds of Mediterranean history - economic, social or political - should mesh.

The second lesson to be learned from the fate of Braudel’s work is that histoire probléme should avoid determinism, environmental or otherwise (cf. Chapter VIII). Whatever chains of cause and effect it tries to disclose will not all lead in one direction. There must certainly be scope for investigating the effects of man on the environment as well as of the environment on man. And there must, further, be genuine histoire, a discipline with its own identity that cannot, we contend, be reduced to the procedures of the biological sciences.

Thirdly, therefore, no limits must be set in advance to the kinds of evidence and topic that will be admissible. History of the Mediterranean - as we have defined it - will be in large measure a history ‘close to the soil’ - and the sea: a historical equivalent of human geography. But such history cannot be ‘mindless’,

for all its attention to subconscious patterns of behaviour. Mentalités must clearly find their place.

That stipulation applies most forcefully to the study of interaction in the Mediterranean - a subject which, fourthly, we must attempt properly to integrate with the ecologizing approach. Interactionist and ecologizing approaches have been detached from one another in many of the currents of thought that we have reviewed. As we have already indicated, Braudel’s way of at last bringing them together is not wholly adequate.

Fifthly, it is in keeping with this requisite flexibility of approach that we shall expect conclusions that are neither absolute nor all-embracing. Our task is the investigation of unity in space and continuity over time; these are the prerequisites of a distinctively Mediterranean history. But we shall not presuppose either unity or continuity: both remain to be demonstrated (or denied) topic by topic. And if we find them we shall not suppose them to be measurable in other than loose and relative terms. To borrow an evocative term from mathematics, the Mediterranean is a ‘fuzzy set’. A certain vagueness should be of the essence in the way that it is conceived. Unity is obviously unlikely to be hard and fast, exhibiting clear external boundaries and internal homogeneity. It can only be assessed by reference to recurrent features that are more frequently found within the region than outside it. And, most importantly, it should be allowed that, if the Mediterranean past turns out to exhibit any unity at all, then the region may have been far more unified in some respects than in others. Continuity will similarly involve such patterns, and may be of several different kinds. These should ideally be specified, generously documented, and measured against change. Continuity in history will not really resemble immobility. In other words, like unity it will not be an ‘all or nothing’ matter. Far too much debate on these twin issues has been clouded by the implicit assumption that it will.

Finally, we must state our preference for a broadly ecological model in interpreting the kind of Mediterranean history that concerns us: history of, not just in, the region. But we must take this earliest opportunity of making clear the model’s heuristic limitations and the extent of our reliance on it.

5. Historical Ecology

Ecology is the scientific study of the relationship between living organisms and their animate and inanimate environment. There is as little place in it for, on one hand, simple environmental determinism (now, fortunately, both theoretically and empirically discredited) as for vague popular concern with pollution on the other. An ecologist is customarily involved in the detailed - and usually quantified - study of niches, systems, food chains, transfers of energy, the size and distribution of animal or human populations, and so on. For us to draw on the terminology of such a discipline will therefore be first and foremost a way of indicating that it is here a question of the many-faceted interaction between humanity and environment, rather than of environmental primacy, of human autonomy, or of the limited responsiveness to surroundings implied by ‘possibilism’. To that extent an ‘ecosystemic’ approach clearly has much to commend it. Can ecology however offer anything more specific to Mediterranean history? Can the models and techniques devised by ecologists be rendered ‘operational”
he estimated that the input energy of each sex is approximately equal (some 28,000 kilocalories per hectare). He also calculated energy inputs for clearing undergrowth, weeding, planting taro and yams, and so on. Combining all the different inputs he concluded that the calorific yield to input ratio was about 16:5:1 in taro–yam gardens and around 15:9:1 in sugar–sweet potato gardens. Even so, and on this apparently limited empirical front, Rappaport has been taken to task by his critics: for the inadequacy of his data about energy flow, the number of variables he failed to consider, the small scale of his original field work, and the incompleteness of his use of systems theory.

The second notable feature of Rappaport’s study is his confidence that there should be no conceptual difficulty in treating culture much as one would the behaviour of other animals’ (1984: 5). Though Rappaport does not attempt to explain either the origin or the ethnic significance of Tsembaga religious behaviour, the charge of reductionism seems justified. Despite the importance attached to religious ritual, which is, so far as we know, a specifically human phenomenon, animal ecology supplies the frame of reference within which religion and other components of culture are viewed in his study. The Tsembaga have been regarded as a population in the animal ecologist’s sense: a unit composed of an aggregate of organisms having in common certain distinctive means whereby they maintain a set of shared trophic relations with other living and non-living components of the biotic community in which they coexist (224).

The problems that would beset imitation of such an approach by Mediterranean historiography seem insuperable. Like the discipleship levelled at Rappaport, it is a matter partly of evidence, partly of interpretation.

Gathering evidence in the field is obviously difficult enough for an anthropologist able to spend months, even years, making close observations and accurate measurements, working with small groups whose economy is relatively uncomplicated and geared almost entirely to self-sufficiency. How much greater are the difficulties involved in finding any data at all from the remote past. Not only that: the data must adequately represent large and fluid communities – communities that display complicated and far-flung ties with a still wider world. The Mediterranean region does not, we shall suggest, offer the ‘local populations’, the clearly bounded environments on which ecologists conceptually speaking thrive (Chapters III–V). Yet without such closed systems, estimates of trophic exchanges or of ‘carrying capacity’ (signifying either the available resources or the level of population that these will sustain) are clearly impossible.

Vigorous comparativism may of course be a partial solution to the problem of evidence. The strategy has for example informed a very substantial monograph arrestingly entitled The Ecology of the Ancient Greek World (Sallares 1991). Musterling copious models and statistics from the journals of modern ecology can certainly suggest the possible forms that answers to ecological questions about Antiquity may take (Sallares 1991: 8). Yet historical evidence is still needed to decide which of the suggested forms can appropriately be projected back onto the past; and that evidence is rarely sufficient to the task. The requisite demographic particulars are lacking for any period before the early modern one (cf. Volume 2). And the palaeobotany and palaeozoology that would, for an ecologist, be their essential complements are simply not available on a sufficient scale to permit a properly scientific ecological history of the Mediterranean spanning millennia. As we shall hope to show, the character of Mediterranean ecosystems
can certainly be indicated – but it cannot be described with anything like the degree of specificity that an ecologist would consider respectable.

The so-called New Archaeology developed in the 1960s, along with the intellectual fashions that have succeeded it, might seem to have progressed towards an alternative solution to this problem set by dearth of evidence. Anxious to acquit itself of the charge of obsession with mere objects, archaeology has performed its own version of the Annalist feat of embracing models derived from the social and natural sciences, thereby hoping to establish itself as ‘the past tense of anthropology’ (Hodges and Whitehouse 1983, 15). But where it has successfully elaborated autonomous techniques for attempting to reconstruct the environment – and even the psychology – of prehistoric communities through a scientific treatment of the limited data at its disposal, it still has only occasional contributions, on quite specific topics, to make to the larger project of Mediterranean ecological history. It has not yet been able to provide results across a broad enough spectrum from which useful generalizations could be inferred and analogies drawn.

The limitations of archaeology in this context have of course sometimes been transcended. Renfrew and Wagstaff’s pioneering study (1982) of Melos makes the bold attempt to apply the ‘new’ methodology to the archaeological history of an Aegean island from the earliest times to the present (cf. III.4, V.2, IX.5). No facts about Melos can be irrelevant to the project: the Melian Dialogue of Thucydides becomes an artefact like a statue or a potsherd. The difficulty with this fascinating tour de force of archéologie totale is that, once again, what is barely possible for a tiny area cannot straightforwardly be carried out on any larger scale. And Melos, though an island, is far from isolated. The sheer complexity of the relationships between thousands of very different environmental niches make this approach as imperfect as that of human ecology à la Rappaport. We shall, in what follows, use all the Mediterranean archaeology that we can – but only as one kind of evidence among many, not as the discipline that has provided an overarching model.

Finding the right evidence is none the less hardly the greatest problem that faces Mediterranean ecology. The strictly ecological approach to history is, for us, disabled by the undesirability of treating human beings solely as organisms forming part of a biological system, even one of very wide and uncertain boundaries. When considering such relatively restricted topics as modes of subsistence or demographic regimes, the ecologist has already to omit, gloss over, or reduce to evolutionary terms precisely what the historian is most interested in: apparently autonomous cultural ‘variables’. In the long-standing debate over whether or not history can be assimilated to the natural sciences we wish, for all our ecological leanings, to uphold its distinctiveness.

Human ecosystems differ from model biological ecosystems in kind as well as in degree. For one thing, information, technology, and social organization play extraordinarily greater roles. More critically, human individuals and groups have unique capacities for purposive behaviour involving (a) the matching of resources with objectives, (b) the transforming of natural phenomena in order to meet these objectives, and (c) the capacity to think about these processes objectively without actually implementing them. The pivotal role of human cognition is illustrated . . . both by value systems and goal orientation that are not characteristic of simple ecosystems and by the significance of group attitudes and decision-making bodies in the complex societies of the historical record. . . . it is important to appreciate at this time that goals, values, and perceived needs are critical in understanding human actions and that culture, perception, and behaviour condition the way in which individuals and societies interact with their environments. (Butzer 1982, 32)

That – from, let it be stressed, an ecological archaeologist – is to put it mildly. And none of the available theories of ‘ethno-ecology’ (native understanding of the environment), ‘cognitive factors’, structures of decision-making, food systems or similar abstractions, seems adequate to the task of fully assimilating cultural to scientific explanation – certainly in the ecological sphere (contrast Sällres 1991, 212, on the ‘naturalness’ of slavery and the evolutionary reason for its historical rarity). Just as there is (or has been) a new archaeology, so also there is a ‘new ecology’ which involves dynamic evolution, the ecology of nature’s ineluctable contingency. Such an ecology concerns itself with instabilities, disequilibria and chaotic fluctuations (Zimmerer 1994). It is thus opposed to the older systems ecology, with its concepts of competitive exclusion and niche specialization (for an instance, Hardisty 1978). In this older ecology homeostatic ideas of systems adaptation became teleological, changes could not be explained, and there was no historical dimension. The ‘new ecology’, on the other hand, sees no possibility of estimating generalized carrying capacity, because of local and temporal variability (cf. VII.4).

Historical time with its emphasis on the irregular periodicity of environmental variations and ecological functioning has replaced the cyclical time of systems ecology. Disturbances such as fire, wind, drought, pest outbreaks, disease epidemics, volcanic eruptions and landslides take place relentlessly across a wide range of biotic and biophysical landscapes. (Zimmerer 1994, 110)

But to enumerate chaos-inducing factors is not to incorporate them into a coherent model. It is merely to confirm that the historical ecology of the Mediterranean cannot, in the end, however ‘new’ it becomes, stand as a scientific pursuit. The dynamics and flux of social allegiances and ordered behaviour in the Mediterranean region will defy scientific modelling. Historical ecology, as opposed to other kinds, will therefore investigate these processes in a different spirit. The study of them may clearly be enhanced by frequent invocation of the natural ecologist’s terms, procedures and self-reinventions. But without sustained attention to what is distinctively historical about the place of humanity within the environment, and particularly to the complexity of human interaction across large distances, the study of the Mediterranean past will ultimately not have advanced very far beyond Plato’s simile of the frogs round a pond.
The intricate local patterns within the dispersed hinterlands of Mediterranean settlements provide a suitable point of transition in our enquiry into 'routes et villes . . . ', Fevre’s lapidary response to Braudel. From villes, we turn to routes. In the preceding chapter we argued that the study of towns should, for the purposes of ecological history, be replaced with a much more open conception of the ways in which larger settlements are nourished. Towns have been seen as a defining feature of Mediterranean history. But, as such, they have usually been understood in conjunction with sharply defined lines of communication and redistribution, on which they have been seen to depend. These Mediterranean routes have therefore also attained a constitutive role in notions of the Mediterranean past. Our emphasis on the processes which sustain more or less transient agglomerations in the Mediterranean entails that we should also attempt to set routes in a much broader interpretative context.

We certainly do not mean to imply that defined highways or sea-lanes have never existed; on the contrary, their functioning more or less throughout our long period is well documented. Rather, just as we proposed in Chapter IV that the town is not a readily discriminable category of settlement and has no distinct ecological history of its own, we now want to suggest that the kind of route which Fevre and Braudel envisaged is best seen as a special instance of a far larger phenomenon: the connectivity of microregions. By this term, we understand the various ways in which microregions cohere, both internally and also one with another – in aggregates that may range in size from small clusters to something approaching the entire Mediterranean.

We have argued that microregions always need to be understood with reference to some wider setting (Chapter III); and we have extended our micro-regional approach to the study of larger (‘urban’) settlements (Chapter IV). Here, then, we complete the exposition of our basic model of the Mediterranean past, by attempting to show how microregions can coalesce on a grand scale. This coalescence – which begins across the ‘short distances’ corresponding to the ‘definite places’ in the title of this Part of the book – encourages that history of, rather than merely in, the Mediterranean which we defined right at the outset. In the present chapter our aim is chiefly to describe. The explanation of connectivity, and its consequences for the timbre of Mediterranean cohesiveness, will emerge in the course of Chapters VI–IX.
places often - and not coincidentally - of great religious significance, as we shall see in Chapter X. The highest volcanic summit of the Alban hills, Monte Cavo, provides a useful example (III.2). This most conspicuous peak was the site of the Temple of Jupiter Latiaris, the federal sanctuary of the archaic League of the cities of Latium. Quite generally, Mediterranean microregions are patterned by ties of mutual visibility. The watchtower or look-out has been a prime constituent of the region's landscapes, and has given its name to many prominent features, as is reflected for example in the modern Greek toponym Vigla, from *vigliia*. Chains of beacons or signal stations could convey simple messages very rapidly, and were often used by the Greeks and Romans as part of their network of communications. The distance from Troy to Mycenae is powerfully evoked in this manner at the beginning of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* of 458 B.C. There can be little doubt that an essentially visual ordering of geography was one of the earliest ways by which the individual might understand the relationship between his own sphere of movements and far broader horizons (Tracy 1986).

Fields of perception and their foci are characteristic ingredients in the definition of Mediterranean microregions because these microregions can never be sufficiently understood solely in their local context. The chains of perceptibility created by looking from one vantage point to the next serve both to express the relationship of individual localities to one another and, as with Friar Felix's vision of the Mediterranean quoted at the end of Chapter I, to make sense of the wider world. Faced with the difficulty of comprehending the layout of whole mountain-ranges, ancient geographers even carried the notion to its extreme, and offered exceedingly optimistic assessments of mutual visibility - for example, Strabo's assertion that from the heights of the Balkan ranges west of Macedonia it was possible to see both the Aegean and the Adriatic (*Geography*, 7, fragment 6).

In Chapter I we explored some of the earliest documented ways in which the Mediterranean came to be understood as an entity. We emphasized the coastwise voyage and the listing of features that punctuate the shore. For the coastwise mariner, the list was made possible by the visibility of landmarks. The Isola di Camerota off the Tyrrenhenian coast of Elea, for example, can be shown to have acted as a visual reference point for the definition of this ancient city's seacoast (De Magistris 1995, 60–76). Like lines of intercommunicating watch towers, the mariner's lines of sight express the greater unity of what lies beyond the bounds of perceptibility: Along the mountainous coast of the ancient Maghreb, the cities that lay in a sequence of safe anchorages took their names from the headlands which identified them for the seafarer: Rusazu, Rusippisir, Rusuccurru, Rusaddir (Mackie 1983; Map 23). Well into the Roman period, they retained the toponym - related to the later Arabic *ra's* or head - that they had been given centuries before by westbound Phoenician mariners. In this case the names that had reflected the early sailors' perceptual continuum were used for the Roman cities that made this coast part of the empire. The seafarers' perception was institutionalized in the administration of the area, and contributed to another kind of unity, that of a province of the *imperium Romanum*.

Under the Roman thalassocracy, the coastal villas of the rich often took over the locations of landmarks, and their confident display came to symbolize
the quality of life in an age that had tamed the sea's perils. It was a particular pleasure to own pairs of villas that looked along the coast from promontory to cape or from island to mainland, lending the proprietor a sense of control over the maritime landscape. Moreover, the owners who adapted the landscape in this way were also deliberately appropriating the architecture with which Hellenistic cities had embellished their harbours. Port monuments such as lighthouses and mole or the famous colossus of Rhodes all belong in this context – as only the most sophisticated expressions of the idea that the identity of a powerful Mediterranean figure depends on how his territory is perceived from its maritime approaches.

Mutual visibility is at the heart of the navigational conception of the Mediterranean, and is therefore also a major characteristic of the way in which microregions interact across the water, along the multiple lines of communication that follow those of sight. There are only relatively restricted zones where, in the clearest weather, sailors will find themselves out of sight of land. And these unidentifiable 'deep's of the sea are the areas that have held the greatest terror for the Mediterranean seafarer, from Odysseus onward. Yet a map of them shows how confined they are. Thanks to the mountainous nature of so many coasts, much of the Mediterranean basin is linked quite easily by lines of sight (Map 9).

The sequences of fixed points that pattern lines of visual communication between microregions are most obvious, and are easiest to use, in the continental sphere. The shores, with their usually clear unidirectional and their easily intuited sequence of prominent features, readily assist the conceptualization of space. On land, by contrast, there are so many complications that lines are less easy to determine. Indeed, in its unhappily jumbled, the interior bears a certain resemblance to those deeps of the sea. The abundance of features and directions promotes perceptual confusion. Away from the coasts, fewer topographical features are dominant enough to provide an equivalent armature for the patterns of human interaction. Only a very small number of mountain passes, some isolated peaks, and certain great river valleys approximate the effect of seashores. By means that are analogous to the provision of artificial landmarks, however, the gaps in the perceptual network of terrestrial communication can be improved: landmarks can be emphasized architecturally, and lines can be elaborated too.

