Challenging Braudel: a new vision of the Mediterranean

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Chutzpah is an evocative Yiddish word, classically defined by Leo Rosten as “gall, brazen nerve, effrontery, incredible ‘guts’, presumptuous arrogance” to which no other language can do justice. Imagine it: to challenge Fernand Braudel, le maître lui-même, on his own terrain. At least there are two of them. What is more, the authors of The corrupting sea have aimed not just at essaying a monumental critique of Braudel’s vision of the Mediterranean world, but at replacing it with something better. No wonder that, on hearing a description of their extravagant undertaking, Momigliano laughed (ix). That this bold venture was published on the threshold of a new millennium seems not out of place. But the scholarly gamble has paid off, and splendidly so. At more than 750 pages, The corrupting sea is just the first part of a great folding doorway, the second wing of which is to open onto scenes of demography and death. More than 500 pages of narration and analysis in the main text are followed by half as much devoted to 12 bibliographical essays (one per chapter) and a consolidated bibliography; both, and especially the bibliographical essays, are considerable resources in their own right. The whole is completed with some maps that make visual the theoretical arguments. One of these, to display those areas of the Mediterranean from which a sailor could catch a glimpse of the coast and those where he would be alone in his maritime environment (127), has much the same revelatory impact on the viewer that Braudel’s dramatic ‘upside-down’ reverse map of the Mediterranean had on an earlier generation.

Time, units, and the problem of Mediterranean unity

I can still see the sudden arrival of the paperback edition of Braudel’s ‘Mediterranean’ in 1975 in the bookstores of Cambridge, and the ripples of excitement as the whole coterie of young

1 The extent of the challenge became clear only recently to the authors when they learned (p. 1) of the manuscript of Braudel on the prehistoric and ancient Mediterranean, many of the perspectives of which, I suspect, were mined to produce the opening chapters of L’identité de la France vol. I: espace et culture (Paris 1986). Although it is imputed that this unformed work is an unpublished manuscript, the whole of it was in fact published by Editions de Fallois in 1998, edited by R. de Ayala and F. Braudel: F. Braudel, Les mémoires de la Méditerranée: préhistoire et antiquité (Paris). Horden and Purcell are fully conscious of the fact that the scale and repute of Braudel’s monumental work alone have frightened away others (39-40).

research students in ancient history hurried to acquire their own copies. It offered a panoramic revolution, a rush of exhilaration at suddenly seeing a new possibility, a new historical perspective. But Horden and Purcell do not want us to see that Mediterranean, thick with the surface of an ocean, the nervous superficial agitations of big fixed structures overlaid onto an intricate, fluid history. Their method is to allow a modern reader to see through the thickets of the Mediterranean, on its stage, but a history of a Mediterranean in itself (2, 9). There will be a new sense of time, in the classical tripartite form—long, short, and nervous, bridged, perhaps, by an interlinking, continuous cycle. Horden and Purcell reject this too, by necessity with their concept of time and distances as continuous contractions and expansions and contractions of the whole system and of its constituent parts. The picture can, therefore, dispense with the classical tripartite form. There will be no new edition, thereby not eliminating any of Braudel’s previous interpretations. The history of what actually happened will be the same, and so there will be no hesitation in deciding to publish his third section on ‘the events,’ von Ranke himself being still alive, he would find much in it that is familiar.2 Yet Braudel must be included, for there is no more to history than the study of pre-existing structures and the evolution, remains obscure, even to diligent readers. For their purposes, Horden and Purcell also embrace the priority of the long-term, and so reject the canonical chronological treatment of the Mediterranean from the beginning of the first millennium B.C. to the end of the first millennium A.D.3 Within this broad spectrum, they are interested in events primarily insofar as they reveal how the mechanisms of the Mediterranean work and not as things that are intrinsically important. This they share with Braudel. The distinction is found in their rejection of any sort of objective summary unity that makes sense of the parts. For Horden and Purcell the arcanum mundi is to be found in the fragments themselves.

I am convinced of the Mediterranean, sans double parle que venu du Nord, comme tant d’autres, après tant d’autres... je le dois aux封feu pour toutes j’aime la France avec la même passion, exigeante et compliquée que Jules Michelet.4

F. Braudel

The shift in approach is mirrored in style. Thiers is not the romantic canvass of Braudel—a arresting panorama of ships and commerce that sweeps the reader along in a tidal rush of energy, a glorified and organized unity that is particularly the peculiar. Nor do their text lend itself to lavish illusionism in the baroque mode. The maps and illustrations are few and spare compared to the lavish spread of cartographic views and visuals that animated Braudel’s second edition.5 It is also a more difficult book to read. In true English form, despite the underlining of theory, it is a huge accumulation of empirical data that is tightly knotted into the argument. In this it shares some aspects of Braudel’s original that produced the response in one of its first reviewers that the avalanche of supporting detail made it “an exhausting treadmill” to read.6 Not that stylistic flourishes are not present. The individual parts are finished with memorable set pieces. Rather than being striking, descriptive, or evocative, however, the prose is didactic. It is not as much the dense references to data, the academic allusions, or the passages in French and Italian left untranslated, as the constant weaving and cross-referencing that makes this a complex work. More than a dozen years in the making (about half the time it took Braudel’s Mediterranean to reach the press), the organic-like accretion of the text is betrayed by its sometimes byzantine principles of organization.7 Like the whole two-part project, The corrupting sea is itself composed of two parts: the first explicates the general theory, the second offers some experimental applications.

Two major truths have remained unchallenged. First, 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, a heavy one indeed, with identical problems and general trends, if not identical consequences.8 F. Braudel

The prose rhythms and diction of Braudel’s statement of fact remind one of the Nicene Creed.

There is one Mediterranean. But with the question “What is the Mediterranean?” there is a prior problem about the thing signified by the word.9 The authors appeal to Gallie’s idea of

3 Despite being available since 1969, Braudel’s Mediterranean was either dismissed or forgotten by most Anglophone historians until the appearance of the English translation in the mid-1970s; see Parker responses to the first appearance of the text.

4 Again, a distinction: Braudel, The Mediterranean vol. 1, 167, seems to have been aware, even extension. But how far in so far are we justified in extending it? This is a difficult and controversial question we should be asking.

5 The precise status of the events that are enclosed in the so-called histoire contemporaine is unclear: the history of human communities or “collective groups” as well as the narrative of structure and conjure with the conjunctural cycles, although Braudel himself seems explicitly to state that there is no rational connection between the two, such that the short-term events take place, so to speak, almost in a world of their own.

6 Since one author is a Roman historian and the other a mediaevalist, the weight of the coverage tends to be Roman and Mediterranean. For European, see Panayotou, a companion piece to this one.

7 These were intended to be in the 1969 edition, but had to be cut from the final printing because of the exigencies imposed by post-war austerity; the marbles produced by the cartographic unit of the Sismondi Section contributed substantially to the visual impact of Braudel’s history. The ‘rhetorical function’ of these in Braudel’s historiography has often been noted: Koestler (supra n.2) 48. It is interesting to see that such striking graphics are entirely absent from the third section of his history, the short-term event history, which is borne entirely by a traditional verbal narrative.

8 Balzac in 1851 274, in a review that this was very influential on this side of the Atlantic. He further charged (286) that Braudel had “mistaken a poetic response to the past for a historical problem.”

9 The difficulty is perhaps inherent in the complex and fragmented nature of the subject. On re-reading Braudel, I was reminded that his text sometimes reduces to a welter of examples that tend to obscure the argument. So Balzarin on the earliest edition he felt that it somehow succeeded despite its lack of organization.

an 'essentially contested concept' as a measure of the problem (328). And they add a central element: the culturally constructed concept of the Mediterranea is globally specific, it is regionally vague. It is, if you like, the observer's guide that the person's identity is of the region central European (22; 28), but a life-world in its peculiarities and wholeness that it is not like northern or recognized at first sight as fundamentally unlike his own. Horden and Purcell are not to be addressed to the Mediterranean world simultaneously with its unity as its basic defining characteristic. The problem is that, unlike Aristotle, there is no telos; different kinds of unity. Mediterranean Polybius and its organic whole achieving its living unity in its own day; new world of proto-capitalist endeavor that broke the bonds of oriental lethargy and despotism.

The data that enable any investigation of the Mediterranean are so profuse that any dream may be abandoned in favor of a problem-based, historical, different perspective — one in which Mediterranean unity is grounded in the nearly fixed relatively kind to sea-born communications and the fragmented and heterogeneous micro-Mediterranean units and then broke this unity down into typological subunits. Much in the necessarily small units whose dynamic interaction leads to the creation of the larger unity. The dyad ingredients of a distinctive Mediterranean history (175). It is in this ecological language or authors wish to discover how far this unity can be pressed. In their insistence on nearness and

14. But also assent, since their quest is one that has been shared by many who have been engaged in Mediterranean history, A. Flerw, The forgotten frontier: A history of the sixteenth-century three-African frontier (Chicago 1978) A: "ideally, the historian of the Mediterranean should struggle to expose the patterns of both unity and diversity that lie beneath the surface of events." He proceeds to observe how in practice most historians have been driven to one of these two poles.


17. Braudel, The Mediterranean world 1, chap. 3, "Boundaries: the greater Mediterranean," 168-203, in which he traces the three main extensions of the Mediterranean out into its great peripheral spaces of the Sahara, Europe (with its Mediterranean "infringes" of France, Germany, Poland, Russia) and the Atlantic. Oddly absent is any eastern face.

18. And not just the crops, but common language fields centered on them; for one case, see J. P. Brown, "The Mediterranean vocabulary of the vine," chart 4 in Israel and Hellas vol. 1 (Berlin 1995) 154-58.

19. R. Salani's forthcoming study, Malaya and Rome: A history of malaria in central Italy in antiquity, will
Perhaps fail to catch the fundamental distinction (which drew Braudel's attention): the had as extensions of Mediterranean history.

Geographic fragments, micro-regions, and interconnections

Horden and Purcell argue that it is not as much the looming wholeness of the Mediterranean as the profound inequality of each of the frontiers and therefore the different valence that each has as it is the much smaller unit of the micro-region that is the important key to understanding regions themselves are the result of the interaction of longer-range external forces and more immediate interactions between humans as they work to exploit each local environment in which their argument: the Bega's valley of the Lebanon, S. Etruria, the Jebel Akhdar of Cyrenaica, particularly of kinds that are congenial to the authors' endeavor seem oddly underexploited: the fundamental characteristics and importance of micro-environments to their analysis. First, which, for example, pit humidity against drainage, or acidity against the need to collate which valley, can relate to each other in a wide variety of different contexts. The Mediterranean world is not defined only by actual islands in the sea but also by a plethora of 'real' islands not different in kind from any micro-region; they should be analyzed according to the same method as the rest.

'Only connect' could be the authors' motto: they insist that the essential unity of the Mediterraneans communicates involves movement and knowledge: knowledge then provokes and sustains can be connected. This connective mobility is characteristic of a world that is so flexible in its own nature. Synecists could describe peasants in the hinterland of Cyrenaica. But neither had Augustine when he was a young boy living at Thagaste: the sea, he exemplifies one pattern: a reasonable extent of localized mobility punctuated by extraordinary occasions. The spectrum between the extremes of the Cyrenaican peasant and a notable like soldiers, pilots, cabotiers, missionaries, imperial and municipal officials, traders, slaves, go a long way to filling this hiatus in Mediterranean ecology.

