

# Symbols and Models in the Mediterranean



# Symbols and Models in the Mediterranean:

*Perceiving through Cultures*

Edited by

Aneilya Barnes and Mariarosaria Salerno

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-9144-4

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9144-8

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## EDITORS' PREFACE

This volume contains selected essays that were presented in earlier forms at the sixth International Conference of Mediterranean Worlds (MedWorlds), which was held in September 2014 by the Department of Humanities at the University of Calabria, Italy. Scholars from the Mediterranean and throughout the world presented papers that addressed the interdisciplinary theme entitled “Symbols and Models in the Mediterranean.” The central issues examined were the symbols, including signs, gestures, objects, animals, persons, etc., that embodied meanings deeply interconnected with the development of societies across the Mediterranean. Through such analyses of the symbolic from their respective (historical, political, archaeological, religious, economic, artistic, social, literary, and other) viewpoints, these scholars have illuminated the importance of both the tangible and intangible models that have served as cultural reproductions and imitations, marking and conditioning the lives of the Mediterranean people across time and place. As editors, we would like to express our gratitude to all the contributors of this volume. We hope that its contents will inform readers about the many facets of Mediterranean culture and inspire further research into the many cultural avenues of the Mediterranean yet unexplored.

Aneilya Barnes & Mariarosaria Salerno



# INTRODUCTION

ANEILYA BARNES\*

## Introduction to Mediterranean Studies

Nearly 6 million years ago, evaporation had left the Mediterranean Sea in such a dehydrated state that it was surrounded by land, no longer connected to any other body of water. Approximately 5.33 million years ago, however, the Atlantic Ocean broke through the Straits of Gibraltar, resulting in the Zanclean flood, which scholars estimate to have filled 90 percent of the Mediterranean Sea in a short period of time, ranging from only a few months to two years long.<sup>1</sup> With the Atlantic overfilling its basin, the Mediterranean swelled well above its earthen boundaries, flooding north until it connected with the Black Sea. Today, as scholars study this great sea that links Eurasia with Africa, the definition of its boundaries remain defiant. The actual waters of the sea undoubtedly suggest certain physical parameters, but human developments and interactions significantly complicate the demarcation of that which is “Mediterranean.” Thus, the goal of this book is not to limit the definition of the Mediterranean within any geographical, environmental, political, or economic context but to elucidate a range of cultural components that can be identified specifically as symbols shared uniquely among Mediterranean communities, demonstrating how such cultural elements were emblematic of ideas and practices distinct to Mediterranean peoples and communities.

The Roman conquest of the Mediterranean, along with the political and economic fusion of the sea with the empire, influenced both the region and its peoples for so many centuries that viewing the Mediterranean through the lens of the Latin legacy has largely dominated the imagination of Western scholarship well into the modern era. This overly Eurocentric

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<sup>1</sup> D. Garcia-Castellanos et al., “Catastrophic Flood of the Mediterranean after the Messinian Salinity Crisis,” *Nature*, 462, no. 7274 (December 10, 2009), 778–81. See also *The Physical Geography of the Mediterranean* edited by Jamie Woodward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

approach to the Mediterranean was first acknowledged in Henri Pirenne's pioneering work, *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (1939).<sup>2</sup> Pirenne argued that it was crucial for scholars to consider the significant role that the Islamic world played in the development of the West. Rather than seeing the barbarian invasions as the catalyst that divided the classical world from that of the Middle Ages, as had been the claim since the Enlightenment, Pirenne contended that the Latin West continued to function much as it had in antiquity up until the seventh century when, as he stated:

Islam had shattered the Mediterranean unity which the Germanic invasions had left intact. This was the most essential event in European history which had occurred since the Punic Wars. It was the end of the classic tradition. It was the beginning of the Middle Ages, and it happened at the very moment when Europe was on the way to becoming Byzantinized.<sup>3</sup>

With the eastern and southern Mediterranean under Islamic control, Pirenne maintained that the northwestern Mediterranean was cut off from classical trade routes, forcing the Carolingians to turn inward to northern Europe to establish new outlets for the exchange of goods. He asserted that, because of their unique position among both Christian and Muslim communities and their inter-communal contacts, only Jews continued as an economic link in the Mediterranean between East and West.<sup>4</sup> For Pirenne, only the Byzantine controlled regions of the Mediterranean retained their classical foundations.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, he argues that, because Islam cut the Frankish Kingdom off from its ancient Mediterranean connections, forcing the Carolingians to establish new economic and political networks in the north, the world that came into being under Charlemagne would never have existed without Muhammad.<sup>6</sup> Although the crux of Pirenne's work was still decidedly Eurocentric, it was also ground-breaking, as it inspired scholars to examine further historical complexities that influenced and affected the West outside of the Christian purview.