The Roman road, the most developed form of overland interconnection in Mediterranean history, was surveyed as a set of links along lines of sight. The course of the road was a highly artificial choice. In its most frequent ancient conception, indeed, it can be defined simply as the shortest distance between two prominent landmarks or navigable rivers (Purcell 1990b). In this it was quite unlike the great channels of trans-Saharan or Asiatic communication, formalized in the latter case as the Royal Road of the Persians. Operating on an intercontinental scale, these routes were locally very variable in their exact course; they did not have to have close relationship to the regions which they traversed and to which they did not really belong. Clearly the geometric simplicity of the concept, and the power displayed in ignoring physical obstacles, were both part of the

Map 9 Visibility of the land from the sea

This revealing cartography (after Chapman 1990) may be contrasted with Braudel's eloquent, if somewhat misleading, analogy (1972a, 103): 'great stretches of the sea were as empty as the Sahara.'
Roman engineer's point. But lines of communication always embody an element of the arbitrary. The nonchalance of the Roman engineer reminds us that the supposedly natural route is often no more of a physical determinant of human behaviour than is the natural geographical frontier (cf. I.2). If there was a determinism at work in the Romans' choice of direction for major roads, it derived not from the incomprehensible jumble of the local topography, but rather from features of the reliable and well-known geometry of coasts and watercourses. It was, in other words, a determinism of the understanding.

Claims about the economic advantages of the Roman road are often dismissed by reference to the non-utilitarian rationale of its creation, as well as to the likely poor state of repair of its surface and the paucity of evidence for road-borne commerce in classical times. The debate is misplaced: the importance of a road project in the Mediterranean landscape is the effect that it achieves through proclaiming and encouraging interaction between microregions - an effect achieved by symbolism and the establishment of social relations as much as by any physical movement of goods and people. Compare a likely coastal case: in two ports there are goods to be exchanged, people whose interests and understanding of each other promote friendly association, and a short passage between. A compact may be made to encourage exchange, and physical facilities in the two places may be improved. For a time the two localities interact. Bad weather or the decay of the harbour mole will have only a limited effect on the connection that has been set up. With a road it is similar; the compact represented by the investment in this link between these two places is the important aspect, not the 'hardware' that goes with it.

Where such a compact has acquired the solidity of high esteem and long use, it may continue to function against the apparent dictates of rationality and expediency. Classical Athens, famously, enjoyed the advantage of a capacious and defensive 'natural' harbour, at Piraeus. This functioned as its gateway to a dispersed hinterland in the network of Mediterranean communications and rapidly developed into a major hub within that network, to the great gain of the Athenian state. Yet smaller, less well endowed landings and anchorages, more remote from the city, none the less continued to play a vital role in the economy. The strongest case is Oropos, on the opposite, northern, coast of Attica (Map 10), separated from Athens by twenty miles of hilly road. For seaborne traffic from the north, it would seem preferable to continue the journey by sea to Piraeus. Although the rounding of Cape Sounion entails a longer journey, somewhat at risk from bad weather, this route can hardly have failed to be cheaper and quicker than transhipment at Oropos. Yet, we are told, during the Peloponnesian War, when Athens' enemies occupied the strongpoint of Decelia and made the land-route from Oropos unusable, the interruption of the movements of transhipped goods caused the Athenians grave inconvenience (Thucydides, History, 7.28.1). Further, we now discover (Blackman 1997, 14–16) that Oropos had already been an important centre of exchange and of metalworking in the eighth century, when it participated in the forming of complex economic connections between the communities of nearby Euboea and far-flung parts of the Mediterranean. As a link between early Attica and this precursor of the Piraeus hub, Oropos acquired functions and relationships which proved highly durable.

The path of actual movement between places, like the simple perceptions of contact and juxtaposition that underlie it, is therefore a selection of just one
strand in that potentially omni-directional connectivity between ecologies best exemplified in ties of visibility. It is a selection made for any one of a variety of possible reasons. The significance of a strand will ebb or endure as the ecologies, in all their contingency, mutate. That is why, at the extreme, routes may be invisible to the untutored eye: they are defined by local knowledge and current practice, not by physical peculiarities.

That is also why modern studies of the communicability of Mediterranean regions—even of so physically individual a landscape as the Peloponnesse—have shown some striking differences between the communications networks of classical and of modern times. The configuration of passes, plains, fords, ports and minor paths has remained substantially unchanged; but the relationship between them and the major lines of transportation has varied considerably over time. In the Peloponnesse, an impression of great continuity between ancient and modern networks is created by the recorded efforts of nineteenth-century travellers to retrace the steps of the ancients. If the classical routes had altogether disappeared (the travellers surmised) the landscape could show where they must have run. And yet this impression of continuity is deceptive. For what matters in assessing the communications of the area is not the fate of particular routes, but the relative significance of each part in the workings of the whole. Now in theory this can be measured. When dealing with a fully specifiable network, connectivity may be defined (far more narrowly than we do) as one of several possible mathematical functions of the proportion of nodes to links and of the likely journey times. A comparison, in these terms, of the connectivity of the Peloponnesse displayed, on one hand, in the Peutinger Table, probably dating in its original form to Augustan times, and, on the other, in George Gennadius’s map of the Balkans of 1822, shows how much has changed. In particular, the increasing value placed on speed of travel has, contrary to all received wisdom about Mediterranean transport, lent a new importance to routes through the northern mountains, and caused a relative decline in the part played by coastwise traffic (Sanders and Whitbread 1990: III.6, with Section 3 below; Map 32).

If the scope for comparison is extended back into pre-Roman times, a yet more striking contrast emerges. It seems that the ancient Spartans may have controlled and exploited their territory (of over 8,000 square kilometres) by a unique system of wagon tracks, quite different in character from Roman networks, let alone from more recent ones. Nineteenth-century travellers had occasionally noticed parallel grooves traversing the landscape and acting rather like railway lines for wagon wheels. But it has required a modern topographical investigation (Christen 1989) to reveal the full extent and the antiquity of the system. It seems to have been created especially for the safe transport of goods across the Taygetus Mountains, enabling the Spartans to enjoy the wealth of the Plain of Messenia. At its most developed, it integrated the whole of the southern Peloponnesse, contradicting the poor connectivity that might be ascribed to Sparta simply on the basis of the Peutinger Table (Sanders and Whitbread 1990, 348). Such findings should encourage a more sympathetic reading of Thucydides’s ‘mythistorical’ claim that the Greeks once travelled more by land than by sea (History, I.13.5).

Thus, even routes that cross difficult terrain, and that might be expected to prove ineffective as lines of communication, often turn out to admit of surprisingly fluent and varied interchanges between regions. A further illustration to set alongside the survey of Peloponnesian wheel roads comes from Larner’s (1990) study of the Apennines inland from Rimini during the Renaissance. It nicely reinforces the conclusions derived from Sparta: it shows once more that Mediterranean mountains are not necessarily barriers; and it adds another chronological period to our set of examples.

The Apennine routes were described as ‘difficult and harsh’ by more than one eminent Renaissance observer; and the difficulties involved in the movement of goods and people could certainly be enormous. Yet there is sufficient evidence to show that, as channels of redistribution, these routes were of great significance for the regional interaction of the period. ‘We went through the mountains of the Apennine, which last for around twelve miles, but it is an easy mountain (è montagna facile).’ So wrote Francesco Guicciardini on crossing the Cisa Pass in 1511—and not during the summer of that year, but in cruel February (Larner 1990, 148–9). Armies moved around as Guicciardini could, albeit with far greater effort. In 1495, the invader Charles VIII of France had taken a force of some 10,000, with fourteen heavy artillery and twenty-three smaller pieces, across the very same pass. Trade routes, too, could be found when necessary, for instance the one negotiated between Florence and Rimini in 1402, when most of the usual Florentine channels had been cut by her war with Milan. The secret of such relative ease of passage lay in the knowledge of a dense and evolving network:

a network of tracks leading from one valley to another, from the hill pastures to the valley bottoms, and over the high watersheds... Again, wherever there was a castle, village, church, or monastery, there was a track leading somewhere else, and wherever a commune or local lord extracted tolls, smugglers would seek out obscure paths across the highest passes in order to avoid paying them. (Larner 1990, 152–3)

Even mountainous regions, as we have earlier argued, are not as impenetrable as classical and medieval opinion, reinforced by a Romantic sensibility to desolation, would have them. This is a fact which Islamic geography, perhaps because it was less oriented towards the sea, always recognized (Miquel 1980, 35–69). By and large, the Mediterranean world before railways did not depend on the wheel (W. H. McNeill 1987, Buller 1975). Pack-animals have been the gathered solution, and their versatility is responsible for the complexity of the geography of communications in areas of high relief. We may add that it is important to distinguish zones of high relief from zones of high altitude. In the Mediterranean lands high mountains are commonly plateaux and massifs of ancient limestone, surrounded by tumbled lower foothills of softer, more recent rocks. It is the foothills that create difficulties of communication. Except when they are under snow, summits can offer very easy routes (Butzer 1994, 23). The inhabitants of mountainous regions travel through them with striking ease, making use of surprisingly short and level routes among the summit plateaux and ramified watershed ridges which in many Mediterranean mountains form a relatively coherent surface across hundreds of miles. The high Pindus and the central Apennines provide good examples of that coherence, as do some of the cultural units formerly to be found across the Yugoslav mountains (Milovejić 1939). There have also been notable cases of unity within and between regions linked
only by high-altitude communications – in the Lebanon, for instance, which long coherently resisted the Hellenistic kingdoms and Rome, or the cultural realm of the Algerian Kabyle. We should, in addition, mention the mountain-based state of the rebellious Italian allies of Rome at the beginning of the first century B.C., with its aspiring capital at Corinthia high in an intermontane basin; or the case with which the Lombard presence in Italy was maintained along the dorsal ridge and its outliers, from the Cisalpine settlements in the north, through the Duchy of Spoleto, to the Duchy of Benevento in the central south.

It is with the points of transition between mountain and lowland that the picture becomes more complicated. Transhumant herding, linking high and low pastures, which we encountered in our ‘definite places’, and to which we shall return in the next chapter (Section 7), helps integrate upland zones. But on most Mediterranean mountains only a relatively restricted summit level is rendered quite useless during the season of snow, and relations between the middle mountain zone and the coast, or between the middle zone and the high pastures are more common than movement all the way from high pasture to coast or vice versa. This is partly because both the summer pasture and the coastal wetlands are particularly good for the animals; and country folk will have had to be content with access to only one of what were, in any case, often widely separated areas. There is nothing unusual about such cases. Just as microregions have some environments whose potential is to be realized only through animal husbandry, so too must have some access to mountains – a fact which has been added to explain the slow development of the luxury snow-trade in the Mediterranean (de Planhol 1995).

The main hindrance to the movements of people and goods by land has usually been social rather than physical (VII.4–5). Some tracts are, however, relatively free from this problem because aridity makes them so sparsely populated. This effect reinforces the paradoxical ease of communications of Mediterranean mountains. Dry levels and bare plains, some at high altitudes, such as the Spanish Meseta, may be isolated by their height and rugged fringes, but still offer vast areas of easily traversed countryside. Communications across the great deserts themselves, to the east and south of the Mediterranean lands, have also often been easier than might be supposed (a theme to which we hope to return in Volume 2; cf. III.3 for Cyrenaica and the Sahara).

Mediterranean places are doubly identified. First, they have their own distinguishing features that are perceptible to their inhabitants (although perhaps not to the stranger, who can register only the ‘natural’ physical environment). Yet, secondly, these local characteristics derive at least some of their significance from being part of more extensive networks. Such networks often abut on the unexpectedly connective tracts which form the skeleton of the Mediterranean peninsula and islands, ridges, plateaux, plains. But much more important is the role played by the sea itself, and particularly by coastwise navigation. If we are seeking to illustrate connectivity in the Mediterranean area at its most comprehensive, its most variable in direction, then we must clearly look to the sea, and particularly to its islands and peninsulas. Their dense and convoluted interaction provides a more appropriate image of Mediterranean routes in general than could any network of lines and vertices, suggestive of perennial, physically determined channels of contact.

2. Extended Archipelagos: The Connectivity of the Maritime

The lines of visibility that bind places across the Mediterranean Sea create, as we have now begun to show, a distinctive maritime milieu – a milieu that dominates pockets of the land-world with which it comes in contact. The Greeks called these pockets that lie opposite islands peraias (Dilke 1985, 74–85); and the terminology, defining a piece of the mainland in terms of its relationship to an offshore island rather than vice versa, strikingly reflects the conceptual primacy of the maritime world. The sea, as we saw in Chapter 1, unites the Mediterranean conceptually as well as topographically. It is no barrier to communications, but the medium of all human intercourse from one region to another. Moreover, to the sea in the literal sense we must add the very important cases in which water-borne contacts extend the sea into the land. Navigable rivers – Ebro, Rhône and Tiber, Po, Adige and Narenta, Axios, Strymon and Hermus, Maeander, Pyramus, Orontes and Nile – and dozens of smaller but often partly navigable streams, with the coastal wetlands where land and sea mingle, together constitute another zone of communications (VI.5). The advantage of maritime transportation, economical of energy, relatively quick, wide open and unobstructed, is not outweighed by its risks, terrible though these often are. As the ancient interpreter of dreams Artemidorus of Daldis (a land-locked town of Anatolia) says, sea-travel is a far better dream to have than land-travel because of its greater facility (Or the Interpretation of Dreams, 2.2.3). Maritime communications have been regarded as a necessary (though not a sufficient) condition for growth in the Mediterranean economy (Finley 1985a, 129). The sea is also the foundation of our case for the distinctiveness of Mediterranean history: deeply implicated in the unpredictability of the conditions of life, it is also of course the principal agent of connectivity.

In the patterns of relationship between microregions, the coastal enclaves that are part of the world of the sea but interact with the ‘depths’ of the hinterland have always played a special, if highly volatile, part (IX.7). They function as what geographers have labelled gateway settlements, through which goods and people are ‘funnelled’ in both directions (Hodges 1988, 42–52). The ensemble of Mediterranean lands is not just a gigantic peninsula in reverse (cf. 1.4); it has an inside-out geography in which the world of the sea is ‘normal’ (the interior), and the land is the fringe, its marginality increasing with its distance from the sea. Distance is, in effect, inverted: places linked by sea are always ‘close’, whereas neighbours on land may, in terms of interaction, be quite ‘distant’. The influential theories of Wallenstein (1974–89) about the nature of large-scale social and economic systems will therefore apply to the Mediterranean, if at all, in a curious way: the core territories may be composed of far-flung coastlands whose functional proximity is the product of seaborn connectivity. Peripheral regions will be found in the interstices of this network as well as in geographically remote areas (G. Woolf 1990). Hence the differences in cost between land and sea transport characteristic not only of the ancient world but of any period in Mediterranean history before the advent of railways (IX.4).

The study of maritime connectivity is one subject in which the Mediterranean historian has most to learn from prehistory. The degree of intercommunication displayed by the islands of the Mediterranean in the second millennium B.C. is well known (A. B. Knapp 1990). Already in the Mycenaean period, the
unpromising offshore islet of Vivara on the north shore of the bay of Naples acted as the depot for seafarers in their interactions with the rich Italian mainland, just as Pirkeousa, a few kilometres away, was to do from the eighth century (Frederiks 1984, 65–7; IX.7). In the fourteenth century B.C., Ustica, a small volcanic island north of Palermo, was regularly in the swim of Mediterranean-wide exchange and had been equipped with a fortified encinte and rectilinear ground plan (Ross Holloway and Lukesch 1991). Still earlier, in the Gulf of Mirabello at the eastern end of Crete, a Minoan city flourished on an islet, modern Pseira, that had virtually no productive potential. The community served as a gateway to a fertile area on the mainland, that would once again focus on Pseira when it prospered in the early Byzantine period and supported an island monastery (Harrison 1990).

At the dawn of the historical period, when the textual evidence is at its scantiest, archaeology produces further instances of the precocious existence of Mediterranean-wide interdependence. On the other side of Crete from Pseira is the port of Kommos, where notable connections with the Phoenician milieu as it grew to embrace the whole Mediterranean basin have been revealed. Examination of the ancient graffiti shows that Greeks from different places, including both Euboea and central Greece, were to be found there in the eighth century B.C. (Casas 1991, I. W. Shaw 1989). In the Euboean ambit during the same period, the site of Zagora, an unwelcoming corner of Attika, is revealed as sharing in the continuum of redistribution – more, to owe it its very existence (Camitoglu 1988).

A further example from the Phoenician world, and from just outside the Mediterranean region, is provided by the city of Gades, now Cadiz. It was founded from distant Tyre, most likely in the mid-eighth century B.C., on a small group of islands commanding access from the coastal routes to the wide estuary of the Guadalquivir. It flourished as the entrepot through which the increasingly complex local cultures of the mainland, with their rich resources of silver, were tied in to the redistributive networks of the Mediterranean (Aubet 1993; Chamarro 1987; IX.2).

With Pithéousa, the successor of our first instance, Vivara, and with Gades, we have arrived in the mainstream of what is usually called Greek colonization, one of the most complex manifestations ever of the interactive potential that has been central to Mediterranean maritime history. As a result of the intricacy and pervasiveness of seafaring interaction and the development from it of the more formal practice of establishing daughter-settlements, by the fifth century B.C. the whole sea had become virtually a single hinterland – the extended archipelago of the title of this section. The Greeks and Romans themselves recognized the world of the Greek maritime settlements as a cultural and social continuum. Cicero provides a memorable simile with which to register, retrospectively, the seafaring character of the spread of Greek culture: ‘the shores of Greece are like hems stitched on to the lands of barbarian peoples’ (On the Republic, 2.9).

Cicero wrote in the knowledge that the maritime world that he was describing had, thanks to Pompey’s thalassocracy, become Roman.