For several reasons. Both the whole of Anatolia and many of its components have been particularly well studied. The evidence is dense and of high quality and is available over a long term. Moreover, developments that are central to the authors' concerns. One has to think that Braudel perceived some of this too; consider, for example, The Mediterranean vol. 3, the broad and the routes they follow,"Credentialing L. Felbrigg with the insight: 'The Mediterranean is the artists, sailors, athletes, monks, exiles, migrants, armies, nomads, shippers, and others, who connected the parts in a pulsating world of motion. These constant smaller motions are the connections on which Horden and Purcell wish to focus our attention as one of the most important of the weblike skeins that have formed the Mediterranean.

What could be connected depended on the pictures of what the routes, the sea-lanes, and the topography looked like to its inhabitants. For the sea this reposed not so much on Greek or Roman precursors to Portolan charts as on a complex and layered knowledge, some of which marked centuries of geographic form: a world of mental and physical landscapes, the cultural and sex descriptions of routes.28 Against Braudel's immobile topographies of the roads and sea-lanes, the authors draw on the communicative ideographs of cybernetics.29 Roads are not to be privileged as 'things as such'; rather, they are potential lines of movement that intersect (123 f.). In this respect, land routes are fundamentally different than sea-lanes. As destinations, towns and cities are of no special interest in themselves as "fixed points in space." Instead, they are 'addresses', points where communications and people intersect; other than density and number, they have no special effect (90). Like the patterns in which towns and cities are embedded, roads and sea-routes are potential networks of connections that can fade, intensify, or shift, depending on the larger networks of which they are part (the example of Spartan and 19th-c. Laconia is proffered: 130). One can agree with all of this, save for the fact that it tends to disguise a simple but important point. No matter how slow the sea currents may have been, they provided free movement in a way that roads did not. It took a different quality of energy and deliberation to land by land that it did not require by sea. Even more important is the fact that the free escalators provided by the sea had their own price. The great sea currents of the Mediterranean move in specific directions, generally in great counterclockwise movements, that had a tremendous impact on 'direction' and 'connection'. As with road travel, these forces could be channeled by human ingenuity, deliberation, and the expenditure of a lot of energy. But in the very long envisaged by the authors, the direction and movement of the sea hardly made connectivity as innocent as it first appears. One might also object that the image of the constant communicative movement is only one possible metaphor; one could just as strongly urge a different one, that of physics, where simple mass has a profound gravitational effect — that density itself might count as much as speed and transfer of communication. Whereas in the one metaphor it is true that electromagnetic forces are the spectacular ones, in the other the cumulative effect of the constantly weak force of gravity is often just as determinate. More of these metaphors later for the moment, it is only necessary for Horden and Purcell to emphasize that the lines of connectivity that united the Mediterranean were never truly broken in any period (155-56, 164). They were either working or potentially available, even if at levels that are barely perceptible in our surviving historical sources. If the records of the Cairo Genizah strongly suggest as much, then recent research has confirmed that precisely in the age seen by Pierre Nicole as the ending of Mediterranean unity, east-west communications were still effective and that various kinds of social arrangements were made to surmount potential impediments.30

Melos is offered as a micro-laboratory of intensification and connectivity from the perspective of an island. The authors argue that the same Mediterranean characteristics are replicated here too, even if in real combinations that are peculiar to the island. More than the continuity of characteristic forms, however, Horden and Purcell wish to controvert one of the assumed

28 K. Brodersen, Terrae cognitae: Studien zur römischen Raumfassung (Zürich 1995), is one of the better investigative and theoretical investigations of these levels of cognition, which I think works better when it describes these mores of knowing and organizing the environment rather than fixing them in three objective types of space: Kleinraum, Mittelraum, and Großraum.


Challenging Braudel: a new vision of the Mediterranean

ties, or varieties of transport containers, they want to focus on the dynamic and constantly
moving interactions between humans and their environment and amongst human communities
that border the shores are just as characteristic of its islands. The patterns of connectivity and micro-fragmentation of the environment are as typical of Melos (or Amorgos or Chios) as of any
mainland peninsula. The processes that are characteristic of the whole can also be seen in its
parts, even in the islands. Some of them might well be isolated (a few striking cases are
offered) but no more so than some "backwoods areas" on the mainland. Just as one can peer into
cities from the vantage point of the lines of communication streaming into them from the
countryside, so one can look backwards, so to speak, into the islands from the high sea and visualize the lines of connectivity penetrating into their cores. A defining characteristic quickly emerges - fragmentation itself, sometimes taken to almost absurd degrees in archipelagoes of tiny islets. Furthermore, the islands are not especially isolated, but are just as connected (or
not so) as any mainland micro-regions (225 f). Seeing islands from this perspective enables one
to understand why they are ideally suited to colonial types of production (especially of
cotanicals) and why, from Chios of Archias Greek to Sicily of the Roman Republic, they
became primary foyers of the most intensely commercialized form of labor, that of chattel
slavery (227-29).³¹

Fragmentation is the essential foundation. In the general cosmos of the Mediterranean, the
characteristic fragments are found over and over again, even in variant patterns, provoking similar human mechanisms for coping with them and for linking them. The theme of regional
distinctive rare conceals an underlying similarity of process.³² The authors are therefore
quick to caution that they are not simply replacing Braudel's grand Mediterranean with smaller
er units. That is not at all the point. "It matters that they [i.e., the units] are kaleidoscopic; it does
not matter what their actual size might be. The fragmentation is more important than the scale" (79). Whereas it is true, for example, that, just as some islands are isolated, so are some
mountains isolated, communities, while others are not (80-81). Furthermore, in the constantly changing relationships between mountain and plain, there is no permanent condemnation of specific communities to isolation and others to integration. In this communicative world, mountain highlands can be envisaged as roughly analogous to the high seas; they too are permanently and perpetually penetrated by a constant interpellation of large- and small-scale
commerce. In part this is true, and it represents a considerable nuancing of the rather stark
clamors articulated by Braudel.³³ Detailed footwork in the mountains inland of Caesarea in
Mauretania Caesariensis or in those of Isauria in SE Anatolia has shown decisively that, despite the weaknesses of political control by lowland authorities, cultural, linguistic, and religious forms regularly permeated these highlands.³⁴

In short, Horden and Purcell want us to think differently about the Mediterranean. Rather than the fixed categories of typologies such as types of urban settlements, kinds of commodi-

³¹ A point which, to a considerable extent, was perceived by Braudel, _The Mediterranean_ vol. 1, 154-58 (both on island monocultures and on colonial exploitation). See P. Bruun, _Les archipels égarés dans l'Antiquité grecque (Ve siècle av. notre ère)_ (Amelitskobasion 1990), which semantically makes the theoretical case that Horden and Purcell are arguing; one might also consider the comparable insights provided by C. Brookbank, _An island archaology of the Early Galaxies (Cambridge 2000)._³²

³² M. Bruzis, "Le paysage agraire de Délos dans l'Antiquité," _5_ (1999), 1-50, on the characteristic response of exploiting the soil by systems of terraces, even this type of response, however, is regionally distinctive, as Bruzis is at pains to emphasize for the terraces on Délos.

³³ Braudel, _The Mediterranean_ vol. 1, 341, with special attention to the mountains of N Africa in the Roman period.

³⁴ See the meticulous and pathbreaking work of P. Leveau, _Leaves of Mauretania: une ville romaine et ses compagnons_ (CollER 70, 1984) on the former, and the equally meticulous papers by N. Lenski on the latter; _Assimilation and revolt in the territory of Isauria, from the 1st century BC to the 6th century AD._ _Imperial_ 42 (1999) 413-65, and "Basil and the Isaurian uprising of AD 375," _Phoenix_ 53 (1999) 308-29.

³⁵ Braudel, _The Mediterranean_ vol. 1, 525-29 (the conclusion of the whole argument on towns).

³⁶ E. Le Roy Ladurie, _Les paysans de Languedoc_ (Paris 1966), with remarks also on the periods of "extensive agriculture" (186 f.) and "urbanization" (200 f.) of agriculture that run parallel with the demographic upturns mentioned (34), than D. Horden and Paul Purcell, "Le paysan de Languedoc avant son expérience "(1930) in _The Mediterranean_ vol. 1, 170.

³⁷ If the literary creativity of the idea of the Mediterranean begins with Homer's Odyssey (p. 43), than D. Horden and Paul Purcell, "Le paysan de Languedoc avant son expérience " (1930) in _The Mediterranean_ vol. 1, 170.

³⁸ Therefore, one might say, even part of popular knowledge, like Elliott Wilkes's observation of the historical characters of the world, 1920-1957 (New York 1968) 234.

³⁹ When a given concept as knowledge, like Elliott Wilkes's observation of the historical characters of the world, 1920-1957 (New York 1968) 234.

⁰ I shall refer to their general concepts as a model, although it is technically not such in the sense of a dynamic process of how things actually happen in a Mediterranean world.

⁰⁰ Again, an effect that was at least sensed, if not clearly articulated, by Braudel; see for example, The

⁰¹ Hence, they argue, towns and cities, like Freydon, neuroses, are best seen not as set amidst absolute of their kind, but rather as heightened and intensified forms of normal processes that are already inherent in the whole._
landscape places them at the center of dynamic linkages extending into and out of their cores. This way of conceiving urban centers makes one think differently about analyzing the broad catchments or dispersed hinterlands of towns and cities (115 f.). In the case of Mediterranean, for example, one thinks of the extensions of the city, so carefully traced by Garstang, as having to do not just with the special effects of trade or business (his concern) but with the normal extensions of the city throughout its dispersed hinterland, concentrating here and there in linearly-linked, but specifically-dispersed areas of interest to the city.  

In this processual view, towns and cities are continually being created in a way that turns the process of their making and unmaking into the essence of their role in a history of the Mediterranean.  

The essential driving force: risk and economic strategies  
The process that unites the whole is driven, in the first instance, by the fragmentation of the Mediterranean region into smaller units: city-states, kingdoms, empires; the fragmentation of these units into still smaller ones; and the characteristic marking of even the smallest enclave by a wealth of different ecological challenges and potential rewards. Overshadowing this fact of fragmentation for each local community and individual is the imminent specter of environmental shifts and threats to success that impel any given circumstance. Taken as a whole, the Mediterranean is an environment marked by fragmenting ways that are exacerbated by an erratic climatic and, by topographical variability. These forces produce a characteristic human predicament — that of risk. It is a factor on which the authors place great emphasis. It is, as they say, the crucial concept (265, 287).  

It is the constant threat posed by environmental risks that drives individual humans and human communities to communicate and to connect with each other — to overcome the isolation and separation imposed by regional diversity by exploiting the opportunities inherent in the very fragmentation of the lands in which they live (179-79).

The ever-present element of risk in a marginal environment means that the repertoire of responses is concomitantly spread, wherever possible, over time and distance. For the small peasant farmer, this can be done by mechanisms such as diversifying crops, adopting new inexpensive techniques and tools, exploiting kinship links, travelling greater distances to work, and extending the resources of his own family. For the latifundist, the same goal is achieved by recourse to various regimes of forced labor and by acquiring lands and resources spread across the wider tracts of the Mediterranean. Once the role of risk is established, Horden and Purcell advance to a systematic study of the means by which diversification, storage, and redistribution are achieved (a long third part [173-400]), many of the details of which cannot be adequately encompassed here. Moving from mountain to coast, specific environmental niches and crops are investigated in detail, beginning with forests (182 f.).  

Forest resources are important enough to merit the attention of the state; the ‘royal forests’ of Anatolia and the Lebanon were carefully delimited, controlled, and managed by monarchs from Antiochus III (and perhaps earlier) to Hadrian.  