Highly influenced by Pirenne's broader perspective, Fernand Braudel extended his own analyses of the Mediterranean to paradigm shifting proportions in his landmark work *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (first published in English in 1972).<sup>7</sup> Braudel

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<sup>2</sup> H. Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (Totawa, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 164.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 174.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 184.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 234.

<sup>7</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York, 1972).

was a leading figure of the French *Annales* tradition and wrote the earliest draft of the book while imprisoned in Nazi internment camps. The first version of the multi-volume work was published in 1949, and by the time it was reprinted in 1966 it was already recognized as a resounding success. Braudel demonstrated the value of moving away from a short-term historical perspective that focuses on big events and “great men” in favour of the *longue durée*, which privileges more slowly evolving societal structures in order to reveal larger historical patterns. The application of this theoretical approach to the Mediterranean resulted in a work that no longer privileged the centres to such a degree and acknowledged the importance of the region’s peripheries. By abandoning the historical narratives that relied on big events, Braudel was able to write extensively on the Mediterranean’s climate, geography, and many other aspects that do not fit neatly into event-based histories. Likewise, this more expansive effort made room for analysing the contributions and influences of deserts, tribal peoples, and a variety of other factors that had long impacted the history of the Mediterranean but were neglected in its scholarly treatment.

While, Braudel’s approach has heavily influenced numerous fields of study, including history, anthropology, sociology, and others, only in the past two decades has the field of Mediterranean studies begun to take on a disciplinary life of its own with the growth of centres, journals, and institutes dedicated to its cause rapidly increasing worldwide, including those that contributed to the creation of this volume.<sup>8</sup> Undoubtedly, the recent development of Mediterranean studies as a field in its own right is in large part because the Braudelian model creates significant new challenges. For example, some scholars have questioned whether it is possible to study the Mediterranean in the context of the *longue durée* without simply replicating what Braudel has already accomplished. Others argue that it is difficult for academics trained in specialized niches to give thorough treatment to the Mediterranean in such a manner. Likewise, for those who have scaled down their analyses, there is criticism that they are destined to do little more than regional studies, and even those who appreciate Braudel’s enduring contribution note that he himself was often guilty of using “Mediterranean” as a metonym for Italy.<sup>9</sup> Thus, some conclude that the category of “Mediterranean” can mean little outside of the Roman Empire or modern tourism.

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<sup>8</sup> The essays in this volume were originally among the papers presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Mediterranean Worlds hosted by the University of Calabria (Italy).

<sup>9</sup> P. Horden, S. Kinoshita, eds., *A Companion to Mediterranean History* (West Sussex, England, 2014), p. 2.

Regardless, just as scholars have recognized the value of the *longue durée* for world history, many also believe that Mediterranean studies is an equally useful category for writing large-scale syntheses of the region, including David Abulafia who has downplayed the geophysical aspect in favour of addressing the social, political, and religious factors that came into contact as a result of the sea itself.<sup>10</sup> Also notable are Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell who have written an “ecologizing” history in which the goal was to examine micro-ecologies threaded together with “connectivity.”<sup>11</sup> Relying heavily on social, cultural, and economic history from late antiquity to the Middle Ages, they also incorporated sociology, anthropology, and other disciplines in an effort to underscore how micro-ecologies communicated the shared elements that unified them as uniquely Mediterranean. While Horden and Purcell wrote a sort of prequel to Braudel, naysayers have criticised them and their colleagues for both gaps in their work and for allegedly using the distinction of “Mediterranean” as a category imposed from the outside, serving as a trope that props up Western superiority.<sup>12</sup> Despite such claims, however, Horden and Purcell have successfully propelled the discourse of the “Mediterranean” forward, enticing scholars to engage in meaningful debate and demonstrating how it is possible to build upon Braudel’s sprawling foundation through multidisciplinary efforts. In 2014, when describing what he categorized as the four types of methods that academics have employed for understanding the Mediterranean, Horden wrote:

Type 4 is the youngest within this still young discipline. It reintroduces the Mediterranean as a culture area. Gone, though, are the old clichés of the supposed commonalities of Mediterranean life....Instead we encounter a region with suitable post-modern credentials—a region of cultural fluidity, even perhaps hybridity, and of the movements in space that promote such mixing. In this historiography, the categories of national traditions (in the arts, in literature, in material culture) or the polarities of East and West, Christianity and Islam, Europe and the Middle East can be productively transcended by Mediterranean-wide trail-finding.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> D. Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2011); Idem, ed., *The Mediterranean in History* (Los Angeles, CA, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Malden, MA, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> For an excellent summary of the debates and Horden’s and Purcell’s responses to criticisms, see W. V. Harris, ed., *Rethinking the Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Horden and Kinoshita, *A Companion to Mediterranean History*, pp. 4–5.



Thus, it is within this context, among the so-called “newest of the new,” that this particular volume belongs. Its theme centres on the intercultural exchange of symbols throughout the Mediterranean, specifically symbols that were so prominent that their basic meanings remained intact from one cultural context to another. Collectively, this volume demonstrates that through the lens of the emblematic it is possible to reconstruct and identify Mediterranean cultural elements common among various communities, often spanning both significant geographical and chronological divides. It crosses disciplinary boundaries, drawing from history, art history, archaeology, literary criticism, and various other fields, and employs the *longue durée* to recognize patterns of the symbolic in order to define that which is “Mediterranean.” It is impossible for a single volume of this nature to be comprehensive—regionally, chronologically, in its disciplinarity, or otherwise—even when limiting its approach to cultural symbols. It does, however, exemplify that, when such an approach is applied in an interdisciplinary fashion, it is possible to unearth cultural elements of the region that allow us to break through the superficially imposed notions of empire and tourism and to reach that which is intrinsically Mediterranean.

## **Themes and Organization of this Book**

The first section of the book, “Representing and Re-Modelling Order in the Mediterranean,” expands on the Pirenne thesis, addressing assorted gaps that remain in it. Jean-Marie Martin opens the volume by advancing the argument that Pirenne was too focused on how Islamic expansion impacted Europe north of the Alps in the seventh century and, as a result, failed to recognize just how much the Byzantines continued to influence the West, especially in Southern Italy, even after they no longer controlled the region. For example, Martin contends that there were numerous religious elements of the Roman Empire that were not severed in the seventh century the way trade routes were in the barbarian kingdoms and that they continued to mirror the religious institutions of the Byzantine and Islamic regions. Also, Martin looks to Sicily and Calabria as loci of blended political traditions, such as bureaucratic titles, which borrowed from the Byzantine and Islamic traditions well after the Norman invasion. In sum, Martin maintains that, when examined more closely with an eye for the symbolic, it becomes evident that there was far more cultural, religious, and political continuity both in the barbarian West and in Southern Italy long after the Roman and Byzantine empires had lost control of the territories than Pirenne had acknowledged. Additionally, he

illustrates that the Mediterranean trade routes of the ancient world were more open than Pirenne concluded, which resulted in the blending of Islamic traditions with those of the Byzantines and Normans, as is especially evidenced in the currency minted and government bureaucracy of Southern Italy.

Mariarosaria Salerno moves away from Martin's broader regional analysis to a more in-depth examination of Southern Italy under Norman rule. In so doing, she shows how the perception of the personal characteristics of the first three Norman rulers, Robert Guiscard, Roger I, and Roger II, each symbolically personified the three separate phases of the establishment of Norman authority over the territory. Unlike England where the Norman Conquest was static, it was the sum of several individual initiatives in Southern Italy, and Salerno effectively explains that the personal traits of each of the three rulers contributed to the collective success of the Normans in Italy, as they increasingly imitated Byzantine rulers. She maintains that Robert Guiscard was represented as a sort of gang leader who took power, while his brother, Roger I, further extended Norman authority by embodying the ideals of military virtue, diplomacy, and *caritas*. Under Roger II, the dynasty in Italy was finally realized, because, despite his Norman heritage, Roger II looked to the East for his model of kingship. As a result, he presented himself with the wealth, power, and pageantry, of a Byzantine *basileus*, co-opting the iconographical symbols that had long represented power in Southern Italy and symbolically creating unity with the past. Like Martin, Salerno illustrates that the successful establishment of the Norman kingship in Southern Italy must be properly situated within the symbolic cultural context of the Byzantine East, which had long influenced the region and continued to do so well beyond the seventh century.