For some time now [since Pompey’s defeat of the pirates] we have seen that immemorial sea, by whose disturbance not only the maritime routes [mare

maritimum] but even the cities and the military lines of communication were afflicted, by the courage of Gnaeus Pompeius and the Roman People kept safe and controlled from the Ocean to the furthest recess of the Black Sea, just as if it were a single harbour. (On the Caneus’ Province, 12.31)

Little more than a century later, as reflected in St Paul’s ‘odyssey’ in Acts, the foundations had been laid for the extended archipelago to be christianized. The islands and peninsulas that had been the sites of Hellenistic ports or Roman villas, proclaiming the power of the rulers of the sea, came in time to be the sites of holy communities such as Linos or Athos. The Mediterranean network became a Christian one – informed by pilgrimage and crusade and by the wanderings of saints and their relics; sacralizing, and further demonstrating the coherence of, seafaring communications (Chapter X). The rulers of the sea began to define themselves by their religious allegiance: but their political behaviour continued to follow a logic that had been observed for centuries. The maritime empire of classical Athens had once known a strategy called epeireitosma. This involved the fortification of beaches supplied from the sea with which the adjacent land powers could be harmonized. Islamic enterprise now sought to establish pockets of control on Christian shores, at Garde Freinet in Provence, for instance, during the years 891–973, or in the marshes at the mouth of the river Garigliano in Italy. Christian leaders, whose aspiration to control the maritime milieu found its most ambitious expression in the Knights of St John, came to establish similar bases on the shores of the Maghreb, some of which – e.g. Melilla and Ceuta – have proved tenacious.

For the story does not end with the early modern period. In the waters where the term epeireitosma was coined, the insurgents of the Phyllene Fabvier made use of the Methana peninsula of the north-east Peloponnesse as a base for occasional raids into Turkish territory in just the same way; they christened it the Cadiz of Greece, referring explicitly to similar events at the other end of the Mediterranean in the Spanish revolution of 1823 (Forbes 1982, 57). Until the Second World War, Mediterranean Realpolitik remained as much a matter of the manipulation of extended hinterlands as it had been in the first millennium B.C. And although Tangier, Port-Mahon and Malta have now settled back into a more local frame of political reference, the divisions of Cyprus, the contested status of the Rock of Gibraltar, and the importance during the final years of the Cold War of military enclaves such as the American naval base at Cretan Souda can still remind us of the more distant past. Since the advent of new maritime technologies in the nineteenth century, and above all since the advent of air travel and intercontinental ballistics, such reflections of Mediterranean unity can no longer be seen as the product of the totality of water-borne interactions between microregions. But they offer a potent reminder of how significant that totality has been (1.4).

In connectivity of this type, what is the place of sea routes as conventionally conceived? We have suggested that they can be treated as just a special instance of a broader phenomenon. Yet, while few doubt that land routes have been extremely various and resistant mapping, Mediterranean sea routes have often been taken to be quite clearly defined. How then does our interpretation relate to the more usual image of the Mediterranean as nibbled with shipping lanes?
3. Shipping Lanes

Our answer can begin by returning to Cicero. His assessment of Pompey’s achievement refers explicitly to *cursus maritimi*, sea routes. And this might well appear to be an ancient testimony to the wisdom of Febvre’s remark about ‘routes et villes’. The context is highly instructive, however. In Part One above we included the preconceptions of political and military power among those that have been most influential in forming historical attitudes to the Mediterranean, and that need to be treated with caution by the student of the *longue durée*. Here, in Cicero, is an example of their effect. For the requirements of naval might are vastly more specialized than the infrastructure within which everyday microregional interaction occurs. The ensemble of dockyards, arsenals, victualling stores, deep-water anchorages, and battle-zones will come to be linked by well-defined routes that are suitable for major warships. It is to routes of that kind that Cicero refers. And it is to routes of that kind that the attention of maritime historians has principally been drawn.

Onto the blurred and complex picture of communications that we derived from lines of sight can, then, be superimposed a far sharper image. It owes little to the versatility of oculars and much to the capabilities of larger ships and to the imperatives of weather and current. The best presentation of this sharper image has been given by John H. Pryor (1988). His discussion is intended to apply to the period running from late Antiquity until the fourteenth century at least, and in many respects on into the early modern period. Let us look at some of its details. We shall suggest that Pryor mistakes the special case of large vessels, above all war ships, for the generality of navigation and thus exaggerates the constraints on the latter.

Pryor depicts merchant and war ships, sailing and oared vessels in the medieval Mediterranean as substantially determined in their habitual courses by a combination of technology, climate, and current: ‘to a large degree man had to make his crossings of the sea in harmony with the forces of nature rather than in spite of them or against them’ (1988, xiv). Summer and winter alike, nearly all the prevailing winds right across the Mediterranean sea blow from somewhere between north-west and north-east. The exception is the scirocco, but that is

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Map 11  *A façade maritime* from the Arno to the Ebro

From the coast of Liguria to the delta of the Ebro is a single *façade maritime*. High mountains or rugged coastal chains lie close behind the shore over almost all of this area, and are interrupted only by small coastal plains. Over these four hundred kilometres of Mediterranean coastline, there are just four important corridors leading into continental space: the passes behind Genoa which give access to the upper Cisalpine plain; the Rhone valley, leading into the heart of France and to the upper Rhone; the Carcassonne gap, an easy route to the Garonne basin and the Atlantic coast of France; and the Ebro valley, which connects with all the northern and central parts of Iberia. The focus of this façade is the embayment into which the Rhone debouches. Here the coastal plains are much wider, and are flanked by a noteworthy series of lagoons from the delta of the Camargue to the marshes at the mouth of the Ter in Catalonia. This area is portrayed in more detail on Map 22. The Gulf of Lion itself is a shallow continental shelf on which focus sea routes from the northern Tyrrhenian, from Tunisia via the west coast of Sardinia, and from the Strait of Gibraltar by the Spanish seaboard or the Balearic archipelago. The height of the mountains renders most of these waters visible from land.
too violent to be of much navigational help (20). Meanwhile, apart from currents flowing between Sicily and Libya, the general direction of the movements set by the inflow of Atlantic water through the Straits of Gibraltar is anticlockwise. Winds and currents are therefore two potent and often opposing forces in the Mediterranean. In addition to these, the medieval mariner also had to take account of the dangers of many of the sea’s southern lee-shores: numerous reefs and sandbanks (such as the Syrtes), a frequent lack of natural deep-water anchorage, coasts often too low-lying to afford clear landmarks (cf. Pyror 1988, 21, with U dovich 1978, 543–4). Navigation was further complicated by the limitations of the ships themselves. ‘They could maintain a real course at 90° to the wind only with great difficulty, even when that wind was by no means a gale force’ (Pyr or 1988, 35). This applied not only to earlier medieval vessels with lunate sails, shallow keels and rounded hulls, but also, to a considerable extent, to the cogs, carracks and galleys of later centuries. They all lacked windward capability (33–6, 51). Technological development made relatively little difference (Section 4 below).

So it becomes clear why long-distance voyages, above all voyages from east to west and south to north, could be made more safely and speedily along the chain of islands and coastslands in the northern waters of the Mediterranean (Pyr or 1988, 14, fig. 2). Mariners would take advantage of the currents and of the daily cycle of coastal breezes to make their way against the prevailing winds that could otherwise render northern and western voyages impossible. In very general terms, we can plot the results of navigators’ decisions, we would arrive at a relatively uncharted chart of maritime trunk routes or highways, zones within which medieval captains very commonly set course. For east-west voyages, the trunk routes ran from Alexandria to Tyre or Beirut. They then diverged – north to the area of Antioch and along the Lycian coast, or west to the south coast of Cyprus. The routes merged again at Rhodes and ran thence via Karpathos across to the south coast of Crete. From Crete they bent north into the Ionian Sea past Cephalonia, then across the Straits of Otranto, and around the Italian coast to the eastern end of Sicily. From Sicily, shipping could either turn north into the Tyrrenian Sea and follow the Italian, French and Spanish coasts around to Gibraltar; or it could proceed south-west through the Sicilian channel, north-west again to the coast of Sardinia, thence either north to the Provençal coast or due west across the open sea to the Baléarics. From the Baléarics, the routes made either west towards Gibraltar or southwards to the African coast (Pyr or 1988, 7). For voyages from west to east and north to south, the currents would have made a southern route faster. The prevailing winds were also generally more favourable and they allowed a greater choice of route. None the less, Mediterranean shipping still preferred to follow those northern lanes – even during the later Middle Ages, when more manoeuvrable cogs and carracks, a little better able to point into the wind, became, in Christian waters at least, increasingly common. Scattered along the northern lanes were the major ports and naval bases – Malaga, Bonifacio, Malta, Naxos, Rhodes, Attalaia and others. These continued to exercise a ‘gravitational pull’ on shipping, and hence to define the shipping lanes, even when advances in design and in navigation had made a wider choice of route conceivable (1988, 54). Also on these lanes lay, not surprisingly, the chief battle zones of the various wars between Christian and Muslim forces from the eighth to the sixteenth centuries (7–8, 54).

In Pyror’s pages we thus find in essence a scholarly amplification of Cicero’s vision of the Mediterranean sea as marked out by currus maritimae, adherence to which was made attractive by a combination of wind, tide and current and technology. It is a quite different picture that would have been familiar not only to the orator but to Herodotus five centuries earlier. So far as it goes, therefore, there is nothing in this analysis from which we could reasonably dissent. In both Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Mediterranean shipping undoubtedly had its preferred, long-distance, commercial and naval routes which it followed – other things being equal. As soon as attention focuses on the words in italics, however, it becomes clear that some qualification must be entered, some complexity added to the simple chart of delineable shipping lanes. This can be done here very largely on the basis of the evidence that Pyror himself offers. For of course, as he writes, geographical and technological factors were not the only ones that entered into the calculations of Mediterranean captains: ‘economic and other considerations constantly induced ships to voyage away from the main trunk route sea lanes’ (58). By giving still greater emphasis to the caveat, we can perhaps show how the supposedly clear definition of those trunk routes can be blurred. The apparent distance between Pyror’s conception of maritime communications and our own might then diminish.

Two initial points of qualification concern the degree of contrast between north and south. First, the relative significance of the southern lanes should not be underestimated. Muslim navigators, cartographers, and geographers certainly knew about them. And those in a position to do so used them when they could – that is, when political circumstances permitted. The routes that followed the southern lee-shores were hardly unfamiliar. In the writings of the early Muslim geographers they are rather, as we should expect, the more fully recorded ones (Lewicki 1978, 447–8). Like the northern routes, they too had their insular ports and anchorages (Pyr or 1988, 24). Moreover, if we look to the massive documentation of the Geniza archive for details of actual nautical practice, we can see there that direct routes between Egypt and the Maghreb were easily frequented by ships travelling in both directions, not just eastwards with the current (Section 7 below; cf. II.2). Indeed, the Arabic-speaking Jewish merchants whose enterprises loom so large in the Geniza were largely confined to the realm of Islam: they seem to have tested the northern routes hardly at all (U dovich 1978, 562; Goitein 1967–88, 1.211–12).

Secondly, if the southern lanes should not be underestimated, nor should the northern ones be overpraised; they were by no means uniformly conducive to easy passage. The Palestinian coast, for example, proved extremely rough and challenging (Goitein 1967–88, 1.320). The eastern part of the south Anatolian coast was rocky and reef-strewn (Pyr or 1988, 90, 98). The Italian side of the Adriatic was also unwelcoming: few landmarks, natural anchorages or sheltering offshore islands; and some dangerous shallows (93). North Africa had no monopoly of navigationally demanding coastline.

The discrepancies between northern and southern routes in the Middle Ages were not, then, quite so great as might have been suggested by the outline presented above. The south certainly had its fair share of accessible and popular shipping lanes. But giving due weight to them is not the only way in which the map of nautical communications must be more densely filled in. For one thing, some indication has to be added of the routes that crossed the open sea. These were especially attractive for vessels moving from north to south and, in the
eastern Mediterranean, from east to west because they would have the prevailing wind behind them (Pryor 1988, 37, 95; Lewicki 1978, 452–67). Our suspicion is that underwater archaeology will increasingly reveal that the dangers of the open sea routes were far less of a deterrent to pre-modern mariners than has customarily been assumed (BE IX.4).

It is, however, even more important to stress quite how much choice faced the captain of a Mediterranean ship even when he had already made the decision broadly to follow one of the lanes that we have described. There were, in other words, routes within routes – a multitude of them. This was particularly so in the western part of the sea; the eleventh-century Muslim geographer al-Bakri (ed. de Slane 1965) for instance knew of some twenty ways of crossing from North Africa to his native Spain (Lewicki 1978, 458). We can simply point to the enormous diversity of courses that could be set through the Cyclades to show that the east was not so different (Pryor 1988, 91, 97).

In addition to these routes within routes, there were other routes quite different in type from the main shipping channels. Not so much in those ‘deeeps’ out of sight of land, but rather across every stretch of Mediterranean coastline, the sailors whose practice defined these marine byways risked the dangers of shallow, headwinds or contrary currents for political or economic gain. Routes of this kind were too various in direction ever to be fully recorded. The myriad possible combinations of port, shelter, detour and accident comprised by even short journeys could hardly be mapped or set in writing – although some remote indication of them is perhaps to be found in the large number of minor anchorages and landmarks recorded, for example, by al-Bakri as defining the itinerary between al-Mahdiyya (in Tunisia) and Alexandria (cf. Udovitch 1978, 545). What was required in making such a journey was the maritime equivalent of that local knowledge of the Romagnol Apennines to which we referred earlier (Section 1). Such knowledge informed the navigation of innumerable small vessels.

These vessels could be engaged in any combination of a range of possible ventures: cabotage (or tramping), petty piracy, the transport of travellers and pilgrims. Although individually they operated on a small scale, they were probably responsible in aggregate for many more of the movements of goods and people around the sea than was le grand trafic maritime (Heers 1958). Braudel aptly called them ‘proletarians of the sea’ (1972a, 296). He emphasized how perennial their activity has been, and how dense: ‘the importance of the shore was such that the coastal route was scarcely different from a river’ (105). Indeed, as we have suggested, real rivers made a crucial contribution to Mediterranean connectivity. The ‘fluvinization’ of land transport which has been discerned in both the early Roman Empire and the later Middle Ages can be seen as an extension of the domain of cabotage deep into the heart of the continent (Lopez 1956, 22). Islands too have a vital part to play in the network of coastal

Map 12  Records of connectivity in Genoese ship logs, 1351–70

‘La mer est l’aventure; l’escrèce l’occasion, et l’occasion les profits’ (Balard 1974, 258). Simone Lecavella was captain of a warship acting as rearguard to the fleet of Pagantino Doria. His voyage in 1351–2 took 135 days and covered 5,480 nautical miles. Pelaggio Maccabote sailed on a diplomatic mission in the winter of 1369–70, with merchants on board; he covered 3,700 nautical miles in 81 days, and about a third of his nights were spent at sea.
contacts: ‘les iles out longtemps servi de carrefours et de tremplins de cabotage’ (Kolodny 1974, 129). Commerce of this kind has an accidental, casual flavour about it; destinations, cargoes, the speed of the voyage, what was available and what was wanted in each locality all change, season to season. In the preceding chapter we used the image of a beaded string rather than Braudel’s river: the beads are the dozens of anchorages and harbours on each journey, different each time because of the accidents of wind, current and the mariners’ preferences. Map 12 illustrates something of this from the records of voyages made from Genoa in the fourteenth century. But the activity can be hard for the historian to see, especially in generally ill-documented times or places. The informal harbour – for which the Venetian label scala, literally a flight of steps, has become widespread in the Mediterranean – is of greater overall significance than the great naturally endowed port, a Piraeus or a Marseille.

The vessels frequenting informal harbours would mostly have been lateen-rigged: so at least was the two-master, only 15 metres long, that sank with its diverse cargo of glass and amphorae off the Turkish coast at Şerç Liman in the early eleventh century, and that is perhaps the best surviving example of this kind of ship (van Doorninck 1991; IX.4). It may be that the advantages of the lateen sail are easy to overstate. Once claimed as an innovation of the Middle Ages but actually attested in Antiquity (L. Casson 1971), its potential was seldom fully realized because of the dynamics of medieval ship design. None the less it can still reasonably be said that a small lateen sail is readily deactivated in sudden bad weather (Kreutz 1976, 98). Hugging the shore or island hopping for safety and for ease of navigation, vessels of cabotage could therefore respond quite rapidly to changing winds and currents. It is their ‘Brownian motion’ on the Mediterranean’s perimeter that does most to fill the conceptual gap between potentially all-round communications (with which we began) and the restricted shipping lanes connecting major harbours that form Pryor’s starting point.

A similar conclusion can be reached by turning, finally, from geography to the temporal dimension of maritime activity. The sailing season, the period from roughly early April to late October, is the chronological equivalent of shipping lanes: the clear limits within which maritime activity was commonly reckoned both safe and profitable. The annual winter standstill, when manners often found the sea too stormy and visibility too poor, was, indeed, more honoured in the observance than in the breach. Changes in design and navigation during the later Middle Ages potentially extended safe sailing into earlier spring and later autumn (IX.4). Yet, whatever its timing, the contrast between open and close seasons remained quite pronounced. And it is no surprise to find its most vivid presentation in the pages of Braudel (1972a, 248–53, 260–4). On this score the broad continuity between Antiquity and the later medieval to early modern period is striking.

None less, as with the summary of shipping lanes, some quite strong qualification must be introduced (Pryor 1988, 89). If the winter standstill was universally observed, why should various authorities have sought to enforce it through legislation? Why should al-Bakri have referred to a number of obscure points on the North African coast as suitable winter harbours (cf. Uдович 1978, 548)? Large, strong ships could of course always put out during the winter months if travel was essential. Small tramping vessels could continue to avoid major winter hazards by keeping close to the shore (Braudel 1972a, 249).

4. Economies Compared

Raids – Dark Age Muslim pirates, for example (Kreutz 1976, 97) – could attack unexpectedly by risking a winter voyage. A bar chart of all nautical ventures (were records of them available) would then, in all probability, show both seasonal peaks, when masters preferred to put to sea, and a lower level of more or less constant activity throughout the year, the reflection of avarice, cunning or necessity. Certainly the registers of a tax levied on incoming ships to the capital of Majorca in the early fourteenth century show that the seasons had relatively little effect: ‘almost any month could rate as a busy one’ (Abulafia 1991, 46; cf. Abulafia 1994, 132–3). We shall see later in the chapter (Section 4) how that appears to have been equally true two millennia earlier. Potentially all-round connectivity was matched by potentially year-round enterprise.