On reaching the sea, the authors rightly note that fishing has never represented a substantial resource (190 f.). More importantly, they make us rethink the modernist propensity to view supposedly ‘degraded’ or ‘unresourceful’ parts of the environment, like wetlands (185 f.), marginal drylands (201 f.), and lands partly or wholly abandoned from cultivation, as necessarily negative or bad. This same re-evaluative approach is extended from fixed land to mobile resources like herds (197 f.); for example, the ‘superfetation’ of individual crops like olives (209 f.) and grapes processed as wine (213 f.).  

Cash crops developed for surplus wealth are selected developed out of an existing repertoire; they expand and intensify what already exists. Since their emphasis is on the mobility of options, Horden and Purcell also reject the stereotypical opposition between ‘pastoral’ and ‘commercial’, preferring to see these as complementary resources in most normal situations — either extended in the preferred exploitation of a marginal environment or attenuated to allow different types of development of other land resources (198-200).

The same basic concepts of intensification and abatement are applied to the production of agricultural commodities. The intense development of any one living system is a decision to develop that element within the local range of plant or animal resources. The case of large-scale transhumant pasturing of sheep, for example, can be seen as ‘superfetation of the underlying range of normal animal husbandry’ (200). In other words, given the whole system in play at any time, the improvement of specific land or animal resources or the decision to ignore such bonification is not necessarily a purely good or bad thing; it depends on where the exploitative energies of the society are going to be most advantageously deployed. One should not underestimate the importance of the small and intense simply because their presence tends to be ignored by contemporaries who concentrated their observations on the grander scale.  

The intensity of development of garden cultures, like the heurta of Spain, is itself a signal of their importance (220 f.). More importantly, Horden and Purcell reject the supposed impact of sudden novel innovations in agricultural technique or cropping. They take to task the received wisdom on the supposed revolutionary innovations of Islamic agronomists and farmers (259-43, 258-62) as a standard example of this type of thought.

There basic conclusion on one of the main driving forces of rural economic development in the pre-modern Mediterranean deserves to be quoted in full:

It appears that the reality of improvement in productive conditions is almost always the combination of the extractive purposes of the power with the co-operative, adaptive behaviour of the labour force; both sides of the apparent interpretative gap are usually found together, if in different proportions (255).

Even if this is true — as I believe it to be — there are still two problems. The first is to find data

42 P. Garstang, "Economy and society of Meditterranean," PBSR 44 (1975): 13-27; chap. 3 in his Cities, peasants and food in classical antiquity (Cambridge 1998) at 53-56, where one can now sense how much more than just 'trade' or 'business' contacts are reflected in these pieces of data.

43 Rome is as good an example as any of growth that depends on continual population inputs and whose existence was predicated on a specific system of Mediterranean population movements; this immigration is at long last receiving some concerted study; e.g., D. Noy, Foreigners at Rome: citizens and strangers (London 2000) esp. section II.

44 Again, the basic sense of this is already there in Braudel; see, e.g., The Mediterranean vol. 1, 241 f.: "The truth is that the Mediterranean has struggled against a fundamental poverty, aggregated but not entirely accounted for by circumstances. It affords a precarious living, in spite of its apparent or real advantages."
that reveal the process at the lower-level connections between owners and managers, on the one hand, and workers and producers, on the other. The second problem is to discover the temporal links between the historical and political power to local development, or the other way around, or both? These questions are bedeviled by the nature of the evidence. Studies exist of the material and epigraphic minutiae that connect social and political elites with local agricultural and commercial development - detailed analyses exist of the involvement of elites in commercial concerns in Pergamum, Pompée and Aquileia, or the development of Istria in the early Imperial period - but they always seem to fall short of demonstrating the necessary links between the interests of the powerful and the processes of production, distribution, and consumption.48

A related claim that Horden and Purcell 1502 as a corollary proposition - that the modern scholar's desire to know if the "extractive purposes" of the wealthy were better armed with double-entry bookkeeping and other instruments of "modern economic rationality" is "misplaced" - is an objection that is difficult to understand (292-94). The inability to calculate profits, record costs, and so on, not only must have affected the nature of 'extractive purpose' but is also revealing of the place of such rational extraction in the whole social system. Claims that such rationalization existed and made a difference, based on the most detailed recorded case known, an estate in Egypt, has been restated in sober terms.49 Such calculations did enable landowners to assess the viability of certain crops, their objective being "to stabilize income by keeping the costs of production under control". Much ink has been spilled on whether or not such behavior was "rational" (it surely was); perhaps more attention ought to be directed, as Horden and Purcell would have us do, to the nature of the social system of which the cycles of production, distribution, and consumption were part.50 The heart of the matter is surely not whether or not it was economic rationalism in the sense that such records and calculations were directed towards a more rational organization of existing assets, but rather what sort of "rational ends" did the economic (in the narrow sense) behavior prescriptively accept.51 At its leading edges, the extreme lines of surplus wealth seem to be invested in efforts to 'trump nature' that were 'artistic' or 'architectural' in type: qualitative in form, quantitative in effect. In this sense, compared to the leading sectors of 17th-c. capitalism, earlier social order appears to be an exotic Farahye Welt. Whatever the outcome of this side of the argument, however, Horden and Purcell are unwavering in their view that, in the development of the pre-modern economy, what mattered was the cumulative impact of small innovations the "trickle down" effects of numerous adaptations, and the inclusion of small new elements in a traditional system that produced a new system of options — and not any one astonishing revolutionary discovery as such (261-62). In this, they are almost certainly right.


50 It has been aptly put: it is not as much the raw presence of "individual rational calculations" that matters, but a social system that enables such persons and choices to have a more dominant place in the economy which in turn transforms the economy itself; J. de Vries and A. van der Woude, The first modern economy: success, failure and perseverance of the Dutch economy, 1500-1815 (Cambridge 1997) 713-14. The same argument has now been made in criticism of Rathbone's analysis of the Heronine archive: J. Andreson and J. Mauroci, "A propos de la 'rationalité économique' dans l'antiquité grec-romaine," Topoi 9 (1999) 47-102.

51 A. Schiavone, La storia spezzata: Roma antica e Occidente moderno (Rome-Bar 1996) = The end of the past; ancient Rome and the modern West (Cambridge, MA 2000) (although there are other fundamental elements in this general perspective with which I would take issue).

Despite much with which one would agree, there are, of course, some difficulties. By its very nature, a post-structuralist vision of power and property will efface the boundaries and the specifics that are necessary to concretized actions of individuals that shape political and other types of history. And one of the big ones that the authors wish to efface, at least from a Mediterranean perspective, is that between ancient and medievel. This is not a bad idea. The many strands of continuity are well worth emphasizing but, as with everything, there is a price to be paid. For example, instead of placing such a high historical premium on long-range transport of expensive luxury commodities and basic fungibles like wheat and olive oil, Horden and Purcell wish to posit an economic analogue to their micro-regional approach to economy — to see the world of the multiple caboteurs and the scions of large-scale long-distance commerce as paradigmatic. Such a view is, in many ways, quite misleading. The extent to which this is so, and in another. They are determined not to privilege the big and the long as necessarily better or more modern (143-44). Their approach entails paying less attention to the exceptional, such as the emergence of an industrial capitalism in NW Europe that has produced so much scholarship on the reasons for the differences between us and them.

Such an analytical move necessarily questions the utility of the distinction between an 'ancient' and a 'feudal' economy, under whatever rubrics (for example, modes of production). Historians who have operated with such paradigms risk being excoriated as 'minimalist' or 'primitivists' (145, 153, 359).52 The specter of the label 'primitive' is one that evokes some emotion:

All our period is pre-industrial; it is also pre-aerospace, pre-television, pre-nuclear. It is a sterile exercise to count off aspects of life in the present until, by exclusion, an unredeemed primitive squallor is arrived at (280). This is all very true. I am as ready as any other to discover newer and better models of economic relations that would enable the historian to comprehend the emergence of complex economic achievements that are above the level of unrelied squallor; but not at the cost of gross misrepresentation. Battering straw men rarely achieves anything. In many of these quarrels, we are facing objections to what are assumed to be the core tenets of an existing model of the ancient economy, so perhaps now is the time to clear the decks once and for all.

The model proposed by M. I. Finley and others is no doubt marked by some features that are unclear, but amongst them are not the following: (1) that the ancient economy was primitive and therefore somehow stagnant and immobile; (2) that trade and commercial relations were relatively inconsequential to economic development and, in some case, even growth; (3) that there was little or no technical innovation per se; and, least of all, (4) that there was little or no expansion or quantitative build-up in the forces of production and in the development of what we would call infrastructure and economic goods, both mobile and fixed. None of these are true; and anyone in some 'refutations' who simply cobbles together evidence for increasing wealth and the greater spread of material goods and products, thereby showing that the economy could develop and in some cases develop on a significant scale, is demonstrating nothing against the model itself.53 Finley was speaking about a certain quality of economic and social cohesion and not about the size of the economy, nor about the economy "to expand or to develop, even significantly, in quantitative and spatial terms.

I am still inclined to accept that the technical limitations of the ancient economy were indeed more or less of the kind outlined by Finley, and that these parameters set the confines of stereotypical responses. It was not that this economy could not, in Horden and Purcell's own

52 Other oddities occur: the claim that Finley lumped the economies of the first millennium B.C. together with those of the later Greco-Roman types (146), a statement that would surely have astonished him.

terms, intensively and develop considerably when compared to the benchmark of Neolithic or proto-Neolithic economies (many pockets of which were still to be found in the Mediterranean in antiquity). But there were overall general systemic ceilings that are apparent for the premodern Mediterranean. The ceilings were fixed by aggregate demand, which in turn was strongly influenced by the gross limits set by the total population. One cannot really estimate the long-term potential of any purely theoretical long-haul-bearing limit of the land. For one marginal environment just beyond the frontiers of the Mediterranean world, the highest population imaginable falls in the upper range of half a million persons, where about 16 million live today. That is more than just a quantitative change. By removing all of the restrictions of modern medical and other technological improvements, one could very plausibly reduce the upper limits of population. Whether or not one sets the total population of the Mediterranean at the acme of its unification under Roman rule at 50 million or closer to twice that number, the parameters are relatively fixed, both for the velocity and intensity of connectivity and for economic growth. The two types of growth, ancient and modern, are in such different ranges of quantity that it is necessary to understand what the limits of the former were, and why they existed. Within the generally higher level of development encouraged by Roman imperialism, however, there were clear opportunities for what I would call hot spots of development that were made possible by combining regional peculiarities with highly centralized Mediterranean-wide systems of connectivity. In this case, as Horden and Purcell eloquently argue, it is nonsensical to speak of intrinsic characteristics of any given micro-region of the Mediterranean: considered in isolation, such regions might appear quite unpromising, but when connected, they can suddenly flourish. Take two well-documented cases of economic development: the arid lands along the Guadalquivir river (Baetica) and the similar arid zone inland of the Lesser Atlas along the coast of the Jabal Nefoussa and its major drainage basins. In both cases, arid conditions that appear to be distinctly disadvantageous when viewed from the perspective of the micro-region in isolation strangely turn out to quite beneficial, given the right circumstances of connectivity: that is to say, they are very arid conditions that rules out the intensely varied agriculture of the rich plains of Campania suggests the value of a monocrop that faces virtually no environmental competition. There are no big alternatives that constrain a commitment to a single crop or a sustainable (just in that particular environment). In other words, some micro-regions are more perfectly attuned to the good crops of the region. The historical case of the Jabal Nefoussa (in this case, olives), and to do that very well. E. Gordon and Purcell's example of Cyrenaica and silphium is another case (65).