Riccardo Berardi also focuses on Southern Italy as a locus where various symbols of Byzantine authority were appropriated in an effort to establish and maintain Norman authority in the region. Specifically, Berardi's essay surveys a wide range of documents and terms related to the feudal agrarian economy to reconstruct a symbolic language of socio-economic hierarchy. Although the region of southern Calabria had remained under Byzantine influence until the Normans (maintaining Greek administrative structures, language, and religion), Berardi argues that, during Norman rule, there was a shift in the relationship between the aristocracy and the land, resulting in a feudal hierarchy that developed for the purposes of land management that Norman feudatories had donated to churches and monasteries. For example, bishops and abbots acquired the powerful title of "*despotès*" when responsible for administering the

ecclesiastical *signoria*, which relied almost entirely on the management of peasants for their income. Berardi, therefore, concludes that the terminology used to describe those within the feudal hierarchies that were the basis for the agrarian economy of Southern Italy symbolizes the complex nature of Calabria between with eleventh and thirteenth centuries. While the Normans fully integrated the region into their kingdom, Berardi contends that the region also remained a unique model of Mediterranean feudalism, as it blended the complex Greek and Latin legal and linguistic foundations with the decidedly Norman socio-economic hierarchies. Like Salerno and Martin, Berardi explains how long-held symbols of authority in Southern Italy were incorporated into new systems of power, intentionally employing emblems that were well-known throughout the Mediterranean in both the Byzantine and Islamic empires and adapting them for local purposes.

Following Berardi, Luca Parisoli extends his philosophical analysis of Mediterranean thought to the ascetic world of esoteric symbolism, particularly that of Joachim of Fiore who broke with the medieval Latin Christian tradition at the end of the twelfth century to establish his own monastic order in Calabria, the Joachimites. Building on the theoretical foundations of Pierre Legendre, Jacques Lacan, and others, Parisoli approaches emblems and symbols as something that can stand as an unspoken meaning outside the constructs of language. In so doing, he argues that words and symbols become alternative cultural contexts much in the same manner that Lacan contends human anthropology is a mirror and Legendre maintains that emblems are the articulation of speech that is seen. In an age when scholasticism was most highly prized, Joachim advanced the esoteric, making him an outlier within the normative monastic tradition. Parisoli notes that the symbolic certainly existed alongside the scholastic, but it did not stand alone. For example, the mysteries of the Eucharist were accompanied by the liturgy. What was unique for Joachim, therefore, was his willingness to separate symbol from text. Unlike Rabanus Maurus, who masterfully blended text with figures in such a way that the text was inseparable from symbol, Joachim presented his own drawings without either caption or text, choosing to speak to his audience through the symbolism of images. Thus, where other Western scholars of the time combined language and the emblematic to evoke the esoteric, Joachim of Fiore preferred a more Eastern model in which he let the images articulate the unspeakable. Parisoli notes that Rabanus and other contemporaries understood the necessity of symbolism and its importance in religious discourse and human affectivity, but only Joachim

was willing to let the unspeakable stand without the accompaniment of language.

As Martin argues, the cultural, political, and religious traditions of Byzantium were rooted far more deeply throughout the Mediterranean than Pirenne recognized, which is especially evident in the religious and legal realms of Southern Italy. Long after the seventh century, the region continued to be closely tied to its Mediterranean past, as is apparent in a wide array of symbols that have survived, including those remodelled and represented in Norman coins, the presentation of Norman rulers, the nomenclature of feudal hierarchies, and the presentation of ascetic philosophies. Much like the Normans, Joachim of Fiore appropriated a longstanding symbolic infrastructure, in this case the monastic scholastic tradition, to represent and remodel ideas of order and authority in Southern Italy. Undoubtedly, the cultural symbols discussed in this section demonstrate that Southern Italy stands as a prime example of a shared Mediterranean symbolic identity and cultural continuity, not only in spite of the region's evolution but also as agents of its change. Moreover, the expansion of the Islamic empire did not close off the Mediterranean from the West nearly to the extent that Pirenne once argued; instead, it engaged with communities throughout the Mediterranean, infusing other cultures with its own symbols of power and authority, which were adopted, adapted, and blended with those of the Byzantines, Normans, and other local variations, contributing to the evolving world of the symbolic throughout the region.