4. Economies Compared

Pray that yours will be a long voyage; and that there will be many summer mornings when you arrive – very gladly, and with the most grateful thanks – arrive at havens not known to you before. Drop anchor at Phoenician trading-posts and acquire beautiful wares, mother-of-pearl, coral, amber and ebony, and pleasurable perfumes of every kind, the most you can, amass the perfumes of pleasure. You will go to many of the cities of the Egyptians, and learn, learn from those who know. (Kavały, Ḳubāṭī, 13–23)

So far in this chapter we have been discussing exchange in the context of communications in general. Focusing on the specifically economic concerns of Mediterranean communities does not, though, require any change of emphasis. The pattern of the redistribution of commodities can be seen as analogous with a dense mesh – too dense to imagine in terms of ribbons on a map. Sections of Chapter III, on ‘four definite places’ and on mountain environments and pastoralism, have already shown how rapidly the boundaries of Mediterranean microregions can shift. They have also suggested the variety of ways in which the economy of a microregion may be bound up with that of others. To the emergent picture we have added the typically dispersed hinterlands of larger settlements (Chapter IV) and the kinds of communication exemplified by acoustic and visual geography (Sections 1–2 above). All these can be aligned under the heading of the aggregates of ‘short distances’ that correspond to the definite places.

Also in Chapter III, we saw how a microcosmological approach could be brought into relation with the established narrative of Mediterranean political history. We should next begin to look at the concomitant narrative of economic history. ‘Four definite places’ pointed several times to the problems inherent in wide-ranging judgements about regional prosperity. So it is appropriate here to return to that theme, and to examine in a more general way how connectivity relates to the conventional narrative outline of Mediterranean exchange. Can the apparent gap between the two be narrowed?

On one hand there is the Brownian motion of cabotage. On the other, there is a narrative outline that begins with the development under the Romans of a Mediterranean-wide exchange principally generated by the interests and purchasing power of aristocracy, state and army. The story moves on to the decline and fragmentation of that exchange in late Antiquity as a consequence of first Germanic and then Muslim invasion. There follows the recovery and boom of
the high Middle Ages associated with the names of a handful of Italian cities and often considered a commercial revolution. Then, perhaps, the narrative allows an excursus — to the Muslim world and to the commercial primacy of Fatimid Egypt, epitomized in the activities of the Jewish communities in Cairo or the Karimi merchants. We return, however, to Europe for the height of medieval Western prosperity and domination represented by Italian colonies in Byzantium and the Caliphate. And the final chapter expounds the later medieval decline heralded by the Black Death. Told in these summary terms, the story is one of waxing and waning empires, of clear growth and decline in the volume and complexity of trade. It mainly involves the shipping of goods over long distances; and it dwells most on trade in luxuries — furs and delicate fabrics, precious metals and spices, exotic slaves. This is the commerce of Mediterranean poetry, of the Romantic images of ‘Phlebas the Phoecian’ type, juxtaposing the Odyssean struggles and tragic risks of seafaring with the precious fruits of the journey. The passage of Kavafy at the head of this section is a characteristic example. This is the elite trade by comparison with which — and the comparison is effectively a transfer to historical analysis of the Romanic schema — the
cabotier
is a ‘proletarian’.
Such a ‘high commerce’, often prestigious, usually of great economic value, can indeed be discerned in many periods of Mediterranean history. Its glamour has encouraged scholars to study it in isolation. Here we wish to stress five ways in which harm can result from that.
First, the glamour of high commerce may detach particular instances of it from their real social context and idolize them: ‘Nous connaissons déjà ce type de commerce, ou plutôt, ce type de représentation économique, qui voit les échanges surtout dans un sens et imagine le nègre international comme une sorte de pompe aspirante au bénéfice d’un monde musulmane qui ne rendrait rien’ (Miquel 1967–88, 2.462).
Our aim, by contrast, has been to replace the almost mystical attachment of French geographical historians to the concept of routes with a notion of shifting webs of casual, local, small-scale contacts radiating from slightly different centres in different ages but constant in their economic and social effect — with something nearer, in fact, to Braudel’s own formulation: ‘the whole Mediterranean country in space’ (1972a, 2.77). We hope thereby to undercut the dualism of existing approaches to Mediterranean trade, which are founded on a clear distinction between the world of ‘high commerce’, la grande navigation, and small coastwise movements. Insistence on this dualism (we believe) makes the sophistication of the one end of the spectrum harder to explain, and distracts attention from the humbler movements at the other end, although these are a fundamental ingredient in the social and economic history of the Mediterranean.
(The same dualism also renders the economy of demand more obscure. In this work, we shall mostly be stressing supply, but the attention which the social and economic history of demand is beginning to receive is naturally welcome; cf. Foxhall 1998a.)
A second problem arising from a concentration on high commerce is that, among the ordinary redistributive processes which are overlooked, there is a whole set of highly effective but illegal, informal, arbitrary movements. These have, at some periods, exceeded regular commerce in importance, and include the activities of the pirate, the brigand or the plunderer. In reality, the seizure of passing goods or travellers by simple force is a perennial form of the redistribution which we have been describing; it is easier and perhaps more natural than trade, and has the merit for the historian of being arrested throughout the ages (Section 5 below; IX.6).
Third, high commerce has usually been closely, if not exclusively, linked with the history of a particular variety of economic sophistication, with topics such as credit, insurance, investment, trade guilds, elaborate port architecture, protectionism, capital growth. Interest in such specialized outgrowths and accompaniments of redistribution has distracted from the study of the latter. Worse, it has created the impression that the two are indissoluble, encouraging a progressivist approach to economic history in which the advent or disappearance of these possible adjuncts of elite exchange calibrates primitiveness or modernity. But sophistication of that sort is not a necessary condition of high commerce. Significant volumes and densities of exchange can exist without such infrastructure. Indeed it is less the absence of that infrastructure (in periods of supposed decline) than its presence at other times which needs remark — as has been excellently well demonstrated for ships of large tonnage. These served a very specialized economic purpose in the grain trade of ancient Rome (when ships reached 600 tonnes’ burden quite frequently), but were not to be met again until the inception of that striking phenomenon, the alum trade of fifteenth-century Genoa. Their absence in other places and at other times, for example the earlier Middle Ages, cannot, however, be taken as a symptom of economic primitivism or recession. ‘Un navire trop grand pour un marché donné coûte vraiment trop cher’... c’est à partir du moment où il faut acheminer régulièrement des produits pondéreux ou volumineux sur un long parcours que les gros tonnages deviennent intéressants’ (Poméy and Tchernez 1977, 251).
From the elements of economic sophistication, it is worth identifying the history of nautical technology as giving rise to a fourth way in which the privileging of high commerce has led to distortions. It is true that ships were relatively expensive. The ancient historian Ammianus Marcellinus (History, 14.8.4) regarded as a wonder the fact that Cyprus could build ships entirely from its own resources; construction usually depended on existing shipping to assemble the raw materials for new vessels and their equipment. But these are the ships of high commerce, at the top end of the market. The norm is the little boat of the
cabotier.
And with respect to this norm (as to other aspects of technological history: Chapter VII), we can stress again that technological improvements appear local and ephemeral: they have been less profoundly revolutionary than enthusiastic historians in search of turning-points have claimed; or, where they have had a brilliant future in front of them, it has been many years before their potential has been realized. In medieval Italy of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, ‘improvements in naval architecture were made with respect to increase in size and to modifications to long-established designs rather than to any radically new features’ (Pryor 1988, 31; contrast P. Jones 1997, 183). We have already considered the case of the lateen sail (Section 5). As for the compass, ‘navigation out of sight of land without a compass had never been very difficult in the Mediterranean. Even after the compass was well known and widely available, shipping continued to navigate the Mediterranean without it because it was not really essential there’ (Pryor 1988, 53). The size of ships, and in particular their capacity to carry supplies (above all, water), was much more important than their
navigational equipment in determining the extent to which direct passages across the deeper sea were attempted in addition to *isotage* by way of coasts and islands.

And this brings us to the fifth and most serious issue, which is nothing less than that of how Mediterranean history should be periodized. We have seen some of the distortions that arise from rigidly separating the ancient 'consumer' city from its 'productive' medieval successor (IV.5). In analogous fashion, the presence or absence of high commerce has been one of the touchstones by which epochs have been classified. The classification has usually had a more or less Whiggish, telescopic intent: to investigate primarily those parts of economic history which may be regarded as precursors and perhaps ancestors of economic institutions and practices that have been central to the European economy and its worldwide ramifications since the sixteenth century. The consequence has inevitably been to devalue practices which cannot be usefully seen as embryonic modernity – practices which are quite different in kind and may be more interestingly comparable with forms of economic behaviour in, say, Asia or the pre-Columbian Americas. An openness to such comparisons enables us to see what is distinctive and interesting about Mediterranean history – what is there, rather than what is missing. For the telescopic perspective encourages the itemizing of absences and shortfalls: a historiographical strategy which is helpfully, if pejoratively, labelled minimalism.

In the case of the Mediterranean, minimalism originated primarily in the age of the 'Battle of the Books', in the Enlightened vindication of Modernity against the all-too-potent and essentially reactionary glorification of Greek and Roman Antiquity (VIII.1). In the twentieth century, it has taken the form of a series of claims about the economic primitiveness of the distant Mediterranean past which find some justification in contemporary inflated and anachronistic visions of a mercantile Golden Age in Antiquity. On this minimalist view the vast majority of the people of the ancient Mediterranean were engaged in essentially self-supporting agriculture which created little surplus and small aggregate demand. Transport costs were crippling high, technology stagnant. Such interregional trade as there was concerned mainly luxuries for the tiny aristocratic elite, though there was from time to time a command economy supplying staples to a few favoured centres. Traders were despised, and the institutional and physical infrastructure of trade was inadequate. On this foundation, established by A. H. M. Jones (1964), Finley (1985a, published first in 1978) built the vision of an ancient economy which could be identified and distinguished from (other) its successors. Influenced by social anthropology, especially by the work of Karl Polanyi, Finley pursued the laudable project of exploring the distinctive features of ancient Mediterranean cultures. His work embodied a galvanizing imperative to explore retentions into Antiquity of the characteristics of later forms of economic organization. Ultimately, however, the project was sabotaged by the use of the 'minimalizing' comparative technique. Its thrust remained essentially negative: a generation was taught – in a very emphatic way – what was *not* important in the pre-medieval Mediterranean (cf. Foxhall 1990b, 22-3).

Adding the notion of the 'ancient economy' to an already progressivist account of social and economic history makes sensible periodization very difficult. First, it lumps together the actually extremely diverse economic systems of the first millennium B.C. and the first half of the first millennium A.D., inhibiting their proper interpretation. In the process, it refines the divisions between 'Antiquity' and later prehistory on the one hand, and the early Middle Ages on the other. In the interests of long-term comparative Mediterranean history, we believe, on the contrary, that it is essential to overcome the prejudices and traditional hostilities which have hindered prehistoric archaeologists, classical historians and medievalists in learning from one another. The concept of 'the ancient economy' makes this type of comparison much more fraught. And the problem is an unavoidable, structural consequence of the strategy involved in classifying economies chronologically. The search for common denominators using the comparative approach across wide spans of space and time seems to us more promising than asserting schizophrenic splits of historical experience created around ‘turning-point’ events on the telescopic scale. The notion of an ancient economy is inextricably compromised by that species of historiography (cf. VIII.1 for its equivalent in the history of catastrophe). Apart from mere chronology, in the economic behaviour of the Etruscans, Carthians, Romans, Spartans, Carthaginians, Mycenaenae, Tartessians or Vandals, there was nothing which deserves the title 'ancient'. But there was much that merits the label Mediterranean.

A further flaw in minimalism is that many aspects of it owe less to economic actuality than to normative wishful thinking on the part of the ancient persuaders. The elites of Antiquity whose opinions are best represented in the surviving literature went to great lengths to marginalize those who engaged in commerce (as they did those who received pay for their work). Changes in prevailing sentiments of this type are not to be confused with changes in the character of an economy. It would be rash, for instance, to make much (with Lopex 1959, 84-5) of the apparent contrast between the ancient-style prejudice against commerce of Byzantine Greeks and the hardy and modern-sounding opportunism of Venice. Not that the ancient authors presented a united front on this topic: there are many evocations of practices which closely resemble those of high commerce as we see them in later periods. The hymns of praise to profit which we know from the Hellenistic period – including the extreme 'let me be called a bad man, so long as I make a profit' – are perhaps willfully paradoxical inversions of the literary and philosophical orthodoxies (Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library*, 37.30). But there are other arresting passages too. In the Odyssey the hero is appalled to be thought a trader: by contrast his divine patron, the wise Athena, disguises herself as a roving warrior-captain with a cargo of goods. The godliness may be just that: behind the head of a traditional merchant that is integral to the weave of Mediterranean historiography. In overtly Odyssean fashion, the historian Herodotus criss-crosses his Mediterranean with the tracks of wanderers: among the *condottieri* and ‘culture heroes’, he gives a special place to Kolaos and Sostratos of Aegina, the most redoubtable traders known before his time, fabulously successful in their dealings in southern Spain and in Etruria. Later, the captains of the acme of Athenian connectivity appear in the oratorical writings of the fourth century, their achievements prefigured by the faint praise of that reluctant thalassocrat, the ‘Old Oligarch’:

and if we are to recall smaller advantages too, it is through the rule of the sea that the Athenians have been quick to research the varieties of good living, mixing with different people in different places: whatever is pleasurable in Sicily or in Italy, in Cyprus or in Egypt, in Lydia or Pontus or the Peloponnese, or anywhere else, it is all gathered into one place – through the rule of the sea. ([Xenophon] *Constitution of the Athenians*, 2.7)
In the Roman imperial period, connectivity became one of the wonders of pan-Mediterranean power, for all its banal associations. The encyclopaedist Pliny grudgingly explains the arcana of meteorology; he thinks these are unjustly despised by the vast crowd of so many thousands who make voyages, using the open sea and 'the welcoming reception of all the coastlines' (hospitale assumes litorum omnium) (Natural History, 2.118). The inscriptions of both the Hellenistic and Roman periods reflect this recognition of the paradoxical glory of seafaring communications, and attest the commercial achievements of some of those who used the ever more lavish port facilities and larger vessels of the time.

If you don't mind, guest, stop and read. I have often run across the Great Sea in sail-winged ships; I have visited very many lands, but this is the final boundary-mark which the Fates once sang for me as I was born. Here have I laid down my worries and all my labours: here I have no anxieties about the stars or the clouds or the rough sea, and I do not fear that expenses might outweigh my profit. Kindly Credit, I thank you, most holy Goddess: three times you restored me when I was exhausted by the fountaining of my luck. You are worthy to be chosen personally by every mortal. Life and health to you, guest, and may you always get the better of your expenses, since you have not despised this stone and thought it a worthy memorial. (CIL, 9.60, Brundisium)

It is natural to juxtapose this text, from the end of the first century, with the archives of the Cairo Geniza or the literary relics of the great traders of the late medieval Mediterranean. The dazzling fame of a Kolaos or a Sostratos seems readily comparable with the reputations of the great Italian merchant patricians such as Benedetto Zaccaria (cf. Braudel 1986, 11–12). Nor, in making the comparison, would we be setting up a handful of ancient examples against a plethora of medieval ones. Such men were, after all, not commonplace in Christendom, nor do they have easily discoverable counterparts in the medieval Islamic world. And there may have been many more of them in ancient times than has customarily been supposed.

The archive of wax tablets, roughly contemporary with the inscription just quoted, that was discovered in the middle of the twentieth century at Murcine near Puteoli shows the complexity and value of the trading interests of the port of Puteoli (Wolf and Crook 1989). Such interests, too, begin to seem comparable with those of the Merchant of Putea. Their social and cultural framework was, however, quite different: the principle of Roman business-life appears to have derived from the duties that were owed at law by the freed slave to his former owner. For these enabled a reliable form of agency to exist in the absence of other kinds of commercial association – while carefully preserving the invisibility of the notables at the top end of the tiers of freedmen and freedmen's freedmen. As Finley protested (1985a, 137–8), the excavators of ancient cities have indeed found no Cloth Halls, or other quasi-medieval symbols of the political standing of entrepreneurs (IV.5). But that cultural difference is not germane to the comparative study of levels of economic connectivity.

Minimalist accounts of the Mediterranean economy before the Middle Ages have been accustomed to draw attention to the alleged absence then of high commerce, and to suggest that only high commerce would do to establish a comparison between the later Middle Ages and what went before. At the same time, such accounts have been inclined to belittle ancient trade – for all the world like the Old Oligarch – as the frivolous support of a leisurely elite. Yet as Braudel showed long ago, in discussing the economic importance of the spice trade (1972a, 442), the very high values of the cargoes of high commerce represent very considerable movements of capital; their social history is of far greater overall importance than the practical significance of the activities that they represent might suggest (Sherratt and Sherratt 1991). We must not be misled into thinking that, because its bulk was small and its recipients few, 'luxury' trade was economically insignificant. Nor, in a study of levels of connectivity, should we be particularly concerned that much ancient trade (and not only ancient trade) was 'directed' trade, or the result of a command economy, aimed at the supply of the state or the army. The 'market' is among those features of modernity whose presence or absence in the past is principally of interest from the progressivist point of view. (Which has not deterred proponents of one response to minimalism from attempting to reinstate the market, alongside other aspects of formalist economics, even in the Bronze Age.)