The key is that the monocrop must be sustained by a connection — a huge demand, external to the region, that is first created and then filled. By definition, demand on this scale must be external since poor local environmental conditions could never sustain or create a massive demand for one product and one alone. In the cases of the Guadalquivir and the Jabal Nefoussa the result was economic booms of such magnitude that they made the local economies burst forth against the background of the general agricultural production of the rest of the western Mediterranean lands. Huge wealth resulted from a highly marketable and desired mono-crop, and the same environmental constraints that encouraged the cash-crop also ensured that great wealth was concentrated in the hands of relatively few. The scale of these two economic hot spots was such that the results became palpable even at the highest levels of the imperial state. Baetica began producing emperors by the end of the 1st c., Tripolitania by the end of the 2nd. The facts are explained not by prosopography, but by crude material effects. Economic developments preceded the high-level political payoffs. The concentration of unchallenged wealth came before the personal links enabled by it. The shift in the concentration of production and commerce, as far as can be seen, is not explicable in terms of a dramatic prior improvement in political or social advantage, since the west itself (Africans began to produce the oil shipments to Rome soon after) clearly preceded the acquisition of political power. Why did the transition take place? The Horden and Purcell model is surely to be preferred: some complex combination of forces led to a greater concentration of 'connectivity' that systematically linked Tripolitania better to the major markets in Rome and Italy, to the relative disadvantage of Baetica. Part of the explanation lies in the pre-adaptation of both regions to supply Roman demand, signalled by the special measures that Julius Caesar had already undertaken in both of them in order to link production to the needs of the metropolis. Such forces operated slowly but decisively over the course of the first half of the 2nd c. to produce the social and political results that we witness.

But these are exceptional cases, dramatic spikes in the general series of economic relationships that permitted the wealthy who were part of these intensive economic developments to acquire political power. Like the city of Rome itself, they are effects of the system. This story replicates almost perfectly Horden and Purcell's interpretation of the virtual 'island' of Cyrenaica: 'The vocabulary of prosperity or desolation as applied to whole geographical regions should be seen as part of political authority and central management' (74). Without the city of Rome and its type of political authority and central management, the mega-booms of olive oil production would not have happened along the Guadalquivir or in arid Tripolitania. Both regions could (and did) become poor and unimportant once that large-scale overseas game was over. Not until Libya hit a different type of oil boom (equally dependent on mass markets outside the country) would its fortunes rise, once again catalysing it upwards from its former status as one of the poorest countries in the world. But the word 'management' suggests the permanent structure of government that was invariably part of the intensification of population in cities. One cannot escape the inevitable economic and social conclusions of intensification that we call the state. Horden and Purcell wish to do away with this difference: 'A distinction which we hope to be able to by-pass through the application of an essentially ecological methodology is therefore between private enterprise and the role of the state' (376). This elision might not be so easy. Different systems of thought have entertained the withering of early Roman Baetica (JRA Suppl. 29, 1998) 183-99.

55 K. Schippmann, Geschichte der alt-afrischen Reiche (Darmstadt 1999) 8:15; the population of the Yemen was c.350,000-500,000 during its apogee in antiquity.
56 This does not mean that a high or dense population guarantees an automatic transition to a modern economy. On this basis, India and China should have produced a modern economy earlier than anywhere in the West. It is just that the converse conditions — relatively low levels of population and population density — will set lower levels of aggregate demand.
57 Note in particular general remarks by Schlabach (supra n.51) 60-61; and in more detail in the paper by R. Saller, "Framing the debate over growth in the ancient economy," in L. Morris (ed.), The ancient economy: evidence and models (forthcoming 2001).
58 J. Renesal Rodríguez, "Baetica olive oil and the Roman economy," in S. Kevy (ed.), The archaeology of

59 A. Caballero Rufino, "Ciudad as the basis for supra-provincial promotion: the cases of Baetica," ibid. 123-46; esp. fig. 1 on 132. The same process seems to be true elsewhere, as in the case of the Lacessi of Sardinia: the economic crises which they happened to be able to exploit in the last half of the 1st c. B.C. and early decades of the 1st c. A.D. relatively magnified the household heads upwards towards the political order, and finally to the consolate in 40. Here again great economic success was usurped by higher-level political and social agents. The estates of the Lacessi were folded into the ownership of the emperor's brothers: see T. Bresciani, The Lacessi's amphiareteus and the villas of Brixiá (Vienna 1998) 3:51-73, 76-82, and reservations by S. Martin-Kilcher, JRA 13 (2000) 506-9.
60 For example, by imposing a large permanent olive oil tribute (3,000,000 lbs. per annum) on Lepcis Magna. Caesar forced the elite of the city and its hinterland to direct their attention to developing supply systems for the metropolis (Bell. Afr. 97.2). Whether purposefully or not (probably not), his move compelled the laying of the groundwork for future economic developments that Lepcis was now favorably pre-adapted to exploit.
61 J. Wright, Libya (London 1969) 199, for an assessment of the country's situation in 1948.
Challenging Braudel: a new vision of the Mediterranean

Mediterranean system? Could it, for example, be sufficiently contained to compel its further intensification by its own means, or would it tend, like much else, to migrate to new locations and to reduplicate itself in space?

Palmyra's difference, it might be argued, was possible precisely because of its peripheral position in relation to the dominant forces that were shaping the core of the Mediterranean world. So too, the freeing of individual entrepreneurial families (often persons who benefited from pre-adaptive advantages as managerial slaves and freedmen) in commercial systems such as the cloth trade (perhaps best evidenced on the walls of the masoleum at Igel near Trier and the comparable relief sculptures of the Moselle valley) was possible because of the peripheral nature of their location. Movement in itself constituted a basic freedom (formally recognized, for example, in the Delphic manumission documents) that could not be achieved, for example, by the more mobile Roman freedmen agents, to potential qualitative change in the social system. The relocation of such persons at a distance from any central Mediterranean space of imperial control might enhance their autonomy to the point of fundamentally changing their creative economic power. In this case, I am not quibbling so much about an appeal to a piece of iconography (the evidence on shipping (the tombstone of a Roman maritime trader) that is rather atypical, as about the adducing of the Puteolan archives of the Sulpicius with the claim that the pervasive use of freedmen agents in these dealings is a "social difference" that "is not germane to the comparative study of levels of economic connectivity" (148). The difference does not lie so much in personal status as much as it does in its enforceability and therefore on how much 'space' there was in Roman imperial social structure at its core for such persons as a group to become free of contextual constraints on their values and behavior.

Moreover, Horden and Purcell's insistent emphasis on the cumulative effect of series of tiny forces and small exchanges tends to cause the impact of physical concentration in given places and forms of coercive or restraining constraint to be underestimated, for the cities that were closely interlinked by proximate competition and dislocation in the core of the Mediterranean system of trade, the space in which social and economic systems were located and where they developed was therefore significant in itself. A knowledge of how things were used, a knowledge of how connections are broken, and of how connections are renewed, the social and cultural repertoire 'transferred' but freed to develop in a new environment, should therefore contribute to a better understanding of Mediterranean-wide processes. These observations provoke two questions. What was the rôle of peripheral spaces in a Mediterranean-centered system? And what happened to intensified or accumulated wealth in any pre-modern Mediterranean system? Could it, for example, be sufficiently contained to compel its further intensification by its own means, or would it tend, like much else, to migrate to new locations and to reduplicate itself in space?

62 Braudel, The Mediterranean vol. 1, 449 f.; here only as the 'principal entrepreneur', but with clear implications for the rôle played in his second volume.

63 For example, W. Hutterer, "Villages and tribes of the Gotha under early Ottoman administration (16th century)," British 36 (1997) 79-84, esp. diagram 1, and 183 f. of Palmyra fiscal conceptions with the different emphases on markets, fields, water wheels, river (islands, tribes, etc., as sources of tax revenue, and their proportionate importance in the local environment.

64 1. Origo, The Merchant of Prato: Francesco di Marco Datini (London 1957 etc.), pl. facing 361, and her soaring notion on 388.

65 Even in those cases, the weight of the larger context seems decisive: Ostia exists because of Rome; Lugdunum largely because of the Rhine supply route to the Roman arms along the Rhine. The case of Palmyra, to seem an example of a 'caravan city', must be nuanced. F. Millar, "Caravan cities: the Roman Near East and long-distance trade by land," in M. Austin, J. Harnes and C. Smith (edd.), Mushroom sprouts: essays in honour of Geoffrey Rickman (London 1998) 131 f. (a modified yes). For a collection of the epigraphical texts, which are the decisive evidence, see M. Gavrilowicz, "Palmyra as a trading centre," Iraq 56 (1994) 27-33.

In this critical question, the problem of knowledge and evidence is one that mercilessly hammers the historians away, notably in the 14th c. Prato, Francesco di Marco Datini. In the midst of a huge mass of literary evidence in the form of 500 log and account books, 150,000 letters, 300 deeds of partnership, and hundreds of other files containing insurance policies, bills of lading and exchange, and other business documents — and he was not alone among a large number of literate traders and entrepreneurs of the period — Datini's spirit and thought were provided with an epithet in Latin. It is such a miserable and poor kind of testimony that his modern biographer hardly bothers to mention it in her long story of Datini's life. Its words are largely irrelevant, and unnecessary, to the important events of his life as related by her. But this is the sort of evidence that has been left to ancient historians — and often fragmental and in need of restoration at that. If all that we had for Datini's life and work was the epigraph on his tombstone, what would we make of it? Were there many Datinis in Greek, Roman, and Phoenician antiquity who were not sufficiently imbued with the literary aspirations of their ruling elites? Or whose accounts and ledgers have simply been lost? Or is it a plain fact that what remains of their social world gives no hint of the existence of such a class of persons?

To Horden and Purcell, "the fact that urban benefactors spent their money on baths and theaters in Antiquity, and not on guild buildings or commercial exchanges as they did in later medieval Ypres, Padua or Antwerp, tells us nothing whatsoever about the organization of production and exchange of textiles, positive or negative" (360, my italics). But Paul Veyne was surely right to insist that the forms of patronal behavior that he labels everestians were peculiar to the world of the city-states of Graeco-Roman antiquity and, indeed, that they assumed peculiar forms within each civilization.65 The benefactions of baths, basilicas, theaters, and temples, rather than guildhalls (or churches, hosteleries for the poor, or opera-houses, for that matter) signaled that this was 'my culture' and 'my people' with whom I am connected within a system of patronage that governs my social order. Since the production of textiles is used as a model case, the point is perhaps worth pursuing, without necessarily rehearsing the whole of the 'proto-industrialization' debate.66 Their model of textile production (352-62) suggests that it was a question of a type of link between the controllers of raw materials and household producers is part of the way in which a system of manufacturing can be understood to have functioned. Even so, Graeco-Roman proto-industrialism was not that of 15th-c. NW Europe, if only because of the different social position of holders of wealth, the investment requirements, and the financial centers held in either social system.