In the second section of the book, "Symbolism in Mediterranean Art and Architecture," Linda Hulin and Damian Robinson open with an essay that advises scholars not to assume too much when assessing the similarities found among Mediterranean symbols. They argue that analyses must go well beyond the political and economic spheres of power and prestige to that of the social and cultural, considering religious beliefs and ritual practices alike, before such symbols can be properly contextualized. Specifically, Hulin and Robinson compare boat models and maritime symbols found on burial objects from Early Cycladic Naxos and Old Kingdom Egypt. For the communities of Early Cycladic Naxos, the boat models and maritime imagery on the so-called "frying pans" were emblematic of an active maritime sub-culture that was connected to the sea, but they did not reflect the greater economic value of maritime trade. Whereas, in Egypt, the Nile River was the first body of water to inspire the boat and water symbolism that infused Egyptians' religious views and ritual practices well before they expanded their trade and travel to the Mediterranean. As a result, there was no room left for the sea's imagery,

which was the economic mark of power and prestige, to enter the religious realm. Thus, Hulin and Robinson conclude that, while those living on Naxos and along the Nile were both closely connected to water, boat models and maritime symbols represented something quite different in each of their respective religious and ritual practices, which also illustrates the importance of separating such symbols from the economic assumptions of power and wealth before their social meanings can be fully appreciated.

In her essay, however, Simone Voegtli demonstrates how situating a symbol within the proper religious and social contexts of different societies can also illustrate shared ideas of the symbolic across Mediterranean communities. Following the use of the eagle as a symbol representing attributes of the divine and supreme deities, Voegtli traces the eagle from Bronze Age Mesopotamia, along the northern coastal regions of the sea, and to the Roman Empire. In so doing, she argues that supreme gods, including Baal, Zeus, and Jupiter, subsumed the roles of weather and sky gods, making the eagle an attribute that they inherited from the divine forces. Overtime, however, in absence of the gods, the eagle came to symbolize the supreme deities themselves with the part standing as a symbol for the whole, such as the eagle on the Roman standard. Voegtli concludes that, while the symbol of the eagle was layered with additional meanings among individual communities, the general essence of the symbol, which was emblematic of the supreme power of the divine, was widely distributed and appropriated throughout the Mediterranean over several millennia.

In their essay, Branka Gugolj and Danijela Tešić-Radovanović also analyse religious symbolism in an effort to reconstruct the movement of imagery and ideas throughout the Mediterranean. In particular, their essay focuses on a ceramic oil lamp that is today housed in the Belgrade City Museum and dates back to the sixth or seventh century CE. Gugolj and Tešić-Radovanović challenge previous claims that the figures portrayed on the lamp (which are in an *orant*, or praying, posture) are SS. Constantine and Helen. Instead, they argue that the lamp originated in the Egyptian town of Antinoë, which was an early Christian centre that highly revered St. Mina and St. Thecla, who Gugolj and Tešić-Radovanović maintain are also the individuals depicted on the Belgrade lamp. After comparing the Belgrade lamp to others known to have originated from Antinoë, they theorize that the lamp may have travelled from Egypt to the Balkans via a pilgrim, soldier, or trade routes. Ultimately, they conclude that Antinoë was a flourishing Christian city with a strong local cult of martyrs that became widely venerated among Christian communities throughout the Mediterranean, as the sea allowed for the diffusion of goods, ideas, and

symbols that extended to Christian communities well inland from the coastal regions, including Antinoë and Belgrade.