It is certainly a 'state document' that provides the most unexpected and arresting new evidence for many years about eastern Mediterranean commerce in the mid-first millennium B.C. For sheer completeness, this document will find few (if any) parallels before the early modern period (cf. Lopez and Raymond 1955, 135). Painstaking editorial work on an Aramaic palimpsest from Elephantine in Upper Egypt has revealed the official record of the customs dues exacted by the Persian government of Egypt at a port of the Delta in the year 475 (Porten and Yardeni 1993, 82–195, and Excursus 3, xx–xxi). The repetitive nature of this long text enables reconstruction of the complete roster of arrivals and departures during that year, with the nature of both inbound and outbound cargoes, and the origins of the ships. Forty-two vessels paid duty between February and December 475 – across, it should be noted, a very long sailing season (Section 3). Thirty-six of them were Ionian Greek, and six Phoenician. The level of duty was high, including nearly a tonne of silver. The imports were varied, embracing wine, oil, wood, wool, various metals and empty jars, which were perhaps used for the export cargoes, in every case solely composed of mineral soda (natron), the raw material of much textile processing. We shall return to various aspects of this particularly interesting text in later chapters. For now, it is sufficient to see that how a single document corrects the prevailing picture of primitivism in archaic Greek commerce. Here is a port wholly devoted, it appears, to the export of a single valuable raw material (which shows that we are not dealing with one of the major gateway-ports of Egypt but with somewhere less grand). The sophistication of the commercial relationships that are revealed accords with what letters on lead tablets from the Black Sea and the western Mediterranean have begun to show us about the nature of Greek trade with non-Greeks in the sixth century. But it is striking also that the ships engaged in this specialized and high-value trade away from Egypt not only had diverse origins, but were also relatively small – to judge from plausible reconstruction of the total size of the cargoes, no larger than a few dozen tonnes' burden. Moreover, the inbound cargoes were the extremely varied ones that we should expect of commerce which retained, despite the sums of money involved, close links with enobling.

Thus far luxuries for the most part; but yet another way in which the minimalist orthodoxy has come to be questioned concerns the volume of interregional
trade in staples, especially as revealed by the ubiquitous archaeological evidence. This evidence suggests that under the Romans (if not before) empire-wide trade—over land as well as sea—seems to have been much more voluminous and pervasive than Finley or Jones would have conceded. ‘Ecology, history and society all find a new role through a shift in focus from the exclusively regional to the more broadly Mediterranean’ (Papadopoulos 1997, 207). During the later Empire for instance, the type of pottery known as African Red Slip ware (ARS) achieved a remarkable degree of market penetration:

there were some places, like northern Italy, that ARS did not reach until late, but inside the area it did reach, such as those covered by the central Italian field surveys in Etruria [cf. III.2] and Molise, the latter by no means easily accessible or prosperous, it can be found even on the smallest sites, thus indicating that it was available even to peasants: a mass-produced, long-distance commodity, only semi-luxury, cheap enough for everyone to buy, just the sort of product in fact that Jones and Finley tended to ignore. (Wickham 1988a, 190)

We return to the whole subject of redistribution in much more detail in Chapter IX, where we shall encounter many other instances of the increasing rapprochement between the economies of the Greeks and Romans and other parties in the ancient and prehistoric Mediterranean on the one hand, and their medieval successors (Byzantine, barbarian or Islamic) on the other. The Finleyan orthodoxy is thus being eroded by the simple accumulation of contrarian evidence – the natural fate of overbold, negative assertions: a case in point is the Elephantine Palimpsest can have a devastating effect. The more telling argument against minimalism has, however, been theoretical. It is based on the closer comparison of Mediterranean connectivity across the millennia, and it is to be sought in the Brownian motion of the world of what we can call ‘low commerce’.

Even when its high counterpart was at its highest, the volume of cabotage probably exceeded that of the great commercial ventures (Heers 1958). And the relatively ‘small’ traders involved in it were quite capable of dealing in a tremendous variety and quantity of goods, as is amply demonstrated by the documents from the Cairo Geniza (Gottstein 1967–88, 1.153–5; cf. Hopkins 1978a, 51–2). Our estimate of the characteristic levels (as against the peaks) of economic activity in the Mediterranean may therefore have to be reduced a little; but we shall be drawing a fairer picture of the medieval norm than is implied by a study of, say, Benedetto Zaccaria. And doing that will, in this respect, again bring Antiquity and the Middle Ages quite close to one another. In either, the movements of goods associated with connectivity across ‘short distances’ take up a far larger portion of the overall picture than the usual narrative would suggest. After all, the more glamorous high commerce itself involved numerous small commercial outlets, as even the poetic image of Kavafy suggested. ‘Short distances’ stand for what is not directly comprehended in the standard glamorous story of commercial networks: frequent overnight stops; an extremely dense and mutable pattern of movement; and the redistribution of a great variety of goods, not just luxuries. In sum, the profound, widespread, and lasting interdependence of Mediterranean microregions. We shall be pressing this argument further at several points in Part Three. At this stage, it is enough to suggest how reference to short distances brings into focus the more or less constant ‘background noise’ to the history of Mediterranean exchange across both Antiquity and the Middle Ages: the invisible currents – to use Braudelian metaphor – beneath the swell of great commercial empires.

In emphasizing this repetitive background we are by no means implying that the usual story embodies an illusion, that there were not some changes of the utmost importance in the volume and objects of trade, or in the institutions and cultures associated with it: the Genoese or Venetian empires are hardly to be written out of significance. Rather, the point is simply that the obvious fluctuations in Mediterranean high commerce can usefully be approached – and indeed explained – as it were from the bottom up: by looking, in Braudelian manner, at their recurrent, less glamorous, features instead of working from the top downwards. ‘High’ and ‘low’ commerce are inextricable, and the former is best seen as depending on the latter (IX.4), arising out of it, declining into it, in overlapping phases (to anticipate VI.1 and VII.4) of what might be labelled intensification and abatement.

Some characteristics of the ‘low’ background are described in later chapters and need only brief rehearsal here. First, even to think in terms of exchange over any significant distance – cabotage and the like – is not necessarily to be ‘touching bottom’ in analytical terms. At that fundamental level, we should envisage the kinds of diversification and year-by-year adjustment that we have already seen being achieved by the producers met in Chapter III (cf. VI). These responses to environmental change often simulate the results of redistribution, even when they do not reflect its conscious practice (Chapter IX). Just as important a response to risk is the habit of storing surpluses: an interannually exchange, in effect, operating within a single enterprise. And all this is, of course, in addition to the highly localized but genuine exchanges embodied in customary reciprocity between neighbours, or between smallholder and lord or patron. Engagement in the wider world of redistribution has no more glamour than the other vital means of diminishing risk. It need not be popular or ‘smart’. On the contrary, it is often stigmatized as uncertain, dangerous, demeaning or immoral, too closely involved with the corruption induced by the sea. Contact with wider horizons is not necessarily embraced with enthusiasm. The necessity of redistribution does not erode the charm of autarky. Rather the reverse – it makes that charm comprehensible (IV.7). Here is a further example of that dazzle of ancient arguments to which we have already alluded. The enthusiasm for self-sufficiency of the ancient literary tradition – and its medieval inheritors – is a sure sign that this was a goal hard of attainment, a goal which needed high levels of persuasion before it was even attempted.

Secondly, the importance of land transport to Mediterranean redistribution should not be underestimated (IX.4). Even goods mainly transported by sea usually had to be moved overland to or from harbours. And where necessary, bulky goods could be taken across extremely arduous terrain, for example the Romagnol Apennines (Section 1). Land transport was always relatively expensive: only very modern technologies would alter that. But it must not be assumed that its high cost was inevitably prohibitive. Above all, as we saw with the example of the road from Oropos to Athens (Section 1 again), local circumstances could induce patterns of microregional interaction quite different from what is apparently dictated by simple physical realities. It was to accommodate just such imponderables that, in Chapter III, we replaced a geographically determined microregional picture with our own conception of the ecology.
V. Connectivity

Thirdly, even in periods when overall demand was at its slackest, and the movement of luxuries least in evidence, the requirements of the relatively poor could remain very large in total and generate an interregional trade in cloth, foodstuffs and perhaps other commodities too. We shall find signs of this in the next section and much more detail in Chapter IX.

Finally, such demand was quickened by minute spatial and temporal variation in the environment. The four local examples in Chapter III show how Mediterranean rainfall varies immensely from one year to another and from one place to another (cf. Table 1). To the notion of a microecology must be added that of a microclimate (to be developed in Volume 2). Hopkins (1978a, 1983b) and Garvey (1988a, ch. 2), for example, have used modern agricultural statistics to emphasize what Braudel had already made clear in his study of sixteenth-century famine (1972a, 328–32): years of glut and severe shortage follow each other in a Mediterranean microregion, not only with alarming unpredictability, but in a sequence that may be quite different from that of adjacent regions. Consider the recent order of magnitude of average interannual variations in wheat yields in Mediterranean lands. Egypt has the lowest variation (12 per cent) and was therefore probably not the most substantial but also the most reliable producer of wheat in ancient and medieval times, her yield dependent on the varying height of the Nile flood rather than on microclimatic conditions. Other countries fare rather worse: Lebanon (42 per cent), Tunisia (67 per cent), Italy (21 per cent) and so on. Moreover, these national averages conceal enormous and still more local variations, such as those of the Biqa valley (III.1). If wheat yields varied thus, from both year to year and place to place, crops of other grains would have been comparably unpredictable. Wine and oil production would have fluctuated still more. All this could create sudden local demand that a microenvironment could not satisfy but local traders perhaps might. A Roman legal authority writing at the period when the Roman Empire made possible maximum interdependence could still rule that

This suit is left to the discretion of the Judge, because we are aware how greatly prices vary between one community and another, and between regions: above all in the case of wine, oil, and cereals. Even granted, moreover, that currency does have a uniform value everywhere, in some places it can be raised easily and at low interest, while in others only with more difficulty and at a high rate of interest. (Digest, 134.3.3 preambule, Gaius, Commentary on the Provincial Editic, bk 9)

A reminder that money is also part of the capricious environment, another Mediterranean resource of very uneven distribution. In many periods, even recent ones, Mediterranean lands have, moreover, not even enjoyed the monetary sophistication that Gaius takes for granted.

To emphasize the lowest common denominators of redistribution is not, to repeat, intended as a denial of the obvious cultural differences between Minoan palace officials, Hesiodic landowners and early Byzantine senators, or between the commercial networks of Hellenistic Rhodes and tenth-century Cairo. But it does offer a genuine opportunity, first, for identifying the degree of continuity that can defensively be predicated of Mediterranean redistribution and therefore, secondly, for making a contribution to the debate on a very vexed question of Mediterranean history, the transition between Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

5. The Early Medieval Depression

To what extent can the Mediterranean Sea be said to have displayed continuous connectivity throughout the ancient and medieval periods, and at what level? The answer to that is best sought from the very early Middle Ages.

To judge by the evidence of shipwrecks, the late Roman Republic and early Empire may well have witnessed more trans-Mediterranean commercial shipping than did the next millennium. By the late Empire, the fourth to sixth centuries, long-distance exchange was thus (by the same measure) very much reduced, especially in the western Mediterranean. According to the archaeology of settlement meanwhile, demand was, as we should expect, shrinking; and much of the demand that remained was determined, however indirectly, by the exactions of the government. Traditional civic life entered a decline, contraction, reconfiguration – earlier in the west than in the east. Overall population levels fell noticeably, although parts of the Byzantine Empire enjoyed a temporary boom until bubonic plague arrived in the mid-sixth century and Persian and Arab invaders in the seventh. Exchange networks became highly circumscribed. In short, the Mediterranean maritime economy was entering a severe depression from which it would not begin to emerge until, at the earliest, the very end of the ninth century. Even then, recovery would be visible only in the newer ports of Italy; and, to judge by the size of harbours such as Amal’s (Kreutz 1988; IV.8), transmarine shipping and commerce were still extremely small in scale.

Such, more or less, is the least controversial picture that can be painted of Mediterranean exchange during the obscure transition from late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages. It is worth noting parenthetically, how far its validity depends on acceptance of the revisions to the Finley–Jones orthodoxy mentioned earlier: unless, that is, a substantial volume of interregional redistribution is conceded to the ancient Mediterranean, there can have been no preceding apoge from which the early Middle Ages could markedly decline. In another sense, however, this agreed picture of late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages is closer to the old orthodoxy than to its revisions. The ‘minimalist’ view of ancient trade has not been entirely abandoned; it has just been transferred to a slightly later period. According to this newer minimalism, it is the seventh century rather than the second in which aggregate demand was small, merchants were few, and trade was conducted in a world where long-distance trade could remain relatively invisible.
of those prehistoric archipelagos referred to in Section 2 (Lewicki 1978, 454–7, 466).

7. Conclusion

‘A journey from Spain to Egypt or from Marseille to the Levant was a humdrum experience’ (Goitein 1967–88, 1.42). The documents recovered from the Cairo Geniza (cf. II.2) preserve for us the conceptual map of the Mediterranean common amongst later generations of Mediterranean merchants and seafarers than those of the Pirenne period. ‘The West’ was a long way away, the documents imply. But ‘the West’ was not only Christian Europe or al-Andalus: it included the Maghreb as well. Little distinction was made between Islamic and infidel parts of this distant region. On the other hand, this distant West was far from inaccessible. The chief lesson of the commercial information that the Geniza contains is that the Mediterranean was looked on as a single region – despite pirates, politicians, or technological constraints. In this chapter we have been exploring the varied forms of communication, from the acoustic to the commercial, which help make that unity, that humdrum ease of movement, possible, even in periods – such as that associated with Pirenne – when it has seemed least to be expected.

We could hardly deny that it can be helpful for specific purposes to use the terminology of the routeway in describing channels of connectivity – as we found Cicero doing, for instance. The annual movement of grain from Alexandria to imperial Rome can usefully be conceived in such a way. Even in this instance, however, the vagaries of the journey meant that the economic impact of this specialized form of redistribution was felt in hundreds of harbours ‘along the route’ in quite different ways each season. And it is our contention that the normal rhythms of Mediterranean exchange, the ‘background noise’ of coastwise movement which we have found in supposed Dark Ages, are vastly more fluid in their patterns; and that, whether they take the form of cartage, slave-raiding, piracy or pilgrimage, they act to bind the microecologies together even when the phenomena that answer to the description of routes have – actually or apparently – ceased.

We must not, however, leave the impression that the continuum of communication was unvariegated and all-embracing. The existence of such a continuum has, we believe, been a constant from at least the second millennium B.C. onwards; which is why the medieval and the prehistoric have alike provided the material for detailed examples in the preceding pages. But the point of our definition of the microecology (Chapter III) and our discussion of extended hinterlands (Chapter IV), and (here) of the patterns of interaction too various and detailed to be called routes, has been to emphasize that the clusters and series of points of contact are constantly changing, and that the degree of connectivity is locally very changeable too. These – to allude once more to an earlier epigraph – are the differences which resemble each other.
Quails and prickly-pear are their principal resource; There is no water anywhere in all the Inner Mani. It bears only beans and thin wheat; This the women sow, the women reap: The women gather the sheaves to the threshing-floor The women winnow it with their bare hands The women thresh it with bare feet Their hands and their feet are cracked with drought Like tortoises’, coarsely thickened.

Niphakis, Poem in praise of Tsanetbey Grigorakis, late eighteenth century, version collected by Leake (1830) *Travels in the Morea*, 1.332-9

1. **The History of Mediterranean Food Systems**

We have identified extreme topographical fragmentation as one of the two key environmental ingredients – along with the connectivity provided by the sea itself – in a distinctively Mediterranean history. The claim needs to be tested further. The primary production of food can legitimately claim to be a basic human activity (although we shall again be resisting the claims of ‘calorific determinism’ (II.5)). Dramatic variation – over the shortest distances and within the briefest times – in the practices of primary production is characteristic of the Mediterranean landscape. If, as we suspect, the core of Mediterranean history is the control and harmonization of chaotic variability, then that should be manifest in the history of food production. The distinctiveness that we stressed in Chapter III should make it worthwhile to compare the different periods of Mediterranean history, in the hope of understanding similarities in the conditions of production within a network of fragmented and ever-changing environments. That comparison, through a selection of some patterns in the agrarian past of the Mediterranean lands, is the subject of the present chapter. We offer an outline statement of what we take to be the parameters for a history of Mediterranean agriculture – some well-known, others more controversial.
Success in our project of tracing intrinsically Mediterranean factors in the history of primary production will entail assigning revolutionary changes in techniques or organization a reduced role. If the types of continuity for which we are arguing find general acceptance, then some at least of the turning-points and revolutions familiar from orthodox analyses may prove to have been more apparent than real. To some extent the historiography of discontinuities has been powered by a sense of intractable differences between periods: the transitions from one to another in such cases have needed to be sufficiently dramatic to account for them. In this chapter we purpose to nuance the investigation of qualitative differences through time in Mediterranean social history, and in the next two (VII–VIII) will look again at some of the alleged turning-points between periods in the light of what we have found. Until the last quarter of the twentieth century, there has been an unresolved problem in this area. On one hand, agronomical theorists have not found it too difficult to identify characteristic Mediterranean agricultural behaviour: although this project has sometimes been tinged with Romantic Mediterraneanism, discussed in Part One, many of the similarities in the cultivation of olives, wheat or vines between ancient Greece and late antique Syria, Islamic Spain or early modern Italy do seem to be more than superficial. On the other hand, there has of course been a tendency of great theoretical force on the part of economic and political historians to divide up this same range of cultures precisely on the grounds that the means of obtaining and distributing the primary products on which life depends have been radically different in each. By contrast with the associative, almost picturesque, approach of the first school of thought, such analyses have often ultimately been based on comparison with places environmentally very different from the Mediterranean.

In general, a tendency to simplify the essential diversity of Mediterranean landscapes has also led to over-schematic interpretations of the agrosystem. Accounts have tended to privilege a rather limited number of strategies, and therefore to attribute too great a significance to possible transformations of those activities – transformations through technical improvements, as it might be. The complexity of the Mediterranean environment suggests that what is needed from scholarship is a more organic and ecological account of how the effects of human activity intertwine with the processes of geomorphology and the life-cycles of other living things. Investigation of the agricultural production of a rather limited range of ‘staples’ seems to us to be much less interesting and fruitful than holistic approaches to the problem of human survival, such as those which use concepts of the sort familiar to the social anthropologist (e.g. ‘food system’: LaBlanca 1990, 1–20). But towards the end of the chapter, and still more in Chapter 7, we shall move into those parts of the agrosystem where the effects of the pursuit of power and wealth are as marked as any environmental constraints.

2. The New Ecological Economic History

Diversity is now widely perceived as central to the study of historical Mediterranean food systems. Three principal currents in scholarship have brought this about.