Horden and Purcell's model further suggests rather uniform and unvariegated consequences of organization, production, and exchange, but when the relations of social and political organization to systems of production and distribution are investigated, it is precisely the nature or quality of these systems — whether the quasi-system of the Tahitian voyo or the manors of archival records at an Elba — that are central to the operation of the system in crises and to our understanding of net-sum increases or decreases in both production and distribution. It does not seem that intensification and abatement can be considered in such a mechanical form as to disregard entirely the social relations by which these results are produced (their assumptions about the standard kind of Mediterranean social order is a case in point: see pp. 446-48 below). Their model also presumes no connection between the systems of everestia and social forms of economic exchange, whereas these two would seem to be integrally linked in the manner analyzed so effectively by Veyne. Benefactors of the type found in Greek city-states and often ritualized in the Roman forum; for example, do not appear in Near Eastern politics, whether that of the Assyria of Shalmaneser III or the Egypt of Amenhotep III. The general market system of the Mediterranean city-states, I would argue, produced — indeed, necessitated — the evereste, since a liturgist or a benefactor of some description was needed to re-link the wealthy producer with the autonomous members of his own society (now classed as 'citizens'). Someone like him had to close the gap with the community, an hiatus that was the natural result of having wealth terminate in the hands of a relatively autonomous social and political elite.

As against the skepticism of some, however, I would agree with Horden and Purcell on the 'reverse' penetration of rural values and structures deep into the structures of the populations of cities themselves. It is not just the neighborhoods of modern-day Cairo that reflect these perverting values (499-500), but also those of ancient Alexandria and Rome at their heights.67 But the constant shutting of populations between urban and rural locations was not always qualitatively balanced or qualitatively determinate, certainly for any given period of time. So here is a problem, and one that benefits, a large part of the work. Where does quantity become quality? When do cities become not just so many intensifications of population? New York is not just a hundred doses of Topike, Kansas, nor is modern-day Rome a thousand replications of Gravina di Puglia. These simple observations are not as facile objections to obvious of which the authors are well aware; the query is provoked by their own rhetorical question of the urban variable: Why make the distinction at all?68 (96). They point to the malign and, to them, anachronistic effects of seeing pre-modern cities through the lens of the supposed 'economically progressive' role attributed to cities in the development of their host civilizations?69 here a division of labor, and perhaps beyond.

An explanation and theory of the reverse effects of these larger permanent units back through the system is missing. Perhaps more important is the absence of a clear sense of the driving forces that might cause a general rise in the net sum in the population, of which 'intensifications' like cities might be part. Since everything is represented as caught up in connecti

65 La Gaule du Vie au Ille s. av. J-C à travers les épaves," in M. Bats (ed.), Marseille grecque et la Gaule (Trav. Centre Camille Jullian 11, 1992) 189-98, and R. L. Hohfelder and R. L. Vann, 'Cabotage at Porto Venere, an ancient harbor,' (INAP 29 (2003) 126-35) at 130, which touch on the importance of these small boats and transporters. The volume for each individual boat, even if modest, was sufficient not only to sustain local economies, with the constant percolation of goods, but also a network of ports through which the larger shippers could pass.

66 V. Branca Vittore (ed.), Mercanti scrittori. Ricordi nella Firenza tra Medioevo e Rinascimento (Milan 1986), offers a selection that would be impossible to replicate for Graeco-Roman and Phoenician antiquity.


68 The same could be said of Christian charity.

69 Some of the following are sources for what follows: P. Krikel et al., Industrialization before Industrialization (1981); P. M. Frere, Europe and the expansion of the world (C. 1700-1900) (1992); M. F. Platt, The rise of industrial capitalism (1984); M. F. Platt, The early years of the industrial era (1992); M. F. Platt, The early years of the industrial era (1987); a rather cynical review of the work of the present study was offered by L. A. Clarkson, Proto-industrialization: the first phase of industrialization? (1982).
Challenging Braudel: a new vision of the Mediterranean

Brent D. Shaw

vity tau court," Horden and Purcell's system naturally tends to homosostasis, a zero-sum balance. In population schemes in one region, the temptation is to say that "if the average of those that are to make decisions about production and those whose labour they control" (277). It might be objected that this new substitute does not seem to be a manifest improvement over existing interpretations of these relationships. A colonus on his patch of ground might well have to make all of the de facto decisions about production, but it might be the ones that make the decisions about 'them' which makes the difference. Still, their model surely offers a much better understanding of the phenomenon of latifundism as a combination of intensification and the factors of distance and risk in an economic system founded on the exploitation of land (279-83): it is the Mediterranean smallholder's strategy writ large.

The manner in which Horden and Purcell have approached the problem, however, does raise a large question. Time is itself a real dimension from which the historian finds no escape. The existence of patterns of intensification or abatement for different durations of time matters greatly. A trade or informational contact that is sustained for only a few days, months, or years is different in kind, because of the element of time from a million persons concentrated at a single point on the island over 500 CE or more. Yet this element of time, years or more. This element of time, years or more, tends to become 'real' in historical ecology as other dimensions, seems to receive no systematic treatment. The fact that the Roman empire that defined and unified a Mediterranean okoumene for half a millennium can be presented as an 'exception', even if a conspicuous one (23), is only possible if one places a higher priority on elements of material dimension than one does on the factor of time. It follows that the nature of movement through space, or velocity, is highly considered at all. In economic terms that are critical to their argument this factor alone enhances or depletes what we call 'value'. So a recent detailed study of price formation in the economy of the ancient Mediterranean has found the reason for the lack of universal price-setting markets in the 'drag effect' inherent in the slow speeds of exchange. With more assets tied to the immobile resources of land than to the more mobile resources of trade, price-setting mechanisms remained trapped within local milieus.75

When it comes to the distribution side of the economy, Horden and Purcell debunk the excessive and perhaps misleading concern with long-range luxury trade as the Holy Grail for typifying the ancient economy and draw attention instead to ever-present small percolations of exchange.76 They are surely right to see the activities of thousands, if not tens of thousands, of small shippers and boxers as more important to an understanding of how the underpinnings of the whole Mediterranean system functioned. But however positive constant cobaye might be, some kind of fixed and durable intensification is required to provide an economic development above the level of a system of exchange and distribution that operated only at this diffuse and very small-scale level (as they admit, in their claim that the early medieval depression gives us an idea of the general 'background noise' in the economy: 154). Yet there are two distinct patterns which seem to bedevil the latter economic type whenever these intensifications occur. Both of them are embedded in the observed fact that the production and distribution of goods in larger-scale trading patterns seem to follow a 'normal curve' of development, efflorescences and retardation rather than the straight line. The example, are not entirely satisfactorily, largely because small-scale activity was hampered by the slow and very unpredictable delivery of goods and information. Consequently, there was a tendency for products to be reproduced at sites closer to the sites of demand and for production to shift geometrically, in a series of lateral movements, to smaller local

74 Arguments and evidence in my "A Wolf by the ear," in M. J. Finley, Ancient slavery and modern ideology (repr. Princeton 1993) 34 t. Even for the Po valley, where the commercial rural economy was "the most developed of all areas of Italy, down to late antiquity, the pattern of the urban-centered aristocracy remained fixed: L. C. Ruggiu, Economia e società nell'Italia antica (rev. edn., Milan 1997) 84-85, with specific reference to Bostov-tecf's concept of the late Roman aristocrat as a rural-dwelling near-feudal landlord.

75 M. Bressan, "Les cités grecques, le marché et les prix," in La cité marchande (Paris 2000) 288-92, offers an array of reasons, but they all amount to the velocity with which exchanges over distance could be achieved.

76 J. L. Land, "Towards a better understanding of the production pattern of Roman lamps," Acta Hortoriana 3 (1991) 289-95, based on a chronological distribution of four major forms of the 1st to the end of the 2nd c. A.D.

77 The use of long-distance and luxury trade as a touchstone of the modernizing economy fascinated Braudel, who was following Fiume: Kimmer (supra n. 2) 75-76.
productivity centers. These served local consumption better, but dampened the centralization and intensification of production and demand. The same phenomenon can be observed in the formation of prices in the most intensely studied case, that of the Greek city-states. Such price-setting interactions took place within "homogenous zones" that did not interconnect with each other so as to form "a unified world" of Mediterranean markets and prices; rather, these "price regions" were compartments that had to link with each other across their mutual frontiers by commercial exchanges that were, in effect, "transnational" in type.

The second pattern is evident when a collocation of demand and local production does manage to produce a commercial success, whether agricultural or manufacturing, above all a level that makes that particular center of production noticeable for its unusual profits. Such manufactories did not sustain independent wealthy entrepreneurs who then replicated and built on their economic successes; rather, in a significant number of cases, they provoked serial takeovers from the aristocratic landed elite who then folded these commercial successes into their existing land assets. The case of the brick production in the city of Rome and Latium is a good case in point. But the same happened to agricultural productivity as well, as the larger and more successful estate-based production centers, in Italy as in Africa, and the centers of the olive oil trade, in Baetica and Tripolitania, fell into the hands of an "aristocracy" dominated by their properties, on the one hand, and by the cultural and political values of the city and its politics, on the other. These assets, indeed, were often usurped by the ultimate landholder of all. Such exchange and production could be, it is true, relapse into the hands of full-time traders and businessmen, but only at the cost of fragmentation into smaller units of production and management. It was always a sort of economic noblesse oblige.

Consider the examples of early modern Spain and Italy as they pertain to the reduced potential for economic growth in the 16th c:

The fundamental cause [i.e., for the stagnation of growth] are ... to be found in the siphoning out of the artisan sector by a powerful landlord class and a major market seeking revenue and political support. These conditions vitally affected patterns of land acquisition, capital accumulation, and seigneurial authority so as to block agrarian improvement.

The same authors describe how the elite preferred to use their incomes to be expended on the more important sphere of political investment in terms of municipal officers and court posts. The result was that as government or landlords' expectations intensified, capital did not flow into agricultural improvement.

Landlords sought not only to manage agricultural surplus but — with considerable success — to carve themselves a larger slice of the existing pie. By the late sixteenth century — only extensive growth had been achieved, and once the ecological limits had been reached, agricultural development slipped quickly into reverse.

A variant of the same story was played out in Italy in the same period. The landlords, mostly urban, drew their capital out of the countryside for expenditure on their own agenda, which was not economic growth, but their own political and social power base court. As always, there were some exceptions.

More commonly, however, resources were diverted away from the land, so even extensive growth came to a halt.

The same story could be told of Roman N Africa. The economic boom of the long 4th c., caused in large part by the Maghrbī's unusual position at that precise juncture in the Roman imperial system, provoked widespread and extensive development of agricultural lands, especially into marginal frontier zones, by means of mechanisms well explained by Horden and Purcell. There is no reason to believe that the fundamental means were the same as those so well evoked by them (see below) that we see much later in the 19th- and early 20th-c. in the sudden explosion of rural development in the Tunisian polders that they traced along very largely for that which seems to be sustained by The corrupting sed, one closer to that urged by Finley. It might be invoked under images of 'ceilings' and of 'latifundia,' or, if a more prosaic description is to be offered for the latter, that of 'parallel movement!' that is to say, development consists of filling space with a restricted number of types of more intense operations. When these economic developments reach the ceiling or are curtailed by new political, economic, and ecological conditions in which they function (or even before such ceilings are reached — in anticipation, as it were, of easier or better possibilities elsewhere) they move laterally to occupy more space, which can only be achieved by a reduplication of the existing arrangements in new surroundings. This characteristic movement is found not just in feudal production and distribution, but also in the circulation of ideas and social forms. There was no qualitative social change, for example, that provoked fundamental bouleterausms or metamorphoses of social orders, their re-orientation and integration in new modes; there was only a sort of lateral shuffling, whether at the top of the society — for example, the successive regional displacements in the social recruitment of membership of the Roman ruling orders — or at the bottom, as exemplified, in extramuros, by the aims of the slave laws of the 2nd and 1st c. BC. A modern type of economic growth was able to transform the place of slave labor and social relations predicted on servitude, whereas in pre-modern societies one could not even imagine its absence. It is this final and determinative transformative effect of bare economic force that is missing in the one case and present in the other. Nowhere does economic change in the pre-modern Mediterranean involve the sort of qualitative changes in social order, economic qualities, ideology or technological impact that typifies modern social and economic development.