Like Gugolj and Tešić-Radovanović, Attilio Vaccaro's essay also addresses the use of symbolism in early Christianity, particularly the ritualistic imagery and symbols of the Christian East. Vaccaro's assessment includes symbols that were prominent in a wide variety of Christian ritual practices, such as baptismal water, monogrammed emblems (Alpha, Omega, Chi, and Rho), and imagery on altars, including the cross. Additionally, he extends his analyses into the realm of visual arts, elucidating on the prominent symbolism of icons and depictions of halos in artistic representations. Finally, Vaccaro explains numerous symbols found on liturgical artefacts, such as vestments and altar cloths. While he acknowledges the limits to his vast undertaking, Vaccaro's essay provokes the reader to consider the role symbols played in forging a Christian identity among communities of believers throughout the Mediterranean from East to West.

Taking a more concentrated approach to symbolism in the Christian East, Thomas Kaffenberger turns to the island of Cyprus where he argues that the chevron motif formed an emblematic element of a late-medieval revival of "crusader architecture." For Kaffenberger, the chevron motif is an architectural and artistic symbol so distinct that its migration in the Mediterranean is indicative of and connected to larger socio-political shifts. Kaffenberger claims that the chevron arch is an architectural element that arrived in Cyprus with the refugees from the (then lost) Levantine crusader states in the late thirteenth century. Over time, though, the chevron came to stand as a local symbol on the island that harkened back to a glorious past, especially in the urban centres of Nicosia and Famagusta.

In sum, the second section of the volume demonstrates the necessity of looking to the nuanced cultural spheres if scholars are to uncover more meaningful distinctions of what we might identify as symbolically Mediterranean. As Hulin and Robinson advise, visual symbols should not, in and of themselves, inherently be assumed to have the same meanings or purposes from one community to another, despite their similarities, prominence, or contemporary existence. Instead, as the authors of the second section collectively illustrate, numerous social, ritual, and other cultural factors often combine with the political and economic to influence and inform how various communities read such symbols or incorporated them into their daily lives. When, however, scholars situate these emblems properly within such complex cultural contexts, a rich cross-cultural pollination becomes evident throughout the Mediterranean, often extending well inland.

The third section of the volume, “Symbolizing the Mediterranean in Literature,” underscores the symbols extant in different literary motifs that have long been shared among Mediterranean communities, including some that have existed for more than two millennia. Vassiliki Kokkori’s essay opens this final section, presenting readers with a vast range of symbols that represented the virtues and (mostly) vices attributed to ancient and medieval women in the East. Using dreambooks, Kokkori compiles a diverse list of animals, birds, and flora that ancient Greeks and Byzantines alike believed were emblematic of women. Some, such as swallows, horses, and barley, represented the virtues of women as mothers, wives, and daughters, while others, such as snakes, foxes, and hydnun signified the more unseemly characteristics attributed to women, including deceitfulness and bareness. Ultimately, Kokkori concludes that dream symbols, which were rooted in antiquity, illustrate complex nuances that were emblematic of gender inequality that continued throughout the Byzantine period.

In his chapter, Gioacchino Strano argues that Byzantine ecphrastic texts, writings that vividly describe another work of art (usually architectural structures), from the ninth and tenth centuries also often relied heavily on other ancient literary motifs but incorporated contemporary religious and ideological symbols as well. For Strano, Constantine the Rhodian’s *Wonders of Constantinople*, exemplifies how ecphrastic texts were written so that the language was intended to move the reader symbolically through the very spaces it described, such as elevating readers from the bottom of Theodosius’s column to the top, lifting them with the written word. While Constantine’s description of the Church of the Apostles closely modelled Paul the Silentiary’s poem about the site, symbolically transporting the reader through the space as visitors to the church would have experienced it, it does much more than simply carry readers through the space. Additionally, Constantine the Rhodian’s text is also dedicated to Constantine the Porphyrogenetos, whom the author repeatedly praises as the descendent of Leo VI (the wise). As a result, Strano maintains that Constantine the Rhodian’s writing simultaneously appropriates earlier ecphrastic texts and combines it with language that binds the current emperor to the Macedonian dynasty, underscoring the legitimacy of his claim to the throne. The result is that the emperor is infrangibly and symbolically linked to both his royal lineage and the most sacred and historic spaces of the imperial capital through the timeless and fluid nature of the emblematic motifs embedded in the ecphrastic text.