The first is landscape archaeology (BE III). This is essentially a result of the combination of new techniques (ranging from air photography to the computer processing of large quantities of data) with the escalating costs of traditional excavation and with new opportunities – or emergencies – in the development of large tracts of the rural landscape. The sophistication of the means by which material is recovered from wide segments of landscape, and of the techniques by which it is interpreted, is now very considerable. Not the least of the beneficial outcomes has been a tendency (developing for other reasons also) towards chronological period-inclusiveness. Earlier neglect of certain periods at the expense of others – often of early medieval at the expense of classical – has been corrected, and huge strides have been made in the identification, provenancing and dating of diagnostic artefacts (which have often been of primary importance for the economic and social historian in themselves). Most important perhaps, the practice of survey archaeology has entailed a complete understanding of the whole gamut of changes in the landscape through time, and has therefore generated a salutary holistic approach to the history of the environment. This development in archaeology has brought about a quantitative revolution in the amount that we know about Mediterranean rural landscapes in the past. It is not too much to say that the present book could not have been written before this revolution; and we should register the effect of its absence from almost all works of Mediterranean economic and social history written before about 1980.

The second and third currents are in some ways side-effects of the first. In the pursuit of a holistic comprehension of the landscape, archaeologists have revived interest in two other avenues to the understanding of past environments. One of these is the systematic study of the literature and documents produced by travellers in the Mediterranean from the later Middle Ages onwards. The other, which has in some ways made the greatest contribution of all, is ethnography – contemporary, historical, archaeological (the last sometimes called ethno-archaeology). The debate on one phase of Mediterranean productive history, the agriculture of ancient Greece, has for example been totally transformed by methods derived from social anthropology: through the interest of archaeologists in anthropological theory, and through the comparison of ancient productive systems with the data of modern ethnographic research.

There are some difficulties which should be registered in relation to each of these new approaches. Archaeological survey is skewed towards certain sorts of recognizable material, and the sites which it identifies are not always easy to reconstruct in imagination as a functioning social landscape. Adents of survival prevent effective survey in many of the most fertile areas of the Mediterranean, where continuous human use has obliterated the record; equally, the changing geomorphology (which we shall examine in more detail in Chapter VIII) has buried important landscapes wholesale or allowed their removal by erosion. The accounts of travellers are often tralatciar, tendentious and misleading; they suffer from the characteristic purblindness of the literary observer to the processes of production. Ethnography meanwhile privileges a certain sort of country person, who will usually live in a more or less unfavourable location, relatively, and untypically, as we shall argue, little integrated into networks of redistribution – because by and large those are the places where country life has changed least (cf. Chapter XI). This has also skewed the picture. For ethnographic analysis of the centres that are much more normal in Mediterranean history – that is, the central places of lowlands with easy access to the sea, rather than the remoter mountain villages – the only raw material available
is derived from the vanished past, and must be interpreted by the historian. Ethnographic accounts of small producers underplay relations with the state or with powerful members of the community, and exaggerate autonomy and independence and the values of the household. Their remarks too may be tendentious or untrue, and are in any case hard to build into narratives with a chronological dimension. But when all these caveats have been entered, it remains the case that no other single influx of knowledge has ever had the transforming power of comparative ethnography in the field of Mediterranean history. And that is simply because it illuminates and expresses the basic logic of survival in the Mediterranean. Which is that, in the face of the highly unpredictable delivery - microregion by microregion - of the rain on which all production depends, unpredictable both in overall quantity year by year and in terms of its distribution over the winter months, the producer is faced with an ineluctable triple imperative: diversity, store, redistribute.

The material which is presented in this chapter will amply illustrate the theme of diversification. Nor is it hard to find evidence for the central role that storage has played, which suggests a notable degree of over-insurance against risk. To give only one introductory example, Ramon Muntaner recorded in his Chronicle (ed. Lanz 1843, 223) that in the 1280s, after their disgusting atrocities at Rodosto, the Catalan Grand Company settled in eastern Thrace and greatly subsidized there for five years on the stored provisions that they had seized - without ploughing, digging the vineyards or pruning the vines. The implications of storage for relations of dependence and decision-making in Mediterranean landscapes receive fuller attention in Chapter VII.

Historically, the most important strategy for coping with risks of all kinds to the provision of food and the maintenance of production, and especially for coping with the unpredictability of the weather, has probably been redistribution. Redistribution from one part of a microenvironment to another - the 'low-level' connectivity of the previous chapter - is one of the normal and obvious ways of responding to risk. Larger-scale networks of distribution offer proportionally more thoroughgoing remedies. In nutritional terms, swapping my peas for your barley is a relatively egalitarian manoeuvre. But if I can sell my peas to the city, with the cash I may perhaps be able to invest in more barley than would have been available to me from local exchange. The strategy of entering a market may thus be seen as an ingredient in the repertoire of responses to risk. We suggest that the degree of participation of a microregion in the networks of exchange and supplementary supply - its redistributive engagement - constitutes another helpful scale of variation on which to assess the agrarian history of that place. Agrarian history is closely entwined with connectivity, and should not be considered in isolation. That theme will be specifically addressed in Chapter IX.

3. Understanding the Marginal

Dans de nombreuses régions et pendant de nombreux siècles l'agriculture a été...l'art de ne pas cultiver la terre.

Sigaut (1975) 215, his italics

The newer approaches to Mediterranean production just described have strongly emphasized risk: principally the risk that is inherent in the meteorology of the Mediterranean, with its marked intra- and inter-annual variability of precipitation (although there are many other uncertainties of life in such a complex landscape to which we shall return in more detail in Chapter VIII). The patterns of risk avoidance in production, through the myriad complexes of crop choice, interspeciation, processing, redeployment of residues, and interaction of agriculture with animal husbandry, are one of the most interesting factors differentiating microregions. This is in turn precisely because Mediterranean environments have very different and very local conditions of aspect, moisture-retention in the soil, natural vegetation, or accessibility.

Describing diversification in British agriculture since the fourteenth century, Joan Thirsk writes of

a sequence of movements from mainstream farming to alternatives, and then back again. Major disjunctures have occurred, obliging farmers to divert their attention from the primary pursuit of grain and meat, to investigate other activities. On each occasion, when diversification has been necessary, farmers' ingenuity has been taxed, but it has successfully produced solutions which enabled them to survive until the old order returned. (1997, 2-3)

The essential difference between Mediterranean and north-west European production is sharply visible here: in the Mediterranean those disjunctions are typical accidents of everyday experience, and, rather than 'a sequence of movements', we find a coexistence between 'normal' and 'alternative' agriculture. The coexistence itself takes such various forms as to make such a classification as Thirsk implies almost unworkable.

Another way of expressing the omnipresence of risk is to regard all Mediterranean environments as 'marginal'. This marginality comes in three forms. First, the structural marginality of those places whose average climatic conditions, above all their aggregate precipitation, are only just sufficient for the usual range of productive activities: the semi-arid and arid fringes, or the areas of continental winter cold at the edge of the Mediterranean climatic zone. It is relatively easy to understand the marginality of those places where the zone of Mediterranean-type production - classically defined by the practicability of oliveculture (see Map 1) - shades off into areas differentiated by summer rainfall or greater aridity, or by lower winter temperatures. In fact, the complexity of Mediterranean topography makes the application of even this simple standard more difficult than might be expected. Witness the climate of the north Aegean island of Samothrace with its year-round gales, summer rain and cold winters; or the extreme aridity of the hinterland of Valencia in south-east Spain; or the tough conditions of production in the Mani of southern Greece, as they appear in the epigraph to this chapter.

Within each microregion, moreover, even away from the limits of the 'Mediterranean' climatic region, the accidents of relief and lithology, hydrology and soil, produce, under the influence of changing weather patterns, a second kind of marginal transition, in which the scale is purely local, or even microlocal. Examples include small-scale rock-formation such as the surface travertine beds of the Plain of Antalya, or the fossil dunes of the coast of Palestine and the microtopography of the hard limestone karst regions. On the coasts, salinity, dune formation, or exposure to the wind also multiply the zones of seasonal risk. All these have frequently produced areas of increasing difficulty into which human
productive effort is extended with diminishing returns. The accidents of the unpredictable Mediterranean year do not all derive from shortage of rain; the formation of marshes through heavy precipitation and poor drainage or exposure to unexpected cold may be equally hazardous. Sometimes, the rain is too much – as in Tunisia in 1761 when it rained from August to May and all the crops rotted (Valens 1885, 142).

Risks which may intensify through time constitute the third type of marginality, reinforcing the difficulties of an uneven environment. Some such risks are sudden: the unexpected local transformation. In the unstable landscape of the Mediterranean, at each locality the temporally marginal is only moments away – beyond the landslide, or the earthquake – or hours away – after the flash-flood or the wildfire. Beyond the sudden event, routine but unforeseeable, normal but tragically disruptive, the relentlessly haphazard meteorology and the ecological threats of disease or insect infestations recalibrate the scale of difficulty of production from month to month and field to field. The other type of temporal marginality is more gradual and foreseeable: the process by which productive terrains become less and less easy to use as the seasonal shifts of the year’s weather move towards the drier or the colder. This fourth and last form of marginality is replicated in almost every microregion, during every season: few localities are so sheltered as to be wholly immune to winter frost; few have water so perennial as to render them immune to complete productive incapacity in the summer.

These forms of marginality interact with each other, and require the utmost adaptive flexibility on the part of producers. The balance between complex agricultural activities and simpler forms of foodstuffs collection is one reflection of the shifting conditions of time and locality. Thus, as every summer’s drought approaches, the interdependence of the world of the farmer and the world of the gatherer is restored – as we see from the following traveller’s description of the Mani in the early nineteenth century:

To forage in search of esculent wild herbs in the spring and early summer, is a common occupation of the women of Greece, those herbs forming an important part of the food of the poor during the fasts of that season. In the summer they have no such resource, and in the long fast which precedes the feast of the Epiphany on the 18th of August a.v., the patient has little but the gourd tribe to depend on. The summer productions of the garden, however, which depend on irrigation, such as gourds, cucumbers, badjinjas, water-melons, etc., are too dear for the poor, or rather are not to be had, as gardening, the produce of which is so liable to be plundered, can never flourish in a country where property is so insecure as in Turkey. The chief food of the lower classes, therefore, in the summer fast, is salted star-fish, olives, goat's cheese and bread of maize, seasoned with garlic or onion and washed down perhaps with some sour wine. No wonder that the great summer’s fast sometimes proves fatal, especially to women. (Leake 1830, 2.258-9)

The crops have changed from one period to another, but the desperation has arisen in every period of Mediterranean history before our own times.

In this chapter we consider how the omnipresence of the marginal has enforced diversity, flexibility and opportunism in managing the environment, re-examining the relationships between extraction of food from the uncultivated environment and the formal procedures of agriculture sensu stricto. In Chapter VII we shall be able to move on to the consideration of what all this implies for the qualification of production as ‘subsistence’ or ‘cash-crop’. Throughout, the level of ‘redistributive engagement’, the locality’s degree of involvement with other places, will be seen to be of high importance. Our aim is to show how analysis of this sort can offer a way of cutting some of the Gordian knots of the Mediterranean economy. Understanding environmental responses can suggest alternatives to the polarity between primitive and modernist in the discussion of the ancient economy, and help to find common ground between Antiquity and the Middle Ages or between the Islamic and Christian worlds. It also promotes a deeper understanding of the productive regimes from which the changes of the early modern period emerged.

Maintaining the maximum variety of resources is an obvious response to the variety of risk, and it is most economical to allow frugal Nature, that has been so prodigal in its environmental diversity, to provide a solution. In a highly differentiated ecology, the repertoire of ‘extras’ for the gatherer has been extremely large. The natural setting itself is rich in potential contributions to the pursuit of survival, as Leake’s description suggested – the foraging for herbs and edible vegetation, and the salting of starfish from the rocky seashore. The place of such simple gathering in the nutritional history of the Mediterranean must be acknowledged: an early twentieth-century list for example includes 621 plants for casual gathering (Garnsey 1988a, 53). Each tiny region has to augment its food supplies in difficult times with what chance offers – tortoises in places where starfish were clearly not available, according to the rural informants of one ethnographer (we must, however, recall the predilection of Greek countryfolk for the colourful exaggeration of plights of this kind: Halstead 1990a, 153). And when a Greek comic poet of the fifth century B.C. pictured a townsman retiring to rural comfort – to an enterprise including a yoke of oxen for ploughing, wine presses, goats and sheep – he imagined the man’s satisfaction at being able to eat as relish (with the staples of his diet) nor old fish from the urban market, but the tasty finches and thrushes that inhabited the countryside (Aristophanes, Islands, frag. 387).

Paradoxically, then, the environments in which the more complex manipulations of human agriculture would be most difficult offer a different kind of resource which is crucial when preferred strategies fail. Gathering from such areas is augmented by specialized, extensive, and intensive production through olive-trees planted in rows, with terraces of hillsides where nothing else will grow, or vines, carobs and figs (to all of which we shall return). But the starfish and tortoises offer an even more important lesson: the usefulness of animals, small or large, in carrying the nutrition available in winter over into the summer drought. There are many animal species which perform this function more effectively by far than those two strange instances, and it is in this strategy that we have the key to that great symbiosis between animal husbandry and agriculture which is at the heart of Mediterranean agrosystems (thus, for instance Butzer 1996, 142; cf. also III.6). Not the least of the benefits of environmental intricacy in the periphery of the Mediterranean is the range and quality of the riches that it offers for humans’ domesticated animals.

The peripheral environment of marsh, mountain, forest or sea was long undervalued by historians influenced by the cultural prejudice that privileges, as being more civilized, tilling the soil over other productive activities (Fumagalli 1992, 99–101). An agrarian history which stresses the interdependence of
agricultural activities with other strategies for maintaining nutritional input from the environment is to be preferred. Archaeological discussion of the nature of early agriculture, in revealing, for instance, the great importance of the prehistoric occupation of Mediterranean wetlands, has promoted such an approach (Delano Smith 1979, 290–1).

In point of fact, we often dismiss as least hospitable, or perceive as residual fragments of a landscape that was once hostile to humanity, are among the most diverse and complex portfolios of complementary productive opportunities. They offer, in most dramatic fashion, the opportunity of harnessing natural variety to buttress against natural risk. Woodlands and wetlands are prime examples, and the next two sections are devoted to them.

4. The Integrated Mediterranean Forest

To this day, forests survive in the remoter Mediterranean mountains – in the Taurus or the Pontic range, or in some parts of Pindus or Rhodope – which suggest to us the ‘natural vegetation’ of the region. They survive either as forest in the strict sense, or in the altered states known as maquis or pinyon (or other such local names), the bushy, thorny and impenetrable scrub which forms an immediate impression on the visitor to the Mediterranean (Margaris 1981). It is tempting to regard these wood- and shrublands as a hostile natural environment to be set against the tamed product of human cultivation. In fact, of course, the forest is not a static isolated piece of natural nature being vandalized by careless mankind, but a tremendous resource which can be used to a whole range of intensities according to human needs, and which is in a constant state of change according to the different demands made upon it.

It follows from this openness to human activity that little, if any, Mediterranean woodland is actually in its natural state (and that was probably already true in Antiquity: Delano Smith 1996). There is virtually no ‘primeval’ wilderness. Every part of the environment has been used, abandoned, reoccupied to various degrees and at varying rhythms. This makes microregions what they are: ‘a region’s landscape reflects the essentially episodic nature of both human activity and geomorphological process’ (1996, 176). The genuine wilderness has, moreover, always been a good deal less amenable than sentiment suggests.

Much of the wildwood may have consisted of small, stout, hard and intractable trees, casting a dark dry shade beneath which nothing would grow, and yielding nothing but wood and small amounts of pasture. What has replaced it is by no means the useless ‘scrub’ that geographers often suppose. It is a complex, beautiful and resilient mosaic of vegetation... Meat, wool, cheese, honey, edible plants, drugs, dyes, etc. are products not of wildwood but of the historic vegetation of Greece. (Rackham 1983, 347)

It is wrong to regard change to the natural vegetation as being automatically ‘damaging’. In the first place, causing rapid and irreversible simplification of an ecological system needs to be distinguished from making major changes through introducing new symbioses. Even in seemingly wild forest, the less useful trees are gradually thinned to the advantage of the more desirable species, such as those whose fruit (acorn or chestnut) is useful. In late Antiquity we hear of a ‘large village’ on Mount Lebanon where the principal productive activity was the gathering of walnuts, presumably from managed wild trees. The people engaged in this activity (whose local centre was the prosperous city of Hiera) are interestingly described as ‘having no master’, unlike the country people of most parts of Syria, who were more tightly bound into structures of dependence. Forest-margin exploitation was opportunistic and relatively uncontrolled, a strategy that called for collaboration but which did not invite domination (Theodoret, History of the Syrian Monks [Historia Religious], 17.2–3).

In this case the nuts were being gathered for trade as a quality foodstuff. But the nuts and fruits of the woodland are also of great importance for animals. It is crucial not to take this as a sign that the wood is part of the outer darkness, any more than are the mountains which are also so frequently linked with pastoralism (III.6). Animal husbandry is almost everywhere integral to the diversity of Mediterranean production, and it is husbandry more than anything which binds the forest to other productive zones. Nothing could be less helpful than to urge, in the context of the forest, an ‘appreciation... of the change from a predominantly tillage economy to one in which pastoralism has played a major part, and of the decline of the classical culture’ (Thirgood 1981, 8). A revealing juxtaposition, that – and an unhelpful one, reflecting the equation of agriculture with civilization and the deep-seated cultural hostility to the shepherd in any manifestation that we have already had occasion to criticize. A corrective comes from a careful study of the pollen of the woodland of the delesos, the coastal margin of the wetlands of the Guadalequivir plain in southern Spain. Here an ecology which is characteristic only of Iberia and the Maghreb turns out to have been adapted for extensive animal husbandry since well before the Bronze Age. The peaks of sophistication of this usage coincide with the moments when the economy of Spain has been most ‘urbanized’ and its societies most complex (Stevenson and Harrison 1992). We return in Chapter VIII to the effects that misunderstanding of the uncultivated landscape have had on the long-term history of Mediterranean environments.