Development therefore tended to take place within modular units that were replicated through space. It might push out from existing units, in a form that could be presented as an extensive development of existing arrangements; or it could be drawn outwards by the superior power of the state to cover advance risk. The latter model seems to be one of the consistent themes that drove much of development in the Mediterranean that is only alluded to in Horden and Purcell but deserves a more consistent and conscious theoretical development. The great linking of state and private enterprise is a theme that is typical of development in the Mediterranean, clearly attested in detail as early as the Assyrian merchant communities that were mentioned at Kanesh in Cappadocia. The links between the state and the landowners (the landad and the Assyrian state were pervasive. The connection is also manifest in the Phoenician advance along the southern banks of the Mediterranean in the 10th-8th c. BC. The story is replicated in the best-documented age of the expansion of the Roman Republic, when the close linkages between the interests of the state (tribute collection and the placement of state contracts, not least for army supply) placed primary corporations and the state in a symbiotic alliance. The great development of the western Mediterranean and Atlantic in the 14th and 15th c. shared a
similar structure. In this way the interests of the state drove collective bodies and private families forward, such as the family of the Barbili from central Italy, to Aquileia and Istria, then fanning out with their shipping and production interests over the N Adriatic and thence north towards Lauriacum and Carnuntum.85 The army had to be supplied and on that basis much else could be developed and extended. They were the forerunners of the Laencae of Istria whose later pattern of economic activity replicates theirs in almost every detail.

The outright take-overs, patronal controls, vested interests, and covert ownerships made by members of the landed elite does not mean that there was no investment by them in productive workshops, or that the same upper classes were not involved in trade. Quite the reverse. There is every indication that this sellsame upper class, including its privileged aristocrats and political leaders, were very heavily involved in trade and businesses, including manufacturing in the area.

The problem is the geographic location of this ruling elite, from one end of the Mediterranean to the other, the epicenters of intensification that we call towns and cities where industrial or manufacturing production could expand most efficiently and rapidly (all this according to Horden and Purcell’s own model). These towns were also the locus of the political power and the basis of control (via the public and private law) of the dominant ruling elites. There was insufficient space for the growth of merchant, business, trading and banking groups as dominant or independent social orders in their own right. In NW Europe I would argue, even in the fully-developed Roman imperial system of late antiquity, this specific relationship between the political power elite and towns and cities was never the same as it was in the Mediterranean. So a systemic transition of an ‘ancient economy’ as a whole from a ‘slave’ to a feudal or ‘serf’ economy is almost entirely a mirage. It is not so much an economic as a geopolitical shift, from the Mediterranean world dominated by peculiar forms of demographic intensification that we call cities (and city-states) to a different NW European eco-

mical milieu where slavery had never been the principal productive force in the vast rural expanses dominated by rural lords in their Roman-style villas. And in the Mediterrane-
an, as Horden and Purcell themselves caution, chattel slavery as a form of labor was one that interfaced and abated, being especially concentrated in certain island or viritual-island milieus that favored such concentration, and was less important elsewhere in the repertoire of rural labor.86

As for technology and technological change, Lynne White must face some plain speaking. The authors argue that the true history of technological innovation and change has remained hidden behind collections of odd and striking inventions (287-89). In their view, it is the small and constant changes introduced over long periods of time that matter. They find a parallel to this pseudo-history of technology in an environmental history that cateches itself onto catastrophes (301-6). The rhetoric of catastrophism similarly forefronts the striking and


86 The reviewer therefore separates himself from what he understands to be Finley’s interpretation, and regards the position taken, for example, by J. H. D. Armit, Commerce and social standing in ancient Rome (Cambridge, MA 1981), as not sufficiently aggressive against claims of the restricted involvement of the political and social élite in commercial dealings. The problem is not that these persons had some daring and occasional involvements in trade and manufacturing carefully overlooked, but rather that their position in its leading and most profitable spheres was always dominant and suffocating from the point of growth (in Duplessis’ terms). They were just as interested in the crude power of money and wealth of whatever species; but their final interest was in controlling and dominating it to reap its benefits for their own purposes, not in the further competitive growth of markets as such. And no classes of persons other than them possessed sufficient concentrated wealth to drive the latter.

87 Shaw (supra n.74) 18 f., on how this remained true of chattel slavery as a type of labor in the transfer from its Mediterranean milieu, to islands off the W coast of Africa, and thence to island environments in the New World.


89 The reviewer therefore separates himself from what he understands to be Finley’s interpretation, and regards the position taken, for example, by J. H. D. Armit, Commerce and social standing in ancient Rome (Cambridge, MA 1981), as not sufficiently aggressive against claims of the restricted involvement of the political and social élite in commercial dealings. The problem is not that these persons had some daring and occasional involvements in trade and manufacturing carefully overlooked, but rather that their position in its leading and most profitable spheres was always dominant and suffocating from the point of growth (in Duplessis’ terms). They were just as interested in the crude power of money and wealth of whatever species; but their final interest was in controlling and dominating it to reap its benefits for their own purposes, not in the further competitive growth of markets as such. And no classes of persons other than them possessed sufficient concentrated wealth to drive the latter.

86 Oddly enough, there does not seem to be any specific treatment of money/coinsage, although a rather novel interpretation of its emergence is naturally suggested by their system.
87 Nothing, therefore, that is equivalent to Braudel, The Mediterranean vol. 1, 49-54.
creates modernity (269). Consequently, they see the true farmer and rural worker as distinct from the stereotypical image of ‘the peasant’ (271) and (correctly in my view) refute the idea of a supposed ‘peasant mentality’ (274). As the authors put it in one of their wicked sententiae, “to aim at subsistence is suicidal” (272). I can report that the same Ukrainian peasants who were regarded as the model of peasant production by Chayanov, when transported to Western Canada were perfectly capable of becoming burgeoning capitalist wheat farmers — so successful, indeed, that they ended up feeding the world with their surpluses. The judgement, “il était impossible de devenir paysan, il fallait l’être depuis la naissance” (notably, that of a Polish historian A. L. Koch [276]), only goes to show, perhaps, that each ancient historian shares the prejudices of his own cultural tradition. The statement carries with it an implicit suggestion about the fixity of such persons in an almost genetic disposition to indolence, dullness, lack of curiosity in improvement, and a confinement to the narrowest of horizons. It is humiliating, then, to hear the declaration: “I was in the beginning and I remain now an historian of peasant stock.”91 The words are those of Braudel.

Ancient and modern economies, cities, and social types

Movement and hence uncertainty, even radical uncertainty, and shifting meanings and sliding temporal elisions are privileged in a fashion that is typical of the post-structural sentiments of the 1990s and our own decade. In describing the shifting ‘strategies’ of the peasants and village-dwellers of the Beqa’s valley, Horden and Purcell’s vocabulary is so current that one would think that one was among the brokerage houses of Wall Street: “The fittest who survive are those keeping their economic options open and reviewing their portfolios frequently” (58). Whereas it is certainly true that there are constantly changing forms of interaction, both human and environmental, some remain rather stubbornly fixed over relatively long periods of time. And bare topographical and geographical conditions can remain much more determinant in one region than in another: Egypt, for example. Not only is Egypt’s existence predicated on a bare geographic fact, but its whole ecology stands completely at odds with the authors’ model of the Mediterranean. So here the story must be of how patterns formed in the world of the own the Mediterranean outside Egypt came to be important and to have an incremental effect in the upper regions of the Nile valley. Then again, a western and an eastern Mediterranean have been reasonable constants, even within the house of Islam. One has to believe that these fundamentality different Mediterranean worlds, even beneath the mask of the basic cities like surface of the Principate. The way in which the Roman empire fragmented along regional lines in the mid-3rd c. and the territorial division of powers that emerged in the Tetrarchy are only further evidence.92

Whatever the effects of these more enduring divisions of the Mediterranean, a fundamental main point made by Horden and Purcell might at first be contrary to Weber’s view of their special fêtes noires). Cities and towns should not be wrenched out of their living context: seen from the absolutely impartial perspective of the whole Mediterranean, they can be viewed just as profitably from the perspective of the countryside. They therefore reject any ad hoc special characteristics that makes a town or city, but they see in the urban center simply a gross intensification of anthropogenic effects taken to their extreme (“the ultimate microenvironment”, as they put it). Cities in some sense are just longer-term, more permanent, and bigger examples of a dynamic phenomenon that can be perceived all around the Mediterranean where large periodic markets and fairs flash in and out of existence. The result is an across-the-board rejection of the city as essentially a center of consumption in any meaningful sense (101 f.).

91 Braudel, MedHist, 1972 (supra n.2), 448-49, following a description of the simple peasant village and house in which he grew up.

92 Braudel, The Mediterranean vol. 1, 134-35, on the consistent division into ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ Medicioceans.

Before considering the value of this iconoclasm, however, it should be noted that the authors appear to assume a given type of ‘intensification’ of population that constitutes a town or urban center. The names of Knossos or Pylas, for example, never make it to discussion or bibliographic annotation. Is the assumption that the Mediterranean comes into its own, so to speak, and produces a stereotypical type of urban center only after c.1200 B.C.? Or are palace and temple distributions in command centers as just as typically Mediterranean? It is unclear. But the issue seems important because the appearance of common city-state forms, perhaps first in Phoenicia, does seem to signify the Mediterranean over the whole period of our authors’ analysis. Indeed, one might argue that it is the characteristic unit of the autonomous city that is really the sign of the premodern Mediterranean. One might even hypothesize that it is the retreat of palace and temple-centered communities from the E Mediterranean in the centuries after c.1200 B.C. that marks the critical emergence of the Mediterranean city in its own right. This raises the problem of a shifting frontier between Mediterranean types of towns, cities and polities, and ones that were more typical of the great land mass to the east, with the possibility that either could intrude into the ‘natural territory’ of the other.93 If so, this would raise, again, Braudel’s problem of the reverse impact of the antireal-like continental extensions of the Mediterranean back into its core.

Whatever the answer to these questions, it is certain that the rest of the argument is frankly iconoclastic, since it effaces basic distinctions that historians (amongst them, Weber and Pirenne) have made between the statuses, if not the types, of ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’ cities. On the one side, historians observed cities that were an integral part of their rural world and were dominated by landed aristocracies who controlled the resources of the countryside, but elites who resided in the towns and cities that were their points d’appui for dominating the rural economy. On the other side stood the independent mercantile cities of NW Europe. Aristocratic cities were still present, but were stranded or isolated in estates in the countryside, thus leaving the cities to be developed and dominated by a different class of persons. One sympathizes with the authors’ attempt to efface useless typologies and their rejection of the dubious value of center-place theory (101f). But it is difficult to see, even on the basis of their own theory, why strongly divergent types of connectivity should not produce strongly divergent and long-lasting kinds of intensification, both of economic forms and of the locations of human population — and, therefore, fundamentally different types of towns and cities. The statement that “It is hard to believe that the old Finleyan view could ever be re-emergent” (105) seems to constitute Morley’s study of the economic rise of the city of Rome in support. But it is difficult to see what they see as pertinent in Morley’s fine study. He claims that the city of Rome became a “driving force” in the Italian economy,94 but this still does not make it capitalistic in type, since economic growth per se is not what is at stake, but the kind and scale of economic growth.95

93 The ‘export’ of the polar-form to the lands of Syria, Mesopotamia and lands further east by Alexander and his successors would be the opposite of the process.