Turning to another ancient literary genre, Massimo Bidotti examines the hagiographical tradition of Calabria to trace the spread of saintly dragon slayers from the Eastern Mediterranean to the West. Specifically, his chapter centres on the cults of St. Theodore of Amasea in Cerenza, St. Athenogenes in Tritanti, and St. George in Reggio Calabria, the first two for which the folk traditions have varied little from their Eastern origins, while the latter of the three came to reflect more of the local historical, economic, and social institutions of its new locale. Bidotti accepts Jacques Le Goff's thesis that the sauroctonus saints' legends originated in the East as representations of bishops who, in their religious and political positions, dominated the natural forces of evil, which the dragons embodied. Thus, early Eastern martyrs gradually transformed into the heroic dragon slayers from the regions of Transcaucasia, Pontus, and Cappadocia. Although their earliest cult venerations can be dated back to the beginning of the fourth century for SS. Theodore and Athenogenes and to the early sixth century for St. George, they did not achieve fame in Southern Italy as dragon slayers until the eighth, ninth-tenth, and eleventh-twelfth centuries, respectively. Even when a dragon-slaying cult was appropriated and adapted for more regional purposes, as with the cult of St. George in Calabria, the most basic symbolic structure of the saint's tradition, which celebrated the defeat of evil, was retained. Ultimately, Bidotti concludes that the spread of the triumphant Christian symbolism that the sauroctonus saints embodied from East to West is evidence of the unifying effects of the Mediterranean, which served as a connective pathway for shared cultural constructs across an expansive territory from late antiquity to the Middle Ages.

Like Bidotti, Irena Aysenik Nabergoj also follows the movement of a literary motif, the folk ballad of "Fair Vida," from one region to another to reconstruct the spread of written symbolism. Nabergoj notes that "Fair Vida" dates back to the Middle Ages, and it exists in multiple forms throughout the northern Mediterranean, including in Slovenian, Italian, and Albanian national poetry. She compares three types of modern Fair Vida Slovenian folk ballads with earlier Mediterranean renditions, emphasizing the symbolic elements of longing and temptation found in them. In its most basic form, the story is of a young woman, Fair Vida, whom a Muslim abductor lures away from her husband and child, taking her by sea voyage. The Mediterranean versions often tell of a beautiful, young noblewoman who is persuaded onto a ship to see the goods the Muslim merchants have to offer before being kidnapped and sold into slavery. Although her husband attempts to pay the ransom for her return home in some accounts, his efforts are not successful. In the Slovenian



iterations of the poem, the young mother is enticed aboard the ship, because she is seeking medicine among the ship's goods, which she believes will cure her sick child, only to find that she has been duped and taken captive. The end varies from one ballad to another with her taking her own life, forever searching for her lost son, or ceaselessly mourning the loss of her family. Regardless of the ending, a number of mythological symbols are the same among the Slovenian adaptations, such as the sun, moon, and stars, as are the literary themes of despair and longing, symbols and themes that are deeply entrenched in the Fair Vida accounts throughout the Mediterranean. Therefore, while the specifics of the story may change from one telling to another, the central symbols and literary motifs remain constant from one cultural setting to another across the region.

In the final chapter of the volume, Yousra Sabra also examines the literary world to underscore the ancient origins of some of the Mediterranean's most prominent symbols, emblems that have continued to represent the Mediterranean from its coastal regions to its hinterlands and from the ancient world well into the modern era. In particular, Sabra assesses the work of nineteenth-century French historian and religious scholar Ernest Renan. Through Renan's most controversial work, *La Vie de Jesus*, Sabra demonstrates how pervasive some of the same Mediterranean symbols—as discussed in Kokkori's dreambooks—such as figs and olives, remained in the Christian tradition well into the nineteenth century. Sabra's essay also illustrates that, although Renan lived in Paris, a region that some modern scholars deem the Mediterranean “hinterlands,” Renan emphasized the importance of ancient Mediterranean symbols, just as those had who lived in the Levant nearly two thousand years before him. For example, Renan recognized how the ancient symbols of the palm, fig, and olive have continued to be as integral to Levantine culture as the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have, contributing to the uniqueness of the Mediterranean for centuries.