Throughout Mediterranean history up to the nineteenth century, woodlands and scrublands have constituted a major source of energy. The combustion of vegetation has been essential to the survival of Mediterranean people in the often very cool winters, not least the poorer inhabitants of cities (IV.6). In the absence of cheap wood for fuel, there are many other possible resources which have been important in the Mediterranean past. On a microregional scale, the litter of local woodland or maquis can be drawn upon. Brushwood, leaves and twigs are sources of fuel the collection of which need do no harm to the ecology; they form part of a complex array of recycling activities which also make use of the residues of a number of other productive techniques. The bath-houses of twentieth-century Syria are for instance fuelled with terebr, a mixture of camel-dung and straw from cereal crops (Robert 1980, 276). The bake houses of the Middle East often used dried olive-pulp, straw and small twigs. Locally and periodically these small-scale demands can in aggregate be greater than the capacity of the immediate environment (Bresc 1986b, 87–98). But that is precisely why the portfolio of fuel resources, like that of food resources, is everywhere diversified. On Cyprus highly specialized use of particular maquis species is recorded: the smoke of Pistacia lentiscus is valued for curing meat, and its fruit is used to flavour sausage; Arbutus andrachne provides an important fuel for...
resource because it coppices so freely, regrowing rapidly after fire damage or cutting, and the ladanum gum which is produced by *Cistus ladaniferus* is collected by shaving off and processing the beards of goats that have been browsing in these localities (Hayes 1995).

Trees also provide an extremely valuable raw material for human artefacts, underestimated with respect to the more distant past because of their poor survival rate. What does remain in a few favoured contexts justifies the use of the term ‘civillà del legno’ for Antiquity as much as for the Middle Ages (Fumagalli 1992, 4–5; for wooden barrels, cf. the discussions of the ‘container revolution’ in Chapters V and IX). The omnipresence of wood in myriad small-scale objects and devices was, like the ordinary requirements of human communities for fuel, maintained by symbiotic coexistence with forested areas, and benefited substantially from the natural variety of species.

All such uses can be intensified and planned – by selective clearance, by atten- tive regimes of felling and cutting, and by replanting where necessary: systematic forestry, in fact. This can, in principle, enormously extend the capacity of the woodland environment to fulfil the demands made on it – as by metallurgy, which depends on the combustion of charcoal for its high temperatures. One ton of refined iron may have consumed 65 cubic metres of wood. We should however recall that metallurgy has often been more intermittent, shifting, and opportu- nistic than we readily imagine from the modern analogy (cf. IX.2). Therefore even these demands may be met from the concerted woodland resources of quite large numbers of microenvironments; and silvicultural management, and par- ticularly the practice of coppicing, is capable of notable yields. One hectare of good coppice will yield 84 cubic metres in 16 years (Bechmann 1990, 151–4). The fuel needs of even a sustainable metallurgical establishment might therefore be reckoned at some 12 hectares of coppice/wood per ton of annual product. In a fragmented topography, and in a society not consuming large quantities of refined metal, local needs could no doubt often be supplied in this way. Similar silviculture has no doubt regularly been able to supply most ordinary demands for wood as a constructional material (the special cases of timber for ship building and major architectural projects are discussed in Chapter VIII).

Cities and other large settlements form another test case, because of the intensity of their demands (IV.6). A traveller in Naples in 1777–80 (Swinburne 1790, 81) reported finding himself in the Posilippo Tunnel, one of the main entrances to the city; in danger of being ‘hurt by the faggots which ass are continually bringing from the woods’ – maintaining supplies for a substantial city from local resources in relatively recent times. We know that in the Roman Empire there was sufficient woodland in Italy for specific tracts to be assigned by the emperors to the provision of fuel for the enormous bath-complexes of the city of Rome (Augustan History: Alexander Severus, 24, 5; cf. Hemphill 1987). Such woods, probably in former times public property of the Roman People, could be de- ployed wholesale, whether (as seems more likely in this case) for planned extrac- tion or for asset-stripping. The effect of fragmentation in local topography and the distribution of forest between jurisdictions – whether of cities, villages or estates – will elsewhere generally have acted to protect forest from wholesale exploitation.

In most periods it has been relatively usual for forests to have been indiscriminately and destructively exploited for long enough to abolish them.

According to one calculation, a population of fifty million in the Mediterranean basin would require 75,000 tonnes of wood every day; the aggregate of 27 million tonnes per annum would represent about half the likely primary pro- ductivity of Mediterranean woodlands (Le Houérou 1981). The aggregate impresses with its inhumanity that such quantities were forthcoming is eloquent testimony to the importance of the complex extractive relationship with the woodlands in which so many Mediterranean producers have regularly participated, and on which all inhabitants of the region have depended. There have undoubtedly been in- stances of over-exploitation and deforestation, sometimes on a quite large scale. No mystical equilibrium between human demands and natural resources in the Mediterranean has ever existed, however subtle and flexible extractive strategies may seem; and the sudden demands of a commercial opportunity such as the sugar-cane industry of medieval Cyprus or a state-led intervention such as a Roman silver mine have sometimes had irreversible effects. We shall set out our assessment of the place of such developments in the wider context of Mediter- ranean environmental history in Chapter VIII. But it can be asserted here that, before the nineteenth century, the urgency of societies’ needs for woodland products led to the active integration of forest or scrubland into the managed environment more often than it caused irreversible loss of so flexible and varied a resource.

Extraction of forest products is not, of course, entirely fragmented by the topography of the microregions. Access to the forest depends on the nature of the systems of redistribution which can tie together processes of exploitation across thousands of microregions. Rivers, especially where they are suitable for the flotation of timber, privilege adjacent forests (Petr 1990). The forests of the uncleared lowland plains were a convenient resource for the fleets and architects of the Mediterranean: in Albania the Venetians, for instance, took ship-timber from the marshy coastal plain of Durazzo (Ducellier 1981). The belief that Mediterranean lowland forest was ‘certainly never so productive as that of the mountains’ (Thirgood 1981, 13) is simply false, an instance of that underestima- tion of the wet lowlands in Mediterranean history of which we shall see more in the next section. There is a productive zone where the forest meets the Medi- terranean seaboard – or, to put it another way, where the accessibility which makes the seaboard a region of high potential for communication shades off into the less accessible and more mountainous interior. Here, in this zone, two sets of environmental responses abut, in an interaction which is locally dependent on specific microregional characteristics. No doubt in the prehistoric period the zone of exploitation was narrow; by the Middle Ages, however, it had in many places expanded to near the environmental limits of the most important cultivated species (Toubert 1973, 181).

Let us return, finally, to the relationship between Mediterranean forests and traditional ‘tillage’. Many of the woodland products that we have met are integral to other forms of production: making equipment for instance (there is a particularly interesting symbiosis with viticulture: Bechmann 1990, 88–92), and the provision of fuel for food-processing, or preserving, flavourings and additives. In those ways, the managed wood complements the open field. But there has always been the possibility of using the forest as a buffer zone into which tillage can be extended when necessary, through the clearing of forest and woodland on a short- or long-term, cyclical or permanent basis (for instance, by
various intricate procedures of burning: Bechmann 1990, 55–68). The new, rich, unworked soils are highly productive, and the forest-edge habitats are particularly rich in possibility (Bechmann 1990, 4). If every microregion has usually had its woodlands and scrublands, in every microregion the last three millennia have seen numerous ebbs and flows of the area under formal cultivation, and dramatic fluctuations of the blurred boundary at the edge of the managed landscape. In some ways, Mediterranean agriculture in its shifting opportunism has retained aspects of the slash-and-burn or swidden systems which are found elsewhere in the world, and which are sometimes predicated of earlier and supposedly more primitive phases in the history of this region.

The various means of increasing the yield of the forest are themselves naturally often cyclical or intermittent. Even attempts at wholesale reclamation may be practised in any one environment at sufficient intervals to allow recovery. A certain beneficial regularity of flux and reflux of forest margins over time is recognizable (Bechmann 1990, 76–8). Much more common is an ebbing and flowing, within the woodland, of the less destructive patterns of exploitation, according to the demands of production and the calculation of the best technological means, all within the context of the microregion. The uncultivated environment, like the cultivated, is subject to the periodical intensifications and relaxations of human intervention which form one of the basic rhythms of Mediterranean agrarian history (VI.14).

The full range of procedures can be seen in the forest margins of medieval Latium, which were exploited with every degree of intensity, including management which closely resembled gardening (Toubert 1973, 266): ‘une présence aussi diverse et affirmée témoigne de l‘ingéniosité attentive avec laquelle le paysan latal a su tirer parti de l‘extrême discontinuité des sols et des microclimats’ (1973, 197). It is noteworthy that this use of the marginal is a sign of sophistication rather than primitiveness. Where the productive system has not had the advantages of redistribution to reinforce its pursuit of variety, the wilder woodlands have indeed been less attractive. An example is the forests in Pontic Anatolia that were avoided by Neolithic settlers (Roberts 1982).

The productive potential of woodland has been neglected by scholars for too long. ‘The study of the human exploitation of Post-glacial Mediterranean woodland ... was ... complicated by the lack of inter-disciplinary communication and an unwillingness to consider models of land use not advocated by Hesiod or Columella’ (Lewthwaite 1982, 217). Ancient economies, like medieval ones, were never among those in which activities other than ‘tillage’ played only a minor part. Flexibility of production has been essential for survival in the Mediterranean.

5. THE UNDERESTIMATED MEDITERRANEAN WETLAND

Among the widespread environments of local marginality in the Mediterranean, wetlands have been, if possible, more underestimated by scholars than even forests have. Modern reclamation of them was first aimed at fighting malaria and was subsequently motivated by the profitability of intensive horticulture or arboriculture, or by the settlement expansion associated with tourism. It has so greatly reduced their frequency and extent that few people would regard wetlands as a canonical feature of the Mediterranean landscape. But a glance at the coast of Albania, which did not undergo any modernization until after the fall of its communist regime, reveals the previous state of affairs. The great wetlands at the mouths of the major rivers, such as the Rhône, Po, Strymonas, Nestos, Hebrus, Maeander, Pyrénas, Nile or Bagradas, are especially distinctive and significant. The delta of the Elbe provides a classic case. Thousands of hectares of alluvial soil, so heavy that it reportedly needs three horses to pull effectivity a single bladed plough, are surrounded by great belts of tall reeds, and, in the outer fringes, by fishy salt-lagoons. The air is so humid that wooden buildings are impracticable and reed or brick must be used; this part of eastern Spain has not suffered from shortage of water. Huge numbers of insects feed a vast population of frogs and toads which in turn feed great flocks of migratory birds. Apart from the care of a few scrumpy cattle, fishing and fowling almost entirely supported the scattered human population until the advent of modern drainage. The twentieth century saw the introduction of intensive horticulture (huerta) of the sort long characteristic of other places on the east coast where environmental management posed less extreme problems (cf. Chapter VII).

Highly distinctive and relatively extensive landscapes of this kind are important; but in some ways the smaller and more local wetlands have made a greater contribution to Mediterranean history. As with woodlands and scrublands, they form a part of the repertoire of environments available in a relatively small number of different microregions. Wherever a seasonal watercourse backs up behind beach deposits, wherever the accidents of topography render a valley floor less quick to drain, or wherever fault-lines have created intermontane basins, zones of inland drainage (as with the ghouta of the Orontes valley, Map 15), there is a potential wetland, ranging in degree of saturation from perennial pool or lake to marsh which dries out in summer. The flood-plains of any perennial river can provide an extended chain of environments constantly changing according to the river geomorphology, length of winter inundation, and the permeability of the soil, and creating what ecologists call ‘hydraulic disturbance patches’ (Petts 1990). Mutability is characteristic: each season, at a different rate according to the weather, the layout of reed-bed and lagoon, salt-flat and sand-bank changes, and it changes vegetation and wildlife. Thus the coastal azubba of the Maghreb—flooded during the winter, but dried out completely by evaporation in the heat of the summer. The wetness of any wetland, its salinity, the frequency and effect of flood, the details of the topography of levee and watercourse or pool and pasture—all are liable to change according to vicissitudes in the catchment areas of the streams that feed them. The resulting diversity is actually offered multiple opportunities for gradial management: conditions of the margin, and it is this flexibility that makes the wetlands so important, particularly as part of a chain of resources involving neighbouring regions of different types. So it is those who make use of such chains of resources who particularly need wetlands (which for the ancient dream-interpreter Artemidorus (On the Interpretation of Dreams, 2.28) are positive only in the dreams of shepherds). In west central Italy, the wetlands afford winter grazing for sheep excluded by snow from the uplands, to which they move during the malarial summer. In Palestine, it is the moisture that forms the special resource in the dry heat of summer: the eighth-century St Willibald was impressed to see sheep immersed in the wetland at the source of the Jordan to keep them cool through the heat of the day (cf. Hodkinson 1988, 47). These environments are all ultimately the product of the alluvium created by the
erosion and weathering of the hills and mountains, and they are therefore highly prone to dramatic changes during winter floods, with consequences for human activity which will require our attention in Chapter VIII below.

Wetlands resemble forests, then, in their normality: few microenvironments lack a spectrum of conditions ranging from the well-drained to the – at least seasonally – very moist. They are also like the woodlands in their internal variety, and even more kaleidoscopic in that that variety is more prone to intra-annual fluctuations. It is not surprising, therefore, that people have made use of them in a huge variety of ways. Just as the destruction of forest for fields was only the most extreme of a great series of interactive involvements with woodland, so reclamation is only the most transformative of a whole range of symbiotic techniques for using the wetland environment. The wholesale reclamation of marshes and lagoons to provide crops for the swollen cities of today disguises the potential of such environments for much less draconian forms of productive intervention. The fowler, fisherman, huntsman and reed-cutter, like the woodland shepherd, charcoal-burner or beekeeper, should not be relegated to the fringes of a world whose centre is misleadingly defined by a single sort of agriculture.

The coastal wetland offers four general levels of opportunity. The first is as an environment for gathering – of the characteristic plant and animal species. One of the wild plants gathered for food in Antiquity was an unusual type of water-cress native to the marshes of the lower Strimon valley in Thrace (Theophrastus, Enquiry into Plants, 5.14.5). It achieved a certain value as a particularly estimable bonus to the local diet, comparable to the abundant and nutritious marsh-vegetation of the Egyptian Delta, above all the loris. Like the tropical wetland crops that have been introduced in more recent times, plants of perennially waterlogged habitats were available during the summer dearth. But the type of habitat has not been given the place it deserves in Mediterranean historiography – despite the possibility (Sherratt 1980) that it had at the dawn of human agriculture been the cradle of cereal-gardening (contra, Limbrey 1990, preferring self-mulching basaltic vertisols, the highly fertile tracts of black clay soils locally found in parts of the Fertile Crescent). More obviously, and more importantly, the wetland is a major location for the acquisition of extra nutritional resources from hunting and fowling (as is the forest) and, above all, from fishing, to which we shall turn in more detail in the following sections.

The second type of opportunity concerns the marginal aspect of humid environments. Like the forest edge, the wetland edge offers locations for the occasional and local extension of productive activities – moving towards the open water as the fringes dry through the spring, or opportunistically improving sections of marsh with dikes or dykes to make wet pasture more manageable. The annual movements of the edges of lakes in intermontane basins (such as that of the Fucine Lake in the Central Apennines, or Lake Copais in Boccia: Map 16) have particularly lent themselves to this sort of use. On the Pompentine Marshes south of Rome a part of the whole vast tract was more or less suitable for cereal cultivation – of the most shifting, desultory and extensive kind. About a quarter of the possible cereal lands would be cropped at any one time, while the rest were used for rough pasture: great herds of oxen were allowed to roam, fulfilling no immediate function except manuring. The cycle of wheat growing was a long one. A band of seasonal migrants from the nearby mountains would break the soil in spring; it was left bare all summer; after the autumn rains, having been ploughed a second time, it was finally sowed for harvest the following year. More intensive, but equally shifting and transitory, use was made of wetter areas near settlements:

the people of Terracina have the civil right to reclaim any plot of terrain that is inundated and that seems suitable to them, and every year in the summer they drain a twentieth part with small ditches which they surround with dikes. They sow maize and vegetables and collect fruits in great quantity – in general these little reclamation do not last, since when the winter comes, the rivers carry so much water that they overflow the low dikes and destroy the work of the farmer, who in the good season starts again and thinks it worth his efforts and investment in view of the money that the provisionally reclaimed land yields him. (Attinae 1993, 50, quoting a description of 1759; cf. 34–5 for cereals)

The third type of exploitation makes use of the perennial characteristics of permanent wetlands, as places in which water is reliably available for pastoral or arable production. In the pursuit of productive diversity, it is very useful to have access to environments of guaranteed special characteristics, and there are many instances of interlocking productive systems which make use of adjacent but quite different physical milieus. The case of south and east Spain illustrates the repertoire of environments well. The basic division is between the dry upland terras where secano dry farming is practised and the well-drained but well-watered plains that are the foci of Andalusia. The tracts where rivers make irrigation possible are known as regas; on them is found intensive agriculture and in places the horticulture of the huertas. Wettest of all are the coastal wetlands, mariimas, where today rice-paddying is practised – a modern way of exploiting an environmental extreme beyond the point where even the extension of huerta can reach. The possibility of agriculture actually within the wetland environment is not to be neglected. That is revealed by the systematic use of wet lowlands in pre-Columbian Central America, which have received the sort of study that the Mediterranean so sadly needs. In Central America, ditching and mounding to control the soil-moisture, and to provide a ‘nutrient sump’, made wetland one of the most important productive landscapes (Shuyer 1994). Roman centuriation of wet lowlands, as in Casalpine Gaul, and the control of valley-bottom moisture in fragmented wetland environments through underground drains, as in west central Italy, may be seen as partial Mediterranean equivalents (VII.2). Medieval evidence shows that such high estimation of Italian wet-bottomland continued: ‘the Lucchese charters are documents for people who considered marshes alongside vines, olive groves, arable fields, and vegetable gardens to be viable resources’ (Squarrito 1995, 39). In this case willows, yielding withies for vine-ties, were of special importance.