94 N. Morley, Metropolis and hinterland: The city of Rome and the Italian economy, 200 B.C.-A.D. 200 (Cambridge 1996) 126. Morley’s study of the development of the Italian economy. However, the process could not continue indefinitely. Rome’s population stabilised at around one million perhaps there were insufficient migrants to maintain a higher level, perhaps the city’s supply infrastructure could not sustain more.

95 The market was not indefinitely expandable, and so limits were set on the extent to which the metropolis could promote changes in the hinterland. The chief constraint on development in the Roman economy was not the consumptive nature of Rome or other cities but the limits set on surplus production [127] and hence [128] on the level of demand, within a pre-industrial economy.

Quite apart from the fact that this puts an “Italian economy” and confuses production with development, and surplus production as a cause of demand, Morley offers what is a fairly classic statement of the limitations of this type of city.96

Duplessis, “Why did development rarely accompany growth?” in Transitions to capitalism (supra n.73) 82-85.
Here again, one risks caricature. What is the real model of the city that is at stake? The mythic beliefs that seem to surround the model are of the following order: (i) that cities only consumed and never themselves produced; (ii) that all ancient cities fit one uniform model of the ‘consumer city’; (iii) that consumer cities are necessarily stagnant and do not grow or cause subsidiary economic growth; and (iv) that the economy cannot expand with them at its center.98 None of these are true, and yet these seem to be the views that Horden and Purcell are trying to refute.

To begin, two simple points must be conceded. First, that as it grew into the singular exceptional megapolises of the ancient Mediterranean, the city of Rome surely did impact greatly on the economic development in other areas of the Mediterranean (two of these, Baetica and Tripolitania, have been considered above). This has both to do with the consumptive demands of a very large city and with what Horden and Purcell call “political management”. But it is massive consumption of agricultural produce that is involved. The second is that Rome’s position as a megapolis depended not only on its ability to produce economic goods, but rather on its political position at the center of a militarily sustainable Mediterranean empire. In the 5th c. A.D., when huge forces began to recogmize the Mediterranean under the Rome was part, and Italy was transformed from the core of one system into the periphery of another. From being the center of a world with distant external frontiers to become the eastern frontier of another state, the city of Rome suddenly collapsed to a fraction of its former size and economic importance; and with it, all of its consumptive demand (with dramatic effects on the producers). Madrid, the authors’ example of a city that acted as a ‘damper’ or ‘breaker’ on the national economy, rather than as an accelerator like London (107), surely makes the same point.99 Madrid had these effects in the Early Modern era because it had a far more reduced population, and that, as so long as they are at the center of world capitalistic (i.e., economic) forces and networks, they will maintain their status as cosmopolises. The city of Rome that was the metropolis of the Roman empire simply was not productive in this sense, and in an economic system outside the empire, it depended on a high level of demand for economic goods that it produced. In lieu of this general demand in the economy, it is very difficult to understand how Rome could be a “driving force” in the economy in the same sense that Amsterdam and London have been in the Modern Age. The generic distinction is still worth making historically.

- If you mix these approaches ... you get an abstract of one of the most complex situations on this planet
- That’s what makes it interesting
- Yes, but exhausting ...
- and you end up totally confused. At first I thought I understood ... but the more you get to know all the factors underlying such a complex phenomenon, the more you realize what a mess it is.99

One of the great benefits of the model is its catholic inclusiveness—which necessarily makes it messy. First of all, the authors will have no truck with the idea that only certain acceptable and legitimate commodities count as ‘economic’. The Harvard Business School

98 The papers in H. Parkins (ed.), Roman urbanism: beyond the consumer city (London 1997), when they are actually relevant, seem to be ‘shadow boxing’. Parkins herself admits (107), of her arguments on the involvement of families in urban shops and properties, that ‘None of this contradicts Weber’s consumer city model’. Rather than battling over names and pursuing an attack on what would appear to be an historically valid typology, it would seem better to pursue the individual sub-types and types of economic relationships that were peculiar to this system. Surely, that would answer some of the malaise perceived by D. Mattingly, ‘Beyond belief: Drawing a line beneath the consumer city,’ ibid. 210-18.
99 Source from Morley (supra n 94: 29-31) and 57, based on the work of D. Ringrose, to which Horden and Purcell provide full reference in their bibliographies.
99 The case for the Bronfmans is well documented: M. R. Mann, Mr. See: the life and times of Samuel Bronfman (New York 1991) esp. chapter 2, ‘Bootlegging in the West’, p 150; 16; that for Joseph Kennedy Sr. is more dependent on later oral, sometimes anecdotal, testimony. For the recent resume, see S. Hersch, The dark side of Camelot (Boston 1997) 46-60.
100 Orcigga (supra n 64) 36 f.
Challenging Braudel: a new vision of the Mediterranean

Honor and belief: a few brief experiments

Having explicated their new model in the first three parts of the book, in the last two the authors test their novel contrivance — "try it out", as they say (404). In these two test pieces, the reader has an almost palpable sense that the authors are stepping into terra incognita, well beyond the firm physical and ecological word that gave birth to the model. The twin explanatory forays are one on the "Geography of religion" (403-60) and another on the social-structures and moral codes of the Mediterranean (463-523). In the first of these (a single chapter entitled "Territories of grace") the authors hope to demonstrate why it is that certain places are repeatedly invested with special sacerdotal status — a status that is marked out and made explicit by both the ideology of religion, marked by textual and oral 'statements' about the place, and by physical practices and material structures such as pilgrimages and shrines. What they wish to avoid is a crude evolutionist or traditionalist argument — the frequent claim, for example, that later Christian holy places were sited where they were because they are 'relics' of earlier 'pagan' practices. The force is "local tradition" and the explanatory device is that of "survivals": that is, a conception of social institutions or practices that have a life of their own that is so deeply entrenched in local realities that they dictate their renewed presence in new social circumstances in ever novel guises.102

Horden and Purcell urge a more flexible approach based on their standard fragment of the micro-region. It is not enough, they protest, to catalogue the continuity of importance in terms of religious practice at a 'holy spring' in N Tunisia in successive 'pagan’ Christian, and Muslim epochs and genres (422). For them, this is to miss the point. They draw our attention to the larger fact that each region contains a possible network of sacred points in the topography: a system of mountain peaks, forest groves, springs, rivers, sea coasts, valleys and underground entrances and caves, all of which might be invested with a peculiar significance within the local topography. One way in which this sacred system expresses itself and its links to the local ecology is by the way in which local human structures (shrines, cult places, temples) that mark these points are undertaken by and are part of the same system of production and distribution that structures that ecological zone.103 The sacred system is no more accurately or isolated or autarkic than are the more obvious economic one that historians are willing to consider in ecological terms. As property-owners, as managers of wealth, and as persons inextricably implicated in the same regimes of production and distribution, the purveyors of the sacred system too do not escape the clutches of their local ecology.

The authors offer many examples, and each historian can surely add his or her own. One wonders if there is an opportunity for an ecology of ideas, beliefs, and behaviors that has eluded this larger net.104 The system of basilicas and the distributions of Christian bishoprics in N Africa, for example, is an almost perfect replication of the urban and rural networks of power — as is their relationship to the Roman system of administrative controls.105 It had to be. The basilicas did not rise out of thin air but had to be tied to the productive and distribution systems of the communities that they served. The pervasive involvement in property by the bishops, who had to support themselves, also tended to the same end. Outside N Africa, one can point to the unusual concentration of establishments of concentrations of personnel and wealth (the monastic communities) and their regulation in one of the most urbanized and wealthiest areas of Italy, the heartlands of Campania. So too religious structures are tied to periodic fairs and markets show how sacred space and time can be linked. They contain within themselves and they replicate religious functions. They too are characterized by patterns of intensification and abatement, so it is possible that they antedate urban formation and are not merely after-effects of city development (435). The subordinate lower layer of cult and sacred places tend gradually to disperse into their own hinterlands, in much the same fashion, as do semi-perforated nodes of settlement spreading outwards, in ripple-like fashion, from the densest centers of settlement (436). Given the similar dynamic at play, the fact is that the one phenomenon could substitute for the other. Sacred systems, the authors argue, are therefore no different at heart than others that mark the Mediterranean: they are characterized by much the same types of intensification and connectivity. They have a commerce of their own that is parallel to those of secular trade. These movements of ritual and belief were just as ubiquitous in the Mediterranean, but perhaps not apparent or easily apprehended until Christianity and Islam provided the technical language of sacred travel and pilgrimage (443-49).

Secular concentrations of people are therefore just one manifestation of the movement and location of population. The overlapping and reinforcing of the mutual systems, however, means that the one is often revealed in the other. A late 4th-c. calendar of religious events for Capua inscribes echoing effects in a hinterland that radiates outwards to form a triangular-shaped pyramid, with Capua at its apex and the ports of Cumae and Baise located at its distal angles (451; map 31b). The authors' sententious conclusion points the way: "micro-regions, in other words, exist in the mind as much as on the map." Somehow all the inhabitants of a region knew that all of these "places" (and in more or less 'this' rank order) are very important to them and to their beliefs. The authors therefore offer an explanation at odds with the notion that cultic continuity is the result of stagnation and isolation. Continuity of that type, they argue, is not just a misnomer but fundamentally misleading since (if I understand the argument correctly) it is a false label for patterns that are recursively recreated. Each micro-region's human interactions make and re-make the sacred foci in the environment such as leca sacra remain in more or less the same location (with sensible variations, like the siting of the nearer ports: 117-18) is not so much owed to any inherent sacred continuity as it is to the fundamental patterns of human interactions that make them so. But these could shift permanently. For all its importance, the oracle of the Siwah Oasis was sustained by a system of Greek cities. Their failure signalled its demise. The oracle of Apollo at Claros was similarly parasitic on the systems of Greek cities of the eastern Roman empire. The end of political favor of the state signalled the effective end of the oracle.

The arguments and the examples will have to be worked out in greater detail by every researcher in every region of the Mediterranean. If one considers the growth and spread of a Mediterranean-wide phenomenon with a name to it, such as the Christianization of the Roman world, one can readily discern the effects of the collective micro-regions on the process of communication. In the larger ecological zone of the Nile valley and its part of Alexandria, Christianity assumed one form; in Cyrenaica it assumed another; in Syria and Antioch, another; in the Maghreb, another; and in parts of the Iberian peninsula, yet another. And within each of these ecological zones, the sub-units then reproduced the general pattern but in their own local thematic variations. In N Africa the NE corridor around Carthage, coastal Byzacena, the high plains of the Numidian interior, and the easterly ribbons of the Mauritanian coast served as centers of Christian origins to their local communities. There were never entirely exclusive but, given the doctrine of 'connectivity' and the interdigitation of lines of communication, that is to be expected. There is no need to suggest that these are 'nationalisms in disguise' any more than continuity is a form of pagan essentialism in disguise.

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102 I. Capograssi Colosimo, "Le forme giuridiche della schiavitù e la società Romana nella tarda Repubblica", Opus 1 (1982) 90, for reasoned objections to the conception of 'survivals' in cultural analysis.

103 K. S. Bagnall, Egypt in late antiquity (Princeton 1993) 265-68 on the way in which the 'pagan' temple system of the Nile valley exemplified this, and the consequences for this system when the Roman state artifically cut the economic links in the mid-3rd c.

104 Anatolol, for example, seem to be a perfectly distinct concept, given the fact that it provides one of the finest micro-laboratories for these phenomena — the studies of Louis Robert come to mind (some of which they have used to good effect).