Collectively, the final section of the book exhibits the prevalence of the many distinctly Mediterranean symbols that can be found in an array of literary genres, including dreambooks, ecphrastic texts, hagiographies, and ballads. Even when there are divergences in accounts, an impressive range of symbols and literary motifs remain. The result is that innumerable communities over vast geographical ranges and many centuries have shared the sacrificial stories of dragon-slaying saints and naïve young mothers; the first of whom triumphed over the great symbol of the natural forces of evil, while the latter told a tale riddled with the very feminine virtues and vices that had long been interpreted in ancient and medieval

dreambooks. Additionally, even when regional adaptations, personal religious views, and loyalty to one's patron were added in, these literary works retained the Mediterranean symbols that added value and validity to their present works, grounding them in a symbolic past that gave meaning to the present.

### **Some Concluding Remarks**

Because this collection spans a vast array of place and time, ranging from Old Kingdom Egypt to modern-day Slovenia, it is not intended to be a comprehensive effort. Likewise, it geographically moves from centres to the peripheries of the Mediterranean and back again, including Antinoë, Calabria, Constantinople, Belgrade, and Paris. While this volume can be situated well within the context of Mediterranean studies, it is far from being an all-encompassing look at the field or an attempt to survey it as a whole. Rather, each chapter serves as a micro-study that demonstrates one of the many ways in which Mediterranean communities have co-opted, appropriated, and adapted symbols from one another. As a result, this interdisciplinary volume adds something unique to each discipline represented within it (history, anthropology, art history, literature, etc.) while contributing to the greater discourse of Mediterranean studies. Also, because the volume is a collection that traces symbolic threads throughout numerous Mediterranean cultures, it is necessarily limited in its regional focus. For example, analyses of symbols and representations from the Levant and North Africa are notably limited, while those from Italy are heavily represented. Regardless, this collection serves as an example of how such cultural studies can be done in an effort to generate future discourse, which should extend to additional places, times, and disciplines. Also, the essays collectively further the dialogue about what "Mediterranean" might mean, as this volume acknowledges how carefully cultural nuances must be considered for such an approach to be meaningful. For example, Hulin's and Robinson's essay on maritime symbols from Early Cycladic Naxos and Old Kingdom Egypt stands as a warning to those who are tempted to overextend the assumptions of a shared Mediterranean identity (even within the seemingly narrow context of maritime symbols), lest a sort of "Mediterraneanism" be falsely constructed. The result is an overview of how symbols and representations can be useful instruments for identifying and understanding patterns of cultural elements that are decidedly Mediterranean. Above all, it should be seen as a beginning, as it is the product of those who hope it will inspire future scholars, especially those who specialize in the "peripheries," to

contribute to this vast undertaking of cultural exploration, this “newest of the new” in the field of Mediterranean studies.



# **REPRESENTING AND RE-MODELING ORDER IN THE MEDITERRANEAN**

## CHAPTER ONE

# POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS MODELS IN THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN

JEAN-MARIE MARTIN\*

In late antiquity, the entire Mediterranean was politically unified, and it was also the heart of the Roman Empire. Although it was divided in the fourth century, the *pars orientis* and the *pars occidentis* did not form two separate states. Even during the fourth century, Christianity, still a target of persecutions under the reign of Diocletian, became an official religion practiced by the emperor Constantine, and, from the reign of Theodosius I, it became the official state religion. Besides Christianity, Judaism was allowed as an accepted minority. The pagan confessions were officially forbidden, despite their popularity among part of the ruling class, and they disappeared gradually by the seventh century, after which no mention of them was made.

During the early Middle Ages, from the fifth to the ninth century, the Mediterranean unity was broken, but the break up was not a simple and linear phenomenon, making it necessary to analyse its various aspects, especially the political and religious structures, in order to identify elements of continuity or change, which is the goal of this essay. It has given rise to studies and controversies at least since the eighteenth century, starting with the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon (1776-1788),<sup>1</sup> which is an overall history of late antiquity and the Middle Ages. More recent, precise, and scientific is the great book *Mahomet et Charlemagne*<sup>2</sup> by the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne, published posthumously in 1937. The success of Pirenne's thesis, and the

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<sup>1</sup> E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 7 Vols, 1776–1781, ed. J. B. Bury (London, 1909–1914).

<sup>2</sup> H. Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (reissued Paris, 2005).