This reminder of the way in which the interdependence of productive strategies promotes the interaction of microregions leads naturally to the fourth advantage of the wetland: because of its position between land and sea it is often especially well endowed as a place of communication, a node in networks of redistribution. Its outlets to the sea may be used as harbours, its channels provide natural routes of communication behind the dunes along the seaboard, and navigable rivers may debouch into it. The setting of medieval Tintis in the Egyptian Delta, of Ravenna from the Roman period on, and still more so of Venice among the lagoons and river-channels of a deltaic wetland, poised between reclaimable
6. ‘These Places Feed Many Pickling-Fish...’

The labours of the months which form such a familiar ingredient of the art of the medieval calendar offer a vivid evocation of the life of primary producers. In Italian examples, both hunting and fishing scenes are prominent. In French ones they do not feature. Italy has on these grounds been called ‘primitive’ (Mane 1983, 247); rather, it is Mediterranean.

The starfish of the Mani remind us that the sea itself is among the productive ‘marginal’ environments of the Mediterranean. Many a microregion has turned to the sea for sustenance: but Mediterranean fishing has suffered from a poor press. Braudel, for whom the meagre resources of the sea were the inadequate counterpart of the scant resources of the land (1972a, 144), spoke of its waters in powerful, but meaningless, evolutionist terms as ‘geologically too old... biologically exhausted’. He contrasted the Mediterranean unfavourably with the North Atlantic (138); when supplies did not equal the demand of a city such as Genoa (138-9), or when changing shoaling-habits deprived Dalmatian communities (158), there were no long-distance fishing-fleets to relieve the crisis. But that dearths mattered to the inhabitants is significant too. They suggest that a sufficiency was more usual.
macroeconomy of the country. Had there been a shortage of figs from the Jabal Marmara or melons from Sfax the country would have remained unaffected. On the local level, however, that of a microeconomy, such products were the safeguards without which people at the mercy of a capricious climate and poor equipment would have been unable to secure their subsistence. (Valensi 1985, 110–16).

Such a microeconomy may, however, have more implications even for the macroeconomy than this account allows, when the strategy of diversification and intensification is used to ward off risk across vast tracts. It seems to have been characteristic of the fragmented production of Roman Egypt, for instance, that the small producers were constantly trading off their surpluses even while they aimed at autarky (Bowman 1986, 91). It has been suggested that diversity of production (as opposed to specialization or commercialization) may sometimes be promoted in order to encourage speculation by making available a large number of different products at several different levels of quality. We must also remember that it was always possible for self-sufficiency to be ‘not the result of successful peasant smallholder aspirations, but... a deliberate strategy pursued by urban landholders’ (S. R. Epstein 1991, 39).

‘The economy has a normal surplus’ (Halstead 1989), the product of regular overproduction to avoid risk in an unpredictable environment, and it creates the possibility of using surplus – through ‘social storage’, exchange, or trade – to provide a more diverse insurance cover for the future. The Mediterranean garden, therefore, is the more typical image of primary production than the wheat field or the grazed hillside. Diversity, of labour technique or intensity, as well as of the quality and quantity of what is tended on the small scale, are structural features of Mediterranean history.

11. THE CASE OF THE SMALLER MEDITERRANEAN ISLAND

In Sections 9 and 10 we have had occasion to name eight islands – and two places called ‘almost island’ (Cherro-/Chersonesos). In many respects, the smaller Mediterranean islands exemplify admirably the concept of the marginal that we were exploring earlier in this chapter. They tend to instantiate especially well the variety of landscape – aspect, geology, relief, soil, altitude, hydrology – that creates a microregional topography. Most contain some very productive niches, which have sometimes been highly renowned. Theophrastus for example records the spot on the islet of Chalkia off the west coast of Rhodes where barley cropped twice in the length of time that barley all around took to do so once (Historia Plantarum, 8.2.9–10). The case illustrates how tiny these niches often are, constrained as they are especially by the limitations of island aquifers (Kolodny 1974, 75–92). Extending production involves opportunism and ingenuity.

It has been common in different periods of Mediterranean history to make use of island resources in the same way as those of mountain or wetland – as adjuncts to the more accessible landscape, places into which expansion can take place when times seem suitable. ‘Clazomenae’, says Strabo of the city in the Gulf of Smyrna, ‘has in front of it eight cultivated islets’ (Geography, 14.1.36). The inhabitants of neighbouring microregions exploit island resources in classic fashion as extra opportunities in the margin: as pasture for instance, on the outlying Lipari islands in the fifth century B.C. (Thucydides, History, 3.88). As early as the Odysseus (12.134–5), occupation of the pastoral resources of an island – in this case occupation of the mythical island of Thrinakie by the Daughters of the Sun-god, looking after their divine father’s cattle – is eloquently called ‘oversea settlement’, apokriseis.

The next step beyond the seasonal and occasional exploitation of island resources is instantiated by the mid-twentieth century history of Kyra Panagia, the most remote of the Northern Sporades in the north Aegean. A hermitage-dependency of Mount Athos, the island had been uninhabited (occasional monks apart) when it was let in 1969 to three families (10 individuals) from nearby Halonnnesos. They took on the 2,000 goats and 600 olive trees, and produced 1,500 kids for sale to neighbouring islands, as well as 3,000 kg of oil. Forty beehives each yielded 60–80 kg of honey annually. The six men of the population took 500 kg of milk each day for cheese; the sheep were pastured using a microtranshumance system, moving uphill from the shore some 300 metres in July. Except for trips to sell their produce and buy staples, the tenants lived in great isolation (Ellstratiou 1985, Appendix VI, 168–9). As it happens, a tiny island in a bay of the larger Kyra Panagia is the site of one of the most important Neolithic settlements of the Aegean, a striking testimony to precocious human appreciation of the resources of a whole chain of islands important as a route across the northern Aegean.

Such tiny niches of high potential for intensification have long been recognized as special features of the Mediterranean landscape. In an archaic Greek poem on Euboea (Map 14), which became notorious as the object of hot contention between rival communities and their aristocratic leaders, is labelled with a technical term ‘vine ground’, oinoepodon (Theognis, Eligies, 891–4). Two and a half millennia later, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the oinoepodon of central Zante (Zakynthos), which had once been a wetland (Gooldson 1822, 176), exported seven million pounds of dried grapes to Britain (H. Holland 1815, 21). In the Peloponnesian of the early nineteenth century, another such microregion, a small alluvial basin in the barren and grindingly poor mountains of the Mani, where the opportunity had been taken to develop an extensive vineyard plot, could be poetically called a ‘wine-spring’, krasivrysi (Leake 1830, 1.266). From the beginning of the historical period onward, we hear of the association of some of the islands with specialized production of certain high-value commodities destined for a wide market. What is it that makes island productions especially important, so that from them are derived all the most famous wines of ancient Greece – Pramnian (from the island of Ikaria), Thasian, Chian and Coan, and some famous in more recent times, such as the Byronic Samian? How was it that islets such as Papeithos and Ikos in the Northern Sporades can be shown archaeologically to have had an abundant viticulture serving, as the distribution of their distinctive amphora shows, a substantial market in the Black Sea (Doulgéri-Intzessoliou and Garlan 1990)?

The answer can only be connectivity. Islands are uniquely accessible to the prime medium of communication and redistribution. It is not that island niches are usually really much more productive in themselves than similar environments on the mainland. It is rather that they have the simple advantage of being located on islands. And despite a malign tendency to see islands as isolated and remote, characterized principally by their lack of contamination and interaction, they
in fact lie at the heart of the medium of interdependence: they have all-round connectivity (V.2).

This helps to explain the special importance of the opportunistic exploitation of resources such as the fish and fowl which we noticed earlier in this chapter, and the curious prominence, far beyond their intrinsic worth, of many other island products: resin, wax and honey, minerals such as Lemnian earth, Cean ruddle, Melian obsidian, Thasian metal-ores, Parian or Proconnesian marble, the iron of Elba or the copper of Cyprus. Some of these commodities were among the islands' earliest enticements to settlers. And in the case of high-bulk substances, exploitation in the heart of the medium of redistribution offers real advantages: the marble of Thasos and Proconnesos was worked from ships or barges at sea-level.

In the heart of the medium of redistribution, moreover, so much value is added to all forms of production as to make improvements on the provision of nature well worth attempting. Hence arrangements such as the dovecotes of Tenos, enhancing the yield of island fowling. Animal husbandry can be practised at a level of intensity comparable to that of the most specialized horticulture. On Delos the tiny terraces were also used for animal pens; and from the late Middle Ages Minorca evolved a highly developed cattle-rearing economy (Bisson 1975). But many islands have sold the dairy or meat products of more extensive pastoralism, especially where they have had the good fortune to be quite well placed for a major market. Thus, during the early modern period, the islands of Crete and Lusign in the northern Adriatic paid their taxes to Venice out of the cash received from the sale of the produce of as many as 150,000 sheep (Imamovic 1987, 171–9).

Wine has pride of place among the 'island monocultures', as they have been called. But the list, continuing down virtually to our own times, is long, and reflects all the specializations of the Mediterranean. Fresh vegetables, such as garlic and onions, are the speciality of some of the Cyclades. When population rises to a sufficient density, even tiny and rocky islands such as Delos and its neighbour Rhenia can be adapted to intensive market-gardening, producing barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates and vegetables on narrow terraces facing away from the wind (Brunet 1990a; 1990b). More famous are specialized crops such as the sugar-cane of medieval Cyprus and the mastic of Chios (Perikos 1993), dependent on a sophisticated and quite far-flung market (now largely in the Islamic world). Such exploitation needs to be highly planned. The sacred grove of the sanctuary of Zeus Temenites at Arcos in Amorgos (SG, 963) sets out detailed provision for the productive behaviour of tenants, prescribing compulsory fallow, careful digging around vines and figs, maintaining walls and spreading manure. Another inscription from the small island of Herakleia attempts to regulate the inevitable tension between, on one hand, settlers at the very basic stage of exploitation which we have seen in the case of Kyra Panagia, with their herds of goats, and on the other, those who were attempting something more intensive and more like the prescriptions on Amorgos just described (Robert 1949).

The islands, moreover, produce the wherewithal of trade: clay, salt, timber, and flax. Island potteries have been as prominent in the manufacture of containers for transportation as island shipyards have been in the making of the boats themselves. And finally, dense island populations provide the labour input
required to carry out the redistribution — which takes place at times when the Mediterranean agriculturalist is kept from work on the land by the drought. Those are also the times when labour is available for the potteries of islands which specialize in ceramics, such as Izo in the Dalmatian archipelago (Carlton 1988).

Three case studies, of which two actually involve peninsulas, may help to illustrate the nature of these archetypal microregions: the Mani, as we met it in our epigraph from Niphakos; the northern Ionian islands at the beginning of the nineteenth century; and the reoccupation of Mount Athos at the instigation of St Athanasius the Athonite (died c. 1001).

In the Mani of immediately pre-modern times, we find a place of extremely limited natural resources, colonized because of its remoteness as a stronghold against the mainland of the Peloponnesse, and acting as a parasite upon its more productive neighbour. In Niphakos's poem, the epigraph to this chapter, note the stress on women's labour. The men are engaged, by way of an elaborate culture of aggression, conflict and honour (Chapter XII), in transactions which, essentially, deploy their energies beyond the Mani — aggressively or in a mercenary fashion — to bring back the wherewithal for survival. In this case, the distinctive role of the Mani in the network of commodity redistribution, which derives from the danger of its shores to coasting voyagers, is secondary to a more developed and highly specialized exchange of what are basically labour services. The involvement of the mountain populations of south Anatolia, Greece and southern Italy in the exchange economies of the first millennium B.C. often centering on the recruitment of mercenaries, was not so very different. The Mani is the 'off-shore' refuge from which engagement in a wider world takes place.

Further north and west, a different symbiosis took place. In the early nineteenth century, Holland described how Santa-Maura (Leukas) and its large population (at that time some 18,000 people) survived: 'the island may be said also to traffic in manual labour, as a great number of the peasants pass over every year to the southern parts of Albania to assist in the cultivation of the land: for which service they are chiefly paid in produce' (H. Holland 1815, 62–3).

The very fertile alluvial soil of the north shore of the Gulf of Arta (Ambracia) was their main destination: 'The population of this plain is of a very fluctuating kind, and several villages appear in different parts of it which are appropriated to the peasants of Santa-Maura and Cephalonia who come over to assist in the labours of tillage and harvest' (1815, 81).

Further south, the people of Zante had turned over most of their fertile soil to the current monoculture mentioned above. They still grew a third of their requirements of grain; of the remainder another third came as payment in kind for labouring in the Peloponnesse, while the rest was imported to the island and bought with cash gained in payments for such work (1815, 22). We must remember that at this period the Ionian Islands were under quite separate government from any part of the mainland. The running of a high-population commodity-specialized community on a safe and independent island, through the occasional management of the resources of a neighbouring mainland perain, is a pattern which was very common in the first millennium B.C. too.

What we see here is a special instance of a characteristic Mediterranean inversion: the topsy-turvy conditions which develop when the fringes, into which human activity has extended, become the paradoxical centre of population and enterprise because the more obvious niches have been rendered less desirable, usually by political insecurity. Mountains and wetlands, forests and islands have all at times been the location of this paradoxical transposition, but the last have the most to offer, through their engagement with the maritime.

Our third example is also rich in paradox. The enigmatic impulse was transformed on Mount Athos into a full-scale re-colonization and intensification of the range of cultivable niches on the Athos peninsula. It made use of the population-gathering force of monastic recruitment to create what was virtually an island sanctuary, from which the produce of intensification could be inserted into the redistributive process and further productive niches progressively colonized (Teall 1971, 54, 56). In the reoccupation of many of the Mediterranean islands, the monastery played a notable role (Kolodny 1974, 179–88).

It has been the same accessibility to the seaborne that subjects Mediterranean islands to the burdens of what might be regarded as a colonial agriculture (1974, 159–62). Such exploitation divides the productive niches into land-allotments for the benefit of a thalassocratic power; it assigns them to the settlers of a new city (Gaffney and Stanic 1991); it forbids the cultivation of highly productive environments because it is unable to dominate them politically, as when the Venetians (between 1364 and 1463) refused to allow agriculture on the Lasithi and Anopolis plains in the mountains of Crete (J.-P. Richard 1985). In 1815, 5,200 square miles of Sardinia were still owned by Spanish landlords (H. Holland 1815, 6).

This external economic logic has again and again caused the concentration on monocultures to the ultimate detriment of local society, institutions and the environment (Braudel 1972a, 151–8). No wonder that in early modern Corsica the populace of the island begged the authorities of Genoa to spare them economic growth or improvement: it was a palpable sign of subjection and did them no good (Fel 1975). The same process, in less disastrous starkness, can be seen throughout the history of the Cyclades from the Latin conquest to their independence from Turkey (Slot 1982, 18–19, drawing attention to the forced monoculture of grain, but pointing out that some monocultures supported high populations). The invasion which gives islands an unexpected centrality has various demographic consequences, to some of which we shall return (IX.5).

One is the characteristic 'pulvérisation' of property into the 'microfundia' that we have met in the two previous sections (Kolodny 1974, 377–88). Islands give an impression of productivity and prosperity — but this has often been at considerable cost to their inhabitants.

The ruthlessness of colonial-type exploitation shows in extreme form that the use of the Mediterranean island, opportunistic and mercenary in its origins, vulnerable and precarious in its continuance, is intrinsically prone to disastrous down-turns and even to extinctions. When abatement occurs and the intensive monocultures are abandoned, the islands revert to being dependent margins. By the Roman period, Ikaria was used mainly for pasture by the Samians (Strabo, Geography, 14.1.19) and Ikos had become the domain of a single viticulturalist from Peparethos (Philostratus, Heroicus, 8.9–10 [139]). Or, if the process continues, the islands may be wholly abandoned for a considerable time, giving the impression of catastrophe. Insularity reinforces crisis: islands are characterized by 'l’instabilité et vulnérabilité de l’implantation humaine' (Kolodny 1974, 127–37), which enables us to see very clearly the processes which are toned down or confused on the mainland.
The lesson of Mediterranean islands for the historian of production is, therefore, that it is unhelpful to take as the category for discussion either a particular crop-type or even a basic productive regime. Two places growing barley or almonds; two places cultivating fragmented lots with irrigation; two places using unfree labour... may be wildly different from each other because of their respective contexts in the wider ecology of connectivity. Excessive concentration on the traditional classification by crop-type or regime will obscure and render unintelligible much of their economic and social history. The true nature of Mediterranean production is its adaptability. We need to assess, in a given place at a given time, what function is being fulfilled by a type of production which we think is familiar. Is there a high degree of redistributive engagement, as often in island environments? Has a set of local conditions made the avoidance of environmental risk the dominant concern? Do political conditions entail that a set of producers are left with their own choices to make, or is there a strong degree of extractive pressure being applied by authorities near or far? Is the activity which looks so similar to ones we have seen elsewhere part, broadly speaking, of a tendency towards intensification or towards abatement?

The effects that are on display so clearly in the islands include, then, the fragmentation of the landscape, the flexibility of human response, the ease with which the processes of intensification and abatement ebb and flow, and above all the central importance of the sea in enabling all of these things to be developed to what is often such an extreme form. Islands usually offer little that cannot be found elsewhere. The attractiveness of using energy and ingenuity in exploiting their scanty resources so painstakingly is wholly dependent on the fact that they are islands, which transforms their potential through the alchemy of engagement in redistribution. Mediterranean islands demonstrate very clearly that intensification is primarily a matter of realizing that potential for entering networks of redistribution which is naturally their salient feature. In these insular cases we can see beautifully demonstrated the principle at the heart of our microregional analysis: that it is not the physical givens alone, but the changing emphases placed upon them according to the quality of interaction, that determine the character of a locality. We have also repeatedly noticed the extent to which the means of survival have been adapted and manipulated in the interests of those who possessed the power to do so: ‘in the risky environment of the Mediterranean, the few have repeatedly commandeered the “normal surplus” of the many’ (Halstead and Jones 1989, 55).

The economic history of the Mediterranean has thus been formed by the anxieties and precariousness of production, in which neither the problems nor their remedies are easily anticipated, and by the ambiguous forces of exchange – necessary, despised, belonging to the margins, but implicated in the life of most localities. That, however, is a static characterization. It is time to turn to the question of how to model change.