105 I would not claim that there is a perfect one-to-one match (and that is not what Horden and Purcell are arguing), but rather that one can discern a common patterning resulting from mutual systemic influences.
Challenging Braudel: a new vision of the Mediterranean

It could be argued that the authors' ecological approach has only confirmed existing work on the location of sacred spaces in given environments (e.g., the location of the shrines of Islamic holy men on the coast of Syria: map 24, p. 405). But one could also argue that their choice of points in the local ecologies, precisely because they are unusual, exotic, or notable natural features, misses the point that much sacred space is more mundane in quality. One could take, for example, the case of N African Christian basilicas, and the attendant location of many of the sancti. The plain fact is that they were placed in artificial urban surroundings that were well known to their inhabitants. Their design is so similar that one can say that their presence in any given locale offers a repeated presence of the ordinary and the comfortably familiar. They are as much alike as one cannot tell the churches of the so-called Donatists from those of orthodox Catholics. They were so similar in their replication of a well-known form (the Roman civil basilica) that they offered nothing exotic but rather that which was ordinary and reassuring. The sacred space of the church (and later the mosque) therefore offers a rather different relation to a local system of topography than do the network of springs, groves, rivers, and coves. This domestication of space is just as anthropogenic as the human observation of the natural network of sacred signals in the clues suggested by unusual local topographical features.

While their observations on these local networks are persuasive, they raise yet another question. Has Mediterranean unity been emphasized too much at the expense of an understanding of the enduring divisions that Braudel wished to highlight? From his prison at Lubeck, Braudel saw that ethnic unities rooted in their own geographic spaces would survive even the horrors of the worst of modern wars. This observation led him to speculate on the reverse impact of the huge continental 'peninsula' on the Mediterranean itself. Such massive forces, he claimed, had created a permanent schism within the Mediterranean basin between east and west (a claim lodged before the consequences of plate tectonics were even imagined). Despite the obvious communicative links that have streamed predominantly from east to west as a result of the effect of predominant winds and currents, it is difficult to deny this basic division and the way that it has had on everything from large-scale internal movements of population (e.g., colonization) to the movements of ideas (e.g., Christianity). Braudel noted that eastern attempts to establish colonies in the western Mediterranean basin began first with local autonomy and then ended with their gradual erosion and disappearance (and the same happened to western attempts to colonize the east). It is not that communications back and forth between the two sides (they did, and sometimes on a large scale — but rather, as Braudel suggested, that these movements were filtered through a median geographic sieve, as it were, that separated the eastern Mediterranean basin from the western. The same applies to the large continental blocks that impinge on the eastern shores: to take but one example, a half-century of warfare between the successors of Alexander the Great, that witnessed the marshalling of unprecedented manpower, material wealth, and advanced technology in the pursuit of overcoming traditional boundaries, achieved virtually nothing. Before Alexander, the main power blocks were concentrated in N Greece and Anatolia, in the lands from the Nile to the Indus (in the Persian empire), and in the territories of the Achaemenids. The attempts of the Achaemenids to exert control over a half century left this basic situation unaltered. Human endeavor at its most violent was played out on an ecological stage that was, in certain respects, more determinative than the warfare itself.

More difficult and provocative is the fifth and final part, on the uses and abuses of social anthropology. The authors have courageously assumed the task of demonstrating not just any simple problem of mental mapping, but rather one of the most daunting and intractable of Mediterranean problems: the putative unity of the region in terms of common social structures and common social values. On the question of a distinctive Mediterranean system of values, they state unflinchingly their belief in such a unity while confessing that it is "a hopeless task" to prove their belief on the basis of any collation of evidence currently available (510-12). For a test case, it is the vaunted honor that is selected for investigation. Horden, in turn, argues for the dominant place of honor and for its pervasive acceptance even amongst the poor and dispossessed as a sign of a common Mediterranean set of values (520). In the face of considerable difficulties with the evidence (of which they are well aware), they systematically stake out their own interpretative frameworks. First comes a head-on confrontation with Huntington's construct of "Mediterranean anthropology." Few escape unscathed, and rightly so. The world of unchanging Mediterranean peasant communities, like C. Levi's Alano (467-69), are demonstrated to be parts of larger structures of change, even in the very years in which their civilized and educated interpreters portrayed them as exemplars of a pristine age of ancient Mediterranean continuity. They do admit the relative stability of some of these patterns at the level of the village or rural community. Located at opposite ends of the spectrum of intensification, however, the state and the small community have their own agendas and repertoires, and it is not entirely predictable how it is that changes in the one will be responded to by changes in the other: the perhaps unexpected resurgence of the 'archaic' kinship structure of the famille de souche ('stem family') at 'Ste Foy' is a case in point (474-77).

As for the problem of a Mediterranean unity of values, the authors boldly answer 'yes', with the appropriate caveat that this was true of a Mediterranean that was still capable of having its own history. In that Mediterranean age, the dominant social structures were similar, and so were the dominant values such as honor, despite regional variations in the moral repertoire (503, 507). It is not that there are not some minor problems of interpretation in the argument. For example, in discussing Pitt-Rivers on honor (honoradze) in his community in Spain, they accept his judgment that the honor-shame dyad is not a polarity like other Mediterranean ones (male/female; autonomy/dependence). This is both illogical and runs counter to a large number of arguments (which I find more persuasive). To use Horden and Purcell's own terminology, even these values are susceptible to concentration and abatement that are strongly systemic in nature. To the extent that a man is a man of honor, he is for that reason 'more autonomous' and 'less like a woman'. And shame (or dishonor) on Pitt-Rivers' own evidence) is strongly systemic in nature. The precise line that Horden and Purcell themselves argue 4 pages later: "An essential point is that the attributions of honor are gender-specific" (501). The argument can be made (as it has been) that the dominant values of the ecological regions remained the unified dominant values of the whole society. In other cases, the impact of honor seems oddly under-estimated. The claim that (for modern Italy) "in practice, the value for the sake of honor is an extreme rarity" is gainaid by the hard evidence: even in the postwar decades, other than traffic accidents such delitti d’onore were the main cause of death for young Italian males. Moreover, as with sacred space and topography, it might be objected that the ecological approach contains both ready-made answers inherent in its own method and the pitfalls of selecting and using evidence. Few would doubt that honor in some parts of Mediterranean value — and such a proposition might indeed be sufficient for Horden and

108 A point also made by M. I. Finley, "Anthropology and the classics," in The use and abuse of history (London 1975) 113-1, on the radical gap between the small-scale village-oriented studies that have been the staple of Mediterranean anthropology and the social organizations that defined 5th-c. Athens or the Roman empire. When attempting to find homologies that link the later with the former, "the indispensable first step is reductionism ... in this case the elimination of the state."

109 As is made clear by the apparently unchanging world of rural druzgery depicted in Olmin's brilliant film ethnography degli zoccoli (1970) or for the peasants of the Bergamo, Milan was for centuries not far away.

110 T. Lendon, Empire of honor (Oxford 1988), has presented an argument, and a montage of episodes to underwrite it, that the Roman empire, even at its administrative best, was suffused with codes of honorable behavior.
Purcell's limited purpose. But the suggestion that honor was the predominant value because of its Mediterranean ubiquity might be to misread its general force in many important social strata. Indeed, it might misread those very social elements on which the authors themselves place so much weight because of their connectivity and mobility. It would be very difficult, for example, to provide a convincing explanation that movements as important to Mediterranean history as Christianity or Islam work in terms of a dominant universal value of honor. Rather, both seem to work quite successfully without any such conception. Might it be suggested, instead, that these value-systems offered a safe haven from the intense worries that attended an ideology of honor? — and surely in part precisely because of one of the factors that Horden and Purcell see as one of the core driving forces in their system: risk. Yet not once in their discussion of ideology do the authors connect the elements of honor and risk. Some of the most successful of popular religious ideologies, it might be argued, offered a kind of safe haven both from risk and from the conflicting and competitive win-and-lose world of honor. Especially if life beyond death was a viable option, all values anchored in the ever-present ecological fact of risk in this mundane world came to be seen in a different light. But that light was not a physical one that can be read directly by means of a metaphoric transfer of ecological forces to the realm of ideas and beliefs.

In the fifth part of The corrupting sea, readers find themselves far from the fundamental ecological and topographical forces with which the authors began, far from great Braudelian structures of regional ecologies, mountains and plains, cities, trade routes, and thrown instead into mental and cultural processes. Can the same model be usefully applied so pervasively to both? The final section is strewed with much ethnic description and solid refutation of silly ideas, but also vague explanations often characterized by the authors themselves as not much more than guesses (516 f.). In this case, the application of the model, admittedly to a very difficult problem, seems at once too forced and too fluid. The explanations provided by the model of intensification and abatement, and of connectivity, are so broadly systemic in nature that they are in danger of becoming a universal solvent, and risks tautology. A transformation as fundamental as monotheism could be seen as nothing much more than a case of ideological intensification, but one suspects that such a claim would be an easy form of self-deception.

To return to the beginning. One can hardly thank the authors enough for having provided not just an iconoclastic destruction but a re-visioning of Braudel’s problem. From the perspective of the working historian it is indeed a better construction. The distinctions between Horden and Purcell and the grand historian bring to mind an ethnography of higher scholarship. Braudel’s impressionistic and romantic panorama (and just how romantic this sort of history could be was confessed in his introduction to L’identité de la France), a great canvas of busy harbors, floating galleys, verdant valleys, clinging hillside towns and lonely roads, haunting vistas, all apprehended by a series of posted antinomies (mountain versus plain, town vs. country, hinterland vs. coast), frames a narrative driven by vivid example. His painting in words reminds one of Brueghel’s canvases, teeming with life and hope, but still a snapshot of a world we have lost.

Horden and Purcell’s world is not this world at all; it is rather more mundane, and decided-ly less romantic. They are not much taken by detailed descriptions of Mediterranean life, but are concerned to understand the basic dynamic forces that have set in motion the elements that created Braudel’s picture. These turn out not to be Braudel’s longue durée nor his deep glacial structures that form his most basic realities. The relationships between time and place, between knowledge and historical epistemology, and between orders of cause, are quite different. Horden and Purcell wish to provide a workable and workaday model of how things happen, of how the Mediterranean world was generated, of how unity happens out of incessant fragmentation. In the end, it is not simply a choice between a great romantic visionary and Anglo-Saxon pragmatism. However prosaic, their machine works. The number of dead-end problems vitiated, the number of shibboleths dissipated, the number of Gordian knots cut, are one proof. Its manifest applicability to a host of other historical problems and data that they have not explicitly confronted in this large book is another. Further, the reader of this review must take it as fact that the synopsis necessarily does serious violence to the history of smallness and detail that is at the heart of this innovative vision of how the history of the Mediterranean ought to be done.

Individual parts of this history, like the great sea at its core, have been explored and explained before — the authors are generous in their recognition of other scholars whose work has contributed to the construction of their magnificent edifice. And there are bound to be criticisms, sometimes not insubstantial, by the experts in this or that field who will espy errors of fact or detail. But the combination of a mass of data in a unified understanding of the whole is not just a marvel of intellectual logistics, but an innovative breakthrough in understanding. Horden and Purcell’s new Mediterranean panoramas, which will take a generation of historians to digest and to implement, forms one of those manifest watersheds in the study of antiquity. Tolle, lege.

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111 Mostly, one suspects, of the same type to which Braudel himself was exposed; see the formidable lists of errors drawn up by J. Elliott, New York Review of Books, 3 May 1973, 25-26, and Jack Hexter, the hanging judge of the profession (1979, supra n.2, 110 f.). Braudel has more than survived the errant details.